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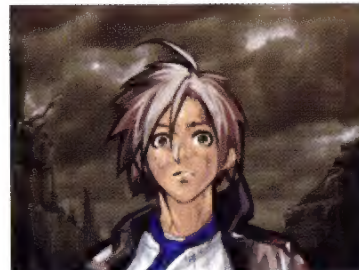


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ADVANCE WARS

DAYS OF RUIN



"FEATURES LIKE WI-FI PLAY WITH VOICE CHAT, AND MAP CREATION AND SHARING REMAKE THE TITLE WHILE KEEPING ITS ADDICTIVE STRATEGY GAMEPLAY."

- JOYSTIQ.COM

"ADVANCE WARS: DAYS OF RUIN LOOKS TO BE THE MOST EXCITING ENTRY IN THE SERIES SINCE ITS INTRODUCTION. ANY FANS OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS SHOULD FIND AN INCREDIBLE NEW DEPTH WITH THE TITLE, AS WELL AS THE MATURITY THAT A GAME ABOUT WAR SHOULD HAVE."

- UGO.COM

"IT MAY BE A BIG CHANGE, BUT ADVANCE WARS: DAYS OF RUIN IS A WELCOME ADDITION TO THE SERIES AND ONE THAT SHOULD BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO THE GAME."

- KOTAKU.COM

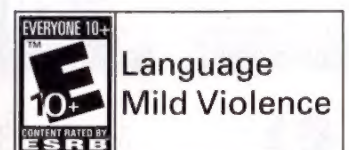
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HUNTING SEASON OPENS 2.05.08



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The "Life Goes On After The Holidays" Issue



cover story

50 RESISTANCE 2

The follow-up to last year's breakout PS3 launch title takes the fight for mankind's survival to a new epic level. Get the details about what makes Resistance 2 one of the biggest shooters we've ever seen. Eight-player co-op. Sixty-player online matches. Towering building-sized enemies. The entire U.S. of A. as the battleground. What more could you want? Flip to page 50 for the full story.

features



THE ART OF MULTIPLAYER

A quality multiplayer map is like a finely tuned watch – an intricate piece of machinery whose myriad parts produce one thing: entertainment for the players. Call of Duty 4's Todd Alderman explains what just what those parts are.



WII IN 2008

Everybody loves Mario, but a system cannot survive on plumbers alone. We scoured the industry to find out what 2008 has in store for Nintendo's phenomenon, and we think you'll agree that the future looks good for Wii gamers.



LEGO INDIANA JONES

Harrison Ford is returning to the role, but that's not the only thing awaiting Indy fans. Check out our extensive coverage of the most adorable treasure hunter in gaming, since that one photo of Mr. Ford with the fedora is getting a little tattered these days.

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The end...or is it?

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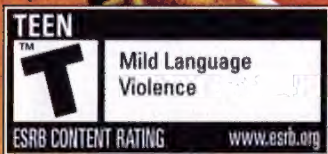


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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



PREVIOUSLY ON...

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I don't know about you, but I watch a fair amount of TV and movies in the few hours that aren't spent playing games. There are thousands of things video games do better than both mediums in my book, but at the same time, there is a lot video games could learn from these passive mediums.

The obvious thing that games could learn from Hollywood is how to tell stories and develop characters. Not only is this a no-brainer statement, I think this is something that the game industry has done a wonderful job addressing. This year alone we saw some spectacular releases that really forced people to think, and we have literally watched game developers master the craft of storytelling over the past few years. I expect they will continue to do so in the years to come (for more on this, please read Miller's fantastic write-up on complex themes in gaming on pg. 46).

But back to our regularly scheduled programming. The big thing I think games are missing right now is something so obvious and easy, I'm surprised it's not already a common practice. The classic television series recap at the beginning of a show has helped my entertainment-riddled brain more than once. Who doesn't love a good "previously on..." quick recap before you sit down for some quality time on the couch?

Sometimes it takes up to two or three years for the sequel to a game to come out. In that period, I'll have played and watched thousands of different things, yet games don't consistently offer quick and easy recaps to make sure you are up to date for the plot twists to come. Imagine how confusing the TV show *Lost* would be without a minor update of past storylines that are relevant to the episode you are about to watch.

Sure, if you have the time, replaying the original game is a great idea, but not everyone in the world has enough time to do this for all the games that hit the streets. It also makes it possible for people who missed the original game to have the ability to join into a series mid-stride, making it easier for some of the longer-standing series (in particular RPGs) to get new or casual gamers into their products.

Story and character development is the future of gaming, and this simple advancement in game presentation would make sure that every gamer has a chance to enjoy a game even if they showed up late to the party. I'm looking at you, Metal Gear Solid, mother of all confusing story lines.

Cheers,

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Model Down, The New Pornographers, Portal's "Still Alive" (I Can't Stop Listening To This Song For Some Odd Reason), Also Give Me Led Zepplin, Silversun Pickups, And Green Day On GH III Or Rock Band, Please (Or Both) **Dislikes:** People Who Use Avatar (Looks Squarely At Miller) To Inflate Their Gamer Scores, People Who Didn't Buy And Play Uncharted But Own A PlayStation 3, Heroes Season 2 (Which Sucked), That Annoying Fox Football Robot **Current Favorite Games:** Assassin's Creed, Mass Effect, Ratchet & Clank: Tools Of Destruction, Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, Rock Band



Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** My New Year's Resolution (Play More Games... Ignore Family To Do So), *Stargate: The Ark Of Truth*, The Cubs Getting Their Man (Welcome, Fukudome!) **Dislikes:** Spending A King's Ransom On Rock Band Downloads (There Goes My CD/iTunes Budget), Wii Fit Not Making Me Look Like He-Man, The Sad State Of TV For 2008 **Current Favorite Games:** Culdcept Saga (I'm An Addict), Mass Effect, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Devil May Cry 4, Burnout Paradise



Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Nick Drake - *Fruit Tree Vinyl Boxset*, *Freaks And Geeks* (Such A Great Show), Cooking, How Fun This Football Season Has Been, The Resurgent Vikings, Regular Michelob In The Brown Bottles (Most Underrated Beer) **Dislikes:** How Wimpy I Am About Cold Weather This Year, Possibly Having To Wear Man Sandals (I Don't Know How Billy And Adam Live Like That), Changing Flat Tires In Winter **Current Favorite Games:** Mass Effect, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, Burnout Paradise, WordJong



Kato >> kato@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Getting To Play Hockey At The Xcel Energy Center - Home Of The Minnesota Wild, "The Draize Train," *The Extras* Christmas Special **Dislikes:** Daft Punk (And/Or Anything With A Vocorder), Disney, Online Petitions, The Urge To Re-Record My Entire Record Collection, Bobby Petrino **Current Favorite Games:** Burnout Paradise, NHL 08, Mass Effect, Race Driver: Grid



Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Leveling Up My PhpBB Admin Skills, Google Documents, Avoiding Nasty Weather By Spending All My Free Time Playing Games, *Farscape*, Crushing News On Pubbie Servers **Dislikes:** Wrestling With Rock Band Over Xbox Live Profiles And Calibration Settings, WordJong Having Less Of A Vocabulary Than I Do, Sick Cats, Sports "Personalities" **Current Favorite Games:** Unreal Tournament 3, World Of Warcraft, WordJong, Platinum Sudoku (Best \$6 Cell Phone Game Ever)



Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Downloading Crappy Free Gamer Pictures To Friends' 360s (You Are Now A Yaris), *Survivor* By Chuck Palahniuk, Wrex, The Minnesota Rollergrils **Dislikes:** The Long Road To New Dexter, Kaidan (He's Even Worse Than Carth!), Netflix's Inability To Send Me 24 Fast Enough, Smug TV Newscasters **Current Favorite Games:** Mass Effect, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, LEGO Indiana Jones, Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney, Lost Odyssey, Street Fighter IV



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Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** Joseph Angela Juba (I'm Sure There Is No Relation To Joe), *Reaper* (Too Bad It's Off The Air Already), Big Real Christmas Trees **Dislikes:** Leeann Chin (You've Had Your Second Chance - Now I'm Done With You), Calibrating For Lag In Rock Band, Changing Movie Endings From The Book To Be More User-Friendly (Hint: Asriel Is Not As Nice As He Seems) **Current Favorite Games:** Resistance 2, Rock Band, Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock, Mass Effect, Assassin's Creed, My Word Coach



Bertz >> mattbertz@gameinformer.com

Handle: Lord Gamington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** The Purple Jesus-led Playoff Push, *Dexter*, Weekly Rock Band Downloadable Content, *Juno*, LTP: *A Song Of Ice And Fire*, The Black Lips - *Good Bad Not Evil* **Dislikes:** Windows Vista (What A Travesty), The Volkswagen Jetta (Why Is Something Small And Expensive Always Breaking?), David Milch (Abandoning *Deadwood* Should Be A Punishable Offense), The New Wide And Ugly iPod Nano **Current Favorite Games:** Rock Band, Crisis, Half-Life 2: Episode Two, Mass Effect, NHL 08



Ben >> ben@gameinformer.com

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Anticipating *Indiana Jones And The Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull*, *Live Free Or Die Hard* (Why Didn't I Go See That In The Theater?) **Dislikes:** Losing Sleep Because Of All The Time I Spent Playing With Laptops, Cars That Break Down Seven Times A Year **Current Favorite Games:** Mass Effect, Assassin's Creed, Rock Band, Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass



Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Rhythm **Interests:** *The Extras* Finale Special, Band Of Horses - *Cease To Begin*, *The Proposition*, The Constant Replenishing Of Tasty Holiday Snacks Around The Office, The Next Rock Band DLC Schedule **Dislikes:** Several Things About *The Golden Compass* Movie Adaptation (But It's Still Okay-ish), Holiday Shopping, Wii Fit Giving My Mia A Belly That Doesn't Exist In Real Life **Current Favorite Games:** The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass, Patapon, Wii Fit, Rock Band, Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney

GAMEINFORMER

FEBRUARY 2008
Volume XVII • Number 2 • Issue 178

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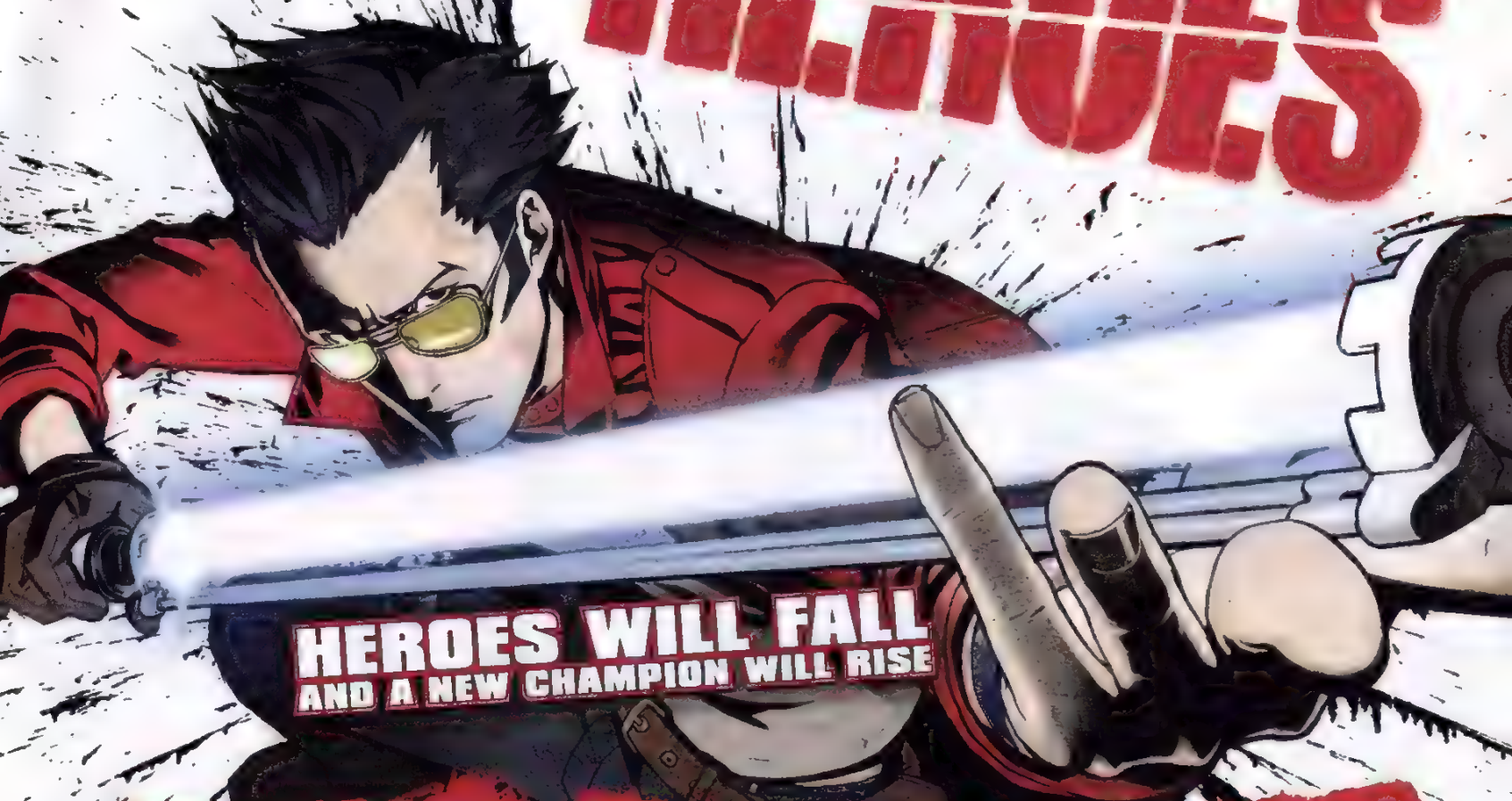
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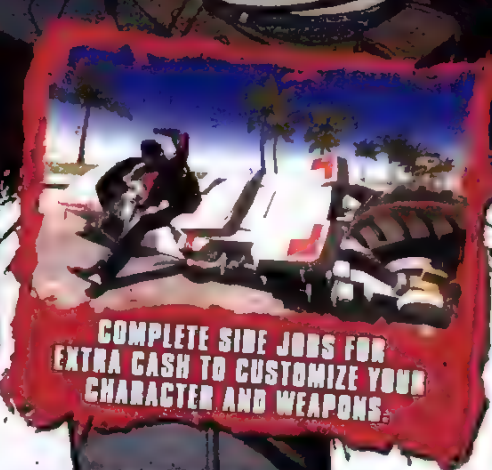
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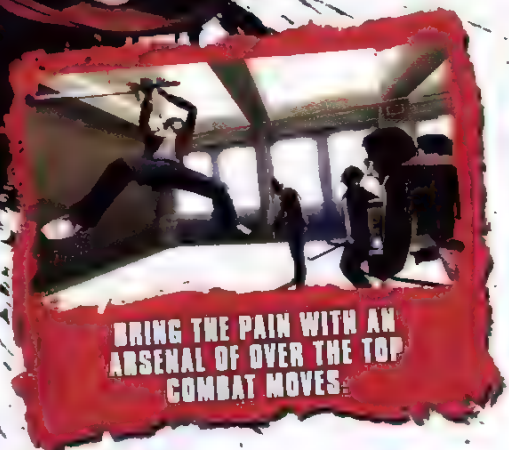
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GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



8



1



2



7

1 Tali Fischer and Omar Woodley of Sega teach Ben how to shake his groove thing 2 Just two hours at Game Informer, and Billy and Ben have already turned Hudson's John Lee and Mike Pepe toward a life of crime. It used to only take an hour; we're getting soft around here 3/3A These red-clad cocks caused quite a stir at the Spike TV Awards when they disrupted the presentation for Game of the Year. GI Spy knows their identity but we'll never tell. Stop snitchin' 4 Ex-GI homie Jeremy Zoss of Destineer Studios reunites with Miller and Reiner for a wallet-busting comic run 5 Minneapolis made history on December 8 when it was home to the Monster Jam debut of the new Donkey Kong-themed monster truck. And Europeans say America doesn't have culture! 6 Everyone's ether going crazy or...sleeping. From left to right: Reiner, Bertz, Joe, Eidos's Jennie Sue, Miller, and Eidos's Stanley Phan 7 Frank DeLise, general manager of Kaos Studios (Frontlines: Fuel of War) and THQ's Ben Collier pose in front of GI's prize possession, our new TV! it's so dreamy... 8 Anarchy! Smash the System! No WTO! Subvert the Dominant Paradigm! Well-Behaved Women Rarely Make History! That's probably what Bryan and Atari's Todd Slepian and Alissa Bell were saying when they took this picture. We don't know, we were shopping at Wal-Mart at the time



3

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6



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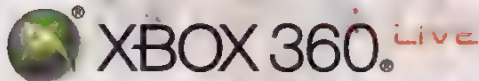
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THE QUESTION

What is your pick for the 2007 Game of the Year?

Mass Effect. It's an incredible experience that is hard to put into words. BioWare has outdone itself this time in creating a universe from scratch that rivals the Star Wars universe

Cheech11

Super Mario Galaxy. This is an exceptional example of the running-on-all-cylinders platforming I've come to expect from Nintendo. The wait was long, but let's face it: If Nintendo doesn't deliver this experience, nobody does.

Tanooki



Hotel Dusk: Room 215. No other game this year has bonded me so close to several characters as much as this one did. While it's more of an interactive story than a game, it's one of the most amazing stories I've experienced

God_of_Destruction

Assassin's Creed. Amazing graphics, fun combat, intuitive free running, and a cool sci-fi twist to the story make this game more and more fun each time I play it.

MstrChl

BioShock, because that game has done more than any this year to demonstrate the potential of video games to present a profound experience that any serious thinker can appreciate, and will stand as an important milestone in the development of the medium

PhenaDaw

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. There is no other first-person shooter on the market that uses phenomenal graphics, realism, multiplayer, and campaign, while running at a silky smooth 60 FPS like CoD 4. When people talk about true next-gen games, this is what they mean

FinalFatality-Ryan

Proseus DS. It's not epic, nor is it genre-defining. Instead, it's addictive, rewarding, and has a high level of replay. It doesn't try to be a huge interactive experience - it's just an immensely satisfying game

skelley

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

SUBTITLES: ON

In your article entitled "The User Experience" in issue 176, Patrice Desilets of the Assassin's Creed team says that he would have liked to have subtitles in the game, but that they ran out of time. I bet if anyone on the development team were deaf or hearing-impaired, they would have placed subtitles much higher on the list of priorities. For deaf and hearing-impaired gamers (such as myself) subtitles are essential for understanding the story of a game. For instance, Ubisoft lost money on me; when I discovered that Assassin's Creed had no subtitles, I cancelled my preorder. Here I am, trying to give my hard-earned money to game makers, and they essentially refuse it by not including what I need to play the game! I am not alone, either. According to the American Association of the Deaf, it is estimated that 10 percent of the population is deaf or hearing-impaired. Do game developers really want to lose 10 percent of their potential sales because they won't put text to the voices?

Robert Nunn
via hotmail.com



■ Thanks for your response, Robert. The ability to toggle subtitles should simply be a standard feature in gaming, right between "invert Y-axis" and "music volume." The unfortunate reality of the situation is that it all boils down to numbers for many publishers. Since implementing subtitles costs time and money, someone needs to allocate those resources to the process. But if a greater number

of consumers are served by spending that time and money elsewhere, then deaf or hearing-impaired gamers lose out. This approach ultimately serves the bottom line, but you are right to speculate that it may do more damage when it comes to publishers maintaining good faith among gamers.

OH EM GEE

Recently I have noticed people at my school talking the way they message in games. I mean, they actually say the individual letters in omg and lol, and even pronounce rofl (rhymes with "waffle"). This is worse than any fanboy I have seen. It isn't just the people who play World of Warcraft, either.

In my math class I heard "OMG! Your purse is 5000 cool!" It's terrible.

Colin White
via yahoo.com

■ We agree that this trend is annoying and doesn't make a lot of sense. There is only one way to fight back, and that's doing the exact opposite: Start pronouncing common phrases as acronyms. For example, "please pass the potatoes" becomes "pee pee tee pee," and "hide that on Miller's desk" becomes "aych tee oh em dee." Even then, you may be on the wrong side of a losing battle, considering Merriam-Webster recently proclaimed "w00t" the word of 2007. Pfff. What's next, is someone going to give Steven Seagal an Oscar?

SLOWLY CATCHING UP

Long before the Wii came out, I remember hearing it would have DVD playback eventually. I thought it was supposed to happen in 2007, but I'm still waiting. Has Nintendo completely ditched plans to let Wii owners watch DVDs?

David Downey
via email

■ The short answer is no, Nintendo hasn't completely abandoned its DVD plans. In order to meet current production demands for the Wii, Nintendo announced that it is pushing back plans for the DVD player, which is now scheduled hit Japan in 2008 (though U.S. plans were not specifically discussed). Even though most gamers already have at least one DVD playback device, the whole scenario is kind of sad when you think about it...while 360 and PS3 owners argue over

MASS DEFECT

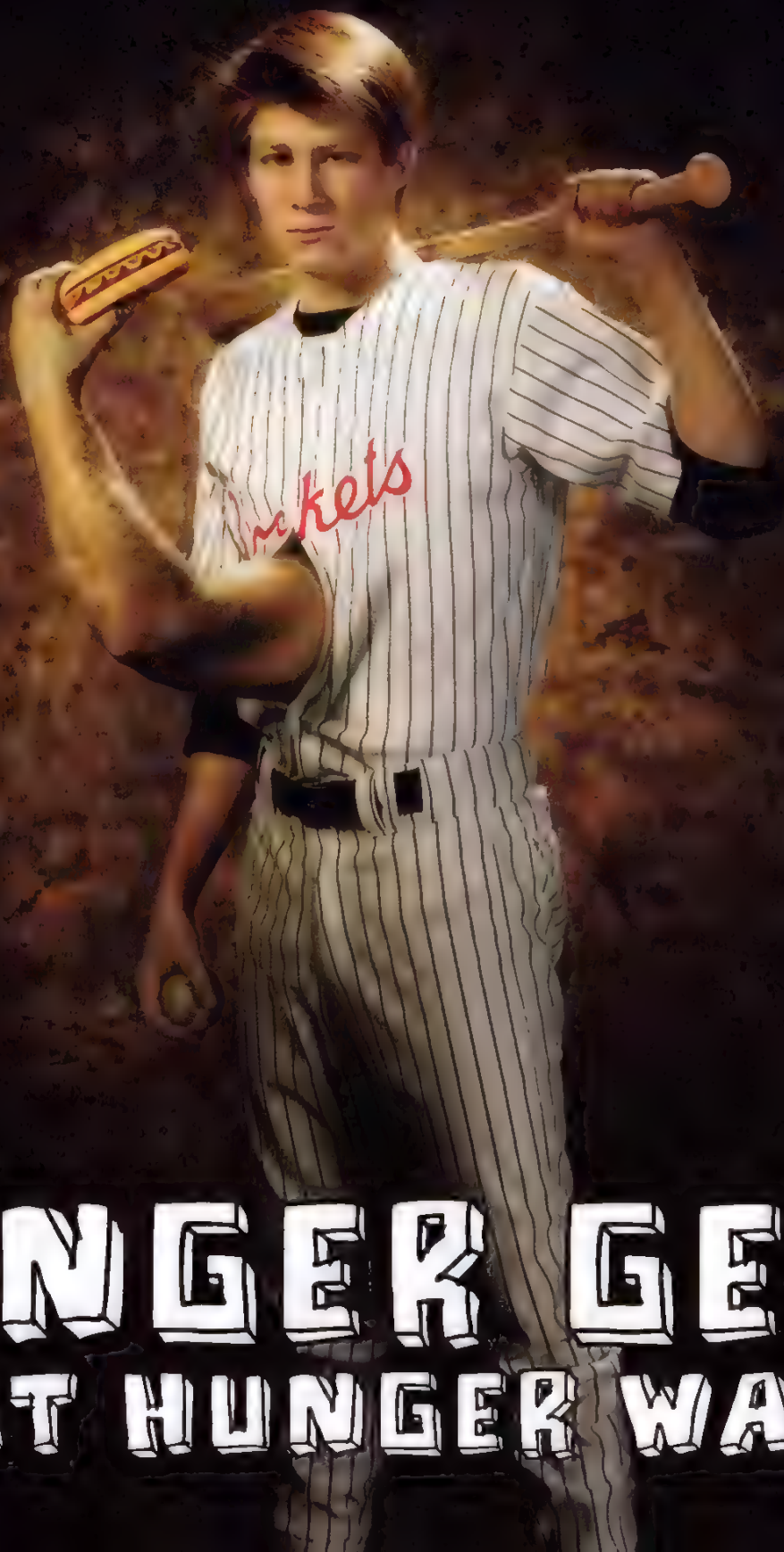
I am writing to tell you that I bought Mass Effect with great anticipation, especially after you gave it a great review. After about four hours of playing it, I traded it in. This game is horrible, and doesn't deserve the same rating as Halo 3. As soon as I went to aim my rifle, the crosshairs were all over the screen. And why couldn't it zoom in with my sniper rifle? I wasted a large part of the four hours I played running around the Citadel talking to people, wondering when the next mission with decent combat was going to come. Maybe I didn't really give the game a fair chance, but after a few hours of playing, I just didn't care. I picked up TimeShift instead, which is way more action-packed, and should have gotten a better rating than this piece of garbage.

John
via yahoo.com

■ Look, you can't buy a tractor as a pet and then get angry when it won't do backflips. Mass Effect is a third-person action/RPG. It isn't a straight-up shooter, and as a result, doesn't have the same gameplay as Halo 3 or TimeShift. Its real strengths lie in the tale it weaves, the universe it explores, and the characters it follows. While the game certainly has some issues with the combat, none of those issues are "it isn't a fast-paced first-person shooter." From the sound of it, Mass Effect just wasn't your style. That's fine, but it doesn't make it a bad game.



MYHUNGER.COM



**HUNGER GETS
WHAT HUNGER WANTS**

whether HD DVD or Blu-ray will win the next-gen format wars, the Nintendo faithful are wondering if their console will ever include a function that came with the PS2.

THE MICROSOFT MICRO

This has me stumped. The portable market is booming. Nintendo has been in there for years with Game Boys and the DS. Even Sony is making plenty of money off of the PSP. Is Microsoft going to make a handheld to take a chunk of this market? There is nothing that I would love more than playing a modified, handheld version of Halo on the go.

Mike Hebden
via yahoo.com

Despite numerous recurring rumors to the contrary, Microsoft doesn't appear to have any immediate designs on breaking into the handheld arena. Every time a possible contender emerges, it turns out to be something totally different. First there was Project Origami, which is a mobile PC, but not a gaming device. Then there was the Zune (a.k.a. The Sucker's iPod). Obviously, neither of these were intended to go up against the DS or PSP, but it would be silly to assume that Microsoft isn't looking for its own way to get a piece of the portable pie. For now, it's probably best that the company's gaming division is concentrating on the Xbox 360 and trying to make it profitable.

UGLY IS THE NEW PRETTY

Most video game heroes of the PlayStation 2/Xbox/GameCube era were androgynous pretty-boys. Look at Sora, Link, and Raiden, for example. They could easily pass for girls. But look at the characters that are turning heads these days: Kane and Lynch, Niko from GTA IV, and Solid Snake (who is now as old as dirt). These characters have disfiguring scars or bald spots. The best thing about this evolution into grittier protagonists is the way it contributes to the characters' personalities. When you look at someone's scar-riddled face, it tells you something. A smooth, perfect face reveals very little. I am finally blown away by what I am seeing. It takes my breath away, it is so wonderfully ugly.

Derek Ivery
Via yahoo.com

You're right – it is surprisingly engaging to control characters who don't have perfect smiles or clear complexions. It's certainly a far cry from the standard musclebound hero that adorned almost every piece of NES boxart. Part of this character evolution probably has something to do with the popularity of the concept of an anti-hero. There are many people who, like you, want to root for imperfection. The good news is, with the capabilities of current hardware, developers are finally able to convey certain flaws visually. Scars do tell stories, and gamers can finally see those accurately represented on the character models in front of them. Of course, being unattractive isn't all it takes to be a compelling protagonist these days. If it were, Waluigi would have legions of fans instead of dying inside from loneliness.

READER ART



This month's winner receives copies of the F.E.A.R. Files and F.E.A.R. Perseus Mandate expansion packs. Expect the intensity of battle to continue in the second expansion pack to the critically acclaimed first person shooter, F.E.A.R.



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

Send to:
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Reader Art Contest
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DMEG ROSMANN
I want to know how to make a better looking creature like the Alien versus Predator. Really? My suggestion: Get better!

JAMES RAFAEL

Hint: Even if he's shouting "hurt me more," Gray Fox should be approached with extreme caution



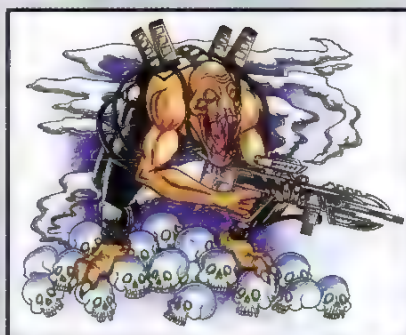
MIKE MARTIN

Every now and then we need a reminder that Anima is the most screwed up monster in Final Fantasy lore



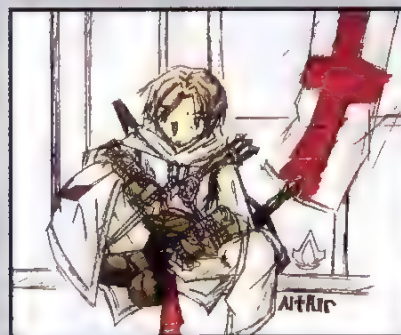
JONATHAN MUNOZ

In a fight between this guy and a Toyota Prius, we know which hybrid will come out on top



ALFONSO ELIAS

These guys get just as pumped up about soccer as Reiner does over Wat Tambor pajamas



VICTORIA TAO

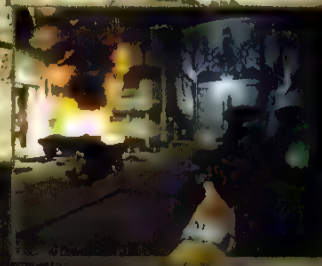
Altair gives up assassination for a more lucrative career in the field of sitting down

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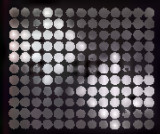
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MEGA MERGER

ACTIVISION AND VIVENDI JOIN FORCES



Activision's James Bond

Electronic Arts was considered the biggest third-party developer in the world, and when it recently purchased BioWare Pandemic, the video game world considered the \$800 million deal obnoxious. Now, however, the stakes have just been raised. Activision and Vivendi Games – which owns World of Warcraft developer Blizzard Entertainment – have effectively merged to create Activision Blizzard. This new company has an estimated combined value of \$18.9 billion, as compared to EA's \$3.8 billion.

As part of the deal, the French media conglomerate Vivendi SA (which deals in everything from telecommunications to music) will hold a majority controlling stake in Activision, which in return gets \$1.7 billion in cash and the entire Vivendi Games subdivision, including Blizzard and Sierra. Despite Vivendi's controlling stake in Activision, the Tony Hawk publisher will take the lead: Bobby Kotick, Activision's CEO, will serve the same role with Activision Blizzard.

Although it's unknown exactly what other structural changes will take place when this merger is expected to be approved and implemented in the first half of 2008, one thing will remain the same: Blizzard's independence. Blizzard co-founder, president, and CEO Mike Morhaime will retain his positions, and a FAQ on Blizzard's website makes it clear that on Blizzard's end

everything will be business as usual – including the standard Blizzard logo on the company's retail boxes.

World of Warcraft and its 9.3 million subscribers around the world (the American division alone should be bringing in \$2.7 billion in revenue by 2011) is clearly the crown jewel in this deal, but

BLIZZARD'S NEW MMO

Blizzard has posted an online job listing looking for a "Lead 3D Character Artist – Next-Gen MMO," which Blizzard says is for an unannounced MMO that is not an expansion pack to World of Warcraft.

Activision will see other benefits to its portfolio. Vivendi is gearing up for next year with high-profile titles such as Ghostbusters, Prototype, and Brutal Legend, and the wide-ranging spectrum of music artists under its Universal Music Group umbrella will benefit Guitar Hero.

For Vivendi, the bottom line would certainly be survival. As the parent company of Sierra and its development subsidiaries (see sidebar for more), it has many irons in the fire, but wants to make video games a larger percentage of its revenue (which stands at an estimated five percent). In fact, it was not long ago that Vivendi put its entire games division, including Blizzard, unsuccessfully up for sale. This was during a time when Vivendi was selling off other parts of its organization. In 2004, the games division laid off 20 percent of its workers. Blizzard's staff, however, was wisely spared. In fact, the developer was even allowed to ramp up

employee numbers in preparation for World of Warcraft's release. Given Vivendi's attempts to bolster its portfolio since then, this latest deal appears to be an attempt to help the fortunes of its very inconsistent video game sector.

HOT PROPERTIES

Here's an abridged list of some of the studios and franchises that both Activision and Vivendi control

ACTIVISION

- Infinity Ward: Call of Duty franchise
- Neversoft: Guitar Hero, Tony Hawk
- Raven Software: Marvel: Ultimate Alliance
- Bizarre Creations: Created Project Gotham series (Microsoft has retained franchise name rights)
- Treyarch: Spider-Man
- James Bond License
- Marvel License
- DreamWorks License

SIERRA

- Blizzard Entertainment: World of Warcraft, StarCraft, Diablo
- Massive Entertainment: World in Conflict
- Radical Entertainment: Scarface: The World is Yours, Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, Prototype
- High Moon Studios: Darkwatch, The Bourne Conspiracy
- Sierra Online
- Sierra Mobile
- F.E.A.R. Franchise
- Ghostbusters
- Brutal Legend
- Crash Bandicoot Franchise
- Spyro Franchise

BURNING QUESTIONS

Game Informer asked Wedbush Morgan analyst Michael Pachter some important questions regarding this merger.

MONSTERS OF ROCK

Vivendi has an extensive list of music subsidiaries which could be used to bolster Activision Blizzard's Guitar Hero series, including acts like U2, Guns N' Roses, The Killers, Oasis, 50 Cent, Dr. Dre, Marilyn Manson, Eminem, Fall Out Boy, Jay-Z, Anthrax, Black Sabbath, Jane's Addiction, The Mars Volta, The Who, and many, many more



Who is now more powerful – EA or Activision?

EA is still more powerful. Activision gets around half its profits and a fourth of its revenues from a single product [World of Warcraft] that isn't really distributed at retail and that doesn't require a lot of marketing. EA is still the packaged goods leader, with stronger retail and marketing presence.

What is the next mega-merger?

I don't think that there is a next mega-merger. If the media companies decide to act, they will either go very small (Codemasters) or very large (EA), but I don't see further consolidation. This was a unique situation, with Vivendi owning a great franchise [World of Warcraft] and not knowing how to effectively redeploy the profits. They decided to put the franchise in the hands of Activision, and take a majority stake in Activision while that company grew their business for them.

Can EA's intention to use RPG developer BioWare match up with Activision Blizzard's World of Warcraft?

Yes, BioWare will compete, probably more effectively than others, which isn't saying a heck of a lot. WoW is an unprecedented success, and no game has ever sustained subscribers at even a fourth of the level that they have grown to. I would guess that BioWare will generate a two million-subscriber game, but nobody is likely to replicate WoW's success.

TIMELINE

1989
Blizzard, which was formed in 1991, is sold to French publisher Havas, which is purchased by Vivendi

1999
Activision acquires Tony Hawk developer Neversoft



2000
Vivendi Universal is formed after a merger with Universal's parent company, Seagram. Sierra, which had gained fame with titles such as King's Quest, Leisure Suit Larry, Homeworld, and Half-Life, is picked up in the deal



2001
Activision acquires the rights to games based on the Spider-Man movies as well as Treyarch



2002
Vivendi tries to sell off its games division (including Blizzard Entertainment) with an initial value of \$1.6 billion. VU Games' value would later bottom out at \$800 million

2003
Vivendi announces the sale of some of its assets to GE, creating NBC Universal after a few years of downsizing whereby Vivendi sold off a number of its worldwide assets. Activision acquires Infinity Ward

2004
Twenty percent of Vivendi's games division is laid off and a \$70.1 million loss is reported. On November 23, World of Warcraft is released

2006
Activision gets the exclusive rights to James Bond, and buys Guitar Hero publisher RedOctane

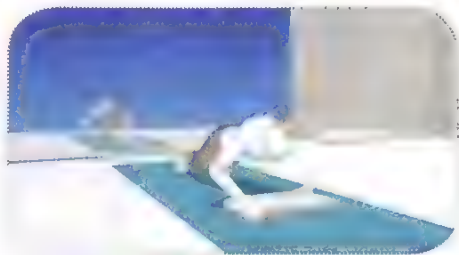


2007
Activision acquires Project Gotham developer Bizarre Creations and announces plans to merge with Vivendi, which will gain a 52 percent controlling stake in Activision



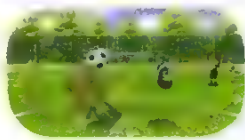


We imported the Japanese version of Wii Fit and gave Bryan five days to determine if this "Brain Age for the body" really works.



day 1

Upon starting Wii Fit, a happy little anthropomorphic Wii Board named Wiibo instructs you to import your Mii. Next you enter your height and date of birth and it performs a quick scan to calculate your Body Mass Index (BMI). Complete with drum roll, my BMI dial shot up into the overweight category at 26.99. My poor Mii grew a little pot-belly and hung his head in shame. To break into the "normal" category, I'll apparently have to lose 14 lbs. Wii Fit then has you input how much weight you want to lose and how long it will take (two weeks to a year). My pale mannequin trainer guided me through some super sit ups, a crane stance, and a breathing exercise. In addition to these more serious strength and yoga exercises, the other side of the coin includes cartoony Mii-infested minigames focused on strength and balance.



day 2

Today I was prompted to create a Wii Fit channel, which simply reminds you to do your daily workout. Based on the time put in the day before, several new exercises were unlocked (there appears to be 48 in total). Yoga seemed like a good place to start since there's plenty of stretching. The first actual tough exercise so far alternated pushups with balancing on one hand in a "T" formation. I did, however manage to get my first perfect four-star rating. A top 10 leaderboard keeps track of records in every exercise from all profiles on your console. Good luck beating that! After doing some fun slalom skiing and head-butting soccer balls, it was time for the daily test. I was able to lower my balance age to 25 (pretty close to my real age) compared to yesterday's sad score of 35. BMI dropped slightly to 26.48.

day 3

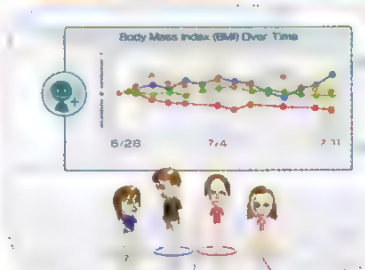
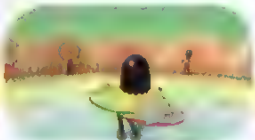
You really have to move the Wii board around a lot to accommodate all of the different exercises in relation to your furniture. I like it far back from the TV to get a good look at games like the ski jump and the Marble Madness get-the-ball-in-the-hole challenge, but you need to move it far forward to do things like pushups and sit-ups. Also, the hula hoop game really burns up your core. My BMI shot back up to 26.99. Accordingly, Wiibo asked what the hell happened. Optional excuses range from "I just ate dinner" to "I drank too much booze." I blamed the office potluck.

day 4

Man, there are a ton of safety warnings in this thing. Don't fall, don't jump, don't smack into the coffee table. Nintendo's lawyers must have gone through this with a fine-toothed comb. I unlocked a decent new game that has you maneuver down a river in a bubble without touching the sides and somehow achieved perfect 50/50 balance on the test.

day 5

I finally discovered the more challenging variations on certain games. Jogging had an alternate extended route (complete with hidden Mario graffiti), strength exercises allowed for more reps, and the ski course grew longer. A new balance game outfitted my Mii in a penguin suit, and I had to tip a floating chunk of ice back and forth to catch multicolored fish.



the verdict

BMI:
26.99 to 26.32
Weight:
188.1 lbs to 183.7 lbs
Balance Age:
Erratic (ranging from 46 to 25)

Though I never really felt worn out from Wii Fit, the general downturn in weight means at least something is going on. The easy-to-read chart system made me think a little more about my day-to-day weight and food choices. It is, however, easy to spend more time playing the fun stuff than doing the real workout activities, and I hope the U.S. version has an option to just say "Hey, I've got 20 minutes. Just throw a bunch of random workouts at me." Flipping through menus between each activity doesn't allow your heart rate to get up to a decent level. We'll have a full report in our upcoming review of the North American version. ■■■



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Whether you're running with a group of friends toward an enemy encampment or sitting motionless with a sniper rifle on a hillside, you may not realize it, but you are doing exactly what the game designers want you to. Creating a multiplayer game may seem as simple as building a map and populating it with players. But like a scientist learning how to teach a rat how to run through a maze, the process is extensive and involves countless hours of testing and refinement to craft the perfect experience. We recently sat down with *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare's* lead multiplayer designer, Todd Alderman, to learn exactly what makes a multiplayer game tick.

UNLIMITED ENABLED

THE ART OF FPS MULTIPLAYER DESIGN

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE



KILLING MACHINES

Most games don't reward players for getting into the zone and stringing together a number of kills. *Call of Duty* embraces these demonstrations of skill and gives the players that pull them off the chance to rack up even more kills. When you reach three kills in a row, all enemies appear on your radar. Five kills in a row calls in a player-activated airstrike. And a seven-kill string brings out a trigger-happy helicopter. But this wasn't the original plan for the game. "We tried all sorts of different things for the air support," says Alderman with a sigh. "Originally, they were areas on the map people fought over. There was a little icon that said helicopter. You ran over and hit the button, and the helicopter would come and fight for your team. This system broke team deathmatch because people were just doing the rounds. They were like 'I'm going to the helicopter, then I am going to the radar, then the airstrike.' They would just circle around the map and do that the whole time. So we thought, why don't we reward the players for doing well?" This kill-based reward system conversely acts as a penalty for death — something the *Call of Duty* team felt they needed. In games like *Halo*, the penalty for death is losing a powerful weapon that you picked up along the way. This player will likely do the dreaded rounds to get his or her gear back. *Call of Duty 4's* kill streak system pushes player to perform better, keeps their attention solely on the battle, and rips out your heart when you come up one kill short of calling in a helicopter.



IRONING OUT THE BATTLEFIELD

Even if the gameplay feels great, a poorly designed map can destroy the entire experience. Before a map is created, the designers first figure out the fight distances. "They created a model of a little guy with rings around him representing fight zones," says Alderman. "One is a 500-meter circle, and there is also a 1,000-meter circle. They display the weapon effectiveness." Some of the maps in Call of Duty were designed with clear ideas in mind, such as the downed helicopter on Crash drawing inspiration from *Black Hawk Down*. Others are designed with certain weapons in mind. But despite offering a handful of different match types, all of Call of Duty 4's maps are designed for team deathmatch. Alderman explains, "We tried to design maps that were specific for game types, but eventually, it just didn't work out. They weren't as fun. So the priority was to design for team deathmatch because that's the core of the game. In the back of your mind you can say 'I want this to be cool for Domination,' but a lot of times, if you design a map for team deathmatch, it's going to work in a lot of game types."

SKILLS & KILLS

Even if you're wielding the bullet-spitting P90 and have earned the ability to throw three grenades, if you hesitate or are generally a poor shot, you won't fare well. "My theory is: if you get a drop on a guy, you should feel like you are going to win that fight," says Alderman. "One mistake that a lot of game developers don't see is that they think weapons that take a ton of bullets to kill a guy make the game accessible. To me, that makes the game hardcore. So, if you play a game where it takes a million bullets to achieve a kill, you stay alive for a really long time, but that essentially means the new guy is never going to get any points. He's going to feel like a new guy. He got to stay alive for a long time, but he never got to kill anyone. In our game, bullets are really deadly. You can get kills if you are a new guy or hardcore. We still have that element of if you are really good and if you have skill, you are going to do really well. But if you are the new guy, you are going to be able to get kills too."



