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Tie-A-Rang

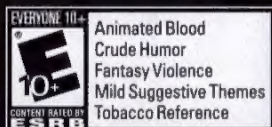
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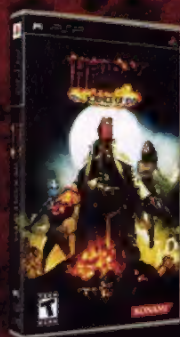
WE ALL HAVE OUR DEMONS... HIS ARE JUST A BIT MORE OBVIOUS

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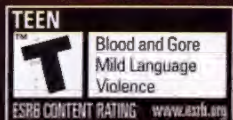
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Xbox 360™ screens shown



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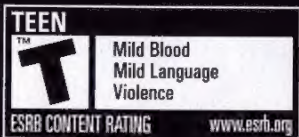


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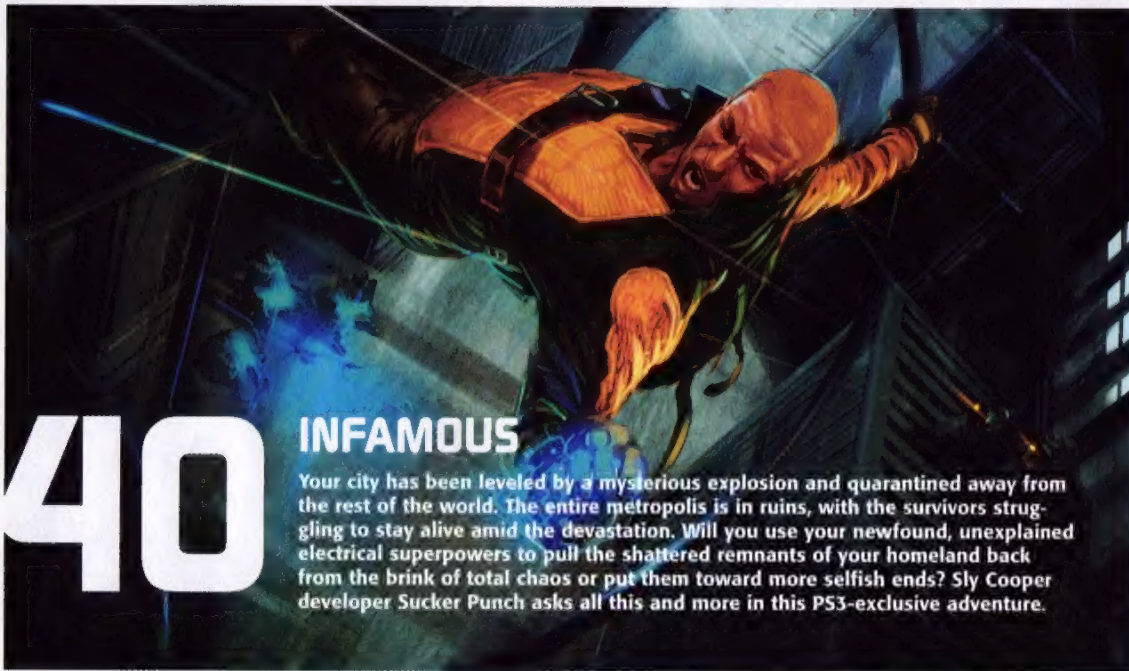
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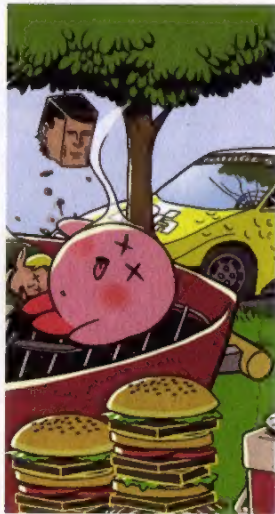
Your city has been leveled by a mysterious explosion and quarantined away from the rest of the world. The entire metropolis is in ruins, with the survivors struggling to stay alive amid the devastation. Will you use your newfound, unexplained electrical superpowers to pull the shattered remnants of your homeland back from the brink of total chaos or put them toward more selfish ends? Sly Cooper developer Sucker Punch asks all this and more in this PS3-exclusive adventure.

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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



WE GET IT, DROP IT

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In the wake of Grand Theft Auto IV's launch, and the fallout that follows each release, I find myself amazed that the mainstream press, from newspapers to cable news channels, still latches on to the same old "video games are destroying America's youth" story.

Haven't video games been a part a mainstream culture long enough now? Haven't even the soccer moms and dads of the world started to believe that these witch hunts after video games are getting a tad ridiculous? You would think so, but it still rears its ugly head on a yearly basis.

We get it. Grand Theft Auto IV is not for kids. It never was. It's made for adults, as are many games... and movies...and books...and magazines. It's just the way the world works. Video games have grown up. They have become a part of American pop culture. It's as American as mom's apple pie or baseball.

More people are playing than ever before. With products like Wii Fit giving people fun ways to lose weight, and Rock Band and Guitar Hero letting people live out their rock n' roll fantasies, there really is something out there for everyone.

This is why it upsets me so when people don't get that video games are a release from the day-to-day grind of our lives. They are the way that people escape their ills and have some fun. Games are how you pass the time, whether it's on your PlayStation 3 or on your cell phone. Gamers are no longer a small segment of the culture. We are everywhere.

I can't go to a doctor's office or stop by a grocery store without running into someone talking enthusiastically about games. It's a dream come true for a life-long gamer like myself. Now we just need the mainstream media to wake up and pay attention for once to what is going on around them and not just take the easy way out and blame video games for the problems of the day - to analyze how games are a force for good in a world that is far too often more violent and unforgiving than the games that it likes to blame as the cause for its woes.

Cheers,

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Muse On Guitar Hero & Rock Band, Walleye, Game Art, Activision And LucasArts Backing Out Of E3 And The ESA (Let's Face It, Neither Is Getting The Job Done) **Dislikes:** That E3 This Year Is Back At The Convention Center In L.A. And We Will Be Surrounded By A Gift Convention That Is Not Only Bigger, But Perhaps Even More Annoying **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2, Civilization Revolution



Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Getting Back Into Warhammer 40k Miniatures, The Kurt Russell Experiment (If You Speak With Kurt's Inflections, Do People Like You More?), Creating The League That Will Someday Topple The NFL - The LGL (Ladder Golf League), Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* **Dislikes:** Xbox Live Hardly Holding My Interest Anymore (Rocky & Bullwinkle R.I.P.), Wristbands Never Being In Style (Think Of Them As Modern Gauntlets & Wear Them Proudly) **Current Favorite Games:** Battlefield: Bad Company, Grand Theft Auto IV, Grid, Secret Agent Clank, Civilization Revolution, Boom Blox



Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com

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Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Pants Without Gigantic Rips In Them, Rediscovering Winamp, Having A Car Again, Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* **Dislikes:** Keyboards Without Media Controls, Mice With Only Two Buttons, Spending Three Hours Setting Up My Music Collection's Genres Properly, Spring Allergies, Running Out Of TV Shows To Watch On DVD **Current Favorite Games:** Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire Of The Rift, Civilization Revolution, Civilization IV, Echochrome, Disgaea 2



Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Warrior Mice, *Whistcutters: A Love Story*, Telling Co-workers Fake Metal Gear Spoilers (Snake Is The Final Cylon!), *Thank You For Smoking*, Crank Calling Emergency Services In GTA IV **Dislikes:** *Dramedy (More The Word Than The Genre)*, Zanzibar Hamsters, Pregnancy In Season Finales (Hay Guys How 2 Rite Script?), High Prices On Rare PS2 RPGs **Current Favorite Games:** Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots, Ninja Gaiden II, Grand Theft Auto IV, Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire Of The Rift, Echochrome



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Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** Arburnitos (Ask Joe About Them), The OneUps, The Arrival Of Sonic In The Twin Cities (Burgers, Not Blue Hedgehogs), 4th Edition D&D (Very Cool, But Still Won't Make You Cool) **Dislikes:** Orzo Bratwurst Surprise (Go Grocery Shopping Before You Stoop This Low), *Breaking In New Shoes*, The Return Of My Eternal Battle Against Growing Grass **Current Favorite Games:** Grand Theft Auto IV, Braid, Grid, Pixeljunk Eden, Lost Winds, On The Rain Slick Precipice Of Darkness, Episode One



Bertz >> mattbertz@gameinformer.com

Handle: Lord Gamington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** *Generation Kill*, Summer Rock Concerts, KG's Quest For An NBA Crown, *Before The Devil Knows You're Dead*, Deadspin's "The Dark Side Of The Locker Room" **Dislikes:** Scarlett Johansson Covering Tom Waits (Gorgeous? Yes. Gorgeous Voice? Not So Much), ESPN's Dwindling Respectability, Fishing Trips Missing One Major Thing (FISH!) **Current Favorite Games:** Battlefield: Bad Company, Grand Theft Auto IV, NCAA Football 09, Civilization Revolution



Ben >> ben@gameinformer.com

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*, Family Road Trips, Brian Michael Bendis' *Secret Invasion*, *Iron Man* (The Movie), *Iron Man* (The Comic) **Dislikes:** *Iron Man* (The Game), Meatless Hamburgers (They Seem To Be Missing The Tastiest Part), Being Used As A Human Shield **Current Favorite Games:** Grand Theft Auto IV, Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Ninja Gaiden II, Mario Kart Wii, World Of Warcraft, Civilization Revolution



Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** Finally Taking The Time To Figure Out All Of The Cool Things The PSP Can Do (Why Don't They Play This Stuff Up More?) **Dislikes:** Sizzle Trailers, Housekeeping Items, The First Hour Of Metal Gear Solid 4 Gameplay Showing Up Everywhere (Let Me Play The Whole Thing Or Get Out Of My Face!) **Current Favorite Games:** Battlefield: Bad Company, Boom Blox, Grand Theft Auto IV, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots

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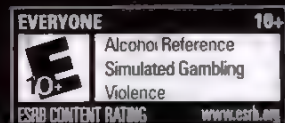
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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



9



8



7

1 Adam entertains the World in Conflict posse (he's a great tap dancer, actually. True story!): Sierra's Troy Mirmirani, Maverick PR's Matt Fray, and Sierra's Luke Thai 2 Andy hangs with PC World's Darren Gladstone and Electric Playground host Donna Me Ling Park 3 Here's one of GI's youngest readers, Brock Podratz, dressed as our favorite Sith Lord. We sense that the Force is strong with this one 4 Ubisoft's Hayden Walling and EA's Mariam Sughayer talk shop at an EA event in San Francisco 5 Reiner demonstrates his new "cat burglar chic" look (it's hot for summer '08) to High Moon Studios' Meelad Sadat, Paul O'Connor, and Forty Seven Communications' Laura Weir 6 It takes a village to raise a video game. Here we see "Sir Cork III" (Jeff's new self-appointed nickname), with the crew that's helping to raise Konami's Dance Dance Revolution: (standing) Greg Price, Mr. Takase, Hiro Chiwata, and UT-ASAMI; (sitting) Adam Fenton, Andrew Kelly, Marisa Gross, and Parnaz Taheri 7 Miller, Nick, and Reiner hang with some of the talented folks behind Gears of War: voice actor Carlos Ferro (Dom), writer Joshua Ortega, Microsoft's Rob Semsey, producer Rod Ferguson, and the infamous CliffyB 8 GI Online's Meagan VanBurkleo wins the belt from some of the best and brightest grapplers in TNA Impact! Seriously, she threw a guy through a table, it was crazy! 9 The EA gang, Julie Michel, Tyrone Miller, and Jennica Pearson try out their best super-spy poses



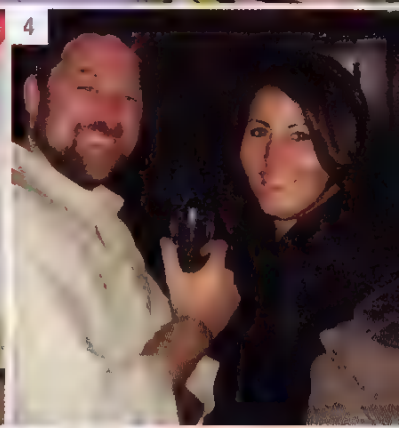
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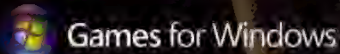
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ALONE IN THE DARK

JUNE 24, 2008
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Nintendo Online

My brother lives in Chicago and I live in Missouri. We love to play online games together, and couldn't wait until Mario Kart Wii came out so we could do some racing. The only thing missing was live chat, which Nintendo doesn't include for some reason. As a solution, we decided to chat over Xbox Live while playing Mario Kart. This also works with any Wii game (like Super Smash Bros. Brawl). Just a helpful tip for anyone out there who has a 360, a Wii, and someone to talk to.

Deb Rinz
Paris, MO

At Nintendo's E3 press conference last year, Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime posed a question. What if Nintendo already had an online strategy, but no one noticed? It seemed strange at the time, but it makes so much sense now: Nintendo's secret online strategy must be the Xbox 360. Take that, PlayStation Home...if you ever come out!

Sound Check focuses on groups that cover classic video game melodies - flip over to page 24 to learn about new interpretations of familiar favorites.

Keep It Simple

I cannot agree more with The Name Game article in issue 181. When perusing video games, I am always attracted to the games with short, evocative names such as Rock Band, Mass Effect, and BioShock. I also like the names Halo, Doom, and Grand Theft Auto because of the new connotations they add to words that are already a part of our cultural vocabulary. As a consumer, bad names make me very wary, like war games with generic titles (Conflict: Denied Ops), or Japanese RPGs with nonsense names that barely fit on the the box (Mana Khemia: Alchemists of Al-Revis).

Noah B.
via gmail.com

Not long ago it seemed like every game needed two titles separated by a colon. Publishers seem to be moving away from that these days, relying on more compact language to convey the idea of a game. Even so, we can't help but wonder if more gamers would have checked out cool games like Metal Arms: Glitch In The System and Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy if their names were a little easier to digest. Of course, the gameplay should speak louder than any title on the box, but as a great shampoo commercial once taught us: You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

Jumping The Gun

I've noticed a rising trend in video games: Indie games are in increasing demand. Last year, all you heard about was Halo 3, Mass Effect, Call of Duty 4, and other blockbuster games. This year, thanks to XBLA, PSN and WiiWare, indie games are getting all the buzz. Could video games as we know them be shifting towards the opposite end of the spectrum? In the arts, almost every movement is answered with a movement in the other direction. I believe the same could be applied to video games. If this trend continues, then I wish to name this movement Indieism, if it hasn't been coined already.

Christopher Garcia
via gmail.com

You're getting ahead of yourself, Christopher. You can't really name a movement if it doesn't exist. True, the three major consoles each offer an outlet for less traditional games, but availability doesn't necessarily equal demand...yet. Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo are all still experimenting with the best way to position these games and get people playing them. The indie war is far from won; gamers are definitely curious about these titles, but the majority of buzz is still surrounding the blockbusters like Metal Gear Solid 4

(with good cause - check out our review on page 88). Gears of War 2, and Resistance 2. Thankfully, gaming isn't an either/or hobby, and one type of game doesn't need to replace the other. Just like movies, you can enjoy the big-budget releases right alongside the smaller, independent titles.

The Dubious Proposition

Pull Ben's finger.

Brian Hillhouse
via gmail.com

Nope. We're not falling for that one again. Last time we tried it, Ben got performance anxiety and just started sobbing. Awkward.

A Touch Of Strategy

I've been seeing lots of turn-based strategy games come out for the DS, but I'm puzzled as to why I haven't seen many real-time strategy games. They have even started coming to consoles but not the DS, even though the stylus could easily replace a mouse. Why haven't game developers taken advantage of the touch screen and Wi-Fi connection to make something like StarCraft for the DS?

Nathan Coburn
via email

Have you played any of the real-time strategy games developers attempted to

make on the DS? They will make you cringe. You'd think that the stylus could just replace the mouse, but the tiny touch screen makes it difficult to issue orders with any kind of precision. Plus, there is much more to a good RTS than just selecting your units. You need to multitask, micromanage, and wage war on multiple fronts; these crucial elements are difficult to adapt to a handheld control scheme. We're not saying real-time strategy on the DS can't be done, but there are a lot of problems that need some ingenious solutions.

Easy Listening

Thanks for the Sound Check section in your last issue. It's nice to know that I am not the only dork who enjoys the musical scores in video games. I became hooked on soundtracks after playing Mass Effect - it must be an '80s electronica thing. Anyway, I look forward to Parts 2 & 3 of the Newcomer's Guide to Video Game Music.

Don Stiger
via aol.com

We're glad that you liked the feature. Don't worry - if you love video game music, you are definitely not alone. In fact, plenty of dorks enjoy it so much that they form bands exclusively devoted to it. This month's installment of



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

GI COMMUNITY

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

THE QUESTION:

Who is your favorite video game horse, and why?



My favorite horse is easily Shadowmere from Oblivion. I mean, she's jet black, has red eyes, belonged to a lifelong killer, and can throw down to boot! What about her isn't awesome?!
Joe43302

My favorite horses are the Alliance ones that the humans ride on. Especially when it's the level 40 ones that have no chance of escape
SmackeyTheFrog

Agro from Shadow of the Colossus. There's no way you could make it through the vast land and those gigantic colossi without him

He was more than just a horse - he was your friend to the end.

Wii_Master

It comes from a mediocre game, but the Undead Bone Horse from Two Worlds is probably the most unique horse I've ever ridden. It just screams badass, even if the game isn't

HulkSDurkin

Before you enter the area where Snake's entry vehicle crashed in Snake Eater, you hear the Boss' horse. The first thought to go

through my head when I heard it was if I could eat it or not

King Süshi

Everyone loves Epona, Link's trusty steed. Who wants to walk across Hyrule?

Iorsberg1785

My nomination goes to Hudson Horstachio of Viva Piñata. Sure, fast horses are great, but a candy filled one - now there's a winner

Phoenixmofa



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

Meet The Samura1. This cyber-criminal gained fame hacking office networks from deep within his mom's basement. But suddenly he was blocked from his cyber dojo, and the master is now the student.

Visit hugsforhackers.org

Tough on Threats. Easy on You.

70 million people switched to AVG 8.0 because it protects from online threats without slowing PC's or networks to a crawl. That put a lot of hackers, and their threats, out of business. But we're dedicated to the rehabilitation of every lost soul defeated by our award winning software. To help us help them, visit hugsforhackers.org. Do it now, because somewhere there's a hacker who needs a hug.



Tough Question

What happened to the good old days when beating a game actually meant something? Breaking controllers and pulling out your hair in frustration has given way to mind-numbing simplicity. In the past few years, games have become easier and easier to finish. Where's the challenge? It seems like I breeze through just about every game I get with no real effort. Am I the only one seeing this, or am I just too nostalgic for the NES glory days?

*Karl Hegyi
Cleveland, OH*

It's not that games aren't difficult anymore; they're just difficult in different ways. If a modern game implemented the same design choices that make people go starry-eyed for the "glory days" of difficulty, no one would play it. Imagine if you had to start Super Mario Galaxy over from the beginning every time you put it in your Wii. Or let's say that you had to play through Call of Duty 4 with only three lives (and maybe a continue). Instead of relying on these kind of artificial, external limitations, the medium has evolved to the point where it can provide you with more organic challenges based on mechanics. Most of today's games aren't as hard because they are simply designed better. You may not get the same bragging rights for beating a game, but you also aren't putting up with garbage like memorizing an entire speeder bike obstacle course in Battletoads.

Kicking It

It was good to see your picture in GI Spy of the Minnesota Vikings' kicker Chris Kluwe playing Guitar Hero, simply because it is nice to see a blending of the cultures. All too often I see pictures of celebrities playing exactly what you'd expect: footballers playing football games, wrestlers playing wrestling games, and so on. It's cool to see what a famous person is really playing.

*Jon Bruinooge
Green Bay, WI*

Praise for a Vikings player coming from a reader in Green Bay? Now we've seen it all. Anyway, despite the number of growing celebrity skills used to promote games, there are still plenty of notable names (like Chris Kluwe) who are true gamers through-and-through. Maybe developers can start creating games that cater to this exclusive crowd of stars, like My Press Conference Coach, or Dancing With The Me.



JOSE DIAZ
We'd be pretty nervous hanging out with either of these guys

reader art



MEGAN BECK
It's good to see Professor Layton spending time with people his own age



MATTHEW WEATHERSTON
For most people, their haircuts in old pictures are embarrassing. Not for Solid "The Sneaky Mullet" Snake



NOAH SUMMERS
If only there were a game where Batman and Joker could fight, possibly involving Mortal Kombat characters. Oh, to dream...



BRYAN CASTILLO
Any alternate interpretation of Wario is an improvement in our book

DRAGON BALL Z

ドラゴンボール

BURST LIMIT

バーストリミット



COMING JUNE 10, 2008



Burst Limit © 2008 Dragon Ball Z™: Burst Limit © 2008 Atari, Inc. All rights reserved. © 2008 Bird Studio/SHUEISHA, TOEI Animation, Licensed by FUNimation Productions Ltd. All rights reserved. Dragon Ball, Dragon Ball Z, Dragon Ball GT, and all logos, character names and distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks of TOEI Animation. Developed by NAMCO BANDAI Games Inc. Game © 2008 NAMCO BANDAI Games Inc. Marketed and distributed by Atari, Inc. New York, N.Y. Atari and the Atari logo are trademarks owned by Atari Interactive, Inc. The ESRB rating icons are registered trademarks of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Use of this product is subject to acceptance of a license agreement. The terms of this license agreement can be found in the product's manual. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Online access requires broadband Internet service and a wireless access point or LAN. Certain limitations apply to Wi-Fi connectivity. User is responsible for Internet service fees. © 2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft.

NEWS

What Do You Think

Perceptions are weird. They can be right, they can be wrong, but they are definitely important — especially if you're a publisher or developer relying on millions of customers to put down their hard-earned money. Game Informer was curious what you the readers thought about the companies that make and publish the games you play, and over 1,300 people responded to our survey.

Our main aim was to gauge the perceptions respondents had to overall brand experiences. Who do you trust and who is to be avoided? Does this even matter when it comes to the games you buy? Some of the data was not conclusive. Not surprisingly, when ranking which of the three console manufacturers — Nintendo, Microsoft, and Sony — they trusted to deliver good games, the results were pretty evenly split, with Microsoft slightly edging out Nintendo and Sony. Other times, the data revealed contradictions. Take a peek at our questions, your answers, and a quick analysis of the results.

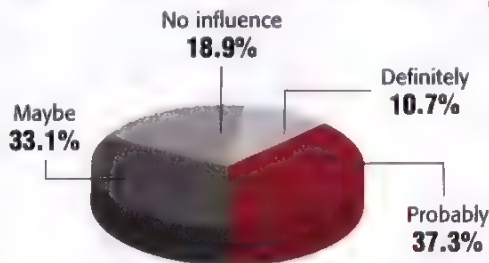
Note: All percentages are based off an online survey of 1,346 respondents.

BUYING PATTERNS >>>

While gamers keenly weighed in on which developers they did and didn't like, the majority of respondents only felt that the developer listed on the box was "Moderately Influential" when it came to buying games. Overall, it appears that many gamers judge titles mostly on a case-by-case basis.

In a broader sense, this measured approach extends to other areas, such as buying new intellectual properties versus already established franchises or licensed games. When asked about licensed games, 54.2 percent of you took the middle-of-the-road option, saying you sometimes buy licensed games depending on the title.

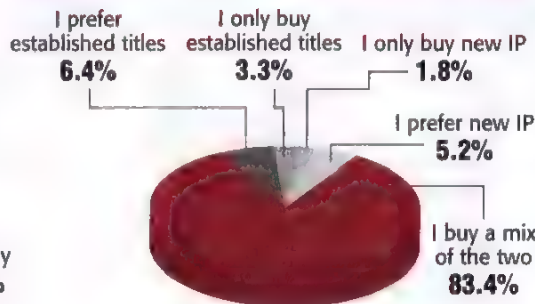
If you liked/disliked one game by a developer, how likely are you to buy/not buy a game by that same developer?



How influential is a game's developer to whether you buy a game or not?

Extremely influential	5.9%
Strongly influential	20.2%
Moderately influential	42.8%
Not very influential	19.7%
Not influential at all	11.4%

Do you value new IP over an already established franchise or vice versa?

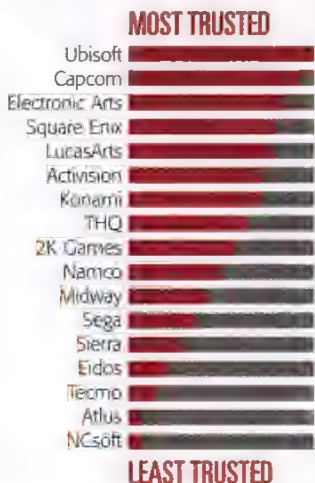


Most Trusted
Probably
No influence
Maybe

I buy
Not Trusted

PUBLISHER PUBLIC OPINION >>>

Out of the following third-party publishers, which do you trust to make good games?*



*Respondents were asked to grade each company individually on a five-point scale ranging from Most Trusted to Somewhat Trusted to Not Trusted. The companies listed here are only ranked by their averages.

UNLIMITED ENABLED
Want to crunch the hard data? Check out our full survey results in this month's Unlimited section, including a number of questions not shown here.

› Although only 26.6 percent of Activision's tally notched in the Most Trusted category, the bulk of its responses (40.5 percent) fell just below the highest score.

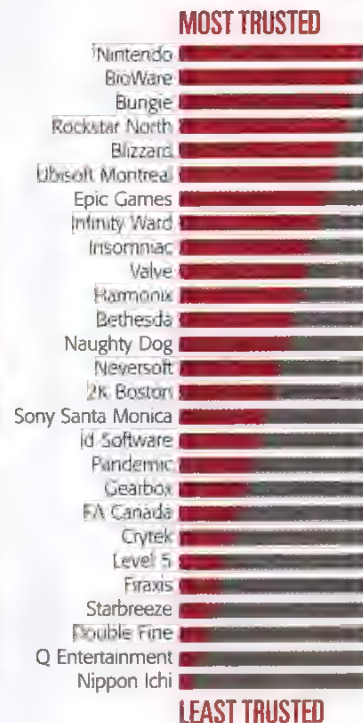
› 2K Games rates right in the middle of the pack, but 85 percent of the company's scores lie in the Somewhat Trusted category and above.

› The two cellar dwellers, NCsoft and Atlus, both actually scored around 40 percent in the middle, Somewhat Trusted category. Did these two companies fare poorly mainly because their products are niche and people don't know them?

› No company tallied a majority of its scores below the Somewhat Trusted category, showing a relative positive outlook by our respondents.

RATING THE DEVELOPERS >>>

Out of the following developers, which do you trust to make good games?*



† For the purposes of convenience, Nintendo's various development offshoots were aggregated into one unit for this survey.

› Some of the cult developers – Double Fine, Q Entertainment, and Nippon Ichi – sit at the bottom despite wide critical acclaim.

› BioWare had the lowest amount of marks in the Not Trusted column with only 20 responses out of 1,297.

› Although Valve, Ubisoft Montreal, Infinity Ward, Insomniac, and Bethesda scored the majority of their responses in the Most Trusted category, some of them were beat by companies like Harmonix and Epic in the overall standings.

a mix of the two

Strongly influential

I only buy new IP **Definitely** Moderately influential

Not influential at all I prefer new IP

I prefer established titles I only buy established titles

Extremely influential **Somewhat Trusted** Not very influential

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

PS3 BIOSHOCKER

One of Xbox 360's premier FPSs, *BioShock*, is coming to the PS3 this fall. It is assumed that the post-release content for the 360 and PC versions of the game will be included in the release, but a feature set for the game has yet to be announced. In other *BioShock* news, *Pirates of the Caribbean* director Gore Verbinski is handling the *BioShock* movie. Verbinski says he sees the movie being similar to *Blade Runner* in its overall tone.



SONY ANNOUNCES HARRISON SUCCESSOR

Sony named Shuhei Yoshida as Phil Harrison's successor as president of the company's worldwide studios. Yoshida is a long-time Sony employee, including stints as SCEA's vice president of product development and senior vice president for the worldwide studios. Sony's president and group CEO Kaz Hirai says he expects Yoshida to lead the company and "accelerate" PS3 and PSP software development.



PS2/Wii ROCK BAND EXPANSION CUTS DLC SHORT

PlayStation 2 *Rock Band* owners haven't been able to download any tracks for the game like next-gen gamers (Wii rockers will be in the same boat), so MTV Games is releasing *Rock Band Track Pack Volume 1* for \$29.99 on July 15th. Unfortunately, the game does not feature all of the DLC that's been made available, instead, Volume 1 cuts only 20 tracks.



PS3 GOES YOUTUBE

Sony and YouTube have struck a deal that allows PS3 users to upload in-game video captures to YouTube. Right now this feature is only available in Japan, but the deal is worldwide and it can be integrated into existing games via an update.

BLIZZCON TO EXPAND

Tickets for BlizzCon 2008 should be on sale shortly. The convention, being held at the Anaheim Convention Center October 10th and 11th, is expanding in size this year due to fan demand. Not all of BlizzCon's activities have been announced, but you can be sure you'll get to bask in all things *Warcraft*, *Starcraft*, and *Diablo*. Check out www.blizzcon.com for more info.

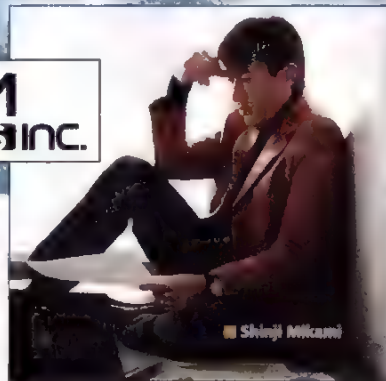


PLATINUM GAMES STARTS OUT STRONG

CAPCOM/CLOVER VETS TEAM UP WITH SEGA

PLATINUM GAMES INC.

Capcom's Clover Studio was an exciting developer that attempted daring games like *Viewtiful Joe* and *Okami*. Although Clover didn't find as much commercial success as it did critical, gamers appreciated the studio's adventurous attitude and sense of style. Now the talent from Clover – including [right] Shinji Mikami (*Resident Evil*) and Atsushi Inaba (*Okami*) has come together again to form Platinum Games. The company has signed a four-game deal with Sega over multiple platforms. The fourth title, which is being directed by Mikami, has not been announced to date.



MADWORLD

When your protagonist has a chainsaw for an arm, there's only one direction to go. With its *Sin City*-inspired visual style, *MadWorld* sets to take the Wii by bloody force. You can impale people in the head with street signs, splatter enemies on a giant dartboard for points (known as *Man Darts*), and grab foes and smash them into beds of spikes. In other words, the ESRB won't have to think too long on this one.



BAYONETTA

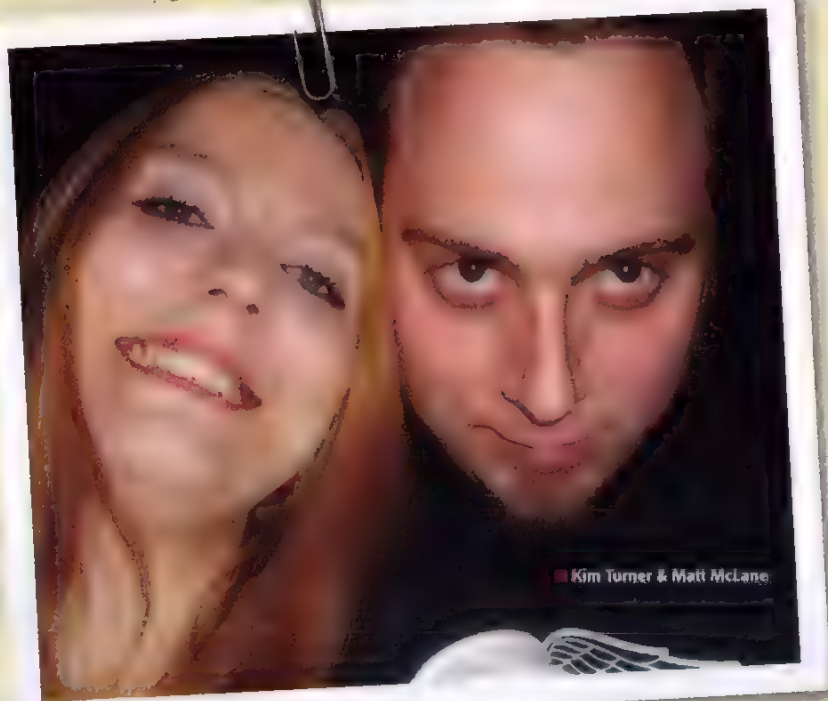
Headed by the director of *Devil May Cry*, Hideki Kamiya, *Bayonetta* is a witch with guns on both her hands and feet. The game's initial trailer doesn't show much, but it's clear that *Devil May Cry*'s hyper-stylized brand of action is carrying forward here on the PS3 and 360. Guns on your feet will do that.

INFINITE LINE

Based on *Childhood's End* by Arthur C. Clarke, *Infinite Line* is a Nintendo DS title that allows you to customize your ship with over 150 design models and hire an equally large number of crewmembers. The game mixes 2D and 3D gameplay focused on boarding enemy ships, real-time ship combat, and more.



Gamers

**Accomplishments:**

Longtime couple Matt McLane and Kim Turner have amassed more than 400 million fans on Rock Band's World Tour mode. The next closest band has a good 60 million worth of catching up to do.

Origin of Skills:

"We've always tried to be higher on the Guitar Hero leaderboards, but were never able to get there because everybody had it before us," Turner says. "So once we got up to about 150 million fans and we were in the 5th or 6th spot, we decided right there that we had to do our best and just work at it to get the number one spot."

Time and Strategy:

"We just play and play and play," Turner says. "We play about four to five hours a night." The band strictly plays guitar and bass on Expert and tries to earn as many gold five-star ratings as possible. "What I've been reading is you get whatever it takes to five star the point amount, multiply that by 1.52, and that's the score you have to get to get the gold stars," McLane says.

Life Outside of Rock Band:

Turner works at Wal-Mart and McLane works in the plastics industry. "I take little plastic pellets that are made of BBs, melt them down, and shoot them into molds and make parts for cars like air filters, things like that," he says.

Guitar of Choice:

"I prefer the X-plorer," McLane says. "I didn't care for the Les Paul wireless — [due to] the detachable neck,

I had a lot of problems with buttons not responding." Harmonix will be relieved to know that at least the other half of the band likes their Fender Stratocaster controller. "I really like the little frets,"

Turner says. "I like being able to just finger tap through solos. It's a lot easier, and I can strum a lot faster."

Other Games:

"For a while we were going back and forth to Guitar Hero III, but it's got a way different feel on how the note charts work," McLane says. "It's kind of a difficult transition to move back and forth so we pretty much stick with Rock Band now." McLane also enjoys Call of Duty 4 and the Tony Hawk series, while Turner prefers JRPGs like Blue Dragon, Enchanted Arms, and Folklore.

The Future of Rock Band:

Both band members agree that a bass solo tour would be great. McLane hopes for more '90s music like 311 and Tool, while Turner would like an expanded World Tour so the band can earn even more fans.

Staying On Top:

"Hopefully, [we don't have to do] this five-hour-a-day thing much longer," Turner says. "I get kind of tired. But I would like to keep the number one spot for as long as we possibly can. It's nice to know that you're number one."

MOST FANS

Matt McLane &
Kim Turner

Handle:

sonnyxchiba

Band Name:

Bender v2.1

Age:

27 (McLane),
23 (Turner)

Hometown:

Mount Victory,
Ohio

Rival Bands:

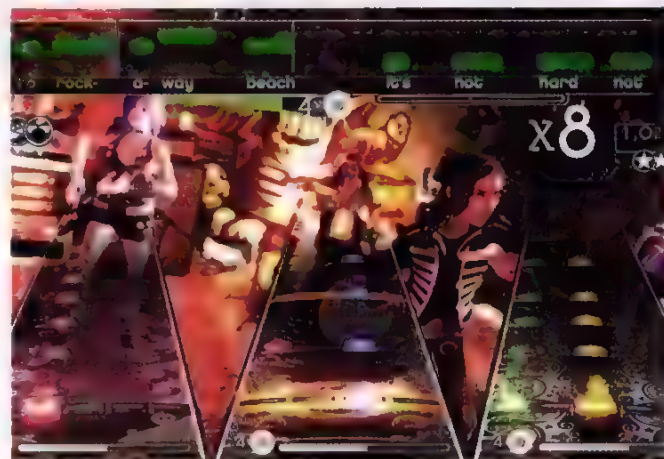
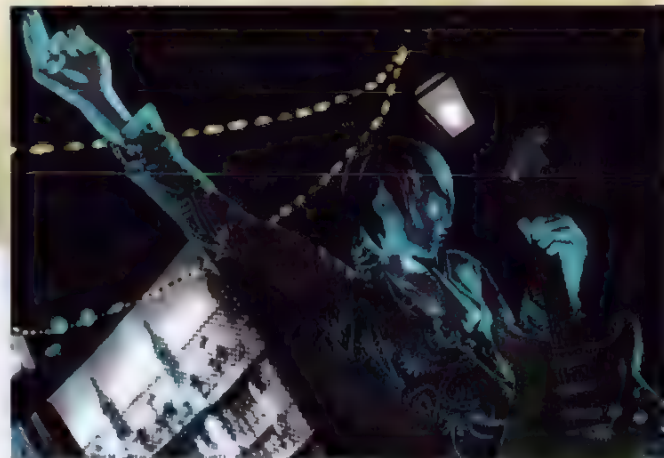
Warbear and
the Tiger Horse,
Spacelord

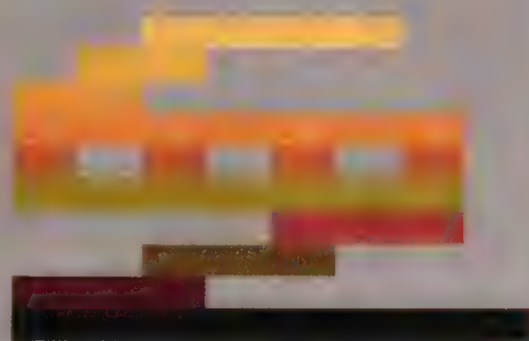
Favorite Track:

"Cherub
Rock" by The
Smashing
Pumpkins

Rock Band Idols

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





■ E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial on the Atari 2600: worst game ever? Or impressive feat of programming?

WHY DO GAMES GO

BAD?

It's one of the most hallowed tales in video game history: A game so bad that hundreds of thousands of copies ended up buried in a desert somewhere in New Mexico. So goes the legend of Atari's E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, but that's only half the tale. After the box office success of Steven Spielberg's film, Atari spent more than \$20 million to purchase the rights to make an E.T. video game. Unfortunately, after all the financial haggling, the company had less than six weeks to develop the game to meet its Christmas deadline. The fact that one man — Yar's Revenge creator Howard Scott Warshaw — developed the game so quickly casts this story in a slightly different light. Good intentions don't always result in good games, and sometimes the deck is stacked against developers. But why is that? Why is it so difficult to make a good game? We polled experts from across the industry to talk about why good games sometimes go bad.

I have never ever had a developer that didn't put enough time in or not want more time to make a product better.

Dean Martinetti, Producer, Spark Unlimited

TIME

The problem isn't with limited time, it's with trying to do too much in too little time, or not properly accounting for problems that will arise and eat up your time unexpectedly.

If anything, having to give too many demos, regardless of whether it's to people inside or outside the organization, has a bigger negative impact on game development than most other single events. You'd think they could be anticipated, known, and scheduled properly, but they never are, and they can drop out of the sky and lay waste to a week of productivity here and there throughout the whole development cycle.

The easy and by-the-book answer is that extreme crunch time comes from not following the plan you made for the time constraints you have, or not making a proper plan for your game with the time constraints you have. Reality is a million times more complicated than a book.

You would prefer to work on a game until it's done, but more often than not you're going to have a scope and a budget that's one tenth of what you'd like to have. The business reality is that time and budget are driving against you. The most successful people in the industry are those who can understand the business and still remain creative.

Eric Lindstrom
Creative Director,
Eidos

Kim Krogh
Game Director, IO
Interactive

Mike Mika
Studio Head, Backbone
Entertainment

OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

When I was the president of the studio and was the only person I could turn to for game development, I thought that it was true. People know how many hours I had put in and where someone from a rival studio and they seemed to be rich in change in the game in order to get ahead of you, but it was a hard forecast. So many, and I believe that it has me to believe that I have to take creative advice from someone who probably plays games every week because he has to and not because he wants to. It also bugs me that I have to do some game because marketing doesn't get it. The one time it truly pissed me off was when we played up PlayStation. A great great game that got little to no attention because the marketing team couldn't get their heads around it and wasn't a hit. They didn't even want to pick the game up because they don't know how to market it. Marketing plays that role.

These types of outside influences occur on every project. At some point someone wants a triple jump because that is what the market wants even though the dev team thinks it should only be a double jump because it's better for gameplay.

You have a product for EA, and you want to make it the way that you produced when we showed it at E3. After the show, we got no feedback from the publisher that said, "We'd like to take the pet simulation that you did and make it a platformer." You would have picked a team opposite game from what we had, and we literally had weeks left to make the change. We said, "No" twice, but this was a publisher that had a lot of weight behind them, and they come back saying, "Don't we, no again?" So it is a matter of how much you had to compromise on the game.

LICENSES

The biggest problem with a license is the amount of time you have to do it. You have to do it in a certain amount of time, and you have to do it in a certain amount of time. You have to do it in a certain amount of time, and you have to do it in a certain amount of time. You have to do it in a certain amount of time, and you have to do it in a certain amount of time.

Working on a license is usually a pain in the ass. Nine times out of ten the person you have to work with on the license end has no idea how to make a video game or what it takes to make one, much less what makes a game fun. They only care about the license and the "brand" of it all. Usually it's "We need to get this game out when the movie comes out," and the developer will ask "Well, when does the movie come out?" and they get "six months from today" or something idiotic like that.

It would be great to have the person making a game at the same time as the movie, but that doesn't happen. Film has a very different production cycle than games do. They're much longer process and much longer. A lot of the time, games are being handled by the movie studio's product division. They're doing alongside the same thing as Lindbergh and the other things, and the movie people are managing them.

I have worked on numerous licensed titles in my career and have found that most of the bad licensed games are created because the publisher or holder of the license wants specific items in the game that don't work well in an interactive experience. For licensed properties everything must be approved by numerous parties and may take a long time to get the team the information they need to move forward. Imagine creating six months worth of work on a driving engine and then you get the feedback back from the publisher or license holder. "Oh, the main character never drives a car in the movie, so would you take that out?"

TEAM DYNAMICS

Haden Blackman
Project Lead,
LucasArts

It really is like casting a movie in a lot of ways. You've got to find chemistry between all these people. If your lead engineer and your lead artist don't get along, you're in for a really long haul.

Dean Martinetti
Producer,
Spark Unlimited

I hear that there are some executives out there that came from the foods industry or the automotive industry and I get a weak stomach. I mean it's great to have these people for their business know-how, but they do not know the first thing about games or interactive entertainment for that matter. And this, my friends, is a vastly different affair than a car or a frozen dinner. You have to know your audience before you step into these shoes. Otherwise you misguide the entire process.

There was a lead designer on a game I worked on a long time ago that was starting fist fights with his teammates and was basically just an a-----. Those are rare cases and usually you never hear from those types again. A cancerous atmosphere is no good in a creative industry like this one. It kills creativity; it makes you worry more about keeping your ass employed rather than making a great or good game.

Frederik Fusager
Producer,
IO Interactive

Like in many other companies and industries, poor management can kill a project even before it starts. If not skilled and experienced enough, management can make poor decisions resulting in walking the fine line between the life and death of a project.

Eric Lindstrom
Creative Director,
Eidos

When people talk about bad development atmospheres, they often mean ones imposed on a team from the outside. When I was a tester at EPYX in the late '80s, I left just before the company collapsed under the weight of its debt. In the final months, with so much uncertainty in the air, it was very hard for teams to focus on their work.

ETC.

Cordy Rierson
Development
Director,
The Collective

There are random acts of God. It happens. Life happens. And you do what you can to work around those issues. I lost my father during the alpha phase of a project, and it happened to a partner of mine on another project. I worked as a third party vendor with some people who were down in Florida when a lot of hurricanes were going through and there were days when things just went dark, because no information could get through and everything was down. You have to deal with that stuff. You deal with it as it comes.

