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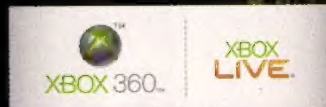
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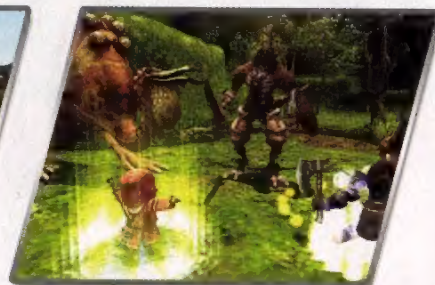
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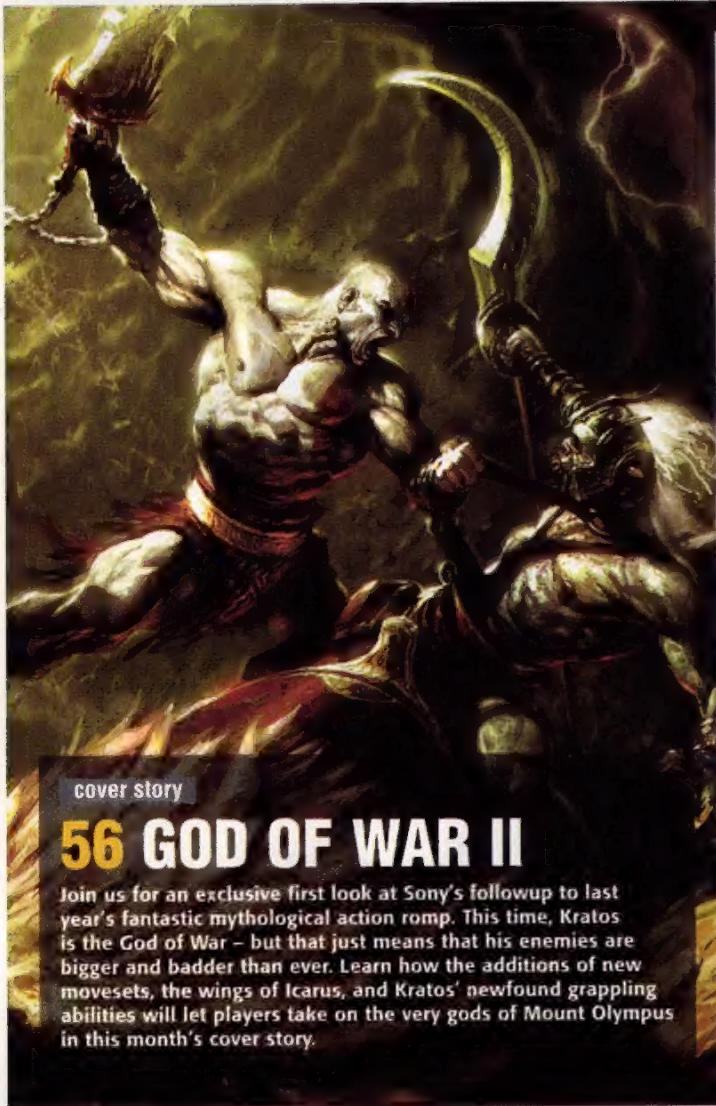
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From acclaimed action/RPG developer Snowblind Studios comes a triple-A treatment of DC Comics' highest-profile team of superheroes. We bring you the exclusive first look at what the face of this outstanding collaboration will look like.



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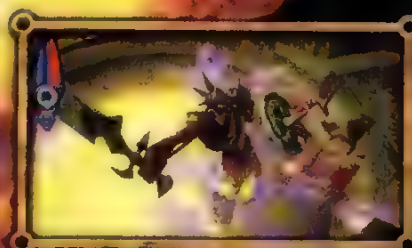
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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



THE ART OF REFINEMENT

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

A few months ago, I promised you that Game Informer would have an outstanding year with some of the best cover stories in our history. Thus far, I think we are keeping that promise, and this month's God of War 2 exclusive is just another way for us to prove to you that we are working hard to get you the latest and greatest.

However, getting the best cover stories wasn't our only goal for this year. We wanted to make sure that we also took a good look at some of the other parts of the magazine and did whatever we could to improve them as well.

This month you will see a number of new additions to the magazine that we feel will help you navigate the video game universe. To us, that meant taking the things we talk about around the office and getting them into the magazine. Enter three new Connect sections: Connect Ten, Connect Debate, and Connect Culture.

All three are just the first volley of things we have planned for the next year. While we don't expect each section to appear in every magazine, each one is flexible and will enable us to express more opinions on industry topics, and also to stop and take a look at the good things – including things outside of games – that make them so important.

So make sure to take a moment and explore the new things this issue has to offer, while enjoying your old favorites. And make sure to come back next month, as we have a surprise for you that I am sure you will absolutely, positively want to see.

Cheers,

Andy >>> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *The Office*, 1080p HDTVs (But I'm Annoyed All Broadcasts STILL Aren't Required To Support It) **Dislikes:** When World Events In WoW Like The Gates Of AQ Are Destroyed By Unbelievably Horrid Server Lag, Kevin McHale's Lackluster Timberwolves Roster Management **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Black, Tetris DS, Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter



Reiner >>> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** Ninjatology (The Study Of All That Is Awesome & Sneaky), HD-DVD, Playing Guitar Hero Without Looking At The Screen, Optical Gravitational Micro Lensing Experiment (Proof Of Aliens), Myspace.com **Dislikes:** A Future Without A New Star Wars Movie, Microsoft Dragging Its Feet On Updating Xbox 360 Backwards Compatibility **Current Favorite Games:** Kingdom Hearts II, Burnout Revenge (Xbox 360), Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter, The Outfit, Tetris DS



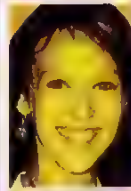
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Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** ESPN's *Through The Fire*, The Next-Gen Console War, Tortoise And Bonnie "Prince" Billy – *The Brave And The Bold*, Dungen – *Ta Det Lungt, A Different World* (It's Like *The Cosby Show* With Sinbad!) **Dislikes:** The Flu, The Olympics (A.K.A. "The Time Of No Law & Order"), A Bunch Of Stuff That Exists **Current Favorite Games:** Dexter, Tetris DS, Super Princess Peach, Fight Night Round 3 (Xbox 360)



Kato >>> kato@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Taco Parties, AMC's *Gritter Show Hustle*, *The Notorious Bette Page* – Best Movie Ever, *Murder, Misery And Then Goodnight* By Kristin Hersh, The Owls, The Return Of NASCAR (Promise You'll Never Leave Me Again) **Dislikes:** Clap Your Hands Say Yeah (No), Arctic Monkeys, The Olympics (It's When Non-Sports People Say They Like Sports) **Current Favorite Games:** The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-Earth II, WRC: FIA World Rally Championships, Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter, Guitar Hero



Lisa >>> lisa@gameinformer.com

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Survival Horror, Adventure, RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing **Interests:** Perplex City, My New Roller-skates, Tim Tam Slam, DS Lite (In Saucy Tea!), *Marvel Zombies*, Ted Nugent Is The Key To Geometry Wars **Dislikes:** Car Malfunction, Waiting (For The Burning Crusade, Elder Scrolls, Gears Of War, Twilight Princess, FF XII, Resident Evil 5, And Everything Awesome) **Current Favorite Games:** Tetris DS, World Of Warcraft, Burnout Revenge (360), Zuma, Elder Scrolls: Oblivion, Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code



Jeremy >>> jeremy@gameinformer.com

Handle: Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Platform, Fighting, Strategy/RPGs **Interests:** The Tim Tam Slam, DC Superheroes Toys, *Final Destination 3*, Rewatching *The Dirty Harry* Movies, The Lord Of The Rings: Tactics (It's Awful, Yet I Keep Playing It), *Stay Alive* **Dislikes:** *Planet Hulk*, The Eternal Starship Debate (It Sucks, Admit It!), **Current Favorite Games:** Justice League Heroes, Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter, Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code, Fight Night Round 3 (360), Black, Geometry Wars



Adam >>> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Owning The Alliance 35-1 In Warsong Gulch, Experimental Cooking, Finally Finding Shoes That Fit, *The Sopranos* (Yeah, So What If I'm Four Years Late To The Party?) **Dislikes:** Ten-Man Turtles In The Flag Room, Trying To Find People To Play Magic (Yes, The Card Game) Against, The Crap That Guitar Hero Expects You To Pull Off In Hard Mode **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code, The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-Earth II, Galactic Civilizations II: Dread Lords



Joe >>> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** *Final Destination 3*, Edward James Olmos (Who Carries *Battlestar Galactica*, Starbuck owned), *Starship Troopers* (Jeremy Sucks. Admit It!), *Deathcoil* **Dislikes:** Grandia III (Apparently), Getting Fooled By Cardboard Boxes In Subsistence, Unwatchable Movies With Transparent Oscar Hopes (Snap Out Of It, *North Country!* You Lose!) **Current Favorite Games:** God Of War 2, Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence, Metal Gear Acid 2, Shadow Hearts: From The New World



Miller >>> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *Firefly* (And How Did This Get Cancelled?), Yellow Curry, Great Comic Weeks, Bartimaeus (I Need A Pet Demon) **Dislikes:** Christmas Trees That Never Go Away, Discovering School Loans I Never Thought I Had, *Taruto* DVDs On My Desk (I Still Need Disc 2 and 3, Guys) **Current Favorite Games:** Call Of Duty 2, Kingdom Hearts II, Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones, Zuma, Kirby: Canvas Curse, Dexter, Beatmania

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GAMEINFORMER

APRIL 2006
Volume XVI • Number 4 • Issue 156

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Manufactured and printed in the United States of America. The Editor welcomes company product information for all video games. Such materials should be addressed to: Editor, Game Informer Magazine, 724 North First St., 4th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. Entire contents copyright © 2006 Game Informer Magazine. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Game Informer is a trademark of GameSlop, Inc. Products named in these pages are trade names, or trademarks, of their respective companies. PUBLISHER LIABILITY FOR ERROR: The publisher shall not be liable for slight changes or typographical errors that do not lessen the value of an advertisement. The publisher's liability for other errors or omissions in connection with an advertisement is limited to reproduction of the advertisement in any subsequent issue or the refund of any monies paid for the advertisement. NON-DENIFICATION: The advertiser and/or Advertising Agency agrees to defend and indemnify the publisher against any and all liability, loss, or expense arising from claims of libel, unfair competition, unfair trade practices, infringement of trademarks, copyrights, trade names, patents, or proprietary rights or violation of rights of privacy, resulting from the publication of the Advertiser's statement.



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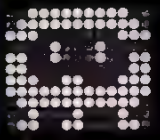
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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly
Of The Video Game Industry



8



FIRST CRUSH RESTAURANT

1



2



7

1 Bender Helper LA's Christina Wood and Stacy Schwartz give Miller some much-needed lovin'! 2 Where except Sony PlayStation Super Bowl party would you be able to snap a photo of *The Practice*'s Dylan McDermott, superhottie Jessica Alba, and rap legend Snoop Dogg? Nowhere! Not even in Awesomeville, the capital city of the Rad Republic! 3 Suikoden art director Hideki Tanaka, game director Takahiro Sakiyama, and Konami's Ken Ogasawara 4 Reiner and Ubisoft's Michael Beadle display the "Giants vs. Cubs" trophy that will be awarded at the end of the baseball season to the one whose team has the best record. At first they were going to give it away to whichever team won the World Series, but then they realized both the Giants and the Cubs are huge choke artists! 5 Lost Planet creator Keiji Inafune enjoys the weather with some snow bunnies at a recent Capcom event in Las Vegas! 6 *Electric Playground*'s Julie Stoffer, Victor Lucas, and Adam Fenton from Bender/Helper Impact get crunk for the GI Spy camera! 7 Billy, Shinta Nojiri (director of *Metal Gear Acid*), Miller, and Ryan Payton (Kojima Productions) 8 Matt hangs with Capcom's Alicia Kim and Arne Cuatrecasas in Las Vegas.

3



4



6

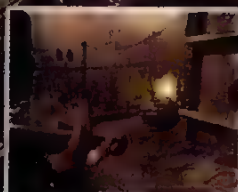


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GI COMMUNITY

Game Informer has a thriving online community, and this is where they can sound off about issues facing the gaming industry today.

THE QUESTION:

What do you think about the rising trend of re-releasing games with additional content?

For those of us who are living solely off of our student loans, it's practically impossible to afford games upon their original release. Special editions are the redemption of the starving yet-dedicated gamer. Good things come to those who wait
mitch_the_swift

I think it's just a conspiracy to make more money. Not that I'm paranoid or anything. I just feel that after spending \$50-\$60 for a brand new game, I shouldn't have to spend another \$20-\$30 just to get the whole experience
SmackeyTheFrog



As long as there is sufficient added content, such as the additional

missions in Fable: The Lost Chapters or the ability to play as Vergil in Devil May Cry 3, fans of the game benefit.
MstrChf

I think that the re-release of games is good and needed for gaming to grow. It is an ingenious marketing idea. It gets fans to repurchase a game, and it also draws in many new ones.
breakingthebenjamin

I hate special editions, all they do is sap funds that should be going to new games. It's not like



they can't fill a game with special features to begin with like Sega did with Panzer Dragoon Orta. Perhaps if it had a shiny case and said "Special Edition" people would have bought it.
kulleriacw



Most of the time there's only a couple updated things with a higher or some price, so it's not really useful. It's kind of like the new DS. I got a normal one, then weeks later they announce a new one.
DollMeatSteak

Do you want to make your voice heard? Weigh in with your opinion at www.gameinformer.com/forums.

I WANT TO BELIEVE

I just read your "The Good, The Bad, The Ugly" column in issue 153 and couldn't help but notice the word "GOOD" in front of "Yu Suzuki says that there's no Shenmue 3." You people have no souls.

Aaron Teplitsky
via aol.com

I don't understand why you guys said there was no Shenmue 3 coming out. Yu Suzuki would never have said that! There is a Shenmue III petition which now has over 35,000 signatures. Yu Suzuki will direct it and it will be next-gen!

Ryan McDermott
via yahoo.com

Why the hell did you say that Shenmue III isn't coming out? It has been done for years! Yu Suzuki didn't direct it, but it's still coming out. All of the Shenmue games (including III!) have been confirmed for Xbox 360 in a single collection called Shenmue Saga!



Eric Anthony
via hotmail.com

■ Dreams are good, and we don't like crushing them, but regardless of what *Finding Neverland* taught you, believing something really hard doesn't necessarily make it true. Despite some conflicting reports online pertaining to "confirmed" details about the next entry in Yu Suzuki's epic Shenmue series, we talked to a Sega spokesperson who had this to say: "Sega Japan has not publicly commented on the development of Shenmue III, so the only thing I can do is dismiss this content as rumors and unsubstantiated speculation." However, there is a silver lining for Segaphiles: it is possible we took Suzuki's comments out of context for the "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly" section in question. Even though we don't know if Shenmue III exists for sure, we also can't definitively say it doesn't exist. So, there's still a chance it's out there...somewhere...and that's enough to keep many fans believing.

SYMPATHIZE THIS!

I just read the "Sympathy for the Devil" editorial, and Matt makes a great point about how gaming fans, developers, and the media should be able to accept criticism from reasonable critics. However, the critics of our beloved industry with reasonable complaints seem to run few and far between. Thankfully, it seems like the good guys are on our side; I am proud that we have intelligent, informed people like Doug Lowenstein in our corner.

Michael Stewart
via gmail.com

I just read your "Sympathy for the Devil" article in the February 2005 issue and I have to ask: How can you possibly feel sympathy for people with no moral values? The only thing these and Washington politicians are doing is aggravating gamers around the world by trying to place bans on games! This has made me angrier than any video game!

Chris Rodolico
Philadelphia, PA

Kudos to Matt Helgeson for his "Sympathy for the Devil" piece. It's good to see a balanced perspective rather than politicians reacting to things they know little about and gamers reacting to the politicians' ignorance. Let's be realistic: Violence in games is fine for a normal person, but there are abnormal people out there who may not be able to handle it. My hat's off to you, Matt.

John Stokes
via email

■ Hey, isn't it funny how Matt can be threatened with a dimension-altering Chaos Blast one issue, then be praised for an even-handed analysis in the very next one? Anyway, the most intriguing thing about these responses (along with many others we received) is the variety of interpretations of the issue. Some saw the editorial as a call to arms against certain politicians, while others thought it was a condemnation of developers who produce violent games.

WONG = WRONG

On page 122 of the February issue, you call out Ada Wong as one of the great unsung heroes of classic gaming, playing second fiddle to Leon Kennedy and Jill Valentine. But in *Resident Evil 2*, it was Chris Redfield's sister Claire that was one of the main characters of the game — not Jill!

Scott Roemaal
via yahoo.com

■ As it turns out, the staff of Game Informer is only human. Well, one of us is a goat in a Miller suit, but the point is that we make mistakes. The factoid mentioned in Scott's letter (and dozens of other less-polite RE fans' complaints) is one such error. Some information got mixed up, it managed to slip through the proofing process, and we apologize to everyone who was personally offended. We feel just sick about it...kind of like how Claire Redfield must have felt when she faced off against Nemesis at the end of *Resident Evil 4*! Kidding, kidding. Put down the chainsaw.

Remarkably, to many readers the piece seemed to say whatever they wanted it to, which prompted a flood of interesting (and impassioned) reactions that looked beyond the simple "black and white" approach to the debate. It is great to have people like Doug Lowenstein on our side, but we're also impressed with how much gamers as a community have banded together to meet this challenge in a thoughtful manner. You rule!

MAKING THE GRADE

I'm a recent subscriber to your magazine (only into my second issue), but I can't help being perplexed by your rating system. To point out an example, I am referring to issue #153, page 132: You grade games on a 1 to 10 scale, with 5 being "passable." However, out of the 42 games reviewed in that issue, only two games received marks below 5 (*Shadow the Hedgehog* and *Shattered Union*), the average game score being 7.41 (the previous issue reviewed 48 games with a mean of 7.39). My question is, why the grade inflation? Shouldn't 5 be "average," and not 7.4?

Jason Coley
via yahoo.com

■ For the benefit of Jason and the rest of our recent subscribers, here's the basic rundown on how our scoring system works. If you take another look at those score descriptions, you'll notice that even though 5 is considered passable, 7 is our designated average. It helps to think of the system like a grading scale in school. If you get 40 percent on an assignment, you fail. Similarly, anything in the 90 range is passing with flying colors. Now, we don't sit down with a bell curve every month, but since our average score is hovering right around 75 percent (a solid C), it seems like we're staying pretty consistent. However, if



From the chaos of battle, four heroes rise



Drakengard



Switch between 4 characters with unique weapons and abilities.

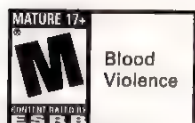


Lay waste to entire armies on the ground and in the air.



Annihilate enemies with more than 60 weapons in over 90 missions.

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PlayStation 2

SQUARE ENIX



UBISOFT

the day ever comes when a 5 actually is our most commonly assigned score, then you'll know the industry is in a rough spot. Either that, or it's a month with a whole lot of Army Men games.



TO BOLDLY GO

I hate to be a nitpicker about something as nerdy as Star Trek, especially since I consider myself to be a Trekker rather than a Trekkie, but I felt that you may have made a gross over-generalization in your Star Trek Legacy: A New Frontier article of issue 154. On page 60 you write: "At its core, Star Trek is about the characters, the ships, and how they come together in battle." This seems to be a superficial perspective on Gene Roddenberry's science fiction masterpiece and nowhere near an explanation of Star Trek at its core. From my experience with Star Trek, I see the underlying themes in most of them to be about exploration, not just of space, but of the mind and of human potentialities. It's about humanity constantly stepping beyond itself in a neverending quest to overcome its limits, both physical and metaphysical, and while space battles sometimes play an important part in this quest, it is hardly a vital component. The humanity portrayed in Star Trek is one that ultimately seeks peace and if the heart of the show was about battle then that humanity would seem inauthentic and petty.

Chris Jones
Grand Forks, ND

■ Thanks for the input, Chris. One of the interesting things about Star Trek as a franchise is that it appeals to many people for different reasons, though the humanity you mention is certainly a critical component. Of course, so is 7 of 9's bodysuit, so it's probably a multi-faceted mystery. On another note, you may be surprised to know that out of the thousands of nerds that read our magazine every month, you were the only one to send us a correction regarding our article on Star Trek: Legacy. Given the notoriously meticulous nature of Star Trek fans, we can't help but view that as a small victory. Oh, and you officially get upgraded to Elite Nerdguard for using "metaphysical" and "space battles" in the same sentence.

ENVELOPE ART

APRIL WINNER!
DARRY E. CHANDLER
Winning envelope art is on page 15 of this magazine.

Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best damn envelope art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address on the back of the envelope. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault.

Send to:
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Envelope Art Contest
724 1st St. N., 4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401



CHARLES ROBERTSON
So, what's Mario's snake name? Cobrat?

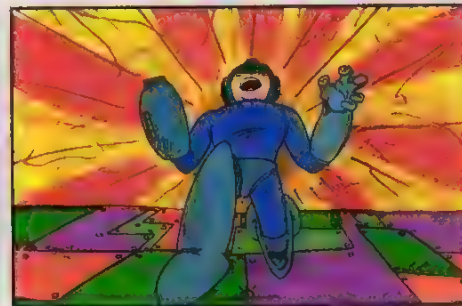
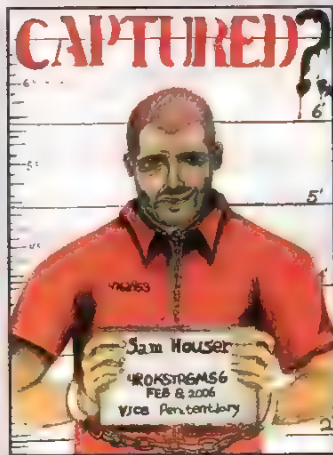


CHARLES ATKINS
Now we see Pac-Man for the ghastly mask of pure malice he truly is



DAVIS CATHCART
The kid from ICO is totally our favorite member of Gorillaz!

ORAN MCCAULEY
Get outta there, Sam! Pull a Keyser! Soze!



SERGIO GUTIERREZ
I want to dance...SO...BAD!

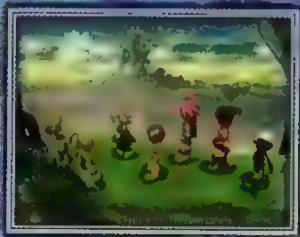
TALES OF LEGENDIA™

The battle for an ancient relic begins with the hunt for the "Merines"...

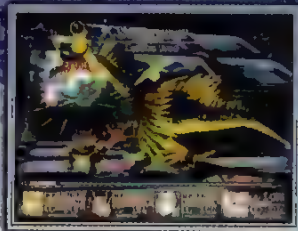
Adrift on an endless, raging ocean, Senel Coolidge and his sister Shirley find themselves drawn ashore a mysterious ship. Known as the Legacy, it is an ancient relic that conceals countless dangers — including those who lie in wait for Shirley.

To save his sister, Senel and his party uncover the deepest secrets of a legendary ship, and in the process, discover the ties that bind them all.

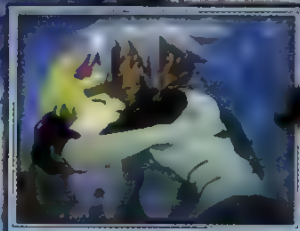
Take strength from friendship. Take pride in love. Take everything that you believe in — and turn it all to power.



A new cast of endearing characters in a stunning 3D setting.



Fast-paced real-time battles. Throw massive enemies for the first time.



Over 70 hours of gameplay in a stirring tale of love and heroism.

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NORMA'S TREASURE CHEST

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PlayStation 2



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HALO 3 DEAD?

BUNGIE'S NEXT PROJECT: FORERUNNER

Is it true that there will be no Halo 3? If you ask Bungie or Microsoft, the current answer will be, "Yes." In fact, at the time of this writing, both companies have flat-out denied that Halo 3 even exists. And yet the game has not only been the constant subject of talk and rumors by both fans and the industry itself, online retailers have thrown up bogus release dates from time to time to stir up the masses. How can a game that supposedly does not even exist be speculated about so much? We know that Bungie is working on various projects, and despite employment advertisements asking that applicants love "combat on the high seas," Game Informer has learned through its network of industry spy pirates that Bungie's next release will be a Halo Xbox 360 project. However, as of now, it's not even called Halo 3.

The relentless confusion over Halo 3

starts with the powers that be at Bungie. Shortly after the release of Halo 2, the company's studio manager Pete Parsons told the BBC, "After Halo 2 we are planning to do something different. We will do something else and we have a few ideas." This led the public to the logical conclusion that the next project wouldn't be Halo-related. None other than Microsoft's Bill Gates himself put down the gauntlet on Halo 3 and seemingly confirmed the game's existence in the spring of 2005 when he told *Time* that the game would release alongside and compete with Sony's PlayStation 3. Gates would later recant this exact release date of the game, but didn't deny the project existed. That job has instead been left to others such as Microsoft Game Studios head Shane Kim who dubbed the game "the mythical Halo 3" in a February update of the website Next Generation. And, of course, all the

while Bungie has held the course that Halo 3 does not exist.

In its customarily clever way, Bungie is not telling a lie — it's just not telling you the whole truth. A well-connected Game Informer source has seen this game up and running, and tells us that the project is dubbed Forerunner (and no, this is not an April Fool's joke). At this time the game is not being called Halo 3, which is perhaps how Bungie has been able to deny the existence of a title that literally bears the name "Halo 3." Of course, when all is said in done, the game could be officially dubbed Halo 3: Forerunner or some variation thereof. It is very common for a game in development to be tagged with a temporary codename. For the time being, however, our source tells us that it's being referred to simply as Forerunner. We contacted Microsoft about the game, but it would not comment on "rumor or speculation."

The game is being designed around huge persistent worlds that will be created with what we're being told is a modified Halo 2 engine. "Big" is the operative word, and many aspects of the title will be affected by the large scale of the game. For instance, Forerunner will showcase four-player co-op in a move away from a strict linear single-player experience. Make no mistake about it, though, Master Chief is in the game, and gamers will play as him to drive along the story. However, the world itself and the events that draw from it will be more malleable to the player and any co-op friends that join in on the action.

If you are charged to capture a weapons depot, for instance, you might not choose to do it, or may fail trying. Although our source says the game still has a definite mission structure, your failure at this particular task will mean that whatever extra firepower may have been yours for the



taking had you captured the depot will instead strengthen your enemies from then on. This cause/effect concept applies to the game's destructible environments as well. Of course, this philosophy is nothing new in video games, but it clearly embraces Bungie's love of multiplayer and the lessons learned from the series' success online. We imagine that these tidbits are surely only the tip of an iceberg that hopefully includes plans to merge the offline and online worlds together to great effect.

We're told the game's storyline will delve into the origins of the Forerunners, the long-absent, technologically advanced civilization that inspired the Covenant's Great Journey. Up to this point, the Forerunners are a mysterious element within the Halo story that has yet to be fully explained. However, the plots of Halo and Halo 2 imply that humans, the Master Chief, and the Forerunners are linked, but with as

little we know about the actual plot of this upcoming project, we don't know how everything is going to fit together. Although our source has seen the Chief in action, even his presence could only be half the truth. After all, this is from the company that surprised everyone with the introduction of the Arbiter as a playable character in Halo 2.

Bungie's denials that Halo 3 exists have led fans to surmise that the company says so simply because the next Halo project doesn't involve an actual halo, unlike the first two titles. That would make sense, given what our source has told us regarding the game's focus on the Forerunners. However, that does not preclude the title from picking up where Halo 2 tantalizingly ended — with the Master Chief returning to Earth with a mandate to kick some ass.

The project could also be aligned with the Halo movie scheduled for release in the

summer of 2007, which has Peter Jackson at the helm as executive producer. Our source tells us that the film will be based on the book *Halo: The Fall of Reach*, chronicling a time leading up to the first game. If the mysterious Forerunner project is in fact related to the movie, then perhaps the video game's title could not only refer to the civilization, but to the game being a prequel set during the early part of humanity's war with the Covenant.

Clearly there are more questions remaining than have been answered with the information we've brought to light. Does this Forerunner project actually mean that there won't be a legitimate Halo 3? Could there be a game called Forerunner and an entirely other project entitled Halo 3? What if Forerunner is simply a side project meant to explore storyline tangents within the Halo universe? If "Forerunner" is indeed the actual name of the game our source has seen,

and not simply a temporary codename, we can't imagine a Halo product leaving Bungie's doors without a Microsoft marketing executive slapping the word "Halo" somewhere on the box for maximum effect.

As always in the development process, there are myriad aspects that can change at any moment. But for the time being, our source has assured us that the tantalizing snippets that have come our way are indeed true. Whether or not they point to the whole truth is something we won't know until Microsoft pulls back the curtain on the project at E3. Bungie clearly delights in winding up the public, so we wouldn't at all be surprised if what we know now are merely isolated pieces of a larger puzzle that Bungie has cleverly constructed. Regardless, any project from the developer is a big deal and one that's guaranteed to get fans excited, regardless of what it's finally called.

!!!! DRIVER ALERT !!!!
STEADY RAIN OF MISSILES WITH
SCATTERED CONCRETE AND GLASS
NEXT FIVE MILES.



SEGA



Game experience may change during online play.

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Unprecedented environment damage.



Full Auto: The Game



Up to 8 players on Xbox Live.



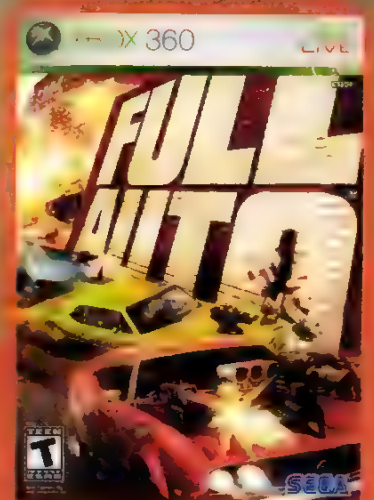
Full Auto: The Game

"CRUSHINGLY REAL... I LOVE IT."
- Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Electronic Gaming Monthly

5 OUT OF 5 STARS (GAME OF THE MONTH)
- Maxim

"THE MOST SENSATIONAL CAR COMBAT EVER."
- Official Xbox Magazine

8.5/8.0/8.0 OUT OF 10 (SILVER AWARD)
- Electronic Gaming Monthly



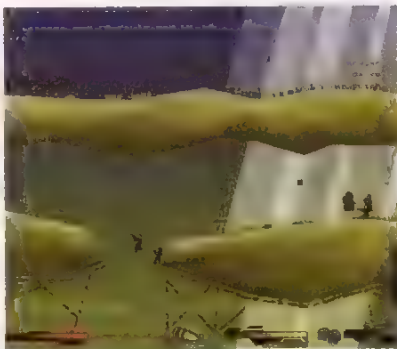
HORSEPOWER MEETS FIREPOWER.

SEE THE FUTURE AT FULLAUTOGAME.COM

1 SOLDAT

WWW.SOLDAT.PL

Developed by Polish student Michael Marcinkowski when he was still in high school, Soldat (released on the net in 2002) has consistently been one of the most popular freeware titles on the Internet. After playing the game for about five minutes, you'll quickly understand why: it's damn fun. Marcinkowski's basic premise with the game was to take simple, 2D Worms-influenced level designs and gameplay, then infuse it with a greater degree of control and multiplayer modes from popular FPS series like Quake. After a quick bout of zooming around the levels via jetpack and unloading massive firepower on your foes, we guarantee you'll be hooked. For hardcores, there are numerous Soldat clans, mods, and forums, all easily found via Google or the Soldat home page.



2 FAÇADE

WWW.INTERACTIVESTORY.NET

While some games, like Soldat, are happy to provide us with nothing more killer gameplay, the experimental side of freeware community is well represented by Façade, an "interactive drama" created by AI researchers at the upstart company Procedural Arts. The game places the player at the center of a story about Trip and Grace, two disaffected friends whose marriage and urbane life disintegrates before your eyes during the course of a dinner engagement in their upscale apartment. By typing in dialogue and using the mouse to interact with objects in the environment, you will eventually be forced to choose sides in the conflict and ultimately help determine the couple's fate. In gaming, where "adult" usually means Kojima's convoluted dialogue or GTA's prankish lad humor, Façade is shockingly well written and more than a little depressing. Not "fun" exactly, but a real revelation to anyone interested in just how emotionally gripping interactive media can be. Deservedly, Façade won the Grand Jury prize at the recent Slamdance festival.

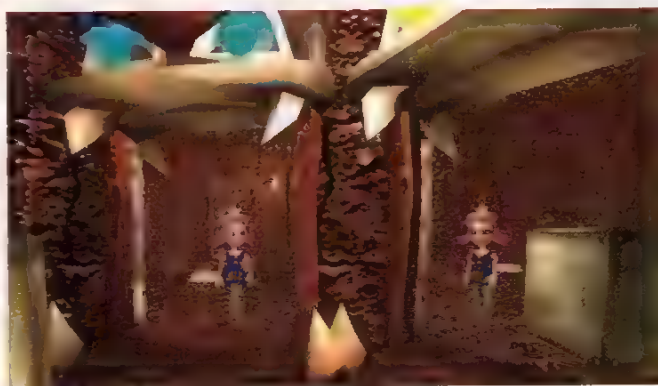


Grace, are you angry at Trip?



no, I think it looks fine!

THE TOP TEN GAMES YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF



5 NARBACULAR DROP

WWW.NUCLEARMONKEYSOFTWARE.COM

Don't judge Narbacular Drop by the screenshots (or its unwieldy name). What appears to be a slightly shabby looking platformer is actually one of the most creative action/puzzle games we've seen in ages. Developed by Nuclear Monkey Software and recently featured at the Slamdance festival, Narbacular Drop, like most great puzzle games, makes use of a concept that's both simple and incredibly deep. Here's the gist: you can place one blue and one red gate almost anywhere in the environment. When you walk into one, you will instantly walk out of the other. By using this principle, you must navigate the main character through a series of increasingly complex 3D levels. It takes a while to understand just how this concept works in the game world, but once you get the hang of it, it's completely engrossing and impressive in how much it changes the way you must think about navigating the environments. You simply must experience the first time you see yourself going into one gate and coming out of the other side-by-side. Remember those pictures of a man watching a television broadcasting a picture of him watching television? Kind of like that, man...trippy.

7 N

WWW.HARVEYCARTEL.ORG/METANET

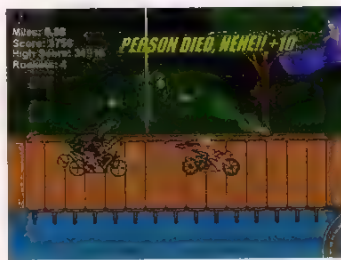
Not surprisingly, given the budget and personnel restraints that many upstart developers operate under, many of these titles take inspiration from old-school PC and arcade titles. One such is N, which is a clever and surprisingly addictive amalgamation of Lode Runner and Pac-Man, with some modern-day character control, animation, and physics modeling thrown in to make this game feel like much more than just the sum of its parts. Basically, you control a small stick figure...er...ninja (because, well, it's just cooler if you call it a ninja), and navigate through dozens of single-screen levels outfitted with labyrinthine layouts and other extras like switches and jump pads. Along the way to the exit, you must collect as many small Pac-Man style pellets as possible. N is timeless fun, simple and well crafted.



8 STREET BIKE FURY

WWW.S64GAMES.COM

Eschewing the high-brow, philosophical bent of some of the student-created freeware games, Street Bike Fury is a product of the underground, homebrew development scene, and packed with loud, rude, and over-the-top thrills. Created by scene veteran Shawn Noel, Street Bike Fury was recently released to rave reviews on the popular freeware site Acid Play (www.acid-play.com). Basically, it's simple and fast destruction. The game places you

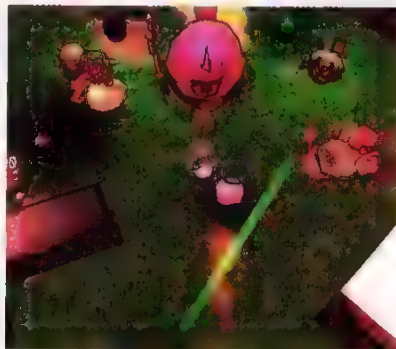


on a high-powered motorcycle, then sends you careening through a series of side-scrolling levels as you shoot down everything in sight. Using the mouse for aiming and the WASD keys for bike control, you'll set off a number of massive explosions and even trigger some impressive scripted events. The environments, which are rendered through unique, comic-book inspired visuals, are highly destructible.

3 OCULAR INK

WWW.PISTACHIOPRODUCTIONS.COM

If you're sick of clichéd game characters like soldiers, we've got a hero for you! Ocular Ink details the adventures of a detached eyeball armed with a paintbrush. While strange, the title features gameplay that manages to be innovative yet completely intuitive at the same time. While rolling your eyeball through top-down levels, you use the mouse to manipulate the paintbrush, which can fling objects and enemies in the environment by painting lines on the ground. Needless to say, the action quickly ramps up to a sublime level of chaos. Ocular Ink also displays a finely crafted, cel-shaded look and humorous dialogue. Of the more "experimental" games we checked out, Ocular Ink is the most ready to make the leap into the realm of commercially released products, and would be a great fit for the Nintendo DS.



4 RUNESCAPE

WWW.RUNESCAPE.COM

A Java-based MMORPG that operates on most Internet browsers, Runescape is an extremely long-running and successful shareware game. Recently, the amount of live players on Runescape eclipsed the 185,000 mark – a number envied by many commercially released MMOs. Originally released as a 2D/3D sprite-based title, Runescape is now in full 3D, and offers such amenities as full camera control, friends and ignore lists, and a wide array of items, skills, and quests. Considering the amount of features and content available, along with the fact that it's exclusively browser-based, Runescape is one of the most impressive feats of programming ever. It's certainly not the most refined MMO, and the visuals are more Ultima than World of Warcraft, but it does provide most of the basics of the genre in suitable form. If you've been skeptical of the genre, Runescape is a great, no-cost opportunity to get your feet wet in online questing without shelling out a hefty sticker price and subscription fee. If you become hooked, a fuller-featured version of the game is available for the reasonable price of \$5 a month.



While the game industry continues to grow larger and more money-driven with each passing year, a healthy underground community of freeware and shareware exists on the Internet, offering some creative (and usually free) alternatives to commercially released games. However, for the uninitiated, it's often difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff amongst the literally thousands of titles out there. So, to save you time, Game Informer offers this list which details some of the most creative and entertaining shareware titles out there. Keep in mind that this selection is in no way comprehensive, there are literally hundreds of worthwhile free- and shareware titles out there, so start searching.

6 CLOUD

WWW.THATCLOUDGAME.COM

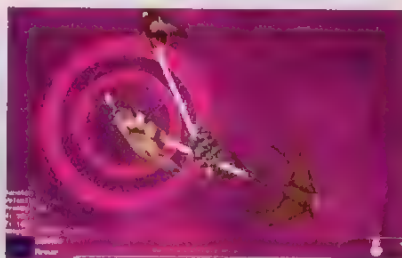
Created by students at USC's new, state-of-the-art Interactive Media Lab (see issue 155 for our interview with USC professor Tracy Fullerton), Cloud is another game from the more esoteric fringe of the freeware universe. Interestingly, it's almost completely at odds with the current climate of video games, generating a mood that's at once calming and dreamlike, at the same time getting across a subtle message of ecological consciousness. This Zen-like atmosphere is greatly enhanced by a gorgeous, meditative musical score. In terms of gameplay, it's a bit like a more diffuse, abstract Katamari Damacy – you fly through the air, gathering up groups of clouds, internalizing them, then using them to form shapes in the sky. Although at times it feels more like an "experience" than a proper game, it's definitely something you owe it to yourself to investigate. Along with Façade, Cloud seems to point to a bright future for games, one that will be filled with a range of emotions far beyond what most commercial titles are capable of invoking.



9 EPOCH STAR

WWW.EPOCHSTAR.COM

Epoch Star is an example of a game that, while not really pushing any left-field concepts or truly innovative gameplay, managed to succeed by sheer craftsmanship and attention to detail in a genre that's largely been left by the wayside in gaming: A 2D, top-down space shooter in the vein of Asteroids or Star Control. It's pretty simple; you traverse through multiple galaxies by way of warps, using your mouse to target various enemy ships and other dangers like asteroids. It's good fun, but the real addiction comes by way of the game's very robust upgrade and economics systems. When you dock at various space stations, you'll be able to buy new ships, engines, power-ups, and weapons. Overall, Epoch Star features a level of customization that rivals many currently released commercial products.



10 STINKOMAN 20X6

WWW.HOMESTARRUNNER.COM/GAMES

While many freeware games are overtly attempting to push the art of game design forward, Stinkoman, which runs on most browsers, instead looks back to the heyday of NES-era side-scrolling platformers like Mega Man and its ilk. Hosted by the popular Homestar Runner site, Stinkoman displays that site's goofy sense of humor. This is most evident in its dialogue, which is a satirical tribute to the often grammar-mangling Japanese to English dialogue translations

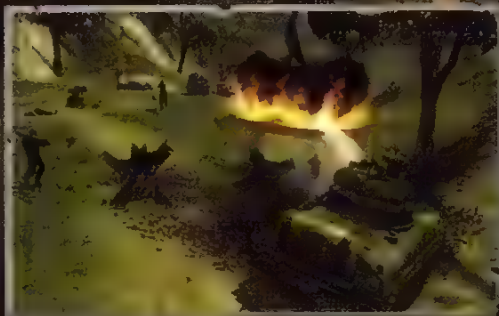


of many popular 8-bit titles – one example being the "Keep Try!" message that appears on the game over screen. Sure, the control won't put Super Mario Bros. 3 to shame, but it's quite entertaining, filled with funny characters and the requisite visual non-sequiturs. It's definitely a good way to while away a few hours on a Saturday afternoon, especially for those of us who grew up in the NES era.



“WAR IS HELL.”

- GEN. WILLIAM T. SHERMAN




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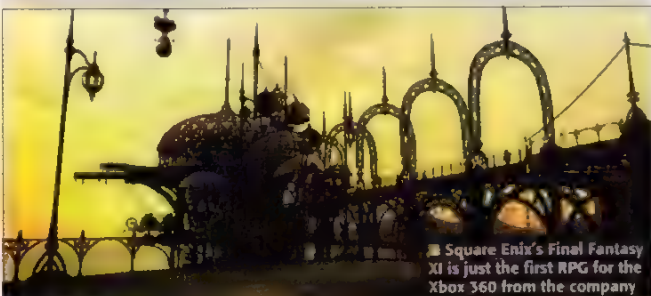
LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



GT 4 ONLINE RUMBLINGS

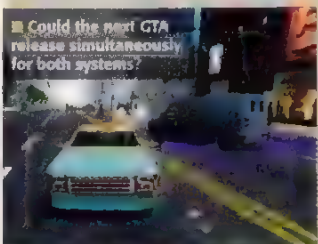
Gran Turismo 4 fans have given up hope on seeing the release of the fabled GT 4 Online title, but a rumor has hit the streets that the game was seen as part of Sony's marketing plan. Sony has no comment on the rumor, but the game would apparently involve six-player online races, voice chat, replay options, and worldwide rankings.



■ Square Enix's Final Fantasy XI is just the first RPG for the Xbox 360 from the company

SQUARE'S 360 MMORPG

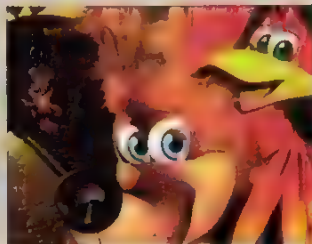
Add another to the list of RPGs the world is waiting for on the Xbox 360, this time from Square Enix. Final Fantasy XI executive producer Hiromichi Tanaka has mentioned the development of a new Xbox 360 MMORPG. According to Tanaka, the game will be based on the tech demo shown by the company at Microsoft's pre-E3 conference.



■ Could the next GTA release simultaneously for both systems?

GTA EXCLUSIVITY OVER?

BusinessWeek recently opened up the possibility that the next Grand Theft Auto may be released simultaneously on both the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. A source pointed out that Take-Two still has the option to eschew Sony exclusivity, something that would be a huge boon for Microsoft and its system. Of course, with Take-Two's financial troubles, two GTAs would be a nice cash boost for the company.



RARE PLAYS BANJO

Not to be deterred by the lack of success by that chick from Kameo, Rare is plowing ahead with its latest franchise revival. Loose Talk can reveal that the developer is working on a new Banjo Kazooie game for the Xbox 360. We're crossing our fingers that this is the title that finally gets the developer back on track.

THE FUTURE OF EA'S BATTLEFIELD

EA's Battlefield PC franchise is a pretty good juggernaut, but the publisher is looking to broaden the franchise's horizons. As silly as it sounds to mess up a good thing, the series is heading into the future. Waaaayyy into the future. 2124 to be exact. It'll be interesting to see how this huge change goes over with the fanbase.

Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gamenformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Who the hell is Bruce MacGavin? Well, he's nobody special, that's who. This month's Name That Game is a spin-off to a very popular franchise that decided to veer off its road of respectability to deliver this forgettable light gun shooter for the PlayStation 2. Despite being the forgettable debut of Bruce MacGavin, this shooter also featured third-person exploration.



(Answer on page 36)

NEWS

BEHIND BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY

MICROSOFT'S DAVID REID TELLS ALL



Before the release of the Xbox 360, Microsoft went back and forth about adding backwards compatibility between the new console and old Xbox titles. The problem was that the 360 uses a different CPU and GPU than the original Xbox, and thus to run Xbox games an emulator had to be created. After the release of the 360, people began playing Microsoft's list of compatible games and many gamers began to wonder why some were buggy and why certain titles weren't compatible yet. Game Informer talked to a number of publishers and developers, and we were surprised to discover (as some of them were) that the process is controlled solely by Microsoft. Heading straight to the source, Game Informer sat down with David Reid, director of platform marketing at Microsoft, who took us through the process.

What determines which games are made compatible?

It's a bit of an art. Number one, we take a lot of feedback from gamers. The second part of it is the technological aspect of it. Some games are simply more difficult to emulate than others. Software emulation is really difficult stuff here. You end up looking at this portfolio thinking, "We could get these three games which are pretty easy versus this one game that will take quite a bit of effort."

Do publishers have any input in the process?

We keep our publishing partners informed, but it's not something where we ask, "Do you want this game backwards compatible or not?" By and large, people do want it, but it's not actually part of the process. We're doing this mostly for the gamers.

Microsoft won't say which games will be compatible next, but what is the end goal? Will all Xbox games eventually be compatible?

We hope so. It is a hard software challenge. Some of the best developers at Microsoft have been peeled off other projects to lend a hand here. We do have people who could be doing other really interesting things working hard on this. We are hoping to get them all.

Is pulling developers off of next-gen work just to help with backwards compatibility a sacrifice that's not worth it just so people can play old games?

I don't think we view it as that kind of trade-off at all. Making the original Xbox games compatible is about gamers who have these portfolios of original Xbox games that they need to feel comfortable that they are going to be able to play them into the future. Backwards compatibility provides that kind of fuzzy comfort for people. Secondly, I don't want to stop playing Halo 2 with my friends because I got a 360.

Games like Fable: The Lost Chapters and Ninja Gaiden Black have bugs or don't run properly. Can this be fixed?

We were pretty open about this when we launched this. The process that we've gone through, we believed, was a high fidelity process that found a lot of bugs and stamped them out. But the testing process just can't uncover everything that the community is going to find when they start going much deeper into games. We know exactly which of those top games have those bugs, and we're working on them. [Reid told us that future additions to the backwards compatibility list would include fixes to older emulators that don't run properly. — ed.]

Does it worry Microsoft that publishers might not like that a buggy Xbox 360-compatible Xbox game will make them and their products look bad?

I can tell you that we've been very open with publishers about the process and how it's going. People knew that this was a hard problem and that we've done a much better job than people thought was actually possible.

Some gamers think Microsoft didn't make some already released Xbox games compatible with the Xbox 360 in order to force them to buy the version out on Xbox 360 instead. What are your thoughts on this?

First and foremost, that's absolute crap. We're working on each and every game, some games are more technically challenging [to make compatible] than others. There was no filter of, "Geez, let's leave this game off the

list." It was more a case of some games just don't work yet. For example, EA in particular. They do a pretty good job of sharing code libraries across developers. So if you look at a line-up of games from EA, for example, there are certain features among them where we are seeing certain problems among them. Once you crack one of the problems open, it'll likely enable a bunch of games. But until you do, a bunch of them aren't working quite right. Again, I can assure you that there is no effort to filter games out based on anything; we want to get them all.

"Backwards compatibility provides that kind of fuzzy comfort for people."

THEY FLEW LIKE EAGLES.
THEY FOUGHT LIKE LIONS.

BLAZING ANGELS

★★★ SQUADRONS OF WWII ★★★

Dawn breaks over the skies of war-torn Europe. Bandits at twelve o'clock high! It's time to take command, lead your squadron of Blazing Angels into combat, and send the enemy fighters down in flames!



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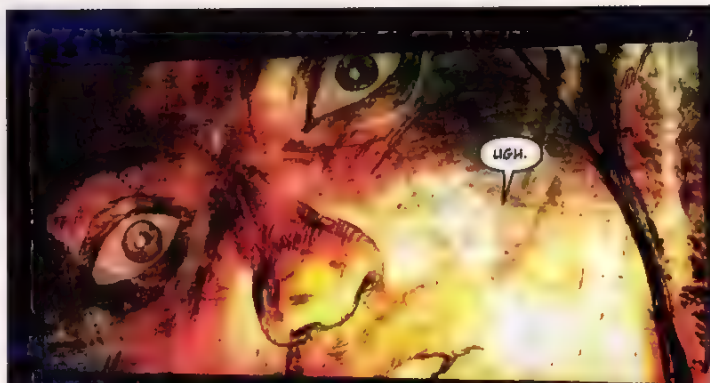


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NEWS

THE KONAMI PSP EXPERIENCE

NEW WAYS TO EXPERIENCE METAL GEAR/SILENT HILL

Konami is looking for new ways to tap into the PSP market, and it thinks it has found it with animated interactive comics. The company will put out *The Silent Hill Experience* and *Metal Gear Solid: Digital Graphic Novel* for the handheld, and the UMDs will not only allow owners to view comics based on the franchises, but they will also feature music, art, and interviews.

