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JULY 2006

Aliens turned Tommy's world upside down...

PREY™

"Prey looks like one of the best first-person shooters of the year in both graphics and gameplay." – IGN

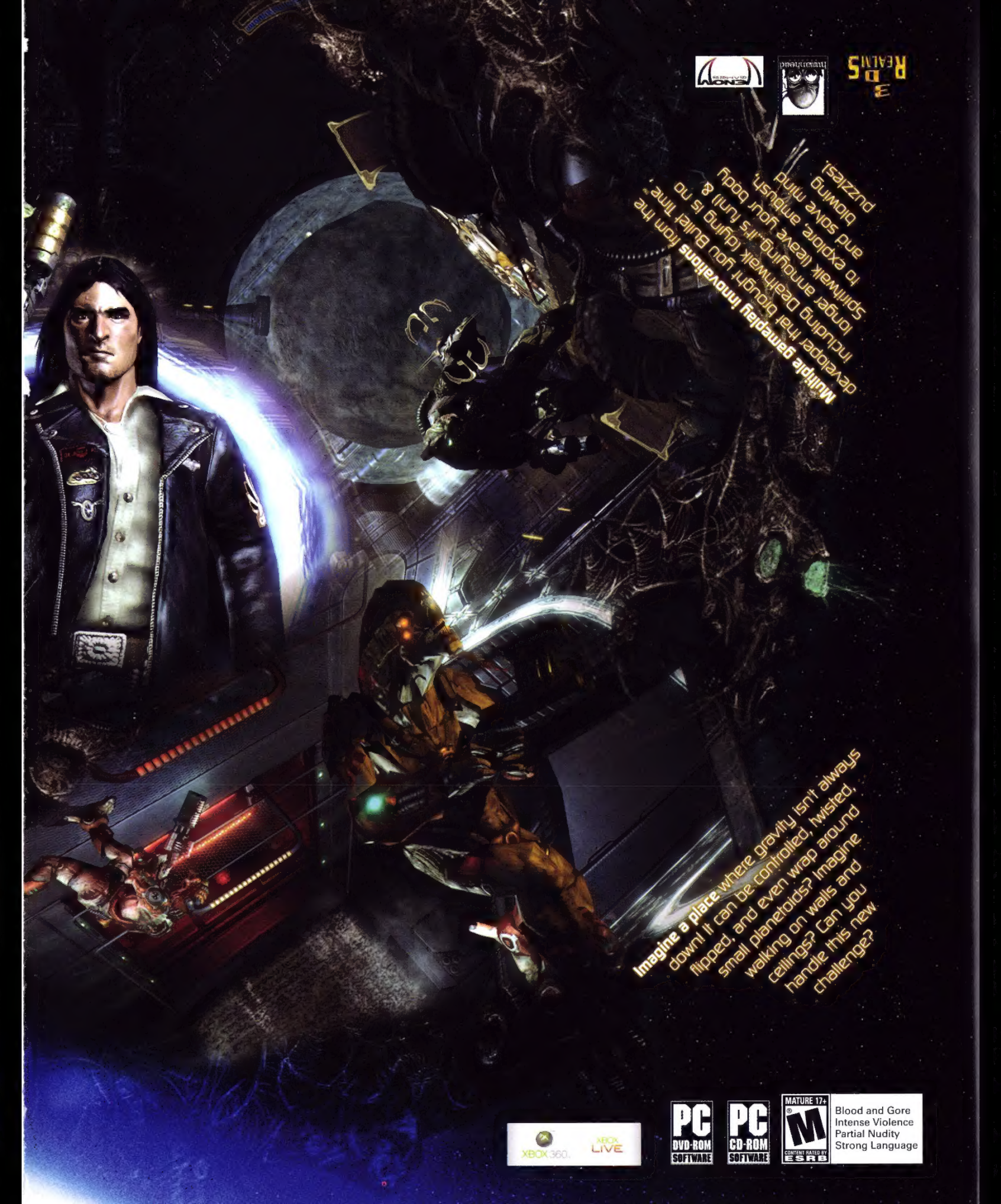"Absolutely incredible to look at, packed with scintillating effects." – Play

"Doom 3™ hiked the bar. Prey may transform the bar altogether." – 1UP

"Prey is built around a carefully crafted, cinema-worthy storyline." – Official Xbox Magazine

"An alien-abduction epic, Prey casts the player as Tommy, a reluctant Native American hero trying to save himself and his girlfriend from a gigantic organic spacecraft--a sentient Dyson sphere powered by the artificial sun inside its shell--that is strip-mining the Earth for human food." – Edge

"The environments have a fleshy, biomechanical, organic style that hints at a variety of filmic influences...The flesh-and-bone body of the alien ship is merged with a variety of stolen alien technologies that mess with gravity, direction, and relativity." – x360

"...Possibly the dawn of a spiritual awakening for the shooter genre." – PC Gamer

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The "Man, E3 Was Awesome" Issue

features

E3 2006 REPORT

It's the biggest annual event in gaming, and we of course bring you all the news and analysis you need. Full breakdowns of all three console manufacturers, explanations of all the crazy claims made at the show, and more are all part of our massive E3 coverage.
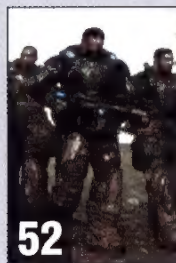
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THE E3 HOT 50

Faced with an overload of fantastic software at this year's expo, Game Informer picks the 50 titles that every gamer absolutely must know about – and gives you the scoop on every single one of them. From Gears of War to Alone in the Dark, we've got what you need.

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Mega-publisher Electronic Arts is busting out of the racing mold with this current- and next-gen racer. Not content with merely reinventing the single-player career paradigm, the company is introducing video games to a whole new style of automotive competition. Join us for this world-exclusive first look on page 42.

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THE CITY NEEDS A SAVIOR

STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

SHOCK AND AWE

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I'm sure I wasn't the only one that was floored by Sony's announcement of a $600 price point for the PlayStation 3. While it's a lot of cash, I don't think the cost is unreasonable. The PlayStation 3 has everything but the kitchen sink inside it. That said, the price point is going to be a nightmare for Sony's PR and marketing machines to overcome, especially when you consider that many of the third party games, like Grand Theft Auto, will be available on the Xbox 360 and will likely look the same to most consumers.

Sony will sell each and every PS3 it puts in the pipeline this year, even at this outrageous price point. However, it does leave the door open for the other two contenders, and I think it's highly likely that both will capitalize on Sony's overzealous approach.

What this does do however, is put the console war on hold. Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony will quite well over the next two years. The real battle begins when these console manufacturers try to reach outside of the hardcore gamer crowd. Sony will have to aggressively lower its price point, Nintendo will need to keep third-parties supporting its system, and Microsoft will just have to keep doing what it's doing.

I do feel that Sony's only hope to reach its previous dominance of the market lies in delivering entertainment that simply isn't possible on the other two systems, and that means a monster 50 gigabyte game that pushes graphics and gameplay to never-before-seen heights. But even then, I wonder if that is enough.

Industry insiders are putting the market share at 40 percent each for Microsoft and Sony, with the remaining 20 percent for Nintendo.

Personally, I think the Wii will do even better than that. Its unique gameplay opportunities and sub-250 dollar price point will make it an easy choice for gamers as a second system, if not their first.

Regardless, Sony's domination of the video game market is likely over unless it pulls a rabbit out of its hat. That said, the PlayStation 3 is going to be awesome and I know I'll be there day one. Of course, I'll have all three. The real question is: How will consumers react and what will be their choice? Anything can happen, and probably will.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

Andy >> *andy@gameinformer.com*
Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** The Heroine's Hair In Heavenly Sword, Nintendo's Screw-You-We-Will-Do-What-We-Want Attitude **Dislikes:** Sony's Press Conference (It Was Perhaps The Worst I Had Ever Seen), The Wii Name (I So Wish It Was Still The Revolution) **Current Favorite Games:** Gears Of War, Spore, Mass Effect, BioShock, World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, Assassin's Creed, Super Mario Galaxy

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Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*
Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Zelda On The Wii, The Endless Stream Of Wii Jokes, *Green Arrow*, *X-Men: The Last Stand* (90 Minutes Of Awesome Death) **Dislikes:** PlayStation 3's Price (Looks Like I'm Eating Grass Sandwiches And Dirt Pies From Now Until November 17), Straining A Muscle While Playing Baseball In Wii Sports, The PlayStation 3 Controller Not Having Rumble **Current Favorite Games:** Gears Of War, Super Mario Galaxy, Final Fantasy (All 12 Of Them), Mass Effect, The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess

Matt >> *matt@gameinformer.com*
Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** All The Great Games In Development, *Mission Impossible III*, Making The Most Delicious Enchiladas **Dislikes:** The Fact That A Lot Of Great Games Aren't Out Until 2007, Fox 9 News Scaremongering ("Downtown Is A Death Wish!"), Ramsey County Judges Putting Rock On Lockdown **Current Favorite Games:** Gears Of War, New Super Mario Bros., Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter, BioShock, Just Cause

Kato >> *kato@gameinformer.com*
Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Sid 'n Susie – *Under The Covers Vol. 1*, *X-Men: The Last Stand*, Toyota Coming Into NASCAR, Roscoe's House Of Chicken & Waffles **Dislikes:** Poker On Sports Channels (No, Poker Is Not A Sport), The Retirement Of Little Big Man Doug Flutie, The End Of *The West Wing* **Current Favorite Games:** Rainbow Six Vegas, Heavenly Sword, Alone In The Dark, Supreme Commander, Mass Effect, BioShock, Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway, Loco Roco, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, Brooktown High: Senior Year

Lisa >> *lisa@gameinformer.com*
Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Survival Horror, Adventure, RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing **Interests:** Next-Gen Excitement, Bike Commuting, *Lost* Season Finale…And Web Game…And Potential Game Ideas, Perplex City **Dislikes:** Not Having Enough Room To List All Of The Games I'm Pumped For, Freakin' *X-Men: The Last Stand* – Total Bummer **Current Favorite Games:** Gears Of War, Mass Effect, New Super Mario Bros., Heavy Rain, Final Fantasy Versus XIII, Assassin's Creed, World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, Cooking Mama, Spore, Halo 3, Valkyrie Profile (Both Parts), Heavenly Sword

Jeremy >> *jeremy@gameinformer.com*
Handle: Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Platform, Fighting, Strategy/RPGs **Interests:** Creative Labs Zen Vision: M, The Glut Of Gaming Awesomeness On The Way, Giant Enemy Crabs, Camping, *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang*, Revisiting My Metalhead Roots, *52* **Dislikes:** Wrathful Garbagemen, The Putrid Purple-Grey Color Of L.A.'s Sky, Getting Stuck In Pandemic's Elevator **Current Favorite Games:** Rise Of Nations: Rise Of Legends, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Gears Of War, Spore, Mass Effect, The Club, Alone In The Dark, Supreme Commander, And A Ton More

Adam >> *adam@gameinformer.com*
Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Mocking The Alliance, Seeing More Awesome Software Than I Thought Existed At E3, Moving To A Sweeter Residence, **Dislikes:** How Flying Makes Me All Stupid For A Day, Paladins Who Know How To Play Their Class (Both Of Them), People Having Awesomer MP3 Players Than I Do, *X-Men: The Last Stand* **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Castlevania: Portrait Of Ruin, Enemy Territories: Quake Wars, BioShock, Supreme Commander, Company Of Heroes

Joe >> *joe@gameinformer.com*
Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** The Spread Of Misinformation ("Divine Retribution" Was A Headline, Not A Subtitle, Suckers!), *Knowing Me Knowing You With Alan Partridge*, Hiding Chicken In Vegetarian Salads **Dislikes:** George R. R. Martin (I Trusted You!), Brett "Hollywood's Toilet" Ratner, All The Pun-Hate In The Office, The Fact That It Isn't 2007 Right Now **Current Favorite Games:** Mass Effect, Spore, BioShock, Final Fantasy XIII, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, Final Fantasy Versus XIII, God Of War II, Assassin's Creed, Heavy Rain

Miller >> *miller@gameinformer.com*
Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Roscoe's Chicken, Roscoe's Waffles, Roscoe (Whoever You Are), My Own Personal Robot Friend (Finally!), The Games Of 2007 **Dislikes:** My Dog's Deep Mistrust Of My Own Personal Robot Friend, Fundamental Flaws In What Could Have Been A Great X-Men Movie, Waiting For Fall TV To Start **Current Favorite Games:** New Super Mario Bros., The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Mass Effect, Star Trek: Legacy, Final Fantasy XIII, Heavenly Sword, Assassin's Creed, Super Mario Galaxy

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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.

1 Clint Eastwood was on hand for the debut of the Dirty Harry game, and his very presence made us feel like sissies **2** Joe and Jeremy celebrate former GI Online staffer Chris Cook's birthday with buddies from Sega, Koei, and IDG Entertainment outside the Hooters on Hollywood Boulevard. Chris gets classier all the time! **3** Steven Spielberg stopped by the Nintendo booth to check out the Wii and shake hands with Miyamoto, creating a vortex of geek fandom that nearly consumed the entire L.A. Convention Center **4** The GI posse and Vivendi Games' Eric Reynolds visited the famous Roscoe's House of Chicken and Waffles, and witnessed the horror of what a hungry Miller can do to a chicken **5** Matt and *Ameican Idol* castoff Ace Young plan their upcoming world tour **6** Kazutoyo Machiro, Akihiko Yoshida, Daisulee Watanabe, and Akitoshi Kawazu from Square Enix's Final Fantasy XII team couldn't be more thrilled to pose for the GI Spy camera **7** Gaming legend and cell phone enthusiast John Carmack chills with his boy Kato **B** Jennifer Lam reacts to boyfriend Charlie Sinhaseni's proposal in last month's GI Spy. She said yes, by the way. Congratulations!

GI: GAME INSPIRER

I just wanted to thank you so much for the "Stay in School" article that appeared in issue 157. I am currently at a point in my life where I am trying to decide on a career path and still have no idea what my options are. I've often thought about going into the gaming industry, and reading your article made it sound like it could actually be attainable. I just wish that it had been longer and more in-depth.
Amanda Holt
St. Paul, MN

Your "Stay in School" article pumped me up and inspired me to work harder in art class. I am a 19-year old student, and my degree will be a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Art. I just have to ask: Is what I am studying a good way to pursue a career in the video game industry?
Leon Coachman
via email

■ **We're happy that aspiring industry insiders found our article helpful. After it printed, we received piles of letters from readers with questions about how to pursue a career in gaming. Unfortunately, no matter how long or in-depth an article on industry jobs may be, there is one fact that is hard to escape: It's never a sure thing. Is a BFA in Studio Art a good start? It certainly can't hurt. You could even graduate from a respected school like UAT, but it doesn't guarantee you a place on a dev team. It isn't like Resident Evil, where you can just find the key that unlocks the door; you need to have the necessarily skills and (with a little luck) be in the right place at the right time. Other than that, the best thing you can do is keep yourself informed as to who is hiring out there by checking out developer websites and message boards (see the letter entitled "That's Unpossible" for advice on how to communicate on these message boards).**

ALPHA MAIL

I had my suspicions that you write your reviews based on alpha and beta versions of games, and you proved me correct when I received my April 2006 issue. My issue arrived on March 20, exactly nine days prior to the street release of Kingdom Hearts II. Now, I want to know how you can write a review (complete with English screenshots) that far in advance before the game has been officially released in the USA? How can your readers trust your reviews when they are solely based upon alpha and beta versions of a game?
Kirk Bramlett
Saint Charles, MO

■ You are right that alpha and beta versions often have bugs or incomplete features, Kirk, but they are mainly used for internal testing and QA by the developers. As such, these versions are not sent out to the media for review. In most cases, our deadlines make it impossible to play the plastic-wrapped retail copy of a title, so the game companies send us final code in advance. Because it takes time to manufacture hundreds of thousands of copies of a game, this final code is actually available earlier than you might think. Developers aren't usually pulling all-nighters the day before their game ships to stores. The versions of the games we receive are practically indistinguishable from the product you pick up from your local game store. If we believe that we have been given a build that is not in a reviewable form, we will always opt to wait until we have a version we can accurately score. It's as simple as that.
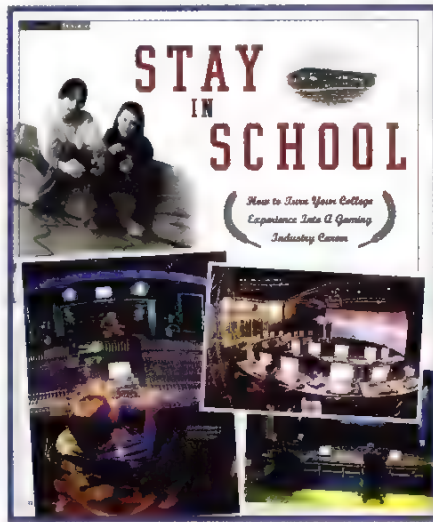
NERDTERIOR DESIGN

I've got a new room to decorate, and I've decided to do it in geek style. I've already planned to have Triforces pressed into the plaster and sponged gold, I have Tetris shelving ordered, and I am sewing a SNES controller-style blanket. You often feature some really awesome furniture in your Gear section. Sources? Sites? Suggestions? Anything would be greatly appreciated!
Kara Joshink
via hotmail.com

■ **We're happy to do anything we can to make the world a dorkier place. You can find a wide array of generally nerdy furniture and accessories at Think Geek (www.thinkgeek.com), and more specific video game-related oddities can be found at import sites like National Console Support (www.ncsx.com) and Lik-Sang (www.lik-sang.com). For the more discerning nerd lifestyle, Cool Hunting (www.coolhunting.com) is a great resource for stylish design. None of these sites specialize solely in the decorative arts, but you'll undoubtedly find something that catches your eye. However, even with so much at our fingertips, we're still no closer to obtaining the Holy Grail of Geekery – a 12-foot tall bronze statue of the girl from *Weird Science*. Get on it, Internet!**

THAT'S UNPOSSIBLE

I have been currently looking over certain online MMO forums, and I must say that they have horrid grammar. I find it appalling trying to decipher the language in the posts. Why can't they type out a whole word? I have seen many intelligent beings assaulted by this method of typing, and it is decimating the minds of today's youth. Is there anything we can do to stop it from spreading?
Maaku Iano
via comcast.net

■ **Unfortunately, you are powerless to slow the tireless march of Internet-speak. One person cannot make a difference. Therefore, your only hope is to educate yourself on some of the more common phrases and abbreviations. We've provided a short list of terms you can use to conveniently translate forum posts and make those trips online more understandable:**

ftw: Feeds the whales (like chum or plankton – describes something useless)

wtf: Wonderful tact, friend! (a compliment)

qft: Quit fire trucking! ("fire trucking" is when someone attempts to extinguish a "flame war")

iawtp: I am wetting these pants (usually typed by the very young or very old)

imho: In my head only (refers to the opinions of a crazy person who hears imaginary voices. Disregard)

Think Geek carries plush 20-sided dice

■ The Hand Grenade Oil Lamp from Piet Houtenbos

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

8 GAME INFORMER

YA WIILY

Wii?! I know there's much more to a console than it's name, but come on...Wii? That is absolutely, positively, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the dumbest name any inanimate object has ever been assigned. I love Nintendo, but that name just sounds like the console is for a five-year-old kid. I thought Nintendo might have lost it when they unveiled the controller, but I didn't count them out. But Wii? Is the double-i supposed to indicate two people playing together? Man, get that weak s— out of here.

E.M. Wade
via e-mail

■ **First and foremost, "Bawlz" is the dumbest name ever given to a consumer product, followed closely by "Gizmondo." Regardless, millions of gamers reacted just like this when Nintendo announced the new branding for the Revolution. The strange thing is this: No matter how awful Wii may sound right now, people have already started to use it. Sure, it may be accompanied by sarcastic jazz-hands or eye-rolling, but over time that will die off and it will just be the Wii you know and love. The fact that you will eventually learn to tolerate the name still doesn't make it a good choice, though. Especially since gamers at large have never been known for exercising restraint when it comes to jokes about genitals and urine. We sure hope Nintendo has a thick skin.**

GROPING FOR ANSWERS

I'm a fan of wrestling games, and I've always liked your reviews and scores for them (you saved me from wasting $50 on Wrestlemania 21). But when it comes to captioning the pictures for these games, you sound like total wrestling haters! Wrestling is nothing to make fun of – you can't give it a glowing preview, and then on the next page insinuate that Rey Mysterio and John Cena are a couple.

Ruben Nunez
via snail mail

■ **Look, it isn't our captions' fault. A picture is worth a thousand words, and when two half-naked dudes are half-nakedly grappling and playing "slap and tickle," there isn't much to insinuate. The images speak for themselves.**

JULY WINNER:
JENNY-JIN(A HEFCZYC

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.

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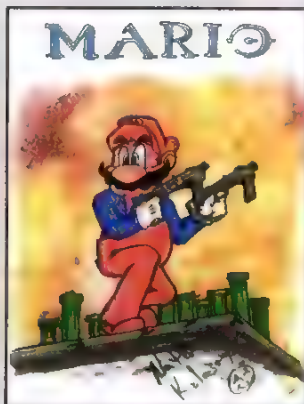
NATHANIEL KOLASA
"Mario" and "dual-wielding" should never be in the same sentence

IAN KNIGHT
"If you call this a 'horse' one more time, you'll be smoking sticky shockers."

JOSE RAMIREZ
You want more Ryu. Instead, you get more volleyball. That is the way of the world

BERYL ALLEE
Shadow the Hedgehog: bad game, worse garnish

JOSHUA GEIER
"I'm too weak to beat him alone. If only Cait Sith were here!"

SUPERMAN RETURNS

new world mortar

Before EA concept art director Phil Straub and his team could construct Metropolis in the game environment of *Superman Returns*, they needed a map. Building on 2D maps supplied by DC Comics, EA created a detailed 3D representation of the city – first on paper, then in clay, then out of papier-mâché and wood and finally out of bits, pixels and polygons. Eighty square virtual miles of playable space.

And playable means seriously playable: billboards, fire hydrants, cars and tractor-trailers, lamp posts – you can use nearly every element in the environment as a shield, a weapon – or, in *Metallo*'s case, a toothpick.

lurking villains
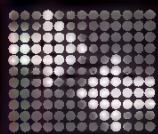
E3 2006·LA

NINTENDO PROMISES CHANGE IN Wii COMING OUT PARTY
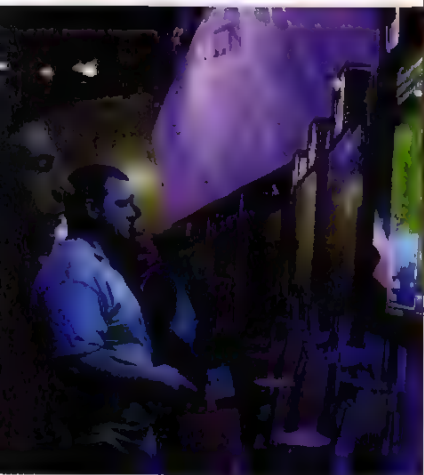
After having digested the announcement that the console formerly known as the Revolution is now called "Wii," we were curious as to what other tricks Nintendo had up its sleeve at its annual E3 press conference. You couldn't ask for a more vivid illustration of the vast differences between the strategies and philosophies of Microsoft and Nintendo than the way the companies began their E3 2006 press conferences. While Microsoft served up a bloody slice of the violent shooter Gears of War, Nintendo introduced their annual event with legendary Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto in a tuxedo, conducting a virtual orchestra with a Wii remote controller. This was but one indication that, as always, Nintendo was set to balance the sublime and the ridiculous in an E3 that, despite

some silly moments, turned out to be a grand coming out party for the company's oddly named new home console.

After Miyamoto left the stage, Nintendo's master of ceremonies, Reggie Fils-Aime, took control with his trademark style of high-concept sloganeering. In typical fashion, Fils-Aime dismissed Nintendo's competitors as stuck in the past.

"If all you want is next-generation, you're in the wrong place," he stated. "Because what you'll see from Nintendo is not just next. Instead, it's what's absolutely new. What we're unveiling is the next leap in gaming."

Fils-Aime went on to detail the way in which Wii will challenge the conventional thinking about video games, comparing it to the company's Super Mario 64, which revolutionized gaming with true 3D graphics and the introduction of the analog

stick. In Nintendo's view, the industry must expand beyond its current way of making games in order to truly reach to the mass market, and it is gambling that the Wii's motion sensitive controller is the way to do that.

Expounding on this theme of inclusiveness, Fils-Aime observed, "Let me start with a couple of questions for you. Do you know anyone who's never watched television? Never watched a movie? Never read a book? Of course not. So let me ask you one more question. Do you know someone, even in your own family, who's never played a video game? I bet you do. How could this be? If we want to consider ourselves a true mass media, if we want to grow as an industry, this has to change. Today, change begins here, with a new console, just as it already has with a new handheld."

■ Madden NFL 07

MADDEN NFL 07

How to kick:

Swing the remote controller upward to generate kick power.

Keep the remote controller level to minimize slice.

■ Madden NFL 07

Although Fils-Aime said the company would not release any pricing information or a specific release date for Wii [It was later confirmed that Wii would be priced at under $250], he did tackle the somewhat touchy subject of the system's name, which drew massive criticism from fans when it was announced in the weeks leading up to the show

Taking a humorous approach, Fils-Aime announced, "Next [subject] – the name. We want to thank everyone that wrote good things about it the day you heard it…both of you. Seriously, the response didn't surprise us at all. At first, every distinctive name sounds strange. Did you love Lexus the first time you heard it? How about IKEA? Google?"

Point taken, but that didn't stop us from spending the rest of the show restraining ourselves from blurting out. "That's what

■ Pokémon Mystery Dungeon DS

she said!" when we heard comments like "once you get the Wii in your hands, it's unlike anything you've ever done before."

From there, the focus switched to upcoming Wii software, starting with one of the company's most bankable franchises – The Legend of Zelda. Although the GameCube version of the game has been shown many times, Nintendo's Bill Trinen took the stage to demonstrate the version releasing for Wii, which has been retooled to feature an all-new control scheme. In addition to demonstrating how Zelda would work on Wii, as well as revealing a promising new fishing minigame, Trinen revealed that the controller's nunchuck attachment also features motion sensing technology, and can be used to perform Link's spin attack. That was not the only surprise. Trinen also let the audience know that each Wii remote is outfitted with a small speaker,

which will provide depth of sound by handling audio elements like the sound of your bow being pulled back.

While the Wii version doesn't appear to look dramatically different from the GameCube version, it was playable on the show floor and the new control mechanics seem to be working very well. Most importantly, Fils-Aime announced that it would be available on launch day, marking the first time that the Zelda franchise would appear on day one of a Nintendo console. While cynics might point out that this is more due to the endless delays that plagued the GC version (which will release concurrently) than Nintendo's planning, it's definitely the company's strongest launch title since Super Mario 64.

Following Zelda was Nintendo's other superstar: Mario. The showing of the new Super Mario Galaxy had a bit less impact then we expected, perhaps because Nintendo had already tipped its hand by showing it in a brief video montage earlier in the press conference. The game itself, which features an all-new Wii control scheme and levels comprised of spherical planets, was playable at the show, and appears to be every bit as fun and inventive as we expect a new Mario title to be. Still, one wonders if Nintendo didn't miss

an opportunity to make a bit more of a splash with this huge announcement.

While the old standbys generated the most talk, Fils-Aime also stressed Nintendo's commitment to creating new franchises. Three new properties in development were shown, including the graphically unimpressive but very polished racing game ExciteTruck, a hack n' slash title called Project H.A.M.M.E.R., and a mysterious trailer for Disaster: Day of Crisis, which revolves around a terrorist group in the aftermath of a tidal wave striking U.S. soil.

Fils-Aime also touted Nintendo's third-party support, which at this point, appears to be a somewhat mixed bag. Promisingly, it does have some high profile exclusives from some of gaming's biggest companies, like EA's new version of Madden, Ubisoft's Red Steel and Rayman 4, Sega's Sonic Wildfire, and a new Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles from Square Enix. Red Steel, which will be a launch title, looks like a solid pickup for Nintendo, and will be a much-needed adult-oriented game early in the Wii's lifespan. It's a shame that the press conference demonstration was marred by technical difficulties, which resulted in the majority of the Red Steel presentation not being shown on the big screen. Right now, it appears that
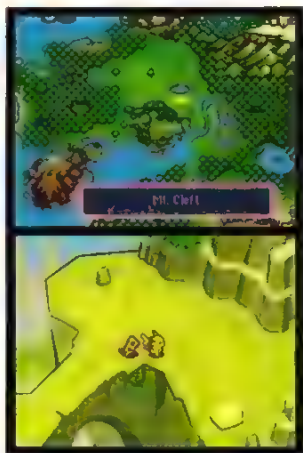
■ ExciteTruck shows how the Wii remote can be adopted to the racing genre

the Wii's third-party support could be viewed as either better or worse than the GameCube's. On one hand, the technological gap between Wii and the other systems is going to mean that fans will miss out on many high-profile games that would have been ported over to GameCube in the last generation. On the plus side, it appears that publishers are taking Wii seriously, and the games that are being developed for the system seem to be making a real effort to utilize the novel controller in unique ways.

Moving on to the company's handheld business, Nintendo senior vice president of marketing and corporate communications George Harrison touted the worldwide success of the Nintendo DS. Stating that "a little clarity is in order" with regards to the battle between PSP and DS, he cited actual sell-through numbers for DS at 16 million worldwide, while claiming that PSP's actual sales were "millions less." He also unveiled a lineup of DS games for '06 that looked very strong, including such franchises as Pokémon, Yoshi's Island, Star Fox, Diddy Kong Racing, Tony Hawk, Mario vs. Donkey Kong, and a 3D remake of the formerly Japan-only Final Fantasy III. He also unveiled a new initiative called Touch Generations, a line of games that seeks to reach out to older and non-gamers with

titles like Sudoku Gridmaster and the popular Brain Age series.

After some of the big announcements, the press conference ended a bit anticlimatically, with president Satoru Iwata taking the stage to (once again) stress Nintendo's desire to reach out to non-gamers and lapsed gamers. He also explained some of the details regarding the company's unique plans for Wii's online network [see interview on page 19]. Finally Iwata joined in, along with Miyamoto, Reggie, and an online contest winner for a game of Wii Sports tennis, which won some laughs from the crowd when character models that closely resembled Nintendo's leaders came on the screen

Rounding out the presentation was Fils-Aime, who restated Nintendo's position that the game industry must change its ways. "The future of our industry is inclusion, not exclusion...we know that the future is right here. Wii and the DS represent the same thing: risk. Risk allows for progress. We're a company that doesn't run from risk, we run to it. Change is good." After thanking the crowd, he ended the program with Nintendo's new slogan "Playing is believing" and urged the crowd to check out the 27 playable Wii games that would be on the show floor.

Mere minutes into the first day of E3, it was apparent that thousands were taking him up on his invitation. The Nintendo booth was literally mobbed with gamers eager to get their hands on Wii, with waits to get into the gameplay area running up to six hours. Each day at show open, one could observe people literally sprinting to the northwest corner of the hall, and some showgoers even reported being trampled by the oncoming throng.

The good news was that those patient enough to endure the waits (or smarmy journalists like us who get PR people to bump them to the front of the line) were rewarded with a system and games that – despite its esoteric design – appears to be extremely user-friendly and fun to play. Although some games, like Wii Sports or a drumming game being demonstrated, were little more than diversions, Super Mario Galaxy and Zelda seem to indicate that the

■ Mario Vs. DK: March of the Minis

Wii controller can handle deep, complex gameplay while providing an invigorating break from the norm. Third-party titles like Madden, Red Steel, and Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam also made solid showings, although it will be interesting to see how many third parties are willing to put the time and investment in to making quality Wii titles in the future.

In the end, E3 2006 finds Nintendo where it always is: following its own path. While Sony and Microsoft are emphasizing high-end technology and epic gaming experiences, Nintendo is staking its future on the things that have made it successful in the past. This philosophy centers around innovative gameplay, its stable of legendary franchises, and the idea that games ought to be accessible to everyone in your family, not just the high school and college-aged crowd who will buy violent titles like Gears of War by the millions.

E3 SCORECARD

THE GI PERSPECTIVE:

A-

For a company that's been declared dead in the console wars numerous times over the past decade, Nintendo has an uncanny knack for pulling through with truly innovative titles and concepts at just the right time. While we might never truly embrace the name "Wii," the truth is that it most likely won't affect the system's sales come launch day. Although it's a bit annoying that Zelda has been delayed as long as it has, it will move units on day one, and Mario Galaxy should demonstrate the potential of the new controller in much the same way Mario 64 did with the analog stick. While Nintendo will likely never be number one in the console market again, it's a profitable company that's clearly built to be a player for the long haul. In addition, the success of the DS seems to indicate that there is an audience out there looking for something different. Of course, questions do remain, most notably third-party support and exactly how low Nintendo's price point will be, but all told Nintendo looks to be a very real factor in the next-gen race. Plus, if the more affordable Wii ends up being the second system of every PS3 or 360 owner, it's possible that it could make a run at the top spot in terms of installed base.

BIG CONTROLLER NEWS FOR Wii

O ne of the biggest surprises of the show for Nintendo was that there is, in fact, another controller for the system. While the focus for new games will certainly be on the system's innovative motion-sensing play, Nintendo has taken into account the fact that the Wii remote is not well suited for all of its back catalog titles, which are slated to be available on its Virtual Console online program. To that end, they unveiled a new, classic style controller, complete with two analog sticks, four shoulder buttons, and the familiar d-pad and face button configuration of the SNES controller. When asked about it, Reggie Fils-Aime stated that they would not be using it for new titles, with the possible exception of newly created 8- or 16-bit style games that would be released for the first time on the Virtual Console, à la Xbox Live Arcade.

There is also more to the standard Wii controller than previously known. Most importantly, the remote is not the only part of the controller that is motion sensitive. The nunchuck attachment also detects movement, and is already being used for things like opening doors in Ubisoft's Red Steel or performing Link's spin attack in Zelda. Also, the remote unit features a tiny speaker, which can be used to add a depth of sound to games. For example, when you pull the bow back in Zelda, you'll hear the strings creak in your ear via the controller's speaker. Nintendo's general manager of software developement Takashi Tezuka also commented that it would be used to alert players that it was their turn in four-player contests.

Finally, another controller for Wii might be the Nintendo DS. While Reggie Fils-Aime refused comment on any plans for connectivity between the systems, Tezuka seemed more certain that the Wii and DS will be linked wirelessly in the future.

"We definitely developed them to have that potential, so I believe it's just a matter of time," Tezuka stated. "We have some of the experience and knowledge, thanks to the GBA and GameCube connectivity, so we'd like to put that to use and do things later. And I think we will be able to."

A couple Nintendo employees enjoy a game of Wii Sports in the booth

One thing that Nintendo said at the conference was the idea that the Wii would always be on standby, and always be connected to the Internet. Could you elaborate on that?

As part of the Wii console, when you turn it off – it doesn't turn off completely. It will continue to consume a small amount of power and still be connected to the Internet. What that means is that, if you've gotten to a particular part in a game, we could push content out to you, so you get to battle a new boss. Maybe you get a new artifact; Maybe you get a new weapon. But that concept is core to encouraging both current gamers to play more, but is also a way of encouraging new gamers to get into the system.

So the idea would be that small bits of episodic content would be uploading into your system when you were asleep?

Correct, but that's just one example. We envision a range of uses for what we're calling "Wii Connect 24" as a way of encouraging continual use. We see the system as something that's going to be used by everyone in the household everyday. That's our focus on expanding the gaming universe.

You mentioned the whole family using it everyday. Will this include things like news updates or news headlines?

All of that is possible. And that's why as we sit down and share with you all of our Virtual Console plans, we'll be able to lay that out in a huge amount of detail. But it will be clearly focused on driving consumers to use the device everyday, everyone in the household.

Microsoft and Sony are really pushing microtransactions, in terms of buying a car in a game or a weapon. Is that something you see as viable?

All of that is possible with what it is we are trying to do. If our licensee partners want to go in that direction, it's certainly possible in our system.

So you would give third parties some freedom? Since you already have an online store for Virtual Console and credit card information, they could add cars to a racing game as a microtransactions and you would be okay with that?

Exactly.

INTERVIEW
REGGIE FILS-AIME
PRESIDENT AND COO OF SALES AND MARKETING, NINTENDO OF AMERICA

We see the system as something that's going to be used by everyone in the household everyday.

set up the expectation for doing something different than our competitors. In the final name for the product, we wanted the communication to be simple, inclusive, pronounceable in any language, and that's why Wii was chosen.

Was Revolution considered too hard to pronounce for the Asian market?

It's a long name. In certain parts of the world, it's not an easily pronounceable name. So, Wii is a fantastic name, and my belief is that, come the time of the launch, any concerns about the name will be long forgotten.

Obviously, one of the other surprise announcements at the show was Sony's controller, which is now using tilt sensing functionality similar to Wii.

It is not at all similar, let's be quite clear.

How is it not similar?

What our remote allows you to do is to play one-handed, which opens up a whole spectrum of games. Second, the range of motion is complete in all directions, because of the pointer capability we've embedded. It can sense if you're pointed away. My understanding of their technology is that it's fairly simple tilt technology, which is – quite frankly – a very small part of what we've embedded in our controller. So, the technologies are not at all similar. We've already had people play the one game on their show floor that uses that technology, and it's not a great experience. So, we have been working on our controller for a long time. The difference is night and day. When you play Madden, and you drop back and throw a pass, it's nothing like what can be done on any other system.

Do you have any concerns that their announcements might take away from Wii being perceived as unique in the marketplace?

My role at Nintendo of America is to drive our sales and profitability, so I take our competitors quite seriously. But the fact is that our lineup of games and the technology really is just not comparable to what our competitors are doing.

In terms of 360, one of the big pushes for them is what Bill Gates talked about in their Live Anywhere, connecting up PC, phones, and 360 into a multisystem platform. What's your opinion on that overall strategy?

I have to say that I was confused. When they say "gaming on the go," it's already available on the Nintendo DS as well as Game Boy Advance. We have a library of games that is incomparable. It's quite clear that Microsoft is on a corporate strategy to drive Windows and to try to own the center of the consumer's living room. We're a simple games company. We make great games that are supported with highly innovative hardware, and we believe we do it better than anybody in the world. The adoption rate of Nintendo DS, in our view, supports it, and the adoption rate of the Wii console will support that too.

Is Nintendo specifically planning microtransactions for your own products?

Again, for what we plan to do on Virtual Console – everything from what titles will be available at launch, how much is it going to cost, how does the Wii Connect 24 work in terms of what content we will push out – all those details will come at a later date.

Obviously, Sony announced a price point, and it's very high. What is your take on that in terms of their strategy?

They have announced a high price point that I've come to understand that many gamers gasped when they heard what that price point would be. That's their strategy. Frankly, they need to have that type of high pricing to offset some fairly significant corporate investments they've made into the system. I think it's not gone unnoticed that they've scaled back what's included, at least in their lowest priced alterna-

tive. That's Sony, they have their own masters to serve. We believe in making a system that is affordable to the masses. We believe in bringing real technology and real innovation to bear to the consumer, and that's our strategy.
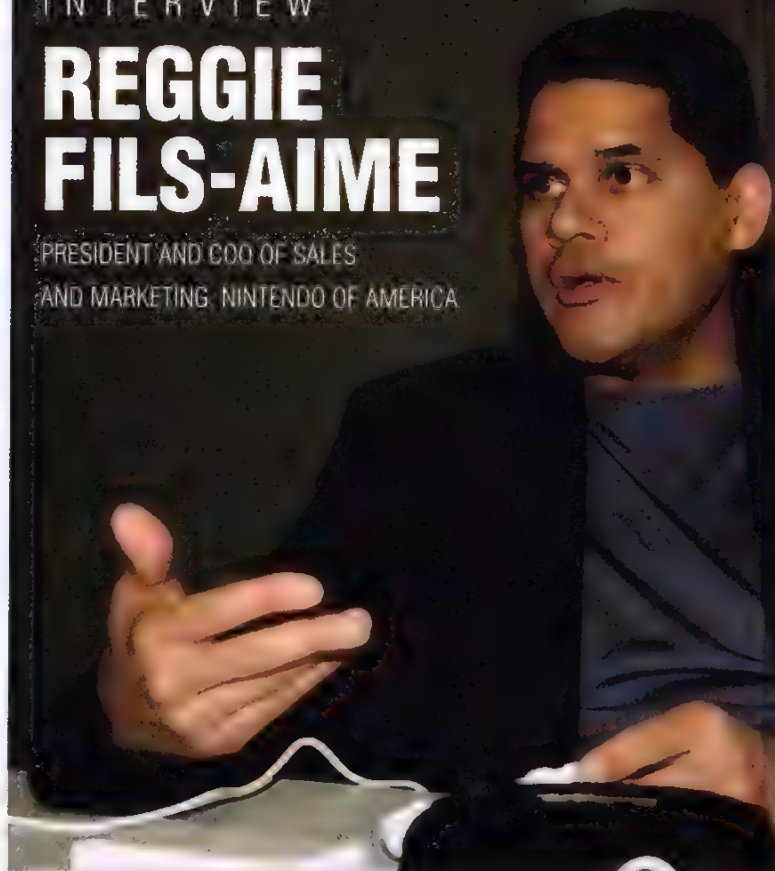
Are you certain Wii will have the lowest price point of the three systems?

We've been very clear in commenting that our system will provide more fun for less money than our competitors. I think your readers need to take that comment at full face value. We will be the most fun for the least money in the marketplace. [After the show, Nintendo confirmed that the Wii would retail for less than $250 USD. – Ed.]

Obviously, there's been some resistance to the name Wii, at least on the Internet. What was wrong with Revolution, and why did you go another way?

You know, Revolution, as a codename, is fantastic. It really

What would you consider a successful installed base for Wii a year into the lifespan in the U.S.?

Our focus is on a substantially higher base than we achieved with GameCube. We think that our strategy in terms of great core gamer games, expanded audience games should allow us to achieve that. Plus, with the stellar third-party support we're getting, really, right at launch, that's another major difference from what we did with GameCube.

MICROSOFT HAS IMPRESSIVE E3 SHOWING

Although it is now a veteran of one console generation, Microsoft has always struggled to hit the right notes during its E3 press conferences. Last year's presentation, despite the fact that it had the first next-gen system launching in a few months, was muddled and weighed down with far too much marketing fluff. Instead of touting the power of 360, the main message seemed to be that Xbox Live consisted of nothing more than 26-year-old, multi-ethnic fashion models breakdancing and practicing karate moves in their living rooms. This year, we're happy to report that Microsoft did E3 absolutely right, in what was beyond a doubt its best show to date.

Microsoft's press conference was just about everything gamers could hope for: expertly paced, full of solid information, laden with big announcements, and with an emphasis placed squarely on games. This focus on the strong lineup of second generation Xbox 360 products was apparent from the start of the presentation. It began not with a Microsoft spokesperson, but rather Epic Games' Cliff Bleszinksi, who briefly introduced himself and launched straight into a playable demo of E3's most impressive title: Gears of War.

After this bracing and bloody beginning, Microsoft's Peter Moore, who would be the emcee for the remainder of the proceedings, took the stage and welcomed the crowd to the conference, claiming, "I couldn't be more excited to be here, because we're delivering the next generation of games – right here, right now, with titles that are nothing short of spectacular."

Interestingly, both J Allard and Robbie Bach, two of the architects behind Microsoft's Xbox program who have played large roles in past conferences, were nowhere to be seen. In hindsight, it was a good move, as it allowed the personable Moore to use his trademark blend of humor and sly bravado to achieve a real rapport with the responsive crowd. Moore delivered a message that would resonate throughout the presentation: that games are now central to Microsoft's entire business strategy.

"I'm also excited because this is the first E3 since we've made a major organizational shift at Microsoft," said Moore. "For the first time ever, all of our gaming and entertainment resources – Xbox, Games for Windows, and handheld games – are under a single entertainment devices division. This move reflects a very important principle: that games are driving Microsoft's company-wide vision for entertainment. Our vision is one where you, your games, your friends, and the entertainment choices that define your lifestyle always take center stage."

He then went on to boast about the Xbox 360's breakneck success since its release in November 2005. Proclaiming it the "fastest start in console history," he pro-

jected that the 360 would hit the five million sold mark faster than the original Xbox, the first two Sony PlayStations, or the Apple iPod. In addition, he praised the platform's strong accessory and software sales, quoting 4.5 accessories and games for each 360 unit sold.
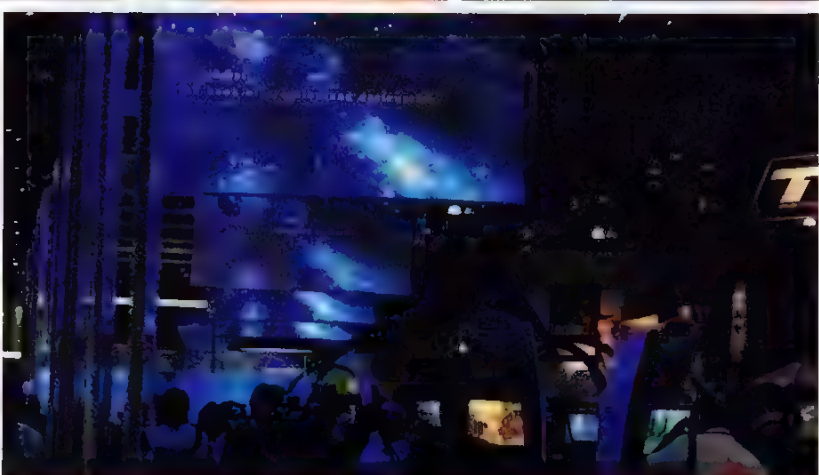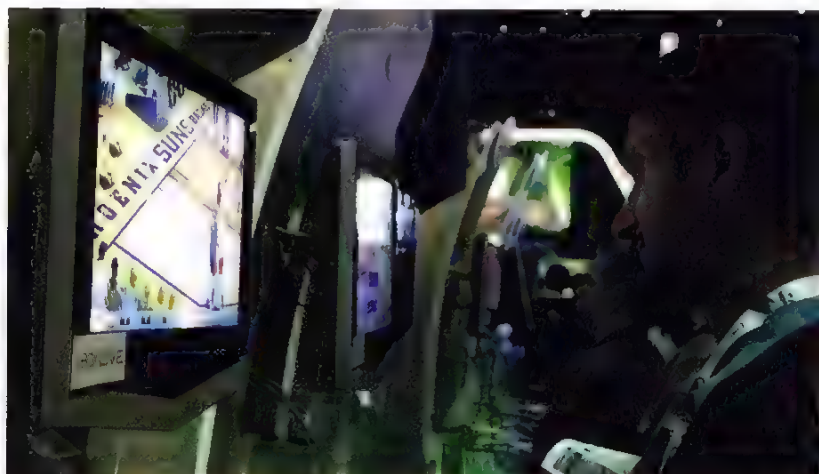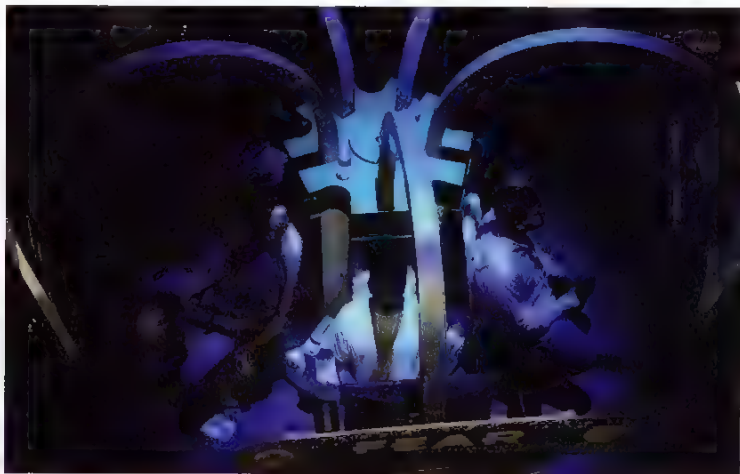
He also acknowledged some of the hardware shortages that had made 360s very hard to come by in the months following launch. He jokingly dismissed rumors that Microsoft has purposely held back units from retail to create a buying frenzy by saying, "Before we get any further, let's take a minute to dispel an urban myth that's been floating around out there. Not a single unit was hidden in Area 51 in the Nevada des-

ert in a wacky plan to create console shortages." He also pledged that the company had spent the last six months doing everything in its power to increase its production capabilities and keep retailers stocked.

He also credited much of the 360's success to Microsoft's popular online service, Xbox Live, which has so far enjoyed a whopping 57 percent subscription rate among 360 owners. Moore also promised that, if current trends hold, Xbox Live would eclipse six million users by next year's show.