Eric Lindstrom
Creative Director,
Eidos

I was at EA during the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989 that closed us for days. I've seen small fires, extended power outages, and even a pretty exciting plumbing disaster at Crystal Dynamics, the details of which are best left unmentioned. My mother also passed away while I was making the game Solar Eclipse earlier in my career at Crystal and I abruptly left my team on its own for a week.

Mike Mika
Studio Head,
Backbone
Entertainment

Here in the Bay Area it rains a lot sometimes, and the roof of our building – it used to be an old engine factory, so it could be better. And once during a big crunch this water started gushing in from the corners of the room and it was getting on computers and all our work. Good creative people grabbed a bunch of tarps and taped them over our heads to make a channel for the water to drain out. During this crunch we were constantly looking over our heads to make sure the tape was holding. It was very stressful. We had nowhere else to go and we had to finish the game.

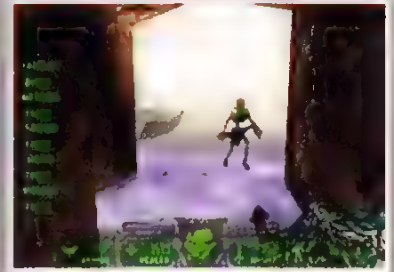
Dean Martinetti
Producer,
Spark Unlimited

I have never ever had a developer that didn't put enough time in or not want more time to make a product better. Most dev teams work insane hours to get the job done, and 99 percent of the time are really into what they are doing. No one wants to make a bad game; sometimes it just happens and is unavoidable.

TALES FROM THE DARK SIDE

DAIKATANA PC & N64

Doom co-creator John Romero had a very ambitious approach to making Daikatana: use a green team to develop a new IP with outdated technology in only seven months. It's not too surprising that the development turned into a storm of delayed release dates, in-house squabbles, and major design and engine changes. A large portion of the original design team even left in the middle of production to go work on another title. It also didn't help that the game was aggressively marketed from the onset to be an explosive success. One ad actually read, "John Romero is about to make you his bitch." He sure did.



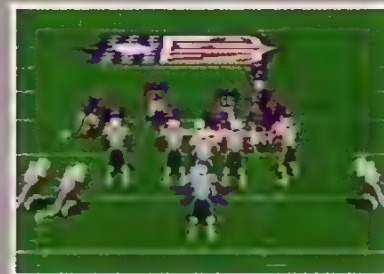
SUPERMAN 64 N64

Superman 64 was clearly a victim of two of game development's worst villains: time and money. Labeled one of the worst video game titles ever by many, Superman 64 was an atrocious mess of game-breaking bugs, terrible graphics, and poor gameplay. Superman has

an impressive list of superpowers, but the ability to walk through doors was definitely a problem with the game's code. We weren't in any of the licensing meetings, but we wish someone mentioned that it's a bad idea to rush a game through QA.

JAWS UNLEASHED PS2

Game glitches, freeze ups, and poor camera control weren't the only problems in Jaws Unleashed. The tale of Jaws is part of a larger story about bad business decisions. Publisher Majesco spent millions buying big license properties such as Jaws, Aeon Flux, and Martin Scorsese's Taxi Driver before finding itself in financial trouble when those investments failed to harvest a return. But you can't put all the blame on Majesco when developer Appaloosa had Jaws collecting key cards to open locked doors. What were they thinking?



MADDEN NFL '96 PSone

Tiburon hasn't always handled the Madden mantle. EA used to outsource their flagship franchise, and back then the company hoped to publish the first football game for Sony's brand new PlayStation. Unfortunately, developer Visual Concepts didn't meet the rigorous design schedule

while learning the ropes of a brand new 32-bit console. After numerous delays, EA and Visual Concepts eventually had a falling out and the publishers scrapped the game. Madden '96 stands as the most famous example of a publisher making that difficult – though probably correct – decision. Too bad they didn't make the same decision with Madden NFL 06 for the Xbox 360.

news

ACTIVISION, LUCASARTS DITCH THE ESA

E3 TAKES A HIT

In the past few years, industry event E3 – where publishers and developers congregate to showcase upcoming titles to the media and retailers – has been changing. This year's convention will again be markedly different. Activision and Vivendi Games (soon to be merged together), among others, have pulled out of E3. Activision, as well as LucasArts and id Software, has even terminated its membership with the ESA, the trade organization that puts on E3.

Game Informer reached out to Activision, LucasArts, and the ESA, but none of the companies would elaborate on the reasons for the fallout. In a statement Activision cited vague "business reasons," while the ESA took it upon itself to characterize LucasArts' departure from the organization as led by "unique factors." Despite its disassociation with the ESA, LucasArts says it will still attend E3. Other companies, such as Foundation 9, Atlus, and NCsoft, have confirmed they are skipping the event.

Last year, E3 was held in Santa Monica versus the usual Los Angeles Convention Center – the site to which it will return to for 2008. This move cost the ESA a reported \$5 million in cancellation fees paid to the LA Convention Center last year. There is speculation that this prompted an increased cost to ESA members. Publishers already pay large amounts of money for booth space at E3, as well as hidden development costs as studios push to provide playable demos for the convention.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



GOOD

Last year the Tony Hawk franchise bailed while Skate soared, as Activision's Hawk was outsold two-to-one by EA's upstart series. Thankfully, Activision wants to take something positive from this beatdown. The company says that it has no Tony Hawk title planned for this year, with the skating franchise taking a much-needed rest until 2009.



BAD

Texas-based Anascope has won a \$21 million decision in a lawsuit against Nintendo. A jury found that Nintendo had infringed upon Anascope patents in the design of the Wii Classic, Wavebird wireless (shown), and GameCube controllers. Nintendo says it plans to appeal the ruling, and expects to have the decision reduced. Anascope also sued Microsoft, with which it reached an out-of-court settlement.

BAD

Last month we told you about the sad loss of Prototype's multiplayer. The news goes from bad to worse, as now Sierra has delayed the game to an unspecified time in 2009. When asked if multiplayer could be reintegrated given the extra time, a PR representative for publisher Sierra said that it was "evaluating" the possibility.



GOOD

Ubisoft wants to help you help yourself via the Nintendo DS. The publisher is releasing a software version of Allen Carr's book *The Easy Way to Stop Smoking*. One of the game's strengths is that you can't burn smokes off of it when you break down and get desperate.



GOOD

Your PC can stop feeling inadequate because it doesn't meet Crysis' high tech specs. Developer Crytek says that future games in the series and from the studio in general will no longer be PC exclusives. The move is being made because of piracy.



BAD

The now officially titled *Guitar Hero: World Tour* has lost one major feature that was discussed in our June cover story on the game (issue #182). The game's Jam Mode, which would have allowed players to freely improvise over chord changes and scales from the game's soundtrack, has been removed. Thankfully, the game's more complex music creation studio mode will still be included in the game, allowing players to create their own original GH tracks.

news

THE HEART OF GAME DEVELOPMENT

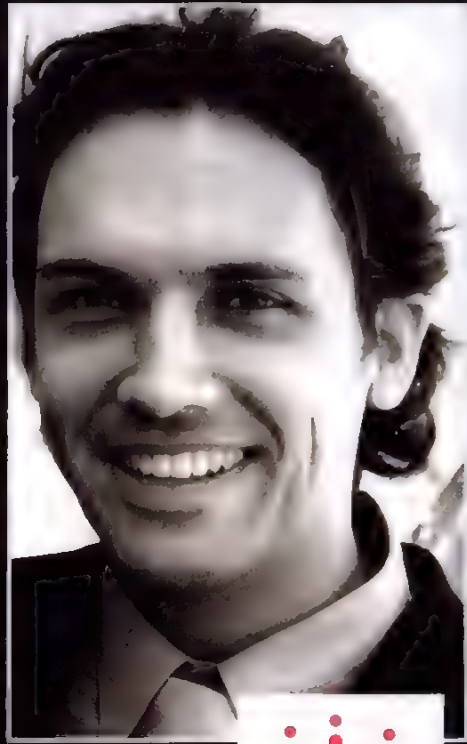
ONEBIGGAME UNITES DEVELOPERS FOR CHARITY

Inspired by the music industry and its successful charity/awareness events such as Live Aid, ex-Guerrilla Games (*Killzone*) co-founder Martin de Ronde created OneBigGame to harness the creativity of the games industry to do the world some good. "I think what OneBigGame is doing is providing companies with a platform to help the world become a better place," de Ronde told us. "Many, many game designers we have spoken to have said, 'This is great. I can actually do something good for the world with my game design skills.'"

OneBigGame is currently working out deals with developers of all sizes for them to create games that OneBigGame can host on its online portal for gamers to play, with the money after operating costs going to worldwide charities that have a giving rate of 90 percent or more to ensure that the aid goes to those in need. "What we don't want to do is send a big check to a large, corporate non-profit or charity organization and just say, 'That's it.' When we are speaking to our current charity partners, we are stressing the fact that we want specific projects."

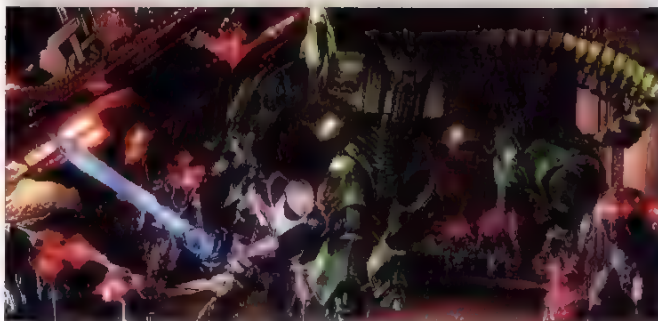
Currently, the games expected to be offered are PC flash titles, but de Ronde says three console games are in the works (although OneBigGame has not signed consent agreements with the console manufacturers themselves), and it hopes developers will utilize existing game brands to not only further those game franchises, but to create added excitement for fans.

For more information, please check out www.onebiggame.org



LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



SILICON KNIGHTS UP FOR SALE

We've heard Canadian-based developer Silicon Knights (Too Human) is up for sale – meaning that another currently exclusive Microsoft partner might leave the fold. Last year gamers were surprised when Microsoft let Bungie and Project Gotham creators Bizarre Creations go their own ways. Too Human is being planned as a trilogy of games, but if a sale goes through, future installments likely won't be 360 exclusives.

MORE ON ROCK BAND'S DLC

Harmonix has finally kicked off full downloadable albums for Rock Band, with Judas Priest, The Cars, and The Pixies leading the way. We're hearing that after The Pixies' *Doolittle*, the developer plans to put out Rush's *Moving Pictures*.



BRÜTAL LEGEND TURNS DARK?

The world is waiting to see what Tim Schafer and Double Fine have cooked up in the rock 'n' roll lore-inspired *Brütal Legend*, but Loose Talk has heard that all is not well at the studio. Apparently, the studio is not happy with the recent Activision/Vivendi merger, and may be looking to release its game with another publisher.

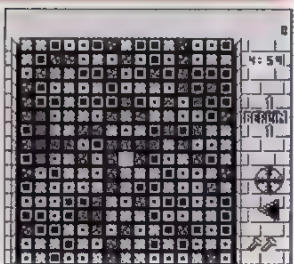
Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gamemformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

We all know Alexey Pajitnov for his seminal work *Tetris*, but that was far from the last game the puzzle master created. This mid-90s game, which appeared on the SNES and other systems, expanded on the concept of *Tetris*. You dropped colored blocks in order to make like-colored blocks in groups of two or more disappear. You can also shift groups of blocks left and right as well as use special objects like dynamite and rockets, which can destroy blocks in their way. *Tetris* may be an unbeatable classic, but this game at least shows that genius never rests.

(Answer on page 27)



SOUND CHECK

A NEWCOMER'S GUIDE TO VIDEO GAME MUSIC

PART 2 OF 3

Last month, we examined some of the best recent original soundtracks for games. In our second installment of *Sound Check*, we take a quick look at the ever-growing world of video game cover bands. A relatively recent phenomenon, these gaming-focused musicians take familiar tunes (most often culled from 8-bit classic games) and reinterpret them in their own unique style. We've included four of the most well known bands in this growing genre, plus a few other of our favorite suggestions. Generally, each of the bands' music is available on iTunes or through their websites. Check back next month, when we'll conclude our *Sound Check* series with an examination of the wider world of online video game music remixing.



The Advantage

This talented group currently based out of California has released a self-titled album and a follow-up entitled *Elf Titled*. Both releases tend to an eclectic mix of the familiar and the obscure, but are united by their intense attention to detail and rhythmic precision. From *Metroid* to *Mega Man*, the band chooses the most musically complex tracks from a given game, rather than the most remembered. Refreshingly devoid of extraneous instrumentation, *The Advantage* offers one of the most exciting options around for a pure rock take on the world of the 8-bit sound clip.



Minibosses

The Minibosses is one of the most prolific gaming cover bands out there. Active since the turn of the century, the band has reinterpreted dozens of familiar gaming tunes. Their sound delivers clear and crisp melody lines with a solid rhythmic background, often steering into a harder edged driving beat than you'd sometimes expect out of the likes of *Ninja Gaiden* and *Kid Icarus*. As of this writing, you can check out a lot of their recent work for free on their website, then choose whether you'd like to support them with an album purchase.



The OneUps

A totally unique sound sets *The OneUps* apart from their contemporaries, as they focus entirely on loose interpretations of classic gaming tunes in a jazz/funk style. Their *Bossa De Link* is *Zelda* as you've never heard it – smooth and languid, with some excellent solo work throughout. The rest of their still growing catalog is great fun, if for no other reason than to hear how they approach the familiar melodies.



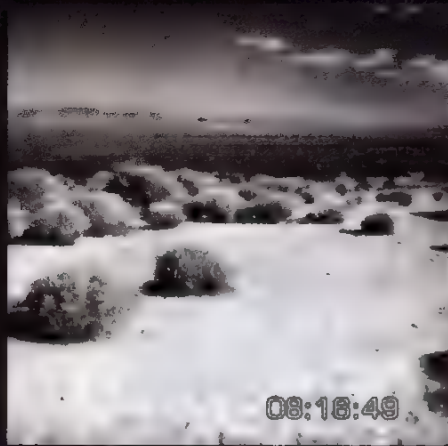
Powerglove

If you've ever wondered what *Final Fantasy* licks would sound like run through a power metal filter, *Powerglove* is the band for you. Even if you haven't, you'll likely be amazed at the technical skill exhibited by the band on every track from their premier album, *Metal Kombat for the Mortal Man*. Musically complex and adventurous, *Powerglove* brings a new sound to the scene.

So Many More:

More groups than we have room for here deserve your attention. In particular, we love the experimental sound of the *NESkimos*, where they repeatedly try out new styles to match the sentiments of individual games and series. For bands focused on individual series, you might enjoy Nobuo Uematsu's own *The Black Mages*, who hone in primarily on *Final Fantasy* tracks. Alternately, check out *The Megs*, a group that is suitably named for their specialization in the various awesome tunes that emerged out of the *Mega Man* series. The lesson to take away? There's a lot of great stuff out there to enjoy once you start looking around.





impulse

BY MATT MILLER

Lost Winds breathes new life into the Wii's online suite. Eden asks: How does your garden grow? And Penny Arcade takes you to the precipice of darkness. Pleasant surprises abound for the curious downloader.



for the Wii remote that is far more intuitive and functional than most. Players guide around a little boy who is accompanied by the spirit of the wind. With quick flicks of the remote, you control the breeze, sweeping the adorable protagonist to and fro through his world.

New powers emerge over time, such as the ability to pull fire from a torch and send it scorching ahead to burn down a blockade of vines. It's a strikingly original variation on traditional 2D platforming, and the beautiful art design and music only accentuate the clever idea.

Live Arcade had a long awaited surprise for us in late May, when

Penny Arcade Adventures: On The Rain-Slick Precipice of

Darkness, Episode One finally released. It may be pricier than most arcade releases, but it's totally worth it. The mix of RPG combat and old school adventure gameplay is handled with a deft eye towards lampooning these traditions and at the same time showering them with adora-

This emerging downloadable scene offers constant surprises. Sure, a few questionable titles make their way to market, but there's also a lot of great experimental games we never would see if they were shoehorned into the standard retail model. Shorter development times and smaller teams add up to lower-cost games. At these cheaper prices, the folks with the money become a lot more magnanimous about letting a team stretch their wings to try something new.

PixelJunk Eden

serves as a fine case in point. Exclusively found on PlayStation Network, Eden doesn't offer a lot of guidance as you're dropped into the strange color palette of its game world. You're a small creature that can jump and swing about on a web-like line. By gathering pollen as you wildly fly about the stage, you plant seeds that grow into new plants, creating more new points to jump and swing to, and the cycle continues. Reach far and high enough, and you'll find destinations that recharge your time limit and allow for continued growth. It's a straightforward design that seems innocuous until you turn the thing off, at which point you'll spend the next several hours waiting to play again. The experience is made even more fun by grabbing some friends to play



May saw the first public releases for Nintendo's downloadable platform, and at least one of the early games deserves your attention: Frontier's **Lost Winds**. For a fraction of the cost of one of the many dubious releases crowding retail Wii shelves, Lost Winds delivers a use



cooperatively, where the ability to fling and catch each other adds yet another layer of gameplay. It is without a doubt an unusual title, but like the game world itself, it grows on you.

At long last, WiiWare is making its entrance.



tion. The webcomic's trademark humor is very much intact, presenting an absurd and refreshingly original world. Think steam-punk meets H.P. Lovecraft meets film noir and you're halfway there. The worst I can say about the game is that after you finish this first installment you're likely in for the long haul; Episode 2 will be out within a matter of months.

STORIES



> Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life As A King
Square Enix's premiere WiiWare release had me ready to cry foul when I learned I'd be hanging back in town building shops and houses while I sent out NPC adventurers to do the real work. Move past that initial frustration, and the game reveals itself as a pleasant little community builder - simple but addictive.



> Linger In Shadows
This unusual PSN release isn't really a game. It's more of an interactive video, where a strange sequence of shapes and animations flow together into a smorgasbord of color and images, all of which you have control over. Potentially a herald of things to come from Sony, it certainly breaks the mold.



Siren: Blood Curse
Survival/horror finds a new home on PlayStation Network. Spanning 12 downloadable episodes, Blood Curse tells the story of an American TV crew investigating a mysterious Japanese village. While sharing a setting with the earlier PS2 Siren game, this is an entirely new story with some stunning eye candy. By next month, I should know whether it plays as well as it looks.



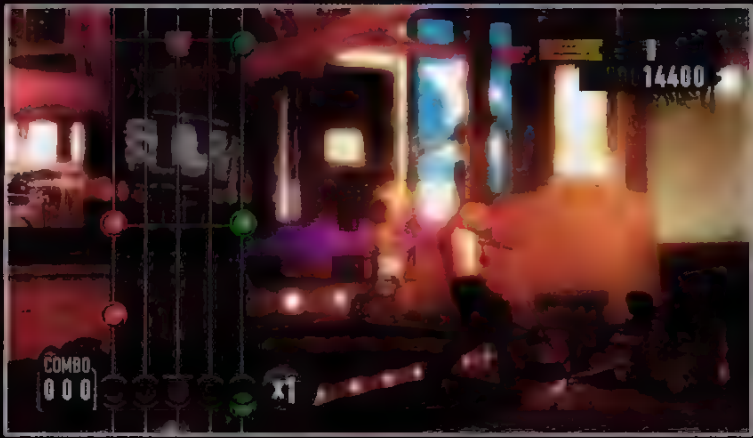
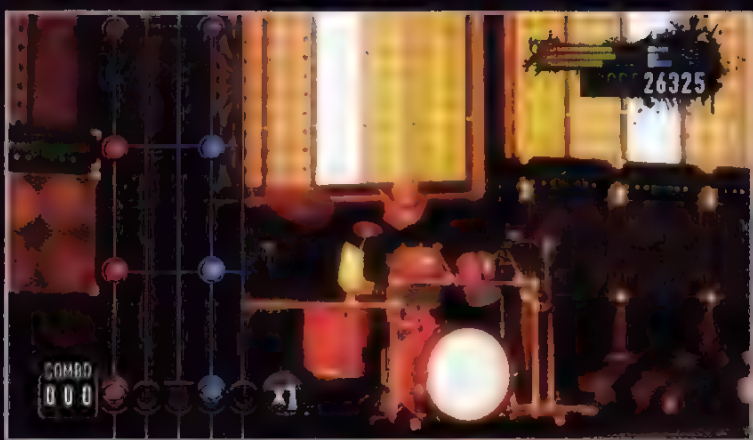
KONAMI PROCLAIMS ROCK REVOLUTION!

NEW DRUM SET & 40-SONG SET LIST

In music, you have to respect your roots. Before Guitar Hero or Rock Band, Konami held the torch for the music genre with its Bemani series, which includes Dance Dance Revolution, GuitarFreaks, and DrumMania. Therefore it's no surprise that Konami has announced Rock Revolution. The game features a six-pad drum set (a snare, three cymbals, two drums, and a kick pedal) and comes out this fall on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii, and the DS.

Rock Revolution features 40 cover songs, and apart from playing through all the songs, its three instrument career mode (drum, bass, and guitar) contains challenges such as having to avoid poison notes while playing or making your way through a song without the benefit of seeing any of the falling notes. Although the game doesn't use master tracks, it is turning this to its advantage by letting you perform fills at any time that will sound out along with the song in real-time. It also features a Jam Mode where you head into the studio to create your own music.

Konami isn't talking about instrument controllers for the game beyond the drum set, but the recent demo we saw was being played with a Guitar Hero Les Paul controller. The company says downloadable content will be available, and Rock Revolution's online mode will feature band vs. band play, co-op, and multi-instrument face-offs.



Here is a short list of just some of the confirmed cover songs for Rock Revolution:

- "Am I Evil?" – Metallica
- "Blitzkrieg Bop" – The Ramones
- "Chop Suey!" – System of a Down
- "Dance, Dance" – Fall Out Boy
- "Dr. Feelgood" – Mötley Crüe
- "Last Resort" – Papa Roach
- "No One Like You" – Scorpions
- "Round and Round" – Ratt
- "Sk8er Boi" – Avril Lavigne
- "Somebody Told Me" – The Killers
- "Spoonman" – Soundgarden
- "Walk" – Pantera
- "We're Not Gonna Take It" – Twisted Sister
- "Youth Gone Wild" – Skid Row

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER
BEN JUDD
Producer, Bionic Commando

- 1 Guardian Heroes – Saturn
- 2 StarCraft – PC
- 3 Street Fighter Alpha 3 – Arcade
- 4 Phantasy Star II – Genesis
- 5 Policenauts – Saturn



READER
ROBERT A. JOHNSON JR.
Hyde Park, MA

- 1 Tekken: Dark Resurrection – PSP
- 2 Patapon – PSP
- 3 Star Wars: Battlefront II – PSP
- 4 Marvel vs. Capcom 2 – Arcade
- 5 Beatmania – PS2

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine/Top Five
724 N 1st St 4th Fl
Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: toptive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists... Everybody Loves Lists...

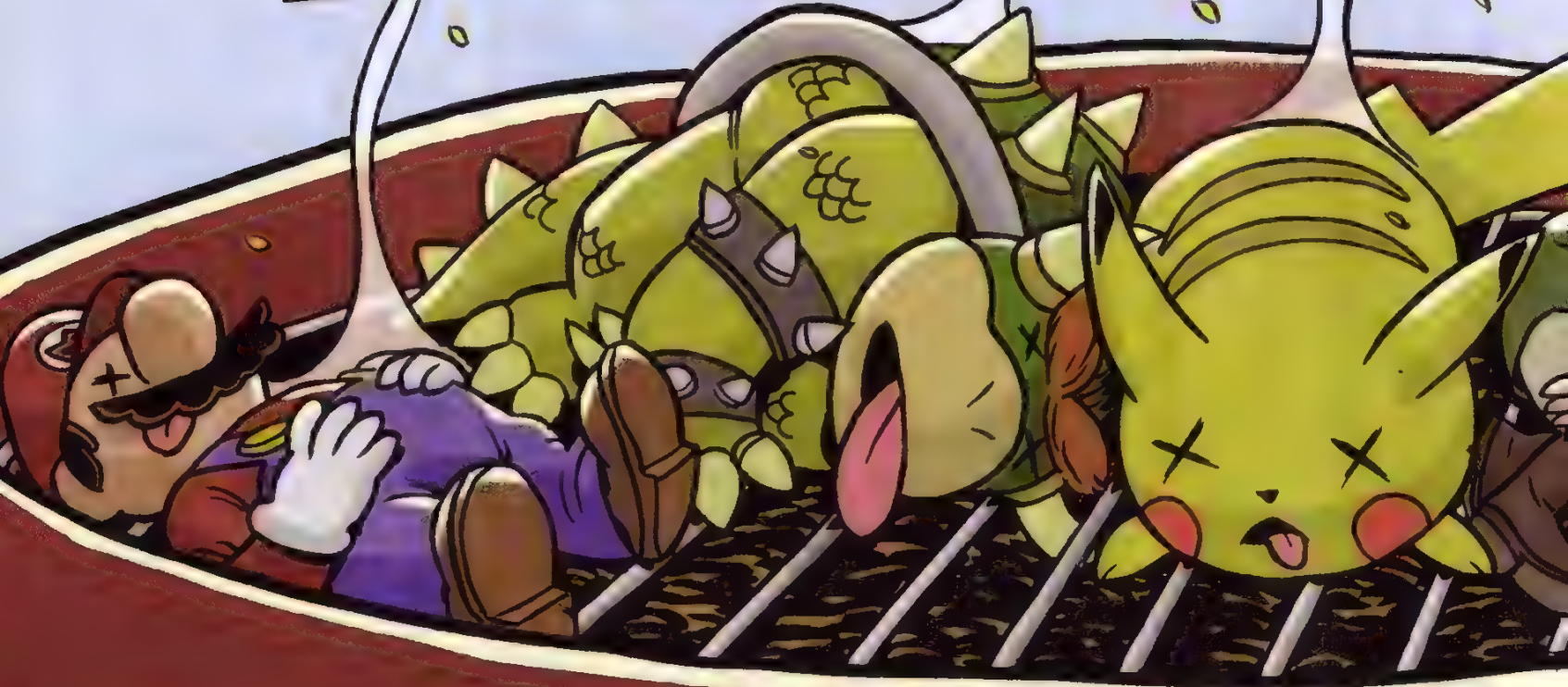
Top 10 Ways To Ensure Nothing Interrupts Your Metal Gear Solid 4 Sessions

- 10 Put a sign on your door stating "Alone time, if you know what I mean. Keep Out."
- 9 Wear camouflage in the exact pattern of your sofa. This material can be taken from the back of said sofa.
- 8 Set up C4 and claymore mines to deter intruders
- 7 Threaten to dress up as "Naked Snake" if disturbed
- 6 Keep a stack of rations, tree frogs, and cobras handy for sustenance
- 5 Put an exclamation point above your head... somehow. That'll show 'em
- 4 Dress your little brother up as Raiden and have him replace you as your life's protagonist
- 3 Move your TV, PS3, and surround sound speakers into a cardboard box. No one will ever look in there!
- 2 Discard or destroy all nearby copies of Grand Theft Auto IV to avoid distraction
- 1 Repeatedly yell "Snake! Snaaaaaake!" if anyone tries to move you

Name That Game Answer: BreakThru!

Game Informer's Second Annual*

SACRED COW BARBECUE



A few years ago, we launched our very first Sacred Cow Barbecue, a feature that knocked some of gaming's most revered icons off their high and mighty pedestals. Not surprisingly, the story earned us more than a few angry emails and not-so-nice phone calls from some gaming PR people. However, we've recently gotten hungry for another meal of freshly grilled cheap shots and ice cold Haterade. To that end, we present our Second Annual Sacred Cow Barbecue! Come on in and inhale the whirlwind of fresh beef. Assuming we all still have jobs after this, we'll be glad to print your responses in next month's Dear GI.

*In this case "annual" means "whenever we feel like it."

Artwork: Zander Cannon

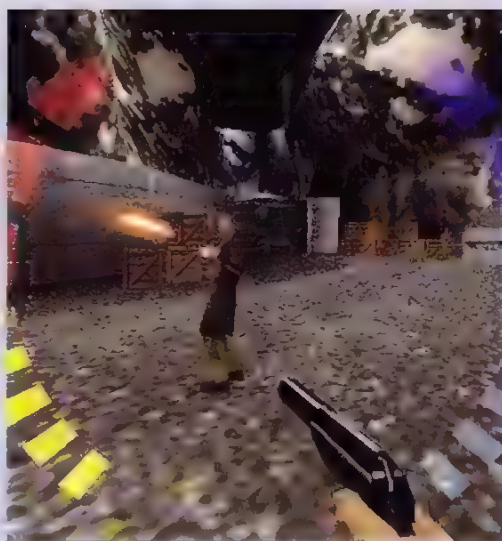




Chrono Trigger

Imagine you were in elementary school. Let's say you wrote a story for a creative writing assignment. Perhaps that story was about a boy named Crono with a Flock of Seagulls haircut who traveled through time with a sentient frog named Frog and a Robot named Robo trying to defeat an alien being called Lavos who is trying to destroy the planet for some reason or other. Along the way you meet some cave-woman named Ayla and some other chick named Marle, who's really a princess but pretends not to be a princess. Then you end up saving the world and meeting a room full of Japanese video game developers who say "thanks for playing our game."

In school, turning in work like this might earn you a trip to the psychologist's office and quite possibly a seat in the "special" class next to the kid that eats paste. But in the crazy world of video games, you'd be praised for being a deathless masterpiece of the role-playing genre. Chrono Trigger proves that RPG dorks will buy literally anything, just as long as it's Japanese and doesn't make a lick of sense. For the rest of us, the game reveals itself to be nothing more than a bunch of tired genre clichés, the worst of which is the mute protagonist, who serves the purpose of making every other character in the game sound like they are talking to Lassie: "C'mon Crono! You wanna go save the world? Do ya? Do ya? Yeah, boy! Who's a good doggie? Yes, you are!"



GoldenEye 007

Some great games stand the test of time. Others scream out "You had to be there," like an awkward retelling of that joke that seemed so funny at the party last night. GoldenEye 007 frequently makes "Greatest Games of All Time" lists, a perplexing phenomenon that can only be explained by a single theory: We're pretty sure no one's actually played this damn thing since 1998. We have, and believe us — this game eats a bag.

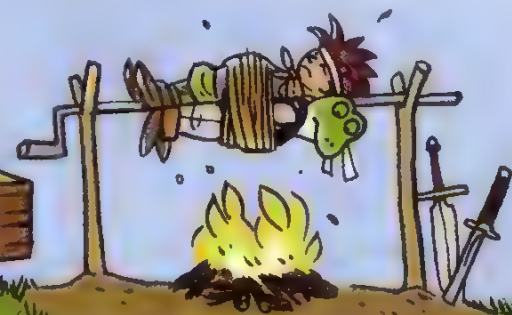
Booting it up again, the first thing you'll notice is how temble it looks. The enemies appear as though they were hastily assembled from olive drab cardboard boxes, not that you can actually tell as from a distance the N64's blurry display renders them as little more than distant smudges on the horizon. The levels are largely bland military facilities decorated in a two-color palette: gray and puke. Even worse, the game's square-headed Bond is mute and exhibits all the charisma and panache of a department store mannequin (or Timothy Dalton!). But all this doesn't prepare you for GoldenEye's control scheme. Much like our grandparents talk about the Great Depression, we'll someday regale bored children with tales of life before two analog sticks. Listen up, kiddies: It wasn't pretty. The "classic" multiplayer almost achieves mediocrity, assuming you like playing painfully simple game modes on a postage stamp sized quadrant of your TV. For making FPS a console staple, we'll admit GoldenEye is of historic importance. But so is the cotton gin, and we're sure not going to waste our weekend playing with one of those.

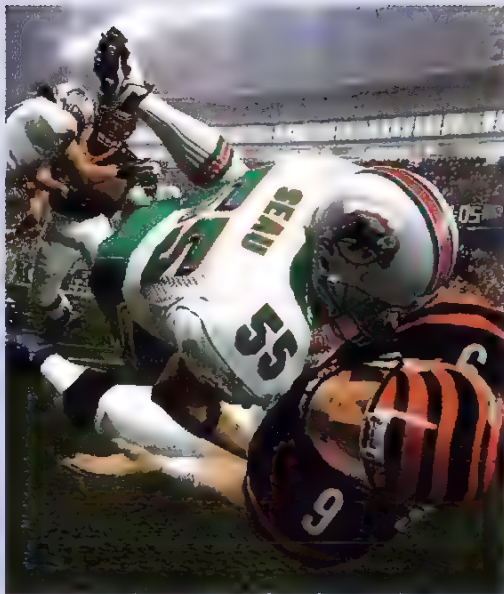


Gran Turismo series

It must be nice to work at Polyphony Digital. Imagine being highly paid to crank out what are essentially identical versions of the same game over and over, just adding a few new cars, graphical tweaks, and tracks each time. But it gets better! Unlike most sports franchises, which at least have the excuse of having to come out on a yearly basis, you only have to deliver a title as often as the U.S. changes presidential administrations!

Oh, Gran Turismo. Where to begin? Or, more importantly, where to end this endlessly dull, poorly designed rust bucket? We've tried committing virtual suicide by crashing into a light pole, but since the game has yet to implement vehicle damage, we had no luck. So, all that's left is to keep racing the same tracks over and over, winning exciting things like fake licenses and the right to drive cars that are even worse than the hunks of junk we drive in real life. Our rough estimate is that out of the 200-plus cars you'll find in a GT game, at least eight or nine are actually fun to drive. Really, hasn't it been your dream to drive a used Honda Civic that can barely exceed 75 mph, helplessly spinning out on every corner you dare to take at speeds faster than a leisurely stroll? Thankfully, Polyphony Digital is here, making sure that your flea-bitten Sentra is accurate down to the last pixel. And it's a good thing too, because if they didn't spend so much time recording engine sounds for every car on Earth and taking reference photos of mufflers, they might have time to implement things like a good career mode or cool online features. Who wants that? Oh yeah, everyone that bought Forza 2, Burnout: Paradise, and PGR 4.





ESPN NFL 2K5

Once upon a time, in a land far, far way, we lived in a state of football nirvana. Indeed, the shining knights at Visual Concepts had made the greatest football game of all time! A masterpiece that could never be topped: NFL 2K5! This digital monument to gridiron glory could only be stopped by the evil meanies at EA, who were so threatened by its greatness that they convinced the patsies at the NFL to give them an exclusive license and ruined the fun forever.

When it comes to overly romantic memories, few so-called greats have more built-in mythology than the NFL 2K series. The only problem is, once you strip away the fanboy hatred of EA, the game isn't really better than another mediocre edition of Madden. Apparently, VC didn't feel like fixing any of the series' mynad problems like the spotty secondary play (could those morons EVER catch an interception?), horrible play-by-play, and the totally generic quarterback AI (only in 2K does Michael Vick play exactly like decrepit, old Kerry Collins). Instead, they piled on gimmicky features like the inclusion of ESPN blowhard Chris Berman, lizardy draft "expert" Mel Kiper, Jr, and a "Crib" mode that allowed you to play dollhouse by furnishing garish apartments that were some unholy mix between Barbie's Dreamhouse and an episode of MTV Cribs. Want more? How about "first-person football"? Yep, that was great – for about five minutes until you realized it was completely unplayable and nausea inducing. But hey, it was only \$20, proving once and for all that you get what you pay for.



Half-Life series

The greatest first-person shooter series of all time? A lot of people would say so, and if that's true, the genre's in worse trouble than we thought. For a second, let's strip away all the critical kudos and look at Half-Life with fresh eyes. For a series that's been praised for its great storytelling, we sure as hell can't make head or tails of this convoluted collection of sci-fi drivel. Evil corporations? Yep. Aliens? Check. Zombies? Oh hell, why not? To top it off, you have Gordon Freeman, a sad geek of a main character, so completely devoid of personality that his only notable feature is his hideous indie rock glasses. Really, there are only two reasons anyone should ever be caught dead in frames like that: 1) You're the lead singer of Weezer, or 2) You're in a cell phone commercial saying "Can you hear me now?" – expected, Gordon fails on both counts.

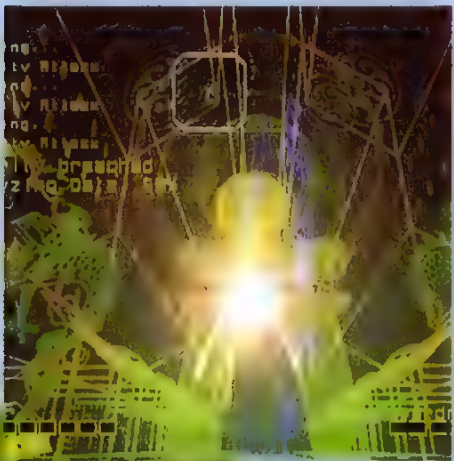
While we're willing to admit that, yes, the Half-Life games are pretty damn good looking, the graphical fireworks fail to distract from the fact that a lot of this game is just fancy packaging for the same old song and dance. Yes, Half-Life, you sure have nifty physics, but physics-based box puzzles are still the same old Tomb Raider jive we've been sick of for years. Also, your only cool enemies – the walkers – were ripped off from HG Wells, but hey, at least dead guys don't ask for royalties! And one more thing: would it be too much to ask the greatest FPS game of all time to include a little multiplayer that's not Counter-Strike or an add-on pack? Apparently so.



Super Smash Bros. series

Super Smash Bros. is essentially the Celebrity Fit Club of video games: a bunch of flabby has-beens assembled together to engage in meaningless jumping around for hours on end. Except instead of seeing Screech from *Saved By The Bell* act like a jerk to Joanie from *Happy Days* – which at least provides some entertainment value – all SSB gives us is a seemingly endless series of poorly designed beat 'em up contests starring a veritable Who's-Not-Who of video games.

Okay, fine, there are a few characters (i.e. Link, Samus, and Mario, the only three Nintendo characters that have sold a game in the last 20 years) that have some cachet. But even Miyamoto would have to admit that, these days, Mario's about as choosy when it comes to guest appearances as Snoop Dogg and T-Pain. The rest are – let's be honest – just dreadful. Pit? Diddy Kong? The Ice Climbers? Seriously, these guys couldn't get past the door guy at a decent video game nightclub, and they look like Solid Snake compared to losers like Mr. Game & Watch and R.O.B. The gameplay itself is designed to be "fun for all ages," which basically means that skill has nothing to do with winning or losing, as even the most hardcore gamer can get lucky by a six-year-old because he or she happened to get a omeddy power-up at the right time. Really, it's more like unsupervised recess at an elementary school than an actual game, but as long as suckers keep buying this tripe Nintendo will be more than happy to cash the checks.



Rez

Gamers love a failure, and for this reason Sega still gets more than its share of love amongst the hardcore crowd. It's easy to see why: They've released a bunch of crappy consoles (which somehow became "underrated" the moment they died), most notably the Dreamcast, which is considered by some to be the greatest system ever for... having a terrible controller, worse graphics than PS2, and about a dozen good games in its library. Sega also has a host of so-called cult classics games that played terribly and sold worse. While even we don't have the heart to tear into the bloated, boring train wreck that is Shenmue, we'll gladly perform a takedown on Rez, a goofy shooter that's considered an overlooked masterpiece for reasons we'll never fathom.

You often hear that Rez is innovative, and boy is it ever. Its unique and adventurous visual style was just as groundbreaking when it was used in *Tron* and *Battlezone* almost 30 years ago! And the soundtrack! Don't forget that! If only more games would have made use of faceless, generic techno music that even superstar trance hacks like DJ Tiesto and Paul Oakenfold would be embarrassed to spin for drunken frat guys on spring break in Acapulco. However, the real genius of Rez lies in its gameplay. We've honestly never seen anything like it. While it's hard to sum up its complex design in mere human language, we'll try: You point your reticle at enemies onscreen, and then when you let go – they explode! Crazy, huh? Oh, we almost forgot: when they blow up the sounds they make are kinda sorta almost in time with the music, making this game *totally* unlike any other shooter you've played before. What more is there to say about Rez? Actually, nothing. That's the whole game, yet another legendary title that completely fails to live up to the hype. We admit that Rez would at least make one hell of a screensaver. ■ ■ ■

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1969 Teach the Children

Walsh begins his career as an educator, teaching school in districts in Massachusetts, Washington D.C., and Minnesota

1978 Advanced Psych

Leaving education, Walsh takes a job as a psychologist at Fairview Health Services in Minneapolis

1996 Founding Father

Seeking to help parents deal with an increasingly complex media environment, Walsh founds the National Institute on Media and the Family at Fairview Health Services, which he leads to this day

1996 Grading the Industry

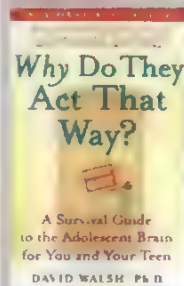
The Institute issues its first Video Game Report Card, criticizing the game industry for a lack of a universal ratings system and the violent content of its games. The Report Card garners worldwide media attention

2000 On Capital Hill



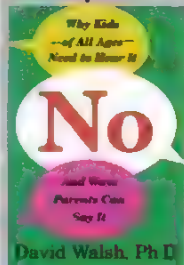
Walsh testifies before the Senate Commerce Committee on the effects of video game violence on children

2004 Critical Lit



Walsh published the book *Why Do They Act That Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen*. The book is widely praised and sells strongly

2007 On Discipline



Walsh publishes another best seller, *No: Why Kids - Of All Ages - Need to Hear It, and Why Parents Can Say It*, this time on the subject of parental discipline

DAVID WALSH

PRESIDENT, NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON MEDIA & THE FAMILY

>> Whether in the press or on Capital Hill, Dr. David Walsh has been a critic of the game industry's marketing practices, violent content, and ratings system. We recently spoke with Walsh on a number of these issues. <<

For some of our readers that aren't familiar with you, explain what it is you and your organization do and how it relates to video games.

A lot of your readers may not have an accurate view of who I am and what we do, because we're often perceived as being against video games – which is not true at all. The mission of the Institute is to maximize the benefits and minimize the harm that media has on children's health and development. We don't come at it from a religious or moralistic point of view. What we try to do is to provide information for parents to make good choices about media. Our basic belief is that media is powerful and getting more powerful as the technology advances. It's not good or bad – just powerful.

You've continued to issue the Report Card each year. How do you estimate video games in terms of influence on children as compared to other media?

I think that the impact of video games, both positive

and negative, is greater than other forms of media. So, we shined the spotlight on that. One of the results was the advertising code of conduct, where video game producers have a commitment that they won't market games to kids. We then shifted to the retailers, because we knew that any 10-year-old could go in and buy a game. When the retailers announced three years ago that they were no longer going to sell those games to kids, they literally credited the Institute in their announcement.

Moving forward, what are the biggest changes you'd like to see happen?

I'd say that the room for the biggest improvement now is on the parent's side. We've been saying that for a couple of years now. We know from our surveys with kids that there are a lot of parents that don't pay attention. That's why, in the Grand Theft Auto IV release, we did something we've never done before: we issued a joint press release with the ESRB. We both agree on the fact that it's important for parents to understand that it's not a game for kids.

The book presents things in a more subtle fashion, whereas most of the debate about game violence has been very inflammatory. How damaging is Jack Thompson to the dialogue?

Extreme positions create a lot of heat but very little light. Television and talk radio love extreme positions. So, there are folks out there who do not hesitate to take positions that they can't defend. You get these food fights going on that talk radio loves, but don't really advance our understanding and knowledge whatsoever. It got to the point where I had to publicly distance myself from Jack Thompson.

Are you familiar with the book *Killing Monsters* by Gerard Jones? He makes the case that some degree of fantasy violence is actually beneficial in that it's cathartic to kids and helps them form early ideas of conflict and morality.

It's an interesting theory but there's no research to back it up. What scientists call the "catharsis hypoth-

It's important for parents to understand that GTA IV is not a game for kids.

and negative, is greater than other forms of media. As a psychologist, I am aware of how interactive media has a greater effect on us compared to passive media. If I'm watching television, I'm a passive observer. When I'm playing a video game, I'm making the decisions. When I do something, it has an impact. That's a powerful learning model.

