

Exclusive Info: **LEFT 4 DEAD**
A 10 Page Behind-The-Scenes Look at **Valve Software**

The Creator of **BRAID** Speaks Out!
Jonathan Blow On His Overnight Success and His Next Big Game

GAMEFORMER

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of **Baldur's Gate:**

Dragon Age Origins

An Exclusive
First Look At
The Console
Editions



ISSUE 167

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MATURE 17+

M

Blood
Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Sexual Themes
Strong Language

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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A promotional poster for the video game Far Cry 2. The background is a lush, hazy jungle landscape with a wooden structure on the left and a large tree in the center. In the foreground, two military-style vehicles are driving on a dirt road. The vehicle in the foreground is a larger truck with a driver, while the one behind it is smaller and has a bright light on its roof. A large, close-up portrait of a man's face with a beard and a serious expression is overlaid on the right side of the image. The title 'FAR CRY 2' is written in a large, white, distressed font across the middle. Below the title, the tagline 'PLAY IT YOUR WAY' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. To the right of the tagline, the release date 'OCTOBER 2008' and platform information 'ON CONSOLES AND PC' are written in a red, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the website 'WWW.FARCRY2.COM' is written in a red, sans-serif font, and the Ubisoft logo and name are in the bottom right corner.

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Shaun
White
Snowboarding

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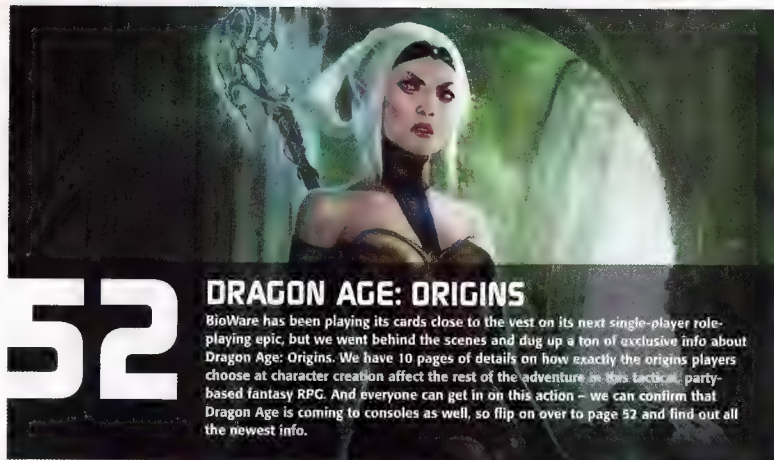
xbox.com/fable2



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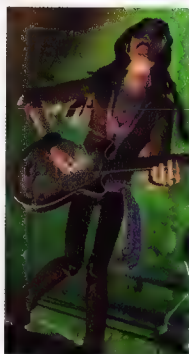


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DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

BioWare has been playing its cards close to the vest on its next single-player role-playing epic, but we went behind the scenes and dug up a ton of exclusive info about *Dragon Age: Origins*. We have 10 pages of details on how exactly the origins players choose at character creation affect the rest of the adventure in this tactical, party-based fantasy RPG. And everyone can get in on this action – we can confirm that *Dragon Age* is coming to consoles as well, so flip on over to page 52 and find out all the newest info.

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MAKING OF A SONG

We talked to the folks at Harmonix to ferret out the process by which your favorite track gets implemented into *Rock Band*. Believe it or not, there are reasons why your favorite Sub Pop newcomer isn't already in the game, despite the fact that they are so, like, totally awesome.



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FULL STEAM AHEAD

It's been 10 years since Valve Software's *Half-Life* appeared on retail shelves and changed first-person action forever. Join us for an inside peek at how things work at one of the industry's most popular and profitable developers – and an exclusive report on the soon-to-be-released *Left 4 Dead*.

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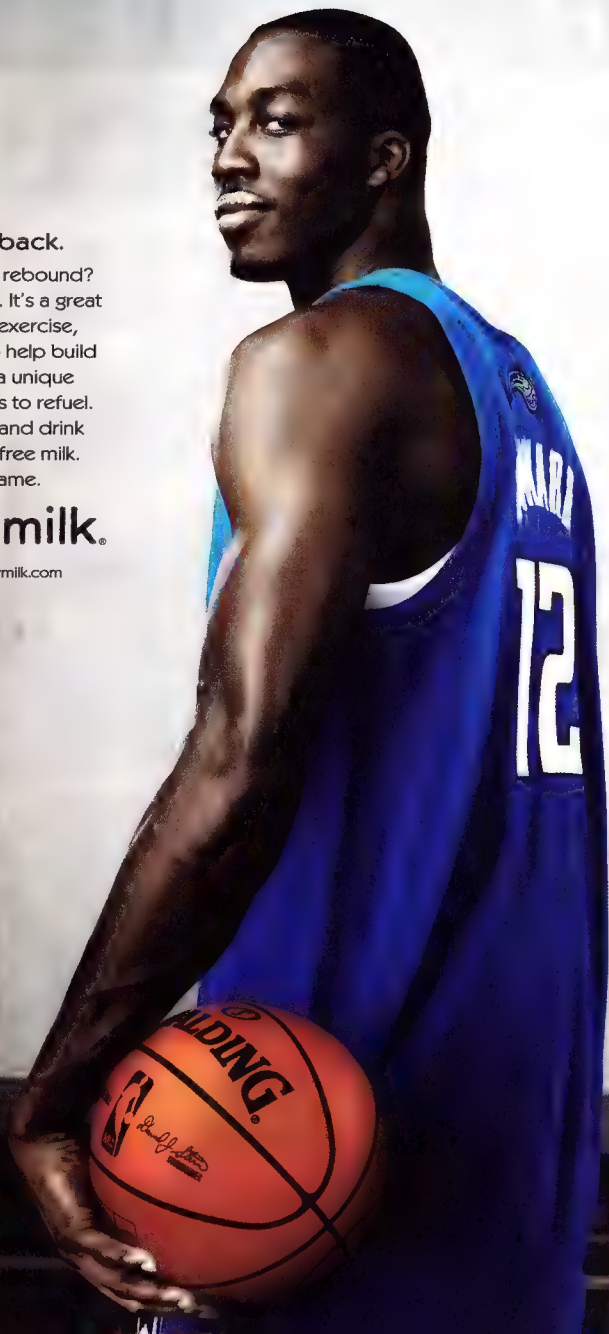
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THE LIST

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

At this point I guess you could call it tradition, but I figured it was time I broke out my big list of games that I'm excited about for the holidays. Oddly enough, I find myself in conversations quite often with industry pundits who say 2008 is an off year for the video game industry because there isn't a monster title like Halo or Grand Theft Auto coming out."

My response is always the same. I just shake my head and wonder how these people become experts if they even play games, because when I look at 2008, I find myself in awe of all the outstanding titles coming out this year.

I am surprised there isn't more hype running rampant for titles like Resistance 2 or Left 4 Dead, but I think once people get their hands on these titles we will see them, and get their due. So here is my big holiday list, in no particular order. Some of these games are out already, but that doesn't change the fact that they will be awesome holiday titles that anyone would be happy to get. There are certainly other big titles that didn't make my list, but this is my list, so I can do what I want.

- Fallout 3
- Rock Band 2
- Dead Space
- Guitar Hero World Tour
- Left 4 Dead
- Gears of War 2
- World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King
- Warhammer: Age of Reckoning
- Fable II
- Prince of Persia
- LittleBigPlanet
- Chrono Trigger
- Sporo
- NHL 09

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

Andy >>> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** 30 Rock, World Series Of Poker, Dexter, Kojima, iPhone Apps, Master Chief Sucks At Halo, Entourage **Dislikes:** Maya on Heroes Might Be the Worst Character Ever If It weren't For The iPod Girl, The Awful Microsoft PC Ad Campaign With Senfield **Current Favorite Games:** Advance Wars: Days of Ruin, World of Warcraft, Warhammer: Age of Reckoning, Rock Band 2, Braid, Dead Space



Reiner >>> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Game **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** The Latest Trend In Gaming: Air Strikes, Rock Band Overtaking Bars As The New Karaoke, Transformers: Animated (I Haven't Had This Much Fun With A Cartoon Since The '90s), Anything Silversun Pickups **Dislikes:** Replaying Terrible Games Just For Achievements (A New Form Of Mental Illness), The Lack Of Quality Control On Wii (This Game Is Unplayable. Wait... It's Even A Game?) **Current Favorite Games:** Dead Space, Fable II, Gears of War 2, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, LittleBigPlanet, Guitar Hero World Tour



Matt >>> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Game **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** HBO's Generation Kill, David Foster Wallace (Rest In Peace, You Were My Favorite Writer), Miles Davis - Bitches Brew & In A Silent Way, Finally Joining The GI Cult Of George R. R. Martin's Song Of Fire And Ice Series **Dislikes:** GAAAAH VIKINGS UUUUUUUH I AM SO MAD AT U!!!!!!!, Chilly The Secret Squirrel, Runner's Knee **Current Favorite Games:** Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood, Midnight Club: Los Angeles, Rock Band 2, Baja Edge Of Control, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09



Kato >>> kato@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/RPG **Interests:** My Hockey Team Winning The Summer League Championship, Getting A Library Card For The First Time In Ages, Baklava (Is This The Best Dessert Ever?), The Sweet & Sucidid Sounds Of Bossa Nova **Dislikes:** Any Talk That The Next Wave Of Consoles is Approaching, The 360 Controller, Wii. The Fused D-Pad Not Coming Here, Natalie Merchant, The Hold Steady **Current Favorite Games:** NHL 09, Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway, Midnight Club: Los Angeles, Castlevania: Order Of Ecclesia



Adam >>> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Game **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Led Zeppelin (How Did I Get This Old Without Actually Owning Any Zep?), Speculating About Lich King Talent Builds, The Unexpected Bounty Of Meaningful Summer Baseball, Google Chrome **Dislikes:** Losing Sleep Over The Twins' Playoff Hopes, Chris's Many Bugs, Taking Half An Hour To Configure A Usable Interface For iTunes 8, Unskippable Splash Screens **Current Favorite Games:** Final Fantasy IV, Diablo II, Lord Of Destruction, Warhammer Online, World Of Warcraft: Wrath Of The Lich King, Worldling



Joe >>> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Game **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Freaks And Geeks (Whoa! James Franco Can Act!), The Return Of Dexter, Starting New D&D Characters, Hustle, FUDR (A.K.A. The Only King Of America) **Dislikes:** Losing Literary Geniuses In Their Prime (David Foster Wallace, R.L.P.), Anyone Who Thinks The Wii Remote Is A Substitute For A Mouse, The Fact That Chuck Still Isn't Canceled (Watch Pushing Daisies Instead, Dummies!) **Current Favorite Games:** Dragon Age: Origins, Spore, Dead Space, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, Castle Crashers, Braid, Heavy Rain



Miller >>> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And All Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** The Final Ten Minutes Of Sex Under Linder, Ben's Extensive Training In The Handling Of Wasps, More Rock Band Songs Than I Can Count **Anytime Dislikes:** Comics That Assume I've Read Every Other Comic Ever Written (I'm Looking At You, DC, With Your Crazy Final Crisis), My Increasingly Decrease PC (I'm Pretty Sure It Has Dementia At This Point) **Current Favorite Games:** Rock Band 2, Castle Crashers, Ninja Golden 2, Guitar Hero World Tour, Prince Of Persia, Fallout 3, Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core



Bertz >>> mattbertz@gameinformer.com

Handle: Lord Garinith III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** The Noted And The Dead By Norman Mailer, The Gaslight Anthem - The '59 Sound, The Night Of The Gun By David Cain, EA Sports Hockey League **Dislikes:** Vikings Play-Calling (What Else Is New?), Battlefield: Bad Company's Crappy Party Matching, Commercial Blobs During Football Games (Why Do I Have To Watch The Same Damn Ads Six Times During One Game?) **Current Favorite Games:** Fallout 3, NHL 09, Rock Band 2, Dead Space, Left 4 Dead, NBA 2K9



Ben >>> ben@gameinformer.com

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Game **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Umbrella Academy by Gerard Way And Gabriel Ba (So Awesome), Taco Bell (It's A Sickness), Doctor Who, The Wire, The River Of Doubt: Theodore Roosevelt's Darkest Journey By Candice Millard **Dislikes:** Nothing (Can't We All Just Get Along?) **Current Favorite Games:** Braid, N+ (Now On PSP), Castle Crashers, Spore, Dead Space, Civilization Revolution, Final Fantasy IV, Castlevania: Order Of Ecclesia



Bryan >>> bryan@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** Fulfilling A Lifelong Dream Of Seeing Journey Live (Those Songs Were Made To Hear In An Arena), The Anniversary - On Blu-ray No Less **Dislikes:** EA Only Selling Rock Band 2 Instruments Separately For Xbox 360 Until October **Current Favorite Games:** Rock Band 2, Guitar Hero World Tour, Braid, Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood

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In memory of Paul Anderson

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7

1 Adam and Valve's Mike Booth and Adrian Finol get down to business – literally. They actually aren't even playing games in this picture; they all do part time data entry for a banking firm in Singapore for extra money on the side

2 Bethesda's Fallout 3 team enjoys a post-apocalyptic barbecue. It turns out that uranium charcoal is the secret to the tastiest burger!

3 Activision's Vince Fennel, Joshua Selinger, and Treyarch's Dan Moditch and the rest of the GI gang smile for the camera. Except Ben – he has a mental illness commonly known as "Hamburger Brain."

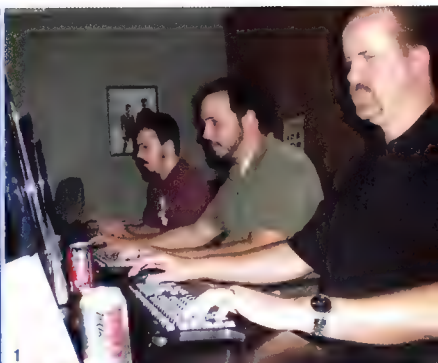
We're still trying to find a cure

4 D3 Publisher's Alex Coward and Michael Cerven show Meagan and Ben their sword skills. If you think Ben looks somewhat horrified, don't worry – he always looks that way

5 Miller and Jeff teach Fall Line Studio's Tim Huntsman and Disney's Michelle Jacob some ultra-high-level Wii controller maneuvers. Some of their moves are copyrighted – so don't try to copy them. Really – don't do it. We warned you once. Most people have to be a high level Mason before we even talk to them about these techniques

6 Former Blink-182 drummer Travis Barker shows his skills on the Guitar Hero stage at the GameStop Manager's Conference

7 "SHAAARRON!" The GI gang has an audience with the Prince of Darkness, Ozzy Osbourne



1

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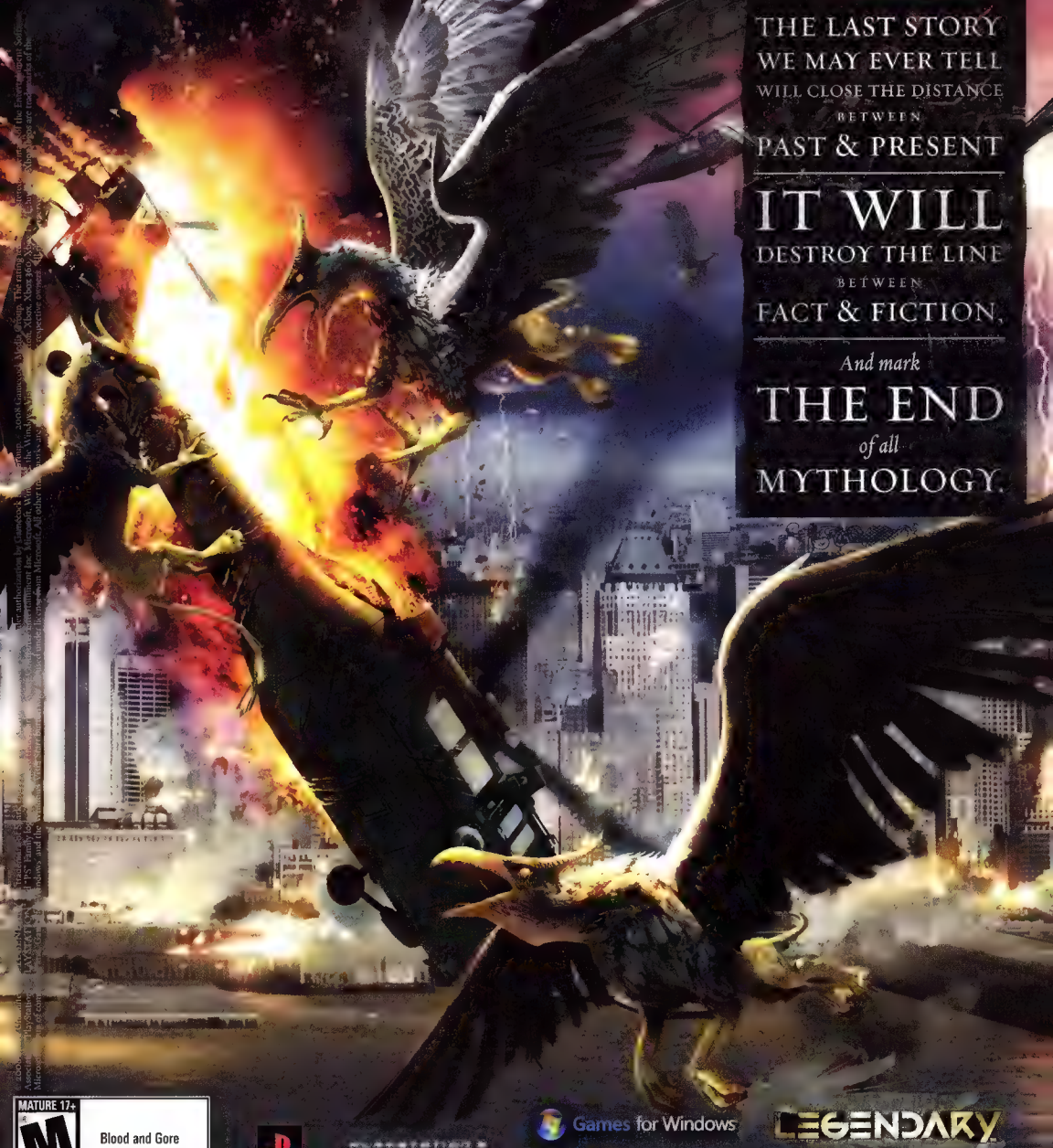
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of all
MYTHOLOGY.



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The Wire

I just bought a PS3 and was disappointed that the USB cable for the controller is extremely short. It barely reaches even if I sit directly in front of my television. When I get the low battery warning for the controller, my two choices are to either stop playing or to play while standing up, neither of which are very appealing. I called Sony, and they said I should be able to connect my PS3 controller to my PS3 system using any USB cable. I quickly found this to be untrue when I purchased a standard USB cable and the plug was far too big to fit into the tiny port on the PS3 controller. What can I do?

Ivan Trembow
via email

We've run into this problem ourselves. It's true that the cord included with the PlayStation 3 is hilariously short, but that can be fixed...albeit not with a standard USB cable. You want the one pictured here (USB-A to Mini-B). You should be able to find them at major electronic stores, as well as online retailers. For around \$20 you can get the Sony-brand pack, which includes two 10-foot cables - more than enough room to play and recharge simultaneously.

Fickle Franchise

I'm an avid PS3 supporter and Final Fantasy fan, so to hear that the franchise is also moving to the Xbox 360 is a serious outrage. I mean, PlayStation has been its home for years! Just because the PS3 started slow doesn't mean this series needs to downgrade to the 360. Perhaps I should just accept that times are changing, but a part of me just feels betrayed by Square Enix. Where is the loyalty? I don't think the 360 is ready for this monumental franchise yet. Maybe in the next generation. Maybe.

Andrea Tuck
via email

It's interesting that you mention loyalty, since Final Fantasy has a rocky history in that category. The first six entries were released on Nintendo systems (only three came out here), but then moved over to Sony's platforms for Final Fantasy VII onward. The official reason was that the PlayStation discs had better storage capacity than N64 cartridges, but it's likely the two companies were clashing behind the scenes. Regardless, remember that Final Fantasy XIII is still coming out on PlayStation 3. Just because 360 owners will also be playing the game shouldn't diminish your experience. Yes, the multiplatform move is annoying

to people for whom Final Fantasy XIII was the deciding factor in a PS3 purchase. However, there's a lesson in those somewhere: Don't buy a console for a single game that doesn't even have an announced release date.



Got You Covered

I've noticed something about our magazine over the last few years: Each issue has some seriously amazing cover art. While this has always been true, the two Batman: Arkham Asylum covers were especially cool. Some of my other favorites are Infamous, Gears of War 2, and Brutal Legend. How do you guys do it?

Brad
via email

We're glad you like them! The talented artists at the development studios almost

always provide the art you see on our covers. The rest of the process, like laying out text, matching the colors, and generally making the whole composition pop, is handled by our in-house production department. They're also responsible for laying out the page you're looking at right now. Don't worry, we can still do whatever we want in the text. Paaaaaartly!



Testing, Testing

I have been trying to crack into game testing for what feels like forever now, and I even took the chance on a site that I researched and purchased a subscription to get started. I never got a reply or confirmation or login information from the site, but someone is enjoying my \$44.95. I have visited several publishers' official sites for testing positions, but they are all on-site. So, I'm confused. Do companies really outsource to people at home?

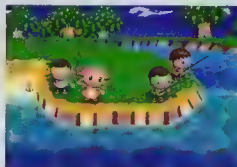
Je'Don Bagley
via email

As a general rule, if something looks too good to be true, it probably is... especially if it looks like those flyers you see stapled to telephone poles. You can't sit at home, have companies send you games, and make thousands of dollars by working 12 hours per week. That's not a job...it's a get rich quick scheme, and you aren't the one getting rich. For a number of reasons, practically all video game testing is done on-site. If you want a job in quality assurance, you should apply through a company's regular channels, not by signing up for website memberships. If you're repaying someone to let

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 section shares our most popular threads from our forums. We'll be posting these threads weekly.



Nintendo has found the casual market to be the area where they can succeed most, but there are still plenty of hardcore games coming for the Wii and DS. People just need a whopping boy for the industry.

itsamethat

I still haven't gotten past the fact that people are calling Animal Crossing a "hardcore" game.

noobbaab

Yeah, they still care about the hardcore, but for the time being they're going to milk their new-found audience for whatever they can. I think we can rest assured that the next Mario and Zelda are well into development.

Tanooki

I believe with Nintendo's complete overhaul to attract the casual gamer and venture out to people who are new to games Nintendo has been very profitable and therefore has no reason to focus more on hardcore gamers at this time.

TheMach3Warrior

As long as Nintendo is developing Metroid, Zelda, Super Smash Brothers, and real Mario games they care for the hardcore gamer. The day one of those franchises' new game is akin to Iron Age as the day they stopped caring.

loersberg1785

THE QUESTION:

Do you think Nintendo still cares about the hardcore gamer?

Nintendo hasn't abandoned the hardcore gaming market for the Wii yet, but they're heading down that road when compared to the competition. It's a lot like the GameCube era (losing first-party titles for hardcore gamers), except this time the casual gamer is leading Nintendo.

AngelGamer

Sadly, I say yes. The Legend of Zelda, Mario Galaxy, Mario Kart, and Smash Bros. have already been released, and those series seem to only come around once a console cycle. I want to be wrong, but it seems the best of hardcore gaming is over unless a third-party developer steps up and makes a game that isn't shovelware.

not_a_bumblabee



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you work, you're doing it wrong.

The Rundown

I really liked your PlayStation 2 Top 25 you did in the Classic GI section of issue 185. I think it would be really cool if you did this for all of the past consoles, especially my favorite system, the Nintendo GameCube!

Shane Akos
via yahoo.com

If you liked that, you should definitely head over to this month's Classic GI on page 138, where we take a look at the top 25 Xbox games. As for the GameCube, we'll run that as soon as the system has 25 games worth mentioning. Oof...that one's gonna hurt next month.

Too Harsh, Man

I usually agree with your scores, but your review of Too Human was a little harsh. Granted it may have some flaws in the targeting system, balancing, and health orbs, but most other aspects of this game are pretty decent. You should have looked past your high expectations for this game and based it on how fun it really is.

Frankie Molinelli
via yahoo.com

This is in response to your review on Too Human. Third Opinion: 8.25 out of 10. First I would like to say you're right, it's not a terrible game, but I will not have your nitpicking ruin its legacy. You don't give enough credit to the gameplay (and I don't mean the menus), which is relatively smooth and satisfying. The targeting problem you keep mentioning is minor compared to the camera, but even that is easily tossed aside. And please, cut the graphics some slack.

Dan Varano
via email

We can't print every "Your review of [some game I bought] was wrong" letter we get, but these were unique. If you're going to rush to a game's defense, it's customary to offer more than concessions and lukewarm praise. If this is what Too Human's stalwart champions can muster, we can only imagine what the people who really hated the game have to say. Actually, we shouldn't. It's probably littered with profanity, and may even contain phrases from the Black Speech of Mordor.



WILLIAM BENITEZ
Snake can remain undetected even amidst the most garish '70s wallpaper

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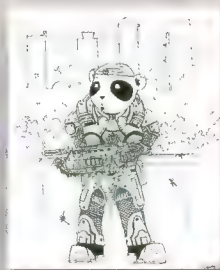
JAMES ROLAND IV

You're asking for it, Hulk. If there's one thing super heroes are good at, it's avenging their family members



EMRE TUG

Is it bad that we want a game starring panda marines? At this point, anyone who isn't some musclebound meathead is kind of refreshing



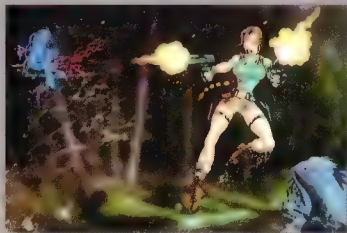
RAMEL HILL

People who scowl constantly are just smiling on the inside. Either that, or smoldering with unceasing fury. Give 'em a hug to find out which it is



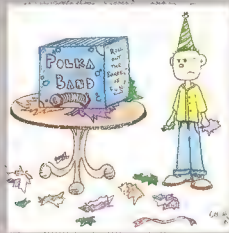
CODY DEEGAH

Even tomb raiders hate Murlocs



CLAY WITT

Why the sad face? Polka music provides hours of repetitive, public domain fun. Hopefully they have that one "Oom-pah" song!





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NEWS

THE FUTURE IS NOW

WHAT THIS HOLIDAY
MAY HOLD

The holiday season is always a battleground, and with all three home consoles going strong this year, the stakes in the system and software wars are bigger than ever. While it's a given that people will buy Wiis until the store shelves are picked bare, what happens this holiday season could have an impact on the industry. Will the PS3 take off? Can Nintendo salt its lead? Will the Xbox 360 put some distance between it and the PS3? Game Informer talked to two industry analysts to get a better look at what this holiday has in store for video games and what it may mean for the future.

What Will Be The Surprise Hit Game This Season?

"The one I think people just don't appreciate is LittleBigPlanet. Sony could blow it on the marketing, but I don't think they will. When people see it, everybody instantly goes, 'Oh my god, that's so cute.' I think this game is going to transcend gender and age much like Wii Sports did.

What surprised me last year was the phenomenal success of Assassin's Creed. I wonder if Assassin's Creed did so well because it was such a cool game, in which case a game like Mirror's Edge could really surprise. Or, did Assassin's Creed do really well because it's a Ubisoft game with a historical theme? In which case, Prince of Persia might do that well. I don't know the answer, but perhaps the two games to watch are Mirror's Edge and Prince of Persia. Because if one of them breaks out, it tells you there's this untapped hunger, either for something innovative or that period piece kind of business."

— MICHAEL PACHTER
Wedbush Morgan

"We don't see any one non-sequel breaking through to the extent that Assassin's Creed and Rock Band did in terms of sales last year. The new IP coming this year for 360 and PS3 is just not as compelling. Among the non-annualized sequels, Gears of War will likely be the biggest followed by Fallout 3, Prince of Persia, Resistance 2, and Fable II, but I'm not sure this will be much of a surprise. The best-selling new IP will likely be Dead Space from EA, which is previewing nicely, although somewhat limited in sales by being in the horror genre."

— EVAN WILSON
Pacific Crest Securities

Guitar Hero World Tour Vs. Rock Band 2

"In terms of sales, not game quality, Guitar Hero will be difficult to stop. The brand is still better known, it will have more hardware supply, and it has a larger base of existing users to upsell. Rock Band will likely gain share again and could very likely receive better reviews, but the improvements made in the second version do not appear significant enough to catch the juggernaut that Guitar Hero has become."

— EVAN WILSON

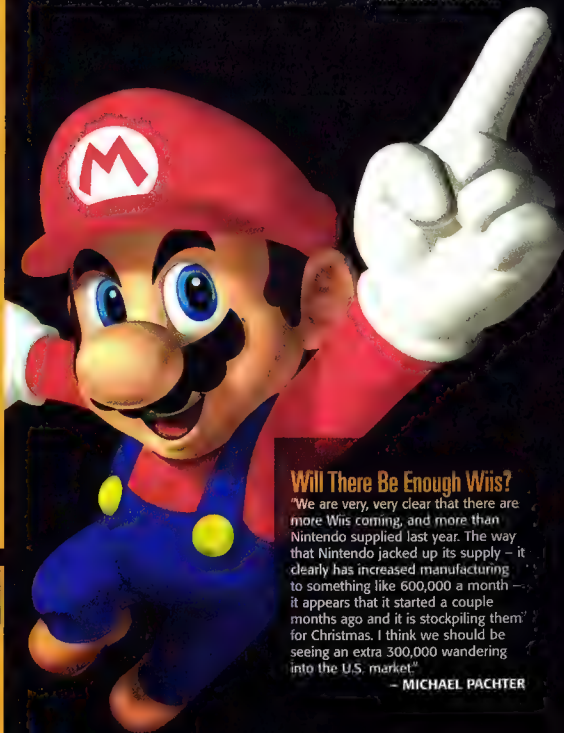
Who Gets The Most Momentum This Holiday?

"In the U.S. the Nintendo Wii will likely outsell both the PS3 and the 360 by a two-to-one margin. The Nintendo DS will likely outsell the PSP by a two-to-one margin. The large publishers' success should be partially judged based on their ability to gain market share on the Nintendo Wii. This will once again be Nintendo's holiday to lose."

— EVAN WILSON

"Nintendo sells the most consoles, but probably doesn't have the most momentum. I think the momentum is Sony's to capture. I think that Microsoft is doing its damndest to keep that from happening with a price cut."

— MICHAEL PACHTER



Will There Be Enough Wii's?

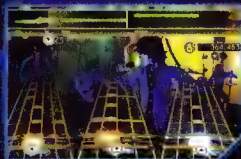
"We are very, very clear that there are more Wii's coming, and more than Nintendo supplied last year. The way that Nintendo jacked up its supply — it clearly has increased manufacturing to something like 600,000 a month — it appears that it started a couple months ago and it is stockpiling them for Christmas. I think we should be seeing an extra 300,000 wandering into the U.S. market."

— MICHAEL PACHTER

Will Wii Owners Be Disappointed By The Lack Of Quality New Software?

"Potential Wii owners aren't a very picky crowd when it comes to brand new games. Nintendo's current slate is plenty. Existing Wii owners, especially those that bought the Wii in holiday 2006 and early 2007, will likely be less enthusiastic. We are seeing more games developed specifically for Wii instead of being ported from another platform. This should allow quality to improve, but customer interest is far from certain."

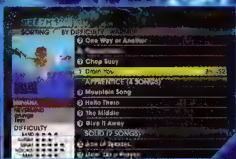
— EVAN WILSON



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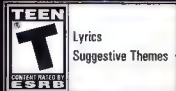
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*ROCK BAND INSTRUMENTS COMPATIBLE WITH ROCK BAND 2. See the complete track list on

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HARMONIX



Fender

Original Rock Band disc tracks upgrade requires online connection and key purchase. *Items are sold separately. ****Online connection required. See pack back for details.

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DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

COURT BODY SLAMS WWE

The Connecticut Superior Court dismissed some of WWE's charges against THQ regarding the pair's video game company's licensing deal. WWE tried to convince the court to void the deal on the grounds that it was bribed during negotiations. In other THQ news, the publisher announced the opening of an office in Shanghai, China. THQ plans to launch Company of Heroes Online in Asia.



ROCK BAND TV SHOW

Reality television kingpin Mark Burnett (Survivor) is working with MTV to start up a TV contest based on Rock Band 2. Recruitment ads have already been posted looking for four people to form a band and play live for a chance to win "the Ultimate Rock Band Experience."



NCSOFT EXPANSION

Korean developer NCSOFT (Tabula Rasa) is trying to strengthen its MMO position in the west. The company opened NCSOFT West in Seattle to handle all American and European operations under one roof. Currently, NCSOFT has offices in both Austin and Brighton, England.

MORE MODERN COMBAT & MARTINIS

Activision has rarely seen a license it didn't like. The company is betting heavily on Bond, saying that it will just out a 007 game every year - starting next year - movie tie-in or not. Speaking of years (and off-years), Activision Blizzard announced that, thankfully, developer Infinity Ward will be back at the helm for the next Call of Duty title.



CAPCOM TURNS AWAY FROM JAPAN

In its annual report, Capcom unveiled its blueprint for the future. The company says that the Japanese market accounts for 35 percent of its console game sales, and it is avoiding any Japanese mergers for potential partnerships with Western companies in order to grow that sector of its business. As an adjunct to this strategy, Capcom says "all major titles launched during the next fiscal year or thereafter will be developed as multiplatform games."



Image Metrics' animation software is built for Rock Band intro videos.

FACING THE FUTURE

WHAT THE "EMILY" VIDEO MEANS FOR GAMING

If you've been to YouTube in the last few months, chances are you've stumbled across or followed a link to the "Emily" video. What initially looks like a standard interview showing a close up of a woman's face is - at the end - revealed to be a computer-generated fake. The animation and texturing is so realistic it has led some to declare the uncanny valley crossed.

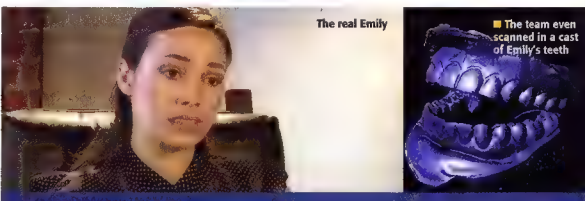
"From my point of view it was a SIGGRAPH demo, and it just became something more than that," says Image Metrics' head of production David Barton. "It's created a bit of a global buzz." Image Metrics, a tech company specializing in a new take on facial animation, was looking to make a splash at the annual Special Interest Group on GRAPHics and Interactive Techniques conference (SIGGRAPH) in Los Angeles. The company partnered with the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies' graphics research team to try out their cutting edge hi-res facial scanning tech, which earlier iterations had appeared in the Spider-Man movies, *King Kong*, and *Superman Returns*. Next, they hired "The Young and the Restless" actress Emily O'Brien and things got rolling.

Over the course of several months, Image Metrics sent O'Brien off to USC for facial scanning inside their custom light globe, filmed her answering questions in a studio, animation and rendered the video, and brought the final product to SIGGRAPH last August. Excitement about the conference exhibits is generally contained within the highly technical industry, but Image Metrics' demo showed progress that anyone could see. Soon media outlets picked up on Emily and, in

turn, YouTube hits on various copies of the video rose to over 1.2 million.

But Emily is simply the latest demonstration of its unique approach to facial animation. Rather than using motion capture dots or traditional keyframe animation, Image Metrics films an actor's performance with any standard video camera and uses its custom software and team of animators to translate into digital form "If you were to give it a motion capture analogy, somebody might put 30 markers on the face," Barton says. "Well, we have an almost limitless number of markers because every single pixel that is on the face in that video we can analyze and extract data from it." Image Metrics' process is not only accurate; it's also very fast. The core animation time excluding final texturing and lighting took only two weeks to complete.

So when will we start seeing Image Metrics animation in games? Most likely you already have in titles like Grand Theft Auto IV, Devil May Cry 4, and Unreal Tournament III. But current home console horsepower doesn't allow really-blurring animation just yet. "We've worked on 50 video games, but none of those games have ever attempted to create something photo real," Barton says. "There is still some way to go before we can do things like hundreds of blend shapes in a facial rig or multiple displacement maps for real detailed fine skin creasing. Maybe the next generation of consoles? Within the next two to three years we should be seeing characters that genuinely draw the gamer in as realistic and believable."

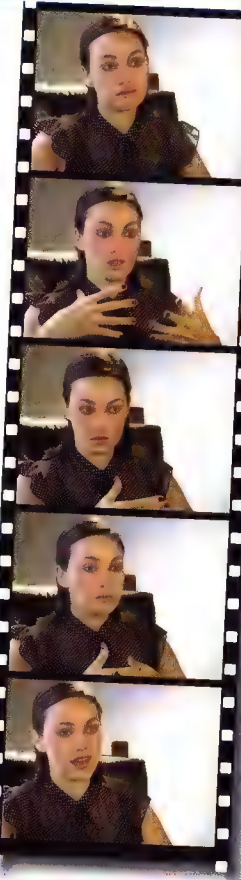


The real Emily

The team even scanned in a cast of Emily's teeth

REAL-WORLD RÉSUMÉ

Image Metrics' tech isn't just pie in the sky concepts. It's been used in movies like *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*, Gnarl Barkley's music video for "Who's Gonna Save My Soul," and in several games stretching back to 2005's *The Getaway: Black Monday*. Rockstar has been the company's biggest supporter, using its tech in essentially every game since *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. "We are all about story driven games like *GTA IV*," says Image Metrics' David Barton. "We've worked on 300 minutes of facial animation in that title." The company also just announced a partnership with Codemasters for *Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising* and has several other unannounced projects in the works.



UNLIMITED ENABLED

Check out this month's Unlimited for the full-length interview with David Barton and a downloadable hi-def copy of the Emily video.

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QUOTE

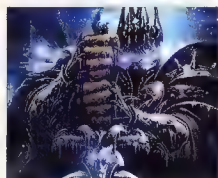
...unfortunately I think the industry had passed Rare by.

— Former Microsoft executive Peter Moote, reflecting on Microsoft's early relationship with developer Rare for UK's paper *The Guardian*.