The *Silent Hill Experience* will come out in conjunction with the movie starring Sean Bean in April. The UMD will feature two animated comics, adding up to approximately two hours. The first is a new book written by Scott Ciencin and illustrated by Steve Perkins and Alex Shibao. The second will be the previously released five issue *Silent Hill: Dying Inside*, penned by Ciencin. Also included on the disc are 20 musical selections from all the *Silent Hill* games, interviews with series composer/producer Akira Yamaoka and movie director Christopher Gans, and more.

Less is known about the contents of *Metal Gear Solid: Digital Graphic Novel*, but its comic is a rendition of artist Ashley Wood's treatment of the PSone game's story from two years ago. It is more than static panels, however. Viewers can scan around the comic as it runs and look for hidden clues that will open up additional content in the UMD's *Metal Gear Matrix*.



DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

SONY GRABS ZIPPER

Sony has nabbed long-time exclusive partner and SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs developer Zipper Interactive. Shortly afterwards, the company put an advertisement on its website recruiting talent to work on a multiplayer next-gen console game. Of course, given the success of SOCOM, a PS3 version of the series is a sure thing. Meanwhile, SOCOM 3 players can buy multiplayer map packs for \$5.99 exclusively online.



MOVIES FOR CONSOLES PANNED

More people may have gone to see Harrison Ford's flop *Firewall* than bought the PC title *The Movies*. The game's disappointing sales has led publisher Activision to cancel the release of the game for the consoles, although developer Lionhead says that the credits have yet to roll on the series. An administrator on the company's website intimates that a new publisher is being sought and states that an expansion pack is in the works. We contacted Lionhead, but the company wouldn't officially comment.



UK BANS ACTIVISION ADS

Activision has been busted by the U.K.'s Advertising Standards Authority for its Call of Duty 2 and CoD2: Big Red One commercials. The ASA argued that consumers were misled by the ads for the games because they both used pre-rendered footage. The ads cannot be shown in their current form again.



DEAD RUSH

From this month's "You'll never see this in the U.S." department comes PS2's *Zombie Vs. Ambulance*, where you mow down the walking dead with...an upgradeable ambulance. Awesome. But Japan only.



ATARI WOES

After watching third-quarter revenues drop by a third, Atari has announced that it is selling off some of its internal game studios, dropping one-fifth of its worldwide workforce. This means that studios such as Reflections (*Driver* series), and Shiny (*The Matrix*) will be sold.

AT LEAST WHEN YOU DIE NOW, YOU WON'T DIE ALONE.

METAL GEAR GOES MULTIPLAYER.

Solid Snake just added a new weapon to his arsenal: the net. Introducing Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence with unprecedented online play. There are multiple players and online modes, a controllable third-person camera, a Secret Theater mode and four complete games in one: multiplayer online, an enhanced Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, and the original Metal Gear and Metal Gear 2.

A MULTIPLAYER MISSION

PLAY AGAINST OTHER AGENTS ONLINE.

SNAKE

PLAYING FROM
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

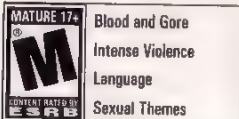


OCELOT

PLAYING FROM
NEW YORK, NY



TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION
METAL GEAR SOLID 3
SUBSISTENCE



PlayStation 2



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THE ART OF OKAMI

There's been a great deal of debate in recent months about whether games can be considered an emerging form of art, but it's an argument we have trouble understanding when we take a look at the incredible images that come out of a game like Okami. We got the chance recently to question Naoki Katakai about the amazing art style that makes up the visuals of Capcom's upcoming game, and about the place where art and interactive games meet.

What is your role on the Okami team?

I am a lead background artist at Clover Studios. I created concept designs for the environments and style of Okami. I'm also working on a number of locales featured in the game.

What were some of the primary inspirations and influences on the art style of Okami? Were there particular artists or styles that served as a model?

Okami draws inspiration from a lot of things in ancient Japanese culture, so there isn't really one specific model. The Celestial Brush system borrows heavily from traditional calligraphy. Many of the buildings within the game are also based on different parts of Japanese culture and history.

Okami is artistically unique because the gameplay itself is tied to the creation of art. How has that idea influenced the overall art design of the game?

The biggest thing would be the Celestial Brush element. Since the player can use it to interact with the world in so many ways, we had to work extra hard to create objects in the environment that lend themselves to that kind of player interaction. You can interact with nearly everything you see in the world from plants, objects, houses, and people. This was a new challenge for me, but I think the end product is a very beautiful and enjoyable game.

As an artist, in what ways do you find yourself working with the game programmers to maintain the artistic look during the transfer into animated interactive gameplay?

No matter how great your designs are, ultimately it's the skill of the programmers that determine whether they work well in the game. I think that this is especially true for Okami. I think that as a designer, part of my responsibility is being able to convey to the programmers the complete vision. Working as

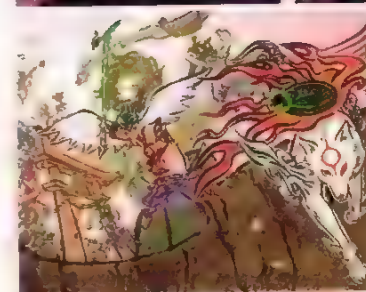
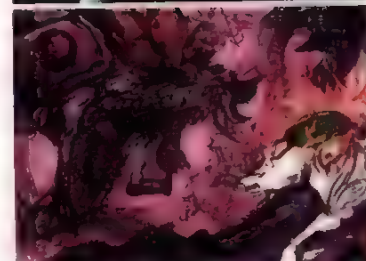
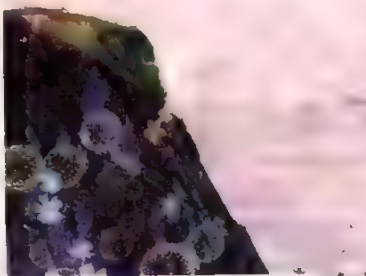
a team is essential in order to create something wonderful. For Okami, the concept art was well done and that helped the programmers figure out how to bring it to life on the screen. Also, I think it helps to have the programmers' and designers' workstations close together to help keep the lines of communication constantly flowing. Communication is key.

What were the greatest challenges you faced in designing the look of the game?

I struggled quite a bit with where to hold back, from a design standpoint. When working to build designs based on Japanese art styles, it can be very difficult to get just the right balance of color, density, and line thickness. Draw too much and it looks out of place. Sometimes you just have to risk it and create open, blank spaces. Before Okami, the games that I had worked on focused more on photo realism. So at first it took a lot of trial and error to get a feel for how to create something with a unique visual style.

Is there a difference between creating art for a game instead of for some other discipline, like film or books?

I think that what makes art creation for games different than for other media is that absolutely everything is influenced by the actual gameplay, and it practically changes on a daily basis. We are not so much artists as we are game developers, so we have to always think about how things will work within the confines of the game itself. Of course I believe that the visual beauty of this game is one of its major selling points, but at the same time we have to make the look and feel match the gameplay. No matter how good the art is, something always needs to be changed or fixed. But for all that hard work, being able to run around and experience the game world you created is one of the great pleasures you get as a game artist.



(From top to bottom) **1** Naoki Katakai **2** Katakai cites varied Japanese styles like Sumi-e, Nishiki-e, and Ukiyo-e as inspirations **3** "To keep from getting too serious, I tried to give everything I designed a sense of fun," Katakai explains **4** Screenshots from the game retain the original artistic style







FAR CRY INSTINCTS PREDATOR™

What's the only Xbox 360™ game you'd need on a deserted island?

ONLY ON XBOX

PUBLISHER: UBISOFT DEVELOPER: UBISOFT RELEASE: SPRING 2006

OK, maybe it's not so deserted, since it's actually the base of operations for a ring of modern-day South Pacific pirates – bloodthirsty warriors, in more ways than one. Far Cry® took awards in 2004 on the PC, and in 2005 on Xbox®. Now, in Far Cry Instincts Predator, Jack Carver will stalk the most dangerous prey of his career, played out against the jaw-droppingest settings you've ever seen on Xbox 360.



This new Far Cry adventure uses that Xbox 360 processing power as much for ass-kicking gameplay innovations as for the unbelievable new graphics. In the levels we played through that power was on full display, from the enormous new maps and incredibly detailed settings to the insane number of enemies on-screen – all boasting the most lethal, most realistic enemy AI ever seen. You'll be challenged to play your best if you hope to survive in this deadly paradise.

Then there's the game design itself, featuring wide-open levels (you'll even play across multiple islands at once, picking your goals at your own pace), destructible environments, and new gameplay elements that let you use the environment as a weapon as deadly as your guns and



WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE
This is not only the best-looking shooter we've ever seen, but also the deadliest...

NEW RIDES

Ride in deadly style! From the pirate sampans to armored pickups (Fast! You're gonna love these in Multiplayer!) and transport trucks (Think Multiplayer here, too — like, say, why not pack a truck with teammates and thunder up to the enemy for truly devastating blitz attacks?), you'll be packing both heat and speed!



SAMPAN

TRANSPORT

TECHNICAL TRUCK

grenades. For instance, we fought an army of pirates on their drug plantation, using logs as traps, setting fire to fields to flush out the enemy, even blasting those guard towers to topple them right on top of the bad guys' hiding spots.

Far Cry's CryEngine® looks better than ever on Xbox 360. It'll blow your mind with lush, tropical settings — dense green jungles, amazing blue seas, and soaring mountain peaks so real you'll swear you're touring an island paradise. In fact, it'd be relaxing if this paradise weren't so dangerous!

As Jack Carver,

you'll put your powerful feral abilities to work from the moment the game begins, facing enemies that sport the same powers. So you'll have to think like these tough new enemies, and use your feral abilities to their fullest. Use your Feral Smell to actually sense the fear of your enemies, and, like the predator you are, dispatch your prey with a lightning-fast Feral Attack. It's all about the law of the jungle: only the top predator will survive.

Amazingly, Far Cry Instincts Predator for Xbox 360 contains not only the all-new Far Cry game (see right) but also the entire, award-winning Far Cry Instincts™ original — completely updated with mind-blowing Xbox 360 graphics. Thanks to some amazing work by Ubisoft's design team, this promises to be among the most phenomenal shooters you have ever experienced.

And of course, multiplayer action is going to be a big part of Far Cry Instincts Predator. You'll battle through all-new multiplayer maps, playing the familiar Chaos, Team Chaos, Steal the Sample, and Predator modes, as well as the all-new and incredibly addictive multiplayer mode, Seek and Secure.

It keeps getting better, too, thanks to the one-of-a-kind Far Cry map editor for even more varied multiplayer island action. With its new template and brush sets, you'll be able to build your own huge levels, share them with friends, and play your maps online! And if you don't feel like creating maps yet, this baby ships with a staggering 22 multiplayer maps — eight new ones, 14 of the best from Far Cry Instincts, and every one of

them optimized for incredible visuals, amazing depth, and action-jammed multiplayer gaming like

“The best tropical vacation a shooter fan could hope for!”

you've never experienced before.

Add it all up, and Far Cry Instincts Predator is the best tropical vacation a shooter fan could hope for! With its intense combat and cool new weapons, unbelievably lifelike graphics, and fully customizable multiplayer maps, you can bet Far Cry Instincts Predator is going to quickly become one of the most popular shooters available.

FAR CRY INSTINCTS™ EVOLUTION FOR XBOX

Don't worry, Xbox fans! All the killer gameplay innovation, the new weapons, vehicles, and amazing new locales are coming to Xbox. Watch for Far Cry Instincts Evolution if you're looking for the absolute best first-person shooter available for Xbox!



LOOKING GOOD As these screens prove, Ubisoft is cooking up some of the best graphics yet on Xbox!

BECOME THE ULTIMATE PREDATOR

Far Cry Instincts Predator has a hefty loadout of weapons, including a few new attacks that are destined to become favorites...

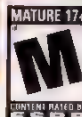
POISON DARTS Climb a tree, camp out, and silently take down foes.

PIPE BOMB Not as quiet, but just as fun. Plant a bomb and detonate it.

MOLOTOV COCKTAIL Light it, throw it, and watch your enemies burn.

DEADLY TRAPS Set devastating traps on patrol routes, or lure unsuspecting enemies to their brutal doom.

MORE WAYS THAN ONE Hide, set traps, and literally hunt down your hapless prey.



Blood
Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

Surprise, surprise! Another Xbox 360 game is being delayed! Ubisoft has aborted the release date for Splinter Cell Double Agent. The game will be out by September.



BAD

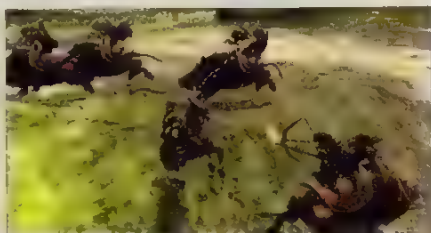


GOOD

Nintendo is expanding the capabilities of the DS handheld. Not only is Metroid Prime Hunters getting out-of-game chat, but at the end of March, kiosks will be deployed at retailers that will offer content for download. In Japan, the system will be getting cartridges enabling the Opera web browser and digital broadcasts.

BAD

Nintendo has officially delayed The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess to some time in the fall of this year. The game is still slated to appear on the GameCube.



UGLY

Rockstar can't keep the ladies in line. Sex Workers Outreach Project USA is standing up for working girls everywhere in its condemnation of the Grand Theft Auto series with its treatment of prostitutes. Pimpin' ain't easy.



GOOD

Aliens director James Cameron has his eye on creating an MMO to go along with an upcoming film he's got buzzing around in his brain. With the working title of Project 880, the game isn't expected until 2008 - by which time the planet Earth will likely be officially renamed World of Warcraft.

UGLY

Sony fired PS3 artist Josh Robinson for breaking his non-disclosure agreement by claiming that "everything I've developed or seen developed [for the PS3] has yet to be 'next gen'." Robinson further stated that he didn't think the system would reach its full capabilities until a year after launch. He is taking it all in stride, however. He's since accepted a job elsewhere for more pay and a better title.



GOOD UGLY

Former executive officer of now defunct Gizmondo, and reputed Swedish mob friend Stefan Eriksson crashed his rare Ferrari Enzo in an illegal high speed street race in California. When police questioned the legally intoxicated Eriksson, he said that he wasn't driving the car, claiming the real driver was a German man named "Dietrich," who had ran off. Police failed to find this mystery man after a three-hour search. Perhaps O.J. Simpson can be put on the case.

news

PSP'S FAIRYTALE OVER? STUDIOS CUT BACK ON UMD MOVIES

A slowdown in PSP movies sales has prompted some Hollywood studios to cut back on the films they adapt to the medium. Sony is continuing to propagate the format by selling DVD/UMD combo packs (for under \$30) so consumers don't have to buy both formats. The company also has an adapter planned that will allow you to play a UMD on a regular TV, and Sony will start a download service letting PSP owners watch movies on their handheld without a UMD.

As much as the initial runaway success of the UMD format has cooled, some don't believe that it will negatively affect the handheld. Industry analyst for Wedbush Morgan Michael Pachter believes that this downturn will merely force studios to cut out the chaff. "You'll probably get a lot of content aimed directly towards the PSP audience. *Saw II* might be of more interest, and *Pride and Prejudice* not so much." Furthermore, Pachter sees a brighter future for the PSP, forecasting a price drop and more software as companies use the PSP as "an easy out" for current-gen development until the next generation gets fully going.



GI OPINION



As someone who has never been all that keen on the PSP as a movie player, I'm not at all surprised by this news. With higher prices, fewer features, and less ideal viewing situations than DVDs, it was only a matter of time before Hollywood's attitude towards the UMD changed substantially. Narrowing the scope of movies released on the format is definitely a smart move, but UMD films need to offer bonuses that can't be replicated by simply ripping a movie to a memory stick. Game demos seem like the obvious choice. —JEREMY

Comedies and movies like *Saw II*, which appeal more directly to the PSP's audience, will continue to be available



TAKE-TWO UP FOR SALE STILL SCALDED BY HOT COFFEE

The after-effects of Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas' Hot Coffee scandal keep slamming Take-Two and its subsidiary Rockstar Games. The scandal has not only cost the company millions of dollars, but the numerous pending lawsuits could prove the mistake to be even costlier still.

The Hot Coffee controversy is just one of many aspects that will influence which direction the company takes. As of the time of this writing, Take-Two was the focus of buyout talk, although industry analysts have said the usual suspects of EA, Activision, and Ubisoft weren't interested in the company. But with lawsuits filed or pending in more than a half a dozen states in the country (with more expected), the potential payout and controversy is not attractive to prospective buyers.

Perhaps more influential, however, was the recent resignation of Take-Two audit committee chair Barbara Kaczynski. A letter from Kaczynski's lawyer explaining her resignation cited the "unhealthy relationship between senior management and the board of directors" as one of the reasons. Another referenced the apparently poor internal financial controls of the company. Because of this, Take-Two's annual report was filed two weeks late. In fact, one of the pending lawsuits charges the company with insider trading and other illegal financial practices. Take-Two's stock fell 26 percent in the four-day wake after Kaczynski's resignation.

Bono's Elevation Partners is tipped to be interested in buying, and some believe that it has the cash to buy back all of Take-Two's shares, no longer making it a publicly-traded company. Elevation could then strengthen Take-Two's financial position using product from developers like Visual Concepts and Firaxis until there was enough stability to make the stock public again.

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- Maxim magazine

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TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
MIKE LEGG
President, Petroglyph
(Star Wars: Empire at War)

READER
MEGAN BROWN
Auburn, OH



- 1 World of Warcraft – PC
- 2 Mario Kart Double Dash!! – GC
- 3 Monkey Island series – PC
- 4 Samba de Amigo – DC
- 5 Command & Conquer: Red Alert series – PC

- 1 Resident Evil 4 – GC
- 2 Super Mario Bros.
- 3 – NES
- 3 Super Smash Bros. Melee – GC
- 4 Star Wars: Battlefront – Xbox
- 5 Time Crisis II – Arcade

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top Ten Things We'd Like to See at E3 This Year

- 10 Kameo's Chilla Brand Sno-Cones
- 9 Splinter Cell: Xtreme Beach Volleyball
- 8 Booth babes in Dexter costumes
- 7 The Phantom. Again
- 6 Displays made from recycled Gizmondos
- 5 A giant EA robot that smashes other booths and absorbs them into its constantly growing superstructure
- 4 Nintendogs Revolution: With simulated pooper-scooping
- 3 Atari handing out game licenses to the first 50 people in the door
- 2 PS3 controller boomerang contests
- 1 The true 360 killer app: Bloodwake 2

Name That Game Answer: Resident Evil: Dead Aim

NEWS

PAY YOUR RESPECT

MARYLAND'S JARVIS THOMAS WINS MADDEN CHALLENGE



The "pay to the order of" line is not filled in. No reports as to whether Thomas was mugged in the parking lot for this \$100,000 blank check

18-year-old Jarvis Thomas from Maryland juked and blitzed his way to Madden Challenge fame and a \$100,000 fortune during the NFL's Pro Bowl weekend in Hawaii. But it wasn't an easy road to hobnobbing with the likes of Bengals star receiver Chad Johnson and walking away with a giant check. Between road-tripping 19 hours with a busted window and hitting a deer along the way to the regional championships, Thomas tells Game Informer all about what it takes to be the best Madden player in the world.

So, set the scene for us in Hawaii. What was it like?

It was real fun, you know. I'd never been to Hawaii before. The environment. The competition. I had a real good time. The championship game – it was a real tight game, but I played good D, and I ended up blowing him out [Thomas won 42-18]. When we weren't playing, right before the final game we had a dinner, a BBQ, and we got to meet some of the NFL players that came down like Shawne Merriman, Antonio Gates, Darren Sharper, etc. Shawne Merriman – that's my man.

Is solid defense your basic strategy?

I gotta get a lot of pressure, throw the game down, play it at my pace, and just get my opponent out of his game. I like to bait you. I'm gonna blitz, then I'm gonna fake the blitz. First I'm gonna play coverage, then I'm gonna fake coverage and blitz. You're gonna think I'm playing man-

to-man when I'm playing zone. I just like to bait you to make you do turnovers.

On defense, who do you like to control?

Most of the time I play linebackers, but most of the time it depends what team your opponent uses. If you're gonna play with Vick, then I'm gonna play the safety because most people use Vick to do the QB draw. But other than that, I always play with the linebacker and just try to create pressure.

You won the championship with the Eagles?

Yeah, that was a gametime decision. I played with the Raiders when I won my challenge. But right before the tournament, when the brackets came out, I changed to the Eagles. I thought of the matchups and I knew they were using updated rosters, so I didn't like what I saw with the Raiders. So I made a gametime decision to switch to the Eagles because I like the personnel and I thought that I

could do better with a more mobile QB. When I played with the Raiders it was all run-and-gun, but when I played with the Eagles, it was run the ball, slow it down because I couldn't really score that fast without Randy Moss.



Seattle Seahawks' Lofa Tatupu and San Diego Chargers' Shawne Merriman mingle with the Madden Challenge contestants

How long does it take for you to breakdown your opponent's game? A few series?

I catch on real quick. I play football, so I know football strategy, so after the first quarter, I'm pretty hip to what you're gonna do.

So, what about next year? Do you get a first round bye or anything?

Nah, I gotta go through the process again like a regular old person [laughs].

What are you going to do with the money?

Invest. Invest a lot. I'm gonna get a car and go to college. One hundred thousand dollars – that's a big prize, but the bigger prize is having the respect of everyone coming up to you saying, 'Good job. You played really well.'



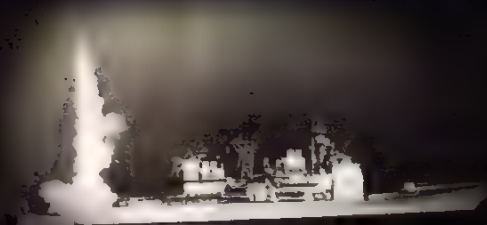
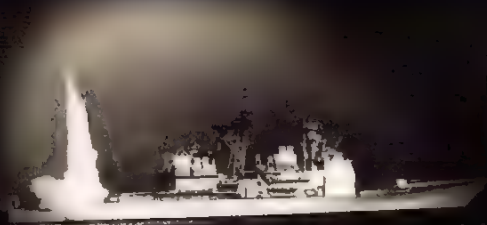
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WHO WILL WIN THE

CONSOLE WAR?

The video game industry is faced with a ton of difficult questions and many ways to look at them. In the new Game Informer debate section, we will attempt to analyze these scenarios from different angles. Like a traditional debate club, our editors have been assigned to defend a position whether it agrees with their personal views or not. In this inaugural edition we tackle arguably the biggest question of them all: Which console will come out on top in the next generation?

The Fanatic:

The pro argument has been given to Reiner. He will make a case for why each console will be successful and outline how they can win.



The Hater:

The con argument has been given to Matt. He will make a case for why each console will falter and outline the challenges they face.



M I C R O S O F T

XBOX 360

PRO

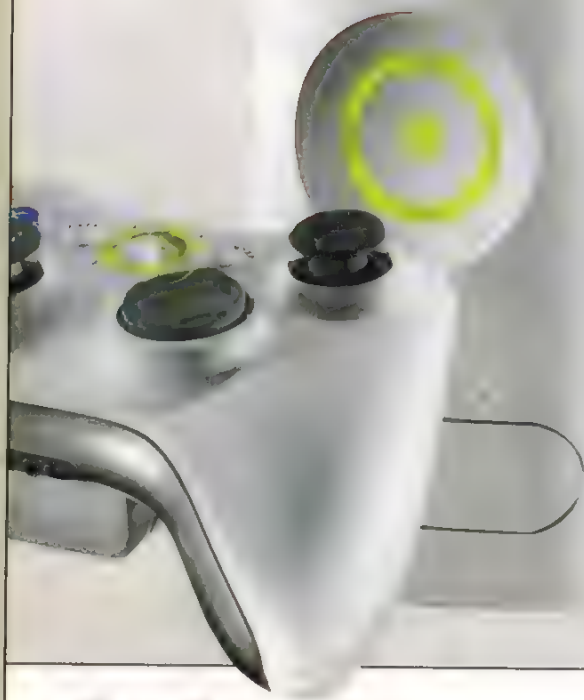
By launching first, Microsoft is poised to build an installed base that will

be nearly impossible to topple — especially if the company reaches its goal of shipping five million units by the end of June. The Xbox 360 was the hottest item in gaming this last holiday season and it will remain so until another console hits the market. The longer that Sony and Nintendo drag their feet, the more likely it is that Microsoft will come out on top. This console already has the momentum, Microsoft just needs to steer it in the right direction.

Unlike the original Xbox's inaugural year, third-party support is one of the prime advantages that Microsoft has this time around. EA and Ubisoft are pledging full support, and key Japanese companies like Square Enix, Tecmo, and Mistwalker should help this console find its worldwide pulse. Given the rise in game development costs and just how similar the PS3 and 360 are in terms of technology, I have a feeling that we'll see fewer exclusives for each system. The race to gobble up the market thus rests mostly on first-party efforts. Sony still has the upper hand in this area, but you can definitely see signs that Microsoft is broadening its horizons while focusing more on quality product over trying to fill every genre. Halo is still the company's ace and arguably the most highly anticipated title coming to any platform, but recent deals like the partnership with 4Kids Entertainment shows that Microsoft is expanding its scope and trying to reach other demographics. Publishers still favor Sony for software that targets a younger audience, but this could change if Microsoft truly embraces this avenue. Outside of the publishing juggernauts, the Live Arcade service allows smaller developers to find their audience.

Xbox Live made quite an impact in the previous generation, but is now showing its full potential in building communities. This generation will be built around online. Microsoft has the clear advantage here. The Achievements and Gamerscores may seem like silly gimmicks, but in the long run they could lead to people favoring the Xbox 360 version of multi-console releases.

The battle ahead for Microsoft is to simply maintain the course. —REINER



This console already has the momentum, Microsoft just needs to steer it in the right direction.

CON

There's no question that Microsoft has learned from its mistakes on the

Xbox. The 360 is a great system with a great controller. So, why haven't I been playing mine more? Honestly, after all the launch excitement wore off, the 360 library seems a bit underwhelming. Sure, there are better-looking versions of experiences I can easily have on current-gen machines (King Kong, Need For Speed: Most Wanted, Gun), but the only game that felt truly "next gen" to me (Call of Duty 2) was a cross-platform title released alongside the PC version.

Yes, Microsoft has a head start, but I don't think it's any secret that the company should have had more units out at launch. Also, after crowing about how it had been making in-roads with Japanese publishers and intended to be a serious player in that market, the 360 has been an absolute bust in that country. Less than half of the initial shipment to stores was sold on day one, causing many retailers to start immediately discounting the system. Can Microsoft succeed in besting Sony in the U.S.? It's possible (although not likely), but Sony's real strength is being able to dominate in all three major territories.

More troubling is the fact that some of Microsoft's stated objectives for the system seem like simply pipe dreams. At last year's E3, it touted Xbox Live as a self-contained digital society, one that could attract both casual and hardcore gamers from around the world and become the center of their online socializing. Sorry, but kids around the world are already socializing and interacting by the millions on an innovative online service. It's called MySpace. To think that Xbox Live will ever be much more than a good online gaming service seems naive. If Sony steps up to the plate with a comprehensive service of its own, Microsoft could easily lose its edge in the only area in which it has a real advantage over the PlayStation brand. —MATT

SONY

PLAYSTATION 3

PLAYSTATION 3

PRO

The next-generation war was decided well before Microsoft shipped the

Xbox 360. Within the last two console life spans, Sony has created a juggernaut out of the PlayStation brand. For many people, PlayStation has become synonymous with video games. People don't want a new video game machine. They want the new PlayStation.

While Microsoft pounds its chest as the company that hardcore gamers turn to, and as Nintendo continues to target a younger audience, Sony has created the atmosphere that the PlayStation is a place where everyone can congregate. By continuing to speak directly to each person that picks up the controller, Sony should be able to stay well ahead of the competition. This feat has been accomplished through a development empire that is well versed in creating franchises that are broad in appeal for all these major markets. Sony has always obtained the highest level of third-party support because of this. Xbox 360's embarrassing start in Japan and Nintendo's high-concept console only strengthen the chance that publishers will make games exclusive to PlayStation 3. The high-profile Metal Gear Solid 4 is just the start.

Through Blu-ray, the PlayStation 3 is the only console that embraces high-definition to the fullest extent. This may not mean much now, but as games continue to grow in size, developers are going to look for larger storage mediums.

Sony also has a great opportunity to gain ground in the online battle. Topping Xbox Live's functionality isn't entirely necessary. Finding a way to keep the online service free to gamers is. Micro-transactions could very well be used to foot the bill for new community building features.

The one stumbling block that Sony faces is affordability. The technology within this console screams of a lofty price point, but then again, so did the PlayStation Portable's. It's ludicrous to think that Sony would throw away all the momentum that it has gained by creating a product that would be out of reach to the masses. If the system can launch for around \$400 to \$500, PlayStation is once again poised to be the console for the mass market.—REINER

CON


It seems hard to bet against Sony, which has dominated the console

market for the last decade. However, we used to think it was impossible that the once-mighty Nintendo would relinquish its stranglehold on gaming. The fact is, as they say, you're only as good as your last hit. Today, I fear that Sony is making enough mistakes to let its hungry competition back in the game.

Most notably, Sony has lost one of the most important advantages it had over Xbox last time around: a head start. Xbox 360 is already established in the marketplace, and could have an installed base of over two million in the U.S. before PS3 sells its first unit. And don't pull that nonsense "Dreamcast" card. However powerful Sony's Cell technology turns out to be, the 360 is a machine that can more than hold its own. Developers are going to make gorgeous-looking games for both systems, and the general buzz amongst developers is that Microsoft's hardware is much easier to program for.

Another problem Sony faces is the cost of production for its cutting edge Blu-ray disc technology. The first consumer Blu-ray player shown at CES this year was priced at \$800 (However, this player was from Pioneer's high-end home theater line), seeming to indicate that the disc system will be very pricey. Although I don't believe, as some do, that Sony will bring out the PS3 at \$500, it will be forced to take a tremendous loss on each console sold, a situation that was a huge drag on Xbox during the last generation. It also might be forced to come out with a historically high price point, which leaves it open to a threat from Nintendo, which promises that The Revolution will be very affordable.

Thirdly, Sony has always succeeded by securing huge third-party exclusives, a practice that is slowly but surely being phased out by publishers. With the investments required to make a triple-A title, it just doesn't make sense to release it for only one system. On this new, more level playing field, consumers will increasingly make choices based on factors like online services and media/PC cross functionality — areas where Microsoft excels.—MATT



For many people, PlayStation has become synonymous with video games.

N I N T E N D O

REVOLUTION

PRO

Nintendo has vowed that it will not be competing with Microsoft and Sony in the next-gen war. From this statement, most people instantly wrote Nintendo off as a distant third-place finisher. Given how software sales have been going – favoring 50 Cent: Bulletproof over Psychonauts by more than ten to one – the Revolution's newfangled approach seems asinine. It effectively closes the doors on publishers being able to port games. Instead, the Revolution's innovative design favors original intellectual property and a library of third-party support that should be quite different than that of the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

Not having the luxury of supporting most multi-system ports is a risk, but this system has the potential of rewriting the very way that we play our video games. The strange looking remote control design certainly screams of gimmick, but it also sings of a higher level of immersion than is possible with today's standard controller. If developers can grasp this potential, I think that we'll see that the gaming community is ready for something different. The Nintendo DS is concrete proof that a unique concept can be used to build an empire.

I foresee casual gamers of all ages being drawn to its unique functionality, but also hardcore gamers turning toward it for its ability to innovate into each genre. The extensive back catalogue of 30 years of Nintendo games will also speak to a wide audience.

As of now, all signs point toward the Revolution winning the price war. This system may lack the power of its competitors, but this could lead to a lean and highly affordable price point. Lower development costs should also produce lower priced games. Affordability and innovation are hard to deny.

If Nintendo can flood the market with units for its holiday launch (something that Sony likely won't be able to), Nintendo could cut into Microsoft's lead by a great margin and also bury Sony in the holiday snow. And what better way is there to christen this console than the possibility of The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess launching on the same day as the Revolution?—REINER

CON

I've been as impressed with the success of the Nintendo DS as anyone, and the possibilities of Nintendo's downloadable games service and innovative Revolution controller certainly present some intriguing possibilities. However, as much as I commend the company for taking chances, I think that Nintendo still faces some serious issues when it comes to its next-gen console.

Foremost is third-party support. Although it seems to be attempting to make amends, the fact is that many companies in the industry are still smarting from the losses they took on GameCube and Nintendo 64. No matter how excited the development community is about the Revolution controller, it's the suits who sign the checks that decide which systems get high-profile exclusives. I'd be willing to bet they're going to grant them to either A) Sony, the long-standing market-leader or B) Microsoft's easy-to-develop for (and already established) Xbox 360.

I'll admit – I'm extremely excited at the prospect of being able to download Super Mario Bros. 3 for an afternoon of gaming when the mood strikes. It's a fantastic idea – no question. However, I worry that it will end up cannibalizing sales of both first- and third-party software sales. If I can "rent" Mega Man for \$5, why take a \$50 chance on a new title? This could make it even harder for third-party titles, which already sell poorly on GameCube, to find an audience.

Finally, while I have no doubt that Miyamoto is already formulating some wonderful uses for the Revolution controller, I have to wonder how many good ideas are out there. I fear that many Revolution titles will feature the same standard gameplay with a few motion sensor gimmicks. Unless developers outside of Nintendo bring some truly unique concepts to the systems, the Revolution could end up being just another interesting curio in gaming history.—MATT

I Fear that many Revolution titles will feature the same standard gameplay with a few motion sensor gimmicks.

BEAUTIFULLY



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PlayStation 2



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eidos 

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1989 ▼ Shareware Days

Taking heavy inspiration from pen and paper RPGs and the influential MUD (multi-user dungeon) online text games, McQuaid forms his first company with friend Steve Clover. Along with artist Milo Cooper, they release the shareware hit WarWizard for Amiga and PC.

1995 ▼ The Big Time



Impressed by a WarWizard online demo that McQuaid and co. had posted online, Verant Interactive head John Smedley hires McQuaid and several of the core WarWizard crew to head-up a new, ambitious online project, which would evolve into EverQuest.

1999 ▼ A Smash Hit



EverQuest launches, and quickly redefines the MMORPG experience for hundreds of thousands of players. It quickly became the market leader in the genre, far eclipsing Ultima Online. Over the next few years, numerous EverQuest expansion packs garner huge sales.

2000 ▼ Consolidation



Sony rolls all of its online properties, including Verant, underneath the Sony Online Entertainment umbrella. In the process, McQuaid receives two major promotions, first heading the premium games division, then becoming chief creative officer.

2002 ▼ Saying Goodbye

McQuaid, wanting to reconnect to the development process and focus his full efforts on one product, makes the decision to leave both EverQuest and SOE behind.

2002 ▼ A New Adventure



McQuaid forms a new company, Sigil Games. Based on his successful track record, he quickly secures a deal with Microsoft to publish his upcoming project, Vanguard. Saga of Heroes, a PC MMO set to release sometime in 2006.

BRAD McQUAID

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, CHAIRMAN, AND CEO, SIGIL ENTERTAINMENT

>> Sigil Entertainment is working on what can best be described as "the next big thing" in massively multiplayer gaming – and having the former lead designer of the original EverQuest working on it can't hurt. We got the man himself, Brad McQuaid, to share his thoughts on the business of online gaming from a designer's perspective. <<

What made you want to walk away from the success of EverQuest and SOE and everything that was going on over there?

There are a lot of different reasons that I left the company. Mainly, I had risen to the point in the company that I was Sony Online's chief creative officer and vice president of premium games, which were any games that had a subscription fee to them. So at one time I was in charge of EQ, all of its expansions, EQ 2, PlanetSide, Sovereign, and Star Wars Galaxies all at once. So I had risen to this point where I realized that having those titles and authority wasn't making me happy. I missed the days of being hands-on and working with the folks and focusing all my creative energy on one or two titles.

Do you see any difference between the kinds of players that started with EQ versus the kind of people who are playing now?

Yes and no. I think that, first of all, the demographic has expanded – it's been 10 years. You

games like World of Warcraft and Vanguard, just from a financial standpoint, require a subscription-based revenue model. Simply, I've got 95 people working on Vanguard and it's going to cost a lot of money. I've heard that, for World of Warcraft, they went on for five years and I've heard numbers like \$60 to \$75 million spent. When you're talking about those kinds of dollars, you're talking about a premium experience, you're also talking about an expectation among the player base that there's a strong customer service team, that there's a live team that's keeping the game fresh and balanced, tweaking and balancing gameplay.... So, for the big premium games like that, I see this revenue model around for quite a while.

Obviously, MMOs are a very risk/reward-heavy proposition for publishers. You said that World of Warcraft was \$65 or \$70 million; if that hadn't been as successful as it is, that could have been a huge problem for the industry.

It could have destroyed the genre and set it back

ter you can be because you're focused. They can make a polished but smaller game and attract a smaller audience. The people with the spreadsheets can still be happy, if that was the idea. Not all games have to be million-subscriber games. They're still strengthening the online genre in general by putting out quality product. Ultimately, I'd rather see 15 different games that offer different themes rather than two huge games.

Have you given any thought to using other media to support Vanguard's secondary functions, like allowing player auctioning through cell phones or email to connect with users in the game?

Big time...from the very first version of the Vanguard design doc, we talked about using cell phones and PDAs, stuff like that, to stay connected to different aspects of the game. The examples you cited are all valid and very interesting. With Vista, we'll be able to have little applets that, while you're not all the way inside the game, you can

I missed the days of being hands-on and focusing all my creative energy on one or two titles.

have people now who are 16 or 17 who are playing MMOs who were six or seven when EQ and UO and Meridian 59 came out. So you have that many more people. Combine that with games like World of Warcraft that are just growing the game space, and any time you talk about a game space that's growing, you get larger cross-sections of different types of gamers. I don't really think that that means that people have changed, I think it means that the larger a group of people that you look at in any kind of demographic, the larger the number, the more types either exist or maybe they existed before and now they exist in numbers large enough that you need to pay attention to that group.

Speaking of change, do you think there's any way to evolve or alter the subscription model that most MMOs subsist on?

Well, I don't think it will change. What I think you'll see happening is, you'll see some different models tried out. Some will succeed and some won't. What I see happening over the next five or ten years would be different revenue models tried, and again some of them succeeding and some of them failing, and the end result being more options for players. I wouldn't say we're exclusively tied to this model, but the big huge virtual world

years. If it had failed for some reason, the ripples it would have made through the industry, how gun-shy would it have made publishers and investors? I shudder to think.

Do you think that this high risk factor is eventually going to catch up with the genre and pose a risk to the long term viability and variety you'll find in it?

You always have a risk of someone going and getting a lot of funding for a game like this and then having it fail. And there are people who just look at the numbers and go, "This is bad." But you go up and down. I remember when single-player RPGs were in kind of a funk, and people said that RPGs were dead. Then Blizzard did it again and came out with Diablo. And there was a resurrection of single-player RPGs. It wasn't that the players disappeared, but that there weren't really great games out there. There are only a certain number of publishers who are willing, or even able, to publish a game like EverQuest 2 or Vanguard. The reality is that there are only going to be a few of these games out at a time. There needs to be some diversity. There has to be more niche product. I think that's good. It gives more variety and more choices to online gamers. The more focused you can be on a certain genre or theme, the bet-

control some things and do some degree of communication. It's just a matter of when we can fit it all in. I think you'll see some of it hopefully by launch, but you'll certainly see much more of it after launch.

There's been a lot of rumor and speculation about the Xbox 360. Do you want to comment on whether or not Vanguard is going to see a console release?

I would say at this point that it's unlikely. Early on, we talked about it, back when Microsoft was going over the specs for that box. We were borderline for a while on whether or not the box would have in it what we needed to make Vanguard a great game on both console and PC. Eventually it became clear that it didn't make sense. When I have a vision for a game, I want to make sure that the platform I deliver it on can give the experience with as few compromises as possible. The way that Vanguard has developed, although the 360 is an incredible machine, it just doesn't have the RAM and other things that we need for our game. Will there be some incredible massively multiplayer games coming to console? Absolutely. A game the scope of Vanguard will probably have to wait until the generation after this.

SEARCHING THE HORIZONS OF THE MMORPG

■ Sigil Games' Brad McQuaid hopes that Vanguard can repeat his groundbreaking success with EverQuest



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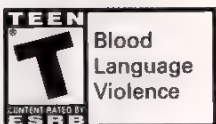
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NINTENDO DS LITE

Manufacturer: Nintendo
Website: www.nintendo.com
List Price: TBA

Finally. Our long wait is nearly over and a Nintendo DS that doesn't look like a plastic brick from the mid-1980s will be available shortly. The DS Lite modifies little of the basic idea for the company's wacky handheld, but does add the bright screens from the SP's recent update, moves a few buttons around, adds multiple backlight brightness settings, and puts the power and connection lights onto the hinge. Cumulatively, the nips and tucks on each side of the unit make it two-thirds the size of the original and some reworking on the inside lowers the weight by 20 percent. The Lite is hot, and if it's shiny like the test photos, a pre-order stampede is waiting to happen.



tech

TF-DVD560

Manufacturer: Coby Electronics **Website:** www.cobyusa.com **List Price:** \$120
 This portable DVD player's 3.5-inch screen isn't going to win any awards for pure magnitude, but the extra features built in just might. A rechargeable battery, headphones, car adapter, AV cables, built-in stand, and carrying case are cool and all, but the best bit is that it plays 12 classic Sega games. Altered Beast, Golden Axe, Sonic Chaos, and Ecco are interesting built-in additions sure to add some value to the little backseat driver's value-priced player is designed for.



etc

PONG CLOCK

Manufacturer: Buro Vormkrijgers
Website: www.burovormkrijgers.nl **List Price:** €199.00
 Here's a clock that plays Pong... or a game of pure magnitude. Either way, this is a software-driven session where the left player's score is the hours and the right's is the minutes. Every time the substantially more awesome guy on the right scores 60 points, the sucker on the left scores one. There's also a built-in play mode for a pickup game and each piece is individually numbered. Our only gripe is that it's smaller than we would like, but the online store does enthusiastically ship worldwide.



peripherals

LCD TOPGUN

Manufacturer: EMS Production
Website: www.hkems.com **List Price:** \$34.95
 We can't help but wonder if the realistic styling of this gun is terribly legal in the States, but importers are bringing in this Hong Kong special light gun purporting to be the first compatible with LCD, plasma, DLP, and projection televisions. To work with these non-CRT sets, two strips of LEDs have to be installed on either side of the screen, but they look pretty unobtrusive in the pictures. PS2, Xbox, and PC ready, the gun can also be set up with force feedback, auto-fire, and auto-reload.



(Shown with PSP, not included)



tech

iTRIP FM TRANSMITTER FOR PSP

Manufacturer: Griffin **Website:** www.griffintechnology.com **List Price:** \$49.99

Lately known mostly for their sleek and high-quality iPod accessories, Griffin is hitting up the PSP market in the next month. The company's new focus starts with an iTRIP module with functions that mimic its iPod counterpart (namely, listening to the PSP's audio output through an FM station), but with design more in keeping with the PSP's lines and proportions. Other accessories like the iFM and SmartShare headphone splitter work just fine with the PSP, although they were designed for the stylish black iPods.



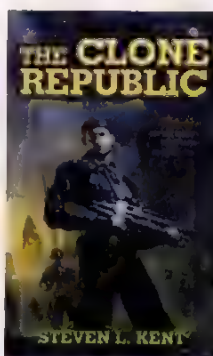
tech

SWISSMEMORY USB VICTORINOX 2GB

Manufacturer: Swissbit **Website:** www.swissbit.com

List Price: €192.00 (Ruby Red), €186.00 (Retro Alox)

Due in the next month, SwissBit has upgraded the storage capacity of the company's Swiss Army knife/USB flash drive combo to 2GB. Each model comes with scissors, a knife, nail file/screw driver, and the removable USB 2.0 flash drive. The ruby red edition adds an LED light and ballpoint pen. It appears that the aluminum-dad Retro ALOX, since it's lacking the light and pen, might be a tad smaller than its classic red counterpart.



etc

THE CLONE REPUBLIC BY STEVEN KENT

Manufacturer: Ace Mass Market Paperback

Website: www.penguin.com **List Price:** \$7.99

Lauded video game journalist and occasional Game Informer contributor Steven Kent (see Classic GI, issue 149) has a sci-fi novel ready to hit bookstores in the end of March. *The Clone Republic* follows a military drone whose biggest offense is being different from his clone brethren, putting him into the middle of a conflict bigger than himself.

RADEON X1900 XTX

We almost wish ATI had skipped the 1800s entirely. That line of cards was announced less than six months ago and took its sweet time getting to retail shelves. We're sure that ATI's competition was happy about the supply shortage, but gamers left the company in the dust. The X1900 XTX (the gamer-centric card in the new line) will hopefully wash away that icky taste in people's mouths. The quick and dirty advantage about this card is that it's designed to be particularly efficient with high-resolution games and images that tap into Shader Model 3.0, besides just being a very high-end video card. Gamers of every level will see the advantage, but if you want more technical mumbo-jumbo, check out ATI's website for an extensive breakdown on the card's components.



Manufacturer: ATI
Website: www.ati.com
List Price: \$649



Real Tones

The Crazy Frog - Axel F real7729
 The Crazy Frog - Rocky Theme real7770
 The Crazy Frog - Crazy DJ real7777

Crazy Frog Fun Sounds

Little City real7743
 Cocoon real7744
 Beauty & The Beast real7745
 Crazy Frog real7746
 Mad real7747
 Original real7748
 Rollercoaster real7749

Wallpapers

pic3655 pic3656 pic3657

Screensavers

move2876

GAMES

Worms GAME1305	Root Beer GAME1306	Paintball GAME1307
Miami Vice GAME1308	Spy Hunter GAME1309	Johnny Crash GAME1310
		Destroy All.. GAME1311

REAL TONES

Jamster Top 10

1) Yo (Excuse Me...) - C. Brown real7731
 2) Check On It - Beyonce real7732
 3) R.O.C.A.B. real7733
 4) Unpredictable - Jamie Foxx real7734
 5) Temperature - Sean Paul real7735
 6) DJ Play A Love Song - J. Foxx real7736
 7) Nasty Girl - Notorious B.I.G. real7737
 8) Laffy Taffy - b4L real7738
 9) Poppin' - Three 6 Mafia real7739

REAL TONES

Back in Black - AC/DC real7740
 Badd - Ying Yang Twins real7741
 Bat Country - A. Sevenfold real7742
 Bet You Can't Do It Like... - D4K real7743
 Big Poppa - Notorious B.I.G. real7744
 C.R.E.A.M. - Wu-Tang Clan real7745
 Can't Let Go - Hamilton real7746
 Check On It (Grizz R.) - Beyonce real7747
 Cold - Crossfade real7748
 Down With The... - Disturbed real7749
 Draped Up - Bun B real7750
 Flossin' - Mike Jones real7751
 Fresh Azimiz - Bow Wow real7752
 Gasolina - Daddy Yankee real7753
 Here We Go - Trina real7754
 Hung Up (Chorus) - Madonna real7755
 I'm Sprung - T-Pain real7756
 Lovers & ... - Lil Jon & The East real7757
 Naggin - Ying Yang Twins real7758
 Presidential - Youngbloodz real7759
 Ride Wit Me - T.I. real7760
 Run It - Chris Brown real7761
 Shake - Ying Yang Twins real7762
 Stay Fly - Three 6 Mafia real7763
 Stiletto - Crime Mob real7764
 Stupid Girls - Pink real7765
 Tell Me When - E-40 real7766
 Yeah! - Usher real7767
 You're Beautiful - Xscape real7768

RINGTONES

poly8700
 poly8701
 poly8702
 poly8703
 poly8704
 poly8705
 poly8706
 poly8707
 poly8708
 poly8709
 poly8710
 poly8711
 poly8712
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 poly8714
 poly8715
 poly8716
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 poly8718
 poly8719

4) Don't Cha
 5) James Bond
 6) Candy Shop
 7) Bad Boys (Cops Theme)
 8) Dirty Little Secret
 9) Tubular Bells (Exorcist Th.)
 10) Trapstar
 11) Gold Digger
 12) Wait (Whisper Song)
 13) Naked
 14) Because I Got High
 15) Back Then
 16) Unbreakable
 17) Let Me Love You
 18) Wake Me Up When September Ends
 19) The Anthem

COLOR WALLPAPERS

I KNOW YOU'RE LYING pic3520	 pic3521	YOU'RE a PAIN IN THE A** pic3522	 pic3523	I am so BROKE ... I can't even pay attention pic3524
 pic3525	 pic3526	 pic3527	 pic3528	 pic3529
 pic3535	 pic3536	 pic3537	 pic3538	 pic3539
 pic3545	 pic3546	 pic3547	 pic3548	 pic3549
 pic3555	 pic3556	 pic3557	 pic3558	 pic3559
 pic3565	 pic3566	 pic3567	 pic3568	 pic3569
 pic3575	 pic3576	 pic3577	 pic3578	 pic3579
 pic3585	 pic3586	 pic3587	 pic3588	 pic3589
 pic3595	 pic3596	 pic3597	 pic3598	 pic3599

SOFTWARE

Party Chat app1300 Party Chat - It's finally possible to send your txt by cell as scrolling text.	Mobile Watch app1301 Mobile Watch - Does the clock on your mobile phone bore you? Get the Metal Dragon!
special Nightlight app1302 Disco Light - Reading Lamp, 10 different light colors, 10 different blinking sequences, automatic change of	SoundFX Pad app1303 SoundFX Pad - THE Annoying Sound Generator!
app1304 Mobile Watch - With this cool clock you will never be late again. Get the Yin Yang watch on your cell	app1305 Armwrestling - Prove to everyone that you are the strongest!