You've always been a watchdog in terms of video game ratings. In its current state, how effective and informative do you think the ESRB ratings are?

What we have consistently said is that the ratings are an effective tool for parents to use for making game choices for their kids. Is it perfect? No. Part of our job is to be the voice regarding children's health and welfare. When you look at some of the major industry changes over the last 12 years, you can track them to the Video Game Report Card. When we started, the ratings weren't universal. Some were rated; some weren't. In the very first Report Card, one of the things we called for was one ratings system that everyone can agree upon. Once that got into place, we realized that even though some games were rated for M, they were being marketed to kids. It was easy to find; they were literally being advertised in *Sports Illustrated for Kids*.


What was your reaction to the recent book *Grand Theft Childhood*, which called into question a lot of the methodology involved in the studies that purport to show a link between game violence and violent behavior?

We put out a statement that had a dozen of the leading scientists that signed a statement 18 months ago saying that the scientific evidence shows a link. Now, it's the nature of the link that's important. It doesn't mean that a kid who plays a violent video game is going to become violent. The research says that a heavy diet of violent video games is a risk factor for increased aggression. You need to understand what "risk factor" means. If we [use] the analogy of health, we know that there are a handful of risk factors for heart disease. If I'm obese, if I have a family history of heart disease, if I smoke, and if I don't get any exercise, you'd say that I'm a walking heart attack. As you add risk factors, you increase the probability of a problem. Just the fact that I'm overweight does not mean that I'm going to have a heart attack, because as a matter of fact most people that are overweight don't have a heart attack. Most people that play violent video games don't become violent. But is it a risk factor? Yes, it is.

esis" has been around for a long time. The idea is that you "blow off steam." That would make sense if our brains operated on hydraulic principles – the pressure builds up, we release the pressure, and we are relieved. Our brains don't operate like that at all. Say you've changed your phone number. If I want to remember it, what do I do? I say it out loud, I say it again, and then write it down. I keep firing that circuit, so when I need that number an hour later I've got it. The more a circuit fires, the more likely it is to fire in the future.

You've testified many times in front of Congress regarding game violence. Would you like to see Congress step in with legislation with regards to games?

No, I'm not in favor of censorship. Once we delegate to the government what we can and can't say and freedom of expression – and video games are a form of expression – that's a very slippery slope. I think government can have a role. I think the role they've been playing is the "bully pulpit," to raise awareness.



■ Dr. David Walsh is one of gaming's most thoughtful and reasoned critics

THE
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pc

ALIENWARE AREA-51 M15X LAPTOP

★★★★★

With a 512MB NVIDIA GeForce 8800M GTX, the m15x devours power guzzling PC games like Crysis. We love the system's elegant, clean design, and with its Blu-ray burner and HDMI port this baby is capable of delivering some quality hi-def entertainment. The system's built-in Command Center is also nice for customizing light effects and managing the system's battery supply. The main drawback of this beauty is that due to all the power it pumps out, the unit can get hot and loud, and for only a 15-inch screen it's a hefty little toy.

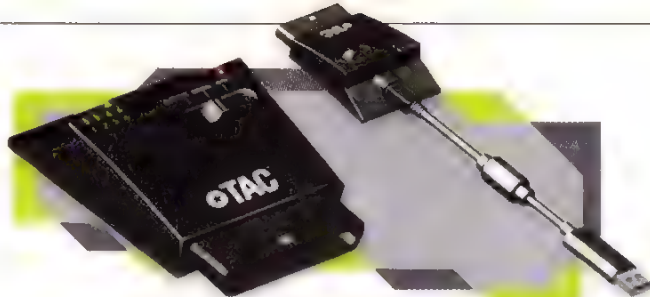
3D Mark Score: 9257

\$1,539.00 • www.alienware.com

etc

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You aren't still carrying around your laptop in that blue jean messenger bag from junior high, are you? The one where you drew, "I ♥ DiCaprio" on the side? Face it, you need a new style, and Solo has got you covered. This excellent selection of sturdy, stylish, and very portable cases are great for gamers constantly on the go.

\$95.00 • www.solocases.com

peripherals

TAC ROCK COMMANDOS ADAPTER

★★★★★

If you've already committed to a PS3, chances are you only have your PS2 still connected for one game series: Guitar Hero. The TACs Rock Commando Adapter allows old PS2-era guitars to work on the PS3, which means you can rock out to the original Guitar Hero without dusting off the PS2. Unfortunately, the adapter isn't compatible with Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the '80s or Guitar Hero II, an unforgivable oversight. The Commando also works with standard PS2 controllers, but this is a moot point considering the rumble functionality doesn't transfer and the DualShock 3 is now available. Save your money.

\$19.99 • www.theantcommandos.com

peripherals

LOGITECH DRIVING FORCE GT FOR PS3

★★★★★

Racing just isn't the same without a palm-numbing wheel rattling in your hands. Logitech hopes to, uh, get your palms raw with its new rumble compatible racing wheel for the PS3. The official racing wheel of Gran Turismo, the GT feels great and has a 900-degree rotation. Though the wheel worked with every game we tested it for, one of its coolest features, a 24-position adjustment dial lets you fine tune settings such as brake bias on the fly, will only work with Gran Turismo. While the wheel itself is great, we found that the pedals lack a certain amount of weight we like to have underfoot.

\$149.99 • www.logitech.com

relics

WORLD OF WARCRAFT FROSTMOURNE REPLICA

Seeing Prince Arthas' sword in real life probably stirs up some powerful emotions among the Warcraft faithful. So just imagine the crazy nerdgasm you'll have when you buy this 47-inch stainless steel replica. Each sword comes with a leather-wrapped handle, a display mount, and is embedded with a microchip that ensures the authenticity of each replica. We don't advocate the use of this weapon to threaten your friends and their pets. But we'd think it was funny.

\$379.00 • www.epicweapons.com



D&D INSIDER

The online subscription-based D&D Insider gives enthusiastic players something to peruse between game sessions. Articles and new rules will expand the game in between major book releases, including new adventures. A character creator will let you design the exact look of your character, and there's even an online game table that lets players and DMs play across the Internet, placing virtual miniatures on maps that the DM lays out onscreen.

books

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS 4TH EDITION CORE RULEBOOK COLLECTION

Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson published the first version of Dungeons & Dragons in 1974, and in so doing gave birth to the modern role-playing game. Now, over 30 years later, Wizards of the Coast is launching the newest edition of the tabletop classic. The new release is a triumph of design, and includes some dramatic alterations to the structure of the game. For some seasoned players, the wealth of changes may be enough to keep your games grounded in 3rd edition (or 3.5) for the next few years. However, standing on its own, the new edition has a lot going for it.

In many ways, the new D&D is squarely targeted at you. That is to say, it's clear that Wizards is keenly interested in drawing in video gamers who haven't played a tabletop RPG since they were kids, as well as new gamers who've been weaned on the fast-paced excitement of MMOs. At the same time, experienced gaming groups with an open mind should find this ruleset to be comprehensive and filled with fun options.

The biggest fundamental shift in gameplay comes through the use of powers. Every class has access to several of these special abilities, each of which offers

interesting tactical options for every situation. Some powers can be used freely, others once per encounter, and a few only once every day. Gone are the days when your wizard will run out of spells, or your fighter won't have anything interesting to do but a basic attack.

Meanwhile, even as powers add tremendous flexibility and strategy to a session, many other elements of the game have been simplified, from character alignment (there are only five) to skill use (no skill points — you're either trained or not). The noble dragonborn, graceful eladrin, and sinister tiefling races fill the spots of notably absent races like the gnomes and half-orcs. The warlock and warlord classes are inspired new additions to the Player's Handbook, even as druids, barbarians, monks, and bards have been presumably shunted off to a later book release.

Adventure and encounter design (both combat and non-combat) has been streamlined to give dungeon masters an easier time dealing with the boring stuff, leaving more time for the fun of shaping a story and setting. Individual monsters each have designated roles in combat and a few unique and flavor-filled abil-

ties. It's easy to customize changes to these foes, but straight out of the book they're inventive and ready to throw into battle. It's worth noting while on the subject of combat that miniatures of some sort are practically a requirement at this point, which will require an additional investment. That'll be fine for some folks and anathema to others.

It's impossible to ignore how ideal the new mechanics will be for licensure into video games. The structured formula of power sources that offer every character unique powers mixed with the core mechanic of the d20 rules combine to make this a system you will almost assuredly be seeing in everything from action/RPGs to future MMOs. Meanwhile, 4th edition D&D makes for a stellar new tabletop game. For anyone who needs a break from the WoW raid encounters, wants that one dialogue choice not offered in Mass Effect, or thinks they can make a character way cooler than Kratos, now is the time to return to the original role-playing phenomenon.

\$104.95 (\$34.95 each) • www.wizards.com

PAUL CHARCIAN
CO-HOST OF VIDEO GAMES WEEKLY,
CHECK OUT THE PODCAST ON KFAN.COM



The time has come for developers to cater to those of us who want to succeed with our friends, not at the expense of them.

Poker can be an intimidating game, and most people don't have the guts to sit down. Tables are filled with people who have been playing for years and know every tactic. Joining their ranks is almost assuredly going to result in a lengthy series of punishing defeats.

On the other side of the casino is the craps table. Even if you don't see the tables, you know where they are because you can hear them from across the casino. A dozen people, usually all on the same team, are playing together for a single objective: beat the house. When they're successful, they're successful together. The resulting jumping, screams, and high fives are loud enough to be heard by the poker players, who glance up from their cards momentarily before returning to their mental gyrations.

Poker is Las Vegas' equivalent of PvP death-match. Craps is co-op. For a decade, video game developers have been catering to their equivalent of the poker player; studios refine deathmatch with countless iterations and evolutions. The time has come for developers to cater to those of us who want to succeed with our friends, not at the expense of them.

I imagine there's a lot of eye-rolling from GI's more jaded, fanatic readers (how does someone read while rolling their eyes? Point the magazine toward the ceiling?). These people think co-op play is for newbies, wimps, girls, introverts, or a combination of all four, resulting in some kind of überpansy. But, let's face facts: co-op play, in all its forms, is driving the industry's biggest sales numbers. Why? Because it's fun. Strike that. It's more fun.

Developers bold enough to embrace social co-op play have been rewarded financially and in myriad other ways. The current hardware sales juggernaut is the Nintendo Wii, a social gaming console whose sales are driven by people who

have a blast playing at a friend's house and go buy the system themselves. Does anyone own just one Wii remote? The biggest stories in game sales are Guitar Hero and Rock Band. Again, both games offer gameplay driven by a sense of success derived from playing together. Guitar Hero World Tour will feature Rock Band's full lineup of accessories in an effort to keep pace with the cooperative and social aspects of its competitor.

Did you blow someone's mind when you joined a friend's Gears of War session and whom, they found you playing side by side in their campaign? How many millions of Imperial Clones have met their demise at the hands of fathers, sons, and daughters working together to rid the universe of evil in LEGO Star Wars? My wife and her best friend, total non-gamers, evaporated an entire week-long vacation by joyously grinding their way through Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance — one of the best co-op games ever made.

Clearly, the availability of co-op play is growing, but it remains the redheaded stepchild of online play for a few reasons. Studios listen to their customers — especially the ones that speak up. As a result, they've responded to the vocal hardcore players who thrive on challenging PvP play. Second, video game journalists, also hardcore players, reward developers with praise for these features, while rarely addressing a lack of co-op features. Lastly, co-op is a much tougher technology to build. It's harder to code, has more loose ends for developers, and requires more time, money, and effort than PvP implementation. Heck, most products never had co-op in the plans, either because of a failure to recognize the need or an inability to deliver the goods. That's got to change.

Most criminally, online co-op still isn't in Madden. It's 2008, and Electronic Arts still won't let me lead block for a buddy, stretch out for a pass from a friend, and coordinate corner blitzes with a teammate. The game is in its 20th itera-

tion, and despite countless improvements, online co-op continues to be ignored.

How motivating can awesome co-op play be? Here's an example. Raise your hand if you bought and loved The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion. If you're reading this while engaged in an act of self-abuse, choose which hand wisely. Raise your other hand if you'd pay full retail for Oblivion all over again if it had just one enhancement: co-op play. Even those engaged in the previously described activity would be inclined to raise both hands. Bethesda's brilliant opus absolutely begged to be played with friends. Heck, the only reason Two Worlds sold more than a dozen copies was because it was originally thought to be Oblivion with co-op. As it turned out, neither was accurate.

Devs, I'm doing you a favor here. I represent the vast majority of gamers. I'm acting as a voice for the unheard, the people who don't spend time on your forums, and will never earn your coveted "100,000 headshots in online ranked matches" Achievement. We're the people who buy products and urge our friends to do the same when we can have a great time playing together, leveraging our skills for a common objective.

The developers that have already embraced co-op have been rewarded because we buy a lot of their products. But it doesn't happen by accident. From the moment they start dreaming up the Next Great Game, developers should consider how the game would work with cooperative play, either hip-to-hip on the couch or across an online structure like Live or PSN. When you do, you'll be taking your first steps away from the poker table and starting your journey over to the craps table, where the rest of us are already having fun. ■ ■ ■

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



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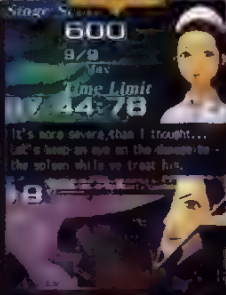
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july

For more information on these games and others go to www.gameinformer.com

NEW RELEASES

- Heist – PS3, 360, PC
- Kitty Luv – Wii
- Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2 – DS
- We Love Golf! – Wii



Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2 – 07/01

In Joe's perfect world, Will Smith would be in every movie. He'd be the lion from *Prince Caspian*, Neo from *The Matrix*, and Vivian from *Pretty Woman*. His latest blockbuster, *Hancock*, opens today, showing us what he looks like both drunk and in tight spandex. YES!



GENERATION KILL

The creators of *The Wire* have teamed with HBO again for a seven-part miniseries called *Generation Kill*. The show chronicles America's attack on Baghdad in 2003. As of press time, a start date had not been given, but it will launch sometime this month.

08

NEW RELEASES

- Beijing Olympics 2008 – PS3, 360, PC
- Carnival Games – DS
- Civilization: Revolution – PS3, 360, DS
- Devil May Cry 4 – PC
- Ducati Moto – DS
- Unreal Tournament III – 360



Unreal Tournament III – 07/08

TRINITY

DC Comics' third monthly series, *Trinity*, started last month, but we thought we'd bring it to your attention as it actually deals with this universe's prime players, and not Jimmy Olsen, Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman take center stage in a story where they apparently all share the same dream.



We'd like to say we'll be the first in line to go see *Hellboy II* today, but that would be a big fat lie. We'll definitely be in line, but we'll be there to give the dreamy Brendan Fraser our money. His latest hit (yes, we are already calling it a hit) *Journey to the Center of the Earth* makes its run for highest grossing film of all-time today. Kisses Brendan!



Hellboy II – 07/11

15

NEW RELEASES

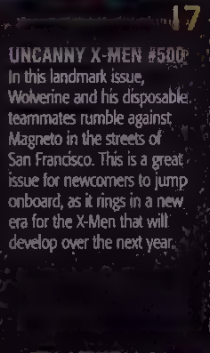
- Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility – Wii
- Nancy Drew: The Bender Society – DS
- NCAA Football 09 – PS3, 360, Wii, PSP
- Rollin' Rascals – DS
- Space Chimps – 360, Wii



NCAA Football 09 – 07/15

E3 2008

ES 2008: 15-17
The Electronic Entertainment Expo has always been the video game industry's most notable annual event, but with a number of key companies backing out, we really don't know what to expect from this year's gathering. There's one thing we can count on, however: All three console manufacturers will find some way to say they are number one in the sales charts.



UNCANNY X-MEN #500

In this landmark issue, Wolverine and his disposable teammates rumble against Magneto in the streets of San Francisco. This is a great issue for newcomers to jump onboard, as it rings in a new era for the X-Men that will develop over the next year.

If you don't go see *The Dark Knight* today, then we can only assume you are hanging out with Reiner. His plans for the day include trying on new jeans at the Gap (with no intent of purchase), grabbing "a slice" at California Pizza Kitchen, and then to top it off, going to see *Mamma Mia*. Just so you know, he'll need the aisle seat, as he has prepared dance routines for each of the ABBA songs featured in the film.



22

NEW RELEASES

- Chess Crusade – DS
- Final Fantasy IV – DS
- Gauntlet – DS
- Order Up – Wii



Leaf DICE – 07/22

CASUAL CONNECT 2008

23-25
The experts in casual gaming descend upon Seattle this week to discuss the future of this budding area of gaming. The question is: would you take them seriously if they weren't in casual attire? Over 3,000 professionals in this field are expected to attend.

24

CHRISTIAN GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE

24-26
And on the eighth day, God gave us video games! This is the seventh year for the Christian Game Developers Conference, which, if you haven't guessed already, deals with Christianity and its inclusion in video games. After this summit, maybe Creed will finally get into Guitar Hero.

25

Since we can all remember what happened on the *X-Files* TV show so clearly, we should have no problem following the new *X-Files* movie. Yeah right! There's a better chance of *Lost* actually making sense, and we all know that ain't gonna happen. Here's to forever being confused!



29

NEW RELEASES

- Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness – DS
- Soulcalibur IV – PS3, 360
- Spectral Forces 3 – 360



Soulcalibur IV – 07/29



Spectral Forces 3 – 07/29



LOOK AT yourself MAN

ENOUGH SMOKING

but you're

NO stress

you're not yourself ON weed

way more than words

drinking

this ISN'T YOU

DON'T NEED

high.

COME ON

need

ENOUGH

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but you're

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you're not yourself ON weed

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way more than words

drinking

TALK TO YOUR FRIEND. SOMETHING WILL STICK. ABOVE THE INFLUENCE.COM



A famous axiom states that a civilization is never more than few missed meals away from anarchy.

If a society's infrastructure — government, utilities, law enforcement — stopped functioning, how long would it be before people put aside the trappings of civility and focused solely on survival? Imagine how far you would go to feed yourself or your family after just one day trapped in this bleak

I N F A

scenario. What about after 15 days? Hope is difficult to find in such a harsh environment, but not impossible. Infamous, a new open-world action title from Sucker Punch Productions, puts players in position to save what is left of a deteriorating society. As an ordinary man developing extraordinary powers, you can be the light that guides the people out of the darkness... if you choose to be

M O U S

SOMETHING STIRRING

PLAYSTATION 3
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS
> **RELEASE** SPRING 2009

Infamous begins with a serene, panoramic skyline view of Empire City on the title screen, with the words "press start" flashing unobtrusively.

This is the first and last time you'll see Empire City intact; once you push the start button, a massive explosion rips through the heart of the city. Six city blocks are entirely consumed by flame, and a large crater forms at the source of the blast. In the center of that crater, a man named Dylan staggers to his feet. Cracking with electricity, he is the only living thing in sight. Knowing only this information, players take control of this mysterious hero and explore the devastation left in the wake of the explosion.

Gamers acquainted with Sucker Punch's previous work on the Sly Cooper franchise will notice that this subject matter is a considerable thematic shift. But for a developer that has spent the last six years working on a cartoon-inspired platforming series, it is the perfect chance for the studio to showcase its talent in other areas. "We felt like we did a lot of good things [with Sly Cooper], and our job is to create something new, and reinvent ourselves along the way," says producer and Sucker Punch co-founder Brian Fleming. "When we saw the PS3, we saw our target demographic shifting to an older one for this window, so Sly wasn't the first thing we wanted to do."

Instead of anthropomorphic animals, Sucker Punch is applying its skill to a modern day hero tale full of complex characters, intense action, and unraveling mysteries. The hero at the core of Infamous' narrative is Dylan, who develops an array of electricity-based powers following the explosion in Empire City. However, the event didn't suddenly transform him from a regular guy into a spandex-wearing savior of humanity. Dylan doesn't understand the source or extent of his newfound abilities, and he gradually adapts to the acquisition of superhuman powers.



■ The explosion in Empire City destroys six blocks, but the entire surrounding area is thrown into chaos



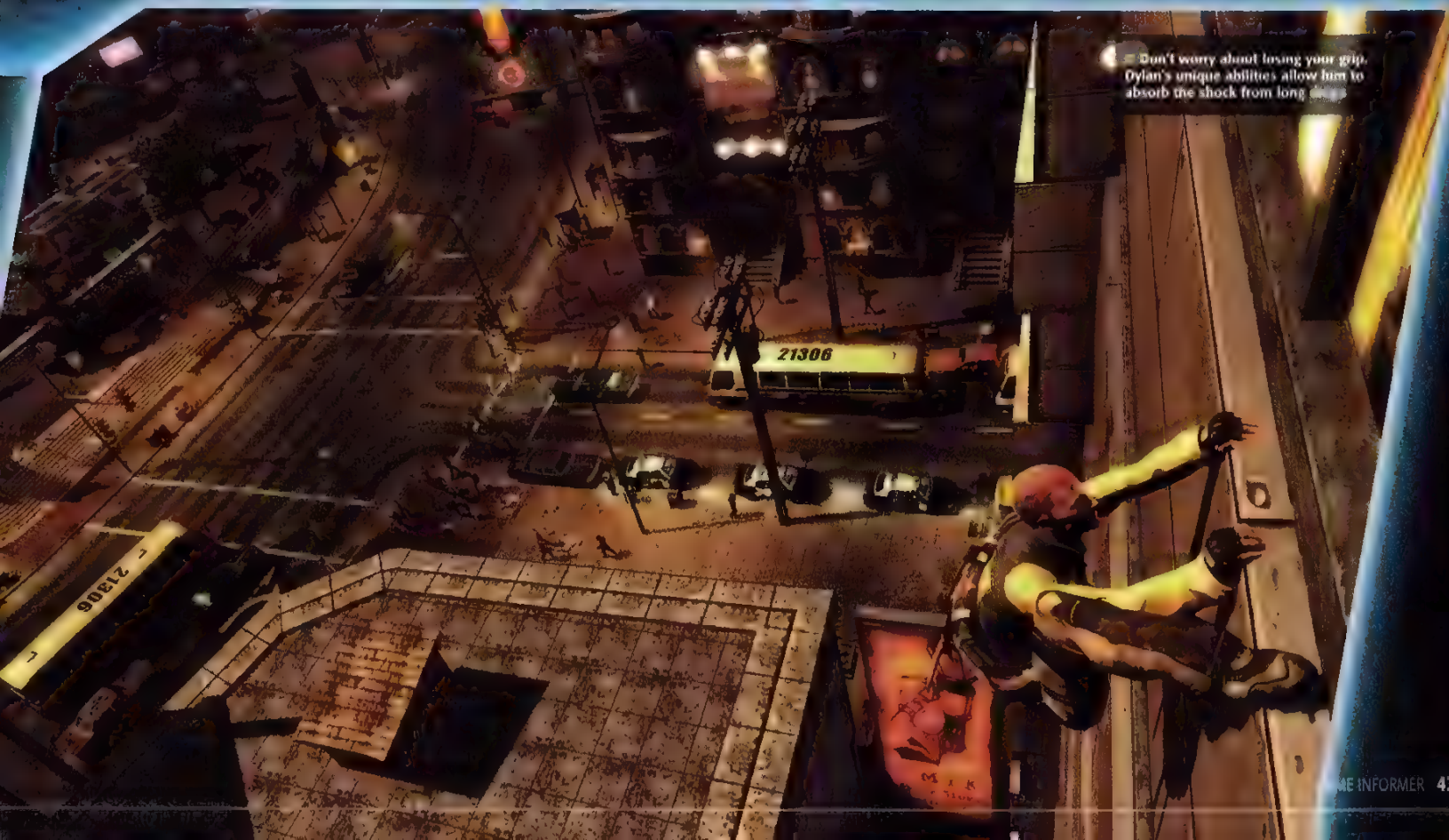


■ Dylan tries to escape the city early on, but all routes out of town (including this bridge) are heavily fortified

"Dylan is kind of an everyman," explains game director Nate Fox. "He's not particularly successful in life, and then the city is shaken to the core, and he becomes the guy at the center of the action by developing powers that mark him as singular in the world." The everyman portrayal doesn't mean that Dylan won't be a distinct character; he begins as a somewhat apathetic rule-breaker, but gradually becomes invested in what's going on in the city. A major part of his personal journey in the game is coming to terms with the obligations his powers entail. However, you may choose not to bear the mantle of those responsibilities.

"We want to get into the headspace of what it would be like to be a real human being who has been granted these exceptional abilities, and then let the player take it from there," Fox tells us. You will gain control of Dylan only moments after the explosion, before he is even aware of the gift he just received. As he assesses his situation in the middle of the crater, Dylan gets a phone call from his friend Zeke, an eccentric conspiracy theorist and survivalist. Having made a contingency plan for doomsday, Zeke tells Dylan to meet him. But buildings are collapsing all around the blast area, so you'll need to dodge crumbling masonry, vault over charred vehicles, and climb deteriorating structures on your way to safety. The surprising thing is that these acrobatic feats are your basic human abilities, not your new superhuman ones.

One of Dylan's hobbies happens to be urban exploration. Using his strength and agility, he can go where most people cannot. He runs up rooftops, effortlessly scrambles across building architecture, and seeks cover in unlikely nooks and alleys. "Freedom of movement is something we really believe in, and we're creating a very fluid environment in which the hero can interact with objects," states Fox. These types of smooth interactions have been relatively complex when implemented in other titles, but Sucker Punch doesn't believe that



■ Don't worry about losing your grip. Dylan's unique abilities allow him to absorb the shock from long drops



We want to get into the headspace of what it would be like to be a real human being who has been granted exceptional abilities.

—Nate Fox, game director

needs to be the case. "We want it to be simple and feel right," Fox declares. "We strive for simple controls that allow you to do not-so-simple actions." As players explore the three islands that comprise Empire City, they will see the highs and lows of the fallen metropolis, all by way of an intuitive control scheme introduced in the opening minutes of the game as Dylan flees from the crater.

Despite his athletic prowess, the surge of power in his body proves to be too much for him. After dodging falling buildings and evading danger, Dylan collapses unconscious, only to wake up 15 days later. Of course, several important developments unfold as he sleeps. Infamous will convey these events through the use of stylish cutscenes that will reinforce the game's comic

book roots. Using narration and animated 2D panels that look like pages of a graphic novel, the game covers 15 days worth of exposition in short order. After the explosion, Empire City falls into chaos, and riots ensue. Of the survivors, many become infected with a mysterious plague, prompting the government to quarantine the entire area. Food is scarce, there are no police or firefighters, and people are fighting to survive. The city's Neon District has been overrun by a gang called the Reapers, who have imposed martial law and claimed the territory as their own. This is the city Dylan wakes up to, brimming with the power to change the world.

As soon as you step into the ruins of Empire City, you'll realize that Dylan's abilities are not just your

standard comic book suite of all-purpose classics. He isn't invulnerable, he doesn't shoot beams from his eyes, and he can't move things with his mind. He is an electricity-based hero, and every power he develops is rooted in that fact. He can shoot bolts of lightning from his hand, emanate an electrical field that repels nearby foes, and create delayed-blast balls of energy (which function like sticky grenades). While these powers clearly elevate Dylan beyond the ranks of normal humans, they are only the skills he masters early in the game. They will look like amateur manifestations compared to what he can accomplish as he harnesses his full potential. Later abilities will fully embrace his raw elemental power,

■ The men in hoods are members of the Reapers. Even with their guns, these goons clearly don't stand a chance



like the ability to call multiple bolts of lightning from the sky to create a devastating electrical storm.

As fun as it will be to zap enemies (and pedestrians), you will have more options than simply lining up someone in your reticle and pulling the trigger. One of the nice things about electricity is that it reacts with many elements of a modern city, like generators, cars, lights, and more. "We're trying to integrate the powers into the environment as much as possible," explains Fox. "There's a rich landscape of possibilities beyond just hit point subtraction." For example, we saw a fight in which Dylan and Zeke are trying to break through the government quarantine on a bridge. In addition to numerous armed guards, the area is dotted with power generators. You have the option to use your abilities directly on your foes (electrocuting them, then propelling them off the bridge is particularly satisfying), but you can also gain the upper hand by overcharging the generators to create explosions and cause more damage.

The situations become even more diverse when you factor in Dylan's climbing skills. Being able to establish a position from just about any surface opens up several offensive and defensive options. In one instance, a soldier is firing from an armored turret that is impossible to approach directly. But by using the verticality of the environment, you can get above the turret, opening the enemy up to a bolt of lightning.

On the defensive side, you aren't limited to overturned vehicles on the ground to lend you protection. When Dylan comes under fire he can take cover anywhere, high or low. Things that were once just a part of the environment suddenly become safe havens from attack at all altitudes, like neon signs, windowsills, and pillars. "We've got this guy who can move around... fluidly and easily, and we want him in situations where this really fun shooting mechanic can intersect with the freedom of motion of the character," reveals Fox says. "There are a lot of excellent cover games, and we're trying to take what we love about that and add to it."



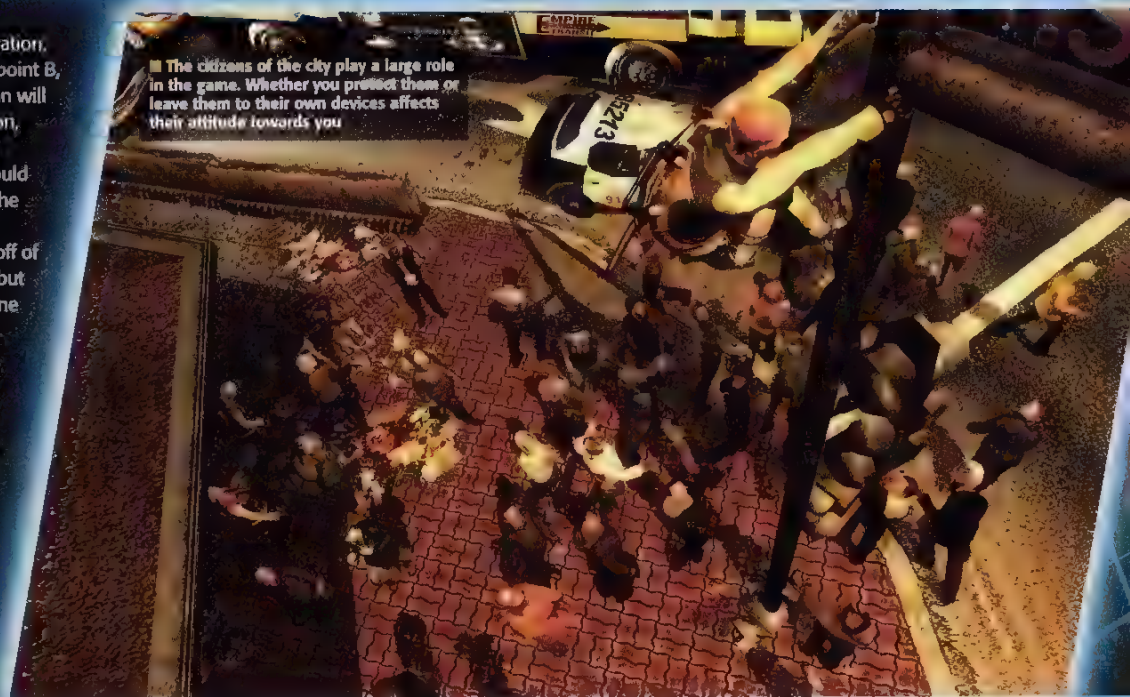
■ Your ability to jump is not tied to your powers, but you may eventually develop other ways of covering ground



■ The environment can be used for cover, and to establish a good offensive position

Scaling the city sounds like fun for combat and exploration, but it isn't exactly the fastest way to get from point A to point B, especially since Empire City spans three full islands. Dylan will eventually require a more efficient mode of transportation, though no one at Sucker Punch was ready to reveal any specifics. We can only speculate as to what forms this could take – from electrically powered leaps to literally riding the lightning. “We’re trying to keep what’s happening either connected to his powers or man-sized. It’s got to come off of one of those two things,” says Fleming. “He’s a climber, but he also has electrical powers. If there are ways to combine those things, then sure, it’s our job to find them.”

If this were a Superman game, everyone would just assume that flight would take care of the mobility problem. Of course, since Dylan is an original creation, all of his powers and abilities aren't already foregone conclusions. To the developers, this is a key component of creating a superhero that works in a video game context, because every power Sucker Punch puts in Dylan's arsenal can be in service to making an entertaining experience. Unlike games based on pre-existing heroes, there isn't a need to find ways to shoehorn in unlikely situations, like throwing in some burning buildings so the hero can use his cold breath. “The powers are designed to be deeply



■ The citizens of the city play a large role in the game. Whether you protect them or leave them to their own devices affects their attitude towards you



THE VOICE OF SURVIVAL

The world of Empire City has fallen apart, but you wouldn't know it by watching the newscasts. All of the major networks are in spin mode, saying that the situation is under control and everything will soon be back to normal. This clearly isn't the case, and the Voice of Survival wants people to know. The Voice is really a man named Dallas who hijacks TV and radio broadcasts in order to inform the citizens of Empire City about food drops and other information related to their survival. People love him, but he turns the population against Dylan by airing a video depicting him opening an exploding box seconds before the blast destroyed the city.

THE EX

Trish and Dylan were in a relationship before the blast. She was a medical student, so her skills have allowed her to help survivors as a kind of guerilla medic. Her sister was killed in the explosion, a fact that leads her to resent (and understandably break up with) Dylan after a video reveals he was the source of the disaster. Their interactions are complicated given the conflict between their emotions and the chaos around them. One description Sucker Punch offers is to think of her as "Lois Lane with syringes."

THE NUT

Zeke is Dylan's best friend. He also happens to be kind of crazy. Zeke is a dedicated survivalist, with a stash of guns and dozens of contingency plans for any number of what he considers to be inevitable disasters. He is "that guy" at a party, ruining the atmosphere by talking about banking conspiracies and doomsday scenarios. Of course, that time he was right. He also believes in superhuman abilities, so when his best friend develops electrical powers, he sees it as a vindication of his beliefs. Of course, he's also a little jealous.




With no operational infrastructure, the city is kind of a mess.

interactive and fun to play, as opposed to being a narrative device," says Fleming. "It means the hero's powers and the storyline are in support of gameplay."

In order for the powers to hold up their end of the superhero equation, they need to be the centerpiece of the combat. That's why the team is making the powers the exclusive method for taking down foes and tackling obstacles. In other words, if you played *The Darkness* and didn't understand why you had to use guns when you had cool powers, you don't need to worry about that for *InFamous* — it's all about the powers. In fact, Dylan won't even be able to pick up a gun. His electrical current isn't something he can just turn off — it pulses through him constantly. This makes it difficult to use firearms, since ammo clips would explode in his hand. It also complicates other interactions in the world: "It's not all good that you're Lord Electricity," jokes Fox. "There are some serious downsides...you just haven't thought of them all yet."

This touches on another angle of the classic superhero weaknesses. Dylan won't be vulnerable to glowing green rocks, but in the same way that a plastic prison can contain Magneto, *InFamous* has certain conditions that will be uniquely challenging for the hero to overcome. Don't worry — they won't be overused. The team doesn't want a hero game



where you can't use your abilities. "His power is integral to how he relates to the people, the environment, and it's the best way to dispatch enemies," Fox assures us.

On the other hand, playing through *Infamous* would just be a slaughter if Dylan were the only person in Empire City lucky enough to undergo a transformation after the explosion. A superhero needs iconic villains that present a challenge, and *Infamous* will definitely have foes worthy of its protagonist. Each of the three islands is under the control of a different organization, and it's probably safe to assume that the leaders of each group have special skills that will allow them to stand against Dylan.

On the first island, your basic foes will be the hooded members of the Reapers, the gang that has taken over the Neon District. Most of them are regular humans with guns and other weapons, but there are a select few elites that wield powers of their own. We witnessed a confrontation with one Reaper that had the ability to teleport and throw out concussive blasts, which only gives you a small window to shock him. The battle looked more challenging than a standard encounter, but it wasn't the epic dash that gamers can expect from later fights. "He's the first super-powered enemy. He's kind of the equivalent of the giant rat in the cellar," laughs Fox.

We also saw a brief run-in with the leader of the Reapers, though he wasn't present in physical form. While trying to purify a poisoned water supply in the park, Dylan's eyes are sprayed with a black, viscous substance. He begins to hallucinate, and the intimidating voice of the Reaper boss booms in his ears with taunts and accusations. Dylan's girlfriend (and former med student) Trish eventually restores him to normal, but many mysteries remain: How is the goop connected to the Reapers, and to Dylan? Why did Dylan survive the blast? Why has a plague suddenly spread? What is the source of his power? *Infamous* will answer all of these

questions while continuing to pose others until the pieces of the puzzle fall into place.

The main storyline will deal with the pressing issues relating to your powers, but there will be another narrative to explore in the world around you. A new kind of society has taken root in the ruins of the city, and the absence of authority allows anarchy to rule the streets. This plays out in a variety of sequences that players will discover as they move through Empire City. *Infamous* isn't structured like most other open world games, with a marker on your mini-map indicating your next story mission and an array of side missions. Instead, the team's goal is to create an engaging world where events unfold naturally.

"The citizens, the thugs, and the city are all a part of the ecology we're trying to build," Fleming describes. "It's this weird intersection of scripted events and set-ups along with a systemic universe that's reacting to all that stuff." For example, you may be on your way to defuse a bomb only to notice a woman in the street begging for help, bleeding from injuries sustained in a car accident. The clock is counting down — no one would fault you for hurrying to take care of the bomb — but what kind of hero do you want to be?

Your choices in these situations represent the philosophy behind the name *Infamous*. The name has a duality to it; you can gain renown by using your powers for good, or you can inspire fear by using them capriciously. It isn't a question of whether you are good or evil — *Infamous* is a hero story. Ultimately, Dylan will defeat the bad guys and liberate the city, but even heroes have differing opinions about the best way to achieve noble goals; Superman and the Punisher would do the same job in two different ways. Dylan can take it upon himself to help the suffering masses of Empire City. Alternately, he can ignore them completely, accept their deaths as collateral damage, or actively attack them.



Your decisions won't come without consequences. *Infamous* will track Dylan's actions through a karma system that affects how the civilians react to him. If you become known as a champion for the defenseless, they will rally to your side to help you. If you're a sadist, they'll flee from you – or may even try to take you on.

A few times in the story, the crowd will even make up its own mind. Shortly after the game begins, Dylan and Zeke are in Archer Square, the location of a food drop gone wrong. The relief crate is stuck on a statue, so Dylan uses his urban exploration skills to climb up and retrieve it. The people are thankful, but then things take a turn for the worse: A mysterious pirate broadcaster called the Voice of Survival airs a video on a nearby

jumbotron. Filmed seconds before the explosion, it depicts Dylan opening a small package. Flames begin to pour out, and they soon grow into the rolling explosion that took a piece out of the city and left it in ruins. After a stunned silence, the people turn on Dylan – who is just as confused as they are – and try to run him out of town. Apart from plot points like these, it will be up to the player to cultivate their desired reputation.

Beyond influencing your social status, your karma also figures into how your abilities develop. Making a series of good choices will count towards improving certain powers, while more malicious actions will feed into others. Don't expect something as polar as the light and dark sides of the Force, though. If you've made some choices you aren't proud of, the door to redemption will always be open. "There are no unforgivable sins

The powers are designed to be deeply interactive and fun to play, as opposed to being a narrative device.

Brian Fleming, producer

in video game morality," Fox states. Similarly, there's always something compelling about noble heroes who take a turn towards a darker persona. The path is yours to choose.

Ultimately, *Infamous* is about fulfilling the hero fantasy: the recognition of a hidden strength, grappling with its implications, and the progression towards greatness. How you fill in the blanks is up to you. *Infamous* will allow players freedom in their movement, decisions, and combat, allowing them to craft their own mythology for Dylan. "For most heroes, the journey of becoming is one of the most interesting stories, and we get to tell that," Fleming says. Fox adds: "It's a journey that I think a lot of us want to go on. When we see these movies where people are suddenly granted abilities, we want to feel it. You want to feel what it would be like to discover what you can do. That's what we're going to let players do." ■■■■



PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



PLAYSTATION 3

Resistance 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION / 2-30-PLAYER ONLINE > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER INSOMNIAC GAMES > RELEASE FALL

FOREST FIRE

While we covered a lot of the big picture elements of Resistance 2 in our February cover story, we recently got some hands-on time with the multiplayer portion to figure out just how the Insomniac team is handling 60 players on a single map. It turns out they have some pretty good ideas.

We played on a giant map named Scotia, set in California's redwood forests. Lumber mills add some variety to the landscape and a full town is almost hidden on the far edge of the map. While the match is

essentially a 30 versus 30 setup, all players are divided up into small squads and given a rival group from the other team. Using what Insomniac calls a "dynamic objective system," rival teams will fight it out over constantly shifting attack and defend points. Occasionally, if one squad is having particular trouble completing objectives against a tough rival, the game will call in another squad in for reinforcement. Even though players will primarily be fighting a smaller group throughout the match, there will still be plenty of interac-

tion with the rest of the teams on the battlefield.

While almost all multiplayer FPS games dole out points for kills, Resistance 2 awards points for every shot landed. As you unload a clip into an enemy, points tick away above their head culminating in a big chunk for a kill. As you kill more people without dying, you'll earn both passive and active bonuses like a health recharge or a plasma shield. Kill streaks aren't all roses, however, as a point multiplier will show up above your head making

you an especially appealing target.

Several questions remain after playing through multiple sessions. Will points accrued in matches funnel into a larger ranking system? What other rewards lay beyond the shield power-up? Will the Chimera and humans have race-specific specialties like in the first game? Insomniac is staying tight-lipped on these subjects for now, but with the fall release not too far around the bend, we're betting the team will be willing to talk again soon. ■ ■ ■



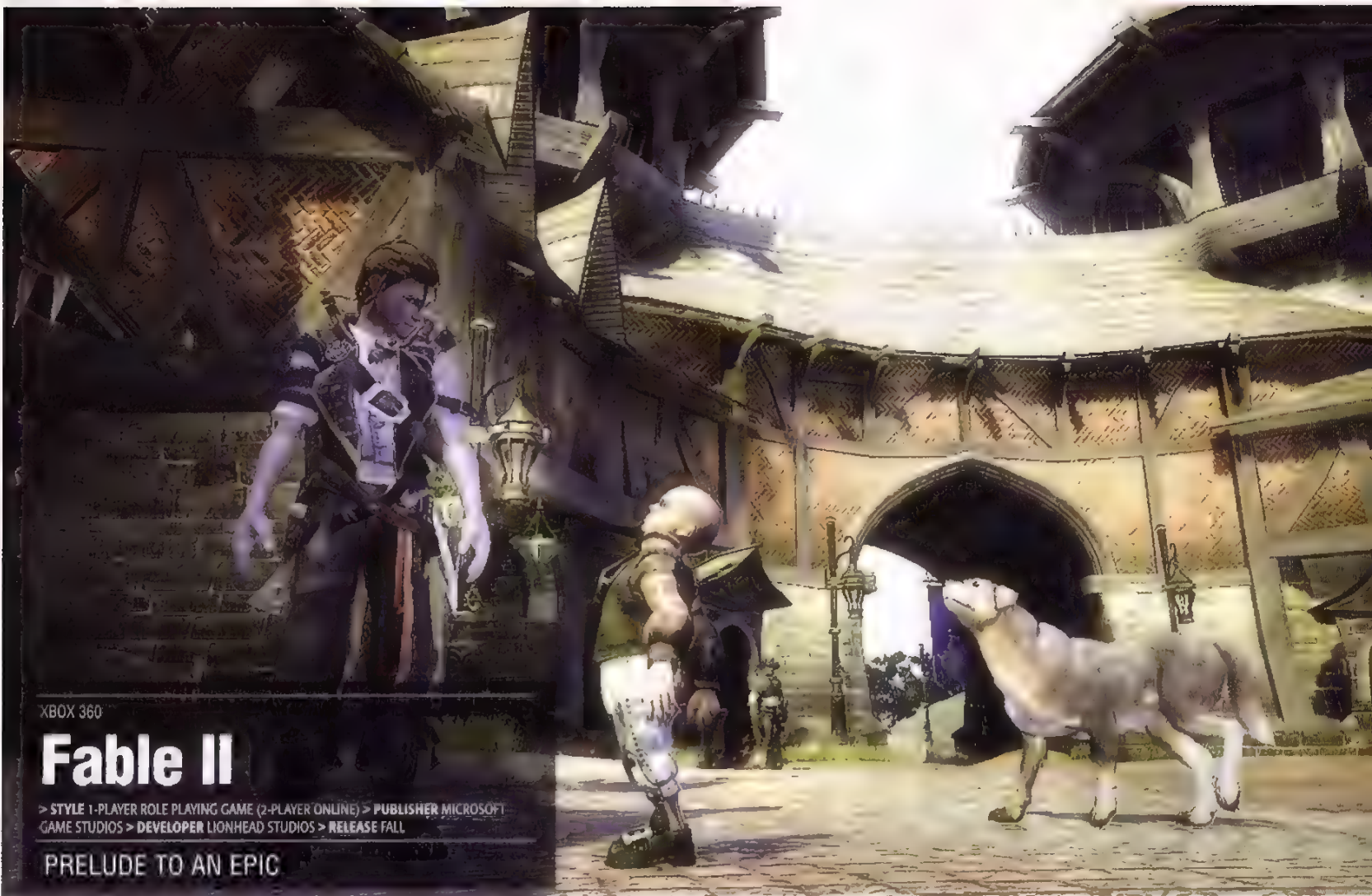
A charming B&B management sim was cut during the final concept meeting



■ Only humans were playable in the most recent build of the game, but we're looking forward to seeing what the Chimera can do



■ One attack and defend point involves the final stash of Charleston Chew on Earth



XBOX 360

Fable II

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER LIONHEAD STUDIOS > RELEASE FALL

PRELUDE TO AN EPIC

After several years in development, Fable II is finally in the homestretch. Lionhead's Peter Molyneux says the team has the feature set locked in and is solely concentrating on cleaning up the bugs in what he hopes will result in a "truly memorable experience" this fall.

