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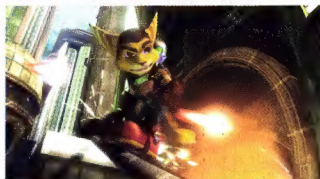
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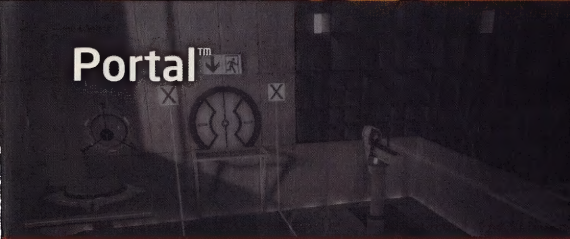
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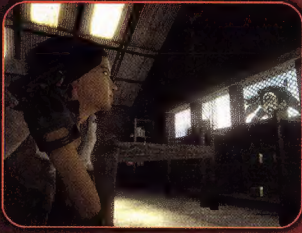
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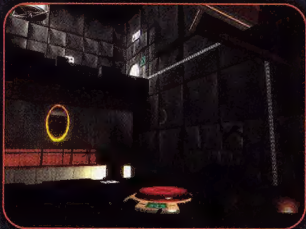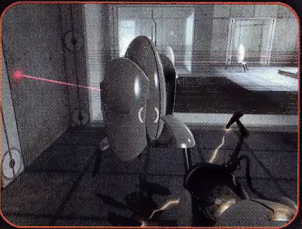
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FREE ADVICE

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I know I'm just some editor-in-chief at some video game magazine in the eyes of Sony Computer Entertainment, but sometimes you just have to say enough is enough and lay it all out. So here we go, Sony, I've got some free advice for you, and I sure hope you take it.

First and foremost, you need to add gamer scores and you need to add them now. I realize you don't want to give Microsoft credibility for creating this gaming phenomenon, but sometimes you just have to swallow your pride and deal with it. Yes, I know your upcoming Home service will have trophies and the like, but ultimately gamers, including myself, are making purchasing decisions based on whether we can get achievements and add to our gamer score.

This is coming from a guy who quite frankly doesn't go out of his way to inflate his score, but when given the choice between a third-party game on Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3, I'm going with the Xbox 360 almost every time because if I can get points for basically free, I might as well take it all things being equal. It's not like it costs you anything. And it's not like third-party companies aren't already doing all the work. They just aren't putting this aspect into your games because you won't add this rather simple feature.

Here's another hint. Make your games use a 2,000 point system, so it seems better than Microsoft's 1,000 point cap. It's the little things, but I'm telling you this will work. As it stands, most of the staff simply wants the points, and I don't think we are the only people in the world choosing Xbox 360 over PlayStation 3 for this very simple program.

Next, you need to get rumble back into the PlayStation 3 controller. Personally, I could care less, but not having this basic feature is driving your fan base crazy. I mean seriously, when did you guys stop listening to the gamers?

Finally, and most importantly, you need killer exclusive games and you need them now. Letting BioShock go to Xbox 360 was a mistake. Letting GTA IV go multiplatform was a mistake. I remember a PlayStation that came onto the scene in 1995 and gave gamers what they wanted. What happened to that company? You are trying to make the PS3 the central part of people's home theater systems, yet your system won't work with standard universal remotes because you went off and used Bluetooth? I don't get the odd and offbeat decisions you make on a day-to-day basis, and if you want to be a serious player in this generation you need to get back on track fast. There is still time, mostly because Microsoft has so many red ring of death issues with the 360, but it's time to right the ship and get back in the game.

By the way Sony, you just scored 300 Game Informer points for reading this letter. You can score the other 700 if you actually listen.

Cheers,

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Weeds, Dexter, Minnesota Vikings Football, Potbelly Sandwich Works **Dislikes:** That Wii Games Look Like Such Crap On My Home Theater (480p And Last Generation Technology For The Loss), That I Might Actually Have To Watch Celtics Games While The Wolves Rebuild **Current Favorite Games:** BioShock, World Of Warcraft, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, Rock Band, Picross DS, Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, Skate

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Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Watching Comic Books Take Over Hollywood, Collector's Edition Games (Sweet! I Got A Helmet!), Heroes On HD-DVD (Heaven Better Look This Sharp), AT-ATs (They Can Crush Houses) **Dislikes:** How The 360's Red Ring Of Death Appears To Be Contagious (Get Mine To Quarantine Now!), Man's Inability To Get To Mars (Idiots), AT-STs (They Can Only Crush Small Shacks) **Current Favorite Games:** BioShock, Skate, Heavenly Sword, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, NHL 08, Mass Effect, My Sims

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Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Charles Mingus Sextet Featuring Eric Dolphy – Cornell 1964, Battles – Mirrored, George Saunders, Vikings Football, Crawfish Boils, My New Stereo **Dislikes:** Constant Switching Between Droughts And Floods, Bridge Disasters, Billy O'Reilly Hating On Nas, Miller's Lack Of Appreciation For Slayer (Death To False Metal) **Current Favorite Games:** BioShock, Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks The '80s, Dead Space, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, Rock Band, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08

Kato >> kato@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** The New Mastersounds (Funk/Soul Instrumentalists), Fake Harry Potter Book Covers (With Titles Like Memoirs Of A Shark F—–) For Those Too Ashamed To Be Seen Reading The Series **Dislikes:** The Desperate Need For Video Games To Be Thought Of As "Art" (Does It Matter Beyond People's Own Insecurity?), Comic Books, How The Term "Hardcore Gamer" Has Been Negatively Applied To Anyone With A Modicum Of Skill, Pretty Boys **Current Favorite Games:** Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, Stuntman Ignition, NHL 08, NHL 2K8, Skate, BioShock

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Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** When Games I'm Excited About Turn Out Awesome, Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows, Finding Other Gamers Who Share My Tastes For Old PC Strategy Titles, Getting Something (Anything!) Of Value For Ramon Ortiz **Dislikes:** Watching Adam's Brilliance Go To Waste As The Twins Continually Fail To Score Runs **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, BioShock, World In Conflict, Picross DS, Guitar Hero (Of All Kinds), Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles

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Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** The Eggcom Database, In Persuasion Nation By George Saunders (A.k.a. The Best Short Story Writer Alive Today), Behind The Mask: The Rise Of Leslie Vernon (My New Favorite Slasher), DM Of The Rings, The Cap'm (I Agree!) **Dislikes:** Adventure Lunches (What Is Wrong With The Near And Familiar?), Good Endings (Congratulations, You're A Sissy), People With Cow Hooves Instead Of Feet **Current Favorite Games:** Heavenly Sword, The Darkness, BioShock, My Sims, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, SimCity DS, Mass Effect

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Miller >> miller@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** Stardust, Declaring Mutants An Endangered Species In X-Factor (Also Known As Peter David Writes Awesome Comics), Biscuit Surprise **Dislikes:** The Need For Roto-Rooting, Slayer (Nothing Like Practicing A Song You Hate For Four Hours), How Many 360s Have Failed On Me **Current Favorite Games:** Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, Rock Band, BioShock, The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass, Mass Effect, Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition

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Bertz >> mattbertz@gameinformer.com
Handle: Lord Carrington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** The New Purple People Eaters, Grinderman, Iron & Wine – The Shepherd's Dog, Super Bad, Fogo De Chao, The National – Boxer **Dislikes:** Bridge Collapses, John From Cincinnati (Good Riddance! Get Back To Deadwood, Milch!), Michael Vick's Plea Bargain (Lock 'Em Up Longer), Comcast Charging For The NFL Network **Current Favorite Games:** BioShock, Civilization IV: Beyond The Sword, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, All-Pro Football 2K8, NHL 08

Ben >> ben@gameinformer.com
Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** My New Orleans Adventure, Earning Game Informer's Much Coveted "Spymaster" Title, Videogame Bachelor Parties, Adventure Lunches **Dislikes:** Spoiled Soy Milk (How Are You Supposed To Know Before You Drink It?), Getting Sent Broken TVs, Kato's Comic Book Hate **Current Favorite Games:** Metroid Prime 3: Corruption, BioShock, Condemned: Criminal Origins, The Darkness, Planet Puzzle League, Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks The 80's

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Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Rhythm **Interests:** Zodiac, The Kind Of Kong: A Fistful Of Quarters, Germany, The Forecast's In The Shadow Of Two Gunmen, Six Feet Under **Dislikes:** When Netflix Screws Up And It's Always Still Somehow Your Fault, Waiting Forever To Get Hi-Def TV Shows From Netflix, Losing Golden Gopher Season Ticket Discounts **Current Favorite Games:** Stuntman Ignition, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, Everyday Shooter, BioShock, The Darkness, Far Cry 2, Alone In The Dark, Picross DS

1 Folklore producer Eric Fong, Sony PR's Alex Armour, and NBA 08 designer Steve Bolender hang with Kato on the legendary Game Informer deck 2 Kato and Miller engage in a drum-off to the death! Man, the Gin Blossoms are no joke! 3 It's party time at the GI offices. From left to right: Edge of Reality's Binu Philip and Mark Nau, Bryan, Bryan's moustache, Reiner 4 Gr8dane PR's Kate Isenberg and Tracey Thompson get down with EA's Tyrone Miller and Bethesda's Erin Losi 5 Blizzard's Jessie Kim and Bob Colayco get some serious gaming in at a Rodea PC Café in Seoul 6 Andy learns the ways of rock from Keith Smith, singer of Guitar Hero favorites Anarchy Club. One problem: Andy's doing the devil horns wrong! Major rock foul! That actually means "I'd like to order some calamari" in sign language 7 Did you ever wonder what Area 51 producer Oge Young, Reiner, Midway's Tim DeRosa, Ben, and Jeff would look like lined up by height? Wonder no more! 8 Billy hangs with his all-time gaming idol, Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto

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■ **Ace Combat 5**

Battlefield 2 for the PC. I'm not the best, but as a sniper I can get on a roll where I can't be touched. I really can't taunt because they are too far away, which is a taunt itself

lorsberg1785

Pokémon. Spend enough time with the little numbers of the game, and you can dominate many people. Although it's hard to feel cocky enough to taunt people when you're playing a kids' game.

God_of_Destruction

■ **Pokémon Red**

I dominate with the chainsaw in Gears of War. A bunch Whenever I chainsaw someone, I am called a "chainsaw noob," as is very common in Gears. So, I just ask what weapon they'd like to be killed with next.

strider021

It would definitely have to be Super Smash Bros. Melee using Fox. I win most of the time, and when I do usually I toss the controller in the air and shout "I HAVE NEVER LOST!" That usually gets them riled up.

waketeen_91

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

EPIC ERROR

I know this is going to sound nit-picky, but in your preview of the Beowulf in the August, you referred to Beowulf as a Middle English epic. It's actually Old English. Yes, yes, it sounds minor, but for those of us that study these things, it's significant. Old English (roughly 449 A.D. to 1066 A.D.) is much more Germanic and will look more like German to a modern English speaker. Beowulf is probably the most famous example of Old English. Middle English is what you get after the Normans defeated the Anglo-Saxons at the Battle of Hastings and all this Old French flowed into the language. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is probably the most famous example of Middle English. Just thought I'd strike a blow for linguistic veracity.

Keith Winkler
Via email

■ **Good catch, Keith. We apologize for the error. We also caution our readers to learn from our mistake – you would be surprised at the number of English graduate student gamers who are out there and willing to take you to task for slip-ups like these. If you really want to fire them up, talk about how Dean Koontz is the pinnacle of hundreds of years of literary evolution.**

KEEP IT SHORT

Thanks to Joe for the article "It's Over When It's Over." There are tons of games that take very little time to conquer that are still fantastic. Hell, I can beat Super Mario 2 in 14 minutes and it's still my favorite game. As I get on in my years and work, bills, bars, stress, hair loss, and just the general things that come with adulthood start taking up more time, it's great to be able to rip out some "Hangar 18" before bed. Especially since the alternative is often racing chocobos for hours on end for a summon spell that takes away another five minutes of my life every time I have to watch it.

Rian Bashaw
Via yahoo.com

I am writing in response to the opinion piece on short games in issue 172. I completely agree. These days, as a 30-year-old father who works full time I don't have time for 40-hour epic adventures. If I spend $60 on a game that clocks in at over 30 hours I will probably be lucky to get five hours in, knowing I don't have time to ever finish it without taking forever. Sixty bucks for a 10-hour game that I will most likely finish in a month and enjoy playing is a much better deal.

Adam Lincoln
Via yahoo.com

■ **Beowulf**

■ **These responses in defense of shorter games illustrate an interesting point: The vanguard of the gaming population – the ones who have been playing games since the beginning – is getting older. As responsibilities increase, it can be hard to find time for gaming, so it's nice to have titles that don't require a huge time commitment. But what about younger gamers who don't have a steady paycheck? When you have to do chores and save your allowance in order to afford a game, you want your investment to last as long as possible. In that case, a 10-hour game feels like a rip-off. Thankfully, the industry isn't in danger of being dominated by any one type of game – long or short – anytime soon, so you can just play whatever fits best into your lifestyle.**

DEAD INSIDE

It seems that games today are nothing but first-person shooters. Halo, Rainbow Six, Call of Duty, the list goes on and on. I'm getting sick of all the shooting! Plus, I haven't played a decent RTS game since StarCraft, action games are all the same, and the past few Final Fantasy games have left me wondering if they can screw it up worse

in the next title. Will there be any games that are actually good coming out in the near future?

Justin Albright
Via gmail.com

■ **In the upcoming holiday season, which promises to be packed with great games for every console, you could very well be the only disappointed gamer on the planet. If you've already decided to arbitrarily write off all of the major genres in gaming, then the future must look incredibly bleak. However, for those** of you who haven't killed your sense of joy, the onslaught of awesome games has already begun. BioShock, Heavenly Sword, and Metroid Prime 3: Corruption are on store shelves, and the coming months will see titles like Halo 3, Call of Duty 4, Rock Band, Guitar Hero III, Super Mario Galaxy, Mass Effect, Assassin's Creed, The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass, Ratchet & Clank Future, Crysis, and Super Smash Bros. Brawl – to name a few. If none of that sounds exciting, check your pulse; you might be some kind of clockwork golem instead of a human being.

YOU ARE A TRASH MOB

When Blizzard announced the Wrath of the Lich King WoW expansion, I was initially kind of excited. That quickly faded when I realized that I have only had Burning Crusade since Feburary. With a new expansion following so closely on the heels of the last one, I can't help but feel like Blizzard is just farming its 8.6 million subscribers for gold.

Michael Gallegos
Via msn.com

IF YOU BUILD IT...

Here is a Scarab from Halo 2 built out of LEGOs. My brother-in-law and I built it in about two hours. Please give New Salisbury a reason for being on the map (with the exception of it actually being a one-stop-sign town).

Matt Money, Max Wolford
New Salisbury, IN

■ **Hey, we don't need an excuse to print awesome homemade Halo toys. In fact, if anyone out there has cool custom video game-related paraphernalia, feel free to send a picture or two our way. We'd love to feature them in an upcoming issue!**

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

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SOMEWHERE IN THE JUNGLE

THE LEGEND IS REBORN

From the east it comes, conceived in thunder, born from lightning

The all-new Subaru Impreza WRX. Breathing fire from its 2.5-liter, 224-horsepower turbocharged Subaru Boxer engine, its mighty talons take hold with road gripping All-Wheel-Drive standard. Prepare to meet your destiny. Ready for action. **It's what makes a Subaru, a Subaru.**

SUBARU

Keep in mind that even though Blizzard announced the existence of Wrath of the Lich King, the company has not said anything pertaining to the release date – not even a year. Blizzard has previously taken the "It's done when it's done" approach, revealing a launch date only when it is sure it can deliver. Even if you assume the will game make 2008, can it really be considered farming if someone only returns to a zone every year or two? It's not exactly like sitting in the middle of the Elemental Plateau banishing everyone else's mobs.

MOVE > SKILL > SUPLEX

I'm a huge fan of video games and pro wrestling. All wrestling games seem to be action-based, but I'd love to see one from the tactical role-playing genre. Just take something like Gladius and use the same gameplay, replacing all the fantasy characters with wrestling personalities. Do you know if anyone is planning on making such a game?

Ed Buturla
West Linn, OR

■ We'll be honest, Ed: No major developer is currently making the game you describe. Maybe it's because wrestlers are more likely to put turn-based strategy fans in headlocks than take orders from them. It could also be that the most appealing aspects of pro wrestling, like bone-crunching bouts and over-the-top theatrics, don't necessarily translate well into an isometric view. Until you get your video game solution, you may want to check out the official wrestling collectible card game, WWE Raw Deal.

DEFILING SACRED GROUND

You recently printed a quote from Shigeru Miyamoto saying, "I could make Halo." I have always thought of Miyamoto as a great game designer – never as arrogant – but I seriously doubt he can make Halo, and honestly find the idea laughable. Sorry, Miyamoto, I don't think anyone wants to play your Halo if you ever decide to make it. We want cinematic cutscenes, not text boxes. We don't want it rated anything but "M." We don't want to use friend codes just to play online (if it has online at all). We don't want an old Marine called "Tingle" prancing around like a fairy. Don't worry, though. Bungie's got it covered. I'm sure Halo 3 will be a vast improvement over Halo 2, because they listen to their fans.

Anonymous
Via gmail.com

■ It's no secret that Nintendo and Shigeru Miyamoto have always marched to the beat of their own drum...but a personal assault on the Godfather of Gaming himself? That's low, man – especially since the design choices you deride are what has made The Legend of Zelda one of the most successful franchises out there (for more than one console generation!). Nintendo's style might not jive with Halo's aesthetic, but the quote you reference was Miyamoto's explanation that he made a conscious choice to make games the way he did – and that choice has paid off for him, Nintendo, and the gaming public in general. Show some respect, scrub!

JAMES RAFAEL
Master Chief surrounded by carnage. If you're playing correctly, he should never be surrounded by anything else
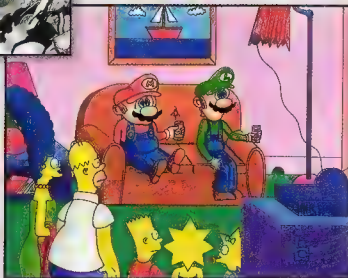
DENIS DIAZ
This is when you know the Mario crossovers have gone too far. Actually, we knew that with DDR Mario Mix

BERYL ALLEE
Enjoy it, Legend of Zelda fans. You're never going to see a shirtless Link in our magazine again

ROBIN BEAUREGARD
These two little girls must be from some unicorn/butterfly/peppermint breeding game. They couldn't possibly be scary, right?
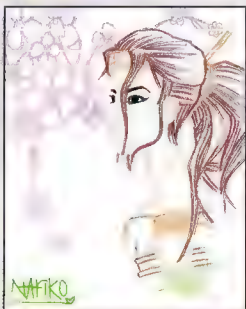
MARCUS BEARD
Sometimes she feels like cleaving through legions of bad guys. Other times, she feels like looking at pretty flowers. Nariko and Miller are more alike than you thought!

The Ambitious
Future of
Rock Band

The

Council
of Rock

Downloadable music for Rock Band
may stretch in some surprising directions,
experimenting with different genres that work
well for the game. Alex Rigopulos explains: "As
an example – funk is not rock. But would funk
music be fun to play on these instruments?
F--- yeah."

f the many games that sought the attention of the crowd at this year's E3, few surpassed the excitement generated by the latest music game from Harmonix, the original creators of Guitar Hero. Rock Band, with its four-player, party-style gameplay, made the question on everyone's lips become: "Have you played it yet?" Behind the frantic jockeying for a turn at the drums, however, was an announcement that carried with it tremendous import for the future of the game. A music advisory board is being assembled as we speak to chart the course of the game going forward, and we spoke with its architects about the game, preserving the history of rock, and offering a life line to a music industry scrambling to find purchase in an era of iPods and the Internet

"We're not just thinking of Rock Band as a game title. We're thinking of it as a platform," explains CEO and co-founder of Harmonix, Alex Rigopulos. "We're planning on building up a library of hundreds and eventually thousands of songs for this platform over the coming years. We realized that the same internal, territorial approach that we've taken to music selection in the past maybe wasn't going to be fitting for that magnitude of an undertaking. We really wanted some fresh perspectives." Working with their extremely well-connected new partners at MTV Games was a good start to this strategy, but a more authoritative voice from the music community was required. That voice came with a phone call from an associate of Steven Van Zandt (also known as Little Steven), guitarist for Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, noted actor from The Sopranos, and

Alex Rigopulos, CEO and co-founder of Harmonix, the developer of Rock Band

radio host. Having heard of the Rock Band project, Van Zandt saw the inherent potential and wanted to contribute.

"He is just encyclopedic about the roots of rock and roll," Paul De Gooyer of MTV Games declares. It's funny, because in our independent interview with Rigopulos only days before, the exact same word came up. "The great thing about him [Little Steven] is that if you start getting into it with him about the history of rock, he has this encyclopedic knowledge of rock music. Not just the big stuff that everybody knows about, but also these sort of blind alley side trails of certain little undercurrents and personal dramas that were going on with different bands at different times," Rigopulos tells us. "In the end, he's also just unbelievably well connected – if there is a particular recording artist that we might be interested in getting involved in the music advisory board, he has the guy's cell phone number."

As we talk to him, Little Steven is simultaneously relaxed and friendly yet clearly excited about the prospects of the Rock Band project. "I think video games are going to play a major role in delivering rock and roll to the next generation," Van Zandt declares. "This isn't just a game that people play, but it's going to be the way that some people learn about the history of rock and roll." It's clear through our conversation how deeply he cares about the importance of delivering that history, and he wastes little time in tracing for us some of the complicated paths of artists that he hopes will be present, both in downloadable content and future disc releases. "We'll see what we can do license-wise, but certainly someone like the Beatles or the Stones, U2, Bruce Springsteen, Zeppelin – they'll probably have their own discs."

He goes on to explain his belief that a huge segment of rock and roll has been lost and forgotten by radio stations and audiences alike. Much of the '50s and a good portion of the early '60s contain songs that just don't see contemporary airplay on almost any format. "That's a good 15 or 16 years that are in many ways the most important years. Those are the years that everything started," Van Zandt states. Consequently, those early years are a huge priority for the advisory board, even if obtaining those old master recordings is a near impossibility -- whether because those songs were never recorded on separate instrumental tracks, or because the masters have been lost to time. An additional challenge is finding a way to contextualize that early music and deliver it to people who might not know the tunes at all. While plans are still being hammered out, several strategies are being discussed to overcome these dilemmas, from meticulous re-recordings under the watchful eye of some of the surviving musicians to having modern bands do faithful covers to include in these downloadable tracks. With luck, these sorts of tactics will enable the inclusion of early rock genres like rockabilly and the early British Invasion to be a part of the mix. "It's history we're messing with here. So everyone is taking it very seriously," Van Zandt assures us. From Elvis Presley to the Yardbirds, from Roy Orbison to the Kinks, we hear a constant flow of heavy hitters that the team is interested in including.

Beyond being an avenue to deliver the earliest roots of rock, everyone we talked to was equally insistent on the importance of new music as a part of the equation. As a group, there seems to be a commitment to the idea that Rock Band has the potential to launch new musical acts and popularize great music that hasn't yet had the exposure it deserves. Ultimately, there's a goal to use Rock Band's long-term downloadable content to trace the full history of the rock genre, with a broad reach that also digs deep. "Where do we want to stretch into some corners that otherwise we couldn't justify putting on the game disc, but are still important?" Rigopulos asks. "Then who are the artists we just want to go nuts with and go super deep?"

One essential component of this ambitious undertaking is the cooperation of the music industry, an area where the team has already met with great response. All of the major record labels have already expressed their support. "I was tremendously pleased with how quickly and how robustly our label partners, artists, managers, and publishing partners have gotten behind the game," De Gooyer says. For the music industry, it's a potential windfall during an era of rapidly dwindling album sales. "This is actually a legitimate new revenue stream. And

they are desperate for a new revenue stream," Van Zandt explains. "Licensing used to be the icing on the cake. Now it is the cake." Rock Band represents a chance for artists, managers, and labels alike to revitalize old music, introduce the new, and license it in such a way that it will be lovingly treated and admired, rather than subjugated as the background music of a truck commercial. It's a difficult offer to turn down.

All that remains is the hard work of realizing the vision – a path that will necessitate a broader group
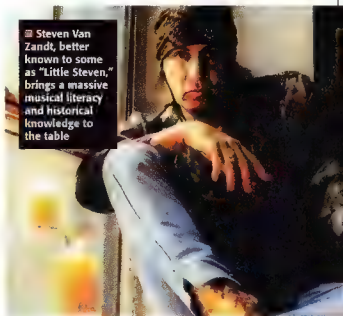
Steven Van Zandt, better known to some as "Little Steven," brings a massive musical literacy and historical knowledge to the table

of musical experts. While De Gooyer, Rigopulos, and Van Zandt will help to form a core start to the project, several more contributors will join the conversation as the months progress, capping out at somewhere between half a dozen and fifteen individuals. Of these, many will be well-known musicians, with a focus on finding different instrument players as well as representatives from different eras. A smaller contingent of music A&R executives will bring their decades-long expertise for picking bands and music that can appeal to a broad base of consumers. And, as a final essential component of the process, Harmonix will continue the work it has always done, and temper the conversation with what will work well as actual gameplay. "It'll be really interesting once this whole project gets airborne to get this particular blend of people together in a room with a lot of Jack Daniels and a loud stereo – to spend the night until dawn playing through tons of different records, debating the finer points of each," Rigopulos opines.

Clearly, for the minds behind Rock Band, downloadable content is a central component of the hoped-for success of the game. It's an idea with a scope that stretches beyond anything that has yet been attempted, not just in the music game genre, but for games as a whole. This council of musical connoisseurs helps to instill tremendous confidence that this great experiment might have equally great results. But perhaps the most exciting hint revealed about the way songs, albums, and artists will be chosen comes from MTV's Paul De Gooyer: "Once the game is out, the dialogue will expand dramatically to include users of the game. So another way that the Board may be valuable is by engaging in that dialogue. You can only imagine that people are going to have their opinions, and will want to vote on what's going in. We really welcome that. I think we're going to have a really good way of capturing that discussion, and that's very exciting for us." ■ ■ ■

Paul De Gooyer of MTV Games is the front line operative between the game maker and the artists, managers, and labels that own rights to the songs

LEIPZIG GAMES CONVENTION 2007

This year's Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany definitely brought back memories of what a pre-downsized E3 used to be all about. Taking place from August 23-26, the open-to-the-public show featured over 500 exhibitors, bombastic booths, and 185,000 attendees. Though the amount of new game announcements and information was nowhere near that of the old E3, there is still plenty to discuss.

Sony led the pack out of the big three hardware manufacturers with announcements, though almost everything concerned European territories only -- the biggest of which are PlayStation 3 DVR capabilities and a PSP video download service (see sidebar). A PS3 version of the popular European quiz game Buzz was also announced, with online "couch vs. couch" gameplay, downloadable question packs, and the ability to write and

post your own questions for others to try. New Gran Turismo 5 Prologue details were also revealed with 50 cars, five tracks, and 16-player online racing coming before the end of the year (see page 30 for more information). Sony also announced Simpsons Yellow and Spider-Man Red and Black versions of the slim PSP exclusively for Europe.

Microsoft's main presence was marked by an enormous Halo 3 Ferris wheel containing Xbox 360s and TVs in every cab. Unfortunately, instead of getting to try Halo 3, we were stuck playing Virtua Fighter 5 and watching a Halo live-action short. At least there were some Halo 3 multiplayer tents to visit afterwards. The company's booth took on a tropical setting with real sand and fake plant life surrounding clusters of demo kiosks. Microsoft's only real announcement was the introduction of the designed-for-gaming Sidewinder mouse. The highly customizable mouse will release in the U.S. this October for $79.95, and we hope to review it in our Gear section very soon.

Nintendo basically regurgitated its E3 2007 lineup. It did give us an expanded look at Flash Focus: Vision Training in Minutes a Day. The Namco-Bandai/Nintendo team-up is structured a lot like Brain Age with puzzles and sports minigames designed to lower your "eye age." The game is already set to release on October 15.

Third parties mostly brought along games that we've seen already, but a few choice games were shown for the very first time. Check out the next couple of pages for some of the biggest announcements.

SONY'S NEW APPS

Sony announced a new HDTV tuner/DVR accessory called Play TV at its press conference. The device supposedly works like a TiVo, allowing PlayStation 3 owners to watch and record live TV. This device also ports recorded videos over to the PSP and allows users to watch live TV and videos stored on a PS3 hard drive via Wi-Fi. Separate from Play TV, a PSP-only video download service will be facilitated by media company Sky under Sony's Go label.

Go Messenger is another application that will allow video chat (with the PSP camera), voice chat, and instant messenger over Wi-Fi. And finally, Go Explore actually puts the PSP GPS accessory to good use. It forms 3D GPS maps for both pedestrian and driving purposes. Now the bad news… Currently, all of these apps and accessories will only be available in Europe next year.

PC
Far Cry 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE SPRING 2008

A FAR CRY FROM THE ORIGINAL

With original Far Cry developer Crytek off working on Crysis for the past several years, it would have been easy for Ubisoft to do a quick cash-in on the sequel. After seeing a first-look presentation of the game, it's clear that the company is doing everything but. Players select one of any number of mercenaries tasked with assassinating an arms dealer who has been supplying two rival African warlords in a constant bloody struggle. You'll be able to choose to fight the warring factions, assist one side, or egg on the war between them even further.

A sprawling open world of grassy plains, rolling hills, and African jungles sets the backdrop. Realtime day and night cycles feature a fully rendered dynamic sky and realistic wind physics blow through trees and grass. Weapons blow chunks off of trees while the wind carries off branches and smoke, and flamethrowers can start a prairie fire that burns in the direction of the wind.

In the mission we saw, our character had to take out a base a mile away, so he scoped out a small encampment to see what kinds of vehicles they had. The enemies have completely unscripted routes and will be located at different posts every time you show up. They also have full eating and sleeping cycles and will light fires when the sun goes down. Our character waded through some water in the back and blazed out of the base in a stolen jeep. The troops hopped into a jeep of their own and began chasing us. After much ramming and gunfire, our character smashed into some ramshackle huts and debris covered the windshield. This led to an inevitable crash in a small village where he had to take out the pursuers on foot.

Afterwards, he met up with Marty, a merc whose life the player had chosen to save previously in the game, to tell him about the upcoming raid he was going to do. You could have just as easily let him die or even shoot him in the face any time, but there are advantages to having allies.

Proceeding to the raid, the Ubisoft team sniped a soldier in the knee. This sent the guards scrambling for cover and a medic emerged to help the injured man. As our character ran in guns blazing, he got shot up pretty bad. Players will hit a first aid button when they take major damage and watch as the character pries a bullet out of his hand or slaps a bandage on his leg. However, our character did eventually go down in a red screen of death. But it turns out that it pays to be friendly because Marty shows up to drag you out of the fire and help you fight.

After taking out the base, we saw the character drive up a grassy hill, leaving a trail of flattened vegetation behind. At the top, he took off in a hang glider, coasting over trees and scattering gazelles. Currently, this mix of picturesque scenery and intense combat will only be coming to PC, but if the first Far Cry is any indication, we'll see the sequel on every console under the sun eventually.

DirectX 10 support is looking likely

After choosing a character, the remaining mercs will appear as NPCs throughout the world
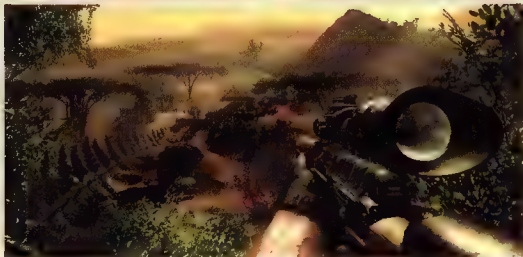
HIGHLIGHTS FROM LEIPZIG

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Midnight Club: Los Angeles

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO
> **RELEASE** EARLY 2008

Rather than branching out to multiple cities, Rockstar's next Midnight Club will focus solely on a single sprawling Los Angeles. But that doesn't mean the environment will be scaled back. LA will be larger than all three cities in DUB Edition combined. Players will have access to the entire city from the start and will drive from race to race with absolutely no loading times. The same Rage engine from Grand Theft Auto IV powers MC:LA, with a unique nitro camera that swoops in to create a sense of tension and blinding speed whenever you hit the boost or take a tight turn. Players will earn rep points for finishing in better positions, which they can then spend to unlock the game's wide variety of cars, bikes, races, and parts. Damage will affect your vehicle's performance, so Rockstar has implemented a quick fix feature that instantly repairs your ride to working condition with bland, unpainted body panels. You can go to a garage, however, for more expensive and cosmetically appealing repairs

NEXT-GEN CONSOLES | PC

Mafia II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** ILLUSION SOFTWORKS > **RELEASE** TBA

Original developer Illusion Softworks is back with a long-awaited sequel to the open world mobster hit. Mafia II is set in the late '40s and early '50s with a new level of graphical polish. Not much is known about the game outside of a brief trailer shown at the Games Convention with all-German dialogue. It begins with a camera swooping into a restaurant while cars and trains pass by on the street. Inside, a table full of Mafiosos are laughing, smoking, and plotting dirty deeds. A montage of shootouts and executions follows with a quick cut to the interior of a car full of made men. All of a sudden, they remember something (or someone) that's stashed in the back. The trunk pops open and a camera from inside it shows the mobsters' disgusted reactions. Though this trailer was most likely 100 percent pre-rendered, we hope the in-game engine can replicate the impressive stylized look.
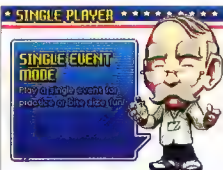
NINTENDO DS

New International Track & Field

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** 2008

Track & Field is back with a new cast of eight cutesy characters and ten Konami alumni including Sparkster from Rocket Night Adventures and Pyramid Head from Silent Hill. Who knew he cared about fitness? The game features 24 events including the 100m dash, hurdles, long jump, swimming, weightlifting, and discus throwing. In running events, players will "scrub" the touch screen back and forth to generate speed and then tap or hold down an onscreen target to jump. Though there's no option to forgo touch screen controls completely, you can jump with the face buttons if you prefer. Online multiplayer over Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection has been confirmed along with worldwide rankings, and a new challenge mode will lay out certain tasks for specific characters. For example, we played a Sparkster challenge where you have to use the long jump mechanic to make it over a pit of lava. While in the air you must collect floating fuel orbs to maintain a rocket boost
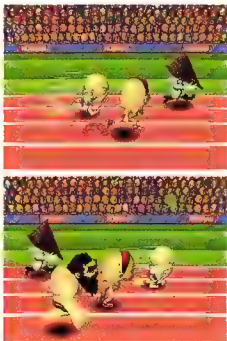
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Race Driver One [Working Title]

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS
> **DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SUMMER 2008

Dirt's reinvention of the Colin McRae rally series proved to be quite successful, and Codemasters is hoping to do the same for the TOCA franchise by building on the same Neon engine and trying some new concepts. Races will support up to 20 cars and span across the U.S., Europe, and Japan in cities like Washington D.C., Detroit, Istanbul, and Milan. Players will start as a driver for hire and eventually work their way up to owning their own team. The eventual goal is to not only reach first place, but also make sure that your team fills in the remaining top slots. There will be over 400 teams to compete drivers to leave in the dust or hire.

news

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV DELAYED
GI LOOKS INTO WHY & WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The holiday gaming season just got a little less sweet. Grand Theft Auto IV for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 has been delayed until some unspecified date this spring. While it should be no surprise that the title is being pushed back, this delay produced shockwaves throughout the industry.

Game Informer talked to a variety of publishers, and although we know of no companies that are moving up any release dates to fill the space created by the delay of GTA IV, the impact is no less. Both Microsoft and Sony have stated that they hope their first-party titles can help fill the void, and in an already crowded holiday season, there are sure to be titles that garner more of the spotlight than they would have otherwise received. Gamers now have $60 they don't have to spend on GTA IV.

Michael Pachter, industry analyst for Wedbush Morgan, thinks that the big winner of this delay won't be an obvious, older-skewing title. "I personally think the biggest beneficiary is Guitar Hero," he told us. "I know that they like to say Call of Duty, but frankly, I think Guitar Hero is the game that comes out at the same time everyone in that 18-30 guy age group wants to have and suddenly feels like they can afford."

On the console side, sales of the PlayStation 3 are expected to be affected the most this holiday season, but both Pachter and Sony senior director of corporate communications Dave Karraker don't think that this development will hurt the system in the long run since they fully expect the platform to make up the numbers when the game

does come out – a date that we're hearing is in April.

According to Pachter, releasing the game on the 360 before the PS3 has never been an option. "I'm absolutely certain on this – contractually, [Rockstar is] precluded from releasing the 360 version before the PS3 version."

The perceived culprit for the delay seems to be the PlayStation 3, which is reportedly hard to develop for in comparison to the Xbox 360. Publisher/developer Electronic Arts publicly admitted as much in regards to its NCAA and Madden NFL titles this year – both of which come out of the EA Tiburon studio with a reduced framerate on the PS3.

Pachter believes that the system isn't the problem, pointing out that teams from companies such as Ubisoft have said that all it takes to develop for the system is some extra time and effort. "Rockstar [emphasis his] had trouble developing for the PS3," explained Pachter, "the PS3 had nothing to do with it."

He believes that Rockstar's inflexibility with the original October release date caused the developer to underestimate what it would take to create the game. "The problem with GTA being delayed was not that it was delayed. It was that their current management repeatedly said it was coming out on time. The Take 2 guys bring it on themselves. At E3, how could they not have known that the game was more than six months away, but [a month later], it's six to eight months away?"

Is the PlayStation 3 solely to blame? In our experience in seeing the game throughout its development we've only ever seen the Xbox

360 version – and even that edition clearly still had a ways to go and was having trouble bringing together all of the game's complex elements. GTA IV's demo at E3 was also an underwhelming affair showing little of the title's gameplay.

Perhaps simply bringing the title to life – regardless of platform – is already a daunting task. Rockstar itself has even admitted that it was still holding out hope that Microsoft would allow them permission to require a hard drive to play the game. Rockstar has said from the beginning that squeezing the game down to a single DVD on the 360 would be a tall order in comparison with the space a Blu-ray disc offers, as well as the mandatory hard drive space on all PS3s.

Whenever GTA IV comes out, it will undoubtedly be a big event. But in a holiday season crammed with good, (if not great) titles, Rockstar can't risk other titles stealing its limelight.

GI OPINION

Having seen a live demo of GTA IV about a month ago, I have to say that – while painful for fans and (especially) the console manufacturers – this decision was necessary. The game I saw on a 360 kit wasn't exactly running smoothly. So kudos to Rockstar for making the difficult call and waiting to give fans the game they deserve. Investors might not like it, but I'll take a quality game when it's done over a rushed, but on-time, disappointment. —MATT

THE REAL GUITAR HERO

Game Informer Talks With Legendary Axe Grinder

SLASH

When did you first see Guitar Hero?

I was on my way to a charity event, and Gibson let me use one of their tour buses to get there. In the back lounge of the tour bus they had Guitar Hero hooked up. So that was the first time I got on it. Soon after that I got a phone call from Activision about being involved with the game, and they sent a copy of Guitar Hero to my house. And I did this crash course on it, learned every single song, and got really addicted to it.

So you play quite a bit?

I used to. It's one of those things that I got so addicted to that I started to shirk my other responsibilities. As it has a habit of doing for a lot of people, I guess. I actually got to the point that I had to unhook it and put it away, so that I could get back to the things I needed to be dealing with. But it's an amazing game, so I'm really glad to be involved with it.

Did Activision approach you to be involved with it, or the other way around?

It's a little tricky. What happened was that the people I work with at GMI Merchandise had the initial idea and they talked to Activision, and Activision had the same idea. So there was something of a meeting of minds on that. And then I got the phone call.

We just got a chance to battle against you in the game. The battle mode is pretty cool, and it was especially cool that you did a new song for it. Where did the idea for that come from?