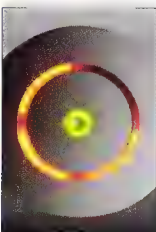
GOOD

Atari is stepping it up with its PS3 version of horror title *Alone in the Dark*. The game features a number of improvements from the earlier 360 version, including a new zoomed-out, controllable camera system, quicker access and manipulation of your inventory, and better driving sequences. The game also features a new action sequence in one of the episodes. *Alone in the Dark* for PS3 comes out in mid-November.



GOOD

World of Warcraft expansion *Wrath of the Lich King* has been given a November 13 release date. The game will appear in standard (\$39.99) and limited edition (\$69.99) forms, the latter of which comes with a 208-page art book, an exclusive in-game baby frost wynn pet, soundtrack, behind-the-scenes DVD, mouse pad, and two World of Warcraft trading card game starter packs.



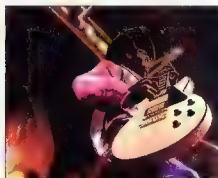
UGLY

Xbox chronicler Dean Takahashi has written a piece for online blog *VentureBeat* detailing the Xbox 360's red rings of death saga. As Takahashi explains it, the system's high failure rate boils down to numerous factors, including the console design, poor testing in its early stages, memory issues, bad soldering, and more. Before launch, 68 out of a 100 systems were coming off the assembly line non-functional, and the continual post-release additions to the system didn't help things after launch. Microsoft even stopped production cold in the first half of 2007 in an attempt to deal with the problems. Meanwhile, Robert Delaware, a Microsoft games tester who Takahashi spoke to on the record for the article, was recently fired by the company for what it deemed a breach of his confidentiality agreement.



GOOD

Metal Gear Solid 4 producer and former Konami employee Ryan Payton has previously acknowledged the existence of a *Metal Gear Solid 5*, and now more news has come out about the game. Konami has filed a trademark for the name *Metal Gear Solid Existence*.



GOOD

It's no surprise that Activision has wide-ranging plans to bring money off the back of the *Guitar Hero* franchise, but we've got the feeling that more multi-platform releases aren't the only thing the publisher has up its sleeve. Activision says it has 2,000 people working on the franchise, so here's hoping that at a minimum the DLC flows fast and furious. One thing that we may see is more Jimi Hendrix—something that Slash recently hinted at in an interview.

news

XBOX 360 DOUBLES DOWN

PRICE CUT PAYS OFF

In early September, after months of rumors, Microsoft announced price cuts for each of its three versions of the Xbox 360. This price drop makes the hard-drive-less Arcade model the cheapest next-gen system on the market, undercutting the Nintendo's Wii by \$50. The core system with a 60GB hard drive now sells for \$299, while the 120GB Elite goes for \$399.

According to Microsoft, the payoff of these long-awaited price cuts were immediate. The company said it saw a 100 percent increase in sales shortly after the announcement. This comes at a crucial time for the Xbox 360. Not only is the all-important holiday season here, but the PS3 has shown steady, increased sales over the spring and summer while sales of Microsoft's platform had stalled. Nintendo's Wii, on the other hand, has consistently outperformed both systems, which should extend into the foreseeable future.



news

MICROSOFT DISASSEMBLES ENSEMBLE

HALO WARS STILL ON TRACK

It's one thing to hear of employee layoffs at a developer after a project ends and the game hits the shelves, but to hear that closing a studio before its title is released is...all a part of the plan? Microsoft announced *Halo Wars* developer Ensemble Studios will shut down following the release of the RTS title in early 2009.

Despite the closure, Microsoft says the studio leadership is already planning to start a new development house and will work on other projects with Microsoft. Many Ensemble employees are taking jobs within the new studio, as well as at Microsoft.

In a statement, Microsoft said the decision was "fiscally-rooted" and that it "keeps Microsoft Game Studios on its growth path." In the past year, Microsoft has shed high-profile developer Bungie from its first-party status, and allowed partners BioWare and Bizarre Creations to part ways even as it says it is committed to first-party software.

ENSEMBLE STUDIOS

This Dallas, Texas developer became a subsidiary of Microsoft in 2001

- 1997 Age of Empires
- 1999 Age of Empires II
- 2002 Age of Mythology
- 2005 Age of Empires III
- 2009 Halo Wars

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How New Music Comes To Rock Band 2

MAKING OF A SONG



Song Selection and Licensing

Choosing what music appears on a disc (or DLC) begins long before a release, but the time it takes to reach completion varies wildly. "At this point, we are more or less in a rolling process with our partners, where licensing and technical delivery on any one track happens very naturally over a fairly comfortable period of time," DeGooyer says. "That said, we can move very quickly if there is a new artist with a great track for the game - I think we've turned some songs around in just a couple of weeks." Headaches often emerge while attaining the appropriate music rights. "We work closely with artists and their management to select songs that the artist wants to see in the game," DeGooyer continues. "From a technical licensing perspective, the owner of the master recording (usually a label) and the publisher of the song need to approve the use of the song." The rights to some music are so fragmented that it takes months to track down the involved parties. When the music in discussion involves deceased artists, MTV and Harmonix make a point to visit with the artists' survivors in person to explain the game and get permission.

After years of enjoying the fruits of Harmonix's work, first on its creation of Guitar Hero, and later on Rock Band and its sequel, we wanted to learn how those rockin' songs make their way into our games. We sat down with Paul DeGooyer of MTV Games and Eric Brosius, audio director at Harmonix, and talked through the life of a song as it journeys from initial selection to your Rock Band menu screen.

Remixing

While Rock Band and its sequel are chock full of the original master tracks, in most cases you're not hearing the album mixes. Since the music must be broken down into its disparate instrumental and vocal parts, a new mix must be completed that closely emulates the original. "A typical issue is technical delivery - a song may have been recorded with certain tracks 'printed' together, like bass and drums," DeGooyer says. "It takes a lot of time and expertise to separate the parts so they are playable in Rock Band and still retain their musicality."

Most of this remixing is completed by a professional audio engineer who works for the record label using notes and cues from the original mixer to set levels and effects. When that process is completed, the "stems" (the individual separated tracks) are passed to Harmonix, which does a limited amount of additional mixing of the song and adds additional variable audio, such as crowd noise and fade-ins. In many cases, Harmonix has way more than four tracks to choose between - it's not unusual for a complex rock number to include 10 unique guitar tracks running simultaneously. Harmonix picks one or more of these to become a sort of "super guitar" track that players will tackle when they play the game, combining the most iconic riffs into a seamless experience. That's why you sometimes start a song like "Pinball Wizard" playing the inimitable acoustic opening, only to shift to the electric lead partway through the song.

Big Rock Endings?

In the first Rock Band, Harmonix went out of its way to amplify the feeling of a "live" concert by implementing a number of special endings to songs. The untold story is that after these "big rock endings" were recorded, around half of them were rejected by the original artists, since it involved new musicians tacking on music to their existing tracks. In Rock Band 2, they show up less, and they're almost always more consistent with the original recordings.



LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



BEATBOX FOR HALO 4

Halo 4 rumors have circulated for a while, and *Variety* says that Brothers in Arms developer Gearbox will be heading up the new title, which is consistent with what multiple sources have told Game Informer. This Gearbox-developed Halo game is different from the side-project Bungie planned to announce at E3 that Microsoft postponed at the last minute.

MORE FROM MOLYNEUX

We all know that Lionhead's Peter Molyneux has tons of crazy game ideas swimming around in his head 24/7, and now we're hearing that the latest brain rush the Brit has is for a whimsical 360 game based around a canoe. Who knows if this game will ever materialize or if it's related to the oft-rumored 360 motion controller, so we'll have to see if this is anything concrete or just another instance of Molyneux thinking out loud.



WHERE NEXT FOR GTA BRAINTRUST?

One of the possible wrinkles in the possible acquisition or merger of Take-Two could be the future of Sam and Dave Houser, the creative minds behind the Grand Theft Auto series. The pair's contract expires in February 2009, and whether they stay or go will surely impact the future of the company and the franchise. Loose Talk has heard that Ubisoft is one of the companies that currently trying to nab the Housers and their gift for games.

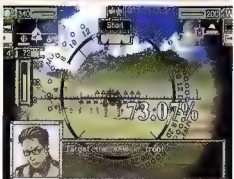
Got some insider info? Email us at boosell@gamerformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

In this alternate history of 1960s Japan, the country has split in two between Soviet and Allied forces in a continuance of aggression that has spilled over from WWII. Both sides use gas-powered mechs to do battle, but this Konami game isn't just some bad Gundam title. It moves turn-based pre-battle tactical maneuvering of your mech and its support units with real-time battles. One of the interesting things about these real-time battles (which are encompassed in missions that can last hours) is that when you're ready to fire, the game switches to a first-person mode, whose accuracy improves the longer you fix a bead on your target.

(Answer on page 12)



TECMO TIES THE KNOT WITH KOEI?

SQUARE EMIX ALSO TAKES LOOK AT DEVELOPER

Japanese publisher/developer Tecmo has been active in the past months. Between losing Mima Co. Mastermind Takemasa Nagakura, Emix Securities, and the resignation of its president, the company clearly has its feet in place. Now Tecmo is considering a merger with developer company Koei, maker of Dynasty Warriors.

Years of this possible merger (especially after former developer Square Enix offered publicly) feared as a tie-up between... We believe Tecmo will be able to make a good deal followed by working square Emix Games. Emix Games president Yoshitaka Matsuda of the firm.

Project Base, Square introduced a deal between the game from Square Enix. And, fastest negotiations were made through a merger. Explained both companies in a statement. We expect we can grow further by expanding both companies' identities and have an opportunity to create a new way to fully utilize the talent.

LAWSUIT SETTLED

In other Tecmo news, the company has settled a lawsuit with another Tecmo news. The settlement was part of the Team Ninja, but the deal is a settlement with the game. The deal is a settlement with the game. The deal is a settlement with the game.



EA CALLS OFF TAKE-TWO BID

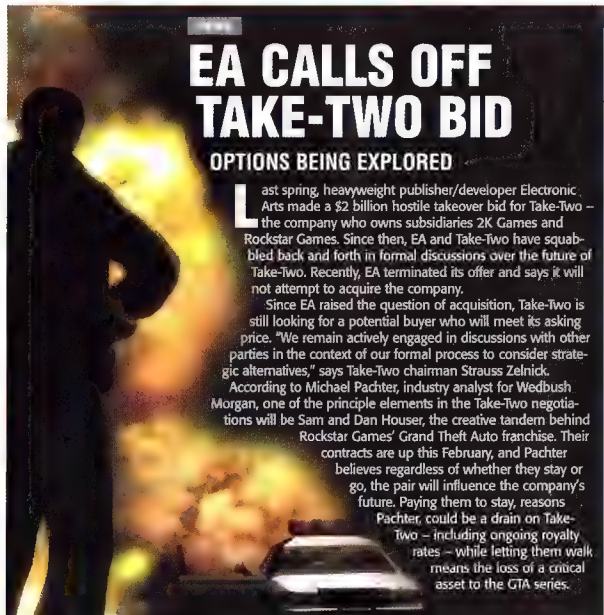
OPTIONS BEING EXPLORED

Last spring, heavyweight publisher/developer Electronic Arts made a \$2 billion hostile takeover bid for Take-Two — the company who owns subsidiaries 2K Games and Rockstar Games. Since then, EA and Take-Two have squabbled back and forth in formal discussions over the future of Take-Two. Recently, EA terminated its offer and says it will not attempt to acquire the company.

Since EA raised the question of acquisition, Take-Two is still looking for a potential buyer who will meet its asking price. "We remain actively engaged in discussions with other parties in the context of our formal process to consider strategic alternatives," says Take-Two chairman Strauss Zelnick.

According to Michael Pachter, industry analyst for Wedbush Morgan, one of the principle elements in the Take-Two negotiations will be Sam and Dan Houser, the creative tandem behind Rockstar Games' Grand Theft Auto franchise. Their contracts are up this February, and Pachter

believes regardless of whether they stay or go, the pair will influence the company's future. Paying them to stay, reasons Pachter, could be a drain on Take-Two — including ongoing royalty rates — while letting them walk means the loss of a critical asset to the GTA series.





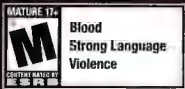
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TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER
JASON AVENT
 Game Director, Black Rock
 Studio (Pure)

- 1 Metal Gear Solid – PSone
- 2 The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time – N64
- 3 Elite – BBC Model B
- 4 Micro Machines – Sega Mega Drive
- 5 Quake II – PC



READER
LYNNE PHILIPS
 Midlothian, TX

- 1 Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion – Xbox 360
- 2 Mass Effect – Xbox 360
- 3 BioShock – Xbox 360
- 4 Final Fantasy XII – PS2
- 5 Final Fantasy VII – PSone

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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 (attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top Ten Things We're Neglecting While We Play All The Great Holiday Games

- 10 Our dog Fido, who can probably just eat in January
- 9 Christmas shopping; Seven Eleven is a godsend on Christmas Day
- 8 Car maintenance; overrated, if you ask us
- 7 Heating bills, which probably aren't important in the winter
- 6 That gaping bullet wound
- 5 Our jobs – this issue was originally slated to be 300 pages long
- 4 Parole officer; what are they gonna do, throw us in prison?
- 3 Your whiny emails – zing!
- 2 The ever-widening expanse of space and time as the universe balloons outward
- 1 The Wii

Name That Game Answer: Ring of Red



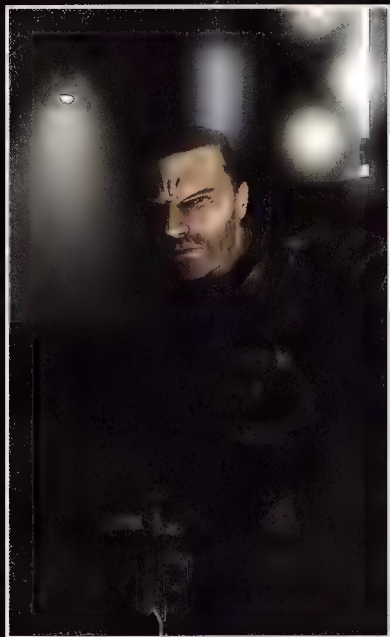
THE PUNISHER HITS PSN

GAME EXCLUSIVE TO PS3

Vigilantes usually have a purpose and method behind their madness, but you can ditch all of The Punisher's family anguish and slop straight to the shooting in Marvel Interactive's The Punisher: No Mercy game exclusively available for PS3's PlayStation Network.

No Mercy is an arena-based first-person shooter running on the popular and powerful Unreal Engine 3. The game allows you to choose from a selection of friends and enemies culled from The Punisher's comic book history, including Jigsaw, Silver Sable, Barracuda, and Bushwacker. The game supports eight-player action (with both solo and team-based missions), and even features character-specific taunts taken from the comics.

Augmenting its multiplayer mode, No Mercy's single-player mode features exclusive artwork from Mike Deodato. At the time we went to press, a price and release date for The Punisher: No Mercy had not been announced.



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TEEN
T Cartoon Violence
 Mild Language
 Suggestive Themes
 Use of Alcohol
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NINTENDO DS

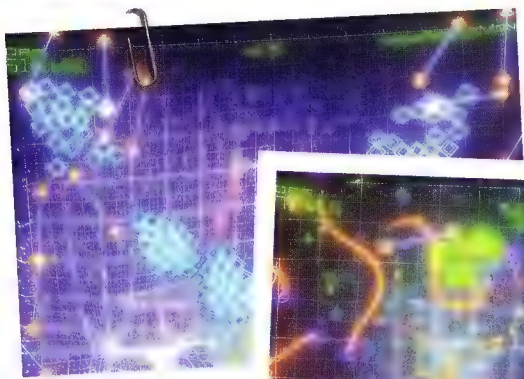


SEQUEL TO THE

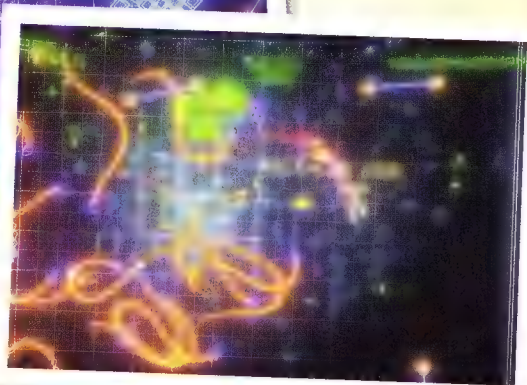


BLEACH: THE BLADE OF FATE

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■ Pacifism mode (above) forbids shooting, while Evolved (right) is classic Geometry Wars



Geometry Warriors

Game Informer scours the leaderboards to find the best of the best, uncover the people behind the handles, and learn their strategies. So, if you get a pesky message over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network from GameInformerMag, please don't delete it. You could be the next featured gamer.

PACIFISM

Handle:
gekti

Name:
Yujirou Terase

Age:
22

Hometown:
Kawasaki,
Kanagawa, Japan

Rivals:
iPacifism,
PrimeMakaveli

Accomplishments:

At the time of this writing, Yujirou Terase earned the number one score in the Pacifism game type of Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2, with over 3.27 billion points. The next competitor trails by almost a billion points.

Origin of Skills:

Even though he wasn't breaking any records, Terase was a big fan of the original Geometry Wars Retro Evolved. "My score is around 4 million," Terase says.

The Key to Victory:

"Extending your survival time is essential for getting a high score," says Terase. "To do this, you have to destroy as many enemies per gate that you can, and make a path through the swarm. Then you can pick up large quantities of Geoms in their wake."

Life Outside of Geometry Wars:

Terase works at a convenience store and enjoys the works of manga creator Izumi Takemoto and sci-fi/horror writer Chouhei Kanbayashi.

Other Favorite Games:

Ikaruga, Ninja Gaiden, and Panel de Pon.

Practice Time:

25 hours a week

Why Buy a 360?

Terase says that he bought a 360 for Ninja Gaiden II, but knows that console has struggled in Japan. "Japan's most popular genre is RPGs, of which there are few for the system," Terase observes. "But the newest Tales game just came out [Tales of Vesperia] and everyone's waiting for the latest Square Enix game, so I think RPG fans are becoming more fascinated with the system."

What Should Be in the Next Geometry Wars?

"I'd like to save and upload replays," Terase says. "That way, nobody will have to bother with explaining their tactics."

EVOLVED

Handle:
pE ExacTly

Name:
Kevin Perez

Age:
18

Hometown:
Burlington, North
Carolina

Rivals:
Blew Meanie,
K4rn4ge

Accomplishments:

Kevin Perez took the top spot in Evolved mode with a score of over 562 million. "I never thought was I going to be able to reach rank one. I just wanted to be in the top 100," Perez says. "Right now my goal is to reach 1 billion points in Evolved mode."

Origin of Skills:

"I played tons of [the original] Geometry Wars," Perez says. "My high score in Evolved was 41 million. I could have kept on going, but I got tired."

The Key to Victory:

"Usually I go in circles close to the wall, quickly dodging the magnet balls," Perez recommends. "I use the gate and black hole explosions to score big points. Also, I collect as many Geoms as possible."

Life Outside of Geometry Wars:

Perez currently attends community college for computer engineering and plans to transfer to a university after two years. He also works part-time as a computer technician and builds gaming PCs.

Other Favorite Games:

Halo 3, Crysis, and Halo 2.

Practice Time:

"When I have free time I devote it all to gaming," Perez says. "When Geometry Wars 2 came out I played it for 10 hours straight every day. I try to play at least 4 hours when I have a busy day."

What Should Be in the Next Geometry Wars?

"It would be nice to have a feature that lets you save your [replays] and upload them to Xbox Live," Perez says. "And I wouldn't mind Bizarre Creations removing the annoying magnet balls that fly straight into your ship."



Yujirou Terase



Kevin Perez

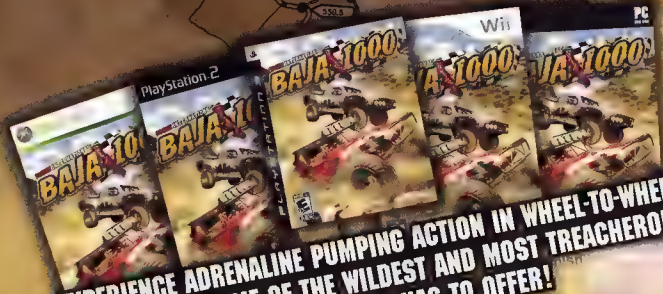
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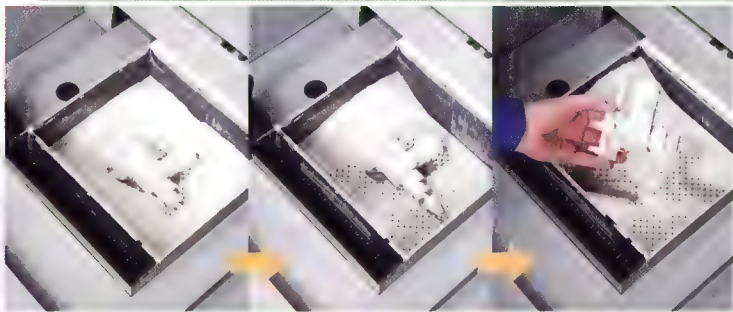
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Your Rock Band character will be modelled down to the last detail

tech

FROM ROCK BAND TO REALITY:

Z CORP TURNS VIDEO GAME AVATARS INTO REAL-LIFE STATUES



Centuries ago, creating a statue out of a pile of dust would have made you a minor deity, or at least a very good wizard. Today, the technology company Z Corporation manufactures and sells a machine that performs this trick in a matter of hours. Formed in 1995, the Burlington, Massachusetts-based firm is the world's leading purveyor of what it calls "3D printers," which can make representations of any three dimensional object. But in this case, it's not printing a likeness on a sheet of paper — it creates an actual model. Recently, the company expanded beyond its core business of prototyping industrial designs to embrace partnerships with the video game industry. Its first big client is MTV Games and Harmonix. This licensing deal will allow Rock Band players to buy small statuettes of their in-game rockers — perfect in every detail, right down to the last studled wristband.

"The business we operate in is called the 'rapid prototyping' business," explains Z Corporation's vice president of business operations Scott Harmon. "Rapid prototypes from many different technologies are used to help designers and engineers test designs before they commit to more expensive manufacturing procedures." The machines create these models by spreading a thin layer of plaster dust, then building and coloring the shape layer by layer (1/100ths of an inch thick) with two inkjet printer heads — one that sprays color, and one that sprays a special binder fluid which holds the model together.

"Admittedly, it's a complex process. 'I joke that I can tell what time it is at cocktail parties. If it's 11 o'clock and everyone's had a few drinks, I have to explain it seven times,'" says Harmon. "If it's seven and everyone's only had one drink, it's only three or four."

"Despite its industrial roots, Z Corp. realized video games were a perfect fit for its services. 'We need 3D data for this to work, 3D data is [used in] video games,'" observes Harmon. "People started to think, 'Wouldn't it be cool if you took the 3D data from a video game avatar and actually make a 3D print of it?'"

The first foray into video game 3D prints was made by FigurePrints, a Z Corp. client started by former Microsoft executive Ed Fries. FigurePrints has marketed and sold World of Warcraft avatar models since 2007, and now owns a half dozen Z Corp. printers to keep up with demand.

Although Z Corp. is primarily a hardware manufacturer, it started offering figure-making services to help popularize the unfamiliar technology. After a chance introduction to some MTV licensing executives and subsequent meetings with Harmonix, they hatched a plan for creating a Rock Band line of models called Bandmates. "[Harmonix] thought it was a really cool way to extend the experience," says Harmon. "The avatars are a pretty fun part of that, between the t-shirts and tattoos and the crazy stuff that you can do with your avatar."

The ordering process is easy; just log onto rockbandstore.com and the site pulls your player data from the Rock Band servers. In a matter of days, you'll have exact replica of your character for around \$60 to \$80. It's a dream for hardcore fans and if Z Corp. has its way you'll have the ability to do this in many future games, including a rumored partnership with Spore, which Harmon declined to comment on. With any luck, the next generation of video game figures will be unique as the gamers that play them.



10 the top video game openings

The beginning of a game can set the tone for the entire experience. Whether it's an opening cinematic, the first level, or just the first bit of gameplay, a good intro should grab your attention. Some even take it to the next level, getting you invested in the action, characters, or story in mere minutes. While there have been dozens of great video game openings throughout the years, these are our picks for the best of the best.

1 BioShock

"All good things of this Earth flow into the city" are the words emblazoned above the entrance to Rapture, but the crumbling paradise tells a different story. After surviving a plane crash and listening to an inspiring speech about the underwater city's creation, you quickly realize that the situation is not as advertised. We wish we could play BioShock again for the first time just to experience the terror, confusion, and dawning comprehension that accompanies your initial descent, introduction to Andrew Ryan, and first encounter with a Big Daddy.



2 Final Fantasy VIII

Back before every RPG had a music video before the title screen, Final Fantasy VIII set the standard with this amazing cinematic. Haunting choral music and a shot of a serene beach starts things off slowly, but it develops into a barrage of images full of foreshadowing and glimpses of future events, culminating in a wicked fight (with gunblades!) between Squall and Seifer. Say what you want about the rest of this game, but the intro was awesome.



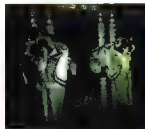
4 Half-Life 2

City 17 is not a happy place. From the second Gordon Freeman steps off the train and sees the Combine-controlled capital, things look bleak. The opening minutes of Half-Life 2 perfectly convey the oppressed desperation of City 17's denizens, the suffocating power of Dr. Breen's regime, and how badly the world needs a crowbar-wielding hero.



3 Prey

Some dude named Tommy sitting around in a crummy bar may not sound cool at first, but things get crazy when "Don't Fear" The Reaper" kicks in on the jukebox. As Blue Oyster Cult rocks out, the entire bar is sucked into an alien spaceship. Players watch in horror as Tommy's friends and family are systematically (and brutally) processed, and that's when Prey really begins — with Tommy alone on the labyrinthine craft armed with only a wrench.



5 Mega Man 2

Not every game needs an elaborate backstory. Even with a set-up as simple as "Dr. Wily made some robots, and you need to kill them," the intro to Mega Man 2 gets you ridiculously psyched. Some text appears under a static shot of a building in a city, but once the "plot" is explained, the camera sweeps up the tallest building. As the pump-up music swells and you see the top of the building, who's standing there in all his majesty? Hell yeah! It's Mega Man!



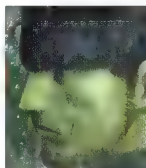
6 Fallout

As old-time music plays ("Maybe" by The Ink Spots), the images on a black and white television tell the story of life before the apocalypse. Soldiers murder citizens in the streets, cars cost \$200,000, and there is a promise of a better life by sealing yourself away in an underground vault. Then, Ron Perlman begins his chilling narration: "War. War never changes." Now that's how you establish a setting.



7 Metal Gear Solid 2

As if destroying a bipedal tank weren't enough, Snake's boarding of the tanker in Metal Gear Solid 2 establishes him as a badass of the highest order. Smoking a cigarette and strolling across the George Washington Bridge in the rain, Snake suddenly breaks into a run. Then he throws off his raincoat, turns invisible (!), and dives off the bridge, landing on the ship below. If only we had gotten to play as him the whole game...



8 God of War II

Not only does the intro show Kratos decked out in his godly glory, but the entire first level is a boss fight against the legendary Colossus of Rhodes. You beat up on regular chumps, and just when you think you're safe, a foot the size of a dumptruck bursts through a wall to crush you. When Kratos finally beats the giant statue, Zeus shows up to strike the new god low. Good thing Kratos isn't the revenge-seeking type, right?



9 Medal of Honor: Frontline

You know all that stuff you're kind of tired of in World War II games these days? The Medal of Honor series did it when it was still inventive. The first level in Frontline had players storming the beach at Normandy on D-Day, conveying intense combat and abject fear similar to the beginning of Saving Private Ryan. The level also appeared on the PC's Medal of Honor: Allied Assault, though that title didn't open with it.



10 Indigo Prophecy

Before you even gain control of Indigo Prophecy's main character, you watch him murder a man in a diner restroom. The game thrusts into action immediately afterward, forcing you to frantically clean up the scene and hide evidence as the threat of discovery gets higher and higher. It generates tension and urgency, and introduces you to the game's core mystery right away.





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impulse

BY MATT MILLER

Mega Man 9 makes history by avoiding change, and Lode Runner proves his worth at age 25. Classics attempt a rebirth on your fancy modern console.



I've noticed an interesting phenomenon in my attitude towards downloadable games, and I'm curious if any of you feel the same. It's like I suddenly develop a five-year-old's attention span as soon as the game starts, and I'm disappointed if they don't entertain me within moments of beginning. This stands in contrast to my feelings toward larger, retail releases, where I'm often more than willing to give a game several hours to warm up. But set me in front of a downloadable game, and I fight frustration if the game isn't in full swing within five minutes. It's a foolish inclination I've pushed past, often to intriguing and complex games that emerge after a little more attention. My prejudice got me to think about the expectations we all bring to our game-playing habits. Do you hold downloadable releases to the same standards of excellence as retail releases? Do you sometimes expect even more from a download, as I do when wanting them to deliver entertainment only moments into a playthrough? Alternately, are you more forgiving of faults in a shorter downloadable game, simply because of its format? These aren't rhetorical questions – I'm genuinely interested, if you care to send me your thoughts.



Peggle

It's still a couple of months off, but PopCap's clever ball-bouncing game of strategy and luck is headed to Xbox Live Arcade. Finally, console players can discover the addictive PC title their friends have been raving about. The XBLA version also features expanded multiplayer options.



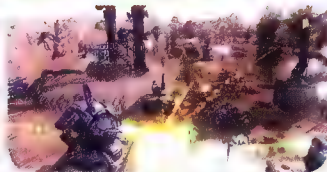
In the meantime, we're heading into a holiday season where downloadable releases are capturing more attention than in years past. **Mega Man 9**, headed to all three consoles, is perhaps the most high profile of these selections. It's not often (or really ever) we see a new release in

a series more than 20 years old that doesn't attempt to update the formula. This will lead to mixed reactions; some players will welcome the blistering difficulty and primitive graphics, while others may grow frustrated. After several hours of battling robot masters and their minions, I'm torn between those two extremes. There's something devilishly entertaining about the punishing level



The Last Guy

This quirky PSN release sends you reeling down city streets as you guide hapless citizens to escape zones while avoiding the swarming zombie apocalypse. From a top-down view, it's almost like looking at a satellite image of your hometown, except crazed undead are out to eat you and your neighbors.



Savage Moon

Take lower defense, fancy it up in almost every way imaginable, and you have the PSN exclusive **Savage Moon**. Giant insect-like aliens charge en masse at your mining facility, and only you have the insanely high-powered machine guns to take them down. Upgradable weapons, support equipment, and evolving tech trees add an extra layer to the familiar formula.

design, but I was reminded why the industry has moved away from making such unforgiving games. Frustration and fun can only go hand in hand for so long before the former wins out. Luckily, the clever new weapons, bosses, and insanely catchy music encourage you to pick the controller back up after you throw it across the room.

Lode Runner

on XBLA has opted for the opposite approach to updating a classic. Fresh, modern visuals and several new modes of play greet gamers when they turn on the new Live Arcade title. The familiar mechanics are still in place, including burying your enemies in rapidly dug holes and collecting scattered

gold to progress. I got the biggest kick out of the new cooperative levels, which require quick wits from all players (up to four) as increasing numbers of enemies relentlessly seek to protect their treasure. A puzzle mode is also a big plus, as it delivers an alternative gameplay experience to the frantic pace of the more traditional platforming.

It's great to see that several episodic games are reaching enthusiastic audiences in recent months. My favorites lean towards humor, but with a surprising level of fun and depth, both **Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain Slick Precipice of Darkness** and **Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People** are moving forward with new installments. If the first episodes are any indication, both should be excellent downloads, presuming you're in on the jokes. I hope to play both before next month, when I'll let you know how each series is shaping up.





Wallpapers	Themes	Screensavers	Games	Realtones
<p>WANNA KNOW WHY MY EGO IS SO BIG?</p> <p>wall7775</p>	<p>theme5183</p>	<p>move8696</p>	<p>game3659</p>	<p>NEW</p> <p>SUPER MARIO BROS. THEMESONG</p> <p>song2377</p>

<p>wall7776</p>	<p>wall7777</p>
<p>wall7778</p>	<p>wall7779</p>
<p>wall7780</p>	<p>wall7781</p>
<p>wall7782</p>	<p>wall7783</p>
<p>wall7784</p>	<p>wall7785</p>
<p>wall7786</p>	<p>wall7787</p>

<p>theme5184</p>	<p>theme5185</p>
<p>theme5186</p>	<p>theme5187</p>
<p>theme5188</p>	<p>theme5189</p>
<p>theme5190</p>	<p>theme5191</p>
<p>theme5192</p>	<p>theme5193</p>

<p>move8697</p>	<p>move8698</p>
<p>move8699</p>	<p>move8700</p>
<p>move8701</p>	<p>move8702</p>

game3660

game3661

Askanli - Good Good	song2378
One Way / Saajia Bay Tell Em - Marco Polo	song2379
David Banner / Chris Brown - Got Like Me	song2380
David Banner / LL Wayne - Shawty Say	song2381
Karinalal O'Rahall / Aken - Dangerous	song2382
Katy Perry - I Kissed A Girl	song2383
LL Cool J - Baby	song2384
Miley Cyrus - 7 Things	song2385
Ne-Yo - Baby On Me	song2386
Rihanna - Disturbia	song2387
Savage / Saajia Bay Tell Em - Swag	song2388
Shwayze - Corona And Lime	song2389
The Dynamite - I Love You Girl	song2390
T-Pain - Can't Believe It	song2391
Young Jeezy / Maye West - Put On	song2392
Young Berg - The Business	song2393

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■ Jonathan Blow's *Braid* is one of the year's most intriguing video game experiences

THE

VANGUARD

JONATHAN BLOW

DESIGNER, BRAID

>> Jonathan Blow's Braid has become this year's Portal, a fascinating cult hit that stretches the definition of what a game can be. We recently spoke with Blow about game design, the development of Braid, and the industry at large. <<

When did you start thinking about some of the concepts that would become Braid and what were some of your inspirations?

Most of them happened in '04, actually. I'd done a game prototype that was about seeing the future. It's actually up for free download now [Oracle Billiards - available at <http://number-none.com/blow/prototypes/index.html> - Ed]. It's a 2D, no-production values thing, but it was about seeing what would happen before you do it. It was interesting, but it wasn't that fun to play. So, I started thinking about things like seeing the future or predicting what would happen if the future and the past were interchangeable. What kind of world makes that easier? I thought of a 2D, Mario type of world, because it's very simple interactions... I wanted the player to be able to visualize things very easily. That was part of the idea, and part of it was from discussions I'd had with friends. We'd played games like Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time, which was

another 3D object, and it would become more confusing. The reason that Braid works as it does is because there is a clarity to the way the elements are laid out in the scene. There's no ambiguity, and that's harder in 3D.

Braid is very allegorical and symbolic. Are there ways in which 2D less realistic games better express allegorical concepts as compared to a very realistic looking game? For example, "Guernica" by Picasso might express something different about nuclear war than a realistic painting of an atomic explosion.

I hadn't thought of that during development, but Scott McCloud has a similar idea in his book *Understanding Comics*. He talks about the level of abstraction that the comic is drawn in, all the way down to stick figures and all the way up to realistic painting. That engages different levels of viewer

number of items that can be used to make this puzzle? If I ever found myself designing a puzzle that had a lot of pieces, I would decide that it was too complicated and either simplify it or throw it out. The more pieces you have, the more it's just a random intellectual exercise. The fewer pieces you have, the more you're getting at some fundamental truth about the way things behave, and that's what I was going for... You go to each world, and that's where a new way that time behaves is introduced. All the puzzles are different, natural consequences of the way the law of the universe that you've been introduced to.

Talk a little bit about working with your artist, David Hellmen. What did he bring to the project?

The gameplay was already figured out before David came on. The gameplay was done in late 2005 - all the puzzles were there, the ending was there.

[Braid] is based on ideas that I have and things that I care about, but not necessarily autobiographical.

not the first game to do time rewind, but it was one of the popularizations of it. Blixn, the platformer on the Xbox, also came out about the same time. They had this time rewind thing, but we didn't feel that they did it very well. As game designers, we were thinking about how you could do it better, and my idea eventually turned into Braid.

You mentioned the classic 8-bit influenced style. What are some of the artistic advantages for you as a designer of a 2D environment?

In theory, it was easier to produce the art, because you could just make it in Photoshop. Ultimately, it wasn't as easy as I hoped, just because we had a very high quality bar for the art and it took a year and a half to do the 2D art. In terms of design, having that [side] viewpoint mean that the player is very aware of what's around [him] and all the elements of the puzzle. As a designer, that gave me a lot more freedom to create puzzles. A lot of the things that are in Braid just wouldn't work from a 3D perspective, especially the ending. The ending just couldn't be done in 3D. There are a lot of other puzzles that could be done, but they would be a lot harder for players to understand. Braid was hard enough for people to understand as it was. If you couldn't see everything at once, you might miss something because it's hidden behind

participation. That lets you play on different levels of literal versus abstract meaning. I always thought that it was a very interesting point. I didn't seek to design Braid that way; this is just the way that the game came out. But I could certainly see that it works the way it does because it's in 2D.

One of the interesting things about the design is the puzzles. All the puzzles in Braid are very discrete and unique from each other, even down to how you interact with time and the environment.

It was a specific design goal of mine to not have any puzzles that repeat. As long as you play through the game, you're always having new experiences. When that runs out, the game is over. I like the originality it brings, because a lot of puzzle games have the same puzzles, whatever the mechanic may be. If you start out with "Hey, you have a grappling hook and you can use it to go up here, throw the switch, then come back and go through the door" - a lot of games do that, but make the puzzle figuring out the order in which to do things. The next puzzle is just a more complicated series of events, which is the same thing you've seen in every other game. I didn't want to do that with Braid. Every puzzle was going to be as simple as it could possibly be. What is the minimum

But it was all programmer art; it looked like nothing anyone would be interested in after seeing a screenshot. I had ideas of what I wanted the visual theme to be. I wanted the game to start out really bright. I wanted a realistic setting and I wanted it to have a painterly style. But I don't have an art education, so I didn't have a concrete visualization of what that would be. I searched for a long time for an artist before finding David, and when he came on we spent a long time looking at possibilities. Drawing out possibilities of what things could look like and then eventually, once we had some ideas about what colors and visual styles might work, there was process of making sure that didn't break the game design.

