

**SHOCKING Wii NEWS!**  
Pricing, Online Details & Date Revealed



**TOKYO GAME SHOW: 12 PAGE BLOWOUT**  
The Latest Games & Info For the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 & More



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will it **consume** you?

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www.gameinformer.com ISSUE 163

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NOVEMBER 2006

# Dirt God Commandments

Thou shall race all offroading vehicles:  
ATVs, bikes, buggies and trophy trucks.

Thou shall do sick freestyle tricks off jumps.

Thou shall not mud pants while getting big air.

Thou shall customize vehicle to make faster.

Thou shall race in all terrain: snow, dirt, sand,  
forest and especially mud.

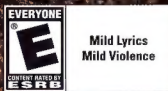
Thou shall not wash ATV unless thou washes it with mud.

Thou shall strive to become a pro racer.

Thou shall feed on adrenaline for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

**Thou shall honor all commandments  
of the Dirt Gods or feel their wrath.**

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PlayStation 2



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PLAYSTATION 3

# ENEMY'S HEAD WILL BE YOUR SWORD.



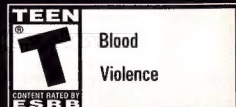
**Full Online Support:** Go online and play cooperatively with your friends or acquire additional game content

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[www.uldarkkingdom.com](http://www.uldarkkingdom.com)



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Game experience may change during online play.



<b>TEEN</b>	
<b>T</b>	Alcohol Reference Fantasy Violence Mild Language Partial Nudity Suggestive Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING	<a href="http://www.esrb.org">www.esrb.org</a>



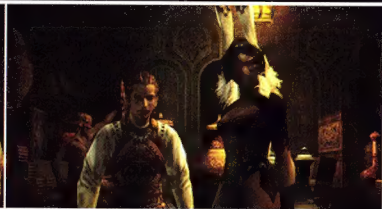
PlayStation 2



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DISCOVER THE SECRET  
THAT WILL UNRAVEL AN EMPIRE.



IN STORES OCTOBER 31, 2006.



**FINAL FANTASY XII**

[www.FINALFANTASYXII.COM](http://www.FINALFANTASYXII.COM)





TITLE

# NEED FOR SPEED CARBON



FACTORY: 91,808 car paints in game

INFORMATION

[www.nfscarbon.com](http://www.nfscarbon.com)

DEVELOPMENT START

01 | 03 | 05

DATE OF RELEASE

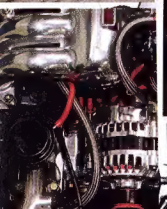
11 | 01 | 06

## primer, bolts and welding burns

Like a lot of us, Andy Blackmore draws cars – except he does it really, really well. Blackmore, a designer at the EA Black Box studio in Vancouver who once worked for McLaren, spends his days putting down incredibly detailed visions of American muscle, tuner imports and exotics – freehand, no less. In *Need For Speed Carbon*, Blackmore has added 200 new works of art to the game's lineup.

In the *Need For Speed Carbon* shop, players who love to get their hands dirty can use the revolutionary new Autosculpt™ toolkit to tweak body shapes, hoods, intakes, vents and every other detail of the masterpieces created by Blackmore and fellow designer Mike Hayes. Or they can build eye-popping whips of their own. The best part of working in the digital realm, as Blackmore puts it: "In the real world, you have to worry about legality."

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OF THE  
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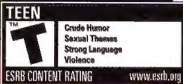
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PlayStation 2



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"Finally, Another Matt On The Staff!"

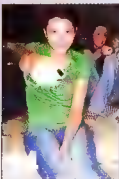


Special Report

## 84 DARK SECTOR

Dark Sector was the first next-gen game to be announced two and a half years ago, and now we bring you the exclusive first look at the actual gameplay that developer Digital Extremes will be bringing to PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. This action-packed sci-fi/horror adventure stars the best kind of assassin: one who has been infected with a techno-virus that gives him super powers. Get all the details in our 10-page blowout that starts on page 84.

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WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS  
WON'T HAPPEN ANYMORE.



A person is shown in profile, looking down at a device in a dark environment. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the person's face and hands against the black background. The person appears to be wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and is holding a small, glowing object, possibly a controller or a piece of hardware.

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# STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



## COLOR ME IMPRESSED

**ANDY MCNAMARA**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I have always planned on buying a PlayStation 3 on day one, as I do for every system launch. But after a recent chance to check out a wide selection of PlayStation 3 software in action at the Tokyo Game Show, I am far more impressed and excited about the system than I was previously.

To be fair, much of the software that I played was incomplete or only offered a limited area that could be explored, so I certainly wouldn't consider my thoughts to be anything more than first impressions, but nonetheless I can't help but be more than satisfied with what I saw.

I had often thought that PlayStation 3 would, to some degree, look like a more expensive version of the Xbox 360, but after playing through all the launch game demos there is definitely something more here. The PlayStation 3 games are simply stunning to look at. They are sharp, well animated, and overflowing with particles and other graphical trickery. And most of these were launch games that I'd be willing to put up with — at least graphically — against almost any of the current Xbox 360 games, and the gorgeous *Geostorm* of War, which is saying a lot.

Now that said, I do think that most of the launch titles in terms of game play were fairly average at best, save *Resistance: Fall of Man*, which stood out with its tight and frantic first-person gunplay. But more important than any game that I played was the hope it gave me for the future. I now believe all those Metal Gear Solid 4 and Final Fantasy XIII movies I've watched are quite possible on the PlayStation 3, and the draw of what developers will be able to do with it once they familiarize themselves with the hardware has me simply giddy with anticipation.

So while I'm certainly convinced of the PlayStation 3's graphical prowess, there are still a lot of issues with the system which are unresolved. Is the Blu-ray player's good for actual movies, or will it be a second-rate movie player much like the original PlayStation 2? Will the PlayStation 3's price point keep consumers away, or for that matter, drive them to the Xbox 360 or Nintendo Wii? What exactly is Sony's online strategy and will it be able to compete with Microsoft's impressive Xbox Live service? And more importantly, will third-party multiplatform games look any different on the PlayStation 3 than they do on the Xbox 360? Because if they don't, all the PlayStation's power may be about as useful as the original Xbox's was to Microsoft (and by that, I mean not a lot).

Nintendo is playing its own game this generation, and I think they will be successful regardless of Microsoft or Sony's strategies. However, the battle between Microsoft and Sony has now heated up in my eyes, and will be the battle to watch this generation. PlayStation 3 certainly stepped it up on a graphical front, but will be enough when there are so many other concerns facing today's modern games? Or put simply, will gamers be willing to pay more money for what some will most certainly see as slightly better graphics? It's Microsoft's move next, and the best part is that with each maneuver they only get better for gamers no matter which system you play.

## Andy >>> [andy@gameinformer.com](mailto:andy@gameinformer.com)

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## Reiner >>> [reiner@gameinformer.com](mailto:reiner@gameinformer.com)

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## Joe >>> [joe@gameinformer.com](mailto:joe@gameinformer.com)

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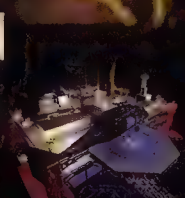
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# GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



1 GI Online's Billy Berghammer lives out some naughty fantasies with Need for Speed booth babes at the Leipzig Games Convention in Germany. He's been a bad, bad boy! 2 Nick Ahrens and Andy Mac pose with Activision's Kehau Rodenhurst and Yale Miller 3 Billy and The Edge of U2 engage in some sultry role-playing at the ultra-sexy Leipzig Games Convention 4 Some Game Informer pledges get in on the rush-week fun at Phi Kappa Ubisoft! Next event: Case race! 5 The Guitar Hero gang drops by to teach Game Informer Way of the Rock. Here we see the first class, "Rock Faces and Hand Gestures 101," with students Bryan Vore and Nick Ahrens of GI Online learning from Professors Marcus Henderson and Bryan Lam 6 Upper Deck's Claudine Recanor and Scott Elliott deliver the smackdown on Reiner and Adam in the new World of Warcraft collectible card game 7 After budget deficits lead to the layoffs of thousands of stormtroopers, some of Palapatine's former minions have been reduced to trying to pick up chicks at German video game conventions.



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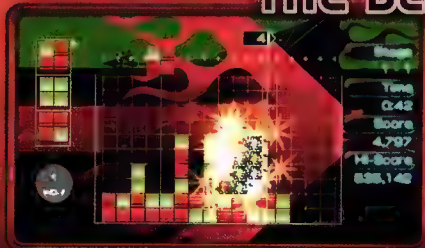
JUNKIE XL

MISSY ELLIOTT

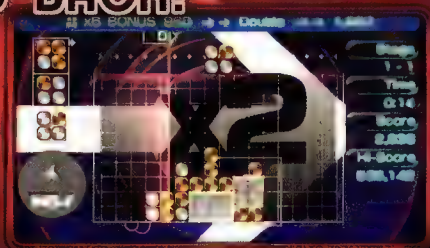
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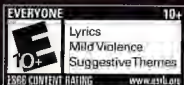


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# DEARGI

The Readers Strike Back

## GI COMMUNITY

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

**THE QUESTION:**  
Do PlayStation 3 games look better graphically than Xbox 360 games?

No, not really. PS3 games look great, but I'm positive that 360 games have the capability to look that good. You have to remember that, generally, games released in the first few years of a system's life don't take full advantage of the hardware.

Halberd

Anything looks better to me that leaves an extra 200 bucks in my wallet.

breakinthebenjam

A game like Oblivion is gonna look good no matter what system it's on. Now games like Metal Gear Solid 4 and Heavenly Sword look absolutely gorgeous, but then a game like Halo 3 comes and makes you think that Microsoft can compete with Sony in terms of graphics.

gipunk



Heavenly Sword

Sure. Pre-rendered graphics will always outshine actual gameplay.

Rauroo\_B

The PS3 could have better graphics, but from the videos I have seen, it is definitely possible to achieve the same graphics on the 360. As of right now, I consider it a tie, and the tie goes to the cheaper console, the 360.

bluzee043

Does MGS 4 look better than every 360 game? Hell yes. But does Madden for the PS3 look better than the 360 version? Heavens no. Everything depends on the developers making the games.

myemotefreak

Of course they do. I wouldn't spend an extra 200 bucks if I wasn't getting better looking grass. duh.

MattieBooy



Next-gen grass in just Cause

Do you want to make your voice heard? Weigh in with your opinion at [www.gamenformer.com/forum](http://www.gamenformer.com/forum)

## THERE'S A COW LEVEL?

Excuse me, but according to those tips in World of Warcraft that I must sit through every day, there is no cow level, contrary to the quiz in the back of your September issue. I believe you owe me the proper ranking I deserve.

Daryl Dalzell  
via yahoo.com

■ There is a cow level. It just isn't in WoW. You'll find the legendary bovine extravaganza in another one of Blizzard's classic games, Diablo II. In the company's first Diablo game, there were rumors that, through certain obscure means, players could access a secret level full of cows. These assertions were false, but they did act as a kind of inspiration during the development of the sequel. After defeating Baal in Diablo II, players were finally able to open a portal to an area filled with warrior cows and their sovereign, the Cow King. So, regardless of what the WoW tooltip (or the Starcraft cheat code) says, there is a cow level out there somewhere.



## GAMES YOUR WAY

What does it take to get a company to look over a gaming script from a person who isn't in the industry? I've been a gamer my entire life, and some of the games we're playing these days do not have fantastic, memorable stories to measure up to gameplay. I have so many situations and scenarios that would make great games. I'm sure a lot of people think the same way, but I was just curious.

Harry Walken  
via hotmail.com

■ Every month many readers send us letters asking this question, hoping to have a positive influence on the kinds of games we play. Unfortunately, the answer is not exactly encouraging. For various legal reasons, most companies have strict policies about not accepting fan-submitted stories or game ideas. You may only want to see your characters come to life, but the business side of things is pretty harsh; there are certain property rights issues involved in accepting unsolicited materials, so it usually just isn't done. The reality is, if you want your ideas to become a real game, you're going to have to make it yourself. However, with more home creation tools becoming available (like Microsoft's XNA Game Studio Express. See page 54 for more), that goal is becoming more attainable every day.

## VOICING INTEREST

I read the article in the September issue about voice actors and voiceover careers, and I enjoyed it very much. I have been interested in how voice actors get jobs or even a career ever since I heard Solid Snake talk into his codec for the first time. I was 10 years old and it sparked something inside of me; voice acting is the main area of gaming

that I would like to be a part of. Granted, I know my voice is not an ideal sound to hear, I want to give it a try anyway.

Greg Wilson  
Richfield, Minnesota

■ This topic actually came up in our conversations with voiceover artists Jennifer Hale and Cam Clarke, but ultimately didn't end up in the feature. So, for some ideas on where to start, here are the comments straight from the pros: "I guess that you've gotta get out here [to Los Angeles]," says Clarke. "You need to study with people who do it for a living, and there are a lot of people out here who teach, who have their finger on the pulse of the gaming community. There's not much you can do but get out here and get your feet wet."

## ZOMBIES CAN'T READ

I recently bought Dead Rising and was very excited to start killing zombies. Everything went smoothly until the first conversation that didn't have voice along with it. The text in the game is so small that it is practically unreadable. Even when I sat directly in front of my TV and squinted I was only able to make out words like "the." Not being able to read the text makes doing missions and understanding the story impossible. I was wondering if you had any suggestions on how to fix this problem.

Frank Mallon  
via hotmail.com

■ You are not alone. Gamers everywhere who only own standard-definition televisions are experiencing the same difficulty. The problem stems from the fact that Dead Rising was developed to be optimized for high-definition, which means that the text just isn't as sharp on regular TVs. When coupled with the small size of the letters, this makes in-game messages blurry and hard to read. Publisher Capcom is aware of the issue, but at the time of this writing has announced no plans for a downloadable patch. Instead, the company suggests that you adjust the settings on your TV or monitor, try using component cables instead of standard composite, or set the TV to the wider screen aspect ratio. If those steps don't help, unfortunately your only other options are to start squinting or buy yourself an HDTV.

Get a hold of agents, casting directors, but there's not much you can do not being in Los Angeles." Of course, even if you're in the right location, there's still work to do. "Develop your ability to do more than one type of voice," advises Hale. "Have a really strong work ethic. Remember you're only a piece of the puzzle. Show up on time. And have a good time! That last one's important."

## FINDING THE LINE

I'm puzzled. I can drive to basically any electronics retailer and purchase a wide assortment of R-rated movies. These movies may hold content ranging from a few dirty words to human entrails dripping blood as they hang from gnarled tree limbs to copious amounts of exposed chests, bottoms, or occasionally a half-hearted crotch shot. Yet – and this is where I'm confused – if a little puxilated nudity is dropped into a video game the rating jumps from M (equivalent to R) to AO (equivalent to NC-17). Can you explain it to me?

Thomas Corey  
Charlottesville, Virginia

■ You bring up an excellent point, Thomas. To be fair, nudity in a game does not guarantee an AO rating, but you are absolutely right in identifying a few incongruities between the two rating systems. Games are a unique form of media, and Patricia Vance of the ESRB admitted in our interview with her (issue 160) that game ratings are more conservative than those in television and film. We wish we could explain why, but we don't get it either.



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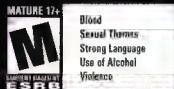
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## TOUCHING IS GOOD

My brother, mom, and I have always been into video games and our father has been interested in joining us. The trouble is, he had a stroke several years ago and his left side, including his hand, doesn't work. The other day he saw me playing the poker minigame on my New Super Mario Bros. on my DS Lite and he jumped right in on it. He had so much fun! We're going to be getting another DS, so can you list the best stylus-only DS games out there?

Grace Weaverling  
via yahoo.com

■ **No problem. One of the great things about the DS is that fact that the best games for the handheld distinguish themselves with innovative and extensive use of the touch screen, so there are several excellent options. We should note that not all of the following games use the stylus exclusively, but the ones that have the occasional button press aren't timing or coordination dependent, so it shouldn't present a problem. Anyway, give these a try!**

- *Advance Wars DS*
- *Animal Crossing: Wide World*
- *Brain Age: Train Your Brain In Minutes A Day*
- *Electroplankton*
- *Kirby Canvas Curse*
- *Meteos*
- *Nintendogs*

## DOWNLOAD LOWDOWN

In the next generation of gaming, people who don't have broadband are getting ripped off. It seems that no genre is safe from "downloadable content" or "software updates." At the very least, I thought I'd be able to play Nintendo games single-player, but now Nintendo's saying that the Wii will always be connected to the Internet. I can't help but realize how I'm getting ripped off – paying \$60 but being unable to access half the content because I don't have a broadband connection.

Erica Whitner  
via hotmail.com

■ **Moving into the next generation of gaming doesn't only mean prettier graphics. It's also about exploring new avenues that weren't previously open to gamers. The online arena, though it was present for the Xbox, PlayStation 2, and GameCube (barely), presents a frontier of exciting possibilities that many developers are eager to experiment with in next-gen titles. As such, there are going to be aspects of the upcoming hardware that offline gamers won't be able to experience to the fullest. Downloading old-school Nintendo titles from the virtual console is out of the question, and split-screen multiplayer seems to be gradually fading away in favor of online co-op. But unless you're playing a game whose only real draw is a heavy online component (like *Chromehounds* or the *Battlefield* series), we're still at the point where these things are more like icing on the cake. Sure, it's great that you can download armor for your horse in *Oblivion*, but your single-player experience isn't exactly damaged without it. The industry might be taking steps in that direction, but we're not there yet.**

## ENVELOPE ART

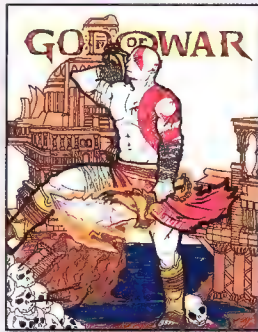
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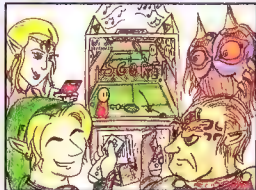
TRAVIS MUHAFFEY

Gee, why hasn't Nintendo thought of making a super-gritty Mario game yet? It worked out so well for *Shadow the Hedgehog*!



NICK LOW

Kratos ponders just how much pain the human body can endure.



ZACH SCHEFFLER

How is everyone cool with that bug-eyed thing floating right there?



CHARLES ATKINS

Don't let the smile fool you. It's actually wondering what it's going to do with your corpse.



TRAVIS ALSTON

Iron Fist, master of the stinky hand.

## NOVEMBER WINNER!

LAURA FELLO

Wonderful.  
Raboons have  
metal claws now.  
Thanks a lot,  
Boswin

## CORRECTIONS

In our last issue (October 2006, GI #162), we misprinted two pieces of information in the review of *Enchanted Arms*. The game should have been listed for Xbox 360 (not PS2), and is rated T (not M). We apologize for the oversight.





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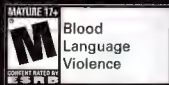


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## NINTENDO Wii GETS DATE & DETAILS

CONSOLE COMES OUT ON NOVEMBER 19

**A**t an event in New York City Nintendo recently spilled the beans on its Wii console, letting gamers in on a number of juicy details. The system will debut in America on Sunday, November 19 – two days after Sony's PlayStation 3 – for \$250. What does that get you? Not only does the system come with a packed-in Nunchaku controller (which connects to the regular Wii Remote), but for the first time since the SNES, Nintendo is bundling in a game with this new console. Wii Sports will be included with the system, and features two new motion-sensor games not shown at E3 this year – bowling and boxing. One thing that won't be coming with the console is a DVD player; Nintendo said it axed this feature for cost reasons. The Wii will come out in America first, with Japan getting the platform (sans Wii Sports) on December 2.

Unlike the PlayStation 3, gamers shouldn't have much of a problem getting the Wii at launch, since Nintendo says that it plans to ship four million units of the system worldwide. The company would not elaborate on exactly how many will be in stores on November 19, but it did say that the number will be over 400,000, and that the "majority" of the holiday's four million will be allocated to North America. Unlike the GameCube's launch, this debut Wii system will only come in one color – white.

The Wii, however, does share some similarities with the GameCube in that it plays GameCube titles, houses four slots for GC controllers, and accommodates two GC memory cards. The Wii also has a slot for an SD memory card which is used to expand the system's internal flash memory. The console can communicate with the DS handheld, but Nintendo purposely is holding back on specific details regarding this feature.





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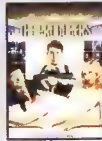
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24X

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24X



**T**wilight Princess started out as a GameCube title, then became available on Wii, and is now launching with the new system. What about the GameCube? Well, what was once going to be a simultaneous launch for both versions of the title has turned into a delay for the GameCube edition. That system won't see the game now until December 11th.

#### Wii LAUNCH TITLES

Thirty launch titles will be available during the launch window from both Nintendo and third-party publishers, with about half that number on hand on day one. Nintendo titles will retail for \$50, and it has urged third-parties to price theirs similarly. The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess and Excite Truck will be there, but Metroid Prime 3: Corruption has been delayed until 2007.

#### Third-Party Titles through March 31st

##### Activision

- Call of Duty 5
- Marvel: Ultimate Alliance
- Rapala Tournament Fishing
- Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam
- World Series of Poker

##### Atari

- Dragon Ball Z Budokai: Tenkaichi 2

##### Atlus

- Trauma Center: Second Opinion
- Chicken Little: Ace in Action

##### Buena Vista Games

- Disney's Meet the Robinsons
- Dance Factory

##### Codemasters

- Sidewinder

##### Electronic Arts

- The Godfather
- Madden NFL 07
- Need for Speed: Carbon
- SSX
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour

##### Konami

- Elitebs

##### Majesco

- Bust A Move: Revolution

##### Midway

- The Ant Bully
- The Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy
- Happy Feet
- Mortal Kombat: Armageddon
- Rampage: Total Destruction

##### Sega

- Sonic and the Secret Rings
- Super Monkey Ball Banana Blitz

##### SNK

- Metal Slug Anthology

##### THQ

- Avatar: The Last Airbender
- Barnyard
- Cars
- SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature from the Krusty Krab

##### Ubisoft

- Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII
- Far Cry: Vengeance
- GT Pro Series
- Monster 4x4: World Circuit
- Open Season
- Prince of Persia
- Rayman: Raving Rabbids
- Red Steel
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent

##### Vivendi Games

- Ice Age 2

## CHANNEL SURFING

When gamers turn on their Wii, they can choose from a number of channels that take you to different features of the console



**DISC CHANNEL** — Here you can start playing either Wii or GameCube discs.

**Mii CHANNEL** — Allows you to create custom avatars that can be used as characters in some Wii games. You can even take them with you when you bring your Wii Remote to friends' houses.

**PHOTO CHANNEL** — Photos imported from an SD memory card can be creatively manipulated and displayed on this channel.



**FORECAST CHANNEL** — If you're hooked up to the Internet, you can check out the weather from anywhere around the globe.

**NEWS CHANNEL** — Similar to the Forecast Channel, this feature requires Internet hookup. Although you will not receive video feeds, headlines and pictures show what's happening in the world.

**Wii SHOP CHANNEL** — Here you buy or redeem Wii points for classic Virtual Console games.



**INTERNET CHANNEL** — If you've purchased the Opera web browser at the Wii Shop Channel, here is where you'd actually surf the web.

**Wii MESSAGE BOARD** — Leave messages for people at home or use WiiConnect24 to talk to those outside of it. Furthermore, you can trade photos and send text messages to people with cell phones. The WiiConnect24 service also allows for updates and downloadable content of Wii titles, even if your Wii is turned off.

**N**intendo is offering 30 Virtual Console Nintendo downloads on day one, and it will increase this catalog by 10 games per month after that. NES titles will be available for 500 Wii Points, SNES for 800, and N64 for 1,000 points. Each point costs a penny, and these can be bought via a credit card or through pre-paid cards available at stores.

Among the 30 titles immediately available are Super Mario World (SNES), Mario 64 (N64), The Legend of Zelda (NES), and many more. These older games will be playable via a sold-separately classic controller (available on day one for \$19.99) that is required to play the SNES, Sega Genesis, and N64 Virtual Console games. Meanwhile, NES and TurboGrafx titles can be played using either the Wii controller or the classic controller. Nintendo has not officially talked about multiplayer capabilities for Virtual Console games.

## THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE REALITY



Some Virtual Console games will require this sold-separately controller

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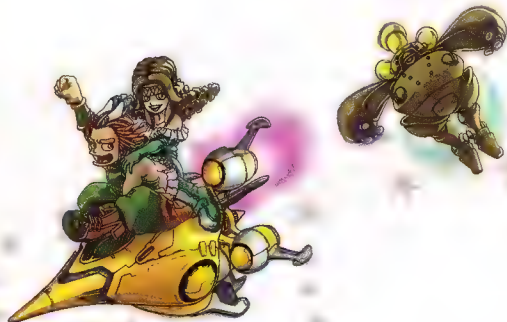


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# TOKYO GAME SHOW 2006



**O**ur annual pilgrimage to the Tokyo Game Show began this year with perhaps the second most unusual keynote speech Game Informer has ever had the pleasure to witness (the first was delivered by an irate Hiroshi Yamauchi, then head of Nintendo, who banged on the podium like Dwight Schrute pulling a Mussolini on *The Office*, declaring that the rest of the world simply didn't understand why the Nintendo 64 ruled). This time it was Ken Kutaragi, president of Sony Computer Entertainment, who spent an hour conveying the obvious about how the Internet and computers were very useful, and that the PlayStation 3 could cure Alzheimer's (Seriously. He said that). Then to sum it all up, he pointed to the screen and showed the world a new trailer of Sony's upcoming PS3 game *Afrika*.

On the show floor itself, TGS was business as usual with Namco Bandai, Capcom, Square Enix, Konami, and Sega leading the charge with a handful of impressive titles to play, as well as plenty of video to watch and absorb. For a change of pace, the Xbox 360 booth was actu-

ally quite busy with gamers lining up to see Mistwalker's *Blue Dragon* (from famed Hironobu Sakaguchi) and a number of RPGs Microsoft announced the Wednesday before the show.

The PlayStation 3 was easily the talk of the show, with five games on the floor running in stunning 1080p (*Ridge Racer 7*, *Lair*, *Mobile Suit Gundam: Target in Sight*, *Gran Turismo HD*, and *Virtua Tennis 3*). *NBA 07* was also shown after hours to make a total of six). However, it is important to note that, as usual, Nintendo didn't attend TGS, and its presence was notably missed. Even without Nintendo, the DS had one of the better showings, almost every company had a robust lineup of games coming to the system – in sharp contrast to the PSP, which garnered little to no excitement (save the announcement of a Pink PSP for the Japanese market, and Kojima Production's awesome *Metal Gear Portable Ops*).

Plenty of RPGs were announced across the board, and the show was perhaps the most crowded we have ever seen it, which is a good sign for the industry both in Japan and here in the States. Over the next 10 pages we will give you the lowdown on all there was to see.



SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

# SHIROKISHI

(White Knight)

■ The combat system flows quickly and showcases smooth animations

■ The game's art style depicts a rich fantasy world mixed with technology

■ The main character's transformation into this gleaming warrior is visually amazing

■ Some enemies are small, while others are comparable in size to the White Knights



At Tokyo Game Show, Sony didn't reveal too many new details about the PlayStation 3 hardware or the system's imminent launch, but it did unveil one huge game called Shirokishi (which translates to "White Knight"). Level 5, the same studio responsible for Dark Cloud and the soon-to-be-released Rogue Galaxy, is handling development of Shirokishi.

Holding true to this developer's prestigious heritage, Shirokishi is a role-playing game with a strong fantasy backing. The game begins with a mysterious group dressed from head-to-toe in black infiltrating a castle. They kill the king, begin torching the castle, but are too late in getting to the princess. A young merchant whisks her away from the siege down into the castle's underground. Along with a safe haven, the pair stumbles across an artifact that was believed to just be a myth—a suit of armor from the fabled White Knights.

The trailer that Sony released for the game showed little of the story, but it did reveal how the combat system will work and also how the White Knight armor is tied into the quest. It would appear that the main character in the game is the very merchant that saved the princess—go figure. He travels with two companions, a middle-aged warrior named Lenard and a petite woman wearing commoner's clothes named Yulie. The party is ambushed on a road by a group of outlaws. What's interesting about this is that the game transitions seamlessly between overworld exploration to a cinematic cutscene showing the confrontation between the two parties and then to battle.

The combat in the game appears to mix real-time movement with turn-based actions. Rather than just having the characters stand there when the enemy takes a swing at them, the game show-

cases an amazing parry system, which matches up sword-to-sword and sword-to-shield animations perfectly. Blocked blows are exchanged with each passing second, and the clang of metal almost drowns out the soundtrack completely. When the merchant is hit, he grabs the area on the body where the blow struck and reels back.

Lenard handles his attacker with a bit more ease and a lot more style than the merchant boy. He taps into a combo that knocks his opponent high into the air. As his assailant is plummeting toward the ground, Lenard leaps up and tosses him down with authority, but it doesn't end there. He then hovers in the air and unleashes a fireball directly at his downed foe.

As the battle continues, the merchant eventually takes out his foe with a clean cut across the chest. That just leaves Yulie, who appears to be struggling. The merchant sheathes his sword, sneaks up behind her target, and grabs a hold of him. As the soldier struggles to get free, Yulie finishes him off with a solid jump kick.

After the battle concludes, the party runs into a foe that would appear to be a bit tougher than some scrawny bandits. It's a fire-breathing tank that stands roughly 20 feet in height. Before a blow is exchanged, the merchant jabs his sword into a gauntlet on his left arm, which after being engulfed in vibrant particle effects, transforms him into a White Knight, who also stands roughly 20 feet in height.

Sadly, the trailer faded to black before we could see this impressive figure in action, but it did leave us yearning for more, and wondering if different Knights would be produced if different weapons were inserted into the gauntlet. Sony hasn't revealed a release date yet, but we can already tell you that it isn't soon enough. This is definitely one to watch, RPG fans.



## PlayStation 3



SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

# GRAN TURISMO HD

Gran Turismo HD was shown at E3, and Sony says that it will be the basis for Gran Turismo HD Classic.

**A**t this year's E3, Gran Turismo developer Polyphony Digital confused everyone when the company showed a Gran Turismo HD demo that it said was not actually a game. At TGS, however, the developer unveiled the real Gran Turismo HD. The title is indeed a game, and a Japanese release is planned for 2007. Sony says that the American release of the title is still being fleshed out.

First off, Polyphony Digital head Kazunori Yamauchi was quick to say that Gran Turismo 5 for PS3 was still definitely on the way. Gran Turismo HD is an offering that will not only give something to fans in the meantime, but will likely evolve over time as features are added — features that will give gamers a glimpse of what to expect in GT 5. The game is split into two modes. GT HD Premium presents 30 cars and 2 tracks, with more available for download. The models used in Premium are designed from the ground up specifically for GT HD, and Yamauchi was so proud of the cars that he said, "The only thing more real than this is a real car." Speaking of real cars, Sony signed

a deal with Ferrari to feature the 599 GTB and other models in GT HD.

Classic mode, meanwhile, is an online component of GT HD. Instead of using the newly rendered cars used in Premium, Classic will use enhanced GT 4 models for its online racing. This mode features 770 cars and 51 tracks for play, but it is unknown how many will be unlocked when it ships. The point of this mode is to download and buy the majority of its cars and tracks. Polyphony says that it wants to offer over 4,500 items via the Sony store.

Sony is not only using online for racing and selling your cars, however. Since GT HD will be an evolving product, Polyphony says it wants to offer a slew of features in the future such as leaderboards, video/voice chat, online garages, team functions, and more. The developer also envisions patches that will upgrade the game's physics and introduce damage to the cars. It may even sell limited edition autos or award unique rides to winners of online circuits. This kind of fluid structure is exactly what Sony is trying to hammer out for the U.S. release.



SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

# LAIR

**Y**ou don't need to know a whole lot about Lair to get excited for it. It's an aerial combat game with dragons instead of planes or spaceships. What more do you need to know? It's going to be awesome, even if they totally ripped off the American Godzilla design for one of the dragons. Need to know more? Okay, Lair was playable at TGS and uses the motion-sensing controller to steer the dragon. You can shoot fireballs at other dragons from afar, but once you get up close, you transition into brutal dragon-on-dragon melee action that uses the face buttons as well as the motion-sensor to deliver brutal God of War-style finishers. Lair also features some ground battles, which means that you get to wade into an army of pathetic humans atop your mighty dragon, and start roasting suckers left and right. Basically, to sum it all up, Lair looks like it's going to be wicked awesome. This sucker doesn't come out until 2007, so it's probably only going to get cooler and more polished in the next few months.

Lair will also have ground combat, but aerial dragon battles are the obvious highlight.

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# Devil Summoner

## RAIDOU KUZUNOHA vs THE SOULLESS ARMY



Blood  
Sexual Themes  
Violence



PlayStation 2



PlayStation 3

# METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

KONAMI



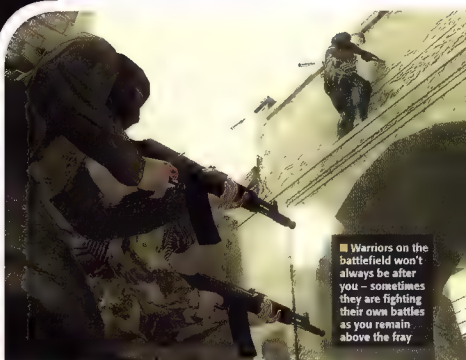
■ By pulling a mask over his entire face, Snake's sneaking suit can provide him with total concealment.

**T**he biggest PlayStation 3 title just got bigger. No one was exactly complaining about the visually astounding trailers that Kojima Productions has been showing at major industry events, but in this year's TGS demo the developer finally blew the lid off the gameplay that will take tactical espionage action into the next generation.

The biggest change for the series is the adaptation of a behind-the-shoulder camera (made popular by Resident Evil 4) that eliminates the need to hold down a first-person view button to aim. Like its genre brother Splinter Cell, MGS 4 uses a third-person view until Snake pulls out a gun and is ready to fire, at which point the camera will pull in. Hopefully this approach will clean up the game's firefights, which have previously caused trouble by requiring players to hold down too many buttons at one time. Traditionally, the major complaint about games using this stop-and-pop style is the inability to move while shooting, but that has never been a big focus of Metal Gear anyway, paving the way for a smooth transition.

The other major revelation about MGS 4's mechanics is the use of camouflage. Updating the system used in MGS 3, Snake will be equipped with an advanced sneaking suit that takes on the texture of its surroundings like a chameleon. We imagine that this will do away with the need to open a menu to change outfits, keeping players hidden while also keeping them in the action.

More information about these systems will undoubtedly surface as the game continues to evolve, but don't hold your breath for more story details. Despite what we know about the involvement of Liquid Snake, Ocelot, Raiden, and the rest of the crew, Hideo Kojima seems to take delight in throwing gamers off-course when it comes to the plot. Until it's actually in our hands, the best we can do is look at these amazing screens and wish it were 2007.



■ Warriors on the battlefield won't always be after you - sometimes they are fighting their own battles as you remain above the fray.

■ Snake will contend with these Metal Gear variants (called "Gekkou") in addition to soldiers.





■ It's like hide and seek, except you find Snake, you're probably already dead



■ There will still be first-person aiming for certain weapons, but this will be the standard view for firing



■ Dizon controls the Metal Gear Mk. II, a small robot that will definitely come in useful



■ See the grenade being lobbed in this picture? That's awesome



■ "Bullet-tag! You're hit!"



■ We still don't know what limits the use of camo, if you could do this all the time, the game would be too easy

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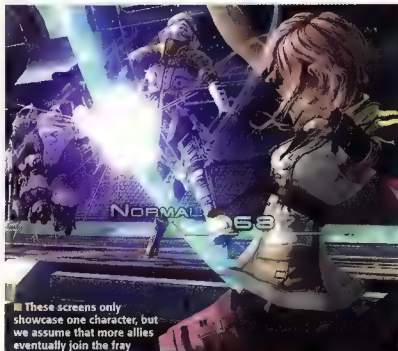
## PlayStation 3

**I**t appears as though the line between action and RPG is going to continue to blur in the newest entry in the FF series, Final Fantasy XIII. The latest trailer for the game contained even more battle footage, and judging from the screens, the series is in for another drastic shift in the battle system. The team at Square Enix isn't talking specifics, but the interface seems to suggest that the main character can fill up a five-slot action queue with a variety of attacks, each subtracting a set amount of points from the Active Time Battle (ATB) meter. Presumably, powerful magic and summon spells will have a higher cost than normal moves, allowing players to strategically manage a whole string of maneuvers. Of course, how or if this system will incorporate multiple party members remains to be seen.



# FINAL FANTASY XIII

■ Not all enemies will be anonymous futuristic soldiers



■ These screens only showcase one character, but we assume that more allies eventually join the fray



■ FF XIII is based on Square Enix's White engine, which takes the visual effects to new heights

## CRISIS TIME

A brand new trailer for Crisis Core, the upcoming PSP entry in its series of Final Fantasy VII spinoffs, revealed several intriguing tidbits. We saw Zack fighting in an action-driven battle system, with familiar faces like Bahamut and Aeris making an appearance in cinematics. Unfortunately, we still don't have a firm U.S. release date, so you'll have to settle for this picture of Sephiroth.



## VERSUS XIII

Final Fantasy XIII will apparently have some ties to the main entry, though this aspect of the Fabula Nova Crystallis remains a closely-guarded mystery. There hasn't been any new info on this game since its unveiling at E3, but once we know more it will be even easier to get excited about this action/RPG from director Tetsuya Nomura and the teams behind Advent Children and Kingdom Hearts.



■ This female has become the face of the game, though we don't even know what role she plays in the story

■ The menu-based interface combines many familiar aspects into a new system



# 4 CHARACTERS

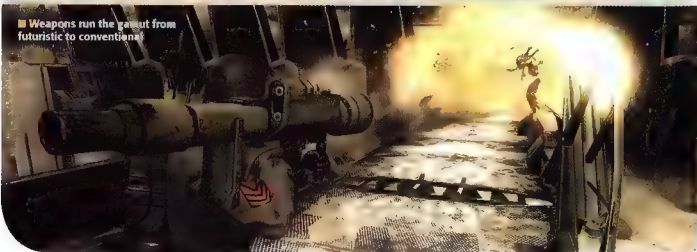
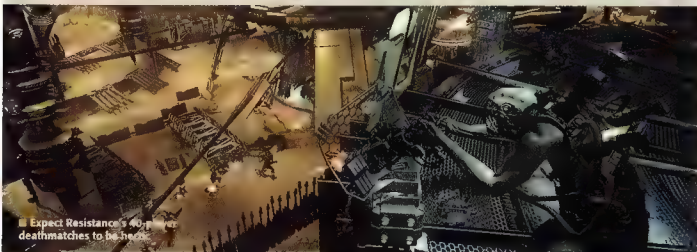


**B**ased on fan reaction, critical response, and analyst predictions, it looks like Insomniac's *Resistance: Fall of Man* is destined to be the biggest game of the PlayStation 3 launch. Everything about this game screams solid, well-built shooter, which is enough to ensure hefty sales day one. The fact that it was created by the famed team behind the *Ratchet* and *Clank* games only bumps it up further, and the new features on display at TGS amped up our excitement to a whole new level.

We got a chance to check out *Resistance*'s single-player campaign at E3, but the Tokyo Game Show was the first time that we got any glimpse at the multiplayer component, which is looking like it will probably be the biggest selling point of the game. Multiplayer supports an impressive 40 players, with both human and Chimera (the mutant enemies in the game) teams. Each has distinct advantages and disadvantages: the humans can sprint and use radar, although running reduces accuracy. The Chimera, on the other hand, can go into Rage mode, which allows them to see through walls and move faster. However, using Rage mode for too long causes a Chimera soldier's health to drain.

*Resistance*'s online mode features several distinct game types, including the classic deathmatch and team deathmatch, as well as new modes called Breach and Meltdown. Both of these modes revolve around capturing nodes, which serve as new spawn points and grant your team some advantages in battle. Breach, however, adds a reactor into the mix for each team. The goal is to destroy the other side's reactor, which becomes a more and more difficult task as nodes are captured.

Breach and Meltdown modes may be somewhat familiar to fans of some other online shooters, but seeing these types of games and scale on a console is a pretty new experience. We have no doubt that these multiplayer features alone will propel *Resistance* to the top of the PS3 sales charts. See you online, soldier!



SQUARE ENIX

## PlayStation 3

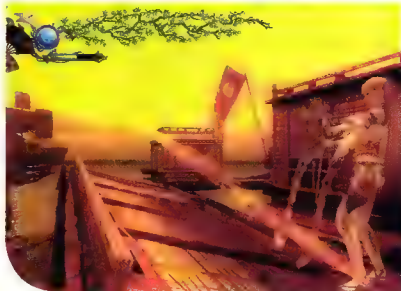
It may have fallen from the day one lineup, but Heavenly Sword remains one of the most exciting titles of the PS3's early life. Touting features like interactive cutscenes and flailing chain-blades, it may seem like developer Ninja Theory is trying to duplicate the success of God of War, but Heavenly Sword will provide its own version of over-the-top action. Several stances put different moves at your disposal, and a counter system allows you to turn the tables if you successfully block an attack. The game even looks like it might be as fun to watch as it is to play, since dazzling effects, flowing hair, and swirling death populate the screen at practically every moment. We can only imagine the flood of tawdry Kratos/Heavenly Sword Girl fanfiction that will spring up once this title releases early next year.



■ Yeah, yeah. We've heard the "Goddess of War" jokes. They weren't even funny the first time.

SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

## HEAVENLY SWORD



SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

GENJI:  
DAYS OF THE BLADE

Since E3, the Genji sequel has improved leaps and bounds in the visuals department. Sharp colors pop off the screen as the highly detailed characters move seamlessly through the world of the game. For fans of the first game, the biggest shift this time around will be the ability to switch between each of the four playable characters at will — a technique that will be most useful in taking down the multi-part boss fights that pop up. While both Yoshitsune and Benkei should be familiar to previous players, the addition of the female warrior Shizuka is a new development. She wields a strange hoop-like weapon to flay her enemies, pull them towards her, or even to navigate to areas other characters can't reach. A fourth character is also in the works, but not yet announced. The straightforward controls include three attack buttons and a jump, and the right stick is utilized for evading rather than the more traditional camera rotation — the verdict's still out on whether or not that's a good design decision. Regardless, the combat system looks extremely exciting, and we're totally stoked to dig in with the game for some massive damage.



SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

## WARHAWK

This PS3 re-imagining of the PSone shooter got a lot of buzz earlier this year at E3, since it was the only game that Sony had showing off the fancy new motion-sensing capabilities of its controller. Now several months later, the big story about this title coming out of TGS is the new details on the multiplayer feature set. While the maximum number of players hasn't been confirmed, the demo running at the show had 16 players duking it out in a team deathmatch mode. Unlike at E3, flying was only one small part of the new experience. Starting on foot, players could pick between other vehicles beyond the hoverjet such as tanks and Jeeps. Alternately, flamethrowers, rocket launchers, mines, and other weapons were scattered across maps and ready for pickup. The balancing of abilities between vehicles and on-foot players seems to be effective, and the frantic firefights that result from all the destructive combat are intense and explosive. If the full game delivers as much tight action as the multiplayer, Incognito could have a hit on its hands.



SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

## HOT SHOTS GOLF



This game is still in the thick of development, but that didn't stop Sony from showing a working demo of Clap Hanz's newest golfer at this year's TGS. So far, this Hot Shot is shaping up to be a solid offering for the franchise. Series standards like the multi-click swing meter and anime art style are already in place. While the scenery looks good and has a decent resolution, it is not quite what we would hope to see on the PlayStation 3. Fortunately, the developer has plenty of time to work that out, as no release date has yet been set.





SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

## AFRIKA

**D**id you know that hippos kill more people every year than lions? No? Then perhaps you should play *Afrika*, which, as near as we can tell, is some sort of game that involves animals. Seriously, we know next to nothing about this title. Obviously, it takes place in Africa, is completely non-violent (according to Sony), and probably comes on a disc that you'll insert into your PlayStation 3. Is it a safan simulator? An African animal photography simulator? We don't really know. We know that it has cheetahs, hyenas, and cute baby elephants in it. We also know that rhinos are cool and that if we could be any animal, it would be an otter. They may not be African, but they do cute human things with their hands.



SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

## MOTORSTORM

**S**ony's new dirt racer looks to be as much a test in durability as it is a trial in speed. Based on its TGS showing, one of *MotorStorm*'s most interesting features is its boost dynamic. Each time you use your nitro, the temperature gauge on your vehicle rises. The more you use this nitro the more effective it becomes, but use it too much and you run the risk of overheating the engine and destroying your vehicle.

There are at least three vehicle types: dune buggies, 4x4s, and dirt bikes. All three types have completely differently handling and physics. For example, the bikes seem to be the fastest but get knocked around easier and slide further, while the 4x4s generally handle well across all terrain but don't cover it as quickly.

Add to all this destructible vehicles, multiple paths, and tracks that degrade as the race progresses, slightly altering the path you might take to the finish line – and you have another title to be excited for come launch time, which is when developer Evolution Studios hopes to have this title ready.

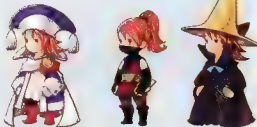


TECMO

## NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA

■ *Sigma* isn't a direct port since it will feature new content like Rachel as a playable character

**W**ell, there's good news and there's bad news, *Ninja Gaiden* fans. The good news is that there is a new *Ninja Gaiden* game on the way exclusively for PS3. The bad news is that you've played it before. Twice. *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* is a port of the original game, albeit a pretty sweet-looking one with beefed up graphics and new features. Ryu will now be able to dual wield swords (sweet!), demon hunter Rachel is now a playable character, and the game will sport new weapons and enemies. This unprecedented third version of *Ninja Gaiden* is being helmed by Yousuke Hayashi, a five-year veteran of Team Ninja. Studio head Tomonobu Itagaki is still focusing on Xbox 360 titles like *Dead or Alive Xtreme 2*. Which title you'd rather have says a lot about you as a person.

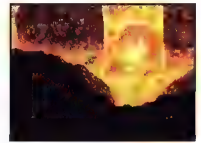
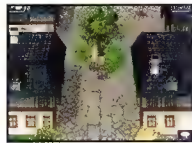
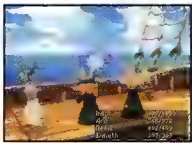


# 279,

POSSIBLE PARTY



FOUR SOULS SHALL BE BLESSED WITH LIGHT, AND SO IT SHALL BEGIN...



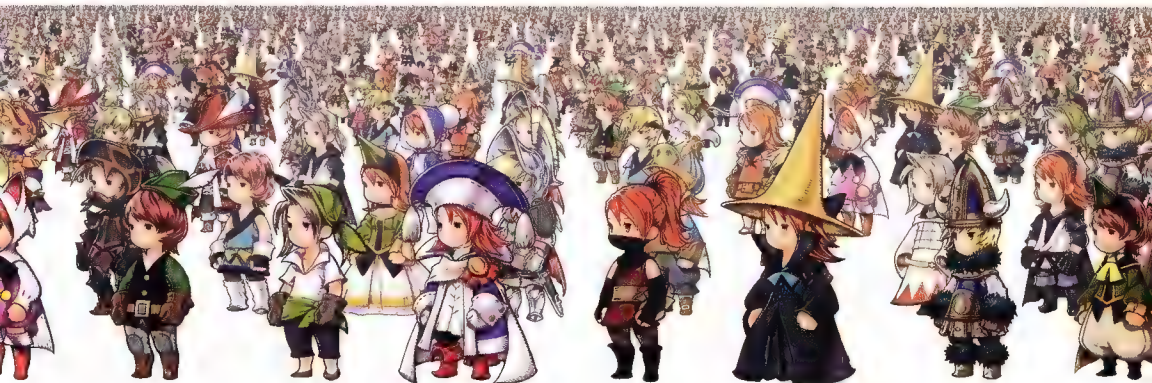
- A dynamic job system brings a nearly infinite number of party variations. Each character can assume any of 23 jobs found throughout the adventure.
- Enlist the aid of allies, providing guidance and added support in battle.
- Unlock hidden challenges and items, and message your friends using the Mognet wireless feature.

THE ONLY FINAL FANTASY NEVER BEFORE RELEASED IN AMERICA.

NOVEMBER 14, 2006

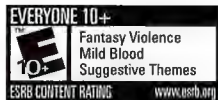
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CONFIGURATIONS



# FINAL FANTASY III

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## PlayStation 3

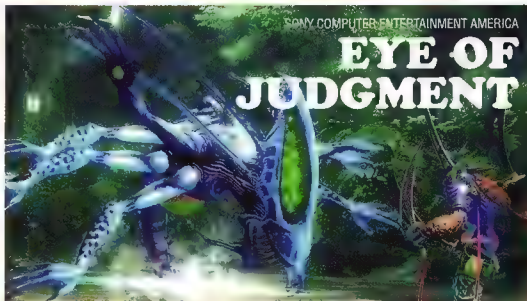
NAMCO BANDAI

# RIDGE RACER 7



There are now three levels of turbo to power through, a change that promises to totally revolutionize the racing genre. Do you believe us?

**S**ony is the first console manufacturer to coin a battle cry: "It's Ridge Racer! Riiiiiiiiidge Racer!" To ensure that all consumers continue saying it for years to come, Namco Bandai is gracing the PlayStation 3 launch with a new installment in the series. Ridge Racer 7 taps into the Cell processor to deliver the exact same gameplay that we've seen in every iteration. However, this is the first Ridge Racer to feature drafting, which is indicated through visual effects, but more so through a small meter below the turbo meter. Get into an opponent's slipstream and you'll gain additional speed that allows you to rocket by them. If you are playing online, make sure you honk as you fly by to truly insult your rival. Namco is also including three levels of turbo. To perform the third, you'll need to hold down both the L2 and R2 buttons. This version is also moving the series forward in terms of vehicular customization, allowing not only for the tweaking of cosmetics but performance as well. Just make sure to get to the store early for this one, because we hear that Kaz Hirai is abnormally enthusiastic about the series, and might just buy every copy on day one.



The whole game isn't spent looking at a square grid. Battles like these showcase the Eye of Judgment's graphical muscle.

**T**hose outlandish Saturday morning cartoons where kids summon monsters from cards are one step closer to becoming reality. Using the PS3 camera, players will scan physical cards, then watch the digital beasts materialize onscreen to do battle on a three-by-three grid. The gameplay will focus on strategic maneuvering with the goal of controlling five of the nine squares, and playing off of your enemies' weaknesses. Since the cards you own determine what you can summon in-game, there's also the chance we'll see this title manifest itself as a regular tabletop card game as well.



Locked up by the fashion police. Nice hat, doofus.

**T**he force behind Genji, developer Game Republic, is trying its hand at bringing an action/RPG to Sony's next-gen console (hopefully minus any giant enemy crabs). As a male or female character, the game pits you against a variety of fantastic beasts that, once defeated in battle, will be yours to summon at will. The way you capture the monsters puts the PS3 controller's tilt functionality to work; once the enemy is vulnerable, you can snare them with an energy beam that you must manipulate by physically moving the controller from side to side, eventually trapping your adversary. It reminds us a little bit of *Ghostbusters*, but with a much more beautiful setting — and with no Rick Moranis screwing things up.



## Editor's Choice Awards

— Official Xbox Magazine, PC Gamer, Computer Gaming World,  
IGN, GameSpot, Team Xbox, GameZone

“Superb...  
A remarkable achievement”

— GameSpot

“An Absolute Masterpiece”

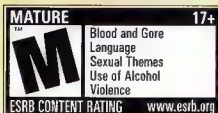
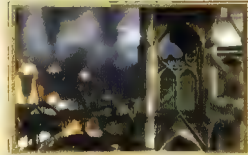
— Official Xbox Magazine

“If any game is worth the price  
of the PS3, Oblivion is it.”

— Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine, November 2006

# The Elder Scrolls IV OBLIVION

Coming November to PlayStation®3 computer entertainment system



PLAYSTATION 3



LIVE



**Bethesda**  
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## Xbox 360

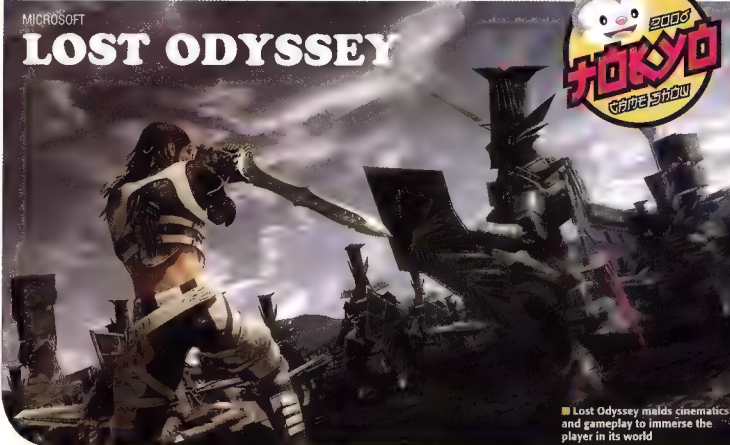


**A**s the first title to come out of Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi's Mistwalker studio, people have high expectations for Blue Dragon – and not just gamers.

Microsoft is counting on this title to be the bunker-buster that finally helps it penetrate the Japanese market. From what we've seen of this traditional RPG, that might not be a bad bet. The art of Akira Toriyama springs to life in the vibrant visuals and animation, and the turn-based fights use an interesting picture-in-picture feature that allows you to see your characters' actions up close in an inset while still witnessing the gorgeous effects on the larger battlefield. However, for the most impressive attacks gamers will still be treated to a lengthy full-screen cinema; we saw protagonist Shu's dragon form, normally tethered to his shadow, break free and unleash a Bahamut-like megafire attack that obliterated its target. Another point in the game's favor is the fact that enemy encounters are initiated by touching monsters in the environment, not through the random encounters that are commonly associated with Japanese RPGs. If you were concerned that the recent lack of information on Blue Dragon was a bad sign, you can stop worrying. It was apparently just being kept under wraps, as the game is nearly complete and still slated to hit its 2006 release date in Japan.



**T**ri-Ace has been on a hot streak lately with its work on the Valkyrie Profile series, and now the developer is taking its RPG skills to next generation with this Xbox 360 exclusive. While there are few details available about Infinite Undiscovery (apart from the fact that the name doesn't make any sense), we do know that it will utilize a real-time battle system similar to those used in Radiata Stories and Star Ocean. However, the screenshot seems to display several heroes encountering enemies in more discrete pockets of action, so there could be much more to combat than meets the eye. Given Tri-Ace's recent track record, we can't wait to find out more about this mysterious adventure.



**S**ince Lost Odyssey's announcement at E3 2005, Microsoft and Mistwalker have maintained a conspicuous silence regarding the game's finer points. However, that all changed with a stunning nine-minute presentation at TGS, rocketing this RPG through the ranks of our most anticipated games. Depicting a crowded and brutal battlefield, the demo seamlessly blends turn-based battles with cinematic CG sequences (which are also reportedly interactive to some degree), breaking down the walls between gameplay and cutscenes. The main character, an immortal warrior, cuts through several groups of armored foes with an effortless and acrobatic grace before being confronted with a gargantuan flame-throwing tank – which he also destroys. At that point, the sky literally falls on the warring armies, crushing them beneath a storm of rock and lava. If that doesn't get you excited to play this game, think about the fact that this scenario is just one of the many dramatic moments in the 1,000-year life of the game's protagonist, and that leaves a lot of free time for some very cool things. Lost Odyssey is vaguely scheduled for a 2007 Japanese release, and a U.S. version shouldn't be too far behind.



**ULTIMATE  
WEAPON**

## Xbox 360

XBOX 360 • KONAMI

# WINNING ELEVEN: PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2007

■ Reports of Winning Eleven being a 360 exclusive have been greatly exaggerated



**W**e didn't think that the Xbox 360 would be the system which would play host to the first next-gen version of Konami's storied series, but until the game appears on the PS3, Microsoft has the de facto exclusive. Luckily, this title seems to be more than just a port, as Konami has tried to imbue the AI with more intelligence on both offense and defense. Making use of what the game does best, players will more often try to run into spaces, allowing you to be more creative with through balls and passes into open areas. Apart from being more technically advanced than its predecessors, the game will also boast more official players and team info, including national teams like England, France, Italy, Argentina, and club sides such as Manchester United and Bayern Munich. Versions of Winning Eleven: Pro Evolution Soccer 2007 will also appear for PlayStation 2 and PC before the end of the year.



XBOX 360 • FROM SOFTWARE

## TENCHU SENTRAN

**F**rom Software recently released a demo of its new Tenchu game for the Xbox 360, titled Tenchu Senran. While the demo does showcase what we've come to expect from the series — slow-paced stealthy action, cool death animations, and dated graphics — it also demonstrates an interesting new feature for the franchise: a character creation system. This series has always held some promise, but has never been able to rise to the top of the action stealth pack. Let's hope From Software has enough time to freshen up this entry's camera and graphical issues before its Japanese release in early October. No word yet on when we can expect this title in the States.



■ If you've been hoping for a historical fantasy game starring the composer Chopin, your wait is over

XBOX 360 • NAMCO BANDAI

## ETERNAL SONATA

**C**onsidering that developer Tri-Crescendo got its start doing the music for Tri-Ace's RPGs, it should be no surprise that its upcoming Xbox 360 game, Eternal Sonata, has a strong musical emphasis. Known as *Trusty Bell: Chopin's Dream* in Japan, the game tells the story of the famous composer on his deathbed as he floats between life and afterlife. Most of the story will take place in the dreamworld, where Chopin meets a girl with a terminal illness and a boy determined to save her. The battle system will contain a mixture of turn-based and real-time elements, highlighted by an impressive visual style that seems to work well with the game's fantasy setting. A firm U.S. release date has yet to be determined, but we'll definitely be singing along to the tune of Eternal Sonata sometime next year.



XBOX 360 • NAMCO BANDAI

## CULDECEPT SAGA

**A** fusion of card and board games, Culdecept may not be immediately familiar to American gamers. However, this intriguing series has a pretty dedicated following in Japan, and the fact that Namco Bandai is bringing it to the 360 is another indication of Microsoft's desire to gain market share in that region. After all, you can only show video of Blue Dragon and Lost Odyssey so many times before they start to lose impact. We did get a Culdecept game on the PS2 back in 2003, but whether the 360 version will see U.S. shores remains to be seen.





**ULTIMATE  
STRENGTH**



## Multi

**F**atal Inertia represents some new steps for publisher/developer Koei. Not only is the game using an outside engine (Unreal Engine 3), it's also being done by the company's new studio in Toronto. Although it will be a launch title, Fatal Inertia wasn't playable at TGS, but instead made an appearance via a trailer. The game puts a focus on physics, and that is evident in the weapons used in the futuristic racer. You can attach magnets to other racers, weighing their wings down or even using them to attract two different vehicles to each other. Rockets don't blast holes through an opponents' fuselage, but instead send your foes spinning out of control. Force blasts also can be employed to disrupt your competitors. As fun as the video seemed, the one thing it did expose about Fatal Inertia is that its sense of speed won't blow you away — far from the norm of other futuristic racers in the genre.



■ Koei says: that the game isn't just about crossing the finish line first; it's also about the weapons you use during a race



WII • KOEI

## SENGOKU MUSOU WAVE

(Dynasty Warriors)

**A**fter years of the same-old-same-old, there finally might be something new to talk about regarding the Dynasty Warriors franchise (known as Sengoku Musou in Japan). Publisher/developer Koei has announced Sengoku Musou Wave for the Wii. Although it's still focused on mindless hack 'n' slash, the game embraces the Wii's controller and has switched to the first-person view to accommodate it. Unfortunately, Koei isn't giving away when the game is coming to America or details such as online or multiplayer, but hopefully we should have that info soon.



XBOX 360 • MICROSOFT

## FUZION FRENZY 2

**A** game like Fuzion Frenzy can only grace each console generation once. We'll leave it up to you to determine why. This next-gen sequel to the relatively unheralded Xbox title has lost none of its minigame flavor. In fact, it looks exactly like the original game, which was available for the original Xbox on launch day. Developed by Hudson and published by Microsoft, Fuzion Frenzy 2 will offer 40 different minigames, online play, and promises to be the only Xbox 360 game that allows players to slam dunk basketballs on alien worlds. If this game goes over well, maybe we'll see a sequel to Azurik as well.



■ Is there a word to describe people who are attracted to robots? We were just curious

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 • SEGA

## ARMORED CORE 4

**A**rmored Core 4? Didn't From Software release at least 20 of these games for PlayStation 2? Regardless of what number this installment truly is (we think it's 23), Armored Core is making the leap to the next-generation with its guns blazing. While the game wasn't playable at TGS, we were able to watch an impressive video that showed off massive scale battles, impressively detailed ruined cityscapes, and explosive particle effects that kick the mech battles into overdrive. Armored Core 4 is slated for a November release in Japan, and will come stateside next spring courtesy of publisher Sega.



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## DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

## CIVILIZATION AS WE KNOW IT

Well, almost. 2K games is re-releasing nearly every Civilization title in the PC series. Sid Meier's Civilization Chronicles will hit the streets this October for \$69.99. Included in the package is Civilization, Civ II, Civ II: Fantastic Worlds, Civ II: Conflicts in Civilization, Civ II: Test of Time, Civ III, Civ III: Play the World, Civ III: Conquests, and Civ IV. Apart from the bounty of games, the box set contains a card game, the book *The Chronicles of Civilization*, and a DVD.



## VIVENDI TAKES ON DOUBLE FINE

Double Fine's extra fine title Psychonauts didn't sell for crap, but that's not stopping Vivendi from hooking up with the studio for its next title. Of course, Psychonauts had Mageico behind it, which probably wasn't a big help. Expect Vivendi to put a little more muscle behind Tim Schafer and company's next product.

## Double Fine's Psychonauts



## HEROES FROM MEDAL OF HONOR'S PAST

While we wait for the next-gen Medal of Honor Airborne title, EA is giving us Medal of Honor Heroes on the PS2 at the end of October. The game gives you 15 single-player missions where you'll play as series heroes Lt. Jimmy Patterson, Sgt. John Baker, and Lt. William Holt. The game's multiplayer component features six modes and accommodates 32-player action if you have a PC to host the downloadable server program.



## XBOX 360 PLATINUM HITS

Microsoft has announced its inaugural Platinum Hits lineup for the Xbox 360 which includes Kameo, Perfect Dark Zero, Project Gotham Racing 3, and Need for Speed Most Wanted. Each title in the series will be priced at \$29.99.



## NEWS

# PS3 LAUNCH NUMBERS AXED

## UNDER HALF A MILLION FOR NORTH AMERICA

Due to the slowed production schedule of PlayStation 3's Blu-ray optical disc drive, Sony has announced that only 400,000 units of the system will be available for launch on November 17. The company says that it expects to have over a million consoles by the end of the year, and despite this slow start, is sticking by its target number of having six million PS3 units in stores worldwide by March. Due to this launch shortage, Japan will only see 100,000 units on November 11. Europe and other PAL territories have had their launch pushed back until an undisclosed date in March.

In a rare moment of weakness, PS3 creator Ken Kutaragi told Reuters, "I feel sorry. I think there are so many people out there who hold such high expectations for PS3." Kutaragi even acknowledged that this launch shortage might even open the door for competitors Microsoft and Nintendo. "If you asked me if Sony's strength in hardware was in decline, right now I guess I would have to say that might be true."

Sony is not saying what percentages of its shipments will be broken up between the \$499 (20 GB hard drive) and \$599 (60GB) models, although Lazard Capital Markets analyst Colin Sebastian believes that 80 percent of the units shipped will be the \$599 model. In an interview with Game Informer, Sebastian said that this allocation had nothing to do with manufacturing, but simply Sony's marketing and the goals of retail stores. "My impression from the retail channel is that the 60 GB SKU is going to be in much higher demand than the other one."

Despite Sebastian's belief that the 60GB PS3 will rule retail, Sony is bolstering the attractiveness of its lower-end 20 GB model by including an HDMI output. Given that all that distinguishes the two models is a larger hard drive and Wi-Fi, it's realistic to think of the \$500 PS3 as a feasible console to own. Contrast this with Xbox 360's Core pack, which was a watered-down version of the 360 to the point of being irrelevant.

Nobody wants to hear that they will have to endure long lines and scarce stock when it comes to a platform launch, but then again, nobody should be surprised by it either. Microsoft released the 360 with an estimated 400,000 units last November, and sold under a million of the system by year's end. If Sony can meet its end-of-2006 goal of shipping over a million units, it will be following the same curve as Microsoft. Of course, the PS2 started with similar meager numbers at its North American launch in 2000, and has gone on to sell phenomenally. Sebastian, who wasn't surprised by the announcement, believes that Sony will hit their year-end ship forecast and sell out of all its units.

Despite the fact that the PlayStation 3 launch numbers are not historically low, the possibility still exists that Nintendo and Microsoft will gain market share on Sony this round. Not only is Microsoft already ahead in the installed base for the Xbox 360 to the tune of approximately over six million units worldwide, but if the PlayStation 3 sells out this holiday season it's a good bet that consumers may turn to the Xbox 360 or Nintendo Wii instead. The latter could pick up some dropped sales particularly due to its \$250 price point. Sebastian expects Nintendo to sell out of all its Wii stock this holiday season. The company says it expects to ship four million units of the system worldwide at launch and have more than 400,000 systems when it debuts on November 19.

One factor that might help Microsoft is software. Sebastian says that games like *Gears of War* "can help move hardware units," and adds that the lack of PS3 numbers could have an impact on software development for the console because publishers instinctively migrate to the system with the largest market share.



## GI OPINION




People like to watch the mighty stumble. While this announcement is a sobering break from Sony's recent boasting and chest-puffing, it is not the behavior of a doomed company as Microsoft and Nintendo fanboys would have you believe. To me, this cutback only shows that Sony is finally floating down to earth from its insular dreamland and giving us a realistic (and perfectly acceptable) estimate of the quantity of PS3s that will be on store shelves. —JDE

# Tired of waiting for your character?



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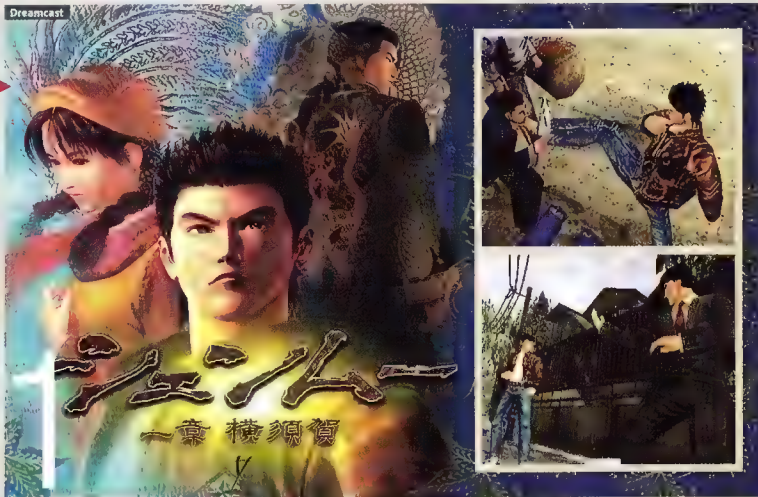
# the top 10 cult classics of the 21st century

The games that are remembered in every console generation aren't necessarily the ones that sold the most or scored the highest. Recent years have seen several titles that have made crucial and lasting contributions to art of game design, yet their releases have gone largely unnoticed by the gaming public. Of course, there have been examples of this throughout the industry's history, but this list chronicles just those released in the past six years — cult classics that may have been lost in the shuffle, but with dedicated fans to ensure they are never forgotten.

THE GREATEST GAMES YOU HAVEN'T PLAYED

## Shenmue

If you doubt Shenmue's right to top this list, try shouting "Shenmue 3 isn't coming!" in a crowd of gamers. When you wake up in your hospital bed, maybe you'll realize why this game has such a rabid following. Set in Japan in 1986, the story follows Ryo Hazuki, and showcases a unique blend of storytelling and combat. Especially interesting were the Quick Time Events (QTE) that worked timed button-press minigames into a variety of scenarios. It's kind of an RPG, kind of an action game, and has a riveting story that legions of fans are still patiently waiting to see concluded.



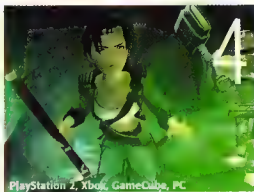
## ICO

ICO is probably the best-known underground game out there. While the puzzle solving and exploration make up the core of the gameplay, the connection players forged with the young protagonist and his female companion was ICO's most endearing quality. You need to have a heart made of cold, cold granite to not be moved by this game's closing sequences.



## Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem

Eternal Darkness can convince you you're crazy. Though it may be best remembered for intentionally messing with gamers' heads (like giving the blue screen of death or saying the controller wasn't plugged in), this action/horror title's story was also innovative in the way it followed several characters over centuries, all tied to their interactions with an ancient book.



## Beyond Good & Evil

Talking about how awesome Beyond Good & Evil is acts like a kind of secret gamer handshake to show others you're "in the club." Don't be fooled by a few cartoony visuals — this is a smart action/adventure title that isn't afraid to deal with social issues. Critics loved it, gamers loved it, but for some reason, hardly anyone bought it. Now that's real evil.

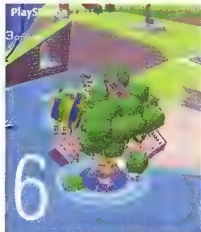


## Amplitude

The video game guitar craze may be in full swing, but Harmonix used Amplitude to fine-tune many of the elements that gamered Guitar Hero swarms of screaming fans. With a great soundtrack, tight controls, and four-player multiplayer (on or offline), this is the rhythm game to play if you're not into gimmick controllers.



# Killer 7 is more like an experiment than a game



## Katamari Damacy

As the game that brought quirk to the masses, Katamari Damacy earned its following with infectious music, colorful visuals, and bizarre dialogue. Its unique dual-analog control was surprisingly intuitive, and had many gamers swaying and leaning into turns for the first time in years. Appealing to gamers of all sorts, Katamari Damacy is a true gaming underdog story.



## Psychonauts

Humor isn't necessarily a high priority for games these days, but it's exactly what made Psychonauts rise above its platforming peers. A cast of captivating oddballs mixed with a distinct and abstract art style breathed life into the hilarious writing, and the gameplay incorporated new elements into the classic genre. Though beloved in gaming circles, this one may have just been too weird for the mainstream.



## Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge

If Indiana Jones flew a futuristic bi-plane and shot down giant mechanical spiders, he would be in this game. Fantastic setting aside, online gamers flocked to Crimson Skies' aenal combat on Xbox Live, where it was one of the most popular games. It may have fallen off the radar since, but the fanbase it gained during its glory days is still clamoring for a sequel.



## EVE Online

Known to some mainly for its players' tendency to scam each other, this MMO is incredibly free-form, allowing players to actually have an impact on the virtual galaxy. Whether you want to form a stellar corporation or just resort to space piracy, EVE Online has proven to be a haven for the hardcore who want to succeed without being hassled by The Man.



## Killer 7

Killer 7 is more like an experiment than a game, but it is an experience that gamers should try nonetheless. It feels like an art project, plays like a shooter, and is so full of obtuse references that the game's devotees are probably so fanatical because they're still trying to make sense of it. Don't forget, God and the pigeon are one.



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## THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



### GOOD

Despite attempts by Sony president Kaz Hirai to scare gamers into thinking otherwise (see issue 161), Activision recently stated that its PlayStation 3 games would hold the line on next-gen pricing by hitting retail at the \$59.99 price point.

Next-gen games like Activision's Tony Hawk's Project 8 will thankfully be \$59.99



### GOOD/BAD

Apple is now offering game downloads for those of you who have fifth-generation or later iPods. Tetris, Pac-Man, Zuma, Bejeweled, and more are available for \$4.99. Some games play better than others, so beware.



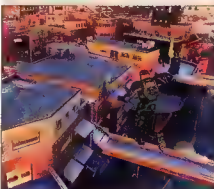
### GOOD

It's no longer all in the mind. It's now going to be all on the PSP! PaRappa the Rappa fans can rejoice with the news that the P-Scene music game is being ported over to the PSP in Japan. Unfortunately, there is no news at the moment about the title coming over to the U.S., but we certainly hope it happens.



### UGLY?

It could be, as EA's newly announced skating game tries to topple the tried-and-true king of the sport: Activision's Tony Hawk franchise. The press release for Skate even takes a dig at Hawk by saying that "Skate won't use the 'typical button mashing gameplay of past skating games.'" The battle could produce two good skateboarding series, or we could see EA get thrashed trying to snake the master.



### UGLY

Once Crackdown was a spring 2006 title, and now the game has again been delayed – this time until 2007. That makes the game a whole year late to the party.

### UGLY

Microsoft is only now admitting that its initial batch of Xbox 360s were defective (yeah, that red semicircle of death is not normal). At least, however, the company is offering complimentary repairs for those afflicted systems made before January 1, 2006, as well as providing refunds for those who've already paid for them. Call 1-800-4MY-XBOX for more.



### GOOD

Only punches in the face seem to come for free these days – unless you're talking about the new Prey download available on Xbox Live and for your PC. 2K Games and developer Human Head Studios are giving you six new characters and four new maps all for nothing. Although the company won't say when the download is coming out, you should still say "thank you."

### GOOD

BioWare is known for its highbrow PC/RPG titles, but the Canadian developer is spreading its wings onto the Nintendo DS for an unnamed, unannounced project which the company has just started hiring for.

news

# XBOX 360 HD DVD FOR \$199

## UNIT COMES IN BUNDLE

The inclusion of an HD DVD player with the Xbox 360, or lack thereof, has been a thorn in the side of the system since even before it was released. Some questioned Microsoft's decision to use the conventional DVD format for its games versus the increased capacity inherent in Sony's decision to use the next-generation Blu-ray format. Regardless, Microsoft is at least allowing those wanting to watch HD DVD movies with their Xbox 360 thanks to a HD DVD peripheral scheduled to appear in early November for \$199.

Game Informer talked to Albert Penello, director of platform marketing, who firmly refuted any rumors that the player could be used for games. Penello told us unequivocally that Microsoft will not release two copies of a game – one that utilizes the HD DVD format and one that doesn't. The Xbox 360 HD DVD is being used strictly for movies.

The player will come packed with the extended cut of *King Kong*, an updated Universal Media Remote, a USB cable for hook up with your 360, and a power supply. Despite Microsoft's recent kick of swappable accessories between the 360 and your PC, the HD DVD player cannot be hooked up to your PC. The housing of the player itself comes with two USB ports, so if you plug in the player to your 360, you can still connect the 360 wireless adapter and Vision Camera, for example, without losing any USB ports.



Because the Xbox 360 does not support an HDMI output and the HD DVD player hooks up to your console via USB, the movies you watch on the player cannot utilize this high-definition connection. Conversely, Sony's PS3 system with its built-in Blu-ray drive does have an HDMI output





# GEARS OF WAR

## EMERGENCY DAY 11.12.06

MATURE 17+  
**M**  
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB  
Blood and Gore  
Intense Violence  
Strong Language



Microsoft  
game studios

XBOX  
LIVE

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Jump In.

 XBOX 360



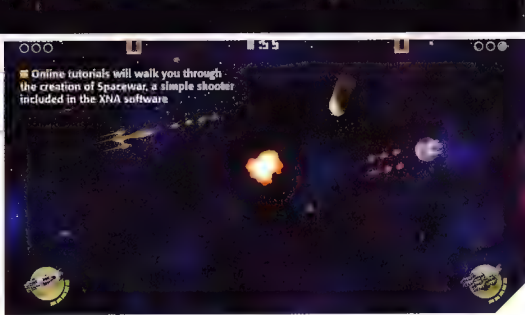
# SPACEWAR

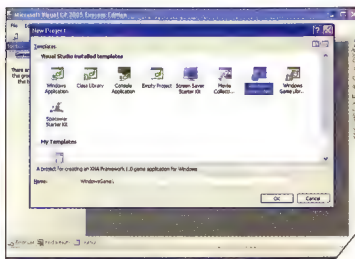
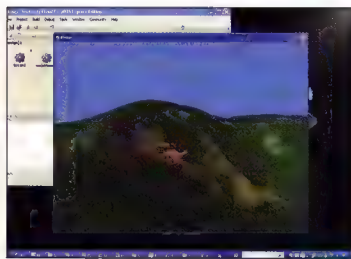
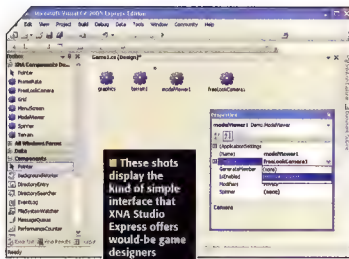


-  RETRO
-  EVOLVED
-  INFO

## MAKE YOUR OWN DAMN GAME!

### XNA STUDIO EXPRESS BRINGS DEVELOPMENT TO THE MASSES





“I have a great idea for a game...” It’s a sentiment that countless gamers have expressed throughout the years, but relatively few have followed through on. As

games have become more and more complex through the console generations, it has become harder and harder for fans to become creators. Even most PC mods require at least some knowledge of computer programming, which puts them out of reach of many fans. But Microsoft hopes that is all about to change, thanks to XNA Studio Express.

Many of our readers have heard of XNA — the tool set released by Microsoft intended to streamline development for PC and Xbox 360 games. Recently, the company announced XNA Studio Express, which is intended to be an easy-to-use game creator that anyone can learn — and it can be obtained for free.

Anything involving technical issues can be confusing, so to get to the bottom of XNA Studio Express, we spoke with Chris Satchell, general manager of Microsoft’s Game Developer Group. According to Satchell, Microsoft’s goal with the software is to “democratize game development” by putting simple tools in the hands of people with good ideas. “We’re opening up the console to anybody who wants to create,” he says. But is XNA Studio Express easy enough to use and understand that people with no programming experience can produce something playable? According to Satchell, it is. Studio Express is built around a simple interface using largely mouse clicks and drop down menus. Not only was Studio Express created with usability in mind, but the beta release of the software quickly spawned an online culture that has helped to lower the accessibility bar even further. One week after launching the beta version of Studio Express, there were 13 community sites online devoted to the software, which had produced 27 tutorials to help new users get started with game creation. One finished game was even reported 24 hours after the beta launched.

Included with the software are “starter kits” for games like Space War, which are almost like model kits for games: By following a tutorial and using the art assets provided, anyone can produce a working version of the game Space War, a simple shooter. Players can then tweak and alter the game to make their version unique. However, these simple little games aren’t

what most would-be designers are ultimately shooting for, and Microsoft is aware of that. The publisher has partnered with Garage Games, creators of the Xbox Live Arcade game

#### XNA GOES TO SCHOOL

According to Chris Satchell, about 20 universities have pledged to use XNA Studio Express in their curricula, including the University of Southern California, Southern Methodist University, and more. What’s more, Microsoft announced during the Tokyo Game Show that Pac-Man creator Toru Iwatani would teach with the software at Tokyo Polytechnic University, and is considering creating starter kits for the software.

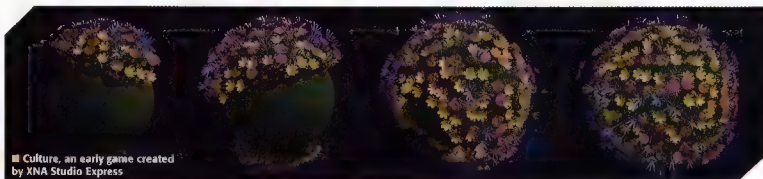
Marble Blast Ultra, to ensure that XNA Studio Express is fully compatible with the small developer’s Torque Game Builder and Torque Shader Engine, two pieces of software that add further user-friendly game creation tools.

XNA Studio Express will allow you to create games that are playable on your Xbox 360, albeit for a price. While the basic XNA software is free, you can only create 360 games if you join the XNA Creator’s Club, which will have an annu-

limited by how good is your art team, how good are your programmers?

Ultimately, members of the XNA Creator’s Club will be able to share their games via an upcoming new addition to Xbox Live. While Satchell stated that the details are still being worked out, he outlined a vague plan for us, in which user-made games would be downloadable through a separate section of Xbox Live Arcade. He also hoped this new Live feature would be complete with accoutrements like leaderboards, which would display what user-created game was the most popular. Not only does Satchell hope that this new feature earns the Xbox 360 a reputation as the system that empowers players to create their own games, but hopes that developers look to the user-created content as a way to find potential eplayers.

Clearly, Microsoft has big goals with XNA Studio Express. If the software turns out to be as easy to use for everyone as the company expects, then we could see a slew of brilliant games coming our way from small teams or even individuals. But if it is too complex for most, it may not find a wider user base. Or, Xbox Live could even be deluged with a flood of boring, uncreative, or even unplayable games. Only time will tell what the results of the grand XNA experiment will be, but the bottom line is that it will all come down to those who believe that their game concept is worth making. ■■■



■ Culture, an early game created by XNA Studio Express

al fee of \$99. The membership is not needed to get your game running on a PC, though. Anyone with a Creator’s Club membership will be able to play their creation on their 360 by networking it with their PC. But that’s far from the only advantage membership in the club has, according to Satchell. The club will also offer components that can be integrated into your game design, such as premade art

assets. Starter kits will also be offered, such as a first-person shooter kit, which will provide players with everything that they need to make a basic FPS, which they can then give their own personal touch. According to Satchell, the limits of what Studio Express can produce are defined by the people working with it. “It can do pretty much anything,” he says. “There isn’t an upper limit. I

think it would be challenging to match something like Gears of War, because those guys are so talented. But it’s really

#### XNA ONLINE

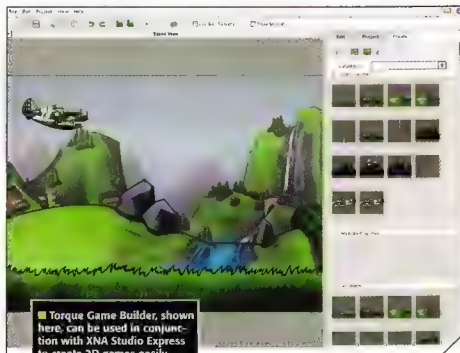
Here is a list of a few of the XNA sites that have already cropped up online. Many offer tutorials to help you get started.

- <http://www.thebuffer.com/>
- <http://learnms.com/default.aspx>
- <http://enaspq.com/>
- <http://kbasoft.com/betweem.com/>
- <http://xdream.no-ip.info/blog/>
- <http://www.ziggyware.com/>
- <http://www.xnadevelopment.com>
- <http://www.xnatutorial.com/>
- <http://www.thetechymind.com/XNAEngine.htm>
- <http://jillaweston4.com/teinoia/>

The XNA Studio Express beta program can be downloaded at: <http://msdn.microsoft.com/directx/mag/ps/>



■ Pocket Jongg is a Mah-Jongg game powered by XNA



■ Torque Game Builder, shown here, can be used in conjunction with XNA Studio Express to create 2D games easily



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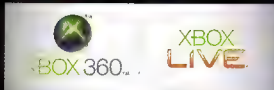


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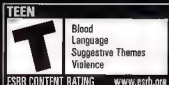
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## LOOSE TALK

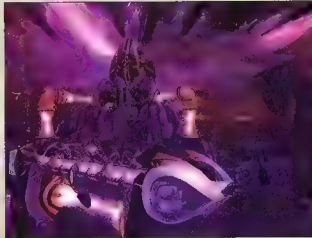
## Hot Gaming Gossip

HEAVENLY  
SWORD  
SHEATHED

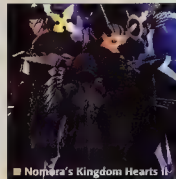
Sony's first-party PS3 title Heavenly Sword made a big impression at this year's E3 and at TGS, but the company—and gamers—will have to wait a little longer to reap the rewards of this hype. Loose Talk has heard that the game is being delayed until March, meaning the PS3 now has one less solid-looking game in its launch window.

CRUSADE  
COMING IN  
NOVEMBER

The burning question for all World of Warcraft fans out there is "When is Burning Crusade coming out?" The answer to that is late November. Now if you'll excuse us, we're going back to gifting lovebirds outside of Theramore.

NO FORZA  
THIS FALL

There's been a lot of talk from multiple sources that Microsoft's Forza Motorsports 2 is not going to make its original late fall launch. Although we'd love it if it made an appearance before the end of the year, word is that the game won't be hitting the track until 2007.



## NOMURA'S NEW PAIR

Kingdom Hearts' director and character designer Tetsuya Nomura is a busy Square Enix bee. Not only is he heading up it's a Wonderful World for the Nintendo DS, but he is also making a foray into the wireless market with a title called Monotone. Although it may seem like this is just some Japan-only side project, remember that Square Enix has already showed ambitions in the U.S. cell phone gaming market.

Get some insider info? Email us at [loosetalk@gamelformer.com](mailto:loosetalk@gamelformer.com) and we'll be all ears.

## NAME THAT GAME

## Test Your Sight

Taking Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest characters and putting them together for the first time sounds like an RPG nerd's dream come true...unless, of course it's for the PS2 board game. Only released in Japan, the title even received a PSP spin-off. Originally created by Dragon Quest designer Yuji Hori, this title puts our beloved characters through traditional board games so they can make as much cash as possible. You don't say.

(Never on page 64)



NEWS

UBISOFT TITLES  
EXPOSED!

## UPCOMING PROJECTS LEAKED?

A slew of future Ubisoft titles were revealed online when a massive file of assets was mistakenly put up on the company's public FTP site. Far Cry 2, Far Cry Wii, Naruto 360, Prince of Persia 4, Splinter Cell: Conviction, Star Wars PSP, Shaun White Snowboarding, and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were among the titles revealed by this mistake. Ubisoft acknowledged the leak in a statement saying, "We are still investigating the events that led to this information leak and at this time have no further comment." However, this is no small matter to the company, who acknowledged that the info could have other implications. "The publication of this type of information can only be harmful to the game development process..."

Release dates for many of these projects are unknown at this time.