The boss battle was their idea. They had this whole dueling guitars concept. And with Activision, it was all just preliminary ideas. So when I came in, we just sort of brainlocked on a whole bunch of it, and made certain aspects come to life. I thought the boss battle was a great idea, because I could play guitar on either side, and the player can play my character, and go back and forth. Everything else I did for the game was just writing the theme song for it and recording that, and of course the six hour afternoon of doing the motion capture movement stuff.

How was that for you?

It was a little out of my comfort zone, but it got done. And I have to say, it made the character look that much more genuine.

So did you compose the guitar solo that you're battling on?

That was just improvising. The only thing I did, I played both the solos one after the other. So I had that in mind, that it was two different people playing. In the beginning it's a lot easier than it gets in the end. So I started out with a simple sort of lick, and answered it with another lick, and then they split that in stereo. It's just improvising.

So it's just off the top of your head?

Yeah.

Have you battled yourself?

I haven't played Guitar Hero III yet. I've only seen it played once at E3.

It's pretty tough.

Well, you know, I saw somebody play it and beat the s--- out of it. And I was like, oh come on, it couldn't be that easy. But he's one of the Activision guys, and he's really good at it. When I listen to the solo, and watch the screen, it certainly looks pretty hard.

Are there any songs on Guitar Hero III you're really looking forward to playing?

They told me some of the stuff that's on there, and it's all cool. But it's always so much good material. I have Guitar Hero I and II. The thing that's so addictive about it is that you finish one song and you just want to go on to the next. And after that you want to do the third. And then the fourth. They seem to get harder as you go.

If you could wish any song to be on there, what would it be?

I think "Whole Lotta Love" would be a good one to try and do, because it's got those starts and stops. But you've got to understand, I'm a guitar player, so that game's harder for me to do because I'm used to playing the guitar a certain way. So I don't equate playing Guitar Hero with guitar playing, so it doesn't really matter what the material is for me, as long as the song is good. I mean, I'm good on Medium. I haven't mastered Expert at all, though.

Do you find, as a guitar player, that the game is harder?

Yeah, it's harder. When it comes to doing chords, the way that I do it feels right, but I f------ miss all the time.

Obviously, it's a toy guitar, but do you think they've done a pretty good job of transferring the experience of actually playing guitar?

The thing about guitar playing for a lot of people, if you're not a guitar player, guitar playing just looks really cool. That's why you have all these air guitar contests. You get into the whole rock star posing thing. I think Guitar Hero is an extension of that. As far as really playing guitar, it's really nothing like it. But it puts you in that position. But there is something to be said that if you can play Guitar Hero, there are certain elements that you learn that you can apply to real guitar playing to an extent. I mean, Guitar Hero is one of those crazy ideas that somebody thought up, and they developed it, and it's almost f------ perfect. Almost too perfect. One of those one in a million ideas that gets through and is just brilliant.

What else are you working on? Coming up in the near future? Do you have new plans with Velvet Revolver?

Well, we just put out a new record, so we're on tour right now. I'm in Boston, backstage at a gig as we speak.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

IT IS NOW TIME FOR THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLA-TURE TO MOVE BEYOND POLITICAL GRANDSTAND-ING AND ACCEPT THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY'S INVITATION TO WORK WITH THEM TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC...

Bo Andersen, President of the Entertainment Merchants Association after a federal district court ruled a California video game restriction law unconstitutional.

▲ The original Fallout from Interplay

GOOD

Original creators of the Fallout series, Interplay, are trying to rustle up enough cash for a Fallout MMORPG. Company chairman and CEO Herve Caen says Interplay's recent debt reduction makes this possible, and he says the game will "play a key role in the future of Interplay."

UGLY

EA got busted for re-writing and softening up its Wikipedia entry, amending topics such as its overtime controversies with employees and general criticisms. EA isn't alone in this white-washing, as edits to Sony Online, Nintendo, and other publishers were traced back to IPs owned by employees of those companies.

UGLY

The high-definition format war is only getting more heated. A month after Blockbuster sided with Blu-ray, Paramount (*Transformers*, *Shrek the Third*) is now exclusively releasing its stuff on HD-DVD. The crucial exception to this, however, are films directed by Steven Spielberg. In response, *Transformers* director Michael Bay threatened to pull out of a sequel for the movie if the first one isn't also put out on Blu-ray. That lasted all of one night, however, before Bay came to his senses.

UGLY

It just keeps getting worse for Microsoft. After acknowledging it's going to cost billions to fix the 360's "red ring of death" epidemic, its 360 racing wheels need to be retrofitted with a device because the power supply can go up in smoke (go to www.xbox.com/support for more info). At the rate it's going, Microsoft's Zune might be next, but that came up lame from the start.

Polyphony has made changes to its menu system, with garage shots, locale wallpapers, and a map and calendar system to keep track of friends and events.

A TASTE OF GRAN TURISMO 5

GT 5 PROLOGUE FOR FREE

At E3, we were a little disappointed when Sony announced Gran Turismo 5 Prologue "Release a full-fledged game!" we cried. Now, however, with the news that GT 5 Prologue will be released on PlayStation Network for free later this year, we couldn't be happier that we'll have an online racing title that is way more fleshed out than GT HD Concept.

We always expect the series to look gorgeous, and Prologue is no different. While cars in GT 4 were comprised of 4,000 polygons, now they contain 200,000 polygons and individually created parts. The attention to detail is evident in the new cockpit view – something series creator Kazunori Yamauchi has always said they wouldn't do until they felt they could do it right.

Due to the larger, 16-car racing fields, the team has worked hard on the AI so that it doesn't just follow the best racing line like a drone. Yamauchi says that continual upgrades for the AI will be offered via PS3 system updates, and also intimated that other areas of the game – including damage modeling and sharing replays – could also be included or improved via updates.

Who knows when GT 5 itself will come out, but if the progress the series has made on Prologue is any indication, it looks like the franchise is already taking big steps.

HUNGER GETS
WHAT HUNGER WANTS

How One Gamer Created The Year's Hottest Downloadable Title

In the days of $20 million game budgets, 1080p, and surround sound, it's strange to think that there's still a market for the simpler games of yore. The PlayStation Network and Xbox Live Arcade have helped to provide a profitable outlet for classic titles and new small team studio creations, but the quest to find the most addictive, innovative, and (most importantly) exclusive games has console manufacturers scouring the indie market for a new wave of cutting edge creativity. Everyday Shooter is Sony's latest indie catch, created from top to bottom by just one guy – Jonathan Mak. But how did he go from college student to rising star developer, and how does Sony track people like him down?

J onathan Mak, a 25-year-old Toronto native, has been dabbling in game design since he was in seventh grade. His father ran a computer shop and first sparked Mak's interest in the field. But it was typical grade school hubris that pulled him towards game design. "I met this guy in school and I was bragging to him like 'I know how to write batch scripts,'" Mak remembers. "And he was like 'Oh that's great. I program in Turbo Pascal.' That day I asked him three times 'So you can make video games?' And that's where I started to learn to write programs."

Mak's first creation was a "guess the number" program. He admits that these early creations were less than stellar, but they provided a solid foundation and also drew him into music composition as well. After all, every game needs a soundtrack. During his studies at the University of Toronto, Mak read up on game design texts that suggested standard tactics like forming a team, writing up design docs, etc. But then he met Raigan Burns, one of the creators of the freeware game N, who told him, "No, no. Just make the game you want." Mak investigated the indie scene on Burns' recommendation and found particular inspiration from games like Kenta Cho's Parsec47.

When he graduated from college in 2004, Mak turned down a job at the university to start Queasy Games – his one-man development operation – and worked on his first widely available freeware game, Gate 88. This mix of Asteroids and RTS is surprisingly deep, supports online multiplayer, and is still available on the Queasy Games website (www.queasygames.com). However, Mak doesn't necessarily look back on his creation with fondness. "I look at that game and it sort of makes me feel bad in a way, because if you play the game, it's made based on this idea that 'if you don't get it, go screw yourself.' It starts off with
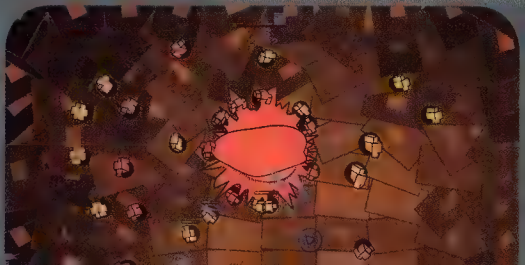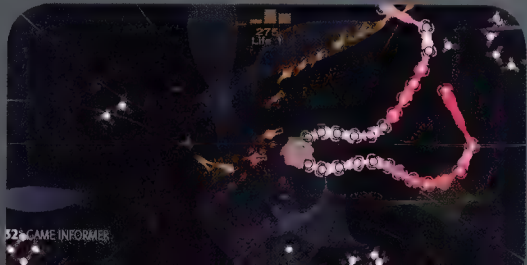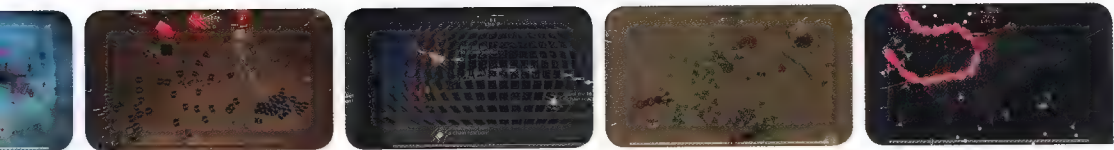
Everyday Developer

this 50-page tutorial...I don't know, I just feel that that game is sort of arrogant in a way."

This led Mak to take a completely different direction for his next project. "I didn't really know how to make a really fun game that I would want to keep playing," Mak says. "That's when I decided to just really simplify, and for me the simplest game was the shooter." The original plan for what would become Everyday Shooter was to have a collection of remakes of games like Snake, Every Extend, and Galaga. But as he worked on the stages, they became so different from the source material that Mak decided to just go completely original. This also came at a time when Mak was moving away from electronic music composition towards guitar, and he had an itch to explore this different sound. "I was like, 'Okay, I'm making a bunch of shooters and I want to make a bunch of songs, so let's make an album of shooters.'"

Everyday Shooter first appeared publicly at the 2006 Game Developers Conference in the Experimental Gameplay Workshop. The game garnered significant buzz, and by December of that year it was nominated for Independent Games Festival Awards and accepted as a finalist at the Slamdance festival. Everyday Shooter ended up winning both the Design Innovation and Excellence in Audio awards, but things didn't go as smoothly with Slamdance. The controversial Super Columbine RPG had been pulled from the festival, and Mak joined several developers (including That Game Company, makers of Flow) in withdrawing their games from the competition. "I didn't really like the game, but I respected that he was trying to do something," Mak says. "It really didn't make sense that Slamdance took it out. It's like, who really is a finalist at that point?"

Mak spent the next several months further polishing the game and returned for GDC 2007. Little did he know how fateful this exhibition would prove to be. "I went to the

independent game festival there [since I] always make a point of swinging by and checking out the games," recalls John Hight, director of external development at Sony Computer Entertainment America and a primary decision maker on what makes it onto the PlayStation Network. Hight tried the first stage and was struck by the artistic style of the game and the way gameplay interlaced with the music. "But then I swung to the next level and the graphics and the AI behaviors were completely different and it struck me that even though it was being billed as a shooter for everyone, there was more depth than met the eye." Hight contacted Mak's agent Warren Currell about setting up a meeting shortly thereafter.

"From the point that we first decided to do PlayStation Network, going after indies and helping them get over to PlayStation was part of the plan," Hight says. "But how does one track down indie games outside of GDC? Hight and his team keep an eye on design heavy schools (Hight actually teaches a class at USC in the spring semester), visit every festival they can, scan the Web for the latest freeware, and participate in IndieCade – an organization that secures show floor space for indie games at major conventions like E3.

But Hight acknowledges that Sony isn't the only one out there looking for the next big thing. "I've noticed that there's more noise coming out of Microsoft and even Nintendo about embracing [indie games], which is a cool thing. I mean regardless of whether it's us or them I think it's important that, in general, manufacturers and publishers start to embrace these independent developers," Hight says. "We haven't had this since the '80s, where a small team can pursue an idea and bring it to a highly polished state."

Mak had fielded several publisher offers before Sony showed interest, and they all seemed to want to get their hands into the design, so he was understandably skeptical

when Sony invited him to LA for a meeting. "He was really concerned that we were going to come in and change things," Hight says. "He said something like, 'You guys don't want to change the music, do you?' And I said, 'Well it's kind of integrated in the game design. Why would we do that?' 'The last publisher I talked to wanted me to get rid of all of my music and put in their licensed music.' Wow, they just didn't get it. I mean, that's the whole point."

The freedom to make Everyday Shooter the way that he wanted was too much to pass up. Mak signed a deal on the spot. Sony sent out a development kit and Mak had Everyday Shooter running on PlayStation 3 within just three days. But the most looming obstacle was transforming the tightly designed shooter stages from the 4:3 aspect ratio the game had been originally designed on to the PS3's required 16:9 presentation. But a careful blend of Mak's gut instincts and Sony's QA process should have Everyday Shooter in a finely tweaked state by this fall.

It's clear that Sony is hoping Everyday Shooter will meet the precedent set by the company's first foray into the indie market, Flow. Hight says that over 120,000 people have purchased the game and that plans for continuing That Game Company's franchise are in the works on various platforms.

Even though Mak is grateful to Sony and what they're doing for Everyday Shooter's profile, he's skeptical of just how much these download services are helping indies. "It's easy to say 'Oh, now indies have a space to work in,' but it's not really true. It still takes a lot of money to put your game out on one of these networks. Also, you need the blessing of whoever owns the platform, so it's nowhere near like it is in the freeware scene where you can just put your game out," Mak says. "I think it's a step in the right direction, but there's a long way to go." ■ ■ ■
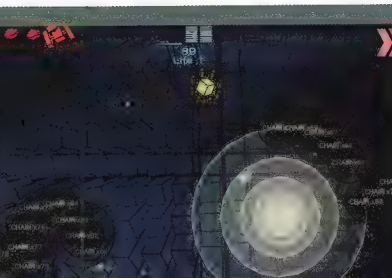
›› Everyday Shooter

Everyday Shooter, at the base level, plays like Geometry Wars. You move with the left analog stick and aim your shots with the right stick. But that's where the similarities end. ES is conceived as an album with eight songs/levels. Guitar plays in the background, and every time you attack or kill enemies a cascade of notes and riffs compliments the music. Players have to survive until the song is finished and defeat a new set of enemies with varying AI patterns with each new tune. Some levels are straight up boss battles, others involve fighting off waves of enemies, and one has you taking out networks of nodes in a glorious chain reaction. Players can search for a unique attack chaining methods like these on each level to maximize point drops. By picking up the scattered points you'll unlock extra lives, visual filters, and practice modes for each stage.
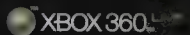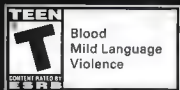
Our war starts here.
The hell below will scatter us our separate ways.
In that chaos, each one of us has a choice to make.
The church bell tower?
The rooftop of the gatehouse?
Or the middle of an enemy encampment?
We decide our own fate.
The first step is everything.

Landing on 9.4
heroesjump.com

the top 10 scariest moments in gaming

Welcome to our parlor. There's a nasty storm raging outside; now's not a time to be out. Relax, take a seat, and we'll tell you a tale or two. But be warned! These are not stories for the faint of heart. These stories will chill your blood and send shivers down your spine, for these are the scariest moments in all of video games. Can you handle the darkness that resides within?

1 Crawling Girl
Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly – Directors Cut, Xbox (2004)

Lost in an abandoned, cursed village and looking for your twin sister, you wander into a room where creepy dead-eyed kimono dolls stare back at you from the shelves of every wall. Suddenly the door behind you locks, and the legless form of a little girl slithers towards you. She's only pleading that you play with her, but she's killing you in the process.

2 Pyramid Head And The Legs
Silent Hill 2, PS2 (2001)

You had only just begun to investigate the mystery of your dead wife's letter in the haunting town called Silent Hill when you come to an abandoned apartment building. Upon entering the building you make your way to room 307. You are disturbed to see the visage of a pyramid-headed man in the room, but what might be even more disturbing is what he does to that pair of twitching, disembodied legs. Out of a crack in the closet you've chosen to hide, you see Pyramid Head slowly turn and face you. Then he begins to walk forward.

3 Here, Puppy
Resident Evil, PSone (1996)

Sure, the licker that jumped through the one-way mirror in the Police station made you jump, and the crimson heads gave you a good fright later on. But that moment during your first zombie adventure when you were traveling down the long hall of a desolate mansion and two virally infected Dobermans jumped through the windows hungry for your flesh, well, that moment will stay burned in your mind for a long time.

4 I Am SHODAN
System Shock 2, PC (1999)

You wake up from a cryogenic freeze on a starship where something has gone horribly wrong. The crew is either dead or has been mutated into some kind of alien creature. At least one other person has survived: Dr. Polito. But something is wrong with her, you think. She's irrationally angry and prone to fits of rage. It's not until you reach her office that you realize what the problem is: She's dead. The thing you were talking to wasn't Dr. Polito at all – it was the malevolent AI known as SHODAN this entire time. You aren't just scared, you feel betrayed and alone. Very alone.

5 Dirty Girl
Eternal Darkness, GameCube (2002)

Your grandfather has died mysteriously and you've traveled to his estate to investigate the incident. After some digging around you make your way up to the bathroom. It looks harmless enough. The maid has been doing her job. Then you approach the bathtub and – flash. The tub is suddenly filled. A dead body, eyes rolled back, floats in the bloody water. A woman's scream shatters the silence as you realize that the person in the tub is…you.

6 Pigsy Sniffs You Out
Manhunt, PS2 (2003)

You are armed with a shard of glass. Only a shard of glass. And it breaks after a single use. The roar of a chainsaw fades in and out of nearby rooms. You are being hunted. To make matters worse, the ground is sprinkled with glass. You make one wrong step – one little noise – and a crazed, pig-faced man comes charging at you with his chainsaw blazing and his penis hanging out.

7 The Mannequins
Condemned: Criminal Origins, Xbox 360 (2005)

You're on the trail of a serial killer, but the hunt has worn you thin and even cost you your job. While investigating an abandoned department store you hardly take notice of the mannequins littered about, but something about them begins to gnaw at your gut. Are they moving? They seem to edge closer every time you look away. Without warning the one standing next to you attacks.

8 Old Man Stauf Built A House
The 7th Guest, PC (1992)

Eccentric toymaker Henry A. Stauf has invited you and several others to visit his newly constructed mansion with the promise of granting you your heart's desire. The catch? Stauf is demon possessed, and you must bring him the soul of a young boy named Tad. Throughout your tour of the house you see remains of Satanic/magical rituals, but the moment that really sends your heart into your throat is when you reach the attic and watch Stauf consume the young innocent boy. It is then that you realize you are Tad, and you are trapped in a purgatory where you repeatedly watch your failure to save your damned soul.

9 Colonel Campbell Flips Out
Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty, PS2 (2001)

You wake after being tortured, naked and alone. Emergency lights go off and a horn starts blaring. Then the whole world suddenly goes insane. Your commander calls you over the codec, "I hear it's amazing when the famous purple stuffed worm in flap-jaw space with the tuning fork does a raw blink on Hara-kiri Rock. I need scissors! 61!" Then he apologizes for making you pay for dinner. What the hell is going on?
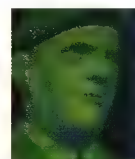
10 The Escape
The Suffering, PS2, Xbox (2004)

It's your first night on death row and an earthquake tears the prison to hell. This is the best chance you'll ever get to escape. You walk past the upper half of a guard pulling himself along a trail of blood. Phantom images appear on surveillance videos overhead as the screams of dying guards crackle the radios. Then a phone rings. You pick it up. An anonymous voice on the other end tells you that the island you are on is more that just a prison. It's something much worse. The line goes dead and a haunting growl emanates from somewhere deep within the facility.

Ever tried lying on a thousand vibrating cell phones?

NEW

5

RAIN

...A TINGLING SPEARMINT GUM

Ever tried New 5 Gum?

Hopelessness

General Despair

Cognitive
Impairment

Incapacitation

Screaming

Sores

Desanguination

Open Wounds

Appendectomy

Abomination

Ligaments

Shrapnel

eoning

They Will

Not Stop

Until

Humanity Is

A Stain

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Pavement.

First

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City.

Distress

Angst

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Rot

Decon

Tribu on

Grave
Lurkers

Whiplash

Stabbing

Scraping

Petrification

Slicing

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Plague

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Greatest

Achievement

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Survival.

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Misery
& Gore

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Fangs

Blight

Zombie
Summoners

Woe

Wreckage

Soot

Delirium

Constant Pain

Infection

Laceration

Dislocatio

Overwhelming
Anxiety

Suffocation

Eternal Darkness

Necrosis

Local Swelling

Grievous Injury

Your

Last

Hope

Is

Undergrou

HELLGATE

Then
They
Take
The
Country.

When
Will They
Take
You?

Scalding

Prayers
Unanswered

The
Sky
Has
Gone
Black
And
The
Streets
Are
Alive
With
Screams
Of Abject
Horror
And Infernal
Devastation.

If
I Have
To
Die,
I Will
Die
Fighting.

Strife
Anguish
Persecution
Battery
Atrophy

The
City
Is
A
Slaughterhouse.

More
Trauma

Hemorrhage
Gaping Wounds
Decapitation
Cramping
Mutilation
Flames
Asphyxiation
Spinal Fracture
Claws-in-the-Head

Carnage

Avulsion

Apoplexy

Grave

Rabies

Tendons

Carnagors

Frenzy

Wreckage
Fetid Hulks

Calamity

Degeneration

Endless
Strangulation
Abscesses
Infestation

Panic
Paralysis

Innards

Gangrene

Severed Limbs

Demoralization

Prepare
For
The
Inevitable
At
Hellgatelondon.com

Gashes

Enfeeblement

Blood Loss

Vegetative
State

Scabs

Pox

Assorted
Rashes

Discomfort &
Numbness

Moaning
Crush
Hy

Electrocution

Irritation

Hypertension

All
Our
Hopes
And
Dreams
End In
Eternal
Hellfire.

Evisceration

Amputation

Cranial Failure

Key To Despair

When The Ravens Flee
The Tower On October 30th
You Will Have
Three Choices:
Hide, Fight Or Die.

No Matter Which You
Choose, The Odds Are
Stacked Against You.
Get Ready For
The Gates To Open.

LOOSE TALK
Hot Gaming Gossip

GUITAR HERO GETS NEW BAND MEMBERS?

Industry analyst group Janco expects Activision to augment the Guitar Hero franchise with extra instrument peripherals – à la rival Rock Band – sometime next year. Regardless of whether the Guitar Hero series adds extra instruments, we expect another Guitar Hero title at a minimum.

RUMBLE ON THE WAY?

Word out of Japan is that Sony is readying a DualShock 3 – as differentiated from the Sixaxis PS3 controller (shown) – that will be compatible with Gran Turismo 5 Prologue. This new DualShock would assumedly use the new Sony controller with the rumble feature, but we figure we would have heard about all of this at E3 if that were the case.
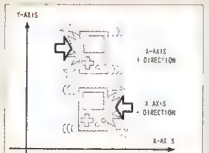
GAME BOY ON THE MOVE

Companies file technology and product patents all the time – regardless of whether they come to fruition on store shelves. Nintendo's newest patent merges motion-sensing technology with a handheld system that could detect motion along three axes.

THE PRICE OF ROCK

How much is it going to cost? That's the big question surrounding Rock Band. Online retailers are listing the full band bundle with the game at $200 for the title's November 20 release. From what Loose Talk has heard, this isn't just the case of a retailer throwing out an arbitrary number to drum up pre-orders, it's a reliable number one source we talked to has confidence in. We don't expect EA to be in any rush to confirm the official price, since it's always better to lather people up with excitement instead of having them fixate on what it's going to cost.

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

NAME THAT GAME
Test Your Sight

Air combat titles and piloting helicopters in particular aren't as popular as they once were, but back in the day, this isometric combat game was well regarded. This '90s franchise from EA spanned six games all based around helicopters engaged in various conflicts. One title in the series even branched out into on-foot missions. The final game in the series promised a future title including mechs that never came out. What was the first game in this series?

(Answer on page 44)
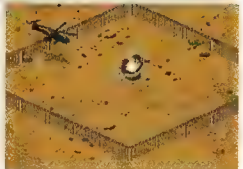
PRICE WAR!

XBOX 360 GETS NEW PRICE, PORT

Microsoft surprised some by not announcing a price drop for the Xbox 360 at E3 to counter Sony's move to offer the 60GB PS3 for less until supplies run out. Now, however, Microsoft has brought down the price of the system by $50 permanently, across almost all its models.

Currently, the Core system (sans hard drive) is available for $279.99, while the 20GB hard drive version retails for $349.99. Finally, the Elite (shown), with its black color scheme and 120GB hard drive, is now going for $449.99. Beyond the price, Microsoft is also giving you more for your money by adding an HDMI port to the Premium (also known as the Pro), a feature that was previously reserved only for the Elite and Halo 3 Special Edition console.

Speaking of Microsoft's newest console SKU, the Halo 3 Xbox 360 – which does not come with the game – remains at $399.99 and has not dropped in price by $50 like the others. Despite this addition, at this time the newly priced and outfitted 360's do not contain the awaited 65 nanometer chips which run cooler than the current 90nm ones. There is speculation that a cooler running system may prevent some of the alarmingly high failure rates of the platform.

Sony says it saw a spike in sales by offering the PS3 for less, and it's a given that the 360 will similarly benefit from its price reduction. This comes at a key time in the system's life, not only before the important holiday season and much-anticipated release of Halo 3, but at a time when sales of the 360 appear to have crested while those of the PS3 and Wii grow.

Billy Wolf:
Master of Madden

Handle:
Da Secret

Age:
20

Hometown:
Tampa, FL

Rivals:
Ayan "Fool" Tariq,
Eugene "Big Gene"
Williams

Accomplishments:
- 2006 Madden Nation champion
- Runner Up, 2006 Madden Challenge finals
- Two-time Mega Bowl champion
- Two-time Madden Challenge regional winner

Game Informer is scouring the leaderboards in search of top gamers to find the best of the best, uncovering the person behind the handle, and learning his or her strategies. So if you get a pesky message over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network from GameInformerMag, please don't delete it. You could be the next featured gamer.

Da Secret turns his touchdowns into paydays

Pay to the Order of   One Hundred Thousand and 00/100 $ 100,000.00   Dollars

Platform of Choice:
"Whatever system the Madden Challenge is on. It was the PS2 and Xbox, but right now it's the Xbox 360."

Life outside of Madden:
"I'm in college. I went to Florida State my freshman year, but right now I'm going to a community college near my home in Tampa."

Origin of Skills:
"I've been playing Madden forever, but I've been playing competitively since the Madden 04 game. I played in the Madden Challenge in 2004 when the game came out and I was pretty good, but I played somebody who was real, real good and I didn't realize people played the game like that. When he killed me, I decided I wanted to be good like that."

Favorite Team:
"Usually whatever team Michael Vick or Randy Moss are on. So it's changed from the Falcons and Vikings to the Raiders, and now to the Patriots. This year I'll probably use New England."

Favorite Play:
"It changes every year. Last year I ran the New England playbook. I really like the Tight End Quick Hit. I don't really run one play; I like to use all my audibles."

Your Scouting Report On Yourself?
"Most people say I'm an offensive-minded player. I usually score every drive and I'm real good at making the right reads on offense and throwing to the right people who are going to be open."

Practice Hours Logged:
"When the game first comes out, I can play all night. If it's not like a night that I go out, I could play all night until six in the morning. I don't go by hours, I go by games, and I play like seven games a day."

Other Games:
"I don't play a lot of other games. The month before Madden comes out I play NCAA Football, but that's pretty much it. I play FIFA a little bit."

Favorite thing about Madden 08?
"My favorite Madden is Madden 04. This year the game has the jump ball, where you can jump real high and catch the ball, and there are fast blitzes."

What Changes Would You Like To See In Madden 09?
"When you set the audibles they don't have it organized by formation; they have everything in one column and it takes forever to change your audibles. That's one thing I would like to see changed."

■ Da Secret's Top Tips for Playing Madden 08

- If you're trying to find plays that work, go to practice mode and use both controllers. Set up some defenses you face a lot with one controller and take over the offense to find plays that beat the defense.

- If you're not real good at using the quarterback vision, use a quarterback that has a big vision cone like Tom Brady or Peyton Manning.

- On defense, play a lot of man to man. Zone isn't very good.

HELLGATELONDON.COM

for Windows

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

HOW A GAME IS MADE
RAINBOW SIX VEGAS

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED HOW MUCH WORK GOES INTO THE CREATION OF YOUR FAVORITE GAME? WE HAVE TOO, WHICH IS WHY WE APPROACHED UBISOFT ABOUT BREAKING DOWN THE MAKING OF RAINBOW SIX VEGAS.

TIMELINE

CONCEPTION
(11 MONTHS)

Ubisoft gives a core design team composed of five people (producer, senior producer, creative director, art director, and lead programmer) a mandate outlining the project's objectives and the target audience. Since this is Ubisoft Montreal's first next-gen title, the team is given more time than is usually allotted for conception. The creative team brainstorms to outline the game's plot, location, and player experience. The technical minds decide which engine and tools will be used to create the game. The team then comes together to build cheap prototypes to test core gameplay ideas like the new cover mechanic and multiplayer. Once the concept and prototype are ready, the team presents them to management in hopes of receiving a green light.

STORY DEVELOPMENT

One of the big differences between how a story is created in games as opposed to film and literature is the amount of people involved in the process. Crafting the story is largely a team effort; while the creative director is responsible for the overall vision, the screenwriter, art director, and level designers are all involved in the process. The team brainstorms to draft a general synopsis, then writes the dialogue and fills in the minor details right down to each level objective.

RESEARCH

Because popular casinos weren't interested in being targeted by terrorists in a video game, Ubisoft Montreal was faced with the unique challenge of recreating Vegas without destinations that make the city famous. The producers sent a team to Vegas for two weeks to capture the essence of Sin City so they could use it to create a believable Vegas doppelganger.

RAINBOW SIX VEGAS BUDGET BREAKDOWN
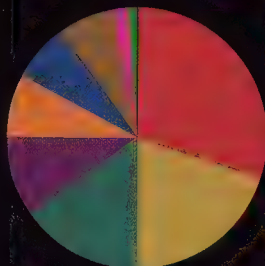
- Programming: 30%
- Art: 20%
- Design: 15%
- Marketing: 10%
- Testing: 8%
- Sound: 7%
- Animation: 7%
- Management: 2%
- Others: 1%

PRODUCTION
[10 MONTHS]

As Rainbow Six Vegas enters the production stage, the development team now ramps up to maximum capacity, nearly 150 people. The team has answered all of its questions about the game, and now it's all about execution. Levels are built, code is refined, and art is sculpted. The producers have defined the scope and number of question marks facing the game, but must remain flexible to overcome the unforeseen challenges. The first major milestone is the alpha stage, where a rough build of the entire game comes together. This allows the team to begin the six month process of play testing, during which quality assurance and quality control teams will comb over the game to balance the game mechanics and make sure objectives are clear to players. The team continues to fine tune the graphics, audio, and game engine until it reaches the beta stage, which is a complete build with finalized art and audio. Now that the game has reached beta, programmers optimize the framerate while the play testers continue to hunt down the remaining bugs.

PREPRODUCTION
[8 MONTHS]

The team now brings in a larger production team to build what's called a "vertical slice" of the game. One single-player and multiplayer level are created and polished so they are nearly final. The goal is to ensure that the engine and tools are mature enough to incorporate all the ideas brainstormed during conception. This test level gives the producers a general idea of how to schedule production, and confirms that the idea will work before Ubisoft commits more money and staff to the project.

MARKETING

One of the major decisions discussed in the first conception meeting is how the game will differentiate itself from the hundreds of titles on the shelves during the holiday. Ubisoft decided to keep quiet about Rainbow Six Vegas until it had something that would blow people away. That something was the gameplay demonstration unveiled during E3 2006. The game had a great buzz around it after the unveiling, so the team decided to create a demo for the public so players could experience Rainbow Six Vegas firsthand before it was released. This was a major production challenge because the team needed to pull some people away from the main production schedule to finalize the demo level. In the end, Ubisoft believed the exposure paid off.

SUBMISSION & RELEASE
[3 MONTHS]

Once the game finishes beta it goes 'gold.' At this stage it is sent to Microsoft and Sony for final approval. Each company has its own teams of testers to make sure the title meets quality expectations for the console. Once the game is approved, Ubisoft can begin manufacturing discs and shipping to retail. The development team can then take a well-earned vacation before starting its next big project.

games

THE WRATH OF KANE
C&C 3'S EXPANSION COMETH
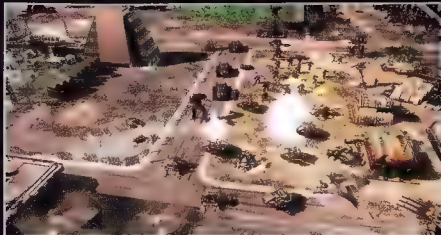
The return of Kane in EA's Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars continues next year with its first expansion pack, Kane's Wrath. This PC and Xbox 360 title starts out as a prequel to C&C 3, telling how Kane came to power after the Second Tiberium War and continuing on past the Third Tiberium War – a span of 20 years.

Unsurprisingly, this expansion pack offers new units, powers, and structures, but it also offers a new global domination mode that adds some territorial strategy with persistent armies and bases before you get to the RTS core of the game. Each faction – Nod, the GDI, and the Scrin – gets two sub-factions apiece. These, of course, have their own special abilities and upgrades.

While a good RTS on a console is still a bit of a novelty these days, EA is helping its fanbase by including a new radial control mechanic to the 360 version of Kane's Wrath. By holding down the right trigger, you'll be able to access any action, including build queues for the selected unit.

EA says Kane's Wrath will come out simultaneously for both systems sometime this spring.

■ Original Kane actor Joe Kucan reprises his role as Kane, although none of the other actors from C&C 3 will be returning. EA has yet to announce the rest of the cast for the live-action cutscenes

TOP FIVES
Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
SCOTT BLACKWOOD
Executive Producer, EA Black Box (Skate)

1 Super Mario World – SNES
2 GoldenEye 007 – N64
3 Half-Life 2 – PC
4 Street Fighter II – Arcade
5 Duke Nukem – PC

READER
ANTHONY DURSO
Bronx, New York

1 Tetris Evolved – Xbox 360
2 Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 – Xbox 360
3 Shenmue – Dreamcast
4 Okami – PS2
5 Yar's Revenge – Atari 2600

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:
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Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN
Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Things Bryan Shouted While Playing Stuntman Ignition

10 I see I've hit a fence.
9 Mother…[groan]
8 Shut up, snobby Frenchman.
7 You give me that gap!
6 I can't see! C'mon!
5 No! Why would you go off that way? Wait! I landed!
4 Get out of the way, flaming scientists!
3 And, I'm in the lake.
2 Oh, boxes. Dammit.
1 Stupid forklift! You're ruining everything!

Name That Game Answer: Desert Strike: Return to the Gulf

WARRENSPECTOR

VICE PRESIDENT, DISNEY INTERACTIVE STUDIOS

>> Since his days at Ion Storm, where he masterminded such classics as Deus Ex and Thief, Warren Spector has gained a reputation as one of the industry's most innovative and outspoken game creators. We recently spoke with Warren regarding the news that his Junction Point studio had been acquired by Disney. <<

A lot of people were surprised at E3 by the announcement that Junction Point has been acquired by Disney. You have a reputation as a bit of a maverick in the game industry and here you are working with the most mainstream, Middle America entertainment company in the world.
It's funny, because anyone that really knows me well knows that it really is a good fit. I've been a Disney freak all my life; I still have the mouse ears from when I was a kid watching the Mickey Mouse Club. When I told my mom, her response was "Well, it's about time." Back in the '80s, I really aspired to be an Imagineer. But beyond that...am I a maverick? I don't know. I guess I'd like to be the kind of gadfly that causes trouble and makes people uncomfortable. I hope that Disney knows what they've gotten themselves into. But I'm looking for new kinds of challenges. I've done the guy that wears sunglasses at night, a trench coat, and two

Pixar movies and characters as appealing, popular, and long-lived as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, or Peter Pan.. the Disney back catalogue is crazy. The opportunity to play in those worlds has a very strong appeal for me. If you go back in 2004, I gave the keynote at the Game Developer's Conference, where half the industry hated me and half the industry thought it was really cool that I was willing to go out there and say "Just because you're working on a sequel or a license, it doesn't mean that you can't be incredibly creative."

But some of those concerns are real in the fact that, for example, the Pixar games that THQ puts out are fine, but they're not tremendously innovative in terms of design. How can you help to move beyond that?
Well, that's where being a maverick comes into play. It's dangerous to make pronouncements, but I'm going to do it again. I just have no interest in

physical world. And we need to find a way to allow stories to emerge from player choices. Deus Ex and plenty of other games have shown that you can let players choose their playstyle when the verbs you're using are "run," "jump," "shoot," and "sneak." But we need to find similar kinds of player choice for "love," "hate," "smile," "tickle," "caress" – we just don't do that well. There has to be a difference between a slap and a hug, and right now games just don't do that. Until we figure that out, how do we have more robust human interactions that don't involve physicality like violence? We're going to be stuck in a rut. We need to get players off the story rails, and that's a really tough problem.

You mentioned violence. A while back, you made some criticisms of Grand Theft Auto and the level of violence in it. Most interactions in video games are violent or adversarial. Is there any way we can move past that?

I'm looking for new kinds of challenges. I've done the guy that wears sunglasses at night, a trench coat, and two 9 millimeters.

9 millimeters stuff.... I don't think you're going to see much change in the game style or the game philosophy. I put up a manifesto on my blog that I still believe with every fiber of my being. This studio is going to live up to the ideas and the ideals of that manifesto. But, I think you can do that in the context of games that aren't hyper-realistic and deadly serious. I'm looking forward to games that have perhaps a broader appeal. I don't mean that in the context of "Let's do casual games," but in terms of providing content and tone that's a little different from the norm.

Given that you're a Disney fan, are you looking at working with some classic Disney properties, be it the Mickey Mouse universe or Pixar? Is that on the table?
Everything's on the table, and, like I said, the Disney back catalogue is one of the biggest appeals for me to being a part of Disney. I've been a fan forever. I love creating original stuff, and it's clearly part of the Junction Point mandate that we will create original IP for Disney, but I'm not so egotistical as to think, "Wow, I want to create my own original, fantasy hero" when I could be making a game about, I don't know, Toy Story. You have properties like the

doing that kind of a project. To be honest, I won't do it.... But, you can make a licensed game that sings. A game that is marvelous, that captures what the license is all about and takes it to a whole new place because you're bringing it to a whole new medium. That's the cool thing for me.

What's your opinion of the current state of game storytelling. Is it getting better?
I guess it's getting better; I don't know. I'm kind of manic depressive on the subject. The actors are certainly getting better. If you look at what Valve's been able to do with Alyx, that is a character that's so much more expressive than what we've been able to do before. I've seen some stuff that BioWare's working on with Mass Effect and that's going to a whole new level in terms of the acting abilities of our non-player characters.... But, beyond that, I don't know that there have been any great leaps forward. In essence, our character interactions are still pretty much the same as they were 15 years ago. Branching tree conversations are still the state of the art, and that's pathetic. And, for the most part, the games that are known for their stones are pretty linear.... We have to find a way to simulate human behavior as well as we simulate a

I think we've made huge strides in the non-story area. You can rattle them off – Guitar Hero, The Sims. In the story-game space, if I knew how to do it, I'd be doing it. The best I can figure how to do this minute is to offer players alternatives. Here's a situation that can be resolved the way you're used to in a game, but there are other ways to approach it.... I'm hoping that, little by little, we can figure out ways to make the non-combat choices more interesting. Maybe, eventually, we won't have to provide the combat choices.

Does the level of violence in something like Grand Theft Auto bother you personally?
Well, you have to separate the personal from everything else. As a person, I'm just tired of it. That's just one person talking, not judging anybody else. That's the thing that everybody misinterpreted when I was talking about GTA. I think it's a fantastic game; it's one of the best designs in a decade. For me personally, [I'm] not into the content. But hey, Igmar Bergman just died. There are people that love Igmar Bergman films and there are people that want Michael Bay films, you know? I'm not a Michael Bay guy these days, that's all.