People have interpreted Braid in a lot of different ways - what the princess represents, what the ending represents. You've been loath to say that there was one interpretation that was right or wrong. When you think of the game that you had in mind?

There's a very definite interpretation of it that I had. There are a lot of reasons why I don't like to talk about it. I don't think I could do a sufficient job of it. If I were to write an essay containing all of that it would be really long, and I would still miss major,

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

First Love



Blow receives his first computer, a TRS-80 Color Computer, and begins developing small game programs as a hobby

Portal



After leaving college, Blow works on porting Doom and Doom II to a set-top box console being made by a joint venture between Silicon Graphics and Time Warner. The console is never released in the US

A New Breed

With some college friends, Blow forms Bolt Action Software to create an online shooter/strategy title for online gaming services, Total Entertainment Network and iMagi Online. The game is released under the names Wulfman and ShockForce

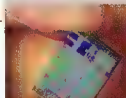
The Advisor

Blow begins a career as a consultant, advising on such major titles as *Odyssey: Munch's Odyssey* and *Deus Ex 2*

Musings

Blow becomes a columnist for Game Developer. His "Inner Product" column explores new ideas in game technology

In The Cell



Blow works on developing a demo game for IBM's cell processor, which would eventually power the PlayStation 3

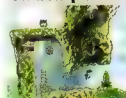
The Beginning

Blow begins work on the project that would become Braid

Grace Notes

Consults on the iPod game Phase for Rock Band creator Harmonix

A Masterpiece



The long in development Braid is released to adorning critical praise and strong sales

1982
1995
1995
2000
2001
2003
2004
2007
2008

JONATHAN BLOW

CONTINUED...

(from page 43)



I don't want to be funded by someone. I want to be independent and have full control over the design of the game.

important things that I didn't manage to communicate effectively. So I prefer not to do that. I don't think that it would be a good way to communicate it anyway. The reason I made a game with these ideas in it is because the game was the right way to communicate them. To get what I was going for, you have to get it in this form, in this medium.

Will you ever reveal the interpretation?

It's unlikely that I would ever reveal it. There's no need to. A lot of people out there have gotten major pieces. Everyone has their own interpretation of it, but a lot of people have gotten major pieces of it. Some people have emailed me and they totally get it. The other day, I got a five-page email and I said, "Yes, that's what this game is about." There are people that really understand it at a deep level. So, it's not necessary for me to say in public what it's about.

Did you let those people know they had gotten it right?

[Laughs] Well, sure, but I don't want to turn this into a national guessing game where people write and I say yes or no. But it's good to have communication like that with people.

One of the major themes is time and regrets, the attempt to correct past mistakes. How personal was this game to you? Were you trying to express some of those feelings that you had about the past and how it relates to you now?

Yes, it's very personal. This game is about the kind of subjects that are the most important to me. But it's not personal on a literal level. People have noticed that there are break-up scenes in the game — it's really not about me breaking up

with someone. It's based on ideas that I have and ways that I feel and things that I care about, but not necessarily autobiographical.

You've said that there will be no sequel to Braid. Does that still stand?

Yes. I'm working on the next game and it's not related to Braid. There are some ways in which the design has some characteristics that are similar to Braid, but maybe not in a way that people would recognize. It's not about time manipulation at all.

Does it revolve around a core concept in the way that Braid revolved around time?

There's a way in which Braid is really simple. You're this dude, you can climb and jump and bounce off monsters. This new game is very much like that. There's a simple thing you do in the gameplay, and it's kept simple through the whole game as much as possible, and then there's variety that comes in. That's the way that it's similar to Braid. But it's different in every other way.

Does it have the same 2D, more retro look?

This next game is 3D. It's that way because the core gameplay requires 3D. It's going to be a more expensive game to make and harder to make.

Will you have to work with a larger staff?

That might be necessary to produce all the 3D assets. Right now I'm not really worrying about that. I haven't even programmed the game yet. I'll do it the way I did Braid; do a program that lets me do the basic gameplay and have some really bad art in there that I make. Then I can try it out and see if it works. Assuming it works and is interesting, then I would start looking at how to make all the 3D stuff to bring the visual interest back to the game.

Is Microsoft pressuring you to make another Braid now that it's been successful?

They are very happy with how the game has done on Xbox Live. Anytime you work with someone and get good financial results, they are interested in working with you again. That's the level of the conversation with them right now. I don't have any contractual commitment or financial support from them. They might be interested in that, but I'm not asking for it because I don't want to be funded by someone. I want to be independent and have full control over the design of the game. That's where things stand. They might be interested; Sony might be interested for all I know. I won't talk to publishers until the game is pretty far along.

You invested a lot of your own money and loaned money into the game. Has it sold well enough that you've been able to pay back those loans?

The game is profitable now. It's at the point where, if I had been consulting for the last three years instead of making this game, that I've made back the same amount of money. That's actually a decent amount, and that's more than I hoped to make going into it. I was pretty sure I was going to lose money. When I release the PC version, hopefully it will be even more profitable. That will help me save up more for the next game, which will be more expensive.

You've been very critical of the mainstream publishing system in games. Is that system broken from an artistic standpoint?

Yes, I think it is. In terms of high budget games, it's very hard to do anything creative or interesting. But I don't know if that's necessarily broken — that's just the way things go when budgets get up that high. I'm not sure complaining about it

would ever do any good. If you look at Hollywood movies, it's the same thing. Every once in a while you get a movie that's interesting. I thought *The Dark Knight* was actually artistically interesting, and it was certainly a very expensive movie. It was very financially successful. But, that's really the exception rather than the rule. Most movies are like your buddy cop movie or thriller or chick flick that aren't trying very hard in terms of being films or stretching the medium. Maybe that's the case to be made for lower budget games. If a lower budget game does a lot of crazy things and is successful, then maybe higher budget guys can pick up on that later. That's the way [indie games can] feed the medium. The problem is that, anytime you do something that's very experimental, there's a high chance of failure. Even if the people are very talented, that's what it means to go into unknown territory. So, maybe lower budget games is the place that work should be done.

In an interview with MTV Games you commented that if someone only thought games were Madden, it's not surprising that they wouldn't think games were art. But isn't Madden inherently art, just the same way that a realist landscape painting is art? There are a lot of artistic decisions being made, like how shots are framed and things like that, even if it's a simulation of something.

It's an even more difficult question, because everyone has a very different idea of what art means. So if I say, "All games are art," somebody else who thinks of the word "art" differently than me will complain about that. I think that all games do have artistic decisions like that in them. But then so do a lot of utilitarian objects in the world. If I build a laptop or something, and I'm designing that, there's art in that. I'm picking what the color is, how the lid opens. But that's in a direction where we don't necessarily think of the result object as art. We consider that industrial design. There are creative decisions, but they are secondary to the financial performance and the utilitarian performance of the item. I think of Madden being more in that direction. But there is a continuum of that [approach] all the way to the "I don't care about the utilitarian function" side of art. Games can land all the way along that spectrum. I don't try to define art, because it can mean too many different things. But what I care about is the people that make things, the overall artistic intention of the work as a whole. What does this thing exist for? Whether or not it has little creative decisions in there that are interesting, what is its purpose as an entire object? For Madden, that purpose is to get people to buy this year's football game. So, for me, that makes it not as close to the core of what I care about.

I think some people have the perception that we're on the cusp of a real breakthrough of independent games. As someone who's been involved in it for years, how healthy do you think the independent game scene is?

I think the health is good right now. If you're an independent developer, there are a lot of options for how to publish your game. There's more audience reception for independent games than ever before. We just had the summer of Live Arcade, and Braid sold well — Castle Crashers sold even better. There's more freedom than when I started in the industry. The Internet means that if you can't get a publishing deal on the Xbox, you could always put your game up and get it out to people, which is the most important thing. Now, I don't necessarily know if we're in the beginning of that period. I think we might be in the middle of it. This might be as good as it gets. Things might narrow up as these distribution channels become more focused. A lot of big companies are publishing games on Xbox Live now that there's proven to be money there... Any time a market emerges, there's a brief period where people react to that, and then everyone fills the market to capacity. That's the process we're in now, people exploiting the downloadable market as much as they can. If you start an indie game now, in three or four years when it's done it might be hard to find a place to publish. I can't predict that far into the future.



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phone

SONY ERICSSON W760

With shake controls that let you automatically switch tracks, clear audio output, and software that identifies unknown songs and lets you sort them by mood, the W760 is a great music player. The sleek look, built-in GPS, and speedy 3G support also make it a solid cell phone. Too bad it's still designed like one. The media controls feel cramped and sluggish, and the mini SD card tends to pop out while it's in your pocket. While the games we played on the W760 looked and sounded good, the game library didn't impress us. Let's hope developers embrace the motion tilt system in creative ways because the standard controls are painful for gaming.

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peripheral

LOGITECH SPEED FORCE WIRELESS

You're probably wondering what games you can even use this 'Wi wheel' for. Have you forgotten about the Wi's extensive library of racers, such as Need for Speed: Carbon, Need for Speed: Pro Street, and the upcoming Need for Speed Undercover? Despite the Wi's thin supply of racing games, this Logitech racing wheel works as well as the Driving Force wheels for the PS3 and Xbox 360, providing a sturdy wireless signal while delivering full range force feedback.

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pc

PLANTRONICS GAMECOM 777 SURROUND SOUND HEADSET

Plantronics' newest PC headset sounds good thanks to the use of its USB 5.1 virtual surround sound plug-in. The microphone slyly tucks into the headset arch so it's out of the way while unused, but we experienced vocal distortions while playing games online, and the huge in-line volume and mic-mute controls always seem to get in the way. The biggest issue is the headset shape; the 777's extreme curve adds a lot of extra pressure just below your ears. They actually started to make our jaws hurt after extended use.

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tech

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\$35.00 (PS3IRX1), \$100.00 (PS3IR-PRO) • www.schmartzstuff.com





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

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etc

HALO INTERACTIVE STRATEGY GAME

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\$49.99 • www.b1games.com

media shelf

Art | Game Design



The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses

Written by Jesse Schell, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University's Entertainment Technology Center, this easy read is filled with practical resources for aspiring game designers.

\$59.99 • www.elsevierdirect.com

kick ass

GEARS OF WAR II LANCER

Created using actual in-game data from Gears of War, this full-sized model Lancer is the coolest toy we've seen in a while. Standing 36 inches long by 10-inches tall, the 13-pound Lancer's trigger activates chainsaw sounds and a numble effect Amazon.com has an exclusive deal on the product for anyone who preorders the game, but we've heard this bad boy will be popping up at other outlets sometime next year.

\$139.99 • www.necaonline.com



toys

MCFARLANE GUITAR HERO FIGURES

Proof that God rocks, these new McFarlane figures catch the Guitar Hero icon in perfect rock posture. This first wave of toys based on the hit Activision franchise includes Johnny Napalm, Axel Steel, and Lars Ümlaut. Each figure stands 6-inches tall, includes a unique guitar, and features around 15 points of articulation. Why should your younger sister be the only one who plays with dolls?

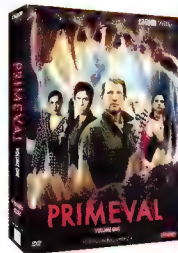
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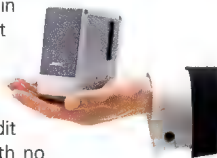
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november

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



BETHSOFT
If you surf the web in search of interesting video game stories, Bethblog is a great place to stop on a daily basis. This site dives deep into Fallout and Elder Scrolls, but also has a fun side, such as asking gamers what they like to eat. www.bethsoft.com



Resistance 2 - 11/04

NEW RELEASES

- *Destiny: All Humans 3: Path of Honor* - PS3, 360
- *EndWar* - PS3, 360, PSP, DS
- *Futurama: Bender's Game* - DVD
- *History Channel: Civil War Secret Mission* - PS3, 360, PS2
- *Imagine: Interior Designer* - DS
- *Imagine: Move! Star* - DS
- *James Bond 007: Quantum of Solace* - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PC, DS
- *Kitty Luv* - Wii
- *Legendary* - PC
- *The Lord of the Rings Online: Mines of Moria* - PC
- *Luxor 3* - Wii
- *Madagascar 2: Crate Escape* - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, DS
- *Monster Lab* - Wii, PS2, DS
- *Moto CP '08* - Wii
- *Nerf TV: Smile* - Wii
- *Newscenter Nights 2: Storm of Zehir* - PC
- *Paintball Breakout 2009* - PS3, 360, Wii
- *Princess on Ice* - DS
- *Race Pro* - 360

04-06

- *Resistance 2* - PS3
- *Safe Cracker* - Wii
- *Sam & Mac Season 1* - Wii
- *Secret Service: Ultimate Sacrifice* - 360, PS2
- *Still Life 2* - PC
- *Touchmaster II* - DS
- *Ultimate Band* - Wii, DS

07

It's Friday! If your friends invite you to go to a movie (like *Madagascar 2*), tell them to go to hell. Like a motion picture blockbuster, *Gears of War 2* is releasing on Friday, giving you a head start on a weekend full of chainsaws, brumaks, and barely literate protagonists.



Gears of War 2 - 11/07



Call of Duty: World at War - 11/11

NEW RELEASES

- *AMF Bowling: World Lanes* - Wii
- *Animal Crossing: City Folk* - Wii
- *Band of Brothers* - Blu-Ray
- *Benjo Kazooie: Nuts and Bolts* - 360
- *Bob* - Wii
- *Call of Duty: World at War* - PS3, 360, Wii, DS, PC
- *Cabin Tracker's Redneck Jamboree* - Wii
- *Club Penguin: Elite Penguin Force* - DS
- *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3* - 360
- *Dragon Ball Z: Infinite World* - PS2
- *Dragon Ball Z: Origins* - DS
- *Eternal Poison* - PS2
- *FaceBreaker: K.O. Party* - Wii
- *Guitar Hero: World Tour* - DS
- *Hedra Family Game Night* - Wii, PS2
- *Mirror's Edge* - PS3, 360, PC
- *MIB Superstars* - Wii
- *Mortal Kombat vs DC Universe* - PS3, 360
- *Mushroom Men: Spore Wars* - Wii
- *My Stop Smoking Coach* - DS
- *National Geographic Panda* - DS
- *Ob and the Orde* - PC
- *Pro Evolution Soccer 2009* - PS3, PS2
- *Rayman Raving Rabbits: TV Party* - Wii
- *Real Soccer 2009* - Wii
- *Rick Revolution* - PS3, 360
- *Star Wars: The Clone Wars: Jedi Alliance* - DS
- *Star Wars: The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duel* - Wii
- *Tenna Bowl Kickoff* - DS
- *Valkyria Chronicles* - PS3
- *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King* - PC
- *WWII: Smadown vs. Raw* 2009 - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS

11-13

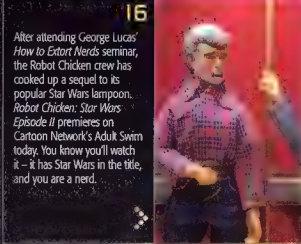
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- *Star Wars: The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duel* - Wii
- *Tenna Bowl Kickoff* - DS
- *Valkyria Chronicles* - PS3
- *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King* - PC
- *WWII: Smadown vs. Raw* 2009 - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS

14

If you miss Pierce Brosnan's James Bond, you should start liking better things. We won't put up with any more speed-car-pursuing, especially after seeing Daniel Craig as Bond. His latest installment, *Quantum of Solace*, opens today. It picks up right where *Casino Royale* left off, and features none of the following: hat throwing villains, golden body paint, Christopher Walken, and face-eating octopi.

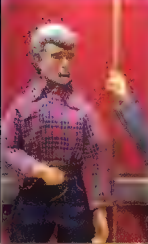


Quantum of Solace - 11/14



16

After attending George Lucas' *How to Start Your Own Star Wars* seminar, the Robot Chicken crew has cooked up a sequel to its popular *Star Wars* lampoon, *Robot Chicken: Star Wars Episode II* premieres on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim today. You know you'll watch it - it has *Star Wars* in the title, and you are a nerd.



NEW RELEASES

- *Alone in the Dark* - PS3
- *Bak* - PS3, 360, PS2, DS, PC
- *Castleinaria: Judgment* - Wii
- *Deal or No Deal* - Wii
- *Doctor Who: Season 4* - DVD
- *Dynasty Warriors 6* - PS2
- *Ebbles: Adventures of Kai & Zero* - DS
- *EveQuest II: Shadow Odyssey* - PC
- *Gothic 3: Forsaken Gods* - PC
- *Grand Theft Auto IV* - PC
- *Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades* - DS
- *Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors* - Wii, DS
- *Left 4 Dead* - 360, PC
- *The Last Remnant* - 360
- *Lips* - 360
- *Luminous Arc 2* - DS
- *Metal Slug 7* - DS
- *Monster Band* - DS
- *Moon* - DS
- *Need for Speed: Undercover* - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PSP, PC
- *Prince of Persia* - PS3, 360, DS, PC
- *Pro Evolution Soccer 2009* - 360, PSP
- *Rock Band 2* - Wii, PS2
- *Shaun White Snowboarding* - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS
- *Sonic Unleashed* - PS3, 360, Wii
- *Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World* - Wii
- *Tomb Raider: Underworld* - PS3, 360, Wii, DS, PC
- *Tony Hawk Motion* - DS
- *Wolf E* - Blu-Ray, DVD
- *Wii Speak Mic* - Wii
- *You're in the Movies* - 360

18-20

- *Pro Evolution Soccer 2009* - 360, PSP
- *Rock Band 2* - Wii, PS2
- *Shaun White Snowboarding* - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS
- *Sonic Unleashed* - PS3, 360, Wii
- *Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World* - Wii
- *Tomb Raider: Underworld* - PS3, 360, Wii, DS, PC
- *Tony Hawk Motion* - DS
- *Wolf E* - Blu-Ray, DVD
- *Wii Speak Mic* - Wii
- *You're in the Movies* - 360



Tomb Raider: Underworld - 11/18



23

Fun Fact: Bryan Vince once ate 10 hams.



Wanted - 11/25

NEW RELEASES

- *Age of Empires: Mythologies* - DS
- *Chrono Trigger* - DS
- *Cooking Quiz: Can't Decide: What to Eat?* - DS
- *Hockey* - 360, PC
- *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* - PS3, 360, DS, PC
- *Wanted* - PS3, 360, DS, PC
- *Wii Speak Mic* - Wii
- *You're in the Movies* - 360

25

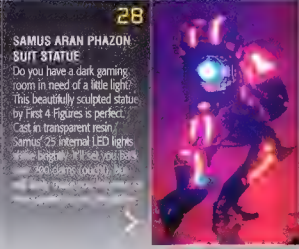


Chrono Trigger - 11/25

THANKSGIVING CHALLENGES

When eating Thanksgiving dinner with your family, how naked is too naked? Does a Wii remote function as a fork? Are there things you can't put gravy on? Is Xbox Live speak welcome at the dinner table? Find out today with one Thanksgiving challenge.

27



28

SAMUS ARAN PHAZON SUIT STATUE
Do you have a dark gaming room in need of a little light? This beautifully sculpted statue by First 4 Figures is perfect. Cast in transparent resin, Samus' 25 internal LED lights create a glow that will set your boss on fire. (Slightly glowing.)



Wii U

ACTIVISION



VOCALS

GUITAR

DRUMS

BASS

WE ARE ALL GUITAR HEROES

10/26/08



TEEN

Lyrics
Mild Suggestive Themes

When the world is asleep, the unconscious minds of its denizens cross the Veil into the Fade. This dream plane is populated by ethereal beasts, and while they may influence the psyches drifting by, they do not harm them. Living minds, however, are another matter. Only mages can enter the Fade in corporeal form by using magic to shield themselves, but it attracts the attention of the most powerful demons of the realm. That is why you are here; it is your Harrowing - a rite of passage all apprentices undertake to join the Circle of Magi. Drawn to your power, the creatures of the Fade try to kill you and take possession of your body and strength. If you emerge victorious, you will be a mage. If you fail, you will be dead. If only you had been born someone else in some far corner of Thedas, perhaps you would not be staring into the eyes of a hungry demon...but now is not the time for wishful thinking. This is your fate, and it is yours to steer.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

> STYLE | PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME

> PUBLISHER | ELECTRONIC ARTS

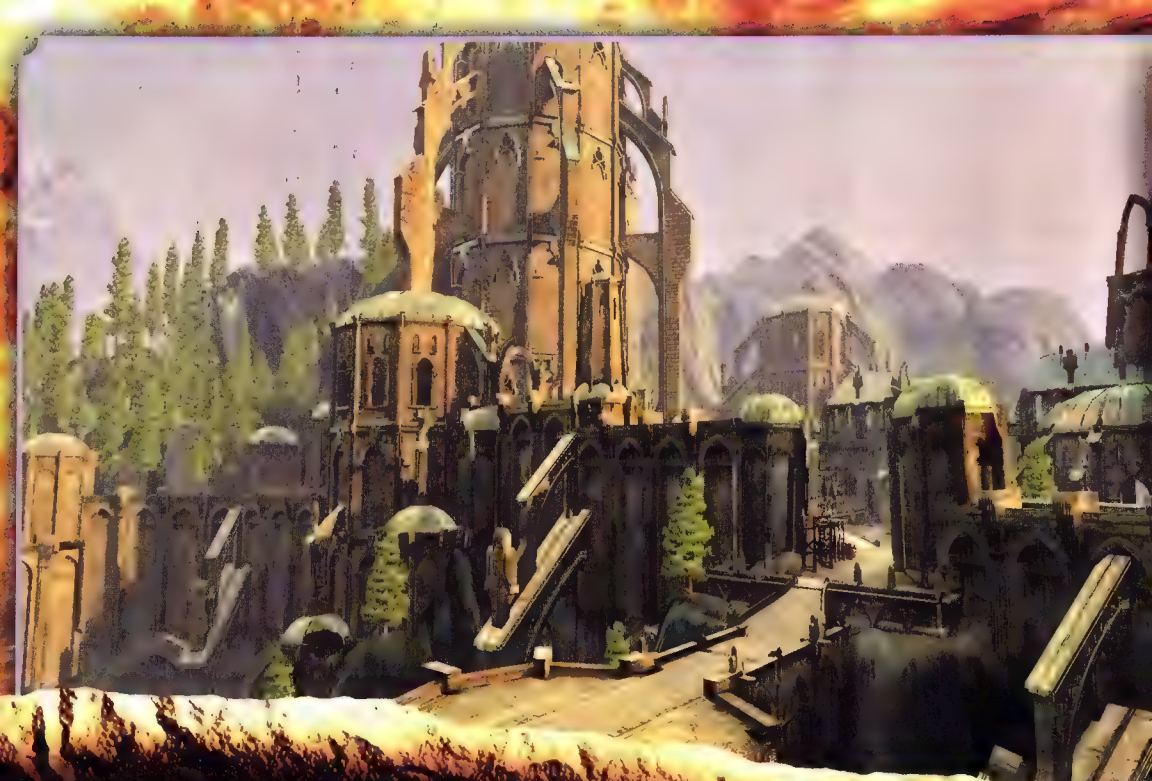
> DEVELOPER | BIOWARE

> RELEASE | EARLY 2009 (PC), HOLIDAY 2009 (PS3, 360)

The cover art for Dragon Age Origins is framed by a circular, glowing orange and yellow border that resembles a cave entrance or a fiery ring. Inside, three characters are depicted: a man with a beard in a blue tunic on the left, a woman with white hair in a purple dress in the center, and a knight in full plate armor on the right. Below them, the title "DRAGON AGE" is written in a large, ornate, golden font with intricate scrollwork. Underneath the title, the word "ORIGINS" is written in a smaller, white, serif font, with a red, blood-like splatter effect behind it. At the bottom of the frame, a dragon's head is shown in profile, breathing fire, with its mouth open and sharp teeth visible.

DRAGON AGE

ORIGINS



“We want to innovate with every game we make. Our goal for Dragon Age is to make it the best game we’ve ever done.”

— Ray Muzyka, CEO

It is difficult to overstate BioWare’s contribution to the role-playing genre. In the 13 years since its founding, the developer built the backbone of the western RPG with groundbreaking titles on PC and home consoles including *Baldur’s Gate*, *Neverwinter Nights*, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, *Jade Empire*, and *Mass Effect*. Each game was instrumental in charting the course of gaming, and BioWare is one of only a few elite developers in the industry with a long-running sterling record. If you aren’t excited for BioWare’s next project, *Dragon Age: Origins*, you should be. The name may sound familiar; *Dragon Age* was announced over four years ago, but the team went underground afterwards and kept a close guard over new information. *Dragon Age* finally re-emerged at this year’s E3, showcasing tactical combat in an original dark fantasy setting, but lacking specifics in key aspects like the console versions and the significance of the newly added “Origins” in the name. We visited the legendary Edmonton-based studio for answers to those questions – and to get some playtime with this expansive and intricate adventure. From what we saw, BioWare’s winning streak won’t be broken anytime soon.

The phenomenon began with *Baldur’s Gate*, BioWare’s 1998 PC role-playing game was built around the framework of the *Dungeons & Dragons* tabletop game, using the popular *Forgotten Realms* as the setting. Though it was an excellent video game implementation of D&D rules, the driving force behind the game’s success wasn’t its license; the reason people still talk about *Baldur’s Gate* today is

the incredible combination of story and gameplay. The members of your party had their own personalities and idiosyncrasies, and the combat integrated classic fantasy elements with tactical decisions, creating an addictive mixture of narrative and action.

The *Baldur’s Gate* series went dormant after two games and two expansions, but it had already set a role-playing standard. Gamers have clamored for a follow-up in the years since, and while that isn’t likely to happen anytime soon, it doesn’t mean that BioWare has abandoned the fans that made *Baldur’s Gate* such a success. “What *Baldur’s Gate* gave us was an epic story,” recalls BioWare president Greg Zeschuk. “You enjoyed it with your party members, and it had a real impact on the world. There was an incredible amount of stuff you could do and change. It was those simple things – we thought, ‘People like those things. Let’s make more of that.’” Thus began *Dragon Age: Origins*.

“The team wanted to take the experience and learning from the fantasy projects we’ve had the privilege to work on in the past – *Baldur’s Gate*, *Neverwinter Nights* – and apply it to a dark and heroic fantasy universe,” BioWare CEO Ray Muzyka tells us. Built on the familiar gameplay tenets of tactical combat and storytelling, *Dragon Age* takes place in an entirely new world created from scratch through years of effort. The continent of Thedas is home



Party members and NPCs will have voiced dialogue, but your hero will remain silent once you select his or her dialogue



The library in the Mage's Tower is full of books you can read to expand your knowledge of Dragon Age lore



The team assures us that BioWare's acquisition by Electronic Arts has adversely affected Dragon Age's development "in any way, shape, or form"

to its own history, mythology, politics, and heroes. The forces of evil are strong and getting stronger — that is the state of things when players create their characters and set out to explore the world, find allies, and shape their destinies.

"Dragon Age is referred to as the spiritual successor to Baldur's Gate, and for us, this is very true. It really is a return to our roots and origins," explains executive producer Dan Judge. "We have a large chunk of the development team who worked on the Baldur's Gate series. In a lot of respects, we get the best of both worlds with Dragon Age. We were able to develop our own universe and take a lot of influence from what we've done in the past to create what we think is the uber core fantasy RPG."

"At first, the name Dragon Age: Origins points to the developer's return to its roots, but the title is more significantly bound to the game's unique premise. When you create your character, you select more than your hero's abilities and appearance; your choices dictate how you spend the opening hours of the game. The race and class you choose determine your origin — an introductory section of the game that presents unique characters, environments, and tasks to perform.

For instance, if you are an elf mage, the game begins in the Mage's Tower, which is the center for magical

learning and training. Faced with a rite of passage called a Harrowing, your inexperienced mage travels to an otherworldly dream plane — the Fade — in order to defeat a demon and become a full member of the Circle of Magi. If you create a different character, such as a human warrior, your introduction to Dragon Age takes another form. You start in another part of the world with different goals and challenges. After all, without the gift of magic, all of those mage-specific tasks would simply not be possible. The availability of multiple origins promises replay value in Dragon Age, particularly since the team estimates each one takes between two and three hours to complete.

The importance of these events runs even deeper. The origins are not just a series of tutorial missions to acquaint you with the game's controls. They convey your hero's view of the world, and you will see the ripples of your origin constantly from the beginning of Dragon Age to the end. "You have different slots you fit into — social or racial structure — depending on your origin, and the world starts interacting with that," says art director Dean Andersen. "Really, the origin stories are more about your place in the world and your

CONTINUING AN AGE

Dragon Age: Origins is more than just the first entry in a video game series. The fully-detailed world is filled with interesting characters, and it has the potential to spread to multiple media — much like Mass Effect and its spin-off novels. "The universe is something we've developed from the ground up to support a lot of great entertainment products, and it's something we see expanding to other markets," Judge tells us. "We're not committing to any details other than that right now, but definitely it is something that could spread to novels — it could spread to a lot of areas."

perception of how the world works.

For example, if you are a non-mage elf, you quickly learn that elves are second-class citizens on Thedas: They're treated rudely and typically relegated to servant positions, and many NPCs react to your character accordingly throughout the game. A quartermaster in a camp might greet you with disdain and condescension, while a human character would get a warmer welcome. However, the elves aren't always at the disadvantage; there could be an enchanter who is indifferent to humans, but just happens to be your best friend because you saved him during your origin sequence. "You might meet someone in an origin and get to know them," says lead programmer Ross Gardner. "They may appear later in the story, but if you had taken a different origin, you won't have that connection at all. They'll just be another guy."

All the origins converge briefly near the ruins of Ostagar. There, at King's Camp, you begin your work

GATHER INFORMATION

Fans of *Mass Effect* are familiar with the concept of an in-game codex. It is essentially a database of facts about things you encounter in the world. *Dragon Age: Origins* also features a codex in order to collect the various bits of lore and useful information, but this time particular entries grow as you progress through the game. "If there's a fabled sword, you may just get some hint about what its powers might be," says Knowles. "Later, you learn more...and maybe where to find it." As you learn more about specific characters, or uncover enemy weaknesses, expect to see their codex entries change to reflect the new information. As an added bonus, there are in-game incentives to collect all of the codex entries in specific categories like geography, history, and magic.



as a member of the Gray Wardens. Each origin path contains different pressures and motivations to join the Wardens, but eventually all players find themselves recruits in the organization of warriors and protectors fighting against the darkspawn menace. Your mentor in the group, a seasoned veteran named Duncan, expresses misgivings about a looming attack. The young king of Ferelden, Cailan, feels differently. He theorizes that since the darkspawn don't have an archdemon to lead them, there is no true Blight—the darkspawn infestations that led to legendary wars in the past. Cailan is confident that the imminent battle is no excuse to worry, and more of an opportunity to prove his worth. What he doesn't seem to realize is that there are forces working against him; Thedas is complicated, with shifting politics, powerful and shadowy organizations, and bad blood between races that goes back generations. As players undertake the mission of lighting a beacon atop a tower, the fight on the ground goes awry.

King Cailan is grabbed by a hulking ogre in the middle of battle, and though the team at BioWare wouldn't reveal the outcome of the encounter, we do know this: Once you complete the Ostagar sequence,

the world opens up and your journey truly begins. "In order to tell a gripping tale, you need to bring it in at key points to align the story," Tudge explains. "There are key moments that will be common to a lot of individuals, circling around the Gray Wardens and certain spoiler events I won't talk about. But then you're free, back again to pursue your own experience. In that way, we're able to tell what I think is our best story yet."

Your origin is based more on your race than class (mage is the exception), and is meant to provide players with varied perspectives, but it is just the first of many choices that affect the lens through which you view the world. BioWare games are known for presenting players with moral decisions, but you may be surprised to find that the world of *Dragon Age* is not as clear as light side versus dark side. Some situations don't have a perfect solution, but you still need to make a choice. Furthermore, even when some outcomes are better than others, the path to those outcomes won't be immediately apparent.

"It's not about good versus evil," Tudge states. "It's about the more realistic choices that you face. Everyone

has to make difficult choices. That's sort of the flavor of the gritty, more mature world—how do you, as a role-player, want to make the choice?" In one case, you encounter a prisoner in a hanging cage. He's hungry, and begs you for food. If you press him for information, he explains that he was arrested after finding a key to a treasure chest, and will exchange the key for food. At this point, you can simply kill him and take the key, which allows you to open the chest later in the game. Obviously, the nice thing to do would have been to get the man some food, but there's a catch: If you do that right away, without even pressing the prisoner for information, he'll never even tell you about the key. You could get through the whole game without knowing that he had something to offer in return.

The decisions in *Dragon Age* are not set up like this to penalize the player. Being a jerk will not always land you the treasure, and being good won't see you constantly forsaking rewards. That's the point; it's unpredictable, encouraging you to make the choices

continued on page 59 >>

OLD AND NEW

BioWare has a reputation for creating games with outstanding stories, and that didn't happen by accident. Before the technical development of *Dragon Age* hit full swing, the development team prototyped the entire story using the *Neverwinter Nights* engine. The gameplay wasn't representative of the finished product, but the process allowed the writers to refine the plot, dialogue, and quests early in the development cycle. Given the non-linear nature of *Dragon Age*'s narrative, this intermediate phase ensures everything in the story flows and interacts in ways that make sense.



Dragon Age: Inquisition



■ Certain enemies have unique skills. This ogre can throw rocks, as well as pick you up and repeatedly sucker-punch you



■ You gain new abilities and spells (which can be added to the active bag) by investing points in a variety of talent trees





■ Players will find weapons and armor, which can also be enchanted to add magical properties.



■ Spells work well alone, but you can also combine effects, like casting a grease spell and setting the pool ablaze.

1 Level Up

7 Soldier

THE TRANQUIL

One of the more unnerving moments you'll encounter during the mage origin is when you talk to your first Tranquil. With a serene and emotionless speech pattern, the Tranquil are men and women who were once candidates for the Circle of Magi, but deemed unfit to undergo their Harrowing. Some just didn't have the aptitude, and others were unable to control their latent power. Individuals like this are forced to endure the Rite of Tranquility – a magical process that forever severs their connection to the Fade, leaving them emotionally dead. The Tranquil retain some magical ability in order to perform tasks like potion-making and weapon enchantment, but their complacent attitude ensures that they are never beyond The Circle's control.

■ The team cites author George R.R. Martin (*A Song of Ice and Fire*) as an influence when it came to creating a world of dark fantasy.





Tower of Ibal — BioWare

“With Dragon Age, we wanted to keep a foot cemented back in the games that BioWare built in the old days, and to make sure that we have something still there.”

—Greg Zeschuk, president

continued from page 56

you want and then live with them. Don't expect all of them to be on such a small scale, either. Sometimes the fate of an entire race or nation may rest on your shoulders. “The origin story was a choice, and there are points in the game where you make other choices and there is a divergence,” reveals lead designer Brent Knowles. “There are other divergences that will impact the gameplay — almost like making another origin-story decision.”

There are more concerns to consider as you make your mark on Thedas, like how your allies will react to your decisions. As in *Baldur's Gate*, party interactions play a major role in *Dragon Age*. The individuals who join your cause are fully developed characters. Some of them like helping people, others only care about getting the job done, and sometimes they simply can't stand each other. This can lead to some entertaining comments, sarcastic banter, and other interactions that live up to the experience.

Which party-members you can recruit depends on several factors, including your origin, your dialogue decisions, and your deeds. You may have to accept quests

or help them out before they'll join, and even then, it's not always obvious which ones have the potential to join your entourage. “They won't be running around the world carrying big signs that say ‘I am a potential party member!’” jokes Knowles. “Some of them are nice surprises.”

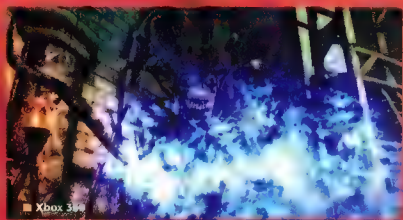
Even once an ally joins you, you shouldn't stop caring about their perception of you. *Dragon Age* features a party approval system that indicates how much other characters like (or dislike) you, which can lead to additional dialogue, sub-plots, and even unique specialization classes for your character. If you're about to do something despicable that your good-natured rogue friend would dislike, it might be wise to return to the party camp. There you can find all of your allies in a central location, talk to them, and switch someone in favor of others. If you plan on regularly doing things certain members will have problems with, you may have a smaller pool of viable combat buddies. “If you just want to make choices your way, you may have to start sending people back to the camp in favor of members who like your decisions,” Knowles acknowledges. “We've tried really hard to keep the choice aspect viable. A couple party members have a big story role, but we've minimized the number of times we dictate anyone you need to have in your party.”

When compared to BioWare's last big hit, *Mass Effect*,

Dragon Age: Origins is less concerned with revolving around one exceptional hero. “The more defined character you have, the more choices are limited to a subset,” Knowles explains. “You have the potential choices that guy would make, and choices outside that range wouldn't be practical.” Since choice plays such a critical role in *Dragon Age*, the story is more about the world and the individual tales it contains, rather than the exploits of a single individual. “It's not about the iconic hero,” asserts Tudge. “You and your party are the heroes. *Mass Effect* was perfect for Shepard, because that character is really developed as a way to tell that story. We consciously made the shift to let you tell your story.”

Making choices and developing characters are only two parts of the successful BioWare equation. Much rests on creating a compelling combat system, since you can't talk your way out of a fight with the tainted dragon controlling legions of darkspawn. When it comes to joining the fight, *Dragon Age: Origins* is an innovative combination of classic concepts and modern conveniences. Drawing the pause-and-play flow from *Baldur's Gate*, players will find an emphasis on strategic thinking, smart party management, and tactical depth.