- Far Cry 2
- Far Cry PSP
- Far Cry Wii
- Lost
- Naruto 360
- Open Season
- Prince of Persia 4
- Rocky PSP
- Shaun White Snowboarding
- Splinter Cell: Conviction
- Star Wars PSP
- Surf's Up
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles GBA



# RAYMAN

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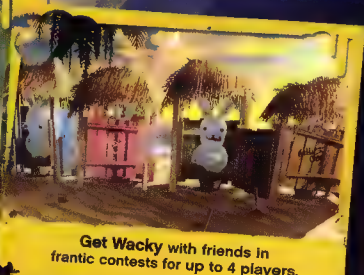
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# Anatomy of a Game: Gears of War

Game designers, like any artists, are invariably influenced by many sources when crafting their epic projects. Good designers recognize what they like in games, and ideally create a finished product that they want to play. But it's not just other games that inspire designers; it can be many things, be it movies, travel, or sports. To get a sense of what influences can affect a game maker, we spoke with Epic Games' Cliff Bleszinski, the lead designer behind the upcoming mega-title *Gears of War*, to learn what sources he looked to in creating its world.

## THE HALO CONNECTION

Obviously, any big shooter published by Microsoft will draw comparisons to the Halo games, and Bleszinski isn't shy about acknowledging what those games did right. Not only does *Gears* draw on Halo's pacing, but also the checkpoint system and the controls. Bleszinski states that the control scheme is fairly close to Halo's, as there is no point to changing a control scheme that works well and is well-known by gamers everywhere.

## NEGATIVE SPACE

While Bleszinski cites several examples of influences that added something to the *Gears of War* formula, he admits that several titles stood as examples of what he and his team didn't want to include in the game. "*Gears of War* is not just taking features we like in other games and saying 'hey that's kind of cool.' It's also looking at what we don't like in games," says Bleszinski. "It's looking at the negative space. I don't like replaying the same section over and over. Why do I even need a jump button in a game like this? How did this legacy feature from platformers come over to drive a whole genre? If you're getting shot at, the last thing you'd want to do is raise your head up higher. The existence of jump completely contradicts the fact that it's hard to aim up and down on a console."

Speaking on the subject of the *Gears*' pacing, Bleszinski says "I wanted the inverse of *Splinter Cell*. I'm tired of creeping around in the dark." On the subject of in-game training, Bleszinski compares *Gears* to both *Half-Life 2* and *Halo*, without being exactly like either. He also takes a shot at another, unnamed game, that many players will recognize as *Call of Duty 2*: "I've always hated the whole 'sit there and be yelled at by a drill sergeant, not shooting real guys, and throw potatoes in a basket kind of training.'"





## PACING

One aspect of *Gears of War* that draws on *Resident Evil 4* is the pacing. Bleszinski explains that a good game always makes you quit doing something while it is still fun and gives you something else for a while, so you're excited to go back to the core gameplay. "RE 4 had such a good mix of little palate-cleanser moments, where one minute you're on a jet ski, the next minute you're back in the action." The designer also cites *Halo* and *Halo 2* as games that understood this concept. "Right when you're having fun shooting guys, you get a vehicle. Then you're having a blast driving the vehicle, but then you're back to shooting. You have your core anchor, deviate from it, then come back to it. That's good pacing in my opinion."

## THE CAMERA

Bleszinski has never been shy about his admiration for *Resident Evil 4*, and its effect is clear on the look of *Gears of War*. "The first thing is offsetting the character in third-person," says Bleszinski. Not only does this give the player a clearer view of your target than a standard third-person action game (which typically has the character in the center of the screen), but it also highlights the detail of the Marcus Fenix character model by bringing him in closer. "It doesn't matter how next-gen your graphics are if you don't see them," says Bleszinski. "It's not an accident that in *Gears* you have to pull the left trigger to zoom in, so you can look around at the pretty freakin' graphics and get a Pavlovian response of 'ooh, if I zoom in, I get to see pretty stuff up close!'"



## THE WORLD

While he admits that certain elements of *Gears* were inspired by movies, Bleszinski feels that developers have to look to more significant experiences for ideas. Serra, the world of *Gears*, was inspired by a trip Bleszinski took to London. "I was at the top of St. Paul's cathedral, and the sun was setting. That's where some of the feel comes from. That's what we need to look to." The look of the world has a definite European flair, and the thought of London's architecture being damaged is what led Bleszinski to the theme of "destroyed beauty" that is prevalent in *Gears*. "The collateral damage of mankind's greatest structures going to hell is such a shame," he explains.





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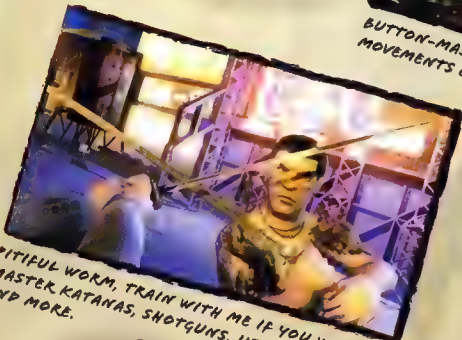
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MOVEMENTS EXPERTLY OR BLEED PROFUSELY.



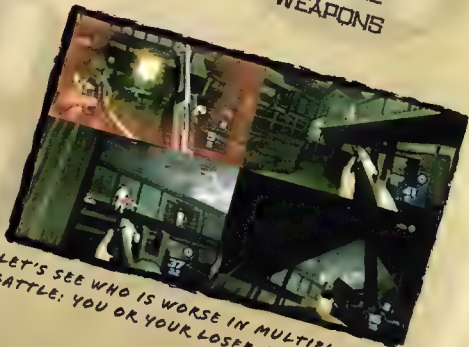
PITIFUL WORM, TRAIN WITH ME IF YOU WISH TO  
MASTER KATANAS, SHOTGUNS, UZI'S, REVOLVERS  
AND MORE.



⊕  
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WEAPONS



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HEAD



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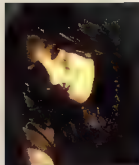
## TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

## DEVELOPER

CHRIS STOCKMAN  
Design Director,  
Saint's Row

## READER

CHRISTINA  
SANTIAGO  
Hollywood, Florida

- 1 StarCraft - PC
- 2 Tetris - Arcade
- 3 ICO - PS2
- 4 Super Mario 64 - N64
- 5 Resident Evil 4 - GameCube

- 1 Resident Evil 4 - PS2
- 2 Parasite Eve - PS2
- 3 Manhunt - PS2
- 4 GTA: Vice City - PS2
- 5 Tetris Attack - SNES

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(attach digital picture)

## TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

## Top Ten Least Popular Cosplay Outfits at TGS

- 10 Bearded Yoda
- 9 The yellow cube from Adventure
- 8 Krang, Remember Krang?
- 7 SephiroboCop
- 6 France
- 5 Geisty Geisterson  
(or whoever that tool from Geist was)
- 4 Obi-Wan Shinobi
- 3 Naked Raiden
- 2 Raiden
- 1 J Allard

Name That Game Answer: Dragon Quest & Final Fantasy in  
Itadaki Street Special



games

CODEMASTERS  
RE-IMAGINES  
WWII

"WHAT IF THE NAZIS WON?"

In 1931, Winston Churchill was crossing 5th Avenue when some idiot hit him with his taxi. Luckily the British bulldog lived so he could lead his people out of the darkness of the Nazi threat. But Codemasters and developer Spark are proposing that if history had gone slightly different, and Churchill had actually died that day, then their next-gen/PC game Fall of Liberty would be the resulting alternate history.

In Fall of Liberty's world, because England wasn't a bulwark against Hitler in Europe, the continent fell and the invasion of Normandy never occurred. Nazi power grows uncontested, and on December 7, 1951 they launch a surprise invasion of New York. In order to stop the fall of the free world in this FPS, you must join the guerrilla resistance and fight the Nazi menace on U.S. soil when the game releases late next year.

news

NAVIGATING THE PS3  
PS3 INTERFACE AND OTHER DETAILS REVEALED

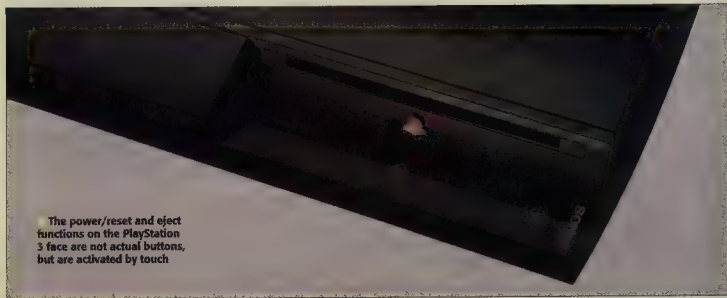
Tokyo Game Show might have been relatively light on new PlayStation 3 info, but after Ken Kutaragi's keynote address, Sony worldwide studios head Phil Harrison surprised the audience with a demonstration of the system's interface, which he called a work in progress. Harrison said that like the PSP's interface, the PS3 would receive updates after its release.

The interface is similar to the media cross bar that is used in the PSP. As you scroll across the bar you'll see tabs for things like your System settings (including everything from your A/V settings to accommodating multiple users on the same PS3), Music, Games (where your downloaded content will show up and you'll manage saves), and Videos (where you'll access Blu-ray and regular DVDs).

Other tabs on the media bar showed off some of the console's features. The Photo section gives you different ways to view your snapshots, including varying slideshow presentation formats. Friends can be called up with the Friends tab, where you can text chat (with or without a USB keyboard), as well as talk with them over a voice or video peripheral.

You can also see what's going on in the world via the PS3 menu's Network section. During the demo, Harrison brought up several web pages and showed the console's ability to minimize them into thumbnails or view them at full screen size. In this section you'll also be able to interface with your PSP. As for downloadable games, Sony told us that the company plans to have a selection of titles available on day one, including the Internet flash game Flow.

We also uncovered some other info about the console. Sony is planning to have some sort of system similar to Xbox 360's Gamer Achievements, although we've been told that they won't be available until after launch. It is unknown at this time if launch games will simply be without this feature, or if there's a way to patch them later so this function is enabled after the fact.




The power/reset and eject functions on the PlayStation 3 face are not actual buttons, but are activated by touch

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THE ART OF

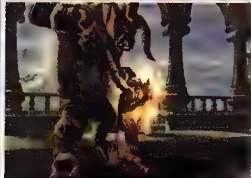
# GOD OF WAR

**CHARLIE WEN — VISUAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR FOR GOD OF WAR ■**

SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA, SANTA MONICA STUDIO



UNLIMITED ENABLED



We love the artistic style that fills the screens of the approaching *God of War II*, so this month we talked with Charlie Wen, one of the many artists working to craft the visual style of the game. Not only did he design this gorgeous piece of art that graces these pages especially for us, but he took some time out of his day to talk about his work on the project. To see the full interview, check out this month's *Unlimited* section online.

**What's your role on the *God of War II* art team? What is the process like of working together within a team to create an artistic look for the game?**

My role on the *God of War II* project is as Visual Development Director. A part of my time is spent with other concept artists, and sometimes modelers, talking about or going over work together to make sure the concept is consistent with *God of War*, or the model is consistent with the approved concept. Another part of the time, especially in the beginning to middle part of our project, was adjusting our visual development process to accommodate the game director. Along with my teammates, I was constantly trying to find new processes that could allow the game director (who has final say on all aspects of the creative process) as many choices as possible. Since we didn't have a firm schedule for concepts, it was a challenge coming up with ways to give concept options, maintain quality control and visual consistency, and meet real production needs for the project without the safety net of a firm schedule. This was a task larger than me alone, so much of my time is spent meeting with our lead artist Ken Roy (who schedules the production needs for our art team) to try our best to get concepts out to the rest of the art team efficiently and timely. This process includes so many different people on all aspects of the game-churning-machine to come up with the look for the game. It's inspiring from the sheer amount of talent and focus towards a common goal that is around you, especially from my concept teammates, Andy Park, Cecil Kim, Dwayne Turner, Erik SanJuan, and Scott Seeto.

**When creating an art style for *God of War* and its sequel, what inspirations did you and the team draw from?**

Some of our inspiration for art styles came from Greek mythology stories themselves, merged with studying Greek architecture, art, military, and culture. Other elements were taken from Greek/Roman period films alike. Although Greek and Roman art styles have distinct differences, we drew from both to describe our world. We ventured to make a saga that more people could relate to (visually), so we drew from some classic Harnyhausen [Ray Harnyhausen, producer of *Clash of the Titans* - Ed] films for *God of War*. We started from Harnyhausen, and pushed it as far as we could to draw in the more youthful audience, but kept enough classical elements to retain the older Harnyhausen audience.

**What is the process of art moving from concept into animation and then final gameplay? Are there special challenges or problems involved with so many people sharing in the creative process?**

The exchange of information or change of game concept or story can be a sizeable stunt in the pipeline, which can mean serious rework if a character is already at the animation stage. And if it's a change in concept or game design

of the character, it affects the concept artists, modelers, riggers, and animators (possibly more if outsourced art is used). And things like the changing in game design and/or story-line can, and often does, affect production.

**Is there something unique about creating art for a game rather than for some other field? Does it change your approach to what you're creating?**

Concept art for games is under the same premise as concept for film, live action, or animation. We're creating a world in which this game or story takes place, and populate it with characters or objects that the audience can relate to. The main difference with concept art for games is the interaction between departments. It's necessary to talk with the game director for overall feel, and talk with level designers to know the layout and purpose of an environment, talk to combat designers to know what the characters are supposed to do (how they interact, fight, weapons needed), talk to the art director and technical director to see if a character concept is even possible for our engine. This doesn't necessarily change the fundamental approach to creating concepts, but it does give you more limitations to consider when conceiving for games.

**Do you see fundamental differences in the art and approach to art direction between Japanese and North American developers?**

Yes, I definitely see a difference in the art approach, although I believe the gap is closing a little. In Japan, manga has been a cultural phenomenon for decades. Everywhere you go, there are people reading Japanese comic novels. These stylized characters made their way into anime and games, as well as fashion and trends. In very general terms, characters in Japan are stylized - the main characters have an effeminate tendency, and are either very cute or very pretty (even the male characters) with few blemishes. Japanese audiences respond much more to the manga-ish designs, so when working on designs for the Japanese marketing, something like *God of War's* Kratos is going to be a bit too rough and raw for a Japanese hero. Kratos' Japanese counterpart is probably the much more stylized, sleeker, and prettier Dante (from *Devil May Cry*). Kratos appeals more to the American market of football and grit, which stems from its earthy European roots - Hollywood portrays this quite well with Rambo, Arnold, and Bruce Willis as action heroes. However, with the cross-cultural influences, you can see American influences here in the U.S., and the gap closes over so slightly.

**In your mind, what will make *God of War II* a success on an artistic scale? How will you know if you've done your job right?**

Visually, I think *God of War II* is already a success. It looks great, quite a bit better than the last one, and we're still tapping the capabilities of the PlayStation 2. So that alone is a success.



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# Saints Row

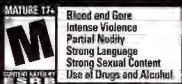
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If the Grand Theft Auto series lit a fire under the ass of the action genre, then Saint's Row burns down the whole damned house. -GamePro

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## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1984 **Blue Collar**

Flock starts his long career in gaming at Electronic Arts, hired on as a temporary warehouse worker during the holiday season. Soon, he had moved his way up to doing marketing on titles like *Slake or Die*.

1988 **Up the Ladder**

Moving on, Flock joins Activision (which had just changed its name to Mediagene) and was focused on the PC market. At Mediagene, he oversees marketing for a host of games including the original *MechWarrior*.

1990 **The Empire**

Flock leaves for a position at Lucasfilm's game division, heading up product development. Under his guidance, the company creates many classic titles like *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe*, *The Secret of Monkey Island*, *Day of the Tentacle*, and *Rebel Assault*.

1993 **Boom Goes Bust**

In a rare misstep, Flock leaves LucasArts out of desire to be in southern California. He joins a small startup called Thinker Interactive, which quickly fizzles.

1995 **The New Leader**

Flock joins the company that would come to dominate the industry, Sony, taking over the company's Imagine! publishing division, helping it transition into production for the company's new PlayStation console. Eventually, Imagine! is folded into Sony Computer Entertainment America.

1998 **Breaking Out**

Flock is given a chance to start a new, second-party development wing within Sony's 999 Studios. 999 has some major success in sports and with *EverQuest*, but is eventually brought back under the SCEA banner.

2000 **Moving Online**

After leaving SCEA and 999, Flock is asked to lead yet another Sony division, Sony Online Entertainment. Here, along with developer Verant, he builds *EverQuest* into the most dominant MMO of its day.

2005 **New Challenges**

Flock begins a new chapter in his career at THQ, one of the world's most successful third-party publishers. Here, he begins to push the company's efforts on next-generation consoles.

# KELLY FLOCK

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF PUBLISHING, THQ

**>> Kelly Flock brings to THQ a lifetime of experience at some of the industry's largest and most successful companies. Under his direction, THQ has already had a very successful 2006, releasing such hits as Saints Row, Cars, and Company of Heroes. <<**

**You've been with a lot of big companies in gaming; what was your motivation for coming to THQ?**

They were moving up the ladder very impressively in creating original IP, which was very interesting to me. I was aware of the Saints Row project underway and I felt at the time that that was a great call, to move into the open world genre on the next Microsoft platform. I didn't believe that the current leaders in that category were going to appear first on a Microsoft platform. We were playing a lot of Dawn of War, so there were a lot of things going on that were very intriguing. Clearly there had been consolidation in the industry and we were getting down to about five or six major players in the world; THQ had gotten there and was poised to really start innovating and cranking out a series of original IPs. It was an exciting thing to become a part of.

this company – and we do – into the mega-range, we're going to have to develop a lot of original IP on top of that.

**We've noticed that THQ has really been ramping up the scale and quality of its PC publishing, with big games like *Warhammer*, *Company of Heroes*, *Titan Quest*, and *Supreme Commander*. Often, people talk about the demise of the PC market, but you are obviously investing heavily in it.**

There are certain categories of product, like RPGs and RTS, that do very well in the PC market. It also goes hand-in-hand with our globalization strategy. We do about 40 percent of our revenue overseas, outside of North America. Europe is a great PC marketplace right now, and will continue to be. So, the fact that we can take a title like *Titan Quest*

capable machine. They're going to be competitive. They have the resources to support it and they have good development studios. We like the box, we're behind it and we have titles in development for it. I just think that a lot of the noise level that's out there now and a lot of the speculation and criticism will evaporate come the end of November – unless, of course, they cut back their forecasts or move their dates again.

**The last few Nintendo home consoles haven't been great for third-party publishers. Do you see the Wii as having more potential for third parties than the GameCube or N64?**

We've been successful on all the Nintendo systems – that's a good point to bring up. We've had a nice GameCube business even though there wasn't a very high penetration on the platform...

## I wanted the company to get more aggressive on next-gen platforms.

**When you came into THQ, looking at where they were at and where they were going, what were some of your goals for the company?**

I wanted the company to get more aggressive on next-gen platforms. The properties that THQ had were more legacy titles, and everyone knew that THQ probably did better than anybody in the later years of a hardware platform, and was one of the last to get on the new platforms. We wanted to get aggressive on taking some risks, so within a few months of my being here we started some Wii titles and more 360 stuff into production. We stopped some current-gen stuff that was out of the core genes. [We really] got the company started towards building a technology base. We converted *Heavy Iron* from a PS2 house to a PS3 and 360 [studio], even though they are doing largely Pixar-related stuff. They're managing the current-gen titles, which we'll continue to do on those platforms, but our internal resources are moving aggressively into next-gen.

**Did you want THQ to become less reliant on its stable of licenses?**

Not less reliant so much as building on them. They were always a core part of the business, between Nickelodeon, WWE, and Pixar. Those have a certain finite market that they serve. If we want to grow

and do a few hundred thousand in North America, and a multiple of that overseas – that makes it viable to do some of these high-end PC titles. And you create two things: a body of expertise and IP that we can leverage into sequels in the next-generation consoles. Because we know that these categories of titles are eventually going to prosper on consoles, too.

**You bought *Stuntman* from Atari recently.**

**What's the status of that project?**  
Well, Atari was developing with one of their internal developers, Paradigm, which was working with the original developer overseas. So, we acquired Paradigm along with the *Stuntman* franchise. It was already well into development and we're continuing the development there.

**Do you know when it might be coming out?**

It's next year. You know, there's two dates in development – next month and infinity. [Laughs]

**Sony's had a bad few months in terms of PR and consumer perception since E3. Has it hurt itself in the long run?**

Sony's gone through this with every iteration of their hardware launch, where there's been a gloom before the storm. So, I don't know if they've damaged themselves. We all know that it's a very

The Wii looks like an extremely well-designed, well-positioned device in the current marketplace. It should do much better than GameCube did. They know what they're doing. It feels, in many ways, like the right box at the right time... If Nintendo can deliver on their end and market and get the hardware out there, it should exist peacefully next to the high-end systems and have a great market opportunity on a global basis.

**Generally, people have believed that there's not room for three successful systems. Do you think that's changed?**

I think so. Every iteration of hardware has grown the installed base of machines worldwide. If you're looking at an installed base of a few hundred million machines, then 30-50 million machines is a viable market.

**There are always rumors that THQ is going to acquire the *Homebrew* franchise and reunite it with Relic. Is there any truth to that?**

Obviously, Relic has a great deal of affection and affiliation for that property. We're just not prepared to announce anything right now. We may do something in conjunction with the game at some point, but there isn't anything to say at the moment.

# THQ ON THE RISE

■ Kelly Flock and THQ are focused on building the company's stable of original IP

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PLAYSTATION 3



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# WORLD OF WARCRAFT TRADING CARD GAME

**Manufacturer:** Upper Deck **Website:** [www.udg.com/wow](http://www.udg.com/wow)  
**List Price:** \$29.99 (Starter Set) TBA (Booster Pack)

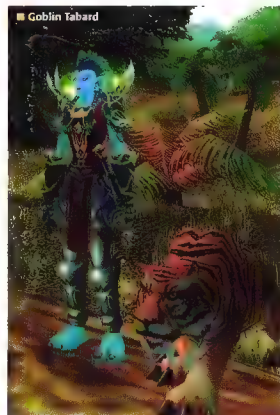
The massive success of World of Warcraft is spawning another spin-off product to be launched on October 25. The WoW Trading Card Game, created by Upper Deck, plays out very similarly to Upper Deck's popular Vs. System line of games. Players start a round with their Hero character already in play, and tap the resources of their customized decks to summon in powerful allies, play character-specific spells and abilities, and even equip their avatar with magical weapons and armor.

The first expansion, due November 22, will be a Raid set focusing on the great

Broodmother of the Black Dragonflight, Onyxia. This will allow multiple heroes to band together to try and defeat a "boss deck" controlled by another player, and should pander well to the more casual coffee table crowd. This set will be sold only in increments of \$29.99, which includes the pre-set boss deck as well as over 30 Treasure cards that can be used to further customize your standard hero decks (as well as find Loot that can be used in the online game; see sidebar).

Expect these cards to be incredibly hard to find this holiday season. Game Informer's

own Andy McNamara has already stated that he is going to buy these things by the truckload. For those of you who don't lust for this game for its ability to enhance your online character, we found that it's an enjoyable play. The game mechanics are solid, and there's plenty of room for both game-time and deck-building strategy. It's also a gorgeous set, with illustrations from Todd McFarlane, Darrell Sweet, Greg Hildebrandt, Greg Staples, and Mike Krahulik (from Penny Arcade). The exciting line of cards is set to release in October.



Goblin Tabard



Baby Hippogryph



## THE DIGITAL LINK

The World of Warcraft Trading Card Game shares a close symbiotic relationship with Blizzard's MMO. How close? The card game actually has an effect on the MMO. Special Loot cards that you'll find randomly inserted into packs unlock exclusive rewards for your online World of Warcraft character. The three initially available Loot cards are the turtle mount, a special goblin tabard, and a non-combat hippogryph pet. Also, each booster pack contains a point that can be cashed in for different online rewards, such as the Ogre Magi Suit or a trinket that puts on a unique fireworks display.

"IT REALLY CAPTURES THE BEAUTIFUL GRANDEUR OF *STAR TREK* COMBAT."  
 -GAMESPOT

# STAR TREK LEGACY

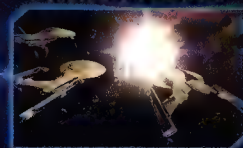
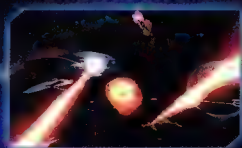


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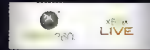
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etc

# JERICHO CROSS HALLOWEEN COSTUME



Are you looking for a Halloween costume? Is your Tidus cosplay costume missing a button? Look no further, nerd kingdom. California Costume Collections and developer High Moon Studios have a setup for you. Darkwatch's protagonist Jericho Cross is now immortalized as a Halloween costume. The basic costume set consists of the hat, duster, cowl, vest, badge, belt, boot tops, western duster, and eye patch. Additional accessories, such as the armored gloves, Redeemer revolver, and armored kneepads are sold separately. The costume comes in three adult sizes, and, if you are small like Jeremy, also two child sizes.

**Manufacturer:** California Costume Collections  
**Website:** [www.highmoonstudios.com](http://www.highmoonstudios.com)  
**List Price:**  
 \$79.99 (Adult),  
 \$39.99 (Child),  
 \$12.99 (Revolver),  
 \$14.99 (Gloves/Kneepads)



peripherals

## MIURO

**Manufacturer:** ZPM Inc. **Website:** [www.miuro.com](http://www.miuro.com) **List Price:** \$925.00

We all know that robots are eventually going to be the downfall of mankind. Why else create them? What we didn't see coming, however, was that the iPod was going to start the mechanical revolution. Japanese company ZPM has created a robot specifically for iPods called the Miuro. Plug your iPod into the top of it, turn it on, and the Miuro will follow you around the house as it pounds out your tunes through Kenwood speakers. This is only the start, people. Soon we'll have a robot drying our hair, a robot clipping our toenails, and eventually a robot strangling us to death as we sleep.



peripherals

## XBOX LIVE VISION

**Manufacturer:** Microsoft **Website:** [www.xbox.com](http://www.xbox.com) **List Price:** \$39.99 (Basic), \$79.99 (Gold)

Social gaming now has a whole new meaning. With the Xbox Live Vision camera, gamers can personalize their gamertag image with a photo, chat with friends through video, and record video messages. The Vision will also be used for games much like Sony's EyeToy, allowing gamers to physically appear in their games, and also interact on a very personal level through Xbox Live titles. The Vision will be sold in two different sets. The basic set comes with the camera, the Xbox 360 Headset, a one-month Xbox Live trial, and two camera-enabled games (Uno and Totemball). The Gold set comes with all of these things, as well as Robotron 2084, a 12-month subscription to Xbox Live, and 200 Microsoft Points. Totemball is a fairly weak game, but it did show us that the Vision is a hair better in quality than the EyeToy. We can't wait to see what else MS has planned for this device.



tech

## TRUE 5.1 DOLBY DIGITAL GAMING HEADSET

**Manufacturer:** Triton Technologies

**Website:** [www.tritontechnologies.com](http://www.tritontechnologies.com) **List Price:** \$89.99

Designed specifically with the Xbox 360, PC, and current-gen machines in mind, this headset brings out the best sound in your games. Each ear cup contains four individual speakers, and you can adjust the front, center, and rear volume at any time. This headset also comes with a removable microphone that is compatible with both Xbox Live and PC games. It doesn't have the best low-end sound, but it does a great job of separating the channels and delivering the surround sound experience.





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# YUNG JOC

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I KNOW YOU SEE IT true3681  
PATRON true3682  
1ST TIME true3683  
KNOCK IT OUT true3684  
DOPE BOY MAGIC (A CAPELLA) true3685  
NEW JOC CITY true3686  
DOPE BOY MAGIC true3687



WALLPAPERS

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pic7893

pic7894

pic7895

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## REALTONES

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ABOUT US - BROOKE HOGAN → true3433  
ANIMAL HAVE BECOME - THREE DAYS GRACE → true3434  
CHAIN HANG LOW (KIDS) - JIBBS → true3435  
CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP - DJ WEBSTAR → true3436  
CRAZY - GHARLS BARKLEY → true3437  
FAR AWAY - NICKELBACK → true3438  
I KNOW YOU SEE IT - YUNG JOC → true3439  
IT'S OKAY - THE GAME → true3440  
LIPS OF AN ANGEL - WINDER → true3441  
LONDON BRIDGE - FERGIE → true3442  
MONEY IN THE BANK - LIL SCRAPPY → true3443

MONEY MAKER - LUBACRIS → true3644  
P... BUTTER & JELLY - C. DON & J. MONEY → true3645  
PUSH IT - RICK ROSS → true3646  
RING THE ALARM - REYNOLDE → true3647  
SEXY BACK - JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE → true3648  
SEXY LOVE - NE-YO → true3649  
SHOULDER LEAN - YOUNG DRO → true3650  
SHOW STOPPER - DANITY KANE → true3651  
SNAP YO FINGERS - LIL JOH → true3652  
STUNTIN' LIKE... - BIRDMAN & LIL WAYNE → true3653  
U AND DAT - E-LU → true3654  
WALK IT OUT - DJ LUNN → true3655

## WALLPAPERS



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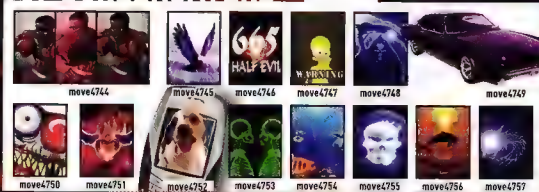
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## TOP SCREENSAVERS



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move4745

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move4749

move4750

move4751

move4752

move4753

move4754

move4755

move4756

move4757

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## CASSIE

**Realtones**

Me & U true3694  
Long Way 2 Go true3695  
Me & U (Do What I Do) true3696  
Just One Time true3697  
Call U Out true3698  
About Time true3699  
Ditto true3700  
What Do U Want true3701

**Wallpapers**

pic7894 pic7897 pic7898

## FUNSONDS

CRAZY FROG INDIA → fun7966  
TOO DRUNK TO RING → fun7967  
CRAZY FROG - CRAZY TRAIN → fun7968  
MISS AUGUST → fun7969  
POLICE HORN → fun7970  
BLD TELEPHONE RINGING → fun7971  
MANSION PARTY → fun7972  
FREAK - TXT GOIN ON → fun7973  
WEARING NOTHING → fun7974  
MY BUNNY EARS → fun7975  
COME OUT AND PLAY → fun7976  
HEY MUTHA → fun7977

## Mike Epps

**Voice ringers**

Ferty-Five true3688  
Ur Breath Smells Like... true3689  
Broke Back Mountain true3690  
Five Head true3691  
Cut Off My Phone true3692  
Get Yo Latta on true3693

**VIDEO TONES**

PROMISCUOUS  
KELLY FURSTAD  
VIDEO0234

AIN'T NO OTHER MAN  
CHRISTINA AGUILERA  
VIDEO0235

OBSESSION  
FRANKIE J  
VIDEO0236

TRAP STAR  
YOUNG JEEZY  
VIDEO0237

## MORE REALTONES

4 MINUTES - AVANT → true3656  
AMERICAN IDIOT - GREEN DAY → true3657  
ANGELITO - DON OMAR → true3658  
BLOW - RICK ROSS → true3659  
BOSSY - KELIS FT TOO SHORT → true3660  
BUTTONS - THE PUSSYCAT DOLLS → true3661  
COME TO ME - DIDO → true3662  
DANI CALIFORNIA - RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS → true3663  
EVERY TIME WE TOUCH - CASCADA → true3664  
GOOD LUCK CHARM - JAGGED EDGE → true3665  
HANDS UP - LLOYD BANKS → true3666  
HATE ME - BLUE OCTOBER → true3667

HUSTLIN' - RICK ROSS → true3668  
I WRITE SINS... - PANIC AT THE DISCO → true3669  
IT'S GOIN' DOWN - YUNG JOC → true3670  
RIGBY (RIGBY DIRTY) - CHAMILLIONAIRE → true3671  
RUBBERBAND KISS - YOUNG DRO → true3672  
SAY GOODBYE - CHRIS BROWN → true3673  
SIDE 2 SIDE - THREE 6 MAFIA → true3674  
TWO LITTLE - TOO LATE - JO JO → true3675  
UN BESO - AVENTURA → true3676  
WANS → true3677  
WHEN YOU'RE MAD - NE-YO → true3678  
WHY YOU WANNA - T.I. → true3679

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# KEEPING COSTS UNDER CONTROL



BY SCOTT STEINBERG,  
MANAGING DIRECTOR,  
EMBASSY MULTIMEDIA  
CONSULTANTS

**W**arning: The videogame industry is officially under siege. Not by parents, politicians, or the mainstream media either. The biz's truest, and most insidious, enemy? Our own inability to keep rapidly ballooning budgets from spiraling out of control.

In November 2005, researcher Screen Digest predicted that within the next-generation gaming era, a scant 80 titles a year would succeed. Here we sit months later, and given current spending levels, one can't help wondering — were estimates actually too conservative?

The average costs of developing a "Triple-A" console/PC product now hover between \$5-15 million. The number of independent software houses capable of assuming that kind of debt, let alone handling a project of this scope, is shrinking daily. And so it happens that treasured studios like Troika (Vampire — Bloodlines), Stainless Steel (Rise & Fall), Cyan Worlds (Myst), and Lionhead (The Movies) disband, barely cheat death, or become victims of corporate consolidation.

Ask the pros and they'll tell you. Risks are higher than ever, barriers to market entry insurmountable, and the odds against original titles triumphing shock-inducing — the glory days of garage development are just a fading dream, too.

The net result: Fewer games put into production, there are less offerings that push the envelope, and enthusiasts like us feel robbed of hard-won goodwill and harder-earned dollars. Not to mention release schedules bursting with cut-rate sequels and Z-grade fare spat out in faint hopes of recouping a few cents on every development dollar.

In other words, insiders are convinced that nowadays, it takes money to make money — lots of it. And that if you don't have access to eight-figure capital or bankable talent, well... you can take that puzzle-solving/turn-based strategy hybrid and shove it.

Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved — produced in record time by a largely one-man team, sold for \$5 via Xbox Live Arcade, and downloaded a whopping 200,000+ times — tends to refute this theory. Ditto for my own self-published boxing sim Heavyweight

Thunder, built in a proverbial back bedroom, which sold 50,000 units worldwide. Let's not forget rising trends like mobile gaming either. To wit, a little secret that begs sharing. While some decision-makers are loath to admit it, it's entirely possible that it's our own poor business practices (not player apathy or unpredictable transition cycles) that are suffocating the market.

Hence the reason buzzwords like "convergence" seem so unsettling. Name-brand actors are unnecessarily expensive; costly scripts from best-selling authors seldom offer a true product enhancement.

As an everyday working professional with typical family responsibilities, I'm not one for 50-hour epics either. With the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) placing the average age of game players at 33, wouldn't it most be better served by shorter, punchier — and cheaper-produced/priced — titles with greater impact?

Nor does episodic content seem like a compelling solution. Rather than bite-sized chunks of a larger epic, how about studios trying taming their ambitions and crafting smaller, shaper, more complete standalone games that offer real incentive for fans' continued interest?

The likeliest explanation for recent shortcomings: We, as both game makers and marketers, simply haven't figured out how to best speak to the consumer.

It's a lesson best taught by so-called casual games, an anticipated \$1 billion market by 2008 according to Jupiter Research. The fact we even lump these titles — user-friendly amusements — into their own category says everything. Touting catchy themes, intuitive play mechanics and instantly gratifying action, the only thing separating them from most traditional retail offerings is their approachability.

Distributor RealNetworks says 70 percent of its purchases come directly from females aged over 40, an audience most titles can only dream of. Given typical videogame themes — sci-fi, fantasy, war — it's understandable (You try getting a mother of two browsing Wal-Mart's aisles to comprehend BioShock).

Smartly built think teams of three to five people working 6 months on sub-\$100,000 budgets — and

even more cleverly marketed, 5,000 copies sold of a casual game can be considered a hit. Compare that with the 50-100,000 required for standard PC/console games and the implications are chilling.

Simply put: These titles aren't a fluke. They're the type of cost-effective outings publishers desperate to grow the gaming market should've been making all along.

That's not to say playing to a niche audience isn't possible. War game manufacturers such as Shrapnel and Battlefront thrive online. Adventure games and RPGs are sleeping giants too. (Just look at the success of Oblivion.)

Nor can those of us who aren't responsible to legions of cash-hungry shareholders rightfully cast stones. But here are a few thoughts worth bearing in mind for those eyeing a potential industry takeover nonetheless:

Developers: Build titles that speak to the widest possible audience. (No mutant monkey cyborg simulators and undersea strip-mining tycoons, please.) Keep ambitions within reason. Why overextend yourself on a single project when a series of smaller, more cost-efficient games could eventually fund a chart-topping smash?

Publishers: Use celebrity appearances sparingly, package games for maximum reach, extensively research potential licensing ops before committing and spend cash on value-added content only where appropriate. Critically assess development partners and try to green-light games with lower overhead/broader appeal. Furnel cost-savings into additional, more forward-thinking titles.

And to you, dear reader: Keep an open mind. Be a gaming evangelist, not a jaded naysayer. As a young industry, we're all learning through experimentation. Just because things sometimes go awry, doesn't mean they can't be put straight again. (We see you, Tomb Raider.)

The upshot: Money still talks. But with a little more foresight, there's no reason everyone — designers, executives, even your average PlayStation 3 owner — can't have a meaningful dialogue. ■■■

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



66  
We, as  
both game  
makers and  
marketers,  
simply  
haven't  
figured  
out how to  
best speak  
to you, the  
consumer.



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

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# november

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03

## PROJECT HORSESHOE

Move over, Freemasons: The video game industry has a secret society of its own. Hiding under the umbrella of Project Horseshoe, this group of roughly 50 people meet to discuss the challenges that come with modern game design. This year, they'll be in Canyon of the Eagles, TX. Who is attending? No one knows.

You won't believe this, but the new film *Flushed Away* is the sequel to *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*. Actually, it's not, but Andy Serkis and Ian McKellen were both told it was, which is why they lent their voices to the movie.



07-09

10

## NEW RELEASES

- Bionicle Heroes - PS2
- GC DS
- Call of Duty 3 - 360, PS2
- Xbox, PSP
- Cats - DS
- Dead of Alice Xtreme 2 - 360
- EA Replay - PSP
- Elite Beat Agents - DS
- Every Extend Extra - PSP
- FEAR: First Encounter Assault Recon - 360

- Final Fantasy V Advance - GBA
- Forza Motorsport 2 - 360
- Gears of War - 360
- Guitar Hero 2 - PS2
- Justice League Heroes - PSP
- Luminis II - PSP
- Marvel Ultimate Alliance - PSP
- Micro Machines V4 - DS
- Rainbow Six Vegas - 360, PS2, Xbox, PSP

- Sega Genesis Collection - PS2, PSP
- SOCOM US Navy SEALs Combined Assault - PS2
- SOCOM US Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo 2 - PSP
- The Sopranos - PS2
- Star Trek: Legacy - 360, PC
- The Sims 2: Pets - DS
- Tony Hawk's Project 8 - 360, PS2, Xbox, PSP
- Ultimate Brain Games - DS

Eight of the Living Dead 3D copers in theaters today! Is there anything on this planet that is as cool as zombies in 3D? Well, other than real zombies? And the idea of zombie seats in 3D being watched by a crowd of real zombies. Oh man, we need alone time now.



12

14-15

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**EMERGENCE DAY:** Gears of War releases today. However, if you pre-order Gears of War from a specialty game retailer, it sounds like your Emergence Day will be on the 7th. The early bird not only gets the worm, it gets the most anticipated game of the year five days early.



Gears of War

## NEW RELEASES

- Capcom Classic Collection 2 - PS2, Xbox
- Civil War - 360, PS2
- Dance Dance Revolution: Ultramix 4 - Xbox
- Dogz - DS
- Dragon - 360, PS2, Xbox, PSP, DS, GBA, PC
- FIFA Soccer 07 - 360
- Final Fantasy III - DS
- Medieval II: Total War - PC
- NFL Street Vol. 3 - PS2, PSP

- Setters II - DS
- Singstar Rocks - PS2
- Sonic the Hedgehog - 360
- Superman Returns - 360, PS2, Xbox, PSP, DS, GBA
- Test Drive Unlimited - PSP
- Trinoline - PS2, Xbox, PSP
- Tomb Raider Legend - GC
- WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2007 - PS2, PSP
- Yoshi's Island 2 - DS

Bond is back in theaters today in *Casino Royale*. Here's hoping it's not *Casino Royale With Cheese*.



**PLAYSTATION 3 LAUNCHES:** A little known system by the name of the PlayStation 3 makes its stateside debut today. It's expensive, but that's why we have two kids here. One for Keets, and one to fund the PS2.



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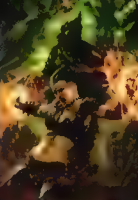
Not one to miss the party, Nintendo introduces the Wii to the world on November 19th, which is good, because we're pretty sure if you go to get a new game system that day most places will already be sold out of the PS3. The early bird may get the worm, but the late bird ends up paying for a much less expensive console, as it turns out.



## HOT Wii LAUNCH TITLES

- Call of Duty 3
- Elebits
- Circle Trust
- The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess
- Madden NFL 07
- Marvel Ultimate Alliance
- Rayman Raving Rabbids
- Red Steel
- Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz
- Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam

- Castlemania: Portrait of Ruin - DS
- Gothic III - PC
- Jacks: The Game - PS2, PSP
- Karaoke Revolution: American Idol - PS2
- Marvel Trading Card Game - PSP, DS
- Sonic Rivals - PSP
- Winx Club: Join the Club - PSP, DS, GBA



Castlemania: Portrait of Ruin

**HELLGATE: LONDON PREQUEL:** This four-issue comic series serves as a prequel to the forthcoming game. We're just going to go out on a limb here and say that the story will involve humans battling demons in London. Cross your fingers and pray that the game comes out shortly after this series concludes.