NEVER SAFE

Since no one likes getting shot, it's instinctual for players to try and find safe zones and cover. Alderman says cover is certainly important, but you should never feel entirely safe. "Our designers think about things you normally wouldn't even think about. They would be like, 'You can get onto the roof, then you have an eyesight of a window over here, but this window has a view of this window over here.' They put a lot of effort into figuring out every angle and eliminating any chance of someone camping somewhere safely. There's a lot of refinement that goes into it, like putting a door here, and closing this off." The team also has to factor in spawn points. No one likes appearing in battle only to be mowed down seconds later. "In our spawn code there a lot of checks that are made to see if the enemy can see you: Is there a grenade nearby, is there an air strike incoming? We have to avoid 'spawn, die, spawn, die.' The spawn points vary by map size, but on our average sized map I think we've implemented around 40 of them."

NO ACHIEVEMENTS FOR MULTIPLAYER

"We didn't do Achievements for multiplayer," says Alderman. "We found that people just farm for points and ruin the experience for others. And do you really want to force players to play 1,000 matches to get 20 points?"

EASE THEM IN AND BLOW THEIR SOCKS OFF

"The first thing we shoot for is to make sure the gameplay feels good," says Alderman. "We also wanted the experience to be deep with legs, yet accessible to everyone. The biggest challenge is to make a deep game accessible." By offering a level progression system similar to that of an MMORPG, where players earn experience for each kill and unlock new weapons and abilities as levels are attained, it's not uncommon for a new player to face off against a seasoned veteran. "We tried to balance it out. A level 1 assault class can compete with a level 55 who is completely decked out. Every weapon has its strengths and weaknesses, but in the end everything is balanced out," adds Alderman.

WEAPON OF CHOICE

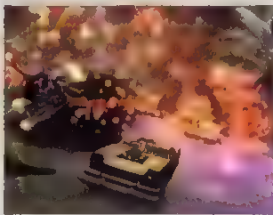
At the outset of each match, players can select their firearm of choice. This does away with the feeling that you have to go against your instinct of killing to search for a more powerful firearm. This system also gets players better acclimated to every weapon in a game. "We want you to feel powerful, and we want the outcome of battles to feel right. This is the deciding factor for most people when they determine if they will play a game or not. I think we are really unapologetic in how we treat this. You kill guys really fast, but that's why you are going to like it. Kill more, and you'll get more weapons to play with. We want people to get points, and we want to see them all on the scoreboard." ■■■■

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

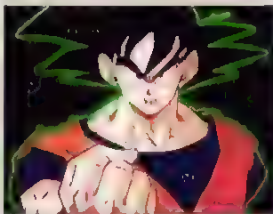
JAFFE'S COMPANY NOT A "PORT HOUSE"

Here's a quick look at what developer David Jaffe (God of War) and his new company Eat, Sleep, Play thinks is the last great PlayStation 2 title – Twisted Metal. Head-On. Extra Twisted Edition. The game (coming this spring) is a port of the PSP title except it's got new levels and offers the ability to strike out on foot as Sweet Tooth.



DBZ NOT OUT OF THE WOODS JUST YET

Unfortunately for Dragon Ball Z fans everywhere, Atar has struck a deal with FUNimation to retain the U.S. video game rights to publish titles based on the anime franchise. Now go back to wishing for a good DBZ game.



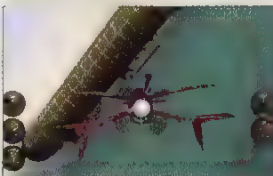
PARAPPA DEVELOPER FOR WII

PaRappa the Rappa and Vib Ribbon developer Nanaon-Sha has announced it is working on a music title exclusively for the Wii. The game is due out in late 2008, and will reunite the developer with PaRappa character designer Rodney Alan Greenblatt.



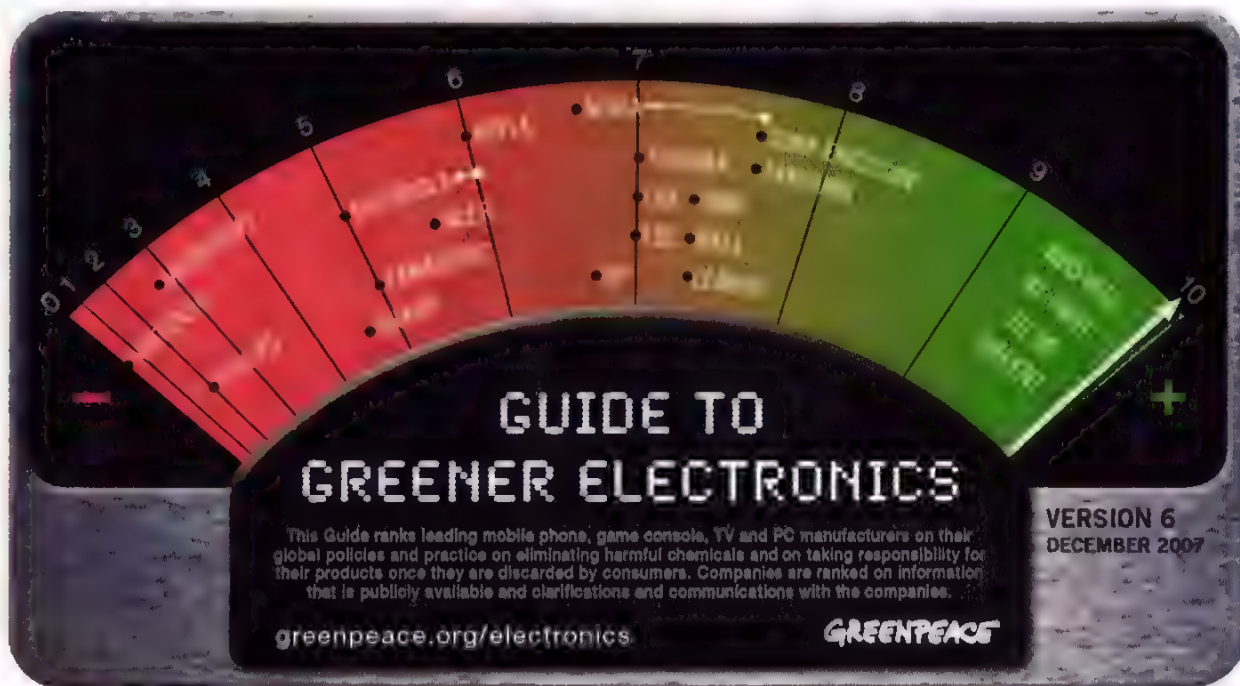
CRIMSON SKIES FLIES AGAIN?

Jordan Weisman, former member of FASA Studio, has spun off and opened his own shop named Smith & Tinker. Weisman says that he's secured the rights to old FASA properties Crimson Skies, Shadowrun, and MechWarrior.



XBOX LIVE DOWNLOAD DOWNGRADE

Changes have been made to Microsoft Xbox Live Silver accounts, whereby these members will have to wait a week before they can access free downloadable content. "This is not done to annoy Silver members," says Xbox Live director of programming Major Nelson "Limited-time exclusive access to content is just one of the many benefits of having a Gold Xbox Live account."



news

ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION

WHAT CAN THE CONSOLE MANUFACTURERS DO?

Greenpeace has released its yearly Greener Electronics Guide, grading and critiquing how consumer electronics manufacturers can improve their environmental credentials, and for the first time, home consoles and TVs have been included. According to the organization's guide, Nintendo scored a scumful 0 out of 10.

The Guide is based on two main principles: Companies' elimination of harmful chemicals such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and brominated flame retardants (BFRs), and the taking of responsibility for their products when consumers discard them. The two issues are effectively one in the same since the use of toxic substances in consumer electronics not only protects workers and consumers from exposure, but also ensures that the safe recycling of these products is not an issue either. The guide gives kudos to companies that show a commitment to proper chemicals management – even if "the full extent of harm has not been fully established scientifically" – and the public documentation of these policies.

In scoring 0 out of 10, the guide says Nintendo doesn't make its chemical policy public for scrutiny, and that unlike other consumer electronics manufacturers, Nintendo doesn't have a global recycling policy for its products. The company is also faulted for not having a policy on the use of PVCs.

In response to its abysmal score, Nintendo released a statement that read in part: "Nintendo is surprised by the content of the Greenpeace report. Nintendo takes great care to comply with all relevant regulations on avoiding the use of dangerous materials, recycling of materials, etc. Nintendo has established the Green Procurement Standards, requiring component suppliers to certify that any parts they deliver do not include hazardous chemical substances. ... Nintendo is always actively looking at ways to continue to increase its environmental stewardship and holds this as a corporate priority worldwide."

Greenpeace pointed out, however, that it sent the report and Nintendo's grade to the company in advance of its publishing, and received no response, correction, or relevant information as a rebuttal. Moreover, the environmental organization states that its grades don't just cover what is required, but what a company is doing beyond what it is legally obligated to.

For more on how the home consoles and how their makers could improve their green credentials – and what you can do to help – head over to the Greenpeace website (www.greenpeace.org/international/clashoftheconsoles/).

THE GREEN LEADERBOARD

Here's how Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo fared in Greenpeace's Greener Electronics Guide and some excerpts from the organization's critiques.

0/10 – NINTENDO Nintendo joins the guide in bottom place. The company scores zero on all criteria, allowing infinite room for future improvement

2.7/10 – MICROSOFT The company scores points for its chemical management and for setting a timeline by which it intends to eliminate vinyl plastic (PVC) and all brominated flame retardants, but only by 2011. Microsoft scores poorly on most waste criteria, but is reporting on amounts of e-waste recycled, albeit only for Europe.

5/10 – MOTOROLA

6/10 – APPLE

7.3/10 – SONY The company receives a good score for providing many examples of products that are free from PVC plastic. Sony has commitments to phase out PVC and BFRs by 2010. Sony's takeback and recycling program has good coverage, particularly in the U.S., and the company provides clear information to its consumers about what to do with discarded products.

7.7/10 – SAMSUNG

10/10 – NONE

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UBISOFT

Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

the top 10 sequels in demand

Game publishers are already obsessed with sequels, so they should do themselves a favor and create the games that gamers want to play. Please, shelve the *Blinx 3* project, put a hold on *My Street 2: Kidz in the Hood*, and forget about *Maria vs. Sonic Pillow Fight*. These are the games we're anxiously awaiting.

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

PROBABILITY: **85%**

Forget the disaster that was the prequels (admit it, Reiner!), *Knights of the Old Republic* was the epic story that Star Wars fans really relished. Since *KOTOR* was set thousands of years before the rise of the Empire and Darth Vader, LucasArts and BioWare were not constrained by pre-existing storylines. This led to one of the best decisions in LucasArts history – sculpting a historical period filled with so many Jedi and Sith that lightsabers were sold as impulse items along with gum and *US Weekly* at Target checkout counters. A sequel to this fan-favorite RPG not only sounds plausible, it seems inevitable. The only questions remaining to be answered are “who?” and “when?” BioWare has its plate full with *Mass Effect*, *Dragon Age*, and a Sonic RPG, so hope for another *KOTOR* from the Canadian RPG masters may be a long shot. But the company has licensed the *Star Trek Online* engine for an unannounced MMO in project, and we can only hope the Force is strong with that one.



Shadowrun

PROBABILITY: **45%**

No, we're not talking about the crappy marketing experiment gone awry that was Microsoft's recent fantasy multiplayer farce (by the way, Microsoft, we're still waiting for an apology on that one). We're talking about a return to the cyberpunk fantasy role-playing roots that put *Shadowrun* on the video game map. The classic pen and paper game is ripe for translation to consoles. With assassins, hackers, a pre-Neo Matrix, and mercenaries running roughshod over a society dominated by mega-corporations and corrupt police, Seattle never seemed so cool (unless you were really into lattes and flannel in the '90s). With a developer like BioWare or Bethesda at the helm of a *Shadowrun* recovery project, we'd be more than willing to return to the Emerald City. Let's hope Smith & Tinker, which recently acquired the rights to this series, can recapture the glory.



System Shock

PROBABILITY: **80%**

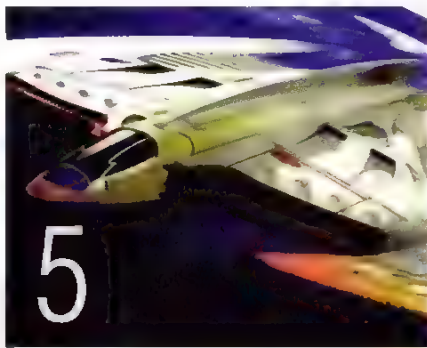
Electronic Arts has been sitting on the *System Shock* license for years, but after the well-deserved success of its spiritual successor, *BioShock*, maybe EA will revive this classic sci-fi horror series. We're hoping for sooner rather than later, too, since EA renewed the trademark in 2006. As one of the first titles to successfully blend first-person real-time combat with a deep role-playing infrastructure, it's no surprise that the prospect of *System Shock 3* arouses the interest of PC gamers everywhere. The last game pitted you as a hacker battling an alien infestation with the aid of a sinister artificial intelligence aboard a vessel drifting aimlessly in deep space, a scenario we would love to revisit. With all due respect for the highly anticipated *Dead Space*, we think there's room for two sci-fi horror games in the EA family.



Jedi Knight

PROBABILITY: **15%**

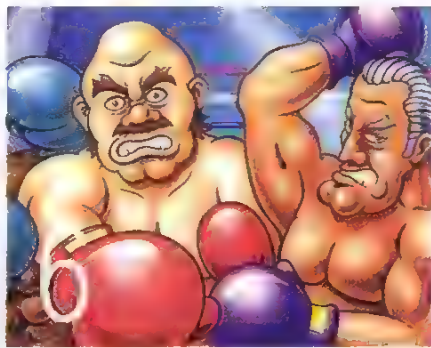
Jedi Knight wowed gamers by putting a lightsaber in their hands, giving them command of the Force, and allowing them to choose between the powers of the Jedi or the Dark Side. Many of *Jedi Knight's* traits spread from this abundant source into the many Star Wars games that have followed since, including *Knights of the Old Republic* and the upcoming *Force Unleashed*. With that in mind, the chances of us revisiting bearded rogue Jedi Kyle Katarn as he fights the remaining Empire and Sith forces in the New Republic are low. Still, gamers and fans would surely appreciate wielding the Force in the wide-open, post-Vader Star Wars era mostly defined by novels and comics.



X-Com

PROBABILITY: **99%**

We've spent many years monitoring the airwaves, searching for any signs of vitality from this storied strategy franchise. And this past May, the life beacon finally responded when 2K Games inherited the X-Com franchise and re-released X-Com: Terror From The Deep on Steam. X-Com focused on repelling alien forces from infiltrating planet Earth by controlling and commanding outposts throughout the planet and engaging enemy forces in turn-based battles when they attack. But the strategy went even deeper, as your science teams could uncover alien artifacts that would improve your technology. Our dream scenario would be to see 2K Boston reinvent this classic Microprose strategy series with the treatment it gave BioShock.



Punch-Out!!

PROBABILITY: **75%**

With the success of Wii Sports, bringing Punch-Out out of retirement seems like a no-brainer. But boxing games have evolved since the glory days of Bald Bull, Soda Popinski, and Mike Tyson – the current heavyweight champion, Fight Night, won over gamers with its innovative control scheme, legendary boxers, and deep career mode. Nintendo could come out swinging by retaining the great cartoon feel of the original while granting Little Mac a career mode where we could hone his skills in preparation for the big bouts against Super Macho Man and Mr. Sandman. An online component featuring player-versus-player bouts and customizable boxers may put the game in contention for the title belt. While an unlockable prison bout versus a disheveled and disdainful Iron Mike himself may be far fetched, no one can deny it would be the coup de grace for this anticipated comeback.



Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem

PROBABILITY: **95%**

Eternal Darkness still ranks as one of the best games in the GameCube catalog. Its brilliant, epic storyline of ageless evil, mix of historical settings, and creative scare tactics that had gamers feeling a very real kind of horror helped the title attain greatness. In the years since its release, developer Silicon Knights has ended its exclusive arrangement with Nintendo, but Dennis Dyack has publicly stated they are planning a return to the Eternal Darkness universe, and we've heard rumors that a spiritual successor is already in the works. Whether the game will appear on the Wii or another platform (like current Silicon Knights partner Microsoft) remains a mystery, but as long as we're offered another chance to encounter the Three Ancients we'll be happy. Just don't erase our save files again, okay?



Chrono

PROBABILITY: **65%**

The Chrono time-traveling role-playing series remains one of the steadfast legacies in the Square Enix catalogue. Not only were Chrono Trigger and Chrono Cross met with rave reviews, they sold a crazy amount of copies on the SNES and PSone respectively. So what's the damn holdup?! We wish we knew. Fans got their hopes up when Square trademarked the name Chrono Break in 2001, but the trademark expired in 2003 and Square Enix didn't bother to renew it. To make matters worse, Square Enix has spent entirely too much time cashing in on endless Final Fantasy remakes instead of bringing back another of its greatly adored works. The recipe for a successful Chrono resurrection seems painfully obvious – refresh the look with contemporary anime, offer a lot of recruitable party members, bring back the dual techs, and offer multiple timelines of realities to explore. But for now, Chrono fans have to be content with waiting.



Diablo

PROBABILITY: **80%**

Sure, there are plenty of hack-and-slash fantasy role-playing action games, but none of them rival the amazing experience of Blizzard's masterful Diablo II. Hopping on Battle.net and mincing foes with friends in pursuit of treasures was one of the epic gaming moments of the early millennium; if you don't believe us, just ask one of the 17 million people who bought a Diablo game. Fans are feverishly waiting for a sequel, and imagining this game as a cross-platform title that joins the PC and console communities likely causes heart murmurs in the rabid players still populating Battle.net today. So what do you say, Blizzard? How long are we going to have to leave our dungeon crawling gear covered in dust until you feel like making truckloads of money on Diablo III?



Crimson Skies

PROBABILITY: **75%**

The flight genre seems to be largely ignored by most gamers, which is a sad state of affairs given the rich history of games like TIE Fighter and current stars like Namco's Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation. All it takes is a talented development team to think outside the box to re-conjure our inner flyboys, and Crimson Skies, arcade-like flight is the perfect platform. The great ideas for a next generation Crimson Skies are plentiful. To start, bring back the customizable planes of the original with a Forza 2-like creation and sharing system. Then introduce an open world like that of Test Drive: Unlimited, complete with explorable environments, pirate clans, varied objectives, and multiplayer dogfights.



Eternal

Darkness still

ranks as one

of the best

games in the

GameCube

catalog.



Sequel's Greetings

While they may have fallen short of our top 10 list, we wouldn't mind seeing publishers breathe life into these critically-acclaimed franchises.

- Alpha Centauri
- Baldur's Gate
- Beyond Good & Evil
- Black
- Dark Cloud
- Donkey Kong
- Doom
- Full Spectrum Warrior
- F-Zero
- Gunstar Heroes
- Jade Empire
- Jak and Daxter
- Legacy of Kain
- Oddworld
- Onimusha
- Panzer Dragoon
- Planescape
- Psi-Ops
- Psychonauts
- Shadow Hearts
- Skies of Arcadia
- Sly Cooper
- Starfox
- Star Wars: TIE Fighter
- Thief
- Ultima
- Vagrant Story
- Viewtiful Joe

Afterwords

GUITAR HERO III:
LEGENDS
OF ROCK

Alan Flores
Lead Designer, Neversoft



Game Informer reviewers get to air their gripes with the world's most-wanted video games on a monthly basis. Now we've decided it's your turn. In this (hopefully) recurring feature, we subject video game developers to the harshest critics known to man: the motley crew of regular forum posters at gameinformer.com. This month, Alan Flores at Neversoft answers the fans on Guitar Hero III.

I wonder why "The Seeker" by the Who was chosen over other songs by them?

— shane

■ Musical taste is probably the most subjective thing in the world. There are so many great Who songs out there that we would never have been able to pick one that would make everyone happy. "The Seeker" was picked because we felt it sounded and played great, and thought that fans of the game would like it.

Why can't you ever just "jam out?" For example, you could assign a pentatonic scale to the buttons and let people improvise.

— crappieshondo

■ That's a great suggestion. We get feedback every day on Guitar Hero, and we are all active participants in the community message boards and dedicated Guitar Hero forums, so we listen to and hear what our fans would like to see in the game. Surely, there are a lot of interesting ideas that are possible, though it's in everyone's best interest to ensure that any new features are implemented in a way that's enjoyable and fun for all of our fans. With that said, we aren't ruling anything out, and we're excited about how we can continue to build upon the gameplay experience moving forward.

Why no "Stairway to Heaven?" Did you try to get it?

— cheech11

■ How could we not consider "Stairway"? It is one of the most recognizable songs with one of the greatest guitar solos of all time. But licensing music isn't as simple as you might think. We work very closely with lots of records labels and artists to make an awesome soundtrack, but there are always some songs that you don't get in. Who knows, maybe we'll see some "Stairway" in the future.

Will you offer downloadable content through WiiConnect24 next year for the Wii version owners?

— ItsameMatt

■ We certainly hope so, though the infrastructure for the Wii is currently not available. We are working very closely with Nintendo to hopefully offer a possible solution.

What made you think that it was a good idea to have songs that can only be unlocked in co-op? And why no Quick Play co-op mode for parties?

— almoshowers

■ We added the co-op career as a way to experience a progression with a friend. And you can unlock bonus co-op encores, earn money, and get to see some story cutscenes. We thought this would be a fun feature and would be enough co-op for people. We caught the mistake of not having co-op Quick Play kinda late, when we were at a point where we just couldn't get it in on the disc. So we did the next best thing — we offered it up as a title update that players can download now if they are online, to automatically download co-op quickly.

Where are the groupies?

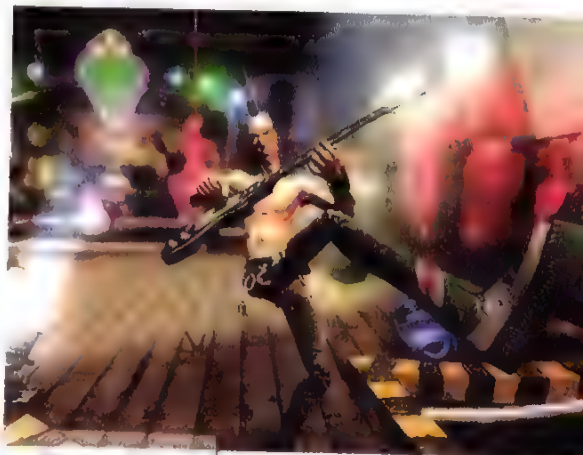
— sarinvx

■ That one's easy. Just go to www.guitarhero.com! There you can join the Guitar Hero gaming community where you can form tour groups, earn gear by winning tournaments, and most importantly, earn groupies!

How frequently do you plan on releasing downloadable tracks, and are they going to be as ridiculously expensive as the ones in GH II?

— boogieman29

■ We will be releasing DLC on a regular basis, and we're definitely continuing to explore alternative options for our fans to have access to their favorite songs — including putting out free DLC.



What was it like taking over the reins of an extremely popular franchise? Was there more pressure to make it live up to fans' expectations or did you simply not pay attention to that?

— TrueNerd

■ There was a ton of pressure. Not just from fan expectations but also from ourselves. When we first found out we were doing it we were super excited. We all love this game. So there's the excitement, but then you have the fear of messing it up.

Was there any discussion over the idea that perhaps you made the game TOO hard this time? Seems like the last couple tiers are all incredibly difficult on Expert, on par with "Freebird."

— aubradley84

■ Yeah, there was some concern that the game is hard. But a lot of that had to do with the songs that we got. We wanted to use the best songs we could get, and it turns out that some of the best songs were really brutally hard like "One," "Raining Blood," and "Number of The Beast." On the other hand, there are a lot of experienced players out there who absolutely killed the previous two games and were up for a challenge. We tried to put together a set list of songs that are fun for players on both easy and difficult.

What's with not including the boss battle songs in quick play, and then planning to releases them as DLC?

— Sangheili

■ This is one of those things that most people don't seem to realize. Everything you put into a game takes time. Getting the songs working in quick play seems like a total no-brainer. But, if a song is offered in both single-player and co-op modes, it has to be coded for each mode separately, which takes a lot of time. Between writing the code for the game and coding each song, we didn't have enough time to include the boss battle songs on the disc, so we decided to offer them for free online.

DYNASTY WARRIORS 6

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PLAYSTATION 3



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

This project was so f----- up. I wasn't excited about this Area 51 game.

—BlackSite: Area 51 designer Harvey Smith



GOOD?

The first project out of Eidos' new Montreal studio will be the next title in the Deus Ex series. Although the series certainly has some support, Deus Ex: Invisible War (shown) was somewhat of a commercial letdown, and it remains to be seen if Eidos has enough firepower to stop the franchise's downward trend.



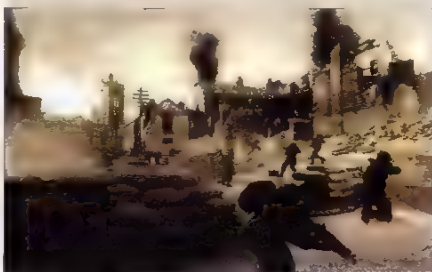
■ These guys think they're rock stars?

BAD

Get this: The Romantics are suing Activision because developer Neversoft's version of The Romantics' "What I Like About You" is—in the eyes of the band and its lawyer—too close to the original even though Activision has the license to cover the song. Once a one-hit wonder, always a one-hit wonder.

UGLY?

Boxing promoter Don King is stepping into the ring to show the world what he's got. The 2K Sports' boxing title we rumored about a few months ago is titled Don King Presents: Prizefighter. The game will be developed by Venom, the studio behind Rocky Legends. Don King versus Fight Night? Don's hair might be a little more than messed up after this encounter.



UGLY

Sony makes Fortune's list of "101 Dumbest Moments in Business" twice. The first is for a European God of War II promo event featuring a slaughtered goat, while Resistance's use of Manchester Cathedral is the second. Uhh, we can think of more than two.

UGLY

Transformers director Michael Bay has once again shot his mouth off on the HD format war. "Microsoft wants both formats to fail so they can be heroes and make the world move to digital downloads." Bay says that Transformers studio Paramount received \$100 million to switch over to HD-DVD from Blu-ray, even though Bay thinks Blu-ray is better.



BAD

The good news for Ubisoft is that Assassin's Creed has sold over 2.5 million copies. The bad news is that End War, Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway (shown), and Far Cry 2 have all been delayed until fall at the earliest.



YOUR FAVORITE BAND SUCKS!

ROCK BAND/GUITAR HERO III OUT OF TUNE

It's not quite on par with getting your gear stolen or your guitarist coming down with "nervous exhaustion" before a big show in front of the suits from the record company, but EA/Harmonix's Rock Band is hitting a few bumps now that it's on tour. First there were reports that a number of the initial guitar controllers had broken strum bars, and later other complaints popped up about the drum kick pedals. Luckily, EA has been on top of the problem, saying it's fixed the guitar in particular in later production runs, and offering to "send a replacement immediately" for any defective instrument.

Some PlayStation 3 owners are pissed that their Guitar Hero III guitars don't work with Rock Band—something that was promised before the game was released, and already worked with the Xbox 360 version of Rock Band. This is particularly important since standalone instruments are not on sale yet, and some PS3 owners might have bought the game by the (and not the instruments bundle), thinking their GH III guitar would have them rocking into the night. The Guitar Hero franchise was originally developed by Harmonix, but was taken over by Activision before the release of Guitar Hero III.

At first, developer Harmonix said it had a patch to fix the problem, but then claimed that guitar hero III publisher/developer Activision was blocking the patch. In a statement, the company said, "The compatibility patch was submitted, approved, and had been scheduled for release by Sony on Tuesday, December 4. Unfortunately, Activision objected to the release of the compatibility patch. The patch remains with Sony, but we have been told that it will unfortunately not be released due to Activision's continued objection."

Not so, says Activision. "In fact, Harmonix and its parent company MTV Games/Viacom recently declined Activision's offer to reach an agreement that would allow the use of Guitar Hero guitar controllers with Rock Band. We have been and remain open to discussions with Harmonix and MTV Games/Viacom about the use of our technology in Rock Band. Unfortunately for Rock Band users, in this case Harmonix and MTV Games/Viacom are unwilling to discuss an agreement with Activision."

Sony doesn't want to get in between this battle of the bands. One official told Game Informer matter-of-factly, "This is a matter that needs to be resolved between Harmonix/MTV and Activision regarding intellectual property."

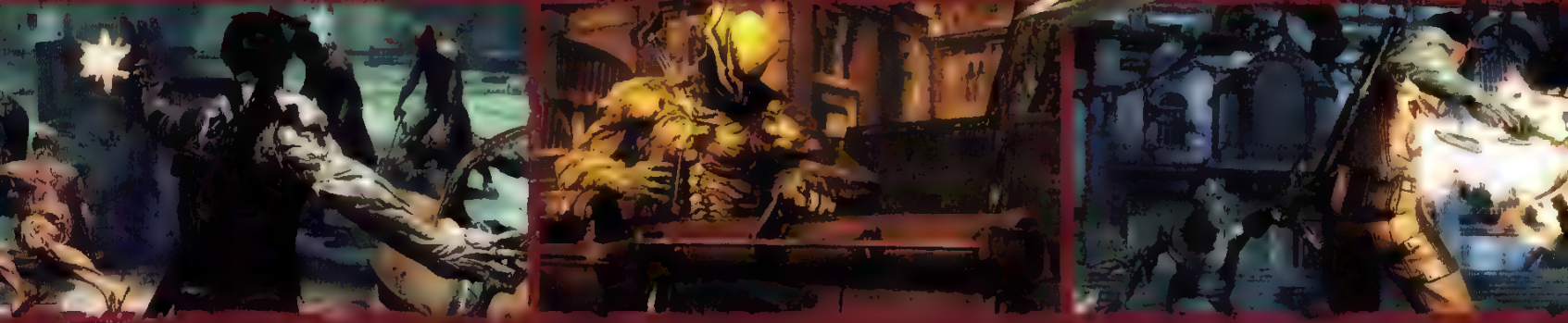
And for an encore, the Wii version of Guitar Hero III only puts out in mono—not stereo like advertised. Surprise, surprise, the Wii's technology is from the '50s. Activision says it's working on remastered replacement discs that will be available soon at no cost.

be the
weapon.

unleash the
power.

become the
hero.

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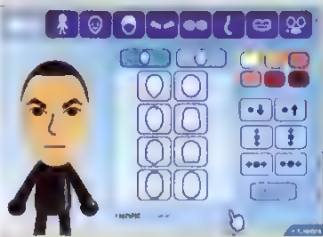
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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



MORE MIIS

We all love Mii. They're cute; they're funny. So why aren't we seeing more of them utilized in Wii games? Because—in all its wisdom—Nintendo doesn't want that to happen. According to some developers Loose Talk has spoken with, Wii developers have been begging to integrate Mii into games more, but it's Nintendo that keeps slapping developers down. Of course, some games do use them, but the whys and wherefores of who Nintendo lets use Mii remain a mystery to third party publishers and developers.

NINTENDO INFLUENCES E3

E3 is moving back to the Los Angeles Convention Center (shown) after a one-year hiatus in Santa Monica, but the industry event is staying in the month of July, with the event running the 15th-17th. Although traditionally held in May, last year's event couldn't get May because of late organization. What's special about July? Nintendo has a rule that it cannot announce new products within a month of its financial reporting, so rather than not include Nintendo or have them showcase nothing, E3 was pushed into July for last year's event. It seems Nintendo's influence remains.



THE POWER OF THE ASSASSIN'S BLADE

According to the *Financial Times*, the success of Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* has stayed the blade of Electronic Arts. The large third-party publisher has long eyed acquiring Ubisoft, which it has a 15.4 percent stake in, but the theory is that the game's success has created some stability and made it that much more cost-prohibitive for EA to swallow Ubisoft up.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

This game isn't that old, and it certainly wasn't good enough to garner classic status on its gameplay merits, but this game sank without a fight so you might not remember it. In a failed attempt to be cute, funny, or just plain interesting, this game tasks you with blasting cuddly, happy Kewlett invaders of your world in a third-person action title. You know what's not cute? Shooting yourself in the face and putting yourself out of your own misery.

(Answer on page 32)



NPD SALES OUT OF THIS... GALAXY

GOOD NEWS FOR EVERYONE

This year saw the release of some of the biggest critical hits in video game history, and according to industry sales tracker The NPD Group, November was a huge month for video games, with sales up over 50 percent from last year at \$13.12 billion overall. The NPD expects 2007 to have rung up just over \$20 billion when all is said and done.

SOFTWARE

(\$1.3 billion in Nov. – up 61 percent from last year)

- 1 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare (360) Activision – 1.57 million
- 2 Super Mario Galaxy (Wii) Nintendo – 1.12 million
- 3 Assassin's Creed (360) Ubisoft – 980,000
- 4 Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock (PS2) Activision – 967,000
- 5 Wii Play w/Remote (Wii) Nintendo – 564,000
- 6 Mass Effect (360) Microsoft – 473,000
- 7 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare (PS3) Activision – 444,000
- 8 Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock (Wii) Activision – 426,000
- 9 Halo 3 (360) Microsoft – 387,000
- 10 Assassin's Creed (PS3) – 377,000

CONSOLES

(\$1.1 billion in Nov. – up 41 percent since last Nov.)

- Wii 981,000 (best month since last December. NPD says only supply limited sales)
- PS3 466,000 (biggest sales increase from October of all platforms due to price drop)
- PS2 496,000
- PSP 567,000

FAST FACTS

- According to Microsoft, the Xbox 360 has reached an unprecedented attach rate of 6.9 360 games per console.
- Assassin's Creed earns the "best-selling new IP launch" crown from Gears of War according to the NPD.
- Rock Band sells 382,000 units in November on 360 and PS3. NPD says it expects this to increase dramatically because the game's initial shipments were limited.
- To date, Xbox 360's HD-DVD add-on peripheral has only sold 296,000 units in America, representing 3.4 percent of all 360 owners in this country.

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER
JOSH HOLMES
 General Manager,
 Propaganda Games (Turok)

- 1 ICO - PS2
- 2 Sid Meier's Pirates! - Amiga
- 3 Tetris - Various
- 4 Grand Theft Auto III - PS2
- 5 Portal - Xbox 360



READER
IMARI REYNOLDS
 Detroit, MI

- 1 Super Mario 64 - N64
- 2 Mega Man X - SNES
- 3 Donkey Kong 64 - N64
- 4 Super Mario Sunshine - GC
- 5 Sonic Mega Collection - GC

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Guitar Hero/Rock Band Songs We Would Download, But Be Ashamed Of

- 10 "Life is a Highway" by Tom Cochrane
- 9 "Paradise By The Dashboard Light" by Meat Loaf
- 8 "What Would You Say" by Dave Matthews
- 7 "I Want a New Drug" Huey Lewis and the News
- 6 "More Than Words" by Extreme
- 5 "Rock Me Amadeus" by Falco
- 4 "Money for Nothing" by Dire Straits
- 3 "Danger Zone" by Kenny Loggins
- 2 "We Built This City" by Starship
- 1 "The Final Countdown" by Europe

Name That Game Answer: Raze's Hell

IMMORTALIZED IN WARCRAFT

MAKE YOUR CHARACTER COME TO LIFE



Ed Fries might not be a vice president at Microsoft anymore, but that doesn't mean his heart has left gaming. His newest endeavor is FigurePrints, a service that will create a 3D statue of your World of Warcraft character.

Using a 3D printer, FigurePrints can reproduce a hardened and sealed plaster-like powder figure of your character at 1:18 scale for \$99.95 (not including \$14.96 shipping and handling). For example, not counting the base the figure stands on nor its protective glass dome, a six-foot-tall human character would come out at about four inches.

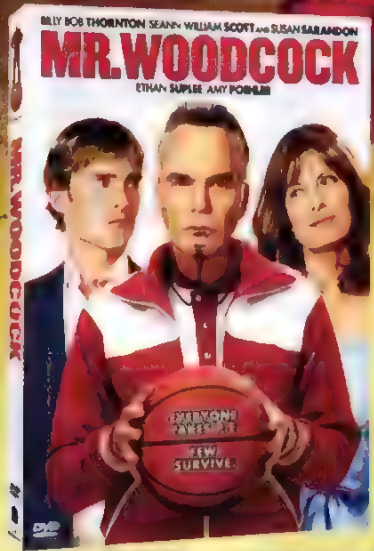
After creating an account at FigurePrints.com, the company will take a screenshot of your character. Afterwards you can pose your character and outfit it as you desire. The figure itself is formed via a stack of over a thousand slices created by a state-of-the-art 3D printer.

Availability is limited, so head over to www.figureprints.com for more.

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Wii in 2008



Everyone's heard the standard complaint about the lack of good third-party Wii games. Well, we've scanned the horizon to find plenty of promising Wii games without the words Mario, Zelda, or Metroid in the title. This collection purposely strays from commonly covered games in favor of new announcements or titles we haven't heard from in a while. Take a look at just some of the Wii games you'll be playing this year, ranging from arcade shooters to RPGs to music.

baroque

• PUBLISHER: ATLUS • DEVELOPER: STING • RELEASE: FEBRUARY

Ten years after its original release on Sega Saturn, Atlus is bringing a revamped version of this obscure dungeon crawling RPG to the U.S. on Wii and PS2. The graphics have received a necessary overhaul and the perspective has changed from first person to third person. Your amnesiac protagonist awakens in the year 2032 to find a desolate world. He must atone for some unknown sin by making it through all the floors of Neuro Tower, which changes every time it's entered. In a strange twist, dying in the game helps uncover new secrets about your character's past.



bomberman land

• PUBLISHER: HUDSON • DEVELOPER: HUDSON
• RELEASE: JANUARY

A mysterious champion dressed in Three Amigos attire has kidnapped the mayor and will only let him go if someone can rise through a tournament to beat him in a one-on-one challenge. Players must work their way through 50 minigames in five different hub worlds to win. Challenges include a mine cart race, a Brain Age-esque math game, and a katana quick draw. Up to four players can compete in many of the minigames or battle it out in classic Bomberman style.



deca sports

• PUBLISHER: HUDSON • DEVELOPER: HUDSON • RELEASE: S

Who knows when or if Nintendo will make a follow up to their system-selling Wii Sports. Fortunately, Hudson is taking the baton and running with it. Deca Sports compiles 10 sports made with the same simple flavor as Wii Sports, but is careful not to duplicate any games that may have already been covered. Hudson tried to get Nintendo to let it use Miis in the game, but apparently even their partnership from all of the money-making Mario Party games wasn't enough to seal the deal. Similar customizable cartoony characters fill out the ranks, nonetheless.

The various sports facilitate anywhere from two to four players simultaneously for single match quickplay or longer tournaments. The full list of activities includes basketball, soccer, badminton, archery, kart racing, motocross, beach volleyball, figure skating, curling, and snowboarding.

During our hands-on time we found some familiar control schemes. Kart racing and motocross play like Excite Truck, badminton feels like Wii Sports tennis, and soccer is like a down-to-earth interpretation of Mario Strikers.

Figure skating actually provides a surprising gameplay mechanic that's got more in common with rhythm games than sports. Players follow a dotted line performing tricks at the glowing circles. The tricky part is you have to keep pace with the music. Move too fast or slow in your routine and even Tonya Harding will be ashamed to be seen with you.





the house of the dead 2 & 3 return

• PUBLISHER: SEGA
• DEVELOPER: SEGA
• RELEASE: SPRING

In a follow-up to its first Wii Zapper title, *Ghost Squad*, Sega is once again opening its vast arcade vault to resurrect both *House of the Dead 2* & *3*. Originally released in the late '90s and early '00s respectively, the Wii should be able to handle these arcade games quite well. Outside of using the Wii remote in place of a light gun, it's not necessarily clear how this version will differ from the 2003 Xbox port of *House of the Dead III* (which included *HotD 2* as an unlockable).

The fact that *Typing of the Dead* and its Japan-only sequel *run the HotD 2 & 3* engines, respectively, combined with a recent Wii firmware upgrade that facilitates USB keyboard input, has lifted our hopes that the two games could turn out to be excellent unlockables. Sega reps say that they haven't heard much about it, but would not rule out the possibility entirely.



emergency mayhem

• PUBLISHER: CODEMASTERS • DEVELOPER: SUPERSONIC • RELEASE: SPRING
Disaster has struck in the unfortunately named *Crisis City*. Players will get behind the wheel of a fire truck, ambulance, or police cruiser to race to the scene. If you make it in time, you'll compete in one of 60 minigames including hosing down fires, tranquilizing monkeys, performing CPR, and restraining escaped prisoners. Up to four players can compete in a tournament or try to stick it out in *Survival mode*.



fragile: farewell ruins of the moon

• PUBLISHER: NAMCO BANDAI • DEVELOPER: TRI-CRESCENDO • RELEASE: 2008 (JAPAN)
Though a U.S. release of this title has not been confirmed as of yet, we'd be surprised if the next RPG from *Eternal Sonata* developer *Tri-Crescendo* didn't cross the pond eventually. Players take on the role of a young boy who wanders a desolate world devoid of population. He seems to travel mostly at night and uses a Wii remote-controlled flashlight to explore ruins. Ghosts appear to be the primary enemy, though it's still unclear as to whether you will fight them directly or simply avoid them. We'll surely have more details when (or if) *Fragile* is announced for North America.



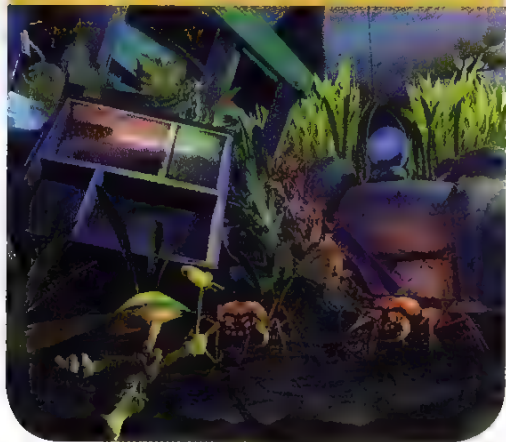
harvest moon: tree of tranquility [working title]

• PUBLISHER: NATSUME • DEVELOPER: MARVELOUS INTERACTIVE • RELEASE: FALL
The latest *Harvest Moon* title looks to maintain the familiar formula for the most part while adding interactive farming controls. We can see the appeal in tasks like fishing, but hopefully there won't be too much waggling when it comes to weeding, tilling, and planting. Players can choose to be a boy or girl who happens upon an island town in trouble. They'll have to yield crops, raise livestock, and flirt with the locals to reawaken the *Mother Tree* and herald the *Harvest Goddess'* return.



mushroom men: the spore wars

• PUBLISHER: GAMECOCK • DEVELOPER: RED FLY • RELEASE: FALL
Taking place after the events of the DS game (Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi), The Spore Wars begins after the Bolete mushroom tribe has fought off the evil Amanitas (who were all given sentence after a mysterious comet passed Earth). Mushroom lore states that anyone who discovers the true origin of fungi will be granted ultimate power over all creatures on the planet. Main character Pax will fashion weapons out of everyday objects in his quest to stop the Amanitas and hopefully put an end to the fungi fighting.



obscure: the aftermath

• PUBLISHER: IGNITION
• DEVELOPER: PLAYLOGIC/
F1WORK/IGNITION
• RELEASE: MARCH

Set two years after the events of 2005's *Obscure*, *Aftermath* finds the surviving characters all attending Fallcreek University. A mysterious black flower has shown up and, naturally, students began "experimenting" with it. Side effects include vivid dreams and untold terror. The purposely campy teen horror flick storyline allows easy access for newcomers and drop-in, drop-out co-op adds a change of pace to the genre. The six playable characters each have a unique skill: the jock moves heavy objects, the blonde decrypts puzzles, and the nimble raver dude scales tough obstacles. Bonus: *Aftermath* will only cost \$30.

ninja reflex

• PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS/NUNCHUCK GAMES
• DEVELOPER: SANZARU GAMES • RELEASE: MARCH
Nunchuck Games' David Luntz describes *Ninja Reflex* as a martial arts take on *Wii Sports*. The team spent six weeks traveling China and Japan gathering reference materials and looking for ninja training inspiration. The game will feature six different challenges with six progressively harder iterations in each. Players will take on a ninja name and work their way from white belt to black belt. Train with katanas, nunchaku, and shuriken, snatch fish out of a pond, catch flies with chopsticks, and be the first to spot fireflies. Up to four players can compete to see who's the best ninja, as well.



dragon quest swords: the masked queen and the tower of mirrors

Compared to the rest of the *Dragon Quest* offshoots (*Rocket Slime* and *Monsters*), Square Enix is getting closer to a traditional RPG with *Swords*. Players will see most of the game through the eyes of an unnamed silent protagonist. The game begins on the eve of your sixteenth birthday during the five-year anniversary celebration of the defeat of Xiphos the Deathbringer. The next day you must complete the Walk of the Worthy, a rite of passage for all young men.

