WORLD EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON WITH THE NINTENDO REVOLUTION

GAMEINFORMER

THE WORLD'S #1 COMPUTER & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

RED STEEL

Ubisoft Breaks The Silence
On The Nintendo Revolution

www.gameinformer.com ISSUE 157
US $5.99 | EUR €5.99 | UK £3.99
05
7 20150 85070 5
MAY 2006

Super Tail Action!

Move over, mullet! You are no longer the undisputed king of stylish tail technology! Mullet, it's time to pass the torch to the all-new Fit Sport with sleek body design and aerodynamic rear roofline spoiler!

Super style meets super substance! Fit is loaded with enjoyable driving technology! Steering wheel-mounted paddle shifters*! 6-speaker audio with iPod® integration†! Blue illuminated gauges! Mullet loses again!

Fit is all business when it comes to safety! Standard front, side and side curtain airbags are your driving companions! Standard anti-lock brakes accompany you everywhere! Mullet has no answer!

The Fit is Go!

Fit

New from Honda Ignition time! Thrust onto the rolling blacktop! Feel the quiet roar of the vigorous 1.5-liter VTEC® engine! Swift, stylish mover with satisfying efficiency! 38 mpg** on the freeway...Super Pump Beater! Cargo time? The roomy 5-door, 5-passenger Fit with 60/40 split 2nd-row Magic Seat® brings the versatility! Hatchback attack!

fit.honda.com

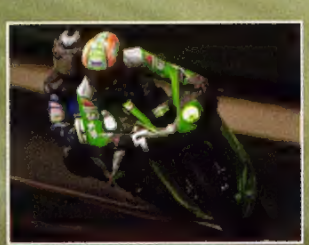
*Fit Sport with 5AT only. †Available accessory. Apple and iPod are registered trademarks of Apple Computer Inc. **Fit with MT. Based on 2007 EPA mileage estimates. Use for comparison purposes only. Actual mileage may vary. 1-800-33-Honda ©2006 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

Take a knee.

Bow to no one.

Tourist Trophy™

THE REAL RIDING SIMULATOR



Tourist Trophy The Real Riding Simulator is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. ©2006 Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All manufacturers, motorbikes, names, brands and associated imagery featured in this game or endorsement of this game by such party or parties. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "Live In Your World. Play In Ours." is a registered trademark of Sony

From the makers of Gran Turismo™ comes Tourist Trophy, the most realistic motorcycle simulator ever created. Featuring over 35 real-life and fantasy courses, customizable riding gear, and over 100 licensed sport bikes and graphics that truly capture the fluid movement of man and machine. So zip up the leathers and open up the throttle. Nothing gets you closer to the action than Tourist Trophy.

www.touristtrophy-thegame.com

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

POLYPHONY DIGITAL

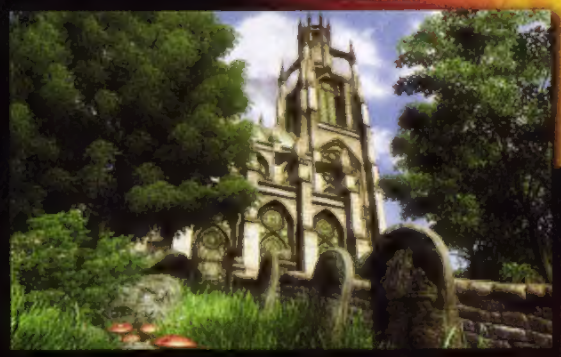
PlayStation 2

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD
PLAY IN URS.

are trademarks and/or copyrighted materials of their respective owners. All rights reserved. Any depiction or recreation of real world locations, entities, businesses or organizations is not intended to be or imply any sponsorship Computer Entertainment America Inc.

(c) 2006 IO Interactive A/S. Hitman, Hitman: Blood Money, Eidos and the Eidos logo are trademarks of the SCi Entertainment Group. IO and the IO logo are trademarks of IO Interactive A/S. All rights reserved. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox Live, the Live logo, and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or in other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. The rating icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.

CLASSICALLY EXECUTED
COMING SOON
HITMAN
BLOOD MONEY
www.HitmanBloodMoney.com
eidos



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

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

PC SOFTWARE

XBOX 360™

BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS

Bethesda SOFTWORKS a ZeniMax Media company

2K GAMES

The Elder Scrolls® IV: Oblivion™ © 2005 Bethesda Softworks LLC, a ZeniMax Media company. The Elder Scrolls, Oblivion, Oblivion character and place names, Bethesda Game Studios, Bethesda Softworks, ZeniMax and their related logos are registered trademarks or trademarks of ZeniMax Media Inc. 2K Games and the 2K Games logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries and are used under license from owner. All Rights Reserved.

CONTENTS

The "Revolution Will Be Printed In Magazines" Issue

cover story

44 RED STEEL

The Revolution is not just for kids. Ubisoft confessed everything to us regarding the company's upcoming launch title for Nintendo's next console. We take you through how the Revolution's unconventional motion-sensing controller will change the face of gaming through this Yakuza-based thriller.

features

58

FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

From the creators of the fantastic Desert Combat mod for Battlefield 1942 comes a challenge to the series that they started with. We blow the doors open on this Unreal Engine 3-powered online shooter and why it's worth waiting for.

64

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

Join us for an exclusive first look at the future of the X-Men Legends series. Appearing on next-gen systems as well as current platforms, Raven Software has big plans for this super-sized beat 'em up.

departments

10 STAFF
Read the team's latest favorites

12 GI SPY
Silly pictures of our life and times

14 DEAR GI
Your chance to fire back at us!

18 CONNECT
Where news, talk, and technology collide

34 INTERVIEW
Greg Richardson, VP of commercial operations for BioWare-Pandemic/Elevation Partners explains the reasoning behind and the benefits of the recent merger

38 GEAR
Geeky gadget stuff for the masses

40 OPINION
I Am 8-Bit mastermind Jon Gibson muses on the relative merits of video games as an art form

42 CALENDAR
Get hip to this month's happenings

70 PREVIEWS
Finally, news about Final Fantasy XII! Tons of next-gen hotness awaits as well, with new installments in the Rainbow Six and WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw franchises

90 REVIEWS
Game of the Month: The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion for Xbox 360 and PC

114 CHARTS
Retail Sales Data and the GI editors' Top 10 Games

116 SECRET ACCESS
Codes, strategies, and passwords

120 CLASSIC GI
Reliving gaming's greatest moments

122 GAME OVER
The end...or is it?

game index

GAME	PAGE #
Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War	102
AutoAssault	86
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	94
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	88
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	111
Driver: Parallel Lines	98
Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach	108
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	98
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, The	92
Field Commander	113
Final Fantasy XII	70
From Russia With Love	113
Gangs of London	84
Generation of Chaos	111
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	106
Godfather: The Game, The	99
Gods & Heroes	89
Guilty Gear: Dust Strikers	113
Gun Showdown	84
Me and My Katamari	112
Metal Saga	101
Metroid Prime: Hunters	111
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix	97
Mortal Kombat Unchained	89
MX Vs. ATV: On The Edge	110
Over G Fighters	88
Rainbow Six: Vegas	74
Rampage: Total Destruction	97
Rumble Roses XX	104
Samurai Champloo: Sidetracked	101
Samurai Warriors: State of War	111
Soul of the Ultimate Nation	89
Splinter Cell Essentials	112
Steambot Chronicles	101
Suikoden V	101
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	110
Table Tennis	79
Tomb Raider: Legend	96
Top Spin 2	104
Tourist Trophy: The Real Riding Simulator	100
Unreal Tournament 2007	78
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom	76
Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	110
Viva Piñata	81
Warhammer Online	80
WarPath	98
Worms: Open Warfare	113
WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw 2007	72

SMASH THE COMPETITION

THE #1 TENNIS GAME ON THE XBOX® video game system is back and better than ever! Play as, or against, 24 of the world's hottest pros—Sharapova, Williams, Roddick, Federer, Hewitt, and many more—or create your own custom character. Take the court online with more strokes and shot control than ever before for the ultimate tennis experience anywhere!

In Stores Now, $39.99 – Xbox 360!

www.topspin2.com

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

NINTENDO DS.

XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE

GAME BOY ADVANCE

2K SPORTS

© 2006 Take-Two Interactive Software and its subsidiaries. All rights reserved. Top Spin, 2K Sports, the 2K Sports logo, and Take-Two Interactive Software are all trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox Live, the Xbox logos, and the Xbox Live logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. ™, ®, Game Boy Advance and Nintendo DS are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2004 Nintendo. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other marks and trademarks are the properties of their respective owners.

STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

VIVA LA REVOLUTION!

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

First off, I can't say how proud I am to present this issue to you all. Getting an opportunity to show the first Revolution game to the world is quite an honor. Nintendo normally saves these types of unveilings for its giant, worldwide press conferences, so I wanted to at least pass along my joy and excitement over the opportunity to bring you Ubisoft's newest game, Red Steel.

But there are more important things happening here than just a huge cover story. I think this shows that Nintendo is serious about this console generation. So much so that it's changing the way it deals not only with us, but with its third parties as well. And this change is for the better.

I will admit, when Nintendo first showed the Revolution controller last year, I laughed out loud at the absurdity of the whole thing. I mean, come on. A tiny remote is a revolution? But I'm not too proud to eat my own words. Nintendo is on to something here. And if it can garner third-party support and truly change the way games are played, this Revolution will do more than make Nintendo a lot more money for it to store in its vaults. It could change the very way all games are played now and forever.

A bold statement to be sure, but after spending some time with the Revolution and Katana, I can see how this thing could not only work, but blow up and change the entire face of the video game industry.

I think everyone knows of the mindshare and power that PlayStation holds over the market and the industry, and that may not change with this next generation of game machines. I know most people believed Sony's biggest challenger would be Microsoft, myself included, but I think there might be more to Nintendo than meets the eye.

Nintendo has gone from a dark horse to a serious competitor in my mind, and I can't wait to see how the rest of the world reacts to the Revolution.

Because like any revolution, it can either upend society as we know it, or be squashed under the power of the ruling class.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

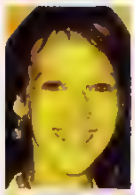
Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (Thank You, Square! Now Get Cracking On A Final Fantasy III Movie), Nintendo Revolution (Wild Arm-Swinging For The Win!), The Return Of *Dr. Who*, Mixing Cheetos With Red Peppers (Tons Of Toilet Paper Required) **Dislikes:** Gamers Using Performance Enhancers, The Expensive Holiday Ahead (Are You Saving For PS3, Revolution, Or Both?) **Current Favorite Games:** Tomb Raider: Legend, Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Final Fantasy XII

Matt >> *matt@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Malachi Constant – *Pride*, *The New World*, Parker's Farm Peanut Butter (In Comparison, Jif Tastes Like Rhino Diarrhea), New Mexico **Dislikes:** My Dog's Paranoia (That Was The Furnace Turning On, Not An Intruder!), Lack Of Creativity In Game Design **Current Favorite Games:** Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror, Fight Night Round 3, Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix, Top Spin 2

Kato >> *kato@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Hockey Goalie Fights, The Absolutely Filthy Mind Of Bob Saget, Making My Own Draft Board, The Triangle Of Authority, Culver's, The Nintendo DS Lite **Dislikes:** Daunte Culpepper's Attempt To Hold The Vikings Hostage (Go Pout Somewhere Else. See Ya!), Street Hassle, MySpace (Disco Stu Doesn't Advertise – Unless It's In An Interests And Dislikes Column!) **Current Favorite Games:** Table Tennis, Tounst Trophy, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix, Fight Night Round 3



Lisa >> *lisa@gameinformer.com*

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Survival Horror, Adventure, RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing **Interests:** *Ultimate Sandman* (Which Is Hopefully Awesome), Tim Gunn, A New Dog, Natalie Portman On SNL, Re-Playing Final Fantasy VII **Dislikes:** Not Getting *Good Eats* Seasons On DVD (Food TV Jerks Holding Out On Us), Some Minor New Dog Angst, Low Quality Graffiti **Current Favorite Games:** Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Table Tennis, Tomb Raider. Legend, Jewel Quest, World Of Warcraft

Jeremy >> *jeremy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Platform, Fighting, Strategy/RPGs **Interests:** Playing The Revolution, Visiting The Eiffel Tower, Surviving A French Student Riot, *V For Vendetta*, Basement Remodeling, *New York Doll*, Choscar **Dislikes:** French Hotel Rooms (Where's My Alarm Clock?), MySpace, Losing The Oscar Samurai Competition (Congrats. Next Year I Will Have Revenge! Bwahaha!) **Current Favorite Games:** Red Steel, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, GRAW, Fight Night Round 3, Burnout Revenge, Geometry Wars

Adam >> *adam@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Meeting New Awesome People Online (Especially When They Make My Mage New Equipment), Deliberately Mispronouncing Names To Cause Mischief, Revisiting Classic Games **Dislikes:** Finding Out That My Old Favorite Games Don't Hold Up Very Well, Ripping Nails (Yes, It Happens To Guys Too), Cleaning My Apartment, Noobs, Haxxorz, Vagrant Story **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Super Princess Peach, Metroid Prime

Joe >> *joe@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** The Dark Brotherhood, Watching A Legal Version Of *Advent Children*, Finally Seeing The End Of *Six Feet Under*, Inch Thick Strategy Guides **Dislikes:** Mena Suvari As Aeris, Adam's Persistent Vagrant Story Hate, Felwood (Yay, Another Forest), Playing Games In Japanese That I Can't Play In English For Six Months **Current Favorite Games:** The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Final Fantasy XII, Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence, World Of Warcraft, Vagrant Story, Mega Man 2

Miller >> *miller@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Liking The Series *Firefly* More Than The Movie *Serenity*, Finally Getting To See *Advent Children*, Snowmobiling Snowball Jousting, People Who Think Articles Are April Fool's Jokes When They're Not **Dislikes:** The Sweeping Scourge That Is A Loved One's *Gilmore Girls* Addiction, Missing Lunch, The Cost Of Awesome Toys **Current Favorite Games:** The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Fight Night Round 3, Super Princess Peach, Tomb Raider: Legend, D&D Online: Stormreach, Marvel: Ultimate Alliance

Andy >> *andy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Building A Home Network The Likes Of Which The World Has Never Seen, E3 Planning **Dislikes:** Getting Destroyed In My NCAA Tournament Pools, That TiVo's Amazingly Simple Interface Isn't The Standard For All TV Viewing (Please License Your Tech To Time Warner For Pete's Sake) **Current Favorite Games:** Metroid Prime: Hunters, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Field Commander, World Of Warcraft

UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAME INFORMER UNLIMITED

When you see this logo on a game preview, review, or feature, you can learn more about it by heading to www.gameinformer.com and clicking on the Unlimited logo. There are tons of other bonuses there (including movies, interviews, and screenshots) exclusively for Game Informer subscribers, so even if a game you like doesn't have the logo in the magazine, there is a good chance you can still learn more online.

GAME INFORMER

MAY 2006
Volume XVI • Number 5 • Issue 157

PUBLISHER
Cathy Preston

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Andrew McNamara

EDITORS
Executive Editor Andrew Reiner
Senior Editor Matt Helgeson
Senior Associate Editor Matthew Kato
Associate Editors
Lisa Mason • Jeremy Zoss
Adam Biessener • Joe Juba • Matt Miller
Mascot Arthur

PRODUCTION
Art Director Thomas Blustin
Production Director Curtis Fung
Production Assistant Rachel Nimerfroh

CONTRIBUTORS
Photographer John Green

GAME INFORMER ONLINE
Managing Online Editor Billy Berghammer
Associate Online Editor Bryan Vore
Online Production Assistant Nick Ahrens

ADVERTISING SALES

SAN FRANCISCO
Doug Faust
Vice President Advertising Sales
(650) 728-5647 • Fax (650) 728-5648
doug@gameinformer.com

LOS ANGELES
Damon Watson
Regional Sales Director
(925) 287-8837 • Fax (925) 287-1397
damon@gameinformer.com

MINNEAPOLIS
Rob Born
Director of Marketing and Midwest/East Coast Sales Manager
(612) 486-6155 • Fax (612) 486-6101
rob@gameinformer.com

EAST COAST
Suzanne Lang
East Coast Consumer Sales Director
(718) 832-5575 • Fax: (718) 832-5589
suzanne@gameinformer.com

MINNEAPOLIS
Amy Arnold
Advertising Coordinator and Online Sales
(612) 486-6154 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
amy@gameinformer.com

Matt Edgar
Advertising Assistant
(612) 486-6152 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
mattedgar@gameinformer.com

CIRCULATION
CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT

For change of address or subscription inquiry ONLY:
Toll Free: **1 (866) 844-GAME (4263)**

Fax: **(612) 486-6101**
Email: **customerservice@gameinformer.com**
Or send correspondence to
724 North First St., 4th Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55401 • Attn: CIS Dept

Circulation Manager
Paul Anderson • (612) 486-6104
paul@gameinformer.com

Information Systems Manager
Paul Hedgpeth
paulhedgpeth@gameinformer.com

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 GameStop, 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 republication of the advertisement in any subsequent issue or the refund of any monies paid for the advertisement. INDEMNIFICATION 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.

Member Audit Bureau of Circulations

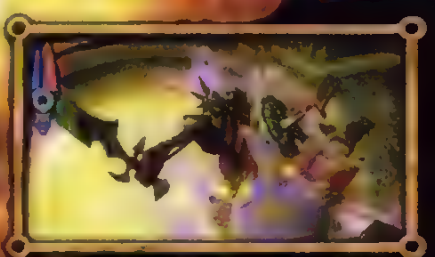
What Dark Beast Lurks Within You?

The SEQUEL to the
#1 ACTION RPG
on the PSP™ system*

UNTOLD LEGENDS
THE WARRIOR'S CODE

Immerse yourself in an epic storyline brought to life through dramatic in-game cinematics and voiceovers.

Experience an enhanced 3D game engine that takes graphics, SFX and lighting to a stunning new level of quality and detail.



Hack, slash and morph your way through the game with the help of the superior combat system.

Pre-order now at www.untoldlegends.com

TEEN
T
Animated Blood
Fantasy Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
Game experience may change during online play.

PSP PlayStation Portable

SOE SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

Untold Legends™ The Warrior's Code™ © 2006 Sony Online Entertainment. SOE and the SOE logo are registered trademarks and Untold Legends and The Warrior's Code are trademarks of Sony Online Entertainment Inc. "PSP" is a trademark and "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Memory Stick Duo™ may be required (sold separately). *Based on data from NPD group.

GI SPY

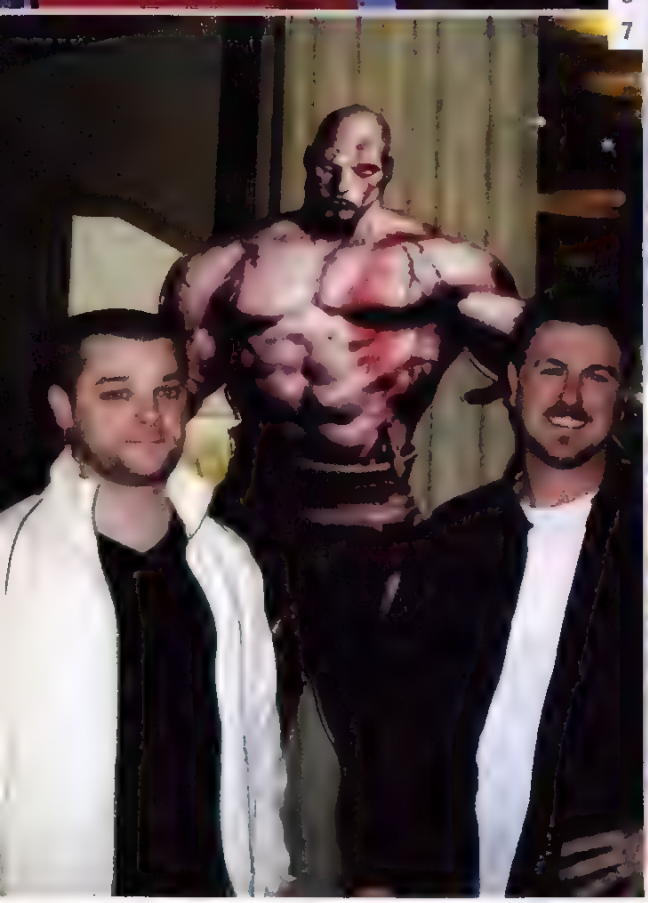
Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry

1

2

3

4



5

6

7

8

1 GI Online's Billy Berghammer sings his heart out in his one-man show, *Mars Ain't The Kind of Place To Raise Your Kids: A Musical Tribute To Elton John* (not pictured. Billy's giant sunglasses) **2** Miller and Raven's Dan Vondrak and Brian Raffel tend to the needs of the company's CEO, Creepy McDeadbird **3** Andy pays a visit to Kaos Studios, who are working on a top-secret new project. It's so secret that, after this photo was taken, they performed a memory wipe on Andy (and took his wallet!) **4** Adam hangs with Kohnke Comm's Eddimae Jukes and Destin Bales and Steve Perkins of Mythic Entertainment **5** Rock legend Eddie Money gives Fiona Silk of Mind Candy (makers of Perplex City) and Sandbox Strategies' Corey Wade two tickets to paradise at Toy Fair **6** Andy poses with the man who will someday steal his job, Henry Cao, who won Verizon's GI "Editor for a Day" contest. Henry is a good dude **7** Cory Barlog and Steve Caterson of Sony Santa Monica Studios, seen here plotting a brutal future for Kratos **8** Ubisoft's Roman Campos Oriola, Nicolas Eypert, Damien Moret, and Michael Beadle demonstrate their weapons skills

ALL THE ACTION. ALL THE FUN. ALL THE TIME.
Get hooked up with EA™ Air Hockey fun on your phone - text keyword AIR to 22123
Play the demo at ea-mobile.com
Get Air Hockey and other great games from these carriers:
cingular
Sprint
verizon wireless
We never stop working for you.
EA
AIR HOCKEY
© 2006 Electronic Arts Inc. Electronic Arts, EA and the EA logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Electronic Arts Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. All Rights Reserved. © 2006 JAMDAT Mobile Inc. All Rights Reserved. All other logos and trademarks are property of their respective owners. Standard text messaging rates apply.

DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back

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:
How important is online functionality to you in considering whether or not to purchase a game?

I've been playing video games by myself or with a friend over for my entire life, so basically when I see that a game has online multiplayer, I shrug and buy it for the original reason I intended to; it's a good game.
FrayedEndsTie

Online gaming is extremely important. I mean, I can no longer imagine buying a game that doesn't give me the capability to hear 13-year-olds from around the world trying to turn people's user names into hilarious innuendo.
TrueNerd

I want to play my games with other gamers I don't know (like in an arcade) rather than always play with my friends. Fighting games like Dead Or Alive and Tekken need to be online so we can have that "arcade" experience.
Wazza_inc

It depends on how good the gameplay is. If a game has great multiplayer (or potential for great multiplayer), online play is very important. But if a game has solid single-player and poor/non-existent multiplayer, it's no big loss.
TheInvisMan

Like a lot of gamers out there, I don't have my consoles online-enabled, so it's not at all important if the game I'm buying has online play or not. If I'm buying a PC game, however, the online play is a deciding factor, as I rarely play single-player on computer titles.
almoshower

What I like the most about having online functionality is downloadable content. New multiplayer maps, sometimes new characters, and for some games, even new single-player maps. It's always been an important thing for me to get the most out of my game, and with a reasonable subscription cost, I can't complain.
~IRISH~

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

GOD OF PRODUCTIVE EFFICIENCY

I love God of War. I'm also failing microeconomics. Could you please take it upon yourselves to influence the industry to make a mythology-themed game that helps me understand unit-elasticity and what supply and demand really means to a free-market economy?

Allan White
via msn.com

Done and done. Every major game publisher was (understandably) all over this idea. Even though we can't reveal which one picked up the game, we did get an advance look at the text on the back of the box: "After becoming the god of war, Kratos savagely begins a small business in Athens. Watch in horror as he brutally maximizes his total utility while eviscerating his nonessential inventory to stay competitive! With the new Blades of Surplus chained to his wrists, he's able to viciously analyze the demand curve before it even hits the ground. His bloody conquest forces him to traverse the merciless Desert of Income Inequality Metrics before he tracks down and exacts his revenge on the legendary Pareto Optimum, plunging his blades into its soft, milky resource allocation. It's educational action and mythological microeconomics at every turn!" Wait a second...did we just make a joke about microeconomics? Uh-oh. The doctors told us this would happen if we didn't watch at least two hours of *Elimidate* every night.

YOUNG AND RESTLESS

I am a pissed off kid gamer. No one gives a s– about our opinion! I've seen reviews on weak games that say "This game sucks, but it's great for kids." Well, I'll admit I'm still just 11, but we play all kinds of games, not just crappy cartoon rip-offs. Rise up, my fellow kids! Rise up!

Anonymous
via aol.com

Yeah! Rise up! We're just as sick of those games as you are! Even though we make a conscious effort to avoid recommending bad games to anyone regardless of age, there are some titles out there (like Pokémon and Viva Piñata) that are specifically geared towards a younger crowd. Still, we know that doesn't mean that budding gamers only want to play licensed, collection-heavy garbage. Rest assured that when you see our scores and read our reviews, they are based on a number of factors, none of which are "how old do you have to be before you realize you don't have to put up with this crap." Charlie & the Chocolate Factory is an experience we would wish on no human or beast. Since we are older than you, though, we would offer this sage advice: lay off the swearing until you're 18. For every curse word you say before then, a Friendship Fairy dies in Whisperwinkle Wood.

TWILIGHT ZONE

The console wars were coming to an end. Sony almost had a monopoly, Nintendo was being destroyed, and Microsoft was probably the biggest threat to the Sony consoles – and let's face it, they were gaining. All of a sudden, Microsoft flat-out failed, Nintendo is at the top, and Sony is dying. The Xbox is doing better than the PS2, and the PS3 is definitely going to lose to the Nintendo Revolution. Maybe Sony will rise again, but I'm not sure they can do it.

Jon Chanalatte
via hotmail.com

All gamers are entitled to their own opinions, Jon, but it seems as if your opinion was formed at the krux of a temporal disturbance where several alternate universes converge. Very few things happen "all of a sudden" in this industry, and even though the 360 had a rocky start, it hasn't failed by a long shot. Nintendo needs to do a lot of work to repair third-party relationships, and Sony appears to still be alive and well. The point is that the current state of gaming can't be summed up as simply as Nintendo>Microsoft>Sony, and the future is even more mysterious. If you're going to make predictions, though, at least try to make sure the info you're using wasn't culled from the bizarro world's gaming industry.

ANALYZE THIS

I heard analysts are predicting that the PS3 will cost $500. How will this even be possible? Since it uses Blu-ray, and standalone Blu-ray players are going to cost around $1,000, shouldn't that put the cost of a PS3 around that price range as well? Either these analysts are stupid, or Sony desperately wants to win this console war, no matter how much money they lose in the process.

Phil Gminski
via gmail.com

You've hit on the biggest mystery surrounding the PS3 right now, and we're wondering about the exact same question. It isn't uncommon for console manufacturers to lose money at first, since the technology used in their machines is often relatively new and advanced. That lost revenue isn't gone forever, though; production costs decrease as time goes on, and an increased installed base means more money from software sales. In Sony's case, it's also important to remember that the company owns the plants where its consoles are made, which can make the process a bit cheaper. Here's the bottom line: We don't

FULL FARCE

I just wanted to say congratulations on producing the best Game Infarcer cover ever! Each time I look at it, I find a new hidden piece of hilarity. My only problem is that the features you list don't agree with your info on the Halo Forerunner game on page 18. Tell me the truth: will the next Halo game have Denver Omelettes or not?

Bradley Bell
Spartanburg, SC

While we can't testify as to the presence of breakfast foods in Forerunner (which by the way, was *not* an April Fool's joke), we are glad that you got a kick out of the Game Infarcer cover image. The art was actually done by the Minneapolis-based studio Big Time Attic, whose staff (Zander Cannon, Shad Petosky, and Kevin Cannon) has done work in the past with big names like Marvel, DC, and comics legend Alan Moore. After all, when you need someone to draw a fire-breathing rollercorn, nothing but the best will suffice.

Send your comments to Game Informer. Snail Mail: Game Informer Magazine • Attn: Dear GI • 724 North First St., 4th Floor • Minneapolis, MN 55401 Email: deargi@gameinformer.com

Tom Clancy's

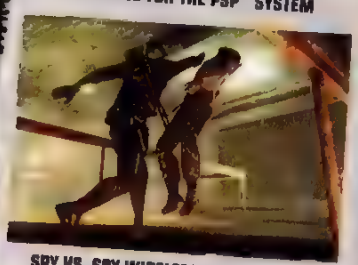
SPLINTER CELL

ESSENTIALS

"ONE OF THE BEST GAMES ON PSP."
—GameSpy

STORYLINE SPANS THE ENTIRE SPLINTER CELL® SERIES

ALL-NEW, EXCLUSIVELY DESIGNED MISSIONS FOR THE PSP™ SYSTEM



SPY VS. SPY WIRELESS MULTIPLAYER

IN THE PERILOUS WORLD OF ESPIONAGE, YOU'RE ALWAYS ON THE MOVE.

Go deeper than ever into the best-selling Splinter Cell saga in an all-new spy action adventure exclusively for the PSP™ (PlayStation®Portable) system. As covert operative Sam Fisher, you are arrested by the agency you serve. Caught in a menacing conspiracy, you must re-examine your past and escape the agency who is threatening your future.

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Strong Language
Violence

PSP
PlayStation Portable

AVAILABLE NOW ONLY FOR THE PSP™ SYSTEM.
WWW.SPLINTERCELL.COM

UBISOFT

© 2006 Ubisoft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. Splinter Cell, Sam Fisher, the Soldier Icon, Ubisoft, Ubi.com, and the Ubisoft logo are trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the U.S. and/or other countries. "PSP" is a trademark and "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Memory Stick Duo™ may be required (sold separately).

know the PS3's final price point or how much it costs to make, so how big of a financial hit Sony will be taking per unit (if any) can't be determined. However, Sony has displayed formidable business acumen in the past, and it's hard to believe that the company would be foolish enough to price itself out of the market before next-gen gaming hits its stride.

PARENTAL DISCRETION ADVISED

I would just like to give major kudos to Rob Cooper and his article on parents and violent video games (Issue 156). It's about time someone out there addresses the fact that so many people want to blame the gaming industry for what their children are doing. As a mother of two and an avid gamer, I also censor what I play around my children, saving my favorite shoot-'em-up games for when they are fast asleep. More parents should realize it's our responsibility to know our children and what they are playing/hearing/watching – not someone else's.

Cari K
via email

We received several letters from concerned parents like Cari in response to Mr. Cooper's opinion piece. It's no surprise that, despite all of the sensational news stories about teenagers driven to crime by video games, the vast majority of parents are actively monitoring the material that their children are exposed to. Basically, the core message of the many responses can be distilled down to this simple statement: Don't rely on pop culture and mainstream media to raise your kids, and then complain when you don't agree with the message. That would be like hiring a Killbot nanny, then getting upset when your kids get disintegrated. Come on! They're called "Killbots!"

I WANT MY HDTV

I was hoping you could clarify a detail about the HD DVD/Blu-ray situation. As I understand it, the fat cats in Hollywood have decided that the high-definition discs can only be viewed using HDMI cables. If I only have component cables and DVI, doesn't this make it impossible for me to watch movies and play games on my HDTV?

Naiche Robinson
via email

Not yet. While there was some brief talk about HDMI being the sole option for high-definition games and movies, recent announcements indicate that component cables are still going to be a decent option for at least a few more years. This means your games and movies will still play and look great in component, but for you total HD junkies, it won't technically provide the best picture possible. Even though the 360 and PS3 will support hi-def through component, HDMI will be the choice for those of you who want to squeeze every optimized pixel out of your consoles (though the 360 doesn't have the outputs for it at this point). According to the specs from E3 last year, the PS3 will have two HDMI outs, and it's even possible that Microsoft's announced HD DVD player accessory will have one. Check out our Gear section on page 38 for more details regarding the inputs and outputs of the HD era.

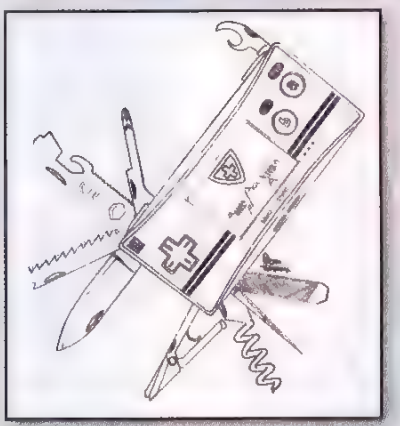
ENVELOPE ART

[redacted]

Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn 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:
Game Informer
Envelope Art Contest
724 1st St. N., 4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401

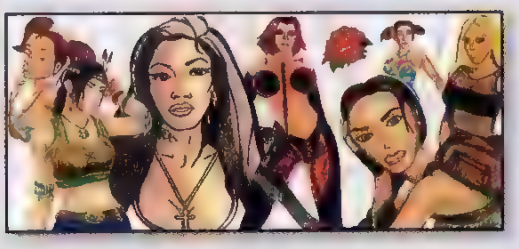
CHRIS CROOK
Plumb this pipe, sucka!



CY HEMA
Let's see...a redesign of a redesign? Price point: $150

LUPITA SANCHEZ
For smooth, tarry skin and a clear complexion, alien symbiotes prefer Noxema

SHANITA BROCK
Is this art awesome because it has a worm from *Tremors*, or stupid because it has Kameo? You be the judge



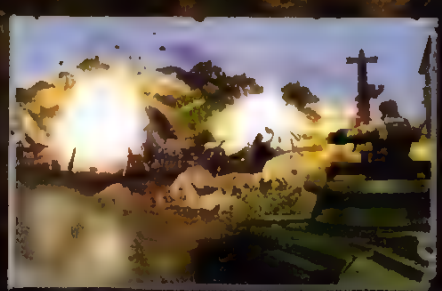
STEPHANIE REFSYNDER
Birdo from Super Mario Bros. 2 never gets invited to girls' night

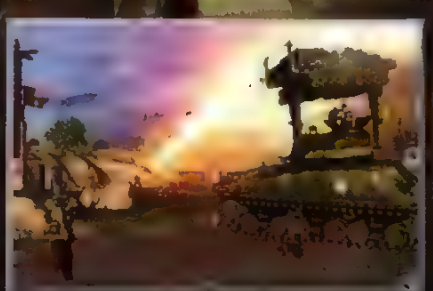
"WAR IS HELL."

-GEN. WILLIAM T. SHERMAN

"YEAH, BUT DESTROYING STUFF IS DAMN FUN."

-THE OUTFIT





Available Now.

The Outfit

DESTRUCTION ON DEMAND™

www.theoutfitgame.com

MATURE 17+

M

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence
Blood and Gore
Language

LIVE

relic

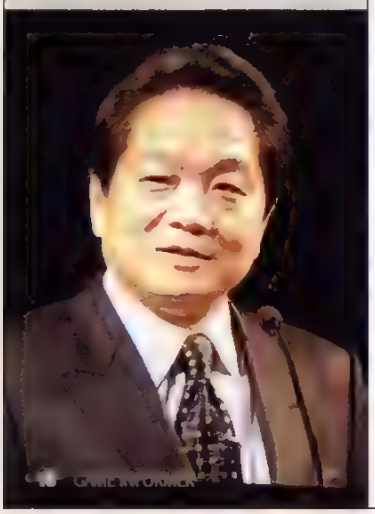
THQ

www.thq.com

©2006 THQ Inc. All rights reserved. Developed by Relic Entertainment. THQ, Relic Entertainment, The Outfit, Destruction on Demand and their respective logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of THQ Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox Live, the Xbox logos and the Xbox Live logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. All other trademarks, logos and copyrights are property of their respective owners.

Rather than have developers create games for the PS3 with or without the HDD, we will be asking them to develop games as though all PS3s have the HDD installed.

– KEN KUTARAGI, PRESIDENT SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT



news

SONY OFFERS PEEK AT PS3

PS3 WITH HARD DRIVE/FREE ONLINE IN NOVEMBER

Up until this point, Sony has let the public formulate speculation and rumors about the PlayStation 3 to make up for the lack of hard information about the system. But for the first time since last year's E3 in May, Ken Kutaragi has taken the stage and shed more light on the much-anticipated system. Speaking recently at the 2006 PlayStation Business Briefing in Tokyo, Kutaragi confirmed what many of us have believed all along – the PlayStation 3 will come out worldwide in early November. But Kutaragi wasn't just on hand to deliver some bad news about the PS3's delayed launch, as he also fleshed out some concrete details on the system.

Sony says that one million units will be available each month, with the goal being to ship six million worldwide by March 7. Kutaragi didn't specify if the first million PS3s would be allocated across all territories, but the company's worldwide goal of spring 2007 seems to be an indication that U.S. gamers will have to split each monthly shipment with the Japanese and European markets. Because of this and the likely high demand, it seems clear we can expect shortages similar to those that befell Microsoft's Xbox 360.

Kutaragi explained that the reason behind the launch delay was that Sony was waiting for the finalization of the specs for Blu-ray – the next-gen DVD format discs contain enough space (50GB dual layered) to hold high-definition content. Games for the PlayStation 3 will only use Blu-ray discs (and will be free from region encoding), because DVDs are too easy to copy. However, the PS3 will still play all DVDs, CDs, and be backwards compatible with PS2 and PSone games. In fact, games for Sony's old consoles played on the PS3 will actually be upscaled into HD-video formats. Sony also laid other incompatibility rumors to rest by saying that the platform would work on all regular and HDTVs, and would support the current and "next generation" of HDMI.

The PlayStation 3 will debut with online functionality out of the box through its online service dubbed the PlayStation Network Platform. Sony says that a basic, free version of the service will be available to all, and every game will offer player matching, voice/video chat, messaging, ranking, commerce opportunities, and game uploads/downloads. A Sony spokesperson told us that it has not been decided yet if gamers will be able to play games online with the free basic service, although they did point out the company's history of not charging for online play. Once again, Sony is putting most of the control for game content and management into the hands of its third parties. Rumor is that Sony will offer downloads of PSone and PS2 games, and GamesIndustry.biz has reported that Sony is already in talks with companies such as EA for the rights to digitally distribute the publisher's back catalog.

The PS3 is supporting a 60GB hard drive (HDD) to handle such possibly large downloads. Sony says that all games will require the hard drive. A Sony spokesperson confirmed with us that the PS3 will ship with the 60GB hard drive included, so the public will not have to purchase one separately. The HDD will come with the Linux operating system pre-installed and be able to connect to the Internet. PS3 owners will also be able to swap it out for a larger drive. It could also serve as a home server that would store MP3s or pictures for access from other devices such as the PSP.

Although those who were banking on a spring PS3 release may be disappointed by the system's fall date, developers are already saying that they welcome the delay in order to put more work into their games. At the Game Developer's Conference, Sony showed off gameplay clips of MotorStorm, WarHawk, and Insomniac's Resistance: Fall of Man to mixed reviews. However, a video of a new PS3 Ratchet & Clank excited the audience. It will be interesting to see how much progress developers have made at E3, and also when the final dev kits go out this summer.

GI OPINION

For anyone in the industry, the idea that the PS3 is getting "delayed" is something of a joke. Having seen the current state of most PS3 titles, the idea that the system might be ready any time before fall is a little ridiculous. Meanwhile, Sony's plan to have developers incorporate the hard drive into development comes as welcome news. The alternate approach that Microsoft has adopted seems to me a mistake, and I'm glad to see Sony won't be following suit. Sony is also wise to be packing a hard drive in with the console – presuming they can make the system cost less than a new car.—MILLER

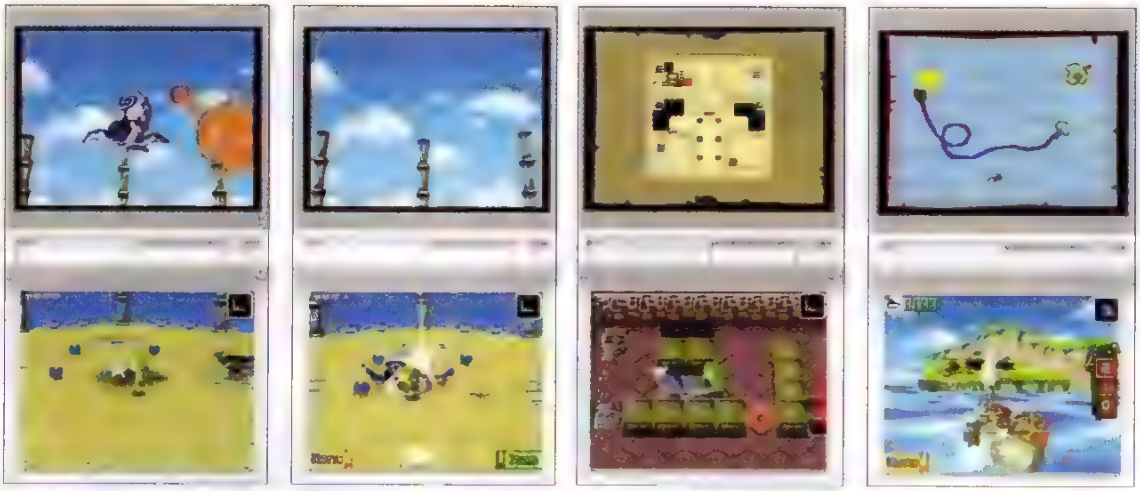
PSP DROPS PRICE, GAINS FEATURES

Although Kutaragi stopped short of announcing a price for the PS3, the Sony president was happy to declare that the PSP is now available for $199.99 – down from $249.99. This reduced price point isn't without its sacrifices, however. This cheaper version of the PSP only comes with an AC Adapter and battery, leaving consumers to get their own memory stick and case.

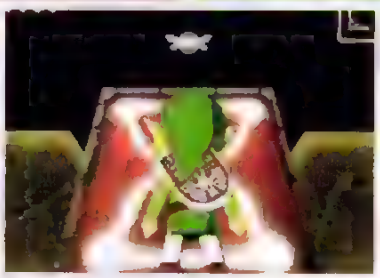
Sony is expanding the feature set of the handheld by adding an externally attached EyeToy USB camera by the end of the year. By then the system will also add support for video voice-over and motion JPGs. Best of all, Sony says it is currently working on an emulator that would allow PSPs to play PSone titles that would be digitally distributed to the handheld online, starting this fall. However, a PSP with a hard drive is but a rumor at this time.

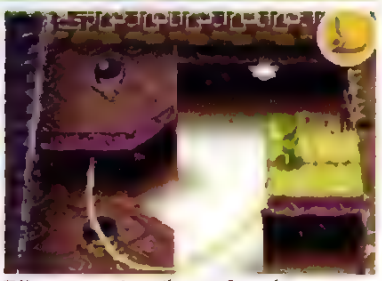
Kutaragi also mentioned that future updates for the platform will allow the PSP to run games in Macromedia Flash 6.0, support RSS feeds, and utilize GPS functionality for new versions of games like Hot Shots Golf.

■ This boss battle spans both screens



■ By completing an outline of an hourglass, Link can open this door





■ Here you can trace the arc of your boomerang

news

A LINK TO THE PAST

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA HITS THE DS

As if recent confirmation from Shigeru Miyamoto himself that GameCube's The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess would take advantage of the Revolution controller when played on the next-gen Nintendo system wasn't enough to make fans happy, the unveiling of The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass for the Nintendo DS should put them in a happiness coma.

Phantom Hourglass will use a model similar to the cel-shaded Link from The Wind Waker, but will fuse that game's standard action camera work with the classic top-down perspective. Of course, the game utilizes the system's dual screens for maximum effect. Sometimes you'll be tracing out the arc of your boomerang or plotting the course of your water-bound ship on the lower screen, other times you'll be drawing shapes or numbers on it to solve puzzles. One clip we saw had the player trace the outline of an hourglass in order to open a door. Most interestingly, there are times when what's shown on the top and bottom screens will actually swap places. We've seen footage where you'll input something on the bottom touch screen, which will then zoom upward and swap places with the action happening on the top. Boss battles can also span both screens, letting gamers input attacks on the touch screen once the boss is knocked down to the ground.

No doubt this is just a small sampling of what surprises Nintendo has in store for us, and the company says that the game shall come out some time later this year.

news

REVOLUTION CLOSER TO REALITY

CONSOLE CORNERS 16-BIT CLASSICS

The Revolution's ability to download and play titles from gaming's past has gotten many gamers excited about Nintendo's upcoming platform and its "virtual console" capabilities. At this year's Game Developer's Conference, the company finally announced a partnership detailing what kind of games we can expect to appear on the system. Once rivals back in the 16-bit days of the Super Nintendo and Genesis, Sega and Nintendo are now teaming up to deliver content for the Revolution.

The system will be able to play selected titles from the Sega Genesis' back catalog of 1,000 titles. Also announced was a partnership between Nintendo and Hudson to bring games from NEC's TurboGrafx-16 platform to the Revolution. No specific titles were announced from either company, but between the Genesis, TurboGrafx-16, and the Super NES, the Revolution should sport a who's who of 16-bit classic gaming.

In a statement released concurrent with his GDC speech, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata also intimated that downloadable games similar to those offered on Xbox Live Arcade for the Xbox 360 might be in store for the Revolution: "New forms of innovative software that can be created by any size developer will be made available for download via Revolution's Virtual Console service."

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

ID ALREADY ON NEXT PROJECT

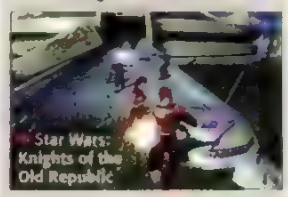
Developer id Software is already talking about its next project, which will appear for the PC, Xbox 360, and PlayStation 3. In other words, the company is saying next to nothing. Acknowledging the project's existence but little else in an interview with worthplaying.com, id CEO Todd Hollenshead said that a simultaneous launch would be hard. "It's too early to guess on whether we'll have all of those ready to go at the same time."

2K SPORTS DONS GOLDEN GLOVES

The EA Sports/2K Sports rivalry is heating up with the announcement that 2K Sports is stepping into the ring with a boxing game. Currently, EA Sports owns the space with its Fight Night franchise. A developer is currently not announced for the game, and a spokesperson for 2K Sports developer Visual Concepts did not comment. Perhaps 2K subsidiary Venom Games will be tasked with the project, as it made Rocky Legends back in 2004.

THE BIOWARE MMO

BioWare is jumping into the MMO market with a new unannounced project, and has started up a studio in Austin, Texas to oversee the project. BioWare vets with experience on Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, Baldur's Gate, and Neverwinter Nights will head the team.

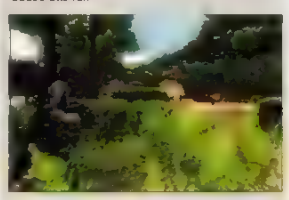


LIONHEAD EXPANDS

The developer is putting out two PC expansion packs this spring: The Movies: Stunts & Effects and Black & White 2: Battle of the Gods.

EIDOS' 360 CAUSE

Americans love meddling in the affairs of countries south of the border, and Eidos and developer Avalanche are giving you the chance once again in Xbox 360's Just Cause. Head to South America and take on a rebellious, corrupt government in this game that includes a map that can take up to 40 minutes to cross. You can also buddy up with different island factions and play them off of each other. Look for Just Cause this fall.



news

THE DS LITE DOWNLOW

GAME INFORMER GOES HANDS-ON WITH THE NEW DS

Nintendo has done it again. The company never fails to come out with new and different iterations of handheld systems it has already released, but we can't help but be seduced by them. Although Nintendo has yet to announce the release date or price of this new Nintendo DS Lite (see Loose Talk for more), we've already played around with it, and here's how the system stacks up.

The DS Lite's smaller size not only makes the handheld more pocket sized, but it feels better in your hands – particularly because it's not as top-heavy as the old one. The d-pad (taken from the GBA Micro) is more compact and responsive, making power slides in Mario Kart DS, for example, easy as pie. Also, the command buttons are raised, allowing more tactile feedback for your thumb. The unit's backlight is much improved. It's not only brighter, but it offers different levels of brightness as well.

The thicker stylus is now stored along the side, and you can see that the Select, Start, and Power buttons are in new places. Also notice how the microphone is placed in the middle of the DS's hinge – making it easier to speak into for games like Nintendogs.

