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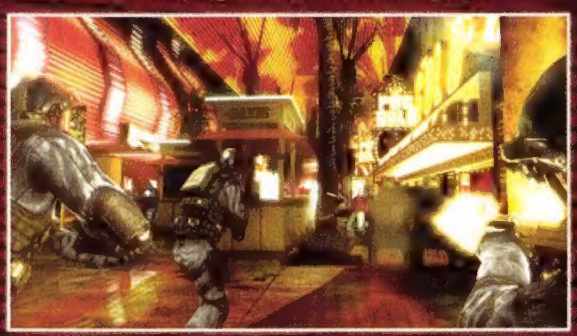

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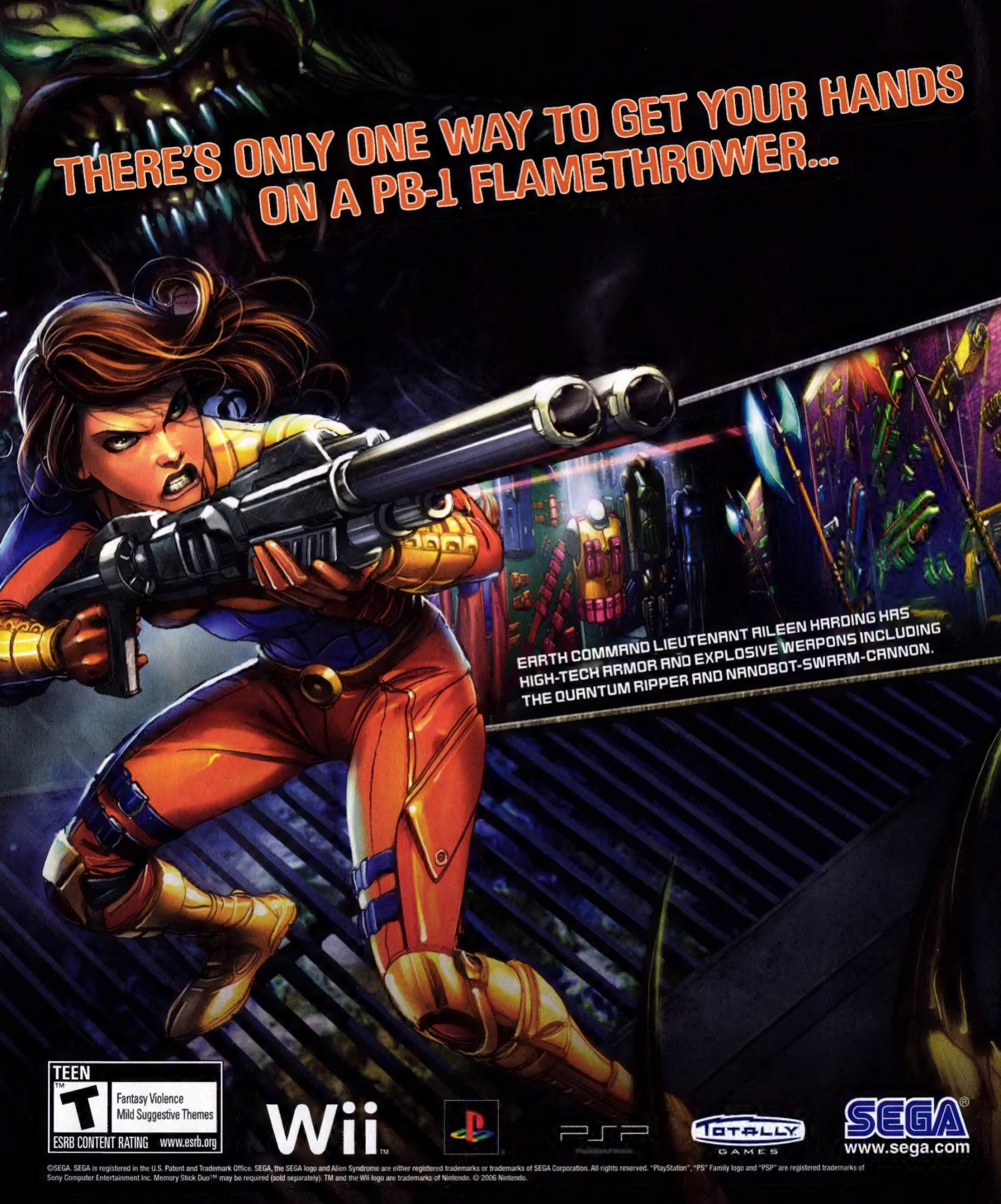

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The original studio behind Call of Duty and Call of Duty 2, Infinity Ward, is returning to the series with this enormous title. Video game warfare will never be the same; once you get a look at Modern Warfare you may find that your current gaming library isn't cutting it any more. Dive into 10 pages of our in-depth world-exclusive report on the game that could challenge Halo 3 this holiday season, right here.

THE BIG QUESTIONS

We talked to sources in every part of the video game industry to find out the answers to the most burning questions facing our favorite hobby right now.

THE LAST REMNANT

Anyone interested in the first look at a new RPG series from Square Enix? Yeah, we thought so. Come on in and we'll take good care of you.

SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

Everything changes, and Splinter Cell is no different. We travel to Montreal to check out Sam Fisher's surprising new look and gameplay.

RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS

We have the world-exclusive reveal of this massive RPG set in the rich world of Greek mythology that aims to reinvent a lot of the tired clichés that hold back the genre.

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SUMMER 2007

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PLAYSTATION 3

STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

DEVELOPERS MATTER

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I have never been one to care much about name brands. Sure, I know of a fashion designer or two, but when I put my pants on in the morning, they are called jeans, and they go on one leg at a time.

But ask me about video game designers, and I'll talk your ear off for an hour. Developers and the work they do are far too underappreciated by many gamers today (and a few publishers for that matter, but I'll save that subject for another letter).

This is a shame, since knowing the developer is one of the most important pieces of information you can get on an upcoming game. Take this month's cover story, for example. Another Call of Duty from anyone other than Infinity Ward simply wouldn't have made it on our cover. To me, this developer makes the series.

Not to say that I don't mind a nice installment from one of the other developers to fill my time until the next Call of Duty from Infinity Ward graces my favorite console, but those games are more about going through the motions, not about pushing the series forward like Infinity Ward has done with Modern Warfare. (On a side note, the new game is simply stunning and is for sure one of the biggest first-person shooters of the year – a serious competitor to Halo 3 without a doubt.)

Infinity Ward isn't the only developer out there setting a standard of excellence that shouldn't be ignored. Learn the names of developers that define the envelope and commit them to memory. Companies like Epic, Bungie, and Blizzard are ones that everyone seems to know, but there are plenty of companies out there who are consistently doing work a cut above the rest. Knowing these companies doesn't just make you more interesting at social gatherings (and yes, I think talking video games at a party is the "in" thing to do), it will also help you hone your video game tastes so you play more of the great ones and less of the crap.

I like lists, so I made of list of my favorites for you to enjoy over and above the obvious ones I mentioned above. Success at these companies isn't an accident. These developers are good because they want to be.

My big list:
Insomniac, Big Blue Box, Ubisoft Montreal, Criterion, Starbreeze, Valve, id, Raven, Naughty Dog, Factor 5, Rockstar North, Gearbox Studios, Neversoft, Kojima Productions, Whatever Project Kobayashi is working on at Capcom, Bethesda, Bioware, Polyphony Digital, Bizarre Creations, Monolith, Retro, Irrational, Ensemble, Intelligent Systems, Crytek, Firaxis, Harmonix, and many more to come

Cheers,

Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** My New Home Theater (You Can See & Hear It From Space), Xbox 360's Spring Update, *Grindhouse* (Kurt Russell Better Win An Oscar), *Planet Earth* Blu-Ray (Jumping Sharks For The Win!) **Dislikes:** The Media Claiming The Chicago Cubs' Season Is Over Whenever A Player So Much As Farts, Ben's Recent Pokémon Obsession (If He Talks Like A Squirtle Again, Prank Calls For Life) **Current Favorite Games:** Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars, Grand Theft Auto IV, Guitar Hero II, Puzzle Quest: Challenge Of The Warlords

Matt >> *matt@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Blonde Redhead – *23*, Seventies Aerosmith, *Jonestown The Life And Death Of People's Temple*, Tacos **Dislikes:** High Cholesterol, Snow In April, *The War At Home* (Might Be The Worst Fox Sitcom Ever, And That's Saying Something), Sub-par New Season Of *24* **Current Favorite Games:** Super Paper Mario, God Of War II, Kororinpa: Marble Mania, Monster Madness

Kato >> *kato@gameinformer.com*

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Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Getting Out And Walking, Working On My Baseball Swing, Crushing The Damage Meters (Warlocks Be Damned), Couches That A Man Can Actually Stretch Out On, Fly Girls Singing "Slap Slap" **Dislikes:** Hitting One Soft Grounder After Another Right At The Shortstop (6-4-3 For The Lose), L.A. Traffic, Running Out Of DS Battery Power On The Bus **Current Favorite Games:** Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, Puzzle Quest: Challenge Of The Warlords

Joe >> *joe@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** The Montages In Brooktown High, *The Brief And Frightening Reign Of Phil* By George Saunders, Theon Greyjoy (I'm Sure He's Doing Fine), *A Princess Of Roumania* By Paul Park, *Deathproof* **Dislikes:** Launchpad McQuack, Bean (He's Like A Store-Brand Ender), How Season Four Of *24* Stacks Up To The First Three (Hint: Poorly) **Current Favorite Games:** The Last Remnant, Spore, Mass Effect, Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night, God Of War II, Phoenix Wright Ace Attorney: Justice For All, Odin Sphere

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Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Bertz's Irresistible Charm With Women (Who Are Over 75), The Impending Arrival Of World War Hulk (Let The Insanity Begin), The New *Daily Show* Set, The Way My Dog Has Eliminated The Need For An Alarm Clock **Dislikes:** When Netflix Stalls (Due To My Own Inability To Keep Pace), Arguing Court Cases Before A Judge (Not As Fun As You'd Think) **Current Favorite Games:** Rise Of The Argonauts, The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles, Puzzle Quest: Challenge Of The Warlords, Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night

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Handle: Lord Gamington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** New Season Of *Entourage*, Playoff Hockey, *Blades Of Glory*, *Killing Pablo* By Mark Bowden, Spring Fever, *Planet Earth* (Sigourney's Voice Is Hypnotic) **Dislikes:** Being Groped By Senior Citizens (True Story), No Franchise Mode In All-Pro Football 2K8, No Checkpoints In GRAW 2 Co-Op Campaign **Current Favorite Games:** Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2, The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles, Rainbow Six Vegas, S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl

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Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *Deadpool* (I Could Do It), *Hellboy*, *Arrested Development*, My New Metal Gear Ray Head (Thanks Joe, All Is Forgiven For Now), *Planet Earth* **Dislikes:** Dreaming About Pokémon (Not A Good Sign), Whoever Keeps Calling And Hanging Up On Me (Stop It!), Trying To Write With Fish Pens, Helping My Brother Move Twice In The Same Month **Current Favorite Games:** Splinter Cell Conviction, God Of War II, The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles, Pokémon Diamond, Puzzle Quest: Challenge Of The Warlords

Bryan >> *bryan@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Rhythm **Interests:** New Home Theater Systems, When Reinerflix Goes Wrong, eBay (A Little Late To The Game On This One), Acceptable tv **Dislikes:** Setting Up New Home Theater Systems, Being Tempted To Have Both Blu-ray And HD-DVD Players, Having Too Many TV Shows To Keep Up With **Current Favorite Games:** Super Paper Mario, Pokémon Pearl, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Phoenix Wright: Trials And Tribulations

Andy >> *andy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Modest Mouse, Nine Inch Nails, Alice Russell, *Entourage* **Dislikes:** I Hate To Say It, But I Need More Games For My Wii And PlayStation 3 – Get On It As This Drought Has To End, The Stupid Insanity That Has Spawned In Void Of The Old E3 **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, Guitar Hero II, God Of War II, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry

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1 Jeff of GI Online is the proud father of the newest member of the Game Informer family – young Henry Cork! We were going to call Henry the "newest AND cutest member of the Game Informer family," but Joe threw a big fussy fit about it. Not worth it **2** Vivendi's Erik Reynolds works on his modeling poses with Adam and Dan McClure of Mad Doc Software. Do "Blue Steel" next, Erik! **3** Miller puts on his happy face for Kohnke's Eddiemae Jukes and EA Mythic's John Drescher and Steve Perkins. Aw... we just want to pinch Miller's cheeks! (both sets!) **4** Jason West of Infinity Ward shows off one of the perks of his job – a full set of limited edition Call of Duty figures At Game Informer, we call these "retirement plans," but don't worry, our health care coverage is great – all the free copies of Trauma Center we want! **5** Nick hangs with one of his gaming heroes, Frank DeLise of Kaos Studios **6** Square Enix's Sonia Im and Charlie Sinhaseni hang out with a bunch of morons **7** Billy "Double Barrel" Berghammer goes 'huntin' for big game with Teresa Tyndorf of Fortyseven Communications. Raccoon stew for everyone tonight!

IN ANY OTHER GAME,
THIS MIGHT ACTUALLY HELP YOU.
When death can come from anywhere it can make even the most unflappable near-future warrior a little jumpy. In Shadowrun, good brains matter as much as good aim as you ditch the usual run & gun to outwit and outgun your enemies. You're a deadly combination of firepower and mystic powers as you teleport, see through walls, and even turn to smoke to put the bad guys in a state of permanent relaxation. The bad news? Your enemies can too. Better keep your eyes open.
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DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back

GI COMMUNITY

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

THE QUESTION

Are you going to buy an Xbox 360 Elite?

No. This is a product that tries to take a step in the right direction by offering a bigger HDD to solve space issues some current 360 owners have, but trips and falls backwards due to the ridiculous pricing strategy

Shatteredlamonds

I think the purpose for the Elite is to appeal to people who haven't bought a 360 yet. I've bought one myself, and I find the upgrades to be a tad too meek for the extra money

Resident_Sonic

I bought an Elite 360 last month It had a bigger hard drive, was black, and had HDMI It was called a PlayStation 3

ZakMiller

Since I don't already own one, why not get the Elite? I need something to play Blue Dragon on

GCNMatt

■ **Blue Dragon**

As a current 360 owner, I see no reason to buy the Elite even with its upgraded features. Although the new HDMI output is nice, it's not enough to sway me to buy another 360 right now.

Splitfire101

Yes, I've been holding off on buying a 360 so they could release one that isn't as buggy and is worth the money. The 120 GB hard drive is worth the extra $70 compared to the $399 bundle

shibbydashang1

I would've paid the extra money for an Xbox 360 Elite a year and a half ago if it was released in place of the original Premium bundle. Too late now, Microsoft

neobluebat

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

CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE

I just got the April issue and read both Elder Scrolls articles (the PS3 version of Oblivion and the 360's Shivering Isles). Then I started to remember my own Oblivion adventures. Out of all the characters I interacted with in my many hours with game, I just realized that none of them were children! Why are the only characters adults? Are people in Tamriel not reproducing?

Chris Sartin
Via hotmail.com

■ **No one under 18 admitted in Cyrodiil**

■ **Even though it seems strange, Oblivion doesn't take place in some *Children of Men*-style world where no new kids are being born. It's true that there are no children in the game, but the team did consider including them at one point. Pete Hines, Bethesda's vice president of public relations and marketing, explains: "We felt they caused more problems than they solved, even though the world would feel more realistic. We're looking into that issue again with Fallout 3, so we'll see how it turns out." So, even if you can't run kiddies down with Shadowmere, maybe you'll be able to abandon them in a radioactive wasteland. That certainly won't upset anyone.**

IGNORANCE OVERWHELMING

There's one thing about video games that I just can't figure out. Why is it so hard for most women to understand video game controls? My girlfriend complains that the games I buy are too hard and complicated. Now, is that our fault as men? I tried to explain to her that it was because a portion of her brain was smaller than mine. The number of women gamers is growing, but there are so many women who can't experience great games like Okami, God of War, or even Legend of Zelda because their brains can't handle more than three face buttons. I think developers should create a specific difficulty mode for women: "Girlie." Don't get me wrong, I love ladies. I just hate having to turn off my game because my girlfriend can't figure it out.

Anthony Jacobs Jr.
Via yahoo.com

■ **The movie *Billy Madison* said it best: "Mr. Jacobs, what you've just wrote is one of the most insanely idiotic things we have ever read. At no point in your rambling, incoherent letter were you even close to anything that could be considered a rational thought. Everyone here is now dumber for having read it. We award you no points, and may God have mercy on your soul."**

THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER

In a fight, who would win: Master Chief or Kratos?

Chris Hall
Via email

■ **This letter actually triggered a somewhat lengthy debate in the GI office, most of which was arguing the specific rules of the proposed bout. Would Kratos be allowed his blades or magic? Could Master Chief wear his armor or use grenades? Eventually it was decided that both Kratos and the Chief could use only their fists as weapons, though the latter would also be afforded the luxury of his Mjolnir battle armor. Then we started talking about battle armor in general, which naturally led to a discussion of Robocop before a victor could be decided. So, as always, Robocop wins.**

CASUAL COMPLAINTS

I usually agree with what your writers say about the state of the gaming industry, but I had some huge issues with the article "Space Invaders" by Kato in issue 168. The casual gamer is not necessarily a new gamer. Quite often it is someone who enjoys gaming, but doesn't have the time to spend two hours playing just to get to the next save station. So what if a handful of games offer short bursts of entertainment? The industry isn't going to spit in the face of its core support.

Elaine Burkett
via msn.com

Whoa, am I missing something? In his opinion piece, Kato laments that publishers are catering to casual gamers at the expense of the more hardcore among us. Trying to please everyone at once is a fool's errand. Isn't that what the difficulty settings are for? Give me options. Let me choose my path instead of outright insulting my intelligence with coddling or punishing me with unforgiving challenges. Then, maybe, you might just find you've pleased everyone without even really trying.

Kyle Wadsworth
Via mail.com

Is CliffyB going to stop working on Unreal and Gears of War to make a canasta game? Is Microsoft pulling money from Halo 3's budget to make Crossword Puzzle Challenge? Have gamers forsaken Rainbow Six to play blackjack online? The answer to all of these questions is, of course, no. But you wouldn't know that after reading Matthew "the sky is falling" Kato's article about casual gaming ruining video games. What a whiner. After being a niche hobby for so long, gaming has finally reached the mainstream, and you're just circling up your elitist nerd wagons (with +1 enhanced durability) to keep everyone out. Let Grandpa have his poker game. Your hardcore games are in no danger.

Wade Knapik
Via email

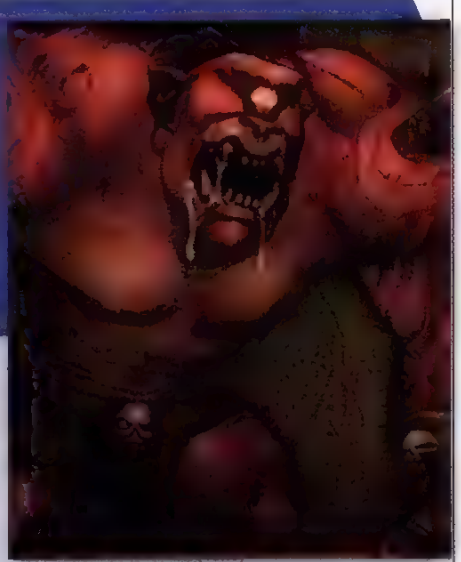
■ **No, not everyone hates Kato. Tons of readers wrote to voice their agreement as well, but the dissenting opinions are actually more illuminating. Gamers pay attention to what interests them. For the hardcore, this could include the hottest new FPS to the most obscure Japanese import. But there are thousands of gamers who might not be drawn to the most challenging or time-intensive experiences on the market. That's totally fine, and publishers and developers need to consider these consumers as well. However, if those considerations start to**

MASSIVELY MISTAKEN

I see this all the time: Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game. I get kind of frustrated because it makes gamers look stupid. If you don't understand what I mean, look up "massively" in the dictionary. It is an adverb, not an adjective. It should be Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game. Why hasn't this been changed by the editors?

[redacted]
Via aol.com

■ **You're right, a game can't just be referred to as "massively." However, in this phrase, the word is actually meant to describe the multiplayer, not the game in general. In short, because MMOs supports hundreds of players simultaneously, they are considered "massively multiplayer." See, gamers aren't so stupid after all!**



■ **Gruul: massive, not massively**

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come at the expense of compelling and high-quality games, the gamers who have supported the industry over the years will have every right to feel betrayed.

FOOL'D

I work in a game store, and I just wanted to thank you for the hilarious Wii Balls segment in Game Infarcer. I thought you might like to know that a woman came into my store the other day and actually asked to reserve a set. Of course, I did the only thing I could do; I asked if she wanted the flesh-colored sack or the blue one.

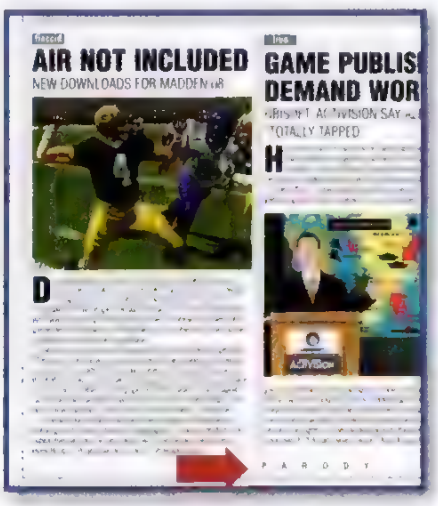
Jon Wilburn
Via email

A friend of mine just called me with some urgent news: "Dude, did you hear that Microsoft is starting a Life Achievements program!? You can, like, buy a Zune, and you get points! It's gonna be sweet!" I was literally speechless.

Eric Dawson
Omaha, NE

In your article in the April Issue, "Air Not Included", you state that it is planned that people will have to spend real money to download things such as helmets, mascots, and air for the ball. This is ridiculous. I have no problem with companies offering content that you pay to download. However, this content should include new logos for the helmets, updated rosters, and new draft classes. When it comes to charging for the air in the ball, I find this totally unacceptable. It is disturbing that companies are beginning to think that they can put anything online and then make you pay extra for things that should be included to begin with. At that point, they're just releasing an incomplete game.

James Balderson
Via email



We received lots of letters like these from people who either fell for the jokes in Game Infarcer or had friends who fell for them. Maybe it's a little sadistic, but we find these tales highly entertaining. Here's a tip for the future: If a page in our April issue contains a highly unlikely article, has the word "parody" at the bottom of the page, and is a part of a feature entitled Game Infarcer, it probably isn't true. At any rate, thanks for sending in your stories!

CORRECTIONS

In our May issue (169), we incorrectly stated that Maserati is the Italian division of Lamborghini. Maserati is actually owned by Fiat. We apologize for the mistake.

READER ART

[redacted]

Enter the Game Informer Reader Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best dam art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault. All entries become the property of Game Informer and can't be returned.

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BAILEY ANDERSON
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DAVID REID
Can you really rock the soul patch if you don't have a soul?

SETH DEMING
Leonardo's thoughts drift gently to Casey Jones, and how best to murder him.

KENDAL PHILLIPS
"Hey, pal. Keep your filthy vines to yourself."

STEVE McDONALD
Kratos gets ready to eviscerate the next moron who says "This...is... SPARTA!"

LARIS LEMESEVSKI
This piece of art is better than every Uwe Boll movie combined. By the way, is *BloodRayne 2* ever coming out?

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE BASKETBALL.

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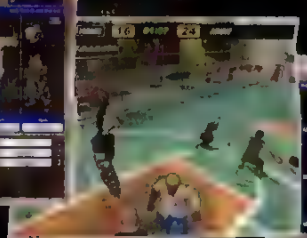

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FREE STYLE STREET BASKETBALL

CONNECT

Breaking News, Views, And Technology From The Cutting Edge Of Gaming

IT'S STILL MOVING!

CAPCOM BRINGS RESIDENT EVIL TO Wii

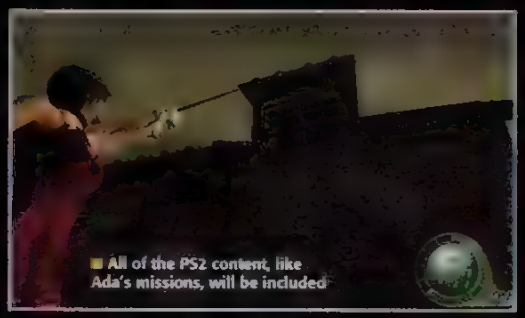
At Capcom's spring gamers' day, there were two games that had everybody talking. You'll have to wait until next month to get all the details on one of them (Devil May Cry 4), but we've got the full scoop on the upcoming Wii version of the modern classic, Resident Evil 4.

In terms of content, players won't find any major differences between this version and the PS2 entry. It has all of the extra costumes, Ada missions, and high-definition options that were added to the PS2 port. Unsurprisingly, Capcom hopes the Wii controls will distinguish this one from previous incarnations.

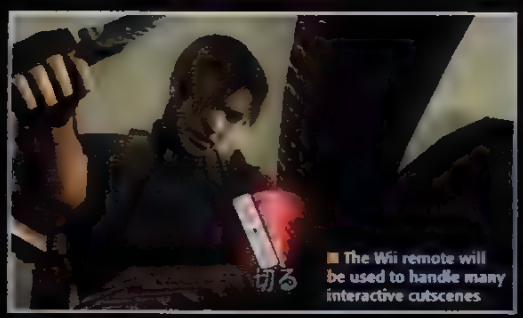
Using both the nunchuk and remote, the set-up feels strange at first. Players move with the thumbstick, and enter fire mode by holding the B button. At this point, you move the remote to aim the reticle on-screen (which replaces the laser sight), and press A to shoot. If you want to use your knife, you can just slash the remote (outside of fire mode), and Leon will instantly take out his knife and swing it at the nearest foe. This makes using the knife far easier than before, but purists can still use the old knife controls instead.

The interactive cutscenes will also use the motion-sensing controls, making players shake the remote back and forth to outrun a boulder, or swing it to attack Krauser during the knife fight. These events required a great degree of precision before, so we'll have to wait and see how that translates to the flailing of the remote.

Resident Evil 4 and Devil May Cry 4 may have been the biggest topics of conversation at the event, but Capcom had an array of other games available in some form or another. Project Treasure Island Z for Wii, Monster Hunter Freedom 2 for PSP, two new DS MegaMan games, and Moto GP 07 on PS2 (Capcom acquired the PlayStation rights from Namco) all made appearances, as did some interesting Xbox Live Arcade fare like "HD Remix" versions of Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo and Super Street Fighter II Turbo. Despite the lack of new info on Resident Evil 5 or no announcement of Dead Rising 2, it looks like Capcom has a solid year ahead.

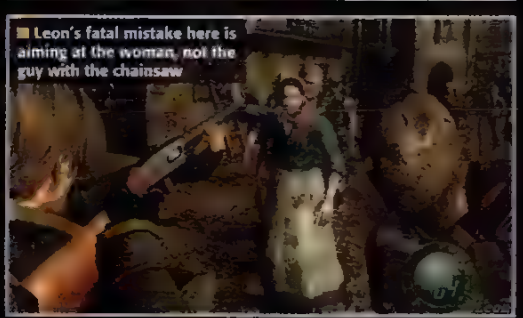

All of the PS2 content, like Ada's missions, will be included

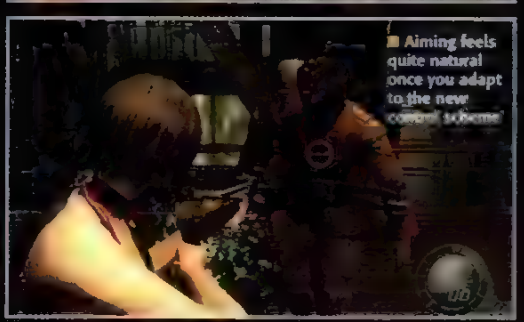
When you run out of ammo, you may have to rely on the new knife controls



The Wii remote will be used to handle many interactive cutscenes

The reticle replaces the stylish laser sight


Leon's fatal mistake here is aiming at the woman, not the guy with the chainsaw


Aiming feels quite natural once you adapt to the new control scheme

NO OBJECTIONS HERE!

The fourth game in this series just released in Japan (and is selling like crazy), but we still have some catching up to do. Phoenix Wright 3: Trials and Tribulations is hitting our shores in September. There won't be any major overhauls to the formula, but the story will feature two timelines, one in the present with Phoenix and the other in the past starring Mia Fey as a rookie defense attorney. Players will also face a formidable new foe in the form of a coffee-swilling prosecuting attorney named Godot.

SHOOTING GALLERY

Another Resident Evil game, entitled Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles, was also playable at Capcom's event. Capturing the feeling of old arcade light-gun games, this rail-shooter has players using the Wii remote to stem a never-ending tide of zombies. The gameplay isn't exactly innovative, but since it has returning characters like Chris Redfield, Jill Valentine, and Wesker, Resident Evil fans will definitely be playing through to get the whole story behind the collapse of Umbrella.

the top 10 worst licensed game ideas

While it's certainly easy to make a bad game based on a good license, there are some games that have no business existing in the first place. This month's GI Ten gathers the best of the worst licenses in gaming history, plumbing the depths to find the ultimate in "What were they thinking?" marketing deals.

1 Trolls on Adventure Island

Leading up our charge of horrendous video game licenses are the Trolls gang, a line of cheap plastic toys with Don King hair that were popular with weird aunts and cat ladies throughout the late '80s and early '90s. The ugly, naked "dolls" were bad enough in non-virtual form, but for some reason American Video Entertainment decided to make a spectacularly bad NES game based on the license in 1992. We hope they bought the rights at a Dollar Store.

2 Paris Hilton's Diamond Quest

For a person whose sole talent seems to be a knack for appearing in every picture with the exact same dead-eyed, vague expression, Paris Hilton is surprisingly famous. But, as we all know, you can't make a living solely on amateur sex tapes, and even Mom and Dad's Visa has a limit. So, the canny heiress agreed to appear on this Gameloft mobile title, which is basically Bejeweled with some Paris wallpaper slapped on it. File under "completely unnecessary."

3 Yo! Noid

Before the days of in-game advertising, money hungry publishers just made games that *were* advertising. Yo! Noid starred a long forgotten Dominos Pizza mascot, the Noid, who was then the star of a popular advertising campaign. Strangely, the game was made by the normally solid Capcom, which made Yo! Noid on the cheap by adapting it from a Japanese-only NES title named Masked Ninja Hanamaru. It's too bad the game itself was about as satisfying as three-day-old deep dish.

4 Hooters Road Trip

If you're one of the few people on Earth not familiar with Hooters, here's the deal: It's basically like Applebee's, except the waitresses dress like '70s roller derby players and the buffalo wings cost $18. In 2002, Ubisoft scooped up the big-bazoomed franchise and released this horrible racing game on PSone and PC, which featured cross-country road races and the chance to "hang out" with Hooters girls. Only the extremely lonely need apply.

5 Left Behind: Eternal Forces

While we'd love to see an intelligent look at religion in video games, it's likely that it's not going to come from a PC title based on the Left Behind books, the knuckleheaded novel franchise that attempts to mix the Book of Revelations with hokey *Da Vinci Code* thriller theatrics. Eternal Forces raised the ick factor with surprisingly high levels of violence, allowing players to convert or kill gays, Muslims, Jews, and Catholics. Not exactly "turn the other cheek."

6 California Raisins: The Grape Escape

The California Raisins, claymation R&B musicians who starred in commercials encouraging people to eat dried fruit, were one of the worst pop culture phenomena of the '80s. Not content with butchering tunes like "Heard it Through the Grapevine" (geddit?), the gang made the leap into bad video games. This PC title was released, and a playable ROM of a canceled Capcom-produced Raisins NES game was uncovered in an article on NESplayer.com.

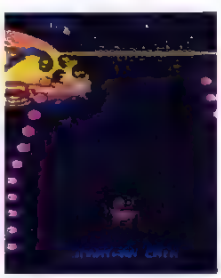
7 V.I.P.

Although she usually keeps busy bouncing between relationships with Kid Rock and Tommy Lee, Pam Anderson did find time for an ill-fated syndicated TV series called *V.I.P.* in the early part of the '00s, and even convinced Ubisoft to release a game based on the detective show for multiple systems. A dumb idea to be sure, but the gameplay was even worse than you'd expect. Highlights include "combat" that lets you hit bad guys with a purse. Yes, a purse.

8 Michael Jackson's Moonwalker

It was a bad idea at the time, but hindsight has made Moonwalker even worse. Before he'd fully transitioned from pop icon to plastic surgery ghoul, Jackson and Sega created this action/platformer clunker for the Genesis. Recent events have made the premise – Michael "rescuing" kidnapped children from a drug dealer named Mr. Big – pretty creepy. Sadly, these days most parents would probably rather have a coke dealer babysit their kids than MJ.

9 Journey



MOR rock legends Journey didn't fare well in this bizarre 1983 arcade title, which tasked players with reuniting the supergroup with their missing instruments and then getting them to their "Scarab" space vehicle. While it sounds strange, it looked even weirder, as the members of Journey were represented onscreen by actual digital headshots attached to primitive animated bodies, ensuring that the group's mullets and moustaches were accurately represented.

10 Shaq Fu

If you were going to make a video game based on legendary center Shaquille O'Neal, one might suspect your first thought would be to make it about, you know, basketball. Not so in Shaq Fu, a beat 'em up that featured a digital representation of Shaq studying kung fu and battling a mummy mastermind named Sett-Ra. Yes, it is just as stupid as it sounds. Thankfully, the game tanked and Shaq spent the rest on the '90s concentrating on things he was good at, like acting and rapping.

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UNLIMITED ENABLED

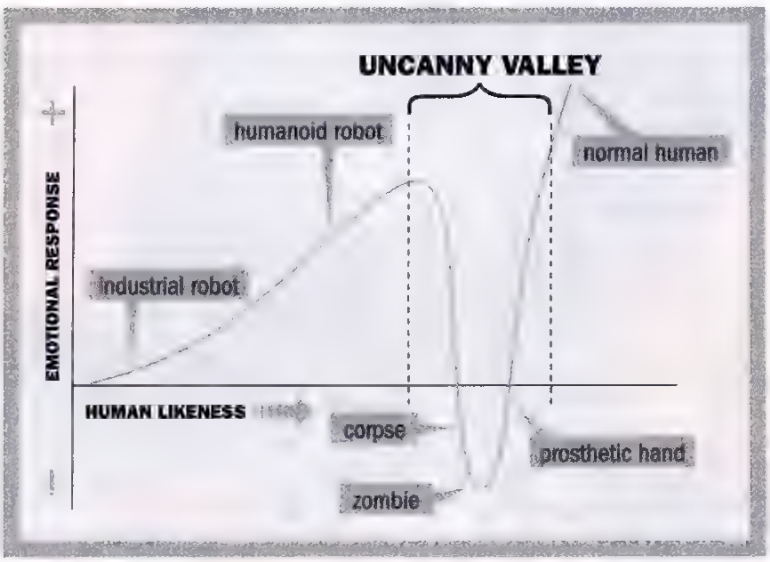
STARING DOWN THE UNCANNY

WHEN REALISTIC

In 1970, a Japanese roboticist named Masahiro Mori observed something strange in his work with humanoid machines. He noticed that as robots become more human in appearance, they elicit a stronger emotional response from the people interacting with them. This increase could result from relatively small changes like adding a pair of eyes, or structural similarities like arms and legs. However, as the machine gets closer and closer to resembling a living person, Mori theorized that responses do not continue to rise until the robot is indistinguishable from humans. In fact, there is a drastic drop-off at this point where fundamental features are so similar that imprecision in the tiny details become glaringly apparent. For example, the movement looks unnatural, or the eyes appear vacant and dead. Instead of being appealing, the robot becomes eerie and repulsive to humans (see graph). This dip is known as the Uncanny Valley.

The theory of the Uncanny Valley has been around for over 35 years, and its underlying concepts even longer. While some question their scientific merit, one cannot deny that there is some truth to Mori's observations. If you keep up on issues facing the gaming industry and game development, odds are good that you've heard references to the Valley in the last few years. Even though the theory was formulated in regards to robotics, the technology used to make computer-generated characters in video games and film has become so advanced that people are experiencing a barrier similar to the Uncanny Valley, even if they can't articulate it as such.

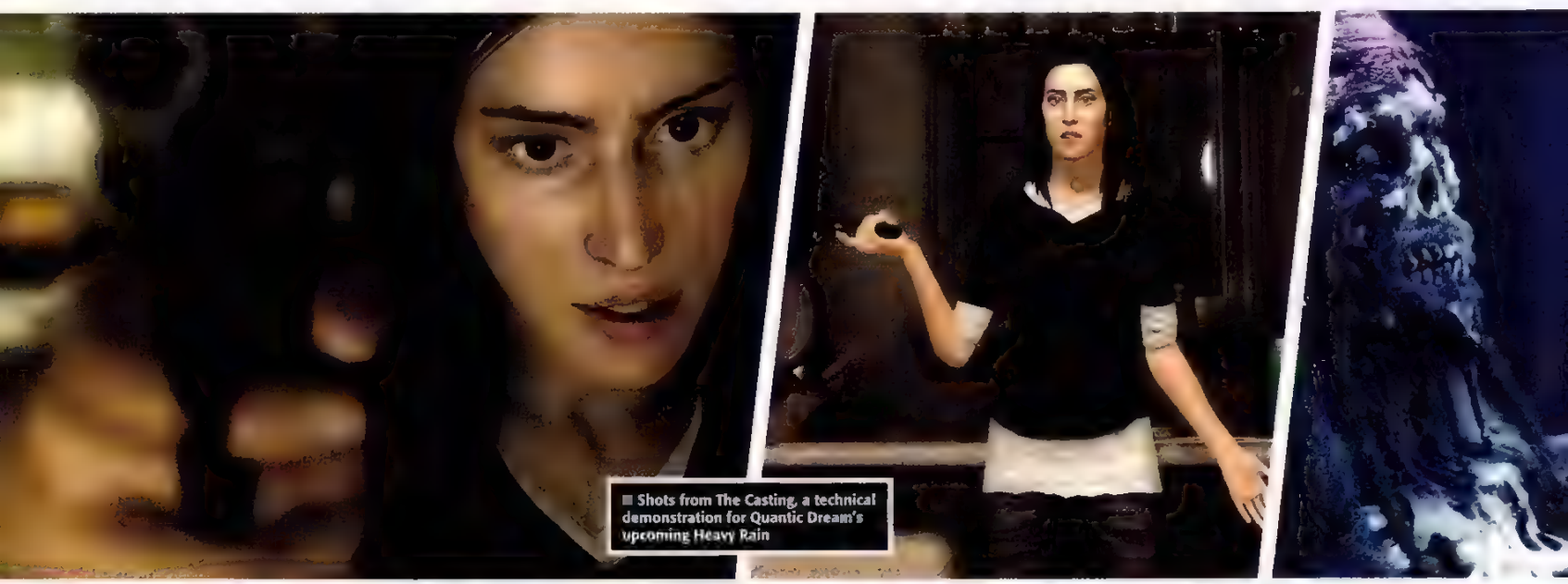
In particular, many discussions were sparked at E3 2006 when the developer Quantic Dream (which made Indigo Prophecy) debuted the technology behind its new game, Heavy Rain. The demo, entitled "The Casting," featured an incredibly realistic female delivering an emotionally charged monologue, and was at times unnerving in its realism. Because this game is what brought the Uncanny Valley to many gamers' attentions, we spoke with Quantic Dream CEO Guillaume de Fondaumiere about how the studio approaches issues relating to viewers response to its characters.



"Our objective is to create true virtual actors capable of expressing complex emotions and generating empathy," states de Fondaumiere. "We've worked more than a year analyzing, in particular, the human face and experimenting with different approaches to obtain a satisfactory solution for our virtual actors. The conclusion was scary: Creating a believable character meant working on all areas surrounding the human expression and movement. Whenever one tiny thing didn't work – for instance, the expression of a smile in a particular frame set – the whole performance was ruined."

The goal of producing these hyper-realistic characters is not aimless; it has implications far beyond the simple sensation of planting your flag atop a previously unscaled mountain. In fact, de Fondaumiere believes that these advances are integral to expanding video games and the audiences they reach. "I think it is an important step forward for the industry because a realistic world is one that everyone knows and relates to easily," he tells us. "Hunting dragons and monsters in dark fantasy worlds is appealing to certain audiences, but not to the masses. It will contribute to widen video game's audience from niche to mass market."

One challenge of tackling the Uncanny Valley in video games is the necessity of making the characters function in real time – a restriction not faced by CG artists working on characters for films. As such,



■ Shots from The Casting, a technical demonstration for Quantic Dream's upcoming Heavy Rain

VALLEY IS TOO REAL

that industry appears to be further along in crossing the Uncanny Valley than gaming, with attention now being paid to remarkably intricate details. Hal Hickel, animation director at Industrial Light & Magic (and recent Academy Award winner for *Pirates of the Caribbean II: Dead Man's Chest*), explains the nuances in creating the most convincing aspect of a CG character: the eyes.

"The eyes are the most critical part in making any human character feel alive," reveals Hickel. "A big chunk of that is in the animation, making sure you have the subtleties of the scans and the blinks. Another huge chunk is in their lighting, making sure the eyes don't glow too much and are readable. Often times, with CG characters, there's a tendency to up the ambient lighting on the eyes so it really reads well and you get a really good eyeline. That's great in a cartoon to make it pop, but in a real character, it's too easy to step over that line and make them unnatural."

If such minute details comprise the current concerns in film, one would think that battle with the Valley is largely won. That isn't the case; one of the biggest obstacles facing digital characters is the audience's expectation from computer-generated content. "It used to be enough to create a kick-ass CG dinosaur," laughs Hickel. "Nowadays, everyone is educated enough about movies to know that, at the very least, it was done in a computer. People think it's a compliment to say 'that's some great CGI.' Which is, to me, sort of a failure. I'd much rather have people be confused and say 'I don't understand how they did that.'" This means that the simple awareness that something is computer animated can produce a rift between the action and the viewer – another issue relating to the Uncanny Valley.

If computer animators in film and video games are currently wrestling with these concepts, where does that leave robotics, the field where the Uncanny Valley theory originated? According to Mike Winter, manager and co-founder of the robotics think-tank Stupid Fun Club (alongside famed game developer Will Wright), robotics has begun to branch into more effective and compelling ways to generate an emotional response.

"We're very interested in robots communicating with people and robots having emotions," Winter explains. "We're looking into and developing how every appliance in your house has a personality, and remembers you, and knows how to respond to you, and how to respond to each other. But they're not doing it with a typical protocol; we're using an emotional protocol. They know our actions, what we like and don't like, and can think a little ahead to what we might or might not want." If you think that sounds like an unattainable science-fiction ideal, think again. The Stupid Fun Club's headquarters already has working prototypes of appliances that have these functions.

This approach effectively adds another angle to consider when dealing with the Uncanny Valley. Looks are not the only avenue through which people respond to robots, and convincing or relatable behavior can be just as important as appearance. De Fondaumiere echoes this sentiment when talking about Heavy Rain. "The more we move towards bridging the aesthetical gap on human entities, the more we'll need a third dimension to this chart – and the theory – representing intelligence," he asserts.

The aesthetics angle seems pretty superficial when one considers the possibilities of developing endearing or convincing behaviors for artificial entities. In fact, Winter doesn't even believe that making completely realistic humanoid robots is even a goal worth working toward at this point. "It would almost be untrue to their nature," he muses. "We look the way we do because we have evolved. It works out great that we have arms and legs and our eyes are up high. That's great for farming or for hunting. But robots, they live in a different world. They have different mechanical abilities."

Even though Winter's Stupid Fun Club doesn't choose to confront the Uncanny Valley on a visual level, it doesn't make the challenges presented by the theory any less relevant to other fields. With visual media like games and movies, sacrificing looks for function isn't an option, so artists and developers must continue to push forward through the issues.

Ultimately, even if the phrase "Uncanny Valley" becomes a buzzword in the vocabulary of every gamer and movie-goer, it is still only an idea. It isn't a rule constraining progress, and it isn't an excuse to settle for less. The problems associated with it may seem complex – solvable only with advanced technology and computer trickery – but Hickel offers a straightforward, deceptively simple solution: "A lot of avoiding the Uncanny Valley just comes from observation, attention to detail, and hard work. Most of the time it's just about staring at things in the real world and trying to understand why they look the way they do." ■■■

Go to Game Informer Online to check out our full Q&A with CEO of Quantic Dream Guillaume de Fondaumiere. He reveals more info about Heavy Rain and the studio's approach to realistic characters.

Photos courtesy of ILM

■ This is the Moonbot, one of the Stupid Fun Club's creations. The eyes are its only human feature, but Mike Winter says its interactions are "about as smart as a drunk friend"

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

EA CONTINUES WITH LORD OF THE RINGS

Not long ago EA announced that Lord of the Rings RPG The White Council was on indefinite hold. Now, the company is renewing its partnership with New Line Cinema and declaring that an all-new title is on the docket for 2008. Looks like our initial speculation (see issue 168, page 34) regarding The White Council being hijacked for New Line's needs took a step towards being true.

BAY FOR PRINCE OF PERSIA

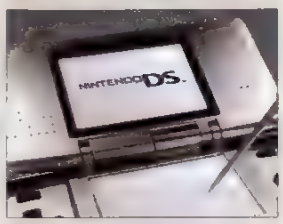
Internet film news site IESB confirmed that mega-producer Jerry Bruckheimer wants *Transformers* director Michael Bay to handle the upcoming *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time* film, which has entered pre-production. Here's a quick look at some art from the movie.

FTC PRAISES INDUSTRY

A report by the Federal Trade Commission praises the video game industry for making "significant progress" in limiting the sales of M-rated games to children – doing better than the movie and music sectors. The FTC's underage secret shoppers where only able to purchase inappropriate games 42 percent of the time, which was down from 69 percent in 2003.

THE WORLD'S FASTEST SYSTEM!

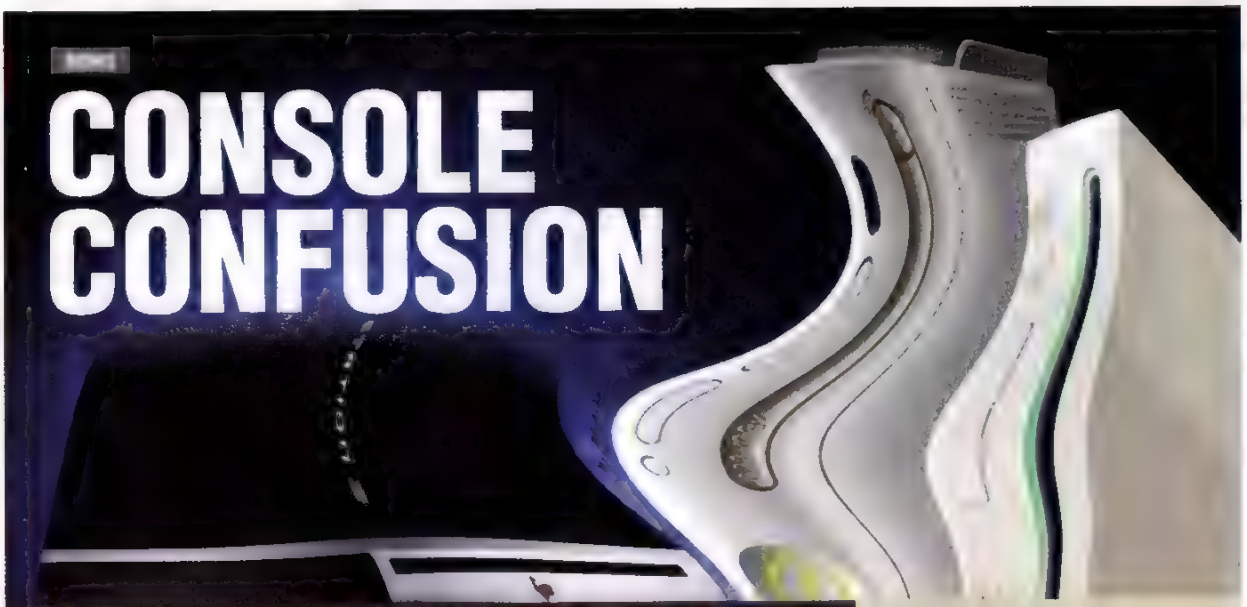
The Guinness Book of World Records (Video Game Edition) has declared the Nintendo DS the fastest-selling system of all time for selling 40 million units worldwide in 28 months.



LEGO BAT SIGNAL GOES UP

Entertainment mag *Variety* has confirmed that publisher Warner Bros. and Traveller's Tales are set to make a Lego Batman title in the same vein as the successful Lego Star Wars games. Lego Batman will appear for multiple consoles sometime in 2008.