A NEW BEGINNNING

■ Legendary game creator Warren Spector is forging a new path as a part of Disney Interactive

POTENT PORTABLE
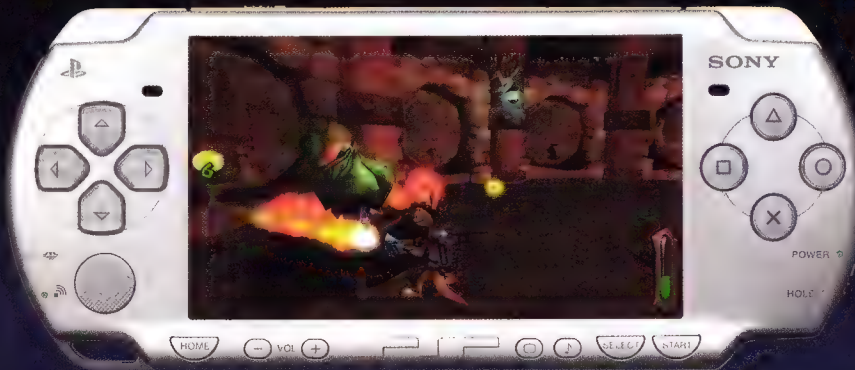
HANDS ON WITH SONY'S REDESIGNED PSP

■ A few layout changes have been made to the unit. The WLAN switch is now located at the top of the unit, and the UMD door pulls open so the door switch has been removed

(Device pictured is actual size, game not included)

We got some hands-on time with Sony's new PSP unit and were pretty pleased with how it feels. Many of the problems with the first design have been addressed: The square button is just as firm as the rest of the face buttons and no longer feels like it might break in half, and of course fingerprints aren't as glaringly noticeable on the new finish.

Our unit took about an hour to charge and played for about as long as the old model, but Sony has even larger batteries planned for sale at some point in the near future. Most immediately noticeable is the system's size. The unit is 33 percent lighter and 19 percent slimmer, but the 4.3-inch LCD screen hasn't been reduced at all. A new UMD drive helps speed up load times and conserves battery life. Still, the most intriguing new feature is the video-out capability, which will allow players to display their PSP games and movies in a window on their TV (cables sold separately). We

tried this feature out, and the transfer is pretty good, though we experienced a small amount of graininess due to the size increase. The only complaint we have for the system overall is the fact that Sony won't add an SD memory card slot on the unit.

The first bundle goes on sale on September 10th and includes the ice-silver colored system, the game Daxter, *Family Guy – The Freakin' Sweet Collection* on UMD, and a 1GB Memory Stick PRO Duo. The second bundle goes on sale October 9th and includes the limited collector's edition ceramic white system featuring a silk-screened image of Darth Vader and the game Star Wars Battlefront: Renegade Squadron. Those not interested in a bundled can purchase the newly redesigned PSP by itself in mid-September.
$199.99 (Bundles),
$169.99 (Core Pack)
www.us.playstation.com/psp

PSP VIDEO-OUT CABLES

With these cables you'll be able to display games on progressive scan televisions at a 480x272 resolution, and watch movies, videos, or display photos at a standard definition of up to 720x480. Unfortunately, these will not work on older PSP systems.
$19.99 • www.us.playstation.com/psp

etc.

TRANSFORMERS XBOX 360 FACEPLATES

Getting 12 faceplates for the price of one is a deal in our book, but when you are talking about getting 12 Transformers faceplates, well then you've got us sold. Core Gamer actually has a pretty large selection of Transformers merchandise, but we like these G1 faceplates, which include fan favorites like Optimus Prime, Soundwave, Starscream, and Hot Rod.
$24.99 • www.coregamer.com

STARCRAFT THE BOARD GAME

Who knows when StarCraft II will be coming out? Can you really wait that long? No, you can't. That's why you need to pick up this board game from the same guys who brought us the Doom and Warcraft sets. We got to play a quick run through of the game, and it's pretty fun. Up to six players will be able to play as the Terran, Zerg, and Protoss as they battle using over 180 miniatures based on the units from the PC phenomenon. It might just make the wait for StarCraft II a little more tolerable.

$79.95 • www.fantasyflightgames.com

peripherals

ALIENWARE DUAL COMPATIBLE GAMING PAD

GOOD ●●●●●●●●●●

Alienware is set to invade the console market with its new controller, which is compatible with PS2 and PC. We played around with the pad and it feels pretty comfortable, but the d-pad and the face buttons are a little stiff. However, its unique features make up for what it lacks. The replaceable analog nubs help your thumbs find just the right comfort zone, while the built-in shift buttons help you find the right analog sensitivity. This is a decent option for gamers who travel a lot between their TV and computer.

$29.99 • www.alienware.com

literature

THE ABSOLUTE SANDMAN VOL. 2

Sandman is where *New York Times* bestselling author Neil Gaiman got his start and earned his chops. One of the most notable comic books of all time, Sandman weaves together historical myths and modern fantasy like no other. This is the second of four slipcase volumes and features all new coloring and other never-before-seen extras.

$99.00 • www.dccomics.com

peripherals

CORE GAMER Wii BLASTER

AWFUL ●●●●●●●●●●

Don't say we never warned you. This Wii blaster is made from cheap plastic, is awkward to put together, and by our count is only useful for 1/9th of one Wii game. Maybe by the time Nintendo releases its Zapper there will be more reasons to use this, but we still don't think we'll want to. Have your dad make you a slingshot, instead. You'll have more fun with that.

$16.95 • www.coregamer.com

toys

NECA CASTLEVANIA FIGURES

The buzz coming out of San Diego Comic-Con was pretty hot for NECA's first line of Player Select figures based on Konami's Castlevania series. Simon Belmont, Alucard, Dracula, and a Succubus will all be available by late October. We've been pretty happy with NECA's other videogame figures for God of War and Tomb Raider, so we can't wait to snatch these up for ourselves.

$13.99 • www.cornerstorecomics.com

PRESERVING VIDEO GAME HISTORY

THE TIME IS NOW

BY BRENDA GUNN, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, RESEARCH & COLLECTIONS, THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

Until a few months ago, the relationship between the archives, where I am head of a large research and collections division, and video games was only as close as the nearest residence hall on the University of Texas at Austin campus where student residents play games. Just beyond that dorm, though, lie the classrooms and labs where the game culture, game industry, and games themselves are part of a growing corpus of game studies classes offered in various academic disciplines. Soon, that relationship will become much more personal and direct as the Center for American History establishes the UT Video Game Archive. The Center's archive will enhance the global study of the industry by highlighting the influence of Texas-based developers and entrepreneurs. With its international reputation for high caliber and highly accessible media collections, the Center is perfectly suited to house this archive. With the initial announcement in the spring and with increasing publicity this summer, interest in the new archive is high, especially among students. Suddenly, the student population on this campus views archives as relevant to themselves and to their interests.

Ironically, the idea for a video game archive came from within the Austin game community itself and not from academia. Warren Spector and Bill Bottorff made the initial contact with the Center's director, Dr. Don Carleton. Soon, Richard Garriott and George Sanger entered the conversations and they collectively argued, persuasively so, that the industry's history needed preserving. Spector, a long-time game developer, noted, "The fact is that the history of the video game business is being written every day and, sadly, being lost just about as quickly. Luckily, we're a young enough medium that nearly all of our serious practitioners are still alive and available to be interviewed and invited to contribute to the archive."

The game industry is at a critical moment in its history. This is an industry that is worth many billions of dollars in terms of economy in this country, and it's a serious business that needs documenting. The need to preserve and protect its material and intellectual culture is growing, as is the need to provide primary source material for the study and advancement of the industry. The new archive is the first to be created in Texas, and it sits at the very center of this state's flourishing video game industry – an industry in which popular culture, art, technology, business, and the law fuse and form a rich new environment for current and future research. With an international reputation for the caliber and accessibility of our media collections, the Center can help foster collaborative opportunities among universities, researchers, and other similar ini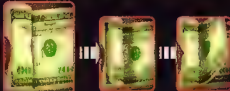tiatives around the world. To ensure an archive of scholarly and cultural interest, the Center will gather and make available for research materials from all sectors of the industry, including developers, publishers, and artists. In addition to the games themselves, archival materials of interest include: documents relating to the conception, development, planning, management, marketing, scripting, technology, and design of computer and console games; art in the form of drawings, paintings, sketches, diagrams, block diagrams, play charts, environments, and other forms involved in game development projects; digital files, including development documents, art, programs, source code, images, email correspondence, planning data, contracts, and business plans; physical game platforms including computers, consoles, cartridges, diskettes, controllers, sound boards, speakers, and especially early models that are no longer available for play; collateral materials used in marketing or developing games, such as posters, cut-out figures, play weapons, photos, costumes, and vehicles used to convey the sense of the games; and finally, business documents related to the operation of the game business.

In short, the UT Video Game Archives will gather material that illustrates the processes and means by which the developers arrived at a finished, packaged product. Not to be overlooked in our effort to document the backstories, we will accession the games and hardware too.

The archive will support game studies curricula, not only at the University of Texas, but to all interested researchers wherever they call home. Formal, academic programs devoted to game studies exist in just a few universities. More commonly, at the moment, classes focusing on games and digital media are scattered throughout university catalogues. The trend will be to bring those disparate classes together under a formal unit, with a defined structure and course of study. A proposal for a formal game studies program at UT is in the works; but meanwhile, the new archive will enhance the potential for collaboration among University departments with emerging video game curricula and then will provide support for students and professors involved in these programs.

Just as important, the archive will support the industry itself, by preserving the evidence and documentation of its creative contributions and its impact on all aspects of our society, culture, and institutions. The articles, books, research, talks, and presentations derived from this archive will be one of this industry's most effective tools in advocacy and public education.

Seldom do companies or businesses dedicate resources toward saving their own histories. When it happens, and it is typically with older, well-established, big businesses, the archives remain within the company and are for internal use only. It is a happy situation when any historically valuable material can be transferred into a public research setting such as ours, especially when the material might not be saved otherwise.

You may think you're just producing a game, but consider again. To a student or scholar, you're creating the raw data from which history is written. As far as relationships go, that's a match made in virtual heaven. ■ ■ ■

> Seldom do companies or businesses dedicate resources toward saving their own histories.

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

Jeep

game calendar

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat

Ratchet & Clank: Tools of Destruction – 10/23

02
NEW RELEASES
- Crash of the Titans – 360, Wii
- Front Mission 1st – DS
- Mobile Ops: The One-Year War – 360
- NBA 2K8 – PS3, 360, PS2
- NBA Live 08 – PS3, 360, PS2
- Rock Tour Tycoon – PC
- Spider-Man: Friend or Foe – Wii, PS2, PSP, PC
- Tabula Rasa – PC

03
WORLD CYBER GAMES FESTIVAL
Starting today and running through the remainder of the week, the World Cyber Games Festival, a yearly showdown of the best gamers around the globe, comes to a close. It will be held in Seattle, WA this year, and the games include WarCraft III, Gears of War, many more.

04
PUSHING DAISIES DEBUTS
On this Wed, at 8/7c, ABC's new must-see show begins. Writer Bryan Fuller (Heroes, Dead Like Me) and director Barry Sonnenfeld (Men in ... ing us a story of a man who... reanimate the dead. He'll use this gift to help solve murders.

05
... The hottest s... sion is finally getting the pla- ...t treatment that it deserves. ...her core assortment (Number ... Costanza) should be every... Karl "Helo" Agathon, ... Sanders, and a new version of ... different stores.

Tony Hawk's Proving Ground – 10/09

09-10
- Avatar: The Burning Earth – Wii, PS2
- Bleach: The Blade of Fate – DS
- Bleach: The Shattered Blade – Wii
- Code Lyoko: Quest for Infinity – Wii
- Donkey Kong: Barrel Blast – Wii
- FIFA Soccer 08 – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS, PC
- Half-Life 2: Orange Box – 360, PC
- Naruto: Rise of the Ninja – 360
- Sega Rally Revo – PS3, 360, PSP
- Star Wars: Battlefront Renegade Squadron – PSP
- Tony Hawk's Proving Ground – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS
- Universe at War: Earth ...

12
...ing of the Hitman movie, and we snuck in a UPC scanner. It turns out that the barcode on Agent 47's noggin says he's worth $3.50. It also says that he's a can of SpaghettiOs.

Star Wars: Battlefront Renegade Squadron – 10/09

SWAT: Target Liberty – 10/16

16
NEW RELEASES
- Build a Bear – DS
- Flash Focus: Vision Training – DS
- Mega Man ZX Advent – DS
- Panzer Tactics – DS
- Spanish for Everyone – DS
- SWAT: Target Liberty – PSP
- Zack & Wiki: Quest for ... – Wii

17
... she outbreak rocked the Marvel universe. After devouring everything in the cosmos, the zombies are returning to earth for an undead civil war.

19
... that have an entire month of night! The comic book movie 30 Days of Night opens in theaters today.

Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation – 10/23

23-24
NEW RELEASES
- Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation – 360
- Cars: Mater-National – 360, PS2
- Conan – PS3, 360
- EA Playground – Wii, DS
- Imagine: Animal Doctor – DS
- Imagine: Babyz – DS
- Imagine: Figure Skater – DS
- Imagine: Master Chef – DS
- Indy 500 Legends – Wii, DS
- Naruto: Clash of the Ninja Revolution – Wii
- Naruto: Path of the Ninja – DS
- Nicktoons: Attack of the Toybots – Wii, PS2, DS
- Phoenix Wright: Trials & Tribulations – DS
- Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction – PS3
- PS2, DS
- Viva Piñata: Party Animals – 360

26
JAFFE'S GAME DESIGN
www.davidjaffe.biz
This frequently updated blog provides a look into the video game development com... ...and also shows that David Jaffe has great taste in toys, comic books, and movie... it's always a fun read, and a ... should miss.

The Sims 2: Castaway – 10/23

TimeShift – 10/30

30-31
NEW RELEASES
- Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures – PC
- AJ & Ally – DS
- Battalion Wars 2 – Wii
- Beautiful Katamari – 360
- Bee Movie – Wii, PS2, DS, PC
- Buzz! The Mega Quiz – PS2
- Dementium: The Ward – DS
- Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness – PSP
- Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock – 360, Wii, PS2
- Hellgate: London – PC
- Need for Speed: Pro Street – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, DS
- Octopuzzle – Wii
- Ratatouille: Food Frenzy – DS
- The Simpsons – 360, Wii, PS2, PSP
- Singstar – PS3
- TimeShift – 360, PC
- Virtua Fighter 5 – 360
- The Witcher – PC

october

All release dates subject to change. For future release dates, go to www.gameinformer.com

SICK DECK. RUGGED TRUCKS. WICKED WHEELS.

READY TO TAKE ON THE CITY?

CASH IN WITH JEEP AND TONY HAWK.
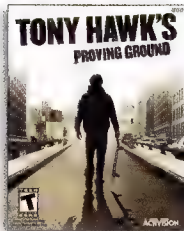
Enter the Jeep/Tony Hawk Go Anywhere Sweepstakes. Score the game system of your choice, a limited-edition Tony Hawk autographed board, $350 in GameStop Gift Cards or Tony Hawk's Proving Ground. All brought to you by Jeep and Game Informer. **Enter to win at www.gameinformer.com/jeepsweepstakes.**

Have fun out there. Jeep

DEAD SPACE

THE DARK FUTURE OF HORROR

Somewhere right now, a devoted team of horror fanatics is slaving away in their cubicles, endlessly twisting and refining grotesque beasts – and then finding ever more gruesome ways of tearing these same creatures limb from limb. Light and shadows are being placed in ominous, foreboding spaceship corridors. Eerie clattering noises and icy synth washes are being artfully deployed to create an atmosphere of overwhelming tension.

All this in service of a story, one the team hopes will be the foundation of a new video game series. In fact, their goal is not just to create any game, but the "scariest game ever," in the words of executive producer Glen Schofield.

Even as the project begins to take shape and the team gears up for the final year, the main architects of the project are relentlessly fine-tuning the experience, screening endless DVDs from their assembled library of horror films to help them unlock the secrets of terror. So far, the results are impressive. Dead Space is a science-fiction survival horror game that aims to be among the very best that the genre has to offer. To meet this goal, they've been given impressive resources, time, and freedom for a risky new IP.

However, the most notable thing about this story is not what's happening, but where it's happening. These committed, ambitious people behind Dead Space aren't working in the offices of a renegade start-up, but rather the world's largest and most powerful video

game company: Electronic Arts. Although many video game fans have criticized the super-publisher for sticking too close to its familiar formula of established brands and Hollywood licenses, EA realizes that this next generation of consoles is the place to establish the new and exciting games that will be the triple-A titles of tomorrow. Dead Space is one of the first fruits of this philosophy, and shows just how powerful the resources of a company like EA can be when teamed with a group of experienced developers that are finally getting to make the game of their dreams.

THE GENESIS OF AN EPIC

"A lot of us have been working together for a long time working on some pretty major projects," recalls producer Glen Schofield. "Me and [creative director] Bret [Robbins] have worked together since 1996. We've always had it on our mind to make a science-fiction horror game. We're big fans. You just don't think you're going to get the chance to do it at EA."

Lifelong survival horror fans Schofield and Robbins, who most recently worked on the licensed titles From Russia With Love and The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, had long harbored a desire to work in their favorite genre. Unfortunately, none of the myriad licenses or properties in the impressive EA stable really lent themselves to that style of gameplay, one that has more frequently been dominated by Japanese developers like Capcom and its Resident Evil franchise.

Still, the idea wouldn't go away. Schofield decided it was time to take a chance on the concept that would become Dead Space.

"[Licensed] games are fun to make, but this was something that was a passion," says Schofield. "We went to my bosses and told them we want to do survival horror in space – think Aliens and Event Horizon together. They liked the idea, and they said we had to go to Paul Lee, the president at the time. I had a conversation and he asked what we wanted to do. I explained it, and he said, 'What do you need?' I said, 'Let me hand-pick a team, put me in a corner, and leave us alone.' He told me to write down the names of

the people I wanted and said 'and go get 'em more.' Suddenly, Schofield and company were in the position of actually having to deliver on their pie-in-the-sky dream project (Schofield recalls his initial reaction to the news that the project was being tentatively approved as being "Holy s—-!"). This six-month period was spent feverishly working to fashion their big ideas into a concrete playable demo. Thankfully, the product of their labors impressed the higher-ups at EA, including then-COO John Riccitiello, to a degree that not only was the project given the official greenlight, it was tagged as a possible trilogy with tie-ins across multiple forms of media [see sidebar on page 64]. Suddenly, the team's Dead Space dreams were becoming very real.

A SHOT IN THE DARK

In hopes of creating a saga as gripping as the horror movies they grew up loving, the team crafted a story that plays to many of the classic archetypes of both sci-fi and horror. Dead Space stars Isaac Clarke, an engineer who specializes in fixing giant mining ships for the Concordance Extraction Corporation. The company receives a mysterious distress call from the USG Ishimura, a "planet cracker" class ship that is used

The zero gravity sequences are quite striking, especially due to the eerie sound design

Dead Space features a healthy amount of gore
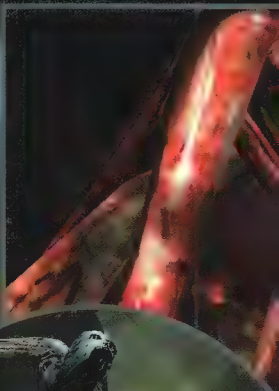
You can still see traces of the Necromorphs' human hosts in their grotesque bodies

Combat hinges on finding the correct dismemberment points for each creature type

to break an entire planet down to rubble and smelt the pieces for valuable ore. Assuming that some mechanical mishap is preventing the ship from doing its job and returning to base, Isaac – along with computer specialist Kendra Daniels and security officer Lt. Zach Hammond – leads a small crew aboard the cruiser Kellion to investigate and assist the crew of the Ishimura in fixing the problem.

As you might expect, this routine mission turns out to be anything but. As soon as they board, it becomes apparent that the Ishimura and most of its crew have been devastated by a mysterious alien race – one that has been using its human prey in a most foul manner.

Dubbed the "Necromorphs," these creatures infect and take over the bodies of dead humans, twisting their remains into new and horrific forms. These bloodthirsty beings have decimated the ship, and lie in wait for our hero to make the smallest misstep. Soon after entering the ship, you're separated from your comrades and must now explore the dreadful

confines of the Ishimura alone.

One of the keys to the developer's goals to create sheer terror in the audience is the design of Isaac himself. As an engineer by trade, his combat history is scant and is ill prepared to deal with the carnage about to unfold.

"He's not Master Chief. He's not from Killzone or any other kind of space marine thing where they've got big [armor] and are like 'Come get me,'" observes art director Ian Milham. "If you put Master Chief in a horror game, you're not going to be that scared. That guy can take on hordes of aliens. We wanted [Isaac] to look cool, but at the same time, maybe you're not all that safe. He's vulnerable."

As you guide Isaac through this strange ship, you'll begin to uncover bits of information that give clues to the events that transpired on the Ishimura. As in recent titles like BioShock, the story is told exclusively through in-game assets, making the audience feel as confused and disoriented as Isaac himself.

■ Melee combat is simple, brutal, and effective –
no pretty karate moves to be seen.

> If you put Master Chief in a horror game, you're not going to be
> that scared. That guy can take on hordes of aliens. We wanted
> [Isaac] to look cool, but at the same time, maybe you're not all
> that safe. He's vulnerable.
>
> — Ian Milham • Art Director

"[Isaac] is a guy thrust into a position he doesn't want to be in, like Ripley in *Alien*," said Schofield. "You are learning the story along with him. We're keeping everything in-game. There are scripted events and audio logs and video logs. There are no cutscenes."

Although the story is clearly dear to the developers, all the elements of the game work in service of their primary goal: to scare the living daylights out of players. The team is quick to stress that – although it's set in space – this is a survival horror title, not a shooter. While the setting might make you think of Doom, this is far from a fragfest: you'll frequently be outnumbered and low on ammo, helping to enhance the already palpable sense of tension. While nasty shocks in the form of aliens jumping out of a supposedly dead body certainly play into this,

the team is adamant about finding more creative ways to send a shiver down your spine.

"There's a huge amount of iteration to get horror right," states Robbins. "The music has to be there; the lighting has to be there. It has to be in a really polished state before it scares anyone. The timing is important. If you're off a tenth of a second, you have to figure out how to fix it."

"It's like comedy. You can use a punchline once," said Schofield. "Maybe, in a video game, we can get away with using that scare moment three or four times, as long as it's spaced out over 20 hours of gameplay. There are a lot of one-offs."

For example, during one demo we saw Isaac go through a decontamination chamber to reach one of the

This isn't going to end well

You're constantly outnumbered, so conservation of ammo is key to survival

ship's research areas. Suddenly, the lights flickered as we saw aliens climbing on the windows on the other side. Then – in a split second – the lights went off completely, leaving us fighting a horde of unseen beasts. Schofield revealed to us that the beast had infiltrated the room through the ship's vent system, even a steel vault door is no guarantee of safety in Dead Space.

HANDS-ON HORROR

The team has approached Dead Space's gameplay with the same intensity and devotion to craft that it has applied to the game's eerie feel. Early on, the decision was made that, instead of trying to be everything to every gamer, the title needed to focus on honing and perfecting a more modest number of gameplay features.

"When we committed [to the game]," remembers Schofield, "we knew we were committing to a very expensive and deep proposition. But that's the allure of it. When we made Bond, there was a bunch of mechanics that we could never go deep on because you had so many. In this case, we said, 'Let's do four: zero [gravity], dismemberment, kinesis, and the stasis gun and go as deep as possible.'"

The rather gruesome concept of dismembering alien bodies is instantly apparent as Dead Space's bloody calling card. Each Necromorph species has different dismemberment points, and mastering your approach to each is crucial to surviving in this hostile environment. Your main weapon, the Plasma Cutter, can sever the arms, heads, and legs of enemies. However, not all enemies will react the same way to losing a limb. Cut off the leg of one enemy, and it will be disabled, while another will simply adapt (using a completely new animation sequence) and continue

crawling toward you. Sometimes, beheading a creature will mean an instant kill; other times it will shoot out a grisly appendage from its neck and latch onto you. Another enemy, the "pregnant," will let loose a horde of bat-like creatures from its belly to attack you if hit. It's a complex system, one that the team is devoting a large number of resources to perfecting.

"When we decided to make dismemberment our big mechanic, it was huge in the design of the enemies, and huge in the design of the technology," comments Schofield. "There's tons of animation involved, because you have to account for every different type of interaction – cutting off an arm, or cutting off one foot, or cutting off a different arm. There's tons of stuff [to consider]."

In survival horror tradition, ammo is always at a premium, and your fighting style is often determined more by desperation than combat acumen. Isaac

This sequence shows what happens when you make the mistake of shooting a "Pregnant" Necromorph in the belly

IMAGINING THE UNIMAGINABLE

"Sci-fi is tough to design for," says Glen Schofield. "If you're making a cop or a mobster game, you know it's realistic New York – that's fairly easy to figure out. In sci-fi you've got to figure out what your future looks like."

In creating their own vision of the future, the team, under the watchful eye of art director Ian Milham, has taken on the daunting task of making the Ishimura (where a majority of the game takes place) a detailed environment that's both coldly technological yet oddly familiar.

"Part of what you're buying is a built-in anthropology and world," observes Milham. "We've been drawing this for about a year and a half. What you see now probably represents the last two months of work, because at about the year mark we said, 'Okay we've got a good base.' But a shocking amount of time is spent on 'Well, what's a coffee cup look like?' Immediately, you say 'Well, 500 years from now they wouldn't have cups, they'd inject coffee.' But it's not really relatable if you're walking around and everything is floaty and spacey, especially in a horror environment. We try to strike that balance of being futuristic and compelling, but at the same time we want the player to recognize a fire extinguisher, because that makes the world more real."

Walking through the dark corridors of the Ishimura, it's easy to see how much care has gone into the design of Dead Space. Layers of detail reveal themselves to the eye, each complex surface and cog in the ominous background representing yet another place from which danger could strike. This sense of danger is heightened by subtle shifts in lighting and color palette, a move Milham feels is crucial to adding to Dead Space's ability to set the player on edge.

"We're constantly trying to get that horror on a subliminal level – slightly uncomfortable angles," he comments. "Some of the lighting is based on surgical and dentist lights. Think about when you're in a dentist chair and he swings that thing in front of you. That's uncomfortable – as opposed to that pleasant, indirect lighting in Star Trek. It's like you're constantly being interrogated and beat down by the lights."

Even more crucial was the laborious design process involved in crafting the game's Necromorphs, who emerge as Dead Space's true stars. "Initially, we'd gotten guys that worked on some of the top stuff in the film industry, like Star Wars, The Matrix, or Men in Black, doing all those creatures. But we stopped working with them because they were giving us something we'd seen before. The look actually eventually came from our internal team."

The final vision for the Necromorphs is truly disturbing, even more than the traditional zombies of Resident Evil or the fantastical H.R. Giger designs of the Alien series. "We tried to be more primal," says Milham. "The enemies are based on very relatable and disturbing images and colors. You can see that they used to be human, but not in a standard "guy in zombie costume" way. It's someone that has been violently reconstituted in 10 seconds. Bones are broken and twisted backwards. They're the colors of wounds and infection – that grey, yellow stuff as opposed to lime green alien blood. You can still see some humanity – a face or jawbone or something that's been exaggerated or stretched. You might not be conscious of it, because the skin will be stretched and flayed or the ribcage will be repurposed into something else, but you're scared of it on a primal level."
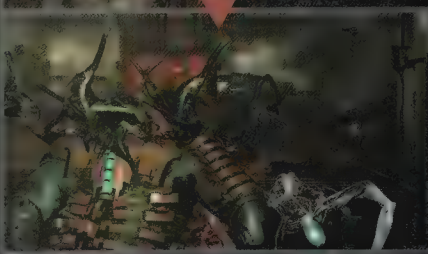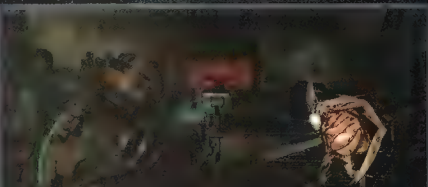
Clarke, after all, is an engineer, not a soldier, and often finds himself armed with mining tools that have been repurposed to more violent tasks – either shooting down your predators or using them as a club with the game's satisfyingly primitive melee combat system.

"We didn't go for your typical 'grab a knife' [combat]," reveals Schofield. "We asked ourselves, 'What would you do in real life?' If you've got a weapon in your hand, you're going to swing it. With each weapon you have a different hand-to-hand animations. The foot-stomp you'll find is pretty useful for dismembering something on the ground that's crawling on you." Although, it's not as useful as your Plasma Cutter, which is equipped with three laser sites and the ability to be flipped horizontally or vertically for more accurate severing.

Although the core gameplay will revolve around shooting, Isaac also has some more esoteric abilities that lend themselves both to combat and puzzle-solving. The Stasis gun can slow time, but only for the object that's targeted, making it much more demanding than similar mechanics in F.E.A.R. or Max Payne. However, if you're being overtaken by a horde of necromorphs or need to get through a closing door, accurate use of Stasis powers will be a lifesaver.

Kinesis lets you pick up and throw objects in the environment, be it oxygen tanks, fan blades, or even body parts from dismembered aliens. This ability is extremely useful in combat strategy, as the game – in true survival horror fashion – is fairly stingy with the

Something tells us that Dead Space is going to earn an M rating

Most of the game's weapons are actually mining tools
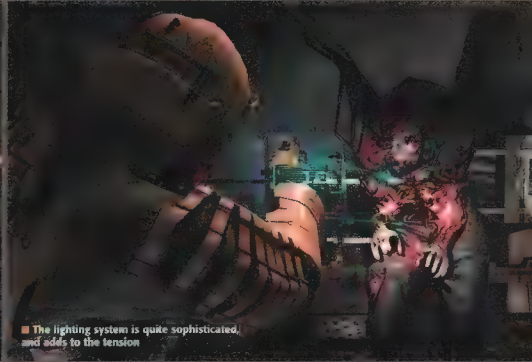
The lighting system is quite sophisticated, and adds to the tension

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

In attempting to create a sci-fi survival horror title for the ages, the Dead Space team has studied a wide variety of influences, taking cues from some of the greatest and scariest creations Hollywood and gaming have to offer.

The Thing
Although it's set on Earth, horror master John Carpenter's gripping tale of an Antarctic research base that becomes infested with an alien presence is a clear inspiration for Dead Space. While the team has generally avoided taking visual cues from more famous properties like Star Wars or Aliens, The Thing's grotesque alien forms and writhing tentacles have definitely left their mark on Dead Space's nausea-inducing creatures.

Event Horizon
If you're looking for the most clear-cut source of inspiration for Dead Space, look no further than the 1997 cult classic Event Horizon. Starring Sam Neill and Laurence Fishburne, the film traced the events surrounding the Event Horizon, a mysterious spaceship that had vanished for seven years and suddenly reappeared. Of course, when the crew goes to explore the vessel, all is not what it seems. Interestingly, Event Horizon's director Paul W.S. Anderson handled the original film adaptation of another Dead Space influence – Capcom's Resident Evil.

Resident Evil
As fans of survival horror, it's no surprise that the Dead Space team members are huge fans of Capcom's Resident Evil series, which almost single-handedly established the genre among gamers. Glen Schofield gives particular praise to Resident Evil 4, claiming, "Resident Evil 4 showed that you could do a great, third-person survival horror shooting game."

amount of ammo you'll have to complete a level. By chopping off the arm of a Slasher (one of the more common enemies), you can often get through an area with limited ammo usage by using the aliens' body parts as projectile weapons. In addition, both Kinesis and Stasis powers will be used frequently in puzzle solving, as you manipulate huge machinery in an effort to power up equipment and open up new areas on the Ishimura.

But perhaps the game's most striking sequences are those that happen in zero gravity, which adds a strange feel to the already gripping action. Stepping out of a claustrophobic airlock into open space is an odd feeling indeed, made stranger by the excellent sound design; all of the explosive sounds are sucked out of the air, leaving only the odd thud and your own heartbeat as accompaniment to the battle. Using the simple laws of physics and your gravity boots to lock onto the ship, you'll be able to float around in a 360-degree environment while battling aliens -- although one false move can send you hurtling into deep space. Despite the game's scenario, here again realism is key to the team's design decisions.

"The idea with zero gravity is that we didn't want it to feel like a jet pack," comments Schofield. "So I'm jumping and shooting in that way, but if I miss -- you're out in space. You'll bounce if you don't land correctly. We were tempted to do a tether, but we wanted to keep it as realistic as possible."

Silent Hill

Although Schofield (correctly) observes that Konami's venerable Silent Hill franchise "[doesn't] have the best combat," he does have high praise for a series that -- perhaps even more than Resident Evil -- delivers gamers a creepy, dreadful vibe. Schofield comments, "When you walk into an area [in Silent Hill], it feels corrupted and horrible."

Alien

If you're doing anything involving fear and outer space, it's pretty hard to avoid the influence of Ridley Scott's brilliant film Alien. Although the team does note Alien's ability to deliver drawn-out tension and chills, they were sure to avoid outright emulation of a series that's influence has become so prevalent in gaming. "You have to make sure you don't look like Alien or Star Trek or Star Wars or Riddick -- or any of these other games," said Schofield.

David Fincher

Acclaimed director David Fincher's uniquely gritty style of filmmaking has been an inspiration to the team. "Fincher as a director is a huge influence," comments Ian Milham. "He doesn't exactly do horror movies, but if you look at the palette of Seven, Fight Club, or The Game, there's an oiliness and a decay to things while still having color and richness. You don't just take the color out of everything, but there's a feeling of decay in his frame that we referenced a lot. If there were a Dead Space movie, he would be the guy."
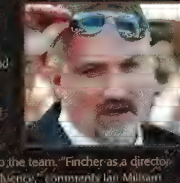
Half-Life 2

Although very different in pace and gameplay, some of Half-Life 2's brilliant design has shaped the way that the Dead Space team thinks about puzzles. "Our puzzles are... priced... comments Schofield. "Think of some of the Half-Life ones on steroids, like the one where you get in the crane -- they are all more physical puzzles than Resident Evil, where you take the gem and stick it in this guy's ass. [Laughs] We're intending you to use your environment, and also use the Stasis gun in time-based puzzles."

MULTIMEDIA MACABRE

The team's work on crafting a deep and rich universe for Dead Space has resulted in the plans for this game becoming much more ambitious than a simple survival horror game. In fact, the plan now calls for Dead Space to be an entire standalone universe, one that will be taken across several forms of media and a planned trilogy of next-gen titles.

"We wanted to create a franchise," comment Schofield. "The idea was to make at least three games. Being science fiction fans and watching *Battlestar Galactica*, you know how rich and deep their background are. You want to know where these characters come from."

Adds Bret Robbins, "We always wanted it to be cross media, but the game needed to be first and best."

Now that the game is establishing a firm foundation for the series, EA is beginning to reveal some of the other ways in which it will expand and further the Dead Space universe. First off is a six-issue comic series created by a couple of rising stars in the world of independent comics, writer Antony Johnson (*Wasteland*, *Alex Rider*) and artist Bruce Templesmith (the graphic novel *30 Days of Night*, now being adapted to the big screen by producer Sam Raimi and starring Josh Hartnett). Publisher Image Comics distributed a seven-page teaser book

at the recent Comic-Con in San Diego, but there was no indication that it was tied to a major video game.

The series will follow the events leading up to beginning of the game. However, lead character Isaac Clarke will not be appearing in the comic at all.

"The nice thing is having the comic writers looking at it from a different point of view," observes Schofield. "They asked us questions that normally we wouldn't have to answer for a video game – like, 'How deep is the mining hole on the planet?' At that point, we realized we had to make a story way bigger than we thought we were going to make. It's really

You'll frequently be in near-total darkness, so the life bar on the back of Isaac's suit is helpful in keeping track of your onscreen position

TRUE TO THE VISION

After playing a couple of work-in-progress levels of Dead Space, it's easy to get excited about what the team has created. For a game that has more than a year before it's scheduled to ship, it's already achieved something that some titles never do: It's a fun and polished experience. While not everything was perfect, a large part of what we played was already of a quality of game that could be on sale at any store across the country. This seems to be a testament to the enthusiasm and experience of the people that are helping to make this one of the most exciting new entries in the survival horror genre in quite some time.
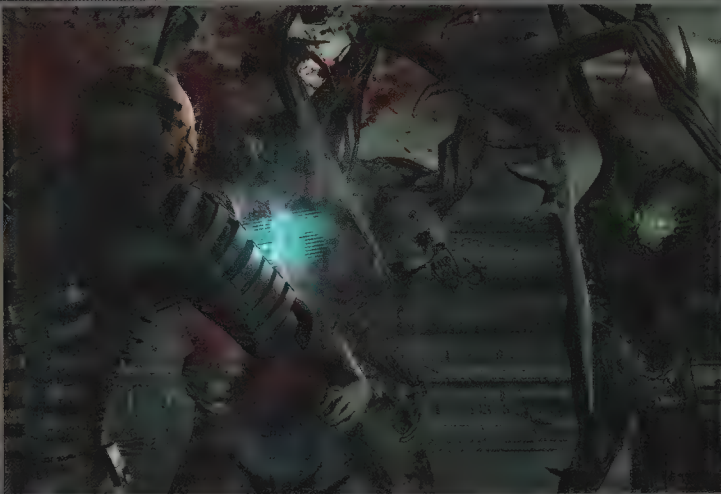
Talking with some of the key players in Dead Space, it's not hard to see that they are passionate about what they do. This is not just a product; it's a chance for them to make the game they always dreamed about playing.

"Survival horror in space – there's not too many games that have been like that," says Schofield. "Doom is more of a shooter, System Shock is first-person as well, and more of an RPG. We want to go right up against Silent Hill and Resident Evil. We think there's a big crossover between the science fiction guys and the horror guys."

As he continues, it's clear that Schofield and the team's goals have moved far beyond just emulating the games and movies that inspired them – they want to create something better than what's come before. "Resident Evil is a great game, but it's not that scary – it's intense. We want to have the 'boo!' moments," claims Schofield. "We also want to have the uncomfortable moments in Silent Hill…We wanted to take those two, put them together, and put it in space."

So far, Dead Space seems to be progressing even better than its creators had hoped. With a lot of hard work and a bit of luck, they just might end up creating the game that inspires the next generation of video game horror fanatics.

"[We've] built up so much momentum. It started out as a rogue team that said 'This is what we wanted to make,'" observes Schofield. "But it was a perfect storm EA wanted to make more new IP. We wanted to be in survival horror, and EA wasn't in that genre yet. Horror is huge in the movies right now, and I still don't see a survival horror in space game… it feels like the stars are aligning."

helped inform the video game.

In fact, the story has now grown so large that the staff maintains an internal wiki just to track all the myriad of fictional information created about the Dead Space universe.

With our story, you have to think about the past to get where we are," states Schofield. "Why are we mining big planets? How do we make big ships? You don't just do things for no reason. So, three pages of writing turned into hundreds. We even have a backstory on the ship. We know when it was built, who the first captains were, and how many captains there have been."

In fact, it's likely that the saga of Dead Space will go far beyond the boundaries of a traditional video game. "Whether we use [the story elements in the game] or not, our comic book and other mediums will be able to go into that," reveals Schofield. Notice that he said "other mediums." When we tried to press EA on the possibility of a Dead Space movie, senior product manager Rich Briggs would only say, "We're not talking about that. There is other stuff that has been secured and other stuff that is close to being secured." It appears the future of Dead Space could be very interesting indeed.

PROJECT ORIGIN

What is fear? Is it a skittering sound emanating from out of sight, or a genetically mutilated abomination clawing at your flesh? Is it a cryptic message scrawled in blood, or an implacable foe who stops at nothing as he stalks you until your untimely demise? Perhaps it's the knowledge that every step you take comes closer to flinging you headlong into a vision so twisted and terrifying that your brain can barely process it, made all the more horrible by the fact that in its own way it's just as real as the physical world around you. In Project Origin, fear wears every one of these faces, and bombards players in its relentless quest to scare the bejeezus out of anyone who picks up the controller.