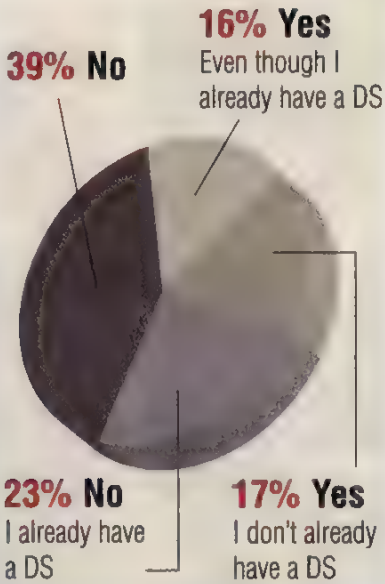
Next to the more responsive volume slide control is the GBA cartridge slot, which now comes with a dummy plastic insert you can plug in when a game cartridge isn't present.

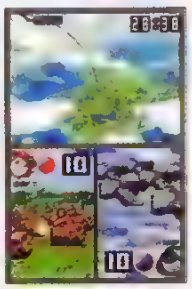
CONCLUSION GRADE: A

There is no doubt that this new DS is better than the original. It's sexier, sleeker, and is functionally better. With an improved backlight, better ergonomics, and not to mention the fact that Nintendo keeps getting more and more power out of batteries, we're gonna buy the DS all over again just because it's so irresistible.

POLL:

We asked Game Informer.com readers: Are you going to buy a Nintendo DS Lite?





Advance Wars: Dual Strike

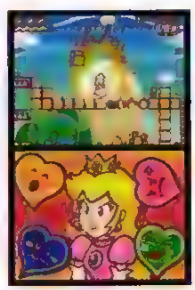
Animal Crossing: Wild World

BUY THESE GAMES!

Now that you're totally dying to have this new Nintendo DS Lite, make sure you feed it with the right food! Here, in no particular order, are the 10 titles that are must-haves for the system.

- Tetris DS
- Advance Wars: Dual Strike
- Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow
- Super Princess Peach
- Trauma Center: Under the Knife
- Animal Crossing: Wild World
- Kirby: Canvas Curse
- Mario Kart DS
- Meteos
- Nintendogs

Mario Kart DS

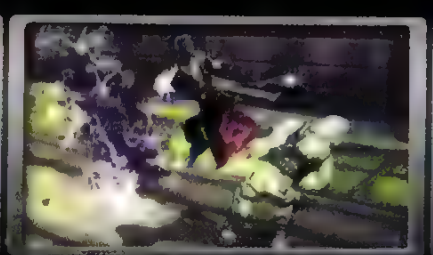


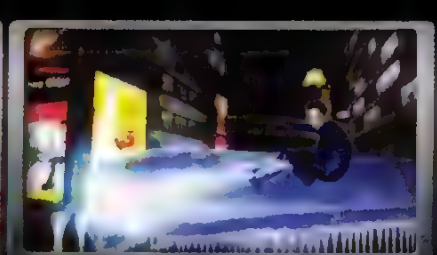
Super Princess Peach

MASTER THE POWER OF THE X-MEN

THE OFFICIAL GAME

IN STORES 5.16.06





TEEN T Language Violence ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

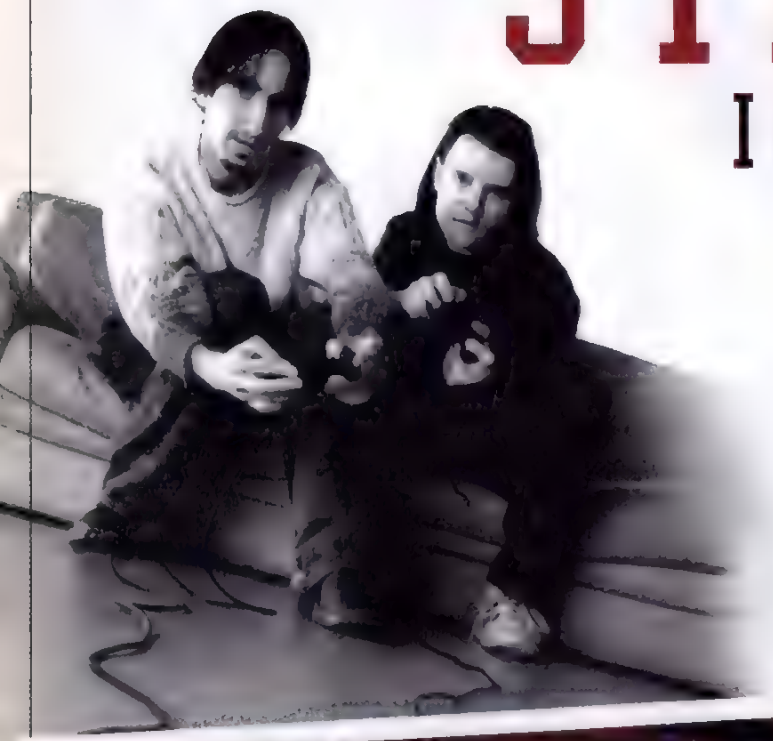
GAME BOY ADVANCE NINTENDO DS XBOX

ACTIVISION activision.com

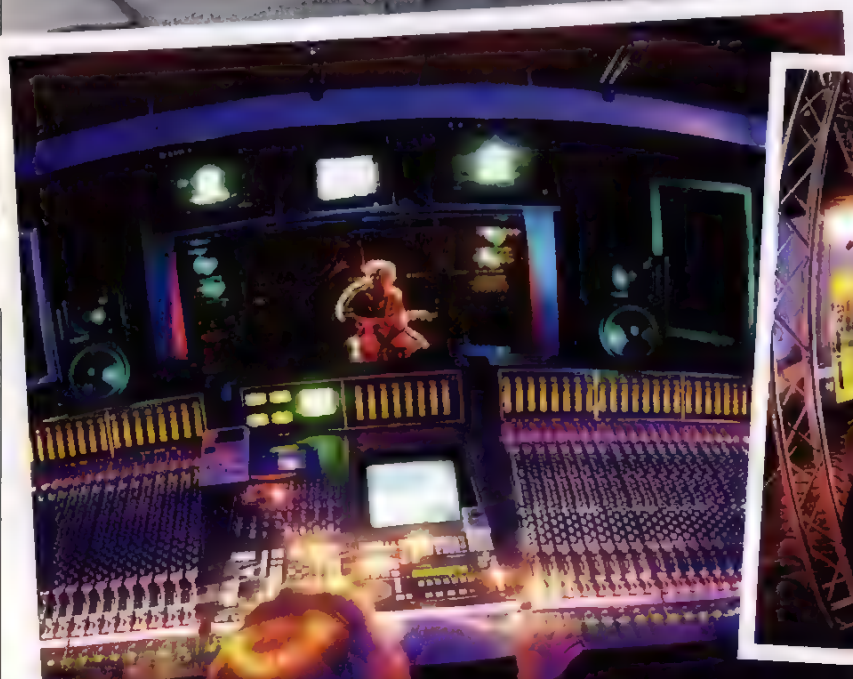
PlayStation.2

MARVEL, X-MEN and all related character names and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks of Marvel Characters, Inc., and are used with permission. Copyright © 2006 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved. www.marvel.com. This interactive game is produced under license from Marvel Characters, Inc. X-Men: The Last Stand Motion Picture and Images from Motion Picture © 2006 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. All rights reserved. Game © 2006 Activision Publishing, Inc. Activision is a registered trademark of Activision Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360 and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. TM, ®, Game Boy Advance, Nintendo GameCube and Nintendo DS are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2004 Nintendo. All rights reserved. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All rights reserved. PC CD-ROM logo TM and © IEMA 2003. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners.

STAY IN SCHOOL



How to Turn Your College Experience Into A Gaming Industry Career



Private schools like Full Sail offer a very specialized curriculum

Audio engineers are just as needed as anybody else

Most people know that there are a number of paths into the gaming industry. Making a recognized mod for an existing game, working in a testing department as a summer job, and simply knowing somebody who can help you get your foot in the door are often talked about as the "best" ways to get a job making video games for a living. However, as is the case with many professional industries, a college degree makes up for its lack of glamour, excitement, and ease with rock-solid results. As with any career choice, there are lots of decisions to make before even enrolling in a particular program. Here are some tips and information to help get any interested industry hopefuls started down the right path.

There is much to be said for simply combining a bachelor's degree in a relevant field with a love of gaming. We spoke with John Donham, vice president of development at Sony Online Entertainment's San Diego studio; Rob Hill, producer of both Untold Legends PSP titles from the same company; and Denis Dyack, president of Silicon Knights, to get an insider's look at what makes the people in charge of hiring notice applicants. In all of the conversations we had on this topic, the primary qualifications they mentioned were those two simple things. Without question, being a dedicated gamer with a degree is a good starting point. Being into games and being able to talk about them intelligently is huge – as Dyack puts it, "The enthusiasm will resonate with the people you're speaking to."

The benefits of having a bachelor's degree, as anyone can tell you, are enormous. It gives any potential employer – not just in the video games industry – the certainty of knowing that not only have you been broadly educated, but that you are dedicated enough to complete a four-year course of study and hard work. Also, having a degree opens up the possibility of continuing your education beyond the undergraduate level, a choice that can do even more things for your career.

Getting a regular four-year degree isn't the only way to prepare for a gaming career, though. Some schools are either wholly focused on digital entertainment or offer programs that are. The DigiPen Institute of Technology (in Redmond, WA) and Full Sail (near Orlando, FL), are two such places. There, the faculty and staff are well-versed in the particular challenges and opportunities that come along with the gaming industry. Best of all, graduating from any of these programs (provided they are accredited, which should be a requirement for any school that you choose to attend) will net you a bona-fide bachelor's degree, so a career in gaming is far from your only option.

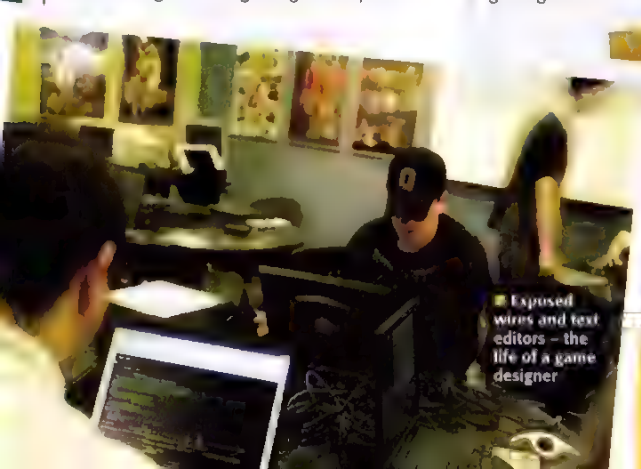
Yet another way to get sufficiently educated to qualify yourself for a position at a game developer is through post-graduate studies. Attending the Guildhall at Southern Methodist University, or the game program at the School of Cinema-Television at the University of Southern California, will make you even more attractive as a prospective employee. These programs have markedly stricter admission standards, and require a lot of hard work and dedication, just like any other graduate-level program. However, the high placement rates [see sidebar] and specialized, in-depth knowledge that come along with it can be worth it.

Of course, having a degree doesn't automatically get you into the video game industry. Thousands of people graduate with computer science, creative writing, and art diplomas every year. Setting yourself apart from the pack is key, and that process can start while you're still in school. Internships were specifically cited as a big boost to a candidate's visibility. "One of the good things to do is look for a school that at the junior or senior level will let you get college credit for internships. And then pick a school that does that and happens to be near a game company," offers Bonham. "The last thing to do is make sure you get really good grades."

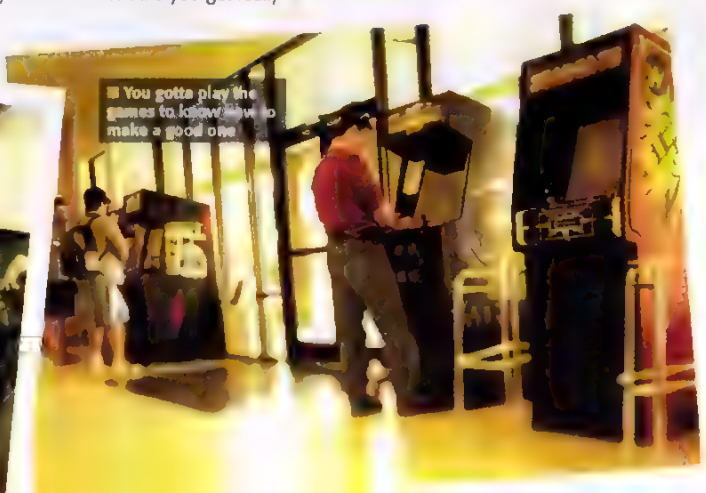
Another way to make companies notice you is through interviewing well. Communication and social skills were mentioned over and over as being critical to game development. "Getting along with people is the biggest thing," according to Dyack. Hill adds, "Personality's a big thing… being able to communicate well and articulate well is extremely important, because you're dealing with a team in all of these cases, so you've got to be able to work well with all of those people." While these qualities don't necessarily come across on a resume, the interview is a great place to demonstrate your skills in this area.

Because working with a team is so important, melding different disciplines is very helpful. Having a minor in creative writing or film studies with a major in computer science may seem like an odd combination, but it's exactly the sort of thing companies look for. A programmer who understands the science of film, for instance, is immensely valuable to a studio that is looking for talent to help create a camera system for a 3D game. A game designer with a degree in writing fiction who is also familiar with statistical mathematics can be much more effective when involved with the creation of an RPG and its many game systems.

College is a heady topic, and there are many angles to consider when you're deciding on how to proceed down a career path. There's no substitute for in-depth researching of specific jobs and universities that interest you. But, as Dyack puts it, "The industry's growing, and it is possible to get a job in the industry, and if you follow your heart I think you'll get there."



■ Exposed wires and text editors – the life of a game designer



■ You gotta play the games to know how to make a good one

ALL DEBTS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

There are a huge number of programs to choose from when deciding where to attend college. We couldn't possibly list all of them here, but there are a few general things to consider that can help get you started.

STATE SCHOOL

Any way you slice it, going to college isn't cheap, but public universities can offer a fantastic education at a relatively reasonable price – especially if you're a resident of the state the college is in. The University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, for instance, charges roughly $8,800 per year for undergraduate resident tuition, while students lucky enough to be residents of California can attend the University of California – San Diego for around $2,500 per year in tuition. Non-resident tuition is much higher, from between eight and nine thousand dollars per year at the University of Texas – Austin to over $20,000 per year at the U of M – Twin Cities.

PRIVATE COLLEGE

Programs that aren't state-funded often provide more things like post-graduate services and internship opportunities, but can come with a commensurately higher price tag. Full Sail, a digital entertainment university based in Florida, boasts a 74 percent placement rate in professional positions for their graduates (based on figures the school provided for students graduating in 2004), but costs around $61,000 for four years of tuition.

POST-GRADUATE STUDIES

Getting a graduate degree from a school that specializes in digital entertainment can do wonderful things for your employment prospects as well. The Guildhall at SMU, for example, has an overall placement rate of 85 percent of its graduates since the program's inception, with alumni working everywhere from Neversoft to id Software and NCsoft. Of course, the 21-month course of study costs about $42,000 in tuition alone.

THE MANY DEGREES OF GAMING

This is by no means a comprehensive list of the possible degrees that can qualify you for a job in the gaming industry, but these are the most common ones mentioned as being useful by the people who decide who to hire.

CREATIVE WRITING/ENGLISH

There are a lot of facets of game design that require stories, scripts, and other language-oriented tasks, and these degrees will teach a skill set that can prepare people for those creative jobs.

COMPUTER SCIENCE/ENGINEERING

Programming is, of course, vital to the creation of games. A CS degree will teach you the basics of convincing silicon to perform the tasks required by digital entertainment.

CINEMATOGRAPHY/FILM STUDIES

Games become more cinematic by the day, and these degrees can be surprisingly helpful to development studios – particularly when combined with a good knowledge of creative writing and/or technology

ART/ANIMATION

All those wonderful visuals are designed by somebody, and most of those somebodies have formal training in 2D art, 3D art, or both. An art degree and an impressive portfolio will get you far.

BUSINESS/MANAGEMENT

Video games are undoubtedly a business, and development studios need people to keep them running just like any other company. Many producers in the industry have come by way of business education.

HIS BAZOOKA IS WORSE THAN HIS BITE.

"...dogs with rocket launchers sounds like a recipe for success."
- VGO Network

"...deep and totally likeable..."
- Newtype USA

METAL SAGA™

Use your personal arsenal, unleash the dogs of war, or hop in a tank!

Test your skill and your luck in 12 mini-games!

Travel across a war-torn world with over 800 events and quests, providing 40+ hours of gameplay!

A full-scale rpg that offers unprecedented freedom!

TEEN
T
Alcohol and Tobacco Reference
Crude Humor
Fantasy Violence
Language
Simulated Gambling
Suggestive Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation.2

RPG

ATLUS®
WWW.ATLUS.COM

©2005 Success/Crea-Tech Licensed to and published by Atlus USA. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.
The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. Sony Computer Entertainment America takes no responsibility for this offer

games

ROCK AND ROLL NEVER DIES

GUITAR HERO GOES TO 11, OR AT LEAST II

The music lives on in Guitar Hero II, slated by publisher RedOctane to come out this winter. Developer Harmonix is currently in the studio bashing out over new 40 licensed songs for you to rock out to. At the time of this writing, the game was confirmed for PlayStation 2, but we've heard that nice-smelling tour roadies will set up its Marshall stacks on the next-gen console stage at some point.

Apart from its new collection of fret burners and finger melters, Guitar Hero II will let gamers split off and play rhythm, bass, and lead guitar tracks – a feature which should be hot if the game goes online. Of course, nobody in their right mind would play bass when they could get all the glory being lead axe! But whether you're holding down the beat or stealing the solo spotlight, you're gonna want to play this game until your eardrums bleed.

games

FEAR & RESPECT GETS MURKED

MIDWAY HOLDS ON TO SNOOP & SINGLETON

Midway's marriage of high-profile hip-hop celeb Snoop Dogg and acclaimed director John Singleton first announced in 2004 seemed to be the perfect union for video game Fear & Respect. Unfortunately, gamers will have to wait on the fruits of this collaboration – Midway has cancelled the game. Although no official reason was given by the company for the cancellation, the development of Fear & Respect had not been smooth sailing. The game was originally slated for current-gen systems, but was then moved to next-gen consoles after rumors of cancellation surrounded the title. Despite the fact that Fear & Respect won't come out, Game Informer received an official response from Midway that read, "Midway is continuing to look for opportunities to work with John Singleton and Snoop Dogg."

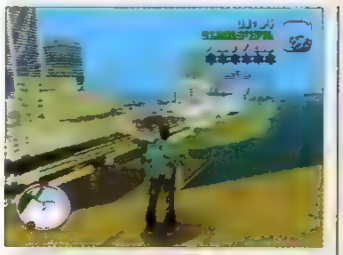
LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

Bungie's Project Orion looks to capitalize on the Halo franchise's Xbox Live success

BUNGIE'S OTHER PROJECT

Last issue we told you about Bungie's Forerunner Halo project, and now we're gonna let you in on another game the developer has cooking – a project currently codenamed Orion. Bungie is teaming with Ensemble Studios for this Halo-themed FPS MMO on the 360, and the game is currently still in the planning phase. So, details regarding Orion – like Forerunner – could change.



GTA ON THE BRINK OF PULLING A 360?

Last month we told you about rumors that Rockstar Games might release its Grand Theft Auto series simultaneously on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, and now we're hearing even more talk from insider sources on the subject. Loose Talk has been told that Microsoft is making a hard charge at Rockstar, and may have even already cemented a deal for simultaneous launch or even exclusivity.

FF VII x XII

Last E3, Square Enix made fanboys squeal when it showed how Final Fantasy VII could be remade on the PlayStation 3. Of course, the company went to pains to point out how it had no plans to release an updated version of Final Fantasy VII on the system. Rumors have been swirling since day one that the game would indeed come to the PS3, and now Loose Talk has not only heard that those rumors are true, but that the remake will in fact use the battle system from Final Fantasy XII.

MICROSOFT HANDHELD IN WORKS

San Jose Mercury News reporter and author Dean Takahashi claims in an upcoming book covering the launch of the Xbox 360 (Takahashi wrote *Opening the Xbox* regarding the debut of the first system) that Microsoft is definitely planning a handheld gaming system that would also play movies and music. The company has hinted that it might make a handheld in the past, but Takahashi goes into greater detail, uncovering that J. Allard is heading the project and Transmeta is supplying the chips.

NINTENDO DS OUT IN MAY

A little red koopa told us that the sexy new Nintendo DS Lite will actually come out on May 16 in conjunction with the release of the New Super Mario Bros. That's soon, but not soon enough.

XBOX 360 CAUGHT ON CAMERA

Microsoft has been working on an Xbox 360 camera for a while, but some patent news has leaked out that may point to the direction the peripheral is taking. A fall 2004 patent updated recently describes a technique for gesture-enabled gameplay that is recorded by using two cameras which track three-dimensional space. The rumored codename for this undertaking is Project Vision.

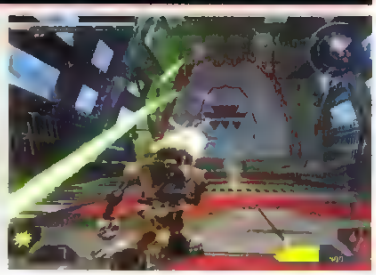
Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

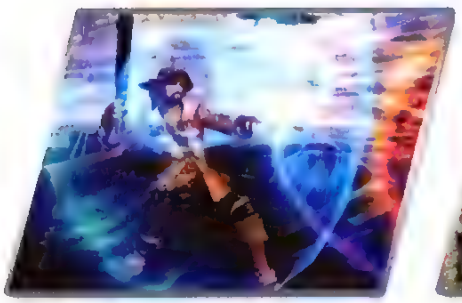
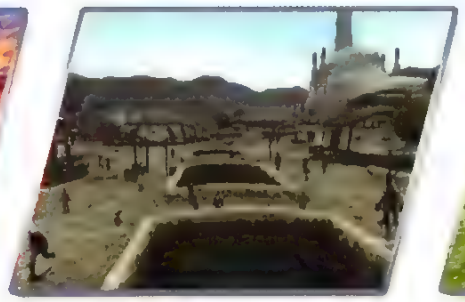
Test Your Sight

Everyone knows why Kameo didn't sell well – it was a bad game. But it's a total mystery why this month's Name That Game – which was excellent – didn't fly off shelves. This current-gen third-person game put you in control of Glitch, a robot on a quest to free his fellow robots over a span of 50 missions. Glitch sports an impressive array of weapons, including the ability to jack into and control other robots. If we had the ability to do that, we would have sent every one of those robots to go out and buy this title. And then to attack old people.

(Answer on page 30)



EXPLORE. POSSIBILITY.

DURING THE CRYSTAL WAR, THE NATIONS OF VANA'DIEL BANDED TOGETHER TO AVERT THE THREAT OF ADVANCING BEASTMAN HORDES. NOW, TWENTY YEARS LATER, NEW EVILS THREATEN PEACE IN VANA'DIEL.

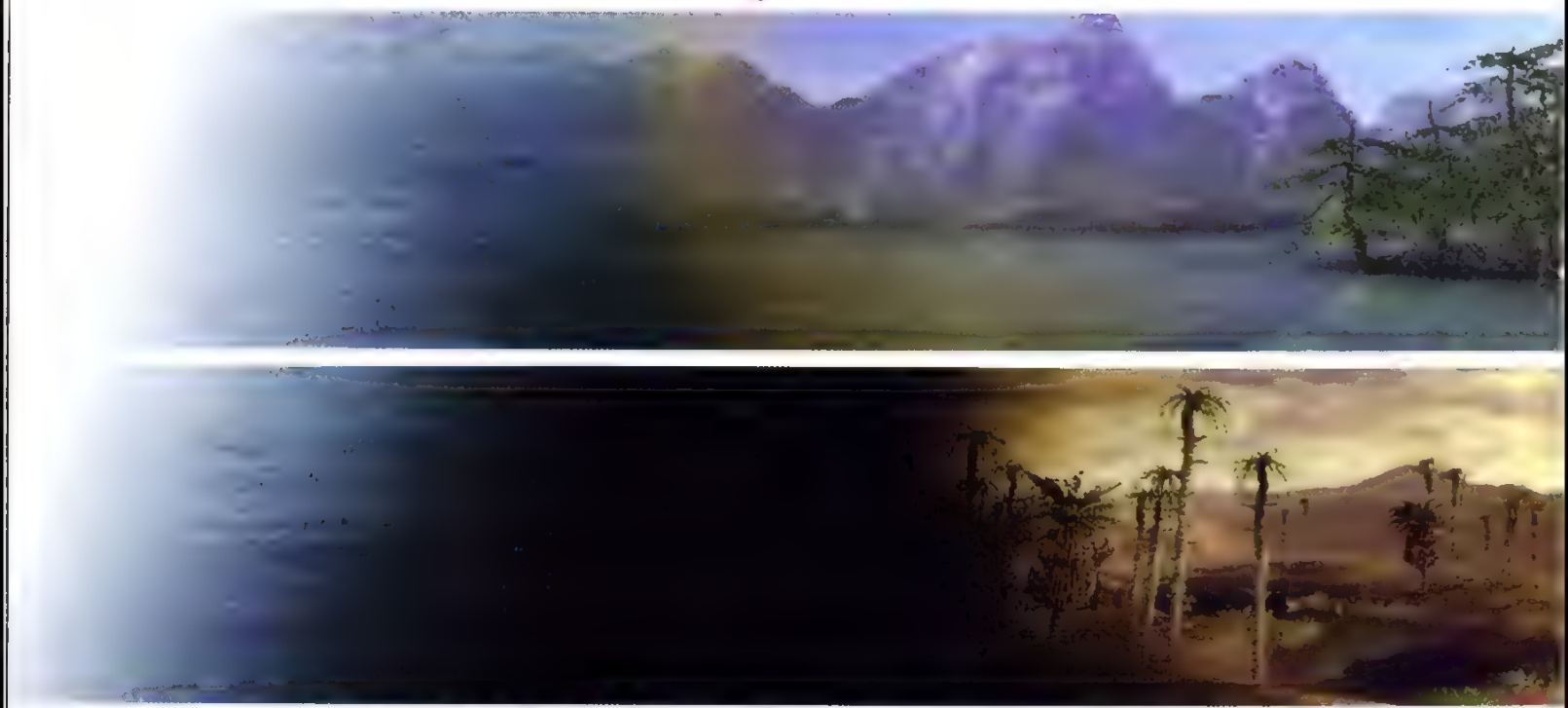
ADVENTURERS FROM THE FURTHEST REACHES OF THE GLOBE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO DEFEND THEIR WORLD.

FINAL FANTASY® XI

ONLINE

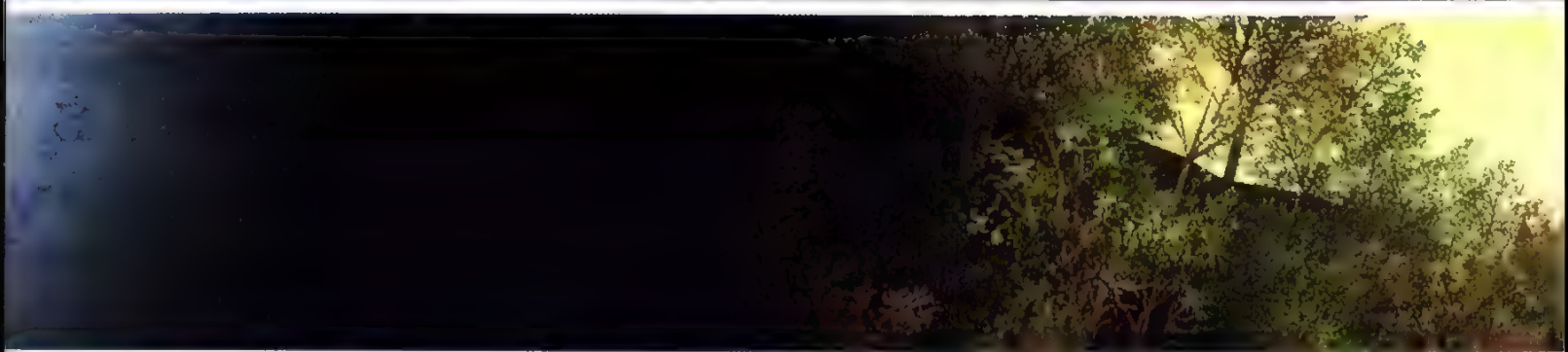
Rise of the Zilart™ Chains of Promathia™

Treasures of Aht Urhgan™



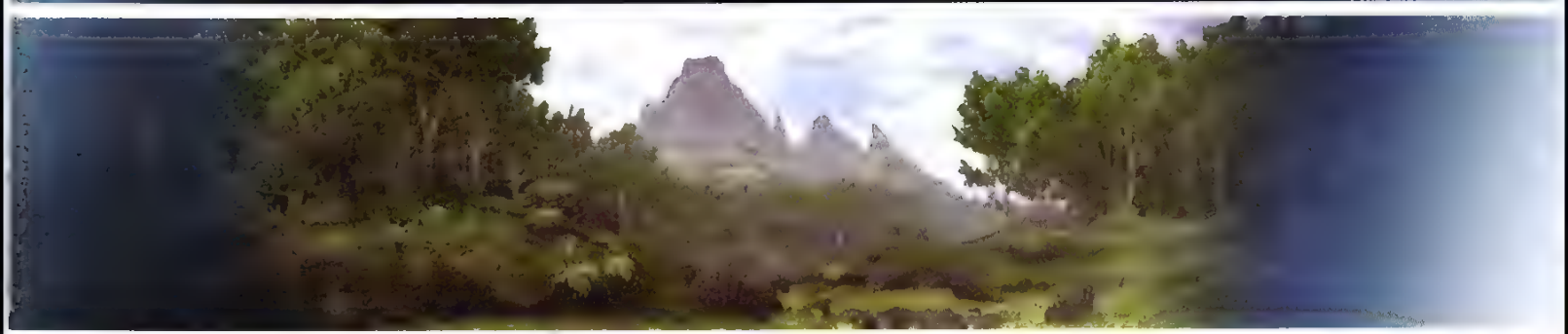
JOIN THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS ALREADY PART OF AN UNPRECEDENTED ONLINE COMMUNITY.

EXHILARATING QUESTS AND AN EPIC STORYLINE AWAIT YOU IN THE PREMIERE ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME.



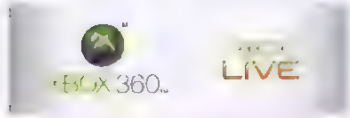
A WORLD WITHOUT LIMITS

FINAL FANTASY XI



AN UNENDING ADVENTURE

COMING IN APRIL



© 2001-2006 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved. FINAL FANTASY, PLAYONLINE, [illegible] THE 25 ART and THE CHAINS OF PROMATHIA are registered trademarks of Square Enix Co., Ltd. SQUARE ENIX, the SQUARE ENIX [illegible] are registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation [illegible] Software Association. All other trademarks are owned by their respective owners.

UBISOFT Shanghai 上海

Sections of Ubisoft Shanghai's latest project Splinter Cell: Double Agent will actually take Sam into the heart of the Chinese metropolis

China is widely considered to be one of the most crucial up-and-coming economic markets in the world, and businesses of all kinds are fighting to get a foothold in the country. The video game industry is no exception. As the largest and most established game developer in China, Ubisoft's Shanghai studio is not only paving the way for other companies, it is quickly defining itself as one of the most valuable assets in the company's roster of international development houses.

Formed in 1996, the Shanghai studio began its existence with a slate of smaller projects, such as Game Boy Advance titles, PSone games, and PC software. As the studio grew, however, it began to take on bigger projects, such as ports of Ubisoft's flagship Tom Clancy games. After porting the first Splinter Cell game to PS2 and GameCube, the studio began work on its biggest project to date: primary development of Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow. After the success of that game, the Shanghai studio was rewarded with the opportunity to take the Splinter Cell series into the next generation with Splinter Cell: Double Agent (see issue #153).

Along with Double Agent, the Shanghai studio's recent projects have included the current-gen version of Ghost Recon 3, as well as much of Ubisoft's next-gen technology development. Near many of China's best colleges, the Shanghai studio works closely with area universities to develop potential new hires, and employs roughly 85% local talent. With a largely Chinese staff, the Shanghai studio is in the unique position to be able to develop specifically for Chinese audiences. One of the projects in development is an MMO created specifically for China, based on the upcoming film *Wu Ji* (*The Promise*).

After The Promise, the Shanghai Studio will continue to develop for China, but focus primarily on the global market. Ubisoft clearly trusts the development house with hugely important projects, and it is likely that many of the company's upcoming triple-A titles will come to fruition thanks to the Shanghai studio. With its massive staff of talented individuals, Ubisoft Shanghai has the potential to be one of the next great developers.

By The Numbers

4 Number of employees the studio began with in 1996

28 Average age of studio employee

500 approximate number of staff currently employed

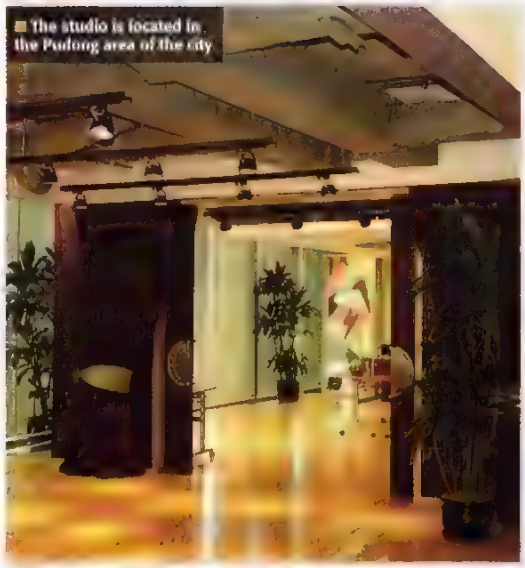
5 games currently in development at the studio

19 Number of games developed by the studio

9.5 Highest score awarded to an Ubisoft Shanghai game to date (Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow)

French President Jacques Chirac is one of the studio's most notable visitors

A few employees take a break from making games to enjoy some tea and watermelon



The studio is located in the Pudong area of the city

An Ubisoft Shanghai employee smiles for the camera

The announcement of the MMO based on the Chinese film *Wu Ji* was a big moment for the studio, and declared the developer's commitment to the Chinese market

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Charest visited the studio in 2005

The office is decorated with art from several Ubisoft Shanghai projects. The studio developed the current-gen version of Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter

TIMELINE

1996
Ubisoft founds studio in Shanghai with only 4 employees on site

2004
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow for Xbox hits the number one spot on the sales charts after its release

2004
The studio moves into the current facility

2004
French President Jacques Chirac visits Ubisoft's Shanghai studio

2005
Ubisoft and Pegasus sign the agreement to develop, promote, and operate the MMO game based on the Chinese fantasy movie *Wu Ji*

2005
The Shanghai studio extends its office to the K Wah Center

2005
Prime Minister of Quebec, Jean Charest, visits Ubisoft's Shanghai Studio

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
JUSSI LAAKKONEN
Development Director, Bugbear (FlatOut 2)

1 **Wing Commander 2: Vengeance of the Kilrathi – PC**
2 **Sid Meier's Pirates! – Commodore 64**
3 **Baldur's Gate – PC**
4 **Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec – PS2**
5 **Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge – PC**

READER
KYLE STEPP
Mitchell, SD

1 **Ys II Eternal – PC**
2 **Seiken Densetsu 3 – Super Famicom**
3 **Dragon Warrior IV – NES**
4 **Rudora's Treasure – Super Famicom**
5 **Final Fantasy III – Famicom**

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine/Top Five
724 N 1st St 4th Fl
Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Things Omitted From The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

10 The "Kato-mancy" school of magic. Conjure conspiracy theory!
9 Using your Security skill to break into Paris Hilton's Sidekick
8 A stupid twist ending revealing it's all really happening...*in the present day!*
7 "Verily," "forsooth," and all that Renaissance festival nerd-talk
6 Shrek
5 Dual-wielding! C'mon, dudes! Halo 2 had it!
4 Hula hoops. You know, for kids
3 The Screen Actors Guild
2 *Living in Oblivion* starring Steve Buscemi
1 A way to keep playing while in the shower, at work, or in court

Name That Game Answer: Metal Arms: Glitch in the System

THE FUTURE OF WARFARE

BATTLEFIELD'S BLOODY 22ND CENTURY

As we told you in last month's Loose Talk, Battlefield fans are in for a big change. The new PC title from EA is fast-forwarding into the future – 2142 to be exact. But as much as things may change (such as the return of an ice age that has made habitable land a premium), shooting your enemies over 64-player team play has thankfully remained the same. Of course, we're not going to balk at the game's advances in warfare technology, especially when they put mechs, futuristic aircraft, and other goodies at our disposal. Players can not only form squads to launch assaults against foes, but the game also features Command mode, where you strategically work behind the scenes.

Battlefield 2142 is being developed by newly-acquired developer Digital Illusions in Sweden, and is scheduled to ship for the PC this fall. No official announcement has been made regarding the consoles, but we imagine the home systems are in EA's plans.

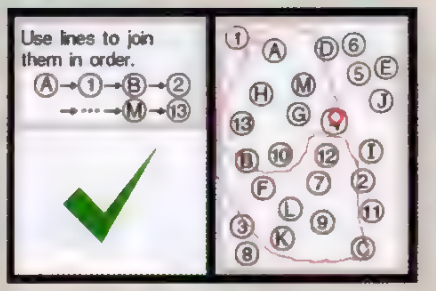
THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

Shigeru Miyamoto and Ubisoft's Michel Ancel (Beyond Good & Evil and Peter Jackson's King Kong) have been awarded knighthood into France's Order of Arts and Letters. The pair can now cross swords with the likes of Bruce Willis, who was no doubt inducted for giving the world *The Return of Bruno*.

UGLY

Snap! In a funny rebuttal, the Entertainment Software Association has filed a petition against the state of Illinois asking that the state pay the ESA $644,545 for legal fees due to the state's recent unsuccessful attempt to ban the sale of violent video games. Commenting on the matter, ESA president Doug Lowenstein said, "It was clear to everyone that the proposal would be found unconstitutional and would waste taxpayers' dollars. That is precisely what happened."



GOOD

Hospitals in Japan are using Nintendo's Brain Age DS game (see our preview in the April issue) to help the elderly stave off dementia. Doctors say that although the game won't help cure dementia, it serves as a form of self-diagnosis and it is a great form of mental stimulation.

GOOD

Video games are being used in Oregon's penal system to curb the violent behavior of its inmates. Prisoners with clean disciplinary records after 18 months are eligible to purchase a small game system loaded with 50 old-school titles. Since the program was enacted, unruly incidents among inmates has dropped. When we want to curb our violent behavior, we poke Jeremy with a stick, then we feel much better.

A recent job posting by EA may signal that a handheld version of Will Wright's Spore is in the works. The listing was simply seeking an applicant who would be "responsible for designing, creating, and maintaining game systems and content for Spore handheld titles." No specific platforms were mentioned.

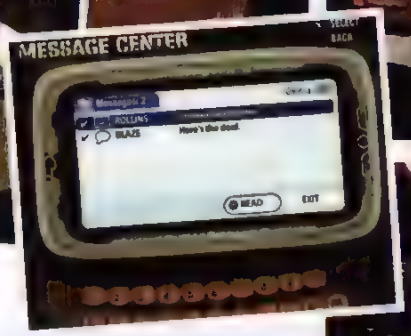
Acclaim is back in action thanks to the new ownership of Howard Marks (formerly of Activision) and Ken Chan. The company's strategy this time around is different. Acclaim is localizing free MMOs from Asia, and its first offering – Bots – is already beta testing. The company's other title, 9Dragons, has yet to receive a release date. Check out www.acclaim.com for more.

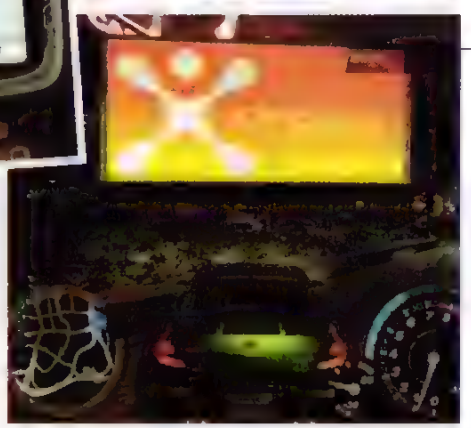
DON'T MAKE HIM WHIP OUT THE BIG GUN!

ON DVD
APRIL 25th!

Watch American Dad! on FOX
Sundays at 9:30p/8:30c

©2006 Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment [illegible] Century Fox and their associated rights are the property of Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.





Is In-Game Advertising Hurting Video Games?

The video game industry is faced with a plethora of difficult questions and many ways to look at them. In Game Informer's debate section, we will attempt to analyze these scenarios from different angles. Like a typical debate club, our editors have been assigned to defend a position whether it agrees with their personal views or not. In this edition, we tackle the controversy surrounding advertisements that appear while a game is being played.

IN-GAME ADVERTISING MAKES SENSE. But there are two points to consider: money and realism. Developing a game is expensive, marketing and distributing it can be even worse, and even though it's a harsh reality for those of us who think of video games as something too pure for commercial concerns, companies make video games to ultimately make money. One great argument for the case of ads in games is that, sometimes, making money can help a real-world based game seem even more immersive, and to many gamers that can be a good thing. Easy ways to do that are product placement, dynamic advertising, and tie-ins that cross the virtual and real-world barrier (think typing/pizza in EQ II to bring up Pizza Hut's website). We can all come up with examples that take these ideas to the extreme, but surveys indicate that the general gaming public doesn't mind ads in their digital escapism – Massive Incorporated (one of the big companies managing in-game advertising) reports that 90 percent of gamers fall into that camp. If we're giving publishers and developers the benefit of the doubt, that means that Sam Fisher gets his Sony Ericsson mobile phone, a publisher gets its cash, and gamers get more immersive realism. If we're all really lucky, the good guys who make smaller titles have another revenue stream to fund their other gaming adventures while the big guns can keep the realism high with Coke vending machines and Thrifty rental car ads splashed across the walls of stadiums.—**LISA**

DOES SPIDER-MAN WEAR DESIGNER GAP JEANS? Have you ever seen Batman eating a McGriddle after a night of crime fighting? Laugh if you want, but if advertising in video games continues to build up steam, there's a good chance that we'll see Lara Croft making a quick stop at Kentucky Fried Chicken for some greasy goodness before heading to Anubis' tomb in Egypt. The video game industry is constantly compared to Hollywood, but I've always felt that it held a greater similarity to comic books. Both are forms of art, and both are forms of escapism. Advertising in games not only tarnishes the art that developers are creating, but it also pulls the player back into reality. We should never have to play a game only to be bothered with thoughts of having to buy Turtle Wax for our cars. We should walk away with memories that we couldn't or shouldn't be allowed to grasp in the real world. Recent releases like Fight Night Round 3 nearly leaves the gamer with more thoughts of advertising than the game itself. After just a few hours of throwing punches, my stomach was growling for a combo meal at Burger King and I really wanted to test drive the new Dodge Caliber. I can't stress this next point enough: Video games need to keep flying in the same direction that Superman has – into a world of imagination and larger-than-life adventures. If advertising continues to seep into the experience, games will become as dull and everday as Clark Kent.—**REINER**

REAL COMBAT. REAL DANGER.
REAL D&D.®
EBERRON
The time for dull level grinding and one-key combat is officially over. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE™: Stormreach™ is the most dangerous and unique online game ever devised. Prepare for a radical gaming experience that puts you and your team in the middle of real-time combat within unforgiving private dungeons. Outwit, outfight and outsmart yourfoes - or die trying (a lot).
Real Combat: Fight using Active Combat, where skill matters and seconds count.
Real D&D: Experience classic D&D v3.5 races, classes, monsters and rules.
Real Danger: Use your brawn, stealth and wits to survive unforgiving dungeons.
IN STORES NOW!
WWW.DDO.COM
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE
STORMREACH
TEEN
T
Alcohol References
Blood
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
turbine
Properties Group

GREG RICHARDSON

VP OF COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS – BIOWARE-PANDEMIC/ELEVATION PARTNERS

>> Greg Richardson has an impressive track record in the game industry, having worked at 3DO, Eidos, and Electronic Arts. Recently, he began his most exciting project yet: coordinating operations at the newly formed merger of BioWare and Pandemic, which was made possible through an investment by ex-EA head John Riccitiello's Elevation Partners. We recently talked with Richardson about the future of what might be the most talented developer in all of games. <<

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1989 ▶ A Political Education
Richardson graduates from the University of California Berkeley with a degree in political science

1992 ▶ A New Trip

After Richardson sends an application letter to Electronic Arts, then-head Trip Hawkins recruits Richardson to work at the newly formed 3DO, which launches an unsuccessful disc-based video game console

1995 ▶ Developing A Brand

After the 3DO is abandoned, Richardson helps the company retool as a third party developer. The first two results of the effort are High Heat Baseball and Army Men, PC titles that would become long-running console series

1999 ▶ Starting Up
After leaving 3DO, Richardson starts a dot-com firm called Quiq, which specialized in tech support for companies like Compaq

2002 ▶ New Challenges
Richardson returns to games at Eidos, heading up the company's North American development, which includes respected studios Crystal Dynamics and Ion Storm

2003 ▶ The Giant
Richardson joins EA to become the head of EA Partners, overseeing such blockbusters as Battlefield 2, and leading the company to post revenues of over $360 million for the year 2004

2005 ▶ The Mega-Merger
After joining Elevation Partners, Richardson helps the company engineer the merger of BioWare and Pandemic. Richardson then stays on with the newly formed mega-developer to head up business operations

Elevation Partners is a "private equity firm." Could you explain what a private equity firm is to our readers?
What a private equity firm really does is raise a lot of money and they only make a handful of investments. They usually control the investments, meaning they take a percentage of the company – that means they run it. Elevation is very unique, because most private equity firms have no focus. Elevation was formed with a singular focus, which is media. Our investment portfolio is limited to a handful of areas, video games being a very prominent one.

How did you come to be involved with Elevation Partners? Was it based on your relationship with ex-EA head John Riccitiello, who helped found the company?
John had recruited me to come to EA when I was at Eidos, and I worked directly for John until he left. As they got closer to finishing the fundraising and closer to making investments, we got to talking about whether there was an opportunity for me to come in and help. So, last March, I joined as an "executive in residence." My entire focus was to come on board, help them make an investment in the video game space under the assumption that, once the investment was made, I would roll over and be part of the management team of the new company. Which is what I've done; I'm actually a full-time employee at BioWare-Pandemic.

> ***"There's only a handful of people that consistently make hit games."***

EA is extremely dominant in the video game world. What made you want to take the leap into something unknown at Elevation?
Even though I've worn a lot of hats whether in marketing or business development, I'm a product guy. What was compelling about the opportunity at Elevation, which eventually became BioWare-Pandemic, was that it was the first time that people who really understood the game business had the capital to invest in the part of the [industry] that they felt was most valuable – the content, and the people that create content.... I feel like the luckiest person around just to be a part of it.

We haven't really seen a deal like BioWare-Pandemic, in terms of two respected developers merging along with a large investment of outside money. How did it come together?
One of the key elements of Elevation's thesis was that the video game space provides a very unique opportunity for new investments. So, they had created this giant spreadsheet of the business, which ranks the top developers in the world. No kidding at all, the top two companies were Pandemic and BioWare. They were very unique in that they both had significant scale; both were over 200 employees. From a quality view, no one touches BioWare. Pandemic was on this amazing run where almost everything they touched was not only commercially successful but also being critically acclaimed. If we had the kind of talent that they had and some great capital and some experienced people like John and I to be involved in the management, the sky would be the limit. About six to nine months later, we put it together.

Are things pretty much business as usual at BioWare and Pandemic or are you consolidating some of their operations together, as often happens?
That's an interesting question, because we didn't have an acquiring company. Both Pandemic and BioWare took a large portion of their equity and rolled it into the new company; they own a significant portion of the company. Because we didn't have an organization, we were able to come in and say, "Look, you were successful in the past, we need you to continue to be successful in the future. We want to leave the brand names in place, we want to leave the culture in place, and all we want to do is make you better in ways that you think make sense." In terms of the synergies between the two companies, if there are opportunities to share intellectual properties, technology, and learning – great. But none of it can be forced.