We got to check out the opening 45 minutes of gameplay that sets the scene for this epic tale. A rendered cutscene follows a bird as it soars through a snowy wilderness into a bustling city. Once it finds a suitable perch, it takes a sizeable white dump, which the camera artfully pans around as it falls directly

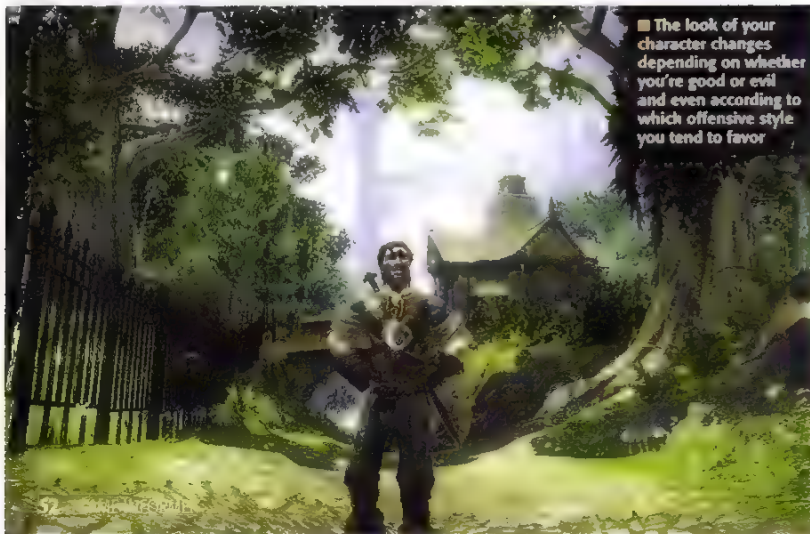
on your character's head. You start as a penniless child roaming the streets with your sister in search of a music box that supposedly grants wishes.

The mini-map has been scrapped in favor of a new glowing line, called a breadcrumb trail, which leads you directly to your next objective. Those preferring to explore the city can ignore these directions if they choose. One early task has players tracking down five warrants for town guards. Instead of turning in the documents to Johnny Law, players can also sell them to local crime lords if they choose. This seemingly trivial choice will

transform the city into a bustling metropolis or a crime-ridden slum when you return years later as an adult, resulting in completely different missions down the road.

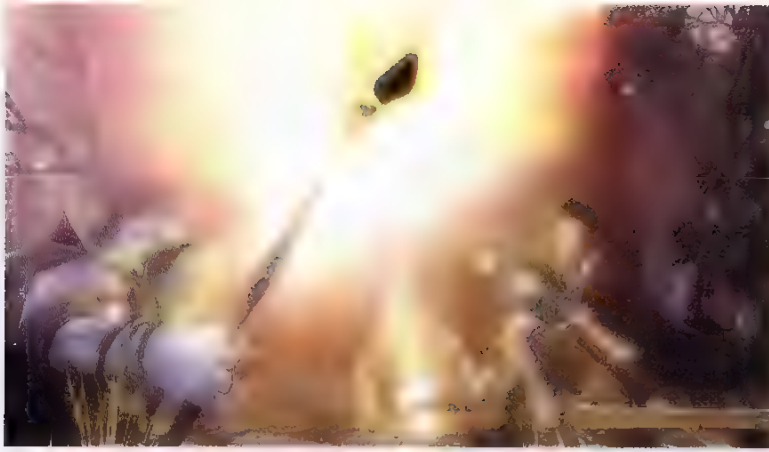
After gathering enough cash to purchase the mystical music box, your sister wishes to live in the extravagant castle in the middle of town. Like magic, you are quickly summoned there by Lord Lucien, who, as it turns out, is in search of special people called Heroes. During conversations like this you can trigger various emotes that will affect how NPCs interact with you. To break the ice of this serious encounter with the lord of the castle,

Molyneux triggered a fart, of which you can customize the timbre and duration. Lucien didn't seem to react in this early build, but we're assuming most NPCs won't be pleased with this type of behavior. We won't spoil what happens next, but the event sets off a storybook sequence that fast-forwards the plot a good 10 years. This is where the game truly begins and you can start gaining powers like the ones we've discussed in previous coverage. This simple, yet jarring, intro sets the scene well and has us excited for what's to come. ■ ■ ■



■ The look of your character changes depending on whether you're good or evil and even according to which offensive style you tend to favor





Enter The Parlor

Shortly before *Fable II*'s release, a triple pack of casino-themed minigames taken from the main game will be available for download over Xbox Live Arcade. All the money earned while gambling will transfer into the retail release when it hits stores later. The download also includes unique unlockables like weapons, tattoos, and dog tricks. Over time, players can earn new board skins, rule variants, and higher stakes. Keystone, a mix of craps and roulette, is the only game revealed so far. The dealer rolls three dice and, as seen above, you can bet on specific number totals, shapes, colors, ranges, and even a three of a kind. Lionhead's Peter Molyneux says players need not worry about this influx of cash breaking the game. Since you can apparently buy all of the in-game property in addition to the stockpile of items and weapons, he estimates that players will have to accrue around \$100 million to purchase everything.



Fable II is so realistic it even has a bread line simulator...in real time!



Molyneux teases that there is still a "very big surprise" kept under wraps concerning the co-op mode



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

The Lord of the Rings: Conquest

> STYLE 1, BOTH-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) • PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER PANDEMIC STUDIOS • RELEASE FALL

GET MEDIEVAL

While LucasArts continued the Star Wars Battlefront series on its own with the PSP-only Renegade Squadron, the developer of the first two games in the series, Pandemic, is currently working on the true spiritual successor using one of the few franchises with an equal amount of cachet — The Lord of the Rings.

"I think when the films were closer [the Tolkien estate was] a little tighter on trying to maintain a certain consistency to the fans," says Conquest director Eric Gewirtz. "Now that there's been a little distance, we've gotten a lot of response from the fans that they want to have more fun in the universe." And so they shall. Conquest features every large scale battle from the trilogy, a full roster of playable key heroes and villains, both good and evil campaigns, four-player co-op (online and splitscreen), and 16-player competitive multiplayer.

Our demo begins in the thick of the defense of Helm's Deep. "We wanted to make sure that we started the battles right at the intense point in the action," Gewirtz says. "We didn't want to have any downtime." In order to defend three control points on the outer defensive wall, Gewirtz brings up the character carousel, which can be used to swap among the five classes at any time during gameplay. In offering the mage, warrior, archer, scout, and guardian, Pandemic hopes to give players plenty of options in how to tackle the variety of battle situations spanning Middle-earth. Even if you figure out a solid strategy, however, enemy AI behavior and placement are expected to play out differently every time, so memorizing patterns won't be an option.

Selecting the mage, Gewirtz blasts Uruk-hai with lightning bolts, conjures defensive firewalls, and heals troops. Next, he switches over to an archer to cut off torchbearers from igniting bombs near the drainage points. Too many enemies are charging to simply pick them off one by one, so he lays down some tar traps to slow them down and ignites them with a flame arrow.

Next we jump into the battle on Pelennor Fields, where Gewirtz changes to the scout, hopping onto a horse and trampling enemies underfoot along the way. While in a cloaked state, the scout becomes mostly invisible and can

perform instant kill backstabs. After clearing the area, he commandeers an enemy catapult and uses it to destroy one of their siege towers. Since the other tower is out of range, he rides another horse over to it and plants a signal flare at its base, triggering a catapult strike from Minas Tirith.

With the towers out, oliphaunts lumber towards this capital of Gondor. Instead of just hacking away at their legs until they collapse, several strategies are available to various classes. Ordinary archers can light the oliphaunt's saddle canopy on fire with a flame arrow, while hero archers like Legolas can target a small soft spot on their heads with a well-placed shot. If they can avoid being stepped on, warriors can trigger a contextual button press sequence that shows them damberring up the beast, stabbing it in the head, and sliding down its trunk.

"We're trying not to faithfully recreate the events from the film, but rather create a scenario where the events from the film can happen," Gewirtz says. "Not every player's going to be able to do [the trunk slide], but when you do, you're going to be like 'S---, I pulled it off!'" ■■■■

Competitive multiplayer includes such modes as conquest, capture the flag, hero deathmatch, and ring bearer, where it's Frodo versus the ringwraiths



■ "It's actually limitless fun to run around as a troll," Gewirtz says. "You can hit soldiers with a club, pick a guy up, bite off his head, and walk around with his dead body. Then you can throw it at troops and it'll knock them like bowling pins."



■ Devastate Saruman's forces as a towering ent



A TALE OF TWO CAMPAIGNS

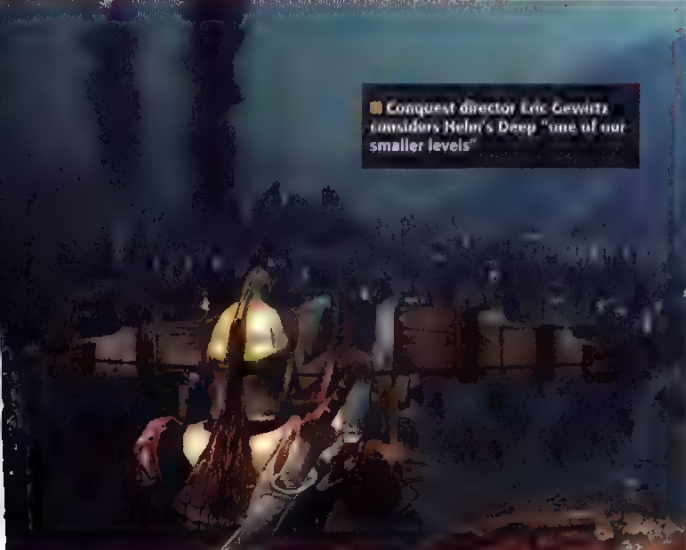
GOOD

The good campaign mostly follows the events of the films, beginning with a training stage at the Battle of the Last Alliance from the opening of Fellowship of the Ring. From here you'll lay waste to Isengard as an ent, confront Saruman as Gandalf in his tower, battle the Balrog in the mines of Moria, protect Frodo from fell beasts as Faramir in Osgiliath, and fight inside Minas Morgul for the first time. The campaign ends at the Black Gate, where you can play as all of the heroes while they buy time for Frodo to drop the ring into the pits of Mount Doom.

BAD

In the bad campaign, players start out as a Nazgûl, who kills Frodo just before he destroys the ring. "In both the films and the books they alluded to the horrible things that would happen if Sauron was able to get the ring, but they never go into detail," says director Eric Gewirtz. "So for the first time ever you get to live out what happened if the good guys were to fail." Players will tear up Minas Tirith on the back of an oliphant, ravage Helm's Deep as a troll, resurrect and play as the Balrog in the mines of Moria, confront Aragorn on Weathertop, burn the Shire to the ground, and devastate Rivendell as the dark lord Sauron himself.

■ Conquest director Eric Gewirtz considers Helm's Deep "one of our smaller levels"



■ Horses and wargs can be commandeered at any time



Madden NFL 09

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
> **RELEASE** AUGUST

GEARING UP FOR A TITLE RUN

After years of struggling to find its stride on the next-gen consoles, the Madden series finally delivered a playable NFL game last year. With Madden 09, Tiburon hopes to accelerate its development curve and make it the best NFL game to date.

The improvements start with the polished visuals. The game runs at 60 frames per second on both consoles and has undergone a complete graphical overhaul. The new look features brand new player models, tweaked animations, and vastly improved stadium effects like shadowing, fog, and lighting to give the game a more authentic look. Sidelines are populated with more players, and the weather effects like snow look much more realistic, with players leaving footprints as they move across the field.

The fine-tuned visuals are complemented by

the drastically altered presentation. Gone is the annoying local radio announcer in favor of commentators Tom Hammond and Chris Collinsworth, who apparently took time off from his 300 jobs as a football analyst to

record voiceovers for Madden. The television-style presentation's prize feature is the Backtrack commentary, which is triggered by mistakes or big plays. If you blow a crucial third down conversion by throwing to the wrong receiver or turning the ball over, Collinsworth will break down the play on the telestrator by analyzing the defensive coverages and receiver routes to pinpoint the poor decision-making. Not only does this give the game the depth of a true NFL broadcast, it also serves as a short lesson for players less familiar with football's intricacies.

The player's "Madden IQ" is a pillar of this year's game design. When you start the game

for the first time, you will take control of a player on a holographic football field to test your Madden mettle via 12 skill challenges covering passing, rushing, pass defense, and run defense. Your collective performance will determine your Madden IQ, which the game uses to tweak your difficulty level based on your strengths and weaknesses. Players can also tweak the difficulty via sliders in the menu system if they prefer.

If a less experienced player is taking on a Madden expert, you can even the playing field by activating the Rewind system. Like a mulligan in golf, this allows a struggling player to replay a down if something goes horribly awry (you know, like letting a quarterback break free from a sure sack so he can complete a pass to a fifth string receiver on third and five with less than two minutes left). Purists (or Giants fans) can turn off this feature to keep the game on the level.

Want to recreate memorable moments like the Tyree Super Bowl catch or the Dolphins escaping a 0-16 season? Then check out the new Madden Moments feature, which puts you in 32 memorable games from last year to recreate the magic.

If you're more into creating your own history, then franchise mode is the way to go. This year it features a completely rewritten

logic system that shares the same back-end as NFL Head Coach. Gone are the insane number of running backs rushing for 2,000 yards or teams with two solid running backs drafting another one in the first round (although Al Davis likely still will). Teams should now look out for their own self-interest more often, and simulated games should more actively reflect an authentic NFL game.

Another notable tweak to Madden is the new Options on Demand playcall screen. Instead of drilling deep into the menu system to make a key substitution or watch an instant replay, everything is accessible right on the playcall screen. This year also marks the return of the highly coveted formation substitutions, which lets you craft special player packages based on the formation you are choosing.

The training camp is just around the corner, and we can't wait to get our hands on this latest build of Madden to see if the game holds up as well in action as it looks on paper. ■ ■ ■

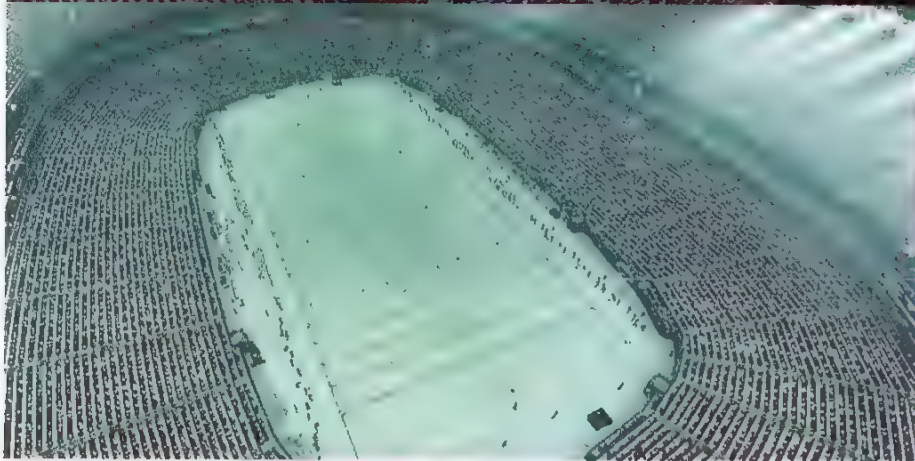
A League of Your Own

Whereas 2K players have had online leagues for years, Madden fans were left out in the cold like those Patriots fans wearing 19-0 memorabilia after the Super Bowl. No longer. For the first time in the vaunted franchises' history, Madden 09 features online leagues. Select your team and go head-to-head with up to 31 other human-controlled teams as you vie for a playoff spot and the online league championship. The game doesn't support AI controlled teams and ditches the NFL's standard division and conference format in favor of a Premiership-style table. The commissioner determines how many games make up a season, and the top half of the league will qualify for the playoffs. Players can select any NFL or created team they want, or the league can host a fantasy draft. While there are no free agency or franchise options, you can perform player-for-player trades. The flex scheduling allows league members to play their games in any order, which will help speed up the league's progression.

■ Not content with his NFL record for interceptions, Brett Favre returns to throw a couple more pick sixes to cement his legacy



Tiburon has revamped the stadiums and weather systems, as is evident in this comparison shot between Madden 08 (top) and 09 (bottom).



Tron football! The virtual training center allows Madden noobs to learn the game and challenges savvy veterans to raise their Madden IQ.



The new playcall screen gives you access to replays and substitutions without having to go into the pause menu.



Turning Fantasy Into Reality

Madden fans who play fantasy football take note: You may want to switch from your current league host to EA Fantasy Sports. For 1200 Microsoft Points (or \$15 on PSN) you can download a fantasy football draft application that allows you to host your offline draft on your Xbox 360 or PS3. The great interface looks like an NFL draft board, displaying the recently picked players, team rosters, and bye weeks for the remaining players. When you select one of the top players, a highlight video will play featuring color commentary and stats from last year. After the draft, the commissioner uploads the information to the EA Fantasy Sports site and then the league operates from the site as any other league would. For an additional 400 Microsoft Points (\$5), you can also download a stat tracker that provides live updates on your players' performances on gamedays. This tracker gives you access to a full screen of up-to-the-minute information, or you can minimize it to a picture-in-picture box on compatible televisions. This new fantasy suite of features also allows you to download your fantasy roster into Madden for use in unranked online and offline games.

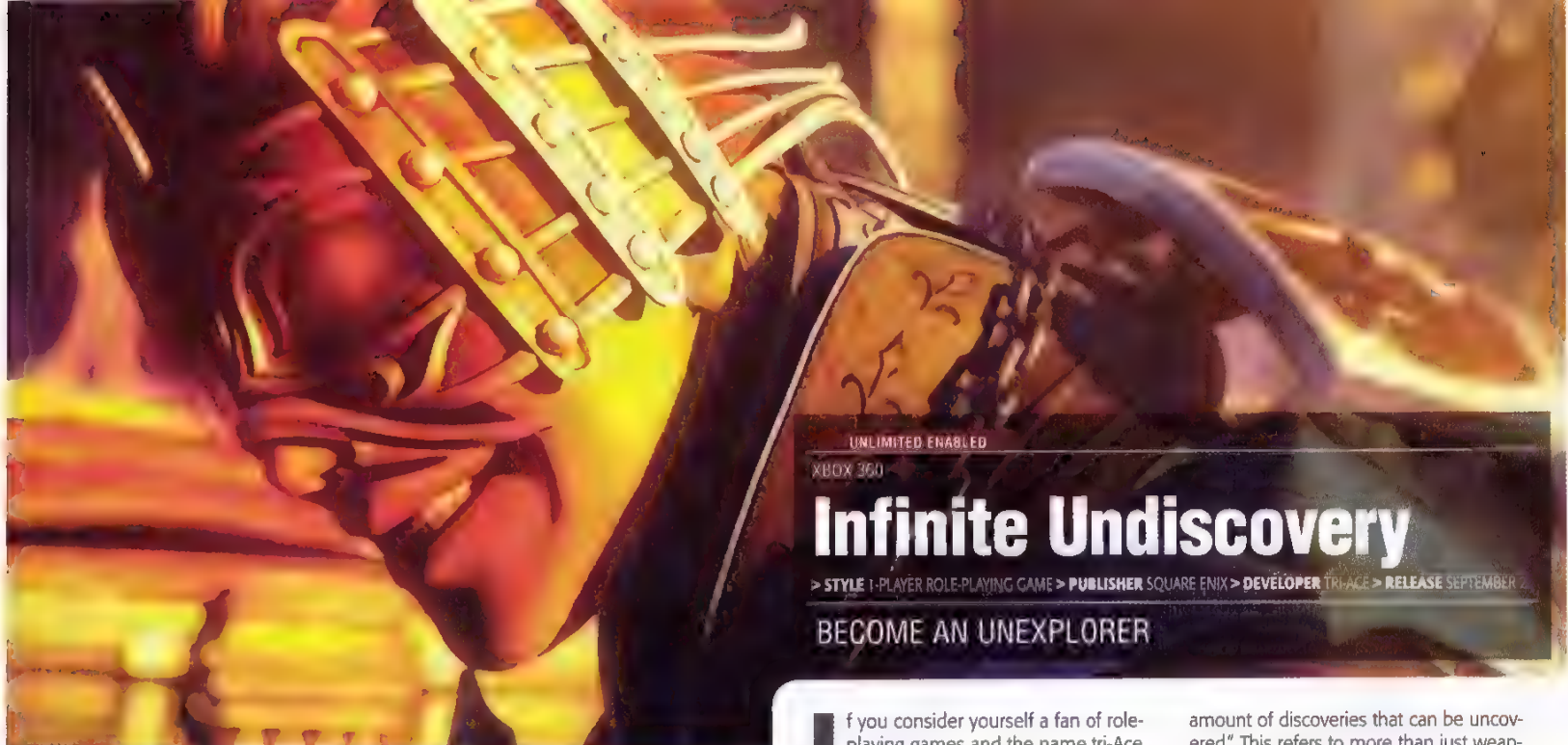
Madden's Special Sauce

The Collector's Edition of Madden NFL 09, which ships with NFL Head Coach 09, also features cross-title perks. Any play you create in Head Coach will be automatically imported into Madden for use in games. The package also includes a Madden '93 emulator featuring updated rosters and teams, along with video interviews chronicling the game's storied history. Best of all, for Viking and Bears fans, the Collector's Edition doesn't have Brett Favre on the cover, so you can avoid inviting the Packer legend into your living room. Cheeseheads suck!

Chris Collinsworth breaks down big plays or major gaffes with the new Backtrack instant replay. Adam Carriker is on fire!



BACKTRACK



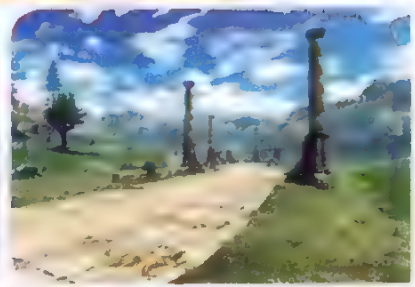
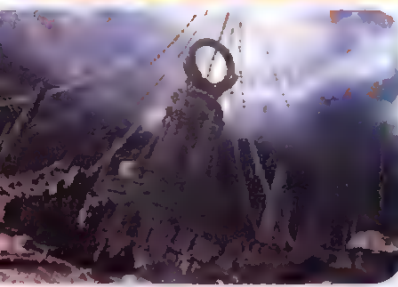
UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

Infinite Undiscovery

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER TRI-ACE > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 2

BECOME AN UNEXPLORER



If you consider yourself a fan of role-playing games and the name tri-Ace doesn't sound familiar, you should really pay closer attention. The developer is the force behind RPG powerhouses such as *Valkyrie Profile*, *Star Ocean*, and *Radiata Stories*, and this fall its next grand adventure is coming exclusively to the Xbox 360.

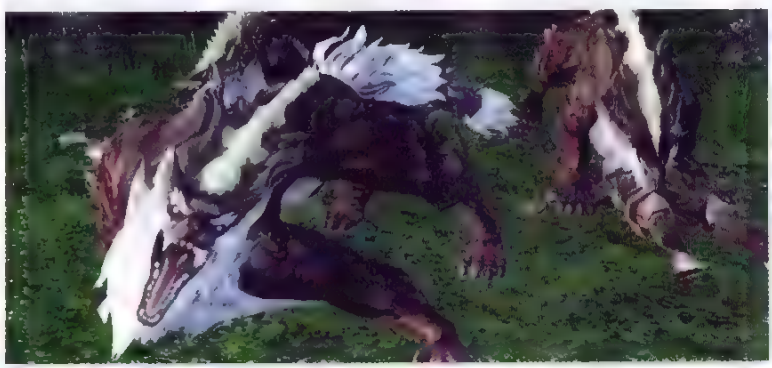
Infinite Undiscovery may seem like a nonsense name, but it was chosen deliberately to reflect the game themes. Producer Hajime Kojima explains: "While we did create the word 'undiscovery,' I think it helps to explain that the overall concept of the game is discovery...there are an infinite

amount of discoveries that can be uncovered." This refers to more than just weapons and loot – there are hidden factors in battle that players will have to discover, like how to use the environment, weather, and which senses the enemies rely on to locate and attack prey.

The core of your party is Capell, a guy whose most notable trait is that he looks exactly like the world's greatest hero, Sigmund. He may not have the same level of renown, but Capell is still a force for good. As Kojima says: "One becomes a hero when his people declare him as such, so couldn't you say that he simply hasn't become a hero just yet?" In fact,



You will control Capell, while the AI handles your allies.



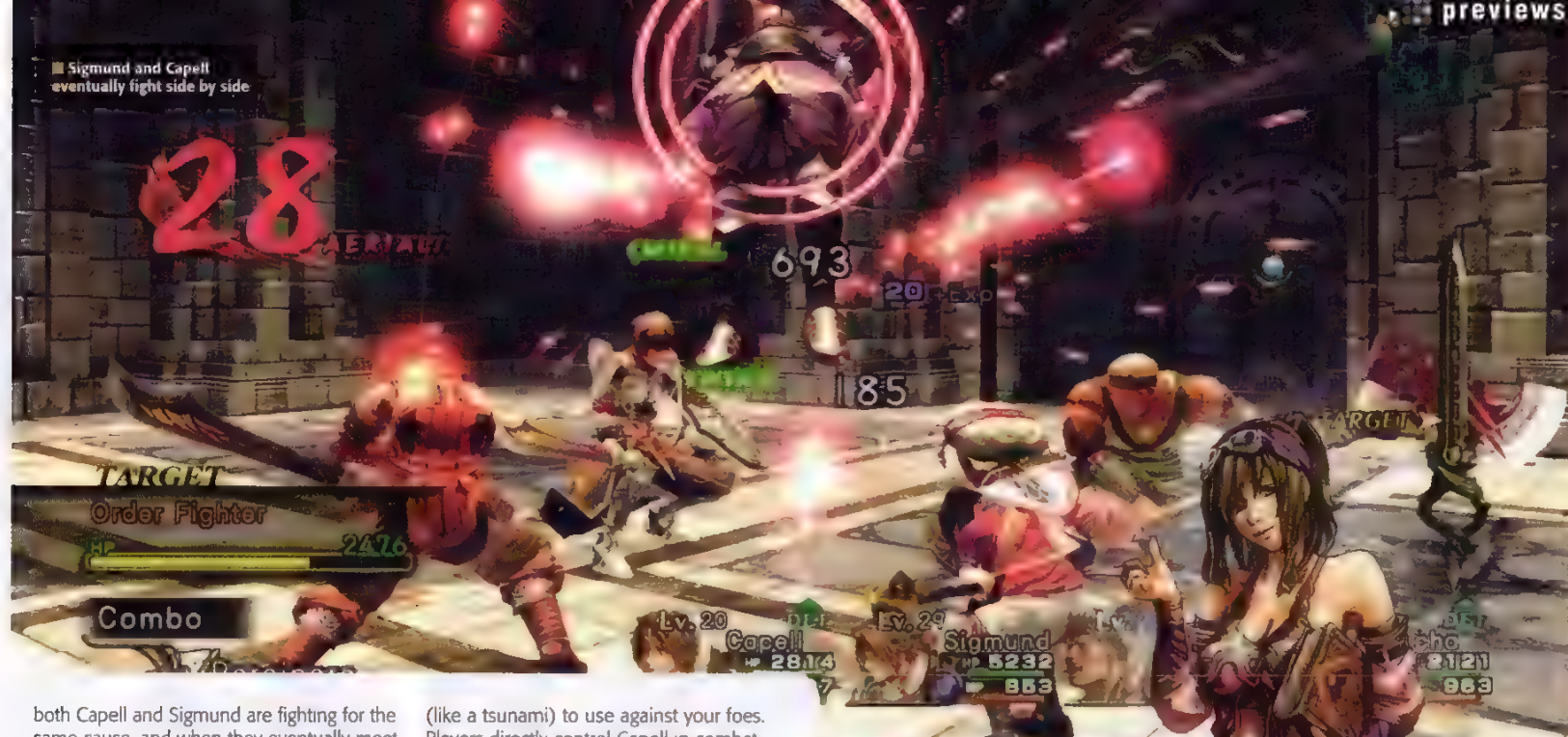
The more you use your special attacks, the stronger they will become.



Have video game villains, like Leonid here, ever considered not looking so obviously evil?

What kept you, Liberator?

■ Sigmund and Capell eventually fight side by side



both Capell and Sigmund are fighting for the same cause, and when they eventually meet in the story, they join forces. "Their stories are also tied to the heroine, Aya," Kojima adds cryptically.

Combat uses mechanics similar to those found in *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time*. Players fight in real time, and balance a variety of skills against standard attacks. "The most unique changes are the seamless integration from field to battle, and the effects discoveries have on overall gameplay," clarifies Kojima. For example, smaller enemies might change their attack pattern if a larger enemy enters the field to assist them, or you may be able to predict elemental forces

(like a tsunami) to use against your foes. Players directly control Capell in combat, though an advanced party AI system will let you tweak the behaviors of your companions to fit your strategy.

Fans of tri-Ace's previous works are probably wondering if there will be any character cameos from previous tri-Ace titles, which has become one of the developer's signature touches. Unfortunately, those details will have to wait for another time. "We haven't decided anything at this point," Kojima admits. Oh, well. Even if we don't get to see Lenneth or Jack Russell, *Infinite Undiscovery* is still one of our most highly anticipated RPGs this year. ■■■



■ A swirling world of intellect





XBOX 360

Gears of War 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> DEVELOPER EPIC GAMES > RELEASE NOVEMBER 11

NOVEMBER CAN'T COME SOON ENOUGH

■ That may look like a gun on the Brumak's back, but it's actually an ice cream dispenser.



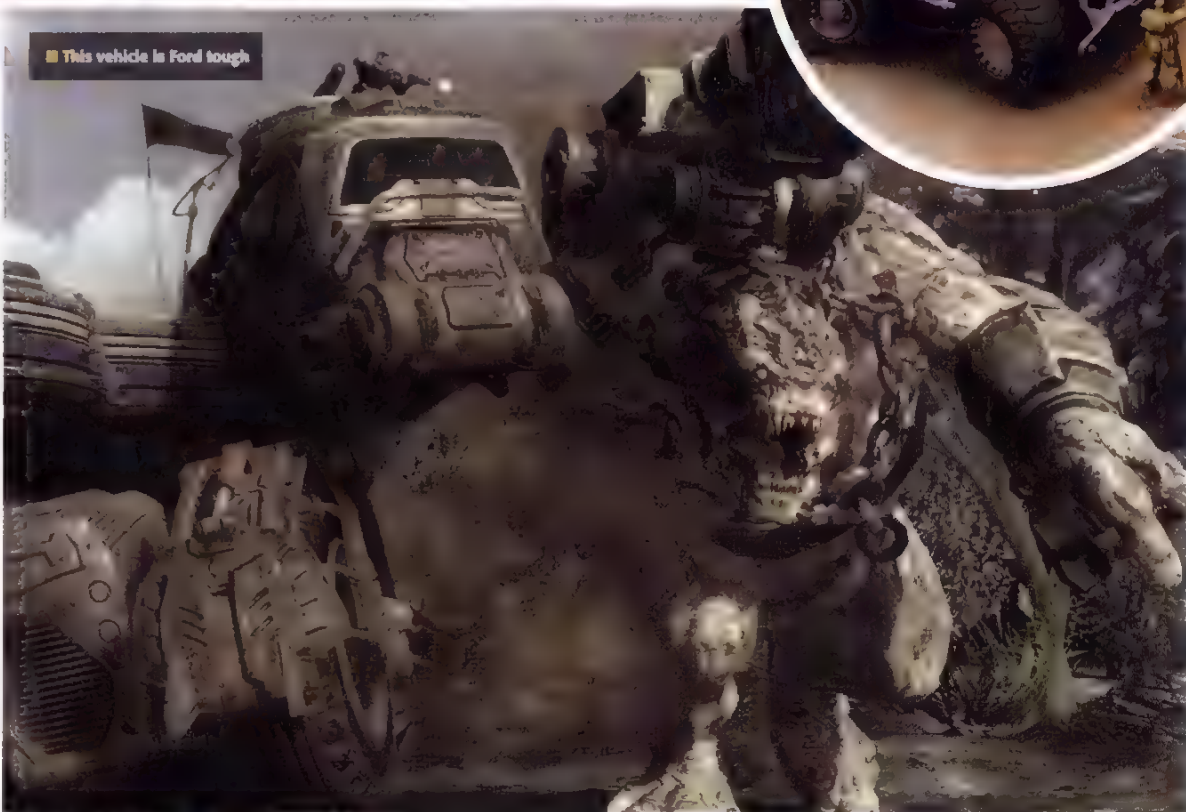
Before you get your cogs in a whirl, you should know that most of the information you want about Gears of War 2 was contained in our May 2008 cover story. This month, we're keeping the hype train going with these brand new screenshots in all of their Brumak-sized glory, plus a few new tidbits to sate your appetite.

These screens are culled from the level entitled Assault. During an exciting sequence in which the Locust horde overruns a convoy of Cog derrick trucks, a furious fight ensues across mountainous terrain. The Brumak takes a much more prominent role in gameplay, as you'll be forced to take down multiple individuals of this species throughout the course of the game. You can also see the new advancements in Unreal 3.0 as the incredible number of enemies will swarm across your screen. These battles now have an epic Lord of the Rings-like scale, as dozens of enemies of different sizes and abilities vie for the right to tear you to shreds.

With environments that span as far as the eye can see, vehicular action is now a more integral component of the experience. In addition to the derrick, we know of one other exciting vehicle that players can pilot called the Centaur. This powerful little vehicle combines the punch of a tank with the mobility of an ATV. Wouldn't it be cool if the second cooperative player had to handle a specific active reload for the devastating cannon atop this vehicle? Additionally, the Centaur would present a number of interesting scenarios if it were integrated into the wider multiplayer experience.

Keen observers of recent Xbox Live videos of the game have also seen the new "human" shield mechanic, wherein you can grab an enemy and use them as walking cover. The potential for both single and multiplayer mischief is abundant. Each new morsel of information about Microsoft's holiday flagship only gets us more excited about what's to come. ■ ■ ■

■ This vehicle is Ford tough



■ As a general rule, the team with a flying eagle usually wins



■ The Locust will try to board your derrick



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Dead Space

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EA REDWOOD SHORES > RELEASE NOVEMBER

AIM FOR THE ARMS

It's been a while since our first look at Dead Space back in October, so it was good to get our hands on the game and check in on how things are coming along. For those unfamiliar with the story, Dead Space takes place on the mining ship USG Ishimura, which has recently unearthed an alien artifact. An infestation called the Corruption quickly spreads throughout the ship, transforming crewmembers into hideously disfigured monsters. As Isaac Clarke, you must investigate the disaster and get out alive.

Our play session begins as we open a door into outer space. Air rushes out and sounds take on a muffled effect. Looking out an enormous hole torn in the side of the ship, we take in the blinding view of a nearby star occluded by floating space junk. Our air supply is running out, so we use our mechanized telekinesis glove to draw in a power cell necessary to open a nearby door.

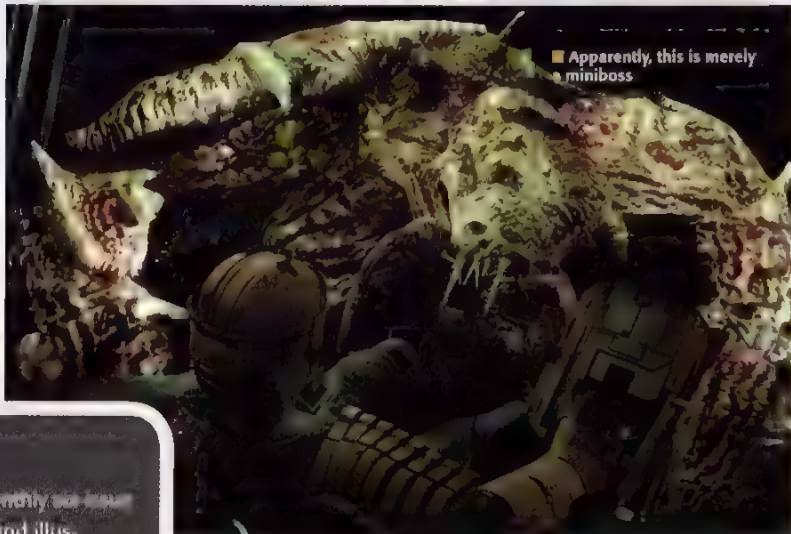
It isn't long before Necromorphs start popping around corners, crawling out of the ceiling, and creeping out of floor vents. We instinctually shoot for the head, but this only makes them flail their sharp tentacles blindly. We shoot off the legs, but the bloody torso just keeps crawling toward us — it turns out that aiming for the tentacles is the only way to take these particular enemies down. Fortunately, using stasis powers you can

slow enemies down to a crawl, making their unconventional weak points much easier to blast. Once you take off a blade-like arm, you can use the telekinesis glove to draw it in and shoot it back at remaining foes. This tactic should come in handy since ammo has been purposely limited to a meager supply, similar to the early Resident Evil games.

The next puzzle area helps break up the tension and allows us to mess around in zero gravity. Instead of wildly floating around, Isaac uses magnetic boots to stick to walls. We jump from point to point inside a large cylindrical room, using the telekinesis glove to connect various power cells into the proper jacks. Later in the game, wall jumping will be integrated into combat and you'll be able to switch gravity on and off in certain areas.

For the final sequence, the developers take the reigns and show us a hulking beast confined in a small room. Instead of putting up a fight, they run straight toward the monster to show off the gruesome death animations. Rather than just getting smacked around until your health runs out, a contextual button sequence pops up on screen to give you a chance to survive. None of these prompts were followed, however, as the creature picks up Isaac, bites off his head, and tears him in half with blood flying everywhere. Chainsaw death: owned. ■■■

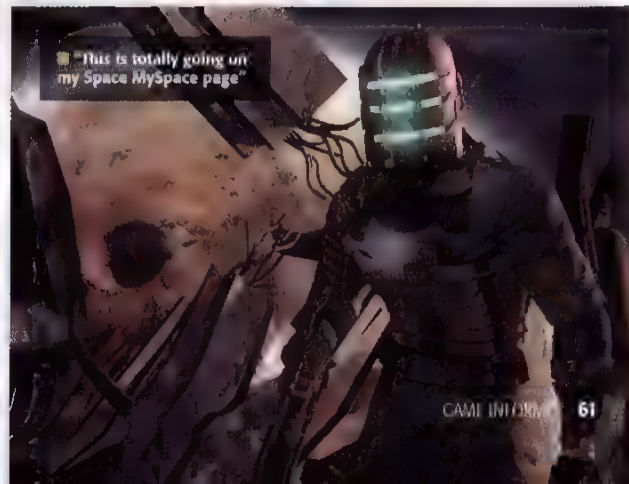
■ All HUD elements are displayed on the character model. The glowing blue lights on Isaac's back are health and stasis power, and remaining ammo is shown as a hologram on the currently equipped weapon



■ Apparently, this is merely a miniboss

EXPANDING THE UNIVERSE

Now looking to dig into the events leading up to Dead Space, EA has announced a comic book miniseries published by Image. Written by Antony Johnston (*Wasteland*) and illustrated by Ben Templesmith (*30 Days of Night*), the full run should be completed in August. Then in October, an animated Dead Space movie will appear on TV and DVD.



■ "This is totally going on my Space MySpace page"



PLAYSTATION 3

Killzone 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE)
 > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
 > **DEVELOPER** GUERRILLA GAMES > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 2009

NOT THIS YEAR

For those hoping to spend their holiday break this winter conquering Helghan, we have some bad news: Killzone 2 has been pushed to 2009. But Sony says it's more a matter of scheduling than bugs. "There is nothing wrong or causing a delay to the development of the title," says senior PR manager Ron Eagle on the official PlayStation blog. "Killzone 2 was moved to February 2009 to make sure we didn't have three shooters in the marketplace [SOCOM: Confrontation and Resistance 2 - Ed.] competing for retail dollars during the same holiday season."

During some recent hands-on time with the game, we played part of the second level. As the mohawked Sev, you are part of Alpha Team, which is clearing the way for the Nemesis Convoy. We started right in the middle of an intense firefight, with Helghast shooting at us from almost every angle. Utilizing the first-person cover mechanic was a necessity. Holding down L1 will stick you behind the nearest chunk of cement, while the right stick allows you to peek over or around cover for quick potshots. After taking out a few flanking units, we picked up a rocket launcher and destroyed an entire bridge full of Helghast vehicles and soldiers in one tremendous explosion.

You're only allowed to carry one large weapon along with a pistol, but the standard issue ISA rifle seems the best choice with its solid accuracy and nice rate of fire. At least if you run out of ammo, the magnum handgun packs a punch at close range while you scavenge for a Helghast rifle.

Next we teamed up squadmate Garza to open a gate for the convoy. To access a particularly high platform, he gave us a boost Army of Two-style and we in turn pulled him up. Despite this obvious hint towards a co-op mode, Sony reps kept up the front, saying there was "nothing announced for co-op at this time." We took a lift down to a warehouse loaded with enemies and plenty of bright orange explosive barrels. Here we took in some of the small details, like blasting the helmets off of soldiers and the impressive movement animations as Helghast buzz through the ceiling, slide down ropes, and hop railings. Garza went down a couple of times during the early stage, but we managed to revive him. While in the early stage, we have a babysitting job.

Sixaxis integration is a pretty fun feature. To open the gate, we had to push two buttons to grab on to a wire and perform a variety of motion with our hands as enemies were marching the movements. As long as Garza will see the subtle recipe for motion controls, keeping a Hollywood level of action and production values, and offers a compelling narrative, we see no reason why Killzone 2 can't live up to the ridiculous hype it's been riding these last few years. ■■■

■ Despite the third-person angle in this screenshot, the in-game cover camera remains completely in first-person

■ Even standard grenade explosions have a ridiculous range

■ Just admit that you're going to have co-op, Sony!