CONSOLE CONFUSION



KEEPING UP WITH THE MULTIPLE CONSOLE EDITIONS

After barely six months in existence, Sony is already phasing out the 20GB version of the PlayStation 3. Even before the decision was officially announced, online retailers had already pulled the unit from their websites, leaving only the 60GB edition on sale for $599. The 20GB was being sold for $499, but despite this lower price, Sony says that the demand for the 60GB version from consumers and retailers was "overwhelming" in comparison. A Sony spokesperson we talked to said there was "very little" stock of the 20GB still at stores. Despite the demise of this edition of the PS3, a Japanese Sony official has stated that the hardware maker is considering an 80GB edition.

As Sony's 20GB PS3 ends, another iteration for Microsoft's Xbox 360 has just begun. The company has released the Xbox 360 Elite – its new 120GB $479 system with an HDMI port. Having different iterations of a single console is not a new phenomenon, but in this age of changing hard drive sizes and accessory combos, David Cole, analyst for strategic research firm DFC Intelligence, says companies run the risk of confusing consumers.

While having multiple versions of a console gives gamers the choice to choose which features are most important to them, Cole says that even this can be a problem in and of itself. "I think there's a lot of potential to confuse consumers when you go with multiple SKUs [stock keeping unit] when the hardware configurations are so different, because there's a lot of confusion like, 'What will the bigger hard drive get me? How much is that worth?'" In other words, at the time you get the system, you might not even be able to fully assess which features are the most important to you or how much you'll use them. This is especially relevant today as systems are being more and more future-proofed. For example, you might not have thought you needed a large hard drive until you got an HDTV and Microsoft announced it was allowing HD movie downloads.

There is also the possible ill will that gamers might harbor if they feel like they are getting nickel and dimed or aren't getting the best version of their platform. Although Cole thinks that consumer confusion or anger is not good thing – whether legitimate or not – he doesn't think companies like Microsoft are out to get people. "I don't really buy into the conspiracy theory because I think Microsoft believes the Elite is more of a niche item." Cole agrees with this and sees the Elite as a way to appeal to more high-end gamers who might think that the PS3 is more "fully featured."

Price is always an important factor for any console, but it appears that the features of the 60GB PS3 were more important than its $599 price tag. Cole theorizes that "when you're talking about that type of money people really aren't in bargain shopping mode. The price sensitivity comes in when you're under $300."

Having multiple versions of a system can also pose problems for developers. Some didn't like the lack of a hard drive in 360's Core system and the fact that the HD-DVD drive wasn't included in order to offer more disc space to 360 titles. Currently, one developer we talked to said that the situation isn't hard to adjust to, but there can be annoyances such as having to restrict save file sizes to ensure that they are palatable to a stand-alone memory card in cases where a version of a system – or a platform like the Wii – might not have a hard drive.

Although Cole doesn't think that history or sales numbers are very favorable to multiple console iterations, he believes the practice isn't likely to stop since it has become a regular practice to include features that don't directly impact gameplay to a console, like Blu-ray or HD-DVD. For consumers, choosing wisely remains the best advice for the foreseeable future.

WHERE OH WHERE IS THE Wii?

Nintendo's Wii has definitely caught on with the video game world. The problem is, even six months after its launch consumers are still having problems buying the system. The console had a great start, but Nintendo and its struggles to ship enough units remains the problem.

Nintendo says that it is doing all it can to manufacture as many systems as possible, but that for the foreseeable future the supply situation likely will not change.

Game Informer talked to Billy Pidgeon, analyst for IDC, who told us, "The Wii production is way below my expectations. Specialty retailers say they are getting regular shipments, but it's only two or three [units] at a time. Historically Nintendo has been really conservative, and maybe it is being too conservative."

Pidgeon says the status quo on this situation is not acceptable. "It may cost them a bit to ramp up production and air-ship consoles, but it needs to be less conservative and less cost-conscious. The technology is not as complex; it's harder to build Xbox 360s and PS3s than it is a Wii. The shortage really doesn't make sense."

One thing which might explain the unfathomable is the age-old "grassy knoll" theory of video game console launches – a manufactured shortage to increase buzz about the console. Game Informer has heard from one anonymous source that Nintendo has intentionally been stringing out its shipments in order to spread the reported profits across its fiscal quarters. Nintendo denies this is true, and maybe it's not, but all that matters right now is that the system is in short supply.

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game informer answers

the big questions

Common perception is a funny thing. One person might say something (perhaps someone in a marketing department somewhere), and some website or magazine prints up the quote. Someone reads it, and mentions it to a friend. It's not long before everybody acts like they know exactly what's going on with their favorite games, consoles, or industry trends. But how much can you trust the Internet buzz, or that thing you heard from your friend who knows a guy in the industry? This month, we take a step back from the hype to answer some of the tough questions facing the gaming world. Are things really as simple as they appear to be? Are they supported by real numbers, informed opinions from the experts, and detailed analysis? Welcome to your own personal reality check.

has the PS3 already lost

If you read the gaming blogs during the PlayStation 3 launch, Sony was dead on arrival. It certainly wasn't the smoothest of launches, with console shortages, already lofty pricetags inflated due to eBay auctions, no online strategy to rival Xbox Live, and a dearth of compelling games for the nascent machine.

But did the PS3 really limp out of the gate that badly? Putting its initial sales up against its direct competitor, the Xbox 360, the numbers tell a different tale. According to NPD Group data, the PS3 sold approximately 902,000 consoles during its first three months in the United States. The Xbox 360 sold 50,000 fewer consoles during its first three months on the market in the U.S., coming in at roughly 854,000. Comparing the PS3 with its highly successful predecessors, it outsold both the PSone and PS2 during the same time frame. So why the doom and gloom surrounding Sony?

"The media are plain stupid," says Michael Pachter, analyst with Wedbush Morgan Securities. "People are being overly critical on how well it's doing mostly because their expectation for what the sales should have been were too high."

Billy Pidgeon, an analyst with IDC, agrees that Sony received an overabundance of criticism. "Initially, there was a scarcity of consoles and people were overpaying on eBay. But all of a sudden those auctions dried up and there was a surplus of consoles on retail shelves – this led to a negative perception of the PS3. The press developed a script, which often happens. Nintendo was the victim last time of being out of touch with the GameCube, even though the system was plenty capable and Nintendo was dominating the handheld market. This time it's Sony who is out of touch. It's easy to write the script that they are out of touch, they don't understand the market, and that they are arrogant. I don't think that's fair, but it's an easy story to write."

One of the other problems facing Sony was the overwhelming success of its current heavyweight, the PS2. "The fact of the matter is that the PS2 is still entrenched," says Pidgeon. "That is Sony's biggest problem for the PS3. What is the incentive to buy PS3 when you can still get great titles like God of War II for PS2?"

Despite the public perception of Sony's folly, the console is selling well without a true blockbuster title, and the marquee games will come in time. Pachter sees the console's future as being bright. "A year from now we'll all be laughing because the PS3 will have a price cut, Blu-ray will be the standard high-definition movie format, and there will be a lot of software for the box."

When forecasting the future of the console, both analysts see the PS3 trailing in the short term, but breaking even and eventually overcoming the Xbox 360 and Wii. "It will be a slow build," says Pidgeon. "I expect the Wii and Xbox 360 to stay in the lead in North America for the next two years. Where that flips is in 2010, 2011, where the PS3 has a huge install base and surpasses [Nintendo and Microsoft] while they are prepping their next boxes."

"I think it ends up in first," says Pachter. "But all three consoles will all have 30 percent or greater market share, and all of them will win."

is PC gaming dead

In a word: no. Pundits in the industry and the press have been repeating this tired old cliché since the original PlayStation and – despite increasingly sophisticated and graphically powerful home consoles – PC gaming shows no signs of dying. In actuality, one could argue that it's thriving. World of Warcraft, the biggest breakout hit of the last few years, now stands at over 8.5 million subscribers worldwide and is still rapidly growing.

PC gaming absolutely dominates emerging gaming markets Korea and China, which will only grow in importance as the years go on. Even as the consoles improve, the PC is still the system of choice for serious real-time strategy and first-person shooter gamers, who demand the accuracy and depth of the keyboard-and-mouse interface.

If that weren't enough to prove the health of the PC, two of 2007's most anticipated releases, Will Wright's Spore and Crytek's Crysis, will hit the market exclusive to home computers. Expect this list of hot titles to grow as we begin to see the next generation of PC games tailored for dual-core processors and DirectX 10, which will likely blow the prettiest PS3 and 360 games out of the water.

are console exclusives always bad for gamers

On March 19, Capcom announced that it will bring former PlayStation 3 exclusive Devil May Cry 4 to Xbox 360 and PC. Little did the company know that the Sony faithful would light up the Internet with self-righteous anger. An online petition was started soon after the announcement, threatening to boycott all Capcom products unless the company redacted its multiplatform plans. At the time of this writing, the petition has almost 12,000 signatures, though a good number of those are ironic posts by more level-headed gamers.

Observe some of these excerpts from signers (with their original grammar intact): "Why have you screwed us! Capcom is very very bad! I used to love your games but now, you disgust me!" writes Capcom H8R. ManiacMagee shares the sentiment, "I can not believe you would do this to us Capcom. Hope you and your greedy company burn in fireeee."

Is this just fanboy ranting? Other than holding certain heavy hitting exclusives over rival console supporters, what do gamers care if more players can enjoy a certain game?

"As a consumer, I don't want exclusives because I want to be able to play anything anyone makes on the console, or consoles, that I play games on, " says Bethesda VP of PR and marketing Pete Hines. "I'm not a fanboy of one console over another, so I don't really care if I have a game on the console I'm playing that you can't play. Plus, I've never bought a console just to play one game, or even a couple of games, that were exclusive to that console, but I might be in the minority on that one."

The Elder Scrolls developer just doesn't see the point of exclusives. "For developers and publishers, in general, I think most folks find that it is beneficial to make their games available to as many people as possible," says Hines. "Certainly our philosophy continues to be that we make the game that we want to make, and then make it available on as many platforms as possible."

Billy Pidgeon, an analyst for technology research firm IDC, says that the trend of exclusive games is moving in a different direction. "What drives gamers' propensity to buy a particular console is the perception that the best exclusive games will be on that system," says Pidgeon. "Whereas that used to be driven by third-party exclusives, now it's about titles from first and second-party studios."

In the end, console exclusives have both good and bad sides to them depending on who you talk to. Good for: hardware manufacturers, diehard fanboys. Bad for: third-party publishers, the average gamer with a limited hardware budget.

can anyone make good Wii games other than Nintendo

There's no denying it: In recent months, things have been going far better for Nintendo than even the most optimistic industry pundits predicted. The Wii is a genuine phenomenon, nearing almost seven million units sold worldwide. So far, it's outsold the PS3 by a large margin (over 2-to-1), and is rapidly gaining on Xbox 360.

Despite this success, looking at the Wii software library, it's not hard to notice that the system already seems plagued by a problem that has dogged several recent Nintendo systems: sub-par third-party support. While the industry has generally been more positive about the Wii than the GameCube or N64, it's not yet translating into compelling content. Reviewing the Wii catalog on the website Metacritic (which compiles scores from hundreds of press outlets), the average non-first-party Wii title score is a paltry 63.7 out of 100 at the time of this writing.

Sales also reflect this trend. While Nintendo's The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess has sold well over one million copies, large franchises like Call of Duty and Need for Speed have sold a disappointing 217,000 and 117,000 units respectively. It's clear that fans aren't clamoring to scoop up dumbed-downed versions of past console games with tacked-on Wii features.

Will things get better? Perhaps, but there are some serious obstacles the Wii will have to overcome. One is history. Recent Nintendo consoles have seen generally poor third-party sales, as its fans often seem to gravitate towards more traditional Nintendo franchises. It's very possible that – despite claims to the opposite – many publishers and developers are afraid to devote large budgets and high quality teams to a product they don't believe will sell in large numbers. Even Nintendo's own Shigeru Miyamoto recently chided game companies for putting their "third-string team or their fourth-string team" on Wii development projects in a recent interview with *Newsweek's* N'Gai Croal.

However, with Wii's continued success, these perceptions may be changing. Recently, EA president Larry Probst admitted that the company had underestimated customer demand for Wii and would be reallocating resources to ramp up development for the platform. Valve Software's Doug Lombardi thinks it's just a matter of time: "I think most publishers have already been convinced. In the next year, it's a safe bet that we will see a flurry of Wii-only product announcements from all the major players."

Even with better resources, creating innovative Wii experiences might prove difficult. Croal observes, "It's hard to make quality games. The paradox of the Wii is that the very features that made it easy for Nintendo to make it stand out are the ones that are going to pose a tremendous challenge for third parties. The problem is that third parties are oriented around making triple-A games for traditional controllers. That's what they're good at."

Still, there are glimmers of hope. Ubisoft's infectious Rayman Raving Rabbids, which features unique motion-based minigames, has sold well enough to become the third-best selling Wii game on the market (behind Zelda and Wii Play), and EA recently announced Boogie, a Wii-specific dance title that caters to the platform. Whether others will follow suit is anyone's guess, but one thing is clear: third parties' current strategy of throwing motion controls on existing brands and gameplay formulas is a dead end.

does raw power matter in the console war

The question seems stupidly simple. Just listen to that guy at the local game shop or read postings from any number of online message boards. After all, the system that has the most power should theoretically be able to push the limits of graphics, AI, physics, and multiplayer the farthest. Can a system's success be reduced to a mathematical formula? Is a console's success so easily calculated?

Not if history has anything to say about this topic. The original Xbox had a 733 MHz CPU and 64MB unified 128-bit DDR SDRAM, and came in second to a system with specs almost half that, the PlayStation 2. The N64 was a 64-bit console with a 93.75 MHz CPU and lost to a 32-bit console with a 33.8688 MHz CPU. The Neo Geo had cutting-edge graphics and sound and still only managed to sell a million units in a war against two less powerful systems: Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis. The Sega Master System had 8KB main RAM and could display 32 simultaneous colors from its 64-color palette, and the NES outsold it even though it only had 2KB main RAM and could only display 25 colors out of a 53-color palette. Even the Atari 2600 continued to outsell a string of more powerful competitors, lasting 14 years when it was finally, officially retired in 1992 by Atari.

If you want more recent proof that raw power isn't all it takes to win a sales race, just look at the Wii, which started outselling Sony's PS3 almost straight out of the gate. So with the track record for consoles firmly established, does the future look any different?

We turned to a few developers in hopes of getting a clearer view of the big picture. "I think the main difference between consoles is our own engine and our own technologies and our ability to develop," says Patrick Fortier, creative director at Ubisoft Montreal. "You need enough power at the start to dream of those things and support them, but the real difference doesn't lie so much in the hardware as it does in the talent of our people."

Basically, a console's power is important, but a developer's ability to access that power is even more pivotal. After all, the reason people buy new systems in the first place is to enjoy the games developers create. As Infinity Ward studio head Jason West says, "It's all about the games – a few key exclusive titles that everyone wants can make a console. It's not very gratifying to make a game for a powerful machine that nobody has. We make games so people will have fun playing them."

Maybe gamers have been asking the wrong question all along. Instead of asking, "Which system is more powerful?" you can get a better idea of a console's performance by asking, "Which system is going to have the best games?" Raw power might be a good indication of a console's potential, but as history and current trends illustrate, it is by no means a guarantee of success. Games are ultimately the deciding factor.

Is Microsoft ripping you off

One of the keys to Microsoft's hugely successful Xbox campaign has been Xbox Live. While not the first attempt at console online play, it's been the first that has offered a solid, approachable service to gamers. With over six million subscribers, it's fair to say that the program has exceeded even the most optimistic observers' expectations.

However, recent events have many questioning Microsoft's practices in managing Xbox Live, bringing to light concerns about whether or not the company has some less consumer-friendly intentions for the future of the service.

First was a controversy surrounding Xbox Live downloadable content pricing. Many developers and publishers complained that they had wanted to offer extra content free on Live, but were told they had to charge for it by Microsoft. Although Microsoft's Aaron Greenberg denied these claims in an interview (Connect, Issue 168), saying, "It's ultimately up to the publisher," it's pretty clear now that this statement was, at best, misleading.

Here are the facts. On the Epic forums, the company's Mark Rein explicitly stated that the studio had wanted to release a set of Gears of War map packs free of charge, but was told no by Microsoft. "Epic thinks the way to maximize the return on Gears of War is to give the maps away for free and Microsoft thinks the way to maximize the return on Gears of War is to sell the maps," wrote Rein. "So what we've agreed to do is to put these maps on sale at a reasonable price then make them free a few months later. ... Quite frankly, Xbox Live Marketplace isn't our store. It's Microsoft's store. Like any retailer they have the right to figure out what goes on the shelves of their store and what price they sell it at."

Others confirm Rein's statement. In an interview with Bizarre Creations' Ben Ward on the Australian version of IGN.com, he stated that the company had intended their popular Geometry Wars as a free download, but was forced by Microsoft to charge a "bare minimum" of 400 points (approximately $5). These pricing dictates extend to hard copy sales as well; we spoke to one major publisher that wasn't allowed to release a new 360 game at $20 as planned. The game eventually went on sale for a higher retail price.

Fans of Guitar Hero were also surprised to see the high prices attached to downloadable songs for the Xbox 360 version of Guitar Hero II. Three-song packs of tracks from the original PS2 release are being offered at 500 points ($6.25). This would place the cost of buying every song from the first title at around $100, a hefty price tag for previously released material. Fans soon reacted angrily on the Internet, accusing Microsoft and Activision of profiteering. Commenting on the popular Xbox blog MajorNelson.com, user "Bernie" expressed the popular sentiment: "Disappointed in the pricing for this one too...especially since Guitar Hero is such an excellent game on the 360...would have bought plenty of the GH I tracks if they were reasonable. Won't be getting any at this rate. These packs are then priced at $2.08 per song (for pre-existing content) with you being locked into buying the three-pack which may not be all songs you're interested in."

Console gamers aren't the only ones who are worried. Microsoft's new Windows Live program, which seeks to wed PC and console gamers together under the Live umbrella, has many in the computer gaming scene wondering what the future holds.

When Microsoft's Live Anywhere program was announced at E3, the response was largely positive. The company positioned the initiative as a boon for gamers, allowing them instant access to their Live account and friends list from multiple platforms, mobile, 360, and PC. Cross-platform play between PC and 360 was also touted, starting with titles like Shadowrun.

However, speaking to developers in the PC community, it's clear that many have strong reservations about Live on PC. While no one would speak to us on the record for fear of angering Microsoft, we heard many comments and criticisms. Behind the public face of Live lies a hard reality: Microsoft wants to turn the traditionally free world of PC multiplayer into a for-pay service under the Live brand.

Right now, Microsoft is in the process of offering substantial financial incentives for developers and publishers that agree to make their games PC Live "exclusives." What this would mean is that they would function exactly as 360 games: you would have to buy a Gold membership to play online. Essentially, you'd be paying for a service that has traditionally been free in PC gaming.

That's not to say there would be no benefits. One plus would be cross-platform play against 360 users, something not currently available due to Live's closed structure. Also, amenities like standard voice chat protocols and unified friends lists would theoretically give some needed structure to the PC multiplayer scene. However, these features would only be of real value if every PC developer agrees to be a part of the service, as you would have no way of tracking friends playing non-Live enabled titles. It's worth noting that third-party software Xfire provides many of these features to PC gamers right now at no charge.

In the final analysis, it's hard to see a real upside for most developers. Many of PC gaming's biggest companies, like Blizzard and Valve, have already devoted serious resources to building their own communities, digital distribution models, and matchmaking services. As for the millions of gamers who play PC games online every day, will a slightly more streamlined online experience be worth paying for? *Newsweek*'s N'Gai Croal summed up PC Live as such: "It's a solution in search of a problem."

did Wii Online get a free pass

Since the Wii released in North America last November, sales have climbed over the two million mark and it's still tough to find in stores. In that time, we've seen the rollout of several online features including classic games on the Virtual Console, an Internet browser, an AP news feed, weather updates, and the Everybody Votes channel. But one glaring omission has received relatively little backlash from consumers and media alike: online multiplayer.

Meanwhile, Microsoft touts its figure of six million gamers worldwide who are using Xbox Live, which equates to approximately 60 percent of the 10 million Xbox 360 owners. Even though this includes everyone who has at least plugged their 360 into the net and started a free Silver account, Microsoft claims that almost 50 percent of gamers in the U.S. log on to the Xbox Live Marketplace every time they turn on their console. Add this to their statistic that gamers have played 2.3 billion hours worth of online games (260,000 years) since Live was launched on the original Xbox, and it's clear that online gaming is no small phenomenon.

Sony has taken the brunt of comparisons to the Xbox Live juggernaut even though online multiplayer was available from day one. Additionally, Sony says that 600,000 out of over a million North American PS3 owners have gone online – keeping with Xbox Live's 60 percent rate. Obviously, online multiplayer is an important factor in today's gaming landscape. So why is Sony getting most of the guff while Nintendo escapes relatively unscathed?

"I think honestly people have given up on Nintendo for online," says host of Spike TV's *Game Head* Geoff Keighley. "It's been so long that they've done nothing and they've never really figured it out."

"When I interviewed Miyamoto at GDC he was talking about how he was really disappointed with the sales of Twilight Princess in Japan. I asked him why and he said, 'Because I think the Wii's really selling to a lot of non-gamers right now and they're the people that are really snatching it up,'" continues Keighley. "If that's really the case, I guess online is less vital for Nintendo than it is for Sony because Sony's box is really the ultimate high end of next-gen systems. People are really expecting all the true next-gen feature sets for that kind of money."

Historically, Nintendo has never launched a console with online multiplayer. The GameCube modem didn't hit until almost a full year after the system's launch, and the only games that supported multiplayer were from the Phantasy Star Online series. The DS didn't support online multiplayer for its first year either, but at least brought one third party, Activision, into the fold with Tony Hawk's American Sk8land right out of the gate.

Nintendo's getting things moving a little earlier this time around with Pokémon Battle Revolution in late June, but third-party online multiplayer titles are still nowhere to be seen. These publishers still don't have a concrete timeline on when they'll be able to implement these features. "We were always of the understanding that online play was something that was in the works for the Wii, but was not available for us to implement in MK Armageddon," says Midway's Ed Boon. "Mortal Kombat has been online since MK Deception, so we have always been ready to put it in our games."

"We have heard that online is 'on its way,' but as of today we don't have any specific dates," Boon continues. "We are looking forward to it as much as anyone."

Despite this confusion on the third-party side, Nintendo vice president of marketing George Harrison issued the following reassurance in a Reuters report published on April 5, "I'm confident there will be third-party titles with online game play by the end of the year."

So it seems that Wii did indeed get a free pass, and Game Informer certainly contributed to it, giving the Wii a grade of "A-" in issue 165 while PlayStation 3 garnered a "B." We even put Wii online in the "Pro" category saying "Though multiplayer isn't ready, it is encouraging that the company is finally taking a serious approach to the Internet." Is it?

is the PSP a failure?

As with many forms of competition, gamers like taking sides. When there are multiple systems vying for gamers' attention, they relish the analysis, speculation, and ultimately the vindication of "picking the winner." One of the most interesting arenas for these activities at the moment is the handheld market. Some will say that the contest has already been decided; the DS is ahead in sales, moving more units on a monthly basis, and has features that you won't find on any home console. These facts led to an erroneous belief that since Sony's PSP isn't winning the handheld war, it must be a failure.

The least complicated way to gauge the success of the PSP is simply to look at the bottom line: sales numbers. Amid all of the cynicism, you might be surprised how the system is performing in that department. "The numbers simply don't back up the claims that it's a failure," states Ron Eagle, senior public relations manager for Sony Computer Entertainment America. As of the end of March, the PSP has sold 7.5 million units – and that's prior to the recent price drop. "We're approaching the 10 million mark in North America," says Eagle. "How does selling 10 million units equate to failure?"

The easy answer is to say that the DS is selling better, with over 11 million units in the hands of North American gamers. But that wasn't always the case. "Until the DS Lite came out, we were killing them." Eagle tells us, and sales numbers from the NPD Group support his claim. It was only once the DS Lite released in June 2006 that sales for DS outpaced Sony's system.

Even with healthy sales, the PSP still faces challenges. "Failure" may be an overstatement, but the system has had problems finding a dedicated audience like the DS. This is partly due to an uncertainty as to exactly which media space it is meant to occupy. "[The PSP] was designed for 20-somethings – people who have cars. But the big handheld gamers are passengers," says a longtime industry veteran who wishes to remain anonymous. "Most everybody I know who has a PSP no longer uses it for anything. Music? Got an iPod. Movies? Gimme a break. Games? DS, please."

The kind of software available is a common criticism of the PSP. "Right now, it's literally a portable PlayStation 2, and that's it – in case you want smaller, crappier versions of your PS2 faves," laughs our anonymous source. Others feel like it only relies on safe properties like Madden and GTA instead of experimenting. It is strange that this is only used as a point against Sony; three of the top five DS games in terms of sales have the word "Mario" in the title (New Super Mario Bros., Super Mario 64 DS, and Mario Kart DS).

Another frequent knock against the PSP is its association with UMD movies, which have been getting less shelf space at major retailers. Even so, UMD movie sales were up 35% in 2006 compared to 2005, according to Sony's numbers. Eagle tells us that this jump is due to more targeted marketing, which has in turn caused some stores to jump back on board. "Specific to Target, where they were talking about taking UMDs off the shelf, they've actually come back here in the last couple of months and are restocking UMD movies inside Target now going forward."

If you are determined to find ammunition against the PSP, you'll find it – just like you can find it against all of the major consoles. Gamers love "proving" that the choices they made were the correct ones, and gladly document the shortcomings of the competition. Despite the arguments to the contrary, it is impossible to say that a handheld with solid sales – and the only one to ever steal a significant portion of the market from a Nintendo product – is an outright failure.

will downloadable content replace retail

The belief that retail stores will ultimately lose out to digital distribution is the "in" thing to say for many game developers we have spoken with over the past year. The new distribution format certainly has a long way to go – last year's retail sales reached $13.5 billion. So will it ever happen? "Never," says a pointed Michael Pachter, analyst for Wedbush Morgan. The roadblocks are rather self-evident at this juncture.

If you want to download a full game onto your PC or console, a fast connection is necessary. According to a survey conducted by Pew Internet & American Life Project this past February, only 47 percent of American adults have a high-speed internet connection at home. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to conclude that ignoring 53 percent of the potential gaming market would be a major gaffe. Even if you have a high-speed connection, it could take days to download files as large as some contemporary games. Resistance: Fall of Man takes up over 17GB of space on a Blu-ray disc. That is one epic download to undertake with your paltry DSL or cable modem. Strike one.

The second, and perhaps most important, aspect of the equation is "where are you going to put the game?" Hard drive sizes on next-gen consoles, while adequate for game saves, expansion packs, and classic arcade games, are hardly large enough to house the game libraries of hardcore gamers. Strike two.

The third aspect to consider is a general question of utility. "Downloadable content has no resale value," comments Pachter. "The option to resell a game is worth something. If you can't take it to your friend's house or can't sell it, you won't want to pay full price for it. So what's the point?" Strike three.

That's not to say digital distribution doesn't have a bright future. As console generations move forward, the broadband adoption rate should continue to expand, download speeds will increase with new technology, and hard drive sizes will inevitably increase, thereby correcting many of the ills facing contemporary digital distribution. "At some point, downloadable content should approach 20 percent of packaged retail sales," says Pachter. ■■■

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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

HALO 3 RELEASE DATE

It's no secret that Halo 3 is coming out this year, but we're hearing lots of talk that it will be hitting this fall – in September to be exact. It seems initially curious that it's not a holiday release, but when you consider that not only is Grand Theft Auto IV releasing in October, but that Microsoft might be wanting to give some room to other 360 titles this Christmas, September sounds about right. Sooner is better than later, anyway.

GUITAR HERO'S EXTENDED JAMS

Rock and roll will never die, not as long as Activision and Red Octane have anything to say about it. Red Octane president Kai Huang recently stated in an interview with GameSpot UK that Guitar Hero III will not only feature wireless controllers, but also cooperative and competitive online play. Also deserving of a loud "Rock On!" is the fact that the company is going after heretofore absent bands AC/DC, Led Zeppelin, and Metallica. Want an encore? A 1980s Guitar Hero spin-off will appear before GH III's fall release. This homage to the '80s will feature a wide range of the decade's best, from hair metal bands to punk rockers to pop pretty boys. It will be interesting to see what system(s) this spin off appears on. Will PS2 owners get payback since the Xbox 360 edition of GH II featured exclusive songs? And how will downloads be handled?

STARBREEZE GOES BACK TO THE BAY

Developer Starbreeze Studios greatly helped the cause of movie-based video games when it released Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay in 2004 for Xbox. Now the studio behind The Darkness is revisiting its critically acclaimed work on Riddick with a re-release of Escape From Butcher Bay for both the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. The game is getting a considerable graphical overhaul (it looked awesome to begin with!), and the title will even feature a whole new chapter. Considering Starbreeze squeezed a lot out of the original Xbox, we can't wait to see how the developer utilizes the next-gen systems.

PS3'S VEGAS JACKPOT

Ubisoft hasn't been spreading the love to the PlayStation 3, but this is a little makeup. For the Rainbow Six: Vegas release on the system, the company is including both Xbox Live map packs for free – a welcome gratis bone in spite of the game's late release.

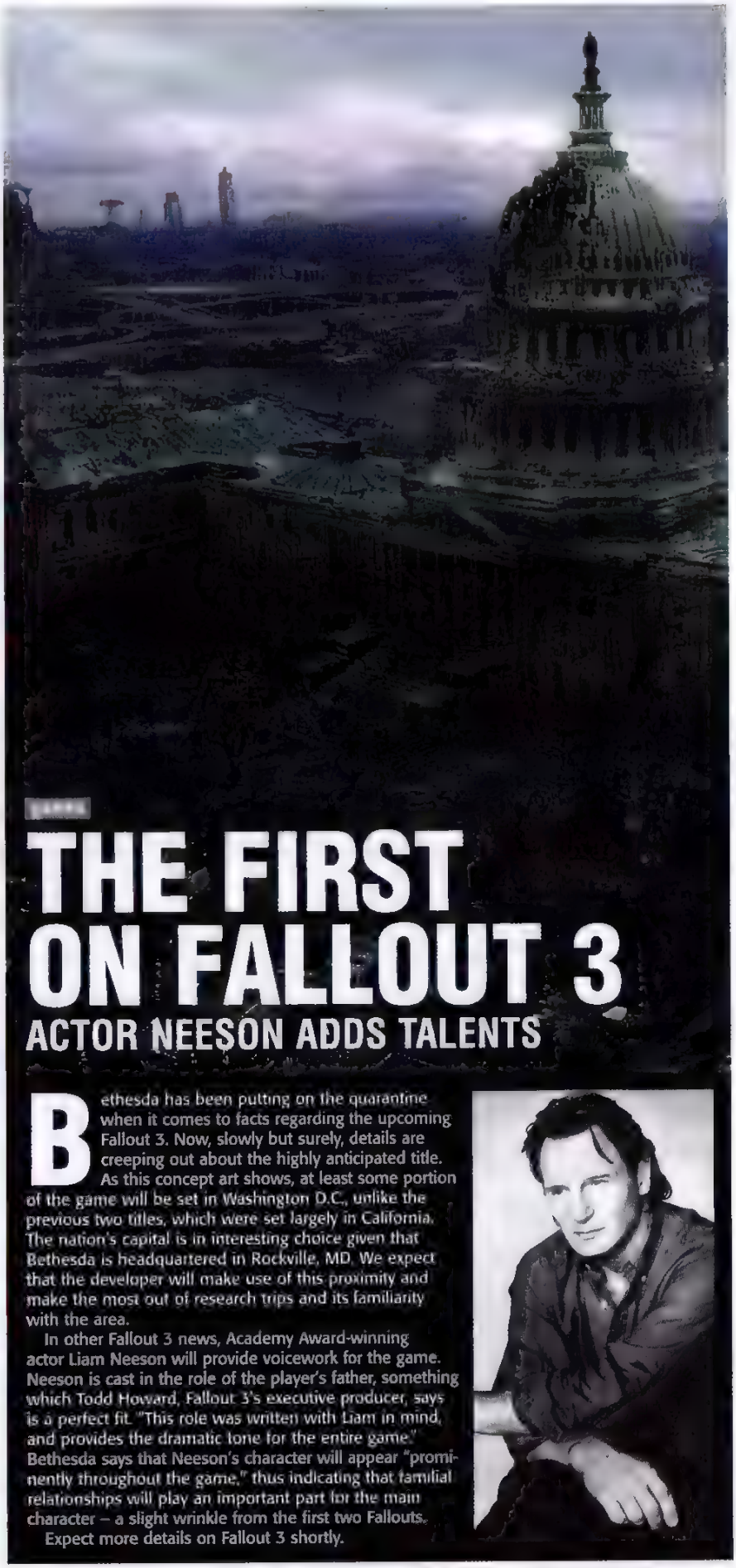
Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

In Japan, there are few homegrown movie stars that are bigger than comedian/actor/director Takeshi Kitano (known famously as Beat Takeshi), but that doesn't mean that he's any good at making video games. In 1986, this title appeared for the Nintendo Famicom and tasked players with some bizarre challenges such as asking you to not touch the controller for an hour, a boss that requires 20,000 hits, holding one button for four hours non-stop, a flying mission that you cannot complete, and more. Oh yeah, the title screen warns that the game was "created by somebody who hates video games."

(Answer on page 37)



GAMES

THE FIRST ON FALLOUT 3

ACTOR NEESON ADDS TALENTS

Bethesda has been putting on the quarantine when it comes to facts regarding the upcoming Fallout 3. Now, slowly but surely, details are creeping out about the highly anticipated title. As this concept art shows, at least some portion of the game will be set in Washington D.C., unlike the previous two titles, which were set largely in California. The nation's capital is in interesting choice given that Bethesda is headquartered in Rockville, MD. We expect that the developer will make use of this proximity and make the most out of research trips and its familiarity with the area.

In other Fallout 3 news, Academy Award-winning actor Liam Neeson will provide voicework for the game. Neeson is cast in the role of the player's father, something which Todd Howard, Fallout 3's executive producer, says is a perfect fit. "This role was written with Liam in mind, and provides the dramatic tone for the entire game." Bethesda says that Neeson's character will appear "prominently throughout the game," thus indicating that familial relationships will play an important part for the main character – a slight wrinkle from the first two Fallouts.

Expect more details on Fallout 3 shortly.

CIRCLE OF LIFE

GI EXPLORES CONSOLES' LIFESPANS

Console makers have a habit of putting out a new system every five years. Is this too short? Just right? Could things be different? We conducted an independent survey across the industry to collect people's thoughts on the subject. Here is a sampling of what we found. Check out this month's Game Informer Online Unlimited section to read more from: Greg Zeschuk, president (BioWare), Julien Merceron, chief technical officer (Eidos), and Jun Takeuchi, producer (Capcom).

CONSOLE MAKERS

There is nothing sacred about a five-year cycle. Some systems have much longer lifecycles – Game Boy for instance continued to sell strong for many years.... We would agree that longer cycles are better than shorter cycles from almost every perspective. But rationality doesn't always rule.

PERRIN KAPLAN
Vice President of Marketing & Corporate Affairs • Nintendo of America

Our competitors may abandon their consumers after five years, as seen by Microsoft stopping production of the original Xbox only a few short years after launching it. We think that sends a terrible message to the consumer, and our approach is obviously very different.... We talk about a 10-year product lifecycle, and we deliver on that promise as well.

PETER DILLE
Senior Vice President
Product Marketing, SCEA

The progression of game development is constant – it doesn't happen in five-year increments. Developers and hardware manufacturers are always pushing the limits of what is possible. Therefore, we have to do the most we can to constantly innovate.... When we took a look at all of the stuff that our customers told us they wanted and combined that with the innovations that we wanted to do, we knew it was time to bring forth a next-generation console.

JOHN RODMAN
Senior Product Manager
Xbox Global Platform Team

GAME DEVELOPERS

It would be nice to be able to spend more time working with a particular piece of hardware before having to go through the challenging task of making the transition to the next generation.

EVAN WELLS
President • Naughty Dog, Inc.

A lifecycle of five years might not seem very long, but if you think about how fast the technology is evolving, it's not surprising that consoles last about that long each generation.

RAY MUZYKA
Chief Executive Officer
BioWare Corp

Consoles overlapping offer great benefits for publishers and consumers. For developers it is a nightmare. We are asked to support completely different technologies and game engines. It takes a lot of resources to do it.

JANOS FLOSSER
Managing Director
IO Interactive

GAMERS

I think the idea of a console's lifespan being longer with each generation is great. The fact is that a new console brings new technology to the industry and that provides a new experience for all those involved, from the programmers all the way to the users.

CHRIS BARRETT
Stillwater, MN

When it comes down to the average lifespan of game consoles, I feel that they are just a bit too short. It feels that the best games come out just towards the end of the system's lifespan.

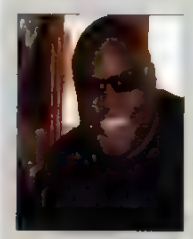
NICHOLAS GUMINA
Whittier, CA

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

MICHAEL SHELLING
Public Relations Manager, Sony Online



1 **Crackdown – Xbox 360**
2 **God of War II – PS2**
3 **NCAA Football 07 – Xbox 360**
4 **Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror – PSP**
5 **Star Wars Galaxies – PC**

READER

SGLEN VIPERFOE
W. Yellowstone, MT

1 **Solar Jetman – NES**
2 **Aidyn Chronicles: The First Mage – N64**
3 **Suikoden III – PS2**
4 **Fable – Xbox**
5 **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion – Xbox 360**

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Quotes That Rile Up GI Editors

10 "You know what game is awesome? Mario Party!"
9 "I haven't seen *The Goonies*."
8 "Miller is a dingus." (Only works on Miller...and Ben, for some reason)
7 "I'm sure glad they're including Bumblebee in the new Transformers movie!"
6 "Why don't you review more GameCube games?"
5 "Is your sister hot?"
4 "I haven't actually played [insert game], but your score is wrong."
3 "*Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* is the worst of the trilogy."
2 "Mickey Mouse is never cool, no matter how many Keyblades he holds."
1 "I roll Alliance."

Name That Game Answer: Takeshi's Challenge

MYHUNGER.COM

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

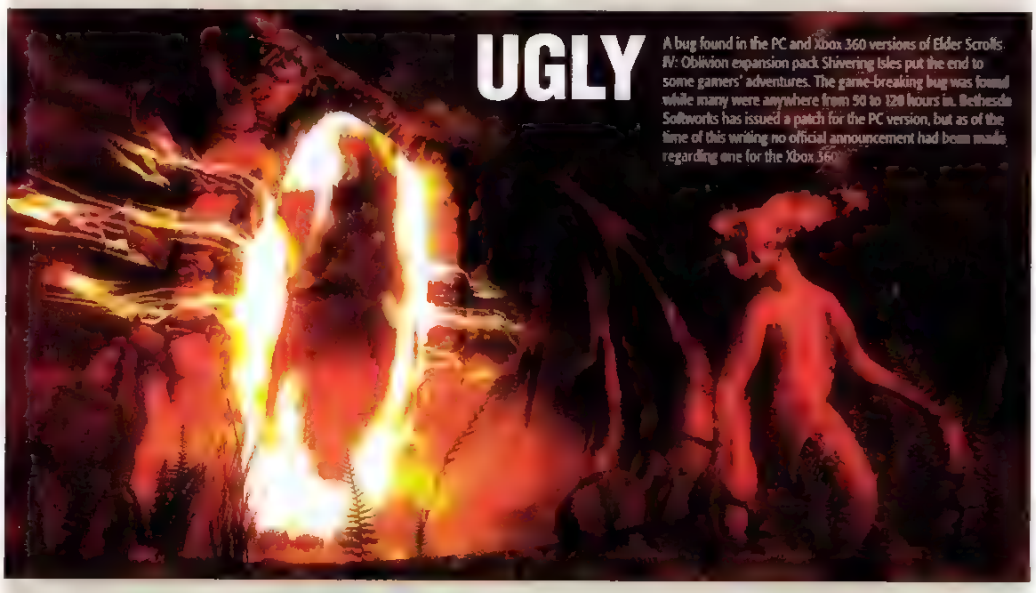
When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

GOOD

Game Informer Online's Nick Ahrens and Jeff Cork are the newest hot-shot developers making the scene. After having created their own Crackdown multiplayer game called Rocket Tag, developer Real Time Worlds has decided to include the pair's creation in the upcoming multiplayer download available in May. The object is pretty self-explanatory. You have a minute to either hit or send your opponent flying with your rocket launcher, at which time the clock resets. Rocket Tag is initiated by finding the game's icon in 21 locations throughout Pacific City.

GOOD

The prevailing wisdom that Guitar Hero creator Harmonix's next project (with MTV publishing and EA distributing) would involve a full band setup has been confirmed. The game is called Rock Band, and it will appear this holiday season for PS3 and Xbox 360. Harmonix says that record labels such as EMI, Sony BMG, Universal, Rhino, and Hollywood Records are on board to supply artists' master tracks.



UGLY

A bug found in the PC and Xbox 360 versions of Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion expansion pack Shivering Isles put the end to some gamers' adventures. The game-breaking bug was found while many were anywhere from 50 to 120 hours in. Bethesda Softworks has issued a patch for the PC version, but as of the time of this writing no official announcement had been made regarding one for the Xbox 360.

GOOD

There might be no stopping the Xbox 360's Red Ring of Death, but at least Microsoft is stepping up its repair and warranty procedures. The length of the warranty has been increased from 90 days to one year, shipping is free, and "most" customers will now receive their original consoles repaired (instead of being sent a refurbished model). For more, please head over to xbox.com.

BAD

It's never a bad day when a price drop occurs, but with news that the PSP is now $169, we couldn't help but look this gift horse squarely in the mouth. Thirty dollars?! That's the best you could do, Sony?

BAD?

Sega won't let the dead rest in peace. The company is pressing Captain America back into service, as it has acquired his license rights, as well as those for The Hulk and Thor in a multi-year deal. Film tie-in games are being made on these properties as we speak. The odds aren't good that Sega can turn the tide of disappointing super hero movie games, and if we see a Sonic and Hulk Marvel Team-Up, we're going to grab our pitchfork.

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SARAH CHUDLEY

COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR, BIZARRE CREATIONS

>> Sarah Chudley, who formed Bizarre Creations with her husband Martin, has helped mold the company into one of the most respected racing developers in the industry. We recently spoke with Sarah about the future of PGR and the studio as a whole. <<

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1987 ▶ Advanced Studies
Sarah enters the physics program at Imperial College in London, a prestigious science school

1992 ▶ Hell Raising Romance
Sarah meets Martin Chudley, who would become her husband. While getting her Masters degree, she helps run Martin's garage development company, Raising Hell

1994 ▶ How Bizarre

As the PlayStation era begins, Sarah and Martin decide to start a new company, hiring an artist and programmer. The four of them are dubbed Bizarre Creations

1996 ▶ On Track
Bizarre releases its first title, Formula 1 for PSone, published by Psygnosis. The game is a huge hit, spawning a sequel

2000 ▶ The Fur's Flying

Bizarre takes a break from racing with Fur Fighters, a cartoonish shooter for Dreamcast

2001 ▶ The Winner's Circle
Returning to racing, Bizarre makes a critically acclaimed title for Dreamcast, Metropolis Street Racer, which introduces the Kudos system

2001 ▶ A New Franchise
After Dreamcast dies, Bizarre quickly adapts the Kudos system into a new Xbox series, Project Gotham Racing

2003 ▶ A Cult Hit

Geometry Wars, a retro minigame included in PGR 2, becomes a huge cult hit and is eventually released for mobile phones and Xbox Live Arcade

2007 ▶ Evolving The Game

Bizarre unveils the next generation of its PGR series, Project Gotham Racing 4, which seeks to create a deeper and more exciting racing experience

You're in a sort of a unique position in the industry, running Bizarre as a husband-and-wife duo with your husband Martin. How do you balance your personal relationship with your professional one?
It's weird actually, because we've always been happy working together. We work together as a team at home as well as we work together at work. We don't actually sit in the same office; when we're at work we'll probably see each other three or four times a day. So it's not like we're in each other's pocket. It's been more difficult since we had kids, because the demands of a family life are greater, but I think the whole industry's finding that. Everyone's growing up and having kids and getting married and things like that. So, I think working all night and every weekend becomes less and less.

Talk about how Project Gotham evolved out of Metropolis Street Racer, a series you did on the Dreamcast. MSR debuted the Kudos system. Why did you feel that was important to carry over to PGR?
I think it was because MSR reviewed so well; everyone really loved the game. But, because it was Dreamcast – it was a dying format and Sega was struggling in those days – it just didn't get any exposure. We loved the concept and those people that got it really loved it. So, when Microsoft said, "Listen, we're looking for a racing game, can you deliver one?" we had a very short time to do it. We said, "Well, we own all of this and we'd love to see it hit a wider audience. We could effectively do a new game based on the Kudos concept." They loved MSR, so they agreed. It's something that was pretty unique at the time, trying to bring the idea of driving stylishly, because the ones you admire are the ones that are stylish drivers instead of just the technical ones. That's why we wanted to carry it on.

Obviously, you have Project Gotham 4 coming out. How will that game evolve the series?
It's funny that you should mention MSR, because there's quite a bit in PGR 4 that's gone back to the roots of making Kudos important. Obviously, it's not the be-all, end-all; you still have to win races. But Kudos is the main way of progressing through the game now, the main scoring system. That's something that the game is taking forward. Obviously, we've got things like all the visual increases like weather effects, which adds a lot of gameplay as well because things like rain and snow are going to be a darn sight more difficult to drive on. But, they're also better for producing stylish moves. They've spent a lot of times on things like teams, cooperative play, and liveries [team colors, uniforms and graphical designs – Ed.] to make it feel a lot more involved for the player. It's always seemed a bit clinical and distant; we want to get people involved in it emotionally as well.

As the power of the systems lets you get closer to replicating a very realistic racing experience, how do you go forward with innovation? Does it become harder to do new things in the genre?
No, because when we try to put "real" reality in, it doesn't look right and doesn't feel right. If you put real-life colors and handling in, it plays like a dog, because you're not actually driving a car – you're using a bit of plastic in your hand. The reality is that you have to make things "super-real" to make them look good.... Once you run out of polygons, that leaves a lot more processing power to put into the gameplay and the innovation behind that. Things that we couldn't really achieve before – like increasing the number of cars and the areas you can drive on. There will always be things we are limited by even as the power increases. If we think it's getting stale, then it's time to change direction.

> ***If we think it's getting stale, then it's time to change direction.***

You've announced that you're working on The Club for Sega. Do you want to make sure that you don't get pigeonholed as a "racing developer?"
We've always been interested in other genres. You've got to branch out; you need more than one iron in the fire. It's something we've been designing and working on for years. Sega saw it in the prototype stage and could see the potential. I hope what you've seen will show you that we can do things a bit differently. We've tried to do with shooting what we did with racing. Like the Kudos in racing, we tried to make it something that you play in a different way – instead of being progressive like level one, level two, etc. We want you to better yourself in every way; the [stages] are very replayable and all the environments have different levels within them.

Talk about the Geometry Wars phenomenon. It's become hugely popular on Xbox Live Arcade. Was it conceived as just a minigame to kill time in PGR 2?
It wasn't even that. The guy that did it was in charge of doing the controller-handling routine when we first got the Xbox. So, what he did was do this little shooting thing so he could test the inputs for the controller. People started playing it and said, "Let's put it in as a minigame." He had about a month to work on it as a sideline. [Laughs]

Were you surprised at the response it got?
Yeah, it's good to know that there are that many retro gamers going back to the grassroots of gaming still around. It's been great. Obviously, the commercial version we spent a lot more time on, but it's great.

With Xbox Live Arcade and mobile gaming, are you going to devote more resources to making simple, retro games?
Yes, we already have. We have a small core group that does that. We've just done Boom Boom Rocket for EA on Arcade, which just launched. They actually came to us, saying they needed someone that knew Arcade to finish it off for them. We've also got some ideas of our own that we're working on. [Live Arcade] is a great platform, because there are times when you think, "This would be a great game, but it's not a $60 game." Now, you can effectively do things like that for console. It's back to the good old days. The fact that you can self-publish is great; you can actually make a bit of profit [since] you're taking all the money from day one.

Five years down the road, what would be your vision for where Bizarre is?
Still producing good games! [Laughs] You're only as good as your last game. We're not out to rule the world; we don't want to make a big fuss or be the biggest developer. We've only grown to keep afloat in the industry. We don't want to be 500 people and 20 projects. The most important part is keeping our core philosophy, which is having a small company attitude and everyone enjoying what they do.