In most traditional publisher relationships, the publisher retains the rights to IP. What are you looking for in terms of publishing deals?
In the history of the industry, there have been a handful of great developers that have been in a position to capitalize themselves to some degree. Look at id Software and what they did with Doom and more recently the Valve guys with Half-Life. These companies that have been very successful and have been able to maintain ownership of their IP and still foster positive relationships with publishers. That's the way to think about BioWare-Pandemic and our publishing partners. There's only a handful of people that consistently make hit games, so we've had a lot of interest from publishers.

Are BioWare and Pandemic going to drastically expand their numbers of games and development studios in the coming years?
The reason that BioWare and Pandemic made so much sense is that they had management that could scale. They could get bigger while still making great games. At BioWare, when they were a single team they were great; and now that they are 275 people, they're still building 90-rated games. We are ambitious about growth. We're hiring at all the studio locations we currently have. We have the BioWare Edmonton studio, and we just announced a new studio for BioWare Texas in Austin, which is going to focus on the MMO space. The Pandemic guys, in addition to the studio in Westwood, have a studio in Brisbane, Australia. Having said that, I don't think we'll be out there looking to open studios just for the sake of growth. Austin is a great example, because there is this group of people that really know the massively multiplayer space and we can combine that with BioWare's expertise in making role-playing games. We look at that part of the business and what World of Warcraft has done and our brands in the role-playing space, and we get really excited.

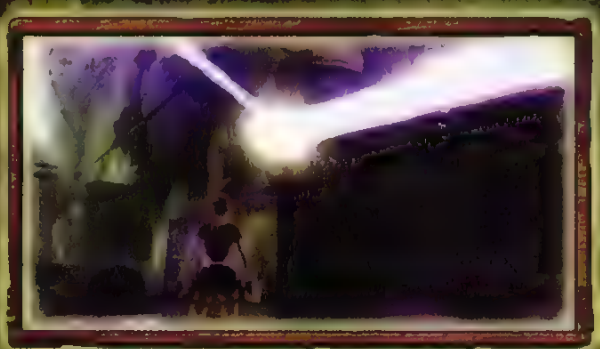
What can we expect from BioWare-Pandemic in terms of new titles or announcements this year?
Well, obviously, I can't let the cat out of the bag on anything that's too new. But I will say at E3 this year, consumers are going to see two products that will embody the kinds of product we want to make going forward. One of them has been announced – Mass Effect from BioWare, which is the virtual successor to Knights of the Old Republic. This is going to be the first epic scale, huge storyline, science fiction role-playing game that we think is going to define the Xbox 360. Pandemic is going to bring back a sequel to one of the games it's made incredibly successful in its past, but taking it to a whole new level. We think both those games will have a chance to be the game of the show, and will be among the shining lights that will be what next-gen software is about.

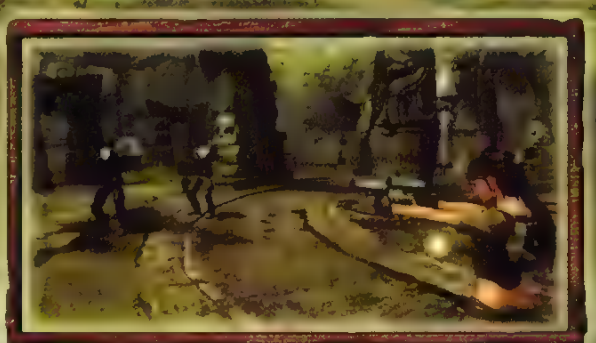
NEW ERA FOR BIOWARE AND PANDEMIC

Photo: John Green

Greg Richardson now oversees business operations for both BioWare and Pandemic

SEEING IS BELIEVING





TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

PlayStation 2

XBOX

The way it's meant to be played

Jeep

DUCATI

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend © 2006 Core Design Ltd. Developed by Crystal Dynamics, Inc. Published by Eidos, [illegible] Eidos and the Eidos logo, Crystal Dynamics and the Crystal Dynamics logo are [illegible] trademarks of SCi Entertainment Group. Jeep® and the Jeep® grille design are registered trademarks of DaimlerChrysler [illegible] ©DaimlerChrysler Corporation 2006. DUCATI LOGOS are [illegible] trademarks of Ducati Motor Holding S.p.A. The name NVIDIA and the NVIDIA logo are registered trademarks of [illegible] are trademarks of the NVIDIA Corporation. [illegible] and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation [illegible] U.S. and/or other countries. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. All rights reserved.

LARA CROFT
TOMB RAIDER
LEGEND
www.TombRaider.com
eidos

tech

HD DVD LAUNCH

TOSHIBA HD-A1

Manufacturer: Toshiba
Website: www.toshiba.com **List Price:** $499.99

THE HARDWARE

It's about to get really ugly in home theaters. Like it or not, the video format wars are officially beginning with the launch of HD DVD players next month. Toshiba's HD-A1 model is a nice introductory-level player with enough high-tech juice to support the format's launch titles (see list at right) – HDMI output, video upconversion for current DVDs to 1080i, and a bucket of supported disc types. Five hundred dollars is a lot compared to current DVD players, but when that format launched, a player started at over a grand. One could say we should count our blessings...

THE MEDIA

HD DVD offers some interesting possibilities for video lovers. Like Blu-ray, extra features such as commentary and cast bios will be readily accessible while watching the flick, instead of heading to a separate menu screen. The format also supports up to 1080p video resolution through an HDMI port, although that's something of a double-edged sword as only newer HDTVs have the input. If your TV doesn't have one, you'll be looking at the next generation of video through high quality (but analog) component cables or an HDMI to DVI conversion cable.

THE EARLY RELEASES

- The 40-Year-Old Virgin
- Batman Begins
- Blazing Saddles
- The Bourne Supremacy
- The Chronicles of Riddick
- Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
- Lara Croft: Tomb Raider
- Lethal Weapon
- The Matrix
- Pitch Black
- School of Rock
- Serenity
- Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow
- Star Trek: First Contact
- Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines
- Unforgiven

With a format war, fans always lose. Movie studios in particular have been making it hard for film buffs to make an easy decision between the new standards. With Warner Home Video, Universal Studios, New Line, and HBO in the HD DVD camp, listed above are some of the titles you can expect to see in the first year of launch.

etc

DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES SOUNDTRACK

Manufacturer: Nimrod Productions
Website: www.nimrodproductions.com
List Price: TBA

Set to come out in two volumes chronicling the game's dual time periods, the discs feature a mountain of interesting tracks from the likes of Public Enemy, The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Suicide, and Grandmaster Flash. Many of the selections are new exclusives and a download-only option of 21 songs is available through iTunes, with physical copies releasing around the same time as the game.

etc

ROCKSTAR/RETAIL MAFIA WARRIORS TEES

Manufacturer: Rockstar/Retail Mafia
Website: www.rockstargames.com/warehouse **List Price:** $40.00

In collaboration with New York-based street wear design crew Retail Mafia, Rockstar Games is putting out a limited edition line of t-shirts based on the gang logos and imagery featured in The Warriors game and movie. Each crew was handled by a different artist in the collective and printed in runs of 500 shirts and 500 hoodies.

tech

OXYRIDE EXTREME POWER BATTERIES

Manufacturer: Panasonic
Website: www.panasonic.com
List Price: $2.99 (AA 2-Pack)

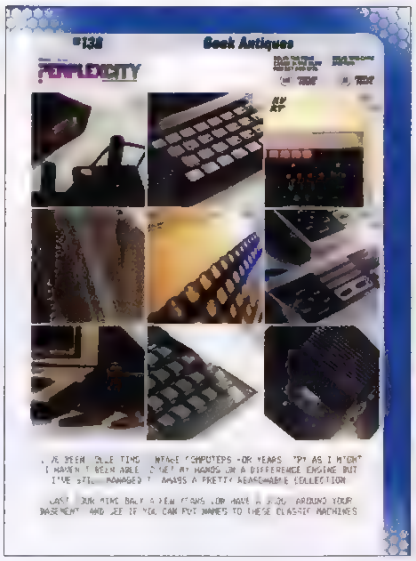
It's not often that something as everyday as batteries gets talked about, but Panasonic's updated Oxyride line could be just the power that our wireless controllers need. While how much longer they last depends on what they're used for, in many cases the batteries could double the lifespan of current alkaline ones – and they don't even cost much more.

etc

PERPLEX CITY

Manufacturer: Mind Candy **Website:** www.mindcandydesign.com
List Price: $4.50/pack

Part I Love Bees and part collectible card game, Mind Candy's elaborate web of internet sites, message boards, phone numbers, and – oh yeah, cards – will have your brain melting. Each card has an individual puzzle that can be solved and tracked through the website; and some require you to hold them under blacklites or heat them up to expose hidden text – at least that's the rumor we heard. Communities have sprung up to work on the tougher cards, a few of which have been out for months and never solved. At the end of this intensely layered and convoluted puzzle is a real-world prize of $200,000…and no, you didn't misread that, so get to puzzling and we can split the booty.



■ The folks at Mind Candy suggested we run this puzzle card, since our geeky clientele would probably get it straight away. Other mind benders deal with logic puzzles, genetics, and even baking

tech

PROJECT ORIGAMI

■ The project's focus encompasses concept devices (such as this saucy red one with the flip out media controls, top) and real production units (like the Samsung Q1, directly above)

Manufacturer: Microsoft
Website: www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/umpc
List Price: TBA

Before this year's CEBIT convention, wild speculation was thundering across the Internet. The rumor? That Microsoft was releasing a handheld gaming unit. A video of it had leaked showing someone playing Halo 2, and implied the unit would somehow manage to be everything to everyone. Well, as it always is, the truth is a little more pedestrian than that. Project Origami was revealed to be the hardware and software to make the "Ultra-Mobile PC," which is essentially a smaller version of a Tablet PC. Its XP-based operating system sure could be handy, with future editions using Vista and much of that OS's built-in gaming suite (like connectivity with Xbox Live player information). A few manufacturers have already promised units for this summer, almost all of which will be under $1,000.

■ A software-based on-screen keyboard displays a semicircle of keys in each bottom corner of the screen for quick text entry. While a handful of concept units have been shown (like the one in the bottom picture here), only a few have been officially announced

ARE VIDEO GAMES ART?

BY JON M. GIBSON, FOUNDER/CURATOR I AM 8-BIT

"Are games art?" Having created I Am 8-bit — a group art show with a certain fondness for remixed renderings of '80s gaming icons — it's a question I get a lot. My answers: Probably. Unlikely. Maybe.

Sometimes I scramble away — often stubbing my toe — because this is a conversation nearly as cumbersome as Darwin vs. the Bible. It's a scene best avoided: sweaty, agitated, and I once even witnessed an Xbox controller nearly knock someone unconscious. So in an effort to project peace among gamers and non-nerds alike, I'll try to save you the quarrel — or at least perplex you a bit more.

Personally, I'm convinced that games are art. Objectively, I'm confused. Really, it's best to first consider the very definition of art (send all hate mail to: jon@iam8bit.net). Art is generally regarded as something emotionally provocative — a painting, a film, a song, a story, a potato chip shaped like the Virgin Mary that is a specimen of the artist that created it. By looking and/or listening, you're taking a magnifying glass to that artist's DNA — his childhood, his twisted fantasies, his humor, his political tendencies, his sexual proclivities, his blacklist, his education, his breakfast, his unabridged consumption manual to life. You're getting a piece of that person, whether you like it or not.

That said, it makes sense that Hemingway gets respect. Spielberg earned his Oscars. The Beatles — hell, that's musical history. Come on, Van Gogh cut off his friggin' ear — that dude deserves mad artistic props! But those are all passive experiences controlled with the utmost precision by the artist. You don't get to choose a different ending to the movie based on your mood; you can't skip a few pages of a novel and pretend they never existed. As Roger Ebert put it so poetically in his controversial *Chicago Sun-Times* declaration, "For most gamers, videogames represent a loss of those precious hours we have available to make ourselves more cultured, civilized, and empathetic."

Yes, it's true — the secret's out — games are interactive, unlike every other traditionally acceptable form of art. You toggle. You mash. Your legs go numb from hours of play. However, like Tarantino has final cut on his films, there is authorial control of videogames as well. While Miyamoto may be more of a producer these days, he's still the master storyteller that gave us the first game with a thru line, a protagonist, a princess in peril, and a villain to meddle. That game was Donkey Kong. There was no dialogue, no CG cut scenes; still, there was a definitive beginning, middle, and end crafted by Mr. Mario himself. Simple, sure, but it's the same core structure all screenwriters lay as a foundation. Fast-forward to our next-gen directors: David Jaffe, the principal of last year's andrenaline-charged God of War; and Tim Schafer, the fountain of funny behind Pyschonauts. These are gaming's authors — the visionaries of pixels and polygons, just like Kubnck, Da Vinci, and Mozart were for their generation.

But what about the itchy idea of games being like a blank canvas? You can cruise anywhere in a Warthog, squash a goomba, drink a life potion. In films or books, the path from start to finish is as straight as an arrow; in games, it zigzags. It forks. It goes off the grid. Or at least that's the perception. Most games merely cast the illusion of choice, when in reality there is a very strict A to B to Z roadmap that all players must follow. You might go directly to the next town in Final Fantasy VII or stay to gamble at the Chocobo Stadium for a stint, but you'll still end up at the very same place that everyone else does to battle Sephiroth for the finale. Most videogames are driven by a few major events — whether that's divvied up by levels, bosses, or quests — with lots of smaller tasks in-between. It doesn't matter how you behave during the little twists as long as you survive long enough to make it to the epic turns…

…Until recently, that is. With adventures like World of Warcraft, the lines are beginning to blur — every miniscule choice, in theory, is starting to count. It's an exception, but the industry may sway towards this "choose your own destiny" direction as technology advances. And this is where the "games are art" argument really begins to crumble.

So, what — since only some games are completely controlled experiences, then only some of them are art? They are all certainly artistic in nature, but are they art? Maybe. Unlikely. Probably. The moment we start cherry-picking, subjectivity conquers — and we all lose. It's all based on experience. For every person that got a little cathartic after slaying their first giant in Shadow of the Colossus, there's another that couldn't care less, switching the channel to *American Idol* auditions. The same goes for a trashy celebrity rant in *US Weekly* vs. a novella by Capote. Who are we to judge the Jane Doe that'd rather empathize with Jennifer Aniston instead of reading a slice of great American fiction?

We should really be asking ourselves the more obvious question: "Are games art…to me?"

> **"Yes, it's true — the secret's out — games are interactive, unlike every other traditionally acceptable form of art."**

Jon M. Gibson is the author of I am 8-bit: Art Inspired by Classic Video Games *of the '80s and co-curator of the* I am 8-bit *version 2.006 exhibit in Los Angeles, running April 18 – May 19, 2006 (www.iam8bit.net)*

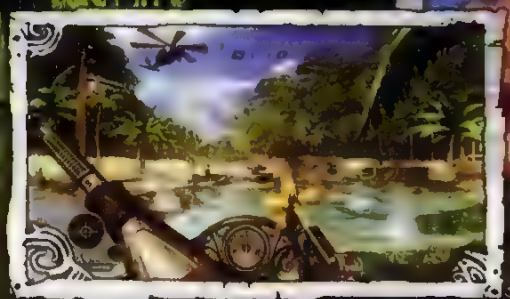
The views and opinions expressed on this page are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer Magazine or its staff

If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com

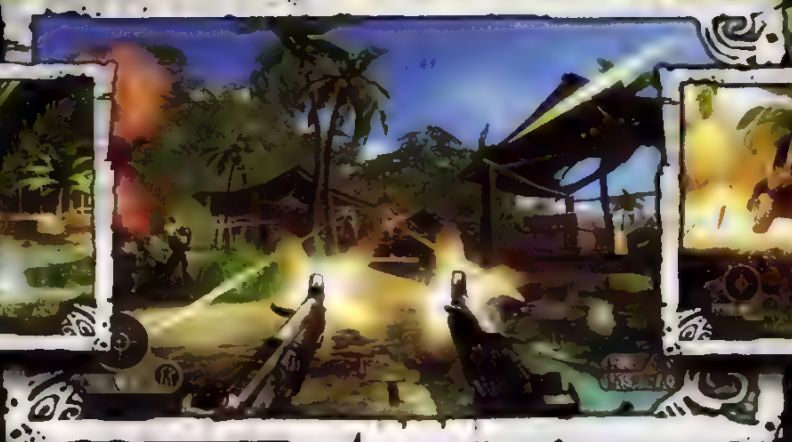
FARCRY INSTINCTS PREDATOR

THE SEQUEL TO THE XBOX SHOOTER OF THE YEAR* NOW ARRIVES ON XBOX 360.™

2 GAMES IN ONE
Also Includes Enhanced FAR CRY INSTINCTS!



WAGE WAR ACROSS LAND, SEA, AND AIR IN A BREATHTAKING TROPICAL WILDERNESS.



CREATE YOUR OWN MAPS AND SHARE THEM ONLINE FOR EXPLOSIVE ISLAND WARFARE.

HUNT AND BE HUNTED BY UNNERVINGLY BRILLIANT AI ENEMIES.

Available Now www.FarCryGame.com

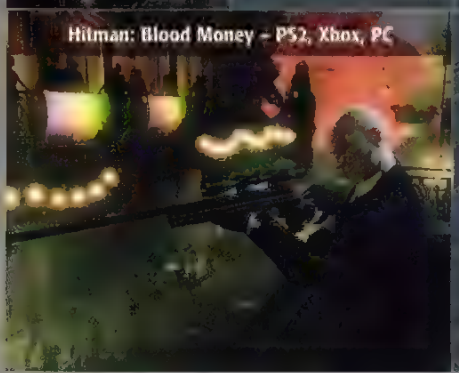
*Best Xbox First Person Shooter of the Year 2005, TeamXbox.com. Action Game of the Year 2004 – PC Gamer Magazine

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes

LIVE

UBISOFT

may

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat
MLB Slugfest 2006		**02** NEW RELEASES • Guilty Gear: Judgment – PSP • MLB Slugfest 2006 – PS2, Xbox • Moto GP 2006 – 360 • Teen Titans – PS2, Xbox, GC	**03** CIVIL WAR The biggest event of the year for Marvel Comics begins today. Hero is pitted against hero, as the issue of secret identities is finally brought into the spotlight. With half of the universe ready to reveal their long-held secrets, and the other half swearing they'll go to the grave before they remove their masks, you know there's trouble brewing.	Civil War	**05** Testosterone pepperoni! Hyperbole in the monkey garden! Seven airplanes are allergic to bulletproof coffins! The above makes about as much sense as the plot in *Mission: Impossible 3*, which crash lands in theaters today.	*Mission: Impossible 3* (© 2006 Paramount Pictures)
Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends – PC		**09**	**10** 52 This weekly series from DC Comics will run for an entire year, it chronicles the missing time that led up to the current	52	**12** Bringing back *Poseidon* takes us one step closer to Hollywood remaking *Ishtar*. Ishtar with totally awesome space battles and Ryan Reynolds! Anyway, *Poseidon* opens in theaters today.	**13** VINTAGE COMPUTER FESTIVAL EAST 3.0 Head to the InfoAge Learning Center in Wall Township, NJ if you want to show off your computer wares or wheel and deal with the various vendors.
New Super Mario Bros. – DS		**16** NEW RELEASES • Dance Factory – PS2 • Fuel – Xbox, PC • New Super Mario Bros. – DS • Tomb Raider: Legend – PSP • X-Men: The Official Game – 360, PS2, Xbox, GC, DS, GBA, PC • Zoo Tycoon 2: African Adventure – PC	**17** STAR WARS: LEGACY Over one hundred years have passed since the second Death Star was destroyed. A new evil is sweeping across the galaxy. Even the resurgent Empire couldn't withstand its wrath. The Jedi are targeted next. The Legacy comic book will debut for only 25 cents.	X-Men: The Official Game – 360, PS2, Xbox, GC, DS, GBA, PC	**19** To give theatergoers a new experience, director Ron Howard decided to tack on a new twist ending to *The Da Vinci Code*, which comes out in theaters and on PS2, Xbox, and PC today. In this version, we learn that Jesus is actually Obi-Wan Kenobi.	*The Da Vinci Code*
	22 *X-Men 3: The Last Stand* spreads its mutant mayhem in theaters on May 26. Will it live up to the awesome first two entries or will Brett Ratner ruin the franchise? It doesn't matter, because either way you are going. Hand over the money, nerd!	**23** NEW RELEASES • Field Commander – PSP • Lemmings – PSP • Table Tennis – 360 • Tokyo Xtreme Racer Drift – PS2	Play! A Video Game Symphony	**26** PLAY! A VIDEO GAME SYMPHONY The team behind the Dear Friends: Music From Final Fantasy kicks off its newest tour in Chicago's Rosemont Theater. The symphony will recreate music from Castlevania, Halo, Shenmue, Silent Hill, Final Fantasy and Metal Gear Solid. Much of the music is arranged by famed video game composers like Nobuo Uematsu and Yuzo Koshiro. CCAC The Classic Computer and Gaming Show descends upon the National Guard Armory of Lorain, OH with over 5,000 feet of vintage video game goodness. If you scream "Game Informer rules!" at the door, you'll get in for free... or not.	
 Hitman: Blood Money – PS2, Xbox, PC		**30**	Big Brain Academy – DS			

POKER. RAISED.

STACKED™

WITH DANIEL NEGREANU

1. Raise your game with tips from Player of the Year Daniel Negreanu

2. Test your skill against the world's best learning No Limit Hold'em A.I.

3. Go online and prove yourself in massive multi-table tournaments

4. And you could end up at the Stacked Showdown on MTV™

"Halo with chips"
Maxim magazine

For more information and updates go to:
Official Stacked Site and Tournament Headquarters
stacked.mtv.com

"Genius."
Xbox.com

For PC, Xbox®, PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system and the PSP™ (PlayStation® Portable) system

myelin 5K ONLINE ENABLED XBOX LIVE PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Crude Humor
Mild Language
Simulated Gambling

© 2006 Myelin Media, LLC. All rights reserved. Stacked™ is the trademark of Myelin Media, LLC. The Myelin logo is the trademark of Myelin Media, LLC. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox Live, the Live logo, and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. "PSP" is a trademark and "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Memory Stick Duo™ may be required (sold separately). Online play requires Internet connection and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). The Online icon is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. (C)2005 MTV Networks. All Rights Reserved. MTV: MUSIC TELEVISION and all related titles and logos are trademarks of MTV Networks, A Division of Viacom International Inc. The ratings logo is the trademark and property of the Entertainment Software Rating Board. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

ARMED FOR THE REVOLUTION

At their best, video games are about immersion. Players shouldn't feel like they are observing the action onscreen, they should be figuratively transported into a different world.

Your avatar's life should become your life, and its adventures should be your adventures. The controller in a player's hands should transcend its role as a mere interface device; it should become the weapon that you see onscreen. Most games try to push immersion with better graphics, more intense action, or overwhelming sound. But one upcoming console is doing something different, trying a new way to make that controller in your hand become something more. That console is the Nintendo Revolution.

With the unveiling of the Revolution's motion-based controller, most gamers envisioned the kaleidoscope of unique ideas that Nintendo would use it for. But while the gaming public was preoccupied with demos of cooking and fishing games, one developer asked itself the question of how the Revolution could be used to take a familiar genre to the next level. This company wanted to figure out how to use its unique controller not to develop an entirely new type of game, but to elevate an already-popular style. That company is Ubisoft, and the answer to its self-imposed challenge is the Revolution launch title known as Red Steel.

UNLIMITED CHANNEL

NINTENDO REVOLUTION
> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT PARIS
> **RELEASE** NINTENDO REVOLUTION LAUNCH

RED STEEL

WORKING TITLE

It is highly unusual for a company like Nintendo to allow the exclusive first look at one of its consoles through a third-party game like Red Steel. But as it turns out, Nintendo has been closely involved in the development of this game, and has great confidence that it is a perfect way to introduce the world to the Revolution. Developed by Ubisoft Paris, one of the publisher's oldest and most experienced teams, Red Steel is a mixture of old and new: a first-person shooter that uses the Revolution controller for aiming – and much more. While Nintendo obviously has several games in development for the Revolution launch, the company simply doesn't make games like Red Steel, so letting a respected publisher like Ubisoft introduce the Revolution through an easy-to-understand game type allows both companies to demonstrate what they do best. So naturally, when we were invited to Paris to see and play this game for ourselves, we jumped at the chance.

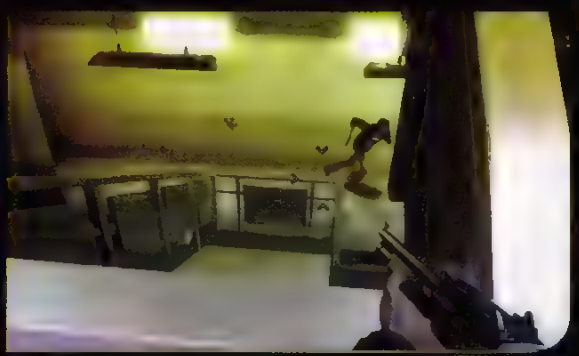
The team at Ubisoft Paris knew that they wanted to create games for the Revolution after the Nintendo DS released. Impressed with how Nintendo had created a handheld that offered new twists on familiar gameplay, as well as all-new game concepts that anyone could play, they knew that the publisher would pursue a similar goal with its next console. After learning that the Revolution's remote-style controller would be based on motion-sensing technology that translated the player's movements into the game, the team immediately began conceptualizing by playing with the remotes laying around their offices, trying to pinpoint what movements were the most fun to do. The engineers on staff spent countless hours waving television remotes around, emulating the motions for digging, throwing, swinging, and more. Once their antics began to coalesce into actual game concepts, they brought their ideas to Nintendo's president Satoru Iwata and the company's legendary chief creative officer, Shigeru Miyamoto. "We got tons of ideas of interactions, and these are what we brought to Japan when we went to see Mr. Iwata and Mr. Miyamoto," said Damien Moret, the team's marketing game manager. "Then we received the first prototype of the controller. We focused first on the controller, and wanted to build the whole game around it." Happy with the Paris team's enthusiasm and concepts, Iwata and Miyamoto gave their blessings to the project. Working closely with Nintendo's engineers in Japan,

continued on page 47

Tokai is the head of the upstart Yakuza gang that kidnapped your fiancé

The photos to the left of the screenshots indicate how the Revolution controller will translate your actions onscreen

When playing Red Steel, you essentially aim the controller like it was a real gun. Your in-game hand, mimics your movements, and the camera adjusts to keep your target near the center of the screen



continued from page 45

the Paris team began their work on its Revolution launch title.

Since the Revolution features an entirely new type of controller, it was important to the Red Steel team that everything about the game was created around it. Although first-person shooters are common on every home console, they wanted to make a game that could only fit on the Revolution. It was imperative to them that Red Steel did not feel like a traditional shooter adapted to fit a new controller – it should feel like an experience that is completely tailored to the system. Some players would certainly end up playing Red Steel before any other game on the Revolution, and therefore it was important that the title taught gamers how to use the controller. While some Revolution launch titles will relegate teaching the basics of the controller to a simple tutorial, for the Paris team, this became the central concept behind the game. Anyone who picks up the Revolution controller should be transformed into a master by playing through Red Steel. With this in mind, the team started developing its game after E3 last year on both GameCube development kits and PC, with the intention of shifting development onto Revolution dev kits as soon as they were available. "What is most important is the idea and the design behind a game," said Moret. "Because we can adapt it to more powerful technology, but in terms of gameplay, it remains the same."

"Our idea was to change the way you play a shooter, a first-person game," continued Moret. "For us, it was very important to do a first-person game, because you are physically in the exact same situation as your character in the game. In a shooter, you typically just have that on the screen," he said, stretching his hand out in front of him to illustrate his point. "The controller is exactly the same. It's a fantastic device to develop a first-person game for, because you see a hand with a device in it, and you've got your hand with a device in it. If you make a good parallel between the controller and the device – be it a gun, a sword, or whatever, you have the feeling of really having it in your hand."

To further explain why the Revolution will be ideal for FPS games, Moret handed us the latest version of the controller, allowing us to turn it over in our hands, feel its light weight and small size, and wave it around in the air in a pantomime of gameplay. "The controller is a pointer," he continued. "It can sense motion vertically, horizontally, depth, and also twisting. So, you can do a lot of movements, and it feels the orientation and gravity. So with one hand, without any buttons, you can do tons of things, and in a much more direct and natural way than pushing buttons."

"This game is not about pushing buttons," chimed in Nicolas Eypert, Red Steel's creative director. "It is about moving, looking, and gesturing. So it is something new to master. That was our starting point for the game. That's where we got the whole idea of the game. We wanted to do something based on mastering the controller. When you first play the Revolution, you'll want to learn how to use it and master it. We tried to find a type of environment that fit with this idea. We wanted to design a game where you start by using your weapons in a ruthless way, and you fight in a more skilled way as you learn the controller. It takes seconds to figure out how the controller works, but it takes longer to master it." The idea of helping players become proficient with the controller by practicing their skills in the game led the team to a setting and world steeped in the martial arts. The focus on practicing movements until they become instinctual found in martial arts fit perfectly with what the team wanted to do with their game. But they also wanted to do a modern, realistic title, with few fantastic elements. Enter the Yakuza.

Although the West knows the Yakuza simply as the Japanese mafia, the reality of the criminal syndicate is far more complicated than that. The largest criminal organization in the world, the Yakuza functions quite differently than the Italian *Cosa Nostra*, operating semi-publicly and adhering to strict codes of conduct and honor. Yakuza members cover their bodies in elaborate tattoos to signify their membership, cut off the tips of their pinky fingers if they have committed a dishonorable act, and consider themselves to be the modern day heirs of the samurai.

While Red Steel's writer Jerome Collette hopes that players learn something about the Yakuza from the game the team isn't striving for complete realism. Instead, it is focused on the fun, adventurous aspects of a regular person's journey into the heart of the Japanese underworld. As a Western developer, Ubisoft Paris isn't trying to make a Japanese game. Piles of books and DVDs about the Yakuza, samurai, and other Japanese topics may litter the office, but the team knows that they can never understand the country in the same way that natives do. As outsiders to this culture, they can only make a game from that perspective, which is why they are making a game about a Westerner who finds himself immersed in the unfamiliar world of the Japanese underground. That outsider is you.

It was important to the team that the player feel completely involved in the world, and thus the decision was made

■ Notice how twisting the controller makes your in-game hand replicate the same motion

not to assign any personality to the main character. You are the hero in Red Steel, and this is your adventure. The only backstory to the protagonist is that he is an American male who is engaged to a Japanese-American woman named Miyu. On the night that you are supposed to meet Miyu's father for the first time, she is kidnapped from the posh Los Angeles restaurant you're dining in. You quickly learn that her father is a Yakuza boss named Sato, who is in possession of an important ceremonial katana. A younger, more ruthless Yakuza faction led by a man called Tokai attempted to steal the sword from Sato to shift the balance of power within the organization. Sato thwarted the attempt to steal the sword, but was mortally wounded in the attack. Tokai's men kidnap Miyu in response, hoping to trade her life for the sword. But Sato refuses to hand over the sword to Tokai, instead giving it to you, with the instructions to use it to find his daughter. Sato dies soon after giving you the sword, leaving you all alone and untrained against Tokai's men. Armed with the katana and a selection of firearms, you must follow Miyu to Japan and defeat Tokai, but first you must gain the skills necessary to confront him.

According to Eypert, the first third of the game will be more brutal by necessity. When you are first learning to use the Revolution controller, you will be less precise and favor more devastating weapons, like machine guns. But as you progress through the game, your skill with the controller will increase, so you can use smaller guns more efficiently, and you are rewarded for doing so. The goal, says Eypert, is to use five bullets to kill five enemies. When you are fighting with this level of skill, the music and sound effects will reflect it, remaining calm and peaceful. When you fight brutally, the sounds around you grow increasingly more intense. This audio feedback is one way that the game stresses the importance of harmony and mastery of your skills. The other way is a special ability called freeze shot. By fighting efficiently, you fill the freeze shot gauge, and fighting chaotically causes it to decrease. When you have the freeze shot gauge filled, you can hit a button to momentarily stop time, and then can target specific locations on your enemies' bodies. While it will be tempting to use freeze shot to score a series of headshots, it is often more beneficial to take a non-lethal shot, such as shooting a gun out of an enemy's hands. In many situations, there will be a higher-ranking enemy who commands the others in the area. By defeating him and sparing his life, he will offer you his respect and help. The enemies he commands will surrender their guns, and the boss may offer you a new weapon, a special path through the level, or other reward. Any time you spare an enemy, you will be rewarded, as it always takes more skill to spare a life than to take it.

Freeze shot adds a lot of depth to the gunplay and is a natural fit for the Revolution controller, but isn't the only way that Red Steel adds spice to the combat. After all, why would you carry a sword through a game if you couldn't use it? Although the majority of Red Steel's gameplay will stress ranged combat, there will be times you need to get up close and personal. You can switch to the sword at any time, and if you can get close enough to an enemy, you can use it for one-hit stealth kills. In other moments, you'll find yourself locked into intense one-on-one sword duels. Any time you see an enemy with a sword of his own, you'll need to take yours out right away, or his blade will make short work of you. Swinging the Revolution controller in front of you, you will see the sword onscreen follow your motions, letting you experience the duel firsthand. Of course, you won't need to be a trained fencer to survive one of these encounters. "Anyone should be able to play this game," says Moret. "With this kind of controller, you can be a man, a woman, a kid, a grown-up, whoever, and take it and be able to play. It only takes about 10 seconds to learn."

The key to winning a sword fight is timing and reaction – flailing wildly simply won't do. Making specific motions with the controller will trigger sword combos, which will be essential to learn in order to survive. The team hasn't finalized what motions will unleash what special moves, but imagine tracing a giant circle or X in the air with your hand to unleash a devastating attack, and you get the idea of what they are aiming for. If you launch into an attack only to realize that you've left yourself open to a deadly strike from your foe, the motion-based controller will actually allow you to

Continued on page 58

■ Learning motion-based combos will be the key to winning swordfights

■ The faster reaction time offered by the Revolution controller allows the game's enemies to be faster and deadlier than in other games. They will coordinate tactics and create their own cover

continued from

stop your attack by simply pausing your own movement. Like everything else in Red Steel, you will master these skills by practicing with the controller, and as your finesse increases, so will your skill in the game. Of course, you won't simply stumble across new moves by accident. You will learn new moves and attacks from two mentors, who will teach you the skills you need to survive in the dangerous Japanese underworld.

After learning the basics of combat in L.A., you must follow Miyu's trail to Japan, a land where ancient traditions live side-by-side with cutting-edge technology. Here you meet two men who will be critical to the next section of the game: Otori, a former Yakuza member who trains you in the art of the sword, and Kajima, who instructs you in the art of the gun. These two teachers will happily impart their wisdom to you, but only if you show them the proper respect, and even the way you interact with friendly characters is tied to the controller. Your communication with these characters is limited to yes or no answers – you signal the affirmative by nodding the controller up and down, and the negative by shaking it from side to side. The team is playing with other ways to use the controller to interact with the characters in the game – such as using it to bow to your masters to further demonstrate your respect. Of course, you can act disrespectfully as well. There are no cutscenes in the game – all conversations take place in-game, as in Half-Life 2. However, unlike that game, characters won't keep prattling on if you walk away from them. They will react angrily to your impudent behavior.

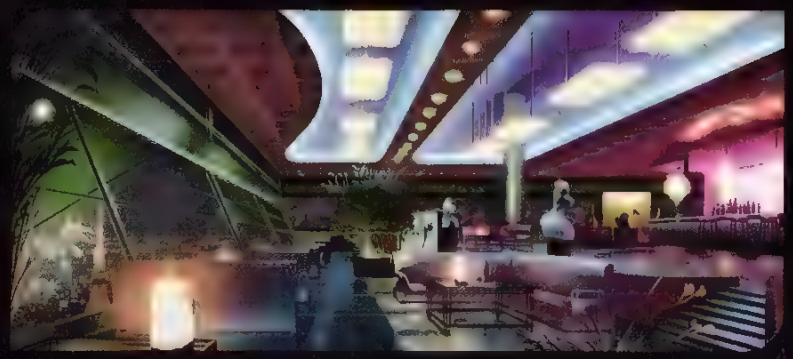
Staying in the good graces of your masters is key, as they will give you missions that can be tackled in any order. The goal of most of these quests will be to track down a high-ranking Yakuza member and convince him to side with you, rather than Tokai's brutal gang. You won't be able to simply walk up to these gangsters and ask for their cooperation, though – you'll have to prove that you're worthy, which will typically involve besting them with your sword and sparing their lives. You'll need as many Yakuza bosses on your side as you can get leading up to the final section of the quest: your confrontation with Tokai. Without their help, you'll be in for a rough time when you finally square off against him. Oftentimes, you'll face these characters in head-to-head sword battles, and turn them to your side by stopping a potentially deadly blow milliseconds before it strikes. Recognizing your skills, they will surrender and pledge to your side.

If you feel like you need a little more time honing your skills before taking on a big mission, you can replay training segments with your masters in the hub world to get a little more practice. Or, if you'd like to play, but don't feel like working towards Miyu's rescue, you can opt for some multiplayer instead. Red Steel will support four-player splitscreen multiplayer, with both traditional deathmatches and some new game types that Ubisoft Paris isn't ready to reveal yet. But the team assured us that they will be just as organic to the Revolution as everything else about the game. They also aren't talking about any possible online component, as Nintendo is still rather quiet on how the Revolution's announced Wi-Fi support will figure into its overall online capabilities. But discussion of Red Steel's multiplayer aspect did reveal some very interesting information about the Revolution. The Revolution works with any television set by placing a small, unobtrusive sensor bar either above or below it. You can stand at any angle to the TV, and it works just as well, losing no accuracy. You can even take your Revolution controller to a friend's house and instantly start playing multiplayer without syncing up the controller. Perhaps most impressive is the fact that although splitscreen reduces the amount of onscreen space you are playing in, you don't have to make smaller motions – you can gesture as widely as you want, and it won't interfere with the other player's onscreen quadrants. Of course, there's no way we could verify these claims without actually playing the system – so that's exactly what we did.

During our visit to Ubisoft Paris, we met with several members of the team, learned the history of the project,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 53

In the middle of the game, you will recieve missions from two masters in a central hub world. These missions can be tackled in any order



While the Revolution won't be as powerful as the PS3 or 360, it will still be able to produce impressive visuals. Ubisoft Paris hopes to populate the game with many types of environments that look distinct from one another

Notice how the angle of the in-game gun reflects the angle at which you hold the controller

Continued from page 50

discussed the ideas, concepts, and goals behind the game, and saw many different elements of the game on PC screens and development kits. As valuable as all this information was, none of it could compare to the first time we picked up the controller. That was the moment when everything came together. The Revolution is real; we have played it. And it will change everything.

Red Steel uses what is commonly referred to as "nunchuck-style" controls, in which the player aims with the remote-shaped motion sensing device and moves with an analog stick attachment that is tethered to the remote with a long cord. The two triggers on the front of the analog unit activate ducking and jumping, while everything else is handled with the remote. Picking up the controller for ourselves, we quickly discovered that Red Steel's gameplay is exactly what the Ubisoft Paris team claimed: at once familiar and strange, easy to learn and hard to master. Our first gameplay experience came in the form of a level that was populated with several shooting ranges, in which targets popped up from behind cover to be blasted away. Aiming with the controller is as simple as using a laser pointer: You point your hand at a target and hit the trigger on the underside of the controller to fire. Unlike other FPS games, which tie the camera and aiming together, Red Steel's camera follows your aim with a slight delay. If, for example, you point to the edge of the screen, the camera will turn to re-center on your view after a second or two. With the sensitivity of the controller, a standard FPS controller would move too much, potentially making the player feel ill.

The shaky disorientation that came with the first moments quickly gave way to fast, accurate blasting of targets on all corners of the screen. Thanks to the improved reaction time that the Revolution controller offers, the Red Steel team can create gunfight scenarios that would be extraordinarily difficult with a standard controller. Most console FPS games limit their enemies to a horizontal plane to prevent player frustration, but targets on a vertical plane are just as easy to hit with the Revolution controller -- you can aim at a target as quickly as you can move your hand. In the demo level we played, targets popped out on rooftops and in second-story windows, as well as from behind cover points on ground level, and all were equally easy to hit. While you can quickly shoot enemies anywhere on the screen, Red Steel never feels like a light-gun game -- this is a true first-person shooter, one that feels like it has drawn from the best of both the PC and console shooter worlds.

One way in which Red Steel merges the two is with its speed. According to lead game designer Roman Campos Oriola, it takes roughly three seconds to turn completely around in most console shooters, while it takes about one-quarter second in a PC game. In Red Steel, it takes about one second. The faster reaction speed that the player has with the Revolution controller allows for not only more complex combat situations, but better enemy AI as well. "The AI characters will care for themselves," Campos Oriola explained. "They will go for cover, attack when you are reloading, that sort of thing. They focus on risk management." You won't see enemies waiting behind cover points waiting to be shot in Red Steel. They will come after you, and they'll be quite aggressive about it. They won't walk around a table to come after you, they'll simply jump over it. They will create cover points of their own and coordinate their attacks. The benchmark for their intelligence and aggressiveness, says Campos Oriola, is the PC title F.E.A.R., which was widely praised for its artificial intelligence. Thanks to the controller, doing anything less with the AI would make Red Steel far too easy.

We spent a good deal of time replaying the shooting range scenario and exploring another of Red Steel's stages, getting a feel for how the

■ Every environment in the game will be full of tons of destructible objects

controller functioned and felt. While we didn't get to play through a full level populated with enemies, we did try to complete the shooting range challenges as quickly as possible to put the team's claims about the controller's speed and accuracy to the test. Unlike most console games, we actually found Red Steel more enjoyable to play while standing up – with the controller's movement-tracking abilities, we felt more natural playing while standing. The longer we played with it, the more natural it felt, and the more quickly we mowed down the targets. Strafing around a target is incredibly easy, as keeping the controller pointed at an object while you move with the analog stick keeps you focused on your target. Aiming felt similar to using a computer mouse, as it is possible to quickly explore every direction in a three-dimensional space with quick gestures. However, functions that relied on moving the controller forward and back in space were not yet in place. In the finished game, you will be able to push forward with the controller to knock over an object to use for cover, pull it backwards to reload your gun, and twist it to lean behind walls. You'll also be able to lob grenades by imitating throwing a ball with the controller in your hand, or even roll it along the ground with an underhand throw, like you were bowling. One fun little twisting feature was already in place, however. Turning your wrist causes your in-game hand to replicate the motion onscreen, so you can hold your gun sideways and fire "gangster-style." There's no advantage for doing so, but it definitely looks cool.

Little things like the ability to rotate the gun in your hand may not sound like a big deal, but all these little things add up to create precisely what the team was hoping to achieve with Red Steel: immersion. We may have only played sample stages, but we really felt like we were living them, experiencing their events firsthand. We expect this feeling to be even stronger in the finished game. Ubisoft Paris has a very clear vision for Red Steel, one that binds everything together into a cohesive whole. The team's desire to teach players how to use the Revolution controller is clearly demonstrated by the arc of the story. Its focus on bringing a new twist on a familiar game style by setting it in a land where the old and new collide on the street displays how carefully they have thought out every aspect of the game. And of course, the gameplay itself is the foundation on which everything else is built, and clearly brings something new to the FPS genre while remaining instantly understandable. With so much care and dedication put into every facet of Red Steel, it's obvious why Nintendo chose to let Ubisoft bring the world its first glimpse at its new console and one of its launch games. If every game for the system looks as promising as Red Steel, then the Revolution has a bright future indeed. ■■■

NINTENDO SPEAKS: AN INTERVIEW WITH

GEORGE HARRISON

While Nintendo is historically more private than the other hardware manufacturers, the company was not about to let the unveiling of its new console go by without something to say on the matter, and they went much further than just issuing an official statement about Red Steel. Nintendo's Senior Vice President of Marketing and Corporate Communications George Harrison actually came out to the Game Informer offices to sit down with us and discuss the Revolution. Our conversation with Mr. Harrison was frank, revealing, interesting, and definitely long – far longer than we can include here. What follows are some excerpts from our conversation. For a transcript of the full interview, head on over to the Unlimited section of Game Informer Online.

Let's start with your general thoughts on the Revolution.
We've done okay on GameCube, but we wanted to do better. So once we started to think about what to do for our next console, clearly the thinking in Japan was, "We've got to do something different." You know you can't just go out and say, "We've got more horsepower, prettier pictures, and those kinds of things." That's an important part of the system, but without something more than that, the chances that we'd do better on the next system than with GameCube were slim to none. So the thinking went back to throw on more basics. And starting with the market in Japan, which has been kind of soft for many years, the question was what are we going to do to revive the market? They started with basic facts like the shrinking of the gaming population – men under 25, that segment has been declining, the general population is going to start to decline. So we realized that they had to attract some people who maybe hadn't played games before or hadn't played games recently. So we set out to think about what was preventing people from getting involved. The first personification of that was the Nintendo DS. That led us to the idea of the touch screen, the voice recognition – all those things that we think makes gaming more accessible. At the same time, it causes us to think differently about the software. So while there have been some great, familiar games coming out on the DS using those new features, it's the games that are different like Nintendogs and the Brain Age series that have really opened up the possibilities. So the idea was, how do you bring that same kind of thinking to Revolution? The first part was to try to give an interface that was more easily accessible to anybody. That's where the unique controller idea came in. Coupling that was improved horsepower in the machine itself, we think opens up a lot of possibilities.

The Revolution will be more focused, obviously, on gameplay rather than graphics. How important do you think that the visuals are in the success of the console?
I think that they're important, but maybe on a different dimension. The dimension that people mostly think about is photo-realism and so you see, for instance, an Xbox 360 racing game and everyone sees how shiny the cars are and that the leaves are flowing and that type of thing, but that's really only one dimension. In many other games, the choice of graphics is really just an artistic choice, in the same way that animation is. *The Simpsons*, for instance, wouldn't be half as funny if it were live action. So the stylized choice is what really makes it. You know, the Revolution is going to be a multiple of the GameCube in terms of capabilities, a dramatic improvement is possible there, but it's really going to come down to the creativity of the gameplay and the story itself that's going to drive this whole piece forward.

What do you see being packed in with the Revolution?
We're working on that configuration right now, questions like one controller versus two and the nunchuck add-on and those types of things.

Are you still shooting for a worldwide launch?
Yes, we're still shooting for a worldwide launch before the end of the calendar year. I don't know if it's going to be even possible for it to be all on the same day, we'll have to see as we get after E3 and see how we feel things are coming along. Clearly, for us, the Japanese market might be the most important – it's the home market, it's the chance to reset the clock to the main competitor, which is Sony.

And you're fairly confident that it will be cheaper than the 360?
Yeah. Our goal is to come in at a slightly more mass market price.

How do you feel about the online component? We've heard some third parties say that they haven't even been approached and that only first party-games will be included for download. Is that going to expand at all?
I would say that we're in the midst of negotiating with the third parties. I'm not sure where that is yet, whether they're going to be available at launch with Revolution virtual console or not. But the intention is certainly to have it fairly broad. But it's also not just about looking backwards and trying to say, "How can we recycle our great library of games and franchises?" There will be other possibilities going forward, too. [Ed. – Since this interview, Nintendo has announced that it has partnered with Sega and Hudson. See page 19 for more.]

Are you considering something like Xbox Live Marketplace?
Those kind of ideas are all on the table. We're working on the business model and how to sort through pricing – purchase versus subscription versus rental, those kinds of things. The good news is that in the virtual world, those are the kinds of things that even if you make decisions on how you launch, you can go on and test a whole variety of those kinds of things. We do believe that there's an opportunity as we go forward for developers to maybe test a small game idea or game concept. Right now the risks of investing in a new game idea to completion and launching it to the retail channel with the substantial amount of inventory and having it fail are huge. So the possibility of people experimenting with new types of gameplay through a virtual console on Revolution we think is pretty exciting.

How do you feel that Red Steel fits into the whole scheme of the Revolution launch?
For us, it's very exciting. There are some things that we do very well for ourselves at Nintendo. The nature of the games that Mr. Miyamoto and his teams make are wonderful, but he doesn't really do games like Red Steel. So for us, when we saw it, we were really surprised and pleased at the level of finish that they have on the game. It showed us that not only could someone adapt the controller to a more familiar feeling type of game, but they also can have the creativity to create a great storyline. I think that it's a great demonstration of how a common game theme can be executed with this new controller. It's actually a much more intuitive way to go than with button controls. In some ways people say it feels more like a PC interface. You want people to feel like "I'm not focusing on the nature of this interface, the interface to me just becomes intuitive. If I want to point at something or highlight it or shoot it or whatever, I just literally point. And if I want to move, I just use the joystick to move around pretty effortlessly."