THE NEW FACE OF F.E.A.R.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE
> **DEVELOPER** MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** FALL 2008

Vivendi Universal owns the name "F.E.A.R.", but developer Monolith Productions owns everything else about the game – the chilling story, twisted villain Alma, and all of the expertly engineered technology behind it. That's where Project Origin comes in. This is a sequel to F.E.A.R. in all but name, and it's taking on traditional sequel duties. Since the original game was outstanding in its own right, Monolith isn't reinventing the wheel here. Expanding the world, continuing the plot, and cranking up the intensity of the outstanding combat are the goals of Project Origin.

In case you missed the first game – read on at your own risk, by the way, because it's impossible to talk about Project Origin without spoiling the heck out of F.E.A.R.'s ending – the hallmarks of the series are thrilling scares in the form of psychotic visions, full-throttle combat against some of the best AI in video games, and a convoluted story that revolves around a little girl named Alma.

Upon starting puberty, Alma was placed in a chemically induced coma by a corporation called Armacham. This sociopathic company saw great potential in Alma's unbelievably potent psychic powers, and kept her in a coma through a series of teenage pregnancies in the attempt to create living weapons that could change the face of modern combat.

The trouble was, Alma did not go quietly into that good night. Her consciousness was too strong to be kept entirely subdued by Armacham's chemicals and the containment chamber her body was held in. Fragments of her will leaked into the world, driving her children (who were most receptive to her psionic emanations) mad with expressions of the emotional hell she lived in. As players took control of one of Alma's children in F.E.A.R., much death and freaky business occurred.

Project Origin kicks off half an hour before the ending of F.E.A.R. with new

protagonist Michael Beckett storming a high-rise complex with his Delta Squad companions. The target of the raid is an Armacham executive who is wanted in connection with a slew of forbidden genetic and weapons experiments. Unfortunately for Delta Squad, Armacham's private mercenary force is there as well, attempting to clean up the corporation's latest mess.

After fighting his way to the top, Beckett finds himself looking out over the very same city whose view dominates the final cinematic of F.E.A.R. As in that sequence, Alma's release from her containment chamber triggers a massive explosion as the reins on her powers are broken. "What she could do when she was inside her containment chamber pales in comparison to what she can do outside," notes Monolith producer Troy Skinner. Chilling words indeed for anyone who experienced F.E.A.R. "When Alma's out, it's not only her children that start seeing things. The effect she has on the world is very marked."

Any guesses as to these chumps' lifespans?

Even a vanilla SMG results in awesome cinematic deaths

Slow motion is also useful for savoring well-placed grenades

The eastern seaboard is going to hell with an enormously powerful, emotionally scarred little girl on the loose. The government is largely clueless outside of sending Delta Squad in and hoping for the best. Every step Beckett takes is hounded by Armacham's mercenaries, disturbing visions courtesy of Alma's psychic projections, monsters born out of failed Armacham experiments, the Replica (the clone army from F.E.A.R.), and terrifying beasts brought to life by Alma's twisted soul. So Beckett

Dressing Them Up

We saw this cinematic in full motion during our time with Project Origin, and if it's any indication of the creepiest moments we've seen in games it's good enough when you're watching bloody decomposing some kind of water creature on top of a 13-person. It's vastly more when the scene changes to some kind of nightmare version of itself, with the doctors replaced by leeching, flesh-eating ghouls feeding on your entrails as your helplessly watch. Could this be a hint of how Project comes by its nightmare conflicts?

falls back to what he knows best as an elite military operative: clearing the way to his objective with the best postmodern weaponry he can find.

As the combat in F.E.A.R. was good enough to carry the game to high critical acclaim and excellent sales, Monolith isn't radically changing the formula. Players can expect more of the same intense close-quarters fighting that sets the series apart from the FPS crowd. Rooms are little more than debris and choking dust after a conflict takes place. Entire courtyards are full of scattered wreckage and drifting smoke by the time all the enemies are down. It's no exaggeration to say that F.E.A.R. may have the most awesomely nerve-frying, pulse-pounding combat that gaming has seen to date, and Project Origin is only improving on it.

The slo-mo power is even returning fully intact, though Monolith is loathe to reveal what makes Beckett capable of this astounding feat. "We'll explain how you get your mojo, but we won't do it upfront," says Skinner. "I'm not trying to be willfully obscure; we just have a lot of twists." Regardless, the time-slowing ability with its regenerating meter and trademark audio distortion is present once again as the sole supernatural

ability of the hero, and it's such a great fit for the combat style that it's hard to find fault with this decision.

Turning up the dial on a feature already so excellent is no small task, but Monolith has several plans in the works to do just that. "The Armacham group – while hard-bitten mercenaries – have a lot more emotional range, things like retreating and panicking," notes Skinner. In contrast to the coldly efficient Replica, the mercs will have amusing conversations while standing about on patrol and react emotionally to situations. Enemies that actually react to messages scrawled on the wall in blood and entrails will feel slightly more human.

Having that third faction (the mercs in addition to the Replica and Delta Squad) means that Monolith can create vastly more dynamic combat scenarios. When you consider that the developers could even throw Alma and her monsters into the mix, the potential for truly epic conflicts is clear. The AI in Project Origin is astoundingly clever – it is, after all, an evolved version of F.E.A.R.'s lauded system – and will go after whatever it deems the biggest threat. Beckett is only one guy, but after the bad guys see him single-handedly

mow down a dozen combat-hardened soldiers, they'll be more likely to want to take him down even if they're staring down an entire unit of hostiles at the same time.

The final piece of the combat puzzle is what Monolith internally terms "flippable cover." This class of object includes things like desks or stretchers that can be overturned or otherwise manipulated to create new cover opportunities. Of course, the AI is aware of this as well, so yet another level of tactical awareness is required on the player's end. This is especially welcome news for F.E.A.R. players who were justifiably disappointed in the game's barren, monotonous environments. The developers are even going so far as to include some limited segments where Beckett pilots some kind of powered exoskeleton in order to confront threats beyond his normal means.

Continued on page 70 >>>

You're not the only threat that the AI is aware of

■ Environments are
nearly unrecognizable
after a firefight

■ Enemies react appropriately
to different body parts getting
wounded

Gimme Some Candy

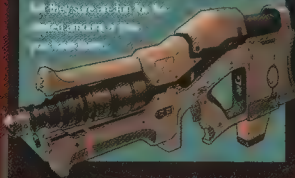Besides of bread-and-butter SMGs, assault rifles and shotguns, Project Origin will have several other Monolith series' candy weapons. Your lasers, for instance, it clearly severs heads and limbs, catches just about anything on fire and generally kills the hell out of everybody. You'll be able to find and munch ammo for these weapons, since they effectively must be but they sure are fun for the limited amounts of time you have them.

Upping the ante in a sequel isn't just about integrating new elements into a design that people already liked. It's also about fixing what was broken, unfinished, or just plain screwed up in the original effort. And while F.E.A.R. had amazing combat and enemy AI to go along with some expertly crafted scare scenes, it was by no means problem-free.

The repetitive mazelike environments, a too-small pool of enemies, toothless horror elements, and annoying health management are all begging to be fixed.

The fact that the horror segments – where Alma pulls you into a demented vision to freak you out – didn't contain any real danger was a big downer in the later parts of F.E.A.R. Horror without any real threat eventually stops scaring even the most easily frightened players. To remedy this, Monolith is making sure that even when you're stuck in an endless bloody hallway with Alma's child-like cries of terror and rage echoing in your ears, you'll have to stay on your toes. A few

deaths will teach blithe players that the fear doesn't stop when the world dissolves around you and Alma's personal demons haunt your senses.

The enemy selection has already been addressed with the addition of Armacham's mercs. Health management in Project Origin will be modeled after Halo or Call of Duty, with regenerating hit points taking the place of hunting for medkits.

The endless deserted office buildings and run-down industrial complexes that made up the vast majority of F.E.A.R.'s setting are also being improved upon. Skinner notes that Project Origin will have "over two and a half times as many environments" as the first game, and we saw both an elementary school and a hospital used as settings for the sequel. As Monolith is well aware of these failings in the original, it seems highly likely based on what we've seen that the shortcomings will be addressed to players' satisfaction.

■ The operation will surely go perfectly with Alma watching over you

■ Enemies will coordinate their assaults using squad-based bounding and flanking tactics

■ They may be monsters, but they sure get into those finger-painting projects

He's Heating Up

One new behavior that the AI is capable of in Project Origin is the ability to recognize and deal with being on fire. Whereas other games make incendiary weapons little more than an extended death animation, enemies here will make use of anything they can find to put out the flames and continue to fight. If there's no water or fire extinguisher handy, they'll even resort to the old stop, drop, and roll. Or, in the case of the mercs, they might panic — a common reaction, Skinner says with a chuckle. "I think that's a reasonable reaction to being on fire."

■ The cinematic sequences are intense, to say the least

Monolith wasn't ready to give out any details on multiplayer, but that's not terribly surprising when you're talking about a game that won't be on shelves for another year or so. Skinner did mention that downloadable content is something the team is definitely planning for post-release, but whether that would take the form of episodic content for single-player consumption, new maps for multiplayer, or something totally different is unknown. Either way, you can be sure that Project Origin will have some kind of online offering.

Based on everything we've seen and the way that Skinner gladly dove into the original game's shortcomings before we could even bring them up, the future looks very good for Project Origin. F.E.A.R.'s oddly staggered release between PC, Xbox 360, and PlayStation 3 won't repeat either, as all three versions should ship simultaneously. This is no quantum leap forward in first-person action/suspense gameplay, but when your start point is as high in quality as Project Origin's, what's so bad about that? ■ ■ ■

Halo 3

STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER BUNGIE > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 25

FOUR IS BETTER THAN TWO
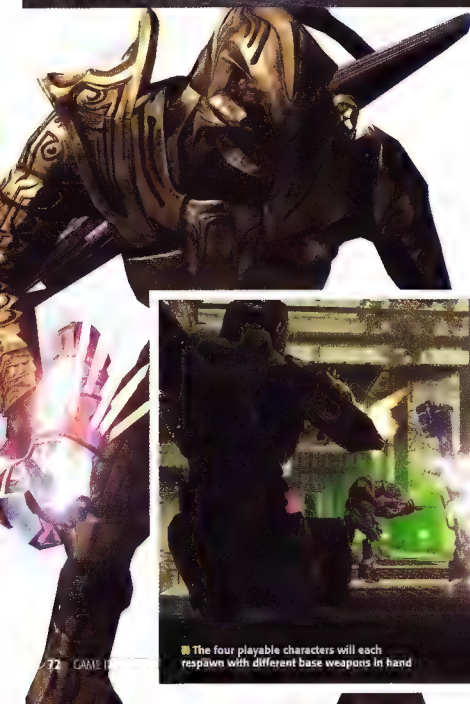
F ew things would get rabid Halo fans more pumped at this point than they already are, but the announcement of four-player online co-op is enough to do the job. This month, we grilled Bungie's Frank O'Connor on the newly announced co-op gameplay, and learned some interesting tidbits to hold us over until the oh-so-close release

One big element that sets Halo 3's co-op apart is the way it fits appropriately into the story. In the first two games, both you and your buddy would fire through hordes of Covenant opponents as identical Master Chiefs, and only one of those two would show up in cutscenes. Not so this time, where each of the four players will play independent characters in the game world. "Cutscenes will be identical in

co-op and we carefully managed the characters you play to avoid precisely that kind of fictional disconnect," O'Connor tells us. Unsurprisingly, the Master Chief and the Arbiter form the first part of the team, while two new Elite characters named N'tho 'Sraom and Usze 'Taham will fill out the roster.

To keep track of everyone, each teammate will show up as a yellow mark on your motion detector, and their service tags will appear above their heads to let you know who is who. AI will react naturally to the threat of so many intelligent opponents, and will maneuver into position to take out multiple threats. Unlike some other recent cooperative releases like Gears of War, you won't have any sections where the

The four playable characters will each respawn with different base weapons in hand

We've been told that large-scale vehicle conflicts will be a big part of the later levels.

team gets split along two separate paths – like always, the Halo game world will be open for everyone to explore. That doesn't mean you can get too split up. As before, if players get separated, a little teleportation will take over. "Warping for catchup is a necessary part of our game, since levels are huge and distances can become unmanageable in terms of gameplay," explains O'Connor. But don't worry. If someone is getting left behind too often, you can still vent your frustration with a little friendly fire – a feature that will always be on, even with four players who might all be wielding rocket launchers.

With anywhere between one and four veteran Halo players at the controls, we wondered exactly how difficulty would be balanced this time around. "It is a huge challenge," admits O'Connor. "Our basic philosophy is that for starters, folks should set difficulty to a minimum of Heroic, and if most of

you have played Halo 2, then start with Legendary." With that said, he also is quick to point out how much added challenge comes from finding and using the various skulls scattered through the game world – a returning mechanic that should keep even four expert players busy for a long time to come.

Given the degree of chaos on display in the single-player demos we've seen, it's hard to imagine the level of destruction that four players will be able to wreak while playing through the story mode. It won't be long after reading this that you'll be able to observe the insanity for yourself. In case you've been hiding under a rock, Halo 3 releases on September 25th. ■ ■ ■

Notice the service designations above each of your allies – this should help you keep everybody straight

While Bungie certainly hasn't said one way or the other, we wonder whether the characters played by the third and fourth players will remain consistent throughout the game

THE FORGE

One of the coolest new features recently announced for Halo 3 is called simply the Forge. This exciting new feature is a variation on the traditional map editor concept. Instead of creating brand new maps and geometries, the Forge will allow players to place vehicles, weapons, spawn points, and objectives wherever they want on existing maps. Multiple players will be able to work together simultaneously designing a map over Xbox Live. You'll even be able to play around in the map as it's being crafted, playing real-time games where some players are running through the game world while others adopt the role of Monitors and place new items into the environment. Of course, your creations will all be uploadable for others to enjoy.

As you can see the player models look highly detailed — and slippery
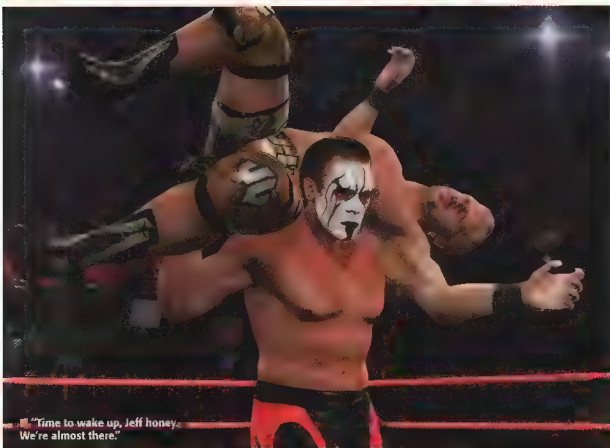
"Time to wake up, Jeff honey. We're almost there."

Sting had a good cry the day he found out *Gilmore Girls* was canceled. We miss them too, buddy. We miss them too (Actually, just Joe does)
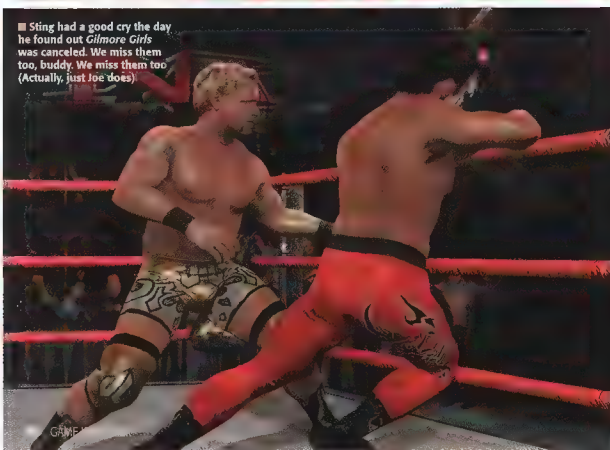
UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

TNA Impact

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING (ONLINE TBA) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY > **RELEASE** 2008

AND IN THE SIXTH CORNER…

Spike TV's TNA wrestling league is really starting to take off, so we're not surprised that it's getting its own game. The league's most distinguishing feature is its six-sided ring, which helps speed up the action. "More ropes and turnbuckles equal more angles in which to Irish-whip someone. Also, it means the ropes are much tighter so guys can walk on the ropes and do lots of cool spring moves off them. The six-sided ring gives us a lot of flexibility to get exciting moves into the game," Midway's LA studio head Scot Lane tells us. "TNA is much more acrobatic than any league I have seen. These guys are true athletes."

The team at Midway has been fortunate enough to get direct input from actual TNA stars. "We have met with a lot of the wrestlers, but Samoa Joe and AJ Styles have been in on the most meetings," says Lane. "These guys are gamers so they really understand games and they know what the real fanbase wants to see in a game. They have contributed in many areas – the nuances between U.S., Japan, Europe, and the pacing of the game, the moves they think will translate well to video games, controls, and a lot more. They have also been in many mo-cap sessions as have several other TNA wrestlers."

But all this wrestler support won't mean anything if the game doesn't have great gameplay. Lane knows this, too: "Our primary focus is on gameplay and our goal is to have the smoothest, most responsive in the genre. We are running at 60 fps and the game already feels great. We have two of the best combat guys in the business, Mark Turmell and Sal DiVita. These guys love wrestling." This team has some arcade roots, but that doesn't mean TNA will feel exactly like an arcade game. Lane was quick to add that they are working hard to make this a game tailored specifically for next-gen consoles. "Mark and Sal bring an attention to detail and a focus on 'feel' that has remnants of the arcade days with a modern edge. They really focus on moment to moment gameplay and the subtleties of combat."

The crowd and the character creation system are important to any wrestling game, and TNA doesn't look to disappoint in either avenue. The team isn't eager to give away too many details about the character creation just yet, other than to say that it will be a big feature when the game is done. As for the other element, Lane adds, "We have put a lot of work into our crowd. Our goal is to create an environment – including crowd – that feels like TNA. We are focusing on making the crowds distinctive when you are in Japan, England, or any of the different arenas."

Lane is also pretty excited about seeing one of his favorite match types from the show, Ultimate X, playable in the game. "Basically there are ropes around 15 feet above the ring with a belt hanging in the middle. The first guy to climb up and get the belt wins, but it is nowhere near as easy as it sounds. I've seen these guys fall and land on their back, it looks real painful." But it sounds fun. Only you'll have to wait until next year to play Ultimate X or any of the game's other match types like King of the Mountain, tag team, and fatal four-way. Better start practicing on your brother. ■ ■ ■
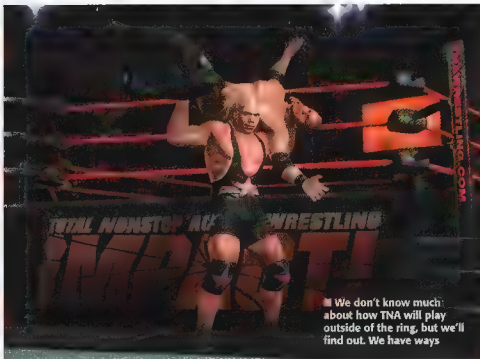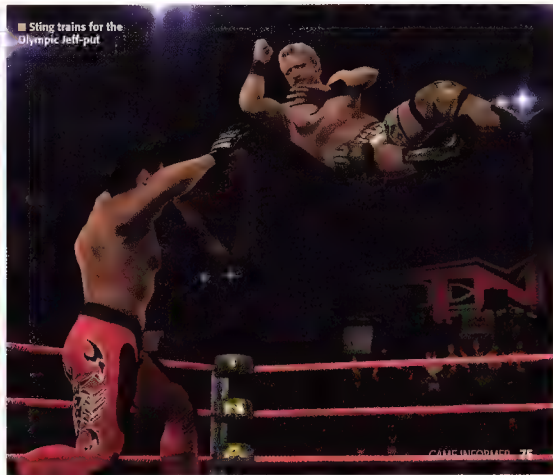

We don't know much about how TNA will play outside of the ring, but we'll find out. We have ways

Jeff wisely chose the airplane ride over the boot to the groin ride

It is not correct form to give a wedgie with your teeth. Or maybe he's going for a wet willy...

Sting trains for the Olympic Jeff-put

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Wet

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** SIERRA ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** ARTIFICIAL MIND & MOVEMENT > **RELEASE** HOLIDAY 2008

...AND MOST LIKELY WILD

It's not often that games are named with such simple titles. There's always some kind of subtitle or number tacked on for good measure. Patrick Fortier, creative director of Wet, feels the name fits the concept perfectly. "Wet evokes this idea of liquids and fluidity – smoothly flowing from one thing to another – and that's exactly what controlling Rubi is about," Fortier says.

Developer Artificial Mind & Movement (A2M) describes this protagonist as a "problem solver." "She works for cash and she'll consider any job – whether it's a smash n' grab, kidnapping, blackmail, framing, protection, or assassination," says executive producer Andre Emerson. "Make your offer and she'll consider it." The game begins when Rubi agrees to help a rich man find his son in Hong Kong. When she gets close to finding her mark, everything goes south fast. It turns out that this man is not who he claims to be, and Rubi gets shot up and left for dead. As she sets out for revenge, Rubi gets mixed up in a gang war between the

Triads, Yakuza, and Russian Mafia. The story is written by Duppy Demetrius, a former writer and story editor on the show *24*. "All of the tension, action, double-crossing and strong characters that the hit show is known for certainly comes through in a big way in our story," Emerson says.

As far as gameplay goes, Wet is all about style. "Wet is focused on seamlessly integrating three major components – gunplay, acrobatics, and sword attacks," Emerson says. "Each of these mechanics is executed with a unique beauty, style, and grace that really defines our hero." Rubi's acrobatic arsenal includes things like dives, wall runs, flips, pole swings, and knee slides under obstacles. To facilitate combat during these actions, Wet uses lock-on targeting and some slow-motion effects during particularly tricky maneuvers. Once enemies have been targeted, you can manually aim at specific body parts

or flick the right stick to dual target separate goons with Rubi's signature Colt Pythons. With dual targeting you can also pin down a guy with one gun and shoot a heavy object that's dangling above his head or blast an enemy while stopping the grenade he just tossed in midair. Rubi will come across weapons like Uzis, assault rifles, grenade launchers, and shotguns, and will be able to upgrade them with cash found throughout the environment.

Rubi obtains the sword from defeating one of Wet's seven bosses. This melee component is used mostly

as a finisher, but can also be stabbed into the wall to reach higher areas and deflect bullets. Once you get in range of a group of enemies, you can initiate a contextual button press sequence that will stylishly slash everyone to bits.

Outside of the standard combat mechanic, Rubi will experience several unique high-action scenes. Chasing targets through the streets, jumping around on top of speeding vehicles, and fighting for a parachute at 10,000 feet are just samples of the over-the-top feats she'll be performing. And we can't wait to try them out once A2M is ready to let us get some hands-on time. ■ ■ ■

■ Wet takes inspiration from Quentin Tarantino films, Sergio Leone westerns, Hong Kong action movies, and comic books like *The Losers*
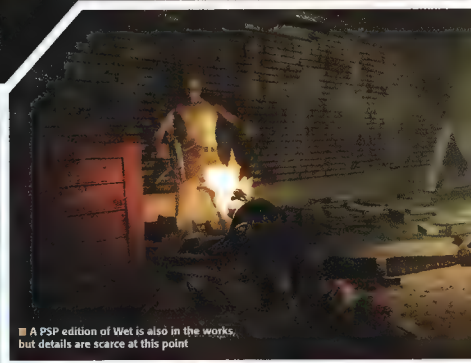
■ A PSP edition of Wet is also in the works, but details are scarce at this point

A2M OR AM2?

Artificial Mind & Movement's moniker A2M can be confusingly similar to Sega's in-house developer AM2. But rather than working on franchises like Shenmue and Virtua Fighter, A2M is better known for licensed products like Happy Feet and The Ant Bully. The company sees Wet as a chance to prove itself outside of the licensed game market, and it assembled a new team in its Montreal HQ consisting of people who have worked on games like Splinter Cell, Assassin's Creed, and Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, and movies like *300* and *X2: X-Men United*.

Norse Gods such as Freya and Hel play a major role but there are a few more characters from Norse Mythology who will pop up throughout the game

Skarin will gain a variety of ways to influence the battles. One way is with magic, where he will be able to buff nearby troops. Another way is through the liberation of various resource points around the island – free the lumber mill from Legion control, for example, and he will have access to siege equipment

Viking:
Battle for Asgard

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** CREATIVE ASSEMBLY > **RELEASE** 2008

BY THE BRISTLING BEARD OF ODIN

God of War, Jason and the Argonauts, Conan, Beowulf, even Lord of the Rings – it seems like the classic European legendary tales have the videogame front pretty well covered. So why aren't there more games based on Norse mythology? "The Vikings were some of the hardest, meanest warriors ever to grace the planet, and we just couldn't resist bringing their kind and their world to a game," says Mark Suthems, marketing manager of Creative Assembly, as we sat down to watch a demo of the game.

"Viking culture firmly embraced the idea of the warrior code, and that's something that we really wanted to tap into and bring out in our game through our hero." That hero's name is Skarin. This young but able warrior finds himself lost in a much larger story that involves the very gods themselves. When the goddess Hel gets banished from Asgard by Odin, she vows revenge by summoning an army of dark Viking warriors called the Legion. The war that ensues quickly spills into the mortal realm of Midgard, and Skarin is thrust into the middle by forces that are far beyond his control.

"There is that direct connection from that Warrior code to the gods," Suthems adds "which means we have the gritty reality of the Viking warriors themselves with the idea that their lives and destiny's are driven by the gods. So Norse mythology offers a rich universe, which has elements that are both very real and fantastical."

Viking's combat system helps bring out that realism a little more since it's not quite as fantastical as many other action games on the market today. "Vikings were mighty warriors who adopted a combat style which – shall we say – was a little more direct and brutal than your average warrior," lead programmer Clive Gratton told us. "We wanted to avoid the 'wire fu' spins and vague impacts that many games in the genre employ, and instead give the player total control over the moves they were pulling off. But this realistic feel doesn't mean that we're turning our back on the spectacular – the combat is supremely brutal. We've got a wide variety of combat moves that will leave a trail of severed heads and limbs."

And you'll see plenty of body parts after some of the Viking's larger war-scale battles. Creative Assembly is no stranger to epic conflicts, having cut its teeth on the popular Total War PC titles. But, instead of managing these battles RTS-style, players will witness all the chaos from the center of the action. "Skarin can roam freely across the battlefield and choose to concentrate his efforts on any section of the enemy line. His army will react to the movement and actions of their leader and capitalize on any gaps that Skarin can clear," says Gratton. If Skarin fails to take out some of the enemy's key personal it will have a devastating impact on his own army's survival. However, as we witnessed firsthand, Skarin might also alter the corse of battle by summoning a dragon to attack the city, which could cause his army to start storming its walls.

Throughout our demo we felt as though we were only scratching the surface of all the game will offer. Creative Assembly has planned a massive open world game spanning three islands, a deep combat experience with upgradeable weapons and magical powers, and a dynamic army warring system that changes while you play. It all adds up to one ambitious project, but if done right Viking will be a game we can't wait to get our hands on. ■ ■ ■

The battle system is based on one vs. one combat, so Creative Assembly says whether you are fighting one guy or one hundred you'll always feel in control of your character

Skarin will see a variety of missions on his quest. From raiding and liberating a quarry to sneaking into enemy territory to free his troops, Skarin will travel through caves, forests, ancient ruins, and expansive settlement cities
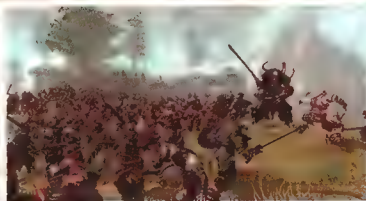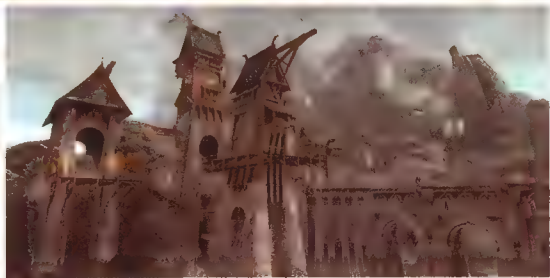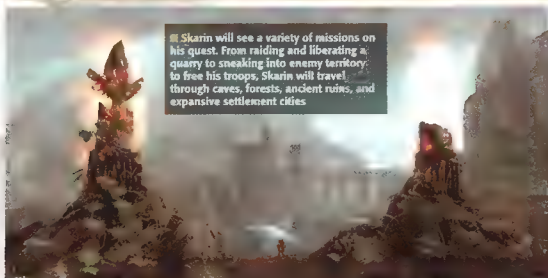
The player begins the game with a rudimentary set of combat moves which can be expanded at dueling rings in various home settlements around Midgard. At these rings Skarin can purchase and learn new combinations of stealth attacks, frontal attacks, and defensive moves.

■ The newly renamed "Rock Power" has some interesting changes on the guitar to go with the name, like the ability to recharge the meter even while the power is being deployed.

■ While the bass won't have its own career, you can finally play it in single-player quickplay

■ Notes are now flatter than the old circles, while hammer-ons and pull-offs appear as noticeably smaller notes.
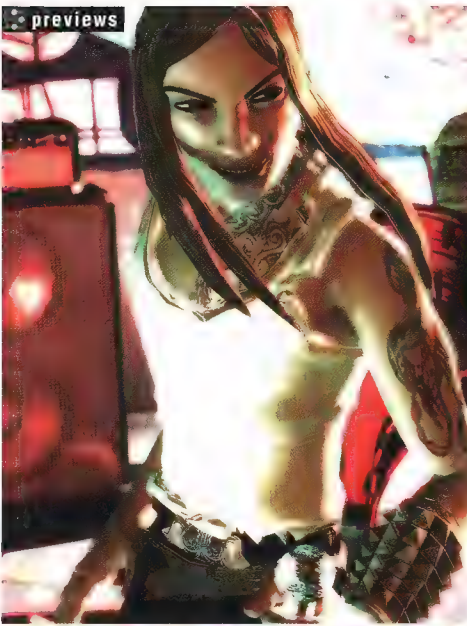
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Rock Band

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** MTV GAMES/ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

HEAD TO HEAD

This month, we finally got some extended hands-on time with this exciting upcoming release from Harmonix. At E3, our time with the game was certainly fun, but was limited by the press of people and constant noise. With two final drum kits in our office, this time we got to play the game the way it was meant to be played, and for the first time tried out the new drumming head-to-head modes in stick-clashing, cymbal-crashing throwdowns.

First, we dug into the career mode a little bit, which is accessible with any of the solo instruments or together with friends as a larger band. Everyone gets to craft their own unique rocker. Customization options for the body are relatively simple, with several faces, hairstyles, and physiques to choose from for both men and women. Perhaps the coolest element here was the option to choose a personality style that dictates the way you move and act on stage. The clothing options are significantly more flexible, letting you shop at different genre stores, from punk to metal. Each has the full array of leather pants, unbuttoned shirts, and other paraphernalia in which to dress your rocker so he'll be ashamed to appear in public. Some elements of the band career mode remained under wraps, but what we observed was a system that has players unlocking new songs and venues based on how many cumulative stars they've gotten on different performances.

The full band experience is positively addictive, as you and three other friends work your way through one song after another. To our eye, even on Expert difficulty the guitar parts are a little easier than one might expect, especially considering the blazingly difficult guitar lines in Guitar Hero III. Of course, that's the sort of thing that may very well get tuned up in the coming weeks as Rock Band nears completion.

Meanwhile, the drum gameplay has plenty of challenge to make up for it. Learning to balance what your arms are doing against the foot pedal will be an entirely new test for most rhythm gamers out there. Our only complaint is about the foot pedal itself -- the spring it sits on makes rapid double taps of the pedal a real pain. Head-to-head drumming is a blast -- and makes for a lot of noise as each player whacks away at those pads. Our favorite is a new tug-of-war mode that has each player trying to pull a meter over to their side of the board by performing with greater accuracy.

As you can see, the full song list is coming along nicely -- and the word on downloadable content is pretty remarkable (see page 20 for details). Rock Band has some big plans ahead, from the multiple instrument gameplay to the huge list of original master track songs. Only the coming months will reveal whether the team behind the project can bring all those plans to fruition in a way that will draw in the crowds. ■ ■ ■

ROCK ON!

Here's the official list of songs confirmed for release, listed by decade. Only those marked (Cover) are not the original master recordings.

1960s
- Rolling Stones "Gimme Shelter"

1970s
- The Who "Won't Get Fooled Again"
- Mountain "Mississippi Queen" (Cover)
- David Bowie "Suffragette City"
- Black Sabbath "Paranoid" (Cover)
- Blue Oyster Cult "Don't Fear the Reaper"
- The Ramones "Blitzkrieg Bop"
- Deep Purple "Highway Star"

1980s
- Rush "Tom Sawyer" (Cover)
- Bon Jovi "Wanted Dead or Alive"
- The Clash "Should I Stay or Should I Go"
- Faith No More "Epic"

1990s
- Foo Fighters "Learn to Fly"
- Metallica "Enter Sandman"
- Nirvana "In Bloom"
- Stone Temple Pilots "Vasoline"
- Weezer "Say It Ain't So"
- Smashing Pumpkins "Cherub Rock"
- Radiohead "Creep"
- Beastie Boys "Sabotage"

2000s
- The Hives "Main Offender"
- Queens of the Stone Age "Go With the Flow"
- The Strokes "Reptilia"
- Jet "Are You Gonna Be My Girl"
- OK Go "Here It Goes Again"
- Nine Inch Nails "The Hand That Feeds"

DON'T JUST RIP UP THE TRACK. TEAR IT A NEW ONE.

Hit a rut at the wrong angle and risk being launched into oblivion.

Ride the grooves with skill and attain breakneck speed.

Plow through uncharted mud, but beware of its unpredictability.

Actual in-game screenshot.

GeoDeformation™ is here—an earth-pulverizing technology that makes each lap more torn up than the last. Other games have promised it, but Sega Rally Revo delivers. Combine that with a slew of erratic weather conditions and track surfaces, and you'll never know what's around the bend. Check out the groundbreaking off-road racing at www.sega.com/segarally.
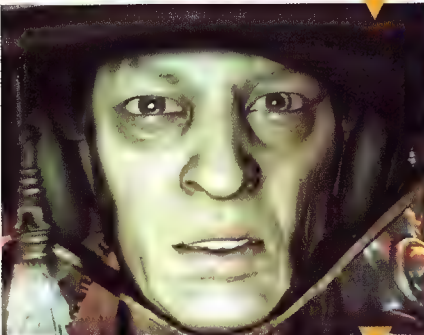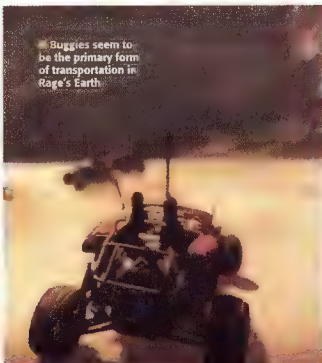
SEGA RALLY REVO™

COMING OCTOBER 2007
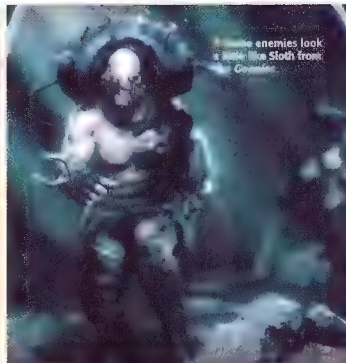
The id Tech 5 engine allows for some amazing character detail

A futuristic revolver is the only weapon shown in Rage's brief teaser trailer

Buggies seem to be the primary form of transportation in Rage's Earth

enemies look a little like Sloth from Goonies

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Rage

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** TBA > **DEVELOPER** ID SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** TBA

DRIVING IN A NEW DIRECTION

Developer id Software is currently hard at work on its first new IP since Quake came out over a decade ago, and the company's got a new engine, id Tech 5, to power it. Rage (which follows id's single syllable naming convention) will be a mix of driving and shooting gameplay set to a post-apocalyptic backdrop. "The setting takes place in the future after the Earth is mostly destroyed by a comet and civilization is trying to rebuild itself," says creative director Tim Willits. "You play an outsider. You play someone that's kind of a Buck Rogers guy, but not from space. It's got a Road Warrior feel to it." Your character will work with various settlers to complete missions with the ultimate goal of taking down an evil regime.

Willits says that the split between shooting and driving will be about 60 percent to 40 percent, respectively. "We already know we can do great first-person stuff. That's easy," Willits says. "What we wanted to do is really kind of blow it out." Part of this involves taking the gameplay out of id's trademark confined corridors and out into sprawling sun-baked canyons and deserts. The other half is venturing into the unknown territory of racing.

"We're not trying to do Gran Turismo. It's more arcadey,"

Willits says. "We may have some races where you have to kill the number three car before the race ends, try not to take as much damage, or watch out for the guys that are shooting at you." To help accomplish missions like this, players will have a garage where they can customize their vehicles and experiment with different weapons.

Even though id has a reputation for multiplayer, Rage won't necessarily utilize it in the way Quake III Arena fans are accustomed to. "We haven't finalized all of our multiplayer stuff quite yet, but I highly doubt we'll have any deathmatch type stuff," Willits says. "We want to set [multiplayer] to be more like WoW cooperative, where you can go and do missions together. Some guy may have a mission you need to do so you can go help him out, so it will be more limited like that where the cooperative is more discrete."

Rage's projected release is currently in a loose "when it's done" schedule, but we're hoping for at least a late 2008 timeframe. And even though no publisher has been announced, we wouldn't be surprised if id went with longtime ally Activision. ■ ■ ■
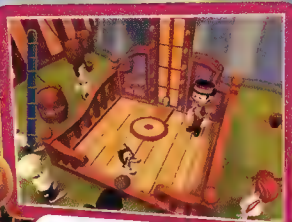
PC

World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** TBA

DEATH KNIGHTS!

At BlizzCon, Blizzard announced the next expansion for its massively popular MMORPG, but no release date. We fans are now left salivating over the first bits of info regarding the trip between levels 70 and 80, but no way to know when to respec our characters for the grind. Ah, well – anticipation flavors the most delicious of meals, and Wrath of the Lich King looks to be a feast beyond imagining.

WoW's second expansion will guide players through the final arc of Prince Arthas' storyline on the frozen continent of Northrend. As told in Warcraft III, this fallen human lord of Lordaeron lost his soul to the runeblade Frostmourne, and ultimately fused with the Lich King to become something more. He even beat the hell out of Illidan – the final boss of The Burning Crusade – without anywhere near his full power. It will be interesting to see where this takes the Warcraft narrative, and what new directions Blizzard takes the world in; unless we miss our guess, the end of the expansion will mark the end of all the plot threads we've been following since Warcraft III.

The themes of frost and undeath pervade Wrath of the Lich King. WoW's first hero class, Death Knights, will become available to players

who complete an involved questline. This won't involve changing one of your existing characters' class; instead, you'll unlock the ability to create a new Death Knight on your account that will start at a high level.

Naxxramas, the floating necropolis that was the highest reach of pre-expansion WoW's raid content, will be retooled as a 25-man raid for level 80 players. Only a tiny fraction of players were able to experience Naxxramas at level 60, and the designers at Blizzard have publicly opined that it is possibly their best work to date, so this seems like a natural fit.

A new profession, Inscription, will allow players to customize their spells (and sell scrolls to allow others to partake in the goodness) with additional effects. For instance, you could have a Fireball that incorporates a knockback component, or a Prayer of Healing with a reduced mana cost.

Player-vs-player combat isn't being neglected, of course. A new battleground that Blizzard hasn't said anything about yet will be included, and siege weapons and destructible buildings will be incorporated into the world for non-instanced PvP combat.