- HOT PS3 LAUNCH TITLES**
- Call of Duty 3
- Madden NFL 07
- Motorstorm: Need for Speed Carbon
- NHL 2K7
- Rainbow Six: Vegas
- Resistance: Fall of Man
- Tony Hawk's Project 8
- Unltd Legends: Dark Kingdom
- Warhawk

28

## NEW RELEASES

- The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II: The Rise of the Witch-King - PC
- My Frogger: Toy Trials - DS
- Online Chess: Kingdoms - PSP
- World of Warcraft: Burning Crusade - PC



The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II: The Rise of the Witch-King



Resistance: Fall of Man

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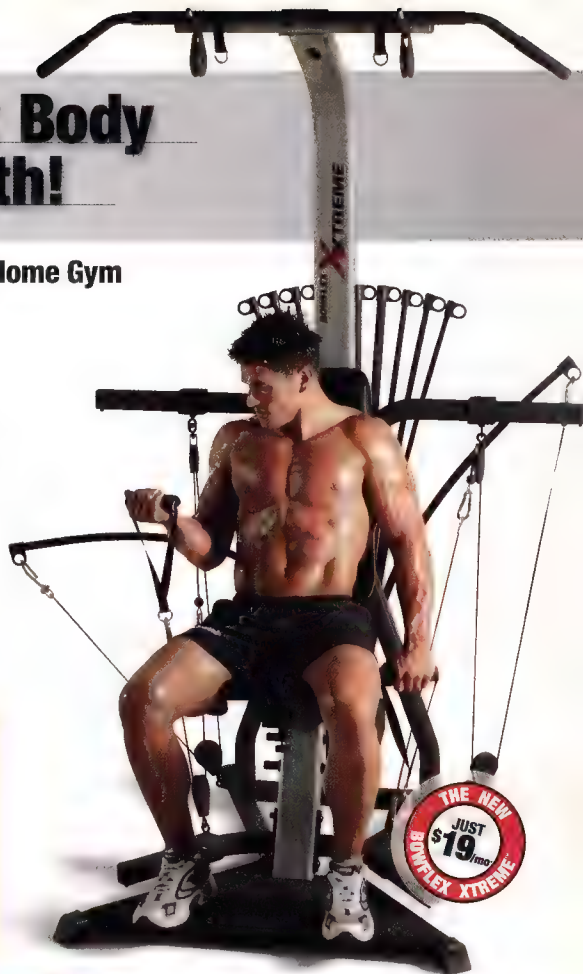
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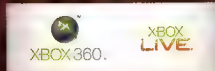
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> **PUBLISHER** D3 PUBLISHER OF AMERICA

> **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL EXTREMES

> **RELEASE** FALL 2007







Two facts never leave your mind as you sink through the alleyways of the war-torn city, two realities that would be lethal to forget. The first is that the soldiers walking the streets are looking for you, and they will take no prisoners. They will turn their guns on you and fire without a moment of hesitation. The second is that there is something else stalking through the city, a monster. Something inhuman, something vicious that can tear a man apart before he even senses the creature's presence. You spy a group of soldiers on patrol ahead of you, and you remember this second fact. You look at the sinister weapon in your hand and remember that you are the predator. You are the monster.

Many games have placed players in the role of violent, morally ambiguous characters who rack up huge body counts over the course of the story. Hayden Tenric, the protagonist of Digital Extremes' new next-gen action game *Dark Sector*, can definitely be counted amongst their ranks. However, unlike most of these other characters, Hayden is quite literally an inhuman killing machine. "Here's someone who is really a monster on the inside, and in becoming a monster on the outside, he's kind of saved as a person," says Steve Sinclair, the game's director. *Dark Sector* is Hayden's story—the tale of how he evolves, both physically and emotionally.

But before learning about the content of the game, it's important to know the history of the project itself.



# darkSector

THE EVOLUTION OF A HERO

## If the name Dark Sector sounds familiar, that's because it was the first next-generation video game ever announced.

Back in April of 2004, Digital Extremes began showing a next-gen tech demo around to a few select people in the industry, calling the project Dark Sector. While it wasn't intended to be made public at the time, word got out to the gaming media, and Digital Extremes' early work accidentally became the first official glimpse of what would become the next round of video game software. Although not well-known, Digital Extremes had earned a name for itself as a respected developer with the popular Unreal franchise. While gamers all over the world are familiar with the Unreal and Unreal Tournament series, not everyone realizes that Digital Extremes co-created the Unreal Engine with Epic Games. Digital Extremes even developed games like Unreal Championship for the original Xbox, and at one point the company was considering merging with Epic. However, tax laws prevented the Canadian company from merging with the American Epic, and the developer decided to go off in new directions and work on their own original titles.

Digital Extremes found the perfect publishing partner for Dark Sector in D3Publisher of America. The company may not be a household name in the video game industry, but it hopes Dark Sector will become its flagship title. A subsidiary of a Japanese company best known for its Simple series games, D3Publisher was willing to take a chance on a new property with big ambitions.

Even if Dark Sector hadn't already earned a place in video game trivia history for being the first announced, next-gen game, there are a lot of reasons to get excited about this dark, gritty action game. In the campaign, players take control of Hayden, an assassin for a shadowy

American government agency. Hayden's aptitude for killing gets him sent on a mission to the Balkan state of Lasria to investigate the strange happenings there. It appears that the Russians had been using Lasria as the site of some bizarre biological experiments back in the 1950s, and have returned to reclaim their work. Under the mysterious codename Dark Sector, these experiments in bioengineering were abruptly halted for unknown reasons that caused the Soviets to leave Lasria. Something went wrong, and a terrible secret has escaped from the mysterious holding facility called the Lotus Complex: a strange techno-organic virus that has begun infecting people and animals in the area. The infected organisms quickly begin to mutate into partially metallic lifeforms, and are driven mad by the pain of the transformation. It is up to the trained killer Hayden to get to the bottom of things, but events quickly take a drastic turn as Hayden is infected by the virus.

*continued on page 89*



■ Dark Sector will take the player through a variety of locations like military laboratories, crumbling churches, and more

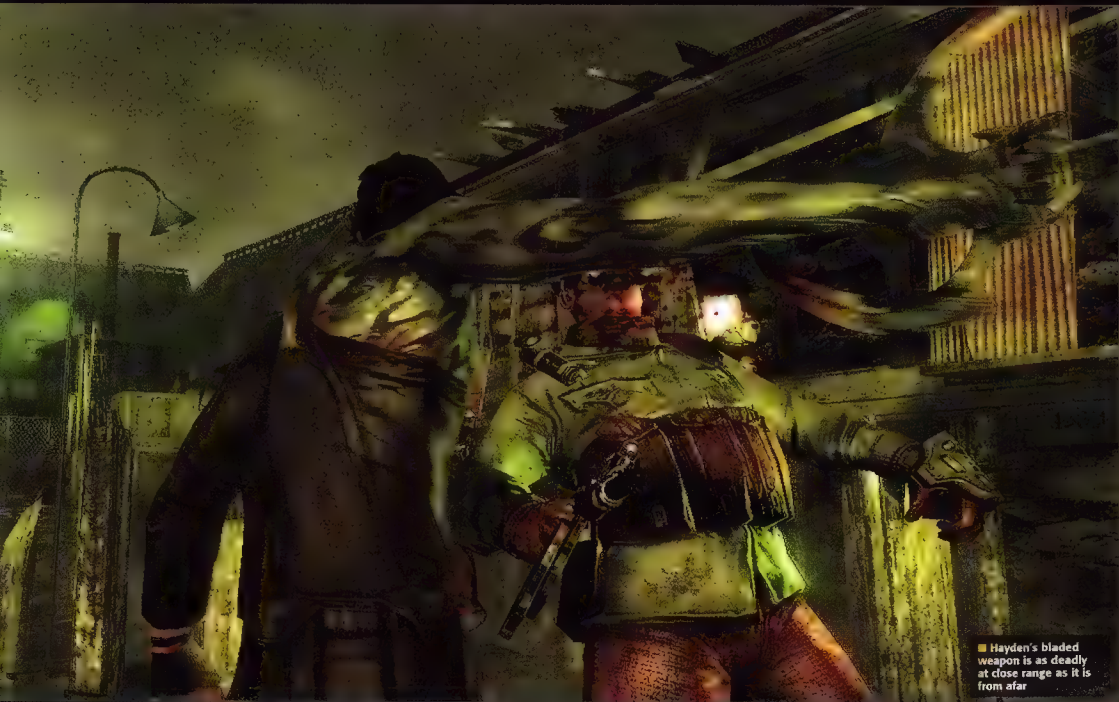


## Hayden's Dark Past

Considering that Dark Sector was the first announced next-gen game, but isn't due out until fall of next year, one question that quickly comes to mind is what has taken the game so long? The short answer is that Digital Extremes changed its approach to the visuals partway through development. "We built this sort of sci-fi tech demo originally," says Sinclair. "The essence of what we wanted to do hasn't changed, in terms that the character is still Hayden Tenno, and he's still following this sort of messianic journey, but the setting has definitely changed considerably." When the team first started on the game, sci-fi shooters were going strong, but as the capabilities of next-gen hardware started to become clear, more realistic games became the next hot thing. "The thing that we kept hearing from people was realism," says Sinclair. "Realism, and natural environments, and plausibility. We had a good sprinkling of manga mayonnaise in the game, and stuff like tentacles. You have to have tentacles in that sort of thing. It just seemed like people were stumbling over that, when really what we were talking about was a character-focused third-person shooter with some special powers. The wrapping was in some ways alienating for most. Some people were like, 'Oh yeah, I love the tentacles,' but generally speaking we found it hard to get traction on that. When we talked to D3, we were fortunate enough to click on the character focus thing, and the setting seemed to be not as big an issue."

After Digital Extremes and D3 Publisher agreed to make Dark Sector more realistic, the process of paring down the sci-fi elements began, until the game reached its current almost-real-world setting. "We did a treatment where we said 'Imagine that sort of technology [from the early versions of the game], but we'll put it over here in this fictional Balkan state, in this sort of 20 seconds in the future kind of thing,'" says Sinclair. "It seemed to be resonating a lot more with people, so that's kind of the direction that we went. The essence had been boiling down and down and down. First, Hayden was a guy who found a suit, then he was a guy who they made wear the suit, and it just kept getting closer to the core of what it is now."

■ Early versions of Dark Sector had a much heavier focus on sci-fi elements

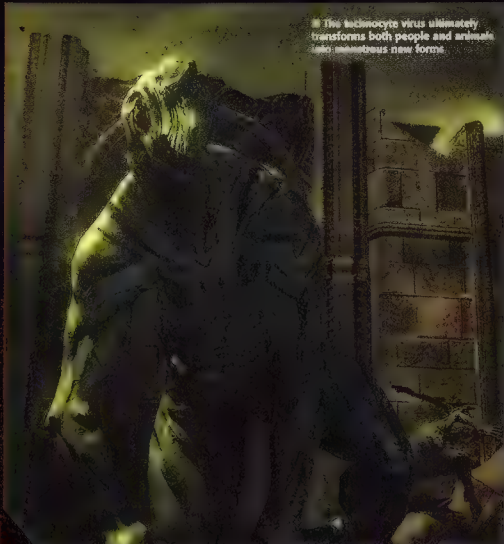


■ Hayden's bladed weapon is as deadly at close range as it is from afar

# If we f--- [the disc] up, then we've lost everything

— Steve Sinclair

■ The echinocyte virus ultimately transforms both people and animals into indestructible new forms.



■ Killing a commander will send the rest of the soldiers into disarray, making them easier to defeat.





Dark Sector features a mechanic that automatically transitions on and off based on your proximity to a safe zone.

continued from page 86

Although he finds himself evolving into something different, Hayden isn't driven mad by the virus. Instead, he stays in control thanks to a congenital condition, a rare genetic defect called *Familial dysautonomia*, which leaves Hayden with the inability to feel pain. This is an actual disorder that only affects a handful of people around the world, and makes the lives of its sufferers very dangerous and difficult. However, it is Hayden's salvation from madness, and plays an important part in his dark backstory. It also adds a nice individuality to Hayden: as Steve Sinclair puts it "You always have to have some kind of weird superhero quirk."

As Dark Sector progresses, Hayden will gain new powers as his evolution into a new lifeform continues. However, players get control of his most important adaptation right away: the disc. A huge three-bladed throwing weapon that pops out of Hayden's metallic hand, the disc is at the very core of Dark Sector's action. "If we f--- this up, then we've lost everything," jokes Sinclair. The disc is the one weapon he'll carry with him through the entire game. It can be used to dismember enemies from afar, grab distant objects, and much more.

"It's not exactly like the Zelda boomerang, where you throw it and it comes back to you," says Sinclair. The disc is a little more complicated than that — it's both slightly trickier to use, and more versatile. After throwing the disc, the player must hit a button to manually recall it and send it speeding back towards Hayden's hand. This means that if you throw the disc and it's clear that you'll

miss your target, you can recall it mid-flight for another throw. When the disc is recalled, it emits a small electromagnetic pulse that will stun nearby enemies, which makes them easy to finish off with a gun or a second hurl of the disc. You can even get more devious with it. For instance, you can throw the disc into a wall and leave it lodged in the brick until an enemy soldier walks by, then recall it for a stealthy decapitation attack.

The disc is far from the only weapon in Hayden's arsenal, as this trained killer will also have access to any and all weapons discarded on the battlefield. Picking up guns from fallen soldiers is key to survival, as the disc isn't as useful for taking on groups of enemies as a hefty machine gun. Using the disc in conjunction with conventional firearms will become more and more necessary as the enemies Hayden faces evolve. Early in the game, most of your foes will be human, but as the infection spreads the victims will transform more and more into metallic monsters (or technocytes, as Sinclair calls them). Some soldiers will carry riot shields that will need to be grappled out of the way with the disc so they can be finished off with a gun, whereas some monsters will be so advanced in their metallic transformations that they must be distracted with bullets, then finished off with the disc.

As players experiment with the disc, they will learn that certain enemies actually function as resources if handled correctly. For example, one human enemy type called the Mauler carries a tank on their back filled with inferno gas, which affects

technocytes. Since Hayden is partially transformed, getting hit with the gas causes the screen to distort and warp, making it difficult to see the Mauler rush in for a brutal melee attack. But if you hit an unsuspecting Mauler from behind with the disc, the tank will rupture, killing the Mauler and coating the disc with liquid inferno, which will make it extra deadly to the next technocyte you hit with it. On the other hand, technocyte blood carries the virus, so if you kill one with the disc, it may return to your hand coated in the vile blood. The blood-coated disc will then drive any humans you hit with it mad as they begin the painful transformation into a monster, and start attacking their allies.

"This organic metal s--- is rather porous. If you whip this disc through a flame, the disc is going to superheat for a moment, and you'll be able to light things on fire. You'll be able to burn up objects, and that sort of thing," says Sinclair excitedly, detailing yet another use of the versatile throwing weapon. It can also be used as a melee weapon, and even for brutal stealth kills if you come up on an enemy undetected. Yet it has another function, one that isn't quite as directly combat-oriented: The disc is also a light source, and will illuminate the area in front of you when exploring some of Dark Sector's shadowy areas. During our time with the game, we witnessed the disc thrown down a long unlit hallway, and watched as the light it projected

■ Instant kills are activated by sneaking up on an unaware enemy, and are appropriately brutal



followed it down the corridor and back, momentarily revealing what lay in our path. Should you feel that something sinister is waiting for you down a darkened corridor, you can throw the disc into a wall to create an impromptu light source, recall it, and throw it to another unlit area. As an added bonus, the technocytes shun the light and recoil from it. "You're using it almost like Frodo's sword in *The Lord of the Rings* in how you're creating fear amongst them with it," says Sinclair.

While the disc and guns will be available throughout the entire game, they aren't the extent of what players should expect to see in Hayden's arsenal. Since *Dark Sector* is ultimately a game about Hayden's transformation, he will evolve a few additional powers over the course of the game, and his reactions to his abilities will change over time as well. At the beginning of the game, Hayden's animation for throwing the disc will be slightly hesitant, demonstrating how unfamiliar he is with his strange mutation. But as the story progresses and Hayden becomes more accustomed to using the weapon, his throws will become faster and more fluid. It will become second nature, something that he doesn't have to think about, thus making him even more dangerous. There may also be some special bonuses added for quick combo kills with the disc, but the development team is still tinkering with this idea.

Although Hayden will simply change naturally over the course of the game, there will also be a few distinct jumps in his evolution as the technocyte virus spreads further and he becomes more distinctly inhuman. These leaps in his transformation will coincide with the appearance of three boss encounters who are, like Hayden, humans who have been converted by the virus. "They are in some

way a hint about what's going to happen to you," says Sinclair. After each of these bosses, Hayden will gain a new power. According to Sinclair, there are three distinct evolutions. The first is the disc, and the second one is a shield. Although we didn't get to see the shield in action, Sinclair explains that it will be a natural extension of Hayden's mutation, and will allow him to create his own cover on the fly; our guess is that the disc expands into some kind of large surface that players can hide behind. As for the third mutation, Sinclair wouldn't say a word. All he would reveal to us is that it is important to the team that players continue to use everything they learn throughout the game, constantly figuring out new ways to utilize their powers. What the team doesn't want to do is to add elements late in the game that negate the need to use earlier abilities, so the third power will most likely be a complement to the disc and shield, not a replacement. Sinclair believes that if the players aren't constantly figuring out new ways to use the tools at hand, then they will get bored with the game. "When the learning stops, the fun does," he says. "If I'm not figuring out stuff, if I'm not learning, if I'm just capping guys who are just bags of hit points, then boredom is going to set in."

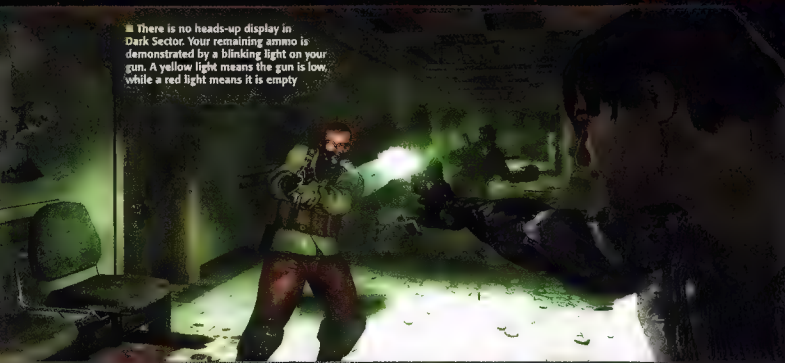
Digital Extremes has many secrets left to reveal with *Dark Sector*, and how this third mutation will open up a new set of gameplay options is one of them. Another is any information on multiplayer. While Sinclair would confirm that the game will feature a multiplayer component, he was mum on any details, other than saying that Digital Extremes has some ideas for a unique online experience. We have to imagine that it will share many of the

same design principles as the single-player game, including its focus on maintaining a cinematic feel. The visuals in *Dark Sector* are crisp and realistic, and Digital Extremes isn't using any sort of heads-up display to maintain the realism. Setting a high bar for the visuals is another element that Sinclair sees as essential, as visuals are often what get players interested in a game in the first place. "I'm a graphics whore," says Sinclair with a laugh.

Digital Extremes wants *Dark Sector* to feel like a game that takes place in the real world, despite some of its sci-fi elements. As such, the company is also skimming off some of the gaming clichés that it feels are unnecessary for the game, like a jump button. Instead, the game uses a context-sensitive action button like that found in *Resident Evil 4* for vaulting over walls and jumping off ledges. "We also have this implicit cover system. If you're in the right spot, you'll go into cover," Sinclair explained to us as Hayden pushed his back against the wall when he approached a corner. A moment later, a rocket from an enemy turret slammed into the building, and Hayden recoiled distinctly. This cover mechanic will transition on and off automatically without even the press of a button to further see a smooth and realistic experience.

In keeping with Digital Extremes' goal of maintaining a realistic world, *Lasra* won't be exclusively populated with bloodthirsty monsters and deadly soldiers. Like any real country, there are civilians caught in the middle of the conflict. Throughout the game, you will encounter survivors, and it is up to you whether or not it is worth the risk to save them. You can certainly choose to ignore them

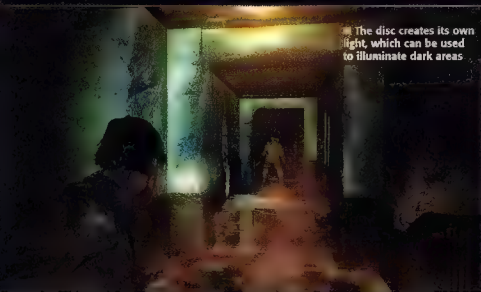
■ There is no heads-up display in Dark Sector. Your remaining ammo is demonstrated by a blinking light on your gun. A yellow light means the gun is low, while a red light means it is empty



**You always have to have some kind of weird superhero quirk.**

— Steve Sinclair

■ The disc creates its own light, which can be used to illuminate dark areas



■ Recalling the disc creates a small pulse of energy that can stun nearby enemies



and concentrate on your core objectives, but if you take the risk and save them, there will be rewards. Each survivor that you help will give you a small memento that identifies them, like a medal or other personal object. These mementos are the keys to winning the assistance of the Lasrian underground, a group of resistance fighters trying their best to fend off both the Russian occupying force and the inhuman technocyte menace. By showing these mementos to members of the underground, they will know that you saved their friends and offer you new weapons or upgrades. However, upgrades won't be as simple as an automatic stat increase for one of your guns – you will actually have to improve it yourself in an interactive minigame. Sinclair wasn't ready to share how these minigames will work, or how exactly they would improve your weapons, but he did share that they are intended to be simple little distractions to add a little spice to the gameplay.

Dark Sector will be filled with all sorts of moments that switch up the action, from using mounted turrets to driving vehicles, and other short deviations from its action-shooter core to keep things fresh. Everyone involved with the game wants the action to have a nice ebb and flow, with certain parts focusing on frantic action, and others featuring a slower, more horror-influenced pace. During our demo of the game, we witnessed Hayden slice and blast his way through open courtyards populated with hostile troops, as well as dilapidated buildings that skittered with creepy metallic monsters. Patterned after realistic animal behaviors, the technocyte enemies won't always attack you directly – instead trying to lure you into traps where another monster lurks in the shadows. Other situations force you to use the weapons available to you in more savvy ways. At some points in the game you'll encounter enemies like giant walking tanks, which can take an extreme amount of damage before being destroyed. But rather than standing to fight, you can search out the tank's controller, operating the machine remotely from a nearby location. Take out the controller, and you've neutralized the tank and saved yourself from a brutal fight. "It's like a combat puzzle," offers producer Josh Austin.

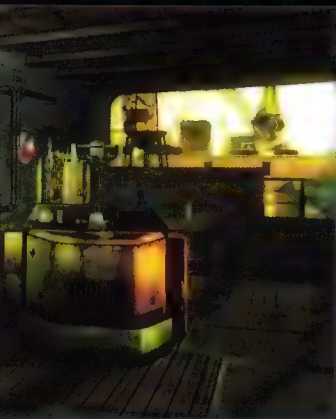
Keeping the action constantly fresh and exciting is key, but of equal importance is the man at the center of everything, Hayden Tenno. Both Digital Extremes and D3Publisher see Hayden as a crucial element of the game. "He's got a great character arc," says Austin. "Not many games have such strong character development." Neither the developer nor the publisher wants to give too much away about how Hayden changes over the course of the game, but both stress that he's a bit of a lost soul who finds his inner humanity through his transformation into a monster. Sinclair sees him as someone who is more proactive than other video game heroes – he doesn't wait until someone whispers orders in his ear to head towards an objective, he sets a goal for himself and he accomplishes it. "He's very self-sufficient, very self-reliant," says Sinclair. "We like to joke in the office that he's like 'What if Jack Bauer went

to Russia and became Wolverine?'"

Mentioning both an espionage icon and a superhero in the same breath isn't surprising, given the wealth of influences that the Dark Sector team is working with. Featuring elements of sci-fi, action, and horror, along with more realistic military elements, Dark Sector is a game that could potentially appeal to a wide range of gamers. Many games have tried to be all things to all players, and not all have succeeded. But based on everything we've seen so far, Dark Sector has a good chance of becoming one of those rare titles embraced by the gaming community at large. Digital Extremes appears to have both the talent and passion to make their lofty goals become a reality. If all goes according to plan, Dark Sector may evolve from an interesting project into one of the next great action franchises. ■■■









# PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3

## The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES > DEVELOPER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS > RELEASE NOVEMBER 17

### AN EPIC REBORN

**B**y now, every reader of this magazine ought to be familiar with The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion. The mammoth RPG from Bethesda Softworks has been a resounding smash hit on the Xbox 360, quickly becoming one of the best-selling games on the system. The PC version has fared similarly well, and the downloadable content for the game has kept players hooked by adding new items, areas, dungeons, and quests to the already-epic game. Despite all its success, there is still a huge audience that hasn't experienced Oblivion: the PlayStation crowd. But that's about to change, as The Elder Scrolls IV is headed for the PS3 and

should be available on launch day.

To learn what's in store for the PS3 version, we spoke to Todd Howard, the game's executive producer and all-purpose authority on everything PS3-related. The always candid Howard had some surprising answers about how the 360 and PS3 versions differ. "They are very similar. The PS3 has benefited from us continuing to develop our core technology that drives our Elder Scrolls games. Some of that is noticeable on the screen, some is not," said Howard. "The best examples are the new shaders we have for how the near detail and far detail blend together on the landscape.

You no longer have a harsh line cutting across the two levels - they blend together seamlessly and the far detail looks much nicer."

While the visuals are receiving only some small tweaks, the PS3 version is definitely getting some big exclusive content. "For the PS3 we created a whole new mini-faction, The Knights of the Nine," said Howard. "It's a holy quest for lost relics that make your character into the 'Divine Crusader.' We felt that the classic 'good-guy crusader' was one of the character archetypes we were lacking in the main game. If you want to be really evil, you have



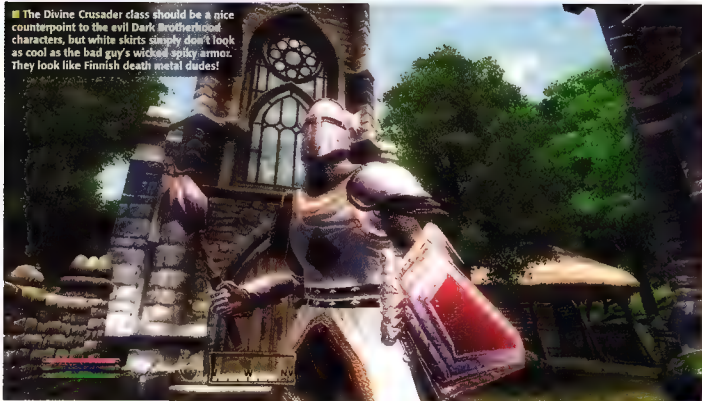
the Dark Brotherhood, now if you want to be really good and pure, you have the Knights of the Nine."

The Knights of the Nine content may be made available to 360 and PC players at some point, just like the downloadable content released thus far should eventually be released for the PS3. "We hope to have them available at some point for download on the PS3, but there are a lot of elements to Sony's online service that are fuzzy right now," says Howard. Aside from the questions about the online service, the biggest differences between the two console versions may be the very discs they're printed on. According to Howard, the 360 pulls information off the disc about twice as fast as the PS3's Blu-ray drive, which means the PS3's in-game loading won't be reduced, even though each unit will have a hard drive. On the other hand, multiple language tracks can be included on a Blu-ray disc, which will be fantastic for the game's eventual release in Europe. Regardless of what system you play it on, Oblivion is a fantastic game, and we're thrilled to see that it will now have a chance to reach an even wider audience. ■ ■ ■

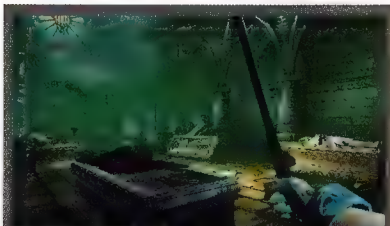




■ The Divine Crusader class should be a nice counterpoint to the evil Dark Brotherhood characters, but white skirts simply don't look as cool as the bad guy's wicked spiky armor. They look like Finnish death metal dudes!



■ The PS3 version blends near and distant textures for a more seamless look.



## Oblivion on the Go

Occasionally, internet rumors are actually correct. Bethesda has confided in us that the previously unconfirmed PSP version of Oblivion is actually a reality. We don't have a ton of information on the game (officially titled The Elder Scrolls Travels: Oblivion), but we do know that it retains the same first-person combat system as the original, has an all-new storyline with both new areas and locations from past Elder Scrolls games, and has at least 10 hours of unique gameplay. It also sports 11 huge environments to explore, meaning that it probably won't be a true open-world game. Travels: Oblivion will also feature the same character customization feature as the original, as well as a user-defined hockey system for your favorite items. Oh, and we know one real thing about the game: It'll probably be awesome.





UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2

# Guitar Hero II

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC > PUBLISHER RED OCTANE > DEVELOPER HARMONIX > RELEASE NOVEMBER (PS2), SPRING (XBOX 360)

## ROCK THIS TOWN

**Y**es, folks. Coming soon to a TV near you — Guitar Hero II on the Xbox 360. While we've yet to see the retail release of the PlayStation 2 version of the game, Red Octane revealed to us details about the upcoming next-gen port of this insanely popular music-game franchise. Not only that, we also received the full song list of licensed tracks for the PS2 version — a queue of music that should have a little something for almost anyone. In fact, we got to play an early build of the game, and every new song we played got us a little more excited.

The lineup of tunes leans a bit more in the hardcore rocker direction than even the first game. Many of the songs are lengthy, epic affairs for you and your axe, well over the radio-friendly 3:05 that so many people are used to. While the lower difficulties are still quite focused on beginners, many of the songs on higher difficulties are truly trials of endurance. The addition of three button chords on some songs adds some challenge, and many of the solo parts seem to stretch on for minutes. Without a doubt, the highlight of the new game will be the new cooperative mode, where players share both success and failure. Thankfully, different players can each pick their own difficulty setting, so players of varying skill levels can still be in the same band. In addition to the 41 licensed songs listed here, the game is also once again filled with a number of unlockable tracks of mostly unlicensed music, bringing the final total of playable songs to 64!

Meanwhile, the 360 version of the game will boast

that same track listing plus several more unannounced songs exclusive to Microsoft's console. The graphics will be increased in resolution to take advantage of the higher power next-gen system. Perhaps the most exciting news coming from Red Octane is the confirmation that the 360 version will be using downloadable content to further expand its song list in the months after release. The current plan appears to be that much of that downloadable music will have a cost, with a single song selling for somewhere between one and five dollars. In addition, producer John Tam reported to us that we can expect a wider variety of music in these downloads as the team tries out different genres and bands to see what people would like to have more of. Red Octane is also considering some sort of plan that would allow music publishers to pay for their own inclusion of music on Xbox Live as a sort of promotion for new bands or albums, and therefore potentially free or reduced-cost downloads for consumers. Furthermore, since the 360 has its own built-in parental controls, Red Octane will



be able to more seriously think about including songs with mature lyrics or content for potential download. They're also considering larger packets of songs that would be available in a single download. While it's too far out to know exactly how fruitful these ambitious plans will be, the potential for cross marketing for music publishers seems like an awfully savvy idea — and gamers look to be in for the best part of the deal. Meanwhile, we'll have to content ourselves with the duets and riffs afforded by the impressive PS2 version — we should have final word about our opinion on that title for our next issue. ■■■■



XBOX 360

Judy Nails rocks out in high def



■ If anything, the sequel is even more challenging than its predecessor

■ A Practice mode now lets you hone your skills on hard solos or other tricky riffs, with the ability to slow down the tempo while you learn the part



XBOX 360

previews

■ The cooperative duet mode has you working together on independent parts to succeed, even sharing a star power meter that both of you must use together



## PlayStation 2 Full Licensed Song List

John the Fisherman – Primus (original master recording)  
 Psychobilly Freakout – Reverend Horton Heat  
 Strutter – KISS  
 War Pigs – Black Sabbath  
 Who Was in My Room Last Night? – Butthole Surfers  
 You Really Got Me – Van Halen  
 YZY – Rush  
 Madhouse – Anthrax  
 Shout at the Devil – Mötley Crüe  
 'Trippin' on a Hole in a Paper Heart – Stone Temple Pilots  
 Freebird – Lynyrd Skynyrd  
 Sweet Child O' Mine – Guns N' Roses  
 Beast and the Harlot – Avenged Sevenfold  
 Can't You Hear Me Knocking – Rolling Stones  
 Crazy on You – Heart  
 Heart Shaped Box – Nirvana  
 Jessica – Allman Brothers  
 Laid to Rest – Lamb of God  
 Message in a Bottle – The Police  
 Misirlou – Dick Dale  
 Surrender – Cheap Trick  
 Tattooed Love Boys – Pretenders  
 Them Bones – Alice in Chains  
 Tonight I'm Gonna Rock You Tonight – Spinal Tap  
 Raw Dog – The Last Vegas (winner of "Be a Guitar Hero" II competition)  
 Bad Reputation – Thin Lizzy  
 Carry Me Home – Living End  
 Carry On My Wayward Son – Kansas  
 Freya – Sword  
 Girlfriend – Matthew Sweet  
 Hanger 18 – Megadeth  
 Institutionalized – Suicidal Tendencies  
 Killing in the Name – Rage Against the Machine  
 Last Child – Aerosmith  
 Monkey Wrench – Foo Fighters  
 Mother – Danzig  
 Rock This Town – Stray Cats  
 Search and Destroy – Iggy & the Stooges  
 Stop – Jane's Addiction  
 Sweet Cherry Pie – Warrant  
 Woman – Wolfmother

XBOX 360



■ While the 360 version will have updated graphics, the real selling point will be new songs and the potential for downloadable music in the future

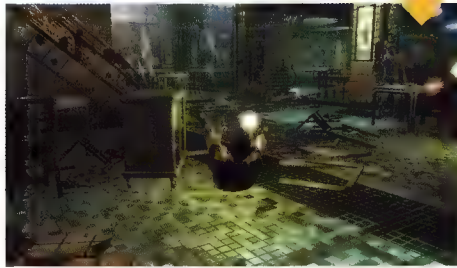
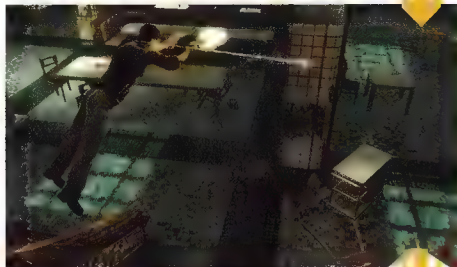
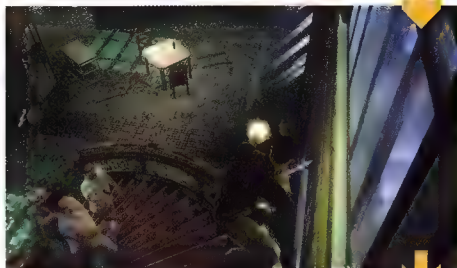
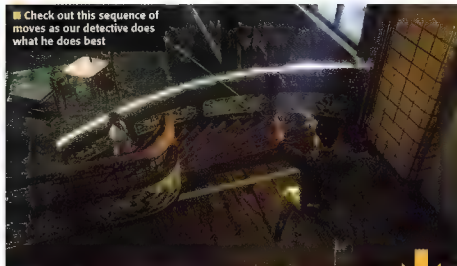
## Passing The Torch: The X-plorer Guitar Hero Controller for Xbox 360

The new 360 controller will function much like its PS2 counterpart, albeit with some stylin' new looks; based on the classic Gibson Explorer. Note the addition of a d-pad and Xbox Guide button. Not visible on this picture is another startling extra feature – an added RJ12 expansion port that conceivably could connect to future peripherals. Think about that for a minute.





Check out this sequence of moves as our detective does what he does best



XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3

# Stranglehold

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER MIDWAY > RELEASE SPRING 2007

## WE LOVE TEQUILA!

It's been a while since we first got word of Midway's John Woo action extravaganza, but it seems at least we're more than halfway through the wait. The powers that be report that the game will definitely launch in the first half of next year, but it's unclear exactly when. What is clear is how great the game continues to look, with each batch of screens and info getting us more excited to see how it turns out. This month we spoke with Brian Eddy, director on the project, who filled us in on the title's progress.

One of the major things he told us about were some of the levels that we hadn't seen very much of up until now. At this point, the teahouse battle is easily recognizable. However, getting to see some shots of the level that follows out in the stilt city of Hong Kong was a treat. These ramshackle buildings hang precariously on and around the cliffs and seasides of the metropolis, and their unsteady construction makes them a fantastic chance for huge explosions and toppling structures.

"You're going to be able to destroy large parts of all these buildings, and make your own path of destruction through the environment," Eddy tells us. "It's a dynamically changing environment based on how you and your enemies attack." Whether smashing through windows or using a downed wall as bullet cover, there are always new approaches to a given challenge. Eddy also told us about some of the excitement that awaits in Chicago. In a level loosely based on the Field Museum and other local archival institutions, protagonist Inspector Tequila will be downing Russian mafia men amid the fossils of long-gone

dinosaurs. Their carefully arranged skeletal forms will shatter during combat, and players will even be able to run up their backs and leap from their heads into battle. Areas like this should keep up with the team's goal of offering intensity akin to the best Hollywood action epics.

Meanwhile, the developer is hard at work adding new features to flesh out gameplay. New interactions with the environment mean you'll be doing far more than just swinging from chandeliers. Eddy told us about plans to include a zipline action, as well as a new ability to grab support poles under structures and spin about them, shooting all the while. "The big thing we're trying to keep with all of these interactions is smooth gunplay during the whole time you're doing them. At no point are you frozen to do these moves," he explains.

With so much craziness in a given level, it shouldn't surprise anyone to hear that the team is aiming for a powerful, non-stop title that rounds out between 8 and 12 hours your first time through. "We're aiming a little on the tighter side. We'd rather have quality than quantity, because we're really going for that cinematic feel of being in a movie," Eddy explains. "We don't want long dead spots where you're just running around for 20 minutes trying to figure out what to do." Hopefully replayability should

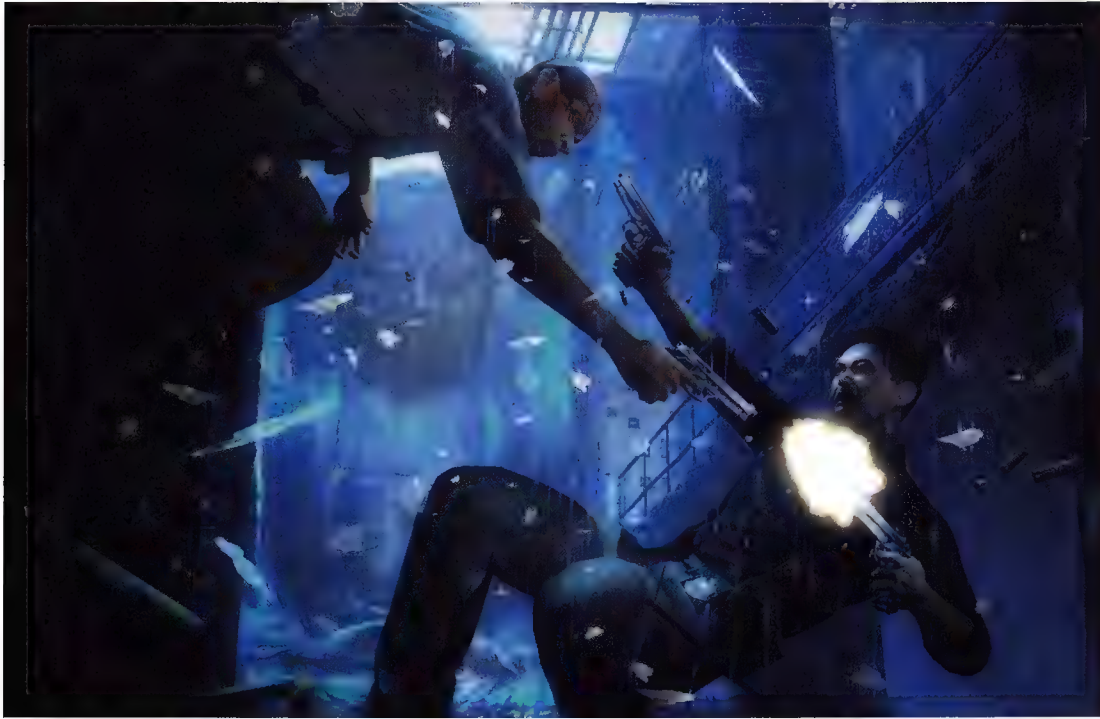
extend play time even more, and word is we may be hearing about both some online multiplayer and vehicle inclusion in the coming months, adding tremendously to the game's already supercharged appeal ■ ■ ■



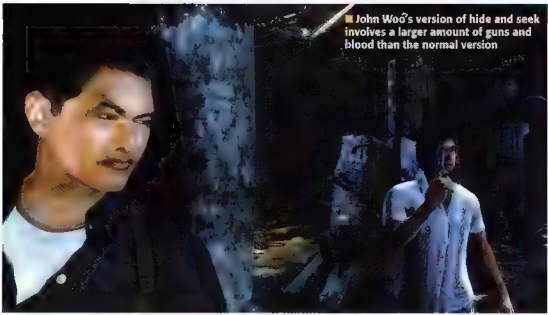
Expect to be juggling two interchangeable weapons at a time, with a total of eight to ten firearms in the game



Giant dinosaur fossils in destructible environments equals something very, very awesome



John Woo's version of hide and seek involves a larger amount of guns and blood than the normal version



The Russian mafia serves as your primary antagonist in Chicago



UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

# Dead or Alive Xtreme 2

> STYLE 1 PLAYER SPORTS/RACING > PUBLISHER TECMO > DEVELOPER TEAM NINJA > RELEASE NOVEMBER 15

## TOTALLY MATURE

Is your mom reading over your shoulder? Quick, turn the page. Okay, safe now? Sweet. We'd be a little embarrassed for you to be reading about butt bouncing minigames and collecting bikinis with her standing around. We're certainly a little embarrassed to be writing about it. Nonetheless, we will struggle on in the never-ceasing quest to bring you the latest in high-tech interactive technology.

DOAX 2 has individual breast physics. We wanted to tell you right away, because Tecmo seems really excited about it, and we figured you might be as well. What that means is that each girl will have a freedom to bounce in directions that have heretofore never been seen in games (or on any actual woman

in history, so take that for what you will) Utilizing the same graphics engine as the last DOA fighting game, there's no doubt that the game is going to look fantastic, even disregarding any fancy torso jiggles. In particular the water effects are pretty amazing, with dappled light and shadow effects and eerily realistic movement.

Two larger game types and a number of minigames will keep you busy as you peruse the natural (in some cases) beauty of the island getaway. Of course, Beach Volleyball makes a return from the first game, this time at a faster pace and with a few more control options, ideally moving the action in the direction of a genuinely fun volleyball simulation. The other major game mode is called

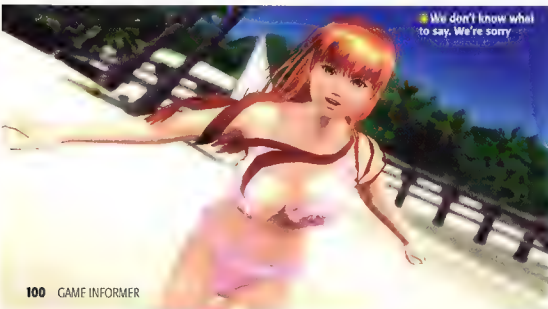


Marine Race, and has up to four girls racing and pulling tricks (you know, like barrel rolls) out in the waves on their jet skis. As you swoosh between buoys that point to the left or right, hitting jumps and navigating rough water, the game certainly evokes the classic Wave Race formula. Sure to be a favorite for early adopters of the game will be the Butt Battle minigame, which tasks you with using a combination of love taps, feints, and tush pushes to topple your opponent into the chilly water below. A similar rock/paper/scissors approach governs the Tug-of-War mode. Pool Hopping has you competing against another girl to jump across the pool platforms without falling, and now rewards color-coordinating the upcoming platform color with which button you use to reach it. A Beach Flag game plays a little bit like Track and Field as you mash on A to reach the flag and then time your pressing of B to grasp the pole at just the right moment. Finally, a Waterslide activity will have you leaning into those well-formed curves to reach the bottom as fast as you can.