The initial wandering around town gives players a chance to get accustomed to the one-handed remote control scheme. All movement is mapped to the d-pad and a pointer onscreen can be used to select people to talk to and objects to search. Adventuring controls are much simpler since you can only really go back and forth on a single rail, searching bushes and rocks along the way.

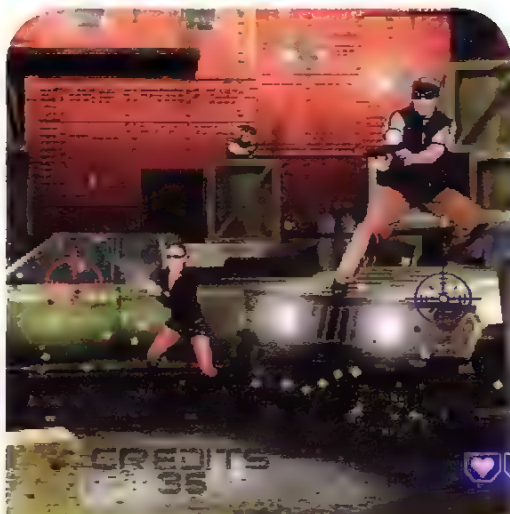
Enemies will pop out at random, and you'll have to slash through several waves before the battle is through. Attacks consist of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal slashes, which can be unleashed at will without waiting for any kind of turn. The key to combat is to watch for patterns in enemy formation. If slimes are lined up in a row, for example, one horizontal slash can take them all out. Players can also wield a translucent shield or save up for a Master Stroke – a super-powered slash requiring a series of precise movements.

The game is split up into distinct chapters primarily focused on a single quest. Upon completion, player performance is ranked, with high scores granting renown and rare items. *Swords* has an impressive look and its mix of traditional and new school gameplay should be worth checking out.



• PUBLISHER:
SQUARE ENIX
• DEVELOPER:
SQUARE ENIX
• RELEASE:
DECEMBER





target: terror

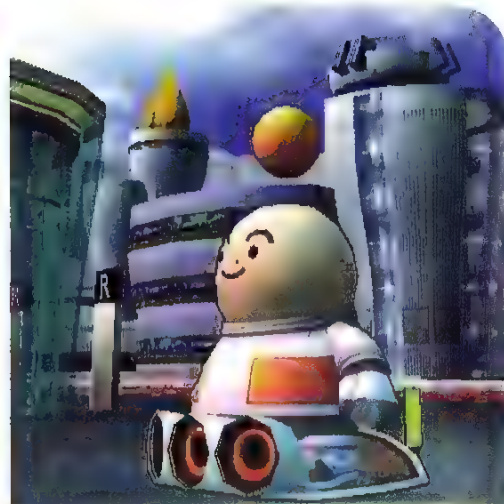
• PUBLISHER: KONAMI • DEVELOPER: LEVIATHAN GAMES
• RELEASE: SPRING

Riding the wave of Wii Zapper-compatible games, Konami has picked up a 2004 arcade title originally created by designer Eugene Jarvis (Defender, Smash TV, and the Cruisin' series). One or two players can kick terrorist ass on the Golden Gate Bridge, the Los Alamos nuclear facility, and even prevent a hijacked plane from crashing into the White House. Justice mode allows one player to dual wield through the entire campaign, and wacky minigames send up several classic arcade games.

wii music [working title]

• PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
• DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
• RELEASE: 2008 (JAPAN)

Shigeru Miyamoto's tuxedoed conducting performance of Wii Music at E3 2006 got many gamers excited about the possibility of conducting a virtual orchestra, but the lack of new details since then has made it seem like vaporware. Fortunately, the game's existence was recently confirmed at a Nintendo press conference. Scheduled to hit this year in Japan, Wii Music will apparently feature a mix of public domain classical pieces and Nintendo tunes. Players can conduct the entire band or control one of several dozen instruments from guitar to xylophone to maracas all with the remote and nunchuk. Up to four players can play together in Nintendo's simplified response to Rock Band.



opoona

• PUBLISHER: KOEI • DEVELOPER: ARTE PIAZZA/KOEI
• RELEASE: 2008

Known for its work on the Dragon Quest series, developer Arte Piazza has joined with Koei to create a "lifestyle RPG" that follows the exploits of a boy named Opoona in his quest to reunite with his family. Opoona will battle Dark Rogues by chucking Energy Bonbons, shop for various items and works of art, take on jobs such as rescuer and detective, and befriend the locals. All controls are mapped to the nunchuk, leaving your other hand free to eat snacks.

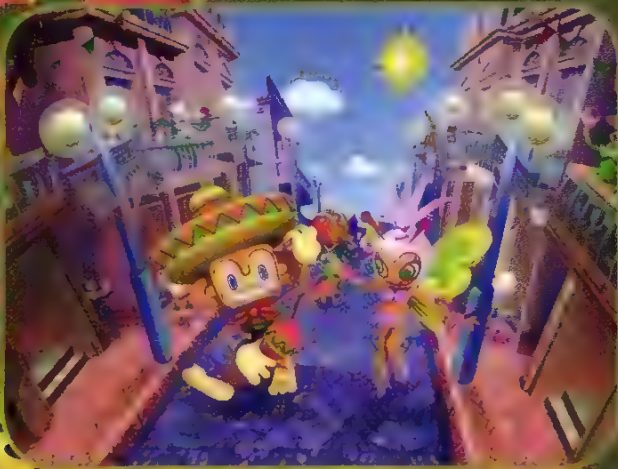
samba de amigo

• PUBLISHER: SEGA • DEVELOPER: GEARBOX SOFTWARE • RELEASE: SPRING

One of the first music games to penetrate the popular consciousness (see this month's classic review on page 110). Samba de Amigo is returning at the hands of a very surprising developer. Gearbox Software, known mostly for FPSs like Brothers in Arms and Borderlands, has so many huge Samba fans in its ranks that the company practically begged to work on the project.

Instead of resurrecting pricey maraca peripherals, the game will be entirely controlled via the remote and nunchuk. The team is also looking into dual remote controls for players who want to keep it cordless. The standard six-circle play mechanic returns along with posing. Hustle mode is appearing in the U.S. for the first time, having only shown up in the Japan-only Samba de Amigo Ver. 2000. This feature adds in full 360-degree arm swings and what can best be described as air drumming to the standard move set. The controls have made the transition surprisingly well, though there is still plenty of tightening necessary before release.

Mii integration is currently planned, as well, but we didn't see it in our hands-on time. A good chunk of classic tracks will be returning including "Take on Me," "Livin' la Vida Loca," and "Macarena." Details on new tracks are scarce, but Sega did confirm that Santana's "Oye Como Va" has been locked in.



wild earth: african safari

• PUBLISHER: MAJESCO • DEVELOPER: SUPER X STUDIOS • RELEASE: SPRING

Majesco is beating Sony's Afrika to the punch this spring with its own nature photography game based on last summer's PC release. Nature documentary fans will scour Serengeti National Park to score photos of 30 different species. New to the Wii version is a three-player co-op mode where one person drives a jeep while the others snap photos, and a minigame mode lets you play as the animals. No mating simulations have been announced.



wonderworld amusement park

• PUBLISHER: MAJESCO • DEVELOPER: COYOTE CONSOLE • RELEASE: JUNE

Players will navigate an open world amusement park, play over 30 carnival games, and go for a spin on the rides in Majesco's upcoming carnival sim. Customizable characters will be able to spend their winnings on new outfits, accessories, and a variety of stuffed animals. Outside of the standard carnival backdrop, players can try various themed challenges in the pirate, fairy tale, and outer space zones. Up to four players can compete in any unlocked minigames.



wwii aces

• PUBLISHER: DESTINEER • DEVELOPER: ARCADE MOON • RELEASE: SPRING

Take on three distinct campaigns solo or co-op as the Royal Air Force, Soviet Air Force, or Luftwaffe in this World War II flight sim. Authentic planes and battles set the backdrop as players make bombing runs, defend bases, and set up paratrooper drops. A nifty slow motion effect can be triggered at any time for those shots that need to be right on, and the two-player versus mode will sort out the true aces. Several control types are available, but the most realistic option places flight control in the nunchuk's motion sensor.



monster lab

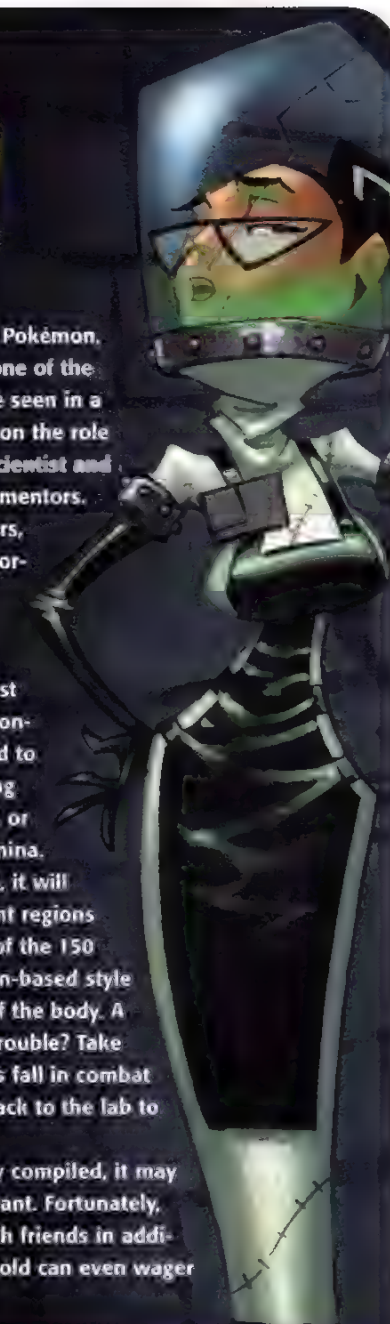
• PUBLISHER: EIDOS
• DEVELOPER: BACKBONE
ENTERTAINMENT
• RELEASE: SUMMER

Mixing Frankenstein with Pokémon, Backbone has created one of the strangest pairings we've seen in a while. Players will take on the role of an apprentice mad scientist and learn the ropes from a series of insane mentors. Rather than creating a stable of monsters, you'll swap out arms, legs, heads, and torsos on one custom creature.

Monster surgery is not as simple as slapping on a new helmet, however. Around 20 minigames will determine just what kinds of stats the new parts will contain. Toss brains into the monster's head to increase intelligence, complete a welding game to beef up an arm's attack power, or correctly mix chemicals to increase stamina.

Once your creature is fully constructed, it will be able to venture forth into six different regions to complete quests and discover more of the 150 total monster parts. Battles play out turn-based style and allow you to attack specific parts of the body. A particular laser attachment giving you trouble? Take it out to gain the upper hand. Once foes fall in combat they will drop materials you can take back to the lab to use on your own monster.

Since all of the enemies are randomly compiled, it may be tricky to score the exact piece you want. Fortunately, Monster Lab features online trading with friends in addition to online battles. The particularly bold can even wager parts on the outcome of the match.



CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1993 Masters Degree

During his third year of college at Washington State, Ryan becomes obsessed with the then-popular strategy PC game Master of Orion, reigniting his love of gaming

1996 Accelerating

After traveling Europe and working for a friend of the family installing computer phone systems, Ryan gets a shot at gaming with a job working with hardware accelerators at Microsoft as a contractor

2000 Internal Affairs

Ryan works as a manager in Microsoft Quality Assurance and Internal Operations department

2001 Lost Cannon

Ryan works as test lead on Digital Anvil's Loose Cannon, a GTA-style title that is never released

2001 Robot Action

Mechwarrior IV: Black Night, on which Ryan served as a test manager, is released. The expansion pack is well received by the Mechwarrior audience

2001 One Hit, One Miss



Ryan serves as QA manager on two high profile Xbox launch titles: Halo and Azurik. Rise of Perathia. Halo goes on to immortality, but as for Azurik (a Game Informer cover story, no less), Ryan recalls it as "not my proudest moment"

2004 Super Sequel



Now a part of Microsoft, Ryan heads the studio as it releases Halo 2. The game is an instant classic, selling millions of copies and is now widely regarded as one of the best multiplayer games ever

2007 The Trilogy

Bungie releases the much-anticipated Halo 3. Not surprisingly, it lights retail on fire, selling 4.2 million copies in its first day

2007 Sweet Freedom

Bungie shocks the industry by announcing that it has reached an agreement with parent company Microsoft to become an independent studio again. Microsoft retains the rights to the Halo brand and publishing rights to Bungie's future titles

HAROLD RYAN

PRESIDENT, BUNGIE

>> Bungie head Harold Ryan has guided the company through three blockbuster Halo titles, and is now steering a new course for the now-independent developer. We spoke with him about Bungie's future after Microsoft. <<

How's life as an independent studio so far?

So far, life is good. The main difference for us is that we're accountable to ourselves. I suppose the disadvantage for me, being the one in charge, is I can't pass the buck up the chain. If someone gets mad at "The Man," they're getting mad at me. But it's good. Certainly a lot more people are interested in talking with us as a company since we've been independent. I've been able to talk to more of our peers in the industry lately.

How long had the idea of going back to being independent been percolating at Bungie?

It depends on who you talk to. There were some people that were convinced after Halo that Microsoft would kick Bungie out because we wouldn't fit in. As a group, it really didn't start out as a planned negotiation to leave the company. We were just looking at what positive things we could do to impact the passion and morale of the team. Eventually, we got to the point where we wanted more control of certain aspects of managing the people in the company than Microsoft

the release of Halo 3. In trying to keep the quality and hit the dates we wanted to hit, we had to stay focused. That meant we didn't spend as much time chatting with our Microsoft buddies as some of them would have liked.

As excited as everyone was at the thought of independence, it must have been somewhat emotional to give over control of the Halo brand after working so hard on it for so many years.

Yeah, Halo was a tough thing even internally [at Microsoft]. There are so many pulls and pressures from other groups that wanted to do things with Halo.... It was something that was going to be outside of our direct control whether we stayed at Microsoft or went independent.

There have obviously been some Halo spin-off projects, like Halo Wars or the stalled Halo movie. Were those things that you were excited about and driving, or was that driven more by Microsoft?

When a Halo novel comes out, it comes by us for edits and fact checking. When it comes to game proposals for other developers, we'll review the original script. What we did with Ensemble, we sent lead designers, artists, and scriptwriters down to the studio to talk about their game ideas and story. It's something that is an expectation going forward. It's in the agreement we signed; one of the things they wanted was for us to stay engaged with them and anyone they signed to work on a Halo project, if they sign someone other than us.

So it's still possible that you'll be doing another Halo game.

It's entirely possible that we'll be doing another Halo game.... We're actively looking at a couple of different games that could be Halo games and working with Microsoft execs to decide about timing and whether we're the right developer to do it.

You've alluded to a new IP. How long has it been in development and could you talk a bit about it?

[Halo] was going to be outside of our direct control whether we stayed at Microsoft or went independent.

was comfortable with doing with one small piece of their company. They have 50 or 60 thousand full-time employees and they have to worry about setting a precedent by treating one group differently than another.

What do you mean by "differently?" Were Bungie considered divas within the organization?

Um... it depends. We did isolate ourselves a fair amount - a lot of it was actually my doing, even before I was in charge of the studio. Halo 1 was so popular, when we started working on Halo 2 we would have school tour groups come through with cameras walking through the studio filming our screens and concept art. We're like, "We want to keep the story secret and we can't do that with 50 people walking through." So we put in our own security doors so people couldn't come through. That's a rare thing at Microsoft. That did leave some people with a feeling of "Why are these guys different? How can they lock me out of their space?"... [Also,] there were people [at Microsoft] who wanted to spend time with us and learn with us, but we were on a pretty tight schedule from 2000 until

We're definitely less excited about other people making games in the Halo universe, because any time you add one more group doing something it just complicates the fiction. It's not that Microsoft would intentionally sign some developer that wouldn't do it, but anything you can't control directly makes you nervous. Originally, when they talked about the movie we were pretty down on it. When it came to the point that they were going to have Weta and Peter Jackson work on it, we were actually pretty excited. It's too bad that the Weta Workshop guys didn't get to finish all their work. The concepts and everything they made for the movie were amazing. I was down in New Zealand and got to drive around in the Warthog.... They did a great job modeling the controls - which made it really hard to drive! [Laughs] My test lead from Halo 1 and 2 crashed us into the building.

It's been a little unclear how much input you will have in Halo games moving forward. How much support will you have in terms of picking a developer or providing oversight or guidance?

We're not saying a lot about the project. There is a new game that [Bungie co-founder] Jason [Jones] has been working on for some time, off and on. He's had a dedicated team for the last year. It's a new IP from us that will be coming out sometime after the next couple of years.

Have you looked at doing a new Marathon title? It still has a large cult following.

It's definitely something we would consider. The Freeverse port of Marathon to Xbox Live was a project that we pushed for internally just to see what it would look like to bring the old game up a little bit and see if people liked it and how it played. That project got a lot of people excited internally.... We're not committed to a Marathon game now, but it's certainly a possibility for the future.

Will you continue to support Halo 3 online?

We'll be actively involved in supporting Halo 3 for more than likely the entire span of the game. We can't imagine walking away from it.



BREAKING FREE

■ Harold Ryan and Bungie are looking for new challenges as a fully independent development house

pc

PORTABLE POWER

EA's *Crysis* is known to devour PCs and leave them quaking in the corner silently questioning their self-worth, so it seemed like the perfect game to give a workout to this month's roundup of gaming notebooks.

How did they perform? Check out our notes and find out.

DELL XPS M1730

VERY GOOD ●●●●●●●●●●

PRO: The M1730 is a gamer's dream come true. Its dual GeForce 8800M GTX video cards and dedicated Ageia PhysX processor helped this powerful system place first in our 3D Mark benchmarks. The backlit keyboard is great, and the system's use of lights and overall attractive design make it desirable.

CON: Given the astronomical price, the lack of a next-gen optical drive and an HDMI port are upsetting. The colossal power brick makes this already heavy PC even more of a chore to transport.

3D Mark Score: 12034 • PC Mark Score: 6387
\$4,974.99 • www.dell.com

ASUS G2S

GOOD ●●●●●●●●●●

PRO: This is about as budget friendly as serious gaming notebooks get. The small chassis makes the G2S more portable than its competition, and the audio output impresses.

CON: The G2S is not DX10 compliant, so you won't be experiencing next-generation PC gaming. The system runs loud, and could benefit from both a higher resolution screen and a faster GPU. *Crysis* runs on the system, but it doesn't run well.

3D Mark Score: 2301 • PC Mark Score: 4621
\$1,699.99 • usa.asus.com



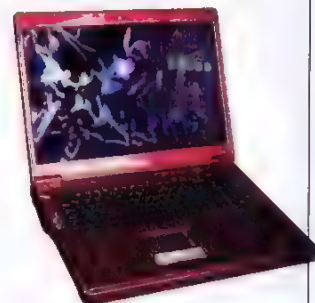
FALCON NORTHWEST FRAGBOOK DRX

GOOD ●●●●●●●●●●

PRO: The DRX puts up some good scores and runs demanding games like *Crysis* admirably. We also like its customizable automotive-class paint job options available upon ordering.

CON: The DRX is the heaviest notebook we tested, and while it puts on a fine performance, given the price we expected more. The overall boxy design is outdated and the system lacks many bells and whistles, such as media controls or biometric security, that are common in the other books we tested.

3D Mark Score: 8184 • PC Mark Score: 7204
\$4,858.00 • www.falcon-nw.com



HP PAVILION HDX

GOOD ●●●●●●●●●●

PRO: The HP is a sweet package for media and gaming. With a Blu-ray drive, the best array of ports in the bunch (including HDMI), and one of the most gorgeous 20-inch laptop screens we've ever seen, everything looks great on this system.

CON: The HDX is so big and heavy it's practically a desktop. The screen hinge has us a little worried that it might weaken over time. The included remote is handy, but its buttons are too small and its dock ruins the system's otherwise sleek design.

3D Mark Score: 8014 • PC Mark Score: N/A
\$4,053.90 • www.shopping.hp.com



SONY VAIO AR630

GOOD ●●●●●●●●●●

PRO: The AR630 sports a clean overall design, lightweight construction, and Blu-ray drive. Given the attractive price and modest tech under the hood, it's impressive that this system plays *Crysis* at all.

CON: This notebook's sluggish performance isn't aided by its odd design quirks, such as the poorly designed touchpad buttons. The throwaway suite of Sony software unnecessarily clutters the system, as well.

3D Mark Score: 2641 • PC Mark Score: 4157
\$1,599.99 • www.sonymstyle.com



TOSHIBA SATELLITE X205-SL13

GOOD ●●●●●●●●●●

PRO: This Toshiba has an HD DVD-R drive, HDMI output for plugging in consoles, amazing Tru-Brite screen, biometric security, and strong audio output provided by Harmon Kardon speakers, all of which makes the Satellite a great fit for dorm rooms.

CON: We found the overall system design to be ugly, and the hard drive comes pre-packed with a bunch of junk software that you'll want to erase as soon as you get it. The hard drive is also slow for a gaming machine.

3D Mark Score: 3722 • PC Mark Score: 4909
\$2,499.99 • www.toshibadirect.com



PHILIPS HTS8100 SOUNDBAR



WORSE ●●●●●●●●●●

Philips' space-saving surround sound solution comes with a built-in DVD player complete with 1080p video upscaling and an optional iPod dock. Using only one speaker (plus amp) and Philip's ambisound technology, this SoundBar delivers some fairly deceptive surround audio. However, you will occasionally be reminded of those four missing speakers. Considering that this costs more than a decent six-channel system, the 8100 is probably only best for those worried about their living room real estate.

\$799.99 • www.store.philips.com

tech

D-LINK DGL-4500 ROUTER

BETTER ●●●●●●●●●●

D-Link's gaming specific router may not be the cheapest option, but it's easy to set up, features a dual-band wireless N signal, and houses four Gigabit ports. But the real standout feature is the Gamefuel functionality, which allows you to prioritize game traffic to ensure you'll always have the strongest bandwidth possible for games.

When we tested it we got a strong enough wireless signal to cover an average home. Our biggest complaint is the LED screen, whose poor placement makes stacking awkward. While this detailed screen is nice, navigating its menus is not.

\$179.99 • www.dlink.com



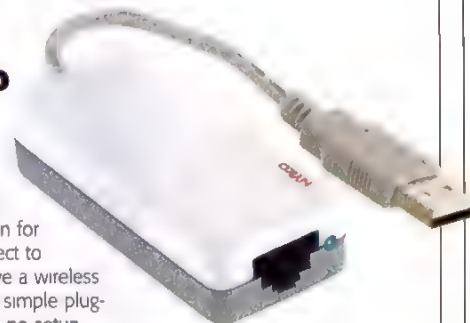
tech

NYKO NET CONNECT

BETTER ●●●●●●●●●●

Sick of being unable to connect to your wireless network with your Wii so you can check the weather? Nyko's new Net Connect is a great solution for those who need to connect to the Internet but don't have a wireless setup in their home. This simple plug-and-play adapter requires no setup.

\$24.99 • www.nyko.com



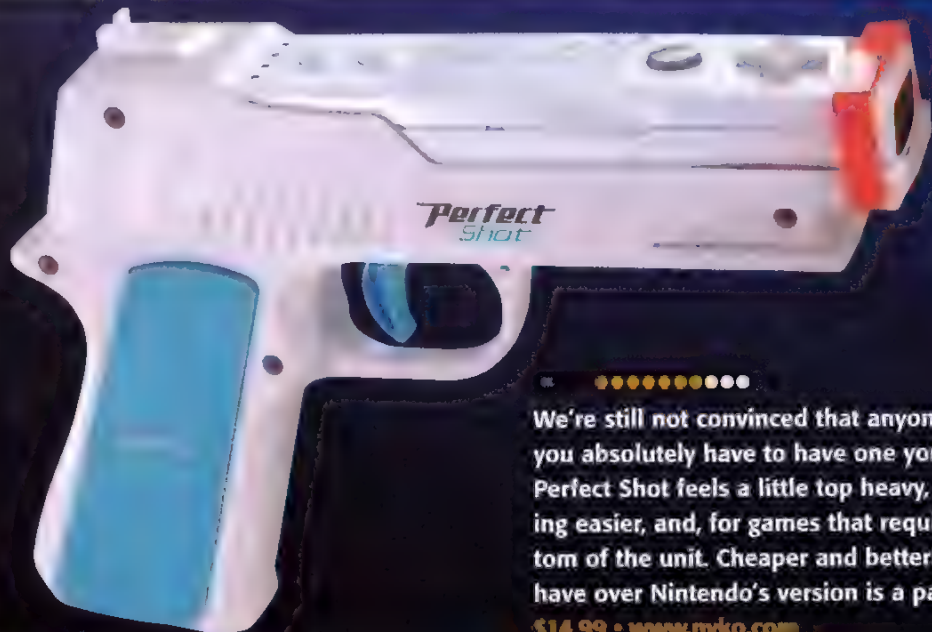
tech

NYKO PERFECT SHOT

BETTER ●●●●●●●●●●

We're still not convinced that anyone needs a gun casing for their Wii remote, but if you absolutely have to have one you might want to check out Nyko's offering. The Perfect Shot feels a little top heavy, but its slick trigger and shorter barrel make aiming easier, and, for games that require a nunchuk, an adaptor is located on the bottom of the unit. Cheaper and better! About the only thing the Perfect Shot doesn't have over Nintendo's version is a packed-in game.

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Screens from Nintendo DS™ version

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RATED MATURE:

THE RISING TIDE OF GAMES WITH SOMETHING TO SAY



BY MATT MILLER,
GAME INFORMER,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

By all accounts, 2007 was a remarkable year for anyone with at least a passing interest in gaming. Three powerful consoles have continued to carve out their niches in the gaming landscape. Handhelds and mobiles platforms are on the rise. And PC MMOs are a cultural phenomenon. Most importantly, an array of stunningly fun games hit the market this past year. Bolstered by technology that allows developers to march into heretofore untapped arenas of visuals, audio, and design, the interactive worlds we play in are more complex and varied than ever before.

Of course, none of this comes as a great surprise. We've almost come to expect these sorts of titanic leaps forward in technology on a yearly basis, even if the last 12 months saw a more rapid and exciting expansion than usual. However, along with the expected growth of technological complexity, 2007 was also a year that saw an increasing push from developers to offer something few games have sought after until now — meaning.

For decades, most games have carried with them an unstated and perhaps unintentional flirtation with power fantasy, an idea more eloquently detailed by Friedrich Nietzsche than anyone else. The famous German philosopher suggested the idea of the will to power centuries ago, asserting that people have a desperate drive to assert their power in the world, often even above their own will to live. More than once, I've heard gaming criticized for its reliance on this concept — to hand a little boy a controller and let him play out this overwhelming need to act and maintain control over an imaginary world is characterized as irresponsible. In my mind, an argument can be just as easily made that games offer an avenue to safely explore those potentially aggressive impulses, for both children and adults, but that's a discussion for another time.

Suffice to say, escapism into an interactive world where players can assert their dominance is both cathartic and wildly fun, and I don't think we need

to worry that the idea will go out of style anytime soon. But recent releases seem desperate to strive for some more subtle and powerful thematic visions, and the trend has only recently begun to hit its stride. Perhaps the most profound example doubles as the most commonly proclaimed game of the year for 2007 — BioShock.

As that sprawling undersea metropolis opens up to players, it's hard to avoid the cultural commentary. Anyone familiar with the controversial writings of objectivist Ayn Rand can't help but note some not-so-subtle jibes. Founded as a beacon of individualism, Rapture has fallen from grace, a victim of its own ideals. Even Andrew Ryan's eventual fate seems tied to questions about the dangers of rampant self-interest — especially after you anagram out most of the letters of his name into "Ayn Rand." But beyond that, BioShock deals more significantly with the question of free will and the temptation of man. As gamers wander those water-drenched halls, they're confronted with a choice where morality butts up uncomfortably against that will to power we're so familiar with in other games. With that little girl staring up at you, where do your priorities lie? And when you step up into Ryan's office and learn the truth, you are face-to-face with the existential dilemma: Are all our choices made for us, or do we have the means to exert control on our own future?

What's exciting about these ideas isn't that they're new. They're not. We've had writers struggling with issues of free will throughout history. What is exciting is that we are starting to see games explore these issues in a way that would be impossible in anything but an interactive context. Would the revelation in Ryan's office carry even half its potency delivered in lines of text, or read on stage, or acted out in a movie? It is the player's role as a participant in that drama that carries the weight of the theme; passive observation of the narrative wouldn't carry nearly the same emotional or intellectual gravitas. The interactive protagonist is an entirely new tool through which to explore philosophy, psychology,

The
interactive
protagonist
is an
entirely new
tool through
which to
explore
philosophy,
psychology,
and
morality.

and morality. Because we vicariously inhabit the characters we play, the connection to the message being delivered can be all the more potent.

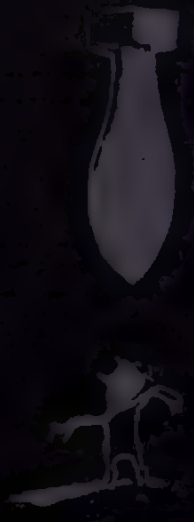
BioShock is certainly not the only title blazing this trail. Assassin's Creed presents a historical fiction bathed in moral gray tones — where the conclusion leaves behind any number of questions about who is good, who is evil, and if those terms even carry any meaning. The clever and humorous writing in Portal hides a complex exploration of the human condition and the willingness to accept authority. Mass Effect abandons traditional ethics entirely, and explores relevant real-world issues of what we're willing to sacrifice for security and peace.

For years, we've had a smattering of titles that seamlessly blend fun and exciting gameplay with deeper and more complex thematic issues, from Oddworld's environmental commentary to the wasteland motifs of Fallout. What's changing is how successful some of these games have become, and how willing and eager the development community seems to be to embrace these more adult and challenging ideas. The question now falls to the public. Do we, as gamers, want more than escapist power fantasies? The chance to blow up some aliens or stomp a turtle shell isn't going away, nor do I think anyone wants them to. But do we want at least some games to step beyond that? Would Assassin's Creed really be so much better if the ending wrapped everything up in a neat bow and sent you on your way, or is it okay for a game creator to leave some questions unanswered? Should a character in Mass Effect ask if you believe in God, or is that something best reserved for Sunday school? The developers are listening. They want (and need) to make games you are going to play. They know we want fun. But do we want more? ■■■

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

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

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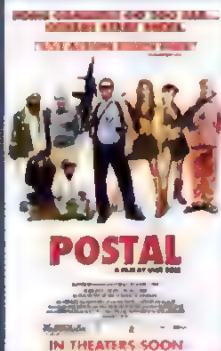
february



Condemned 2: Bloodshot - 02/26

01

Postal opens in theaters today, bringing the total number of Live Bolt movies released in 2006 to two! Incidentally, that is the same number of tickets that this film is expected to sell on opening night. One to Ben, and another to his cat.

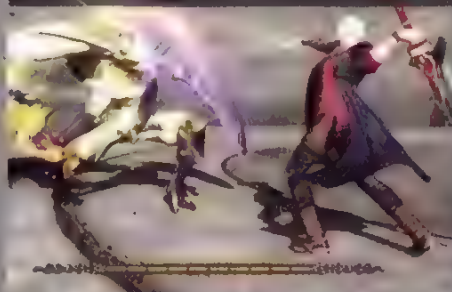


POSTAL

IN THEATERS SOON

05-06

Devil May Cry 4 - 03/01



NEW RELEASES

- Alan Classics: Broken - PSP
- Iron Assid - DS
- The Club - PS3, 360, PC
- Culdeop Saga - 360
- Dark Messiah of Might & Magic - 360
- Devil May Cry 4 - PS3, 360, PC
- Mercenaries 2: World in Flames - PS3, 360, PS2
- Need for Speed: Pro Street - PS3
- Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword - DS

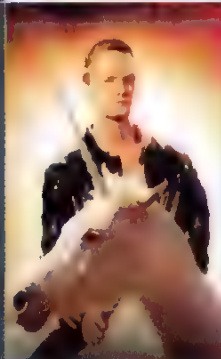
- World Championship Cards - PS3
- World in Conflict - 360



Mercenaries 2: World in Flames - 02/05

08

Neil Patrick Harris and two actors we could care less about return for *Harold and Kumar 2: Escape From Guantanamo*. The first movie, riddled, and sequels are always good. Besides, when has Doogie Howser ever steered you wrong?



12

Super Smash Brothers Brawl - 02/10



NEW RELEASES

- FIFA Street 3 - DS
- Frontlines: Fuel of War - PS3, 360, PC
- Inacidible - DS, PC
- Let's Ride: Friends Forever - DS
- Lost Odyssey - 360
- Space Station Lycooon - Wii
- Suzuki Superbikes - DS
- Wild Petz: Tigerz - DS
- XIII Century: Death of Glory - PC
- Yamaha Supercross - PS2



Frontlines: Fuel of War - 02/12

15

FINAL FANTASY MASTERPIECE ARTS JUDGE GABRANTH FIGURE
If you are a huge Final Fantasy fan (and we're talking on the verge of cosplay or debating a name change to Squall McMoogles) this is the collectible that you need to have next to your gaming rig. It stands in at a mighty 20 inches, but will break the bank with its \$439.99 price point.



18

Get in line early for the Far Cry 2 keynote



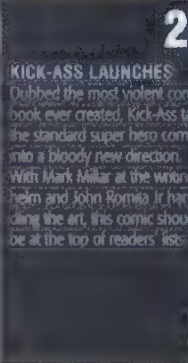
GAME DEVELOPER'S CONFERENCE

Starting today and running through Friday, developers from around the globe descend upon San Francisco's Moscone Center to talk, games and learn from their peers. Attendees can take part in countless keynotes, the Independent Games Festival, and maybe even land a job in the industry at the career pavilion.

19

NEW RELEASES

- Conflict: Denied Ops - PS3, 360
- Dynasty Warriors 6 - PS3, 360
- FIFA Street 3 - PS3
- Professor Layton & the Curious Village - DS
- Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer - DS
- Supreme Commander - 360
- Zoo Lycooon 2 - DS



KICK-ASS LAUNCHES

Dubbed the most violent comic book ever created, Kick-Ass takes the standard super hero comic into a bloody new direction. With Mark Millar at the writing helm and John Romita Jr. handling the art, this comic should be at the top of readers' lists.

22

XENOSAGA EPISODE 3 KOS-MOS STATUE
Her hair is translucent, and she's made of PVC! We're not sure if those are selling points or not, but none of the female statues that Joe has on his desk (shudder) have these features. Expect to see Joe greedily rubbing his hands as he looks out \$89.99 for this statue today.



26



Universe at War: Earth Assault - 02/26

NEW RELEASES

- Bratz: Super Babyz - DS
- Condemned 2: Bloodshot - PS3, 360
- Lost - 360
- Ni - PSP, DS
- Universe at War: Earth Assault - 360



Condemned 2: Bloodshot - 02/26

28

Will Ferrell has portrayed some of the most nuanced, complex characters in modern cinema: Ron Burgundy, Ricky Bobby, and whoever that guy was in *Blades of Glory*. He takes his craft to the next level in *Semi-Pro* as Jackie Moon, a singer who decides to buy a crappy basketball team. Be sure to bring tissues to the theater for this one - it's bound to be an emotional rollercoaster ride.



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REALTONES

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Pop Bottles - Birdman	true9511
Good Life - Kanye West	true9513
Crank Dat Batman - Pop It Off Boys	true9515
Apologize - Timbaland	true9516
Woozyname - Nelly	true9517
I'll Still Kill - 50 Cent Feat Akon	true9518
Until The End of Time - Justin Timberlake	true9519
Bubbly - Colbie Caillat	true9520
Sweetest Girl - Wyclef Feat Akon	true9521
Just Fine - Mary J. Blige	true9522
Cyclone - Baby Bash	true9523

THEMES

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Sweet Cherry Bomb

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SCREENSAVERS

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move7618
move7619
move7620
move7621
move7622

SURPRISE!

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RESISTANCE 2



PLAYSTATION 3

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 60-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK)

> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

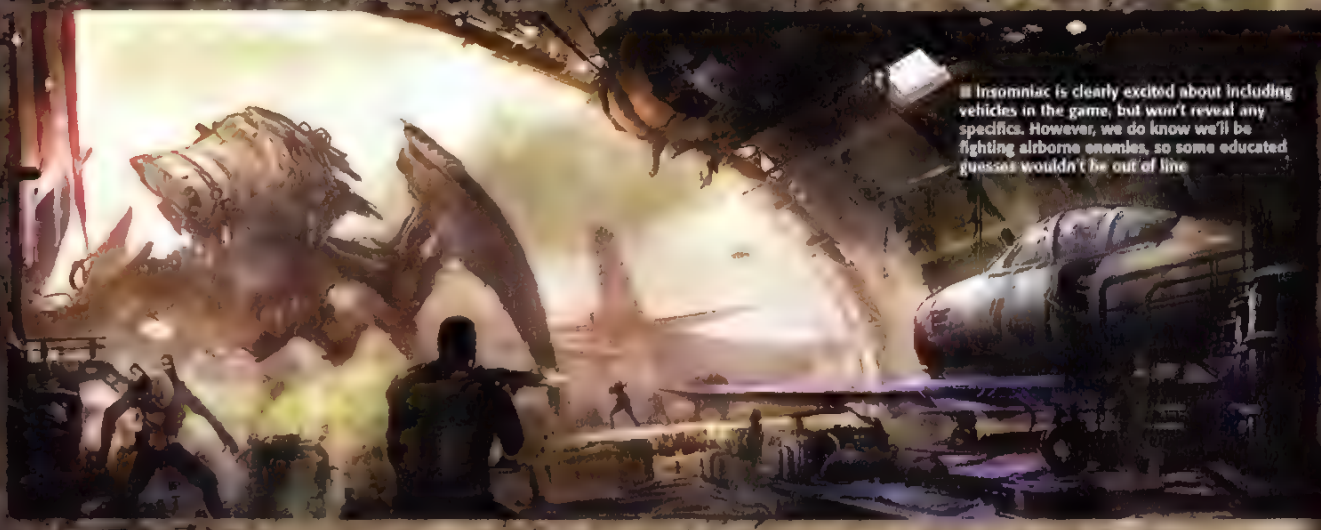
> **DEVELOPER** INSOMNIAC GAMES

> **RELEASE** FALL 2008

UNITED WE FALL

THE CHAINGUN IS HEAVY, AND YOU'RE TIRED — ESPECIALLY AFTER THAT SWARM OF LEAPERS HIT THE SQUAD A LITTLE WHILE BACK.

But the medics on your team have patched you up. The snipers are in position. You know running down this hill is suicide, but somebody has to take out that node. And you've got the squad at your back that can do it. You've fought beside some of these men dozens of times, and others are replacements, sent in after that last sorry excuse for a fight. But as the nearby wall explodes and dozens of Hybrids begin to pour out from the smoke, the seven men beside you don't care about being outgunned or overmatched, even as that colossal Titan roars its way out onto the field. You don't care either. It's your country this time, and you'll be damned if those overheated, body-stealing, six-eyed freaks are going to take it away.



■ Insomniac is clearly excited about including vehicles in the game, but won't reveal any specifics. However, we do know we'll be fighting airborne enemies, so some educated guesses wouldn't be out of line.



Resistance 2 is a big game. That simple adjective describes so much about Insomniac's latest endeavor. The scope of the game world is massive – the cities and landscapes of the entire United States serve as the backdrop. The player count is unprecedented – an independent, eight-player, story-driven cooperative game is being built right alongside the single-player campaign. Finish that, and you shouldn't have any trouble joining the various 60-player competitive modes. The scale of the conflict is overwhelming, allowing for positively gigantic battles against dozens of enemies, along with overwhelming boss encounters against creatures and machines hundreds of feet tall. It is, in short, a tour de force for the untapped might of the PlayStation 3.

Insomniac is a difficult studio to marshal complaints and concerns against. This is its third full retail game for Sony's latest platform. Its first two releases (Resistance and Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction) are often cited as the biggest selling points for the console during a first year that otherwise wasn't everything

Sony had hoped it would be. Insomniac's experience is apparent when we visit their Burbank studio, most particularly as they sit us down to play an hour of that insane eight-player online cooperative mode. Keep in mind this is a game that doesn't come out until this fall. For neophytes out there, having something like that up and running at this point in the process is fairly remarkable. Ted Price splits his attention between running the studio and serving as creative director on this latest project. As soon as he sits down to speak with us, it's clear that integrating all the elements of the game into a unified whole serves as a central goal for the project. "Most first-person shooters today have a very separated single-player and multiplayer experience," Price says. "We want to change that around." The starting point for that endeavor is a gripping story, and the team is upping the ante to draw players into both an engaging, character-driven plot and a more sweeping, dramatic setting.

Resistance 2 abandons the third-person narrated account of the savvy British Intelligence girl from the first Resistance, putting the emphasis squarely on hero Nathan Hale. "We realized we have to keep the focus on the main character. With Resistance 1, we spent a lot of time in narration. Rachel Parker was really the main figure as she told this story about Hale. This time we're going to stay with Hale the whole time." The opening scene of the new game is the same as the closing epilogue after the credits of Fall of Man. Hale is cornered by some mysterious masked troops in a helicopter, and he hesitantly surrenders and is flown away to Iceland. "In Iceland, they are shot down because the base there has come under attack," says Price. "Hale barely makes it out alive, gets back to the mainland United States, and becomes part of a special program called the Sentinels." These soldiers have also

continued on page 54 >>



Having heard complaints about a lackluster beginning to the first game, *Resistance 2* will open with a bang.



The team is interested in juxtaposing a bleak alternate 1950s America against the monstrous alien qualities of the Chimeran threat.

Viscerality

"It's an internal word that we've been using, and it's kind of a silly word — we made it up. But when you say it enough, it starts to get a real meaning. It starts to feel like it belongs in our vernacular," creative director Ted Price explains. "Viscerality, for us, is the sense or state a player feels when the obviously unreal feels real — when you're playing the game and nothing else seems to exist. We've been focused on that when we're setting up our levels, when we're implementing the gameplay, and honing in on what makes the game feel right." It's a common goal for developers these days that are increasingly eager to draw players into their unique fiction. However, at *Insomniac*, it has been an overriding focus across every gameplay component. The intense visuals, shocking and surprising sound work, taut storytelling, and even the rumble in the controller all aim to serve the wider goal of viscerality.



continued from page 88

developed a resistance to the Chimeran virus. They train at his side in the coming months as the military's secret weapon against the enemy, and will serve with him throughout the story to come. Two years after arriving Stateside, the Chimerans launch a full-scale aerial assault. "Hundreds of giant ships invade the U.S. from both coasts," Price continues. "They drive America's soldiers and citizenry into the middle of the country." Beginning in San Francisco, and eventually expanding to battlefields across the country, Hale fights back even as he continues the internal struggle hinted at in the first game; his viral resistance is a far cry from

total immunity. "Throughout the game, the player is faced with completely overwhelming odds. It is a losing battle. We're creating a sense of despair and bleakness with the story," Price concludes.