Since the game isn't bound to the *Dungeons & Dragons* license, limiting concepts like spells-per-day are replaced with magic and abilities on a cooldown timer. While that may sound similar to *World of Warcraft*, gamers needn't worry that *Dragon Age* is chasing



■ Xbox 360



ORIGINS FOR ALL

Even though the new Xbox 360 version of *Dragon Age: Origins* will cost \$49.99, BioWare fans had a harder time deciding whether to buy the PC or console versions. In late 2009, the Xbox 360 version was to be made, but it will otherwise be the same adventure that PC gamers get. In the years since, gamers had a clear favorite: "We are spending a lot of time focusing on making the core PC experience the richest," says Knowles. "Obviously we're not going to have the same level of detail on consoles — that is really good on the PC, and a lot of these screens of the Xbox 360 version are going to need to brace for a loss in quality."



■ A leveling the tone origin story isn't necessarily more accessible to other characters, but they will have to wait until later in the game to see

the mass-market appeal that title has garnered. The infusions of these mechanics are all in service to the strategic nature of the combat.

"We didn't want to come up with a completely bizarre system that people have to struggle to learn," Knowles clarifies. "The goal is to remove elements that may confuse or intimidate gamers who aren't D&D fans, while still retaining the fun parts that core RPG fans have come to expect."

In our opinion, this approach is proving successful. We took control of a party in an area called the Korcari Wilds, and were very impressed with how the game encourages tactical combat while discouraging thoughtless clicking. When faced with a band of darkspawn composed of creatures called Hurllocks and Genlocks, we tried heedlessly charging forward, and died in short order. Only by effectively using our magic, melee skills, and ranged attacks did we defeat the beasts. The process required frequent pauses for battlefield assessment, issuing various orders to individual party members, and resourceful combinations of spells and effects.

As fun as tactical planning can be, combat in *Dragon Age* would move at an agonizing pace if you needed to dictate your party's every move. Gamers expect a certain level of intelligence out of their allies, and *Dragon Age* lets you be as involved or hands-off with their actions

as you want. You can choose from sets of pre-defined behaviors, or you can delve into a party tactics system that lets you set conditions, actions, and priorities.

"It is similar to the gambit system [in *Final Fantasy XII*], but we've pretty much opened up the engine," Knowles says. "It is effectively scripting through a slick interface." If you want a character to use healing magic when an ally falls below 30 percent health, or cast a particular spell against a certain enemy, the party tactics system lets you set those actions. The idea is to let gamers decide how far they want to go down the path of micromanagement; there are options all along the spectrum.

Some users will want to be even more involved in *Dragon Age: Origins*. Maybe controlling your party in an encounter isn't enough and you'd rather create the encounter itself. Continuing in the tradition it established with *Neverwinter Nights*, BioWare is including an extensive toolset with *Dragon Age* that allows you to make your own adventures and share them with the community. "Last time, with *Neverwinter* stuff, we weren't able to host that stuff on our site because there was this legal gray area," laments Zeschuk. "With *Dragon Age*, that's not a problem. We're the ones that own it. That way, we can do a lot more about celebrating the content, categorizing it, and making it available to the fans."

"We want to enable, first off, a great toolset, and a

lot of people to make the content," Muzyka elaborates. "If we build a great toolset, great engine technology, a great universe, and great game content, that's the Holy Grail. And the fans will come. It's very much a trust relationship we have with our community. We believe that they are going to do great things."

This faith in BioWare's fanbase is not misplaced. Given the loyal community of *Neverwinter Nights* players, not to mention the gamers who modded *Baldur's Gate* before the developer even provided appropriate tools, games like *Dragon Age* tend to attract a devoted following. Though the game could potentially reach a broad audience, ultimately it's being made with that group of core users in mind. "We're lucky that people care enough to want a next-gen *Baldur's Gate*," laughs Zeschuk. "With *Dragon Age*, we wanted to keep a foot cemented back in the games that BioWare built in the old days, and to make sure that we have something still there."

"We're not satisfied to just do it again," Muzyka states. "We want to innovate with every game we make. Our goal for *Dragon Age* is to make it the best game we've ever done." Topping *Baldur's Gate*, *Knights of the Old Republic*, and *Mass Effect* may sound impossible, but from what we've seen, it's definitely a goal within reach for *Dragon Age: Origins*. ■■■



EXPANDING CONSOLES

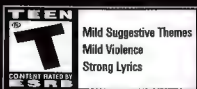
If you plan to play *Dragon Age* on PC, you can browse and download user-generated content with the in-game interface. BioWare wasn't revealing any specifics about how this expanded content might make the transition to consoles, but when asked if some of the best user-made content could find its way onto a disc or DLC, Muzyka slyly responded: "That would be a great idea, wouldn't it?" Zeschuk chimed in, "Yes, that's quite an idea."



■ By using matching sets of armor and weapons, you can gain additional bonuses in combat



■ All characters will perform the beacon mission for the Gray Wardens, but afterwards the world is yours to explore



PLAYSTATION 3



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MIDNIGHT CLUB

湾岸 LOS ANGELES

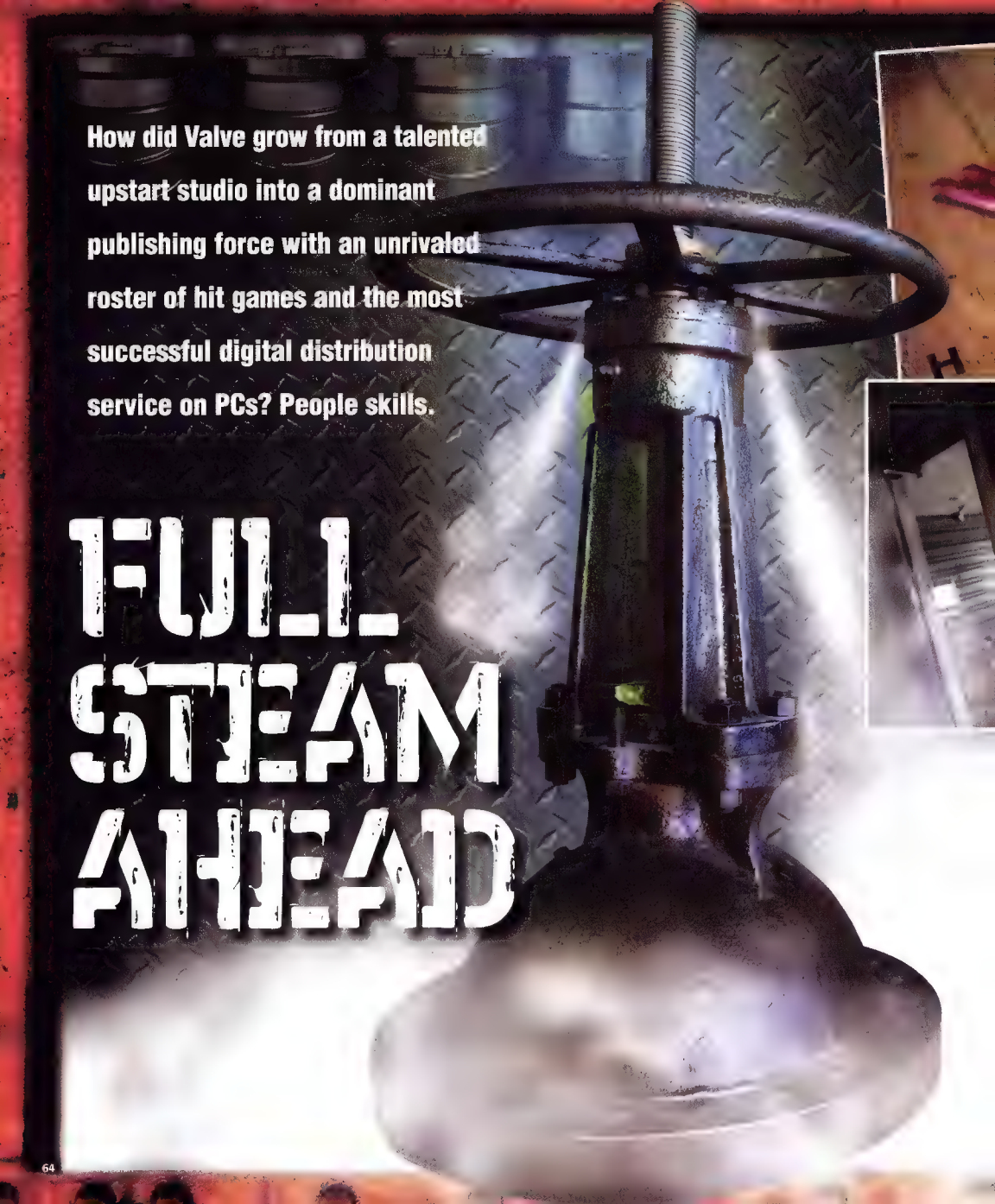


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How did Valve grow from a talented
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roster of hit games and the most
successful digital distribution
service on PCs? People skills.

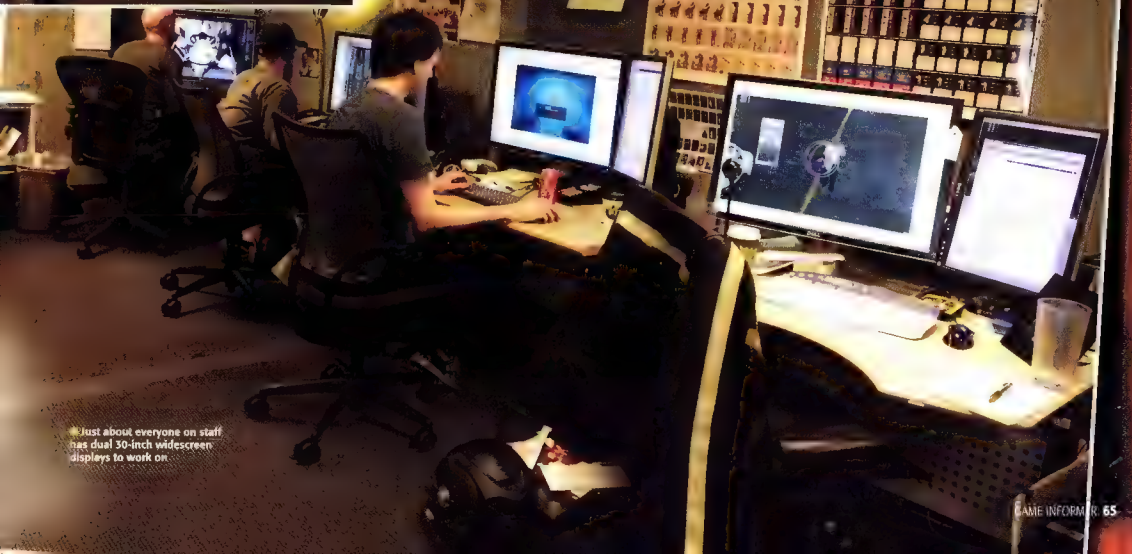
FULL STEAM AHEAD



On November 19, 1998, the first-person shooter scene changed forever. Upstart developer Valve Software released its first product, an ambitious story-driven adventure chronicling a dystopian future in which mankind's curiosity leads the Earth down a terrible path. *Half-Life* was a smashing success from the moment it released, garnering dozens of awards, millions in sales, and a dedicated fanbase that rivals any in gaming. Ten years of amazing PC and console products later, Valve is preparing to launch its next assault on industry conventions in the form of cooperative survival horror shooter *Left 4 Dead*. We recently spoke to several senior Valve staff about the journey so far to see what a decade of genius looks like from the inside.



Photos: Richard Brown



Just about everyone on staff has dual 30-inch widescreen displays to work on.

GABE NEWELL ON... GAMERS

"It seems by and large that gamers are incredibly smart; the average gamer seems to know more about what makes a good game than the average person at a publisher."

The mid-'90s was a golden age of PC gaming. The strategy space exploded with titles like Civilization II and Master of Orion II, while graphic adventures were big business with LucasArts and Sierra inundating gamers with classics like the King's Quest and Monkey Island series. The first-person genre started to pick its stride with Duke Nukem 3D and Doom II. Yet, in the eyes of ex-Microsoft engineer turned Valve managing director Gabe Newell, "it seemed like a lot of the decisions being made were relatively contemptuous of gamers; [some companies] weren't taking them seriously. It was the era where if a double-barreled shotgun was good, a quad-barreled shotgun was better." Refuting this kind of thinking, according to Newell, is what sowed the seeds of Half-Life.



LEFT 4 DEAD

GABE NEWELL ON... RETAIL

"Entertainment as a service means you focus on consumers, not on endcaps."

HALF-LIFE

RELEASED: NOVEMBER 1998

WORLDWIDE RETAIL SALES*: 9,300,000 UNITS (HALF-LIFE),
1,100,000 (OPPOSING FORCES), 800,000 (BLUE SHIFT)

*All retail sales figures are according to Steam, and do not include the game's sales on other platforms.

The platform had already nearly all of Valve's success with Half-Life. An early 1990s revolution in the person-gaming. The inclusion of published 3D models like Duke in the development team lent a weight to Half-Life's storytelling that was genuinely absent in the rest of the genre. As Levine puts it: "We just wanted people to treat the story as part of the game — that they had as much to do to figure out the story as they did to figure out the puzzles." The original Gordon Freeman's adventure only seemed straightforward on the surface, as he was trying to survive an alien invasion and the government knows it's a bad idea. As Levine says, "The enemy was a mad scientist who kept on being who mooks in Gordon's fate for better and for worse, has fueled as much speculation among fans as any other character in gamer culture. Emphasis on this unusual plot and puzzle solving pushed

Half-Life or Unreal, though those titles earned their places in gaming history in other ways. The most striking thing about Half-Life is its expansive legacy. The original shipped game was only the first chapter of years of top-tier content — who expected to get Counter-Strike, Team Fortress, or Day of Defeat for free when they plunked down for the Half-Life box back in 1998? The two expansion packs (Opposing Forces and Blue Shift), which were co-created with developer Gearbox Software, didn't match the runaway success of the original game, but served to tide gamers over during the six-year wait for Half-Life 2.



"When I was playing Doom, I was creating this world and this backstory, I was creating for my actions that later on, [after] talking to the guys at id, weren't really there at all," observes Newell. The idea of seeing things through a mute protagonist's eyes and using that avatar in the game world as a blank canvas resonated with Newell. "The fact that games do that, especially first-person games, was an opportunity that we tried to take advantage of by recognizing the storytelling potential," Newell says.

However, in 1995 the genre hadn't moved beyond gunning down aliens in context-free shooting galleries, by combining a silent main character — in this case Half-Life's Gordon Freeman — with a rich narrative and evocative game world, Valve tapped a powerful current in gamers' psyches. This concept has transfixed millions in the decade since — to the tune of a multi-billion dollar industry.

With Half-Life's breakaway success, Valve instantly positioned itself to fulfill Newell's vision of changing the way that the industry related to its customers. With the help of Team Fortress co-creator Robert Walker and others, the company envisioned Half-Life not just as a standalone game, but as a platform for continued development. "We had a mandate to make Half-Life the best mod platform," says Walker. "At that time, we'd just come off of making mods for Quake, so we had a laundry list of things we wished we could've done as mod-makers and we couldn't."

GABE NEWELL ON GAME DESIGN:

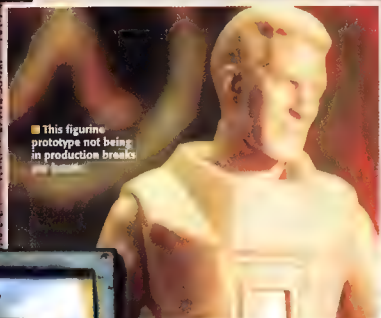
"Most game projects are not started with an understanding of what's fun. They start off with a set of graphics requirements, and then maybe somebody goes off and creates a system for stat grinding."

TEAM FORTRESS

RELEASED: AUGUST 1999

WORLDWIDE RETAIL SALES: SEE HALF-LIFE AND THE ORANGE BOX

People being funny is not a particularly novel idea. But it is an important part of Valve's challenge. Even as a modder in 1994, Valve was so impressed with the great team work that they bred in their on- and off-line staff for years that they decided using the Half-Life engine, the strategy was radically different than anything that existed, with non-traditional elements like the overlander and the pinned-down sort of gameplay for people who enjoy the experience of that sort of thing. They aren't as skilled at twitch aiming or prefer a different role on the battlefield. "One of our lucky accidents back then was realizing that we weren't making the game for ourselves; we were making it for these sets of people with lots of different desires," explains co-creator Robin Walker. "We had a bunch of different people at our LANs; people who were really good at FPS and people who weren't, and we had some really casual players who so wanted a game that we could do it." The popularity indicates the creators' vision resonates well with gamers—enough to keep enthusiasm high despite Team Fortress 2's many delays and eventual release six years later as part of The Orange Box. Today, TF 2 boasts a huge number of enthusiastic players over both Xbox Live and Steam, and the game's regular free updates are a shining practical example of Newell's grand rhetoric about entertainment as a service.



■ This figurine prototype not being in production breaks



■ This monolithic monolith inside Valve is fully featured. The only missing call of fun food behind the Half-Life marked wall

COUNTER-STRIKE

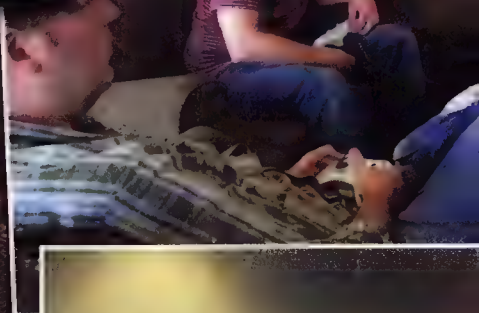
RELEASED: NOVEMBER 2000

WORLDWIDE RETAIL SALES: 4,200,000 (COUNTER-STRIKE)

1,500,000 (XBOX), 2,900,000 (CONDITION ZERO), 2,100,000 (SOURCE)

The second major mod-based official release based on Half-Life, Counter-Strike returns a multiplayer platform to the top. The game's unrelenting beauty—one that kits are complete, there are no keepers, and a skilled player can take you out with a pistol from halfway across a level—make it the godfather of all realistic, skill-intensive competitive shooters. A clever upgrade system, where players earn money for performance during a match that can be used to buy equipment for the next round, adds another additional layer of strategy. When Valve's original marketing program showed an order of magnitude more people playing the very first Counter-Strike than even anything else, project manager Erik Johnson realized this game was something special. "It's like 'COUNTER-STRIKE, a thousand people! What the hell's going on here?'" he remembers. "I got it and played the game, and it crashed all the time. You can't tell players apart because the only difference between [counter-terrorists and terrorists] is if they have shoes. Add in the 'Call of the Time' bosses of the mod and the patch-black early versions of the maps, the Valve Staff

couldn't stop playing Counter-Strike. The title has survived several re-imaginings and re-releases, from an Xbox port to the single-player-focused Condition Zero and the modernized Counter-Strike: Source. Every version has seen massive sales as well as complaints from a rabid playerbase, but Valve marketing director Doug Lombardi tells us that the latest rendition, Counter-Strike: Source, has just recently passed up the original Counter-Strike in current popularity based on statistics about games played over Steam.





HALF-LIFE 2

RELEASED: NOVEMBER 2004
WORLDWIDE RETAIL SALES: 6,500,000 (HALF-LIFE 2),
1,400,000 (EPISODE ONE)

Valve's Eric Johnson laughingly remembers E3 2003. "It was a shock when the show opened hundreds of people sprinting to get in line for six hours [to see Half-Life 2] was a pretty cool moment for us. And then we think that that year, it was worth the wait. Half-Life 2 finally unleashed on the public in November 2004. Powered by the developer's brand-new Source engine, the game's visuals and physics were unmatched at the time. It carefully crafted gameplay from the sunrises to storytelling to battles that fueled Hollywood's biggest blockbusters. Source mods rolling in from the moment it launched. Half-Life 2 was capable of expressing a dark, steaming atmosphere a line for video games proved an amazingly useful tool in creating worlds in and sending us back to Half-Life 2's dystopian future. Half-Life 2 raised the bar further in all the same ways that its predecessor did, plus some more. It's about a mile longer in releasing the best of its increased episodic content. Episode One launched a year and a half after the original, but having two episodic releases to date is a much better deal for gamers than waiting another six years for the next full-blown sequel. Third-party mods like Garry's Mod, a physics sandbox... which was popular enough that a creator eventually developed a priced version sold through Steam... powered Half-Life 2 and Source were just as capable a platform for further development as the original. For a surprise, mod Half-Life 2 again and grab all the updates through Steam. Thanks to Valve's continuing support, a look under the hood, and it still seems like that you probably shouldn't be worried of seeing a working 3D rendering engine and a new one in the pipeline that almost never happens.

GABE NEWELL ON...
"WHEN IT'S DONE":

"I think most games in the industry, across the board, would benefit from an extra six months of refinement."

GABE NEWELL ON... MAKING MONEY:
"The marginal return on investment on the trailing 10 percent of game investments is much, much higher than any of the investments you've made before."



The G-Modding of Half-Life 2 provides a look at the game's engine and a look at the game's engine.

FLYING SOLO

Following the success of Half-Life and its spinoff products, Valve's rise to prominence was threatened by a sequence of unfortunate events. Two in particular had the potential to sink the company: a major lawsuit between Valve and Sierra, and a dramatic electronic break-in that resulted in Half-Life 2's source code being leaked.

In August of 2002, the developer filed suit in federal court against publishing partner Sierra, alleging that Sierra was violating Valve's copyright by selling so-called cyber-café licenses for Valve products. After more than a year of legal wrangling, Sierra filed a counterclaim contending that Newell and others at Valve had deliberately misled the publisher about the creation of digital distribution service Steam, and had cost Sierra money by circumventing the retail channel.

These types of legal shenanigans can easily break a company. Millions of dollars and the intellectual-property rights to most of Valve's work were at stake—the loss of either would conceivably sink the developer. However, Sierra and Valve ultimately settled out of court in April 2006. On the face of it, Valve got what it wanted: Sierra immediately stopped all retail distribution of Valve products, and terminated all cyber-café licenses. Neither company released further specifics of the agreement. Valve went on to partner with Electronic Arts in July 2005 for future retail releases, an arrangement that has persisted to this day.

The well-publicized source code leak occurred in September 2003, when a German hacker cracked Valve's internal network and stole an early, playable version of Half-Life 2. Source code and pre-release software is zealously guarded in the game industry for good reasons—with access to your source code, rival companies could theoretically copy everything from gameplay innovations to new rendering techniques. Furthermore, companies are forever condemned about their image with consumers. An unpolished, buggy, unbalanced game being released on the Internet can turn potential customers off, despite being obviously unfinished.

The hacker was arrested and eventually sentenced in 2006. Newell credits Valve's fans with his apprehension, saying, "It was the community that found the guy that was arrested and put in jail for the break-in. That's the kind of support that we get by operating in a responsible way." Valve eventually recovered, and Half-Life 2 was released in November 2004 to rave reviews and huge sales.

As most gamers undoubtedly know, Valve's recent history consists of one unqualified success after another. Half-Life 2 won dozens of awards and cruised to millions of sales. The Orange Box, which contains Half-Life 2, the long-awaited Team Fortress 2, and the incredibly innovative Portal, brought Valve's genius to console as well as PC—with none of the dumbing-down or other flaws that often mar PC-to-console ports. With the continued success of Steam, loyal fanbases for several franchises, and Left 4 Dead on the horizon, there aren't many companies with futures as bright as Valve's. Given the quality of the releases the developer's delivered so far, that's a prospect as bright for gamers as it is for Gabe Newell.

THE ORANGE BOX

RELEASED: OCTOBER 2007
WORLDWIDE RETAIL SALES: 3,000,000

Of the best values in gaming—Half-Life 2, Team Fortress 2, and Portal are bundled with the dubs of Episode Two, Team Fortress 2, and Portal in a single box—The Orange Box also marks Valve's first foray into the current generation of consoles. In a simultaneous launch on Xbox 360, we're first to see how they open. The console version was just as good as the PC one. It's hard to use too much hyperbole when describing The Orange Box: Even though Half-Life 2 had already been released three years ago, it's still an all-time classic. Team Fortress 2 is a fantastic reworking of the original's inclusive vision for competitive multiplayer FPS, and Portal is one of the most innovative and entertaining games to date.



1 Left 4 Dead impressed us so much at E3 that we named it our Game of the Show, and it has only improved in the intervening months. Valve unwrapped another layer of secrecy from around the game when we visited their offices recently, and we gladly dove back into the zombie apocalypse through another level on the Xbox 360 version, as well as getting our hands on the versus mode, has shot our expectations through the roof.

Using the 360 gamepad to slaughter zombies feels better than we expected. The framerate is solid, and load times are not onerous. Analog movement makes exploring tight-quarters a little easier, and Left 4 Dead's

design doesn't call for pinpoint accuracy like Counter-Strike does. The main difference between this control scheme and standard FPS gamepad controls is the bumpers' functions. One is the crouch function, which is incredibly important since you're often trying to "stack up" firepower against the horde. The other is a quick 180 degree flip, which is amazingly helpful since the dynamic spawn system often results in zombies coming at you from all directions.

Versus mode, which hasn't been playable outside of Valve's offices, lives up to the developer's pedigree. In this competitive gametype, two teams of four switch off turns as zombies and survivors, scoring points based on progress through the level and health

remaining at the end should the survivors make it through. Gameplay for the humans is nearly identical to the standard cooperative mode, with the exception that a dead player can't be revived in a rescue class and players control some of the zombies. Undead players, however, have a much different task.

Upon spawning as one of the special zombies (with incapacitating powers like the Smoker's restricting torque or the Hunter's leaping pin), the infected team starts plotting the survivors' demise. The ability to climb certain walls allows zombie players to set up ambushes from unexpected directions, and makes you think about the maps in a different way. Learning the level layouts is crucial here, as locating chokepoints the survivors are forced to pass through and places good for blind approaches makes taking the humans much easier.

Like all good competitive games, the versus mode in L4D quickly engenders a camaraderie between teammates. Clever mechanics like zombie players being able to see humans through walls if they have clear markings, letting zombie players know which walls are climbable, encourage tactical thinking and elevates the gameplay world a shooting gallery. Versus in L4D is completely unique and plays like nothing else in video games – the Valve polish we expect is evident. Left 4 Dead is set to be one of the top releases this holiday season without question. ■■■■



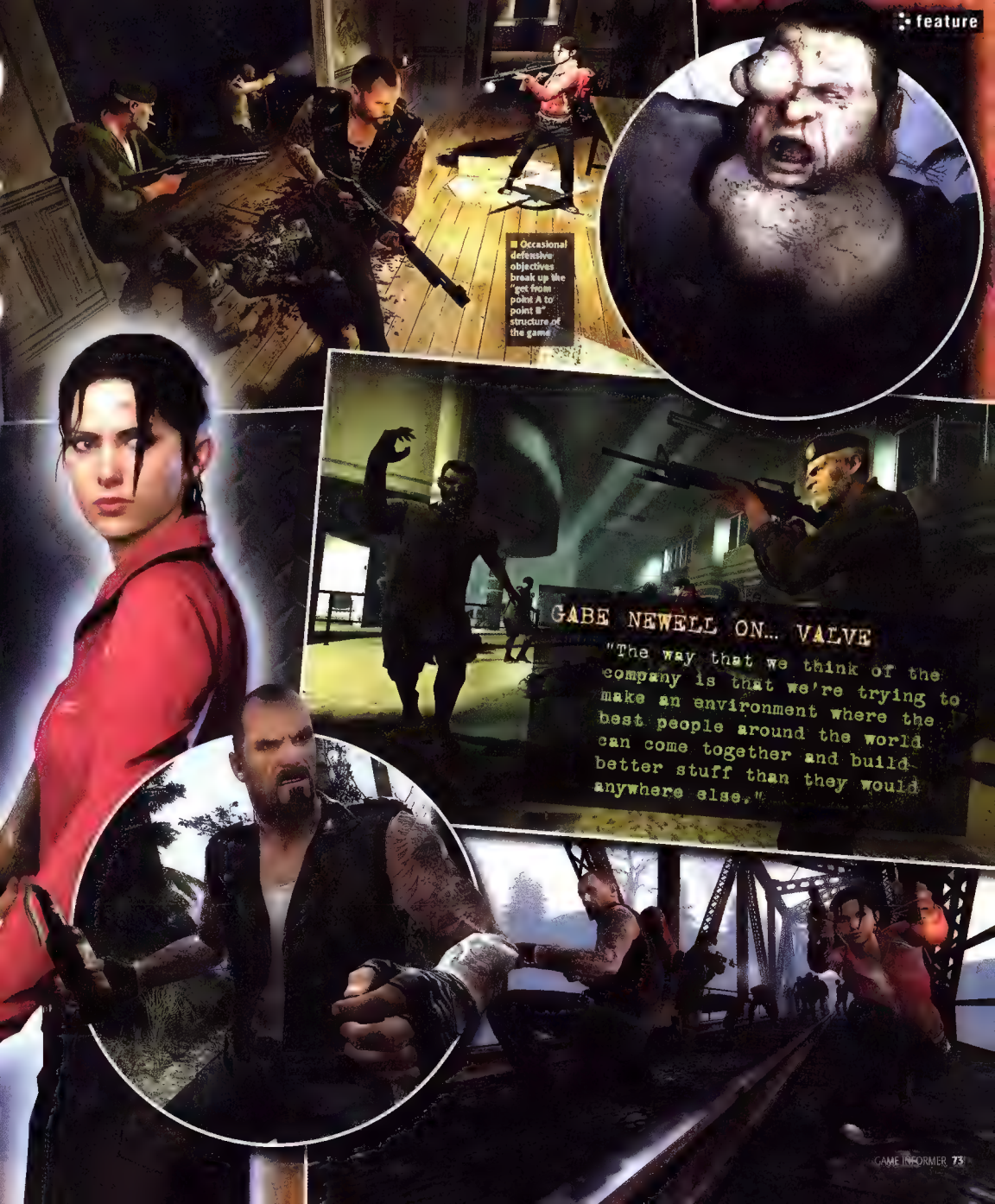
LEFT 4 DEAD

RELEASE: NOVEMBER 19
 WORLDWIDE RETAIL SALES: PROJECTED AT 10-30
 PERCENT HIGHER THAN THE ORANGE BOX



It's a horrible, horrible place to be stalked by zombies in





Occasional defensive objectives break up the "get from point A to point B" structure of the game

GABE NEWELL ON... VALVE

"The way that we think of the company is that we're trying to make an environment where the best people around the world can come together and build better stuff than they would anywhere else."



PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



PLAYSTATION 3

Killzone 2

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

MULTIPLAYER REVEALED

Though we've seen Killzone 2's single-player offerings, multiplayer has remained a mystery until now. Blending the class-based gameplay of the Team Fortress and Battlefield series with the level progression seen in Call of Duty 4, the team hopes to combine the best features to date for a single unified experience.

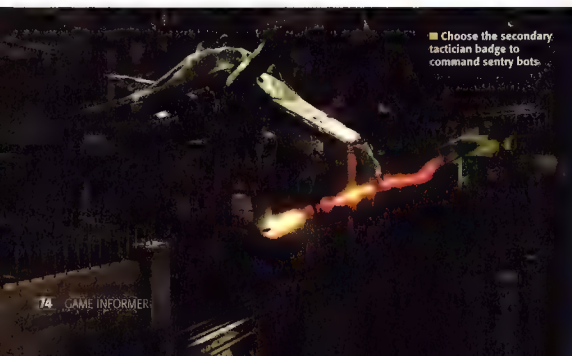
Up to 32 players will face off on eight different maps suited for various army sizes. Bots can be enlisted to fill out an online match with more troops or get some offline practice, as well. Players are split into four-person squads to make larger matches more organized. All squadmates can see each other's health and special abilities, and can spawn on the squad leader.

The five mission types can be set up in a dynamic round format where, for example, teams will compete to capture the flag, then take on an assassination mission, and finally race to destroy crucial enemy struc-

tures. The team that takes two out of three wins. Of course, standard deathmatch is still an option.

Every match contributes to players' overall experience rankings, of which there are 12. Around 50 different medals and ribbons will be awarded for battlefield achievements and over 100 different in-depth stats are recorded for every player, which can also be analyzed at Killzone.com. The leaderboards are just as deep, with all-time, monthly, weekly, and even daily records. You can even search out class-specific rankings like the best medic, for example.

Clan support is a major focus this time around, with match and tournament scheduling also available on the Killzone website. Clans will earn Valor for victories, which can be used as currency to bet against other clans. Tournaments support up to 256 clans, so you can imagine how high the stakes will get ■■■■



BEHOLD THE BADGES

Rather than choose a set loadout of abilities, players mix and match primary and secondary badges to create a custom class (e.g. a medic engineer). Online avatars take on the look of the primary badge. To keep things balanced, both the ISA and Helghest sides have access to all of the badges listed below.

ASSAULT

Primary: Armor becomes twice as strong

Secondary: Temporary speed boost

ENGINEER

Primary: Create automated turret

Secondary: Repair turrets, mounted guns, etc.

MEDIC

Primary: Revive teammates

Secondary: Throw health packs

RIFLEMAN

Primary: Wields a larger variety of weapons

Secondary: Any other secondary badge can be equipped

SABOTEUR

Primary: Dress in an enemy uniform

Secondary: Toss sticky proximity mine

SCOUT

Primary: Turn almost completely invisible

Secondary: All enemies within field of view show up on teammates' maps

TACTICIAN

Primary: Throw a smoke grenade that acts as a new spawn point

Secondary: Call in support from floating sentry bots



■ Pizza delivery is even more dangerous in the future



■ "They'll never see us in these sweet cloaks!"



■ A mission strategy is available for both single player and multiplayer, though it will likely be more console offerings.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE PC, UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE CONSOLE)
> **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS STUDIOS > **RELEASE** 2009

ISLAND IN THE SUN

Our perception of Operation Flashpoint 2 has been restrained excitement, mostly due to the fact that we've heard a lot of big picture ideas and seen some target images, but no real screenshots or gameplay. That's all changed now. The developers finally unveiled the gameplay and all of these screenshots are actual in-game images. While the game has a ways to go, the demo helped us understand how the big picture concepts are coming together.

The game takes place on a real life island, now renamed Skira, whose ownership is in dispute among China, Russia, and Japan due to its possible oil reserves. Since the island's terrain is less than exciting, the team searched for another one to take its place. They found the perfect spot in Alaska's Aleutian island chain that contains a volcano, swamplands, and plenty of mountains. Using NASA topography data, they replicated all 136 square miles and filled it with loads of Chinese military forces and bases.

In OF 2's storyline, China breaks the fragile agreement and invades Skira. As a Russian ally, the U.S. military offers its support. In the first mission, players take the role of a spec ops soldier and sneak onto the island under the cover of night to recon the

area and take out anti-air forces. The next morning, you switch to an infantry soldier as part of a large-scale assault on the beach. If you succeeded during the previous mission without raising an alarm, a significantly smaller amount of enemy forces will greet you the next day. As U.S. forces push further, they'll hit a wall of Chinese tanks and have to retreat to fortify their position. Throughout the course of the game, you'll gradually make your way from the west side of Skira to the east, adopting various roles along the way ranging from foot soldier to helicopter pilot to commander.

The brief gameplay tease showed an early approximation of the beachhead assault. The developers stormed the beach with a large force of soldiers and armored vehicles. Using the trucks as cover, they eliminated the surprised enemies one by one. To show off the massive scale of the world, they looked down the coast to display the miles-long view. Several hundred yards away, we saw little green dots that looked like trees... until they started moving towards us. A few sniper rifle shots took care of business as a few choppers flew overhead. All of a sudden, a massive explosion lit up the hilltop base in the distance and the brief demo came to a close. What's it like to have that kind of firepower at your fingertips? We'll let you know as soon as we find out. ■ ■ ■



■ Over 30 real life U.S. and Chinese military vehicles appear in the game, accurately rendered down to the last rivet.



Combat

Codemasters is quick to point out that the firefights in Operation Flashpoint 2 will most likely happen at rifle range rather than up close and personal. This is due to the fact that most enemies will blow your arm off before you can deliver a rifle butt to their heads. While most serious war games shy away from gore to earn a T rating, OF 2 is embracing it as part of a quest for realism. If players survive getting shot in the first place, they'll have to find a medic or call in an avac before they bleed out.



■ A mission editor is available for both single player and multiplayer, though the PC version will likely be more robust than console offerings.



Multiplayer

Depending on what platform you're using, anywhere from 8 to 16 players will duke it out with the help of dozens of AI-controlled "agents" to fill out the battlefield. Modes include deathmatch, a battle for control of map points, and an attack-and-defend setup that pits a smaller special ops team against a larger standard infantry. New character classes can be unlocked by playing through the single-player campaign, opening up your strategic options. But you don't have to go it alone since 2 and 4-player co-op is available for the entire campaign for console and PC, respectively.

Weapons

Over 70 real life weapons are included in the game, all supported by a realistic ballistic system. This simulates surface penetration based on material and armor values. You can even select different ammo types, depending on whether you prefer knockdown power or armor piercing traits, for example. Players can carry two large weapons: a pistol, and a knife. If one of these happens to be a Javelin missile launcher, you'll have to save that one shot until it matters. Just like in real life, remaining enemies will follow the smoke trail back to your position, so be sure to hightail it out of there after firing.



You're invited to a
SingStar Party at my house

singstar®

Vol. 2

When: Friday at 10pm

Signature
Your BS

Some of the battles got
more heated than others.

This girl scored so high, confetti shot
out of the ceiling. True story. Check out
the video on My SingStar online.

She couldn't remember my name
to Black* by Amy Winehouse.

Don't stand so close to me
let the real videos play on a loop.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Lyrics
Sexual Themes
Use of Alcohol
Use of Tobacco



ONLY ON
PLAYSTATION 3



PLAYSTATION Network

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No girl can resist singing "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." We downloaded the song off the PlayStation Network to prove it.



This guy was unstoppable! A legend! He scored over 8,000 points on all 50 songs!



To see more Party pics & videos, visit www.singstargame.com





■ The downhill shortcut

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Fuel

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE)
 > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS
 > **DEVELOPER** ASOBO STUDIOS
 > **RELEASE** 2009

THE INCONVENIENT TRUTH ABOUT RACING

Remember the game *Grand Raid Offroad* that was announced a few years back but never came out? Developer Asobo studios worked out a deal with Codemasters, ditched the racing MMO theme for a more interesting concept, beefed up their in-house engine, and changed the title to the more succinct *Fuel*. From what we've seen, it was the right move.