SCREENSAVERS

 move2860	 move2861	 move2862	 move2863	 move2864	 move2865	 move2866	 move2867
 move2868	 move2869	 move2870	 move2871	 move2872	 move2873	 move2874	 move2875

TO ACTIVATE YOUR MONTHLY PLAN TXT TO

75555*

GAMES

3D Pool

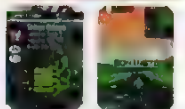


db7/games



GAME1312

Moto GP



GAME1313

Juiced



GAME1314

FUN SOUNDS

- Answer The Phone Pimp fun6563
- Anybody In There fun6566
- Bleep Generic fun6567
- Bout Time for Pimp to Leave fun6568
- Do Not Answer The Phone! fun6569
- From Hell fun6570
- Ho Lottis Ho fun6571
- Lawn Sprinkler fun6572
- Lottery - You Won! fun6573
- Mamma Calling fun6574
- Mosquito fun6575
- Oh My Gawd! - Its A Text ringtones
- Police Horn fun6577
- Sick Tarzan fun6578
- The Crazy Frog Goes To India fun6579
- They Are Looking At You fun6580
- Too Drunk To Ring fun6581
- West Coast fun6582
- You Have A Text - Gosh! fun6583
- Your Attention Please! fun6584

Money Make

Real Tones

Ho On Line 1, 2, 3, 4 And 6 real7769

Time Is Money real7770

Pimp Cup Down real7771

Pimp Apparatus real7772

Pick Up Ya Phone real7773

99 Problems real7774

Wallpapers



pic3595



pic3596

HOT WALLPAPERS



pic3603



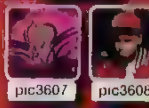
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pic3606



pic3607



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pic3617



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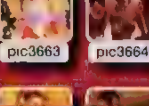
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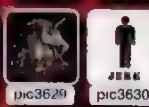
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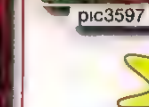
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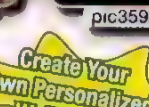
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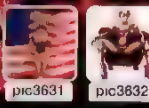
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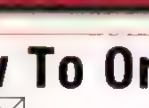
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pic3640



pic3641



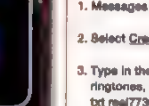
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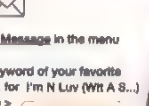
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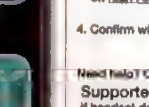
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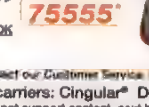
pic3651



pic3652



pic3653



pic3654

SOFTWARE



app1306



app1307



app1308



app1309

Mobile Watch - Why this you cannot resist checking you call over and over!

Chillout Light - Mellow out and leave all your worries and cares behind you!

Mobile Strobe Light - You'll be the life of the party with the wicked mobile strobe light!

Fortune Cookie - Enjoy a new fortune cookie everyday without the calories and mess of...

NAME WALLPAPERS

Just txt the keyword and a name! (with up to 8 characters)



pic3597



pic3598

Create Your Own Personalized Wallpaper!



pic3599



pic3600



pic3601



pic3602

CHECK OUT JAMSTER.COM FOR THE WIDEST SELECTION OF MOBILE DOWNLOADS

SEXY WALLPAPERS



pic3659



pic3660



pic3661



pic3662



pic3663



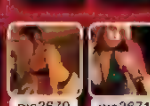
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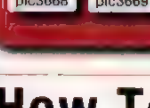
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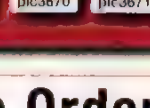
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pic3669



pic3670



pic3671



pic3672



pic3673

How To Order...

1. Message
2. Select Create Message in the menu
3. Type in the keyword of your favorite ringtones, e.g. for I'm N Luv (With A 3...) or real7730 to >
4. Confirm with OK



Monthly Value Plan credits for:
2 Ringtones
1 Game
3 Graphics
\$ 5.99 per plan

Need help? Contact our Customer Service... Supported carriers: Cingular® Dobson® Sprint® T-Mobile® (if handset does not support content, next best supported content is delivered)

How To Download...



For more details see manual of your mobile phone or visit www.jamster.com

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VIDEO GAME VIOLENCE: A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE



BY ROB COOPER,
SENIOR LEAD ANALYST,
MAJESCO ENTERTAINMENT

I like video games. I like violent video games. I like using guns in my games and killing things, whether it's human, aliens, or whatever else that moves. I like watching cleavage bounce around on screen. I like games where I can drive in ways that would get me arrested. I like games that teach me new ways to insult people with crude, inappropriate humor. I like video games. No, I love video games. I love them because video games let me escape into a completely different world where I can do things that are impossible, inexcusable, and irreversible in the real world.

So, why do I sit around on Saturday afternoon and feel obligated to play another game in NHL 2K6 or complete another scenario in Outpost Kaloki X instead of getting through the next mission in Perfect Dark Zero, or trying to finally get past that boss I've been stuck at in Resident Evil 4? Why am I shooting squares and circles in Geometry Wars instead of Nazis in Call of Duty 2? Because I have two kids.

I grew up with video games. I was introduced at a very young age to the Atari, which of course led to Nintendo and so forth. I watched games evolve from blocks to pixels to polygons, and was exposed to the increasingly mature content that came with each revision. I also learned that video games can be influential, but are ultimately fantasy. As much as I wanted to be the hero with the sword, slaying demons and rescuing the distressed damsel, I knew that walking through the woods on my way home from school swinging my wooden "sword" could lead to real world consequences instead of experience points if I did decide to kill the "evil" cat monsters. Unfortunately, I learned a lot of these lessons on my own; my parents used video games as a babysitter while they went about their own lives, never really knowing what I was playing. Now, 25 years after I first picked up

a controller, I have two kids that will be immersed in video games much deeper than I ever was, and exposed to images more graphic than I ever could have imagined.

Video games may have evolved in many good ways, but their influence has also increased as well. I know and you know that killing is wrong, that the female (and male) form should be respected, and you shouldn't eat mushrooms you find lodged in bricks, but I can tell you from experience that a two-year-old boy doesn't know that. I know that "please" and "thank you" aren't words inherent to the lexicon of a toddler and must be taught by the parents. I know that when a child sees arguments degrade into violence she'll learn that violence is an acceptable solution to getting what she wants. I also know that it's my job as a parent to be responsible for what my kids are exposed to and to put anything inappropriate into context. I won't let my kids watch violent TV or movies and I certainly won't let them watch violent or heavily suggestive video games. It can be hard at times to keep them from inappropriate content, but it's my job as a parent to know and understand what my children are exposed to.

Before my current position in the industry, I worked as a sales associate in the video game section of a retail chain. This retail chain had in place (in 2001) an automated system that would indicate to the sales associate and the customer, through the LED price display, any time an M-rated game was scanned. The sales associate was supposed to verify that the purchaser was over 17 and was aware that they were purchasing a game unsuitable for children. I followed this procedure many times under many different circumstances. The most revealing to me were the times mothers would approach with their pre-teen sons with some Mature title. Once the beep sounded and I ran through the brief monologue, the two most

“

I know that it's my job as a parent to be responsible for what my kids are exposed to.

”

common reactions were either A) complete and utter indifference, or B) shock that they were about to buy inappropriate material for their child. This indicated to me that they were completely uneducated about the entire ratings system and video games in general. Very rarely were the parents knowledgeable about what content their children were playing.

Fining retailers won't help. Censoring games should never happen. Reorganizing the ESRB isn't the answer. In this fight to stop the criminalization of the game industry as an enabler to teen violence, the key is parents. Parents need to step up and know what their children are doing, what they're watching, and what they're thinking. It's okay (and often necessary) at a certain point to let go of the innocence and let kids grow up, but parents need to be there to make sure kids know what's right and wrong and what's fiction and reality.

We must remember that video games are only a form of entertainment. Just as the music community was once attacked for driving children to suicide through demonic lyrics and subliminal messages, video games are so persecuted now, and the industry will prevail in a similar manner. The generation that was supposedly under the evil influence of games will grow up and replace the previous generation, but will do so with the knowledge and foresight in preventing, or at least reducing, the number of kids negatively affected by the media. Those who are affected will be the unfortunate kids whose parents don't know, don't care, don't know to care, or don't care to know. I love video games, I love the industry, and I love shooting virtual guns and tearing enemies to shreds, but I love my children more and they'll always come first. ■■■

The views and opinions expressed on this page are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer Magazine or its staff.

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THIS LAND.

BUT YOU ALONE RULE
ITS DESTINY.

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幻想水滸伝

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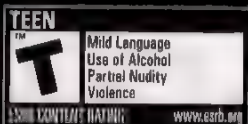
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thur

fri

sat

april



The Slowest Month in Video Games (a.k.a. the 'Play Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion' Month)



02

Teen Titans - PS2, Xbox, GC

ELDER SCROLLS FEAT 1 FINISH THE MAIN QUEST & BELLY FLOP

After ridding the world of evil, find a big rock that overlooks a lake, jump up and down to get your fatigue level up, then do something to knock yourself out like casting Lover's Kiss. This will make your character belly flop into the water. Repeat for added hilarity.



04

NEW RELEASES

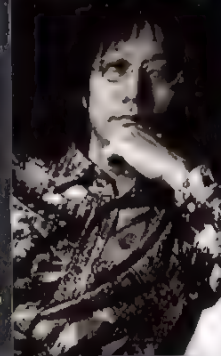
- Brothers in Arms - PSP
- Bust-A-Move Deluxe - PSP
- The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe - DVD, UMD
- Commandos: Strike Force - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Faces of War - PC
- Hearts of Iron II: Doomsday - PC

- Major League Baseball 2K6 - PSP
- NBA Ballers: Phenom - PS2, Xbox
- Teen Titans - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Top Spin 2 - 360, DS, GBA
- Tourist Trophy: Real Riding Simulator - PS2
- The Wild - GBA

06

DEEP THOUGHTS

The father of the Metal Gear Solid series has been running a series of blogs online for a few months now. Just recently these insightful journals have been translated to English. Check them out at www.blog.konami.jp/gshideoblog_e/



08

KINGDOM HEARTS FORMATION ARTS FIGURE SET 1

The first series of Kingdom Hearts figures hits stores. The series includes Sora, Donald, and Jack Skellington.

09

Field Commander - PSP

ELDER SCROLLS FEAT 2 GO TO CHURCH & STREAK Head to Chapel Stendarr in Chorrol and ask forgiveness for all of the civilians that you have killed. Once the service is done, tear off your clothes and streak from the doors of the church all the way to Burtol.



11

NEW RELEASES

- Auto Assault Online - PC
- Bounty Hounds - PSP
- Field Commander - PSP
- Final Fantasy XI - 360
- Lara Croft: Tomb Raider - HD DVD
- Major League Baseball 2K6 - 360
- Metal Saga - PS2
- Tomb Raider: Legend - PS2, Xbox, PC



Final Fantasy XI - 360

14

FINAL FANTASY HOCKEY

Today, the Atlanta Thrashers do battle with the Boston Bruins on NBC at 2PM EDT. Why is this game pertinent to video games? Thrasher goaltender Kari Lehtonen has Yuna and Rikku painted on his mask. How cool is that?

Photo by Jessica Smith



16

Rampage: Total Destruction - PS2, GC

ELDER SCROLLS FEAT 3 BECOME ARENA CHAMPION

Once you have been deemed the toughest man in the world through the gladiator tournaments, fate must be tempted. Enter a fort and hunt down a vampire. Give him a big schmooch on the lips. Once completed, you can also go by the title of craziest man.



18

NEW RELEASES

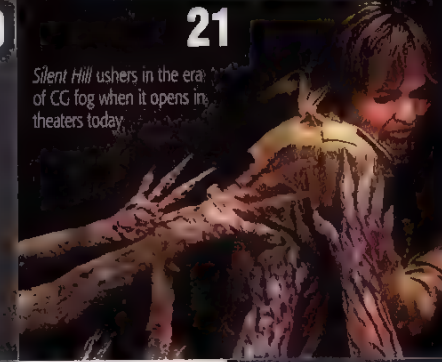
- Dreamfall: The Longest Journey 2 - Xbox, PC
- Final Fantasy XI: Treasures of Aht Urhgan - PS2, PC
- Keepsake - PC
- Lost Magic - DS
- Major League Baseball 2K6 - GC
- Rampage: Total Destruction - PS2, GC

- The Sims 2: Family Fun Stuff - PC
- Thundercats Season 2: Vol. 12 - DVD

20

21

Silent Hill ushers in the era of CG fog when it opens in theaters today.



23

Atelier Iris 2 - PS2

ELDER SCROLLS FEAT 4 COLLECT ALL DAEDRIC ARTIFACTS & PUNCH A UNICORN



25

NEW RELEASES

- America's Army: Rise of a Soldier - PS2
- Atelier Iris 2 - PS2
- Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children - DVD, UMD
- Guild Wars: Factions - PC

26

GAMES & MOBILE FORUM

Returning for its fifth year, this forum explores online and mobile games. Sony Online Entertainment's John Smedley and Jamdat Mobile's Mitch Lasky are just two of the many keynote speakers that will be on hand.

27

CHECKMATE #1 & ION #1

DC Comics launches two new series today. The creative team behind the OMAC Project will be at the helm of Checkmate, a spy agency that keeps tabs on the heroes and villains. And former Green Lantern Kyle Rayner will once again don the helm of Ion, the most powerful being in the universe.



29

30

ELDER SCROLLS FEAT 5 BECOME HEAD OF ALL FOUR GUILDS & STAY INVISIBLE FOR A DAY



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The background of the entire page is a fiery, orange and red scene with lightning bolts striking down. In the center, the character Kratos is shown from the chest up, looking intensely forward with a stern expression. He has a large, dark, horn-like structure on his forehead. The title "GOD OF WAR II" is written in a large, stylized, metallic font across the middle. The word "GOD" is on the left, "OF" is in the center, and "WAR" is on the right. The Roman numeral "II" is positioned below "OF". A small "TM" trademark symbol is located to the right of the word "WAR".

GOD OF WAR II™

EVER SINCE GOD OF WAR EXPLODED ONTO THE GAMING LANDSCAPE LAST YEAR, ITS PROTAGONIST HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MOST FEARSOME AND RECOGNIZABLE FACES IN THE INDUSTRY. THE TERRIBLE DEEDS AND HAUNTING PAST OF KRATOS CAPTIVATED GAMERS AS THEY SLICED THROUGH LEGIONS OF MYTHICAL MONSTERS ON A QUEST TO MURDER A GOD. YET, EVEN WITH KRATOS SUCCESSFULLY PERCHED ON ARES' THRONE AS THE NEWLY-MADE GOD OF WAR, THE ADVENTURE IS FAR FROM OVER. THE GHOST OF SPARTA AND HIS BLADES ARE RETURNING FOR AN ALL-NEW BOUT WITH DIVINE FORCES IN GOD OF WAR II ON THE PLAYSTATION 2. WHILE HIS ENEMIES WILL BE POWERFUL, KRATOS' GREATEST FOE CONTINUES TO BE HIMSELF; AFTER SETTING A REMARKABLY HIGH BAR WITH THE ORIGINAL GOD OF WAR, ONE OF THE MOST FORMIDABLE CHALLENGES OF THE SEQUEL WILL BE DELIVERING AN EXPERIENCE THAT MEETS THE STANDARDS ESTABLISHED BY THE FIRST TITLE WHILE CONTINUING TO EXPAND THE SCOPE OF THE FRANCHISE. WE VISITED SONY'S SANTA MONICA STUDIO TO SEE HOW A NEW DIRECTOR AND NEW IDEAS ARE ENSURING THAT GOD OF WAR'S BRUTAL AND ACCESSIBLE GAMEPLAY EVOLVES ALONGSIDE THE EVER-GROWING MIGHT OF ITS GRIM HERO.

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION

> PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

> DEVELOPER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

SANTA MONICA STUDIOS

> RELEASE Q1 2007

DIVINE RETRIBUTION


When a follow-up sequel to a popular game is a delicate task. On one hand, developers need to provide enough new content to instill players with the sense that they are doing something fresh. On the other hand, too many deviations from the original formula can result in a betrayal of what made the game fun to begin with. Very aware of these potential dangers, God of War II's director Cory Barlog is quick to assure fans that they need not fear a repetition of Capcom's Devil May Cry 2 debacle. "We want to make things that didn't work, work better," Barlog explains. "And we want to take the things that did work, and elevate them beyond where we went in the last game— even the parts where people said 'This is awesome, it can't get any better!' No, it can. And that's what we're doing."

Even though it will have a host of improvements, fans of the first game don't need to worry about God of War II trying to carve out a brand new identity for itself in unfamiliar territory. After all, offshoots in different directions have been the downfall of several high-profile follow-ups. It will retain the visceral, engaging combat and epic scale exploration that made

the first title so enthralling. "We're not just going to go off and make some crazy sequel that has nothing to do with the original," Barlog laughs. "This isn't an expansion pack or some wacky new direction. We pick up where we left off."

One of the things ensuring that the unique and stylish feel of God of War remains intact is the fact that 90 percent of the original team is returning for God of War II. Barlog himself was the lead animator before taking over directing duties, which were previously handled by Dave Jaffe (who was promoted to creative director of the entire Santa Monica studio in the wake of God of War's success). While Jaffe became the public face of God of War surrounding its release, it was the contributions of many that led to the game's positive reception. "Passing the torch may be a misconception," Jaffe elaborates. "It's more like I'm taking one hand off the torch, but we were always holding it together. I'm still involved, but it's Cory's vision, Cory's game. The current team was so instrumental in crafting what the first game became that it doesn't feel like that big of a transition."

Sony realizes that there may be some skepticism regarding the management change. New leadership is usually the first thing blamed when a sequel doesn't perform up to expectations. "At first, I'm sure people will ask 'who the f— is this noob?'" Barlog laughs. Preemptively making light of these apprehensions, he adds, "I'm really excited about our gardening mini-game. It really shows you the softer side of Kratos. He can cross-stitch!" All jokes aside, he adds,



"Really, once they start seeing the content, that speaks for itself." After all, when all is said and done, *God of War II* will undoubtedly provide its own proof of quality.

The biggest hurdle facing *God of War II*, as with many sequels, is opening up new avenues with its content. The first game was over-the-top in all regards; everything from the violence to the environments was done on an epic scale. After all, when the finale has the protagonist killing a god and becoming a deity himself, one would think that there aren't too many ways to up the ante. "We set a high bar, but we still have a lot of room," Barlog observes. "We only closed the doors that needed to be closed, that needed to satisfy the player's understanding about certain aspects of Kratos. What needed to be told in the first game got told and got resolved. What's being added to the plot to elevate it is a massive story — a story that when you start understanding where it's taking you, you're like 'Oh, f---. That's crazy!'"

The adventure picks up exactly where the first game stopped. Kratos has just killed Ares, and is seated upon his new throne. Clad in armor that is a stylistic mix of Ares' suit and Kratos' own protection from his days as a Spartan general, Kratos is otherwise just as players left him. Despite his remarkable achievement, however, he is unable to rest easy. Though forgiven for his deeds, he has not exorcised the demons of

his past. Amid his continuing nightmares, he must come to terms with the fact that even as a part of the Olympian pantheon, he remains subservient in some ways to other gods, and he is still not immune to their twisted machinations.

Even though the game begins with Kratos imbued with full powers worthy of a god, the glory doesn't last long. Other gods, affronted by the fact that a mere mortal has joined their ranks, begin to conspire against their new brother. "Anybody who has some familiarity with Greek mythology knows that's what the gods did," points out producer Steve Caterson. "They stabbed each other in the back."

"It's *Days of our Lives* meets Paul Verhoeven," Barlog interjects. "That dramatic struggle between very powerful people who are incapable of having any moral center."

As a result of this power struggle, events are set in motion that essentially strip Kratos of his new throne. "We kind of return him to what he was, juxtaposing him to how he is at the beginning," Barlog says. Once again betrayed by the conniving of the gods, Kratos makes it his bloody mission to go over their heads and tackle the problem by rooting out those who can command even Zeus: the three Sisters of Fate — the gods' gods.

In Greek mythology, the Sisters weave the threads of fate for every being on earth, god and mortal alike. Kratos realizes that the

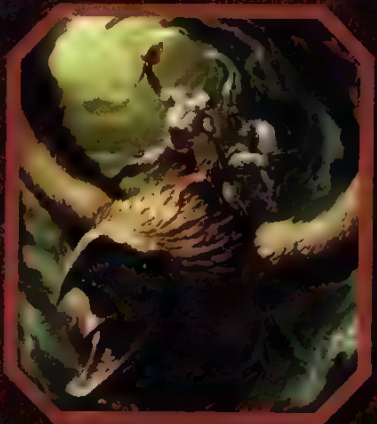
responsibility for the life he is doomed to lead, as well as his terrifying past, rests with those who predetermined his destiny. In order to reverse the event that robbed him of his godhood, Kratos needs to travel to the Temple of Fate situated at the literal edge of the world and confront the Sisters face-to-face — and you can be certain that it won't be a simple please-and-thank-you affair. Barlog clarifies: "It's still rooted very much in the base idea of Kratos' brutality, animal nature, and his revenge — his unbridled desire for revenge. 'You wronged me. Well, f--- you. You're going down.'"

Even though the gorgeous pre-rendered cutscenes conveying pivotal events will be making a return, the majority of Kratos' personality and rage comes through in combat rather than exposition. The ferocious and freeform battle system of the original returns with a vengeance, though it has undergone some changes in order to make Kratos' attacks more streamlined and fluid, allowing for an uninterrupted string of aerial and ground-based carnage. "We're definitely bringing that flavor back, empowering the player to paint whatever picture they want with the combat," Barlog tells us. Kratos still has his signature blades chained to his wrists, though they are now the Blades of Athena, bound to him willingly. In addition to these implements of doom, Kratos will also

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■ The look of these temples may be reminiscent of the first game, but Kratos will journey to a wide variety of new locations, like a sunken temple in a swamp



A PORTRAIT OF KRATOS

The image that appears on the cover of this issue of Game Informer is one of the most evocative and striking illustrations we've displayed. During our visit to Sony's Santa Monica studio we discussed the art with its creator (and God of War II's visual development director) Charlie Wen, who provides unique insight into how the imagery ties into the project as a whole. "The idea is to capture the game's main themes," Wen observes. "The world is chaotic, stormy, it's got lightning arching through the clouds – with possibly some light at the end of the tunnel. Everything is moving – the game is about action, and the motion engulfs everything. There's stuff coming out that Kratos has to meet and match up with, and we're showing that he can jump onto other riders and completely demolish them on their own territory."



■ Movement on walls has been expanded, allowing for combat and quick movement in all directions



■ Hanging from the ceiling provides more opportunities for fighting as well as platforming

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 60

have sub-weapons at his disposal that the player can integrate at will into the chaos of combat.

The original game did feature another weapon in addition to the chains, a sword called the Blade of Artemis. However, the team believes that the way the sword was used in the gameplay displayed too distinct a separation between it and the chains. The weapons were essentially two different modes which the player could toggle between by pressing L1 and R1 simultaneously. While it allowed for some flexibility, players weren't able to switch weapons mid-combo, which meant that each battle made you choose one weapon or the other. Now, you'll be able to switch with just the touch of a single button, similar to the way weapons were handled in *Devil May Cry 3*. This will allow you to launch an enemy with the chains, follow it up with an aerial sword assault, then seamlessly transition back to finish the job.

The same combo-linking technique that is being applied to sub-weapons will also be used for Kratos' new magical arsenal. Last time around, the magic attacks were an excellent tool for managing groups of enemies, though they severely limited players' mobility. In the interest of constantly keeping the combat in motion, most of the spells in *GoW II* will be usable on the go and fully assimilated into the endless string of combo possibilities. For instance, one of the new magic abilities is an ice-based attack that functions similarly to a shotgun blast in other games, and like a sub-weapon, can be used in the midst of any combo. These attacks aren't simply new ways to inflict damage, though; they have strategic functions as well. Kratos will acquire wind harpoons that can be thrown from a distance to keep enemies at bay, and even charged up into a formidable whirlwind that sends nearby enemies skyward, opening them to being brutalized in mid-air. If you charge the spell fully, it creates an enormous tornado that rips your foes to shreds.

Of course, these massive charged moves won't be available right from the start. Every type of magic has three tiers, upgraded by funneling experience orbs into them to increase their power. As the tornado magic illustrates, these increases do far more than just up the damage. Each level is a new attack with new functionality. Some will aid with positioning, while others even have limited defensive capabilities. The middle tier of ice magic has Kratos summoning whirling balls of energy that act as a shield, damaging enemies who come too close. While the shield is active, Kratos will still be able to run around and use his full range of attacks, even going so far as to switch to an entirely different type of magic and fire off some wind javelins. This ties in to the overall philosophy of the team as they attempt to improve an already-solid fighting mechanic; the goal is to ensure that every facet, from the magic to the sub-weapons, is intuitive and easy to perform, never forcing players to remove themselves from the action. "Every single aspect is integrated into fast combo action," insists Barlog. "Nothing should feel clumsy. We want players to feel like they have total control over this guy. Regardless of your level of expertise, you're going to feel like a badass."


While these additions to the combat sound like fun, any respectable sequel can boast new abilities and items. What promises to set *God of War* apart is the way the team is not only incorporating extra features, but how these things build on

and improve the areas that were weakest in the first iteration. "We've spent a good time in development, since we already had the basics, figuring out what we needed to address," Caterson tells us. "We scoured websites, message boards, and we took all the feedback, put it up on a board, and came up with ways to enhance them." Barlog quickly chimes in: "Which, it turns out, people really liked the spinning blades in *Hades*. That was definitely one of those areas where people just wanted more!"

Though a joke, Barlog's comment touches on a genuine concern that some gamers had with *GoW*, and that was the various platforming sections. Something just felt strange about gutting an undead warrior one second, then precariously balancing on rafters and swinging from ropes the next. In *God of War II*, the series will definitely continue to have platforming elements, though a new twist promises to help these sections retain that unmistakable *God of War* feel.

"I think *God of War* is establishing its own identity in the platforming," Barlog muses. "It stays true to the character. You're not going to see Kratos running along walls. We're going for that feeling you got when you played *Bionic Commando* for the first time — that kind of visceral excitement." While fighting the gods and rescuing Super Joe might not have anything in common at first glance, Kratos has a new capability that connects him to the 8-bit classic: grappling and swinging through the use of his chain blades. Scattered around the environments, players will find specific grapple-enabled items, many of which will be above chasms and used primarily for getting from one place to another. However, since the team wants combat to permeate every aspect of *GoW II*, some grapple objects will also be helpful in stringing together combos. You'll find them strewn about the area waiting to be grabbed and swung overhead. Imagine lifting a Minotaur off the ground with a tornado blast, then lashing out to snare a marble block, which you then send barreling toward the airborne beast at top speed.

Swinging around won't be the only way for Kratos to get some extra time in the air. Players who watched the special features on the *God of War* disc will recall that the team had been toying with the idea of including wings that grant Kratos the power of flight. Though this concept didn't make it in to the first game, it will be fully integrated the second time around. This item, called the Icarus Wings, allows Kratos to hover for a few seconds before the wax holding the feathers together begins to melt away. When used in conjunction with the grapple, this ability opens up a vast array of opportunities for vertical experiences. One example we saw had Kratos soaring from point to point with the grapple before sprouting wings and descending slowly. The wings quickly eroded, and at the moment when it appeared Kratos would plunge to his doom, he threw out his blades,



■ The horses in the background were tethered by chains to the Sisters' temple, keeping it from being swept off the edge of the world

CONTINUED ON PAGE 62 ▶



■ Kratos' arsenal of attacks will include some old favorites, but has largely been overhauled with brand new moves and animations.

■ The camera is still fixed, resulting in some amazing cinematic angles on the action.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 60

caught a grapple point at the last second, and swung to safety. This exploration of the vertical nature of the levels isn't limited solely to navigation, though. Hoping to further break down the walls between exploration and combat, you're going to have to take the fight skyward. After all, Icarus won't simply be giving Kratos his wings. You'll have to bring him down...and anyone who has read the story of Icarus knows that battle is bound to happen dangerously close to the sun.

Icarus won't be the only mythical figure Kratos will have to confront one-on-one. The team knows that one complaint gamers had about the first game pertained to the boss battles. Not that they were poorly done – all three of them were harrowing and jaw-dropping encounters – but there simply weren't enough of them. The reason for this was in the puzzle-solving nature of the encounters. None of the bosses used the standard "press X until the life bar reaches zero" approach. Each one had environmental considerations, and required a certain amount of trial-and-error before the player even figured out how to do real damage. This is what made the fights so compelling, but it also took a great deal of time to implement and perfect, which resulted in the scarcity of these epic clashes. "The ones that we put in had that attention to the environments and thinking your way through the problem. That same attention is being focused on all the bosses we have in this game," Barlog assures us. "You will not be disappointed."

The only other clue we have as to another potential boss fight is the deeply disturbing concept art we saw hanging in the studio depicting the Gorgon Euryale, the sister of Medusa. While the Gorgons in the first game were lithe and vicious, Euryale is a bloated, gluttonous fiend who probably wouldn't be up to the challenge of facing Kratos one-on-one. "Oh, yeah. There's a fun interaction with her," teases Barlog, though he tells us we'll just have to wait and play the game to uncover the specifics. Even so, if the encounter utilizes the unique mixture of brains and brawn that defined the decisive battles of the first game, we're sure it'll be worth the wait.

Fortunately, the inclusion of these nuanced boss battles doesn't mean that you'll just be button-mashing your way through the remainder of the game. God of War II will once again use a variety of situations involving contextual button presses to give players even more opportunities to witness the barbaric nature of Kratos' fury. This mechanic has been used in a few games since the original God of War, (most recently Kingdom Hearts II), so the team has been working on ways to once again assert Kratos as the god of the context-sensitive minigame. "The simplicity and accessibility will still be there," notes Barlog. "But we're expanding

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A TIME TO KILL

The sheer brutality of Kratos' arsenal of attacks was a trademark of the first game, and you can expect to see a brand new array of sickening kill moves punctuating GoW II's flowing combat. In our hands-on time with the game, we picked up a boar by the hind legs and eviscerated it, kicked a wild dog in the ribs, and clenched a soldier by the neck as we amputated his limbs with his own sword. "There is a much bigger focus on using the enemies' weapons and body parts against them," Barlog reveals. "This broadens the visceral nature of the combat to basically every enemy you encounter." In these images, Kratos rips out the eye of a rampaging cyclops. What these screens don't reveal, however, is the aftermath: With the cyclops writhing in pain on the ground, Kratos jams the eyeball into the open mouth of the blinded monster before stomping on its jaw to force it shut. Thankfully, a new position on Olympus has done nothing to quench the legendary bloodlust of Kratos.





■ These riders make the cyclops deadlier foes, even going so far as to join in on the beasts' grab attacks



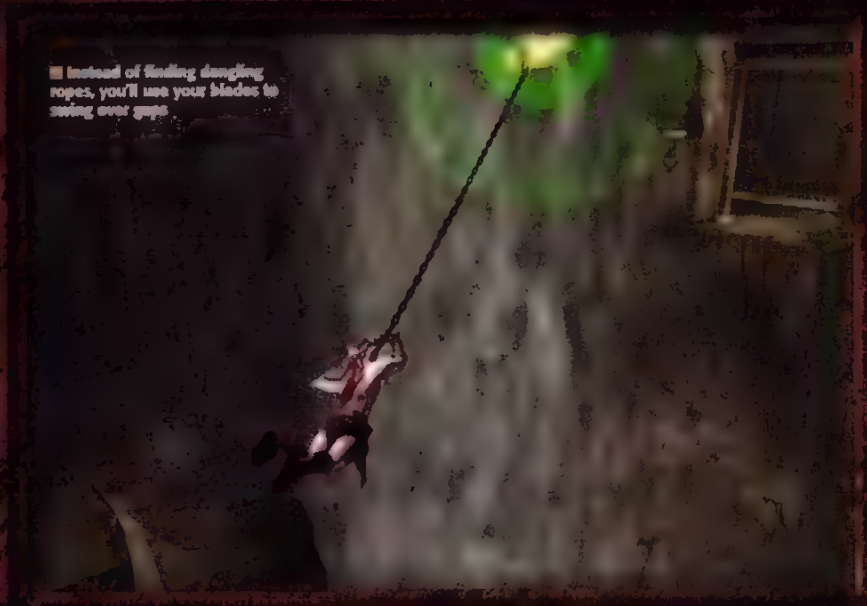
■ God of War II uses the same basic engine as the first game, but revamped to include even more stunning visuals



■ Carrying a sword around Kratos is risky. This game will have a greater focus on using the enemies' weapons against them



■ Through special grabs or a regular assault, it's imperative that you get the imps off their hulking mounts



■ Instead of finding dangling ropes, you'll use your blades to save over gaps



■ More contextual minigames means more ways to highlight Kratos' brutality. This cerberus loses each of its heads in three separate gut-wrenching displays

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 62

on them in their use and making them more pervasive. We have a lot more scenarios where you'll need to find weaknesses and exploit them, so the minigames become less waiting for the circle button to appear, and more figuring out how to make it appear in the first place."

A brand new selection of grotesque kills also requires a slew of fresh victims. Fans will recognize some returning monster designs in God

of War II, but since the foes were the minions of the late Ares last time, most of your adversaries will be unfamiliar, posing unique challenges to Kratos. For example, one new creature type is a short little imp dual-wielding axes. Alone, the imps are easily dispatched, but in a group of more powerful companions, they add a different dimension to enemy AI due to their ability to ride and control much more fearsome opponents, such as a cyclops or cerberus. Focusing the efforts of the larger brutes and increasing their accuracy, the imps quickly become the number one priority when facing a horde of enemies. If you can't kill them quickly, you'll be forced to knock them off the beasts they control in order to make the fight manageable again.

If you have the desire to speculate on other creatures that may appear, the bonus materials from the original game could provide some excellent food for thought. Don't expect them to reveal much about the mysterious events that drive the story forward, however. Even though the

extras present three scenarios that have definite sequel potential, none of them serve as the core of the plot. "I don't think any one of those fully represents what's going on with the story and how we're taking the layers off of this mythological onion," Barlog insists. When asked whether other features and plot-points referenced in the unlockables will surface in GoW II, though, he pauses briefly and gives a suspicious glance. "You never know," he replies. "Some of that stuff could pop up." We received a nearly identical response when we asked about the possible return of the Temple of Pandora.

Even though it appears that the team isn't talking about specific details at this point, we do know that they are striving to include many things that fans of the first game will find familiar. "We're really bringing back the feeling of being part of the world," Barlog reports. "Characters you interacted with in the first game, whether it was major or minor, will all make their appearances. I really like when sequels don't do all-new casts. As a gamer, you played the game for 15-20 hours, and it's cool



It's this grab is ultimately doomed; the imp will use his axes to string off the blades, which lets the cyclops continue its rampage.



BONUS FEATURES UNLOCKED

In addition to innovative gameplay, God of War was one of the first games to feature a multitude of DVD-caliber extras like deleted scenes, concept art, and interviews with the developers. God of War II will continue this tradition with all-new material chronicling the process that gave rise to the game. "We want to give people the insight on the journey we went on," says Barlog. "Ideally, even going deeper. We want as many things as we can pack on there to make the player say 'Wow, this just keeps going.'" We can only hope this means we get more 800-numbers to call and talk to Kratos! He hasn't called us back since we beat the first game

to bring back those characters and see them again."

Does that mean we'll be ogling more scantily-clad priestesses? Even though God of War came out before the Hot Coffee scandal, the game's sexual themes were often referenced as an example of how video games had gone "too far." Even amid the controversy, these elements may be making a return. "It was a conscious story-based and character-based decision to incorporate the sexual material [in GoW]," clarifies Barlog. "It wasn't us trying to be exploitative. The same sense of judgment applies to the second one. If it serves the story and the definition of the characters, then absolutely. It's definitely a mature-themed game. We don't shy away from those decisions." Of course, the attitudes of a development team and a major publisher like Sony have been at odds before, and the changing nature of this debate could still throw the inclusion of this material into jeopardy.

Though less controversial, an equally interesting decision made with God of War II was the one to release it exclusively on the PlayStation 2, even though the PlayStation 3 will reportedly be available and gaining momentum by the time the game releases. Dave Jaffe offers some insight as to why Sony is sticking to the PS2

this time around: "Yes, wouldn't it be cool to come out as a PS3 launch title? But that means that the game we'd be putting out wouldn't be up to the level of gameplay, animation, and depth that we've established. It's about continuing the God of War franchise, and we can deliver that quicker and more completely to the consumer on the PS2." Given the massive installed base of the console, this approach also means that a larger community of fans will be able to thrill at the ongoing exploits of Kratos.

The inventive continuation of the story coupled with even more ways to savagely tear foes to pieces mark God of War II as a brand new experience, but the tone and cinematic style will remain brutal, merciless, and familiar. "Dave and I have a similar mindset when it comes to evoking an emotional response from players," asserts Barlog. "The concept of jarring players and poking them to get a response. The notion that they have to make decisions to feel like this character, whether they like it or not. They may go away with a sour taste, but they go away feeling like a part of the character. Once you press the button, you are Kratos in all his glory. And you're going on a bloody adventure." ■■■■

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H E R O E S



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There are dangers in this world that the average person may not be aware of. There are powers at play throughout the universe that would do us harm. There are creatures that come from beyond our reality and observe our planet with envious thoughts. Aliens and demons, sorcerers and robots, monsters and mutants – all of these vile miscreants have tried to take from us what is

rightfully ours: our freedoms, our resources, and even our very lives. Yet all of these villains have seen their plans wither and fail, thanks to the one force that can stand up to any threat, the one group that can overcome any challenge with the combined might of its members, the one organization that has saved our world time and again: the Justice League.



■ Characters can interact with objects in the environment in different ways. Superman can easily toss objects others can't lift



■ The Martian Manhunter faces off against his sworn enemy, a villainous White Martian

There are many superteams operating in the world of comic books, but none can claim a roster like the Justice League. The X-Men have Wolverine and the Avengers have Captain America, but the Justice League features the DC universe's three biggest heroes: Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman. Not only have these three each defeated foes that would make other teams collectively shudder in fear, but they are joined by Green Lantern, the Flash, Martian Manhunter, and Zantanna.

While these final two members may not be as recognizable as Batman or Superman, every member of the Justice League brings unique attributes to the table to create a team that can take on any threat, from supervillains like the Joker or Brainiac to the biggest

cosmic-level cataclysm. Although several members of the Justice League have starred in individual video games, the entire team has rarely been portrayed in the digital realm together. Now, the world's finest superteam is primed to enter the world of video games in grand style, thanks to the action/RPG experts at Snowblind Studios.

Best known for their work on the *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* and *Champions of Norrath* franchises, the folks at Snowblind know a thing or two about the action/RPG genre. Although *Justice League Heroes* is a departure from their other games in terms of setting and characters, the gameplay will

be instantly familiar to anyone who has played one of their earlier titles. While it is a comic-based dungeon crawler like the *X-Men Legends* games, Snowblind's experience with the genre ensures that the title will look, feel, and play differently from that series.

Either alone or with a friend, players will guide members of the Justice League through an adventure that's every bit as epic as those from the comic. By collaborating on a story with comic book writer (and producer of Cartoon Network's *Justice League Unlimited*) Dwayne McDuffie, Snowblind has crafted a tale that will pit the heroes against some of their most deadly villains and

take them everywhere from the streets of Metropolis to alternate dimensions. Since the League routinely deals with cosmic threats, having them run around the suburbs simply isn't appropriate. Over the course of the game, players will find themselves travelling all over the universe.

Whether battling robots on city streets or taking on an evil White Martian invasion fleet in Earth's orbit, Snowblind wants *Justice League Heroes* to feel like a team game. It should never feel like a Batman or Superman game with some supporting characters. Therefore, each level will feature two League members that the player can switch between on



■ Each character is armed with a variety of skills based on their powers in the DC Comics universe

the fly. In the early stages of the game, the characters will be pre-selected based on who is most appropriate for the mission. These introductory levels help the player get used to taking on the roles of all seven heroes, and discover how their unique powers function. Of course, later in the game, players will be able to choose the League members they like for most stages. There may be a few exclusions based on a character's abilities, however. Batman and the Flash, for example, aren't much use in outer space,

Snowblind is running with this concept by giving each character roughly ten unique abilities. Superman sports all his familiar powers like flight, super-strength, heat vision, and cold breath, as well as limited invulnerability and a variety of special striking attacks. Batman, on the other hand, can throw Batarangs, flash grenades and other unique gadgets, and also has a vast array of martial arts-based attacks. With his technology-aided arsenal, a player taking on the role of Batman will be able to dish out nearly

throw her tiara for a projectile attack and can unleash a devastating flying strike, making her far more than simply a female equivalent to Superman.

The Flash, on the other hand, has a completely unique set of powers that are based on his incredible speed, rather than brute strength. The fastest man alive, the Flash's powers are used to great effect in the game. One ability allows him to stay constantly behind an enemy, unleashing a flurry of super-fast unblockable punches, while another

(also known as J'onn J'onzz), is gifted with shape changing, phasing, and telepathic abilities. His psychic powers enable the entire League to communicate mentally across long distances. In the game, his abilities allow him to transform into a powerful monster form, confuse and convert enemies with his telepathic abilities, and shoot psychic projectiles. He can also "phase out," going into an immaterial state that makes him temporarily immune to harm.

Zatanna and Green Lantern were the



Whether battling robots on city streets or taking on an evil White Martian invasion fleet in Earth's orbit, Snowblind wants Justice League Heroes to feel like a team game.

especially when characters like Superman and Martian Manhunter are available.

With such a wide range in the powers of the characters, the biggest challenge for Snowblind is balancing the seven heroes to ensure that each one is true to the comics, while still fun to play and not drastically over- or under-powered. Obviously, there is a huge difference in the abilities of the alien Superman and the human Batman. But as comic fans know, Batman is every bit as formidable as Superman, just in different ways.

as much punishment as a second player controlling Superman.

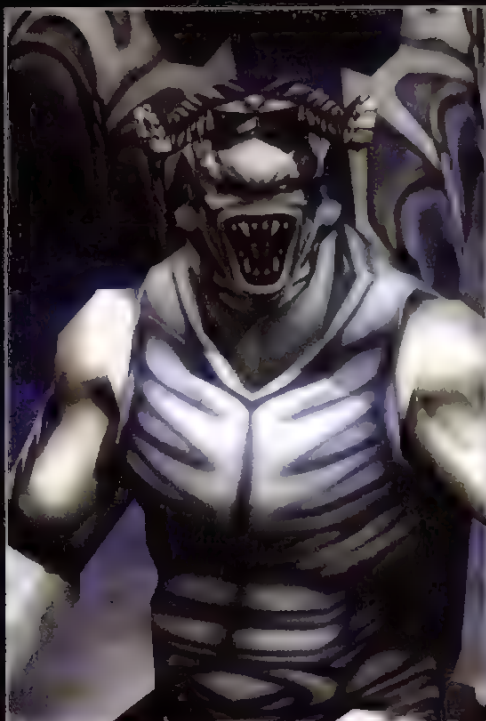
Aside from Superman and Batman, Wonder Woman is easily DC Comic's most prominent hero. Like Superman, she possesses super-strength, invulnerability, and flight. On top of these powers, she also carries her unbreakable golden lasso, which is the basis of many of her abilities in the game. She can capture groups of enemies with it, pull them towards her, and even swing them around her like a weapon. She can also

allows him to rapidly pinball back and forth between a group of foes, taking a few quick shots at each one. Of course, he can also unleash a rapid dash attack, which allows him to phase through any object in front of him, and also has a speed boost skill that doubles his attack speed.

Martian Manhunter has been a member of every version of the constantly evolving League, and is one of its most critical members. The sole survivor of the Green Martian race, Manhunter

two characters that we didn't have the opportunity to see in action, although we have no doubt that these two characters will feel every bit as distinct as the others. With his ring that allows him to create anything his mind can imagine, we suspect that Green Lantern (also known as John Stewart) will have quite a host of interesting abilities. His power is limited only by his creativity and willpower, making him a perfect character for Snowblind to have some fun with.

Zatanna will easily occupy the most



■ Wonder Woman has many skills that take advantage of her magical lasso



■ Like all abilities in the game, Superman's freeze breath can be upgraded to more powerful forms



■ Taking on Brainiac's robots as Superman and Batman is something comic book fans have yearned in for years

unique role in the team. A magician who casts spells by speaking backwards, Zatanna will most likely be a major support character, as she rarely physically engages enemies in the comics. But as one of the only two female characters on the team, we have no doubt that Zatanna will be the character of choice for some players.

Although each member's distinct abilities will make him or her roughly equal in terms of overall power, there will be key differences between them. Of course, Superman will have more hit points than any other character and have the ability to fly, as will Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, and Martian Manhunter. These characters can fly as long as the player wishes and can attack enemies on the ground from above. Batman, on the other hand, can glide for a short time with his cape, and the Flash has an ultra-fast aerial jump kick. This ground-to-air combat is a huge change over Snowblind's previous dungeon crawlers, which were all essentially confined to a single plane. Along with the deeper combat that is afforded by the addition of a second attack button, Justice League Heroes' addition of aerial combat brings a lot of new vitality to the top-down action/RPG genre.

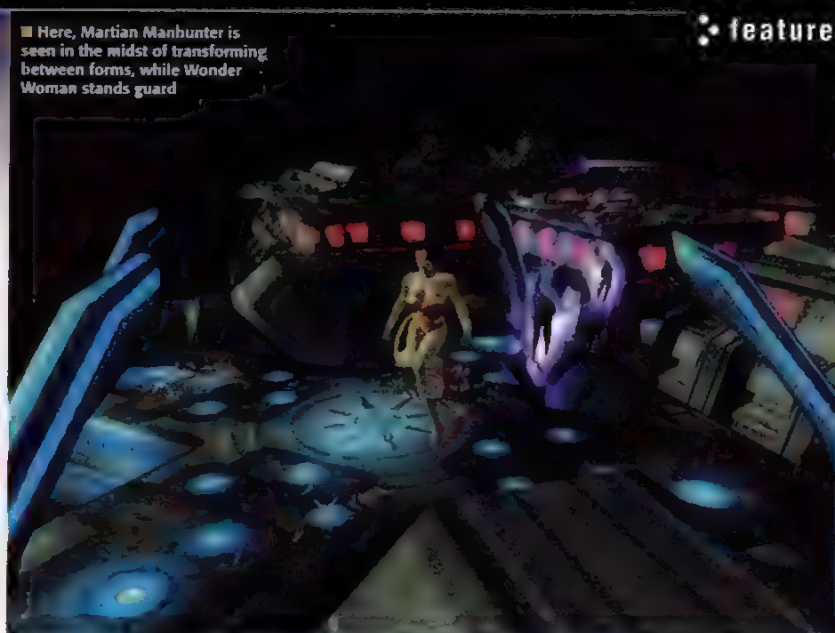
Another difference between JLH and the other dungeon crawlers is in its use of items, or rather, its lack thereof. While defeating enemies will earn the player experience points that can be used to

improve a character's skills, don't expect to see them drop enchanted weapons or health potions. The only items that enemies will leave behind are temporary power-ups and more valuable pieces of loot called boosts. Boosts can be used to improve a character's skills, and the multiple types of boosts affect a power in different ways. For example, adding a speed boost to Batman's Batarang power will make him throw faster, or adding a duration boost to Superman's Power of Krypton skill will make him stay invincible longer. Adding a boost to a skill is permanent, so if you attach it to a power, you won't be able to switch it to another skill later. While every skill can be leveled up with experience points, adding boosts allows further customization of the heroes, so you can play them exactly the way you want to.

Although it may be tempting to add boosts to your powers immediately, patient players who are willing to get a little deeper into the customization aspect will get the most out of them. Multiple types of boosts can be combined for even greater effect, so by saving them up until you have several different kinds, you may discover a great boost effect that you wouldn't be able to achieve otherwise. Snowblind wants Heroes to be easy to pick up and play for people who aren't experienced in the action/RPG genre, but still offer the depth that fans of the genre know and expect.



■ Batman's gadgets and training make him every bit as formidable as his super-powered comrades



■ Here, Martian Manhunter is seen in the midst of transforming between forms, while Wonder Woman stands guard

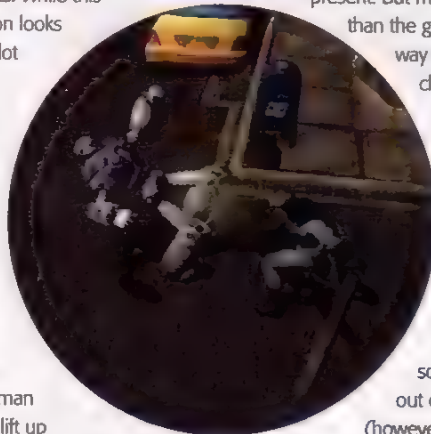
With boosts as the primary dropped items, obviously Heroes needs to have an entirely different approach to health than the standard potions and slow rejuvenation method of other action/RPGs. The team has decided to go with a health system more akin to Halo. If the player doesn't get hit for a few seconds, any damage they have suffered will instantly be healed. This system also fits more naturally with the nature of the characters. The Justice League members don't stop to chug health potions when they're hurt; they shrug it off, get a second wind, and get back into the battle.