Photo: Mike Frisbee

RACING AHEAD

Sarah Chudley and Bizarre Creations hope to maintain their reputation for next-gen racing while branching out into the action genre

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XBOX 360

ON DISPLAY

WHICH MONITOR IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Continuing with our theme of roundups, this month Game Informer strives to find the best gaming monitors. We scrutinize every pixel to give you a run-down of these screens' best and worst features

DELL ULTRASHARP 2707WFP

PRO This 27-incher's brushed aluminum finish and smoked glass base makes it the best-looking monitor of the bunch. With a 1920x1200 resolution, games can be played at their richest graphical settings, and the monitor offers a 92 percent color gamut, which means vibrant images.

CON We noticed a little ghosting, which is less forgivable because of its high cost. The Ultrasharp also lacks an HDMI port and generates a lot of heat.

$1,299.99 • www.dell.com

SAMSUNG SYNCMASTER 206BW

PRO If you are working on a budget, this glossy 20-incher is easily your best bet. It has a wicked 2-millisecond (ms) response time, which eliminates ghosting. The sharp picture quality mirrors the sexy overall monitor design.

CON The 1680x1050 native resolution may not be ideal for HD-obsessed videophiles, and the fixed height stand is a bummer.

$349.99 • www.samsung.com

AOC 212VA-1

PRO Like the Samsung, this 22-inch monitor's price is certainly right. The display is bright and crisp.

CON When the action turned up, we noticed a little ghosting. Its combination of specs – 1680x1050 resolution and a 5ms response time – can't compete with the other monitors on this list. To add insult to injury, its overall design is drab.

$299.00 • www.aocdisplay.com

VIEWSONIC VX2435WM

PRO This 24-inch monitor is the only one on the list with HDMI and component ports, so it's a great choice for the HD crowd. The 1920x1200 resolution will keep your games looking sharp.

CON The lack of a second HDMI port keeps us from plugging in our Xbox 360, PC, and PS3 simultaneously, and the weak speakers won't impress anyone.

$779.00 • www.viewsonic.com

NEC MULTISYNC LCD2470WNX

PRO This 24-inch monitor boasts a 1920x1200 resolution and supports 720p and 1080p. The NEC's base tilts and swivels, so you can orient the monitor from landscape to portrait.

CON The NEC's black plastic exterior looks and feels cheap. Its lack of component and HDMI ports is perplexing given its HD power.

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Being gamers, we spend a lot of time indoors, but there is a whole world of beauty out there. Wait! Don't go away, we're serious. This is cool! Five years in the making and covering over 200 locations, the first documentary is filmed entirely in HD, and it does an amazing job at showcasing the beauty of our planet. Maybe you caught some of this when it was shown on the Discovery Channel, but this original UK broadcast is packed with more content and narrated by Sir David Attenborough. Maybe it's time you took a look outside anyway?

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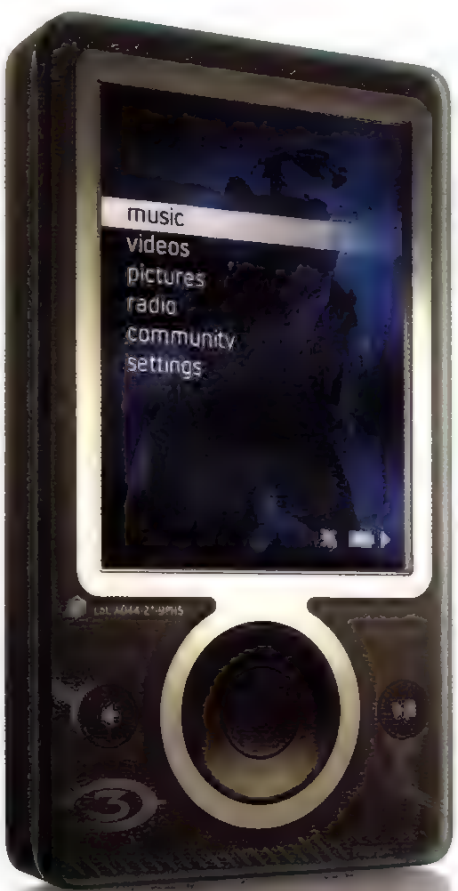
www.bbc.co.uk/nature/animals/planetearth

toys

DC UNLIMITED'S WORLD OF WARCRAFT FIGURES

As if we haven't spent enough money on Warcraft already, DC Unlimited is set to release these awesome figures, and we just know we have to buy them. The Blood Elf Rogue, Orc Shaman, Dwarf Warrior, and Undead Warlock are all a part of the first wave, which range from 5" to 8" high. These figures are highly detailed and come with multiple points of articulation. Unfortunately, they don't come out until October, but at least that gives us enough time to save up some money.

$15.99 • www.dccomics.com/dcunlimited



■ Don't try to put any Kenny Chesney on your Halo Zune. Master Chief prefers heavy metal

tech

HALO 3 ZUNE

We know the knocks regarding the Zune – that it's taller, thicker, and heavier than the uber-chic iPod. But do you think Master Chief cares about these sissy complaints from emo hipster girlymen? He's a dual-wielding killing machine! To commemorate his overall awesomeness and importance to the survival of the human race, Microsoft has created a commemorative Halo 3 Zune. This black-bodied player is decorated with Halo graphics and comes with preloaded Halo videos, including a custom episode of the popular machinima series *Red vs. Blue*. This limited edition iPod killer will be sold exclusively through GameStop starting June 15. If you're that creepy dude who wears Halo pajamas to bed and longs for a date with Cortana, this is a must-buy.

$246 • www.zune.com

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www.jamster.com

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GAMES ... GAMES ... GAMES ... GAMES**

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REALTONES

Don't Matter - Akon	true6561
I'm A Flirt Remix - R. Kelly	true6562
Buy U A Drank - T-Pain	true6563
Pop, Lock & Drop It - Huey	true6564
Walk It Out - DJ UNK	true6565
Throw Some D's - Rich Boy	true6566
The Way I Live - Baby Boy Da Prince	true6567
Outta My System - Bow Wow	true6568
I Tried (So Hard) - Bone Thugs N Harmony	true6569
Go Getta - Young Jeezy	true6570
Diamonds - Fabolous	true6571
Glamorous - Fergie	true6572
Like A Boy - Ciara	true6573
Doe Boy Fresh - Three 6 Mafia	true6574
Because of You - Ne-Yo	true6575
Circle - Marques Houston	true6576
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Lost Without U - Robin Thicke	true6579
Girlfriend - Avril Lavigne	true6580

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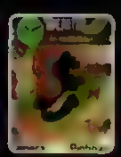
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Ludacris

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Rick Ross

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Trap Star
Young Jeezy

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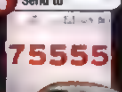
Must Be Nice
Lyfe Jennings

HOW TO ORDER

1. Go to

2. Select

3. Text Orderword

4. Send to


5. Save and Enjoy!

HOW TO DOWNLOAD

5. Go To Inbox

6. Select Link

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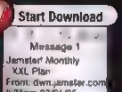

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TELLING STORIES

IN AND OUT OF GAMES

BY ERIC NYLUND, AUTHOR, *HALO: GHOSTS OF ONYX*, *MORTAL COILS*

This week, I'm working on a novel, a comic miniseries, a few video games, and tinkering with two screenplays. There are overlapping skills among these different media...and punji-stick-filled pitfalls when applying one blindly to another.

How did I end up writing in so many different fields? Nine years ago I was a novelist, making a decent living (note: a "decent living" for a science-fiction novelist meant paying rent and not starving). I'd write for four hours and then spend the rest of the day playing video games. My wife hinted that I should actually try and get paid for doing this, so I applied to Microsoft Game Studios as a technical writer.

Back then "professional game writing" was an oxymoron. There were few creative writers employed by game developers. Most writing involved documenting technical aspects of software tools or creating manuals and quick reference cards. It wasn't until years later that developers actually started asking writers to contribute to their game stories. Once that started, though, suddenly everyone thought that having a professional writer make their stories the best they could be was a fantastic idea! Heck, game franchises suddenly depended on having a good story.

So how do various writing media apply to game writing?

NOVELS

Come September I'll turn in my latest novel, *Mortal Coils*, which pushes me over one million words of published fiction. In novels, you go as deep as you want into a character's head. You get to think their thoughts. There are no budgetary restraints on setting, art, texture resolution...and apart from binding costs, length isn't a concern. It's total freedom.

APPLICATIONS TO GAME WRITING: You learn how to build a character. Especially in the field of science fiction novels, you learn how to build credible alternate worlds. Like any storytelling, you also hone your plotting, pacing, and dialogue writing. These skills especially come in handy when creating story bibles, pitch kits for licensors, and planning large story arcs – say for a multiple-game franchise.

SCREENWRITING

I've written about a hundred cutscenes for games, and like every other writer in the world I have a few screenplays that I occasionally pimp to Hollywood and get rejected. Writing a screenplay is like writing a poem: There are rules that must be adhered to. There's no deep charactenzation (yes, you can have interior monologue, but most people frown on that). There may be restrictions to the number of scenes and art you can have based on film/game production limits. Screenwriting is particularly useful to train yourself to write as tight as you possibly can.

APPLICATIONS TO GAME WRITING: You learn how to craft a cutscene (although there is a danger of falling in love with a cutscene, as I'll talk about later). Writing good screenplays will sharpen your dialogue writing to a mono-molecular razor's edge. It also teaches you how to write to a page limit.

COMICS

I'm a dabbler here. Writing one four-issue series, *Battlestar Galactica: Cylon Wars* (out this fall), doesn't qualify me as an expert, but I'll offer my opinion. This medium offers the best of novels and screenplays. Like a novel you can reveal character thoughts (interior monologues are the norm), there are few restraints on scenes and setting (other than the cramped hands of your artist), and like a screenplay or movie, you actually get to show the reader key shots in the story. There are also page limits and your dialogue better be snappy.

APPLICATIONS TO GAME WRITING: You learn how to organize your thoughts like storyboards, which really gives you a feel for putting together a modern game cutscene and for writing within action-packed game sequences.

VIDEO GAMES

In many ways this is the most flexible storytelling medium. You don't have a reader or an audience watching the story on the screen. You have someone becoming the character and moving through the setting, doing whatever (within game-design limitations) they want.

> "I've often said that if you deliberately designed a media hostile to storytelling, it would be the modern video game."

It's easy to believe that you can just transfer skills from the previously mentioned media when writing for video games, but without careful consideration, this can be a dreadful error.

I've often said that if you deliberately designed a media hostile to storytelling, it would be the modern video game. The problem is the paradigm shift from passive reader to active participant. Whenever you attempt to advance the story you run the risk of taking control away from the player, and run a greater risk of annoying them by breaking the illusion that they are immersed in the game world.

Traditional writers tend to fall back on the cutscene or chunks of exposition...all of which bring the game portion of the experience to a grinding halt.

Game writers today, however, are developing new tools based on the traditional skill sets that minimize or entirely eliminate the immersion-breaking problem within a game, such as the micro-cutscene, in-game camera control, semi-interactive cutscenes, and fuller animation controls that make expository dialogue seemed natural and fluid (And of course there's always the A-button to skip the cutscene).

So can a game writer abandon traditional writing skills? Absolutely not. The problem with jumping straight into game writing is that there are too many limits; it's like trying to paint a landscape with only the color blue. You need a thin slice of story in a game – but you do need a full palette to create it from: character, plot, setting, dialogue, etc. It's easier to learn these writing books, comics, and screenplays because there are no restrictions with respect to breaking immersion that you find in games. ■■■

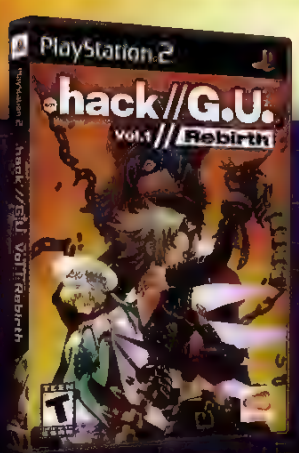
Eric Nylund has written several novels, including three in the popular Halo series. He continues to work on various projects both in video games, print, and comics. For more information go to www.ericnylund.net

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

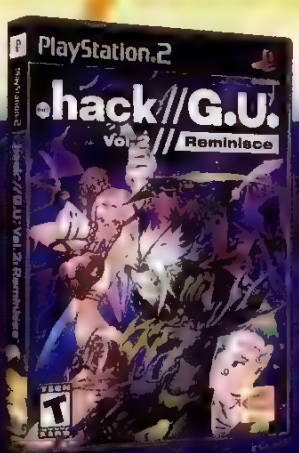
If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com

STOP THE SPREAD OF EVIL

THE YEAR IS 2017, AND SERVERS OF THE POPULAR VIDEO GAME "THE WORLD" ARE INFECTED WITH A DANGEROUS ENTITY. IT IS SPREADING. YOU MUST HUNT IT DOWN AND DESTROY IT. WITH NEW WEAPONS AND NEW FIGHTING ABILITIES YOU WON'T WANT TO LEAVE "THE WORLD" AGAIN!



IN STORES NOW



IN STORES MAY 2007

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INTENSE REAL TIME FIGHTING

CUSTOMIZABLE WEAPONS AND AN EPIC, ORIGINAL STORYLINE

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PlayStation.2

TEEN T
Alcohol Reference
Fantasy Violence
Language
Suggestive Themes

Cyber Connect 2

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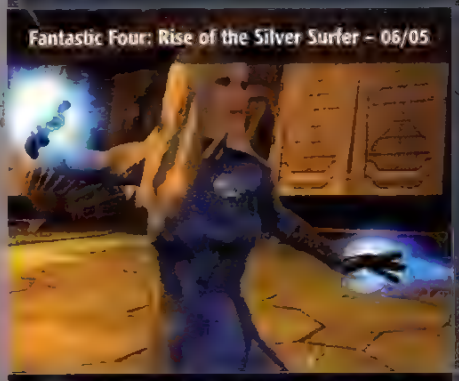
june

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat
					01	

DAY OF THE TENTACLE DAY
On this sacred day, we celebrate one of gaming's long lost treasures – LucasArts' epic adventure, Day of the Tentacle. We recommend creating a tentacle hat, and volunteering to deliver Meals on Wheels. Old people love monsters! So scream like one when they open the door.



05

NEW RELEASES
- Call of Juarez – 360
- Cosmic Family – Wii
- Dragon Ball Z: Harukanaru Densetsu – DS
- Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, DS
- Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2 – PS3, PC
- Planet Puzzle League – DS
- Super Collapse 3 – DS
- Tomb Raider: Anniversary Edition – PC

09

MIDWEST GAMING CONVENTION
Hello, Wisconsin! Held at the Olympia Resort Center in Oconomowoc, this sizeable convention is the only place where you can combine your addictions of video games and cheese curds. Believe us, playing Wii with a handful of curds is something that you absolutely must experience.

12

NEW RELEASES
- Chameleon: To Dye For – DS
- History Channel: Great Battles of Rome – PS2
- Scarface – Wii
- Tenchu Z – 360
- Touchmaster – DS

13

NEW AVENGERS #31
The death of Captain America was one of the largest events to ever rock the comic world but according to Marvel Comics, this issue of Avengers will have the most important last page of any comic book released this year. Our guess? Cap comes back to life.

15

Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer soars into the hearts of moviegoers today. It's a movie with many layers. It's about a stretchy dude getting his groove on with Jessica Alba. It's about a giant world-eating being that trusts a surfer. It's about a rock guy with a big heart. If this doesn't have Oscar written all over it, nothing does.

19

NEW RELEASES
- Adventures of Darwin – PS2
- Brothers in Arms: War Stories – DS
- Hour of Victory – 360
- Transformers – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2
- Transformers: Autobots – DS
- Transformers: Decepticons – DS

22

Dead or Alive bounces its way into theaters today. If you enjoyed *Sniper 3* with Tom Berenger, or *Walking Tall 2* with Kevin Sorbo, then you'll surely love this trashy, exploitative, and totally awesome video game movie! There will be no refunds on tickets.

26

NEW RELEASES
- Alien Syndrome – Wii, PSP
- DIRT – PS3
- Driver Parallel Lines – PSP
- Jam Sessions – DS
- LifeSigns: Surgical Unit – DS
- Ninja Gaiden Sigma – PS3
- Pokémon Battle Revolution – Wii
- Tokobot – Wii, PS2, DS
- Two Worlds – 360
- Wordplay – Wii, DS

27

X-MEN #200
This is a great jumping-on point for new readers. In this 64-page anniversary issue a strike force is dropping mutants like flies, several fan-favorite characters return, and you'll even get a sneak peek of this fall's big X-Men event.

29

Live Free or Die Hard and *Ratatouille* explode onto the movie scene this week. *Ratatouille* is about a Parisian rat that must save the world from bloodthirsty terrorists. *Live Free or Die Hard* is a touching story about Bruce Willis just wanting a slice of cheese. The phrase "yippee-ki-yay" is in both titles.

"...a heretofore unseen level of detail and animation...the action and systems are masterfully executed..."
- Play Magazine

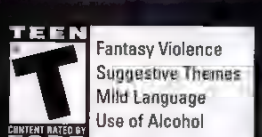
Odin Sphere

Five unique playable characters, each with their own attacks and spells.

Hand-rendered sprites almost breathe off the screen!

Tremble in the shadow of gargantuan mythical beasts! Forge a path to victory in this immersive tale of power, deceit and love!

Lose yourself in its beauty...



Fantasy Violence
Suggestive Themes
Mild Language
Use of Alcohol

PlayStation 2

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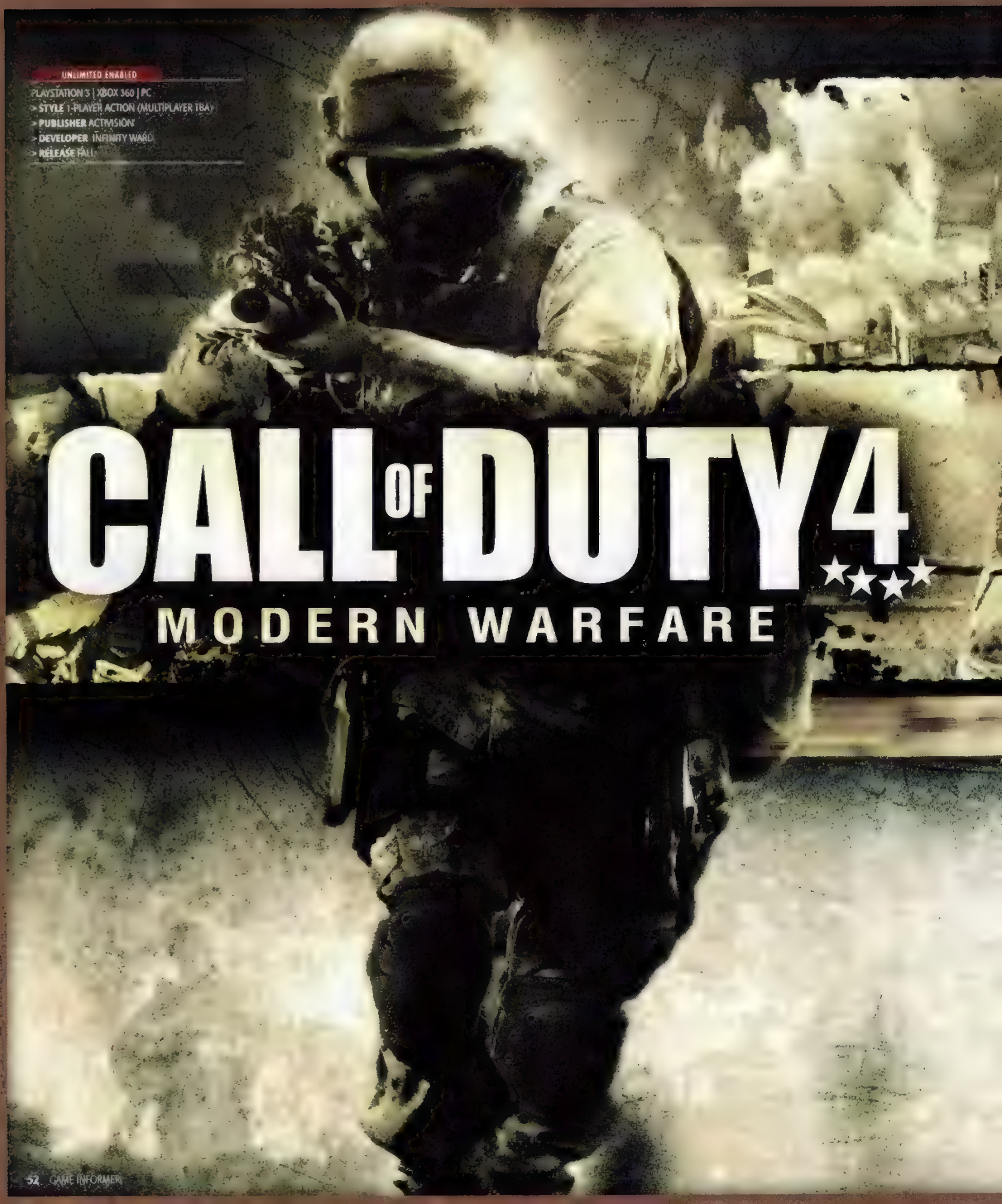

UNLIMITED ENABLED
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
> DEVELOPER INFINITY WARD
> RELEASE FALL
CALL OF DUTY 4
MODERN WARFARE

A CREDIBLE THREAT

To an entire generation of gamers, Call of Duty is synonymous with quality World War II gaming. The series' trademark cinematic action, which thrusts players into the chaos of a raging battlefield like no other game, has catapulted it from its humble beginnings as a new franchise from an unknown developer to being one of the few household names in video games. Developer Infinity Ward has blossomed from a small team of Electronic Arts expatriates to a studio of more than 90 people that has trouble getting people to submit résumés because its reputation for excellence is so intimidating. The company's last game, Call of Duty 2, is still the gold standard for next-gen first-person shooters despite having released in 2005. Now, the creative minds at Infinity Ward have an opportunity to expand their gameplay in previously unimaginable ways. Call of Duty is entering the modern era.

■ Notice how the cigar lights his face, and you can see the sparks flying off of the cherry at the end of the stogie. This is all done in-engine

Every screen on these pages is of in-engine gameplay running on Xbox 360 development kits.

"After Call of Duty 1, we had all these ideas for this sweet modern warfare game," says Grant Collier, one of Infinity Ward's three studio heads. "It was like, 'We really need to do helicopters. Can we do that in World War II?'" Moving the franchise away from its World War II roots didn't sit well with publisher Activision, so Call of Duty 2 starred the Greatest Generation nonetheless. Since that title shipped over a year and a half ago, Infinity Ward has been hard at work bringing to life the ideas that have been floating around the studio since its inception.

While the setting is seeing a drastic change, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare is cut from the same cloth as its predecessors. Infinity Ward is well aware that what makes its games special – huge conflicts, amazingly visceral cinematic action sequences, and a level of polish that most developers can only dream about – needs to be the foundation of any title bearing the Infinity Ward logo. Though Ubisoft's Tom Clancy games may have formed an impression of modern warfare in gamers' minds, CoD 4 is staying true to what made it great in the first place. "During some of the focus groups, some people were concerned that we had taken their Call of Duty and turned it into a tactical shooter," explains Collier. "We have not taken their Call of Duty and turned it into a tactical shooter. We still want the squad to be lifelike, and you are still a member of the squad, but you are not the leader of the squad."

[This wide-open area had become the proverbial barrel, and the U.S. Marines were the hapless fish trapped inside.]

As proof that Call of Duty 4 will deliver the epic feeling of trying to survive a warzone populated with dozens of people with guns who want to see you dead, we witnessed a game level that took place in a Middle Eastern urban center. The narrow streets were clogged with rubble, and tall buildings surrounded the squad on every side – all possible staging points for an attack. Essentially, it was soldier's nightmare. The dark sky overhead flashed intermittently with a background tapestry of low-grade aerial warfare, while occasional flares lent brief, sharp-edged light to the otherwise softly fire-lit city. As the company of a dozen or so infantry reached its mission objective, an M1 Abrams tank that had become stuck in the middle of an open plaza flanked on one side by buildings and the other with a series of highway overpasses, everything went to hell. This wide-open area had become the proverbial barrel, and the U.S. Marines were the hapless fish trapped inside.

At this point, we were the focus of a three-pronged coordinated assault. Enemy infantry, some armed with RPGs more than capable of toasting the inert tank, attacked on foot, bounding from cover to cover in their quest to get an open shot at the Abrams. The surrounding buildings came alive with hostiles, leaving precious few protected spots around which to rally a defense. Worst of all, enemy technicals with sniper support came screaming down the highway to pound the final nail in the mission's coffins from a nearly unassailable position.

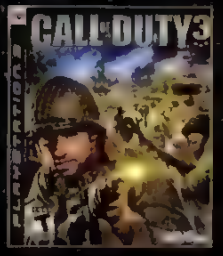
Being the highly trained soldiers that they are, the Marines managed to repel the infantry assault while finding cover from the enemy overwatch. The player's comm then notified him that somebody had spotted a Javelin anti-vehicle rocket in one of the buildings, apparently left behind from a previous skirmish. Fighting his way to the rocket launcher, he eventually found a clear line of sight and the weapon to take advantage

CONTINUED ON PAGE 56 >>

Infinity Ward had us try to find this soldier while he was immobile in the grass. We couldn't

This screen captures the amazing lighting effect perfectly

CALL OF DUTY 3? WHAT?



Infinity Ward didn't make the last Call of Duty game. Instead, Activision decided to have Treyarch handle the release. The game caught a lot of flak for being merely more of the same of what we got in Call of Duty 2, though it's still an entirely competent title – considering that previously, non-Infinity Ward games bore subheads like "Finest Hour" or "Big Red One" to distinguish them. Infinity Ward may have its own thoughts on the Call of Duty continuity, since the executable files we saw in their offices for Modern Warfare were named "cod3.exe."

Smoke effects haven't changed as much as other elements, but they were so good in CoD 2, who's to complain?

You can see that you're not fighting terrorists in some isolated incident – this is a warzone

The riot fighting on characters allows you to relatively easily pick up silhouettes in low lighting

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 54

of it. As he lifted the high-tech weapon's sight into place, we learned that Call of Duty's trademark 'Aim Down the Sights' system translates perfectly to modern weaponry; the electronic display of the Javelin smoothly moved to take up the whole screen. With the target locked, the Javelin fired straight up only to come down seconds later right on top of the enemy vehicle's unprotected roof, blowing it sky-high. With the anti-air gone, the Marines happily radioed in heavily armed helicopters to use their deadly combinations of chainguns and rockets, effectively ending the fight.

Though the threat was over, our hearts were still thumping from the intense fever pitch that the battle worked up to. The frenetic pace of modern war, as evidenced by the solders' terse communications over the comm and cold efficiency with which these warriors work, is perfectly captured by Call of Duty 4.

It's moments like these that make Call of Duty what it is. The player is constantly fighting alongside allies and working toward a common goal within the context of a larger war; you'll never be that Rambo character single-handedly mowing down entire enemy brigades – not unless you're playing on a difficulty level lower than you ought to be, anyway. And through it all, you never encounter snags that take you out of the experience. The polish is evident even at this stage, several months before the game will release.

WHOSE WAR IS IT ANYWAY?

To avoid politics as well as get a little more creative freedom, Infinity Ward decided to make up a war, rather than set Call of Duty 4 in an existing conflict like Iraq or Afghanistan. "We wanted an enemy that is going to give the player a stand up fight," declares Collier. "When people hear modern warfare, is that driving in a Humvee until an IED [improvised explosive device] blows your tire off, then people shoot at your Humvee and you shoot back at them and they run away? Strangely enough, that's not Infinity Ward-style combat. So we are creating a robust enemy that is going to give the Western powers a run for their money. They use high technology just like we do."

To that end, a nefarious Russian warlord with ties to the mob and old oil money has been written in as the main villain. This evil mastermind goes by the name of Zakhaev, and he's calculating enough to stage a bloody military coup in an unnamed Middle Eastern nation simply to distract the Western powers while he consolidates his power in Russia. The story starts with

The self-shadowing on the character models is amazing

FIRST-PERSON REGICIDE

"We're really trying to push the envelope in first-person storytelling," says West. There's no better example of this commitment than the way that players will experience the coup that Zakhaev funds in the Middle East: in first person. This short cinema sets the tone for the game, starting with boots kicking down the door to your palace. Kidnapped, and stuffed in the trunk of a car with no explanation, you're transported to a barren town square with four wooden posts in the middle. The soon-to-be-dictator is there waiting for you, pistol in hand. Wordlessly, he raises the gun to your face, unmoved by your protests. *Click*.

first-recon missions by the U.S. Marines deploying to the faceless nation in response to the coup, and quickly grows into a massive look at what kind of large-scale war would be fought tomorrow, using today's technologies. Though there are probably more theatres to this conflict that we don't know about, the two that we saw were the aforementioned Middle Eastern country and the steppes of Russia.

One way that players will be clued into this is through the loading screens between missions (which, incidentally, were only around 10 to 15 seconds long when we saw the game). Here, players are treated to a view of the globe that zooms out from your previous area of operation and back in to highlight the setting of your new mission. Jason West, the second face of the ruling Infinity Ward triumvirate, explains, "The idea here is that you have this global map and we're zipping around from hotspot to hotspot, to let the player know – because the story's fairly complex – how these things are interacting together."

Though the enemy in Call of Duty 4 has been created to be menacing enough to make the U.S. and NATO take it seriously, this will be no plodding trench-line war. "Sometimes we go back in time; we're keeping you guessing like a *24* episode. We want the player to constantly be feeling like, 'I don't know what's going to happen to me next,'" expounds Collier. "We'll do some flashback missions where you get to play the characters that you're surrounding yourself with."

> ***When people hear modern warfare, is that driving in a Humvee until an IED blows your tire off, then people shoot at your Humvee and you shoot back at them and they run away?***
> – Grant Collier

Since the story kicks off with a first-response action by the Western powers that be, the player will be part of some of the most elite units in the world today. British SAS commandos and Russian loyalists fighting against Zakhaev's cruel regime

NUCLEAR LAUNCH DETECTED?

We saw a mission simply called "ICBM" [Intercontinental Ballistic Missile] in the level select screen of Call of Duty 4. Later on, we were treated to a display of how Infinity Ward's new realtime post-processing effects can eerily simulate being near a suborbital missile launch. When asked for comment the team begged off: "There are story spoilers involved in levels with lots of smoke, and that's all I can say," said West. Collier added, "Not to give away any story elements, but there are areas that you go through where heavy scorching has happened." We invite the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

After some damage, cars catch on fire. After being on fire for a while, they explode. Sound familiar?

join the U.S. Force Recon Marines, and though we didn't see them in action, we've been told that the SAS will definitely be playable at some point in the campaign as well, and we'd be very surprised to find that the Russian loyalists won't be too. Given Collier's teases about flashbacks, we can safely assume that these soldiers have a history and a narrative voice that is often lacking in war games.

THE NEW FACE OF WAR

Having a technologically advanced and highly trained enemy on top of the move to a modern setting opens up many more creative doors than simply an expanded weapons list. "When we were doing those World War II games, we had all these ideas, and it was like, 'We can't do that, they don't have comm systems,'" notes West. "We can do those types of things that were impossible in World War II games." The early levels that we saw reflected this philosophy from the first moments of gameplay, with lightning-quick strikes being made simultaneously by special forces troops, armored units, and aircraft working in deadly concert.

"We do want to show the reality of modern combat, so you have much higher-trained people than in World War II," says Collier. This is overwhelmingly evident in the challenges that players face. We saw enemies fastroping out of helicopters, using suppression and flanking techniques, and applying all the principles of modern combined-arms warfare. "It may not be 10,000 guys, but there's some tanks, a couple helicopters coming overhead, so that support feeling is still there," adds Vince Zampella, the third member of Infinity Ward's leadership. And because the engine running underneath the gameplay is so robust, you can pull off some crazy stunts. We saw one scene with helicopters zooming in to drop off enemy reinforcements via fastrope about 200 meters away. Grabbing an RPG dropped by a fallen foe, the player was able to take out one of those choppers while its passengers were still on the rope, changing the battlefield in a way that would have been unimaginable in previous titles.

We're all familiar with how differently you approach a combat situation when you're carrying an MP5 rather than a BAR, but better rifles are the least of the changes in how wars are fought in the new millennium. From the example above, it's obvious what access to a Javelin rocket launcher does for a soldier. Similarly, it's much easier to take out aircraft when you're packing a Stinger surface-to-air missile launcher. Rail-shooting missions aboard a modern, fully equipped AC-130 gunship result in far more destruction via TV-controlled railguns than a Jeep-mounted .50-cal could ever accomplish.

Call of Duty has always relied on scripted sequences setting up objectives that the player is free to accomplish however he or she prefers. The modern setting gives vastly more freedom to developers and players both. "It's the battlefield from the soldier to the satellite, and everything in between," declares Collier. Coordinated assaults from multiple squads and support units, cutting your own line through enemy fortifications with advanced military technology like the Javelin or semi-automatic sniper rifles, and defending your own flanks with landmines and C4 are just some examples of awesome scenarios commonplace in Call of Duty 4 that wouldn't work at all in a World War II game. And the best part is that the hallmarks of Call of Duty – massive conflicts, cinematic action, and the smoothest gameplay experience possible – are only enhanced by CoD 4's new direction.

UNDER THE HOOD

As gorgeous as Call of Duty 4 looks, there's little purpose to the graphical fidelity if a choppy framerate keeps you from consistently hitting your target, as Infinity Ward will tell you. "Being 60 frames per second is really important to us. Some people don't think that there's a difference between 30 and 60, but we feel like there's an unconscious understanding that when you're at 60 frames per second it feels more realistic," enthuses Collier. "We push it all the way we can, but we stop at 60 – anything that would make it go under 60, we get rid of." That's right. Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare should never, ever drop below 60 frames per second on Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3.

Beyond that, the visuals speak for themselves. Realtime post-processing effects allow the artists to get in and tweak the lighting for each individual scene until it's perfect. If you look carefully during a mission, you can even see that the light quality will vary as you move from location to location – one helicopter insertion has the contrast jacked way up to make all of the muzzle flashes and individual conflicts pop off the screen, and then returns to more normal mid-day lighting once you hit the ground so that the player is not distracted during the actual mission.

The team's attention to detail doesn't stop there. Tiny islands of peace can be found in outdoor settings, where bubbling brooks sparkle realistically in the sunlight. Bullets sitting on a table will cast their own dynamic shadows from a swinging light bulb. Marines carry flex-cuffs clipped to their backpacks that bounce along as they run. Cloth and skin lack that overly reflective plastic-like sheen that can be seen even in great rendering engines like Unreal Engine 3. The cumulative effect is that this is the most

CONTINUED ON PAGE 60 >>

All of this grass is animated to sway in the wind...and the scene still stays above 60 frames per second

Hiding in tall grass might finally be a viable tactic

The depth-of-field effects that make the foreground appear out of focus in this shot add a lot to the scene's realism

BATTLE ACTIONS?

Remember "Battle Actions" from Call of Duty 3, where you got to do little minigames for things like setting C4 charges or punching a Nazi in the face? Well, it turns out Infinity Ward thinks the same thing about this Treyarch invention as we do – they're nowhere to be found in Call of Duty 4.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 58

photo-realistic video game we've ever seen, and that's no overstatement.

Improvements to Call of Duty's underlying technology for this installment go far beyond graphics, impressive as they are. Depending on the ballistic properties of a firearm and the materiel and thickness of a barrier, bullets will be able to penetrate walls and doors to damage anything on the other side. Choose your cover carefully; you've been warned. The implications of bullet penetration on multiplayer alone are astounding.

Some walls are far too thick or too dense to give the time of day to small-arms fire. Luckily, much of the world is physics-enabled to the point that you'll be able to blow the hell out of it with high explosives. What do you get when you take the "building" part out of "sniper nest in a building?" One less immediate threat, that's what. Of course, this works both ways as well. Holing up in a bunker won't do you much good if there's a tank coming after you – those 120mm shells won't be stopped by

> ***"Anything that would make it go under 60 [frames per second], we get rid of."***
>
> *– Grant Collier*

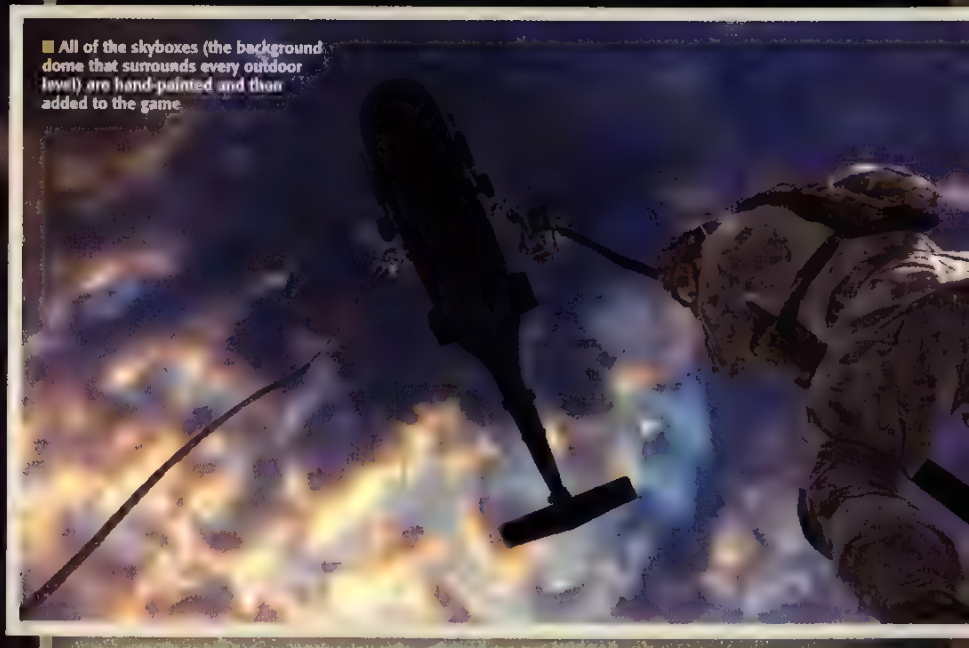
We saw enemies bounding between cover on this level, just as a smart player would.

The shadowing in COD 4 is amazing.

STAYING FOCUSED

In its new, spacious offices, Infinity Ward has a unique setup: In-house focus testing. About once a week, they'll bring in some random person – maybe some fortunate shopper at a game store, or a friend of a friend, or just some dude off the street – and have them play through a bit of Call of Duty 4. The feedback is recorded, and allows the team to smooth out any frustrating rough edges that pop up in level design, control scheme, or mission objectives. Of course, since it's Call of Duty 4, the feedback tends toward the positive. Collier relates a story about one particularly enthusiastic tester: "We said, 'What would you tell your friends after you saw a clip of this game; what would you tell them about Call of Duty?' And they said, 'I'd tell them to wear their brown pants before they saw that game!'" We couldn't agree more, random dude we never met. We couldn't agree more.

Infinity Ward is striving to keep modern-day politics out of its game



All of the skyboxes (the background dome that surrounds every outdoor level) are hand-painted and then added to the game

much, short of a double-walled concrete bunker. This may sound harsh, but it's all in the pursuit of making the most visceral and intense war game ever.

NOBODY FIGHTS ALONE

There's no question that multiplayer is a big part of Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, but Infinity Ward is keeping relatively silent on the details. Some tidbits of information were available, though, and it's clear that the online portion of the game is hardly a tacked-on afterthought. After all, Call of Duty 2 was the most-played 360 game on Xbox Live for over a year and still boasts over 50,000 users a day.

Taking a cue from Ubisoft's Rainbow Six franchise, CoD 4 will feature an experience system for multiplayer. By performing well, players will unlock new cosmetic additions, better weapons, and more. And while the game will offer up several preset loadouts, players will be free to customize them as they see fit. There's no reason you can't outfit your assault package with a silenced pistol for quiet kills and some C4 to deal with enemy vehicles, for instance. We also saw an airstrike called in by a player, but it's unknown whether that's tied to perks, specific maps or modes, or how exactly it's used.

Weapons and new skins like uniforms and hats are hardly the extent of it, though. "Perks" will fit into the progression of your avatar as well, offering you advantages in combat. We didn't see them in action, but the list that we saw would imply things like increased accuracy with certain weapons. Along with the customizable loadouts, it seems that Call of Duty 4 will allow players to go farther in making their online capabilities match their playstyles than ever before.

Challenges are another new element to online play. Much like Xbox 360 Achievements, these are special tasks like "kill 10 people in a row without dying," though Infinity Ward assures us that there will be more interesting and creative ones as well (think of Crackdown's car-juggling Achievements). These are separate from Achievements and PlayStation Home, and are tied to in-game experience points and unique unlocks instead.

Finally, the team is working hard to make sure that it's easy to get in, start a game with your friends, and keep playing with them for as many matches as you like, unlike some recent releases. From what we've seen, and the clear enthusiasm present in the multiplayer team, the experience should be smooth from top to bottom – even if we don't know exactly what the experience is quite yet.

The core team at Infinity Ward has been making the best war games in the business for the last 10 years. It is without reservation that we say that Call of Duty 4 is poised to blow their previous work out of the water, both in terms of scope and quality. Everything we saw looked as epic and amazing as anything we've seen in video games to date, from a nighttime search-and-destroy mission aboard a storm-tossed freighter to a scene in the Russian steppes with some disturbing imagery that suggested this foe is as brutal and despicable as the Third Reich ever was. Everyone we talked to at Infinity Ward, from the three heads of studio to the character animation team, emanated an excitement for the project as infectious as any developer we've ever met. And the experience of being "in the s—," as they say, was unparalleled.

We asked West if he was concerned about releasing near Halo 3 this fall, given that title's unbelievable levels of hype. He merely shrugged his shoulders, smirked, and made a noncommittal sound with a twinkle in his eye. "You can call us up after you play it," he quipped. If he can be so confident, who are we to argue with him?

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

While Microsoft is pushing their cross-platform PC/360 multiplayer via Live as hard as it can, Infinity Ward isn't interested. "The benefit is to have more people, a bigger pool of players," says Collier. "We have a [lot] of people playing on PC, we have a [lot] of people playing on 360. We have a lot of players." Zampella adds, "Not only are we not doing it, we're not striving for it."

Still not enough Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare for you? Log onto Game Informer Online at www.gameinformer.com to access Unlimited content including exclusive video interviews with Jason West and Grant Collier, as well as a guided video tour of the expansive Infinity Ward offices!

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THE
LAST
REMNANT

NEXT GENERATION CONSOLES
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
> **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
> **RELEASE** SPRING 2007

ONE THOUSAND YEARS AGO, HUMANITY CAME INTO CONTACT WITH REMNANTS. THESE MAGICAL FRAGMENTS OF A BYGONE ERA WERE ONCE USED TO PROMOTE PEACE ACROSS THE WORLD. SOON, AS THE RIFT GREW BETWEEN THOSE WHO RULED AND THOSE WHO OBEYED, THE REMNANTS CEASED BEING INSTRUMENTS OF BALANCE, AND INSTEAD BECAME PATHS TO IMMEASURABLE POWER. WHERE ONCE THERE HAD BEEN PEACE, ONLY BLOODSHED REMAINED.

Square Enix knows role-playing games. In the video game industry, rarely is a single company so closely tied to the identity of an entire genre. The company is responsible for the two biggest RPG franchises in the world, Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest, and people have been playing these series since the 8-bit era. RPG fans know Square Enix as the name to turn to for grand adventures, unforgettable characters, and jaw-dropping moments remembered for years. Recently, Square Enix has devoted considerable energy to iterating on its past successes, but that doesn't mean the company isn't moving forward. Next year gamers will be treated to The Last Remnant, an all-new title that incorporates all of the rich locations and thrilling combat an RPG fan could hope for, along with a handful of unexpected details that will help define the direction of the genre in this generation.

In addition to marking the beginning of a new franchise for Square Enix, The Last Remnant represents a significant deviation from the way RPGs have traditionally been presented to a North American audience. Since most role-playing titles are created by Japanese developers, they are released in Japan first, and then find their way to American gamers after a delay for localization (which took seven months for Final Fantasy XII, for example). With The Last Remnant, this process will change. The game will be released simultaneously in the U.S. and Japan. "From the conceptual stage of this project, we kept a global market in mind, placing a special emphasis on the North American market," says director Hiroshi Takai.

One of the results of this emphasis is the fact that the game has two prominent characters, each created to appeal to a specific territory. The Japanese

The man with his back turned is an influential figure in Rush's life. If his face were visible, you would see him wearing a futuristic eyepatch

How exactly movement is handled within a battle has yet to be seen.

IT TAKES ALL KINDS

The world of The Last Remnant is populated by several kinds of creatures, each with distinctive visual characteristics and innate skills. These are the four main races players can expect to encounter, both in exploration and in combat.

MITRA:

Not to be confused with the cat-like Mithra race in Final Fantasy XI, Mitra are basically humans as we know them. They are the most numerous of all the races in the world.

YAMA:

Large fish-like beings, Yama are incredibly powerful. Because of their strength, special weapons exist for Yama that cannot be wielded by other races.

QSITI:

These small humanoids resemble lizards, and are particularly adept with magic. They are energetic and can be found all over towns.

SOVANNI:

With four arms and cat-like features, the Sovanni are able to wield multiple weapons and excel in battle. They are also the rarest of the four races.

audience is most likely to connect with Rush Sykes, an energetic and idealistic 18-year-old swordsman. On the other hand, American gamers will probably be more drawn to the dark and mysterious figure only referred to as the Conqueror. Older and battle-hardened, the Conqueror is unlike Rush in almost every way. Despite this clear distinction, The Last Remnant does not force players to choose one character or the other. While interesting in its attempt to reach out to American gamers with the Conqueror, the game will be exactly the same on both shores, with Rush set up as the primary protagonist.

"Rush is the main character of this game," Takai clarifies. "He was designed with the traditional Square Enix RPG style in mind, but the players' impression of him will likely change once they advance in the game. You can expect a lot of plot twists involving him." Even though Rush drives the tale at first, he has an unknown connection to the Conqueror that slowly draws that character into a more prominent position as the tale unfolds. "The Conqueror is a type of dark hero, which is a first for a Square Enix RPG," Takai admits. "As you can see from his costume, tainted red by blood (it was originally white), the cruelty that he holds within will have a great effect on the overall story."

Though the tale eventually expands into these dark corners, players are introduced to the world of The Last Remnant in a familiar fashion. The adventure begins on an isolated island called Eulam where Rush and his sister Irina lead carefree lives. That all changes early on when Irina is kidnapped by a mysterious organization and Rush finds himself in the middle of a world-spanning conflict somehow tied to ancient and powerful relics called Remnants.

As the game's title would imply, Remnants are a key part of practically every element of the world. What exactly they are, however, is difficult to define. Remnants vary in shape and size, and can take the form of machines, beasts, and weapons. "Humans first came into contact with Remnants about 1,000 years ago," explains Takai. "People then made settlements around these Remnants. To this day, these colossal Remnants stand as they were 1,000 years ago." For instance, one Remnant, the Valeria Heart, is a sword the size of a small mountain. It is surrounded by the town of Athlum, which was built up around the artifact because of its extraordinary qualities. The Valeria Heart bestows courage upon those around it, and it also is responsible for the plentiful water supply. Like this sword, Remnants can have an array of unique powers – some of which are hidden or unknown.

In contrast to the monumental Valeria Heart, we witnessed another Remnant in action with more offensive capabilities. On a sprawling battlefield, a group of soldiers set up an enormous cannon that was clearly controlled by a handheld analogue – wielded by an unnamed character. As the young man wearing a mechanical eye patch charged his gun and pulled the trigger, the nearby cannon gathered energy and fired a devastating blast into the fray.

Because of their power and rarity, Remnants are priceless treasures. Not everyone is able to carry one into battle, and must instead rely on more conventional (at least for fantasy RPGs) methods of attack. "Swords and magic are the basic common weapons in the world," Takai states. "However, the Remnants are considered as mysterious technology that no one can explain. We currently cannot even disclose if Remnants are machines, structures, or living, breathing things."

We may not know exactly how to classify Remnants, but we do know that people will go to great lengths to obtain them. The Conqueror, for instance, has made it his mission to seize and collect as many as possible, though his intentions are unclear. The primary struggles in the game are fueled by the Remnants and the desire to control them, which often results in massive and bloody conflicts. These clashes are not limited to cutscenes and event sequences; the central combat system in The Last Remnant focuses on the player's ability to direct the battles between opposing armies.