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Project Origin

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE TOO) > **PUBLISHER** WARRIOR BROS. > **DEVELOPER** MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** FALL

DON'T F.E.A.R. THE FUTURE

In the several months since we first looked at the sequel to 2005's successful F.E.A.R., developer Monolith Productions has been quiet about this horror-themed, action-oriented first-person shooter. We recently caught up with lead producer Loz Doyle and got a rundown of a few of the unique situations players will find themselves in as they try to stop a psychically super-powered little girl from plunging the world into a twisted nightmare. ■■■



THREE-WAY ETIQUETTE

DOYLE: There is a scene at the Wade Elementary School where you enter from a backstage area onto one of those "cafetorium" stages that some schools have. You know, where it is the cafeteria and the auditorium... anyway, you come out onto the stage to see the backs of a couple Replica soldiers dug into cover behind the 2D wooden barn facade from the set of the Wade Elementary presentation of *Farmer Gene's Magic Barn*. These guys are pinned down by a bunch of Armacham soldiers who have flipped up cafeteria tables for cover out in the main cafeteria area. Since you have the drop on these guys, you can choose to pick them off from behind, or hang tight and watch the fight play between the two factions and wait to fight the victor... unless of course one of the factions spots you, in which case you then

have two factions that hate you. You can use them against each other by pressing in, which forces the Replica to reposition themselves to fight you from a position where they become an easy target for the Armacham soldiers. It could also end up playing out that you become distracted enough flanking this Replica threat that an Armacham soldier uses the opportunity to flank your position and bear down on you. But, more importantly than any of this combat goodness, the absolutely best part of this encounter will occur if the player takes up cover behind the second wooden donkey on the stage. The AI understands the environment and what is in it, so that they can call out the player's location to their squad mates. To hear one of the Armacham soldiers emphatically calling out "The ass! He's behind the ass!" is sheer bliss.

OPTICAL ILLUSION

DOYLE: There is this great scene that takes place in a movie theater in the middle of the destroyed city. Replica soldiers are everywhere, reinforcements are being called to your position in wave after wave, and you have fought like mad through the streets and into the lobby of the "Monoplex" to finally achieve a bit of a respite. You can hear the sounds of the movie playing inside the auditorium. The marquee says they are playing the latest *Snakefist* flick, so you head in to check it out. Inside, the theater is empty, you see the flicker coming from the projection booth, and on the screen you see a grungy alley and a police car... or so you thought. That is when Replica soldiers enter the alley, take up positions behind that police car and start firing on your position.

You come to realize the entire back wall of the theater has been blown out and what you thought was a scene in the movie is actually the alley behind the theater. The fight in the theater plays out really nice as Replica hold the alley and use the rows of seats as cover to advance on the player.



RED BARRELS: A SOLDIER'S BEST FRIEND

DOYLE: There are these great opportunities in the "Gen-Lab" mission where you are fighting Replica and Armacham soldiers in this really cool tech environment that has been totally messed up by in-fighting between factions and the release of some of the "experiments" held there. Players can flip over these tech carts to use as cover, and these high-pressure chemical canisters that look like soda syrup canisters are rolling around that will explode when you shoot them. We combined the two to create these really nice combat opportunities by placing the tank on its side on top of the

tech cart. The player can flip the cart, which topples the canister to the ground and rolls them down the hallway toward the enemy. A well-placed shot blows the tank and takes out the bad guys in a glorious spray of flames, blood, and body parts. Of course, there is the flip side to all this in that the AI knows how this works as well.

XBOX 360 | PC

Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3

> STYLE 1 PLAYER STRATEGY (ONLINE TRAI) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER EA GAMES
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 11, 2008

TIME-TRAVELING SOVIET BLIMPS

■ EALA hopes the ability to build your base at sea and an emphasis on combined-arms forces will spell the end of the early tank rush

Perhaps the most loved entries in the Command & Conquer franchise, the Red Alert games posited a world in which Albert Einstein traveled back in time to assassinate Hitler prior to his rise to power – which brought about a timeline where zeppelins ruled the skies, Nikolai Tesla's electrical gadgets changed the face of war, and a vastly stronger Soviet Union warred with the combined forces of the West for global dominance. This gonzo setting gave birth to some of the wackiest units in real-time strategy, with massive Tesla coils one-shotting anything that wandered too near and mind-control fields paralyzing entire battalions of warriors. Electronic Arts is bringing Red Alert back this

fall, and throwing a few curveballs into this already insane universe.

Red Alert 3 opens with the Soviet empire on the verge of collapse. After losing the war against the West (as told in the first two games), they send their own time travelers back to liquidate Einstein before the Allies can use his inventions to defeat the Red Army. While this prevents the defeat of the Soviet forces, it also changes the past to give birth to a third superpower: the Empire of the Rising Sun. This technologically advanced Japanese faction completely changes the global power dynamic, and the ensuing wars set the stage for RA3's innovative campaign.

Instead of the scripted single-player cam-

paign that nearly all RTS games offer, RA3 is going in an entirely new direction: cooperative campaigns. Every one of the 27 missions is designed to be played with a buddy (though AI generals will be available for those who prefer to play offline), and EALA intends them to go far beyond the "comp-stomping" that we've enjoyed for years. Some missions will have players working independently on completely separate objectives, while others require more hand-in-glove cooperation toward a shared goal.

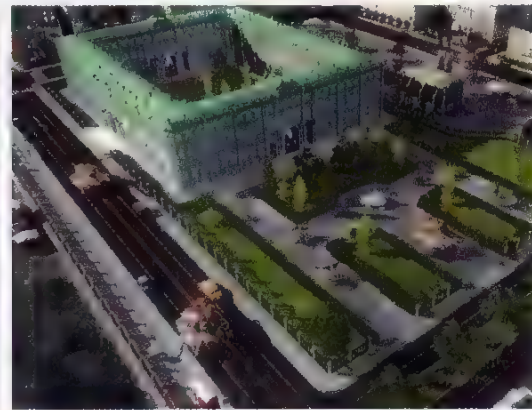
The other major point that distinguishes RA3 from its competitors is its focus on naval action. While integrating high seas action has traditionally been a stumbling block for the genre, EALA has some ideas

that give us hope for RA3. Each faction has several amphibious core units that can transform between ground and water modes, and the ocean offers resources to players who take advantage of building their base on water. Together, these concepts will hopefully make the seas an integral part of any good strategy rather than a discrete sub-game that only matters on a select few maps.

The unique setting is great, and the ways that EALA is riffing off of C&C 3 (Red Alert 3 will share a very similar interface and gameplay style to the first EA Command & Conquer title) have us pumped to get our hands on the game. ■ ■ ■



■ Mechs and ninjas versus transforming tanks!



■ We've got no complaints about the graphical quality



■ The economy will be as straightforward as C&C 3's



Wii

Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI > DEVELOPER NAMCO TALES STUDIO > RELEASE SEPTEMBER

SOME OLD, SOME NEW

Tales of Symphonia was a big fish in the small pond of GameCube RPGs, and it is no surprise that the sequel is about to achieve the same distinction on the Wii. The console hasn't had any notable entries in the genre, but Namco Bandai is aiming to change that with Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World.

Fans are probably wondering what has happened to characters like Lloyd, Colette, and Genis since the end of the first game. The good news is that you'll find out, but not through their perspectives. Dawn of the World focuses on a new set of protagonists, teenagers Emil and Marta. Even with these new main characters, the familiar cast of the original will show up in roles of varying importance.

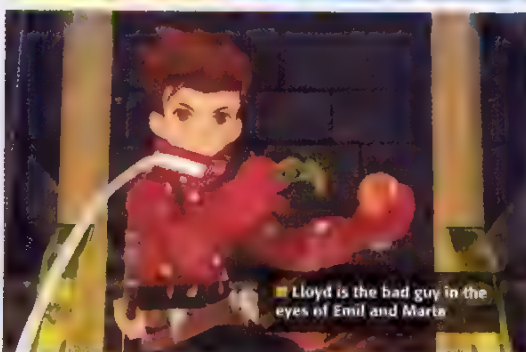
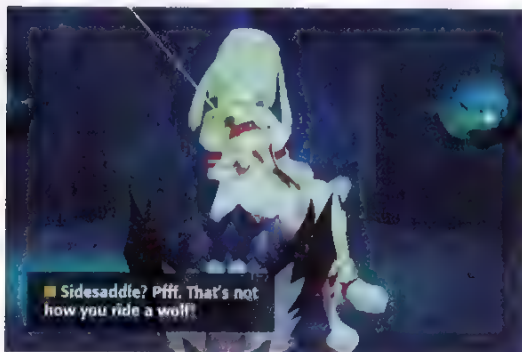
The story revolves around the tension between Sylvarant and Tethe'alla, the two worlds reunited in the last game.

Bringing them together hasn't been a peaceful process, and the conflict has led to the destruction of Emil and Marta's hometown. To make matters worse, the raid was apparently led by former series hero Lloyd Irving, so Emil and Marta set out on a quest to unravel the mystery behind the events.

Most of the series' gameplay traditions will remain intact for this entry, including real-time battles and the option to play four-player co-op instead of using AI allies. However, one new element being added is the ability to recruit monsters into your fighting ranks. Once captured, these beasts will take the place of one of your human party members in battle, and you can increase their power by feeding them meals.

Featuring Tales' signature art style and traditional mechanics, Dawn of the New World looks like a fantastic opportunity to revisit Sylvarant and Tethe'alla.

It's been four years since the original hit shelves – it shouldn't be too hard to wait a little longer for this sequel's fall release. ■■■■



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EX model shown.



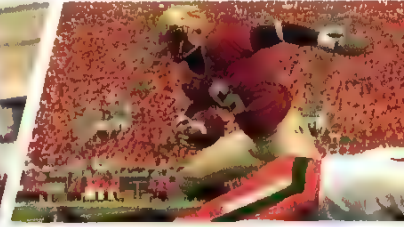
■ No more holding turbo to guarantee yourself five to eight yards on a dive play. When plunging through the line, backs must find cutback lanes quickly before they disappear amidst all the flab of offensive and defensive linemen



■ NCAA 09 emphasizes wide-open offense. The differences from walk-ons and blue chippers is all the more evident, as NFL-ready players will dominate lesser-skilled players



■ The new dynamic gameplay engine allows you more freedom at the point of contact. Break out of juke animations early to change directions



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NCAA Football 09

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS
> DEVELOPER EA TIBURON > RELEASE JULY 15

THE PRESEASON FAVORITE

College football's governing body just doesn't get it. While bowl games generate money and allow a much larger pool of teams to celebrate winning seasons on a big stage, the BCS is still a mess of a system that, in the end, more often than not lacks a true championship team. While college football's postseason lacks the fervor generated during March Madness, you can't say the same thing about its video game counterpart. With the bold new additions to NCAA 09, this may be the most popular college football game to date.

NCAA 09's standout feature is undoubtedly the 12-player online dynasty mode. You and up to 11 other friends can compete on the gridiron for the top ranking in the polls while also jockeying for the blue chip prospects that will put your team over the edge next year. To concentrate the player-versus-player match-ups, commissioners can either create a new conference composed of any combination of Division I teams or use one of the current conferences like the Big 10. Dedicated leagues can go as long as 60 consecutive seasons.

On the field, EA Tiburon has given the game a large overhaul, with remodeled stadiums, a redesigned lighting system that successfully creates the feel of those hazy Saturday afternoons, and a new dynamic animation system that allows the player more freedom at the point of contact. Ball carriers can now perform subtle juke and stutter

steps. Instead of being locked into canned animations, players fluidly maneuver in and out of moves if a defender has cut you off at the pass and you need to readjust.

In the huddle, Tiburon has placed more emphasis on team composure this year. College quarterbacks are known for their shaky psyches, and NCAA Football recreates these classic flameouts when the going gets rough. If a quarterback is rattled by the crowd or a poor performance, the button indicators on receivers will turn into question marks and the receiver routes are replaced with squiggly lines while you are making pre-play reads. If your struggling gunslinger throws a pick, the Quarterback Quiz minigame pops up, presenting you with three plays the defense may have used on the last play. Guess the correct coverage and your quarterback will recover some of his composure.

Composure also counts when the game comes down to kicking the game-winning field goal. In these situations, the defense can ice the kicker by calling a timeout before the snap. The camera will then shift to a dramatic angle, and the kicking meter's accuracy window shortens while the controller rumbles to mimic the beating heart of the player responsible for winning or losing the game.

If this impressive list of features integrates well and the gameplay shows marked improvement over last year, we'll be carrying NCAA Football 09 off the field in celebration of its victory. ■■■

SEND IN THE CLOWNS

With NCAA Football 09's new Mascot Mode, we can finally answer the age-old question: Can a team of Lil' Reds from Nebraska beat a team of Big Reds from Western Kentucky? This arcade-style mode replaces every player from your favorite college team with an army of mascots and lets you duke it out between the sidelines. Surprisingly, these mascots are better athletes than the jocks they cheer for. Whereas a running back may spin and juke his way downfield, the mascots perform outlandish moves like flips to move the chains.

HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE

While NCAA 09 sadly leaves out the fantastic Create-A-Sign feature, home field advantage still goes a long way. The new celebration mode allows you to interact with team mascots after big scores to either pump up or taunt the fans. You can also import songs on your Xbox 360 hard drive for use at your home stadium for 23 different game scenarios, such as kickoffs, sacks, third downs, and scores. Dethklok touchdown celebrations, here we come!

SHARE THE WEALTH

EA's new EA GOLF Championship Series is a must-have for every golfer. EA's new EA GOLF Championship Series is a must-have for every golfer. EA's new EA GOLF Championship Series is a must-have for every golfer. EA's new EA GOLF Championship Series is a must-have for every golfer. EA's new EA GOLF Championship Series is a must-have for every golfer.



Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II

► STYLE: 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (ONLINE TOWNS) ► PUBLISHER: THQ ► DEVELOPER: RELIC ENTERTAINMENT ► RELEASE: SPRING 2009

SPACE ORKS

Relic Entertainment's outstanding 2004 real-time strategy effort, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*, was received well enough to spawn three expansion packs, but now it's time for a true sequel. *Dawn of War II* aims to keep the core values of the original – a streamlined economy, larger-than-life units, and brutally visceral violence – while pushing the RTS genre forward by integrating long-term goals and a RPG-like reward structure to get players more invested in their troops and the wars they're fighting.

The single-player campaign is seeing the greatest amount of change. Instead of offering the same slog through scripted missions that we've accepted as standard for the

genre, *DoW II* charges players with determining the fate of an entire sector of the galaxy. On your spaceship, you can move to a planet and check out a number of distress signals emanating from the surface. Each one of these points is a mission waiting for your attention, but you can't get to every one since the chaos in the sector moves along with you. Which missions you complete, your performances within them, and your choices during battle all have an effect on the flow of the campaign – it's possible to squeak out a marginal victory but leave the sector in ruins. Relic hopes that this series of choices and different outcomes will lend the campaign a unique replayability, particularly since you can play through the whole thing as any of the game's races,

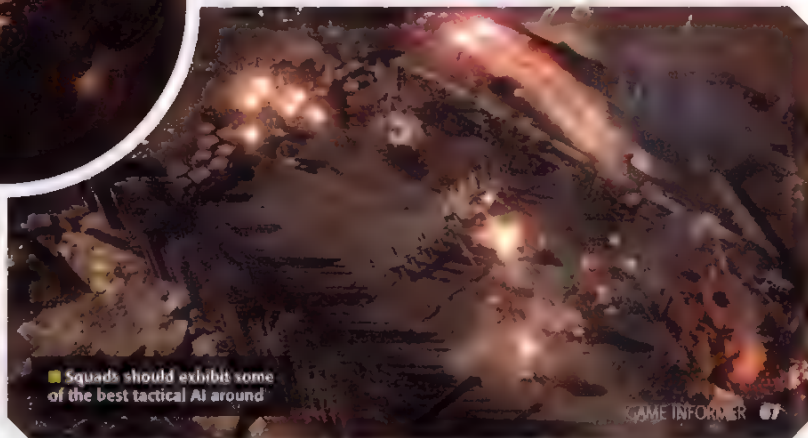
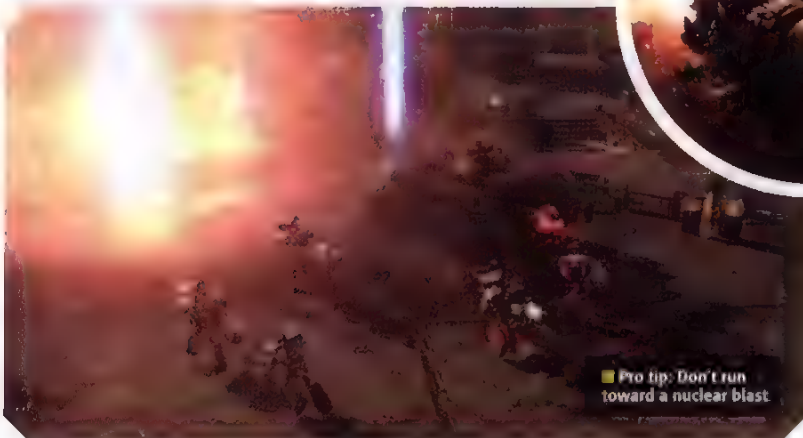
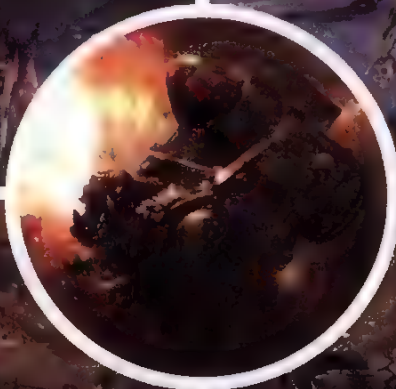
each of which has its own goals.

In order to invest players more heavily into their troops, your forces are persistent from mission to mission. Troops will gain experience as they survive battles, but you'll also scavenge equipment from the battlefield that you can then use to customize your squads between missions. Relic's goal with this is to produce the "one more turn" syndrome that RPGs and strategy games have up to now had a monopoly on. Of course, which missions you undertake and how you fare in them has an effect on this as well, giving players one more reason to delve deeper into the campaign.

Relic also developed 2006's impeccably crafted *Company of Heroes*, and many of that game's innovations find their way into

DoW II. Destructible buildings and other terrain features, deformable battlefields, excellent cover mechanics, and competent squad AI should all help to make combat in *DoW II* as entertaining as anything in the genre. On another technology front, the gruesome animations that *Dawn of War*'s units are famous for will be fully integrated into gameplay in this sequel – when a mech picks up a guy, rips him in half, and throws the bloody pieces away, chunks of flesh will bounce off of the landscape and knock down any troops in their path.

Given Relic's top-flight pedigree in the RTS genre, our hopes for *Dawn of War II* couldn't be higher. ■■■





Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

PS3, XBOX 360, PC, PSP2
 2-PLAYER ONLINE
 DEVELOPER: GIGAWATT
 RELEASE: AUGUST 11

IT'S GETTING HOT IN HERE

They sent you on a dangerous mission to rescue a deadly man. But that was just business. They stiffed you on the bill. Again, just business. They used you and betrayed you. Hey, you're a mercenary, that's part of the business. But then they shot you in the ass, and that makes it personal.

The sequel to 2005's breakout success, *Mercenaries 2* plays a lot like a buddy action film: explosive, fast, and often funny. Keeping in line with that buddy theme, Pandemic has added drop-in/drop-out co-op functionality. At anytime during the story, you and a friend can team up and take on any of *Mercenaries 2*'s missions.

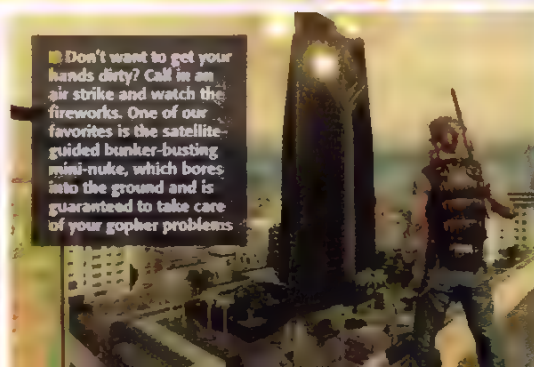
Whether together or alone, you'll have plenty of room to roam in the game's 64-square kilometer world. The setting this time around is a fictional Venezuela, which allows for a brighter color palette, creating a warmer, more tropical feel. Compared to the first game's drab brown tones, the visuals in *World in Flames* practically pop off the screen.

This time, the war is about oil. Six different factions are fighting over these reserves, and like last time you can work for all of them, playing each group against the other. But the war isn't dependent on you, and you'll see pockets of violence erupt all over the place as you explore the island's cities and jungles.

We're glad to see a few new features in this sequel, such as the ability to swim and the opportunity to quick travel across the map via landing zones. Even more impressive is the game's persistent world. As long as your system stays powered on, the damage you cause will stick around. Bomb a building to its foundation – or just run over a tree – and the debris will remain where it landed even if you drive to the other side of the island.

Mercenaries 2 is filled with over 130 civilian vehicles and military transports, all of which are yours for the taking. Hijacking a tank starts a minigame where you wrestle with the vehicle's gunner before dropping a grenade down the hatch. Even airborne transports aren't out of reach thanks to a handy grapple gun, which lets you skyjack any helicopter that passes overhead. If you can't find what you need, or find yourself pinned down with limited resources, just call in an airdrop so the vehicles and equipment come to you.

Pandemic doesn't seem eager to change a formula that worked so well the first time around, and we don't blame them. However, we can tell that the in-game navigation system still needs a little work, and we hope the mission variety is more diverse than the first game. Otherwise, this sequel looks to be shaping up nicely. ■ ■ ■





■ High fantasy with a darkly gothic twist is the most apt description of Sacred's tone

XBOX 360 PC

Sacred 2: Fallen Angels

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) (XBOX 360), 1-PLAYER (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) (PC)
 > **PUBLISHER** CDV > **DEVELOPER** ASCARON ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

OLD WORLD, NEW TRICKS

European-developed games often bear a stigma in the U.S. — painfully detailed war simulations and F1 racing sims don't exactly capture our national imagination. Still, certain games dispel this stereotype, one of which was an amusing Diablo clone from 2004 called Sacred. This sequel builds on the hack n' slash credentials of the original, but raises the bar in so many ways that it defies the inevitable Diablo comparison.

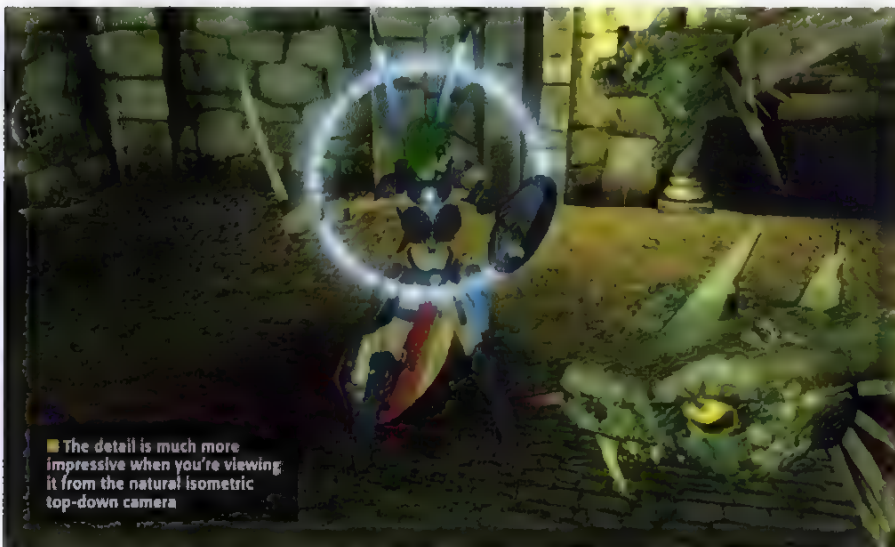
As nice as the visuals are, the powerful new proprietary rendering engine is the least of Sacred 2's improvements. Twenty-two square miles of seamless handcrafted landscape hold enough secrets to keep adventurers busy for months. No generic, randomly generated dungeons or loading screens bog down players in their quest to either restore the balance of magic in the world or seize power for themselves as one of six classes. It's a big, beautiful world.

On either Xbox 360 or PC, Sacred 2 supports drop-in/drop-out cooperative play. The game automatically scales the challenge to match the number of players present, and certain pieces of loot will only drop for hero parties. However, the Xbox 360 version is somewhat limited, with

a maximum of four players in a game (though Ascaron is trying to increase that number). Players are also forced to stick together X-Men Legends style. The PC edition will allow 16 players per world, and has no limitations on where you can go.

Rather than using the tried-and-true tiered skill system common to action/RPGs, Sacred 2 gives players all 15 of their combat abilities right off the bat. As you gain levels, you can modify those powers with mutators like increased area of effect, longer duration, higher damage, or better buffing or debuffing. Any fan of the genre who has dumped twenty hours into a character only to find out that the skill they were gunning for isn't as cool as it sounded on paper can tell you the obvious advantages of this approach.

Between the six classes, two paths through the main quest, four difficulty levels, and six deities that grant different unique skills and sidequests, Sacred 2 has the basics in place to be an excellent hack n' slasher. If Ascaron can nail the gameplay — and the developer's track record suggests that it likely will — Sacred 2 has a good shot at living up to its sky-high potential. ■■■



■ The detail is much more impressive when you're viewing it from the natural isometric top-down camera



previews

PLAYSTATION 3

Valkyria Chronicles

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

BEAUTIFUL STRATEGY

It's easy to get drawn in to Valkyria Chronicles' distinct watercolor and pencil shaded art style. But what really has us excited is the game's interesting take on the long held tenets of tactical RPGs.

Set in an alternate 1930s Europe, two warring factions struggle to amass stockpiles of the most valuable element on Earth, Ragnite. The player's home country has remained neutral in the struggle, but it holds one of the richest veins of Ragnite in the world and quickly becomes an intense battleground.

Combat begins with a simple paper map of the battlefield with friendlies in blue and enemies in red. Once a unit is selected, the camera zooms in to a third-person action perspective. Rather than tying movement to a grid, units have a "fuel gauge" that allows them to run freely, climb ladders to higher ground, and take cover behind objects. A network of yellow lines points you toward enemies on the map, similar to the colored arcs in Final Fantasy XII. When you're ready to attack,

an aiming reticle appears onscreen and the camera zooms in to an over-the-shoulder Gears of War view. From here you can target specific enemy body parts. As always, headshots are ideal, but the torso is easiest to nail from longer distances.

Later on, you can earn vehicles like tanks and specialized units, like snipers. We saw a sniper climb up on a high perch and wipe out a soldier several hundred yards away. Since she had neglected to find cover after the attack, however, an enemy tank eradicated the entire tower she was standing on. These destructible environments not only look cool, they also provide tactical alternatives. Instead of taking on the enemy in bottlenecked city streets, for example, players can blow out a wall for a surprise flanking maneuver.

Sega is currently in the process of localizing this Japanese release for the English speaking market, but Japanophiles can rest easy since both dialogue tracks will be included in the North American release. ■■■



PLAYSTATION 3

SOCOM: Confrontation

> STYLE 32-PLAYER ACTION ONLINE > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER SLANT SIX GAMES > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 19

THE WAR BEFORE THE WAR

SOCOM fans have waited patiently for the series' debut on the PlayStation 3. While *Confrontation* isn't a true sequel, much like *GT5: Prologue*, Slant Six's online-only offering serves as an appetizer to tide you over while the wait continues for the Zipper-developed main dish.

Confrontation likely won't wow gamers with its basic feature set. The game includes only seven multiplayer maps, three of which are the classic maps Crossroads, Desert Glory, and Frostfire. Each has been renovated to support 32-player matches. The number doubles when you factor in the day and night settings for each, but this is still a skimpy number for an online-only title. At least each of the seven modes — Elimination, Suppression, Breach, Demolition, Extraction, Escort, and Control Point — works on every map.

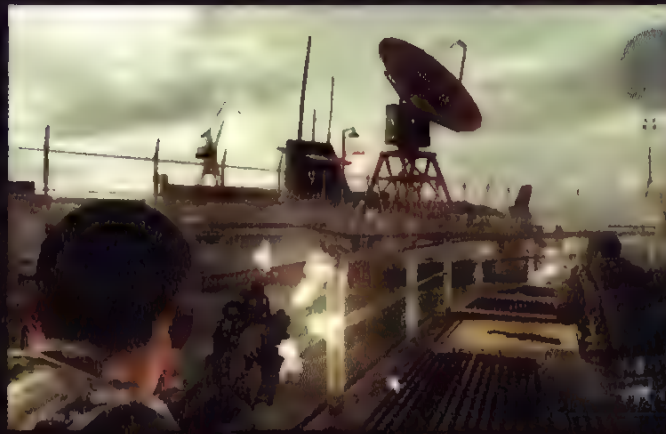
Confrontation focuses heavily on team-based multiplayer. When setting up a clan, you must choose to join one of the five Special Forces outfits: the Navy SEALs, British SAS, German KSK, Spanish UOC, or French RPIMA. Each group has specialized armor, weapons, and camo that you cannot otherwise use, so choosing a SF with kits that match your clan strengths is imperative, as you cannot switch to another group unless you create or join another clan. A robust management system makes it easy to plan clan matches, keep track of community events, see invites, manage ladder matches, and view past performances.

On the battlefield, not much has changed. *Confrontation* sticks with the classic SOCOM control scheme, adding the ability to sprint and tapping Sixaxis functionality to allow soldiers to lean, peak, and crouch without the press of a button. The camera is zoomed in for a closer, over-the-shoulder view, but the classic view is still an option. When chucking grenades, the game now gives you the option of tossing them over- or underhand to grant you more control.

With online mainstays *Halo*, *Rainbow Six Vegas*, and *Call of Duty* featuring robust persistent player ranking systems, it seems strange that an online-only offering like *SOCOM* forgoes this feature altogether. If players want to rank progression, they must join a clan and do it within the confines of that organization. Nothing carries over if you leave to join a new clan.

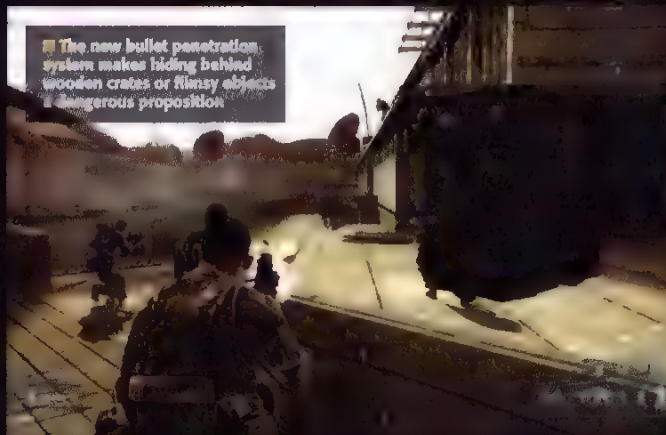
Regardless, the *SOCOM* faithful will likely flock to get their fix when the game ships in September with a Bluetooth headset pack-in. ■ ■ ■

■ Whether you are sneaking behind enemy lines, leading a full-frontal assault, or sniping from a distance, *SOCOM*'s soundtrack dynamically changes to reflect the situation's emotional intensity and mood.



■ This is the first look at Viral Labs, a level centered on a domed industrial facility surrounded by metal catwalks and water.

■ *Confrontation* features a dynamic matchmaking system that makes it easy to find games as a solo player or with a party of friends.



■ The new bullet penetration system makes hiding behind wooden crates or flimsy objects a dangerous proposition.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Silent Hill: Homecoming

STYLE T | PLAYER ACTION | PUBLISHER KONAMI | DEVELOPER THE COLLECTIVE | RELEASE SEPTEMBER

HOME SWEET HELL

■ That unfortunately placed exit sign has fooled many wayward souls into entering the pits of Hell

Change can be a scary thing, and for Silent Hill's sake, we hope that adage holds true. For the first time in the series, Konami has handed Silent Hill to a U.S. studio: The Collective. That's not the only change for the fifth entry in the famously terrifying series. Homecoming starts off in a new town called Shepherd's Glen. If that wasn't enough, the game also features a protagonist who can actually handle himself in combat, a military vet named Alex who returns home in search of his missing younger brother.

Though it's expected that we're going to change aspects of the game, there's a

sense that we're messing with someone else's baby," says lead designer Jason Allen. "And from that perspective we've been very careful with where we apply innovation to preserve the same feel of previous games."

One welcome innovation is the new camera system. Ditching the series' standard – and spotty – fixed camera, The Collective has implemented a more flexible third person, free-look system. "We believe that being able to fully examine each and every environment rather than seeing only a small portion of the room helps ground the player in the game world," Allen says. "It also has

the added benefit that you no longer have instances in combat where you're being attacked and yet unable to see the enemy on screen."

Combat has also received a complete overhaul. Alex is a soldier after all, and should be more capable than your average Joe at handling himself in battle. The wider array of combo attacks and counters give Alex more control over combat situations, which has been a sticking point for the Silent Hill games in the past. "I believe the combat changes we've introduced for this latest outing are going to make the people who complain about combat in previous games

very happy," says Allen.

Fans shouldn't worry that their favorite horror title is turning into an action bloodbath, however. The Collective's goal is merely to make the combat as fun to play as the exploration and puzzle solving. Just because Alex will be a more formidable protagonist doesn't necessarily mean he'll find Silent Hill, where he will eventually end up, a more welcoming town. "You see, that's the thing about Silent Hill," says Allen. "Every time you play it, your whole body is screaming 'Run away!' but you don't. Some perverse fascination keeps you exploring deeper into the madness." ■ ■ ■

■ Crazy steampunk church? Oddly placed, giant glowing fans? Demonic, oppressive sky? Silent Hill must be somewhere in Alabama

■ The Collective has implemented a rapid select inventory system for weapons and items

■ Though he starts in the new town of Shepherd's Glen, Alex will eventually work his way back to Silent Hill

NINTENDO DS

Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE FALL

THE BELMONT STAKES

You can't keep a good vampire lord down. Just when you thought the world was safe from Dracula's evil influence, the original bat man returns on his third DS outing. At a recent Konami event, we got to see *Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia* in action and spoke with series producer Koji Igarashi.

"Order of Ecclesia" refers to one of several groups that formed in Richter Belmont's absence following the events of *Symphony of the Night*. Igarashi says it takes place between that game and the Sega Genesis title *Castlevania: Bloodlines*, though he wouldn't be

more specific about the timeline.

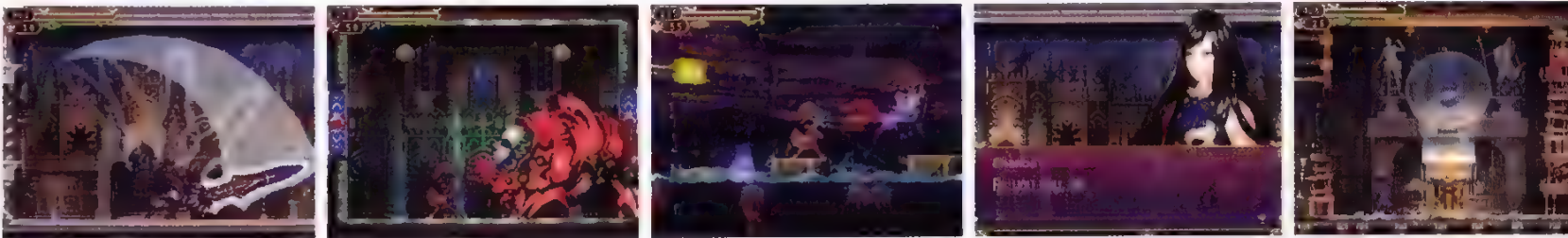
Add main character Shanoa to the elite group of women who have populated the *Castlevania* universe over the past few decades. Igarashi says there were a few reasons the team added a new playable female to the series. "The main reason is that basically it's a request that we've heard from a lot of fans," he says. "It's definitely something that we've listened to." Next, because of the game's story, Igarashi says she was a natural fit for a main character. "Thirdly, one of the artists for the game, if it's a female character, it inspires him more — it's just something that he enjoys

drawing a lot more," he says, laughing. "It raises his motivation."

Even though she's not a member of the Belmont family, don't think Shanoa is ill-equipped to handle Drac and his minions. Using a new glyph system, she can equip weapons and magic-infused gear to her arms and back. Dual-wielding sabers let her unleash a furious blast of quick attacks, though it depletes her stamina meter more quickly. Sabers are fine, but what about the old-school whip lovers? Is there a chance there's a whip glyph in the game? "Hmmm... I wonder," teases Igarashi. "You'll have to wait to find out"

From what we saw, *Order of Ecclesia* boasts the highly detailed, screen-filling bosses that DS players have come to expect, including a segmented lobster-like beast and a fight against a massive crab in a narrow vertical passageway. Why all the crustacean love? Igarashi says his team loves the way the segmented creatures move. "For some reason, I've been told that games with crabs in them are really good," he says, adding with a laugh, "Or that's just something I'm saying."

We'll see just how good it is when *Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia* ships this fall. ■■■■



Can you talk?



Can you talk?



Cool. But can you go from the beach to the woods to the mountains?



Cool. But can you go from the beach to the woods to the mountains?



NINTENDO DS

Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** TECMO > **DEVELOPER** TECMO
> **RELEASE** FALL

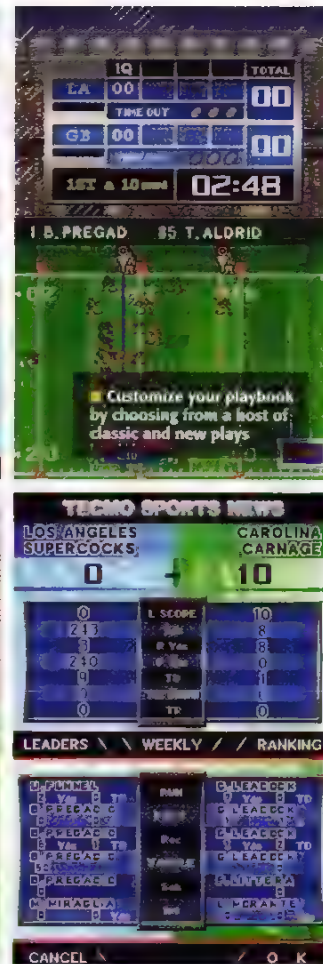
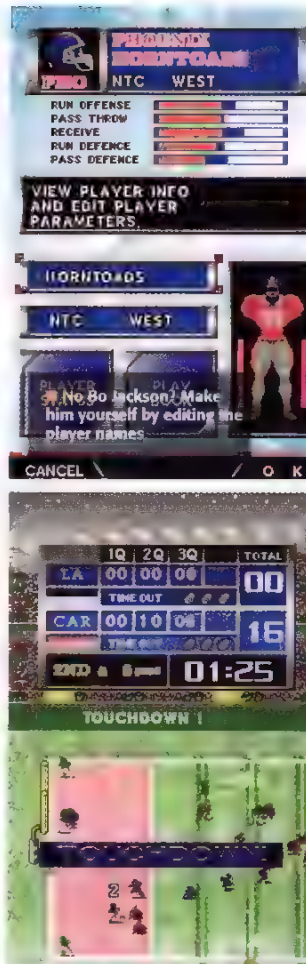
READY! DOWN! HUT! HUT! HUT!

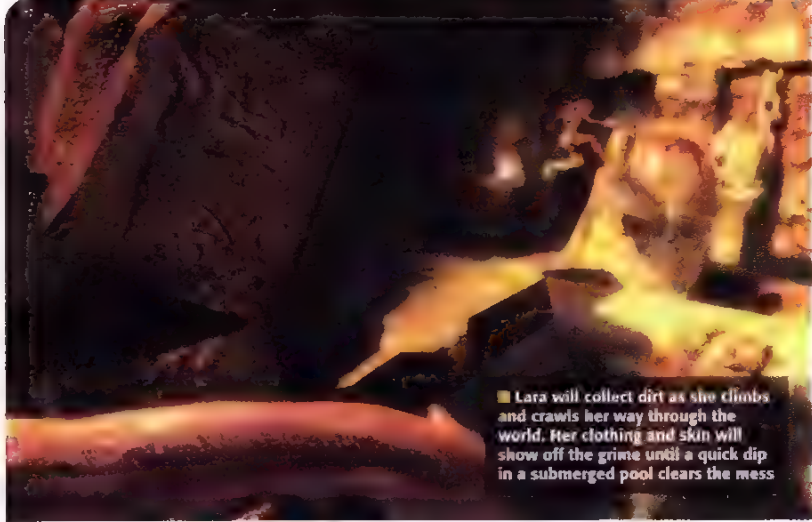
It's time to put down your emulators and pick up a DS — the first new Tecmo Bowl game since the SNES is about to step onto the field. Though Kickoff may lack legendary gridiron juggernauts like Bo Jackson, Christian Okoye, and QB Eagles, little else has changed to dim this game's prestigious standing among landmark sports titles.

Tecmo Super Bowl's core remains faithfully intact. Each team has the full allotment of players on the field, and you choose among the standard four running plays and four passing plays. Though the game doesn't have the NFL license, gamers can customize all 32 teams right down to their names, cities, jerseys, player names, and abilities. Unfortunately, there is no way to share your created rosters, so everyone must customize their teams individually. Players can compete online with a friend or jump into a season mode, which features full stat tracking.

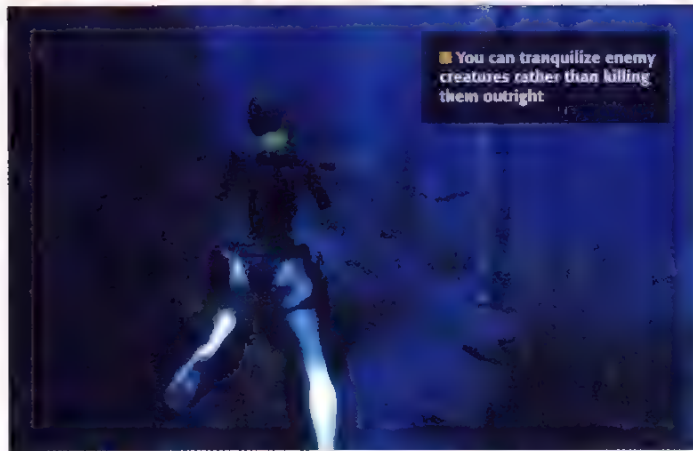
On the field, the new stylus controls complement the classic button interface. Tapping the screen hikes the ball, moving the stylus around the screen will move the ball carrier toward the direction you are drawing, and scribbling over players makes them break or make a tackle. Tecmo has added super abilities for special players like the super juke, lightning pass, and power run, which allow them to run rampant over the opposition. Players can trigger some moves, and others will happen randomly depending on the game situation. In classic Tecmo Bowl fashion, big plays trigger short cutscenes, and Tecmo has remixed many of the memorable 8-bit songs from the original titles.

With people still emulating the old game online with updated NFL rosters, Tecmo Bowl Kickoff should have a huge following. The ball snaps sometime this fall. ■■■■





■ Lara will collect dirt as she climbs and crawls her way through the world. Her clothing and skin will show off the grime until a quick dip in a submerged pool clears the mess



■ You can tranquilize enemy creatures rather than killing them outright



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Tomb Raider: Underworld

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

INTO THE DEEP

It's becoming clearer as the months pass just how big a step forward is planned for Lara Croft. Underworld has been blowing us away for months with teasing images, but this time we got an up close look at the game in action. This glimpse only reinforces the point – Lara is headed into some exciting new waters.

The level we saw begins as Lara stands in her wetsuit aboard a well-appointed yacht. Diving off, she enters into the profound blue of the Mediterranean Sea and swims downward in her scuba gear. As some dangerous sharks approach, Lara has her trusty spear gun for protection. This time around, and throughout the game, she can use non-lethal tranquilizers – not everybody was enthusiastic about the need to kill off endangered animals in earlier games.

Far below, Lara finally reaches her destination – a fully submerged temple on the floor of the sea. As more threats arise to confront her, she must explore the temple until she figures out the entry puzzle. The game focuses on making individual puzzles feel genuine and organic to the game world – random key card tricks are nowhere to be seen. As she swims, a pinging sonar system locates hidden caves and other secrets, further expanding her repertoire of tools. However, for players more interested in action than brainteasers, an extensive in-game hint system now offers the solutions to every puzzle as you explore. Purists will no doubt refuse to even enter the hint menu, but others can avoid frustration if they choose.

Finally inside the ancient structure, the tomb raider comes face to face with the Kraken, a tentacled horror that blocks her way. Instead of radioing back to headquarters for quips and conversation, Lara now carries

a camera with which she films her discovery. She'll often speak into the camera as she films, cluing players into the path that lies ahead. In a similar way, Lara can now take pictures of her exploits – there's even a ten-second timer on her camera so she can set up that insane action shot as she leaps across a gap. These images will be uploadable to the

Internet, so players can share their adventures and advise other gamers about secret locations and hidden pick-ups.