Extreme weather and drought has ruined large swaths of the planet, and petroleum-based fuel is running out. In response, several adrenaline junkies are returning to these abandoned areas to race for fun and fuel supply winnings. The game world is a staggering 5,000 square miles, with 100,000 miles worth of roads and tracks filled with deserts, mountains, forests, salt flats, dried out river beds, beaches, and abandoned roads. Asobo has also faithfully recreated such landmarks as Grand Canyon, Mount Rushmore, and Yellowstone National Park, using satellite data.

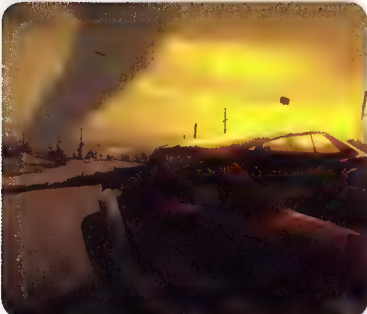
Players can freely explore this massive world to discover landmarks, salvage parts and vehicles, find liveness, and complete side missions like rescuing people. If you just want to focus solely on burning through the race career, you can always call in a helicopter to instantly transport you to the next event.

Vehicles include pretty much anything with wheels: dirt bikes, ATVs, 4X4s, muscle cars, SUVs, dragsters, monster trucks, the list goes on. Some races are confined to a specific vehicle type, but others are completely open, allowing for some interesting alternate routes. For example, a sports car can speed down a winding mountain road faster than, say, a dirt bike or a monster truck. But instead of taking the standard route, the bike can zip straight down the slope and weave around the trees, while the monster truck can just flatten them all on the way down.

What really sets *Fuel* apart, however, is the extreme weather factors that can happen any time in or out of a race. Players will charge through thunderstorms, blizzards, sandstorms, and even the occasional tornado. Fortunately, your onboard GPS will constantly update with the best tornado-free route to the finish line.

Online multiplayer is seamlessly integrated into the single player world. You can just explore the environment with your buddies, or meet up at one of the numerous check-ins for a structured race. There is even talk of several multiplayer-specific challenges scattered throughout the world.

While all of this sounds great, we're extremely interested in getting some hands-on time soon to check out the gameplay, scope out the world, and, of course, drive straight into a tornado. ■■■



■ Motion lines make everything look more exciting



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Rage

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** id SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** TBA

ANGER FOR EVERYONE

■ "Sand People always walk single file to hide their numbers."

Since it was revealed at last year's QuakeCon, details on id Software's *Rage* have been as hard to find as \$3-a-gallon gas. The trailers have shown a gritty post-apocalyptic world, filled with hard-edged drifters, devil-may-care drivers and pipe-swinging mutants, but aside from some impressive (but canned) gameplay footage, we haven't seen much of it.

Rage is being simultaneously developed on all of the major platforms (and Macs, zing!), and id says it's not playing favorites. "The same artists and designers, the same

textures, the same models, the same levels that are on the PC will be on all the platforms," says lead designer Tim Willits. "To say that we have a lead platform is not quite right. We have 360 controllers hooked up to our PCs, because it's just much easier than having a PS3 controller. But we are definitely focused on making one game that's enjoyable on all of the platforms."

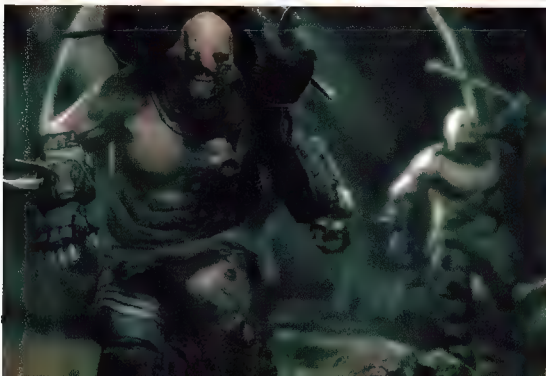
So is it basically *Doom* with cars? Will it feature an open world or more traditional level-based action? "It's more of a first-person game that has these other elements that you have to do in order to complete

the game, but they're built into the whole fiction," says id CEO Todd Hollenshead. "It's not like you go into the race track and magically you appear in the car."

Players can exit their vehicles at will, exploring the vast desert areas on foot if they desire. As Hollenshead puts it, that might not be the best use of your time, or your talents. "Getting between settlements is a skill that's in demand in the *Rage* universe, so to demonstrate your chops out on the racetrack puts you as a person who's in high esteem or high regard within the settlement area. These things fit together like that

within the universe."

We couldn't help but wonder if id is concerned that its "when it's done" philosophy could lessen the game's visual punch by the time it's eventually released. "People always like to talk about the future, and people also like to speculate," Willits countered. "The games that we have at id are great. It's going to play great. There are a lot of very successful games with very old technology. . . We can't constantly look at the future and worry about it and make changes and make changes, because we'll never finish." ■■■■



■ Driving will figure in to official races and as a way to get around faster



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

The Last Remnant

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX
> DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX > RELEASE NOVEMBER 20 (XBOX 360), TBA (PS3)

PRO-UNION

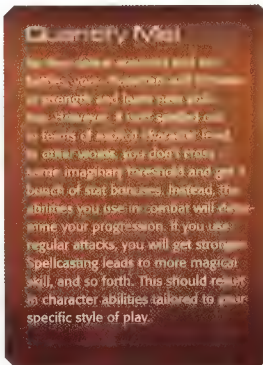
The role-playing genre has a lot of traditions, but some of them are more important than others. The Last Remnant is testing those boundaries by doing a few things differently, particularly with the battle system, which we finally had a chance to try for ourselves. Even though the action still takes place in a turn-based format, the battlefield is far from conventional.

Your characters are grouped into unions, which are clusters of soldiers that take orders as a unit. For instance, any command you give Rush (the protagonist) applies to every character in his division. You won't control him individually unless you have him grouped into a union all by himself, which is a major tactical disadvantage. Speaking of tactical disadvantages, one thing we're not sold on is the presence of vanable battle commands; the orders you can give your unions depends on context. For instance, unless your hit points are less than half gone, the game may not present you with the ability to heal yourself. It isn't random, and it seems like you can always count on certain offensive commands, but the lack of consistency could hurt the game's tactical potential.

While the actions you take are obviously important, positioning your unions is also critical. When you move to attack another union, a few things can happen. If your foe also selected you as a target, the two unions become deadlocked. This restricts your movement, limiting the other unions you can attack. Alternately, if your enemy selected a different target, you may intercept them. You still attack each other, but you have more freedom to

engage nearby unions. A degree of luck is involved as well, since you can also be intercepted on the way to your designated target.

There are a few nice touches on the periphery of the battle system. Your troops will be restored to full health after each encounter, which lets you focus your full strength on the fight at hand. Plus, if you want even more of a challenge, you can round up multiple encounters (similar to Blue Dragon) to increase the value of your rewards. We'll have to wait for the final build to see how all of these elements work together, but if nothing else, The Last Remnant will be a deviation from the standard RPG formula. ■ ■ ■



LL COOL J, BEFORE



"WITH OLD SPICE SWAGGER, I'M DOIN' IT AND DOIN'
IT AND DOIN' IT WELL. BEFORE SWAGGER, I WAS
DOIN' IT AND DOIN' IT AND DOIN' IT JUST OKAY.
THANKS, OLD SPICE." -LL COOL J

Old Spice
Swagger

THE SCENT THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Shaun White Snowboarding

> STYLE | PLAYER ACTIONSPORTS' RISKY UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE
 > PUBLISHER | UBISOFT > DEVELOPER | UBISOFT
 > RELEASE | NOVEMBER 11

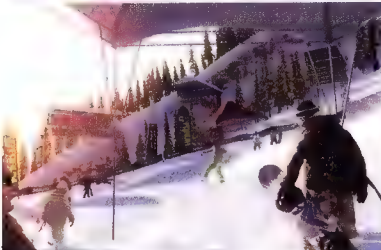
FIRST TRACKS



■ A new sweet buddy, shredding the gnar



■ A much cooler way for Atréy to get to the Southern Oracle



■ Broken legs, bro. Summer

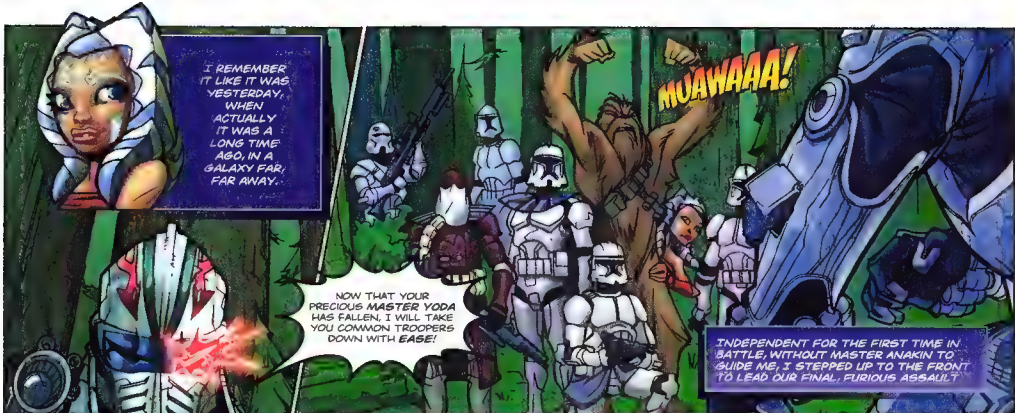
Snowboarding has come a long way in its short lifespan. Now the most popular snow sport in the world, snowboarding even has its own ambassador, much like skateboarding has Tony Hawk. Shaun White's domination of the sport has spilled his popularity into the mainstream, which makes him the perfect person to star in Ubisoft's new action-sports title.

Like *SSX 3*, the big philosophy behind *Shaun White Snowboarding* is the open mountains. Players can carve, shred, and explore real-life, true-to-scale mountains. Getting down the mountain is a no-brainer — you strap in and ride. But players can also unhook from the bindings and walk around to session a fun rail or line up the perfect run to a jump. The chairlift is your basic navigation tool for going up the mountain. You can ride in real-time, or jump off once you spot a cool run on the way up. Thrill-seeking types can ride a helicopter to the top of the mountain.

Co-op is all the rage this generation, and *Shaun White Snowboarding* allows friends to join up and shred the mountain together. This mode already supports an impressive 16 players, but Ubisoft is pushing to get that number to 32 by the time the game ships. Players can participate in events together, challenge each other, or even have a classic snowball fight.

Like action-sport titles that follow the same philosophy (*Skate*, *Amped*, etc.), *Shaun White Snowboarding* is all about the controls. At a recent event we checked out one of the mountains, and there was an evident learning curve for the control mechanics. The system is much like *Skate*, where one stick controls one aspect of the rider and the other stick takes care of the rest. The build that we played felt a little clunky, especially when it came to jibbing a rail. The game is still in development, so we hope to see some tightening of the controls.

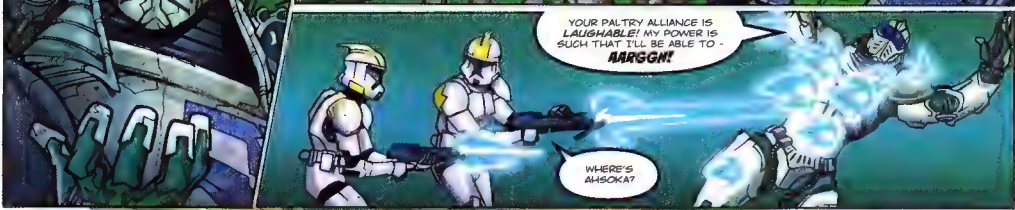
On the content side, *Shaun White* is delivering in a big way. The game features 500 something pieces of gear for the player to choose from. There are also four full mountains to explore. While that may not sound like a lot, your mind will change when you walk around one. Add the avalanches, video recording, and more, and *Shaun White Snowboarding* is a title action-sport fans should keep on their radars ■■■



I REMEMBER IT LIKE IT WAS YESTERDAY, WHEN ACTUALLY IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO, IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY...

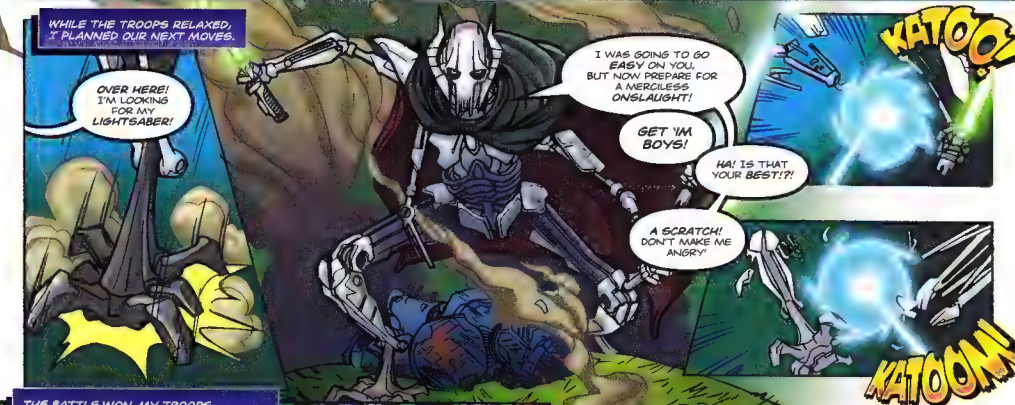
NOW THAT YOUR PRECIOUS MASTER YODA HAS FALLEN, I WILL TAKE YOU COMMON TROOPERS DOWN WITH EASE!

INDEPENDENT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN BATTLE, WITHOUT MASTER ANAKIN TO GUIDE ME, I STEPPED UP TO THE FRONT TO LEAD OUR FINAL, FURIOUS ASSAULT!



YOUR PALTRY ALLIANCE IS LAUGHABLE! MY POWER IS SUCH THAT I'LL BE ABLE TO -
AARGGH!

WHERE'S AHSOKA?



WHILE THE TROOPS RELAXED, I PLANNED OUR NEXT MOVES.

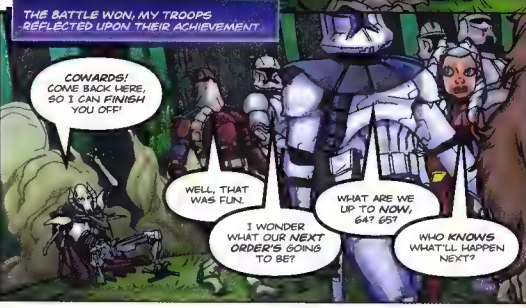
OVER HERE! I'M LOOKING FOR MY LIGHTSABER!

I WAS GOING TO GO EASY ON YOU, BUT NOW PREPARE FOR A MERCILESS ONSLAUGHT!

GET 'EM BOYS!

HA! IS THAT YOUR BEST?!

A SCRATCH! DON'T MAKE ME ANGRY!



THE BATTLE WON, MY TROOPS REFLECTED UPON THEIR ACHIEVEMENT

COWARDS! COME BACK HERE, SO I CAN FINISH YOU OFF!

WELL, THAT WAS FUN.

WHAT ARE WE UP TO NOW, 647 657?

I WONDER WHAT OUR NEXT ORDER'S GOING TO BE?

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Mortal Kombat Vs. DC Universe

STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER MIDWAY > RELEASE NOVEMBER

NOT AS STRANGE AS IT SEEMS

We'll be honest. Our first reaction to a fighting game pitting Mortal Kombat characters against DC superheroes was utter confusion. But after getting some hands-on time with the game, we're excited to see how the final game turns out. Players who haven't tried the series since MK II or III will feel right at home here with the quasi-2D design and standard punch, kick, uppercut, sweep kick base move set for all characters. Plus, it's fun to see what Midway can get away with in terms of T-rated gore.

Everyone's seen Scorpion burn opponents down to the bone with his fire breath. Well, now he just crisps enemies as they flail around. Works for us. The award for coolest fatality so far, however, goes to Joker. As the opponent stands there in the trademark MK

daze, Joker fires a fake pistol that deploys a flag with the word "bang" written on it. This snaps the victim out of it and they perform some kind of "what the hell's wrong with this guy?" mime. Joker then whips out a real revolver and shoots them in the face.

In addition to traditional special moves, players can utilize minggaime combos for over-the-top attacks. *Klose Kombat* brings the camera in for a *Fight Night*-style view and prompts the offensive player to hit one of the four face buttons. If the defensive player manages to match the button, he'll perform a counter. *Freefall Kombat* uses the same matching system to determine who comes out on top as both fighters plummet off the cliffs found in many arenas. *Test Your Might* returns from MK 1, except now it happens mid-battle. In some stages, you can ram

your opponent through a series of walls. The button mashing competition will determine how much damage the defending fighter receives. Additionally, players build up a rage meter by using special moves or receiving damage. Once it's full, you can trigger rage, which renders your attacks unblockable and more damaging.

Specific plot details are still under wraps, but the primary career mode lets you choose whether to experience the story from the MK or DC side. This scripted mode has you play as every character on your selected team against the rival roster until you finally meet the mysterious final boss. If you want to, you can climb the traditional arcade battle ladder as a single character and get his or her specific ending as well. Online play is designed to resemble the

COMPLETE CHARACTER ROSTER

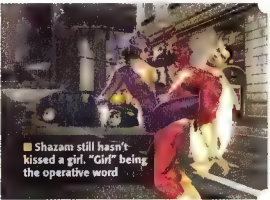
MORTAL KOMBAT

- Scorpion
- Sub-Zero
- Sonya
- Jax
- Shang Tsung
- Liu Kang
- Raiden
- Kitana
- Kano
- Baraka
- Shao Kahn

DC UNIVERSE

- Batman
- Superman
- Catwoman
- Green Lantern
- The Joker
- Shazam
- The Flash
- Wonder Woman
- Deathstroke
- Lex Luthor
- Darkseid

arcade days of yore, supporting lobbies where you can talk smack before heading into a match. You can even watch for people who are winning multiple matches in a row and get in a queue to take them on. Unranked matches are available for honing your chops, but you'll have to join ranked matches if you want to climb the leaderboards and prove once and for all that you're the best Sub-Zero player in the world. ■■■



■ Shazam still hasn't kissed a girl. "Girl" being the operative word.



■ Never gets old, does it?



■ Liu Kang loves his new wrestling championship belt.

GEARS OF WAR 2

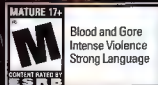
HOPE RUNS DEEP 11.07.08

www.gearssofwar.com



Microsoft
game studios

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Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

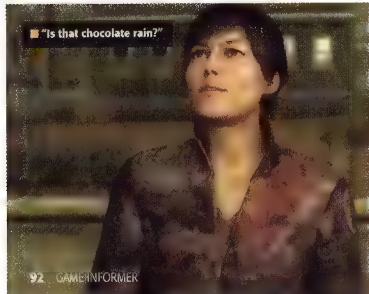




ONLY ON
PLAYSTATION 3



■ "Who ordered the sexy?"



■ "Is that chocolate rain?"

PLAYSTATION 3

Heavy Rain

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER QUANTIC DREAM > RELEASE 2009

GET YOUR FEET WET

For two years, Heavy Rain has only been a name to most gamers. The game debuted with an amazing tech demo at E3 in 2006, and then went completely dark. Despite the lack of information, Heavy Rain's realistic character models and animation made it a hot topic for discussion and speculation. After seeing the game in action recently, we can finally stop guessing — about some things, at least.

Like Indigo Prophecy (Quantic Dream's last title), Heavy Rain strives to be a cinematic, story-driven experience. It focuses on several characters in what seems to be an episodic format, but all plot specifics are being kept tightly under wraps. Early game art features the subtitle "The Origami Killer," which suggests that the plot will revolve around a serial killer and those involved in the investigation. The demo we witnessed supports that assumption, though Quantic Dream insists that the scenario was developed only to illustrate the game's main concepts.

The demo opened with a woman named Madison riding her motorcycle to a taxidermist's shop because the owner fits

the Origami Killer's profile. She breaks into the house and discovers numerous corpses (some even stuffed and posed like mannequins), and then the taxidermist comes home. This is where the game's story showcases its ability to adapt to player choice. The segment can play out in numerous ways: Madison can flee the house (though she may inadvertently alert the taxidermist, resulting in a chase), she can hide and call the police, and she can even find weapons in the house and kill the man herself. None of the choices are wrong; each path has distinct differences, advantages, and disadvantages. The goal is to give players the freedom to control the details of the story, though certain elements of the overarching plot will remain constant regardless.

If you had to assign a genre classification to Heavy Rain, it is probably best described as an adventure. However, it is significantly different from the point-and-



click titles that usually carry the name. The controls are designed to be contextual, allowing you to intuitively interact with your surroundings, whatever they may be. For instance, pressing up on the right stick might make you inspect a mailbox or peek through a window, depending on where you're standing. Quick-time events are also a part of the action, though they are used in a more natural and less intrusive way than usual.

We can't wait to hear more about Heavy Rain. The story promises to be one of the title's big selling points, but it's also the biggest mystery. It would be nice to have more details, but we're pretty sure it won't go the Indigo Prophecy route and have sentient beings from the Internet try to take over the world. ■ ■ ■

GAME OVER?

in the interest of developing a continuing narrative, you will never see a "game over" screen in Heavy Rain. That doesn't mean that the stakes are low, since characters can still die. If Madison gets caught by the murderous taxidermist, the story just continues without her. Theoretically, this means you could get to the end with every main character dead, but how the game would handle that possibility remains to be seen.

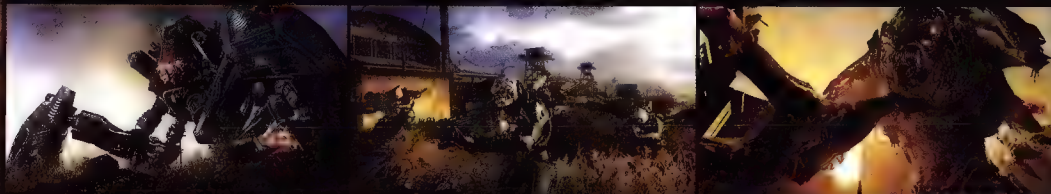


■ "And get a haircut!"

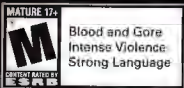
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XBOX 360

Ninja Blade

PLATFORM: XBOX 360 > PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
 > DEVELOPER: FROMSOFTWARE > RELEASE: SPRING 2009

NINJAS > DOCTORS

Ninjas fit video games like a glove, a fact that Microsoft and FromSoftware haven't forgotten since their last project, *Tenchu*. Hopefully this time around they'll produce a better critical and consumer reception. *Ninja Blade* takes place atop the skyscrapers of Tokyo as ninja Ken Ogawa battles monstrous former humans infected with a horrible new virus. The inspiration for this disease? Bird flu.

"While [bird flu] hadn't infected any

humans yet, many thought that it was only a matter of time — and ultimately it didn't take long before humans were infected," says producer Masanori Takeuchi. "I thought, 'What if there was an even more powerful disease? There would be intense fear of it spreading.'"

Players can expect traditional ninja tools of the trade like katanas and grappling hooks mixed with modern weapons like grenades and more mystical powers. *Ninja Vision* reveals enemy weak points with the tradeoff of lower-

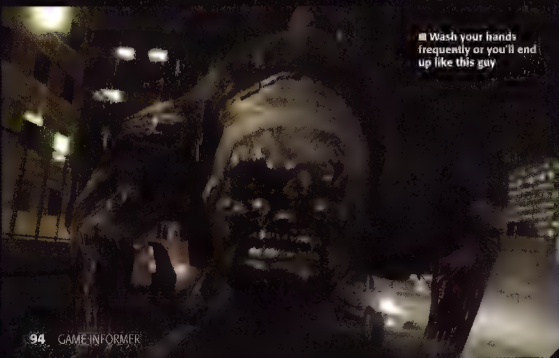
ing your defense. Tодome is some kind of instant kill heart stab, and *Ninjitsu* unleashes an electrical blast. Character progression will work a lot like *Devil May Cry*. "The fundamentals of the two systems are similar, but we don't have shops," says Takeuchi. "When a player kills an enemy in *Ninja Blade*, he or she collects crystals that can then be used to upgrade the weapon of choice."

Contextual button pressing is a big part of the presentation, and From teases that it'll be different than what players are used

to. "I think that in a lot of games, the quick time events aren't integral to the game's content and seem staged," says Takeuchi. "What we've done in this game is make a distinct connection between the quick time events and the gameplay. They aren't something that just appear now and then, either. We have a lot of quick time events. Numerically, I think we'll overwhelm other titles on that basis alone." ■ ■ ■



■ Many real life Tokyo landmarks will appear in the game such as Shinjuku Station, Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, and the Park Hyatt Hotel.



■ Wash your hands frequently or you'll end up like this guy





PG

World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King

► **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ► **PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT
 ► **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT ► **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 13*

JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE OUT

Blizzard's getting ready to pull millions of gamers back into Azeroth with the impending launch of this second expansion for World of Warcraft. The laundry list of improvements evident from our extensive time in the beta is immense, but it's much more interesting to look at some of the design decisions going into Wrath of the Lich King to get a feel for the direction WoW is headed.

THE ASHBRINGER

The story of Azeroth's (and WoW's) most famous weapon continues in the Death Knight leveling experience, which we can only hope is an example of more content to come. As a newly awoken avatar of the Lich King's will, fresh Death Knights play through the destruction of a Scarlet Crusade city in one of the best quest lines in WoW (and yes, that includes the Greatmother line in Nagrand). Let's just leave it at this: Riding on the back of a frost wyrm and breathing the Scarlet Crusade's lines with freezing death lines above isn't even the high point of the experience. Ever wonder what could make Arthas turn tail and run like a dog? They should. This and find out.

LORE, LOL

Even the staunchest of Blizzard fans have had to concede that certain key elements of the Burning Crusade were, to be blunt, hilariously bad. The most glaring were in the WoW beta, grounding the new world of Azeroth's better-docked backstory lends a weight to the events that were largely lacking in Burning Crusade's space. The events of the expansion further into the mysteries surrounding the Lich King, the fallen Nerubian empire, the mysterious new continent of Northrend, and Ner'zhul himself is a lot more interesting than the mushroom dudes in a purple swamp that we had to contend with.

CRITICAL IMPROVEMENTS

Another change to Warcraft III is the reworking of spell critical and haste boosts with their magical counterparts. The few classes capable of making us actors in both categories are seeing some nice boosts rolled up in them: Shamans, Paladins, and Death Knights. We're going to take advantage of all of these bonuses now that focusing on one aspect of their abilities will now give us less damaging to their other facets. The changes have PvP balance implications at higher levels, but it seems very unlikely to result in a single overpowering strategy that we're currently seeing in PvP.

NEED MORE TANKS

At various points in WoW's history, the tanking classes (Warriors, Druids, and Paladins) has been regarded as the most difficult to play. In Burning Crusade, the designers intended the three classes to be more as all-around tanking powerhouse, with Druids as so-called "off-tanks" and Paladins as "off-healers." Suffice it to say that many Paladin and Druid players were not too happy. In WoW, however, the developers say they intend all four classes to be able to be fully capable main tanks, with only minor advantages among them for each class. We'll see how well they will help many raiders, as only the highest-end guilds will be able to afford to have a tank for any given raid.

HEALERS CAN PLAY TOO

Consolidating the attributes that grant healers and damage-dealers into a single bonus drastically changes the way healers and offensive spellcasters play their gear. With this change, healing classes have their playstyles opened up, and it's no longer such a tedious time soloing and assisting the damage-dealers in PvP combat. Now a player who chooses to focus on firepower with his talents and gear will be able to play a reasonably effective healer in a pinch. The only danger to this change is that healers like Shamans and balance Druids could get a bit too powerful and versatile in PvP, but it's impossible to gauge at the moment. For now, it's a great boon to primary healers in the arena and in the raid, and less painful.

■ The setpieces are impressive



■ The finale of the Death Knight intro is unlike anything in WoW thus far



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■ See how the jester minion earned his hat



■ "Does Overlord gotta choke a minion?"



Wii

Overlord Dark Legend

> STYLE | PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CODEMASTERS > DEVELOPER CLIMAX STUDIOS > RELEASE SUMMER 2009

MOTION CONTROLLED THROTTLING

Usually when a game hits multiple platforms at the same time, the Wii version gets the shaft (bad graphics, less features, weird controls—you know the drill). So it's refreshing to hear that Codemasters isn't just watering down the upcoming *Overlord II* (see last month's issue) to fit within Wii specs. *Overlord Dark Legend* is its own game set just before the first *Overlord*, maintaining the medieval tone instead of following the sequel to a Roman Empire setting. Expect more trolls and dwarves in addition to new witches, gingerbread men, and even Little Red Riding Hood, who, in an interesting twist, transforms into a werewolf.

After some hands-on time, we were surprised at how well the gameplay mechanics translated over from PS3 and 360. You control a new Overlord with the nunchuk, and the traditional set of minions (including brown, red, blue, and green) by pointing the remote. It's easy to just point at an enemy, hit A, and watch him get torn to shreds. The same goes for environmental objects like barrels and crates. Minions even salvage

items from the wreckage into usable materials. One of our horde made a helmet out of a pumpkin, for example.

A completely new attack involves grabbing the closest minion and throttling it by shaking the Wii remote. While this has the potential to wander into grisly territory, the choking is definitely more *Homer Simpson* in tone than *Manhunt*. After a few good shakes, you can let your minion go and it'll run off to blow up a nearby target. If you throttle them too much, however, they just die and give off a slight health boost.

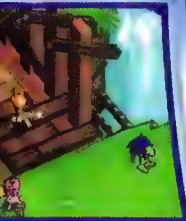
Climax wants to keep the story of *Dark Legend* self-contained and accessible to new players so they are dropping in a few references to the last game here and there. The boss battle we saw was against a Halfling jester in control of a large wooden war machine that charges at you and fires off a cannon. Once you take it down, one of the minions puts on the hat, explaining how the jester minion from the original *Overlord* first got his trademark accessory. ■ ■ ■



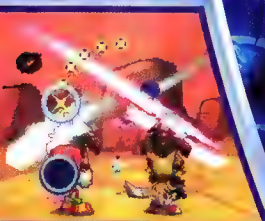
NEW ROLE. NEW RULES...



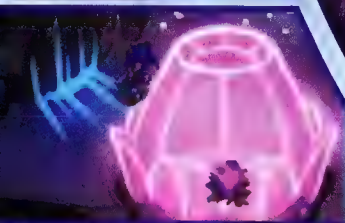
Uncover an epic storyline and defeat a mysterious menace.



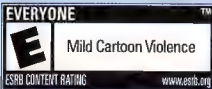
Overcome obstacles with the unique strengths of your team.



Launch lightning fast combo attacks with one character or the whole party.



Discover hidden items and Chao in over 20 environments.



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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Lord of the Rings: Conquest

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) ► **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
 ► **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS ► **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 24

BIG BATTLES

In its quest to bring something new to the open battlefield multiplayer it created with Star Wars: Battlefront, Pandemic tapped the Lord of the Rings lore to create a unique medieval fantasy fighting experience. To help players cover the massive battlegrounds more quickly, they can jump on a horse or warg at any time, trampling enemies under hoof wherever they go. Destruction-minded players can also ride the massive oliphants, taking out entire legions in a single step.

The options to wreak havoc don't stop there. Name a set piece from the movies and you'll likely find it in the game. Ents, felbeasts, eagles, catapults, battering rams, ballistae, and siege towers all make appearances. Game director Erik Gewirtz promises that "each one behaves differently and has a unique role on the battlefield."

Different tools are available depending on which team players decide to fight for. If anyone grows tired of seeing their favorite character live, they can always join Sauron's army and alter history. Fans

of the books might remember the references Tolkien made to the horrible things that could happen if Sauron ever got his hands on the Ring. "We just filled in the details of what that would be like, and let the player live out that dark fantasy," says Gewirtz. "You're playing the conflict from the evil side, which feels cool, but there's definitely a little voice inside your head telling you 'this is just wrong.'"

Pandemic's ultimate goal is to capture the spirit of these grand battles in a dynamic way, creating plenty of memorable moments for players. As Gewirtz puts it, "you might be in the middle of a massive battle in the Mines of Moria and scamper up the back of a troll and stab him in the eye. But in the next fight you'll be using a horse to catch up to a stampeding oliphant in Pelennor Fields, climbing up its leg and shooting a few arrows into its head before sliding down its trunk." Sounds promising. We'll know soon if Conquest can live up to those lofty goals. ■ ■ ■

■ Hugo Weaving will reprise the role of Elrond to narrate both campaigns



PLAYSTATION 3

EyePet

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION ► **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
 ► **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE ► **RELEASE** LATE 2009 (EUROPE), TBA (US)

MAN'S BEST FAKE FRIEND



■ "Goat! Dad is such a controller hog!"

While most PlayStation Eye software has failed to impact the gaming populace, the newly announced EyePet looks to change that. The game has only been announced for Europe. U.S. Sony reps have no details about a stateside release at this point, but we'd be shocked if this widely appealing title didn't make its way to North America as well.

Players create their own furry little creature and outfit it in a variety of accessories. Then you set up the Eye camera on a table in front of you and your television will show the pet frolicking around in your living room. Reach out and tickle its tummy and it will laugh. Poke it with your finger and it will jump back. You can even roll a ball at your pet and it will jump over

it and chase it around. This level of interaction is impressive, but even more interesting is the ability to draw pictures with a standard marker and piece of paper and scan it into the game. In the announcement trailer, players drew a simple car, held it up to the camera, and soon the crude creation was driving around on the table—at least until the tiny pet smashed it to pieces.

Little information is available on whether EyePet will be a relatively shallow application that you can play around with or if it will have some kind of deeper daily care required like Nintendogs. Due to the distant expected release date, it could be awhile before this and many other questions are answered, but we'll keep you posted on any new details. ■ ■ ■



■ We can't wait to see how this little guy reacts to a fist

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Quantum Of Solace

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
> DEVELOPER TREVARCH > RELEASE NOVEMBER

MIG VS. THE ORGANIZATION

Recently, members of the Quantum of Solace team stopped by to finally pull the curtain back on the multiplayer. Several hours (and deaths) later, we came away with a relatively clear picture of what's in store for online fans in James Bond's latest adventure.

As the headline above indicates, British secret service agents will face off against members of a mysterious "organization," which is being kept under wraps at this point to prevent movie spoilers. The controls feel similar to Call of Duty 4, which is not a huge surprise since the games share an engine. Even the weapon loadout structure of primary weapon, pistol, and grenade is the same. The biggest difference, however, is the ability to go into cover with a click of the A button. While this isn't the smartest mechanic to use during close quarters skirmishes, it's handy when you're defending a position.

We fought at a wide variety of locations, including a barge, construction site, science center, spa, embassy, hotel parking garage, Italian streets, and Mediterranean rooftops. Over the course of battle, players earn credits that they can spend on all manner of items and perks. The in-game store offers machine guns, shotguns, sniper rifles, pistols, grenades, perks (like extra health or larger attack radius), silencers, and scopes. All purchases can be incorporated into up to five different customizable kits, in which you select primary and secondary weapons, a grenade type, and two perks. These can be tailored with certain long-range or short-range weapons to suit specific match types.

Overall, Quantum of Solace's multiplayer offers a surprising amount of variety, depth, and fast-paced gameplay. We can only hope that the single-player campaign measures up as well. ■■■■

■ Check out Gameinformer.com for new Quantum of Solace multiplayer screens and additional details.

MULTIPLAYER MODES

Quantum of Solace includes seven different multiplayer modes and an as yet unspecified number of maps (although we played on at least eight).

CLASSIC

This is an intentionally straightforward deathmatch mode without preselected weapon loadouts. All players begin with a pistol and must make a mad dash for floating guns and grenades stashed throughout the environment.

CONFLICT/TEAM CONFLICT

Conflict takes another twist on deathmatch, allowing access to weapon loadouts. A team-based version is also available.

TERRITORY CONTROL

Players will attack and defend specific points that periodically change during the match.

BOND VERSUS

One randomly selected player becomes Bond and must either take out everyone else or disarm two out of three bombs stashed around the map. Seems pretty one-sided, right? To make up for the lack of teammates, Bond gets two lives per round, a health boost, faster run speed, and can see every enemy on the in-game map.

BOND EVASION

A group of MI6 agents must escort Bond to a pre-designated location as the other team tries to take him out.

GOLDEN GUN

An insanely powerful golden six-shooter (with exploding bullets) is placed in the middle of the map and everyone must scramble to get it first. The goal is to take out as many opponents as possible with the gun before someone inevitably kills you and swipes it.

■ Activision already has plans in the works for downloadable multiplayer content. It's been teased that the first round could even be available for free as a preorder bonus.

■ Players can purchase gold-plated guns for bragging rights. No stat advantages, though.

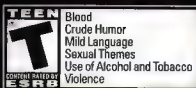
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Jump in.

 XBOX 360 LIVE



Neverwinter Nights 2: Storm of Zehir

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME (UP TO 64-PLAYER ONLINE) ► **PUBLISHER** ATARI
 ► **DEVELOPER** OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT ► **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18

DIY DUNGEON DIVING

What's the over/under on the Forgotten Realms' lifespan these days? Can't be more than a month, given the constant world-threatening events that impend its very existence. Last year, it was an army of royally pissed off spirits and a dead death god. This week, it's a poison god halfway across the world concocting some kooky plot to kill everyone. Ah well, at least we get to abuse some Dungeons & Dragons rule sets along the way, right?

This time around, players create a full party of heroes from scratch (or import an existing character and gin up a posse) to handle the adventure, which should take them from about levels 3 to 15. A few new bits have been added to the D&D 3.5 Edition rules that NWN 2 uses, notably three intriguing classes:

Swashbucklers dance around and poke foes with sharp things much like a ranger, but with more style and fewer

smelly animals following them around. Hellfire warlocks are a prestige option for casters that (unsurprisingly) burn enemies in a variety of ways, while doomguides are specialized prestige clerics who pound undead hordes into dust with ease.