So what are the lessons you learned from the GameCube?
I think a couple of things. I think that, oddly enough, when people talk about horsepower, sheer graphical processing and things, the system that had the least impressive technical specs, the PlayStation 2, became the huge winner in the last generation. That told us that it wasn't always just about horsepower. One of the things that we did learn, and one of the reasons that we're here today is that you have to get third-party involvement early and they have to be able to get access early. Nintendo, I think historically, until fairly recently, has been pretty closed. Not letting third parties get involved on our systems early, not letting them get going. For Revolution, that was a clear strategy change – get them involved early and you're not talking about a large number, but a handful of the big successful publishers and developers around the world, get them involved early and let them have access to it. One thing that we certainly learned from PlayStation 2's success was that you never know where the next hit game is going to come from. Grand Theft Auto had been out there, I think, as a PC game it did okay, not great. But suddenly it just rocketed and carried the PlayStation 2 along. The fact that you never know where the next great game is going to come from, it could be Red Steel, you have to open up the aperture a little bit, even though we're confident in our own ability to do great software. I think that, for GameCube, was kind of it. The other thing we recognize is that you really make your reputation in the first year. You've

got to deliver software, not just at launch, but you've got to deliver software in the first six to nine months after launch. It has to be solid software. In GameCube, we didn't quite have that, we had kind of a drought for six months after it launched. By that time, your reputation starts to solidify and it's hard to reverse that after a while.

The next generation has introduced a $60 price point for games, many of which for 360 were just ports with better graphics. Do you think that games for Revolution will fall into this trap of the $60 game?

To me it's kind of a risk, you understand why it happens -- the development costs have gone up, the publishers would like to be able to sell at a higher price, and it makes little difference to retailers. I still think that the majority of the titles are going to come at the $50 price point. There might be some that have special features or special content that might go a little higher than that. The reason I say that is that this is still a discretionary purchase for people, and if you look at things like DVDs and costs of music these days, they're going in the opposite direction -- they're going lower. If you really want a consumer to buy five or six games and year and not two or three, then you can't get the price up too high. It's in the business that, if someone's only buying one game, we get the core users like maybe yourselves or your readers, someone's only buying two or three games a year, that means that there are big gaps. Every time that there's a gap between purchases, there's a risk that they're going to lose interest and go off and do something else, buy a new iPod or do something different. So we need to have a frequency of involvement and that will lead you to lower price points. There may actually be some games, depending on the development costs, that would come in at below $49. I think that that's perfectly reasonable.

What challenges do you see with marketing the Revolution?

I think that the most obvious one is that it's hard to just show it to people, and say, "watch this and you'll understand." I think you have to get people to try it. For core gamers, that's not hard. They'll try anything. They'll walk up into a store to an interactive display and they'll put their hands on it. For someone who is maybe a casual gamer or who is a lapsed gamer, they're going to have to be enticed to do that. First of all, they don't generally go into the video game section of the store, they won't typically walk into a specialty store, so we have to go out and find them where they are and give them a reason to try it. We're actually learning as we get ready for E3 about how can you present this thing in videos. You can't just show a video of the game footage because you can't just look at it and understand, even if it's pretty, but you wouldn't understand how that relates to what the controller is doing to control the game. So there's got to be some other way to do that. I think back to the challenge of marketing Virtual Boy, there was no way to do a TV commercial around that and have people understand what that experience was like. It was one of several problems with that product. [Laughs] It certainly was a marketing challenge. One of the things that you may see that we haven't seen in commercials in a while is a lot more people in the commercials. It was almost a cliché when I first got to the industry in the early '90s that every commercial had to have a couple of smiling guys on the couch playing the game. Then we kind of got away from that as an industry and focused much more on the graphics and things. You might come back to a sense where you see much more humanity -- people involved and actually using the controller in the advertising and in the videos and things. But it's fun that we have the Internet and things available to us now because there's lots of speculation now that people are creating their own little videos and things and hypothesizing what's going to be possible. So we have a great grassroots opportunity here to spread the word that we didn't have four, five, ten years ago.

How important do you think that online play will be for the Revolution?

I think that it will be important, I don't think that it will be the primary reason to buy the Revolution. I think that the games that are offered will be the primary reason to buy it, but the interest in the virtual console is very high. You know there's a certain level of nostalgia there, "I can go back and play these games that were released on prior systems." But it also has to ultimately go beyond that. Because I'm not sure that someone who's 10, 12, 14 years old today frankly cares about what happened in 1985. How many kids today want to go back and watch *Steamboat Willie*? It's like, "No, I'd rather go watch something new." So it has to go beyond that, but I think that it opens up a world of possibilities that is an important element or aspect of the Revolution that has people wanting to get into it. But I think they're going to want to look at the brand new games as the primary reason that they want to get involved.

But do you think that publishers like Ubisoft will be including an online component to games like Red Steel?

It will be possible, I don't honestly know what they're thinking about or how critical that is to the game. Those are things I haven't really seen much of yet, as I've had a limited view into the third-party game development. But, I think that one of the things we've talked about with DS is we finally unveiled the Wi-Fi connection because people were chiding us for years like, "Oh, you're missing the boat on online gameplay." But it was for a couple of things. First, we thought it was a cost barrier. Putting in an access fee or a subscription fee was a limitation. But more importantly almost we felt that the barrier of being able to find people that you were compatible with and could enjoy, we tried to break that down with the Nintendo DS. So for us that's really going to be a key factor. We look at it as being almost the primary selling factor for Xbox 360. They place a lot of effort against that. We think it probably falls somewhere in the middle. It's an interesting addition to the enjoyment of gameplay, but the core game has to be fun for itself as a starting point.

How many games do you think you might have at launch?

It's hard to say. I would say that it will probably be around 20. The reason I say it's hard is that we haven't even really seen how much the licensees have

How many do you think will be from Nintendo?

That's also hard to say. I would say, maybe, a third.

> **"...the games that Mr. Miyamoto and his teams make are wonderful, but he doesn't really do games like Red Steel."**

Where does Red Steel fit within the launch lineup?

What it does is sort of allow us to broaden our appeal to the extent that we can. In the same way when we ultimately released GoldenEye for Nintendo 64, it anchored us with those people and gave confidence to the publishers that they could in fact sell games to that audience on our Nintendo 64. For us, we're going to try to cast a net as wide as possible, but we're not banking our success on getting the Grand Theft Auto fan and converting them to the Revolution.

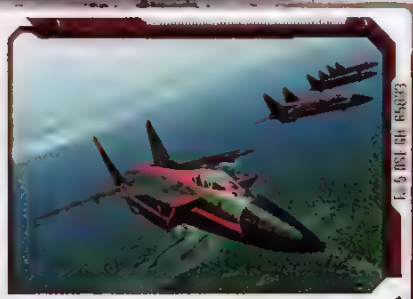
If the DS had not worked out, do you think that Nintendo would have taken a more conservative approach to the Revolution?

I think that we were pretty committed to this notion that we had to draw more people in to the business and that the way to do that was to simplify the interface and make it more intuitive. I think that this is something that Mr. Miyamoto and Mr. Iwata talked about and Mr. Iwata really set the course on probably three to four years ago, based on the discussions on the declining gaming population in Japan. Mr. Iwata has only been with the company for a fairly short time, but he came in at a point that we needed to find a different direction for Nintendo. We had no choice but to be successful with Nintendo DS. Every transition is a risk and an opportunity for us, and we had to keep plowing forward. Like any creative business, you're only as good as your last creative idea.

ACE COMBAT™ ZERO
THE BELKAN WAR

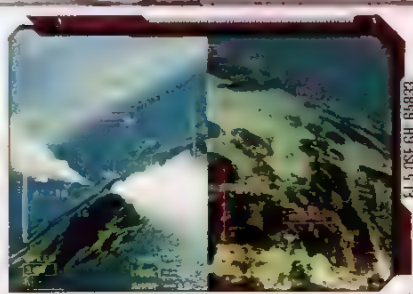
THE SKIES HAVE NO MERCY.

Defend the country of Ustio against an enemy that is smarter, faster and deadlier than any that have come before. Relive the events fifteen years prior to *Ace Combat 5*. Welcome to the dogfight of your life–The Belkan War.



Battle skilled rival aces with their own individual flying styles.

The Ace Style Gauge adjusts play to maximize the challenge.



Challenge your friends or enemies in two-player versus mode.

TEEN
T
Mild Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation 2

BANDAI NAMCO Games

ACE COMBAT™ THE BELKAN WAR & © 2006 NAMCO BANDAI Games Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association
All trademarks and copyrights associated with the manufacturers, aircraft, models, trade names, brands and visual images depicted in this game are the property of their respective owners, and used with such permission.

FRONTLINES
FUEL OF WAR

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD)
> **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** KAOS STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** SUMMER 2007

A Passion Play

What do you do when you find yourself unsatisfied with the games you play? If you are Frank Delise, general manager of Kaos Studios, you go out and make one yourself. After years of working on the standard-issue game development tool 3D Studio Max and other 3D projects for TV and film, that's exactly what he did. After posting on various gaming forums that he wanted to create a modern combat game ripped from the headlines of the day, he found a community of like-minded gamers who also yearned for a chance to play games based on modern warfare, and were willing to work for free to make their collective dream come true.

Their canvas was Electronic Arts' blockbuster PC title Battlefield 1942. The game that eventually spawned out of his desire to play something different was the award-winning mod Desert Combat, which has been downloaded over three million times since it released in 2003. Created in their spare time, the mod took on a life of its own. While Desert Combat was dominating the multiplayer servers, Electronic Arts contacted Delise and asked him and his team to keep the Battlefield maps coming. So Delise formed Trauma Studios, and worked with EA to support his staff and the development of more game content with marketing dollars tagged for Battlefield 1942.

The creators of 1942, Sweden-based DICE, were so impressed with their work that they asked Trauma Studios to do all the R&D work for its upcoming game Battlefield 2. Pleased with the gameplay that Trauma Studios had delivered (according to Delise, almost all the gameplay elements were developed by his team), DICE decided to buy Trauma Studios in 2004. For Delise and his team, this was an opportunity to do what they loved, working for a development company that would let them continue to work as a small studio doing what they do best. That is, until Electronic Arts moved in to purchase DICE.

Faced with being shipped off to Sweden or walking away from the big money promised from the purchase of Trauma Studios, Delise and his team chose the latter, opting to start over from scratch. Enter THQ, which offered Delise a deal for a new studio and a chance to make a new game. This game, born from his team's passion, is Frontlines: Fuel of War.

The team is working towards 32-player multiplayer games for both the consoles and PC

The thing that made Desert Combat so successful in the mind of Delise was that he and his team listened to the feedback of the players and used iterative gameplay design and prototyping to make sure what was created was fun to play. "If you have a gameplay mechanic, then build it quickly, and test it, test it, test it," explains Delise in regards to Kaos Studios' design mantra.

Delise goes on to explain how the goal of Frontlines: Fuel of War is to have the immersive world of Call of Duty 2 with the open world, non-linear gameplay of Battlefield. To attain this lofty goal, the team started with a single-player console experience in mind. Story is not an afterthought. The title, Frontlines: Fuel of War, not only refers to its gameplay, but also to a tale driven by the world's need for fossil fuels and what countries will do to protect them.

Frontlines is set in a dark, near-future world in which the planet's reserves of oil are running out and the global economy is collapsing. This is the next world war, where the two opposing factions, the Western Coalition (the U.S. and EU) and Red Star (Russia and China), have unleashed an arsenal of advanced weapons and vehicles to make a claim to the world's last resources.

Considering Kaos Studios' pedigree and its work on both Desert Combat and Battlefield 2, you can see a lot of similarities between this title and the team's previous work. Like those titles, Frontlines features over 60 weapons and vehicles for players to use at their disposal, including jets, helicopters, tanks, personnel carriers, and off-road trucks – all of which can be piloted by the player.

The player also chooses loadouts when going into battle, like close combat, heavy weaponry, and sniper to name a few (the list is not finalized, but there should be five options in total). But here is where the similarities end, and the real draw of Frontlines comes to the forefront.

Unlike previous open world first-person shooters, Frontlines wants to draw the player into fierce and gritty battles just like those that take place in the real world. In combat, you aren't running around trying to capture different points over and over. In fact, the war moves as a unified front, the imaginary line that signifies the territory that your faction controls. Capture a territory beyond your front, and you'll move it forward. By keeping the game mechanic limited to these fronts, Fuel of War is able to immerse the player by keeping the battle up close and personal. Look to your left or right, and there will be people fighting alongside you.

This is not to say that there aren't important strategic points to capture, but

Vehicles will transform when multiple players enter a vehicle to give the player a visual cue that a gunner or other position is filled

these points only open up to the player as you move the front forward. There is no single route to victory. Perhaps after you break into a town, you want to move west and then flank the enemy to move out into the oilfields. Kaos Studios wants to leave these decisions up to the player. As you would suspect, there are benefits to capturing various strategic points on the battlefield.

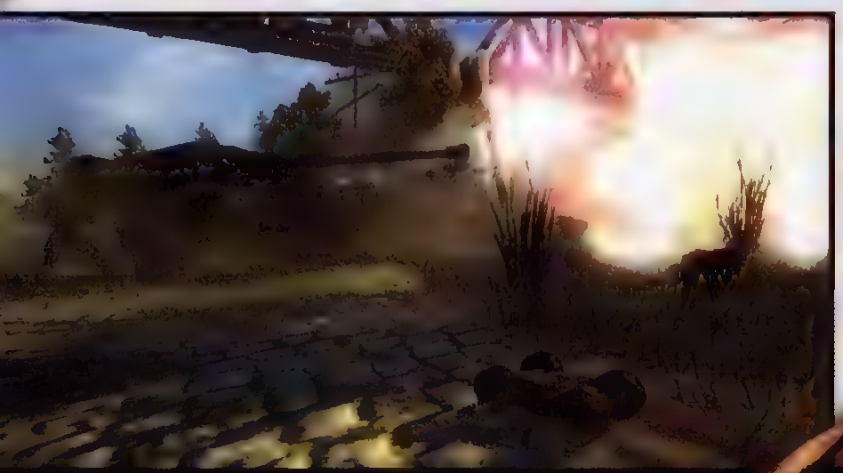
In a multiplayer game, all these things are fairly standard, but Kaos Studios didn't want to just make a single-player game that features AI-controlled bots representing characters that would normally be played by live gamers via the internet – a common solution for multiplayer games that feature a single-player campaign.

"In most games, you die. You do it over again. You die. You do it over again," proclaims an excited Delise, whose love of games seeps through his every word. "We want this game to be a battle. A battle that chips away [as you play]. You affect this battle as a whole. Did I shoot this guy right? Did I get where I was supposed to go? I get really tired of that personally. I want people to try a strategy and see if it works. If it doesn't, then try a different strategy. Or, if I'm not the typical Rambo-styled player, I can play more [stealth-like], and still be allowed to complete the missions. It allows me to use my own play style in a single-player campaign."

Delise continues, "Some games will force you into a play style. Here is your heavy machine gun. You have to 'Rambo' through this part or you can't get to the next mission. People don't all play the same. We feel you can take the 'go anywhere, do anything' mentality of a multiplayer game and do it in a single-player experience."

To help focus this single-player experience, Kaos Studios hired developers from other more single-player-focused games like F.E.A.R., Madden, Medal of Honor, and Doom 3. But they didn't want to deliver a predictable single-player experience. In fact, you don't play the game as a single character, but as a division. Your squad is at your disposal, and you are able to deliver various com-

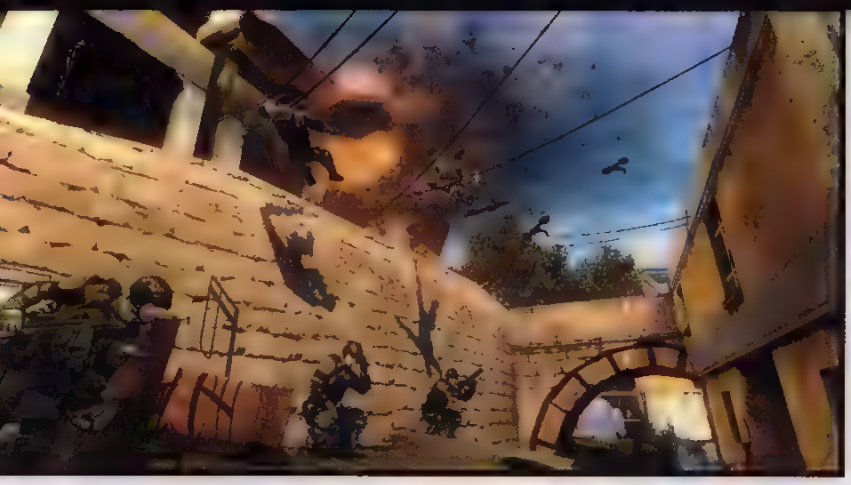
(Continued on page 63)

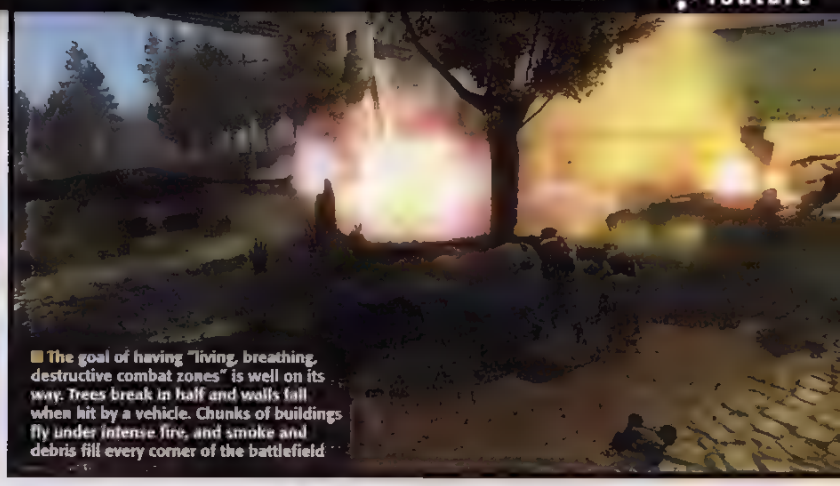


■ The Western Coalition uses technology and stealth, while the Red Star relies on lumbering power to make its point.

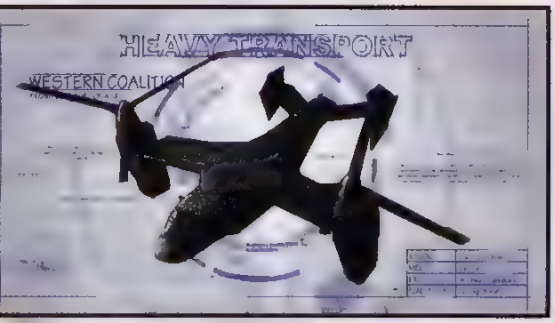
To help promote teamwork, a tank gunner can mark targets so that the driver knows which enemy force to maneuver towards in the heat of battle – a small innovation, but one that makes vehicles all the more deadly

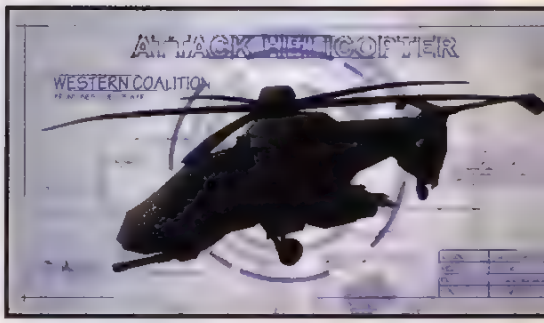
Unlike previous open world first-person shooters, Frontlines wants to draw the player into fierce and gritty battles just like those that take place in the real world.





■ The goal of having "living, breathing, destructive combat zones" is well on its way. Trees break in half and walls fall when hit by a vehicle. Chunks of buildings fly under intense fire, and smoke and debris fill every corner of the battlefield





mands via the d-pad on a controller or via hotkeys on the PC. Throughout the battle, your squad moves with you (if that is the command you give them). For example, if you get in a tank, then one of your squad will man the gunner spot, and then the others will load up in the surrounding vehicles to give you support.

The single and multiplayer experiences both offer a rather ingenious way to create escalating battles. When spawning, players can not only choose their loadout, but what role they want to play. The team is currently working towards five different roles the player can assume, and we were lucky enough to see a couple in action. The roles work much like an RPG, in that when you use a role it gives you experience that can unlock different skills.

For example, with the Recon role, you begin with just a simple device that enables you to ping through walls to see what's inside a building. The next upgrade gives you a flying drone that you can pilot through the battlefield to scout out enemy positions, or you can leave it hovering above the battle to relay enemy maneuvers to your team (if the opposing forces don't shoot it down). Continued use eventually gives the player a drone that can explode on impact and take down its target. The Demolition role evolves in a similar way, opening up more powerful explosives and a remote-controlled four-wheeled rover that can be moved underneath tanks or other vehicles with explosive results.

To give the game more depth and players more options, you can mix your use of these different roles to create balanced characters with more options, or simply concentrate on a single job to unlock its more advanced technology. This also plays an important role in the multiplayer game, since a team with all of the roles covered will have an upper hand on teams that stick to using only specific roles.

The most interesting aspect that the roles bring to the game is that as the front moves forward and the players advance in their roles, it brings the battle to a giant crescendo near the end of a mission. The evolution in roles creates more havoc and puts additional strategies at the player's disposal to either vanquish the enemy or turn the tide. Now imagine all these things going on in the single-player experience. With enemy AI that works under the same division movements as your team, taking defensive positions and engaging your squad all along the battlefront.

Fuel of War is still early in its development, since there is still over a year of work to be done before its summer 2007 release. However, given this team's past successes and passion for constantly iterating on gameplay to maximize the fun both online and off, we can't help but get excited about what Kaos Studios can do with Frontlines. ■■■

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PSP | PC

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION

> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION

> **DEVELOPER** RAVEN

> **RELEASE** WINTER 2006

MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

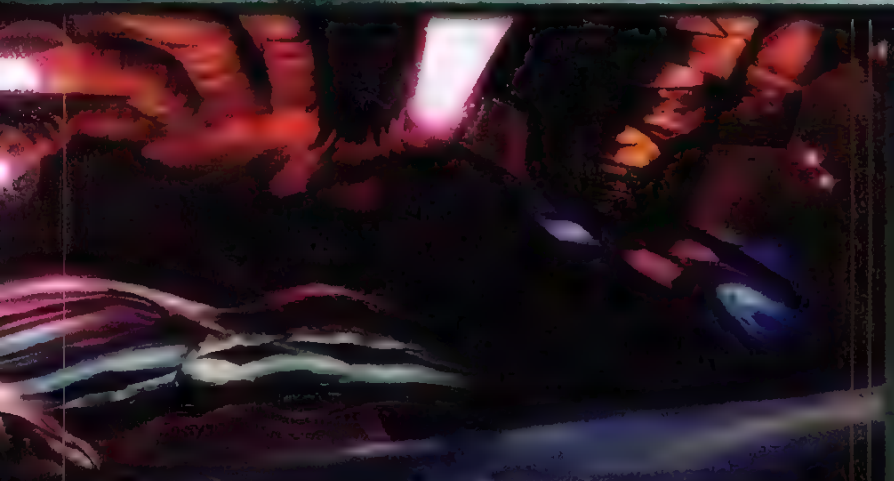
SHATTERING BOUNDARIES

Comic book licensing has hit it big. Perhaps it's the frantic and constant action that so often fills those colorful tales. Maybe comic creators have begun to tap into deeper layers of their characters in recent years, exploring basic human problems with superhuman personalities. It might even be that, more and more, people hunger for larger-than-life stories about the fantastic events and people who are too big to be real – the heroes of our age. Whatever the case, the public can't get enough, and comic worlds have become big business. However, even for fans riding the tidal wave of enthusiasm, there's a problem. There's a danger that with all the movies, games, and toys that now show up on a weekly basis, it's easy to get lost in the shuffle. In the video gaming world, a comic book property now has to do a lot more than throw together some costumed heroes. It has to stand out and do things that haven't been done before. It has to approach the comic game with the ambition to go in whole new directions – the ambition that is obvious in Raven's massive new undertaking: Marvel: Ultimate Alliance.

Changes in the next-gen version include an increased focus on light and shadow to accentuate the mood of a level

We only got to see the classic looks of each character, but we were assured that a number of alternate costumes would be available for everyone

Characters like Captain America have weapons like his shield, but dozens of items in the environment can also be wielded offensively



Raven is certainly no stranger to the Marvel universe. X-Men Legends and its equally stellar sequel didn't take long to establish themselves as benchmarks for how to do comic book games right, fusing fanboy enthusiasm with rock-solid fighting and a great multiplayer component to bring friends together around their favorite characters. But where could they go next? How do you top the epic-length tales of those first games? As we tour Raven's headquarters, project lead Dan Vondrak tells us their solution, and why it didn't make sense to just move on with a new title simply called Marvel Legends. "Marvel: Ultimate Alliance is a completely new action/RPG and is not a sequel to the X-men Legends series, so it didn't make sense to have Legends in the title – we didn't want to confuse anyone," he explains. "We used the Legends engine as a starting point, but we have crafted a brand new unique story and have made all sorts of minor and major changes to the combat and game mechanics." As he begins to show us through the studio and introduce his team and the work they've begun, the name change seems more than fitting. While maintaining much of the core excitement that made the Legends games so fun, there's a fervor from everyone we speak with for pushing forward into new territory, including plans to take the tremendous stride forward into the next generation. In addition to maintaining a presence on both PlayStation 2, Xbox, and PSP, a dramatically redesigned version is also on its way to Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 (where it may very well be a launch game), and perhaps even the Nintendo Revolution (a far less certain but still exciting possibility).

While each of the platforms for the game will share the same gameplay, an entirely new art design separates current and next-gen versions. Current gen will sport a style not unlike the X-Men Legends games, filled with bright characters and destructible environments. The next-gen version, which we saw displayed on an Xbox 360, reveals dramatically more detail in every area. "Creating art styles that worked well on both the current and next-gen consoles was not an easy task," we're told by art director Dan Hay. "In a sense it was very much like working on two games at once. We wanted the player to be able to see every scratch and dent they inflicted on the environments as they battled through the game." High-res normal-mapped character models sport individually articulated fingers and carefully rendered faces. Environments are lit by stark divisions of light and shadow. "Lighting is extremely important when trying to convey the mood or style of a level in Marvel: Ultimate Alliance," Hay explains. "A simple change of color or direction can alter the tone of a map dramatically. With that in mind we put a great deal of effort into making the lighting match the mood of the story so the gamer would feel immersed in what the character was going through." The result is an effect that simultaneously looks realistic and yet maintains the snap and color-popping eye candy of a comic.

It's far more than a visual overhaul that sets Ultimate Alliance apart. With the entire Marvel universe to call on, Raven has opted to take it all. "We've got decades of comics to pull from, and among all those pages we can find some great stuff to use," Vondrak excitedly informs us. "Every few weeks we seem to add more and more characters into the mix. Right now we've got over 140 different Marvel characters in the game." Of this surprisingly massive number, over 20 characters are fully playable throughout the game. Each of these playables is far more than a different visual skin with a couple of new powers; they are designed to offer a unique gameplay dynamic that sets them apart from every other character.

While the RPG experience and skill system from X-Men Legends will once

A HERO APART

One major focus for the team at Raven has been making each of the 20-plus playable characters feel distinct from the others. "We're always looking for ways to make the gameplay more interactive. As a result, we've added special button combinations to a number of the super hero powers and also to various character interactions in the levels," Vondrak tells us. "Sometimes it's simply pressing down the button to supercharge a power before releasing it. Other times you'll need to rapidly press a button, move the analog stick, or chain specific button sequences together to either unleash a more devastating version of an attack or get past a level puzzle or boss." We got a glimpse of several characters in action, and learned exactly what set them apart from each other.

CAPTAIN AMERICA

Cap's coolest attack has to be his shield throw. Launch his emblematic weapon out and it will begin to bounce off walls and enemies in a storm of destruction. At higher levels, you can hold down a button after the throw to gain a limited degree of steering control over the shield, letting you effectively clear a room with one well-aimed toss.

SPIDER-MAN

The webslinger's movement and attacks needed to maintain the unique style that has made Spider-Man so popular over the years. In addition to swinging through stages when he pleases, Spider-Man can tie up foes with a special grab that leaves them hanging precariously from the ceiling by webbing. While there, heroes can repeatedly smash the stricken foe until the webbing breaks. Meanwhile, Spider-Man's spidey sense lets him slow down time, allowing him to move at full speed while the rest of the world crawls at a snail's pace.

THOR

Many of Thor's titanic powers stem from his mighty hammer, Mjolnir. One attack calls down a lightning strike on Thor that splits off to strike any nearby goons. The faster you tap the button, the more chains of lightning appear. Alternately, Thor's hammer strike ability flings his enemy skyward, where the thunder god rises to meet them and smash them offscreen.

WOLVERINE

Logan's most exciting feature is a special bar unique to his character that indicates his rage. The bar rises as he fights, and when it fills Wolverine drops into a berserker rampage. All of his normal powers morph into rage-filled versions, each with different animations, effects, and functionality.

DR. STRANGE

The Sorcerer Supreme uses his mystical powers to bring down ruin on his enemies. With his magic, a supernatural orb of energy can transform an enemy into an object that will shatter to pieces at your next attack. Also, Strange's Falteen Flame hurls out balls of fire that absorb health from enemies based on the speed of button tapping, before returning to restore the Doctor's health.

GHOST RIDER

With his otherworldly chains, Ghost Rider can toss enemies into the air and then slam them down repeatedly with the right button press. He can also use the same chains to pull distant enemies close for a surprise melee attack.

again return, a new dynamic has been added that brings out the ever-changing team lineups common to the Marvel universe. Players will now be able to form their own unique superhero squad, name it, and improve it throughout the course of the game. "Who hasn't dreamed of creating the ultimate dream team of superheroes? It's like fantasy football only with an all-Marvel superhero cast," Vondrak jokes. "There are no restrictions on which of the superheroes you group together. This is your team – you choose the members, you name them, you even pick the logo. Once you've assembled your team from the roster of heroes available and they begin going on missions, they will gain team reputation. As your team's reputation grows, you gain team levels, which allow you to improve that particular team in different categories." In this way, reputation acts like experience for your newly crafted squad. You'll only get reputation when you play with members of the team, and new roster slots will show up as you progress, allowing you to grow into a veritable force of nature against super villainy. Alternately, you can begin play with one of the classic Marvel teams you recall from the comics, and start out with special reputation bonuses right away.

The entire focus of combat has been retooled as well. "We've made Marvel: Ultimate Alliance much more action-oriented. We still kept the great RPG elements, but for this game we wanted to make sure these amazing heroes were in a world where fast-paced action is the number one rule," Vondrak explains. This focus is obvious in just a few minutes of watching the game. New individual grab moves add to the distinction of each character. Blocking has become a central aspect of the fight. Plus, characters are constantly running, dodging, and rolling about the stage to avoid attacks, lending a mobility to the formula that hasn't been present before. Add these to the new contextual button presses for particular hero powers, and the onscreen action has become way more dynamic than in both its predecessors and other action/RPGs.

To match the massive roster of Marvel mainstay characters and the frenetic approach to combat, Raven wanted a world-spanning conflict to challenge players. Raven writers have worked together with Marvel editor C. B. Cebulski to create just such a story. In this new tale, Dr. Doom has brought together a gathering of fellow villains. These new Masters of Evil come to the attention of Nick Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. when they begin stealing artifacts across the world. Heroes from around the Earth muster to stop the villains' mysterious thefts, and they rapidly discover their enemies' ultimate plan. By gathering these far flung objects from as far away as alternate dimensions, Dr. Doom hopes to steal the power of Odin, the most powerful Asgardian god. The ensuing conflict is potentially so catastrophic that the omniscient Watcher involves himself, and the heroes will end up traveling from the depths of the sea to the far reaches of outer space, even confronting the world devourer, Galactus.

We got the chance to witness first-hand several levels on Xbox 360 that exhibited just how expansive the game aims to be. The opening level is set aboard a massive S.H.I.E.L.D. heli-carrier, where Nick Fury and his men are fighting off an attack. Far below, a massive city stretches out, appearing as pinpricks of light on the distant ground. Attack craft zoom past as the heroes go to work, each harnessing their unique powers to tear into their foes. The battle serves as an eye-opening beginning to the action-packed story. Next, we witnessed a level set in Atlantis, home of Namor and his people. In a new twist, the characters were all swimming through the aquatic environment, engaging enemies along the sea floor and floating in three-dimensional space to solve puzzles amid the oceanic kingdom. Finally, we were treated to two more levels set far away on the Skrull Throneworld. While the development team was hesitant to reveal why gamers would be traveling to this alien home planet, we did get to see the most exciting part of the level: Galactus. As the heroes fight the Skrulls, the massive form of Galactus wanders about the background, tearing the city to shreds as he takes the world apart bit by bit. Later, something the heroes are doing seems to attract the planet eater's attention, and he begins to chase after them. Ripping up the ground as they pass, gamers will be in a race to simply outpace their gargantuan hunter. Finally, the level ends with a confrontation against this celestial power, where one lucky player will actually get to briefly adopt the cosmic powerhouse Silver Surfer in order to strike down Galactus while the other heroes offer their aid.

Every one of the levels we saw had a distinct look and feel to it. These unique flavors are aided along by some significant changes to the camera system normally found in an action/RPG like this. Many stages will still focus on the traditional rotating isometric view, but other viewpoints have been introduced for dramatic and gameplay effect. "We always want to be sure we're taking advantage of the camera changes by making the levels play a bit different," Vondrak tells us. "Some levels have a quasi side-scrolling camera, others have an over the shoulder third-person view to them." Often, these new perspectives are in place to give players a new view on the action, such as the awesome sight of Galactus destroying a city in the background as the heroes fight the Skrull in the fore.

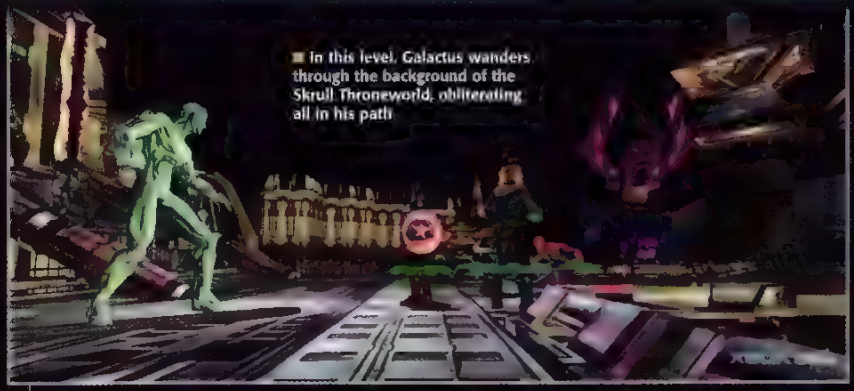
As we were shown this array of new mission areas, most of what we saw had a single player navigating the world, switching between the four characters as he went. However, the best way to play will almost certainly be with four friends, whether you gather together on one couch or play the game online. Raven was hesitant to reveal extensive details on the multiplayer feature set, but we did learn that at least one mode will be a competitive cooperative style where the high scoring player will get a bonus at the end of each level. The plan also includes the freedom for players to drop in and out of play freely throughout the game.

Other gameplay tidbits were dangled in front of us as well. Apparently, choices made and side quests taken throughout the game will result in any number of different epilogues at the conclusion of the story.

■ Elektra is lethal at close range, or she can throw her sai at incredible speed for a special instant kill

■ This opening level of the game takes place on the S.H.I.E.L.D. helicarrier, high above the earth

■ Scorpion is one of the early bosses, setting the tone for tons of other Marvel characters you'll meet in the game



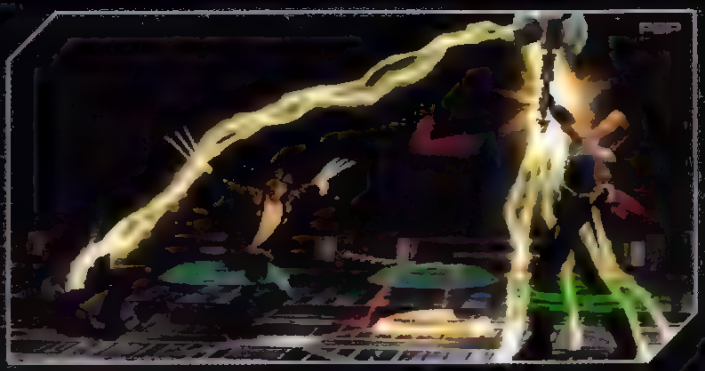
■ In this level, Galactus wanders through the background of the Skrull Throneworld, obliterating all in his path

While not strictly alternate endings, these vignettes will reveal what happened to characters across the course of the game, depending on how you left them. We also learned that a variation on the popular X-Men Legends flashback missions will return. Now much more frequent, there's at least one of these classic comic missions for each of the playable characters in the game, as well as more that let you play out major fights between a hero and his great nemesis. Since many of these missions will be for a single specific hero, other players will now be able to become the bad guys in these scenarios, trying to stop the first player from succeeding. Every one of these comic missions can be played right away when you find them in the world, or you can return to them later in the S.H.I.E.L.D. simulation room.

As one after another of these new features are revealed, it's clear what a tremendous task Raven has undertaken in what many on their staff consider a dream project. Unwilling to rest on its laurels, every indication is that the team is well on track to electrify the wider Marvel universe in the same way it did the X-Men only a few years ago. Ready to step out from the increasingly crowded throng of comic-licensed product, Marvel: Ultimate Alliance is looking to set a new bar, not just for comics, but for a whole genre ■■■

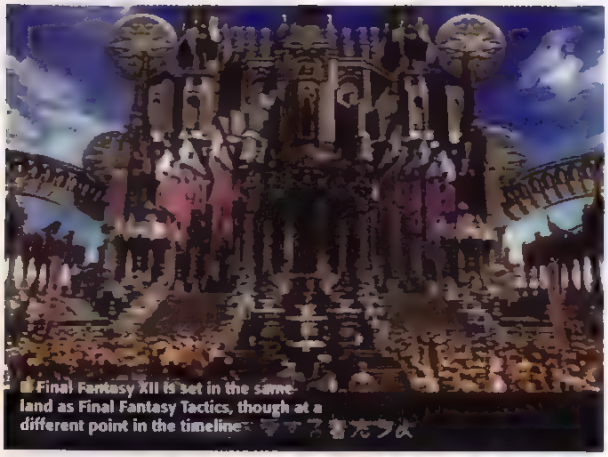
■ The game may very well be the first next-gen action/RPG, and is on track to hit the launch window of the PS3

■ As you play, every character will build up a momentum gauge by completing successful combos. The more combos you manage, the faster you'll be able to fill the gauge and unleash an Ultimate power attack



SHARING RESPONSIBILITY

A game this big takes a lot of manpower, particularly when the aim is to hit so many different platforms. While Raven is the primary developer for the game, Vicarious Visions is helping with the middleware of the game, as well as taking on full responsibility for the PSP version. Meanwhile, Raven has once again partnered with the company Blur to produce the exciting cinematic sequences that will fill the game.



Final Fantasy XII is set in the same land as Final Fantasy Tactics, though at a different point in the timeline

When the battles heat up, the screen can become an explosion of particle effects and arcing lines

The Gambit system allows you to govern ally behavior without having to command them directly

It is sometimes important to let other characters be your tank, as you stay back and try to survive

PLAYSTATION 2

Final Fantasy XII

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX **> DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX **> RELEASE** FALL

FF XI-2

When North American gamers got their first taste of Final Fantasy XII's gameplay via the demo packaged with Dragon Quest VIII, reactions were understandably mixed. With its turn-based roots tossed by the wayside, some fans were uncomfortable with the new battle system, while others welcomed the change as an evolution of the classic formula. Of course, there's always more to a Final Fantasy than the combat, and we got to spend several hours with the full Japanese version of the game to see how the many other nuances of the adventure are coming together.

After a stunning opening cinematic, the game begins with a tutorial level in which the player controls a young soldier who witnesses a shocking act of betrayal. Even though it only lasts a few minutes, this sequence serves as a vital backdrop to the story, which properly begins with Vaan and Penelo in a bustling city. As you explore the various alleys and shops, you'll notice that, unlike previous entries in the series, FF XII is fully 3D. You can rotate the camera at will to look at your surroundings from all angles, which is helpful both when you're in town and when you're exploring the great beyond.

The world of Ivalice is constructed much like an MMORPG (which shouldn't be surprising considering the role Final Fantasy XI's Yasumi Matsuno had in the game's creation), with expansive interconnected zones. There will be no overworld map, which allows the player to move directly from one area to another, much like Final Fantasy X. However, in MMO fashion, the movement among zones is far from linear. Most environments have several exits, leaving you with a handful of choices of where you can go next. Some areas are home to stronger monsters, though, so it would be wise to level up before wandering too far from town.

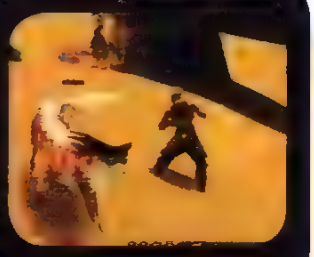
In addition to simply gaining experience, the way characters advance in skills is also new for the franchise, blending familiar elements from several previous games. Using a system called the License Board, all spells and abilities are arrayed on a chessboard layout. By expending LP (which you gain from winning battles), you can unlock a license for a particular skill. For instance, purchasing Cure for Vaan on the License Board only grants him the ability to use the spell; you'll still need to physically purchase Cure from a magic shop. Every time you buy a license, the adjacent squares become available to buy as well – it's a little like the Sphere Grid in this way, because the more you advance in a particular direction, the more powerful abilities you will gain access to. Of course, with a full party and a wide array of available skills, it could be tough to manage the actions of all of your allies at once.

In the demo released last fall, the Gambit system seemed to simply mean "auto-attack." We know now that it is more than that, since it enables to player to set certain conditions that govern your party members' behavior. In essence, it is an advanced way of controlling your buddy AI. For instance, you can set a rule that says that a character will use a certain spell (like Cure) when an ally's HP falls below a certain percentage. You can also set priorities for these actions, giving some commands greater weight than others.

Every time Final Fantasy XII makes an appearance, we discover yet another way that it is shaking up the formula that the Final Fantasy series has relied on for years. Considering the success the game is currently enjoying in Japan, we know that these fresh, innovative approaches are clicking with at least one side of the ocean. In our time with the game, we found the combat and exploration to be enjoyable, despite their open-ended nature. However, whether the majority of American gamers will be as receptive to the changes is unknown, and the only way we'll learn is by toughing out the long wait between now and this coming fall when it hits Stateside. ■■■

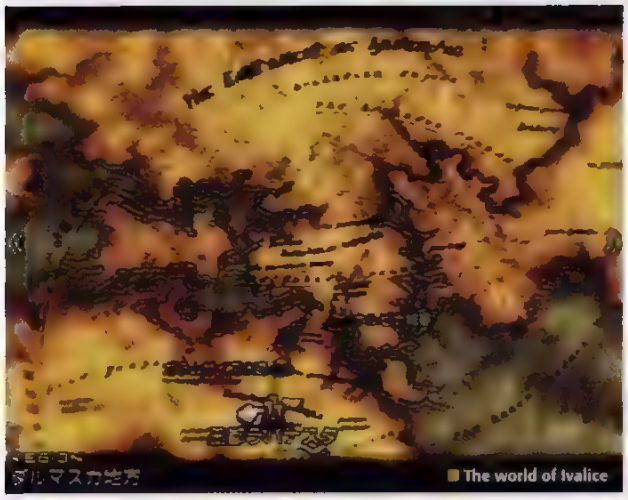
Beware of Adds!

Because of the wide-open nature of Final Fantasy XII's introductory areas, it seems that the game will place a new focus on managing groups of enemies. Like most MMORPGs, it is possible for you to be engaged in combat with a wolf, then have a cactus man sneak up behind you and add itself to the fray. Some monsters even take advantage of this linking by retreating from battle into areas swarming with new enemies, forcing you take on a fresh batch of foes. Even though the days are gone when a fight would start and you would know exactly what you had to kill, this variable nature of the combat has the potential to make battles in Final Fantasy XII far more dynamic than previous entries.

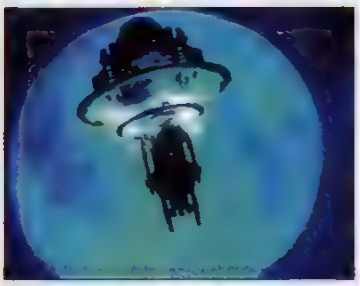


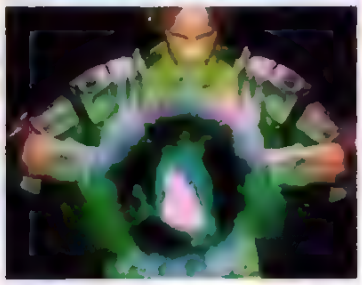
This tomato-headed pansy is the target in one of FF XII's first missions

Deciding which characters purchase particular licenses will have a dramatic effect on how battles play out



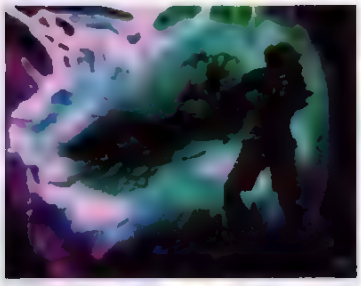
The world of Ivalice





Chocobos seems less cute and more war-capable this time around

The License Board in its earliest phase. Eventually, every square will be filled with abilities and spells



In the opening sequence, you will be fighting alongside other characters, but you can't control them

One of the first things you do is kill rats down in a sewer. No joke

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3 | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP

WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw 2007

> STYLE 1-4 PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE TBA) **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** YUKE'S **> RELEASE** TBA

BIGGER AND BADDER

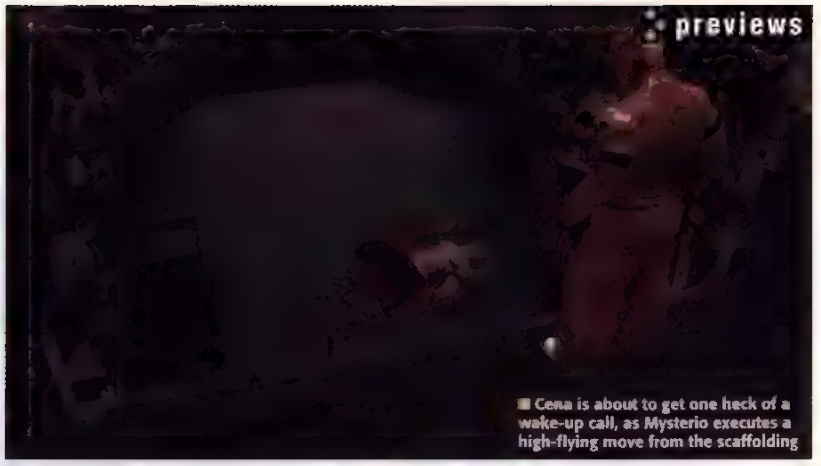
THQ is proud to say that it gives fans what they want with its popular WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw series. Each year, the publisher talks to wrestling fans to learn what they would like in future iterations. The 2006 edition added a ton of new features to the series, like the locker room, General Manager mode, and more. But while 2006 added to a successful formula, the upcoming WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw 2007 is more like a total rebirth of the franchise.

The first big change is that this formerly Sony-exclusive series is going multiplatform. It's still coming to the PS2 and PSP, but real wrestling fans will want to jump to the first next-gen WWE games on either Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3. Improved character models and presentation are only the start of the changes in store for the series. Season mode will be fleshed out with more branching storylines, cinematic cutscenes with full WWE Superstar voiceovers and motion-capture, and more. These additions are nice, but the biggest changes are based on the totally revamped fighting engine. Grappling moves are now all mapped to the right analog stick, which should make the combat both more intuitive and realistic. The analog scheme allows players a greater deal of command over their character, as moves that were once canned animations are now player-controlled. If you lift an opponent into the air in a suplex, you can hold him there until you decide to slam him down with the analog stick. The analog control will also be used for environmental interactions. For example, you can use the analog stick to slam your foe's head against the announcer's table or scrape his face back and forth across the steel cage.