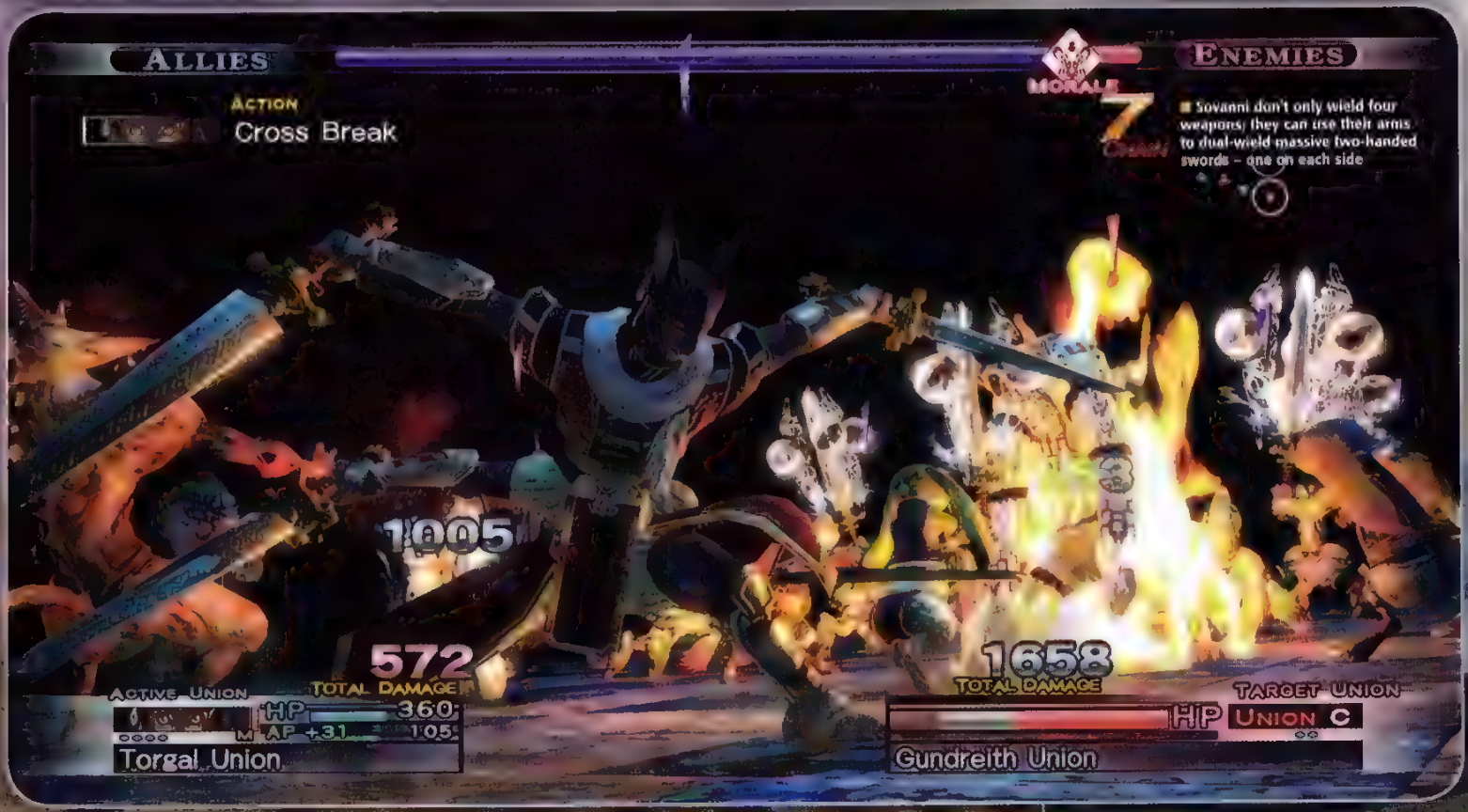
In traditional Japanese RPGs, turn-based fights usually pit players against various kinds of flora and fauna, politely giving and receiving beatings in an orderly fashion. Instead of this back-and-forth, the emphasis here is on recreating the sensation of a soldier on the battlefield. The cinematic angles are meant to give a more realistic flow to the combat, and it will not be a passive affair where you just select "attack" and watch your party jump over an invisible line separating friend from foe. After you choose an action, you will need to adapt to changing circumstances, which might require you to perform a series of timed button presses in mid-attack. Success in these situations can score you a critical hit, while failure might mean you deal less damage. For those traditionalists that are scared off by real-time RPGs, don't worry; the fights still take place in a turn-based framework. This isn't a real-time hack n' slash like Dynasty Warriors.

Rush plays the role of one soldier among dozens as players group him and his companions into different Unions – small groups of five that can be ordered to perform actions on the battlefield. Though they are unified, the characters in Unions don't sacrifice their individual strengths. Different characters have special attacks and unique abilities, though these may vary depending on the current situation on the battlefield. "The commands can differ depending on

CONTINUED ON PAGE 71 >>

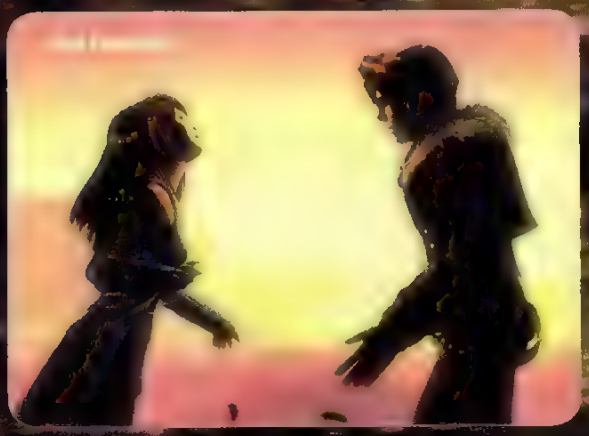
IT BEGINS

A few months ago, Square Enix announced that it had licensed Unreal Engine 3 for use in its upcoming titles. It is now clear that The Last Remnant will be the first game we see from the company to utilize this technology. Square Enix RPGs usually excel in the visual department anyway, but according to Takai, there are other benefits to using Unreal. "I think it shows in the screenshots we just released," he laughs. "The time between starting the development and seeing the graphic resource onscreen was so fast, we were able to delve into illustrating and experimenting at a very early stage."



ENJOY THE SHOW

For a title focused on story and epic battles, it should be no surprise that Square Enix is intent on portraying The Last Remnant's events in as cinematic a way as possible. Taking charge on this front is real-time movie director Kouzi Kobayashi, the man responsible for the opening, ending, and event movies of Final Fantasy VII and VIII. This experience, along with Kobayashi's work on *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* and *The Final Flight of the Osiris* (from *The Animatrix*), ensures that these sequences will be memorable.



This screen perfectly illustrates the scale of battles players can look forward to

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 68

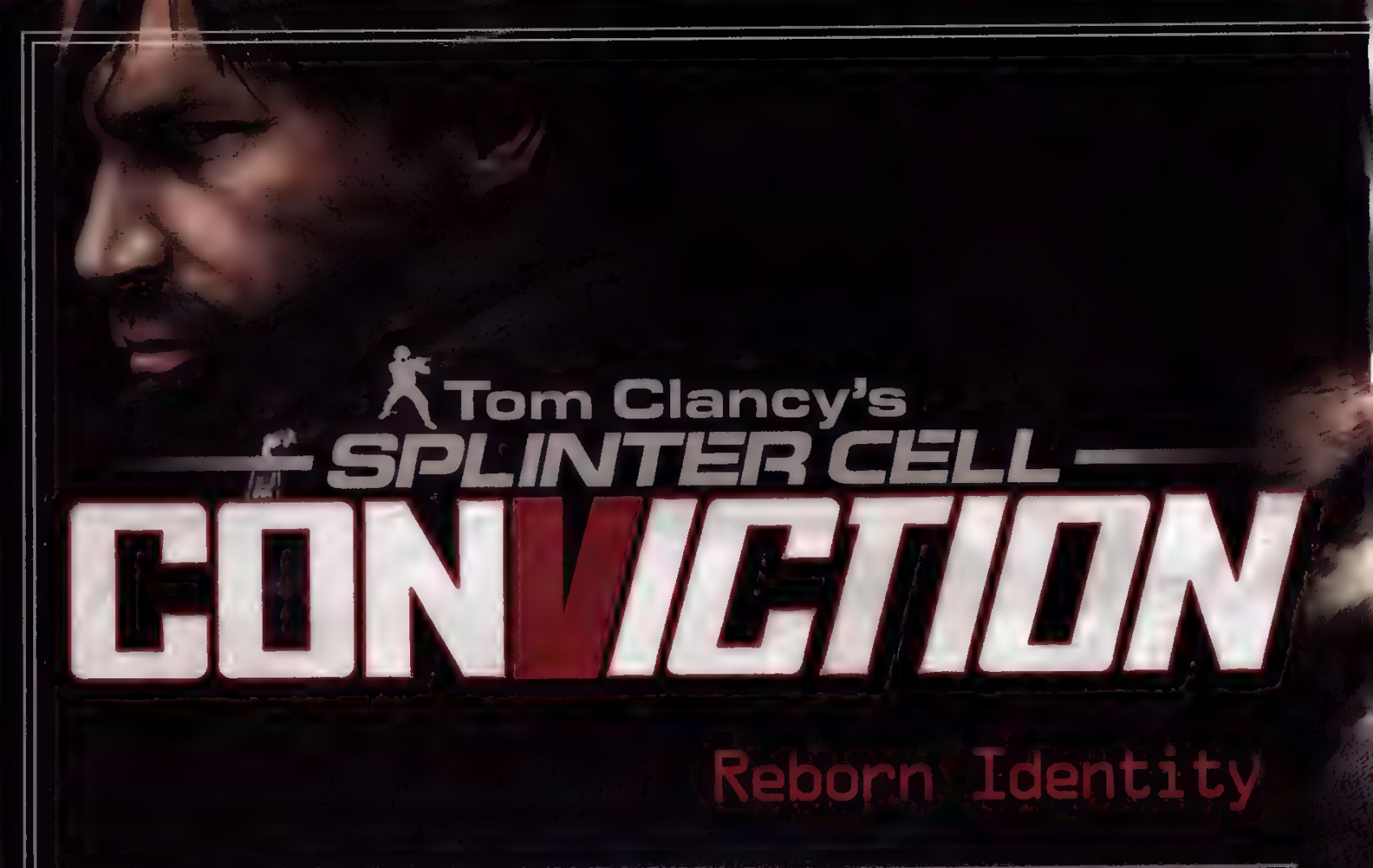
the combination of Union members, the target of the battle, and morale. Players must make decisions based on these factors," says Takai.

The morale Takai refers to is another pivotal factor on the battlefield. Represented by a meter on the top of the screen, it fluctuates throughout the battle, resulting in different consequences. "If morale is low, characters will not be able to exert their powers. Players must aim to continuously improve their battle-style and commands, or they may end up with a difficult battle," Takai cautions. We saw an example of these shifting tides as two armies met in the middle of a field. Outnumbered, one side was immediately at a morale disadvantage. That changed as soon as a magic-user summoned a monstrous flying beast, which sent the opposing army's morale into the gutter. Then Rush came in to save the day by calling forth a lumbering golem onto the field, which once again tipped the scales in his favor. It is easy to imagine that this seemingly simple match of tug-of-war will become the key to victory, especially considering that up to 70 units will be engaged in combat at once.

The conflicts in The Last Remnant aren't limited exclusively to such a grand scope. However, with the potential for massive clashes, there is certainly an effort to avoid throwaway fights and make each encounter matter. "Our main objective was to create a gaming experience in which players can fully enjoy the battles as opposed to thinking of them as a grind fest," asserts Takai. "The story is definitely scripted to keep players on the edge of their seats, and we have prepared an abundance of short quests. However, the main draw of this game will definitely be the battles."

No matter how stunning your battle system or how intriguing your world, the first step to captivating gamers is by ensuring they can play your game in the first place. Square Enix has a long and successful history of making console-exclusive games, but The Last Remnant breaks that pattern. "We made the decision to go multiplatform after researching global ownership rates and overall marketability," says Takai. But there is more to the story than simple numbers: "As game developers, we would like to have as many users play as possible, and we are confident that we can create an RPG with the best specs imaginable at this point in time." While contractual issues prevent Square Enix from specifically confirming which platforms the title will appear on, the issue is hardly puzzling. Since the game is too graphically intensive for the Wii, that only leaves the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.

There is no denying that The Last Remnant is an incredibly ambitious title. Whether it's the epic combat, the game's global aspirations, or a multiplatform release, there are a number of challenges to be addressed in the next year of development. Even when faced with these issues, Takai's main concern is ensuring that The Last Remnant lives up to its potential in the eyes of RPG fans. "The most difficult challenge is to provide a quality RPG that Square Enix fans have come to expect, while giving it its own unique style," he tells us. "By combining an engrossing story and a ground-breaking battle system, we are seeking to create the ultimate RPG experience." Coming from the company that already dominates the genre, that's definitely saying something. ■■■



Tom Clancy's SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

Reborn Identity

With 2005's Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory, Ubisoft Montreal tried to make the best stealth game ever. The development team felt pretty good about what it accomplished; it pushed the limits of what had defined the Splinter Cell brand. Even though the games were good, they also ran a dangerous risk of getting repetitive over time. There were weaknesses in the series that had yet to be repaired — namely a lack of emotional attachment to the main character, Sam Fisher. Ubisoft knew that Splinter Cell had to become something else.

The plan was twofold. Step one was last year's Double Agent (developed by Ubisoft's Shanghai studio), which involved a change of pace for the series' story. Sam had two sides to receive orders from, expanding the universe through narrative. Step two would enlarge and innovate the series by completely altering the gameplay. It was a vision of Splinter Cell where the goggles had been removed — a Splinter Cell more about reacting on impulse and improvisation and less about waiting for the right moment to strike. A Splinter Cell more in the vein of properties like *24*, *Die Hard*, and *The Bourne Identity* — where one man is on the lam, trapped, and pulled into something bigger. It would be a Splinter Cell unlike any before it, and it would be called Conviction.

XBOX 360 | PC
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> **RELEASE** HOLIDAY

Born Rebel

The only thing that the team at Ubisoft Montreal knew about Double Agent when they started Conviction was that the game would leave Sam at odds with Third Echelon, the government agency he had spent four games working under. But this wasn't a bad thing; it was an opportunity to do something different. "We wanted to find new ways – new technologies – for doing things. At the same time we were doing that, we wanted to take Sam out of his comfort zone, and we wanted to put him in a situation where he could express himself," says creative director Patrick Fortier.

Conviction takes place two years after Double Agent. Sam Fisher has separated from Third Echelon and has moved to a remote area of the country, removing himself from the rest of society. When he hears that his friend – recurring Splinter Cell character Anna Grimsdottir – is in trouble, he decides to get involved with his old agency and help track her down. But Sam returns to find a very different Third Echelon – a Third Echelon that has become political to the point of dysfunction. The agency is so chained down by red tape its operatives are unable to complete their tasks.

"Sam Fisher has always been a mature character. He's got a lot of perspective on things. He's not one who likes what he sees with the bureaucracy that he has been confronted with," says Fortier. Very quickly it becomes clear to Sam that if he is going to be of any use, he is going to have to break out on his own, act as an independent agent, and rebel against his own government. He becomes an enemy of the state, fighting for what he believes. He's alone, his resources are limited, and "he's on the run," Fortier reminds us, "but he's not defenseless."

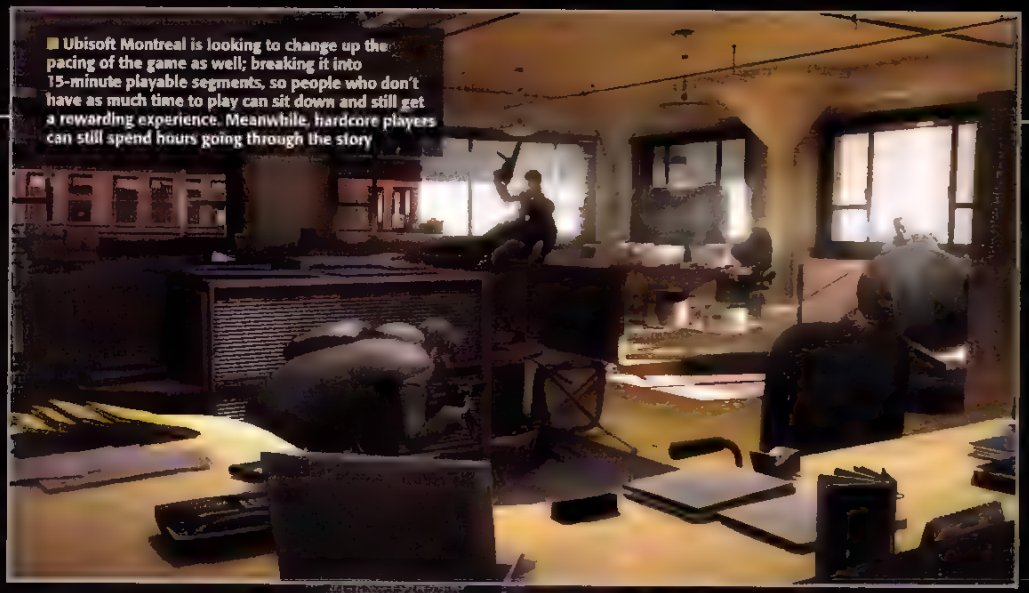
Sam knows Third Echelon. He knows how they work. He knows their strengths and weaknesses. Even though they are actively hunting him, some of them are his friends and he might be reluctant to fight them. This internal conflict of being forced to fight is just one of the things that adds depth to Sam's character and helps endear him to players, but it wasn't a decision so simply made.

The studio had to ask itself many questions before it made the big decision to alter the franchise. "What if we took our character out of his element? Out of his zone of comfort? What would happen to him? What would we discover about him?" Fortier asks.

What they discovered was that Sam Fisher is a man of conviction. And it's this conviction – not his renegade status – that gives Splinter Cell its name. "He's not a victim. He's not a fugitive. He's not hiding," says Fortier. "That's why it's called Conviction, because it's really about Sam's conviction that he has to do what he has to do because he feels it is for the greater good. And he's going out on his own and doing that, but he's not necessarily happy about doing that."

■ "In previous games, we had 2,000 or 3,000 animations, now we already have over 10,000," says Lepage

■ "What if all the elements in the environment had to be read from that perspective, that you can hide under them, or throw them at people, or throw people onto them?" asks Fortier



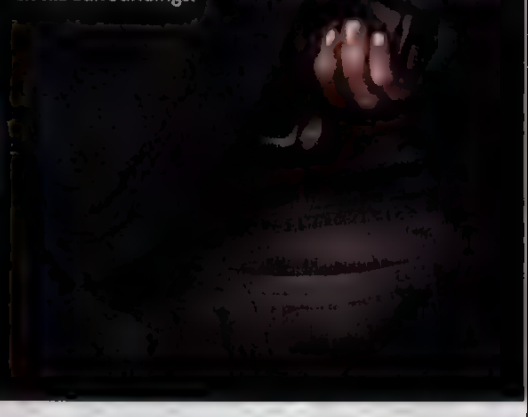
Ubisoft Montreal is looking to change up the pacing of the game as well; breaking it into 15-minute playable segments, so people who don't have as much time to play can sit down and still get a rewarding experience. Meanwhile, hardcore players can still spend hours going through the story

Conviction uses the Havok physics engine, but the studio tells us that almost all of the original code has been rewritten

Born Free

Sam's fugitive status is much more than just a story device – it extends into every facet of the game. No longer is Splinter Cell about finding the perfect place to hide in the dark, watching the guards' patrol patterns, and then acting when the coast is clear. Ubisoft Montreal likes to call this style of play an active stealth system, because it forces players to always remain active. "With active stealth, patience won't always pay off. It's the opposite. The enemy will come after you and you will always have to be on the move," says producer Dany Lepage. "You will always be able to set your own pace; you won't get bonuses for waiting."

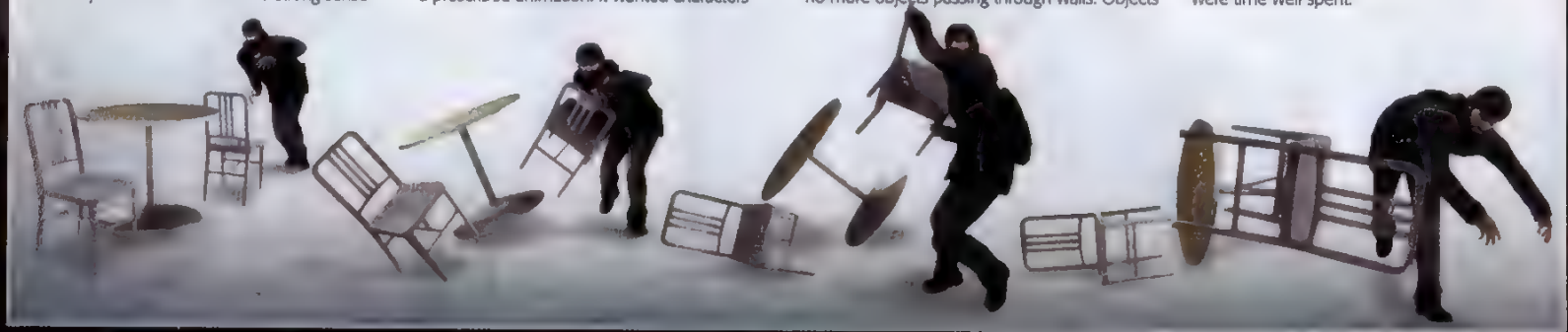
Like cornered animals, men on the run are dangerous because they are unpredictable. Interacting with the environment isn't completely new to the Splinter Cell franchise. Players have always been able to interact with lights by turning them off or shooting them out, but what if that freedom extended beyond the lights to the rest of the environment? If Ubisoft Montreal wanted Sam to be like one of those dangerous animals, it would have to give him more freedom in his surroundings.

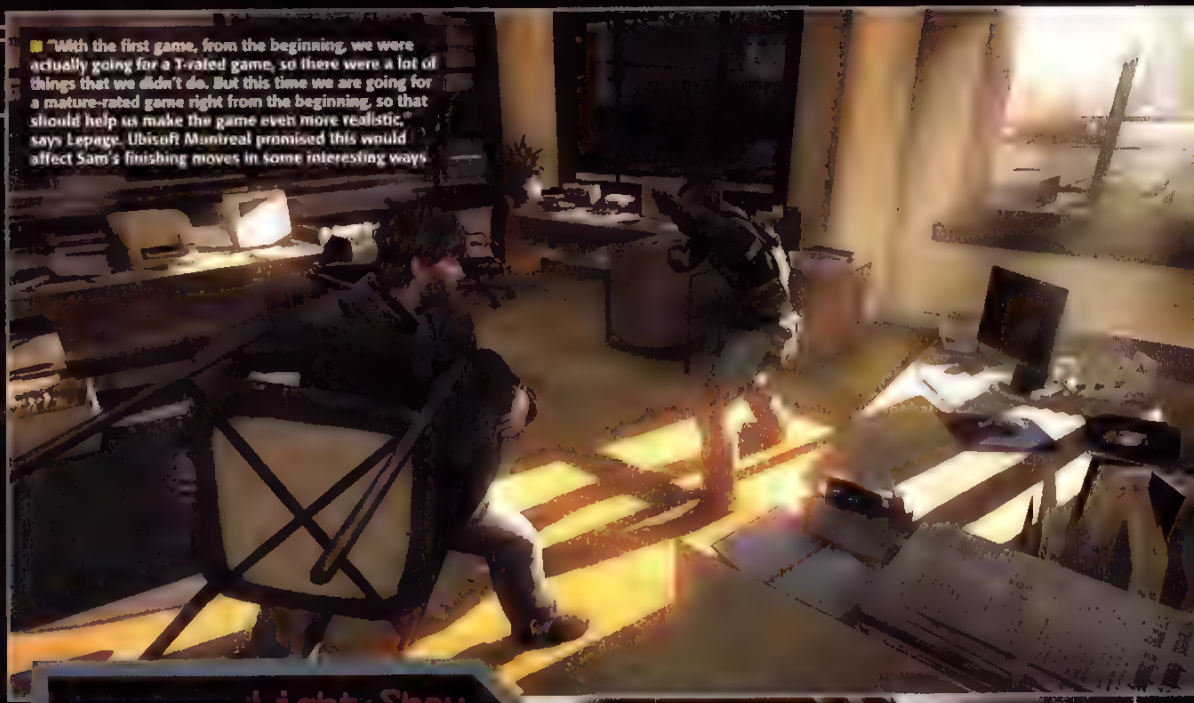


How Long Does It Take To Pick Up A Chair?

Eight months – that's how long it took Ubisoft Montreal to learn, anyway. This seemingly simple act is surprisingly more complex than it sounds. One of the buzzwords in the industry right now is biomechanics, or the science of studying living creatures' motions. Ubisoft Montreal's goal with Conviction is to make Sam's interaction with his environment as lifelike as possible. "There is a smoothness to the way Sam moves. There is a strong sense of analog feel to the control. There is a sense of weight transfer. There is a sense of good foot contact with the ground. There is a nice realistic sense to his motion," says physics programmer Eddy Boxerman. Plenty of games have interactive environments, but how realistic are they really? Ubisoft Montreal didn't want its characters to pick up objects by walking up to them then sliding into place before doing a prescribed animation. It wanted characters with fluid, realistic movements. Given the complexity of picking up a chair – based on its multiple hand holds, multiple positions in any environment, and variety of approachable angles – Ubisoft Montreal chose to teach Sam that action first.

But they didn't stop there. "All the large objects actually stay in physics while they are in Sam's hands," says Boxerman. "So there are no more objects passing through walls. Objects in Sam's hands will knock over other objects in the environment. I don't think there is any other game out there doing that right now." The importance of these features is hard to understand without seeing them firsthand, but when Sam fluidly grabs a chair from either a dead run or slow stroll, twists the object around as he lifts it, and then repositions his hands for the best fit, it's clear that those eight months were time well spent.





"With the first game, from the beginning, we were actually going for a T-rated game, so there were a lot of things that we didn't do. But this time we are going for a mature-rated game right from the beginning, so that should help us make the game even more realistic," says Lepage. Ubisoft Montreal promised this would affect Sam's finishing moves in some interesting ways.

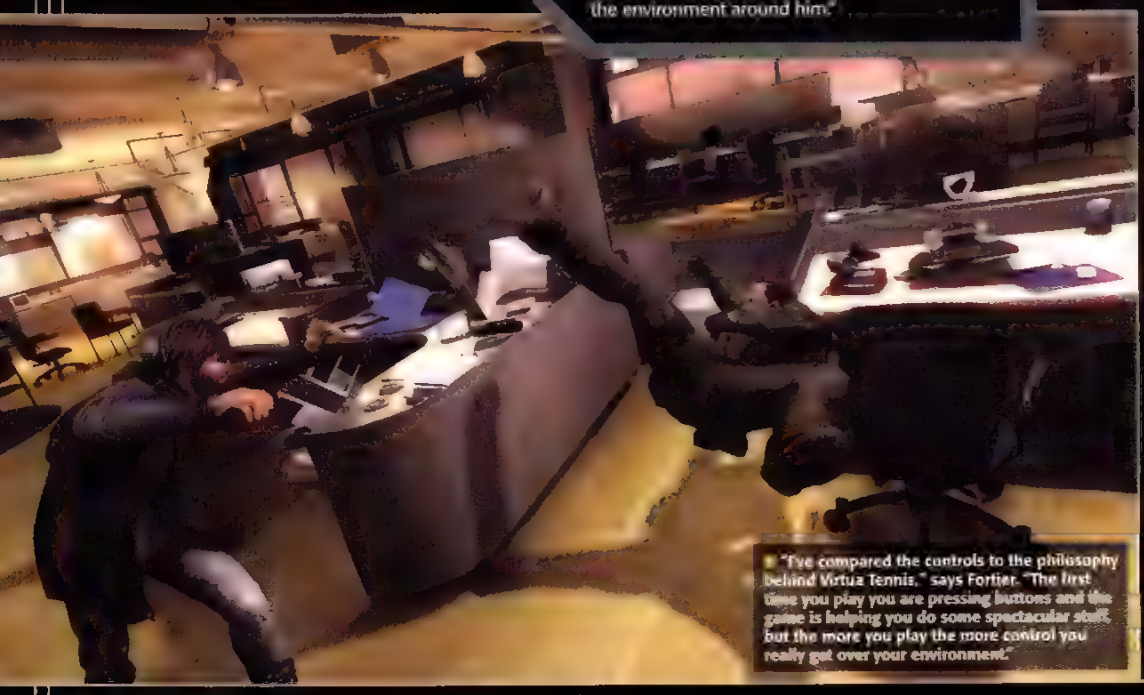
Imagine this: Sam starts off by taking out a guard with a brutal flurry of melee combos, or he grabs the guard and throws him through a pane of glass or over a table, sending its contents into the air. Sam then grabs the guard's radio and tunes into the police band. They are coordinating an attack – coming in through the front. Sam opens the back door, but doesn't go out. Instead, he hides under a nearby table. The guard walks in and heads over to investigate the open door. Sam sneaks out through the front, or he knocks over the table and uses it for cover while opening fire, or he sneaks up behind the guard, handcuffs him to a stairwell handrail then kicks him down the stairs.

"From the moment you are detected there are a whole bunch of tools you can use to get through a situation," says senior producer Mathieu Ferland. "You have a lot of means available to you," adds Fortier. "Because your inventory is out in front of you, it's your environment, it's not in your backpack." And these are just a few of the actions Ubisoft Montreal promised us would be available to players in the final game. It's a style meant to make players feel like super spies, as they improvise their way out of tough situations. It's enough to completely alter the series and reinvent its gameplay. But, as it turned out, it was also just the beginning.

Light Show

Splinter Cell has always looked good, but now players won't be looking at the game through the green tint of night vision 50 percent of the time. They will actually get to see just how good Ubisoft's texture work really is. Light and shadows no longer affect the gameplay like they once did, but maybe that is a good thing, since Ubisoft Montreal has been able to experiment with lighting techniques it couldn't use before. Where previous games were only able to support one spotlight casting a single shadow, now Sam can cast three shadows from three distinct light sources. Another lighting technique that helps lend some realism to the game is indirect lighting. Say there is a large red poster on one wall. Light will reflect off of that poster and cast nearby objects in a soft red glow just like in real life. All objects and characters in the game will be lit by this indirect lighting. These different lighting techniques add a nice graphical push to the game that couldn't have been done on last-generation consoles. As 3D programmer Don Williamson promises, "Sam'll be lit perfectly by the environment around him."

Interestingly, Sam Fisher was originally created with a beard in concept art for the very first Splinter Cell.



"I've compared the controls to the philosophy behind Virtua Tennis," says Fortier. "The first time you play you are pressing buttons and the game is helping you do some spectacular stuff, but the more you play the more control you really get over your environment."

Born To Run

Though Conviction is a departure in many ways for the series, it is still filled with plenty of great spy moments. Sam will still be hacking computers and planting bombs, but the real challenge won't come so much from completing an objective as it will from getting to the objective. In previous Splinter Cells, the gameplay revolved around blending into the environment by hiding in the shadows. Now Sam has a new way to blend into his environment – he becomes a part of the crowd. Think of it like the St. Patrick's Day parade sequence from the movie *The Fugitive*. Sam's goal is to do whatever it takes *not* to draw attention to himself.

Multiplayer Mystery

Ubisoft resisted all attempts to break them for information regarding Conviction's multiplayer. The big news, however, is that the Ubisoft Montreal studio will also be handling that portion of the game, making it the first time since the original Splinter Cell that Ubisoft Montreal has developed the entire game. Savvy gamers might already know Chaos Theory actually shipped with two executables on the disk. A different studio handled the multiplayer portion, resulting in a very different feel between multiplayer and single-player. The Ubisoft Montreal team will certainly bring a more unified feel to the two sections.

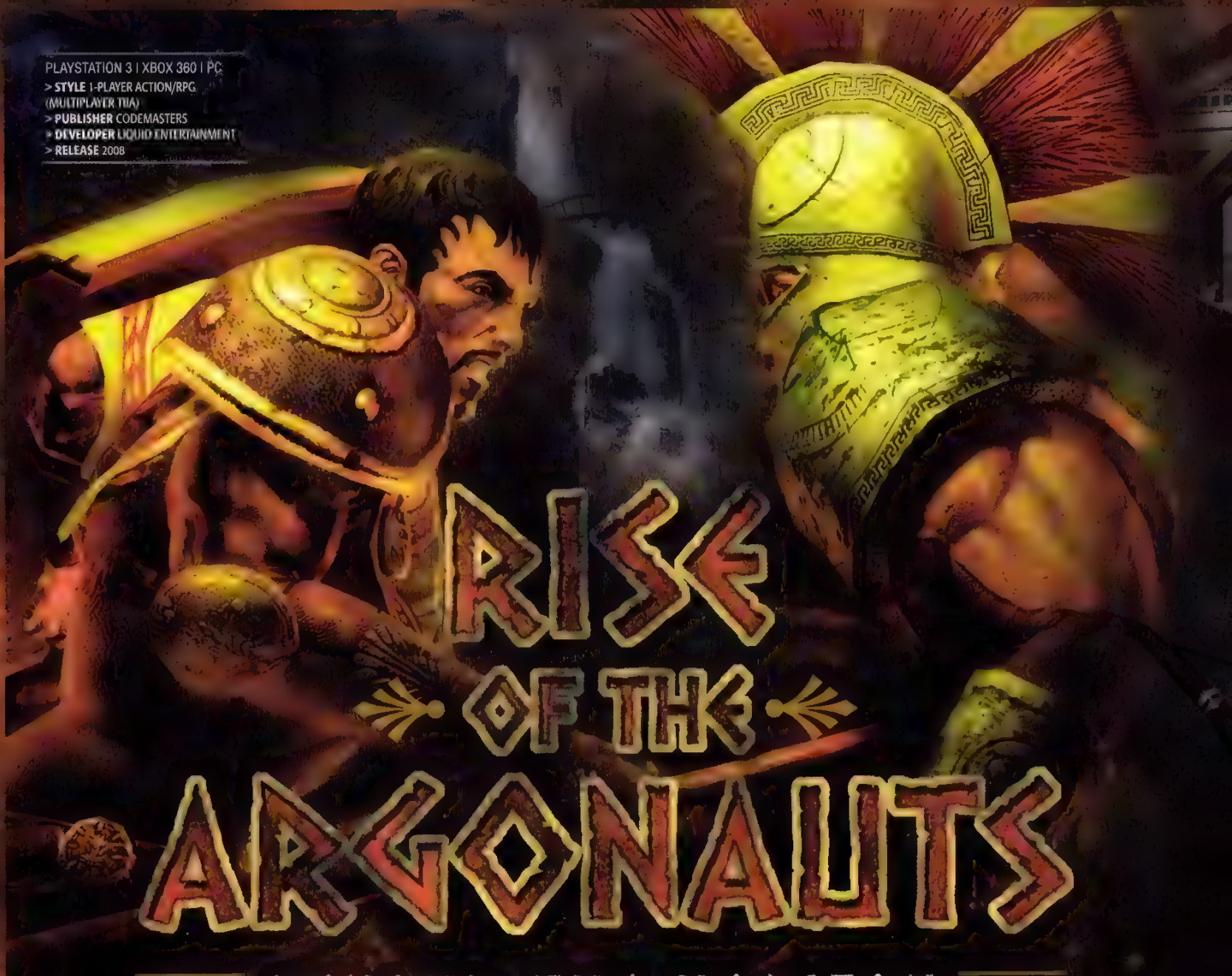
Conviction's diverse crowd mechanic requires robust AI. People in the environment will react to Sam's presence, become unhappy – maybe violent – if he harasses them for too long, and even tip off the local police if he begins doing something suspicious or illegal. We witnessed one scene where Sam ran up to someone and stole their laptop. The person who owned the laptop started to follow Sam and call out for the police while other people who witnessed the scene pointed the nearest officer in Sam's direction.

But the crowd is also a tool for Sam to use to his advantage. "The crowds are our mobile stealth devices," says Felix Duchesneau, AI programmer. "They replace the shadow and light gameplay. They are the tool for stealth and blending into the environment." For example, if Third Echelon agents are looking for Sam, maybe he could cause some kind of mayhem – an explosion even – then flee with the rest of the crowd as the authorities are left to deal with the chaos. This might sound a little bit familiar. Remember this is the same studio that is making Assassin's Creed, but since the studio claims that the decision to use crowd gameplay was made independently for each game, we are fairly confident that there will be some unique differences between the two games.

Most crowd systems, like GTA, generate random populations when needed. This provides density, but doesn't really work for Conviction's needs. Ubisoft Montreal has created a system that simplifies the calculations for NPC's movements to a point that they hardly require any attention from the CPU. This system also allows characters to react to changes in their environment. People move out of the way of new objects in an environment, which is good since Sam's impromptu fleeing can drastically change any level's layout. Crowds also pass through each other fluidly; people will avoid each other in advance instead of walking up to each other then spinning around and walking off in other directions like we have seen in games for years.

With all these changes there is bound to be some backlash from the hardcore Splinter Cell community. After all, Conviction could almost break off and become a completely new franchise, but Ubisoft Montreal doesn't see it that way. Conviction is Splinter Cell. "We are in a company where innovation is highly encouraged, and in order to support that we have a lot of flexibility in the proposals we make," says Ferland. "I think there was a natural progression with the narrative. There was also a good opportunity with the new technologies. So we have been able to match a new theme with the new technologies to support the series in a way that will be as rich and as powerful as the original Splinter Cell."

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS
> **DEVELOPER** LIQUID ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** 2008



RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS

BEYOND THE HORIZON

How big and well known must a development studio be before a game it makes can force people to stand up and take notice? What does it take to make that elusive buyer pause in the store and pick up a new title – one without a two or a three after its name? Can you make a succesful role-playing game that branches away from the traditional conventions of that frequently reiterative genre, and can that game succeed? These are the questions that must preoccupy the team at Liquid Entertainment as they work day to day on their dangerously ambitious new project. Rise of the Argonauts is a dramatic undertaking for what is in this day and age a moderately sized studio – sixty-some team members work to bring the project to life. It also happens to be one of the most exciting and original variations on the traditional action/RPG framework we've seen in a long time – maybe even enough to overcome the vast challenges that lie ahead for this brand new franchise.

While plenty of things set Rise of the Argonauts apart

from recent role-playing games, it's a fabrication to characterize the game as a complete departure from tradition. At its core, Rise of the Argonauts retells one of the classic Greek myths – Jason's search for the Golden Fleece, accompanied by an array of heroes who made up the crew of his ship, the Argo. This baseline concept has been kept intact, but Liquid has opted to revise the details to create its own unique version of the tale. "There's a lot to like about Jason and the Argonauts," opines Ed Del Castillo, president of Liquid and creative director on the game. "What I really dig is that it's known and yet it's unknown. People have some level of familiarity with it, yet it's a completely public domain property, so it's not set in stone. You still have a lot of latitude to how you visually define things." The game that has emerged from Liquid's vision is peppered with familiar role-playing staples, but it's implemented through some remarkable variations on the theme.

Charting the Unknown

Liquid's version of the search for the Golden Fleece is based only loosely on the original myth. In this story, Jason is already king of the island nation of Iolcus, soon to marry his beloved in a massive wedding ceremony. On the eve of their union, Jason's bride is struck down by a hidden assassin. Sealing her body in the temple in which they were to be married, Jason discovers the only path to bring her back lies with the restorative powers of the Golden Fleece. Leaving his lands under the questionable rule of his uncle, he sets out aboard the newly constructed Argo to bring back his lost love. To hear Del Castillo describe it, the entire tale that follows is a sort of love story – a quest where Jason acts out the vows of his wedding through the actions he takes to save the woman he treasures above all else.

To do so, he'll travel back and forth between over a dozen islands (15 are in the works), gathering new companions as he goes. In addition, Del Castillo explains: "the ship is a persistent part of the world, just like your character. It's going to be modifiable. So as you do things in the world, the Argo is actually going to change." Initially, the cargo hold beneath the deck will be empty. Eventually, a priest might reside inside, letting you dedicate your heroic deeds without returning to a god's temple. Or a blacksmith may take up residence at your request, letting you improve your weapons by converting bronze into iron. After every major encounter, your ship will acquire new decorations and adornments – a giant trophy that tells the story of your voyage while doubling as transportation to the next adventure. "This entire world is built on islands," Del Castillo informs us. "And we're very free about how you can unlock them, so you're probably going to discover this world completely differently than your friend. You're always feeling like there are islands you know about and those that you don't. And we give you tons of reasons to go back and forth between them."

These heroes will accept simple squad commands, as well as respond to the need for one of their special attacks

Every weapon you acquire has meaning, whether you found the lost blessed weapon of a great forgotten hero, or you carry the spear of one of your fallen comrades. When you're finished with any of these unique items, sacrifice them to a god for a permanent boost in heroism in the eyes of that jealous deity

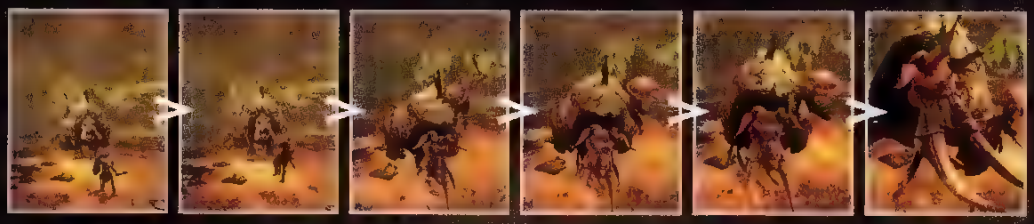
"I think when you see the game, you go: 'Wow, this is Unreal'? We're not trying to look like every other Unreal [Engine 3] game," explains creative director Ed Del Castillo

The Island Sanctuary

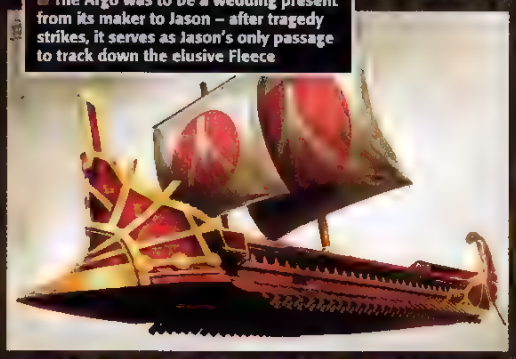
During our visit, we watched an extended demo that revealed one of the major events players will encounter – the hunt for a monstrous giant boar on the island haven of the goddess Artemis and her capricious dryads. As the demo opens, Jason stands on the beaches of a gorgeous shoreline with two of his companions, Hercules and Atalanta. Hercules is a massive brawler, literally ripping and wrestling his way through enemies and uprooting giant stone pillars to serve as clubs. In contrast, Atalanta is a quick-firing archer and follower of Artemis.

With the two heroes at his back, Jason treks into the woods beyond, the green spirits of dryads flitting from tree to tree, retreating before the party. Once Jason's team breaches too deep, the four-armed feminine naturists materialize only to sprout thorny daggers from their arms and attack. As Hercules sets to work tearing their arms off, Jason draws his sword to strike left and right at his multiple attackers. Once they've been dispatched, the Argonauts continue on to a hunter's camp, where conversations reveal that the great hunter Orion and his apprentice Adonis have ventured deeper into the forest and are presumed lost. Questing further, we eventually find Orion, and learn a gruesome story. His protégé Adonis was overcome by arrogance and pursued one of the chaste dryads. When she refused him, he ravaged and killed her. In punishment, the vengeful Artemis transformed Adonis into a giant boar that now wanders the forest. A wounded Orion is no match for the beast, and Jason ends up with the task, but not before taking the opportunity to scour the forest for other lost hunters who have come under the angry assaults of the dryads.

Once satisfied on that score, Jason lures the angry monster from hiding, and a huge boss fight ensues. As the boar charges at you along the length of a deep ravine, the hunters you've saved line up on the cliff wall above to fire their arrows. As Jason dives clear, Hercules steps up to grab the boar by its tusks, leaving an opening to move close and slash deep gashes in the animal's sides. On its next pass, Jason leaps high above its head and stuns Adonis with a slow motion sword strike to its neck. When Adonis finally falls, the crash shakes the ground, and Orion emerges to strike the final blow to his disgraced student. Artemis descends to the ravine as an ethereal stag to end the episode, declaring Jason a hero and rewarding his companion Atalanta the role of Orion's new apprentice. When the sequence comes to a close, a wounded Jason stands back at the shore near his ship, ready for his next adventure. As the camera pans, the narrator expounds on the new locations in which the adventurers might now continue their search for the Fleece – the arid deserts of Alexandria might offer a clue, or the blood-soaked battlefields of Sparta. Alternately, you can venture deeper into Artemis' island so Atalanta can attempt the trials that will cement her new role in the goddess' hierarchy of mortal followers.



Health will be managed with as few display options as possible – damage will heal between conflicts, but a few consumable items can save you while you're in the thick of it



The Argo was to be a wedding present from its maker to Jason – after tragedy strikes, it serves as Jason's only passage to track down the elusive Fleece

Fewer Menus, More Fighting

Unlike many RPGs, everything within Rise of the Argonauts is handled in real time through explosive, action-oriented combat. As game players, we've gotten used to certain behaviors in an action sequence that we nod and accept, even if they don't make a lot of sense. "If you see a guy in a movie take a spear and ram it through another guy's chest, when that spear comes back out you pretty much know that he's dead. Our business is the only business where you can puncture a guy 20 times and he works exactly the same way he did before you stabbed him the first time." This video game "slang," as Del Castillo describes it, is something that Liquid hopes to eliminate in its combat. One solution is the use of a procedural animation system that is constantly reacting to your control input. The legs, torso, head, and both arms each act autonomously and at independent speeds. You can swing at an enemy on one side of you even while you raise your shield arm to block an incoming attack from behind. More than that, Jason's head will turn in the direction of this new attack, and as his torso completes its first swing, it too will rotate to face the new enemy. As if that weren't enough, as you bring your sword arm around to strike from that far side, your attack will carry additional momentum from the rotation of your torso, and that second target will take more damage as a result.

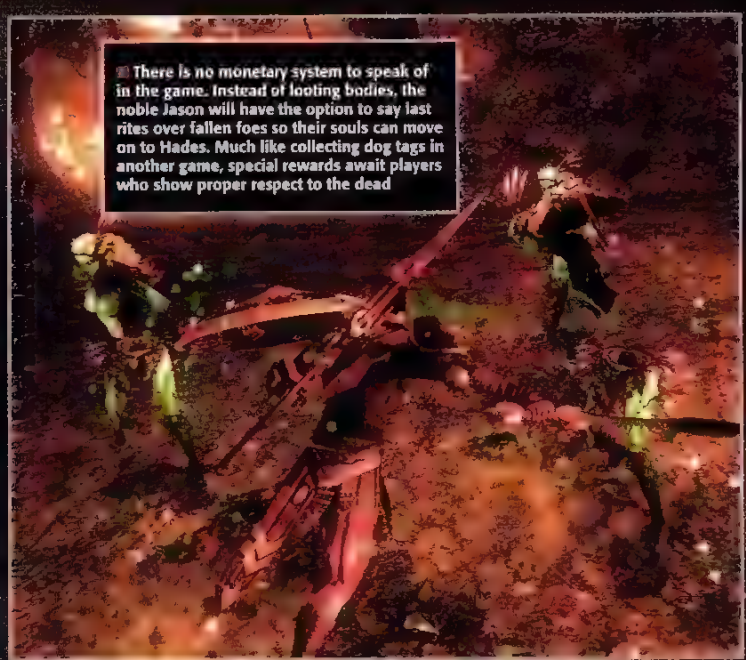
Within this unique animation and combat system, Jason has several choices in weaponry – all available at any time throughout the game. A quick slashing sword, a heavy mace or axe, and a devastating long-range spear form the core of his arsenal, while even his shield can be used to charge or bash beyond its utility as a defensive tool. As important as the weapons you carry will be the companions who stand beside you – your choice of two will accompany at any given time. The others you've recruited (at least half a dozen are planned) will wait at your ship, from the wise Odysseus to the invincible warrior Achilles. Every Argonaut in the game will have individual storylines connected to him or her – additional quests that affect abilities and attitudes as the story progresses.

To Please a God

"In most games that we looked at, gods were these sort of *deus ex machinas*. They're only there to grant me spells, and then they go away," Del Castillo suggests. Instead, the gods are critically tied to the moment-to-moment gameplay throughout Rise of the Argonauts. "We thought about how we could bring gods more into play. So we said, 'Why don't we intrinsically link the character development with the favor of the gods?'" To bring that vision to life, the normal approach to experience has been scrapped, and the player's relationship with a number of deities takes its place. "Although the entire Greek pantheon exists in our universe, Jason's going to have four patrons: Ares, Apollo, Athena, and Hermes. Each one roughly corresponds to something related to his character growth." As examples, Hermes might improve your speed, but only Apollo can boost your healing ability. Throughout the game, you'll try to complete an array of heroic deeds, from tracking down a lost individual to killing a certain number of one enemy type. Finish a deed, and you can dedicate that action to a given god and your heroism in their eyes will increase. Concurrently, your progression along that god's skill tree will progress. "We have this whole loop that we do," continues Del Castillo. "What the player does affects the gods. What the gods do affects the world. And what the world does affects the player."