In addition, all of these titillating game

types will be available both as single events and in the larger Vacation mode, where, like before, you'll build relationships with your chosen partner and play through a story (of sorts). Don't worry, Team Ninja assures us that the harsh requirements for making and keeping a friendly teammate won't be as impossible this time around. The casino will return with even more gambling options than before. There's even an unlockable Viewer mode that allows you to string together a sequence of cinematics of your favorite girls in their most lady-like outfits and then watch them unimpeded as one long movie, presumably so your hands will be free and you can catch up on your knitting.

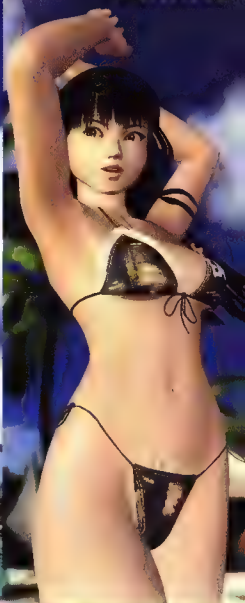
All nine of the female characters from DOA 4 will show up (minus the Spartan girl from Halo), so you're basically looking at the same cast as the first Xtreme game but with the addition of Kokoro. Both Volleyball and Marine Race will be available for Xbox Live play, so expect some heated arguments online with your friends over which one of you has the best tan lines. Ah, the wonders of technology. ■■■■







■ While Ayane has fought in countless life and death struggles, no defeat ever rankled so deeply as when her butt was thoroughly bounced



■ Even when somebody loses, everybody wins



■ Seriously, this water slide looks positively terrifying



■ All of the minigames are designed to be fun diversions that hopefully add up to an amusing break from the norm in your game-playing habits



■ Your eyes do not deceive you. Your girls will develop new tan lines based on the swimsuits you dress them in. No, we're not kidding



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

## Burnout 5

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER CRITERION  
> RELEASE 2007

### J.G. BALLARD'S AUTO-EROTIC FIXATION

**W**hen you tell someone that a game is "open world," they usually think of having the freedom to cause mayhem in games like Grand Theft Auto. You may think you're a badass because you can rough up some stumptets strutting around on six-inch heels, but that's nothing compared to the sheer level of destruction that will be unleashed as Burnout 5 moves into the open world format.

Of course, "open world" is also sometimes a word of derision. Need for Speed Underground 2 bored its players by making them wander around its streets, but the Burnout franchise has thrived on making even casual driving fun with its sense of speed and focus on constant mayhem. Developer Criterion isn't talking about how its streets are going to be structured, but we hope that the orchestrated Crash mode intersections aren't lost in this move to an open world. This traditional Burnout mode sets up intersections with specific traffic configurations and has you plow into them in order to cause maximum damage. It's possible that every intersection is like Crash mode, but it sounds like a tall order for Criterion to intricately choreograph that many intersections. Also, will the open world format be too arbitrary for you to rack up lots of combo points? Regardless of how everything is structured,

we're sure that the developer won't neglect the fanbase's craving for more twisted metal.

Burnout 5 will also feature a Driver's License which will keep track of all your nasty crashes, stats, etc. Although EA and Criterion aren't talking a lot about this game yet, they have said that as you get better you'll attract more attention from the rest of Paradise City's most wanted. You'll obviously be challenging these motorheads, but it'll be interesting to see how these races come about and in what manner. It's not hard to imagine that the regular races and checking of traffic (which was introduced in the last Burnout) will be easy to implement in this new format, and at a minimum we're glad that Criterion at least has the ambition to stretch out its wings a little.

Another possible contributor to this game's success is the fact that it is on next-generation consoles. Criterion is famous for its engines, but the developer felt that in order to do the series and the new systems justice, it had to start from scratch when creating this game. It's no secret that the game will push the envelope in terms of destruction, and all the developer is saying at this point is that cars will actually rip in half due to the devastation visited upon its automobiles. That's what we call in the insurance biz a "total loss" ■■■■





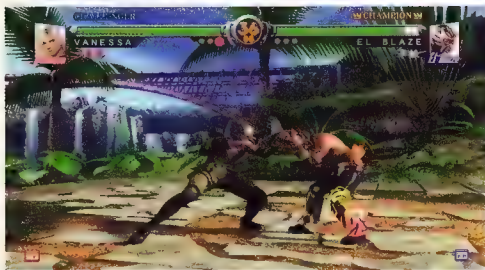
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PLAYSTATION 3

# Virtua Fighter 5

> STYLE 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SEGA  
> RELEASE SPRING 2007



## BOW TO YOUR MASTER

**F**ive years after it drop-kicked fighting fans with the near-perfect Virtual Fighter 4 on the PS2, Sega is arming its next installment of the classic fighting with some new faces, deadlier moves, and a high-def makeover.

The PlayStation 3 exclusive Virtual Fighter 5 ups the ante with 17 total fighters, including popular faces from the past and two new characters. Fresh out of Latin America comes El Blaze, a masked luchador champion who rocks the

Lucha Libre technique made famous by high-flying wrestlers like Rey Mysterio and La Parka. For the second new character, Eileen, fighting is a family affair. Growing up around her grandmother (who just happened to be a Kung-Fu master), Eileen studied the art of Monkey style, an acrobatic fighting technique that features jerky movements and tumbling.

Sega has yet to verify if you will be able to create your own fighters, but we do know that players can earn cash prizes by winning bouts and spend their earnings on character customization. Unlock different outfits and collect different accessories to make your character stand out from your opponents.

Details about the online mode (or lack thereof) and the revamped fighting engine were nonexistent at press time, but Sega did announce a new "Offensive Move" maneuver that will let you attack your opponents from the side, which adds a new layer of strategy to close combat.

No word if Chuck Norris appears as an unlockable character, but there is still time if Sega is listening... ■■■■



A Japanese tea ceremony goes bad when Eileen tells Aoi she looks fat in those clothes

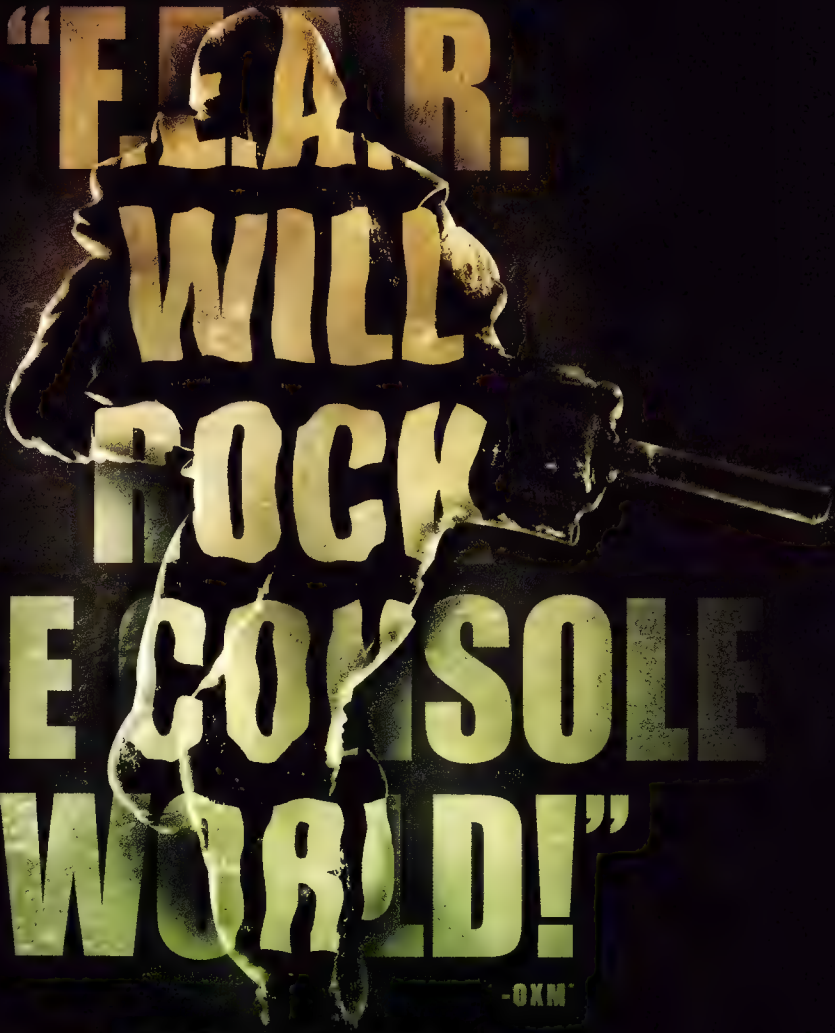
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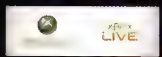
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PLAYSTATION 3



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Printed Aug 2006, OXM July 2006



PC

# Dark Messiah of Might & Magic

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT  
 > **DEVELOPER** ARKANE STUDIOS/KUJU ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 24

## ONE DECAPITATION AT A TIME

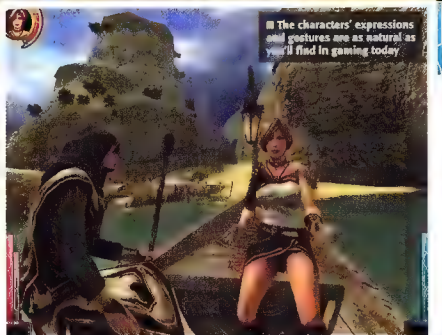
It's been a long wait, but we finally got our hands on an early build of Dark Messiah of Might & Magic. After playing through the several levels of the build that Ubisoft sent us, our anticipation for the full game is higher than it's ever been. That's really saying something.

The number one thing that we took away from the game is that developer Arkane Studios has actually managed to make first-person melee combat fun. And not just in that "Hey, this doesn't suck" kind of way, either. Confronting multiple opponents—a situation that happens an awful lot—requires both tactical awareness and a modicum of skill. The cool environmental interactions, like kicking your

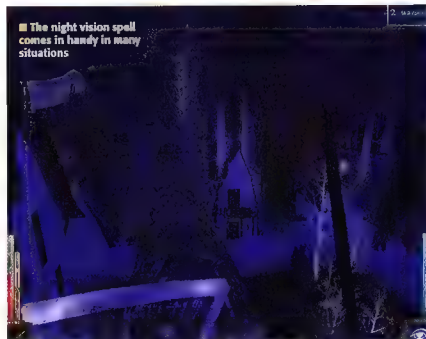
enemies into a fire or dropping barrels on their heads, are functional as well as hilarious. In many cases, they serve as one-shot kills, which greatly speeds up your progress as well as conserving the potions you'd invariably be burning through if you tried to fight everything blow-for-blow. These physics-based interactions are integral to the entire game, and whether you're exploring or fighting, they're a lot of fun to play around with. Whacking bad guys with crates and knocking them into spikes is just the start of it.

The puzzles that we saw that involved navigating the world, while never really reaching the level of a dedicated platformer like Prince of Persia, were certainly as entertaining as anything we've seen from a first-person game. A rope bow that functions much like a grappling hook adds a third dimension to the exploration, and the parts of the game that we played thankfully never force the player into too much running around before the combat starts up again.

Graphically, this game is a winning argument that Valve's Source engine can continue to provide cutting-edge visuals despite the rise of newer



■ The characters' expressions and gestures are as natural as you'll find in gaming today.



■ The night vision spell comes in handy in many situations.



■ The violence isn't exactly subtle or understated.

engines. Also, a great attention to detail in the environments prevents the feeling that you're running through the same corridor or room over and over again, and helps keep the game feeling fresh. To be honest, outside of some normal preview bugginess that reared its head in some wonky ladders and a few dipping issues that forced a reload, what we played of Dark Messiah is some of the better PC adventuring we've had since Deus Ex. We'll be sure to update you with a full review as soon as possible, but the early word on this title is very good. ■ ■ ■

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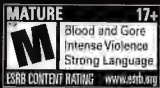
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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# DIRT: Colin McRae Off-Road

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER CODEMASTERS > DEVELOPER CODEMASTERS > RELEASE 2007

## EAT DIRT

**T**here's a saying in the racing world: "Rally racers like to do it dirty." Okay, so maybe we made that saying up, but we do know this: Racing cars at breakneck speeds and slipping through the dirt and gravel on the edges of cliffs takes cojones the size of Michelin tires. And yet the folks at Codemasters – masters of the rally racing genre – want to take gamers to new heights with DIRT: Colin McRae Off-Road.

As the title suggests, DIRT is a slight departure from the straight-up rally games that have previously made up the Colin McRae series. This game expands the types of racing you'll do apart from normal rally courses to include Hill Climb events, multi-car cross-country 4x4 competitions, the COOR Off-Road series (which takes buggies through jumps and moguls), and more for a total of six event types. We talked to Alex Grimbley, the title's producer, and asked him: Having different types of racing is great, but will they actually feel different to gamers? He was confident they

would. "We've gone to great lengths to ensure each vehicle will feel like its real world counterpart. Additionally, each environment and location will have a unique look and feel, so the player really gets a sense that they are racing in various locations throughout the globe. Couple this with the huge variety of single car and multi-car content we're confident that no two races will feel the same, let alone two series."

Because of the new types of racing this game is adopting, appropriately its career structure is also being transformed. Becoming the world's greatest off-road racer requires you to scale the career pyramid, making choices along the way. Taking different paths as you work your way up will lead you to varying events. However, money is a constant reward, so you'll be able to open up more events and buy all kinds of cars along the way.

Codemasters has more than proven itself as a company



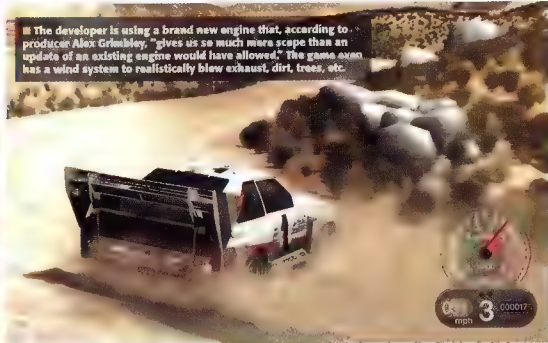
Codemasters says it's going to take its already impressive damage modeling to a whole new level

that knows the ins and outs of good racing physics and how to push gamers to the edge of the envelope. How is this game going to fare when you're not confined to the tight twisting courses of a rally race as you hit the desert dunes? How cool is it going to be now that you can race some circuits with multiple cars? And what about the Hill Climb events? Those are always fun. Games don't always succeed by this kind of additive formula, but DIRT: Colin McRae Off-Road may just prove that being the sum of many parts is the way to go. ■ ■ ■

We have faith that Codemasters will bless these trucks with its magic physics touch



The developer is using a brand new engine that, according to producer Alex Grimbley, "gives us so much more escape than an update of an existing engine would have allowed." The game even has a wind system to realistically blow exhaust, dirt, trees, etc.



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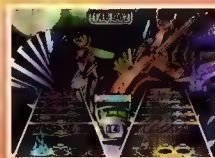
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UNLIMITED ENABLED

# Medieval II: Total War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY > RELEASE NOVEMBER 14

EUROPE IS YOUR OYSTER

**T**his newest addition to the Total War franchise incorporates everything that has made the series so popular – deep turn-based strategic planning and realistic real-time tactical battles – and also streamlines and improves a number of systems like any good sequel should. Of course, an overhauled graphics engine presents visuals with the best visuals in the series to date as well. We spoke with a few key developers at The Creative Assembly about the game, and came away chomping at the bit to check the game out firsthand.

First off, every aspect of the game is looking bigger and better – more units, new types of imperial agents, and more factions to play as or against. A religion system that presents interesting risks and rewards sounds cool as well; converting your state religion to Catholicism will grant you the blessing of the Pope, but at the price of allowing the Vatican a certain sway over your peoples' attitudes and your

government's policies.

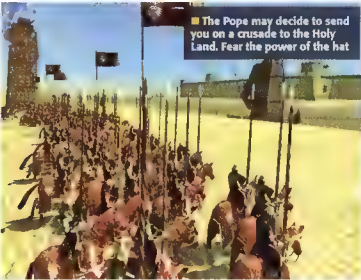
In terms of the battle system, the change of setting from the Roman times of the developer's last game to the 1080-1530 A.D. Europe of this title brings noticeable changes.

"Many European armies [went] from purely infantry armies to having units of massively armored cavalry. Sieges also changed over time with giant stone castles being erected, which required improved siege technology to destroy... all this was thrown on its head with the invention of gunpowder and its use spreading through the world," notes designer Dan Lehtonen. "Massive technology shifts such as these were not available to us in the Roman setting." Fellow designer Dan Toose adds, "There's no all-dominating faction or culture, so you'll see more evenly-pitched battles."

Also important to the Total War experience are the tactical considerations that go well above and beyond the simple "attack-move" frenzy of traditional RTS games. "So

many RTS games are won in the resource management and build queues and not in the actual strategy of the fight itself," scoffs Toose. Producer Prasad Moorthy adds, "They didn't build and forage during real world conflicts, so why do that in games? Also the primary factor in our encounters is morale. Winning battles isn't about killing the enemy, it's about making them break and run. The trick is knowing the difference."

Total War has been a well-regarded series for several years now for good reason, and Medieval II looks like the best entry in the series yet (as it should be). We should have a full review for your reading pleasure soon, as the game is scheduled to launch in November. Be sure to check out the full transcript of our conversation with Toose, Lehtonen, and Moorthy in the Unlimited section of Game Informer Online in the meantime ■■■



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Sonic the Hedgehog

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SONIC TEAM > RELEASE NOVEMBER 17

## LAUNCH DAY

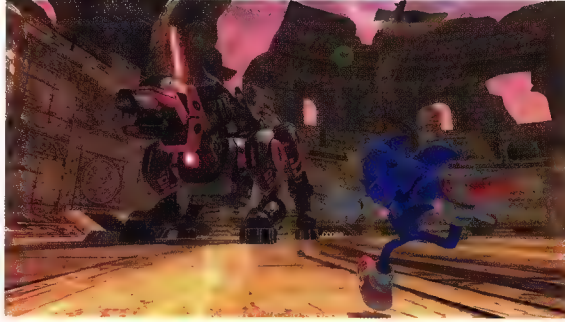
**N**ever one to miss a party, everyone's favorite little blue hedgehog is sprinting his way to a launch day release for the PS3, and a simultaneous appearance on Microsoft's Xbox 360. We got a chance to run Sonic through his paces, as well as meet some of his new buddies, but what we found was a runner in need of some intensive training before he shows himself to the public. However, with a little work, he still has the potential to redeem some of the lost dignity of the series.

The first thing to notice when you start up a game of Sonic's premiere next-gen appearance is the fantastic CG that opens the game. These cutscenes are of superior quality by any standard, and offer an exciting opening to your time with the game. From the start, you can pick between Sonic, his darker compatriot Shadow, and a new companion named Silver (the Hedgehog, as if you couldn't guess the surname).

Storywise, we find ourselves in the idyllic land of Soleanna, where a young princess guards a dark secret called the Flames of Disaster. Surprising absolutely no one, Dr.

Eggman arrives to steal both the lovely girl and her suppressed power, and Sonic must save the day. Meanwhile, Silver has traveled back in time from a Flames of Disaster-ridden future to stop Sonic, who he believes is the cause of his decimated home. Shadow is apparently some sort of secret agent — we think. You'll also have some brief sections where you play as the "Amigos," including Knuckles, Amy, E-123 Omega, Rouge the Bat, Blaze, and of course the nimitable Tails.

All of the characters share some frustrating control problems which we hope to see addressed by release, not the least of which are the wonky camera, sluggish response, and frequent inability to have your characters move in the direction or do the action you want them to. On the bright side, this is the first Sonic game with extensive use of a real physics engine, and it's especially apparent with the cool new telekinetic powers of Silver. And, as always, Sonic is definitely one crazy-fast little dude, and who can complain about that? We should have our final word on the return of Sega's favorite mascot in our next issue. ■ ■ ■



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The forces of Chaos don't have to rely on mere goblins and greenskins to get the job done

# Warhammer: Mark of Chaos

STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TTD) > PUBLISHER NANO MANTA > DEVELOPER BLACK BOX GAMES  
> RELEASE OCTOBER 17

## THE OTHER WARHAMMER

**B**lizzard fanboys, put a sock in it – the Warhammer universe has been around far longer than Warcraft, just in the tabletop gaming space rather than the digital medium. Mark of Chaos, being developed by the team that created the underappreciated *Armies of Exigo*, will bridge that gap next year. We got a chance to check out a pre-release version of the game firsthand, and we must admit that the early word is good.

Functioning more along the lines of the strategic army clashes of the tabletop wargame than the traditional resource race of the RTS genre, Mark of Chaos is staying very true to its Warhammer roots. Base-building, at least in the build we played, is not part of the equation. You have to make the best tactical use out of the troops you have and the terrain you're fighting on to prevail, simply zerging the enemy forces is usually a sure-fire route to disaster.

Unit morale is a huge part of gameplay, breaking the enemy's will to fight is nearly as effective as killing them outright, and adds another dimension both to gameplay and to differentiating between the factions. Goblins may be cheap to recruit and numerous on the battlefield, but their innate cowardice makes it much easier for a smaller, disciplined force of Imperial troops to carry the day. Similarly, impressively large units like trolls are worth more than their simple combat prowess would suggest – it's the rare soldier that can stand his ground against a rampaging beast thrice his size.

Heroes also play a huge role in combat. Gaining experience lets you customize their abilities via

a RPG-esque skill tree, and attaching them to a normal unit grants obvious morale bonuses. Furthermore, while they do have powerful skills that can turn the tide of battle, heroes serve another important function: dueling enemy heroes. When opposing champions meet in the field, they'll square off in what amounts to a minigame with its own set of buttons and skills while their respective armies continue the fight around them. This seems like a rather interesting (and very cool) way to tackle the problem of balancing hero power against regular unit strength.

Special abilities are also handled in an interesting and unique way. Rather than making players micro-manage the energy or mana bars of every individual unit, each side has an "army power pool" that slowly recharges over time. Activating powers and special skills takes a chunk out of that pool, so even if you load your army with spellcasters you won't be shooting off fireballs willy-nilly.

Outside of direct combat, you'll pilot your faction through a turn-based overworld that will determine how the game's story plays out. We can't speak to the depth of this mode since it wasn't fully implemented in the build we played, but it certainly has the potential to be much cooler than the linear RTS single-player modes of the past.

Overall, Mark of Chaos certainly has the chance to do for fantasy Warhammer what Dawn of War did for Warhammer 40,000. We're looking forward to seeing how the final version game turns out, and we suggest that anyone interested in PC gaming do the same. ■■■



The game is all about formation combat and large-scale battles



Sieges should provide some interesting gameplay

XBOX 360 | PS3

# Civil War

► STYLE 1-PLAYER ► 11 ► 2010 RELEASE

## REAL AMERICAN HEROES

**O**n the surface, this first-person shooter from Activision's value-publishing branch might look like nothing more than another title destined for a quick trip to the bargain bin. However, after getting our hands on the game during a recent trip to the publisher's offices, we have to admit that this could very well turn out to be a decent amount of entertainment for its lower-than-average price point (\$50 on the 360, \$40 on PS2, or \$30 for PC).

The first things that come to mind when picking up the controller are the numerous similarities to Call of Duty. From the control scheme to the overall presentation, it's clear that that franchise was used as a template for Civil War—not that that's a bad thing. The game takes some liberties with the

firearms that allow play to flow decently (no two-minute reload times, for instance, and you'll be able to get your hands on a rare repeating rifle that behaves much like an M1 Garand), while the prevalence of melee combat via knives and bayonets further differentiates it from standard-fare FPS.

From what we saw, Civil War looks like it will provide a reasonably well-executed linear adventure with some neat historical tidbits thrown in courtesy of The History Channel's involvement with the game. We're not expecting our worlds to be rocked when this releases, but neither is this shaping up to be the kind of stinker that would make end-of-the-year "worst" lists, which is not bad for a game that can claim to be at least quasi-educational. ■ ■ ■

Actual topographical maps of the battlefields were used to build the terrain



There's no word yet on whether you'll be able to unlock a special "Morphine Addiction" ending



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# Tony Hawk's Project 8

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE FOR XBOX 360) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION  
 > **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT ENTERTAINMENT (PSP, 360), SHABA GAMES (XBOX, PS2), PAGE 44 (PSP)  
 > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 7 (XBOX 360, PS2, XBOX, PSP), NOVEMBER 17 (PSP)

## INNOVATION FOR THE SKATING NATION

**T**ony Hawk's Project 8 represents developer Neversoft's first true next-generation skateboarding game, as last year's American Wasteland on Xbox 360 was basically the same product you found on the current generation of hardware with some graphical upgrades.

Using motion captured animation and Hawk's physics system, the game has a whole new look. At its core, the gameplay we have all become accustomed to is still intact, but the subtle changes give the game not only a more realistic look, but a new level of challenge. Real-world physics put more demands on the player to use gravity and momentum to a greater degree to pull off massive combo strings.

We got some hands-on time with the Xbox 360 version of the game, and to say that we were pleased with many of Neversoft's changes would be an understatement. First and foremost, the developer has finally dropped its "giant training mode" design and moved this portion of the game to its own mode where new players can learn the intricacies of Tony Hawk's extensive trick system.

Gone as well are the various difficulty settings, which have been replaced with new in-game icons that show the player the trick lines. A basic example would be a simple grind where you begin at the game's designated start point. If you grind around a simple bend and land it, you have completed the trick at an Amateur level. But if you look around the world and find the various icons that show the trick line for the Pro or Sick level, you can try the trick again and string together all the lines to complete the Sick challenge.

This change in and of itself is the true genius of this game, as it puts the fun of exploration and experimentation back into the experience. It also lets the player pick and choose where and when you take on these challenges. The various areas of the world are still unlocked by completing a percentage of the challenges in a given area, but which trials you take are left up to you. This is all done seamlessly in one load-free world. So for example, if you see the Classic mode challenge and you take it on, the game seamlessly introduces all the objectives to the player, throws up the timer, and you begin your run.

This also plays into the game's story, which has Tony Hawk looking for the next eight great skaters — the Project 8. You can climb to Project 8 status by completing the challenges at the easier difficulties, but if you want to become the greatest skater in the world you will need to complete all the Sick challenges.

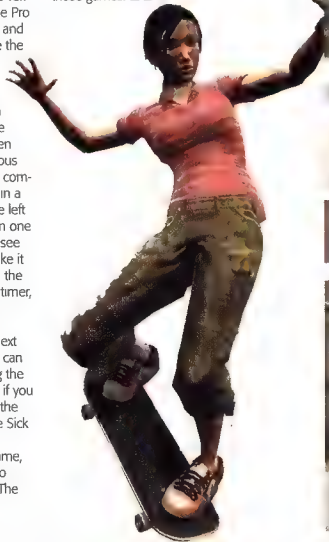
Of course, as with any Tony Hawk game, there is a new skill set incorporated into its vast arsenal of tricks. Dubbed "Nail The

Trick," it is performed by pressing both analog sticks simultaneously. The camera then zooms in to your feet where you now have complete control of rotating the board by pushing the analog sticks in various directions. Push both sticks down and your skaters feet flick the board toward the screen, time it right (when the top of the board or the trucks are face up) and you can move your feet again to spin the board in different directions. String various foot movements together, while spinning with the left and right shoulder buttons, and you will soon find huge scores in your future.

Besides all these exciting new gameplay innovations, Project 8 brings a ton of new features to the table. Pedestrians get angry and chase after you when you knock them over. Some challenges let you move various pieces around in the world, and other force you to pull tricks off in front of crowds or perform tricks on film (complete with a nifty picture-in-picture view of your skater).

All told, Project 8 is finally bringing the series back to what matters — skating and exploring the world — and we simply couldn't be more excited.

Unfortunately, the PlayStation 3 version of the game will not support online play, but Activision does promise some unique aspects that will be exclusive to that version. Also, we haven't had a chance to play the current-generation or handheld editions of the game, so we are unable to confirm how well these new features work in those games. ■■■



A SWEEPING SAGA  
AN ANCIENT BETRAYAL  
A BATTLE TO END ALL BATTLES

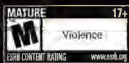
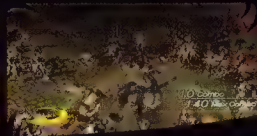
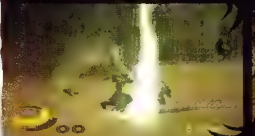
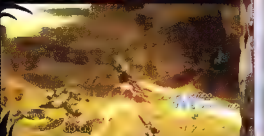
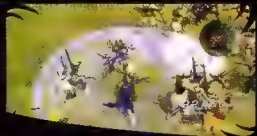


ナインティナイン ナイト

# NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

INTENSE ACTION

IMMERSIVE BATTLES



—PHANTAGRAM—

ONLY ON  
XBOX 360





■ Using the environment to your advantage should be a huge part of the game

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Def Jam [Working Title]

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS  
> **DEVELOPER** EA CHICAGO > **RELEASE** MARCH

## KEEPIN' IT SURREAL

**W**hen we first spoke with EA Chicago head Kudo Tsunoda and Def Jam producer Michael Mendheim about the third game in the series late last year, the duo expressed a desire to incorporate hip-hop music and lifestyle more completely into the fighting engine. At the time, details were scarce, but now EA has dished out a little more info on the game, and the ideas at play are certainly interesting, to say the least.

Like the last Def Jam game, the next entry (currently with no announced title) will feature many recognizable hip-hop stars (around 40), licensed tracks, and a focus on environmental interaction. However, this time around, the stages react to both the player and the music. In one example EA trotted out, throwing your enemy into a gas pump caused the pump to break, and then fire shot out of the opening in time with the music. Buildings in the background pulse to the beat, signs rotate with the rhythm, and other objects around you interact with the music. We can see how a reg-

ular blast of fire could be useful in battle, but we are anxiously awaiting more info on how this strange rhythmic world is useful in a fistfight.

While a very odd feature for a fighting game, the interaction with the music is clearly the most interesting addition to the franchise. Players will actually be able to import their own tracks into the game, and the world will sync up with their chosen music. There are also stat boosts based on the song playing - Nelly gets a bonus when a Nelly song is playing, for example. There is also talk of some unique DJ-style controls that let you remix the music and the players will be able to switch tracks to remove a song bonus, and rewind time to see your enemy suffer brutal damage again and again.

While EA hasn't announced many details on the multiplayer aspect, we're certain that the new Def Jam will



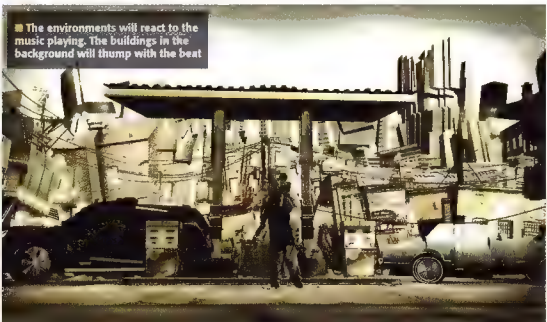
■ The rappers in the game get a bonus when one of their songs is playing during a fight

feature two-player mode on a single console, as well as online fighting at minimum. The single-player mode sports a create-a-character function, and a story that has you trying to start up your own record label, earning artists, bling, and houses along the way.

There are certainly a lot of creative ideas at play in the new Def Jam, and the finished product could be great. It could also be too bizarre for its own good, or simply too far removed from the previous games for many fans. Only time will tell, but we'll certainly be keeping an eye on this one. ■ ■ ■



■ No one likes puffy coats. If you get beaten up while wearing one, you have only yourself to blame



■ The environments will react to the music playing. The buildings in the background will thump with the beat



NINTENDO DS

# Final Fantasy III

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX  
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 14

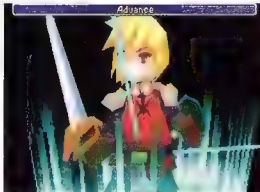
## BLAST FROM THE PAST

For the Final Fantasy fanatics who aren't prepared to accept changes to the classic formula (see our Final Fantasy XII review on page 132 for more), there is another option coming for DS that cleaves tightly to the franchise's old-school traditions. Despite the fact that this particular entry has never been released on our shores, in many ways Final Fantasy III is the root of what gamers think the series should be.

As the title that introduced long-standing mechanics like the job system and summoned monsters, gamers will recognize many familiar elements in FF III. Random encounters play out in turn-based battles, and being able to switch freely among classes like warrior, monk, and black mage means that you can customize your characters' roles. You may have seen variations on this in Final Fantasies V, Tactics, or X-2, but this is where it all started.

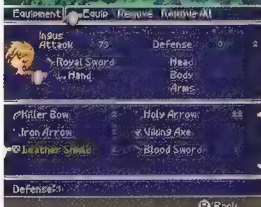
Beyond the beautiful visual and modern interface, the only major changes from the 8-bit version deal with making the

characters and story more distinct. As a whole, the gameplay stays true to the game's original release, complete with a Dungeons & Dragons-inspired magic system based on spell levels rather than MP. It may be difficult for some gamers to take a step back from current RPG conventions, but for fans of the early games in this series, it may just recreate that thrill of playing through an old favorite for the first time. ■ ■ ■



### Didn't I Play That?

Between various U.S. and Japanese releases, it isn't easy to keep the numbers straight on the Final Fantasy games. In case you're confused, this DS game is not a remake of the Final Fantasy III released for Super Nintendo; that one was actually Final Fantasy VI (which is getting a new GBA port in the coming months).



Wii

# GT Pro Series

> STYLE | TO 4-PLAYER RACING > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER MTO > RELEASE HOLIDAY

## BOTH HANDS ON THE WII!

There may be questions about the motion-sensing gameplay of the Wii, but it seems obvious that one of the genres that should have no problem translating onto the console is racing. However, Ubisoft is going the extra step. Instead of just moving your controller to maneuver your car in GT Pro Series, the company is including a plastic wheel peripheral. Although the game itself looks a tad basic, utilizing this wheel will perhaps add that extra dimension that Nintendo promised the Wii would deliver.

To use the wheel with the normal Wii remote, simply snap it in horizontally into the wheel's frame. From here all the buttons on the controller are still easily accessible while you drive. Because the wheel utilizes the Wii remote in this way, you can use it with Ubisoft's other launch driving title *Monster 4x4* or any other horizontal and tilting remote-only driving game, for that matter. Whatever benefits this peripheral may add to the game may be necessary, as GT Pro Series is a pretty straightforward racing title. However, despite its cel-shaded graphics, we are excited that Ubisoft has gone out and grabbed 80 licensed cars. The real test for the game, and the controller, will be how different this gamut of rides feels as you progress through

the game and unlock them — especially since they are all fully tunable. We hope that a customized Lancer Evolution doesn't feel the same as some pedestrian Toyota. The game also includes drift racing, which should make these kinds of differences crucial.

Debuting during the Wii launch window is just the place for this game, when people are excited to try anything and everything it has to offer. Throw in a well-done peripheral and having fun with your hands at 10 and two o'clock could be easier than ever. ■■■



■ The Wii remote controller will snap horizontally into the GT Pro wheel that comes with the game



Wii

# Splinter Cell: Double Agent

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTI-LAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** WINTER 2006

**S**am Fisher's latest adventure, Splinter Cell: Double Agent, has already been confirmed for Xbox 360, PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube, but apparently another console will be getting some attention from the super-spy. Ubisoft recently announced that Double Agent will also appear on the Wii, although most of the details about this version are still classified.

We sent one of our own highly-skilled spies into Ubisoft's French headquarters to find out more, but unfortunately, he didn't make it out alive. But before he was beaten to death with baguettes, he managed to send out a coded transmission with a few details. The Wii version will be available the day of the console's launch, and is basically a port of the PS2 version. Fans hoping for more shouldn't be disappointed, however. We've played

the PS2 version, and it is a big improvement over the other entries in the series for that platform, rivaling the beautiful visuals found in the first three Xbox games. To write the Wii version off as a mere port does a disservice to the impressive work Ubisoft Montreal has put into the game.

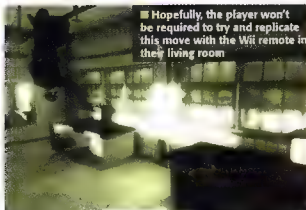
Of course, the big question is how Double Agent will use the Wii's motion-sensing controller. Sadly, our spy wasn't able to uncover that info, as the development team is still working out the details on this aspect. But given Ubisoft Montreal's stellar track record, we have no doubt that they'll be able to come up with something better than our fictional tale of a make-believe GI-employed secret agent. That's right, we made that part up. Will you ever forgive us? ■■■



■ "No one goes to the can on my watch!"



■ Sometimes teamwork leaves you with a great view



■ Hopefully, the player won't be required to try and replicate this move with the Wii remote in their living room

Hold up there, Napoleon. I'm more than stylish. I'm also crazy versatile.

elementandfriends.com

I'm versatile, too. I can wear a funny hat or a little leather jacket.

Element SC



PC

## The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II: The Rise of the Witch-King

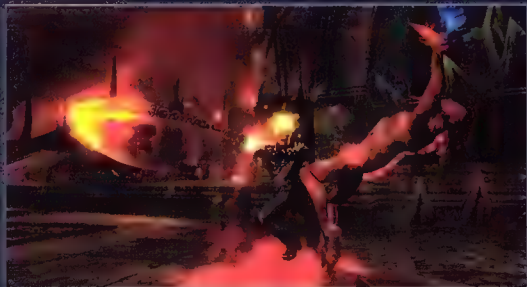
EA is expanding its latest foray into Tolkien's universe with this release, scheduled to come out this winter. Players will experience the Witch-King's original rise to power firsthand, as well as witness his destruction of the kingdom of Amor. EA is also working to refine nearly every aspect of the game, particularly the strategic War of the Ring mode. This time around, War of the Ring will feature fleshed-out army movement and siege battles, and a new Create-A-Hero option will allow players to customize their army's leader from the many races of Middle-earth – including trolls! There's no word yet on this expansion coming to the Xbox 360, but it seems a bit of a no-brainer.



PSP

## Brothers in Arms: D-Day

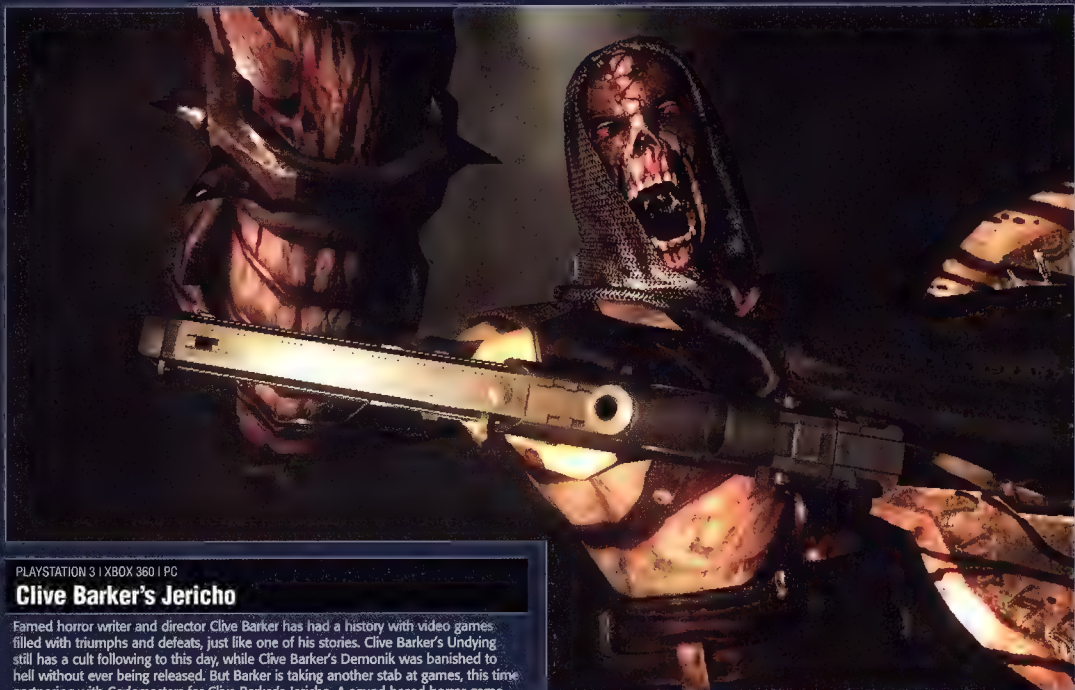
Admit it. You were just thinking, "Man, what I really want is a World War II first-person shooter on PSP. I just haven't gotten the chance to play one of those with only one analog stick!" Lucky for you, Ubisoft is bringing an all-new Brothers In Arms adventure to Sony's portable. Lucky for us all, the company isn't changing the gameplay formula from the excellent style that the franchise has developed on home consoles. Additionally, we've been promised improved AI, co-op play through ad-hoc wireless, and new weapons like bazookas. Provided the control scheme works out decently on the handheld, PSP owners will have something to look forward to when this launches. As soon as we know when that is, we'll let you know.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PSP

## Ghost Rider

Nicolas Cage has been desperately trying to be in a superhero movie for years, but for some reason his desire has never been met (Sorry Nic, you'd make a lousy Superman). Until now, that is. In February, Cage is starring in the adaptation of Ghost Rider, the comic book hero who hasn't been popular for about eight years. Launching alongside the movie will be the obligatory game, being published by 2K Games and developed by Climax Group. The game promises both racing sequences on Ghost Rider's infernal motorcycle, as well as on-foot action. Based on this screen, it looks like the combat will be like God of War on fire, but realistically will probably be 87 percent less cool than that sounds. But hey, it'll probably still be the best game based on a flaming biker.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

### Clive Barker's Jericho

Earned horror writer and director Clive Barker has had a history with video games, filled with triumphs and defeats, just like one of his stories. Clive Barker's Undying still has a cult following to this day, while Clive Barker's Demonik was banished to hell without ever being released. But Barker is taking another stab at games, this time partnering with Codemasters for Clive Barker's Jericho. A squad-based horror game due out in fall of 2007, Jericho puts you in the shoes of the leader of a squad with supernatural powers devoted to defending the U.S. from paranormal threats. As the squad moves into a mysterious city in the Middle East, you'll be forced to rely on your squad's unnatural abilities more and more as you face the horrors lurking in the streets. Will Jericho deliver the same giddy thrills that Barker's better films and books offer? Only time will tell.



PSP

### Gurumin

Developed by Falcom, the company behind the long-running Ys series, Gurumin is coming to the States on PSP. This action/RPG places players in a cutesy world, guiding a cutesy girl through a cutesy adventure. There's even an adorable "boing" sound that plays every time you jump! Surely that'll retain its charm after 20 hours of playtime. The big draw of Gurumin is the almost entirely destructible environments, which hopefully means more than "breaking barrels for potions." Because that never gets old!



NINTENDO DS

### Kirby Squeak Squad

Everyone's favorite anthropomorphic pink blob is making his way back to the Nintendo DS on December 4. Moving back to a traditional side-scrolling control scheme, Kirby Squeak Squad focuses on Kirby's ability-copying powers. You can combine different abilities that you've absorbed to make new ones, and some of them can even affect the environment in ways like burning down foliage or freezing bodies of water solid. Up to four-player multiplayer is also included using the DS's wireless capabilities, though we don't know exactly what that entails yet.



# REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To



Scarface: The World Is Yours



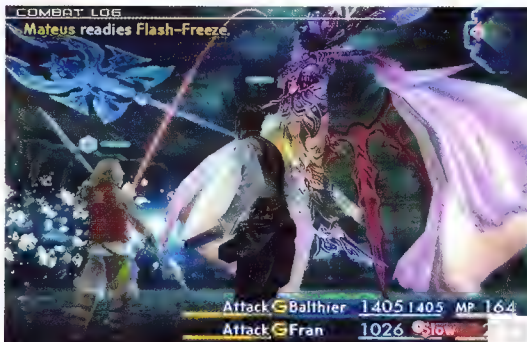
God Hand



Test Drive Unlimited



Baten Kaitos Origins



## Final Fantasy XII

With a huge built-in fanbase, the Final Fantasy series doesn't necessarily need to take big risks. Even so, the latest masterpiece from Square Enix is a daring yet classic experience that will shape how we think about RPGs in the years to come. A sweeping political story is brought to life by a fantastic cast of characters, and the elimination of turn-based battles adds a strategic thrill to combat. Seamlessly blending new ideas with old traditions, Final Fantasy XII is another triumphant entry in this beloved franchise.



## Every Extend Extra

Mizuguchi and the gang over at Q Entertainment have done it again with another mesmerizing title for the PSP. Defying easy description, Every Extend Extra combines elements of puzzle, shooter, and music games to great effect with its flashing explosions and Zen-like beats. Check out our review of this unusual addition to the PSP family on page 141.

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** Ammo. Only good for whippin' at nerds.

- > 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.

**GameStop**



**You are Invited**  
To an Exclusive Launch Premiere of

THE LEGEND OF  
**ZELDA**<sup>®</sup>  
Twilight Princess

Wii

**EB GAMES**<sup>™</sup>



**What:** Launch Premiere of The Legend of Zelda:  
Twilight Princess

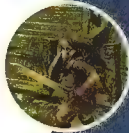
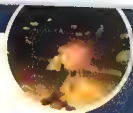
**When:** November 19th, 2006 – 12:00 AM

**Where:** Check with your local **GameStop** and  
**EBGAMES** for participating locations

**How:** Reserve your copy of The Legend of  
Zelda: Twilight Princess

*Go to any GameStop or EB games store before November 19th and your reservation receipt will get you into the launch premiere. It only takes \$5 to reserve your copy of The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*

*Also available for GameCube in Dec. 2006*







**Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team**



**Killzone Liberation**



## Battlefield 2142

EA's juggernaut online franchise is back, and the futuristic setting of Battlefield 2142 doesn't do anything to diminish the brilliant tactical gameplay that the series is built on. The single-player game isn't anything more than the gimpy bot battles that we've seen out of Battlefield forever, but who cares when the online play is so good? Peep the full review over on page 138.

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pg. 130

**the edge**  
(When All Games Aren't Created Equal)

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

<b>ESRB</b> CONTENT RATING C	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.	<b>MATURE</b> M	Content suitable for persons 17 and older.
<b>EVERYONE</b> E	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.	<b>ESRB</b> CONTENT RATING RP	Product is awaiting final rating.
<b>TEEN</b> T	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.	<b>ESRB</b> CONTENT 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. 480p (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 Devil's 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, blured glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces.

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

**collimating** – 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.

**frame-rate** – The frames of animation used to create the illusion of movement.

**front-end** – A game's menus and options.

**GBA** – Game Boy Advance.

**GC** – GameCube.

**“hahaha”** – The response we received from Square Enix when we asked for a release date on Final Fantasy XIII.

**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** – Crapshly 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 the term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft.

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

**normal mapping** – A graphical technique in which a texture set 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 Puyo.

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

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

**shooter** – A term we use for games like Ikuraga and Gradus.

**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.

# FINAL FANTASY®

THE DEFINITIVE  
RELEASE OF THIS  
ROLE-PLAYING  
**CLASSIC**

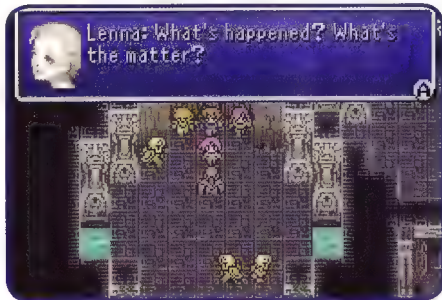
YOU HAVE TO SEE WHAT'S NEW

**E**xperience the magic of FINAL FANTASY V for the first time on the Game Boy® Advance with the re-release of this seminal role-playing game. When a young boy, named Bartz, explores a meteor strike, he crosses paths with Lenna, the daughter of the King of Tycoon, and Galuf, an old man on a critical mission who cannot remember anything but his name after the meteor crash. Lenna tells Bartz of the wind's irregular patterns and the king's voyage to the shrine of the wind crystal to investigate the disturbance.

Lenna fears the worst for her father, so the three enlist the help of the pirate Faris to take them to the crystal shrine on a sea dragon to face an unknown future. The revamped FINAL FANTASY V Advance features several enhancements over its original version. A new graphical makeover brings the game to life, a redesigned menu system makes navigation easier than ever before, and the fresh translation from the original Japanese script gives the story a new sense of life.



■ Use the optimized system & interface features to defeat the games toughest enemies



■ All new on-screen character profiles during story dialogue and dramatically improved sound quality

The game also includes an enhanced FINAL FANTASY soundtrack available anytime you want, and the Sealed Temple, a treacherous, never-before-seen dungeon that features 30 floors to explore. FINAL FANTASY V Advance combines its epic story with several role-playing innovations still found in the FINAL FANTASY series today. The "Active Time Battle" system keeps the battles raging in real time. Each of the characters has an attack gauge that slowly fills according to his or her abilities. With each character possessing different abilities, players must

strategize attacks and defense if they want to defeat the likes of Shinryu and Omega, two of the most challenging battles in FINAL FANTASY history. Perhaps most dear to the FINAL FANTASY faithful is the fantastic job system in FINAL FANTASY V. As characters journey to new crystal locations, each character can learn and master new jobs. As your levels increase, the characters will unlock new skills to help them on their quest. Many of these skills can be carried over when you learn a new job. The most exciting new inclusion to this classic game is four new never-before-seen jobs:

- » **GLADIATOR:** a specialist in powerful physical attacks
- » **ORACLE:** a mage who can use fate-altering effects like pronouncement and prophecy
- » **CANNONEER:** a demolition specialist who combines items to create bombs to throw at enemies
- » **NECROMANCER:** a mage that uses evil dark magic and summons demons into battle

**"AN EXCEPTIONALLY WELL-CRAFTED AND FASCINATING PORTABLE GAME"**

From a princess to a pirate and a young warrior to a wise old man, this unlikely group of warriors must find courage and strength through the powers of the crystals. It won't be easy for you or them. This is a title not to miss, with an expected release date of November 8th, 2006 from the world innovators of all things fantasy, Nintendo and SQUARE ENIX.

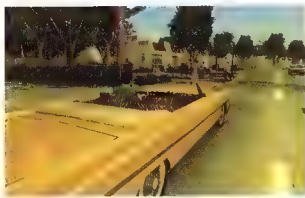


**FINAL FANTASY V**  
ADVANCE

**GAME BOY ADVANCE**



**SQUARE ENIX.**



**BOTTOM LINE** **8.5**

> **Concept:** Allow the player to know what it's really like to be a drug kingpin

> **Graphics:** Won't win beauty contests, but it's mostly solid on the graphics front

> **Sound:** Great soundtrack, including tracks from the film, a great mix of '80s pop, reggae classics, and modern hip-hop

> **Playability:** The basic gun and driving mechanics are solid, but it's not the most polished game

> **Entertainment:** Overcomes the GTA clone tag by emphasizing bloody gunplay and empire building

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# Scarface: The World is Yours

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 8 > **ESRB** M

## PUSHIN' WEIGHT

Over the course of its long and somewhat troubled development cycle, I'd seen versions of *Scarface* that — quite frankly — looked fairly terrible. However, in recent months, the title seemed to be making some real progress, and I'm happy to report that the finished product is a very playable and addictive open-world game that manages to put its own fresh spin on the familiar genre.

The biggest way in which it distinguishes itself from the pack is its focus on the economics and power struggles of being a drug kingpin. Unlike *Grand Theft Auto*, in which you're frequently at the mercy of powers much greater than yourself, *Scarface* allows you to blaze your own path to greatness, eventually restoring Tony Montana to his seat atop the Miami underworld. Starting out by pulling small jobs and slinging grams on street corners, you'll soon find yourself growing in influence, to the point where you're commanding an army of henchmen, numerous storefronts around the city, and cruising your seaplane down to the islands to move kilos. The epic scope and the sheer amount of money at stake gives *Scarface* a sense of urgency that few games in this genre have achieved. Greed is a powerful motivator, and I soon found myself wrapped up in the quest for bigger dollars, more

glamorous cars, and all the ostentatious items that can be purchased in the game's Exotics catalog. Even better, employing henchmen like drivers or boat pilots allows you to call on any of your cars at any time — which beats the tar out of having to jack a scooter on the fly.

The basic gameplay has been significantly upgraded from the early versions as well, and the staples — driving and shooting — are genuinely fun. The targeting system is similar to that of *The Godfather*, using an auto-aim and then allowing you to manually adjust the reticle for quick headshots. Your technique is important, too, as it fills the Balls meter, which results in a short burst of invulnerability that plays out in a first-person view. As many of the gunfights are very hectic, intelligently managing your Balls becomes a strategic necessity. [That's what she said! —*Ed*] Another aspect of the game I really appreciate are the golf-swing style minigames that govern laundering money and making drug deals. It's pretty nerve-wracking at times to know that blowing the button press will result in you losing \$50,000 to the bank or your life to a big-time distributor.

As much as I love *Scarface*, it is by no means a perfect game. At times the auto-targeting felt a bit



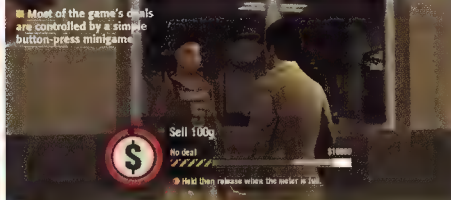
▲ Aside from a few flaws, the targeting system works well

off, and getting in and out of cover is often hard to the point that the feature becomes completely worthless. There were also a small number of collision problems, which resulted in my car getting stuck in the environment. A more serious issue for me were the side missions, which were very repetitive, often requiring you to defend the same person from attack a dozen times (Felix's brother is a real idiot, let me tell you!). However, this complaint is somewhat mitigated by the henchmen missions, which allow you to switch to your enforcer, driver, and assassin at any time for novel mission types.

Overall, I had a great time with *Scarface*. It's every bit as profane, violent, and over-the-top as the movie, and delivers not only the gunplay you're expecting, but as much depth as almost any other game in the genre. Like the film that inspired it, it's sometimes a bit clunky, but makes up for it in bravado and style. —**MATT**

## Second Opinion 8.5

Since Tony Montana is the poster boy for video games these days, it only makes sense that his title would raise the bar for unnecessary violence, excessive vulgarity, and unappealing behavior. Mr. Montana's seedy criminal life is pushed so far out of the realm of believability that he seems like a cartoon parody of himself — which is pretty much the definition of awesome. The game comes equipped with a sewer-like ass-kick button, and also rewards bonus points for kidney shots. Beneath its over-the-top antics resides a finely crafted sandbox game that excels in both weapon and vehicle play. It has some issues with targeting, but most of the action is fast-paced and bloody brilliant. The game also addresses many issues that have plagued this genre. Why drive for miles on end to find a car, when you can have it air-dropped to your location? In the end, *Scarface* can be summed up in only one way: It's an effin' riot. —**REINER**



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# BULLY



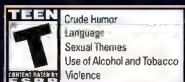
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PlayStation®2



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XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

# Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07

> **STYLE**: TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER**: EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER**: EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE**: OCTOBER 17 > **ESRB**: E



## STRAIGHT DOWN THE FAIRWAY

**G**olf is a game of tradition where change can be frowned upon, but this year's Tiger shakes things up a bit. Given that fact, however, this game largely remains the same as it ever was—due to the consistency of the gameplay from last year. But because that the tour has adopted the new FedEx Cup system, your career can't help but feel a little different. Add in some other tweaks to this mode, and this game is more fleshed out and more fun to play than Tiger 06.

By integrating practice minigames, the PGA tour schedule, and the normal match play rounds against fictional or historical chumps, I found this career path more engaging than past years, where the pro challenges and the tour schedule felt more divided. With a new tiered skill system (Amateur, Pro, Championship, etc.), and the

fact that you can't fully extend your abilities until you break through to the next tier, you are constantly switching between the different play types to move up the ladder of your career and better your golfer.

It's quite obvious that Tiger needs to go through a major push forward if it wants to keep evolving, instead of this shell game. Given the weakness of last year's edition, this version may keep the... ahem... tigers at bay, but even golf has to keep things new and fresh. That may not make the Bushwood crowd happy, but we're gamers and we like innovation. —**KATO**



## Meanwhile Over On the 19th Hole...

The current-gen version is a little different than the next-gen version in that it utilizes an older stats system, as well as manufacturer sponsorships. Plus, it adds a new wrinkle to your career mode via Team Tour mode. You'll beat the usual club pros as you go up the ladder, but this time you can add them to your team. That way, if you're playing against a hard opponent and can't come up with a good short game, you can't opt out, and won't be for another game different.



**BOTTOM LINE** 8

> **Concept**: Putt for dormie and flip for bogey at Spyglass Hill?

> **Graphics**: The picture-in-picture and animated crowds don't sound like much, but this is golf, after all

> **Sound**: It's extremely annoying when EA Trax scores obscure your shot HUD

> **Playability**: The new controls are just tweaks to do old tricks, so there's nothing to be worried about

> **Entertainment**: Yet another change to the career format, but this series is not any worse for the wear

> **Replay Value**: Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 8.5

Another year, another strong outing for EA's venerable golf franchise. The current-gen versions are largely the same as last year's, although the new team options are a great addition, and something that is not available on the 360 version. That being said, the 360 will be my console of choice for golf this year. I really like the overall structure of the tour mode, especially the way it emphasizes training and makes you feel like earning new skill points is a real accomplishment. I also loved the new mechanic for pitching shots up and down and the new circular targeting icon (both of which are exclusive to 360). However, this is a quality sports game any way you slice (or hook) it, and I think fans of the series will be very pleased by this year's model —**MATT**

# MULTI-SYSTEM QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX  
**NBA Live 07**

**BOTTOM LINE** 7.5

> **STYLE**: TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER**: EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER**: EA CANADA > **RELEASE**: SEPTEMBER 25 > **ESRB**: E



**N**BA Live 07 is like the late-era Michael Jordan of hoops games. The occasional game reminds us of the glory years, but the franchise can't make the crowd cheer like it used to

EA continues to ignore the basic flaws in gameplay to focus on circus sideshows like the NBA

All-Star Weekend mode. Once again the player AI is stuck in Forrest Gump mode, as CPU-controlled players spend their minutes shooting at the back of the backboard, watching instead of playing defense, and running with the ball out of bounds.

The deep Dynasty mode is the only feature worth the price of admission. The day-to-day tasks are organized better than NBA 2K7's Association mode, and new features like the NBA rumors and managing assistants give sports fans a greater sense of control. —**BERTZ**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

## The Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning

**BOTTOM LINE** 7

> **STYLE**: 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER**: SIERRA > **DEVELOPER**: KROME STUDIOS > **RELEASE**: OCTOBER 10 > **ESRB**: E10+

**F**or a game whose primary audience is clearly a slightly younger crowd, Spyro's latest effort can nonetheless boast some impressive production values. Strong voiceover from Elijah Wood in the lead role and David Spade as his sidekick propel the fairy tale story forward. Bright and colorful palettes



abound in the visuals, with a heaping helping of particle effects and explosions that almost flood the screen at times. If the gameplay was as exciting as the game was to look at and listen to, I'd label this a great title regardless of your age. Unfortunately, the entire affair is filled with repeated waves of what amount to the exact same enemies, and it doesn't take long for boredom to set in. If they were going to go for an all-action approach with almost no platforming or puzzles, the combat needed some more depth. In this case, that primary activity in the game of beating up baddies is pretty mindless, and fails to elevate the title to anything above average. —**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX  
**NBA 2K7**

**BOTTOM LINE** 8

> **STYLE**: TO 10-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX) (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER**: 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER**: VISUAL CONCEPTS > **RELEASE**: SEPTEMBER 25 > **ESRB**: E



**T**his isn't the current-gen review of a next-gen title that you think it is.

Yes, the presentation isn't as good, and unfortunately there is no 24/7 mode — which is a real bummer, but on the court this game hasn't been left for dead. Freestyle moves flow, but don't always dominate the

action, and the new defensive moves are cool even if the collision between the players is as rough as always. Association fans will also be heartened to know that they can develop their players off the court by setting up between-game practices. —**KATO**

It's got solid graphics, but most importantly,  
it has gameplay that's interesting and unique.

- IGN



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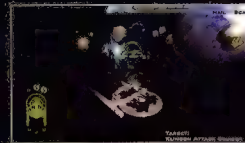
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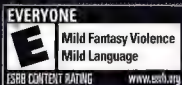


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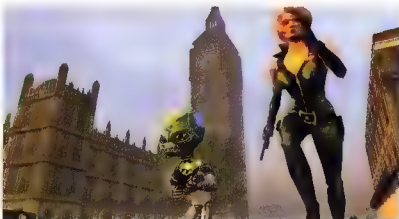
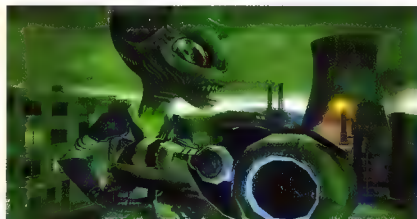
PSP screens shown



NINTENDO DS



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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# Destroy All Humans 2

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER PANDEMIC > RELEASE OCTOBER 17 > ESRB T

## LITTLE GREEN MAN, BIG PROBIN' GUN

**T**he concept of the apocalypse conjures up different images for different people. As for me, when doomsday is at hand, I hope it's exactly like *Destroy All Humans 2*: tanks flying through the air, charred bones in the street, and flaming meteors falling from the sky—all with a mischievous and sardonic spin. Like its predecessor, DAH 2 skillfully uses offbeat humor to turn what would otherwise be ghastly carnage into a hilarious spectacle.

For this sequel, practically all of the roadblocks that were in gamers' way in the first game have been tossed aside; there is no collecting DNA to advance the plot, and Crypto has unlimited use of his psychokinesis. These changes, along with the shift to an open-world mission structure, go a long way towards streamlining the mayhem and making the game more fun to play overall. The story missions may not be incredibly varied (you're usually either destroying or protecting something), but the new

weapons ensure that Crypto's tasks are filled with incredible "did you see that!" moments. Hit a bus with the Dislocator and watch it go airborne. Call up a giant worm (think *Tremors*) from the ground. Repeatedly toss hapless pedestrians into traffic. The possibilities just keep on coming.

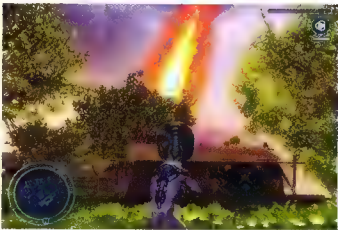
There is a decent variety of side missions, too. Capturing draft

odgers, forcing dudes to get sex-change operations, and making people worship the Lord of the Sacred Crotch are all a part of Crypto's plan to cripple humanity. Unfortunately, the objectives for several of these are unmarked, forcing you to wander around an area in frustrated desperation until a flashing dot appears. It is annoying and oddly out of place in a game that otherwise flows smoothly.

The only area of DAH 2 that is a noticeable step down from the original is the '60s setting. Sure, it's entertaining to poke fun at drug-addled hippies, but the writing seems to crutch on that one joke too often, so the majority of the game's laughs are of your own creation. Even so, the improvements to the controls and mechanics, plus an option to have a buddy jump in for co-op at any time, means that there's never been a better time to pick up a Zap-O-Matic and vaporize some meatbags. —JOE

### Close Encounters

As soon as you land in a new area, it's a good idea to fly around town and abduct everyone you see. Crypto needs to collect a variety of different humans for use in his Gene Blender. Instead of purchasing psionic upgrades, Crypto combines human DNA (harvested from abductees) to enhance his mental abilities. The sooner you obtain the necessary components for the different "recipes," the sooner you'll be able to lift cars, body snatch faster, and convince law enforcement to defend you instead of attack.



**BOTTOM LINE** 8.5

> **Concept:** Sadly, not all humans were destroyed last time. Get closer to finishing the job.

> **Graphics:** Effects and explosions look great, but the environments lack the distinctive style of the first game.

> **Sound:** The soundtrack just isn't as memorable this time around, but the dialogue is funny (though slow-moving).

> **Playability:** Smooth when no precision is required. Thankfully, that's practically all the time.

> **Entertainment:** The inventive weapons, widespread destruction, and abundance of crude humor result in the funnest game I've played all year.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 8.25

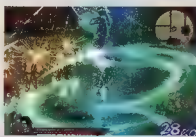
As a sequel, this does it right, fixing some of the problems of the original *Destroy All Humans* while continuing to expand the possibilities inherent in playing as a powerful alien wreaking havoc on puny Earthlings. The sixties setting provides fertile ground for the series' comic mischieff, even if most of the gags are pretty obvious (Boy, hippies sure like to smoke! pot—tee hee). I still think this series hasn't quite lived up to its potential, as your ability to use the world as your playground remains too limited by the game design and the missions are frequently a bit repetitive. However, this concept is just too great not to be fun, and I had myself in stitches as I threw around cars, jacked human bodies, and toppled buildings with my flying saucer. If *Destroy All Humans* can make it to the next generation of consoles, the sky will be the limit. —MATT

## MULTI QUICKIES

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2

### Samurai Warriors 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)  
> PUBLISHER KOEI | DEVELOPER KOEI  
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 19 > ESRB T



**BOTTOM LINE** 6  
Playing Koei's "Warriors" games is kind of like living in the shoes of Bill Murray from *Groundhog Day*. You've been here before, you know exactly how the gameplay works prior to touching the controller, and it feels like it's from the '90s. The sequel does boast a ton of new content, however. Not only does it offer 10 new characters, players can now tap in to special attacks as well as unleash triple Musou assaults. I also like how the castle warfare segments are now blended onto the field. Koei has also implemented a board game called Sugoroku—which should really be called a bored game. Outside of this, the core gameplay mechanics are just as sloppy and simplistic as before. The enemy AI is also quite appalling. As it turns out, mindless killing isn't agless. The gameplay really needs an upgrade before I can recommend this series again. —REINER

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

### Spy Hunter: Nowhere to Run

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING  
> PUBLISHER MIDWAY  
> DEVELOPER TERMINAL REALITY  
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 5 > ESRB T



**BOTTOM LINE** 3  
Dear Mr. The Rock, I think you're cool, even though you're in some crap. The

*Rundown?* Awesome! Be Cool? Temble! You know what else is awful? *Spy Hunter: Nowhere to Run*. Why would you appear in this game? The driving parts feel like controlling a drunken ice skater with a machine gun, and the action sequences are even worse. Your character model runs like he has a poopy diaper, and the gun combat is so erratic and goofy it's like a Benny Hill episode. This game is glitchy and broken (I drove through a mountain), and fails to deliver either solid driving or action. Please don't do any more games like this, The Rock. You deserve better. —JEREMY



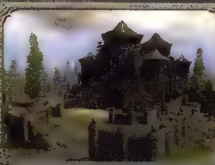
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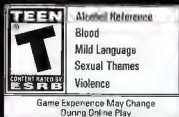


EVERYTHING YOU DO HAS A MEANING

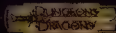


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PLAYSTATION 2

# Final Fantasy XII

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX  
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 31 > **ESRB** T



BELIEVE

A game that bears the Final Fantasy name undergoes scrutiny like few others. As a part of the most popular role-playing franchise in the U.S., no hurdle in Final Fantasy XII's development (staff changes, delays, a lackluster demo) escaped notice from ravenous RPG fans. However, those things are all in the past, and it's time to forget what you think you know about this game. Final Fantasy XII is an amazing and stirring adventure that stands among the best RPGs of this generation.

"But wait," you may say, "Doesn't this game go against everything Final Fantasy has ever stood for?" Absolutely not. In fact, many elements that I consider crucial to the series have crystallized here in a more complete and compelling way than ever before. The cast of characters is easily my favorite ensemble to date, replete with histories, conflicts, and secret motivations that will leave you in awe. The young war orphans Vaan and Penelo are plucked from their lives on the streets of Rabanastre, caught up in a rich and cinematic tale of succession, loyalty, and lust for power. This setup may seem old hat, but the tone is very different; players feel like a cog in a much larger machine rather than a ragtag group of heroes who need to save humanity. There is a looming sense of political intrigue that

lends a grand scope to the events and drives the action forward, making it seem as though you're part of a much larger cause.

The most controversial aspect of FF XII will undoubtedly be the battle system. I'll admit that I was apprehensive at first, considering the move to real-time and the necessity of setting up Gambits (scripts that dictate ally behavior). However, now I can't imagine how I ever managed without it. To be perfectly clear, the Gambits don't rob you of control. Instead, they act as a safeguard to ensure that everyone in your party is doing something useful, though you can interrupt and issue commands at any time. The result is fast, efficient combat that is packed with strategy and dependent on characters' roles within the team. Who should do what is determined by gaining skills on the license board, dictating the weapons, skills, and magic your characters can access. By sending everyone in different directions on any situation, you can't see any of the license board beyond tiles adjacent to those you've activated, which makes it impossible to plan long-term character growth.

This uncertainty is actually representative of one consistent problem in Final Fantasy XII that, despite the



**BOTTOM LINE** 9.25

> **Concept:** Take Final Fantasy in a bold new direction by adapting certain MMO sensibilities to a single-player framework

> **Graphics:** One of the most breathtaking games on the PS2. The CG in particular is unparalleled even on next-gen consoles

> **Sound:** Hiroshi Sakamoto's score is a masterpiece, even without much help from Nobuo Uematsu

> **Playability:** Battles have an anime flair; like never before, but the map system needs work

> **Entertainment:** Will draw you in with just as much force as its predecessors

> **Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion** 9.5

Led by a politically charged story that instantly seizes your imagination with riveting events and an extraordinary cast of characters, Final Fantasy XII rides onto the PlayStation 2 with its sword held high, delivering one of the year's most exhilarating adventures. In a move that will surely ruffle the Chocobo feathers of its fan base, this game moves away from the series' storied past on the handheld to adopt a real-time combat system. Is it for the better? I didn't think so at first—in fact, I loathed it for the first few hours of play—but as the game developed, so did the combat, moving from unfocused chaos to a strategy-laden work of art. This series has always been a visual tour de force, but this installment really rears the bar, not within the detail of the graphics, but in both the character and monster designs. The only area where this game truly stumbles is in its inability to clearly guide players. Final Fantasy XII is the masterpiece you hoped it would be, and also the masterpiece that you didn't expect.—REINER

title's many triumphs, casts a shadow over the gameplay: lack of direction. In a series that has been criticized for being overly linear, this entry is definitely on the opposite end of the spectrum. Destinations are often poorly marked, and having the best weapons and skills for a situation is a nebulous task at best. Whether I was wandering through vast plains, advancing across the license board, or fighting a tough boss, I never quite shook the feeling that I was doing something wrong—like maybe I needed to restart and just have another go from scratch.

These nagging doubts are distracting enough to keep Final Fantasy XII from ascending to the same heights as some previous entries, but I should clarify that if you approach FF XII clinging to the past, you will probably be disappointed. Where this game shines the brightest is in the new paths it blazes, not the traditions it revisits. While familiar enough to earn its place in this hallowed franchise, Final Fantasy XII is an innovative and artful game unlike any I've ever played.—JOE

## Mistifying

Mist attacks are the FF XII version of limit breaks, though your characters won't gain them automatically—they need to be purchased on the license board. Getting these unique abilities should be one of your highest priorities as you move around the board and gain new skills. Not only do they put powerful new moves at your disposal, but they also increase your max



MP (after the first one), and can be chained with other characters' mist attacks for a huge assault. They cost a lot of precious MP though, so they are often best used as desperation strikes.

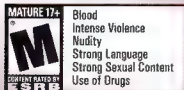


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PlayStation 2



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PLAYSTATION 2

## God Hand

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM  
> **DEVELOPER** CLOVER STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 10 > **ESRB** X

PIMP SLAP

Not every game is a far-reaching, forward-thinking, ambitious project. God Hand, for instance, is simply about running around and beating some dudes up. This style of game has not been particularly well-represented in the current generation of consoles to date, and even though God Hand comes at the very end of the system's lifespan, it still fails to nail the sweet spot that we've been waiting for since The Bouncer flopped years ago.

Don't let the pedigree of Clover Studios (Viewtiful Joe) fool you. God Hand is an almost totally uninspired 3D brawler that doesn't avoid any of the common pitfalls of the genre. Locking the camera close to behind the character's head is almost never a good idea, and certainly not in this case. The automatic targeting mechanic bugs out at least once every five minutes of play. Enemies are too predictable, and most are entirely incapable of doing anything to you once you're up in their grill. And, is it too much to ask that more than four enemy types show up per two hours of playtime?

Even with all these problems you'll occasionally stop, take a breath, and think to yourself, "Man, I just rocked those guys hardcore." But for every one of these moments where every element of the game works together seamlessly, there will be 15-20 minutes of frustration, cursing, and boredom. Tack on the constant borderline offensive caricatures of broad groups of people (Immaculately groomed, oiled-up guys dressed up as showgirls lispin, "You wanna go brokeback, cowboy?" Please.) and most gamers will be hard-pressed to find God Hand deserving of their time. —**ADAM**

**BOTTOM LINE** 6

> **Concept:** For no adequately explored reason, you have to wreck a whole bunch of bad guys in hand-to-hand combat.

> **Graphics:** Good fighting animations, but having almost no variety in enemies or environments gets old quickly.

> **Sound:** Gooey pseudo-Wild West music is one of the game's bright spots.

> **Playability:** Monotonous button-mashing sprinkled with moments of needing uncanny dexterity isn't my favorite design ever.

> **Entertainment:** There are less competent games out there, but there's still no good reason to spend money on this.

> **Replay Value:** Low

**Second Opinion** 6.75

Given Clover Studio's stellar track record as of late, I'm very disappointed in God Hand. It's just nowhere near as polished or visually accomplished as the Viewtiful Joe series or the brilliant Okami. That being said, this game is not without its own bizarre charm. Blessed with an outrageous sense of fun and goofy visual non-sequencers by the dozen, God Hand is quite imitating at times. If only it weren't plagued by a spotty camera that reminds me of PSone games from back in the days before the controller had two analog sticks and tedious level design. Still, it's way more fun than it should be. —**MATT**

## PS 2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

### The Fast and the Furious

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INTERNET)  
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI  
> **DEVELOPER** FUTECHNIX  
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 > **ESRB** E



**BOTTOM LINE** 6  
Loosely based on the famous film franchise (there's little actual tie-in or plot from the movies), The Fast and the Furious aspires to add a unique, drift-racing focus to the popular street racing genre. While Eutechnix has constructed a solid foundation — the graphics are decent and there is a very wide selection of real-world cars and myriad performance and cosmetic upgrades — the game ultimately fails to deliver in a number of areas. I found the feel of the control very clunky and often got a headache from the overdone camera shake effects that only serve to emphasize the slightly sub-par framerate. It also feels that winning races depends more on how many upgrades you've purchased rather than your skill. With the enhanced version of Midnight Club 3 retailing for \$20, I see little need for this title. —**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2

### Tales of the Abyss

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER  
ROLE-PLAYING GAME  
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI  
> **DEVELOPER** NAMCO TALES STUDIO  
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 10 > **ESRB** T

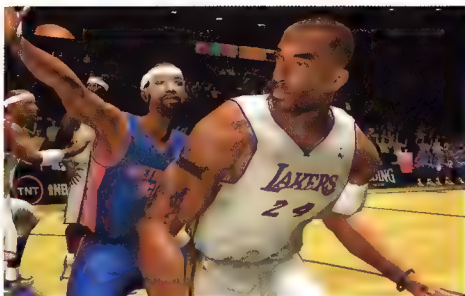


**BOTTOM LINE** 7.25  
If you'd asked me in the first five hours how I felt about this by-the-book anime RPG, I'd have growled, possibly cursed under my breath, and turned back to the screen. Thankfully, like so many games of this ilk, it reveals its worth in later hours with a story and characters that I found myself increasingly involved with, even if I've seen their like before dozens of times. With the exception of some brief animated out-scenes, nothing about the visuals is impressive. But the marginally 3D action battle system is an improvement over the recent Tales of Legendia, and the plotline has enough political twists and betrayals to keep you playing, even if the main character is another confused youth with amnesia. Do we need to start a petition to halt that particular plot device, or what? —**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2

## NBA 07

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SGA SAN DIEGO > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 > **ESRB** E



### A LIFE WORTH LIVING

The only thing that kept NBA 06's inaugural The Life Vol. 1 mode from being an uncontested dunk was — unfortunately — the gameplay. Now that Sony's awesome career mode is a year older and wiser, I'm glad to say that it has lost none of its overwrought drama, twists and turns, and the ability to suck you in hour after hour. But some changes in its structure and gameplay now bring the on-the-court action up to the "playable" level.

What a difference a few tweaks can make. With the new dynamic goals and changed balancing, you'll no longer be stuck on the same challenge for hours on end, and the fact that you play as both Big W and The Kid takes the drama meter off the charts. Although some of the goals and drills you face are unfortunately the same, the fact that it's more bite-sized is a big improvement, and the basketball itself has gotten better. The low post has improved and a few extra variables have been included into the shot indicator to tip a few sure shots into misses and vice versa.

Whereas The Life mode is clearly where this game plants its flag, the basketball itself is still basic. Offensive and defensive setups are predictable, there seems to be little individuality among players, fouls are still non-existent, and even rebounds seem to occur in the same manner play after play. Despite the roller coaster drama following our protagonists off the court, it's as if the play on the court has flat-lined in its blandness. Of course, it's better than last year, but it still has a ways to go before it supplants The Life as the reason to get this game. —**KATO**



**BOTTOM LINE** 7.5

> **Concept:** Make headway on those problems that obscure playing The Life.

> **Graphics:** Unchanged from '06, and most definitely looks like a PS2 game.

> **Sound:** Awesome music with a larger song list, as well as great voice over work for The Life Vol. 2.

> **Playability:** The new rebound indicator is a nice addition to the sport.

> **Entertainment:** Getting to continue The Life alone is worth the price of admission, but the changes made make it that much more fun.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



**Second Opinion** 6

No matter how much locker room drama 989 Sports throws into the great The Life Vol. 2 mode, it still doesn't hide NBA 07's woefully underdeveloped game mechanics on the court. Players move with reckless abandon, the players from both teams mysteriously rest at the other end of the court after a basket (which prevents any sort of fast-break opportunities), and the graphics and presentation are still sub-par. These kinds of errors are inexcusable in the face of such stiff competition from EA and 2K Sports. Rent the game for a taste of The Life, but prepare to vince when you dribble down the court. —**BERTZ**

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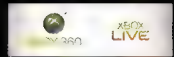


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 Use of Drugs  
 Violence  
ESRB



XBOX 360

# Test Drive Unlimited

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** EDEN GAMES  
 > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 5 > **ESRB** E 10+

## THE OPEN ROAD

**H**ow would you like to cruise around a Hawaiian island in a \$400,000 convertible with the wind ruffling your designer clothes as you head along the shore from your beach house to your secluded mansion in the dense tropical forest? Once you arrive, how would you like to swap that car for another in your fleet of luxury vehicles? Will you take the Jag, the Mercedes, or something more exotic? These are the questions that face you in Test Drive Unlimited, a racing game that balances driving with aspirational lifestyle aspects that make you feel like you're on the best vacation you've ever had.

On a basic level, Test Drive Unlimited is a concept that we've seen before: an open-world racer that lets you drive around its world (the island of Oahu) at your leisure, picking up different racing challenges to earn money for new cars. What sepa-

rates TDU is how it executes these familiar concepts, while simultaneously adding new ones. The biggest addition to the genre is what Atari calls Massively Open Online Racing; when connected to Xbox Live, you can see other players who are in the same part of the island as you, and can drop into multiplayer challenges from your single-player game. Up to eight players can compete in a race, although you may actually be able to see hundreds of real gamers online without ever opening up a menu or visiting an online lobby. After you've raced online, you can go right back to some single-player challenges to earn some money or Achievements. This integration of single and multiplayer racing is seamless, and one

of the most impressive uses of next-gen gaming hardware we've seen yet. The ability to race real humans at nearly any time adds a ton of depth, realism, and replay value to an already massive game.

Another area in which TDU excels is in its use of Achievements. They themselves are fairly standard (win 10 races, own 20 cars, and the like), but the way they are integrated into the single-player game is brilliant.



Earning Achievements advances your rank, which in turn opens up new races. You can check your progress towards an Achievement at any house you own, which kept spurring me to play "just a little longer" every time I saw I was close to earning another. Of course, the big draw for many players will be the huge number of licensed luxury cars, including companies like Maserati, Saleen, Ferrari, as well as bikes like Ducati, Triumph, and Kawasaki, as well as more familiar cars from Ford, Saturn, and more. Each of the cars looks great and handles distinctly, although the general feeling of the racing is somewhere between arcade-style and more realistic sims. Unfortunately, the odd racing physics are the worst part of the game. Some cars feel a little off, others feel downright terrible. Overall though, there's a lot to like in Test Drive Unlimited, and its positive aspects far outweigh the few issues I had. I definitely recommend taking it for a spin. —JEREMY

**BOTTOM LINE** 8.25

> **Concept:** Single-player and online racing merge in an open-world driving sim

> **Graphics:** Not as pretty as some racers, but mighty fine considering the scope of the game

> **Sound:** Many of the licensed songs are good, but repeated too often. The radio stations need more variety

> **Playability:** The feel straddles arcade and sim-style racing a bit, but the controls are clean and straightforward

> **Entertainment:** Although it's not the slickest racer around, TDU is so packed with content that it will keep you coming back again and again

> **Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion** 8.25

Test Drive Unlimited is an exemplar of next-generation design and one of the deepest multiplayer experiences on Xbox 360, but it runs into a roadblock when it comes to racing. The game's most brilliant stroke is how it amalgamates the single and multiplayer components into one mode. You are not alone in the massive world; other human players share the roads, leading to an MMO-like community. You can cruise the strip with friends, form racing teams, and even fund your next vehicle purchase by creating pay-to-enter challenges for other players. While delivering a nice sense of speed and great variety in its track designs, the vehicle physics are a hair off—especially for hard turns. Just think of it as a Lamborghini that someone died in. It's an awesome ride, but every once in a while your nose hairs will be tickled by something foul. This game leads the charge for next-gen racing with its innovative design, and it's well worth your dollars, but go into it knowing that it isn't the smoothest ride on the road. —REINER



**BOTTOM LINE** **8.25**

> **Concept:** Even without major changes, this title remains the best basketball game out there

> **Graphics:** The game looks great, but the overall presentation is fabulous

> **Sound:** The commentary is okay, but the addition of a sideline announcer is genius

> **Playability:** Performing Isomotion moves with your controller runs the gamut from automatic to unresponsive

> **Entertainment:** Whether pounding out a season or jumping into the new 24/7, this game's got it doled in

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 8

Visual Concepts schools the competition once again with its great television-style production value, superior gameplay, and deep Association mode. Graphically, players move and react as smoothly as a Ray Allen jumper, but the Isomotion dribbling controls are still as awkward as a Shawn Bradley drive to the hole. The revamped 24/7 mode benefits from the new storyline; too bad the street games often degenerate into one-man shows. —BERTZ

XBOX 360

# NBA 2K7

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS  
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 25 • **ESRB** E

## A LAY-UP COUNTS AS MUCH AS A DUNK

**T**he joke with basketball is that you only have to tune in and watch it during the last five minutes in order to see who wins. Seeing how there's a lot that's similar between this year and last year's games, you could do that, but then you'd miss some of the small differences in place.

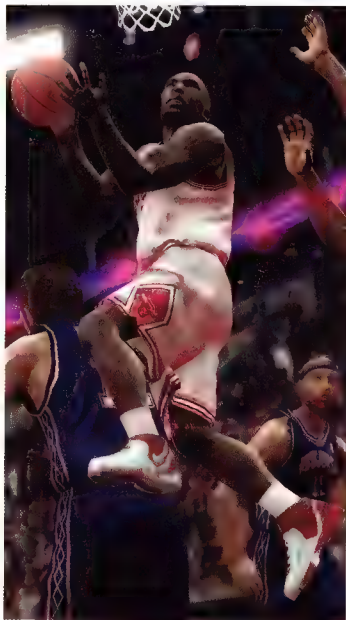
The battle between offense and defense in your average basketball game is often pretty one-sided in favor of offense, but I like the new defensive steal mechanic simply because it is far better balanced than last year. Instead of lunges that make you dangerously vulnerable to drives to the basket, playing defense with the right analog stick is more tempered. When I was doing everything right, I forced the CPU

AI into taking some strange shot clock violations. Given that pulling off freestyle moves isn't always money, once you add on this new defensive flexibility, you feel like you're doing more than running up and down the court all day.

Perhaps the biggest improvement for this year is the welcome change to 24/7 mode. I, for one, like the more linear, story-driven focus it has adopted, although

some may miss being able to apply skill points as they see fit to their character. However, when you're in the arc of the story learning new moves and playing some of the mode's minigames, I think you'll take it as much as I did.

It's fitting 24/7 mode would be my favorite change this year, because this kind of subtle reshaping fits the overall theme of this year's changes. As sweet as the game looks, I found the changing camera angles when you're bringing the ball to half court to be one of the smartest moves the game has made — no matter how minor. Until video game basketball truly undergoes a revolution, we'll have to find solace in these kinds of small victories. —KATO



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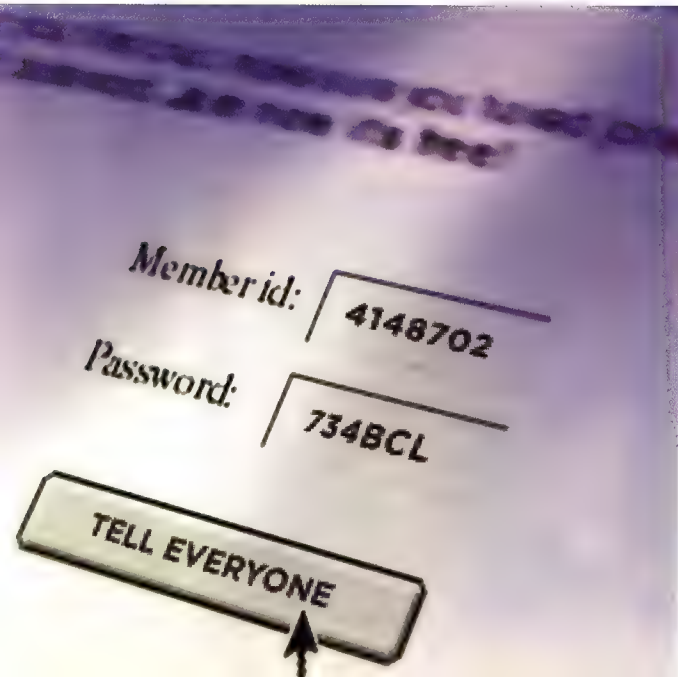
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■ Battle walkers are as effective as they are impressive



■ The Titan is a mobile siege platform, and as such can do wonders to control an area

PC

# Battlefield 2142

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 64 PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS  
> **DEVELOPER** DICE > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 17 > **ESRB** T



IT'S ALL WHO YOU KNOW

Know this is going to come as a shock to a lot of you, so brace yourselves: Battlefield 2142 is little more than Battlefield 2 with mechs and gunships. In nearly every way, a round of 2142 plays out exactly like a round of its predecessor. Not that that's a particularly bad thing, but for all intents and purposes this is a \$50 mod.