That's all we've been able to learn about

Wrath of the Lich King so far, but there's plenty of time before the expansion hits. Don't worry, you can keep bouncing off of the Curator for a few months – after all, Karazhan is serious business. ■ ■ ■
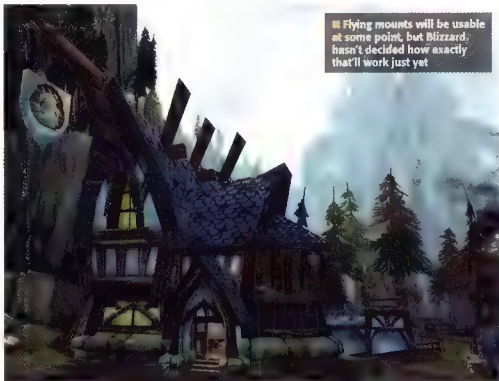
PC

Hellgate: London

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER VIA INTERNET) > PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI/ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER FLAGSHIP STUDIOS > RELEASE OCTOBER 31

FOR REALS

■ Oh yes, there will be boss fights

■ The action plays fast, but doesn't require pinpoint twitch control like a competitive FPS

It feels like we've been writing previews for Hellgate: London for an entire console generation at this point…oh wait, what? We have? Well, we'll be done on Halloween when the game finally comes out. Jokes about the long wait notwithstanding, we're itching to dig in and start leveling up some heroes through a dystopian London.

As you probably already know, the landscapes of Hellgate are randomly generated and populated with enemies. The various character classes specialize down three skill trees, and items are a combination of a base item with random properties and sockets. In short, it's a refined version of the Diablo II design with fancy new visuals and a different setting, except for one thing: the multiplayer.

Out of the box, players can go through the entire single-player story-driven campaign by themselves or with friends. Server-side secure character storage and the ability to play with everyone who owns the game (no worrying about what server your friends play on here) are included as well. Plus, the social tools like guild support and friends lists and the like are miles beyond the bare-bones implementations in most co-

op friendly games. However, though you get all this for free, you can also choose to pay a monthly fee for extra goodies.

Despite the unbelievable amount of message-board whining that goes on about paying a monthly fee for a game, there are some absolutely valid reasons to do so for Hellgate. You'll gain access to frequent new content drops, improved social tools (the ability to create and/or lead a guild, for instance), and improved customer service. The subscription model won't make sense for all Hellgate players, to be sure, but for those who get really into the game, those several dollars per month will go an awfully long way.

An item creation system with depth to match the infinite replayability of Hellgate's randomly generated dungeons, enemies, and items adds yet another layer to this action/RPG. Everything we've seen about Hellgate points toward it being the next awesomely addictive level & loot grind-fest, and we're so close now to the game finally coming out that there's little left to say other than to hope that it all pans out. ■ ■ ■

■ There are an awful lot of titles out there that could benefit from a simple, clean UI like this

■ How Hellgate can randomly generate these sorts of environments is beyond us, but that just makes it all the cooler

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The game takes full advantage of the Unreal 3 engine to deliver some amazing visuals

The game's "brotherhood moments" reveal small fallibilities in your AI-driven companions

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Brothers in Arms:
Hell's Highway

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

THE PUSH FOR AUTHENTICITY

Since we saw the game in action at this year's E3, the newest Brothers in Arms game has stayed on our radar as one of the most exciting upcoming projects in any genre. Gearbox CEO Randy Pitchford recently gave us some new information on the game, and did nothing if not inch our expectations even higher for the third in this unique and realistic take on the World War II experience.

"Fighting in Europe during WWII was often about close quarters combat – men would fire from any position they could find that would help conceal or protect them," Pitchford explains. "When I play any WWII game (including our past ones), it's silly that wooden fences provide perfect, impenetrable cover. I've fired a machine gun at wood before – it gets chewed up pretty bad. So, Brothers in Arms Hell's Highway features a lot of destructible cover." This new focus on degrading cover dramatically changes the way the game will be played, with a need to factor time into the equation, since one moment of delay too long means that wagon you're behind might be nothing but splinters of wood.

Of course, the liability goes both ways, especially since Baker will now be able to command new teams like the machine gun and bazooka squads – teams that can shred enemy cover with the best of them. "The fact is that Baker's squad has become a recon team for Operation Market Garden. So, they are attached to the 101st Airborne at the division headquarters level and they have access to assets that aren't normally part of a typical airborne infantry squad," Pitchford tells us. "Since you're Baker and you have command of these assets, well – you can really kick some ass."

Another feature that sets the game apart is what the team terms "brotherhood moments." While we've known about their presence for a while, Pitchford elaborated on their importance in Hell's Highway. "When was the last time you saw someone trip and fall in a video game? Have you ever seen someone accidentally drop their weapon or a magazine while they are trying to reload? People make mistakes. Teams help each other. We invested a little in this kind of behavior because we felt it helped take us more plausibly into the real experience." The authenticity of your companions will be further aided by a new combat stance system, where your entire team will naturally recognize situations and act accordingly. At HQ, they'll stand around, relaxed. On patrol, they'll be alert, but will also chat about girls or drinking. Sneak up on an enemy position, and your allies will enter a stealth stance, where they'll communicate with hand signals and flank the enemy. If the enemy gets the drop on you, the whole team will immediately drop into combat stance – without a command, they'll naturally throw themselves to the ground behind cover and react intelligently to situations.

Even with the technical know-how that is backing up the game, Pitchford is insistent on the deeper values he'd like to instill in Hell's Highway. "In Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway, Baker jumps into Operation Market Garden, the largest airborne invasion of all time." Pitchford explains. "Complete obliteration is what these men faced. Baker has to struggle with this burden and it begins to crush him – much like how the corridor of Hell's Highway was crushed by the Germans. I know we're making a video game. I know that if we did the easy amusement park ride version of the subject where you slap WWII textures and themes to the same old FPS game that we could probably make easier money. But I think this medium – that video games – can be better than that. I think we can take a serious subject matter and, yes, treat it like a game, but also treat it as something more than that. I think it's important that we try." ■ ■ ■

While Gearbox won't confirm, it sounds as if it's at least considering a cooperative component to the game's multiplayer offerings

The soldiers at your side will naturally recognize changing combat conditions and adjust their stances appropriately, even without an order

Destructible cover will dramatically alter the way the game is played – encouraging quick decisions and rapid flanking

While they won't be a major focus, the game will include pilotable vehicles as the American and British troops attempt their push into Germany

Carriers can now auto-build interceptors. Thank goodness

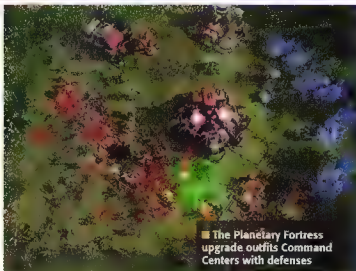The Planetary Fortress upgrade outfits Command Centers with defenses

PC

StarCraft II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD
ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** TBA

YOUR LIFE FOR AIUR

Playable for the first time at BlizzCon, StarCraft II did not disappoint. A slew of newly announced units for both the Terrans and Protoss aptly displayed Blizzard's focus on player choice for this real-time strategy slugfest. It's now clear that the move to a 3D representation of the familiar StarCraft shapes and the signature bright primary color palette is working out brilliantly, with dozens of sharply detailed units onscreen showing off smooth animations. We've seen nothing at all to dampen our enthusiasm for StarCraft II so far.

The Zerg are still under wraps, but playtime was available with both the Terran and Protoss factions. In particular, the Terrans showcased a strongly player-driven evolution of the traditional RTS tech tree. Production buildings can be outfitted with either a reactor to speed up unit deployment, or a tech lab to enable upgrades like better body armor for marines. Command Centers can upgrade into Planetary Fortresses, which come with built-in defenses, or receive a very similar Scanner Sweep ability to the original game, where you can reveal an area of the map and detect stealthed units.

The new Viking unit is another example of this philosophy. After the ability has been researched, this ground assault walker bot can transform into an air-to-air fighter and back — and a few seconds calm reflection will tell you just how useful an ability this is in a game like StarCraft that has very separately defined counters to ground and air units.

The Protoss are not without powers of their own. The most potentially game-changing thing at BlizzCon was definitely the Phase Prism. This inorganic flying unit can teleport other Protoss units across the battlefield — a function it has taken over from the conspicuously absent Arbiter — but also can deploy itself to power nearby Protoss buildings like a Pylon. With the addition of a Warp Gate (an upgraded Gateway), which allows units summoned through it to appear anywhere within the Protoss power grid, the possibilities explode. One other intriguing Protoss ability that has our nerd-glands pumping is the opportunity to combine a normal Templar with a Dark Templar to create a Twilight Archon. We don't even know what a Twilight Archon does yet, and it sounds totally awesome.

Of course, Blizzard hasn't announced a release date yet. Multiplayer is also still a complete mystery other than the developer saying, "Battle net is gonna be awesome! We promise!" Good thing for StarCraft II that Blizzard is one of the few companies that we're willing to totally take their word for it, sight unseen. Seriously — it's StarCraft II. Stop pretending like you need any more than that to get amped for the game. ■ ■ ■

That giant mech is called a "Thor," but it ain't no whiny hippy god-wannabe

Getting nuked is what you get for not paying attention to enemy Ghosts

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SLINGSHOTS. PUMP UP THE CROWD AND YOUR SCORE WITH EVERY HIGH-SPEED
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AND ON THE OTHER DRIVERS' FRAGILE LITTLE EGOS. XBOX.COM/PGR4

PGR4
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XBOX 360 LIVE

■ There will be interior locations where players will face challenges like puzzles, repairing gear, or accessing computers
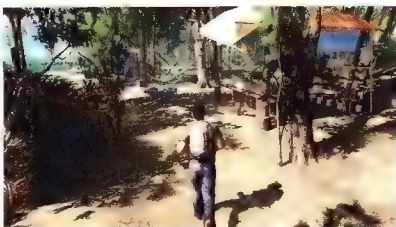
■ Familiar faces from the show will interact with you on the island, and will even have cameos in some of your flashbacks

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PLAYSTATION 3 I XBOX 360 I PC

Lost

> **STYLE** I PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** SPRING 2008

MORE MYSTERIES

What works for a TV show won't necessarily work for a video game. The team at Ubisoft Montreal working on the Lost game, based on the hit show, realizes this. But they also realize that if the creative minds behind these different mediums work together, then maybe, just maybe they can produce something richer – something more fulfilling than anything either team could do separately. "I can honestly say that it's a true pleasure to work with the Lost/ABC team; we have developed a relationship that goes beyond client and customer," creative director Nicolas Eypert tells us.

In July of 2006, Ubisoft traveled out to the ABC office to have a lengthy planning meeting with the Lost executive team. "We had detailed discussions regarding the mythologies and rules for the show," says Eypert. "Because of the close relationship, we've been able to ensure that everything we put into the game fits with the world of Lost. The game isn't treated as an alternate Lost universe. We wanted to be able to say, 'Yes, you saw that in the game. It's on the Lost island somewhere.'" But meetings aren't the end to the show's creative input. Many of the show's actors are already being approached for voiceover, and TV staff writer Dawn Kelly has been work-ing closely with the team to develop the game's story.

The game starts off just as the show did, with the crash of Oceanic Flight 815. Eypert is quick to clarify, "This game isn't just a rehash of the series. You've already got hours of amazing television that show you those events better than we could. Instead, ours is a story that runs in parallel with events on the TV series." Main character Elliot has contracted amnesia after the crash, and must learn how to survive on the island while he learns more about himself through playable flashbacks. "When you enter flashback locations every-thing will be quite vague and blurry," Eypert explains. "Only by finding specific actions, items, and people will you start to see things clearly. Armed with new informa-tion you'll be able to use the flashback details to help you with other missions. You will use the character's past to help you progress on the Island."

It might be easy to dismiss this as just another quick cash-in title to a popular IP, but Eypert definitely isn't thinking that way. "Overall, we felt it was vital that we kept to the rules of the TV show. The Black Smoke Monster has to follow the same rules as the show uses. The Dharma Initiative hatches should look as they do on the series. Anything we put in the game needs to fit with the show. Along with the producers of Lost, we agreed from the start that the game can't be viewed as a little side project. That doesn't count. The game does count, and things you learn in the game can be applied to fans' theories about the Lost universe." ■ ■ ■
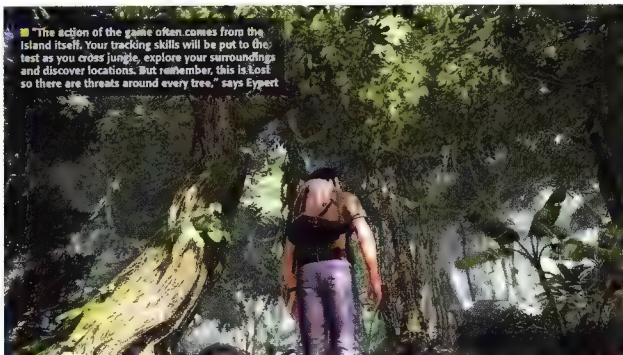
■ "The action of the game often comes from the Island itself. Your tracking skills will be put to the test as you cross jungle, explore your surroundings and discover locations. But remember, this is Lost so there are threats around every tree," says Eypert
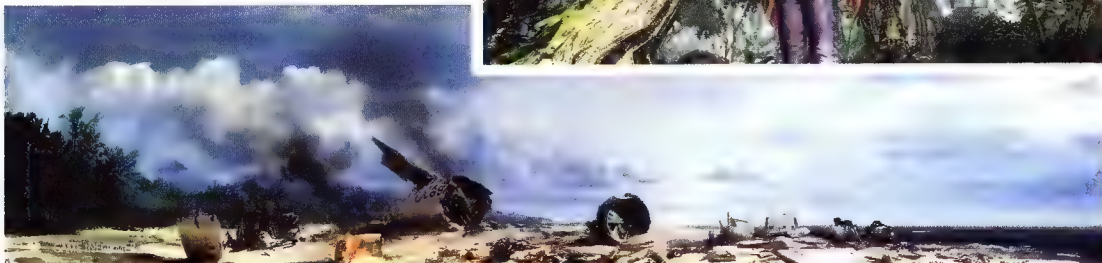
PC

Neverwinter Nights 2:
Mask of the Betrayer

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 64-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 9

EPIC LEVELS

What do Dungeons & Dragons nerds want, besides Cheetos and Mountain Dew? To bend the rules as far as possible by creating an unstoppable combat monster of a hero, of course. Well, that and participate in a cool story. This first expansion for Neverwinter Nights 2 has both of those elements nailed. The several new prestige classes, epic level campaign, and top-notch story in Mask of the Betrayer should make a top-tier PC role-playing experience – nevermind that it's "only" an expansion.

Starting a new character at level 18 (or carrying a previous NWN 2 hero over at up to level 20), the official campaign starts players off in the depths of a mysterious cavern. The ending of the original story has left the player with no memory of how he or she came to this place and an unexplained chest wound. Almost immediately, a Red Wizard of Thay offers to join you (complete with a familiar that can conveniently pick locks and disarm traps), and so begins an epic quest to find out why the spirits of this place are acting so strangely and what is wrong with the hero. A few cutscenes we

saw evoked fond memories of the Child of Bhaal from Baldur's Gate, and the story overall seems steeped in delicious intrigue.

Beyond the promising story, the NWN 2 interface has benefited greatly from additional attention over the last year. Some of the improvements here, like easier modal action control and a vastly better voice emote menu, have been slowly added to the base game via patches. Others, like the complete overhaul of the camera system, are new in the expansion. While still

not perfect, this expansion pack pushes the UI leagues beyond the buggy mess that marred NWN 2's original release.

The massive collection of new ways to customize your characters' progression is truly impressive. The addition of four new humanoid variants as playable races, dozens upon dozens of epic spells and feats, and several new prestige classes is like buying three new sourcebooks – but with dynamic lighting and normal maps. If building your own NWN 2 campaign is your thing, this huge content drop along with the ever-improving toolset should make Mask of the Betrayer worth your while.

Wizards of the Coast may have just announced 4th Edition D&D, but this add-on promises to be reason enough to stick to the 3.5 Edition ruleset for a bit longer. ■ ■ ■
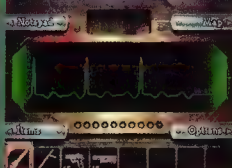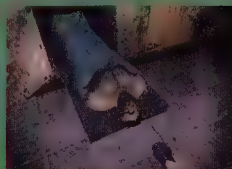

■ The increased graphical detail is readily apparent

■ This landscape will probably stay idyllic and peaceful. Probably

Dementium:
The Ward

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION > >
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 31

U MAD

Made by a team consisting of N64 vets, Dementium has a simple concept: Make first-person survival horror work on the DS. From the level we played, it's got a very good chance to succeed. Ever since the DS was announced we've been waiting for a good FPS to come out on it, and it looks like this little title could be the one.

As a recently freed inmate of an asylum that is playing host to some sinister forces, players will wander around this doomed hospital collecting clues, solving puzzles, and shooting twisted enemies. Much of the game is dark, but a flashlight will let you illuminate whatever you like. You can't use it with a weapon out, though (no, there is no duct tape in the game), so lighting becomes a strategic decision.

With the d-pad controlling all movement and the aiming done via the touch screen, navigating Dementium's decrepit asylum couldn't be easier. The L and R buttons attack, and all menu wrangling is done on the bottom screen, meaning you don't use the face buttons at all. Most impressively, it feels smooth and natural. The framerate is high and stable, and it's not a stretch at all to say that these controls react just as well as dual-analog inputs on home consoles.

Much of the story remains mysterious, but the game's design is very reminiscent of early Resident Evil with its obtuse clues and hidden keys. In other words, between that and the excellent control, Dementium is a great fit for the DS ■ ■ ■
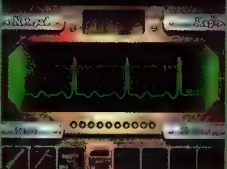
■ Your creatures level up over time, gaining new powers and abilities

■ You pull the "Id" out of your enemies through various motion-controlled minigames

PLAYSTATION 3

Folklore

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER
ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** GAME REPUBLIC > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 9

I SEE DEAD PEOPLE

S tanding apart in several ways from the traditional
Japanese RPG, Folklore follows two playable charac-
ters on a journey into the world of the dead as they
seek to solve a mystery of missing people, murders,
and the decay of a small coastal Irish town. Ellen is a young
woman haunted by the loss of her mother when she was
only a child, and Keats is a skeptical reporter from a decid-
edly unskeptical magazine of the occult.

In each chapter, you'll choose one of the two as they
delve into various branches of the Netherworld – strange,
mystical realms where the spirits of the dead travel after
life, and the dwelling place of creatures called Folk. After
acquiring some special powers, Ellen and Keats are able to
absorb the "Id" of these creatures, and henceforth to call
on their aid in battle. Each creature from a huge, ever-grow-
ing catalogue (over 100 all told) can be assigned to one
of the controller's face buttons, then used in battle against
subsequent foes. The seven different realms, such as the
flower-strewn wonderland of the Faeries to the battle-torn

wastes of Warcadia, contain their own Folklore – a huge
boss creature that must be defeated through a combination
of different attacks you've collected up to that point.

While the graphical quality isn't quite up to the same
standards as many PS3 releases, the art design itself is
astonishing, filled with odd creatures and beautiful back-
grounds. The haunting and atmospheric musical score
adds to the ambience, giving excitement and depth to the
supernatural world of the game. While the early hours of
the title are a little slow to get going, the mysterious vibe
starts to grow on you the deeper into the story you dive.

Beyond that, Sony has dropped some info that players
will be able to design their own dungeons to be shared
with other players online, and the populations of your dun-
geon can be culled from the creatures you've collected in
the story. While Folklore will have a hard time stealing the
thunder of some of this holiday's big RPG blockbusters, it's
definitely a title to watch for players interested in something
beyond the standard fare. ■ ■ ■
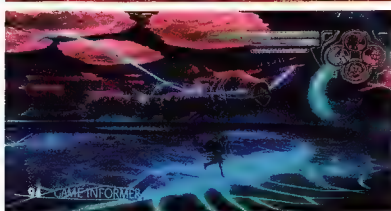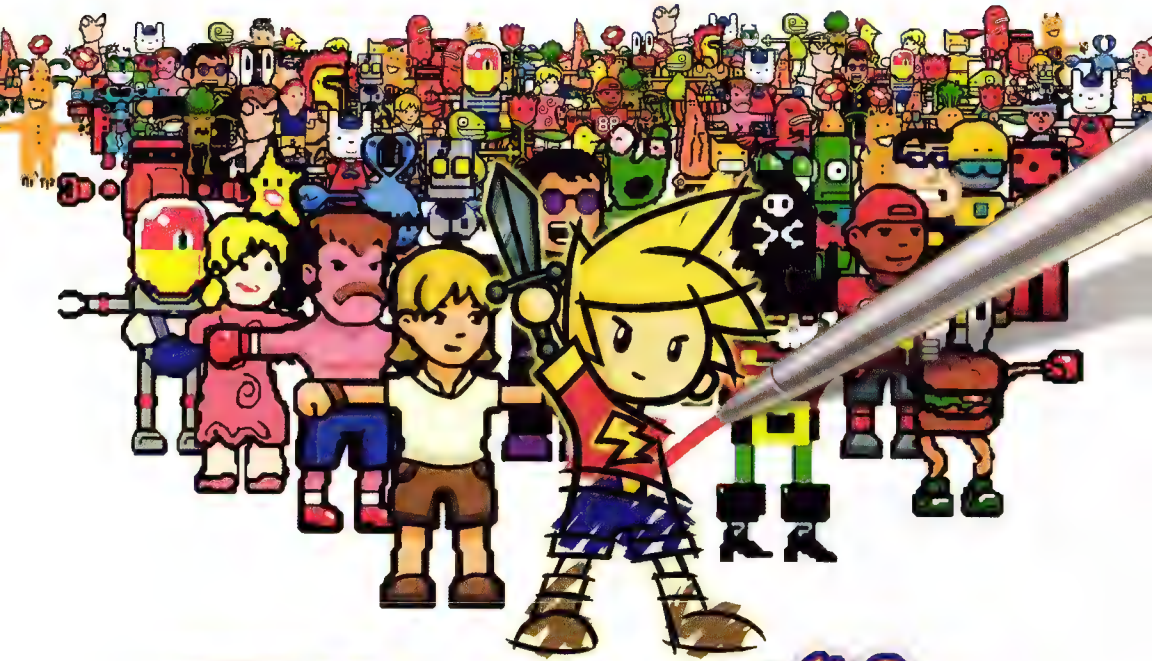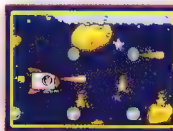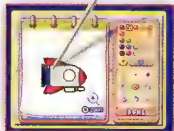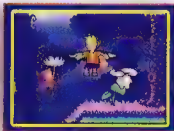
NINTENDO DS

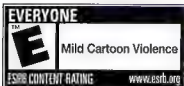# Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS)
> PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER TOSE > RELEASE NOVEMBER 6

MONSTER PARTY

Scout

Huh? Who are you?

I f you've ever spent an afternoon catching, training, and breeding an army of digital creatures, then you know that monster collection games aren't just for kids. Square Enix is hoping to tap into that broad appeal with the latest installment of its Dragon Quest Monsters series – the first one to hit North America in six years. We played the opening hours of Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker, and it is far more than another Pokémon pretender; there are plenty of interesting features that set the game apart from the gotta-catch-'em-all crowd.

Developer TOSE, the minds behind Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime, have brought the series into 3D using the same striking cel-shaded style of Dragon Quest VIII. Players begin as a spiky-haired rookie who needs to catch monster allies and arrange them in three-member battle parties. You engage enemies by running into them on the world map (no random encounters), and fight with all three monsters at once. You can give each creature individual commands in battle, or set specific tactics like "show no mercy" or "don't use magic" and let the AI take care of things. Of course, that's

assuming you choose to fight at all. For most enemy encounters, you can choose to scout your foes rather than fight them. Your monsters will still attack, but instead of doing damage, they attempt to impress the opponents. A successful hit increases a percentage bar that indicates how likely the monster is to join you. There are other dynamics at play, too, since enemies are more or less likely to be swayed to your side by certain kinds of monsters. It's more complicated than just throwing a Pokéball, and adds a little more strategy to the experience. You can only gain experience from fighting, and you can only gain new monsters from scouting, so you'll need to strike a balance between the two as you wander the islands.

One of Pokémon's most attractive qualities is its familiarity. Long-time trainers already know that Rattata is weaksauce and that Charizard rules. The creatures in Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker may not be as well known, but the game has all the features you could want – like breeding and wireless multiplayer – along with fresh new territory to explore. ■ ■ ■

An area map and your party's status is displayed on the lower screen

Head for Baden's Belfry at the MSO's HQ

SlimKing uses Hallowed Slash!

Hannibal would have gotten mad pwned by this Rome's defenders

PC

Gods & Heroes: Rome Rising

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER PERPETUAL ENTERTAINMENT/SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER PERPETUAL ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE OCTOBER 30

CALLING ALL MINIONS

We've told you all about Gods & Heroes: Rome Rising's unique spin on the MMO genre before, but with the game's release nearing, there's one more thing you should know about before it goes live: the collectible minions. Since the combat is based on players controlling a handful of fighters at a time (your hero plus whatever cannon fodder you can round up), upgrading your power isn't just about gaining levels and finding fat loots. Winning the allegiance of rare underlings, up to and including mythical creatures like minotaurs and centaurs, will do as much if not more to boost your effectiveness as getting a legendary sword.

As with any special reward in an RPG, you'll have to complete suitably epic tasks in order to have the best companions. Furthermore, not every character will have access to every minion – the god you pledge yourself to

determines which supernatural beings will consent to follow your lead.

The launch of Gods & Heroes is nearly upon us, and there isn't much left to say about the game that hasn't already been revealed. Its solo-friendly gameplay (playing a tank isn't so painful solo when you have a pet healer following you around) and classical Roman themes look interesting, and we've seen quests that go far beyond the "collect 10 bear asses" grinds typical to fantasy MMOs. Stay tuned for our soon-to-come final verdict ■ ■ ■

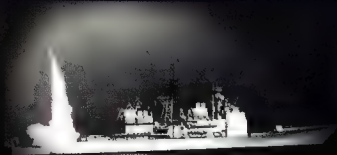Name us a fantasy RPG where you never fight spiders. We dare you

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

NBA Live 08

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR WIICONNECT24)
2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR PC INTERNET) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 2 (PS3/XBOX 360/PS2), OCTOBER 9 (WII), OCTOBER 30 (PC)

A BETTER BALLER

This series has such a rebuilding job to do from the fiasco that was the next-generation NBA Live 07 that it makes you wonder if Kevin McHale doesn't have a hand in the franchise. But, there's nowhere else to go but up, right?

In our initial time with the game it was immediately clear that – at a minimum – EA has made changes to this series to make it playable. The ball itself no longer is subject to odd, looping physics, and gone are the weird collision moments with the backboard. The feel of the players is simply better, too. No longer do they feel like they're on skates. This can help in the low post area, where you don't have to worry about stepping out of bounds whenever you go to the basket. Fakes, cuts, and rolls are performed in way better spatial relation to the basket and other players. In short, the low post isn't a disaster area anymore.

The Superstar moves system is gone, which is fine because they could be a mess to get going anyway. In their stead is a more basic system mapped to the right analog stick. As a sort of replacement for the Superstar moves, some play-

ers will have signature moves at certain contextual points, such as Kobe doing a fadeaway. While these signature moves attempt to bring some realism into the game, the title's use of Hot Spots actually represents real NBA play. Once you pass half-court with the ball you can bring up areas on the court where that player is good or bad shooting from. This feature is accessed through a pause menu on the PS2 and PC, though absent entirely on the Wii. It's optional, but one that's cool to use and to see where your bread and butter is on the court.

This series has taken some good steps towards respectability, and we're anxious to see how it all comes together in the end. ■ ■ ■

Here are some key features for some of the other versions of NBA Live 08.

Wii: Shooting requires an up/down timing movement with the remote, dunks are done by rotating the remote to the left or right in a downward motion, while crossovers are easily done by tilting the nunchuk right or left. In all the controls are evenly split between the traditional and motion sensing.

PS2: You can play Dynasty mode as you have traditionally, or you can participate in specific Dynasty game scenarios if they pop up while you're simulating any of the games on your calendar.

The AI will now use subs more often – not just when they're in foul trouble

PLAYSTATION 3

NBA 08

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SAN DIEGO > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 2

LOOKING FOR AN OPEN LANE

Without The Life mode, NBA's inaugural PS3 title had all the razzle-dazzle of a lay-up and not a dunk despite being in 1080p. Unfortunately, the story-based The Life mode is still absent in 08, but this game has improved itself in key areas and is not as basic as it has been in the past.

The game's AI has been tightened up, making you rely on different ways of moving the ball around instead of some of the traditional money plays that have been so easy to exploit. To this end, the game gives you an extra layer of strategy by allowing you to tell which specific player you want to go to the basket or set up a pick and roll. This is in addition to your normal team-wide strategies, and these individual commands can be chained together so you can further customize your gameplan on the fly to suit your plans.
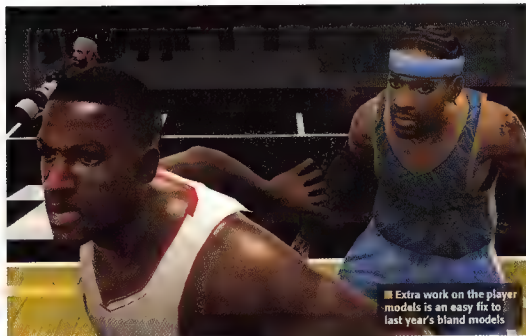
Perhaps the biggest customizable asset in NBA 08, however, is the create-a-player function. While in some ways not that different from your standard

create-a-player mode, Sony was smart to let you accrue character-building experience points throughout every other mode in the game – whether you are playing with your created baller or not. And since you don't have to make your guy immediately, you can play the game like you normally would, amass loads of character points, and then when you decide to make him he's an instant starter. Another cool aspect is that the player equipment you can buy confers mild stat bonuses similarly to the Tiger Woods games. There are also throwback jerseys, player intros, retro floors, and a few special stadiums available.

NBA 08's approach to character creation, its improved AI, as well as the downloadable real-life NBA scenarios during the season not only show that the franchise is trying to get serious on the court, but it highlights some new approaches for a traditional sports title. And given the full-on competition in the NBA space, pulling off the beaten track isn't a bad idea. ■ ■ ■

Extra work on the player models is an easy fix to last year's bland models

XBOX 360 | PC

F.E.A.R.: The Perseus Mandate

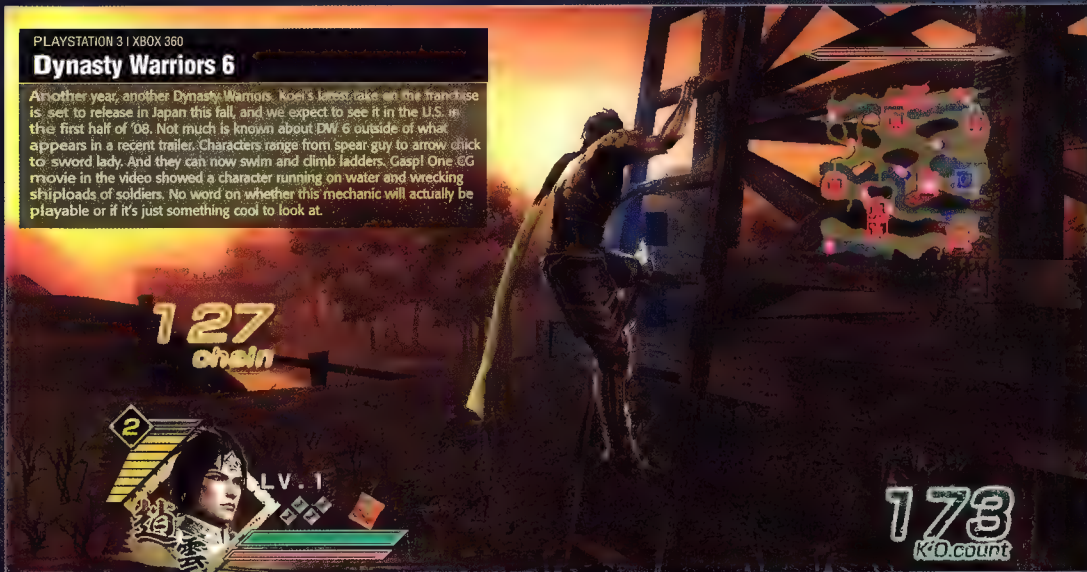The second expansion to F.E.A.R. has players blowing a hole through an experience that runs concurrently to the timeline of the first add-on, Extraction Point. You'll use some new weapons, including a grenade launcher, to take on a group called the Nightcrawlers. Of course, evil megacorp Armacham is deeply involved in the plot as well. Perseus Mandate also has an AI buddy that plays a large role, which is a new type of gameplay for the series. Oh, and you 360 owners should look for a title simply called F.E.A.R. Files rather than The Perseus Mandate – you'll get both this and Extraction Point in a single box when it comes out in late October.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Dynasty Warriors 6

Another year, another Dynasty Warriors. Koei's latest take on the franchise is set to release in Japan this fall, and we expect to see it in the U.S. in the first half of '08. Not much is known about DW 6 outside of what appears in a recent trailer. Characters range from spear guy to arrow chick to sword lady. And they can now swim and climb ladders. Gasp! One CG movie in the video showed a character running on water and wrecking shiploads of soldiers. No word on whether this mechanic will actually be playable or if it's just something cool to look at.

PSP
Aliens vs. Predator

Due out this November as a tie-in to the motion picture, Vivendi Games is releasing a new Aliens vs. Predator PSP game. Players will take on the role of an elite Predator and use his Pred-tech/thermal vision and cloaking device to stalk Aliens and humans, then take them out with an advanced arsenal of wrist blades, laser trip mines, and dual shoulder cannons. Co-op multiplayer is also in the works, but the best news is that this title is being developed by the same team that brought us the well-received Aliens vs. Predator PC game. Hopefully they will have equal success in the handheld market.

NINTENDO DS
Viva Piñata

Hot on the heels of Microsoft's announcement of Viva Piñata: Party Animals for 360 is the revelation that series creator Rare is creating a full-featured DS version of the original title. Rare stresses that this is not a dumbed-down minigame collection, but a full-featured breeding and strategy title with as much depth as it had on console. You'll get to manage your menagerie with a host of new tools and actions, expanded Journal and Encyclopedia functions, and a Sandbox mode that gives you total access to your Piñatas. Of course, the stylus will make the interface more intuitive and give you more direct control over your critters. You'll also be able to trade with friends with the DS's wireless connectivity. Sounds like another winner for the resurgent Rare.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360
NBA 2K8

Visual Concepts' series is the undisputed king of hoops, and to reinforce that point, the franchise is adding a dunk contest to try and shove the ball down the competition's throat. Not only is this a Sprite-branded dunk contest, but it features props, locations around the globe, and scoring based on your takeoff, mid-air style, and finish. The game will also let you take control of players off the ball on offense and offer more blanket coverage on defense. After all the hard work you've put out on the court, you'll deserve a Spr... umm... a refreshing citrus soft drink manufactured by your friends at Coca-Cola. Not a 7-Up. Contrary to popular belief, the two are not interchangeable.

PLAYSTATION 2

Fire Pro Wrestling Returns

You're probably not familiar with Fire Pro Wrestling, but the series has been amassing Japanese fans since 1989. Now, Agetec is hoping to convert a few North Americans to the brand when it releases Fire Pro Wrestling Returns on the PS2 this holiday season. Up to eight people will be able to play together in a variety of match types including Singles, Battle Royal, and even the eccentrically named Electrified Barbed Wire Ropes Exploding Deathmatch. With a deep custom wrestler creator players will be able to save hundreds of created fighters with unique looks, moves, and AI, as well as create different referees, rings, logos, and belts. We're not sure what to expect from this game yet, but can the Japanese be all that wrong about wrestling? Well, yeah…they probably could, but this game might still be worth checking out.

Wii

Victorious Boxers: Revolution

XSeed is bringing the sequel to the anime-inspired cult boxing title Victorious Boxers to the Wii this fall. Victorious Boxers: Revolution utilizes the Wii's motion sensing functionality to create a boxing experience that's quite unlike anything we've seen outside of elaborate arcade boxing cabinets and Wii Boxing. You'll be able to control your punches and movement exclusively by leaning and swinging your arms. Think of it like more exercise-intensive version of Fight Night's control scheme. However, if you're a punk and that sounds like too much work, a remote-only pointer mode and even a classic controller option are available. That way you can continue to grow into a giant blob, your muscle fibers slowly turning into pudding as your arteries corrode. Have fun with that, tubby.

PC

Heroes of Might and Magic V:
Tribes of the East

Ubisoft is getting on the standalone expansion train! This ending to the Heroes of Might and Magic V storyline doesn't require the base game to play, and promises to tie the plot directly to the events of Dark Messiah of Might and Magic. The brand-new Orc faction is the major selling point here, as well as alternative upgrades for every creature in the game and a plethora of additional spells, artifacts, buildings, and abilities. Let's just hope that the developers at Nival have made some headway in figuring out what makes a fun single-player campaign.

Wii
Nights: Journey of Dreams

A lot has changed in the decade since we last saw a Nights game, so we're interested to see how its gameplay will have evolved in that time. We don't have full details on that just yet, but we have learned a few other things. The two main characters are Will and Helen, and certain aspects from their real world life will appear in their dream levels. For example, the amusement park in these screens represents happy memories of Will's father. Players will also be able to alter the environments in the game. By touching one of the TVs in the desert level, the whole area turns into a lush oasis for a short period. This affects Night's flight path as well as the number of enemies and pickups in the level. Only time will tell if Sega is able to revive this almost forgotten property, but it looks like we'll only be waiting until Christmas.

Wii
Indianapolis 500 Legends

Torus Games is working together with publishing partner Destineer to take you back in time to see the genesis of the most famous car race in America. Rather than deliver an all-too-familiar take on the oval raceway, this new title for the Wii explores what most people remember as the 10 most exciting years of the big race, bridging the decades of the '60s and '70s. The intuitive control mechanics of the Wii remote shouldn't confuse anybody – they felt relatively smooth in our early playtests. Special missions will have you tackling real historical crashes through the years, and you'll watch as the familiar brickyard evolves with the times. While the presence of only the one course will be a turn-off for many, racing history fans will have their work cut out for them when Indianapolis 500 Legends releases this November.

Wii
Samurai Warriors Katana

Koei is actually trying something different for its first Warriors title on the Wii. Though you'll still be taking on legions of dudes, this time you'll be slashing and shooting on rails from a first person perspective. Rather than nonstop remote waggling for sword and spear attacks, you'll target enemies with a reticle and hit the A button – only big finishers require a full arm slash. Arrows and bullets can be fired with the B button, and Musou attacks are initiated by shaking the nunchuk and following onscreen prompts. Expect to get your hands on Katana in early 2008.

MULTI

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Metroid Prime: Corruption

GAME OF THE MONTH

Retro Studio's vision for Nintendo's landmark Metroid series has always met with a certain amount of criticism from fans. With awesome power-ups, harrowing boss battles, and a sprawling universe to explore, we can say that Retro Studios has done all they can to meet fan expectations. With its first title on the Wii, Retro has not only shown us how first-person games should be played on the system, but it's demonstrated that the Wii doesn't have to be a graphical slouch. Turn to page 120 to find out what the future of Wii can look like.

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The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass

HANDHELD GAME OF THE MONTH

There is no better fan service in video games than the Legend of Zelda. This series is tailored for the people who get shivers whenever they hear the magical melody signaling the opening of a secret passage. With a powerful nostalgic hook leading the way, Phantom Hourglass takes you on a journey beaming with gameplay ingenuity so profound you won't look at your DS in quite the same way again.

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 Critical Failure. This game rolled a 1.