Continuing, Moore praised the breakout popularity of Xbox Live Arcade, the pay-for-play casual game service that has, so far, exceeded most expectations. Building on this momentum, the company plans to

expand the scope of Xbox Live Arcade on a number of fronts, the most notable being a cavalcade of classic games from companies like Namco, Konami, Capcom, and Midway. The titles announced included such favorites as Contra, Frogger, Ms. Pac-Man, Sonic the Hedgehog, Defender, Street Fighter II, Time Pilot, and Galaga. "These are more than games, they are our shared heritage," observed Moore, "and on Xbox Live, they'll be updated in high definition." He also revealed that some titles will be updated with online multiplayer, Achievements, and leaderboards. Promisingly, especially for the burgeoning garage development scene, Microsoft is also reaching out to indie developers (over 100 in all) to create all new,

original content to be available for download on Xbox Live.

Other notable Live news included the announcement that the PSP hit Lumines would be coming to Arcade in the form of Lumines Live, which will feature licensed tracks by Warner Music Group artists such as Madonna. Later in the presentation, Moore promised that Live would evolve into a one-stop entertainment shop for movies, trailers, demos, and music, beginning right after the show with a Gears of War "making-of" documentary produced in conjunction with MTV and many playable game demos and trailers. After the dust cleared, in the week following the show over 1.5 million gamers had logged on to Live to

Gears of War

Fable 2

Forza Motorsport 2

Fable 2

Viva Piñata

Shadowrun
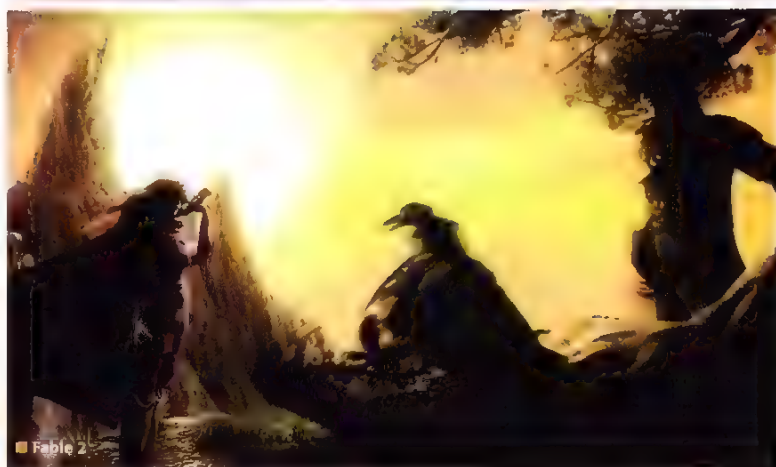
consume over 600 terabytes of demos and trailers for games like Gears of War, Halo 3, and Lost Planet.

The focus then switched back to upcoming Xbox 360 titles, of which there will be a total of 160 to choose from by this holiday season. After a quick nod to two powerful international sports franchises – EA's Madden NFL and Konami's Pro Evo Soccer – he took time to welcome "the newest addition to the Microsoft Game Studios family," acclaimed designer Peter Molyneux and Lionhead Studios. There's no doubt that Lionhead was a great pickup for Microsoft, and it only appeared stronger after Moore showed for the first time a gorgeous trailer for the previously unannounced Fable 2. Also unveiled was Forza Motorsport 2 (in the form of a rendered trailer). Forza was coupled with the announcement of a trio of new peripherals for the system, a wireless, force-feedback racing wheel, a wireless headset, and Xbox Live Vision, a camera that will allow you to put photos of yourself on your Gamercard and in some titles like Rainbow Six 3: Vegas. Later in the show, he pulled the curtain up on the long-awaited HD DVD attachment for 360. Unfortunately no price point was revealed, but Moore did promise it would be a "better bargain than anything else."

Moore did pause briefly to acknowledge the company's problems in Japan, the one territory in which Xbox still struggles mightily. "While in no way do we underestimate the challenges that this market presents us, it's with relevant content that is created by world-class Japanese developers for Japanese gamers that will allow us to ultimately break through," opined Moore. Unfortunately, that "relevant content" still seems to be limited to two titles by Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi's Mistwalker studio (Blue Dragon and Lost Odyssey) and yet another DOA title from Team Ninja (DOA Xtreme 2).

He also noted the need to reach beyond the Xbox's current audience of hardcore gamers into more kids-oriented territory. Microsoft hopes this failing will be at least partially helped by its new property Viva Piñata, which is being developed as an animated series and a game in conjunction with the children's TV powerhouse 4Kids Entertainment. Other younger-skewing titles include the sequel to LucasArt's successful LEGO Star Wars and a new Sonic the Hedgehog game.

Up to this point, the conference had been a smooth, solid presentation. Then, Moore dropped the biggest bomb of the show, cementing what would go on to be termed a tremendous E3 PR win for Microsoft by most observers.

"Speaking of powerful entertainment experiences, I've got an important announcement about one of the most powerful gaming experiences of all time," he teased. "I'm talking about a franchise that generates more excitement than almost anything else out there – not just in our industry, but in all of entertainment."

Doffing his coat, Moore revealed his famous Halo 2 tattoo ("I know some of you thought that was fake"), then joked, "I save the big guns for the big guns." The "big gun" in question was the very biggest of them all: his other arm displayed a tattoo bearing the logo of Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto IV, which is set to release on both PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 on the same day: October 16, 2007. As GTA is widely seen as one of the prime driving forces of PS2 sales over the past five years, this announcement represents a real coup for Microsoft and Xbox fans across the world, and was a direct blow to Sony. [For more, turn to GI News, page 33]

In spite of its massive 360 blitz, Microsoft has equally ambitious plans for the somewhat stagnant PC gaming market. In hopes of adding some much-needed marketing muscle to the PC scene, a new Games

for Windows branding campaign is being launched. This aims to revamp everything from the actual product packaging to new retail displays, which will be moving into most major chains. Microsoft will also follow the lead of such successful titles like Call of Duty 2 and Oblivion by releasing more of its products on both PC and 360 the same day. Two of these titles will be FASA's newly unveiled Shadowrun shooter and Remedy's much-anticipated Alan Wake (a new Microsoft Game Studios signing).

More importantly, Moore promised that Microsoft's new Vista operating system also places a huge focus on gaming. "Windows Vista is built to run games," claimed Moore. "It will be the single biggest launch in the history of Microsoft, and it will be a great day for gamers." Some of the game-centric features supported by Vista include easier installs and being able to boot up your games from the start menu. In addition, a new version of Direct X will make it even easier for PC developers to deliver groundbreaking visuals, a point driven home by an impressive live demonstration of Crytek's gorgeous shooter Crysis.

To underscore the point that Microsoft feels games are extremely crucial to its future, Moore introduced E3's biggest surprise guest. "[I'd like] to bring someone here who's not been to E3 before, and there's no better person to present the vision of where we're taking gaming next. Ladies and gentleman, the chairman and chief software architect of Microsoft, Mr. Bill Gates."

Gates took the stage to massive applause, and appeared affable and genuinely enthusiastic about Microsoft's success with Xbox. So impressed is the world's richest man with 360 sales so far that he guaranteed that Microsoft would have a 10 million unit head start before either one of its competitors shipped its first console.

He also revealed the company's ambitious plan to connect Vista, Xbox Live, and Windows Mobile under the umbrella of a new program called Live Anywhere. This technology will allow gamers to easily connect with friends no matter what they're doing at the time. In a real-time demonstration, Gates illustrated just how cool this idea is. Basically, you'll see a friends list just like in Xbox Live, except it will now have icons that show whether your friend is on Xbox, a PC, or mobile phone. From there, you can send game invites, messages, or even gifts across every platform. Because of a standard login, you'll also be able to do things like play adapted version of Xbox Live Arcade games on your phone or PC, or even tweak cars in Forza 2 or buy microtransactions for your 360 via your phone or PDA. If it works as planned (and is embedded in every version of Vista as planned), this could truly be the next revolution in online gaming. Still, it's fair to remember how badly Microsoft has failed to deliver on initiatives like Ultimate TV and Windows Media Center, so some skepticism is warranted. Following this impressive demonstration, Gates had one last trump card to play. Addressing Moore, Gates teased the audience, "Actually, Peter, as we walk offstage, I think we have something that would be fun to show these people. We've got a little in-game footage of one of the game's they'll probably recognize. So, let's take a look at that."

Unless you're completely clueless, we'd imagine you already know what's coming: a gorgeous teaser trailer for Halo 3. Although it showed no gameplay, and revealed little in terms of the game's plot, hardcore fans on the Internet were soon deconstructing every frame to extract hidden clues as to what Bungie has in store for us in the next iteration of its legendary shooter. It was a crowd-pleasing and exciting end to a conference that felt like a triumph for Microsoft.

Rain

Halo 3

Shadowrun

Alan Wake

Ninety-Nine Nights

Too Human
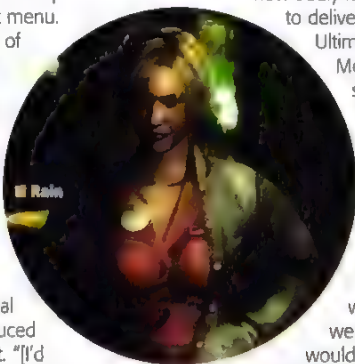
E3 SCORECARD

A THE GI PERSPECTIVE:

We've been extremely critical of Microsoft's E3 showings in past years, so let's now take the opportunity to give credit where credit is due: Xbox 360 absolutely owned E3 2006, and the company's press conference was easily the best in its short history as a console maker. As opposed to last year's stilted and gimmicky presentation, this year's had a strong focus on games and delivering hard information to the gaming community. It was also concise, clocking in at a little over an hour, a relief for those of us who were worn out by Sony's two-hour-plus marathon. At least part of the credit should go to Peter Moore, a well-spoken and polished industry vet who is quickly becoming the public face of Xbox 360, who did a tremendous job at keeping the momentum for the duration. Thankfully, the positive spin for Microsoft continued through the three days of the show, as all attendees could see a bevy of extremely good 360 games in production from nearly every major publisher. At this point, it looks like Microsoft's move to start the next generation early is paying off; the early Wii and PS3 titles on display seemed lacking in comparison to second-year 360 product. If there's one thing that Microsoft as a company is good at, it's studying the market and learning from its mistakes, and it appears that this pattern is continuing in video games. Based on what we saw at E3, the next couple of years should be extremely rewarding for Xbox 360 owners.

Starting with the press conference, obviously the signing of Rockstar is a huge deal. Can you talk about how that deal came about?

I actually can't, because I'm the first-party guy. But obviously working with them is a huge thing for us, because GTA 3 was a huge driver of the PS2's success, and now that's not exclusive to Sony. It's going to be available on Xbox 360 on day one. That's just a general trend that you're seeing, the third parties playing field has become very level, very even. Third parties have to support multiple platforms – EA, Activision, Ubisoft, [and so on]. Because the cost of development is rising, and we're a very legitimate, very successful platform, too. We're the leader in this generation. So it's the first parties, Microsoft, Sony, that have to deliver the exclusive content that's going to differentiate the platform. This holiday, customers are going to have a very hard decision. It got much harder due to Sony's pricing.

Speaking of first-party titles, lets talk about Halo. Halo did far and away better than the other first-party games. If a year from now, you don't have another first-party franchise selling as well as the Halo series, is that a failure? Don't you need to have a second or third two million seller?

Well, Fable has sold over two million units, but I wouldn't put it in Halo's category. I think you have to remember today there are really two mega-hit franchises, Halo and GTA. I believe that Gears of War is going to be the next one, and from our perspective, Xbox 360 is going to be the only place where you can play all three of those titles. It is what we try to do as a first party, trying to create big hits, big blockbusters that have a significant impact on the market, and showcase our platforms, so it isn't an easy decision for customers, trying to decide which of the next-gen platforms they want to buy.

Going back to the launch of the 360, some people didn't like that there were two different models. Do you think that having two models was a mistake?

No, I don't think it was a mistake at all. Giving customers choice with the Xbox 360 Core System is a very important thing. Customers can have a great high-definition gaming experience, and that's what we want for the Xbox 360 core system. Of course, the Xbox 360 adds more functionality and capabilities with the hard drive, and the wireless controller. But everything is available to the Core system buyer as well. What Sony is doing with their two [models] is they've actually physically removed capabilities that to my knowledge can't be added back to the 20 gig [model]. You can't add back HDMI. I think we took a very different approach. We like giving that choice and that flexibility to our customers without asking them to make a long-term sacrifice. If they want a hard drive, they can add the detachable hard drive.

Well, on the side of the developers, we talked to some that would have liked the hard drive to be there for all customers.

I don't know any developer who wouldn't rather have a single configuration. It's the easiest thing for them. So from that perspective, I understand. I have plenty of developers that work for me, and they would all prefer a single configuration, but from a customer standpoint, you have to be

INTERVIEW

SHANE KIM

GENERAL MANAGER, MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS

Giving customers choice with the Xbox 360 Core System is a very important thing.

very careful on focusing on their needs, because they're the ones who vote with their pocketbooks.

Does it make sense to have the Xbox 360 console lifecycle to be longer, like 10 years, to allow the penetration of HDTVs to hit around 50 percent?

That's a very complicated question. The one thing I'll say is that we have no problems betting on or investing in the future. That's what we did with Xbox Live by putting an Ethernet connection in the Xbox, because we believed that broadband was going to be the future for online gaming and connected gaming, and we believed that would be a smart strategy for us. And we believe the same will hold true for HD. Who knows what the Xbox 360 life cycle will be? I think it will be around for a long time, and we don't know what the next generation after this is going to be, and what innovations there will be. It may not be anything technical. Who knows? So I think we're in the sweet spot for HD gaming basically. 720p, 1080i, that is what customers are enjoying the bulk of

their high-def content in, and will be for the foreseeable future.

Will there be any connection between the 360 as a game machine and the HD player at all?

Not from a gaming standpoint. It's completely for HD movie playback. Because we've chosen to take the flexible path of choice, game developers can't say, oh gosh, we can count on the HD-DVD player being there. All of the feedback that we have is that people don't believe that they don't need a high-def drive like that in order to have a high-def gaming experience. A game like Oblivion has a massive amount of content, and the DVD-9 has plenty of storage for that. So, we don't think that it's going to be impactful from a game standpoint, and from a development standpoint.

Even though you don't think it will impact games, do you guys wish that you had put that drive into the 360? Sony is certainly touting the Blu-ray player. By releasing the HD player, you're saying that Microsoft wants to be part of the next-gen DVD format wars.

No, we don't wish we had. Then we would be doing what Sony is doing, which is forcing customers to pay more for a Blu-ray drive that may not end up being the high-def movie standard of the future. I understand why Blu-ray is good for Sony, but I don't understand why it's good for gamers. No one has been able to explain that to me. Now, gamers are going to have to pay for that capability in every single PS3, whether they want it or not.

Bill Gates mentioned the integration of Xbox Live into PCs and mobile. Does the simultaneous release of games on Xbox 360 and PC hurt either market in any way?

No, I don't think so. I think customers are going to decide on which version is worth playing, and it is still a very different experience, even though they may look and feel similar. The difference between playing on your computer, versus playing on your couch on your high-def television, I still think is a very different experience. I think consumers are going to continue to pick the one that's best for them. What's going to be interesting is when we start building more integrated experiences cross-platform on top of Live, like we're going to do with Shadowrun, like the concept demo we showed with Forza, [also in] the casual gaming space. That's where I think it's going to become much more interesting. The whole is going to become greater than the sum of its parts.

A lot of PC gamers are really used to downloading things for free, and a lot of stuff on Live obviously costs money. Is it going to be difficult to convince PC gamers to pay for content on Live?

We haven't announced pricing yet for Live on Windows, or Live on the mobile space, but I can tell you that we are very sensitive to what has been there before. But no one has ever attempted to build a service like Live. And if we can deliver a truly integrated experience, one marketplace, one identity, then you start to realize that you're adding a ton of value there. It's one thing to deliver connected gameplay, it's another to deliver a real network, a real service, a real economy

SONY UNVEILS PRICE POINT, NEW CONTROLLER FUNCTIONS FOR PS3

PSP

PSP RIPHERALS

DOWNLOAD GAME DEMOS HERE

PSP
PlayStation Portable
TM

While there's no doubt that E3 is probably not as important in terms of the ultimate success of games and consoles as the industry and we in the press make it out to be, the event does often set the tone for the months to follow. Sony, which has essentially controlled the worldwide console business for 10 years running, has typically understood the art of E3 hype better than any other company. However, this year's conference found the perennial powerhouse strangely off its game in a presentation that hit far too many sour notes.

Things started out in typical Sony fashion: with Sony Computer Entertainment President Kaz Hirai touting the company's powerful PlayStation 3 hardware as the true next-generation system.

"Last year...we sent a message and the message was clear: PlayStation 3 is not an incremental upgrade to previous platforms, but is truly designed to advance our vision for computer entertainment today, and for many more years to come," commented Hirai. "PlayStation 3 is meant to be the companion device in your living room, flexible enough to sustain many years of technological advancements. It's an arsenal of media compatibility, with seamless access to both packaged and non-packaged content through a networked environment."

Taking shots at the competition, he continued. "We're not about cutting corners to rush a product to market, and we're certainly not about gimmicks or clever rhetoric or conventional thinking.... The next generation doesn't start until we say it does."

Following this was a series of statistics and graphs that detailed the company's continuing success with the current market-leader PlayStation 2 console. At present time over 100 million units have been sold worldwide, including 41.2 million in North America, supported by one billion units of software sales. Hirai promised that Sony would continue to support the PS2 throughout the next few years, and showed a brief video of upcoming titles for the

console like God of War II, Square Enix's Final Fantasy spin-off Dirge of Cerebus, Final Fantasy XII, and THQ's Destroy All Humans 2.

Next up was the PSP, with Hirai touting that over 17 million units had been shipped worldwide to date. The key word in the sentence is "shipped," as Nintendo in their conference made much of pointing out that actual sell-through numbers were "millions less" than the stated figure. An additional 12 million units are scheduled for 2006, as is a new PSP Greatest Hits program, which has proved very successful on the PS2. The first titles in the program include ATV Offroad Fury, Hot Shots Golf, Twisted Metal, and Wipeout, which qualify by selling over

Pictured from left to right: LCDR Mark Simon, ETCM Eric Olis, BMC Dan Ames, BM1 Michael O'Connell, EN1 Jason Fetterman, EM2 Mark DiPietro, LT Lewis Baker, MM2 Sergio Rodriguez

navy.com/seals

do you have what it takes?

The Gran Turismo HD presentation showed what GT will look like in 1080p.

Eight Days

Afrika

250,000 copies over at least a nine-month period. Also shown was a video of upcoming titles, including Killzone: Liberation, Ape Escape Academy 2, B-Boy (a breakdancing game), and the highly anticipated Japanese sensation LocoRoco.

New online features for PSP were also announced, including a firmware update that adds Flash support and RSS channels to the web browser. Other planned peripherals include a GPS, voiceover IP microphone, and a camera attachment. Although no details were given, a couple of new titles appear to use these attachments, including interactive travel guide software named Planet PSP and Talkman, a utility that translates English into languages like Japanese and vice versa.

Later in the show, Sony's plans to sell PSone-era titles as downloads for PSP were unveiled when Hirai played a game of the original Ridge Racer on the handheld. Unfortunately, Sony's choice of game was poor, as the demonstration of the aged racer drew almost no applause from the crowd, causing Hirai to attempt to rouse them by exclaiming "Ridge Racer!" Soon after the show, this quote was already being passed around the Internet as a running joke among gaming forum users.

Of course, the main focus of the presentation was PlayStation 3, and Hirai went out of his way to stress Sony's view that the system is by far the most technologically advanced of the three next-gen consoles, dubbing the Cell chip "a processor with power rivaling supercomputers." He also touted the importance of Sony's high-density Blu-ray discs, which hold up to 50 GB of information (Xbox 360 currently uses standard DVDs). Citing statistics that showed the growth of storage needs throughout the PS2 lifecyde, he opined that "by adopting Blu-ray, a forward-reaching medium, we're sending a message to the content creation community that their only limitation in bringing ideas to life is their imagination."

More online details were also revealed regarding Sony's PS3 online program, which – on paper, at least – should be fairly competitive with Microsoft's Xbox Live platform. Popular features like friends lists, video chat, online rankings, text messaging, parental controls, and news updates are all slated to be included. The good news here is that – at present time – Sony says the service will be completely free to users. While Microsoft has had great success with its subscription-based formula, it's clear that Sony sees Apple's iTunes as a better model – giving away the software and making money on microtransactions like in-game items, songs, or episodic content.

Sony Computer Entertainment Worldwide Studios head Phil Harrison demonstrated how this would work from a user's perspective with brief demos of shopping for items in its upcoming PS3 titles Singstar and Warhawk. In Warhawk, there was a long list of items ranging from upgraded weapons to completely new vehicles. In Singstar, a karaoke game that leverages Sony's entertainment empire, players will be able to download new tracks and then sing them over high-defini-

tion versions of the actual artists' music videos. While perusing songs, you will also be able to see sidebars that display the current Top 10 sales leaders as well as a "What's New" section.

Of course, improved online is an excellent step for Sony, but the real selling point of any E3 press conference is the games. After dazzling the audience last year with pre-rendered, visually intense movies and tech demos of titles like Killzone and MotorStorm, expectations regarding the PS3's graphical prowess were running high. This year, the emphasis was on actual playable demos instead of elaborate trailers. While it was certainly a more honest approach, the effect was somewhat deflating in some cases; on the show floor, titles like MotorStorm showed almost no resemblance to the videos shown last year.

The first game showcased was not really a game at all, rather an E3-only tech demo called Gran Turismo HD. Using assets from both Gran Turismo 4 and the recent Tourist Trophy, series creator Kazunori Yamauchi

Eye of Judgement used the next generation of EyeToy technology
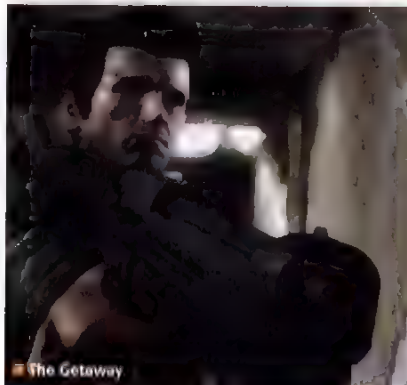
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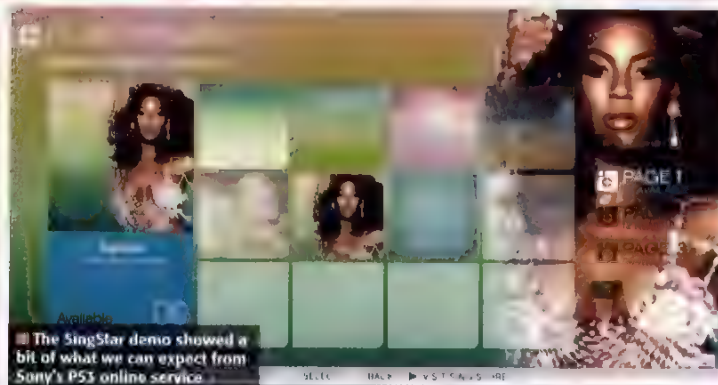
The SingStar demo showed a bit of what we can expect from Sony's PS3 online service

did a live run-through of a few tracks running at an unprecedented 1920x1080 resolution. However, on the big screen, it did not look markedly different than the current-gen GT titles running in high definition. As the overlong section of the presentation wore on, you could feel the momentum draining from the room.

Although certainly an interesting bit of technology, a showing of a new EyeToy game called Eye of Judgement (which superimposes animated dragons and beasts over a Magic-style collectible card game), really didn't do much to restore the excitement to the show. Of course, it was certainly better than the fate that befell Game Republic's Genji 2, which looked like an unpolished upgrade from the original PS2 title, and suffered from some bugs during the live presentation. We later heard that actual demo at the conference had only been shipped to Los Angeles that day, and the game did seem to look in better form on the show floor. Still, when coupled with the underwhelming visuals also shown later

for titles like Hot Shots Golf and Formula One, it did seem to undercut Sony's message that the PS3 was light years beyond Xbox 360 in terms of power. It seemed a bit odd that these titles received so much time during the conference, especially when amazing demos for PS3 titles like Mercenaries 2 and Assassin's Creed were being shown at the show itself.

However, despite some missteps, there was plenty of impressive game footage shown. One breakout hit of E3 2006 was Ninja Theory's Heavenly Sword, a God of War-style action title that was also playable on the show floor. Although the level shown was only a simple arena, the graphical quality displayed was quite literally jaw-dropping, and the finely tuned gameplay seemed every bit its equal.

Other highlights included Insomniac's Call of Duty-with-aliens shooter Resistance: Fall of Man, which is already very polished and perhaps the best of Sony's first-party lineup so far. Jak & Daxter creator Naughty Dog demonstrated its tradition of creating

great graphics engines with an untitled project that resembled a Tomb Raider-style action/adventure starring a 20-something male protagonist. Unfortunately, the lack of an official title hindered it from gaining any real buzz at the show. Sony's London Studios showed a very cinematic trailer for a title named Eight Days, which somewhat overshadowed a too-brief clip of the next Getaway title. Also generating interest was a less-than-revealing teaser for a title called Afrika (which is reportedly a safari title) and Factor 5's devastatingly cool snippet of its dragon title Lair.

Of course, amongst the new titles were some key exclusive franchises, including Final Fantasy XIII, which was shown as a Matrix-style rendered video that appeared to be more sci-fi in theme than the series' traditional fantasy setting. Even more mind-blowing (literally) was Kojima Productions' Metal Gear Solid 4 trailer. While the graphics are every bit as fine as one would expect, the clip ended on a shocking, dramatic note, when Solid Snake loaded up a

single bullet into his pistol and appeared to commit suicide. As always, it seems we can expect the unexpected from Mr. Kojima.

Speaking of surprises, Sony had two massive ones in store for the audience. First off was the controller. After showing a boomerang-shaped controller unit last year, which won a frosty reception from fans, this year all the playable demos seemed to be using a standard (although silver) Dual Shock controller – which was true, with the exception of one notable detail. After a brief CG movie unveiling the controller, we became a bit confused as to what all the fuss was about. These questions were soon answered by PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi, who revealed that the controller actually includes multi-directional tilt function that allows games to be guided by moving the unit in the air. This was then demonstrated by showing a playable demo of Warhawk that uses the functionality. Although it wasn't said outright, the implication was that this was a direct response to Nintendo's motion-sensing Wii controller.

While we're quite content to be playing on a familiar controller instead of a weird plastic banana, and excited for the possibilities of Sony's technology, the real shocker of the show came at the very end of the presentation — and was not nearly as pleasant for many. Declaring that the PlayStation 3 would release in three territories at once, starting in Japan on November 11 and launching in the U.S. on November 17, Kaz Hirai then revealed the question that had been at the top of everyone's mind: the price point. The answer was a whopper: a high-end version with a 60 GB hard drive for $599 and a 20 GB version for $499. If you listened close, you could hear a few gasps. The PR got even worse for Sony when observant Internet sites soon began reporting the

fact that the lower-priced model also lacks memory card ports, HDMI outs, and Wi-Fi capabilities. However, one should keep in mind that a Wi-Fi adapter (included in the top-line PS3) for Xbox 360 is $100, and we expect the announced HD DVD attachment for 360 will be at least $150 (and not used for games). Also the most affordable Blu-ray player currently announced is $1,000 retail. So, in many ways, Sony has built the Cadillac of games machines, one that will have more than enough horsepower and features to be cutting edge five years from now, even if right now the games do not look dramatically better than Xbox 360 titles. Whether or not the public will be willing to spend that much on a console is another matter altogether.

ots Golf

NEW CONTROLLER, TWO DIFFERENT PS3S

While a lot of information was released regarding Sony's PS3 plans at E3, the two most important things from a consumer's perspective were the unveiling of the new controller and the announcement that there will be two different PS3 models on sale on day one.

The controller is essentially the same as the one you're used to on the PS2, but with a couple of key differences. Unlike past models, this one features internal six-axis tilt technology, allowing you to control the motion onscreen by simply moving the entire unit about in space. However, this comes at a cost. Perhaps because of the room required for the tilt sensor, all rumble functions have been removed from the controller, which drastically reduces the overall weight of the unit — it's almost a bit too light for our tastes. There's also a new round button in the middle, presumably to turn the console on and off, but even Kaz Hirai himself admitted in our interview that he wasn't sure what it was for. In addition, the L2 and R2 buttons have been replaced with triggers, not unlike those on the Xbox 360 controller. Also, at least one version of the controller will be wireless.

In terms of the two separate models of PlayStation 3 available at launch, here's what you need to know. The biggest differences between the high-end $599 version and the $499 model are the inclusion of a Wi-Fi adapter and a 60 GB hard drive (versus a 20 GB) in the higher end console. Currently the Xbox 360 has a 20 GB drive and sells an add-on Wi-Fi adapter for $100. The lower-end PS3 also lacks Memory Stick, SD, and Compact Flash ports and HDMI (an all-digital video signal) outs. For now, HDMI is not a huge issue, as you can run hi-def signals through analog component outs, but it could eventually be problematic for TV owners in the next five to eight years if Blu-ray movies only run on HDMI, as has been discussed. Still, for most consumers, the real question will probably be hard drive space. If you're simply looking to save games and rely on your HDD to ease loading times, the 20 GB will likely be sufficient. However, those that want to purchase a lot of episodic content or microtransactions should go with the larger model.

First of all, can you talk about when you guys put in the motion sensor for the controller and the decisions made to go with that?

I need to go back a bit through history here. You know the form factor for the original PlayStation controller, the one without the sticks, remember that? That's where we started. And we've seen a natural evolution of the controller features and design.... So the motion sensor is something that is, again, the next evolution in trying to really increase the man/machine interface and make it a deeper relationship with the controller.... If you look at it through the timeline of how the controller for the PlayStation products have evolved, I think that you can see that it's a natural progression. As opposed to a lot of people, especially in the mainstream press, they just look at it and say, "Was that just a decision based on what your competitors have done?" Nothing can be further from the truth.

At its press conference Microsoft announced their partnership with Rockstar, bringing GTA to 360 day and date with you guys. Why didn't you emphasize or announce the fact that GTA is also on PS3 at your conference?

Without getting into a lot of detail, obviously, it's not just Rockstar, but we have a lot of discussions with various publishers on a variety of different arrangements. Those announcements will be made at the right time. But I think that, just from a software strategy standpoint, we're still six months from launch. We didn't talk about any first party lineup of software. And likewise, the third parties have not talked about their third party launch plans at this point. It's just too early in the game.... It doesn't make sense to just talk about something in the abstract.... That's why we didn't get into those kinds of nitty gritty details on the software side, because that I think is more for an announcement later on.

Going on to Blu-ray. What if Blu-ray doesn't win the format war?

How can that be?

Well, hypothetically speaking, what if HD DVD does have a certain kind of stronghold and makes it out of the gate and Blu-ray can't catch up? Does that negatively impact PS3?

That's a nice hypothetical question, but I think that the Blu-ray disc is going to be the de facto standard for the next generation pre-recorded optical media disc – mainly because of its capacity, first and foremost. And, at the end of the day, when you look at the evolution of optical media, it's always [the question of] how best to increase the capacity? Blu-ray does that, leaps and bounds over anything and everything in the market.... We experience it today, when you open a DVD and it's got three discs in it, with the special features and everything else. When you get into an HD world and your special features are all in HD as well, you're going to again end up with multiple discs. This means that it's going to cost you a lot more to press three discs instead of one disc. So you look at all those factors, and I just don't see how any other format can win out in this particular round.

We've seen some rumors that the PS3 may have some trouble with backwards compatibility. Can you talk about that, whether that is true or not? It's been a problem for Xbox 360.

INTERVIEW
KAZ HIRAI

PRESIDENT/CEO,
SONY COMPUTER
ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
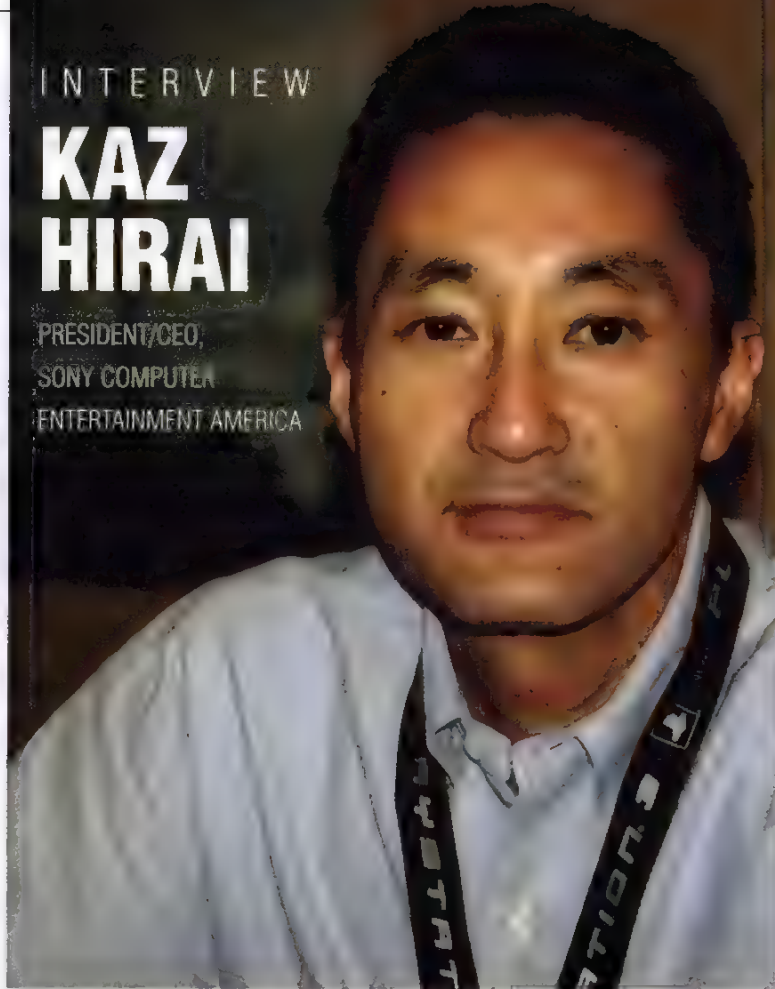
...I think that the Blu-ray disc is going to be the de facto standard for the next generation pre-recorded optical media disc...

I think that we have the same concerns, questions, skepticism, when we talked about backwards compatability for PlayStation 2 with [PSone]. I don't think we're going to suddenly turn around and say, "Did we say backwards compatible? We meant half of the time." It's just not going to happen. It's all about making sure that we keep our commitment to the consumers in terms of things like backwards compatability, and not try to sweep it under the rug by saying, "Well, only 50 percent of the titles or 70 percent of the titles." That's just not right.

The Xbox 360 launch was plagued by shortages. With PS3 having two separate hardware options and a multi-territory launch, are you going to be able to avoid a huge shortfall in units on day one?

I think that just from a purely operational and logistical standpoint, it's going to be very difficult to try to ramp up any production in terms of a factory or manufacturing facility, to be able to meet initial demand one for one. Although,

I think we came very close to it with the PSP – launch year in North America, we did ship a million launch units into the market. It then becomes really, how quickly are you able to replenish the market? And it's always a challenge in this industry. We're going to try to minimize that wait time as much as possible, but in this particular instance, we felt that it's more important for us to launch in three territories simultaneously, from a strategic standpoint given the importance of the product.

Do you think that consumers will be confused by having two different PS3 models?

It's not something that we suddenly decided to do that's never been tried before. If you look at any time that you buy a laptop – same model number, same name, or same form factor – you can have either 50 GB or 100 GB. Do you want a network card or not want a network card? Do you want a fast processor or one below? In the case of PlayStation 3, the processor is the same, but you configure it differently. It's not like we're suddenly introducing a bizarre new business model into the world. And I think that consumers are used to looking at different configurations of the same product...at least we're giving the consumers the option to say, "Yes, I'm happy with 20 gig of storage. Or no, I want the best of the best."

You've said the online service will be free. But, will it be two-tiered – free just to use some of the features, and then a subscription fee to actually play games online?

We're still looking at the tiers, but I think that one of the strong suits of being able to play PlayStation 2 games online was that we leave it up to the rights holders or the publishers to decide whether you want to charge or not charge. Predominantly, I think with the exception of very few, it has been free. And I think that the consumers have come to expect that, it's just playing one on one or with a [smaller] number of players, that it's considered to be a basic service. So, I'm not going to definitively say, "Absolutely free!," but by and large, I would not be surprised if most of them were free of charge for basic online play.

Most people we've talked to say the PS3 is more powerful, but because of companies like EA and Activision that do cross-platform ports, it's not really going to show in a lot of games compared to 360. Does that bother you?

Ultimately, if you again look at the 10-year lifecycle that we have on our platforms, and therefore the ability for the development community or the publishers to really climb the learning curve and then take advantage of what they've learned.... I think will lend itself to more stable and immersive content than platforms that change very quickly. If you look at PlayStation 2, for example, what you see today is very different than what we had in 2000. It's going to manifest itself in the software being a lot more immersive and entertaining, not just for the first two years, but for the long haul as well. So, it's not really a concern of mine and I think that it's perhaps a mistake to just compare a PS3 title to another platform title, just now and say, "Does it look better? Does it not look better?" That's obviously an important factor, but let's look at the longevity of the platform.

100 BULLETS BACK ON

DC/Vertigo Comics' 100 Bullets series is coming back to the video game universe. D3 Publisher has grabbed the rights to put out titles based on the comic, and we can only hope that it fares better than the Acclaim version that never saw the light of day.

THQ HIRES STUNTMAN 2

Updating the news we brought you last month that Atari was selling off Stuntman 2, it turns out that THQ is the new home for the next-generation game. Atari says that between the sale of Stuntman 2 and TimeShift it has raised $13 million. Also trading hands was Stuntman 2 developer Paradigm Entertainment.

GUITAR HERO SIGNS TO MAJOR LABEL

Red Octane – publisher of cult hit Guitar Hero – has become a wholly owned subsidiary of major label Activision. Cries of "Sell-out!" could be heard from the peanut gallery filled with indie music nerds wearing Trans Am t-shirts, but nobody cares what they think anyway.

FEAR EFFECT RESURRECTED?

Word from the *Hollywood Reporter* is that the lesbian action title Fear Effect is being brought back for a movie and a simultaneous video game treatment by Eidos. Unfortunately, the missing link in this title is the developer of the first two Fear Effect titles, Kronos Digital, which has since closed its doors. An official statement from Eidos says that no game is currently in development, but admits that it is something the company is "considering at this time."

INDIE BUILT DEMOLISHED

After supplying the Xbox 360 launch with Amped 3 and Top Spin 2, 2K Games is closing the doors of its Salt Lake City-based developer Indie Built. A spokesperson for 2K Sports told Game Informer that the franchises themselves are still safe with 2K despite the closing.

Amped 3 for the Xbox 360

BRINGING STAR WARS INTO THE FUTURE
LUCASARTS BUILDS ITS NEXT-GEN FOUNDATION

Not deterred by the fact that the Star Wars movies are done, LucasArts is marching ahead with its next console game based on the franchise. Behind closed doors at E3, the publisher gave us a sneak peek at some of the technology behind the unannounced, unnamed title (which at the moment is scheduled for 2007). If work continues along this vein, we think you can expect some good things in Star Wars' video game future.

Once we got into the meeting room and were told to ignore the giant wall art hanging up depicting a battle between Darth Vadar and some presumed Jedi, the demo started. It revealed that LucasArts is serious about using next-gen technology developed by Pixelux Entertainment to implement non-scripted sequences in its game.

By throwing squawking R2 units, the developers showed how a highly damageable environment would break apart differently each time. Since its destruction wasn't pre-scripted, any breakable object in the game realistically splinters, deforms, or falls apart. That includes all kinds of materials like, for instance, Jar Jar Binks in carbonite.

Combining this technology with the Euphoria AI engine, both of which are being used in the new Indiana Jones title (see last month's feature for more), LucasArts' upcoming Star Wars title should be more dynamically realistic than ever before.

We got to see a quick pre-rendered demo of these principles in action that showed powerful Jedi using the Force to pick up and push Stormtroopers about like toys. One unfortunate soldier was slammed repeatedly to the ground before being hurled, along with some environmental debris, at an incoming TIE fighter, which blew up on contact.

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV IN 07
SIMULTANEOUS RELEASE FOR PS3 & 360

Two years ago, Microsoft corporate vice president Peter Moore bared his muscles and showed the assembled E3 crowd a tattoo declaring the release date of Halo 2. This year, not only have Moore's guns gotten larger, but the fake tattoos have also become more impressive. Rolling back his sleeve, Moore and Microsoft have announced that the first next-gen installment of Rockstar's seminal Grand Theft Auto series will be coming to the Xbox 360 on October 16, 2007.

Although word spread that Microsoft had inked an exclusive deal with Rockstar for the game, that is not the case. The game will appear on that same date for Sony's PlayStation 3 as well. However, being able to release simultaneously with the PS3 is a big step for Microsoft and its system, since they've previously had to wait for PlayStation's exclusivity period to end.

Microsoft also announced that it had snagged exclusive episodic download content from Rockstar, but a source at Rockstar has told Game Informer that this exclusivity does not necessarily pertain specifically to Grand Theft Auto IV, and could instead refer to any title from the company.

For those of you who can't wait that long for your GTA fix, Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories will be hitting the PSP on October 16th of this year. Similar to Liberty City Stories for the handheld, this upcoming game will feature a new storyline and never-before released missions to augment the original title. And for those of you whose light bulb hasn't gone on yet: You can expect there to see a San Andreas Stories for PSP sometime in the future too.

TOMORROW NEVER DIES
BOND RIGHTS GO TO ACTIVISION

James Bond has a license to kill courtesy of her majesty's secret service, but in the video game world he just got a new employer. In a stunning move, Activision has secured the rights to the future exploits of the world's most famous British spy. The deal, which covers both movie-based games and non-movie titles for current- and next-generation systems (as well as handhelds) continues through 2014 and is rumored to have cost Activision $70 million

However, Game Informer spoke with an Activision spokesperson who told us that it does not go into effect until September of 2007. Given these terms, Activision has the non-exclusive rights up until then, conceivably leaving the license wide open for the time being. At the time of this writing there are no known Bond games expected from Activision, EA, or anybody else. There are rumors that EA had in fact started preliminary work on an adventure based on the first Daniel Craig film *Casino Royale*, but had to scrap it because the project couldn't coincide with the release of the November movie.

A spokesperson for EA told us that although the company's contract for the Bond license was inked through 2009, that EA "was severing the agreement in advance of its conclusion. We had obviously had a great relationship with them for a number of years," the spokesperson elaborated, "but EA is shifting its focus towards original IPs."

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY
When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

GOOD

Capcom and Nintendo's relationship continues, despite the fact that the Resident Evil series struggled on the GameCube. A Wii version of the survival horror franchise has been announced. Who knows yet if it'll actually be Resident Evil 5 (shown) or yet another re-release of an old classic from the series.

BAD

As much as we are looking forward to Call of Duty 3 for the Xbox 360, we're disappointed that as of now, there is no announced CoD 3 for the PC. Then again, the console version is being handled by Treyarch, so it's conceivable that Call of Duty 2 (shown) developer Infinity Ward is still free to handle a future PC edition
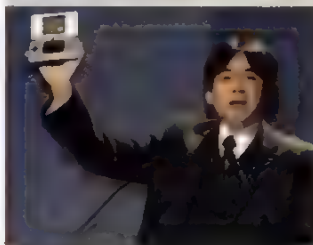
BAD

In an interview with *Reuters*, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata said that the company has no plans to make the next-generation version of the Game Boy because they are already making a crap-load of money on the DS. In the past Nintendo has always stated that they were working on the next GB, referring to the DS as a separate "pillar."

GOOD

"Let me be very clear," said Metal Gear's Hideo Kojima recently, "Mr. Uwe Boll will not direct a Metal Gear Solid film." If that joyous news wasn't good enough, Kojima went on to announce that he has finalized a "class-A contract" for the movie based on the franchise.

BAD

The New York Times reported that Blizzard has inked a deal for a World of Warcraft movie with a Warner Bros. affiliate. Although no director or cast has been assigned yet, Game Informer has obtained an exclusive snippet from the script: "uh need teh 133t haxxors pwned... my toon!" Clearly, a promising start to a brilliant screenplay.

Crane shots. Lots of crane shots. And subtitles

GOOD

Underpaid developers of the world are uniting. Employees of Activision are suing the company in a class action lawsuit filed in California complaining of the publisher's failure to pay overtime. Rival company EA has now lost two such judgements – the latest one was reached with its software engineers to the tune of $15.6 million. These lawsuits have caused EA to not only to pay the settlements, but to change its employee classifications and even its milestone structure.

games

THE HEAT IS ON
GEARBOX SIGNS ON FOR DENIRO MOVIE

Michael Mann's 1995 film *Heat* has become a cult classic not only for its iconic bank heist shoot-out filmed in downtown Los Angeles, but for its story and brilliant ensemble cast including Robert DeNiro, Al Pacino, Tom Sizemore, and Val Kilmer. Now Gearbox Studio (Brothers in Arms) has announced that it is attempting to pay homage to the film via a next-gen video game due out in 2007.

At the time of this writing, negotiations were ongoing with actors such as DeNiro, Pacino, and Kilmer (as well as with director Mann) for their assistance on the project. Because of this, it has yet to be determined whether the game will be a sequel or prequel.

Gearbox president Randy Pitchford says he's excited to tackle the often-tricky movie license conversion. "There is something about this concept that I call 'hardcore heist' that has never really been done well in a video game," explained Pitchford. "Yet everyone on the planet has thought about robbing a bank or something at one time or another. *Heat* pretty much defined what hardcore heist means, and it gives us a narrative mechanism to consider both sides."
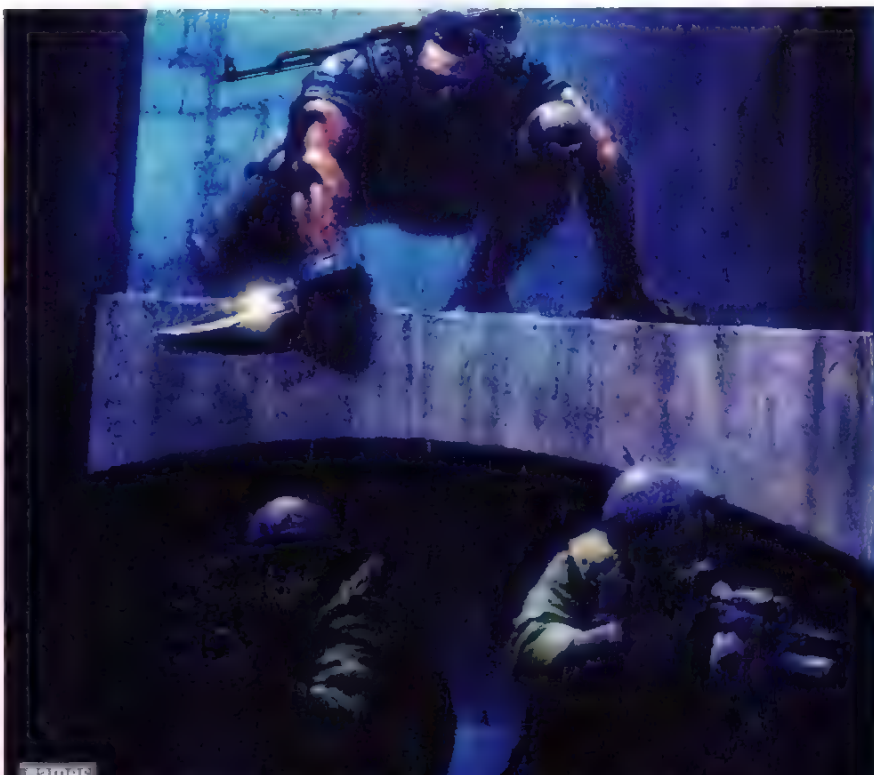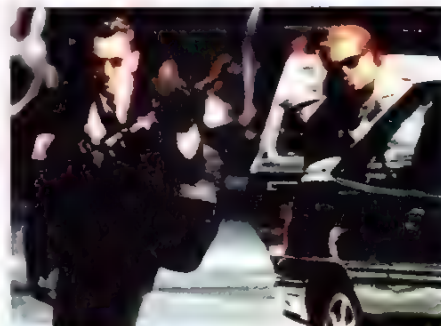
games

THE CIPHER COMPLEX
NEW PS3 TITLE FROM EDGE OF REALITY

Austin developer Edge of Reality is working on a new action title for the PlayStation 3, using its experiences with a wide range of titles (everything from the Tony Hawk series on N64 to the console versions of The Sims) to see it forward on this new game entitled Cipher Complex.