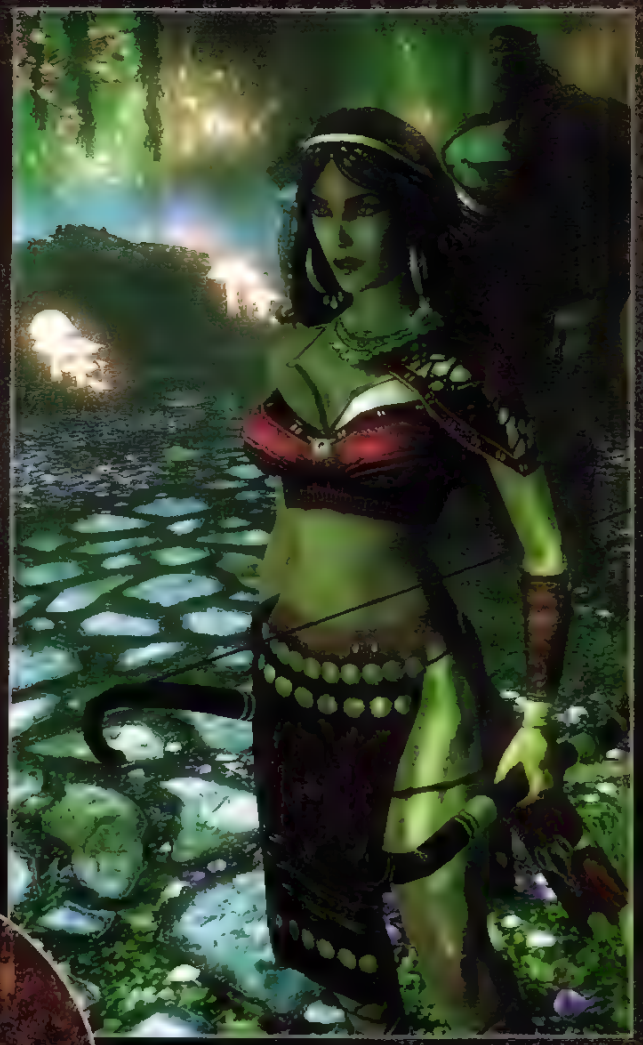
The ever-changing whims of the gods are difficult to predict. While you'll never move backwards on any skill tree, any of the gods can become furious if you displease them, and they'll rain down torments, from strengthening your enemies' attacks to hindering your progress in an area. Greatly please a god, and he'll visit miracles on you, boosting your health or revealing hidden areas that lie in your path. Beyond direct adjustments to gameplay, the favor of one god or another will be on constant display. If Hermes currently hates you, the wind will rise and buffet your characters. At the same time, Ares may consider you his favored son, brightening torches in your path with his power over flame, or dimming them to near darkness when his anger at you flares.

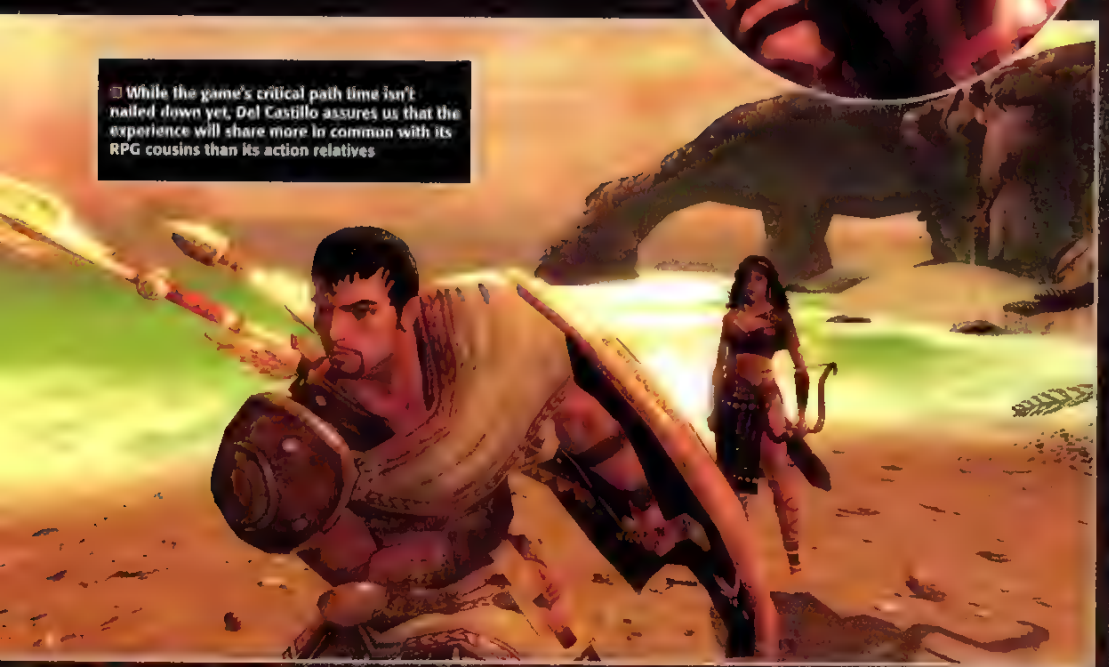
Take a character all the way through a given god's skill tree, and the divine being will summon you out of the world and reward you with a hero's trial. We were told of one god that would summon you to the Elysian Fields when you reached this "golden" status with them. There you'd be challenged to fend off a horde of attacking satyrs with an endless supply of throwing spears. Completing each of the four god's trials will grant you one part of a remarkable weapon – a special treat for players who manage to satisfy all of the hard-to-please gods.



There is no monetary system to speak of in the game. Instead of looting bodies, the noble Jason will have the option to say last rites over fallen foes so their souls can move on to Hades. Much like collecting dog tags in another game, special rewards await players who show proper respect to the dead

Most choices in the game will have at least three options. One option might please one god and upset another. A second choice will do the reverse. A third option might compromise, and improve each god's opinion of you only slightly. While each choice has consequences, none of the choices are wrong





While the game's critical path time isn't nailed down yet, Del Castillo assures us that the experience will share more in common with its RPG cousins than its action relatives

Together or Alone

Cooperative play is one more way in which Rise of the Argonauts hopes to stand apart from the crowd. While details of this exciting feature are still in the works, Del Castillo plans to include cooperative play with at least one friend both off and online. It sounds as if this will be the only way in which you'll gain direct control over the other varied heroes the game has to offer. What remains to be seen is how much of the upgrade system, story, and weapon selection will be included in the cooperative mode – these dilemmas have been one of the major obstacles to cooperative role-playing in the past. Here's hoping Liquid can find a worthy solution.

There's little to complain about in the conceptual design that is the framework for this compelling, myth-driven adventure. With innovative ideas and a solid game structure, it's easy to get excited about the potential presented by Rise of the Argonauts. What remains is the hard part – making everything work and delivering the promised content and breadth of gameplay experiences. It's here that Liquid faces an uphill battle. Between programming for new and complicated console platforms to successfully integrating ideas from several challenging genres, an array of obstacles await. However, if their early successes are any indication, this maiden voyage of the Argo may surprise more than a few staid gamers.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP | NINTENDO DS | PC

The Golden Compass

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SHINY, A2M (DS) > RELEASE DECEMBER 4

HIS DARK LICENSED GAME

This is pretty much exactly how it pictured Mrs. Coulter's apartment

This Gyptian vessel takes Lyra north to uncertain doom

The announcement of this game is going to be super exciting for some and completely off the radar for others. Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy, published between 1995 and 2000, has sold millions of copies worldwide but still has yet to claim Harry Potter-like status. New Line Cinema hopes to raise the profile on this epic fantasy tale when it releases a film based on the first book, *The Golden Compass*, on December 7. Fans of the books have been going wild with speculation on how they will be translated to the screen [see sidebar]. But perhaps the bigger question is how to make this world into a fun game.

Sega has recruited developer Shiny, known for Earthworm Jim and games based on the Matrix movies. This will be Shiny's first project after the departure of founder David Perry and the signing with developer conglomerate Foundation 9. "A majority of the core team is still intact during [the transition] and we are constantly learning how to better bring a film experience to an interactive format," says lead designer Dax Berg. "No matter how much we love the book, the film, or the universe, it is our goal to create the gameplay first, and then wrap the narrative of the universe around that. If you try to do it the other way you often do not end up with a solid game."

Shiny plans to mix exploration, platforming, stealth, minigames, puzzle-solving, and even some brawling as you take control of Lyra's massive bear friend, Iorek. In the books, Lyra is known for her ability to talk her way out of sticky situations, so Shiny is trying to incorporate this into gameplay as well. "We've created a deception minigame within the game which is played out in a series of flowing conversation rounds where Lyra attempts to win over her opponent by means of persuasion," says co-lead designer Ken Lee. Players will use this against NPCs and enemies alike to obtain information

Check out the screen to the left for the first look at Pan's ermine form

THE BOOKS AND THE FILM

The Golden Compass follows the story of a young girl named Lyra Belacqua who lives in an alternate version of our own world. In this place, all humans have a constant animal companion called a daemon that is essentially part of their being. Lyra's adventure begins when she sets off with a group called the Gyptians to rescue her friend Rodger and the many other children who have been kidnapped by the mysterious Gobblers. She eventually obtains an alethiometer (a.k.a. the golden compass), which will answer any question you ask it by pointing to a series of coded symbols. Lyra is one of only a few people in the world who can actually decipher these codes. As the story progresses she encounters a hot air balloon piloting cowboy, atypical witches, and sentient armored bears.

Newcomer Dakota Blue Richards will play the role of Lyra in the film adaptation. And the roles of the powerful opposing characters Marisa Coulter and Lord Asriel will be played by Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig. But will we hear these stars in the game? "We're trying to stay true to the motion picture and voice-over is a key component to this," says lead designer Dax Berg. "We'll have more to announce in the coming months."

and gain access to blocked locations. Aside from verbal dodges, Lyra will also physically evade captors in minigame form. This makes a little more sense than artificially tacking on some punch and kick combos.

Lyra's daemon, Pantalaimon, will be able to morph into four different animal forms with a quick press of the d-pad. One of the forms, an ermine (think weasel), will help Lyra balance on ledges and highlight hidden paths. The alethiometer will serve as a tool for hardcore players to get deeper into the game. "Throughout the game Lyra can find or come across dozens upon dozens of questions about the world," says Berg. "The player can pull meanings from these questions and attach them to appropriate compass symbols depending on their current knowledge and scope of the world. The more meanings they match correctly the easier it is to divine a correct answer which in turn unlocks more areas/aspects, and lore in the game."

The Golden Compass will contain 13 different stages that follow and extend outside of the book and film. While the core gameplay will remain essentially the same across the various platforms, it doesn't mean motion controls are out of the picture. "We will be taking full advantage of Sony's Sixaxis controller and many aspects of the Wii Remote and its nunchuk," says Berg.

As far as movie tie-ins go, we're definitely excited about the potential for The Golden Compass. Let's just hope it can deliver to the lofty expectations of the constantly growing set of His Dark Materials fans. ■ ■ ■

Electricity is one of the natural defenses your cell can develop

PC

Spore

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

IN THE BEGINNING

When most gamers think about Spore, the first thing that comes to mind is the simulation's ambitious scope. Demonstrations of the game have illustrated how it follows the evolution of a player-created organism into a world-spanning civilization, but even a race of galactic conquerors needs to start somewhere. We spoke with one of Spore's designers, Chaim Gingold, about what players can expect from their humble beginnings as a single cell.

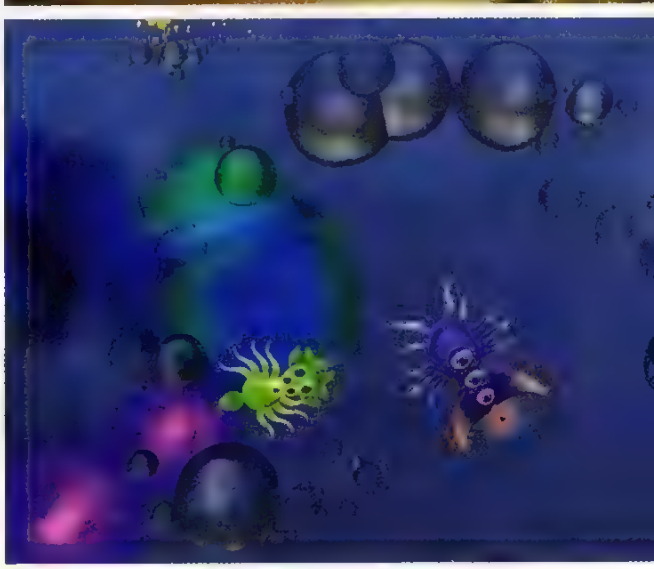
"Why would you want to play a game about bacteria?" laughs Gingold. "We tried to think about, if Pixar were to make a movie about bacteria, how would they make it cool, appealing, and fun?" This philosophy is what gave rise to Spore's tidepool phase, a mixture of charming visuals and easy-to-understand gameplay that introduces the game's key concepts. In many ways, the cell level acts as a tutorial to familiarize players with simplified versions of Spore's various editors and mechanics.

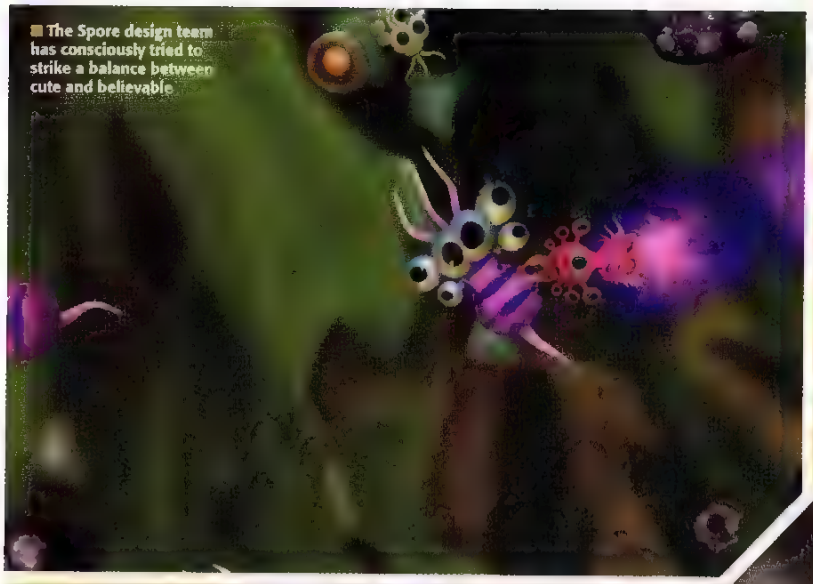
"Think about the original Super Mario on NES," explains Gingold. "The first screen is totally blank, but it teaches you how to walk and sets up the main goal: Move to the right. Then you see one goomba, some blocks, and a mushroom. This way, players know they can stomp things, break blocks, and grow larger." Similarly, the tidepool phase will gradually give players the gameplay vocabulary they will need to succeed as Spore progresses. At first, it's all about finding food and growing larger. Once you figure that out, predators emerge to teach you how to stay alive. Eventually your cell will lay an egg, which gives you the opportunity to use the creature editor to make modifications to the next generation.

Despite the fact that the cell level has a definite educational quality, it shouldn't be dismissed as an unimportant part of the gameplay. Parallels have been drawn between this sequence and the classic arcade title Pac-Man – a comparison Gingold thinks is fair to a limited extent. "Pac-Man is about eating the right stuff, and not getting eaten. In the cell level, there's always someone bigger than you who will try to eat you, and always someone littler than you to get." The concept may be similar, but remember that Pac-Man can't level up or improve, and it's this progression that sets Spore apart from the arcade-style titles from which it draws inspiration.

The tide pool is separated into discrete stages, and for the last part of the phase players will see a beach beckoning in the background. The cell level ends as your creation crawls slug-like onto that beach to begin its life on land. This is where the creature game begins, and while specifics on this phase are still unknown, we're pretty sure you're going to want to get some legs as soon as possible. "Of course, you don't have to add legs," adds Gingold. "You can slide around like a slug if you want. It's Spore." ■■■

All of the life in the tide pool is created with the same tools available to the player





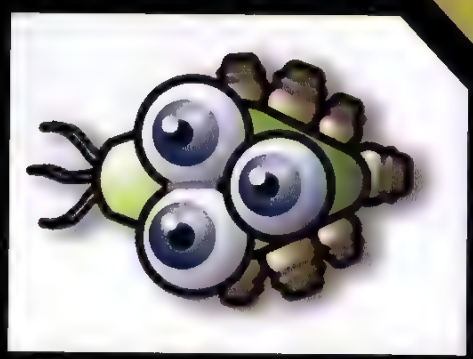
The Spore design team has consciously tried to strike a balance between cute and believable

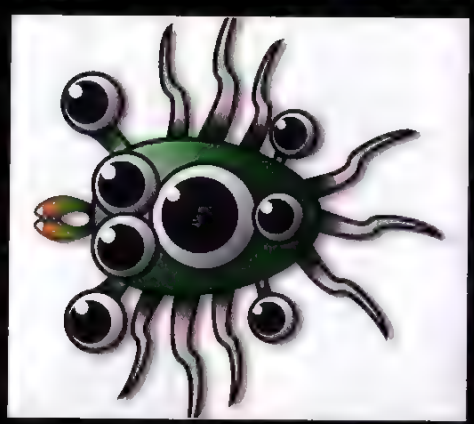
Adding a flagellum gives you decent maneuverability, but a slow rate of movement

Each level will feature foes of various sizes, and a mixture of predators and prey

WE'RE NOT ALONE

As you swim through the primordial ooze, you will encounter a variety of other organisms that have been created using the exact same tools available to players. Internally, the team has given the "enemy cells" cute names like Chomper and Pinky, but players will know them by behavior rather than name. Pinky, for instance, is swift and annoying, which makes it incredibly satisfying when you are fast enough to catch up and devour it. Chomper is large and slow, so you'll have to give it a wide berth until you are advanced enough to defeat it. Even at this early phase in the game, these creatures give a glimpse of the diversity Spore will allow in the levels to come.





Chomping mandibles will allow you to break up larger objects into digestible pieces

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
> DEVELOPER NAMCO BANDAI **> RELEASE** HOLIDAY 2007

SETTING THE BAR

No, those aren't photos you're looking at, but we certainly wouldn't blame you if it took you a second glance to realize it. Ace Combat has always had a reputation for remarkable visuals, but the move to next-generation hardware seems like it's placing the franchise in a league of its own. In addition to snagging these amazing new screens, we spoke to the director of the game, Natsuki Isaki, who filled us in on what's in store for the franchise beyond a drastic graphics overhaul.

One major shift he describes is the number of NPC characters and vehicles in a battle at one time. "Advanced AI enemies and allied units carry out their missions and interact on the battlefield. These units react in real time to the player's actions creating a 'living' battlefield of constant change," Isaki tells us. "Imagine a battlefield crisscrossed with contrails and missile fire. Bases burn as a wounded bomber falls out of formation painting a swath of thick black smoke, and burning battleships fire their final shots." Adding to this excitement is the expanded ability players will have to command naval and ground forces in addition to other flight units. "Various allied units actively pursue individual missions within the overall war zone," Isaki continues. "If the player helps one of these units achieve their mission objective, that unit will in turn come to the player's aid when need be." By building up an array of allies across the battlefield, players will conceivably be able to call down massive bombardments from ground, sea, and air as they confront their most difficult fights.

Xbox Live will play host to an array of online multiplayer options. Battles Royale offers huge every-man-for-himself arenas, and a team-based version adds additional strategy. Another mode has one team defending a base that the alternate team is out to obliterate. There are even plans for a co-op mode where players join up for particularly tough stand-alone battles against the AI.

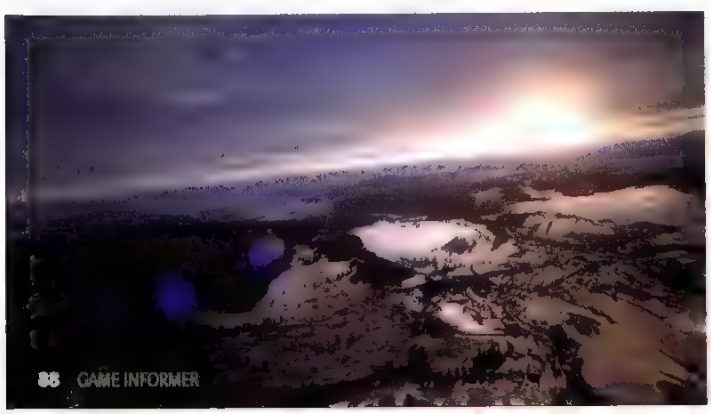
Story-wise, expect another modern military conflict in a fictitious world analogous to our own – this time involving a prosperous world power at the tail end of a civil war that is suddenly drawn into a larger conflict. While it sounds as if there will be only one central character, you'll learn more about him and the world he lives in through seven other main characters who each have their own perspective on the situation. While the realistic graphics continue to push the envelope, long time fans needn't worry about over-the-top boss fights. According to Natsuki Isaki, next-generation tech has allowed the team to make even more massive and devastating machines of war than before. We're crossing our fingers for a giant flying mechanical squid that shoots lightning and devours helicopters for fuel. That would be sweet.

Of course, the graphical magic isn't to be forgotten. "We've been able to achieve flawlessly detailed photo-realistic sky and land visuals whether viewing them from thousands of feet up or screaming by at tree top level," Isaki points out. "The clouds are another graphical area worth noting. Things such as large billowing cumulonimbus clouds warning of a coming storm just couldn't be done before." Well, call us impressed. We'll be signing up for action soon, and we'll let you know as soon as we've spent some quality time in the cockpit if the game plays as good as it looks. ■ ■ ■

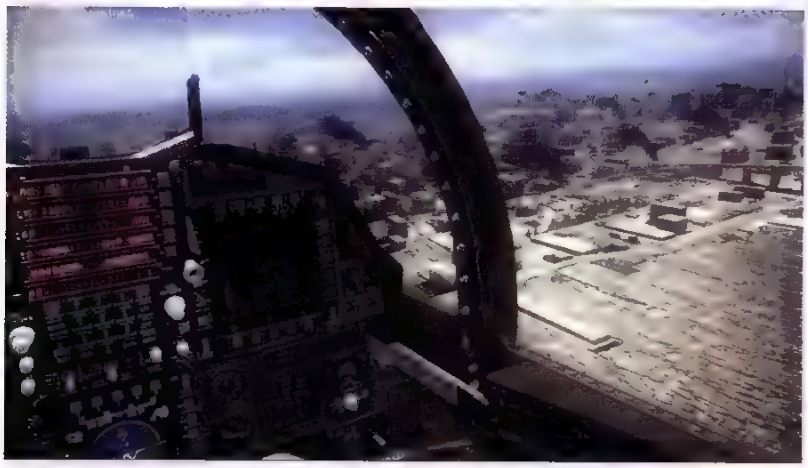
■ Next-gen tech allows for some remarkable new feats – the clouds are one of the most exciting advances for the dev team

■ The top ranked players in the world will be awarded an exclusive rank that will show beside their gamer tag within the game

■ Story will be told from the perspective of at least seven main characters as they reflect on their experiences with the central hero



Online battles will include both competitive and cooperative options



While the planes have always looked amazing, Ace Combat 6 brings the same level of jaw-dropping realism to the massive stretches of land and sea

Behold John Travolta's next career phase

"Please don't nerf me next patch!"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** EA MYTHIC **> RELEASE** 2008

WHERE "WAAAAGH!" IS A NOUN

Anyone who even remotely follows massively multiplayer gaming should be aware by now that Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning from EA Mythic promises to be the next great player-versus-player MMORPG. The minds behind Dark Age of Camelot's excellent realm-versus-realm gameplay have several years' worth of ideas to pour into Warhammer's PvP component, and it looks great (hostile players even collide, so they can't walk through each other!). But what about the rest of the game? What about the dragon-slaying that no fantasy MMO is complete without?

EA Mythic's answer to that question comes in the form of public quests. These are zone-wide objectives that spawn dynamically for different factions depending on what else is going on the world (and a healthy dose of random selection). The twist is that public quests are basically scripted outdoor raid encounters designed to get people working together against a common threat, which is tied to the overarching war that is always going on.

One example that we saw involved the forces of Chaos attacking a farming village on the outskirts of the Empire. Intrepid warriors that we are, we rallied a dozen or so farmers against the enemy. At this point, the second stage of the quest began with the farmers arming themselves from a nearby cache of weaponry. Shortly thereafter, a flood of Chaos warriors came charging out of the woods and made quick work of the poor saps before we could respond and show them who's boss. Breaking this first offensive triggered the onslaught of a massive ogre, who stomped out of the woods and slaughtered us quite handily, along with everyone else who came near him for the next five minutes before storming back into the dark forest.

For our money, these public quests are absolutely brilliant. Not only are they somewhat dynamic content that add to the fiction of the gameworld and make it seem more alive; they serve as a great way to get people to play together and get to know each other, easing the newbies into the social interactions that make the MMO experience so much fun.

We could talk about Warhammer for hours. The asymmetry of the factions, where each nation has its own classes and races, is fascinating. The way that EA Mythic is allowing tanks to actually protect their squishier groupmates in PvP without resorting to "taunting" or forced targeting is great. And the fact that Chaos magi ride around on metal discs that are actually transdimensional sharks (don't ask) is…well…interesting. Since the game won't be out for another year, though, we'll just leave you with the knowledge that we think Warhammer has the capability to tear us away from WoW when it comes out. ■ ■ ■

"I'm really mad! And edgy! Look at the skull on my banner! I even have a The Used CD here somewhere..."

Assimilated By The Borg?

EA Mythic was, until recently, Mythic Entertainment – one of the last independent MMO houses. Super-publisher Electronic Arts bought the company out to bolster its almost-imperceptible presence in the massively multiplayer market. We've all heard the horror stories about established development teams being broken up and creative visions destroyed when EA steps in, but EA Mythic assures us that isn't the case. According to the developer, EA has such faith in the product that no staffing changes have been made and no creative control asserted, and that the team has even received an increased budget and more time to make Warhammer the best it can be. Sure, it sounds like public-relations spin, but the product speaks for itself even in this early stage. We're as excited for the game as we ever have been, and that's no small praise.

This whole island is one of the dozens of instanced PvP arenas

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2

NASCAR 08

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (PS3, 360), 1 OR 2-PLAYER (PS2) (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE, 2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** JULY

NO SINGLE-FILE RESTART

Electronic Arts' NASCAR franchise didn't make the leap to the next generation last year, but the fact that this racing series is now making the jump isn't even the big news here. The stock car association has started using a new car body style dubbed The Car of Tomorrow (COT), and as NASCAR phases it in this year, it will change the way racing is done both in real life and EA's game.

NASCAR started investigating a new stock body template after the death of Dale Earnhardt at Daytona in 2001, and the COT features various safety features. In relation to the video game, the COT promises more competitive racing and greater flexibility in how you set up your car to your liking. Overall, the car will grip better due to increased downforce, and developer Tiburon says that old-school slingshot passes using the draft will be easier. Also, due to the COT's reduced reliance on aerodynamics for speed, cars out in the front of the pack won't be able to dominate as much.

Players can choose to use the COT only in the actual races it will appear in this year, or they can run the entire schedule with it. This is just one change to how gamers will approach playing the game in NASCAR 08. Instead of the old career path where you slowly worked your way to the Nextel Cup series, now you'll start out by knocking down license challenges (which will also teach you the skills and terminology of the sport) to earn contracts with big-name teams like Penske Racing. These contracts will stipulate a few necessary conditions over the next few races, such as averaging a finish in the top 10. If you complete these goals, you'll win a car setup from that team (getting a setup from Jimmie Johnson sure would be a sweet advantage) and unlock future races on the schedule, so the result is you can jump between doing races and getting licenses.

Visually, NASCAR 08 features real-time time of day changes that produce shadows and sun glare for drivers to reckon with, and also a 3D cockpit. This allows you to swivel the camera around with the right analog stick at any time and see where the other cars are – a useful tool that will augment the series' traditionally poor spotter audio. Also at your disposal is a customizable, real-time HUD that tells you your tires' temp and grip level, degree of banking in turns, and more. It will be interesting to see if this HUD gives you enough feedback that players will be encouraged to make use of the game's 40 different car adjustment settings. Most racing games aren't instructive enough in telling players why their cars are handling the way they are, serving only to scare users from tweaking their car setups away from the default setting.

With NASCAR not scheduled to run the Car of Tomorrow full time until 2009, drivers' opinions of the new body will likely remain split until teams get more comfortable with it. Imagine if all its promises come true and we're blessed with races where winning and losing come down to who's a better driver and which crew chief can make the necessary in-race adjustments to find speed. Sounds like that'd make for a fun game. ■■■

TOMORROW'S CAR TODAY

As of the time of this writing, the COT had only been used in two races, Bristol and Martinsville – both short tracks where the new aerodynamics of the model couldn't be fully tested in true racing conditions. Driver reaction was mixed as to whether it actually provided better racing, but the added stability of the COT did seem to make it harder to bump people out of the way from behind.

■ The Car of Tomorrow's dramatic front splitter and wing spoiler

■ The current car form featuring a sleek nose and blade spoiler

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

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> DEVELOPER EA TIBURON **> RELEASE** LATE SUMMER

THE BEST TIGER EVER?

It's like we hardly recognize Tiger anymore. First he doesn't want to hang out on Friday nights and play Crackdown (by the way, Tiger will get Cheetos fingers all over your controllers). Next thing we know some other dude is wearing the green jacket at the Masters and this year's Tiger is like nothing we've seen before from the series – which is a very, very good thing.

It's no surprise that Tiger 08 will play much like its predecessors and contain its customary modes, but that's not what we're here to talk about. The series is now being developed by Madden makers EA Tiburon, and the studio is busting out a sweet-sounding feature called GamerNet. It allows you to record your play on any shot, series of holes, or entire course. This creates a clip that you'll upload for everyone to play. Players can then go through and play whatever clips they want, whether it's your amazing 18 holes at Pebble Beach, that time you hit the cart path and still bounced it onto the green, or some other guy's spectacular back-to-back holes in one. Think of it as YouTube for Tiger Woods. Clips will be classified into five categories, but EA says that the whole database is searchable by any number of criteria, and that it will add categories after launch depending on what kind of content is posted.

Players can set win conditions for each replay they post, and points will be awarded for completion based on difficulty, etc. You'll even get double the points if you're the first to beat it. Two leaderboards will exist – one to track how many GamerNet points you've bagged for your accomplishments and one for those who actually put the clips up. The latter creates a cool "Times Viewed" bragging right for those who consistently come up with the most buzzed-about, must-play challenges. Since you obviously have to perform the feats in your clip before you post it, GamerNet will serve as a stage for everyone's created characters.

GamerNet's flexibility is intriguing because it's an online feature that does away with many of the annoyances of traditional online play without losing the benefit of being plugged into a community where you go up against your friends and the best out there. Maybe you just want to kill time knocking down some easy clips, or perhaps you'll only play those challenges put up by your friends. How you make use of the feature is up to you. The only bad thing about this whole thing is that – at the time of this writing – EA wasn't sure if the Wii version would have GamerNet/Game Face. We wouldn't bet on it.

You don't expect Tiger to be very different from year to year, and iterations in the series since Tiger 2004 have struggled to make as big a mark. But if GamerNet can fulfill its promise, EA will have shown that the yearly sports grind doesn't have to be a jinx, and proven that you don't have to

YOU ARE TOO UGLY FOR ELIN NORDEGREN

Tiger 08 has evolved its Game Face feature to allow you to use a picture of yourself for your created golfer. You can use a picture taken with the PS3 or Xbox 360 cameras, or you can import a picture from your computer via a special EA website. Once uploaded, you set marker points as guides on the front of your face and its profile. The computer will generate a bald likeness of you. From here you can use the more traditional Tiger Game Face features to add your hairdo and whatever crazy features you want. Whatever you come up with, you're still likely uglier than Tiger.

Elin Nordegren, Tiger's Swedish model wife

Tiger can't believe he couldn't complete your GamerNet challenge

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

The Darkness

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES > DEVELOPER STARBREEZE STUDIOS > RELEASE JUNE 25

HEART OF DARKNESS

■ These heads will act as your HUD, displaying demonic powers and strength by number of eyes and the size of their glowing tattoos

What is The Darkness? It's not a superhero game. Sure, it's based off a comic book, but it was a book created to be the antithesis to heroes like Superman. Main character Jackie Estacado is a mafia hitman who inherits violent powers on his 21st birthday. It's also not a first-person shooter – at least, not a traditional one. Sure, it uses the first-person perspective, but it's about so much more than just shooting guys with guns. Starbreeze Studios, the guys behind fan favorite The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay, are developing the game with their own brand of action that incorporates stealth, strategy, and some light RPG elements.

2K Games likes to show this game off every few months, and we have to admit that it looks a little better each time we see it. This time we got to see an area called the Otherworld. Two fifths of the game takes place in this area, which seems to be a perverted version of the First World War where soldiers fight in perpetuity but never die. We saw men who looked like jigsaw puzzles because they had been pieced back together so many times.

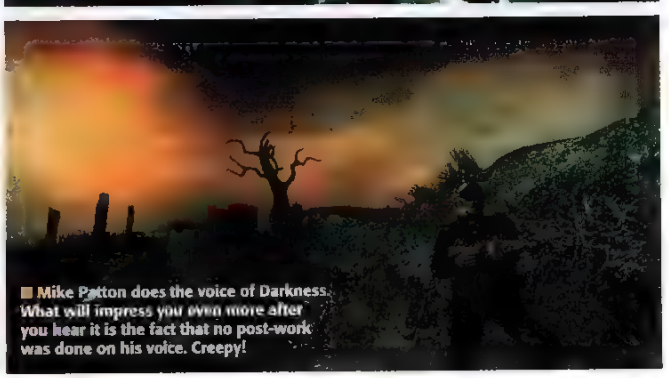
This other world is also where Jackie gains some new toys: two guns decked out with a creepy supernatural design. These weapons are able to kill enemies where normal handguns had previously been ineffective. They also use no ammo; instead they function as one of Jackie's Darkness powers, and like his other powers they are limitless as long as he is able to constantly recharge his Darkness by staying out of the light.

Everything about the game seems tailored to make players feel immersed in a richer world. Jackie has a real in-game body that casts a shadow, and his darkling minions will interact with each other and even carry on conversations. Jackie can receive side missions from NPCs, but if he is in full Darkness mode or is pointing a gun at them, they will be intimidated and can even freak out. In one rain-soaked graveyard scene we witnessed, enemies who had moments ago been heatedly chasing Jackie down begin to run away or cower in fear after Jackie first inherits the Darkness.

Other new features we witnessed help smooth out the game's storytelling. Loading screens between levels have been cleverly disguised with character monologues. Jackie appears in front of a black screen and peppers the game with personal anecdotes; we don't even see a loading bar. What gives these scenes an added sense of realism is that the voice actors were motion captured during their recording sessions, so the movement of the game's characters correspond really well with whatever they are saying. So back to our first question, what is The Darkness? Our answer: promising. ■■■

■ The game's plot is penned by famed comic writer Paul Jenkins

■ The four horsemen of the Apocalypse are in the game at various points. This is a representation of Death



■ Mike Patton does the voice of Darkness. What will impress you even more after you hear it is the fact that no post-work was done on his voice. Creepy!

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

navy.com/seals

do you have what it takes?

No time for love, Dr. Jones. The Club is all about running and gunning

Fear the moustache. Respect the moustache

This is what happens when you don't respect the 'stache

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

The Club

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** BIZARRE CREATIONS **> RELEASE** Q4 2007

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

When it debuted at the 2006 E3, The Club was lost in the shuffle of blockbuster announcements and next-gen fever. Now that the smoke has cleared, Bizarre Creations has revealed more information about its upcoming third-person shooter. Does the studio that cut its chops on great racing titles like Project Gotham Racing and surprise hits like Geometry Wars have what it takes to create an interesting action title? Gain admittance to The Club to find out.

The premise of The Club comes straight out of a Van Damme movie like *Lionheart*. The world's wealthy and elite aren't content watching the clean competition of modern sport, so they pay astronomical amounts of money to join an underground organization – The Club. This shadowy group operates above the law, hosting a network of clandestine events featuring the ultimate in entertainment – gambling, gunplay, and body counts. No one knows exactly where or when The Club originated, but rumors link the underground organization to the Hellfire Club of 18th century London, the Napoleonic Wars, and even to some of the founding fathers of the United States. The modern day network sponsors events all across the world in forgotten areas like abandoned steel factories and war-torn regions.

Gamers can play though the game as one of eight characters, each entering the competition for his or her own reasons: blackmail, revenge, or just pure bloodlust. Playing through each of the narratives will only take six to eight hours, so the replay value should be high.

The Club offers an exciting amalgam of game genres. It merges the kinetic pace of a racing title, the non-stop action of a brawler, and the gunplay of a shooter into its own arcade-like gameplay. Each level will play out in two to three minutes, placing stress on accuracy, speed, and style instead of the cautious approach advocated in many modern shooters.

The Club expects you to kill off your competition, so don't expect kudos simply for blazing through a level. Instead, emphasis is placed on how you take out your prey. Much like the systems implemented in fighting games, when you kill your first enemy, it activates a timed combo multiplier. The more kills you string together, the larger the multiplier will grow. If you drop out of a gunfight for a while, the combo will bleed away. The scoring system also awards bonus style points for pulling off challenging attacks like head shots, combat roll kills, and environmental explosions used to kill multiple baddies. At the end of each round, The Club tallies your overall score, which can be uploaded online for comparison to your friends and fellow gamers.

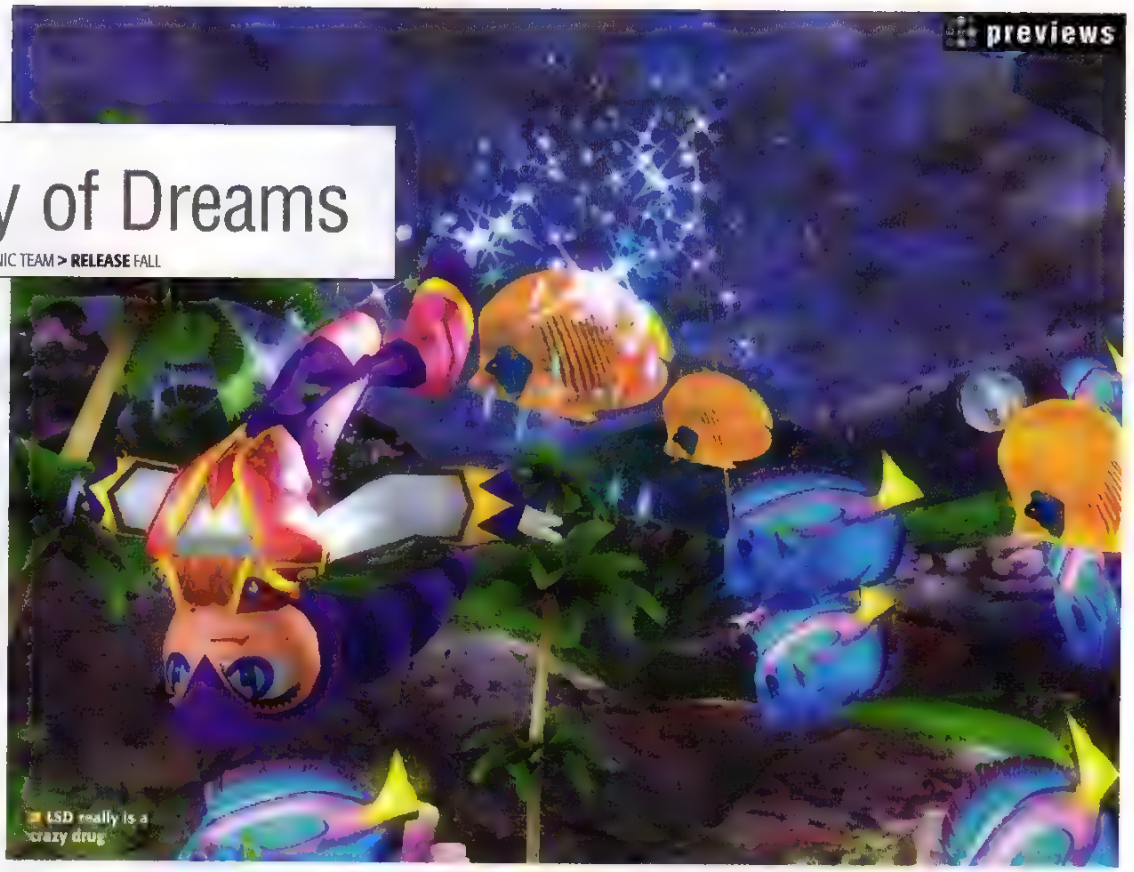
As you would expect, The Club features a vast array of weapons to choose from, including most modern guns and explosive devices like grenades. The first time you attempt a level, you must complete it with the default arsenal, but as you move though the level you can collect other weapons, which will then be unlocked and available when you replay the level.

Bizarre Creations has confirmed that there will be online and split-screen multiplayer for The Club, but it is keeping the details under wraps. Look for more information regarding this unique shooter as we move closer to the late 2007 release date. ■■■

Wii

Nights: Journey of Dreams

> **STYLE** 1 TO 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM > **RELEASE** FALL



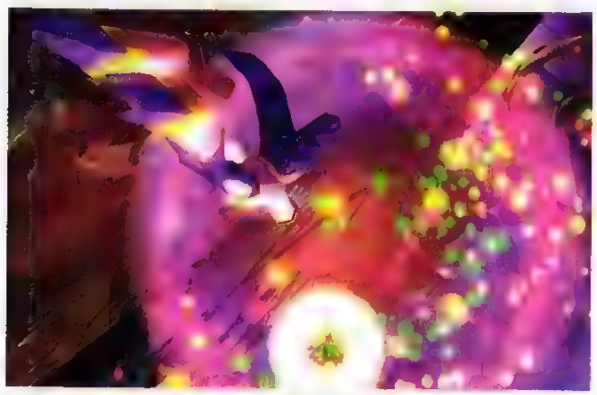
LSD really is a crazy drug

FANDREAM COME TRUE

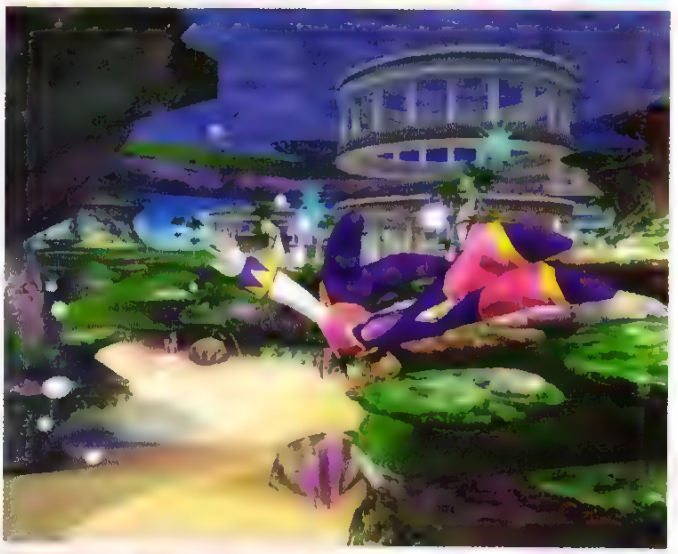
Due partially to the facts that it was one of the first games to let players explore a 3D world, there wasn't a whole lot of competition on the Saturn back in 1996, and it was actually a fun game, Sega's Nights: Into Dreams amassed a large cult following. If you listen closely you can hear a million little fanboy squeals of joy as they read this. But, for some reason Sega never went forward with a Nights sequel. That all changes later this year as Sega releases Nights: Journey of Dreams on the Nintendo Wii.

Players take control of the ridiculous-looking but loveable jester called Nights, and fly through seven different environments in a land called Nightopia – a fantasyland where dreams come to life. Nights will have to use his acrobatic skills to confront and defeat the inhabitants of the land of Nightmare, called – what else – Nightmarens. We don't know much about the story, but we suspect it will stay true to the lighthearted nature of the franchise. According to Sega, it will revolve around the themes of hope and courage.

One new gameplay mechanic involves the use of masks. In what might be similar to The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask, Nights will be able to equip himself with different masks that transform him and give him different abilities. A dragon mask will give him the ability to withstand strong winds, for example. A dolphin mask will transform him into a dolphin so he can swim underwater, while a rocket mask will allow Nights to travel at super fast speeds.

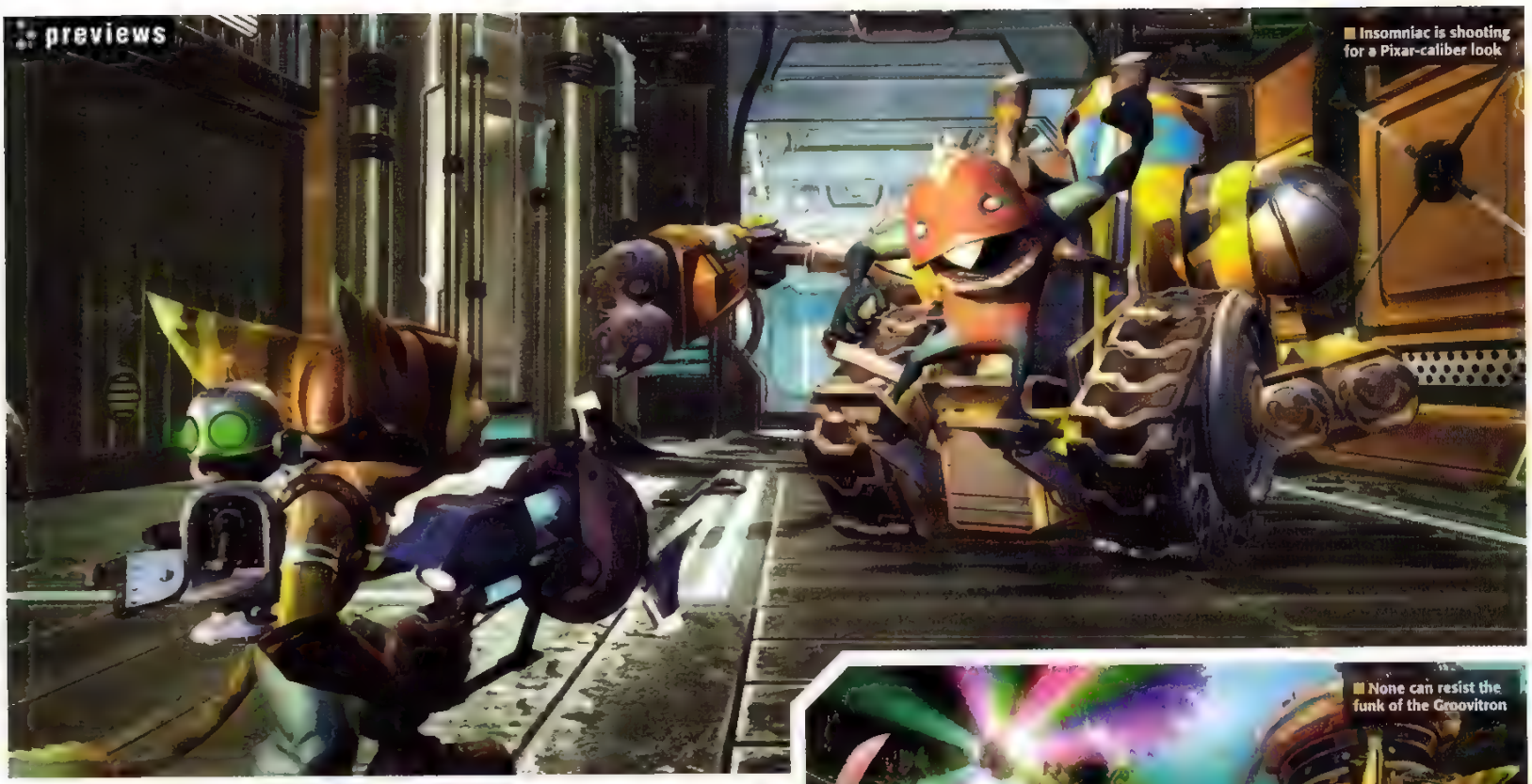


How the game will control is a big question, but Sega has said that it is hoping to use the Wii controls in some new and innovative ways. Since the original game required Nights to do a lot of aerial aerobics, we imagine that the Wii remote will end up doing some fancy airborne maneuvers of its own. The original game didn't have much in the way of multiplayer, so we are interested to know more about what Journey of Dreams will offer since it will have some kind of two-player mode. Finally, one of the more interesting rumors we've heard is that Journey of Dreams will work with the Wii's Forecast Channel to learn your local weather and then change the in-game scenery accordingly. Considering most gamers play games to escape the weather, we're not sure how excited people will be about this feature, but it sounds like a cool idea. ■■■

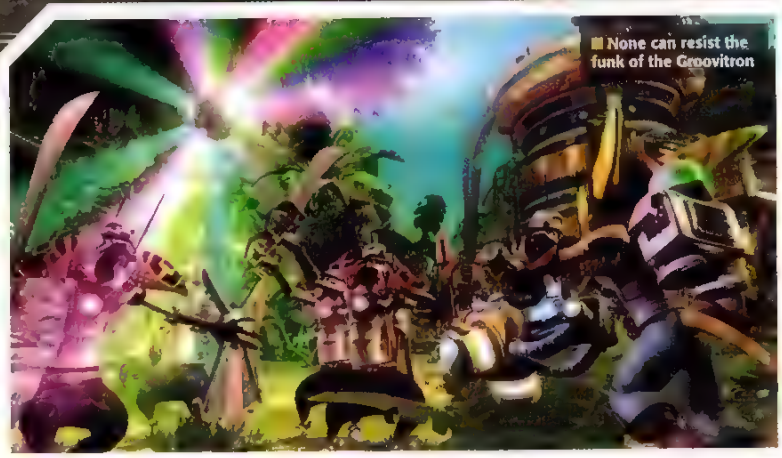


It looks like the bosses in Journey of Dreams will be very reminiscent of Into Dreams

Looking at Nights now, one wonders why we ever thought he looked cool; maybe we were watching so much Sailor Moon in the mid-'90s that it affected our judgment



Insomniac is shooting for a Pixar-caliber look



None can resist the funk of the Groovitron

PLAYSTATION 3

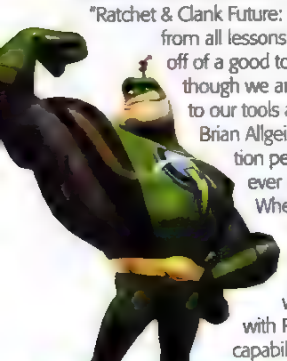
Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools Of Destruction

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** INSOMNIAC GAMES > **RELEASE** FALL

GENOCIDE IN SPACE

Coming off the heels of releasing the highest profile exclusive on PlayStation 3, Resistance: Fall of Man, Insomniac is now taking its marquee franchise next-gen for the very first time – except this time the team doesn't have the stress of a console launch on its shoulders.

"Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction gets to benefit from all lessons learned on Resistance and builds off of a good tools and engine foundation – though we are making major enhancements to our tools and engine," says creative director Brian Allgeier. "We also had a long pre-production period on RCF – longer than we've ever had on past Ratchet & Clank games. When the team finished Resistance, we had many of the levels designed and a storyline in place."



Obviously, the possibilities for what Insomniac can accomplish with Ratchet have expanded beyond the capabilities of the PS2. But what will it do with the extra horsepower? "We're now able to make much richer and sophisticated worlds that still have that stylized Ratchet & Clank feel – yet with a much greater dimension," says Allgeier. "Our surface technology gives us more control over the lighting, depth, and detail, and we believe that will give players that feeling of being in a CG-animated movie."

Ratchet and Clank are on more of a personal quest this time around. Even though the game takes place after the previous adventures, longtime fans will finally get to dig into Ratchet's origin as he searches a new galaxy for something called "The Lombax Secret." This all ties in with a new villain named Emperor Tachyon, who is hell bent on killing every Lombax in the entire universe, which, of course, includes Ratchet. "After having completed Ratchet: Deadlocked, we realized that we took the series about as far as it could go in the 'shooter' direction," declares Allgeier. "For RCF, we wanted to put more emphasis on creating a saga and more closely tying it to an epic adventure."

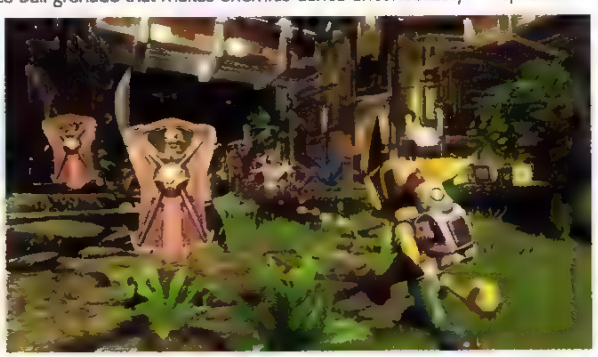
New wacky weapons abound including the Groovitron, a disco ball grenade that makes enemies dance uncontrollably. Ratchet can also toss slimy mines called Plasma Beasts that will jump out of the ground when enemies approach and tackle them in one big toxic mess. A gun called the Tornado Launcher shoots out whirlwinds that can be directed with Sixaxis motion controls, leaving the analog sticks free to handle the camera and character movement.

Ratchet will explore several futuristic locales like Stratus City, a floating metropolis featuring flying cars and creatures. Slag's Fleet serves as a spaceport for pirates to restock supplies and get into scuffles. Ratchet and Clank must also escape from Zordoom Prison, a high-security lockdown for shady creatures from all around the galaxy.

Since this adventure involves a lot of interstellar travel, there will be plenty of on-rails space battle sequences. "On R&C: Going Commando, senior artist Craig Goodman created space combat levels and had to make compromises to work within the limitations of the gameplay and technology," says Allgeier. "Now with the PS3 tech and the fact that the experience is more focused, he's been able to create some spectacular views of space."

Multiplayer is still under wraps, but Allgeier promises details soon and would only comment on Sony's upcoming Home in general terms (complete with a little Insomniac humor). "Much like MySpace provides a place where people of different interests can share ideas on photography, music, or fashion design for turtles, Home offers the potential for that sense of community to be developed for games. I'm sure eventually non-gamer related communities will grow too – hopefully not the kind that are in Second Life with those naked people in the clouds." ■■■

The little dot on the bottom left? Yeah, it's Ratchet



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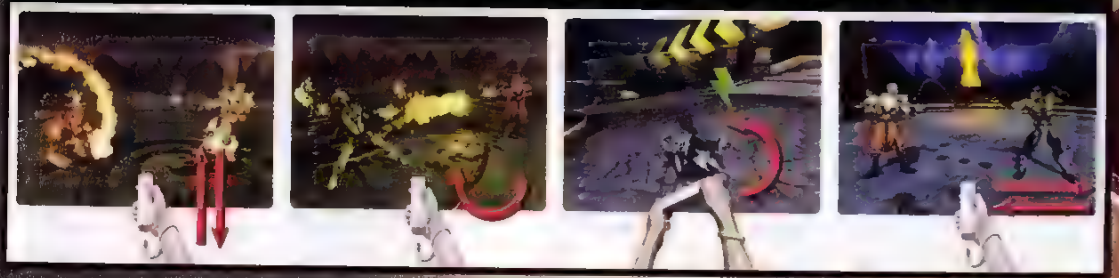

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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

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XBOX 360

Tenchu Z

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> DEVELOPER FROM SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** JUNE 12

GO NINJA, GO NINJA, GO

When Tenchu first came out on the PSone back in 1998, it developed a strong fan base due to its innovative sneaky action and entertaining stealth kill animations. The years have not been kind to the series, however. as sequel after sequel failed to improve on – or even fix the problems in – the original. We recently got a chance to talk to Tenchu Z's director Kiyoji Tomita about his new Tenchu game, how he hopes to change that tendency, and what a studio primarily known for their mech games thinks it can bring to the stealth action genre.

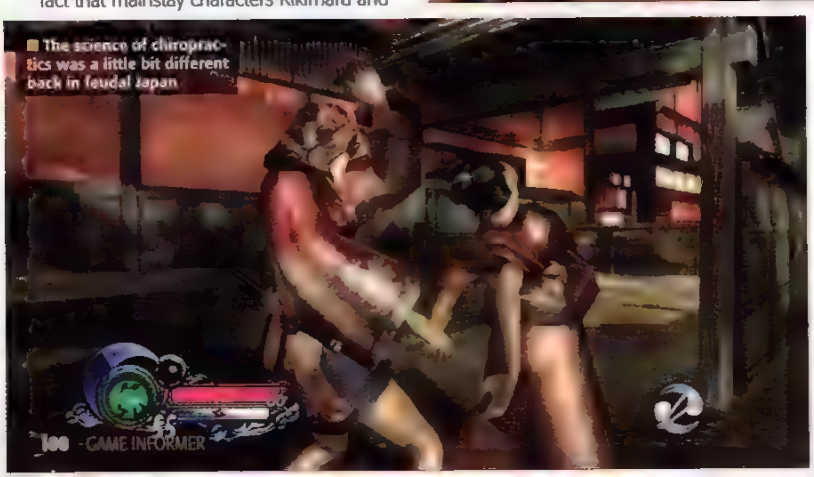
"The challenge," according to Kiyoji, "was finding a balance between action game features and stealth features. We know that people prefer flashier and showier ninja moves and swordfights, but we chose to focus on stealth and stealth kills." To this end, From Software is hoping for a return to the original feel of the first game, but with a few notable, and needed, changes. The camera, a constant weak point for the series, has been reworked – and its actually passable.

Another major change for the series is the fact that mainstay characters Rikimaru and Ayame are no longer playable. Now, players get to create their own ninja. "Actually, Tenchu Z is a special addition to the Tenchu series," says Kiyoji. "In the game, the main ninja character is the player's own creation and the story focuses on a group of ninjas as opposed to one specific ninja, so we decided that it would not be suitable for Rikimaru and Ayame to be main characters."

But there is another reason for the player-created characters. Kiyoji comments, "I decided to add character creation because of the strength of multiplayer mode on Xbox Live." The hope is that fans will grow to feel an investment in their created ninjas that is more meaningful than what they experienced in previous games. "Tenchu fans already have fond and vivid images of old familiar characters, so I did not want someone to destroy these images by making their own Rikimaru who runs slow and moves like a newbie."

This is the first time that Tenchu fans will be able to play with or against up to three friends online. Especially intriguing are the co-op levels where four people will be able to tackle one mission together. According to Kiyoji, "it requires good strategy and strong teamwork. However, the players can also act separately if they want. They can disrupt others to get a higher score."

Despite its new multiplayer and improved camera, Tenchu Z doesn't feel finished. In the build we played, the controls, AI, and graphics all needed some polish, and the new character creation system wasn't very deep. Hopefully, these issues can be ironed out before Tenchu's release in June, because it would be great to see Tenchu back on the top of the stealth action genre. ■■■



Office of National Drug Control Policy/Partnership for a Drug Free America

■ New tasty graphics: Totally worth the wait

XBOX 360 | PC

TimeShift

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE AND INTERNET) **> PUBLISHER** SIERRA **> DEVELOPER** SABER INTERACTIVE
> RELEASE FALL

A WHOLE NEW TIMESHIFT

"Wait a second? Wasn't this game already supposed to be out by now?" you may say to yourself. And you'd be right. Four years ago, Atari agreed to publish TimeShift for the original Xbox and PC – adding an Xbox 360 SKU one year later. Another year goes by and Sierra picks up the rights, canning the Xbox version with the intention to release the other versions in the fall of 2006. That date has come and gone without a peep, but there has been a hell of a lot going on behind the scenes.

In April 2006, Martin Tremblay left his position as head of Ubisoft Montreal to become the president of worldwide studios at Vivendi Games (Sierra's parent company). When he looked over Vivendi's lineup, Tremblay saw potential in what TimeShift could be if it was given more time.

"When he asked me about what would we do with another year my response was 'Are you f___ing kidding? We're seven bugs away from submitting to Microsoft!'" recalls senior producer Kyle Peschel. "Doing something as radical as giving a game another year when we were so close to the finish line is just unheard of."

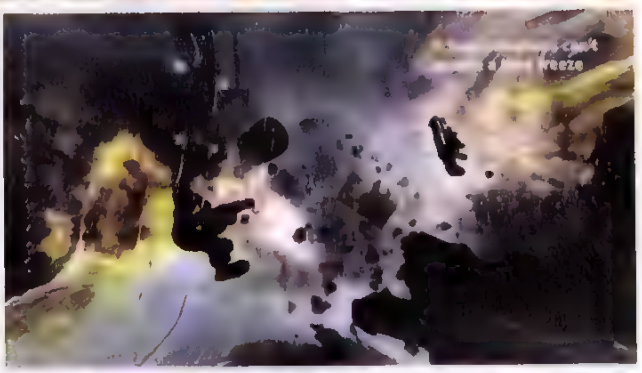
"We had to talk a few people down from the roof, but it all comes back to sacrifice and dedication," says Peschel. "It is not an easy thing to stand in front of the team and tell them that 70 percent of what they created and thought was finished is going out the window. But ultimately once you go back to all the wish lists of things we couldn't do because of time all the creativity flows again and we start kicking ass."

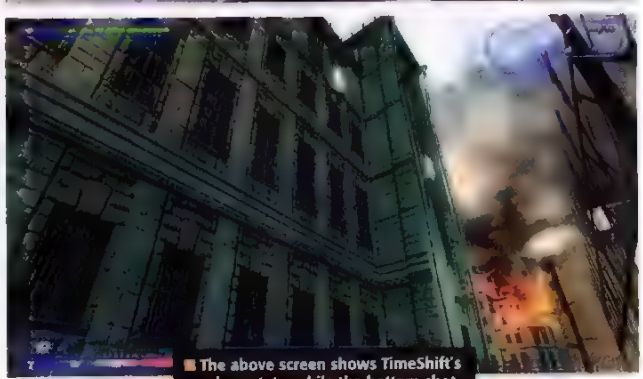
Saber has since been tackling a laundry list of new ideas and changes in focus. The shortlist includes beefing up the game engine, physics, and AI, redesigning the first four levels from scratch, reworking the entire storyline, creating new characters, adding a new vehicle, and tweaking multiplayer.

But perhaps the most drastic change is the ousting of the main character. "No more Michael Swift, no test pilot, just you believing [you] are the main character," says Peschel. This also means that previously announced Hollywood voice talent attached to TimeShift is now out of the picture. "We are in the process of recording all new VO for Timeshift and believe that Dennis [Quaid] and Michael [Ironside] did a great job with the original vision of the game, but we need to take this game in a different direction that supports a believable universe."

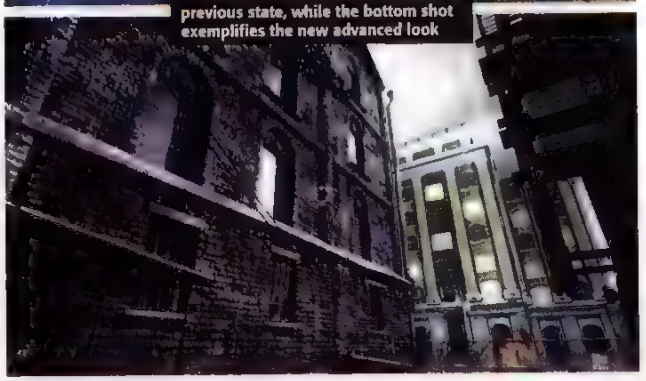
Sierra believes that the previous version's multiplayer mode was the strongest element of the game and has left the core mechanics in place outside of some balancing tweaks and customization options. Up to 16 players at a time will be able to choose from seven game modes spread across 14 multiplayer maps.

After seeing the latest screens of TimeShift compared to previous versions, it appears all of the tweaks were definitely worth it. Let's just hope this is *really* the last round of polish. ■■■





■ The above screen shows TimeShift's previous state, while the bottom shot exemplifies the new advanced look



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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Use of Drugs

Jump in.

XBOX 360

PC

Empire Earth III

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > PUBLISHER SIERRA
> DEVELOPER MAD DOC SOFTWARE > RELEASE FALL

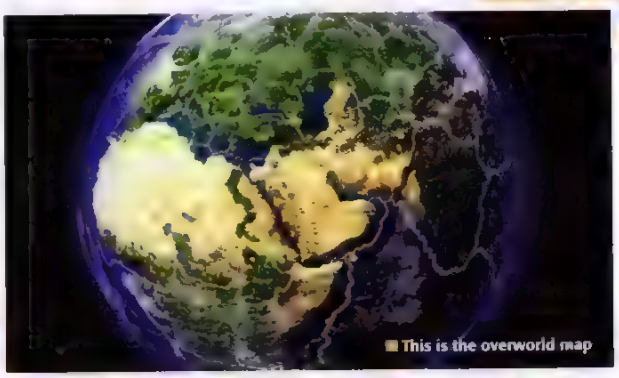
SWORDS, TANKS, AND MECHS

The sheer scale of Empire Earth has always been the franchise's strong point. Like Sid Meier's Civilization, Empire Earth lets players experience the entire range of human history, from hunting and gathering to the craziness of near-future warfare. Empire Earth III isn't falling far from the tree in that regard; however, developer Mad Doc Software is tightening up some of the less-enjoyable aspects of the last game's design, going through several months of polishing work to make the gameplay as smooth as possible, and dropping in an entirely new take on single-player RTS campaigns.

While Empire Earth III is a fairly traditional RTS in the sense that you gather resources, build up a base and army, and advance along a tech tree, it breaks the mold when it comes to the single-player campaign. Rather than having a set of scenarios that feature arbitrary limitations on what you can and can't build, you'll play out strategic turn-based campaigns on a globe of the Earth. Territories can be built up with improvements like barracks, tech can be researched, and RTS combat is joined when two opposing forces end their turns in the same area.

The overworld map is fairly simplistic, but not to the point of The Battle for Middle-earth. Certain technologies give powers that can change the layout of the board – for instance, the Coup ability switches ownership of a territory, though it comes along with a fair hit to your treasury. Armies can move around and assault territories while spies incite revolt, gather information, or steal valuable tech. Bases that you build in one RTS battle will remain there (though not your units, for obvious reasons) for subsequent engagements in that territory. All in all it's about what you'd expect, but for one cool addition: a dynamic mission generator.

■ The Revolutionary War will play out differently when we're in charge

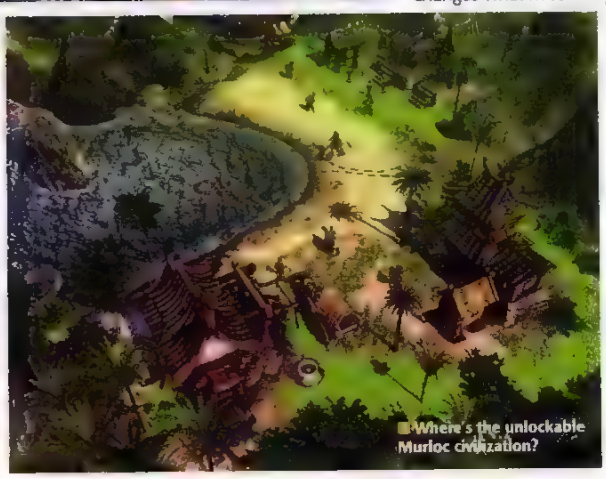


■ This is the overworld map

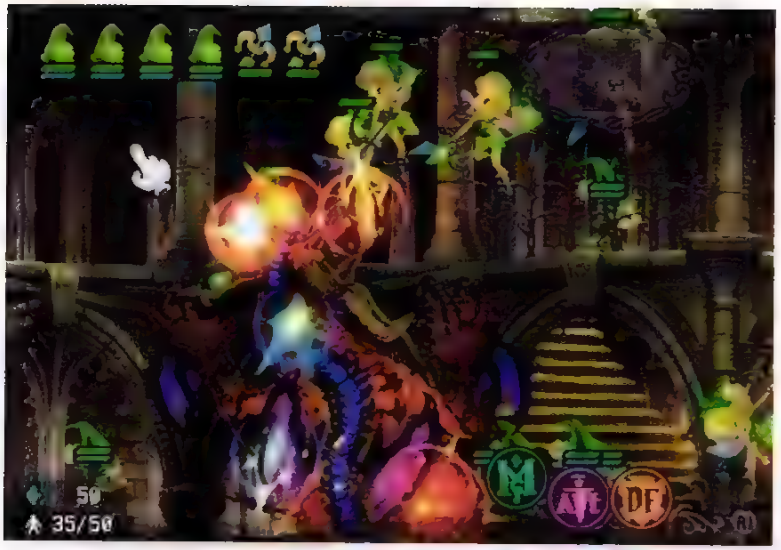
Depending on how the war is going on the overworld and what sorts of actions you're taking, you'll be presented with missions in the RTS combats that can give all sorts of rewards. For instance, helping one native tribe in a conflict against another might convince them to rebel against any foreign rule in that area. Since there are story trees associated with these goals, you might get another task to liberate a sister village from enemy control later on. This system changes what missions you get based on what's happening in the game, so every time you play the campaign – even if you're playing the same faction with the same settings – you should see different storylines and new objectives.

Mad Doc isn't ready to talk about the multiplayer aspect of Empire Earth III yet, other than to say that it has "big plans." With an offline campaign that sounds cool and the level of polish that we've already seen in action, though, the Empire Earth franchise is looking ready to step into the RTS spotlight with this entry. ■■■

■ Bombing runs never get old, despite the fact that they're in like every RTS ever



■ Where's the unlockable Murloc civilization?



PLAYSTATION 2

Grim Grimoire

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** NIPPON ICHI > **DEVELOPER** VANILLAWARE > **RELEASE** JUNE

GRIMHOG DAY

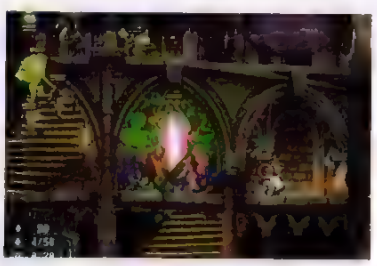
Judging from the screens of Grim Grimoire, at first glance you might think this is another preview for Odin Sphere. While the art style is similar in this title – also made by developer Vanillaware – the two games are drastically different.

Grim Grimoire is a 2D real-time strategy game, not an RPG. Using adorable elves as gatherer units, players will harvest mana crystals, which function as the game's only resource. Once enough mana has been accumulated, you expend it by summoning magical creatures to blaze a trail to victory. Your various thralls come from four schools of magic. For instance, elves and fairies are available through Glamour magic, while the Sorcery school allows you to call demons and dragons.

Apart from the fact that the action all happens on a 2D plane, many of the gameplay elements are similar to standard RTS titles. You create an army of beasts, separate them into groups, and send them against enemy units. There is a rock-paper-scissors relationship among the schools of magic (for instance, Glamour is weak against Alchemy but strong against Necromancy), so it is important to carefully select which units take on certain foes.

Tying together all of the action is a fantasy story that is like Harry Potter meets *Groundhog Day*. The protagonist, a female wizard named Lillet, is at a prestigious magical academy. After five days, something strange happens – everyone disappears. When Lillet wakes up the next day, she realizes she is reliving those five days again, though she retains her memories from her first time through. Using those memories, the player needs to discover what happens to everyone on day five, and what can be done to stop it.

It may not feature the comic genius of Bill Murray, but with Grim Grimoire's unique approach to console real-time strategy, we're anxious to see how all the pieces fit together. We hope the solution isn't "fall in love with Andie MacDowell," because that just ain't happening. ■■■



■ Story sequences take place between talking portraits. In battle, the main character takes the form of a floating hand

PLAYSTATION 2

Odin Sphere

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** VANILLAWARE > **RELEASE** MAY 29

GOD OF SHAPES

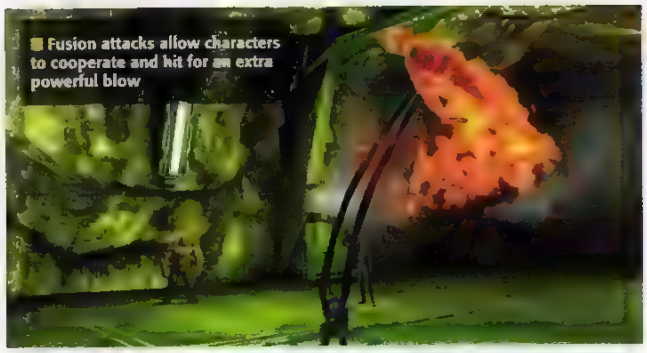
Atlus is the undisputed champion when it comes to publishing niche PS2 role-playing games. Even with this long tradition, Odin Sphere is shaping up to be one of the company's standout efforts. Not to be written off just as a quirky Japanese title, Odin Sphere is a 2D side-scrolling action/RPG that follows five characters through separate (but related) stories.

Even though they may look like standard sprites in these screenshots, watching the characters in motion provides a different sensation. The heroes and enemies seem to be paper cut-outs, with different sections moving independently, almost like puppets. When compared to static character portraits, this kind of movement adds an intriguing spark of life to the action. Enjoy it while you can, because once the combat starts you won't have any time to admire the scenery.

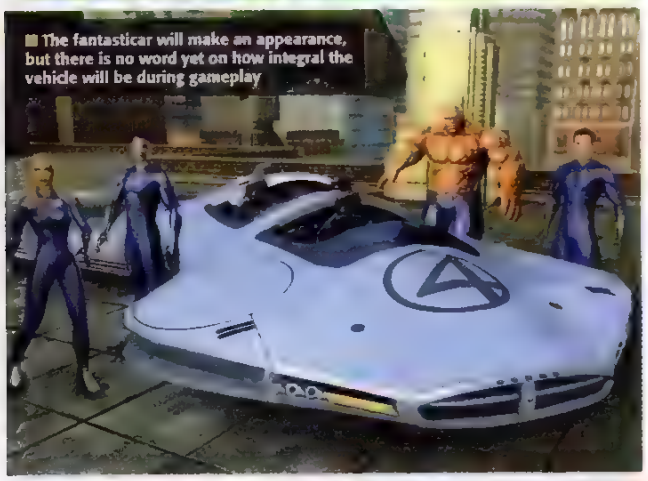
Battles take place in circular areas, allowing players to go in either direction and eventually loop around. Along the way, enemies on the ground and in the air will attack, forcing you to take them out with weapon combos. You can also use powerful offensive items, and unlike many other RPGs, when and how you choose to use them is critical. It's incredibly dangerous to get close to a dragon (it can swallow you in one bite), but if you throw poison from a distance, your odds of survival improve. Items aren't just something that are available but no one will use; they are powerful enough to turn the tide of a fight and render otherwise unbeatable foes vulnerable.

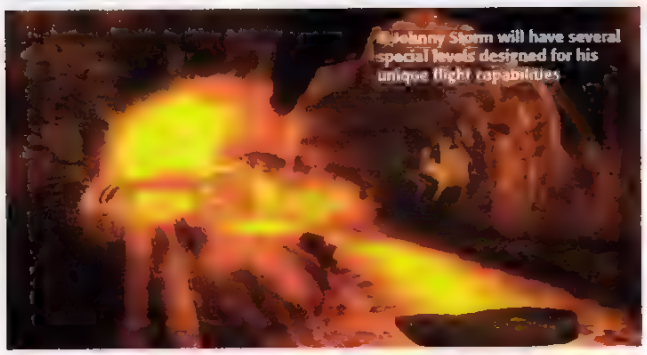
God of War II may be considered by many to be the PS2's swan song, but the console hasn't run out of momentum yet. If Odin Sphere fulfills its potential, gamers will find that there are plenty of reasons to clutch that old Dual Shock controller a little longer. ■■■

■ The five major characters will occasionally interact, but their stories remain separate

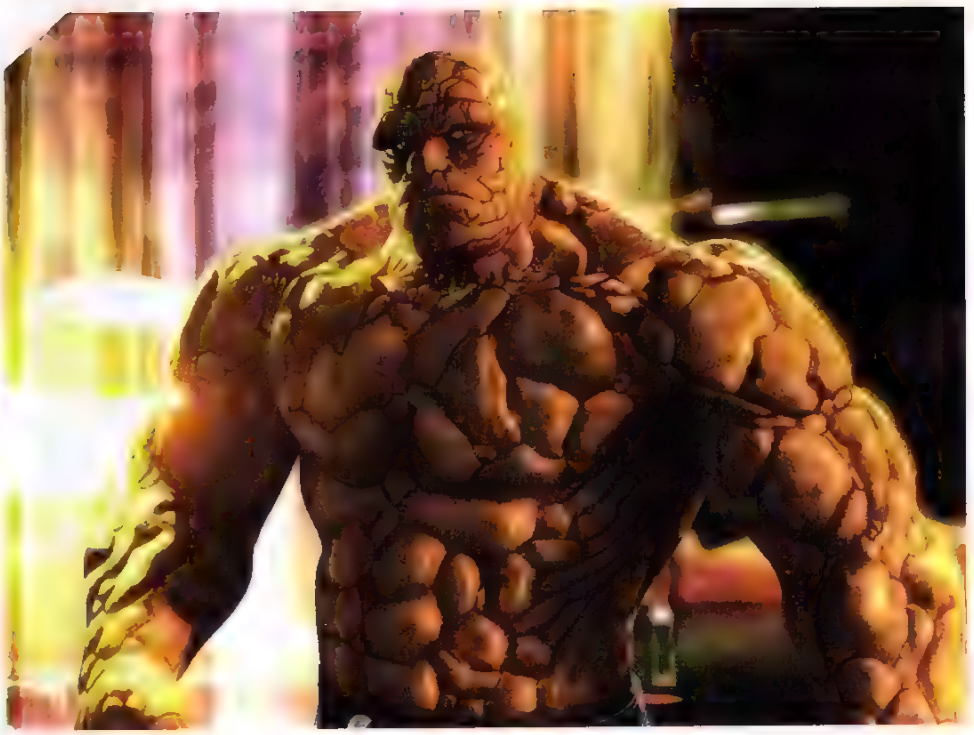

Fusion attacks allow characters to cooperate and hit for an extra powerful blow

Sue's force field can deflect laser blasts and protect other heroes within its radius


The fantasticar will make an appearance, but there is no word yet on how integral the vehicle will be during gameplay


Johnny Storm will have several special levels designed for his unique flight capabilities

Environments are highly destructible, and Reed, with his ultra-keen intellect, has always been a sucker for breaking boxes



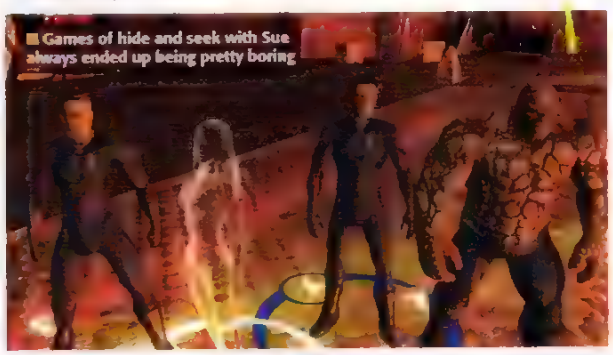
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2 | NINTENDO DS

Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES **> DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS (PS3, 360), SEVEN STUDIOS (DS, Wii, PS2)
> RELEASE JUNE 15

YOU HAD ME AT FOUR-PLAYER CO-OP

While the last Fantastic Four movie game didn't exactly inspire us with confidence, this one is being bolstered by a brand new developer and publisher. Our early look at the sequel revealed a number of new ideas that could make the game a worthy addition to the growing stable of Marvel superhero titles.


Games of hide and seek with Sue always ended up being pretty boring

The most important shift by far is the inclusion of four-player cooperative play, allowing players to drop in and out at any time. Even when only one player is fighting through the adventure, all four of the main characters will remain onscreen. You'll always have the ability to switch to whichever character suits your current mood, as well as issue simple squad commands to control your other members.

We got the chance to see one of the early levels of the game, set just prior to the wedding ceremony of Reed and Sue that will open the new movie. In the underground rooms we played through, the Fantastic Four are investigating the presence of the Skrull, so there's plenty of combat to be had with that classic Marvel group of villains. While the repeated tilesets of the Skrull's lair weren't very impressive, the prevalence of destructible environment set pieces certainly was. While playing alone, the camera was zoomed in close enough to notice some great texturing on the four heroes, and some well done animations to show off powers like Johnny Storm's flaming attacks or Reed's elastic punches. Sue's forcefield could deflect laser bolts, while Thing added the expected heavy punches and ground-hitting shockwaves into the mix. The coolest combat moves were reserved for the fusion attacks – unique combination powers where the different members would partner up to inflict the hurt.

Another new addition we got to see were some exciting flight levels, including the chase through the traffic tunnel that made for such a cool movie trailer. In the level, the Human Torch zooms back and forth through cars and trucks in pursuit of the enigmatic Silver Surfer. If nothing else, the flight controls seem like they should deliver a nice change of pace from the brawling action that fills the rest of the game.

While we'd be lying if we said that Rise of the Silver Surfer looks like it's going to change the world, we were surprised by the level of polish present in the game areas we played through. While there was no sign of the planet-eating Galactus in what we saw, we're crossing our fingers that the big baddie will make an appearance in both the film and game incarnations of this big summer blockbuster. Both ways to find out should be available soon; the game is set to accompany the movie release this month. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 3

Ninja Gaiden Sigma

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER TECMO > DEVELOPER TEAM NINJA > RELEASE JUNE

THE SHURIKEN REMAINS THE SAME

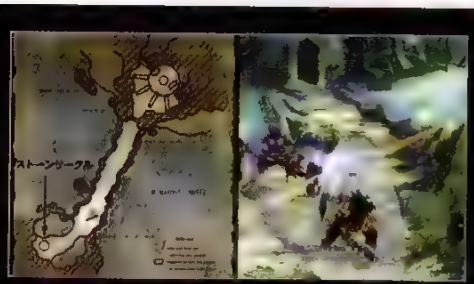
Even though most of the gameplay content remains almost exactly the same as the 2004 Xbox Ninja Gaiden and the Black follow up, don't call Sigma a remake – at least around anyone from Team Ninja. "Of course, we knew that the subject of, 'Is this another remake?' was going to come up, and we don't want it just to be thought of as that," says director Yosuke Hayashi. "That's one of the reasons why we've been so careful in making sure that the graphics were up to next-generation standards, so we could come in and say, 'The game speaks for itself.' You can tell that it's not a remake. We're shooting for the best graphics on the PS3 right now."

Outside of updated visuals, 1080p support, and a smooth 60 frames per second, Team Ninja has added some additional content for fans that know the game backwards and forwards. Ryu can now dual wield two large katanas which open up a whole new set of combos. As we ran through the now-familiar first stage with these blades, the new stabbing and slashing options felt extremely tight – just like a ninja should play. Players will also be able to incorporate some minor Sixaxis movement by shaking the controller to power up ninpo magic.

We were able to take control of new playable character, Rachel, in a brief mission mode to fight off several waves of enemies. Her war hammer is slightly slower and more powerful than Ryu's quick attacks, but that doesn't make the beatdowns any less cringe-worthy. It wasn't long before we were hacking off heads and hooking guys in the chest to toss them on the ground. Rachel also uses a grappling hook to strike far off enemies, but Team Ninja has not yet decided if they will allow players to pull in foes with this new tool.

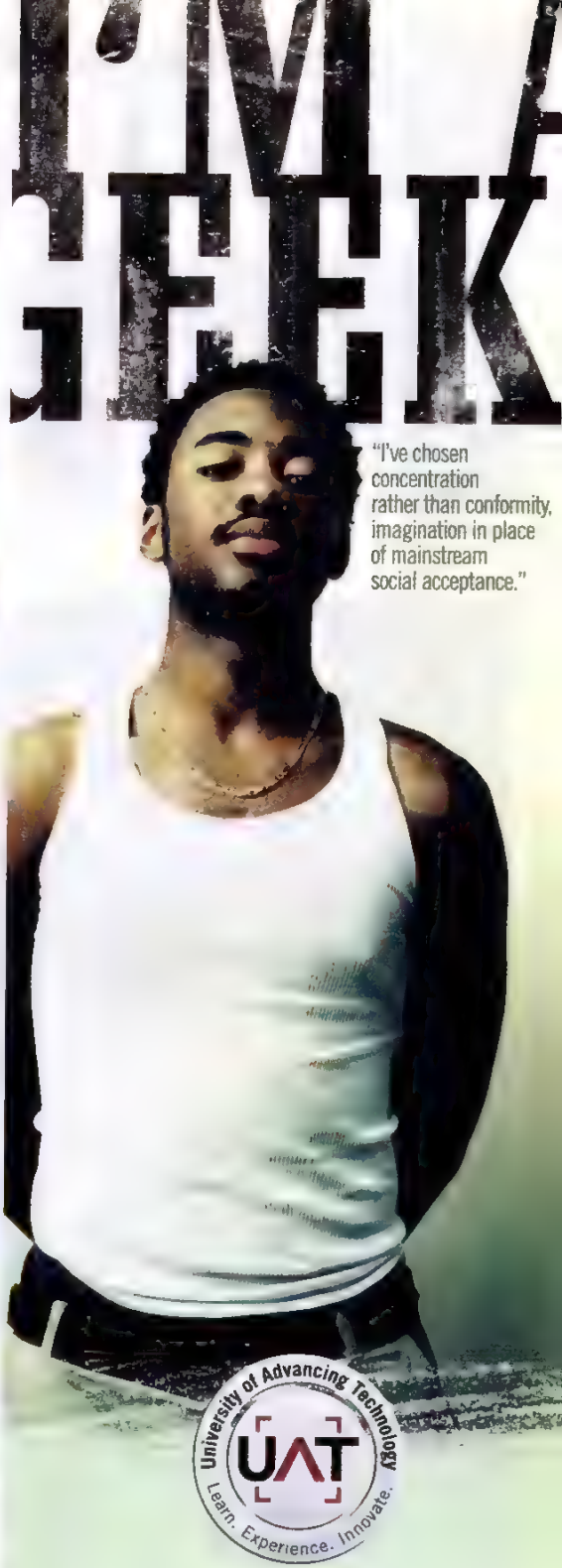
Unfortunately, those who are looking to play the classic NES Ninja Gaiden trilogy that was hidden on previous Xbox installments will be out of luck. "We think Ninja Gaiden Sigma is the first chapter in the Ninja Gaiden franchise for next-generation consoles, so we're not as concerned about going back and looking at the history of the franchise – though we obviously respect those games and the people who made them back in the day," says Hayashi. Does this hint at a possible Virtual Console release some time in the future? Only Tecmo knows for sure, but Sigma should be a great way for the PlayStation faithful to finally experience the pleasure and pain that is the modern Ninja Gaiden. ■■■

■ Unsurprisingly, DOA-style "sexy" physics are fully present on Rachel's character model



NINJA GAIDEN: DRAGON SWORD

PlayStation 3 owners aren't the only ones who will get their ninja on in '07. Ryu is coming to the DS this October courtesy of Team Ninja with an entirely new storyline. Players will hold the DS sideways like a book and use the touch screen to perform attacks, throw stars, and cast magic. Here it appears you'll have to trace a Japanese character with the stylus in order to summon the strongest possible spell. Not much more is known about this title, but we'll have more details as they come along.



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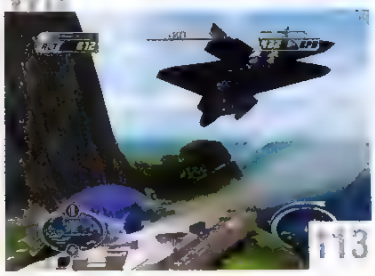

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Heatseeker

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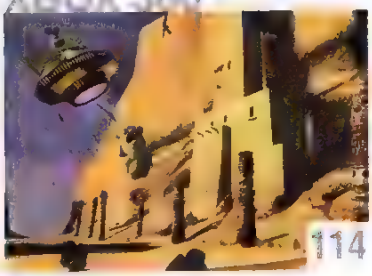

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Rayman Raving Rabbids

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GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

Super Paper Mario

Mario is back with the help of Peach and Bowser to save the world from Count Bleck in this excellent mix of platforming and RPG elements. Switching back and forth between 2D and 3D opens up previously unseen gameplay options, and the dialogue is some of the most hilarious to come out of Nintendo in years. This truly is a must-own Wii title.

NO PC GAME OF THE MONTH?

Due to the complete lack of quality PC games this month, we have decided not to issue the award in this issue.

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	Seventh Grade: At least it's not sixth grade.

> 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

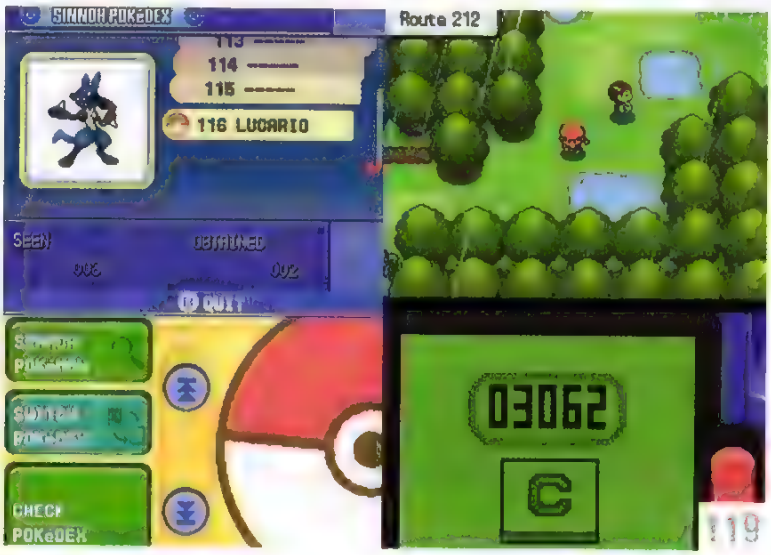
Low – You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

NINTENDO DS

Touch the Dead 117

PSP

Brooktown High 117



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Pokémon Diamond/Pearl

After a string of sub-par spinoffs, Pokémon is finally back in true form. Fans are free to catch over 100 new little monsters and trade, battle, and chat over the Internet for the very first time in the series. Here goes the summer!

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pg.96

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

frontend – A game's menus and options

GBA – Game Boy Advance

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ninja Gaiden Black Sigma Extreme Redux: Special Edition – The inevitable fifth remake of the original. Finally, we get to play as the shopkeeper!

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

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

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

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

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

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

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

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

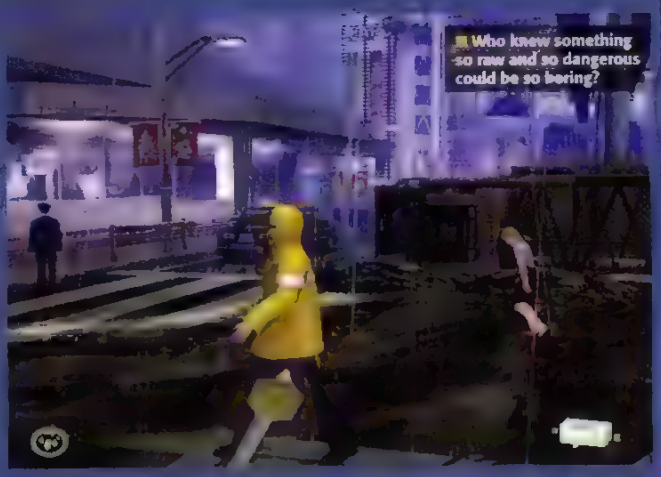
RPG – Role-Playing Game. A game that involves character improvement through collecting and spending points. A term we use for games like Final Fantasy and Xenosaga

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

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL

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

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



PLAYSTATION 2

Raw Danger

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** AGETEC > **DEVELOPER** IREM > **RELEASE** MAY 22 > **ESRB** M

STRUGGLING TO SWIM

Survival horror games generally pit you against the supernatural, but nature itself can be just as brutal as brain-hungry zombies. This is the premise behind Raw Danger, which places you in the shoes of six people fleeing a city crumbling under the stress of flood rains and tidal waves. At its best, Raw Danger calls to mind blockbuster disaster flicks like *The Day After Tomorrow*.

But no matter how compelling an idea is, all value is lost if the game is hamstrung by poor execution. Raw Danger suffers greatly from this affliction. The broken camera brings to mind frustrating nights spent fighting with wonky perspectives in early third-person action games. Even the level design is horribly confining, offering a limited amount of gameplay choices outside of managing your inventory. A game that takes place in a decimated city ravaged by floods and tidal waves should be much more open-ended, with several available paths to survival instead of just one.

Even the narrative manages to grasp firmly to the sinking life raft of mediocrity; instead of implementing a fragmented storyline like *Pulp Fiction* to merge the stories into one action-packed adventure, you must wade through the flood to safety six separate times. I was wet and tired enough after surviving the natural disaster with the first character; I hardly wanted to relive the trauma five more times.

When you survive a disaster, lessons are often learned. I hope some developer takes the gaffe that is Raw Danger, extracts the great idea at its center, and creates the blockbuster experience it has the potential to be. —**BERTZ**

BOTTOM LINE 4.5

> **Concept:** The city's levees have broken and the tidal waves are coming. Run!

> **Graphics:** A joke. I've seen Flash games with more impressive graphics.

> **Sound:** With comatose voice actors delivering flatline performances, I suspect George Lucas may have worked on this project.

> **Playability:** Clunky controls and a broken camera may get you caught in the undertow.

> **Entertainment:** The novel concept is spoiled by the poor game design.

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5

In an ironic twist, the biggest disaster that unfolds in Raw Danger isn't a flood or a tidal wave wiping out an entire civilization, it's the game itself. Raw Danger feverishly tries to bring out the intensity of living through a cataclysmic event, but with laughably bad gameplay, robot-like characters, and graphics that require imagination to bring to life, it ends up being more of an unintentional comedy than an exciting adventure. I wanted to get into it, but the only thing that kept me going was the gut aching humor that stemmed from its poor execution. There's certainly room for a disaster genre in video games, and at times Raw Danger shows the potential that this genre could bring, but it needs to deliver more intensity than finding a way to dry your clothing. —**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2

Atelier Iris 3: Grand Phantasm

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NIPPON ICHI > **DEVELOPER** GUST > **RELEASE** MAY 15 > **ESRB** T

PLOT GO DOWN THE HOLE

I've got some pretty serious qualms with Atelier Iris 3. The story and characters – integral parts of any RPG – are entirely throwaway, and the mission-based structure of the game itself is poorly paced and often disjointed. But as many second-tier Japanese RPGs do, it throws together an engaging and complex battle system on top of these forgettable elements.

As is customary for the series, this title features an alchemically inclined protagonist, turn-based battles, and cute manga-style 2D sprites. It's quite thematically inoffensive, but beyond that it's got problems. Dialogue is stilted and sophomoric, the epic conflict that the spunky teenage protagonists inevitably find themselves in the middle of is rather predictable, and the characters themselves are about as complex as a game of tic-tac-toe. In no time, you'll be skipping through textbox after textbox to get back to the battles and exploration as soon as possible.

Atelier Iris 3's lone saving grace is the way it treats dungeon exploration. Each encounter area is explored as a whole – you're challenged to balance your time remaining (after a certain duration, you're kicked back out to the overworld), an element gauge that persists between combats, item stocks, and HP against each other. There is no "resting" to recover HP mid-dungeon, and the timed nature of fights means that you're pushed to make each encounter as fast and efficient as possible. Though most fights are individually simple to conquer, placing them within the context of the larger adventure zone makes the experience vastly more interesting.

Sadly, once you've conquered (or run out of time in) one of these dungeons, you're booted back out into the lame overworld. Say hello to another half-hour of running around and suffering through droning conversations until you can get back to the fun part!

In order to derive any worthwhile enjoyment out of Atelier Iris 3, you pretty much have to be a big fan of both anime and dungeon crawling. The rest of us should spend our time with RPGs that have stories that add to the experience rather than subtract from it. —**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Drop some standard anime characters into a clichéd anime plot...but with some pretty cool and original battle mechanics

> **Graphics:** Like Final Fantasy Tactics Advance (yes, the GBA one), but with a slightly higher resolution

> **Sound:** The abysmal voice acting gives the horrid adolescent scriptwriting a run for its money in suckitude

> **Playability:** Do we need this many menus? Really?

> **Entertainment:** The Saturday morning cartoon plot won't draw anyone with a speck of taste in, but an engaging combat system has enough meat to it to save this from total failure

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 6.5

Mix Philosopher's Ash and Meruze Water and you get an X-Jar. Combine a stoic swordsman with a spunky female and you get Atelier Iris 3. Like the alchemical recipes it features, this game follows a predictable and generic formula that quickly becomes tedious. The focus on fetch quests and backtracking is aggravating, and the terrible voice acting and unoriginal characters sink any chance the game had at being fun. It still retains a kernel of the charm that drew me to Atelier Iris in the first place, but not enough to curb the groans and sighs of frustration. —**JOE**

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- **AVERAGE TIME TO REPLACE INTAKE MANIFOLD:** 11 HOURS
- **PAINT:** HEY, NOTHING LASTS FOREVER
- **FEELING TO DRIVE:** AWESOME (WITH APPREHENSION)

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- **PAINT:** INFINITE LIFETIME WARRANTY
- **FEELING TO DRIVE:** AWESOME (WITH EXTRA AWESOME)

FORZA 2 MOTORSPORT

FUEL YOUR FANTASY.