> **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

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PSP

Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles | 127
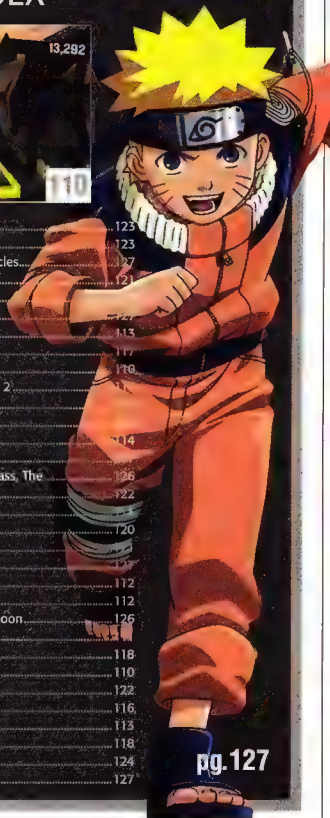

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World in Conflict

Moreso than any other genre, real-time strategy benefits from having an outstanding interface. World in Conflict not only has an absolutely brilliant UI (including the first truly usable free-flying camera), it's got some of the most intense and fluid battles the genre has ever seen. Stow your MBA, because economy doesn't even factor into the World in Conflict equation – you'll have to survive on tactical skill and twitch reflex alone in this supremely polished RTS.

PC GAME OF THE MONTH

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theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

EC	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older
M	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older
E	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older
AO	Content suitable only for adults.
E10+	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.
RP	Product is awaiting final rating.
T	Content 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).
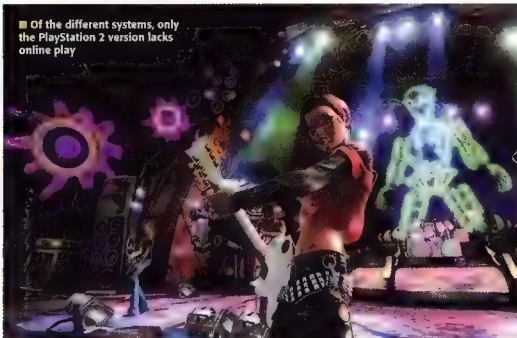
1080i – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The "i" means that the video is being interlaced

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 – A graphical technique in which a hi-res skin containing 3D information, revealed by light reflecting off the surface, to give the impression of realistic speed

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

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

onion delight – Raw onion topped with ice cream. We learned that Ben will eat one of these for four dollars

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

■ Of the different systems, only the PlayStation 2 version lacks online play

■ The co-op career has several songs not available in the single-player career

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

Guitar Hero III:
Legends of Rock

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2 PLAYER MUSIC (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR WiiConnect24) > **PUBLISHER** RED OCTANE
> **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28 > **ESRB** T

ROCKS YOU LIKE A HURRICANE

Make no mistake. This is the most exciting and compelling release yet in the franchise that made music games a household experience. With more original recordings in place for many of the great songs in rock, Guitar Hero III delivers an incredible song list, even if more casual listeners may not recognize every tune that comes their way. New modes of play add some cool new variety to the mix. Vibrant and colorful visuals leap off the screen, drawing players even more into the rock star fantasy. Only a few confounding choices as to the handling of unlockable music and party-style gameplay keep this from rocketing into the heights of guitar nirvana.

The first thing experienced players may notice about Guitar Hero III is the newly expanded time frame for hitting notes – even a fraction of a second makes a big difference. At first, it might seem like a slap in the face to faithful GH players – perhaps a nod to the casual playing market? That's how you'll feel until you start hitting some of the harder tunes. Frankly, very few Guitar Hero players in the world would be capable of handling the insane riffs coming their way in the later tiers without the added split-second widening of the windows of success. Ultimately, this is the most challenging game in the series, thanks to more multi-button chords, longer solos, and the dreaded boss battles against the likes of Tom Morello and Slash.
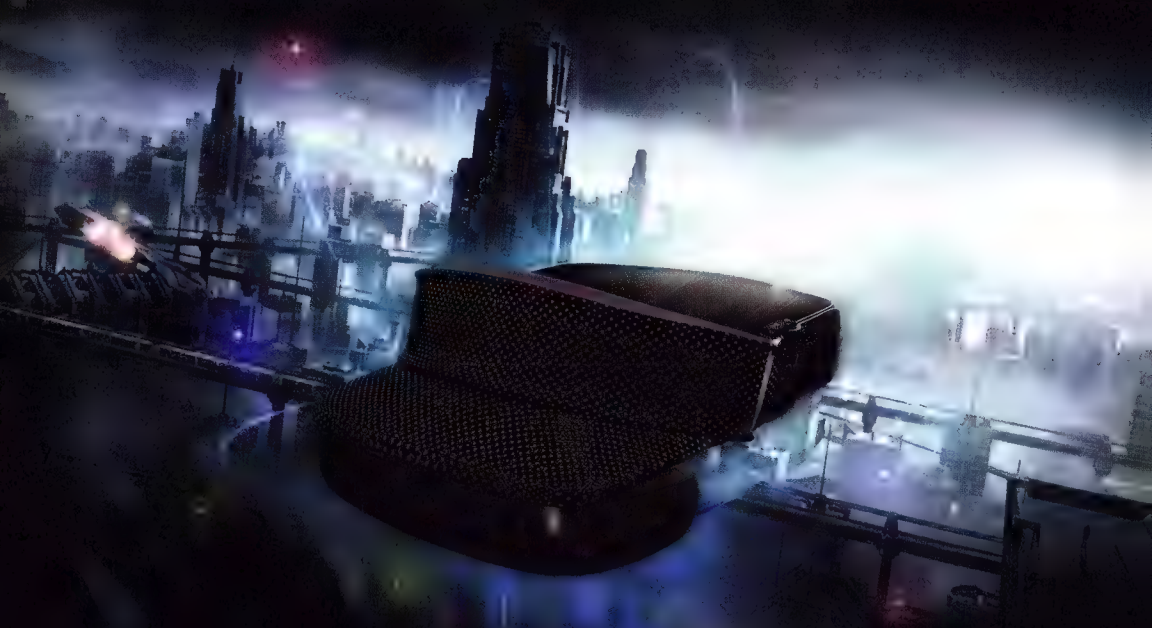
Several new additions flesh out the feature set

in this installment, the most prominent of which is the new battle mode. While its "screw up your buddy" mentality won't appeal to everybody, it certainly is a more exciting variation on competitive play than the traditional face-off modes. In battle mode, you'll collect various power-ups that can be thrown at your opponent, doing everything from doubling their notes, to breaking one of their strings, to triggering them into the dreaded lefty flip. It's cutthroat, but fun nonetheless. Online is another major addition to the formula, letting you shred with a buddy across the country if such is your desire. Finally, a cooperative career gives a little more story context to playing together.

The co-op functionality is my only major gripe with the game. There is no cooperative quickplay option, making the popular party play experience a lot harder to achieve. In the co-op career, you'll only unlock songs in the particular difficulty combination you initially played on. If you played through all the songs on Expert–Hard, and your other friend comes over who plays on Medium, then he's

■ It takes less of a tilt of the guitar to activate Star Power this time – a small but welcome change

YOUR NEW AXE

For GH III, the old PS2 and 360 guitar controllers will work fine on their respective systems, but you players on other systems may be buying a guitar for the first time. Lucky you. This is the best peripheral guitar yet in public release, with some added tweaks that really make a difference. The neck easily detaches for transport, and reattaches in a snap. The strum bar feels slightly sturdier on the model we played, and doesn't seem to click as much as before. The Select button is once again prominent, like on the original PS2 controller, so lazy players can palm the button to enter Star Power rather than performing that dangerous tilt. Interchangable face plates add a degree of customization. And, of course, this sucker is wireless. With all that in mind, even players who already have old guitars may want to consider an upgrade.

■ Xbox 360 model shown

screwed. Time to start another co-op career and unlock everything all over again. Only the unlockable songs from the store aren't part of this strange design decision – they are available on all difficulties as soon as you pay for them.

For the solo hardcore player, however, this release will be a godsend. Filled with wailing solo lines and uncompromising in its commitment to choose songs that rock hard over ones that might be more familiar, Guitar Hero III won't disappoint its longtime fans. It also has one of the most hilarious and awesome endings to a game in memory. You're in for one hell of a good time.—**MILLER**

■ Downloadable tracks to expand your song list may be available as soon as the first day of public release

Second Opinion 9

The team at Neversoft knew they had inherited a winning formula in the Guitar Hero franchise, and have (wisely) not messed with the things we've all grown to love about the series. But that's not to say that this sequel doesn't represent real progress. Rather than taking a left turn, Neversoft approached the game from the perspective of the fans, refining the GH template and adding elements both large and small that enhance the already addictive experience. The boss battles and multiplayer Battle mode is a real coup, adding a depth of strategy more akin to an action game into the simple act of shredding. And, although it's a small touch, I really like the new counter that shows your current string of consecutive notes. The co-op career mode is nice as well, although the exclusion of a co-op Quick Play mode is a puzzling mistake for a game that seems to cover all the bases so well. However, that disappointment is somewhat mitigated by the fact that – all due respect to Harmonix – I think this is the best Guitar Hero soundtrack to date. Throw in a better made (and wireless!) controller, vastly improved graphics, dead-solid gameplay, and you've got proof that Neversoft can handle any genre it sets its mind to.—**MATT**

Stuntman Ignition

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (PS3/XBOX 360) 1 OR 2-PLAYER (PS2) (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** PARADIGM ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** AUGUST 28 (XBOX 360, PS2), SEPTEMBER 28 (PS3)
> **ESRB** T

YOU ARE THE WHEELMAN

There are a lot of death-defying stunts in Stuntman Ignition, but perhaps the most impressive one of them all is the mere fact that THQ decided to bring this franchise back from the dead and hand it to developer Paradigm. More than just a sequel, Ignition is the heart-pumping thrill ride that the first Stuntman was supposed to be.

Ripping off stunts while charging through the game's six movies (each comprised of six scenes) is not only just a collection of memorable high-flying moments but it's got that addiction angle the first one lacked. The ability to string the stunts you and your director is yelling out with improvised moves on your own (such as near missing cars or drifting around corners) gives the game a Tony Hawk feel as you search for that perfect run and high score. While this game is more forgiving and less trial-and-error than the last Stuntman, make no mistake about it – it is not easy. Granted, there are sometimes when I swear I completed a stunt that I didn't get credit for, but

overall, I never tired of Ignition's challenge no matter how hairy things got.

As if escaping a lava-infested town at breakneck speeds while meteors blow up cars next to you wasn't cool enough, the game is smart to throw a variety of rewards your way, whether its unlockable items for the create-your-own stunt arenas, stuntman trophies, badges (similar to Achievements), rehearsal sessions, or odd job stunts like commercial shoots. Multiplayer also has its own little twist that will keep you playing into the night. Backlot Battle races feature a stunt string stealer where you get the points your opponent has accrued on a combo string if you bump into them.

THQ and Paradigm have taken an already white-knuckle ride and added the features that were conspicuously absent the first time around. However, this game earns its stripes by letting players have more of a hand in creating their own style of mayhem to spice up a scene, and trust me, you'll take every opportunity you can get.—**KATO**

Second Opinion 9

While the original Stuntman was just too frustrating for its own good, Ignition manages to find the perfect mix of forgiveness and challenge. The variety of film sets and vehicles keeps things fresh, and the new movie trailers are a hilarious payoff. The difficulty will still have you whoopin' and a hollerin' (see this month's Connect top ten), but the sense of attainability and awesome action is constant and addicting. My only complaints are the occasional late director cues and unclear paths. Some have suggested that Ignition would be better with some out-of-car stunts like jumping out of an exploding building, but I'm fine with the vehicle focus for now. After all, we don't need another Rogue Squadron III.—**BRYAN**

■ Whoopin' and a Hollerin' if comes at you loud and proud, and features some of the game's funniest dialogue

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

FIFA 08

> **STYLE** 1 TO 7-PLAYER SPORTS (PS3), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX 360) (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
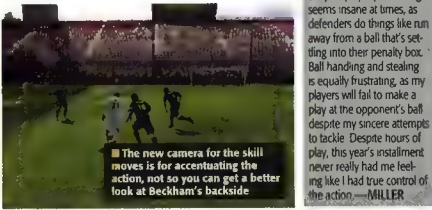> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 9 (XBOX 360), OCTOBER 22 (PS3) > **ESRB** E

DOES EA HAVE THE MAGIC SPRAY?

Football is called soccer, except when it's called football. Despite the fact that we Americans call the world's game soccer, this year's FIFA actually has a lot in common with EA's Madden. FIFA 08 is the most playable version of the series yet in the next-gen era – including a cool Superstar-like mode – but ghosts of old gameplay still haunt this release.

Be A Pro mode allows you to play as a single player on the pitch where your influence in calling for passes or through balls depends on how well you play your position in the context of the team. My favorite part of it is how the camera zooms in on you when you've got the ball and are performing the now-included right analog skill moves. Although it's cool you can play online with nine other friends in this mode, it's really too bad that on the single-player side you can only play individual games, which is just ludicrous.

Although this year the players are certainly smarter than in FIFA 07 – I'm particularly glad that your guys respond quicker to your defensive double-team command – they still produce some bonehead moves every now and again. Also, there are too many times when control of your player is ceded and the outcome of a free ball, tackle, or any other action is determined too far in advance. There are even times when you're not allowed to switch your player, which is just ludicrous.

On the surface, you'll be happy that the gameplay has been slightly improved, there's a new mode, and that there are now the normal number of international leagues. But until EA gets serious about fixing its historic deficiencies, some of this stuff is like paving over pot holes. It only buys you so much time before you start to hit the same ruts.—**KATO**

Second Opinion 7.75

FIFA moves in some very positive directions this year, which is why its shortfalls are all the more disappointing. I certainly love the addition of the Be A Pro feature, where players can hop into the cleats of their favorite player. Controls are as spot-on as I've seen from the franchise so far, with little tweaks like the right analog defender switching option. Animation has also leapt ahead this year, so that players and ball alike move in realistic bursts of speed and power. The gameplay itself is where things start to go awry. AI player positioning seems insane at times, as defenders do things like run away from a ball that's settling into their penalty box. Ball handling and stealing is equally frustrating, as my players will fail to make a play at the opponent's ball despite my sincere attempts to tackle. Despite hours of play, this year's installment never really had me feeling like I had true control of the action.—**MILLER**

■ The new camera for the skill moves is for accentuating the action, not so you can get a better look at Beckham's backside

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Skate

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK AND XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA GAMES > **DEVELOPER** EA BLACK BOX > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB** T

A GREAT START

The Tony Hawk series was once heralded as the closest thing there was to actually standing on a skateboard and attempting tricks in the real world. In the years that have followed, the series has sacrificed its basis in realism for fantastical feats. The thrill of performing a flawless kickflip has been crushed by the larger-than-life feats, such as having the ability to grind an entire rollercoaster rail or perform a 900 over the spinning blades of a helicopter. The incredible scale of these goals suits Tony Hawk's gameplay well, but you can't help looking back to the days where this series made you feel like a legitimate skateboarder. That's precisely what Skate, EA Black Box's first foray into video game skateboarding, accomplishes. It makes kickflips fun again, and through its accurate depiction of the sport, makes you appreciate the skill and determination that goes into each and every trick more than you ever have.

In a way, you could call Skate a simulation. Its gameplay is more heavily tied to realism than any of the Tony Hawk titles. Never once do you feel that a trick performed in the game couldn't also be replicated in real life. You won't be launching over building tops, altering the terrain with your mad skills, or finding ways to grind uninterrupted across an entire city. Rather, you'll find yourself salivating uncontrollably over a simple rail on a staircase. The feats are small, but the thrills couldn't be larger. When you bust out an incredible trick, you may cheer with just as much zeal as baseball team celebrating a World Series.

The desire to make this experience as authentic as possible is also passed on to the masterful

controls, which replicate the actual motions used by skaters. For instance, on Xbox 360, to gain speed, you can either hit the A button to make your skater kick off the street with his right foot, or the X button to have him use his left. To perform an ollie, you'll first need to press down on the right analog stick to transfer your weight. When your skater crouches in a ready stance, pushing the right analog stick forward will make him pop up. Grabs, as you would imagine, are handled on the shoulder buttons. To grind, you simply need to land your board on rail. Manuals require a gentle shifting of weight on the board.

These controls feel great, and they really need to since the game isn't in the slightest bit forgiving. When you go for a grind, you won't magically be transported onto the rail. You have to line it up and pray that you time your jump and adjoining trick correctly. When you do nail a trick, the game allows you to go back and view it in a replay editor. It's here that you see just how amazing this game's physics and graphics are. Wheels stop and spin back when they make contact on a grind, and you'll also see that board balance is dependent on the surface it rests on. If you love one of your runs, you can save it, alter the camera angles and color tones, and best of all, upload it online so you can brag to your friends.

In addition to a number of great head-to-head multiplayer games which include the death-defying ramp from the X-Games, Skate offers an expansive Career mode where you'll learn the tricks of the trade, perform the toughest feats skating has to offer, and earn cash that can be used to alter your created skater's look. The

challenges range from entertaining games of S.K.A.T.E. (which is like basketball's H.O.R.S.E.) and Best Trick to difficult photo shoots and pro skater challenges.

As amazing as it feels to excel in this game, it can also prove to be unfairly frustrating. As you begin a goal, there's a random chance that a person may walk right in front of where you are skating or you may get splattered by a car. The terrain also works against you more than you would like, as your skater will bail on any exposed lip (even if it looks to be no thicker than an inch).

Skate is a great first foot forward for EA. And the beauty of it is that it doesn't infringe on Tony Hawk's turf. The two games share similar content, but couldn't feel more different. At the end of the day, it gives skating fans another must-play option.—**REINER**

The pedestrian AI isn't very responsive, which can lead to some frustrating bails

Given how dynamic the gameplay is, you will often spend hours in one area trying to nail a line

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NHL 2K8

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK AND XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** KUSH GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 11 > **ESRB** E10+

FALLING OUT OF CONTENTION

Making like a goon who drops his gloves before the puck even hits the ice, developer Kush Games has come out swinging this year. In an overly aggressive move, many of the alterations implemented into this year's game are in direct response to the innovations rival developer Electronic Arts Canada debuted in last season's product. Like any good competition, Kush's intent isn't to copy, but to go one step beyond. As powerful as some of these punches may be, many miss the target, leaving Kush with its jersey pulled over its head, and primed for a concussion-inducing retaliatory strike. NHL 2K8 certainly makes strides forward, but even so, many of its new elements lag behind where its competition is today.

The entire control scheme has been reworked to open up the gameplay to stick movement, which allows players to swipe at pucks and block passing lanes on defense, and protect the puck and change the shot location on offense. Rather than desig-

nating the shooting functionality to a forward thrust on the stick like EA does, Kush has placed it on a shoulder button. As much as this ensures that you won't accidentally fire a shot while handling the puck, the combination of the analog stick and shoulder button doesn't feel natural. I found one-timers easier to fire, but the necessities (slap shots and wristers) are horribly clunky. The problematic shooting greatly lowers the effectiveness of the perimeter game, which is already prone to meltdown due to poor player positioning.

On the plus side, NHL 2K8 will make you leap from your seat and cheer when a player charges the net. Punching in simplistic button combinations will activate a special move worthy of a highlight reel. These moves are difficult to perform mid-game, but add tons of excitement to the shootout.

It may not deliver the entire package this year, but NHL 2K8 is a fun game that offers a fast-paced arcade feel.—**REINER**

Once again, little has changed in the franchise options. This year, you get to monitor player conditioning (snooze)

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NHL 08

> **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER SPORTS (PS3), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (360) (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 11 > **ESRB** E10+

OUT THINK TO OUT PLAY

Since I began my hockey career in video games, I've been taught that in order to win, the best strategy is to immediately check the puck carrier. As much as I've enjoyed laying out Wayne Gretzky, or more recently, that snotty brat Sidney Crosby, throwing your weight at a player isn't how hockey should be played. It's a game of strategy and skill, something that video games haven't explored properly. NHL 08 is the first game that moves in this direction. If you try to throw your weight at a skater, you're just going to leave a huge hole in your defense.

This series' move toward a realistic simulation relies largely on the AI's ability to the adapt to your style of play. If you keep crashing the net, or don't play a tight point, the AI will make proper adjustments. What's great about this is that it brings out a do-or-die coaching battle. Your ability to read the game has just as much of an impact as your skills on the ice. With your defensemen doing a better job of keeping the

puck in the offensive zone, working a defense proves to be surprisingly entertaining. If your team can't seem to find chemistry on the ice, you can always jump into the play editor to build custom strategies. The editor is simple to the point that Chris Pronger could figure it out, and proves to be highly effective on both sides of the ice.

The gameplay is backed by enhanced puck control, which works amazingly well for those exciting one-on-one situations where you might want to slip the puck between the defender's legs. This year, players are also treated to goalie control. It works much better than NHL 2K's, and really showcases just how quick these human vacuum cleaners are. The only problematic area of gameplay is checking. Even when you find yourself in a situation where a check is called for, it's hard to throw your weight in the desired direction.

I was a bit worried that moving toward a slower, sim-based game would hurt the experience, but I found that it's just as intense. —**REINER**

This year's game isn't just about the NHL. You can also play through your team's AHL games

XBOX 360 | PC

Medal of Honor Airborne

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER EA GAMES > DEVELOPER EA LA
> RELEASE AUGUST 28 > ESRB T

DROP ZONE BLUES

It has been three long years since World War II fanatics have had a Medal of Honor game worthy of its namesake. In the midst of its repeated failed campaigns, Call of Duty arrived with a brilliant strategy to take over the war. EA is now parachuting in reinforcements to even the score, but can this airborne unit turn the tide? Let's just say Eisenhower would have more faith in the real 82nd.

The big draw of Airborne is the open environments. Each mission begins with you parachuting down to a location of your choice on the battlefield. As you would guess, the game takes you through the most memorable airborne missions during World War II, including the big drop at Market Garden. Once you've cut the cord, it's up to you to tackle the mission objectives as you see fit. You'll be the soldier leading the charge, too, because your fellow soldier AI more often resembles Jeremy Davies' cowardly character from Saving Private Ryan than it does a brave airborne division. The 82nd inconsistently participates in firefights and is nearly worthless in many of the tougher circumstances.

As a virtual WWII vet, I expected to grab my trusty M1 Garand, drop into the fight, and smoke some Nazi scum with some well-placed headshots. If only that were the case. In an apparent focus group decision gone wrong, EA decided to cripple your accuracy from the beginning, which allowed them to create an upgrade system that rewards you with better accuracy, faster reloads, and larger ammo clips as you use the weapons. These are WWII guns, folks. Midfirefight modifications feel as out of place as The Terminator would on the beaches of Normandy.

An accurate weapon is definitely necessary for dispatching the uncannily bright enemy AI. I loved how well they used cover and moved to flank me, but sometimes their smarts bordered on omniscience. I have no idea how a soldier preoccupied with suppressing fire coming from 12 o'clock would immediately know to shoot at 3 o'clock when I deftly lean from behind cover to line up a shot.

The multiplayer may as well have gone AWOL, as the three modes and six maps don't do this shooter any favors. To make matters worse, the maps are basically the same six from the single-player campaign.

Medal of Honor: Airborne sprinkles minor moments of brilliance though a minefield of questionable game design. Fans of the series will experience some memorable gunfights, but if you're a casual gamer looking for a great World War II title, stick with Call of Duty. —BERTZ

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> Concept: Parachute into famous WWII battles and shoot Nazis. You know, the usual

> Graphics: Animations look great, but the stale, painted lighting keeps the game from reaching its next-gen potential

> Sound: A classic cacophonous symphony of whizzing bullets and grenade explosions backed by a Hollywood quality score

> Playability: The controls respond well

> Entertainment: Some levels make this franchise feel new, while others remind you why this soldier often leaves the combat zone in a pine box

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

This is no three-point landing. Shooting bad guys works well enough, and you can indeed land anywhere in a level and attack it how you see fit. However, that's about as far as the good stuff goes. For every time that you fight your way through a house to flank an enemy position, you'll take a wrong turn and end up wandering until you find the single entrance point to your objective half a dozen times over. Your allies' AI is so wretched your comrades just get in the way. Leveling up your weapons is just as stupid as I feared it would be, and the controls cause needless frustration by not letting you move while aiming down the sight. What was supposed to be special about Airborne only partially works, and the rest of the game barely holds up under the weight of its own mediocrity. —ADAM

• reviews

MULTI-SYSTEM QUICKIES

XBOX 360 | PS2
Warriors Orochi
BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KOEI > DEVELOPER OMEGA FORCE
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 19 > ESRB T

Oh, how many restless nights have I spent yearning for a Koei game that would combine the worst parts of Dynasty Warriors with those of Samurai Warriors! In my dreams, this game would throw players into a mess of menus and pointless setup before every battle. And of course, it would also feature the same overused, repetitive action and stupid AI that we've all come to love. Maybe Koei would even add an uninspired and pointless new mechanic like being able to switch between three teammates during battle. But surely the quota of around a dozen Warriors games has already been met this year, where would the company ever find the time to craft such a slipshod amalgam? Then I showed up to work today and that very game was sitting on my desk. Something within me died and I began to weep as I realized my dream was a nightmare. —BEN

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam
BOTTOM LINE 5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI > DEVELOPER KOEI
> RELEASE AUGUST 28 > ESRB T

We couldn't come up with a more hellish franchise pairing if there were a Game Infarcer in every single issue. This expectedly delivers the same tired Dynasty Warriors combat mixed with the ridiculous dialogue of Gundam ("You're letting your emotions as a woman take control!"). Shooting is absolutely useless, so players will spend most of their time mashing the melee button to build up to a super move. Space battles play out exactly the same as on-foot stages, except your Gundam hovers around instead of running. And if you can trick another player into trying DWG, there's plenty of co-op to be had – too bad it's game over if either of you die. Please, just don't play this. —BRYAN

Wii | PLAYSTATION 2
Guilty Gear XX Accent Core
BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> STYLE 1 OR 2 PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER AKSYS GAMES > DEVELOPER ARC SYSTEM WORKS
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 11 (PS2), OCTOBER 16 (Wii) > ESRB T

Much like the famous Street Fighter II, Guilty Gear XX has seen a number of arcade and console revisions since its original release. Accent Core is the latest of these, and it provides a fresh wave of balance tweaks, new mechanics, and two additional playable characters (ABA and Holy Order Sol). The changes are solid, but there isn't anything that radically alters the landscape of the combat – unless you're playing with the Wii remote, and that only changes things for the worse. The Classic or GameCube controllers for Wii work fine, though. Guilty Gear XX is a fun 2D fighter with lots of character, and if you haven't tried it yet, Accent Core is a great chance to see what you're missing. —JOE

GAME INFORMER 113
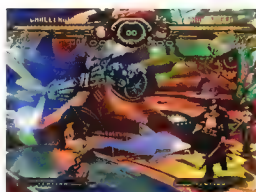
> **Concept:** A cinematic tale of courage and vengeance, plus lots of fighting

> **Graphics:** If you can tear your eyes away from the swirling blades and dazzling CG, you'll see some pretty environments, too

> **Sound:** The voice acting brings the characters to life, and a wonderful score fuels the story and the action

> **Playability:** Pulling off combos and switching among the styles works well, but the lack of an active block is a pain. Also, some of the button-press minigames seem designed for you to fail the first time

> **Entertainment:** Combat is fluid, and the story takes some unexpected twists. Be aware that the fun won't last forever, though

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Turn It Off

At some point early on, you should head into the options menu and turn off two of the three Sixaxis motion-sensing options. The one worth checking out is the Aftertouch, which lets you tilt the controller to steer objects in mid-flight. You'll probably even want to turn that off eventually too, since the arrow-guiding segments late in the game require more precision than the Sixaxis can provide. This is definitely a case where motion-sensing controls add needless frustration to an otherwise great experience.

PLAYSTATION 3

Heavenly Sword

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** NINJA THEORY > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB** T

■ The three stances (power, ranged, and speed) provide you with a combo for every occasion

RAZOR SHARP

On one level, Heavenly Sword is all about combat. The warrior heroine Nariko wields a cursed sword that drains her life, and players control her as she flips and twirls with an elegant fury that decimates legions of enemies. That's the heart of the gameplay, but Ninja Theory's PS3 debut is about more than just action – it's also about presentation. Each aspect of Heavenly Sword, from the fighting to the art direction, comes together to create one of the most engaging titles on the PS3.

From the moment Nariko chooses to wield the Heavenly Sword, her time with it is limited. As a player, your experience with the sword will also be fairly short; most gamers will probably finish the game in about seven or eight hours. However, that timeframe is dense with non-stop thrills thanks to the game's ability to continually throw compelling new challenges in front of you. When you aren't fighting, you'll assist Nariko through puzzles; help her sister, Kai, avoid capture; and single-handedly take on an entire army. The pacing and implementation of these sequences are excellent, giving you a break from the combat at just the right moments. Incidentally, guiding Kai's arrows in slow motion through the necks of advancing goons has to be one of my favorite gaming moments this year.

The action is stylish and satisfying, but it has a few gaps that keep Heavenly Sword from reaching the same heights as some of its illustrious peers. The number of different combos is impressive, but the game never motivates you to really explore the intricacies of these options. Button-mashing alone won't get you through, but the enemies (even the bosses) lack sufficient intelligence to require true calculation. It feels like Ninja Theory was trying to create a strategic and intricate combat system that anyone can play, but that mixed focus occasionally muddles the fighting. Then there's the blocking system, which requires you to not be in the middle of an attack animation in order to deflect blows.

Even though it emphasizes a balance between offense and defense, I was constantly wishing I could deliberately block. Removing your fingers from the buttons (to ensure you don't start a new animation) also takes you out of the action.

It may not realize its full potential, but the combat in Heavenly Sword is frenzied and entertaining – more than enough to justify giving the game a try. The amazing cutscenes (with some of the best facial animations I've ever seen), a cool cast of characters, and the stirring musical score complement the gameplay to create an incredibly cinematic experience. It may invite comparisons to other action titles, but I can safely say that Heavenly Sword is a unique and captivating adventure with a style all its own.—**JOE**

Second Opinion 9

Film critic Roger Ebert may speak poorly of video games at the moment, but if Heavenly Sword's seamless blending of silver screen caliber acting with razor-sharp gameplay points toward where this entertainment medium is heading in the future, he may soon give them two thumbs up. The performances that Andy Serkis and his fellow actors deliver are just as impressive as the never-slowing action that unfolds on the battlefield. As you swing the Heavenly Sword, your combat swagger transitions from acrobatic finesse to unabashed brutality – a chemistry that is so satisfying that you'll wish that there were more enemies to slaughter in each level. When your steel isn't singing, you are treated to long-range weapon play that, by slowing down time and allowing players to manipulate the trajectory of a shot mid-air, gives wonderful new meaning to a headshot. I know many of you won't agree with this next point, but part of this game's charm is how short and compact it is. It throws you right into the fire, doesn't bog down the quest with random events, and just keeps rolling with the intensity high. Many believe that games will deliver the same cinematic punch as movies. Heavenly Sword shows us just how close this union is.—**REINER**

■ Kai isn't able to fight up close, but her playable segments are incredible

■ Flying Fox is one of four bosses Nariko takes down

> **Concept:** Participate in some insane battles in this multiplayer-only battle royale

> **Graphics:** With this much going on during a fight, it's not surprising that something had to take a hit. You've certainly seen a lot better, particularly on your PS3

> **Sound:** The constant explosions and warhawks flying past your head hit the spot

> **Playability:** Some vehicle controls take a few minutes to get used to, but everything works great once you master the unique handling

> **Entertainment:** One of the most intricately balanced action games in years, the full-scale battles have to be seen to be believed

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

A game like Halo illustrates just how much fun a man-versus-vehicle battle can be. After all, watching some hapless rookie bounce off the fender of a Warthog is what online gaming is all about. Now, imagine the thrill you can derive from seeing a soldier feverishly scampering across a bridge only to get rammed by a plane clocking in at Mach 4. With the sun blotted out by aerial dogfights and the terrain littered with smoldering tanks, Warhawk delivers vehicular mayhem with a thunderous bang. Each vehicle is fitted with an explosive payload, and offers controls so precise that you can spin a warhawk through a tiny gap between two buildings. To top it off, the balance between these units is exactly where it needs to be, pushing for player skill over brute force. As brilliant as the vehicles are, great thrills also stem from the base defenses, which really ups the intensity for capture the flag and territories battles. The lengthy climb up the ranking ladder ensures that players will be locked into this stellar game for a long time.—REINER

PLAYSTATION 3

Warhawk

> **STYLE** 2 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** INCOGNITO > **RELEASE** AUGUST 28 > **ESRB** T

BETTER THAN YOU HOPED

I have to admit to a degree of skepticism about Warhawk prior to playing the final version. Its debut more than a year ago was all about the motion-controlled flight, which frankly didn't amaze me. Then came the announcement that the game would be a purely multiplayer experience. Within my mind, there was much hissing and booing. Then I started seeing screenshots of the final game, and the graphical quality on display certainly wasn't what I was expecting out of the PlayStation 3.

So it was with a great deal of surprise that I found myself loving Warhawk within moments of playing my first giant online multiplayer match. At the center of the game's success is a willingness to focus in on an idea and get it totally right. My complaints above stand, but the lack of cutting edge graphics and a cool single-player story are in service to the game's primary goal – providing multiplayer fun with unprecedented excitement and destruction while simultaneously delivering great controls and the flexibility to play the way you want to.

Let's talk for a moment about game balance, and how hard it must be to achieve in a multiplayer game like this. You've got people on foot, with all sorts of insane weaponry. You've got people zooming by in artillery-mounted jeeps. Added to the fray is a regular smattering of explosively charged tanks. And flipping and
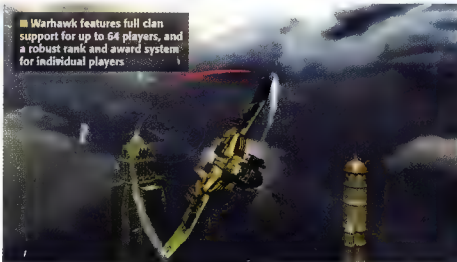
firing through the air are these massive VTOL style jets. In every way imaginable, Warhawk strikes a nearly perfect balance between each of these disparate groups. Wherever you are on the field of battle, you have a role you can play, and almost all of the on-foot and vehicular options are valid at any time. In other words, you can play the game any number of different ways and still be successful.

Of those numerous ways to play, many players will marvel most at the game's namesake machines – the flying warhawks make for one of the best flight experiences you've had in a game, particularly one that also includes ground-based combat. Whether you use the motion-control scheme or not (*not* is surprisingly the default), these strange hovering death machines handle like a dream. With a quick button press, players can switch between a slowly hovering state to a blazingly fast jet, complete with trick moves on the right analog. Large scale midair dogfights are as good as they've ever been on a

console game, and just the flight combat game types are enough to keep people happy for hours.

Few of the other game variations are a huge surprise, but everything from simple deathmatches to capture-the-flag competitions are fun and functional. Several gigantic maps serve as the setting for your matches. While there are only a few of these, you'll constantly be playing battles out in different areas of these huge land masses, so that you won't bore quickly of those same tired layouts.

At its best, Warhawk delivers constant thrills through exciting team-based action that'll have you coming back for more if only to rank up to the next level in your leaderboard standings. At its worst, Warhawk will disappoint because you'll never really get a good context or sense of the world around you, since there really aren't any plot or characters to deliver those elements. For those who could care less about such nuances in their games, Warhawk makes for some positively explosive firefights.—**MILLER**

Warhawk is available as either an online download through your PS3 or on disc at retail outlets

Warhawk features full clan support for up to 64 players, and a robust rank and award system for individual players

PLAYSTATION 3

Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT/UBISOFT PARIS > **RELEASE** AUGUST 21 > **ESRB** T

TANGO DOWN PAT

PlayStation 3 owners may not have had the chance to play GRAW, but that didn't stop Ubisoft from bringing them the sequel to the Xbox 360 hit. It also shouldn't stop you from playing this game.

Since you most likely missed the first tour of duty, here is the sitrep: All hell broke loose in Mexico City while the U.S. president was campaigning for the North American Joint Security Agreement. When Mexican dissidents captured the U.S. president and stole our nuclear launch codes, Captain Scott Mitchell was sent in to set the record straight on the sly with a few well-placed bullets and the occasional C4 emplacement. GRAW 2 finds you in the roll of Captain Mitchell 48 hours later as he and his squad of Ghosts attempts to squash the mobilizing Mexican revolutionaries headed toward the U.S. border.

The game looks and plays very similar to the critically acclaimed Xbox 360 version. Guiding your squad across the map is a fluid experience, and more times than not your soldiers will know how to attack and defend if you position

them well. The enemy AI has a tendency to make questionable decisions.

As with the PS3 version of Rainbow Six Vegas, my few nitpicky complaints revolve around the noticeable jaggies in the environment and the control scheme. The PS3 controller now features pressure-sensitive triggers, but Ubisoft yet again neglects to use them in favor of the shoulder buttons. The Sixaxis motion controls are largely ignored save for a tacked on feature that lets you perform a combat roll with the flick of a wrist.

GRAW games are all about multiplayer, and this version doesn't disappoint. PS3 owners will receive 14 additional maps, most of which are just variations on the Xbox 360 maps and a few classic ones from Ghost Recon past, and two new co-op modes that task you with locating POWs and evading enemy forces.

If you're like to mix a little strategy into your shooters, your choices have been slim thus far on the PS3. GRAW 2 is the reinforcement you've been waiting for. —**BERTZ**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** PS3 owners get a crack at defending America's borders from Mexican dissidents

> **Graphics:** A bit jaggier than the Xbox 360 version, but still impressive

> **Sound:** Has a modern Tom Clancy game ever had bad sound?

> **Playability:** Standard controls are solid, but there is no config for using the trigger buttons as, well, triggers

> **Entertainment:** Fans of tactical shooters should enlist

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

What do you want from me, GRAW 2? An admission that I had fun during our time together? Very well, you can have that. What, you want my word that I won't say mean things about your framerate, AI, and controls like I do to all the other tactical shooters? Okay, you've earned that one too. Between you and your cousin Rainbow Six Vegas, you've finally convinced me that realistic tactical first-person shooters can work well on a console. You could still use a little more color – shades of brown and green are great and all, but there's more to the world than that. I'd also appreciate a little more effort put into taking advantage of the PS3's hardware. Still, it looks like you've adapted to your console home quite well at long last. Congratulations. Oh, and could you send in SOCOM on your way out? He and I need to have a little chat.—**ADAM**

XBOX 360

Fatal Inertia

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** KOEI
> **DEVELOPER** KOEI CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 11 > **ESRB** E10+

FLOATING IN PLACE

If you perked up as soon as you saw some snazzy future cars splayed across the screens on this page, you already have a pretty good idea what to expect on this one. I'm here to tell you that your expectations are pretty much right on the mark. This is a racer in the tradition of the games that have come before it, from F-Zero to Wipeout and everything in between, and it succeeds admirably in its emulation.

Fatal Inertia certainly has the eye candy element handled. The sparkling water and wafting smoke on display is top notch, as is the texture work on solid surfaces, even if there is a good bit of draw-in. Unfortunately, the charm of these attractive visuals wears off through the use of only a few repetitive tilesets.

Players have access to several basic vehicle designs, which can then be customized at a garage to optimize your racing style using parts acquired through strong performances on

the track. The initial spread of races is pretty simplistic, but the difficulty ramps up quickly – probably a little too fast, actually. Races get plenty hard even within the first hour of play.

The racing itself is a lot of fun, especially once you exit the early races and nail some real speed. Added to the traditional dynamics of balancing the lean/turn and an array of weapon pad pickups, you'll also be juggling the vehicle's pitch – thanks to the use of Unreal 3, Fatal Inertia has you bouncing all over the place. To prevent bottoming out, you'll use the left analog to pull up or down as much as you will to turn left and right. If anything, the physics feel a little too exaggerated, at times sending you wildly spinning out.