Although the developer has yet to sign on with a publisher, president Binu Philip told Game Informer that it's all part of the plan. "We don't want a publisher involved in the creative loop until it's really rock solid." The company would rather be free to create the game around its vision instead of a publisher stepping in and tacking on a license or taking over the process. As for the game, the developer is excited to be tackling the PS3. Edge of Reality's creative director Thomas Coles told us, "You want to make sure you target the platform that is the challenging one to develop for." We hope to see the results of the company's work in the coming months.

LOOSE TALK
Hot Gaming Gossip

THE WII WAITING GAME

Gamers were disappointed that Nintendo wouldn't release the price of the Wii system at its E3 press conference. We've heard that the reason behind this was that work on the vertical sensor isn't complete on the motion-sensing controller. Until this issue is figured out, the company won't have a clear idea of total cost. Also being considered is a peripheral for racing games that would make the controller easier to handle.

JURASSIC (IN THE) DARK

Loose Talk spied a giant Jurassic Park logo on a monitor in a meeting room behind closed doors at Sony's E3 booth. What does it mean? Could Sony be in talks to bring the movie to the PS3 via a marketplace download? Who knows? It could be nothing or it might mean something. ..

PLAYSTATION 3 EXCLUSIVES JUMPING SHIP?

It's a sign of the times. Exclusivity isn't nearly what it once was, and we've heard rumors that high-profile titles such as Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed and Pandemic's Mercenaries 2 (shown) aren't exclusive to the PlayStation 3 as advertised. So, expect both to be announced for the Xbox 360 in the future.

NEW SYSTEM SHOCK

Although the team behind the original System Shock is developing 2K Games' BioShock, rival publisher Electronic Arts has the rights to the actual System Shock name. The publisher is starting development on System Shock 3, and has assigned the team from The Godfather on the project.

IT'S ALL KUTARAGI'S FAULT!

We've heard from good sources that one of the reasons for a lack of good software at Sony's E3 press conference was that PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi himself chose the games to be presented. Instead of picking the best titles available, the companies and games selected had more to do with those who were Kutaragi's friends. In other words, the Japanese old-boy network was at work.

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

NAME THAT GAME
Test Your Sight

It's fitting that the protagonist in this month's little Name That Game quiz is called The Nameless One. This month's title is a Black Isle PC title based on an AD&D universe and BioWare's isometric RPG Infinity Engine. As the Nameless One, you can change your class by talking to other classes in the game, and your repeated resurrections in the game spark memories of your previous life.

(Answer on page 35)

"ID SOFTWARE NEVER WOUND UP DOING A FANTASY GAME"

JOHN CARMACK ON HIS MOBILE GAME ORCS & ELVES

id Software's John Carmack has long been known for his work at the forefront of gaming technology. With last year's release of Doom RPG for cell phones, however, Carmack has shown he is equally adroit at games of a smaller scale. Now with his newest cell phone title – Orcs & Elves – Carmack is showing that his interest in this rising type of gaming isn't a passing fad. We talked to him about the game and other topics in our exclusive interview.

Tell us about how Orcs & Elves came about.
As I was doing Doom RPG, it was obvious that somebody had to do a fantasy game. The games I used to play when I was a teenager were like Wizardry and Ultima and Bard's Tale and things like that. And id Software never wound up doing a fantasy game. When Orcs & Elves was started, we got to take everything that was good about Doom RPG and then go ahead and lay on a whole bunch of really good new ideas on there and try it all out. There are like a dozen new things that happen in there, and every level has an interesting hook. There's water that rises, walls that move around and reconfigure, and there are multiple things that happen at the end of the game. Hidden within the game there's a lot of lore, and we're expecting this to be a game that has sequels and spin-off products and things like that.

Can having a good game on a cell phone overcome the fact that playing games on your phone isn't always the best experience?
A year and a half ago, when I started making Doom RPG, I made a comment that you really can't do an immersive experience on a cell phone, but I pretty much have to retract that. With Orcs & Elves, we saw so many people sit there that were playtesting it, and they'd be totally absorbed in this little two inch screen, and I'd walk by the playtesting room and see them there. Three hours later, I'd walk by and they'd still be sitting there. That's immersion [laughs].

Have you ever challenged other developers to try and do something with cell phone gaming?
A lot of times they look at me a little funny, and it's like, 'Why is John doing mobile games?' A lot of people don't really get it, because they think that I'm all about pushing the highest end of the technology, but that's not really the motivation factor. For me, the engineering is about trying to do something good with some set of resources. I almost like the low cost aspect of it too, because if you buy a $50 or $60 game, it almost has to be a lifestyle decision for people. To me, that's almost getting away from what playing games is about. I come from an old arcade games sort of background, and that's what I think about games, not something I'm going to devote my life to for the next six months.

Does your inspiration ever flow from your work on the mobile space up to what you might do for the PC?
I've got not so much of a plan but a hope. What you see now is everything flowing downhill. Where if somebody has a hit for the console, they'll make some little scaled down cell phone

version of that. But I think there's actually potential for it to go the other way. If Orcs & Elves is very successful, and a million people download it and play it like that, we can look at that and go, 'Well, it's already got an accepted fan base here, maybe we can graduate that to the PC or console space, or intermediately the PSP or something.' If it works out that way, that has great implications for people willing to try out new franchises and ideas on the cheapest development platform, and then when it's proven to a degree, roll it into the more expensive-to-develop-for platforms. So, I'm kind of crossing my fingers and hoping that can work out there, because that would be a really positive thing for the game industry in general.

Last time we talked to you, you said that developing for the Xbox 360 was better than working with the PS3. Has that changed at all?
No, that's still the same. Sony's a hardware company, Microsoft's a software company, and you can really tell in the difference in what the development tool chain is set up for. Now, PS2 eventually got to have really nice development tools, but it wasn't because of Sony. It was because of other third-party companies that did understand that. And right now, all the tools for the PS3 are essentially coming from Sony, and they are not that good. The hardware is plenty powerful, and it's gonna be a little more powerful than the 360. But in terms of what you're gonna get out of games on there, the 360 is easier to develop for and essentially they are close enough that the hardware isn't going to matter.

What's your opinion on the fact that more people have licensed the Unreal Engine 3 than your Doom 3 engine?
There's money to be made there, but I'm certainly not interested in doing a lot of hand-holding. I've always been in the case where it's, 'Take it or leave it. Here's what you got,' because I'm not interested in becoming this tiny little person atop this monstrous pyramid of a company. I have a main programmer who often says, 'We should put this in.' And I'll say, 'What do we need that for?' And he'll say, 'Well, it will be good for licensees.' And I'll say, 'That's not good enough of a reason.' We need to concentrate on what's good for us first and foremost.

Do you still plan on id not handling the next Doom?
We have no plans on doing any of our follow-up sequels ourselves. We have a Wolfenstein sequel right now, and Enemy Territory: Quake Wars, but there's no Doom title right now. But it will unquestionably happen at some point.

Infiltration
1986

Though he initially had aspirations of working in film, Kojima breaks into the video game industry as a designer with Konami

Solid Snake Hatches
1987

Metal Gear, the first game directed by Kojima, releases for the Japanese MSX2 computer and introduces Solid Snake to the gaming world. The following year, the game appeared Stateside on the NES with a few modifications

A Forgotten Classic
1994

Though it came out in Japan years earlier, U.S. gamers finally get an English translation of Kojima's acclaimed cyberpunk graphic adventure Snatcher on Sega CD

!!!
1998

Solid Snake secures his place as an industry icon as Metal Gear Solid hits the PlayStation, earning adoration from critics and consumers alike

Enders Game
2001
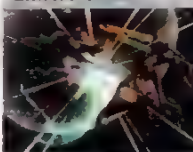
A boy and his giant sentient mech battle evil in Zone of the Enders. Included with the game is a demo disc containing a sample of Metal Gear Solid 2, which releases in full later that year

Flashback
2004
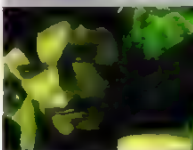
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater hits shelves, detailing the origins of Big Boss during the Cold War. It doesn't deal with Solid Snake directly, but it sets up a compelling context for the series as a whole

A Unified Front
2005

Kojima's team at Konami Computer Entertainment Japan officially becomes Kojima Productions. In the wake of mounting administrative tasks, Kojima is back in a more creative role at the company

HIDEO KOJIMA

KONAMI DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT, OPERATING OFFICER; KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS, STUDIO HEAD

>> Very few individuals have the ability to captivate an audience like Hideo Kojima. As the creator of the legendary Metal Gear franchise, Kojima's games are known for blending intense high-action gameplay with sophisticated philosophical themes. We had a chance to sit down and speak with Mr. Kojima about the upcoming console war, games as an art form, and the future of the legendary Solid Snake. <<

The issue of whether games can be considered an art form is a hot topic in the industry right now, and your games frequently figure into the discussion. Do you think that games are art or just entertainment?

I believe that games are not art, and will never be art. Let me explain – games will only match their era, meaning what the people of that age want reflects the outcome of the game at that time. So, if you bring a game from 20 years ago out today, no one will say "wow." There will be some essence where it's fun, but there won't be any wows or touching moments. Like a car, for example. If you bring a car from 20 years ago to the modern day, it will be appealing in a classic sense, but how much gasoline it uses, or the lack of air conditioning will

I don't think there is a danger to expanding, because expanding the population of people who play games opens up possibilities in the industry. I am a game designer who grew up playing Mr. Miyamoto's games, a gamer who became a game designer. This means I will probably create games for the people who play games they love and they are devoted to. And I will keep creating games for that core audience. There will be that difference in games in the future, but it is a good thing that there are new possibilities by bringing in new people.

We've seen Japanese companies like Konami and Square Enix promising major support for the PS3, while western developers like BioWare and Lionhead are working

highly and have higher sales than Japanese movies. In the near future, since there are so many great European and American developers, publishers, and creators, we believe that those will be the ones that will be appreciated, even by the Japanese audience. Having said that, there will be games that will be important to keep the Japanese culture in there. However, in the future, it might just end up being like a Japanese movie – a niche market. But I believe there is a need for that as well.

For the next generation, many gamers are anticipating entries in familiar franchises like Halo, Mario, and MGS. Does this shrink the space available for original IPs?

That's really up to the game creators. It's the same

If you talk about the war between Japanese developers and those overseas, I acknowledge that we have already lost.

simply not be appreciated in that era. So games will always be a kind of mass entertainment form rather than art. Of course, there will be artistic ways of representing games in that era, but it will still be entertainment. However, I believe that games can be a culture that represent their time. If it's a light era, or a dark era, I always try to implement that era in my works. In the end, when we look back on the projects, we can say "Oh, it was that era." So overall, when you look back, it becomes a culture.

You have said before that Metal Gear Solid and the PlayStation brand are very closely intertwined. Do you have any interest in pursuing development for the Wii or the 360?

Of course. For Wii, I really want to do it. The biggest stress or disappointment I have now is that I can't work on new things on Wii right away, but I have MGS 4 and MGS: Portable Ops that I have to finish. When I went to Nintendo's [E3] party, Mr. Miyamoto came up to me and said "Aren't you creating for the Wii?" And I said, "Yes, I really want to, but I can't."

All three of the hardware manufacturers have made it a goal to draw in more types of gamers. If more novice and casual gamers come into the fold, do you see a danger of games becoming overly simplistic?

mainly with 360. In addition to being about hardware, does the upcoming console war have an element of eastern games versus western ones?

Well, I don't think that is true. But, as a fact, the Xbox 360 is not succeeding in Japan. So, it is difficult for a Japanese developer or publisher to select 360 in the first place. Therefore, they are setting their hopes high for the PS3. On the other hand, for the foreign publishers, since Microsoft is based in the U.S. and succeeding there, it's more likely they could put more effort on the 360. This is just a fact based on the market situation. If you talk about the war between Japanese developers and those overseas, I acknowledge that we have already lost. The Japanese creators have lost to the European and American creators. Therefore, I always say to my staff, "Don't look at the Japanese creators. Look toward the Europeans and Americans when looking at development or technical things."

As a Japanese developer, what do you think about Microsoft's strategy for penetrating the Japanese market?

Of course, the approach is not a mistake. But that's probably only the truth for the next two years or so. In Japan, Hollywood movies are respected

situation with movies and books as well. Franchises and sequels are easier to collect funding for operation or receive okay within the company to proceed, because they are easier to understand and promote. However, I believe that even within those franchises, it's possible to do something new for the user. Or you can take the more difficult route, where you start up with originals. But that choice is left to the creators. So, if you watch the trailer, you see Snake sticking a gun in his mouth. That's kind of a half-joke, but if Snake dies, that means that I don't have to make MGS anymore, which means I want to create something different. So that's kind of a hidden message there.

Solid Snake is an industry icon. If he ends up dying in MGS 4 as the E3 trailer implies, it could be the first time that a true gaming legend has been killed off. Do you have any reservations about doing that?

Well, I'm not sure if he's really going to die. But if he is going to die, I am the only person who can make that possible. Even the team members are afraid to kill Snake. If I decide to end this, I think people will understand, but I have the responsibility to be the one to do it.

KONAMI'S MASTER STORYTELLER

■ Hideo Kojima's groundbreaking
Metal Gear series celebrates its 20th
anniversary in 2007 with the release
of the latest chapter, Metal Gear
Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

THE GEAR OF E3

1 XBOX 360 WIRELESS RACING WHEEL
Microsoft I www.xbox.com I TBA
Along with bigger memory cards, a camera, wireless head-sets, and the HD DVD player, Microsoft trotted out this wire-less racing wheel that's due out in the fall of this year.

2 GAME FACE FOR XBOX 360
Nyko Technologie I www.nyko.com I $19.99
With refill packs coming out this summer, Nyko's print-your-own faceplate kit could be just the deal for gamers that can't commit to only one look. [shown with Xbox 360, not included]

3 EDOC LAUNDRY
Edoc Laundry I www.edoclaundry.com
around $32 (shirts), $4 - $60 (accessories)
Smart designs are an understatement for this clothing line that mixes alternate reality game clues into their graphics. Wear the clothes and solve a mystery at the same time.

4 PHYSX 128 MB PHYSICS CARD
Ageia Technologies
www.ageia.com I $299.99
Ageia's add-in card will let compatible games offload phys-ics processing to this separate processor, leaving the CPU and GPU free to do other things.

5 G3 LASER MOUSE
Logitech I www.logitech.com I $59.99
An entry-level gaming mouse with ambidextrous design, the G3 is a great cost-efficient way to get features like adjustable resolutions and Logitech's sweet laser-tracking tech.

6 FANG COMBAT PAD
Ideazon Inc. I www.zboard.com I $34.99
Designed to work with righties or lefties, the Fang pad puts 41 programmable keys at the fingertips of FPS, MMO, or sim gamers.

DESKSAVER KEYBOARD

Manufacturer: BenQ
Website: www.benq.us **List Price:** $39.99

Let's all be honest – this keyboard was designed to go with those wee, sexy Macs. And yet, when plugged into our 360s, BenQ's little keyboard offers up a nice compromise of keyfeel, size, and usability. Our only real complaint is that the USB cable is too short to bridge the gap from couch to console.
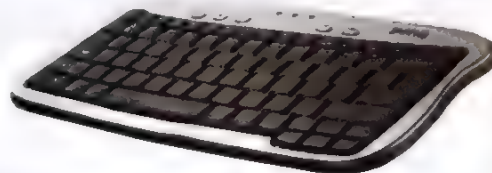
HALF-LIFE 2 HEADCRAB COLLECTIBLE

Manufacturer: Valve
Website: store.valvesoftware.com
List Price: $24.95

Made to one-quarter scale, this disarmingly cute version of the maniacal headcrabs from Half-Life 2 is the perfect thing to set on Fido's head and watch him shake it off. The poseable legs can also be wrapped around bedknobs or broomsticks to leave a little bit of cuddly terror in random places.

VALKYRIE PROFILE TRADING ARTS

Manufacturer: Square Enix **Website:** www.square-enix.com **List Price:** $5.99/each

Square Enix consistently offers great character designs. While their Final Fantasy series has always gotten high-quality merchandise, now the publisher/developer is spreading the love to a franchise with a new lease on life – Valkyrie Profile. This collection of six painted PVC figures will be out in Japan this July, and although a U.S. release isn't confirmed, importing will certainly be an option.

JOGGER JUMP SNEAKERS

Manufacturer: Steve Madden
Website: www.stevemadden.com **List Price:** $69.95

Besides these being totally wearable sneakers, the big news is that two of the colorways offered sport some nice Space Invaders graphics. Keep an eye out for the brown or red versions and you'll be in luck.

PINBALL MACHINE

Manufacturer: Zizzle
Website: www.zizzle.com
List Price: $300

These mini pinball machines have big features like real solenoid flippers, ramps, and multiple levels. The plan is to release one for Pirates of the Caribbean and another for Marvel Super Heroes. While they aren't as flashy as the machines that drew quarters directly from our souls in the arcades of yore, this could be a great compromise for getting some of that arcade feel into a real living room.

A LIKELY STORY:

THE RPG RECYCLING EPIDEMIC

BY JOE JUBA, ASSOCIATE EDITOR, GAME INFORMER MAGAZINE

When I played Final Fantasy for the first time, I was convinced that video game stories had reached their high point. At only 10 years old, I simply couldn't imagine a game that could cram more awesome things into one experience: It had dragons, ninjas, robots, and four young heroes with the fate of the world on their shoulders. At the end of the epic tale, the final screens explained that the light warriors had broken a 2,000 year time loop, but in reality, that game was actually the beginning of a seemingly endless cycle for me.

Wizards and magical orbs were totally sweet when I was in elementary school, but as I grew older I began to hope for something more complex than some loosely assembled Dungeons & Dragons clichés. In fact, I'm still hoping. For all of the gaming advances in the last several years, a majority of recent RPGs have continued to drag fans of the genre through the same adolescent role-playing fantasies over and over again.

There is no reason we should be caught in a circuit of predictable world-saving. We are on the verge of some amazing advances in video games; with E3 behind us and a full-fledged console war ahead, developers have begun to showcase the technology and experiences that will define gaming in the years to come. However, amid all the talk of what makes a game "next-gen," how often is innovative storytelling a selling point? There's a new battle system or some fancy kind of texture mapping, but it's taken for granted that you'll be led through the same template scenarios you've been playing for years. The narratives aren't changing – the pieces within them are just being swapped.

Will the hero have amnesia at the beginning or will his village be burned down? Should his sword be really huge or just pretty huge? Will his sidekick be a spunky girl or a stoic mercenary? Is the villain searching for ultimate power or...well, I guess that's really the only option there. While these interchangeable plot-blocks provide an illusion of distinction, many of the stories are identical at the core. In the 19th century, the French writer Georges Polti wrote a book outlining 36 dramatic situations, and even though the list encompasses a broad range of potential conflicts, I think I've only played through three of them...about a dozen times.

Of course, I can't heap blame on anyone for revisiting a time-tested story. After all, on some level we like this familiarity. When you sit down for 40 hours of gameplay, there is comfort in knowing what you've signed up for. Games are an investment, and it's not easy to spend money on something that might not deliver. We see the same theory in action at the box office every weekend. I can spoil the ending of every romantic comedy for you right here: the guy and the girl get together. However, even with that fact as a given, people flock to these films because they enjoy seeing the same events play out in new ways.

So, if people like what they know, why should RPGs take risks with a formula that works? Because that's what makes the difference between a passable game and a memorable one. Take a look at the most highly acclaimed current-gen RPGs and you'll come up with titles like Final Fantasy X and Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic. Even though these games have some conventional themes, they distinguish themselves through storytelling that crafts a unique and compelling world. They aren't assembled from an outdated library of standard components; each one has characters and locations that add something new to the RPG landscape. Who didn't swell with pride when it was revealed that you were Darth Revan, or shed a tear when Tidus made that final jump from the airship?

Trying to create amazing moments like these using worn-out story material is like trying to paint a masterpiece using ClipArt. Those stock images on office memos are never engaging or impressive, and yet we put up with their game-based equivalents in RPGs all the time. The duty-bound princess. The wise mentor. The absent-yet-heroic father. It's not enough to just give players an excuse to wield a sword and kill a monster anymore; we need context, and that isn't provided by cookie-cutter characters lifted straight from the anime du jour. Is it too much to ask for some imagination?

This isn't a call for RPG stories to be outright zany or bizarre. Games like Shadow Hearts: From the New World push the boundaries of what is tolerable on that front. But there are some series out there that deserve credit for trying something different. For instance, Shin Megami Tensei often features complex and mature-themed plots, and I love Xenosaga's epic and philosophical tone. But for every one of these, there are twice as many "Tales of..." games that are tragically stuck in the '90s.

Here's the part of the editorial where I want to propose a solution – a plan for sweeping reform that will make all RPGs unique and surprising adventures – but I can't. There isn't a simple fix. The genre is entrenched in Japan (where people skip work to wait in line for the latest Dragon Quest), and I realize that no one is eager to mess with a formula that works from a sales perspective. Hell, I'm even a part of that formula; I'm guilty of buying RPGs that are not revolutionary. I enjoy them for what they are, but every time I select "new game" and start in a rural village subjugated by a faceless evil empire, I can't help but reflect on how the genre is holding itself back. So, to any RPG developers who are reading this: As gamers, we are eager to venture into new territory. With such an intense focus on characters and narrative, RPGs are in a position to define the medium's storytelling potential. Please take advantage of it. ■ ■ ■

> The narratives aren't changing – the pieces within them are just being swapped.

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

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat

july
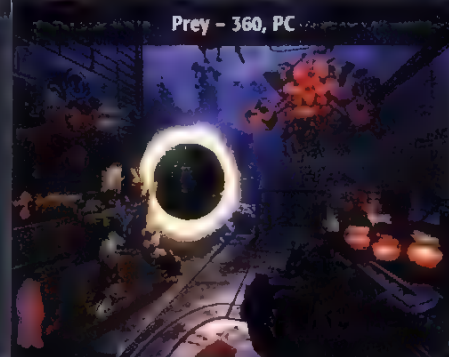
Prey – 360, PC *(tue)*

1 *(sat)*
CLIFFY SPEAK
When he's in the magazine, CliffyB mostly talks about his upcoming game Gears of War. On the other hand, his website (www.cliffyb.com) explores video games as a whole. If you are looking for advice as to how to get into the video game industry, or would like to hear rants and raves from the development floor, this is a great site to frequent.

NCAA Football 2007 – 360, PS2, Xbox *(sun)*

4 *(tue)*
NEW RELEASES
- *Doctor Who* Season 1 – DVD
- The Godfather: The Game – 360, PSP
- Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II – 360
- NCAA Football 2007 – 360, PS2, Xbox
- Teen Titans – PS2, Xbox, GC

5 *(wed)*
CPL SUMMER 2006 CHAMPIONSHIPS
The Cyberathlete Professional League's summer championship kicks off today at the Gaylord Texan in Grapevine TX. The games on the docket are Counter-Strike 1.6 and Quake 4. First place in Counter-Strike will net the winner $40,000 in cash. Quake 4 nets $20,000.

6 *(thur)*

7 *(fri)*
Keanu Reeves says "Whoa! Pirates say "Yo ho ho!" They're perfect for each other! Both *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* and *A Scanner Darkly* open in theaters today.

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9 *(sun)*
CALIFORNIA EXTREME 2006
Some people call this convention "gaming heaven." With hundreds of classic arcade machines set to free play, we really can't argue with this statement. Just don't expect to play Mappy. Jeremy will be playing it nonstop over both days. Check www.caextreme.com for more details.

Super Monkey Ball Adventure – PS2, GC PSP *(mon)*

11 *(tue)*
NEW RELEASES
- Prey – 360, PC
- Super Monkey Ball Adventure – PS2, GC, PSP
- Vanguard: Saga of Heroes – PC

12 *(wed)*
HALO GRAPHIC NOVEL
It'll set you back $24.99, but this jacketed 128-page hardcover comic book expands upon the Halo canon with a collection of stories. If these tales are penned in the same vein as the games, then they'll end before any conflict is truly resolved.

THE HALO GRAPHIC NOVEL

BUNGIE Microsoft

14 *(fri)*
Pulse, which is based on the Japanese horror film *Kairo*, graces the silver screen today. It's good to see that Gollum is still getting work.
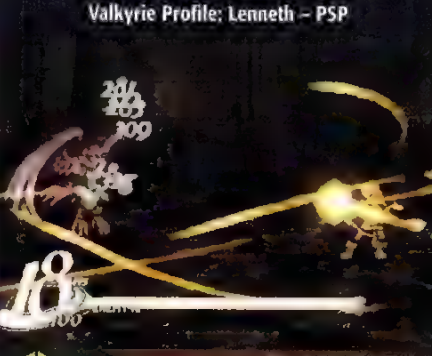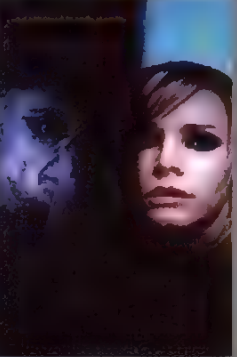
Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth – PSP *(sun)*

18 *(tue)*
NEW RELEASES
- The Ant Bully – PS2, GC, GBA
- Blade Dancer – PSP
- Miami Vice – PSP
- Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth – PSP

19 *(wed)*
THE ADVENTURES OF BRISCO COUNTY JR.
Remember those days when gas prices didn't lead to heart attacks and Blossom's friend was hot? If you do, then you probably remember a show that stood head and shoulders above all others. This show was *Brisco County Jr.*, and it's finally coming to DVD. All 1,260 minutes of this series in one eight-disc set.

BRISCO COUNTY JR.

21 *(fri)*
Famed director M. Night Shyamalamadingdong's *Lady in the Water* releases in theaters today. Here's the twist ending... she's really a ghost super hero alien who's allergic to water!

Prey 6/11 *(sat)*
LIMITED COLLECTOR'S EDITION
PREY

Labo infomation *(sun)*

25 *(tue)*
NEW RELEASES
- Contact – DS
- *Pinky & the Brain* Vol 1 – DVD

Blade Dancer – PSP *(wed)*

(fri)
"I JUST HAD A GREAT IDEA. THAT TRUCK IS GOING TO BE YOUR FATHER."

Contact – DS *(bottom)*

Lance – 95 Gozen – 7/98
Gozen chants the Pace II spell!

NEED FOR SPEED™ CARBON

Electronic Arts is the victim of its own success. The company is the number one third-party publisher, and has become so due to a stable of franchises that perpetuate themselves yearly and keep people coming back for more. But there is the growing feeling among gamers and even within the industry that this gravy train of iteration cannot continue indefinitely.

Of course, EA (or any other company for that matter) is not going to just stop long-running franchises such as Need for Speed in their tracks. Instead, Need for Speed Carbon executive producer Larry LaPierre and his development team at EA Black Box in Vancouver have the altogether harder task of confounding people's expectations.

During our time with LaPierre, we learned that he is an engaging person who is quick to talk to you about any aspect of video games – from the nuances of the business to the intricacies of development and the mysteries of what makes gameplay fun. Getting to the heart of why Need for Speed Carbon was going

TUNING FOR SPEED

to be more than another racing title, LaPierre asks himself and his development team, "'What are you going to do that's different?' We do all sorts of surveys and focus tests and all that, and we get a great sense of what people enjoy and what they didn't enjoy, etc. But if you went through that and literally made the game that they are saying they want the next game to be, you are not going to succeed."

Having the ability to not only question every element of Need for Speed Carbon up until this point, but the conviction to steer the project straight, are qualities that have already served LaPierre and his team well throughout the whole development process. When they were faced with a tough decision or things just didn't feel right, LaPierre was able to make an honest assessment and remind himself, "You have to go somewhere where they are not expecting you to go."

The adoption of a new moniker for this Need for Speed is telling. "This isn't Most Wanted 2. That'll be good news to some people and bad news to others. That's the decision we made and I stand by that," explains LaPierre. "This [version] is more about racing." The franchise has reinvented itself in the past, and Carbon not only does that but it also combines different racing concepts into a more comprehensive world.

Carbon will feature over 50 different cars – more than NFS: Most Wanted

Teammates like the Blocker will help pave your way to victory
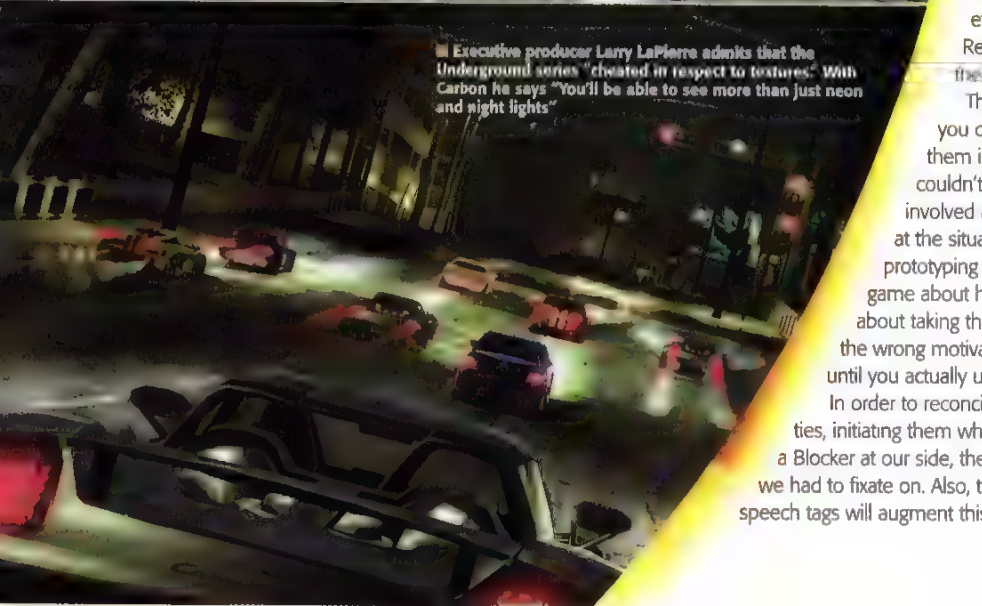
Taking inspiration from the real life racing clubs, Carbon gives you AI teammates with upgradable skills who help you out during a race. Some do so directly out on the streets while you are racing alongside them. Others will aid you in the garage or behind the scenes. LaPierre and the team felt that something else besides the standard steering wheel and turbo nitrous boost needed to be in the players' hands.

Before a race begins, you will pick your AI crew from a pool of the different members you've accrued, and each racer will play a different role. The Pathfinder teammate will help you understand the best way through a track, even showing you some of its shortcuts. The Blocker is your aggressive ally during a race against the six other competitors (for a total of eight). You can sic the Blocker on the targeted cars in your way that you want put into the wall. Meanwhile, the Drafter crew member will work closely with you so you can utilize their slipstream to slingshot your way to the front of the pack.

Your off-the-track friends will be no less valuable to you. Fabricators help you trick out your car, while Mechanics fix up your ride when you inevitably cave in the hood after running into oncoming traffic. Perhaps

> THIS ISN'T MOST WANTED 2. THAT'LL BE GOOD NEWS TO SOME PEOPLE AND BAD NEWS TO OTHERS. THAT'S THE DECISION WE MADE AND I STAND BY THAT.
>
> – *Larry LaPierre*
> *executive producer*

the most valuable of these is the Fixer – a behind-the-scenes influence who can swing all kinds of deals. Is the heat getting to be too much? The Fixer can see to it that the cops back off a little. Or maybe he can talk to a couple of truckers to make sure that they get out of your way out on the streets, and get in the way of your competition. Because you have multiple slots for more than one teammate, you can even combine them for added abilities. For example, if you have two Fabricators on your team, you will unlock benefits that you normally wouldn't have if you were rolling with just one. Regardless, as the game progresses all of your teammates can upgrade their abilities for bigger payoffs.

The trick with teammates in any racing game, however, is that ultimately you don't care about them. They may help you, but your job is to leave them in the dust and cross the finish line first – it's nothing personal. LaPierre couldn't agree more. Originally, this team component of the game was more involved and integral. But after some prototypes, LaPierre stepped back, looked at the situation, and didn't like how it was changing the core of the game. "The prototyping proved that at the point in the game in that you were trying to make a game about having a crew, you were sacrificing the racing. And your mind wasn't just about taking the best line, it was about 'Where's that Blocker guy?' It was completely the wrong motivation. This is why in prototyping you can't get too married to something until you actually use it in the game."

In order to reconcile Need for Speed Carbon's foundation of racing with your team abilities, initiating them while in a race is very easy. While we raced through Carbon's streets with a Blocker at our side, the presence of our teammate and when to use them wasn't something we had to fixate on. Also, the situations when we did use them didn't seem overtly staged. The speech tags will augment this feeling when they are added to the game, making interacting with

Executive producer Larry LaPierre admits that the Underground series "cheated in respect to textures." With Carbon he says "You'll be able to see more than just neon and night lights"

your crew members as flowing and natural as the cop chatter was in Most Wanted. LaPierre told us that he expects that players will be able to access these teammate abilities once or twice during a race, and they are giving consideration to allowing gamers to use them as defensive countermoves to your opponents' own abilities (possibly accompanied by a minigame).

Although some games have made team features their sole lynchpin, LaPierre wanted this to be just the start for Carbon. Beating our cynicism to the punch and reading our minds, he deadpanned, "I'm sure you can appreciate that we didn't think it was meaningful enough to turn around and hang our hats on and get super giddy about." It was at that moment that we started to really appreciate LaPierre's outlook on development, and got excited as to how it would contribute to pushing Carbon forward. In a unification of Carbon's team racing and the open world format that the previous Need for Speeds have created, you and your crew will battle all over the map for chunks of territory. This real estate will trade hands and go back and forth as the game progresses and racing battles are won and lost.

To win a piece of territory you'll have to compete and win races based on the normal variety of race types you're used to. More interestingly, however, territory is key to the game because it also lets you progress in other ways. In Risk-like

> ## I'M SURE YOU CAN APPRECIATE THAT WE DIDN'T THINK [TEAM RACING] WAS MEANINGFUL ENOUGH TO TURN AROUND AND HANG OUR HATS ON AND GET SUPER GIDDY ABOUT.
>
> ### – Larry LaPierre

fashion, some pieces of land are more valuable than others. You might go after one because it has a certain crucial parts shop in it. Another might catch your eye because you want to recruit a better crew member that hangs out there. This interplay between team members and territory is further accentuated by the fact that certain members get discounts at select shops. Such regions will be harder to win than other less-valuable plots of land.

Of the game's five main areas (there are approximately five to seven pieces of territory to win in each area), three are dedicated to Carbon's trio of car classes: muscle cars, exotics, and tuners. Although you don't have to race a tuner if you're in tuner territory, for example, the courses in that area of the game will be designed for what that car class does best. Muscle cars are good at short acceleration but break loose in the corners. On the other hand, tuner cars are tight in the corners and the exotics have the best top speed of them all. Beat the bosses in these areas and you'll get their pre-configured ride for your stable.

Of course, performing your own customizations on your cars is still a huge part of this Need for Speed, and Carbon takes it to new heights via Auto Sculpting. Using a tool similar to Tiger Woods' dynamic face editor, through sliders you can morph the look of the parts that you put on your car in real time. Tying back to the game's team feature, if you decide to assign two Fabricators to your crew, you will even unlock a special slider with which you can tweak your ride.

LaPierre and his team looked at the elements that were going into Carbon and felt that they'd expanded the next-generation foundation that Most Wanted had created and made good use of the franchise's open world. But they weren't satisfied. Something was wrong. "Territorialism and crew tactics and crew customization – that was where we were at. It felt good. It was deep – but a collection of little pieces. It wasn't sharp; it didn't have that visceralness. You have to have that TV moment where you go, 'Yeah, that's cool. I like that.'" Hoping to avoid simply offering up a sequel to Most Wanted, it was at

■ There will be no drag racing in Carbon. LaPierre described it as "more of a distraction than a benefit"

■ Knowing which chunks of territory to capture over others is key to progressing in the game

Carbon's storyline will again be cheesy like in Most Wanted. LaPierre told us the team made it that way intentionally
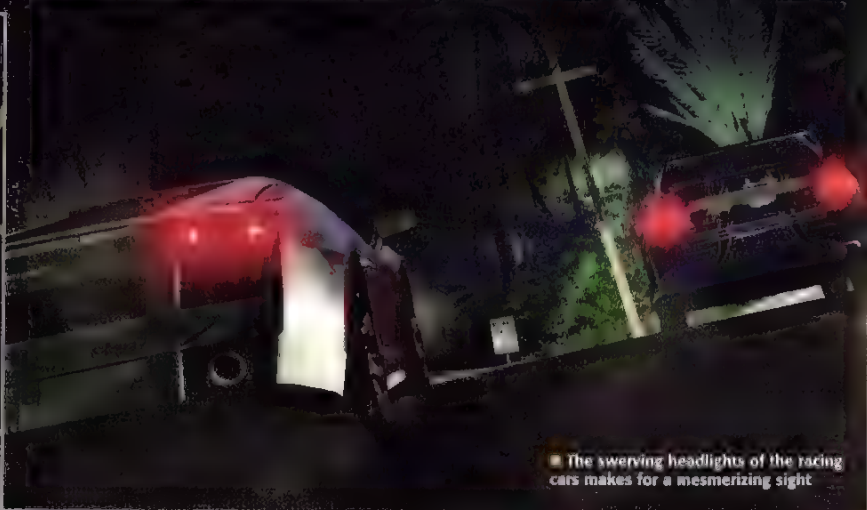
The swerving headlights of the racing cars makes for a mesmerizing sight

this point that LaPierre pulled once again from the cultural well of street racing, proving that the kids on the streets are always one step ahead.

Drift racing requires you to intentionally break loose the back of your car to kick it out and send it into a slide as you round a corner. The creators of drift racing – the Japanese – used it as a defensive maneuver to prevent a driver from passing. It also enabled the driver of the drifting car to keep their RPMs high (by keeping the back wheels spinning) and retain speed, so that they wouldn't have to downshift to get out of a turn.

Having already conquered the streets, spread their culture to the movie screens, and captured the attention of local police departments everywhere, street racers are constantly looking for new thrills. To feed their need these racers have turned to drift racing – something that has been a staple of video game racing for years. LaPierre realized that this hair-raising type of racing was just the way to give the game the over-the-top moments that he was looking for. Then again, it wasn't just important how this type of racing would impact Carbon, but where it took place. As real life street racers here in America got bored of drag racing and the cops started cracking down on them, they took their skills to greater heights by tackling the hairpin turns of California's canyons to drift race against each other and possibly life-threatening odds.

Canyon racing is a natural fit for the game. It not only serves as the battleground for the races against the bosses – known as Canyon duels – it also enables Carbon to take its racing literally to the edge. Canyon Duels will be broken up into two legs. First you must follow your opponent down the twisting

■ Here's an early look at the game's neighborhoods and canyon areas

WEST CANYON

CARBON CANYON

★ CANYON TRACKS

■ The team is thinking of some consequences for losing at the canyon races, such as possibly having to re-qualify

EAST CAN

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON

Even if you break through a canyon barrier, you have a split-second to try to steer your way back. Sometimes you can and sometimes you can't

canyon trail, trying to stay as close as possible to their back bumper without hitting them – which is an automatic disqualification. At the same time you are trying not to break through the guard rails on the side and plummet hundreds of feet to your death (some canyon tracks won't even have rails!). If you survive, your roles are reversed for the second leg and now it's your turn to lead the way down the mountain. The winner is the one who scores the most points over the two legs, or the driver who passes the lead car – which grants an automatic win. These are calculated by how close you are to your opponent at the end. It is also comprised of point bonuses for things such as not hitting the guardrails.

In our time with the game, the canyon racing put our skills to the test. In the first leg, the more we pressed to cut the distance to our foe's bumper, the more we dangerously pushed the edge of the racing envelope. The game takes place from dusk to dawn, so in the canyon races your headlights are mesmer-izing as the car rocks from side to side on its suspension. In the second leg we found the racing to be even more intense and tough. We not only felt the pressure of our opponent on our bumper, but we had to come up with ways to shake them off our tail and still gain every speed advantage possible by concentrating on the right racing line. LaPierre told us of one canyon track that has a pitch as steep as some slopes in the SSX series. He said he had to start breaking for a curve a half-mile ahead of time to keep from shooting off the edge. As if that wasn't enough, the canyons will also feature traffic for your heart-stopping pleasure. Other races besides boss battles will take place in the canyons, including drift challenges and sprint races featuring full-on racing crews. Unfortunately, we didn't get to see these during our demo.

As you can well imagine, Need for Speed Carbon's territory battles and canyon races are tantalizing fodder for online players everywhere. Although EA has yet to

With the game's team-based racing, you can only imagine how fun it would be to hit the town with your own clan online
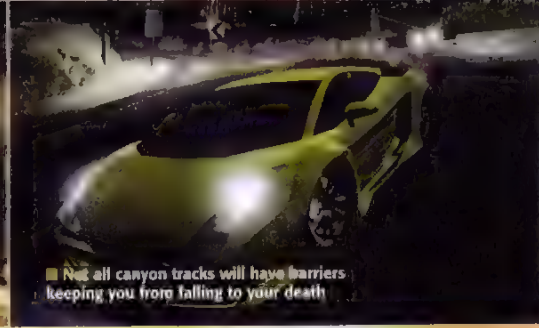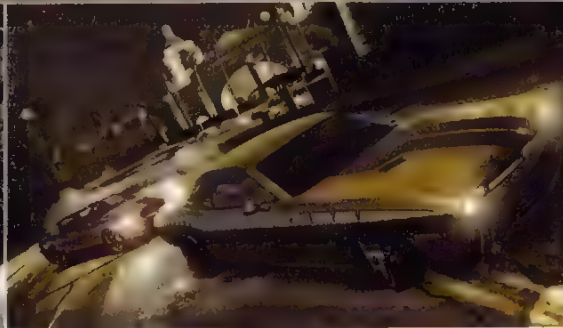
Not all canyon tracks will have barriers keeping you from falling to your death

decide on an exact online feature set, they've intimated big things in store for this aspect of the game, and it's not hard to see online racing clans forming up and taking to the canyon tracks or challenging others for chunks of the virtual map. Also up in the air at the moment are the differences between the versions of the game for each of the different consoles. Support for the new Xbox 360 racing wheel is easily done, but reconciling the motion technology of the PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Wii still hasn't been worked out to LaPierre's satisfaction. He told us that he's worried about the sensitivity of these controls, and for the Wii in particular, the fatigue factor of having to constantly hold up your arms.

The racing genre is a hard one in which to innovate. For so long the public has thought that the genre was filled with nothing but sim-racers. But racing series like Need for Speed have made fans out of gamers who race by the seat of their pants, not the spec sheets. By connecting back with the real life pioneers of street racing themselves, LaPierre and his team have fulfilled their promise of delivering more than just Most Wanted 2, instead taking Carbon in a new direction. And from what we know about LaPierre and how he and the team have constantly made decisions for the betterment of the game all during its creation, we know that nothing short of a totally high-octane experience will be good enough. ■ ■ ■

There will be an icon system to help you engage teammates during a race

THE E3 HOT 50

AS YOU NAVIGATE the bright lights and enormous booths of E3, there is one question you will hear repeated endlessly over the roar of the crowd: "What have you seen that's good?" With so many amazing games around every corner, it's a tough question to answer – but we're giving it a try. Here, ranked in order from one to 50, is the very best of what we saw and experienced at E3. These are the games that had people talking, and the ones positioned to define gaming in the coming year and beyond.

Gears of War

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

BEGIN COUNTING THE DAYS

Halo 3, a new Super Mario, and a dozen different Final Fantasy games were on hand at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, but the one game that showgoers couldn't stop talking about was Gears of War. When we say that people were talking about the game, we actually mean gushing with their jowls flapping in ways that would get even the most softly-spoken of people thrown into a nuthouse. Going into the show, Microsoft had recognized that this game would likely be the talk of the show. At the company's press conference, it wasn't Shane Kim, Peter Moore, or J Allard that greeted those in attendance. Rather it was Gears of War's lead designer and well-known video game personality, Cliff Blezinski – better known as CliffyB. With a warm smile on his face, CliffyB shrugged and said, "Come on, don't act surprised to see me here." What followed was a hands-on demonstration of Gears of War that made nearly every jaw in the famed Grauman's Chinese Theater drop to the floor in collective stunned disbelief.

The level that CliffyB walked us through was one of the earlier stages in the game, in which hero Marcus Fenix must escape military prison to help his friend Dom combat the Locust Horde. For those of you not familiar with this title yet, the Locust Horde is a race of creatures that have emerged from the depths of the planet to wage war against mankind. From the moment that Fenix took to action within a building that had been ravaged by war, he was ducking under crumbled structures, spinning behind columns that appeared to barely have the strength to stand, and doing everything he could to stay out of the line of fire. Make no mistake about it, this isn't a game of stealth. It's as fast-paced as they come, but survival depends on your ability to avoid taking fire while using cover as an optimal position to decimate your enemy. Pop out and fire off a few rounds, or keep yourself safe and raise your gun up for a blind burst.

The terrain is usually littered with objects like battle-damaged vehicles, jagged sheets of metal, and remnants of housing that you can use as cover. Sometimes, however, you really have to hoof it from zone to zone. Running is usually an action that doesn't generate much excitement in a video game, but Gears of War will likely change this perception and should have a great effect on all games moving forward. When Fenix speeds up, the cinematic camera (called the roadie cam) makes it seem as though players are running behind their character like a wartime cameraman.

CliffyB navigated his surroundings cautiously, yet even if he got the jump on his adversaries, each Locust proved to be a pain, as they are capable of taking multiple hits before falling. When desperation kicked in, Fenix switched his arms to a shotgun, which like in most games smashes skulls and sprays blood with one powerful blast. Enemy after enemy tumbled to the ground, and those who chose to look Fenix directly in the eyes felt their skin and bones churn under the might of the chainsaw, which is
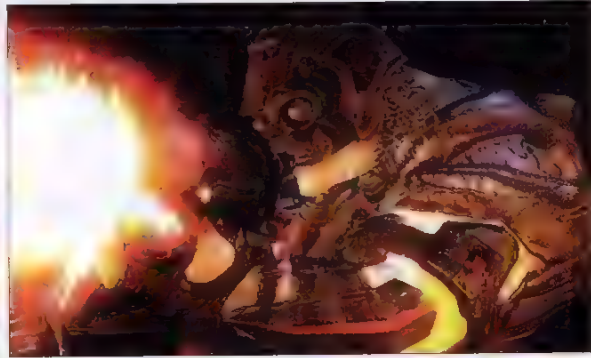
The entire game can be played cooperatively through Xbox Live

Yes, the game actually looks this beautiful in action

From what we can tell, it would appear that Dom will always be at your side, making him the character the second player becomes in co-op

attached to the machine gun. Flexing its graphical muscle, structures toppled in the distance as Fenix pressed forward, not as a whole, but brick by brick.

At the end of the stage, Fenix reached a helicopter, and as they sailed away to safety, something huge and nasty crawled out from the bowels of the planet. It lunged toward the helicopter, but before we could see what happened next, the screen faded to black. Damn you, CliffyB!

At Microsoft's E3 booth, we were treated to another look at the game, this time getting our hands on the multiplayer component. Our first of many matches pitted four Locust troops against four soldiers from the Coalition of Ordered Governments. We donned the guise of a COG soldier. The map itself was quite small, but almost every inch of it seemed to be designed with advantageous cover in mind. Again, from a design standpoint, it seemed like a war had already torn through this zone. Some people took to towers with sniper rifles, others hurried with an ally at their side, bouncing from one safe zone to the next on the main road. We decided to stick to the perimeter, where we found a chain gun sitting out in the open. As we learned, most of the weapons sit in areas that have little protection and will likely get you killed if the foe has you in their field of vision. The battle only lasted a few minutes, and like the demo we watched a day earlier, cover is everything in this game. If you leave yourself exposed, you are doomed. Interestingly, when a comrade falls, you hear them cry out for a medic. If you can get to them before they perish, you can revive them – but you can imagine how risky of a venture this is.

We managed to fare very well in the multiplayer matches, but we have to admit that we panicked whenever we heard a chainsaw kick into action. With a drool-worthy story mode that supports co-op, and a multiplayer experience that just kicks you in the teeth, Gears of War is definitely shaping up to be the next best thing in gaming. Emergence Day is coming. Hopefully it's sooner rather than later. ■ ■ ■

■ With a few generations under your belt, you can start controlling herds of your creatures at once
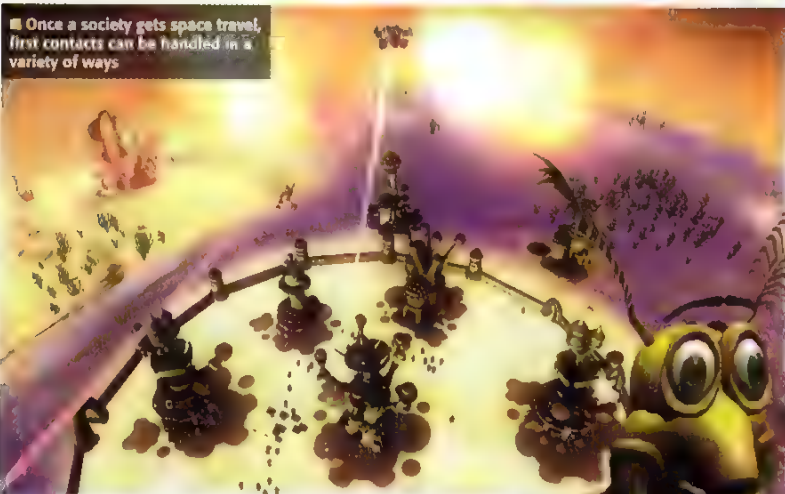
■ Once a society gets space travel, first contacts can be handled in a variety of ways

■ Mating...um...animations are generated based on the...um...structure of your creature. Wright said that they were hoping for a low rating, but the ESRB's rules on alien intercourse were a little vague

PC

Spore

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** MAXIS > **RELEASE** 2007

AND ON THE EIGHTH DAY...