Once Lara wraps up her photography session, she faces the task of passing the Kraken. In the process, she must platform and leap her way past those endlessly writhing tentacles. In some cases, the dangers she faces will warrant one of the new adrenaline moments. Rather than the scripted button press minigames of previous games, this redesigned feature slows time to a crawl during specific moments, giving Lara time to run up the falling pillar, leap over the swinging tentacle, or dive beneath the cutting blade.

The overall impression we took away from this demo was extremely favorable.

Gameplay innovation and technical expertise are advancing apace, and the result is a game that looks and plays quite well.

If the series can keep that innovation and maintain what made the last two entries such fun, Underworld may surprise more than a few gamers who long ago turned their backs on Lara's adventures. ■ ■ ■





Animation

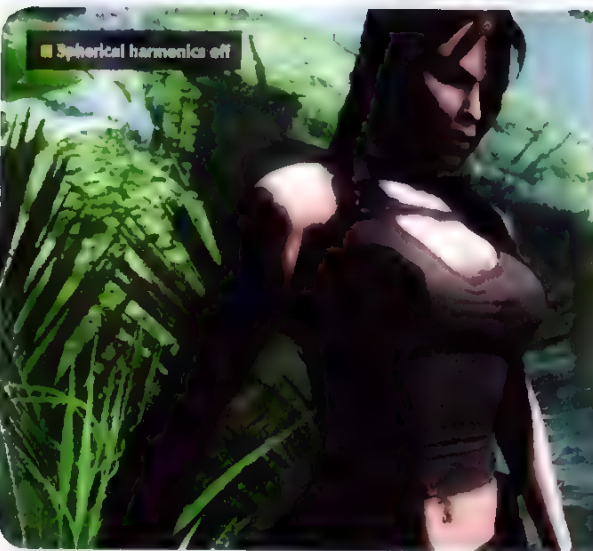
Lara's new animation system takes the modUV system for the first time, allowing for new mechanics like full climbing and crawling over objects in a way that not realists.



A Simple Screen

This straightforward shot illustrates several exciting features of the game world. In the upper reaches of the image, you can spy the use of bloom and HDR lighting, providing atmospheric contrast against the rain weather effect. Light maps on the structures deliver realistic shading to the environments. Multiple layered textures on the forefront of the rock walls add the final touch of detail.

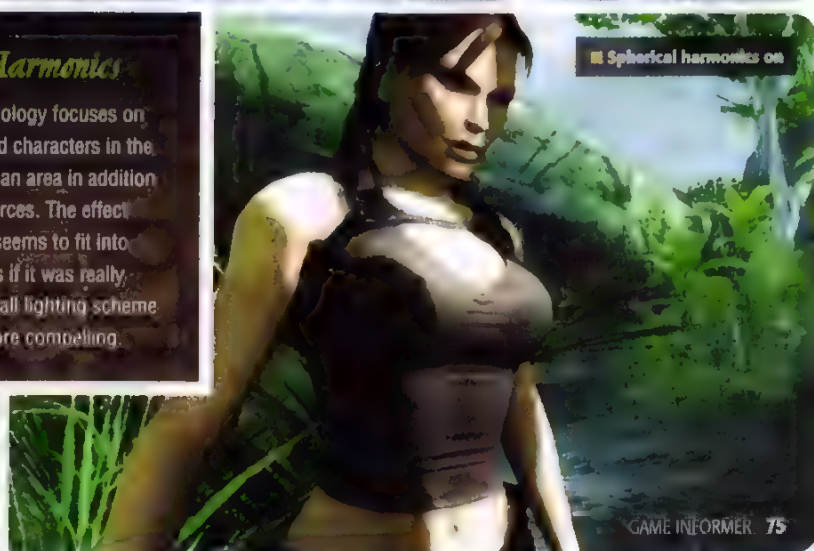
■ Spherical harmonics off



Spherical Harmonics

This exciting technology focuses on bathing objects and characters in the indirect lighting of an area in addition to the direct light sources. The effect is that everything seems to fit into the environment as if it was really there, and the overall lighting scheme becomes much more compelling.

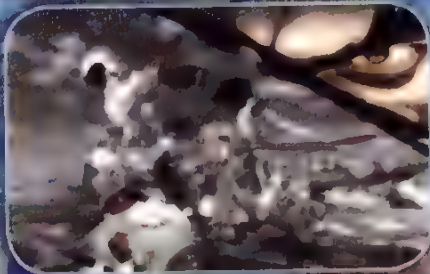
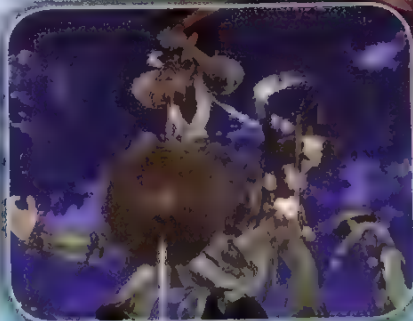
■ Spherical harmonics on





PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Afro Samurai

Namco Bandai looks to deliver style and action in spades with Afro Samurai. Based on the hit animated show, the game includes voice-over work from the original cast, including Samurai Jackson, Ben Perlmutter and Kelly Hu. Even the sweet hip-hop soundtrack created by Wu-Tang Clan's RZA and DJ Chaz Boeris is present and accounted for. Combat focuses on bloody sword swipes and an AI that changes its attacks in response to the music, while the art style looks to capture the cool essence of the original show. The story focuses in on Afro's search for revenge against his father's killer, mirroring the plot of the first season. The game should be out in fall, just in time to play catch up before season two airs on Spike TV.



PC

Space Siege

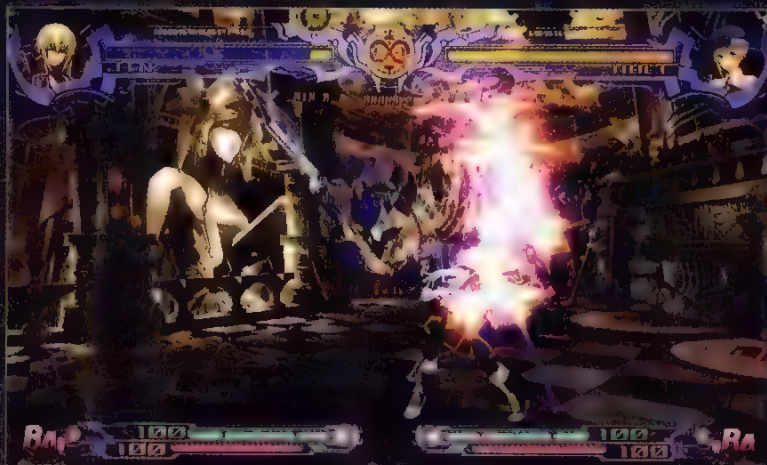
Dungeons – in space! Gas Powered Games, the force behind the Dungeon Siege franchise, is bringing its brand of streamlined action/RPG butt kicking into the far future with this August release. As grizzled Sergeant Seth Walker, players will use a selection of futuristic weapons, customizable robotic allies, and magic-like technological powers to drive back a brutal alien invasion. Aiding you in your quest is a staggering proliferation of exploding barrels of various types, from ammo dumps that detonate at the slightest provocation to oxygen tanks that squirt around randomly before blowing up. These amusing physics elements, and a clever dodge mechanic that sends you rolling toward your mouse cursor, make Space Siege a candidate to scratch your Diablo itch.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

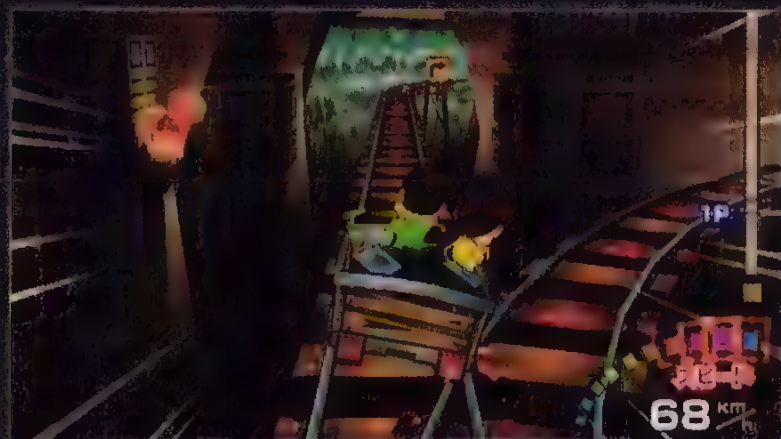
Shaun White Snowboarding

The Flying Tomato is finally making his way into video games courtesy of Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed engine. Players can carve their way down 14 square kilometers of mountains spanning Europe, Japan, Alaska, and Park City, Utah. The PS3 and 360 versions will allow up to 16 players (or possibly 32) to race or face off in trick competitions simultaneously, while the Wii version fully supports the Wii Balance Board and features alternate locations. Stay tuned for more details as we get closer to SWS's holiday release.



ARCADE
BlazBlue

The next entry in the Guilty Gear series may be moving in a different direction, but that doesn't mean developer Arc System Works is leaving its fighting fans high and dry. BlazBlue is a new 2D fighter the company is hoping will fill Guilty Gear's flashy shoes. Just looking at the game's outlandish characters, we can safely say that fans of over-the-top fighting games won't be disappointed. It doesn't hurt that the game's combination of hand drawn animation and 3D backdrops are gorgeous, either. Unfortunately, the game is only out in Japanese arcades. We don't know when the game will be coming Stateside, but we've got a good feeling about this one.



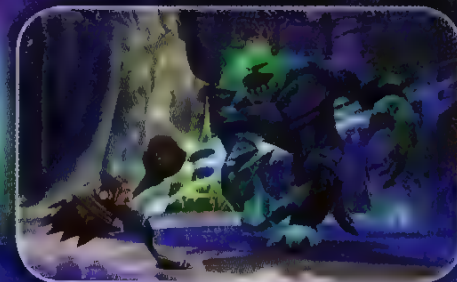
Wii
Active Life: Outdoor Challenge

Namco Bandai, the creators of the original Power Pad on NES, are bringing back the mat this September for the new Active Life series. Featuring full Mii support, the mat/game bundle is expected to retail for \$59.99 — \$30 less than Wii Fit. However, Namco says the Active Life series, of which several versions are already in the works, is more about fun than serious exercise. We tried a variety of in-line skating, log jumping, and mine cart riding minigames, and while they up the heart rate, problems with mat sliding and bunching still haven't been fixed after almost 20 years.



XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP | NINTENDO DS
Crash: Mind Over Mutant

Neo Cortex has devised the ultimate endgame. His latest bid for world domination induces mind control via text messaging. Crash will try to thwart this plan by pulling monsters out of his pockets. In addition to jacking monsters, Crash can now store his favorite monsters in his trousers. His sister Coco, who can be played by a second player, gives Crash some much needed assistance. The monsters this duo brings can unlock different zones in the overworld, much like Zelda. When Crash is not riding on the back of a lumbering titan, he can tap into an arsenal of new moves, such as the abilities to dig and climb. Sierra Entertainment has Mind Over Mutant slated for a fall release. With platformers dying faster than the dodo, Crash is a welcome face indeed.





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

They

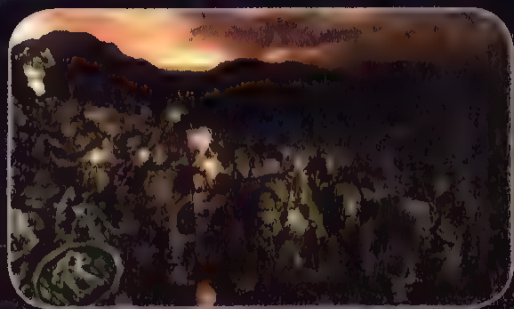
"They" are coming in 2009, courtesy of Polish developer Metropolis Software. Using an in-house engine, Metropolis hopes to craft a mystery FPS in the vein of TV shows like *Lost* or *Heroes*. Set in a fully destructible London overtaken by robotic creatures, *They* features a unique weapon customization mechanic that allows players to combine two gun types (shotgun and plasma, for example) into one and cover it in a custom paint job. Competitive multiplayer has been confirmed, albeit with very few details. However, it is expected to include more than just your standard deathmatch and capture the flag modes.



Wii

We Cheer

Hey, Wii owners, are you ready to bring it on? Well, it's already been brought on — by Namco Bandai. That's right, we've finally seen the inevitable: a Wii motion-based cheerleading game. *We Cheer* is a hyperactive music and rhythm title that will put all your appendages to the test with a host of choreographed cheer routines tailored for the game's high energy licensed soundtrack, which features Hillary Duff (one of Joe's favorite musical artists), KC & the Sunshine Band, Paramore, and Aly and AJ. In addition to creating your own custom cheerleader, you'll be able to test your skills in a number of different ways, including the calorie burning Exercise mode and the two-player Campaign, where you'll compete with a friend for the honor of being Captain of the team. Go! Fight! Win! You Ugly! You Ugly! Yo Momma Says You Ugly!



XBOX 360 | PC

Warhammer: Battle March

Coming this September, *Warhammer: Battle March* is more or less a souped-up version of 2006's *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos*. This resource-free real-time strategy title features hundreds of weapons and items to customize your armies with, and 75 maps to fight over in three campaigns and one-on-one or two-on-two online matches. The all-new Greenskins faction, comprised of orcs and goblins, joins the existing Empire and Chaos forces in this tactical slugfest. Where other RTSs make you worry about economy and base building, *Warhammer: Battle March* tasks players with managing morale levels, unit formations, and flanking. Hopefully, developer Black Hole Entertainment can tighten up a few things and fulfill the game's promise more fully than the mediocre *Mark of Chaos* did.



XBOX 360

Guilty Gear 2: Overture

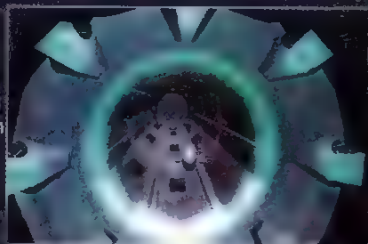
Guilty Gear has always been known as a fun, yet bizarre, 2D fighting game. After numerous incarnations in that form, Guilty Gear's true sequel undergoes a surprising transformation into a third-person action/strategy game. Fan favorites Sol Badguy and Ky Kiske return to the battlefield (along with several new characters), but the style of combat has changed entirely. Rather than fight one-on-one, players construct an army to assist their hero character, giving orders and directing movement via map that displays all activity in real time. Your goal is to deplete the life bar on the enemy's base by attacking it directly, tearing through units, and defeating the opposing hero. It may look like Dynasty Warriors in screens, but the combat appears to be more strategic and less button-mashy. Look for Guilty Gear 2: Overture this fall courtesy of publisher Aksys Games.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

Wall-E

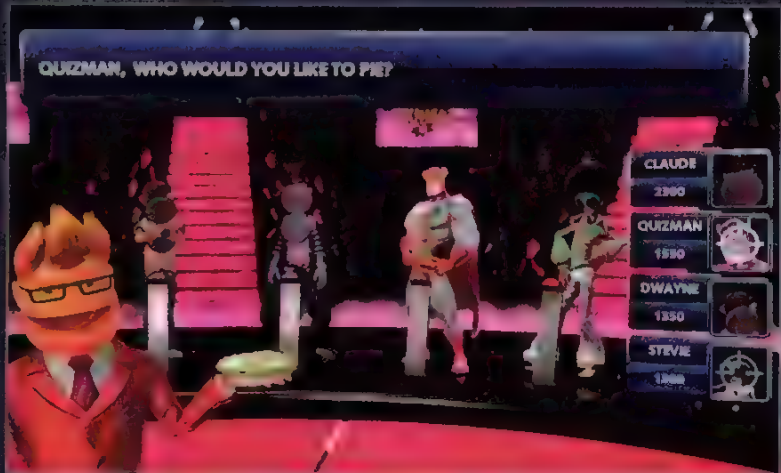
In the world of kid-targeted licensed games, you could do a lot worse than some of the previous Pixar movie adaptations. Our early glimpses at Wall-E seem to continue THQ's tradition of quality by offering a clever mix of platforming and puzzle gameplay. As the oh-so-cute little robot named Wall-E, you'll create differently powered cubes out of trash to solve and surpass environmental obstacles. One cube might be explosive and clear away debris, while another cube could have magnetic properties to move metal. By focusing in on realistic physics interactions, the game world becomes a playground of tumbling and falling objects, including the titular robot himself. We hear talk of co-op play, which is always a welcome addition, and four-person multiplayer minigames should add some family get-together fun. Expect elementary schools to buzz about the game when it releases with the movie this summer.

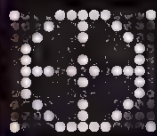


PLAYSTATION 3

Buzz Quiz TV

Relentless Software and Sony are bringing their popular-in-Europe quiz franchise to the PS3 this September. New features like wireless buzzers, "4 couch" online play, and DLC expansion packs could help, but its user-created content has us really excited. Players can plug a USB keyboard into their system, write up eight questions under a common theme, and upload it for others to play. Once you try a community quiz, you are instantly asked to rate it and comment on any factual errors or inappropriate content. Sample question: Fill in the blank - "Garth, marriage is punishment for _____ in some countries."





REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



82

Battlefield: Bad Company

PLAYSTATION 3



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Haze

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Ninja Gaiden II



88



Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

If you thought Metal Gear Solid 4 would be the game that defines the PlayStation 3, you were right. Snake may be feeling the aches and pains that come with age, but Metal Gear's gameplay has never been in better shape. Integrating incredible freedom, explosive moments, and shocking revelations, MGS 4 is undoubtedly the best game in the series. This isn't just the conclusion of Solid Snake's story - Metal Gear Solid 4 is a singular experience from the opening credits to the closing cinematic. Does Snake die? You'll have to play to find out.

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** Virulent. Nuke the site from orbit, it's the only way to be sure.

> **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.

Wii



Death Jr: Root of Evil

HANDHELD



Hot Shots Gold: Open Tee 2



94



Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift

One of the best games to come out for the DS owes little thanks to the system's touch screen. Final Fantasy Tactics A2 uses the traditional sequel methodology of polishing, improving and adding onto an already successful game design to great effect. More jobs, more tribes, more missions – there's a ton of content to enjoy here and the tactical RPG gameplay that holds it all together is second to none.

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83

The edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

C CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 3 AND OLDER	M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS 17 AGES AND OLDER
E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 6 AND OLDER	A CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE ONLY FOR ADULTS
E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 10 AND OLDER	RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB PRODUCT IS AWAITING FINAL RATING
T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 13 AND OLDER	

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

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

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. 480p ("i"= interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting.

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

Arburrito – Miller's greatest triumph and Joe's greatest shame. Fast food wrapped in a tortilla.

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.

DLC – Downloadable content. Usually takes the form of inexpensive or free add-ons to existing games.

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.

frontend – A game's menus and options.

HDTV – High Definition Television.

HP – Hit Points. A numerical representation of a character's remaining life. Common in RPGs.

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 – Graphical 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 Cross.

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

RPG – Role-Playing Game. A term 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 Gadius.

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Top Spin.

strategy – A term we use for games like Diggia and Fire Emblem.

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

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Battlefield: Bad Company

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 24-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER DIGITAL DICE/DICE
> RELEASE JUNE 25 > ESRB T

BLOWING UP

It's been a long wait since Battlefield: Bad Company was first announced back in mid-2006, but the extreme polish evident in the final product makes it all worthwhile. Both single- and multiplayer shine — at long last redeeming DICE for the crappy bot-fests offline players had to endure in previous games in the series.

As "new guy" Preston Marlowe you've been stuck in the fatality-prone B-company instead of going to prison for some offense that is strangely never explained. Entertaining banter from screw off squad-mates Haggard and Sweetwater plays well off of the hard-nosed sergeant Redford, and is a nice change of pace from the ridiculous one-liners you hear in most FPS games. These guys primarily function as storytelling devices in your rogue quest for mercenary gold, so you never have to futz with commands or worry about keeping them alive — every once in a while they may even kill an enemy.

The primary gameplay draw is the destructible environments. Mowing down trees with a turret, creating your own side entrance to a heavily fortified base, or npping open a building to get at the enemies inside are all endlessly fun. Then you gradually add in vehicles like tanks, boats, and choppers, and deadly weapons like the mortar and air strike, and it takes things even higher. Instead of having to save

your super-powered mortar strike for just the right moment, you can bomb buildings as much as you want (after a modest recharge time) Vehicles can be endlessly repaired as long as they're not totally destroyed. Most of the time, leaving behind a tank feels more like a strategic decision than a limitation, and über-weapons are eventually taken away at the end of a level to prevent overuse.

With enemy AI, there's a thin line between very stupid and very smart. Sometimes soldiers stand out in the open and slowly reload their gun while you blast them to bits, but the majority of the time they tear open every building you hide in and attack from all sides. It takes the "no cover is safe" dynamic of the Auger in



Sound Off

Bad Company features quite possibly the best sound work in any video game to date. You've never heard anything like the sound of gunfire echoing off the inside of a building. Even standards like the roar of a tank engine, the clinking of turret shells on the ground, and the general battlefield cacophony sound incredible

Resistance to an entirely new level.

Unfortunately, the campaign loses a little steam in the final hour or two. The game runs out of new gadgets and rides to introduce and you just drive from town to town grinding through hordes of enemies ad nauseum. The last battle has an "oh, I guess that's it" feeling to it, and I didn't really feel a sense of ill will toward the antagonist. Also, it's disappointing to discover that collecting gold and rare weapons doesn't amount to anything worthwhile.

Multiplayer kicks things back up, however, by incorporating

all of the great destruction and vehicle elements into satisfying attack and defend battles over gold crates scattered throughout the eight huge maps. The five character classes all offer unique weapon combos, and the constantly shifting battlefield dynamics offer plenty of incentive to regularly change your kits. Experience earned in multiplayer (+10 per kill à la Call of Duty 4) increases your rank and allows you to buy new weapons and items. Piling four guys into a jeep and rushing into a firefight is just as fun as Battlefield fans have come to expect, but it serves as a bitter-sweet reminder that all of the building blocks were there for a co-op campaign that will never be. —BRYAN



BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** Single-player Battlefield finally comes into its own

> **Graphics:** Destruction, wide open vistas, character models — all awesome. Interiors are a little sparse

> **Sound:** It's truly a crime to play this game without surround sound

> **Playability:** Sometimes vehicles get stuck on pesky objects, but the FPS gunplay is top-notch

> **Entertainment:** After making your own doorways through pretty much any wall you want, it'll be tough to ever go back

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.25

Story has never been a real component of the Battlefield games, which makes Bad Company's hilarious narrative all the more surprising. While it's a shame that the main villain doesn't appear until the last few acts, this game is mostly about the ride, not the destination. It feels like you're on a road trip with your buddies, only with bullets, bad guys, and gorgeous explosions. Much has been made of the destructible environments, and they are very cool — even if they're a bit canned. Seeing an enemy duck into a house and knocking out a wall to expose him is as effective as it is fun. It works both ways, though, which is a great incentive to keep moving. And even with only one mode available at launch, multiplayer is a must-play part of the experience. —JEFF



L1 City Screen

R1

■ A brilliant interface never gets in the way of making your wishes known to the peeps whose only purpose in life is to carry them out.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Civilization Revolution

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES > DEVELOPER FIRAXIS GAMES
> RELEASE JULY 7 > ESRB E10+

AN ADORABLE BABY BROTHER

1710 AD

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Rebuild Civilization from the ground up to make it work on consoles

> **Graphics:** It's easy to tell what's going on — no mean feat in a complex strategy game

> **Sound:** Advisor Volume: 0. Leader Volume: 0. There, I just saved you a trip through an aural hell of obnoxious gibberish

> **Playability:** Given how complex Civilization is, the control is astoundingly good

> **Entertainment:** This would have been a respectable PC strategy title. On consoles, it's downright seminal

> **Replay Value:** High



My longstanding love affair with the Civilization series is well documented, and I approached this console re-imagining of the PC franchise with no small amount of trepidation. Sid Meier and the talented team at Firaxis Games have proven me wrong and crafted a unique and compelling strategy game that retains Civilization's core ideals while streamlining everything about the gameplay. Civilization Revolution can't hold a candle to the labyrinthine complexity of Civ IV, but the experience is none the worse for a certain measure of simplicity.

For those unfamiliar with the franchise (both of you), the idea is to guide a culture from the dawn of recorded history to the near future. Victory comes in several flavors; you can win by cultural dominance, economic power, scientific knowledge, or military might. Along the way, you'll settle new territories, develop cities into booming centers of research, trade, culture, or industry, and interact with rival empires both peaceably and militarily. With randomly generated maps, every new game brings its own challenges. How you go about conquering them is wide open.

Any transition from mouse/keyboard control to a gamepad is cause for concern, but Firaxis manages it brilliantly. In dozens of hours spent conquering the world in Revolution, I can count the number of times I missed function keys or a mouse pointer on one hand. The interface efficiency is surprising to



the point that the vastly more complex Civ IV would probably work just fine with it.

Every facet of Revolution's design is aimed toward paring down the often-tedious aspects of Civilizations past so that players spend their time making big-picture decisions: when to go to war, managing armies in the field, and expanding and controlling territory. So much of the franchise's evolution has been stripped away in this iteration that it's hard to know where to begin. Developing and customizing your land via workers: gone.

The vast number of city improvements: slashed. Micromanaging culture and Great Person production: gone. A part of me misses perfecting my empire's output in a dozen different ways like I do in Civ IV, but the rest of my brain is too occupied in having a great time with Revolution to care.

Rather than use Civ IV's careful approach to balance, Revolution embraces the overpowered. To the experienced player, every faction's abilities get a reaction of "how is that possibly fair?" Ultimately, though, since everyone is overpowered, higher-level play involves tailoring your strategy to take better advantage of your ridiculous bonuses than the other players can. I suspect the multiplayer community will quickly gravitate toward a handful of "most-overpowered" civilizations, but that would happen no matter how minor the differences were. As it is, experimenting with different factions and unconventional strategies is a blast — particularly in multiplayer, where the clever approach to time-limited turns speeds the gameplay up to an almost RTS-like hectic pace.

This is hands-down the best pure strategy title to appear on consoles to date, and easily worthy to bear the Civilization name. —ADAM

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The Xbox 360 version runs a bit smoother, but the horrid d-pad is occasionally frustrating. Both are very minor differences, but the superiority of Xbox Live over PSN gives the Edge narrowly to the 360. Stay tuned to a later issue for our full review of the DS adaptation, which we were unable to review in time for this issue.

Second Opinion 9.25

Firaxis owes me an apology. It has ruined my social life, I'm having trouble getting my work done on time, and I'm always tired. I keep staying up all night playing Civilization Revolution. It's no wonder, since Firaxis' console offering serves up a hearty helping of strategy, has an easy-to-navigate interface, and uses charming cartoon visuals. You don't have to micromanage your cities as much in Revolution, which is fine with me, because it means the game moves faster and you can spend more time strategizing how to take over the world. Civ Rev still has a steep learning curve, and the tutorial system isn't very good, which is a shame since this entry will likely attract a number of people new to the series. Online games move at a nice brisk pace, and Civ's "just one more thing then I'll quit" addictiveness will keep you playing long past dinner, bathroom breaks, and sleep. You've been warned. —BEN



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Hellboy: The Science of Evil

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KROME STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 24 > **ESRB** T

A GOOD PUNCH CAN GO A LONG WAY

There's alot to like in the early hours of Hellboy. This is certainly a more robust and satisfying treatment than most comic characters have come to expect from video games. Combining solid combat, clever dialogue, and a great looking art style is no small feat. The problem is none of these advantages ever congeal into anything that holds my attention.

Hellboy's fist makes for one hell of an enemy basher, and the integration of his gun and thrown objects add up to what would seem like some good variety. However, as the hours wear on, nothing happens. The punching, the shooting, the throwing — everything stays the same, without any chance for growth or evolution.

Plus, almost all the enemies you fight do little more than clamber in the way of your next devastating punch. This isn't surprising, since many of these foes are capable of taking inordinate amounts of punishment before they succumb. The end result is a long sequence of too-long battles, few of which ever

challenge the player to do much more than bang on the face buttons.

The snappy dialogue suffers a similar fate to the combat. I spent most of the game wondering what Hellboy was trying to accomplish, since the story refuses to set down its roots and say something. Instead, most of the game is spent jumping back and forth between different time periods, and only near the end do things begin to coalesce. In the meantime, perhaps Hellboy gets it, but the player is out of luck.

Even as the story and gameplay falter, it's hard to argue with the joy of smashing open walls and hunting down demonic threats. That's especially true when you can do so with a friend — the co-op feature adds a lot to the fun and replay, as it allows players to adopt the roles of Hellboy's uniquely powered teammates.

The Science of Evil deserves applause for getting what's cool about Hellboy. Alas, it just doesn't take him anywhere once it has him. —MILLER

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Totally rad what's funny and cool about Hellboy in a repetitive sequence of punch and repeats.

> **Graphics:** Solid animation work and some great looking backgrounds accentuate the quality art design on both Red and his foes.

> **Sound:** Top-notch voice work, especially from the inimitable Ron Perlman.

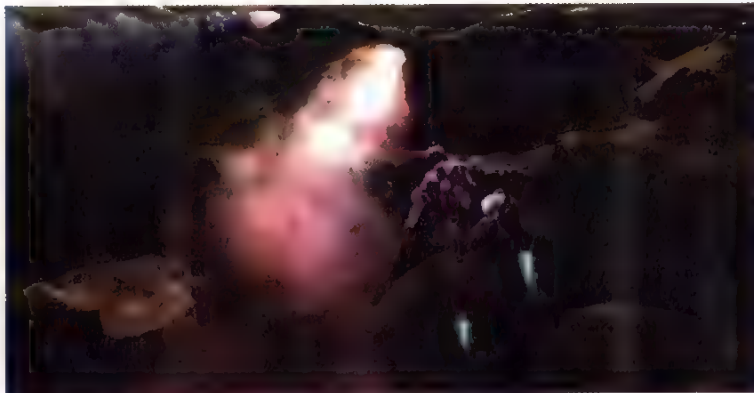
> **Playability:** Straightforward and simple. You won't be scratching your head trying to grasp the controls.

> **Entertainment:** A fun and simple action brawler, but it never really takes off to try something unique in its own right.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate.

Second Opinion 8.75

The Science of Evil isn't an appropriate title. Something like Science of Monotony would be more fitting. In the first level, this game throws a ton of great content your way. You'll drop luck demonic midgets, punch coffins, and blast mangled beasts back to Hell in no time flat. It hits the ground running, but ends up sprinting in circles, as very little new content materializes after the introduction. With uninteresting, tacked-on objectives, the levels grow more tiresome the more you play. This franchise has always excelled with interesting character development, snappy dialogue, and unforeseeable plot twists, but this story has none of it, and ends up being a predictable snore. If you plan on playing this game in an evening, you're going to hate it. The gameplay repetition is best digested in weeklong breaks. It's not a bad game, per se, it just doesn't progress past its introductory excitement. —REINER



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Iron Man

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SECRET LEVEL > **RELEASE** MAY 2 > **ESRB** T

A HERO & HIS SCRAPHEAP

I punched a tank into the stratosphere, and downed a helicopter by throwing its own missile back at it. I walked through a hail of lasers unscathed, and destroyed a mile-long flying fortress with a hail of my own. These extraordinary feats personify Iron Man as an unstoppable one-man army, but moreover highlight the only moments of destructive joy this game delivers. The remainder is a superhero-sized train wreck, a disaster even by movie game standards. The experience is so defeating and depressing it could lead to gamers using Tony Stark's coping methods of drowning their sorrows in a bottomless bottle of scotch.

If you were to strap balsa wood wings onto the Titanic, I'm convinced that it would fly more gracefully than Iron Man does in this game. His movements are jerky, the sensation of flying hardly feels realistic, and the controls are the very definition of unintuitive. Most of my time in the air was spent bouncing uncontrollably off of the terrain and man-made structures.

When Iron Man isn't doing his best impersonation of a drunken human pinball, he's vomiting all over the art of combat. With his targeting system providing a range not even suitable for skeet shooting and his laser packing a

punch similar to the children's game Laser Tag, Iron Man consistently gets his ass handed to him by lowly Abrams tanks. His suit plays a large role in his combat ineptitude. It always runs out of power, like it's using half-drained batteries from a TV remote control.

Tony's assignment for each level is to locate colored blips on his radar and annihilate them. Most of these conflicts are lengthy and devoid of much needed checkpoints. While I would like to say that most of the frustrating death I experienced revolved around Tony's inability to fly, target, and shoot, most of my visits to the reaper were caused by the aggressive enemy AI. I don't think I've ever seen enemies spawn this quickly and in such unfair locations. Moments where I wasn't getting niddled with gunfire from multiple vectors and from enemies I couldn't even see were few and far between. Even if I did locate them, they could hit me, but my targeting system couldn't get a lock on them.

Needless to say, I played this entire game tense, angry, and praying that the next level would be the last. I never really felt like I was in control at any point during the game. The summer movie games usually bring misery, but I never expected them to bring this much pain. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 3.75

> **Concept:** Balancing issues, a blistering difficulty level, and poor controls make Iron Man a lock for our worst games of the year list.

> **Graphics:** Iron Man's animations look great, but the remainder of the graphical presentation is underwhelming, and some of the later stages run into extensive slowdown.

> **Sound:** A cacophony of lifeless voice work, monotone-like effects, and the sound of your character dying unfairly.

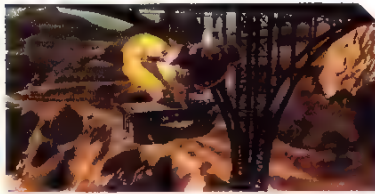
> **Playability:** The controls are an unintuitive mess, the enemy AI is far too aggressive, and the level designs do little to instill excitement.

> **Entertainment:** It starts out bad, and only gets worse.

> **Replay Value:** Low.

Second Opinion 4.25

Every once in a while, a game comes along that changes your perception of licensed games, proving that even movie tie-ins can have a life outside of being shameless cash-ins. This isn't one of those games. Like the worst aspects of Tony Stark's personality, there's a shiny veneer over this game that hides deep flaws. Missions never elevate beyond simplistic shoot-and-punch objectives. Targeting is haphazard and finicky, which is the worst aspect of a wider control scheme that is only marginally less broken. Most damning of all, the few levels that could have been fun are lobotomized by some of the worst balancing and enemy management I've seen in years — fewer enemies with more intelligence would have helped a lot. As is, Iron Man is shot down again and again in battles where he's totally out of his depth. His game suffers the same ignominious fate. —MILLER



BOTTOM LINE 9



> **Concept:** Grid's blistering racing and excellent career structure combine to form the best racing title out there

> **Graphics:** The color palette is dull, but the details and sense of speed are great

> **Sound:** Getting called by your real name during races is a nice touch, and hearing key competitor's positions is very helpful

> **Playability:** Due to the sense of speed and constant changing of cars, it may take you a few extra laps to get used to new courses

> **Entertainment:** Do not hesitate. Hit the streets, drop the hammer, and go buy this game

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.25

From the moment the slick menu screens appear, Grid aims to pull you into its world. It's a rare feat for a racer, and one that Grid executes flawlessly throughout the hours you'll pour into one of the best releases the genre has seen in years. Whether it is hearing your actual name spoken by the team manager, choosing your sponsorship deals, or firing that slick Italian teammate who never wins a race for you, the constant stylistic touches keep you invested in the fantasy. That's without even mentioning the stellar races, which never cease to deliver variety and excitement throughout your long career. By offering several options to tweak the difficulty, then adding in-race flashback sequences to recover from devastating mistakes, Grid encourages players to take chances and dive at the bleeding edge of their abilities. Even the occasional injection of tense music at just the right moment during races feeds the sense of drama and speed. While other games may nail the simulation experience, Grid embraces the fun of racing, and doesn't let up until you cross the finish line. —MILLER

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Grid

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS > **RELEASE** JUNE 3 > **ESRB** E

RACING'S FINEST

Racing is a fearless, visceral experience that is instinctual in spite of itself. You slam down the accelerator, gear up to ramming speed, stretch the laws of physics at every chance, and go faster than is wise. However, there is a fate worse than death: coming in second place. Grid taps into this oddly natural compulsion in every way.

This is the fastest sim-leaning racing game I've ever played. With all the demanding S-turns and 90-degree corners, it's also the most dangerous. You'll have just as much fun shredding your ride in Grid as in Burnout. Once on a straightaway cooking at about a 170 mph, I clipped a barrier and shot my car twirling 15 feet into the sky. What kind of numb-nuts crashes on a straightaway, you ask? Well, I was in search of some serious speed, and I tried to shave things as close as possible, knowing that maintaining my speed at the risk of a possible crash was well worth it. And I'd do it again. Grid is built to not get in the way of your racing instincts.

The Flashback feature is just one way that Grid balances perfectly between being challenging and fun at every turn. You're given a limited number of Flashback tokens every race, and these let you rewind the game whenever you want and reset time to before you crashed or blew that particularly hard corner. Far from being *Groundhog's Day*, however, Grid is anything but predictable. Thanks to some well-tuned AI,



computer-controlled competitors will pile up at difficult turns and generally act like humans. I probably could have spent a Flashback token per race due to the surprise crashes in front of me, which is a good balance.

Grid's career structure is more fleshed out than fellow Codemasters title *Dirt*, and it's positively inventive compared to the boring modes of most racing games. In Grid world it's

not a black and white case of win or lose; it's more like win or win less. Due to your sponsorships, you'll always get some cash wherever you place, and the game flows well enough that you don't get hung up on a steep learning curve, even though the game can get challenging if you want it to. I loved the sponsorship aspect, as you can juggle them to maximize your profits. Selecting the best teammate is similarly important.

The career features are deep enough to engage those that want to get into them, but they never get in the way of your number one job — going as fast as possible. If a certain kind of racing isn't your strong suit, there's enough variety here that you'll likely find something you're good at. I particularly like the way Grid offers special events like the yearly Le Mans long-distance race, Japanese Touge (like *Need for Speed's* canyons), and head-to-head battles.

Although the drift racing is too dependant on the hand brake and I'd like more emotional investment in the cars in my garage (some tweaking would be nice, as would more of a sense of pride in each car I own), Grid is a shining example of how to make a fresh racing game that captures that age-old, fundamental desire to go screaming down the asphalt like a rubber-shredding, hell-bent maniac. —KATO

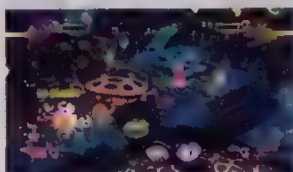


MULTI QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Hail to the Chimp

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** GAMECOCK > **DEVELOPER** WIDELOAD GAMES > **RELEASE** JUNE 24 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE
4

If your concept of humor doesn't induce you to laugh at a hippo with a pimp cane, stop reading now and forget about this game. Even if it does, I suspect the unresponsive controls, nonexistent single-player content, lame minigames, and horrendous voiceovers will overshadow any enjoyment to be derived from the sophomoric humor in this shoddy attempt at a politically satirical party game. The short spoof videos could have been as briefly amusing as YouTube clips, but suffering through the awful gameplay to see them isn't worth it. This is Fusion Frenzy with one-liners about stuffing ballot boxes and endless, boring minigame repetition. There are worse party games around, but many better ways to enjoy the company of three friends. —**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** DISNEY INTERACTIVE STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S TALES > **RELEASE** MAY 16 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE
6.25

With the number of levers it takes to open a door in Narnia, I can understand why its kings and queens haven't been seen for hundreds of years. I used to think of Narnia as a place where I could converse with beavers and fight side-by-side with centaurs, but now all I see are these damned locked doors and the annoying contraptions used to open them. As you move from one enclosed area to the next, you'll get the chance to play as 20 different characters, many featuring unique abilities used for environment navigation, and — you guessed it — door opening. I enjoyed playing as the lumbering giants and towering trees, as they could both send enemies flying, but the remainder of the characters didn't lend much to combat outside of sucking. The swordplay is simple, and dreadfully dull. Even with a level that expands Narnia's fiction past the books and films, the only thing you'll take away from this game is a phobia of locked doors. —**REINER**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S TALES > **RELEASE** JUNE 3 > **ESRB** M

AN ADVENTURE? YES. ORIGINAL? NO.

BOTTOM LINE
7

> **Concept:** LEGO Indiana Jones suffers from a case of mistaken identity. Building a new game on the foundation of another just doesn't work when the two properties are so distinctly different

> **Graphics:** Hilarious details run rampant in the environments and character models. The camera can be problematic for vertical platforming segments

> **Sound:** Composer John Williams has ownership over this category, as his score nightfully bunes the sound effects and mumbling characters

> **Playability:** The fun of building LEGOs is present, but the challenges suffer from unimaginative puzzles and frustrating platforming

> **Entertainment:** The gameplay is a bit of a mess, but its lax difficulty and hilarious moments keep it fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

If you attended a Star Wars convention and saw someone wearing stormtrooper armor, you wouldn't think twice about it. After all, the ratio of humans to stormtroopers is nearly even. However, if you saw a stormtrooper dressed in Indiana Jones clothing, you'd likely learn over to your friend and say, "that dude has serious issues" or "get me out of here, I don't feel comfortable anymore." This is the problem that LEGO Indiana Jones runs into. Even with a fedora and a furious crack of the whip accompanying each battle, you cannot shake the feeling that you are actually playing LEGO Star Wars with an Indiana Jones skin slapped on top of it, and not a true Indiana Jones game.

With that said, the gameplay pulled from a galaxy far, far away remains largely entertaining. I always get

excited when I see a pile of bricks that need to be assembled into a contraption, and the sound of LEGO studs spilling onto the floor is music to my ears. Like its science fiction predecessors, the replay component in LEGO Indy is high, as you are encouraged to play levels again with different characters to reach new areas and secrets.

To capture the adventurous tone of the movies, combat has been scaled back to give way for more puzzle and platforming sections. Figuring out how to crack open a tomb fits the profile of the famed archeologist, but most of the puzzles linked to a feat like this are either painfully simple or overly tedious. Some even require extensive platforming. With the perspective misleading you most of the time, and your characters' jump animations being incredibly hard to read,

many jumps are blind leaps of faith—something that worked for Indy in the films, but not for gamers who want to keep their controllers in one piece. Of course, you have unlimited lives, but if you are trying to unlock everything in a level, one missed jump can lead to you restarting the stage

All three of the Indiana Jones films are flush with unforgettable moments. This game butchers most of them. The boulder evasion is an absolute mess, the mine cart sequence is incredibly boring, and all of the vehicle-based segments are poorly constructed. The best parts of the movies are oddly the worst parts of this game.

As much as I enjoyed playing as Indiana Jones and his father, I really couldn't find too many other characters that I actually wanted to suit up as. Do you pick another faceless German, some old dude, or the most annoying female of all time, Willie? It's not like Star Wars or Batman where every character is cool. I mostly wanted to play as Indy.

The magic just isn't here. Repeating the success of Star Wars with a radically different license requires more than Star Wars as a foundation. It really never finds Indiana Jones' pulse, and ends up being somewhat of a mess, albeit a moderately fun one. —**REINER**



Second Opinion **7**

Who would you rather be, Satipo or Yoda? Willie or Chewbacca? As much as I love the Indiana Jones movies, they just don't have the same abundance of awesome characters as the Star Wars universe. This fact dulls some of the excitement of LEGO Indy when compared to its predecessors, but Traveller's Tales still manages to capture some of the films' magic with its clever brand of fun, simple gameplay. Shifting the focus from combat to puzzle-solving increases the sense of adventure and discovery, but that also means you spend more time with frustratingly imprecise platforming. However, since there are no real consequences for death, perseverance will get you through any situation. It may not be complex, but LEGO Indiana Jones makes it easy for anyone to relive the exploits of the classic archeologist/adventurer and his lineup of sub-par sidekicks. —**JOE**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NASCAR 09

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 14-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** JUNE 10 > **ESRB** E

KITTYWAMPUS

As always, there's plenty of arguing around the NASCAR video game water cooler these days. Just as you'll always get conflicting opinions about who's responsible after a multi-car wreck, EA's NASCAR fanbase is split in different directions. Some want to see a no-holds-barred sim experience like they used to get in the old Papyrus-developed titles. Others are more casual and just want to race as their favorite driver. Me? I'm in the middle. Given these divergent audiences, players of this year's game will likely be pleased in some areas in disappointed in others.