The team is insistent about the widespread locales in which the remaining and unrevealed plot points will take place. Hesitant to spoil the details, they only hint that anyone who has done a little stateside traveling knows full well the breadth of environments that a game set across the entire United States could yield. "We have a style that is about the contrast between the sophisticated Chimeran alien technology and the more grounded human technology, which should be era appropriate for the '50s, but with a twist," art director Chad Dezern tells us. It's not hard to imagine

massive cityscapes juxtaposed against the mile-wide aerial battleships of the Chimeran fleet, or full-scale infantry engagements across desert flatlands and craggy mountains. The game is set in the 1950s, but it's a place not much like the post-war boom of our history. In the world of *Resistance*, World War II never happened as the Chimeran threat rolled over Europe. The darker America that results never really pulled out of the Great Depression. The developers at Insomniac are fascinated with the idea of mixing this bleak new vision of 1950s America against the broiling might of the hulking Chimeran war machine.

A new backdrop isn't the only thing spicing up the campaign. Along with their mighty floating battle fortresses, we'll see any number of new monstrous threats that Hale must confront. Price tells us about one: the Chameleon. This frightening stalker has a total



“Throughout the game, the player is faced with completely overwhelming odds. It is a losing battle. We’re creating a sense of despair and bleakness with the story.”

—Ted Price

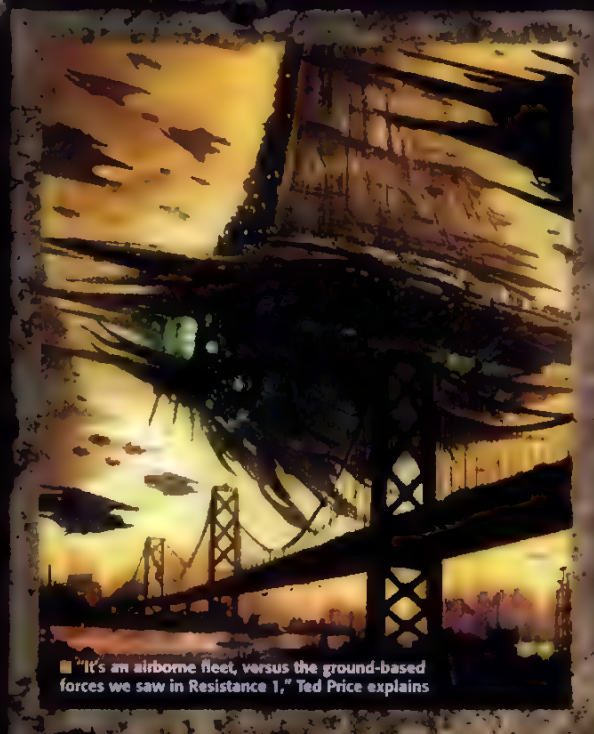


■ Epic scale is a theme that weaves its way throughout the game, from the unprecedented multiplayer modes to the scope of the battles you’ll fight. Case in point: Everything in this screen is real in-game geometry.

cloaking ability, and attacks in close-quarters melees with its devastating blades. Your first encounter with it is when it gorily shreds some of the soldiers you’re traveling with. If it’s not openly assaulting you or your team, its virtual invisibility will have to be tracked with careful skill, like watching for its passing footsteps in a nearby puddle. Likewise, familiar foes like the Hybrid have been completely overhauled with dramatically improved AI routines and a new suite of detachable armor pieces that players will need to overcome. Beyond a broadened array of standard enemies, Insomniac is also committed to overcoming the stigma that boss encounters can’t work in a first-person shooter. As expected, the studio is silent on the content of those major conflicts, but one need look no further than some of the surrounding images to get some good ideas. “Bosses are generally not the domain of first-person shooters, which generally focus on

run and gun gameplay,” Price opines. “We want to break things up and include these monstrous bosses — things that are much larger than anything you saw in Resistance 1.”

All of the above is enough to get us pretty excited about the single-player campaign. And, in another game, we’d be equally excited to hear about tackling that story a second time with seven of our friends. However, that’s not how Resistance 2 works. An independent story and campaign is being prepared for two-player offline co-op, or up to eight players over PlayStation Network. “Traditionally, you have to make compromises,” associate creative director Colin Munson says. “If you go crazy with single player, you have to compromise the co-op — and vice versa. It’s frustrating. We don’t want to do it like that. We want to take it a different direction.” Using the backdrop of some huge multiplayer battlegrounds, the cooperative mode reveals a story that runs parallel to Hale’s, but focuses on other soldiers involved in,



■ “It’s an airborne fleet, versus the ground-based forces we saw in Resistance 1,” Ted Price explains

“We want to break things up and include these monstrous bosses – things that are much larger than anything you saw in Resistance 1.”

—Ted Price



■ Multiplayer maps are positively huge, with an increased focus on individual battle zones, use of cover, and a logical flow of movement, rather than empty haphazard arenas where everybody charges for the center of the map.

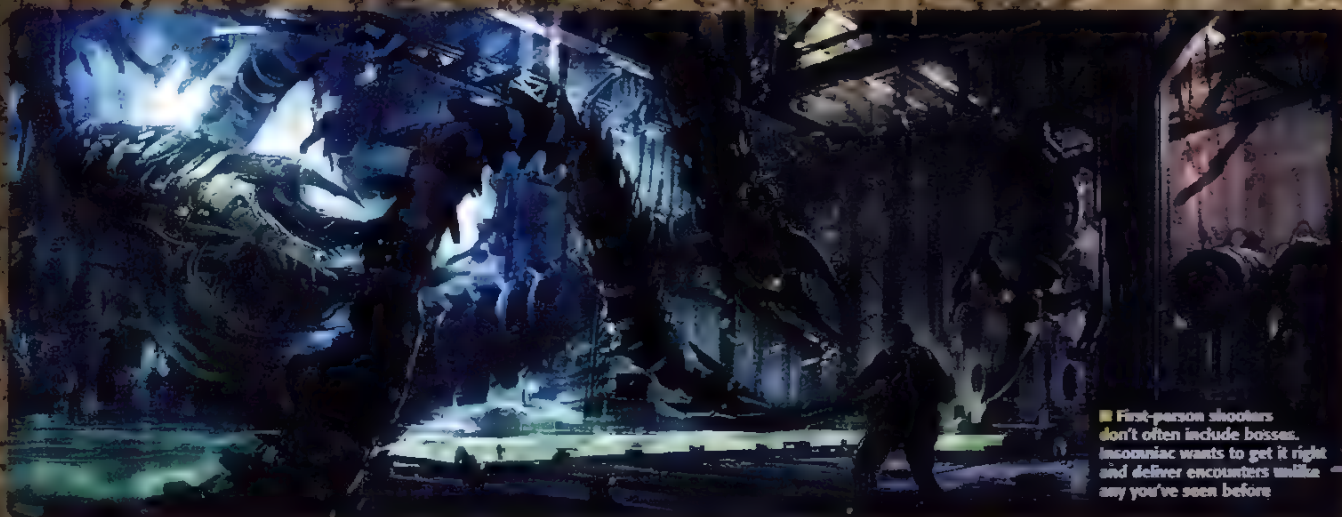
the fight for America's survival. Initially conceived as a sort of bridge between single-player and competitive multiplayer, the co-op game hopes to reel in the huge numbers of players who buy a game like this and never bother to take it online due to the stiff competition. The cooperative challenges will be objective-based, delivering enough plot and character interaction to keep gamers excited but encouraging squad tactics and fast-paced action above long cut scenes or narrations. As planned, this second full campaign will be at least as long or even longer than the single-player story, and more than that, it will be different each time it is played.

You'll tackle this mode with your own unique character, chosen from one of three basic templates. A tank-style soldier wields a heavy chaingun to mow down enemy forces. His kills help to fuel a recharging mobile energy shield that can be deployed in front of him and his squad mates. A Special Ops class provides a distance damage dealer, as these soldiers wield a modified Bullseye rifle with zoom features and

extreme stopping power. Finally, the intriguing medic class seems like it would be at home in an MMO raid encounter. The medic's "Medicator" gun fires damaging red bolts of energy at enemy targets that charge a special meter, but slip your reticle over a friend and the gun instantly pours out a healing blue shot fueled by that same meter. Any combination of the three classes can make up your team, encouraging unique approaches to each level. Standard difficulty settings have been discarded in favor of a challenge scaled to the skill of you and your teammates, since you'll be ranking up your character as you play. Even without a full squad of friends beside you, the game will be capable of auto-matching you with fellow players online who are also looking for co-op play, and will find other gamers at the same place in the story as you. Finally, the levels themselves will morph on subsequent playthroughs. While the team isn't ready to promise

truly randomized level design, the geometry of these stages can and will be altered each time you play.

If working together with seven players isn't enough for you, perhaps blasting away at 59 of them will be. The competitive modes of Resistance 2 will reveal yet another component of the wider tale, but here the story takes a total backseat to intense, large-scale conflicts. At the same time, the team is keenly aware that an unchecked 60-person battle could get unwieldy pretty fast. "With 60 players, we want to give that sense of epic battle," lead multiplayer programmer Eric Ellis explains. "But at the same time, we don't want that to be the gameplay. We actually think more focused squad-versus-squad gameplay is going to be best." When prepping for a night of competitive multiplayer, you'll log into a lobby with smaller four- to eight-person



■ First-person shooters don't often include bosses. Insomniac wants to get it right and deliver encounters unlike any you've seen before

squads, encouraging genuine communication and camaraderie pre-game before you join the battle as part of a larger contingent of troops. Your squad will usually be tasked with a particular objective – each squad might have a different goal on the field. Likewise, your opponents will have rival objectives, and if all goes well, the skill level of the opposite team should match up with your own. Careful level design aims to deliver intense combat zones of small team conflicts that flow together within the arena of the larger battle. It's an elaborate approach to online competition bolstered by an equally ambitious handling of the wider community features.

With online play more important with each passing

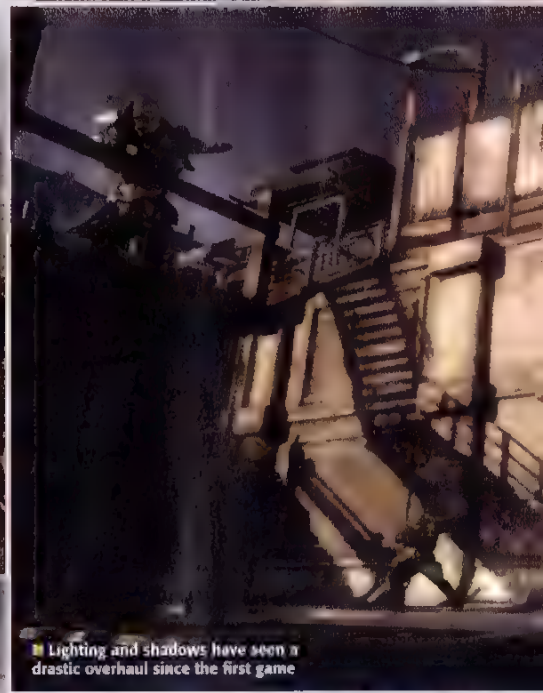
software generation, Insomniac has had team members focused in on community from the get go. "It's been built into the game from the initial design," Price explains. "Most community features are just add-ons for the big first-person shooters. This is something we're passionate about." Eschewing peer-to-peer networking, Resistance will have dedicated gaming, community, and stats servers that should allow for faster matchmaking than the console games of 2007. Full-featured profile pages through myresistance.net will incorporate social networking concepts. Meanwhile, in-game, Insomniac is enacting a totally open clan and party system to encourage everyone to join up and get to know other

players – no invites will be needed. Improved voice chat aims to deliver mobile phone-quality sound. Beyond the details, there is a larger vision to make community building a central component of the game, rather than a tacked-on feature set constructed after the game is already on store shelves.

Given Insomniac's close relationship with Sony, it's unsurprising to hear praise for the flexibility and power of the PlayStation 3. Nonetheless, as the studio's third game on the system, Resistance 2 is taking advantage of more than just the sophisticated networking features



■ Even small details receive surprising attention – the clouds in the distance aren't just background art – they are all procedurally animated.



■ Lighting and shadows have seen a drastic overhaul since the first game.



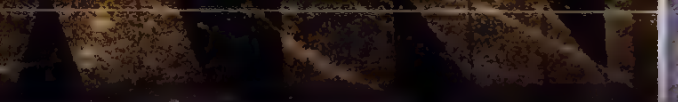
■ Iceland serves as the first major battlefield in your fight against the inexorable Chimera.

of the console. "We've learned a lot about how to work on the PlayStation 3. Resistance 2 will see a lot of those benefits," Price tells us. "Our technology is home grown. We develop everything here. We're not reliant on outside vendors." Proprietary game systems are now being heavily farmed out to the PS3's SPUs, keeping the central PPU as a sort of traffic cop that organizes what gets attention at any given moment. In simple terms, the game is taking much better advantage of the untapped potential of the console. In regard to visuals, the expanded use of the SPUs means more enemies on screen, significantly more complex AI from all of those foes, and dramatically expanded options for special effects. Lighting and shader advances show off the broadened color palette of the game, which moves away from the cool grays and blues that filled the first game in the series towards a more vibrant, painted tone. More complex normal mapping and detail

mapping combine to deliver textures that look amazing both from afar and at extremely close distances, a complaint that some critics leveled against the first installment. On the gameplay side, artificial intelligence is getting a lot of attention. The AI will scale on the fly to the player's perspective and viewpoint. What does that mean? Enemies closer to the player will actually have more sophisticated AI routines than those further away. Likewise, assailants in your direct field of view also receive heightened intelligence. The result is an observable cunning from the adversaries you're directly dealing with, while the more distant or out-of-sight enemies remain dangerous without being overwhelming or frustrating.

While the game strives to take some wild leaps forward, it's also clear that the team is reexamining where they came from with the first game. Some

players found fault with the long checkpoints and health system management introduced in that installment. Refreshingly, Price and the rest of his team seem open to acknowledging people's dilemmas, and honest enough not to promise a solution they haven't yet found. Rather, they are clear in expressing that those issues and any number of other concerns are being addressed, but that such balance and level flow issues are hard to talk about this far away from release. Instead, the team has focused on early prototyping of the entire game, building early versions of everything from the levels to enemies, then placing them into a functional game that can be tested and refined throughout the many months ahead. As evidenced by our chance to sit and play a full cooperative mission



with seven members of the game's multiplayer team, Resistance 2 has a more than solid start. Our time playing was a blast – each of the character classes contributes to the fight in a unique way, and we particularly loved the strategy-laden play style of the medic, as he juggles damage dealing and healing. There is a unique sense of teamwork involved in confronting the hordes of enemy fighters that the game throws at you. The opening of this article was no conjured fantasy, but a dramatized description of the exact events in the game level we played. Hybrids were shattering barriers and charging en masse as we descended into a valley. Huge Titans would dominate a fight as our forces scattered around it, furiously pouring fire at it while our medics kept us barely alive. One fight would finish and we

would immediately find our rear support troops had been ambushed from behind. Even in its unpolished state, the excitement of these large-scale cooperative battles makes good on a promise many gamers have waited a long time for. We can only hope that the final version that releases later this year maintains that promise in its finished form. While conscious of its legacy, Resistance 2 is a game eager to move into the future. Throughout our time at Insomniac, we read between the lines about the bigger picture of moving the franchise forward. We ask about the mysterious Cloven hinted at in game one, and are met with only cryptic and elusive answers, implying that even those questions might not be fully cleared up by this sequel. Nathan Hale's continuing struggle against

the virus within him remains an equally well-guarded secret. Even the origin of the monstrous Chimera remains foggy – but this is one secret we expect some solid info on by the time the credits roll on Resistance 2. Insomniac crafted what many regard as the premier launch title for Sony's PlayStation 3 in Resistance: Fall of Man. At the same time, its appearance so early in that console's life cycle made it a remarkable game that some enthusiasts might have missed. In contrast, however the final product turns out, Resistance 2 will be too epic to dismiss as anything but one of the biggest, boldest, and most high-reaching titles of 2008. It's a game that won't be ignored. ■■■



INDIANA JONES

THE VIDEO GAME



WITS,
DARING,
AND
BLOCKS

It's one of the most recognizable opening scenes in history. Indiana Jones, wearing his dusty brown fedora, enters a room containing a stone idol on a pedestal. He stares at the figure, rubs his hand across his whiskers, and tries to find a way to replace the ancient relic with an object of equal weight. If you're watching *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, he hefts a bag of sand. If you're playing the latest title from renowned LEGO game developer

Traveller's Tales, he rummages around in his coat and pulls out a pink teacup, which he confidently swaps for the idol. Indy's running from a giant boulder seconds later either way, but fans of the films and newcomers to the franchise alike will appreciate seeing the adventuring archaeologist's exploits portrayed in the same lighthearted, humorous style that made LEGO Star Wars a remarkable success.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP | NINTENDO DS | PC
> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, AD-HOC, OR WIRELESS) > PUBLISHER LUCASARTS
> DEVELOPER TRAVELLER'S TALES > RELEASE JUNE



On the surface, LEGO Indiana Jones bears an uncanny resemblance to its Star Wars brethren. It relies on simple action, an uncomplicated control scheme, and the fun factor of playing alongside a friend. Despite these similarities, it would be a mistake to view LEGO Indy as the same experience with different characters and locations. The team at Traveller's Tales is making every effort to tailor this title to the unique qualities that have shaped Indy into such a classic character.

If you had to pick one thing to define Indiana Jones, it would be difficult to choose anything but his signature whip. It gets him out of plenty of sticky situations in the films, so it shouldn't be a surprise that it will play a central role in how players solve problems and navigate the environment in LEGO Indy. "The whip is pretty much his Swiss Army knife,"

explains associate producer Kellam Eanes. "It can do so many things. He'll pick up items, grapple and swing, disrobe enemies to become them. It's not a weapon – it's more of a tool."

Another one of Indy's traits that is working its way into gameplay is his general athleticism. It's difficult to convey the sense of exploring ancient ruins if all you can do is hop around. Unlike the characters in LEGO Star Wars, Indy has a broad range of physical interactions with his environment. He can climb ladders, grab ledges and shimmy across, swim, and use stealth to tiptoe around dangerous situations. This approach also translates to the combat mechanics. Indy obviously doesn't carry a blaster pistol or lightsaber around, so he'll rely mainly on his fists and his surroundings.

"Indy's not really about running and



All of the major characters and scenes will make the LEGO transition

gunning," says production assistant Andrew Bell. "He uses everything at his disposal." As a result of Indy's up-close and personal nature, players will be able to grab chairs and bottles from the environment to use as weapons (which can be thrown once they break). Occasionally you will find a gun, but you can only fire it a handful of times before it runs out of ammo. In other words, players can expect to do a lot more brawling than

shooting – which is exactly what Indy would prefer.

Even with improvements to combat and platforming, the gameplay in LEGO Indy won't leave fans of LEGO Star Wars in the dust. It will retain the familiar accessibility that made it possible for so many types of gamers to enjoy the previous titles. "It's still a family friendly, keep-on-going experience. There's no way to really lose," admits Bell.





Not that Indiana Jones would ever really die anyway. He's right up at the top of the hierarchy of awesome action heroes. If you're playing the game in single-player mode, that means you can run around and explore as Indy as much as you want. But what happens when you're playing *Go!* with your buddy? You're constantly saddled with tagalongs like Short Round. The secondary character has a whole lot of things to do. Most characters have

so someone wants to play one of these characters instead of Indiana Jones?" laughs Eanes.

"One of the problems is to make the characters feel as distinct as possible. We gave them different abilities," Eanes tells us. "Satipo, for example, has the ability to fly. The female character has powers, like charm, that allow them to get through certain areas." Some of the enemies will utilize different gameplay

mechanics, while others open paths that Indy wouldn't be able to access alone. Academic characters (like Henry Jones Sr.) will be able to read hieroglyphics that might open secret passages, and the monkey can swing up to otherwise unreachable ledges. Best of all, solving puzzles using these options won't restrict you to just using up other characters. Instead, you can switch on the fly from available solutions.

INDY FOR ALL

LEGO Indiana Jones is going to be available on seven platforms when it releases later this year. The Wii will use motion sensing for controlling the whip, but the DS is actually the system that seems to have the most original mechanics. Players will use the handheld's built-in microphone to blow out torches and inflate rafts, and using the touch screen enables you to swing Indy's whip.



■ With the whip, Indy can move through the environment in more varied ways than previous LEGO titles

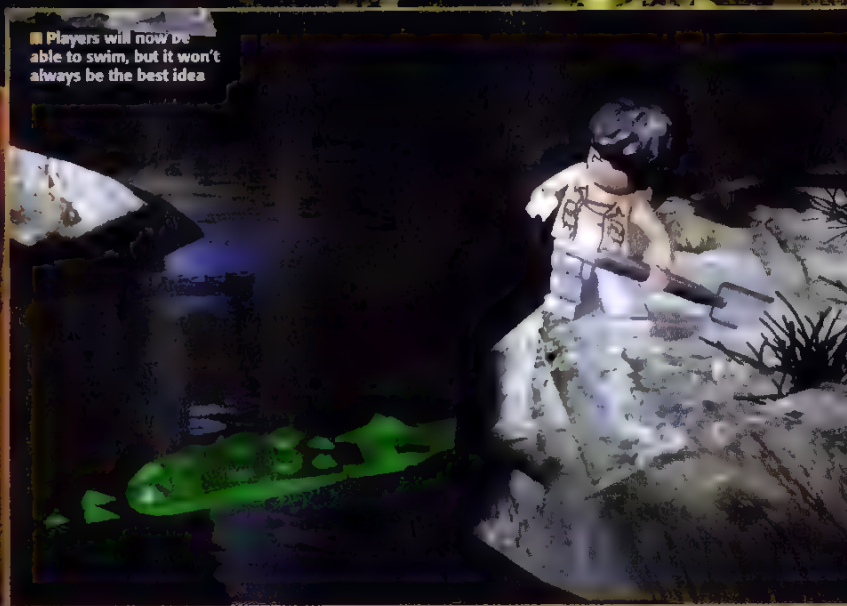
■ Players will now be able to swim, but it won't always be the best idea

■ Next-gen screenshot



THE OTHER ONE

Some gamers may remember that LucasArts also has another Indy game in the works. The company has kept relatively quiet on the project so far, but we know that it is being timed to hit closer to the new film, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Much like *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, the next-gen Indy title will use special technology to make enemies react to the player and the environment in believable ways.





■ The game can be played entirely in co-op, but only one player gets to be Indy himself



■ Expect hilarious pantomime instead of lines like "So once again, Jones, what was briefly yours is now mine"

AMBIGUOUS EVIL

Even though you'll see plenty of familiar faces from all three films, don't expect any of them to be wearing Nazi uniforms. Indy might have fought against the Führer's secret police on the silver screen, but LEGO Indy will (understandably) just have generic German soldiers in their place. "No swastikas – they don't really play 'cute,'" Eanes observes. Additionally, toy enthusiasts should expect this trend to carry over to the LEGO Indy sets available on store shelves.

As daring as Indy is, there are some situations he can't handle alone. For instance, what would he do if he came up against his greatest fear, snakes? "Oh, there will definitely be a focus on the phobias," Eanes assures us. "That's also a reason to use other characters. Obviously, Indy's afraid of snakes. His dad's scared of rats." Well, add: "You need to have those secondary characters there to help you out, to grab the torch or get the sticks out of the way as Indy shakes in fear."

When it comes to choosing that secondary character in free play, players won't be short on options. The game covers the events of all three films and you can choose up to 40 playable characters total, including Marion, Sallah, Marcus Brody, Willie Scott, and, of course, Indy's place of employment, Barnet College, which is a hub world where these characters will congregate, similar to the Mos Eisley Cantina in LEGO Star Wars. You can also

wander around the college's halls to view items and artifacts you have collected. If you manage to gather all three holy relics from the films (the ark, the sankara stone, and the grail), you will even have access to special powers during free play.

On one hand, LEGO Indiana Jones isn't drastically different from its space-themed predecessors. On the other hand, given the popularity of the LEGO Star Wars titles, it's probably a wise decision to stay close to a proven formula. The important thing isn't to create a groundbreaking new experience, but rather to tap into the fondness and nostalgia gamers have for both properties involved. "We're being sure to get all of the iconic moments in from all three of the movies," confirms Eanes. "It's the wit and daring of Indy mixed with the fun and customization of LEGO." Like combining a whip and a fedora, that sounds like a perfect match. ■ ■ ■

■ Indy prefers punching to shooting





PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



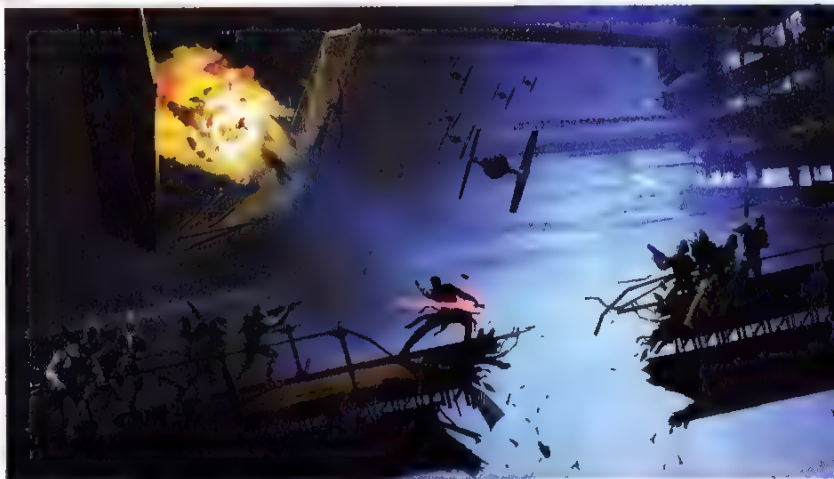
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER LUCASARTS > DEVELOPER LUCASARTS > RELEASE SUMMER

THE QUICK AND EASY PATH RULES!

Each level will unlock a new look for the Apprentice, but you can unlock additional costumes in other ways.



You might not know it from watching the original Star Wars trilogy, but the Force can be used for more than slowly moving things up and down. The prequels definitely expanded the Force's applications, but viewers still never got a complete picture of its full potential. That will change when *The Force Unleashed* finally hits later this year. As the next chapter in the Star Wars saga, this game is all about expanding gamers' perception of the Force and how it allows a single warrior to take down an entire army – a goal the development team seems to have a firm handle on. In the time we spent playing as Darth Vader's apprentice, we used the Force in ways we had never even imagined.

The first mission you'll undertake as the Apprentice (portrayed by Sam Witwer from *Battlestar Galactica* and *The Mist*) occurs in a TIE Fighter construction facility. Because Lord Vader has ordered you to leave no witnesses, all inhabitants – including stormtroopers – must be eliminated. Fortunately, this environment serves as the perfect training ground to experiment with the Force's newfound flexibility; there is a constant stream of mechanical components in

various stages of assembly just waiting to be used. When faced with a handful of armed guards, we simply reached toward the ceiling and sent an entire TIE Fighter crashing into them. We then used the Force to throw the flaming cockpit into another group of enemies (giving us a payoff camera view of the destruction) and jumped into the fray with our red lightsaber swinging.

All of the individual Force powers will be mapped to their own buttons on the controller, so players won't need to mess around with selecting moves from a menu screen. The fluidity with which the powers are integrated into the combat is reminiscent of the cult hit *Psi-Ops*. A press of the right bumper might initiate a Force grab on a hapless rebel, while holding it down will start to choke him as he hovers in mid-

air (leaving you free to fling the corpse into a gun turret). If you happen to get surrounded by aggressive Felucians, you can hold a button to charge up Force repulse, a power that throws enemies back at lower levels – and completely vaporizes them when powered up.

Being able to use these powers on the fly is impressive, but even better are the ways multiple abilities can be combined for different effects. Even a simple power like Force grab can lead into some jaw-dropping situations. For example, imagine you are holding a droid aloft; you could skewer it with your lightsaber, send a nearby metal container flying into it, or channel Force lightning to turn it into an unstable bomb that will explode on impact. If you prefer melee combat, you could use Force push right after a dash to send foes reeling back, then charge your lightsaber with lightning to increase damage and reach.

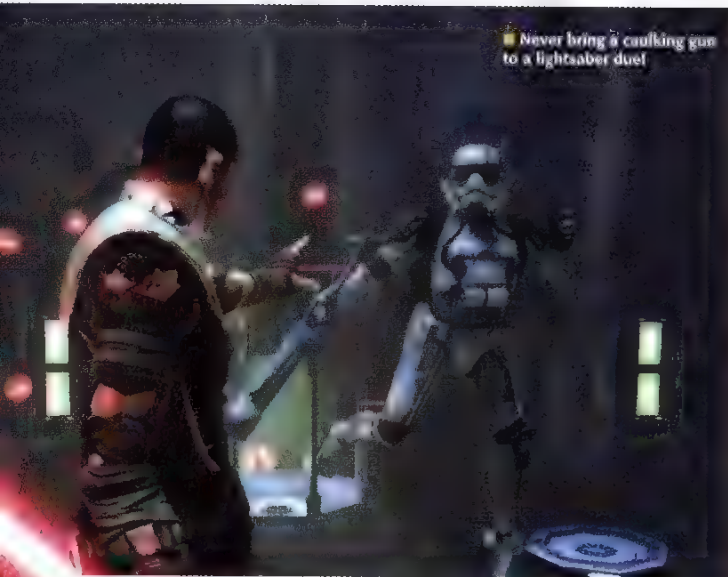
Now picture all of these scenarios imbued with the previously announced Euphoria engine, which allows characters to interact naturally with their environment. Stormtroopers grab on to railings to keep from falling off ledges, duck to avoid debris, and hold on to each other's ankles as you fling them across the room. Simply witnessing the carnage that results from your actions is a reward in and of itself.

With its new summer release date, gamers may have to wait a little longer than expected to start unleashing the Force, but the extra time looks like it is serving the game well. After playing just one level, we're ready to give in to the Dark Side. ■ ■ ■



Rancors are pretty tough when you can't crush their skulls with metal doors.

■ Never bring a caulking gun to a lightsaber duel



■ Situations like this are not the time to use the "Force Delicious" power, which might not even exist



■ You can level up the Apprentice's Force powers, focusing on your favorites



THE FORCE IS EVERYWHERE

There are also games called *The Force Unleashed*, coming to PS2, PSP, DS, and Wii, but they won't be using the same technology that allows the 360 and PS3 versions to simulate behavior and environmental properties. That doesn't mean they don't have their own perks; we got our hands on the Wii incarnation, which includes a one-on-one versus mode. Swinging the remote will attack with lightsaber based on direction (though it doesn't track your movement exactly), and other motion controls will activate your array of powers. For example, jabbing the nunchuk forward while holding a trigger will activate a Force push. The particulars of the configuration are still being ironed out, but the Wii version is shaping up to connect you to the Force like never before.



Tomb Raider: Underworld

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION / ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER EIDOS > DEVELOPER CRYSTAL DYNAMICS > RELEASE WINTER

THE NEXT LOGICAL STEP

We're not rewriting history. We're not going into the past. Legend happened. Anniversary happened. Underworld is going to be after those events and the fans will not be disappointed. But it was also very important to us to make an adventure that would resonate to people who were new to Tomb Raider and Lara Croft. This was one of the first things we heard from creative director Eric Lindstrom when we asked him about Lara's next evolution in the newly announced Tomb Raider: Underworld. While hesitant to reveal plot points, he was clear in his expression that the events of previous games, particularly the dangling questions left behind after Legend, aren't being forgotten. With that said, Underworld is branching into some new territory, both with the story and some dramatic advances in gameplay and technology.

The game has very few established story points announced beyond the locations revealed in the screens you see here (like Mayan ruins in Chiapas, Mexico). However, Lindstrom did shed some light on the surprising title choice. "A common theme that runs through the whole adventure and the mythologies she delves into are the Underworld myths of those ancient cultures." Consequently, the name may have less to do with wandering underground settings and more about the object of her quest.

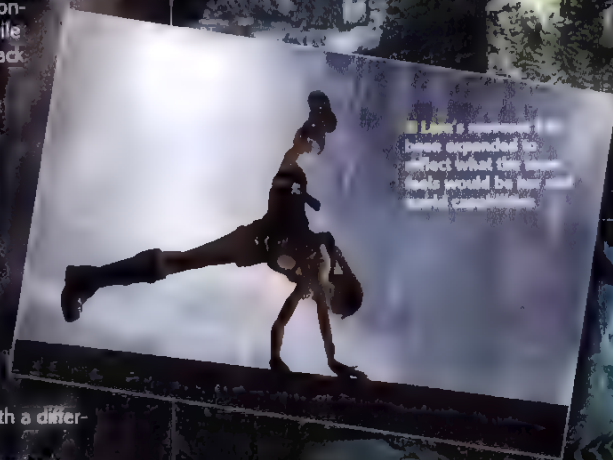
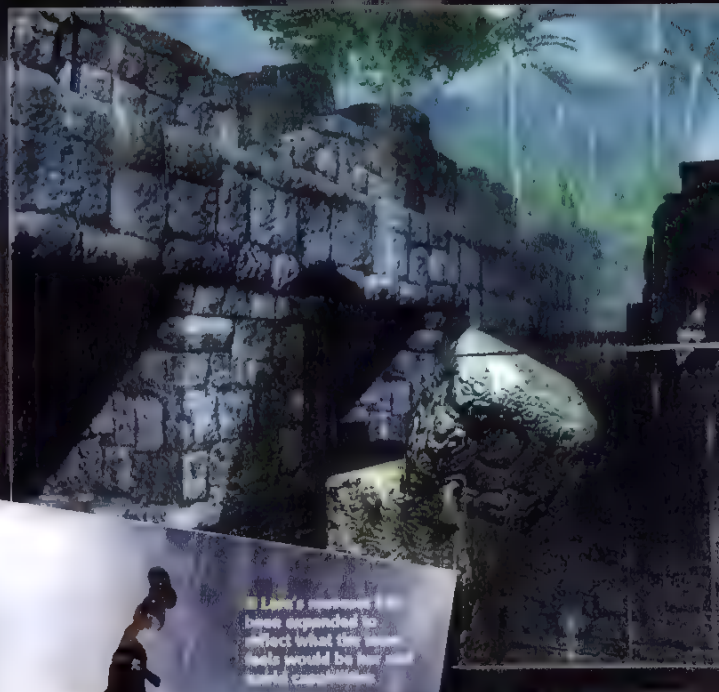
Meanwhile, gameplay is seeing some pretty major changes. "In the past, there was climbing, and there was shooting, and there was puzzle solving. And they often didn't overlap," Lindstrom explains. "We've now integrated all of those elements." As examples he details situations like a gunfight that might play out as Lara is precariously swinging from a rope, or a sequence of fighting off enemies while in the midst of arranging the parts of a puzzle.

Even vehicle components are being more smoothly integrated into the larger level design. Lindstrom offers the situation of a motorcycle that Lara will have on some levels, which can

be used to help solve puzzles as much as get around. "We're constantly talking about this concept of 'What could Lara do?' It's the way we filter and organize everything." To this end, Lara's suite of movements has expanded in many directions. She can freely climb walls and available handholds. She can pull herself up on swinging poles and perch on their narrow ledges. She can pick up items in the environment and run with them, even while her other hand draws a gun to attack some vicious beast.

That idea feeds into some of the more complex animation work being developed for the game. For the first time, Lara's moveset will be modeled from motion capture work — her real-world doppelganger is Olympic gymnast Heidi Moneymaker. After motion capture, much of the blending of those animations is being done by hand to create seamless transitions between moves and combine them, i.e. Lara drawing a single weapon while running with a different object in the opposing hand.

In tone, the team at Crystal Dynamics is hoping to split the difference between the isolated solitude of Anniversary and the banter-filled conversations of Legend. They also seem very interested in exploring emotions and mood through background environments, so don't be surprised to find Lara coming to some shocking and disturbing revelations that lead into levels filled with pouring rain and dark imagery. The game is a long way off yet, but we were impressed by the enthusiasm the team is showing as they continue to evolve Lara and her adventures. After two quality releases in recent years, it would have been easy to rest on their laurels and do a retreat, but Underworld seems to be delving down into new and unexplored territory. ■■■

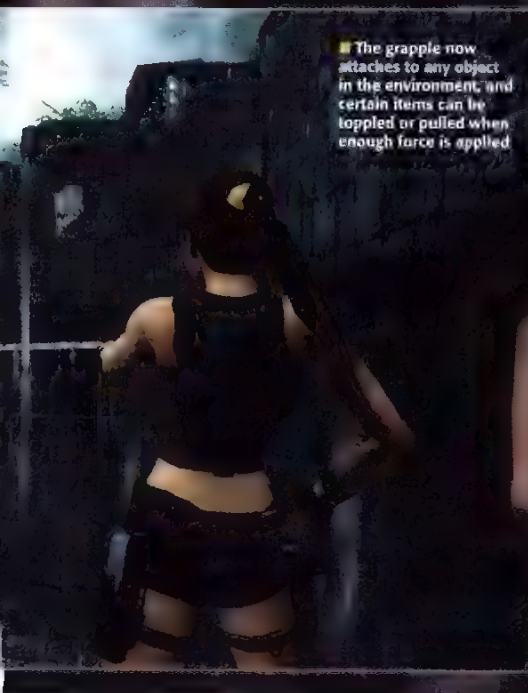


■ Lara's combat options include expanded melee attacks to fend off the numerous voracious predators

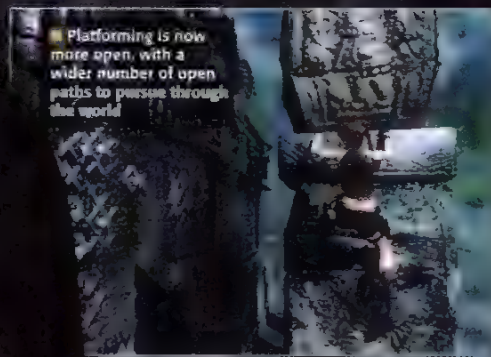


■ These Mayan ruins serve as the backdrop for part of the narrative

The grapple now attaches to any object in the environment, and certain items can be toppled or pulled when enough force is applied



Platforming is now more open, with a wider number of open paths to pursue through the world



An Olympic gymnast is doing motion capture work for all of Lara's movements



■ Building a successful colony spaceship is still a Herculean task.

RB

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | NINTENDO DS

Civilization: Revolution

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION 3 NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE)
> PUBLISHER 2K GAMES > DEVELOPER FINIX GAMES > RELEASE DATE 2008

NOT A PORT

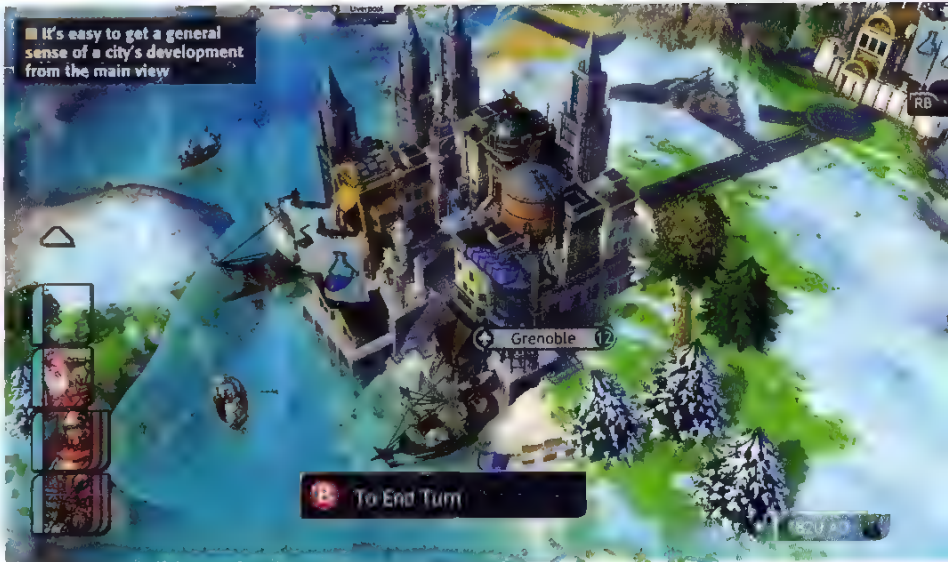
The venerable Civilization series has been entertaining PC gamers for decades with its endlessly deep empire simulations. This spring, the patriarch of strategy games will be available on consoles for the first time in a streamlined package called Civilization: Revolution. While some concepts are pared down for this release, make no mistake: This is a full-featured Civilization title in every sense of the word. Trust us, we've played it.

The core mechanics are nearly identical to the PC iterations with but a few exceptions. Players will guide their culture toward global dominance by settling and building up cities, researching technology from pottery to superconductors, and of course military might. It's an addictive mix, and nothing has been lost in the move from desk to couch.

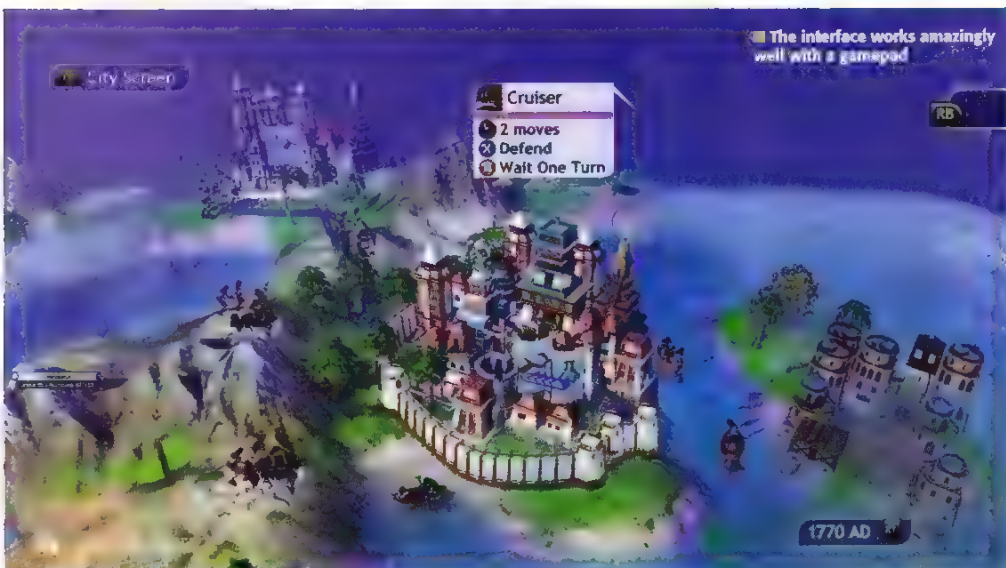
The largest departure from traditional Civ concepts is the removal of workers. No longer will you improve terrain with roads, mines, and farms. Though this sounds like a dramatic "dumbing down" of the game, in reality its largest impact is that it frees up the player's attention for more interesting decisions like troop movement and city building. We can't say that we don't miss the draw of terraforming our territory to glean maximum output, but losing that often-tedious micromanagement aspect of the game isn't the worst thing ever.

Another change in this release is in the difference between factions. Each of the 16 civilizations is vastly more distinct than they have been in previous titles; huge bonuses like Aztec units fully healing after winning a battle or Egyptian cities gaining two food out of desert tiles make each culture a unique

■ It's easy to get a general sense of a city's development from the main view



■ The interface works amazingly well with a gamepad



experience. Every faction gains additional powers as they advance through the ages, so you're not stuck with a faction-specific unit that goes obsolete within 10 turns, leaving you scratching your head as to why anyone would ever play as the French.

New players will hopefully have an easier time getting into the game with expanded tutorials and exploration "breadcrumbs" that reward you for getting out there and discovering the world. For instance, moving onto a minor tribe (the traditional Civ "goodie huts") might give you the location of an ancient relic in the distance, or a threatening barbarian enclave nearby. It's a cool mechanic that should help encourage necessary early-game expansion.

There's much more to talk about in a title of this magnitude, like the National Geographic-powered Civlopedia that includes real photos and movies of the various units, technologies, and Wonders of the World. Or the fact that the DS version is exactly the same game as the 360 and PS3 titles, just with a different interface. Really, though, what you need to know is that one of the very best strategy franchises of all time will soon be available on consoles — and it's going to be awesome. ■ ■ ■



- 1st Spy
- L 2 moves
- X Defend
- B Wait One Turn

Rome 11
 Courthouse 28/80

HOW TO BUILD EMPIRE?