Under the health bar, a second meter indicates how many special move points a character has, which allows the player to tap into that character's unique skills. Characters like Batman have more points than more physically impressive characters like Superman, to further establish a balance between them. Wonder Woman may deal out more damage than Batman, but Batman's deeper reserve of special move points allows him to use his skills more consistently, creating huge combos with his powers.

With Batman constantly chucking flash grenades, Superman burning through

foes with his heat vision, and Green Lantern's ability to create a virtual arsenal, expect to see a lot of chaos unfold onscreen. Heroes features environments that are a lot more interactive and destructible than other dungeon crawlers, so fire hydrants bursting, cars exploding, and lamp posts collapsing are all common sights. While this kind of destruction looks cool and adds a lot

of comic flavor to the action, it also figures into the gameplay. Based on their different strength levels, characters will be able to pull items from the environment for weapons. Batman and Zatanna can lift up mailboxes to throw, while Martian Manhunter and Wonder Woman can smash their foes over the head with cars. The strongest characters, like Superman, can even uproot trees to use as giant baseball bats!



Capturing the mood and excitement of comic books is a huge priority for the team, which is why they've chosen to go with a realistic yet stylized presentation to the graphics. The characters and environments look realistic, but are painted in the bright colors and somewhat simplified level of detail that modern comics present. But more importantly

than the graphical style is the way that Snowblind has chosen to approach the story. Inspired by the comics rather than the popular *JLU* cartoon, Snowblind hopes to deliver an intelligent, action-packed story that feels like something directly out of the comics (however, the game takes place in a separate continuity).

While the precise details of the plot are still under wraps, Snowblind promises that Heroes will be far more story-driven than their previous games. They want the player to feel like they're inside a comic

book, and everything about the game flows from this goal. The heroes will feel distinct and true to the source material, due to both how they play and how they interact with one another and the other characters they encounter. Story elements will unfold in their banter and in cutscenes, avoiding the long boxes of scrolling text found in so many role-playing games and keeping the action from grinding to a halt. Although we don't know exactly who the League will take on over the course of the story, players should expect to see roughly 10 of the team's biggest enemies like Brainiac, as well as lesser-known villains like Queen Bee.

With classic characters both good and evil, Justice League Heroes is shaping up to be a comic book fan's dream. Never before has such a roster of heroes fought side by side in a game. Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, The Flash, Martian Manhunter, and Zatanna together equal a force that can stand up to any oppressor that may threaten our planet. Together, they are mankind's greatest defenders. Together, they are unbeatable. Together, they are the Justice League. ■■■



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UNITED STATES

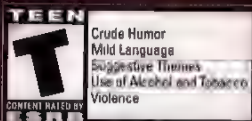
www.shadowheartsnewworld.com

xseed
GAMES

ARIZEGROUP

www.xseedgames.com

PlayStation 2



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Without **power**, you cannot build a Dynasty.

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5

Empires

Without **wisdom**, you cannot build an Empire.

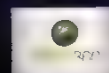


Mild Language
Violence

March 2006



PlayStation 2





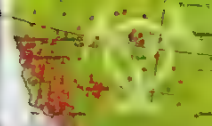
This Just In:
RENT Sucks
[PG. 44]



New Rare Game
Announced, Delayed
[PG. 66]

P A R O D Y

EA Viral Marketing Out-
break Kills Thousands
[PG. 96.6]



GAMEINFORMER

FOR THE PC & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE



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BEST IF READ BY MAYPRIL 1



MAYPRIL 2006

INFORMER 77

STAFF

Like You, But Way Cooler!



THE FUTURE OF GAMING: ME!

First of all, I want to take a second to apologize to all of you Xbox 360 owners out there. Due to my extreme amounts of unbeatable awesomeness, I obtained so many Xbox Live friend requests in one hour that I crashed all of the Xbox Live servers worldwide. Also, since I'm the bestest Geometry Wars and Zuma player in the galaxy, all of your Xbox Live Arcade scores might have spazzed out and erased themselves out of pure humiliation. So, I'm sorry for being so rad. NOT!

Because I'm basically the smartest guy in the industry, everyone is always asking me who will win the next-gen console war. The answer is simple: Whoever I want! Duh! Companies know that I run the most awesome magazine ever assembled by man or cyborg, and if I decide their new game systems are lame-o, then they don't have a chance. So, they send me dump trucks full of free stuff to convince me to tell you that their system is the most rockin', since they know that you all listen to me and think I'm the most awesome dude ever. Right now I'm leaning towards Nintendo (they gave me this totally sweet new remote control!), but I hear Sony just sent me an animatronic Dexter, so they have a decent chance too. Man, you're soooo lucky you have someone as brilliant and great as me doing your thinking for you!

Garnadan,
Editor-in-Chief

Garnadan



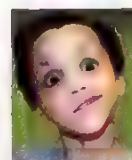
Typhoon Klinehart, The Forgetful Gamer

Who am I? Where am I? You want me to review games? I can't even remember anything about my past! All I know is that I was orphaned at a young age when the dark emperor Mordamaer burned my hometown and killed all the villagers. Everything after that is a complete blank - which probably just means that nothing worth remembering happened. I'll just carve out a humble existence in an idyllic coastal town until I get swept up in a plot to topple Mordamaer's evil empire. That's sure to keep my memories from flooding back in a soul-crushing moment of self-realization!



Gargamel, The Bungling Wizard Gamer

I hate those Smurfs! However, since all of my potions and contraptions made to capture and/or turn them into gold failed, I had to find a new evil hobby. So, I took up the most sinister pastime in the world: video games. Mwa ha ha! Now, Azrael and I just sit in my dilapidated hovel playing Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas all day. I get more evil done before noon than I did in a whole week pursuing those blundering blue blockheads!



Chaos Forge, The 1337 Gamer

u think u have skillz? lol! ur total n00bkakes compared to me. i know how to play ur class better than u carebear. if u want to learn2play call me and my budz Hemmlokk and SoulGriever we will melt ur face off so hard, even ur alt will cry! lol! u will be in the olympic corpse run marathon with all the practice u get! wts [Total Pwnage] pst. Have mats!



Chad, The Chad Gamer

Yo, what up, players? So, I'm Chad, but my friends call me The Chadster, Dr. Chadly M.D., or (my favorite) Chadden NFL, cause I love Madden Football, like, more than anything. Except the ladies, of course. But Madden ain't the only game that I dig on. I totally love all kinds of games, like Halo 2, Grand Theft Auto... AND MORE MADDEN! WOO! GO PATS! YEAH!

DEARGI

Your Opinions Are Stupid

CALCULUS???

You neither asked for nor received permission to use my copyrighted "Overflowing Toilet" logo in your article "The True Face of Infinium's Phantom Console." I believe you have willfully infringed my rights under 17 U.S.C. Section 101 et seq. and could be liable for statutory damages as high as \$150,000 as set forth in Section 504(c)(2) therein. I demand that you immediately cease the distribution of the article in question, or I will take further legal action against you.

Allen Smock
via smocksanitation.com

■ If you're going to write to us, please use real sentences and words. \$150,000? 504(c)(2)? This is supposed to be a letter, not a math equation! Turn in your homework at school, nerdhole!

I'M A DESPERATE LOSER

Typhoon is totally hot. Will you ask him if he will marry me?

Sarah Gilligan
via yu-gi-oh-yeah.net

■ He says "yes" if you're hot. If you're ugly, he still says

"yes," but he immediately wants a divorce and is legally entitled to half of your games.

TAKE IT!

I have thought about it, and I decided that my career will be a game reviewer. Now that I know what to do with the rest of my life, will you please tell me how to get a job at Game Infarcer, how much money you make, your social security numbers, and what exactly a "game reviewer" even is?

Johnny Summertime
Butte, MT



■ To work in the magazine business, you need to print things on paper. This requires one important ingredient: ink. We get ink on everything, like our clothes, hands, and eyes. If you can get used to that, you'll know you've got what it takes.

connect Interview

YUKIKOJIMOTO

CAREER MILESTONES

1981 The Beginning

Kojimoto designs the timeless and revered 8-bit classic, *Blocks N' Stuff*. It sells 10 million units in two weeks.

2006 The Best

Kojimoto attains true fame in an interview with the peerless Kaiser of Radness, Garnadan: Enemy of all that is Bogus.

>> No developer in the video game community commands as much respect as Yuki Kojimoto. Game Infarcer's Garnadan managed to catch up with (and subsequently tackle) this development legend to ask him some questions about the future of gaming. <<

So, I hear that you're ready to give us exclusive info on your super secret, super awesome new next-generation game!

僕のゲームを誇りに思い。身も心も打ち込んだ。じつは何でもの任天堂ゲームのほうが良い。

What?
訳者が遅れている?

!Louder! What?
血の巡りが悪い?! それはぼくの時間の無駄だ!

[Storming out] Look, I'm mega important, and I don't have time for this. I didn't cancel my interview with Miyamoto to listen to you crazy-talk! I'm totally telling your boss on you!



■ Kojimoto, Important Japanese Guy



news

NINTENDO ASSURES YOU "YOU'RE SPECIAL!"

NEW AWARD SYSTEM REVEALED

With its unconventional design philosophy, the Nintendo Revolution becomes more surprising with every new announcement. The latest was made this month as Shigeru Miyamoto outlined the company's only strategy to compete with Xbox Live's Achievement system: gold stars printed out using a new Nintendo accessory, the Twinkler. "It plugs in to your GBA," clarifies Miyamoto, "which connects to your DS, which communicates with your Revolution via Wi-Fi to download your achievements and print out your stars!" When asked which particular accomplishments would earn the self-adhesive rewards, Miyamoto began pointing at objects around the room. "If you finish a level, you get a star. If you beat a game, you get a star. If you lose a game, you get a star. Stars everywhere, for everyone, like the night sky come to life!" Response to the announcement has been largely positive. "I think it's great!" squealed Nintendo fan Chuck Middleman. "Gold stars were the only validation I ever received in grade school. I've missed them so much..." That's not all; we've heard rumors that Nintendo will tap into even more childhood nostalgia for its rewards in the future, including "great work" rubber stamps, racecar-shaped pencil sharpeners, and an extra Saltine at snack time.

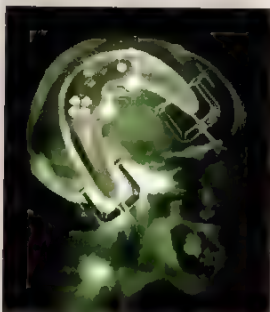


DATA FILE

You Should Rent *Hardbodies*

SONY TO OFFER CONVENIENT FINANCING ON PSS

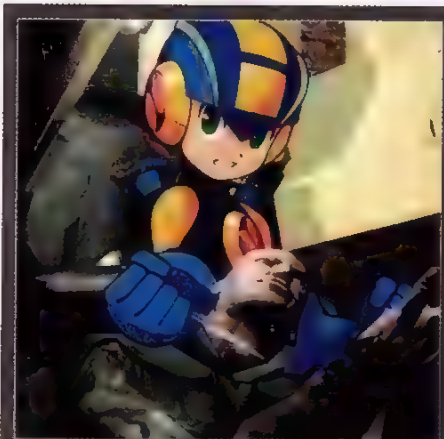
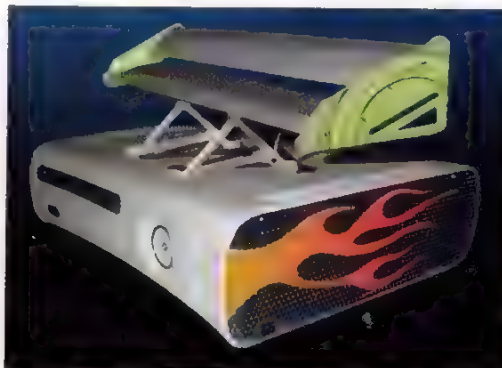
Quelling rumors that the PS3 will be impossible to afford, Sony has announced that it will offer several ways to pay for its next-gen console, including a 30-year fixed rate and 7-year ARM. Closing costs can be rolled into the total payment, but a Sony spokesman stated that gamers could get the console absolutely free if they consented to having a small microchip installed in their frontal lobe. The chip will cause a involuntary and incapacitating muscle spasms any time the gamer touches a consumer electronics product from a Sony competitor. Mouthguards are being offered as a pre-order bonus at most specialty retailers.



news

MICROSOFT CALLS FOR DO-OVER WHOOPS

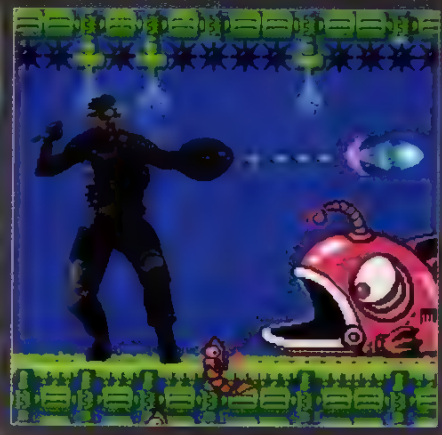
Citing a "total clusterf---" in execution, Microsoft's head of marketing Peter Moore declared that the November 2005 Xbox 360 launch "didn't count," and that the company will be re-launching the console "for real" this fall. He had several reasons for the launch debacle, which included too many current-gen ports, huge shortages (due to factory workers spending too much time playing Mario Kart DS), and J. Allard embezzling marketing money to fund his off-Broadway musical *Oh, Snow Crash!* "We realized that there weren't enough of the crappy games that Japanese people like at launch," continued Moore, "so we're working with partners to ready exclusive Dynasty Warriors games and train simulators, plus some anime junk. And we've added even more value to the console with our new Ultra-Super Deluxe Pack, which includes everything from the Premium pack, plus a sweet new spoiler!"



news

UBISOFT TRADES FISHER ADDS MEGA MAN TO LINEUP

In a move that has puzzled analysts, this month Ubisoft traded Sam Fisher, its star offensive starter and hero of the Splinter Cell series, to Capcom in exchange for the robotic blue bomber Mega Man, two servbots, and a robot to be named later. The Paris-based development club has signed Mega Man to a one-game contract, with a conditional option for a sequel. Mega Man has been benched for the last two seasons with Capcom due to gameplay injuries, though Ubisoft is expected to move him to its active roster almost immediately. He is expected to fill Fisher's former position in the stealth/action genre. "This arm cannon is old and busted," laughed Mega Man, "I can't wait to ditch it for some sticky shockers. Have you seen how people twitch with one of those in their neck? It's awesome!" On the other hand, Fisher's role within the Capcom organization has yet to be determined, though a grizzled Fisher did express some mild apprehension: "If they make me some big-eyed, spikey-haired bastard's digital pet, I'm just gonna start knifin'."



butt-drugs

SONIC LAX

When you've got a bit of a "traffic jam" going on, you want relief fast.

Who better to turn to than that master of speed and slop, Sonic the Hedgehog? Sonic-Lax sports a secret ingredient: DNA from Sonic himself, making it faster-acting than any other product on the market. It works so quickly, in fact, that you'll probably want to take it while sitting on the toilet, unless the people around you are wearing biohazard suits.

Manufacturer: Sega Pharmaceuticals
Website: www.runrunrun.com

List Price: Free With Sonic Riders (either way, it's a bunch of crap)



pretention

SPARKNOTES: KILLER 7

Written by Suda 51 himself, this comprehensive guide aims to clear up some of the foggier moments in last year's baffling *Killer 7*. For instance, Mr. 51 explains the bizarre ending as follows: "For religion and the life of helmets: worm-sauce fortitude." Finally, the peace of darity.

Manufacturer: Suda 51
Website: www.trust-the-pigeons.com
List Price: \$2.4 x 2² / 0)



secret access

Mod World

DOOM 3: PORTAL
Play Ba'all Interactive
www.sulfuriousgeorge.com



Are you tired of your demon-blasting exploits being confined to your computer screen? No more! This fantastic *Doom 3* mod physically transforms your monitor into a swirling portal to Hell, summoning forth anguished fiends of the inferno right into your living room! Grit your teeth and grab your BFG, because these hellspawn will brutalize, desecrate, and defile you like never before! (Warning: Improper configuration of this mod may destroy your hard drive's partitions. Please install with caution.)



PREVIEWS

Upcoming Junk

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PS2

LEGO Final Destination

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER INEVITABILITY > **PUBLISHER** REAPER BY THE DOZEN
> **DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S IMPALED > **RELEASE** HOLIDAY

NEXT STOP: HILARITY!

If *LEGO Star Wars* has taught us anything, it's that everything is adorable in LEGO form. Hitching a ride on the movie-licensed, building block-based cash wagon, the blockbuster series *Final Destination* is about to burst onto the gaming scene like an impaled abdomen. The gruesome deaths that are the trilogy's trademark will be recreated with the comical whimsy only LEGO can deliver. Scenes that were gut-wrenching on the silver screen, like valley girls baking alive in tanning beds, will instantly be transformed into comedic gold through the game's clever use of pantomime and gestures. Whether you're a teen gore fanatic, a LEGO enthusiast, or a young ruffian hoping to learn more about Death's inexorable march, *LEGO Final Destination* is shaping up to stab you in all of your vital organs when it (eventually) finds you.



PSP

Steel Battalion

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER GIANT UNWIELDY THING > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** PRACTICAL JOKE R&D > **RELEASE** THE DAY YOU GET 500 BUCKS

TRAVEL SIZED

If you liked the thrilling mech action of *Steel Battalion*, but have longed for a portable version, then we've got good news for you. Capcom is bringing the giant robot simulator to the PSP, with its massive 40-button control intact! This new version will feature everything you need to play on the go, including the game, controller, foot pedals, PSP stand, and a special limited-edition card table. The entire setup will fit into a carrying case for easy travel, and weigh a mere 75 pounds. Capcom also announced that *Steel Battalion DS* is on the way, which will feature all of the huge peripheral's buttons, dials, and doo-dads on the touch screen.



GAMECUBE

Mario Rodeo

> **STYLE** 1-4 PLAYER SPORTS...OR SOMETHING > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** SO VERY TIRED, INC > **RELEASE** WHENEVER

NOT EVEN TRYING ANYMORE

When Nintendo announced that *Mario Rodeo* would be the next entry in their Mario sports lineup, we were a little confused. To get to the bottom of things, we contacted Nintendo spokesman A.J. Sprecher, and he filled us in on the company's decision to take the plumber into cattle country.

"Mario's pretty much done all the cool sports," Sprecher explained. "So it was either this or NASCAR, but we're saving that one for next year. So, you know, you'll ride bulls. And rope stuff. Do some rodeo downing, too, I guess. Junk like that." When we asked what crazy plot Bowser cooked up to get Mario to the rodeo, Sprecher explained with a yawn, "You know, Bowser, umm... brought Peach to the rodeo, so Mario has to, like win it to get her back. Look, I don't know, you just play these minigames,



all right?" We pressed further to try to get some more details, but Sprecher just angrily answered, "Look kid, it's got Mario in it, okay? Just buy the damn game. It's for the GameCube, what other choices do you have?"



PLAYSTATION 2

ICO 2: Even Hornier!

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER NERD-GAME > **PUBLISHER** SONY CLASSIC PICTURES GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** ART & THINK > **RELEASE** DUINO AND DONT CARE
> **ESRB** BORING

I TOTALLY DON'T GET THIS

Dude, what the crap is this noise? The Chadster does NOT wanna play holdyhands with some weird chick who doesn't speak American when he could be gettin' down with some broads in Vice City! This is like, some chick game or something. There's not even any guns or nothing! You just, like, climb stuff and junk. You know what would be crazy sweet? If Brian Urlacher came running over those stupid misty hills and tackled this nerdy kid and knocked him on his stupid face. Dude, one time, Steve Reiser totally dared me to knock down some nerd with an armload of books, and I so did it, and his books went flying everywhere! It was awesome! But then, like five years later, I got a job at Radio Shack, and that nerd was like the manager. But that's all right, 'cause I'm totally on unemployment now, which gives me tons of time to play Madden! Whooh! Go Chad! —**CHAD**

BOTTOM LINE Zero Chad Points

> **Concept:** So, like, I don't even know what I'm supposed to do in this game. What team does this guy play for? The Boise Wieners?

> **Graphics:** This don't look right. There aren't even any ads in the game. It doesn't make me want to go to Burger King or Gatorade at all!

> **Sound:** They don't talk right, and Dr. Chad don't read when Dr. Chad doesn't have to!

> **Playability:** I think it's broken. I can't kill this chick and take her money!

> **Entertainment:** This is kinda like watching a foreign movie — only brainiacs and art freaks will even want to

> **Replay Value:** Like, none

Second Opinion 0

This game makes me more irate than opening those confounded exploding packages from that buffoon, Jokey Smurf! There are no opportunities for dastardly deeds whatsoever! Why is the young hero assisting that tagalong waf? He should be injecting her with explode-opotton, or saddling her with some kind of cannon that only shoots at blue things. This despicable n nny-simulator could only have been created by those datted Smurfs and their saccharine pacifist coddling. Curse you, Papa Smurf! I will have my revenge! —**GARGAMEL**



PC | MICROWAVE

World of WarKraft

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER INTERACTIVE FOOD PRODUCT
> **PUBLISHER** KRAFT FOODS, INC > **DEVELOPER** MODERATE SNOWFALL ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** 27TH, IIRC > **ESRB** OMG

> <

Wh is this? its like they took a normal MMO, then replaced all teh drops, skills, and zones w/ Kraft products. its still fun, tho. i roll a Stove Top Shaman, and its teh hotsex IMO. btw, farming w/ teh gimpy Velveetamancer class ftl. i <3 teh new zones, like teh end-game instance MC (Melted Cheddar). It has some fatty loot, but it has KoS mobs that aggro from, like, the AH. i wuz kiting a Slaving Glutton in MC 1 time and i got a 7k cnt w/ my Butter Shock. then SoulGnefer forked it from behind. teh mob wuz like O RLY? and then Hemmlokk's Searing Oil proc'd and did another 7k. YA RLY, beotch. ROFL! All teh Kraft stuff in this game is uber weak, but i dont care what teh game is about as long as i can twink and own n00bs. i don't pay attention to ads, anyway. only adds. anyway, mungry IRL, i'ma make some shells n' cheese. /afk.—**CHAOS_FORGE**

BOTTOM LINE (.) (.)

> **Concept:** w00t!

> **Graphics:** <— hawt

> **Sound:** if u duel me, u prolly hear urself begging 4 rez

> **Playability:** uber hard if ur pyping w/ me or my budz Hemmlokk and SoulGnefer

> **Entertainment:** Do u <3 gettng pwned?

> **Replay Value:** BoP

Second Opinion ??

I momentarily used this game to distract me from the inevitable task of regaining my memories, but I was soon overwhelmed by confusion. Someone named Hemmlokk kept insisting that I follow him to "Gank Town," but I am unfamiliar with that village. The only home I have ever know was reduced to ashes by Mordamaer, though even my recollection of that harrowing event is vague. Come to think of it, I hope that I wasn't an elite soldier in Mordamaer's personal guard who burned and massacred my own home town. Naw, that kind of improbable mental baggage would turn anyone into an emotional cripple, and I'm fine. Except for those blackouts and night terrors. I know! I'll go ask my childhood love interest who mysteriously survived, Nella! If anyone can put my mind at ease, it's her —**TYPHOON**

connect opinion

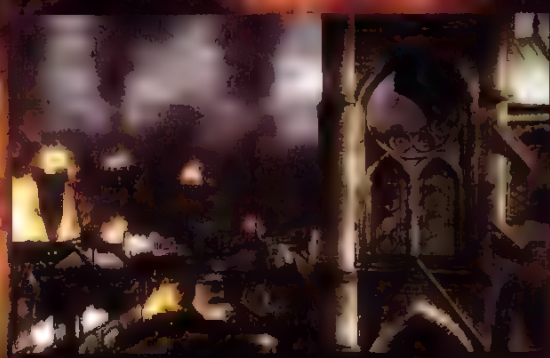
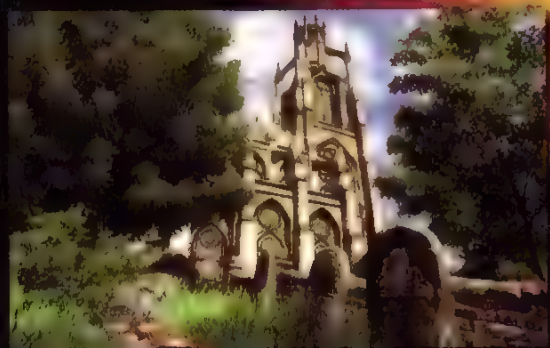
I SHOULD BE IN THE NEXT SMASH BROTHERS

BY THE DUDE FROM GEIST



The gaming industry is a cold, heartless black hole. One minute you have corporate yes-men telling you you're going to take down Master Chief and save a dying console, and the next you're possessing dog food bowls on a street corner for nickels. Now, I realize that I didn't live up to everyone's expectations, but I'm writing this final appeal to Nintendo to give me one last chance. For the love of all that's holy, at least put me in the next Smash Brothers game. Please.

I don't have any delusions of grandeur; I'm not an A-list property. Then again, Smash Brothers isn't exactly the most exclusive club on the block. For Pete's sake, they let Marth into the last entry. Who the hell even knows who Marth is? And you can't tell me that I don't have what it takes to beat the crap out of the Ice Climbers. Seriously, just because I spent a little bit of time haunting file cabinets and dinner plates doesn't mean that I need to shuffled off into video game oblivion, right? Right? ■■■■



Winner, Best RPG of E3

— Game Critics Award, GameSpot, IGN, GameSpy,
Xbox Evolved, Console Gold, Daily Game, Games Domain

"Oblivion is, at this time, the best-looking
game I have ever seen in my life."

Xbox.com

"The biggest title for the Xbox 360™,
and the one I'm most looking forward to."

— GamePro Magazine

"One look at Oblivion will shatter your
conceptions about what is possible in a
video game."

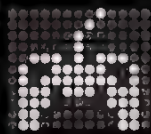
— GameInformer

The RPG for the Next Generation





The Elder Scrolls IV
OBLIVION™



PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming

■ Inside the alien energy field, both the look and gameplay of *Crysis* will change significantly

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

Crysis

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER CRYTEK
> RELEASE TBA

THE COMING CRISIS

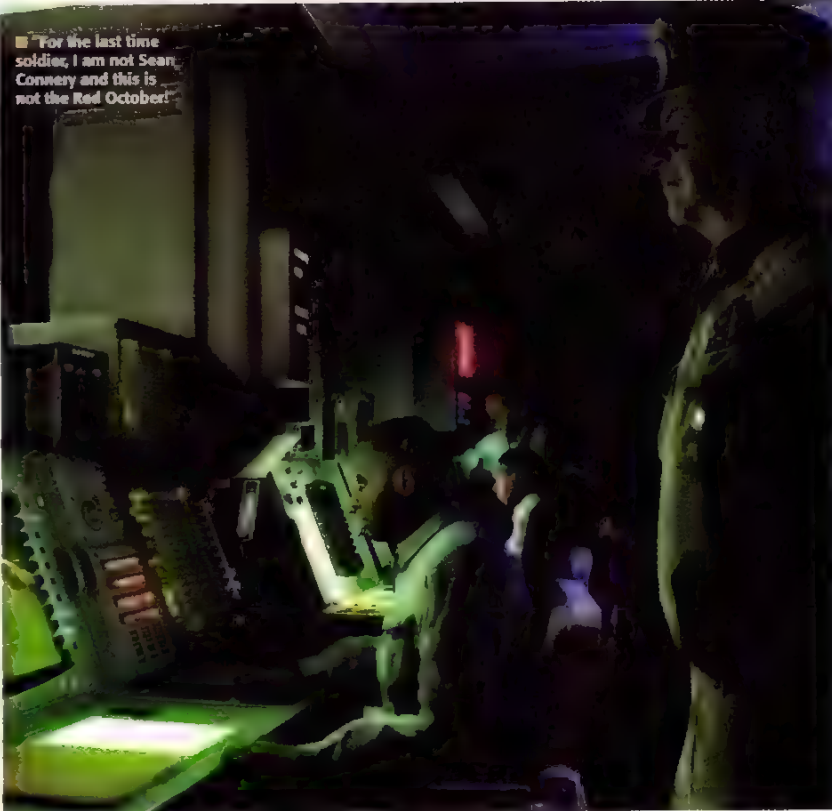
After the release of the original *Far Cry* for the PC in 2004, it became clear that German developer Crytek was destined for big things. Fueled by the powerful CryEngine, *Far Cry* instantly earned Crytek a reputation as a developer that pushed game visuals to new heights. Not surprisingly, mega-publisher Electronic Arts offered the developer a deal, and the results of that partnership is *Crysis*. A gorgeous sci-fi first-person shooter set for multiple next-gen consoles, *Crysis* further cements Crytek's place as one of today's most talented studios.

The conflict in *Crysis* begins when an alien spacecraft crashes on a tropical island and starts emitting a strange energy field. Both the U.S. and North Korea rush to the scene, to discover that the field is expanding, plunging everything within it into sub-zero temperatures. The aliens, it seems, can only survive in the extreme cold, and are trying to make our planet habitable for their species. But before you can stop their plan, you've got to deal with a human enemy.

The challenges that players will face in *Crysis* will change greatly over the course of the adventure. In the first section, you'll be facing off against the North Korean

military, as the two armies vie to capture the otherworldly technology. But once you enter the alien energy field, you're tasked with entirely new struggles. You can't survive the deadly cold without an advanced survival suit, and you'll battle with an extraterrestrial species that is none too happy to see you. Fortunately, you'll be able to capture some of their technology, including a freezing ray and a gun that pulls moisture out of the air to create deadly ice shard projectiles.

EA and Crytek aren't letting much more info on *Crysis*' gameplay slip out just yet, but we do know a bit about the powerful technology that will drive it. The CryEngine supports massive destructibility, so not only will you be able to blow up any structure you see, trees and bushes will also get shredded during firefights. Pretty much every graphical buzzword you've ever heard is being used as well, and the results speak for themselves. These screenshots guarantee that *Crysis* is going to be a gorgeous game, and the story is interesting as well. If the gameplay turns out to be similarly impressive, *Crysis* could end up being one of the great new shooter franchises. ■ ■ ■

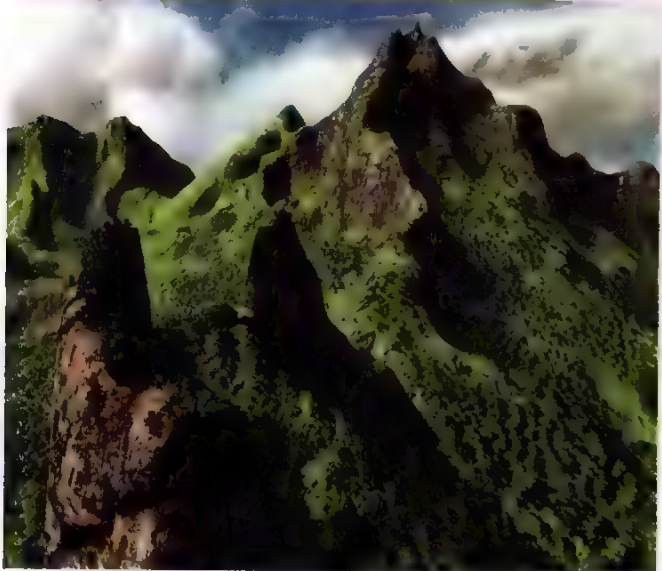




■ Like Far Cry, Crysis will feature some of the most impressive foliage around



■ Military asset or backwoods still? You decide.



■ Despite the typical military look of some shots, Crysis is definitely a science fiction tale at its core



■ Much of Crysis' technology is based on the U.S. military's real projections on the future of warfare



As a gang leader, you'll eventually command an army of henchman and thugs

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Scarface: The World Is Yours

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES > DEVELOPER RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE FALL

REBUILDING THE EMPIRE

Scarface has been in development for a long time, and experienced several delays in release date. However, far from being a sign of a troubled title, executive producer Peter Wanat sees the delays as a huge positive for this high-profile open world game.

"[Vivendi] as a company gave the game the time it needed to be great," comments Wanat. "The executives agreed with the game makers that open-world games can not be rushed out to make Christmas or the company fiscal year that happens to end in March, regardless of quality level. It sounds so simple — but how many times have players said to themselves, 'Ah, man, this game doesn't even feel finished!' There are other open-world games making exactly this mistake right now...and their quality level is obviously suffering for it."

With this extra time, Radical Entertainment has revamped almost every aspect of the game, from the graphics to creating a new random mission generator, in addition to both subtle and noticeable tweaks to the base gameplay mechanics like driving, vehicle physics, targeting, and character movement. The hope for Wanat and the team is that Scarface will "capture the authentic vibe of Tony Montana...it was critical for us to bring a true Scarface experience to the player at home."

As previously reported, the game begins at the end of the film, and imagines an alternate reality where Tony survives the attack and eventually rebuilds his empire. Although Al Pacino is not doing voiceovers, he has been giving feedback to the team and even handpicked the actor that plays Tony himself. Along with a script written by respected

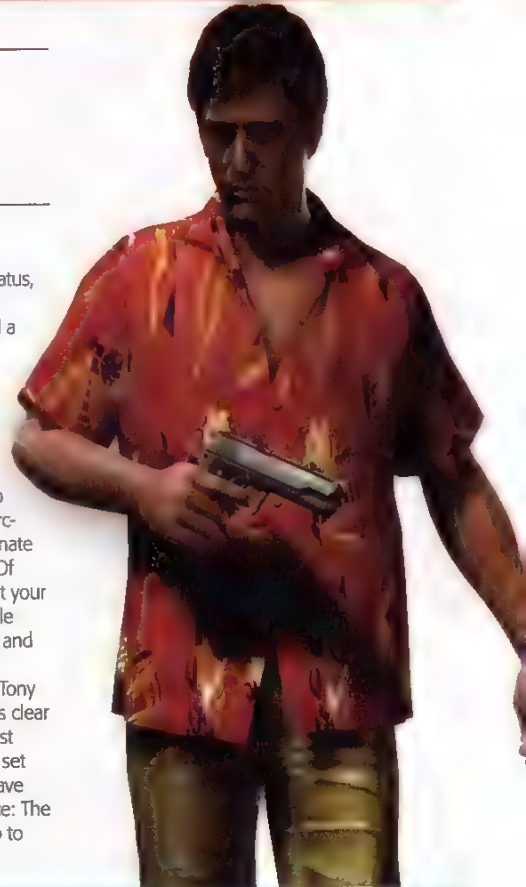
Hollywood scribe David McKenna (*Blow*, *American History X*), it looks as though *The World Is Yours* has the opportunity to be a licensed game that really lives up to the original source material.

Wanat admits there are some similarities to Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto*. "The GTA series is amazing...if you are making an open-world game these days, you would hope the developers would have the sense to look at GTA rather than, say, *Driv3r*," observes Wanat. However, the key difference is the fact that you will experience the story arc from the perspective of a kingpin rather than a street soldier.

Through a negotiation mechanic and contextual dialogue, you'll gradually rebuild Tony's respect on the streets by buying and selling larger and larger amounts of narcotics. The game world and

characters will change based on your status, completely altering the experience. For example, at first you might have to steal a car for transport, but by the end, you'll simply call on your paid driver to pick you up in a sports car from your fleet. Your wealth and power will continue to expand as you purchase items in the game's Exotics Catalogue, which sells everything from over 11 power boats to airplanes to "hirelings" like drivers, enforcers, and assassins (which become alternate playable characters in their own right). Of course, new cars and toys all help boost your reputation. In addition, you'll also be able to buy less functional items like jewelry and decorative "themes" for your mansion.

While it might be too early to crown Tony Montana the new king of the streets, it's clear that this game aims to be more than just another GTA clone. With a release date set for sometime this fall, Radical should have more than enough time to craft *Scarface: The World Is Yours* into a game that lives up to the legend of its license. ■■■■



Starting off robbing cars, you'll later be able to call for a private plane



Given the beachfront setting, boats will play a large role in Scarface



In keeping with the film, we can expect tons of explicit content and violence



The game recreates a stylized version of period Miami





TOM CLANCY'S Rainbow Six CRITICAL HOUR™


PUBLISHER: UBISOFT DEVELOPER: RED STORM/UBISOFT RELEASE: MARCH

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Critical Hour is the **BEST OF THE BEST**, in every sense – the most **MEMORABLE LEVELS** from one of the most popular gaming series of **ALL TIME**. Rainbow Six® actually **CREATED** the tactical-shooter genre, and it still stands today as the best **BALANCE** of realism and gameplay available. Rainbow Six Critical Hour brings the **PAST AND PRESENT TOGETHER** with state-of-the-art graphics and classic, **AWARD-WINNING** maps and missions – all at an unbeatable price of **\$29.99**. It's the perfect entry into the series for newcomers and a **MUST-HAVE** for any true fan.

Operation Deep Magic

Date: Sep. 26, 2000 04:00
 Location: San Francisco, California
 Origin: Rainbow Six



Mission:
 Infiltrate Horizon's heavily guarded skyscraper headquarters and extract information about the Phoenix Group.



Operation Zero Gambit

Date: Mar. 27, 2002 02:00
 Location: Cherkasu, Ukraine
 Origin: Rainbow Six®: Rogue Spear®

Mission:
 Assault the Ukrainian nuclear plant and neutralize the terrorists.


Classic Rainbow missions and tactics with stunning new graphics.

In 1998, a revolutionary new experience came to gaming in the form of reality-driven, team-based Rainbow Six. Pioneering the realism we've come to refer to as "One Shot, One Kill," Rainbow Six put you in charge of the world's most elite anti-terrorism squad, Team Rainbow. Founded by counter-terrorism expert John Clark, Rainbow is the world's last defense against freedom's most dangerous enemies. With its emphasis on close-quarters combat and deadly authenticity, the Rainbow Six series has redefined video game realism.

Rainbow Six Critical Hour takes place on the occasion of founder Clark's retirement, and offers both die-hard fans and those new to the series a chance to experience the greatest moments from the series. You'll infiltrate the terrorists' biological warfare labs in the mission codenamed Fire Walk. You'll breach enemy security to save hostages in the mission codenamed Razor Ice, from the original Rainbow Six. Rainbow Six Critical Hour lets you play through the very best single-player missions in series history.

Best of all, Rainbow Six Critical Hour brings today's technology and action to those amazing Rainbow Six missions. Veterans of

Rainbow Six will thrill to experience levels like The Canals of Venice with all-new lighting and intense new AI. And if you are new to the series, this is your chance to play the best of the best and get a taste of what Rainbow Six is all about.

Beyond thrilling single-player missions, the Rainbow Six series is known for its unbeatable multiplayer gameplay. Rainbow Six Critical Hour ups the multiplayer ante with superior gameplay modes including

Persistent Elite Creation™ mode on the Xbox® video game and entertainment system from Microsoft. The Xbox version also boasts the new Assassin and Free-for-All modes – even more intense multiplayer gameplay modes, and your chance to revisit some of the finest multiplayer game maps in the business.


This is Rainbow Six at its finest. No matter how you look at it and no matter which system you're playing on, Rainbow Six Critical Hour brings it all, and brings it hard. This is the tactical action that put Rainbow Six on top – an all-in-one, incredible gameplay experience, and at a price that's almost too good to be true.

"This is the tactical action that put Rainbow Six on top"

Operation Aztec Palace

Date: Jun. 20, 2003 14:00
 Location: Venice, Italy
 Origin: Rainbow Six*: Urban Operations*


Mission:
 Sneak through the canals of Venice and assault a Venetian library housing a collection of rare medieval manuscripts.



Operation Razor Ice

Date: Sep. 19, 2000 23:00
 Location: Southampton, England
 Origin: Rainbow Six

Mission:
 A stealth mission where you board a boat, disarm a bomb, and save Dr. Winston, who is being held captive by the Phoenix Group.




Operation Infinite Seven

Date: Aug. 18, 2003 05:45
 Location: Mexico City, Mexico
 Origin: Rainbow Six: Urban Operations

Mission:
 An assault mission where Team Rainbow has to flush Marxist revolutionaries out of their downtown headquarters.



THE BEST OF THE BEST – ONLINE!

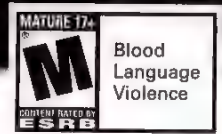
Rainbow Six Critical Hour combines the best maps of the past and present with a dizzying array of multiplayer game types. The 7 classic maps were chosen by the fans and have proved to be some of the most intense multiplayer experiences on any system.

CO-OPERATIVE PLAY
 Up to four players can join in for any of the single-player missions or play the addictive Terrorist Hunt.

VARIETY OF GAME TYPES
 The Xbox version comes with, Total Conquest, Retrieval, Team Sharpshooter, Team Survival, Free-for-All Survivor, Free-for-All Sharpshooter, and Assassin.

P.E.C. MODE – Xbox Only
 The class-based multiplayer of P.E.C. (Persistent Elite Creation) mode is back with all new maps, skills, and player levels. Each of the four character classes (Commando, Combat Medic, Spec Op, and Engineer) has added a new skill to really up the intensity level online. And with Rainbow Six Critical Hour you can take your P.E.C. characters all the way up to the 60th level.

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■ Honk your horn at another driver to set up a race, and then the fun begins

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

Test Drive Unlimited

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** EDEN STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** JUNE 20

GET IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

If we were to offer our readers a contest in which they could win a mansion in Hawaii stocked with a full wardrobe of fashionable clothes and a garage housing multiple high-end sports cars, we'd certainly be flooded with entries. There are few people who wouldn't be attracted to at least one part of that scenario. Well, we unfortunately can't offer that contest, but Atari has got a game on the way that will make this fantasy seem like a reality. Test Drive Unlimited isn't just about cars, it's also about the lifestyle.

Many racing games have claimed to be about the culture of cars, but Test Drive Unlimited is tackling this concept in a different way. Melding Gran Turismo's accurate recreations of high-end sports cars with the open world and lifestyle aspects of street racers, Unlimited is poised to carve out a unique place in the Xbox 360's roster of driving games. Players will create their own characters and hit the streets of an accurate recreation of the island of Oahu, earning money to buy new cars, houses, clothes, and more. Bigger houses will have bigger garages that hold more cars, and you'll be able to outfit your character with real clothes from designers like Marc Ecko, Ben Sherman, and more. You may even be able to purchase recognizable works of art to hang in your house.

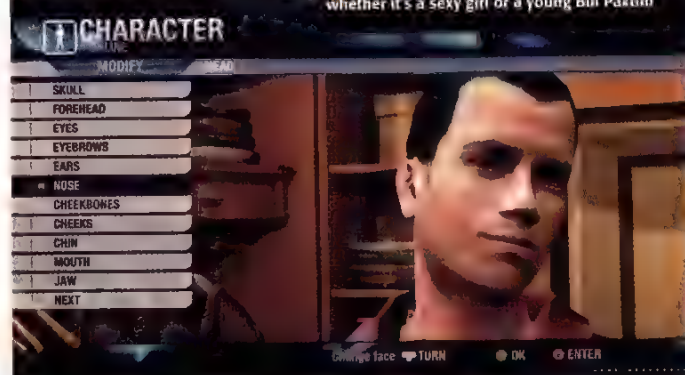
Of course, driving is at the center of the game, and Test Drive Unlimited definitely has some slick new features under the hood. While you

can simply drive around the game world's 1,600 miles of road to your heart's content, the real thrill is in the race. Virtual racers will populate the world for you to challenge and wager with, but racing against real opponents is what the game is all about. Whenever you're connected to Xbox Live, you'll see other online racers speeding around your single-player game world. You never need to pop out to an online menu to race a human opponent – at any given time, you can see up to eight online racers in your game world, and you can create your own race routes and rewards. You can set cash prizes, or even wager one of your cars. You'll also be able to jump straight to an event, search for races by various parameters, join car clubs, test out cars from dealers, hear live satellite radio in your car, and much, much more.

Each of the over 125 vehicles has been accurately recreated down to the smallest detail. Every car's interior, engine sounds, and performance is based on manufacturer specifications, and lust-worthy rides from companies like Audi, Lamborghini, and Mercedes Benz are included. Even Ferrari has lent rides to the game, and there are also an admirable amount of motorcycles from brands like Kawasaki and Ducati. In short, there are vehicles for every type of driver. Of course, the real thrill about your ride is showing off what you can do with it. ■ ■ ■ ■



■ You can create your own custom character, whether it's a sexy girl or a young Bill Pastno



Change face TURN OK ENTER



■ Every car features a fully-modeled interior that's accurate to the real car



Several live satellite radio stations will be available in your car, including the BBC.

previews

FREE RIDE (ONLINE) **ROOKIE | \$100,000,000**

REPLAY **PHOTOS** **EDITOR** **OPTIONS**



There are over 1,600 square miles of road in Unlimited's virtual recreation of Oahu.

See the final seconds again

CONTINUE
GAME INFORMER 91

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?



COMMAND A WIDE RANGE OF SQUADS

US Light Infantry, US Special Forces,
Multi-National Coalition Forces



UTILIZE REAL-WORLD COMBAT TACTICS

Outthink, Outmaneuver, Outgun Enemies Through
Over 12 Levels of Intense Combat



8 UNIQUE MULTIPLAYER LEVELS/MODES

Co-op and Coalition Vs. Opposition Forces

WWW.FULLSPECTRUMWARRIOR.COM



Blood and Gore
Strong Language
Violence



PlayStation 2



XBOX
LIVE

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FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR TEN HAMMERS



STRIKE FROM ANY POSITION

Position sniper teams or split squads into buddy teams.



CALL IN THE CAVALRY

Control mechanized units like Bradley Tanks and armored Humvees, or call in air-strikes on enemy positions.



ZERO IN WITH PRECISION FIRE

Take control of specialized soldiers to snipe enemies, lay down suppressive fire, or laser sight targets for air-strikes.

COMING SOON.



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XBOX 360

Saint's Row

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** VOLITION
 > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 2006

POLISH TAKES TIME

We have the sad duty to report that the wait for Saint's Row must continue. Now believed to be headed for fall, Saint's Row has moved several months beyond THQ's original plans to have the title out during the launch window of the 360. Delays aren't always a bad sign, however. Sometimes, the most committed developers are willing to take the extra time to get things just right. That's certainly the implied sentiment of Jacques Hennequet, lead producer on Saint's Row. We recently got his thoughts on the project, and a status update on this, one of the most highly anticipated games scheduled for Microsoft's new baby.

"Saint's Row is far more open-ended than our direct competitors. Our city is open from the get-go and players are free to explore as much or as little as they want from the very beginning of the game," Hennequet told us when we asked how his game differs from the popular GTA series. "We are the very first open-world game that gives the player complete freedom to create his character however he or she wishes." A big part of this element refers to the wide open character creator that Volition has built into the game. "Our character creation kit is really extensive. There are too many options to list, but to give you an idea, we have 12 sliders just to control the way your ears look," Hennequet explained. "Our character

customization (clothes, bling, tattoos) is also incredibly deep, and it does have an impact on gameplay, as each element acts as a multiplier to the amount of respect you earn when you perform activities."

Apparently, a major focus of play will be the open-ended activities. "Activities are the quickest way to earn respect and money in Saint's Row," says Hennequet. "They are available to you immediately after you complete the tutorial and remain available all the time. The respect you earn allows you to unlock missions, which in turn earn you territory." The city you'll act out these activities in is more focused on lots of action per square block, rather than being gigantic just for the sake of size. Hennequet predicts players should be engrossed for a good 25 hours before completion.

Strangely, the lead producer was hesitant to provide extensive info on the multiplayer portion of the game. However, earlier visits to the developer revealed a number of exciting modes. Unless dramatic changes have been made, the team originally planned to implement both cooperative missions as well as competitive group games, all available for online play over Xbox Live. Modes like Protect the Pimp, Big Ass Chains, and Blinged-Out Ride all promised to be hilarious, but we'll have to wait and see whether those features make the final cut.

■ Those guys he's shooting? They're not really far away. They're just really small



■ Every player's character can be different, thanks to the insanely detailed character creator

While Hennequet was unwilling to comment on the possibility, the new time frame for the game's launch does make us wonder about a possible move to other systems, namely a certain new Sony product that may be releasing around that time.