The new content, to be fair, is pretty cool. The battle walkers (a mech by any other name is still a mech) actually feel like you'd imagine a bipedal armored walker would—they're big, slow, clunky, mobile weapons platforms that dish out pain like nothing else. Gunships operate under their own sets of physics and behave uniquely, though they're not really any easier to control than the jets and copters of Battlefields past. And the new Titan mode, which primarily involves controlling missile silos on the ground that shoot at the enemy Titan (an enormous flying aircraft that performs similar duties to a Star Destroyer), is a neat twist on the standard Conquest gametype.

The unlock system has been expanded and refined, though its basic nature is very similar to the one in Battlefield 2. You'll now be able to unlock a huge variety of equipment, from better grenades to stamina upgrades and cool toys like recon drones. Unfortunately, these also serve to further disadvantage new players against veterans. It's hard enough to play against people who already know



the maps inside out and can headshot you with a pistol while jumping from 40 yards—trying to fight them when their guns and equipment are leagues better than yours is just demoralizing.

If you can make it past the learning phase of the game without being turned off to it, however, there is a surprising amount of depth to the strategy contained here. From sniping placements to team loadouts to hit-and-run tactics and support powers (artillery strikes, etc.), there's a lot of room to come up with your own tactics and strategies. Of course, finding a team that will follow your orders or a commander who you can trust is another matter entirely.

As with all primarily online games, the biggest



■ As cool as the vehicles are, much of the time a match is decided through good old-fashioned infantry combat



determinant over your enjoyment of Battlefield 2142 will be the crowd that you play with. A good server with friendly, teamwork-oriented players (yes, they do exist) can be one of the best places to hang out and have some fun on the whole Internet. Conversely, playing with a bunch of teamkilling cheaters is even less entertaining than the game's bare-bones single-player mode. Trust me—it's well worth the effort to find a group of like-minded players to frag with.—ADAM

**BOTTOM LINE** **8.5**

> **Concept:** Insert mechs and fancy futuristic weapons into the classic Battlefield formula

> **Graphics:** Gorgeous as always, but not really anything special compared to Battlefield 2

> **Sound:** The constant cacophony of cries for medics and control points changing hands is informative, if nothing else

> **Playability:** You'd like to think that someday, in the future, Battlefield will have controls that don't totally suck to control. Today is not that day

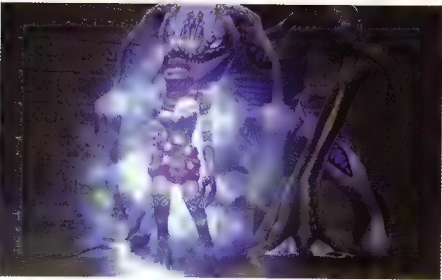
> **Entertainment:** Find a good crew to wreck shop with, and this is as good an online experience as any

> **Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion** **8.5**

By moving Battlefield into the next century, DICE turned the war meter to 11. The infantry possesses ridiculous new weapons like personal shield systems and sentry drones (both of which need to be unlocked by upping your rank). The armored columns pack more heat than ever, and battle walkers (think MechAssault) are sure to strike fear in your squad if you come across one without backup. The new Titan mode, which has you trying to destroy the enemy Titan ship before they can take out yours, gives the action a sense of variety that Battlefield 2 lacked, but I would have liked to see this taken one step further with the inclusion of some close-combat slammish modes that lock out vehicle combat. Rising in rank is more important than ever. Since EA chose to lock basic accessories like grenades and defibrillators. Does this hit the fight too much in the direction of experienced soldiers? Probably. But this fragfest is worth the growing pains noobs have to endure.—BERTZ





GAMECUBE

# Baten Kaitos Origins

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO BANDAI MONOLITH SOFT/RI-CRESCENDO > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 25 > **ESRB** T

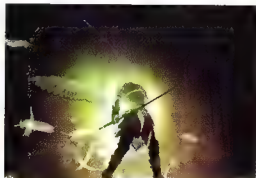
## JUST GLIDING

**A**s it turns out, not every game involving collectible cards is some Poké-Gi-Oh RPG mishmash. Baten Kaitos Origins, like its predecessor, uses inventive card-based battles and puzzle-solving to advance the story. However, instead of using the same mechanics that made the first one so much fun, Origins takes so many steps backwards that it feels like a prequel in terms of gameplay as well as story.

The place where most of these downgrades are most apparent is in combat. First of all, there are only three playable characters, and they feel totally indistinct. Where before players had the opportunity to customize decks for each combatant, now everyone just uses one communal deck. However, the change isn't all bad since it opens up more fluid chains of attacks; you'll rarely even find time to watch the battle unfold because you'll be constantly occupied setting up your next onslaught. I like the urgency this adds to every

encounter, but I have problems with the sense of detachment from the action at hand.

Just because it isn't as good as the first game doesn't mean that Origins is bad. The battles are still challenging, and I found the tale itself pretty interesting — barring a few tedious fetch-quests. Also, the characters eventually shed their seemingly clichéd personalities to dish out a few surprises down the road. If your lonely GameCube is starved for a new RPG, this is your best option. Well, it's actually your only option, but that doesn't stop it from being a competent and generally playable experience. —**JOE**



> **Concept:** The few people who played and enjoyed the first game get a prequel

> **Graphics:** The towns and dungeons are merely functional, rarely beautiful

> **Sound:** The music is average, but the voice overs are a cut above the rest — especially the freaky robot

> **Playability:** A splicing dash meter?! Stupid. Everything else works without any notable hiccups

> **Entertainment:** Fun if you don't mind watching cards instead of the attack animations

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

## Second Opinion 6

This may be the last straight-up RPG for the GameCube, but the swan song is out of tune and ill-sounding at best. An imaginative art style is ruined by muddly implementation. The card-based combat leaves me endlessly frustrated and unable to even watch battles play out because I'm so busy shuffling skills and weapons. Only the story was moderately redeeming — but frankly not enough so as to keep me interested in the boring subplots. This one just wasn't for me. —**MILLER**



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NINTENDO DS

## Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** CHUN SOFT  
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 18 > **ESRB** E

### GARBAGE IS NOT MYSTERIOUS

Imagine the world of video game design as a meat-packing plant where great concepts are processed and packaged. Now, try to picture all of the rand*id* idea-carasses that would be rotting on the floor of this facility, unfit for any game. If you were to sweep up these leavings and shape them into one pestilential mass, you would have Pokémon Mystery Dungeon.

It isn't necessarily that any major elements in the game are broken; everything seems to work as intended. However, what I can't understand is why anyone would intend for a game to function like this. The dungeons are randomly generated, ostensibly to provide a "unique experience" every time, but all they did is bore the living hell out of me. An endless stream of nuisance enemies makes the ordeal even worse, since combat is entirely devoid of strategy: You press A. You do damage. You Press A again. Sometimes you select a special move. If this approach somehow fails and your Pokémon dies, you'll find that you've permanently lost all of the items and money you were carrying (unless you stored them in town beforehand). In normal games, that would be something called a "glitch." Not here! In Pokémon Mystery Dungeon, it's a "challenge." Ah, the semantics of sucking.

I know that this kind of trash can be expected from the Mystery Dungeon games (which have a following for some reason), but subjecting cute little Pokémon to these atrocities is pure animal cruelty. I usually enjoy the simple pleasure of leveling up a Charmander or Bulbasaur, but even that process provides no solace here. Simply put, this game is bad and I hate it. —JOE



**BOTTOM LINE** 3

> **Concept:** Get a bunch of Pokémon together and suck really bad.

> **Graphics:** The sprites are small and the tiled textures repeat and repeat until you can bear it no more.

> **Sound:** I've listened to more musically compelling carbo-tunes

> **Playability:** You press buttons and things happens, but it doesn't go too far beyond that

> **Entertainment:** Not even any "so bad, it's good" appeal. So bad, it's bad

> **Replay Value:** Low

**Second Opinion** 3.5

If Pikachu were diagnosed with arthritis, started losing hair by the curl, then suddenly went blind in both eyes, I would send him to Pokémon Mystery Dungeon—a place so forlorn that it must be where Pokémon go to die. The walk of death begins with the simplest system: It's as simple as running headlong into a foe and clicking the button to make them attack. Given how crude the battle animations are, it's difficult to determine whether your animal is attacking or having a seizure. The randomly generated dungeons only make matters worse, unless of course you enjoy exploring graphically challenged paths that often lead to nowhere. Even if you can rattle off all of the Pokémon names in alphabetical order, I strongly advise that you avoid this anonymous genre and poorly designed dungeon crawler. —REINER

NINTENDO DS

## Children of Mana

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX  
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 30 > **ESRB** E10+



**BOTTOM LINE** 7.75

### THE QUEST OF FOUR

The Mana Tree continues to grow in size, stretching high into the heavens. Powerful magics course through its branches and are believed to keep the forces of evil at bay. With all power comes the desire to possess it. Someone has disrupted the tree and is siphoning its power, plunging the world into a dark age. This, of course, is a problem that only a handful of annoying prepubescent can handle.

To be quite frank, the story is tacked on and as ridiculous as could be. The game's true star is the combat system. In past Mana games, the battlefield wasn't covered with foes. You could pick enemies apart one by one. In Children of Mana, you are almost always surrounded. Hacking away three hit combos with the sword still works well, but now you'll have to strategize. Maybe your best bet is to launch an enemy into another one. Maybe you have to summon one of the eight elemental spirits to clear a path. Or maybe you'll have to use props in the environment, such as barrels and rocks, to send your foes flying. You can even dual-wield weapons, but not in the way you would want. You can have both equipped at once, but must alternate between the weapons with each strike, which is pretty weak. In all, however, the action is always fast-paced, challenging as all get out, and loaded to

the hilt with different enemy types. The game also excels in multiplayer, allowing up to four players to unite and tackle the game through cooperative play. The frenzied approach to combat is perfect for multiplayer sessions, and is only hindered by moments of slowdown. Single player is fun, but co-op is where this experience shines the brightest.

The Mana games have never been temibly deep in the RPG sense.

Holding true to this, Children of Mana offers up a simple, yet highly effective gem system that allows players to assign attribute points to boost their character's effectiveness in certain combat areas. The game isn't shy about empowering players with new weapons, either. You just have to wait until you reach certain zones before you can equip them. Nothing sucks more than getting a sweet new flail and not being able to use it against a difficult boss. Getting to these pivotal encounters is another design mis-step; the goal of each dungeon is to find a glowing orb and bring it to a beacon of light to reach the next floor. Repeat this several times and you'll fight a boss... a boss that screams of nostalgic (yet awesome) 16-bit design.

Children of Mana is not the longest game in the world, but it sure is a fun ride while it lasts, especially if you have friends that are into it as well. —REINER

> **Concept:** A somewhat shallow, yet highly energetic dungeon crawler that keeps you playing with its frenzied battles and awesome co-op

> **Graphics:** Reveals the colorful art style of Sword of Mana, but offers the most basic character designs

> **Sound:** Music to a role-playing fanatic's ears. The battle sounds are also quite good

> **Playability:** Focuses more on straight-up action than any form of exploration.

> **Entertainment:** The single player quest is decent, but co-op is where the big thrills are achieved

> **Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion** 7

At first glance, one might confuse Children of Mana with the top-down action/RPG classic The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past (in fact, one boss battle is ripped off wholesale). Don't be fooled—something is missing here. The action is solid but simplistic, with no real strategy beyond mashing one of your two attack buttons. Of course, I have nothing against slashing or smashing evil hordes, but the dungeons' floor-by-floor structure totally voids the thrill of exploration. And why do I have to wait for designated break periods before I can equip a new item? I found an iron sword and I want to use it! Problems like these make Children of Mana hard to dive into, but it does deliver a fair amount of low-impact fun. —JOE



PSP

## Every Extend Extra

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** BUENA VISTA GAMES  
 > **DEVELOPER** Q ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 17 > **ESRB** E

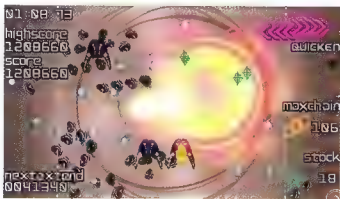


### A NEW BREED

**H**ard to classify but fun to play, Every Extend Extra continues the tradition of music-integrated puzzlers from Mizuguchi and the gang over at Q Entertainment. While I'm ultimately forced to place it in that puzzle category, it has as much in common with Geometry Wars as it does with games of falling blocks, and offers a gameplay experience that is both novel and intriguing.

This new effort lacks the immediacy of Q's first PSP classic, Lumines. Whereas the patterns and challenge of that title are apparent almost instantly, I was several games into Every Extend Extra before I started to feel that familiar Zen-like flow. Other comparisons to Lumines are useful if only for explanation. Like that game, the musical score is reactionary to your onscreen actions — tempo speeds up as you grab power-ups, and every movement you make has a corresponding musical riff or sound effect attached to it. When you start to actually get what you're doing and how to succeed, the game bursts open with a need for exciting strategies, lightning quick responses, and careful observation.

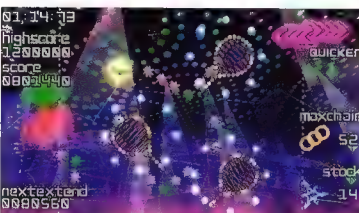
Basically, you control what amounts to a



floating bomb that can be blown up in proximity to onscreen objects. These objects in turn explode, and if you're doing everything right those explosions start a chain reaction that spreads across the screen. Destroyed objects drop power-ups — some that "extend" your game by moving you towards having more lives (bombs), and others that speed up gameplay or add extra time to the clock. Eventually, you're having to contend with a huge number of obstacles that are simultaneously your only route to success. Balancing time, lives, and the insane activity onscreen becomes mesmerizing.

Alas, the flame burns out too fast. Too few levels (even including unlocks) mean that those who want to constantly see new

content are in for a pretty short experience. Only those who thirst for that elusive mastery of that elusive mastery of the concept will be playing for weeks on end. Even so, this may be one of those cases where the remarkable interaction of different gameplay elements should make it worth a look. —MILLER



**BOTTOM LINE** 8.25

> **Concept:** A strange amalgamation of puzzle, shooter, and music elements come together as one of the PSP's more original titles

> **Graphics:** Puting, colorful, and eye-straining — it's exactly what you'd expect from the gang over at Q

> **Sound:** As always, integrating music and sound effects into gameplay is an art unequalled by any other game studio

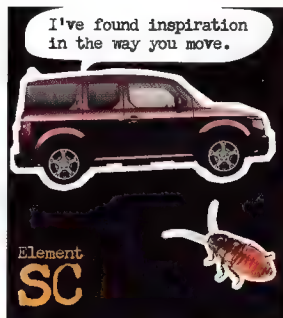
> **Playability:** Tricky to grasp for the first few games, then addictive and challenging

> **Entertainment:** A phenomenally new and exciting concept, but one with too few layers and levels to stick up with many other titles

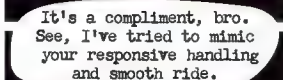
> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 8.5

Without a doubt, Every Extend Extra is the best exploding spaceship versus flying doodads action-puzzle-music thing I've ever played. Every bit as brilliant and challenging as it is bizarre and hard to explain, Q Entertainment's latest PSP game instantly joins Lumines as one of the best and most unique games on the system. A steep learning curve and some intense difficulty keep it from achieving the brilliance of that game, but Every Extend Extra is still definitely recommended for fans of truly original game design. —JEREMY



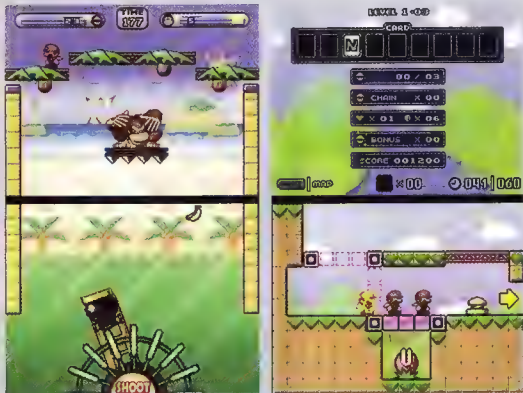
Element  
SC



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SC model shown.



NINTENDO DS

# Mario vs. Donkey Kong 2: March of the Minis

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY CORP. > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 25 > **ESRB** E

## BIG DEAL

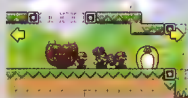
**T**he original Mario vs. Donkey Kong has a neat concept behind it: Lead Mario through some mazes with his platforming skills, collecting helpful toys along the way. Unfortunately, I didn't think that game lived up to its potential, and its underachieving sequel is even less successful. Dropping the platforming elements completely, Mario vs. Donkey Kong 2: March of the Minis focuses squarely on the Mario toys and mazes, and is closer to a simplified version of Lemmings than the original game.

Every level is basically the same: You must lead two to eight Mario Minis to a maze's exit by guiding them around

with touch screen controls. Unfortunately, there is very little challenge to any stage (even at the end of the game), as there are multiple solutions to each puzzle. In fact, the hardest thing about the game is failing to complete a level. There are point goals based on time and item collection that are intended to drive multiple replays, but I finished nearly every level with a gold or silver star, and never felt compelled to try to best my score.

But my main gripe with March of the Minis isn't that it's too easy—it's that it's boring. To me it felt like it was designed to ensure that any player could pick it up and blast through the game in a couple hours—bland, safe, and dull. The touch controls, while simple, can be occasionally imprecise and frustrating. When a game manages to be simultaneously aggravating and boring, that's when I know it's definitely not for me.

I'm sure some people will dig March of the Minis's all-ages gameplay, and the chance to share player-created levels via Wi-Fi is a nice touch, but unless someone comes up with stages that are more interesting than the ones in the main game, I'm certainly not interested. —**JEREMY**



**BOTTOM LINE** 6

> **Concept:** Lead a bunch of brainless toys through some simple mazes, and anger a big monkey in the process

> **Graphics:** Big and colorful, but nothing special

> **Sound:** The music is decent, but more forgettable than many other Nintendo games

> **Playability:** The touch screen controls are simple, yet still manage to lead to frustration

> **Entertainment:** When there's no challenge, there's simply not much appeal to a puzzle game, is there?

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

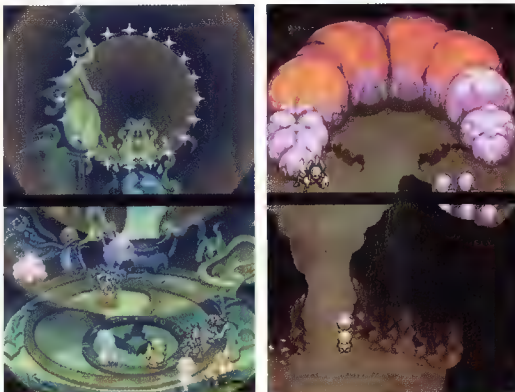
**Second Opinion** 7.5

I like Lemmings, and consequently find myself liking this relatively derivative take on the concept with a Mario coat of paint thrown over top. Puzzles are quick and fun, and I appreciate that the game is pretty forgiving in what it takes to progress forward. Then again, this certainly isn't the most challenging collection of puzzles, with its repetitive boss fights and minigames. The biggest question the game left me with was what exactly Mario is doing rescuing a girl other than Peach. It was fine to play the field with Pauline when you were younger, but come on, buddy. It's time to settle down and start raising some little plumbers. —**MILLER**

NINTENDO DS

# Magical Starsign

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA WI-FI) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** BROWNIE BROWN > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 23 > **ESRB** E



## SCHOOL SUCKS

**I**f school really consisted of rocket ships tucked away in closets, teachers who offer combat training, and playground injuries being treated with gummi worms and gummi frogs, kids would rather sit in class than head home to play video games or ride their bikes. Such is the world of Magical Starsign—a world that combines the magic from Harry Potter with the boundless science-fiction wonder of Star Wars.

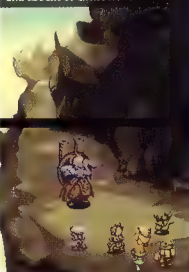
The game starts off fairly slow, sacrificing the flow of the story to get long-winded tutorials out of the way. It's not until the second or third hour that the game actually begins to move forward. It's at this point, however, that the magical allure of the world begins to wear off, revealing a story that struggles to flesh out its characters or give the plot weight. Traveling to different worlds to battle aliens sounded fun early on, but as the game chugs forward at an unbearably slow clip, the prospect of getting sucked into the vacuum of space suddenly has more appeal.

As for the gameplay, picture getting drilled smack dab in the face with an asteroid, and you'll have a pretty good idea of what to expect. The idea of planetary alignment affecting elemental-based powers in each battle is certainly intriguing,

but this concept really doesn't have much of an effect on the outcome of the easy battles. Magic greatly outpowers physical attacks, and it would seem that all other alien civilizations are brain dead when it comes to combat strategy. The bosses that you encounter are amazing in design, often stretching across both screens and towering over your party, but like any of the other critters that you encounter, are mentally unfit to be on the battlefield, or simply alive for that matter.

Magical Starsign has a strong allure, but plummets fast and hard with each new second of play that you are exposed to. In the end, it's difficult to determine which would be worse: a day with this game or a day back in the sixth grade. —**REINER**

**■ The combat system is shallow and absent of excitement**



**BOTTOM LINE** 6.5

> **Concept:** A slow-moving, yawn-inducing RPG that combines Harry Potter, space exploration, and elemental based magic

> **Graphics:** An explosion of pastel colors. The scenery is beautiful, and the creative boss designs often crowd both screens at once. Sadly, the animation is lacking

> **Sound:** A festive and fun soundtrack, with canned battle sounds and little else

> **Playability:** The touch screen controls are implemented nicely, but battles crawl like a turtle with four broken legs

> **Entertainment:** The unique setting and story go a long way, but they are not enough to overcome the lackluster gameplay

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

**Second Opinion** 7

Would you consider replaying Final Fantasy IV or grinding your way through one of the earlier Dragon Quest titles? Your answer will tell you whether or not Magical Starsign deserves a place on your radar. Fiddling along in a boat entirely constructed of Eastern RPG clichés, this title really doesn't offer much in terms of new ideas. I guess we should be thankful that the touch-screen control is intuitive and that the dialogue doesn't suck, but a Harry Potter knockoff for a plot (sans drama and interesting characters) and a by-the-numbers battle system won't do much to cater to anyone outside of the RPG faithful. —**ADAM**

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## PSP QUICKIES

PSP

WTF

BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** D3/PUBLISHER OF AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 17 > **ESRB** T

**N**ot unlike a stack of TPS reports, WTF (Work Time Fun) crams all the monotony and repetitiveness of your 40 hour work week into a package you can take with you. To make the process even more loathsome, you can only spend your hard-earned money on unlocking other jobs or collecting meaningless trinkets. The 40 tongue-in-cheek mini-games range from dull (putting caps on ball-point pens in an assembly line) to delightful (guessing phone numbers of flirtatious ladies). While the quirky sensibility of this collection is a welcome addition to the PSP library, WTF should have spent more time on the fun aspect rather than on the work theme. As is, it falls well short of minigame standards like Brain Age or WarioWare.—**BERTZ**

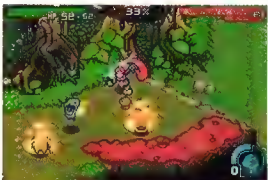


NINTENDO DS

Scurge: Hive

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SOUTHPEAK > **DEVELOPER** ORBITAL MEDIA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E10+



**I**n Scurge: Hive, players adopt the role of female space bounty hunter Samus Ar... I mean Jenosa Arma, along with her prototype battle suit that has the ability to integrate new weapons into its design. As it happens, Scurge desperately tries to be Metroid, but with an isometric view. While I can't condone the

blatant copy of concept, the game itself ends up being a lot of fun, so I suppose I shouldn't complain. A huge world with lots of enemy types, power-ups galore, and intense action is complemented by some stylized, cartoony graphics and toe-tapping old-school music. The only big frustration is the eight directional shooting, which never seems to nail your target the way you'd like. I'll take 2D over this isometric stuff any day, but Scurge gave me lots of reasons to forget my preference.—**MILLER**

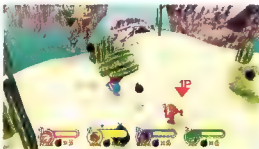
PSP

Power Stone Collection

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 3 > **ESRB** T

**P**ower Stone Collection brings both of the Dreamcast classics, Power Stone and the sequel Power Stone 2, together with a special Collection mode that includes various features you can unlock, including several minigames. For those of you unfamiliar with the series, the joy of Power Stone is found in its interactive items and environments. As you battle it out, you can pick up and use weapons, shove and throw various objects like chairs and barrels, and even swing from poles or jump off walls. On top of all the mayhem, you also want to collect all the Power Stones, which endow your character with super powers for a limited time. I personally like the original more than the sequel, but overall this is a solid collection and a must for any fan. The load times can be annoying, but it's a small price to pay for Power Stone on the go.—**ANDY**



PSP

## Killzone: Liberation

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (6-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** GUERRILLA > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 31 > **ESRB** T



FEEL LIBERATED ENOUGH TO KILL IN THIS ZONE?

**K**illzone: Liberation is a completely different game from its PS2 namesake that came out a couple years ago. Instead of a FPS, developer Guerrilla has made a top down third-person action game that tries to emulate the intense gunplay and war-torn atmosphere established by the first. Sadly, the tight controls of a FPS didn't make the trip over to this portable frag-fest. Don't get me wrong, the action in Liberation is good, and at times intense, but it still seems to lack that visceral experience I like to have with my action games, first person or otherwise.

The control takes some getting used to and might wear on your hands after extended play. I had some trouble strafing and with the lock on feature in particular (you have to hold down the R button to crutch then hold down the L button while aiming with the analog nub to lock onto objects. This doesn't work on enemies). There is an auto-aim feature that points your gun at whatever enemy you face, and it works well enough, but still does not feel as good or accurate as pinning the enemy under a crosshair. At times, the whole set-up left me feeling weak, as though I didn't have the power to bring down my foes.

This leads me into the other issue I had with this game. There were several points where I got stuck playing the same section over and over again because of one annoying guy with a rocket launcher, or a couple of grenade-

happy guys with a pair of good throwing arms, etc. If you don't master the strafing and lock on features and you have trouble finding or keeping cover, this game will kick your ass. There were a few times when dying felt almost cheap. However, this kind of repetitive challenge might not turn off others as it did me, and the checkpoints are generous enough that it is possible to beat this game without giving yourself a migraine.

Control and difficulty aside, there is some fun to be had here. The CG movies are very well done and the graphics in general are excellent. Driving around in the tank and blowing stuff up is loads of fun, as is leading your comrades around. You can command your allies to set C4, man a machine turret, or just watch your back. These helpers can turn into a liability, though, if you don't watch their health. Still, I wish these segments were a little more frequent, as you spend most of the game on your own. I also wish you could carry more than one gun at a time and that the game had not crashed on me those few times just after I'd finished a particularly frustrating section. All in all, if you like hand-held action and you are looking for something that requires a little bit of skill, then this might be worth checking out.—**BEN**

BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

> **Concept:** All the frantic firefights across war-tattered battlefields and hardcore action of a FPS, but with a new, more portable perspective

> **Graphics:** Very solid. About what we've come to expect on the PSP

> **Sound:** A good depth and range. You'll want to use headphones to really get pulled into the action

> **Playability:** The missions have a nice variety, but the controls might leave you with hand cramps

> **Entertainment:** A solid challenge, though it can get a little frustrating at times

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **7.5**

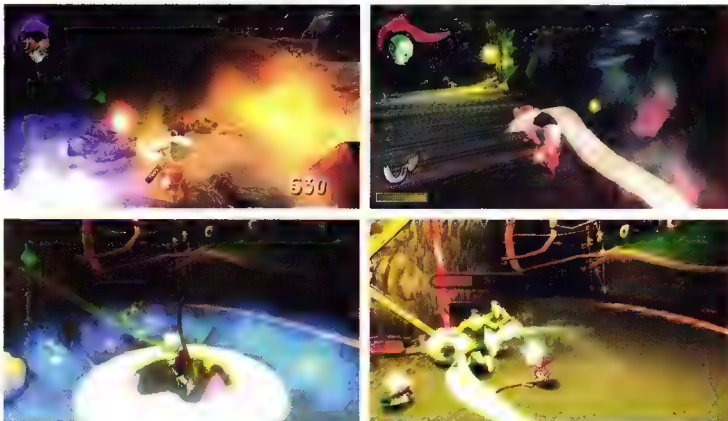
Killzone is a franchise that has generated a lot of hype based on one average console FPS and a really wicked EE video a couple of years ago, but Liberation is a PSP title that has some real meat on its bones. Developer Guerrilla has given this isometric top-down action title a load of content, including both conventional and co-op multiplayer and game sharing. The basics here are all done well; I just wish there was a better auto-targeting system in place, a flaw that really limited my enjoyment of this game. Still, when portable versions of shooters so often feel like product for product's sake, it's good to see a company that's actually trying to do some quality work on the PSP.—**MATT**



PSP

# Death Jr. 2: Root of Evil

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 14 > **ESRB** T



## DIGGING OUT OF A HOLE

The original Death Jr. title, despite its clever characters and cool setting, was hamstrung by iffy level design and a poor camera. This sequel addresses both of those problems magnificently, and lets the off-beat tone and refreshingly unique universe reach their full potential. Though not without its problems, Death Jr. 2 successfully delivers on the unfulfilled promise of the first game.

The mix of hectic combat and challenging platforming is more smoothly executed this

time around. Enemies no longer constantly spawn behind you, and the well thought out pacing keeps any one element from getting old during the lengthy adventure. The later levels in particular crank up the intensity and force you to tap into every ounce of dodging, shooting, and jumping skill you possess, as well as making the best use of your weapons to overcome the insane odds you face. Thanks to a forgiving checkpoint system, though, the challenge never gets too out of hand.

DJ's fictional universe was one of the clear highlights of the first title, and nothing has changed for the worse in that department. The mood music, off-kilter art design, and severely dysfunctional cast of elementary school heroes are all brilliant. The addition of Pandora (the snarky little girl with the

box full of evil) as a playable character is particularly welcome.

Unfortunately, all is not well in Death Jr.'s twisted world. Collision detection issues, glitchy special platforming moves like the mantling maneuver, and a horrid default camera (which can thankfully be changed to the more usable strafe mode most of the time) hold this title back from greatness. The good easily outweighs the bad in this case, though, and plants Death Jr. 2 firmly in the upper echelon of PSP titles. —ADAM

Co-op has a fairly bare-bones implementation.



The art style is one of the game's greatest strengths

**BOTTOM LINE** 8.25

> **Concept:** Mix up crazy weapons, melee combat, and platforming with a Burton-esque twist

> **Graphics:** Clever art design and excellent effects make this a visual treat

> **Sound:** The varied score adds a nice dimension to the tongue-in-cheek setting

> **Playability:** An almost unusable default camera could have sunk this game were it not for the addition of a locked-view strafe mode

> **Entertainment:** The franchise isn't the top dog yet, but it's nonetheless head and shoulders above the platforming PSP crowd

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 7.5

Death Jr. 2: Root of Evil delivers the same lovable undead characters and macabre art style as the original. Unfortunately, the convoluted camera control also returns. Though you can control the camera with the L and R shoulder buttons this time around, jumping from platform to platform still demands that you move slowly and deliberately unless you want to take a spill after the camera disorients you. I wouldn't blame Death Jr. if he developed a fear of heights given all the bailing he'll do as you take him through this otherwise appealing game. —BERTZ



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EX model shown.



**BOTTOM LINE** 6

> **Concept:** A very linear, hand-drawn take on The Getaway franchise, which misses in several ways  
> **Graphics:** Very solid, but also very bland. I did love the art style of the graphic novel cutscenes  
> **Sound:** Oddly, there isn't much music in this game, and when there is it's pedestrian techno that fails to register  
> **Playability:** Managing the camera can be a chore and your henchman appear to be nearly brain-dead

> **Entertainment:** Some great extras add a little value to an otherwise sub-par game  
> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

**Second Opinion** 4.75

Gangs of London seems to make a point of ignoring the lessons that dozens of games in the past have already learned and moved on from. There are dozens of activities to engage in—silly, almost all of them don't really work. The grey and lifeless city has almost no shape or contour to it. The stealth mechanic is positively awful. And don't even get me started on collision and camera issues. Some of the minigames are fun, but if the best that London has to offer is darts and billiards, I think I'll stay on this side of the Atlantic, thank you very much.—MILLER

PSP

# Gangs of London

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING (2-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC) > **PUBLISHER:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA  
> **DEVELOPER:** TEAM SOHO > **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 3 > **ESRB:** M

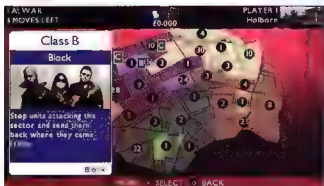
## THE GANG THAT COULDN'T SHOOT STRAIGHT

Despite its flaws, I enjoyed the original *The Getaway*, which benefited both from being one of the first open-world games to be released in the wake of *GTA III* and from its hard-boiled, Guy Ritchie-inspired Cockney ambience. After an uninspired sequel, the series is now being brought to the PSP in the form of *Gangs of London*, a title that—on the surface—appears to be trying some interesting new things. For one, you're now part of a larger battle for control of London, as you can choose one of five separate underworld organizations and control small crews of

henchman during certain missions. It's great that Team Soho has tried to break out in some new directions; it's a pity that the gameplay and missions aren't up to the challenge. The most disappointing aspect for me was the total linearity and lack of freedom that makes this an "open world" game in name only. After selecting a mission from the menu, you're instantly dropped off at the start point to shoot or drive your way to the objective, at which point you're kicked back out in to the menu. Some missions will fail you if you leave the area, which completely undermines

any sense of freedom of choice. The missions themselves are pretty much standard fare...go here, kill someone; run this guy off the road; escort the car. Still, I'll take these drab objectives over the [shudder] horrendous stealth missions. These frustrations are exacerbated by the plowing car handling and the auto-targeting, a faint red outline around the enemy that makes it difficult to see who exactly is in your sights. In addition, you'll find that your crew of henchmen are essentially worthless for anything other than taking a few bullets.

It's not all bad news, though. There are a number of extra modes that I found to be quite enjoyable, and preferable to the main game. The Pub contains pool, darts, and skittles (a tabletop bowling of sorts), all of which are well done and fairly addictive. I also enjoyed the Gang Battle mode, which resembles the classic board game Risk and can be played as a wireless multiplayer contest. However, it's telling that these appetizers brought me a lot more enjoyment than the main dish.—MATT



# HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

## Bounty Hounds

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC OR GAME SHARING)  
> **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO BANDAI  
> **DEVELOPER:** P2C ENTERTAINMENT  
> **RELEASE:** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB:** T



**BOTTOM LINE** 6.25 I'm calling it now: *Bounty Hounds* will develop a small out of fans, and be totally ignored by the mainstream. It's certainly not a bad game, but just one that serves up good and bad in fairly equal doses. The combat engine is good, but the enemies are boring. The RPG-like leveling system is deep, but then drops, economy, and healing systems are all too convoluted. The game does a poor job of teaching you its systems, the boss fights are aggravating and the camera is weak, but despite all its flaws, I played *Bounty Hounds* longer than I needed to. In short, there's fun to be had here if you're willing to put up with the stuff that sucks.—JEREMY

PSP

## The Godfather: Mob Wars

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER ACTION  
> **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS  
> **DEVELOPER:** PACE 44 STUDIOS  
> **RELEASE:** SEPTEMBER 19 > **ESRB:** M

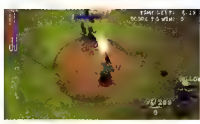


**BOTTOM LINE** 4.5 Electronic Arts couldn't quite get *The Godfather* to run correctly on the PSP, but that didn't stop them from releasing it. Applying cement shoes to the experience, developer Pace 44 Studios has stripped all of the open world gameplay from this version, leaving nothing but the lame missions and a putrid Risk-like minigame. This means that you can't drive the cars anymore. Not having a second analog stick also throws a kink into the gameplay. Simply turning to face your foe is not too impressive. This sad excuse for a port doesn't even deserve a body bag. Just toss it in the river.—REINER

PSP

## 50 Cent Bulletproof: G Unit Edition

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC) > **PUBLISHER:** WENDY UNIVERSAL  
> **DEVELOPER:** HIGH VOULTAGE  
> **RELEASE:** AUGUST 29 > **ESRB:** M

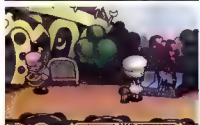


**BOTTOM LINE** 6.25 The console version of 50 Cent *Bulletproof* sold well despite poor reviews, so I guess Fiddy's probably not too concerned about what I have to say about this game. At least I hope so—I don't want 'Fiddy'! I also don't want to play another minute of this PSP adaptation, which—in some ways—is less offensive than the original game, if only for the fact that it's much more modest in scope. Basically, it's a top-down dungeon crawler with Kevlar and saved-offs in place of chain mail and broadswords. You run around, you shoot people, and that's about it.—MATT

NINTENDO DS

## Touch Detective

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE  
> **PUBLISHER:** AILLIS  
> **DEVELOPER:** SUCCESS/DEBORNS  
> **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 19 > **ESRB:** E+



**BOTTOM LINE** 6.75 *Touch Detective* is packed with such funny dialogue and stylistic quirk that it may take a few hours to realize that it isn't a very good game. I was thrown off the scent by the delightfully oddball characters and Tim Burton-inspired visuals, but eventually I had to come to terms with the fact that each episode is rigidly structured and full of obtuse and unintuitive puzzles (Of course! Insert the air pump into the chicken/landlord's butt!). *Touch Detective* definitely has charm, but this cluttered gameplay fails to recall the fun of point-and-click adventures in the genre's heyday.—JOE

PSP

## Spectral Souls

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG  
> **PUBLISHER:** NIPPON CCHI  
> **DEVELOPER:** SUCCESS/DEBORNS  
> **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 17 > **ESRB:** T



**BOTTOM LINE** 5.5 Even the most patient of strategy nerds will be hard-pressed to maintain interest in *Spectral Souls*. The genre plot certainly doesn't sell the weak-battle system, but that's hardly the deal-breaker here. It's the constant, jarring load times that drop the entertainment value of *Spectral Souls* through the floor. You're looking at a two-second load every time a new character speaks just for a portrait (there's not even any voice acting). Battles are more work, though—four seconds of loading just for a basic attack, complete with slowdown during the animation? No thanks. There is some good stuff here, you'll just need the patience of a saint to really enjoy it.—ADAM



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# CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

## TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For July 2006 Based On Units Sold

### 1 MADDEN NFL (PS2)



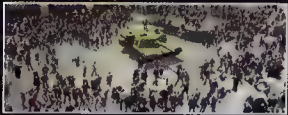
We hope you like reading about football, because pigskin games tend to rule the charts for months this time of year. But hey, you'll get to read a blurb about zombies in a little bit. That's cool, right? Zombies would really add a new layer of strategy to football, wouldn't they? Of course, they're not real good at taking advice from the coach. "I wanna see some hustle out there!" "Uh-huh! Brains!"

### 2 MADDEN NFL (360)



Our favorite football player is Brian Bosworth, cause he was in the movie *Stone Cold*. Not to be confused with "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, Stone Cold and Brian Bosworth were in *The Longest Yard* together, which is a movie about football in prison, thus making this whole thing somehow relevant.

### 3 DEAD RISING (360)



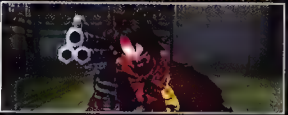
Here's that blurb about zombies we promised you. Zombies are cool. In the movie *Zombie*, a zombie rights shark, which is awesome. There aren't any sharks in *Dead Rising*, so you can't re-enact the scene. We expect this situation to be rectified in the sequel *Capcom*, or at least let us fight an undead manatee.

### 4 MADDEN NFL (XBOX)



This Madden character has been around for a long time. You'd think he'd retire at some point, but he keeps on going. It's like he doesn't age. Undead things don't age... zombies are undead. John Madden, logically, is therefore a zombie. GET IT, STANK!

### 5 DIRGE OF CERBERUS: FINAL FANTASY VII (PS2)

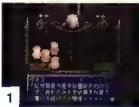


*Dirge of Cerberus* has nothing to do with football or zombies. Well, you run around a lot, which is kind of like football, and Vincent Valentine is like a vampire or something, so he's undead like a zombie. But he's never scored a touchdown or fought a shark, which is why he's down here at number five.