Maybe Will Wright is a god. Or maybe Will Wright is making us into gods. After all, the man behind The Sims has been slaving away at the tools any deity would have been jealous to use when fixing up this plane of existence we call home. Concepts and evolutions that science and religion have been trying to explain since man learned to make fire seem almost, well, simple when Mr. Wright sits down and shows you how to make them work.

The basic gameplay of Spore has been discussed in these pages before – create a creature, help it evolve, develop a society, and explore the galaxy. What we saw at E3 wasn't a rehash of these ideas, but instead some examples of how it actually works in the game, demonstrated by Will Wright himself.

Wright started by making a new species. Granted, he had worked through the steps of this particular animal hundreds of times, but the methods looked surprisingly intuitive, almost as if a master sculptor could see into your brain and translate the vision exactly. Amorphous balls are stretched and prodded by moving their spines. Arms and legs can be attached anywhere and are animated based on the total structure. Different eyes offer boosts to certain statistics. Mouth shape and size dictate the kind of diet required. When different skins are

selected, the engine learns where joints are, what's the top and what's the bottom, and modifies the mottling and wrinkling appropriately. If you heard a deep rumbling below the crust of the Earth during the week of E3, it wasn't a global seismic shift, it was minds blowing every half-hour in the Spore demonstration room.

Spouting off phrases like "neonatal algorithm" as side notes, Wright showed off mating, socialization, a burgeoning society, the discovery of space travel, and a first encounter with another society. You or another Spore player will have created each planet and item in your game world, and the origin information will be available for each piece. Consider this fair warning: Running headlong onto a planet by "Joe Juba The Awesome" should be done with nothing short of nuclear weapons. It's not just the models and designs of other players that will be imported into your galaxy, but also the proclivities, technologies, and moods of those worlds. In the demonstration, it only took some fireworks to get the new species to worship Wright's alien creation as a god, C-3PO style – it seems that even player-created constructs quickly recognize when they're in the presence of a higher power. Fortunately, Mr. Wright and his team are giving us the tools to have the same effect. ■ ■ ■

■ The creation tools allow for designs that are whimsical or closer to a photo-real Earth

CIV
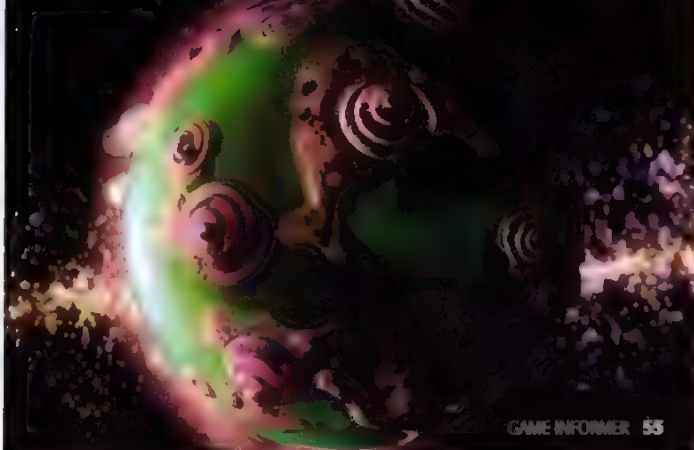
PEACE, LOVE AND HYBRIDNESS.

HYBRID

2006 MOTOR TREND CAR OF THE YEAR

The all-new 50-mpg* Civic Hybrid from Honda. It'll reverse your thinking

*Based on 2006 EPA mileage estimates: 50 combined, 49 city/51 highway. Use for comparison purposes only. Actual mileage may vary.

This is an example of what most of the conversations look like, with camera angles generated on the fly

3

XBOX 360

Mass Effect

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** BIOWARE > **RELEASE** 2007

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

One thing is rare at E3: a game that instantly and universally makes people gape. Slack-jawed and unblinking, it seems that everyone who left BioWare's demonstrations of Mass Effect found this most lusted-after of E3 prizes, and we join the chorus of gamers giddy in the face of what next generation hardware can deliver.

The developer's pedigree with the role-playing genre gives many clues about what to expect in Mass Effect. Elements the demo explored, like morality and squad-based action, are now more fully realized than in its predecessors, Knights of the Old Republic and Jade Empire. Mass Effect sets players up as one of the first humans to live in the galaxy at large – our species is something of a novelty to the more advanced intergalactic residents. But it falls on the shoulders of this player-created hero to warn the galaxy of a great danger, one that BioWare threatens could destroy the universe.

Taking on this task one resident at a time, players will have lots of talking to do. Unlike the stilted puppets of earlier games, the conversation system was one of the most impressive parts of the game's E3 presentation. Camera angles are dynamically created and feel much more like a TV drama than any random chat with an NPC, and selecting your tone instead of specific lines keeps the interaction moving. The variety of conversation options will add many layers of gray to the company's light side/dark side choices of earlier games, as we saw in an example where you could plead for information or just squish a gun against the NPC's forehead. In short, you are tasked with saving the galaxy and doing it "at any cost." The game, in essence, asks players to decide exactly what price is too high, and allows those choices to be downright extreme.

Sometimes, though, talking won't get you everywhere. Players will explore hundreds of locations – some as large as a whole planet and others as small as an abandoned ship floating in orbit. Player-owned vehicles will be just as customizable as the main character, and whether on foot or in your ride, conflicts do arise. In these, your party will rely heavily on guns. You can set the path, end point, target, and action of each companion to execute attacks in tandem. If that's too much, the AI seemed to take good care of itself, and we're hoping that's one way that the team is making this heady title accessible to a variety of players. We asked about different classes and attack types and, while details were limited, allusions to different classes focused on hacking or explosives were mentioned.

There's nothing small about Mass Effect. The level of detail in animations, options, locations, customization, and an unbelievably grand story to tell are all exciting for people who want to get the most out of their games. But the bottom line is that BioWare's new epic looks gorgeous, promises big things, and seems on track to deliver with every little detail. ■ ■ ■

The game's universe offers literally hundreds of locations, from full-featured planets to abandoned ships. More are promised as downloadable content after the game's launch

4 Super Mario Galaxy

Wii

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** 2007

MARWIIO WULES

After all of these years, Mario is still leading the charge for Nintendo. As the Wii launches gaming into uncharted territory, Nintendo is sending its plumber into the far reaches of space. For decades, Princess Peach has been kidnapped and locked away in castles. Now, she's found a way to get abducted by an alien. That woman really needs to be implanted with one of these tracking chips that the humane society injects into cats and dogs. It's up to Mario to find her and bring her back to the Mushroom Kingdom.

Like many of you, we were skeptical as to how a Mario platformer would control on the Wii. Would you have to point the remote to tell Mario where to go? Would you have to flick the remote to make Mario jump? Lay your fears to rest, Super Mario Galaxy plays exactly like the Mario titles of old. The analog stick handles Mario's movement, A button jumps, Z centers the camera, and B is used for various interactions like grabbing items. The remote simply adds

another layer of interaction to the game. At all times, Mario has a little star cursor traveling with him that follows the movements of the remote when it is pointed at the screen. If the cursor highlights a star icon and the player hits the B button, Mario will be pulled toward the star. As you can image, you'll need to point and click quickly to navigate a series of these challenges. Shaking the remote under a gigantic star will launch Mario into space, which often ends with him traveling to another planet. Interestingly, most of the planets in the game are miniscule in size, allowing players to explore the entire terrain in seconds. Because of this, most stages are comprised of multiple worlds.

We've been waiting for a follow-up to Mario Sunshine for quite some time, and this one seems to be taking the series to a bold new frontier of gaming. Sadly, creator Shigeru Miyamoto stated that Super Mario Galaxy will likely miss the system's launch, but should be available within the first six months of the machine's release. ■ ■ ■
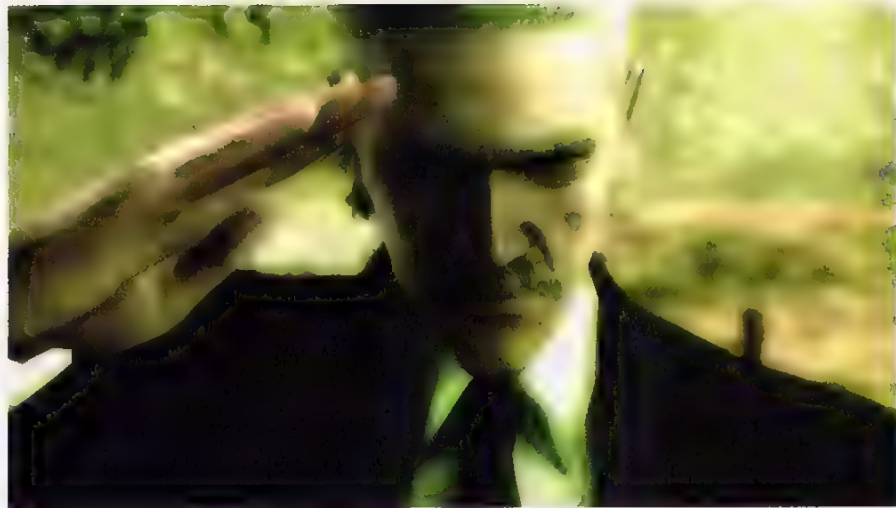
5 Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

PLAYSTATION 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** 2007

THE BIG GOODBYE

Normally it would be hard to liken Solid Snake to a TV sitcom, but after seeing the latest 15-minute trailer for Metal Gear Solid 4, one comparison seems unavoidable. Remember when practically every character from *Seinfeld* appeared in the final episode's trial for one last moment of screen time? Well, we got the exact same feeling as we watched familiar faces like Naomi Hunter, Meryl Silverburgh, and Roy Campbell show up to lend advice and assistance to a war-weary Solid Snake. Kind of like a group of old friends gathering to say goodbye.

Of course, we don't know for a fact that MGS 4 is the end for Solid Snake, and neither does Hideo

Kojima (see our interview with him on page 36). Even though we witnessed the aging spy place a pistol in his mouth while uttering the phrase "some legends are meant to die," the series is too well-known for twists and fake-outs to take anything at face value. One thing, however, is impossible to deny: Raiden has transformed into a badass of the highest order.

Now on the same level as the mythical Gray Fox, one scene depicts the once-wussy Raiden single-handedly taking down an entire group of Metal Gear-like bipedal machines with a series of lightning quick flips and slashes. It looks like he's certainly come into his own since the defeat of
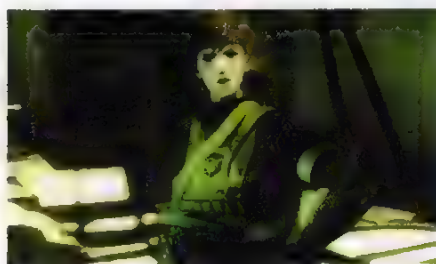
■ MGS 4's warzone will have players looking for new ways to hide

Solidus, and he even suggests that it's now his turn to protect Snake.

We don't know what brings Raiden to the Middle Eastern warzone, but Snake is another story. One of the game's themes is how wars are being outsourced to private military companies (PMCs), and the United Nations learns that all of the worlds PMCs are controlled by one organization: Outer Heaven. In fact, Outer Heaven's strength is equal to the military might of the rest of the world, and since the company is operated by Liquid Snake himself, Solid Snake is sent back into active duty to neutralize his brother once and for all.

As has historically been the case with Metal Gear Solid trailers, the newest one delivers intense anticipation along with a pile of questions. What happened after the Big Shell? What's up with Ocelot? Is this the final Metal Gear Solid? In the coming months we may learn more details about the game's mechanics, but odds are that these story-related mysteries won't be cleared up until the we're all growing old with Snake sometime next year. ■ ■ ■
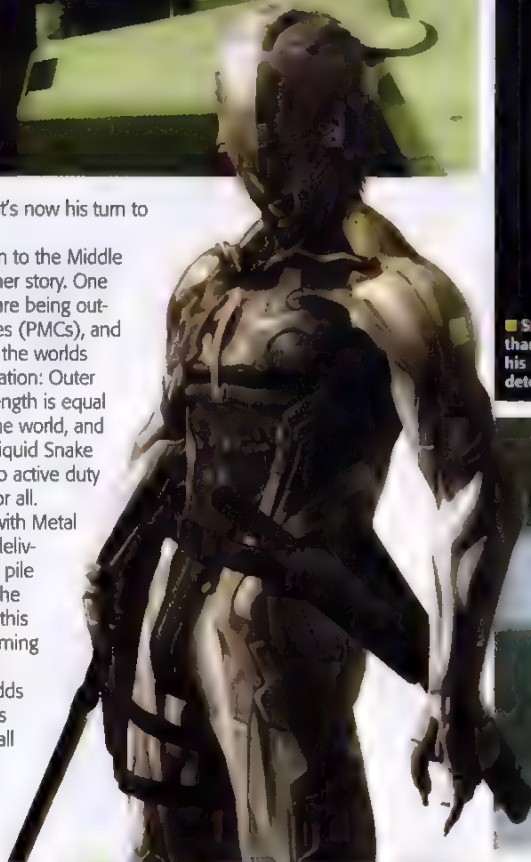
■ Snake has aged more than his friends because his genetic material is deteriorating

■ Liquid Snake/Ocelot's eyewear courtesy of SuperAmerica

These machines appear to be a conceptual cross between the Metal Gears REX and RAY

■ Alone on the battlefield isn't the cheeriest way to die
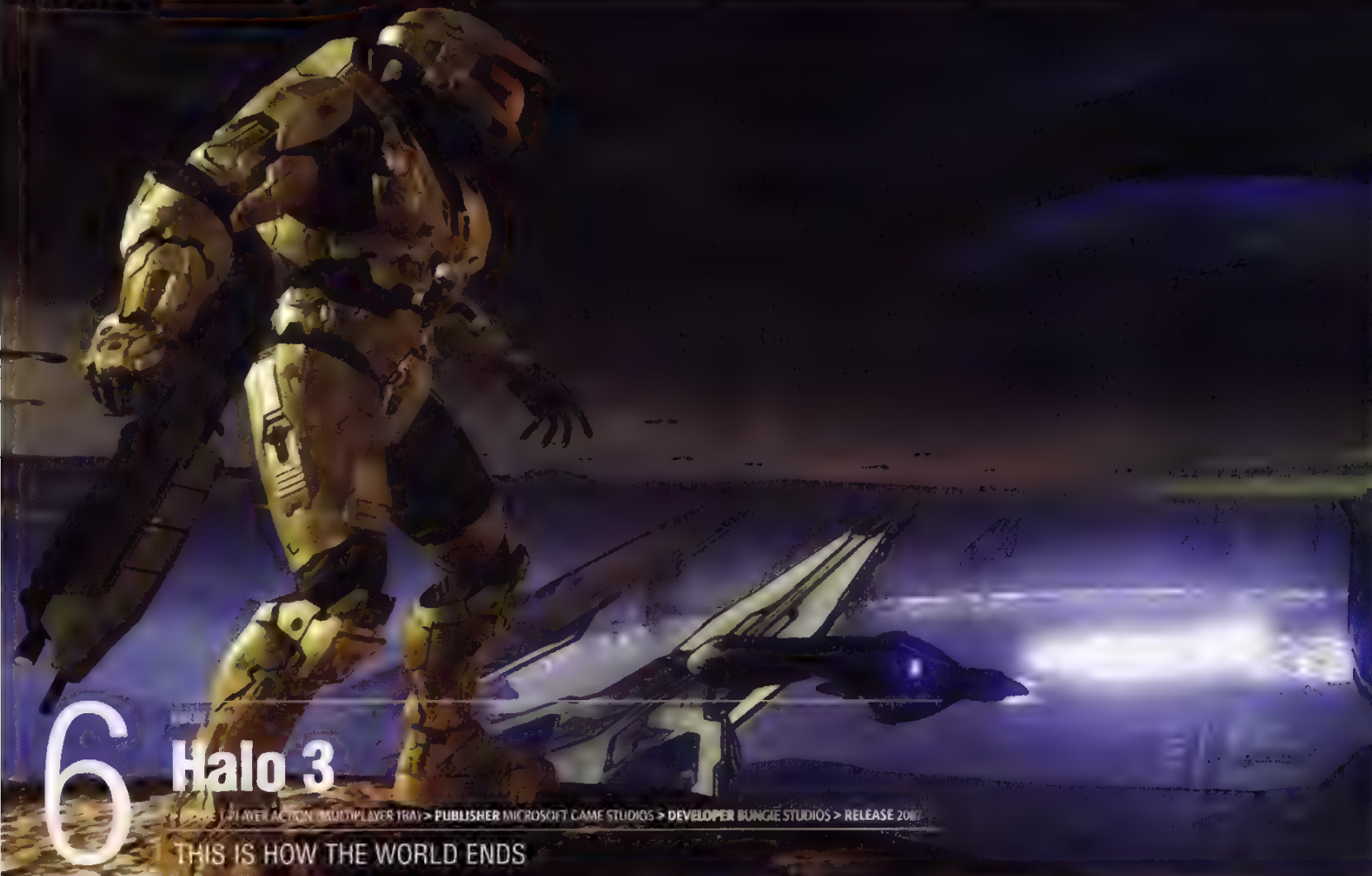
6 Halo 3

> 1 PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** BUNGIE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** 2007

THIS IS HOW THE WORLD ENDS

The new reflection technology is so impressive that you can see the entire environment reflected in Master Chief's visor
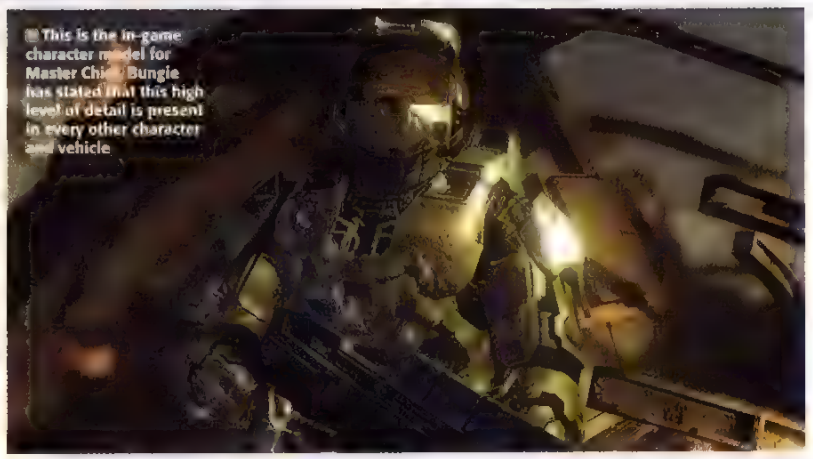
This is the in-game character model for Master Chief. Bungie has stated that this high level of detail is present in every other character and vehicle

The Covenant controls Earth, Master Chief stands alone, and it would appear that the Forerunners designed the Death Star. The two minute and 17 second Halo 3 teaser trailer that debuted at Microsoft's E3 press conference definitely put an itch into our trigger fingers, but it also generated a wealth of questions. Was any of the footage taken from the game engine? Could a level really be this big? And what in the world is that huge weapon?

After the press conference concluded, Game Informer snuck backstage to meet with Bungie Studios, who just happened to have the game on hand. As we soon learned, the entire video is comprised of in-game assets. Bungie illustrated this for us by zooming around the huge environment shown in the video. They even took control of Master Chief!

Halo 3 director Marcus Lehto outlined the direction of the video: "It was intended to be an understated announcement of Halo 3 – the tone is that of mystery and suspense – the calm before the storm. I wanted to make sure that we re-introduced the Chief, show that Earth is thoroughly conquered, with Covenant everywhere, and that there is a glorious, ancient artifact buried under the Earth's crust which will provide Halo 3 with the epic journey which we all want."

Interestingly, the environment shown stretches for 14 miles, and the ancient artifact that Lehto pointed out is inlaid with Forerunner technology. Who turned it on? What does it do? Your guess is as good as ours, but we have a feeling that the Forerunners will be on hand for some of the action in this sequel.

Another point of interest in the trailer is the appearance of Cortana. "Given the variety of character and story arcs at the end of Halo 2, we wanted to boil down our announcement to a few key threads," says Halo 3's director of cinematics, CJ Cowan. "Cortana and the Chief being a galaxy apart is a situation we haven't seen before, and is something that is a powerful component to Halo 3. We are using her transmissions in the demo to give the viewer a few subtle clues to her situation and state of mind, without revealing any specifics we want to save for the game itself."

A release date has not been set just yet, but we can only hope that this will be the big 2007 holiday release for Xbox 360. ■ ■ ■

Not a McDonald's for miles...
this really is a wasteland
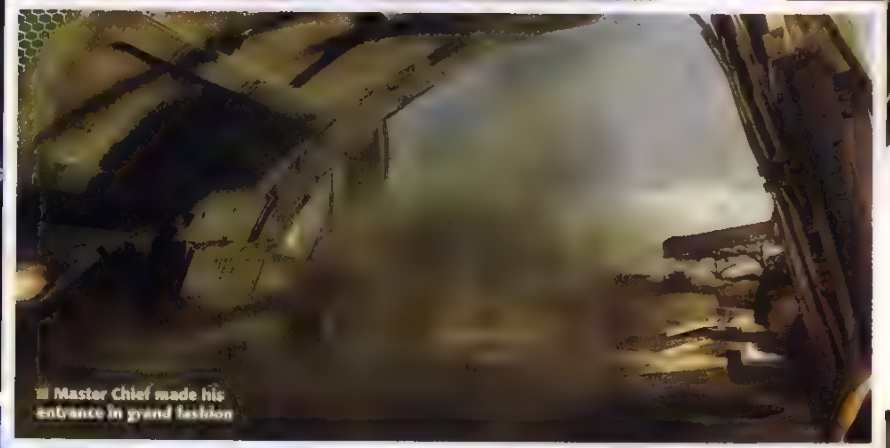
Master Chief made his
entrance in grand fashion

George Lucas called...
he wants his hologram
technology back

7

PLAYSTATION 3

Assassin's Creed

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE 2007

TAKING UP ARMS

The rest of the world finally got to see what we were so jazzed about last month. Ubisoft Montreal's ambitious Assassin's Creed made its presence known at Sony's press conference through a trailer that stopped attendees dead in their tracks, and later in private demonstrations. While we were already in on the game's big points, a few new kernels of information managed to sneak through.

A most impressive feature was seeing the free-running in action. Altaïr shifts his weight while crawling between ledges, tiny juts of cobblestone, and windowsills. At the top, he pulls himself over the lip of a building and takes to the rooftops. Even sprinting across wavering beams, jumping across alleys, and catapulting over embankments seems as intuitive as the team had promised it would be. Without a doubt, what was shown at E3 was early and had some quirks to smooth out, but the result has potential beyond anything we had previously imagined.

The other nugget was less concrete, but no less there.

Rearing up a horse in front of the locals is considered "high profile" for good reason – those villagers really freak out

The crowd dynamics are already looking really impressive, and this low-profile move will draw little attention from townspeople

When Altaïr dies from missing a jump or losing a fight, players are shown an unexpected sight. In what appears to be a first-person perspective, decidedly modern-looking people and equipment surround the player as they lay in what appears to be a surgical room. Quickly, the team dismisses any questions about this, but we do know that they have hinted at a tale that encompasses "a very long time." We talked about it a bit in last month's cover story, but suffice it to say that this futuristic twist promises an interesting angle for Assassin's story.

There's no doubt that Assassin's Creed made a big splash at E3 this year, and it's no surprise to anyone who's seen it. Even in a show so packed with amazing games, this adventure title has the pedigree and gameplay to get our mouths watering. ■ ■ ■

The dichotomy of a cute little girl stabbing corpses with a huge needle is just a little unsettling
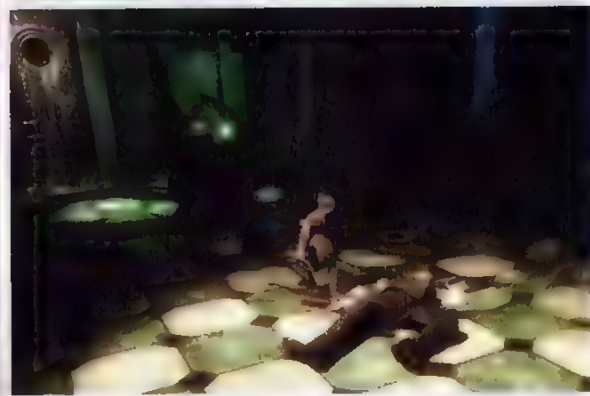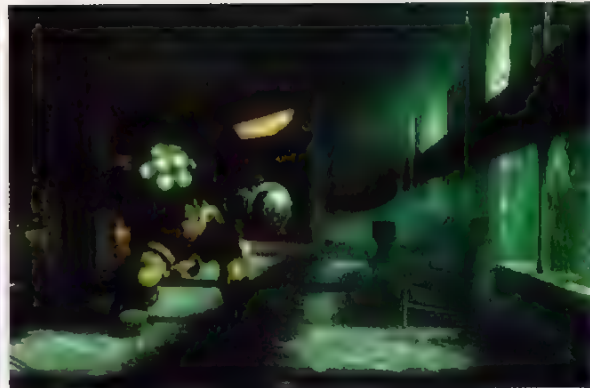
XBOX 360 | PC

BioShock

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** IRRATIONAL GAMES > **RELEASE** 2007

CREEPY IN A GOOD WAY

We may not have learned much about BioShock's gameplay that we didn't already share with you in our cover story back in the March issue, but we did get to check out a few of the scenes that drove home the title's philosophy behind next-gen gaming. As if it weren't enough to have to deal with a mutated little girl in a pink dress coughing up blood and desecrating corpses with a foot-long syringe, we got a glimpse of what life in the underwater dystopia of Rapture is like – and how the ethical decisions that players must make can be emotionally impactful.

Most of the denizens of Rapture are irreversibly mad, but the madness takes different forms in the various people you meet. Some of them just climb on ceilings and try to disembowel you with steel hooks, so whether or not to gun them down isn't exactly a moral dilemma. They even thank you for freeing them from their nightmare as their lifeblood leaks onto the linoleum. One scenario we witnessed, however, showcased a more insidious form of insanity. After some time playing the twisted games of a musician-turned-psychopath who toys with you over the public address system, the player ends up in what used to be a record store. The obligatory ambush ensues, but surviving that lets you get the one thing to convince the madman to come out and face you directly: a recording of someone spoofing his supposedly timeless music.

Watching the game running, it quickly became clear that Irrational's preoccupation with morality and consequence is paying off. To ease the onerous task of survival,

you have the option to rip up the whole social contract. Looting corpses, abusing the warped perceptions of whoever you meet, and even disfiguring your own body to gain power are all viable choices. This additional layer of immersion, over and above the many ways to overcome the obstacles in your path through different types of gameplay, makes BioShock a prime example of how video games can be a unique and compelling form of entertainment. ■ ■ ■

The sensation of constantly being pressed in by the ocean adds much to the ambience

■ The other environments may not be as impressive as the jungles, but they're no slouch

9

PC

Crysis

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** CRYTEK > **RELEASE** WINTER

COLD AS ICE

Crysis has long been blowing gamers' minds with unbelievable screenshots, but the game looked even better running live at E3. Hearing about a gigantic space crab robot tearing apart aircraft carriers and breathing freezing gas at anything that threatens it is one thing, but experiencing it firsthand and actually trying to kill the beast is another. The graphics that developer Crytek is able to coax out of its own CryEngine 2 are truly breathtaking, but we're even more pumped about the intense gameplay that goes along with the visuals.

Another facet of Crysis that we were able to check out was the real-time weapon and armor customization. With a simple in-game menu similar to sending radio messages in Battlefield 2, players can add new functionality or change the properties of their equipment on the fly. This feature should be immensely useful in dealing with the promised variety of enemies and environments. Utilizing the right tools, weapons, and tactics to effectively deal with different

situations is one of the primary gameplay elements of any action title, and Crysis is poised to let players explore that concept in a big way.

There's no doubt that Crysis is one of the best-looking titles that gaming has ever seen, and from what was shown at E3, the nuts and bolts of the gameplay will be far from disappointing. If everything we've been promised about Crysis – dynamic environments that dramatically change through alien technology and natural disasters, true tactical enemy AI, and a single-player campaign that reacts to your actions – comes true, this is going to be an FPS for the ages. ■ ■ ■
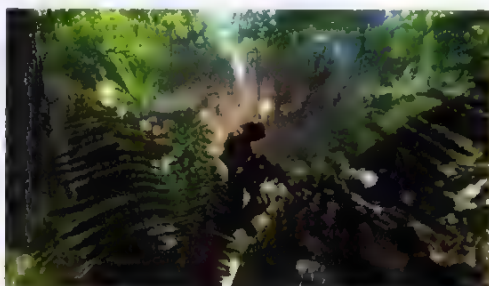
■ Presumably, this odd lighting is caused by the alien freeze-tech

10

PC

Supreme Commander

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** GAS POWERED GAMES > **RELEASE** 2007
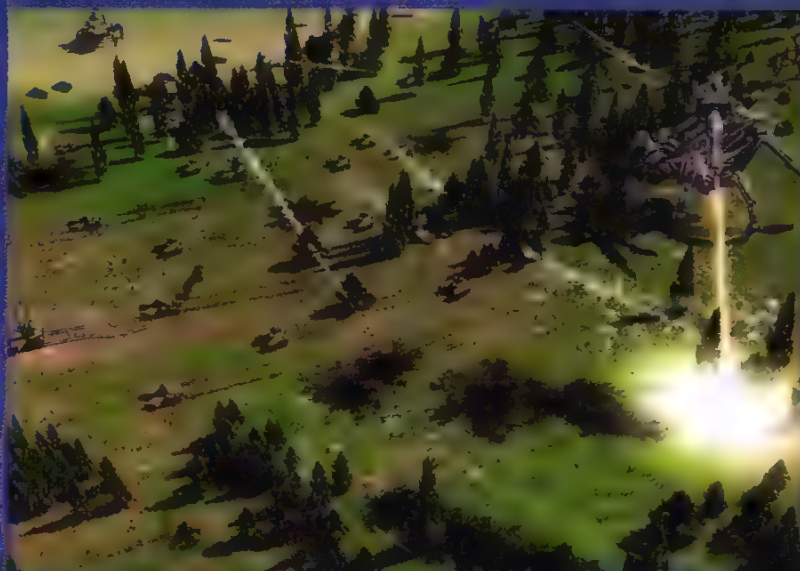
TOTAL REVOLUTION

We're big fans of real-time strategy games out here; the genre has supplied us with years of entertainment. Chris Taylor (the man behind Total Annihilation) and Gas Powered Games aren't satisfied with merely iterating once again on the old formula, though. Supreme Commander is as close to a total reinvention of a beloved genre as we've ever seen.

This title's most-lauded feature – being able to zoom all the way out to see the entire map in the main view – is a cool idea, but what does it really add to gameplay? We saw it in action, and it's much more than a neat toy. From this holistic view, you can see where your battle groups are and where they're going, as well as change their

attack and patrol paths through an easy and intuitive point-and-click interface. This feature really shines when you consider the size of the conflicts you'll be engaging in. The gameplay that we saw had literally hundreds of units of all descriptions mixing it up in three different simultaneous battles.

The sheer scale of Supreme Commander, from the enormous war machines at your disposal to the scope of the combats that break out and the huge maps that wars are fought on, is like nothing we've ever seen before. We'll have to re-learn everything we think we know about RTS when this comes out next year, but that's the kind of learning that we don't mind too much ■ ■ ■

■ For reference, each of those pine trees is two to three times as tall as an infantryman

■ Many of Kratos' basic attacks are the same, but his advanced moves have been revamped

11

PLAYSTATION 2

God of War II

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SCEA **> DEVELOPER** SCEA SANTA MONICA STUDIOS **> RELEASE** Q1 2007

ANGER MANAGEMENT

Some people are just destined to be unhappy, no matter how good things are going. Take Kratos, for instance. He's a mortal who ascended to godhood and inherited boundless power, and he's still nothing but scowls. Thankfully, this a good thing for gamers, because God of War's brand of action is at its best when it's packed with rage and discontent, and that hasn't changed a bit for God of War II.

Despite the fact that Sony's next-generation hardware and software is just around the corner, this sequel to last year's action hit remains one of the most anticipated games in the industry. It may not be boasting a vast array of new features, but it promises to give gamers more of what they loved in the first God of War. In addition to the features we've outlined before (like hanging from walls and swinging from your blades), the big news is that Kratos can now take his fury sky-high. We watched as the Ghost of Sparta hijacked an enemy griffon, killed the rider, then leapt to *another* griffon whose wing he proceeded to hack off, sending the beast twirling toward the ground.

This is just one example of how God of War II is raising the bar for its revenge-thirsty protagonist. With a new array of brutal kills, enemies (including mini-bosses), and epic surroundings, players will find every facet of the game tuned up and expanded. Though a few of the controls have been remapped (the shoulder dash is now on one of the face buttons for easier access), the blade-swinging combat feels familiar and intuitive. When the game hits next year, will players finally be able to guide Kratos to the serene happiness he secretly longs for? Probably not. But they'll be able to kill a whole bunch of stuff, which is almost as fulfilling. ■ ■ ■

■ "Man, this is the worst kite ever!"
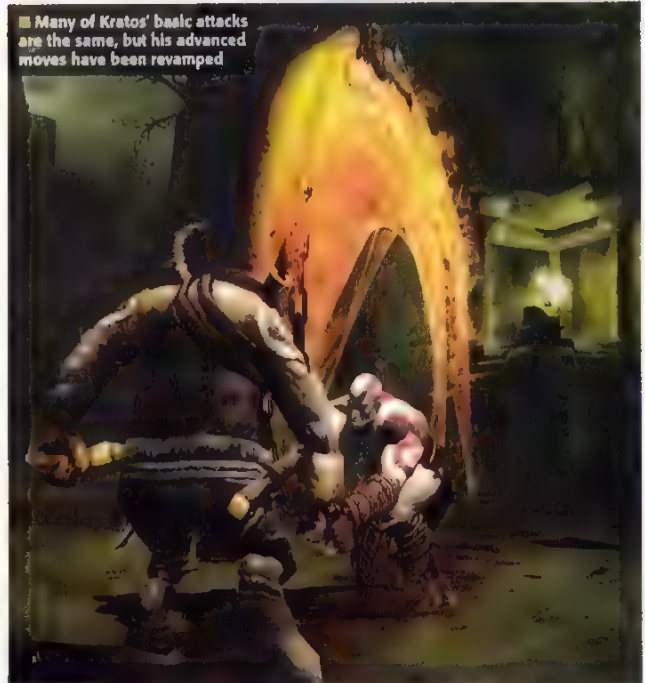
■ Your surroundings will still be of mythical proportions

Draenei can be newbs - err, Paladins - in addition to Mages, Priests, and Warriors according to the current plan

13 The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO
> **RELEASE** FALL

One thing is for sure, the Wii will definitely make you look cool

A DOUBLE DATE IN HYRULE

At this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, Nintendo delivered the message "Playing = Believing." What it should have been, however, is "Winner = Everyone." Holding true to its promise to the hundreds and hundreds of GameCube owners across the globe, The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess will still be released on Nintendo's purple, square box. On the same day that it hits retail for GC, Nintendo is also offering a version of Twilight Princess for the Wii – which should be the first day of the machine's launch. The content between the two is virtually identical, but the Wii version will of course control much differently, and it will be the only one that can be displayed in 480p on an HDTV.

Obviously, control means everything for a game like Zelda, and we're happy to report that it handles quite well on the Wii. In some areas, we'd even go as far to say that it could control better. For instance, with a weapon like the bow and arrow, the remote's motion sensing capability is utilized to highlight targets. Holding the down button on the d-pad notches the arrow. Releasing it lets the arrow fly. Interestingly, you'll hear the feathers whiz past your fingers thanks to the speaker that is built into the remote. After a few seconds, we were firing off arrows with the swiftness and ease of Legolas from The Lord of the Rings.

We also found that sword combat is an easy way to burn off calories. While normal attacks are still handled with a press of a button, a quick spin of the nunchuck unleashes Link's violent spin move. Additionally, jabbing the remote toward the screen results in Link bounding forward with a shield thrust.

The Wii is also showing us Kevin VanDam has nothing on Link when it comes to fishing. To drop a line in the water, you simply have to mimic the motions of casting with the remote. Hold down the A button, raise the remote over your shoulder, then as you whip it forward, release A to let the line loose. Flicking the remote creates movement on the lure. When a fish bites, you need to hook it by pulling back, then reel it in by spinning the nunchuck.

Nintendo boldly stated that Twilight Princess will be the greatest Zelda adventure to date. These are huge shoes to fill, but after three years of delays, we expect nothing less. ■ ■ ■

12 PC
World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade
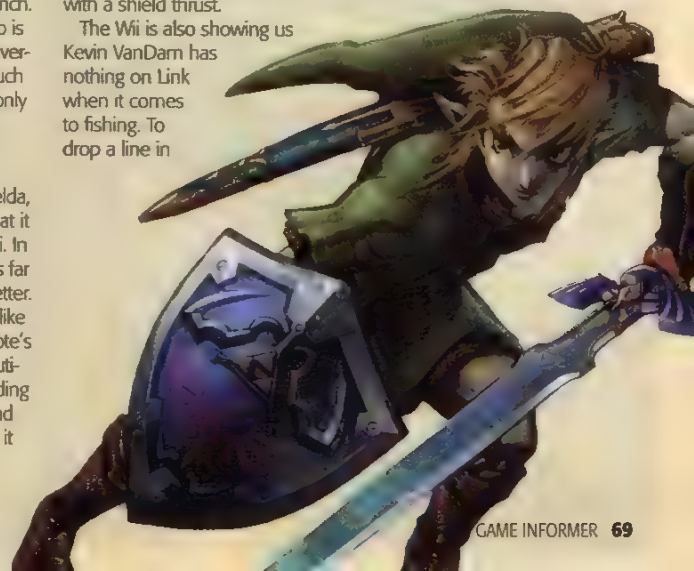
> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> **PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** WINTER

NERF DEATHCOIL

Complaints about the relative power level of Warlocks aside, The Burning Crusade is shaping up to be nearly everything that our WoW-obsessed staff could wish for. The recently-announced new Alliance race, Draenei, is almost cool enough to be part of the Horde. Blizzard has big plans to give players who choose not to participate in the massive 40-man raids something interesting to do in the form of dungeons designed for five, 10, and 20 heroes. And, at long last, open-world PvP will have a purpose.

The new world of Outland, in addition to housing many instances filled with new challenges and fat loot, will also feature many different outdoor PvP objectives that can be claimed for your faction. The plan is to give certain advantages to the side that controls them, from unique quest lines to special vendors and cool buffs. If it puts an end to trying to fight while outnumbered 3:1 in the current Battlegrounds (curse the stupid broken queue system), we're all for it. Blizzard is also planning to revamp the three existing Battlegrounds to make them even more team-oriented, and hopefully alleviate the long faction grinds that PvPers currently have to put up with to get their rewards.

Of course, there will be a ton of content available for those with no interest in PvP as well. The already-announced instances of Kharazan, Hellfire Citadel, as well as the abodes of Warcraft III heroes Kael and Illidan will no doubt only be a portion of what's in store. Honestly, World of Warcraft is already a good enough game to get several million people's $15 per month, and The Burning Crusade is looking ready to blow the lid off of the game. Let's just hope that Blizzard actually manages to release it in the projected 2006 timeframe – the company's track record on content releases isn't exactly confidence-inspiring ■ ■ ■

Aww, it's so cute when Priests think they can do damage

14

Super Smash Bros. Brawl

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** SORA > **RELEASE** 2007

PINT-SIZED PUGILISTS RETURN

O n the first evening of E3, Nintendo packed a number of special guests into a lecture hall-like auditorium to unveil its latest project: Super Smash Bros. Brawl. The exclamation point on the announcement is that Masahiro Sakurai, the original director of the series who had previously left Nintendo to start his own company, has reunited with Nintendo for the creation of Brawl.

His new company, Sora, began development of the title in October 2005 and it hopes to have the title out sometime in 2007 for the Wii. Mr. Iwata asked Sakarai personally to return to the project, and you can rest assured that Nintendo has helped fortify his new Tokyo-based studio.

All that was shown was a video (which can be seen at gameinformer.com or smashbros.com) that started with a quick transformation of Mario, Pikachu, Link, and Zelda to the new graphic fidelity that these classics will enjoy on the Wii. But the real excitement happened

when the video began unveiling some of the new champions that players can look forward to when the game releases: Meta Knight from the Kirby series, Pit from the 8-bit classic Kid Icarus, Zero Suit Samus dolled out in a tight blue jumpsuit rather than her familiar power armor, the infamous Wario complete with fart attack, and the crowd favorite Solid Snake from Hideo Kojima's Metal Gear series.

Many questions were asked, but few were answered. Online play is uncertain, but hints that you could perhaps use

your GameCube controller to play the game had the fans giddy in their seats. Sakurai also addressed Solid Snake, as he doesn't want to introduce guns into the series, but he did feel that rocket launchers could add a fun element to the game. He also assured the players that Snake's cardboard box would indeed be in the game.

There is still a lot to learn about Brawl in the coming year, but fighting fans everywhere couldn't have asked for a better gift for their Wii consoles. ■ ■ ■

· Zerosuit Samus

The released videos suggest an appearance by some Nintendogs
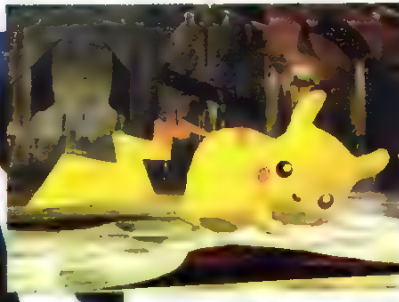
Meta Knight will haunt your dreams

Move over Pink Floyd, the Mario and Zelda Laser Light show is the new hotness

The stages feature some amazing backdrops

While the long-awaited Kid Icarus sequel still hasn't been announced, we do have its star, Pit, featured in Brawl

Mario obviously has someone's plumbing he needs to go fix

Now if we could just get Mario to do this move in Super Mario Galaxy

Nintendo hinted that you might even be able to use your GameCube controller to play Brawl

15
PLAYSTATION 3
Final Fantasy Versus XIII

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** TBA

FIGHT!

After its relatively subdued E3 presence over the last few years, the Final Fantasy franchise finally came out of the gate swinging with a whopping 12 titles showcased at this year's show. However, even though one of those games was a playable English build of the much-anticipated (and often-delayed) Final Fantasy XII, the title that stole gamers' hearts was the mysterious new project from Kingdom Hearts director Tetsuya Nomura: Final Fantasy Versus XIII.

As a joint venture between two of Square Enix's most acclaimed teams, Versus XIII has a pedigree that will make RPG fans weak in the knees. The gorgeous cinematics are being created by the team behind Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children, and the gameplay will be handled by

Nomura's Kingdom Hearts staff. What this means for the future of Kingdom Hearts III is uncertain, but it does suggest that Versus XIII will have a greater focus on action than a traditional Final Fantasy.

Even though gameplay details are scarce, the trailer that Square Enix unveiled at its press conference displayed some of the most impressive PS3 footage we've seen. It depicts a haunting young man sitting on an ornate throne before he stands up and confronts an army at the bottom of a large staircase. At first, it seems that odds aren't in his favor – until he summons an array of magical swords and fixes his stony glare on his foes.

Players will take control of this enigmatic warrior in the game, but like other entries in the Final Fantasy series, friends and com-

panions will play a significant role as well. In fact, Nomura announced that bonding will be a recurring theme in the story. "Bonding is not just about friendship. It's about every kind of relationship we can have with different types of people," he explains. "All of these things will converge to some kind of tragic element. I think tragedy will be a very important element in the story of Final Fantasy Versus XIII."

This tragedy may explain the menace that emanates from the main character, but players will ultimately see a focus on these relationships, their rewards, and their pitfalls. How this philosophy will translate into gameplay has yet to be seen, but you can be sure that we will pass along any new info on this exciting project as soon as it is available. ■ ■ ■

■ Even the main character's name is still unknown

■ If you can summon magical guardian swords, you immediately become awesome. It's a law

16
PLAYSTATION 3
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** TBA > **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

FIRE IT UP

You're on an oil rig off the coast of Venezuela, surrounded by unfriendly militia soldiers. Your foes are carrying assault rifles, and you're armed with only a lighter. For most people, this would be the end. In Mercenaries 2, it's just the beginning. You strike up your lighter and toss it towards a stack of corroded barrels as you leap off the platform and plummet towards the ocean. In the midst of your fall (and the ensuing explosion), you take out your grappling gun and latch on to your partner's hovering helicopter. As you are airlifted to safety, you know that the smoldering wreckage behind you is a job well done – and your ticket to a hefty paycheck.

Pandemic's Mercenaries was packed with indiscriminate destruction that made it a surprise hit last year. Now, its follow-up is expanding on the life of a lonely merc by adding a brand new co-op element. At any point during the game, a second

player can join in for split-screen play. The core missions remain the same, but a partner in crime serves to accent the many paths that are open to complete each objective. One player can draw attention by firing on a base from a helicopter while the other drives through the back door in an armored Jeep. Alternately, you can both just storm in from the front and hope that your combined firepower will overwhelm your enemies.

Because so many games use an open world and lots of loud noises as a selling point, it might be difficult to imagine how Mercenaries 2 is any different. Rest assured, apart from being one of the best-looking PS3 game's we've seen, World in Flames is well on the way to upping the ante in terms of sheer freedom and destructibility in a virtual environment. This is definitely a case where playing with fire is shaping up to be a very, very good thing. ■ ■ ■

■ Cue Dukes of Hazzard theme music

■ Hijacking vehicles is an important part of being a mercenary

17 Enemy Territories: Quake Wars

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER SPLASH DAMAGE/ID SOFTWARE > RELEASE WINTER

FOR THE PLANET

After spending a good amount of time playing Enemy Territories: Quake Wars at E3, it became apparent that the game is going far beyond the Quake license that's attached to the project. While it's cool to be able to relive the Strogg invasion of Earth that kicks off the Quake storyline, Quake Wars is definitely its own title. Even though the trumpeted Solo Assignment System – which will give tasks to players and squads based on their composition and experience – wasn't active in the build that we played, that very early version was still a hell of a good time.

Surprisingly, for a game that injects so many new concepts into the multiplayer FPS genre, Quake Wars' learning curve isn't all that steep. Once you figure out how to read the radar, which tells you where all of the current objectives and sighted enemies are, it's a breeze to find the action. For instance, getting the most out of an anti-vehicle class is as simple as following the symbol that points you toward enemy vehicles and trashing them. The open nature of the maps also enables some interesting and effective tactics for smaller squads of players to slip behind enemy lines and wreak some havoc.

The human Global Defense Force feels pretty familiar, with futurized versions of modern military equipment. After all, a sniper rifle is pretty much a sniper rifle, no matter how many fancy gadgets you strap to it. The Strogg, on the other hand, are much

more exotic. They may have sidearms that fulfill the same purpose as a standard-issue pistol, but getting used to the radically different functionality takes a little time. The same goes for the vehicles, from the one-man quasi-jetpack to the lumbering artillery pieces. Once you wrap your brain around the way the Strogg do things, though, the carnage swings into full gear and all of a sudden several hours have flown past.