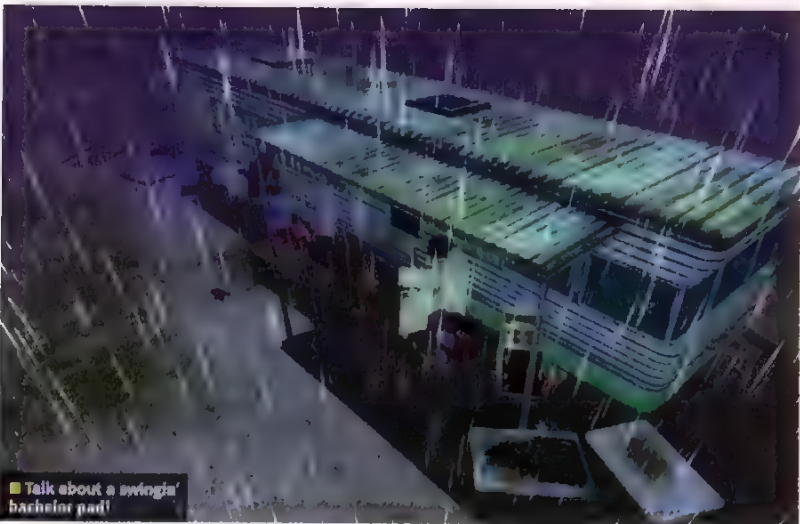
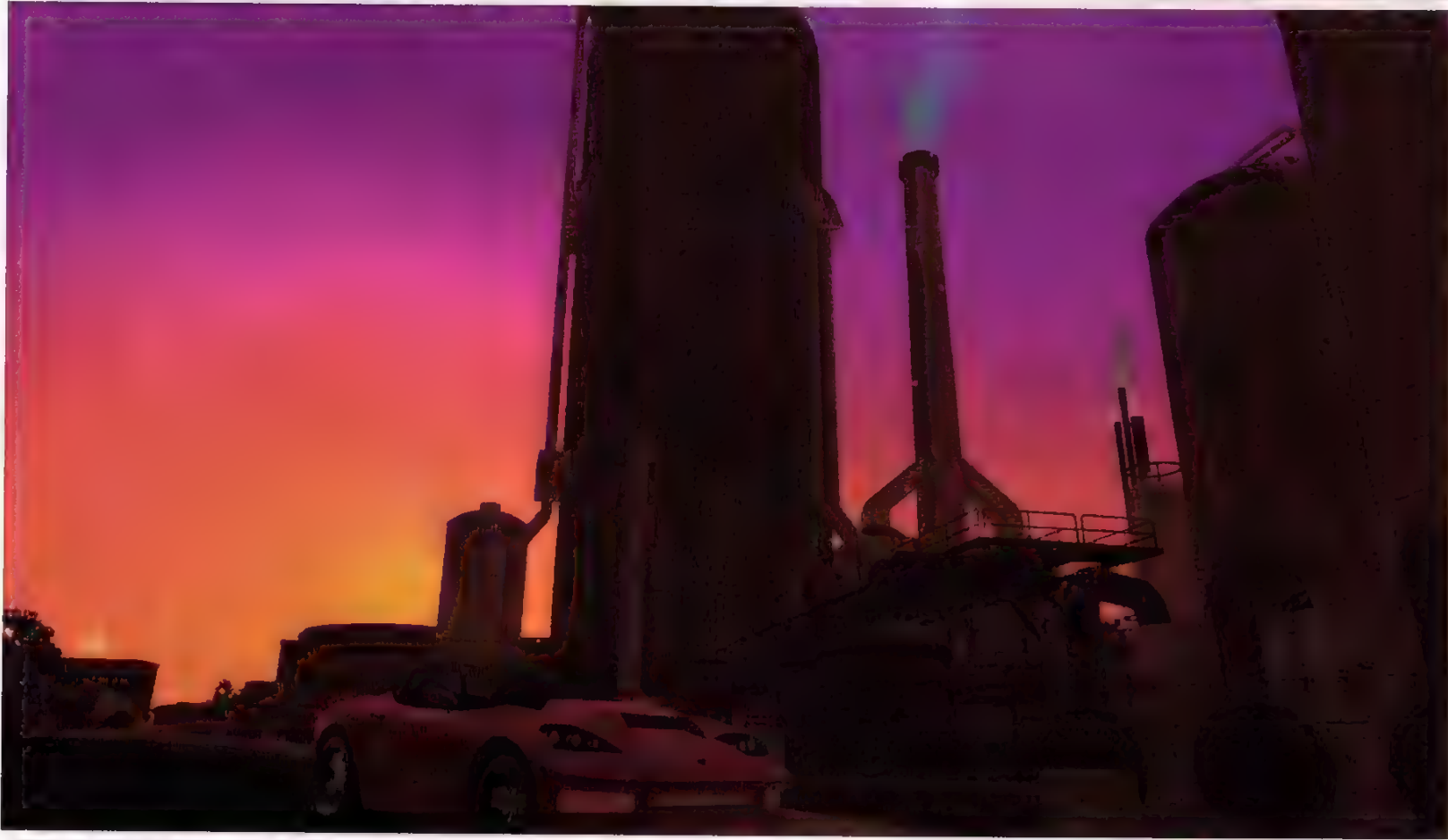
Whatever systems it eventually arrives on, Saint's Row has a lot of cool features to look forward to. Hennequet assures us the wait is worthwhile. "I just can't wait for people to try the game, period. It won't be too long now." ■ ■ ■



Real time shadows will shift as the day passes



Cangsta-style biathlon is in contention as a sport for the next summer olympics



Talk about a swigga' bachelor pad!



You'll have to seize and control strongholds throughout the world



UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

Chromehounds

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** FROMSOFTWARE
 > **RELEASE** SPRING

MECH MADNESS

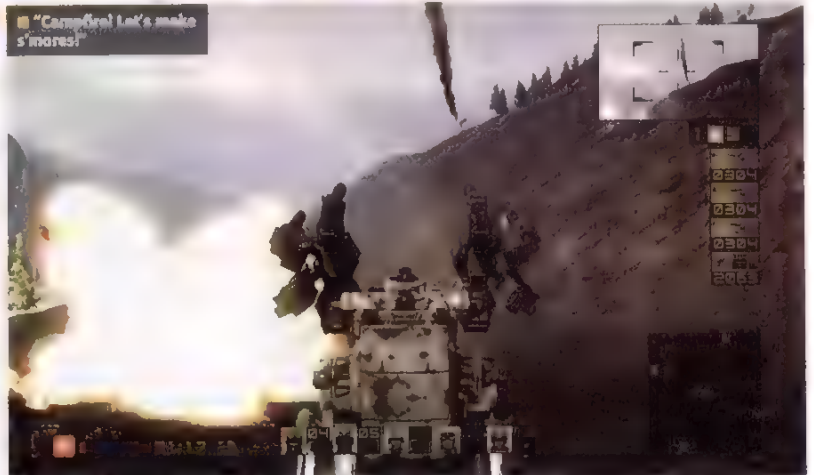
To date, the Xbox 360 has proven to be about as popular in Japan as the staff of Game Informer at a nude beach. While no amount of sit-ups can help our saggy selves, there is hope for the 360, as more and more Japanese-developed titles for the system are coming to life. Chromehounds is one such title that we've been following for some time now, and it looks like it has the potential to be a nice little addition to the library of Eastern games for the system.

Although it has its roots in Japan, Chromehounds will be instantly familiar to fans of an Xbox franchise developed here in the States, namely MechAssault. Like that

series, Chromehounds centers on mech combat, and is being billed as a primarily online experience. Players will be able to form clans with up to 20 members, and take on other teams in groups of up to six. What separates Chromehounds from MechAssault is that one player assumes the role of Tactics Commander and issues orders to the others on his or her team. Only the Tactics Commander's map displays the entire combat zone, and therefore all of the enemies. Thus, the Tactics Commander must issue orders via voice chat to ensure that the team functions well together and isn't blindly searching for foes.

While Chromehounds offers a huge

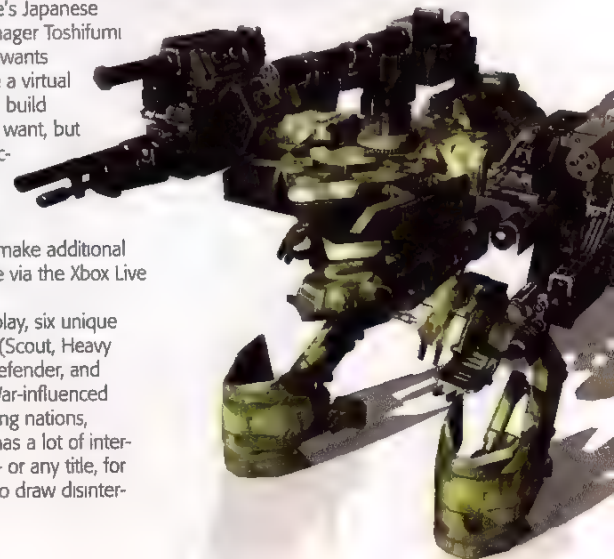
"Complere! Lak's make s'mores!"



variety of premade mechs (or HOUNDS, as they are called in the game), you aren't limited to those models. You can actually create your own robot from a massive selection of different parts. During a visit to developer FromSoftware's Japanese headquarters, general manager Toshifumi Nabeshima stated that he wants this feature to function like a virtual LEGO set. You'll be able to build pretty much whatever you want, but will have to consider restrictions like weight and size to create something functional. Nabeshima also stated that they may make additional building materials available via the Xbox Live Marketplace.

With its online-focused play, six unique roles for squad members (Scout, Heavy Gunner, Sniper, Assault, Defender, and Commander), and Cold War-influenced storyline about three warring nations, Chromehounds certainly has a lot of interesting aspects. But will it — or any title, for that matter — be enough to draw disinter-

ested Japanese gamers to the Xbox 360? Certainly, each Japanese game that comes to the system will help, especially when they feature a unique twist on the classic mech formula. ■ ■ ■



Chromehounds promises to deliver your daily dose of Explosions, an enemy's...







■ Yakuza's world is a living breathing place that accurately captures the vibe of Tokyo.



■ Cinematic presentation is a huge part of Yakuza

あ、あの、助けてください!



■ Many objects in the environment can be used as weapons

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Yakuza

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SEGA > RELEASE SUMMER

THE JAPANESE MAFIA HEADS WEST

Those who keep an eye on the Japanese gaming world have probably already heard about *Ryu Ga Gotoku*, the hit action title from Sega. A critical and commercial success in its native land, the big-budget adventure is coming Stateside under a name that easily describes its Japanese underworld setting: *Yakuza*.

The *Yakuza*, for those who aren't up on their criminal organizations, is the Japanese version of the mafia, and the largest organized crime syndicate in the world. *Yakuza* puts players in the role of Kiryu Kazuma, a former *Yakuza* star who is released from prison after serving 10 years for a murder he didn't commit. Out for revenge in a sprawling, open-world version of Tokyo, Kazuma must dive back into the underworld to get to the bottom of a complex web

of mysteries.

Since the *Yakuza* isn't as familiar to American gamers as, say, the Italian mafia, we spoke with producer Toshihiro Nagoshi to get his thoughts on how this title will translate to Western audiences. "We have intentionally made the game accessible for all gamers, but within the storyline and environments as well. Really, anyone can pick up and play without prior knowledge of the *Yakuza*, as the game actually becomes the educational tool that introduces the player to Japan's underground society," says Nagoshi. "A game should contain the three important elements: A rich adventure, compelling battles, and beautiful cinematic scenes. I believe that as long as these three elements are included, such games will be accepted in any country across the globe." Considering that *Yakuza* uses the open-world template of ultra-popular titles like the *Grand Theft Auto* series, its gameplay could possibly transcend both borders and culture.

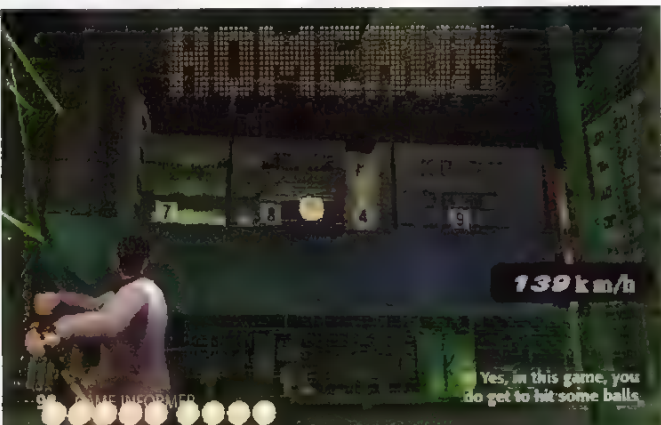
While *Yakuza* has some similarities to *GTA*, it also has several features that set it apart. Like in a role-playing game, Kazuma will gain experience points that will translate into new



■ Minigames like this skill crane populate the world, but will they be as much of a ripoff as the real thing?

moves, skills, and more hit points. Also like an RPG, when the player encounters an enemy in the world, it will load into a fight. The combat is where *Yakuza* really sets itself apart. Kazuma is armed with quick and strong attacks, as well as guard and dodge functions. This combat system was designed to let players take on large amounts of foes at once, and has been widely compared to a 3D version of *Streets of Rage*.

There are a lot of reasons to be excited about *Yakuza*. Not only does brawler-style gameplay in an open-world setting appeal to us, but the story is quite compelling as well. Nagoshi crafted the plot along with famed Japanese novelist Seishu Hase, and apparently it branches out based on the player's actions. "*Yakuza* allows players to create their own variations in the plot to advance in the story," says Nagoshi. "It allows gamers to get deeply immersed into its highly unique story." For us, these reasons are enough to dive into the seedy Japanese underworld. ■■■



139km/h

Yes, in this game, you do get to hit some balls.





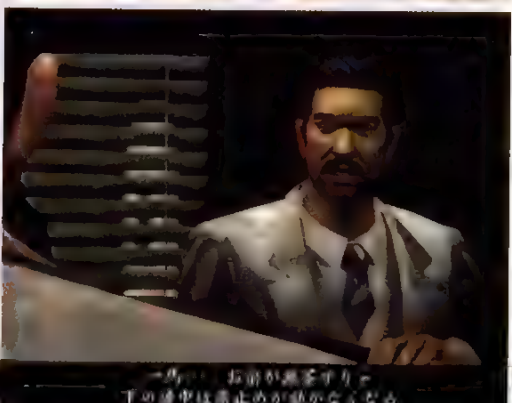
"You can tell just by the way I use my walk that I'm a ladies man, a gangster man..."



■ Yakuza's fighting engine is as deep as what you find in most brawlers



東城会、二万五千 死に術強いでかき集めた金や



一馬... お前が黒茶サリ一下の道中は前止めが厳かくなる



■ "Soo... you come here often? What's your sign?"



New allies

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XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PSP | PC

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS > **DEVELOPER** CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
> **RELEASE** APRIL 11 (PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, PC), XBOX 360 AND PSP TBA



RETURN TO GREATNESS?

Let's be honest. Everyone counts the new Tomb Raider game as a real wild-card. It's no secret that Lara's gaming stardom has faded over the years. Despite this, we've been hearing promises for some time now about how Legend will be a brand new start for the once-beloved heroine. Until now, we've been hesitant to truly join in the enthusiasm. Lara has bummed us before. However, this month we were offered the chance to actually play several hours of Tomb Raider: Legend. Quite simply, it's a game that has the potential to be remarkable.

There's an interesting trade-off we've seen over the years. The first Tomb Raider undoubtedly counts among its influences the platform jumping of the original Prince of Persia. In turn, the new Prince of Persia had much in common with Lara's early games, but had advanced to a much friendlier control scheme. Now, the circle continues as Tomb Raider handles in many ways like the most recent Prince games. It's a great fit. It's hard to explain until you actually feel the controls and how differently Lara moves in her new incarnation. No grid governs the world that players navigate. Platforming feels totally natural, as an intuitive control scheme

has you flipping and clambering along cliffs and statues.

There's much more than a new control scheme in Legend to look forward to. Puzzles are often organic to the environment – solutions are based on object physics and changing cues within the world. Combat has also seen a facelift – fast-paced acrobatic gunplay rules the day. Vehicle sections also offer a change of pace. Finally, dramatic interactive cutscenes demand quick button presses as Lara narrowly avoids environmental hazards.

The new gameplay elements have the added bonus of playing out amid gorgeous backdrops. Even on PS2, the great visuals are helped along by widescreen and progressive scan support, and there are definitely moments where players will simply stop and stare.

One final hurdle remains. A number of technical glitches were still abundant in the version we played this month. With release only a few weeks away, the development team has their work cut out for them fixing some noticeable collision bugs and smoothing out the cutscenes. With that said, we can't wait to see how the final build turns out. It's on track to surprise a lot of people. ■ ■ ■

Every chapter of the game feels like an extended movie scene. Think of a film where you've seen a fight, followed by a car chase, followed by a flashback, followed by a startling discovery. This is the sort of arc that every level of Legend seems to take.



BOLIVIA

The game opens on a ragged cliffside overhanging the vast Bolivian rain forest. Lara hangs precariously from the rocks as you pull her to the dubious safety of a forgotten temple atop the rocks.



TOKYO

Lara's adventure continues when she attends an upscale party in the teeming metropolis of Tokyo. While the level opens with Lara prowling the scene in a sleek evening dress, it doesn't take long for things to devolve into violence. Yakuza gunmen attack and Lara is forced onto the precarious scaffolding outside the high rise.



THE FLASHBACK

In a run-down and dilapidated foreign town, Lara meets up with a childhood friend and is ambushed by mercenaries. Following a pitched street battle, Lara commandeers a motorcycle and battles her way to an old excavation site. What follows is a flashback to the first time Lara visited the site, and then her descent into a dramatically different dig in present time.





■ Tag team matches let you become a sex object alongside a friend

XBOX 360

Rumble Roses XX

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER KONAMI
> DEVELOPER KONAMI/YUKE'S ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE MARCH 28



BREAST IN SHOW

Well, it's official. Rumble Roses XX is even more raunchy than you thought it was. We too were surprised that such a thing might be possible. However, after some extensive hands-on playtime, the overabundance of nearly-naked grapplers had us embarrassed to even call our mothers on the phone. Regardless of the boundaries of good taste, we certainly can't argue with the amazing graphical quality that shows off so much skin. More importantly, a wealth of impressive gameplay options makes this far more than a peep show – Rumble Roses XX is shaping up into one of the most impressive wrestling games in years.

The 360's first wrestling title dramatically fleshes out the options from the previous PS2 offering. Popular request

meant that tag team matches were going to be a sure thing. Online or offline, you'll be able to partner up and dominate the ring against another pairing. Team interaction is actually governed by how the two girls get along with each other, so you'll constantly want to stay on your teammate's good side. Alternately, forget about making friends and jump into a four-player battle royal for an insane throwdown. There is now a straight-up street fighting mode, where your only goal is to deplete your opponent's health like in a classic fighting game. Another new addition is the Queen's mode, wherein the loser is forced to embarrass herself in any number of humiliating penalty games.

For these and all the other gameplay modes, you'll be constantly unlocking new costumes, penalty games, photo shoot actions, and entrance animations. Since each new character costume brings a new personality, there are effectively over 40 female wrestlers to unlock – the returning baby face

and heel versions for each girl, as well as the new powered-up superstar persona. No matter which version you're playing, your actions during a match will actually evolve your character, naturally increasing features like the power of your attacks or your walking speed, all based on how you play.

If none of the available buxom athletes strike your fancy, the brand new character creation mode should capture your eye. While falling just shy of being pornographic, this mode nonetheless allows you to alter pretty much every aspect of your character's physique, and play dress up in a wide range of outfits that span from bikinis to fetishwear. Ah, the marvels of the M-rated game. The physical changes won't be just cosmetic; different body types will move and fight differently in the ring.

The overly campy sex appeal of Rumble Roses XX is going to be hilarious for some players, and a total turn-off for others. Either way, our time with the solid game mechanics made it clear that it would be a mistake to dismiss the title out of hand as nothing more than an adolescent fantasy – even if it is also most certainly that. ■ ■ ■

■ Like beasts in the wild, the Rumble Roses tend to stare curiously at the cameras that document their every movement



■ Play as a familiar character from the first game, or use the character creator to craft your own



■ Notice the high heels – those give her stability while perched on the ropes. Heels are good for balancing

New worlds





■ Yes, these touch screen shots are indeed boring. Hopefully it will be useful in the game

NINTENDO DS

MechAssault: Phantom War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > PUBLISHER MAJESCO > DEVELOPER BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE MAY 9

TINY GIANT ROBOTS!

MechAssault fans, it is time to rejoice, for a new entry in the series is on the way. Surprisingly, though, it's not coming from either Microsoft Game Studios or developer Day 1 Studios (who together brought the two MechAssault games to the Xbox). No, this title is being published by Majesco and developed by Backbone Entertainment for the one portable that gets more diverse all the time: the Nintendo DS.

The first handheld entry in the series, MechAssault: Phantom War places gamers in the role of MechWarrior Valen Bryce (your character finally gets a name!), and concerns a galactic dark age in which interstellar communication has been cut off. Of course, this can only lead to an attack by sinister forces and intense Mech vs. Mech combat. Phantom War boasts 24 different types of Mechs and other vehicles, including tanks, turrets, and battle armor. As MechAssault 2 players know, the battle armor allows players to take over enemy Mechs by hacking into their computers, and this fun feature is back in Phantom War. But rather than a button-press minigame, this feature will now be assigned to the touch screen.

Multiplayer has always been a hallmark of the MechAssault series, and Phantom War is

certainly no different. Four multiplayer game types are included, each supporting up to four players via wireless (there's no word yet if Phantom War will take advantage of Nintendo's Wi-Fi network). We'd like to get some more information on this game, but we already know enough to get excited. Taking your giant robot death machine out of the house is always a good time. ■ ■ ■



■ The touch screen: now in soothing "Arctic Blast Peppermint"

PSP

Splinter Cell Essentials

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE MARCH 21

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING SPY



The fact that Ubisoft's top secret agent Sam Fisher is headed for the PSP has been declassified for a while now, but we've gone and executed our own investigation on the subject. One of our contacts slipped us an early build of Splinter Cell Essentials, so we dove in and spent some serious hands-on time with the title.

Although it takes place after the upcoming Double Agent in the Splinter Cell timeline, Essentials is actually an origin story of sorts, as it details Fisher's time in the Navy SEALs before joining the NSA. The opening missions are actually flashbacks to earlier days, and are comprised of both new and classic missions. So not only will the player experience Sam's time as a SEAL, but also familiar missions like the Oil Rig from the first game. We won't reveal much more about the story, but obviously Splinter Cell fans will find it every bit as compelling as

the console games.

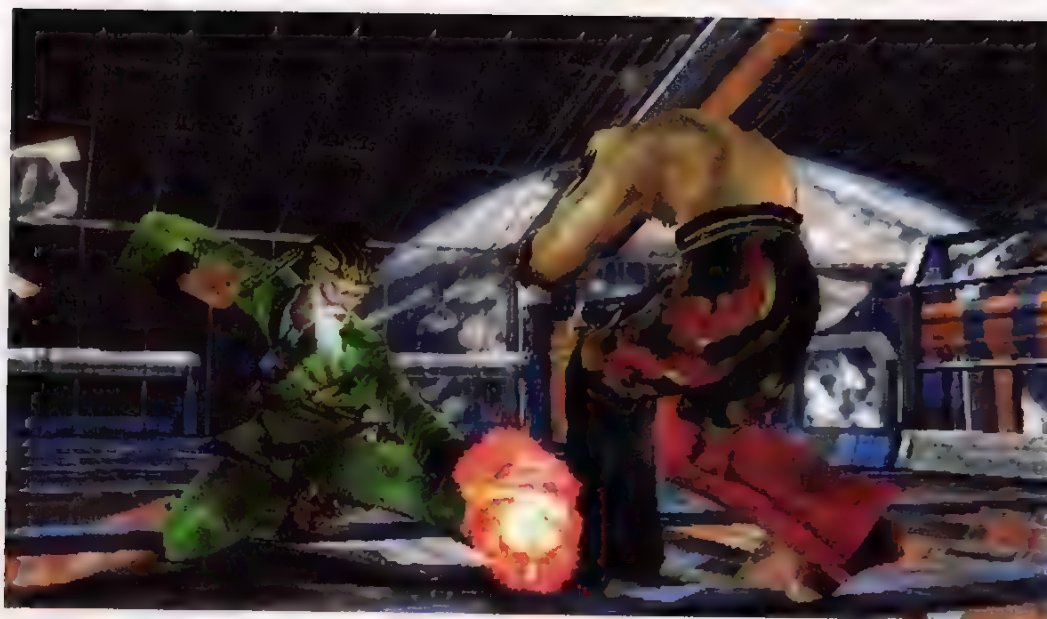
To accommodate the translation to a portable system, there have been some changes from the console versions' control scheme, but Fisher hasn't lost any of his moves. All his skills and gadgets are accounted for, although there have been tweaks to the gameplay. The large mission areas have been broken up into smaller bites, so you can play for a short time and still accomplish some goals. A flexible, save-anywhere checkpoint system has been added as well. But the biggest change is definitely the camera. Pressing the circle button centers it behind Sam, while holding it allows for free rotation. It definitely takes some getting used to, and obviously changes the way you play, but works as intended. Even though these changes may take some adjusting, it's still clear to us that Essentials is a worthy addition to the spy series. ■ ■ ■



■ Sam never tired of his favorite practical joke: shooting guys in the back of the head, hilarious!



■ "Never sneak up on a man relieving himself in the woods!"



PSP

Tekken: Dark Resurrection

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
 > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** SUMMER

ROAD WARRIOR

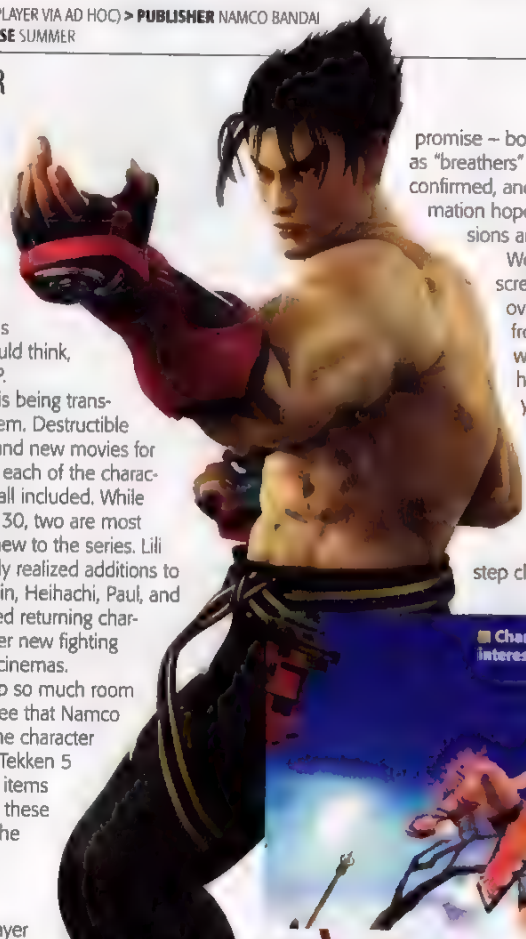
Some dream a little dream of portable butt kicking, and those hardcore gamers are going to live the sweet life with Namco's upcoming Tekken: Dark Resurrection. The game has more to offer than you would think, and it's only coming to PSP.

The full Tekken concept is being translated to the handheld system. Destructible environments, 19 stages, and new movies for the opening, as well as for each of the characters' individual stories, are all included. While the roster tops out around 30, two are most notable for being entirely new to the series. Lili and Dragunov are each fully realized additions to the Tekken mainstays like Jin, Heihachi, Paul, and Law (some of the confirmed returning characters), and promise to offer new fighting styles, moves, and ending cinemas.

With the fighters taking up so much room on the screen, it's nice to see that Namco is planning on expanding the character customization option from Tekken 5 by doubling the number of items available. You can then use these personalized characters in the game's ad-hoc multiplayer for two-player battles. The company is being vague, though, on another multiplayer

promise -- bonus minigames designed as "breathers" between epic battles are confirmed, and the coy lack of more information hopefully indicates fun little diversions and not insipid space fillers.

We're digging the look of these screens, as they ably capture the over-the-top styling expected from one of the console world's favorite fighters. But we haven't gotten our hands on it yet, and are looking forward to seeing if the gameplay is on par with the looks. A summer release isn't far off, and the dream of console-quality 3D fighting on the slim PSP could be one step closer to reality. ■■■



■ Character customization will be most interesting in the multiplayer matches



■ Including destructible environments is a big plus for handheld fighting



■ Effects are getting some special attention



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PlayStation.2







PSP

Blade Dancer

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** NIPPON ICHI
> **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** JULY

THE MANLIEST DANCER EVER

Further enhancing the PSP's ever-growing stable of platform-exclusive titles, *Blade Dancer* will give players a brand new fantastic world to save from the depredations of evil. The story may be built on familiar blocks (oh no, the legendary Dread Knight has reappeared and brought a demon army with him! Guess what happens next), but the unique real-time battle system, extensive item creation, and wireless co-op multiplayer make *Blade Dancer* deserving of some attention. And besides, what's wrong with leveling up, getting some magical artifacts to equip, and laying waste to various enemies?

Though the combat takes place in real time, each participant in the battle will get the chance to act when their individual Luna Clock makes a full cycle, the speed of which is governed by that person's speed attribute. To add a twist, the use of special abilities isn't limited by magic or

energy, but by Luna power. This is a separate gauge that is shared by both sides, and fills up with each blow landed in the fight. The catch is that the enemies can use it just as well as you can — trying to save up Luna power for a big finisher could backfire as the bad guys drain the meter with a super-attack of their own.

Cooperative multiplayer is another way to beef up your characters if flying solo isn't cutting it for you. Connecting with a buddy will allow you to plumb the depths of some bonus dungeons filled with items that you'll be able to take back into the single-player quest. Of course, the deeper you go, the bigger the enemies get, but so do the rewards.

Blade Dancer could well end up to be a nice shake-up of the tried-and-true RPG format. Hopefully the implementations of the various systems add up to something cool, and we'll let you know as soon as we get our hands on it to find out. ■ ■ ■

NINTENDO DS

Lost Magic

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** TATTO > **RELEASE** APRIL

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

A first glance certainly isn't enough to identify *Lost Magic* as anything more than another clichéd RPG about an orphaned boy with great power. The admittedly amusing but ultimately tired story isn't what will fascinate people. It's the remarkable new approach to gameplay that, more than any other game, makes players feel like they're actually crafting magic.

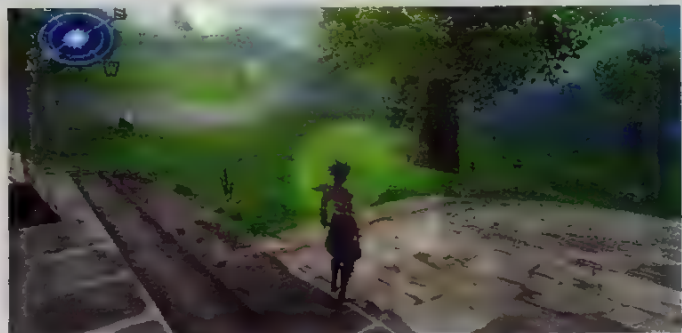
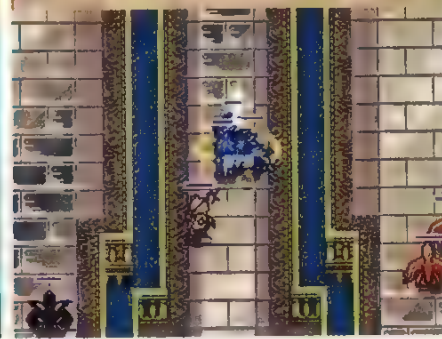
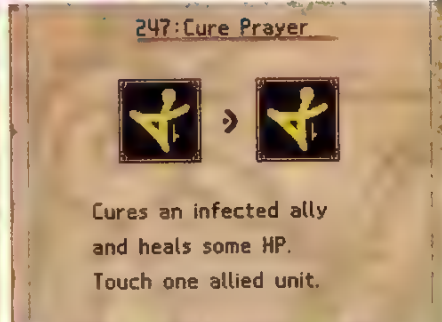
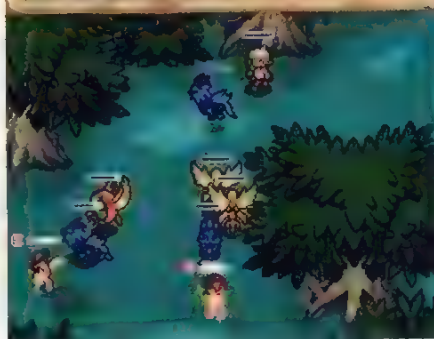
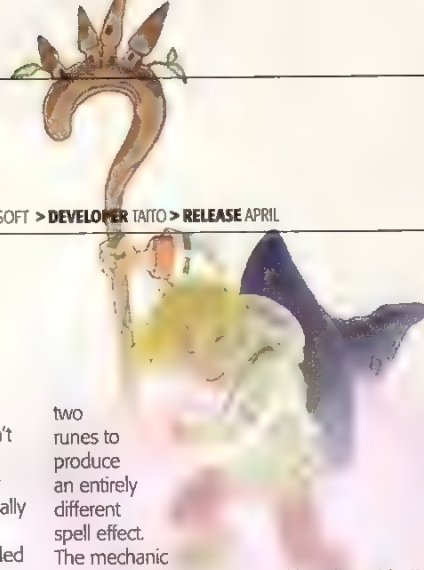
Pretty much everything in *Lost Magic* is handled on the touch screen, from character movement to the implementation of actions. The overworld map is simplistic, involving nothing more than running your character from point to point. Similarly, dialogue-driven cutscenes trigger periodically to move the tale forward. It's when the map dissolves away into the battle screen that things get exciting. As your little hero Isaac the Mage learns new spells, they are each tied to a rune, not unlike the symbols from the recent *Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow*. Draw the rune and the spell is summoned into being, and you then tap a spot on the screen to send your magic reeling away. Battle plays out in real time, so memorizing runes becomes almost a necessity. Each time you use a spell, you improve in its usage. Since different monsters have different weaknesses, it pays to improve every spell you can. Eventually, you can start to combine any

two runes to produce an entirely different spell effect.

The mechanic is rewarding, challenging, and has the odd effect of making you feel like a real wizard, as you wildly flip through your spell book to fling fire and ice at the fearsome beasts that assault you. The second exciting gameplay element is the ability to collect the monsters you fight to form your own army. These creatures can be manually maneuvered

about the screen to attack, divert attention, or simply to block and defend as you hurl your spells.

The several hours we got to play of the game proved to be remarkably challenging. The only major flaw in the gameplay department seemed to be the pathfinding of your allies — as in, they don't have any, and you need to lead them around like the stupidest of blind mice. We'll see how the final version plays out, but what we saw was definitely enough to confirm that RPG players should keep an eye on this one. ■ ■ ■



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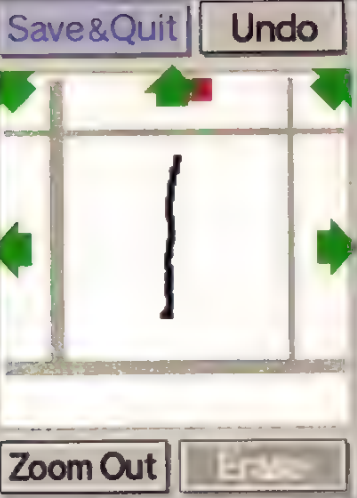
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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

FlatOut 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PC INTERNET) > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES > **DEVELOPER** BUGBEAR > **RELEASE** SUMMER

BACK TO DRIVING SCHOOL



NINTENDO DS

Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day

> **STYLE** 1 TO 16-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** APRIL 17

TEST OF MENTAL METTLE

Is video gaming ready for neurological mumbo jumbo that doesn't fit into a trite sci-fi shooter? For Japanese gamers, the answer has been a resounding "Yes!" as the country has propelled Nintendo's high-concept Brain Age (called Brain Training over there) to the top of its sales charts. It's a weird collection by gaming standards, and forces the question of what really qualifies as a traditional game, but Brain Age could prove to be that addictive kind of puzzle crack that American players can't keep their hands off of.

Drawing from the research of professor and neuroscientist Ryuta Kawashima, the game's collection of quick diversions is designed to test and then sharpen a human's lumpy gray matter. Some tasks have users complete scrolling lists of simple math problems. Another example asks players to say the color of a font instead of the word that is written (like if the word black is written in green ink, the correct answer would be green... it's harder than it sounds). The final localized version could change many of the problems and tasks found in the Japanese edition, but these two examples have been floating around in playable forms over the last few months, and should be included in the first volume.

With a budget-friendly price point of \$20 and a handful of potential activities (word memorization and those crazy sudoku things have both been mentioned), we wouldn't be surprised if every DS owner succumbed to curios-

Use lines to join them in order.

The proof of the pudding is in the eat-ing.

ity. It seems, though, that Nintendo is dead set on this idea of daily, bite-sized gameplay taking more than a cursory hold in the American market, as the publisher has already announced a similarly themed follow-up. Big Brain Academy is set to hit shelves a month after Brain Age. ■■■

When you start out with a game as mediocre as the original FlatOut, you don't usually get the chance to do it right with a sequel. Luckily, through pretty good sales of the first FlatOut, developer Bugbear is getting to correct some of the problems of the original; offering a game that not only has more content at the same cheap price, but is simply more fun to play.

One thing that you'll immediately notice is that the tracks are more wide open -- not only allowing for more side-by-side racing, but the courses themselves are less technical. This lets you concentrate more on rubbing metal with the competition (earning you more nitrous) and keeping an eye out for shortcuts instead of worrying that you might not take a corner correctly and spin out. Although it doesn't move as fast and funous as the Burnout series, the philosophical change the FlatOut series has undergone is immediately noticeable. Now

you'll crash through stuff and send it flying instead of getting stuck on stupid road-side objects. Furthermore, through some simple backstories and AI, your racing opponents will feel more lifelike and fun to race against, as they use nitro boosts and knock you around, unlike before.

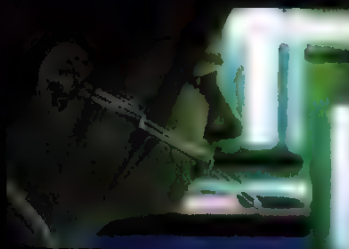
FlatOut's funny ragdoll minigames return, where you eject your driver from the car at high speeds, have doubled and are online. Royal Flush asks you to send your driver flying through the air to pick up good poker hands; while basketball, curling, and baseball all mirror their respective sports. In our playable time with the title our favorite was stone-skipping, where we managed to skip our rag doll driver across a pool for a good distance.

Although this game won't change the world, anyone looking for mindless thrills or those who picked up the first FlatOut will clearly find that this sequel is heading in the right direction. ■■■





THE GAME



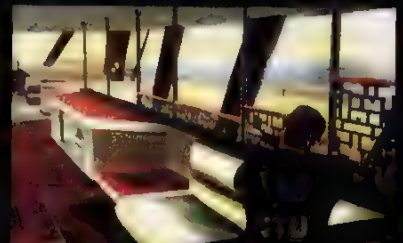
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PlayStation 2



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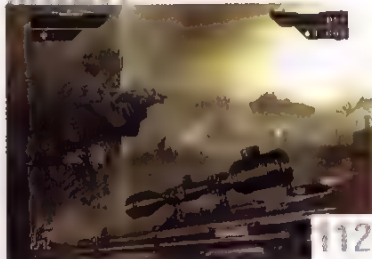


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REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

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Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter

There aren't a lot of must-have titles in the Xbox 360 library yet, but that number just increased by one. Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter completely reinvents the franchise as a pulse-pounding shooter with wide-open strategy, dizzying thrills, and some of the most gorgeous graphics around. Beyond the stellar campaign, Advanced Warfighter's multiplayer is packed with enough modes and game types to keep you logged on to Xbox Live for months. For 360 owners, this is one title that simply can't be missed. *previously*

(Note: Both Burnout: Revenge and Metal Gear Solid 3 have both won the Game of the Month award, and are therefore ineligible)

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Our crack (or crackhead, we can never decide which) review team rates games in a number of categories to help you sort out the great from the stuff you'll hate. Most games are reviewed by two staff members, and you will find both their opinions on each review. To make things a little easier we have put together some definitions of what the numbers mean, what we look for in a game, and also a cheat sheet so the newbies can understand our advanced video game jargon. It is important to note that the Game of the Month is determined only by the main review score, not an average of the two opinions.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

- 10** Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.
- 9** Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
- 8** Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.
- 7** Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.
- 6** Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.
- 5** Passable. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
- 4** Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
- 3** Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
- 2** Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
- 1** Dietrich. A game as painful as having your million-dollar car crashed by a fictional German man.

> **Concept:** What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

> **Graphics:** How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.

> **Sound:** Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?

> **Playability:** Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

> **Entertainment:** Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.

> **Replay Value**

High – You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.

Moderately High – Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.

Moderate – Good for a few months or a few times through.

Moderately Low – After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.

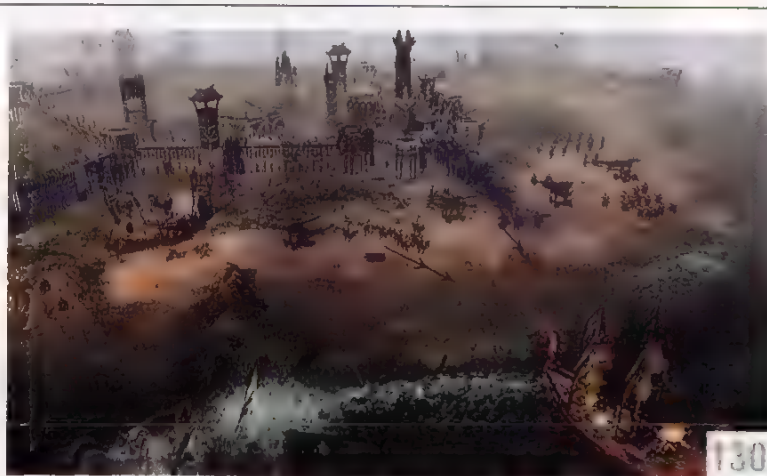
Low – You'll quit playing before you complete the game.



Fight Night Round 3



The Rub Rabbits!



The Lord of the Rings: The Battle For Middle-earth II

Fixing a number of issues, dropping in a whole mess of new content, and making huge improvements to the core gameplay is a perfectly dandy recipe for an excellent sequel as far as we're concerned – especially when the original game was good in its own right. The Battle For Middle-earth II is one of the best licensed efforts to ever grace gaming, as well as being a great way to celebrate your Lord of the Rings fandom – without the lifelong shame that that "Hobbit Pillow Fight"-themed party will result in.

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For our newer readers, here is a glossary of terms and acronyms that commonly appear in the magazine. Video game veterans should move along (these aren't the droids you are looking for).

The Edge
When All Games Aren't Created Equal

This is where GI breaks down multi-platform games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

C CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS 3 AND OLDER	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older	M MATURE CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS 17 AGES AND OLDER	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older
E EVERYONE CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 6 AND OLDER	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older	A ADULTS ONLY CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE ONLY FOR ADULTS	Content suitable only for adults
E ESRBI CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 10 AND OLDER	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older	RP RATED BY PARENTS CONTENT RATED BY PARENTS PRODUCT IS AWAITING FINAL RATING	Product is awaiting final rating
T TEEN CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 13 AND OLDER	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older		

1080i – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The "i" means that the video is being interlaced.

480p – Progressive scanning, this option ("p"=progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture. 480p (= interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting.

720p – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 720p stands for resolution of 1280x720 pixels. The "p" means that the video is in progressive format.

action – A term we use for games like Devil May Cry and Viewtiful Joe.

ad hoc – A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity.

adventure – A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island.

AI – Artificial Intelligence. Usually used to refer to how well the computer reacts to a human opponent.

bloom – An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces.

board – A term we use for games like Jeopardy! and Mano Party.

cel shading – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn illustrations.

E3 – Electronic Entertainment Expo. The world's largest convention for video games.

fighting – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive.

first-party – A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system.

FMV – Full Motion Video. Usually refers to an animated CG cutscene.

FPS – Frames Per Second. How many animation frames happen in one second. Also used to denote First-Person Shooters like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty.

framerate – The frames of animation used to create the illusion of movement.

frontend – A game's menus and options.

GBA – Game Boy Advance.

GC – GameCube.

HDTV – High Definition Television.

infrastructure – A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances.

isometric – Three-quarters top down view, like StarCraft or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance.

ISP – Internet Service Provider. The company that provides you with access to the Internet.

jaggies – Graphical lines that are jagged when they should be straight.

LAN – Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast, simultaneous gameplay.

Meerrow-Kahl! – The sound of the Death Star powering up. Also known as "The Best Sound Ever".

MMO – Massively Multiplayer Online. Usually applied to role-playing titles, we use this term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft.

motion blur – Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed.

normal mapping – A graphical technique in which a texture skin containing 3D information, revealed by light reflecting off the surface, is wrapped around a low-res model.

NPC – Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans.

particle effects – Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time.

platform – A term we use for games like Super Mario and Crash Bandicoot.

pop-up – When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance.

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2.

puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Puyo Pop.

racing – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart.

RPG – Role-Playing Game. A game that involves character improvement through collecting and spending points. A term we use for games like Final Fantasy and Xenosaga.

shooter – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gears of War.

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL.

strategy – A term we use for games like La Pucelle and Front Mission.

third-party – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Black

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER CRITERION GAMES
> RELEASE FEBRUARY 28 > ESRB M

A ROLLER COASTER RIDE

Since I first saw *Black* at E3 in 2004 I was enamored by its no-holds-barred approach to guns and the emotional feedback that comes from not only your weapon in hand, but its effect on the environment.

Over time I saw bits and pieces of the game, and came away from those experiences thinking this game would be a non-stop assault of bullets, destruction, and debris. The finished game wasn't exactly what I expected it to be, but that doesn't mean I was disappointed.

Black is about the personality of the weapons – not about the frantic, non-stop action that I once thought would be this game's hallmark. Featuring eight levels total and no multiplayer whatsoever, this game focuses on one thing, and that's a precise single-player experience. And with that in mind, I think the game is a success.

Each weapon has a unique and gratifying feel. In fact, most times I didn't find myself battling the analog sticks to get a bead on my target, but instead fighting the kick and pull of the weapons to keep the target painted.

Which brings me to the game experience. There are moments when you are in the woods, carefully moving from target to target to keep your attack guarded. Then there are the explosive moments when the game truly shines. The developers did a fantastic job of setting up the dominoes (which in this case are the destructible environments) so that I could come in and knock them down in a wash of bullets and destruction. Each level is a juggling act moving the gamer between these two basic experiences.

For some, it will be too short. The game's length didn't really bother me. It's an extremely well-produced game. Not only does it have some of the best

visuals the PlayStation 2 has ever seen (the Xbox version is also sharp but has to compete with more advanced software), the audio track is simply marvelous. The music by Michael Giacchino is superb, and the sound effects...oh, the sound effects...they boom from a weapon blast but also set tense moods with apt ambient voices and sounds.

My one major gripe with the game is that the story, while interesting, isn't woven into the gameplay experience. You watch a movie. Then you play a level that relates to the story, but the characters from the two never really intersect. I know there is an evil American terrorist, but you never actually

see him (or if I did, I sure didn't notice).

With four difficulty levels, there is some replay value here, but not a ton. I played through the game and I plan to visit it again. It's a fun roller coaster ride. Unfortunately, like most amusement park rides, the experience doesn't last long enough.

That said, I really enjoyed it, and can't wait to see what Criterion can do with this franchise in the future. For a first-time entry into the first-person shooter market, *Black* is impressive. It just needs some tweaks and some of the required options that gamers expect from an FPS – like multiplayer. —ANDY

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** An intense first-person shooter that cuts away the extras to focus on the single player experience

> **Graphics:** I never thought a PlayStation 2 game could look this good, and it doesn't look too shabby on Xbox either

> **Sound:** I don't say this lightly, but Michael Giacchino is the new John Williams – his music is that awesome

> **Playability:** Simple FPS gameplay that is heightened by the destructible world

> **Entertainment:** The lack of various parts hurts this game's long term value, but as a singular experience it is exhilarating

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 8.5

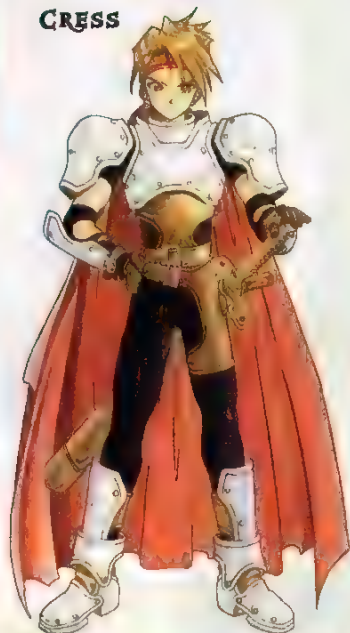
Black is like an Andrew Lloyd Webber musical. That's an analogy I never thought I'd make, but it's true. It's loud, flashy, over the top and thrilling, but once you get below the surface, you realize that there's not a lot of depth to be found. Relying solely on its explosive presentation, *Black* isn't concerned with story or even deviating from FPS traditions, and it largely works. While *Black* is a little behind the times in some ways (repetitive enemies, no jump button, no multiplayer), it does what it does extraordinarily well. *Black* is a thrilling experience from start to finish, and is as much fun on the third runthrough as on the first. The music, the gunfire, and, of course, the destruction combine into a gaming experience that gets the blood pumping and palms sweating as you revel in its unbridled chaos. There are more polished and complex shooters out there, but *Black* is far more bombastic than most, and simply a heck of a good time. —JEREMY

Black has simple thrills: death and destruction

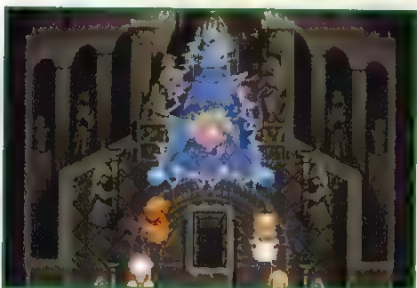


TALES OF PHANTASIA

CRESS



Cress is the lead character of the game and son of a master swordsman. Cress has been a student of swordplay from a young age.



AN EPIC ADVENTURE AWAITS YOU

WHEN YOUNG SWORDSMAN, CRESS ALBANE, RETURNS HOME TO FIND HIS VILLAGE TORN ASUNDER AND HIS FAMILY KILLED, HE IS FORCED TO SET OUT ON A QUEST THROUGH TIME AND SPACE TO UNCOVER THE VILLAINS BEHIND THE TRAGEDY. IN HIS EFFORTS TO UNCOVER THOSE BEHIND THIS EVIL DEED, CRESS SOON FINDS HIMSELF ON A MISSION THAT WILL TAKE HIM BACK AND FORTH THROUGH TIME.

TALES OF PHANTASIA UTILIZES THE UNIQUE "LINEAR MOTION BATTLE SYSTEM," WHICH ALLOWS PLAYERS TO ATTACK ENEMIES IN REAL-TIME, GIVING THE GAME MORE OF AN ACTION FEEL THAN A STANDARD RPG. WILL YOU JOIN CRESS ON HIS QUEST FOR VENGEANCE?

CHESTER



MEET THE CAST

Chester is Cress's neighbor and best friend and specializes in the bow attack. He's cool and compassionate, but when his parents are killed, he vows revenge.