Environmental interactions are another big focus for this year's edition. For the first time, the action can spill over the crowd barrier and into the audience. As the fight rages amongst the fans, players can grab signs from bystanders to crack over their enemy's head, or be handed weapons like crutches, belts, and much more. Players can also scale scaffolding to deliver the types of daring high-risk diving attacks that made WWE stars of many former ECW wrestlers.

Along with the host of new additions, many of Smackdown Vs. Raw's standard features will return with improvements. Last year's GM mode will be back, with the added ability to sabotage an opponent's show. More than 100 match variations are being included, and over 50 types are playable online. Voice chat is being supported for the first time, and the Create-A-Superstar mode will now sport over 250 new customizable items and parts. All together, it adds up into a package that no wrestling fan should be able to resist. We were quite pleased with last year's outing, and Smackdown Vs. Raw 2007 has the potential to blow it out of the water ■■■

■ The crowd can now get in on the action, as you can go over the barrier and fight amongst the audience



Cena is about to get one heck of a wake-up call, as Mysterio executes a high-flying move from the scaffolding

Despite appearances, John Cena and Rey Mysterio are just good friends

Members of the audience can hand you objects that can be turned against your opponent

Las Vegas is the perfect environment to show off the 360's impressive lighting capabilities

XBOX 360 | XBOX

Rainbow Six: Vegas

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL **> RELEASE** FALL

NO DING, NO BLING

Hot on the heels of Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter's critical acclaim and commercial success, Ubisoft has released some beautiful screens and tantalizing info for the next installment of the publisher's Rainbow Six franchise. As the title would have you believe, Rainbow Six: Vegas has you taking a brand-new team Rainbow into Sin City to fight the latest terrorist threat to the union. This is still Rainbow Six, but if Ubisoft delivers on half of the improvements it is promising, Vegas will do for this series what GRAW did for Ghost Recon.

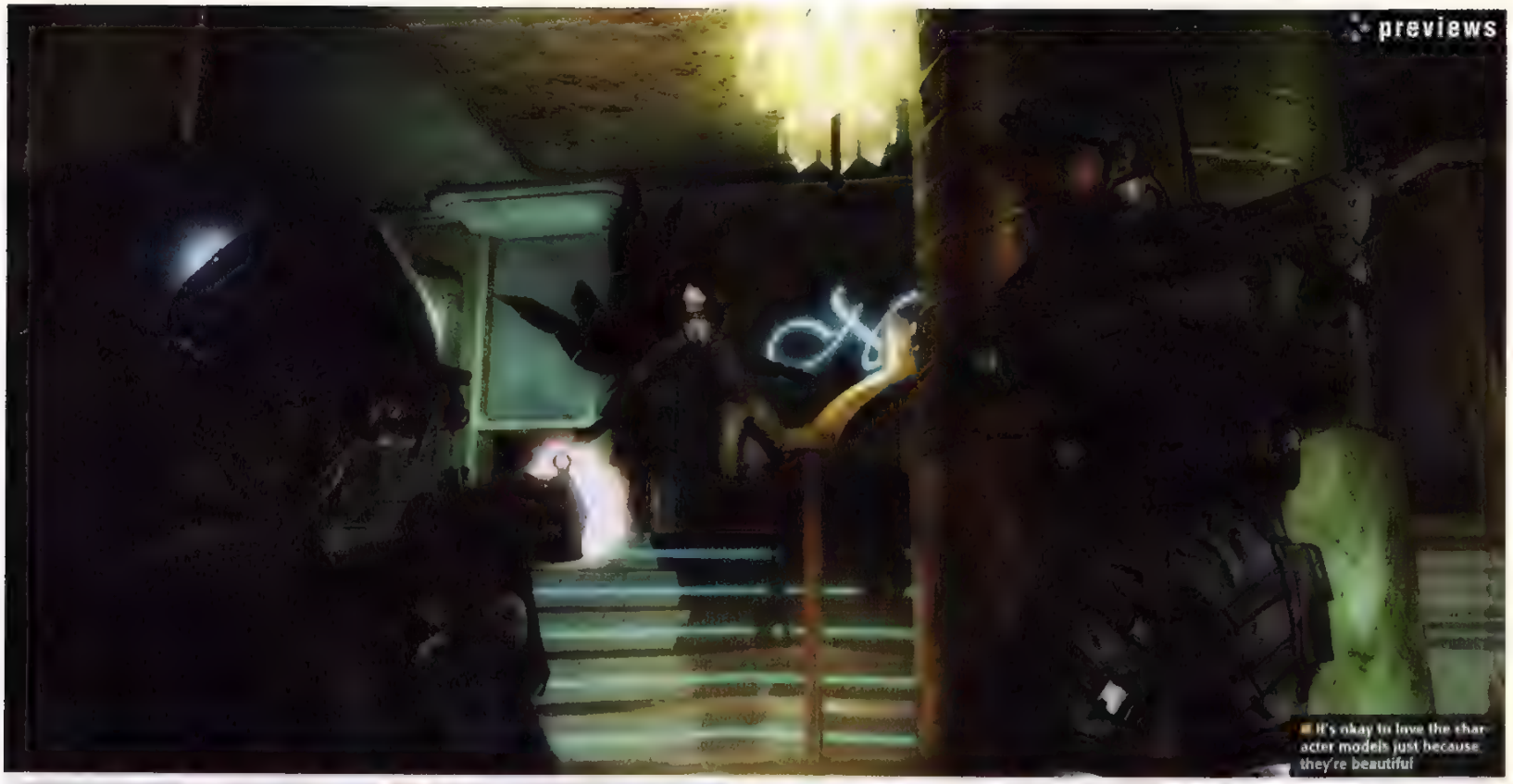
Nearly every aspect of the Rainbow Six formula has improvements in store for it. The AI (once you clear out the cannon fodder and start working your way closer to the heart of the terrorist organization) will actually counter your tactics. Rather than running through scripted behaviors that take little of the player's actions into account, it supposedly will analyze the environment, situation, and the forces it has available and drop a little tactical science of its own. We've heard similar promises that never came to fruition before, of course, but the demonstrated power of the Xbox 360 and the excellence of GRAW have us willing to buy into Ubisoft's claims.

Additionally, the levels will be much less linear than they've been in previous Rainbow Six titles. Multiple paths will be available to you, and multiple recon gadgets like snake cams will let you gather the intel you need to choose the best course. Your AI teammates will even offer suggestions when they come across situations that their particular specialties can take advantage of. Computer expert Jung Park, for instance, will bring the fact that he can hack into terminals to subvert security measures to your attention when the opportunity presents itself. Best of all, your heavy weapons guy, Michael Walter, will cheerfully offer to blow through a wall to gain the advantage of surprise against a fortified terrorist position.

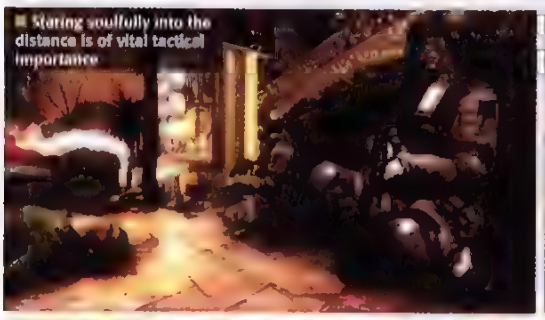
Further improvements, like real-time briefings and better squad control, are also on tap for team Rainbow's trip to the Strip. While these aspects, and most everything else that makes Rainbow Six: Vegas exciting, can't truly be gauged until they're seen in action, the screenshots really do speak for themselves. Multiplayer is still a big unknown outside of the return of PEC mode, but it'd take an awful lot to convince us that next-gen Rainbow Six online play won't be awesome. Even without digging into Vegas' gameplay, it would seem this will be yet another feather in Ubisoft's next-gen cap when it launches this holiday season. ■■■

If these screens are any indication, there will be lots of environmental destruction to enjoy

As always, cover and tactics will be of prime importance



■ It's okay to love the character models just because they're beautiful



■ Staring soulfully into the distance is of vital tactical importance

■ The Strip is certainly shinier than Mexico City, if nothing else

■ Enemies will supposedly make excellent use of cover as well

■ Using stealth well will make everything much easier on your team

Some epic conflicts will undoubtedly take place

It's physically impossible to make a dungeon crawler without a sewer level

"I'm the shiniest barbarian ever!"

PLAYSTATION 3

Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

LAUNCHING INTO THE WELL-KNOWN

With Sony's recent announcement of the PlayStation 3's launch date, there's no hotter topic in gaming than the company's next platform. We recently got a first-hand look at Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom, the first confirmed launch title for the system, and though the game may not immediately blow gamers away with the kind of graphics that Sony proudly showed at last year's E3, we're willing to give developer/publisher Sony Online Entertainment the benefit of the doubt for now. After all, the team has many months to make improvements, and the development kits that they have to work with have just recently gotten much closer to the retail hardware (and are therefore faster). However, many questions still remain.

Dark Kingdom will stay fairly true to the established Untold Legends standard action/RPG formula. Players will gain levels, learn new skills, find better equipment, and all of the things you'd expect out of a dungeon-crawler. The combat will be expanded with the addition of a second attack button and some basic combo attacks, however. Sony Online has also promised that Dark Kingdom's use of Havok real-time physics has opened the door to creating more interesting puzzles, boss fights, and overall action than we've ever seen in the genre. These may not be the radical departures from action/RPG canon that some would like to see, but if the core of the game is as solid as the last Untold Legends PSP title, we're confident that Dark Kingdom will be an entertaining dungeon crawler at the very least.

To be honest, though, the video of the game that we saw was underwhelming. Perhaps our expectations were too high from the outstanding PS3 videos at last year's E3, but Dark Kingdom looked decidedly less impressive than most Xbox 360 games that are already on shelves. The title's graphics aren't completely without merit (the real-time physics modeling of nearly everything in the game world simply wouldn't be possible on current-gen machines), but Dark Kingdom's engine won't be making anyone's eyes light up in its current incarnation. Sony Online reps insist that the game looks much better internally, and that definitely could be the case, but only time will tell just how "next-gen" the title will end up looking. As always, though, if the gameplay is solid, then average graphics are nothing to really complain about. ■■■

Believe it or not, you'll punch some bad guys in this game

Some of the combos result in widespread destruction

It may be visual trickery, but this is a gorgeous-looking game

DISNEY SQUARE ENIX

New allies

Onslaught mode returns – and there is much rejoicing

The look of a real windshield is made up for by the ability to blow up anyone who you run into

PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

Unreal Tournament 2007

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** MIDWAY **> DEVELOPER** EPIC GAMES **> RELEASE** TBA

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

There isn't a great deal that can be said about Unreal Tournament 2007 that can relay the same sense of cool as the screens that surround this text, but we'll see what we can do. Epic Games recently ran us through some of the newest features of the game in an unpolished early form, and suffice it to say there's a lot more than pretty graphics in store for Unreal fans in this newest incarnation of the remarkable and long-running series.

The first glimpses of the game we were shown were of a new level set in a dimly lit Liandri robotics factory. As machines assembled automatons in the background, the corridors and larger halls of the arena exhibited the familiar industrial future look that fans have come to know so well. Interestingly, we learned that the dev team has had to actually go back through levels like this one and apply a technique they have humorously dubbed "grungification". The initial level designs looked so clean and sparkly with the next-generation graphical effects applied that artists were forced to go back in and add dirt and damage and other tweaks just to make the levels feel real. (We've always thought that process was just called texturing, but we won't tell the guys at Epic if you won't).

The return of the popular Onslaught mode from Unreal Tournament 2004 meant that we got to see several vehicle designs in action. The Paladin will serve as a ground vehicle best utilized as an escort, since a shield can be deployed in a small area about the hulking unit. The new SPMA can still fire a bird's eye camera into the air for long distance artillery strikes, but now you can aim with the mouse for precision hits. The new Cicada indicates the intent for an increased focus on air combat, and includes a cool missile locking technique that lets you hit your target even when facing the opposite direction. Finally, one need only look to the lower right to check out the obvious assets of the new Hellbender vehicle.

After the vehicle showcase, we finally got a look at some of the insanely high polygon character models that will be running around within the world. The crimson-armored team we've seen the most of so far are called the Twin Souls, while series mainstay Lauren will lead another team called the Iron Guard, decked out in yellow regalia. Epic indicates that these models are 1,500 times more detailed than the characters in Unreal 2004 if you go by strict poly count, which rounds out the in-game models at somewhere between 5 and 6 million polygons.

What about PS3 and Xbox 360? The PS3 version is definitely on the way. We've yet to hear a formal announcement for Microsoft's next-gen platform, but we certainly won't be surprised when we finally do. There's no reliable word on a release date for any of the systems yet, or if console versions will coincide with the PC iteration. We'll keep you updated as the months pass. Don't worry. You'll need the time to upgrade your PC. ■ ■ ■

He may look pissed off, but that's only because he hasn't killed anyone yet today

The new Ford SUV actually shoots petroleum from its turret gun

XBOX 360

Table Tennis

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS **> PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES
> DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO **> RELEASE** MAY 22

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

The character models are incredibly detailed

Rockstar's first foray onto the Xbox 360 plunges gamers into the hardcore, explicit world of…ping pong? While a table tennis game isn't exactly what you'd expect from the company that brought us Grand Theft Auto and Manhunt, after playing a recent build, we have to say this is one incredibly fun title. Developer Rockstar San Diego has actually been working on this pet project for quite some time, devoting some real effort and thought into making this a strange but high-quality addition to the company's library of hits.

Balancing accurate physics and precise controls with an easy, pick-up-and-play approachability, Table Tennis has "party game" written all over it. Featuring 11 original characters, a host of unlockable arenas, and Xbox Live tournament play, Table Tennis offers up some gorgeous visuals, with player models coming in at 30,000 polygons apiece. Look closely, you'll see the characters' clothing sway and even become damp with sweat. The environments, from the floor textures to the fully polygonal crowds, are equally detailed. It's quite impressive. In fact, the game engine, called RAGE (Rockstar Advanced Game Engine) will actually be used for all the company's future Xbox 360 titles.

There isn't much in terms of career mode depth, but the developer Rockstar San Diego (Midnight Club 3) is delivering some very polished gameplay. Don't be surprised if this budget-priced title (it retails for $39.99 on May 22nd) is one of this year's surprise hits. Remember that this very industry was launched by the success of a little game by the name of Pong, and with any luck, Rockstar will make the sport a phenomenon all over again. ■■■

The game features fictional players from around the globe

Dwarves' beards will grow longer and more impressive as they level up, while orcs collect trophies like skulls to adorn their armor

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Warhammer Online

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** MYTHIC ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** MYTHIC ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** 2007

WAR, WAR EVERYWHERE

Mythic Entertainment's Dark Age of Camelot is still regarded as one of the best player-versus-player MMORPGs years after its initial release. Now the developer/publisher is taking a stab at one of the biggest properties in tabletop gaming: Warhammer. Scheduled to release in 2007, Warhammer Online certainly has its share of PvE content, but the possibilities that are opened up by its unique PvP design are easily its most exciting aspect.

No matter which of the six factions (which are loosely aligned into two rival alliances) you choose to join, you'll be surrounded by conflict everywhere you go. Even the "noob" quests that serve to get you familiarized with the controls pit you against weak NPC versions of your racial enemies. This philosophy of war as the only inescapable truth of the world extends throughout the whole game.

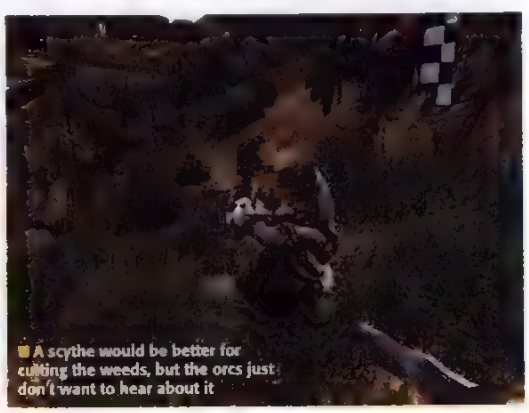
Rather than having players choose a PvP or PvE-focused ruleset when selecting a server to play on, Warhammer Online is designed to offer both types of content to all players. Certain areas are flagged as being PvP-enabled (not just a few – nearly every zone contains these PvP areas), and anyone adventuring in them is fair game to be attacked by the opposing factions. However, you're not just forced to enter these places to complete certain quests. Persistent objectives worth fighting over are present, as well as more typical missions given by NPCs. Controlling these points of interest gives your team a leg up on taking over the zone (as well as the all-important bragging rights) in addition to providing a focal point for PvP action.

Even more important to conquering the world (up to and including the capital cities of other races!) are what Mythic calls "scenarios," which are instanced PvP battles akin to World of Warcraft's Battlegrounds. Unlike WoW, however, these instances are open to anyone, and only allow each team a certain number of "points." Each player is worth points based on both levels and gear, and the game will even pad out the teams with NPC bots if it's taking too long to get a match going. Winning a scenario will give a large boost to your faction's effort to control a zone, moving you that much closer to looting an enemy capital.

Of course, being a top-tier MMO means that there's a ton more to talk about regarding Warhammer Online, from the extensive character customization to the way you can have two actions going at a time during combat. We'll be sure to let you know more details as the game's far-out release date nears, but for now rest assured that there's a PvP title waiting in the wings that strikes a balance between "get ganked incessantly by characters 40 levels higher than you" and "hold hands while you wait in line to PvP for five minutes every hour." ■■■

Not to be confused with Warhammer 40,000, this setting is definitely fantasy

"Stop, or I'll – aw, who am I kidding? I'm gonna shoot anyway"



A scythe would be better for cutting the weeds, but the orcs just don't want to hear about it

Here's hoping that Rare's next project has origami giraffes!

XBOX 360

Viva Piñata

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT **> DEVELOPER** RAREWARE **> RELEASE** WINTER

NOT JUST FOR WHACKING ANYMORE

If you've ever wondered what a piñata does when it's not being busted open by a blindfolded child swinging a bat, Rare and Microsoft may have an answer for you. These studios have teamed up with 4Kids Entertainment to bring you a media blitz that includes a children's television series, a plethora of merchandising options, and this interesting game for the Xbox 360 that shows what those crazy piñatas get up to in their spare time.

Obviously designed with the children's market in mind, this sandbox-style piñata garden simulator for the 360 is not your standard kids' fare. Given a basic set of building tools, you'll need to design a garden to attract wild piñatas into your care. Different styles of piñatas will require different buildings and features in your garden, and figuring out who needs what is up to you. Once attracted to your garden, different styles of piñata creatures will interact with each other, so be cautious if a fox ends up next to a hen. Once you've lured two of the same piñata types to your garden and have the proper facilities, they can be enticed to "dance" and produce an offspring. Piñatas will even be able to be traded to friends via Xbox Live.

It will be interesting to see if this style of game will appeal to the target audience and beyond as the publishers are clearly hoping. Regardless, Viva Piñata should make it clear that piñatas are not just destined to be on the receiving end of a Louisville Slugger. ■■■

This piñata was responsible for giving Steve Irwin a cuddly, adorable mauling

As cute as they are, these chickens deserve to be beaten. No seriously, all chickens deserve to be beaten

Shortly after hitting him with a stick, Roger learned that this wasn't a piñata, but rather a real donkey covered in decorative paper. What was inside was definitely not candy

Disney
SQUARE ENIX
KINGDOM HEARTS II
The story isn't over.
SQUARE ENIX
www.kingdomhearts.com
Published by Square Enix, Inc.
PlayStation 2
bvg GAMES
EVERYONE 10+
E
10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Blood
Use of Alcohol
Violence

PSP

Gun Showdown

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** REBELLION/NEVERSOFT > **RELEASE** SUMMER

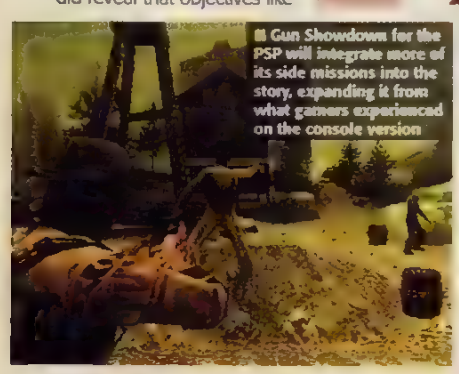
THE NEW SHERIFF IN TOWN

■ At gunpoint, Colton declares it's time for confession and repentance

Gun got a mixed reception from gamers, and there were even rumors that Activision canned future plans for the series as a result. Thankfully, the publisher is not giving up on Gun's western action. In fact, Neversoft – in conjunction with Oxford, England's Rebellion – is using this PSP title as a chance to actually improve the game and address what some gamers saw as shortcomings.

Irwin Chen, the game's producer, told us that some players were enamored enough with the title's main story arc that they didn't participate in Gun's many side missions. The PSP edition of Gun Showdown will try to kill two birds with one stone. "We're looking to integrate [the missions] more into the story. Some of the side missions were really good, and some people might have overlooked them." Although he didn't want to give away what surprises will be in store for protagonist Colton White, he did reveal that objectives like an all-new bank robbery will help lengthen the game's storyline. New characters and situations will also be added onto the full list of side missions and locations from the console edition.

Gun Showdown on the PSP will also give gamers new weapons like a throwing knife with their own upgrades. Addressing another comment some gamers had, this version will make your steed more of a permanent presence. Instead of just changing horses when yours inevitably bites the dust, you'll get to forge a more permanent connection to your horse through upgradeable attributes and even a summoning whistle. The ambitions don't stop there. Up to six-player multiplayer is planned, as well as some quick play modes – including a way to just play Texas hold 'em. This full docket of features is what's currently planned, and with Rebellion researching how to best stream all of Gun's world with minimal loading fuss, let's hope that things don't get left on the cutting room floor. If this game does make it in its proposed form, we can't see anything but a bright future for this franchise. ■■■



■ Gun Showdown for the PSP will integrate more of its side missions into the story, expanding it from what gamers experienced on the console version

■ Gamers can drop in and play quick missions if they don't want to hit the story mode

■ Somehow, we doubt there's a peaceful solution to this scenario

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PSP

Gangs of London

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE > **DEVELOPER** TEAM SOHO > **RELEASE** 2006

STEALING ENGLAND BY THE POUND

Although the title might be unfamiliar, Sony's recently announced PSP title Gangs of London comes from a well-known pedigree. A spin-off of the company's successful Getaway franchise, the game has been built from the ground up by Sony's London-based Team Soho.

However, if you're expecting a slimmed-down version of the first two Getaway titles, you'll be in for a pleasant surprise. Based on the preliminary information that Team Soho has released, Gangs of London looks to be one of the most ambitious PSP titles yet. The main story mode expands on the basics of the free-roaming genre with an emphasis on team tactical combat and multiple branching storylines. At the outset, you'll take command of one of five different criminal organizations and send out teams of gangsters to tackle the game's 60+ missions. You can both control members individually and issue orders, and swap control of characters in real-time. Of course, in addition to combat, there will also be the full complement of driving gameplay. To add replay value, missions can also be replayed from the perspective of different gangs.

That alone would be noteworthy in the current PSP market, but that's far from all Gangs of London has to offer. Gang Battle mode is a full-featured game on its own, a card-battle contest where you compete against the computer or a friend for control of London neighborhoods by strategically laying down your battle cards. Taking cues from The Getaway, there is also Free Roaming mode, which lets you tackle customized mission objectives based on parameters you set before play, and Tourist Mode, which lets you freely travel the city, taking snapshots of landmarks to better learn the city's layout. Finally, a minigame mode contains popular pub amusements like darts and pool.

Although details are scarce, multiplayer is definitely on the menu, including a special game sharing feature that will generate unique missions and environments based on your PSP's serial number. Needless to say, we'll be keeping a keen eye out for an American release date for this promising title. ■■■

■ You'll command squads from one of five London criminal organizations

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!

TEEN T Language Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX

XBOX 360 LIVE

WWW.BLAZING-ANGELS.COM

© 2006 Ubisoft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. Blazing Angels, Ubisoft, and the Ubisoft logo are trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the U.S. and/or other countries. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox Live, the Xbox logos, and the Xbox Live logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. Software platform logo TM and © IEMA 2003.

UBISOFT

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

AutoAssault

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NCSOFT
> **DEVELOPER** NETDEVIL > **RELEASE** APRIL 13

WAY BEYOND THUNDERDOME

A recent hands-on demo of AutoAssault left us impressed with the strides the game has made since its somewhat lackluster last showing. At this point, you can count us as believers that AutoAssault's unique blend of destructive vehicular action will be worth checking out when it goes live (which it may well have by the time you have this magazine in your hands).

Developer NetDevil has spent the time granted by the game's delays wisely. The majority of this additional effort has focused on polishing up the content, and it shows. Rather than having combat situations all feel alike, the team has diversified the enemies with a host of new abilities. For instance, hostiles in a muddy area will gladly clog your weapons with muck instead of merely gunning for you in standard fashion. It sounds like a small thing, but these additional challenges will hopefully add enough variety to the frenetic combat to keep it interesting -- and believe us when we say that blowing up everything in sight was pretty dam enthralling to start with.

Player-versus-player action will be available right from level one, with instanced arena battles that match you up against similarly-powerful combatants from any live server, rather than just your own. Fighting in the arena earns you a ranking similarly to a chess tournament (so the better your opponents are ranked, the more standing you gain by defeating them), and regularly-scheduled tournaments will be held to compete for special prizes. Tons of stats for both individuals and clans are tracked, and we'd be surprised if some serious competition doesn't spring up rather quickly.

The non-PvP side of things looks good as well, with around 2,000 missions available between the three factions. Plenty of solo content is available, and many of the instanced missions will scale up the challenge (and rewards) if you choose to enter with a group. On the whole, we couldn't be much more excited to jump in and check out the retail version, and thankfully we won't have to wait long. ■■■

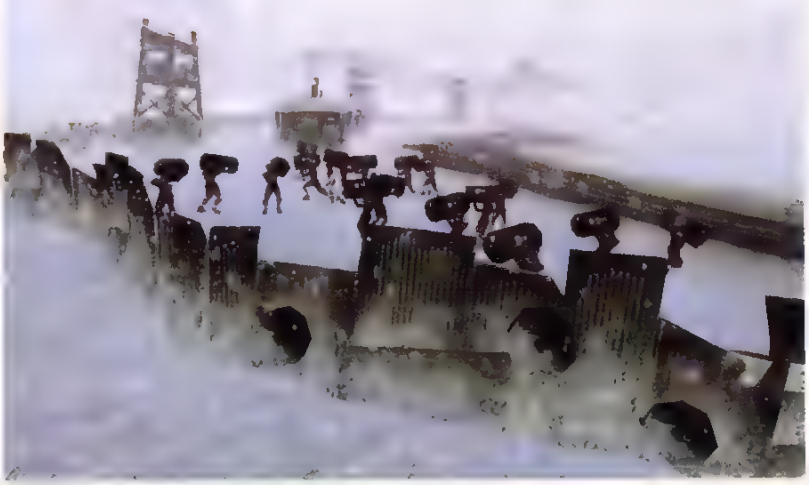
GROUND ZERO

This super-high-level zone is one of AutoAssault's coolest features. Though you can enter a non-contested version of it instead, the contested version offers a ton of sweet PvP action as the three factions fight over military outposts and alien artifacts, with the eventual goal of beating down the alien landing force at the center of the zone. Think of it like a big, persistent MMO version of Battlefield, or a sci-fi based World of Warcraft Alterac Valley match that never ends (and isn't filled with away-from-keyboard reputation grinders).

Combat is almost too fast, nearly too furious

Each faction has its own distinct look. The Humans favor a clean, smooth style

Both avatars and vehicles can be heavily cosmetically customized



Because of the full physics modeling, weather effects like wind, lightning, and meteor showers can have a real gameplay effect

Fast. Mobile. Drop Dead Cool.

Alienware® recommends Microsoft® Windows® XP.

AREA-51® m5700

Microsoft® Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
Intel® Pentium® M 750 (1.86 GHz, 2 MB Cache, 533 MHz)
NVIDIA® GeForce™ Go 6800 PCI Express 256 MB Graphics Card
512 MB Dual Channel DDR2 SO-DIMM at 533 MHz
120 GB (60 GB x 2) 5400 RPM Hard Drive
17" Wide Screen LCD with ClearView® Technology
[illegible]

Affordably Priced less than **$1,849**

AREA-51 m7700 | AREA-51 m5700 | AREA-51 m5500

AREA-51® m5500

Microsoft® Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
Intel® Pentium® M 750 (1.86 GHz, 2 MB Cache, 533 MHz)
NVIDIA® GeForce™ Go 6600 PCI Express with Graphics Control Technology
512 MB Dual Channel DDR2 SO-DIMM at 533 MHz
60 GB 5400 RPM Hard Drive
15.4" Wide Screen LCD
24x10x24 CD-RW / 8x DVD Combo Optical Drive

Affordably Priced less than **$1,549**

ALIENWARE
HIGH-PERFORMANCE SYSTEMS

Latest Every Interest promotion available at:
www.alienware.com/gomainfo

[illegible]
1.800.ALIENWARE

Intel, Intel Inside, Intel Inside logo, Intel Centrino and Intel Centrino logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries. Alienware, Alien head logo, Alienware High Performance logo, and Area-51 are trademarks, and/or registered trademarks of Alienware Corporation. All other trademarks are property of their respective owners. Alienware can not be held responsible for errors in photography or typography. Prices, configurations, and availability may change without notice. Taxes and shipping charges are not shown. Promotions and rebates are subject to end without notice.

intel inside
centrino™
MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway

Ubisoft is taking its WWII action/strategy franchise to the next-gen front this fall as Matt Baker and his boys make their way deeper and deeper into war-torn Europe. This time they're gonna have more help as the series expands the number of squads you can command. Hell's Highway will not only put a third squad under your control, but it will offer more varied kinds of teams at your disposal. You can easily imagine how adding a bazooka team to your arsenal would open things up a bit. Blow a hole through your enemies, to be more exact. Stay tuned, as we'll have more on Hell's Highway and the continued evolution of the series very soon.

XBOX 360

Over G Fighters

Scoot over, Ace Combat. You finally have some competition in the jet fighter arena. Ubisoft's newly announced Over G Fighters will be releasing exclusively on the Xbox 360 in June, and has all sorts of cool features that have us plugging in Kenny Loggins to take a highway to the danger zone. Thirty unique jet fighters are flyable in the game. Among them is the remarkable F-22A Raptor, the plane that is credited with maintaining U.S. air superiority for the last several years, as well as other familiar vehicles like the Fighting Falcon, the MiG, and the Nighthawk. Eighty missions fill up the game, each filled with primary and secondary objectives throughout a fictionalized modern day, real-world conflict. Players will have a full 360 degree view within their cockpit, letting you check your six as you navigate combat. Finally, up to eight players will be able to engage in massive online dogfights over Xbox Live. We're already breaking out our Top Gun flight jackets – haven't gotten to wear those for a while.

PC

Soul of the Ultimate Nation

Up-and-coming Korean publisher Webzen has a treat in store for North American item-hunting enthusiasts. SUN, though it's being developed in-house across the Pacific and definitely possessed of a distinctly Korean flavor of design, is being localized by the publisher's U.S. offices, and should see a release here this fall sometime. This action/RPG is very much in the vein of Diablo – except with the visuals of a top-tier first-person shooter – and offers four distinct classes and a large variety of missions to play through, castles for guilds to conquer and defend, and the option to go head-to-head in player-versus-player gametypes. A monthly subscription fee will be required for SUN, but the dollar amount hasn't been decided yet – and we wouldn't be surprised to see it sneak in under the $15 that most games, like World of Warcraft and Final Fantasy XI, charge.

PSP

Mortal Kombat Unchained

This port of Midway's most recent grisly fighter is set to light up PSP screens as soon as this coming fall. Most of the brutal elements that are mainstays of the game should be just as insane on a portable system as they were on a larger screens, since fatalities, multi-tiered environments, and death traps will all be present. This PSP version will even include the single player Konquest mode for all those times you don't have a buddy to engage in Wi-Fi head-to-head combat with. Minigames like Puzzle Kombat and Chess return to round out the mix. However, the coolest addition is probably the six new playable fighters, including Kitana, Jax, Frost, Blaze, Goro, and Shao Kahn. Everything about this sounds just about perfect to us. Brutal killing while we're waiting in busy airports? Yes, please!

PC

Gods & Heroes

It seems like half of the interesting PC games in development are being worked on by ex-Blizzard employees these days. Stieg Hedlund, former lead designer of Diablo II and lately of Ubisoft's Clancy franchises, is now helming Gods & Heroes as creative director. This Greek mythology-inspired MMORPG departs from the genre's usual format in a few very important ways. In particular, players will be able to recruit squads of NPCs to follow them around and assist them in combat, which allows the designers a lot of room to create compelling, solo-friendly content that wouldn't be possible in most other online games. Look for Gods & Heroes to come out this fall under the Sony Online Entertainment label.

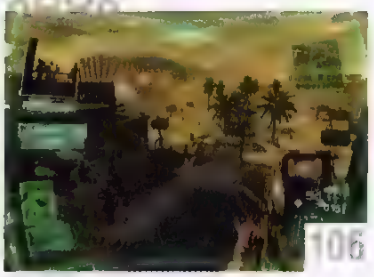
REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII

Tourist Trophy: The Real Riding Simulator

Top Spin 2



Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

When it was first announced, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion provided a seemingly impossible glimpse into next-gen gaming. Now that it has arrived (after a longer-than-expected wait), it shines as brightly as ever. With an array of different classes, quests, and choices to be made, Oblivion is the next step forward in player-driven gameplay. Whether you decide to tackle the main story or lose yourself in countless diversions and activities, you'll be amazed by the vast and immersive experience that developer Bethesda has crafted.

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	You Got Served: No, we're not talking about the movie. You got served for playing this.

> 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.

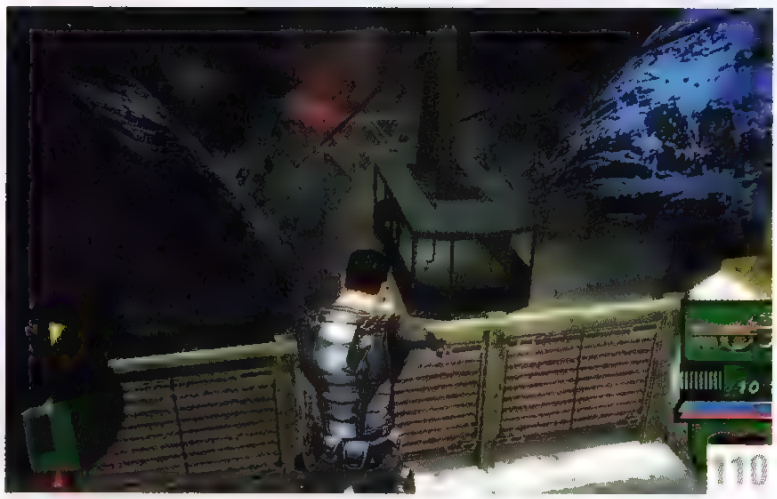
Low – You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

PC

Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach — 108

HANDHELD

MX Vs. ATV: On The Edge — 111



110

REVIEWS INDEX

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion 92
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII 96
Tomb Raider: Legend 96
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix 97
Rampage: Total Destruction 97
Driver: Parallel Lines 98
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires 98
WarPath 98
The Godfather: The Game 99
Tourist Trophy: The Real Riding Simulator 100
Metal Saga 101
Samurai Champloo: Sidetracked 101
Steambot Chronicles 101
Suikoden V 101
Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War 102
Rumble Roses XX 104
Top Spin 2 104
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 106
Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach 108
MX Vs. ATV: On The Edge 110
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror 110
Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble 110
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed 111
Generation of Chaos 111
Metroid Prime: Hunters 111
Samurai Warriors: State of War 111
Me and My Katamari 112
Splinter Cell Essentials 112
Field Commander 113
From Russia With Love 113
Guilty Gear: Dust Strikers 113
Worms: Open Warfare 113

pg.112

HANDHELD GAME OF THE MONTH

Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror

After an ambitious but poor-selling PS2 entry, it appeared that Sony's Syphon Filter franchise was on its way out. Thankfully, the series' creators at Sony Bend have managed to revitalize the franchise in what is one of the most masterfully accomplished PSP action titles to date. Expertly dishing out the high-tension action that Syphon Filter is known for, while at the same time overcoming the system's lack of a second analog stick, Dark Mirror is one of the highlights of this high-powered handheld's library.

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.

EC	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older	M	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older
E	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older	AO	Content suitable only for adults.
E10+	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older	RP	Product is awaiting final rating.
T	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older		

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).

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, 480i (i = 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 Mario Party

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

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

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 hi-res 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

SharkViper – An awesome '80s show about the super intelligent dune buggy that fought crime with Jan-Michael Vincent. Netflix it!

shooter – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius

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

XBOX 360 | PC

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS > DEVELOPER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS > RELEASE MARCH 21 > ESRB T

THEY SHOULD HAVE SENT A POET

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** A vast, self-directed adventure with seemingly limitless opportunities

> **Graphics:** These character models and gorgeous surroundings would be impressive on a game with half of Oblivion's scope

> **Sound:** The score is beautiful, but you notice early on that only a handful of voice actors were used (in addition to Patrick Stewart, of course)

> **Playability:** This is a tight and responsive first-person game The third-person perspective is barely functional, but you'll never need to use it

> **Entertainment:** Provides constant thrills, whether you're advancing the story or following your own whims

> **Replay Value:** High

The Emperor is dead. The world is on the brink of chaos, and hordes of demons are pouring into the wilderness though the gates of Oblivion. Why then am I, as the only hope for the land of Tamriel, hanging out in a tavern? Or carrying out assassinations? Or stealing from poor merchants? Because the way I see it, there are more important matters at hand. Of course, you're free to disagree and single-mindedly focus on the noble task of saving the world. That's the real triumph of The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion; the open-ended, choice-driven gameplay that has defined the series returns, but with an unparalleled depth that puts you at the very center of a living, breathing world. The bar for the next generation of RPGs has just been set.

The moment you step out of the Imperial sewers into the wide open countryside of Cyrodiil, you will likely feel intimidated and overwhelmed by the sheer number of possibilities. While your options never dwindle, the scope of the game becomes much more manageable as you individually determine which quest chains take priority. Follow the main story if you like, or join a guild, or help citizens in need. While many games have claimed to allow players to "create their own stories," this is the first time I felt like it was actually happening. Be warned, however, that gamers who cling to the need for linear progression will be left wanting for more specific direction, since it's entirely possible to have 10 or more quests on the back burner at any one time.

The act of physically carrying out these numerous quests is thankfully just as rewarding as the game's conceptual basis. The clean, intuitive combat is a great improvement over Morrowind, with hit detection being the only area that seemed occasionally spotty. The d-pad is used to select your hotkeyed weapons and spells (used with the right trigger and bumper, respectively), but this convenience comes at the expense of being able to scroll through your options mid-fight like you could in Morrowind.

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

My biggest complaint about the battles stems from fact that sometimes the game would force me into encounters that I, as a stealthy assassin, didn't have the skills to win. For example, I had to confront two warriors in a locked crypt. They attacked me as soon as I approached, and the only way I survived was by using a once-per-day summon to distract one of them, killing the other, and then looting the body to get the key. As I fled the crypt and the remaining heavily-armored thug pursued, the city guards showed up and cut him down. Now, one could view this as dynamic, but having the guards kill your enemy is the Oblivion equivalent of having your mommy bail you out. Thankfully, for every moment like this that frustrated me, there were a dozen quests that – at long last – made me proud to be an Xbox 360 owner.

Trying to sum up all of the possibilities and highlights of Oblivion in one page is like summarizing The Lord of the Rings in a single sentence; it's possible to convey a general idea, but the real joy lies in the minute details. Breaking and entering and stealing. Saving (not killing!) the rats in an old woman's basement. Desperately seeking a cure for vampirism. Once you start unearthing these tasks, brace yourself for the long haul. Providing you don't mind blazing your own trail, the content in Oblivion just keeps on coming, and it never gives you any reason to stop playing.—**JOE**

MOVING UP

There are a total of four guilds in Oblivion, and it is possible for the player to ascend the ranks and become the leader of all of them. As you advance, the ranks you attain aren't just meaningless promotions; new titles often change your role within the guild. What follows is a summary of what it's like to climb the ladder in the Dark Brotherhood (the assassins' guild), and how your responsibilities evolve.

Murderer: Kill things. Get paid.

Slayer: Undertake more difficult contracts, often involving stealth and recon. Gain the option to become a vampire.

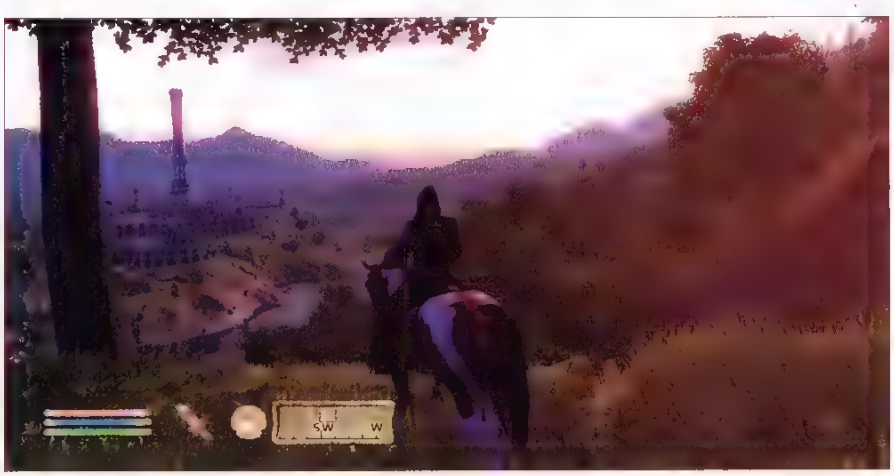
Eliminator: Receive a key that allows access to the sanctuary's hidden entrance. All contracts are now received directly from the leader of the sanctuary.

Assassin: Jobs continue to become more intricate, requiring even more deception and betrayal.

Silencer: Work directly for a Speaker serving as a personal assassin. Get orders covertly via dead drops.

Speaker: Act as a member of the Black Hand, the guild's ruling council. "Remedy" matters of concern within the Dark Brotherhood.

Listener: Commune directly with the Night Mother. Pass contracts along to your Speaker, who assigns them. Receive a cut from the guild's weekly earnings.



Second Opinion 9.5

As the hours drop away into days, it's clear just how ambitious Oblivion really is. The ability to craft the character and play experience that you want is unprecedented. Early in the game, I encountered a situation that is representative of the experience as a whole After emerging from the opening underground area, I began to climb a hill that gave way to a mountain, and at a sufficient height I turned to see miles of landscape laid out before me – ancient ruins, tall trees, and the glistening towers of the Imperial City all beckoned. The enormity of options was overwhelming. It's a feeling that has yet to go away even now, dozens of hours later If a stuttering frame rate and long load times are enough to dissuade you from such wonder, you may have missed the point. I'd love to see these small dilemmas addressed, as well as a little more refined combat balancing, but the problems don't even begin to outweigh the benefits of this, the first next-generation RPG, and the one by which all others will be measured.—**MILLER**

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The PC version has shorter load times and fewer framerate issues, providing your computer has the muscle for the hefty recommended system requirements. Otherwise, you should feel no shame in playing the 360 version; both are outstanding achievements in graphics and gameplay

Game Informer Online is bringing you the next generation of gaming LIVE from E3 2006 beginning on May 8th. Now you have a chance to win it all!

GAMEINFORMER ONLINE

PRESENTS THE

COUNTDOWN TO E3 CONTEST

SPONSORED BY

GameStop EB GAMES

FROM APRIL 7TH TO MAY 20TH, REGISTER TO WIN THE HOTTEST SYSTEMS OF THE YEAR ON THEIR DAY OF RELEASE!

ONE GRAND PRIZE WINNER GETS IT ALL!

SONY PLAYSTATION 3, PSP, NINTENDO REVOLUTION, DS LITE, and a MICROSOFT XBOX 360

1ST PRIZE WINNER
SONY PLAYSTATION 3

2ND PRIZE WINNER
NINTENDO REVOLUTION

3RD PRIZE WINNER
MICROSOFT XBOX 360

4TH PRIZE WINNER
NINTENDO DS LITE

5TH PRIZE WINNER
SONY PSP

ENTER ONCE A DAY

WWW.GAMEINFORMER.COM

GAMEINFORMER ONLINE PRESENTS

MARC ECKŌ'S getting up

SWEEPSTAKES

WIN An ALL EXPENSE PAID trip to meet MARC ECKŌ in NYC

OR

ONE OF FIVE $500 shopecko.com gift certificates

ENTER ONLINE @ www.gameinformer.com

GameStop marc ecko games ATARI

HAVE YOU SUBSCRIBED TO THE WEEKLY GAME INFORMER NEWSLETTER YET?

IF NOT, GET INFORMED and sign-up at WWW.GAMEINFORMER.COM

■ The Pokémon World Championship got a little out of hand

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Takes the genre to towering new heights with visuals that feature the highest level of realism, but nearly grounds itself with sloppy gameplay execution

> **Graphics:** Even Bob Ross couldn't paint environments this beautiful

> **Sound:** Thanks to terrible voice acting, you'll find yourself wishing that you could shoot your annoying wingmen instead of the enemy

> **Playability:** Innovates in several key areas, but struggles with the most important gameplay elements

> **Entertainment:** A rocky flight that will take your breath away but still leave you craving something grander

> **Replay Value:** High

XBOX 360 | XBOX

Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PC ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT ROMANIA > **RELEASE** MARCH 23 > **ESRB** T

PLACING GAMEPLAY ON THE AFTERBURNER

The horizon was ablaze with vibrant hues of gold and orange. Rays from the setting sun glistened upon the river's surface with a soothing sheen that made the city beyond look like it was built out of gold. The serenity that sprawled across the earth and its skies lulled my every sense into a comatose state. I couldn't even react to the deafening roar of airborne steel that hurtled dangerously close. By the time that the enemy squadron opened fire, it was far too late for evasive maneuvers or even a blind retaliatory strike.

Crushing the graphical standards set by the genre, Blazing Angels spreads its wings and soars as a visual marvel. Even while engaged in a deadly aerial dance with an ace Japanese pilot, you'll find your eyes wandering off of the critical target to view the incredible detail that has been applied to the sprawling cityscapes, the scurrying feet of hundreds of soldiers on a military base, and even the ever-expanding trail of smoke from a fighter plummeting toward the surface. The impressive visual display also has a heavy hand in the gameplay. The black smoke that rises can become so dense that you'll find yourself completely disoriented. On the other end of the spectrum, flashes of light or directly looking into the sun will temporarily blind you.

With so much chaos erupting outside of the cockpit, it's easy to lose focus on the mission at hand. Thankfully, the game does have a built-in safety. By pressing the left trigger, your pilot's eyes will lock onto the target that you are engaged with. For dogfighting, this function removes the frustrating guesswork that comes with reading your opponent's next move. You'll now see which way they are spinning and can adjust your craft appropriately. The game also tries to keep you airborne as long as possible. If the enemy has you locked in their sights, your craft will be a flaming heap in no time, but if you duck out of the fight, you can manually repair your vessel by tapping the series of buttons that flash onto screen.

While flying high with most of the content it delivers, Blazing Angels does spiral out of control in the areas where it needs the most stability. As much as I enjoyed weaving through ice caverns and tearing bombers to shreds, most of the missions are repetitive and short. You never really feel like the Axis is a formidable foe. Concerning the mechanics, I can appreciate targeting being a precise science, but leading your shot is an incredibly difficult feat, and your machine gun range is far too short given how fast the fighters move. The game can certainly paint extravagant vistas, but it doesn't even attempt to tell a story. You just have to listen to your terribly-voiced allies to get your bearings as to what may be going on in a mission. When you throw all of these parts together, this bird hardly gets off of the ground.

The game does offer up a nice selection of modes. In addition to Campaign and various minigames, online is outfitted with four-player co-op that offers a wide variety of unqiue missions, plus 16-player deathmatching that is complete with a ranking system. As you would expect, the lock-on mechanic works incredibly well against zigzagging human targets. As much as it pains me to say this, online is the only area where you really want to take to the skies.