We had an absolute blast playing Quake Wars, but hopping onto a team with a dozen strangers, playing with default keybindings, and being aurally blasted by the incessant din of E3 isn't exactly optimal playing conditions. There are several layers to the game that we didn't get much time with, from deploying emplaced weapons at your base to exploring the full capabilities of each class of soldier. Hunkering down and digging deep into the gameplay of Quake Wars is going to be one of the highlights of the second half of 2006. ■ ■ ■

Dealing with enemy vehicles is a huge priority

As in other games, medic characters can change the flow of battle

The GDF may not have alien technology, but they do all right

While the E3 demo was a tight arena, the team promises wide-open exploration and environments like this one
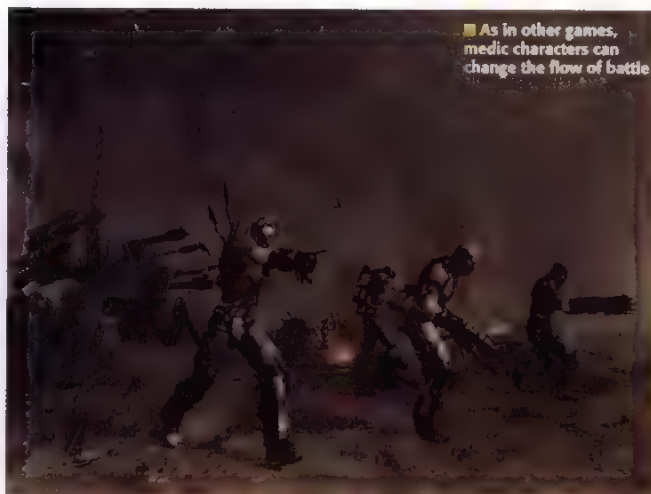
PLAYSTATION 3

Heavenly Sword

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** NINJA THEORY > **RELEASE** FALL

SKIP THE EASY JOKE

Go ahead. Just get it out of your system. Yes, Heavenly Sword could have been (and has been) lovingly referred to as "Goddess of War," but is that even such a bad thing? After some solid hands-on time with this title, our instinct is to answer in the negative.

Story-wise, the doomed killing machine on a quest for bloody vengeance is certainly reminiscent of Kratos' memorable backstory. In Heavenly Sword's version, Nariko takes up the legendary Heavenly Sword after an invading army kills the weapon's protectors – specifically, her father and his men. While the blade offers power beyond measure, it also kills its bearer within hours. Nariko, knowing the sword's double edge, rages through the countryside to avenge what she has lost before she too dies on the blade.

What we played was an arena battle with waves of armed men jumping down to the atrium's floor, only to be brutally sliced and diced. The combat engine offers some nice variety, with three main stances are switchable on the

fly via the shoulder buttons. Many things in the world can be picked up, kicked over, and tossed at enemies, including their own weapons. While Heavenly Sword could certainly feel like a fast-paced button masher, this early demo also promises interesting and deep combat highlighted by amazing animations.

As the teams of armed men were slain and we explored the myriad ways to kill people in Heavenly Sword, the leader appeared and entered the fray. When the bout between Nariko and this boss character finally got down to business, the game switched to a fast button-pressing minigame, and success moved a high-flying fight to its dramatic conclusion. And, yeah, to be honest, it's a lot like God of War's boss battles. Still, if Heavenly Sword is going to ape another game, the developers at least have great taste in what to lift.

And the team at Ninja Theory has clearly been paying

attention. While the demo level was a small roofless room, representatives were adamant about one thing – this is no arena-only affair. The plan is to have Nariko explore, solve puzzles, and kill her way across a variety of open spaces. With the lead character's imminent death, we're even wondering if it's possible that the story will be real-time.

Okay, so maybe "Goddess of War" isn't a total misnomer, but Heavenly Sword deserves better than being dismissed as a rip-off. High-style combat, a great lead character, and the potential to be as shockingly good as that other brutal action game? Sounds like a good deal to us. ■ ■ ■
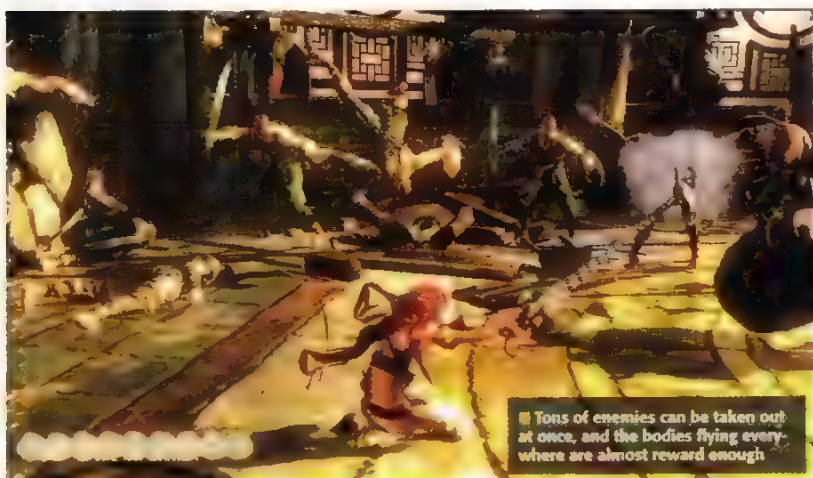
Tons of enemies can be taken out at once, and the bodies flying everywhere are almost reward enough

One style offers big, sweeping moves like this one, but another is for heavy, close combat

The difficulty has been turned up, so now the expert tracks are even more formidable

19

PLAYSTATION 2

Guitar Hero II

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** RED OCTANE > **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

ROCKIN' THE SUBURBS

What more is there to say about Guitar Hero II than we want to play more of it as soon as possible? At E3, we got to play through seven of the new songs making their way to the stage for this hotly anticipated sequel, and the cooperative duet mode continues to totally rock. Re-recorded tracks of "Who Was In My Room Last Night" (Butthole Surfers), "War Pigs" (Black Sabbath), "Psychobilly Freakout "(Reverend Horton Heat), and "Arterial Black" (Drist) join the songs we announced last month: "Strutter" (KISS), "You Really Got Me" (Van Halen), and "YYZ" (Rush). It may be a while before we get word of any other major included songs. While we love the initial lineup, our hope is that the full song list offers even more genre variety than what we've seen so far. ■ ■ ■

20

PC

Hellgate: London

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
> **DEVELOPER** FLACSHIP STUDIOS > **RELEASE** TBD

KILL, LOOT, REPEAT

Some games are designed to be intricately balanced, highly competitive events that players can dig deeply into to maximize their efficiency. Not Hellgate: London. This action/RPG is about killing a whole ton of enemies, getting better equipment, and leveling up – and doing it all with style. The sheer number of abilities that you can use to decimate the hordes of enemies onscreen is a good time in itself. The twist here is that the action is mostly experienced from a first-person perspective, lending a certain immediacy to the real-time RPG-style combat. Multiplayer is wholly integrated into the experience as well, with an online structure similar to Guild Wars, though you won't be required to play online at all times. Furthermore, nearly everything is randomly generated: Levels, enemies, items, and even missions are all created on the fly, so you shouldn't run out of content to explore as long as the action stays fun. Which, by all indications, will be an awfully long time. ■ ■ ■

21

John Woo Presents Stranglehold

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17

Rubble doesn't magically disappear

LET DESTRUCTION REIGN

How many times have you found yourself unloading clips into objects in an environment just to see if your ammo would somehow have an effect on them? And when you do learn that a computer will short out and explode with the squeeze of the trigger, do you shoot every other computer that you come across throughout the course of the game? If your answer is a gleeful "yes," then brace yourselves for Stranglehold.

Errant bullets can shatter individual ties on walls, make couches cough up fuzz and stuffing, demolish a concrete pillar right down to its rebar, and knock out legs on a tables which in turn sends food and plates crashing to the ground. Even the plaster from ceilings can chip off and float to the ground. Everything in the environments can be destroyed. Now picture what a rocket launcher can do to a cluttered kitchen. Don't worry, devilish grinning is allowed.

Incredible environmental destruction aside, Midway is also creating a gameplay experience that captures the acrobatic talents of actor Chow Yun-Fat as well as John Woo's insistence that it's not a gunfight unless thousands of bullets are fired and a dove spreading its wings in slow-motion are somehow included. You can run up railings, swing from chandeliers, and dive onto serving carts all without breaking the rhythm of thumping your finger on the trigger. To ensure that players tap into their arsenal of moves, the game rates each of the deaths that you deal. Rack up a string of impressive maneuvers and you'll fill your special meter in no time flat. What functionality does the special meter serve? The ability to send a gaggle of goons to an early grave with one tiny button press. These sequences are highly cinematic and worthy of another devilish grin. ■ ■ ■

Midway isn't saying much about vehicular combat yet, but did comment that you will find yourself piloting a boat
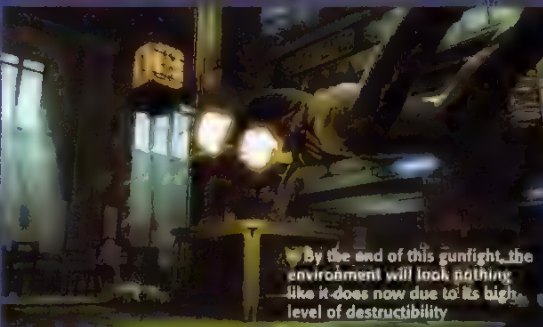
By the end of this gunfight, the environment will look nothing like it does now due to its high level of destructibility

The Dark Walkers are a totally original, never-seen-before concept for alien war machines, but they're so awesome, who cares?
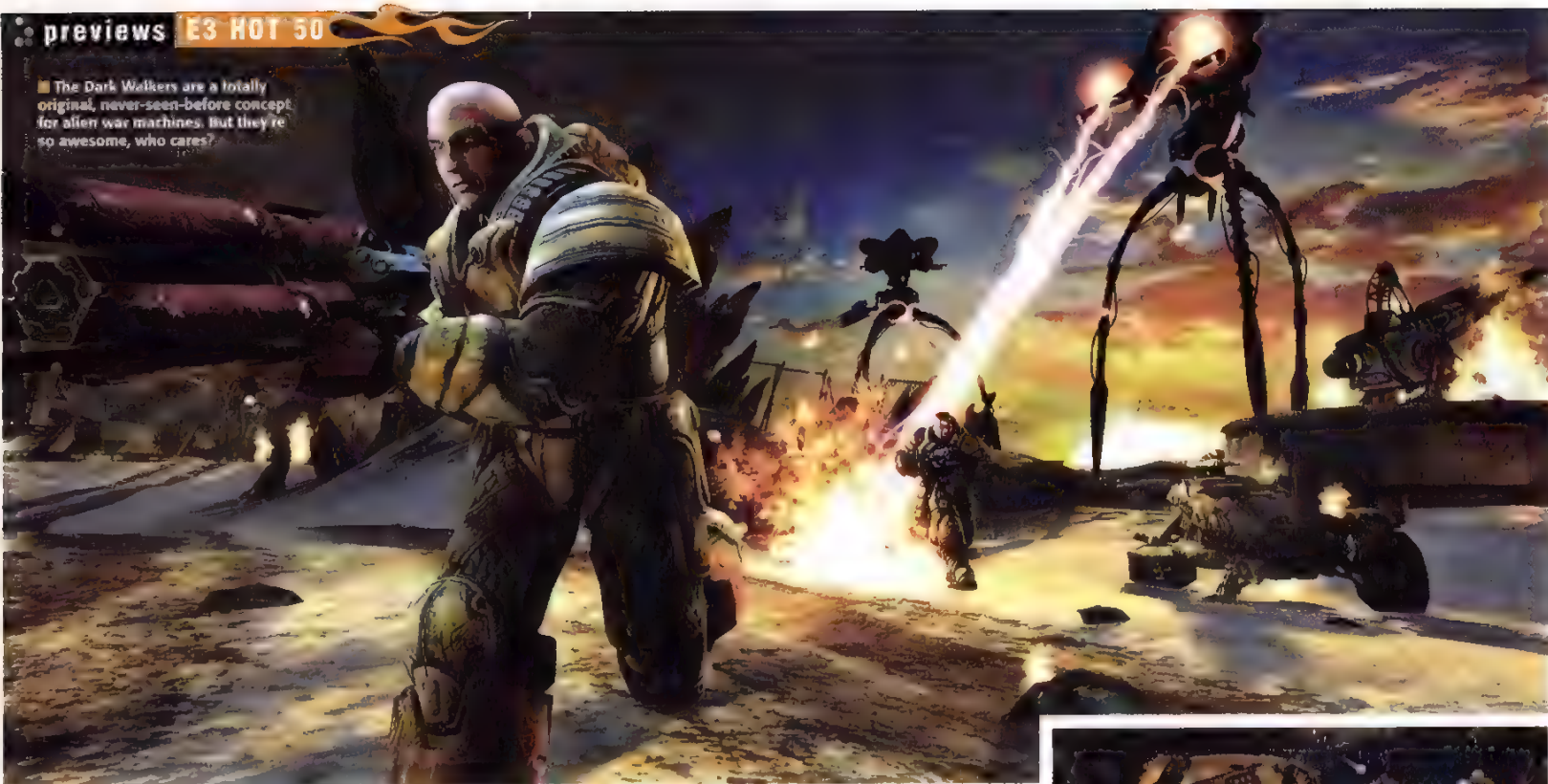
22

PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

Unreal Tournament 2007

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

FOR REAL THIS TIME

The Unreal Tournament franchise has been rocking gamers for seven years now, and the latest iteration of the series is shaping up to be as badass as the outstanding UT 2004 release. As one could assume, nobody can squeeze the most out of Unreal Engine 3 like creator Epic Games can, and a whole new mode of combat that makes Onslaught look like a Sunday brunch is in the works. Unreal Tournament 2007 is poised to blow up online like few games ever have.

Massive online matches are how the UT franchise rolls, and this edition will kick it up into all-out Warfare. This new mode combines the popular Onslaught and Assault modes of the series' past and drops players into huge maps where each team has equivalent but separate objectives. Rather than just fighting over control points, you'll have to carry a power core between various points on the map to take over nodes, as well as overcome other obstacles to open the way. Unlike some other titles with similar modes, however, both teams will have the ability to go on the offensive, rather than one side being stuck on defense for half an hour at a time. Each side has

access to a separate vehicle list as well, so a round of Warfare will be a far cry from the "mirror matches" that previous online FPSs have given us.

Vehicles will definitely be a large part of UT 2007, but to make the enormous levels that the team has planned fun for everyone, a new method of transportation had to be devised. Epic's elegant solution is to give every player one-button access to their own personal hoverboard. By whipping it out, you'll start trucking across the landscape like Michael J. Fox in an ill-conceived sequel -- but a single point of damage will knock you sprawling, and you'll have to spend several vulnerable seconds on the ground catching your breath. The whole

point is to get players to the conflict zones quickly without requiring the use of a vehicle; we can speak from experience that waiting for a new ride to spawn isn't exactly thrilling gameplay.

The visuals speak for themselves, but we're happy to report that Epic is pushing to evolve the franchise's gameplay as well. No official word has yet been heard about an Xbox 360 release or cross-platform online play, but an announcement along those lines at some point wouldn't surprise us at all. Until then, start saving up those nickels for either a new graphics card or a PlayStation 3, because this is one title that's worth upgrading your electronics collection for. ■ ■ ■

While hoverboarding, you'll be able to grapple unto and skitch behind vehicles

The Leviathan now has several independently-controlled turrets for maximum pwnage

All the old-school UT hilarity, from shock combos to dismemberment via rocket, will be present

23

PLAYSTATION 3

Final Fantasy XIII

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

ABSOLUTELY FABULA

It can't really be said that the announcement of a new Final Fantasy is ever a disappointment, but many fans of the series were certainly surprised to see what was unveiled by Square Enix at E3. After all, many rumors (including several printed in our magazine) seemed to suggest that a PS3 remake of the classic Final Fantasy VII was the likely candidate, especially since 2007 will mark the 10-year anniversary of the title's PSone release. Instead, gamers learned of a new venture called Fabula Nova Crystallis, with the PS3's Final Fantasy XIII as its cornerstone.

A catch-all name for three different titles (Final Fantasy XIII, Final Fantasy Versus XIII, and the phone-based Final Fantasy Agito XIII), Fabula Nova Crystallis means "the new tale of the crystal" in Latin. While each game will feature separate stories and characters, they will all be based on a common mythos, and Final Fantasy XIII will be the first one to introduce that universe to gamers around the world.

After several entries based in a more traditional fantasy setting, FF XIII is returning to a futuristic world filled with high-technology, as illustrated by these stunning screens. From the trailer shown at the Square Enix press conference, we know that the heroine is acrobatic and highly skilled with weapons, and possesses some kind of psychic powers as well. How these powers are used in combat is still unknown, as are most specifics about the game's battle mechanics.

The fights may look more like an action game than an RPG, but the team at Square Enix is very aware of the line between the two genres, and definitely wants to keep a clear distinction between them. That is why FF XIII will adopt an active time battle system similar to previous games in the series. Powered by what Square Enix calls the White Engine, the ATB allows players to carefully select their actions while eliminating the feeling that you're just waiting for your turn to come up. Could this mean a reincarnation of FF X-2's fast-paced system? If so, let's hope it doesn't have too many dress-up fashion cutscenes.

A new Final Fantasy – in any form – is a huge event in the gaming world. Even though we may have to wait a while to see Cloud and company again (if ever), this mysterious female warrior and her extraordinary abilities leaves us with a good feeling about where the Final Fantasy series is heading. ■ ■ ■

24

XBOX 360 | PC

Prey

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYERS VIA XBOX LIVE OR PC INTERNET) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** HUMAN HEAD STUDIOS (PC), VENOM GAMES (360) > **RELEASE** JULY 10

MAKING CONTACT

After more than 10 years in development, Prey is finally nearly upon us. The innovative shooter from 2K Games, 3D Realms, and Human Head Studios (and Venom Games, which is handling the 360 version. That's a lot of studios!) was on display at E3, and we got a chance to get our hands on the multiplayer section of the game.

Prey is the story of Tommy, a Cherokee mechanic who has been abducted and brought on board an alien ship. As such, there are many otherworldly aspects to the game, like strange weaponry and even stranger gravity. While each of the weapons works in a fairly standard manner, each has a creepy, biomechanical feel, which extends to the environments and enemies. Rendered by the powerfully atmospheric Doom 3 engine, Prey has a look that is as impressive as it is unsettling.

What is even stranger than the weapons and aliens are the areas that allow you to walk on walls or even the ceiling. Because of this new twist on gravity, traditional deathmatch stages have a much larger playable area, and you may find yourself having a firefight with someone directly above you. Initially, Prey's twisted world was a little disorienting and confusing, but we quickly picked it up. The ability to walk on the walls and ceiling adds a lot of new strategy to deathmatch, and the ability to move from one area of a map to another via portals only makes Prey's multiplayer feel even more innovative.

With its new gameplay systems, great visuals, and interesting story, Prey has a lot of potential, and we're definitely interested in checking out the single-player portion of the game. Should everything come together as well as we think it could, Prey's launch during the sparse summer months could help it find the strong fanbase it deserves ■ ■ ■

At long last, David Cronenberg made a video game!

LIFE
T-ENG 0968
AIR TEMPERATURE -23.40

010
Hand Grenade

225
Machine Gun

25

XBOX 360

Lost Planet: Extreme Condition

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** SPRING

POTENT BREW

At first blush, Lost Planet might sound like a strange mix. Set far in the future, the game has an amnesiac soldier battling against hordes of bugs, legions of snow pirates (well-armed humans that are none too friendly), and brutally cold weather. Of these, the air temperature is the most immediate threat. The main character has a finite resistance to the cold (called t-energy or thermal energy) that is constantly draining. When that runs out, his health starts to take a hit, but killing enemies leaves behind knobs of energy that restore small bits of this resistance.

This dynamic requires players to constantly seek combat, and is made even more compelling by a few of the game's other additions. While on foot, players have access to a grappling line much like Bionic Commando's, allowing for quick jumps between clusters of enemies or to better vantage points. Although the demo we played didn't have vehicles in the traditional sense, there was great emphasis on the game's other main feature: Vital Suits. These machines offer great firepower and increased t-energy, but at the cost of slow movement and sheer bulk. You can jump out of the suits to grab extra ammunition, activate items in the environment, or pick up new weapons. The suits use two guns independently, and players can detach and use one of these massive weapons when on foot.

When taken individually, all of these features sound like gameplay we've seen before. But in the E3 demo levels (which are also available for free over Xbox Live), the intense pace of combat is highlighted by the large-scale explosions and the sheer number of enemies swarming your location at all times. With swirling clouds and blasts of snow across your field of vision, the widespread destruction of barrels, cars, and enemies adds to the chaos of this war.

We know little about how the story will play out, but combat of this magnitude could hold us over for quite some time. Multiplayer options haven't been fleshed out yet, but the thought of real human teams savaging the landscape has us salivating. All we know for sure is that Capcom has confirmed cooperative as well as versus modes. Lost Planet, even at this early stage, promises to carry on the traditions we've all come to know and love through the history of video games – mechs, super soldiers, fierce aliens, and grand explosions certainly can't be bad, can they? ■ ■ ■

LIFE
T-ENG 8979
AIR TEMPERATURE -23.27

Here's the grappling line, and in action it's insanely fast – you'll use it constantly

809

242
Machine Gun

LIFE
T-ENG 0984
AIR TEMPERATURE -23.27

Most of the handheld weapons are energy-based, but Gatling guns, rocket launchers, grenades, and missiles all make an appearance as well

010
Hand Grenade

Machine Gun

■ Boss fights against the aliens are over-the-top fun

■ In the future, the Orkin man has his work cut out for him

■ The sandworms from *Dune* were frozen for later marauding

Dark Messiah of Might & Magic

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** ARKANE STUDIOS/KUJU ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** 2007

Cry more, noob

VIOLENCE SAVES THE WORLD

Unreal Engine 3 might be getting a lot of (well-deserved) press, but Valve Software's Source engine is no slouch itself. Dark Messiah of Might & Magic, the second title in Ubisoft's plan to revitalize the Might & Magic franchise, is making excellent use of Source from what we can tell. By integrating physics into gameplay to a much greater extent than just about anything we've seen, Dark Messiah is its very own flavor of first-person adventure.

Two things that we saw at E3 cemented our excitement for this title. The first was a room full of spiked boards, traps, and various other objects. Interestingly, the player was able to defeat several orcs that attacked him with very little actual attacking. By baiting the orcs into their own traps, kicking them into environmental hazards, and otherwise using the surroundings to great advantage, a nasty combat situa-

tion was taken care of with relative ease.

The other event that got our attention was a fight with a cyclops in an underground cave. Far too big and strong to take on directly, the cyclops encounter required a little more thinking. Darting under some fallen rubble seemed to be a good idea until the monster simply picked up the huge slab of stone to get after the hero. Instead, the player ended up stunning the beast with a log trap to buy time to fire a ballista bolt into its vulnerable eye. Of course, an elaborate death sequence for the enormous cyclops was its own reward.

If this kind of quality keeps up throughout the game, there is no doubt in our minds that Dark Messiah could be the title that Deus Ex fans have been waiting for. And we can't think of much higher praise than to compare a game to that classic. ■ ■ ■

■ The amount of action that Insomniac can squeeze onscreen at one time is astounding

27

Resistance: Fall of Man

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA PS3 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** INSOMNIAC GAMES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

A DIFFERENT WORLD WAR

From the gallows, Revolutionary War hero and spy Colonel Nathan Hale was allowed to make one final statement before he was hanged for treason by the British. It was then that he reportedly delivered the immortal words, "I only regret I have but one life to lose for my country." The new PlayStation 3 title Resistance: Fall of Man from Ratchet and Clank creators Insomniac Games puts you in the role of this real-life patriot's descendant, Sgt. Nathan Hale. But this is a world that is very different from our own, one that sees Hale teaming up with the very country that sentenced his ancestor to death

Resistance takes place in an alternate version of the 20th century, one in which World War II never happened. Instead, humanity has teamed up to battle a vicious new foe – the Chimera, a monstrous species that converts humans into more of its kind. Having overrun most of the world, the Chimera lead an attack against Great Britain, one of the last free human civilizations. It is here that the American Hale joins up with the British to defend the human race.

Resistance is a first-person shooter that has already been compared to Call of Duty 2 with monsters. Set in the mid-1950s in a war-torn battlefield, Resistance really does feel like a WWII shooter with a sci-fi twist. The exterior stage that was playable at E3 was fairly open, full of damaged buildings and troops from both sides running around madly. A second, interior level was a bit more linear and featured less peripheral action, but still recalled a typical bunker stage in a WWII shooter. However, while Resistance does remind one of other games, it definitely sports some unique Insomniac touches. Just like in the Ratchet series, Resistance has a variety of inventive weapons based on alien technology. Every weapon has a secondary fire, including one which shoots a tracer bullet that all subsequent rounds will head towards, regardless of location or firing angle. The same gun can also be used to create a bomb of sorts that can be steered around the environment and detonated remotely. Another weapon is a grenade that sends hundreds of needle-like objects in every direction, affectionately referred to as the Porcupine.

Insomniac is a company known for bringing clever twists to familiar genres, so we couldn't be happier to see them taking on the FPS genre. Merging WWII shooters with sci-fi themes is a concept we can definitely support, and we can't wait to see what other cool weapons and gadgets await us when we get a little further into the game. Plus, with 32-player online support, Resistance looks poised to be one of the most popular multiplayer games of the PS3 launch. ■ ■ ■

■ With teeth like that, these guys will never be able to chew gum like humans can. Go back to space, losers!

■ Rescuing members of your squad from the aliens will allow them to fight by your side

These little guys are adorable! Well, by alien standards, anyway

Despite the sci-fi elements, Resistance definitely has the feel of a WWII shooter
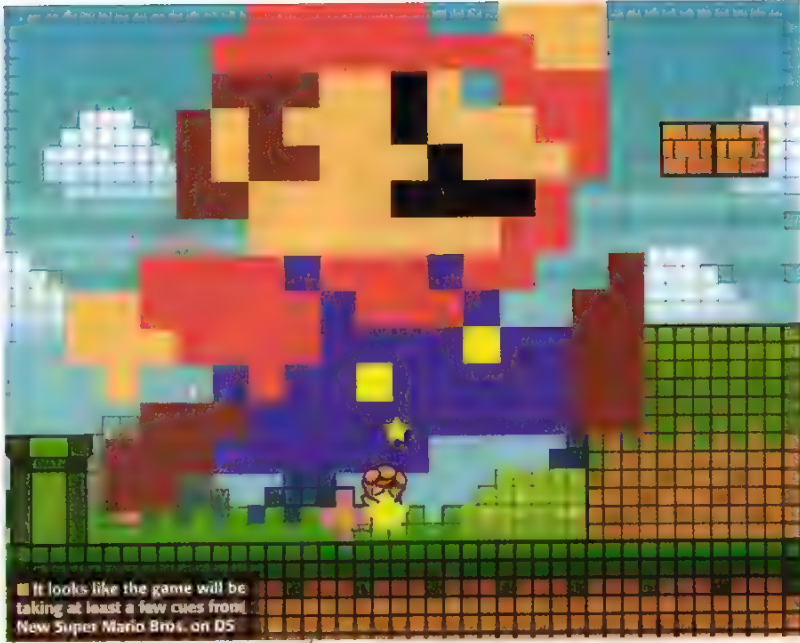
It looks like the game will be taking at least a few cues from New Super Mario Bros. on DS

28

GAMECUBE

Super Paper Mario

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
> **RELEASE** WINTER

STRANGE MIX

Sneaking in under the radar of many E3 attendees was the announcement of Nintendo's mascot making yet another foray onto the GameCube, this time in a form that 'Cube owners have been long awaiting – a sidescroller. Sort of. Super Paper Mario pulls together a number of familiar gameplay ideas into one package – and the early peek we had at the game appears to be an altogether new way to explore with the iconic red and blue plumber.

The artistic style familiar to players of earlier Paper Mario games returns, but everything we've seen so far implies that it is one of the only things that remains from the RPG titles that have come before. While Nintendo claims there will be some basic RPG elements, everything we saw suggested a full-on side-scrolling platform adventure. The battle screen from other Paper Mario games was absent, replaced by the more traditional jumping and Koopa-stomping action familiar to anyone who has ever picked up a controller. However, unlike the old school NES and SNES games or the more recent New Super Mario Bros. on DS, Super Paper Mario will have players switching between the 2D plane and a 3D perspective to advance through the stage.

Some of the screens on the page here help to illustrate this idea, as interactive platforms can clearly be seen in the background of some shots.

The demo we witnessed included three playable characters – Mario, Peach, and Bowser. It appears that unlike in Super Mario Bros. 2, players will be able to switch characters on the fly in the midst of a level, a trick that will no doubt come in handy for the planned puzzles and traps scattered throughout the world. Sticking with a popular tradition in the series, there will be eight full worlds to explore, peppered with a wide spread of unique locales. Beyond the traditional outdoor backgrounds, we saw underwater levels, space battles, and even strange gravity-defying wall-running stages. Observant fans should take note of the unusual transparent box that follows characters in the screens seen here. In action, the box flits along behind the character, and seems to have an important but as-yet-undefined role in gameplay.

Needless to say, the announcement of such a high profile Mario title for the seemingly forgotten GameCube is something of a shocker. However, backwards compatibility means that both long-time GameCube owners and new Wii adopters will get to try out this latest adventure when it releases late this year. ■ ■ ■

Sometimes a girl just gets sick of waiting. We're looking at you, Mario

■ Check out how characters are moving along multiple two-dimensional planes
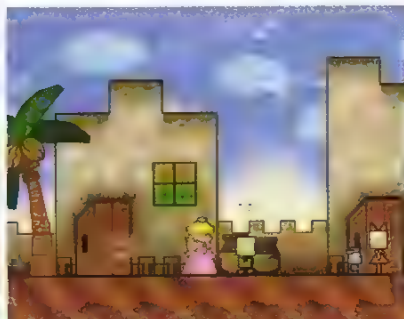
■ Characters are fully customizable. Even weapons can be personalized

29

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3

Army of Two

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS3 ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA MONTREAL > **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **RELEASE** 2007

OF WAR AND BLING

The name of the game says it all. Army of Two is designed with the co-op fanatics in mind. This game is all about teamwork. Parachute drops are fun as is, but imagine what it would be like tandem, with one person controlling the chute, and another stationed in front with a sniper rifle. It's up to the gunner to issue commands like "turn right" and "stabilize." Other buddy maneuvers include lifting a friend up to a ledge, but not just to climb up. You can also extend an arm over the floor and fire off a few shots. If you are low on ammo, your friend can toss you a clip, even if you are a couple stories higher. As if we need to say it, two-player vehicles are in

great abundance, the most exciting of which is a helicopter. The pilot can even throw down a rope for his or her comrade, who in turn can dangle with one arm and fire with the other. Completing missions earns players cash that can be exchanged for new weapons and upgrades. Hit it big and you'll have so much cash that you can outfit your arms with platinum and diamond plating. If you don't plan on playing the game online or via split-screen, you do have the option of playing it single player. EA Montreal has developed intelligent AI that will talk back to you, remember your previous actions, and even flip you the bird if you happen to "accidentally" drop a ceiling onto them. ■ ■ ■

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XBOX 360   PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

Frontlines: Fuel of War

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, PS3 ONLINE, OR PC INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** KAOS STUDIOS > **RELEASE** 2007

NEXT-GEN WARFARE

We blew out the story on Frontlines in our May issue, and the game looks even better now. Not content with being just another Battlefield clone, Frontlines charges players with moving the front lines of the battle by completing objectives in an open-world setting. Utilizing the role system (which allows players to choose a specialization and upgrade it as the game progresses) and intra-team information

sharing (target acquisition and the like) will be key to achieving those goals. Overall, developer Kaos Studios is well on its way to making good on its claims of cool destructible levels, intense action, and fun toys and weapons to play with. To cap it all off, Kaos showed us what happens in Frontlines when a superpower gets desperate – it's tough to not get pumped for a game that lets you feel the power of a nuclear explosion firsthand. ■ ■ ■

30

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** RETRO STUDIOS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER
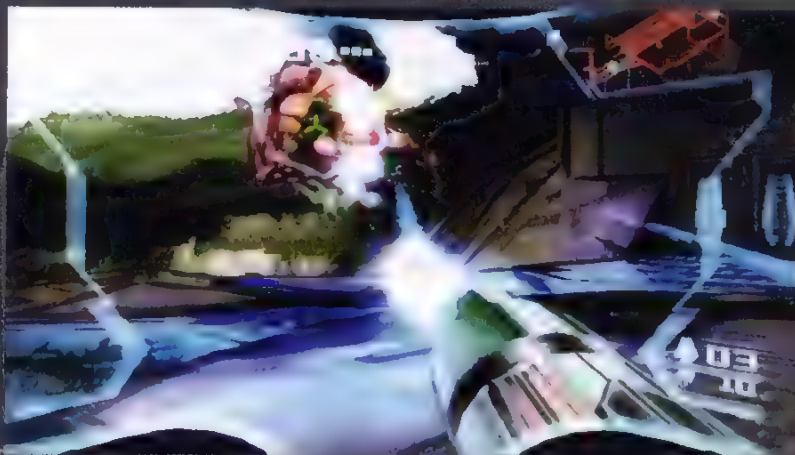
THE PRIME NUMBER

The moment Nintendo unveiled the Wii's unique control interface, gamers everywhere knew that Nintendo's wee remote would soon orchestrate the arms of one of gaming's greatest females, Samus Aran. As you would expect, the remote handles your aim, but there are a number of other surprises behind the way this game controls that makes it more than just another first-person shooter.

In the E3 demo, which finds you fighting everything from space pirates to Ridley, a number of unique control features are presented to the player. For one, you can manipulate objects in 3D space using the remote. After activating a control, a cylinder slides out from the wall with a handle. Target it, and then with a press of a button you have it in your grasp. To use it, you must pull inward toward your body, twist the cylinder, and then slide it back into place. The execution and effect is simply astonishing. It feels like you are literally moving things in a game.

And that's just the beginning. Utilizing the new

motion sensor technology in the nunchuck, to use the grappling hook players must target and then whip this controller at the screen, which sends the energy rope flying across the screen to latch onto its target. A push down on the analog stick sends it flying over your head as you pull the object free. In one area of the demo you even use this trick to rip shields out of the hands of your enemies.

As you would expect, there are plenty of shooter and ball puzzles to keep Metroid fans happy, and there will also be a number of visors for the players to master and use.

Aiming and movement with the remote controller takes some getting used to, and was a tad touchy for movement at the show, but we have high hopes that Nintendo will smooth out the controls before its November launch. ■ ■ ■
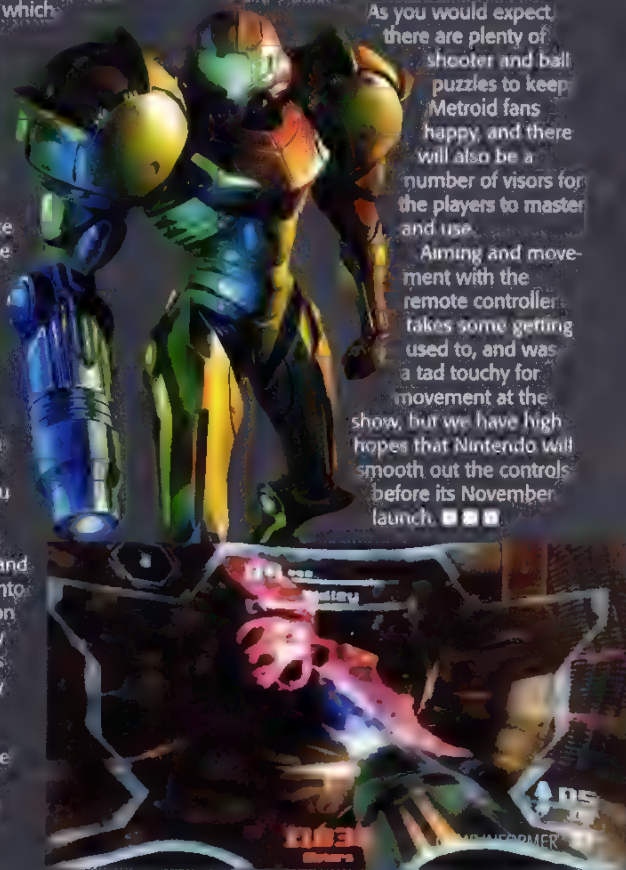
32 PLAYSTATION 3
Rainbow Six: Vegas

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

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG DREAMS

There's nothing pretty about tactical military operations. At least, that's what we thought before seeing Ubisoft's Rainbow Six: Vegas in action. Screenshots for the title have been streaming out for the last few months and we have lots of faith in the company's Montreal studio, but seeing really is believing.

The next-gen shooter is obviously taking advantage of the new consoles' power, offering smoking renditions of Vegas landmarks like Fremont Street and the strip, but what really got us going was the gameplay. The team's dynamics are crucial to success – you play as a recon expert, another member takes a fancy to heavy weaponry, and the third specializes in

long range attacks as well as electronics. In single-player, your team will offer tactical advice and suggestions like hacking the security system or where to blow an access hole in a wall. You can take these ideas, ignore them, or add them to your existing plan.

In one scenario, you see a room with two doors and four enemies inside. One is near a door, two more are in the middle of the room, and the last is on the balcony holding a gun to the head of a hostage. Telling your companions to wait at one door, you head to the other, slide a snake cam underneath, tag the two enemies in the middle of the room as targets for your squad, and then order them to blow the door

down. When they storm in, the first enemy is taken out. You open your door and head for the guy on the balcony while the team disables their marked targets. Four enemies down and less than 20 seconds for planning, ordering, and executing later, and we were sold.

It seems that the team knows how amazing this game is shaping up to be. We asked if all the single-player tactical options will be included in multiplayer, and a grinning nod was enough of an answer to get our minds racing at this updated vision for the Rainbow operatives. Vegas may be a place for last-ditch dreamers, but it seems like an exciting revolution for Rainbow Six. ■ ■ ■

There's lots of cover on Fremont Street, but when so much of it is made of neon bulbs, that doesn't seem like the best idea.
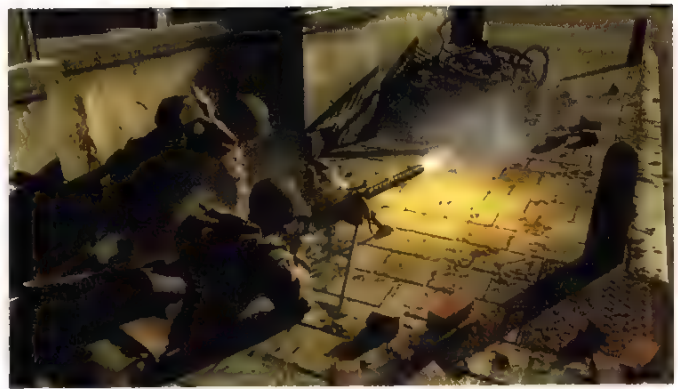
33 XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3 | PC
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** GEARBOX SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** 2007

HELL AWAITS

World War II games are a staple of the gaming world, and more than one WWII shooter is on the way in the next year. However, one stands clearly above the rest of the pack: Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway, which drops players into the ill-fated Operation Market Garden. While the first two Brothers in Arms games were both solid, well-received games, Hell's Highway looks like it could be to be the best in the series yet, thanks to its focus on expanding the franchise's key features while increasing the realism and immersion.

The simple squad mechanics of the first game have been expanded, so you now have three fireteams under your control. Your new fireteams can include powerful units like machine gun crews, bazooka teams, and even tanks, which you can use to cause some serious damage. Of course, these powerful allies will be able to blow the environment to pieces, which adds to both the illusion of reality and your strategy. Just like you can blow up your enemy's cover,

they can blow up yours. Many other new features will add to the experience, such as a new feature called "Brothers Moments" or BroMo.

While the game will have few scripted moments, it will occasionally automatically focus on certain events that highlight the chaos of war. For example, if you are waiting under cover for your squadmates to catch up, the camera may pan to reveal one soldier helping another who has stumbled get to his feet. It may also highlight a bazooka team taking aim at a target, or a spectacular explosion. Of course, being pulled out of the action could be distracting, so the BroMo system will never trigger when it would unfairly put you in danger. This may sound like a small feature, but we've seen it in action, and it does wonders for selling the intensity of a battle. Players everywhere will be able to see it in action in early ■ ■ ■
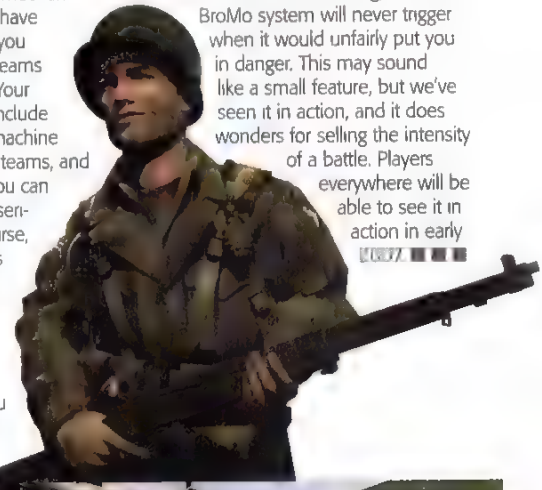
"Okay, these plans should lead us directly to the girls' locker room."

34 Warhawk

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA PS3 ONLINE) > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > DEVELOPER INCOGNITO ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE NOVEMBER

FLIGHT TRAINING

We love a good arcade-style flight sim, which is why we were so happy to see Incognito's remake of the PSone title Warhawk in playable form at E3. Set in an alternate world in which the sinister Chernovan army is invading your homeland, Warhawk puts the player in the cockpit as they take to the skies and blast apart anything that flies.

Although Warhawk purportedly also features on-foot sections and ground vehicles, only one aerial scenario was on display. Taking place around an island being assaulted by swarms of enemy pilots and huge, floating aircraft carrier-like vehicles, this stage was awash with the same arcade sensibilities and fun pulpy sci-fi theme that made games like Crimson Skies so much fun. A lock-on mechanic allows you to release hordes of missiles at multiple targets, your plane can switch to a VTOL-style hover mode, and your machine guns make short work of any enemy that crosses your sights. The chatter of allied pilots adds to the intensity of the aerial combat, and the explosion effects are impressive. However, perhaps the most interesting thing about Warhawk was

how it controlled – with the PS3 controller's motion-sensing capabilities.

The motion-sensing ability of the PS3 controller was one of the biggest surprises Sony brought to E3. While the controller's new capabilities overlap with those of the Wii and promise six-axis sensitivity, Warhawk only seemed to recognize three – pitch, roll, and yaw. The game played quite smoothly with the motion-sensing controller, and it was the only PS3 title that took advantage of the feature in any way. By tilting the controller side to side or back and forth, you would move your plane in the game world. However, acceleration and all weapons were handled with normal button inputs. This system was quite easy to pick up, although many players expressed that they had a hard time keeping their

thumbs off the analog stick, which served no purpose in the E3 demo of the game. We're curious to see if the motion-sensing controls will also be exclusively used in the unseen ground segments of the game.

Whatever new control mechanics Warhawk and other PS3 games ultimately utilize, we're sure gamers will quickly adjust to the new features and the gameplay opportunities they present. ■ ■ ■

■ Giant flying battleships? That's enough to get us excited

■ "Where's your parachute now, unnamed COBRA pilot?"

■ "Hey, that cloud looks like a squadron of enemy fighter jets. Ooh! That one looks like a cuddly panda!"

35

Red Steel

Wii

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT PARIS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

After being unveiled in our pages a few short months ago, Red Steel was shared with a wider audience at E3 in playable form, and was easily the most talked-about third-party game for the Wii. Unlike the version we saw in Paris, the E3 build of Red Steel had both the shooting and swordplay sections of the game playable, as well as some of the other motion-based features, such as reloading and opening doors. The Freeshot feature, which allows you to pause time and pick your targets, was in place, as was the ability to command surrendered foes with gestures. But getting to finally try the swordplay was easily the biggest thrill, as we faced off against a boss

character at the end of the demo level. Not only did the remote accurately replicate our actual sword slashes, but the recently unveiled motion sensor in the nunchuck attachment could be used to parry attacks. Just as the Red Steel team promised, timing and observation was key to winning the sword fight, and felt just like the mock saber duels nearly everyone had as kids, so anyone who ever dreamed of being a samurai will pick it right up.

Both the sword and gun sections of the game will be polished even further before release, but Red Steel was already playing remarkably well, and we're confident it will be one of the hottest games of the Wii launch. ▪ ▪ ▪

■ A friendly reminder that gambling is bad

36

NINTENDO DS

Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** KONAM > **RELEASE** FALL

MORE HANDHELD GENIUS

Konami's handheld Castlevania entries have been uniformly fantastic for years, and Portrait of Ruin looks to be continuing that trend. Ditching the soul-harvesting ways of its two immediate predecessors, this entry focuses on how two vampire hunters help each other to overcome the latest reincarnation of Dracula's castle. Jonathon Morris wields a traditional whip, doesn't take too much damage, and is a good all-around performer. Charlotte Orlean, a magic-user in the vein of the Belnades clan, has a bevy of hard-hitting special attacks at the cost of a somewhat wussy regular strike. Utilizing the individual strengths of the pair against the more than 100 enemy types will no doubt be the key to victory.

You can switch between the two characters on the fly à la Castlevania III, but that's not even the cool part. They both stay onscreen all the time (with some basic support AI controlling the second person) unless you choose to banish one offscreen, and you can even burn some magic points to execute sweet tag-team attacks. Both the exploration and RPG facets of the series thankfully appear to be in full effect, so from what we can tell the game should play out more akin to later entries like Symphony of the Night than the franchise's linear roots. Interestingly, no touch-screen functionality was present in the demo that we played – which isn't necessarily a bad thing, considering Dawn of Sorrow's inane Magic Seal system.
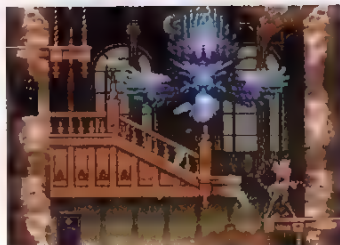
The only other thing that we would love to see is wireless two-player co-op – but even though Castlevania mastermind Koji Igarashi was very excited about the possibility when we spoke to him at E3, Konami hasn't confirmed that brilliant feature as of yet. However, some unlockable multiplayer modes that we don't know about yet are definitely in. The DS library really does just keep getting better and better, thanks in no small part to old-school titles like this ▪ ▪ ▪
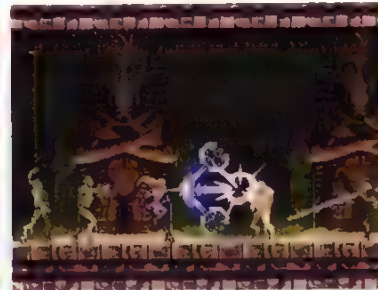
■ The art style and visual quality make this one of the prettiest DS games in the pipeline

37

Turok

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** BUENA VISTA GAMES > **DEVELOPER** PROPAGANDA GAMES > **RELEASE** 2007

OLD LICENSE, NEW START

It's a scientific fact that when giant guns are combined with massive dinosaurs, the resulting amalgamation creates a static cloud of awesome that can spread voraciously and rapidly overcome its victims. Due to the highly volatile nature of such a powerful force of awesome, Turok has been safely tucked away for several years now to prevent such a calamity. However, Propaganda Games simply has no regard for public safety, and they've picked up the long dormant franchise and are giving it a brand new start (which is a good thing – some of those old games didn't exactly live up to the awesomeness potential).

The new Turok is a sequel in name and spirit only. The team at Propaganda has crafted an entirely new story and mythology for the game, picking the best ideas from the series and placing them in a brand new setting. Players will adopt the role of Joseph Turok, a futuristic former Black Ops commando who is tasked with tracking a dangerous war criminal back to a strange, genetically altered alien planet. As Turok and his squadmates soon discover, the planet is home to a wealth of prehistoric beasts more than equal to the vast sci-fi arsenal of the team.

We saw the gorgeous game in action for the first time at E3, and the demo immediately exhibited the furious intensity of the gunfights. The human enemies wield some powerful weaponry, but it's their coordinated and cooperative AI that makes them a real challenge. Of course,

the highlight reel started as soon as a pack (Gaggle? Flock? Does anyone know?) of raptors descended on the battle, indiscriminately attacking humans on both sides of the conflict. At one point, Turok was tackled by one of the monstrous dinosaurs, and he was forced to desperately stab out with his knife to take down the creature before getting gutted. As if the terrifying speed of the raptors wasn't cool enough, a T-Rex soon joined the party, and the real carnage started. One of the coolest aspects of gameplay strategy is the ability to catch the attention of a dinosaur and lead it into an unsuspecting group of enemy soldiers. The soldiers, as it turns out, are not pleased.

A unique feature of Turok will be the option it gives you between gun-blazing action and stealth-based sneak attacks, enabled by lightning-fast bow and arrow strikes. We also saw designs for some heavy duty vehicles and all sorts of techie-dream weaponry. Multiplayer has been assured, but Propaganda has remained mum on exactly how it will work. Not a lot of people got a peek at Turok during E3, but it's definitely one of the more exciting new action games to emerge from the craziness of the show floor this year. ■ ■ ■

Stealth battles will offer variety to the combat

38
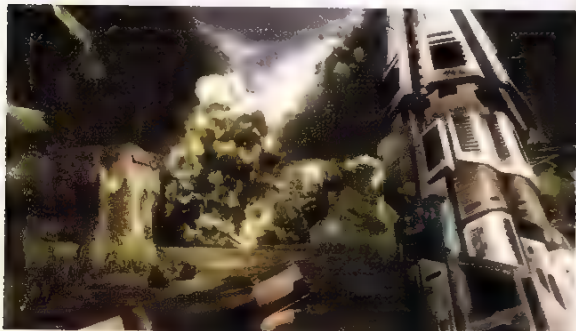
F.E.A.R.