MINT



Mint can cast healing and attack support spells. She's modest and gentle, but when the battle starts, she never backs down!

CLAUS

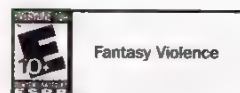


A human from the village of Euclid, Claus is a modern day agent. After years of studying, he is able to make contracts with spirits and then summon them into battle.

"Full of Old-School Appeal" - Game Informer Magazine



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You'll see some gorgeous views of the game's fictional city of New Radius

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure

STYLE | PLAYER ACTION PLATFORM > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER THE COLLECTIVE > RELEASE FEBRUARY 14 > ESRB M

TALL CITY BOMBING

After years of sitting through a host of low-budget knockoffs that simply try (and fail) to emulate the hottest, biggest selling games out there, I tend to be drawn to any game that presents a truly unique or novel concept and setting. For this reason alone, I've been rooting for Marc Ecko's *Getting Up*, which attempts to give gamers a look into the culture and art of graffiti, one of the late 20th century's most important populist art movements.

Playing the game, it's instantly clear that Marc Ecko (a former graffiti artist) played an instrumental role in crafting this title, which manages to perfectly infuse an old-school hip-hop attitude into its near-future sci-fi plotline involving an aspiring graf writer named Trane, who helps spark a revolt against the authoritarian regime in the fictional city of New Radius. The graffiti art in the game is of the highest quality and even features pieces by real-world graffiti legends like Cope 2 and Obey. Your arsenal of pieces includes all aspects of graffiti, from wheat paste lettering to simple marker tags to complex "wildstyle" aerosol artwork. It's great to see a game that has such a genuine affection for art, and does so much to draw you into an underground subculture.

To earn your stripes, you'll be asked to leave your mark on all manner of edifices throughout the cityscape, from alley walls to the highest skyscrapers. Platforming works a bit like *Prince of Persia*, allowing you to easily make and land jumps that would normally cause you to fall to your doom. Although this self-correcting control often makes the acrobatics a little mechanical feeling, there is a good challenge in figuring out just how you're supposed to get from here to there. That being said, there is usually one very linear solution, and it would have been nice to see more alternate paths available and less limitation of your movements. Still, I was honestly enthralled with the graffiti portions of the game, and really found myself taking pride in selecting a nice variety of patterns and then laying down smooth, even paint to avoid drips (and a loss of reputation amongst my fellow writers). It's too bad that the



actual mechanics for writing are extremely repetitive, and don't really offer you much real control of what's going on. As a result, the initial thrill does wear off as the game goes on.

Sadly, the rest of this unique game fails in some not-very-unique ways. The combat ranges from adequate to downright frustrating, and there is the usual list of faults like camera issues and really horrid enemy AI (which essentially ruins all the game's stealth elements). As much as I'd like to laud this as a must-play, it just doesn't live up to its promise. If we are to truly see video games progress, unique and innovative games like this need to start delivering gameplay as polished as less-novel (but immaculately crafted) games like *Call of Duty 2* (which succeeds despite the glut of WWII games on the market). As it stands, *Getting Up* is a game I like more for its potential than its execution, and that's a shame. —MATT

Throughout your adventures you'll experience all the forms of graffiti...



...even tagging moving subway trains

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Rebel against the man armed with an aerosol can

> **Graphics:** Overall, it's serviceable current-gen visuals all around. The real fireworks are provided by the amazing graffiti art

> **Sound:** With a soundtrack that includes everything from Jane's Addiction to Mobb Deep to Brit rockers Kasabian, you know you're in good hands

> **Playability:** The platforming is often compelling, but the combat and stealth are seriously flawed

> **Entertainment:** As much as I'd love to give this game the highest honors based on its intriguing concept, it's just not as good as it could be

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.5

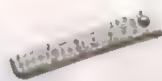
The refreshing concept screams "you've never seen anything like this before," but the gameplay incoherently mumbles "you've played this type of game a million times before, and sadly, it's usually executed far better." Rather than pushing players to be skillful and creative in their tagging, the gameplay mechanic that is used for this function is designed much like a children's coloring book. In other words, it's a mind-numbing affair that makes you feel like you are four years old again. Thrills could have been garnered from the platforming and hand-to-hand combat, but unresponsive controls, problematic camerawork, and general repetition plague both of these aspects. In a cruel twist of irony, a game about graffiti art delivers an experience that is as boring as watching paint dry. —REINER



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Jump in.





PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX SYSTEM LINK OR UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR INTERNET) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** M

AWAITING ORDERS

The first Full Spectrum Warrior was a good template for the series, and opened up the door for other tactical titles like Ubisoft's Brothers in Arms. But whereas I saw the first FSW as a starting point for better things ahead, Ten Hammers finds the series right back where it started.

In some ways it's hard to blame developer Pandemic. They've given you a lot more flexibility in managing your squad, and even added some first-person elements for specific troops that gives you more of a hands-on feel in the combat. But as much as they've added to the title, its meat and potatoes strategy doesn't feel any more satisfying. The game's bigger, but not necessarily deeper.

Problematic camera and various bugs poke some holes in the air of rigid military protocol that rules the game. As much as it's a slave to calculating factors of cover and so forth, there are still those mind-boggling moments where you get picked off inexplicably.

To its credit, Ten Hammers does a better job of random opponent AI than the first FSW. Insurgents move around so you can't get a bead on them. However, this can cause havoc with your AI soldiers who can't even hit uncovered foes in front of them. Multiplayer contains some good ideas, but I frankly found keeping tabs on my teammates confusing — especially in a multiplayer environment where fumbling for a second can get you killed.

The Full Spectrum Warrior series has given inspiration to Brothers in Arms and 360's Ghost Recon Advance Warfighter, but is still lacking some of its own. —**KATO**



BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Before there was Brothers in Arms, there was Full Spectrum Warrior

> **Graphics:** Gets by with doing an okay job, but it's pretty average stuff

> **Sound:** The soldiers' voiceovers often chime in at the wrong time

> **Playability:** The camera is still problematic, but splitting up your squads and controlling them is pretty easy

> **Entertainment:** Ten Hammers adds a fair amount of gameplay, but it doesn't add up to the penultimate military experience

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.75

As much as I appreciate games that exist outside the bounds of over-represented genres, there's no excuse for Ten Hammers' nonstop litany of rough edges and frustrations. Because there's no way to react to a changing situation in a timely manner, your success as a commander depends solely on setting up your men properly. One small mistake (or botched order due to the odd control scheme), and you're looking at the mission going irrevocably into the tank. This problem kills the fun of multiplayer as well — get flanked once, and you're hosed. Executing a clever strategy to overcome nasty odds is still entertaining, but everything beyond that simple draw is a mess. —**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Major League Baseball 2K6

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** KUSH GAMES > **RELEASE** MARCH 20 > **ESRB** E



THE NEXT LEVEL OF AI

There's no denying that Kush Games is one of the most ambitious developers in the industry. For the second year

running, this studio has completely reinvented the majority of its game, scrapping ideas that just needed a little refinement for unexplored concepts. In doing so, the company has created AI that could very well have a great effect on every sports game moving forward.

By teaming with scouting company Inside Edge, Kush was granted access to the motherlode of all baseball knowledge — detailed breakdowns of every pitch, from every game, for every player, for an entire season. While this may just seem like fodder for the hardcore fans, this data is actually running through the digital veins of each of 2K6's players. Much like Dr. Frankenstein, Kush has essentially created life. If a specific player is prone to biting on a first-pitch fastball on the inside of the plate in real life, the tendency will also be displayed within the game. This goes for every player. You've faced Randy Johnson before in a game, but now you'll get a chance to face the real Randy Johnson.

Inside Edge also comes into play in many of the in-game strategies.

As the general manager of your ball club, if you choose to draw a contract with Inside Edge, you'll be provided with scouting for the opposing team. This means that your fielders will auto-adjust for certain batters, and your catcher will also lend a hand as he calls for the most effective

pitch. Once you see this data in play, looking at another baseball game is going to be extremely difficult moving forward.

While not quite as mind blowing, Kush has also found a way to apply more skill and strategy to both pitching and batting. The new pressure-sensitive pitching mechanic does a nice job of balancing risk and reward, but moreover humanizes the hurler in that it allows for more mistakes. Batting has also expanded in scope and is now tied to an analog swing. Moving your feet in the box, stepping into the pitch at different moments in the pitcher's delivery, and changing the timing of your cut allows skilled players to have a hand in placing their hits. Both of these mechanics work incredibly well and embrace the highest level of realism from the sport. This title fires blazing fastballs in everything that it offers except for fielding. Applying momentum to the player movements makes sense, but delivers gameplay that is sluggish, robotic, and lacking the grace that you see in the infield.

Outside of this, through its array of innovations, Major League Baseball 2K6 blows the doors off of what you could expect from a baseball game. —**REINER**



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Stats lead the way to a whole new baseball experience

> **Graphics:** Recreates the feeling of being at the park — whether it's in the liveliness of the catchers and crowd or the attention to paid to the smallest of player movements

> **Sound:** The commentary team is insightful, but also highly redundant with their phrases

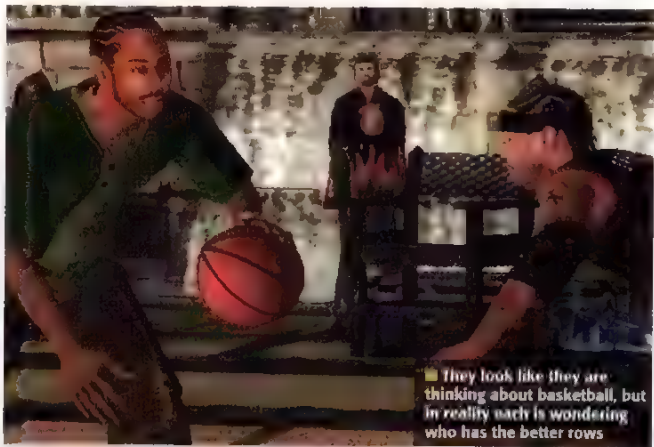
> **Playability:** Batting and pitching encompass every aspect of the game and really brings out the user's skill in how each mechanic can be manipulated

> **Entertainment:** Typical in its delivery of modes, but the realism that is delivered on the field far exceeds anything that we've seen in a sports game

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8

2K Sports has some lofty ambitions with this title, and for the most part, the game gets them right — delivering a step forward for the sport. The Inside Edge info and the way it is integrated into gameplay is awesome. The new analog swing has a great feel and gives you lots of control. The only hiccups come when playing defense. Fielders' jerky movements can cost you easy outs, and you never know if a routine play will turn into a two-run fiasco. The exclusive baseball license is in good hands, but that unfortunate touch of buggy unpredictability keeps it from greatness. —**KATO**



They look like they are thinking about basketball, but in reality each is wondering who has the better rows



In Story Mode you can explore the different areas for things to do

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NBA Ballers Phenom

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE)
 > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY > **RELEASE** APRIL 5 > **ESRB** E

A.K.A NBA CRIBS

The original Ballers offered a unique take on the arcade street ball game. It served up solid one-on-one play coupled with the off-the-court lifestyle that million dollar NBA basketball players enjoy. In all, it was a welcome twist on the standard head-to-head play that has been a hallmark of the genre since the days of NBA Jam.

With Phenom, Midway ups the ante by adding two-on-two gameplay to its already established one-on-one play, and more importantly, fully interactive environments for the player to explore in Story mode. This creates not only a

deeper, more fleshed out single-player experience, it also gives the player more ways to build up their Ballers, including all the perks of being a basketball superstar, like record deals and clothing lines.

While these improvements make the game deeper (the quests even feature an RPG-esque exclamation point over NPC's heads), it doesn't fundamentally change the game. It's still NBA Jam with lots of bling. Of course, that's not necessarily a bad thing, as Phenom is definitely fun to play. And I have to give Midway credit for really exploring the NBA lifestyle and giving the game more depth in the single-player mode.

That said, I really want to see some innovation in the gameplay. Midway has taken the story mode to the next level, now we need to see the gameplay step it up a notch to match the flash. —ANDY



The minigames are a great diversion

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Take Ballers and add more depth to every dimension

> **Graphics:** The player models are really impressive, but the world environments are rather drab

> **Sound:** The soundtrack is most certainly kickin', and I even like the theme song — which I never thought I'd write

> **Playability:** I'm definitely a fan of the classic NBA Jam run-and-shoot gameplay that Ballers delivers

> **Entertainment:** A great story mode combined with predictable gameplay gives players what they expect, but nothing more

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

This sequel explores the concept of the obnoxiously rich to the fullest, and allows players to amass a fortune through attractive unlockables and minigames. However, little has changed on the court. The stunt dunks give the offensive game a punch, but rebounding is often problematic. It's a better game as a whole, but due to the minimal changes, you find yourself getting more excited about the side content than shooting the ball. —REINER

JANUARY 2006. COMMAND THE FORCES THAT SHAPED THIS NATION'S DESTINY!

A game that should appeal to Civil War buffs everywhere, not to mention Texas. —DAVIDSON



AMERICAN CONQUEST

DIVIDED NATION

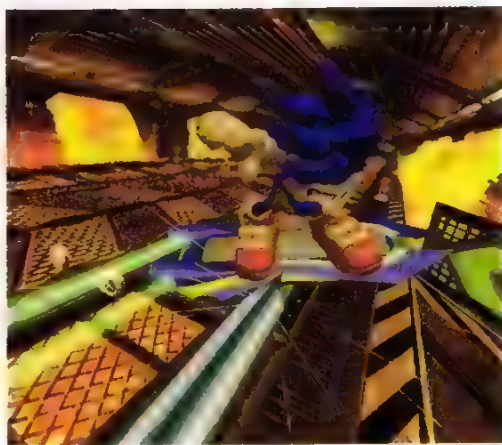
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E 10+
 CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
 Game Experience May Change During Online Play

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Sonic Riders

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 21 > **ESRB** E

IT'S A LONG RIDE DOWN

What's that feeling? It's strange... unfamiliar. Could it be... nostalgia for Sonic Heroes? As sad as it sounds, I think Shadow the Hedgehog and Sonic Riders have finally made me look back with affection for a time when Sonic games at least managed to achieve mediocrity. Sonic Riders places the usual gang atop some sci-fi hoverboards and sends them through a series of races conceived by Eggman in service of some rather incomprehensible and silly plot points. I shan't waste your time with the details.

Let's stick to what is important, that being the fact that Sonic Riders is a very poor game. For one, it manages to actually annoy me with the way it starts the races (no mean feat!), and matters generally go downhill from there. It's certainly fast, but the control is wildly erratic and aggravating. Even worse, much of the time you aren't really in control of your racer at all, either zipping automatically on another racer's slipstream or going through a scripted mini-cutscene sequence. That's one of the biggest problems with the whole current-gen Sonic franchise for me — one of its main design precepts seems to be to take control out of the player's hands as much as possible. The general feeling this game conveys is confusion and chaos, akin to being flushed down a jet-powered toilet. If that sounds fun to you, I say go for it. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Another bad outing for Sonic and co., this time in a botched hoverboard racer

> **Graphics:** It actually looks fine and moves fairly quickly

> **Sound:** Sonic proves he's as adept with bad techno as he is with bad '80s metal

> **Playability:** The control scheme, while simple, is a mess in practice

> **Entertainment:** Weird design decisions and erratic gameplay collide head-on

> **Replay Value:** Low



Second Opinion 4.5

Sonic is like a family pet. He's been a great friend for 15 years, but now he's crapping on the carpet. His most recent stain of stink is Sonic Riders. As cool as it is to see a game based on an idea from *Back to the Future 2*, barreling down the track on a hoverboard has led to some of the most frustrating moments in my gaming career. Never have I felt such a lack of control over my character, nor have I been so confused by track designs. The game does deserve props for its innovative approach toward drafting and the starting line, but the remainder of the content is a mangled mess of blue fur and something rank. —**REINER**

MULTI QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Torino 2006

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** 49 GAMES
> **RELEASE** JANUARY 24
> **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 4.25

I have nothing nice to say about this game. There isn't a single feature, idea, event, or

option that ever rises above the very low bar of "half-assed." Commentators don't match the onscreen action or results of an event. The spectators all do the same animation at the same time. Award ceremonies are merely a shot of three athletes on a podium, doing canned animations. Events are being at best and frustratingly inconsistent at worst. Four player options, multiple difficulty settings, and offline leader boards for each sport are universally handled in the least ambitious (and least fun) manner. Torino 2006 just sucks. —**LISA**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

FIFA Street 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
> **PUBLISHER** EA BIG
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 28
> **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 6

What this franchise did to deserve a sequel I really don't know. I'm sure some marketing

fellow has an equation filled with sales numbers that made a second outing seem reasonable, but for my part, I'm at a loss. While mild improvements have been made to the camera, trick move system, and customization tools, the actual gameplay of FIFA Street 2 feels even more ramshackle than the first time around. Somehow, my players can bust out insane bicycle kicks and juggling miracles one moment and then suddenly trip on their feet the next. If my high school coach saw so much bunching on the field he'd probably have an aneurysm. I love soccer, but this is insulting. —**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Arena Football

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX) (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 7 > **ESRB** E10+



ALL-FLUNKIE LEAGUE

The real-life players that inhabit the AFL teams in the game weren't man enough to even sit on the bench in the NFL, and yet here we have a video game based on their failures as pro athletes. Great. This prospect doesn't get the blood pumping any more than playing as college baseball players did in MVP this year, but the faults of this game aren't just that these players aren't good enough — it's that the sport of arena football isn't fun enough.

Offense rules the roost in arena football, but even those who like to chuck and duck in Madden will find that the steady diet of touchdowns you get in this title leaves you with a hollow feeling. Between the money plays and the total lack of a running game, I found little enjoyment in putting up 60 or more points on my opponent. The only redeeming part of the title is that you can control a receiver and pass to yourself, although even this doesn't work too well, as it's hard to get receivers to turn and face the line of scrimmage.

If playing offense made unlikely stars out of NFL flunkies like Tony Graziani, it only goes to show that playing defense in the AFL is a joke. By the rules of the league, linebackers are very restricted in what they can do. Cornerbacks can't blitz and the defensive line can't stunt — leaving you little to do when playing D. Although this game features some big multi-player hits, the run-ins with the sideline walls give you the feeling that you're watching some stupid sports bloopers show hosted by Mike Golic — who fittingly is an AFL commentator. And don't get me started on how embarrassing the trash talking is.

If this game sounds like it should be a freebie feature in Madden or if you're asking yourself why you don't just play NFL Street (which is more fun despite its faults), you're not wrong. I have no idea why this title was even made. —**KATO**



BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Hemmed-in field, hemmed-in gameplay, and little reason for being

> **Graphics:** Luckily this fast-paced game doesn't suffer the slowdown that hits Madden sometimes

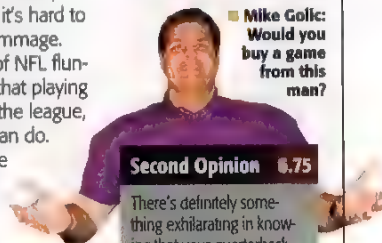
> **Sound:** The trash talking dialogue cutscenes are embarrassing

> **Playability:** Without a strafe or turn-to-face button, catching balls while controlling your WR can be hard

> **Entertainment:** This is the poor man's version of a poor man's version of football

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

■ **Mike Golic:** Would you buy a game from this man?



Second Opinion 6.75

There's definitely something exhilarating in knowing that your quarterback can run it into endzone from anywhere on the field. Arena Football excels in the prospect of delivering big game-changing plays, but falters in offering gameplay that fits this mold. This is simply Madden Football on a smaller field. As much as I love seeing the brutal mid-air collisions, players tumbling over the walls, and on-field coaches being splattered by running backs, the gameplay is one-dimensional. It's all about passing. The running game is rarely effective given the constrained space that you have to work with. Arena Football has the potential to be a nice counter to Madden, but as it stands now, is just a poorly thrown Hall Mary. —**REINER**



SET UP
LOCKED UP

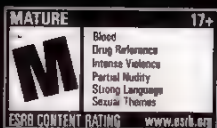
GET OUT.
GET EVEN.

New York City, 1978. You were the fastest wheelman on the street. You were a legend. You were money. Until they set you up and sent you down. Twenty eight years inside for someone else's crime. Now you're getting out. Guess what? You got a new job...

...It's called revenge.



DRIVER PARALLEL LINES™



PlayStation 2



ATARI

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BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **Concept:** Masterful hack n' slash and a spellbinding adventure set within well-known stories that have grown way too familiar

> **Graphics:** The particle effects leap from the screen with stunning vibrancy. The character models and lip-synching are quite impressive

> **Sound:** The maestros at Square Enix have conjured another unforgettable score. Additionally, Haley Joel Osment (Sora) does an exceptional job, but Christopher Lee (Diz) steals the show

> **Playability:** Rather than focusing on both platforming and action, the game is now all about the glorious fray and the miraculous moves that players can perform within

> **Entertainment:** It nears perfection when it isn't recycling content

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

PLAYSTATION 2

Kingdom Hearts II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** MARCH 30 > **ESRB** T

THE MARRIAGE BETWEEN SUMMON SPELLS AND CARTOONS

Kingdom Hearts II makes great strides forward in exposing the battle-hardened spirit of Final Fantasy and the waggish mystique of the Magic Kingdom. Moments after Donald Duck's temper flares into comical effect, there's a good chance that you'll find yourself neglecting your combat duties just to watch Cloud Strife unmercifully mince a throng of Heartless. As much as these two worlds clash violently, they also dance harmoniously, unifying into a milieu that fills your mind with wonder. In a twist, it's neither Final Fantasy nor Disney that remains embedded in your mind once this journey concludes. It's the original content that is woven within these two worlds that dominates this wondrous adventure.

Even though the game starts out on an unfamiliar note, following the exploits of a troubled boy named Roxas, these moments are used to herald the return of Sora. In a devilish yet remarkable plot twist, you may not want Sora back. It's an amazing chain of events, to say the least. The stones that Sora overtures in his desperate search for childhood friends Kairi and Riku lead him down dark paths and toward even darker revelations. Who has been pulling the strings? What are the Heartless? What secret lies behind Organization XIII? By the time the game concludes, everything is revealed. It's not quite as

powerful of a story as it was in the first game, but it will still most certainly give you shivers and make your heart leap.

Square has made every effort to make Final Fantasy elements feel at home within Sora's world, but most of the Disney content feels tacked on. While serving well as a trip down memory lane, the Disney-themed conflicts that arise can once again be viewed as entertaining diversions that hold you back from the real meat of the story. This time around, however, much of the experience is repeated like a broken record. In *The Nightmare Before Christmas* you'll be fighting Oogie Boogie...again! The same goes for Jafar in *Aladdin*. There is great opportunity to expand upon the stories from the movies, but I really get the feeling that Disney handcuffed Square Enix on being able to create new content. As a result, the overall experience is a choppy roller coaster ride. One minute it will have you screaming in delight, the next holding your head in pain.

Where the story alternates between hit and miss, *Kingdom Hearts II* absolutely clobbers in the combat that it unleashes. The combo potential that Square Enix places in your fingers is so divine that even *God of War's* Kratos would deem it awesome. There are few games that deliver controls that make you feel as confident and comfortable as *Kingdom Hearts II*



does. Given how dynamic the control is, you feel like you can defeat an army a thousand strong by your lonesome.

Chaining together massive combos delivers a thrill a second, but it's the new reaction commands — opportunistic timing-based button presses — that really give this sequel's melee razor-sharp teeth. They put your reflexes to the test and make you approach each enemy differently. Limit breaks, form changes, and summon spells are also used to great effect, allowing players to approach battles in numerous ways.

The RPG elements remain as light as can be, but offer a greater sense of satisfaction in the form of the new abilities and items that become available as your characters level up. The Gummi Ship was downright loathsome in the original game, and while remaining a far cry from truly respectable, at least offers some degree of satisfaction this time around.

Kingdom Hearts II is a remarkable journey and another Square Enix masterpiece. Just be forewarned that it has a knack for periodically strangling you with your childhood memories. —REINER

Second Opinion

Kingdom Hearts continues to be a hard sell for me. How a mishmash of Disney and Final Fantasy characters manages to be anything but ridiculous is beyond me. However, the formula works, and *Kingdom Hearts II* delivers a powerful narrative filled with so many beloved childhood characters that it's tough to keep them all straight. At the same time, it abolishes almost all of the problems of the original, tweaking cameras, menu navigation, inventory management, and the battle system. The resultant gameplay is streamlined and smooth, punctuated by incredible moments of action and interwoven with deep themes of friendship and personal identity. If anything hurts the experience, it might be its incredible length. Like a great movie that could have used some careful editing, this may be one instance where a game should have been more concise. But it's nowhere near a deal breaker. Memorable, exciting, and incredibly fun, *Kingdom Hearts II* is exactly what you hoped it would be. —MILLER



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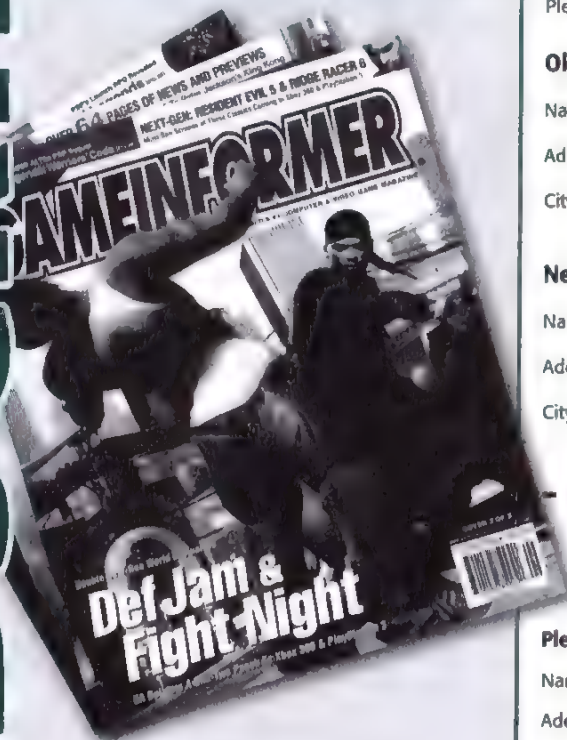
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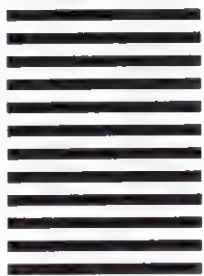
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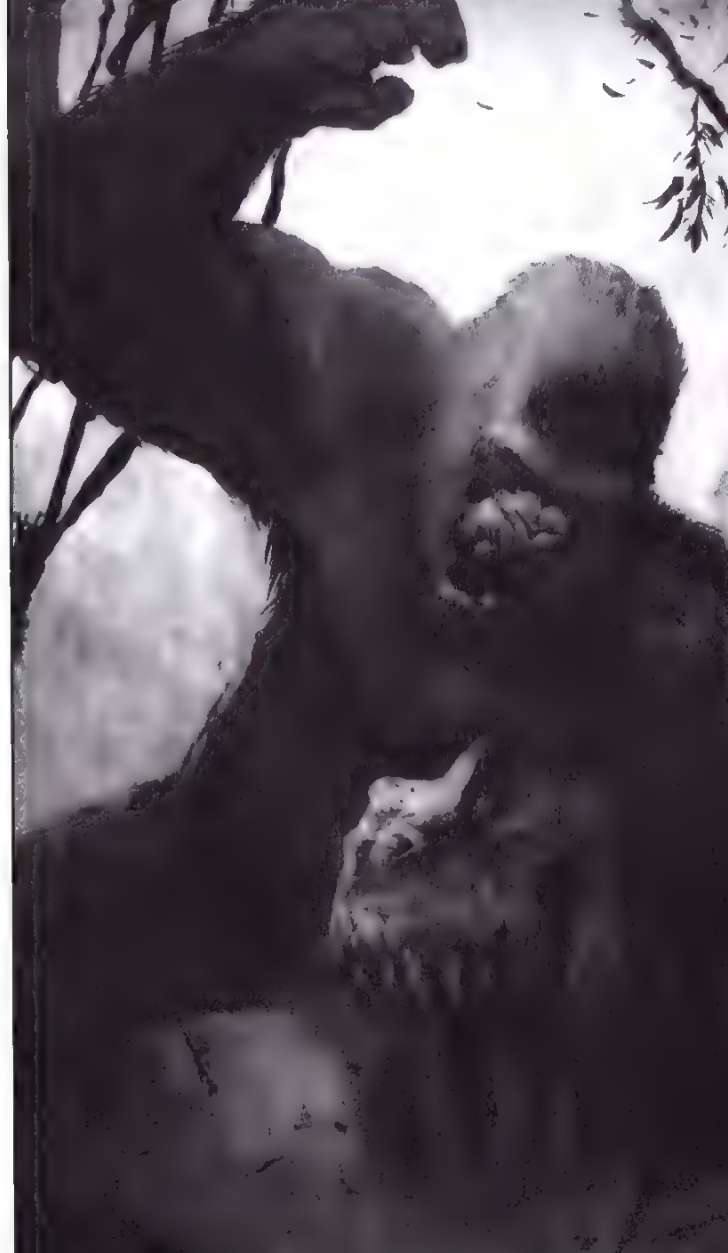
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Art Courtesy of Ubisoft



■ The third-person camera gives you a more comprehensive view of your surroundings



■ One-on-one tactical encounters are more common than these firefights

PLAYSTATION 2

Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** MARCH 14 > **ESRB** M

STILL THE BOSS

I'm glad that games don't have feelings. If they did, Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence would be the over-achiever that makes the games around it feel embarrassingly inadequate. Here they are, trying to scrape together what it takes to be playable, and Subsistence struts around with a ton of expanded content added to an already-outstanding game. Basically, this package is the complete Metal Gear Solid 3 treasure trove, with inside jokes, new features, and Snake shootin' at monkeys, all supplementing one of the finest games of this generation.

If you played through Snake Eater when it first came out, you'll find that little has changed in the core game. A fully-controllable third-person camera speeds things up, since you are no longer forced to stop every three steps to check things out in first-person view. The main mission and its story are as compelling as ever, but it's the bevy of extras that are the true draw of Subsistence, with the multiplayer being the most prominent addition.

It may look like conventional third-person action, but it's unmistakably Metal Gear, for good and bad. Instead of just running and gunning, you'll be using every sneaky advantage you can get, like daymores, cardboard boxes, and dirty magazines. While this adds an incredibly fun angle to the competition, the aging control scheme that eats away at Metal Gear Solid 3 is present in full force and slows everything down. Even though the modified camera helps a bit, sometimes you'll simply find yourself with too many items in your inventory, and the only way to equip what you need is to tap the shoulder buttons to cycle through everything, or hold them down to select traditionally. Neither of these methods is fast or convenient, and can result in you taking more shotgun blasts to the face than you'd like.

The multiplayer maps are well-suited to the Metal Gear style, though only one game type really showcases it: the Sneaking Mission. Like the recent Splinter Cells' versus mode, this pits Snake against

several enemy soldiers as he tries to covertly accomplish objectives. Everything else is pretty standard capture-the-flag and assault matches, which are still fun, but seem to rely less on strategy and more on simple firepower.

Even if you don't plan on playing online, Subsistence still has some fun bonuses to explore. The Secret Theater movies demonstrate the team's sense of humor through ridiculous reenactments of memorable scenes (like Snake and the CIA director prancing around together in a field of flowers). Also included are the MSX versions of the first Metal Gear games, which are nice to have for the collectors, but the antiquated gameplay makes it difficult for me to recommend that you actually play through them unless you're a true fanatic. Even if you're a more casual player, however, Subsistence has plenty of reasons to welcome newcomers into the twisting jungle while still inviting back the combat-hardened veterans. —JOE



■ Sgt. Fred, having left his green camo at home, was forced to squall in shame in the tall grass



■ CQC is an invaluable tool for the multiplayer matches. Learn to love your knife

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Metal Gear Solid 3 with sprinkles!

> **Graphics:** Still some of the most impressive visuals on the PS2

> **Sound:** If you missed them the first time through, listen to as many radio conversations as possible. Great voice acting, and the dialogue is hilarious

> **Playability:** The camera fixes certain problems, but gives rise to a new set when it comes to close-quarters battles

> **Entertainment:** The multiplayer is a fun addition, and the Secret Theater stuff (previously released online) is a not

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.5

I'm glad I waited. I'd been about ready to play through Snake Eater when Subsistence was announced, and I managed to resist the urge to jump in, in hopes of an even better game in a few months. While a longer wait than I'd hoped, the new version doesn't disappoint, mostly thanks to a rotating camera that fixes the largest dilemma I've had with MGS games. As expected, the game itself is chock full of epic boss fights, tense stealth missions, and constant extra goodies. For me, the beauty of these games is the varied solutions a player can take to any given problem, and MGS 3 excels at exactly that. Online multiplayer, meanwhile, is exactly what you would expect it to be. That is, it's immense fun, despite the same ancient control scheme we've had for years. Put simply, Subsistence is pretty much a no-brainer for two groups of people: long-time fans and curious new players. That's pretty much everybody, isn't it? —MILLER



■ Sometimes, the easiest way to clear an area of enemies is to use their environment against them

PLAYSTATION 2

24: The Game

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** CAMBRIDGE STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 28 > **ESRB** M

FOR THE FANS

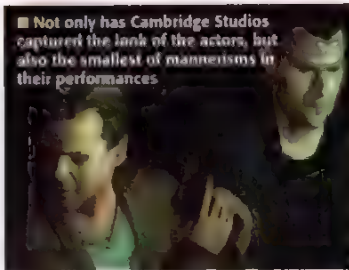
Cambridge Studios didn't just adapt *24* into a video game. This development house has created an interactive experience that is so faithful to this show's source material that it should be chronicled as another official season. The script, which is penned by the same scribes that panned out the plot for the show, reveals the gritty events that took place between seasons two and three. What happened to Kate? How serious was the viral attack on President Palmer? How did Jack meet Chase? All of these questions are answered through a magnifying glass of nearly unendurable intensity that snakes from one nail-biting plot twist to the next.

The amazingly lifelike character models and incredible detail that has been applied to replicate the actors' performances perfectly recreates the feeling of the show. Rather than just focusing on Jack and one style of play, Cambridge Studios brings you into the world of every key

player — be it Tony or Kim — and allows you to experience their role in the terror-filled day through a highly variegated gameplay design. If Jack calls CTU for a thermal satellite reading of hostiles in his area, you'll be asked to fulfill his request. You'll have to move the satellite into position, scan the interiors of the building, and highlight all of the potential targets that you find. Once this action is completed, control switches over to Jack, who is positioned to take them all out with a sniper rifle.

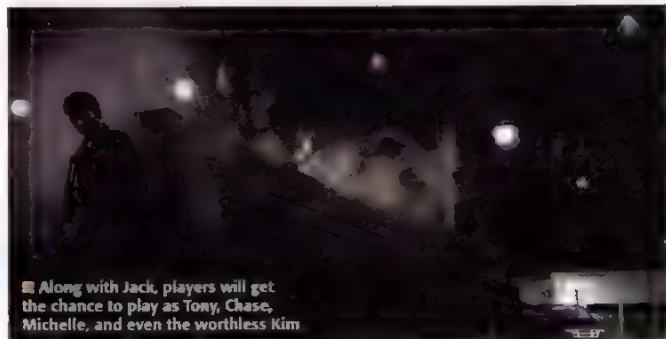
Within the course of 24 hours, you'll find yourself weaving through traffic, retrieving computer data, interrogating a junkie, unloading countless rounds from a helicopter-based turret, and even posing as a tourist at a government facility. The shifting gameplay keeps the action fresh, but the quality of these individual components is far from respectable. The core run-and-gun gameplay offers a nice assortment of rapid-fire

■ Not only has Cambridge Studios captured the look of the actors, but also the smallest of mannerisms in their performances



weapons, but also a clunky targeting system and enemy AI that seems to be based on finding the easiest way to step in front of your bullet. Driving, which delivers a top speed that feels no faster than 20 mph, is basically misery on wheels. The interrogations are certainly intense, but also frustrating given the lack of precision in the timing-based meters. The only elements of the game that function well and are consistently fun are the computer-based minigames — which there are a ton of.

Much like Jack, this game has a tower of problems stacked high upon its shoulders, but it still finds a way to knock you out. Sure, most of your time is spent trudging through mediocre gameplay, but the experience of being a part of the show is too much to deny, especially given how great the story is. In the world of games, it deserves a body bag. In the world of *24*, it's just as good as the show. —REINER



■ Along with Jack, players will get the chance to play as Tony, Chase, Michelle, and even the worthless Kim

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** One of the best video game adaptations yet. It feels just like the show and players have a hand in all of the action

> **Graphics:** Outstanding facial texturing and great camerawork. The in-game animations are a bit stiff, however

> **Sound:** Sean Callery's score is just as intense as it is in the show, and all of the actors deliver great performances. Christian Kane (Lindsey from *Angel*) makes for one of the show's most fearsome adversaries

> **Playability:** Enjoyable, yet far from polished

> **Entertainment:** Not quite 24 hours of gameplay, but it is a lengthy game that boasts great replay in unlockable interviews with the cast

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

This is the best bad game I've ever played! Fox's hit *24* is the ultimate series for today's attention deficit culture — dispensing with exposition and pacing in favor of all-out action and constant climax. The game takes this philosophy to heart, doling out bite-sized missions, a handful of playable characters, a potpourri of gameplay mechanics, and a huge selection of cool minigames. As a fan of the show, I was totally engrossed in the plot, which is told through nicely done cutscenes that make use of *24*'s signature multiple-frame cinematic style. It's as well written and acted (the real actors did voiceovers) as any of the television seasons. It's a pity you actually have to play it. Aside from the ingenious minigames, the gameplay is mostly a clunky hodgepodge of third-person shooting, driving, and stealth. A must-play for fans, everyone else should approach with caution. —MATT

PS2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

CMT Presents: Karaoke Revolution Country

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX
> **RELEASE** MARCH 28 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 6

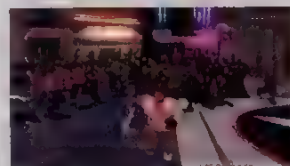
Several years ago, I would have scoffed at the notion that I might be making my

career by singing "All My Exes Live in Texas" at an unfeeling TV screen. It might have surprised that past self even more to know that I managed to enjoy the process, despite my relatively irrational dislike for the style. This first genre-specific Karaoke game does its job admirably, letting you croon through both kinds of music: country and western. It's not going to convert anyone (including myself) to the boot-scootin' cause, but I expect that most anyone who has ever left their house with a cowboy hat on while not in a Halloween costume should be pleased. May I request a yee-haw? —MILLER

PLAYSTATION 2

State of Emergency 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE
> **DEVELOPER** DC STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 14 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE 6

Playing through *State of Emergency 2* is a lot like watching a decent actor try to produce a

real performance in a straight-to-video horror movie. There may be some inspired moments, but unfortunately they're surrounded by crap. *SoE 2* has a few clever action sequences over the course of its short adventure, but they're sandwiched between repetitive run-and-gun gameplay sections that feel tired and look horrible. I appreciate that the folks behind *SoE 2* tried to switch up the action regularly and added some amusing bonus games, but when a game is this low-budget and by the numbers, it takes more than a few sparks of creativity to transform it into something beyond the sum of its parts. —JEREMY

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PLAYSTATION 2

Beatmania

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** MARCH 28 > **ESRB** E10+

WON'T YOU TAKE ME TO FUNKYTOWN?

Last night I dreamt of endlessly scrolling white and blue bars that suddenly popped alive into sound at my touch. This isn't some abstract writer's metaphor. My mind is so wrapped around the hours I've poured into Beatmania that I've literally begun to dream of it in those brief hours I'm not playing it as I sleep. Sad, but true.

You should expect a similar level of absorption if you plan on delving into the dastardly beats of this, the hardest rhythm game I've ever played. The hours of required commitment to even cross the beginner threshold make for a high barrier of entry, and it's the only warning I'd offer about what is otherwise a fantastic entry for the genre. It's for this reason that I might not rank it right beside last year's phenomenal and accessible Guitar Hero. Even so, unless you despise club and dance music (which I realize has a substantial population of haters), you should feel no qualms about stepping up to the DJ stand.

It's hard to imagine someone claiming to have "beaten" Beatmania. For every task you complete, there's always one more way to ratchet up the difficulty. And while there are certainly some musical duos, the majority of tracks keep the flow going, led by genre mainstays like Moby and Timo Maas. Whether alone or with a friend, Beatmania delivers where it counts.—**MILLER**

Interestingly, the button pad of the excellent controller can be pulled out and reversed, placing the spinner on your left or right depending on hand preference. The only downside to the slick peripheral that we noticed was a tendency for buttons to stick from time to time.



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Graduate to the most challenging rhythm game yet as a DJ in training

> **Graphics:** Silly videos and a utilitarian background grid aren't going to amaze you

> **Sound:** A largely stellar mix of dozens of club tracks gives you plenty to keep busy with, but why must the menu music make me want to die?

> **Playability:** Extremely challenging, with a constant learning curve that continues literally for days of playtime

> **Entertainment:** Intensely rewarding to genre faithful, but you're looking at some major time commitment before you can even call yourself decent

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.5

Initially, this game kicked my ass enough to make me want to legally change my name to DJ PWIND NOOB. While I appreciate a good challenge, I found the overly large and clunky buttons to be a huge obstacle to enjoyment, especially after the great job Harmonix did on the Guitar Hero controller. This definitely has some value for hardcore music game fans, but I find both the presentation and the soundtrack to be a bit stale (for every Moby or Timo Maas song, there's 10 tracks of shoddy Muzak). While solid, I just don't believe Beatmania is moving things forward in the music genre.—**MATT**

PS2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

Tokyo Extreme Racer Drift

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
> **PUBLISHER** CRAVE ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** GENKI
> **RELEASE** MARCH 14 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 6

This is a budget-friendly racer with a feature list that sounds great on paper. Sure, there

are real cars, twisty courses through the mountains of Japan, variable weather conditions, and customization options for your car. There are even two game modes that players switch between—legit drift races during the day and unofficial betting battles during the night. But the physics, money system, and constant loading are real downers that racing games have largely moved past. Cheap or not, there are many good racers out there, and Tokyo Extreme Racer Drift doesn't come close to its contemporaries.—**LISA**

PLAYSTATION 2

Warship Gunner 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY
> **PUBLISHER** KOEI
> **DEVELOPER** KOEI
> **RELEASE** MARCH 21 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 5

I don't think I've ever been as bored as I was while playing Warship Gunner 2. After suffering through an hour-plus tutorial that was about as much fun as a history lecture, I hoped that the actual game would deliver some entertainment. Boy, was I wrong. The counter-intuitive control scheme and slow movement speed of my ship through enormous levels were too much for even the massive destruction wrought by my 14-cm cannon to overcome. If the research and design features that are available between scenarios were any easier or more fun to use than a CAD program from 1993, this could've been at least mediocre. As it is, it's like all the irritation of endless sailing in The Wind Walker without any of the cool parts.—**ADAM**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

MLB 06: The Show

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** 989 SPORTS > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 28 > **ESRB** E



2006: PART TWO

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

Sony's baseball franchise hits the diamond in nearly the same shape that it was in last season. The Show may come up short in delivering content that adds new dimensions to the experience, but much like a World Series contender that fell just short of the crown, this game really didn't need a ton of new material. It was a meaty game to begin with and all of the key pieces were in place. They just needed to be tweaked or enhanced.

For the most part, this is precisely what developer 989 Sports has done. Career mode now boasts a spotlight system that tracks your created player's failures and achievements. Rivalry mode stores the stats of each player that you compete against. Player management now spans across a full 40-man roster. Athlete morale has been integrated into Franchise mode. King of the Diamond, a wacky target-based minigame, allows players to take a break from the lengthy season. There's definitely some great stuff here, but as you can see, most of these changes are minimal at best.

Fielding was the one area that desperately needed the most attention. The new multi-branch animation system, which allows players to change their fielding decisions on the fly, certainly presents a greater degree of control, but what good does it really do if it is full of glitches? This franchise has been buggy during its existence, and it's disappointing to see them still plaguing the series.

Nothing can beat the feeling of tossing aside your ratty minor league gear for a chance to prove yourself in the show, but this franchise hasn't quite reached the major leagues just yet. The Show is a beautiful game, and it offers the best fantasy and create-a-player options. However, the gameplay is starting to show its age, and is in need of an upgrade.—**REINER**

> **Concept:** A year dedicated to enhancement. Most of the new content can best be classified as fluff

> **Graphics:** It does a nice job of authenticating the player stances and deliveries. Stadium details are also right on the money

> **Sound:** An encyclopedic calling of the game. The three-man commentary team is easily one of the best in video game sports

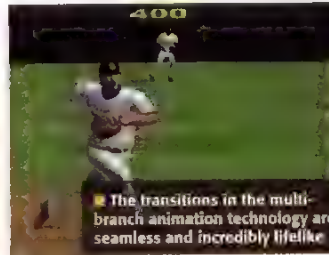
> **Playability:** The simplistic batting and pitching haven't changed in the slightest since last year. Fielding remains buggy

> **Entertainment:** Climbing from the minors to the big leagues is once again a blast, but there's little reason to do it again

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.25

If this franchise continues, it may be up for contraction. It's not that this game plays so bad it needs to be put down, it's that the franchise's evolution is creeping along at a snail's pace. But yes, it's got its gameplay problems as well. Infield fielding is inconsistent, the AI worse, and when it tries to copy its competitors, it can't even do that correctly. In short, I'm glad that 2K Sports got the exclusive baseball license and not Sony.—**KATO**



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INSTANT GAMING GRATIFICATION

The screenshot shows the Game Informer website with a top navigation bar including 'NEWS', 'REVIEWS', 'GAMES', and 'FORUMS'. A prominent banner for 'MEDAL OF HONOR AIRBORNE' features a '50 Games! ONE WINNER!' contest. Below the banner, there are sections for 'top story' featuring 'X-Men: The Official Movie Game Preview' and 'features' with various game-related articles. A sidebar on the right contains a 'GRANDIA' pre-order offer and a 'game poll'.

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Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK)
 > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER UBISOFT/RED STORM > RELEASE MARCH 9 > ESRB T

COMBAT EVOLVED

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** The Ghost Recon series is reborn as one of the most intense and visceral shooters around

> **Graphics:** Beautiful. The lighting is amazing and the visuals create an aura of incredible realism

> **Sound:** From the chatter of teammates to the roar of machine guns, the sound effects further heighten the realism and sell the illusion of a real combat zone

> **Playability:** Although slightly sluggish in rare instances, the series has never played better

> **Entertainment:** With a great campaign and equally impressive multiplayer, this is one game no 360 owner should be without

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.75

The joke with Ghost Recon was always how these guys could be elite soldiers and yet be so stupid. Well, this title improves the AI of your comrades and recasts the franchise in an altogether better light. Certainly the top-notch graphics give you awed pause, but more important is how the game deals with its urban locations. The open environments and better enemy AI change the franchise's boring, by-the-books operations into holy crap moments where the textbook (probably written by non-combat desk jockeys anyway) goes out the window. Your AI squadmates are usually up to the task—at least more than they've ever been in past Ghost Recon games. As much as this game puts you in the fight, the targeting controls aren't as fast and smooth as I'd like, and you can have trouble getting under cover at times. Still, don't let these things put you off of the multiplayer—which has some modes you've got to play.—KATO

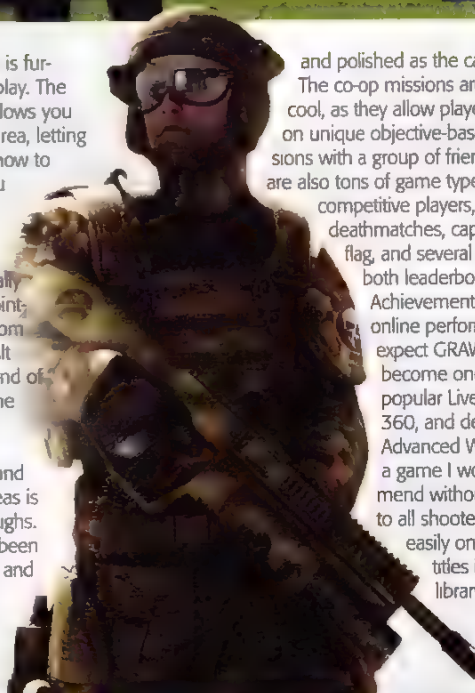
As much as it pains me, I owe an apology to Tom Clancy. For the last few years, I've been harshly critical of the two Clancy shooter franchises, Ghost Recon and Rainbow Six, as I felt that both series were pumping out more of the same stale action with each release. My fear was that Advanced Warfighter would be simply a prettier version of the same old thing. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter is not only the best tactical shooter I have ever played, it is one of the most immersive and exciting shooters ever. The developers have done away with most of the flaws that plagued the previous games, including linear level design, questionable AI, and workmanlike visuals. In their place are wide-open mission areas populated with deadly, adaptive enemies that are portrayed with jaw-droppingly realistic graphics. Many developers have claimed that emotional involvement in a game would increase in the next gen because of more lifelike visuals, and that was certainly the case for me in GRAW. I truly feel like I am a part of the game's war-torn Mexico City while playing—the danger feels real, making for an experience that's thrilling, nerve-racking, and, at times, downright frightening.