Blazing Angels is definitely a sight for sore eyes. Its visuals will leave you gazing in wonder, but at the same time, the gameplay will have you fighting back tears.—**REINER**

Second Opinion 7.75

Barrel ng through a cloud of black smoke to shoot down an enemy fighter wait ng on the other side is an exhilarating experience, especially when it feels totally believable and immersive. When it's at its best, Blazing Angels has you convinced that you're fighting the good fight over the skies of London, thanks to some truly gorgeous visual effects. But when it stumbles, as it does fairly often, the illusion falls away and you're reminded of the fact that you are indeed merely playing a game, one with finicky targeting, occasionally frustrating mission objectives, and repetitive, generic banter that constantly assaults your ears. I'm willing to put up with these technical annoyances because some missions are great fun, but I'm a little let down because the moments of brilliance tell me that the whole game could have been better with a little more time and polish.—**JEREMY**

■ Sgt. Frank was the only fighter pilot relaxed enough to "do his business" in mid-flight

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Blazing Angels showcases a ridiculous level of detail, but the Xbox 360 version still smokes the current-gen offering. Specular mapping, improved texturing, luminous area glare, and realistic battle damage are just a few of the visual enhancements you'll find exclusively on the Xbox's big brother. It also offers sound enhancements like perception filtering.

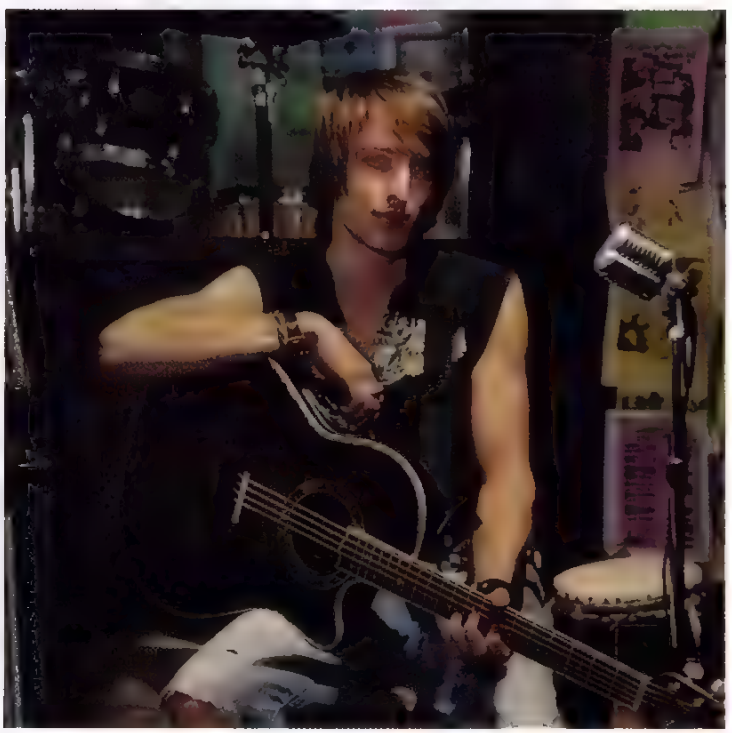
GK

THE GAMEKILLERS

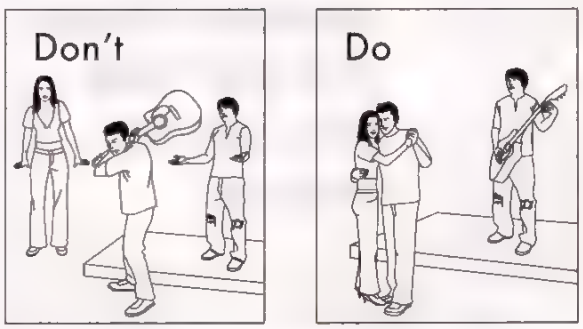
There are people out there whose sole mission in life is to cause you to blow your cool and lose the girl. They are, The Gamekillers.

THE BALLADEER

For an encore, he's going to do your girl.



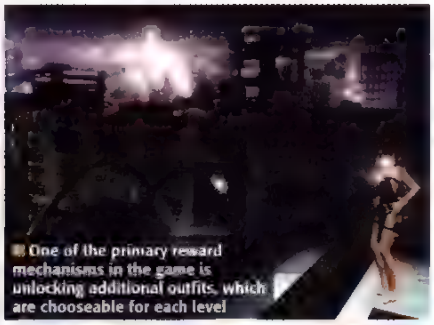
It doesn't matter that he might sleep on a futon in the back of a van, chicks will always dig a guy who can sing. Whether he's the quintessential frontman for a college indie-alternative band or the scratchy-voiced crooner at the local pub, you've got to be wary of this pseudo rock star and his ripped-up jeans that he only takes off to have sex. Sure, his esoteric lyrics are irritating, but The Axe Dry wearer keeps his cool by letting the tune play out—after she sees he's a quasi-homeless has-been that never was, you'll be the one left singing her a sweet bedtime lullaby.



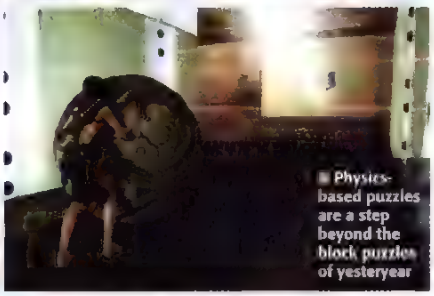
Keep Your Cool. Axe Dry.

Learn more at gamekillers.com

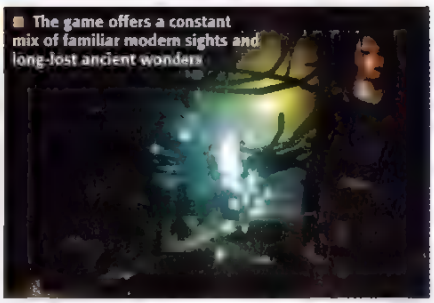
©2006 UNILEVER



One of the primary reward mechanisms in the game is unlocking additional outfits, which are chooseable for each level



Physics-based puzzles are a step beyond the block puzzles of yesteryear



The game offers a constant mix of familiar modern sights and long-lost ancient wonders

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Return to what made Tomb Raider a classic in the first place

> **Graphics:** Stunning scenery and atmospheric ruins are a marvel, and Lara has never looked better

> **Sound:** Consistent dialogue over the intercom brings the characters to life, and the music certainly sets the mood appropriately

> **Playability:** A complete rethinking of movement and action makes for smooth platforming and fun combat

> **Entertainment:** Don't let years of disappointment with the series keep you away – this is the real deal

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Tomb Raider: Legend

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS > **DEVELOPER** CRYSTAL DYNAMICS > **RELEASE** APRIL 11 > **ESRB** T

WHAT WORKS

In some circles, Tomb Raider has become a joke. What was a prized and praised franchise in its early years now evokes healthy skepticism, even from some of its fans. Thankfully, Lara's latest adventure is in good shape to reset perceptions for those still willing to give her a chance. Sporting a totally redesigned control scheme, for the first time a Tomb Raider game feels natural and intuitive. Even more importantly, this newest entry in the series brings back the adventure and awe that made those early games so exciting. Tomb raiding is fun again.

The moments that really work in this game are the ones that make you pause and gaze about in wonder. The gorgeous level designs are often breathtaking – thin shafts of sunlight dapple ancient ruins and long-forgotten stonework arches overhead. These same inspiring locales are filled with a constant stream of clever puzzles, hard enough to give you pause but reasonable enough to keep the action going. The more modern level locations are also well put together, even if those fail to elicit the same excitement as delving into the trap-laden remains of a dead civilization.

"...brings back the adventure and awe that made those early games so exciting."

Taking cues from the best recent platforming games, (most notably Prince of Persia), Tomb Raider: Legend boasts a silky smooth control scheme that I'd be surprised to hear complaints about. Because the world no longer functions on an invisible grid of squares, the physics-based puzzles feel somehow more genuine in their solutions. In addition, some excellent animation work has Lara jumping flipping, shooting, and dodging in ways that stretch credulity, but at least don't feel any more ridiculous than a good action movie. Combat feels like an afterthought to the real game, which is much more about exploration than fighting. Even so, the brief gun combat sequences are fun, and the occasional vehicle sections give some variety, even if they're by no means perfect. An intriguing story and passable characters round out the mix, giving you plenty of reason to keep playing. Plus, some worthwhile replay value is built in thanks to the level time trials and secret rewards, many of which are a major challenge to track down.

Tomb Raider: Legend fails to be a reinvention of any genres, but succeeds in every way at reinventing itself. It walks the fine line of pleasing long time fans, the folks who just watched the movies, and even brand new players, all at once. Don't miss out just because it might be popular to hate on the franchise these days; Legend reminds us why we fell in love with Lara in the first place.—**MILLER**

Second Opinion 8.5

After suffering a bone-shattering fall from grace, the spunk has finally returned to this spelunker's step. Tomb Raider: Legend rekindles the thrill of adventure and sense of discovery that once made this series a juggernaut. Masterfully crafted architecture and lushly detailed landscapes fill your eyes with wonder. Your brain will twist over the ingenious physics-based puzzles. For the first time in this series, you'll also find yourself roaring enthusiastically over the immaculate platforming and finesse that has been applied to all of Lara's acrobatic moves. Rather than keeping players submerged in dimly lit caverns the entire time, the face of the game is constantly changing. This leads to an experience that moves along with the fervency of someone extending a hand to grasp a golden artifact. The only time you'll find yourself frowning is in wobbly-controlled motorcycle segments. Without question...welcome back, Lara!—**REINER**

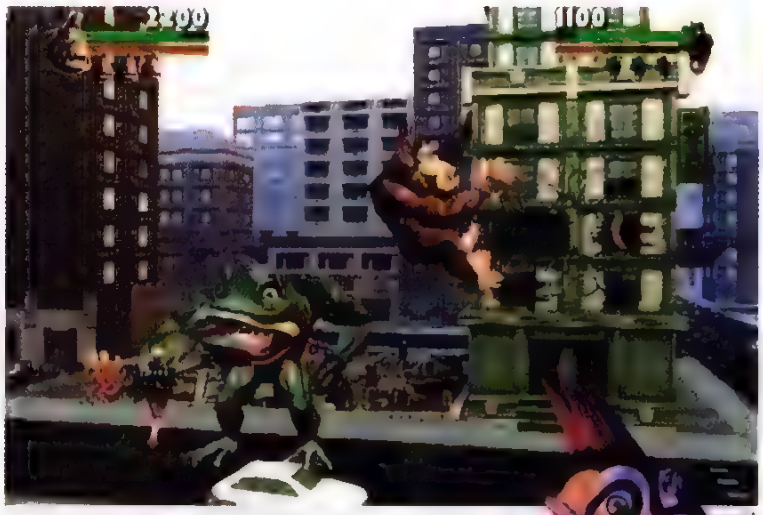
Lara's magnetic grapple comes in handy as a tool for pulling, swinging over gaps, and even throwing at enemies for a laugh

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Tomb Raider looks great on all of its platforms, and a choice between PS2 and Xbox should be governed by nothing more or less than controller preference. However, if 360 is an option, that's definitely the way to go. Excellent normal-mapping work on both characters and environments make the game world shimmer, detailed shadows and light work are gorgeous, and the moving water effects are some of the best we've yet seen.

Combat remains simplistic, but is now definitely a fun part of the mix



PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Rampage: Total Destruction

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** PIPEWORKS > **RELEASE** APRIL 25 > **ESRB** E

PUNCH THAT BUILDING!

Remakes of old games are a decidedly mixed bag. Sometimes, it's like playing a newly remastered version of an old Beatles record, as you get a new appreciation for an all-time classic. Other times, it's more like finding a Spin Doctors CD in the closet of your old room at your parent's house, evoking little more than a feeling of "What was I thinking?" While it does hold some nostalgic fun for fans, I'm afraid the experience of playing this new version of Rampage is much closer to the latter than the former.

I can't really fault the developers. They've stuck close to the old arcade game's formula, while offering more variety in the form of new monsters and modes, as well as special challenges and unlockable moves. If they were told to emulate what made Rampage a classic in the first place, they've done their job well. However, the fact is that this game just hasn't aged well. I swear I used to love this; now I'm almost shocked at how repetitive and shallow it is. It might as well be called "Super Building Puncher."

And, for a while, that's enough. The game, despite a decidedly old-school graphical look, is fairly well done for what it is, and still has the series' trademark wacky humor and over-the-top character designs. I must admit there is still some satisfaction to be had by flinging around buses and stomping skyscrapers into rubble. That being said, I still don't see the average person putting in more than an hour on this game. What's more, the recent Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction offers the same sense of power and destruction with 10 times the gameplay. In the end, I really don't see this title connecting with an audience beyond the most hardcore Rampage fans.—**MATT**

The environments satirize famous cities like Las Vegas and San Francisco

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** A redux of the classic monster movie arcade brawler

> **Graphics:** Has a great art style and a colorful, vibrant look that brings the old game into the new century

> **Sound:** Forgettable music coupled with lots and lots of explosions

> **Playability:** The unlockable moves add a modicum of depth, but it's mostly just simple button mashing

> **Entertainment:** It's a nice trip down memory lane for about an hour, then you realize that this is all there is

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.75

Rampage: Total Destruction doesn't ask a lot from players besides the ability to constantly mash buttons. This flashback lacks huge glaring flaws (besides the controls being a bit clunky), but it does little very well except to stroke the nostalgia cortex in my brain that makes vapid, repetitive entertainment really excellent if I enjoyed it as a kid. This game will tickle that part of us that remembers Rampage as a bitchin' way to spend a quarter, but that doesn't mean it's an awesome game – it means it's an awesome memory. I know I might sound a little bitter, but sometimes it's sound advice to let the past be and, for me, revisiting Rampage is my lesson learned.—**LISA**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, XBOX LIVE, OR SYSTEM LINK)
> **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO > **RELEASE** MARCH 14 > **ESRB** E 10+

FOR THE WIN/WIN

When Rockstar's third Midnight Club came out last April, the game's fast pace and slick presentation was a slap in the face to other street racers. The partnership with *DUB* magazine gifted the game, its soundtrack, and style with credible choices and none of the fake-baked street culture that other titles shoved down our throats. So what's with all the love for a re-release? When a company takes a game this successful and well-crafted, and then jams it full of great extras and drops the price to truly budget-friendly levels, we should all send a letter of thanks.

Unquestionably, the biggest addition to Remix is the Tokyo Challenge. Available from the start, this is the much-missed Tokyo level from Midnight Club 2. Just as realized and full-featured as the other MC 3 cities, Tokyo is a parallel mission where newly unlocked cars can be used freely in any of the other cities. It's just as challenging, just as intense, and just as enjoyable as Atlanta, San Diego, and Detroit are, and also offers access to some of the other new content.

Twenty new vehicles have been added to the game's already interesting lineup. The motorcycles, SUVs, and classic muscle car classes each get new rides, and the game's unique play balance of making each class a rip-roaring good time is further highlighted by these new rides. As a car dork, I'm a little bummed that the Ferraris are fake, but there's no denying that they're unbelievably fun to play.

In all, the new stuff adds more than 30 percent to the top of the already full-featured title. There are rarely experiences so necessary in gaming, and they come along when the rare alchemy of challenge, fun, rewards, and solid presentation collide. Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition is such a moment, and the Remix is well worth revisiting.—**LISA**

The game features a host of new vehicles

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Take an excellent street racer and pump it full of new content for the budget-friendly greatest hits edition

> **Graphics:** The new city and cars fit into the rest of the game seamlessly, and the open worlds are rich with interesting details

> **Sound:** One of the best soundtracks in memory gets even more tracks, making it almost unbeatable

> **Playability:** Arcade-styled (in a good way) and sometimes faster than your brain can process

> **Entertainment:** A rocking good time from beginning to end, and the new content is a great addition

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.5

If you look up the term "no brainer" in the dictionary, it will likely have a picture of Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix next to it. Basically, this is my favorite racing game of the past few years, now released at $20, with some really nice added content. Rockstar San Diego has taken Tokyo from Midnight Club 2 (which many didn't experience because of that game's high degree of difficulty) and transferred it to MC3, along with a host of cool new vehicles. It's basically increasing the content of the game by almost a third, and a great example of how to do a "greatest hits" version the right way. Kudos to Rockstar for going the extra mile.—**MATT**

MULTI QUICKIES

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2

Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** KOEI
> **DEVELOPER** OMEGA FORCE
> **RELEASE** MARCH 28 > **ESRB** T

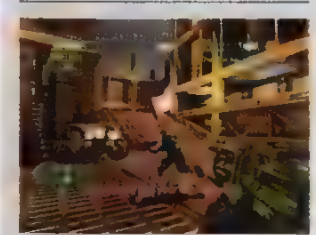
BOTTOM LINE **6**

If I were to dust off one of my old Dynasty Warriors reviews, make a few minor tweaks, and run it again, I'd be guilty of self-plagiarism. Yet somehow, Koei pulls this trick over and over again, altering its Dynasty Warriors series with such glacial pacing that there will be another ice age before there is any significant change in the series. Yes, there are a few additions in this release, like squad controls, but still nothing that amounts to a significant change. Heck, there's barely any difference between the PS2 and 360 version (720p and 5.1 sound. Big whoop). If you like this franchise's simple brand of mind-numbing hack 'n slash action, then Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires will deliver exactly what you want: more of the same.—**JEREMY**

XBOX | PC

WarPath

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK)
> **PUBLISHER** GROOVE GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL EXTREMES
> **RELEASE** MARCH 28 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

As derivative and uninspired as WarPath's premise of sci-fi death-matches, base assaults, and capture-the-flag contests is, the game still succeeds on a basic level. WarPath's sole innovation, the ability to collect weapon upgrade modules and use them to improve the potency of your arsenal, is an enjoyable twist to the familiar first-person action – especially in the case of a few of the surprisingly unique firearms. Single-player is utterly forgettable, but the online play is much smoother and more solid than what most of us have come to expect out of a $30 under-the-radar release.—**ADAM**

Parallel Lines puts the emphasis back on the series tradition of over-the-top racing

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Driver: Parallel Lines

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** REFLECTIONS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 14 > **ESRB** E

I WAS BORED BEFORE I EVEN BEGAN

Every game could be better in some respect. Even the most acclaimed titles have some slight flaws in camera, control, or playability that could have been fixed with just a little more time or money. Driver: Parallel Lines, in attempting to fix the flaws of the much-reviled Driv3r, runs head-on into a problem that I simply can't see a solution for. The problem is that I can't really find an answer to the question: Why does there need to be another Driver game?

Well, that's not entirely true. There's one reason. That reason is that Atari obviously felt that the Driver brand name could be rehabilitated and once more rise to the top of the gaming world. Well, I hate to be cruel, especially when it's clear that Reflections made a genuine effort to right the ship, but it's just not going to happen.

They've certainly done some things right. The focus is now back on the racing and away from the dreadful out-of-the-car action of Driv3r (although the targeting has been somewhat improved for this outing). The story is also better, and enhanced by a truly amazing vintage soundtrack, taking us back to the 1970s and through a real whopper of a plot twist.

Aside from the obvious problems (most notably the police are either painfully dim-witted or practically omniscient, and always bothersome), the real problem is that nearly every part of the now-aged Driver formula has been done better elsewhere. It simply can't touch the jaw-dropping scope, variety, and subversive humor of the Grand Theft Auto series. Even worse, the returned focus on racing just points out how completely it's been eclipsed by open-world street racing titles like Need for Speed: Most Wanted and Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition (both of which totally blow the driving in Parallel Lines out of the water). For every Mario, there are 10 once-successful franchises that got left in the dustbin of history because they couldn't adapt to the changing times. I'm afraid it's all too possible that Driver is going to be one of them.—**MATT**

T.K.'s sanitation career didn't last long

This screen gives a clue as to the game's big plot twist

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

> **Concept:** Bring Driver back to its…ahem.. driving roots

> **Graphics:** Really bland both in terms of art style and graphical details

> **Sound:** Amazing, a huge variety of '70s and current-day music, from rock to R&B

> **Playability:** The gun targeting is still somewhat tricky, although improved. The driving is serviceable but not thrilling

> **Entertainment:** A renewed focus can't help this game shake the general sense of ennui that pervades the experience

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.5

Parallel Lines aimlessly drifts between wanting to be an open-world game like Grand Theft Auto and a straight-up racer along the lines of Midnight Club. Without a commitment to either, the structure of the game ends up being a mess. Too much distance separates the destinations, the missions don't offer up much variety, and the vehicle customization that is offered is too simplistic to really get players excited about reusing cars. The really frustrating part of this is that the gameplay is quite impressive. Muscle cars roar with amazing control and the police chases that ensue often have you weaving dangerously through densely packed traffic. It has some truly amazing moments to it, but outside of these infrequent sparkles, it'll most certainly put you to sleep.—**REINER**

Sonny's claim that he could dodge a thousand bullets ended in a laughable way

The player has a direct hand in many of the unforgettable moments from the film

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

The Godfather: The Game

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE** MARCH 14 > **ESRB** M

TROUBLE IN THE FAMILY

Much like someone who pays their respects to the Don, Electronic Arts has paid its respects to director Francis Ford Coppola by preserving the look of his classic film, *The Godfather*. The camerawork and performances that the actors deliver makes you believe that Coppola was behind the lens yelling "action" through the entire development process. The game also delves heavily into director's cut territory by lacing new content beautifully with classic scenes. For instance, you'll now see how the gun was planted in the bathroom for Michael Corleone and who was behind the delivery of the horse head.

As magnificent as this experience sounds, *The Godfather* license is a cumbersome crutch when applied to gameplay scenarios. Most of the missions lack a sense of accomplishment, and are often devoid of meaty action. Holding true to the film, a lot of your time is spent attending meetings or simply talking to your Mafioso brethren.

While failing to transform this classic film into an engrossing interactive experience, the game does shine when it doesn't have to rely on the license to pull it along. When not progressing through the story, you are invited to get your hands dirty and make a name for yourself. You'll have the chance to extort businesses, take cuts from illegal gambling rings, and ultimately become the most powerful man in New York City.

All of this bloody handiwork is tied to a swift analog-based combat mechanic. Depending on how twisted your thoughts are, you'll be able to smash the heads of storeowners onto counters, dangle frightened hotel managers off of buildings, strangle uncooperative bank clerks with wire, or even use a shotgun to execute a baker that gets a little lippy.

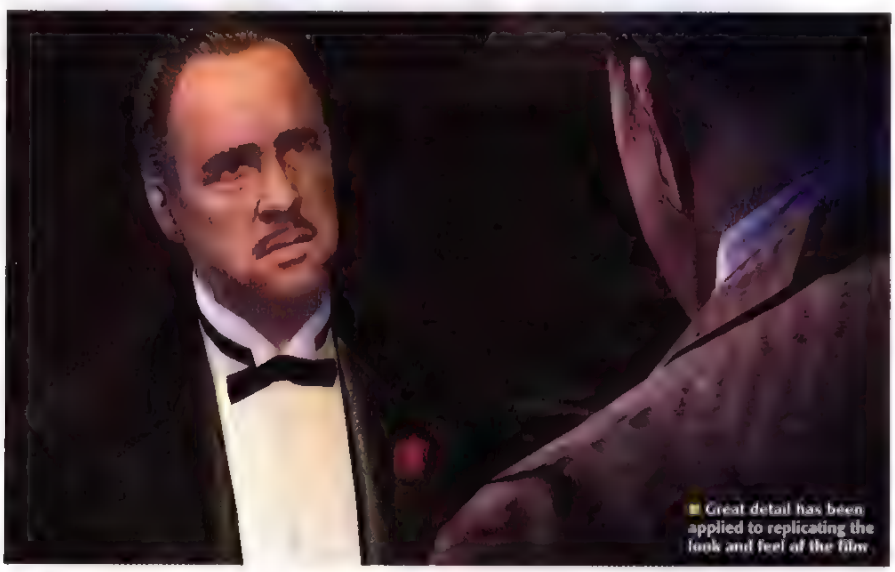
If you don't want to get blood on the expensive clothing that you've worked hard to earn, using a pistol from a distance is another highly effective means of exacting punishment on the weak and powerless denizens of this city. Thanks to a ridiculously simplistic targeting system, performing a headshot is one of the easiest actions in the game. Vehicles can also be used to splatter brains, but it usually takes a great reflexive effort given how acrobatic your frightened targets can be.

It just isn't the same without Al Pacino

This game definitely succeeds in making you feel like a despicable and highly feared human being. The quest for power greatly exceeds your feelings for the innocent. You want to climb the ranks. You want to impress the Don. And above all, you want to become the Don. You want to rule the city. And you can if you have the means of taking the other families down. The story-based missions feverishly try to clamor into the spotlight, but they do little to capture your imagination like this open-world thug-work does.

Initially, it would seem that Electronic Arts has devised a world that rivals those seen in the Grand Theft Auto series. Miles upon miles of unique architecture stretch in every direction and are used effectively to paint a realistic 1940's setting. Upon further inspection, however, you'll see that character models and building interiors are reused and repeated to the point that it would seem that EA only created one block's worth of unique content.

Interacting with Marlon Brando certainly gave me shivers, but the biggest thrills that I took away revolved around the senseless beating of unfamiliar characters. I would have loved to see how this game turned out without *The Godfather* license attached. It really holds some great concepts back from reaching their full potential. As it stands, Take 2's underrated Mafia is still the closest video games have come to capturing an atmosphere similar to that of this legendary film in a gameplay context.—**REINER**


Great detail has been applied to replicating the look and feel of the film

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** What happens when cinema's most powerful family collides with Grand Theft Auto? You are treated to a great story that is dispersed amongst hours of meaningless action

> **Graphics:** The grandeur of New York City is nowhere to be found. Repeated environments and character models abound

> **Sound:** Hearing Robert Duvall, James Caan, and Marlon Brando (in one of his final roles) bring their characters to life again is a real treat

> **Playability:** Mechanically sound, and incredibly violent

> **Entertainment:** It fleshes out this classic story, but ultimately fails as a game

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion

The Godfather, despite being a "gangster movie" classic, is really a slow-paced family drama, which makes it a bit of an odd choice for a video game. Still, it's iconic, which is why expectations for this title have run high. EA's never really tackled the open-world genre before, and its lack of experience shows. While I love how the game gives you another look into famous events from the films, the game is much too dull for its own good. Most of the time, you feel like all you're doing is driving from meeting to meeting. While I like the side missions like extorting businesses and pulling hits, they get very repetitive and don't seem to really affect the game world. All of this might be fine if the core gameplay were better, but the all-analog fighting is shallow and the gunplay is mostly just frustrating. It just doesn't have the sense of discovery and fun that marks the best of this genre.—**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2

Tourist Trophy: The Real Riding Simulator

> STYLE 1 OR 2 PLAYER RACING > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > DEVELOPER POLYPHONY DIGITAL > RELEASE APRIL 4 > ESRB E

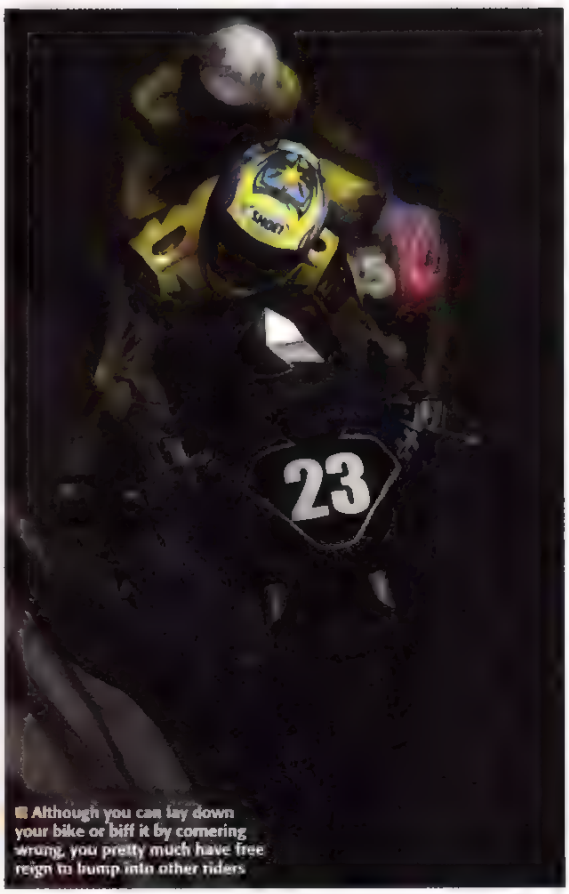
ENTERING THE FOURTH DIMENSION

If you've ever seen me play a racing game, you know that I'm a leaner. I lean to the left and right in a determined, yet unconscious, attempt to influence what my car does onscreen via my personal field of gravity. I'd rather look like an ass in public than risk scrubbing off too much speed and losing my advantage in the middle of a corner. Well, my swaying back and forth is finally paying off in Tourist Trophy. Of course, where I move the controller has nothing to do with what happens onscreen (this ain't no Revolution game!), but I somehow feel that all my years of twisting in my seat have prepared me for Tourist Trophy's brand of motorcycle racing. Here, tilting your body into a corner is important. Who looks like a fool now?

When you enter a turn in a normal racing simulator, the three things you think about are from where on the track you enter the turn, the speed at which you do so, and when to accelerate out of the turn. In Tourist Trophy, you also have to take into account how much your rider leans into a corner – something that instantly affects the other variables. I think of it as the fourth dimension of racing. At first, mastering this new way of racing was frustrating, and I took it out on my avatar rider by jack-knifing the bike and sending him flying. But I soon realized that Tourists' fourth dimension actually gave me ways to get out of situations that were less than perfect, as I could adjust the pitch of the bike and its speed on the fly. Once you get a feel for it, you really can have fun with a course as you yank your bike from side to side and flirt with danger. After playing this title, racing cars is like riding a bike with training wheels – it's for wussies. Although many of the game's tracks are instantly familiar to anyone who's played Gran Turismo, you won't think of them the same way when you're on a bike.

As much as I was impressed with the racing on the track, going through the game's career mode there is no doubt that this is a game made by Polyphony Digital. The license tests and the overall structure of races are painfully unchanged from Gran Turismo, as if the developer thought that the phrase "GT with bikes" didn't come with any negative connotations. And as much as I love the racing in this game, I know I'm a part of the hardcore subset of fans who appreciate simulation racers. Most will probably turn this title off after a half an hour and put in Burnout.

While I don't expect (or would even like) a wholesale change in Polyphony's approach to its craft, I do feel that the developer needs to inject some personality into its titles. It's ironic that for a Polyphony game where you see more of the actual human racers than in any other title it's done, this game feels as cold and dehumanized as ever. I guess the riders are just along for the ride. If Tourist Trophy uncovers the fourth dimension of racing, then the fifth dimension needs to be turning Polyphony's obvious passion for mechanical engineering into a passion that everyone can relate to.—**KATO**



Although you can lay down your bike or biff it by cornering wrong, you pretty much have free reign to bump into other riders

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** It has that stuffy Gran Turismo feel – except when you're going around a corner with your knee inches off the ground

> **Graphics:** The game supports 1080i, but there is pop-up. Also won't take your breath away after GT 4

> **Sound:** Somewhere an elevator is missing its muzak, and is going up and down in silence

> **Playability:** Bike racing requires a whole new approach to taking turns, so I advise you to use the right analog for braking and acceleration

> **Entertainment:** I think that only simulation fanatics like me will welcome the challenge

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

Polyphony Digital's Gran Turismo series is the *Citizen Kane* of racing games – superbly crafted, influential, epic, and something I tend to respect a lot more than I actually enjoy (give me Burnout or Midnight Club any day). I'm all for a devotion to remarkably accurate simulation of driving physics, but does the presentation have to be as dry as unbuttered toast? Now, the company's Tourist Trophy looks to become the GT of motorcycles. There is a huge number of bikes, and the racing itself, which requires an intense concentration on braking and observing the correct line, is some of the most demanding in all of video games. There's a real satisfaction that comes from mastering the precise controls, and the familiar feeling of accumulating a huge garage is addictive. Still, I'm not sure that the thrill of acquiring new bikes is quite the same as in GT, if only because they don't vary as much in terms of driving physics and onscreen appearance as cars do. I doubt this will be the next racing blockbuster, but for its niche audience, Tourist Trophy redefines the motorcycle game experience.—**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2

Suikoden V

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** MARCH 28 > **ESRB** T

TOUGH IT OUT

The opening hours of an RPG are full of possibilities. You learn about the characters and maybe get a few pieces of intrigue to mull over. Then you'll often witness a startling event that kicks the story into high gear, like Sephiroth burning Nibelheim or Darth Malak blasting Taris into space dust. Suikoden V certainly has dramatic events on par with these unforgettable moments...but not for a long, long time. In fact, it wasn't until about the sixth hour that I didn't feel like turning the game off out of sheer boredom.

For the early segments of Suikoden V, it can't really be said that you "play" the game. You watch some dialogue events, then wander to a set location, which triggers more dialogue events. This farce literally goes on for hours, with only a handful of simplistic battles to break it up. Granted, when the real story actually starts (at about hour seven or eight), it benefits from the initial time it took to establish the characters, but should video games really be an exercise in sacrificing your current enjoyment for an uncertain payoff?

Once you are freed from the agonizing pacing, however, the game opens up in glorious Suikoden fashion. By that point, the story has evolved from clumsy and boring to downright enthralling, and it's a pleasure to travel around the world enlisting your 108 companions – especially since the sailing from the previous game is nowhere to be seen. The new formation system and customizable stats add some depth, and favorites like the duel battles and military conflicts make a return. Fans of previous Suikoden games will even recognize some familiar faces (Georg is still awesome) alongside the new recruits.

Even though I really enjoyed some parts of the game, the dilemma at the heart of Suikoden V is this: If you stick with it for several hours, it develops into a good (though not amazing) game. But there are plenty of RPGs that manage to be consistently solid without dragging the player kicking and screaming through the first 25 percent of the story.—**JOE**

■ Characters can once again team up for co-op attacks

■ The military battles operate on a rock-paper-scissors foundation

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** A silent hero. A buncha people to recruit. It must be Suikoden time again!

> **Graphics:** Cool character designs seem at odds with the bland and predictable surroundings

> **Sound:** The standout tracks are so overplayed that they lose all luster

> **Playability:** Even with some tweaks and new mechanics, combat feels exactly like it did in previous Suikoden games

> **Entertainment:** Once you break through the initial barrier, the story and character customization become highly addictive

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.5

Suikoden V is a tar pit trap. Most people should avoid it, but if you turn to the role-playing genre for sensational writing, this slow-moving experience is well worth being enveloped by. Outside of a few meaningless battles, the first six hours of gameplay are dedicated solely to developing plot and exploring ridiculously large towns. Just when it seems that this game is following the *Seinfeld* rule of being about nothing, you are hit hard with grandiose action. The game's swift battle system makes the quest to recruit the 108 Stars of Destiny as rewarding as ever. It may be a painfully slow burn, but it's well worth sticking with, especially if you are seeking an RPG with a sophisticated story.—**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

Samurai Champloo: Sidetracked

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE > **RELEASE** APRIL 11 > **ESRB** T

Applying the strange sensibilities of Grasshopper's Suda 51 to an anachronistic hip-hop samurai story is an invitation to the surreal. Samurai Champloo: Sidetracked serves as a side story in the popular anime series, and captures its unique essence through several bizarre artistic moments. The combat is frantic and stylish, but about as deep as a mudpuddle. It's simplistic hack n' slash amid an abundance of loading screens, with just enough random craziness thrown in to keep you from giving up hope. Fans of the series will appreciate the game's faithfulness to the show, but to everyone else, Sidetracked will just feel like an uglier version of countless games you've played before.—**JOE**

PLAYSTATION 2

BOTTOM LINE **5.25**

Metal Saga

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** SUCCESS > **RELEASE** APRIL 11 > **ESRB** RP

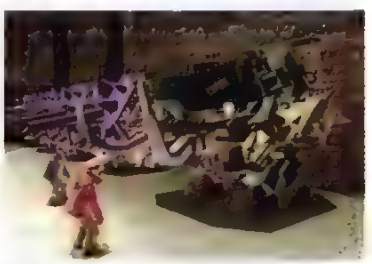
Metal Saga has a lot going on. For example, there are 10 different endings (one of these finales can joyously be executed in the first three minutes of gameplay). There are minigames numbering a baker's dozen. It even has highly customizable tanks and a sizable list of bounties. But Metal Saga also looks like total butt, features dull-as-hell art direction, and has a list of other assets whose interesting qualities top out at "derivative." Metal Saga is like a bastard mash-up of *Mad Max* and *Lawrence of Arabia*...tanks, deserts, and a post-apocalyptic future that manages to be super boring.—**LISA**

PLAYSTATION 2

BOTTOM LINE **5.5**

Steambot Chronicles

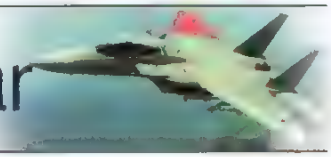
> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** IREM > **RELEASE** MAY 23 > **ESRB** T



Steambot Chronicles is one of the rare games that had me staring aghast at my TV right from the title screen. Proclaiming itself a "relaxing, non-linear adventure," this game is a jumble that tries to blend RPGs, rhythm games, and mech simulators. The story is driven by player choice, which really just serves to make it too unfocused to be compelling. The characters are shallow (amnesia strikes again), and the combat utilizes a dunkier version of the Katamari Damacy dual-analog controls. To its credit, several of the dialogue options and events are pretty funny (like an outdoor musical performance being interrupted by a salvo of missiles), but I'd much rather play a game that's actually good instead of one where moderate comedic appeal is the only reason to keep going.—**JOE**

PLAYSTATION 2

Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War



> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** APRIL 25 > **ESRB** T

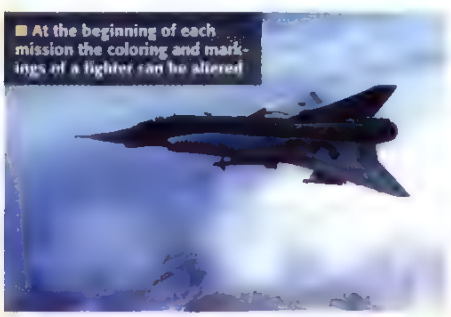
CRUISING SPEED

If you've played the previous Ace Combat games, and you rank their quality highly, there's absolutely no reason why Ace Combat Zero shouldn't be right up your alley. It's a game that excels at offering more of exactly what we've seen before, and almost completely defying the push to innovate in a new direction. Sure, there are some new features, like rival aces and multiplayer combat. However, when all is said and done, this feels like an expansion to a great game. And you know what? That's just fine.

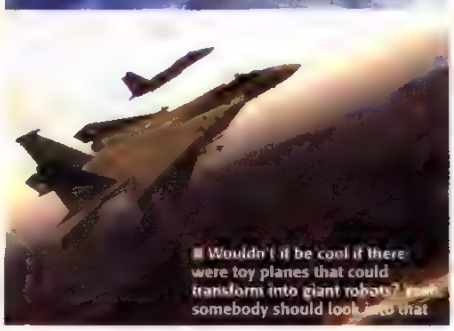
Not every game needs to make giant leaps forward with every incarnation, especially when they've gotten so much right already. I love how the simple control scheme manages to relay such a genuine sense of participating in a nail-biting dogfight. Finally honing in and taking out an enemy jet has a special satisfaction to it. The varied areas of land you fly over go a long way to keeping things interesting, especially during the frequent air-to-surface missions that have you skimming the earth. Overheard communications connect you to both the ally and enemy pilots, as well as the conflict playing out on the ground below. Plus, like every other Ace Combat, the game exhibits a steamy love affair with modern military aircraft, allowing players to buy, paint, equip, and examine any number of different designs, as well as watch combat play out in the phenomenal replays that follow each mission.

The new rival aces certainly make for some challenging battles, but I'm not sure I'd label it the next big thing in flight combat games. There's also a new morality system that encourages a small degree of choice in the ethics of your pilot. Meanwhile, the new two-player competitive matches have only limited appeal, but are certainly a fun addition. These offer a mix of challenges from straight up deathmatches to squadron-based combat and even jet racing.

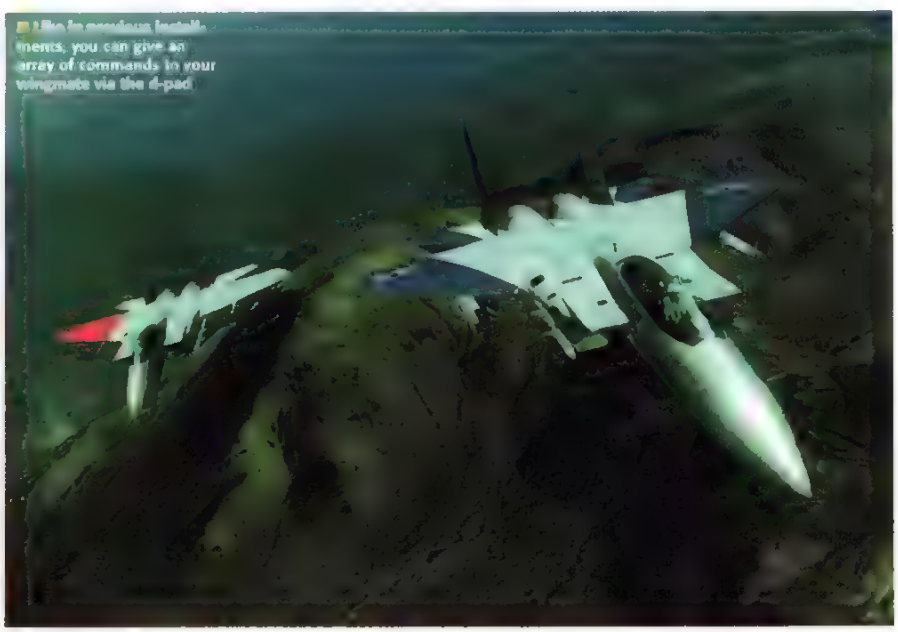
With all that said, I'd probably direct new gamers interested in trying the series to the last version before this one. Ace Combat 5 had a greater sense of drama about it, and I remember enjoying the mission structure more, but only marginally so. Ace Combat Zero fills in some gaps in the fictional universe it is set in, and the gameplay continues to have the visceral edge that has characterized all the recent entries. The seemingly complicated flight sim-like elements scared me away from this game for a long time, but once you give it a shot, you'd be surprised how accessible and fun it can be.—**MILLER**



■ At the beginning of each mission the coloring and markings of a fighter can be altered



■ Wouldn't it be cool if there were toy planes that could transform into giant robots? Wait, somebody should look into that



■ Like in previous installments, you can give an array of commands to your wingmate via the d-pad

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Fly the unfriendly skies again in this clever mix of realistic and arcade flight combat – now with added multiplayer!

> **Graphics:** No big changes this time around, but that's not a bad thing

> **Sound:** Intercom communication isn't as exciting as in the last entry, but sound effects are great and music is just as rocking and cheesy as ever

> **Playability:** Great controls simplify flight down to its core ideas, and a steady ramp of difficulty continues throughout the game

> **Entertainment:** Not much new material, but the core gameplay is still lots of fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

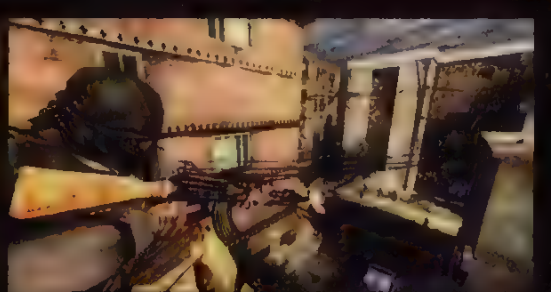
The visceral aerial battles that unfold in Ace Combat games have always been black and white. It's you against the enemy. Little else matters. In this entry, players are now being introduced to the color yellow. This color directly ties into the player's morality. Across the battlefield you'll see targets that are painted yellow. These targets are believed to be hostile, but could very well be civilian. Fighters that have been disabled in battle are also represented in this color. Will you let them retreat? Or will take them out? This enhancement may seem minor, but it effectively toys with your mind and affects how the remainder of the game unfolds. With this said, the series continues to improve in the missions that are delivered. The implementation of rival aces is another brilliant addition. They can turn a simple mission into a dance of death in no time flat. You'll even get the chance to read bios of these skilled fighters. Ace Combat has ruled the console skies since its inception. This entry doesn't soar any higher, but rather continues to bombard you with excitement.—**REINER**

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR
TEN HAMMERS

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

AVAILABLE NOW.

Sound Blaster X-Fi

POWERED BY gamespy

The way it's meant to be played NVIDIA

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Strong Language
Violence

PlayStation 2

ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY

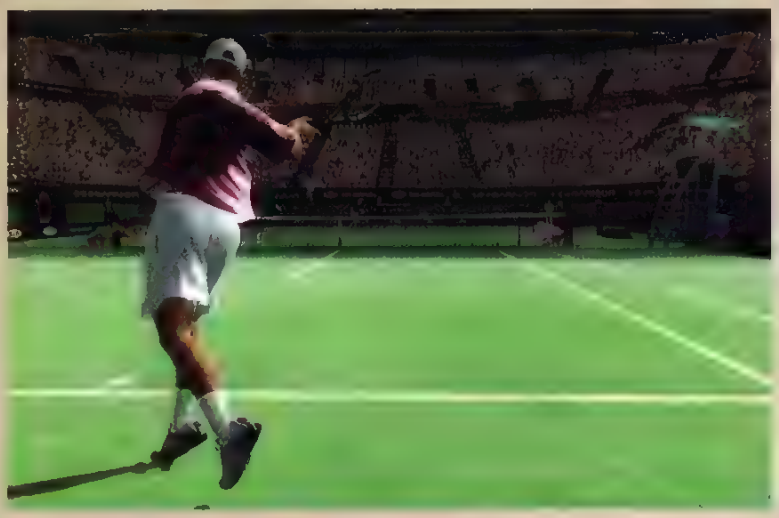
PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX LIVE

PANDEMIC

THQ www.thq.com

© 2006 Pandemic Studios, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Pandemic ®, the Pandemic logo ® and Full Spectrum Warrior™ are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Pandemic Studios, LLC and are reproduced under license only. Exclusively licensed by THQ Inc. THQ and the THQ logo are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of THQ Inc. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox Live, the Live logos and the Xbox logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Online play requires Internet connection and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). The Online icon is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. GameSpy and the "Powered by GameSpy" design are trademarks of GameSpy Industries, Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks, logos and copyrights are the property of their respective owners. NVIDIA, the NVIDIA Logo, GeForce and "The Way It's Meant to be Played" Logo are registered trademarks and/or trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation in the United States and other countries.



XBOX 360

Top Spin 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
> DEVELOPER INDIE BUILT **> RELEASE** APRIL 4 **> ESRB** E

GAME, SET, MATCH

Despite the sport's sagging fortunes, Indie Built has done its best to do tennis proud with Top Spin 2, the first racquet title released for the Xbox 360. Like its predecessor, it's based on a detailed career mode. Working from a sample of male or female "DNA," the amount of tweaking you can do to your character's appearance is nearly limitless. The character models, down to subtle details like skin tone and freckles, are very nice (although, strangely, the actual pros in the game look a bit weird). On your way to the top, you can hire a number of different coaches, take part in improved training minigames, and even compete in special events like mixed double tournaments. It's really comprehensive, although the presentation is very drab, and the sense of momentum is hindered by long load times and frequent saves.

On the court, the action is intense. There are now more special advanced and risk shots (which use the triggers as a shift key of sorts). Mastering these shots is key to survival, as the computer opponents are very challenging, even in the lower levels. In some cases, I felt like the difficulty was a bit too high, as it's initially pretty hard to land solid slice and top spin shots. Also, with so many special shots, it's a bit confusing to know when to use a specific shot, not to mention the skill involved with hitting the meter correctly. It will test some players' patience, but those who take the time to learn their craft will be rewarded with a very deep and fluid recreation of the sport. That being said, there were definitely times I was frustrated, especially when it feels like the AI can pull off wicked risk shots at will. Of course, the game is very well rounded online, with tournaments of up to 16 players and even doubles matches.