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Turn 10

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Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

Bowser's attack power is double that of other characters

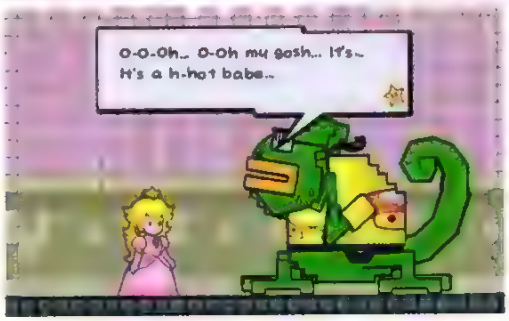
Each world features a unique theme and gameplay style. This stage is a take on the classic shooter

Wii

Super Paper Mario

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
> **RELEASE** APRIL 9 > **ESRB** E



NO PAPER TIGER HERE

Until now, the RPG based Paper Mario titles have remained completely separate from the freewheeling platforming Mario games. But with Super Paper Mario, Intelligent Systems has managed to take the best of both worlds and create what may end up as one of the top games of 2007.

Platforming fans will love SPM's infusion of action into the main gameplay. Players hold the Wii remote sideways in the tradition of classic NES Mario games as they run through what initially looks like a hand-drawn version of New Super Mario Bros. Swapping between the four main characters to utilize their unique skills is reminiscent of Super Mario Bros. 2 (Peach can float, Bowser breathes fire, etc.). Jumping on enemies is still the most widely used attack, while throwing koopa shells, placing bombs, and other abilities can be earned by recruiting little creatures called Pixls. Many people would have been satisfied with this throwback gameplay mechanic alone. But it's the flip to 3D that really blows your mind.

A quick press of the A button opens up a completely different world full of hidden pipes, passages, items, and enemies. As I made my way from world 1-1 to 8-4, I was constantly impressed with what the level designers accomplished using this mechanic. It was difficult enough to attempt to describe how to navigate some of the flipping puzzles to my peers; I can hardly imagine the conversations the developers had to articulate the creation of these new worlds.

Fans of Paper Mario, Super Mario RPG, and the Mario & Luigi portable titles will love the game for its RPG elements. SPM features what is arguably the best writing out of all these games. Bowser's grumpiness, Luigi's inadequacies, rivals you can't help but love, and some of the weirdest NPCs you'll ever come across will have you chuckling throughout the entire game. The most memorable encounter of all is with an obsessed message board fanboy who Tivos sci-fi shows and collects both the standard and limited editions of anime DVDs.

Other RPG traces include damage point listings for every attack, special items with unique attributes, experience accumulation, and leveling. The items will boost your attack or defense temporarily, speed up or slow down time, and initiate elemental attacks. The most entertaining power-up will turn you into a giant 8-bit version of whichever character you're controlling at the time, allowing complete destruction of everything in your path.

Even though SPM was originally a GameCube title, it uses enough Wii features so that players will barely notice the sneaky switch. You can point the remote at the screen to get more info on enemies or objects, shake the remote between jump attacks to rack up style points, or play motion-sensitive minigames at the arcade to earn rare items. These instances are fun when implemented and don't feel gimmicky.

SPM is not perfect, however. The more characters and Pixls you collect, the more of a pain it becomes to keep going in and out of the menu screen to switch companions. It would be nice if this could have been streamlined somehow (at least give the 3D flip ability to more characters than Mario). There also isn't much impetus to collect enemy cards, bake things, or do anything extra since the game never gets hard enough to warrant it. And after beating the game (it takes a little over 20 hours), there isn't any significant additional content to keep players coming back.

These complaints are quite minor in the big picture, and should not dissuade anyone from picking up this fantastic game. Zelda finally has a proper suitor to take her out on the town. High technicaaaaal!—**BRYAN**

Point the remote at the screen to search for hidden secrets

Once you bump the blocks in 3D mode they will appear in 2D mode

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Mash up platforming, role-playing, 2D, and 3D into one awesome experience

> **Graphics:** The cartoony and simple look accentuates the unique art style

> **Sound:** Updated classic Mario themes, quirky new tunes, and, of course, pretty much zero voice work

> **Playability:** After playing this game you'll wish every side-scroller had a 3D flip

> **Entertainment:** Hilarious writing, innovative gameplay, and pure unbridled fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 9.5

There are a number of reasons that, after all these years, Nintendo is still considered the world's best development house. Super Paper Mario is the latest example. In many ways, this game is a loveable anachronism; in both look and gameplay, it harks back to the 8- and 16-bit games that made many of us fall in love with video games. But that's not to say that this is simple nostalgia. Super Paper Mario's seemingly simple concept – giving the player the ability to flip between 2D and 3D worlds – pays off in level designs that are nothing short of brilliant. The gameplay is just as accomplished, blending RPG elements and classic platforming action. This fine craftsmanship is complemented by a vivid, cubist art style and a superb script that balances wacky comedy with a surprisingly touching tale of love. The game lacks any truly challenging boss battles, and a couple of levels are more tedious than they need to be, but these are minor faults in another Nintendo classic.—**MATT**

You'll be pumped playing this game to "Danger Zone," but what game doesn't that work for?

Wii

Heatseeker

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** IR GURUS > **RELEASE** MAY 1 > **ESRB** T

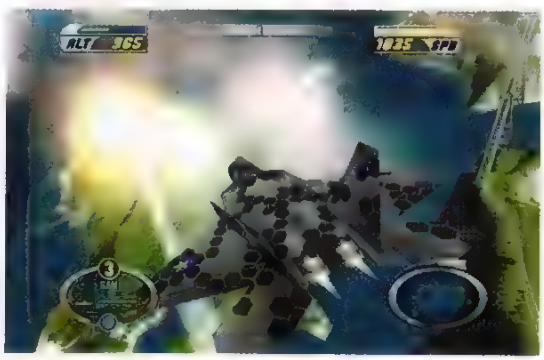
COOLING OFF

Something about Heatseeker reminds me of the Burnout series. Maybe it's the high speeds, or the crazy explosions, or the crazy explosions at high speeds. It could even be its creative and fun use of camera angles evidenced by an Impact Cam, which follows missiles as they home in on their targets. But as much as I would like to call this the Burnout of air combat games, I can't.

It's not that Heatseeker is bad, it just isn't as polished as I'd like it to be. This might have something to do with the controls. The Wii controls have a simplified feel. As you might imagine, you point at the screen to dertermine where you fly. You'll rarely use your guns since the aiming isn't very tight. Instead, the game automatically locks on to the nearest onscreen enemy, and all you have to do is unleash your endless supply of missiles. Something about this combination makes the game feel easy when you're kicking ass and cheap when you're not.

But that might be more of a comment on the AI than anything else. The enemy planes rarely do much more than occasionally send a missile your way. The main challenge usually comes from having to protect some helpless third party. It doesn't provide much depth and the story is immediately forgettable.

Gripes aside, this game can be balls-out fun when it wants to. Tearing through the sky at Mach 3 to sink a battleship and a couple of subs, then doing a 180 to shoot down a sky full of bogeys gets the heart going every time. Plus the missions do a good job at shaking things up; sure you shoot down a lot of waves of enemy planes, but they are broken up by other tasks. None of this makes Heatseeker the best at what it does, but considering the lack of air combat games, fans of the genre might still want to give this one a shot.—**BEN**



BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Arcady air combat with simplified Wii controls

> **Graphics:** Some nice lighting effects make this title look good, but then you look down at the water and wonder what happened

> **Sound:** Loud rock; it might be the only thing to fly to

> **Playability:** The Wii controls feel smooth enough. The only annoying thing is precision aiming

> **Entertainment:** Solid action, but isn't very deep

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

Butt rock, check. Unlimited missiles, check. Cheesy codenames like Downtown and Eyeball, check. Yes, this is my kind of jet fighting game. The Wii controls translate well to flight combat, which I thought was impossible after the atrocious Wing Island. Missions consist of one disaster after another, i.e. protect a defecting enemy agent, protect your base from saboteurs, or protect your fleet. Did I mention there are some protect missions? Granted, a few other tasks exist, but they all pretty much involve blowing up endless waves of planes, ships, and ground units. It just gets tiring after awhile.—**BRYAN**

Wii

Mortal Kombat: Armageddon

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** IGI ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MAY 15 > **ESRB** M

Here Shao Kahn shows Liu Kang how to pick up women and impress them with cool dance moves

CONTROLLER KOMBAT

Mortal Kombat's fighting system has always been pretty solid, and over the years the control scheme has been honed to a science. The Wii takes that finely tuned machine and jams a motion sensitive stick in it. All of the basic attacks have been moved to the Wii remote's d-pad, which is awkward enough by itself. The bigger change is that the special moves are now associated with controller movements. For example, you'll swing the remote in a half circle to throw a fireball. The fighting system isn't destroyed – it works okay – but doesn't feel as responsive or speedy as it does with a good old gamepad. Fortunately, you can use a Gamecube or Classic controller and resolve this issue, but I wouldn't put this version over any of the others.

Armageddon also comes packed with the RPG-like Konquest Mode and kart racing Motor Kombat, but neither really feel fleshed out enough to be more than a mild distraction. Hopefully, with the push to next-gen, this series steps up and does something more than just re-processing sequel after sequel. Until then, MK will just be one of those games I can get crazy and have fun with, but am a little too embarrassed to tell my friends I played the morning after.—**BEN**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** The ultimate MK fighting collection featuring every character ever to be in the series

> **Graphics:** The most bloody and yet slightly cartoonish graphics you'll see

> **Sound:** Standard MK effects and music; stick with what works

> **Playability:** The breaking point. Armageddon doesn't perform as admirably with the Wii remote

> **Entertainment:** There is plenty of stuff to do here, but will you want to?

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

This is probably the most expansive and fan-focused Mortal Kombat game ever, with its huge roster of characters, fun extras like the kart racing game, and the story-based Konquest mode. However, this might not be the best system for long-time fans to partake in the carnage. The new addition of motion controls would be sweet if I felt like I was consistently able to implement the simple motions. Even if the special arm-swinging moves don't always work the way I want them to, I did find that it brought more exciting finishers and flying kicks into the mix than you might see really see. Also, the option to use a normal controller style should please traditionalists. The core game itself is ready for an overhaul; it's time we see more responsive movement and better animation from the franchise. In the meantime, there have certainly been worse ports to the Wii.—**MILLER**

XBOX 360

Rayman Raving Rabbids

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTPELLIER > **RELEASE** APRIL 24 > **ESRB** E

IT'S JUST NOT THE SAME

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Run through a wealth of silly minigames as you try to escape the dastardly rabbids

> **Graphics:** Slightly improved, but a far cry from the best the 360 can exhibit

> **Sound:** The ridiculous music and sound effects are a perfect fit

> **Playability:** It may actually be a little more precise and easier than the Wii version, but that doesn't make it better

> **Entertainment:** Hilarious situations, but without the integral Wii motion sensing, the gameplay falls short

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

These crazy rabbids pulled together to form one of my favorite games of the Wii launch. It's only a few months later, and we now have a version on the 360. For the first time in the console's life, I have to say I like a game better on the Wii than on a more traditional controller. Not that this comes as a great surprise. Beyond the insanity that is the rabbids themselves, the minigames of the original Wii game derived their fun from the frantic arm waving and activity provided by the Wii remote. With that feature lacking, Raving Rabbids is little more than another collection of boring, albeit funny, minigames.

Most of the basic structure of the game is intact. You'll play through a series of wacky events like bonking a maniacal bunny over the head with a mallet or throwing an unsuspecting cow like a shot put in order to unlock a "boss fight," which usually involves shooting plungers at an advancing army of costumed rabbids. A couple of new contests make an appearance here, such as a variation on cow hurling that involves some basketball nets. However, by and large, all the same games make an appearance, but instead of wildly swinging the Wii remote over your head, you'll be gently rotating the analog stick.

Ultimately, that's what kills the fun. Michel Ancel and his team managed with the Wii release to perfectly tap into what people were going to like about Nintendo's new invention – an experience that they couldn't get on other game consoles. Like the classic square peg and round hole dilemma, trying to transfer the experience to those other consoles feels awkward and forced, even if the individual controls work perfectly fine.

In its defense, the 360 version does include support for the 360 camera – but I had a hard time getting my motions to track with enough precision to make the process fun. Not to be underestimated, the unusual humor of the title remains in full effect – a special style of demented fun that is impossible to find anywhere else. It's worth checking out if this is the only system you can experience it on. Some improved textures do indeed make this the best-looking version of the game, but for everyone else, I'd stick with the console this game was made for.—**MILLER**

Second Opinion 6.75

The Xbox 360 version is similar to a rabbid with a clump of poop stuck in its fur. It's still adorable, but playing with it is the last thing that you want to do. This game was originally designed for the Wii, and without the motion-based functionality backing the gameplay, most of the minigames have either lost their luster or suffer from balancing issues. Ubisoft found a way to make all of the games work on the 360 controller, but really didn't do much in making sure that the new functionality was fun. Not even the token cow launching minigame can save this port. Raving Rabbids is a great game, but only on the Wii.—**REINER**

XBOX 360

Monster Madness: Battle for Suburbia

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** SOUTHPEAK GAMES > **DEVELOPER** ARTIFICIAL STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MAY 15 > **ESRB** T

The game offers a nice variety of enemy types. These zombies will toss bombs at you, and if that fails, will strap a bomb to their chests and run at you.

100 PERCENT OLD SCHOOL

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** A flashback to the golden age of campy zombie games that delivers excellent gameplay, but questionable design decisions

> **Graphics:** Physics accompany nearly every item in the environment, and a wide array of lighting effects are used to add a hint of realism to the comical setting and creatures

> **Sound:** The roaring soundtrack accompanies the action perfectly, but the over-the-top teenage voices grate on your nerves

> **Playability:** This is a game of non-stop action. The frantic button-mashing battles are nicely thought out and perfectly balanced

> **Entertainment:** It's lengthy and challenging, but in some instances challenging due to bad gameplay design and not a difficult boss

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

"Zombies have eaten my neighbors," exclaims Zack, Monster Madness' nerdy high school protagonist. In this one line of dialogue, spoken with puberty-piercing teenage angst, this game is perfectly encapsulated. It's a spirited throwback to the 16-bit heyday, and an outlandish adventure that oozes camp.

Fans of Zombies Ate My Neighbors and Ghoul Patrol will certainly feel at home with Monster Madness' mindless button mashing, zany storytelling, and uncanny ability to turn your world upside down in the most unexpected of ways. The scope of the game is as basic as can be: use excessive force to annihilate everything that moves – even the cat-loving granny that only wants to smother you in kisses.

Since this is a tale of suburbia overrun by an unexpected zombie attack, weapons are not easy to come by. As you jam on buttons to keep the brain-eating horde at bay, you'll also be tasked with scouring the environments to find parts – such as metal shafts and screws – that can be used to manufacture makeshift weapons. Leaping to hard-to-reach rooftops, knocking over garbage cans, and veering off the beaten path to find these parts gives this simplistic hack n' slash game an engaging RPG-like quality.

Whether you are brandishing a razor-sharp axe or a high-powered shotgun, Monster Madness' combat functionality is handled quite well. The character movements are swift, the weapons have a nice bite to them, and you can even change to an over-the-shoulder view for long-range assaults. Thanks to these fluid controls, you can really get into a zombie-killing groove.

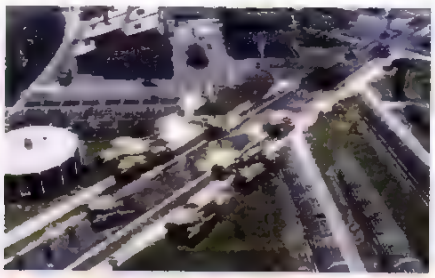
Even if you have the most powerful of weapons in your arsenal, however, Monster Madness' simplistic gameplay can be incredibly frustrating. It would appear that, in drawing inspiration from the games of old, developer Artificial Studios picked up some bad habits along the way. One-hit deathtraps and a low number of checkpoints are a bad combo – especially when all of the time you spent exploring levels to collect parts is lost. Poorly executed vehicular segments further complicate matters. The game also struggles with its multiplayer support. Shoddy camera tracking makes the four-player offline co-op (not supported through Xbox Live) more of a mess than anything. The array of Xbox Live versus modes don't do much to bring out your competitive spirit, either.

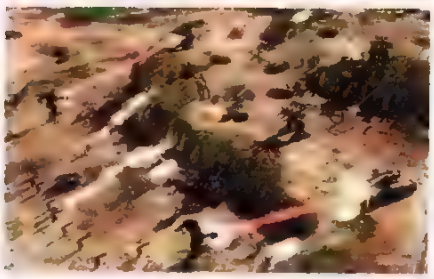
In putting a smile on the faces of nostalgic gamers, Monster Madness also gives them a black eye with its maddening stretches of gameplay. Games like this are definitely needed, but the quality really has to be there to match the historic theme. It's well worth a look, but go into it knowing that it offers some problems that you thought that developers destroyed years ago.—**REINER**

Second Opinion 7.25

Monster Madness is a charming game, filled with goofy humor and a silly, B-movie vibe that make it easy to root for. At heart, it's an old-school top-down brawler, so don't worry yourself with strategy. Just grab one of the four characters and go at it. The game's comic weapons are a breath of fresh air for those of us sick to death of D&D style hack n' slash, and a number of vehicles and minigames add to the variety. Sadly, like the cheesy '80s movies it's modeled on, Monster Madness is rough around the edges. The gameplay can be quite sloppy and frustrating at times, a problem not helped by the poor checkpoint system. Still, this has "sleeper hit" written all over it.—**MATT**

The Scrin have just as much vested interest in Tiberium as mankind





BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** It achieves what was once thought impossible bringing intuitive RTS control to console

> **Graphics:** An outstanding spectacle for HDTVs, and a bit of a blur for SDTVs. It's still playable on SD, but the smaller texts are hard to read and the fine unit detailing is lost

> **Sound:** The in-battle narration is fantastic, and the bass-heavy soundtrack keeps you on your toes

> **Playability:** The controller doesn't replace the keyboard and mouse, but the gameplay is tailored perfectly to it

> **Entertainment:** Home to three huge campaigns, amazing multiplayer, and some of the worst live action cutscenes ever produced. See Sawyer from *Lost* and Sharon from *Battlestar Galactica* make complete fools of themselves!

> **Replay Value:** High

XBOX 360

Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EALA > **RELEASE** MAY 8 > **ESRB** T

THE BEST CONSOLE RTS YET

If you want to see PC gamers topple over with laughter, tell them that you enjoy playing RTS on console. Given just how poorly this genre has fared in this venue over the years, you may find more believability in someone saying that they would jump at the opportunity to play World of Warcraft on Nintendo DS. The idea of playing RTS on console may not compute with the PC-savvy nation, but it is something that Electronic Arts is slowly transforming into a reality.

The company's Xbox 360 port of The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II demonstrates a viable approach to replicating the swift and complex play of an RTS on a console controller. In the Xbox 360 port of Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars, this formula is further advanced. The PC version still has an edge in terms of user-finesse and sheer speed of play, but the fact that it's just "an edge" shows just how far EA and the RTS genre have come on console.

Part of this game's success rests on its simplistic design. RTS fans can rant all they want about how it doesn't come close to offering the same level of micro-management found in Starcraft, or the genre-bending innovations that made Company of Heroes such a hit, but in its simplicity, Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars delivers one of the greatest single player campaigns in all of RTS.

From the moment that you deploy your first unit, you can't help but find yourself completely engrossed by this epic war. Kane, the leader of the religious cult, Brotherhood of Nod, is once again making his bid to purify the planet through bloodshed. As the Global Defense Initiative keeps this madman and his forces at bay, a greater threat, the biggest one to ever grace this planet, arrives from the far reaches of space. In the midst of another World War, mankind is also faced with combating a hostile alien known as the Scrin. Outside of Darth Vader showing up with his Death Star, this battle really couldn't be bigger or more entertaining to watch.

Rather than reinventing Command & Conquer for a new generation of gamers, Tiberium Wars is clearly designed for the series' fans. The complexity of the game hasn't changed in the slightest. In typical C&C fashion, you don't out-think your enemy or out-maneuver them, you just crush them with pure force and the largest number of units that you can fit on screen. As much fun as it is to build unstoppable armies, variety can be found in varied mission objectives. A good example of this is the stage that takes place in a rundown and nearly demolished base. You must hold this ground until reinforcements arrive. What makes this feat tricky is that you have to manage the power grid. Not every structure in the base can be online at once, so you'll have to rotate between base defenses and building. Missions like this one will make you sweat profusely as your unit numbers dwindle or a timer nears zero.

The intensity that accompanies each mission is matched by amazingly intuitive controls. Menu navigation and field maneuvering are as swift as can be. Unlike Lord of the Rings, you never really feel like you are fighting against the game itself. If you can handle an Xbox 360 controller correctly, everything clicks together perfectly. You can even tweak the cursor magnetism and scroll speed to allow a higher level of precision in your tactics. To say something that has never been said about an RTS on console, this game works remarkably well on the controller.

Tiberium Wars is also quite potent online. Seige mode is a serious struggle of skill, and there are some great maps for King of the Hill, Capture the Flag, and Capture and Hold. I didn't think I would enjoy using the Vision Camera during play, but seeing someone's reaction as you drop a nuke on them is as priceless as seeing a newborn baby.

Command & Conquer set the RTS genre ablaze way back in the day, and now, after a stellar showing on Xbox 360, it is leading the RTS charge on consoles.—**REINER**

Why strategize when you can crush the enemy with numbers?

If you play with the Vision Camera, don't be that guy that wears a helmet

Second Opinion 7.75

I have nothing but love for Command & Conquer, and EALA's console RTS interface (as previously seen in The Battle For Middle-earth II) is head and shoulders above previous attempts at adapting the genre. But something's missing here, something that didn't faze me in the PC version. It's the frustration of trying to use the unusable 360 d-pad to navigate the menus. It's the commands I give that get eaten by a framerate that likes to bog down whenever there's a battle onscreen. It's the fact that, as good as the control scheme is, it's going to take several months of practice before you can reliably pull off any strategy more complicated than "build a bunch of tanks and steamroll the opposition." It's all of these issues getting together to irritate me by putting just enough of a barrier between the plans I map out in my head for crushing my enemies and seeing them play out on the battlefield. I can't find the silky-smooth polish that was evident everywhere in the PC version of C&C 3 anywhere here. Without that, this is just another RTS. The game was already light on innovation, and a less-than-stellar presentation of tired ideas isn't anything to get excited over.—**ADAM**

PC

Infernal

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** EIDOS **> DEVELOPER** PLAYLOGIC **> RELEASE** MAY 8 **> ESRB** M

MORE LIKE DIABOLICAL

Infernal opens with a moderately embarrassing cutscene depicting the main character having lunch with a comely blonde. Here, the player learns that Angry Guy With Tattoos And A Goatee (the protagonist has a name, but this is how you'll remember him) has been kicked out of Heaven's army for unspecified infractions. After the cinema ends, the next order of business is slaughtering a few dozen of your former friends who are attacking you for unexplained reasons. Following that, an agent of Lucifer offers you a job working for the bad guys, which you accept for no better cause than "why the hell not," as far as I can tell. After that, the experience starts really heading downhill.

The basic gameplay of Infernal consists of mixing up third-person shooting action with supernatural devil-granted powers and environmental puzzles while telling a story about morality, God, and the devil. Each of these elements is bad and nowhere close to fun, but to the developer's credit they fail in varied ways. The most spectacular is definitely the broken action, though.

The majority of your time with Infernal (may it be short, for your sake) is spent gunning down goons in the employ of Heaven with one of a small handful of weapons. Despite the fact that their AI is very basic, these suckers are decent shots with their own weapons and they tend to come in packs, so Angry Guy is blessed with the ability to hide and blindfire behind cover as well as roll in any direction. Well, theoretically he is, anyway. In all my hours with the game, I could not for the life of me get the cover mechanic to work consistently, which strips almost the entire strategic element out of the combat. The roll-flip isn't integrated into Angry Guy's movement at all, either, so you're looking at about a second of stuck-still animation time on either side of the maneuver – which is a really bad thing when there are five or six dudes unloading SMG clips in your direction.

Your small array of powers – a hell-charged shot that is cool but awfully tough to use in an actual combat situation, "infernal vision" that lets you see and collect health and mana powerups but doesn't let you shoot while it's active (yes, you read that right), and a five-second teleport that is completely worthless outside of a bare few puzzles – is supposed to make Infernal's gameplay unique. Unfortunately, none of them are implemented well enough to be incorporated into how you play the game. They're all so cumbersome to activate and/or use that they're strictly relegated to specific sections, like when there's a security console behind a locked gate that you have to teleport to, or a crumbling wall that a super-shot can break down.

On top of all this, most of the puzzles and boss fights either don't challenge the player at all, like the above example, or have solutions so arbitrary that they don't make sense. A few are noteworthy, but having one interesting encounter every two hours during this strictly linear adventure isn't going to convince anyone to play this game. Angry Guy is a clichéd dud of an antihero, and the storytelling is clumsy at best. I love the subject matter (see my rabid *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fandom), but Infernal does nothing to take advantage of it – or be a fun game in its own right.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 4

> Concept: Sign on with the forces of Hell and fight the war raging between angels and demons on our very own Earth

> Graphics: Enemy models look awfully alike, but that's the only bad thing you can say about Infernal's visuals

> Sound: Voiceovers are unintentionally hilarious at times. Not much else to say about the nondescript audio, really

> Playability: Imagine playing a cover-based game like kill.switch with a broken cover mechanic. Congrats, you've just imagined playing Infernal

> Entertainment: Clumsy puzzles and bad shooting, only $39.99! Go buy yourself a nice steak instead

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 5.5

Infernal plays out like a second-rate comic book adapted into a canceled Sci Fi Channel pilot. Bogged down with B-movie dialogue and tons of clichés, Infernal would have benefited greatly from an introductory writer's workshop. The gameplay suffers a similar plight, as it's boringly focused on repetitive actions like eliminating "x" amount of enemies from an area and finding keycards. The shooting mechanic feels clunky at best, and the broken cover system often fails to leave you, well, covered. Like a game out of the '90s, you're never given enough ammo to make it through your mission, so you must harvest extra clips and weapons off your enemies along the way. With all the tedium this game delivers, it's easy to forget that you're participating in a classically hackneyed struggle of good versus evil. I'm still undecided as to if this is a good or bad thing.—**BERTZ**

NINTENDO DS

Touch the Dead

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** SECRET STASH GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** DREAM ON STUDIO > **RELEASE** JUNE 5 > **ESRB** M

BREAKING THE ZOMBIE GAME MOLD

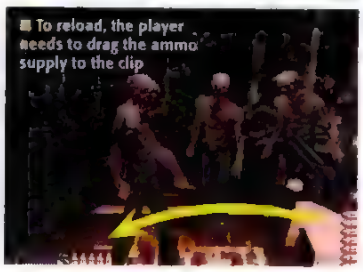
In most zombie-infested games, the player is allotted more than enough time to cycle through his or her arsenal to find the most painful means of downing the brain-eating assailant. As they slowly stumble toward you, moaning incoherently, one usually thinks "I bet I could de-limb this zombie before it even gets within five feet of me" or more commonly "Oh man, I am totally going to rifle butt this zombie in the face, and then when he falls, I am going to step on his head!" Zombies are very much video games' fleshy punching bags.

In Touch of the Dead, the undead legions attack from all angles and in great numbers. What makes this zombie game different than the others is that the user doesn't control the movements of his or her character. The action unfolds on a pre-determined path. All you are tasked with is firing the gun. Now, this may seem like a cakewalk. Just pointing the gun at a sloth-like enemy seems like the easiest challenge ever devised for a video game. What you would imagine to be headshot city is, in reality, the most challenging zombie game to come along in quite some time.

As the zombies struggle to walk, their heads jerk about violently, making it an incredible test of skill to place smoldering steel between their eyes. One slight targeting miscalculation likely leads to a zombie breathing down your neck. Since the game is designed like a shooting gallery on rails, developer Dream On Studios was able to balance each encounter to be as difficult as can be, but also entirely passable if the player is on his or her game. Whether it's a group of five zombies approaching from 10 feet away, or two zombies attacking at close quarters, every shot counts. A wasted bullet usually means a loss of life.

The fevered gunplay is sharply executed, and each new stage continues to throw new curves at the player (such as zombies removing and tossing their heads at you), but these challenges are almost too hard. The life you have at the outset of play must be preserved throughout the entire game. Once your health is depleted, it's game over. Progressing through the game relies on the player's ability to maintain a base of health between each level. This becomes quite the feat when you go against a boss that tears you to shreds.

This is a game that every zombie fanatic could love, but only the hardest of hardcore gamers can excel at.—**REINER**



BOTTOM LINE — 7

> **Concept:** A painfully difficult rail-based shooting gallery that transforms video game cannon fodder into the most challenging of adversaries

> **Graphics:** The zombies, in all their decomposing glory, look great, but the stark environments do little to inspire fear

> **Sound:** Nothing to it other than the sound of a gun barking and zombies growling

> **Playability:** Tapping the screen has never been more skill-based or stressful. You won't believe how quickly you fire off rounds

> **Entertainment:** It's strictly designed for hardcore gamers. The insanely difficult challenges will brutalize everyone else

> **Replay Value:** Low

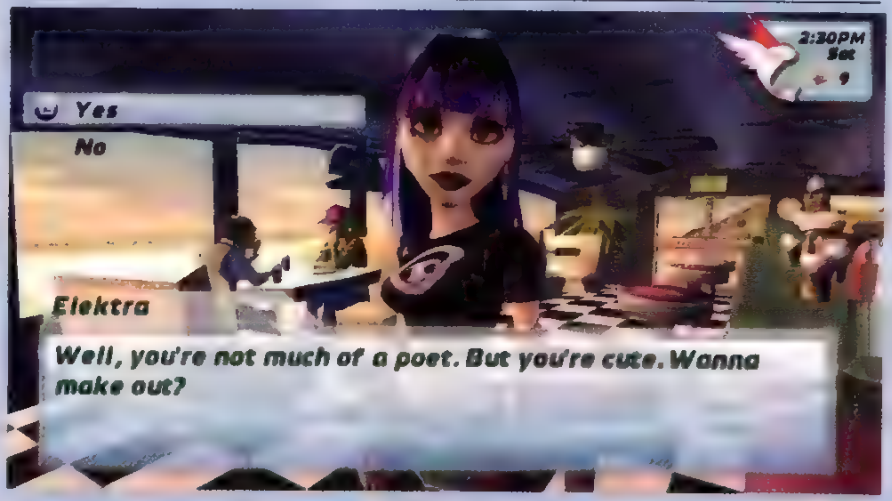
Second Opinion 6.25

I like a good light gun-style game as much as the next guy, but something about the formula is lost in translation when your weapon of choice is a tiny stylus rather than a hefty pistol. The early minutes of this horribly named game are a blast – taking out zombies with a touch screen tap to their moaning heads is undeniably satisfying. The sensation is short lived, thanks to a failure to evolve the formula as the game moves forward. The paper-thin story of an escaping prison inmate certainly doesn't help matters, nor does the poorly implemented difficulty balancing. Points for cool concept here, but this is a brief distraction more than a fun-filled night with the living dead.—**MILLER**

PSP

Brooktown High

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MAY 22 > **ESRB** T



THERE'S A REASON WHY NERDS DON'T DATE

No matter what social circle you fall into, Brooktown High is a place where anyone can find love. After creating a male or female character, you are tasked with leading a horny teenager through his or her senior year. In addition to flirting with everyone that you talk with, you will also have to perform well in school, apply for college, and find a job that can fund your dating ventures. When you have some downtime, you can play some video games in your bedroom.

From a glance, this may sound like a close approximation of a teenager's life. It's not until you spend a few hours raising your flirtatious character that you realize just how flawed Brooktown High's dating is. Teenagers are rebellious and obnoxious, but in this school, they are mostly predictable. To woo someone into liking you, a gift might help, but you mostly have to say the right things. There's a fair amount of guesswork involved in this, but if you fail miserably, you'll likely be given a second, third, and umpteenth chance to correct your mistakes, as the game is incredibly short on dialogue. Scoring with the hottest girl in school boils down to simply memorizing the responses that tickle her fancy and repeating them throughout the course of the game.

On the periphery, all of the schoolwork that must be done is handled for you. You just have to click on your desk to study, or enter one of the classrooms in school. There really are no extracurricular activities in this game. When you arrive at school, you are allotted a few minutes to talk it up, then you head to class and the day ends. If you are fruitful in your flirtations, you'll have the chance to set up a date – which is as simple as picking where and when. To score points at the beach, you'll need to dress appropriately in a swimsuit. Having a nice body also helps (which you can gain by going to class, or playing the DDR-like minigame in you room). You can also go to the mall, hang out on the bleachers, attend one of the school's dances, and to really light the fires, spend time in your bedroom.

Once you know the path to your soon-to-be lover's heart, it's time to make the next move. It's time to make out. Rather than showing these teenagers going at it, the game transitions to hilarious montages of live action footage. If your counterpart enjoys the kiss, you may see a video with a stoplight turning green. If she doesn't, you will likely see something along the lines of a snowboarder face planting a mountain.

Brooktown High is a place where you want to spend a good deal of time, but the barebones gameplay, repetition in conversations, and fact that most of your success relies on exploiting these elements sucks all the fun out of this dating game. Its heart is in the right place, but it doesn't have any style or substance.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE — 6.75

> **Concept:** A dating game that sets the stage for deep relationships, but doesn't offer enough substance to fulfill the experience

> **Graphics:** The kissing/doing it montages fit the tone of the game perfectly. The character models are also top notch – allowing the player to gauge reactions by their facial expressions

> **Sound:** Spoken dialogue is abundant, and the soundtrack is perfect for the art of serenading

> **Playability:** There aren't nearly enough activities or dialogue to truly capture the spirit of the game

> **Entertainment:** It's different than everything else out there, but it is highly repetitive and lacking in challenge

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.5

When scholars of the future start applying the label "John Hughesian," Brooktown High will be the first game classified as such. The students are exaggerated archetypes, the dialogue is cheesy, and you are judged by a wide array of superficial criteria. It's charming, but ultimately too shallow. The social options are paper thin – a fact the game artlessly covers up by severely limiting the time you have to interact with the opposite sex. If you manage to find a date, you're in for a treat; the clips that play whenever you're trying to get action are uniformly hilarious. Unfortunately, I mostly got the train wreck and sports blunders montages, especially on prom night. Of all the girls in the game, I courted the lesbian.—**JOE**

NINTENDO DS

Etrian Odyssey

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS
> **DEVELOPER** ATLUS > **RELEASE** MAY 30 > **ESRB** T

A MERCILESS ANTIQUE

There was a time when I couldn't even play a game without a piece of graph paper by my side. In classic dungeon crawlers and text adventures, knowing your precise location often meant the difference between life and death. Despite the advent of auto-mapping technology, Etrian Odyssey attempts to go back to these ancient conventions – but it loses the nostalgic charm along the way.

Using the touch screen to draw and notate your own map is a fun and natural fit for the DS, but the game built around this function is clunky and unforgiving. Making players do boring fetch quests in areas they've already explored isn't a good way to keep them hooked. Don't count on the story to keep you going, either; since you create all of your characters, and they are totally interchangeable and anonymous. I had to give my party members names like "Fight" and "Heal" just so I could recognize who should do what in battle.

If you have fond memories of the hardcore dungeon-crawlers from long ago, this title recreates that experience well. I have nothing against games that hearken back to old-school sensibilities, but Etrian Odyssey just feels like an outdated game that snuck onto a modern console.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE **6**

> **Concept:** A return to the cold and lonely days when games didn't really want you to succeed

> **Graphics:** Generic character portraits and ugly environments fail to be charming

> **Sound:** Unremarkable (though not bad) all around

> **Playability:** A high difficulty and lots of repetition aren't big selling points unless you're looking for punishment

> **Entertainment:** Anyone who grew up on more recent, enjoyable RPGs will have trouble (but no fun) adapting

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5.75

Having heard nothing about this game prior to its arrival at our office, I was surprised to find a Bard's Tale-style, first person RPG on the DS. Unfortunately, my nostalgia-fueled enthusiasm for EO was slowly whittled away by constantly repeating environments, Dragon Warrior-inspired battle presentation, and a complete lack of story. Okay, so maybe some people will consider adventuring into a deep labyrinth to map and catalogue all of its contents reason enough to play through a game, but I call it a boring level grind with little payoff.—**BRYAN**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Zendoku

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (2-PLAYER VIA WIRLESS)
> **PUBLISHER** EIDOS
> **DEVELOPER** ZOONAMI
> **RELEASE** JUNE 12 > **ESRB** E

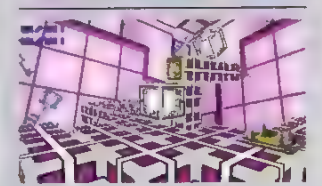
BOTTOM LINE **6**

No matter how many stupid minigames, Chuck Norris look-alikes, or pandas are piled on, one thing about Zendoku doesn't change: It's just sudoku. The multiplayer mode adds a nice combative edge to the traditionally lonesome exercise, and two people can play using a single cartridge. Despite that mechanic, Zendoku is a faithful and stale reproduction of the puzzle sensation – even when it's using shapes instead of numbers. If you only buy one sudoku game this year, maybe you should reconsider and buy zero.—**JOE**

PSP

Cube

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC OR GAME SHARING)
> **PUBLISHER** D3PUBLISHER OF AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** METIA INTERACTIVE
> **RELEASE** APRIL 24 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE **5.5**

I wanted to like Cube's general strategy – move your block around a floating 3D platform towards a glowing goal while dodging perils and collecting keys – but the fun just never kicked in. Beating levels felt more in the realm of schoolwork than satisfying puzzle action. Presentation is very bland and simple, but that somehow doesn't prevent loading screens between every stage. The level editor is a waste since you can only share designs with your friends and not online. And the multiplayer won't hold your attention for more than 10 minutes. Puzzle maniacs with PSPs might find some enjoyment here, as long as they go in with low expectations.—**BRYAN**

PSP

Aedis Eclipse: Generation of Chaos

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NIPPON ICHI > **DEVELOPER** IDEA FACTORY
> **RELEASE** APRIL 24 > **ESRB** E10+

COMPLEX, NOT SMART

Many people will jump down your throat if you come down on a game for being "too complex." Clearly you should be off playing Pokémon or some Pixar-licensed platformer if the game is so complicated that you get bored trying to navigate its nuances. There's another side to that coin, though. Aedis Eclipse is a great example of how some titles pile extraneous systems onto the core gameplay as a substitute for interesting design.

Aedis Eclipse tasks players with commanding armies in the defense of civilization against an opponent that isn't exactly trying to give every little boy and girl a pony for their birthday. An ensemble cast of spunky children, gruff sergeants, and bumbling scientists continuously deliver canned dialogue that makes *Voltron* look like *Neuromancer*. From the strategic map, which plays out more like Chutes & Ladders than Axis & Allies, you'll drop into conflicts where you'll make such exciting decisions as telling your units to spread out or stay together. I'm not exaggerating; the extent of your control over the battles is setting formations and calling retreats.

Now, I'm all about turn-based strategy and its attendant menus. Aedis Eclipse, however, never ties its various systems of scouting, RPG character development, army building, and map control into a cohesive whole. It just never feels like you're commanding an overarching war effort – instead, you're managing boring minutiae in order to avoid the non-trivial consequences of ignoring them. Furthermore, the scripted, pre-canned scenarios never give the player room to stretch his or her strategic wings.

I love this title's core idea of using custom-leveled heroes and their squads of minions to conquer the world (or defend it; same difference) in a turn-based framework. Until I can do that without attending to details that I don't care about through bland menus, though, I'll be sticking with Fire Emblem.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE **6**

> **Concept:** The only way to save this anime world is to navigate a whole lot of menus

> **Graphics:** Just because it's a strategy game doesn't mean that it has to look like it's on GBA

> **Sound:** Three cheers for voice acting in a handheld game! Fewer cheers for the fact that every line is preceded by a couple seconds of loading

> **Playability:** Not only is the turn-based overworld controlled by a cumbersome menu system – so is the real-time combat!

> **Entertainment:** Why play a marginally competent title when there are so many great ones available, even in this niche genre?

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5

When Quinn said "I so wish I had a cyber suit…I'd kick so much butt," I thought I had found a kindred soul. However, only hours later, I wanted nothing to do with the plucky protagonist or his awful game. Aedis Eclipse is an obtuse and barely playable strategy/RPG that falls flat in all the wrong places. The entire interface is clunky and confusing, the battles are too passive, and the characters are annoying. The load times have been improved since the previous Generation of Chaos, but they are still noticeably frequent, making all of the action and dialogue feel incredibly stilted. Aedis Eclipse actually has a lot of characters and content, but if none of it is any good, what's the point?—**JOE**

NINTENDO DS

Pokémon Diamond/Pearl

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RPG (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS, OR UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA NINTENDO WI-FI)
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** GAME FREAK > **RELEASE** APRIL 22 > **ESRB** E

GAME OF THE MONTH

PRETTY MUCH WHAT YOU'D EXPECT

BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

The time has finally come for a true Pokémon game on the DS, and it fulfills every desire of the long-time fans. They'll have over 100 new little monsters to collect, raise, and bring into battle against friends and enemies alike. The urge to "catch 'em all" is just as addictive as ever, online trading and battles effectively widen the community to a worldwide scope (instead of just your circle of friends), and the DS-specific features help to smooth out the interface.

The most notable DS-specific feature in Diamond/Pearl is the Pokétch. The entire bottom screen is taken up with an image of an old-school Game Boy-esque watch that grows in usefulness over time. Players can toggle between a digital watch (set to the actual time of day), a calculator, and a pedometer at the outset. Eventually, it will be able to do things like display a treasure finder, Pokémon health gauges, maps, and more. It's exciting to see what you'll get next, but I'm not too comfortable with having to work for a decent interface.

With the addition of Nintendo Wi-Fi capabilities (including voice chat), multiplayer is better than ever. Players can do straight up trades with their friends or use a worldwide eBay-type system to post a Pokémon they're willing to trade along with specific details on what species, level, and gender they're looking for. They can then check in later to see if someone took them up on the offer. As long as you're fair on what you're putting out there, this takes a lot of the headache out of filling up that Pokédex. Local wireless has all of the battle and trading options of online, in addition to an underground sidequest in which you dig for treasure, deck out your personal secret base, or steal flags from the bases of others. It's a nice change of pace from the traditional battles.

The reason Diamond/Pearl isn't scored higher is simply because the core gameplay still hasn't changed since the very first game in the series all those years ago – so much so that the impatient players out there may start trying to sneak past trainers just so they can mess around in the next town sooner. If you absolutely love all the previous Pokémon iterations, then this will suit you just fine, but those looking for any combat innovation are duly warned. That said, the addition of online trades and battles finally delivers on the promise that the first Pokémon games made. The crucial social interactivity aspect of Pokémon now takes place on a global scale. It only took 10 years!—**BRYAN**

> **Concept:** Take the tried and true Pokémon formula and add online play

> **Graphics:** The plain look is slightly aided by quasi-3D environments

> **Sound:** Lighthearted tunes mixed with Pokémon screeches

> **Playability:** Though touch screen commands are available, traditional controls still work best

> **Entertainment:** Poké-fans have enough here to keep them busy all summer, others will grow tired of the repetitive battle system

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

Yes, there was a time when all I could think about was catching 'em all. I thought I had put those days behind me, but here I am again, whiling away a Friday evening in front of my DS while games like God of War II await me at home. Maybe drug dealers should take a cue and start peddling Pokémon on street corners. However, like my level 16 Prinplup, I wish this series had evolved a little more than it has. The story still isn't very involving, and the graphics hardly impress on the DS. Still, that next level, evolution, or uncaught Pokémon is always only a few battles away – dangled in front of you like a golden carrot. Even after nearly a decade, that basic Pokémon formula still works.—**BEN**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

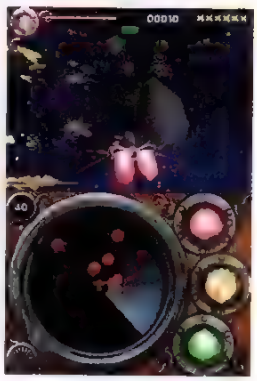
NINTENDO DS

Time Ace

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** TRAINWRECK STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 4 > **ESRB** E10+

I really wanted to make some kind of corny joke about Trainwreck Studios and how this game was a train wreck. Unfortunately for me – and probably lucky for you – Time Ace isn't quite that bad. Conceptually, you fly through nine different time periods as you hunt down your assistant who has stolen your time machine. The graphics aren't that bad for the DS, but the controls aren't as tight as I would like. As most of the controls use the d-pad and face buttons, you'll hardly use the touch screen, but that isn't really a complaint. Time Ace picks up a little bit after the first few levels, but never quite flies high enough for me.—**BEN**

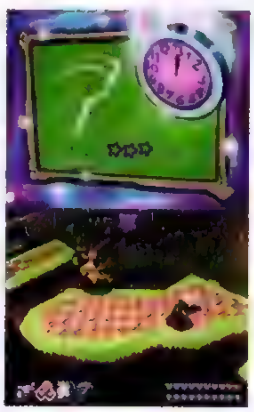


NINTENDO DS

Death Jr. and the Science Fair of Doom

BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MAY 22 > **ESRB** E10+



I kind of like the little guy who stars in this franchise, but he just hasn't seemed to hit his stride yet. His newest DS adventure is no exception. Imaginative characters and environments are all over the place, but the gameplay doesn't keep pace, and Death Jr. is left to wander through another game that falls short. I really love the world of the game, which is meant to be a strange cartoony mix of the demon realm and some sort of secondary school – I'm not sure which is worse. Controls feel consistently off with easy-to-miss jumps and boring combat, and the added functionality of playing as Pandora is more of a distraction than anything else. DJ is a funny guy, but his games have yet to hook me.—**MILLER**

NINTENDO DS

Diner Dash

BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS > **DEVELOPER** CLIMAX > **RELEASE** MAY 22 > **ESRB** E

Now I know why I never worked in food service. Those customers are brutal! From dropping off booster seats for babies to cleaning up spills and pleasing the local food critic, Diner Dash has all the stress of a real restaurant without the monetary compensation. It is, however, strangely fun, especially since the game is constantly throwing new kinks into the equation in the form of yet one more activity or task you'll need to keep track of. You'll run your heroine ragged trying to get the best possible tips by tapping her around the touch screen to keep the customers happy. It's simplistic, and unlikely to entertain for too long, but the concept is clever enough to deserve a look.—**MILLER**

CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For March 2007 Based On Units Sold

1 GOD OF WAR II

Kratos asserts his dominance over the video game realm with the huge debut numbers of God of War II. We usually use these charts blurbs to make fun of games, but you know, Kratos is pretty badass. And God of War II kicks ass. So, here's to a great game getting the sales it deserves. We can't really hate on that.

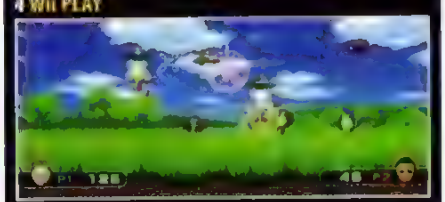
2 GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2

Remember when Tom Clancy wanted to buy the Minnesota Vikings? We were so excited. We were looking forward to buying purple-and-gold night vision goggles at the Vikings Pro Shop. Anyway, it never happened. After that, the Vikings went in the toilet and Clancy is still making mad cash all over the place. Maybe this is like the Curse of the Bambino.

3 GUITAR HERO II

After a long wait, 360 fans finally get their hands on Harmonix's awesome Guitar Hero II. Sure, the Explorer-shaped guitar isn't as cool as the SG-shaped PS2 controller (Angus Young is so much better than James Hetfield!), but this is still a damn fine game. Plus, you can buy downloadable songs on Xbox Live, if you want to take out another mortgage on your house.

4 WII PLAY



Wow, Wii Play is really burning up the sales charts! It must be because of its amazingly tight gameplay and unique minigames! We're sure it has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that buying this game is basically the only way to get an extra Wii controller right now. Not a chance.