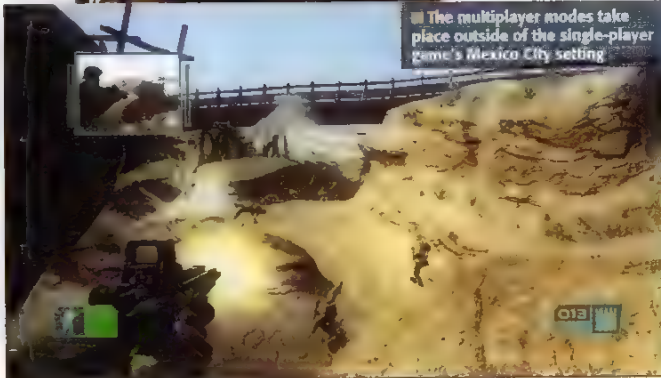
The realism created by the visuals is further accentuated by the tight gameplay. The open design of the mission areas allows you to plot your own route through an area, letting you devise your own strategies on how to best complete a goal. Rarely are you told there is a "right" way to finish a mission. Issuing squad commands, which was a bit clunky in previous games, now requires virtually no thought, thanks to an elegant point-and-click control mechanic. Aside from a few sections that felt overly difficult late in the game, I loved every second of Advanced Warfighter's campaign (the fact that you stay immersed in the game world from the beginning of the campaign to the end is great), and the freedom offered by its open areas is enough to warrant several playthroughs.

Of course, multiplayer has always been a huge component of this franchise, and GRAW definitely doesn't disappoint in this area. A wide variety of game types are included, each offering gameplay that is every bit as tense

and polished as the campaign. The co-op missions are especially cool, as they allow players to take on unique objective-based missions with a group of friends. There are also tons of game types for more competitive players, including deathmatches, capture the flag, and several more. With both leaderboards and Achievements tied to online performance, I expect GRAW will quickly become one of the most popular Live titles on the 360, and deservedly so. Advanced Warfighter is a game I would recommend without hesitation to all shooter fans, and is easily one of the best titles in the 360 library.—JEREMY



■ Players are immersed in chaos from the beginning of the game to the end



■ The multiplayer modes take place outside of the single-player game's Mexico City setting

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■ The analog "swing" before crash runs has been removed

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Pimp and tweak the graphics and online experience to be even more delightful than the current-gen versions of the game

> **Graphics:** Improvements big and small both add to the excitement and the actual gameplay

> **Sound:** The new soundtrack mix is way better than current gen, while the roar of engines is just as overpowering (in a good way)

> **Playability:** Arcade-styled destruction with enough variety to make the whole ride worthwhile

> **Entertainment:** Fast and explosive, the Burnout series has probably never been better

> **Replay Value:** High

XBOX 360

Burnout Revenge

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** CRITERION GAMES > **RELEASE** MARCH 7 > **ESRB** E10+

WHEN EVEN FAILURE IS FUN

It's rare and downright delightful when failing in a game is as much fun as victory. Burnout Revenge for 360 is a blast from beginning to end, and the additions from the current generation release enhance both gameplay and the franchise's all-around good time vibe. Sure, sloppy racing won't win you trophies, but it will treat you to snippets of explosive destruction so over-the-top that only the soulless won't smile. The updated car deformation and new paint damage leaves your ride with scars of automotive carnage unleashed by your very hands. With this system of rewards for screwing up, but even bigger payoffs for getting a line right, the game has a unique balance for casual and experienced fans alike.

The game's ease and accessibility is one of Burnout's greatest assets and the rest of the game skillfully does nothing more than reinforce its general fun factor. Burnout Revenge is like Othello — a minute to learn, a lifetime to master. And every step between the first race and the last is worth repeating for bigger crashes, faster races, and more demolition.

And yet, most of this feel is carried over from the excellent versions available on Xbox and PS2, so why care about this release? Mostly, because the



■ There are 10 new crash junctions in the 360 version of Revenge

360 edition isn't just a port. Improved textures and resolution lengthen the draw distance, letting players plan even further ahead. The 360's updated Live features tap into gamers' most primal desires — uploading your best crashes for player feedback lets you brag on a worldwide stage. The Live Revenge tracking tells you where you stand with any other racers on the course. Did NinjaLoot take you out three times in the last race? The game lets you (and that sucker) know, and encourages players to settle the score. Revenge is a virtue and the game makes it sweet indeed.

While I certainly won't suggest that Burnout is the sole racing game for fans of the genre, I am totally comfortable saying it is one that every next-gen owner really should have. Sure, there are concessions that need to be made in the name of accessible arcade-style racing. The cars are all fake, it's totally true that blind luck and reckless speed can win over skill, and sometimes you get screwed by traffic you couldn't see or a wall nubbins that sticks out just far enough to cause an unexpected crash. Without a doubt, these are all problems to varying degrees. But, as a person who likes fun, I say either get over it or go crawl back into that soulless hovel you call a life. So go out, have fun, destroy some fake cars, and make a bunch of enemies online. After all, even failing in this game is fun. —LISA

Second Opinion 9.5

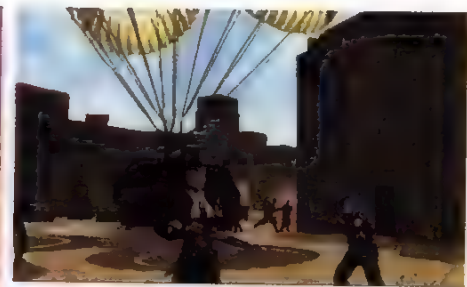
Through faultless controls and an incredible display of vehicular deformation, screaming at breakneck speeds is just as enjoyable as turning your car into an unrecognizable smoldering heap. Burnout has made a name for itself by blending towering levels of destruction with nearly incomprehensible speeds, but it's the online features that take the front seat in this iteration. Never before have I seen a game succeed so greatly in highlighting the players around you. Going into a race, you'll know full well if you've faced another player before; and based on how you fared against them, will either find yourself gunning to knock their car off the track or avoiding them at all costs. The thrill of competition is there even before the race begins. Even if you've already played this game on your PS2 or Xbox, the list of achievements and excitement derived online makes it worthy of a second spin. —REINER

■ During online matches, tons of extra information is provided. Expect to see when opponents crash or how much damage (in dollars) everyone's done, depending on the match type





Being on foot actually isn't that bad, since you can carjack enemies way easier than in Halo 2.



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

- > **Concept:** Blow up a whole bunch of Nazis in what boils down to a simplified version of the PC Battlefield franchise
- > **Graphics:** Pretty, but nothing special on the 360
- > **Sound:** Nondescript war booms and bangs. Occasional unintentionally hilarious voice-acting is the high point
- > **Playability:** Aiming is a bit loose, but dropping in equipment through the Destruction on Demand system is smooth as butter
- > **Entertainment:** As much as they'd have you believe otherwise, this is little more than mindless explosions – not that there's anything wrong with that
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion

On the one hand, *The Outfit* must be criticized for its highly repetitive mission structure, obnoxious story, spotty targeting system, and intoxicated approach toward vehicle control. On the other hand, *The Outfit* should be heralded for its unique approach to online skirmishing and also as an excellent venue for blowing stuff to kingdom come and running over Nazis with tanks. From my perspective, a perspective that has a soft spot for the glorification of mass destruction, the pros definitely outweigh the cons in this sloppily fought war. For every second that it plays with your nerves, it delivers hours of senseless and just flat-out fun violence. After all, it's not every day that you can click a button to make a tank parachute out of the sky and right into your lap – or perhaps onto the heads of your enemies. —REINER

XBOX 360

The Outfit

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** RELIC ENTERTAINMENT
 > **RELEASE** MARCH 13 > **ESRB** M

THEIRS IS NOT TO REASON WHY

I appreciate a simplistic run-and-gun approach to gaming as much as the next guy – *Painkiller*, *Serious Sam*, and *Mega Man* are all franchises that I very much enjoy. However, those titles also have super-tight gameplay and rigorous challenges to be passed, which do a lot to instill a sense of accomplishment and victory in the player. *The Outfit*, on the other hand, has all of the gratuitous violence with little of the supporting framework that makes an experience like this genuinely fun.

On the plus side, it's hard not to enjoy a title that has the level of sheer destruction that *The Outfit* offers. Cast as a sort of superhuman action star supersoldier, players will oversee (and cause) more damage to the Nazi military than General George S. Patton. Secret rocket laboratories, über-tanks on railroads, and garden-variety divisions of the Wehrmacht all feel the titular *Outfit's* wrath during the course of the game. There's something satisfying about watching an enemy tank's magazine catch fire and send debris flying in a glorious cloud of wrecked metal, and that sort of moment happens on a nearly constant basis.

Unfortunately, the entire single-player campaign is plagued by imitations, on both design and technical levels. The fact that you can't lose takes away much of the tension that makes achieving something exciting. Dying simply means respawning at the nearest control point that your

team owns, and the scripted Nazis rarely bother to try to take back any of your territory. The counter-intuitive vehicle control scheme, all-too-frequent collision oddities, and loose aiming and hit detection further prevent the action from being as seamless as gamers expect out of a triple-A title.

While multiplayer isn't free from the technical problems of the single-player portion of the game (though finding, joining, and playing games during our tests was as smooth and easy as can be), it is nonetheless leagues beyond in terms of fun. Facing off against other players requires actual strategic thinking when buying and placing the vehicles, turrets, and airstrikes through the Destruction on Demand menu, which adds a lot to the gameplay. The maps seem fairly well-balanced as well, even

the asymmetrical ones. Online play does have its own set of problems, though. The structure of the game makes it very easy to bypass enemy lines and sneak in a surprise attack or capture an undefended strategic point. This wouldn't be a problem except for the fact that the fighting often devolves into complete and utter chaos, which tends to invalidate the strategic aspect. It can still be a lot of fun, but *The Outfit* can't really hold a candle to top-tier online titles like *Halo 2* or *Battlefield 2*.

If all you're looking for out of your \$60 is a relaxing, casual way to do a ton of damage to both your surroundings and the enemy, *The Outfit* certainly won't steer you wrong. For those whose tastes run more toward competition or challenge, this could well be a recipe for disappointment. —ADAM



Flamethrower tanks are as hilarious as you'd expect them to be



The ability to take the fight to the ocean is less impactful than you'd think



A fully-developed base is a sight to behold



PC

The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA GAMES
 > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 28 > **ESRB** T

THE OTHER FRONTIER

Using the content from the recently-acquired license to the Lord of the Rings books with its existing movie-based assets has resulted in another winner for Electronic Arts. It's a treat to see the rest of Middle-earth, from the Grey Havens to the eastern stretches of Rhun, rendered in the style of Peter Jackson's excellent films. Likewise, exploring the fates of Mirkwood, Dol Guldur, and the dwarven kingdoms of the north is a trip for any Lord of the Rings fan. Some unresolved flaws in the nuts and bolts of Battle for Middle-earth II's gameplay prevent it from being a true classic, but dealing with

them is a small price to pay to experience everything else this title has to offer.

The major changes in this sequel — more traditional free-form base construction and extensive options for walls and other defensive fortifications — are most welcome. Putting these decisions in the hands of the player makes it much easier to control your own destiny, rather than relying on the designers to create a balanced map. Not only is it easier to execute whatever strategy you decide on, but there are a wealth of new tactics to employ that simply weren't possible in the first game.



Sissy Elven architecture doesn't stand up to Mountain Giants for very long



Special powers, like summoning the Motebe, are much more user-friendly in this sequel

Deploying effective defenses, however, is still harder than it needs to be. Too many times an entire company of orcs was able to slide through a tiny gap between my walls and the adjoining mountains, nullifying all of my careful work. Also, siege units take down buildings entirely too quickly. I understand that there need to be counters available against static defenses, but one bash from a battering ram shouldn't drop my expensive tower. Similarly, the ability for cavalry to literally plow through infantry units like a hot knife through butter seems a bit cheap. The system feels more like an arbitrary rock/paper/scissors hard-counter setup than a logical distribution of strength between different unit types.

None of this matters when you're commanding a host of Elves led by Glorfindel against the might of the goblins and their troll and giant allies, though. Desperately trying to bring your archers to bear before a marauding fellbeast decimates your infantry corps is an incredible thrill. And crushing the hobbits under the boots of literally hundreds of troops even makes up for the pillow fight at the end of *The Return of the King*. The Battle for Middle-earth II delivers these moments one after another, and doesn't ever seem to run out of ways to make your hair stand on end with sheer awesomeness. For all its flaws, this is one of the best licensed games to ever hit shelves, and easily worth the price tag unless a bit of loose gameplay here and there is a dealbreaker for you. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Clean up some of the issues from the first game, and move the setting to the secondary conflicts in northern Middle-earth

> **Graphics:** A little chugging with a ton of units onscreen is forgivable given the astounding overall beauty

> **Sound:** I thought nothing could top a good Star Wars game for spine-tingling audio design. I was wrong

> **Playability:** Your troops are still dumb as hell, but the new formation-based movement is brilliant

> **Entertainment:** As a casual romp through Middle-earth, this excels. As a balanced and deep RTS title, though, not as much

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

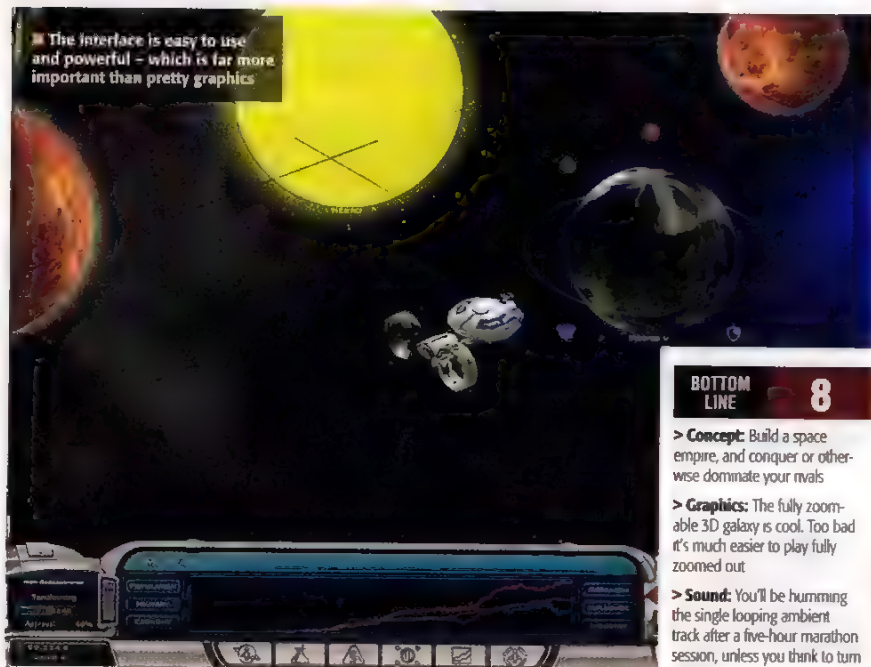
Second Opinion 8.25

Hobbits? I don't care about Hobbits. While they are blissfully smoking their weed without a care in the world, the rest of Middle-earth is busy trying not to get a goblin axe to the face. But hey, that's the way I like it, and that's the way I like my Lord of the Rings games — action-packed. This sequel doesn't skip on the epic battles, and the new method of structure building (although not without its faults) gives some much-needed freedom. As much as the pathfinding or ally AI let me down, this game gives you all the tools to make you feel like you're really participating in the important battles of Middle-earth — whether that's fortifying against counter-attacking goblin hordes with garrisoned fire archers or calling upon a wide range of readily available magic spells. That Tom Bombadil guy sure is a strange chap, but he saved my butt more than once. —KATO

PC

Galactic Civilizations II: Dread Lords

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY > PUBLISHER STARDOCK > DEVELOPER STARDOCK > RELEASE FEBRUARY 21 > ESRB E10+



The interface is easy to use and powerful – which is far more important than pretty graphics

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Build a space empire, and conquer or otherwise dominate your rivals

> **Graphics:** The fully zoomable 3D galaxy is cool. Too bad it's much easier to play fully zoomed out

> **Sound:** You'll be humming the single looping ambient track after a five-hour marathon session, unless you think to turn iTunes on

> **Playability:** But for a few strangely placed controls, the interface is brilliant

> **Entertainment:** This is the best 4X space game around, bar none. It's no Civilization IV, but then again, what is?

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

CIVILIZE THE GALAXY

Empire simulation fans got a serious kick to the groin when Master of Orion III failed miserably to live up to the series' legacy – or provide anything resembling a good game, for that matter. Thankfully, Galactic Civilizations II is here to make us forget about that travesty. This title scratches much the same itch as the old Orion games, and mixes up the 4X formula in a few unique and cool ways.

After setting up your random galaxy's parameters and customizing your race's special abilities (are your people gifted engineers, superior researchers, or hardy warriors? The level of customization is fantastic), you're thrust into the task of guiding your culture to dominance. All of the usual balancing between economy, technology research, infrastructure development, and military buildup is handled very well here. Expansion is a little more of a crap shoot than I'd like, given the nature of trying to find habitable planets to colonize, but that can be tweaked to your liking when creating a galaxy to play in. Overall, it's the same drill we've seen in the genre for years, but done elegantly and well.

In contrast to similar games, however, is the limited amount of army management and deployment options. Especially in the early parts of the game, there simply isn't

much to do, and once the galaxy is fully colonized, a fairly lengthy "build-up" time almost invariably ensues for every faction. This can get overly tedious with the amount of "end turn" button clicking, but is well rewarded by the exciting end-game, as the various empires try to out-manuever each other politically and militarily.

As much as the rest of the game is par for the course, the diplomacy model used in this title is well worth taking notice of. It's quite simply the best I've ever seen this facet of an empire game implemented. A vast array of different factors play into how well an opposing leader likes you, and trying to balance them for every rival is very engaging. Also, the layout of the technology tree gives more pacifistic players lots of options for non-military paths to victory, which opens up the possibilities for many different strategies. If a diplomatic style of play appeals to you, this is your game.

As with any game in the genre, this comes with endless possible hours of gameplay with its multiple difficulties, a random map generator, and almost infinite ways for a game to play out. In all, Galactic Civilizations II is worth a play for any genre enthusiast, and exactly what stranded Master of Orion fans have been waiting for. —ADAM

Second Opinion 7.5

There's no surface reason why I shouldn't like this game more than I do. I love turn-based strategy. I really do. Something about GalCiv II just didn't give for me. I was thoroughly excited about building my own ships, researching far-flung technologies, and reaching my imperialistic arm across the stars. The problem was, I never really felt like any of those things were happening because of me. Too much of the game seems to run on autopilot, leaving me staring at a screen where cursors and icons flit about known space, apparently to orders I issued long ago. That's not to say this sequel is poor. The intricate interplay of economics, military development, trade, and keeping your citizens happy is handled marvelously, and patient players can be well rewarded for their time. As for this patient player, I felt that particular virtue a tad bit strained. —MILLER



PC

The Sims 2: Open for Business

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER MAXIS > RELEASE FEBRUARY 28 > ESRB T

TYCOON, MY ASS

So what really happens when your Sims go to work? The end-of-day progress report and cash infusion don't really get into the gritty details, but Open for Business has players living out this usually sped-through part of the virtual lifestyle. While as ambitious on paper as the University pack, Open for Business ends up being less robust and more of a diversion than it really ought to be.

New or existing Sims need only purchase a community lot or opt to start an in-home business to get the new content rolling. You'll hire employees based on brief resume-like summaries for each applicant, assign them duties, and design the particulars of your shop. Employees will quit, some really ought to be fired, and managers will need to be in charge more and more as your empire grows. It can be a lot to manage, and I think this sense of overwhelming tasks is the expansion's biggest problems.

When working on the Open for Business content, any other normal Sim-stuff is a task over and above what can reasonably be done. Like real-world small business owners, socialization and doing anything that isn't work are both effectively off-limits – there just aren't enough hours in the day.

But even with all of these things to do, the game doesn't really feel like a fleshed out business simulator. It's more busy work than resource management. Parameters like pay scales and how much to charge for goods can be tweaked, but any in-depth features like finding paying customers or making sure that the store location is prime real estate are non-issues. If you build it, they will come. Open for Business doesn't take advantage of the Sims' best qualities and also falls short as a stand-alone idea. —LISA



BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Let your inner entrepreneur fly free

> **Graphics:** The Sims 2 engine holds up beautifully, and this expansion doesn't break the system

> **Sound:** The addition of in-store muzak is both witty and super irritating

> **Playability:** For the first time in a long time, the new gameplay isn't explained very well at all

> **Entertainment:** It's okay at a lot of stuff, but masters nothing...so the fun is more hit and miss than most Sims offerings

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.75

Sell robots! Fire people! Make employees dress like ninjas! You'd think that a game with features like that would sell itself, but Open for Business under-delivers on all of its promises, making these actions feel like afterthoughts rather than core gameplay changes. The new mechanics, like managing employee morale and delegating tasks, could have been brilliant, but you're never allowed to focus on them because your attention is split in too many directions (like finances, life at home, and staying alive). And why is there specialized content for only a few types of shops? Some Sims expansions give you more items without changing the way you play. Open for Business does the opposite, providing some potentially clever systems without supplying the content needed to back them up. —JOE

PSP QUICKIES

PSP

WRC: FIA World Rally Championships

> **STYLE** 1 OR 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
> **DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S TALES
> **RELEASE** MARCH 14 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE **8.75** WRC is a well-respected franchise, and Traveller's Tales does an awesome

job with this PSP port. The sense of speed is good and so is the feeling that your life is in danger. One thing that the developer did for people who aren't rally purists is add ghost cars for your opponent's track times, so you never have to race solo. There is some pop-up – but it doesn't distract – and the only downside to the title is that it doesn't have a manual transmission option. This is frustrating because your car doesn't always downshift for power when it needs to. Hands down, WRC is some of the best racing on the PSP. —KATO

PSP

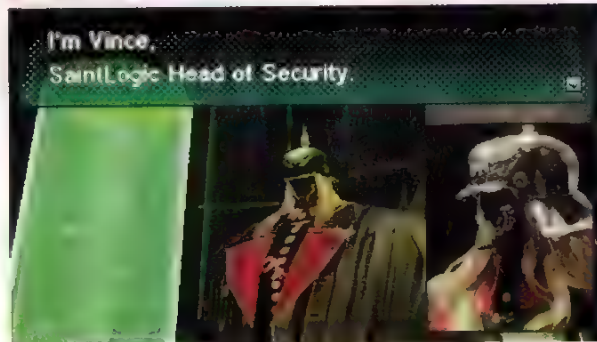
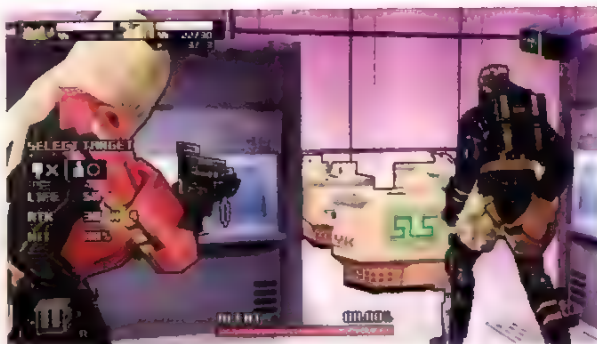
Fight Night Round 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 14 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE **7.75** I'm really starting to wish the PSP had another analog stick.

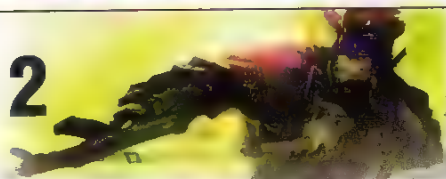
But, as much as I miss the awesome control of the console version, I couldn't really imagine a way EA Canada could have done a better job of translating Fight Night to PSP, given the limitations of the hardware. It's got almost all the features of the console versions, and the ability to twist your torso with the shoulder and analog nub does give you some of the fluidity of the original. Yes, it's a little hard to go back to button-based boxing, but this is a nice-looking port of a great game. Unfortunately, this is being docked points for its ridiculous scheme that forces you to pay for online or give ESPN your email address. —MATT



PSP

Metal Gear Acid 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** MARCH 28 > **ESRB** M



TWO OF A KIND

When the PSP came out last year, Metal Gear Acid helped Solid Snake sneak away from his console origins and distinguish himself on the handheld. As a card-based strategy franchise, Acid's departure from the stealthy action of the Solid series was innovative and fun, and it left many gamers hungering for more. Fortunately, this is exactly what Acid 2 delivers; it doesn't stray too far from the original, but it does streamline the gameplay and the strategy into a more accessible experience.

Like the first Acid title, this sequel is an addictive balance of luck and tactical thinking. There are new cards, a different sidekick, and more varied objectives that keep the missions exciting (Look out for that train, Snake!). All of these additions are well implemented, but apart from its new graphical style, Acid 2 doesn't do anything to establish a separate identity for itself. As much as I want to

believe that ogling clearly uncomfortable women through cumbersome 3D goggles changes the way you experience Metal Gear, the whole "Solid Eye" thing is just a novelty. While you can technically use it during normal gameplay, I topped out at about five minutes before the eye strain kicked in. It's a good thing the game has plenty of other selling points.

For the newcomers, the tutorials are easy to understand, and the non-card actions (like crawling and knocking) are simple to execute, making it much less convoluted than the first Acid game. The story isn't particularly compelling (maybe I just miss the passion

of those homicidal dolls. They loved killing so much!), though it's still packed with plenty of intrigue and betrayal to drive the action forward. I wouldn't go so far as to call the battles fast-paced, but they are surprisingly intense as you find yourself face to face with a guard praying you draw that pivotal card on your next turn.

It may not be a revolutionary step forward, but Metal Gear Acid 2 applies polish in all of the right places and gives us even more reasons to expect good things from this franchise in the years to come. —JOE



MEET THE VETERANS

One cool new additions to Acid 2 is the Arena Mode, where players use their decks from the main game to challenge classic Metal Gear Solid characters in two-on-two duels. These fights can be pretty brutal (though there is an easy setting to soften the blows), but the satisfaction of taking down these villains is well worth it. Here's who you can expect to encounter:

- Liquid Snake
- Vamp
- Fortune
- Revolver Ocelot
- The End
- The Boss

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> **Concept:** Snake combined with poker. Poker is the game where you blow up walking tanks with Nikita missiles, right?

> **Graphics:** The colorful manga-esque art, not the 3D, is the biggest visual draw

> **Sound:** Some voice acting could really spice up the dry dialogue scenes and make the plot more engaging

> **Playability:** Easier than before, though the learning curve is still fairly steep. It'll take a few hours to get a handle on things

> **Entertainment:** Patience and persistence will be the most rewarding, but occasional recklessness is pretty hilarious

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **8.25**

The card-based combat in MAGA 2 is way more action-packed than you'd imagine a turn-based strategy system could be. The wide variety of available actions leads to almost infinite variations on how a fight can play out; the tide can completely turn with one well-played card, and missions often have ingenious victory conditions. The more colorful visuals are definitely most welcome, but I could do without the headache-inducing Solid Eye, which is thankfully optional. Luckily, some annoying camera problems and a few questionable implementations of the strategic aspects of play aren't enough to really halt the fun: Not every popular franchise offshoot is a good idea, but this Metal Gear spinoff gets my vote. —MILLER

PSP

Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC, INFRASTRUCTURE, OR WIRELESS LAN) > PUBLISHER SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE MARCH 14 > ESRB T



FUN IN THE SHALLOW END

Nobody will ever say that Untold Legends: Warrior's Code is any kind of revolution in gaming. However, there's nothing at all wrong with being a very solid, very entertaining title that does exactly what it sets out to do, which is just what this is. Most of the issues in last year's Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade have been fixed; combat is much more interactive with the addition of charge-up attacks and attacks of opportunity, and the interface is exponentially smoother. But, at the end of the day, this is just another hack n' slash – albeit a pretty good one.

I was honestly surprised by how much better the basic fighting in Warrior's Code is than the "mash-X-until-it-dies" mantra of the first game. Various slowing and stunning abilities available to the different classes, along with the aforementioned special attacks, put the player in tenuous

control of a dynamic battlefield. Due to the scarcity of enemy types, however, battles do eventually all start to feel pretty similar to each other – even boss fights, the vast majority of which are merely against a powered-up version of a regular baddie. Of course, the incessant calling of more experience and magic items is a powerful draw to keep playing anyway, and getting a new skill or encountering a different enemy can quickly revitalize any waning interest.

Outside of occasionally making the player run through big, empty expanses of very similar-looking environments and a few rough edges to the multiplayer implementation (which is nonetheless fairly enjoyable), Warrior's Code is one of the better action/RPGs to hit the market recently, regardless of platform. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend this to anyone with even a passing interest in the genre. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Smash your way through an unending horde of fiends in your quest for levels and loot...er, to save the world

> **Graphics:** Effects are pretty, but environments can get awfully boring after looking at the same tileset for two hours

> **Sound:** The only notable sounds here are the cues that inform you of what's actually going on in the chaos onscreen

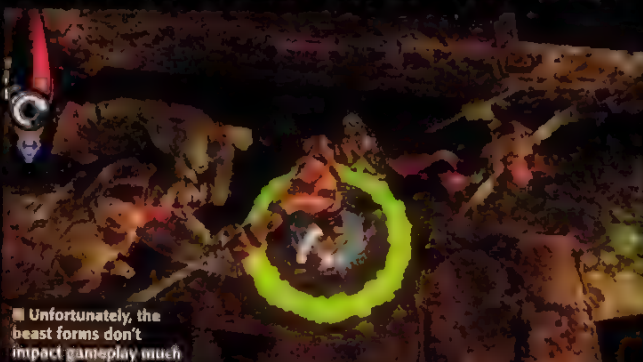
> **Playability:** The few rough spots on the original's interface have been smoothed out, so control is nice and tight this time around

> **Entertainment:** This isn't exactly the deepest game around, but it's definitely amusing

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

Finally, the piece of fat loot I've been waiting for has been dropped into the PSP library. I love a good dungeon crawler, although the first Untold Legends didn't do a lot for me. Fortunately, The Warrior's Code is a huge improvement over the original. The combat engine is much stronger, and the character classes are more original, giving the franchise some sorely needed personality. Plus, my character totally owns, which is always nice. Easy to pick up and play, but complex enough to prevent boredom in long gaming sessions, Warrior's Code has instantly become one of my favorite titles for the system. —JEREMY



Unfortunately, the beast forms don't impact gameplay much

PSP QUICKIES

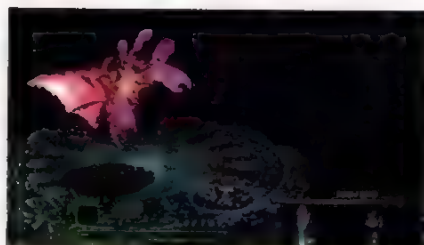
PSP

Ys: The Ark of Napishtim

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER FALCOM > RELEASE MARCH 1 > ESRB E10+

Everyone knows that in any set of twins, one is good and the other is evil. Thankfully, the evil twin always has some conspicuous identifying mark, like a horrible scar or a goatee. Now, while Ys: The Ark of Napishtim on PSP may seem like a nearly identical port of last year's PS2 release, astute gamers will notice the deformity that marks it as the sinister half of the duo: agonizing load times. Sometimes taking as long as 20 seconds, these intermissions break up the action like your mom at a make-out party. What was an average nostalgic sword-slashing game on PS2 has become a choppy, awkwardly-paced handheld adventure with a soundtrack player and a couple of new minigames tacked on to throw you off of the obviously evil scent. —JOE



PSP

MLB '06 The Show

BOTTOM LINE 7

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC AND INFRASTRUCTURE) > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > DEVELOPER SCEA SAN DIEGO > RELEASE MARCH 1 > ESRB E



was harsh towards the console version, and although this edition shares many of its faults, it's still pretty good. That and the lack of competition make this a title you wouldn't regret picking up. Be warned, however, as the game still has some bugs; infielders

can have trouble picking up grounders while on the run, pitchers have unusual stamina, and outfielders can make some ridiculous throws to the bases. The pitching meter is a little small on the PSP and takes getting used to, but otherwise this port captures the console version warts, sweet animations, and all. —KATO

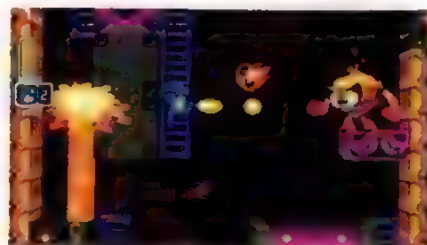
PSP

Mega Man Powered Up

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE MARCH 14 > ESRB E

I'm not one to be taken in by cutesy graphics and what Japanophiles call "quirk." However, underneath the saccharine sweetness of this game's exterior lies a Mega Man game for the ages. All of the original levels from Mega Man (the first one)



plus remixed versions of each are available to test your platforming skills, and beating a boss without using the weapon it's weak against will unlock it as a playable character. Multiple difficulties and a map-making tool are even included. Mega Man Powered Up shows its Mega Man heritage by being cheap at times and somewhat short in length, but it delivers in just about every way you could hope for, given that it's basically a remake of a game that's almost 20 years old. —ADAM

HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** BANDAI/NANAON-SHA > **RELEASE** JANUARY 31 > **ESRB** E



I'm always annoyed by crappy products that make people say, "This would be great for a kid" as if they can or should deal with junk just because they have less life experience. But I'm going to bend that rule a bit for Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop because it has some honestly high quality features and its one big downfall (repetition) is something that kids seem to almost value. Without a doubt, the poppy graphical style, high quality music, and delightfully bizarre activities will appeal to everyone; while the constant reward structure for doing the same thing well (over and over again) offers more than enough positive reinforcement for the younger set. Kids, especially, are asked to play things much worse than this Corner Shop collection. —LISA

forcement for the younger set. Kids, especially, are asked to play things much worse than this Corner Shop collection. —LISA

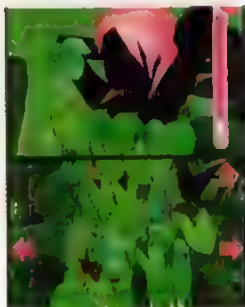
NINTENDO DS

The Rub Rabbits!

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 7 > **ESRB** T

In all, this sequel to last year's Feel the Magic is just too damn aware of itself. The unintentionally dirty translation mistakes are largely gone, the hero is pretty savvy, and the story almost kind of makes sense. Thematically, each of these changes takes away some of the franchise's "Woah, did that really just happen?" vibe. With regard to pure gameplay, some minigames are far more successful than others and I felt like as I got further into the story mode, the difficulty amped up only because of unwieldy controls and not because of better-designed mousetraps. The extra modes are well worthwhile, though, as are some of the activities (like making a dress out of leaves or poking your girlfriend the way she poked you...which sounds way naughtier than it is). —LISA



NINTENDO DS

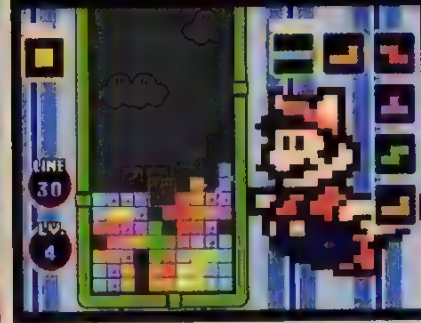
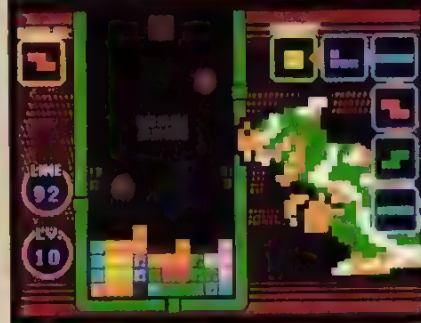
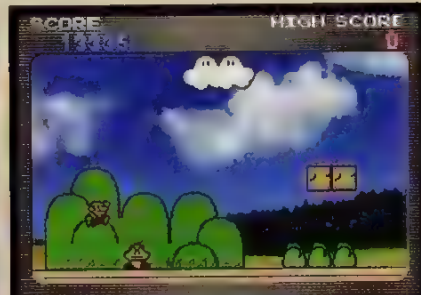
Super Monkey Ball: Touch & Roll

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 21 > **ESRB** E



When a game begins by asking you to poke a monkey in the butt with the DS stylus, you know you're in good hands. Super Monkey Ball is one of those titles that is nearly impossible not to love, unless you have some mindless hatred of fun or cartoon simians. I like both just fine, and it doesn't take a genius to understand how Monkey Ball's tilting gameplay is well suited to the DS. It (mostly) works great, too, although I do think there is a subtle degree of precision lost in the transition from analog stick to touch screen. With 50 new levels, 50 favorites from the past, some cool new minigames like the FPS Monkey War and a version of air hockey, plus single-cart multiplayer, this is yet another nice addition to the DS library. —MATT



NINTENDO DS

Tetris DS

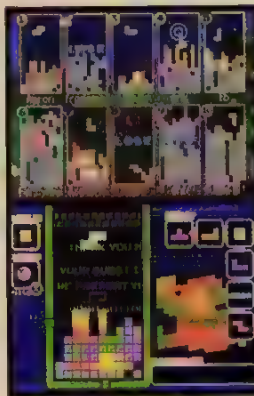
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS, OR UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA NINTENDO WI-FI) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO/ELORG > **RELEASE** MARCH 20 > **ESRB** E

IT'S A WHOLE NEW BALLGAME

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

This is one of the easiest reviews I've ever written. With most games, there's always an element of personal taste and preference that come into forming an opinion. What's fascinating to me might

be boring to you. However, with Tetris DS, there just doesn't seem to be much room for debate. When you take a game that's brilliant enough to have endured on nearly every game system of the last 20 years, then add some interesting and clever new modes that manage to put a fresh spin on Tetris's classic building-block action puzzles, you've got a clear winner on your hands.



Obviously, Tetris DS has the original classic mode that we've enjoyed for years, although you do get to watch Mario progress through some levels from the NES-era Super Mario Bros. series as you complete lines. It's also available for Wi-Fi and wireless play, adding another great multiplayer experience for the DS. However, the big news here is the new gameplay modes, which offer some nice twists on a familiar experience.

My initial favorite was Push Mode, which pits you against the computer or a friend and has you placing blocks falling from either the top or the bottom of the screen. As you complete lines, your opponent is pushed back towards a football-like goal line. It adds a cool competitive element to the game, and is probably my favorite of all the new modes. However, Puzzle (which gives you a limited number of pieces and moves to clear a set of lines), Catch (a unique Metroid-themed scrolling game that will pretty much rewrite the way

your brain thinks about Tetris), and Touch (which exclusively uses the stylus), are all great in their own right. Aside from some small problems I had with rotating blocks in Touch mode, it's a well-designed and executed game from top to bottom. I can't think of a better way to kill a long plane ride, and I expect lapsed Tetris fans who've migrated to other puzzle games will be making their way back into the fold after playing this excellent reinvention of one of gaming's greatest titles. —MATT

> **Concept:** The most creative and sweeping change to happen in the Tetris universe in years

> **Graphics:** The old-school Nintendo themes add some interest to the traditional Tetris look

> **Sound:** Classic Nintendo-style tunes will delight old-schoolers

> **Playability:** Implements the classic Tetris mechanics alongside some clever uses of the touch screen

> **Entertainment:** An all-time great gets a much needed overhaul; put this at the top of your DS wish list

> **Replay Value:** High

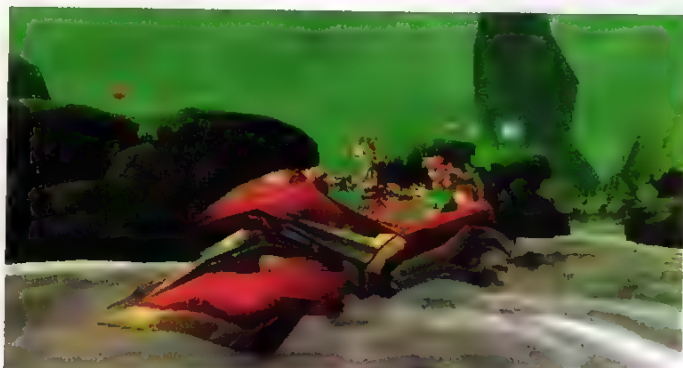
Second Opinion 9.25

Generally speaking, I see "new" editions of Tetris as having the same effect as updated packaging on an established foodstuff — new look, same great taste. Tetris DS isn't this situation at all. While an original flavor is included (with a spiffy new look), the rest of the product is a collection of top-notch variants on the Tetris formula that each add new strategy and mindsets to the classic puzzler. Add on the detail that each game type is decorated with visuals from a legendary Nintendo franchise, and Tetris DS becomes a must-buy for anyone with the hardware to run it. —LISA

PSP

Daxter

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** READY AT DAWN > **RELEASE** MARCH 21 > **ESRB** E



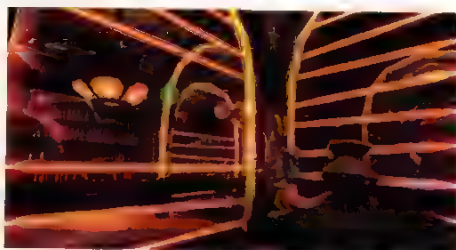
THE LITTLE GIANT

The Jak series is one of my favorites ever on PlayStation 2, and the antics of Jak's comical sidekick, Daxter, have always been one of the main reasons I've loved it over the years. Despite some skepticism that new studio Ready at Dawn could deliver the kind of high production values fans expect on the PSP, I've been hoping that Daxter would be a worthy addition to the saga.

Honestly, I'd have to say that this title actually manages to not only meet but exceed my expectations. First off, this is one of games that best shows off just how powerful the PSP is, as the visuals are, by and large, the equal of those in Jak 3. Haven City and the outlying areas are gorgeously rendered (although there are far fewer pedestrians) and you'll notice a very fine level of detail in the characters' modeling and fur texturing during cutscenes.

While that's all very impressive, the real hook for me was that — for once — we have on our hands a PSP continuation of a console series that doesn't feel like either a quick port or a half-assed afterthought. While you can sense the scope of the game has been ever-so-slightly reined in to make everything fit on a UMD, the real news is that this feels new, like a brand new adventure with an old friend. Just as with every entry in the series, the level design and gameplay is spot-on, crafted with care and made all the better by an excellent and intuitive camera system (it turns out that shoulder button camera control is viable in the right hands). Some might miss the greater emphasis on vehicles and weapons from Jak II and Jak 3, but I actually appreciate the series returning to its platforming roots. I also enjoyed the multiplayer Bug Combat minigame, a Pokémon Stadium style turn-based affair with a surprising amount of depth.

But most of all, this game really solidified for me how much I love this character. Daxter's antics (and his hilarious "dream" minigames) will keep you in stitches, and the story reveals some interesting revelations for hardcore fans. All in all, this is a great addition to your PSP library. —**MATT**



BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** A full-blown, original PSP platformer that reveals events taking place between the first and second PS2 titles

> **Graphics:** Breathtaking. Easily the best looking PSP game I've played to date

> **Sound:** As always, the voiceovers are comedy gold and the soundtrack is top notch

> **Playability:** Probably the best 3D camera on PSP to date, everything else uses finely honed platforming controls in the tradition of the series

> **Entertainment:** A must for fans or those looking for some meaty gameplay on the PSP

> **Replay Value:** Moderately



Second Opinion 8.5

Jak and Daxter have been favorite companions of mine throughout this generation of consoles, and Daxter's first solo adventure does nothing to diminish my love of the franchise. What this spinoff lacks in epic conflicts it makes up for in humor and fun. From his movie-inspired dreams to his need for a sidekick of his own, Daxter's wannabe hero antics make for great laughter fodder. It doesn't hurt that this is one of the most polished and attractive games we've enjoyed on the PSP. As a character and as a game, Daxter can never quite live up to the grand adventures of his best friend. But as an expansion to an already amazing world of characters, Daxter more than holds his own. —**MILLER**

PSP QUICKIES

PSP

NBA Ballers: Rebound

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
> **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY
> **RELEASE** MARCH 27
> **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 8

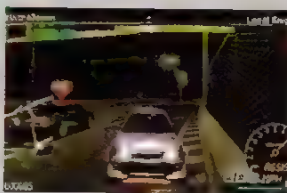
The second installment in this series is currently hitting consoles, whereas an

enhanced port of the original game is landing on the PSP. Long loading times abound, but the heated one-on-one gameplay hasn't lost any of its gravity-defying grace. This is one of those games that constantly puts players into the adrenaline-filled and nail-biting position of a buzzer-beating match. The precise controls and multi-faceted offensive game can lead to some truly spectacular plays, but conversely, some of the moves are just flashy skill-free animations. Ballers may not deliver the full five-on-five experience, but you'll be hard-pressed to find a handheld b-ball title that delivers such an exciting challenge. —**REINER**

PSP

Street Supremacy

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (2-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** GENKI
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 28
> **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 6.75

I've been a fan of Genki's Tokyo Xtreme Racer series in the past. However, Street

Supremacy struggles to make the Tokyo street racing format viable on the PlayStation Portable. Because you don't actually cruise around the city looking for competition like you do in the consoles (you load in and out of specific races instead), the game is very bite-sized. Since your average race lasts well under a minute — and is as unexciting as a drag race — the series' emphasis on car customization and handling is barely augmented by actual racing. The structure is here for a great title, but it doesn't help when half the game's gone up in smoke. —**KATO**



PSP

Pursuit Force

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** BIGBIG STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 7 > **ESRB** T

CAR HOP

When I was younger, my friends and I thought it was a huge thrill to toss cans of Mountain Dew back and forth between moving cars, or even have Super Soaker battles while driving side by side. Despite our misguided belief that this was a good idea (Mountain Dew? What were we thinking?), there is something to be said for the thrill of two vehicles interacting at high speeds. It's the clear inspiration for Pursuit Force.

A braintead story sets up the action: You are part of a special police team that catches criminals by jumping onto their moving cars, shooting them, then driving their car after the next crook. It's a dumb job, but better than delousing guys back at the jailhouse.

The main problem with Pursuit Force is that there's simply no depth to it. Sure, there are a few missions that switch things up (some have boats, on-foot sections, and even track-based shooting), but basically one mission is the same as all the rest. Jumping on a moving car is no more thrilling than hopping on a ledge in another game, and it should be. There's no rush from what should be an exciting action, and the basic driving and shooting are simply decent. All in all, Pursuit Force is an acceptable racer with a few unique features, but it just doesn't pack the punch that it needs. So for now, I'll go back to tossing questionable sodas to my pals in the next car, thank you very much.

—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 6.25

> **Concept:** Bring some action movie thrills to the PSP with a racing game that involves jumping between cars to catch crooks

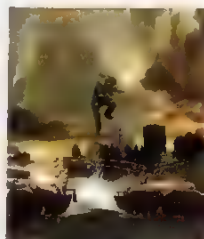
> **Graphics:** Leaping between moving vehicles looks pretty cool on the PSP's bright screen

> **Sound:** The police chief and other characters that yell at you during races are some of the most annoying you'll ever hear

> **Playability:** Cars handle nicely, but speed control is too touchy, and the on-foot sections blow

> **Entertainment:** Despite its over-the-top concept, the gameplay is repetitive and lacks the thrills the game is aiming for

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



Second Opinion 7

Despite a number of flaws, Pursuit Force manages to be a fun little romp. Given the incredibly limited scope of the gameplay — you really do little more than drive fast, jump on some cars, and shoot some guys in the most basic of ways — the game does a decent job of varying scenarios between missions. Occasionally wonky controls and some poorly designed levels prevent it from being great, but playing through the tons of content is an enjoyable way to pass some downtime. —**ADAM**



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For January 2006 Based On Units Sold

1 CALL OF DUTY 2 (360)



The 360's top-selling game has roared back to the number one spot. Does this mean that new gamers were able to find units, or are 360 owners so starved for games that they all bought it again? We have two copies of Perfect Dark Zero. They level out the uneven leg of our couch.

2 MADDEN NFL 06 (PS2)



We learned something very important while infiltrating a so-called "Super Bowl-Party," which had very little to do with bowls, by the way. The football organization depicted in this game is NOT pronounced "niffle." We think that's when we blew our cover.

3 MVP 06 NCAA BASEBALL (PS2)



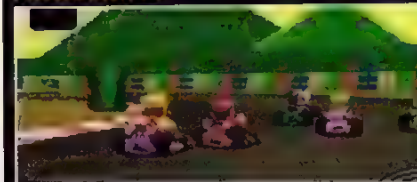
The MVP games are fine and all, but for our money there is no better baseball franchise than *Major League*. All three films are packed with exciting "sportsainment," which is a totally legitimate scientific term. Plus, the third one has Scott Bakula! Leap to home!

4 GRAND THEFT AUTO: LIBERTY CITY STORIES (PSP)



Rockstar has confirmed to us that, due to the continued success of the GTA franchise, it will start manufacturing other merchandise with the brand attached. First up is a line of Grand Theft Bathub exfoliating scrubs. Or perhaps that's just wishful thinking on our part. What can we say? We enjoy smelling nice while we beat up pedestrians.

5 MARIO KART DS



You know what we want? Mario Crunch: Double Sugar! It would be a breakfast cereal, a sweet, sweet breakfast treat with Mario-shaped oat clusters and "mushroommallows" that gave you the ability to throw fireballs when you ate them. Of course, with the DS reference, you'd have to eat two bowls at once. With your hands.