Obsidian has a relatively easy task in front of it with Storm of Zehir, since the first Neverwinter Nights expansion cleared up so many issues with the base game and largely fulfilled its latent promise. Unless the developer's quality of storytelling and RPG craftsmanship takes a serious nosedive relative to its recent history, this should be a solid PC release when it comes out later this year. ■■■



■ A real fan would get a full-arm tattoo of this monstrosity to prove his devotion



Wii

The House of the Dead: Overkill

► **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ► **PUBLISHER** SEGA ► **DEVELOPER** HEADSTRONG GAMES ► **RELEASE** EARLY 2009

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

Light gun shooters are experiencing a resurgence on Wii since it's one of the few genres that naturally fits with the remote. Sega's latest entry follows its House of the Dead 2 & 3 remake with an all-new chapter in the series that reaches far back in the HoD timeline. Overkill follows Agent G's first assignment out of the academy, in which he investigates strange abductions in the small Louisiana town Bayou City.

Fans of the recent *Grindhouse* (and the '70s originals) will be pleased to know the game unabashedly rips them off, from the gritty film grain presentation to the locations and enemy design. Developer Headstrong Games (formerly Kuju London), the first Western developer to

work on the series, strongly advocated the change in tone. Hopefully, this also means less (unintentionally) terrible localization and voice acting.

The stage we saw was set inside a creepy carnival infested with zombies, naturally. As G strung kills together, he built up a "Mo-Fo Slo-Mo" meter that, when triggered, goes into bullet time and allows you to target and dismember specific body parts. The Magnum pistol worked well to knock back charging zombies, while the sub-machine gun defended well against throwing knives.

One of the biggest, and riskiest, new features in Overkill is the battle screen, which extends beyond the limits of the screen so players will have to point the remote to the edges to see what horrors (or powerups) lurk beyond. It should be interesting to see how this works in two-player co-op. Hopefully, players will spend more time fighting zombies rather than battling for control of the view. ■■■





The Sims 3

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EA GAMES > RELEASE FEBRUARY 2009

THE RISE AND FALL OF ARNIE THE SIM

The Sims are running loose! While it's true that they have explored the outside world for years, the Sims 3 does away with the series' increasingly antiquated "teleport here" structure. Now, Sims can walk out their front doors and wander the streets of their town at will, going to work or goofing off with their friends by kicking over lawn ornaments.

In a recent live demo, we saw a typical day in the life of a Sim. Arnie is a mid-level politician with the slightly loftier lifetime goal of being the leader of the free world.

Fortunately for the player, Arnie's happy to take things one step at a time. During the course of his lifetime, he'll keep that ultimate goal while fulfilling much smaller wishes. In this instance, Arnie's spacious home was filled with Sims eager to contribute to a political campaign. After chatting with one of his friends, Arnie gave a rousing speech, filled with grand gestures and powerful cadences. Since that was one of his short-term wishes, Arnie's mood got a temporary boost, and he received points that could be used to purchase bonus traits, such as a stronger blad-

der or the ability to haggle for better deals. Negative experiences affect moods in the opposite way, as we saw when a character moped around lamenting the recent passing of a family member.

Once the schmoozing was over, it was time for Arnie to get back to his paying job at city hall. He passed a group of protesters on the way to his office, each one a full-fledged Sim with a home, family and personality of his own. There wasn't time for socializing, though, it was time to work. The Sims 3 gives players more interaction with their working

Sims than before by choosing how hard to work or facing tricky scenarios. In this case, Arnie faced the temptation of stealing money from his campaign fund. He did, and was caught and fired. Such is life.

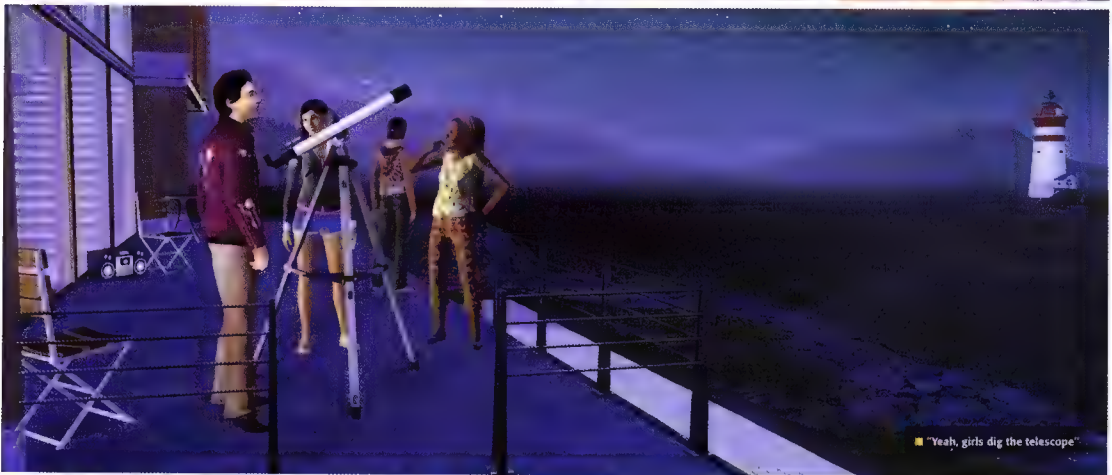
Our demo ended before we saw how this setback affected Arnie. Could he successfully mount a comeback? Would he turn to a life of crime? In the world of the Sims 3, either option sounds equally likely. If nothing else, temporary unemployment might give him time to meet the neighbors. ■ ■ ■



People in Simville have widely divergent perceptions of how hot or cold it is outside, and they're not afraid to wear the clothes that show it.



■ Whatever the context, this facial expression always deserves a slap



■ "Yeah, girls dig the telescope"



■ One of these kids represents Joe's childhood. Any way you see it, Joe had it rough



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REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



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LEGO Batman

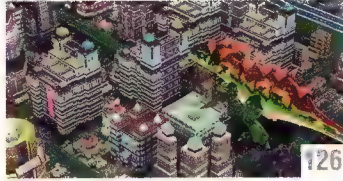
PLAYSTATION 3



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Midnight Club: Los Angeles

Wii



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SimCity Creator

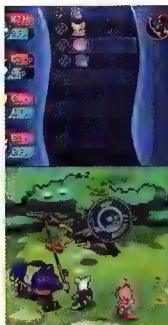


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Dead Space

With gruesome abominations, nerve-fraying gunfights, and scream-out-loud scares, *Dead Space* puts the horror back in survival horror. Isaac Clarke fights for survival aboard an alien-infested derelict starship, unraveling the mystery of how the crew turned into bloodthirsty beasts. Not for the faint of heart, *Dead Space* combines elements of movies like *Aliens* and *The Thing* with Resident Evil-style gameplay – then adds more dismemberment. If you love being scared, you can't let *Dead Space* pass you by.



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Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood

We thought this moment would never come, but there is actually a good Sonic game out there. And it's not even the nineties! BioWare and Sega have proven that with enough time and creativity, Sonic can be relevant in today's gaming climate. With fast-paced turn-based battles, fun worlds to explore, and characters you don't want to strangle (heck, Big the Cat is even likable here), *Sonic Chronicles* is worth the return to Green Hill Zone.

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** The loneliest number that you'll ever know.

> **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.

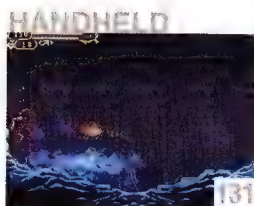
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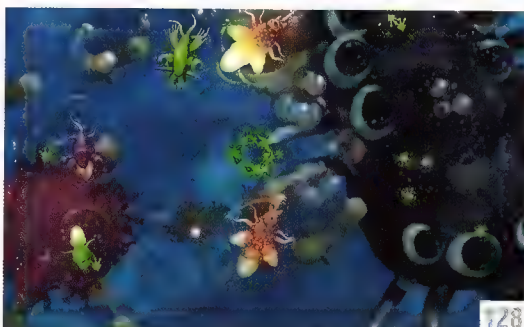
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S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky



Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia



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Spore

Start small with a single-celled organism and work your way up the evolutionary ladder until you conquer the vast mystery of space. This ambitious and long-awaited title from visionary developer Will Wright (creator of SimCity and The Sims) gives players the opportunity to shape the universe and its inhabitants. It might be light on gameplay in places, but Spore is an amazing and intriguing piece of software that gamers everywhere need to play.

The Edge
When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

ALL Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older	M Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
E Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older	RP Product is awaiting final rating.
E Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older	T Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older

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

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

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

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

action – A term we use for games like God of War and Devil May Cry.

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

AI – Artificial Intelligence. Usually refers to how well the computer reacts to human opponents or works with human allies.

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

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

board – A term we use for games like Scene 10 and Mario Party.

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

CG – Computer Generated. Usually refers to cutscenes that don't use in-game graphics.

DLC – Downloadable content. Usually takes the form of response 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.

framesteer – 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 Picross.

ragdoll – 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 King of Kings and Gadius.

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

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

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

WMD – Will Music Deceive. An epidemic that could easily spread without your help.

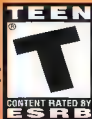
Tom Clancy's

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STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR



Alcohol and Tobacco Reference
Blood
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Suggestive Themes
Violence



XBOX 360

END BEGIN

NOVEMBER 2008



PLAYSTATION 3



NINTENDO DS



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UBISOFT



BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

> Concept: Suspense and gore collide to create a horrifying, atmospheric experience that will leave you gasping for air

> Graphics: The texture work is remarkable (especially on the twisted flesh and rusted metals), and the array of lighting techniques deceive your eyes

> Sound: The ambience messes with your mind, often making you question "what was that?" The voice actors do a decent job making omge-worthy dialogue flow better than it should

> Playability: A satisfying mix of precision targeting and boot stomping. Sadly, most of the objectives fall into the "lead player from point A to point B" category

> Entertainment: I'm a horror fanatic, and I've never jumped this much during any movie or game

> Replay Value: Moderate

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Dead Space

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EA REDWOOD SHORES > RELEASE OCTOBER 27 > ESRB M



THE NEW FACE OF HORROR

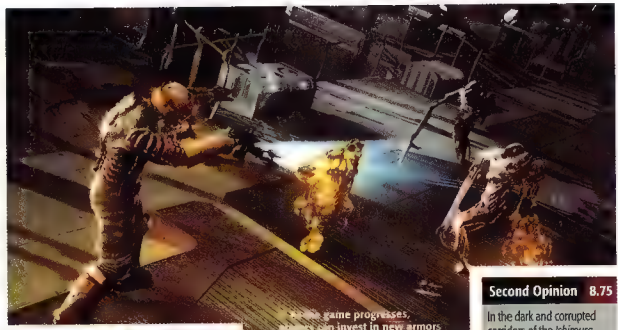
They say in space, no one can hear you scream. After letting out a screech loud enough to burst the eardrums of all life in the cosmos, my time aboard starship *Ishimura* proves this unassailable scientific adage untrue. Dead Space is a bone-chilling journey into the heart of horror. Its nerve-shattering suspense and stomach-churning gore are perfectly orchestrated to play off of your fear and paranoia.

Grotesque humanoid mutations leap from the shadows, diseased corpses reanimate as you approach, and you never know when a tentacle is going to crash through a wall and grab you. Incredible lighting techniques, suffocating level designs, and haunting ambience effectively blend to create one of video games' most immersive and frightening atmospheres. As much as Dead Space makes you jump out of your seat and scream at the top of your lungs, its gameplay makes you respect it as a great game first and foremost.

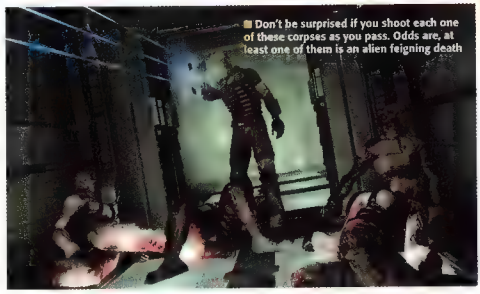
In the introductory cutscene, we learn the *Ishimura*, a mining vessel equipped with tools powerful enough to crack planets from orbit, is malfunctioning. Like all science fiction movies, this ship's communications are offline, so a team containing your character, engineer Isaac Clarke, is sent in to investigate. When a particularly gory sequence occurs within minutes of boarding, it becomes apparent that an alien scourge has infested the ship, and more disturbingly, its crew. In the commotion, you are separated from your teammates. As predictable as this lead is in, it effectively sets the tone. The remainder of the game is a journey of discovery and survival through the bowels of this derelict ship.

As you investigate each section of the ship, the gameplay boils down to a study in precision targeting, relying heavily on the player's ability to pinpoint specific limbs on enemies. As it turns out, bullets don't kill. Disembowelment is the only way to stop these abominations in their tracks. The enemies are aggressive and plentiful in variety, but the rock-solid targeting system can handle any threat. Most of the weapons (which are primarily mining tools) produce large spray zones, and their rounds easily tear limbs

from torsos. Custom weapon assembly allows players to tailor the firearm functionality to their style of play. Do you increase the damage of a particular gun and go for one hit-kills? Or is your style more suited to expanding ammo capacity and wildly clicking the trigger until the creature ceases to move? Finishing off injured foes is particularly easy, as Dead Space is home to one of the most brutal boot stomps in all of



As the game progresses, players can invest in new armor and weapon upgrades.



Don't be surprised if you shoot each one of these corpses as you pass. Odds are, at least one of them is an alien feigning death

gaming. Your heel is basically a B.F.G. As a whole, the combat is beautifully executed, and loaded with unforgettable encounters.

As the story unfolds, you'll trek across nearly every inch of the *Ishimura*. Along the way there are some amazing sights to behold. This game is gorgeous, and it wouldn't surprise me if this ship is modeled to be fully functional. The interface is also stunning and unlike anything else out there. To keep your eyes on the action, the HUD is practically invisible. Most meters and directions are handled within the game environment. For instance, Isaac's health meter is displayed on his back. Some story sequences are

also told through holographic projections. Should you choose, you can keep playing as the video plays. If you get lost, there's no need to visit a map. Just click a button and a holographic trail illustrates the path to the next objective.

Some objectives feature breakout moments, such as an awesome space walk on the ship exterior or a poorly executed asteroid shooting gallery in the gunner's chair. Most objectives, however, are fairly uneventful. Hitting a button to watch an animation of the ship's systems come online is all too common of an event. In this regard, the game plays off of your character's engineering background a little too much. Thankfully, as mundane as most of the missions are, they all fall back on the excellent gameplay and taut atmosphere.

Dead Space is technically a survival horror game, but it should really be compared to motion picture juggernauts *The Thing* and *Aliens*, as it channels the essence of those films more than it does any other game. If horror is your forte, dim the lights, crank up the surround sound, and take the deepest breath you ever have. I think you'll agree, no game has ever been this frightening. —REINER

Second Opinion **8.75**

In the dark and corrupted corridors of the *Ishimura*, gamers are treated to the premiere accomplishment in survival horror since Resident Evil 4. Dead Space is a challenging combination of mystery, tension, and straight-up scare tactics that expertly plays off of the player's fear and paranoia. More importantly, the game doesn't stumble over combat in service to the atmosphere. Battle controls rarely exhibit the genre's typical sluggishness, and necessity of disemboweling foes encourages glee! experimentation with your entire arsenal of clever weapons. Dead Space's biggest problem is devising good reasons for you to progress; most objectives are thinly disguised "go here and press this button" missions, making protagonist Isaac Clarke seem like an errand boy. The harrowing combat and disturbing story are the real stars, wearing an eerie ambience that will leave Dead Space lurking in the dark corners of your mind long after you turn the lights back on. —JOE



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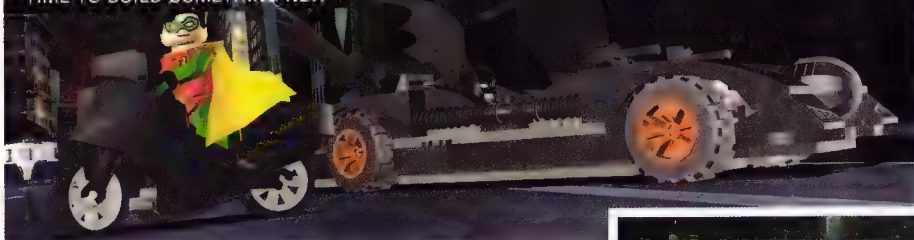


PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

LEGO Batman

BY STYLE | OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE
BY DEVELOPER: TRAVELLER'S TALES > RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 23 > ESRB: E

TIME TO BUILD SOMETHING NEW



If you think the only entertaining version of Batman is the dark, gothic one that deals with mature themes as found in the new films and modern comics, you're wrong. LEGO Batman is as childish as video games can get, yet it's still appealing to a wide audience. By the same token, if you think developer Traveller's Tales is changing its golden formula after succeeding with the slew of LEGO Star Wars and Indiana Jones games, you're wrong again.

The game's story won't impress anyone above basic reading comprehension. Batman's villainous adversaries have escaped their prisons in Arkham Asylum, they're up to no good, and it's up to Batman to stop them. Fortunately, Traveller's Tales has mastered the art of playful slapstick, so every cutscene elicits at least a mild chuckle. Iconic characters, such as Clayface and Robin, have been turned into village idiots with hijinks ripped straight out of Saturday morning cartoons.

Maybe even more so than LEGO Star Wars, this game is filled with cool playable characters, and thanks to LEGO Batman's parallel hero and villain stories you have plenty of opportunities to try them. Nightwing, Joker, Killer Croc, Bane, Catwoman, and Man-bat only scratch the surface of this game's catalogue of great characters. As with all the LEGO games, you'll spend weeks replaying through levels to get all the unlockables.

Combat is a little more important this time, but this is still a button masher. The vehicle segments also offer a nice change of pace, but the primary

thrill in LEGO games has always been smashing the environment into little LEGO pieces then rebuilding them into crazy new contraptions. LEGO Batman falls back on this routine exhaustively. The game is perfect for blowing off some steam or relaxing with friends, but it's nothing more than a mildly rewarding waste of time.

While this may arguably be the best LEGO game to date, it's still a series designed for the lowest common denominator. The level design is extremely straightforward. You can't lose since you have unlimited lives, and you respawn exactly where you "died." The boss battles are also unoriginal. They all follow the exact same pattern: the boss stands just out of reach long enough to throw a few dangerous objects at you, then they come down to your level to get pounded before jumping back to safety to repeat the process.

The charm of LEGO blocks is exploring your creativity and building new things, so Traveller's Tales' habit of sticking to one formula stands in stark contrast to the entire LEGO philosophy. We've had fun with this series, but it's time to dump the franchise out on the floor and start piecing it back into something new. —BEN

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Take the popular LEGO formula from Star Wars, then add Batman

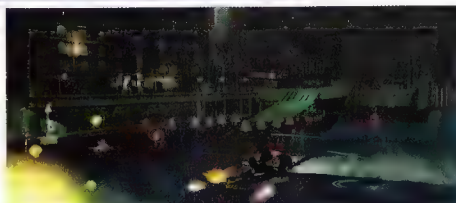
> **Graphics:** The best LEGO graphics to date, but how good can the visuals really get with lots of simple blocky shapes?

> **Sound:** Great music from the cartoons helps mask the generic action sound effects

> **Playability:** The definition of pick up and play, if you have trouble playing this game, you might be holding the wrong controller

> **Entertainment:** The LEGO formula was tired a long time ago, so why can't we stop ourselves from coming back?

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



■ See that smaller, wimpier vehicle up on the left? That's what Batman makes Robin drive

Second Opinion **7.25**

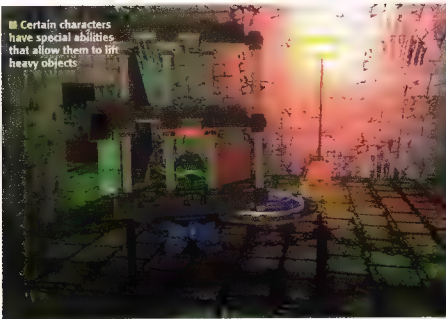
Star Wars: Indiana Jones. Batman: Three spectacularly different licenses united by identical gameplay design. Based on Traveller's Tales' last three games, the universal formula for game creation reads as follows: Make Star Wars game. Remove Star Wars license. Replace with another popular license. Ship. To retail. LEGO Batman is so similarly designed to the other games it even retains the film trilogy format—even though none of the content in this game is based on the Batman films. It's fair to demand an experience that caters more toward the license, but at the same time, it's hard to deny how entertaining this gameplay is, especially when playing with a friend. From the Joker to Clayface, there isn't a character in this game that isn't fun to play. While you will see some Bat-related gameplay, such as a snazzy Batarang targeting system, most of the new mechanics revolve around different costumes for Batman and Robin. These suit-based moves dish out gameplay variety, but again, don't hold true to the license (unless I missed the issue where Robin has a vacuum cleaner). No matter how you cut it, LEGO Batman is a solid game, even if it is just more of the same LEGO experience. —REINER



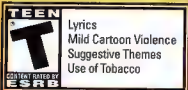
■ Cheer up, sweeter workset: Your smelly, depressing life is almost over



■ Certain characters have special abilities that allow them to lift heavy objects



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YOU GOTTA HAVE
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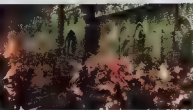
XBOX 360

MULTI QUICKIES

XBOX 360 | PC

Warhammer: Mark of Chaos – Battle March

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** BLACK HOLE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE **5** Image you are the leader of an army, in order to communicate with your troops, you must perform a ritual dance where you juggle flaming axes and snakes. Sounds like a huge exercise in the unnecessary, doesn't it? That's exactly how I feel about Warhammer's control scheme, which sometimes has you navigating a web of menus and holding down two or three buttons just to issue simple commands. Even if you are willing to put up with Warhammer's finger gymnastics, you're still only playing a sub-par strategy title. The graphics are a generation behind, which makes sense, as this is basically an expansion to the 2006 PC title Mark of Chaos with framerate issues. While the controls aren't as big a deal on the PC, the spotty AI, poor pacing, and lack of depth down both versions. —**BEN**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Blitz: The League II

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 13 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE **7** Juiced up players, broken limbs, griffinid drama — **Blitz: The League** is a male soap opera take on professional football isn't afraid to take jabs at the NFL. The over-the-top campaign follows the career of The Franchise, a dual-threat rookie of your creation who dominates opponents on both sides of the ball. This gridiron features gruesome over-the-top injuries that happen so frequently you'll spend as much time re-setting dislocated shoulders as you will dropping back to pass. The game controls often feel unresponsive in real-time, but using the Clash meter slows the action down and allows you to make cuts that spell the difference between tom tendons and touchdowns. If senseless violence and arcade football are your passions, **Blitz** is the league for you. —**BERTZ**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Silent Hill: Homecoming

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** DOUBLE HELIX GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 30 > **ESRB** M

BAD SCORE

After Alex Shepard's discharge from the army, he travels home to deal with a despondent mother, a violent, unloving father, and a little brother who's mysteriously gone missing. Oh, and there's the little matter of his hometown, which's some demonic force devoured, then farted into the sewers of Hell's ninth level. Welcome home, Alex. They say it's never easy. The newest entry in Konami's legendarily disturbing horror franchise attempts a return to former glory, and in a few instances it succeeds. The game's atmosphere — which has always been a pinnacle for the series — does a formidable job and helps set the tone for some frantic moments. The whole world looks as though it's contracted some debilitating illness and begun to rot away. Plenty of cool old-style film effects help accent the game's beautiful grotesquery. The lighting effects are particularly impressive; every level is filled with strange objects that jut out in odd ways, causing your flash-

light to project toothy shadows that look ready to cut you in half at any moment.

The combat has been beefed up, as well. Instead of the stilted, single-wing animation attacks found in previous games, Alex has a limited combo system. He's much faster and more nimble than past Silent Hill protagonists. Sadly, the combat system is also where Homecoming takes a misstep. The dodge, which is required to survive most encounters, often doesn't do what it's supposed to: evade an attack.

Resource management is also a problem. It seems the developers wanted to make every encounter mean something, so they ratcheted up the difficulty. This level of challenge results in you spending most of the game with depleted health and ammo. Every time you find a box of ammo with five shells inside you'll want to jump up and down on Oprah's couch.

The game is dark, and I don't mean dark in macabre, Lovecraftian terms.

I kept going into the options menu to double check that the brightness hadn't been mysteriously turned down. Even though your flashlight casts some impressive shadows, it looks like it's running on the last dregs of a five-year-old battery most of the time. I've had more powerful lights on my keyboard, and I wouldn't be surprised if Alex suffered some kind of irreparable eyestrain over the course of the game. The biggest problem with the darkness is that you sometimes walk right past a door or switch you need in order to progress, so you could easily end up wasting an hour humping the walls on the wrong end of an empty hell prison. I wish I had more to praise about Homecoming, because I'd like to see this series shine again. Fans will probably dig the game's cool set pieces and the story, but the save points are placed too far apart, many puzzles require too much random experimentation, and the dialogue system seems like an afterthought. Who says you shouldn't go home? I do. —**BEN**

BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

> **Concept:** Konami's soul-crushing survival horror title returns with some fresh ideas, but they fail in important ways
> **Graphics:** The game is way too dark, and we're not talking theme. You'll want to turn the brightness adjuster all the way up, but that also washes out the screen

> **Sound:** Homecoming's blend of horror sounds is spooky, but the noise is so continuous that eventually you become desensitized to the racket

> **Playability:** The new combat system is a nice idea, but there is an unnecessary amount of backtracking. Why no shortcuts?

> **Entertainment:** A great game to put you in the mood for horror, but it might also leave you frustrated

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **6.5**

With Homecoming, Konami tried to shake things up by hiring Western developer Double Helix to take the series in a different direction. While there are a few welcome changes, too many outdated Silent Hill conventions have remained onboard. I like the timing-based dodge and counter combat system, but the extremely dark environments (even with brightness settings maxed) and wild camera prevent you from seeing visual tells for enemy strikes. Be prepared for antiquated door knob jiggling and backtracking through tired locales like a hospital, hotel, and the bland gray corridors of the final stage. While bosses are cleverly designed, their difficulty levels are seriously out of whack, mostly due to poor resource distribution. The middle of the game is notably harder than the final third simply because you barely get any health and ammo. By the time I fought the last boss, however, I had more med kits and bullets than I knew what to do with and the beast went down easily. You know what else is crammed into the end? About 80 percent of the story and puzzle sequences. Up to that point you're just chasing around your mysterious little brother and passing out. —**BRVAN**



■ Meet Scarlel. This boss might shorten your life span by a few days.

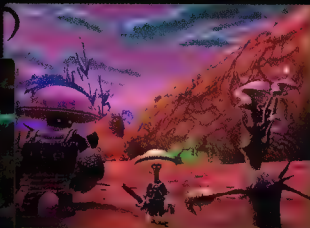
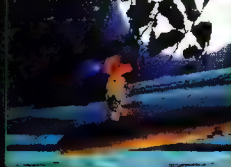
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RISE OF THE FUNGI

FOR NINTENDO DS



THE SPORE WARS

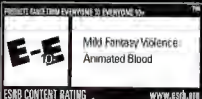
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Wii

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NBA 2K9

> **STYLE 1** | 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 10-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7 > **ESRB** E

DUNKADELIC

It's hard to stay at the top, but basketball teams historically pull it off more frequently than champs in other sports. Nine NBA teams have won back-to-back championships, the best of which — the Boston Celtics of the late '50s and early '60s — won an astounding eight straight titles and 10 in 11 years. Add NBA 2K to this list of legends, as this year marks the ninth straight year of dominating the competition.

NBA 2K9 goes above the rim with its strong blend of realistic animations, solid controls, and superior presentation. The crowds received a major makeover and the difference is immediately noticeable — fans legitimately react to big plays by standing up to scream and clap after thunderous dunks or lead-swinging shots. New player animations for on-the-ball defense blocked shots, and collisions in the paint bring the already stellar on-court graphics to another level.

NBA 2K9 doesn't have a fancy marketing campaign like Live's Made Fresh Daily, but it doesn't need it. The game already features realistic results where star players command the ball and role players make the hustle plays. The only things hindering the gameplay are the sporadic post play — which is still difficult to master — and the unpredictable free throw system. Most players have different shooting motions,

which makes guessing when to release the shot stick at the foul line a painful experience.

The star feature of NBA 2K9 is the Association, the best franchise mode across every sports title. The new NBA.com hub makes it easy to keep track of league happenings, including trade rumors and injury updates. The role system tasks owners with promising specific playing time to each player, finally solving the problem of addressing disgruntled players. Whereas other games pull discontent out of thin air, NBA 2K9 has a logical cause and effect system. The result is true personality management and heavier trade dialogue throughout the season. The contract renegotiations are also remarkable, featuring Bird rights, options, no-trade clauses, and the ability to frontload contracts.

NBA 2K9 also features five-on-five online games, but no club teams like NBA Live. The on-court action is better due to the superior defensive controls, but the dynamic camera needs some work in the transition game.

With its realistic animations, solid controls, and ambitious Association mode, NBA 2K9 makes its title run once again. But the competition is stiffening, and next year needs to bring significant leaps forward with online play and the low-post game if 2K wants to make it 10 in a row. —BERTZ

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Continue to refine an already great title with the deepest franchise mode in any sports game.

> **Graphics:** Amazing crowd animations make you feel like you're in the arena.

> **Sound:** New additions broadcast team gel well.

> **Playability:** Controls swell until you're in the low post.

> **Entertainment:** Still the best basketball game around for hoops aficionados.

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion

The gap between EA and 2K's basketball games is slowly closing, and I feel that some of this is 2K's lack more than a giant leap forward by the competition. While 2K9 can be a fluid, responsive title, the lack of smoothness in the low post game is clear. There were times, when trying to do something as simple as backing down and springing to the net for a shot could produce unexpected results. However, the game's AI sits at a high bar, calling on you to execute smart plays at both ends of the court, and I also like how your AI teammates will get open on their own. Dedication is also shown in the extensive dynasty options, with player roles being a much better way to value chemistry over the broken player logue system from a few years ago. —KATO

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NBA Live 09

> **STYLE 1** | 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 10-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7 > **ESRB** E



FINDING ITS STROKE

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

To improve its chances against the NBA 2K juggernaut, EA went straight to the professionals. By integrating a Dynamic DNA statistical system developed by Synergy Sports, EA finally delivers a game that mimics its real world counterpart. Teams behave as they would in real games, and the right players take the right shots at the right time. Is it enough to dethrone the champ?

The refined on-court action largely aids the cause. Gone are the clueless players who watched loose balls rather than scramble for them or slow down on a fastbreak. The easy-access signature play-calling puts strategy at your fingertips, and the improved Lockdown Control makes guarding AI opponents much less frustrating. The new pick-and-roll mechanic is a hit-and-miss affair, but when used correctly can be a deadly offensive weapon to complement the superior post play.

With NBA Academy, Live's already deep Dynasty mode receives another layer of strategy. Every month you can train your team by running the gauntlet of hoops drills to hone skills. The off-season, however, needs an overhaul.

Trade offers are abundant during the draft, but you can't trade your pick when you're on the clock. During free agency, the game automatically re-signs players without your consent if you don't have at least eight players on the team, and free agents bagging groceries during the regular season demand outrageous \$9 million multi-year contracts instead of accepting the league minimum like most street-bound players would.

Two of NBA Live's new modes, Be A Pro and online team play, largely disappoint. The Be A Pro mode, which shined in NHL 09 by allowing you to create a player and experience the sport firsthand, is a shell of itself. All you can do is play an exhibition game with one player. The five-on-five online team play would be great if there was some semblance of defense; it's so hard to stay on your mark that most of the games will be determined by who misses the most open shots.

NBA Live 09's gameplay improvements make this the best game in the series. If more care would have been taken to the new modes, it might have unseated the 2K franchise. —BERTZ



> **Concept:** Bring the NBA to life with daily updates that keep the game results on par with the real Association.

> **Graphics:** Few defensive animations make the on-court action look more realistic.

> **Sound:** Steve Kerr and Marv Albert's related voiceovers give the game a broadcast feel.

> **Playability:** Refined controls boost gameplay outside of the tricky new pick and roll system.

> **Entertainment:** The core game continues to improve, but the new modes aren't as impressive as they are in NHL 09.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion

This game's slow motion coming along from a very shaky next-gen start, and its ease in executing special moves is one area in particular that makes this game fun to play. If only the AI was up to snuff to stop you. It's often unaware of the ball on grabbing boards and defending your passes (it can be abused by the alley-oop), and this is only heightened in the slight and inconsequential Be A Pro mode. Here you can run rings around your opponent, and the mode in general is just too similar to how you play normally to make it significant. EA has put a lot of work into its real-life stat mimicking system, but I see greater value in being able to replay NBA contests during the season than tendency stats. I also find NBA 2K's real-time hot/cold system more user-friendly in its immediacy, if more shallow. —KATO

> **Concept:** Bring *Midnight Club* to next-gen systems, and add an enormous virtual Los Angeles

> **Graphics:** Demonstrates the power and versatility of Rockstar's Rage engine. It's nearly as detailed as *GTA*, but moves at jaw-dropping speeds

> **Sound:** Slam on familiar hits, but it's a nice selection of underground dance, hip hop, and rock tracks

> **Playability:** Rockstar delivers an arcade-style racer that gives racers control in the midst of chaos

> **Entertainment:** It's not a huge step forward, but rather a gorgeous and exhilarating reminder of *Midnight Club*'s appeal

> **Replay Value:** High



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Midnight Club: Los Angeles

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR GAMES
> DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO > RELEASE: OCTOBER 21 > ESRB: T

BACK TO THE STREETS

Midnight Club is back for next-gen consoles, and fans will be shocked at just how good their old favorite looks. Rockstar's Rage engine proves it can handle the high-speed action of *Midnight Club* while recreating a virtual Los Angeles nearly as detailed as *Liberty City*. Unlike *Burnout Paradise*, these streets are full of life—pedestrians, tons of ambient traffic, real-life stores, and L.A. landmarks like the Comedy Store and Amoeba Records.

The cityscape is amazing. The level of detail and the sheer amount of roadway to tear up seems limitless, and the diversity of L.A. lends it a less monochromatic feel than *Burnout Paradise*. But the real way Rockstar San Diego proves itself the genre master is the street design. While it's most certainly an open world—any number of routes might serve equally well in most cases—*MC: LA* subtly clues you in to the best routes and hidden shortcuts that make it play as fluidly as any track-based racer. In comparison to my experience with other games of its ilk, I rarely found myself getting lost or off track.

That's not to say it abandons challenge: The insane speeds and canny enemy AI will put your skills to the test. That doesn't even figure in the revamped police chases. The 16-player multiplayer matches also include a number of race, capture the flag, and team-based modes of mayhem. Thankfully, the control mechanics are dead on, offering a superb mix of arcade accessibility and fine control.

Longtime fans will be pleased to note that special

abilities like Roar and the new Electromagnetic Pulse are assignable to any car and can be changed—one of many nice improvements to the interface and feature set. Despite *DUB* not being in the title, *MC: LA* has all the customization features (visual and performance based) of the last game and more.



As good as it is, *Midnight Club*'s not perfect. The plot, a clichéd affair, features some horrible dialogue—apparently every single person in L.A. is a macho toolbox (actually, maybe that's true). If I had a quarter for every time I was called "tough guy," "esse," "holmes," or "a little girl," I could probably buy another Xbox 360. Rockstar traditionally excels at pop culture, but this seems to hit all the



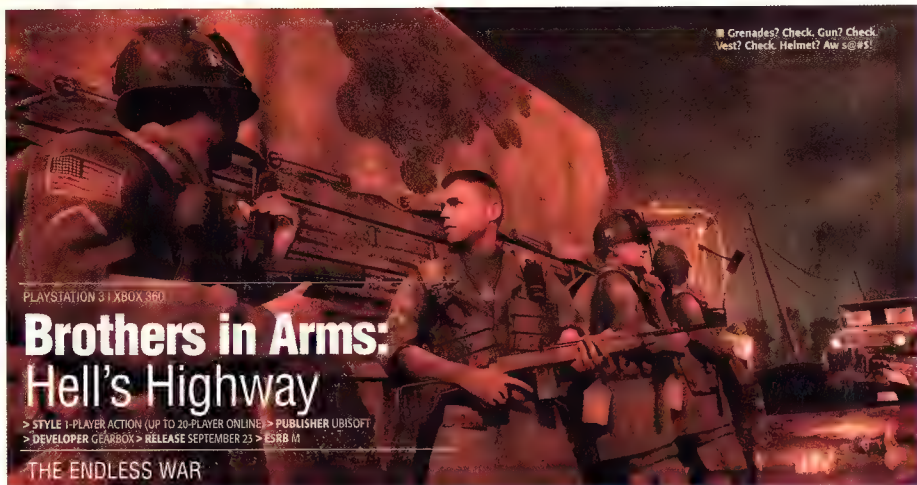
wrong notes in an attempt at being edgy. While I love what they've done with L.A., ditching the three-city format of the last title makes the progression feel more static. There's still much to do and explore, but the excitement of graduating to a new area is gone. This sense of stasis pervades the entire game to a degree.

There's no disguising the fact that the *Midnight Club* basics have remained largely unchanged since the second game. One wonders just how many more miles are left on the tread. But for now, *Midnight Club: Los Angeles* is just what the doctor ordered: a fun, fast racing experience with enough content to keep you playing for months.—MATT

Second Opinion 9

In *Midnight Club: Los Angeles*, developer Rockstar San Diego transforms the bumper-to-bumper crawl of *Los Angeles'* street life into a roaring blur of rubber and metal, making this unlikely venue for one of video games' most enjoyable circuits. In this iteration, the blindingly fast cars take the backseat to the dynamic track designs. From the shifting traffic patterns to the winding flow of the road, Rockstar created some exciting courses. Throw in aggressive AI rivals who always push for photo finishes, and police officers who you can't seem to shake, and most of the races fry every nerve in your body. Unlike the similarly designed *Burnout Paradise*, this game is hassle free. You can restart races whenever you like, and if you find yourself in the middle of rowdier, you can usually compete in a "race back" event to return to where you need to be. Vehicular customization is surprisingly intuitive as well. Rockstar San Diego has long been vested in the street racing genre, and *Midnight Club: Los Angeles* is by far and away the company's most impressive effort.—REINER





■ Grenades? Check. Gun? Check. Vest? Check. Helmet? Aw s@#!