5 MOTORSTORM

Things aren't looking great for PS3 titles right now, but Motorstorm is a bright spot for Sony, debuting in this month's top five. You know, people just seem to like dune buggies. They are like the gummi bears of the automobile world, except they don't taste as good and they handle better in mud.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	God of War II	N/A	PS2	9.75	03-07	$49
2	Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	N/A	360	8.75	03-07	$60
3	Guitar Hero II	N/A	360	9.25	03-07	$90
4	Wii Play	2	Wii	7	02-07	$50
5	Motorstorm	N/A	PS3	8	03-07	$59
6	Diddy Kong Racing	3	DS	7	02-07	$32
7	Spectrobes	N/A	DS	6.5	03-07	$30
8	Major League Baseball 2K7	8	360	8.5	02-07	$60
9	MLB 07: The Show	17	PS2	8.75	02-07	$40
10	Def Jam Icon	N/A	360	7.75	03-07	$60
11	Guitar Hero II	5	PS2	9	11-06	$80
12	New Super Mario Bros.	11	DS	9.25	05-06	$35
13	God of War	18	PS2	10	05-05	$19
14	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories	N/A	PS2	7.75	03-07	$19
15	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	N/A	Wii	6.5	03-07	$49
16	Crackdown	1	360	8.5	02-07	$60
17	Sonic and the Secret Rings	13	Wii	5.5	02-07	$49
18	TMNT	N/A	PS2	7.5	02-07	$39
19	Mario Kart DS	15	DS	8.5	11-05	$35
20	The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess	4	Wii	10	11-06	$50

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Phoenix Wright 4	DS
2	Mario Vs. Donkey Kong: March of the Minis	DS
3	Yoshi's Island DS	DS
4	Wii Sports	Wii
5	More English Training for Adults	DS
6	Wii Play	Wii
7	Naruto: Shippuuden N-Ultimate Accelerator	PS2
8	Prof. Layton and the Mysterious Village	DS
9	Musou Orochi	PS2
10	Pro Baseball Spirits 4	PS2

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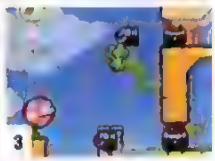

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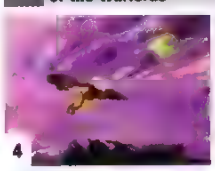
TOP 10 UK

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Super Paper Mario	N/A	Wii
2	God of War II	1	PS2
3	Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	3	360
4	World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	4	PC
5	The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles	2	Multi
6	Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars	5	Multi
7	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	NA	DS
8	Rainbow Six Vegas	8	Multi
9	Crackdown	9	360
10	Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords	N/A	DS



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10

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	The Sims 2: Seasons	3	$27
2	World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	1	$38
3	World of Warcraft	2	$24
4	Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars	N/A	$48
5	The Sims 2	5	$38
6	Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars - Kane Edition	N/A	$59
7	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl	N/A	$39
8	Supreme Commander	4	$48
9	The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles	N/A	$29
10	3333 XP Games	6	$10

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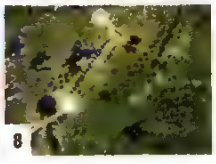


8

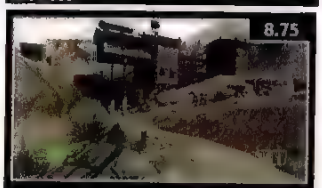
Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Armored Core 4	6.5	Apr-07
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	7	Feb-07
Call of Duty 3	8.75	Jan-07
Def Jam: Icon	7.75	Mar-07
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, The	9.5	Apr-07
F.E.A.R.	8.25	May-07
Fight Night Round 3	9	Jan-07
Formula One: Champion Edition	8	Apr-07
Full Auto 2: Battlelines	7.5	Jan-07
Genji: Days of the Blade	6	Dec-06
Godfather: The Don's Edition, The	7.5	May-07
Madden NFL 07	7.75	Jan-07
Major League Baseball 2K7	8.5	Mar-07
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	9.25	Dec-06
Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire	3.75	Dec-06
MotorStorm	8	Apr-07
NBA 07	7	Dec-06
NBA 2K7	8	Jan-07
NBA Street Homecourt	8.75	Mar-07
Need for Speed: Carbon	8.5	Dec-06
NHL 2K7	8.25	Jan-07
Resistance: Fall of Man	9.5	Dec-06
Ridge Racer 7	8	Dec-06
Sonic the Hedgehog	6.75	Jan-07
Tony Hawk's Project 8	8.75	Jan-07
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom	8.25	Jan-07
Virtua Fighter 5	8	Mar-07
Virtua Tennis 3	7	May-07

XBOX 360



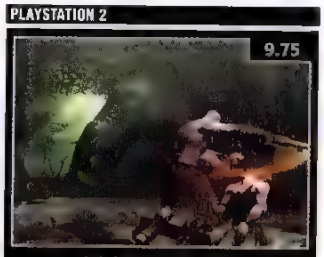
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 - Xbox 360 - May-07

Armored Core 4	6.5	Apr-07
Battlestations: Midway	6.5	Mar-07
Bullet Witch	6	Mar-07
Call of Duty 3	8.5	Dec-06
College Hoops 2K7	8	Feb-07
Crackdown	8.5	Mar-07
Dance Dance Revolution Universe	7.5	Apr-07
Dead or Alive Xtreme 2	7.5	Jan-07
Def Jam: Icon	7.75	Mar-07
Earth Defense Force 2017	8	May-07
Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles, The	9.5	Apr-07
Eragon	6.25	Feb-07
F.E.A.R.	8.5	Dec-06
FIFA Soccer 07	7.25	Dec-06
Fuzion Frenzy 2	2	Apr-07
Gears of War	9.5	Dec-06
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	8.75	May-07
Guitar Hero II	9.25	Apr-07
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	8.25	Feb-07
Major League Baseball 2K7	8.5	Mar-07
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	9.25	Dec-06
NBA Live 07	5.25	Dec-06
NBA Street Homecourt	8.75	Mar-07
NCAA 07 March Madness	7.75	Feb-07
Need for Speed: Carbon	8.5	Dec-06
Phantasy Star Universe	6	Jan-07
Samurai Warriors 2: Empires	4.75	Apr-07
Sonic the Hedgehog	6.75	Jan-07
Splinter Cell: Double Agent	9	Dec-06
Star Trek Legacy	7.75	Jan-07
Superman Returns	6	Jan-07
TMNT	7.5	May-07
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas	9.5	Jan-07
Tony Hawk's Project 8	9	Dec-06
UEFA Champions League 2006-2007	7.5	Apr-07
Virtua Tennis 3	7	May-07
Viva Piñata	8	Jan-07
Winning Eleven: Pro Evolution Soccer 2007	8	Mar-07
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2007	8.75	Dec-06

Wii

Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Call of Duty 3	7.25	Jan-07
Chicken Little: Ace in Action	7.25	Jan-07
Cooking Mama: Cook Off	6.75	May-07
Dragonball Z Budokai Tenkaichi 2	6	Feb-07
Elebits	7	Jan-07
Excite Truck	7.75	Jan-07
Far Cry Vengeance	4.5	Mar-07
Godfather: Blackhand Edition, The	6.5	May-07
Korohppa: Marble Mania	8	May-07
Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, The	10	Jan-07
Madden NFL 07	7.75	Jan-07
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	8.25	Jan-07
Medal of Honor: Vanguard	4	May-07
Metal Slug Anthology	7.5	Jan-07
Prince of Persia: Rival Swords	8.5	May-07
Rayman Raving Rabbids	8.5	Jan-07
Red Steel	7.5	Jan-07
Sonic and the Secret Rings	5.5	Apr-07
SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature from the Krusty Krab	6.75	Feb-07
SSX Blur	8.5	Apr-07
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz	6.75	Jan-07
Super Swing Golf	8	Feb-07
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	6.5	May-07
TMNT	7.5	May-07
Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam	5	Jan-07
Trauma Center: Second Opinion	8.5	Jan-07
WarioWare: Smooth Moves	7.75	Mar-07
Wii Play	7	Apr-07
Wii Sports	6.5	Jan-07
Wing Island	5	May-07

PLAYSTATION 2



God of War II - PS2 - Apr-07

Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Ar Tonelico: Melody of Elemia	6.75	Feb-07
Arena Football: Road to Glory	6.5	Apr-07
Arthur And The Invisibles	6.75	Mar-07
ATV Offroad Fury 4	7.5	Jan-07
Bully	8.5	Dec-06
Burnout Dominator	8	Apr-07
Capcom Classics Collection Volume 2	7	Dec-06
Chulip	3	Apr-07
Dawn of Mana	7	May-07
Dot Hack//G.U. Vol. 1//Rebirth	5.75	Dec-06
Eragon	6.25	Feb-07
Family Guy	5.5	Jan-07
Final Fantasy XII	9.25	Nov-06
Ghost Rider	6.75	Mar-07
God of War II	9.75	Apr-07
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories	7.75	May-07
Guitar Hero II	9	Dec-06
Justice League Heroes	7.25	Dec-06
Lumines Plus	7.5	Apr-07
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	9.25	Dec-06
Medal of Honor: Vanguard	6	May-07
Meet the Robinsons	7	May-07
MLB 07: The Show	8.75	Apr-07
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	8.25	Dec-06
MVP 07 NCAA Baseball	7	Mar-07
Need for Speed: Carbon	8.5	Dec-06
NFL Street 3	7	Feb-07
Phantasy Star Universe	6	Jan-07
Reservoir Dogs	5.75	Jan-07
Rogue Galaxy	9	Jan-07
Sega Genesis Collection	8.5	Jan-07
Shield, The	4	Mar-07
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner	7.75	Dec-06
Shining Force EXA	7.5	Apr-07
Singstar Pop	8	May-07
Sims 2: Pets, The	6	Dec-06
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Combined Assault	6.5	Jan-07
Sopranos: Road to Respect, The	6	Feb-07
Star Trek: Encounters	7.25	Jan-07
Thrillville	7.75	Dec-06
TMNT	7.5	May-07
Tokobot Plus: Mysteries of the Karakuri	7.25	Dec-06
Winning Eleven: Pro Evolution Soccer 2007	8	Mar-07
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2007	8.75	Dec-06

GAMECUBE

Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Sims 2: Pets, The	6	Dec-06

XBOX

Capcom Classics Collection Volume 2	7	Dec-06
Destroy All Humans 2	8.5	Nov-06
Eragon	6.25	Feb-07
Family Guy	5.5	Jan-07
Justice League Heroes	7.25	Dec-06
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	9.25	Dec-06
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	8.25	Dec-06
Need for Speed: Carbon	8.5	Dec-06
Reservoir Dogs	5.75	Jan-07
Thrillville	7.75	Dec-06

PC

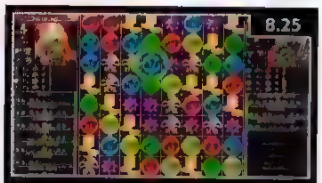
Age of Empires III: The Warchiefs	7	Dec-06
Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Battlefield 2142	8.5	Nov-06
Battlestations: Midway	6.5	Mar-07
Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars	8.5	May-07
Dark Messiah of Might & Magic	9.25	Dec-06
Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles, The	9.5	Apr-07
F.E.A.R. Extraction Point	8	Dec-06
Gothic 3	5	Feb-07
Heroes of Annihilated Empires	8	Feb-07
Heroes of Might & Magic V: Hammers of Fate	8	Feb-07
Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II – Rise of the Witch-King, The	8	Feb-07
Maelstrom	4	Mar-07
Mage Knight Apocalypse	6	Dec-06
Medieval II: Total War	9.25	Jan-07
Neverwinter Nights 2	8	Dec-06
ParaWorld	7	Dec-06
Phantasy Star Universe	8	Jan-07
Reservoir Dogs	5.75	Jan-07
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl	8.25	May-07
Sid Meier's Railroads!	8	Dec-06
Silverfall	6	May-07
Sims 2, Pets, The	6	Dec-06
Star Wars Empire at War: Forces of Corruption	7.5	Dec-06
Supreme Commander	9	Apr-07
Titan Quest: Immortal Throne	8	May-07
Vanguard: Saga of Heroes	7.5	Apr-07
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War – Dark Crusade	8.75	Dec-06
World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	9.75	Apr-07

NINTENDO DS

Brain Buster Puzzle Pak	8	Apr-07
Cake Mania	6.5	May-07
Diddy Kong Racing	7	Mar-07
Elite Beat Agents	6.75	Dec-06
Final Fantasy III	8	Dec-06
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales	6.5	May-07
Gunpey	7.75	Dec-06
Honeycomb Beat	7	May-07
Hotel Dusk: Room 215	7	Mar-07
Izuna: Legend of the Unemployed Ninja	3.5	Apr-07
Kirby Squeak Squad	7.75	Feb-07
Konami Classics Series: Arcade Hits	7.75	May-07
Konductra	6.25	Feb-07
Lost In Blue 2	6.5	May-07
Lunar Knights	8	Apr-07
Mage Knight: Destiny's Soldier	4.5	Dec-06
Meteos: Disney Magic	7.75	May-07
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Justice For All	8	Jan-07
Pogo Island	6.5	Apr-07
Pokémon Ranger	5	Dec-06
Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords	8.25	May-07
Quickspot	7.5	Apr-07
Spectrobes	6.5	Apr-07
Thoncube	6	Apr-07
Wario: Master of Disguise	7.25	May-07
Yoshi's Island DS	8.25	Dec-06

PSP

300: March To Glory	6.25	Apr-07
Ace Combat X: Skies of Deception	8.25	Dec-06
After Burner: Black Falcon	7	May-07
Call of Duty: Roads to Victory	6	May-07
Capcom Puzzle World	7.5	Apr-07
Chili Con Carnage	7	Apr-07
Coded Arms: Contagion	6.75	May-07



Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords - PSP - May-07

Dungeon Siege: Throne of Agony	8	Jan-07
Dynasty Warriors Vol.2	5	Dec-06
EA Replay	6.75	Dec-06
Full Auto 2	7.25	May-07
Gitaroo Man Lives!	9	Dec-06
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories	8.5	Dec-06
Gun Showdown	7.75	Dec-06
Gunpey	7.75	Dec-06
Gurumin: A Monstrous Adventure	7	Apr-07
Legend of Heroes II: Song of the Ocean, The	6	Mar-07
Lumines II	9	Dec-06
M.A.C.H.	6.5	May-07
Marvel Trading Card Game	7.5	May-07
Medal of Honor Heroes	6.75	Dec-06
Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops	9	Feb-07
Monster Kingdom Jewel Summoner	6	Mar-07
Mortal Kombat: Unchained	8	Feb-07
Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords	8.25	May-07
Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters	9	Apr-07
Sid Meier's Pirates!	8	Apr-07
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fire Team Bravo 2	7.5	Jan-07
Sonic Rivals	6.75	Feb-07
Star Wars: Lethal Alliance	6.5	Feb-07
Valhalla Knights	4.5	Mar-07
Warhammer: Battle for Atluma	7.5	Feb-07
Warriors, The	8.5	Apr-07

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Final Fantasy V Advance	8	Jan-07
Final Fantasy VI Advance	9	Apr-07
Summon Knight: Swordcraft Story 2	7.25	Jan-07
Yggdra Union	7.25	Feb-07

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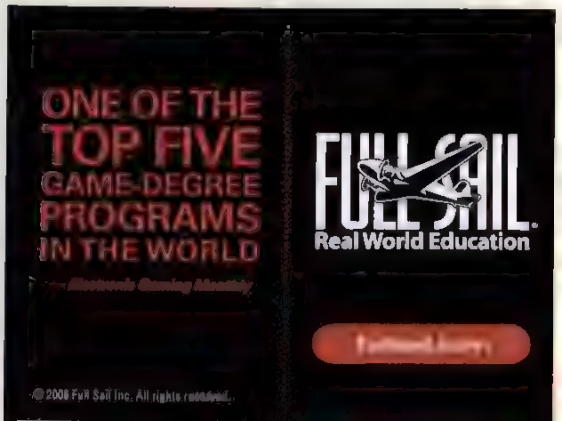


God of War II

Titan Crushing Tips Straight From The Developer

By Jason McDonald & Adam Puhl, Combat Designers

THE THROW ADVANTAGE

Overwhelmed by enemies? Perform throws. Kratos is invulnerable during most throw sequences, so he won't be affected by annoying fireballs, Medusa beams, etc. Throwing in the midst of battle will give you the moment of breathing room you might need to avoid those hazards. This is especially useful in the final hallway in the inner sanctum of the Temple of the Fates. Also, be careful with Satyrs. Satyrs force Kratos to struggle while he attempts the throw – an act that keeps him vulnerable.

Often a large enemy will be grouped with a bunch of smaller enemies as you battle. Kratos can actually throw most of these little enemies as projectiles. This could potentially injure the bigger enemy and any other in its path. On God and Titan difficulties, these throws do even greater damage to the surrounding enemies that are targeted. Use them wisely!

Many enemies can be thrown without a circle appearing over their head. Use this to your advantage and kill them quickly. These include:

- Cerebus Seed
- Beast Lord
- Barbarian Mercenary
- Cursed/Undead Archer
- Cursed/Undead Legionnaire
- Fates Sentry
- Boar
- Rabid Hound
- Hades Arm
- Hades Fiend
- Hades Nymph
- High Priest of the Fates
- Harpy
- Boar
- Satyr
- Rhodes Archers/Soldiers
- Wraiths

GRAPPLE THROWS

When Enemies are in midair, pressing ○ will launch Kratos' chains into them and slam them back into the ground. Holding ○, however, will provide different results for many AI. Examples:

Undead Archer/Legionnaire: Brings AI into a choke hold
Fates Sentry: Brings AI into a choke hold
Harpy: Throws AI as projectile
Boar: Throws AI as projectile
Rabid Hound: Throws AI as projectile
Hades Nymph: Immediate Kill

MEDUSA: AN ALLY?

Medusas can be a valuable tool if manipulated correctly. Attempting to throw a Medusa that hasn't been weakened (no circle over her head) will force her to retaliate 90 percent of the time with a beam attack. Equipped with the Golden Fleece, Kratos can reflect this attack by pressing L1 (block button). A minigame prompt will come up, and if you succeed you will freeze nearly everyone onscreen including the Medusa. Use this to kill her and anyone else around her with ease.

MOVE FASTER

Most of Kratos' moves can be cancelled by rolling (right analog stick). An advanced technique of getting around is rolling in a direction, pressing square to attack, and rolling immediately again. Repeat this, and Kratos can get around the environment much faster than his normal run. It also helps you escape tight situations, since he cannot be hit at the start of the roll.

MIDAIR FREEZE

Freezing enemies in midair using the Medusa Head will cause them to fall and shatter immediately (netting you a nice orb bonus as well). Flying enemies can be easily put to rest by using this technique. Upgrade the magic by one level, and you will gain the shotgun attack (L2 + △) that allows Kratos to launch (Hold △) non-flying AI and freeze them in midair as well. If this is difficult, try using the Spear of Destiny to launch AI by simply pressing triangle.

HIDDEN ABILITIES

After acquiring the Icarus wings in Atlas you learn about the platforming advantages you gained from this new item. What you might not have learned is that the wings also give you a combat advantage. Press L1 + ✕ while on the ground, Kratos will launch himself straight up in the air with the wings, taking any enemy in the nearby area up with him. Performing the same move in the air will flap the two wings together for a blast of wind.

RAGE OF THE TITANS TRICKS

Rage of the Titans has multiple features on top of the obvious: decimate everyone around you. If a Medusa turns you to stone, activate Rage of the Titans to instantly break free from the statue. This is the only way to escape being stoned in the air. When opening a chest with enemies around, activate Rage of the Titans and they won't be able to stop you from opening it. Whenever Kratos' combos are greater than 25 hits, you can press L1 to activate the Prometheus' Inferno. This giant fire tornado does lots of damage and gets larger in size the bigger your combos are. While in Rage of the Titans, the combo counter will not go away. This allows you to build up massive combos. If you use the Urn of Prometheus, you can actually use it forever. This gives you the chance to have one combo that lasts the entire game! The only tricky part is you cannot die and you have to deactivate Rage of the Titans whenever you use the Amulet of Fates, so you don't accidentally use the Prometheus' Inferno.

DESIGNER CHALLENGE

So you've beat God of War II, but what was your completion time? Do you think you can beat 2:46? Try playing through a second time on Easy mode, with god armor, and all your powers. What's the quickest time you can get through the game?

HIDDEN ORBS

While Kratos is fighting with different weapons, he actually gains different amounts of orbs. If you use the Barbarian King Hammer, you will get god orbs and less red orbs when you kill enemies. If you use the Spear of Destiny, Kratos gets magic orbs and less red orbs when killing enemies. Use these weapons whenever you are running low on either meter.

Whenever you open a magic chest, you can perform one magic attack while the orbs are flowing into Kratos and his magic meter will still be completely full.

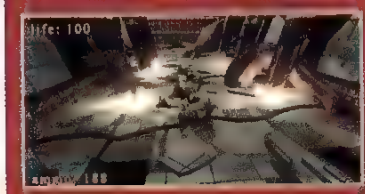
Mod World

theprodukkt
http://212.202.219.162

Ah, those industrious Germans. One minute you're embracing the inherent silliness of your accents via "Vee-Dub" commercials, the next you're condensing 3D bump-mapped first-person shooters into 96 kilobyte downloads. It's almost like taking snippets of individuals within a group of people can make that group look silly.

So what's theprodukkt? Sure, it looks like Quake 2 and plays like Hexen, but it's in freakin' 96k! What do you expect? Remember switching floppy disks back in the day? You wouldn't have to, because this fits on a single one. Even on those big 5.25" suckers you pirated Karateka from your elementary school with. But alas, this won't play on an Apple II. Someday, though, somebody will make an ASCII FPS. And we will gladly cover it.

Now that we think about it, it's a good thing that Sony moved to Blu-ray for PlayStation 3. Really, on DVD-9 you could only fit an effectively infinite number of copies of theprodukkt. On Blu-ray, you could fit infinity times three! How could you possibly win an argument on an internet forum with somebody who could fit infinity times three copies of a fully featured 3D first-person shooter on their media? Might as well try to argue that Warlocks aren't overpowered on the official World of Warcraft boards.

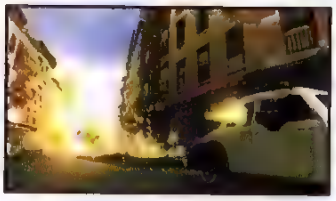


Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

PlayStation 3



The Godfather: The Don's Edition

While playing, go into the pause menu and enter these codes. They can only be put in about every 5 minutes.

$5,000 – □, △, □, □, △, L3
Full Ammo – △, Left, △, Right, □, R3
Full Health – Left, □, Right, △, Right, L3

Wii

The Godfather: Blackhand Edition

During gameplay, go into the pause menu and enter these codes. They can only be put in about every five minutes.

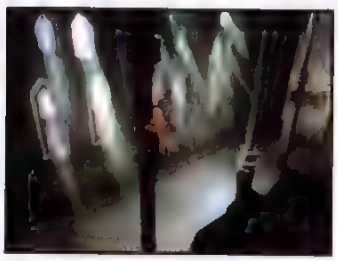
$5,000 – Minus, 2, Minus, Minus, 2, Up
Full Ammo – 2, Left, 2, Right, Minus, Down
Full Health – Left, Minus, Right, 2, Right, Up
Unlock Film Clips – 2, Minus, 2, Minus, Minus, Up

Prince of Persia: Rival Swords

While playing, go into the pause menu and enter these codes

Baby Toy of Death – Left, Left, Right, Right, Z, Nunchuck Down, Nunchuck Down, Z, Up, Down
Telephone Sword – Right, Left, Right, Left, Down, Down, Up, Up, Z, Nunchuck Down, Z, Z, Nunchuck Down, Nunchuck Down

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen filling gas tanks with sand)



Code of the Month

NBA 2K7

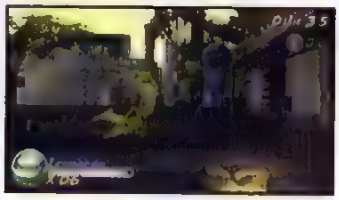
Dear Kevin McHale: These only work on PS3 and Xbox 360, not real life. Please stop trying to convice us that Troy Hudson and Mark Blount are taking the T-Wolves anywhere. Sincerely, Minnesota.

At the cheat code menu, enter these codes and toggle on the codes feature.

+10 Defensive Awareness – getstops
+10 Offensive Awareness – inthezone
All-Star Ball (Xbox 360 Only) – plyflmia
All-Star Uniforms – syt6cii
Bobcats' New Alternate Jersey – bcb8sta
International All-Stars – tns9roi
Jazz's New Alternate Jersey – zjb3lau
Maximum Durability for one game – ironman
NBA 2K Team – bestsim
Nets' Alternate Jersey – nrd4esj
St. Patrick Day Uniforms For The Knicks, Bulls, and Celtics – lpk7sgn
Superstar Team – rta1spe
Unlimited Stamina For One Game – norest
Unlocks the ABA ball – payrespect
Unlocks the Topps 2k7 team – topps2ksports
Wizard's New Alternate Jersey – zw9idla

Bird Camy
Gay Mills, Wisconsin

PSP



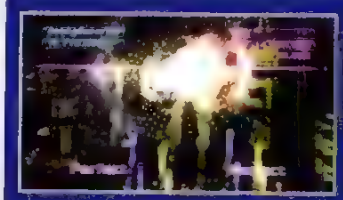
TMNT

At the mission briefing screen, enter this code to unlock a fantasy costume.

Unlock Fantasy Costume – Left, Right, Left, Right, Up, Down, Up, Down, ✕

Xbox Live Arcade Spotlight

Boom Boom Rocket



Some of you may have already checked this one out, but for those of you who missed it, Boom Boom Rocket is one of the more exciting releases for Live Arcade in the last couple of months. From the team that brought you Geometry Wars, Boom Boom Rocket combines psychedelic firework displays with an intuitive rhythm game that has you matching button presses to the beats of music produced by Ian Livingstone. The dance music style tracks may make classical music fans cringe with song titles like "Hall of the Mountain Dude" and "Toccata and Funk," but most of the adaptations are nonetheless pretty entertaining. While even the hardest difficulty setting won't be enough to truly challenge rhythm game masters the endurance mode certainly will – you'll play through repeated laps of the same song as the speed constantly increases. There's nothing quite like Bach at 250 beats per minute. The game's available now – consider a look.

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THE FORGOTTEN SIMS

You cannot stop the simulation revolution. This addictive and engrossing genre was thrust into the spotlight by SimCity in 1989, and years later The Sims would finish what its predecessor started by becoming one of the most popular PC games of all time. While these two series are undoubtedly the most famous works brought to us by Will Wright and Maxis, they can also be seen as bookends containing a wide library of interesting (but lesser-known) simulations. You are probably aware that there were several apocryphal Sim titles during the '90s, but even the most informed gamer will be surprised by the existence of at least one of the games collected on these pages.

SimEarth (1990)

Shaping a world's development sounds like the ultimate god game, and SimEarth gives players controls over many important details like atmospheric gas, land placement, and life itself. Watching robots slowly develop intelligence and build cities is thrilling, but a clunky interface and a sense of randomness left something to be desired in a game that sounded so cool in concept.

SimAnt (1991)

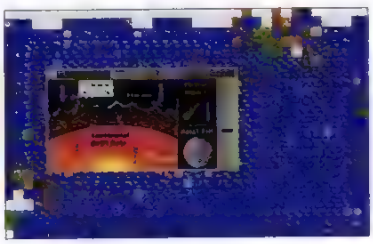
You might not think an ant colony is ripe for exploration, but SimAnt can prove you wrong. As the yellow ant, you're building a small underground empire. You gather food for your civilization, regulate workloads, and dig tunnels. You also have to fend off spiders, red ants, and other hazards in the backyard you call home.

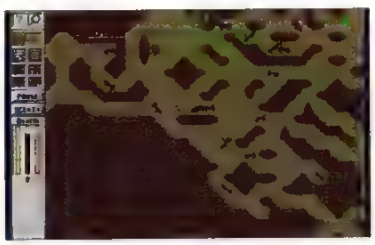
SimLife (1992)

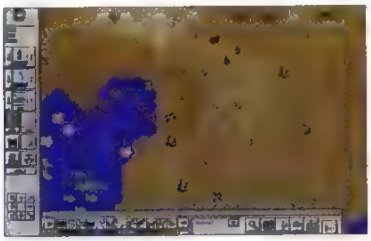
Of all the games on this list, upcoming game Spore seems to draw the most from SimLife. Players can dive into a variety of life forms at the genetic level and fool around to create all kinds of abominations. Of course, the real goal is to manufacture plants and animals that can live together in harmony, but that just isn't as much fun.

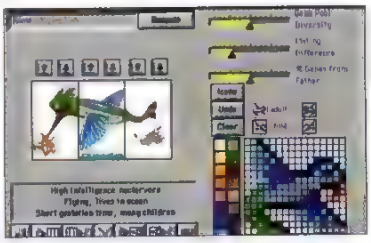
SimFarm (1993)

This is kind of like Harvest Moon without all of the courtship and wacky townspeople. SimFarm puts you in charge of a variety of duties necessary to manage a farm, like selling crops, livestock, and dealing with natural disasters. As in real life, the weather plays a key role in your success. Fans of SimFarm are required to derisively refer to fans of SimCity as "dam city folk."









SimTower (1994)

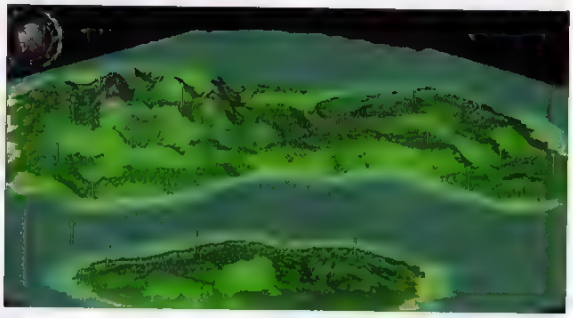
Despite the fact that it takes place in skyscraper, the underlying mechanics of this title are much like SimCity's. Manage your population and keep them happy by building restaurants, hotels, and hospitals. People move around using elevators instead of roads, but all of these similarities to the classic city-builder could explain why SimTower was so fun and addictive.

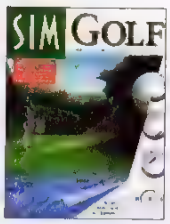
SimHealth (1994)

This game is even less exciting than it sounds. It's a simulation of the U.S. Healthcare system. Who hasn't dreamed of sticking it to those HMO fatcats or reviewing proposals for the nation's medical practices? What little attention the game attracted was due to its timing; it released during the healthcare debates of the Clinton administration.

SimIsle (1995)

The rainforest is a strange place, and it's dangerous to go in alone. SimIsle is a departure from Sim tradition in that players manage their building and resources through several payrolled agents. Think of them like the basic units in an RTS; they receive orders, then take a certain amount of time depending on the task. Considering the subtitle is "Missions in the Rainforest," there is also a focus on solving problems in each region.





SimGolf (1996)

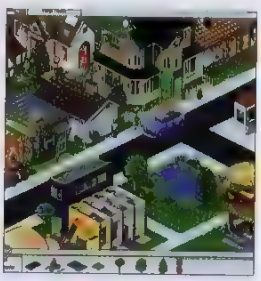
Not to be confused with Sid Meier's Sim Golf, this Maxis game came out years earlier, though it used similar concepts. It's pretty self-explanatory; you build golf courses with the included editor, and then you play them. You control your swings through two methods: mouse movement or the standard three-click approach.

You Know, For Kids

Most of the games with the Sim prefix are relatively accessible to gamers of all sorts. Even so, there was a push in the '90s to make a handful of Sim titles tailored more deliberately to a younger crowd. The following titles were published under the Maxis Kids label.

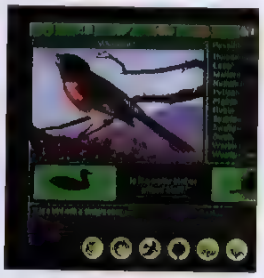
SimTown (1995)

Instead of managing a sprawling metropolis, this game focuses more on individual neighborhoods and residents. Simple management of towns and an emphasis on the people who inhabit them are aspects that eventually found a way into The Sims. In fact, SimTown almost plays like a prototype version of The Sims.



SimPark (1996)

The best part of SimPark is by far the disasters. The core gameplay is fairly simple cause-and-effect relationships, but it's priceless to see your pristine park (trees and lakes, not coasters and tilt-a-whirls) get invaded by aliens. Sure, you can choose a Kudzu plague instead, but prolific plants just aren't as exciting as ray guns.



SimTunes (1996)

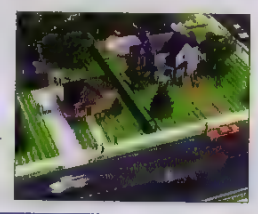
More of a toy than a game, SimTunes is a strange mixture of drawing and music. It gives gamers the experience of creating music without instruments, using pictures and colors instead. Interestingly, SimTunes began as a Japan-only game called Sound Fantasy for the Super Famicom, but this is the only form that saw release.

SimSafari (1998)

If you ever wished that SimCity had more zebra-watching, then this is for you. Certain elements of SimSafari, like managing tourism, resemble the mechanics in tycoon games, but the main focus remained on the building and the animals. SimSafari was not well received, and was the last of the Sim offshoots.

SIMS THAT NEVER WERE

There may have been a lot of Sim games, but there were almost two more. SimMars and SimsVille were both officially announced titles in the series, and trailers for both games were included on the CDs of a few other Maxis products. SimsVille appeared to incorporate elements from both The Sims and SimCity, while SimMars dealt with the colonization of the red planet. While both games have been cancelled, it seems that many of their core concepts have made the transition over to Spore.



SimsVille

CITY LIMITS

They don't really fall into the official Sim canon, but there were two expansion-like games that were intended to enhance your SimCity experience. Both SimCopter and Streets of SimCity allow players to import their creations from SimCity 2000 and explore them in 3D. SimCopter lets you take to the skies and perform various duties like rescuing people from burning buildings and catching crooks. Streets of SimCity is a vehicular combat game that lets you cruise your own streets and blow stuff up – a bizarre departure for the franchise.

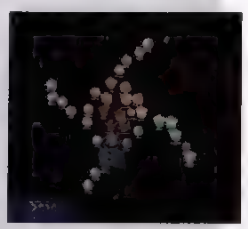
GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Albert Pinsonneault

SPACEWARD HO! 5.0

> **FORMAT** MAC
> **PUBLISHER** DELTA TAO SOFTWARE

Spaceward Ho! 5.0, made by Delta Tao Software for the Mac, is the greatest game of all time. Gone are the complicated nuances of such unfortunate titles as Civilization IV, Master of Orion III, Warcraft III, and other tedious strategy titles. Spaceward Ho! lets you dive right into a world where beefy-armed planets wearing ten-gallon hats produce questionable representations of spaceships that engage in static, unanimated combat. Its brilliance is blinding, and accolades have repeatedly rained down on this game…mostly from its own website.



From the first moment you see the title screen – when you are assaulted by European techno music and the specter of an Earth-like planet/creature covered in cowboy paraphernalia – you are totally hooked. The best characteristic of the game is that you don't really need to know what is going on in order to play well. You can really phone it in. You can even activate a game mode where you only have to play one out of every ten rounds! I have actually fallen asleep playing this game. I don't have the time to solve the riddle of those Sid Meier games; I'm not studying for the MCAT! Spaceward Ho! is simple and straightforward. In other words, you have a really limited number of options as a player; the complexity lies in trying to figure out what exactly is going on without the help of graphics, text, or sound.

Spaceward Ho! is a low-stress space strategy game without complicated gimmicks. It doesn't use fancy visuals, effects, story elements, features, clarity, or buttons to trick the gamer into liking it. It is also one of the only games I know that periodically un-registers itself, obliging you to purchase the game multiple times if you want to keep playing! However, that's a price I'll willingly pay. Spaceward Ho! is worth a million damn dollars, and is unquestionably the greatest game of all time.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

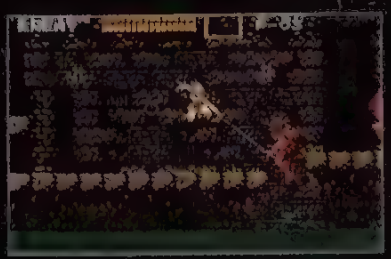
Diablo II released on June 29, 2000, redefining everything gamers thought they knew about leveling and loot. In addition to setting the standard for isometric hack n' slash, Diablo II also set a world record by selling over one million copies in its first two weeks on shelves. With five classes and multiple difficulty settings, the game has endured the test of time. Ingenious in its simplicity, there still aren't many better options than Diablo II if you just want to kill monsters, get better gear, then kill stronger monsters.

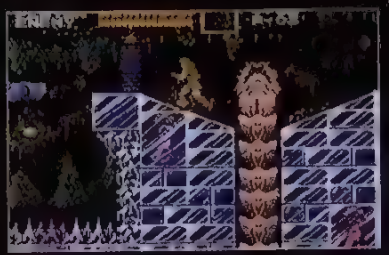
PLAYSTATION

CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** 2001

Generally speaking, there are two categories of Castlevania games – before and after Symphony of the Night. This is the exception to the rule. Chronicles gave U.S. PSone gamers a chance to play a little-known early adventure of Simon Belmont that had never seen release in the States. Thus, even though this release came after Symphony, it lacks the Metroid-meets-RPG styling that gave that game its classic status. Instead, Chronicles is a throwback in almost every way, with linear level designs and a pure action formula without any focus on upgrades or equipment. Some minor changes (such as a dramatically redesigned character model) are included in the Arranged mode that adds on to a faithful version of the original, but it's debatable whether the remade version is truly better than the game it is emulating. You're definitely wielding a whip and a cross, but there are any number of other, better Castlevania releases in which you can take down Dracula.



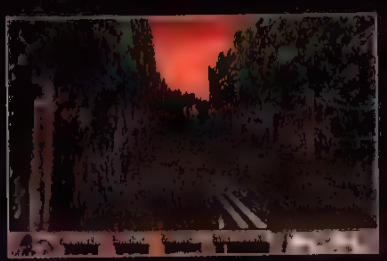


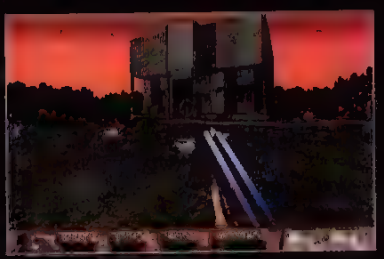
PC

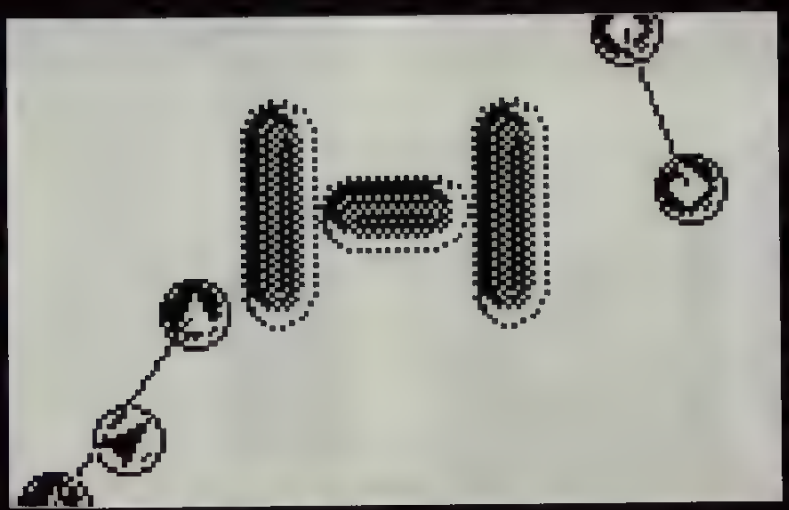
REDNECK RAMPAGE

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE MULTIPLAYER) > **PUBLISHER** INTERPLAY
> **DEVELOPER** XATRIX ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** 1997

Redneck Rampage was the side-splitting first-person shooter that taught us many important life lessons: Swigging the perfect amount of booze will sharpen your aim, a healthy diet of pork rinds and cow pies can cure bullet wounds, and aliens should focus on cloning higher life forms than backwoods kinfolk if they are serious about world domination. The game's steady flow of hick humor still conjures a laugh or two, but time hasn't been as kind to the general gameplay. Redneck Rampage's many levels – ranging from small towns to junkyards to sewer systems – feel vacuous and uninspired. To beat each level you must find keys and locate your thick-skulled buddy, Bubba (great plot point). Scavenging these mediocre levels gets tiresome quickly, and shooting the waves of redneck clones, turd minions, and aliens fails to offset the boredom.



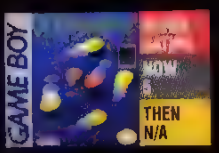




GAME BOY

THE GAME OF HARMONY

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** ACCOLADE/U.S. GOLD
> **DEVELOPER** CODE MONKEYS/THE ASSEMBLY LINE > **RELEASE** 1990



While it's name sounds like a title to a new-age self-help book, The Game of Harmony is actually an intriguing puzzle game curiosity. It's a completely different take on the genre, based around the concept of knocking around circular pieces on the game board. The individual circles are marked with shapes like squares, triangles, and diamonds. The goal is to clear the screen by colliding like pieces together, which eliminates them. It's sometimes necessary to knock opposite shapes together, to create orbs that fill your life meter. The challenge comes in the fact that unclaimed power orbs will eventually turn into more pieces, which must be cleared before the timer runs out. As the level go on, more complex walls are placed on the board to flummox your efforts. Sounds cool, right? Unfortunately, the control is simply abysmal. You steer your onscreen cursor like a bumper car, with the d-pad and an acceleration button, which works about as well as steering a boat through a lake of pudding while drunk.

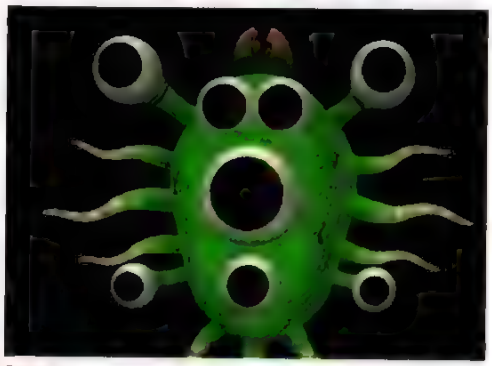
*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Castlevania Chronicles (GI #102 10/02), Redneck Rampage (GI #51 07/97)

ONLINE

Extra Content You Can Find At www.gameinformer.com

UNLIMITED LAUNCH: MAY 16

Still not enough Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare for you? Check out our exclusive video interviews with Jason West and Grant Collier, as well as a guided video tour of the expansive Infinity Ward offices!



Spore

Gamers drooling over the prospect of playing Will Wright's latest opus won't want to miss our extra art work and interview with game designer Chaim Gingold.

Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation

The PlayStation's high-flying jet fighter has defected to the Xbox 360, and game designer Natsuki Isaki breaks down the great new features coming to the popular sky shooter.

PLUS:

Read more about the Uncanny Valley and check out our exclusive Warhammer Online wallpapers!

ALSO ONLINE THIS MONTH:

Game Informer Online continues its unrelenting coverage of gamers' days. On tap this month: LucasArts, Nintendo, Sega, Square Enix, and Ubisoft.

ENTER THE CALL OF DUTY 4 MODERN WARFARE FIRST TO PLAY SWEEPSTAKES!

50 LUCKY WINNERS

will be flown to Call of Duty® HQ in Los Angeles, Calif., home of Call of Duty® 4: Modern Warfare developer Infinity Ward, to go behind the scenes, meet the team and play one of the most highly anticipated games of the year! NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN. VOID WHERE PROHIBITED.

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GAMEOVER

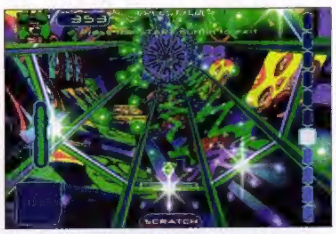
"Would You Like For Me To Continue My Story From Here Next Time?"

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

They may be big-name heroes now, but even our favorite video game characters aren't proud of some of the things they did when they were younger. Everybody has some skeletons in the closet, and these guys might have preferred if we hadn't unearthed their previously sealed police files. Sorry, guys! The truth will set you free. Answer the following to find out which high school exploits most resembled your own.

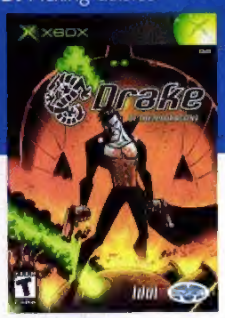
1 Before they hit it big with Guitar Hero, the music maestros at Harmonix already had a pedigree of great music games to their name. Which of the following was not a song in their early PS2 game, Frequency?

A. The Crystal Method's "The Winner"
B. Freezepop's "Science Genius Girl"
C. No Doubt's "Ex-Girlfriend"
D. Garbage's "Cherry Lips"



2 The Xbox has a lot of great games. Drake of the 99 Dragons isn't one of them. Which of the following abilities was not at Drake's disposal as he fought through the streets of Neo Tokyo?

A. Dual-wielding pistols
B. Wearing an imposing black trenchcoat
C. Satisfying his dark and brooding lust for vengeance
D. Picking daisies



3 Even the heavy hitters have to start somewhere. These days, Konami is known for big-name titles like Metal Gear Solid. However, back in 1982, they developed one of the following as a popular arcade release.

A. Time Pilot
B. Xenophobe
C. Joust
D. Centipede

4 Jody Summer was one of the playable pilots in F-Zero X. What was the name of her machine?

A. Astro Robin
B. White Cat
C. Red Gazelle
D. Space Angler

5 In the original King's Quest, Sir Graham needed to track down three unique items in order to become the next king. Two of those items were the magic shield and the magic chest. What was the third?

A. The Magic Crown
B. The Magic Sword
C. The Magic Mirror
D. The Magic Potato

6 2004's Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone gave long-time fans of the fantasy setting a chance to briefly play as one of its most popular characters. Which one?

A. Elminster
B. Drizzt Do'Urden
C. Shandril Shessair
D. Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun

7 In Jak II, several characters find themselves transported into the future, but which of the series mainstays was already a resident of Haven City?

A. Samos
B. Daxter
C. Ashelin
D. Keira

8 Some people believe that Indiana Jones' last name is actually "and the". This is not, in fact, accurate. Which of the following wasn't the second half of a Indy video game title?

A. and the Fate of Atlantis
B. and the Philosopher's Stone
C. and the Infernal Machine
D. and the Emperor's Tomb

9 In the recently re-released version of the 1989 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles game, what delicacy does Shredder plan to dine on?

A. Turtle legs
B. Turtle fricassee
C. Turtle soup
D. Turtle cheesecake

10 Contary to popular belief, Link isn't a one-girl kind of guy. In what Legend of Zelda game did our green-clad hero first get to know a young lady named Nayru?

A. Link's Awakening
B. Oracle of Seasons
C. Majora's Mask
D. Oracle of Ages

BREAKDOWN

91,000 is how many dollars that a U.S. District Court ordered Louisiana to pay the ESA in April to cover legal fees they incurred while they fought an anti-game law that was eventually deemed unconstitutional

0 The number of Dreamcast games we reviewed this month. Come to think of it, that system's been on a decline lately

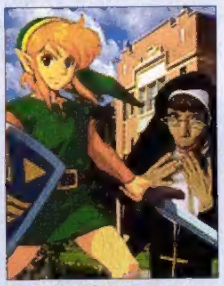
2 million dollars is how much the U.S. Army paid recently for a sponsorship deal with the Global Gaming League website, in hopes of boosting recruitment numbers

255 The number of GameCubes that were sold in Japan during one week in April. Also the cap for many statistics in Final Fantasy titles

90% of Game Informer Editors equate the word "online" with the word "Internet"

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

0-1:
Spyro's Arson Conviction

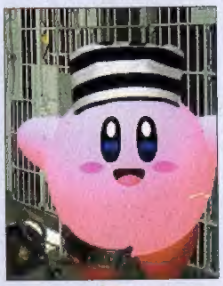


2-3:
Link's Dress Code Violation

4-5:
Sonic's Track and Field Disqualification

6-7:
Lara Croft's Stint On Raiders Gone Wild

8-9:
Mario's "Fungus Among Us" Business



10:
Kirby's Tax Evasion Rap

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Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. A 4. B 5. C 6. B 7. C 8. B 9. C 10. D

WANTING TO GET MORE OUT OF LIFE
IS STRONG.
GETTING THE MOST OUT OF LIFE
IS ARMY STRONG.
There's strong. Then there's Army Strong.
The strength that comes from expert training in one of over
150 different career fields–as well as money for college.
Find out how to get it at goarmy.com/strong.
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