The largest hurdle for any PC game being translated to consoles is in the interface, but our time with an early version of Revolution laid to rest any fears on that score. The right stick moves your cursor and view around the world, while the left stick sets movement paths for active units. The four triggers control zoom distance, the city focus window, detailed production/trade/research reports, and your "bottom line" report for the last turn's activity. Face buttons, obviously, initiate actions. Intuitive and smooth, this interface presents no barriers to conquering the world from the comfort of your couch.



Rival leaders' personalities and moods come through in their animations



Rome 11

+0 No population growth

+24 No build item selected.

+9

+113

Build Unit

Build Building

Build Wonder

City Focus

Guiding your cities' growth is easy

View People

View Buildings

Exit

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Rainbow Six Vegas 2

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION FOR UP TO 16 PLAYERS (VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE SPRING

JUST ANOTHER NIGHT IN THE TOWN

ENGAGING ENEMY
ASSAULT

CO-OP STORY

The new co-op mode allows a friend to jump in at any time during your campaign



What's the point of a laser sight if you still can't aim?



While Gears of War and Resistance: Fall of Man stole the headlines during the 2006 holiday blitz, some gamers felt that Rainbow Six Vegas was the true star shooter of the year.

Its intense tactical action amongst slot machines and roulette tables won over casual and hardcore fans alike, and the deep multiplayer is still one of the best executed experiences on consoles. The game's success and ties to the Tom Clancy empire both indicated that a sequel was inevitable, and now details are starting to emerge about our return trip to the strip.

In the single-player campaign, Rainbow Six Vegas 2 will pick up right where its predecessor left off. After the cliffhanger ending, a lot of questions still need to be answered. We'll finally discover why one of the elite tactical team members betrayed his unit and how this whole mess in Sin City started. The campaign will also feature revamped AI; terrorists have teched up and will now use many gadgets to stay in the fight, including thermal vision, night vision, and blast shields. The campaign also has a new checkpoint system (a common request from the fans) and a more casual difficulty setting for first-time play-

ers. But the highlight is the refined co-op campaign experience, which now allows friends to jump into your battle at any time. When a friend joins the fray, you will retain control of the two remaining AI squad members. "The online co-op system was rebuilt from the ground up," says Jean-Pascal Cambiotti, the lead game designer for multiplayer. "It completely mirrors the single-player storyline. So you can now play through the story in co-op and experience everything, including scripted events and progression."

The Persistent Elite Creation system is back, and this time your customized player will be used in both single and multiplayer. Once you've decked out your soldier and head into battle, you can rack up experience points by taking down terrorists during the campaign or by racking up kills online. Your performance will earn you XP, which will increase your military rank and unlock new customization options. In the last game this applied to weapon unlocks as well, but Ubisoft Montreal has tweaked this with the new Advanced Combat Enhancement and Specialization (A.C.E.S.) system. Players can gain access to new weapons by performing specific actions that fall into three categories: close quarter battle, marksmanship, and

assault. As your battle aptitude improves and you accrue reward points, you will unlock new weapons suited to your skills. Speaking of weapons, the game adds 11 new guns to the existing armory, including the M468 assault rifle, the 500 Tactical shotgun, and a suppressed version of the SR-25 sniper rifle.

Rainbow Six Vegas 2's multiplayer level design has also been tweaked to reflect lessons learned from the last game. "We learned quite a bit from the first Vegas in terms of what works and what doesn't, so we developed our maps to be a little smaller and allow for more intense firefights," says Cambiotti. The game features 13 new maps, each with its own visual style, some of which are revamped Raven Shield maps to celebrate Rainbow Six's 10-year anniversary.

Other multiplayer enhancements include an optimized respawn system to negate spawn camping, improved matchmaking (that still regrettably lacks party matchmaking), and two new team-based modes that will be revealed at a later date. We're already polishing our weapons in anticipation. ■ ■ ■



previews

OUTFITTING
SELECT WEAPON

WEAPON: M4
 DAMAGE: 30
 RANGE: 400
 ACCURACY: 90
 RATE OF FIRE: 600
 MAGAZINE SIZE: 30

RYROGUY
 BERGEMAN

The P.E.C. system now applies to single and multiplayer



LEGO Batman

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, AD HOC, OR WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE
> **DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S TALES > **RELEASE** FALL

THE DARK KNIGHT'S LIGHTER SIDE

Given his darker tendencies, Batman might not seem like the most likely candidate to receive a whimsical LEGO overhaul. His parents were murdered before his eyes, filling him with an obsessive need to take the law into his own hands. Despite this modern view of Batman as a suffering hero, he has been known to let loose and have a good time – just ask Adam “Batusi” West. That may be more camp than one game can handle, but this upcoming title from Traveller’s Tales will balance the many incarnations of the Dark Knight with the pick-up-and-play LEGO style.

“LEGO Batman is drawn not from any individual stylistic expression, but from a distillation of the characters and city as brought to life in different ways over many years,” explains Jonathan Smith, head of production at Traveller’s Tales. This approach grants the team remarkable freedom; they are able to select the best elements of each

Since the game draws its style from many points in Batman’s history, the story won’t retell an established arc. Instead, the game will introduce a new plot that will bring together characters from all corners of Gotham City (and Arkham Asylum). Even so, Smith concedes that the overall concept is pretty simple: “The bad guys have evil plans, and Batman sets out to stop them.” That’s all the excuse players really need to take to the shadows and start dishing out LEGO-brand vigilante justice.

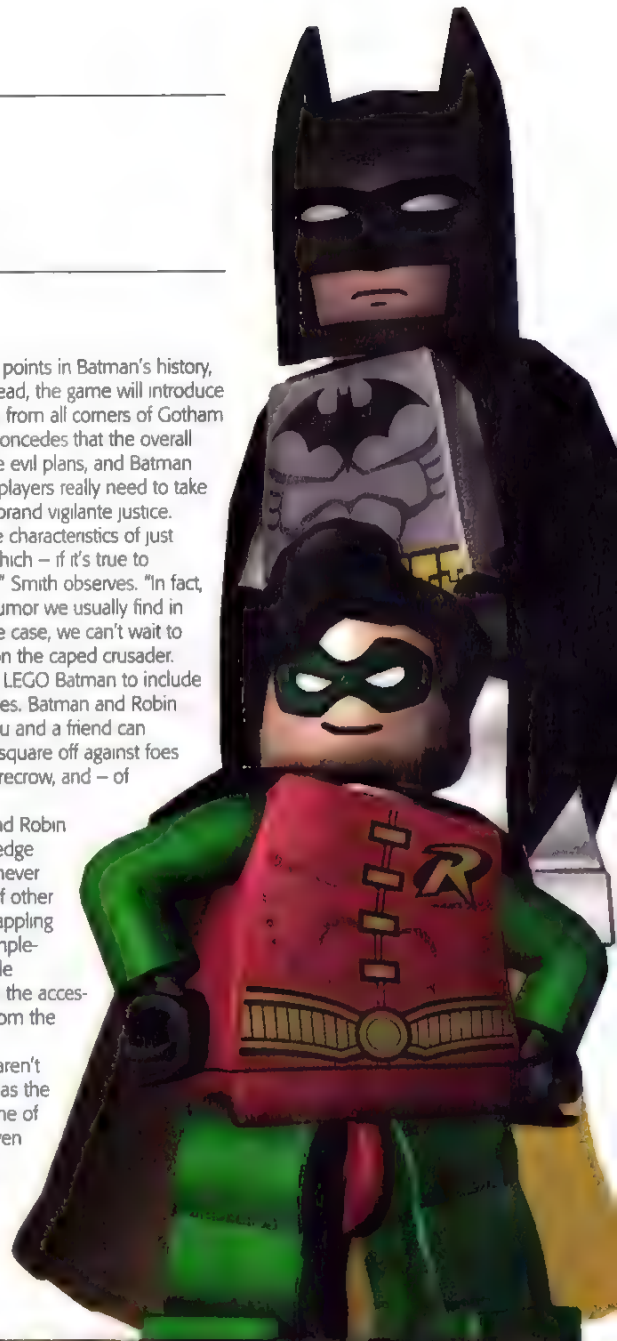
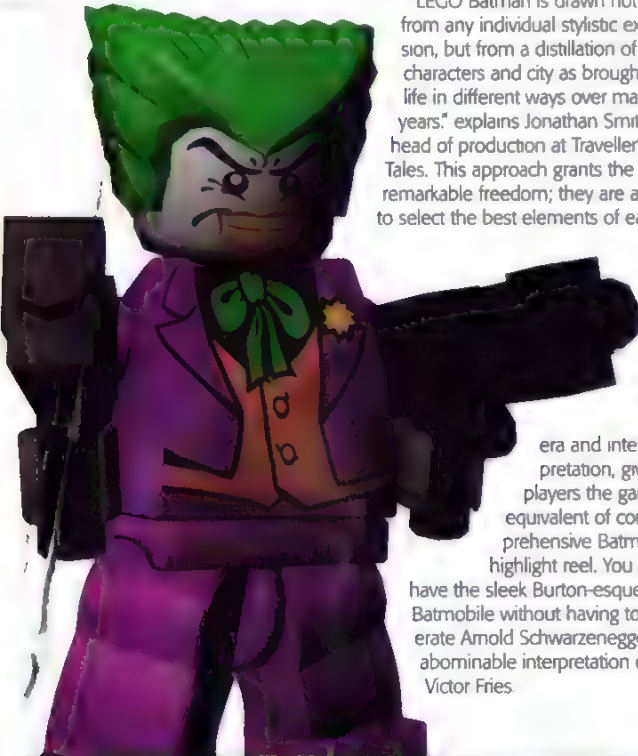
“We discovered that LEGO can take on the characteristics of just about anything you can imagine, in a way which – if it’s true to LEGO – is always perfectly safe and friendly,” Smith observes. “In fact, the ‘darker’ our source material, the more humor we usually find in the LEGO treatment, by contrast.” If that’s the case, we can’t wait to see what happens when Bane gets a hold on the caped crusader.

On the topic of villains, players can expect LEGO Batman to include an impressive rogues gallery of classic baddies. Batman and Robin will be the primary playable heroes (who you and a friend can control via online or local co-op), but they’ll square off against foes like the Penguin, Catwoman, Killer Croc, Scarecrow, and – of course – the Joker.

In order to tackle these threats, Batman and Robin will have to utilize gadgets to give them an edge over the competition. Since Batman would never just shoot his opponents, he needs plenty of other options to take down armed opponents. Grappling hooks, batarangs, and other unique LEGO implements will find their way into the high-altitude heroics. Of course, all of this is blended with the accessible gameplay and humor people expect from the LEGO name.

While the specifics of Batman mythology aren’t as ingrained into the cultural consciousness as the plot of *Star Wars*, the franchise contains some of the most recognizable characters around. Even if the names Frank Miller or Bob Kane don’t ring a bell, everyone knows the Joker – and gamers of all ages and skill levels can take him down when LEGO Batman hits stores this fall. ■ ■ ■

era and interpretation, giving players the gaming equivalent of comprehensive Batman highlight reel. You could have the sleek Burton-esque Batmobile without having to tolerate Arnold Schwarzenegger’s abominable interpretation of Victor Fries



■ Even though the game is drawing from many eras of Batman, don't expect to see any "Zot!" or "Buff!" word bubbles



■ We can't tell...are these likenesses of Gillian Murphy and Michelle Pfeiffer?



■ It's hard for Robin to look cool when he's driving the Fisher-Price Jet Ski



■ The Jevils will have more of a vertical element than previous LEGO titles



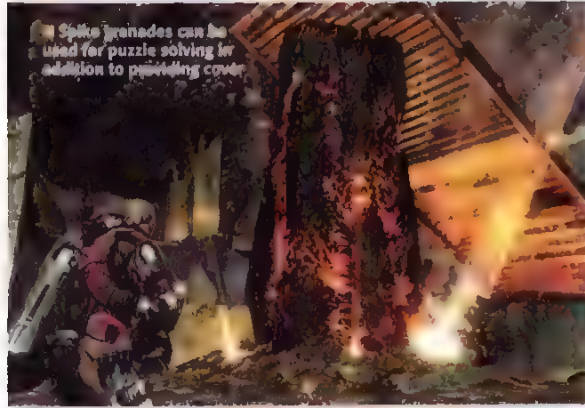
Firing into the vortex will increase the damage taken by enemies trapped inside

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Fracture

STYLE | PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 100-PLAYER VIA ARXON LIVE OR PLAYSTATION NETWORK)
PUBLISHER LUCASARTS > DEVELOPER DAY 1 STUDIOS > RELEASE | SUMMER

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE



Spike grenades can be used for puzzle solving in addition to providing cover

Making effective use of cover has been a key strategy in shooters for years. However, players are usually at the mercy of their environment when it comes to finding a secure position. That's something Day 1 Studios (the developer behind the MechAssault series) is looking to change with Fracture. Using the concept of terrain deformation, this third-person action title allows you transform the ground beneath your feet to your advantage.

At first, this feature was presented as useful mainly for creating cover, but it has other applications. "The normal way we use terrain deformation is for defense," explains assistant producer Tony Grandlich, "but we wanted to see how crazy we could get by having it interact in an offensive manner." You can see this philosophy in action in one of the new weapons, called the Black Widow. This gun fires off a series of sub-surface mines that can be set off in sequence with the press of a button. In addition to producing explosions, the detonations warp the surroundings to the point that they can even take down parts of the environment that appear to be stable, like pillars and metal platforms. Since enemies also have access to similar offensive terrain deforming weaponry, it means that a reliable source of cover could turn to rubble in the blink of an eye.

When we last played Fracture at E3, the multiplayer mode was the main event. While it was fun to use terrain deformation to create cover and confound enemy strategies, it seemed strange that the only way to affect the environment was through the use of grenades. That problem has been resolved with the latest addition to the game: an arm-mounted weapon called the

Entrencher. This implement allows you to modify your surroundings quickly in basic ways, like elevating terrain or creating small craters. "We wanted terrain deformation to be more accessible to the player," Grandlich tells us. "Whenever they want to use it, they can. It's a tool, it's a weapon, it's defense, it's offense."

The Entrencher does not take the place of the grenades. In fact, grenades will have expanded powers and greater flexibility, according to Grandlich: "The Entrencher gives you line-of-sight deformation. If you have to go over cover, or get an arc while you're under cover, your grenades still allow for that. It adds a lot more to multi-



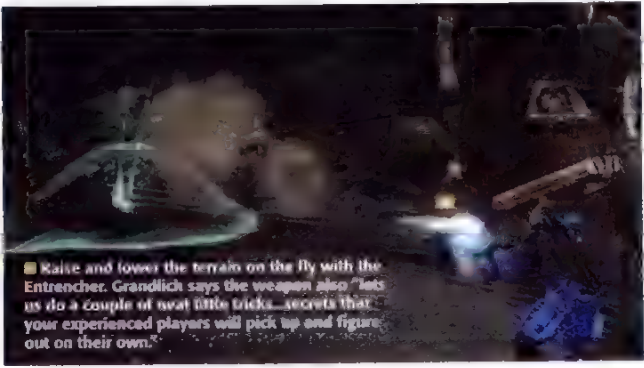
The Black Widow is a weapon that allows you to shoot a series of grenades and detonate them in sequence

MEET JET BRODY

Previous showings of Fracture had the game starring a protagonist named Mason Briggs, who looked like a pretty standard soldier. After listening to feedback from the gaming community, Fracture's hero got a complete overhaul to make him more compelling. Renamed Jet Brody, the new leading man's design is more cybernetic, which fits better with the game's futuristic storyline. Thankfully, he also lost the doofy-looking haircut.



Scrapped protagonist Mason Briggs



Raise and lower the terrain on the fly with the Entrencher. Grandlich says the weapon also lets us do a couple of neat little tricks... secrets that your experienced players will pick up and figure out on their own.

player." The only drawback to the grenades is that their quantity is limited; with the Entrencher, your only restriction is a recharging gauge that prevents you from spamming the environment constantly.

The Entrencher is only the first of several augmentations you will gain through the course of the story. The development team isn't talking about any more of them quite yet, apart from the fact they continue to expand your capabilities. "You're not just playing as the same guy with the same abilities throughout," Granlich dangles. "We want to make visual and gameplay changes so

when he gets cybernetic upgrades, you are able to tell the difference." It's good to see Day 1 addressing some of the initial aesthetic and gameplay concerns from previous demonstrations. We just hope that, amid the retooling and re-imagining, the team has enough time to flesh out elements like the story and characters. Blowing up the ground is fun, but it's even better when you have a compelling reason to do so. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 3

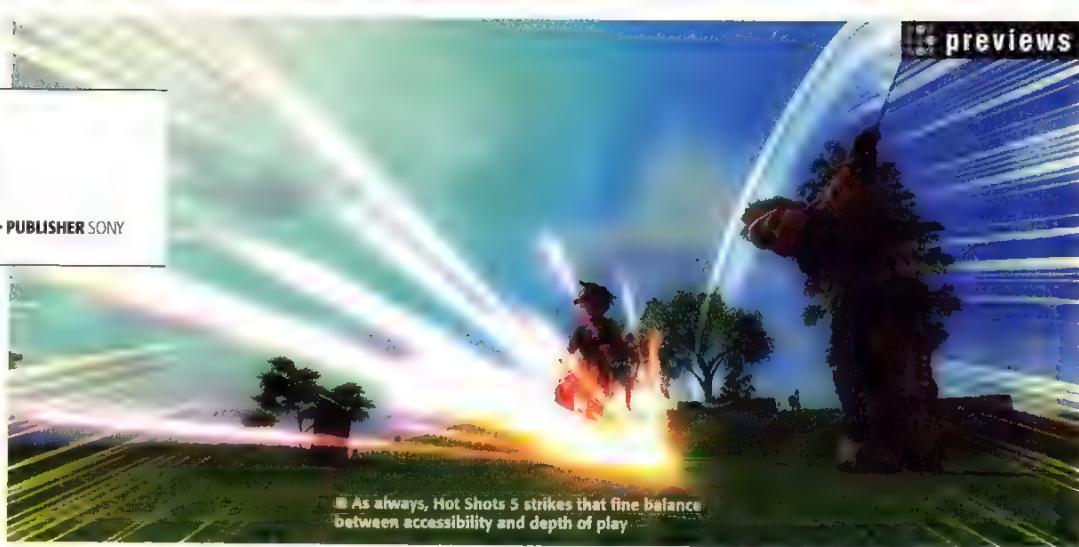
Hot Shots Golf 5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** CLAPHANZ > **RELEASE** SPRING

HITTING THE LINKS AGAIN

While we'd find it hard to recognize the original Tiger Woods PGA game as part of the same series as last year's edition, change comes much more slowly in the world of Sony's popular golfing franchise Hot Shots Golf (entitled Everybody's Golf in Japan). However, that's not necessarily a bad thing. While Tiger has become more and more involved over the years, Hot Shots is a golf game that...well...everybody can enjoy. The fact that it's on its fifth iteration is proof of that, and this new version promises to be the most accomplished to date.

That's not to say innovation isn't happening. In fact, Hot Shots 5 introduces the first real changes to the game's control mechanics, a clever and useful variation on the traditional three-click swing. Instead of a power meter, this new mode lets you judge your power by actually watching your



■ As always, Hot Shots 5 strikes that fine balance between accessibility and depth of play

backswing (you'll notice two quick glimmers of light on your club's shaft that indicate half and full power). After clicking to stop your back swing, you'll see a rapidly shrinking on-screen circle whose center is the ball. The idea is to hit it as close to the center as possible – the wider the circle, the less accurate your shot will be. Putting in this mode does away with

a power meter as well, offering four audio clues to help you get the right club force. While it definitely takes some getting used to, after a couple of hours we were consistently hitting farther and better shots with the new system than with the traditional three-click mechanic, making this a welcome new feature.

The single-player game will feature 15 golfers, and add six brand new courses to the familiar favorites from years past. The big focus for online is character customization; you'll be able to create your own unique-looking golfer from over 300 visual options including hair, masks, clothing, etc. From there, everything from eight-player matches to 50-player tournaments is available. The only minor flaw is that this character cannot be used in single-player action. Still, from our hands-on time with the game, it looks as if one of gaming's most dependable sports franchises is only getting better with age. ■ ■ ■

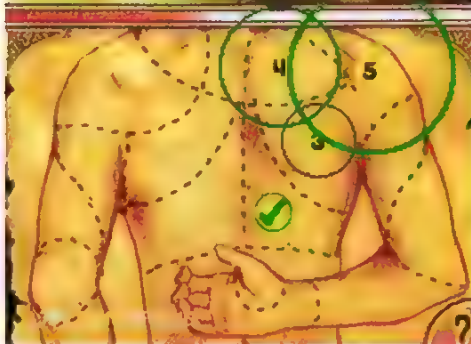
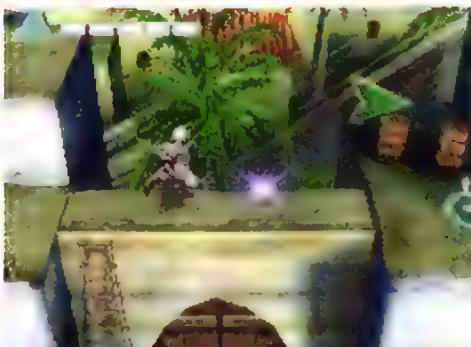
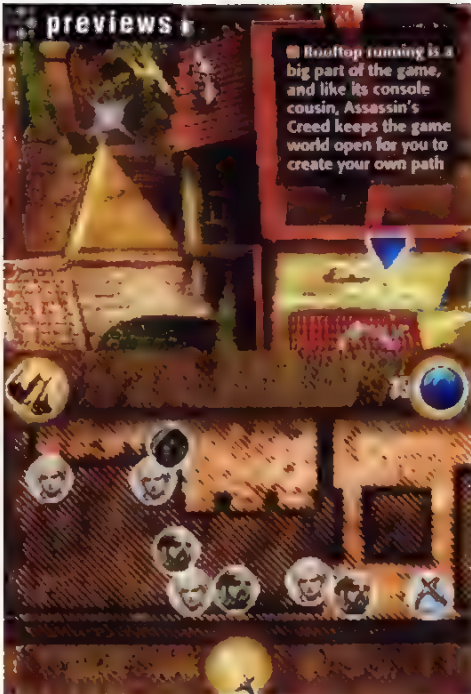


■ Although the exaggerated characters are back, the PS3 allows for much more detailed environments



Happy thoughts.

■ Rooftop running is a big part of the game, and like its console cousin, Assassin's Creed keeps the game world open for you to create your own path



NINTENDO DS

Assassin's Creed

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER GAMELOFT
> RELEASE FEBRUARY

A BLADE IN THE CROWD

Anybody who has made it all the way through the next-gen version of Assassin's Creed knows there's a lot more to that universe than what is contained in a single game. The expansion of that mythology is already beginning with the creation of an entirely new DS adventure with Altair set prior to the events of the console game. We were lucky enough this month to both play through the early part of this ambitious handheld release, and quiz Gameloft's Marine Guillermou on the project.

"People tend to make 2D games on the DS because they think the console is not powerful enough to support an ambitious 3D game," Guillermou tells us. "We wanted to prove this wrong and show that this console could feature one of the most ambitious 3D games on portable consoles." It's a choice that is clearly apparent only moments into this new DS release, as evidenced by the detailed 3D backgrounds and the animations of the characters in the world.

The game steps several months backward from the beginning of the console game, detailing one of Altair's quests across the medieval Middle East to recover a powerful artifact.

Gameplay incorporates many of the primary ideas we saw in the console game. You'll spend a lot of time platforming across rooftops, climbing walls, and fighting guards. Combat is timing sensitive, encouraging counter techniques and surprise attacks over button-mashing. "It's really more efficient to fight wisely, to sneak and be discreet to move to your goal, and use your opponents' mistakes to counter them and kill them very quickly," explains Guillermou. While not a totally open world, the 3D landscape often

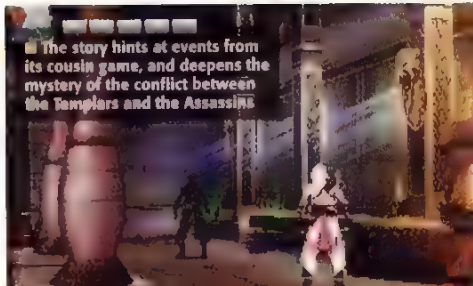


■ Touch screen minigames are quick diversions that add some flavor to the experience

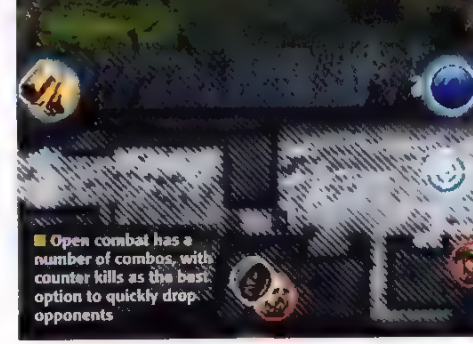
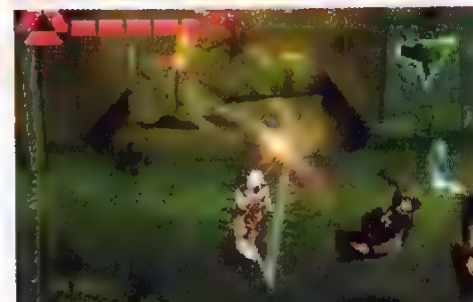
allows for multiple paths to a given objective. In addition, the all-important surprise assassinations are frequently end-goals after a long level. Beyond that, some touch screen-based minigames pop up from time to time, such as a picpocketing sequence to pull a key out from a crowded pouch without disturbing the other items inside. Players also have access to some new toys, including a grappling hook for traversing long gaps, and even the ancient equivalent of smoke grenades to escape the worst scrapes.

The game is still being polished, and we hope to see some of the rough edges involving object collision and combat timing to be addressed. Due to the expansive nature of the levels, one element not likely to disappear is the slightly longer loading times, an unusual feature for a DS game. Guillermou defends the approach: "Pushing technological boundaries doesn't come without a price. The level of details we integrated into each of our levels, the amount of variety in enemies and allies as well as the number of level-specific puzzles, in the end led to a need for separating the levels via loading screens. We're confident the end results will more than justify this decision." By and large, Assassin's Creed on DS is coming together as a fitting accompaniment to the larger platform release. These next couple of months should determine if the game's ambitious approach pays off. ■ ■ ■

■ The story hints at events from its cousin game, and deepens the mystery of the conflict between the Templars and the Assassins



Join the Templars? Or dress myself in strange garb?



■ Open combat has a number of combos, with counter kills as the best option to quickly drop opponents



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2

Sega Superstars Tennis

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR WIICONNECT24)
> **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SUMO DIGITAL > **RELEASE** MARCH

SEGA OPEN

Most hedgehogs would be dead and buried twice over before they turned 16. Sonic, on the other hand, not only competed in the Olympics this year, but he will soon be participating in tennis tournaments across the globe. We'd say that's pretty good for such an old hog.

In addition to featuring Sega's top roster of talent like Sonic, Dr. Eggman, and Aiai, the game will include some of the company's cooler, albeit nearly-forgotten characters. We're happy to see Space Channel 5's Ulala, Jet Set Radio's Beat, and Sega's defunct mascot Alex Kidd from Alex Kidd in Miracle World back in action. The game also includes Nights.

Each character has their own special move that, once powered up, can be used to mix up the on-court action. For example, Ulala gets into a musical groove and distracts her

enemies with the power of dance. Aiai, on the other hand, volleys back a storm of bananas that the ball can easily get lost in.

Superstars will feature 12 courts with themes based on Sega's most popular games. Sonic's court takes place in Green Hill Zone, which seems like an idyllic place to play a friendly game of tennis, but other levels might not be so appropriate. Samba de Amigo's stage is placed in the middle of a fiesta where partygoers can be seen dancing and shaking their maracas in the background.

We were a little surprised when we first heard Sega was making this game, but developer Sumo Digital (Virtua Tennis 3) has some experience developing solid tennis titles, so we have faith that Sega Superstars will be an easily accessible and fun party game. ■ ■ ■



■ Dr. Eggman's latest evil scheme is to tutor Sonic on this singles game; trust us, it's monstrous



■ Strange but true: Inside every bear sits another, smaller bear at a wheel



■ This "party" scene seems a little inappropriate once you learn that they're listening to Nickelback



Happy thoughts.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Viking: Battle for Asgard

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

BY THE BRISTLING BEARD OF ODIN!

After getting a chance to run around Viking's world this month, we really don't understand why real Vikings were always so grumpy. Dismembering legions of Hel's army and liberating the countryside from evil seems like a rewarding life to us.

Viking has all the basic trimmings of an open world game. The total area of Midgard is broken into three islands. In order to make our way around the environments more quickly, we took advantage of portal stones situated in different corners of the Earth.

One new feature of the game is the addition of gloom. In areas where Hel's troops dominate, the sky grows overcast, and it isn't until Skarin frees his troops and they battle back Hel's forces that this gloom begins to fade and the sun emerges again.

As Skarin, we picked up a few quests from various NPCs scattered around one of the game's towns. These smaller quests had us venturing off into conquered lands to rescue Skann's fellow warriors. We had the option to sneak into an enemy camp and take out each enemy with a silent kill, but we quickly failed this and had to fall back on the John McClane style of plowing head-first in to battle.

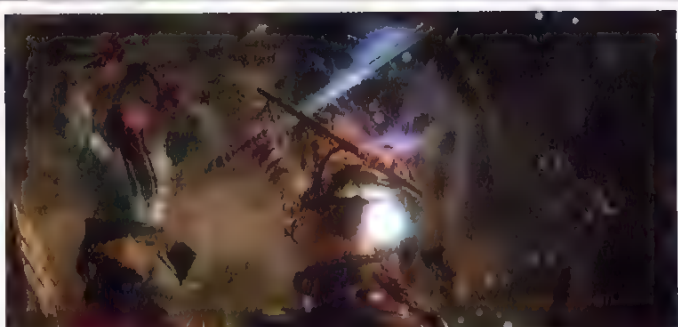
Skann cleaves through walls of undead warriors just as easily as he separates their limbs from their bodies. Some foes even scramble for their weapons and try to continue the fight after they've lost an arm, but it isn't long before their heads join that missing limb on the blood-soaked ground. Defeated enemies earn Skarin blue orbs that he

can save up to use on combo-like supermoves. The more orbs he spends, the more destructive the resulting blows will be. After we'd freed our fellow warriors, they helped us dispatch the stragglers as the gloom slowly faded from the area.

These missions are only half of the game, however, and they aren't even the exciting half. The smaller scuffles might feature anywhere up to 100 soldiers, but these are schoolyard slap fights compared to the thousand-plus war zones we found ourselves thrust into later in the game. Creative Assembly has taken its time and worked out some advanced AI routines for the larger scale battles. As both forces run towards each other for an epic clash, it's easy to be reminded of classic movies like *Braveheart* and *Gladiator*.

Like tides in the ocean, these battles fluctuate depending on Skann's actions. One of Skann's most important goals during these battles will be to take out the enemy's shamans, who are constantly resurrecting the opposition's war machine. Shamans are well protected by deadly berserkers, assassins, and giants. If Skarin is unable to fight his way to these shamans, he will have the option to blow the enemy healers out of their nests with strategic dragon air strikes.

Viking is moving along nicely, but it still seems to be going through some fundamental design changes every few months. Hopefully, Creative Assembly can settle on some of those issues and finish polishing up its game, because from what we've seen so far, this has the potential to an exciting action title for fans of bloody combat. ■ ■ ■



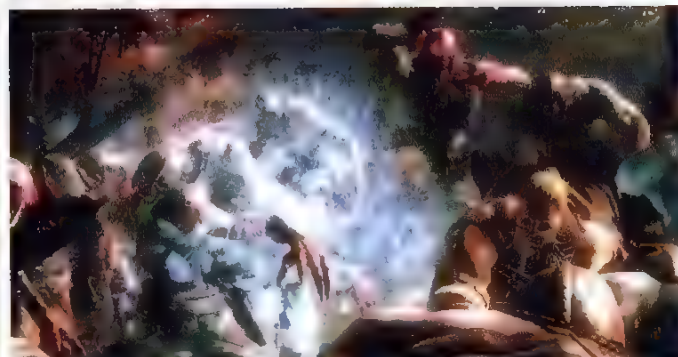
■ The glowing orb on Skarin's back was a gift from the goddess Freya, and promises to be important to the game's story



■ Skarin's enemies aren't half the man he is



■ Skarin can sneak into enemy encampments and take out his enemies before they notice, but it's not always easy





"Get a haircut, hippie!"

PLAYSTATION 3

Final Fantasy XIII

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

LIGHTNING STRIKE

It takes a special breed of game to keep fans so hungry for new information that they will rejoice at even the slightest revelation. That seems to be the approach Square Enix is taking with Final Fantasy XIII, since the publisher has only been releasing small tidbits – often integrated into re-cut trailers featuring the original train sequence shown at the game's debut.

It has been about a year and a half since Final Fantasy XIII's unveiling, and the area of the game about which the most is known is the setting. The floating city of Cocoon is the center of civilization, while everything that lies outside the city (in the region called Pulse) is thought to be somehow contaminated. Cocoon and Pulse are each governed by a crystal, which seem to be more intelligent and active than in previous Final Fantasy installments. The main character,

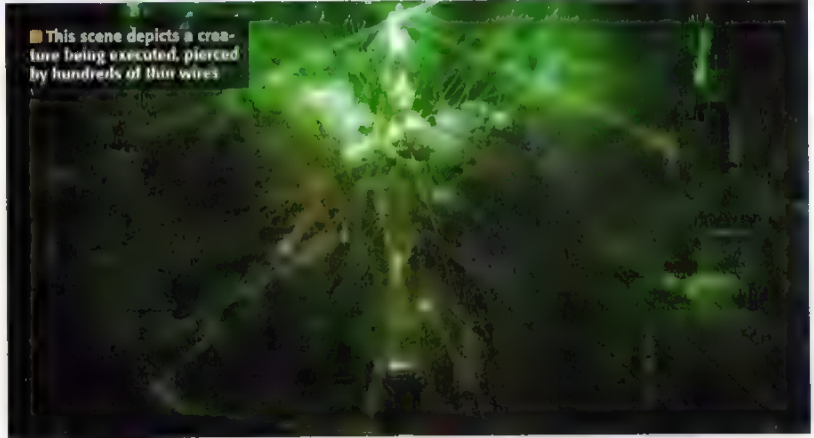
Lightning, has been chosen as an agent of change by one of these powerful beings.

As one would expect, other characters besides Lightning will play a major role in events. There is a mysterious bandana-wearing man, as well as a bow-carrying female. We have also seen the latest incarnation of Shiva, who is portrayed as two sisters melded with machinery (which explains their appearance as a motorcycle). How summons will be integrated into the combat is still unknown, but it could be similar to FF XII, since the development team has confirmed that Final Fantasy XIII will use a real-time battle system.

It looks as though the days of the traditional, turn-based Final Fantasy titles are done, but Square Enix's track record with this series is practically spotless. Wherever the company decides to take RPG genre, success is likely to follow. ■ ■ ■



■ Shiva is a magical being with mechanical components, allowing her to transform into a motorcycle



■ This scene depicts a creature being executed, pierced by hundreds of thin wires

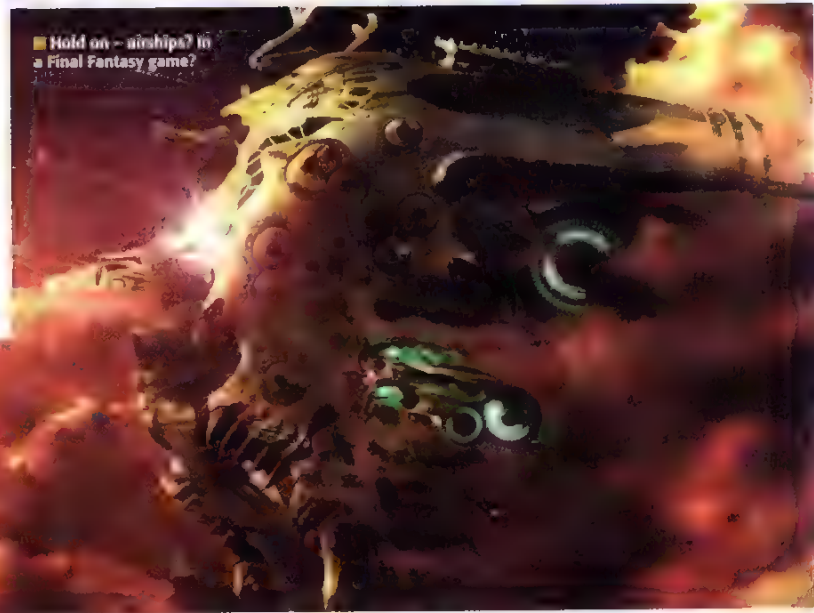


■ Citizens of Cocoon thought to be tainted by the outside world are deported to Pulse



WHAT ABOUT VERSUS?

While Final Fantasy XIII is the next main entry in the series, many fans are equally excited for its companion title, Final Fantasy Versus XIII. Both games are still in production, but you can expect news to trickle more slowly about Versus XIII; all reports seem to indicate that Versus XIII will be released after Final Fantasy XIII, and is therefore not quite as far along. Since a firm release date hasn't even been set for the official numbered entry, it could be a while before gamers are enjoying either of these PS3 exclusives.



■ Hold on – airships? In a Final Fantasy game?



■ Taking on a Cyclops in melee is a losing proposition.

XBOX 360

Dark Messiah of Might & Magic: Elements

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE FEBRUARY 5

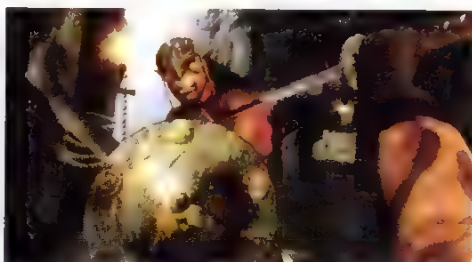
A CHANCE AT REDEMPTION

Though we praised *Dark Messiah of Might & Magic* for its entertaining combat when it came out for PC in 2006, the game failed to achieve commercial success. This Xbox 360 release, due out soon, is attempting to streamline some areas of the gameplay and give console players a chance to get in on the fun. Based on our playtime with an early build of the game, it looks like a mixed bag.

Since this is basically a port, the gameplay remains largely unchanged. In your quest to uncover the mystery of the prophesized Dark Messiah, you'll slaughter many different foes with blade, boot, magic, and conveniently placed physics objects. Utilizing fires, spike traps, crates, and much more to kill enemies in novel ways is the heart of *Dark Messiah's* entertainment, and it's just as fun to use a 360 pad to drop an anvil on some fool's head as it is with a keyboard.

Unsurprisingly, the largest deviations from the original game are in the interface. Outside of remapping controls to the gamepad (which works quite well, especially since sniper-like precision is rarely necessary), inventory management has been drastically improved. Items that you're unable to use due to class limitations are funneled into a "collection" tab to avoid cluttering, which is a welcome addition. Weapons, consumables, and spells can be mapped to the d-pad for quick use, and overall the gameplay fits the pad like a glove.

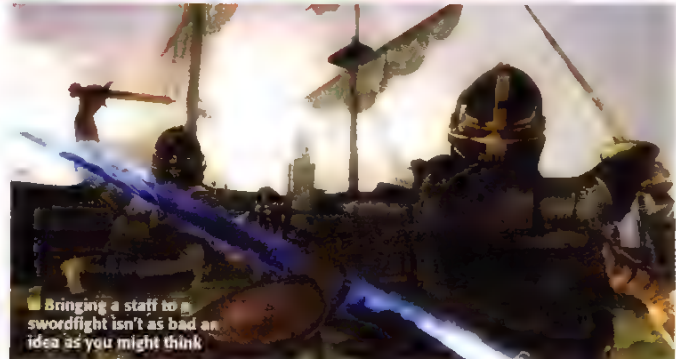
On the other hand, some flaws that were forgivable in 2006 are less so today. Despite a few enhancements to the graphics engine, notably HDR lighting,



the visuals aren't nearly as impressive as they were. The voice-acting and dialogue grate on the ears after the recent slew of highly polished titles, and non-regenerating magic power makes playing a mage an exercise in frustration much of the time.

Another disappointing change is the revisited character progression system. Players now choose a class at the beginning of the game — warrior, archer, mage, or assassin — and have no say in how they gain skills as they level up. The individual skills have been moved from the branching skill tree of the original game and dumped into a linear progression path for each class. This baffling decision adds nothing and drastically cuts the amount of freedom players have for how they wish to attack the quest's many challenges.

We weren't able to check out the multiplayer, but Ubisoft assures us that it's unchanged except for some playability tweaks. Hopefully, enough polish work gets done between now and release to let *Dark Messiah* live up to its potential — we're certainly down for another round of booting unsuspecting chumps off of cliffs. ■■■■



■ Bringing a staff to swordfight isn't as bad an idea as you might think



■ Apparently sorcerers know something about mail polish that we don't



■ The intro level has been entirely redone



NEXT-GEN CONSOLES | PC

Mafia II

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES
> DEVELOPER ILLUSION SOFTWARES > RELEASE 2008

THE REAL GODFATHER

■ "One appetini please."



■ Vito Scalleta is the new protagonist/hunk

“What about you, Vito. You against killin’ animals? How ‘bout, you know, the human animal?” This line, spoken at the dinner table by a mobster who is devouring a medium rare steak, perfectly encapsulates what the Mafia series is all about. Its narrative is dark, yet compelling, and is used to suck players into the criminal lifestyle. The Godfather, Scarface, and even Grand Theft Auto haven’t been able to capture the Mafioso world quite like the original 2002 game had.

“When I was writing the script for the original Mafia game, it was my first time writing such a deep storyline, so I was learning on the fly,” says Mafia II designer Daniel Vavra. “For Mafia II, I have all the experience of Mafia behind me, and let’s just say I think the fans of the first game are really going to be pleased.”

This second story follows a young second-generation Italian American named Vito Scalleta. Driven to rise above the poverty of his youth, Vito sees a bright future for himself in the mob. But Vito isn’t alone in his introduction to organized crime. His childhood friend Joe, who is already acclimated to hustling and thievery, is also along for the ride.

The original game took place in Lost Haven, a bustling city that could easily be mistaken for Chicago. The sequel ventures into the slightly larger 1950s Empire City. As you might

have guessed, this vertically impressive metropolis draws great inspiration from New York City. Vavra elaborates, “We’ve taken numerous steps to bring Empire City to life. One of the major things we have done throughout the entire game is put priority on photorealistic visuals. Empire City looks and feels like a real city, pulled straight out of what we like to call the golden era of gangland America. But more than the visuals, we believe the city is best brought to life by the citizens of Empire City. And as you play the game, you will see and feel a huge difference between Lost Haven’s and Empire City’s citizens.”

The original game didn’t allow much in terms of freedom outside of the story missions, but with subplots and numerous activities being added, you’ll now have great reason to explore the city and veer off of the critical path. Few gameplay details are being revealed at this point, but Vavra does say that the driving will be just as prominent. “Since the majority of the game takes place in the 1950s, the cars have got more muscle and better handling than their counterparts did in the first Mafia game.”

Mafia II is still early in development, but all signs point toward a 2008 release for next-gen consoles and, of course, PC. ■ ■ ■



■ Newer cars = more excitement



■ "I better not pull a Kane and Lynch here."



■ Numerous side missions and activities are planned



■ Battles range from single-ship engagements to literally hundreds of vessels exchanging fire

Sins of a Solar Empire

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > PUBLISHER STARDOCK
> DEVELOPER IRONCLAD GAMES > RELEASE FEBRUARY

SHALL BE VISITED ON YOUR ENEMIES

Real-time Civilization in space is a good idea. Crazy as it sounds, you heard us right; after dumping a fair amount of time into the Sins of a Solar Empire beta, we've become believers despite the ludicrous premise. This massively ambitious strategy game tries something nobody's had the stones to attempt to date, and though there's a lot of polish to be done before its spring release, the seeds of genius are flourishing.