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 20-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER GEARBOX > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 23 > ESRB M

THE ENDLESS WAR

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Continue Matt Baker's story by shooting and strategizing your way through the opening stages of Operation Market Garden

> **Graphics:** Fantastic cutscenes, superb facial animations, and impressive use of depth of field, but the game suffers from serious texture pop-up

> **Sound:** Earnest voiceovers and a solid theatrical score

> **Playability:** Accommodating as can be. Choose your control scheme from classics like Halo, Call of Duty, Rainbow Six, or the BIA default

> **Entertainment:** Hell's Highway doesn't offer gameplay or multiplayer innovation, but the production is top notch

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

Basing your game around Operation Market Garden—a less-than-successful attempt by the Allies to push into the German industrial heartland—is a bad omen. With a little hard work, however, this third game in the Brothers in Arms series survives to fight another day, albeit not exactly unscathed. Hell's Highway is preoccupied with its multi-game spanning story, but I never felt that the game hit the high notes necessary to make it more than an above-average strategic shoot 'em up. It struggles to deliver much that is inspiring apart from its bread-and-butter, flank-the-enemy set pieces. These can definitely be fun, especially as the game uses next-gen graphics to up the eye candy, but they remain largely unchanged from the previous Brothers titles. The new cover system at least makes a difference, although not perfect, its beauty lies in that it allows you to move and shoot from multiple positions in the same cover sitting. It's a welcome of versatility in an otherwise by-the-numbers effort.—KATO

The body count of Hitler's misguided military ambitions and the resulting global retaliation is estimated to be around 50 to 70 million. After playing the hundreds of WWII shooters publishers shoved down our throats over the last 10 years, I've taken down nearly as many Nazis. The latest title trudging back into this all-too-familiar war is Brothers in Arms, a series known for its dedication to production values and tactical gunfights.

The latest entry, Hell's Highway, rejoins 101st Airborne squad leader Matt Baker. His team has been assigned a forward mission to capture several bridges and the Dutch city of Eindhoven in the opening stages of Operation Market Garden, the

largest airborne battle in history. Baker is also dealing with the guilt of withholding information from his squad regarding the death of their fellow soldiers during the Normandy invasion. Through a series of flashbacks, we witness Baker and his squad dealing with the toll of war in different ways—some clinging to superstition, others questioning their objectives, and Baker internally struggling with his leadership decisions. The cutscenes feature superb facial animations, articulate direction, and voice acting worthy of *Band of Brothers*.

As Baker and company dig into the trenches, the familiar BIA strategy takes hold. With each set piece skirmish, you must navigate your squads through the Dutch countryside to find cover positions, suppress the enemy, and execute flanking maneuvers to eliminate the hostiles. Your squad is largely composed of Yanks with poor aim, so most of the kills will come from the barrel of your M1 Garand. Picking good cover positions is paramount, as wooden objects like fences

and barrels won't withstand the fire of a Nazi MP40 (couches, however, can absorb entire clips). Hell's Highway mixes up the action by introducing solo building clearing objectives and larger scale firefights where Baker commands three squads at once.

While the tactical nits and bolts of the previous games holds up, the mission selection does not. Hell's Highway traverses too many well-worn paths. Seasoned veterans may find themselves yawning through clichés like clearing villages with a tank, a token sniper sequence, wine cellar shootouts, and the famed "you lost all your weapons, get by with a pistol" mission. Whereas titles like Call of Duty 4 take missions like a sniper sequence and breathe life into them with new perspectives, Brothers in Arms is content presenting something you've played 100 times before.

Some of the controls could also use some polish. The general squad direction, aiming, and shooting mechanics are all solid, but the game needs a more effective grenade tossing system, melee attack for close-quarters combat, and a refined sprint control that lets you easily control your direction.

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway is a competent tactical shooter blessed with a dedication to narrative rarely seen in shooters. If Gearbox can build off this success with more inventive gameplay, the series has a chance of overcoming the boredom that curses so many WWII titles.—BERTZ



■ Like Adam, the soldiers wind down with impromptu doo-wap sessions



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Fracture

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** DAY 1 STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7 > **ESRB** T



Altering terrain
lead to inventive deaths

RESHAPING THE BATTLEFIELD

The oil economy. Stern cell research. Global warming. Today's hot topics are used to paint an unsettling future in Day 1 Studios' end of the world epic, *Fracture*. In the year 2161, the United States government has collapsed under the public's opposing ideologies of genetic and ecological research. Civil war erupts, leaving the eastern and western states morally opposed and at each other's throats. The west forms the West Republic of Pacifica, a faction deeply entrenched in forcing genetic evolution on its people, whereas the east, now called the East Atlantic Alliance, believes cybemetics will lead mankind to its next age.

Players don't get to pick a side in the conflict. The game places you in the role of Atlantic Alliance soldier Jet Brody moments before he embarks on a covert op deep within Pacifican territory. When Brody is introduced, the political intrigue, analogies to modern day issues, and any semblance of the plot continuing in an intelligent way are washed away and forgotten. The story devolves into level after level of lifeless radio chatter and uninteresting plot twists.

The story falls dead within minutes, but the game's ability to deliver mass destruction sends a pounding pulse through most of the action. With grenades specially designed to alter the shape of the terrain, battlefields are reshaped on the fly to look nothing like they did before you entered them. The terrain deformation technology is beautifully integrated into the firefights, allowing players to quickly raise a hill in front of them to provide protection from sniper fire, or to lower the ground so a pile of rocks loosens and tumbles onto an entrenchment of heavily armed adversaries.

This game also doesn't hold back on firepower. From land-changing grenades to its ridiculously powerful guns, there isn't a weapon in this game that won't put a devilish smile on your face. Great fun comes from blowing

apart the terrain and anyone brave enough to stand on it, but a lot of the joy is dependent on player creativity.

Most of the AI adversaries don't know how to handle mid- to long-range attacks, so it's easy to fall into the lazy routine of removing enemies from afar. As games have taught us, the path of least resistance is the key to victory, and *Fracture* gives you this cushion. As comfy as it is, sitting back in a safe zone isn't fun. The real excitement comes when you dive headfirst into battles with grenades flying. Depending on how you play, it can feel like a blasé shooting gallery or a groundbreaking experience.

Solid controls allow players to dictate their fate on the battlefield, but the inconsistent auto-targeting can lead to some sure hits bouncing off of invisible barriers and headshots hitting the torso. The game's biggest problem, however, is its inability to pull players into the action. The non-aggressive AI coupled with the repetitive enemy clusters gets old quick. A vehicle level is introduced late in the game, and while it offers some high-flying and terrain deformation-related thrills, it's not enough to resuscitate interest in a game that makes you work hard for your enjoyment.

Fracture's multiplayer takes a cue from Halo's "It takes a ton of hits to drop a foe" design, so you really have to work for your kills. It's a good test of skill that makes you use grenades and a variety of weapons. The maps are designed with terrain deformation in mind, and usually end up looking like beautiful messes at the conclusion of a match. The match types are fun, but there isn't much depth to the multiplayer experience.

Fracture comes close to greatness, but the story's disappearing act, half-hearted approach to level design, and poor enemy AI holds it back from being anything other than mediocre. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** A standard shooter with some amazing terrain deformation powers.

> **Graphics:** Jet Brody is a detailed character, but ends up looking like an Unreal reject. The terrain deformation produces some great visuals, but the environments don't catch the eye.

> **Sound:** The excellent Star Wars-like soundtrack ups the intensity and is something I wouldn't mind throwing on my iPod.

> **Playability:** Blowing the crap out of the ground may sound boring, but it is where most of *Fracture*'s thrills lie, as the lackluster AI holds the shooting back.

> **Entertainment:** Multiplayer is well done, but the single-player game is riddled with too many holes.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.75

Fracture opens with a cutscene detailing an America gripped in a civil war over a dispute regarding genetic engineering, an ambitious issue for a video game to tackle. Sadly, instead of subtly exploring the topic, it's BioShock, it's quickly dropped in favor of generic shoot 'em up action and mindless cornball chatter. With no drama to support it, the gameplay has to stand on its own, a task it largely fails to do. The terrain deforming powers are a nice idea, I'm sure it sounded great when it was suggested in a meeting two years ago. However, the levels rarely manage to give you interesting ways to use your powers, outside of a (very) few intriguing puzzles. While the weapon selection is nice, the targeting is outright flawed at times. It's even more frustrating given the fact that the only design apparent in the battles is a constant barrage of ambushes—which is further exacerbated by an annoying over-reliance on camera shake and some terribly placed checkpoints. The chaos caused by multiple triggers creating hills and valleys at will translates into some interesting multiplayer, but even that portion of the game feels average at best. *Fracture* is a strong concept undone by poor execution. —MATT



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2

TNA Impact

> **STYLE** 1-TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9 > **ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Spike TV's Thursday night hit, which features wrestlers like Christian Cage, Kurt Angle, and Shark Boy, finally makes its way to a console near you

> **Graphics:** Sweetly gay-looking as they are going to, and the animations transition flawlessly between attacks

> **Sound:** Annoying in-game commentary, as the TNA announcers seemingly go out of their way to get under your skin

> **Playability:** The game only boasts 25 pro wrestlers, which wouldn't be such a big deal if they all felt original. But many wrestlers share a lot of moves, making the roster seem that much smaller

> **Entertainment:** Nine different modes, including a story mode, is enough for casual players, but hardcore fans will want more

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

A NEW CHALLENGER

TNA *Impact* reminds me of a bratty little kid. You know the type, always running around making bold claims, kicking people in the shins, and talking about how big and strong he's going to be when he grows up. Since he's just a kid, you have to give him the benefit of the doubt—some day he might accomplish impressive things. However, night now he's still just a punk.

Since TNA *Impact* is the first entry based on Spike TV's wrestling series, it doesn't have any previous experience to build from. That explains some of the game's limitations: a thin create-a-wrestler mode, the lack of female competitors, and the fact that you can list all the game's weapons on one finger (folding chairs only, come on).

Those are understandable, but I'm less forgiving about *Impact*'s greater faults. The game's AI, especially in tag team matches, has obviously taken a few too many shots to the head. My partner refused to come to the rescue when I needed him, and sometimes interrupted me when I was doing well. It's almost like someone was paying my AI partner under the table to throw our bouts.

The game pulls off a few impressive moves. The sweaty man graphics look good, the simplified control system is super friendly, and even though the animation suffers from clipping and leads to a few glitches, it's still impressively fluid. *Impact*'s most unique mode, the Ultimate X match—in which wrestlers scramble above the ring to untie a large red X—also offers a nice change of pace from the standard wrestling brawl. Ultimately, TNA *Impact* just feels limited, but it shows some promise. If it continues to work hard and eat its veggies, then it just might grow up to be a big strong wrestler someday. —BEN



Second Opinion 5.75

Holding true to the brutal nature of the show, TNA *Impact*'s gameplay dishes out a ton of pain. The laughable AI is deserving of a smack to the forehead, and if your body is flexible, the shoddy clipping and physics demand a knee to one's own face. The gameplay mechanics are sound—but until bodies pass through each other, attacks don't register, and transitional timing has you doing moves you didn't intend. Without polish, all of this game's potential is thrown out of the ring. The AI difficulty increases with each passing match, leaving little margin for error, let alone the glitches you have no control over. The only real joy for me came from the story, which soars beyond ludicrous speed to flat out stupidity. All told, this game is worth a laugh, just don't best yourself up trying to play it. —REINER



PLAYSTATION 3

Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2 PLAYER RACING (16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** ELUTECHNIX > **RELEASE** AUGUST 27 > **ESRB** E

OLD SCHOOL SKILLS

Featuring an encyclopedic selection of Ferraris past and present and a fiercely demanding difficulty curve, Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli aims squarely at a specific target audience. I have a feeling that this demographic is more likely to purchase the game with Euros than the ailing greenback.

Though the game features only one manufacturer, the list of cars is exhaustive (with more promised through later downloads) — and hey, Ferrari is known to make some pretty hot rides. The cars handle how I imagine the real cars do, they are high performance but extremely temperamental. You'd be well advised to pay close attention during the tutorials with British racing legend Tiff Needell. Take a turn five miles-per-hour too fast and you'll end up in the dirt, even with the assist functions turned on. Still, a real satisfaction comes with mastering the serpentine courses.

The game's presentation is drier than a good bottle of Chablis. Outside of a collectible card game and some decal features, there's little in the way of the depth of experience presented by Forza 2 or GRID. Basically, you peruse menus and race, gradually unlocking new Ferraris and tracks. The car damage is very minimal and seems to have no effect on performance. However, the 16-player online races are a great feature, especially because you can create your own team identity to race against your friends.

In light of all the changes in the racing genre during the last five years, Ferrari Challenge feels like an anachronism. Still, the hardcore racing sim is underrepresented on the PS3, and genre devotees should find this a suitable substitution until the endlessly delayed Gran Turismo 5 is released. Everyone else should look elsewhere for his or her automotive thrills — **MATT**

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **Concept:** An old-school sim racer with demanding gameplay and few frills

> **Graphics:** It looks fine, but lags well behind the photorealism of Gran Turismo

> **Sound:** I love the dramatic Lord of the Rings style choral music in the menus, and the soundtrack is a nice mix of electronic and rock tracks

> **Playability:** Extremely challenging, but there are some options for beginners like track lines and brake assist

> **Entertainment:** A well made game, but it lacks the diversity and depth of the best sim racers on the market

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **7**

Like buying a Ferrari without power windows or remote entry, you can't help but miss the complete package despite how this racer drives.

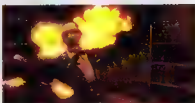
Ferrari Challenge is the racing game for impatient people. You start the game with a Ferrari F430, which is sort of like being born Paris Hilton in that your life's been spoiled by fortune. The game's sense of progression is further halted by the fact that you can't modify these cars. The driving mechanics feel good, pushing a bunch of Italian monsters to their limits without panicking about scratching the paint is certainly exciting. I just wish there was more race variety here to help differentiate this from other, fully featured, racers — **BEH**

PS3 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 3

BioShock

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** 2K MARIN/2K BOSTON/2K AUSTRALIA/DIGITAL EXTREMES > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE **9**

It has been over a year since BioShock's original release, and it is still a magnificent game. This version is a completely faithful transfer, and a great way for PS3 owners to experience this gaming masterpiece.

Unfortunately, there is really no incentive to re-purchase for anyone who played the 360 or PC versions. A super-hard difficulty mode has been added for fanatics, but the most notable new features are the mandatory installation and the ability to pay for exclusive downloadable challenge rooms when they release on the PlayStation Network. BioShock was undoubtedly the best game of 2007, but after a year with so little extra polish, its luster has diminished slightly. — **JOE**

PLAYSTATION 3

Buzz Quiz TV

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER BOARD GAME (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** RELENTLESS SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 25 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

The core Buzz quiz show mechanic maintains the familiar tone of past games, but the extras really set this debut on the PS3. The new wireless controllers rule, though they require eight AA batteries (which are not included). The new online play is great for trivia fanatics who can't round up three other people every time they want to play, but the user-created quizzes are by far the best addition. These eight-question packs cover absolutely anything (Wii, cereal, Guitar Hero tracks, etc.). Quiz creation is handled at the easy-to-use MyBuzzQuiz.com, and anyone can play them for free. I just wish you could create a custom quiz playlist — **BRYAN**



PLAYSTATION 3

NBA 09: The Inside

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SAN DIEGO STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7 > **ESRB** E



POSTERIZED

BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

NBA 09 is like the hard-working, highly touted draft pick that never pans out. It spends the entire offseason working on adding new skills everyone told it to adopt (a franchise mode), but in doing so neglected the traits that got it to the Association in the first place (The Life mode) and failed to address fundamentals altogether.

With gliding players prone to stepping out of bounds, animations that lock you out of reactionary movement, and lackluster commentary, the on-court action offers a similar dose of mediocrity as years past. The low post game is a mess, the strategy suffers from simplicity, and the defensive system lacks the sophistication (and usefulness) of its competition.

NBA 08 mysteriously lacked the series' only respectable mode, The Life. This year it returns, but The Life isn't what it used to be. This version offers three stones so short and devoid of drama they completely undermine the spirit of the idea. Speaking of ideas, Sony finally realized sports fans love franchise modes and included one. It's a noble first effort, but this bare bones attempt lags behind the competition with an ugly user interface, nonexistent trade chatter, simplistic contracts, no player scouting, and no personality management. The online modes are equally uninspiring.

Taken as a whole, NBA 09 feels like a last-generation basketball game. Given its poor performance year in and year out, the game should either retire or spend a couple years in training before it steps out on the court again — **BERTZ**



> **Concept:** Bring The Life back to NBA 09, only to see the game flounder on the court

> **Graphics:** Players glide across the court with this limited animation set

> **Sound:** The lifeless commentator should be shelved for someone with a pulse

> **Playability:** Scoreng's a breeze, but good luck playing defense

> **Entertainment:** Buy a used copy of any NBA Live or 2K game and you'll have a better time

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **7.5**

The Life is welcomed back with mixed feelings. You're given three separate storylines for three different positions, each one suffers in that full attention to each cannot be paid in terms of both time and drama. For instance, in one story I went pretty quickly from my NBA debut to winning the championship without much fanfare. On the court, I like that this year's game pushes you more for loolsh passes, although the players tend to slide around the court and can find themselves surprisingly out of bounds or under the basket when trying to do routine low post moves. With both The Life and a franchise mode, this series is better than it's ever been, even as it's finding its place among the other NBA games. — **KATO**

IF YOU CAN DREAM IT,
YOU CAN BUILD IT.



BANJO-KAZOOIE

NUTS & BOLTS

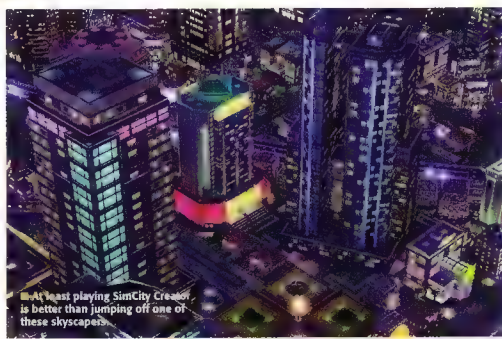


If it flies, floats, or drives, you can build it—and use it to explore six fantastic worlds. Over 100 unique parts and blueprints give you the power to create an unlimited array of ingenious new vehicles to tackle over 150 different challenges.



Jump in.

 XBOX 360



At least playing SimCity Creator is better than jumping off one of these skyscrapers.



...or dying in this fire. But that's where the praise stops.

Wii

SimCity Creator

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** THE SIMS STUDIO > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** E

BURN IT TO THE GROUND

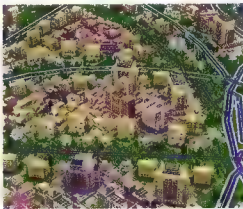
I can't think of a single reason to recommend SimCity Creator. If you like the SimCity series, the game is borderline sacrilegious. If you don't...well, I'm starting to understand why. This title starts with the framework of the classic '90s SimCity games, then falls face-first down the evolutionary ladder.

Players assume the position as mayor to create zones, build roads, and generally tend to the populace. You might think such an uncomplicated formula would be hard to screw up, but wait until you try it with motion controls. Placing roads is hopelessly broken, especially since the tiles

don't snap to a grid. Sure, it lets you make curved roads (who cares?!), but at the expense of turning your little town into an ugly and asymmetrical aberration. The rest of the game is equally uncooperative. With a terrible menu system and finicky camera controls, the game makes practically no effort to draw you in. If it controlled well, it might feel like a nostalgic homage to the old days...but it doesn't. The inclusion of features like hero buildings and various advisors can't reclaim any lost ground when the core gameplay is so cluttered and cumbersome. It's just pathetic...and that's coming from someone

who enjoyed SimCity Societies!

Some games run into problems trying to be everything to everyone, but SimCity Creator suffers from the opposite affliction. It doesn't try to be anything to anyone. Well, that's one thing it does right.—JOE



BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Pollute the gaming public's fond memories of classic SimCity titles
> **Graphics:** At least you won't be looking at them for long
> **Sound:** Why is the game crying? Oh, wait. That's me
> **Playability:** Navigation's erratic and imprecise—truly a monument to terrible usage of the Wii's motion controls
> **Entertainment:** I was smiling once I turned it off. Does that count?
> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 6

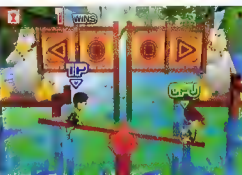
Here is yet another Wii title that exists for no other reason than to fill a perceived market niche on the system. SimCity Creator lacks a great deal of depth in comparison to the recent PC titles, and does little to make up for its failings. The awkward control scheme makes you long for the days of playing SimCity on your SNES, and new features like taking a helicopter ride over your city or the gimmicky "hero buildings" do little to add more than fleeting moments of interest to the terribly dull proceedings. If the Wii is the only gaming system you own (that includes prior generations of hardware) and you absolutely must play a SimCity game, then this might be worth the time. Either way, you have much better ways to scratch that urban planning itch.—MATT

Wii QUICKIES

Wii

Active Life: Outdoor Challenge

> **STYLE** 1 TO 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDA > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO BANDA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E

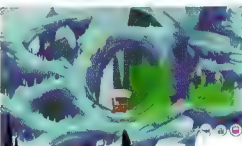


BOTTOM LINE 7 It would have been smart for Namco Bando to release this before Wii Fit, but it helps that Active Life is cheaper (\$50) and most likely easier to find. Tackling the relatively brief career mode is sweat-inducing fun in the harder difficulties, and I enjoyed the retro Power Pad appeal. However, the pad constantly needs to be re-centered in front of your TV and it's not wide enough for two adults to squeeze onto. It's also easy to accidentally hit pause in the middle of gameplay, and there just aren't enough activities for long term exercise interest.—BRYAN

Wii

Line Rider 2: Unbound

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** GENIUS PRODUCTS > **DEVELOPER** INALEX ELECTRONICART > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 8 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 6.25 The original Flash version of Line Rider is about drawing a landscape for a tiny guy to sled through. Unbound maintains that creative aspect (including online level sharing) and adds in a puzzle campaign to deepen the experience. Patching in missing sections of track with various line types is a fun mental test, but several things bang down the experience. Unclear instructions mixed with an un intuitive interface prevent new riders from getting up to speed. You can't save puzzle progress, so if it's half-finished and you have to take off, you must restart it all over again. Don't forget to go into the sound options and turn off the god-awful music.—BRYAN

Wii

Samba de Amigo

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** GEMBOX > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 29 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 6.75 This packed-to-the-brim remake of the Dreamcast classic handles many features admirably, from crisp and bright graphics to the presence of just about any toe-tapping Latin-party dance tune you could request. The big question is how the Wii remote controls work in replacement of the old maracas. Sadly, many enthusiasts will be frustrated. While the functionality is okay, the faster movements required on the higher difficulties frequently don't register as you switch between notes—resulting in failures you don't deserve. It cripples what is otherwise a fun return to maraca-shaking goodness. Other music games have stepped light years beyond what's going on in the gameplay here, but the pure insanity on screen and variety of modes should be enough to make even jaded video game rockers crack a smile.—MILLER

Wii

Rock Revolution

> **STYLE** 1 TO 2-PLAYER MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** HB STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 4.75 This holiday season, many unsuspecting shoppers will buy this profound mistake of a music game, seeing "Rock" in the title and assuming it must be the game their loved one wants. They will be wrong, and many tears will result. Barely functional remote-shaking mechanics may cause some players to turn the game off before their wrists begin to hurt, and the rest will go to sleep that night with equal measures of frustration and arm pain. The decent song list is squandered through some awful covers, and the music creation tool is laughably bad. Animation loops on a few seconds long dominate the background scenes during play, and even the scrolling track is handled poorly—the scrolling speed actually changes between slow and fast sections, resulting in jarring transitions. This is a shameless cash-in on a popular formula. Don't give Konami the satisfaction of duping you.—MILLER

WING

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Extreme
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NYKO



■ The tribal phase is a pared-down RTS, where you collect a single resource while fighting or befriending other tribes

PC

Spore

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION/STRATEGY > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER Maxis > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 7 > ESRB E 10+



■ There are some unfriendly races in the galaxy that may attack your planet while you're off doing space things

LIFE, THE UNIVERSE, AND EVERYTHING

Capturing the evolution of a civilization in a video game is an ambitious undertaking. The degree to which Spore excels in that endeavor is remarkable, but it isn't even the best part of the game. In my time with Spore, I constantly caught myself thinking back to middle school science class; I remembered looking through a microscope for the first time, and contemplating the difference between 100 years and 100,000 years. Whether you're a microbe or a galactic superpower, a thrill of discovery flows through Spore's every peak and valley.

At first, the game is fairly simplistic. The first four evolutionary phases (cell, creature, tribal, and civilization) are not particularly challenging or complex, and therein lies Spore's greatest weakness. For a significant portion of the game, the streamlined versions of popular action and real-time strategy mechanics often feel like they exist solely to give players more excuses to play with the creature, vehicle, and city editors. However, the value of exploring those creation tools is not something to dismiss; the editors forge an early connection with the player. Guiding the survival of a civilization you create — right down to the clothes on creatures' backs and the roofs over

their heads — provides a level of ownership that no other game can match. It also adds insane replay potential; before I even finished the creature phase, I had ideas for at least three other species that I couldn't wait to bring to life.

While most of the buzz around Spore has surrounded the early phases, the space phase is where Spore strips away its simplistic veneer in favor of true depth. Unlike previous stages, this one is built for the long haul, and is the perfect culmination of your species' years of evolution. Taking inspiration from classic space exploration titles like Space Rogue, you hop between star systems, find allies (and enemies), and form colonies on new planets. I sunk hours into this section, traveling to the farthest corners of space in search of suckers to buy my spice at ludicrously high prices. Even with all of these options, the game's interface remains ingenious in its accessibility. Whether you want to play at politics, manipulate economics, or expand your empire, the final phase of the game delivers Spore's most engaging gameplay.

BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

> **Concept:** Mold a space-faring super race from scratch, or just play with the editors to make creatures, spaceships, and more

> **Graphics:** What you see often depends on what you and other users have made, but the stylized art provides consistency. Unfortunately, frequent pop-up issues detract from the beauty

> **Sound:** Ambient music doing what it does best — it fills the space, but never grabs your attention

> **Playability:** No matter what you're doing, the controls and interface are excellent

> **Entertainment:** Even at its most simplistic points, it continues to entertain and inspire

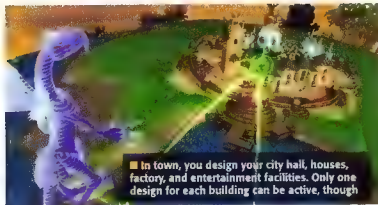
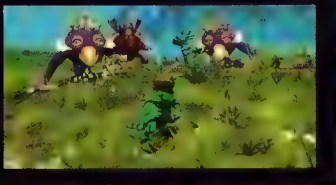
> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **8.5**

From single cell organism to world-conquering space man, Spore's journey through evolution starts out simple, but after millions of years of progression (or roughly seven hours of gameplay), transforms into a complicated masterpiece. Throughout the entire experience, players assume the role of god. Using remarkably flexible creation tools, you determine the look of your species, and then through the gameplay that follows, must define its morality. Will my creature be an herbivore or a carnivore? Is violence the answer to peace? Should my people embrace religion? Should this planet be terra formed? Questions like these give way to an unbelievably high level of replay. Even as my first creature was evolving, I found myself getting excited for my second and third playthroughs. As entraining as this experience is, Spore stumbles a bit with its evolutionary phases; as many of its evolutionary phases lack depth and end up feeling more like samplings of a game rather than a fully featured experience. With that said, the game is always fun. Whether I was conquering a world or spending far too much time in the editor making the most grotesque creature imaginable, Spore captured my imagination and kept me thoroughly engaged every step of the way. —REINER

BLACK SHEEP

If you like other Maxis games like SimCity and The Sims, it doesn't necessarily mean Spore is for you. This time around, forces work in direct opposition to the player. It's not like The Sims, where you can just sit around and proceed at your leisure; if you don't keep your eye on the prize (especially in the tribal and civilization phases), other creatures can storm in and wipe you out. The presence of antagonism doesn't add a prohibitive degree of difficulty, but there is a sense of pressure and urgency in the simulation where there wasn't before. Whether that's good or bad just depends on your preference.



■ In town, you design your city hall, houses, factory, and entertainment facilities. Only one design for each building can be active, though

ALL THE OTHER PLAYERS WILL BE JEALOUS. WELL, JEALOUS AND DEAD.

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PC

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

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** DEEP SILVER > **DEVELOPER** GSC GAMEWORLD > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** M

LESS PAIN, LESS GAIN

Last year's S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl was an unusual title. It pushed the boundaries of what we thought FPS was capable of in some areas: crafting a compelling atmosphere, simulating a post-apocalyptic struggle for survival, and presenting a world that truly reacted to the player's actions. In other ways, it was a perfect example of rough, frustrating design and a startling lack of technical polish; poor performance and punishing tedium marred the experience from beginning to end. Clear Sky, while in many ways a re-release of the first game with a different plotline and new content to explore, even out the peaks and valleys of its predecessor. The technical and design intentions are decidedly less abrasive, but to its detriment, this world lacks the stunning realism of the original.

Objectively, the changes to S.T.A.L.K.E.R.'s mechanics between iterations are for the better. Armor and weapons can be upgraded and repaired by certain NPCs (in the original, the inevitable degradation of your equipment was irreversible and endlessly annoying), and what you have access to is dependent on what you've done to upgrade that faction's capabilities. Tying the RPG-like progression of equipment to the world in this way is a great way to invest players in their decisions of who to help. The new inter-

face for seeing what's going on between the different factions makes it much easier to make those decisions, as well.

For reasons difficult to quantify, the atmosphere isn't quite as unique or compelling in this release. The story feels more contrived, and lacks the intriguing mystery of the original; since it's a prequel, fans already know the outcome. This title's focus on exploring Strelok's (the first game's protagonist) backstory isn't terribly exciting; the Zone itself is a more interesting character than any person in the fiction. Putting explicit numbers about the factional conflicts at the player's fingertips, as great as it is for power-gaming your next equipment upgrade, degrades the verisimilitude of the simulation. Much of the original's draw was that you didn't have access to anything that your character logically would. Breaking those four-wall barriers, though nice from a strict game design standpoint, denigrates the game's greatest strength: conveying the clawing desperation of trying to scrape together an existence in the hellfire-blasted Chernobyl Zone.

It's not that Clear Sky is a bad game. It just doesn't strike the same resonant chord that made the original's many flaws forgivable. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Make some tweaks to the mechanics of last year's ambitious FPS, and tell a new story set prior to that game's events.

> **Graphics:** The engine runs better on modest hardware this time around, and the atmosphere is still top-notch.

> **Sound:** Few files integrate audio into the gameplay this well. Enemies, anomaly detectors, the environment, and Geiger counters all require close attention.

> **Playability:** Fast travel and equipment repair alleviate a lot of the original's tedium.

> **Entertainment:** Flawed in some ways and brilliant in others, this fixes some issues while failing to entirely recuse the magic of the first title.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.'s peculiar blend of RPG and FPS action is still intriguing, but my second visit to the radiation-polluted fields of Chernobyl was less enjoyable. Exploring the haunting post-apocalyptic wasteland filled with mutated beasts and nivaling factions is worth the price of admission when the game runs well, but consistency is fleeting. Many of my problems from the first game—a poor inventory system, conversation text that appears on top of the person you're talking to, and an archaic save system that will have you reaching for FS every other minute—are still present. Combined with crippling bugs, like missions failing to end after you've completed the objectives and storyline critical traders inexplicably closing their businesses constantly, this mess details an otherwise exciting voyage through the ominous Russian backcountry. Maybe a patch will fix these blatant problems, but they should have been addressed beforehand. —BERTZ

NINTENDO DS

Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** BOWWAVE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 30 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

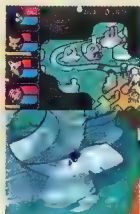
THE TIME HAS COME

Nintendo signed a triple-A RPG developer to translate Mario's greatness into a deeper experience than the limiting platformer genre. Square's Super Mario RPG on SNES paved the way for several great Mario-themed RPGs on portable and home consoles alike. While former rival Sega may be over a decade late to the party, getting Sonic Chronicles makes it worth the wait.

The story follows a standard plotline of Sonic mainstays joining together to take down a common enemy. But the characters so many gamers have grown to hate over the years are actually well written and likeable. Eggman's villain ego shows some amusing tarnish after constant defeat at the hands of Sonic. Big the Cat is satirizingly stupid, and it turns out that Cream is one of the most useful party members. Fans are finally treated to dialogue suitable for someone over five years old, and haters will love having the option to be a total prick to all of Sonic's friends.

The turn-based combat maintains a nice level of difficulty, and the Elite Beat Agents-inspired inputs keep

you on your toes and create some great tension as they become more and more complex. Sonic's speedy pacing is on display here with several quick action options per party member for every battle round. However, if you get distracted during one of these rounds it can seriously screw you over, since there's no way to pause the action. Character skills play off each other well and the team-up moves stir up Chrono Trigger memories. Enemies are decently varied, but robots especially fall prey to too much common enemy.



palette swapping. The colorful hand-drawn maps are fun to explore in search of Chaos eggs, rings, and secret paths. Side missions drift into banal fetch quests and escorts, but it helps that they're short and sprinkled with humor (finding some reading material for a guy in an outhouse, for example). Puzzles almost always involve placing your party on pressure pads, but I was surprised at the variety squeezed out of this mechanic.

Sonic Chronicles is good for dedicated (and lapsed) fans, the BioWare faithful, and anyone just looking for a decent RPG on DS. —BRYAN

> **Concept:** Have a respected outside developer repair Sonic's reputation.

> **Graphics:** Impressive hand-drawn environments mesh well with 3D character models.

> **Sound:** No annoying voices! Killer guitar riffs!

> **Playability:** Phantom Hourglass navigation works well and the active battle system keeps you engaged.

> **Entertainment:** Sonic fans can hold their heads high once again.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

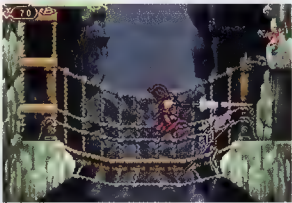
Second Opinion 8.75

Hey guys, have you played the new Sonic game? It's amazing! Also, there's this new band called Nirvana that's really great... singer's name is Kurt something-or-other. Given how much I enjoyed Sonic Chronicles, you'll have to forgive me for thinking I had warped back to the early '90s. BioWare's steady hand has transformed the aging platform star into a role-playing juggernaut in an infectious adventure that blends the depth of a traditional turn-based RPG with the breezy pace of an action game. While the Sonic gang can't manage the great humor and writing that typifies Mario's RPG titles, the battle system, level exploration, and character progression offer miles more depth. I guess you can teach an old 'frog new tricks. —MATT

NINTENDO DS

Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER LOCAL OR ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** XXX > **ESRB** X



BACK TO THE WELL

In many ways, this new 2D riff on Castlevania delivers everything a Belmont fan could want. On the other hand, it's yet another iteration of Symphony of the Night's decade-old design, and the brutally difficult boss battles leave little room for casual players to jump on the Castlevania train.

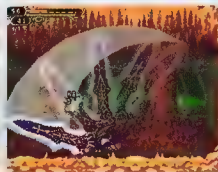
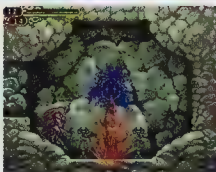
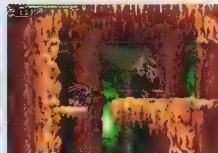
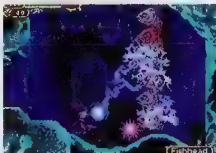
On this latest quest to stop Dracula from engulfing the world in eternal evil, players guide a young heroine through a series of standalone stages, similarly to the structure of Portrait of Ruin. The leveling, skill progression, fighting, and exploration are exactly as you'd expect, with two exceptions: protagonist Shanoa's unique fighting style, and the occasional punishing boss battle.

Rather than wielding weapons in the traditional fashion, Shanoa summons power from glyphs that she absorbs throughout her quest. Every swing of a sword, cascade of lightning, or explosion of holy wrath consumes magic points. However, her MP bar replenishes quickly when not attacking, so the depletion mechanic only comes into play when utilizing attacks that would be drastically overpowered in any other Castlevania

title. It's a brilliant and well-balanced approach; the explosion of options creates much-needed variety in the combat without diluting the crucial tension of the fast-paced gameplay.

This wonderful balancing does not extend to the boss battles. Many are unreasonably difficult—and we're talking the kind of fun-destroying frustration that most developers gave up on after the 16-bit years, not newfangled "grind a few levels until you can power through" cheese. You must memorize and flawlessly execute intricate dodge patterns and counterattacks, in some cases for upwards of five minutes straight to chew through the enemy's inordinately massive health pool. Some hardcore gamers may enjoy the ritual masochism of repeated deaths, but several of Order of Ecclesia's bosses cross well over the line from "enjoyably challenging" to "unbearably frustrating."

The game's greatness makes suffering through a few poorly designed bosses worth it for hardcore Castlevania fans and 2D action experts. But unlike many other titles in the franchise, I can't recommend this much beyond this limited demographic. —**ADAM**



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Take another shot at the 2D Castlevania formula that's served fans for a decade

> **Graphics:** The screens may be tiny, but the animation and art style shine through

> **Sound:** When was the last time a Castlevania had average or worse music? Never, and this is no exception

> **Playability:** Having two attack buttons is weird, but it works once you get used to it

> **Entertainment:** This is a grand adventure, at least until you build your DS dumpling one of the crazy-hard boss fights

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

Konami must have cast a mystical spell of long life on this franchise. Despite regular sequels, the series hasn't succumbed to the pitfalls of sequels. This entry happily follows the traditional Castlevania groundwork. The game's art style, as always, stands out, and I love the new combat system that has you acquiring new glyph powers from fallen foes. The game replaces the familiar single map location with an overworld that has you traveling to different parts of the countryside. While this is cool at first, the deeper exploration elements from previous entries are now missing. The game is also brutally hard, which might turn off even a few longtime fans. Even though it's clear that Konami is changing things to revitalize the series from getting stale, let's hope these few missteps aren't a sign that the series is running out of steam. —**BEEN**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Time Hollow

BOTTOM LINE

7

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23 > **ESRB** T

Time Hollow, like any of the interactive novel titles on the DS, is a tough game for which to issue a blanket recommendation. In one sense, it isn't much of a game at all—you generally just go from place to place and scroll through text. On the other hand, elements of classic adventure games are alive and well, including an intriguing story and some compelling puzzles dealing with time manipulation. It's cool to see the ripples your actions in the past create in the present, but Time Hollow's characters and writing fall a little flat, which makes some sections incredibly dull. Thankfully, the satisfaction you feel when the pieces start falling into place makes it worth the effort—providing you don't expect any real action out of the gameplay. —**JOE**



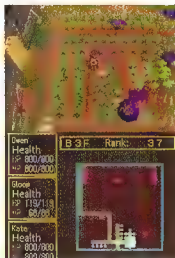
NINTENDO DS

Master of the Monster Lair

BOTTOM LINE

6.25

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** GLOBAI A ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21 > **ESRB** E10+



It's your goal to design a dungeon that attracts monsters. Some of these creatures seek a place to sleep, while others are looking for a trash heap to raid.