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI GAMES > **DEVELOPER** DAY 1 STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FALL

BACK FROM THE DEAD

Sometimes, great reviews aren't enough to turn a game into a hit. For example, last year's PC shooter F.E.A.R. raked in accolades and acclaim, but sold far fewer copies than it should have. Fortunately, this incredible FPS has found a second life on the Xbox 360, and hopefully, this time around it will find a wider audience.

Originally developed by Monolith Productions, the 360 version is now being handled by MechAssault creators Day 1 Studios, who are promising an exact recreation of the PC version, plus some exclusive content. The new single-player instant action mode lets players revisit memorable locations from the story mode, and face waves of progressively tougher enemies. Doing away with the "military squad encounters the supernatural" storyline, this mode is all about action, and was playable on the floor at E3.

The notoriously smart enemy AI that garnered F.E.A.R. so much attention seemed to be in full effect in our demo, as we observed enemies aggressively flanking, working together, and actively pursuing the player. All of the weapons and abilities from the PC version were present as well, including the ability to slow time. The controls seemed to be perfectly adapted to the controller, playing smoothly and retaining all the little things that set the PC version apart, like a button to manually activate health packs.

With fun, fast-paced combat, deadly enemies, solid visuals, and a creepy horror-themed story, F.E.A.R. has everything that a shooter needs to be a hit. Here's hoping that the 360 crowd embraces this excellent game. ■ ■ ■

■ "Flimsy wooden box? I should be totally safe here."

■ F.E.A.R.'s enemies are among the deadliest AI characters we've encountered to date

39

Crackdown

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** REAL TIME WORLDS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER

GOTTA GET UP TO CRACK DOWN

■ The rocket launcher is useful for huge explosions and mid-air corpse juggling

Sometimes a uniform and a gun just isn't enough to stop crime. A dozen armed thugs aren't exactly going to be intimidated when a single law-enforcement officer pulls into a drug warehouse driving a Crown Victoria. On the other hand, if that officer instead enters by throwing a car through the skylight before making the two-story leap down and shattering the ground on impact, that's a different story. It's how justice is done in Crackdown.

Ever since we first unveiled the game in issue 150, outrageous and superhuman feats have been the main force driving the gameplay forward. Now that we've gotten our hands on the most recent version of the game, it's apparent that the team at Real Time Worlds is doing everything it can to give players reason to explore the over-the-top possibilities of the game's sandbox world. One way to do this is through the use of Xbox Live's Achievements; where most games simply dole out Gamer Points when you reach a certain point in the story, Crackdown will be a little more inventive in the behavior it rewards.

Let's say you fire a rocket at a passing crook, and he goes flying into the air. Thanks to the homing technology in your missiles, that doesn't need to be the end. Before the body even hits the pavement, you can launch off another shot and send him even further in the air. Still have ammo? Fire away! Depending on how long you can keep this going, you might get an Achievement...providing you don't lose sight of the body in the stratosphere.

If you prefer acrobatics to weapons, you can decide to scale Agency headquarters, the tallest building in the city. While this is no small task, the greatest challenge comes when you reach the top – there's no easy way down. By jumping off, the only way to save yourself is to land in the safety of a pond, which could also land you a new Achievement to brag about. In many open-world games, buildings are used to limit the player's access, but in Crackdown they are merely another way to do something totally awesome. Sadly, you'll just have to keep planning your stunts instead of playing them as you wait for the game's fall release. ■ ■ ■
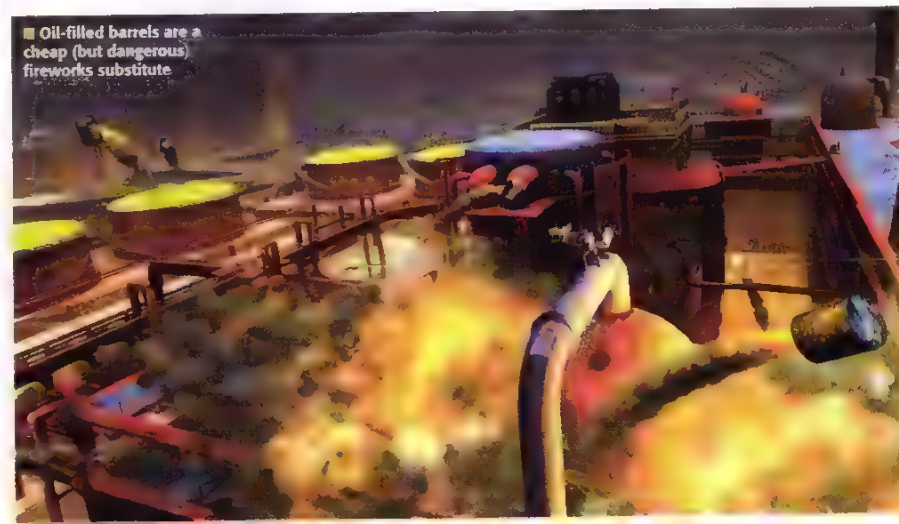
■ Oil-filled barrels are a cheap (but dangerous) fireworks substitute

40

Splinter Cell Double Agent

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, PS2 ONLINE, OR PC INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT SHANGHAI (XBOX 360), UBISOFT MONTREAL (PS2, XBOX, GC, PC) > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26

YOU'RE PLAYING BOTH SIDES

Double Agent is nearly upon us, and yet there are still so many unanswered questions. We don't envy the team for having to show their game at E3 – the Splinter Cell titles should only really be taken in as a whole, and not as the disjointed, random levels that the event necessitates. It's like showing someone Cloud City and asking, "Isn't the whole of the Star Wars galaxy just plain awesome?" Well, that floating metropolis thing is pretty rad, but without seeing the rest…its genius might be missed.

So it is at that perilous level select screen that we approached the newest Splinter Cell.

It should suffice to say that we're all okay, everything's okay here, and Sam's latest mission promises the most nefarious variety of any entry before it. We watched as an innocent citizen was executed. Instead of saving him, we opted to be a chump and preserve our own cover. In hindsight, that was cruel, but it's what the game is going to ask of players over and over through this double-crossing, back-stabbing infiltration saga.

While hopping between distant spots on the globe, we weren't privy to how exactly these choices play out, but we did get to see some of Sam's new tricks. A favorite was on, or more aptly, under, a field of ice

floes. We dead-dropped in from an airplane, retrieved our gear, and then went under the ice. As a guard paced above, we found thin patches in the ice by checking for bright spots on the lagoon floor. Swimming up to listen for footsteps and tracking him like a polar bear would mercilessly hunt, we finally lined up underneath him. The attack came swiftly. Sam punched the ice, pulled the man through the crack, and dispatched him with jarring efficiency.

One big part of the game experience that we sadly didn't get any hands-on time with was multiplayer. It's looking like we'll have to wait for release to see if the team's

ambitious changes will make the experience more accommodating, while still keeping the action that hardcore fans have grown accustomed to.

Beset with merciless killers on all sides, all with different motivations, it's not that we expected Sam to get all soft on us, but Double Agent is infused with the moral conflict of a man asking how far he's willing to go. With two stunningly different endings depending on your choices, we won't be surprised if many players opt to try both sides. Good Sam or bad Sam, we're glad to say that he's a badass either way. ■ ■ ■

■ Daylight Splinter Cell, we're glad to say, is just as promising as the more traditional locations

■ One really great features of Double Agent is the sheer variety of the levels

41

PLAYSTATION 3

Naughty Dog Project [working title]

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** NAUGHTY DOG > **RELEASE** TBA

PITFALL?

Looking at the games scheduled for the next year, one could easily assume that jungles are the new lava world. It seems that next-gen hardware is letting developers get down with their inner equatorial fanboys, and as good as these venues look, we're more than willing to go along for the ride.

At Sony's press conference, which was long on time and short on surprises, one standout was this as-yet-untitled adventure from Naughty Dog. Best known for the Jak and Crash Bandicoot series, the company displayed footage with truly impressive realism. On the surface, this sounds like a risky gambit. Switching the company's standard art direction from over-the-top cartoon visuals to this video, which showed an

amazingly realistic animation system and very dynamic action, seems like a bold move. Instead, remember that the Jak series in particular consistently pushed the PS2 to its graphical limits. It's a different style, but the team has certainly shown the skill required to get this new franchise just right.

The trailer showed a variety of indoor and outdoor locations that the hero moved through by leaping across gaps, swinging on vines, ducking from cover to cover, and kicking down doors. Vehicles were also shown and everything shattered, splintered, and chipped away with full physics. The overriding vision after it was all done, though, was of the lush and overgrown jungle. Light streaming through the canopy

highlighted ancient ruins and armed enemies.

Firefights seemed to be the bulk of the action and the main character is strapped with a few pistols, although some close combat shots suggested that you can strip enemies of their weapons. Could this mixture of Prince of Persia exploration, Metal Gear close combat, and Pitfall locations be the big ticket for PS3? The manufacturer is clearly putting a lot of stock into one of their biggest developers, and the company's track record makes us believe that this is a promising first look at a game that merges the best of some of our favorite mechanics. ■ ■ ■

■ the dynamic lighting and softly swaying leaves made a big impression

■ Up close and personal conflicts show off cloth physics and highly detailed shadows
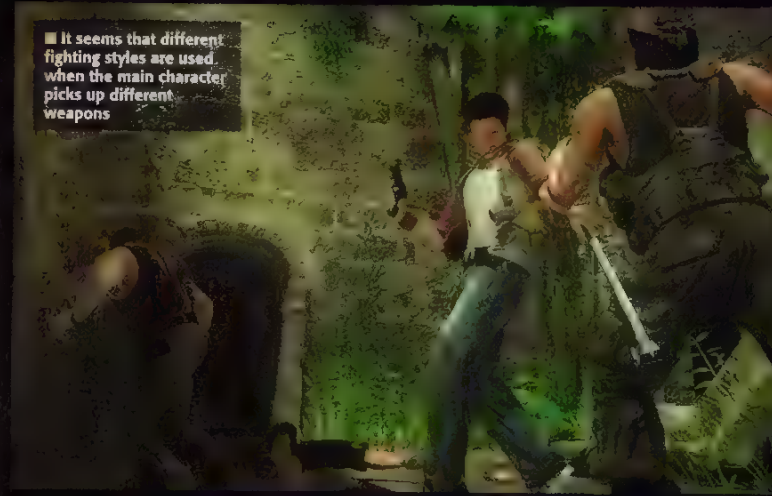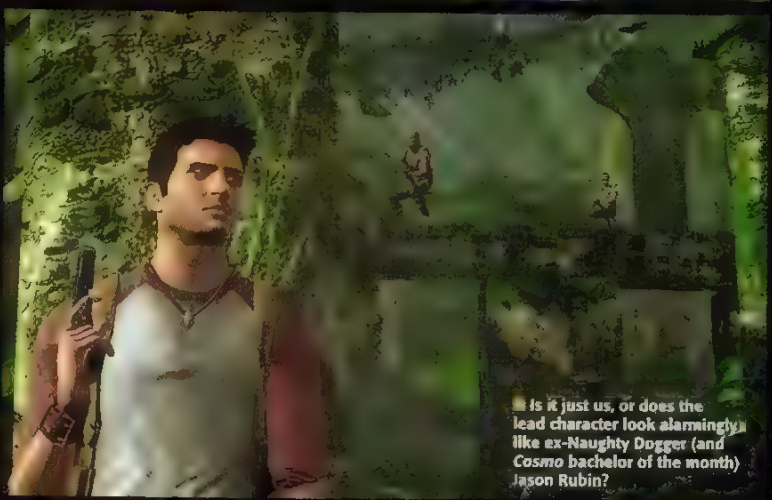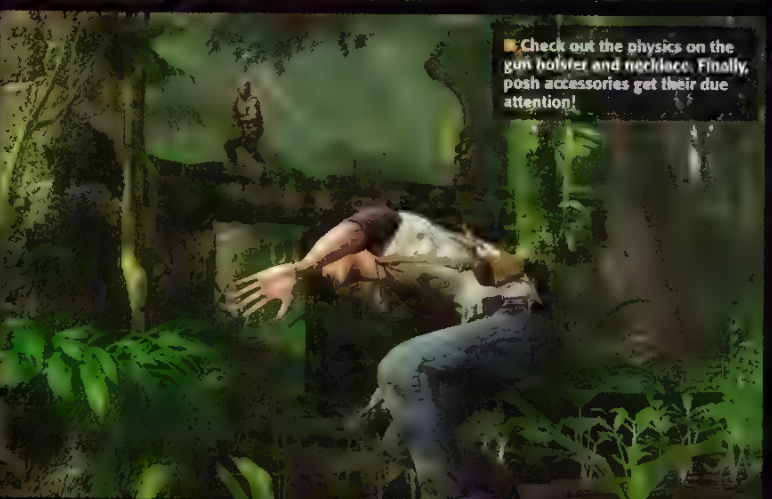
■ The sequel to *The Boy Who Could Fly* surprised a lot of people

42

XBOX 360

Saint's Row

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** THQ
> **DEVELOPER** VOLITION > **RELEASE** AUGUST 29

THE NEXT OPEN-WORLD EPIC?

For the sake of analogy, let's pretend that Grand Theft Auto isn't a game, but rather a make of a car. Now, what would happen if this vehicle's owner, Rockstar Games, just happened to leave it unattended with the doors unlocked? It's bound to get jacked, and once you see Saint's Row in action, we think you'll agree that Volition is the likely perpetrator of this crime. This game is a dead ringer for Grand Theft Auto. Considering that Grand Theft Auto IV is still a year and a half off, we need something to fill our open-world fix, and Saint's Row is shaping up to be an exceptional release.

While allowing gamers to run down pedestrians until they are blue in the face, Saint's Row does deviate from the GTA formula by letting players create their own identities. Another standout feature is online play, allowing you to pit gangs against one another. Of course, the game also boasts all of the next-generation qualities that you've come to expect, including a view that spreads as far as the eye can see without any sign of draw-in, high-resolution texturing, and glorious physics accompanying every vehicle explosion and body thrown from the hood of your pimped out ride. ■ ■ ■
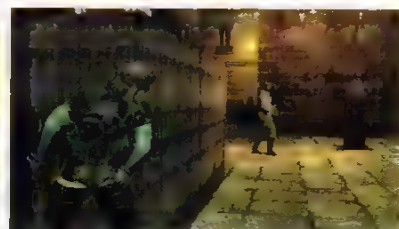
43

PSP

Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** WINTER

NO ACID TRIP

After the conclusion of Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, gamers were still left with many questions about the history of Big Boss and the motivation for his eventual betrayal. The handheld Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops will answer those questions and more as it bridges the gap between the latest installment and the original Metal Gear. While that is the basis of the single-player campaign, multiplayer is something entirely new. Utilizing the PSP's Wi-Fi capabilities, players

will go head-to-head in Subsistence-style matches...but the fight doesn't end there. Your performance online can impact your single-player campaign, and will be the key to helping Big Boss assemble an army to take down the renegade Fox unit with his newly-formed Foxhound squad. Exactly how the on and offline segments interact is still a bit of a mystery, but you can bet on more info becoming declassified as the game sneaks closer to release. ■ ■ ■

44 Tony Hawk Project 8

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER NEVERSOFT
> RELEASE NOVEMBER

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Activision was tight-lipped and protective of its new Tony Hawk Project 8 at E3 this year, but was more than willing to show off its brand new graphics and animation technology (that was rebuilt from the ground up) through a video that had us foaming at the mouth to play.

The heart of this new game is that the skaters themselves have awareness of not only what trick they are pulling off, but the height at which the various moves are executed. So for example, the skater's animation is different when he ollies off a simple picnic table than when he launches off the side of a building to a ramp below.

The video, which is mostly in slow motion (the focus mode from previous games), pans the camera close to the skater's feet, showing his interaction with the board. Watching the skaters push and flip the board with their feet as they glide through the air is mesmerizing.

Balance in the game is also relayed to the player through animations rather than the balance bar that cluttered up the screen in previous games. These fluid movements are achieved by melding numerous animations at once, creating the most realistic skaters gaming has ever seen.

In all likelihood, the game will still play much like previous incarnations, but the graphical improvements are most certainly stunning. Let's just hope Neversoft pays as much attention to the gameplay as it has to the graphics. The company promised a streaming world that will let the player skate from one side to the other as one gigantic area. Hopefully, it's pulled off more convincingly than it was in American Wasteland. ■ ■ ■

■ Create-a-park is gone, but players will be able to set up various props around the enivorment

■ Like the previous games, Project 8 is still all about big combos, it just looks a hell of a lot better
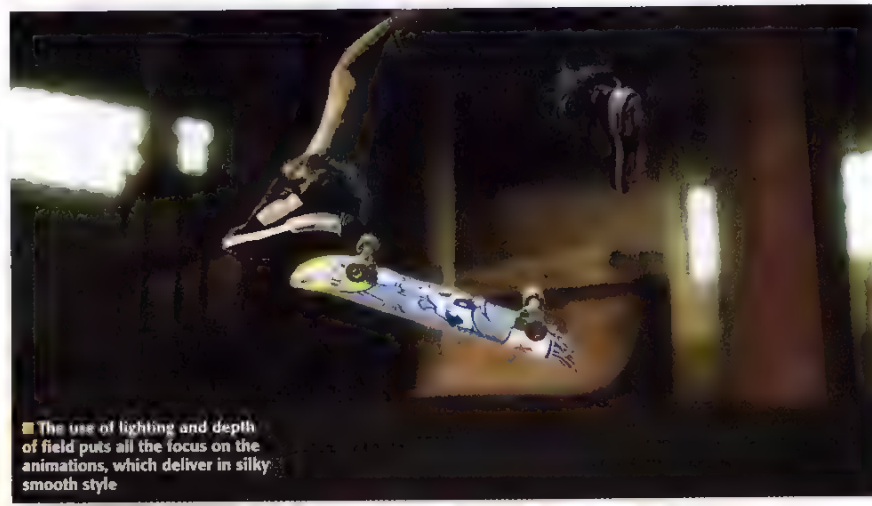
■ The use of lighting and depth of field puts all the focus on the animations, which deliver in silky smooth style

You can play as pro skaters or even create your own, including female skaters in the story mode

Through motion capture and animation blending, the skaters

45

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3

The Club

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** BIZARRE CREATIONS > **RELEASE** 2007

THE RUNNING MAN
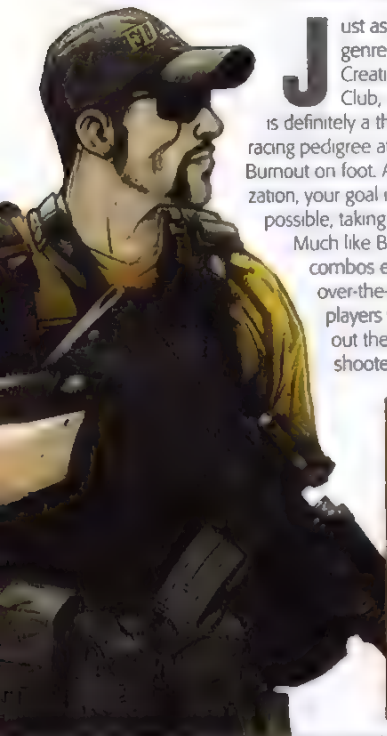
Just as Burnout creators Criterion moved into the action genre with Black, Project Gotham developer Bizarre Creations is moving away from racing games with The Club, a new shooter published by Sega. Although The Club is definitely a third-person action title, you can see the developer's racing pedigree at work in the game, as it can aptly be described as Burnout on foot. As a participant in an underground combat organization, your goal in The Club is to run through a stage as quickly as possible, taking out as many enemies as you can along the way. Much like Burnout's Crash mode, you get cash for each kill, with combos earned for multiple kills. The Club looks fast-paced, over-the-top, and incredibly fun – Bizarre Creations hopes that players will go back and replay stages over and over to max out their score. The Club looks like a refreshing take on a shooter, and we can't wait to see more of it. ■ ■ ■

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PC

Company of Heroes

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** RELIC ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** FALL

WORLD WAR AWESOME

Developer Relic has a pretty impressive track record, most recently including Warhammer: Dawn of War and the Homeworld series. That doesn't look to be changing any time soon. Company of Heroes was even more impressive this year at E3 than it was when first we saw it a year ago, and that's saying something. Of course, the basic RTS action is more than satisfying, but the outstanding environmental destruction and interaction lend some credence to Relic's claim of having true "living battlefields." Improved unit AI and a Dawn of War-esque resource model (where holding control points on the map is central to your economy) also help make Company of Heroes one of the more exciting PC titles for this holiday season. ■ ■ ■

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

Marvel: Ultimate Alliance

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS3 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** RAVEN/VICARIOUS VISIONS > **RELEASE** WINTER

ANY WAY YOU WANT TO PLAY

Activision hasn't told the world very much in the way of new info about this gigantic superhero game since we premiered the title in our May issue. Nonetheless, this was definitely one of the games to watch coming out of this year's show, and the screenshots keep looking better as the months pass.

Along with the already-massive number of console versions that the game will be targeting, we now have confirmation that the title will be headed to the Wii as well. Whether the game will take advantage of the motion sensing capabilities of either the PS3 controller or the Wii remote remains a mystery.

The game continues to evolve in some exciting directions. Over 140 Marvel characters show up in the game, with at least 20 of them as unique playable characters like Spider-Man, Captain America, Wolverine, Thor, and Ghost Rider. The more we hear about the new team mechanic the more excited we get -- for the first time you'll be able to create, name, and power-up your own team of superheroes from scratch throughout the game. Tack on the wide variety of environments, from under water to distant planets, and we're sold. Whatever system you play on, expect to throw down with Dr. Doom and his newly reorganized Masters of Evil by the time the holiday season rolls around. ■ ■ ■

■ Does anyone else ever wonder what's with the whole full splits thing with old Spidey? Seems a little...weird

■ Galactus enjoys long walks in the rain, midnight swims, and eating planets

■ "Isn't it great that we're all in high-quality, successful movies? Oh, sorry Thing, Blade, and Ghost Rider."
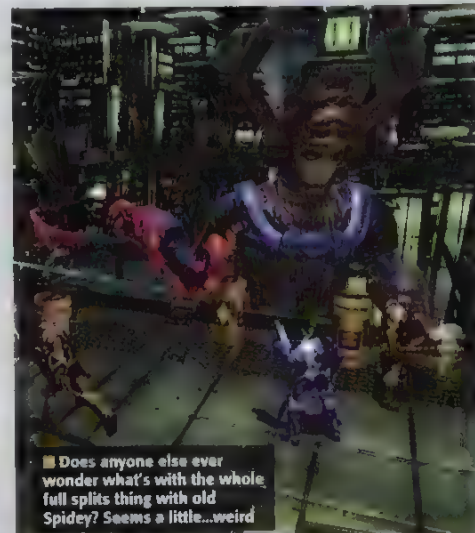
48

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Just Cause

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS
> **DEVELOPER** AVALANCHE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FALL

THIRD WORLD WARRIOR

Given all the print that's been spilled on Xbox 360 open-world titles like Crackdown and Saint's Row, we're surprised that Avalache Studio's promising Just Cause hasn't been the subject of more buzz. It was shown last year as a rough-around-the-edges tech demo in an Eidos meeting room, but this year the game – recently announced for Xbox 360 – really began to show its promise.

The plot places you in the shoes of a U.S. secret operative whose mission is to bring down the corrupt government of a small island country called San Esperito. Of course, this mission is fraught with danger and the possibility of global disaster – especially since U.S. intelligence has it that the dictator of San Esperito is stockpiling weapons of mass destruction (and we're rarely wrong about these things).

Building on this intriguing premise is a game world that takes GTA-style sandbox antics to the next level. The island itself is a boggling 250,000 acres in size, and all totally open to the player with no loading whatsoever. Using procedural graphic techniques, Avalanche has created an extremely detailed landscape, packed with everything from jungles to cities and over 200 small villages. As you work with rebels to cause political unrest, you'll see new areas on the map come under your control, adding a nice strategic element to the game.

Despite the gritty, real-world plotline, the gameplay actually takes cues from a famous superagent – James Bond. In addition to a host of vehicles and conventional weapons, you'll find that your most-used gadget is your parachute. You can pull your chute at any time, allowing you to basically fly from vehicle to vehicle with your grappling hook. At one point in the demo, we even saw an instance where the player grappled up to a helicopter from the top of a limousine, shooting at enemies all the way up. If the finished product has even close to this level of dynamic and creative gameplay, Just Cause could well be one of the breakout hits of 2006. ■ ■ ■

■ The action is completely over the top

Use your parachute to lock onto a car...

then jump down onto the roof to hijack the vehicle

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Indiana Jones

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS
> **RELEASE** 2007

CRACK THAT WHIP

We blew out LucasArts' next-gen Indiana Jones adventure last issue, but that doesn't mean the game is out of surprises. When we saw Indy in action again at the LucasArts booth, we learned that the Euphoria engine isn't the only innovative technology in place. The game will also feature a new system that keeps track of digital molecular matter; objects in the environment will crack, bend, and shatter depending on their density and composition. Wooden doors will splinter realistically under repeated beatings, and metal boxes will deform as they are knocked around. This technology will appear first in Indy, but you can expect to see it in other LucasArts titles as the company unveils more about its next-gen strategy. ■ ■ ■

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XBOX 360

Alone in the Dark

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** EDEN GAMES
> **RELEASE** 2007

TV SHOW!

We love it when developers try new ideas in an established genre. That's one of the reasons Alone in the Dark got us so excited when it was presented to us at E3. Following in the style of TV dramas like Alias and 24, the game will tell its story through short 40 minute episodes that each end with a cliffhanger. Each episode will be filled with dynamic camera angles and horror-style shocks, all told to make players feel like they're part of the show. There's absolutely no HUD as you switch between the first-and third-person sequences. Even your inventory is handled by simply opening up your character's coat and looking in the pockets. The wide-open environment of New York City's Central Park has been meticulously modeled, and the creepy sight of such a familiar locale ravaged by some supernatural force is startling and exciting. The fact that a game as unique and surprising as this sits down at slot 50 on this list is nothing if not a testament to the dozens of remarkable titles we have to look forward to in the coming months. ■ ■ ■
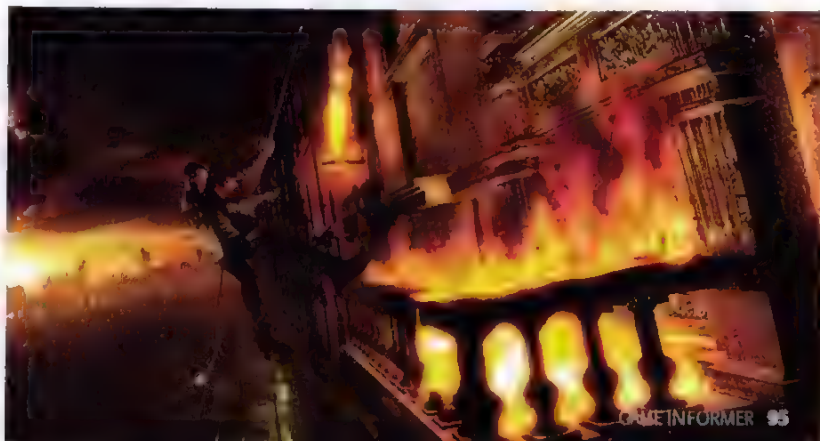
PC
F.E.A.R.: Extraction Point

Thankfully, Vivendi Games isn't letting the disappointing sales of F.E.A.R. prevent the release of an expansion pack. Extraction Point continues the creepy tale of Alma, the sort-of undead little girl with a grudge against people who breathe, and promises plenty more of the intense action we fell in love with a year ago. Most notably, the new chaingun is an absolute joy to use. Short of a portable nuke, the chaingun unleashes the most fury we've ever seen in a video game, and it's a good feeling. No doubt it'll come in handy against Alma's most recent abominable creation: mostly invisible shadow beasts that love nothing better than shredding heroes to bits. Hopefully, F.E.A.R. will get the retail respect it deserves this fall when Extraction Point releases.

PLAYSTATION 3
Heavy Rain

To Indigo Prophecy fans: Get this game on your radar right now. A slightly-interactive demonstration video was shown in the PlayStation 3 booth for something called Heavy Rain, a new game from Quantic Dream and publisher Atari. Both parties are being tight-lipped about release date, other platforms, and even if this is related to Indigo Prophecy or is a whole new tale. What we do know is that the video is an intense monologue, culminating with a crying woman pushing her gun to the viewer's forehead. While the presentation was top-notch, the biggest impression was made by the animation and facial expressions, which the trailer promises were in-game and real time.

XBOX 360
Dead or Alive Xtreme 2

It may not be Ninja Gaiden 2, but at least the Xbox 360 is getting more love from Tecmo and Team Ninja. The gaming world's most infamous volleyball game is returning this year with Dead or Alive Xtreme 2, only for 360. While the first game placed graphics firmly over gameplay, Itakagi and his crew are promising more to do in the second game, including jet skis, waterslides, and many more activities that nubile young ladies partake in while frolicking on a tropical island. Of course, players who prefer the DOA games as eye candy won't be disappointed either, as a new photo mode can be triggered at any point. And finally, we'd be remiss in our duty if we didn't mention the "third-generation physics" applied to the girls' bounciest parts, which allows breasts to jiggle independently. Classy. Totally classy.

XBOX 360 | PC
Overlord

Offering players the wide moral spectrum between being totally evil and being slightly less evil and bored, Codemasters has this unique action title headed to the 360 and PC sometime next summer. The gremlin-like minions of the game have gotten it into their mischievous minds that you are the reincarnation of their long dead master. Consequently, they'll do pretty much whatever you say, regardless of that action's bearing on their own personal safety. Summon up to 60 of the devilish little imps and inflict them on the world, ransacking houses, killing sheep and drinking beer. Three color varieties of minions each have unique abilities to aid in your quest to rid the world of seven magical heroes-gone-bad, (and presumably take over a despotic regime in their place). Like Fable, it's a basically open-world fantasy, but quest-based. Unlike Fable, you can light a field of crops on fire to get rid of some pesky villagers if you are having a bad day.

XBOX 360
Blue Dragon

It's sad that the trailer for this color-saturated RPG got so overshadowed at Microsoft's E3 press briefing, but demonstrations at the show highlighted Blue Dragon's charming appeal much more effectively. The RPG from Hironobu Sakaguchi's Mistwalker studio still doesn't have a firm U.S. release date, but will be a Japanese-friendly 360 exclusive. The game plays with the idea of light versus dark (the heroes' shadows manifest as large blue creatures and mirror their owners' personalities, but are only available when there's a light source around) and a look that merges Akira Toriyama's cartoony-looking characters with more realistic backgrounds.
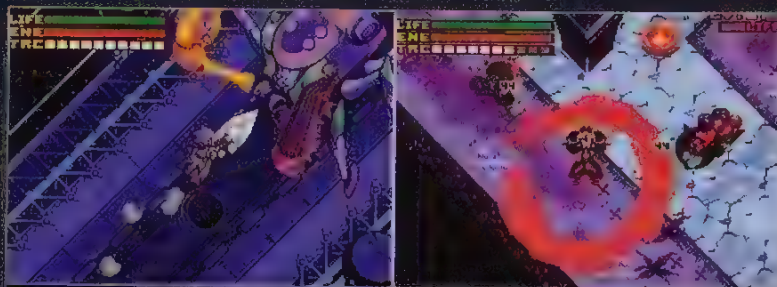
NINTENDO DS
Lunar Knights

Kojima Productions may be most famous for its games involving Solid Snake, but the upcoming Lunar Knights is an entry in the studio's handheld Boktai series. This holiday season you'll take up the roles of two main characters you switch on the fly. Light and dark continue to play a large role in your vampire hunters' power, but the day and night cycle now happens automatically within the game – though players will still be able to use the daylight sensor in the previous games' GBA cartridges if they are looking for an excuse to go outside.
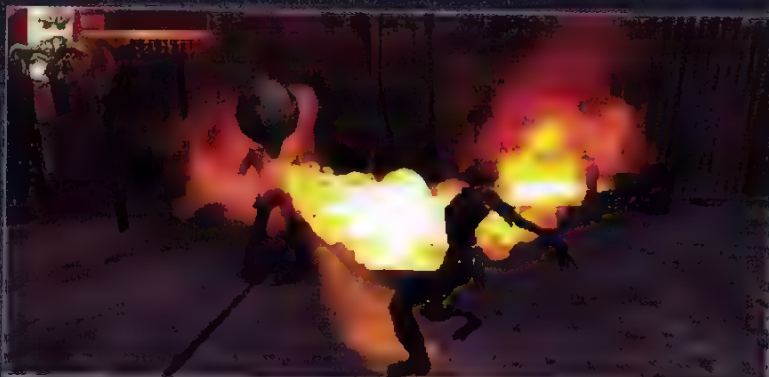
PSP
Dead Head Fred

Film noir detective stories and zombie flicks are two genres of cinema that have been separate for far too long. Thankfully, early next year developer Vicious Cycle and publisher D3 will fix this oversight with the tongue-in-cheek action title Dead Head Fred. Players find themselves in control of the headless reanimated corpse of private detective Fred Neuman as he shambles through the city of Hope Falls. The town's inhabitants have been irradiated and transformed, and the only way you can fight them off is by using a variety of different heads that grant you special abilities, like breathing fire and spewing poisonous gas. Dead Head Fred's mixture of humor and mayhem secures its position as the one handheld zombie/detective game to watch in the coming months.

PLAYSTATION 3
Full Auto 2: Battlelines

The first Full Auto game had a lot of potential, but didn't quite live up to it. We've been rooting for a sequel, and Sega has promised another vehicular combat outing, this time coming to PS3 (although we'd be surprised if it didn't also show up on 360). Full Auto 2: Battlelines is taking the destructibility of the original even further, allowing you to both create new routes and use the rubble as a weapon. A career mode has been added as well, giving some direction to the single-player game. Multiplayer will also see some upgrades, like a Twisted Metal-style arena mode, deathmatches, and base assaults. With these additions and improvements to the vehicle physics, Full Auto 2 could be the fun, frantic game we were hoping the first would be. Look for it around PS3 launch.
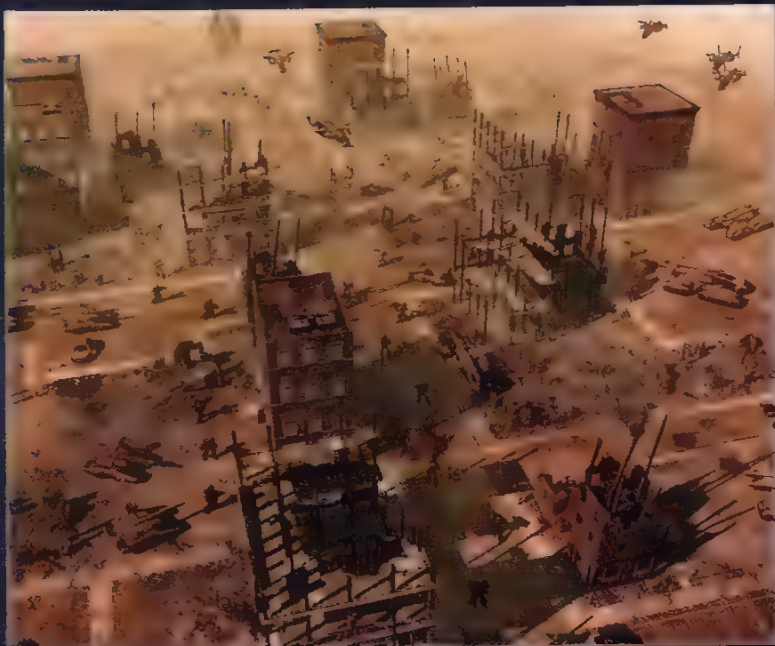
PC
Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars

Who isn't pumped for the next evolution of the beloved C&C franchise? People who don't know awesome when it crushes their base under an unstoppable wave of Mammoth tanks, that's who. C&C 3 is definitely en route to being nearly everything a fan could want out of this long-awaited sequel. A detailed and intricate backstory involving the fictional mineral Tiberium and its impact on global politics sets the stage for EA's promise to tell a gripping narrative through three single-player campaigns – presumably one each for the Global Defense Initiative, Brotherhood of NOD, and the hinted-at third faction of some kind of aliens. A game type with a Rise of Nations-like strategic metagame will be available as well, for those who enjoy more of a freeform experience. When we hear more about a release date or concrete gameplay details, you'll be the first to know.

NINTENDO DS
Cooking Mama

Sleeper hit of the show? The crown might be up for discussion, but it certainly wouldn't be the biggest overstatement when Cooking Mama comes up. This Majesco title is due stateside by the end of the year and has gamers prepping, cooking, and presenting over 75 dishes with the option of whipping up their own specialties. Finally, we can find out if two good things always do taste good together. The game's medal-awarding judgement system might not be as keen on the Gummi Crunch as we are, but computers can't *feel*, so they'll never really get the dish's subtle allure.
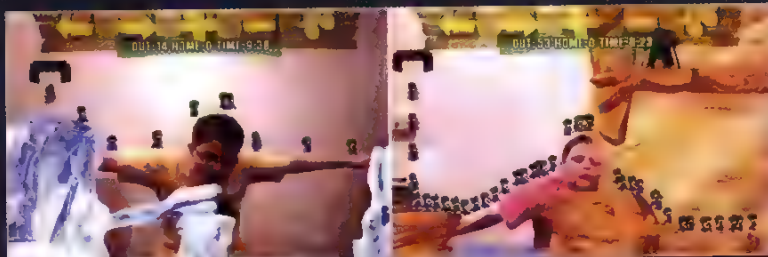
PLAYSTATION 2
Lemmings

As if making lemmings explode on command and letting them fall to their deaths wasn't fun enough, Team 17 has a great idea in store for the new PS2 entry in the series. Utilizing the EyeToy, the console version will let players use their bodies to guide the green-haired morons through treacherous territory; you can use your arms to bridge gaps, or put up your hands to stop the lemmings' march. The game will even allow gamers to import their created levels from the PSP version. Unfortunately, this title is currently only slated for a European release, but since it looks like the most inventive use of the EyeToy in a while, don't be surprised if you eventually see it on our shores.
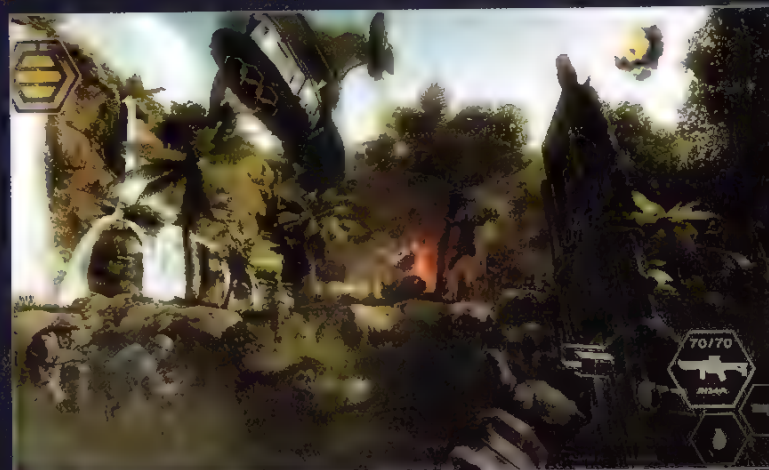
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC
Haze

While there were many new franchises mixed in with returning series at this year's E3, one stood out as a bit more mysterious than the rest. Haze, the new FPS by Free Radical and published by Ubisoft. Based on what we saw, Haze appears to be a fairly standard first-person shooter, but the strange ending to our live demo hinted at some big twist that awaits players, though no one was talking. Free Radical showed off the lush South American jungle setting and squad-based first-person action, and the company's pedigree with the TimeSplitters games assures us that it will be a fun time. But we're curious to hear more about what other surprises could be lurking in the title and its near-future private military force theme. We, like you, will have to wait until 2007 to find out.

PSP
Brooktown High: Senior Year

Were you a loser in high school? Of course you were. Now, thanks to Backbone and Konami, you'll be able to relive your glory days with Brooktown High: Senior Year. Scheduled to hit shelves in spring next year, this dating simulation will allow you to create a male or female avatar and roam the halls of a school populated exclusively with attractive (and bouncy!) potential mates. Of course, it's not all about making out under the bleachers – there's the ever-present social structure to contend with, complete with nerds, preppies, and jocks. Wow...just add in some cowering in a lonely bathroom stall and this game sounds like a direct port of our real-life high school experience.

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2

The Sopranos

While *Deadwood* would probably be our first choice, HBO's first foray into adapting its critically-acclaimed programming into games is its most recognizable show, *The Sopranos*. Coming late this year, The Sopranos puts you in the shoes of whacked mobster Sal Bonpensiero's son, as he attempts to get in good with Tony Soprano. You'll take on tasks like collections, intimidations, and probably dirtier work in order to join Tony's gang and climb the ranks...you know, like in The Godfather game. While you don't play as Tony, James Gandolfini will reprise the role for the game, as will other key cast members. Developed by 7 Studios (who spearheaded the Fantastic Four game), only time will tell if the Sopranos game becomes capo or sleeps with the fishes.

PC

Neverwinter Nights 2

Obsidian Entertainment, master of the BioWare sequel (the studio is responsible for KOTOR 2, among many others), is closing in on releasing its latest project. Neverwinter Nights 2 is due to be on shelves in September, and will come packed with all of the tools that Obsidian is using internally to develop the game. So, in addition to the huge amount of full-on Dungeons & Dragons goodness that comes in the box, the mod community that latched on to the first game should be able to kick into high gear right away with NWN 2. A new party system for the single-player game (which functions much like the one in KOTOR), vastly friendlier interface, and completely reworked graphics engine should make this one of the better PC titles of this year.

ザックス

急いでるんだって！

PSP

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII

What was Sephiroth up to before he was burning villages and impaling loved ones with a seven-foot sword? Our sources tell us that he spent most of his nights mutilating his sister's Barbie dolls and stabbing pictures in his high school yearbook, but now we'll find out what really went on in that head of his in Crisis Core, a prequel to Final Fantasy VII. Mr. One Winged Angel will certainly be a prominent player in this new chapter in the series, but the game actually follows Zack, a charismatic recruit in Shinra Corporation's SOLDIER division. As we all know, Zack served as the core of Cloud's imagined identity. Although little is known concerning gameplay, Square has stated that this game will be an action/RPG, and the teaser trailer that was shown at the company's pre-E3 press event did showcase acrobatic swordplay and highly cinematic story sequences. While we'd love for nothing more than to delve into this game immediately, Square has yet to set a release date.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Madden NFL 07

Take a seat, Randy Moss. Go hit the showers Shaun Alexander. This year, the Steve Hutchinson's of the NFL are basking in the spotlight. Through a mode dubbed Run to Daylight, players will get the chance to control the tackle, center, guard, fullback, or wide receiver that sets up the run. The running back will follow through the hole that you create. Sticking with the theme of enhancing the running game, EA Tiburon is also upgrading the mini-camp with new activities such as the 40-yard dash. Exclusive to the current-gen versions is a new mode dubbed Hall of Fame. In this mode, you essentially role-play as one player. If you suit up as a wide receiver, this means that you just run his routes and make the catches. This also means that you sit on the sidelines when your team is on defense. Madden will make its debut just in time for the football season on 360, PS2, and Xbox, and should be ready to go for the PS3 launch on November 17.

Wii

WarioWare: Smooth Moves

The Wii isn't a console for the extremely self-conscious, and no title illustrates this fact better than Nintendo's own WarioWare: Smooth Moves. The game asks players to assume a variety of bizarre and humiliating positions as they use the remote to navigate through 200 bite-sized challenges. Will you have to swivel your hips as you hula, or do squats as you hold the remote on top of your head? Other less embarrassing activities include balancing an upright broom, tracing an onscreen outline, and chopping stuff in half. No release date for this crazy minigame medley has been announced, but it was in good shape on the E3 show floor, so we could see it in the launch line-up come November.

NINTENDO DS

Elite Beat Agents

Import DS players have been boasting for some time now about the wacky fun of this strange little rhythm game, and it finally looks as if the wider American audience will get to make up their own mind. The elite beat agents are apparently even more secretive than the FBI and the CIA, and their government-appointed task appears to be to dance about with such frantic energy that they help people solve their problems by making them become groovier. Did we mention this game is from Japan? Each stage is a full mini-storyline with one of three endings, based on the quality of your performance as you tap and trace patterns on the touch screen. Expect the elite beat agents to dance their way into American stores by the end of this year.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PSP

Thrillville

With Thrillville, LucasArts and studio Frontier Development are approaching the theme park genre with the thought of it being a highly interactive and personal experience. Micro-management, building rides, and designing the park are part of the picture and are as deep as you will find in similar PC titles, but this game also allows you to create your own character, get to know your guests, and interact with everything in the park. Midway games like bumper cars, mini-golf, and saucer soccer, are all playable components – some even feature multiplayer and customization. As you explore the park, you'll also run into characters that have missions for you to complete. Thrillville is set to shake up theme park simulations this fall.

PSP

LocoRoco

The PSP may be many things, but home to quirky innovation hasn't historically been one of them. A brief change looks to be in the air this September when Sony delivers LocoRoco from the company's Japanese studio. Players tilt the world around six different types of LocoRoco who squish, slide, and swing their way through the 40 stages. If the art style doesn't charm you, the music very well should, as the score and sound effects are a wacky match to the game's pop-art color scheme. Minigames and "wireless features" are also promised, but few specifics on either have been announced yet.

NINTENDO DS
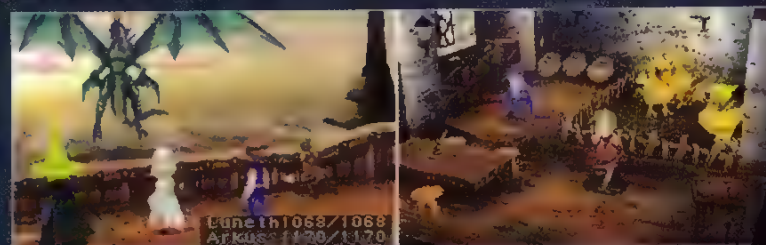
Final Fantasy III

As an evil supervillain probably once said: "At last, my collection is complete! Mwa ha ha!" This lost chapter in the Final Fantasy series is the only one that never made it to the U.S., but that will change this September when Square Enix brings us this visually overhauled remake. In addition to graphics that recall the days of Final Fantasy IX, the game features changes that flesh out the story and enhance the main characters, plus a touch-screen interface which can be used to handle everything from navigation to target selection in battle. And just in case you were wondering: no, gluing this DS cartridge to your copy of Final Fantasy X will not magically create Final Fantasy XIII. You'll just have to wait like the rest of us.

TIME 100
Fighter

SkyBunny

Laser type	Plasma
Lock on	Single
Bomb	N/A
Shield	
Boost	
Time bonus	X

NINTENDO DS
Star Fox DS

Would you rather sell your soul to the devil, or play another Star Fox game with Fox McCloud running around on foot? The fact that some of you are even debating which scenario would be worse clearly illuminates where this troubled franchise needs to go next. Although displaying many unflattering FX Chip qualities in the visuals, we are more than pleased with the gameplay direction that developer Q-Games is taking. This is classic Star Fox gameplay, but instead of leading the player along on rails, the levels offer complete freedom of movement. The DS touch-screen is also used in interesting ways, such as being able to draw the routes that your wingmen take through a level. Additionally, dogfighting is planned in the forms of eight-player local wireless and four-player Wi-Fi. Best of all however, Star Fox will release sooner than you think on August 28.
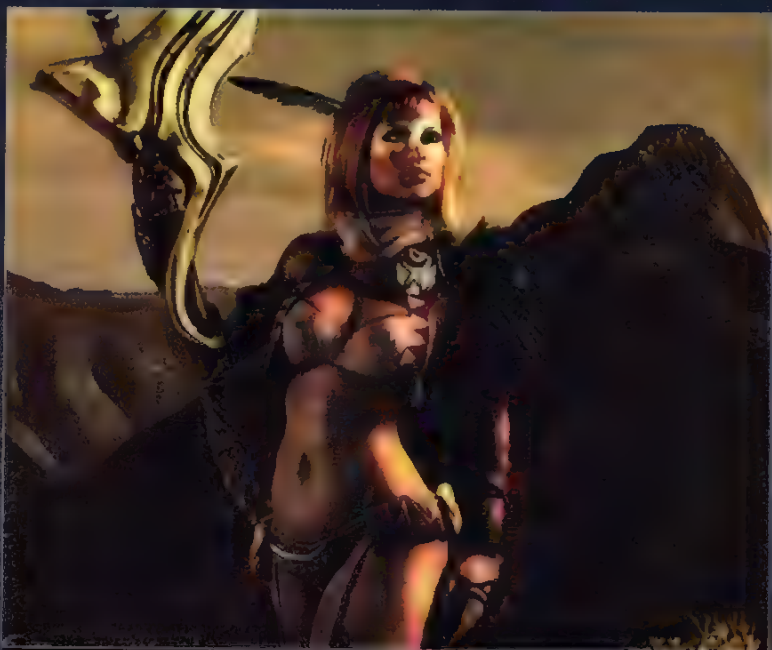
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360
Golden Axe

Sega has been looking to its past to chart out its future, reviving old franchises for the next generation. One of the first to see such a revival is Golden Axe, which is being developed by San Francisco-based Secret Level for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. The game isn't scheduled to release until 2007, so information is scarce. We're hoping that the new title allows you kick gnomes, our favorite part of the original. Riding beasts and using magic has been confirmed, and given its arcade roots, co-op gameplay is a natural fit. We're big fans of hack 'n slash action, so we can't wait to see how this old favorite is reinvented.