The career mode receives the most significant upgrade. Not only are there many more design options for your created car, but the overall flow is miles better than the last game. Reputation points unlock better sponsorships and team offers (which contain certain on-track goals), and performance points let you beef up the aero, engine, or durability aspects of your car. Both kinds of points are earned by racing well and by passing the driver challenges, which are like last year's license tests.

What makes this new structure cool also makes it

dangerous. It's much easier to hit the track and get right into the Sprint Cup/Nationwide/Craftsman Truck series without the hassle of licenses. But since you can stockpile rep/performance points by completing driver challenges at any time, you can stack it so you come right out of the career gate with a hot rod. I'll take this tradeoff, however, given how easy this career mode is to get into.

Despite the improvements made to this year's title — including a noticeable bump in graphical quality — it still doesn't have all the corners dialed in yet. AI cars take better racing lines than in 08, but they still don't show near enough variety or smarts to pit at different times, take rim-riding race lines, or avoid plowing into each other during a caution. Other legacy problems persist, such as the poor quality of the spotters, the lack of interactive pit stops, the fact that being affected by aero damage doesn't exist, and frankly an overall absence of innovation.

Over the past five or so years, this series has refused to build itself up from year to year in any one significant direction. Unfortunately, it has become the Casey Mears of the EA Tiburon stable — sur-

rounded by a top-flight organization but seemingly unable to turn all that potential into a legitimate championship run. —**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** This series is progressing slower than the pit row speed at Bristol

> **Graphics:** A lot of nice little details make this game jump off the screen

> **Sound:** With spotters like these... who needs spotters? Jeff Gordon's cameos are slick, though

> **Playability:** An easy play setting has been added, and overall, the game isn't aimed at the hardcore PC/Papyrus crowd

> **Entertainment:** A new career structure makes designing your own car cooler, but plenty of gripes remain

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

This year's edition packs an impressive graphical punch and has been refined and returned to offer racing that caters to the hardcore and the casual. The casual mode, simply called Normal, lets the player focus on racing strategy, blocking out opponents, and sticking to lines without worrying about your car running up the track and ending the race just because you didn't use the perfect line. Too forgiving? Perhaps, but I like not losing a race after 25 laps and 20 minutes simply because I got a little loose in turn three (that's what Pro Mode is for). I like the improvements to the franchise mode, you can now jump right into the Cup series. But forcing the player to compete in the Nationwide and Craftsman series was a tad Busch league. I know NASCAR wants to push its other series, but I like racing with the big dogs and could care less about the other leagues. The game looks amazing, especially during a night race when the shadows grow long and lights flicker off your car as you fly around the track. NASCAR 09 is a good game, but it's still not all it can be. Where are the interactive pit stops? —**ANDY**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Enemy Territory: Quake Wars

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** UNDERGROUND/1D SOFTWARE (PLAYSTATION 3), NERVE SOFTWARE/1D SOFTWARE (XBOX 360) > **RELEASE** MAY 27 > **ESRB** T



KNOCKING DOWN A STROGG MAN

Last year, we got the chance to assault or defend the Earth in id Software and Splash Damage's *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* on PC. Now, console players can get in on the sci-fi first-person shooter action. This competent, by-the-numbers port job of a good-but-not-great FPS only suffers minimally in the transition, but is still inferior to the PC original.

Quake Wars pits the human resistance against the Strogg invaders in a dozen or so asymmetrical goal-based maps. The attacking team has a set amount of time to complete a series of objectives, while the defenders try to stop them. At its best, the game allows for a lot of creativity in how players choose to accomplish this, whether by taking secondary paths to the goal or making good use of deployable turrets, artillery, or radar stations. Which of the four classes you choose to spawn as makes all the difference, as a well-balanced team that takes advantage of all the powers at its disposal will shred a less cooperative squad.



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Give console players a chance to play last year's enjoyable team-based FPS

> **Graphics:** This engine really shows its age when compared to current-gen first-person shooters

> **Sound:** The canned messages from allied bots are surprisingly helpful

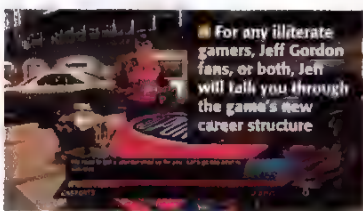
> **Playability:** Deployables and flight controls are a pain on a gamepad, and the aim assistance is beyond generous

> **Entertainment:** Even with some problems, this is one of the better teamwork-oriented, objective-based shooters around

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.75

Quake Wars finally makes its belated appearance on consoles in this competent port. Though the conversion has its faults — like the lack of a grenade button, a poor weapon switching mechanism, low ammo loadouts, slow reloads, the occasional pop-up, and the lack of a progression ladder — the core team-based gameplay still shines. Like *UT 3* and *Frontlines*, if you're looking for a single-player campaign, look elsewhere. But the ingenious objective-focused battles, which encourage teamwork more so than most games, make this a multiplayer standout. —**BERTZ**



For any illiterate gamers, Jeff Gordon fans, or both, Jeff will talk you through the game's new career structure



PLAYSTATION 3

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER KONAMI
> DEVELOPER KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS > RELEASE JUNE 12 > ESRB M

THE END

After years of playing Metal Gear games, I thought I knew the drill: Infiltrate the base, rescue someone, destroy Metal Gear, and fight the last boss. This time-tested approach has won the hearts of gamers and earned Metal Gear Solid a spot on the industry's short list of premiere franchises. But for a game as ambitious and groundbreaking as Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots, sticking to the formula simply isn't good enough. As the crowning achievement of the series' 20-year history, Hideo Kojima's final Metal Gear Solid title may not be what you expect, but it is everything you could hope for in a video game.

MGS 4 plays like the kind of game you always knew Metal Gear could be. The reinvented control scheme is the best thing that has ever happened to the series, giving combat a visceral and intuitive edge. Codec interactions are drastically reduced, which puts the focus on the stunning events happening right in front of you. Similar to games like Call of Duty 4 and BioShock, MGS 4 makes excellent use of scripted events during gameplay, like a rebel's execution at the hands of a PMC trooper, or a Gecko (hulking Metal Gear-like robots) crashing through a building. I doubt you'll even see them all in a single playthrough.

This series has always showcased amazing depth,

but MGS 4 accommodates a breed of player choice unlike anything I have ever seen, providing you with the tools to overcome obstacles in any way you choose. Many titles may claim to have this feature, but its implementation in MGS 4 is truly remarkable. There is no longer just "stealth" or "not stealth" — you devise your own solutions. How do you bypass the Gecko blocking your path? How do you keep a never-ending flood of Frogs (members of Liquid's private army) at bay? The answers may seem obvious at the time, but when your friends tell you how they approached the situations differently, you realize the scope of the freedom the game provides.

This freedom even transfers over to the boss fights. The Beauty and the Beast unit — gorgeous women traumatized by atrocities of war — is the most compelling and haunting collection of foes Snake has ever faced. Since you have more choice in how and when you acquire most guns, dashes with these disturbing women don't feel designed around particular weapons (with one awesome exception). They encourage you to experi-

ment with your guns and your surroundings, leading to some harrowing confrontations that leave your knuckles white.

If you're looking for faults, the only substantial ones involve what isn't there. In other words, there are a handful of missed opportunities (with Raiden, ironically) where cutscenes could have been replaced with playable sequences, giving you more control over pivotal story points. But when a game already features an abundance of jaw-dropping moments, complaining about not having a couple more just feels petty. Leveling criticism at the multi-player is equally pointless, since the inclusion of the Metal Gear Online starter pack is really more of a bonus; the core component of MGS 4 is the 20-plus hours of single-player action polished to radiance.

Speaking of the campaign, I know I haven't mentioned the story yet. That's not an oversight. As a longtime fan of the series, there are many revelations I'd love to discuss in detail, but any information is too much when it comes to the mind-blowing culmination of events. I'll just say I'm beyond satisfied and leave it at that.

Where the Metal Gear franchise goes from here is a mystery. Whatever happens, make no mistake: The story of Solid Snake ends here. With the series' last breath, Hideo Kojima's defining opus does more than just surpass the previous Metal Gear titles — it creates a landmark gaming experience that continually astounds with its variety, depth, and intelligence. Metal Gear Solid 4 is a masterpiece. —JOE



BOTTOM LINE 10

> **Concept:** Solid Snake's last stand. All questions are answered, and the legendary hero earns his rest

> **Graphics:** From the lines under Snake's eyes to the explosions of full-scale war, every nuance is represented with stunning detail

> **Sound:** Excellent. The soundtrack, voice acting, and ambient effects put you right in the heart of battle

> **Playability:** A complete overhaul addresses practically all of the series' past control issues. Over-the-shoulder firing works perfectly, and there is no more sticking to walls or lying prone in the middle of a firefight

> **Entertainment:** An artistic and enthralling blend of story and mechanics. This is one of the high points of modern gaming

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.75

Guns of the Patriots pays off not just because it's the long-awaited resolution to a saga that has captured my imagination — the game expands its horizons and evolves to deliver the best experience in the series. I've always revered this franchise for its superb mix of inventive gameplay and engaging story, and this title exceeds my expectations in both departments. The numerous control improvements and additions allow the game to do things that wouldn't have worked previously, such as one of my favorite sequences — the open battles between PMC and rebel forces that feature a frantic mix of battlefield chaos, fire-fights, and stealth. Throw in Gecko and Frog fights, the best boss battles in the series, an army's worth of customizable weapons, and more than a few gasp-out-loud story moments, and Guns of the Patriots is a triumphant finale that opens up so many doors it feels like it's just the beginning. —KATO

Everything Revealed

If you've played the previous games in this series, you have some questions. Rest assured, Metal Gear Solid 4 has the answers to all the big mysteries:

- Why does Snake look so old?
- Who does Ocelot really work for?
- What's going on with FoxDie?
- How is Vamp not dead yet?
- What ever happened to Naomi?
- Are any MGS 3 characters still alive?
- Can Raiden actually be cool?
- Where is the corpse of Big Boss?
- Seriously, the Patriots. What the hell?



BOTTOM
LINE **6.25**

> **Concept:** Juice and shoot to kill. ALPHA baby!

> **Graphics:** The great particle effects on grenades don't mask the average graphics and dated character animations

> **Sound:** The worst dialogue I've heard since *Army of Two*. Soldiers constantly shout cheesy one-liners worse than anything Paris Hilton has ever said

> **Playability:** Controls suffice, but the zoom reticles are clumsy and the poorly implemented threat indicators make it hard to pinpoint oncoming fire

> **Entertainment:** Four-player co-op can be fun despite the poor campaign. Shoot their Nectar tanks and watch the fireworks!

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



PLAYSTATION 3

Haze

> **STYLE:** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 24-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER:** FREE RADICAL > **RELEASE:** MAY 20 > **ESRB:** M

WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

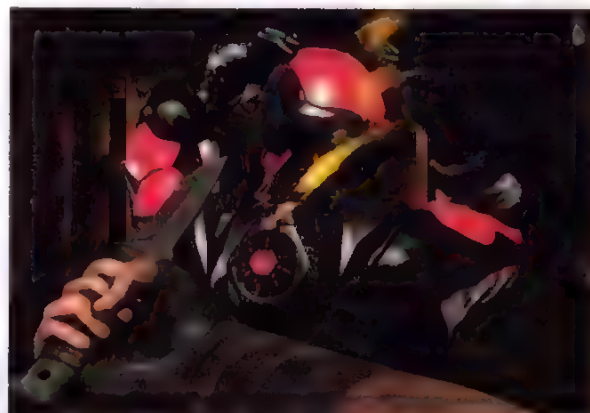
Now I know what it feels like to be a junkie going through withdrawal. Though the drug Nectar hardly makes *Haze* a good game, when Free Radical takes it away a quarter of the way through, the game world suddenly feels barren, and you long for one last hit to make the drab experience mildly interesting again. So much for *Haze* being a killer app for the PS3.

The year is 2023, and Shane Carpenter is the newest numbskull to join the ranks of Mantel Corporation, a multinational biotech company that fields its own army. Their secret weapon is Nectar, a supplement that gives soldiers increased fighting skills and a euphoric high that prevents them from experiencing PTSD. The resulting army is composed of overconfident frat boy/roid freaks who wouldn't be out of place chilling with Brucie in *GTA IV*. Between high fives and fist pumps, these tools indiscriminately smoke anyone who gets in their way. Carpenter isn't as enamored with the drugs and propaganda as the rest of Mantel, and after he bears witness to his fellow soldiers torturing a resistance leader, a series of events leads him to switch sides to the Promise Hand, a revolutionary insurgency fighting the occupying Mantel forces whose own end goals are never really expressed.

Ludicrous story aside, *Haze* is littered with inexcusable gameplay flaws. More often than not the game lacks a waypoint system or intelligent pathfinding to naturally direct you to objectives, which means you waste a lot of time searching for where you should be going. This is especially amplified in maps that force you to backtrack over previously cleared areas.

On the battlefield, Nectar is a powerful tool. Inject the ideal amount and it increases your speed, accuracy, and awareness, highlighting enemies in bright orange. If you take too large a dose or your Nectar tank explodes, however, your character will go berserk, shooting anyone in his crosshairs and sometimes even cooking a kamikaze grenade.

Like the band Metallica, when the game abandons the only feature that made it interesting — drugs — it leaves you with a drab experience akin to watching Lars Ulrich complain about his band mates; that is, repetitive,



Second Opinion 5.75

At the beginning of *Haze*, your character, Shane Carpenter, uses performance-enhancing drugs to gain an advantage on the battlefield. After "juicing" for a few levels, he realizes that the drugs are hurting him, and that the corporation encouraging their usage is corrupt. He then spends the rest of the game battling against his former employer for a drug-free future. There are bad stones, and then there is this colossally stupid waste of time. The game's inability to deliver an entertaining firefight won't help you shake the thought that this story might be based on Jose Canseco's life. The controls are solid, but after shooting one enemy in the game, you've basically seen everything *Haze* has to offer. Its selection of weapons is slim, and its variety of enemies even slimmer. It also has a hard time leading players along. After a battle, you'll likely wander the barren level for a few minutes before figuring out where to go next. Heed my advice, *Haze* should only be played if you intend to mock it. *Mystery Science Theater*-style with buddies in co-op. —REINER



uninteresting, and intolerable. The poorly implemented threat indicators make it tough to figure out where fire is coming from, and enemies display the intelligence of raging bulls, relentlessly charging you with total disregard for tactics — it's a wonder Mantel ever comes out on top in a fight. Your comrades are equally moribund; you'll spend so much time healing them that it's often best to let them die and go it alone. *Haze* also features the worst variety of weapons I've seen in a long while, and you'll only fight variations of two enemies over the course of the campaign. Players won't find solace in the neglected multiplayer, either, which offers all the excitement of a *St. Anger* b-side.

Haze's saving grace is its co-op gameplay, which can be fun when you shoot a friend's Nectar tank from behind to watch him freak out. But these short experiences do nothing to offset the major disappointment the rest of the game delivers. —BERTZ

BOTTOM LINE 8.75



XBOX 360

Ninja Gaiden II

STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER TEAM NINJA
RELEASE JUNE 3 > ESRB M

REAL ULTIMATE POWER

Ninja Gaiden's action is an exaggerated dance of twirling steel and falling body parts. The amount of blood that sprays from your victims' bodies is ludicrous. Its female characters are as stereotypically well formed as its monsters are deformed. And the game's atmosphere is an almost incongruous mix of Japanese spirituality and sci-fi technology. So obviously, I love it.

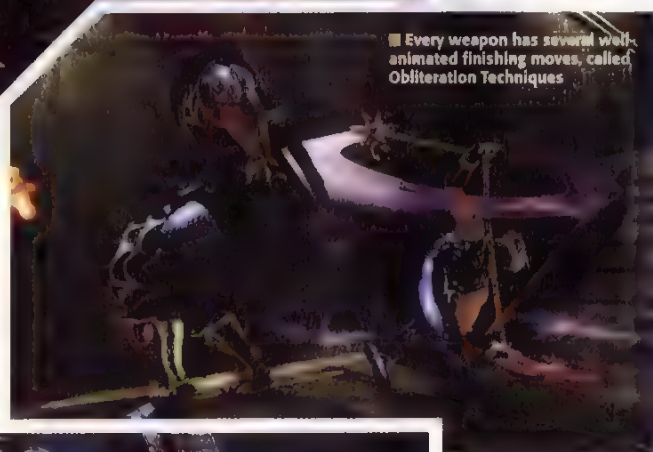
If there ever was a game developed for the attention deficient, this is it. Ninja Gaiden's action is so fast bullets would have trouble keeping up. But since it's action game and not a round of golf, this intensity is pretty flippin' awesome.

Ninja Gaiden II sharpens what made the original Xbox title so fun. The new health recharge system is really just an excuse to throw enough enemies at you to populate a small country, but the system is balanced well. The game still provides a solid challenge; like a real martial art, it takes practice to master the finer points of Ryu's different weapons, combos, and magic. It's worth the time investment, and it's no small thrill once you've trained your nerve synapses to respond with the haste of a hyperactive Navy SEAL. Checkpoints are much improved, so you no longer have to battle through five ninja-filled rooms before reaching the boss every time you die.

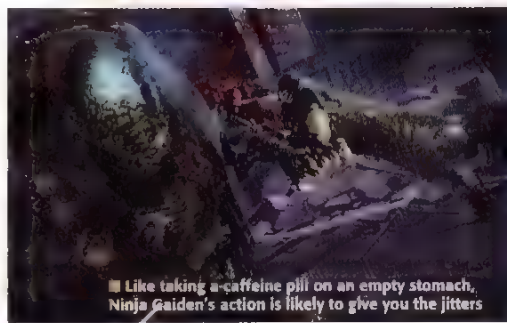
For a game that doesn't offer multiplayer, Ninja Gaiden's online offerings are pretty good. The leaderboard system displays your ranking among the world's ninja elite, and the Ninja Cinema — which works a little like Halo 3's Theater — lets you share gameplay videos with your friends.

But, like a bottle of moonshine in your grandmother's cabinet, other elements in Ninja Gaiden's gameplay have started to lose their potency. Whenever the game isn't focusing on action (which thankfully isn't often), it feels like a game from a forgotten age in gaming. Contextual control issues sometimes arise, making it difficult to do simple things like shimmying along a pipe. The platforming elements, such as running along and climbing walls, can be touchy, and we noticed a few loading issues, too. The game still follows the tired pattern of finding key A to open locked door B. And the story is about as unnecessary as a tomato fruit roll-up.

If you are willing to put up with those few annoyances, Ninja Gaiden will show you a great time, but let's hope Team Ninja adds a few new flavors to the mix next time it stirs this pot. —**BEN**



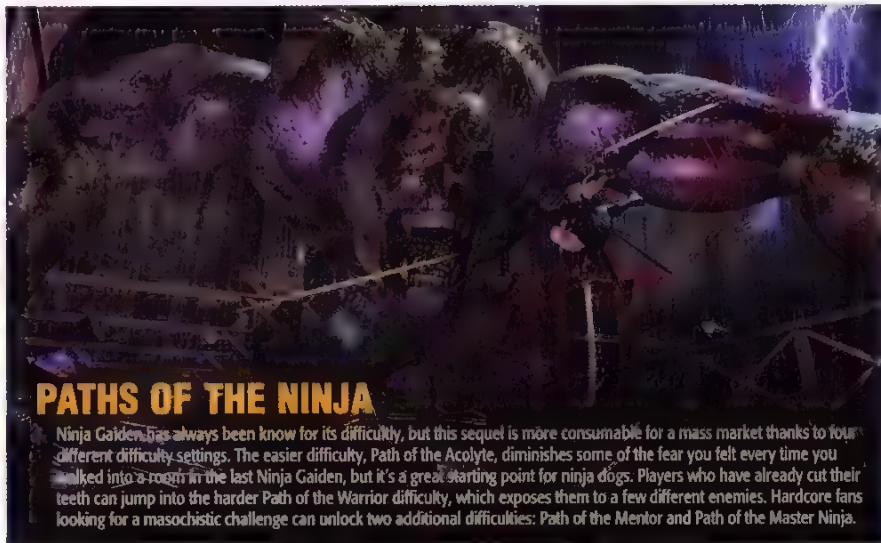
Every weapon has several well-animated finishing moves, called Obliteration Techniques



Like taking a caffeine pill on an empty stomach, Ninja Gaiden's action is likely to give you the jitters



Ryu uses his top secret exploding meatball decapitation technique



PATHS OF THE NINJA

Ninja Gaiden has always been known for its difficulty, but this sequel is more consumable for a mass market thanks to four different difficulty settings. The easier difficulty, Path of the Acolyte, diminishes some of the fear you felt every time you walked into a room in the last Ninja Gaiden, but it's a great starting point for ninja dogs. Players who have already cut their teeth can jump into the harder Path of the Warrior difficulty, which exposes them to a few different enemies. Hardcore fans looking for a masochistic challenge can unlock two additional difficulties: Path of the Mentor and Path of the Master Ninja.

Second Opinion 8.5

History tells us that ninjas were subtle practitioners of assassination and espionage. Screw history — I prefer Team Ninja's "flip out and kill everything in sight" interpretation of these skilled agents. Ninja Gaiden II features the same brand of fast-paced and finely tuned action as its predecessor, and will satisfy your bloodlust with its spectacular combos and brutal kills. Even with limbs and blades flying in all directions, the animations are fluid and the controls are incredibly responsive. However, some of the tension is missing from combat thanks to the new recharging health system. It diminishes the importance of every hit Ryu takes, so you no longer feel the need to be as calculating as before. Then there's the new camera, which gives enemies license to attack you from off-screen more than ever before. Despite some lost luster, the battles are still packed with excellent action and entertaining mechanics that everyone can enjoy, from the lowliest ninja dog to the most exalted master ninja. —**JOE**



The new pause screen menu is a good fit

PC

Mass Effect

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** BLOWARE > **RELEASE** MAY 28 > **ESRB** M

LATE TO THE PARTY

BioWare cut its teeth on the PC decades ago, and the developer's latest masterpiece is finally available for Windows after its Xbox 360-only debut. The company thankfully went the extra mile in crafting an interface more suited to mouse and keyboard control for this port, and load times have been dramatically shortened, but at the end of the day, it's very much the same game.

I won't waste time with a detailed description of the game itself — plenty of ink and electrons have already been devoted to the task. The storyline is amazing, the combat and character progression systems are decent, and the presentation is second to none. None of this has changed from the original. The few areas in which Mass Effect differs on PC are minor, but appreciated.

A completely new pause screen replaces the selection wheels found on the 360. Holding the space bar brings up icons for everything you can do; skills and weapons for your party and yourself are controlled from this screen, and you can give separate movement orders to each of your two companions now. An MMO-esque hotbar allows for one-touch activation of your own skills without pausing play. Much-improved inventory man-

agement and an amusing new decryption minigame are very welcome as well. I'd like to be able to bind keys to a lot of the things that you're forced to use the mouse for on the pause screen, but this is certainly a serviceable interface that goes well beyond the cut-and-paste jobs that PC gamers are too often subjected to with console ports.

While this doesn't use the most scalable graphics engine in the world, a fast rig can pump out visuals that put the 360 version of Mass Effect to shame. That multi-thousand dollar investment seems worth it when you're seeing 60-plus frames per second at resolutions a console can only dream of. Similarly, with a nice machine you'll notice that the Normandy's decks are much closer together — elevator rides are much, much quicker.

Nearly every one of the many praises and criticisms of the console version can accurately be applied to this port, but I'd recommend this edition of Mass Effect to anyone with a good PC. You even get the first downloadable content pack for free, though BioWare was silent when asked about whether future DLC will discriminate between platforms. —**ADAM**



WASD movement dramatically improves the Mako's ride

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Retool the interface and sharpen the visuals for this epic RPG's PC incarnation

> **Graphics:** Texture pop-in still rears its ugly head, but the buttery-smooth framerate and high resolutions you can push on a fast machine are outstanding

> **Sound:** Exactly the same as the Xbox 360 original — meaning that the audio work is some of the best in gaming

> **Playability:** Props to BioWare for creating a decent interface for mouse/keyboard control, but there are still things I feel are missing

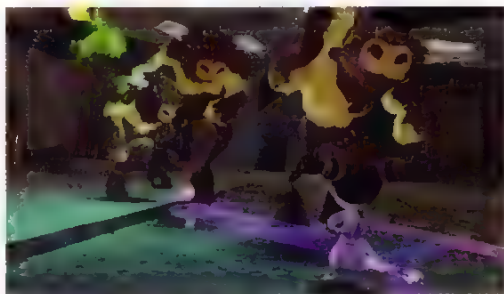
> **Entertainment:** This is one of the best RPGs we'll see in the current console generation, and the platform you play it on doesn't matter much

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.75

I wish I could go back in time and stop myself from playing Mass Effect the first time. That's about the only way I could appreciate this PC release more. Mass Effect was already a stellar RPG, featuring superb storytelling, fun combat, and a revolutionary conversation mechanic. But this isn't a quick and dirty port either; obvious improvements like a streamlined inventory system, multiple hotkeys, and quicker load times smooth out Mass Effect's few wrinkles. And I hope a few improvements make it over to the sequel, such as the new tactical HUD that allows for issuing orders in a more efficient manner, and the fun new decryption minigame. If you haven't played through BioWare's masterpiece yet, my only warning is that once you do you'll also be wishing you could time travel — so you could jump into the future and play the sequel. —**BEN**

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Wii

Death Jr.: Root of Evil

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
> **PUBLISHER** EIDOS INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MAY 27 > **ESRB** T



STILL IN PURGATORY

After years of toiling on handhelds, Death Jr. has finally received his console break with this Wii port. The macabre settings and creepy-yet-lovable crew of characters feels right at home on the big screen; this property is ripe for a Saturday morning cartoon or animated movie. As a game, however, the series is still trying to work out its kinks.

Death Jr.'s controls make the full transition to the Wii, for better and for worse. The remote and nunchuk scheme works well for basic navigation and shooting, but, like the PSP, these are compromised by the tricky camera and overly kinetic melee strings. When surrounded by enemies, orienting yourself to judge where the next attack will come from is a struggle. Your combat equilibrium is hardly aided by your melee attacks either, as your character jumps all over the place when you string three swings together.

Once you move past the troubling combat and camera, the game treads the familiar path of fighting enemies, jumping and/or swinging across platforms, collecting orbs, and squaring off against level bosses. The great art style and smart writing sometimes mask the staid gameplay, but, in the end, the cookie cutter platforming buries the game's strengths. I hope the next title retains the series' charming sensibilities while taking the gameplay to the next level. Death's kid clearly deserves better. —BERTZ

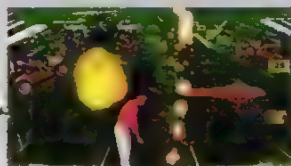


Wii QUICKIES

Wii

Target: Terror

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** RAW THRILLS/LEVIATHAN GAMES > **RELEASE** APRIL 22 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE
4.5

Target: Terror's hilarious FMV action and absurdist weapons (like the freeze gun) make it a perfect match for the Adult Swim crowd. For \$10, the game would be worthwhile just for laughing at so-bad-it's-good moments like when the line of SLA-style terrorists using urinals in the bathroom turn around simultaneously and open fire. But Konami is charging \$40, which is too steep for a four-level light gun game crippled by horrible lag and lack of calibration, which eliminates the option of aiming down the sights—a major faux pas in the genre. Much like an *American Ninja* or *Iron Eagle* movie, if you see Target: Terror in the bargain bin, pick it up for a laugh. For the full price, however, get your shooting fix elsewhere. —BERTZ

Wii

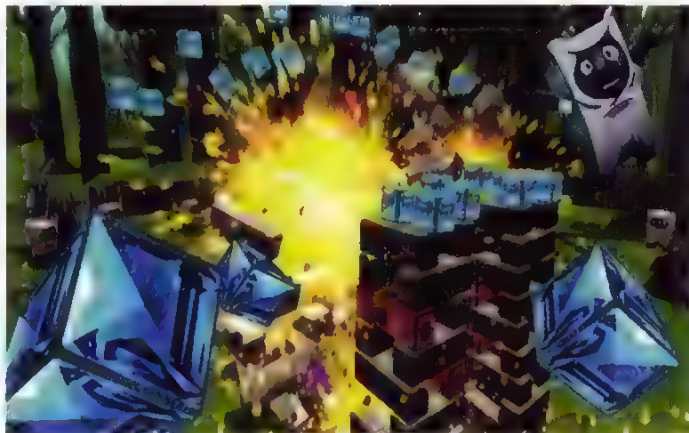
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** JULY 8 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE
5.5

A relic of a gameplay design that should have gone extinct with the dinosaurs, the name tells you everything you need to know about Chocobo Dungeon. First, there's Chocobo; the little yellow bird should never have been more than a guest star. From characters to plot, the story is profoundly forgettable. Then there's the Dungeon. I capitalize because there's no other way to indicate how central it is—the gameplay hinges on this concept. Different tile sets occasionally pop up, and the mazes are randomized each time, but you still just enter, grind, loot, boss, and restart in these dungeons again and again. The game does everything it sets out to do—it's just that what it sets out to do isn't much. —MILLER



Wii

Boom Blox

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EALA > **RELEASE** MAY 6 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE
8.5

BLOCKS OF GLORY

While many gamers were expecting the first EA/Steven Spielberg collaboration to be more along the lines of *Saving Private Ryan* or *Indiana Jones* than a block puzzle game, the resulting bigger budget and longer development time has allowed for some highly creative challenges and impressively tight controls.

Carefully pulling blocks out without bringing the whole structure down is everything last year's terrible Jenga adaptation should have been and then some. However, most of Boom Blox is about tearing down structures, blowing them up, and tipping them over by chucking objects at them as efficiently as possible. These seemingly simple concepts start out with a relaxing appeal and eventually move on to satisfyingly complex.

And that's just the à la carte puzzle mode. The story mode adds in some great twists like defending castles from invading bears, crafting bridges and clearing paths for a gorilla in a Lemmings-style send up, and shooting bandits and blowing up their buildings before they take out your cow friends. The sheer variety of objectives and overall high bar that most of them hit makes for a constantly refreshing game, and a slew of unlockables encourages that "one more time" drive to score gold rankings.

Co-op and competitive multiplayer combine just as much variety with a different kind of fun. In the same vein as bocce ball or darts, the best modes have players taking turns showing off their skills and, hopefully, screwing over everyone else. Expect a lot of smack talk and fist pumping.

The game's biggest fault is that you can only share user-created levels from the robust editor with people on your friends list. This effectively kills what could have been a thriving community churning out potentially limitless entertaining content. Despite this missed opportunity, Boom Blox is one of the best games on Wii, and shows what can happen when a third-party developer plays to the strengths of the console as well as Nintendo does. —BRYAN



> **Concept:** Slap Steven Spielberg's name on a surprisingly deep Jenga-style block puzzler

> **Graphics:** Under a simple veneer lie some fantastic physics effects

> **Sound:** Thankfully, the cute animal gibberish and happy music rarely cross into the annoying category

> **Playability:** Save a few issues with the throwing mechanic, 3D object manipulation has never felt this tactile

> **Entertainment:** Contemplative puzzle solving and rowdy multiplayer strike a great balance

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

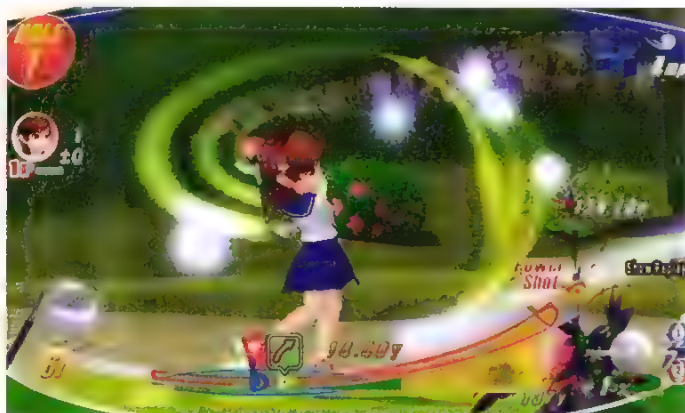
Second Opinion

It's hard to pin down Boom Blox with a one-sentence descriptor. You could say it's a puzzle game about knocking over blocks, but that ignores the shooting gallery challenges, Lemmings-like escort levels, and nerve-wracking Jenga puzzles. While knocking over blocks gave the four-year-old in me a thrill, it's really the game's diversity that kept me playing. The game has so many challenges, I felt like I would never stop unlocking something new. Boom Blox's biggest problem is that the physics sometimes work against you. Hitting the same exploding block twice won't always give you the same result, and subtle variations in block movements can create a butterfly effect by the end of a level. Sometimes you just need to get lucky to score a gold medal. Still, this is one of the more intriguing Wii titles I've played in a while. Grab some friends, because Boom Blox gets better the more people you crowd around a TV. —BEN

Wii

We Love Golf

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** CAMELOT > **RELEASE** JULY 1 > **ESRB** E



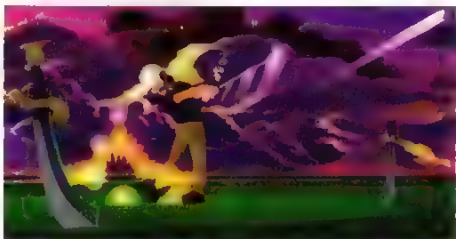
PRAYING FOR RAIN

I'm tempted to reward this game simply because the "We" in the title isn't spelled "Wii," but let's not get carried away here. A title this basic gamers no rewards. It's too bad, because I expected better from developer Camelot – the company behind the original Hot Shots Golf title and Mario Golf.

The main benefit of using the Wii remote for a golf game is obvious – a real-time swing. Unfortunately, Camelot went a totally different route and created a counter-intuitive swing. Although your player's onscreen backswing corresponds to how you move the Wii remote, initiating your club's downward swing and the subsequent follow-through does not match your Wii remote's movements. Instead of a nice, normal golf swing with the controller, you're forced to perform little more than a wrist flick after winding your club back. Some may like this, but I think even kids will find We Love Golf's swing mechanics strange.

The onscreen golf is just as poor as the disappointing gameplay mechanics. The lay of the putting green doesn't have near the effect it does in other golf titles, and the challenge this game presents is more of a Sunday stroll than a nerve-testing Pebble Beach.

Camelot seems to have put all its faith behind its counter-intuitive take on the golf swing, because the rest of the game, like the career structure, is pure vanilla and highly conspicuous in an age when contemporaries like Tiger and Hot Shots have built out their career structures in endearing ways. —**KATO**



This title's short game is a mess

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Put a golf game on Wii without taking advantage of the system

> **Graphics:** Typical Japanese golf fare, but noticeably less sharp than the Hot Shots series due to the platform

> **Sound:** Our soundtrack was the sound of puzzlement and disappointment

> **Playability:** Apart from the botched swing mechanic, the way the ball plays and travels could be better

> **Entertainment:** When this game isn't frustrating, it's blasé

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.25

I'm totally perplexed by We Love Golf. A Wii golf game developed by Camelot, sounds like the easiest lay-up in game history. So what went wrong? While it offers a good amount of variety in the modes (you'll see familiar events like target golf and ring golf), the core swing mechanic tracks very erratically and the power meter somehow manages to make what is essentially a three-click swing confusing. Luckily, the game is totally forgiving of slicing or fading and the short game is fairly automatic – even though the greens appear to be made of concrete judging by how far your puts and chip shots tend to roll past the hole. It's not in the same league as Hot Shots or Mario Golf, and I very much prefer Tecmo's Super Swing series if you're looking for a casual Wii golf title. —**MATT**

Wii QUICKIES

Wii

Deca Sports

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS
> **PUBLISHER** HUDSON > **DEVELOPER** HUDSON > **RELEASE** MAY 13 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 3

The Wii's shovelware deluge continues with Deca Sports. This paper-thin offering bores its victims with 10 random sport activities like curling, figure skating, and beach volleyball. Single-player events like archery are passable minigames, but the team games are an insult to the sports they represent. The simplistic flick-your-wrist-and-sometimes-press-a-button interface is probably great for testing the motor skills of chimpanzees, but humans should do themselves a favor and use this same arm motion to fling this Hudson game into the Hudson River. —**BERTZ**

Wii

Wild Earth: African Safari

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO
> **DEVELOPER** SUPER X STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** APRIL 23 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 5.75

Wild Earth: African Safari made me feel like I was in class again. For a game that delivers interactive education, this can be viewed as both a blessing and a curse. It stimulates the brain with a wealth of knowledge about Africa's wildlife, but comes off just as dry as a lesson a schoolteacher has been reciting for decades. The only goal of the game is to take photos of animals either by yourself or with up to four players in co-op. While tasked with capturing them in certain behaviors, it doesn't matter how you frame the shot. I just took photos of animal butts and still managed to impress my tour guides, who are constantly filling your ear with interesting tidbits about the animals around you. Without any degree of difficulty, however, you don't feel like you are doing anything other than making your tour guides talk. —**REINER**



Wii

Blast Works: Build Trade Destroy

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SHOOTER > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO
> **DEVELOPER** BUDCAT CREATIONS > **RELEASE** MAY 6 > **ESRB** E

THE KATAMARI SHOOTER?

The 2D shooter has been dying a slow death for the last decade and a half, so it's heartening to see the a genre renaissance happening in the world of indie games and services like Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network. Majesco's Blast Works is the direct descendant of Tumiki Fighters, a freeware title created by Japanese shooter savant Kenta Cho. With Budcat Creations, Majesco has crafted Cho's basic template into one of the more unique console shooters I've played in years.

Essentially, it's Katamari Damacy meets Defender.

Players take control of one of a number of spaceships and proceed to blast various enemies to bits. Your ship then latches onto downed foes, eventually forming a giant mass of space debris around your craft. While you can use the space junk as an ad-hoc shield, the downed crafts also give you new types of projectile fire. At first I found Blast Works too chaotic, but soon grew to love the strategy that comes from deciding when to use my bulk as a shield and when to quickly suck it into my ship with the shoulder button to preserve my debris collection. It's certainly challenging – a near ridiculous amount of enemies are onscreen, each with its own complex patterns of fire.

It's certainly not perfect; the difficulty balancing is rough around the edges, and the co-op multiplayer is ruined by the fact that the camera doesn't pull back, resulting in total chaos as each player's hunk of junk grows in size. However, I'm pretty addicted to Blast Works, and this addiction might never end due to the amazing level editor and online community functions, which gives players the ability to create anything and everything in the game and share them for free online. All in all, it's an excellent entry in a criminally overlooked genre. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** An old-school 2D shooter with a Katamari-style twist

> **Graphics:** Blocky and colorful, the graphics favor playability and a clean look over complexity

> **Sound:** As retro as the look, most of the tunes favor minimal techno with a 16-bit era sound

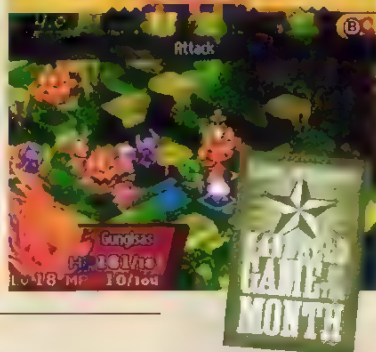
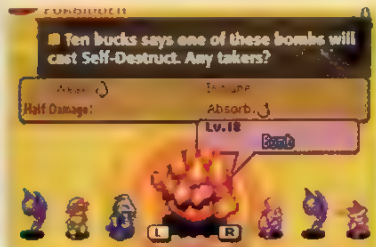
> **Playability:** It's not easy, but the control is accurate enough to give you a fighting chance

> **Entertainment:** In a genre that's often stuck in the past, Blast Works tries new things and (largely) succeeds

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.25

The best, and perhaps only, way to describe Blast Works is as a Katamari shooter. Based on indie game Tumiki Fighters (which is included on the disc), the junk collecting mechanic takes getting used to but eventually becomes rather addicting. There's nothing quite like piloting a screen-filling ship with bullets blasting in all directions. I wish for more level variety in the main campaign, but fortunately a robust level creator and groundbreaking (for the Wii, at least) stage downloading hub allows you to feed off of interesting content created by more hardcore players. —**BRYAN**



NINTENDO DS

Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** JUNE 24 > **ESRB** E10+

LIVING ON THE GRID

In terms of basic design, turn-based strategy games don't differ much from each other. Players tell their units where to move and who to attack, and then watch the enemy numbers dwindle. What really separates the good games from the bad in this genre are the underlying rules, balance, and mechanics. Final Fantasy Tactics A2 succeeds in all these categories.

Players once again assume the role of a boy magically transported to Ivalice. The rest of the story is lame (a noticeable step down from FFTA), but the game wastes no time throwing you into the fray. There are many details to address when creating a battle system, and I love this game's solutions. No automatic counterattacks, no perma-death, and a variety of unique abilities make each battle interesting without being unforgiving. It is similar to its GBA predecessor, but with many of that game's faults ironed out or made less intrusive. It puts the challenge squarely where it ought to be: the strategy.

The addition of two tribes

and several jobs give you plenty of new options to consider. A unit's advancement in a job class is based on skills you learn through weapons, which eventually allow you to unlock new jobs. The system took me a long time to warm up to, since it makes you spend some time in garbage jobs and use non-optimal equipment, but isn't nearly as frustrating as it sounds. It even begins to figure into your tactical decisions as you advance.

While the game nails most of the major points, there are still some annoyances to stumble through. The unit limit for most battles is low, the shop's interface is cumbersome, and the new MP system (starting units at 0 MP for every fight) doesn't make any sense. But for every one of these problems, something else falls right into place. When it all clicks, Final Fantasy Tactics A2 is a well-oiled adventure combining good design and fun gameplay that any strategy/RPG fan will appreciate. —**JOE**

OBEY!

Yes, laws are back in A2, but they aren't nearly the pain they were before. The main consequence for disobeying laws now is the loss of your **clan privilege**, which is a passive ability you set at the beginning of battle. Sure, it robs you of a tactical advantage, but it's nice to know that breaking a ridiculous rule (like not being allowed to miss) doesn't land you in jail anymore.

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Return to Ivalice with a new protagonist to tackle more strategic combat

> **Graphics:** Tactics' distinctive art style returns and really shines on the large, multi-square screens

> **Sound:** Why are you listening to the music? There are monsters everywhere! Attack!

> **Playability:** Even though stylus control is an option, don't bother with it. Also, the lack of camera rotation is a grave error

> **Entertainment:** The story certainly won't keep you enthralled, but the battle mechanics compensate

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.25

There's only one thing that this sequel doesn't improve over its predecessor: the terrible story premise. If you can get over that banality, this is one of the richest and best-balanced tactical RPGs in years. A reasonably lengthy main quest more than delivers \$40 worth of thrills, and the boundless side quests, hidden jobs and characters, and secondary goals make Tactics A2 a game that you can sink your teeth into for upwards of 60 hours. The revamped law system (where you get a bonus for following the random rules, but aren't punished for breaking them) is miles better than the original implementation of the concept, the job system is deeper than ever, and there are even a few shout-outs to localization gaffes from the PSone original. A few niggles, like the slow pace of combat and sometimes-annoying menus, don't stop this from being the best tactical RPG I've played since Disgaea. —**ADAM**

PSP

Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** CLAP HANZ/SCEA SANTA MONICA > **RELEASE** JUNE 3 > **ESRB** E



PAR INFINITY

By the time I unlocked a Shiba Inu as a pet dog to stand alongside my character, I must have sunk hundreds of putts and countless birdies. Regardless, I was still excited to keep going and see what unlockables were around the corner. Besides, I think we both know that my chip-ins need more work.

Hot Shots games — no matter the platform — are really never that different because the solid three-click gameplay core ensures they never have to be. But Open Tee 2 does just enough to differentiate it from its predecessor with the tweaked career structure. As you go through the Challenge mode, choosing which clothing category you want to play tournaments in — divided into head, body, and accessory classifications — determines which skill set you increase. For instance, playing tourna-

ments in the head category gains you both new hairdos and a better control rating. Winning nets you cards. Five cards in any category gains you a level in that skill, and the more cards you get lets you play against and collect the series' characters. Earning clothing pieces and customizing your golfer are nothing new to the franchise, but I found this format more fun than the ones in the first Open Tee or Out of Bounds on PS3.