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Call of Duty 2	18	360	9.75	11-05	\$59
2	Madden NFL 06	1	PS2	9	8-05	\$36
3	MVP 06 NCAA Baseball	N/A	PS2	7	01-06	\$30
4	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	9	PSP	9.25	10-05	\$48
5	Mario Kart DS	6	DS	8.5	11-05	\$34
6	Animal Crossing: Wild World	19	DS	8.75	12-05	\$35
7	Need For Speed: Most Wanted	3	PS2	8.5	11-05	\$46
8	Dead or Alive 4	N/A	360	9	12-05	\$59
9	Star Wars: Battlefront II	2	PS2	8.5	11-05	\$48
10	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	N/A	PS2	10	10-04	\$22
11	WWE Smackdown! VS Raw 2006	4	PS2	8.75	11-05	\$50
12	Gun	N/A	PS2	8.75	11-05	\$29
13	25 to Life	N/A	PS2	5.75	01-06	\$39
14	SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo	N/A	PSP	7	11-05	\$40
15	NBA Live 06	12	PS2	7.5	09-05	\$36
16	Nintendogs: Dachshund & Friends	N/A	DS	8	08-05	\$29
17	Madden NFL 06	N/A	360	7.75	11-05	\$58
18	Need For Speed: Most Wanted 5-1-0	N/A	PSP	7.25	11-05	\$48
19	Call of Duty 2: Big Red One	5	PS2	7.25	11-05	\$48
20	MVP 06 NCAA Baseball	N/A	XBOX	7	01-06	\$30

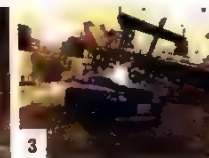
TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Elgo Tsuke	DS
2	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain 2	DS
3	Animal Crossing: Wild World	PS2
4	Siren 2	DS
5	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain	DS
6	Unou No Tatsujin: Soukai! Machigai Museum	DS
7	Tourist Trophy	PS2
8	Monster Hunter Portable	PSP
9	Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams	PS2
10	Mario Kart DS	DS



TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	N/A	360
2	Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	N/A	PS2
3	Burnout Revenge	N/A	360
4	Kingdom Hearts 2	N/A	PS2
5	Fight Night Round 3	2	Multi
6	Tetris DS	N/A	DS
7	Black	N/A	Multi
8	Super Princess Peach	3	DS
9	Grandia III	6	PS2
10	The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II	N/A	PC



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	World of Warcraft	4	\$31
2	The Sims 2	5	\$37
3	Age of Empires III	1	\$49
4	Civilization IV	3	\$49
5	Call of Duty 2	2	\$49
6	The Sims 2: Nightlife	6	\$26
7	Battlefield 2	N/A	\$48
8	RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	7	\$26
9	Zoo Tycoon 2	N/A	\$24
10	Battlefield 2: Special Forces	N/A	\$25



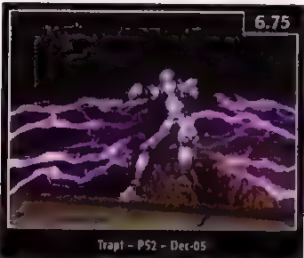
Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

The Really Ugly Page Where You Can See Lots Of Old Review Scores

XBOX 360			
Amped 3	8.5	Dec-05	
Call of Duty 2	9.75	Dec-05	
Condemned: Criminal Origins	8.75	Dec-05	
Dead or Alive 4	9	Mar-06	
FIFA 06	8.25	Dec-05	
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06	
Full Auto	7.5	Mar-06	
Gun	8.75	Dec-05	
Kameo: Elements of Power	7.5	Jan-06	
Madden NFL 06	7.75	Jan-06	
NBA 2K6	8.5	Jan-06	
nBA Live 06	6.75	Dec-05	
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	9	Jan-06	
Perfect Dark Zero	8.5	Jan-06	
Peter Jackson's King Kong	8.5	Jan-06	
Project Gotham Racing 3	8.5	Jan-06	
Quake 4	7.75	Jan-06	
Ridge Racer 6	7.5	Jan-06	
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	8.5	Jan-06	
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05	

PLAYSTATION 2			
25 to Life	5.75	Mar-06	
50 Cent: Bulletproof	6	Jan-06	
187 Ride or Die	6.5	Oct-05	
Aeon Flux	7.25	Jan-06	
Amnesia: Army: Rise of a Soldier	6.5	Feb-06	
Ape Escape 3	8.75	Feb-06	
Arc the Lad: End of Darkness	5.5	Jul-05	
Armored Core: Nine Breaker	6	Sep-05	
Batman Begins	7.25	Aug-05	
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.5	Dec-05	
Beardown: Fists of Vengeance	5	Sep-05	
Big Mutha Truckers 2			
Blitz: The League	6.75	Oct-05	
Blitz: The League	7.75	Nov-05	



Blitz - PS2 - Dec-05

Burnout Revenge	9.25	Oct-05	
Call of Duty 2: Big Red One	7.25	Jan-06	
Capcom Classic Collection	8.5	Nov-05	
Castlevania: Curse of Darkness	7.5	Nov-05	
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	4.5	Sep-05	
Chicken Little	7	Nov-05	
Chronicles of Namia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, The	6.5	Dec-05	
College Hoops 2K6	8	Jan-06	
Colosseum: Road to Freedom	7.25	Jul-05	
Conflict: Global Terror	6.75	Nov-05	
Dance Dance Revolution Extreme 2	7.5	Nov-05	
Darkwatch	8.5	Sep-05	
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	6.75	Oct-05	
Destroy All Humans	8	Jul-05	
Devil Kings	6.5	Nov-05	
Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening Special Edition	9	Feb-06	
Dragon Quest VIII			
Journey of the Cursed King	8.75	Dec-05	
Drakensgard 2	7.25	Mar-06	
Dynasty Warriors 5 Xtreme Legends	6.75	Dec-05	
Evil Dead: Regeneration	6	Oct-05	
EyeToy: Kinetic	8	Nov-05	
EyeToy: Operation Spy	6	Dec-05	
EyeToy: Play 2	8.5	Sep-05	
Fantastic Four	6.5	Sep-05	
Fatal Frame III: The Tormented	7.75	Dec-05	
FIFA Soccer 06	8	Oct-05	
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06	
Final Fight: Streetwise	4	Mar-06	
FlatOut	6.5	Aug-05	
Flonic: Ultimate Pinball	6	Jul-05	
From Russia With Love	7.75	Dec-05	
Fullmetal Alchemist 2: Curse of the Crimson Elixir	6	Jul-05	
Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	6.25	Feb-06	
Genji: Dawn of the Samurai	8.5	Oct-05	
Graffiti Kingdom	6	Sep-05	
Grandia III	8.75	Mar-06	
Gretzky NHL '06	7	Nov-05	
Guitar Hero	9	Dec-05	
Gun	8.75	Dec-05	
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	6.5	Dec-05	
Heroes of the Pacific	8.75	Oct-05	
Incredible Hulk			
Ultimate Destruction, The	8.25	Sep-05	
Indigo Prophecy	8.25	Oct-05	
Jack X: Combat Racing	7.75	Nov-05	
Juiced	7.5	Jul-05	
Karaoke Revolution Party	8.5	Dec-05	
Killer 7	7.5	Jul-05	
LA Rush	6.25	Dec-05	
Legend of Kay	6.5	Oct-05	
Madagascar	7	Aug-05	
Madden NFL 06	9	Sep-05	
Magna Carta: Tears of Blood	8.25	Dec-05	
Mania Kingdom			
Chronicles of the Sacred Tome	8	Aug-05	
Marvel Nemesis			
Rise of the Imperfects	7	Oct-05	

Matrix: Path of Neo, The	7.25	Dec-05	
Medal of Honor: European Assault	7.75	Jul-05	
Mega Man X Collection	8	Feb-06	
Midway Arcade Treasures 3	8.25	Oct-05	
Mobile Suit Gundam Gundam vs. Zeta Gundam	6	Aug-05	
Monal Kombatt: Shaolin Monks	8.5	Oct-05	
MVP 06: NCAA Baseball	7.75	Mar-06	
Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection	7	Feb-06	
NASCAR 06: Total Team Control	8.25	Oct-05	
NBA 06	8.25	Oct-05	
NBA 2K6	7.75	Jan-06	
NBA Live 06	8.5	Nov-05	
NCAA Football 06	8.5	Aug-05	
NCAA March Madness 2006	7	Nov-05	
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	8.5	Dec-05	
NHL 06	7	Sep-05	
Nightmare Before Christmas: Doggie's Revenge, The	5	Nov-05	
Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams	9	Mar-06	
Outlaw Tennis	6.5	Sep-05	
Pac-Man World 3	6.25	Jan-06	
Peter Jackson's King Kong	8.5	Jan-06	
Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones	9	Jan-06	
Psychonauts	8.5	Aug-05	
Radiata Stories	9.25	Oct-05	
Rainbow Six: Lockdown	7.5	Nov-05	
Ratchet Deadlocked	9	Nov-05	
Resident Evil 4	10	Nov-05	
Romance of the Three Kingdoms X	7.5	Jul-05	
Romancing SaGa	5	Nov-05	
RPC Maker 3	6.5	Aug-05	
Samura: Western	6	Jul-05	
Shadow Hearts			
From the New Worlds	8.75	Mar-06	
Shadow of the Colossus	8.75	Oct-05	
Shadow the Hedgehog	4	Jan-06	
Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga 2	6.25	Nov-05	
Sims 2, The	7.75	Nov-05	
S.L.A.I.	5.5	Oct-05	
Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves	7.25	Nov-05	
Sniper Elite	7.5	Nov-05	
SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs	7.75	Dec-05	
Soul Calibur III	9	Dec-05	
Spartan: Total Warrior	7.75	Oct-05	
SSX On Tour	8	Nov-05	
Star Wars: Battlefront II	8.5	Dec-05	
Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	5.75	Jul-05	
Sufferng: Ties That Bind, The	8.5	Oct-05	
Suikoden Tactics	6.75	Dec-05	
Taito Legends	8.5	Jan-06	
Talk: The Great Jujū Challenge	7	Oct-05	
Tales of Legendia	7.25	Mar-06	
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	8.25	Nov-05	
TOCA Race Driver 3	8.25	Mar-06	
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05	
Top Spin	8.75	Nov-05	
Total Overdose	6.25	Jan-06	
Trapt	6.75	Dec-05	
True Crime: New York City	8.75	Jan-06	
Ultimate Spider-Man	8	Nov-05	
Urban Reign	8	Oct-05	
Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit	7	Nov-05	
Warriors, The	8.25	Nov-05	
We Love Katamari	8.5	Oct-05	
Wild Arms 4	7.5	Feb-06	
Wind Arms: Alter Code F	6	Jan-06	
Winning Eleven 9	8.5	Feb-06	
Without Warning	6.5	Nov-05	
WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw 2006	8.75	Dec-05	
X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse	9	Nov-05	

GAMECUBE			
Batman Begins	7.25	Aug-05	
Battalion Wars	5.5	Oct-05	
Call of Duty 2: Big Red One	7.25	Jan-06	
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	4.5	Sep-05	
Chibi-Robo	5	Feb-06	
Chicken Little	7	Nov-05	
Chronicles of Namia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, The	6.5	Dec-05	
Dance Dance Revolution Mario Mix	5.25	Jan-06	
Fantastic Four	6.5	Sep-05	
FIFA Soccer 06	8	Oct-05	
Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance	9	Nov-05	
From Russia With Love	7.75	Dec-05	
Geist	6	Sep-05	
Gun	8.75	Dec-05	
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	6.5	Dec-05	
Harvest Moon			
Another Wonderful Life	7.75	Oct-05	
Incredible Hulk			
Ultimate Destruction, The	8.25	Sep-05	
Karaoke Revolution Party	8.5	Dec-05	



Dance Dance: Revolution Mario Mix - GC - Jan-06

Killer 7	7.5	Jul-05	
Madagascar	7	Aug-05	
Madden NFL 06	9	Sep-05	
Mano Party 7	5	Dec-05	
Mano Superstar Baseball	7	Sep-05	
Marvel Nemesis			
Rise of the Imperfects	7	Oct-05	
Mega Man X Collection	8	Feb-06	
Midway Arcade Treasures 3	8.25	Oct-05	
Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection	8	Oct-05	
NBA Live 06	7.5	Nov-05	
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	8.5	Dec-05	
NHL 06	7	Sep-05	
Odama	7	Mar-06	
Pac-Man World 3	6.25	Jan-06	
Peter Jackson's King Kong	8.5	Jan-06	
Pokémon XD: Gale of Darkness	5.75	Nov-05	
Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones	9	Jan-06	
Rainbow Six: Lockdown	7.5	Nov-05	
Shadow the Hedgehog	4	Jan-06	
Sims 2, The	7.75	Nov-05	
Spartan: Total Warrior	7.75	Oct-05	
Super Mario Stikers	6.75	Dec-05	
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	8.25	Nov-05	
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05	
True Crime: New York City	8.75	Jan-06	
Ultimate Spider-Man	8	Nov-05	
Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	7	Dec-05	
Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit	7	Nov-05	
WWE Day of Reckoning 2	7.25	Oct-05	
X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse	9	Nov-05	

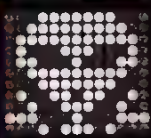


Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones - Xbox - Jan-06

25 to Life	5.75	Mar-06	
50 Cent: Bulletproof	6	Feb-06	
187 Ride or Die	6.5	Oct-05	
Advent Rising	7.75	Jul-05	
Aeon Flux	7.25	Jan-06	
Amnesia: Army: Rise of a Soldier	6.5	Feb-06	
Batman Begins	7.25	Aug-05	
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.5	Dec-05	
Beardown: Fists of Vengeance	5	Sep-05	
Big Mutha Truckers 2			
Blitz: The League	6.75	Oct-05	
Blitz: The League	7.75	Nov-05	
Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood	8	Nov-05	
Burnout Revenge	9.25	Oct-05	
Call of Cthulu			
Dark Corners of the Earth	6	Jan-06	
Call of Duty 2: Big Red One	7.25	Jan-06	
Capcom Classic Collection	8.5	Nov-05	
Castlevania: Curse of Darkness	7.5	Nov-05	
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	4.5	Sep-05	
Chicken Little	7	Nov-05	
Chronicles of Namia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, The	6.5	Dec-05	
Cold War	6	Dec-05	
College Hoops 2K6	8	Jan-06	
Conflict: Global Terror	6.75	Nov-05	
Conker: Live and Reloaded	8	Aug-05	
Darkwatch	8.5	Sep-05	
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	6.75	Oct-05	
Destroy All Humans	8	Jul-05	
Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	8.5	Jan-06	
Dynasty Warriors 5	6	Oct-05	
Evil Dead: Regeneration	6	Oct-05	
Fable: The Lost Chapters	8.75	Jan-06	
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Fantastic Four	6.5	Sep-05	
Far Cry Instincts	8.75	Nov-05	
FIFA Soccer 06	8	Oct-05	
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06	
Final Fight: Streetwise	4	Mar-06	
FlatOut	6.5	Aug-05	
From Russia With Love	7.75	Dec-05	
Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	6.25	Feb-06	
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	9.75	Aug-05	
Gun	8.75	Dec-05	
Half-Life 2	7.25	Dec-05	
Halo 2: Multiplayer Map Pack	9.25	Sep-06	
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	6.5	Dec-05	
Heroes of the Pacific	8.75	Oct-05	
Incredible Hulk			
Ultimate Destruction, The	8.25	Sep-05	
Indigo Prophecy	8.25	Oct-05	
Juiced	7.5	Jul-05	
Karaoke Revolution Party	8.5	Dec-05	
Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes	7.5	Oct-05	
King of Fighters			
Maximum Impact Maniax	5.75	Aug-05	
LA Rush	6.25	Dec-05	
Madagascar	7	Aug-05	
Madden NFL 06	9	Sep-05	
Marvel Nemesis			
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NHL 06	7	Sep-05	
NHL 2K6	8	Sep-05	
Nightmare Before Christmas: Doggie's Revenge, The	5	Nov-05	
Ninja Gaiden Black	9.5	Oct-05	
Operation Flashpoint: Elite	5	Feb-06	
Outlaw Tennis	6.5	Sep-05	
Pac-Man World 3	6.25	Jan-06	
Peter Jackson's King Kong	8.5	Jan-06	
Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones	9	Jan-06	
Rainbow Six: Lockdown	8.5	Nov-05	
Senous Sam II	7.75	Nov-05	
Shadow the Hedgehog	4	Jan-06	
Shattered Union	4	Jan-06	
Sid Meier's Pirates!	7.75	Aug-05	
Sims 2, The	7.75	Nov-05	
Sniper Elite	7.5	Nov-05	
Spartan: Total Warrior	7.75	Oct-05	
SSX On Tour	8	Nov-05	
Star Wars: Battlefront II	8.5	Dec-05	
Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	5.75	Jul-05	
Stubbs the Zombie in Rebel Without a Pulse	8	Dec-05	
Sufferng: Ties That Bind, The	8.5	Oct-05	
Taito Legends	8.5	Jan-06	
Talk: The Great Jujū Challenge	7	Oct-05	
Tecmo Classic Arcade	7	Oct-05	
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	8.25	Nov-05	
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike	8	Oct-05	
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05	
Total Overdose	6.25	Jan-06	
True Crime: New York City	8.75	Jan-06	
Ultimate Spider-Man	8	Nov-05	
Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit	7	Nov-05	
Warriors, The	8.25	Nov-05	
Winning Eleven 9	8.5	Feb-06	
Without Warning	6.5	Nov-05	
X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse	9	Nov-05	

PC			
Age of Empires III	8.25	Dec	



Age of Empires: The Age of Kings DS

Lifting the King's Burden



By Designers Tyler Sigman and Eric Emery

TO MERGE, OR NOT TO MERGE. THAT IS THE QUESTION...

When it's good: Merging is especially useful if you are near your Unit Cap. You can consolidate two weak units into one stronger unit, and simultaneously free up one valuable cap space. When it's bad: First, merging tends to dilute veteran status, so try not to merge three-ribbon veterans with newbies, or you will end up with a newbie. Second, if you have cap room and can either heal/rest the weak units, then there's no rush to merge. Third, sometimes a couple of weak units can be more useful than one semi-weak one.

USE WEAK UNITS FOR DELAYING ACTIONS

Don't underestimate the usefulness of units that are nearly dead. Even a unit at one percent health can be of enormous tactical use. Rather than attacking with them and trying to do a last bit of damage, use them as blockers. Put them on bridges, or surround a valuable unit. The enemy will have to waste a unit's move to eliminate the weak unit. This is especially great if you can force your opponent to use the attack of a really powerful unit (like a Hero) just to clear away your rabble.

USE HAMMERS TO POUND NAILS

Stick to the basics: Use Cavalry to attack infantry and Ranged units. Use Ranged units to attack anything from afar. Use Infantry to attack Siege units, buildings, and Ranged units. Use Siege units to pound buildings (or any unit, in the case of Scorpions). If you control the matchups, then you will be getting the most efficiency out of your units.

JAB, JAB, PUNCH

When you have multiple units prepared to

attack, order of use is extremely important. Use Ranged units and Skirmishers to get "free hits" in on the enemy, and then move in your finishers. Also, think through the order of attack so you don't move in a weak unit to soften the enemy up, and then accidentally block your strong unit from finishing the job.

EVERYONE IS SPECIAL IN THEIR OWN UNIQUE WAY

You can get a lot of mileage out of just using the basic matchups (see above). But skilled generals study the unit specials and learn to use the exact right unit for the right situation. **FIRST STRIKE** and **SKIRMISH** are two of the most powerful special abilities in the game, and can be used to get two guaranteed attacks in a row, or to bait an enemy into attacking you when you will actually end up landing the first blow. **FRENZY** is quite sneaky because opponents won't see it coming, when you two percent health Berserker attacks at full 100 percent for damage purposes! And for Pete's sake, don't attack Knights Templar with weak ranged units... it just makes 'em fighting mad!

CONVERT TIPS...

The Convert equation is based upon a number of factors. A couple of the biggest are proximity and Age difference. For the best possible convert chance, you want to be adjacent to the target, and also be one Age more advanced. Also, if your Monk is currently carrying a relic, then that gives a healthy bonus as well. Unfortunately, putting your relic-carrying Monk directly next to an enemy unit has certain tradeoffs.



CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT

In some of the more difficult Campaign Missions, such as the later Saladins and Richards, don't be too eager to scout the entire map. Unwelling enemy hotspots can sometimes be like shaking a bee's nest. You are basically saying "Hey, I'm nearby!" Until you build up your strength, it can actually be wiser to establish a small warning perimeter around your base, but not expand it too far. As long as you have already uncovered more resource centers than you are currently exploiting with mines and mills, there is no huge need to keep exploring!

THE WISE MAN BUILT HIS CASTLE ON THE MOUNTAIN

It's called the high ground, and you always want it. While you're way up there, you might as well build yourself a castle. Not only will it cement your hold on some prime real estate, but it will give your troops extra defense and can even act as a roadway across mountain ranges for your siege engines (allowing them to cross mountain tiles that they wouldn't have before). Building anything on high terrain is always a good idea.

HE WHO CONTROLS THE BRIDGE...

...controls troop movement on the map. Entire wars can be waged for control of a single bridge, and bridges can often become more vital to success than mere resources. Once you're entrenched on your bridge, the enemy will need a good plan and a sizeable army to take it from you. Of course, this works in reverse, as well.

ECONOMY FIRST

Most of the time, you'll want to focus early on improving your resource production. Get about three Villagers as soon as possible, so you can be cranking out mines, mills, and farms. Devote your food and gold to making ways to get more food and gold. The exceptions are times where you are under early attack (and need to build units to defend yourself), or when you have an early chance to press an attack on an opponent. If you are under early attack, don't get overzealous in building Villagers, or you won't have any cap room left for military units!

DON'T LOSE THE SPACE RACE

Try to research a Tech every turn if you can. Being at a more advanced Age than your opponent gives you the edge in nearly every combat situation, because you'll have access to better units. Sometimes you will be hesitant to research a Tech because you don't see any particular available one that fits your current needs. But remember - even buying a Tech you don't need is helpful, because it counts as one of the Tech prerequisites for advancing to the next Age!

Mod World

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

The Nameless Mod
<http://tmm.offtopicproductions.com>



This total conversion of Deus Ex: Invisible War puts players in a *Snow Crash*-esque 3D representation of a discussion forum, with a good helping of tongue-in-cheek humor. As such, invulnerable Moderators keep the peace and the laws of reality are only loosely enforced. The Nameless Mod promises an involving single-player mystery to solve, with plenty of action to keep things rolling. As of press time, the developers claimed that the mod was around 80 percent done, and are still looking for more voice talent - so feel free to record some samples and send them over!

DOOM 3

Classic Doom 3

<http://rdoom.d3files.com>

Quite simply, this is the first episode of *The Ultimate Doom*, *Knee Deep In The Dead* - except that it's in the Doom 3 engine. So instead of merely blowing up the hordes of the undead, you're blowing up detail-textured, bump-mapped, smoothly animated hordes of the undead. Sometimes something so simple can be genius, and anyone with fond memories of the nonstop action of old-school Doom would be well served with this download.

MAGIC: THE GATHERING ONLINE III

<http://www.wizards.com>



Though not technically a mod, and only partially free, *Magic: The Gathering Online* is nonetheless worth mentioning here. The upcoming relaunch of the game, which streamlines nearly every facet of play as well as updating the graphics, makes this a good time to give it a peep. Though you still have to buy virtual cards just like you'd purchase their physical counterparts, playing *Magic Online* is much like going to a gaming convention whenever you feel like it - except without the overpriced junk food.

Live Arcade Spotlight

Street Fighter II Hyper Fighting

We were excited this month to get the lowdown on a new classic title that should be showing up on Xbox Live Arcade soon. The fighting game that changed the arcade landscape is headed to the 360, as Street Fighter II Hyper Fighting. It's a port of a game many still consider one of the greatest fighters ever, now playable online across Xbox Live. All eight of the original characters are playable, along with the four major boss characters. Perhaps the coolest new feature is the Quarter Match. Through this, you'll be able to watch a match already in progress and put up your virtual quarter to call a game against the winner. Not only that, but highlighting a player's quarter pulls up their gamer tag data. Players can choose prior to a match whether they want to have the match count in their stats, so no one will have to fear trying out new characters or strategies. Finally, Hyper Fighting will include full voice chat options, so smack talking is certainly available if you want it. Throw in 5.1 surround sound and statistics for everything, from monthly point tallies to who plays which character best, and this new version of Street Fighter II could be the best one yet.



Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

XBOX 360



Fight Night Round 3

Enter the following code in the Create Champ mode as the first name of your boxer, then save the game.

Unlock All Venues - NEWVIEW

PLAYSTATION 2

Arena Football

Player Attributes Maxed Out - In Play Now mode, load a profile called IronMen

All the following codes must be entered at the line of scrimmage

Big Ball - Hold down L1 and Δ , then press Up (x2)

Reset Ball - Hold down L1 and Δ , then press Up, Down

Small Ball - Hold down L1 and Δ , then press Down (x2)

XBOX



Arena Football

Player Attributes Maxed Out - In Play Now mode, load a profile called IronMen

All the following codes must be entered at the line of scrimmage

Big Ball - Hold down L and Y, then press Up (x2)

Reset Ball - Hold down L and Y, then press Up, Down

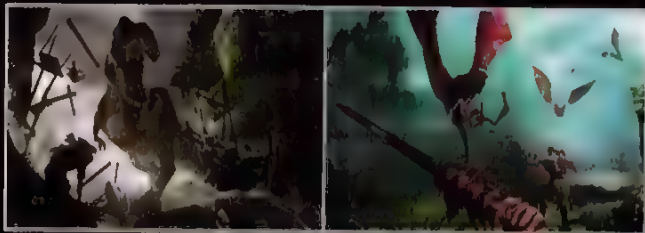
Small Ball - Hold down L and Y, then press Down (x2)

"GI Droid"

(location unknown - last seen running from a crashed Ferrari Enzo screaming "I am Dietrich!")

Code of the Month

King Kong



Whether you play as man or play as Kong, it sure can't hurt to have a little helping hand to stave off the endless hordes of dinosaurs, crabs, and those icky worm things that eat your head. That part in the movie really made us...uncomfortable. Anyway, cheat away!

Each system has a slightly different method of opening the cheat menu, but all the codes are the same. For each system, begin at the start screen. On **360**, hold down LB, RB, LT, and RT, then press Down, Up, Y, X, Down, Down, Y, Y, and release. On **PS2** hold down L1 and R1, then press Down, \square , Up, \square , Down, Down, Up, Up, and release. On **Xbox**, hold down L and R and press Down, X, Up, Y, Down, Down, Up, Up, and release. On **GameCube** hold L and

R then press Down, X, Up, Y, Down, Down, Up, Up, and release. In all cases, a new cheat option should appear on the menu.

999 Rounds - KK 999 mun

Infinite Spears - lance Inf

Invulnerability - @wonder

One Hit Deaths - GrosBras

Unlock All Chapters - KKst0ry (0 is numeric zero)

Unlock All Extras - KKmuseum

Weapon Becomes Bolt Action Rifle - KKsn1per

Weapon Becomes Handgun - KKtgun

Weapon Becomes Sub Machine Gun - KKcapone

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SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

VIDEO GAME WORLD RECORDS AND THE MAN WHO KEEPS THEM



Walter Day and Twin Galaxies have maintained records on gaming achievements for well over two decades



It's remarkable what a person can do when they set their mind to it.

Like any potentially competitive endeavor, video games didn't need to be alive very long before someone decided they needed to be the best at them. Particularly in those early days of classic arcade games, with endlessly climbing point values and seemingly limitless challenge, there were bound to be those who would devote themselves to perfection. The problem, of course, is who would keep track of it all. Someone would have to become an authority on that sort of thing, right? In the early '80s that somebody became Walter Day and a small arcade in Iowa called Twin Galaxies. "I became very excited about video games back in 1980 when I was an oil broker."

IS THAT POSSIBLE?

Just last year, Christopher Knight of Oregon shattered the established speed record for beating the original NES Metroid. His new record stands at 17 minutes, 22 seconds.



Day accompanied his business partner to a local arcade in Houston. For the first time since he had seen Pong years ago (he wasn't impressed), he began to play a video game. He was instantly hooked. "I got addicted to playing video games that night. Space Invaders became my destination wherever I went." At that time, Day found himself on the road constantly, making ends meet as a traveling salesman. Wherever he traveled, the first thing he would search out would be a local location for his new fascination. "I never got good at Space Invaders. But I loved doing it" Upon returning to his small home town in Iowa, it was with great surprise and not a little jealousy that Walter Day discovered that two of his closest friends had opened up arcades of their own. Wasting no time, Day set about to open his own coin-op entertainment center. In one of the great coups of all-time cool-sounding arcade parlour names, the name Twin Galaxies occurred to him, and the focus of his life for the next 25 years was confirmed. "I opened up Twin Galaxies in Ottumwa, Iowa

can't do this anymore! I've gotta go play Space Invaders." I said, "What's Space Invaders?" It was the early summer of 1980 when

as an excuse to play video games as much as I wanted."

The transition from arcade to international video game scorekeeper was perhaps the most casual you could imagine. "It all happened in one day. It took one half hour," Day reminisces. A local player early in 1982 at Twin Galaxies approached him and claimed he could beat a Defender score listed in a recent *Time Magazine* story on video games. Sure enough, the eager player did exactly that. Day decided to call the manufacturer of the game, Williams, for verification. The thing was that they had no idea what the high score on Defender was. He started calling electronics and gaming magazines, and they didn't know either. It seemed time for decisive action. Walter Day began calling companies - Midway, Atari, Nintendo; he made nine calls in half an hour. To each of them he claimed to be an official scorekeeper for video games, and any calls regarding

the subject could be sent on to him. "One of them asked, 'Who are you?' And I said: 'We're the Twin Galaxies National Scoreboard.' I made it up right then on the spot," Day adds, amused. "Twenty-five minutes later, a strange call came in from a boy in Tennessee wanting to know the record on Galaga." Walter's night watchman at the arcade had a higher score than the caller. "I said to him in a very solemn tone: You hold the second highest score in the world!" At which point the boy immediately hung up to go try again. The next day he called back with a newer, higher score. "Within a week we were getting

IS THAT POSSIBLE?

In 2004, Cam Allen set the new record for a full completion of Super Mario Bros. by finishing in 21 minutes, 33 seconds. Easy with warp pipes, right? Nope. Full completion meant he had to play every single level and he could only use a pipe when it was required to progress.





■ Many of the finest classic game players in the world share a lifelong passion for competition and self improvement

a dozen phone calls a day. Within a month we were getting around 40 phone calls a day. By the second month, we started getting calls from the media."

It was in this simple way that Twin Galaxies was catapulted into the gaming world spotlight. It wasn't long before Day got busy hosting national tournaments and accepting interviews for any and all stories that the press was covering on the intense video game boom of the early 1980's. A few months later, he became the first captain of the U.S. National Video Game Team, a cadre of the top players who began to travel to arcades around the country. Walter recalls the early days driving his team around the country, being thrown out of restaurants and hotels due to his rowdy players. He even opens his book on the golden age of video games by detailing a time when he awoke in the night to see two beds fly past his hotel window, only to be followed soon after by one of his players. Antics like these became par for the course. While Day continued his work in the states, the National Video Game Team continued to tour in the following years, even crossing the ocean to compete abroad.

Meanwhile, the arcade boom came to a crashing halt back in the U.S. As the masses faded away, and the media phone calls began to cease, Twin Galaxies National Scoreboard continued, as it would up until the present, eventually making the move onto the internet for all to see. The years passed, but strangely, hardcore players would continue to seek out the one source that could guarantee and document their gaming achievements. "Twin Galaxies

really is the elephant's graveyard of video game playing," Walter Day told us about his lifelong project. "When a video game comes out, there's this huge herd of video game players that are like a bunch of monkeys jumping from tree to tree. They jump from game to game, and if a game is

lucky enough to attract the attention of the herd, the publisher makes a fortune. It's a very fickle group. But after three months, they move on to something else." But, he notes, a devoted group of players usually remains – the people who really

love that game. And those players often eventually find their way to Twin Galaxies. "When those games drop out of the marketing cycle, the manufacturers don't care about them anymore. Twin Galaxies is there for all those games, which is really 99 percent of the games that have ever

come out. Only a small percentage of games are still in that herd. Every single person eventually becomes a retro gamer, because they start to grow tired of being part of the herd."

One of those gamers is Tom Duncan.

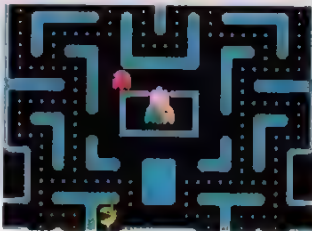
Easily one of the most prolific players that has been a part of the site over the years, Duncan is currently listed as holding 1,191 unique world records in any variety of different game styles. From Mario Bros. to Pole Position to Burger Time and hundreds of others, he has spent years amassing an array of classic gaming achievements. Frequently focusing on one game at a time, he'll play non-stop to beat a record, and then often return just to conquer his own score. In our conversation with him, he rattles off a stream of titles he has recently mastered. "I play every day. Any time I sit down in front of the TV to

IS THAT POSSIBLE?

Croatian player Domagoj Broz established the high score mark in the Warehouse level of the original Tony Hawk Pro Skater on PSone. His score of 1,943,543 has been the standard since August of 2002

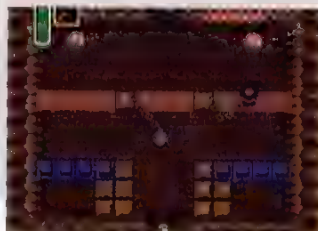
IS THAT POSSIBLE?

The world record in Ms. Pac-Man is held by Abdner Ashman, who achieved a top score of 921,360 in 2005. The previous record of 920,310 (1,050 points lower) held for over 4 years after being established by Chns Ayra



IS THAT POSSIBLE?

Rodrigo Lopes only recently reset the speed record on The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past with a completion time of one hour, 36 minutes, 43 seconds. That's from the moment he hit start until the second that Ganon was struck down. By the way, he couldn't die along the way.



Twin Galaxies Announces the

1000th World Record

Tom Duncan
New world record

■ Tom Duncan's remarkable tally of records continues to climb towards his new goal of 1,500

CGS&N and Twin Galaxies Present

Billy Mitchell Live at the CGE UK

August 13, 2005

Billy Mitchell
New world record

■ Billy Mitchell is one of the most well-known names in classic gaming, thanks largely to his remarkable achievements in Pac-Man

Twin Galaxies is announcing

KELLY THARP vs. Q*Bert

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Kelly Tharp
New world record

■ Just before going to print, Kelly Tharp challenged the Q*Bert world record, playing for a full 44 hours. His final score is currently being verified

Twin Galaxies Announces the

U.S. National Video Game Team

LEARN TRYOUTS

November 12-19, 2005

Tom Duncan
New world record

■ Even now, Twin Galaxies is restarting the U.S. National Video Game Team, with plans for competition to begin this summer

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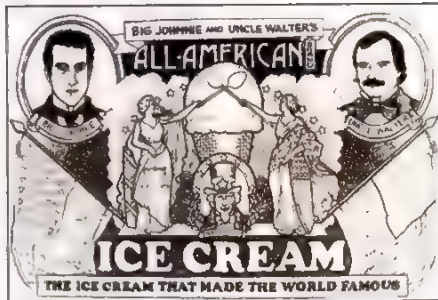
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play, I automatically turn my VCR on to record anything that happens. You never know when you're going to have that one special run or you're going to do something amazing." He recalls a time he worked on Pole Position for eight hours straight. For hours, the established record sat only 50 or 60 points beyond his reach. Then, in a single playthrough, he beat the score by 1,200 points. His resolve to overcome these seemingly simple but ultimately excruciating challenges seems boundless. It's a commitment he's had for almost as long as Walter Day has been around to record his scores, tracing back to the early '80s. "I like to compete. I think it's great that anyone around the world can log on to the website and see where they rate internationally." For Duncan, he only submits a score when he thinks it's his best – a pinnacle that anyone else would truly have to work at to defeat. "I'm definitely not saying any of my



■ Twin Galaxies Arcade originally sold their own special brand of ice cream. Walter Day amusingly tells us now that their "All-American Ice Cream" was simply bought somewhere else and resold at the arcade

IS THAT POSSIBLE?

Matthew J Baker somehow managed to reach the end credits of Grand Theft Auto Vice City in three hours and 59 minutes back in July of 2003. Do you recall how many weeks it took you?



scores are unbeatable. I feel like, if I can get them, then anyone can." Duncan's big goal these days? He's striving towards the 1,500 world record mark.

Other players have equally long histories with Twin Galaxies. Canadian Greg Sakundiak started attending gaming events as a teenager back in the '80s. Sakundiak currently holds the world record in games including Dragon's Lair, Tag Team Wrestling, and Twin Cobra. Interestingly, it was a departure from the gaming world in the 1990s that brought Sakundiak to another of his passions – arm wrestling. Taking up the competitive sport, he rapidly advanced through the ranks to become Canadian champion and take fourth place in the world. It exhibits a quality that many of these world class gamers seem to share. "I'm a competitor. I try to be the best at what I do,"

IS THAT POSSIBLE?

For the recent entry in the long running rhythm game, Dance Dance Revolution, Extreme (8th Mix) Luke C. Wiebe accumulated a score of 341,833,530 points in one three-song game. No hands were allowed on the pad.

Sakundiak tells us. After a rib injury several years ago, Sakundiak once more finds himself returning to the competitive gaming world. As his most recent project, he completely renovated and rebuilt an original Pac-Man machine, and is now studying patterns as he works towards the goal

IS THAT POSSIBLE?

Twin Galaxies maintains several empty slots for the fastest level completion of each of the original Halo levels on Legendary difficulty. As of now, no one has submitted completion times. We just thought you should know.



of being the sixth person ever to play the perfect Pac-Man game. "Humans are easy to figure out. They're very predictable. A computer, meanwhile, they're a little bit more complex," Sakundiak tells us as he compares the two competitive sports. As a world class competitor against both electronic and

thinking human opponents, his comments come as a surprise. "You have to work a lot harder to master a video game than to beat a human opponent."

Walter Day has followed gamers like Sakundiak and Duncan for years, serving as a vital link in the pastime to which they devote immense amounts of time, and they have nothing but positive things to say about the organization that has tracked their achievements for so long. For Day's part, he's developed an almost poetic bent on understanding the players he's

chronicled for so long. "There are some qualities that really separate the men from the boys in terms of video game success," he tells us. "The impulses of desire and direction – thought and intention – they all have to make it through your body and out through the movement of your hands. You can't have dampers that stop the impulses of your mind from manifesting in your hand. But more than that, you have to have very deep, creative, comprehensive thinking. Maybe you'd even call it intuition. You have to have something that lets you perceive the game differently than the next person."

Over the years, Twin Galaxies has grown and expanded. Far more than an arrival point for long-time classic arcade players, the site constantly updates with records from any new game they receive info on, while continuing to receive new record challenges to even the most ancient titles. "Newer games are more dramatic than ever. Older games, because they didn't have the benefit of today's technology and graphics, they had to be richer in their gameplay," Day explains. They had to intoxicate the person just with the incredible genius and strategy of the gameplay." Day is fascinated by the unique way that gaming has to bring people together, and loves that he can help facilitate it. "Today, there's a huge element of socialization in games," he explains in relation to today's MMOs and team-based shooters. "It's really the grandson of the socialization

IS THAT POSSIBLE?

For over 20 years no one has been able to challenge James Vollandt's arcade Joust score of 107,216,700. His marathon game was verified on July 8th of 1985.



that was in the arcade 25 years ago." There's a continued hope that Twin Galaxies can be a service that reaches those new audiences as well as those who remember the dim flash-lit parlours of the '80s. Even now, Day is compiling the second volume of his world record book. Twin Galaxies is also attempting to reorganize the U.S. National Video Game Team, which Day hopes to expand into a nationwide league of play for current generation consoles, with competitions starting this summer. It is those plans that show Twin Galaxies' long history still has a mighty future ahead. "I like to think the history of Twin Galaxies is closely allied with the history of electronic games," Walter muses as we conclude our conversation. "Myself, I just love the competition, and the fun of the games." ■ ■ ■ ■



For more information on Twin Galaxies, visit their website at www.twingalaxies.com, or pick up a copy of the book: 'Twin Galaxies' Official Video Game & Pinball Book of World Records

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

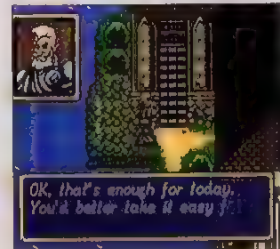
By Nick Nonziata, creator of CHUD.com and producer for 2007's MEG from New Line Cinema



THE SHINING FORCE SERIES

> FORMAT SEGA GENESIS, SEGA CD, SEGA SATURN
> PUBLISHER SEGA

Take your Zelda and its arcade-style combat, and the fun but monotonous battle systems that the (admittedly great) Phantasy Star and Final Fantasy games employ. They're yours, and the fact that they get all the marketing hype and love of mainstream fanboys is why they'll be your little brother's, too. Me, I'll take the Shining Force series every day of the week and twice on Sunday – especially the games in the series released for the Sega Genesis and Saturn.



Of them all, Shining Force II reigns as the big bad boy on the block, thanks to its size and confidence. Sure, there's no Yogurt character and his magical ring does absolutely nothing, but the joy of finishing one of those epic turn-based and strategy laden battles is a truly special feeling that no amount of flashy graphics can match. As a child of the PC "Gold Box" D&D games and classics like X-COM and Jagged Alliance, Shining Force II took me to the consoles with something richer and more mature to spend my time playing – role-playing and strategy interwoven in a way that still informs some of the best games in the current marketplace. I think



we wouldn't be seeing so many games with "tactics" at the end were it not for this little gem of a series. We're still seeing Shining Force games, but it's not the same when you lose the turn-based combat. The Achilles heel of the video game industry, in the mind of this hardcore gamer, since the Atari 2600 first saw shelves is that it always feels it has to push the envelope and never revisit familiar places kept buoyant by old-fashioned good game design and addictive gameplay, something that may see a reversal thanks to things like Xbox Live Arcade. At the end of the day I look to the other franchises as really tasty milkshakes, but when I want a nice full bodied pinot noir, it's Shining Force all the way, baby.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

In April 2000 the American Psychological Association's Journal of Personality and Social Psychology published two studies on the effects of video game violence. Together, they seemed to indicate that games like Doom and Mortal Kombat tend to increase a person's aggressive thoughts and feelings. The studies reignited the heated dialogue that continues today regarding the value and dangers of interactive entertainment.



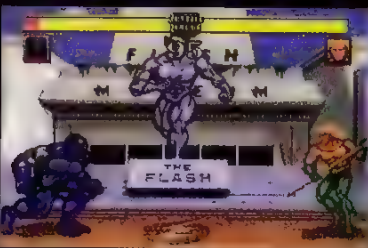


SEGA GENESIS

JUSTICE LEAGUE TASK FORCE

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER ACCLAIM > DEVELOPER SUNSOFT > RELEASE 1995

Like the super-mullet that Superman rocks in this game, Justice League Task Force is a moment in DC Comics history that fans would like to forget. The team's only console game appearance until the arrival of Warner Brothers Interactive's upcoming Justice League Heroes action/RPG (see pg. 68), Task Force is one of the lame 3D fighters that emerged in the wake of Street Fighter II's popularity. This game is probably to blame for the fact that the JLA hasn't starred in more games, because it sucks more than Jason Todd as Robin. A bare-bones story pits the Justice League against each other and three villains: Darkseid, Despero, and Cheetah. Although there is a good thrill in fighting as Aquaman, the balancing between the characters is as broken as the Electric Blue Superman storyline. Combined with an uninspired fighting engine, cheap AI, and a small character roster, Justice League Task Force is so shameful that not even the combined might of Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman can defeat this game's overwhelming wretchedness.



SEGA GENESIS

DESERT STRIKE: RETURN TO THE GULF

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER VISUAL CONCEPTS > RELEASE 1992

This early effort from Visual Concepts had some remarkably smart and innovative gameplay when it first released. While the years have taken away its innovation, the intelligent and challenging design remains. As a helicopter pilot in a fictitious Middle Eastern war, you'll navigate a stark desert landscape, fulfilling a wide variety of mission objectives and blowing up pretty much anything within missile range. The game included all sorts of interesting personalization options, including three unique control schemes and multiple co-pilots, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Each campaign takes careful planning as you juggle fuel and weapon supplies, rescuing POWs, and finding the most efficient path to victory. Objectives are often interconnected, such that taking out a radar dish might make for an easier trip past the AA guns. Gun targeting problems and lackluster backgrounds could be said to hurt the game, but Desert Strike and its two sequels (Jungle Strike and Urban Strike) might surprise you with their complexity.



GAME BOY COLOR

PERFECT DARK

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER RARE > RELEASE 2000

Perfect Dark on the Game Boy Color is an astounding failure. Anyone who thinks that Rare's tendency to under-deliver is only a recent trend need look no further than this hilariously awful title released during the company's N64 heyday. Even with some decent animation and digitized voice (remember when that was impressive?), this game barely manages to keep it together long enough to be playable. Aiming is sloppy, stealth is impossible, and the pointless minigames clutter the already-disastrous gameplay like turds in a minefield. And what's up with the portrait of Joanna in the upper right? It looks like she woke up at a gas station with her face in an ashtray. On the bright side, even if it fails as a game, Perfect Dark may work as an IQ test in a pinch. Just start at the number 80 and count down one number for every second the subject keeps playing. When they stop, record the number and divide by two, and there you have it! Trust us, anyone who even turns this game on wouldn't score higher than 40 on a real IQ test, anyway.





GAMEOVER

You Are Dead

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

It's the April issue, which means you are practically legally obligated to play hilarious jokes on people all month. The world of gaming is ripe for mischievous hijinks, so answer these questions to find out which classic prank you get to dish out this joyous foolin' season.

1 Which of the following godly names can NOT be found in the divine chaos of Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict?

- A. Raiden
- B. Anubis
- C. Apophis
- D. Osiris

2 True or False: The pictures and art by trivia questions will always correspond to the correct answer.

- A. True
- B. False



3 Even though it lost the NFL license, Midway managed to cram some creative teams into Blitz: The League. Which one of these teams is an actual opponent in the over-the-top football title?

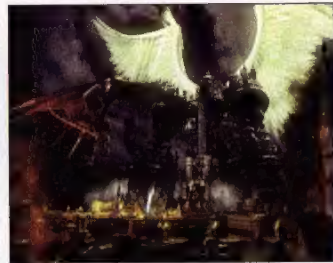
- A. Cincinnati Coonhounds
- B. Moscow Peelers
- C. Dallas Aztecs
- D. Carolina Anvils

4 Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner may have featured a new main character (who names their kid "Dingo?"), but it had a cameo appearance from which familiar icon from another Konami franchise?

- A. Goemon
- B. Metal Gear
- C. Vic Viper
- D. Those guys from Contra

5 Who would win in a fight: Bahamut or Alexander?

- A. Bahamut
- B. Alexander



6 In the special edition of Devil May Cry 3, Nelo Angelo is unlockable as a devil trigger form of Vergil. How can you play as this demonic powerhouse?

- A. Clear Hard Mode as Vergil
- B. Clear Easy or Normal Mode without using recovery items
- C. Defeat the final boss (on any difficulty) without getting hit
- D. Rotate the analog stick clockwise 100 times, then press X, like, super-fast



7 These days Visual Concepts is known for its sports savvy, but back in the 16-bit era the studio developed which of these fighting titles?

- A. Clay Fighter
- B. WeaponLord
- C. Toughman Contest
- D. All of the above

8 Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life is undeniably the best console farm simulator. Which of these lovable animals will never be an addition to your developing virtual homestead?

- A. Goat
- B. Horse
- C. Hen
- D. Pig

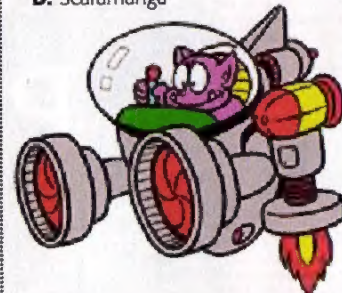


9 You're not anyone until you've been on the cover of Game Informer! By this logic, one of these "celebrities" isn't actually famous at all. Who is it?

- A. Hugh Jackman
- B. Sean Connery
- C. Ben Affleck
- D. Tony Hawk

10 Move over, Bowser! This main villain from Super Mario Land for the Game Boy will forever be remembered as Mario's true nemesis! What was his name again?

- A. Tahrongi
- B. Tatanga
- C. Charmagus
- D. Scaramanga



BREAKDOWN

850,000 is the approximate number of Xbox 360 units sold through January in North America, which is 849,987 more than in Japan. Probably.

100% of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle-themed spam e-mail we receive features Shredder and April in compromising positions. They must be married!

27% of respondents in a recent Japanese survey said that even though they already own a DS, they plan to purchase the DS Lite. Wow! Four screens!

7 Number of awards won by God of War at the 9th Annual Interactive Achievement Awards.

0% of the people in roller rinks today are cool, regardless of how tubular they were in the '70s.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1

Replace copies of Devil May Cry 1 & 3 with DMC 2



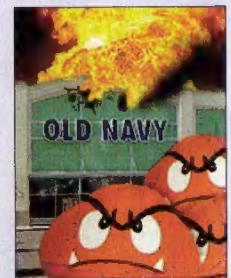
2-3

Overwrite memory cards entirely with RTX Red Rock saves



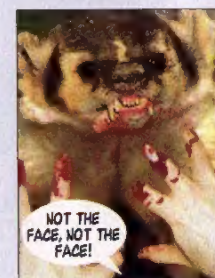
4-5

Cut the brakes on the GT4 steering wheel



6-7

Release rabid Goombas in Old Navy



8-9

Swap Xbox 360 controller with a badger



10

Just shove people over and yell "I'm Samus!"

Game Informer Magazine® (ISSN 1067-6392) is published monthly at a subscription price of \$19.98 per year, or twenty four issues for \$24.98 by Sunrise Publications®, 724 North First Street, 4th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. (612) 486-6100 or FAX (612) 486-6101. For subscriptions, back issues, or customer service inquiries Toll Free (866) 844-4263. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing offices. SUBSCRIBERS/POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Game Informer Magazine®, 724 North First Street, 4th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. Foreign or Canadian orders must be prepaid in U.S. dollars and must include \$20/year additional postage per year. Game Informer® does not claim any copyright in the screenshots herein. Copyright in all screenshots contained within this publication are owned by their respective companies. Entire contents copyright 2006. Game Informer Magazine®. All rights reserved; reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Game Informer® is a trademark of GameStop. Products named in these pages are trade names, or trademarks, of their respective companies.



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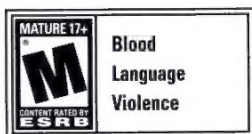


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