Minus the crazy physics, Fatal Inertia really doesn't advance the genre in any meaningful ways. I like the game, but moreso because it reminds me of other games I enjoy than because I love it in its own right.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Zoom through another dystopian future world where people have embraced the sport of hovering car races

> **Graphics:** Gorgeous backgrounds are nice to look at – I wish there was a bit more variety, though

> **Sound:** Games like this are required to have forgettable electronica soundtracks. It's a law. Look it up

> **Playability:** Well-mapped controls have vehicles handling well, but the exaggerated physics don't help you stay in control

> **Entertainment:** Challenging and fun, even if other games have done this formula a little better

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

Fatal Inertia is pod racing without the Star Wars license. Whether you find yourself barreling at breakneck speeds down a narrow canyon pass or rolling vigorously to the side to avoid an onslaught of enemy fire, unthinkable speeds blend beautifully with the constant threat of danger. With responsive controls at your fingertips and spirited AI fighting you the entire race, Fatal Inertia will keep you on your toes. Unfortunately, this game's heart-stopping intensity is backed by some strange moments on the track. The most bewildering of which is the physics ping-pong that occurs when you hit a wall. Is my car made of rubber? Little can also be said of the Career mode, which is just a series of events that elevate in difficulty. It may have some significant roadblocks, but I still have to recommend it to fans of Wipeout and Star Wars Episode I: Racer.—**REINER**

■ While there are a lot of race courses to play through, many of them look very much alike
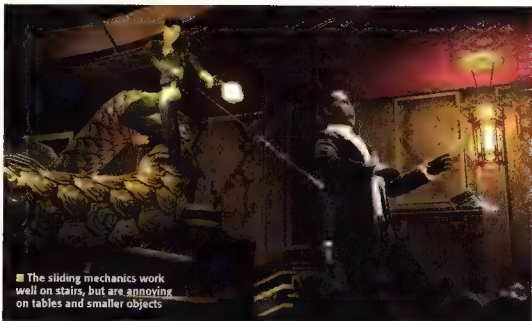
■ The sliding mechanics work well on stairs, but are annoying on tables and smaller objects

■ The classic Woo "standoff" sequences are entertaining and actually playable

■ The facial models and animation are impressive and typical of Unreal 3-based games

XBOX 360

Stranglehold

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY >
> **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY STUDIOS CHICAGO > **RELEASE** AUGUST 27 > **ESRB** M

JOHN WOO PRESENTS: SHOOT A BUNCH OF DUDES

I'm concerned that this review is going to sound a bit more negative than I intend it to be. If so, I apologize. However, I had high hopes for Stranglehold. On paper, it was a slam-dunk. A partnership between Midway, a company that I think has revitalized its internal development over the past few years, and legendary director John Woo seemed like a match made in heaven. Woo appears to really care about gaming, and even stated that this was to be the sequel to his film *Hard Boiled*, an all-time classic. To top it off, it was running on Unreal 3 tech, one of the industry's best looking engines. After having played a few impressive demos over the past couple of years, Stranglehold had become one of the games I was really looking forward to playing this fall.

So what went wrong? Not one thing in particular, but rather a number of failings that combine to make Stranglehold a mediocre (although sometimes invigorating) action title rather than a true next-gen masterpiece.

The main problem lies in the game's pacing and total lack of variety. Playing the game, you quickly realize that the frantic gun battles, which were so exciting in small demo form, are all there is to this experience. Aside from a few boss battles (which aren't really that dissimilar to the main game) and helicopter shooting sequence, it settles into a numbing rut. Run down a corridor, killing enemy after enemy. Enter a room and kill wave after wave of gangsters. Repeat ad nauseam.

At first, this is fairly entertaining. The environments are ultra-destructible; it's fun to see how much carnage and mayhem you can cause in a Japanese restaurant. The Max Payne style "Tequila Time" works well, allowing you to jump to and fro while administering expertly placed headshots. This is augmented by unlocking the game's special attacks, which allows you to use energy points for health boosts, quick headshots, and a couple of very powerful special attacks. However, the visceral thrills of combat are quickly dulled by the game's unrelenting repetitiveness. At this point, Stranglehold's flaws come to the fore, like the unwieldy and sloppy rail and table-sliding mechanics and the poor level designs and goals (Destroy 10 drug tables – no thanks!).

Maybe this would be excusable if the game offered up a good story or multiplayer features. Sadly, this is not the case. The plot and dialogue, which revolve around familiar themes like a damsel in distress, gang warfare, and myriad double-crosses, is not particularly involving. Woo's influence occasionally shows itself in a novel camera angle or nifty zoom shot, but that's about the extent of it. Multiplayer is bare-boned (a scant number of simple environments from the game) and poorly balanced.

Now, as I said, the tone of this review is partially colored by my own disappointment. Stranglehold is not a disaster. If you desire nothing more than to kill criminals on a massive scale, turn nightclubs into a war zone, and look cool doing it – this is your game. For me, Stranglehold was like guzzling a case of Mountain Dew. After the initial sugar rush wears off, you realize there's not much substance there to sustain you over the long haul.—**MATT**

■ You'll see a lot of this

PLAYSTATION 2

Wild Arms 5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** XSEED GAMES > **DEVELOPER** MEDIA VISION
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 28 > **ESRB** T

HIT THE TRAIL

Wild Arms 5 begins in a small village when a young man obsessed with golems and ARMs sets off on a grand adventure with his tomboy childhood friend and an amnesiac girl with possible royal ties who fell from the sky. Along the way they'll join up with all manner of salty characters, deal with love triangles, and get caught up in a plot to halt a world-threatening evil. Sure, WA 5 conforms to a lot of conventions, but it also does a lot of streamlining.

Health automatically refills after every combat, characters out of battle still get experience, and a damage predictor helps immensely when planning battle strategies. You can also turn off random encounters once you get to the end of dungeons, skip elaborate spell animations, and tone down the number of times your characters shout silly one liners.

The Hex battle system still works well, where your party can keep spaced apart to

reduce damage received or cluster together inside a hex to perform team attacks. Like before, you can occupy an elemental hex to take on water-based black magic, for example. This will also reduce damage received from water attacks.

Unfortunately, several other elements of the game dip heavily into mediocrity sauce. The environments are bland and repetitive, nasty popups run wild and free, and dungeons are split up into dozens of tiny little rooms with brief loads in between them – even when you're outside. You'll be sick of the high volume of random encounters by the time you get to the second dungeon, and much of the script is beyond absurd. At one point, the characters cushion their fall off of a train bridge by landing on an exploding grenade. This flips them back into the air and they land softly on their feet. Only a diehard Wild Arms fan will be able to take these physics, and much of the game, seriously.—**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** This Eastern take on the Western returns, along with the Hex battle system

> **Graphics:** NPCs and environments look like they got lost on the way to PSP

> **Sound:** Signature whistling and harmonica tunes continue to impress

> **Playability:** The battle system survives the transition from Wild Arms 4 quite well

> **Entertainment:** Wimpy puzzles, pesky random encounters, and wacky antics drag down this very traditional RPG

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.5

Over the last few years, Wild Arms has been aiming for multiple targets: axing stale mechanics, satisfying fans, and moving the series forward. Wild Arms 5 occasionally manages to hit these marks, but with a shaky trigger finger rather than a gunslinger's steady hand. When Wild Arms 5 misfires, it does so spectacularly; the environments are repetitive and ugly, the story is predictable, and random encounters can be as dull as staring down a tumbleweed. The game overcomes these problems at times – I really enjoyed the classic cowboy motif (maybe I'm just a sucker for whistling-heavy soundtracks), and the return of the hex-based battle system adds a tactical edge to boss fights. Wild Arms is a mixture of good, bad, and ugly, but with a little too much of the last two to make it worthwhile.—**JOE**
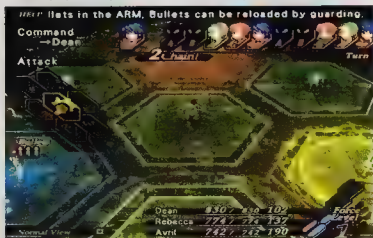
PLAYSTATION 2

Soul Nomad & The World Eaters

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NIS AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 > **ESRB** T
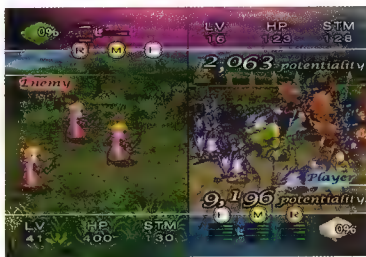
BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Create and customize an army as the avatar of a long-imprisoned war god

> **Graphics:** This uses Nippon Ichi's signature 2D sprites. The animations are sparse and the surroundings are bland

> **Sound:** Listening to Gig's insults can be entertaining (or offensive), but the voice acting on the whole is pretty painful

> **Playability:** The menu system facilitates the many customization options, but feels unnecessarily convoluted. It would also be nice to have to some direct control over which specific enemies your warriors attack

> **Entertainment:** Digging into the army creation is where you'll find the real fun, but the dialogue and story aren't without their charm

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

GANG UP

If you ever get possessed by an ancient war god, and he promises you infinite power in exchange for your soul, it's probably best to not take him up on the offer. This is one of the many lessons I learned from Soul Nomad, which puts players in control of young man whose body is being used as a vessel for Gig, a malevolent deity. Gig's area of expertise is combat, and Soul Nomad gives you plenty of chances to use that expertise in a grid-based strategy framework.

Unlike other titles in the genre, Soul Nomad isn't about a single unit's abilities. Instead of having archers, warriors, and healers all acting independently, you combine them into a group that moves as one. Part of your job – and the bulk of the strategy – is creating the right classes and organizing them into formations that take advantage of everyone's skills. For example, putting pyremages in the back along with archers and protecting them with a front

line of fighters results in a solid group in terms of offense and defense. This broadening of possibilities results in interesting combat dynamics that stretch beyond the simple paper-rock-scissor mechanic found in similar games.

With a system this addictive at its core, it is surprising and sad that Soul Nomad makes it so difficult for players to explore it. Finding tiles with the right combination of formation and innate property on which to position your troops can take several minutes (just give me a list!), and some of the cooler options for customization seem buried under piles of counterintuitive menu screens.

Once you overcome the learning curve, it's easy to enjoy Soul Nomad's brand of charm and humor. Gig is entertaining as a protagonist, and the combat and customization draw you in almost immediately. If you're a fan of strategy games or Nippon Ichi's previous releases (like Disgaea), Soul Nomad could be your next big project.—**JOE**

Second Opinion 7.25

"What's decor?" "How do we change our unit layout?" "What! How did these guys get here? Do we have to fight them?" This is probably what you'll sound like as you try to suss out Soul Nomad's terribly unintuitive menu system. Sure you can probably figure things out after reading the instructions or a FAQ, but that doesn't change the fact that the menu system is poorly designed. Despite this annoyance, Soul Nomad's tactical gameplay is still engaging. Characters attack in groups, so you don't have direct control over any individual, but that just means the strategy is in how you set up your teams. The story isn't particularly gripping, but it's entertaining to watch some of the characters interact (especially Gig, who's amusing though quite distasteful). And that's pretty much how I feel about the whole game: not gripping but entertaining.—**BEN**

NO GRINDING NEEDED

Unlike Disgaea, Soul Nomad doesn't make players go back and grind through battles in order to level up new characters. When you create a unit, you have the option to select its level (up to your protagonist's current level). This tactic increases the cost of creating the unit, but is worth it considering the time and effort you save.

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

Wii

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

GAME INFORMER
GAME OF THE MONTH

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** RETRO STUDIOS > **RELEASE** AUGUST 27 > **ESRB** T
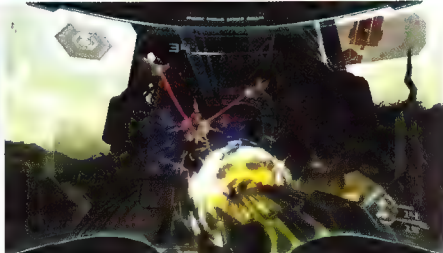
FINALLY

It's the little things. Watching a flying droid melt out of the sky after you've blasted it with a charged plasma shot. The puff of light and smoke a mine leaves behind after it jumps into your face. Seeing the husk of a dead soldier – frozen on a drifting spaceship – disintegrate to ash as you move it out of the way to use a console. These little moments stack up to make Metroid Prime 3: Corruption an unforgettable experience. But you may not notice them right away, because they weave together so well that it's hard not to be distracted by the bigger tapestry they create.

Corruption is a visual dream. Wii games aren't supposed to look this good, but someone forgot to tell Retro Studios. I'm not just talking about graphics, either. A game doesn't look this good based on polygons alone; Corruption's art direction is top notch. From the storm clouds and distant spires of some Jules Verne-inspired forgotten floating city to the acid rain-drenched sci-fi dystopia of an alien homeworld, all of the game's environments, no matter how ugly, drip with beauty. How deep Retro Studio's art team has tapped the Wii is a testament to their skill.

But Corruption isn't just the best-looking Wii game to date; it's the best Metroid Prime game period. This is due in large part to the fluid controls. The highly debated, stubborn lock-on aiming system has been replaced with something far better. You can

finally look around while moving by aiming the Wii remote. This simple system alleviates the major problem many had with the GameCube titles and even manages to feel better than many console shooters on other systems. Throwing switches and using your grapple also makes creative use of the Wii's motion controls and immerse you further into the Metroid world. In short, Corruption delivers on the Wii promise that some of us have been waiting for since the system launched.

Only a few things in the game are far from perfect. Corruption has the closest thing a Metroid title has ever had to a story, and while it may be passable, it still sits far below the bar set by the rest of the game. Instead of adding to the series' classic haunting atmosphere, at times, the script actually takes something away from it. Corruption also isn't much of a challenge; it's much easier than any of the previous titles. This isn't something I really fault the game for, but if you like a challenge, play the game on the

Samus has a few new tricks... like the ability to call in her ship remotely for special tasks

veteran setting with the hints turned off.

When Metroid Prime first came out on the GameCube in 2002, it had been eight years since we'd even seen a Metroid game, and on top of that it was the first time the series had been realized in 3D. It's hard to compete with something that long-desired and fresh, but Corruption refines the Prime formula to its pinnacle. Nothing should stop anyone who loves a good adventure from snatching up this amazing game.——**BEN**

> **Concept:** The ultimate hybrid of shooter action and adventure exploration; the Prime formula has been polished to a sheen

> **Graphics:** No need for Wii goggles here, Corruption's graphics are truly stellar. The shining point on an already sparkling game

> **Sound:** The Prime games usually have a solid, haunting score, and while Corruption's is still good, it doesn't stand out as much as previous titles

> **Playability:** Move and look around at the same time! What a novel idea. Somehow this craziness works out all right

> **Entertainment:** You'll be playing through again to collect all the secrets, but you might skip the cutscenes

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.75

As a long time Metroid fan, it pains me to not smother Nintendo's newest addition to the family with love and adoration. This is not to say that I didn't enjoy Samus Aran's newest romp, but that things have changed, and in my view, not for the better. I always admired Metroid for its story that didn't require lots of senseless dialogue to make its point. In Corruption, this has all changed with the introduction of bad cutscenes and even worse voiceover work. Next up are the giant worlds – the hallmark of any Metroid game – that I love to explore in search of upgrades and clues. While the upgrades and clues still exist, the world has been chopped up into bite-sized little pieces to make it easier, I presume, to digest Metroid's exploration. In the end, it makes it all feel like Nintendo took my favorite cut of prime beef, and ground it up to make a nice fast-food hamburger for the masses. Now don't get me wrong, it's a great hamburger, but it's not the fantastic steak I have come to expect from the series.——**ANDY**

These screens don't really do justice to how good the game looks. The visual detailing in every level is incredible
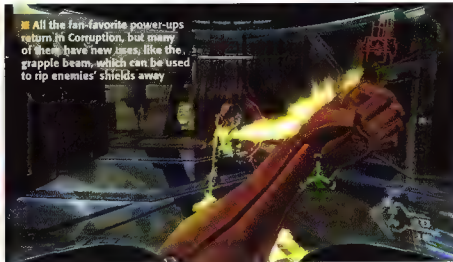
All the fan-favorite power-ups return in Corruption, but many of them have new uses, like the grapple beam, which can be used to rip enemies' shields away

Wii

My Sims

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER THE SIMS DIVISION
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 18 > ESRB E

THE ARTIST'S COMMUNITY

The faint outline of a thriving community can still be seen within the city of ruins that lies before you. With a little imagination and a creative hand, the homes and businesses that have crumbled to their foundations could be rebuilt and reopened.

If your artistic side is properly expressed, new people will jump at the opportunity to call this town home. However, if your design isn't embraced, the city will once again be a vacant wasteland. By combining the building aspects of The Sims with the social interaction of Animal Crossing, Electronic Arts has created a charming community-growing simulation that proves to be mighty addictive.

As the game progresses and your city balloons in population, you'll be contracted by the denizens to build whatever their hearts desire. They tell you what they want, and how they want it to look, but it's your call whether you provide exactly what they ask for, or surprise them with something a little bit more creative. A day's work could include building a home, business, furniture, and maybe even an artistic piece. You'll also be tasked with finding the materials needed to build your items. This will send you down a road of odd chores, such as fishing, gathering, mining, and even insulting people so that you can harvest their tears.

The building aspect of the game is handled superbly. Much like when you open up a box of LEGOs, the sprawl of different shaped pieces will make your mind race with construction ideas. The assembly interface is remarkably intuitive, and allows players to snap together pieces on a three-dimensional object by simply pointing to the desired location and clicking a button. Skilled artists can create some amazing pieces, and thanks to easy-to-follow blueprints, people who are creatively challenged can forge some impressive pieces as well.

As much fun as it is to juggle tomatoes with the Italian restaurant owner, or as strange as it is to perform a séance with your goth neighbor, the interaction you have with the people of this word is not as deep as you would hope. The simplicity assigned to communication greatly limits the relationship building, and makes you view people not as friends, but providers of tasks. This really takes some of the festiveness and realism out of the community.

While somewhat shallow, My Sims will spark your imagination and awaken the inventor in you with its ingenious art-driven gameplay. The allure behind unlocking special items provides the longevity needed to keep this game spinning in your Wii for months.—**REINER**

Second Opinion 8

The bed with wooden posts instead of a mattress, that suspiciously lewd sculpture, and the sprawling skull-laden throne…it's all your doing. My Sims is basically a fully customizable village, letting you craft every house and piece of furniture from scratch without the aid of a magical in-game catalogues. The building mechanics function well when you aren't working with small pieces and precise placement, and the cute visual style is a nice change for the franchise. Some expanded social options could have added a lot of depth, but My Sims is still an addictive and satisfying way to admire your own handiwork.—**JOE**

Wii

Dewy's Adventure

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 4 > ESRB E

RAINDROPS KEEP FALLING ON MY HEAD

As a fan of the platformer, I'm always glad to see developers taking a chance on a genre that's far too under-represented in today's market. In addition, I long for more titles that attempt to show us that the Wii's motion controls can be good for more than just 30-minute party game sessions. Enter Dewy's Adventure, a creative new title by the creators of Elebits that casts players as a drop of water whose mission is to save the world from the age-old video game menace of environmental degradation.

You control Dewy by holding the Wii remote sideways and tilting. Fortunately, things get a bit more interesting due to your ability to change between the three forms of water: liquid, solid, and gas. Your ice form allows you increased attack abilities and the power to freeze bodies of water for traversal, while gas and liquid forms give you a powerful lightning attack and increased mobility respectively. Naturally, many of the game's puzzles and boss battles revolve around switching forms. In addition, you can also shake the controller sideways or up and down for wind and earthquake attacks.

I definitely like the concept in place here. However, at the end of the day, I don't feel that Dewy's Adventure lives up to its promise. While the motion controls work on a base level, they never really gave me the level of accuracy I want from a platformer – too often what should be simple platforming sequences become frustrating for no good reason. Furthermore, the story, level design, and collect-a-thon aspects of the game seem like archaic clichés in a title that aims to do new things with the genre, diminishing the impact of the fresh gameplay concepts. It's a shame, really, because I think there's a great game in here somewhere. It's too bad that the developers felt they could coast along on the strength of a handful of good ideas. Still, with any luck this could be the start of a solid series —**MATT**

Second Opinion 6.25

I had my mind made up I wasn't going to indiscriminately hate on Dewy's Adventure just because it was a kid's game filled with bright colors. I just wasn't going to do that, I was going to enjoy the experience for whatever it was. But the game's mind numbingly sweet story, poor motion sensitive platforming, and simplified level designs led me to change my mind. I just couldn't have fun with this game. I like the premise of switching between three different forms of matter: gas, water, and ice. Unfortunately, I don't think the game really utilizes this mechanic as well as it could have. Maybe I shouldn't try to be so open-minded —**BEN**
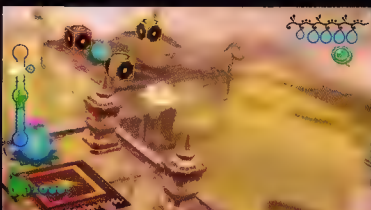
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** AUGUST 28 > **ESRB** E

CADDYSHANK

Playing this game is a lot like playing a round with your hacker clubs after having borrowed your friend's sweet new set of Calloways. The best Tiger in years just appeared on the Xbox 360 and PS3, but this game just doesn't feel the same in comparison. Of course, with the Wii controller it shouldn't – but it also shouldn't leave me guessing half the time as to where my ball is going.

To be fair, EA has worked on Tiger's motion swing, and I'm glad to say there weren't any instances where the game shot for me before I even completed my swing, unlike last year. However, I still found the whole mechanic way too inconsistent. One difficulty in particular was trying to accurately get draw and fade on my shots. Without a consistent way to achieve either of these, you'll find yourself being too conservative on those doglegs, opting to shoot it short and

straight instead of risking it flying off over the bend. I'm also confused as to why this version of Tiger doesn't restrict your putting range according to the situation. The result is that if the cup is only 1 foot away, you still have to calculate that distance in relation to an entire 120 foot swing. I can see the realism there, but it's totally different to what the series has done traditionally. In the end, the entire swing mechanic is one that I feel EA has yet to nail comfortably.

In other areas, EA has added their shot confidence feature and the new honeycomb Tiger Challenge career structure to mirror the next-gen editions. This latter feature is great because it gives you more variety and freedom to chart your career's course. However, the lack of the YouTube-like Gamenet challenges is a big blow, and in general this game is a step behind lugging the clubs instead of pumping its fist on the green.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** A hodge-podge of old and new that can't keep up with the other next-gen versions

> **Graphics:** Last-gen looking, but nothing to worry about

> **Sound:** I miss the announcers during the Tiger Challenge games

> **Playability:** A traditional analog swing has been added to the nunchuk

> **Entertainment:** Swinging with the Wii remains problematic and spoils what could be a tight game

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

Tiger Woods 08 on 360 and PS3 set a very high bar, so I'm not surprised that the less-powerful Wii comes up a bit short. It is missing a degree of polish and the mind-blowing online features of the other versions. However, this is still a fine game that manages to incorporate solid motion controls while providing the deep career structure that Tiger fans expect. The swing mechanics work well, although EA definitely tuned the game to be easier. I really enjoyed playing, even if the short game is a bit spotty at times. Power's definitely not an issue; if anything, it's almost too easy to max out your swing, a problem I solved by clubbing down frequently. Is it the best version of Tiger out this year? No, but it's a genuinely entertaining, full-featured sports game on a system that has far too few.—**MATT**

Madden NFL 08

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA WiiConnect24) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 14 > **ESRB** E

THE MAN IN MOTION

After having a year to settle into the Wii's brand of pro football, this branch of the Madden franchise is certainly less alien, but at the same time it's not necessarily more comfortable to deal with.

Anyone bemoaning the feel of the next-gen Maddens can find some comfort in the fact that the Wii version feels just like old times in comparison. That being said, it was hard to feel totally at home with this game. It's safe to say that almost any action requires more deliberation and should be performed a second sooner than you'd expect. That doesn't sound like much, but when you're trying to defend the quick slant, you don't have an extra second to rely on. Moreover, I found that defending passes by throwing my hands up particularly frustrating. Even so, the best thing about the controls is that it's pretty intuitive to rifle the ball with a quick flash

of the arm when the pocket is closing or you're trying to fit the ball into a tight spot.

As much as this game retains the old school feel from Madden's past, it has some unexpected trouble off the field. There are strangely no scouting options prior to the draft. But I guess that typifies this release: Just when everything's going as you expect, it's still a little off.

I don't know if this game has a more natural feel because it's not the first time I've played it or because the gameplay's been tightened, but now that the franchise's foundation has been established, it needs to decide where it wants to go. Is it going to try and replicate the other next-gen football titles or go a different direction (as evidenced by the family controls)? I don't know if it can do the former by always being a second behind, and if it's the latter, it needs to do more to impress.——**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Run, pass, kick – it's all in the mind!

> **Graphics:** Pretty solidly last-generation, right down to the models themselves

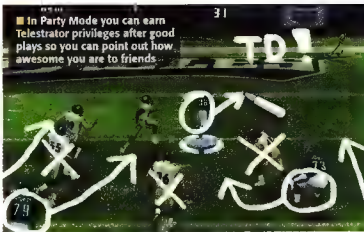> **Sound:** At least this game has commentary by Al and John

> **Playability:** The kicking game is a little inconsistent. I also wish there was a way to remove the passing icons during play

> **Entertainment:** Flashes of fun, but too inconsistent for my taste

> **Replay Value:** Moderate
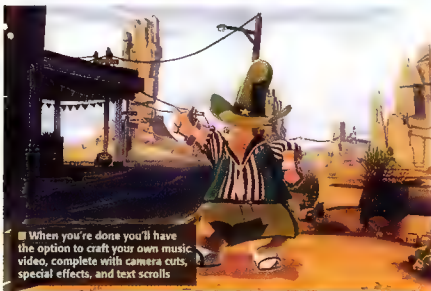
Second Opinion 7.75

Madden Wii has learned enough from its shortcomings last season to compete for a starting job in 2008. Players won't experience the gorgeous graphics or branching animations offered on the Xbox 360 or PS3, but all the modes that make Madden popular are here: franchise, create a superstar, and online multiplayer. A party mode also offers minigames and trivia to enjoy with friends. The Wii controls, while hardly as tight as a Peyton Manning spiral, will suffice for the Wii's casual base; even pre-snap adjustments are much easier to execute this year. Wii Madden may not be a borderline all-pro like its teammates, but it's a dependable veteran that gets the job done.—**BERTZ**

In Party Mode you can earn Telestrator privileges after good plays so you can point out how awesome you are to friends

Wii
Boogie

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA MONTREAL > **RELEASE** AUGUST 9 > **ESRB** E10+

■ When you're done you'll have the option to craft your own music video, complete with camera cuts, special effects, and text scrolls

OFF YOUR HIGH HORSE

Different games have different goals. This one's aim is to make you laugh, sing along to some songs that you can't help but recognize, tap your feet to a beat, and pass that fun on to your friends. Other music games have the market cornered on kicking your ass – Boogie is infinitely more interested in finding a way to make you shake it.

To achieve this modest task, the folks at EA Montreal have arranged a song list of the most ridiculous and flamboyant songs you can name. Seriously, if it made you groan when it played at your high school homecoming dance, it's probably here. You'll notice I used the term "fun" over "good." Few are the brave souls who will defend "U Can't Touch This," "Kung Fu Fighting," "Dancing Machine," and "Slave 4 U" as high musical art. But ingrained in the American consciousness? They've got that covered.

Translating these pop super-hits into gameplay comes in two forms. A simple karaoke style sing-along mode couldn't be much more straightforward. The dancing mode, meanwhile, cleverly utilizes the Wii remote as a sort of conducting baton with which you'll keep the beat to build up

points while your cartoony onscreen avatar struts and poses in response to the flicks and tilts of the controller.

Boogie is not without its faults. Beyond some iffy voice detection, the game has a frustrating tendency to incorrectly detect your gestures on some of the more complex dancing moves. The multiplayer options could certainly use some fleshing out, and a few of the sound-alikes they've used for the song covers are questionable.

A funny thing happened while I was reviewing this game. The first day I was playing it at work, I had a pretty good time, even if the mechanics at play weren't blowing me away – beyond the game's ability to induce shame as my fellow editors looked in on me as I crooned through the phrase: "Don't cha' wish your girlfriend was hot like me?". That night, I happened to have the game at home when some non-game playing friends were over, and the amount of hilarity, guffaws at song selections, and jockeying for the microphone was hard to contain. Leave your stuffy music and game sensibilities at the door – Boogie has a more plebeian appeal.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **Concept:** Dance and sing through the full array of over-the-top party tunes in this simple but hilarious variation on the genre

> **Graphics:** Crisp, well drawn-characters, but the background environments could use some spicing up

> **Sound:** They may all be covers, but every song on this extensive list is the kind that makes you sigh, laugh, and start dancing anyway when it inevitably shows up at your buddy's wedding

> **Playability:** A few of the dance controls are a little touchy, but the overall mechanics are simple to pick up and play

> **Entertainment:** It certainly isn't meant to compete with the challenging edge of a game like Guitar Hero, but for eliciting grins at a get-together, Boogie won't disappoint

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6

I love the idea of Boogie – a lighthearted music game designed specifically for Wii sounds great on paper. It's the implementation that I take issue with. Shaking the remote on the beat works poorly as a core mechanic, since the game's detection of your movements is woefully imprecise. The vocal lines also detect poorly, which does the karaoke half of the game no favors. Most notably, though, there's no motivation to do your best in Boogie. The story mode is laughably easy to complete, and the sloppy detection of both dancing and singing prevents any kind of serious scoring competition. Outside of the outstanding animation, Boogie does everything worse than the dozens of rhythm games out there. Oh, and I hope you like lowest-common-denominator dance/pop music, because that's all you'll find in the song list. Is it a fun time at a party? Sure, but so is Yahtzee, and I'm sure as heck not handing that a high score.—**ADAM**

YOU COME AND GO
LOVIN' WOULD BE EASY IF YOUR COLORS WERE LIKE MY DREAM
177,479
3:01
280

Wii
Alien Syndrome

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** TOTALLY GAMES > **RELEASE** JULY 24 > **ESRB** T

THE DUNGEONS OF TOMORROW

I can't imagine many of the casual gaming fans scooping up the Wii in record numbers have much affection for the ancient top-down arcade shooter Alien Syndrome, but a few of the hardcore set might. This new version isn't a complete change from the old game, although the endless combat is now in a 3D isometric world more akin to many fantasy hack n' slashers.

Since I'm feeling generous right now, let's start with the things Alien Syndrome gets right. I was impressed by the amount of depth offered by the character progression and weapons system, which allows you to boost your fighter's stats in a number of areas, collect loot and items that grant further buffs, and even craft new items from collected material. For those of you who just glazed over reading that, there's also a nice auto-manage function that means you don't have to deal with it if you don't want to. In terms of gameplay, I found the ranged combat to be well realized, as pointing and aiming with the Wii remote makes for easy shooting in a 360-degree radius.

Now, for the bad, which sadly outweighs the above paragraph. The melee combat, which forces you to use convoluted combinations of remote gestures and buttons presses, is just abysmal and useful only as a last resort if you've run out of ammo. The levels are rote and tedious, offering no real surprise or sense of design. Adding to this sense of half-hearted execution are the graphics and storytelling, which are both sub-par even for the Wii. Sorry, but static, hand-drawn cutscenes are just not acceptable in 2007, especially when they are this poorly done. Still, for those of you absolutely dying for a dungeon crawler on Wii, this should provide an adequately decent time.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE **6.25**

> **Concept:** A sci-fi dungeon crawler that retools Sega's old arcade title as a hack n' slasher

> **Graphics:** The future ain't pretty

> **Sound:** Generic music and minimal voiceover rob this title of drama

> **Playability:** The point-and-shoot functionality of the Wii remote works great with ranged weapons, but melee combat is a total mess

> **Entertainment:** It's nice to have this genre represented on the Wii, but Alien Syndrome doesn't deliver as it should

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 5

Even though Alien Syndrome features four-player co-op, I honestly can't picture a group of people meeting up regularly to trudge through these repetitive dungeons packed with legions of identical enemies, especially considering how crowded the screen gets with characters and their aiming reticles. The cutscenes are little more than a camera panning over concept art, and the leveling and loot system offers little grinding satisfaction and essentially pigeon-holes you into one weapon type from the start. You basically have to choose between spending valuable points on one high-powered gun or unlocking several weak guns. Alien Syndrome is one retro franchise that probably should have stayed dead.—**BRYAN**

Losing units puts their cost in points back slowly into your queue, to filter back slowly into the pool available to call in reinforcements

PC
World in Conflict

Middle America: Pwned

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** SIERRA
> **DEVELOPER** MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 18 > **ESRB** T

IN YOUR FACE, MILWAUKEE!

Harvesting gold, lumber, Tiberium, or whatever just slows things down. Building infrastructure is for those Sid Meier games. World in Conflict doesn't mess around with any of that garbage, and it's better for it. You had better get to know the offensive and defensive capabilities of every unit at your disposal – not to mention how they deal with different types of terrain – because no economic wizardry is going to save you here. Lightning-fast tactical combat is all World in Conflict does, and it does it amazingly well.

In similar fashion to Bungie's outstanding Myth series from a decade ago, World in Conflict manages to create compelling combat despite narrowing its scope down from real-time strategy norms. The game approaches semi-realistic modern combat as if it were StarCraft; most units have one offensive and one defensive ability, and the simulation doesn't try to get too deep. Beyond tanks having heavier armor in the front and infantry getting stealth and cover bonuses in the woods and being able to garrison buildings, you don't have to worry too much about small details.

So what's so great about a tactical RTS that keeps it simple? In World in Conflict's case, it's that everything else about the game is done so skillfully that translating strategies from your head onto the battlefield is almost effortless. In combination with the painstakingly crafted maps, game-changing support abilities, and well-balanced rock-paper-scissors unit relationships, this makes for some of the most fluid and intriguing RTS battles I've ever immersed myself in.

The aforementioned support abilities are pyro-technic delights. Deploying napalm strikes to clear out pesky infantry from a forest is great. Dropping paratroopers behind enemy lines to harass his

reinforcements is likewise awesome. But there's nothing better than bottling up an enemy force and proceeding to drop some long-range artillery or an airstrike on them to clean house. These powers are constantly available, since you earn the necessary points by destroying enemy units, and it's rare that you'll see a scenario or match where they don't play a major role in deciding the outcome.

Though the single-player campaign attempts to tell a story, outside of a few shockingly powerful images of a suburban America ripped to shreds by warfare, it's not the game's strong suit. Even the excellent voice actors can't salvage anything better than mediocrity out of the staid dialogue. As is customary, though, the offline content is enjoyable enough while it shows you the ropes that will save you from certain destruction later on in multiplayer.

Online play is solid enough to have the potential to develop the kind of community that keeps
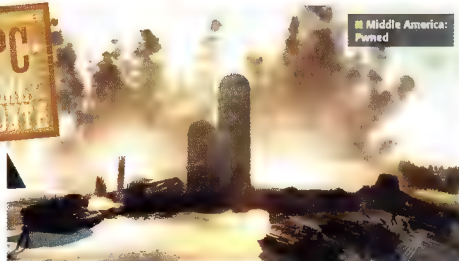
Age of Empires II running strong to this day. The Massgate online service is vastly better than crappy server browsers, and the gameplay is brilliant. With World in Conflict's wall-to-wall quality and strong online offering, don't be surprised to see this at the top of the running for Strategy Game of the Year.—**ADAM**

You can directly control choppers, but jets are called in from offscreen

GIVE YOUR UNDEAD
NEW LIFE.

TRANSFORM YOUR OLD ZOMBIE, VAMPIRE, AND FANTASY GAMES INTO
CASH FOR YOU AND INTO A BRAND NEW ADVENTURE FOR SOMEONE ELSE.

GameStop
power to the players

GIRL

Wow, I've never seen anyone actually on the verge of collapsing before!

NINTENDO DS

Rune Factory:
A Fantasy Harvest Moon

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NATSUME > **DEVELOPER** MARVELOUS INTERACTIVE > **RELEASE** AUGUST 14 > **ESRB** E

HALF MOON

BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> **Concept:** Throw some half-assed combat into the Harvest Moon formula

> **Graphics:** Blocky 3D characters running around in 2D environments

> **Sound:** A surprising touch of voice acting mixed with forgettable music

> **Playability:** Clunky menu and inventory systems complicate even the simplest of tasks

> **Entertainment:** Even though there's an absurd amount of stuff to do, it's not necessarily fun (i.e. chopping up 2,000 logs to remodel your house)

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

F irst and foremost, the core Harvest Moon formula is completely intact here, with hoeing, planting, watering, and harvesting still the main gameplay mechanics. You'll also spend an inordinate amount of time gabbing with the townspeople to build friendships (romantic or platonic), buying items, and working on skills like blacksmithing and medicine. Additionally, players are now able to stroke enemies to get them to help with chores or join them in battle. Unfortunately, these goons are pretty stupid and seem to enjoy death very much.

However, fighting through Rune Factory's many caves is the primary means of story progression. Every crude attack and spell

drains your Rune Points, of which daily chores have already taken a big chunk. Once these run out, every action drains your HP. Add this to the fact that you have to destroy every enemy in the cave to get to the boss, and a totally frustrating gameplay loop emerges: kill some monsters, leave, sleep at your house, tend to the farm, walk back to the cave, try to kill more monsters than last time. You see, all of the enemies respawn whenever you leave the cave, so the goal is to work up to beating them all in one run and then camping outside the boss' door. It's too bad that this only refills a portion of your HP and RP, so you're still at half-mast. Then if you try to switch weapons or use an item during these crucial battles, you're totally vulnerable to attack while scrolling through the real-time menu.

In the end, Rune Factory is just way more trouble than it's worth. Harvest Moon fans should just wait for the upcoming Wii game or the already-announced DS follow up. After all, when a series competes with Mega Man for overexposure, you can afford to wait another five months for a chance that things might improve.—**BRYAN**

Second Opinion 6

Sometimes you've just got to set down the hoe and pick up a broadsword. Harvest Moon's easy-going farming simulation gets an action/RPG infusion in Rune Factory – but like cucumbers in autumn, it has trouble flourishing. Farming takes a back seat to the action-oriented cave exploration, and your Rune Point meter severely limits how much physical exertion you can handle in one day, whether it's sword-swinging or crop-watering. Eventually you'll befriend monsters that take care of most of your farming grunt work (which is actually pretty fun), leaving you plenty of time to wallow in the repetitive dungeons and brutal boss fights. Controlling a farmer/warrior is an interesting idea, but Rune Factory just doesn't balance the two facets well enough to be entertaining.—**JOE**

NINTENDO DS

The Legend of Zelda:
Phantom Hourglass

GAME OF THE MONTH

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 1 > **ESRB** E

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Through mind-bending puzzles, this sequel to Wind Waker shows us how tricky it can be for a pirate to unearth treasure

> **Graphics:** A little blocky in some areas, but the cartoon-style graphics are vivid, and the second screen is used effectively to enhance both battles and puzzles

> **Sound:** Nostalgic. Nostalgic. Nostalgic

> **Playability:** The touch screen controls are more than competent, and the puzzles are some of the series' best. The only sticking point is having to repeat the same dungeon over and over again.

> **Entertainment:** It's a little shorter than other Zelda games, but the thrills that can be derived from it are just as large

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

A s a direct sequel to Wind Waker, a game that left off with Link and his ragtag pirate crew setting sail for uncharted waters, this installment also requires that you have sea legs. A good portion of this journey takes place on the salty blue, but unlike the previous offering, you won't have to pay attention to which way the wind is blowing or travel great expanses without anything happening.

In this new world, the seas are mighty treacherous. Creatures from the deep see you as a tasty snack, and rival pirates are certain there's a good stash of booty on your vessel. Whenever you shove off from shore, your cannon will be red hot by journey's end. The oceanic travel, which is used through the majority of this game, is mighty thrilling, and now boasts the adventurous spirit you have come to expect from Link's land-based explorations.

As much as you could see yourself spending days bouncing across waves and firing cannonballs at voracious squids, the best that Phantom Hourglass has to offer takes place on land. Link's quest may follow a familiar path, such as finding bombs, activating the Triforce, and saving the princess, but the gameplay and puzzles that unfold within it are unlike anything this series has offered before. This is largely due to the unique functionality that the Nintendo DS brings. The touchscreen handles movement and combat without a hitch, and is tapped to deliver puzzles and sequences that will leave you speechless.

Most of the challenges will require that you take notes, but not on a

notepad you have at your side. You can scribble anything you like on the game's map, which is always shown at the top of the screen. Like any pirate map, your notes will lead to buried treasures and hidden wonders. A carefully drawn line can also be used to lead you across an invisible path. Most of the dungeons are brimming with unique moments, but don't necessarily last long. You can usually fly through a dungeon in 20 minutes and tackle the boss without breaking a sweat. The dungeons deliver the fast-paced intensity found in A Link to the Past, but never really allow you to get stumped or think through the problems, as the solutions are clearly laid out before you.