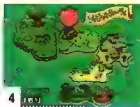
Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Madden NFL 07	N/A	PS2	8.25	08-06	\$48
2	Madden NFL 07	N/A	360	7.75	08-06	\$58
3	Dead Rising	N/A	360	9.25	08-06	\$60
4	Madden NFL 07	N/A	XBOX	8.25	08-06	\$49
5	Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII	N/A	PS2	6.75	08-06	\$49
6	New Super Mario Bros.	3	DS	9.25	05-06	\$35
7	NCAA Football 07	1	PS2	8.25	07-06	\$50
8	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	N/A	PS2	8.75	06-06	\$20
9	Brain Age: Train Your Brain In Minutes A Day	4	DS	8.25	05-06	\$20
10	Ninety-Nine Nights	N/A	360	7.5	08-06	\$50
11	NCAA Football 07	7	360	7.75	07-06	\$60
12	Naruto: Ultimate Ninja	N/A	PS2	6.5	06-06	\$40
13	Big Brain Academy	2	DS	7.75	06-06	\$20
14	Guitar Hero	13	PS2	9	11-05	\$70
15	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	8	PS2	10	10-04	\$20
16	Star Wars: Battlefront II	16	PS2	8.5	11-05	\$20
17	Madden NFL 07	19	PSP	N/A	08-06	\$38
18	God of War	15	PS2	10	03-05	\$20
19	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	N/A	DS	9.25	11-05	\$35
20	NCAA Football 07	17	XBOX	8.25	07-06	\$50

## TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Tales of Phantasia: Full Voice Edition	PSP
2	New Super Mario Bros.	DS
3	Final Fantasy III	DS
4	Mogitate Tingle No Bara Iro Rupp! Land	DS
5	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain 2	DS
6	Shabara! DS Cooking	DS
7	Rhythm Tengoku	GBA
8	Animal Crossing: Wild World	DS
9	Phantasy Star Universe	PS2
10	Mario Hoops 3-on-3	DS



1



4

## TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Final Fantasy XII	N/A	PS2
2	Okami	1	PS2
3	Company of Heroes	3	PC
4	Dead Rising	2	360
5	Battlefield 2142	N/A	PC
6	Scarface: The World Is Yours	N/A	Multi
7	Every Extend Extra	N/A	PSP
8	Test Drive Unlimited	N/A	360
9	Destroy All Humans 2	N/A	Multi
10	Death Jr. 2: Root of Evil	N/A	PSP



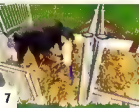
The Staff's Favorite PDS



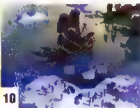
5

## TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	World of Warcraft	1	\$36
2	The Sims 2	4	\$40
3	The Sims 2: Family Fun Stuff	3	\$20
4	Civilization IV: Warlords	N/A	\$29
5	The Sims 2: Open for Business	5	\$31
6	Civilization IV	N/A	\$43
7	Paws & Claws Pet Vet	N/A	\$17
8	Guild Wars: Factions	6	\$48
9	Cars: Radiator Springs Adventures	2	\$20
10	Age of Empires III	N/A	\$48



Based On Monthly Units Sold



10

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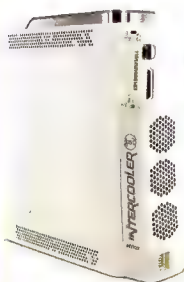


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# ONE OF THE TOP FIVE GAME-DEGREE PROGRAMS

- Electronic Gaming Monthly

SCHOOL OF COMPUTER ANIMATION > DIGITAL ARTS & DESIGN > ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS > FILM > GAME DEVELOPMENT > RECORDING ARTS > SHOW PRODUCTION & TOURING

XBOX 360		
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	7.75	Jun-06
Bloody Angels: Squads of WWII	7.5	May-06
Bombeman: Act Zero	3	Sep-06
Burnout Revenge	9.5	Apr-06
Chronoshards	7	Aug-06
Dead Rising	8.25	Sep-06
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	6	May-06
Edgar Allan Poe's Oblivion: The Enchanted Arce	9.5	May-06
Far Cry Instincts: Predator	8.75	Jun-06
Final Fantasy XI	7.25	Jun-06
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	8.25	Apr-06
Godfather, The	7.75	Oct-06
H-Men: Blood Money	7.75	Oct-06
Just Cause	7.25	Oct-06
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	8	Oct-06
Lord of the Rings: The Battle Middle-earth II, The	8	Aug-06
Madden NFL 07	7.75	Oct-06
Major League Baseball 2K6	7	Jun-06
Motor GP '06	8.75	Jul-06



Chronoshards - Xbox 360 - Aug-06		
NCAA Football 07	7.75	Aug-06
NHL 07	7.25	Oct-06
NHL 2K7	8.25	Oct-06
Ninety-Nine Nights	7.5	Sep-06
Over the Hills	7.75	Sep-06
Over G Fighters	5	Sep-06
PlayStation 2	8.9	Aug-06
Psycho Realm XX	8.5	May-06
Saints Row	8.75	Sep-06
Table Tennis	8	Jul-06
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
Top Spin 2	8.5	May-06
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06

PLAYSTATION 2		
24 The World Cup	7.5	Apr-06
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War	8.25	May-06
Arena Football	6.5	Apr-06
Atelier Iris 2: The Azoth of Destiny	7.5	Jun-06
Beastarna	8.5	Apr-06
Black	8.5	Apr-06
Cars	7	Aug-06
CML Presents:		
Kanako Revolution Country	8	Apr-06
Commandos: Strike Force	6.5	Jun-06
Dance Film	8	Jul-06
Da Vinci Code, The	8	Jul-06
Dige of Cerbus: Final Fantasy VII	6.75	Sep-06
Digress 2: Cloned Memories	8.75	Sep-06
Diner: Parallel Lines	6	May-06
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	6	May-06
Eureka Seven Vol 1: The New Wave	5.25	Oct-06
FIFA 07	7.75	Oct-06
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
FlatOut 2	7.5	Sep-06
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	6.75	Sep-06
Gallop Racer 2006	7.25	Apr-06
Godfather: The Game, The	7.5	May-06
Grain Thrill: Auto		
Liberty City Stories	8.75	Aug-06
H-Men: Blood Money	7.75	Jun-06
Just Cause	6.75	Oct-06
Just Cause	7.25	Oct-06
Kingdom Hearts II	9	Apr-06
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	8	Oct-06
Madden NFL 07	8.25	Oct-06
Major League Baseball 2K6	6.5	Apr-06
Contents Under Pressure	7.25	Apr-06
Metal Gear Solid 3: Subterfuge	9.5	Apr-06
Meta Saga	5.25	May-06
Motor Mechanics V4	7.5	Apr-06
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix	9.5	May-06
MLB 06: The Show	7.5	Apr-06
MLB Slugfest 2006	7.5	Apr-06
Monster Rancher EVO	8	Jun-06
Nanote: Ultimate Ninja	6.5	Jul-06
NASCAR 07	7.75	Oct-06
NBA Ball: Phenom	7.75	Apr-06
NCAA Football 07	8.25	Aug-06
NFL Head Coach	6.75	Aug-06
NHL 07	7.75	Oct-06
NHL 2K7	8.75	Oct-06
Oblivion	9.5	Oct-06
One Piece: Pirate's Carnival	7.5	Jun-06
OutRun 2006 Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
Praves of the Caribbean		
Rampage: Total Destruction	5.75	Aug-06
Real World Golf	7	Jun-06
Rain of Blood	6.25	Oct-06
Rogue Trooper	7.25	Jun-06
Samura Champloo Sidetracked	6.75	Apr-06
Sonic Riders	6	Apr-06
State of Emergency 2	6	Apr-06
Steamboat Chronicles	5.5	May-06
Street Fighter Alpha Anthology	7.5	Jul-06
Sudobun V	7.5	May-06



Kingdom Hearts II - Apr-06		
Super Dragon Ball Z	6	Sep-06
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	7	Apr-06
Waluigi's Project Poseidon	4	Apr-06
Tokyo Extreme Racer 2	6	Apr-06
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
The Game and the Amp	7.25	Apr-06
Tourist Trophy	8.5	May-06
The Real Riding Simulator	7.75	Jul-06
Urban Chaos: Real Response	8	Oct-06
Valley Profile 2: Slovenia	8	Oct-06
Warship Gunner 2	5	Apr-06
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06
Xenosaga Episode III: The Hell and the Amp	8.5	Sep-06
Also Sprach Zarabursta	6	Sep-06
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06
Yakuza	6	Sep-06

GAMECUBE		
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
Cars	7	Aug-06
FIFA 07	7.75	Oct-06
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	8	Oct-06
Madden NFL 07	8.25	Oct-06
Rampage: Total Destruction	6.5	May-06
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	4.75	Sep-06
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06

XBOX		
23 to Life	5.75	Mar-06
2006 FIFA World Cup	8.5	Jun-06
Arena Football	6.5	Apr-06
Black	8.5	Apr-06
Bloody Angels: Squads of WWII	7.5	May-06
Cas	7	Aug-06
Commandos: Strike Force	6.5	Jun-06
Da Vinci Code, The	8	Jul-06
DearFall: The Longest Journey	8	Jun-06
Diner: Parallel Lines	6.75	May-06
FIFA 07	7.75	Oct-06
FIFA Street 2	6	Apr-06
Flight Night Round 3	9	Mar-06
Final Fight: Specialize	4	Mar-06
Fluxus 2	7.5	Sep-06
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	7.25	Apr-06
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	7.5	May-06
Godfather: The Game, The	7.5	May-06
H-Men: Blood Money	7.75	Oct-06
Jaws	4.75	Aug-06
Just Cause	7.25	Oct-06
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	8	Oct-06
Madden NFL 07	8.25	Oct-06
Major League Baseball 2K6	6.5	Apr-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up	7.25	Apr-06
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MLB Slugfest 2006	5	Aug-06
NASCAR 07	7.75	Oct-06
NBA Ball: Phenom	7.75	Apr-06
NCAA Football 07	8.25	Aug-06
NFL Head Coach	6.75	Aug-06
NHL 07	7.75	Oct-06
NHL 2K7	8.75	Oct-06
OutRun 2006 Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
Pankiller: Hell Wars	7.75	Oct-06
Psycho Trooper	7.25	Jun-06
Sonic Riders	5	Apr-06
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.75	May-06
Urban Chaos: Real Response	7.75	Jul-06
WarPath	7.25	May-06
Waluigi's Project Poseidon	4	Apr-06
X-Men: The Official Game	4	Jul-06

PC		
Autoblast	7	Apr-06
Commandos: Strike Force	8	Sep-06
Commandos: Strike Force	5.5	Jun-06
Company of Heroes	8	Oct-06
Diner: Parallel Lines	6.75	May-06
DearFall: The Longest Journey	8	Jun-06
Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach	8	May-06
Edgar Allan Poe's Oblivion: The Enchanted Arce	7.5	Oct-06
Edgar Allan Poe's Oblivion: The Enchanted Arce	9.5	May-06
F.U. Galactic Warrior	7.25	Apr-06
Full Spectrum Warrior	7.25	Apr-06
Galactic Convolutions II: Dread Lords	8	Apr-06
Half-Life 2: Episode One	8.75	Oct-06
Heroes of Might & Magic V	7.75	Jun-06
H-Men: Blood Money	7.75	Jun-06
Just Cause	7.25	Oct-06
Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II, The	8.5	Apr-06
Marc Ecko's Getting Up	7.25	Apr-06
Contents Under Pressure	5.25	Apr-06
Paradise	6	Apr-06
PlayStation 2	8.9	Aug-06
Rise of the Civilization 3	5	Aug-06
Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends	9.5	Jul-06

Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Warlords	8	Sep-06
Sims 2: Open for Business, The	7	Apr-06
SNK Classics: Emergency	7.75	Jul-06
Star Wars: Empire at the Stars	8.25	Mar-06
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	7.5	Sep-06
Titan Quest	8.25	Aug-06
WarPath	7.25	May-06

NINTENDO DS		
Age of Empires: The Age of Kings	6	Mar-06
Big Brain Academy	7.75	Apr-06
Brain Age	8.25	Jun-06
Break Time All	7.5	Sep-06
Contact	7	Oct-06
Cooking Mama	6.5	Oct-06
Disney Jukebox	7.25	Apr-06
Dragon Quest: Heroes: Rocket Slime	8.25	Oct-06
Fairy Quest: Dust Strakes	6	May-06
F.H.I. Pully Animal		
The Game and the Amp	5.75	Sep-06
Lost Magic	6	Jun-06
Magnifying Glass	7.25	Apr-06
Minro Hops 3-on-3	6.5	Oct-06
MediAssault: Phantom War	7.75	Oct-06
Mega Man ZX	7	Oct-06
Metross: Thrux	8.5	May-06
Monster House	6	Oct-06
New Super Mario Bros.	8.25	Jul-06
Pont Blank 07	4.5	Aug-06
Pokemon Rumble	7.25	Apr-06
Pokemon Rumble	8.25	May-06



MARIO HOOPS 3-ON-3 - 05 - Oct-06		
Resident Evil: Deadly Silence	7.75	Mar-06
Rub Rubball, The	7.5	Apr-06
Star Fox Command	8	Oct-06
Super Mario All Stars: Touch & Roll	8	Apr-06
Super Princess Peach	8.75	Mar-06
Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop	6.5	Apr-06
The Legend of Zelda: The Spirit Tracks	2	Jun-06
Yanis DS	9.25	Apr-06
Worms: Open Warfare	7	May-06

PSP		
Asterlitha Story	4.25	Aug-06
Black Diamond	5.5	Apr-06
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	8.5	May-06
Daxter	8.75	Apr-06
Def Jam Fight for NY: The Takeover	8	Apr-06
Earl East	7.25	Mar-06
Field Commander	7.5	May-06
Fight Night Round 1	7.75	Apr-06
From Russia With Love	6.75	May-06
Generation of Chaos	5	May-06
Genesis Collection	8.5	Jun-06
Jackpot Estimator	7.75	Apr-06
Legend of Heroes II, The	6	Jul-06
The Lemmings	7.25	Jul-06
LostLodges	7.5	Apr-06
Me and My Katanam	8	May-06
Mega Man: Maverick Hunter X	8	Mar-06
Mega Man: Powered Up	8.25	Apr-06
Mirages: Methusalem	8	Sep-06
Meta: Car 2	8	Apr-06
Metal Max	6.75	Apr-06
MIB: 05: The Show	7	Apr-06
Midnight in the Fridge	4	Jun-06
MX vs. ATV: On the Edge	8	May-06
NBA Ball: Phenom	7.75	Apr-06
NCAA Football 07	8.5	Sep-06
OutRun 2006 Coast 2 Coast	7.5	Jun-06
Praves of the Caribbean		
Dead Man's Chest	3	Sep-06
Pursuit Force	6.25	Apr-06
Race Driver: V8	8.5	Apr-06
Samura Warrior: State of War	7	May-06
Sprinter Circuit Essentials	8	May-06
Street Fight: Right 3 Max	7.25	Apr-06
Street Superstar	6.75	Apr-06
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	8	May-06
Tekken: Dark Resurrection	8.25	Apr-06
Tomb Raider: Legend	8.25	Jul-06
Ultimate Blood Party	7.5	Jun-06
Ultimate Ghosts'n Goblins	7.25	Oct-06
Unlabeled Legends: The Warner's Code	8.25	Apr-06
Valley Profile: Slovenia	8	Aug-06
Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	7	May-06
Worms: Open Warfare	7.5	Apr-06
Worms: Open Warfare	7.5	Apr-06
WRK: P.A. Vocal	8.75	Apr-06
Yanis DS	9.25	Apr-06
Yanis DS: The Ark of Naphthim	6.75	Apr-06

GAME BAY ADVANCE		
Mega Man Battle Network 6		
Crash Omega/Cybernet Fester	6.5	Aug-06
Summer Night: Swordcraft Rally	7	Aug-06
Super Robot: Team		
Original Generation	7.5	Aug-06
Tales of Phantasia	7.25	May-06
Tower 05, The		

Student Artwork  
Francisco Cruz

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XBOX 360



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# SECRET ACCESS

Codes, Strategies, Hints, Droids, And Tips

## LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy

### One Brick At A Time



*We know how much you want to grab all those elusive little bricks with your cute LEGO friends, so we thought we'd compile a list of power brick locations to help you on your way. It should be noted that completing the game and playing through on free play with all of the character types is the only way to get all of these bricks. Enjoy!*

#### EPISODE IV:

**Blockade Runner** – Find the stormtrooper helmet door in one of the hallways and go inside. In the corridors beyond there will be a room with sprinklers suffused in flower wax. Use the force on the sprinklers and flowers will grow. The flower hole closest to the door can be destroyed for a power brick.

**Jundland Wasteland** – Go left towards the big gap. Turn to the right and you'll see some metal pipes. Change characters to R2 and fly to the pipes. Switch over to your bounty hunter and blow up the pipes with a thermal detonator. Go forward to the small hill and push the car down. Go forward a little more and you'll see a cave with a power brick in it.

**Mos Eisley** – In the opening area there are some garbage cans on the left side past the second carrot. Instead of blowing them up, use the force on them to open up their lids. You'll be able to pull out a bunch of LEGO bricks. After pulling out four sets of bricks you can make a doorway and an R2 panel. Use R2-D2 to open the door, and you should see the brick in the newly opened gateway.

**Rescue the Princess** – There is a point early on in the level where a hallway splits in two. Take the left hallway and head down until you reach an R2 door. Within you'll find three platforms and a red brick on top. R2-D2 can fly across the breach, and then a switch over to a grapple-enabled character will let you grab the brick.

**Escape From Death Star** – After being in the garbage compactor, head off to the left and you'll find a C-3PO interface on a second garbage compactor. Enter through there and

build a refrigerator. Use the force to open the refrigerator and find your red brick. Only works in Free Play.

**Rebel Attack** – Near the last part of the level with the thermal exhaust port, you'll find a hidden niche in the back right corner. Within is a power brick.

#### EPISODE V:

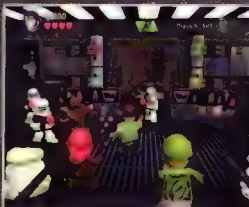
**Hoth Battle** – Head through the TIE door in Area B. Take the drag bomb through the tunnel and blow up the wall at the end. Behind the wall is your brick.

**Hoth Escape** – In the room with the Millennium Falcon go to the gate on the far right. To unlock the door go up the dark force hallway just behind the room with the Falcon and pull the switch.

**Asteroid Chase** – Go right behind the second Star Destroyer from the right side. You'll need to fly relatively close before the brick is visible.

**Dagobah** – In Area A, use Dark Force power to explode the fence on your right near the beginning of the level. Jump over the gap to the race track. You'll find a place where you can build a tractor. Do so, then take the tractor for one lap around the track and you should be all set.

**Cloud City Trap** – This one is easy. The power brick is right behind the X-Wing at the very beginning of the level.



**Cloud City Escape** – The power brick in this level is located on top of Slave I, Boba Fett's imposing ship. You'll only be able to access this in Free Play mode.

#### EPISODE VI:

**Jabba's Palace** – Your first gold brick is in the first big hexagonal room – the one where Leia and Chewbacca meet up with Luke. Build a push block on the right and push it on top of the red button. This should reveal a nearby grapple point. Grapple to the upper balcony for your next block.



**Pit of Carkoon** – Near the end of the level you'll be on top of the Sail Barge. Travel to the stem of the Barge, and destroy the box near to the sail pillars to open up a grapple pad. Grapple to the platform up amid the sails, then use R2-D2 to jet across to the next two platforms, where you can collect the brick.



**Speeder Showdown** – In the last area that includes the AT-AT, on the ground in front of the AT-AT platform, you'll need to push the block on the left into the wall. This will create a small ewok door. Switch to an ewok and head in and up to the second floor for the brick.

**Endor Battle** – Head into the left room of the shield bunker, and use dark force to lift the block up from the floor in front of the window that looks out over the stormtrooper. Blow up the barrier at the end of the push blocks, then push the block into the alcove that lies beyond.

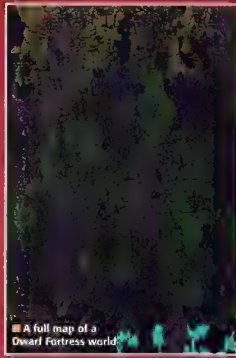
Using either Darth Vader or a stormtrooper, stand in front of the security camera to make the other stormtrooper approach the control panel. Next, build the ramp in the room by standing on the three buttons. Then head to the upper platform. Change characters to R2-D2 and use him to jet across the room to the platform above the window. At this point, C-3PO can activate the panel to drop a block on the stormtrooper and thereby create a new ewok door. With an ewok, head through the door and move the push block to the end of the catwalk where the red brick is located. The block should lock into place and turn off the barrier. Jump onto the block and over to retrieve the brick. Whew! Hope that was worth it.

**Jedi Destiny** – At the beginning of the level in the Emperor's throne room you'll find four dark red panels on the walls to either side. Using Dark Force power on these will light them up. When they're all lit a brick will show up above the Emperor's throne.

**Death Star Battle 2** – Once you get to the core of the Death Star (you know, the big spherical room), use your torpedoes on the two wall targets. This should open the door you'll need.

## Mod World

SLAVES TO ARMOK II: DWARF FORTRESS  
<http://www.bay12games.com>



■ A full map of a Dwarf Fortress world.

You love ASCII graphics, admit it. Apart from being an excellent way to put forum trolls in their place, they also allow the tiny team at Bay 12 Games to crank out this hugely complex game. Dwarf Fortress puts you in charge of a group of dwarves trying to survive in a randomly generated fantasy world, and you'd be surprised at how deep this rabbit hole goes.



Dwarf Fortress is more or less a city simulator. You'll have to get pretty much everything going from scratch, from planting various kinds of crops to training carpenters so that you can house your dwarves. Thankfully, there's a decent in-game tutorial and further documentation, and the game's fanbase online continues to generate more and more resources to help both new and advanced players get the most out of the game.



As long as you're at the Bay 12 Games website, you may as well check out the other free games they have up for download over there. Honestly, you can't go wrong with titles like *Liberal Crime Squad* and *Kobold Quest*. And no, they're not all created with ASCII graphics, delightful as they may be.

### Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases bigger 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](mailto:secretaccess@gameinformer.com) for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

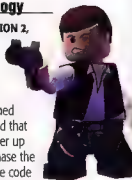
## MULTI-SYSTEM



### LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy

> XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

In the Mos Eisley Cantina you can enter the following codes to gain access to the named character. Keep in mind that you'll still have to gather up enough studs to purchase the character even after the code unlocks them



Beach Trooper	UCK868
Ben Kenobi (GHOST)	BEN917
Bespin Guard	VHY832
Bib Fortuna	WTY721
Boba Fett	HLP221
Death Star Trooper	BNC332
Ewok	TTI289
Gamorean Guard	YZF999
Gonk Droid	NPS582
Grand Moff Tarkin	SMC219
Greedo	NAH118
Han Solo (Hood)	YWM840
IG-88	NXL573
Imperial Guard	MMM111
Imperial Officer	BBV889
Imperial Shuttle Pilot	VAP664
Imperial Spy	CYT125
Jawa	JAW499
Lobot	UOB319
Palace Guard	SCG549
Rebel Pilot	CYX336
Rebel Trooper (Hoth)	EKU489
Sand Trooper	YDV451
Skiff Guard	GBU888
Snow Trooper	NVU989
Stromtrooper	PTR345
The Emperor	HHY382
TIE Fighter	HDY739
TIE Fighter Pilot	NNZ316
TIE Interceptor	QYA828
Tusken Raider	PEI821
Ugnaught	UCN694

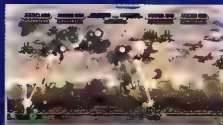
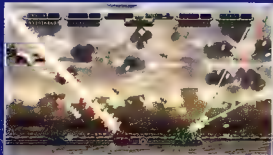
\*GI Droid\*

(location unknown - last seen trying to get Whitney Houston's phone number from Bobby Brown)

## Xbox Live Arcade Spotlight

# Heavy Weapon

PopCap is bringing yet another entry to its already substantial presence on Xbox Live Arcade with the announcement of Heavy Weapon. This side-scrolling action shooter embraces its 80's influences while providing a 21st century look with high-def widescreen support and some helty visual and audio tech. As a beefed up version of the free online game, Heavy Weapon has players blasting their way through 19 story missions, each with their own over-the-top bosses. A second mode is a simple survival game against oncoming waves, and a third play option has you taking on early boss in succession. Unlike when you play on the computer, up to four friends will be able to play together over Xbox Live. Simple, wholesale destruction? Sign us up.



(pwned)

## Code of the Month

# Saints Row

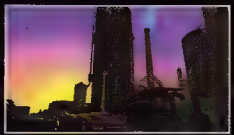


In the grand tradition of open world crime games, Saints Row comes out of the gate with a huge list of the cheatingest cheats this side of the border. To enter these cheats, go to the pause menu and tab over to your phone. Select DIAL and enter one of the following numbers before pressing CALL. Then go into the CHEATS section of your phone to enable them. Be warned, the moment you enter many of these codes, it turns off the ability to get achievements with that saved game, so make sure and keep another save in place from before you put in any codes. Check back next month for the other half of the cheats, including the spawn codes for all sorts of fun vehicles.

Ambulance (Restores Health) - 911  
 Big Willys Cab - 5558198415  
 Brown Beggars - 5553765  
 Chicken Ned - 5552445  
 Clear Skies - #sunny  
 Crash Landing - 335MART  
 Eagleline Yellow (Taxi Service) - 5550180174  
 Eye for an Eye Voodoo - 5555966  
 Evil Cars - #38452277  
 Full Health - #fullhealth  
 Give 44 Shepherd - #Shepherd  
 Give 12 Gauge - #12Gauge  
 Give Ar-40 Xtnd Rifle - #27409863  
 Give AS12 Riot - #AS12Riot

Give GDHC .50 - #GDHC50  
 Give Hand Grenade - #Grenade  
 Give K&Krukov - #K&Krukov  
 Give Knife - #Knife  
 Give McManus - #McManus  
 Give Molotov Cocktail - #Molotov  
 Give Money - #66639  
 Give Nightstick - #Nightstick  
 Give NR4 - #NR4  
 Give Pipe Bomb - #Pipebomb  
 Give RPG Launcher - #Rocket  
 Give T3K UrJian - #T3KUrBan  
 Give Tombstone - #Tombstone  
 Give Vice 9 - #Vice9  
 Give Zenith - #936484  
 God's Wrath (random lightning) - #10  
 Grounds for Divorce - 5559473  
 Impressions Clothing - 5553248  
 Infinite Ammo - #AMMO  
 Infinite Car Mass - #463464836277  
 Infinite Sprint - #SPWINT  
 Legal Lee's - 5559467  
 Lik-a-Chick - 5553863  
 No Cop Notoriety - #nocops  
 No Gang Notoriety - #nogangs  
 On the Fence (Pawn Shop) - 5557296  
 On the Rag Clothing - 5555926  
 On Thin Ice - 5552564  
 Rim Jobs - 5553493  
 Unlock GameStop T-Shirt - #42637867

Lars Ludvigson  
 New Prague, MN



(pwner)



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# REVISITING THE ISLE

A LOOK AT BLACK ISLE STUDIOS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO GAMING

**B**lack Isle Studios was born when now-defunct publisher Interplay dedicated a division of the company solely to the role-playing genre. From its inception in 1997 until Interplay's dissolution in 2002, Black Isle both developed and published a slew of titles that are still beloved among PC gamers. We spoke to Feargus Urquhart, the man who ran the division for most of its life and who now helms Obsidian Entertainment, to get a look inside one of the most respected PC companies of its day.



**W**hile console gamers will point to series like Final Fantasy, Xenosaga, or Dragon Quest as the pinnacle of the role-playing genre, the PC has long been the home of a slightly different style of RPG. Might & Magic, Ultima, and Wizardry may have paved the way in the early days, but the late '90s saw Black Isle Studios pick up the torch and run with it into a golden age of PC role-playing. A perfect storm of sharp graphics, BioWare's flexible Infinity Engine, and talented developers brought us the Fallout, Baldur's Gate, and Icewind Dale franchises, as well as the much-loved Planescape: Torment.

Those were different times in the gaming industry. Two-dimensional sprites were widely used and offered visuals that were state-of-the-art without being overly complicated. "The graphics were not as hard to get right," says Urquhart. "In the Fallout days, [the ratio of artists to designers] was sort of even, and now there's probably about twice the number of artists as designers on the team." Not to malign the beautiful titles we see now, but it was an era where graphics truly did take a back seat to gameplay, and it shows in the quality of the games.

Another factor that contributed to Black Isle's incredible run was the different economic realities of the gaming market. Explains Urquhart, "The easy thing back then was that you made money if your game sold 100,000 or 200,000 units. Now you need a million units. Or, if you talk to other publishers, it's two or three or four million units depending on licensing and development costs. I think the thing back then was that we didn't have to take marketing considerations so much into account because a lot of publishers could use the "many darts" theory: if you throw enough darts at the wall, something's going to hit the bullseye and you're going to make a lot more money than you spent on it." Indeed, the success of Black Isle was in many ways a bright spot in the waning years of Interplay's doomed business — especially when you consider how much less these games cost to make compared to today's triple-A titles. "Nowadays, because they all have to do that well just to make up the marketing and the development budgets, you can't have as many or any failures anymore. I think that really helped back then, when we were considering the market, as to what to make and what not to make, we just didn't consider it a whole lot. We could go a lot more on our gut and on faith."

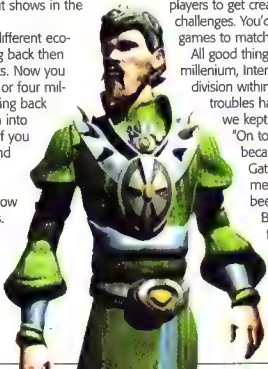
We fans also helped in our own way, according to Urquhart. "Our marketing and sales department, they didn't know what the hell — D&D? What are you talking about? We'll put a dragon on the front of the box." I don't think they understood what RPGs are, but they understood how they reacted in the market. They lasted on the shelf longer; there were a lot more grassroots types of PR and marketing; they had rabid fans that supported sequels and expansions better. And once they understood that PC RPGs followed a different model back then, they were much more comfortable about them. They weren't worried about them selling 50 percent of the lifetime sales within the first two weeks."

Along with a talented and dedicated staff, as well as a very profitable (both for gamers and for the companies involved) alliance with BioWare, this resulted in a set of landmark titles. Though each game was excellent in its own way (see next page), a few common threads bind them together. The stories all offer much more than the tired device of a world that needs saving. The characters invariably break the common RPG clichés. The combat allows players to get creative in using their party's abilities to overcome interesting tactical challenges. You'd be hard-pressed to find a five-year run in the entire history of video games to match what Black Isle put out from 1997 to 2002.

All good things do eventually end, unfortunately. By the early part of the new millennium, Interplay was in serious financial trouble. Though Black Isle was its own division within the corporate structure and very profitable in its own right, Interplay's troubles had a grave effect on the people working there. "It was tiring. It felt like we kept having to make every game faster for less money," sighs Urquhart.

"On top of that, we were always worried about what was going to happen, because in the end that was why I left. We'd been working on Baldur's Gate III and then Interplay lost the license.... The nail in the coffin for me, and I think for a lot of other people, was when this thing we'd all been working on was just one day no more."

Black Isle's sad demise aside, gamers of all stripes should be thankful for the company's contributions to the world of RPGs. As Urquhart puts it, "I hope something like Black Isle happens again." So too should anyone who enjoys a good story, exploring fantastic worlds, or even the simple pleasure of a good dungeon crawl.





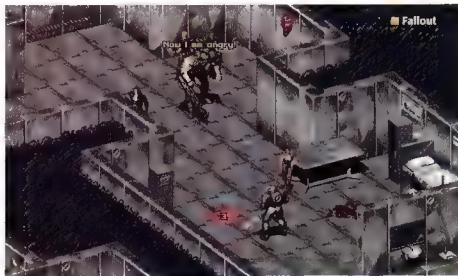
## The Infinity Engine

Created by BioWare for Baldur's Gate, the Infinity Engine was used in all the titles listed below. For all of its faults (pathfinding frequently would mess up, sending your characters precisely where you didn't want them to go), its flexibility and gorgeous prerendered backdrops were perfect for making open-ended RPGs. The hybrid realtime/turn-based action (where every action happens in "turns" internally but gives the appearance of realtime fluidity) was a dramatic step toward deeper immersion when compared to the strictly segregated turns of previous RPGs. You can see many of the very same design concepts in action in both Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic titles and Neverwinter Nights, albeit with much prettier graphics.

### Fallout – 1997

### Fallout 2 – 1998

Set in the far future with the remnants of humanity trying to scratch out an existence after a full-on thermonuclear war, Fallout won gamers' hearts with a unique tone that parodied the "Duck And Cover" style of 1950s Cold War sensationalist propaganda to great effect. Open-ended character development based on Steve Jackson Games' CURPS tabletop system, a great story and wonderful tactical combat made Fallout and its sequel instant classics.



### Planescape: Torment – 1999

Planescape: Torment has all of the excellent combat and exploration that the Infinity Engine affords. However, like Baldur's Gate, this title is heralded as seminal due more to its story, freedom, and memorable characters than anything else. Twisting standard Dungeons & Dragons rules to fit the unique protagonist (an amnesiac immortal called simply The Nameless One) resulted in one of the most involving RPGs gaming has ever seen.



### Icewind Dale – 2000

### Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter – 2001

### Icewind Dale II – 2002

Any Baldur's Gate fan will be immediately at home in the Icewind Dale series. However, this series eschews the character-driven epic plots that franchise for truly outstanding dungeon-crawling and tactical Dungeons & Dragons-style encounters. In particular, Icewind Dale II stands as one of the most faithful adaptations of the 3rd Edition D&D ruleset in video games to this day.



### Baldur's Gate – 1998

### Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast – 1999

### Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn – 2000

### Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal – 2001

One of the most celebrated series of RPGs to ever grace the Windows platform, the BioWare-developed Baldur's Gate franchise deserves every single line of praise that has ever been directed its way. These titles feature the full package: amazingly deep characters who sport their own motivations, an epic plot that touches nearly every part of the rich Forgotten Realms setting, an expansive world that's a joy to explore, and some of the best combat in any RPG to date. We're not exaggerating here; it's more than worth the effort to get these games running on a modern PC to experience some of the absolute most engrossing titles our favorite hobby has to offer. ■■■



## GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Mike Livaqoy



### RESIDENT EVIL 4

> FORMAT GAME/CD/DVD  
> PUBLISHER CAPCOM

Resident Evil 4 claims the top spot on my super short list of perfect games. As I played through this masterpiece, I found myself in constant awe and near disbelief of what was unfolding in front of me. Amazing gameplay absolutely gushed from this title every second.

The enemies in Resident Evil 4 are just as abundant as ever and much smarter now. The improved camera angle means that you'll confront your adversaries head-freaking-on. When a crazed villager runs at you wielding a rusty sickle and letting loose a spine chilling shriek, it scares the hell out of you. Zombies have been replaced with what are more like possessed humans. Since they can still speak and function normally, they are a much bigger threat than the zombies ever were.

Fortunately, the new camera angle allows smooth control, and what's more, all of the weapons have a laser sight. You can now aim wherever you want. Shoot an enemy's hand to make him drop his weapon. Shoot at his legs and feet to make him fall, then finish him with a head shot. Resident Evil 4 confronts you with tons of baddies, and thanks to the improved camera and dead-eye weapon controls, you'll have

the means to take them on. This focus on tight, tense, thrill ride gameplay is the biggest draw of this title, and is absolutely unrelenting during the lengthy (20-25 hour) adventure.

There has never been a game like this. Capcom's re-inventing of Resident Evil, and the entire survival horror genre for that matter, has produced an action title the likes of which we have never seen. Games of this caliber are extremely rare, and as such, Resident Evil 4 represents a new level of gaming which absolutely can't be missed. It's perfect.



## THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

On November 25, 1997, yet another entry in the long list of late '90s failures in Sega's ill-fated console business was scribbled into the history books. The manufacturer announced that The Sega Channel, its subscription-based download service for the company's Genesis console that operated through your TV's cable box, would be shut down. Though 20 million homes had access to the service, a mere 150,000 subscribers and the retirement of the Genesis platform sounded the death knell for this ahead-of-its-time idea.



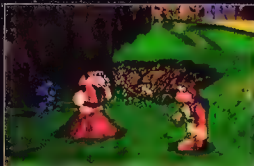


NINTENDO 64

## BANJO-KAZOOIE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER RARE > RELEASE 1996

**B**anjo-Kazooie is considered one of the classic platformers of the 64-bit era, and indeed holds up as better than many other games from the same era. However, even the best games from this period of gaming's past seem dated today, and Banjo-Kazooie is no exception. It's not just that the graphics look blocky and ugly, or that the camera is a constant source of frustration, it's that many of Banjo-Kazooie's gameplay mechanics have gone on to become clichés. Collectable doodads and objects are now out of vogue for the genre, but Banjo-Kazooie is stuffed full of them, including musical notes, eggs, feathers, puzzle pieces, skulls, and more. The moviest (which was lifted rather blatantly from Super Mario 64) also seems really standard today, and much of the humor falls flat. But, on the other hand, some of the level designs and transformation mechanics are still clever, making it easy to see why this game was once such a big deal. It may not be everything it once was, but revisiting Banjo-Kazooie still offers a few glimpses at why it developed its fan base.

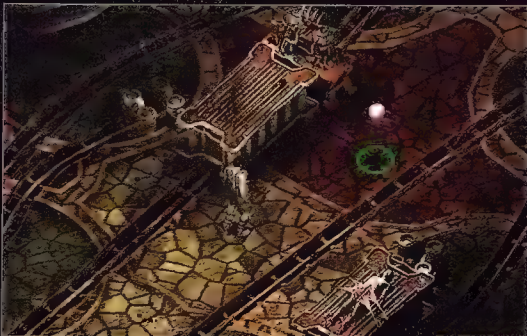
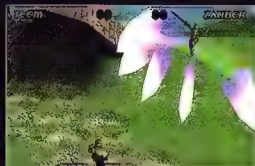


PSONE

## DESTREGA

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER KOEI > DEVELOPER OMEGA FORCE > RELEASE 1999

**D**estrega is one of those games that generated many fond memories for the few people who played it. However, revisiting this game today is like trying to watch *Road House* with a straight face; in the intervening years, something you once thought was awesome somehow became unbearable. Even though movement and targeting in the wide open terrain are handled well, the camera is pretty awful, often leaving players blind as their character eats damage. This is a serious problem when whole pillars or sections of wall pop in and out of view, making it impossible to tell if you're under cover or a sitting duck. Oh, and forget fighting in close quarters, because the hand-to-hand system is terrible. On some level, shooting a bunch of fireballs in the fast-paced battles is entertaining, but the rampant technical problems and balancing issues make it so that *Destrega* is more fun to remember than to play.



PC

## PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER INTERPLAY > DEVELOPER BLACK ISLE STUDIOS > RELEASE 1999

**O**ne of Black Isle's classic D&D titles, *Planescape: Torment* took the short-lived campaign setting off the tabletop and into a dark and twisted digital world. The result was an RPG masterpiece, relatively short on action but long on story, characters, and intrigue. Set largely in Sigil, a city at the meeting of dimensional planes, you awaken on a cold stone mortuary slab with no memory of the life you led before. As you begin to discover your preternatural identity, you also gather around you a motley group of traveling companions unlike any other. Filled with its own strange language and culture, the gameworld is a remarkable triumph, particularly since so much detail has gone into every person and object with which you interact with. Sadly, the darkness of the world that once seemed so evocative now muddies the visuals, but not enough to obscure the unique art style that set this game apart from its predecessors, like *Baldur's Gate*. Occasionally unclear objectives and a focus on character interaction over all-out combat may turn off some players, but RPG faithful owe it to themselves to rediscover this lost gem.



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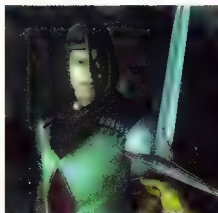
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## UNLIMITED LAUNCH: OCT. 20



You came, you saw, but you demand more intel about the morphing, blade-wielding badass in Dark Sector? We've got you covered with more mind-searing screenshots of D3Publisher's hot new title.

# DARK SECTOR



### The Art of War

Learn more about how Sony Santa Monica's visual development director Charlie Wen and his co-workers create the amazing art in God of War with the full interview.

### Revisiting Oblivion

Can't wait to get your level 35 dark elf mitts on more tasty screenshots of Tamriel? You're in luck. We smuggled some extra special screens of the PS3 and PSP versions of The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion just for you. How's that for speechcraft?



### Celebrity Access

Mr. Blonde, Michael Madsen, talks about going solo in Eidos' upcoming Reservoir Dogs game (reviewed next month), while everyone's favorite hobbit, Elijah Wood, discusses donning a purple dragon outfit for The Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning.



### Get Medieval

From the lofty perch at GI Unlimited, check out all the carnage of dark ages combat without soaking your boots in blood with our extra helping of Medieval Total War 2 screenshots, as well as the full interview with The Creative Assembly.



### ALSO THIS MONTH ONLINE:

The launch dates for PlayStation 3 and Wii are so close our mouths can't stop watering. Log in to GI Online to get the latest news as we creep toward the big days.

### PLUS EXTRA CONTENT FOR:

Dead or Alive Xtreme 2, Final Fantasy XII, Gran Turismo HD, NBA 2K7, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots.

*A Heavenly  
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# GAMEOVER

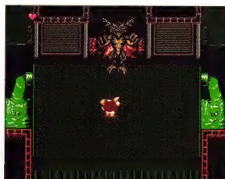
I'm finished!

## VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

The transition between console generations, while great for gamers, can be rough on game characters. Once-great series are pushed aside for newer and shinier franchises, which can leave some of the industry's most iconic protagonists searching for new ways to appear relevant. Take our trivia challenge to find out what character will be successful in a shameless attempt to stay in the limelight.

**1** Licensed games weren't much better back in the days of the NES. This is a screen from which 8-bit movie-based title?

- A. Gremlins 2: The New Batch
- B. Total Recall
- C. Cuthroat Island
- D. Goonies II



**2** Mister Mosquito is universally regarded as the best blood-sucking game that doesn't involve vampires. As a cute but annoying insect, what is the name of the hapless family you terrorize?

- A. Yamada
- B. Yamauchi
- C. Yamato
- D. Yakuza



**3** The Tiny Toons may have been an early '90s television phenomenon, but they live on through gaming. What is the most recent platform to host a title starring the likes of Buster, Babs, and Plucky?

- A. PlayStation
- B. Game Boy Advance
- C. Super Nintendo
- D. PlayStation 2

**4** In Capcom's Viewtiful Joe, which character is named after a weapon from the Devil May Cry series?

- A. Sparda
- B. Alastor
- C. Fire Leo
- D. Silvia



**5** Released for PC in 1992, this title was a unique hybrid of the puzzle and adventure game genres. What was it called?

- A. The Lost Vikings
- B. Castle of Dr. Brain
- C. Goblins
- D. The Adventures of Willy Beamish



**6** True or false: In the original Splinter Cell, if you shoot guards with enough of the normally non-lethal sticky shockers it will eventually kill them.

- A. True
- B. False

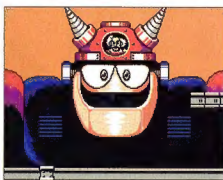
**7** The Leech Gun in Prey is a pretty versatile weapon. How

many different types of ammo for it (supplied at charge stations) are there in the game?

- A. 2
- B. 3
- C. 4
- D. 5

**8** In Mega Man 3, what are the only two weapons that will do damage to the final form of Gamma?

- A. Needle Cannon and Gemini Laser
- B. Hard Knuckle and Spark Shock
- C. Shadow Blade and Magnet Missile
- D. Top Spin and Search Snake



**9** If you play through the original Fable in the most hilarious (a.k.a. evil) way, after the final boss you are rewarded with the game's most powerful weapon. What is it called?

- A. Revenger
- B. Sword of Aeons
- C. Sentinus
- D. Ronok The Axe

**10** Okay Ricky Bobby, what developer (currently working on Excite Truck for the Wii) was responsible for games such as NASCAR: Dirt to Daytona and NASCAR Heat?

- A. Papyrus
- B. Codemasters
- C. EA Tiburon
- D. Monster Games

## BREAKDOWN

**99%** of the fight with The End in MGS 3 is awesome. The other 1% is tranquilizer bullets

**3.3** is the minimum GPA required to be eligible for Penny Arcade's \$10,000 game education scholarship

**500,000** units of Dead Rising shipped within the first two weeks of the game's release. The zombie epidemic spreads!

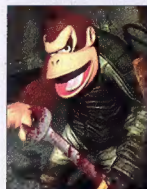
**100** people per minute, on average, downloaded Texas Hold 'Em from Xbox Live Marketplace during the first 24 hours of the game's availability

**18%** of Matt's wardrobe could be described as "strapless"

## ★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



**0-1:**  
Pac-Madden



**2-3:**  
Donkey Kongdemmed



**4-5:**  
World of RauCraft



**6-7:**  
Metal Geist Solid



**8-9:**  
Project Blanka Racing



**10:**  
Blinx My Car

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5 OUT OF 5  
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# DEADRISING

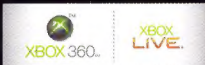
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