Starting from a humble home planet on any of the dozens of pre-made maps or a random star cluster, players must balance economic growth, technology research, and military buildup as they expand their dominion to nearby planets and multiple solar systems. Each planet functions much like a city in Civilization, with a limited number of permanent improvements to be built. Upgrading your population capacity, economic infrastructure, and ship factories are all urgently required, but limited resources force a series of tough choices.

Military action exclusively takes the form of space battles. Massive capital

ships (which can level up like heroes in traditional RTS) exchange plasma beams and nuclear torpedoes with all manner of smaller frigates and cruisers, while fighters and bombers dance their own jig amid the chaos. Taking advantage of special abilities like flak screens and supercannon shots can swing the battle your way, but every second spent zoomed into an ongoing combat takes away from guiding your empire's economic and technological growth.

"A cleverly designed interface makes staying on top of the game's many facets a manageable task. Drop-down menus along the side of the screen allow you to give orders to any production facilities or fleets without changing the view, while a Supreme Commander-like zoom function makes taking a closer look at developing situations a breeze.

Sins of a Solar Empire's novel concept is like nothing we've seen before, and if some of the wrinkles get ironed out in the months between this printing and the title's release, this could be the kind of sleeper hit that strategy buffs live for. ■■■



■ If you have a moment between urgent decisions, admiring the ships is a fun distraction



S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER TBA
> DEVELOPER GSC GAMEWORLD > RELEASE SPRING

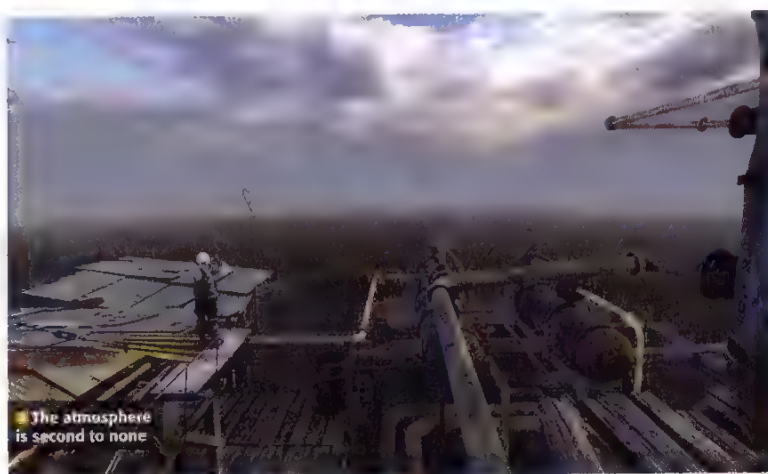
FORMING THE ZONE

How did the irradiated Chernobyl Zone become the nightmarish gauntlet that it is? What brought about the fragile balance of power between its several factions? How did Strelak end up in that death truck? And does S.T.A.L.K.E.R.'s graphics engine even support sunlight? This prequel expansion aims to answer all these questions as well as capitalize on developer GSC GameWorld's vaunted A-Life AI system with an even greater focus on player actions and how they affect the story of the game.

As a mercenary with the choice to ally with any or none of the factions in the Zone, players will experience firsthand the horror that comes along with struggling for survival in a nuclear wasteland. Clear Sky's focus seems to be on the ability for players to influence the development of the

gameworld, up to and including enabling "victory" for any of the factions according to your choices.

A number of other improvements that seem directly related to concerns with the original game are in place as well. You'll be able to repair equipment this time around, which is certainly a welcome change. The HUD and PDA interfaces have been revamped, which will hopefully address some of the issues there. Faster travel will be available, meaning you won't have to hoof it everywhere any more. The engine will take advantage of DirectX 10-capable machines now. All in all, if Clear Sky can maintain the excellent atmosphere that was S.T.A.L.K.E.R.'s greatest charm and deliver a compelling storyline with some interesting choices, this could be one of the better FPS offerings in 2008. ■■■



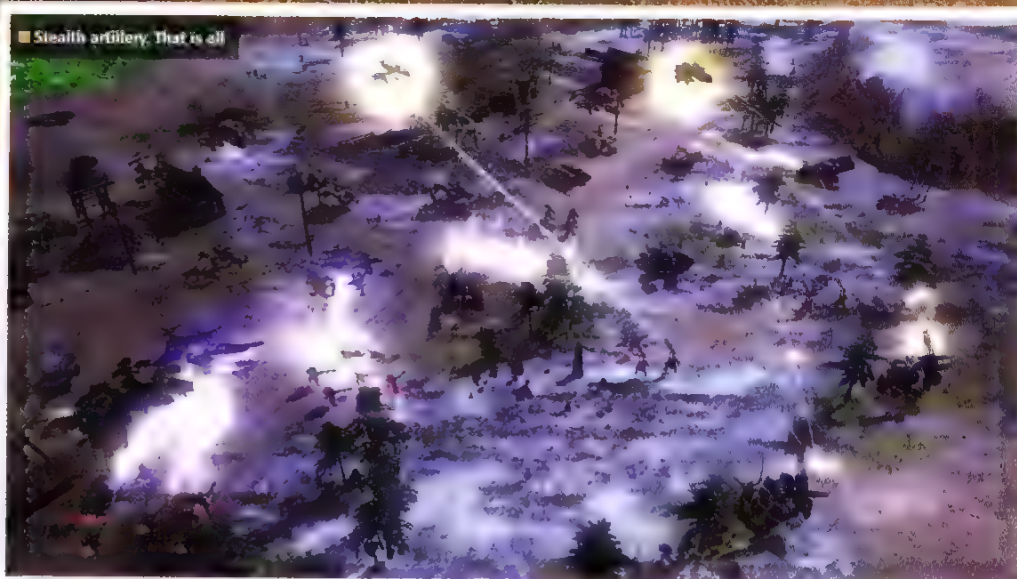
■ The atmosphere is second to none



■ Stealth is your ally as often as firearms



■ Pew pew pew.



■ Stealth artillery. That is all

XBOX 360 | PC

Command & Conquer: Kane's Wrath

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PC INTERNET OR LAN)
 > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA G.A. > **RELEASE** SPRING

NOD NEVER DIES

RTS gamers have something to look forward to in early 2008. This first expansion to Command & Conquer 3 promises the usual gameplay improvements and new units and structures, as well as an added strategic gameplay mode to extend the offline experience beyond the campaign and its cheesy live-action video.

The addition of six sub-factions to the C&C 3 mix holds great potential, particularly for multiplayer. Each one is tailored to a specific playstyle, which should add even more replayability and strategy to online play. For instance, a GDI player can choose between the Steel Talons, who specialize in loading infantry squads into armored vehicles to further cus-

tomize their battlefield role (adding rocket infantry to a heavy chopper to give it anti-air capability, for example) and the ZOCOM subfaction, which seems to focus more on experimental weaponry and special abilities. On the multiplayer end, more than two dozen new maps will permit nearly endless variations on the already-chaotic online warfare.

If the single-player campaign (which chronicles Kane's rise to power after the Second Tiberium War) isn't enough offline C&C for you, the new strategic metagame should fill that void. In similar fashion to The Battle for Middle-earth's War of the Ring mode, you'll create strike forces and capture territory on a turn-based world map while fighting RTS

battles to resolve conflicts.

The final piece of the Kane's Wrath puzzle is the new radial menu system developed specifically for console players. By holding the right trigger and using the left stick to navigate through this menu, you'll be able to access build queues, special unit abilities, and support powers from anywhere on the map. This next evolution marks the third attempt by EA to nail RTS control on console, and it's definitely got some potential. We'll know whether all this potential is fulfilled soon enough, since Kane's Wrath is set to release this spring. ■ ■ ■



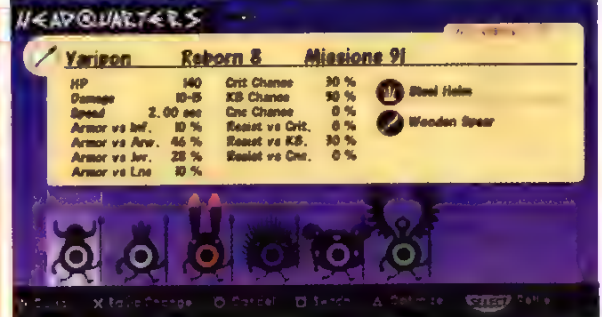
■ Focus fire, noobs!



■ L.A. traffic sucks



■ Is there anything better than watching your base defenses chew up an ill-prepared opponent?



PSP

Patapon

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER SONY JAPAN STUDIO/PYRAMID > RELEASE FEBRUARY

GOD OF DRUMS

Patapon made quite the splash when it was announced at E3 this year due to its unique rhythm army gameplay, distinct art style, and developer pedigree (the team from 2006's *LocoRoco*). We've spent some hands-on time with a localized build of the game to get a clear idea of the story and a firm grasp on the unique gameplay style.

Players take on the role of Almighty, a god of sorts to the downtrodden Patapon tribe. This once mighty civilization was defeated by the Zigotons many years ago, and has been walled off in a desolate corner of the world. By playing the ancient Holy Drums, players inspire the Patapon to fight, take back their lands, and seek out the promised land, Earthend. "Your task as their leader will be to care for them, create them, look after other Patapolis citizens, etc.," says associate producer Christian Hinojosa-Miranda. "All of this is held together by the music and rhythm. There are very few moments where you will not be tapping your feet or bobbing your head humming along to the infectious music."

The four face buttons correspond to various drum sounds and can be combined in several ways to issue commands to your army. The square button makes a "pata" sound, while the circle button sounds like "pon." To issue specific commands, players press a series of four buttons along with a base beat, wait for the Patapons to repeat it back, and then issue another command. For example, "Pata-pata-pata-pon" will make the army move forward, while "pon-pon-pata-pon" initiates an attack.

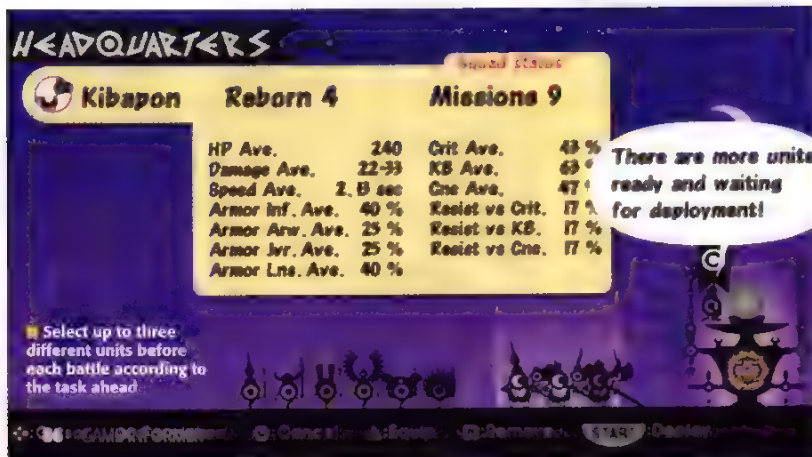
After taking down some Zigotons, you'll return to base to equip new armor and weapons, create units at Mater, the tree of life (e.g. archers, spear throwers, and melee fighters),

and watch your people dance around while a boss's head roasts in the campfire. You can also visit Pan the Pakapon to help him match the notes of a giant singing tree with his trumpet.

Music is obviously a key part of Patapon with various flavors from bagpipes to tribal music. The art style is impressively distinct and smooth animations really bring the world to life — some even work into gameplay. Troops' eyes

will narrow into an angry glare to signal when they're in range for an attack, for example.

Patapon will certainly get trickier as more commands are mixed in later in the game where you'll find that things might not be as the legend foretold. "You'll understand that there is a deeper story as you dive into the adventure," teases Hinojosa-Miranda. "And the ending... well, you'll just have to play to find out." ■ ■ ■





WHEN THE FLOOD HITS,
WE JUMP IN THE HUMVEE AND ROLL.



WE HAVE LOTS OF FLOODING IN MASSACHUSETTS. THE PEOPLE LOVE TO SEE THOSE GREEN TRUCKS ROLLING IN WITH ALL THE NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIERS. THEY KNOW WE'RE THERE TO HELP.

DURING THE LAST FLOOD, WE WERE PATROLLING BACK IN THE WOODS AND FOUND A FAMILY WHO WAS CUT OFF. SO WE JUMPED OUT OF OUR HUMVEE WADED UP AND ASKED, "HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?" THEY ACTUALLY GOT TEARS IN THEIR EYES. THAT MAKES YOU FEEL VERY, VERY GOOD.



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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Highlander

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER EIDOS > DEVELOPER WIDESCREEN GAMES > RELEASE MAY

THERE CAN BE ANOTHER ONE

You never know what you're going to get with the Highlander franchise. The first movie is a classic, while the second is one of the most reviled sequels in cinematic history. One television series ran for five years, while another only had 22 episodes. Highlander may not be a never-miss property, but there's no doubt it has a lot of potential – especially when it comes to video games. Swordfights and epic battles are just a way of life for an average immortal, and Widescreen Games is hoping to bring these elements together in an action game that mixes stylish combat with Highlander's unique mythology.

Featuring a story by David Abramowitz (writer of the original *Highlander* TV series), the game will introduce Owen MacLeod, an immortal protagonist new to the Highlander universe. Even though he carries the legendary MacLeod surname, he isn't directly related to any of the franchise's other leading characters. "He was adopted into the clan MacLeod after he fought at their side, but they are not of the same bloodline," explains Abramowitz. "He is also a thousand years older than either Duncan or Connor. He's heroic because it's his nature, but I think he's tougher, edgier than both Duncan and Connor. He's seen more and done more."

Players will get to control Owen through many of the experiences that have punctuated his long life. The game opens in a near-future version of New York City, but through various flashback levels, Owen will relive events in places like Pompeii, the Scottish Highlands, and feudal Japan. In all of these situations, he will have

plenty of opportunity to draw his sword and fight through hordes of enemies using the game's fluid combat system. "We looked at lots of different games with melee combat when considering the combat mechanics, including *Devil May Cry* and *God of War*," explains executive designer Anna Marsh. "Rather than giving the player some pre-set button combos, we wanted to concentrate more on creating a tool box of moves which the player can string together as they see fit."

In addition to stylish slashing, players will have access to certain perks that come from being an immortal. Through centuries of Quickenings, Owen has obtained some magic-like powers, such as the ability to increase his strength or strike foes with bursts of energy. Also, since Owen can only die if beheaded, his body can take extra punishment on the road to victory. "There are moments where Owen will suffer damage that would be fatal for a normal mortal, but he recovers and keeps on going," says

Marsh. "He can also use his immortality for his own benefit, like impaling himself on enemy weapons in order to disarm them."

The movies, shows, novels, and comics have established several Highlander continuities, and this title will add another one into the mix. The world of Owen MacLeod is full of new characters and locations, but fans will recognize the same emphasis on story and combat that has defined the Highlander franchise. Let the Game begin. ■ ■ ■

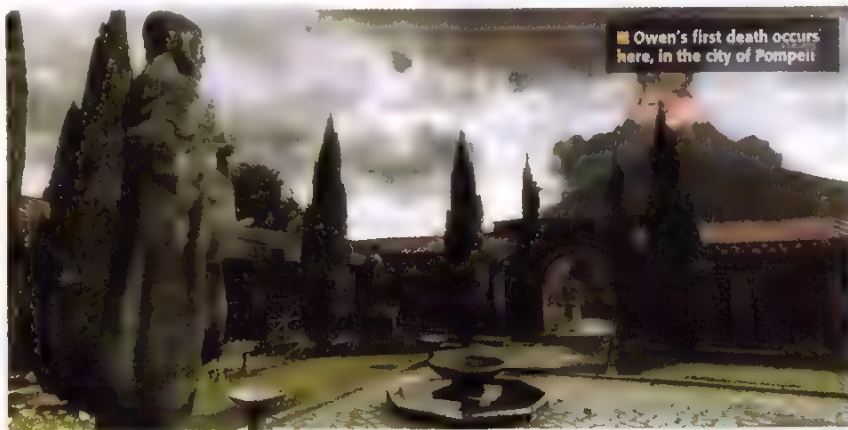
■ When "Jump over a helicopter" sounds like a good solution to anything, you've seriously messed up your life



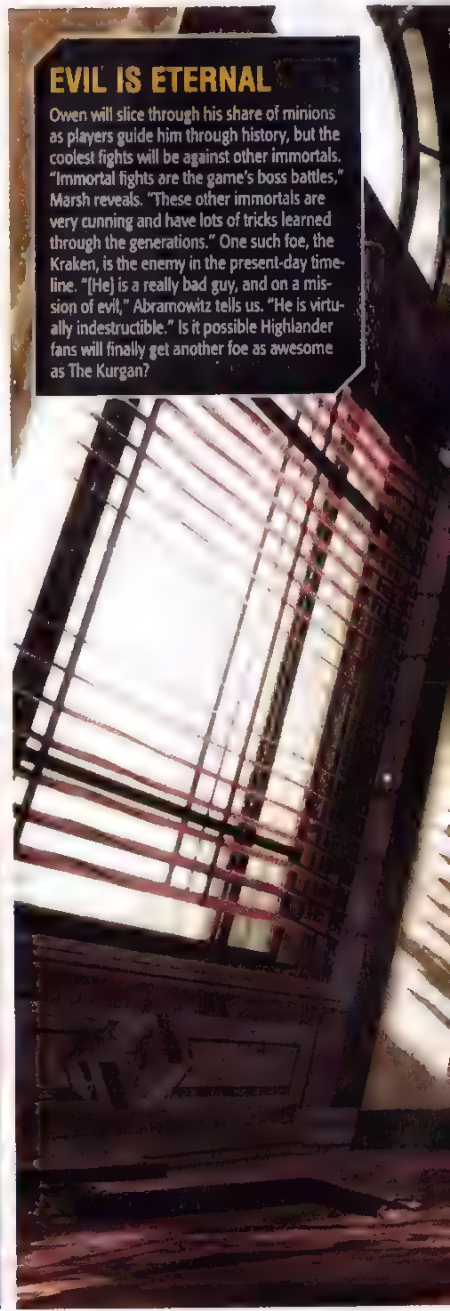
EVIL IS ETERNAL

Owen will slice through his share of minions as players guide him through history, but the coolest fights will be against other immortals. "Immortal fights are the game's boss battles," Marsh reveals. "These other immortals are very cunning and have lots of tricks learned through the generations." One such foe, the Kraken, is the enemy in the present-day timeline. "[He] is a really bad guy, and on a mission of evil," Abramowitz tells us. "He is virtually indestructible." Is it possible Highlander fans will finally get another foe as awesome as The Kurgan?

■ Owen's first death occurs here, in the city of Pompeii



■ The events in New York are somehow tied to Owen's past



The aura surrounding Owen is a special Quickening technique.



Instead of a life bar, you will have a fatigue meter. When it fills, you will collapse briefly from exhaustion, allowing nearby foes to chop off your head.





TBA

Street Fighter IV

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (ONLINE TBA) > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE TBA

RETURN OF THE WORLD WARRIORS

Capcom's initial offering of next-generation software showed a commitment to creating new intellectual properties like *Dead Rising* and *Lost Planet*. In the following year, the company then shifted its focus to announcing sequels to current hits like *Resident Evil* and *Devil May Cry*. Where does Capcom go next? The only place it can: To a dust-covered chest loaded with classics. Come 2008, fans of yesteryear will be treated to a new *Bionic Commando* game, as well as the long overdue resurgence of video games' most accomplished fighting series, *Street Fighter*.

Without question, the *Street Fighter IV* design team is tasked with one of the most challenging goals in gaming: creating a next-generation game that retains the charm and gameplay of the classic. The result of their work thus far, however, is nothing short of remarkable.

While making the leap to three-dimensional characters and environments, the gameplay remains largely unchanged. Capcom says that there will be some interaction with your surroundings, but your movements will be based on the classic two-dimensional plane. Your arsenal of moves will also make use of six buttons (three dedicated to your kicks, and three to punches), and the motions used for unleashing special moves will largely be unchanged. Certainly, *Street Fighter IV* may sound like more of a remake than a full-fledged sequel at this point, but Capcom assures us that there's a ton of new content and surprises yet to be revealed.

One addition we've learned of is a new *Revenge* system. As you take on damage, your *Revenge* meter will begin to fill up, and will give you more options in sticky situations. This system essentially allows players on the ropes to have a



Ryu maintains his look inspired by *The Karate Kid* and *Rambo*



fighting chance, and also prevents players on top from backing away and waiting for the bell to ring.

The name *Street Fighter IV*

might be a tad misleading, however, as the game's timeframe takes place between *Street Fighter II* and *Street Fighter III*. Whether or not new characters will be added to the mix is still unknown, but Capcom has revealed the first four fixtures: Ken, Ryu, Chun-Li, and Dhalsim. While it would seem logical that Guile, Blanka, and Zangief will make the list, we're really hoping that Dan doesn't get overlooked. He's better than Ken and Ryu combined!

Capcom is keeping this game incredibly close to the chest as of now, and has yet to announce when it will be released or for which systems. Seeing that the company is now releasing most of its products on both PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, we can only assume that a high-profile game like *Street Fighter IV* will reach as many gamers as possible. ■■■



Ken still hasn't found that there are easier ways to clip your nails



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Race Driver: Grid

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 20-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR PC INTERNET) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS
 > **DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS > **RELEASE** SUMMER



PEAK PROFESSIONAL

Codemaster's cumulative success with the Colin McRae and the Pro Race Driver (also known as TOCA) franchises paved the way for last year's Dirt game. Now the publisher/developer wants to cash in on the next-gen headway that Dirt has made with Race Driver: Grid. The two games may share Codemaster's Neon engine (of which Grid runs a modified version), but they have different approaches.

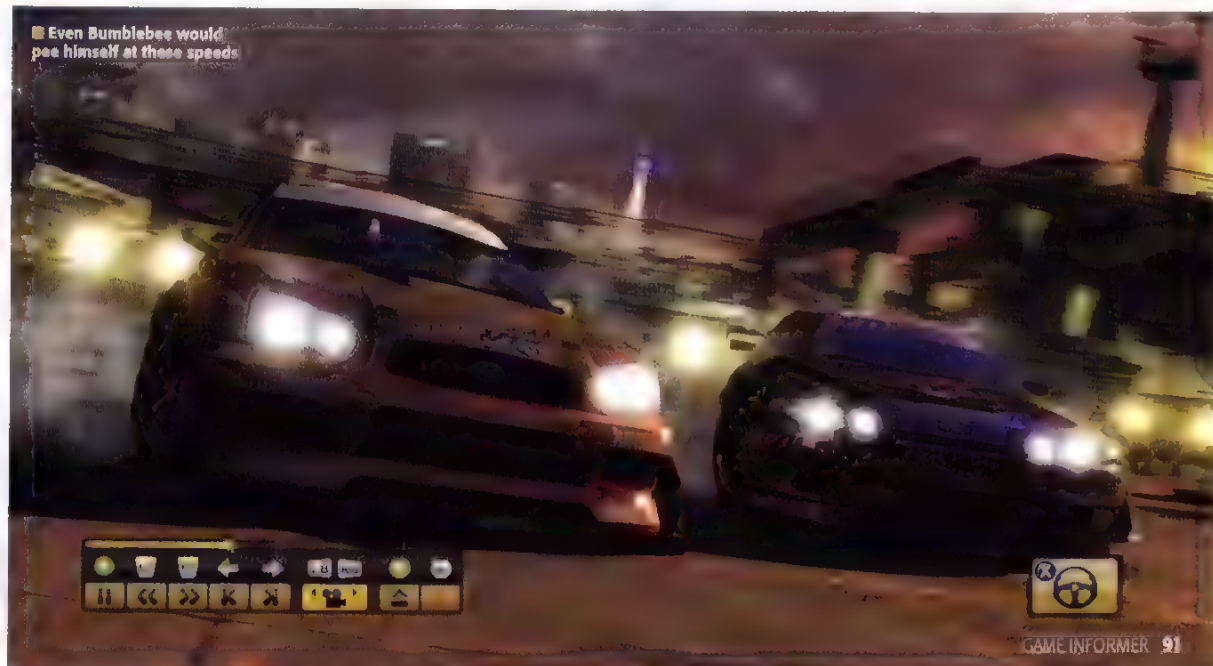
One of Dirt's few faults was its uninspiring, albeit non-linear, career structure. True to Pro Race Driver's roots, however, Grid will put you in the shoes of an aspiring racer slumming it in the lower racing circuits looking for the big break in order to prove his talent to the world. It's unknown at this point exactly how this career will manifest itself, whether you'll have an actual onscreen character like in the first Pro Race Driver, or if you'll simply be navigating menus. Regardless, you'll have choices to make. You'll pick a team to join and have a hand in recruiting other drivers, as well as be responsible for sponsorship decisions.

Your career will take you around the globe, with real-world locations in America, Europe, and Japan whose races reflect the stereotypes of the region. America's got muscle cars, Japan is all about street racing and drifting, and Europe has more common tracks and events. The game will also feature plenty of licensed cars, and in true Codemasters fashion, it'll run those cars through the wringer

with its spectacular damage system.

Given Grid's traditional approach to its racing, it seems it will have to work twice as hard to show us that it's not just another set of wheels on the road. The game's use of rival racers who shadow you your whole career appears to be

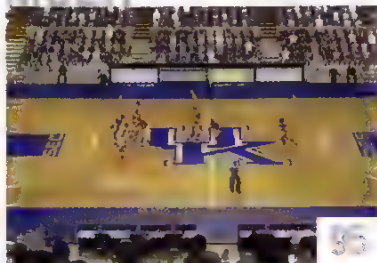
a good start, but let's hope that Grid does more to keep on expanding our racing experience. The first Pro Race Driver opened our eyes to new possibilities in the racing genre, so we have our fingers crossed that Grid can do the same ■■■■



REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



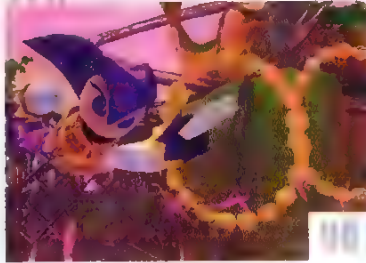
College Hoops 2K8

PLAYSTATION 3



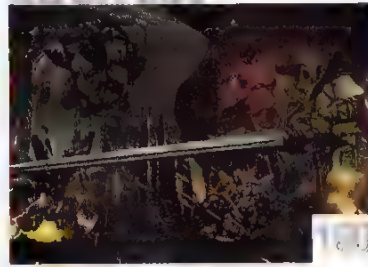
The Orange Box

Wii



Nights: Journey of Dreams

XBOX 360



Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom



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 | Branschweiger Sandwich. Why would you do this to yourself? |

- > **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**

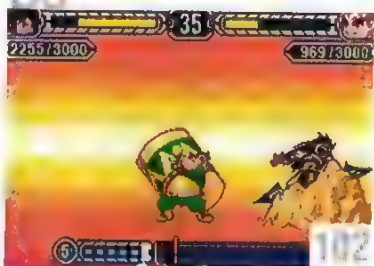
- High** - You'll still be popping this game in five years from now
- Moderately High** - Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.
- Moderate** - Good for a few months or a few times through.
- Moderately Low** - After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.
- Low** - You'll quit playing before you complete the game

PSP



Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice

PSP



Draglade



Burnout Paradise

Criterion's Burnout series has been a fan favorite for years because of its fender-mangling, fast-paced insanity. Burnout Paradise features both, but also adds something new to the franchise – depth. Now set in an ambitious open-world, the game is quite literally one of the largest racing games ever created. Although it's not without its flaws, Burnout Paradise still contains more pure fun than most on the market. While we still miss Crash mode, Paradise gives us more than enough reason to put the pedal to the metal.

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pg. 97

The Edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal
This is a warning of broken down information for form games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older		Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older
	Content suitable only for adults		
	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.		Product is awaiting final rating.
	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older		

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

- +10** – What you should shout at your friends after insulting, punching, or otherwise humiliating them
- 1080i** – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The "i" means that the video is being interlaced
- 1080p** – Currently the best resolution for gaming on an HDTV. In widescreen, 1080p generates an image at resolution of 1920x1080 in progressive format
- 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 God of War and Devil May Cry
- ad hoc** – A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity
- AI** – Artificial Intelligence. Usually refers to how well the computer reacts to human opponents or works with human allies
- adventure** – A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island
- bloom** – An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces
- board** – A term we use for games like Scene 1? and Mano Party
- cel shading** – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cels
- CG** – Computer Generated. Usually refers to cutscenes that don't use in-game graphics
- E3** – Electronic Entertainment Expo. A gaming convention held every year since 1995. It is one of the largest events in the gaming industry
- first-party** – A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system
- fighting** – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive
- FPS** – First-Person Shooter. Describes games like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty. Also used to denote the phrase "frames per second," or how many animation frames happen in one second
- frame rate** – The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement
- front end** – A game's menus and options
- HDTV** – High Definition Television
- infrastructure** – A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances
- IP** – Intellectual Property. A single game or franchise encompassing the ideas and characters contained within
- isometric** – Three-quarters top down view, like Warcraft 3 or Baldur's Gate. Dark Alliance
- Jaggies** – Graphics lines that look jagged when they should be straight
- LAN** – Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast simultaneous gameplay
- MMO** – Massively Multiplayer Online. Usually applied to role playing titles, we use this term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft
- motion blur** – Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed
- music** – A term we use for games like Guitar Hero and Rock Band
- NPC** – Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans
- particle effects** – Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time
- platform** – A term we use for games like Super Mario and Ratchet & Clank
- pop-up** – When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance
- PS2** – Sony PlayStation 2
- PS3** – Sony's PlayStation 3 console
- puzzle** – A term we use for games like Tetris and Picross
- racing** – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart
- RPG** – Role-Playing Game. A term we use to describe games like Final Fantasy and The Elder Scrolls
- RTS** – Real-Time Strategy. A subgenre of strategy games including titles like StarCraft and Command & Conquer
- shooter** – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gears of War
- sports** – A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Top Spin
- strategy** – A term we use for games like Disgaea and Fire Emblem
- third-party** – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer



BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Burnout Paradise takes the series' over-the-top racing to a vast open-world environment

> **Graphics:** Quite simply one of the best graphics engines I've seen to date – an open world that's faster and more detailed than most closed-track racers

> **Sound:** The audio hints are welcome, but the soundtrack is an odd mix of classic rock, techno, and fly-by-night pop artists that doesn't really gel

> **Playability:** The actual racing is excellent; it's too bad the navigation and career structure is seriously flawed

> **Entertainment:** Design mistakes hamper what could have been an all-time classic. But what's here is a whole lot of fun

> **Replay Value:** High

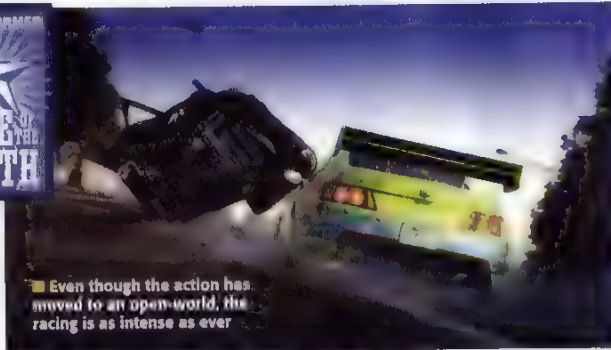
Second Opinion **8.5**

You won't like some of developer Criterion's design decisions for Paradise City, but that doesn't mean you won't like the game. Criterion's stubborn refusal to allow event restarts or quick jumps around the world map may keep the integrity of its open world format intact – and what a gorgeous, chock-full world it is – but this breaks the seamless feeling it has worked hard to create. I spent too much time checking the out-of-game map and not enough time exploiting the crumple zones of foes' cars. In spite of some of these bad choices, there's a very fun game here. One of my favorite features are the Road Rules, which not only show off some of the sick speeds this title hits, but also give some meaning to the otherwise silly Showtime events – which is still not a substitute for the choreographed madness of Crash mode. Criterion has created a huge world with a boat-load of fun things to do in it – particularly if you play online – and working through the kinks to get to them is worth the effort. —KATO

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Burnout Paradise

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE)
 > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CRITERION > **RELEASE** JANUARY 22 > **ESRB** E10+



QUICK THINKING

This is one of those games that is heartbreaking to review. That's not because it's bad; Burnout Paradise features some of the fastest and most thrilling racing I've ever encountered. No, the tragedy here is that, with just a few errors in judgment on the part of the developers, what could have been the year's greatest racing game settles for being merely good.

Now, "merely good" is something that most games on the market don't even come close to achieving. I do not want to understate this title's accomplishments. While we've all loved the Burnout series, it's never been the deepest experience. Not content to rest on a familiar formula, Criterion has made Burnout Paradise a total reinvention of the franchise, a strategy that makes this at once the most compelling and most frustrating entry in the series to date.

Burnout Paradise is an open-world racer in the truest sense. After you load in, everything you want to do both online or offline is available to you in the massive overworld. The map has numerous dots, each of which is a unique event, whether it's a race, Road Rage (where you must cause a set number of opponents to crash), Marked Man (running a gauntlet filled with aggressive enemy cars), or various other contests. Just pull up, hit both triggers, and you're in. This holds true for the online mode as well, allowing you to seamlessly set up and send invites to a variety of events all while tooling through the landscape. The sheer scope of what's available to you at any one time is impressive, and evokes a more user-friendly version of Test Drive Unlimited.

The racing itself, both online and off, is also top quality. This game moves fast – shockingly fast at times – and you'll hardly ever see a skipped frame or a trace of pop-up. That's really something when you consider just how detailed this world is. Even after a few days, I was still uncovering hidden areas,

routes, and jumps. The driving mechanics are in the classic Burnout style – just realistic enough to give it a sense of verite, but more concerned with delivering speed and thrills than accurate physics modeling.

While there's so much good to talk about with Burnout Paradise, it's not hard to spot its flaws. For reasons I'll never understand, there is no "Retry" option for races. That means that after you've lost a race in the last seconds, you'll have to trek all the way back across the map, go to the intersection you began at, and restart from there. This is highly annoying and often confusing, as it's sometimes difficult to remember at which of the myriad dots you began. There's also no "skip to" option, so you'll spend far too much of your time aimlessly wandering the countryside. For me, this robbed the game of a true sense of progression, as I would often just lose a race and then randomly take the next event that I came across rather than making the effort to restart the last one.

This is especially frustrating because, as a result of the poorly designed on-screen map (which doesn't orientate to your position) and vague navigation system (which uses only street signs and a general compass), you'll frequently lose races simply because you took a wrong turn in the huge maze that is Burnout's roadways. After playing this, you'll really appreciate just how good a job the Midnight Club series has done at making open-world racing as intuitive as a traditional driving title.

Finally, I fear many fans will bemoan the lack of Crash Mode, a favorite from games past. It's been replaced with Showtime Mode, which allows you to start crash sequences anywhere by clicking the top shoulder buttons. In this mode, you can bounce your car and "steer" the crash at will, crushing cars that are suddenly streamed into the environment. While it's fun at first, it quickly feels too artificial and gimmicky, and lacking in the "puzzle game" element that Crash's preset levels provided.

So, it's not often that I can say that a game is both a disappointment and a must-play, but Burnout Paradise certainly fits both of those descriptions. What's here is nothing short of amazing, but I can't help but wonder what could have been. I will say this: I cannot wait for a sequel. —MATT



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

College Hoops 2K8

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 19 > **ESRB** E

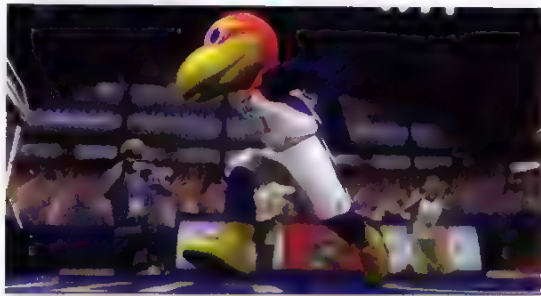


BOXING OUT THE COMPETITION

Perennial college basketball winner College Hoops 2K once again crushes its competitor with an emphatic dunk, but that's not to say this dynasty isn't starting to show signs of wear.

College Hoops 2K8's great mix of realistic on-court action, ESPN-quality game presentation, and first-rate crowd dynamics keeps the game head and shoulders above the competition. You can take your alma mater on a championship crusade, build a legacy by coaching your way up the ranks until you take over a powerhouse program, or create your own school to contend for the NCAA crown, editing every aspect of your nascent university (except for your jerseys — a questionable exclusion).

On the court, this year sees the reintroduction of Maximum Passing, which helps you target that open player in the corner much easier. The only area the proven gameplay buckles is in the low-post action. Getting your player to move with the grace and power of a Roy Hibbert on the block can be a tiresome affair, as the controls are needlessly complex.



The Legacy mode is deeper than ever before, which in this case can be seen as a hindrance. Scouting now revolves around the Amateur Basketball League. You can auto-scout these games, but then you cannot garner more recruiting points. Playing with a bunch of players you'll never invite to your campus ultimately feels like a waste of time; there are better ways of improving recruiting, as evidenced by NCAA Football 08.

The best addition to this year's game is easily 2K Share, which allows you to share rosters, legacies, and game settings with other players online. College Hoops 2K8's gameplay options are rounded out by the forgettable minigames, a problematic play designer that needs more fine-tuning, and the stellar online mode, which once again features tournaments and seasons.

This may be the only game that college fans need to care about, but College Hoops 2K needs to step up its game next year to avoid leaving the court with a towel over its head instead of a basketball net. —**BERTZ**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Cut down the net with the reigning NCAA basketball champ

> **Graphics:** Players look great and move with purpose

> **Sound:** Lively crowds bring the college atmosphere to life

> **Playability:** The gameplay excels until you get to the low post

> **Entertainment:** Serious college hoops fans won't find a better game on the market

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.75

College players in video games can be somewhat anonymous in that they're assigned randomly generated names and numbers, and College Hoops' similarity to last year's offering certainly doesn't help it stand out. The NBA-esque defensive mechanic doesn't work as well as it does in the pros (leaving you flailing), and the graphics and presentation aren't as good as NBA's either. There are few surprises on the court, and the off-court addition of a playmaker and new recruiting structure are only remarkable in that they are typical of developer Visual Concepts' menu heavy, needlessly complicated, and prone to make you disinterested. Legacy fanatics can be forgiven for dreaming of another chance at The Final Four, but hope isn't necessarily springing eternal...not here in the dead of winter. —**KATO**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NCAA March Madness 08

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 11 > **ESRB** E

SHOT CLOCK VIOLATION

March Madness is back for another season, but by the looks of this baller it may need another year in junior college before it contends for NCAA prominence.

The basketball experience in March Madness has improved in some areas and regressed in others. The animations stream smoothly together, the low-post game is as good as any other basketball game, and easy-to-use freestyle controls let you attack the basket with ease. But you'll want to stay in the middle of the court to keep possession, because the players frequently falter out of bounds when dribbling off the sidelines. Try to pull off a freestyle move along the baseline or sideline and you're guaranteed to turn the ball over. Boundaries appear to be an Achilles heel in all EA Sports games, and it needs to get fixed. Opposing teams also never use substitutions unless a player is in foul trouble.

EA is the official video game partner of ESPN, which makes March Madness' poor presenta-

tion difficult to understand. You will almost never see a stat box featuring a player's numbers, even when that information is necessary to make educated decisions about substitutions. You have no way of knowing how many fouls your players have unless you enter the pause menu to find out, which disrupts the flow of the game.

The deep Dynasty mode returns, but it lacks many of the improvements that made NCAA Football 08 such a joy to play. March Madness fails to incorporate the vastly improved recruiting system of its football brethren, and there is no highlight system or shrine either. The rest of the modes don't match up to the competition. March Madness still lacks team creation, and the quizical online league mode still doesn't offer a full season or NCAA tournament bracket.

Basketball fans who want more arcade-like action than the sim-heavy College Hoops 2K8 may find some fun in March Madness, but serious hoops fans should stick with 2K. —**BERTZ**

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Hoop it up with undergrads on your way to the Big Dance

> **Graphics:** The tighter default camera angle helps highlight the solid player models

> **Sound:** It's Dick Vitale, baby! Love him or hate him

> **Playability:** Players move well, but have no concept of the term "out of bounds"

> **Entertainment:** An arcadey college hoops recruit that won't be confused with a blue chipper

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

Sometimes you fill your bracket out and you think you're going to be the ruler of the office pool...and then your lead-pipe locks go down in flames. On paper, March Madness appears to be a game that has its bases covered. It's not until the bullets start flying that you realize how this title comes up just short. It's not bad, but it'll frustrate you with a questionable foul here, a strange pass there, or a baffling low-post move or offensive board. I like the Dynasty mode's structure, particularly in its recruit search functionality and create-a-gameplan. The former they wisely took from NCAA football — if only they took that game's presentation, too. It's these kinds of little things that make this game's trip to the Final Four a little rocky. —**KATO**





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

The Golden Compass

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SHINY ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 4 > **ESRB** E 10+

KIDS BRING NOTHING BUT PAIN

The alethiometer (also known as the Golden Compass) is a truth-telling apparatus. This device's perplexing design usually requires years of trial and error before a person can learn how to use it properly. Even if you held this mystical gadget in your hands for the first time, and asked it "Is The Golden Compass game worth playing?", its hands would spin vigorously, then one would stop on an icon of a skull, the second would land on a dagger, and the third would highlight a new icon that materializes from the ether showing a picture of a grave that reads "Here rests a fool who played bad games."

The Golden Compass is the perfect example of a developer being handcuffed by the property. Without being able to expand the fiction, there isn't enough here for a legitimate game, but Shiny Entertainment did its best to try and add gameplay where there really shouldn't be any. For example, when young Lyra converses with people, she cannot respond without first completing a series of atrocious minigames. She also exhibits the coordination of a young Forrest Gump. Not only does she butcher the art of platforming with her poor jumping skills, she struggles to play a simple game of tag.

Knowing full well that every second that Lyra is on screen inflicts unthinkable pain on the gamer, Shiny opted to start the game with a sequence that shouldn't be seen until the end of the story. As cool as it is to see lorek Byrnison (a battle-hardened talking bear) make quick work of a pack of wolves, these sequences are dreadfully boring and completely void of any form of challenge.

If you were hoping to be swept up in the narrative, this game also ignores critical plot points from Philip Pullman's brilliant story, leaving much guesswork to the gamer. It pains me to say this, but turn off your TV and just read the book or head to your local theater. This is a story everyone must experience, just don't try interacting with it.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 3.25

> **Concept:** Another popular franchise is dragged through the video game mud, and offers gameplay that doesn't fit the content

> **Graphics:** Your eye constantly dances from crude details to choppy animations. This game also wins the award for worst cat animations of all time

> **Sound:** Laughable voice acting and music that doesn't necessarily fit the action at hand

> **Playability:** The experience mostly consists of troublesome platforming, tons of talking, and minigames that should meet the Subtle Knife

> **Entertainment:** There are worse things to do, but most of them involve dying

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 3

Somewhere a poor kid is going to play this game for a book report instead of actually reading *The Golden Compass*. That kid will probably get an F, which is totally unfair. Playing this sorry excuse for a game requires far more effort and dedication. The poorly bound narrative does an awful job conveying the story, and the game's best parts (fighting as lorek) succeed in that they are only boring, not broken. Unfortunately, The Golden Compass can't even maintain that level of shoddy craftsmanship, the aimless exploration and temble conversation minigames sink much lower. It doesn't take an amber spyglass to see that this shameless cash-in is composed of the darkest materials in gaming.—**JOE**

MULTI QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

My Word Coach

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 6 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 8

Dovetailing off the success of Nintendo's Brain Age, My Word Coach is about as much fun as

you can have while getting a vocabulary lesson. With a dictionary appropriate for any age or literacy level, the increasingly difficult minigames are a heck of a lot more entertaining than an SAT prep book. It also uses the tried-and-true method of inserting words you've missed into other games, so you absorb spelling and meaning over time. I wish there was a pronunciation guide, and too much time per day is required to advance your progress — these exercises don't hold up for more than 15 minutes a sitting. I'd also definitely play on DS if given the choice, due to the ease of writing in letters. However, all told, this is a very pleasant surprise.—**MILLER**

Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

Star Trek Conquest

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY
> **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA SOFTWARE WORKS
> **DEVELOPER** 41 STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 20 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 5

There is a dearth of new Star Trek content these days, but games like Conquest aren't the

answer. The concept here is a decent one, combining turn-based galactic conquest strategy with real-time battles. However, both elements are in pretty terrible shape. Each race has only three ships to choose from, and the characters that lead your fleets are second- or third-tier TV guest stars at best. There's no story to speak of, and the whole affair is poorly balanced after only a few turns, due to overpowered stationary defenses. Even the music is recycled from an earlier Bethesda Star Trek game. Leave this one stranded on Ceti Alpha V — it's of no use to you or the cause of the Federation.—**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NFL Tour

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** JANUARY 8 > **ESRB** E



FOURTH DOWN AND FOREVER

BOTTOM LINE 5

Let me start this off with a message to the Miami Dolphins: Believe it or not, you're not the only team that's toiled in futility and totally embarrassed yourselves on the football field this year. I thought that in retooling the NFL Street series into NFL Tour EA would actually be improving the franchise and learning from its past mistakes in the sub-genre. Unfortunately, I was mistaken, as NFL Tour represents a total regression — one that the company says is aimed at young kids and football novices who don't play Madden. Even if I take this at face value, it's clear that this game is a failure no matter how you try and qualify it.