You allow these monsters residency solely because you are going to kill them and loot their corpses for food, money, and items. As it turns out, the concept is far more entertaining than any of the gameplay. The dungeon building process offers no depth, and the combat system is a study in turn-based RPG basics. I got a kick out of seeing my characters grow stronger as the game went on. Additionally the story, which includes a talking shovel, offers some laughs. The gameplay just doesn't have enough meat on its bones to back up the concept. —**REINER**

PSP

Star Ocean: First Departure

BOTTOM LINE

7

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21 > **ESRB** T



As I was playing First Departure, I felt like an archaeologist discovering a missing piece of a long-lost civilization. From a historical perspective, it's interesting to finally play the first game in this series, but the genre has evolved a lot since Tri-Ace first made the game during the 16-bit era. I can't say that the game is executed poorly; the combat works well and the revamped visuals make it look like the PSone sequel, Star Ocean: The Second Story. Regardless, the gameplay and plot show their age, blending into the sea of modern role-playing conventions. First Departure's main value lies in giving Tri-Ace fans like me an avenue to see Star Ocean's origin; for players who aren't interested in a history lesson, there isn't much here that is surprising or engaging. —**JOE**



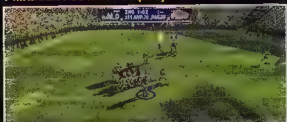
CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For August 2008 Based On Units Sold

1 MADDEN FOOTBALL 09 (360)



Recently I had a dream that I was playing Madden. Except that in the game I was naked and riding a unicorn. And instead of a ball, I was holding a pitcher of milk, which I poured on my opponents to turn them into potted azaleas. This dream was strange to me. Have you had this dream? If you have, send me an email. I think we should talk.

2 MADDEN NFL 09 (PS3)



I love buffalo wings, but I've never seen a football player eat them. Why is that? It seems like a manly food to me. On a related note, I like to feed my dog baked beans. It gives him gas. It's really funny until he lies down next to my fireplace, setting my couch and belongings on fire.

3 MADDEN NFL 09 (PS2)



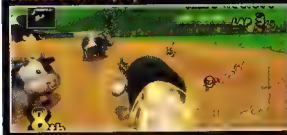
Football players are my third favorite type of people — the first two being the guys who sell you pretzels during the game and women. I knew a kid in high school who talked about playing professional football when he grew up. He even got a scholarship for college. I don't know what happened to him after that. I didn't say this was going to be interesting.

4 WII FIT (WII)



I turn one day older today. Now I'm getting worried about my health. I think I should start to exercise more. The more you exercise the healthier you are, and it seems like the best place for you to do this is in your own home. I bought three copies of this game because more Wii Fit means losing weight faster.

5 MARIO KART WII (WII)

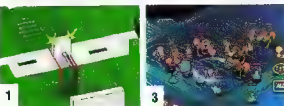


I play Bingo on Thursdays with a group called Old People Who Share (come join us in the basement of the west wing of the hospital), and last week we ordered a pizza from a place called Goober's Pies. The pizza took two and a half hours to arrive. The crust was burnt. The cheese tasted too creamy. I didn't like it. Afterwards I got sick. I tell you all this to warn you about playing too much Mario Kart on the Wii.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	Madden NFL 09	N/A	360	8.25	08-08
2	Madden NFL 09	N/A	PS3	8.25	04-08
3	Madden NFL 09	N/A	PS2	8.25	06-08
4	Wii Fit	2	Wii	8	04-08
5	Mario Kart Wii	7	Wii	8.5	04-08
6	Wii Play	4	Wii	7	02-07
7	Soulcalibur IV	6	360	8.75	07-08
8	Too Human	N/A	360	6.75	08-08
9	Madden NFL 09	N/A	Wii	8.25	04-08
10	Guitar Hero: On Tour	3	DS	7	06-08
11	Super Mario Sluggers	N/A	Wii	5.5	08-08
12	Soulcalibur IV	9	PS3	8.75	07-08
13	New Super Mario Bros.	14	DS	9.25	05-06
14	Mario Kart Wii	7	Wii	8.5	04-08
15	Mario and Sonic at the Olympics	N/A	DS	N/A	11-07
16	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	16	Wii	9.5	03-06
17	Mario and Sonic at the Olympics	N/A	Wii	4	11-07
18	Madden NFL 09	N/A	PSP	N/A	08-08
19	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	N/A	360	10	11-07
20	Mario Party	N/A	DS	7	11-07

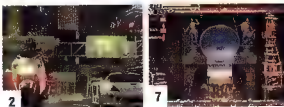
TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Rhythm Heaven	DS
2	Wii Fit	Wii
3	Blue Dragon Plus	DS
4	Afrika	PS3
5	J-League Winning Eleven 2008	PS2
6	Fire Emblem: The Dark Dragon & the Sword of Light	DS
7	Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	DS
8	Daijassou! Band Brothers DX	DS
9	Mario Kart Wii	Wii
10	Inazuma	DS



TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Dead Space	N/A	multi
2	Midnight Club: Los Angeles	N/A	multi
3	Spore	N/A	PC
4	NHL 09	1	multi
5	Rock Band 2	2	multi
6	NBA 2K9	N/A	multi
7	Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	N/A	DS
8	Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood	N/A	DS
9	Civilization IV: Colonization	3	PC
10	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	4	multi



The Star's Favorite Pies

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	The Sims 2 Apartment Life	N/A	\$26
2	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	4	\$35
3	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	2	\$30
4	World Of Warcraft	7	\$20
5	Spore Creature Creator	3	\$10
6	Deadliest Catch: Alaskan Storm	N/A	\$42
7	World Of Warcraft: Burning Crusade	8	\$30
8	The Sims 2 IKEA Home Stuff	5	\$20
9	Warcraft III Battle Chest	10	\$39
10	Diablo Battle Chest	6	\$39



Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWSARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Army of Two	7.5	Apr-08
Battle Fantasia	7.5	Oct-08
Battlefield: Bad Company	9.25	Jul-08
Booze Conspiracy: The Chronicles of Narnia Prince Caspian, The Civilization Revolution	6.75	Apr-08
Chronicles of Narnia Prince Caspian, The Civilization Revolution	6.25	Jul-08
Club, The	9	Jul-08
Condemned 2: Bloodshot	8.75	Apr-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Dark Sector	7.5	May-08
Devil May Cry 4	9	Mar-08
Diagona 3: Absence of Justice	8.25	Sep-08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	8	Jul-08
Facebreaker	7.75	Oct-08
Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	7.25	Jun-08
Grand Theft Auto IV	10	Jun-08
Grid	9	Jul-08
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	8	Aug-08
Hail to the Champ	4	Jul-08
Haze	6.25	Jul-08
HELLION: The Service of Evil	7	Jul-08
Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds	8	May-08
Incredible Hulk, The	6.75	Aug-08
Iron Man	3.75	Jul-08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	8	Mar-08
Lost Via Domus	6.75	Apr-08
Madden NFL 09	8.25	Sep-08
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames	7.25	Oct-08
Metal Gear Solid 4	10	Jul-08
Music of the Patriots	10	Jul-08
MLB 08: The Show	8.5	May-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
Monster Madness: Grave Digger	7.25	Aug-08
NASCAR 09	8	Jul-08
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	6.75	Jun-08
NCAA Football 09	8.25	Aug-08
NFL Head Coach 09	6.75	Sep-08
NHL 09	9.25	Oct-08
NHL 2K9	6.75	Oct-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	7.75	May-08
Pure	8.5	Oct-08
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	9.25	Apr-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.25	May-08
Spider-Man	8	Aug-08
Scavilibur IV	8.75	Sep-08
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	8.75	Oct-08
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	8.5	Oct-08
Top Spin 3	7.75	Aug-08
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	7.25	May-08
Viking: Battle for Asgard	4	Sep-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08

XBOX 360

Alone in the Dark	6.5	Aug-08
Army of Two	7.5	Apr-08
Battle Fantasia	7.5	Oct-08
Battlefield: Bad Company	9.25	Jul-08
Booze Conspiracy: The Bully Scholarship Edition	6.75	Apr-08
Chronicles of Narnia Prince Caspian, The Civilization Revolution	6.25	Jul-08
Club, The	8.75	May-08



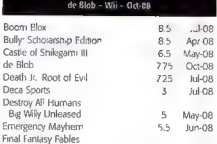
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith - Xbox 360 - Aug-08

Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	7.25	Aug-08
Condemned 2: Bloodshot	8.75	Apr-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Dark Messiah of Might & Magic: Elements	8	Apr-08
Dark Sector	7.5	May-08
Devil May Cry 4	9	Mar-08
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	7.5	Aug-08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	8	Jul-08
Facebreaker	7.75	Oct-08
Frontlines: Fuel of War	7.25	Apr-08
Grand Theft Auto IV	10	Jun-08
Grid	9	Jul-08
Guitar Hero 3: Adventure	6.25	Oct-08
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	8	Aug-08
Hail to the Champ	4	Jul-08
HELLION: The Service of Evil	7	Jul-08
Incredible Hulk, The	6.75	Aug-08
Infamous: Second Son	8.5	Oct-08
Iron Man	3.75	Jul-08
Jumpin' Griffin's Story	1.25	Apr-08

Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Lost Cosplay	8.5	Apr-08
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	8	Mar-08
Colones Edition	8.25	Jun-08
Lost Via Domus	6.75	Apr-08
Madden NFL 09	8.25	Sep-08
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames	7.25	Oct-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
NASCAR 09	8	Jul-08
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	6.75	Jun-08
NCAA Football 09	8.25	Aug-08
NFL Head Coach 09	6.75	Sep-08
NHL 09	9.25	Oct-08
NHL 2K9	6.75	Oct-08
Ninja Gaiden II	8.75	Jul-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	7.75	May-08
Pure	8.5	Oct-08
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	9.25	Apr-08
Rock Band 2	8.25	Oct-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.25	May-08
Scavilibur IV	8.75	Sep-08
Spiderweb Chronicles: The Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	8.75	Oct-08
Supreme Commander	5	Sep-08
Tales of Vesperia	7.25	Oct-08
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	8.5	Oct-08
Too Human	6.75	Sep-08
Top Spin 3	7.75	Aug-08
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Universe at War: Earth Assault	5	Jun-08
Ultimate Tournament 3	8.5	Aug-08
Viking: Battle for Asgard	7.25	May-08
Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise	8.25	Oct-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08
Zoed's Asaiki	5	Oct-08

Wii

Battle of the Bands	6	Jun-08
Blast Wars: Build Trade Destroy	8	Jun-08
Bowberman Land	6.5	Apr-08

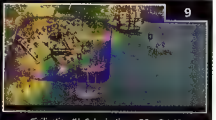


de Blob - Wii - Oct-08

Boom Itax	8.5	Jul-08
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Apr-08
Castle of Shikigami III	6.5	May-08
de Blob	7.75	Oct-08
Death Jr.: Root of Evil	7.25	Jul-08
Dino Sports	3	Jul-08
Destroy All Humans	5	May-08
Big Willy Unleashed	5.5	Jun-08
Emergency Mayhem	5.5	Jun-08
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	5.5	Jul-08
Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	6.75	Oct-08
House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return	7.5	Apr-08
Jumpin' Griffin's Story	1.25	Apr-08
Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Major League Baseball 2K8	6.75	May-08
Major Kart Wi	8.5	Jun-08
Ninja Super Sluggers	5.5	Oct-08
Ninja Relics	5	Jun-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Okami	9.25	May-08
Oponoa	5.5	Sep-08
Order Up	7.75	Apr-08
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	8.5	Apr-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	8	May-08
Rock Band	8.25	Apr-08
Sam & Max Season One	7	Sep-08
Sega Bass Fishing	5	Apr-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.5	May-08
Super Smash Bros. Brawl	9.5	Apr-08
Target Terror	4.5	Jul-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08
Wall-E	6	Jul-08
We Are Galf	6	Jul-08
We Ski	6.25	Jun-08
Wi-Fi	8	Jun-08
Wii Earth African Safari	5.75	Jul-08
Warms: A Space Oddity	6.75	May-08

PLAYSTATION 2

Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Mana Khemia: Alchemists of al-Revis	7	May-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Persona 3: FEES	8.25	May-08
Twisted Metal: Head On	7.25	Apr-08
Extra Twisted Edition	4	Sep-08



Civilization IV: Colonization - PC - Oct-08

Mass Effect	9.5	Jul-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Seven Kingdoms: Conquest	4	May-08
Sine of a Solar Empire	9	Apr-08
Space Siege	6	Oct-08
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08

NINTENDO DS

Advance Wars: Days of Rain	8.75	Mar-08
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney	8	May-08
Assassin's Creed: Altair's Chronicles	6	Apr-08
Away: Shuffle Dungeon	7.5	Oct-08
Banjo-O-Spirts	7.5	Sep-08
Civilization Revolution	8.5	Aug-08
Diagona DS	8	Oct-08
Dragon Quest IV	8	Oct-08
Dragon Quest: The Crown of the Cursed	7	Jun-08
Drome Tactics	7	Jun-08
Eco-Creators: Save the Forest	3	Apr-08
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates	6	Apr-08
Final Fantasy IV	8.5	Aug-08
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	8.75	Jul-08
From the Abyss	5	Oct-08
Guitar Hero: On Tour	7	Sep-08
Harvest Moon	6.75	Oct-08
Island of Happiness	5.75	May-08
Insecticide	5.75	May-08
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	6.5	Jun-08
LIDL	1	Aug-08
Lost in Blue 3	6.25	May-08
Major League Baseball 2K8	6.75	May-08
Fantasy All-Stars	5.5	Jun-08
Mystery Case Files: Mill on the Hill	7	Oct-08
N++	8.75	Oct-08
New International Table & Field	6.25	Oct-08
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	7.75	May-08
Pop Cube! Street	7.5	Oct-08
Fashion Simulation	7.5	Oct-08
Professor Layton and the Curious Village	7.5	Apr-08
Puchi Puchi Virus	7.5	May-08
Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure	5.5	Oct-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08
Summon Night: Twin Age	7	Jun-08
Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Thyrgeyl	6.75	May-08
Tyanna Character	8.25	Aug-08
Under the Knife 2	8.25	May-08
World Ends With You: The	8.25	May-08

PSP

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII	7.25	Apr-08
Dangan Explorer	6	Apr-08
Warrior of Ancient Arts	6	Apr-08
RelatOut Head On	7.5	May-08
God of War: Chains of Olympus	9	Mar-08
Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2	8	Jul-08
Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee	8.75	Oct-08
Potapon	8.75	Mar-08
R-Type Command	7.25	Jul-08
Secret Agent Clank	8.5	Jul-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08
Wig Wags XP	7.5	May-08
Wipeout Pulse	7.75	Apr-08

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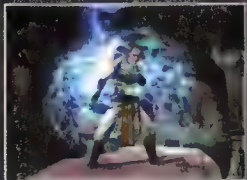
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed



The Call of the Dark Side

UNLIMITED ENABLED

By Rich Davis, Lead Systems Designer



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed puts you in the role of Darth Vader's secret apprentice. Armed with devastating Force powers and a deadly red-bladed lightsaber, the secret apprentice is capable of taking on powerful Jedi warriors and elite Imperial troops. The following is a list of tips and tricks from the game designers that will allow you to dominate any threat that stands in your way.

MASTERING THE FORCE

The Secret Apprentice has a diverse arsenal of Force powers to use while crushing the opposition. In order to complete the game on the harder difficulties, it is critical to know which power is best for which situation.

Force Push - This is best used to blast foes into environmental hazards such as chasms and pits. It is also helpful in creating some breathing room when pressed by melee opponents. The strength of the push increases with range, so for the best results, use push on nearby foes.

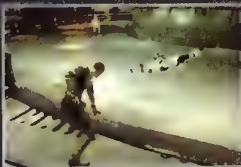
Force Lightning - This skill deals enough damage to take out Stormtroopers, but its strongest effect is that it stuns enemies, canceling their attacks and holding them in place. You can then follow up with one of your slower, more devastating attacks. Be sure to level up Force Lightning to rank 2 as soon as you can - being able to lock down a small group of enemies will grant you an immense tactical advantage.



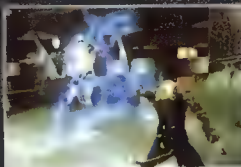
Force Grip - This is your most versatile weapon. It can be used to throw enemies to their death, neutralize a single enemy, turn environmental objects into deadly weapons, and deal damage from extreme ranges. However, such power comes at

some risk - using Force Grip leaves you vulnerable to attack, so it is unwise to attempt it when enemies surround you. Use the following tips to improve your success with Force Grip attacks:

- **The Flick:** Although it is fun to slam enemies around with the Force, sometimes there is no time to delight in such amusements. To quickly use grip, just hold the Force Grip button long enough to lift your enemy off his feet, then - while pointing the left stick in any direction - immediately release the button to send him flying. With some practice, you can quickly send half a dozen enemies flying in the space of a few seconds.



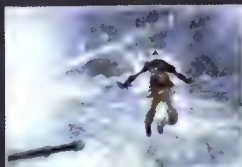
- **The Slam:** Similar to the flick, sometimes you just want to use Force Grip to slam an enemy into the ground rather than send him flying. To do this, grip your enemy and then point the right stick down when you release the Force Grip button. If slamming your opponents face into the ground doesn't defeat him outright, he will be prone on the ground, and a ripe target for any number of follow-up attacks.



- **The Grenade:** One of the first combos you should unlock is the Lightning Grenade. This power will allow you to infuse your gripped target with Force Lightning. When the target impacts the environment, or collides with other enemies, a violent burst of energy is released, and anything nearby will be blasted off the ground and dealt significant damage.

- **The Sniper:** Most of your ranged attacks work out to a range of about 20 meters. With Force Grip, however, you can throw objects and enemies across the entire

battlefield. Whenever you see enemies at a distance, look around to see if there is anything you can use to hurl at them while you remain safely out of range of their attacks.



Force Repulse - This skill can be used as a panic button, knocking back all nearby foes with enough force to cause them damage, both when they are hit by the shockwave and when they slam into the environment. It activates extremely quickly, and is best used when surrounded or when you are being pressed back by melee attackers. Force Repulse can be used offensively - try jumping in behind a turret emplacement and blasting it apart before it can respond.

Lightsaber Throw - This is the ultimate damage-dealing Force Power. Be sure to rank it to at least rank 2, because the charged Lightsaber Throw deals more damage than anything else in the game. Since charging your Force powers leaves you vulnerable to enemy attacks, it is often best to stun an enemy with Force Lightning before attempting a charged Lightsaber Throw. This tactic is especially helpful against tough enemies such as AF-STs and Imperial Purge Troopers.

Lightning Shield - This is the final power you learn, and can be used both offensively and defensively. The extra damage imbued to your saber attacks can make the difference between life and death. It is also great to use when you need to make a surgical strike against an enemy across a populated battlefield - activate the shield to reduce the damage you take as you jump and dash toward your target. Be careful, though, because the Force Energy cost is so high that it will leave you without any Force Powers for a short time.

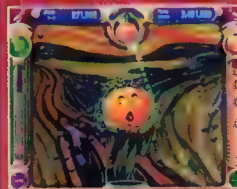


Mod World

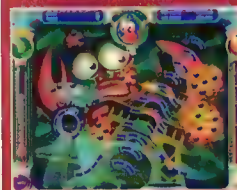
PEGGLE NIGHTS
www.popcap.com



It's not free (\$19.95 to download from PopCap.com or other services like Steam), terribly niche, or indie (developer/publisher: PopCap has made big waves with Bejeweled, Zuma, and the original Peggle). But Peggle Nights deserves to be part of this conversation regardless. The huge number of hours we've lost to Peggle speaks for itself.



Like a cracked mix of pinball and pachinko, Peggle presents an addictive mix of randomness and skill. Clearing all of the orange pegs by hitting them with the ball beats the level, and green pegs grant access to one of several "magic powers" like multiple balls or pinball-like flippers. The challenge mode throws curveballs in the form of different objectives, like score requirements or more orange pegs.



This quasi-sequel tailors the challenges to tilt that balance a little farther toward player ability and away from blind luck, which is a very good thing. A ton of new adventure and challenge boards offer plenty of content for your \$20, and the layouts are great. Unfortunately, only one new magic power is available, making this little more than a set of new boards rather than an actual sequel. Nonetheless, Peggle rules, and several dozen new levels to conquer is a pretty solid value.

Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM



Rock Band 2

From the main menu go into the Extras menu then select Modify Game to enter these codes. Saving will be disabled after these cheats are activated.

Increased Detection - Y, B, O, Y, B, O, Y, B, O

Stage Mode - B, Y, R, B, Y, R, B, Y, R
Unlock All Songs - R, Y, B, R, R, B, B, R, Y, B

Unlock All Venues - B, O, O, B, Y, B, O, O, B, Y



XBOX 360

Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise

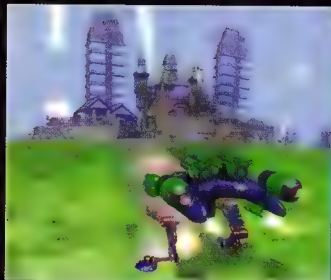
Have trouble getting more Piñatas to show up in your garden? GI to the rescue. We've got an exclusive Piñata for you. Using your 360 vision cam just scan the picture of the card below and you'll unlock your very own Eaglar piñata.

"GI Droid"
(location unknown - Last seen using the Blue Knight in Castle Crashers)



Code of the Month

Spore



Need some extra help with addictive creature creator Spore? To use these codes first open up the cheat console by holding CTRL, SHIFT, and C simultaneously, then type in the following words (without spaces) and hit enter. Keep in mind that some cheats will only work during certain phases or menus as listed.

AddDNA - Gives you more DNA in mating/creation menus

CapturePlanetGIF - Captures a 360-degree .gif file of your current planet
FreeCam - The camera is freed up
Killallhints - No hints will appear during your playthrough

MoreMoney - Gives you more money in Tribal mode

RefillMotives - Fills health completely
SetConsequenceTrait X - Set your trait, where X equals the trait

SetTime (X, Y) - Set time, where X,

equals the hour and Y equals the minute
SpaceCreate - Unlocks all tools while in space

StyleFilter-filmNoir - View the game in black and white

StyleFilter-none - Bring your view back to the default setting

StyleFilter-oilPaint - Make your view appear as an oil painting

UnlockSuperWeapons - Unlocks each super weapon in Tribal mode

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CLASSICGI

Where The Past Comes Alive.

In many ways, the Xbox launch was a series of firsts. Microsoft's first proper foray into the console space marked the debut of console hard drives, interactive Dolby 5.1 surround sound, built-in Ethernet ports, and a unified online service in Xbox Live. While this wasn't enough to propel the nascent Xbox to the top of the console leaderboards, the system left behind some amazing games in its wake.

XBOX TOP 25

1 HALO SERIES

The Halo series defined the Xbox experience. Every console manufacturer hopes for a launch title as successful as Halo: Combat Evolved. Originally developed as an RTS by Bungie, this epic sci-fi shooter found a fast following with its tight gunplay, immersive cinematic narrative, and fantastic multiplayer. The sequel took Master Chief to the next level by introducing the multiplayer experience to Xbox Live and became a cultural phenomenon as feverish gamers lined the blocks around game retailers everywhere to purchase copies during the now-famous midnight launches. Since the first Halo released, the franchise has expanded into novels, comics, collectibles, and even Mountain Dew cans. Not even Grand Theft Auto can claim that kind of cultural impact.

2 STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

With its rich lore and fantastic array of interesting characters, Star Wars was always ripe fodder for an RPG. It took until 2003 for LucasArts to capitalize on this potential gold mine, but at least the company did it right by hiring 20-sided dice wunderkinds BioWare. These two companies teamed to create the best Star Wars tale outside of the original trilogy, set 4,000 years before Episode IV in a time where Jedi and Sith were as common as Dominoes delivery men are today. KOTOR's epic plot twist and wonderful combat system should be experienced by every RPG fan.

3 SPLINTER CELL SERIES

Ubisoft took the Tom Clancy universe in a thrilling new direction with Splinter Cell. As grizzled secret agent Sam Fisher, gamers conducted covert black ops missions to take down terrorist threats by sticking to the shadows and using silenced weapons. An inspired blend of Thief and Metal Gear stealth gameplay, Splinter Cell encouraged gamers to use brains over brute force thanks to a set of high-tech gadgets that would make MacGyver jealous. The impressive lighting and sound effects were unrivaled, and the teamwork-based mercs vs. spies modes demonstrated Ubisoft's creative approach to multiplayer.



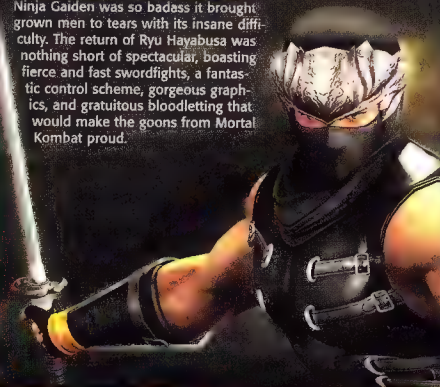
FABLE

Ingenuous creator Peter Molyneux promised gameplay features he didn't deliver in Fable, and many gamers felt cheated. But taken for what it is, Fable is an impressive and innovative RPG that gave gamers the freedom to decide whether to become a magnanimous hero or a meddlesome tyrant.



NINJA GAIDEN

Ninja Gaiden was so badass it brought grown men to tears with its insane difficulty. The return of Ryu Hayabusa was nothing short of spectacular, boasting fierce and fast swordfights, a fantastic control scheme, gorgeous graphics, and gratuitous bloodletting that would make the goons from Mortal Kombat proud.



GRAND THEFT AUTO SERIES

Sixth place for the most innovative game in the generation, you say? We hear you, but to everyone at Game Informer, Grand Theft Auto is synonymous with the PlayStation 2, GTA III, Vice City, and San Andreas eventually made their way to the Xbox, but only after they sold millions of copies on Sony's world-beating console.



JADE EMPIRE

Rather than returning to Star Wars after Knights of the Old Republic, BioWare set its course for the orient. Steeped in ancient Chinese mythology and myriad martial arts fighting styles, the game's innovative skill tree and hand-to-hand combat combined with the quest and dialogue system from KOTOR to form one of the most popular RPGs of the era.

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

Escape From Butcher Bay is the rare instance where the game outmatches its film counterpart. Rather than rehashing the cinematic tale, this prequel tells the remarkable story of Riddick's prison break. With role-playing, stealth, action, and first-person shooting elements, Riddick blurred genre lines into an amazing cohesive experience.

PSYCHONAUTS

The creator of Grim Fandango and Day of the Tentacle made another great game, and almost no one noticed. Like most Tim Schafer games, Psychonauts bombed on store shelves, but captured the hearts of the clued-in gamers with its imaginative, humorous story.



football fans ever since.

FOX Live scene.

supply of ammo.

against other fighters across the world.

Over time, it projects set the table for thousands of games, such as Star Wars: The Force Unleashed.

which focuses on the Xbox palm. PGR 2 also featured a new system, which inspired the future Xbox Live Arcade hit.

Dew commercial.

borrowed liberally from

of friends.

this haunting series.

ambitious but

onto the list.

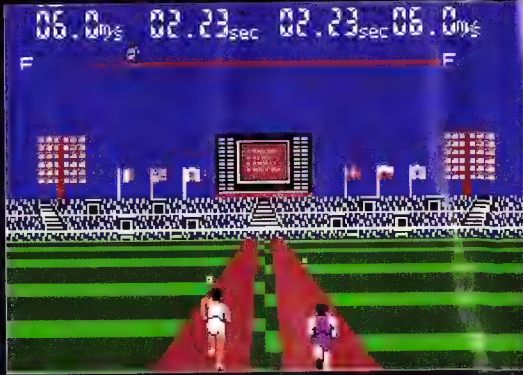
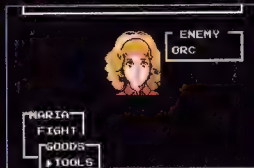


NES

LEGEND OF THE GHOST LION

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER KEMCO > DEVELOPER KEMCO > RELEASE 1989

With box art this bad, it has to be good! Actually, it doesn't. Despite the hilariously terrible depiction on the game's cover, Legend of the Ghost Lion is an average Dragon Quest knock-off. You take control of Maria, a young girl whisked off to the land of dreams in search of her parents. From there, Ghost Lion is a by-the-numbers adventure where you fight monsters, grind levels, buy weapons, and then fight harder monsters. In order to get optimal equipment, you have to collect an absurd amount of money, which can only be done through hours of random encounters. That may have been the standard at the time, but it doesn't make it any more exciting to play today. The ability to summon spirits is neat, but the game's bland art style and repetitive nature fail to amount to anything worth mentioning. If it weren't for the chick who looks like a dude on the cover, Legend of the Ghost Lion would be lost to obscurity forever.

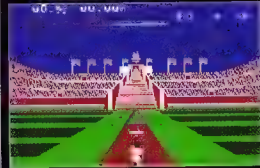


NES

WORLD CLASS TRACK MEET

> STYLE 1 TO 6-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER BANDAI > RELEASE 1986

Will Sports? Pffffff. Will Fit? Who cares? The Power Pad was making kids sweat 20 years ago with this pack-in game and a handful of others. Little known fact: This exercise gaming duo was released a year earlier by Bandai, but was quickly pulled off store shelves once Nintendo decided to throw some cash at the company and rebrand it as a first-party accessory. This was probably for the best, since Family Fun Fitness Control Mat and Family Fun Fitness: Stadium Events are a mouthful. World Class Track Meet includes four sporting events: 100m dash, 110m hurdles, long jump, and triple jump. Variety is not the game's strong suit. The true depth of WCTM lies in discovering the best cheating strategy. Drumming on the pad with your fists may seem like a good idea, but it'll barely get you past Horse. To destroy Cheetah, you must find a counter to lean on and work your feet like a maniac. Only then will you earn all of the Olympic medals and trophies (huh?). Only then will you see the message of victory, "You are champion!"



SNES

ZOOP

> STYLE 1-PLAYER PUZZLE > PUBLISHER WACOM > DEVELOPER HOOKSTONE > RELEASE 1995

Released for every platform with an installed base in the triple digits during the 1990s, Zoop is one of the better fast-paced puzzlers of the era. Blocks constantly spawn in from the sides of the board, ending your game if they reach the middle area in which your cursor resides. Shooting in any direction clears blocks the same color as your cursor, while hitting a differently colored piece swaps colors between your cursor and that block. This simple mechanic is the sum total of the gameplay, but like all good puzzle games it remains solid over a decade beyond its initial release. The excellent jazzy soundtrack, which evolves with the gameplay as the blocks encroach ever faster, stands out as well.

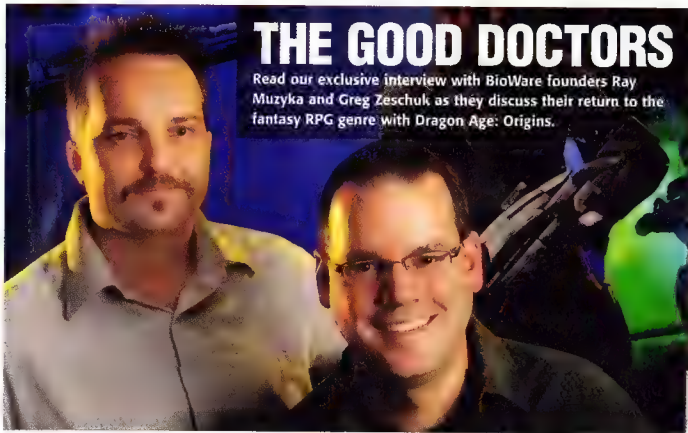




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UNLIMITED LAUNCH: OCT. 13



THE GOOD DOCTORS

Read our exclusive interview with BioWare founders Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk as they discuss their return to the fantasy RPG genre with *Dragon Age: Origins*.



Dead Space

EA's menacing sci-fi horror-fest must be seen to be believed, so tune in for these exclusive video clips!



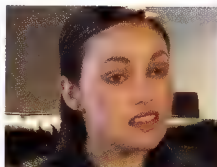
One Conquest To Rule Them All

Game director Erik Gewirtz discusses *The Lord of the Rings: Conquest*'s wide open battles in further detail.



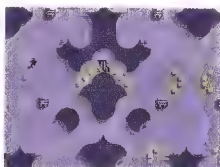
Unleash Your Force

Learn more Jedi tricks of the trade with our extended *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* developer tips.



The Future of Animation

Game Informer dissects the now-famous Emily Project in our discussion with David Barton, head of production at Image Metrics.



N+

Silverbirch Studios gives tips for running your stick figures through the gauntlet of this addictive puzzle game.

ALSO ONLINE THIS MONTH:

Game Informer Online braves the sweltering Tokyo heat to bring you the latest news from the Tokyo Game Show.

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GAMEOVER

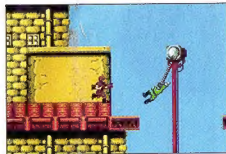
Unlock Full Game?

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

The stars have aligned, and we can see the future. That's right! Through a complex astrollogical and cosmological formula, we've distilled the nature of your future into a 10 question quiz. We're just that good. Your answers will reveal your very own gaming horoscope. Get all the questions right, and surely, gaming nirvana awaits you (in your next life).

1 Who was the playable protagonist in the 1988 NES game entitled Bionic Commando?

- A. Super Joe
- B. Nathan "Rad" Spencer
- C. Master-D
- D. Steve Austin



2 Which skin disorder was not the name of a Battletoad?

- A. Rash
- B. Zit
- C. Wart
- D. Pimple



3 Which of these games featured randomly generated dungeons?

- A. King's Field
- B. Dark Cloud
- C. ActRaiser
- D. Madden 08

4 Oh man, those Fatal Frame games sure are scary. The only thing scarier is keeping track of all those crazy subtitles. Which one of these was the subtitle to the second game in the series?

- A. Crimson Butterfly
- B. Code Veronica
- C. The Tormented
- D. The Room

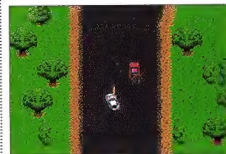
5 Galactic Wrestling on the PS2? Well, sure! But what will it feature?

- A. Featuring Super Slam
- B. Featuring Ultimate Muscle
- C. Featuring Hulk Hogan
- D. Featuring Bill Cosby



6 Back in 1983, Spy Hunter got a lot of attention for its exciting theme song, but that wasn't the original source of the music. What was?

- A. Knight Rider
- B. Pole Position
- C. Get Smart
- D. Peter Gunn



7 Which of these is a real game name?

- A. CyberBear
- B. CyberTiger
- C. CyberDog
- D. CyberLemming

8 Games like Master of Orion are often referred to as 4X. Which one of these isn't one of the four X's?

- A. eXplore
- B. eXterminate
- C. eXplode
- D. eXpand



9 How many visually unique one-screen stages did you encounter in the original arcade release of Donkey Kong?

- A. Three
- B. Four
- C. Five
- D. Six

10 Which of these is your favorite game?

- A. E.T.? Really? Wasn't that the one that got thrown in the desert?
- B. Superman 64? Whew. Have you ever even played video games?
- C. Fuzion Frenzy 2? That game can't even spell its own name right!
- D. Friday the 13th, huh? Dang, your taste in games really stinks.

BREAKDOWN

28% was the plummet that Take-Two stock took the morning after EA announced they would no longer pursue an acquisition

1 million downloads were completed of the Star Wars: The Force Unleashed demo that went up on Xbox Live — a new record

87% fewer copies of Madden 09 were sold for Wii than for 360

\$50 is how much money you could save if you purchased a new Xbox 360 Arcade unit instead of a Wii, under Microsoft's new reduced pricing

6% of our editors recommend purchasing an Xbox 360 Arcade model

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1 The planets have not aligned with your controller. Resign yourself to a future of lost save games, red rings of death, and a friends list filled with people who put XX in front and behind their names. The stars have spoken! Accept your fate, you pitiful, pitiful fool.

2-3 The lunar aspects are at odds with your gamerscore. Beware games with limited checkpoints — you are sure to fall prey to some dude with a rocket launcher just around the next corner. Seriously, he's right there! Oops. Too late.

4-5 The stars reveal mixed signals, and your fate lies in the balance. You can tip the scales of destiny in your favor by shaping your karma with good deeds. Consider not killing every townspeople in that next village you encounter in Fable, and limit civilian deaths to five an hour during your next GTA online session.

6-7 You're not one to usually spend time alone, but the fates speak of a dark time ahead if you don't get away from online deathmatches. Consider spending some time alone with a nice game of Bejeweled. If you must keep playing Call of Duty with us, then stop singing along to the radio while you game, idiot.

8-9 Your Wii is in ascendance. Now is the time to unlock that achievement that has eluded your grasp in recent days. Move up a difficulty level in Guitar Hero. Five frets hold no fear for you.

10 The celestial eye of the universe smiles upon you and your console of choice. No one dares stand before you in online competitions. You will unlock the hidden, never-before-seen ending to Tetris. Expect your pre-release copies of Halo 4, God of War 3, and Super Mario Universe to arrive at your house soon.

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I LOVE THE
SMELL OF
FUN IN
THE MORNING.

Avoid baddies.
Even cardboard ones.

Swing past death with
a smile on your face.

It's not about
winning or losing.
Oh wait, yes it is.

It's unanimous.
People like fun.

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