Overall, Top Spin 2 gets the job done with an attention to detail that might be a bit offputting to more casual fans. But, for the hardcore, this is reason to celebrate.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> Concept: A very detailed and challenging recreation of the sport of tennis

> Graphics: The arenas and polygonal crowds emphasize that this is a next-gen title, as do the improved character models

> Sound: Bland, bordering on non-existent

> Playability: The learning curve is steep, but there is a lot of depth in this control scheme

> Entertainment: You're not going to jump in and start dishing out aces, but after you get the feel this is a great sports title

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 7.25

This game can only approximate how real tennis is played, and it irks me. Net play is all screwed up because the ideal place to camp out for volleying is not near the net, but back by the service line. This greatly affects both player's shot selection, not to mention it makes it harder to lob. The game's main frustration, however, is its arbitrariness – making it similar to the last Top Spin for the PS2. Some training games will just skunk you. Some balls you can hit at times, while others you can't. The game only finds consistency in that it's nearly impossible to hit balls near your body – that and the fact that video game tennis remains a largely pleasureless sport.—**KATO**

■ The game has an impressive roster of pros including Roger Federer and international vixen Maria Sharapova

XBOX 360

Rumble Roses XX

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

GIRLS GONE WILD

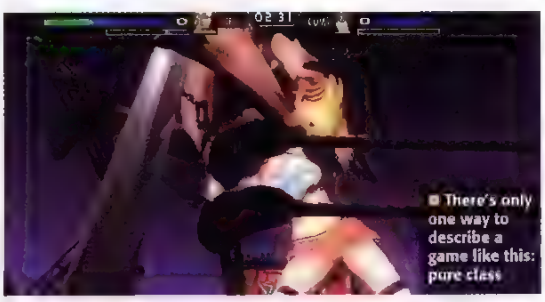
Who says there aren't enough positive roles for women in video games? Rumble Roses XX is like a virtual career fair: there's the sexy nurse, cowgirl, ninja, and, um...bondage queen. See girls, you can be anything you want! But seriously, if you think that you're going to be offended by Rumble Roses' soft-core girl-on-girl wrestling action, then you probably will be.

The concept of Rumble Roses XX is as simple and exploitive as can be. There is a roster of scantily clad women, and you wrestle with them, earning money along the way. Your cash can be used for more ways to tart up these girls, including skimpier costumes, photo poses, and "sexy" movements. The cheesy, yet entertaining story mode from the original game has been stripped out, which makes this second title feel both sleazy and pointless. You can unlock new versions of characters based on their popularity, but this feature is so poorly defined that you never feel like you're working towards a goal.

Rumble Roses XX's problems extend to its combat engine. Some moves take you out of control for several seconds, as your character goes through several stages to apply elaborate (and revealing) submission holds. Clearly, this game was designed to be watched as much as it is played.

There are several different match types included, as well as online play, character customization, and more, but none of it adds enough to counteract the pointless nature of the game. The four-player modes are chaotic and confusing, and there are only a handful of venues to fight in. Then there's the appalling photo mode – rotating the camera around nearly-naked digital women with dead eyes and sex doll bodies is far more creepy than sexy.

While the first Rumble Roses game was a fun, solid wrestler with some cheesecake amusement, XX simply feels aimless, dull, and a little offensive. Unless you're a big Russ Meyer fan, I'd stay far, far away.—**JEREMY**



■ There's only one way to describe a game like this: pure class

BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> Concept: Hey, this 360 can make some pretty good graphics! Let's make a bunch of hot chicks wrestle!

> Graphics: Good enough that you'll feel dirty just for playing this

> Sound: I guarantee it's definitely not what you'll be focused on while playing

> Playability: It seems like the developer spent more time with the camera control than the combat. I wonder why?

> Entertainment: As both a wrestling game and eroticism, Rumble Roses fails to be anything worthwhile

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 5.5

Beautiful. Shallow. Dumb. These three words perfectly describe everything about this trashy wrestler. The visuals that bounce across the screen will certainly make you blush, but there's no denying the craftsmanship that has gone into the character models. What hides behind the seductive graphics is a truly hideous gameplay package. Unresponsive controls, a miniscule list of moves, and laughable opponent AI all add up into one of the poorest wrestling games in recent memory. And it gets worse. The game has no structure to it. There isn't a story, a career, or even a defined ending. You just keep playing to unlock costumes and items. Only those who weren't looking to necessarily play this game will get something out of it.—**REINER**

SIGN UP & RIDE

XBOX 360™

CUSTOM CHOPPER

Visit WWW.GAMEINFORMER.COM or see store associate for more details.

BUILT BY: MARTIN BROS. BIKES™

YOU CAN WIN THIS BIKE & OTHER GREAT PRIZES

ALIENWARE COMPUTER

XBOX 360 ACCESSORY STARTER KIT

SIGNATURE MARTIN BROS. JACKET

XBOX 360 GAMING & ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

37" SHARP AQUOS® LCD FLAT SCREEN

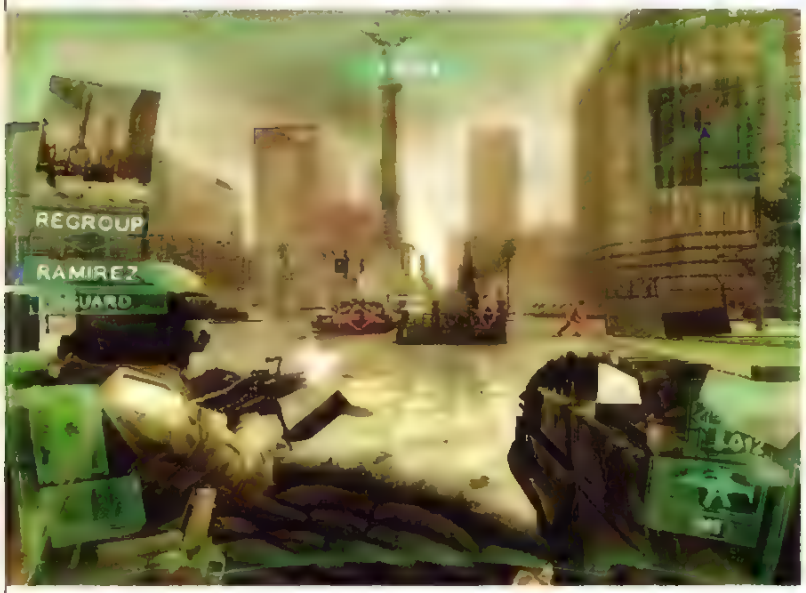
GAMEINFORMER MAGAZINE GameStop EB GAMES™

Images are for illustration purposes only. Actual prizes may vary from images shown. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox Live, the Xbox logos, and the Xbox Live logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries.

No purchase necessary to enter. A purchase will not improve your chances of winning. The Sign-Up & Ride Sweepstakes is open to legal residents of the 50 United States and the District of Columbia age 18 or older. Sweepstakes begins at 12:01 AM (ET) on 4/2/06 and ends at 11:59 PM (ET) on 5/24/06 ("Sweepstakes Entry Period"). To enter and view complete official rules, which govern this Sweepstakes, visit www.gameinformer.com. You must have an Access Code ("Access Code") to enter this Sweepstakes.

Consumers will receive an Access Code (while supplies last) with any purchase of $25.00 or more at a participating GameStop or EB Games retailer between 4/2/06 and [redacted]

To receive an Access Code without purchase, visit www.gameinformer.com during the Sweepstakes Entry Period. Void where prohibited. Sponsors: Microsoft (One Microsoft Way, Redmond, WA 98052) and GameStop (625 Westport Parkway, Grapevine, TX 76051).



As it's entirely in first-person, the game gives you a lean function for working around corners

XBOX

Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** UBISOFT SHANGHAI **> RELEASE** MARCH 7 **> ESRB** T

CHANGING TO STAY THE SAME

Make no mistake about it: The Xbox 360 version of Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter is the Ghost that everyone is gushing over. For its part, this Xbox edition goes through its share of changes, but it doesn't totally separate itself from its mediocre past. I'm glad that the franchise is breaking from its staid mold, but this game is only the first step in recasting the series into something good.

This Advanced Warfighter tries to follow along the same evolutionary path as the Xbox 360 title, but it can make only half the effort. Naturally the results aren't as successful, but even if this edition wasn't living under the shadow of the 360, it wouldn't overly impress you. My ongoing problem with the series has always been its bad ally AI, and your buddies in this game are only marginally smarter than before. Perhaps it's a good thing that your squad options have been greatly reduced from the last Ghost Recon, leaving your comrades fewer ways to look like imbeciles. However, they often ignore even the scant orders you can give them unless you tell them repeatedly.

Even though developer Ubisoft Shanghai did a really good job with the game's maps – including the addition of some rooftop pathways absent in the 360, much of the strategy of the 360's Advanced Warfighter is absent. The UAV drones and your control of your ally squadmates lacks depth and isn't nearly as important. Moreover, you cannot command either via the offscreen strategic map. That doesn't sound like much, but it only makes situating your allies harder, and puts you in harm's way as you have to point and command your soldiers while you are engaged in a firefight. At the end of the day, the fact that this Advanced Warfighter strips out most of the strategy makes the title little more than a good looking first-person shooter. There's nothing wrong with that – except in this case, when the hit detection is off.

As is the case with this series, however, you may eye this game for the multiplayer more than the campaign, and it rewards you with a plethora of options – including co-op campaign missions. You can also set up a squad with your own logo and slogan for competitions. I'm glad that Ubisoft hasn't slowed down on the online front, and indeed Advanced Warfighter for the Xbox is a step up from previous titles in the series. It's not hard to say that this is the best current-gen Ghost Recon yet, but with the next generation taking off, I wonder how much time and effort Ubisoft is going to be able to put into building off this game in the future. —**KATO**

The cross-com and UAV aren't as important in the Xbox version as in the 360

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> Concept: Unlike the Xbox 360 version, this GRAW fails to reinvent the franchise for the better

> Graphics: A step up. The city environments are welcome, and this is the best the current-gen series has ever looked

> Sound: New intelligence comes in over a picture-in-picture feeds that keep the objectives rolling

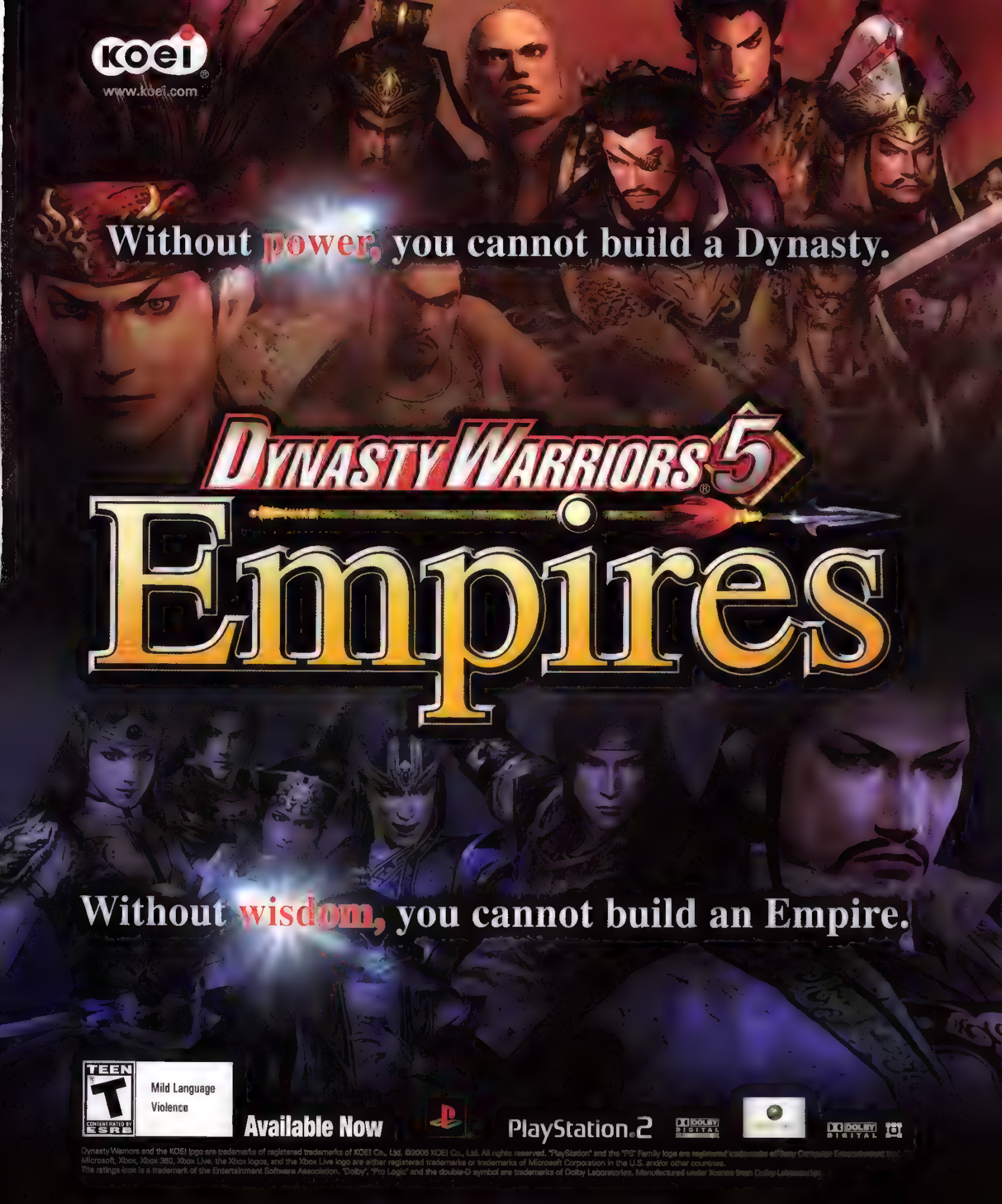
> Playability: As is par for the series' course, hit detection can be frustratingly problematic

> Entertainment: Like previous Ghosts, multiplayer may be more fun than the campaign

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

Inevitable comparisons to its Xbox 360 cousin of the same name aside, Advanced Warfighter on the Xbox is a more than competent squad-based shooter. It's got graphics comparable to most anything else you can find on the system, the fancy-pants gadgets available are fun to use, and everything mostly meets the bar for current-gen FPS. However, I can't help but feel I've played this same game many times before. I've definitely dealt with the same AI miscues, the same irritating "Oh hell, a brigade of terrorists spawned right behind me" moments, and felt the same exultation at flanking and destroying a fortified enemy position. Squad shooter fans will undoubtedly enjoy what the Xbox has to offer with Advanced Warfighter, but the rest of us shouldn't be fooled into thinking that we're getting a next-gen experience without shelling out for a Xbox 360. —**ADAM**



Dynasty Warriors and the KOEI logo are trademarks of registered trademarks of KOEI Co., Ltd. ©2006 KOEI Co., Ltd. All rights reserved. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox Live, the Xbox logos, and the Xbox Live logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. "Dolby", "Pro Logic" and the double-D symbol are trademarks of Dolby Laboratories. Manufactured under license from Dolby Laboratories.

"Nevermind the lightning, I just want to be friends. Really"

The vast source materiel of D&D's Eberron setting makes for a huge variety of challenges

PC

Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING CAME > **PUBLISHER** TURBINE ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** TURBINE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 28 > **ESRB** T

NEW IDEAS, NEW PROBLEMS

Dungeons & Dragons Online is much more than the old EverQuest/Ultima Online gameplay with a D&D skin tacked on. Turbine Entertainment decided to break new ground with DDO's design, with predictable results – namely that some of the most irritating aspects of traditional MMORPGs have been excised completely, while other incredibly enjoyable elements have been utterly broken. Even moreso than with most games, your personal tastes will be the ultimate deciding factor in whether this title is enough to make you cancel your current MMO subscription or jump into the genre for the first time.

The good parts of D&D Online are very, very good. A stellar "looking for group" tool makes it easy to find a party of like-minded adventurers to go dungeon-crawling with – a necessity, since you'll run out of solo-able content in a mere few hours. Once you get a crew together and start rolling through quests, it's all good; the experience and loot flow like water, combat is fast and fun, and a nice variety of challenges keeps things interesting. Every character class gets its time in the spotlight, from rogues disarming traps to clerics utterly dominating the undead and wizards obliterating entire swarms of weak foes. Frankly, the group-based adventuring aspect of the game holds up spectacularly to the best that any other MMO on the market can claim.

Once you get out of the kobold-infested sewers of the early game, the environments get much better

It's the peripheral things that drag D&D Online down. It may not seem like much, but the lack of any true public spaces (even towns are instanced if there are too many people online, similarly to how Guild Wars works) really hurts the sense of community and being part of a larger, persistent world. There is no such thing as crafting and very little in the way of a player-run economy. Playing D&D Online feels like a multiplayer dungeon-crawler, not like an MMORPG. Except, of course, for the monthly fee.

The mediocre interface, a horrendous lack of documentation, and frequent bugs are all rather disappointing for a top-tier game. Why can't I find out what the durations of my spells are? Why does my framerate go to hell half the time I zone? Why must I repeat a two-hour adventure because the game decided that I didn't complete it when I clearly did? These are all questions that players should never have to ask, and are all too common here. Hopefully Turbine will be able to address these concerns soon through updates and patches (as well as the dearth of high-end content), but that's only a hope as of press time. Everyone has their own criteria for what makes a game as huge and complicated as an MMORPG fun, and D&D Online will be just what a certain number of folks want out of their $15 per month. For many established online role-players, however, the lack of community and secondary features will surely send them back to their current, more traditional games.—**ADAM**

Getting players to work together to overcome the baddest of enemies is D&D Online's greatest strength

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Adapt the oldest of old-school role-playing games to the MMO space

> **Graphics:** If you've got the machine to crank the settings, this is a treat to look at

> **Sound:** Built-in voice chat is a godsend for partying up – other than that, iTunes is your friend

> **Playability:** The interface is functional, but bears an unfortunate resemblance to the archaic Asheron's Call setup

> **Entertainment:** Stellar in some areas and very lacking in others. Which aspects of MMORPGs you value most will make an enormous difference

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

The greatest joy and the greatest problem of real D&D is fully realized in its new online incarnation – getting together with your friends. Like the pen and paper game, a great time can be had when everyone's there, but by yourself there's not much more than a character sheet and your own nerddom to keep you company. While it lacks some of the personality of better MMOs, D&D Online is set in a phenomenally imaginative setting, and the 3.5 edition D&D rules are transitioned admirably to the MMO world. The objective-based experience gain system completely eliminates the traditional grind dilemma, but presents several other problems to take its place. As I implied, the greatest of these is the complete inability to do almost anything in the game by yourself. While a robust group-finding engine helps things along, the real fun only really begins if you're playing with your own crew. If you've got that willing group of D&D faithful friends ready to dive in, then offer your DM a break for a while and give this a try.—**MILLER**

2006
GAME LIVE U
COLLEGE TOUR
XBOX 360
PLAY LISTEN LIVE
MOUNTAIN DEW BAR · BEST BUY XBOX 360 LOUNGE
FIGHT NIGHT 3 COMPETITION · HALO2 COMPETITION
FREE SWAG · YAHOO! LIVE MUSIC ZONE · GAME DEMO GIVEAWAYS
PRESENTED BY
ign
Mountain Dew
BEST BUY
EA
EA SPORTS
MIDWAY
VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
GAME INFORMER TOURNAMENT ZONE
HALO 2 AND BURNOUT REVENGE
AMERICA'S ARMY
XBOX 360
2K GAMES
UBISOFT
Schick QUATTRO
Y! MUSIC
GAMEINFORMER
Norcent
GO TO WWW.GAMELIVEEVENTS.COM FOR TOUR SCHEDULE AND MUSIC CONCERT LINE-UP

HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Guilty Gear: Dust Strikers

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS)
> **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO
> **DEVELOPER** ARC SYSTEM WORKS
> **RELEASE** APRIL 3 > **ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 6

Dust Strikers is what you get when you take an existing franchise and suck everything that makes it cool out of it in the process of trying to copy a different successful franchise. Inserting Guilty Gear characters into an uninspired knockoff of Super Smash Bros. gameplay has predictable results. Single-player is boring, as is usual for fighting games, but beating up on your friends through the wireless multi-player is entertaining for at least a little while. Of course, there are a number of much better multiplayer titles on the DS, but it's something.—**ADAM**

PSP

Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** CLOVER STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 7

Of the two handheld Super Smash Bros. clones this month, Red Hot Rumble is clearly the superior. Gameplay is tight and responsive, and there is a ton of content to enjoy. One thing keeps this title from being truly great, though: the insane chaos onscreen at all times prevents any gameplay more advanced than "mash the attack button" from developing. Nonetheless, a large variety of power-ups and playable characters are available, as well as a good selection of gametypes and decent multiplayer. This might not be Clover Studios' best effort, but as ports go this is far from terrible.—**ADAM**

Multiplayer is just as [illegible] as you would expect from a console game

PSP

Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SONY BEND > **RELEASE** MARCH 14 > **ESRB** M

HARDCORE GAMER MONTH

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** A true sequel that is crafted to take advantage of the PSP hardware and not use it for re-releases like most established franchises do

> **Graphics:** Appropriately vibrant and dirty. The character faces are a bit stiff, but the animation and detail in the environments is just as impressive as the series' most recent PS2 outing

> **Sound:** Tons of voicework, including the most f-bombs I've heard since GTA

> **Playability:** The controls become second nature after a matter of seconds. It plays incredibly well and offers great variety in the missions

> **Entertainment:** This is the triple-A espionage thriller that the PSP desperately needed

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

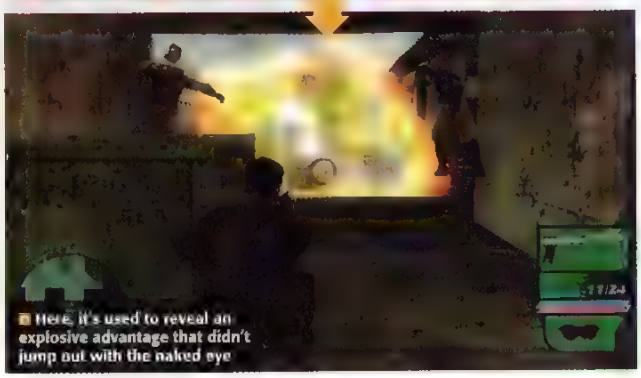
STILL CONTAGIOUS

Weathered with age and scarred from war, veteran Precision Strike operative Gabe Logan has thwarted one biological attack after another. In a way, his efforts have become somewhat commonplace. He can contain an outbreak without so much as breaking a sweat, but he still hasn't found a way to infect the gaming masses like fellow genre alumni Solid Snake and Sam Fisher have. Reassigning Logan's base of operations to the PlayStation Portable may seem like a strange decision on Sony's part, but this transition should result in the gray-haired agent receiving the praise that he has justly deserved from the moment he first fried an unsuspecting terrorist with his taser.

Developer Sony Bend has always had a knack for penning thrilling and highly detailed espionage. Through deadly plot twists and scenes that overwhelm you with raw intensity, your palms will twitch just from the prospect of mopping the floor with the blood of the terrorists. Nearly every second of this incredibly well-written story will have your heart racing and demanding just a moment of rest. The only time that this wish is granted, however, is when you perish.

One of the biggest struggles that developers have had with the PSP is creating a viable way to control characters in 3D space without dual analog support. Dark Mirror proves that the four face buttons can be used just as effectively as a second stick, and that the d-pad can be used for a multitude of actions. The system that Sony Bend has instituted is easy to manipulate and just as precise as any control scheme you'll see on a console. Within seconds, you'll be maneuvering through terrorist-held territories with remarkable ease and firing hard-hearted steel right between the eyes of your assailant with the exactness of touching a finger to your nose.

The three different vision enhancements are [illegible] number of interesting [illegible] throughout the game



Here, it's used to reveal an explosive advantage that didn't jump out with the naked eye

Of course, the terrorists are just as resourceful as you, showcasing intelligence in tactics and an eagle eye for targeting. The missions that are thrown your way blow the doors off of what you can expect from a typical scenario. The easiest of goals such as opening a door often snake into a dozen unique actions. The game also makes great use of ziplines and vision enhancements. Sometimes key advantages are hidden to the naked eye. By switching to a different lens, players may spy something hidden in the environment, or even see an enemy through a wall. No two seconds in the game really feel the same. New gameplay ideas are thrown at the player right up until the very end.

In addition to the incredible story mode, an insanely deep multiplayer component is included. Great pleasure lies in capping a player who is trying to advance on your position through stealthy tactics, and the inventive Objective mode adds a layer of strategy to the common fragfest.

In a market that is overflowing with console ports, having a high-profile title like Syphon Filter offer an experience that is unique to the PSP goes a long way. Dark Mirror proves that if developers invest the time, the PSP can easily hang with the consoles in terms of the experience that is delivered.—**REINER**

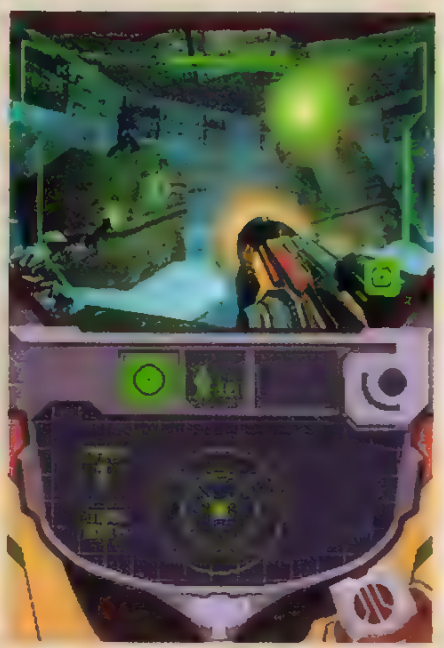
Second Opinion 8.5

The great thing about the PSP is the fact that we can now enjoy PS2-era graphics and gameplay on a handheld system. Unfortunately, that's also the bad thing about the PSP. When it works, it's a thrill. However, too much of the time I feel like I'm playing the same current-gen design clichés that have made me so excited for the next-generation systems to arrive. Syphon Filter falls somewhere in the middle of this continuum. It's certainly well done, offering impressive visuals, sound, and a very robust multiplayer component. However, since it does come so close to emulating home console gameplay, it's hard not to begin to compare it to more recent games in the genre like MGS 3 or Chaos Theory. It definitely does the best job of overcoming the lack of a second analog stick that I've seen on a PSP action title to date, and offers great, if not innovative gameplay for the series' fans.—**MATT**

NINTENDO DS

Metroid Prime: Hunters

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS OR NINTENDO WI-FI CONNECTION) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY > **RELEASE** MARCH 20 > **ESRB** T



NO PAIN, NO GAIN

If you're one of those gamers who likes to sacrifice for their hobby, boy, do I have the game for you. It's not that the control scheme for Hunters is bad. In point of fact, once you cross that first hour threshold, the touch screen control manages to feel much like a mouse and keyboard on the PC – slick, quick, and remarkably accurate. Unfortunately, unlike that ubiquitous PC control method, the touch screen approach never feels comfortable, and long play sessions inevitably result in an exquisite pinprick pain in your wrist. Ah, glorious!

So it's uncomfortable. But is it any good? Definitely. This is a full-fledged new entry in the Prime series, with a wide array of new weapons, secrets, and intense fights, just like either of the GameCube offerings. This time around, the story is spread out over several different worlds, and you'll be using your ship to hopscotch between them. To collect the alien artifacts needed to progress, Samus is thrown into battle with a host of other bounty hunters intent on the same relics. These conflicts, along with the larger boss battles on any given planet, offer enough action to keep players sated, but I noticed a little less overall combat in comparison with the other Prime games.

Unlike Metroid Prime 2, the additional multiplayer element in Hunters is far more than a quick bonus. Whether locally or over Wi-Fi, multiple game types, unique playable characters, and tons of arenas all really surprised me. There's even a pared down match type you can try with just one copy of the game, where you upload info to your buddies. An extensive bot function is also present, so you can practice game types and arenas by yourself or flesh out smaller matches.

It takes some time to learn to love Samus Aran's latest outing. While other control schemes certainly exist, only the touch screen option offers the precision I wanted, and my hand hates me for it. While the single-player adventure falls just shy of the grandeur of some Metroid games, the new multiplayer game positively electrifies the experience. There's plenty of fun to be had, if the pain is worth it to you.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** A new adventure for Samus that has an array of multiplayer features to match the lengthy single-player plot

> **Graphics:** The Prime formula doesn't work as well with so much pixelation, but the game still looks nice

> **Sound:** Classic, haunting Metroid tunes and sound effects are as effective as they ever were

> **Playability:** There is a tremendous learning curve for any of the control schemes. Your hand will never stop aching

> **Entertainment:** Good times, but I'd like to avoid carpal tunnel syndrome next time

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion

When people ask what my favorite series of all time is, I always have a quick answer: Metroid. So for me, Hunters is somewhat bittersweet. The game looks good on the DS, but its hand-cramping control scheme is something that took some getting used to. So much so that there was a period where I was ready to just not play the game at all. But as I went deeper into the experience, I found the single player game to be interesting, but not mind-blowing. The multiplayer certainly helps this game out, but I play Metroid for its immersive world and single-player experience, and in that regard Hunters is good, but not great.—**ANDY**

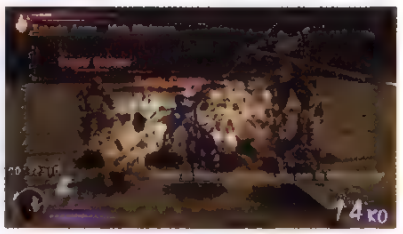
PSP QUICKIES

PSP

BOTTOM LINE **7**

Samurai Warriors: State of War

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** KOEI
> **DEVELOPER** OMEGA FORCE > **RELEASE** MARCH 7 > **ESRB** T



Just when you think another sea of boring barbarian hordes from Koei is too much, the cavalry comes. This title's pre-battle tactical map is a respite from the normal grind of repetitive and simplistic combat that has come to characterize series like this or Dynasty Warriors. Indeed, this game is better than DW for PSP because by controlling certain hexes you can unleash avalanches or floods, and you can also cast charm spells to buff your party and de-buff enemies. With the game's core of boring combat, however, these latest tactical additions aren't enough to make the game's transformation from a lump of coal to a diamond complete. Still, some help is better than none at all.—**KATO**

PSP

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

Capcom Classics Collection Remixed

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ARCADE (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** T

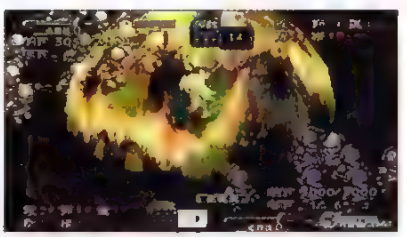
Featuring a different assortment of classics than the consoles' Capcom Collection, Remixed even features the first Street Fighter, which isn't always easy to come by. I am impressed with the feel of the analog nub, and love that the screen can be expanded horizontally or even flipped vertically. The latter is a little weird at first, but becomes second nature. There's a lot of punching, kicking, and shooting here (but no biting), but the selections each have their own hook like Legendary Wings or Speed Rumbler – a shooter where you can get out of your car – making for a great collection of favs (1941, Strider) and hidden gems like Magic Sword (shown) or Mega Twins.—**KATO**

PSP

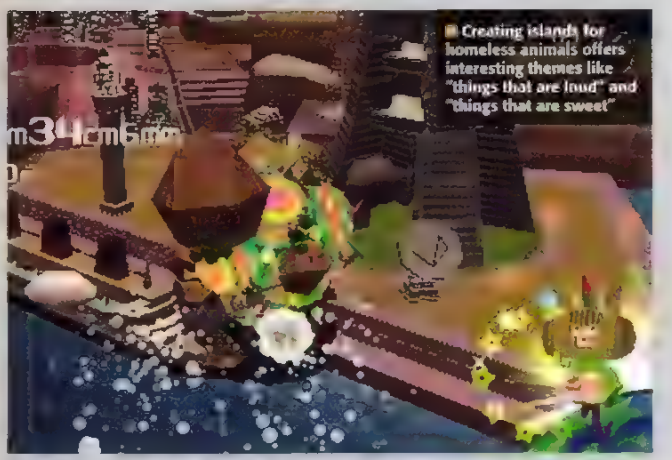
BOTTOM LINE **5**

Generation of Chaos

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NIS AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** IDEA FACTORY
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 28 > **ESRB** T



There may be a very deep and interesting strategy game laying somewhere within Generation of Chaos, but you're going to have to work to find it. GoC is, without a doubt, the least user-friendly game I have ever seen. Chock full of convoluted menus with dozens of abbreviations and arcane terminology, GoC makes absolutely no attempt to teach the player its complex systems; even the instruction book is no help. Not only is it nigh impossible to figure out how to achieve your in-game goals, it's not even clear what those goals are! If you put in the hours required to simply figure out what the hell is going on in this game, you might get a satisfying strategy experience out of it. But if you're not looking for a headache-inducing experience that requires a secret decoder ring to get started, then this is definitely not the game for you.—**JEREMY**



Creating islands for homeless animals offers interesting themes like "things that are loud" and "things that are sweet"

PSP

Me and My Katamari

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
> **DEVELOPER** NAMCO LIMITED > **RELEASE** MARCH 21 > **ESRB** E

ARCHIPELAGO ROLL

We all adjust our standards for handheld gaming. The screens are smaller, the sounds less robust, the controls less precise, and the amount of content is just…less. But Namco's Me and My Katamari is more aptly compared to the series' PS2 entries than anything on a portable system – a sentiment that should be taken as a high compliment.

In some ways, the entry's portable format makes the things you love best about the series even better. The chunky, colorful graphics really pop on the PSP's screen, highlighting a tropical island theme that's really quirky, lush, and even better looking than the console games. While this is the best example of the outright improvements, the hilarious dialogue and surreal cutscenes between levels are back and more frequent, mostly because of shorter missions tailored to the portable experience.

Another part of the platform switch could have been problematic, and that is the console game's forklift-inspired driving scheme. Me and My Katamari has a great translation of the PS2 versions' scheme: Players use the face buttons and d-pad instead of the PS2's sticks, and the layout works really well (if you can get past the occasional hand cramp).

Other issues should be thought of on a case-by-case basis. Short levels (some with mid-mission loading) offer less exploration and openness than the console versions, and reused songs are a potential bummer for some or a delightful reminder to others. The game also has to deal with the fact that players already know what to expect, which lessens the novelty value of its refreshing quirkiness. Thankfully, great writing and an interesting location twist keep the gimmick fresh, and the solid technical execution makes this just as playable as the original.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> **Concept:** Restructure the wildly successful Katamari series, making it shine as a portable title

> **Graphics:** The stylized blockiness looks even better on the PSP screen

> **Sound:** Reusing tracks from the console titles is both lovely and a little weak – memory lane is an okay place to visit, but new songs would have been nice

> **Playability:** Even short one analog stick, the control scheme works really well, with some minor concessions

> **Entertainment:** With each iteration, you know more and more what to expect, but this Katamari is still a good time

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.75

As the first portable version of one of the most innovative and outright entertaining franchises in years, the most recent Katamari game is a tiny step down in quality. Level designs have more collision issues and environmental object hang-ups than before, and while the control scheme on PSP is good, it doesn't match the dual-analog brilliance that the original game was designed around. It's also a disappointment that so many of the musical tracks are repeats from the second PS2 outing. On the bright side, I think this new title may be the funniest of the three, as the King's comedic bumbling is simply priceless. Despite the problems, Katamari hasn't lost any of its charm, and none of its minor problems prevent its most noticeable feature from shining through – constant fun.—**MILLER**

More customization items are offered through the game for the Prince and his cousins (some of which are new to the series)

PSP

Splinter Cell Essentials

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> **RELEASE** MARCH 21 > **ESRB** M

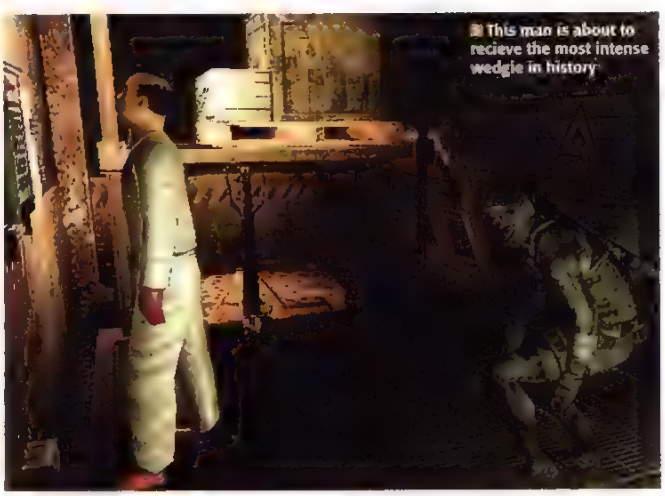
Essentials replicates both the look and feel of the Splinter Cell console games well, with a few notable changes

SAM'S GREATEST HITS

As much as I'm always ready for another one of Sam Fisher's adventures, Splinter Cell Essentials is somewhat of a strange game. The first entry in the franchise to come to the PSP, Essentials tries to be as similar as possible to the console games, and in many ways it succeeds. Many of the missions are even culled from the console games – including the upcoming Double Agent. The result is something of a strange brew.

The most notable adaptation of Splinter Cell's gameplay comes in the form of the camera. Holding down the circle button allows you to move it freely, while tapping it centers it behind Sam. It works pretty well, but obviously the action had to be slowed down a bit to compensate. Enemies are definitely not as deadly as they are in the console games, and missions are broken down into smaller pieces. Once you get the hang of it, the gameplay is pretty smooth and frustration-free. Just like in the console games, you can tackle situations almost any way you want – stealth, firearms, hand-to-hand combat, you name it – and it all works just as well.

The aspect of Essentials that confounded me the most wasn't the new controls, but the story. Chronologically, it takes place after Double Agent, but flashes back before the first game, and then jumps through some of Sam's most notable missions from the series thus far. It was fun to go back and revisit some of my favorite missions, but at the same time I would have liked to see more new content. Also, it's really obvious that this game was originally intended to be released at the same time as Double Agent, as there are some pretty major spoilers for that game's story near the end of the campaign, and it points to the direction the series will go afterwards. I definitely enjoyed Essentials and how it ties into the rest of the series, as will other Splinter Cell fans. However, now that we know that Splinter Cell's gameplay can work on the PSP, I'd like to see more original missions in the future.—**JEREMY**



This man is about to recieve the most intense wedgie in history

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> **Concept:** Sam Fisher hits the PSP for the first time, with a blend of new and old missions

> **Graphics:** Essentials is a pretty good looking PSP game, but you'll play through most of it in Splinter Cell's trademark green nightvision

> **Sound:** Like the console games, there is a good deal of voice work in the games, which conveys most of the story

> **Playability:** Many concessions have been made to get Splinter Cell's gameplay on the PSP, especially to the camera

> **Entertainment:** A good choice for fans, but not a great introduction to the series for neophytes

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

Even with the technical limitations of the PSP, this is a grand entry in the Splinter Cell canon. The elegant camera design works really well, but doesn't let me play the way that I usually do – i.e. lots of looking around while I'm sneaking between pools of shadows. The lack of mobility rarely cost me my life, but it did make me feel like more of a hogtied spy than I'm used to. There were some weird technology glitches (like zooming through the walls of the world), but nothing that really broke the experience. Otherwise, I was disappointed that there wasn't more new content, but this is a good outing for Sam and the PSP. It's pretty, smooth, deadly, and (like a console Splinter Cell game) damn enjoyable.—**LISA**

PSP

Field Commander

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** APRIL 24 > **ESRB** T

The skill combat animations are cool, but very time-consuming

REGRESSED WARS

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

There are few genres closer to my heart than turn-based strategy. The thrill of crushing an enemy with nothing other than a brilliantly executed plan is a thing of beauty. Unfortunately, Field Commander only shines in that way occasionally; much of its potential is tarnished by choppy gameplay and inconsistent AI. There is worth for the genre enthusiast here, but this fails to meet the admittedly high bar set by the Advance Wars franchise.

The basic gameplay is ripped off of Advance Wars in the most profound of ways. For all intents and purposes, this is another installment of that series that trades polish and smoothness of play for a few new gimmicks. Luckily, the premise is strong enough to deliver a certain amount of entertainment by succeeding on a baseline level. Don't get me wrong, I like Field Commander's additions of destroying certain terrain and stacking air units and ground troops on the same tile. However, neither of these innovations are enough to overcome Field Commander's shortcomings in any meaningful way.

The constant small hesitations during play as the PSP loads data are little more than an annoyance in a turn-based game such as this, but the inconsistent AI is gamebreaking at times. Many of my victories felt hollow due to the enemy ignoring blatant weaknesses. The worst offenses were the several occasions when the computer elected to simply end a unit's turn rather than attack an adjacent artillery piece of mine – which wouldn't be a problem, other than the fact that those expensive and powerful long-range units are incapable of defending themselves against a close-by foe.

Multiplayer, either over the 'Net or against a friend across the room, will doubtless be enough for some gamers to purchase this title regardless of its failings. However, the overall roughness in every aspect of the game and the mediocre single-player element make this a niche title in an already-niche genre.—**ADAM**

> **Concept:** Make an Advance Wars clone for PSP, without the delightful attention to detail that franchise has

> **Graphics:** Units are easy to distinguish from each other, and that's all I ask out of a strategy game

> **Sound:** It's sad that there's a noticable load time for infantry to shout, "Yes, sir!" when your cursor moves over them

> **Playability:** But for the overall chunkiness of the framerate and irritating loads, everything works just fine

> **Entertainment:** If you absolutely must have some strategy on the PSP, this ain't bad – but it's a far cry from the Nintendo series it clumsily apes

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion

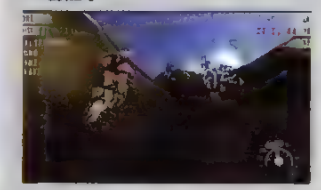
I really liked Field Commander's selection of unit types and having to coordinate everything from a supply line to occupying buildings and making sure that each unit does its job. I liked this aspect so much in fact, that I wanted more of it – even though I was ruthless enough of a general to let some of my helicopters blow up instead of refueling them. Still, I felt handcuffed by the fact that your loadout and the types of units you can build are restricted per mission. Also, the AI can be exploited at times because of your plethora of units. Still, with plenty of campaign missions and multiplayer options, this is a solid purchase for PSP owners who've never played Advance Wars.—**KATO**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

MX vs. ATV: On The Edge

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** THQ
> **DEVELOPER** RAINBOW STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 28
> **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE **8**

I have a feeling that this game's gonna do pretty well. Not only does it throw a lot of racing at you – in various forms and on a bunch of locations – but it captures the spirit of Rainbow's rhythm racing. Timing, foresight, and skill are required to master any track, and this game puts up plenty of challenge. At the same time, it also retains its easy trickability and fluid racing. Unfortunately, it shares the same lack of an engaging career mode with MX vs. ATV Unleashed for consoles, and loading tracks can take a full minute, but that shouldn't deter you from hopping on.—**KATO**

PSP | DS

Worms: Open Warfare

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR WIRELESS)
> **PUBLISHER** THQ
> **DEVELOPER** TEAM 17
> **RELEASE** MARCH 21
> **ESRB** E10+

BOTTOM LINE **7**

Firmly back in the second dimension where it belongs, this portable entry in the Worms franchise will take you back to the glory days of Armageddon and World Party. The DS has a slight edge in the interface, since it's much easier to explore the map and choose weapons on the touch screen, but no matter which version you choose, you'll shoot, explode, and sheep invertebrate warriors to your heart's content.—**JOE**

PSP

From Russia With Love

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES
> **RELEASE** APRIL 4 > **ESRB** T

RETURN TO SENDER

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

If this game is an accurate representation of what comes out of Russia (with love or otherwise), I can only assume the nation's chief export is boredom. Though this handheld port mirrors its console cousin in some ways, it is missing everything that elevated the first iteration to slightly above average.

All of the levels will be familiar if you've played the console version, with some notable omissions. The driving and rail-shooting segments have been removed, leaving behind eight short stints of absolutely conventional action. The running and gunning might have been a passable diversion, but the controls provide more frustration than fun. The single analog nub makes Bond move and aim like he had a ten-martini dinner, and the camera rotation (mapped to square and circle) is utterly worthless. I found myself relying solely on the iffy targeting to give me a usable view of my enemies.

The only real addition unique to this handheld version is an assortment of timed challenges, like "kill 12 rappelling soldiers" or "defeat Red Grant." These tasks (along with the standard multiplayer) provide a little replay value, but From Russia with Love just isn't the kind of experience that leaves you wanting more.—**JOE**

> **Concept:** Is "pulls a Lazenby" a viable expression? If not, it should be

> **Graphics:** The cutscenes still look good. The environments and enemies don't

> **Sound:** Sir Connery's most disappointing work since *Dragonheart*

> **Playability:** It's a good thing the Bond Focus is so overpowered, because the other aiming and camera controls do little good

> **Entertainment:** Provides only the most basic "aim, shoot, reload, repeat" variety of fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.75

With eight brief single-player levels (which are augmented by special challenges and multiplayer), From Russia With Love for PSP is scarcely longer than the film that inspired it. It's not necessarily bad, just extremely anonymous. Aside from some use of Bond gadgets, this is an undistinguished third-person shoot 'em up with flawed controls. Although modeled on the Connery-era Bond, this game feels more like the last few 007 films: breezy, barely enjoyable, and instantly forgettable.—**MATT**

The rocket pack returns, but you won't be driving any other vehicles

CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For February 2006 Based On Units Sold

1 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

How did San Andreas make its way back to the top of the charts? Well, it's now cheap and sex scandal-free. People could learn from this game's example: cleaning up your act can help you reclaim your former glory. That's right, Gary Glitter, we are talking about you!

2 MADDEN NFL 06

Hey, it's Madden NFL 06! Welcome back, buddy! We haven't seen you since... oh yeah, you just won't go away. You refuse to leave the top five, no matter what. What's your deal? Are you some kind of chronic overachiever? Do you fear failure? Do you think that your daddy won't love you if you're not the top-selling franchise out there? He probably wouldn't, you know.

3 ARENA FOOTBALL

Welcome to third place, Arena Football! It's the best your sport can ever hope for.

4 FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

Like the awesome Fight Night itself, this paragraph is brought to you by Burger King, home of the flame-broiled Whopper. Have it your way at Burger King! You look hungry – try a Triple Whopper! But enough about the great tasting Whopper sandwich, let's talk about the game. Whoops, out of space...

5 MVP 06 NCAA BASEBALL

Wowie zowie folks, it's another EA Sports title! Whew, for a minute there we thought they were running out of steam. It's really great of the gaming public to support a struggling independent game developer like this. If they keep this up, they might really make a name for themselves some day.