EA should be ashamed that it's trying to bilk some kids out of \$50 while offering so little in return. I can understand simplifying the controller in an otherwise button-heavy sport, but that doesn't mean the gameplay itself has to become uninspiring and so lacking. NFL Tour's version of Gamebreakers only occur on defense, and gone is the showboating and over-the-top moves that would make plays possibly exciting. The best Tour does on this front is offer counter moves to break or perform tackles. Also, if you're going to simplify the gameplay this much, I think you need to offset that with bells and whistles like unlockables, an intriguing career structure, football cards, or whatever to offer people something off the field. And if you want to go easy on kids, cleaning up the blatant catch-up AI and unresponsive controls is a good way to get into their — or anyone's — good graces.

Given how badly this reinvention of NFL Street has gone, I'd ask for an overhaul of NFL Tour, but who knows what we'd end up with then.—**KATO**

> **Concept:** Cut the NFL Street franchise and set it on fire like an abandoned car on the roadside

> **Graphics:** You'll recognize a number of pro players by their likenesses

> **Sound:** Perhaps here is where Hollywood's writer's strike has hit the hardest, because Trey Wingo's lines are brutal

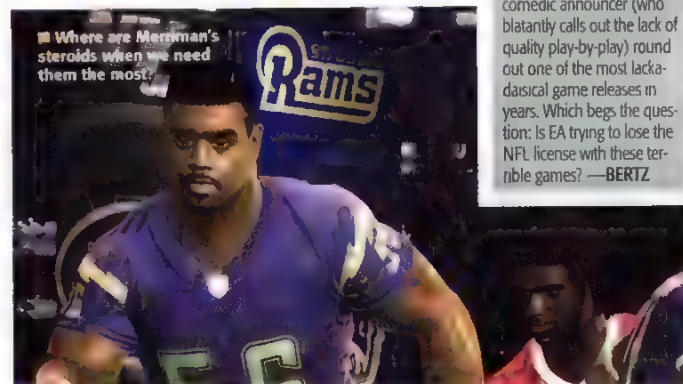
> **Playability:** I strongly suggest you switch to the classic passing mode. Tour passing only confuses

> **Entertainment:** It's like watching the 2007 Dolphins — as a Dolphins fan

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 4.75

If I were the NFL, I'd be seriously questioning my relationship with EA. Sure, Madden sells, but any football game with the NFL license will do that. Is the rest of the partnership really worth it? Case in point, NFL Tour, which, along with NFL Head Coach, shows a startling lack of effort on the behalf of EA Tiburon in developing solid content for America's game. Xbox-quality graphics, sketchy gameplay, no player selection, limited rosters, no build-your-own team mode, and the anti-comedic announcer (who blatantly calls out the lack of quality play-by-play) round out one of the most lackadaisical game releases in years. Which begs the question: Is EA trying to lose the NFL license with these terrible games? —**BERTZ**





PLAYSTATION 3

The Orange Box

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA UK/VALVE > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 11 > **ESRB** M

BRIGHT COLORS FADE WHEN WASHED

If you have never played any of the fantastic games contained on this one little disc, The Orange Box on the PS3 will blow you away. However, unless you've been under a rock the last few months, you know that The Orange Box came out on two other platforms – the Xbox 360 and the PC. With only one small feature exception (an oh-so-wonderful quicksave not in the 360 version), the game simply plays better on either of those two alternate choices. With that said, it would be easy to get bogged down in some technical issues and miss the larger point by just looking for things to complain about. I'm not going to do that here – but here are the sticky situations.

Load times on the PS3 are significantly longer across the board. It can be a little frustrating, especially when these hold-ups occur in the midst of an exciting moment of storytelling. Second, some framerate issues pop up at strange times, which is particularly damaging during heated gunfire exchanges. Finally, the server-based online support for Team Fortress 2 seems more than a

little spotty as of this writing – beware the resultant lag.

So that's my nitpicking. Do the problems ruin the five phenomenal games that you'll be playing on your PS3? That certainly wasn't my experience. Nonetheless, if you're a stickler for technical perfection, expect some hiccups. Obviously, there's not room enough here to detail the myriad features and triumphs of each of the five titles, but let me see if I can give you the short version. Half-Life 2 delivers stunning action and fantastic storytelling, while dramatically changing the tone of the gameplay at regular intervals, and its subsequent episodes only add to that formula. Team Fortress 2 provides a solid but somewhat limited multiplayer experience that rewards consistent teamwork and familiarity with the classes. Finally, Portal is a puzzle game unlike any other, mixing humor with a strange, sterile, white-washed terror into one of the most unique gaming experiences available. It may not be the best platform to play it on, but The Orange Box is still hard to beat, even with a hand tied behind its back. —MILLER

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** Explore five phenomenal first-person games on one disc in a questionable port of this gigantic entertainment experience

> **Graphics:** Half-Life 2 is showing its age, but everything looks generally high quality – right up until the framerate stutters

> **Sound:** Great music and some of the finest voice work in games in both Portal and Half-Life 2

> **Playability:** A dear and steady difficulty curve and responsive controls leave little to complain about

> **Entertainment:** This isn't the definitive way to play these games, but it's hard to complain when they're this good

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.5

For me, Orange Box is little like pizza. I could have it for every meal and it would be a long while before I got sick of it. This is the third or fourth time I've played some of these games (Half a dozen plus, in Portal's case), and I still find them just as enjoyable and addictive as I did the first few times. Half-Life 2 was so ahead of its time that both it and its two episodic expansions still don't feel outdated. This version does have a few graphical and loading hiccups, but they don't ruin the experience on a whole. Unless you only own a Wii, you're running out of excuses for not playing these stellar games. —BEN



For a more extensive rundown of each game, check out our full review of the original release on Game Informer Online

PLAYSTATION 3

Unreal Tournament 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
> **DEVELOPER** EPIC GAMES > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 11 > **ESRB** M



GET YOUR FRAG ON

With a very few exceptions, Unreal Tournament 3 on PS3 is no different than the PC version of the game. It's still lightning-fast, chaotic, and tons of fun when you find a good server to play on. The weapons and vehicles are still bombastically awesome, the game modes are still brilliantly conceived, and the maps are still some of the best in the business. Unfortunately, the gameplay doesn't make the transition to a gamepad with the same grace with which the graphics move onto your TV, making this a somewhat worse buy than its PC brother.

The lackluster single-player campaign, which consists of a series of bot matches with terrible cutscenes interspersed, won't wow anyone – though the ability to play it co-op is a definite plus. As always, the true value of UT lies on the internet, where the action is constantly evolving and real people are on the other end of your taunts. In my experience, the PS3 version performs admirably online,

with little to no network lag or server issues to get in the way of the next frag.

Even though every last bit of content from the PC version is here – including the ability to download mods and tweaks – I would recommend anyone with a decent gaming rig to go the keyboard/mouse route instead. UT's weapons were clearly designed with mouse precision in mind, making it difficult to use the shock rifle, sniper rifle, or rocket launcher to their full potential. Additionally, vehicles control much worse on the Sixaxis; it'll take an awfully long time to get used to the substandard control.

Nonetheless, when the blood is flowing and the taunts are flying, Unreal Tournament 3 transcends these niggling issues and becomes one of the better ways to get your online multiplayer fix. Getting that "Flak Master" award never gets old, and it's no less satisfying to crush the enemy from your couch than it is from your desk in the end. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Bring the full UT experience to console

> **Graphics:** The PS3 pushes Unreal Engine 3 in all of its glory at a perfectly acceptable framerate

> **Sound:** We all love the announcers, but the taunt voiceovers get old real quick

> **Playability:** Vehicles drive like butt and the gamepad makes taking advantage of certain weapons problematic

> **Entertainment:** Solid and entertaining, but this primarily online FPS won't luck Call of Duty 4 or Halo 3 off your playlist

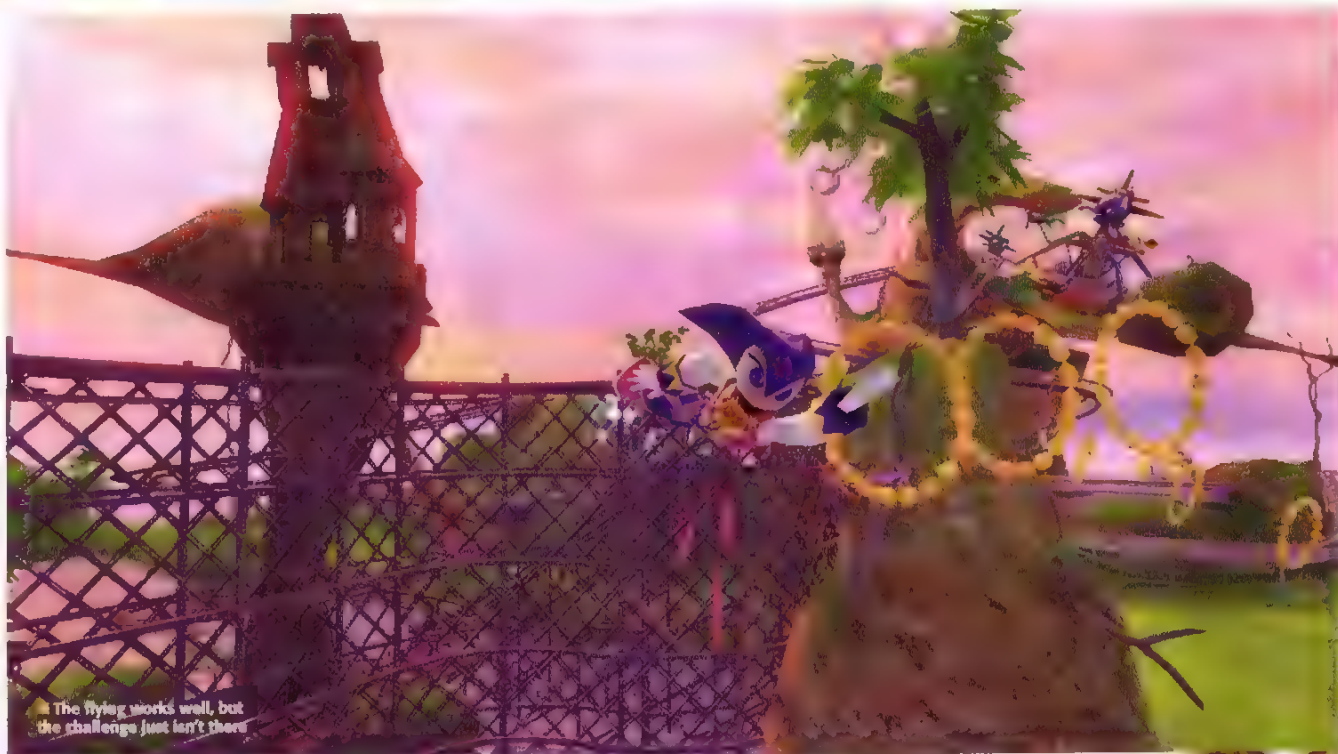
> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

The PS3's UT 3 is nearly identical to the recently released PC version in every major way. The single-player campaign is needless filler that serves as nothing more than an introductory template to multiplayer gameplay for those of you who have been in a coma since 1993 and just awoke. The real meat on this bone is the hypernetic, well-developed multiplayer action. The only real difference between the PS3 and PC lies in the controls; they work well enough in basic combat, but feel awkward when navigating the vehicles. Regardless, UT 3 is well worth the price of admission for fans of fast-paced shooters who don't mind excessive bunny hopping and people using rocket launchers as the de facto weapon. —BERTZ



You can customize your avatar if you're really bored



The flying works well, but the challenge just isn't there

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> Concept: Painfully true to its 11-year-old ancestor, this sequel delivers nostalgic content, but hardly any of it is even remotely entertaining

> Graphics: The textures are as plain and forgettable as the characters, however, the dream worlds are fully realized with stunning landscapes and mind-bending designs

> Sound: The voice actors seem as uninterested with the conflict at hand as I was. The soothing melodies are catchy, however

> Playability: An exercise of pushing to the right and angling through rings to receive a higher score. Driving tests are more complex

> Entertainment: If you haven't played a game since the Saturn, you'll be impressed

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion

Sorry, Sega, but analog sticks and quasi-3D flight are no longer cutting edge. And flying through rings is pretty much only for tutorials these days. This long lost sequel clings to these tenets nonetheless and comes off as somewhat of a gaming dinosaur. Nights actually speaks now (with a lady voice), writing very young protagonists Will and Helen to "dualize" with him. Ugh, creepy. Beating the game with one of the characters takes just over two hours. Even though the remaining quest offers all-new worlds and bosses, it stinks that you have to trudge through the lengthy tutorial over again and that the final stage plays out identically. Sure, you can replay stages to up your ranking, tool around in a gussied up bestiary, or compete in two-player races and battles - none of which are all that appealing. But if you're absolutely crazy about Nights, the core mechanics emulate the original well and should at least satisfy dreams of nostalgia. —BRYAN

Wii
Nights: Journey of Dreams

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA WIICONNECT24) > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SEGA STUDIO USA > RELEASE DECEMBER 18 > ESRB E

LONG LIVE THE SATURN

Time is no one's friend. As seconds of our lives tick away, time prevents us from playing games longer each night. And over long periods, time greatly diminishes the quality of the games of yesteryear. It's easy to get swept up in nostalgia, but the sad truth is not many games can withstand the test of time. This is an industry built on innovation and pushing the limits of technology. Technological progress often makes the games from years and even months ago seem so primitive. Cautious steps are necessary when returning to this industry's roots, especially if you want to keep your fond memories intact. I often go back to play old games for research, but I mostly find myself saying, "That wasn't as cool as I remember it being." Nights: Into Dreams is such a title. It has a place in my heart, and also a place in history, but I'll do everything in my power to avoid revisiting it again. It really shows its age. For this reason, you may want to pass on its new followup, Nights: Journey of Dreams.

It's been over 11 years since the original Nights hit store shelves, but this sequel, which clings tightly to everything that game was, makes it seem like only a month or two. There are few new releases that feel so old...so intentionally old. The intent of the design was to bring gamers more of the same.

In such, the game features two playable characters, Helen and Will, both offering different stories, stages and, with the exclusion of the Wizeman the Wicked, boss fights. By teaming with a character named Nights, the players can fly through their dream worlds and try to rid them of the invading Nightmares.

Soaring through the air and looping through rings has an air of tranquility to it, which makes it one of

the most relaxing gameplay exercises out there, but it can also be somewhat boring. Since the stages run along a predetermined rail, most of the game is a test of moving to the right. It almost makes you feel like a NASCAR driver who can only turn left. Only a modicum of skill is needed to link together rings in succession to receive a better grade at level's end. Given how infrequent enemies appear on the track, you usually find yourself surprised when you come across one. Even the transformations, which allow Nights to become a dolphin, rocket, and dragon, are used sparingly.

The only challenges that are thrown your way are boss battles, which appear after you finish three rail-based stages in the same environment. The challenge isn't beating them, but figuring out how to do so. On your first play through, you'll likely recognize what to do, but run out of time before you can accomplish your goal. This means you'll once again have to trek through the same three stages that nearly put you to sleep.

Another gameplay hurdle arises in the Helen and Will on-foot stages. It's not that you are faced with obstacles to overcome or creatures to slay, but rather, you have to try to navigate plainly designed mazes with characters that move with the grace of a barge.

Making matters worse, the narrative does little to keep you engaged. Will and Helen are both void of personality and their stories are PBS dull.

A good portion of your time is also spent listening to an owl, who looks exactly like the "how many licks does it take to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop" bird that I hated as a child.

The flight controls work well, and I love the mirror world, a place where you can only see what's in your path by looking at its mirror reflection, but the rest of the game is old, uninspired, and above all, boring. Fans have been holding their breath for this sequel for 11 years, yet Sega answered their dreams with a game that feels like a Sega Saturn expansion. Only approach this game if you still love playing the original, otherwise your fond memories of this series will likely be tarnished. —REINER



Wii

Harvey Birdman: Attorney At Law

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** JANUARY 8 > **ESRB** T



Cutscreens play out just like episodes of the show

AVENGER, TO ME!

Harvey Birdman's legal capers are full of oddball characters, nonsensical events, and off-the-wall humor. The randomness of these elements produces an entertaining television show, but they aren't necessarily the building blocks of a good game.

Much like Capcom's other courtroom drama, the Ace Attorney series, Harvey Birdman: Attorney At Law has players presenting evidence and investigating locations in order to defend clients. It's light on gameplay — you just point and confirm — but that's sort of an adventure game standard. The real problem is how the game relies solely on knee-jerk laughs to carry it through the three or four hours it takes to complete all five episodes.

On one hand, it's commendable that Harvey Birdman: Attorney At Law succeeds in capturing the humor of the cartoon. But do you know what else does that? The cartoon itself. With the latter, however, you just get to sit back and enjoy the irreverence. In the game, you are forced to interact with an unintuitive world devoid of any satisfaction. The correct choices are either obvious or ridiculous, robbing you of any sense that you're putting together pieces in a meaningful way.

Each case is like an episode of the show, except with frequent interruptions from splash screens you need to click through. It's like someone is constantly pausing when you're trying to watch, then making you jump through some hoops to keep going. The start-and-stop is jarring, and throws off the comedic flow of the dialogue.

If you're already a fan of Harvey and the craziness that surrounds him, you'll love how this game nails the feeling of the series. If you're just a regular gamer looking for a solid legal adventure, other attorneys will represent your interests better. —**JOE**



Gigi
Harvey Birdman and I recently got back together, we are married.

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Tell Harvey to do crazy things instead of just watching him

> **Graphics:** As seen on TV!

> **Sound:** Most of the major voice talent from the show is present, with the notable absence of Stephen Colbert

> **Playability:** Gameplay isn't really a selling point. Point the cursor using the Wii remote, then hit A to confirm your selection

> **Entertainment:** Fans of the show will definitely get some good (but short-lived) laughs here

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.25

Well, it's certainly funny. And that carries this game a long way, given that there really isn't any gameplay to speak of. I'm serious. This is pure point, click, and watch the scene that unfolds. It would be one thing if these were genuine puzzles, but in most cases, the items you present in court and the places you must travel to seem as nonsensical and random as the plot itself. Only the hilarious writing and animation elevate this into a range that might be worth it for enthusiastic followers of this winged crusader's adventures in law. —**MILLER**

Wii QUICKIES

Wii

Cranium Kabookii

> **STYLE** 4-PLAYER BOARD
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT QUEBEC/CRANIUM INC.
> **RELEASE** DECEMBER 4 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 6.75

You absolutely need at least four people to play this game, which means it's useless if you don't have friends around. Players spin a wheel, complete challenges, and try to earn 24 tokens before everyone else. This straightforward mode is all that's on the disc, and it gets old pretty quickly. While some games like Songpong (guess the player-generated tune) and Coodle (guess the Wii remote-crafted drawing) are entertaining, games that make you imitate common actions (drying a dish) or rearrange letters will have players fighting the Wii controls rather than challenging their minds. —**BRYAN**

Wii

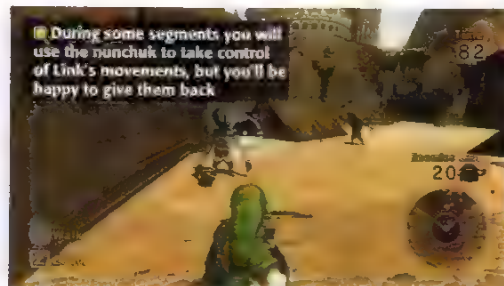
Super Swing Golf Season 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4 PLAYER SPORTS
> **PUBLISHER** TECMO
> **DEVELOPER** NITRELV SOFT
> **RELEASE** DECEMBER 12 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

In my mind, Super Swing is still the best golf experience on the Wii, and I'm glad that Tecmo hasn't rested on its laurels. The new career progression is interesting in that it offers up minigames, bosses, and some side diversions, and there are a whole bunch of outfits, clubs, and other bonus items you can earn along the way. Despite this game's cutesy over-the-top vibe, its swing mechanics are faithfully intact and the golf is by no means easy. Despite all the half-assed games on the Wii, this one does not sacrifice gameplay for charm. —**KATO**



Wii

Link's Crossbow Training

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 19 > **ESRB** T

MOSTLY PACKING PEANUTS

There isn't much to say about Link's Crossbow Training because there isn't much there. Basically 10 levels of environments pulled from Twilight Princess, the game is broken into three different game types: the standard shooting gallery where targets pop up or fly by, a mode where Link stands on a fixed point and enemies come in from different directions, and poorly controlled third-person shooter segments. Nintendo even managed to throw in a few boss battles to round out the experience.

For the most part, these challenges are basic but entertaining. You might even find yourself wanting to replay levels to get better medals, but that won't take long. Multiplayer is a lame tack-on, where you basically take turns between single-player rounds, handing the controller back and forth like you did 20 years ago on the NES.

Since the featured item in this bundle is technically the Wii Zapper, a few words should be devoted to its functionality. Aside from looking cool and being sturdy, the Zapper just isn't necessary on a fundamental level. Crossbow Training (Wii games in general, really) requires a subtle range of movement, and the added leverage of a controller shell actually makes these actions more challenging. The need for a Zapper device is further diluted by the fact that you're never truly aiming down your sights, which was part of the original charm of light gun games.

What you are really buying when you pick up this bundle is a fun minigame that comes with a packed-in controller novelty. Crossbow Training is certainly a richer experience than classic titles like Duck Hunt, but it never really feels like much more than a simple discount title — which it thankfully is. —**BEN**

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Revisit all the environments of Twilight Princess, Duck Hunt style

> **Graphics:** Uh, remember Twilight Princess? Remarkably similar

> **Sound:** A pretty non-descript and unmemorable audio experience

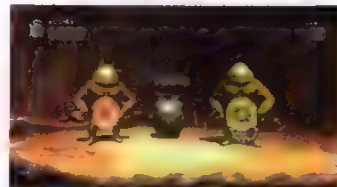
> **Playability:** Ironically, the game packaged with the Wii Zapper actually plays better without it

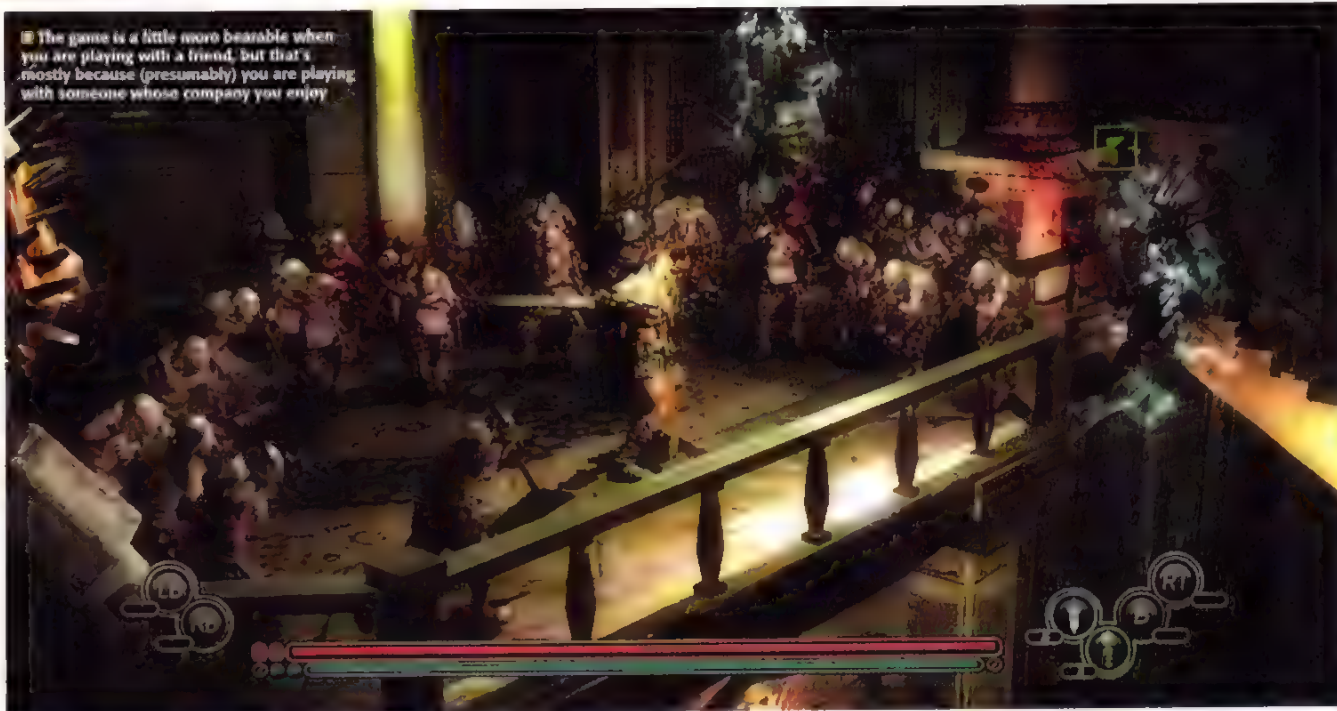
> **Entertainment:** A fun afternoon delight, but you'll beat it faster than it took to run to the store to buy it

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

I'm not saying the Zapper is worthless, but it's a bad sign that I enjoyed Link's Crossbow Training a lot more once I chucked the peripheral aside. It's a shame this game is tied to the Zapper, because it's actually a very enjoyable shooting game filled with nicely designed challenges and lots of Zelda minutia. However, as a pack-in title, it's very short (two to three hours) and lacking in multiplayer modes and depth. I would rather have paid full price for a full featured title and skipped the Zapper altogether. —**MATT**





The game is a little more bearable when you are playing with a friend, but that's mostly because (presumably) you are playing with someone whose company you enjoy

BOTTOM LINE 5.25

- > **Concept:** Start with a broken hack n' slash adventure that has a weak progression system, then change nothing
- > **Graphics:** The visuals are actually pretty decent, and probably the most noteworthy aspect of the game
- > **Sound:** Bad voice acting may actually make you appreciate what the game lacks in music
- > **Playability:** The auto-aim is so bad you shouldn't even bother trying to use ranged weapons
- > **Entertainment:** You're better off suffering of boredom than suffering through this game
- > **Replay Value:** Low

XBOX 360

Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4 PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** BLUESIDE > **RELEASE** JANUARY 9 > **ESRB** M

FUN IS RELATIVE

The problems are clear from the outset. Before you are even mindlessly hacking away at mobs of lemming-like enemies, your character is introduced to you via a short, confusing, and poorly scripted cinematic – “short” being the closest thing to a compliment I can give them. Honestly, the story is all but nonexistent. You practically have to hunt it down. At various points in the game you come upon shrines where you can go to sleep and enter a strange astral-like plane. This is where you interact with the one or two other characters who make up the entirety of the game’s cast, but you may as well just sleep through these segments yourself they are so boring.

Circle of Doom’s combat might have you curling up for a nap too, since the game’s featureless move list requires that you carelessly jam on the A and X buttons like it was still 1985. Not that I have a problem with keeping things simple, but this style of combat gets tedious fast. The action/RPG genre has made great strides to evolve combat systems in recent

years, and Circle of Doom does everything in its power to buck this trend.

Learning new abilities is a rather annoying process. First you have to talk with your mentor about which ones you want to learn. You can only learn two at a time, but for each ability, you must first kill a certain number of enemies. Where you can find these foes – or even which ones you will face in the next area – are never clear, which makes it all the more annoying that you lose any progress you’ve made if you switch out abilities mid-process. Once you meet these requirements, you still have to travel back to the dream plane and talk with your teacher before you can even use your new skill. The whole ordeal is annoying and time consuming. But, perhaps this process was implemented to discourage players from learning abilities, because most of them actually seem quite useless.

After you play it for a while the game starts to grow on you – like a parasite. You get used to dealing with

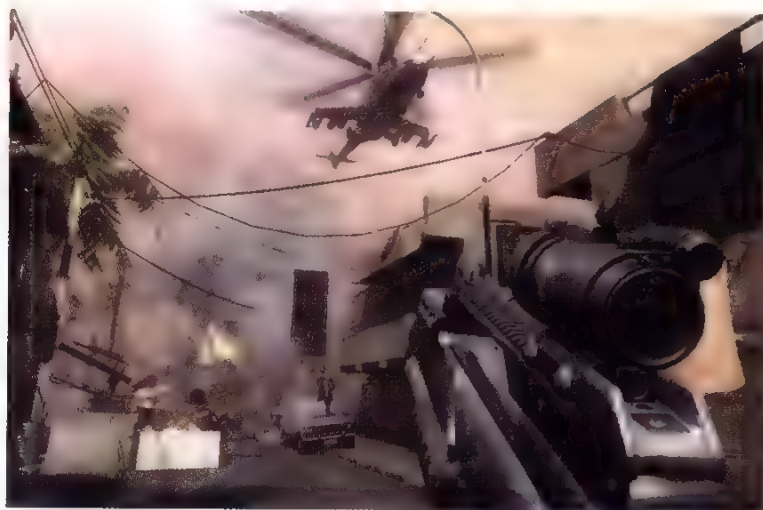
its annoyances, but you know you’re not having fun. Case in point: the game’s synthesis system, which allows you to combine items and weapons to make new ones with different enhancements. The system is confusing and never really explained well, plus I always found plenty of stuff at the store that was just as good – if not better – than what I made. In fact, you’ll have to buy some things from the store, since the loot gained from enemies is usually pretty junky, and sometimes can’t even be used by your character.

I may sound like a whiny little child who’s complaining that his snack just fell on the floor, but all these tiny little issues add up to destroy the experience. And the saddest part is that Circle of Doom’s problems all seem so frustratingly obvious the first time you see them that it makes you wonder why they were never changed. I know the development goal for Circle of Doom was to make a game that was pure fun and silliness, and it looks like the final product came close, because it’s laughable. —BEN

Second Opinion 5.75

The fairly straightforward formula of an action/RPG seems lost and forgotten in Circle of Doom. Core design issues plague the entire experience from beginning to end. No basic block or dodge option? Normal attacks that drain the equivalent of your mana bar? And who thought that randomized dungeons were going to help this sprawling and lifeless level design? Even the extensive ability upgrade system is ludicrously clumsy and misguided. Stack on the total absence of any meaningful story components, and the best that can be said about the game is its inclusion of online cooperative play. Which really begs the question – is a bad game really that much better because you can force your friends to share in the horror? Well, maybe. But that’s no excuse. —MILLER





XBOX 360

Soldier of Fortune: Payback

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** CAULDRON > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 13 > **ESRB** M

DISMEMBERMENT PLAN

Much like the overdone action film franchises of the late '80s, Soldier of Fortune has precipitously declined in quality since its inception. Payback represents the bottom of the barrel, a *Delta Force 3* if you will, for this once-proud series.

Payback ditches the series' primary protagonist, John Mullins, in favor of a random mercenary who has beef with an international terrorist outfit after he gets double-crossed on a mission. The script wouldn't receive a passing grade in an introductory writing class, and the over-the-top voice acting adds even more insult to injury.

The snore-inducing gameplay seems to revolve entirely around dismembering enemy soldiers. Your gun's power and bullet size matter not — even a G36C assault rifle can decapitate a soldier if you aim for the esophagus. While shooting off all the limbs of your target may be worth a quick laugh, the rest of the gameplay is hardly funny. The brain-dead AI is dreadful; soldiers either stand in the wide open and shoot,

run toward you for a close combat fight, or run right past you to employ what must be an avant garde battlefield tactic cooked up by the terrorist organization's chief "outside the box" strategist. The painfully linear level designs further doom the tragic gameplay to bargain bin status.

The tacked-on multiplayer won't offer any respite from the terrible gameplay, either. Payback features a mix of your standard modes, but hardly anyone is playing online, it lacks the deep leveling systems offered by AAA games, and there are only five maps.

Activision is far too good of a publisher to unleash a game this poor onto the unsuspecting public. Fans of the series should skip this horrid excuse for a shooter and keep their glowing memories of previous Soldier of Fortune battles intact. —BERTZ



BOTTOM LINE 4.25

> **Concept:** Dig Soldier of Fortune a grave, bury it, and piss on said grave while singing "You Can't Always Get What You Want"

> **Graphics:** A depth of field filter highlights a decent looking game

> **Sound:** Voice acting worthy of a Saturday afternoon TBS action flick

> **Playability:** This bare-bones FPS wouldn't have been praised if it came out 10 years ago

> **Entertainment:** With so many great shooters available, it's not worth your time or money

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 4

If you really want to have fun with this game, secretly swap it with your buddy's copy of Call of Duty 4. It won't take long for them to notice (and you might get punched), but the expression on their face should be worth it. Aside from being derivative and having poor level design, this game's biggest problem is its AI. Your enemies put on such an amazing show of failure it's almost like watching a Groucho Marx comedy act. Enemies run into walls or at you without attacking, and they have such terrible accuracy you'd think they were all using Wii Zappers. I even faced one boss who never bothered to fire back. Prank worthy, but not play worthy. —BEN

XBOX 360

Culdcept Saga

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER STRATEGY/BOARDS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** OMIYA SOFT > **DEVELOPER** OMIYA SOFT > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 5 > **ESRB** T



MONSTERS IN MARVIN GARDENS

BOTTOM LINE 7

When you win a game of Chutes and Ladders, you can't claim that it was your unsurpassed skill that resulted in victory. Similarly, if you lose a game of chess, you can't say your opponent just got lucky. Mixing games of pure skill and those of pure chance should result in an activity where luck and strategy are equally important. That is the delicate balance Culdcept Saga strives to attain, but it doesn't fully succeed — and it feels fopsided as a result.

With elements of Monopoly and Magic: The Gathering, Culdcept Saga has you rolling dice and summoning monsters to take control of the board. The full rules are too complicated to explain concisely, but the main idea is to amass a set number of points by occupying tiles and collecting tolls. There is some engaging strategy involved in setting up your deck and placing your monsters, but all of that effort can be unceremoniously scuttled with a roll of the dice.

Luck plays a disproportion-

ate role in determining the outcome of a given match in Culdcept. This can be an easy thing to miss (or ignore) when you're on a winning streak, but occasionally you simply feel helpless as you draw all the wrong cards and land on enemy-infested spaces. It wouldn't be so aggravating if a few bad rounds didn't have the potential to ruin your whole match, forcing you to restart. As your skills and deck improve, the varied (and sometimes humorous) abilities of your cards can open up a wider array of options, but there are just times when no amount of strategizing can save you.

If you played the PS2 version of Culdcept a few years back, you won't find any drastic changes — though there are some cool new creature cards and special abilities. As a strategy board game, Culdcept Saga integrates luck and skill well enough to be generally entertaining, and even more so if you are prone to obsession when it comes to collection and optimization. —JOE

> **Concept:** A board game that combines a roll of the dice with traditional CCG strategy

> **Graphics:** The cards look good, and are drawn by a variety of artists. The rest is functional but unimpressive

> **Sound:** Have you ever wanted to listen to a board game?

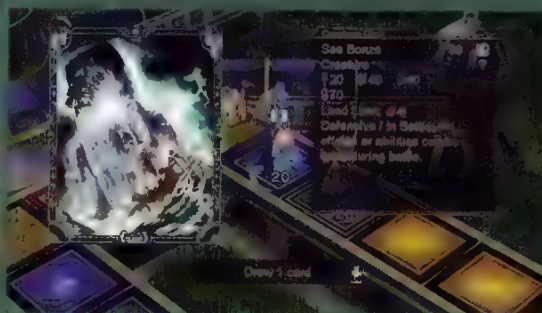
> **Playability:** It will take an hour or so to overcome the learning curve, but the rules are easy to understand

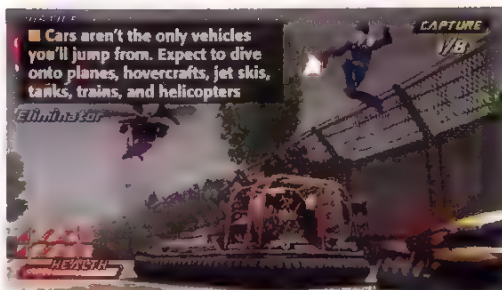
> **Entertainment:** Alone or against a friend, the strategy and collection elements are fun. It's too bad they are poisoned by a bit too much chance

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

Culdcept Saga is deceptively deep, unbelievably addictive, and one of the most entertaining board games I've ever played. For a game built on dice rolls, it's amazing how much control you have over it, and how much strategy can be implemented into your deck of 50 cards. In a way, it's kind of like poker: Is your opponent bluffing? Do you hold onto a specific card? Over time, you really learn how read the flow of the game and how your opponent performs. For this, it's a great multiplayer game, and thanks to intelligent AI opponents, a surprisingly satisfying single-player experience as well. If you've already had a love affair with the PS2 precursor, this iteration adds even more strategy to the mix with new card abilities and land-based attributes. I highly recommend you veer off of your normal gaming regimen to check out this amazing title. —REINER





PSP

Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
 > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
 > **DEVELOPER** BIGBIG STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JANUARY 30 > **ESRB** T

JUMPING CARJACKS

I want to believe that the guys at BigBig studios are either comic geniuses or the world's raddest group of seven-year-old game developers. Who else thinks of a game where the premise is chasing down criminals, then jumping from your car onto theirs? The result plays like a cross between Spy Hunter and a drunken college car rally gone right. Sure, it's about as deep as an inflatable swimming pool, but if you shut off the part of your brain that cares you might remember why kids have the most fun.

If you haven't played Pursuit Force before, these games have a very arcadey feel. Like all good arcade games, the action is fast, a little silly, and easy to pick up. Weaving through highway traffic, jumping through the air in slow motion to commandeer a car going 90 mph, then dishing out justice Judge Dredd-style can be a lot of fun.

Even though the core gameplay of the first Pursuit Force was fun, once you played through the first 10 minutes, you had experienced everything the game offered. Extreme Justice addresses this issue by providing some new game styles such as escort missions, manned turret segments, and some on-foot shooter bits. While these new game types do help break up the action, they don't really solve the game's problems since every time you step out of your car, the controls go to hell.

From its absurd bosses like the fireball-throwing fire truck to its borderline racist cartoon characters (you start the game by chasing down a group of bayou hillbillies), it's clear that this unique game doesn't take itself too seriously, and that may be the trick to enjoying it. With a little more polish, BigBig might have a good series on its hand, but it's not quite there yet. —**BEN**

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** You're in pursuit of some enemy vehicles. What's the best way to take down your suspects? Jump on their car, or course

> **Graphics:** The slow motion effect is cool when jumping from car to car, and the other visuals are generally above average

> **Sound:** The voice actors are over the top and absurd, but that matches the rest of the game

> **Playability:** The third-person shooter segments don't control nearly as well as the racing bits

> **Entertainment:** Almost more fun in concept than practice. Maybe this game should have spent a few more months in the cooker

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.5

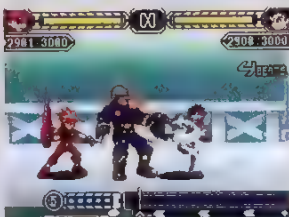
Someone call the Guinness Book of World Records. I think I just achieved the record for the world's longest yawn. To be fair, the original Pursuit Force put me to sleep. This one just bored me. So it is making strides forward. For instance, the driving feels much better, and the injection of variety certainly helps, but the stages and challenges do little to get the blood pumping. I mostly found myself entertained by the campy cutscenes. The tech is impressive for PSP, but the excitement just isn't there. —**REINER**

DS QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Draglade

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (2 PLAYER VIA WIRELESS OR NINTENDO WI-FI)
 > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** BANPRESTO
 > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 4 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 6.75

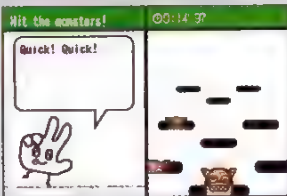
People love grappling! In Draglade, grappling is a fighting sport that has supplanted every other

hobby and activity in the world, but I can't understand why. It's just a simplistic combination of brawling and versus fighting games, with two main attacks you can alter by holding directions on the d-pad. A rhythm element integrated into the battle is supposed to be a hook, but it's too basic (just hit timed notes on a single track) and unnecessary to pull any weight. The controls are responsive and the anime-styled graphics are crisp, but the campaign is short — even with multiple characters to select — and the combat is far too shallow to hold everything in Draglade together. —**JOE**

NINTENDO DS

Left Brain, Right Brain

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO
 > **DEVELOPER** JAPAN ART MEDIA
 > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 4 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 5

From its title, you would probably assume that this game has something to do with the left

and right sides of your brain. Sucker! It's all about hands! No, seriously. The game attempts to train ambidexterity by making you repeat 15 simple reflex-based tasks — which, I reiterate, have nothing to do with exercising one's creative or analytical skills. For instance, you pop a bunch of balloons with your good hand, do it again with your weak hand, and then compare your two scores. If they're close, congratulations, you're ambidextrous! Not really, because many of the tasks control terribly, making the game's position to judge you highly dubious. In the end, I think all Left Brain, Right Brain reliably tests is patience. —**JOE**

NINTENDO DS

Mario Party DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER BOARD GAME (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
 > **DEVELOPER** HUDSON SOFT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 19 > **ESRB** E



SAME OLD SONG AND DANCE

Mario Party DS begins with Bowser inviting everyone over for a barbecue, and, of course, they're all stupid enough to show up. Mario and company are promptly trapped and shrunk down so they can run across piano keys and the tops of toppling books in the game's five new boards.

The 70-plus new minigames offer plenty of variety in both content and control style. Players will be mashing buttons to extend a mechanical pencil, outrunning a vacuum cleaner with the d-pad, blowing over thwomps with the microphone, and circling goombas with the stylus for points. The game does a great job of cycling in new minigames and the majority of them are suitably amusing.

Unfortunately, luck is still a key gameplay mechanic and can really screw you over no matter how well you play. There's nothing like amassing a stash of stars and having them all taken away by Bowser during the final turn. If you do manage to win, however, a fun boss battle awaits at the end of each board.

With every victory, players can amass points to unlock badges, character profiles, and random trinkets from the boards (think flower pots and vines from the garden stage). Even though the collection aspect is mildly amusing, it sucks that you only get points for playing by yourself. Mario Party has always been about playing with others and for Hudson to force players into solitude to make any real progress is just lame.

From a value perspective, it's great that you only need one cart to play with others, but some players will be frustrated that the lack of multicart play means that only one host will get to unlock new minigames. The included puzzle mode mostly consists of games from previous entries in the franchise, but they do provide welcome respite from minigame overload.

Overall, Mario Party DS does a better job at retreading the core concept, however tired it may be, than last summer's Mario Party 8. Barring a complete shakeup of the series, this seems to be the most we can hope for at this point. —**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Finally make the inevitable DS port of Mario's stubbornly unchanging party franchise

> **Graphics:** The absurd variety of minigame environments maintain an impressive visual bar across the board

> **Sound:** Could easily be the same sound bytes from the last four Mario Party games

> **Playability:** Control variety will have players sheathing and yanking out the stylus on a regular basis

> **Entertainment:** The formula remains faithfully intact...for better or worse

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.75

With all the parties Mario throws, I'm surprised he's not on the cover of *People* coming out of the Standard Hotel in L.A. with Paris and Britney — talk about a horrifying "upskirt." Yikes. Anyway, I was hoping the DS would mean a turn away from the laboriously slow and a turn towards more quick-thrill minigames à la Wario World. Alas, this is not to be. Sure the DS adds a few new tricks to the mix — like blowing in the microphone, etc. — but it's mostly the things we've seen elsewhere. As always, single-player is a snooze, so kudos to Nintendo for offering single-cart multiplayer. Basically, if you think you want to buy this, you probably should. If you didn't care before, this is no reason to start. —**MATT**

Ever tried lying on
a thousand vibrating
cell phones?