PC
Sid Meier's Railroads!

Luminary developer Sid Meier basically invented the whole tycoon genre 16 years ago with Railroad Tycoon, and now the prodigious designer is revisiting that classic. Railroads is basically a remake of Railroad Tycoon with updated graphics and an incredibly easy and intuitive interface. You'll build up your empire by connecting various cities and industries to each other, making money and shaping the development of the region by building up the transportation infrastructure. Eventually, victory will require buying out all of your rivals' stock unifying the railroads under a single (extremely profitable) banner. It may not sound like the most exciting thing ever, but we dare you to talk to anyone who spent a decent amount of time with the original and not come away looking forward to Railroads.

NINTENDO DS
Yoshi's Island 2 [working title]

It would be easy to fault Nintendo for its reliance on those core platforming heroes introduced decades ago, but when the results are as promising as Yoshi's Island 2, we'd say that those accusations are dead wrong. Instead of a half-baked re-release, the adventure due out by the end of this year ponies up baby versions of Mario, Donkey Kong, and Peach to make Yoshi's platforming skills more varied. The team is going to need as many super skills as they can get, because word from Nintendo is that every one of the game's levels will span the DS's pair of screens.
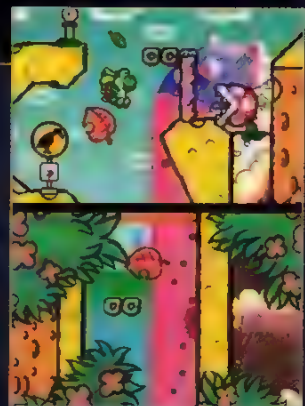
MULTI

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X-Men: The Official Game

PS2

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Gallop Racer 2006

XBOX 360

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Table Tennis

PC

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SiN Episodes: Emergence

GAME INFORMER
GAME OF THE MONTH

New Super Mario Bros.

Has it really been this long since we've had a brand new side-scrolling Super Mario Bros. title? After all the deluxe reissues and repackagings, Nintendo is finally giving fans what we've wanted for years, and the iconic old-school plumber has never looked better. New Super Mario Bros. is that rare title that manages to capture the great things of the past, while providing enough new twists and turns to keep things interesting. If you came up in the NES era, this game will provide you with a bracing reminder of why you fell in love with games in the first place. For younger DS fans, it's an education in the timeless and still-viable art of the 2D game.

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

THE SCORING SYSTEM

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

> **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.

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New Super Mario Bros.

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PC GAME OF THE MONTH
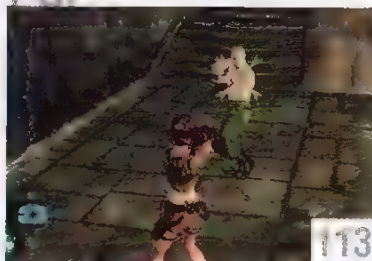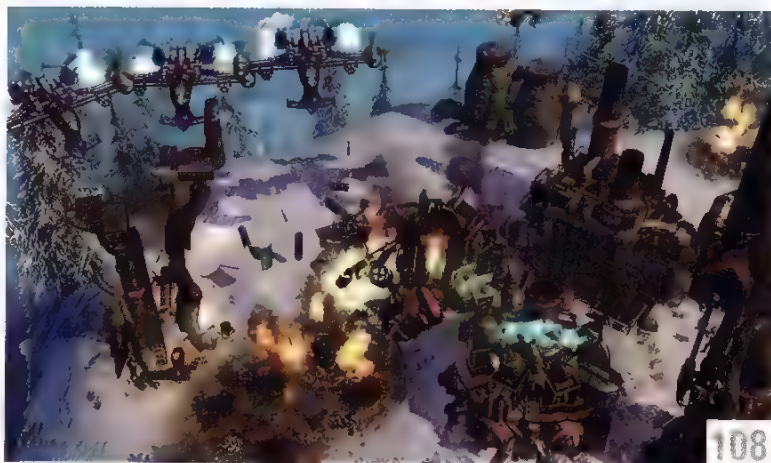
Rise of Nations:
Rise of Legends

Rise of Nations was a kick in the collective pants of the RTS genre back in 2002, injecting more traditional strategy game concepts into a fast-paced, real-time framework. As with all the best sophomore efforts, Big Huge Games blows the doors off of its own previous success with this sequel. An outstanding level of polish, amazing diversity in all aspects of the game, and kick-ass online support make this the next RTS you need to play.

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the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

C	Content 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

Revolution – The correct way to pronounce "Wii"

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

shooter – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and 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

■ There are no checkpoints in the game. If you die in a level, you'll have to start the entire thing over

ACHIEVEMENTS FOR ACHIEVEMENTS
X-Men will likely be remembered solely for one of its Achievements. Once players collect 950 GamerPoints in the game, another Achievement worth 50 points is unlocked. So basically you get an Achievement for unlocking Achievements.

■ Nightcrawler is the only character that is handled properly

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

X-Men: The Official Game

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** Z-AXIS GAMES > **RELEASE** MAY 16 > **ESRB** E10+

MUTANT GENOCIDE

With a bucket of burnt popcorn and a gallon of flat soda swirling down the digestive tract, the marriage of Hollywood and video games has belched up another unbearably foul and highly acidic wad of phlegm. Billed as an experience that goes beyond the motion picture, X-Men: The Official Game attempts to tell the story that bridges the gap between the second and third films. It's a sound idea, but the execution couldn't have been worse. With a thirst for blood, this game violently jabs Wolverine's claws into the hearts of gamers, comic fans, and moviegoers that had hoped that it would provide further insight into this remarkable silver screen saga.

The game does answer several questions that may arise when you watch the third film. How does Iceman finally become a member of the core team? Why is Nightcrawler not around? What other secrets are buried within Wolverine's clouded past? No matter how much your inner dork kicks and screams for the answers, believe me when I say that you don't want to know what they are. In most cases, this story is an utter mockery of everything that the X-Men stand for. While comic characters have a ten-

dency to only stay dead for a year or two, bringing Lady Deathstrike back to life after she suffered one of the greatest deaths in the history of cinema is just flat-out stupid. Sending Nightcrawler to Hell is even worse. And no, I am not kidding.

I don't even know how this is possible, but the quality of the cinematic sequences is even worse than the script. Rather than telling the story through animated clips, the game makes use of still-frame sequences that feature voiceovers from many of the actors from the film. These clips make *Reading Rainbow* seem like a high-quality Disney production. Have you ever watched a person get crushed by a rock without animation? I can now say that I have.

The Hindenburg-like development philosophy also extends to gameplay. Saying that this game has levels can be a bit deceiving. Call me crazy, but small environments that are populated with wave after wave of enemies don't constitute actual stages.

When I played as Wolverine I felt that I was being punished for something that I did. As great as his combat prowess is in the movie and comics, it would seem that his skills have regressed to repetitive blind hacking. Thankfully, the enemies really don't seem to catch on. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that the

enemy types really don't change from level to leve…er…room to room.

On a positive note, the mechanics that bring Nightcrawler's teleportation to life are easy to use and a perfect fit for the character. It's fun to quickly bamf from the rafters to a ledge to behind your adversary. Z-Axis has definitely captured the spirit of this character better than any game, but the challenges that await this blue devil are just as lifeless and repetitive as Wolverine's.

And let's not forget about the exploits of Iceman, who should be rewarded with the honorary rank of fireman given the number of blazes he has to put out in this game. Soaring on the ice stream is definitely cool, but the objectives that you are forced to complete are just obnoxious. His big battle against an army of Sentinels breaks down to the player shooting ice blasts at colored dots on their robotic exteriors. Isn't this the same gameplay mechanic from The Empire Strikes Back on Atari 2600?

In many ways, this game is a digital mousetrap. You really want to know what happens, but you just end up with your neck getting snapped. Unless you despise the X-Men movies and simply want more ammo that can be used to insult your friends, I strongly advise that you avoid this game like you would French kissing Toad.—**REINER**

■ The cutscenes are still frame painted images with spoken dialogue. Action is usually displayed by simply moving (not animating) the characters on screen
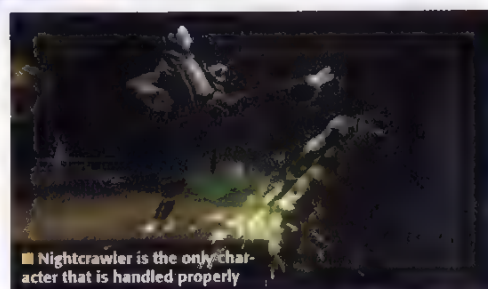
Second Opinion 5

Talk about a letdown. There are a number of reasons why I was excited about this game, and twice the number of reasons why that excitement has been dashed away and replaced by disappointment. The idea of a story between movies two and three was a great one, but the resulting plot is meandering, incoherent, and at times more than a little silly. It doesn't help that the storyboard-style cinematics that tell much of the tale feel so cheap and unfinished. I'd like the variety offered between three unique characters a lot better if any of them worked particularly well, which, in case you hadn't guessed, they don't. Every trick in the book is played to make the game seem longer than it is – from dozens of nearly identical enemy waves to frustrating level restarts after a cheap death. The whole affair feels like a valiant attempt at taking the franchise in a creative new direction that was crushed under the inevitable weight of movie release time constraints and limited budgets. Much as it pains me, this time the X-Men have earned the right to be feared and hated by those they've sworn to protect.—**MILLER**

ICEMAN TIMELINE

01:00 HOURS	02:00 HOURS	03:00 HOURS	04:00 HOURS
Putting out boat fires in a danger room simulation	Putting out fires at a factory	Shooting at fire birds in a nuclear power plant	Battling a fire dragon
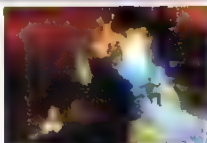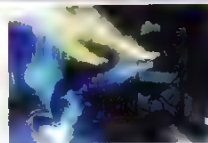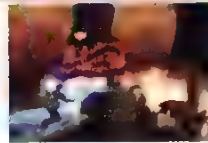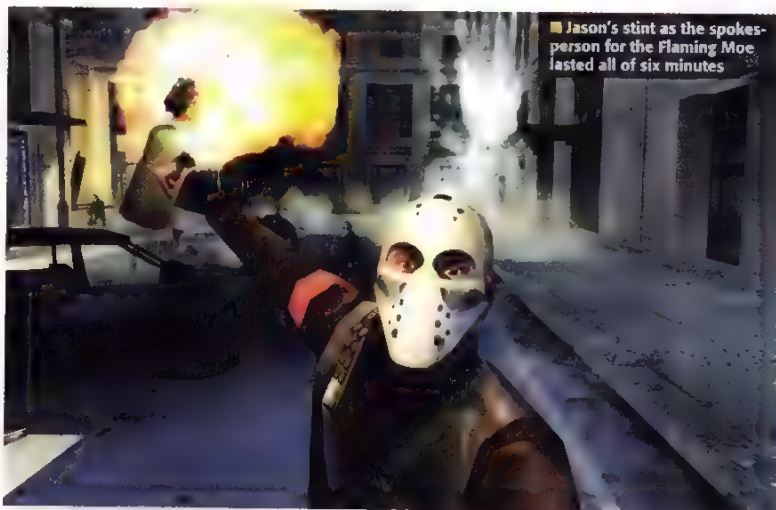
Jason's stint as the spokesperson for the Flaming Moe lasted all of six minutes

Ray stupidly smiled at the flash

This adversary also received a rocket launcher blast

Kids don't want to be firefighters because they get to put out fires. It's the only job that allows you to break other people's things without getting in trouble

The weapons available change with each new stage

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Urban Chaos: Riot Response

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 13 > **ESRB** M

ANOTHER ENJOYABLE SLEEPER

U rban Chaos answers a question that's been swimming around in my head ever since I was a pimple-faced teenager: What would happen if *Friday the 13th*'s Jason found a cloning machine and decided to unleash hell upon a major metropolitan area? The answer, as you would expect, is quite pleasing.

As a brave firefighter desperately tries to douse a blaze that is inching dangerously close to an immobilized citizen, his progress comes to a screeching halt when a goon wearing a hockey mask decides to jam a meat cleaver into his back. This startling (yet highly awesome) sequence is what Urban Chaos is all about. Brave men and women are trying to save the city, but you have to watch their backs and work together to provide the support that the crippled community desperately needs.

It's a cheesy premise, but it's also a unique one that proves to be engaging thanks to a solid gameplay package. Where the game shines is in its usage of a riot shield; not only is it extremely handy for blocking incoming fire, it provides the most satisfying skull crack since the rocket launcher in Halo 2. Let me tell you, a hockey mask won't protect anyone from the force that is put behind these shield thrusts. With Havok 3 fueling the physics, watching bodies soar and die in painful ways is quite amusing. The game even slows down and zooms in to show you the more hilarious deaths. Speaking of which, some of the fights that you get in are staged…right down to how adversaries will

perish when your steel steals their last breath. One attacker may crash into scaffolding that collapses down onto him. Another may flip backwards over the side of a building and plummet 15 stories to his death.

Just when it seems that the gameplay is getting repetitive, variety is injected into the scenarios via mission objectives and the requisite helicopter-based track shooting sequences. Hidden rewards and gameplay-enhancing unlockables give players reason to go back and perform better in each level, thus giving the game a bit of longevity. Online is also present, but its sub-par quality means that this is by no means a destination where you want to spend more than 20 minutes of your life.

Like Cold Winter and Project Snowblind before it, Urban Chaos is a nice distraction from the FPS giants. It's by no means a blockbuster that can suck away years of your life, but it offers up memorable thrills that you won't find anywhere else. It's well worth a look.—**REINER**

Illustrated here are the two uses for the riot shield. While providing great cover, the shield does get damaged; after being hit with several shots, visibility becomes an issue. Still, you'll thank your stars every time you have your shield out and a foe surprises you by leaping out and firing off a quick shotgun blast. Interestingly, you won't be able to march forward with the shield. When it takes fire, you are knocked back a step. To use it as a weapon, you usually have to run forward unprotected, then pull it out for a crushing blow.

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** An FPS of a different breed that asks: "How many heads can be cracked open with a riot shield?"

> **Graphics:** Gritty and somewhat ugly. The effects are commendable, but the animation lacks finesse and the characters are recycled

> **Sound:** The enemy does a good job of taunting the player through blood-curdling insults

> **Playability:** Fluid in movement and dead-on in its targeting. The selection of weapons is also respectable (more games need circular saws)

> **Entertainment:** Online is a hideously disfigured beast, but the single player experience delivers a memory a minute

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

Sometimes the exception does prove the rule. Urban Chaos is just like almost every other action game out there, and yet it mostly steers clear of the minefield of boredom. It's so arcadey and simple that the game amounts to little more than a jazzed up Time Crisis. But by using things like your riot shield, or by instructing a firefighter to axe through a burning door, it keeps you interested. In fact, the AI companion system is so dumbed down that it actually works, which is an ironic breath of fresh air from games that can't do nearly as much as they promise. Urban Chaos does manage to do what many games can't. Through rewards, constant action, and little bonuses like getting to lay into enemies with a chainsaw, it keeps you playing even after you've seen all it can do. —**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

The Da Vinci Code

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES > DEVELOPER THE COLLECTIVE > RELEASE MAY 19 > ESRB T

■ Environments look really great and give a sense of scale

SACRE BLEU

BOTTOM LINE 6

A t its core, The Da Vinci Code (no matter what medium you're experiencing it in) is about an ancient mystery unraveled by two intellectuals. At what point, then, would one expect or demand that they get into frequent fistfights with the authorities? This is but one of many questions that the development team at The Collective had to answer when designing this adventure title and, while I don't envy their position at all, I have to say that many of the core ideas don't work very well.

The book does not contain, for example, a series of hand-to-hand brawls where the main characters are defending themselves while spouting off cheesy one-liners. The game, on the other hand, does. And often. It's almost as if the video game version feels guilty when the subject matter gets too "high-brow," and it's a shame because when they do let players just sink into the mythology, it's actually pretty fun. Extensive menu systems let you access the character's knowledge base on art history, cryptography and symbolism. If the controls were tighter, this would be a joy for puzzle dorks like myself. Instead, I was cursing the random flipping between menus and inconsistent selection methods within puzzles. And, while I appreciate puzzles that I wouldn't know the answers to from reading the book, most of these added sequences feel half-baked at best.

If the whole shindig had been tightened up and the game had faith in players (i.e. believe that we would find being a dorky scholar rewarding), the whole experience could have been much more pleasurable. Instead, the game muddies up what's great and exciting about the novel with clunky video game clichés. It feels like National Geographic and Ultimate Fighting mushed together in a bad, bad way.——LISA

> **Concept:** Translate the movie, itself a translation of a book, into a video game that captures little of what made the novel a fun read

> **Graphics:** While not actors from the film, the characters and environments are all well realized and believable

> **Sound:** Repetitive music clips and stilted dialogue delivery are bummers, but generally it's okay

> **Playability:** Touchy menu controls make things more frustrating than they need to be

> **Entertainment:** Conspiracy dorks, puzzle junkies, and really bored adventure fans will find nuggets here that entertain

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 6

The fact that this game bears the name of the legendary artist Leonardo da Vinci is an abomination. To get revenge, I think someone from the art world should photocopy their ass, hang it in a museum and call it "The Miyamoto Codex." It's only fair. What isn't fair is that a book I quite enjoyed is now ruined by this tedious game in which faux-Hanks and faux-Amélie wander about aimlessly, solving the occasional decent puzzle when they're not engaging in some of the worst stealth and combat I've ever witnessed. As Leonardo himself would say "Theesa game? She-ah no so good."——MATT

■ The menus actually offer a lot of cross-referenced information. I just wish the puzzles would have required players to really dig in
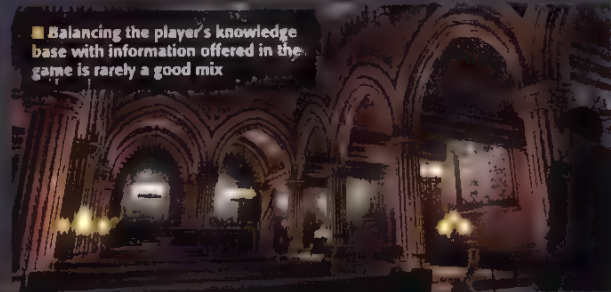
■ Balancing the player's knowledge base with information offered in the game is rarely a good mix

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PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

Gallop Racer 2006

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER TECMO > DEVELOPER TECMO
> RELEASE MAY 2 > ESRB E

W hen it comes right down to it, reviews aren't much more than a well thought-out opinion. Now, I'm well aware that there are some folks out there who adore the menu-driven management and breeding strategies inherent to the Gallop Racer series. I respect that viewpoint. It's just that I don't share it. For me, the dated graphics, elevator-style music, and endless scrolling through lines of text and numbers just doesn't get me excited. The new Theme Park mode aims to supply what's fun about horse racing, but fails to offer even the most basic understanding of how to get started and succeed. As for the races, there are few games that have made me feel less like I was a part of the interactive experience than this. If you already like the series, not enough has changed to stop you from enjoying it. And that's exactly the reason why new players may as well just stay away.——MILLER

PLAYSTATION 2

Street Fighter Alpha Anthology

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM
> RELEASE AUGUST > ESRB T
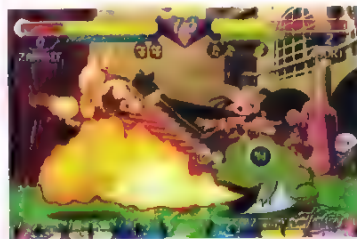
O n paper, Street Fighter Alpha Anthology sounds like a dream. It includes all three Alpha titles, as well as Alpha 2 Gold and Super Gem Fighter Mini Mix, a simplified cute fighter with characters from franchises like Darkstalkers. But although each Alpha game adds new fighters and more elaborate super moves, they're really not all that different, so this compilation doesn't feel as jam-packed as other collections. But how do these games hold up today? Well, to use a tried-and-true game reviewer cliché, fans of the series will love these straight-from-the-arcade ports, while players weaned on 3D fighters will continue to wonder why the Street Fighter series was ever considered a big deal.——JEREMY

PLAYSTATION 2

Naruto: Ultimate Ninja

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI > DEVELOPER CYBERCONNECT 2
> RELEASE JUNE 20 > ESRB T

I t has always bothered me that most licensed fighters are primarily concerned with fulfilling a fanservice quota rather than delivering a solid game. While Ultimate Ninja still provides a ridiculous amount of fodder for Narutophiles, I was surprised to find that it actually does some creative and fun things with the combat. The battles are more akin to Smash Brothers than Street Fighter, with a simplistic control scheme and plenty of pick-ups in the environment that result in some crazy bouts. The overall zaniness of Naruto shines through in big super-moves that play out in interactive (though overly long) cinematics, and fans will love the pile of varied unlockables. Even so, for gamers who don't know jutsu from chakra, don't expect the game to give you any real incentive to play independent of its source material.——JOE

Rockstar put a lot of care into the character models and it shows

Table Tennis plays fast and smooth online, making it an ideal for quick Xbox Live sessions

XBOX 360

Moto GP '06

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
(2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** THQ
> **DEVELOPER** CLIMAX GAMES
> **RELEASE** JUNE 14 > **ESRB** E
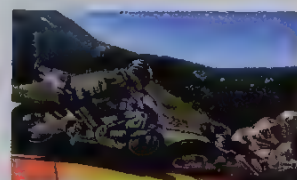
BOTTOM LINE 8.75 Maybe it's unfair to compare Moto GP '06 and Tourist Trophy because they are on different systems (Xbox 360 and PS2, respectively), but whereas the latter comes off as clinical, Moto GP '06 gets the blood pumping. Maybe it's just the graphics, but I think the thrills are simply better. The sense of speed. The crashes. Then again, it's unfair to call Moto GP an arcade racer, because that would give short shrift to the skills needed to play this title as you meticulously manage your bike. I also have to give kudos to this game for adding challenges before each race that increase your overall abilities.—KATO

XBOX 360

Table Tennis

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO
> **RELEASE** MAY 23 > **ESRB** E

BACK TO PONG

Rockstar caught everyone by surprise with Table Tennis, which was announced a few months ago. Given the company's reputation for creating large-scale, adults-only epics like Grand Theft Auto and Manhunt, bringing out a new version of America's favorite old rec room pastime seemed a bit odd.

After now having put some serious time into the game, I have to say Rockstar is onto something. Table Tennis is sheer, simple fun, and might well be the killer party game that Xbox 360 owners have been waiting for. The control is accurate and responsive, lending itself well to lightning-fast volleys that will put your reflexes to the test. Although it is very straightforward, there is some skill and strategy involved in using spin, power, and soft shots. The only place in which

the gameplay stumbles is the player movement, which can be a bit erratic and floaty.

Graphically, it's impressive, although not surprising given how little is going on in the environments. The character models are very realistic, given to sweating and outfitted in real, moving

cloth physics. Although there are no real players (not that I'd recognize a pro table tennis player anyway), the characters cover the gamut of race, ethnicity, and sex, to often humorous results (Rockstar's English roots show

in the game's ridiculous Frenchman).

While I can't fault the gameplay package – especially in two-player or over Xbox Live, where I expect it will soon be a new favorite -- I am disappointed that more effort wasn't put forth to make this game a full-fledged sports title. There is no career mode to speak of, the unlockables are few and fairly unexciting (new shirts just don't do it for me), and characters cannot improve their stats or evolve in any way. In the future, perhaps this franchise could push its already wacky bent even further, going for silly, over-the-top items like the Hot Shots Golf series. However, despite its shallow nature, I'll still keep my copy of Table Tennis handy for when friends come over or when I'm looking for a fast, fun online experience. A good game that could have been great with a bit more effort.—MATT

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** A simple but addictive table tennis game with no frills whatsoever

> **Graphics:** The character models are very detailed, exhibiting cloth physics and even perspiration

> **Sound:** Fairly minimal soundtrack, especially compared to most Rockstar games

> **Playability:** The mechanics are simple, but very accurate, and the basic gameplay is fun

> **Entertainment:** Although I wish there were more here, I foresee this being a hit on Xbox Live and at parties

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.25

I think Rockstar is finding out that Pong wasn't as easy to make as it looks. This game delivers an initial wave of fun that is dispelled the harder the title becomes and the more you call upon the gameplay to uphold its end of the bargain. Your player lacks full analog movement, meaning they slide into pre-set positions around the table. Not only does this make certain camera angles disorienting, it also feels clunky and gets you out of position. Furthermore, I think that there are shots that you or the AI arbitrarily make or miss at any given time. With these problems in mind, and the fact that there was no attempt to offer any sort of career mode, this game is an idea that is better said than done.—KATO

The are alternate arenas and outfits, but few unlockables

XBOX 360

Hitman: Blood Money

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** EIDOS
> **DEVELOPER** IO INTERACTIVE
> **RELEASE** MAY 30 > **ESRB** M

BOTTOM LINE 7.75 This series, and this entry in particular, is skating around on charisma alone. I'm not ready to declare Agent 47 down for the count, but some serious improvements need to be made on the AI, inventory management, and general tightening of the game's systems. The next-gen version looks even better than the PS2 and Xbox offerings, and the deliciously vicious deaths are still intact. Blood Money stands with really great ideas lightly dusted in unfortunate design quirks.—LISA

PC

Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** BIG HUGE GAMES > **RELEASE** MAY 9 > **ESRB** T

MAKE YOUR OWN LEGEND

There's a certain level of basic enjoyment that nearly every RTS released since Command & Conquer can quite easily aspire to. Building up a base and an army and then using them to crush your foes is a good time even in an otherwise mediocre game. Rise of Legends is not one of those titles. Instead, it illustrates how basic concepts like these can be taken to the next level through tight design and a metric ton of polish. A visually and aurally astounding presentation – provided you have a beefy enough PC to take advantage of it – certainly doesn't hurt, either.

It's not as if Rise of Legends doesn't have any good ideas, but any seasoned RTS player has seen all of the many facets of this game before. The groundbreaking (for the

"Simply executed on a level that we rarely see"

genre) concepts from Rise of Nations have been refined, and each and every system and notion works so well both individually and together that the whole is truly greater than the sum of its parts. The resource-gathering structure puts an emphasis on exploration, while also encouraging players to keep upgrading their bases. Likewise, the design of the technology trees (which are startlingly different for each playable faction) rewards a more conservative or defensive approach without screwing over aggressive play styles. Finally, both the immensely entertaining combat and the composition of each troop set push gamers toward exploring the various types of units; it's highly unlikely that a strategy that hinges on huge masses of a single unit will see much success.

The single-player game offers a huge number of skirmish scenarios to enjoy in addition to the dozens of hours of playtime of its three excellent free-form campaigns, which allow you to direct a board game-like metagame in pursuit of your objectives. Multiplayer has some serious legs as well, with rankings for individuals and clans, extensive stat-tracking, and a robust matchmaking service. If there's any fault to find in this title, it's that it doesn't advance the Rise of Nations or RTS formulas very much -- but one could just as easily argue that it doesn't have to.

Everything about this title is simply executed on a level that we rarely see outside of a few elite development studios. If Rise of Legends is indicitive of things to come, perhaps Big Huge Games is ready to join the likes of Valve, Blizzard, and Firaxis at the pinnacle of gaming.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Apply the outstanding Rise of Nations formula to a more fantastic setting – with brilliant results

> **Graphics:** If you've got the machine for it, this is a gorgeous game. If not, don't worry; it scales remarkably well, and can be played well even on a below-average PC

> **Sound:** This is the first title in some time to convince me to not have iTunes running in the background

> **Playability:** Pretty standard RTS controls work as smoothly as one could ask

> **Entertainment:** In a genre teeming with great titles, Rise of Legends stands out as one of the best ways to get out and conquer something

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.5

There is something infinitely satisfying about amassing a huge army of steam-driven mechanical spiders and heavily armed zeppelins to crush one's enemies. Rise of Legends is easily one of the most addictive games I've played in a long time, and every aspect of gameplay is every bit as compelling as the combat. The building, research, resource gathering, and Risk-like overworld map are all sublimely integrated into one another, making for an incredibly smooth, polished experience. But what I admire most about Rise of Legends is how it manages to be incredibly accessible to players of all levels of RTS familiarity, despite offering a huge number of systems and tactics. The original Rise of Nations is one of my favorite RTS games of all time, and Rise of Legends easily bests it in nearly every way. Just writing this makes me want to play more – so I gotta go now. Bye.—**JEREMY**
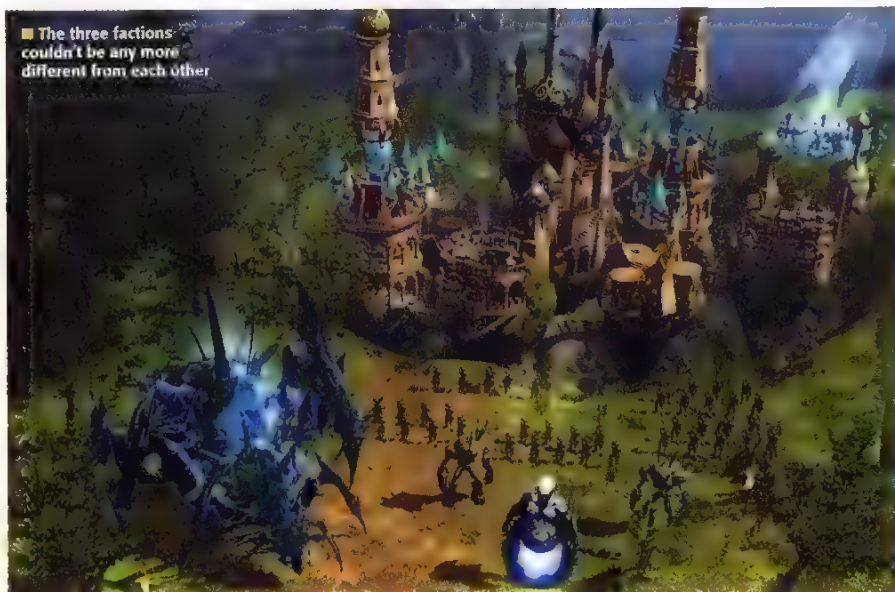
The three factions couldn't be any more different from each other

Heroes are important without being overpowering, believe it or not
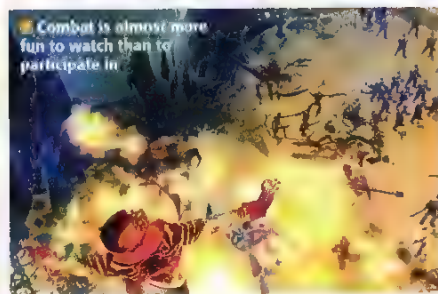
Combat is almost more fun to watch than to participate in

Don't let him fool you. He's really just an enthusiastic puppy

PC

Paradise

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** WHITE BIRDS PRODUCTIONS
> **RELEASE** MAY 2 > **ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE **5.25** Games like this make defending the adventure genre harder work than it already is. Repetitive dialogue, convoluted puzzles, missing logic, and unquestionably boring movement are all here. The game does share one redeeming value with its creator's previous titles (the Syberia series, most notably): it's mighty pretty. Good looks and interesting creature design are the highlights, but I can honestly say that I've seen loading screens more involving than Paradise's long-winded tale.—LISA

PC

SiN Episodes: Emergence

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** VALVE > **DEVELOPER** RITUAL ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MAY 9 > **ESRB** M

IT IS WHAT IT IS

A lot of people from the business side of games are going to be watching this one closely. As the first high-profile game title to try the combination of episodic content with direct downloading, this could be the beginning of a new way to get your games. It's about the only thing about SiN that is likely to change the world in any measurable way, since the game content itself is very much in line with shooters we've all played before. Fortunately, it's the variety of FPS that anyone should be more than happy to enjoy again – non-stop action, constant explosions, and enemies that make up for their lack of intelligence by clever placement within the level and sheer force of numbers.

It's a familiar formula, but Ritual has gotten every part of the equation just right. You'll only be juggling a grand total of three different weapons (plus grenades), but each one is precise and fun to use – even if they are just variations on the classic FPS triumvirate of pistol, shotgun, and

machine gun. Similarly, there certainly isn't an overflow of enemy types, but from the fodder ground troops to the jumping mutant freaks, they're each special in their own little way as a target for your lead. My personal favorite, incidentally, are those kooky, madcap jetpack soldiers – it never ceases to entertain when just a few bullets send them careening off into the side of a nearby building. Level design is totally solid, offering a nice variation of confined corridors and wide open construction zones and building lobbies. The rapid change-up of locations serves the title well in its quest to offer constant thrills throughout the short hours in which the game plays out.

Depending on your skill and difficulty settings, you can expect one very full afternoon of gaming from this first episode, perhaps even a weekend if you don't marathon it. That's actually a good bit longer than I expected out of this first installment, and it's a testament to the game's quality that every minute of those

few hours feels so intense. In a pattern I expect we'll see a lot more of in the coming years, the story hangs over an appropriately sized cliff at the end of the playthrough, and a "Next On SiN Episodes" trailer lets you in on what you can expect from part two.

The Source engine and its over-the-top physics serve the game quite well even if the technology on display is already starting to look a bit dated. And while the philosophy of blowing crap up for several hours certainly works in this first part of the plot, I do hope that we see some new directions in gameplay as the later episodes roll out.

If there's such a thing as a popcorn movie, this is the interactive equivalent – gratuitous T&A, over-the-top villains, barebones story, and a never-ending stream of expendable thugs blowing up to your heart's content. It's not going to win any literature awards, but damned if I can find anything about it that's not fun.—MILLER

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **Concept:** While away a long afternoon with the first installment of this by-the-book shooter

> **Graphics:** The same look we got from Half-Life 2, with perhaps a little less finesse

> **Sound:** Run of the mill sound effects, but a few quality musical tracks are scattered about

> **Playability:** Couldn't be more simple to pick up and play

> **Entertainment:** Do you like shooting things and looking at exotic swimwear? Congrats. You'll have a good time

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

SiN may be borne of the same DNA as Half-Life 2, but seldom does it show similarities to its legendary sibling. While never coming close to reaching the same level of thrills of using a sawblade in Half-Life 2, SiN does toy around with physics in inventive ways. Hitting an airborne adversary in the jetpack leads to flames twirling through the sky and a ragdoll body slamming hard into the ground. A few of the level puzzles are also based on object weight, but most of the stages are straight-forward and comprised of yawn-inducing battles and questionable enemy AI. Some adversaries can see you through walls, while others won't raise a finger toward you even after you've shot them numerous times. The selection of firearms never really delivers the sensation that you are wielding more than a cap gun, either. Although I will say that grenades that spread wildfire are pretty slick. All told, SiN has great tech, but comes up short in design.—REINER

Happy birthday. Don't say we never gave you anything

That's what you get for carrying a combustible chain gun

PC

Darwinia

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY
> **PUBLISHER** CINEMAWARE MARQUEE
> **DEVELOPER** INTROVERSION SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** JUNE 7 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE **7.5** After being hailed at the Independent Games Festival as one of the best indie projects in years, Darwinia is now seeing a retail release. The RTS/puzzle combo of Darwinia's gameplay is an interesting hook, and provides some cool challenges. However, it also gets bogged down regularly by overly long levels, imprecise controls, and horrendous pathing. This may not be a revolution in gaming, but a fresh premise and interesting gameplay for $30, even with some flaws packed in, isn't a bad deal in my book.—ADAM
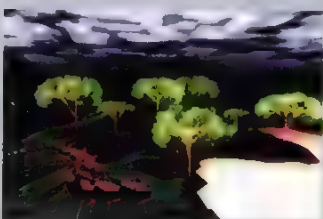
Video Games

Juiced

By showing off your modding and driving skills, you'll gain 'Respect' from the rival crew chiefs, and will soon be invited to their race events, challenge them to race 'for pinks' and bet against them for cash. As your notoriety grows, new drivers will ask to join your crew, opening up the never before seen 'crew races' where your skills at managing your drivers while you race are key to beating your rival crews.

MotoGP URT 3

The MotoGP series is the definitive motorcycle racing game for the Xbox and PC. The game accurately captures the excitement of Grand Prix motorcycle racing. This time, MotoGP 3 is taking the franchise to the extreme, expanding beyond the realms of Grand Prix racing to high adrenaline Stre— hone their skills on — through the Grand —

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War

Ten thousand years have passed since the treasonous acts of Chaos toppled the Golden Age of mankind. Fires burn brightly throughout the galaxies, illuminating carnage and slaughter as mankind defends itself from ancient enemies. Control one of four unique races in head-to-head or cooperative multiplayer action, where faith, skill, and —

[Battalion II]

For the last 15 years the corrupt dictator, Sopot, has oppressed the people of the Commonwealth. His relentless pursuit of unification with the neighboring United Republic has left the country soaked in unnecessary bloodshed and poverty. Propaganda is plastered through communities and a Public Information Building, built as a tribute to the self-centered chancellor spews news broadcasts with claims of victory as more and more soldiers fall victim.

Big Mutha Truckers 2

Big Mutha Truckers 2 begins with Ma Jackson being taken into police custody for tax evasion. The only way she can win her case is by hiring Cousin Jacob, the most "fancy-talkin' legal fella" this side of Booger's Canyon. Players will be challenged to locate six jurors and raise the cash needed to bribe them to let Ma off by trucking, trading, wheeling and dealing.

Full Spectrum Warrior

Based on a Training Aid developed for the U.S. Army*, Full Spectrum Warrior is a squad-based, real-time combat game that allows players to experience the intensity and gritty realism of urban warfare. Featuring advanced AI, your squad will act like a highly trained infantry unit – with team members reactively responding to situations based on combat training and taking the appropriate formations based on combat situations.

Evergirl

Hit the town with your friends as you plan the hottest events and prepare for summer camp. Be an actress, train with the soccer team or throw an end of the year party! At everView, it's up to you!

MX vs. ATV Unleashed

Rainbow Studios has mastered ATV's, conquered motocross, and now redefines the genre they built on the PC. Rainbow Studios isn't the only one building anymore, as the MX vs ATV Unleashed franchise introduces a track editor for the first time, allowing players to create the ultimate off-road environments

Heroes of Might & Magic V

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** NIVAL INTERACTIVE
> **RELEASE** MAY 23 > **ESRB** T

■ Sure, nobody plays with the camera zoomed in like this – but at least it looks cool if you do

■ Having a leveled-up hero is just as important as a big army

RESURRECTION SUCCESSFUL

As fondly as many gamers may remember the first three 3DO-published entries in the Heroes of Might & Magic series, Heroes V can't get a free pass on its license alone. However, the game has come a long way from its horrendous beta, and has emerged as a bright beginning to Ubisoft's custodianship of the Might & Magic franchise. Some fairly serious level design problems prevent Heroes V from being the timeless classic that Heroes III is, but this title evolves the gameplay from that seminal entry enough to make it a worthy successor.

The accessible turn-based goodness that the series is known for is central to the design of Heroes V, and for that we should all be profoundly grateful. Developer Nival has done a fantastic job of identifying what makes Heroes fun – fast-paced battles, RPG-like leveling of your heroes, and a basic level of empire management – and keeping those core ideas intact, while iterating on them to make all of those aspects better than they ever have been. The diversity between the various factions has also long been a hallmark of the franchise, and once again, this element is alive and well in Heroes V. The gameplay foundation is just incredibly strong, and bodes very well for any future sequels.

Unfortunately, the developer apparently didn't pay as much attention to the art of map design. The campaigns, though certainly offering enough depth to give gamers their money's worth, are saddled with several scenarios that just aren't much fun. Not only that, but these mediocre missions can drag on interminably – notably in the first campaign, which isn't any harder or more
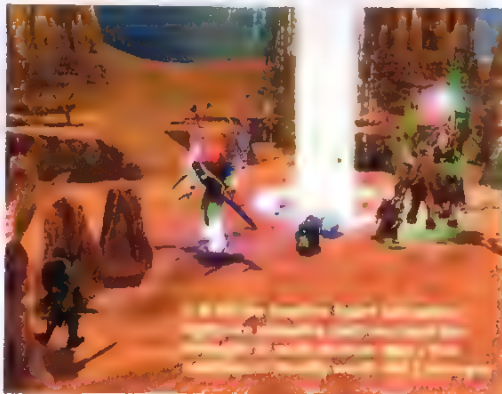
interesting than a tutorial, and can take upwards of a dozen hours to complete. Most of the non-campaign scenarios are also fairly uninspired, and many gamers will be disappointed in the fact that there are only a handful that ship with the game – whereas previous Heroes titles came out of the box with literally dozens.

Complaints and rough spots aside, this is a very solid and enjoyable effort. Anyone with a penchant for raising huge armies of fantastic troops and crushing everything in their path while leveling up a commanding hero into a total death machine – and, let's face it, who doesn't like that? – will definitely be entertained here. If Ubisoft can keep this level of quality up, things can only get better for the beloved HOMM series in the future.
—**ADAM**

■ Each of the factions has its own distinctive look and gameplay style

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Bring back the turn-based Heroes franchise with an entry that harks back to the glory days of Heroes III

> **Graphics:** True to the colorful, engaging style of the series – but much more complex and far prettier

> **Sound:** The operatic themes for each of the factions are gorgeous, but battle sounds don't always sync up with animations all that well

> **Playability:** The occasional need to mess with the camera is but a minor nuisance

> **Entertainment:** Though not an all-time great, this is still a pleasing "strategy-lite" effort.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

I was expecting to enjoy the new Heroes a good bit more than I actually did. Fond memories of earlier entries in the turn-based strategy series kept me excited for a bit, but it seems my game tastes have evolved in a different direction since the last time I dove into the franchise. Now, the slow buildup of troops and city started to feel tedious almost right away. It doesn't help that the entire first wing of the campaign is one immensely long tutorial that drags on for hours. It also drives me a little batty how hard it is to know what you're getting into with any given battle. On the bright side, I appreciate the challenge of creating multiple balanced factions, and the high fantasy setting continues to hold lots of appeal, at least for me. Longtime fans of the series won't be disappointed in the faithful continuation of the gameplay style, but I for one wouldn't mind a few more innovative ideas to move the series forward.
—**MILLER**

Mario's not the only one who gets super-sized

The levels take inspiration from past Mario games

As always, the castle levels provide a stiff challenge

NINTENDO DS

New Super Mario Bros.

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** MAY 15 > **ESRB** E
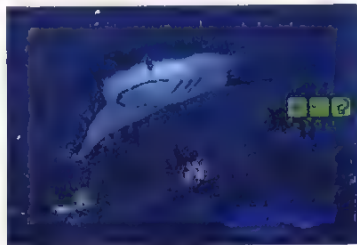
HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN

New Super Mario Bros. marks a momentous occasion in video games: an all-new, side-scrolling action/platformer starring the plumber that put the genre on the map. It's the equivalent of a Beatles reunion, except everybody's still alive and unsullied by our memories of crappy solo records. It's a bit hard to separate my expectations of this game from the reality of playing, but honestly it feels like a triumph – a tour de force of old-school platforming.

From a design standpoint, it's clear that this is intended to be a summary of the Mario games past and present. While the levels and overworld seem to be most inspired by the original NES trilogy (especially Super Mario Bros. 3), you have moves from the entire franchise's history, including the butt slam and even wall jumping from
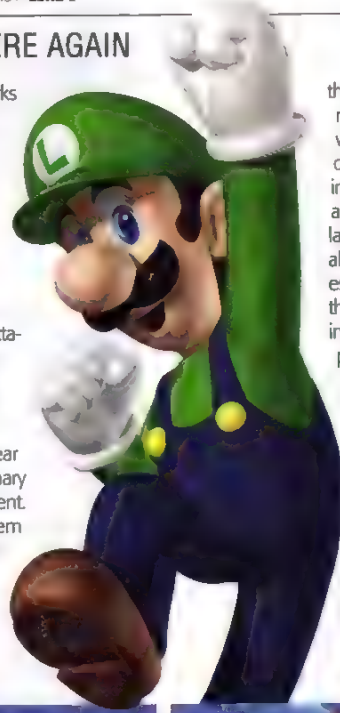
the 3D games. There are a few new mushrooms as well, one which turns Mario very large and one which shrinks him, allowing him to access hidden areas and special pipes. I found the large mushroom only marginally useful. While large, Mario essentially runs roughshod over the whole playfield, destroying blocks, platforms, and even pipes. It's cool the first few times, but it can destroy blocks that might be the key to hidden areas or coins. I did usually attempt to save one until a boss battle, where it came in quite handy. The small mushrooms are incorporated much more organically, allowing you to access small areas and pipes in a way that seems more akin to the exploratory spirit of the original games. Similarly, moves

like the butt slam and wall jump work well in this context; it will be hard to go back to the old games without wishing they were there.

As much as I appreciate the multiplayer and DS touch-screen minigames that have been added, there's really only one reason why you must play this game. Quite simply, the 2D platformer, when done right, might still be the best damn style of game ever created. And believe me, New Super Mario Bros. does it very right. Everything I loved about the originals is here: the brilliantly designed levels, the memorable cast of enemies, the expert pacing, and the host of odd secrets to discover. This feels just like those games that made you fall in love with this hobby, overhauled with a few new moves and dramatically improved visuals. One could complain that it doesn't try to incorporate the touch screen to the degree that Super Princess Peach did, but I'm glad that Nintendo decided to remain true to the spirit of its greatest franchise. It might not be the huge revolution some hoped it would be, but this is a highly enjoyable and well-crafted trip down memory lane.—**MATT**

Large Mario looks great in pictures, but isn't that useful

The small Mario form adds a lot of gameplay

Tomb Raider:
Legend

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS
> **DEVELOPER** CRYSTAL DYNAMICS > **RELEASE** MAY 23 > **ESRB** T
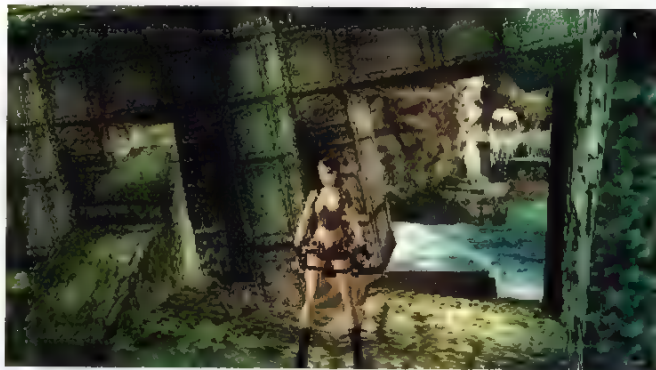
RAIDING A SMALLER TOMB

Over the past few years, Lara Croft went from the gaming equivalent of the girl that every guy wanted to date to the one that people avoided because of her bad reputation. Fortunately, Tomb Raider: Legend was a return to form, as the console game focused on what people originally loved about the series. Sticking as closely as possible to the console template, the PSP version of Legend is nearly as successful, with only a few expected concessions to make it function on the handheld.

By now, everyone who owns the system knows that the major differences between a console game and its PSP port are the loading, camera, and graphics. Legend tackles all three of these areas head on. The notorious PSP load times are handled especially well, with no loading in-game. When you die, it takes about 30 seconds to boot up your last checkpoint, which is the longest the game ever keeps you waiting.

The camera system works almost as smoothly, which does a great job of staying behind you in most situations, and can be rotated freely by holding the square button and using the analog stick. However, sometimes it is difficult to line up a proper camera angle, resulting in botched jumps. While not perfect, it usually works fine, and remains one of the best cameras I've yet encountered on the PSP.