This title doesn't feature the new swing mechanic debuted in Out of Bounds, and it's not much more than a reshuffling of what has already worked for the series. However, this game's predictable ceiling is mitigated by the fact that it stands on solid ground. If I could find this much reliability in my real life golf game, I'd be in the same league as Tiger, too. —**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** A slight tweak from the last PSP Hot Shots keeps the ball rolling

> **Graphics:** Hot Shots always looks sharp, and this is no different

> **Sound:** I don't think that even real golfers have musical taste this bad. The voices are as cute as ever, though

> **Playability:** Open Tee 2 lacks Out of Bounds' new swing mechanic, so this is more "classic" Hot Shots

> **Entertainment:** Like an Arnie Palmer on a hot summer's day, I find this game hard to put down

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

I just had a realization: Hot Shots Golf is "my Mario Kart." I always make fun of the fanboys who get all excited for the latest barely altered Mario Kart game, but who am I to judge? Hot Shots offers about the same amount of innovation from title to title (i.e. practically none), but I still gladly eat it up every time. Open Tee 2 is practically the same game as the first, and it's a damn good time, packed with great characters and finely tuned gameplay. While I miss the new swing mechanics from the recent PS3 version, this PSP sequel offers perhaps the best organized Challenge Mode to date, giving you a better sense of what each item does for your abilities. Open Tee 2 is classic video game comfort food done right, and there's not a thing wrong with that. —**MAIT**

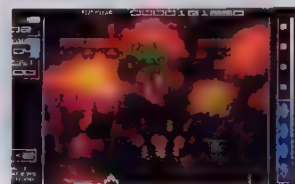


HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS | PSP

Space Invaders Extreme

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SHOOTER (2-PLAYER VIA DS LOCAL OR ONLINE, OR PSP LOCAL)
> **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
> **DEVELOPER** TAITO
> **RELEASE** JUNE 17 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE
8.25

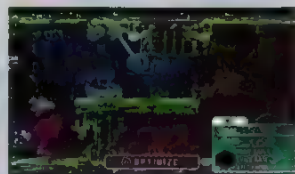
It takes some clever thinking to take something this old and make it feel new again.

Square Enix has done exactly that by maintaining the core "shoot the aliens" gameplay while dramatically expanding the strategy and skill required to succeed in the endeavor. Chained attacks on similarly colored enemies garner power-up weapons, while breaching the invader's defenses to hit one of those top-of-the-screen saucers will often trigger a bonus round. Challenging and unique bosses and exponentially difficult branching stages are equal parts frustration and obsession. Even the music and sound effects integrate with gameplay — your attack timing becomes part of the soundscape much as it does in the cult classic *Rez*. *Space Invaders Extreme* serves as a fitting 30th anniversary gift to one of the oldest franchises in gaming. —**MILLER**

PSP

R-Type Command

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS
> **DEVELOPER** IREM SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** MAY 6 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE
7.25

Developer Irem has left behind R-Type's fast-paced shooter action for the slowest genre

available — strategy. Using a left-versus-right 2D hexagon battle system, players command a fleet of recognizable classic ships against the Bydo armada. While the brief 3D attack animations look nice, the fact that you have to wait through a load every time will have you turning them off after the first battle. Combat is suitably deep, but eventually grows stale later in the campaign. If you dig R-Type and strategy (or just the latter), *Command* definitely does the trick, but shooter fans are better off waiting for the next one. —**BRYAN**



PSP

Secret Agent Clank

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** HIGH IMPACT GAMES > **RELEASE** JUNE 17 > **ESRB** E10+

BIG THRILLS AND EVEN LARGER LAUGHS

If a television station aired a *Behind the Game* show on Ratchet's robotic companion, Clank, it would likely be the most forgettable hour in television history. As beloved as this character is, his legacy has been that of a backpack. Strapped firmly to the back of his furry cohort, he has quite literally just been along for the ride. This begs the question: What if this tin can hero roamed freely in a protagonist role? As *Secret Agent Clank* so colorfully illustrates, a sidekick unleashed is entertainment gold.

In this spin-off game, Clank shows us he's just as capable of a combatant as Ratchet. He can flip over enemy fire with acrobatic grace, and retaliate against his opponent with persona-defining force. His weapons bring variety to the field of war, and are quite fun to use. He can toss razorblade bowties like ninja stars, summon lightning from his umbrella, and unleash plants that don't mind having robots in their diets. Clank's arsenal isn't as robust as those in other Ratchet titles, but it does have a creative flair, and is balanced nicely against the enemy forces. As no surprise whatsoever, Clank's actions are fueled by the same control scheme as Ratchet. It plays well, and while playing off the same mechanics, still has its own unique feel.

Clank, who looks dashing in a tuxedo, is far too sophisticated to spend all of his time on the battlefield. As this game unfolds, you'll see him tearing it up in a ballroom dance and on the slopes on a snowboard. He also pilots a speedboat, and plays poker to the death. Most of these off-the-wall scenarios are handled through breakout gameplay sessions. The dancing sequence, which is loaded with some sidesplitting cinematics, forces players to tap into their rhythmic side, as they must quickly hit buttons that are flying

takedown maneuver shows the same lengthy animation every time it's used (and you use it often), and the identity-stealing missions just aren't fun. Dodging searchlights and laser grids with a fairly unpredictable camera can lead to some frustration as well. This is the one area where the game really struggles, and it just happens to be littered liberally throughout the entire adventure.

Clank's gameplay hits far more than it misses, and both Ratchet and Captain Qwark, who are playable in limited cameo roles, sizzle in this game. Ratchet engages in exciting arena battles, but his arsenal is but a whimper when compared to his other games. Qwark, who has always made me laugh, runs and guns with style, but really makes his mark with a hilarious musical number. It brought me to tears.

Just listening to this buffoon sing is worth the price of admission, but I also found *Secret Agent Clank* to be the perfect accompaniment to the Ratchet games. It offers a nice variety of gameplay, and the story ties in perfectly with the existing lore. Now bring on the Qwark game! —**REINER**



across the screen. The vehicle-based sequences are loaded with jumps and ways to quickly dispatch enemies in pursuit. Most of these gameplay diversions offer solid gameplay mechanics, a sweat-inducing difficulty level, and some great comic relief.

Unfortunately, Clank handles stealth with the grace you would expect from a noisy-jointed robot. His stealth



■ It's fun to stand back and watch the plant feed



■ Qwark's missions are tall tales told from his point of view

BOTTOM LINE
8.5

> **Concept:** Like *Daxter* before him, Clank steps out of the sidelock role and lights up the PSP with excellently crafted and highly varied gameplay

> **Graphics:** It captures the look of the Ratchet series, but also embodies the essence of a futuristic James Bond

> **Sound:** Again, it does a nice job of blending the science fiction setting and espionage genres. Clank and Qwark also provide memorable lines

> **Playability:** Most of the gameplay variations are sound and enjoyable. I could live without the stealth stages, however

> **Entertainment:** It offers gameplay you would never expect to see from a Ratchet game, yet still manages to feel like it belongs in the lineage

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **8.5**

Secret Agent Clank finds our duo in dangerous times: Ratchet has been imprisoned for the theft of the precious Eye of Infinity, leaving Clank on his own to make things right. While we do see a bit of Ratchet in the arena levels, the emphasis is squarely on Clank, who, in addition to his usual puzzle-solving-and-bots gameplay, has been retooled to be a more action-oriented hero. For the most part, it works beautifully. As always, ingenious new gadgets and weapons make for some fun and hilarious moments. That said, there were more moments of frustration than I was used to, in the form of some less-than-stellar camera movement, a few misplaced respawn points, and the pesky new stealth gameplay. However, much of the fun this time is in the wide variety of set pieces and minigames segments — the best of which include a speedboat chase, a deadly dance number, and a musical starring Captain Qwark that rivals the legendary *Mighty Poo* boss battle from *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, which will likely be one of my favorite gaming moments of the entire year. —**MATT**



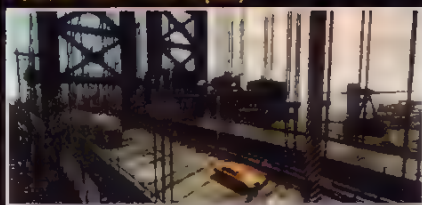
CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For March 2008 Based On Units Sold

1 GRAND THEFT AUTO IV (360)



We've lost our minds, so welcome to Bad Writing Week in Charts. It's been a dry season in video games, drier than a gin martini served in a paper towel glass. But the video game sun has risen on us this month, and like a flaming radioactive kitten we're getting excited. Let's look at what you're playing right now.

2 MARIO KART WII (WII)



Mario Kart's action is so fast it almost plays like a bunch of go-karts trying to race each other around a track. Just like a bicyclist raises his butt in anticipation while going over a bump in the road, we raise our butts in excitement over this game's crazy turtle shell throwing action.

3 GRAND THEFT AUTO IV (PS3)



Liberty City's atmosphere is so gritty it's like some kind of grainy grindy thing. It's like being inside the lungs of a smoker, if you could be made small enough to fit inside of someone's lungs. Though we suppose if that were the case you wouldn't be able to tell the difference because it would be so dark in there. And you'd probably be more annoyed with the constant breathing.

4 WII PLAY (WII)



If Wii Play were bread it would be burnt toast. Not the tasty kind of burnt toast, the kind that is not tasty and you don't want to eat. The kind of toast that turns to charcoal at the bottom of your toaster because no matter how hard you pound on the bottom it won't come out. The kind of toast the even starving birds in Africa won't eat.

5 SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL (WII)



Smash Bros. is packed with so many thrills we shouted until our voices were hoarse enough to pull a carriage. Ugh, who are we kidding? Bad Writing Week was a terrible idea. Bad like warm milk on a hot day, or selling used underwear, or a Jeff Fowworthy joke. (Someone stop us).

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release
1	Grand Theft Auto IV	N/A	360	10	04-08
2	Mario Kart Wii	N/A	Wii	8.5	04-08
3	Grand Theft Auto IV	N/A	PS3	10	04-08
4	Wii Play	4	Wii	7	02-07
5	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	1	Wii	9.5	03-08
6	Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	N/A	PS3	7.75	04-08
7	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness	N/A	DS	N/A	04-08
8	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time	N/A	DS	N/A	04-08
9	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	7	Wii	8.75	10-07
10	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	9	360	10	11-07
11	Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII	6	PSP	7.25	03-08
12	Rainbow Six Vegas 2	2	360	9.5	03-08
13	Naruto: Ultimate Ninja 3	20	PS2	N/A	03-08
14	Game Party	19	Wii	N/A	11-07
15	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	14	PS2	8.75	10-07
16	New Super Mario Bros.	18	DS	9.25	05-06
17	Mario Kart DS	N/A	DS	8.5	11-05
18	Rock Band	N/A	360	9.25	11-07
19	Mario Party DS	13	DS	7	11-07
20	Super Mario Galaxy	N/A	Wii	9.75	11-07

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Mario Kart Wii	Wii
2	Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G	PSP
3	Wii Fit	Wii
4	Link's Crossbow Training	Wii
5	Taiko Master DS	DS
6	Pokémon Ranger	DS
7	Deca Sports	Wii
8	Wii Sports	Wii
9	Bokura Wa Kasekiorida	DS
10	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	Wii



TOP 10 EU

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	N/A	PS3
2	Battlefield: Bad Company	N/A	multi
3	Grid	N/A	multi
4	Civilization Revolution	N/A	multi
5	Grand Theft Auto IV	1	multi
6	Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	N/A	DS
7	Ninja Gaiden II	N/A	360
8	Mario Kart Wii	3	Wii
9	Braid	2	360
10	Boom Blox	N/A	Wii



TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	The Sims 2 Kitchen & Bath Interior Design Stuff	N/A	\$17
2	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	N/A	\$28
3	The Sims 2 FreeTime	1	\$27
4	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	5	\$40
5	World Of Warcraft	4	\$20
6	Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	6	\$49
7	Sins Of A Solar Empire	8	\$39
8	World Of Warcraft: Burning Crusade	9	\$30
9	Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut Edition	N/A	\$47
10	Rainbow Six Vegas 2	N/A	\$49



Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld/IRISYS - David Riley/516-925-2277

Based On Monthly Units Sold



Battlefield: Bad Company



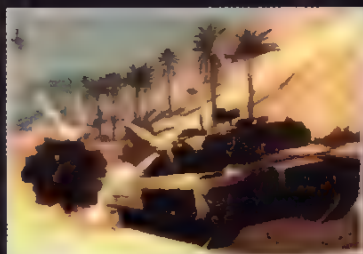
Field Ops Manual for Multiplayer Mayhem

By Gordon Van Dyke, Associate Producer



WE LOVE TANKS

Battlefield: Bad Company's destructible environments change the way you fight. Need to get to an enemy fast? Drive your tank straight into the side of a house or blast out the wall to expose and take out the enemy faster. Flatten trees, bust through fences, blow everything up that gets in your way for the quick kill. Want to disrupt the enemy's advancing armored divisions? Take out the bridge and pick off your enemies from a distance.



BOOM IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

The demolition and specialist kits share a common goal: destroy the enemy's armor with a boom! They also carry a unique pair of weapons to accomplish this. The specialist kit features a gun that fires tracer darts that attach to vehicles. Once a vehicle is tagged with tracer darts, it appears as a tagged vehicle to all players with demolition kits on your team. Once a player with the demolition kit gets a tagged vehicle in his sights while zoomed in, they can fire a locked-on guided hit for an easy kill.



FINDERS KEEPERS

Ammo and weapons are there for the taking. If you're running low, locate the ammo crates on your mini-map or simply walk over a dropped kit for a quick refill. Weapons and gadgets not in your current inventory can be found throughout the battlefield in dropped kits. Check out the kits left from your carnage or ones you stumble upon to



help you accomplish your mission. Finally, when you take down a powerful enemy remember to take his weapons kit; there might be some unique weapons for you to use.

IS THAT BRUSH MOVING?

If charging in headfirst isn't your style or enemy fire is pinning you down, then go stealthy and sneak around the enemy to get the drop on them. Create sniping positions by using blown out pieces of walls or new lines of sight from fallen trees and foliage. Once you're settled in, crouch and use your focused zoom to get a more accurate shot. Each game will offer new and unique places to kill from when playing as the recon kit. You can also improve your odds of surviving a fire fight by crouching, thus making you a smaller target for the enemy, but on the flip side this makes it a tad easier for your enemy to headshot you.

BFFS

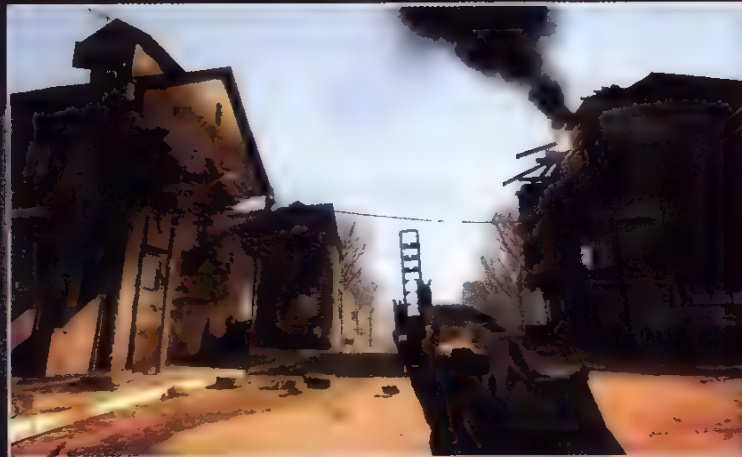
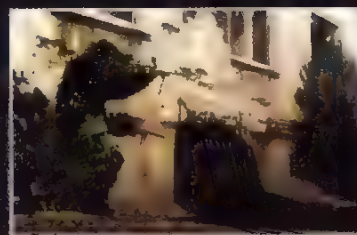
Each team is broken-up into squads that you can spawn from and communicate with via your headset. You can invite up to three friends to join a server with you as a squad. Go to Multiplayer/Custom Match and click Squad Invite. You can tell who is in your squad by looking for teammates with brighter blue nametags than the rest of your team.

I'M A LOVER NOT A FIGHTER

Helping is as much fun as taking out your enemies. In the heat of battle, you can rack up the points by playing support. Use the mini-map to look for yellow crosses and wrenches. These are teammates that need a medic kit or vehicles that needs repair. This will earn you a lot of points.

EXPERIENCING SEPARATION ANXIETY?

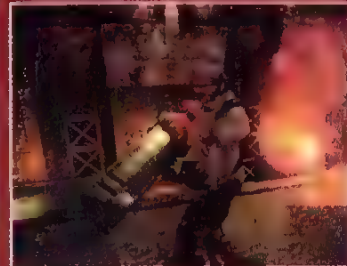
The Battlefield: Bad Company world is a pretty big place and can be deadly if you get separated from your squad. To stay safe, keep an eye on the bright blue nametags on your HUD. These are your squad mates and indicate where you can spawn. Also, if you've got a vehicle, keep an eye on the mini-map to see if anyone nearby wants a ride. If you get lost, use your 3D map in combination with your mini-map to lead you to your objective.



Mod World

QUAKE LIVE

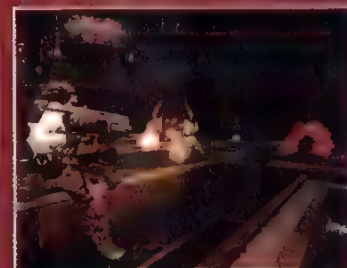
www.quakelive.com



With the first-person shooter PC market in a depression, legendary developer id Software is trying something a little different. Designed to take advantage of the PC's unique capabilities, Quake Live is a free, ad-supported, browser-based adaptation of Quake III Arena scheduled for launch this summer.



Outside of a few touch-ups like smoother fighting, slightly tweaked maps, and a few new levels, Quake Live's gameplay is identical to Quake III Arena. However, the frontend is significantly improved over the 1999 classic. Diehards still play Quake III Arena to this day, so good luck living more than 20 seconds as a new player. The new skill-based Matchmaking and training missions should lower the bar to entry in Quake Live, and id hopes that combining this with the fact that the game will run on nearly any PC out there will broaden its appeal.



Established in-game advertising firm IGA Worldwide will provide the ads that will fund Quake Live, and id hopes that they won't break the immersion. Either way, that's the price we pay for a free game. The developer also plans to keep staff working on new content for the game post-launch, so fans should have reasons to keep playing beyond the first week.

Code of the Month

Grand Theft Auto IV



So you think you've already seen everything Liberty City has to offer? Maybe these codes will help spice things up for you. While playing the game press up on the d pad twice to pull open Niko's phone's keypad, then you can experiment with these codes by entering the following numbers. Warning: these codes will screw with your save and prevent you from gaining achievements. We suggest turning off the game's autosave before you get too code crazy.

Change Weather/Lighting - 468-555-0100

Equip Bat, Handgun, Shotgun, MP-10, M4, Sniper Rifle, RPG, Grenades - 486-555-0100

Equip Knife, Molotovs, Handgun, Shotgun, Uzi, AK47, Sniper Rifle, RPG - 486-555-0150

Raise Wanted Level - 267-555-0150

Remove Wanted Level - 267-555-0100

Restore Armor - 362-555-0100

Restore Health - 482-555-0100

Song Information - 948-555-0100

Spawn Annihilator - 359-555-0100

Spawn Cognoscenti - 227-555-0142

Spawn Comet - 227-555-0175

Spawn FBI Buffalo - 227-555-0100

Spawn Jetmax - 938-555-0100

Spawn NRG-900 - 625-555-0100

Spawn Sanchez - 625-555-0150

Spawn SuperGT - 227-555-0168

Spawn Turismo - 227-555-0142

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@gamerformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

PLAYSTATION 3



FlatOut: Head On

From the title screen go into the Extra's menu and select Enter Code to input these codes.

All Cars And One Million Credits - GIVEPIX

All Tracks - GIVEALL

Big Rig - ELPUEBLO

Big Rig Truck - RAIDERS

Flatmobile Car - WOTKINS

Mob Car - BIGTRUCK

One Million Credits - GIVECASH

Pimpster Car - RUTTO

Rocket Car - KALIJKOPPA

School Bus - GIEVCARPLZ

Wii



Mario Kart Wii

There are plenty of unlockables to be had in Mario Kart Wii. Achieve the following requirements to gain these new bikes, karts, and characters.

CHARACTERS

Baby Daisy - Gain one star in all 50cc cups

Baby Luigi - Unlock eight expert staff ghost data in time trials

Birdo - Play time trials on 16 different courses or win 250 Wi-Fi matches

Bowser Jr. - Attain one star in all 100cc retro cups

Daisy - Win 150cc special cup

Diddy Kong - Complete all retro 50cc cups

Dry Bones - Win 100cc Leaf Cup

Dry Bowser - Attain one star in all 150cc cups

Funky Kong - Unlock four expert staff ghost data in time trials

King Boo - Win 50cc Star Cup

Mii (Outfit A) - Win 100cc Special Cup

Mii (Outfit B) - Unlock all 32 expert staff ghost data in time trials

Rosalina - Have a Super Mario Galaxy save file and she will unlock after 50 races; or get one Star in all Mirror Mode Cups

Toadette - Play time trials on all 32 different courses or win 1000 Wi-Fi matches

BIKES AND KARTS

Bubble Bike - Win Mirror Leaf Cup

Dolphin Dasher - Win Mirror Star Cup

Magikruiser - Play time trials on eight different courses

Phantom - Win Mirror Special Cup

Quacker - Win 150cc Star Cup

Shooting Star - Win 100cc Star Cup

Sneakster - Attain one star for all 100cc Grand Prix Cups

Spear - Unlock 12 expert staff ghost data in time trials

Zip Zip - Win 100cc Lightning Cup

Aero Glider - Attain one star in all 150cc retro cups

Blue Falcon - Win Mirror Lightning Cup

Cheep Charger - Attain one star for all 50cc Retro Grand Prix Cups

Honeycoupe - Win 150cc Lightning Cup

Piranha Prowler - Win 50cc Special Cup

Royal Racer - Win 150cc Leaf Cup

Sprinter - Unlocked 24 expert staff ghosts

Tiny Titan - Beat 50 opponents during Wi-Fi play; or unlock one expert staff ghost

Turbo Blooper - Win 50cc Leaf Cup

"GI Droid"

(location unknown - last seen feeding egg whites to stray cats.)

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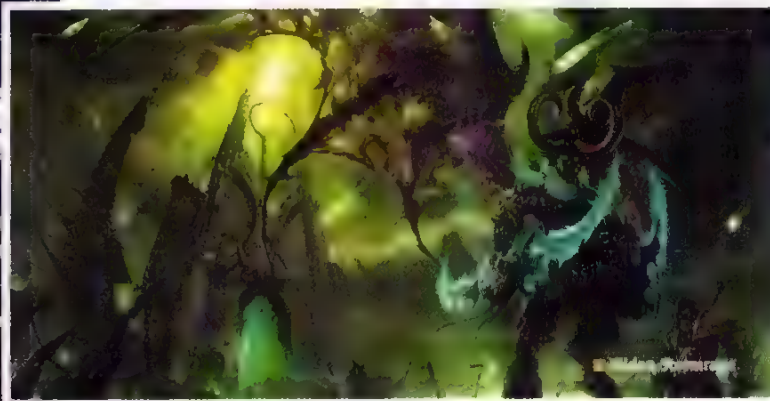
fullsail.com



FACES OF WARCRAFT

THE ESSENTIAL INTRODUCTION TO CHARACTERS

Between the RTS titles that came before and the wealth of exciting lore crafted for the current MMO, there's a lot to keep track of in the World of Warcraft, particularly if you're new to the game. We've created this character guide with an eye toward preparing new players for the world and reminding long-time gamers of the main characters before the launch of the second expansion, Wrath of the Lich King.



Arthas Menethil

WHO IS HE? Once the crown prince of the grand human kingdom of Lordaeron, Arthas fell from grace to lead the undead Scourge against the world of Azeroth.

WHY IS HE IMPORTANT? By taking up the mighty runeblade Frostmourne, he abandoned humanity and sealed his fate as a force for evil. He began serving the Lich King, a powerful spirit bound within the Frozen Throne crystal, which lies in the icy land of Northrend. With Arthas as his champion, the Lich King helped subvert the Burning Legion's invasion of Azeroth during the Third War, but he did this only to serve his own malicious purposes. Arthas eventually battled and vanquished Illidan, who had hoped to destroy the Lich King. Afterward, Arthas shattered the Frozen Throne and merged with the spirit of the Lich King.

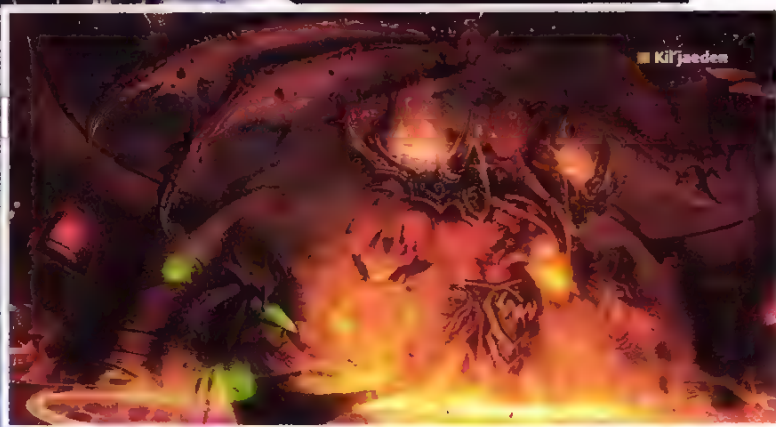
WHAT'S NEXT? As the reborn Lich King, he leads the Scourge in its bid to conquer the world.

Illidan Stormrage

WHO IS HE? Illidan Stormrage was a night elf sorcerer whose hunger for power led to his corruption and downfall. For a time he ruled over the shattered realm of Outland.

WHY IS HE IMPORTANT? Illidan was Malfurion's twin brother, but unlike Malfurion, he had little patience for druidic magic. His sorcery helped win the War of the Ancients. However, his reckless pursuit of arcane magic caused him to be condemned and imprisoned after the war ended. Locked away in an underground prison for over 10,000 years, he was finally released to fight against the Burning Legion. In the process, he seized the Skull of Gul'dan, whose dark energies transformed him into a demon. At Kil'jaeden's command, Illidan attacked the Frozen Throne, but Arthas thwarted the offensive, and Illidan retreated to Outland.

WHAT'S NEXT? Illidan has been defeated, and Outland is free of his grip. Only time will tell what lasting impact his dark legacy will have.



Jaina Proudmoore

WHO IS SHE? Jaina Proudmoore is perhaps the mightiest living human sorceress, and one of the Alliance's leaders.

WHY IS SHE IMPORTANT? She was romantically involved with Arthas before he turned to evil. During the Third War, she led refugees from Lordaeron across the sea to Kalimdor, where she met Thrall, Tyrande, and Malfurion. Jaina proposed that the orc, night elf, and human armies work together to triumph over the Legion's forces during the Battle of Mount Hyjal. When her father attempted to defeat Thrall and wipe out the Horde, she sadly refused to join the fight against the orcs. She rules over the city of Theramore.

WHAT'S NEXT? She considers Thrall a close ally, despite the differences between their peoples. In a conflict against her former companion, Arthas, it's very possible she would choose to become personally involved.

Kel'Thuzad

WHO IS HE? In his mortal life, Kel'Thuzad was an archmage of the Kirin Tor, but as an undead he now serves the Lich King.

WHY IS HE IMPORTANT? Kel'Thuzad was instrumental in spreading the undead plague and leading the forces of the Scourge.

Determined to halt the plague's spread, Arthas slew Kel'Thuzad, but Arthas eventually turned to evil. At the Lich King's command, Arthas invaded the high elf kingdom of Quel'Thalas and used the elves' magical Sunwell to convert Kel'Thuzad into a powerful lich. Since then Kel'Thuzad has been one of the Scourge's most formidable generals.

WHAT'S NEXT? Although he was recently defeated in his floating necropolis of Naxxramas, many believe both he and his dreaded stronghold will reappear above the frozen wastes of Northrend.

Kil'jaeden

WHO IS HE? The Deceiver, as he is called, is an insidious demon lord who currently leads the Burning Legion.

WHY IS HE IMPORTANT? Kil'jaeden was one of Sargeras' chief lieutenants. He forged the orcish clans into the bloodthirsty Horde and manipulated the orcs into invading Azeroth. Ultimately his machinations led to the destruction of their world. He had hoped that the Horde would vanquish Azeroth's most powerful kingdoms, thus preparing the world for a new invasion by the Legion. However, Azeroth's defenders formed the Alliance and defeated the orcs. Furious at the Horde's failure, Kil'jaeden created the Lich King from the spirit of a fallen orcish shaman called Ner'zhul. The Lich King created an undead army that proved more successful in its attacks against Azeroth, but the Lich King eventually rebelled and broke free of Kil'jaeden's control.

WHAT'S NEXT? The Lich King spurned his creator and lord. Kil'jaeden is unlikely to stand for such an insult without exacting terrible recompense. However, he is still trying to manifest fully in the world.

Malfurion Stormrage

WHO IS HE? Malfurion is an archdruid; he was the student of the forest demigod Cenarius. He is Illidan's twin brother and the beloved mate of Tyrande Whisperwind, who has ruled the night elf people for millennia.

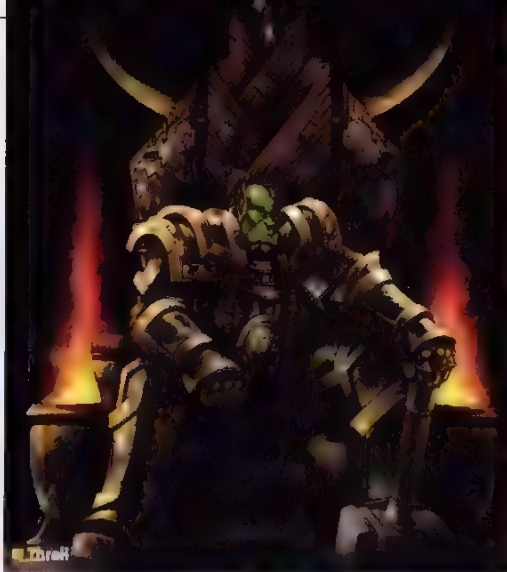
WHY IS HE IMPORTANT? He was one of Azeroth's foremost defenders in the War of the Ancients. He decided to imprison Illidan rather than sentence him to death. After the war, he taught the druidic arts to other night elves and helped found the Cenarion Circle. The druids played a critical role in defeating the Legion's forces at the Battle of Mount Hyjal.

WHAT'S NEXT? His body lies sleeping in the sacred Moonglade. His spirit is currently trapped within the Emerald Dream, a savage paradise that represents what the world of Azeroth might have become without the touch of mortal hands. His fate remains a mystery.

Malygos

WHO IS HE? Malygos is the greatest of the blue dragons, and one of the most powerful creatures living in Azeroth.

WHY IS HE IMPORTANT? Long before the Legion first invaded Azeroth, he acted as the guardian of magic on Azeroth. More than ten millennia ago, he watched in horror as one of his fellow drag-



This Month In Gaming History

July of 1981 saw the release of the Donkey Kong arcade cabinet in the United States. It signaled the first appearance of both the inimitable gorilla and future star Mario. In order to meet supply needs, Nintendo of America gutted around 2,000 surplus Radar Scope machines, and replaced both internal components and cabinet graphics. Despite extreme skepticism about the game's name and content, it went on to remarkable success.



ons, Deathwing, all but wiped out the blue dragon-flight. Maddened by grief, Malygos withdrew to his lair, emerging only to avenge Deathwing's terrible crime. Not long afterwards, he returned to seclusion. **WHAT'S NEXT?** Malygos has been greatly disturbed by the rampant use of magic by mortal races. The magi of Dalaran are concerned that Malygos may resort to drastic measures to reestablish control over magic use.

Sargeras

WHO IS HE? Sargeras was a noble titan warrior who battled evil throughout the Great Dark Beyond until he became convinced that the universe itself was flawed and his efforts were futile. Determined to see it destroyed and remade perfect, he created the Burning Legion.

WHY IS HE IMPORTANT? Countless worlds have fallen before the Legion. Only Azeroth has withstood Sargeras' machinations. The Legion's first invasion of Azeroth was thwarted more than ten millennia ago, but such resistance only strengthened Sargeras' determination. Working through a powerful human spellcaster, Sargeras brought about the orcs' invasion of Azeroth and the First War. However, his human pawn was slain during the war, and there have been no reported sightings of Sargeras since then.

WHAT'S NEXT? Although it is believed that Sargeras was banished from Azeroth more than twenty years ago, his current whereabouts are unknown.

Sylvanas Windrunner

WHO IS SHE? Once a noble high elf ranger, Sylvanas fought hard to defend her people during the Third War, when Arthas and the Scourge invaded Quel'Thalas. Rather than offer her a warrior's death, he transformed her into an undead servant.

WHY IS SHE IMPORTANT? She eventually broke free of the Lich King's hold and gathered other free-willed undead to her banner. With her as their queen, this tattered group of undead rebels claimed the catacombs and sewer systems under Lordaeron's ruined capital. This subterranean seat of power has become known as the Undercity. At the queen's command, a group of apothecaries has been working on a new plague to wipe out the Scourge. In the meantime, the Forsaken struggles to hold its own against both the Scourge and the extremist organization known as the Scarlet Crusade.

WHAT'S NEXT? Arthas led the invasion that devastated her homeland, killed most of the high elf population, and condemned many to mindless undeath in service of the Scourge. She has sworn vengeance against him.

Thrall

WHO IS HE? Thrall is the Horde warchief. He returned the orcs to their shamanistic traditions after the corruption of Gul'dan, the Horde warlock who first led the orcs to Azeroth.

WHY IS HE IMPORTANT? Raised by humans as a gladiator, Thrall eventually escaped his captors and reunited the orcish people. He led them to a new home in Kalimdor, where he and his allies, the tauren and the Darkspear trolls, played a crucial role in the defeat of the Burning Legion at Mt. Hyjal. As one of Azeroth's foremost shaman, he communes with the elementals to calm their occasionally destructive urges and protect his people. He still considers Jaina a close ally, and he tries to maintain the fragile truce between Alliance and Horde.

WHAT'S NEXT? Today he resides in the orcish capital of Orgrimmar. With the reopening of the Dark Portal, the Horde has been reunited with the orcs of Outland.

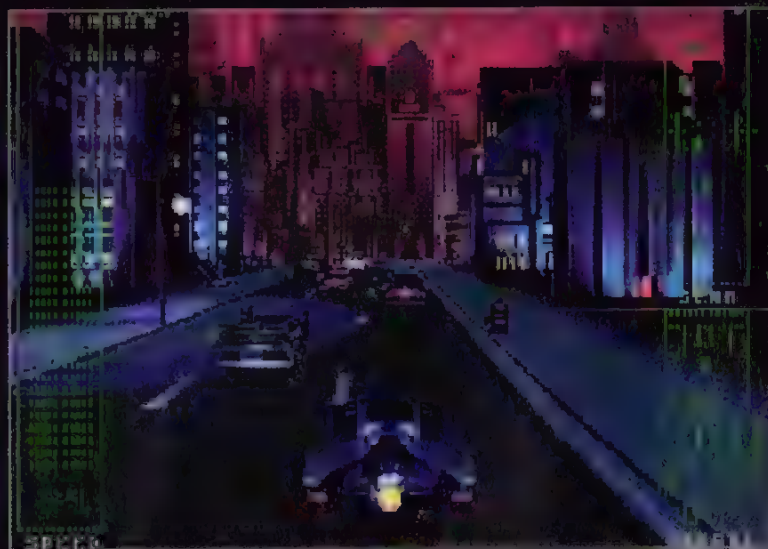


SNES

SPEED RACER: IN MY MOST DANGEROUS ADVENTURES

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > PUBLISHER ACCOLADE > DEVELOPER RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT
> RELEASE 1994

With its focus on campy action and high-speed vehicles, the Speed Racer franchise could have spawned a pretty cool video game. Instead, it crashes and burns in this awful adaptation. At least it's ambitious; Speed Racer tries to capture the flavor of the TV series by alternating between races and side-scrolling levels, giving you the chance to play as both Speed and Racer X. Unfortunately, no matter what you're doing or who you're controlling, the game is tedious at best and broken at worst. The side-scrolling levels are playable, but you can't even use "it's an old game" to excuse away the terrible racing. The original F-Zero hit the SNES years before this game, and is superior in every conceivable way. The tracks in Speed Racer are long, uneventful, and ugly – not even the inclusion of gadgets like wheel blades and autojacks spices things up enough to make this wreck worth playing. Go, Speed Racer. Just go.

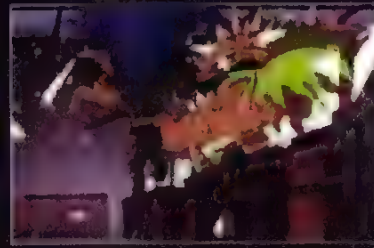


SEGA CD

THE ADVENTURES OF BATMAN & ROBIN

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER CLOCKWORK GAMES > RELEASE 1995

Holy busted gameplay, Batman! While the SNES and Genesis received decent side-scrolling action games based on the popular Batman: The Animated Series cartoon, the Sega CD drew the short stick and ended up with this brutally unforgiving combat racing game. The premise is that Batman must travel across Gotham chasing down villains like Poison Ivy, The Riddler, and the Joker, all of whom have set up ridiculously outlandish driving challenges for him to overcome, and like a chump old Bruce actually jumps through their hoops before busting their heads. The last level lets players pilot the Batplane, which unfortunately controls even worse than the Batmobile, making you wonder how Batman even manages to make it across the city. As a neat bonus, 15 minutes of video were produced for the game by the animators of the show. While this footage is pretty fun to watch, it's too bad it had to be compressed worse than a YouTube video to fit on the CD.



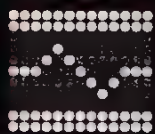
DREAMCAST

CHUCHU ROCKET!

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER PUZZLE > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SONIC TEAM > RELEASE 2000

Neither Sonic Team nor launch games are usually known for being awesome, but ChuChu Rocket is clearly the exception. This Dreamcast launch game fulfills the classic puzzle game mantra of being easy to grasp but hard to master. By putting down directional arrows on the game's boards, you can lead streaming mice into the safety of their rocket ships and away from chopping cats (except for a particularly fun Stage Challenge board, where you have to maneuver them into a cat's mouth!). While the Puzzle mode is more thoughtful – it only gives you a few arrows to strategically place – Stage Challenges and ChuChu's various multiplayer modes are where the game really gets crazy. Here you place as many arrows as fast as you can – which was a problem for the title's online component due to lag. Still, ChuChu Rocket is crazy fun, and the level builder is a deep experience as well. The Dreamcast may have a lot of delusional fans, but they aren't mistaken about this game's brilliance.





ONLINE

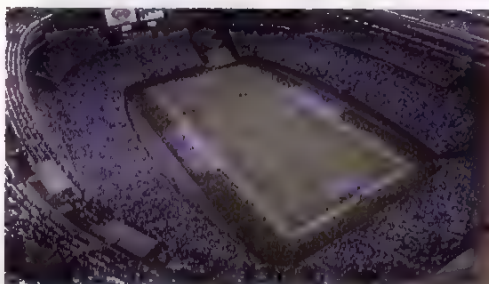
Extra Content You Can Find At
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INFAMOUS

Looking for more info on this month's hot cover story? Check out our full interviews with producer Brian Fleming and game director Nate Fox.



Gridiron Glory

Check out more screenshots of EA's yearly football offerings, Madden NFL 09 and NCAA Football 09.



Silent Hill: Homecoming

Learn more about Silent Hill's revamped gameplay in our interview with Jason Allen, the game's lead designer.



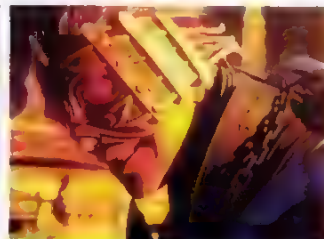
Places: Sucker Punch

Take a tour of the digs that Infamous developer Sucker Punch Productions calls home.

mix of the
ly buy new IP Definitely
influential at all I prefer new IP
I prefer established titles
xtremely influential Somewh

Survey Says

Dig deeper into the data from our recent survey that details your perceptions about developers and publishers.



Infinite Undiscovery

Unread our un-interview with Infinite Undiscovery's unproducer Hajime Kojima.



ALSO ONLINE THIS MONTH:

Game Informer Online reveals a new character for LEGO Batman.

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GAMEOVER

You Were Killed.

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Games based on summer blockbusters rarely turn out well. We have the perfect solution: Combine the biggest and best games with the biggest and best summer movies, and...Whammo! Pure gold. Take the following quiz to find out which epic film/game should be made first.

1 Both Indiana Jones and Star Wars' Yoda were featured in special PC game releases in the 1990s designed from the ground up to be played in Windows without sapping too much computing power. What was the series commonly called?

- A. Casual Adventures
- B. Desktop Adventures
- C. I'm Pretending To Work Adventures
- D. Hero Adventures



2 While they eventually gained the title of ghosts through common usage, what did the original arcade cabinet of Pac-Man called the enemies?

- A. Baddies
- B. Spirits
- C. Monsters
- D. Hellborn Soul Reavers



3 Which of these has never been the subtitle for a Final Fantasy game?

- A. Wings of the Goddess
- B. The War of the Lions
- C. Mystic Quest
- D. XVI

4 Who was a character you could play in the original Super Mario Kart but not in Mario Kart 64?

- A. Yoshi
- B. Bowser
- C. Donkey Kong Jr.
- D. Peach



5 Which of these racing games featured a cel-shaded art style in its original incarnation?

- A. R: Racing Evolution
- B. Driving Emotion Type-S
- C. Auto Modellista
- D. Both B and D

6 Donkey Kong Country and its sequels were the fantastic Rare-developed platformers that finally told the story of the gorilla and his friends. What subtitle was carried by the Game Boy remakes of these games?

- A. Land
- B. Advance
- C. Portable
- D. Little Country

7 What company made the off-maligned sidestory game Enter the Matrix?

- A. Monolith Productions
- B. Vicarious Visions

- C. Shiny Entertainment
- D. Seven Studios

8 In which game were you forced to fight Metal Gear Rex?

- A. Metal Gear Solid
- B. Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty
- C. Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater
- D. Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots



9 Who was the main playable character in the original Call of Duty?

- A. Pvt. Joey Martin
- B. Sgt. Jack Evans
- C. Pvt. Alexei Ivanovich Voronin
- D. All of the above



10 Tell us honestly. Don't spare our feelings. Was this issue good for you?

- A. Let's get married
- B. That was amazing, but I'm just not ready to settle down with a single magazine
- C. Eh. I've had better, honey
- D. Roll over and go to sleep to the sound of our quiet sobs

BREAKDOWN

50 million units of the Gran Turismo series have been sold worldwide since launch

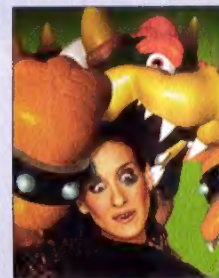
6 titles were available for WiiWare during the first week it launched, but new titles will release throughout the summer

25 percent of Ubisoft's \$1.5 billion revenue last year came from its casual games

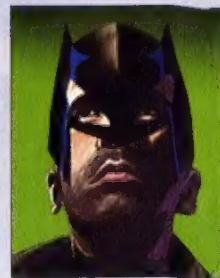
3 unique drum sets will be on the market in the coming year, one each for Guitar Hero, Rock Band, and Konami's newly announced Rock Revolution. And those are just the ones we know about

67395 is our special secret password for all the important stuff we don't want people to access. Shh. Don't tell anyone.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1:
Super Sex and the City Brawl



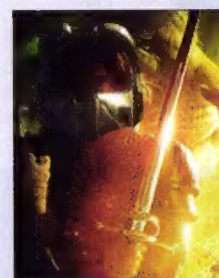
2-3:
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas



4-5:
The Incredibles



6-7:
GUITAR HERO



8-9:
The Chronicles of Namia: Prince Master Chief



10:
Iron Mario

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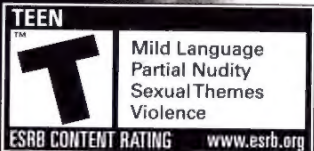
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