Rank	Title	L Mo	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	N/A	PS2	10	12-06	$20
2	Madden NFL 06	2	PS2	9	08-05	$30
3	Arena Football	N/A	PS2	6.5	02-06	$30
4	Fight Night Round 3	N/A	360	9	02-06	$59
5	MVP 06 NCAA Baseball	3	PS2	7	01-06	$30
6	Fight Night Round 3	N/A	PS2	9	02-06	$40
7	Call of Duty 2	1	360	9.75	11-05	$60
8	NBA Live 06	15	PS2	7.5	09-05	$30
9	Animal Crossing: Wild World	6	DS	8.75	12-05	$33
10	Need for Speed: Most Wanted	7	PS2	8.5	11-05	$40
11	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	4	PSP	9.25	10-05	$50
12	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	N/A	XBOX	9.75	09-05	$20
13	Mario Kart DS	5	DS	8.5	11-05	$35
14	Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening Special Edition	N/A	PS2	9	01-06	$20
15	LEGO Star Wars	N/A	PS2	7	03-06	$22
16	Guitar Hero	N/A	PS2	9	11-05	$73
17	WWE Smackdown! VS Raw 2006	11	PS2	8.75	11-05	$50
18	SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo	14	PSP	7	11-05	$40
19	Full Auto	N/A	360	7.5	02-06	$60
20	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	N/A	GC	9.25	11-03	$30

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld ®/TRSTS ® • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

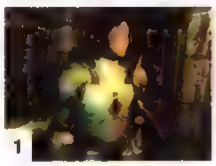
Rank	Title	System
1	Mobile Suit Gundam: Climax U.C.	PS2
2	Children of Mana	DS
3	Sengoku Musou 2	DS
4	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain 2	DS
5	Animal Crossing: Wild World	DS
6	Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth	PS2
7	Devil Summoner	PSP
8	Eigo Tsuke	DS
9	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain	DS
10	Monster Hunter 2	PSP

2

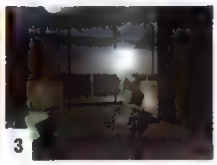
6

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L Mo.	System
1	The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	N/A	360
2	Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	1	360
3	Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	N/A	PSP
4	Tomb Raider: Legend	N/A	Multi
5	Tourist Trophy	N/A	PS2
6	Ace Combat Zero	N/A	PS2
7	Fight Night Round 3	5	Multi
8	Splinter Cell Essentials	N/A	PSP
9	Tetris DS	6	DS
10	Me and My Katamari	N/A	PSP



1

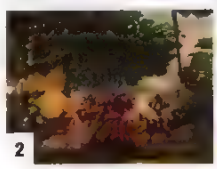


3

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L Mo	Price
1	Star Wars: Empire at War	N/A	$48
2	World of Warcraft	1	$43
3	Age of Empires III	3	$48
4	The Sims 2	2	$40
5	Civilization IV	4	$48
6	Battlefield 2	7	$48
7	The Sims 2: Nightlife	6	$31
8	Call of Duty 2	5	$47
9	Zoo Tycoon 2	9	$25
10	Guild Wars	N/A	$46



2

9

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
Burnout Revenge	9.5	Apr-06
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
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	9.5	Apr-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
NHL 2K6	8.5	Jan-06
Outfit, The	7.75	Apr-06
Perfect Dark Zero	7	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

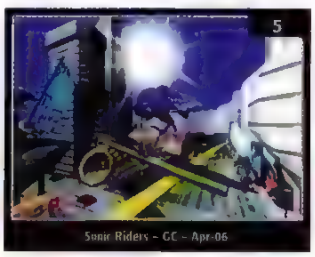
24: The Game	7.5	Apr-06
25 to Life	5.75	Mar-06
50 Cent: Bulletproof	6	Feb-06
187 Ride or Die	6.5	Oct-05
Aeon Flux	7.25	Jan-06
America's Army: Rise of a Soldier	6.5	Feb-06
Ape Escape 3	8.75	Feb-06
Arena Football	6.5	Apr-06
Armored Core: Nine Breaker	6	Sep-05
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.5	Dec-05
Beatdown: Fists of Vengeance	5	Sep-05

Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King
PS2 - Dec-05

Beatmania	8.5	Apr-06
Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder!	6.75	Oct-05
Black	8.5	Apr-06
Blitz: The League	7.75	Nov-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 Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, The	6.5	Dec-05
CMT Presents Karaoke Revolution Country	8	Apr-06
College Hoops 2K6	8	Jan-06
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
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
Drakengard 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
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06
Final Fight: Streetwise	4	Mar-06
From Russia With Love	7.75	Dec-05
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	7.25	Apr-06
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
Jak X: Combat Racing	7.75	Nov-05
Karaoke Revolution Party	8.5	Dec-05
Kingdom Hearts II	9	Apr-06
L.A. Rush	6.25	Dec-05
Legend of Kay	6.5	Oct-05
Madden NFL 06	9	Sep-05
Magna Carta: Tears of Blood	8.25	Dec-05
Major League Baseball 2K6	8.5	Apr-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	7.25	Apr-06
Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects	7	Oct-05
Matrix: Path of Neo, The	7.25	Dec-05
Mega Man X Collection	8	Feb-06
Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	9.5	Apr-06
Midway Arcade Treasures 3	8.25	Oct-05
MLB 06: The Show	7.5	Apr-06
Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	8.5	Oct-05
MS Saga: A New Dawn	7.75	Mar-06
MVP 06 NCAA Baseball	7	Feb-06
Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection	8	Oct-05
NASCAR 06: Total Team Control	8.25	Oct-05
NBA 06	7.75	Jan-06
NBA 2K6	8.5	Nov-05
NBA Ballers: Phenom	7.75	Apr-06
NCAA March Madness 2006	7	Nov-05
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	8.5	Dec-05
NHL 06	7	Sep-05
Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie'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
Radiata Stories	9.25	Oct-05
Rainbow Six: Lockdown	7.5	Nov-05
Ratchet Deadlocked	9	Nov-05
Resident Evil 4	10	Nov-05
Romancing SaGa	5	Nov-05
Shadow Hearts: From The New World	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
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
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
State Of Emergency 2	6	Apr-06
Suffering: Ties That Bind, The	8.5	Oct-05
Suikoden Tactics	6.75	Dec-05
Taito Legends	8.5	Jan-06
Tak: The Great Juju 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
Tokyo Extreme Racer Drift	6	Apr-06
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05
Top Spin	8.75	Nov-05
Tonno 2006	4.25	Apr-06
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
Warship Gunner 2	5	Apr-06
We Love Katamari	8.5	Oct-05
Wild Arms 4	7.5	Feb-06
Wild 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

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 Narnia: 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
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
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



Sonic Riders - GC - Apr-06

Karaoke Revolution Party	8.5	Dec-05
Madden NFL 06	9	Sep-05
Mario Party 7	5	Dec-05
Mario 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
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
Spartan: Total Warrior	7.75	Oct-05
Super Mario Strikers	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

XBOX

Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure
Xbox - Apr-06

25 to Life	5.75	Mar-06
50 Cent: Bulletproof	6	Feb-06
187 Ride or Die	6.5	Oct-05
Aeon Flux	7.25	Jan-06
America's Army: Rise of a Soldier	6.5	Feb-06
Arena Football	6.5	Apr-06
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.5	Dec-05
Beatdown: Fists of Vengeance	5	Sep-05
Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder!	6.75	Oct-05
Black	8.5	Apr-06
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 Narnia: 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
Darkwatch	8.5	Sep-05
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	6.75	Oct-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
Fantastic Four	6.5	Sep-05
Far Cry Instincts	8.75	Nov-05
FIFA Soccer 06	8	Oct-05
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06
Final Fight: Streetwise	4	Mar-06
From Russia With Love	7.75	Dec-05
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	7.25	Apr-06
Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	6.25	Feb-06
Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike	8	Oct-05
Gun	8.75	Dec-05
Half-Life 2	7.25	Dec-05
Halo 2: Multiplayer Map Pack	9.25	Sep-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
Karaoke Revolution Party	8.5	Dec-05
Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes	7.5	Oct-05
L.A. Rush	6.25	Dec-05
Madden NFL 06	9	Sep-05
Major League Baseball 2K6	8.5	Apr-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	7.25	Apr-06
Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects	7	Oct-05
Matrix: Path of Neo, The	7.25	Dec-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 3	8.25	Oct-05
Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	8.5	Oct-05
MVP 06 NCAA Baseball	7	Feb-06
Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection	8	Oct-05
NASCAR 06: Total Team Control	8.25	Oct-05
NBA 2K6	8.5	Nov-05
NBA Ballers: Phenom	7.75	Apr-06
NBA Live 06	7.5	Nov-05
NCAA March Madness 2006	7	Nov-05
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	8.5	Dec-05
NHL 06	7	Sep-05
NHL 2K6	8	Sep-05
Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie'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
Serious Sam II	7.75	Nov-05
Shadow the Hedgehog	4	Jan-06
Shattered Union	4	Jan-06
Sims 2, The	7.75	Nov-05
Sniper Elite	7.5	Nov-05
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
Spartan: Total Warrior	7.75	Oct-05
SSX On Tour	8	Nov-05
Star Wars: Battlefront II	8.5	Dec-05
Stubbs the Zombie in "Rebel Without A Pulse"	8	Dec-05
Suffering: Ties That Bind, The	8.5	Oct-05
Taito Legends	8.5	Jan-06
Tak: The Great Juju Challenge	7	Oct-05
Tecmo Classic Arcade	7	Oct-05
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	8.25	Nov-05
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05
Tonno 2006	4.25	Apr-06
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-05
Battlefield 2: Special Forces	9	Feb-06
Black & White 2	8.5	Nov-05
Call of Duty 2	9.75	Dec-05
City of Villains	8.75	Jan-06
Codename: Panzers – Phase 2	8	Sep-05
Cold War	6	Dec-05
Dungeon Siege II	8	Oct-05
Dungeons & Dragons: Dragonshard	8	Nov-05
Earth 2160	7	Feb-06
Fable: The Lost Chapters	9	Oct-05
F.E.A.R.	9	Nov-05
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	7.25	Apr-06
Galactic Civilizations II: Dread Lords	8	Apr-06

The Movies - PC - Dec 05

Indigo Prophecy	8.25	Oct-05
Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth II, The	8.5	Apr-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	7.25	Apr-06
Movies, The	8.75	Dec-05
Myst V: End of Ages	7.75	Oct-05
Quake IV	8.75	Nov-05
Serious Sam II	7.75	Nov-05
Shattered Union	4	Jan-06
Sid Meier's Civilization IV	9.5	Jan-06
Sims 2: Nightlife, The	7	Oct-05
Sims 2: Open for Business, The	7	Apr-06
Star Wars: Empire at War	8.25	Mar-06
Taito Legends	8.5	Jan-06
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War - Winter Assault	8	Oct-05

NINTENDO DS

Advance Wars: Dual Strike	9.25	Sep-05
Age of Empires: The Age of Kings	8	Mar-06
Animal Crossing: Wild World	8.75	Dec-05
Battles of Prince of Persia	8.5	Feb-06
Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow	9.25	Nov-05
Dig Dug: Digging Strike	6.75	Dec-05
Electroplankton	7	Feb-06
Lost in Blue	7	Oct-05
Lunar: Dragon Song	4.75	Nov-05
Madden NFL 06	5	Nov-05
Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time	8.25	Dec-05
Mario Kart DS	8.5	Dec-05
Megaman Battle Network 5: Double Team	7.75	Nov-05
Metroid Prime Pinball	8	Nov-05
Nanostray	8	Sep-05
Nintendogs	8	Sep-05
Pac 'N Roll	6	Sep-05
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	7.75	Oct-05
Pokémon Trozei	8.25	Mar-06
Resident Evil: Deadly Silence	7.75	Mar-06
Rub Rabbits!, The	7.5	Apr-06
Sims 2, The	6.75	Feb-06
Snowboard Kids DS	6	Jan-06
Sonic Rush	7	Jan-06
Super Monkey Ball: Touch & Roll	8	Apr-06
Super Princess Peach	8.75	Mar-06
Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop	6.5	Apr-06
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3: Mutant Nightmare	4	Nov-05
Tetris DS	9.25	Apr-06
Tony Hawk's American SkateLand	8.75	Feb-06
Trace Memory	7.5	Nov-05
Trauma Center: Under the Knife	8.25	Oct-05
True Swing Golf	7	Feb-06
Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble!	7.5	Dec-05
Zoo Tycoon DS	6	Jan-06

PSP

Ape Escape Academy	7	Feb-06
Armored Core: Formula Front Special Edition	3.75	Nov-05
Con, The	8	Nov-05
Daxter	8.75	Apr-06
Death Jr	7	Sep-05

The Con - PSP - Nov 05

Exit	7.25	Mar-06
FIFA Soccer 06	7.5	Nov-05
Fight Night Round 3	7.75	Apr-06
Frantix	6.75	Oct-05
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	5.5	Dec-05
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	9.25	Dec-05
Gripshift	8.25	Oct-05
Infected	8.25	Jan-06
Kingdom of Paradise	6.75	Jan-06
Legend of Heroes, The	6	Jan-06
Lord of the Rings: Tactics, The	6.75	Jan-06
Madden NFL 06	8.5	Nov-05
Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects	6.5	Nov-05
MediEvil: Resurrection	7.75	Oct-05
Mega Man: Maverick Hunter X	8	Mar-06
Mega Man: Powered Up	8.25	Apr-06
Metal Gear Acid 2	8	Apr-06
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	8	Aug-05
MLB '06 The Show	7	Apr-06
NBA 06	6.5	Dec-05
NBA Ballers: Rebound	8	Apr-06
Need for Speed: Most Wanted 5-1-0	7.25	Jan-06
PoPoLoCrois	8.5	Oct-05
PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient	7.75	Feb-06
Prince of Persia: Revelations	7.75	Feb-06
Pursuit Force	6.25	Apr-06
Sims 2, The	5.5	Feb-06
SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs: Fireteam Bravo	7	Jan-06
SSX On Tour	7.75	Dec-05
Star Wars: Battlefront II	7	Jan-06
Street Fight Alpha 3 Max	7.75	Mar-06
Street Supremacy	6.75	Apr-06
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	7.5	Dec-05
Tokobot	8.25	Jan-06
Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code	8.25	Apr-06
Virtua Tennis: World Tour	8.5	Nov-05
Winning Eleven 9	7.5	Mar-06
WRC: FIA World Rally Championships	8.75	Apr-06
WWE SmackDown Vs. Raw 2006	8	Feb-06
X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse	9	Dec-05
Ys: The Ark of Napishtim	6.75	Apr-06

GAME BOY ADVANCE

DK: King of Swing	7.75	Nov-05
Dogz	6.75	Feb-06
Donkey Kong Country 3	8.5	Nov-05
Drill Dozer	7.75	Feb-06
Dr. Mario Puzzle League	7.5	Jan-06
Dynasty Warriors Advance	7	Sep-05
Final Fantasy IV Advance	8.75	Jan-06
Gunstar Super Heroes	8.75	Dec-05
Mario Tennis: Power Tour	7.75	Dec-05
Mega Man Battle Network: Team Colonel/Team Protoman	7	Aug-05
Mega Man Zero 4	8	Nov-05
Rebelstar Tactical Command	9	Oct-05
Riviera: The Promised Land	8.25	Aug-05
Sigma Star Saga	8.5	Aug-05
Tales of Phantasia	7.25	Mar-06
Yoshi Topsy-Turvy	8	Aug-05
Zooo	7	Nov-05

Tomb Raider: Legend

Exploring 101

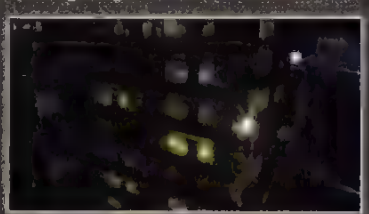
By Producer Morgan Gray

WHEN IN DOUBT, TAKE A LOOK AROUND

Often times you will find yourself confronted with a roadblock. It could be as easy as a simple trap, or perhaps some aspect of a tomb that doesn't appear to be operational. Before frustration sets in remember the following: Search the immediate area for clues. Nearly without fail, every tool you need to get past a situation is in the immediate area, either in the environment or in Lara's possession already. If you are having problems spotting them, remember to use the research analyzing device to help you pick them out. Also, don't forget that the grappling hook is your friend. Look for the metallic shine and tug away. One last bit of advice – some things require Lara to shoot them. Remember, you have unlimited pistol ammo, so if you are seriously in doubt, whip out the guns, go into Accurate Aim mode, and blast away to see what happens.

MOVE WITH STYLE

You are Lara Croft, time to start moving like her! First things first, just navigating through an environment isn't enough; you have to do it with flair! Try combinations of the roll/crouch button and the jump button to perform numerous gymnastic flair moves. Try to keep the chain of moves going to see how far you can go. Unless you are in a hurry, try holding the jump button when pulling up onto a ledge. You'll perform Lara's classic handstand routine. Anyone like to swan dive? Press the jump button, then smoothly slide over to the roll button. The timing may be tricky, but if you pull it off you'll know it! If you need a quick speed up while moving around that edge or swimming, remember to tap the interact/use button in rhythm with Lara and you'll be speeding along. This trick is also useful to avoid



falling to your doom if the surface you are on is unstable. Last but not least, Lara can sometimes under jump, forcing her to catch onto a surface with one hand. You'll get a quick second or two to save yourself by using the interact/use button, so stay on your toes. If you think you are under jumping too often, start watching Lara. Her body language is the key, as she "revs" up for a jump make sure you time your jump with her momentum to go the distance!

FIGHT WITH EVERYTHING YOU HAVE!

Lara's classic dual pistols are all you'll ever need to make it through the game, but having a bit of extra firepower never hurts. Enemies will drop their weapons when they die. Search the battleground for a bit of added firepower. Don't forget that you can enter into a "slow-mo" mode by jumping off of an enemy's chest or head. This is a great tactic to give you the extra edge you need to take out multiple targets at once. Lara can also make use of gun emplacements that the enemies use – if you're quick, you can turn their own firepower against

them. Need to get an enemy in closer or off a ledge? They may be flesh and blood, but their belt buckles are metal. Use the magnetic grappling hook to give them a tug towards you. If you prefer a more hands-on approach, when standing next to an enemy hit the interact/use button to kick them in the stomach, or press jump and then interact/use to kick them onto their backs. When you're done with a fight, make sure you search the combat area to pick up extra ammo, grenades, and health packs before continuing your exploration.

STAYING ALIVE IN THE FAST LANE

During the motorcycle minigame sequences things can get a bit hectic. Here are some tips to keep you firmly planted in the driver's seat and avoid becoming roadkill. First things first, if you find yourself barreling into an obstacle, don't panic, hit the brakes. You'll take some damage, but you'll avoid flying off the bike and dying. Keep your eyes peeled for health packs that have been scattered around – they'll come in handy. The enemy riders can be a pest. Remember that as Lara fires she becomes more and more inaccurate, so try to avoid holding the fire button down. Take short, precise shots and you'll rip through them faster. You can also give them a well-timed bump to send them into the obstacles along the path. Finally, the mercs on the bikes are no Lara Croft; sometimes they have a hard time driving and shooting and will ram into each other. Consider this a special prize, but remember that running over their bikes can send you out of control, so don't spoil your luck. Keep your eyes peeled, and you'll get through just fine.

FILLING UP THE WARDROBE

Finding all of the hidden rewards scattered through out the levels is the key to unlocking all of Lara's costumes and other bonus items. Keep your eyes peeled as you move through the environment for their distinctive shine. As one would guess, each type of reward is progressively more well hidden. Bronzes should be easy enough to find, but hunting down the Silver and Gold rewards is going to require more Croft-like ingenuity. Make sure you search in every nook and cranny in every area. Even if a room contains a massive puzzle sequence, that door you finally opened might have also provided you with a means to access an additional section of the space you are in. So before leaving any area, make sure you've double-checked everything. We sometimes give little hints about reward locations during cutscenes, so keep your eyes peeled at all times. After gaining access to the additional costumes, you can try them on while in Lara's bedroom or take them for a spin while playing through the game. Playing with an alternative costume is a great way to replay a level, making the experience of trying to beat a difficult time trial a little more fresh.

BOSS FIGHTS

Not every boss encounter is a straight-up fight. Keep in mind that Lara matches both wits and brawn when she enters into a fight. Look for clues in the environment that can help you take away a boss's advantage. If you find yourself not gaining much ground during the fight, watch what the boss is doing. Maybe it is using something in the environment as cover, so try taking away that cover to open up the fight. Some of the more "mystical" boss creatures can't even be hurt by Lara's more terrestrial arsenal, in these cases using all of the tools in the environment is key to defeating them.

Mod World

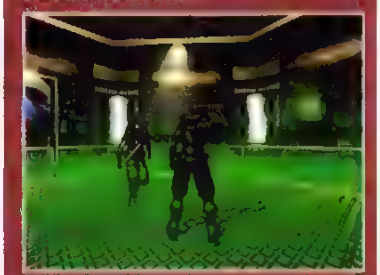
MURLOC RPG

http://www.gamerdisclaimer.com

World of Warcraft players will immediately recognize this Flash game's theme. Featuring graphics pulled from WoW, Gamer Disclaimer's Murloc RPG casts players as Muck the Murloc. This simplistic RPG initially has you helping out with an upcoming feast by collecting meat and spices, and eventually takes a twist as (gasp!) your home village is destroyed by mysterious invaders. Worth your time mostly for the innate amusement of seeing your adorable little fish-man waddle around and gurgle at things, the Murloc RPG is also a testament to just how much the Flash framework is capable of.

DOOM 3 NINJA TOURNAMENT

http://dungeondoom.d3files.com/ninjatournament/index.htm



According to the theory that two great tastes taste great together, Ninja Tournament is awesome. Ninjas swordfighting in the Doom 3 engine is definitely a sweet concept, and this mod's unique scheme of using the mouse exclusively to control your sword movements is pretty cool. This falls more into the category of "quick and fun" rather than "this will change the way you think about games," but every gamer should really have a balanced diet of digital entertainment.

Live Arcade Spotlight

Midway's 2006 Classic Lineup

We've seen several exciting new games show up on the still fledgling Xbox 360 Live Arcade site, but Midway recently announced plans to bring a number of its all-time favorites to the service before the end of the year. Already Midway dominates the classic category with games like Gauntlet, Joust, Smash TV, and Robotron 2084. Joining this squad will be five other well-remembered coin-op mainstays. Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 should give a quick dismemberment fix to longtime fans. Defender will make for a great sidescrolling shooter entry. Even if you never managed to pass the first stage, Paperboy almost certainly lives in the memory of anyone who grew up in the 80's. Root Beer Tapper also makes for a great fit, offering up some frantic and silly fun. Finally, rounding out the mix is Cyberball, the robotic football game from 1988. Together, Midway is single-handedly filling out XBLA's classic niche. Now we just need a few more companies to join the mix.

Code of the Month

Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter

Sure, it's nice to fight fair. But this is war, man! War! If we don't preemptively use cheat codes, then we're just asking for it, aren't we? So what are you waiting for? Do it for your country. For the level code, enter the sequence at the mission select screen. For the other codes, you'll need to pause the game, and while at the pause menu hold down the Back button, LT, and RT before entering the password string.

All Levels – Y, RB, Y, RB, X
Full Life – LB (x2), RB, X, RB, Y
Scott Mitchell Invincible – Y (x2), X, RB, X, LB
Team Invincible – X (x2), Y, RB, Y, LB
Unlimited Ammo – RB (x2), LB, X, LB, Y

Kate Lenard
Gardnerville, NV

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!

MULTI-SYSTEM

Ice Age 2: The Meltdown

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

Pause the game before entering the code.

Unlimited Pebbles – Down (x2), Left, Up (x2), Right, Up, Down

MVP NCAA Baseball 2006

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

For each of the following codes, simply create a player with the given name to get a player that exhibits the listed effect.

Broken Bat 1 (skinny breaking bat, short player) – Julian Kwan
Broken Bat 2 (skinny breaking bat, large player) – Neale Genereux
Inflated Bat (thick bat) – Melissa Shim
Power Hitter 1 (high velocity hits, thick bat, large player) – Chris Deas
Power Hitter 2 (high velocity hits, thick bat, short player) – Alan Blouin

For the following codes, enter the given player name in the Dynasty's create-a-player mode.

Unlock Level 1 Challenge Items – Peter Trenouth
Unlock Level 2 Challenge Items – Trey Smith
Unlock Level 3 Challenge Items – Chris Chung
Unlock Level 4 Challenge Items – Federico Rahal
Unlock Level 5 Challenge Items – Dee Jay Randal

PLAYSTATION 2

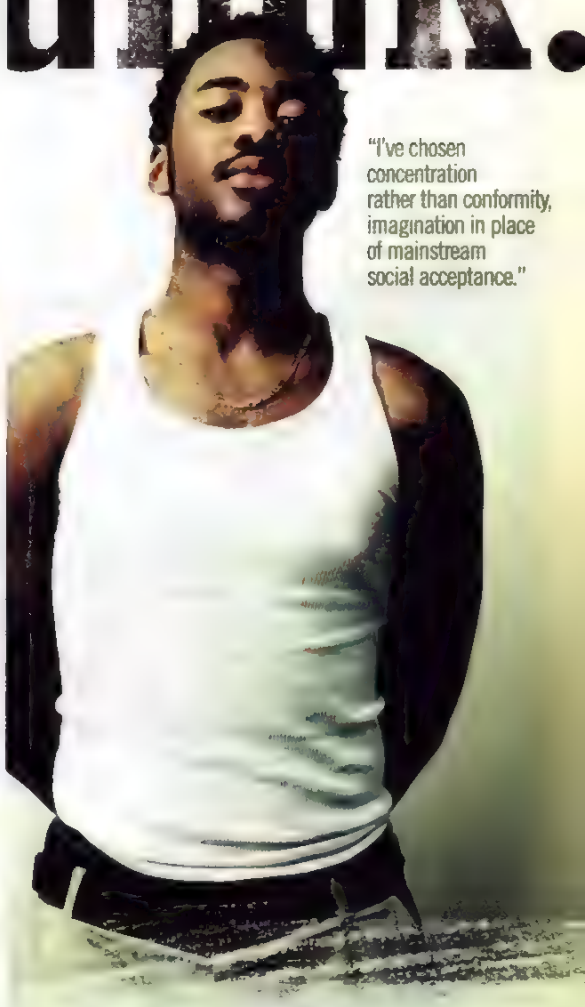
24: The Game

Hold down L2, L1, R2, and R1 at the front-end main menu for ten seconds. Then, in the security clearance menu, enter the codes and press □ to complete the sequence.

All Bonuses – 54PALMER
All Levels – 72DESSLER
Infinite Ammo – 62ALMEIDA
Invulnerability – 66BAUER

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen blowing up Parliament while wearing a funny mask)

I'M A GEEK.



"I've chosen concentration rather than conformity, imagination in place of mainstream social acceptance."

University of Advancing Technology
UAT
Learn. Experience. Innovate.

Come get your geek on.

UAT is a community of geeks—passionate seekers of knowledge and truth in an ever-expanding universe of technology.

GAME DESIGN
DIGITAL ANIMATION
ARTIFICIAL LIFE
DIGITAL VIDEO
WEB DESIGN
COMPUTER FORENSICS
NETWORK SECURITY
SOFTWARE ENGINEERING
TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT
GAME PROGRAMMING

www.uat.edu > 800.658.5744

UNLIMITED ENABLED

THE BLUE BOMBER'S FINEST HOUR

A MEGA MAN 2 RETROSPECTIVE

■ Mega Man creator Keiji Inafune

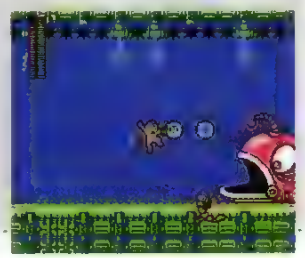
Every gaming generation sees new characters ushered into the ranks of iconic digital heroes. While these new upstarts are featured in some outstanding games, there remains an irreplaceable crew of old favorites that has withstood the test of time, and Mega Man is undoubtedly a member of this old guard. Along with Mario, Link, and Samus, he helped to reshape gaming over 15 years ago, and continues to be a prominent figure in numerous series and spin-offs today. Of course, he wasn't always an industry juggernaut, and this month Classic GI takes a fond look back at the title that transformed Mega Man into a gaming legend: Mega Man 2. We had a chance to reminisce about this classic side-scroller with creator Keiji Inafune, and the following pages are packed with anecdotes, factoids, and "I remember that" moments from one of the greatest and most beloved games of the 8-bit era.

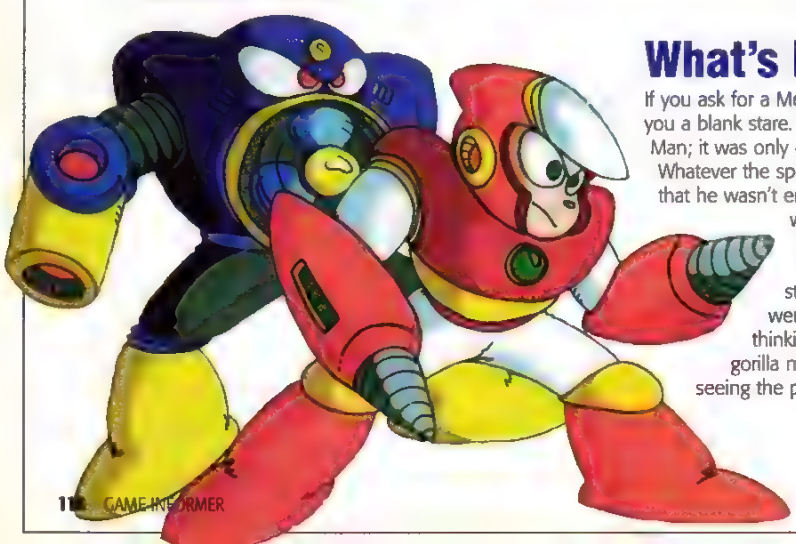
TRY IT!

Even though it doesn't have any tangible effect on gameplay, if you hold the A button while selecting your stage, the background behind the robot master will change from stars to miniature birds.

TRY IT!

The Metal Blades are efficient weapons, allowing you to fire three shots before your supply drains at all. On the fourth, one sliver of energy is removed. However, you can fool the game into resetting your shots fired by pausing. Essentially, by shooting off three blades and pressing start, the game forgets your tally, which provides you an infinite supply of Metal Blades. The same trick can be used with the Bubble Lead and Quick Boomerangs.





What's In a Name?

If you ask for a Mega Man game in Japan, the store clerk is likely to give you a blank stare. That's because the character's Japanese name is Rock Man; it was only changed to Mega Man for the North American release. Whatever the specific reasons for the new handle, Inafune acknowledges that he wasn't entirely pleased when he discovered the change. "When I was first told about it, I was shocked," he laughs. "Because, at least from the Japanese perspective, the name 'Mega Man' makes it sound like some burly, pro wrestler, super-strong character. Not a cute character, which is what we were going with initially with a name like Rock Man. So, I was thinking 'Eww. I don't like this. It sounds like he's an 800-pound gorilla man.' The only thing that shocked me more than that was seeing the package design for the first game."

■ **Though not a dramatic improvement, the box art for Mega Man 2 was certainly better than the first game's**

And Then There Were Eight

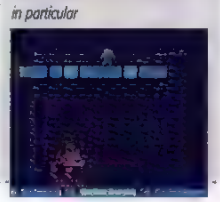
While the first Mega Man game was well received, Mega Man 2 upped the ante and expanded upon its predecessor in almost every department. One of the ways it did this was by including two more bosses, bringing the total up to eight. To our surprise, Inafune discloses that this wasn't really an innovation at all. "Initially, we had eight characters ready to go for the first Mega Man," he says. "But because of memory, we realized we would only be able to fit in seven. The seventh was going to be a character named Bond Man – he would stick you to the ground and then attack you. But instead of having an odd number, we wanted to keep it even, so we said 'Okay, since we can't get eight in, we'll just make it six.' However, after that Nintendo made the ROM sizes slightly bigger, so we were able to put in eight for Mega Man 2 like we had intended. That's why, in the new remake Mega Man: Powered Up, you see it has eight characters instead of six, because that sort of symbolized our true intent."

TRY IT!

When you pause the game and go the weapons screen, Mega Man will do a mini-teleport during the transitions in and out of gameplay. This brief moment of invulnerability, when timed correctly, can be used to avoid taking damage from certain projectiles. Pausing the game can also be used to slow Mega Man's descent if he's falling down a long shaft.

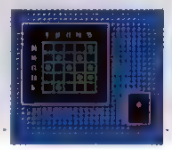
LISTEN UP!

Mega Man 2 contains some of the most memorable music of the 8-bit era, and you can check out your favorite tracks with a modern twist at Overclocked Remix (www.ocremix.org). This great site has remixed music from a wide variety of video games, but the Mega Man 2 section stands out as one of the most impressive. We recommend the Flash Man tunes in particular



THE QUICK AND EASY WAY

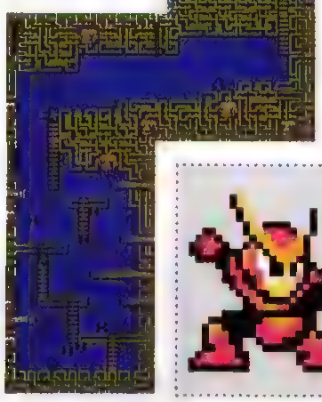
Enter this password and you will be ready to start Dr. Wily's stages, with all eight robot masters defeated and a full complement of four energy tanks.



By Fans for Fans

American gamers may recall a contest in the magazine *Nintendo Power* that allowed readers to submit enemy designs for the upcoming Mega Man 6. What you may not realize, however, is that similar contests had been going on in Japan for years, and Mega Man 2 marked the first time that fan-designed robots made an appearance.

"[The first Mega Man] sold slowly over time, but it did eventually make a profit," Inafune tells us. "I wanted to make a sequel, but Capcom wasn't too interested because the first game wasn't selling all that well. I knew I needed a hook for them to let me make the sequel. What came to mind was, back then there was something on TV, sort of like a real character, Godzilla-esque show with people in rubber suits. Often times, they would ask kids to create monster designs, then they made monster suits for the show based on those designs. I knew I could use that idea in the promotion of Mega Man 2 to make it more popular among children. So we did that. Of course, many of the designs were just really bad, poorly-drawn renditions of what six-year-olds thought would be a good enemy. So, we would pick different characteristics, like if there was a star on the chest, I would try to keep that in the enemy – a blending of what they had given me and what I would eventually transform into the boss robot."



ARE YOU ASKING FOR A CHALLENGE?

If you like doing things the hard way, try taking down Quick Man using only the arm cannon. Without being able to capitalize on his Time Stopper weakness, your first attempt will likely be short and humiliating. His speed and uneven battleground make him difficult to predict, but if you stay toward the middle of the room and fire when he's running into walls, it can be done.

ONE OF THE TOP FIVE GAME-DEGREE PROGRAMS

– Electronic Gaming Monthly

Student Artwork
Francisco Cruz

FULL SAIL
Real World Education

School of
Game Development

School of
Computer Animation

800.226.7625
fullsail.com
GET STARTED

3300 University Boulevard
Winter Park, FL 32792

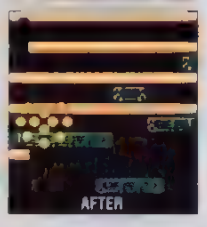
Financial aid available to those who qualify
Career development assistance
Accredited College, ACCSCT

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

TOP 5 MEMORABLE MOMENTS IN MEGA MAN 2

5 THOSE STUPID LASERS

The game never really makes it clear that Flash Man's Time Stopper can be used to stop the lethal energy beams in Quick Man's stage. The result? Legions of gamers today can still pick up the controller and make it through these sections unscathed, the result of hours upon hours of tireless memorization.



4 ENTER THE DRAGON

As a side-scroller, Mega Man 2 generally gives players control over how fast they move forward, but not at the end of Dr. Wily's first stage. As if hopping from one precarious block to another weren't enough, a giant robotic dragon pops up behind you and initiates one of the few auto-scrolling sequences in the Mega Man series.

3 THE INTRO

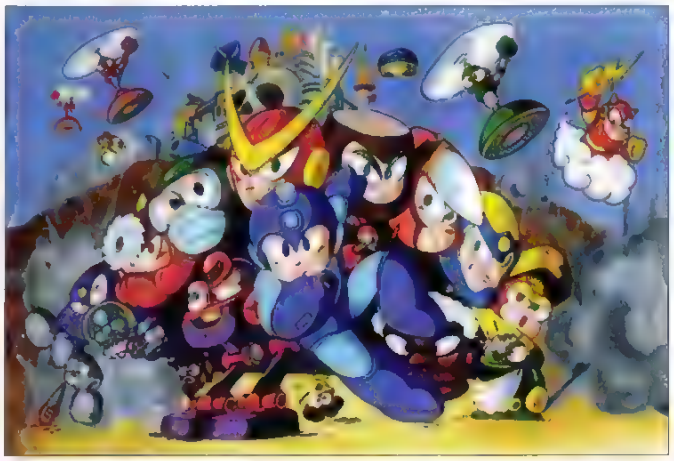
Mega Man games have never really been about the story, but it's difficult not to feel the awesomeness swell in your heart as the rockin' intro music kicks in, the camera pans up the building, and you see a helmetless Mega Man standing on top of a skyscraper. You can tell he's just pumping himself up to beat the junk out of some robot masters.

2 GUTS DOZER?

Why Dr. Wily would choose to resurrect Guts Man instead of Elec Man is puzzling, but this blast from the past came back as a massive boss in Dr. Wily's fortress.

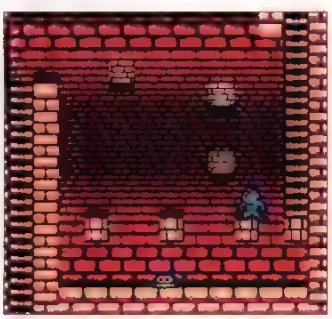
1 METAL BLADES!

This one isn't so much a moment as it is a constant joy throughout the entire game. Due to their power and versatility (like multi-directional firing), the Metal Blades are widely regarded as the best weapon in Mega Man history. The arm cannon is for chumps, Metal Blades should be your default weapon of choice as you play through the game.



Tough Act to Follow

Mega Man 2 was met was roaring success in both Japan and the U.S., which made further entries in the series an inevitability. Unfortunately, the immediate follow-up to Mega Man's second adventure was disappointing for Inafune, and even fans noticed that something seemed to missing from experience. "With [Mega Man 3], the problem was that almost all of the staff except me had switched over to a different project," confesses Inafune. "So I had to begin anew, and unfortunately I wasn't happy with the results. Out of all the titles I regret creating and regret how they went, Mega Man 3 would probably be the top one, because I didn't get to make the game that I wanted to make." Even though many gamers still had a great time with the third game, it is quite telling that its coolest and most memorable battles were with the reincarnations of the robot masters from Mega Man 2. "Unfortunately, when we were making 3, as a team we didn't have our stuff together. After two months, we had nothing, and we knew we were in a pinch," states Inafune matter-of-factly. "So, we ended up re-using those old robot masters to fill the gaps. It may be an unforgivable design offense, and maybe we shouldn't have set it up that way, but it was what it was."



■ **Heat Man's stage has disappearing blocks that require precise jumping**

■ **The ideal order for the bosses is a much-debated topic**

The New Standard

Mega Man 2 set a high bar for all subsequent games in the series. It's clear that the now-expected formula for Mega Man games was solidified for good in the second title, and the Blue Bomber's sophomore effort would serve as the template upon which all later entries in the series were built. Given the significant impact Mega Man 2 had on gaming as a whole, one must wonder if the title holds a special place in Inafune's heart. "Out of all the Mega Man games, Mega Man 2 is my favorite," he confesses. "It felt like a game that I had fully made and created. Mega Man 2 was my game, so ever since that time, I've been trying to make a game like it, and I haven't been able to succeed." When you're still trying to recapture the fun and excitement of a game over 15 years old, that's when you know you've got a true classic on your hands. ■■■

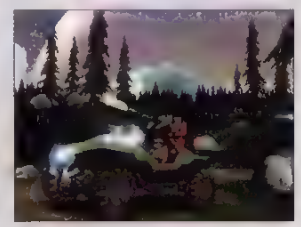
GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

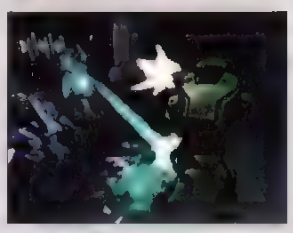
by Brian Muller

HALO

> **FORMAT** XBOX
> **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS

I am, and always will be, a fanboy of Nintendo. It may be surprising, but as of late I've come to recognize Halo for Microsoft's Xbox as one of the greatest games of all time. Halo possibly had the influence that Tetris had with the original Game Boy. Seriously, would the Xbox and its successor even be here if it wasn't for Bungie's launch title support? Few games can hold the honor of saving a console from almost certain death, and Halo definitely has the content to support it. Utilizing the dual-analog sticks and triggers, it almost feels like Halo was meant to be played on the Xbox controller. The gameplay was extremely varied thanks to its well-balanced arsenal and interesting environments. Vehicles were also included, but were more like a better weapon than transportation. The levels weren't "dedicated" to a vehicle either, like a tank mission or a rail-shooting mission. Additionally, the levels played through one after another without a mission-selection screen, creating a seamless ride from beginning to end.





The fun doesn't stop there. Halo featured a multiplayer mode with system link support that allowed for 16-player LAN fests. Similar to the campaign, multiplayer was extremely well-balanced and became more popular than the story mode. Soon, everyone from your average hardcore gamer to celebrities on TV began praising Halo and revealing their fond memories from a LAN party. The Xbox, through this widespread mainstream support of Halo, grew and soon became the console that has (arguably) nearly conquered Sony in the current generation of video games. Sure Halo is older now, succeeded by an even more adored sequel that utilizes Xbox Live, but Halo still stands the test of time as one of the greatest console first-person shooters. That's not easy, since the genre has been flooded these last few years. Each bring their own, new ideas to the conventional gameplay, but none of them chip the iceberg of Halo's greatness.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

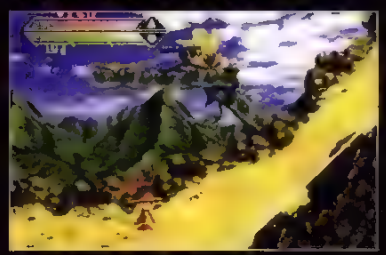
In 1995, after touting the "Saturnday" release of its new Saturn console (which was originally September 2), Sega shocked the industry by actually releasing the hardware in May. This premature debut is often one of the factors blamed for the console's cold reception; it caught third-party publishers unaware, and gave Sony some extra time to learn from Sega's mistakes. When the PlayStation released in the fall of 1995, it was $100 dollars cheaper than the Saturn, which closed the book on any chance the fledgling console might have had.

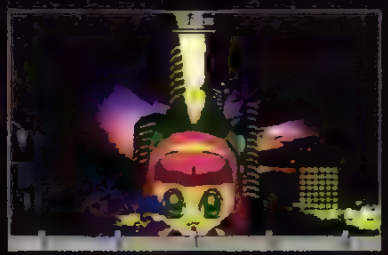
PLAYSTATION

SILHOUETTE MIRAGE

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** WORKING DESIGNS/SPAZ > **DEVELOPER** TREASURE > **RELEASE** 2000

Many PSone games are hard to revisit, as early 3D looks and feels so clunky and primitive compared to today's games. Side-scrolling titles, on the other hand, hold up much better, like Silhouette Mirage. A blisteringly intelligent shooter from genre masters Treasure, Silhouette Mirage is a true gem of classic gaming. In the world of this game, each enemy has one of two "aspects," Silhouette and Mirage. Shyna, the main character, has both aspects, one on each side of her body. The player must shoot Silhouette enemies with Mirage bullets, and vice versa. Since the easiest way to change Shyna's aspect is to change directions, positioning is key. You can grab and throw your enemies so you have them on the proper side of the screen, reflect their shots back at them, and even swap which aspect appears on which side of Shyna's body. If it sounds complicated, that's because it is. Silhouette Mirage is a deep, complicated side-scrolling shooter that will challenge the most skilled players and charm them with its strange story and colorful visuals. If you're a shooter fan, you simply must seek this one out.



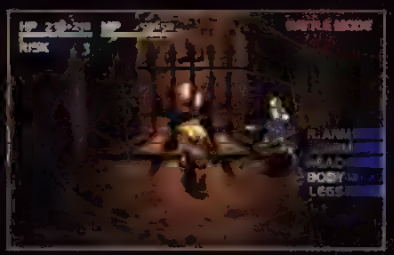


PSONE

VAGRANT STORY

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE SOFT > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE SOFT > **RELEASE** 2000

Before he became involved in Final Fantasy Tactics or the upcoming Final Fantasy XII, Square Enix's Yasumi Matsuno created this much-loved (and somewhat obscure) adventure. As Riskbreaker Ashley Riot, the player navigates the twisting tunnels underneath the city of Lea Monde, taking out bad guys with a unique combat system. The most engaging aspect is the chain attacks, which allow Ashley to increase his damage, as well as trigger other special effects. The game is full of other clever elements as well, like box puzzles that are actually fun, along with the ability to target several points on an enemy's body. Add to that the wide variety of weapons and their customization, and you have an addictive mixture of action and RPG sensibilities that is a joy to play, even by today's standards. As with any PSone-era title, the graphics definitely show their age, but because of the game's comic book-inspired visuals, it manages to retain a look that feels more stylized than outdated. It's games like Vagrant Story that prove Square Enix is the master of all corners of the RPG genre, not just a Final Fantasy factory.



SNES

SUPER STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** JVC > **DEVELOPER** SCULPTURED SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** 1993

Some things are best left in your memory. When it first released, many can recall this second entry in the popular Super Star Wars saga as a truly great 2D action game. Returning to it now, it's only halfway great. Certainly, seeing Luke and Han flip and shoot about the familiar locales of Hoth and Cloud City is still fun, and the digitized versions of classic melodies can still amuse. What you might have forgotten with time is the massive and ever-present slowdown that clogs up the gameplay, or the frustrating collision and enemy respawn problems. Lengthy spaces between checkpoints add to an already hefty difficulty, making this a challenge purely for old school fanatics. Even with the problems, a ray of brilliance shines through in the way each level manages to deliver basically non-stop action at a hectic and fun pace. It's still good, but probably not as great as you recall.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Silhouette Mirage (GI #82 02/00), Vagrant Story (GI #85 05/00)

GAMEOVER

Look Out Behind You!

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Rare's Viva Piñata project is trying to pry open the all-ages market on the Xbox 360, and if it's successful, we could see a lot more adorable and cuddly faces next to Sam Fisher and Master Chief on the shelves. After all, if brightly-colored hollow donkeys can start a craze, anything is possible. Answer the following questions to discover what other everyday garbage could potentially be turned into a collectible next-gen cash cow.

1 In Looking Glass Studios' System Shock, what is the acronym for your sentient, malevolent supercomputer nemesis?

A. SHODAN
B. TROJAN
C. RODAN
D. NIDAN

2 In Enter the Matrix, which of these characters is not available in multiplayer?

A. Agent Smith
B. A humanoid police cruiser
C. The White Rabbit
D. They're all playable. Those crazy Wachowskis!

3 This is a screen from what non-Xbox 360 game by Full Auto developer Pseudo Interactive?

A. Rogue Trip: Vacation 2012
B. Whacked!
C. Twisted Metal
D. Cel Damage

4 Word Association: Throne of Bhaal is to Baldur's Gate II as _____ is to Neverwinter Nights.

A. Shadows of Undrentide
B. Pools of Radiance
C. Shadows of Amn
D. Undershadows of Hordentide

5 Which of the following titles does not feature gameplay that revolves around the idea that dragons flying around blasting stuff is awesome?

A. Drakengard
B. Panzer Dragoon ORTA
C. Dragonsphere
D. Dragon Saber

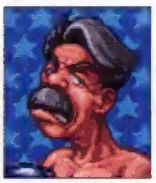
6 In Final Fantasy III for the SNES, which Esper was the only one that could teach you the spell Merton?

A. Odin
B. Crusader
C. Ragnarok
D. Bahamut

7 Which one of the following names does NOT belong to a fighter in the quirky and bizarre Guilty Gear series?

A. Faust
B. Sol-Badguy
C. Chipp Zanuff
D. HARMONY

8 Everyone remembers Glass Joe, but what no-hit-wonder serves as your punching bag/first opponent in Super Punch Out?



A. Porcelain Joe
B. Gabby Jay
C. Milquetoast Johnny
D. Jabs G. Eezer

9 What is the only level of Super Mario Brothers 3 where you can find the rare Kuribo's shoe item?

A. 5-1
B. 5-2
C. 5-3
D. 5-4

10 Before it came to be known as Fable, Lionhead Studio's heroic RPG was called...

A. Project Ego
B. Dolphin
C. I-8
D. Black Belt

BREAKDOWN

89% of Game Informer editors are part of a collective hive mind. Adam just has hives.

60% of online 360 owners have downloaded at least one game demo from Xbox Live Arcade, according to Microsoft.

2,000,000 units made up Final Fantasy XII's initial shipment in Japan.

0% of medieval-themed movies should feature Burt Reynolds as a king. Apparently Uwe Boll missed that memo.

94% of sharks could be taught to read if given proper instruction, according to a figure we just made up.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

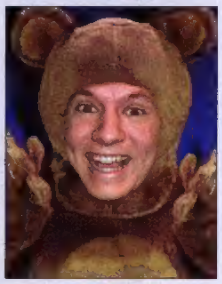
0-1
Viva Cinderblock

2-3
Viva *Broken Arrow*

4-5
Viva 20 lbs. of Softener Salt

6-7
Viva Throw Pillow

8-9
Viva Babies



10
Viva Miller

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.

Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. A 2. C 3. D 4. A 5. C 6. B 7. D 8. B 9. C 10. A

© 2006 Wm. Wrigley Jr. Co.

GET FRESH BREATH. GET BIG RED.

©CAPCOM CO., LTD. 2005 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. RESIDENT EVIL, CAPCOM and the CAPCOM LOGO are registered trademarks of CAPCOM CO., LTD. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks are owned by their respective owners.

Made with love by

Our goal is to preserve classic video game magazines so that they are not lost permanently.

People interested in helping out in any capacity, please visit us at retromags.com.

No profit is made from these scans, nor do we offer anything available from the publishers themselves.

If you come across anyone selling releases from this site, please do not support them and do let us know.

Thank you!