As for the graphics, they're remarkably similar to the PS2, though a bit less detailed. You'd be hard-pressed to point out any huge disparities. In fact, this brings up an important question: Since the PSP version is so similar overall to the console game, do you really need to play both? Not really. But if you like to game on the go, Tomb Raider Legend is a solid little addition to the PSP library, and an adventure that is worth experiencing on any console.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Lara's latest game comes to PSP with a few tweaks, and remains largely faithful to the console version

> **Graphics:** Great environments and character models make for one fine-looking handheld title

> **Sound:** Keeley Hawes is great as Lara, and the rest of the cast is nearly as good

> **Playability:** The camera is the only real difference from the console version, and it's handled quite well

> **Entertainment:** The platforming and exploration are thrilling, but the gunplay and vehicular segments are a bit shaky

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion   8

The first lady of adventure is back. Lara Croft's PSP variant of Legend is great fun and so close to the console version that its biggest problem might be convincing console people to play through the game a second time. If you skipped the big daddy version of Lady Croft's renaissance, this adventure is a fresh look at Tomb Raiding adventures that smartly steals from more recent entries in the genre – mostly Prince of Persia's platforming and the easy target selection from other PSP FPS titles. Control-wise, I had some problems getting used to the jump timing and had a hard time seeing the occasional swinging pole (low-res graphics make certain things blend together), but once those issues were dealt with, I had a blast with the fast-paced exploration and large-scale environments. The whole package is quick fun that makes you feel like a true believer in the magic of exploration.—**LISA**

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For April 2006 Based On Units Sold

1 KINGDOM HEARTS II (PS2)

Man, we can't wait for Kingdom Hearts III! If Sora keeps aging at the current rate, in the next game he'll be in his ill-advised teenage rebel phase. That means he'll be wearing a *Pulp Fiction* shirt, smoking behind the school, and stealing Manic Panic to dye Donald blue. Maybe he'll even form a crappy rap-metal band with Goofy: Tha Kingdoom Hartz!

2 GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER (360)
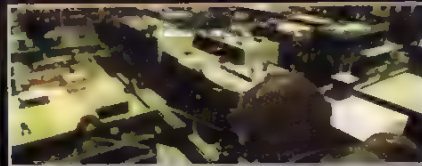
The 360 had a heck of a month, with nearly 300,000 units sold and a whole mess of games flying off shelves led by our good buddy GRAW here. It's definitely a great game, but we think part of its popularity is due to the fact that it's cheaper than actually going to Mexico. Plus, drinking the water doesn't make you all poopy.

3 THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION (360)

Oblivion is such an awesome game that it inspired us to organize a spoken word poetry slam, with all participants performing an original work about how great this game really is. Fortunately, Russell Simmons got word of our "Def Oblivion Jam" and prevented it from happening – which means we get to stay home and play even more!

4 THE GODFATHER: THE GAME (PS2)

With the success of the Godfather, more mafia games are bound to follow. A *Sopranos* game is on the way, and we recently learned that Steven Seagal is trying to sell the rights to his movie *Above the Law*. The company that buys them gets the rights to *Half Past Dead* for free, and he's willing to take payment in the form of Chef Boyardee ravioli and gin.

5 GOD OF WAR (PS2)

Last night, we had a dream that Peter Gabriel was in our kitchen making lasagna. He was wearing a pink apron and singing "On the Air." What does this have to do with God of War, you ask? Well, as soon as we sat down, Kratos came in and started busting up the place with his flaming blades. That guy's a jerk.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Kingdom Hearts II	1	PS2	9	03-06	$50
2	Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	2	360	9.5	03-06	$59
3	The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	3	360	9.5	03-06	$60
4	The Godfather: The Game	8	PS2	7.5	03-06	$39
5	God of War	10	PS2	10	03-06	$20
6	MLB '06: The Show	8	PS2	7.5	03-06	$40
7	Major League Baseball 2K6	N/A	360	7	04-06	$60
8	Major League Baseball 2K6	N/A	PS2	8.5	04-06	$40
9	Tourist Trophy: The Real Riding Simulator	N/A	PS2	8.5	04-06	$40
10	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	N/A	360	7.75	04-06	$60
11	Tomb Raider: Legend	N/A	360	8.75	04-06	$60
12	Major League Baseball 2K6	N/A	XBOX	8.5	04-06	$40
13	Tomb Raider: Legend	N/A	PS2	8.75	04-06	$49
14	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	N/A	DS	8.25	04-06	$20
15	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	13	PS2	10	10-04	$20
16	NBA Ballers: Phenom	N/A	PS2	7.75	03-06	$40
17	Kingdom Hearts	N/A	PS2	9.5	09-02	$20
18	Ice Age 2: The Meltdown	N/A	PS2	N/A	03-02	$37
19	Fight Night Round 3	9	360	9	02-06	$59
20	Metroid Prime: Hunters	11	DS	8.5	03-06	$35

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Powerful Major League Baseball	PS2
2	Tetris DS	DS
3	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain 2	DS
4	Winning Eleven 10	PS2
5	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain	DS
6	Animal Crossing: Wild World	DS
7	Eigo Tsuke	DS
8	Pokémon Ranger: Diamond-Pearl	DS
9	Dragon Quest: Young Yangus and the Mysterious Dungeon	PS2
10	Mother 3	GBA

9

10

TOP 10 GI
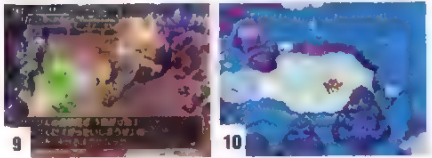
Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	New Super Mario Bros.	N/A	DS
2	The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	1	360
3	Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends	N/A	PC
4	Tomb Raider: Legend	4	Multi
5	Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	7	360
6	Heroes of Might & Magic V	N/A	PC
7	Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	5	PSP
8	Table Tennis	N/A	360
9	Metroid Prime: Hunters	6	DS
10	Lemmings	N/A	PSP

3

7
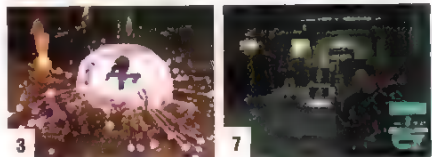
The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	Guild Wars: Factions	N/A	$49
2	The Sims 2: Family Fun Stuff	N/A	$16
3	The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2	$45
4	World of WarCraft	5	$49
5	The Sims 2	9	$34
6	The Sims 2: Open for Business	1	$35
7	Final Fantasy XI: Treasures of Aht Urhgan	N/A	$29
8	Star Wars: Empire at War	3	$49
9	Age of Empires III	10	$49
10	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	N/A	$46

1

2

Based On Monthly Units Sold

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® - David Riley 516-625-2277

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

The Really Ugly Page Where You Can See Lots Of Old Review Scores

XBOX 360

Kameo: Elements of Power - Xbox 360 - Jan-06 — 7.5

Game	Score	Date
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
Amped 3	8.5	Dec-05
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.75	Jun-06
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	7.5	May-06
Burnout Revenge	9.5	Apr-06
Call of Duty 2	9.75	Jan-06
Condemned: Criminal Origins	8.75	Jan-06
Dead or Alive 4	9	Mar-06
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	6	May-06
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, The	9.5	May-06
Far Cry Instincts: Predator	8.75	Jun-06
FIFA 06	8.25	Jan-06
Fight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06
Final Fantasy XI	7.25	Jun-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
Major League Baseball 2K6	7	Jun-06
NBA 2K6	8.5	Jan-06
NBA Live 06	6.75	Jan-06
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
Rumble Roses XX	5.75	May-06
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	8.5	Jan-06
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05
Top Spin 2	8.5	May-06

PLAYSTATION 2

Game	Score	Date
24: The Game	7.5	Apr-06
25 to Life	5.75	Mar-06
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
50 Cent: Bulletproof	6	Feb-06
Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War	8.5	May-06
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
Atelier Iris 2: The Azoth of Destiny	7.5	Jun-06
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.5	Dec-05
Beatmania	8.5	Apr-06
Black	8.5	Apr-06
Blitz: The League	7.75	Nov-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
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
Commandos: Strike Force	5.5	Jun-06
Conflict: Global Terror	6.75	Nov-05
Dance Dance Revolution Extreme 2	7.5	Nov-05
Dance Factory	8	Jun-06
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
Driver: Parallel Lines	6.75	May-06
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	6	May-06
Dynasty Warriors 5 Xtreme Legends	6.75	May-06
EyeToy: Kinetic	8	Nov-05
EyeToy: Operation Spy	6	Dec-05
Fatal Frame III: The Tormented	7.75	Dec-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
Godfather The Game, The	7.5	May-06
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
Hitman: Blood Money	7.75	Jun-06
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
Magna Carta: Tears of Blood	8.25	Dec-05
Major League Baseball 2K6	8.5	Jun-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	7.25	Apr-06
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
Metal Saga	5.25	May-06
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix	9.5	May-06
MLB 06: The Show	7.5	Apr-06
Monster Rancher EVO	8	Jun-06
MS Saga: A New Dawn	7.75	Mar-06
MVP 06 NCAA Baseball	7	Feb-06
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
Nightmare Before Christmas Oogie's Revenge, The	5	Nov-05
Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams	9	Mar-06
Outrun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
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	7.5	Nov-05
Rampage: Total Destruction	6.5	May-06
Ratchet Deadlocked	9	Nov-05
Real World Golf	7	Jun-06
Resident Evil 4	10	Nov-05
Rogue Trooper	7.25	Jun-06
Romancing SaGa	5	Nov-05
Samurai Champloo: Sidetracked	6.75	May-06
Shadow Hearts: From The New World	8.75	Mar-06
Shadow the Hedgehog	4	Jan-06

The Matrix: Path of Neo - PS2 - Dec-05 — 7.25

Game	Score	Date
Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga 2	6.25	Nov-05
Sims 2, The	7.75	Nov-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
SSX On Tour	8	Nov-05
Star Wars: Battlefront II	8.5	Dec-05
State Of Emergency 2	6	Apr-06
Steambot Chronicles	5.5	May-06
Suikoden Tactics	6.75	Dec-05
Suikoden V	7.5	May-06
Taito Legends	8.5	Jan-06
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
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05
Top Spin	8.75	Nov-05
Torino 2006	4.25	Apr-06
Total Overdose	6.25	Jan-06
Tourist Trophy: The Real Riding Simulator	8.5	May-06
Trapt	6.75	Dec-05
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
Warship Gunner 2	5	Apr-06
Wild Arms 4	7.5	Feb-06
Wild Arms: Alter Code F	6	Jan-06
Winback 2: Project Poseidon	4	Jun-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

Game	Score	Date
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
Call of Duty 2: Big Red One	7.25	Jan-06
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
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance	9	Nov-05
From Russia With Love	7.75	Dec-05
Gun	8.75	Dec-05
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	6.5	Dec-05
Karaoke Revolution Party	8.5	Dec-05
Mario Party 7	5	Dec-05
Mega Man X Collection	8	Feb-06
NBA Live 06	7.5	Nov-05
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	8.5	Dec-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
Rampage: Total Destruction	6.5	May-06
Shadow the Hedgehog	4	Jan-06

Dreamfall: The Longest Journey - Xbox - Jun-06 — 8

XBOX

Game	Score	Date
25 to Life	5.75	Mar-06
50 Cent: Bulletproof	6	Feb-06
187 Ride or Die	6.5	Jan-06
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
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
Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder!	6.75	Oct-05
Black	8.5	Apr-06
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	7.5	May-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
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
Commandos: Strike Force	5.5	Jun-06
Conflict: Global Terror	6.75	Nov-05
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	6.75	Oct-05
Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	8.5	Jan-06
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	8	Jun-06
Driver: Parallel Lines	6.75	May-06
Dynasty Warriors 5	6	Oct-05
Evil Dead: Regeneration	6	Oct-05
Fable: The Lost Chapters	8.75	Jan-06
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 Advanced Warfighter	7.5	May-06
Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike	8	Oct-05
Godfather The Game, The	7.5	May-06
Gun	8.75	Dec-05
Half-Life 2	9.5	Dec-05
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	6.5	Dec-05
Heroes of the Pacific	8.75	Oct-05
Hitman: Blood Money	7.75	Jun-06
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
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
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix	9.5	May-06
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
Nightmare Before Christmas Oogie's Revenge, The	5	Nov-05
Ninja Gaiden Black	9.5	Oct-05
Operation Flashpoint Elite	5	Feb-06
Outrun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
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
Rogue Trooper	7.25	Jun-06
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	Oct-05
Tak: The Great Juju Challenge	7	Oct-05
Tecmo Classic Arcade	7	Oct-05
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	8.25	Nov-05
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	8.25	Dec-05
Torino 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
WarPath	7.25	May-06
Warriors, The	8.25	Nov-05
Winback 2: Project Poseidon	4	Jun-06
Winning Eleven 9	8.5	Feb-06
Without Warning	6.5	Nov-05
X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse	9	Nov-05

PC

Game	Score	Date
Age of Empires III	8.25	Dec-05
AutoAssault	7	Jun-06
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
Cold War	6	Dec-05
Commandos: Strike Force	5.5	Jun-06
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	8	Jun-06
Dungeon Siege II	8	Oct-05
Dungeons & Dragons: Dragonshard	8	Nov-05
Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach	8	May-06
Earth 2160	7	Feb-06
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, The	9.5	May-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
Hitman: Blood Money	7.75	Jun-06
Indigo Prophecy	8.25	Oct-05
Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle-Earth II, The	8.5	Apr-06

AutoAssault - PC - Jun-06 — 7

Game	Score	Date
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
WarPath	7.25	May-06

NINTENDO DS

Game	Score	Date
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
Brain Age	8.25	Jun-06
Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow	9.25	Nov-05
Dig Dug: Digging Strike	6.75	Dec-05
Electroplankton	7	Feb-06
Guilty Gear Dust Strikers	6	May-06
Lost in Blue	7	Oct-05
Lost Magic	6	Jun-06
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
Mega Man Battle Network 5: Double Team	7.75	Nov-05
Metroid Prime: Hunters	8.5	May-06
Metroid Prime Pinball	8	Nov-05
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	7.75	Oct-05
Pokémon Trozei	8.25	May-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

PSP

Mega Man: Maverick Hunter X - PSP - Mar-06 — 8

Game	Score	Date
Ape Escape Academy	7	Feb-06
Armored Core: Formula Front Special Edition	3.75	Nov-05
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	8.5	May-06
Con, The	8	Nov-05
Daxter	8.75	Apr-06
Exit	7.25	Mar-06
Field Commander	7.5	May-06
FIFA Soccer 06	7.5	Nov-05
Fight Night Round 3	7.75	Apr-06
Frantix	6.75	Oct-05
From Russia with Love	6.75	May-06
Generation of Chaos	5	May-06
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	5.5	Dec-05
Gradius Collection	8.5	Jun-06
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
Me and My Katamari	8	May-06
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
MLB '06 The Show	7	Apr-06
Monster Hunter Freedom	4	Jun-06
MX vs. ATV: On the Edge	8	May-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
Outrun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
PoPoLoCrois	8.5	Jan-06
PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient	7.75	Feb-06
Prince of Persia Revelations	7.75	Feb-06
Pursuit Force	6.25	Apr-06
Samurai Warriors: State of War	7	May-06
Sims 2, The	5.5	Feb-06
SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs: Fireteam Bravo	7	Jan-06
Splinter Cell Essentials	8	May-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	Jun-06
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	8	May-06
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	7.5	Dec-05
Tokobot	8.25	Jan-06
Ultimate Block Party	7.5	Jun-06
Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code	8.25	Apr-06
Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	7	May-06
Virtua Tennis: World Tour	8.5	Nov-05
Winning Eleven 9	7.5	Mar-06
Worms: Open Warfare	7	May-06
WRC: FIA World Rally Championships	8.75	Apr-06
X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse	9	Dec-05
Ys: The Ark of Napishtim	6.75	Apr-06

GAME BOY ADVANCE

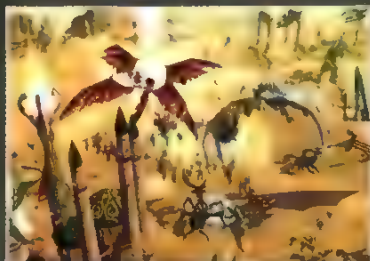| Game	Score	Date
DK: King of Swing	7.75	Nov-05
Dogz	6.75	Feb-06
Donkey Kong Country 3	8.5	Nov-05
Drill Dozer	7.75	Feb-06
Dr. Mario Puzzle League	7.5	Jan-06
Final Fantasy IV Advance	8.75	Jan-06
Gunstar Super Heroes	8.75	Nov-05
Mario Tennis: Power Tour	7.75	Dec-05
Mega Man Zero 4	8	Nov-05
Rebelstar: Tactical Command	9	Oct-05
Tales of Phantasia	7.25	Mar-06
Tower SP, The	7	Jun-06
Zooo	7	Nov-05

Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends (PC)

Mastering the Factions

By game designer Paul Stephanouk and art lead Rodney Summo.

GENERAL TIPS

If you have your hero in play, keep upgrading him or her! If you forget, when your level two hero meets your opponent's level four hero, expect to lose the battle.

Use your Dominances! They aren't powerful, but they can turn the tide of a close battle. And watch the indicators – if you're in danger of losing your Dominance, use it quick!

Even one point of damage will halt the building of new Districts at a City or the repair of a damaged building. Don't let the enemy strengthen his buildings while you have troops around!

PLAYING ALIN

Use Whirling Blades to run quickly across large stretches of map; you don't have to use the mode just for fighting, although it's useful when you have local superiority.

Scorpions are a powerful trample unit. While your target is knocked down, however, they can't take trample damage again, so stop and give them a poison sting while they get up.

Instead of bribing sites, try using your early gold for lots of Heartseekers. They have a powerful ranged attack and can really turn the tide of an early battle.

Juvenile Salamanders can be a great way to open your military strategy. The enemy rarely expects them! If you do, get an Eternal Flame and upgrade your Fire Circles to produce Adult Salamanders as soon as you reach Large City.

Fire Elementals are good at killing medium and large targets like Clockwork Men and Heroes. Watch out for the Spiders!

Sand Dragons are very powerful and have anti-air splash. If you have a good Timonium income and the opponent is using lots of flyers, consider getting to Great City sooner rather than later to get access to these units.

Upgrades are vital. Make sure to give your troops enhancements as soon as you can spare the resources. Even if you're concentrating on a Sand army, consider building an Eternal Flame at your biggest mine. It will help protect against flying raids, and it has a ranged attack upgrade that affects all Alin units.
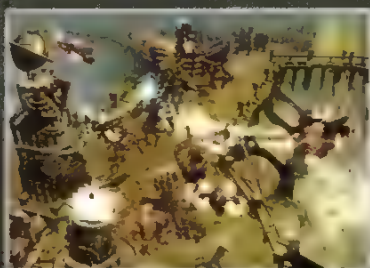
PLAYING CUOTL

Don't forget your Shields and Cloak! Early shields are quite limited, but it's like having 20 extra health, so don't forget to use it. Use cloak as a unit is nearing 1/5 health (no lower—ammo in the air when the Cloak is turned on will still hit for damage) to remove that unit from combat and send it to the rear to heal.

If you have an extra Holy Ark, they don't stack healing, so use the other one to Channel a unit production building or a mine. Every little bit helps.

Sun Idols are expensive Large City units, but their trample will totally eliminate a non-upgraded enemy soldier unit. One of these can take on four to six soldiers without suffering too much damage if the targets are Cuotl or Vinci.

Because of Holy Ark healing, massing troops is vital for the Cuotl. If you can keep incoming damage to a minimum, the Holy Ark can counteract it. And if the enemy focuses fire on one target, cloak it!

The Cuotl receive energy income only from owned sites, so seize Neutrals as quickly as possible to start building a good economic base.

The Jaguar can strike up to four soldiers with one blow, but as a soldier unit thins out, the Jaguar deals less and less overall damage. Consider switching targets and letting another unit mop up the soldier remnants.

PLAYING VINCI

The Vinci are so flexible it's hard to focus on just a few strategies. Try to limit your Research Lab upgrades and Prototype picks to those things that complement your strategy. For example, Giacomo/Clockwork Sniper/Timonium Smelter, is one path to try. Or Doge/Siege Zeppelin/Doge Statue is another. Trying to mix both will dilute your power.

Use Volley Fire when you have numerical superiority against a slow-moving foe. It can be devastating. Siege attack is not increased by Volley Fire, so don't bother using it against buildings.

Clockwork Spiders are very powerful, if expensive. They can trample soldiers while firing on the move against buildings or air targets. Don't forget to web the enemy!

Like the Jaguar, Clockwork Men can strike up to four soldiers with one blow, but as a soldier unit thins out, the Clockwork Man deals less and less overall damage. Consider switching targets and letting another unit mop up the soldier remnants.

Speaking of Clockwork Men, don't forget the special Clockwork Buff! Keep groups of Clockwork Men close to each other for extra healing and attack power.

Juggernauts are powerful, but are by no means king of the battlefield. Unsupported, they can be wiped out quicker than you think. Keep one or two with a support army, and you can fire on the move against enemy heroes and large units while trampling any number of ranged soldiers.
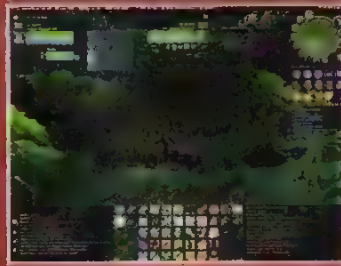
Live Arcade Spotlight
Lumines Live!

To say that we're excited about the prospect of a Live-enabled version of Lumines would be more than a little understated. Easily one of the richest and most engrossing puzzlers in years, Lumines will be making the jump this summer from the PSP screen onto XBLA. While the new 360 version will sport much of the same content, you'll now be able to download new songs, puzzles, and skins, including exclusive music videos, like the Madonna song that was shown off at E3. In addition to the previously playable game types, the new Mission mode challenges players to clear a certain sequence of blocks within a set number of moves. Perhaps most importantly, Lumines Live will offer full online competitive options, including leaderboards. If that weren't enough, the mesmerizing music of the game is being presented in full 5.1 surround sound. Now excuse us. We need to go shake our bodies down to the ground in preparation.
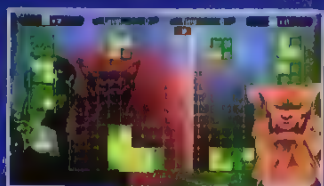
Code of the Month
Getting Up:
Contents Under Pressure

If there's one thing life has taught us, it's that graffiti is going to save the world. Don't let "The Man" keep you down, man. All you need is a spray can and a relatively smooth wall and you have the power to enact change. Can we get a "Hell yeah!"? No? Oh. Okay. Well, here's a bunch of codes for the best Platforming/Graffiti/Brawler/Action game to come out in, well, ever. At the Game Information screen you'll need to go to Options. From there, head to Codes and type in your desired cheat. If you get sick of the effect, enter the code a second time to turn it off.

Infinite Health – MARCUSECKOS
Infinite Skills – FLIPTHESCRIPT
Max Health – BABYLONTRUST
Max Skills – VANCEDALLISTER
Unlock All Art – SIRULLY
Unlock All Black Book Graffiti & The Truth Pieces – SHARDSOFGLASS

Unlock All Combat Upgrades – DOGTAGS
Unlock All iPod Songs – GRANDMACELIA
Unlock All Legends – NINESIX
Unlock All Levels – IPULATOR
Unlock All Movies – DEXTER CROWLEY
Unlock All Versus Characters – STATEYOURNAME

Patrick Moore
Inkom, ID

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
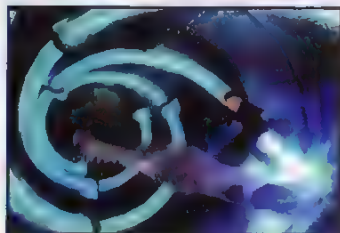
X-Men The Official Game
> **XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX**
Enter the following code at the Cerebro Files Menu. Make sure and use the analog stick, and not the d-pad

Unlock Iceman's Danger Room Level – Right (x2), Left (x2), Down, Up Down, Up, Start
Unlock Nightcrawler's Danger Room Level – Up (x2), Down (x2), Left, Right, Left, Right, Start
Unlock Wolverine's Danger Room Level – Down (x2), Up (x2), Right, Left, Right Left, Start

XBOX 360

Rumble Roses XX
"Fantasia" Intro Song – During any Queen's Match, wait until you reach the "VS" screen, then press and hold RT and then press A

Swap Ring Entrances – During any one on-one style match, wait until you reach the "VS" screen, then press and hold LT and then press A

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen setting the PS3 pricepoint for Sony)

PS2

Black
Enter the following code as your profile name, (including dashes). After accepting the name, you'll be asked to enter your actual profile name, and you'll then begin the game with the BFG.
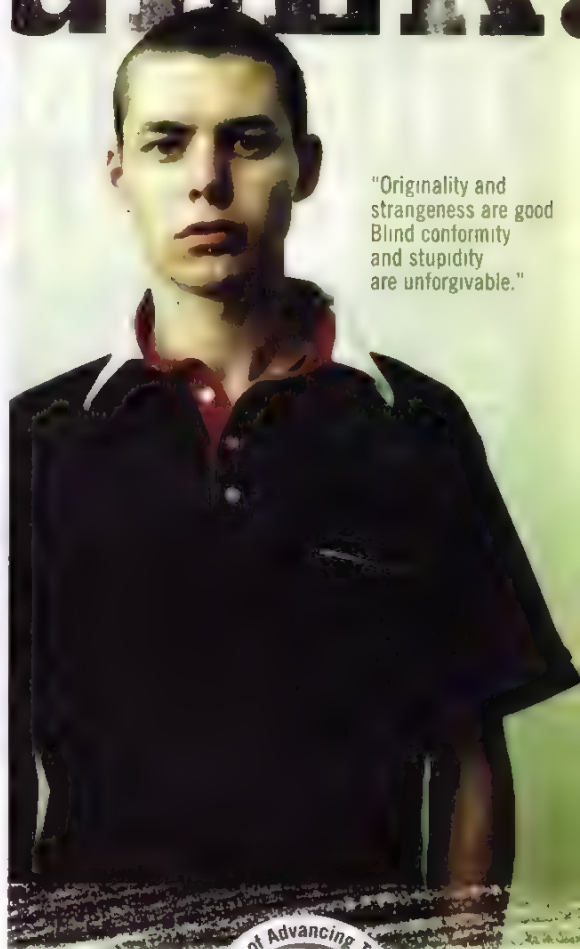
Unlock MSAW (BFG) – FG6S-WFZG-7MDP-PZGT

XBOX

Black
Enter the following code as your profile name, (including dashes). After accepting the name, you'll be asked to enter your actual profile name, and you'll then begin the game with the BFG

Unlock MSAW (BFG) – 5SQQ-STHA-ZFFV-7XEV

BOOK EXCERPT:

DEAN TAKAHASHI'S
THE XBOX 360 UNCLOAKED

Dean Takahashi has been one of gaming's most respected journalists and writers over the past decade. His book **Opening the Xbox** is considered by many to be the definitive history of Microsoft's entry into the video game console battle. With the Xbox 360 currently on store shelves, Takahashi is releasing his newest work, **The Xbox 360 Uncloaked**, a well-researched and compelling tome that takes us from the genesis of the Xbox 360 project to the current day. Reading it is like being a fly on the wall at Microsoft HQ, as we see all the battles, obstacles, and strife that comes with creating a new game console. This month we're pleased to be running an excerpt of the book, Chapter 22, entitled "Gears of War." This chapter details how Epic joined forces with Microsoft to create the system's most anticipated new property, and also how a deal with rival developer Valve Software (Half-Life) was scuttled at the last minute.

THE XBOX 360 UNCLOAKED

THE
REAL STORY
BEHIND
MICROSOFT'S
NEXT-GENERATION
VIDEO GAME
CONSOLE

DEAN TAKAHASHI
AUTHOR OF *OPENING THE XBOX*

CHAPTER 22

Gears Of War

At the 2003 Game Developers Conference, Epic was showing off a new graphics engine. The demo showed incredible details of monstrous characters that were properly lit by all the right sources of illumination, as if there really were a sun or a lantern shining light in exactly the right places, producing all the right shadows. A Microsoft business development manager, Jim Veevaert, saw the demo. He pressed Mark Rein, vice president of marketing at Epic, for details.

"I was interested in pursuing a war franchise, and the technology was very impressive," Veevaert said. "I knew there was a great game in the works."

Rein said that it was a new version of Unreal which had the working title of Unreal Warfare. Veevaert wanted to sign it up for the Xbox 360. In the subsequent weeks, Rein and Epic business chief Jay Wilbur negotiated to free the Unreal Warfare property from the publisher that Epic had found for it.

Everyone at Epic wanted to expand beyond the Unreal franchise. [Star designer] Cliff Bleszinski [a.k.a. CliffyB – ed.] in particular needed to stretch his wings. He had almost quit Epic Games after the first Unreal Tournament debuted. He wanted to work on a new property, something, ironically, more epic. He loved hor-

■ **Dean Takahashi was granted unprecedented access to Microsoft employees in writing both his Xbox books**

ror games such as the Silent Hill and Resident Evil series, where fear was the prevailing emotion.

"Remember that phrase about how 'the only thing we have to fear is fear itself?," he said. "I say, 'Fear, it sells.'"

Since high school, he had wanted to make a game he called Over Fiend, a horror game where a character lost his wife to demons in a post-modern city. It was a single-player story-based game, in contrast to Epic's multiplayer online melees. John Carmack, the graphics wizard at Epic's rival, id Software, had once said that a story in a first-person shooter game was as gratuitous as a story in a porn flick. CliffyB thought that notion was ludicrous.

"This is a medium that can be used to tell stories," he said.

But he didn't get a chance to prove Carmack wrong. More Unreal sequels came along. CliffyB adjusted himself to market conditions. One of the sequels coming was a title called Unreal Warfare, a game that would allow players to engage in huge battles with ultra-modern marines in realistic terrain. But the team at Epic was getting overloaded, so they stopped work on Unreal Warfare in order to ship Unreal Tournament 2004.

One of CliffyB's programmers suggested they switch the Unreal Warfare game to a second-person view, with a perspective where the gamer could see the character that he or she was playing, as if they were just behind and looking over the shoulder of the character. CliffyB liked the idea and wanted to use it with Unreal Warfare. When he saw videos for Capcom's upcoming horror game, Resident Evil 4, he saw how the second-person view looked in practice. "That's totally the way to go," he said. "We had to go to this view because the character would look so f—— great."

The game, now code-named Project Warfare, would be very different from Epic's previous fast-action shooter games. Its pace would be slower than the typical first person shooter. The character would partially obscure the view of the player. By this time, the graphics team had a graphics engine, and CliffyB had pieces of a story. In some ways, CliffyB said, "It was the tail wagging the dog." He started thinking about all of the things he wanted to say. He had been stunned by the fall of the World Trade Center towers in 2001. He was struck with the notion that a surprise attack could bring down something so grand. The ruins of a cathedral reminded him of the last scene of the film *Planet of the Apes*, where Charlton Heston comes upon a fallen Statue of Liberty. He recalled the hysteria about Anthrax and people going to buy duct tape to protect themselves against terrorist chemical warfare attacks. The idea of "destroyed beauty" stayed with him, and it mixed with the demons from Over Fiend. CliffyB wanted to call it Apex

> ■ Microsoft was looking for the game that might be the Halo of the Xbox 360, and Gears of War seemed to be a perfect fit

War, after a sleepy suburban town near where he lived in Raleigh, N.C. He thought of ruined cities during World War II, where soldiers had to take shots and hide under cover, rather than run with guns blazing through the streets.

CliffyB had admired "Halo," which did have some smart enemies. The game had taken the first-person shooter genre from the PC and moved it to the console with grace. CliffyB had been frustrated with the hassles of the PC, and he wanted a console experience. He had to talk the rest of the team into it. One thing that helped him in his quest to do a new kind of game was that the Unreal brand had been associated with the PC. It hadn't worked really well on the consoles yet.

One phrase that stuck with him was "The gears of war are lubricated with the blood of soldiers." It brought to bear the image he had in mind. He did a search on the name, Gears of War, and found an anime comic fan owned the web site. Epic made an offer to buy it and obtained the rights. Now that CliffyB had a game in mind, he became impatient to do it. He knew that Halo 2 was running late. He could extrapolate that Microsoft would need something else to launch with its next console. He knew that gamers with a new console would want something "bad ass."

"I got impatient," he said. "I wanted to go, go, go."

Tim Sweeney's demo at the GDC was the groundwork that he needed for his new graphics engine, Unreal Engine 3, which would power the intri-

cately detailed characters and scenes in the games. The engine would feature the kind of spectacular graphics that Sweeney and his programmers and artists loved to create. Among the highlights was something called "high dynamic range." That meant that the graphics would illuminate a wide range of bright images and dark images in the same picture. The resulting effect on realism would be stunning. They didn't know for sure, but they had made a bet that the kind of graphics they were creating would be perfect for Microsoft's next game console.

In March, 2003, Epic merged with Scion Studios, a start-up which had been working with Epic on derivative titles. The company needed a new building and Sweeney had decided that now was the time to dramatically expand. In contrast to boutique studios such as id Software in Mesquite, Texas, Epic recognized that game development was becoming so complex that it needed bigger teams and budgets.

The company finally had enough people to feed the Unreal franchise and start new titles as well. They then pitched the game as a story-based shooter that had the horror elements that CliffyB wanted to have.

"It was clear that the game Cliff and the gang were making was going to be different and that we should break it out as a new intellectual property," Sweeney said.

As CliffyB and his team refined the concept, the story
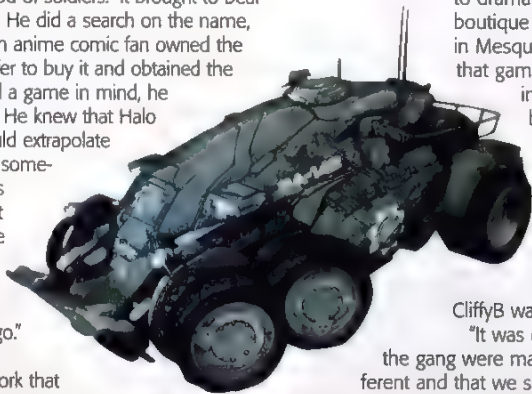
took shape. It was an original science-fiction title where mankind was engaged in insane wars, only to fall victim to a surprise attack on "emergence day," as a subterranean monster race surfaces. It was the game that CliffyB always wanted to do. CliffyB created a universe behind the game with foul creatures, destroyed cities, and massive humans who looked like bodybuilders decked out in body armor. The main characters were two buddy marines who would fight together. The story would unfold with "forced looks," which were canned cinematic sequences that forced the characters to look in a certain direction where they could see a piece of the plot unfold. These sequences would fit seamlessly within the actual game play. CliffyB now had enough material for a whole trilogy of games. The company filed dozens of trademark names for the game, some of them red herrings to throw off spies. One of the names was Gears of War.

CliffyB went to Redmond to make his pitch. On the morning of the presentation, he was nervous. He did 60 push-ups. In the meeting with Microsoft's game studio brass, he had to convince [Mircosoft's] Ken Lobb that the new mode of fighting, dubbed cooperative mode, would work if there were two players and one got ahead of the other.

The Microsoft planners negotiated for an exclusive. Epic wanted a big check to get the development going. Epic's Mark Rein was also dangling something else interesting in front of Microsoft. Sweeney was busy at work on his next graphics engine, the underlying code that would be able to render outstanding graphics that exploited the best technology in just about any platform, PC or game console. If Epic came on board, it could also encourage its licensees for its engine to come on board with the Xbox 360. And that meant that dozens of developers might make games for the Xbox 360. Epic never considered taking the Gears of War title to Sony, which hadn't even begun to court developers for the PlayStation 3.

"Microsoft showed a lot of enthusiasm for it," Rein said. "What makes or breaks a game is marketing. If a publisher wants a game bad enough and it's strategic to them, they will spend the money on marketing to get the game the attention."

Epic had its fans inside Microsoft. Studio manager Bonnie Ross and ATG chief Laura Fryer loved the idea. In fact, she

liked it so much she used the game as an excuse to leave the Advanced Technology Group and shift back into game production as a producer working with Epic. Scott Henson, one of J Allard's buddies and a former boss on Xbox Live, filled the gap at ATG and replaced her. [Microsoft Game Studios head] Ed Fries liked the pitch, but he was also entertaining another pitch from a hometown company. Valve LLC, run by former Microsoft programmer Gabe Newell, had scored big over the years with hits such as Half-Life and (through a modified version of Half-Life) Counter-Strike. Valve was finishing up work on Half-Life 2 for the PC and had decided to do a version of that game for the Xbox. Now Newell wanted to know if Fries wanted a new Valve game for the Xbox 360.

Jay Wilbur, who ran business operations for Epic Games, had to do the negotiating, taking calls at all hours or at his kid's baseball game back in Raleigh. Microsoft wanted it as a launch title, but Epic knew it wouldn't be done in time for a 2005 debut, even with a year and a half to prepare and 30 people on the team.

John Kimmich, the trusty planner who signed up Bungie, came to Fries with both deals at about the same time. Fries remembered weighing the proposals from both companies. They were going to require expensive advances from Microsoft. And Fries didn't really have the political capital to do both deals. Valve was a tough company to work with, since it was developing its own online game distribution network dubbed Steam. Valve wanted the right to sell as many games as it wanted through Steam. It would compete with its own publisher for consumers in that sense. The deal was very difficult to swallow. Valve wanted the publisher to foot the bill for the game development, but take a small percentage of the profits. It was going to compete with the publisher's retail sales via Steam. And it was never clear when Valve would finish a game, given its track record.

Fries weighed both titles, holding stacks of contract papers in each hand at the same time. He looked at Epic on one hand, and Valve on the other. He decided, and he tossed the Valve deal in the garbage can. Those who heard about this decision later shook their heads and wondered why Fries didn't spend some of Microsoft's billions on both deals. It seemed like a case where Microsoft was Goliath, but it felt like it was David. ■ ■ ■

■ Taking cover was one of CliffyB's key themes in making Gears of War

■ In addition to the game itself, Microsoft hoped to promote Epic's Unreal 3 Engine as a good development platform for 360

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME
by Kevin Reichel

ADVANCE WARS SERIES
> **FORMAT** GBA, NINTENDO DS
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO

We all have our greatest game of all time; many people find it hard to pick just one. For me there is only Advance Wars. For many moons I played only first-person shooters. Then there was light. It was the backlight of my Nintendo DS. I bought a DS new so that I could play Advance Wars 1 and 2 and eventually Advance Wars DS. Advance Wars is a turn-based strategy game that places you in the shoes of the commanding officer of a fictional army. Move your army turn by turn and advance on your enemy's position. The game can vaguely be compared to chess. The battlefield is a grid and you play from a bird's eye view. There is a huge selection of units available; each one has its own stats and abilities. There are units for every tactical purpose, which leaves an endless number of strategies you can use to defeat your foe. To compound this there is a huge selection of commanding officers with different personalities. Their personalities are reflected on their units, who have strengths and weaknesses unique to their CO. Because of its
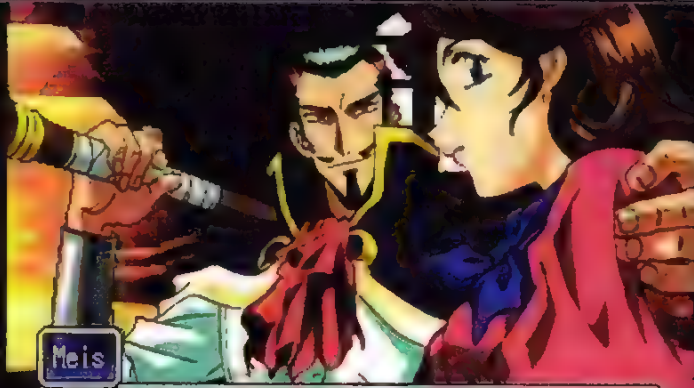

simplicity, the AI can be very challenging. Making one miscalculated move can cause a ripple of mistakes. When you first play Advance Wars you might notice the catchy tunes. There is one for each commanding officer and a handful of others. I love the Advance Wars music in all of its MIDI glory. The sound is not done justice by the DS speakers; you must have a nice set of headphones to rock out righteously. The storyline can be a bit cheesy at times, but that's not why I'm here. If I want a good story, I will read a book. I play Advance Wars to keep my mind sharp. I believe anyone can chase aliens around with the trigger held down. Not everyone can handle Advance Wars. And those select few who can master the art of AW can challenge themselves to infinity with the Hard Campaign. Once you have taste for blood you will seek out others like you. AW has a great multiplayer set up. You can make your own maps, trade them with friends, and challenge them to a variety of game types as well. I partake in a daily 7 a.m. Advanced Wars ritual. After work (graveyard shift), I stop over at my friend's house where three comrades await me. The DS offers wireless multiplayer games with no strings attached. I am considered "elite" on a few titles for Xbox amongst my friends, but I believe that no gamer is "elite" until they can master strategy games. In conclusion, Advance Wars is chess on crack that you can play with three other people.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

In July of 1999, video game pioneer Nolan Bushnell began a new venture called uWink, a company that planned to create a "media bistro" where patrons would order via touch screens at their tables and compete in multiplayer gaming and other activities. In some ways, the venture sought to combine Bushnell's two most prominent successes from his past – Atari and Chuck E. Cheese, a chain of theme arcade pizza restaurants.

PSONE

THOUSAND ARMS

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER ATLUS > DEVELOPER RED COMPANY > RELEASE 1999

It's difficult to find a role-playing game that doesn't integrate some kind of love story between the protagonist and an innocent lass, but Thousand Arms takes the concept to a whole new level. Your noble young hero, in addition to saving the world from evil, is also a big fan of the ladies. A really big fan. More than just a character quirk, this trait becomes a key gameplay element; in order to upgrade your weapons, you need to be on good terms with your many female party members. You endear yourself to them through sweet-talking, gift-giving, and even going on dates. The smoother you are, the more upgrades you can apply to your gear. Apart from the romance, however, Thousand Arms is nothing special. The quirky humor is good for a few laughs, but the battle system and story don't even compare well to its contemporaries, much less withstand the test of time. Even so, if you love dating sims and RPGs, this is one of the only places you can get both in one neat package.
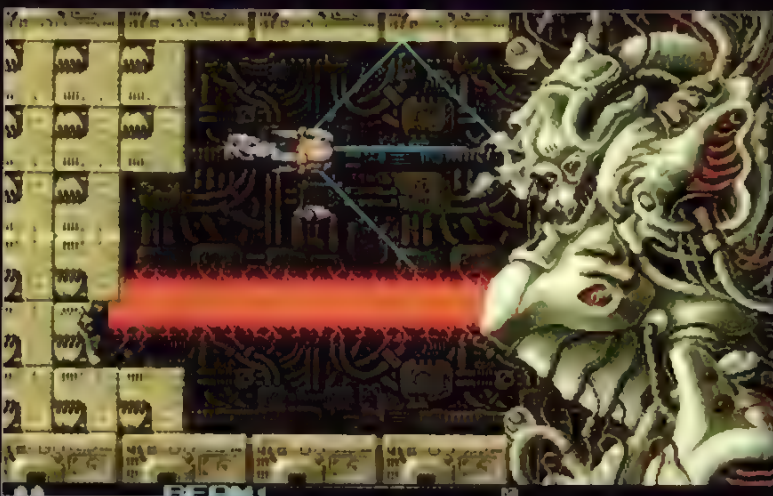
THEN*
7 75

PSONE

STAR WARS: MASTERS OF TERAS KASI

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER LUCASARTS > DEVELOPER LUCASARTS > RELEASE 1997

No matter how awesome that final lightsaber battle between Obi-Wan and Anakin was, there will always be things in the Star Wars universe that will give the haters plenty of ammunition. Masters of Teras Kasi is one of them. You know your fighting game is in trouble when one of your secret characters is Jodo Kast, a total poseur who sort of looks like Boba Fett. It doesn't help that the game's mechanics are about as fun as being shoulder-deep in a Rancor's butt – the combos are needlessly complex, and the characters are hilariously unbalanced. Not that a Tusken Raider should be able to beat Darth Vader in single combat, but from a gameplay perspective, it just gets old mowing through a line-up of inferior opponents. Add in unwieldy controls and a half-assed weapon system, and Masters of Teras Kasi ends up being faintly reminiscent of a good fighting game – except that it has been twisted and perverted by the foul energies of the Dark Side.

THEN*
6 75

PSONE

R-TYPES

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SHOOTER > PUBLISHER ASCII ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER IREM > RELEASE 1999

There is a definite appeal to the side-scrolling shooter genre, but like with many games, it's often hard to revisit their history. R-Types, the PSone title that collects the first two games in the series, should be a shooter fan's dream, but mostly serves to remind the player of far better games. Lacking the finesse of later releases like R-Type III: The Third Lightning or R-Type Final, these two games feel sluggish and frustrating in comparison. In both games, your ship moves like it is flying through a sea of molasses, and the lack of analog control is hard to adjust to. The blistering difficulty that the series and genre is known for is definitely present, but it feels more due to handicapped controls than fair challenge. The two-player mode merely switches off between two players, which seems completely antiquated in today's co-op game climate. R-Types does have a history feature, and the two games do make a nice package for completists, but they should be warned that these games may not be as fun as they remember.

THEN
N/A

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

With a hot new game always on the horizon, it can be tough for some video game characters to stay in the public eye. Since there are no trashy tabloids to detail their weekly exploits, sometimes an endorsement deal is the only way to grab some extra publicity. Answer the questions below to find out which questionable products you'll see your favorite heroes shilling on late-night infomercials.

1 Tracking the lineage of the characters in the Castlevania series is no easy task. Which of these dudes isn't a part of the Belmont bloodline?
A. Reinhardt
B. Soma
C. Juste
D. Julius

2 Developer Level 5, which made the recent Dragon Quest VIII, was also behind which of these early PS2 role-playing games?
A. Dark Cloud
B. Summoner
C. Orphen: Scion of Sorcery
D. Evergrace

3 Street Fighter isn't Capcom's only series filled with bizarre brawlers. Which of the company's B-list fighters features characters like Demitri, Felicia, and Morrigan?
A. Darkstalkers
B. Tech Romancer
C. Rival Schools
D. Red Earth

4 Which of these titles from last year's E3 coverage has actually seen a retail release since the 2005 show?
A. Demonik
B. Possession
C. A Boy and his Blob
D. GripShift

5 What voice actor provided the spoken dialogue for such classic game characters as Solidus Snake, Canderous Ordo, and Dash Rendar?
A. Quinton Flynn
B. Christopher Randolph
C. John Cygan
D. Charlie Martinet

6 If there's one thing a football-like sport needs, it's lots of dying. What publisher realized this fact, foisting Deathrow on the gaming public?
A. Acclaim
B. Ubisoft
C. THQ
D. Infogrames

7 The first step to having a great action game is having a lead character with an awesome name. Dead to Rights failed on this front, starring the colossal doofus...
A. Jack Slate
B. Nick Kang
C. Dingo Egret
D. Max Power

8 Double Fine's resident genius Tim Schafer worked on some great games before last year's Psychonauts. Which of the following games came out first?
A. Day of the Tentacle
B. Secret of Monkey Island
C. Full Throttle
D. Grim Fandango

9 In Cold Fear, the dorkwad protagonist Tom Hansen was a part of what government organization?
A. Tool Patrol
B. FBI
C. Marines
D. Coast Guard

10 Remember Raze's Hell? Yeah, we barely do either. But it had some adorable, fuzzy things you could brutalize. What were they called again?
A. Kuddles
B. Kewletts
C. Kewtletts
D. Korn sucks!

BREAKDOWN

78% of all Breakdown facts were lost or destroyed in the Great Fact Fire of '06

19 people attended Norman Coolguy's "Totally Way Better Than E3" Expo. Most of them were working the show's only booth: NormSoftendo

4 weeks is all it took for Kingdom Hearts II to sell one million copies in the U.S., despite the Little Mermaid levels

31.4% is how much sales increased for Sony's game division last year, though profits still fell by 79.7%

0% of the bacon-wrapped hot dogs Jeremy ate at E3 killed him. Seriously, those things are like Russian Roulette in a bun – sooner or later, you lose
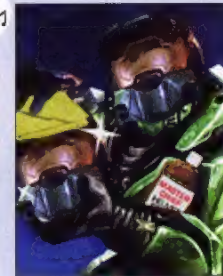
★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

0-1:
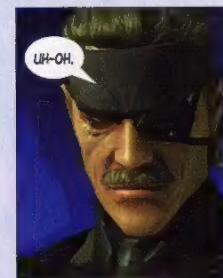Link Brand Pantyhose

2-3:
Dante's Meatlover's Pizza

4-5:
Yuna's Karaoke Mic

6-7:
Master Chief Helmet Polish

8-9:
Ryu's Fundoukens

10:
Solid Snake's FiberBlast

Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. B 2. A 3. A 4. D 5. C 6. B 7. A 8. B 9. D 10. B

DIDN'T WANT TO
BE A FOLLOWER

BECAME A SOLDIER

AUG '04

FEB '05

SSG VICTOR HENDRICKS,
SQUAD LEADER 31B, MILITARY POLICE

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that meant learning from the very best. They told him from day one that
he'd only get out of it what he put in. He listened. Today, he's earned the
right to lead his team. With that rank on his shoulder, he's also in
command of his future. **Find your strength at goarmy.com**

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AN ARMY OF ONE