The game also offers the most frustrating dungeon in Zelda history, and it all has to do with the relic known as the Phantom Hourglass. This item basically brings about a time-based challenge. As the sand drips through the glass, you must hustle through a stealth-heavy multi-floor maze. If you fail, you have to start from floor one again, and if you succeed, you'll eventually unlock the second, third, and fourth Hourglass challenges – all making you run through the same dungeon and puzzles over and over again. In the end, the Phantom Hourglass just brings frustration and unwanted repetition.

It may not live up to the lofty standards recently displayed in Twilight Princess, but this adventure is worthy of Zelda canon, and still has enough great stuff going for it to be considered one of the year's best adventures.—**REINER**

Second Opinion 9.5

There are very few franchises with a track record like Zelda. Phantom Hourglass is the riskiest venture yet for the franchise, as it completely abandons traditional controls and instead plays out entirely on the touch screen. The design choice pays off with an amazingly innovative and useable interface that sets a new standard for games on the DS. From jotting notes on your map to tracing paths for your boomerang, the action feels fast and smooth. The pace of the game zooms forward relentlessly – boss fights and dungeon puzzles zip by in a flash. It may be too quick-moving and easy for some players, but there's no denying the brilliance of the world design, where every few minutes brings a new challenge or game mechanic to master. I'm not a huge fan of the timed hourglass sections, but even those add something to the mix just by being a little different from everything else. The Legend of Zelda has a stellar reputation not just because of its roots in classic gaming, but also for its consistent quality. Phantom Hourglass continues the tradition; this isn't just one of the best DS titles yet released, it's one of the best games on any system so far this year.—**MILLER**

PSP
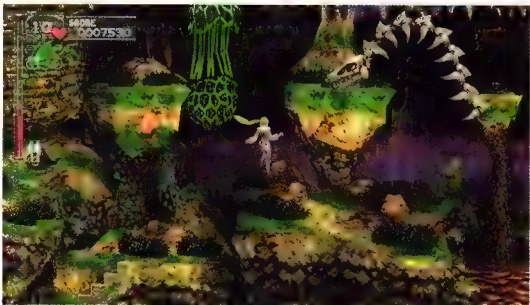
Castlevania:
The Dracula X Chronicles

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI
> RELEASE OCTOBER 23 > ESRB T

A GAMER SCORNED

I want to like The Dracula X Chronicles. I really do — Castlevania is easily one of my favorite series of all time, and this remake of a TurboGrafx-16 game that never came out in the U.S. is a fanboy dream. But I've grown up, and old-school punishing platforming can't hold my interest any more. You want to know why they don't make games like this any more? Because design has evolved, and having your will crushed by arbitrarily high difficulty levels isn't fun any more.

As a reinvented version of a 16-bit game, this looks quite nice on the PSP's sharp display, but it plays like nobody's greased the machinery since its original 1993 release. Richter and Maria walk obnoxiously slowly and don't have so much as a back-dash (which you may remember from Symphony of the Night) to avoid attacks with. Coupled with as unforgiving of a health meter as you've ever seen, the sheer amount of repetition involved in learning the stages is brutal. Of course, since you only have three lives before restarting at the beginning of the stage, you'll have plenty of time to practice the easy parts before dying repeatedly on the later bits.

That said, if you've somehow been able to retain your love of high-difficulty side-scrolling action, you'll love this. This isn't quite as inventive in its level design and boss fights as Super Castlevania IV, but it's an absolutely solid title with marginally branching level paths and two characters to choose from. Plus, if your skills are up to the task, you can unlock the original version as well as the full version of Symphony of the Night (we asked Konami, and were told that there is no secret code to unlock that superior title, unfortunately).—ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Remake the formerly Japan-only Rondo of Blood with new 3D graphics, and include an unlockable Symphony of the Night

> Graphics: Quite nice on all fronts, except that Richter moves like he's got a dump in his pants

> Sound: The score is sweet, but why does Dracula sound like a 15-year old dungeon master

> Playability: I'd forgotten how slowly you move in old-school Castlevania. It's really, really slow

> Entertainment: Old-school, hardcore gamers will love this. More modern tastes will not

> Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7.25

Given that this is essentially a remake of an early Castlevania, it comes as little surprise that Dracula X doesn't have the wow factor of more recent entries. The straight beginning-to-end level design at work here is never very interesting, and Richter struts like a rooster. The dark and gothic stylings are in full effect, from the backgrounds to the impressive boss fights. Faithfulness to the source material aside, I would have loved to see this first PSP Castlevania shine with the same depth and breadth of its DS cousins. Sadly, such is not the case.—MILLER

HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

Dragoneer's Aria

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC)
> PUBLISHER NIS AMERICA
> DEVELOPER H1 MAKER
> RELEASE AUGUST 21 > ESRB E10+
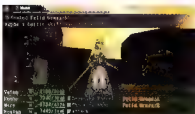
BOTTOM LINE 5.75

Of the various game genres, RPGs are the most likely to fall prey to the false delusion that ever more mechanics, each more convoluted and time-consuming than the last, must make for better gameplay. Sadly, this is exactly the rut into which Dragoneer's Aria falls, a relatively simple RPG made moderately unbearable by its slow pace and confused menus. It doesn't help that the game world is so generic, from the cookie-cutter story to the drab and overly familiar fantasy-themed environments. Battles take way too long, and some are poorly balanced, jumping from way too easy in one fight to almost certain death in another battle only steps away. The PSP needs more RPGs, but not like this. Not like this.—MILLER

PSP

Naruto: Ultimate
Ninja Heroes

> STYLE 1-PLAYING FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI
> DEVELOPER CYBER CONNECT 2
> RELEASE AUGUST 28 > ESRB T
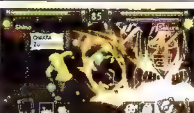
BOTTOM LINE 6.75

Ultimate Ninja Heroes features a slightly improved version of the shallow yet frenzied combat Naruto fans experienced on the PS2. The best addition is the Hero Mode, which lets you battle with a pre-set or customized team of characters, earning points to upgrade your favorite fighters. Of course, even with stat boosts, the 20 playable characters control almost identically. There's really only one attack button, which just illustrates the focus on crazy action versus satisfying combat. The wireless multiplayer is a nice inclusion (especially since only one player needs to have the game), but anyone who wants a fighter with any depth should look further than this portable fan service.—JOE

PSP

Hot PXL

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION
> PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER ZSLIDE
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 25 > ESRB T

BOTTOM LINE 6

Hot PXL (pronounced "wholesale WarioWare rip-off") offers over 120 bite-size microgames, 10 boss battles, and the ability for players to download another 80+ games from a website for play on the PSP. Some of these microgames, such as the one where you are tasked with popping zits on a woman's face before time expires, will bring out a chuckle or two, but most of them will have you saying "Wow, this gameplay is awful" or "Haven't I already played this minigame a dozen times already?" Even the retro-style graphics, which consist of nothing but pixels, somehow look junky when compared to games of old. If you buy a "Rolex" watch from a street vendor, you have a good idea of the quality that went into it. The same realization applies for this poorly handled clone.—REINER

NINTENDO DS

Worms Open
Warfare 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY (L.P TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS OR NINTENDO WI-FI CONNECTION) > PUBLISHER THQ
> DEVELOPER TWO TRIBES/ TEAM 17 SOFTWARE
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 5 > ESRB E10+
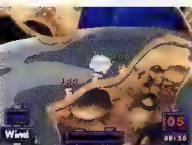
BOTTOM LINE 7.5

It's Worms! At first, I wanted to just leave those two words as my whole review. After all, that's pretty much all most people need to know about a Worms game. This is essentially the same game we have all been playing on PCs and consoles since 1994. The Worms formula has translated perfectly to the handheld here, but this entry feels a little less rushed than the last DS title did. The Campaign mode offers a little variety with slightly varied missions and even some boss battles, but if you've never liked Worms' brand of zany, artillery-heavy 2D action, well, not much has changed.—BEN

NINTENDO DS

Drawn to Life

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACT/ON/PLATFORM
> PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER 5TH CELL
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 10 > ESRB E

BOTTOM LINE 7

Half coloring book and half game, Drawn to Life is a charming (if limited) platformer that takes excellent advantage of the capabilities of the DS. The player is given the opportunity to draw various objects into the environment, where they become permanent fixtures of the game. These objects can be gorgeous pixilated art, or the most infantile, immature objects you can imagine. Guess which we did. No matter the anatomical details, your custom drawn hero will leap his way through a number of uninspired 2D levels, collecting coins and drawing color back into the world. However, your illustrative prowess doesn't affect gameplay, so in the end you're little more than a window dresser for what is otherwise a familiar retread.—MILLER

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For July 2007 Based On Units Sold

1 NCAA FOOTBALL 08 (360)

This morning the Top Ten section walked into our office gloating about how it got to play a bunch of awesome scary games this month. Well, we got news for you buddy: We're Charts – all we do is play games! Sometimes they're even awesome, and quite often they are scary. For example, one time while playing NCAA we almost accidentally played as Duke. We slept with the lights on that night.

2 GUITAR HERO ENCORE: ROCKS THE 80'S (PS2)

Our Guitar Hero horror story happened the day before Guitar Hero's release. We'd been stretching our hands for our big debut, but when we woke up that morning it turned out that prankster, Game Over, replaced our hands with scissors. We can no longer touch the ones we love without hurting them. The joke's on Game Over, though...we can shred a guitar like crazy now!

3 WII PLAY (Wii)

The scary thing about Wii Play is that it opens the door for marketing guys to get away with all kinds of stuff. Imagine it: If you can sell what is basically a tech demo just by packaging it with a Wii remote, then what can't you sell? We bet you could sell *William Shatner Covers the California Raisins* if it came with a Wii remote. Maybe Microsoft should start packaging a Wii remote with the Zune.

4 NCAA FOOTBALL 08 (PS2)

Oddly enough, since NCAA appeared twice on the top five charts, we just happen to have two scary moments related to the game. We had been playing it for several minutes when Bowser suddenly grew two stories tall and lit us on fire. Turns out we were actually playing Mario Strikers Charged. We don't really understand the difference between football and soccer. Isn't it called rugby in Europe?

5 MARIO PARTY 8 (Wii)

The truly scary part about Mario Party is that Nintendo keeps making them. We actually went over to Toad's house to kill the little fungus in hopes it would end the series, but we felt so bad for the guy that we couldn't go through with it. We hung out at his house for a while, he explained the plot of *Star Trek V* to us, and then fed us ice cream. Now he's one of those friends that you just can't get rid of. Terrifying.

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release
1	NCAA Football 08	N/A	360	8	07-07
2	Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the 80's	N/A	PS2	8.25	07-07
3	Wii Play	2	Wii	7	02-07
4	NCAA Football 08	N/A	PS2	8	07-07
5	Mario Party 8	1	Wii	7.25	05-07
6	NCAA Football 08	N/A	PS3	8	07-07
7	Pokémon Diamond	3	DS	8.25	04-07
8	Transformers: The Game	12	PS2	7.25	06-07
9	Guitar Hero II w/guitar	6	PS2	9	11-06
10	Guitar Hero II w/guitar	7	360	9.25	04-07
11	Pokémon Pearl	4	DS	8.25	04-07
12	Mario Strikers: Charged	N/A	Wii	7.25	07-07
13	Resident Evil 4	N/A	Wii	9.5	06-07
14	NASCAR 08	N/A	360	7.75	07-07
15	Ratatouille	N/A	DS	N/A	07-07
16	Transformers: Autobots	N/A	DS	N/A	06-07
17	New Super Mario Bros.	14	DS	9.25	05-06
18	Ninja Gaiden Sigma	N/A	360	9	07-07
19	All-Pro Football 2K8	N/A	360	8	07-07
20	Pokémon Battle Revolution	8	Wii	5.75	06-07

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	J-League Winning Eleven 2007: Club Championship	PS2
2	Mario Party 8	Wii
3	Hot Shots Golf 5	PS3
4	It's A Wonderful World	DS
5	The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	DS
6	Wii Sports	Wii
7	Wii Play	Wii
8	Adult DS Face Training	DS
9	New Super Mario Bros.	DS
10	DS Ganryoku (Medikara) Training	DS

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	... Mo.	System
1	Metroid Prime 3: Corruption	N/A	Wii
2	BioShock	1	360
3	The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	N/A	DS
4	World in Conflict	N/A	PC
5	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	N/A	360
6	Heavenly Sword	N/A	PS3
7	Stuntman Ignition	N/A	Multi
8	Picross DS	3	DS
9	The Darkness	5	360
10	My Sims	N/A	Wii
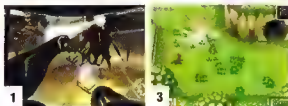
The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	World Of Warcraft	2	$22
2	World Of Warcraft: Burning Crusade	1	$37
3	The Sims 2 Deluxe	7	$37
4	The Sims 2 H&M Fashion Stuff	N/A	$20
5	The Sims 2 Seasons	5	$29
6	Nancy Drew: The White Wolf of Icicle Creek	N/A	$20
7	Harry Potter & The Order of the Phoenix	N/A	$20
8	Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars	3	$49
9	Transformers: The Game	N/A	$20
10	Battlefield 2142	N/A	$30

Based On Monthly Units Sold

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

REVIEWSARCHIVE

BioShock
⊗ Ⓟ

Taking On The Big Daddy

*By Bill Gardner, lead level designer, and Paul Hellquist, lead designer Irrational Games*

In order to survive BioShock and make it through Rapture in one piece, you're going to have to take on your share of the game's Big Daddies. No matter how l33t your shooter skills are, if you just run into every situation guns blazing, you're going to waste a lot of resources and find yourself making regular visits to the Vita-Chamber. Here are some great tips to help you avoid that.

GEAR UP
Your first order of business is probably the most obvious. Make sure you have the tools you'll need to both survive the fight and take down your bounty. Before you fire your first shot, make sure you have enough first aid kits, Eve hypos, and of course, ammunition. It's not wise to pick a fight unless you are near the stack limit on first aid kits.

PICK YOUR ARENA
Once you've built up your arsenal, you may be tempted to throw down with the first Big Daddy you see. However, I can't stress enough how important it is to carefully choose where you throw down your gauntlet. Take a look at your surroundings. Is there enough room? Are there any conveniently placed objects for you to take cover behind? Is there an exit route? It there a health station nearby? Your arena is key, as a fight can go sour pretty quickly if you
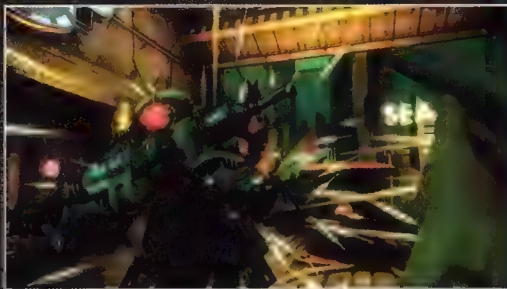
find yourself low on resources and trapped in a corner.

You should also make certain that you've cleared the area of any splicers or security that could be a problem if the fight with the Big Daddy takes an unexpected turn. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, are there any tools you can use to your advantage? If there are any gas tanks or oil barrels nearby, using Telekinesis to place them in a convenient spot is key. Hacking any nearby security systems is another good idea.

PLAN YOUR ATTACK
While having a diverse cache of weapons is always nice, you should always have a clear plan for what weapons, ammo, and Plasmids you'll use. Randomly toggling through your weapons and hurling as many bullets as possible is usually not the best approach. Remember that armor-piercing ammo is much more effective against Big Daddies. Don't worry if you're low on AP ammo though – it will more than compensate if you can utilize your Plasmids effectively.

While everyone has his or her personal preference on which Plasmids to use, I find it especially useful to always initiate combat with Incinerate. That way, no matter what you're doing, your target is always taking damage. Make certain that it stays aflame for the entire fight; the extra damage over time is going to make all the difference. Hitting a

guy with Incinerate multiple times also increases the rate of damage, so don't be afraid to hit them with Incinerate more than once.

Setting traps is also another good idea. Feel free to sprinkle the playing field with proximity grenades and trap bolts to taste. Remember, you should be the one setting up the terms and conditions of combat with a Big Daddy!

KEEP ON THE MOVE
It doesn't matter if you're taking on Rosie or an Elite Bouncer – you should never be standing still. When fighting Rosie in particular, make sure to always reload while behind cover.

HITTING PAYDIRT
Once you've felled your foe, take a deep breath and collect your prize. As the Adam counter spins out of control with limitless promise of upgrades, try to remain rational. When you enter a Gatherer's Garden you often feel like a kid in a candy store. Take your time and choose wisely. While there are no real bad choices, it's important to select Plasmids and Gene Tonics that match your style of play. If you find yourself using Incinerate often, keep an eye out for a complimentary tonic like Human Inferno.

Experiment! The more you play around with different combinations, the more likely you'll find a unique character "build" to brag to your friends about and crack some splicer skulls.

RESEARCH
BioShock's research system is not only a fun and immersive way to improve your combat stats and maximize your damage against targets, but some of the best tonics and abilities can only be attained through Research. Without getting into the specifics of what they are, it's more than worth the risk to take photos of your targets whenever possible. The best time to whip out your camera is when you get the drop on a target and have not yet been spotted. Then creep up and snap away.

Using Enrage allows you to get shots of the enemy fighting, giving an "action bonus," and will usually have more than one enemy in the shot also awarding the "multiple subject bonus." This is the best way to get the "A" photos, which get you the most points.

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!

MULTI-SYSTEM

Surf's Up
> PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, Wii

Enter these codes by going to the Cheat Codes section under the Extras menu to get these unlockables.

Unlock All Boards – MYPRECIOUS
Unlock All Leaf Sliding Locations – GOINGDOWN
Unlock All Multiplayer Levels – MULTIPASS
Unlock Arnold – TINYBUTSTRONG
Unlock Art Galleries – NICEPLACE
Unlock Astral board – ASTRAL
Unlock Bonus Missions Legendary Wave & Pen Gu North – DONTFALL
Unlock Character Customization – TOPFASHION
Unlock Elliot – SURPRISEGUEST
Unlock Every Locale – FREEVISIT
Unlock Geek – SLOWANDSTEADY
Unlock Monsoon Board – MONSOON
Unlock Tank Evans – IMTHEBEST
Unlock Tatsuhi Kobayashi – KOBAYASHI
Unlock Tiny Shockwave Board – TINYSHOCKWAVE
Unlock Video Galleries – WATCHAMOVIE
Unlock Zeke Topanga – THELEGEND

"GI Droid" (location unknown – last seen egging trick-or-treaters in Washington)

UNLIMITED ENABLED
XBOX 360

All-Pro Football 2K8

All-Pro Football has a pretty deep uniform creator, but would you rather just cut to the chase and make your favorite team's jersey? In the Edit Uniform menu press Y and then enter the code for your favorite team. A USB keyboard will be your friend here. Check out the complete list online.

Arizona Cardinals – xtuyawXALevEC47XV2 Qj6fW9oXPaH8rG9vhHWNspozwV9YDgpLMk 37MuX34f8ZwvZd

Atlanta Falcons – WajF9bpKCwn9px9pm7L LXXpXpeZ2VtTd8FU323gHKwcv2cTpAz2dWV Whi8uX7GWocc

**Baltimore Ravens** – sAY5w8WiXWF8ySFeDv dpUH5nZ2aN5wTmyKMsV38tzMmxjF7YdwhY MVhX4SNNpcczZd

Code of the Month

Guitar Hero Encore:
Rocks the 80's

Guitar Hero III and Rock Band are just around the corner, so its time to finish off that copy of Guitar Hero Encore. Test your skill with Hyper Mode's 1.5x speed or remove the HUD and track with Practice Mode for a real challenge. Then again you could just have fun with the other crazy modes. Enter these codes quickly at the main menu screen.
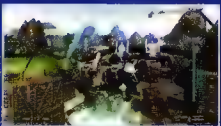
Air Guitar – Y,B,Y,O,B,B
Eyeball Head Crowd – Y,B,O,O,O,B,Y
Flaming Head – Y,O,Y,O,Y,O,B,O
Practice Mode – B,B,O,Y,Y,B,O,B
Horse Head – B,O,O,B,Y,B,O,O,B,Y
Hyper Speed – Y,B,O,O,B,Y,Y,O
Monkey Head Crowd – B,B,O,Y,B,B,O,Y
Unlock Everything – B,O,Y,R,O,Y,B,Y,R,Y, B,Y,R,Y,B,Y

Ted Johnson
Miami, FL

Xbox Live Arcade Spotlight
War World
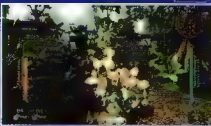
Ubisoft has a brand new game they'll be bringing to Xbox Live Arcade in the near future, a sprawling third-person shooter filled with more mechs and weaponry than you can shake an armored, robotic fist at. The single player component will include 100 levels, each playable on five separate difficulty settings. However, the real fun looks like it'll come from the eight-player multiplayer matches you'll engage in across Xbox Live. Each of the 16 playable mech suits will boast their own special abilities, ranging from super speed to stealth invisibility to shield technology. This is on top of all sorts of mounted weaponry like miniguns, lasers, mortars, and minelaunchers. The chance to blow up your buddy and his giant robot might be enough for most of us, but Ubisoft has also been kind enough to include some pretty hefty tech work on the game - somewhere between the specular lighting and the volumetric explosions, they've managed the remarkable task of making War World look like a pleasant place to go visit.

Buffalo Bills – cztFTjng7q3F9dZlFWumKS uNLgVorbUB4F6eGrNpoPohF6Mc6HnuPePV 7WL9xK8Vec

Carolina Panthers – fdytRmDRxfoKftw8eL RXH4rBNWL2AerTGiv5tUf8hC26kV7cMRj7t2 2Z6tLhwDksc

Chicago Bears – sDZUEpqsPeJpP8weh5Au qxbsKjCuqBuWXKN9ktjcDyJKdTS8abHYWTJx GhGsQjered

Cincinnati Bengals – czpDtbUasqRGWA8f wYXGFja3furTTkCD64uNiog8oZZX3TfPKx5zx hF2efgKafstrc

Cleveland Browns – 5PtsHgMB4uQp7VHbX GeG65YhC7bGd6uev5ypcVWbmsWadUe3AP RPoWNnDvKVBek UGd

Dallas Cowboys – SUwN9tEswaY3j6fvLDX RVzxvbSrHd5BDLCeoNV9frYFbnakFFGuZMG CuWnSPtSufd

Denver Broncos – 2xMJPf9tmZX8FJ99777 qph2EdmHiNXvoUisSno2MB7jzDrtGxdrhQQ DsUxgLWtkrc

Detroit Lions – C5GGtipzBgKvpSwHQPyHi g3P5HFweVGpAAsrBJRcHAqbAsjtG54hhDW 6mbhrBd

Green Bay Packers – gNbTheMiey98jNz2R T3jjLyoiNhDhz7snbXekjUVsiDz8MCpcQNqQn qM6i3ZNWorBd

Houston Texans – KgD8gVTSMCwUTWiHsu WKevRBThh7mwWRiqhrqCseLaMfNLdZ2CFJ9 KE8JAdpQD2WEc

Indianapolis Colts – igwKkStreWhCkjSEiy2 0jP5o2tkdffzWbaqwAXrNJb7wzuLVtABwmC9 4eVhiCWorBd

Jacksonville Jaguars – crw99zZQuqdkv2Vd Qc6CSPDCSWp5MHoXKyidTXLAkCey4cihJG2 9QLVtTRNtjK6frd

Kansas City Chiefs – wtmJxZGfyWiNY5nfJb vtGATuWkTo8aJ9Nf2ine7VPUpNwkECCx6Cky aD6PhKi7o6yc

Miami Dolphins – PniVZF26fcDgzjik9MAsz e3o5WevACfai4yTVQgBRN5yLFzdCtAWHXie q2AEMxATcd
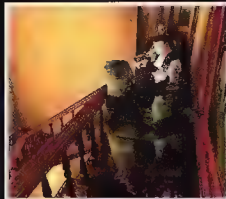
ENTER THE SURVIVAL HORROR...
A RESIDENT EVIL RETROSPECTIVE

Resident Evil is a multi-million dollar franchise; the original and its offspring of more than a dozen sequels, spin-offs, and remakes have received multiple awards and honors over the last decade and sold more than 31 million units – making it Capcom's largest franchise. Add to that canon a host of books, movies, comics, and a plethora of action figures and other paraphernalia, and you have a marketing giant that even Hollywood could respect. But if you rewind more than 11 years, Resident Evil was just a game – a game that helped usher in 3D gameplay and nearly single-handedly established a genre. Come with us as we take a look back and remember why the original Resident Evil is one of the most important games of all time.

EVIL'S FATHERS

Similar to what Doom did for first-person shooters, Resident Evil put survival horror on the map. After having worked on a string of Disney licensed games, Resident Evil creator Shinji Mikami was tasked by Capcom's research and development department to create something very different: a horror-themed game. Mikami quickly turned to another, much older, Capcom game for inspiration. Sweet Home, released in December of 1989 for the Famicom (Japan's version of the NES), was a horror RPG. Many of the elements in Resident Evil, such as the Victorian mansion setting and the opening door loading screen, can clearly be traced back to Sweet Home. Even the name Resident Evil may come from a note in Sweet Home that reads, "House of Residing Evil." But games weren't the only inspiration during Resident Evil's early development. Initially, it was conceived that the mansion would be infested with spectral ghost-like creatures. Mikami hoped for something a little more visceral in his game, and looked to George A. Romero's Living Dead movie series to supply a different kind of monster: the zombie.
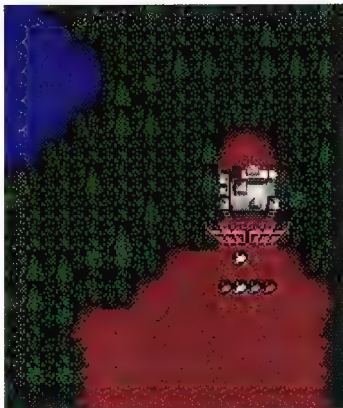
■ Sweet Home

THE GAME THAT COINED THE GENRE

Though there were a few games to come out before Resident Evil that are now considered survival horror titles – such as Alone in the Dark and the Japan-only Clock Tower for the Super Famicom – the phrase wasn't initially used to describe them. In fact, the term "survival horror" was cooked up by Capcom's marketing team, who hoped to play up the elements of survival in its game. The phrase appeared for the first time on the Japanese case of the original, Resident Evil.

EVIL'S OTHER NAME

Many Resident Evil fans probably already know that it was given that name when it came to America, and that in Japan the series is called Biohazard. But, they may not know that the name wasn't the only edit that first game received. Due to Sony Computer Entertainment of America's censorship standards, many of the more violent FMV sequences - and scenes like the one where Chris smokes a ciga-

rette – were cut from the U.S. release. In addition, a few things were removed to increase difficulty and make the game harder to complete on a single rental. The number of ink ribbon saves was reduced and the Japanese auto-aiming feature was disabled.

RESIDENT EVIL 1.1 & 1.2 &...

Resident Evil might be one of the most re-released games in videogame history. Here is a quick breakdown of the different versions and what they had to offer.

RESIDENT EVIL: SEGA SATURN
AUGUST 1997
More than a year after the PSone original, the Saturn version finally gave Sega fans a scare. This version came with an unlockable battle minigame as well as exclusive enemies and outfits for Chris and Jill.

RESIDENT EVIL: DIRECTOR'S CUT | PSONE
SEPTEMBER 1997
Released in order to appease fans after the delay of the sequel, this version featured an Arranged mode (where items and enemies were rearranged), an easy mode, and exclusive new outfits. This version created a bit of a stir when the extra FMV footage (originally left out of the game and intended to be included in the Director's Cut) was again cut out at the last minute. This version was re-re-released a few months later as the Dual Shock Version, which added analog and rumble support.

RESIDENT EVIL | GAMECUBE | MAY 2002
Technically a remake, the GameCube version featured all new graphics and sound. The premise and game mechanics stayed largely the same, but most of the puzzles were reworked. There were some brand new environments, and a few new gameplay elements were added. This is the best version by far, and a great way for those who never experienced the original to go back.

RESIDENT EVIL: DEADLY SILENCE
NINTENDO DS | 2006
Made to commemorate the series' tenth anniversary, Deadly Silence featured a full version of the original game as well as a Rebirth Mode, which added new puzzles that took advantage of the DS hardware.

This Month In Gaming History

In October of 1993, the doomed 3DO system was released in North America. Technically superior to every other console on the market at the time, it received some fanfare during its launch. But due to its lofty $699.95 price tag and poor software support, the system tanked quickly in a slightly bloated market. Interestingly, the 3DO company only produced specifications for its system, then licensed off the rights to manufacture the actual machine to several different companies — a practice not popular today.

FIRST-HAND REFLECTIONS

Hiroyuki Kobayashi is recognizable as the producer for Resident Evil 4 and Devil May Cry 4, but his first job at Capcom was working as a programmer as part of the 100-man team that created the first Resident Evil. We tapped Kobayashi this month for a few of his thoughts on what the nearly four years of development were like.

"The head of research and development at the time had instructed the director of Resident Evil, Shinji Mikami, to create a game where you could see its quality from a single glance." Kobayashi told us. "Our goal was to bring high quality to even the smallest details of the game, while bringing horror and gaming together. I think that the worldwide success of the series means we accomplished our goal."
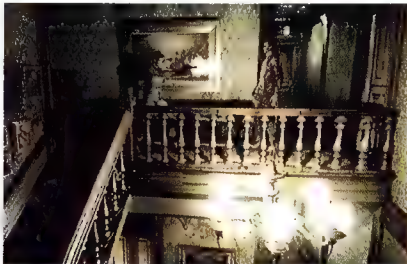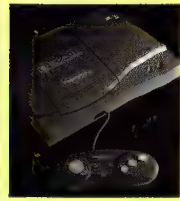
There was a lot of work to be done before that goal was realized, and Resident Evil went through several changes during that time. The game was originally planned as a first-person shooter, but the team wrestled with whether or not this was the right decision. "We experimented with changing to a third-person perspective and found that we could ratchet up the fear players felt within the game. The results of this experiment made the change permanent," said Kobayashi. The team obviously knew what they were doing, since the core Resident Evil titles have gone on to make history and sell millions while its first-person spin-offs – Resident Evil:

Survivor and Resident Evil: Dead Aim – have been uniformly panned by critics.

The original Resident Evil wasn't without its flaws, however. Kobayashi tells us how people like to criticize the game's tank-like controls, but insists that "the controls were intentionally crafted to elicit fear from the player. For a game with a third-person perspective, we felt that the radio-controlled car-like controls fit the game best." Even the game's cheesy B-grade voice acting seems a little more forgivable after Kobayashi told us, "When we recorded voice for Resident Evil, we did not have a high level of know-how for recording English voice and thus used voice actors living in Japan. Unfortunately, it seems the voice actors we used weren't very skilled."

In March of 1996, Resident Evil released in Japan and the U.S. on the PSone, eventually selling more than 2.5 million units. We asked Kobayashi if he ever thought the game would be such a phenomenon, and his response was almost humble, but not very surprising. "I never imagined it was going to be as big a hit as it became, but I was confident that we had made a good game. I think Resident Evil is one of the titles that marked a turning point in gaming. It is a title that has even changed many of the development team members' lives." ■ ■ ■

SNES
DOUBLE DRAGON V: THE SHADOW FALLS

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER TRADEWEST > DEVELOPER LELAND INTERACTIVE MEDIA
> RELEASE 1994

This abomination first appeared back in the Double Dragon media heyday. The Lee brothers were riding high on a horrible live-action movie and a disastrous animated show, the latter of which this game is based on. Hoping to capitalize on the fighting craze of the early '90s, Tradewest decided to forego the series' beat 'em up roots in an attempt to rip off Street Fighter. You can control 12 different losers in your quest to stop the Shadow Master from releasing the Shadow Plague, or you can just try to be his best friend. Combat is poorly animated and most of the moves are shamelessly ripped off from other fighting games – never mind the fact that you can beat the game by mashing hard punch continuously. Battles take place in such glamorous locations as an auto repair shop, chemical factory, and the sewer. Perhaps the only good parts about DD V are the post-fight dis screens ("The code of the dragon says… uh… I forgot" – Jimmy Lee) and the dossiers (Jawbreaker is a master of "Chew-Zit-Tsu" and hails from Des Moines).

NOW 2.5
**THEN** 5.75*
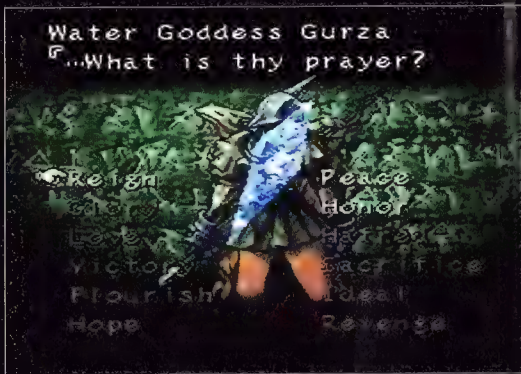
PSONE
TACTICS OGRE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER ATLUS > DEVELOPER QUEST > RELEASE 1997

A 16-bit game that was ported to PSone by Atlus for its North American release, Tactics Ogre set many of the standards that strategy/RPGs uphold to this day. A rich tapestry of support abilities and counters between character classes makes combat a joy to take part in – though units felled in battle die permanently, so completionists will find themselves reloading often. The complex political plotline branches at a few points depending on player's decisions, and weaves a tale that compares favorably to greats like Final Fantasy X. The expertly crafted strategic gameplay, heavy RPG-style customization, and outstanding story make Tactics Ogre a superlative effort. Even decidedly low-tech (even for its time) graphics and sound can't spoil this gem. It might even be easier to get into the game now, since players won't be expecting anything cutting-edge out of the PSone. Fun trivia fact: After making Tactics Ogre, key members of the team left to join Squaresoft and set to work making Final Fantasy Tactics.

NOW 8.5
THEN 8*
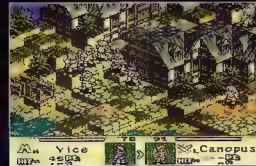
NES
BASE WARS

> STYLE 1 OR 2 PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS > PUBLISHER ULTRA GAMES > DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE 1991

In the 24th century, when baseball players become too much of a risk due to their steroids habits and high contract demands, the owners finally make the roster decision we all can agree on: replace the troublesome "athletes" with robots. This is the brilliant premise behind Base Wars, a game that allows you to customize your roster of metallic Mickey Mantles with weapons like swords and guns in case things get rough on the base paths. In Base Wars, ties don't go to the runner; they go to the robot that survives the deathmatch. Outside of the base combat, gameplay is reminiscent of hardball classics like Baseball Stars and RBI Baseball, but the fielding is severely hindered by twitchy controls and a poor camera, the base running AI is a joke, and the batting is ultimately too unpredictable. To our dismay, the idea of robots hitting home runs and incinerating each other at first base has aged better than the actual game.

NOW 6.25
THEN N/A

UNLIMITED LAUNCH: SEPT 18

DEAD SPACE

Open your airlocks to check out more exclusive screenshots of EA's promising take on survival horror in space.

Fear The Sequel
Alma is back, and she's still not feeling the love. View more freaky screenshots and concept art from Monolith's sequel to F.E.A.R., Project Origin.

Can Lost Find Its Way?
Can ABC's hit television series survive the transition to video game? Ben spoke with Nicolas Eypert, the creative director in charge of the project, to find out.

Skol Vikings!
Creative Assembly owned the battle-field with its Total War series. Now the talented team is tackling the action genre with its Nordic adventure, Viking: Battle of Asgard. Read more of our interview with the developer about its next conquest.

Men in Tights
Are you in need of another back-breaking suplex? Then check out our extended interview with Midway about its upcoming grappler, TNA Impact.

School of Rock
View our high-res images of each of the Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock guitars (including the Wii) to see which axe matches your rocking the best.

Highway to Hell
Gearbox president Randy Pitchford lays out the war plans for Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway in our exclusive Q&A.

ALSO ONLINE THIS MONTH:

Game Informer Online uses its frequent flyer miles to travel to the Land of the Rising Sun. Our money is on Billy getting thrown out of the ninja school and seeking revenge by challenging his sensei to a Virtua Fighter 5 match at the Tokyo Game Show.

GAMEOVER

The Pre-Season Is Over. Advance To The Regular Season?

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Video game characters have it lucky. They've managed to secure cushy jobs jumping and shooting their way through the adventures that play out on your TV. Pass a couple levels and then they go home to their fancy mansions to party with the other stars. They don't realize how good they have it. Take the following quiz to learn what some of the video game greats would be doing if they hadn't hit it big on the little screen.

1 Wing Commander is one of the only places other than Star Wars to catch the acting talents of the inimitable Mark Hamill. He was particularly great in Wing Commander III. What was its subtitle?

A. Eye of the Tiger
B. The Tiger's Maw
C. Heart of the Tiger
D. Tiger Sex

2 Bomberman is a busy little guy. He's shown up on all sorts of gaming systems in the many years since his first game in 1989. Which of these consoles never saw a Bomberman release?

A. Sega Dreamcast
B. Sega Game Gear
C. TurboGrafx-16
D. Nintendo GameCube

3 Balls of Steel was actually a game. It came out for PC in 1997. We thought you'd want to know. It included a themed pinball board starring which video game hero?

A. Bionic Commando
B. Solid Snake
C. Alex Kidd
D. Duke Nukem

4 The original Diablo was the first in a string of games that would imitate it. What class couldn't you pick at the beginning of the game?

A. Warrior
B. Rogue
C. Necromancer
D. Sorcerer

5 Liquid Snake is a pretty awesome archenemy for Solid Snake, given that they're cut from the same genetic cloth. Which game didn't feature Liquid in some form?

A. Metal Gear Solid
B. Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty
C. Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater
D. Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes

6 Did you ever play Actraiser? Yeah, that was pretty sweet, what with the protecting your people and taking over the big statue and all. What did your subjects call you in that game?

A. The Master
B. Your Majesty
C. Overlord
D. Mr. Snookems

7 Sure, it never garnered the love that Final Fantasy did, but SaGa Frontier wasn't that bad. Do you remember how many different character storylines you played through in that game?

A. Three
B. Five
C. Seven
D. Nine

8 Nightmare Creatures might not have been the best game ever made, but it certainly stood apart from its contemporaries, with its strange gothic themes and bloody fights. What city was the game set in?

A. Rome
B. Paris
C. New York
D. London

9 Donkey Kong Country had an interesting progression of protagonists. Which Kong was never one of the main playable characters in a Donkey Kong Country game?

A. Dixie Kong
B. Diddy Kong
C. Kiddy Kong
D. Cranky Kong

10 What page of this issue of Game Informer includes the words "Seedy Underbelly"?

A. 10
B. 36
C. 14
D. 73

BREAKDOWN

500 million The number of dollars MTV has devoted to spending on its game sector in the next two years. For those not paying attention, these are the guys in charge of Rock Band's downloadable content

2 The number of warnings Atari has received in recent months about its potential delisting from the NASDAQ. Translation: It isn't doing so hot

34% of adult users are playing casual games online, a recent study found. In comparison, only 29% use social networking sites

1 million The low-end estimates on how many copies of Halo 3 have been pre-ordered as of the time of this writing

4 The number of Pokémon figures we just hid on Joe's desk

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★
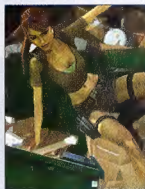
0-1:
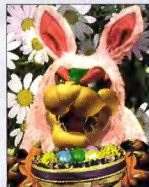Lara Croft, Dumpster Raider

2-3:
Marcus Fenix, Paperboy

4-5:
Judy Nails, Receptionist Hero

6-7:
Goro, Burger Flipper

8-9:
Kasumi, Bearded Lady

10:
Bowser, Easter Bunny Lookalike

Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. C 2. B 3. D 4. C 5. C 6. A 7. C 8. D 9. D 10. C

bodybymilk.com

Mind by Masi.
Body by milk.

My hero? Think hard.
It's milk. Some studies suggest
teens who choose it instead
of sugary drinks tend to
be leaner, plus the protein
helps build muscle.
So grab a glass. Then you can
change the future, too.

got milk?

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