Ever tried **5** Gum?

Stimulate Your Senses



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For November 2007 Based On Units Sold

1 CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE (360)



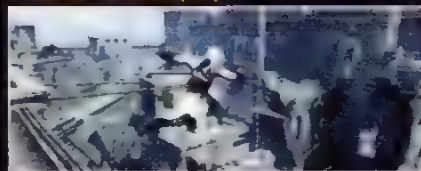
Welcome to a very special edition of Charts. February is often considered the month of love, this is primarily because in Latin "Febru" means "large woman," something those ancient Latinians loved very much. So to help us with this month's Chart's love advice, please welcome love expert Captain Price from Call of Duty 4.

2 SUPER MARIO GALAXY (WII)



Mario wrote in saying that Princess Peach has a problem with his addiction to mushrooms. What should he do, Captain Price? "First of all, mate, addictions aren't a bad thing. They are just a way we express love to ourselves. If your companion can't understand this when you explain it calmly, try raising your voice and doing a lot of jabbing motions with your fingers. Others respect assertive people."

3 ASSASSIN'S CREED (360)



Altair says he's having a problem with stalkers. People follow him wherever he goes and he can't get rid of them. "A good thing to do with stalkers is to be completely open with them. Share with them personal stories and some of your greatest fears; make them feel like they have some kind of control over you, and they'll realize that you're just a normal human being. Also try giving them gifts such as old used clothing or fingernail clippings. Once pacified, these people will leave you alone."

4 GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK (PS2)



Judy Nails told us that living the rock star lifestyle has left her broke and alone. Is there anything she can do to improve her chances of meeting someone? "Actually, there is. The secret to meeting new people and making them like you: money. Try blackmailing your boss, or better yet, kill them and you'll shoot up the corporate ladder in no time."

5 WII PLAY (WII)



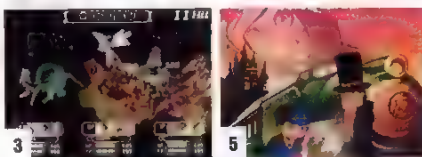
We have a question for you, Captain. Do games like Wii Play feel love? "No, they don't. The reason for this is that Wii Play is not really a game. It's a collection of leftover code that was never used in other games. If you have a copy of Wii Play, dispose of it before your other games get sick. Or better yet, buy all your other games presents and make Wii Play watch them open them. Trust me, Wii Play has no feelings."

Rank	Title	L Mo	System	Score	Release
1	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	N/A	360	10	11-07
2	Super Mario Galaxy	N/A	Wii	9.75	11-07
3	Assassin's Creed	N/A	360	9.5	11-07
4	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock w/Guitar	3	PS2	8.75	10-07
5	Wii Play w/Remote	6	Wii	7	02-07
6	Mass Effect	N/A	360	9.75	11-07
7	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	N/A	PS3	10	11-07
8	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock w/Guitar	4	Wii	8.75	10-07
9	Halo 3	1	360	9.75	09-07
10	Assassin's Creed	N/A	PS3	9.5	11-07
11	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock w/Guitar	2	360	8.75	10-07
12	Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games	N/A	Wii	4	11-07
13	Rock Band	N/A	360	9.25	11-07
14	WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2008	N/A	PS2	8	11-07
15	Madden NFL 2008	11	PS2	8	08-07
16	Mario Party 8	N/A	DS	7.25	11-07
17	Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day	10	DS	8.25	08-07
18	The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	5	DS	9.5	09-07
19	High School Musical: Sing It	N/A	Wii	N/A	10-07
20	LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	N/A	Wii	7.5	11-07

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld/†TRST'S * David Riley 516-635-2277

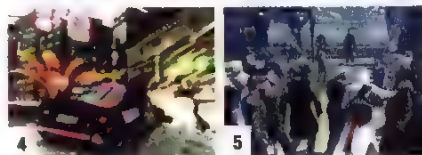
TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Wii Fit	Wii
2	Mario Party DS	DS
3	Tales of Innocence	DS
4	Hot Shots Golf Portable 2	PSP
5	Professor Layton and the Demonic Box	DS
6	Dragon Quest IV: Michibikareishi Monotachi	DS
7	Last Odyssey	360
8	Pawapurokun Poketto 10	DS
9	Super Mario Galaxy	Wii
10	Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games	Wii



TOP 10 US

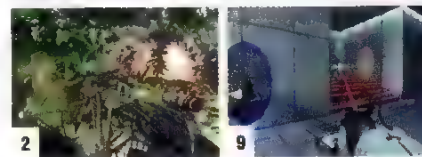
Rank	Title	L Mo	System
1	Super Mario Galaxy	1	Wii
2	Rock Band	2	multi
3	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	3	multi
4	Burnout Paradise	N/A	multi
5	Assassin's Creed	4	multi
6	Contra 4	5	DS
7	Crysis	6	PC
8	The Orange Box	8	multi
9	Mass Effect	9	360
10	Unreal Tournament 3	N/A	multi



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L Mo	Price
1	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	N/A	\$49
2	Crysis	N/A	\$41
3	The Sims 2: Teen Style Stuff	N/A	\$16
4	World of Warcraft	4	\$17
5	The Sims 2: Bon Voyage	6	\$30
6	The Sims 2 Deluxe	N/A	\$32
7	SimCity Societies	N/A	\$48
8	World of Warcraft: Battle Chest	N/A	\$37
9	The Orange Box	1	\$48
10	Nancy Drew: Legend of the Crystal Skull	N/A	\$20



Based On Monthly Units Sold

PLAYSTATION 3

All-Pro Football 2K8	8	Aug-07
Assassin's Creed	9.5	Dec-07
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
BlackSite: Area 51	7.5	Dec-07
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	10	Dec-07
Clive Barker's Jencho	6	Dec-07
Conan	7	Nov-07
Darkness, The	8.75	Aug-07
Dirt	8	Nov-07
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam	5	Oct-07
Eye of Judgement	8	Dec-07



Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 - PS3 - Oct-07

Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer	5	Aug-07
FIFA 08	7.75	Oct-07
Folklore	7.25	Dec-07
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	8.5	Oct-07
Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	8.75	Oct-07
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	6.5	Aug-07
Heavenly Sword	8.75	Oct-07
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	8.25	Nov-07
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	7	Jan-08
Lair	7.25	Sep-07
LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	7.5	Dec-07
Madden NFL 08	8	Sep-07
MX vs. ATV Untamed	8	Jan-08
NBA 08	7	Nov-07
NBA 2K8	8.25	Nov-07
NBA Live 08	7.5	Nov-07
NCAA Football 08	8	Aug-07
Need for Speed ProStreet	7.5	Dec-07
NHL 08	8.5	Oct-07
NHL 2K8	7.75	Oct-07
Rainbow Six Vegas	9	Aug-07
Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction	9.25	Dec-07
Rock Band	9.25	Jan-08
Sega Rally Revo	6.5	Dec-07
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Skate	8.75	Oct-07
Stuntman Ignition	8.5	Oct-07
Surf's Up	6.5	Aug-07
Time Crisis 4	4.25	Jan-08
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	7.75	Dec-07
Uncharted: Drake's Fortune	8.75	Dec-07
Warhawk	8.25	Oct-07
WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw 2008	8	Dec-07

XBOX 360

Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation	8.75	Nov-07
All-Pro Football 2K8	8	Aug-07
Assassin's Creed	9.5	Dec-07
Beautiful Kataman	7.25	Dec-07
Bee Movie Game	6.5	Jan-08
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
BioShock	10	Sep-07
BlackSite: Area 51	7.5	Dec-07
Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions of WWII	7.5	Nov-07
Blue Dragon	9	Sep-07
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	10	Dec-07
Clive Barker's Jencho	6	Dec-07
Conan	7	Nov-07
Crash of the Titans	7.25	Nov-07
CSI: Hard Evidence	4	Dec-07
Darkness, The	8.75	Aug-07
Dirt	8	Aug-07
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam	5	Oct-07
Eternal Sonata	8.25	Sep-07
Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer	5	Aug-07
Fate: Inertia	7.5	Oct-07
F.E.A.R. Files	6.5	Jan-08
FIFA 08	7.75	Oct-07
FlatOut: Ultimate Carnage	7.5	Nov-07
Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	8.75	Oct-07
Halo 3	9.75	Nov-07
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	6.5	Aug-07
Hour of Victory	2.5	Sep-07

Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	8.25	Nov-07
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	7	Jan-08
Kengo: Legend of the 9	2	Dec-07
LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	7.5	Dec-07
Looney Tunes: ACME Arsenal	1.75	Dec-07
Madden NFL 08	8	Sep-07
Mass Effect	9.75	Nov-07
Meda of Honor Airborne	7.25	Oct-07
MX vs. ATV Untamed	8	Jan-08
Naruto: Rise of the Ninja	8	Dec-07
NASCAR 08	7.75	Sep-07
NBA 2K8	8.25	Nov-07
NBA Live 08	7.5	Nov-07
NCAA Football 08	8	Aug-07
Need for Speed ProStreet	7.5	Dec-07
NHL 08	8.5	Oct-07
NHL 2K8	7.75	Oct-07
Orange Box, The	9.75	Nov-07
Overlord	7.5	Aug-07
Project Gotham Racing 4	8.75	Nov-07
Project Sylpheed	7.75	Sep-07
Ratatouille	6.75	Sep-07
Rock Band	9.25	Jan-08
Scene 1? Lights, Camera, Action	8.5	Jan-08
Sega Rally Revo	6.5	Dec-07
Shadowrun	6.5	Aug-07
Shrek the Third	5.25	Aug-07
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Skate	8.75	Oct-07
Spider-Man: Friend or Foe	4.5	Nov-07
Stranglehold	7.25	Oct-07
Stuntman Ignition	8.5	Oct-07
Surf's Up	6.5	Aug-07
Tenchu Z	6.5	Aug-07
Thrillville: Off the Rails	7	Dec-07
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08	9	Sep-07
TimeShift	7.75	Dec-07
Tomb Raider Anniversary	8.25	Dec-07
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	7.75	Dec-07
Transformers	7.25	Sep-07
Two Worlds	4	Nov-07
Vampire Rain	3	Sep-07
Virtua Fighter 5	9	Dec-07
Viva Pinata: Party Animals	5.5	Jan-08
Warriors Orochi	5.75	Oct-07
Wartech: Senko No Rondo	3.75	Sep-07
WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw 2008	8	Dec-07

Wii

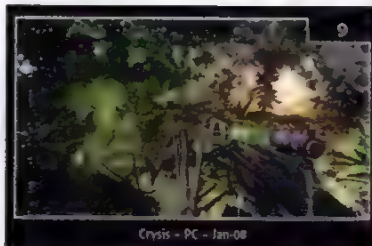
Alien Syndrome	6.25	Oct-07
Battalion Wars 2	7.25	Jan-08
Big Brain Academy	7.5	Aug-07
Boogie	7.75	Oct-07
Carnival Games	5.5	Nov-07
Crash of the Titans	7.25	Nov-07
Dancing With the Stars	5.25	Jan-08
Dewy's Adventure	7	Oct-07
Donkey Kong Barrel Blast	5	Dec-07



Super Mario Galaxy - Wii - Jan-08

EA Playground	7	Dec-07
Endless Ocean	6	Jan-08
Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn	7	Dec-07
Geometry Wars: Galaxies	9	Dec-07
Ghost Squad	7	Jan-08
Godzilla: Unleashed	4	Dec-07
Guilty Gear XX Accent Core	7.75	Oct-07
Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	8.75	Oct-07
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	6.5	Aug-07
Jenga	2	Jan-08
Legend of Spyro: The Eternal Night, The	6.25	Nov-07
LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	7.5	Dec-07
Looney Tunes: ACME Arsenal	1.75	Dec-07
Madden NFL 08	7.5	Oct-07
Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games	4	Dec-07
Mario Strikers Charged	7.25	Sep-07
Manhunt 2	7.75	Dec-07
Medal of Honor: Heroes 2	6.75	Jan-08
Metroid Prime 3: Corruption	9.5	Oct-07

My Sims	8	Oct-07
Need for Speed ProStreet	7	Dec-07
Pokémon Battle Revolution	5.75	Sep-07
Ratatouille	5.5	Sep-07
Rayman: Raving Rabbids 2	7.75	Jan-08
Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles	8.25	Jan-08
Shrek the Third	5.25	Aug-07
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Sims 2: Castaway, The	7.25	Nov-07
Smokey Bear	7.5	Jan-08
Soulcalibur Legends	4	Jan-08
Spider-Man: Friend or Foe	4.5	Nov-07
Surf's Up	6.5	Aug-07
Super Mario Galaxy	9.75	Jan-08
Table Tennis	6	Dec-07
Thrillville: Off the Rails	7	Dec-07
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008	7	Oct-07
Trama Center: New Blood	7.5	Jan-08
Transformers	7.25	Sep-07
Victorious Boxers: Revolution	6.75	Nov-07
Zack & Wiki: Quest For Barbaros' Treasure	8.25	Nov-07



Crysis - PC - Jan-08

Ratatouille	5.5	Sep-07
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3	8.5	Aug-07
Shrek the Third	5.25	Aug-07
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Soul Nomad & The World Eaters	7.75	Oct-07
Spider-Man: Friend or Foe	4.5	Nov-07
Stuntman Ignition	8.5	Oct-07
Thrillville: Off the Rails	7	Dec-07
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08	9	Sep-07
Transformers	7.25	Sep-07
Warriors Orochi	5.75	Oct-07
Wild Arms 5	6.5	Oct-07

PC

Ages of Empires III: The Asian Dynasties	8	Dec-07
Assassin's Creed	5.75	Jan-08
BlackSite: Area 51	7.5	Dec-07
Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions of WWII	7.5	Nov-07
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	10	Dec-07
Clive Barker's Jencho	6	Dec-07
Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts	8.25	Nov-07
Crysis	9	Jan-08
Empire Earth III	6.5	Jan-08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	8.5	Nov-07
Fury	5	Jan-08
Gears of War	8	Jan-08
Halo 2	8	Aug-07
Hellgate: London	8.5	Jan-08
Medal of Honor: Airborne	7.25	Oct-07
Medieval II: Total War: Kingdoms	9	Nov-07
Neverwinter Nights 2: Mask of the Betrayer	9	Nov-07
Orange Box, The	9.75	Nov-07
Painkiller: Overdose	6.75	Dec-07
Settlers: Rise of an Empire, The	7	Dec-07
Shadowrun	6.5	Aug-07
Sid Meier's Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword	9.5	Sep-07
SimCity Societies	8	Jan-08
Supreme Commander: Forged Alliance	8.5	Dec-07
Surf's Up	6.5	Aug-07
Tabula Rasa	8	Jan-08
TimeShift	7.75	Dec-07
Two Worlds	4	Nov-07



Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker - Nintendo DS - Dec-07

Universe at War: Earth Assault	8.25	Jan-08
Unreal Tournament 3	9	Dec-07
Witcher, The	8	Dec-07
World in Conflict	9.25	Oct-07

NINTENDO DS

Bram Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day	8.25	Sep-07
Brothers in Arms DS	6.75	Sep-07
Contra 4	9.25	Jan-08
Cookie & Cream	7	Aug-07
Cooking Mama 2: Dinner With Friends	7	Dec-07
Dermentium: The Ward	5.75	Dec-07
DK Jungle Climber	5.75	Nov-07
Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker	8	Dec-07
Drawn to Life	7	Oct-07
Dynasty Warriors DS: Fighter's Battle	6.5	Jul-07
Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings	7.5	Dec-07
Front Mission 1st	7	Nov-07
Heroes of Mana	5	Sep-07
Jam Sessions	6	Dec-07
Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass, The	9.5	Oct-07
LifeSigns: Surgical Unit	6	Jan-08
Luminous Arc	6	Sep-07
Master of Illusion	8	Jan-08
Mega Man ZX Advent	8	Nov-07
Nanostray 2	7.25	Jan-08
New York Times Crosswords	8.25	Aug-07
Orc & Elves	6.75	Jan-08
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney: Trials & Tribulations	8.25	Nov-07
Picross DS	9.5	Sep-07
Planet Puzzle League	8.25	Aug-07
Prism: Light the Way	7.5	Dec-07
Rune Factory: A Fantasy Harvest Moon	5.75	Oct-07
SamCity DS	8.25	Aug-07
SNK vs. Capcom Card Fighters DS	6.5	Jul-07
Sonic Rush Adventure	7.25	Nov-07
Turn It Around	4	Dec-07
World Jong	8	Dec-07
Worms Open Warfare 2	7.5	Oct-07

PSP

Brave Story: New Traveler	7.25	Sep-07
Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles	7	Oct-07
Crazy Taxi: Fare Wars	5.75	Nov-07
Dead Head Fred	6	Sep-07
Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness	9	Nov-07
Dragonair's Ana	5.75	Oct-07
Driver: 76	5	Jul-07
Dungeon Maker: Hunting Ground	6	Aug-07
Dungeons and Dragons: Tactics	6	Aug-07
Final Fantasy II: Anniversary Edition	6	Aug-07
Final Fantasy: Anniversary Edition	7.5	Jul-07
Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions	9.5	Nov-07
Hot PXL	6	Oct-07
Innocent Life: A Futuristic Harvest Moon	7.25	Jul-07
Jackass: The Game	6.25	Dec-07
Jeanne D'Arc	8.5	Sep-07
Manhunt 2	7.75	Dec-07
Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops Plus	7.75	Dec-07
Monster Hunter Freedom 2	7	Sep-07
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Heroes	6.75	Oct-07
PaRappa the Rapper	8	Jul-07
Silent Hill Origins	7.75	Dec-07
Smash Court Tennis 3	8.5	Sep-07
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs: Tactical Strike	8	Dec-07
Star Wars: Battlefront: Renegade Squadron	7	Nov-07
SWAT: Target Liberty	5	Dec-07
Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow	8.75	Nov-07
Tales of the World	7	Aug-07
Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command	8	Jan-08



Rock Band

The Developers at Harmonix Take You to the School of Rock

DRUMS

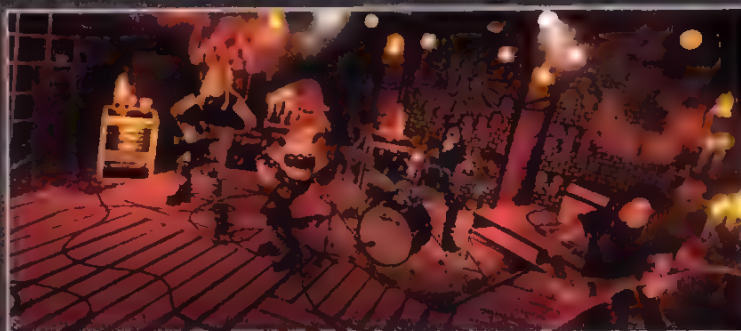
By Rob Kay, Director of Design

Playing drums in Rock Band is uncannily like real drumming, and becomes more so as you climb through the difficulty levels. One real-world drumming skill that advanced Rock Band drummers should practice is good foot pedal technique.

The classic mistake new players make is to stomp on the pedal from a great height, leaving their foot floating in the air between hits. This is poor pedal technique, and it doesn't take long for poor pedal technique to result in leg pain - especially on challenging drum songs.

Good foot pedal technique, on the other hand, isn't painful because it's all about moving your foot as little as possible. The less energy you use on each hit, the more hits you can perform, and the better drummer you'll be.

The next time you play, make a conscious effort to keep your foot resting on the pedal throughout a song. Don't let your foot leave the pedal. Once you've got that licked, practice leaving your foot pressed all the way down between hits. Don't let the pedal rise back up until you actually need it for the next hit. Once you train your leg to play like this, drumming becomes way easier. You don't even need to let the pedal rise up very far between hits; about half of its full range is plenty. Combine these three things successfully - foot always on the pedal, foot down between hits, only letting the pedal up a little between hits - and you'll find yourself destroying songs that previously seemed impossible.



Solo Button Techniques

The solo buttons on the Fender Stratocaster guitar controller are definitely the biggest new guitar feature in Rock Band, and nailing the correct technique can be tricky at first. There are a couple of different techniques you can use to make shredding with the solo buttons easier.

You can use both hands on the solo buttons. No strumming is necessary, but it does make consecutive, same-colored notes tough unless you place two fingers on either side of the fret and alternate between them.

You can use one hand to finger tap, and one hand to strum. This is a good compromise position, since it means you can strum away for long runs of consecutive notes while still not having to strum the rest. It can take a bit of practice to get this coordination up, though.

VOCALS

By Helen McWilliams, Producer

We've heard that some think the vocals in our game are really hard. The fact is, vocals are like any other instrument - you have to practice and train yourself to be good at them. You wouldn't just pop in on drums on Expert, and the same holds true for vocals...even if your high school choir teacher thinks you're a superstar. You gotta work at it. Having said that, here are a few tricks that should help you out.

Start on Easy to learn the songs. You should also play on Easy if you're an egomaniac and don't like your vocals being judged as just "okay." If you wanna do fancy flourishes and annoying vibrato, you should play on Easy or Medium, 'cause Hard and Expert aren't gonna put up with your goof offs.

If you're trying to build your way up to Hard or Expert, try turning up the in-game vocals really high using the face buttons on your controller. I know, that will take away from others enjoying the glory that is your singing voice, but it really helps if there's a section of the song that you find tricky.

On Expert, you're gonna have to sing like a robot a little bit. Hold those notes for the entire length of the note tube, and just concentrate on making your pitch as exact as possible.



GUITAR

By Dan Teasdale, Senior Designer

Big Rock Endings

When you reach a Big Rock Ending at the end of a song, you probably already know that you should be strumming like crazy at the end of the song, but did you know that using both hands to finger-tap with the solo buttons on the Fender Stratocaster guitar controller makes this a lot easier? The aim of the Big Rock Ending is to make sure all of the note lanes are lit up. Going finger-tap crazy at the end is much easier than sliding your whole hand up and down the fret board while strumming madly.

Just be sure to stop a bit before the Big Rock Ending finishes, and allow yourself some time to reset your hand into a position that lets you play the final note, otherwise all of that finger tapping will have been for nothing.



Mod World

THE ORANGE BOX

Half-Life 2 Portal Gun Hack

www.primotechnology.com/2007/10/17/half-life-2-portal



If you haven't already, check out this odd new way to play Half-Life 2. Basically, following the steps given in the above link, you can get access to the Portal gun within Half-Life 2 if you own both games. Oh yes, this means chucking grenades through portals to frag Combine, getting access to places you shouldn't be able to, and much more. Obvious caveats apply, including the fact that you'll probably break the game's scripting if you're not careful, but this is a heck of an amusing way to mess around with The Orange Box.

FRETS ON FIRE

fretsonfire.sourceforge.net



Wrap your brain around this: Open source Guitar Hero for PC. Can you dig it? Of course you can. Frets on Fire is open-source, free, and awesome. With a simple download, you can use your keyboard as a guitar and wail away on imported Guitar Hero I or II songs, or tracks set up by the game's online community. There are leaderboards, plenty of documentation, and forums to discuss the game at the above URL.

Holding your keyboard upside-down and using the F1 through F5 keys as frets and Enter as the strummer may

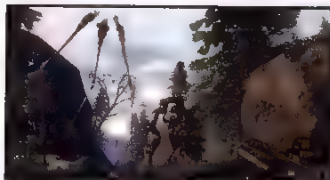


look goofy, but we recommend it anyway. Good luck with a laptop. Of course, you could always use a PS2-to-USB adapter to plug in your PS2 guitar, or simply hook up your wired Xbox 360 guitar normally (advice for drivers and other "getting things to work" questions can be found in the forums at the above site) and get rockin' that way.

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@gamemformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM**The Orange Box – Half-Life 2 and Episodes One & Two**

> XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 3

During gameplay without pausing enter the following codes.

XBOX 360

Invincibility – LB, Up, RB, Up, LB, LB, Up, RB, RB, Up

Restore Health – Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A

Unlock All Stages – Left, Left, Left, Left, LB, Right, Right, Right, Right, RB

PLAYSTATION 3

Restore Ammo – △, ○, ×, □, RI, △, □, ×, ○, RI

Restore Health – Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, ○, △

**Need for Speed ProStreet**

> PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, Wii, PLAYSTATION 2

Go into the Cheat menu and enter the following codes for some cool unlockables

Gain Five Repair Tokens – SAFETYNET

Receive \$2,000 – 1MA9X99

Receive \$4,000 – W2IOLL01

Receive \$8,000 – L1IS97A1

Receive \$10,000 – CASHMONEY

Unlock Audi TT – ITSABOUTYOU

Unlock Boaus Vinyls – ENERGIZERLITHIUM

Unlock Castrol Syntec Vinyl – CASTROLSYNTEC

Unlock Chevelle SS – HORSEPOWER

Unlock Coke Zero Golf GTI – ZEROZEROZERO

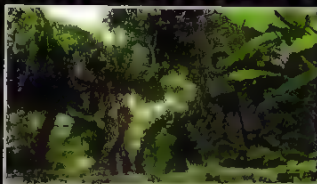
Unlock Dodge Viper SRT10 – WORLDSLONGESTLASTING

Unlock Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution – MITSUBISHIHIGOFAR

Unlock All Bonuses – UNLOCKALLTHINGS

Code of the Month**Uncharted: Drake's Fortune**

PS3



Uncharted is one of those games that makes you glad you own a PS3, so you probably want to squeeze all the fun you can out of the game. To unlock these codes go into the bonuses menu in the pause screen then enter the rewards menu.

Drake's Baseball T-Shirt – Enter Costume Select Screen, Left, Right, Down, Up, △, RI, LI, □

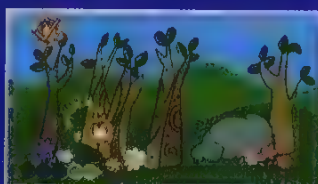
Unlocks Concept Art Gallery 1 – Highlight Concept Art Gallery 1, L2, Right, Up, □, Left, △, RI, Down



Unlock Concept Art Gallery 2 – Highlight Concept Art Gallery Bonus 2, □, LI, Right, Left, Down, R2, △, Up

Unlocks Grave Robbing Video – Highlight Making a Cutscene - Grave Robbing, Left, R2, Right, Up, L2, △, □, Down

Unlocks Time's Up Video – Highlight Making a Cutscene - Time's Up, L1, Right, □, Down, Left, △, RI, Up

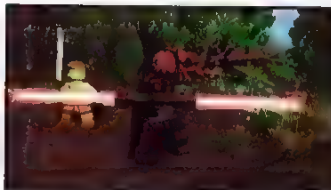
Xbox Live Arcade Spotlight**Rocky and Bullwinkle**

We've paid a lot of attention to the surprising array of action, fighting, and puzzle titles that have become a part of Xbox Live Arcade, but this month we got news about a fun family-oriented title that may have what it takes to attract some more serious gamers along with the kids. Rocky and Bullwinkle sticks pretty close to its source material, with a bright and colorful art style modeled directly off the original cartoon. Gameplay is in the style of rapid-fire microgames – over 100 all told. At least a quarter of these games will include

support for the Xbox Live Vision camera through gesture-controlled actions. Eight playable characters and five difficulty settings for each of the games should keep the fun flowing for awhile, with a focus on delivering a multiplayer party vibe for kids and adults alike. We've yet to play the final version, but it's nice to see Live Arcade exploring some options beyond the multi-directional shooter and color-based puzzle genres. A little classic cartoon humor never hurt anybody.

LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga

> PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, Wii



From the cantina enter the codes menu and input these codes to unlock new playable characters, vehicles, and powers

Boss Nass – HHY697

Captain Tarpals – QRN714

Disguise – BRJ437

Droid Tri-Fighter – AAB123

General Grievous – PMN576



Imperial Shuttle – HUT845

IG88 – GIJ989

Jango Fett – KLJ897

Jedi Grapple Move – CLZ738

Recolor R2D2 – EVILR2

Stormtrooper – NBN431

TIE Interceptor – INT729

Vulture Droid – BDC866

(location unknown – last crashing award ceremonies dressed like a chicken)

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King of the Hill

The Line of Succession

Every generation of video game hardware has its royalty. These games may begin simply as big sellers or critical favorites, but soon they surpass their peers and ascend to a higher level. They become phenomena that generate enthusiasm across the entire gaming industry and beyond. But life at the top doesn't last forever. As the medium evolves and new software and hardware are introduced, new contenders always step up to take a shot at the throne. On these pages we take a look at these larger-than-life titles, and how the torch is passed from one generation to the next.



Arcade Kings:

Space Invaders and Pac-Man

There was a time when playing the greatest new games didn't involve sitting in the comfort of your own living room. The simple graphics and gameplay of classic arcade titles could cause many of them to look and feel similar, but in the late '70s and early '80s, all you had to do to find the best of the best was to look for which cabinets had the largest crowds around them. Odds are, most people were gathered around Space Invaders or Pac-Man. There were other heavy hitters, like Galaga and Donkey Kong, but Space Invaders and Pac-Man really tapped into the pop-culture vein. Remember "Pac-Man Fever"?

There was a renewed interest in arcades in the early '90s when competitive 2D fighters like Street Fighter II and Mortal Kombat hit, but it never created the same fervor seen in the golden age of arcade gaming.



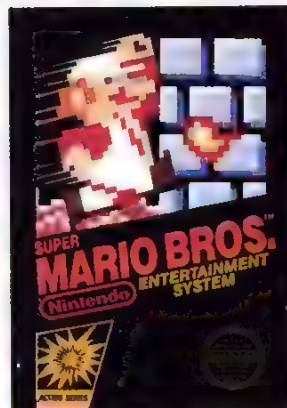
8-bit Kings:

Mario and Zelda

This is where it started for most gamers. There had been home consoles before, but the NES era is when gaming as a hobby really took off. Mario was there at the beginning, teaching us how to jump on platforms, stomp enemies, and look for secrets behind every brick. Even better, since it came with the NES, everyone had a chance to experience it. Super Mario Bros. was Gaming 101, educating players and introducing them to techniques that would serve as the foundation of gaming for the years to come.

Of course, Link deserves his place of honor right beside Nintendo's iconic plumber. Many contend that

The Legend of Zelda is the greatest video game of all time, and it is difficult to disagree. It had everything: a princess to save, challenging foes to defeat, and a sprawling world you could explore for hours. This quality didn't go unappreciated; The Legend of Zelda was one of the titles you were almost certain to find in any NES owner's collection. At a time when the gaming landscape was in its early stages of development, people didn't talk about titles with terms like "triple-A." There was simply Mario, Zelda, and everything else.



16-bit Kings:

Mario, Sonic, and EA Sports



After Nintendo's unquestioned dominance in the 8-bit arena, Sega actually managed to reshape itself into a worthy challenger with the Genesis. Not only was there another system to give Nintendo a run for its money, but Mario was even confronted by a rival mascot: Sonic. If nothing else, Super Mario World and Sonic the Hedgehog rule this era by default, since they were undoubtedly the most-played games on their respective consoles. They were usually bundled with the hardware, so they were shared experiences that gamers could talk about and look forward to together.

Meanwhile, Electronic Arts started its legacy with sports titles like Madden, NBA Live, and NHL. Video games have always had an element of competition, but the combination of one-on-one matches and players' favorite sports franchises was irresistible. These titles also pulled in a different crowd — people who didn't care about Mario or Sonic — and these "sports only" gamers continue to be an important demographic in the industry.

N64/PSone Kings:

Contested!



If becoming best of the best in each console generation is likened to a game of thrones, then this is the period where the king has died and several powerful lords are vying for his crown. There were several excellent and influential titles released in the late '90s, but none managed to rise high enough above the pack to claim the title of champion.

This is partially due to the trend of games splintering off into more varied genres. Resident Evil helped give rise to survival horror, while Goldeneye was the first successful console FPS (and opened many gamers' eyes to the joys of multiplayer). Racing fans got a taste of solid sim racing with Gran Turismo, and Konami's Metal Gear Solid blew gamers away by mixing stealth, espionage, and a twisting cinematic tale. Square's Final Fantasy series also saw its greatest reception on the PSone; in a mere three years, Sony's console saw three numbered installments of the role-playing franchise — more than any other system (before or since) in North America.

Nintendo once again delivered revolutionary games starring Mario and Link, but the biggest surprise on the N64 was Super Smash Bros. Even in the face of Mario 64 and Ocarina of Time, this four-player battle royale remains one of the best-selling games on the system to date.

Last-Gen Kings:

Halo, Grand Theft Auto, and Madden

Every era has its standouts, but with the PS2 and Xbox, we saw games transformed into media superstars. Breaking down the boundaries that separated gaming from the mainstream, Halo, Madden, and Grand Theft Auto were juggernauts. They widened the gap between themselves and the competition by an unprecedented margin, put up incredible sales numbers, and inspired game retailers to host midnight launch parties. These titles redefined what it means to rule a generation of hardware; they weren't just good games — they were events.



Kings To Come

Who will be the next to reach the top? Every reign must come to an end, and now is the perfect time for a new sensation to take over. The Halo trilogy is done, and what Microsoft plans to do to keep the franchise alive isn't clear. Much also rests on Rockstar's upcoming GTA IV, which will demonstrate whether or not the series can have the same staying power on next-gen hardware. That isn't to say that interest in these games is dramatically declining. Rather, gamers' enthusiasm for other titles is quickly catching up.

Music games, which only a few years ago were considered a niche genre, are now sweeping the nation and bringing a more casual audience into the gaming fold. Wii Sports is another success that is difficult to ignore, especially since it goes back to the lessons Nintendo learned years ago: If you include a game with your console, people will play it.

Several other series are currently teetering on the brink of eminence, with everything resting on the next game in the franchise. Gears of War showed players what it meant to be a next-gen shooter, and the initial sales of Assassin's Creed (over 2.5 million copies sold worldwide in less than a month) means a lot of gamers will be interested in a sequel. Titles like BioShock and God of War received an incredible reception from the core gaming community, and that momentum could propel them into the mainstream market with subsequent entries.

With each generation, the franchises that rule the industry seem unbeatable. And yet, as the industry evolves and gamers are introduced to new concepts, attitudes shift and preferences change. Sometimes the old guards are able to adapt and maintain their status, and other times a dark horse comes riding up and takes everyone by surprise. Who knows...the next big thing could be a game you haven't even heard of yet. ■ ■ ■



The Tiniest Kings:

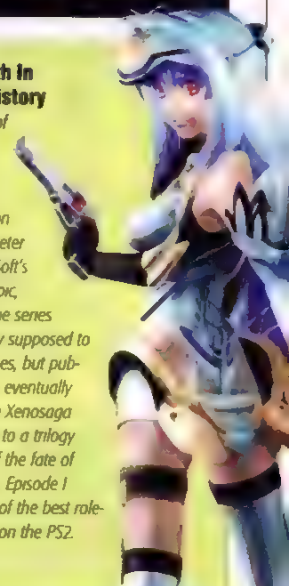
Tetris and Pokémon

Handheld games are difficult to place in the same timeline as those for consoles, since the division between eras overlaps considerably. Fortunately, the kings of portable gaming aren't nearly so foggy. Tetris ruled the Game Boy realm, addicting thousands of gamers across the world — not to mention getting the "A Type" song stuck in their heads. The age of the Game Boy Advance belongs to Pokémon, which capitalized on younger gamers and a popular television property to become a full-fledged craze.



This Month In Gaming History

In February of 2003, North American gamers got their hands on the first chapter in Monolith Soft's space RPG epic, *Xenosaga*. The series was originally supposed to span six games, but publisher Namco eventually cut the whole *Xenosaga* project down to a trilogy. Regardless of the fate of its follow-ups, *Episode 1* remains one of the best role-playing titles on the PS2.

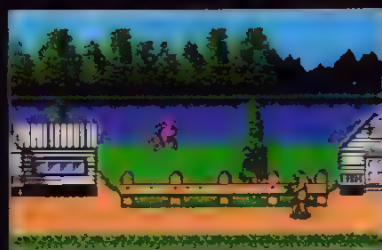




NES
FRIDAY THE 13TH

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER LIN > DEVELOPER LIN > RELEASE 1987

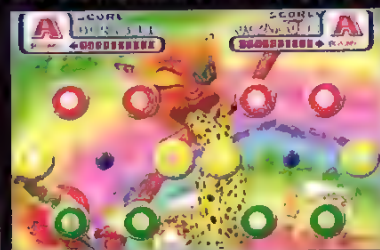
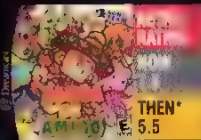
The Friday the 13th series is popular because people like watching stupid teenagers get killed off systematically. Of all the licensed NES games, Friday the 13th is the only one that comes close to capturing the spirit of its property, because non-stop death is all you get. You guide camp counselors around Camp Crystal Lake, but no matter what dumb weapons you collect (a throwing pitchfork?!), or how many times you defeat the disembodied head of Pamela Voorhees, you can't avoid the inevitable: Jason will find you, and you will die. Unfortunately, this faithfulness to the franchise is accidental, since the apparent goal is to not die and actually kill Jason. This is impossible. The game is barely playable, and just like in the movies, encounters with the hockey mask-wearing terror are brief and unwinnable – you take a punch or a machete to the face and you're done. Once this happens with all six playable characters – which it will – it's game over. After only a few minutes with Friday the 13th, you'll wish it would join its iconic villain at the bottom of a rural lake.



DREAMCAST
SAMBA DE AMIGO

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SONIC TEAM > RELEASE 2000

With the upcoming release of a new Samba de Amigo on Wii, it's a good time to revisit the original cult classic. Dreamcast players forked over \$40 for the game and another \$80 for the essential peripheral – a set of red plastic maracas wired to a sensor bar that rests on the floor. Throw in another set for two-player and Rock Band isn't looking so pricey anymore. To play, you have to raise and lower the maracas to line up with a circle of six onscreen multicolored dots then shake them whenever a blue or red circle comes out of the center and crosses over. Occasionally, you'll also have to imitate an onscreen pose. The maracas have a nice tactile feel, though accuracy can be an issue at times. The mix of 16 Latin-flavored tunes including "Livin' la Vida Loca," "Tubthumping," and "Macarena" is positively embarrassing now, but even the best rhythm gamers will find plenty of challenge in the hard difficulty. Party mode and a few minigames help shake things up, and basically guarantee that you look like an idiot to any spectators. Then again, people said the same thing about plastic guitars.

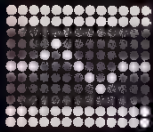


GAME BOY COLOR
RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER M4 LIMITED > RELEASE 2002

It's widely known that this Game Boy Resident Evil title started out as an attempt by Capcom to make a handheld version that was a faithful adaptation of the original Resident Evil. Those plans failed, however, and what was left was this unfortunate attempt to cram some tenets of the series into a cart. Despite the fact that health and ammo are at a premium, the split between the top-down view used for exploration and movement around the environment and the first-person combat segments do not serve the survival-horror genre well. Also, the game's find-the-door-key puzzles give key cards a bad name and don't stand up to the franchise's trademark brainteasers. The genre came alive because of the more cinematic capabilities of CD-ROMs and the PlayStation, and this underpowered entry simply can't make the jump. Where's Barry? He went into hiding after this embarrassment.





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VIVA LA RESISTANCE!

Watch our exclusive video interview with Ted Price regarding Insomniac's highly anticipated sequel to *Resistance: Fall of Man*.



Get Fit

Check out our extra screenshots of the Nintendo product Matt Lauer can't wait to try out on *The Today Show*.



Multiplayer Mayhem

Read our extended interview with Infinity Ward's Todd Alderman about creating the *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* multiplayer experience.



Highlander

Interview with *Highlander TV* show writer David Abramowitz and Widescreen Games, the game developers working on the latest chapter of the MacLeod legacy.



LEGO Batman

Read more about the caped crusader's jump to the LEGO universe with our Q&A with Jonathan Smith, the head of production at Traveller's Tales.



Places: Insomniac

Check out the digs that Ratchet & Clank creators Insomniac Games calls home

ALSO ONLINE THIS MONTH:

Game Informer Online heads to the 2008 Consumer Electronics Show to check out the latest game previews and tech demos.



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GAME OVER

You Communicate Exceptionally!

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

You know, most of us gamers hear the name Zelda and think of a beautiful princess and her green-tight-wearing hero. But the rest of the world thinks Zelda is a name for their grandmother. Complete this quiz to discover which game might have been drastically altered with only a minor change to the character's name.

1 Champions of Norrath: Realms of Everquest took the popular formula found in Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance and moved it into another established fantasy world. What was the name of the studio that made both?

- A. Raven Software
- B. BioWare
- C. Snowblind Studios
- D. Sony Online Entertainment

2 Postal was more than a little controversial when it released in 1997, as it involved the killing of, well, pretty much everybody. Why was this guy so pissed off?

- A. He was a disgruntled postal employee
- B. He was actually an alien sent to destroy the world
- C. His wife left him
- D. His house may have been repossessed, but his motivations remain cloudy



3 Madden's not the only sports franchise that has been around forever. When was the first game with the name FIFA in the title?

- A. 1989
- B. 1992
- C. 1993
- D. 1995

4 The year 2003 saw the release of a PC game called Lionheart, where players could level up their character using a system modeled on the original Fallout. It was set in a medieval Europe where a breach in the space-time continuum had altered history. Yeah, it was pretty crazy. What was its subtitle?

- A. Legacy of the Crusader
- B. Rise of the Inquisition
- C. Warrior's Blade
- D. Medieval Girls Gone Wild!

5 Did you know Game Informer editors Andy and Reiner made guest appearances in the stylistic shooter XIII as prison guards? At least their faces did. What do you get if you add XIII and XL?

- A. XVIII
- B. CMIV
- C. V
- D. LIII



6 In the original English PlayStation release of Persona, your main character was unnamed, but the rest of the teenaged party members were. Which one of these characters was not playable in Persona?

- A. Alana
- B. Nate
- C. Mary
- D. Angela



7 Ikaruga is both awesome and totally challenging, and if you disagree with either of those statements you've either got some personal problems or you're a liar. How did Ikaruga

distinguish itself from other shooters?

- A. Your ship can change between light and dark forms
- B. Display options included the option to flip between horizontal and vertical views
- C. You could absorb some types of enemy fire
- D. All of the above

8 The gaming industry has had all sorts of controversy, but what was the first game (released in arcades) that was so controversial in its violence as to warrant an appearance on 60 Minutes?

- A. Corpse Killer
- B. Death Race
- C. Splatterhouse
- D. Sonic and Charles Manson at the Olympic Games

9 True or False: Super Smash Bros. Melee was the best selling game on the Nintendo 64?

- A. True
- B. False



10 How old are you again?

- A. Who wants to know?
- B. Ladies don't talk about such things
- C. Old enough, sonny
- D. Mommy says don't talk to strangers

BREAKDOWN

63% of U.S. respondents to a recent NPD study said they play video games

40 million dollars will be split between the two heads of Activision after the recent merger with Vivendi

150 million dollars are being spent by Sony on their most recent PlayStation 3 ad campaign

27 additional songs were available to download for Rock Band only one month after the game's release

7 is the number of times the word "minigame" appears in our feature about Wii games in 2008

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



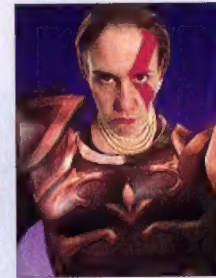
0-1:
Ethel Kombat



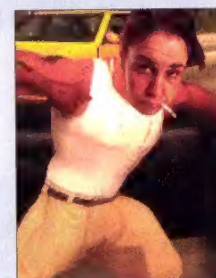
2-3:
Martha Chief



4-5:
Rosemary's Punch-Out



6-7:
Gertrude of War



8-9:
Grand Theft Phyllis



10:
Optimus Prime Pony Friends!

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