

GAMEINFORMER

COMPUTER & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE



HALO 3 RECON

World Exclusive Details Straight From Bungie

ISSUE 188

DECEMBER 2008



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Resistance: Retribution



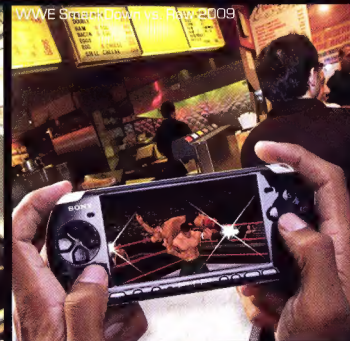
echochrome



Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Heroes 2



LEGO Batman: The Videogame



WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009



Shaun White's Snowboarding



Ben 10: Alien Force



PRODUCTS RANGE FROM EVERYONE TO MATURE
E-M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2



FIFA 09

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Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09



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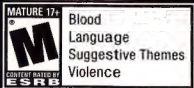


Shaun
White
Snowboarding

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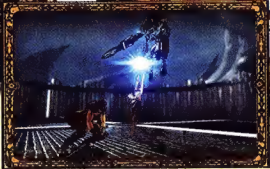
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Alcohol Reference
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PLAYSTATION 3



XBOX 360 LIVE



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cover story



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HALO 3: RECON

Beloved developer Bungie is returning to the Halo universe with this expansion pack to Halo 3, and we have 10 pages of exclusive details about the project. Set between Halo 2 and Halo 3, this dark story casts players in the role of an Orbital Drop Shock Trooper rookie trying to piece together the demise of his squad. Flip to this month's cover story to find out all about Recon's unique story hook and gander at the new maps included for Halo 3 online play.

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HOLIDAY BUYING GUIDE

Jump into 10 pages of the raddest picks and sweetest swag to score this holiday season in our annual Holiday Buying Guide. No socks and underwear this year, we promise!

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SCENE 5: TRANSMISSION

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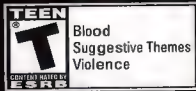
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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



A PLEA FOR LOCAL MUSIC

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It has been proven that songs appearing in Guitar Hero and Rock Band go on to sell more music for their prospective bands and labels. For the most part, the minds at Harmonix (the developers behind Rock Band) and Neversoft (Guitar Hero) have used their powers for good. Each game features songs both old and new, and in both cases I've found new music to enjoy while playing along.

That said, I think they can do more. This may be a shocker to some, but there was a time when I played in a band for many years. I can tell you firsthand that you don't play in a band unless you love it, because it's more work than you would care to believe, and the pay for most bands is barely enough to cover the "beverages," much less the gas it takes to get to the gig.

My request is a simple one: feature more local music. I loved learning about the Boston music scene through the eyes of Harmonix with their work on Guitar Hero and Rock Band. My life simply wouldn't be the same without the pleasant surprises of Anarchy Club, Bang Camero, or Vagiant I found hidden in those games. Sure, these bands don't sell as many games as Tool or AC/DC (if they sell any), but local acts ultimately lend the games the heart behind the flash of the established music giants featured in ad campaigns and listed on the back of the box.

Use the influence these games have on the music industry to help local music around the world, and maybe — just maybe — you might make a pretty penny while doing it. I would gladly purchase a San Francisco Scene Pack, or a selection of local country from Nashville. I know Minneapolis has bands I would absolutely love to see immortalized in one of these amazing games. But more importantly, lots of great music never makes it outside of its local city. If it had an opportunity to leap into the world, it just might make music (and music games) better for everyone.

Rock on, and happy holidays!

Cheers,

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Honore **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Skiesun Pilgrims, On Rock Band 2 (More Modest Music Please), 30 Rock, Dexter, Voting (Sure Hope You Did It, Because We Sure Need It), Fresh Wok **Dislikes:** Heroes (The Story is Good, But The Writing is Just Awful — Less Bad One-Lines Please), The Economy **Current Favorite Games:** Rock Band 2, Guitar Hero World Tour, World of Warcraft, Fable II, Fallout 3, LittleBigPlanet, Resistance 2 (Multiplayer)



Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Carer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Gaming, Becoming An Avenue, For Artists (Someone Should Really Open A Gallery Dedicated To LittleBigPlanet's User-Created Content), Mad Men & House, LEGO Agents (Basically James Bond LEGO) **Dislikes:** Not Knowing If My Vote Is Truly Being Submitted, Losing Fable II Co-Op (The World Really Should Be Open To Both Players) **Current Favorite Games:** Fallout 3, Fable II, LittleBigPlanet, Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts And Bolts, Valkyria Chronicles



Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Carer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** The Return Of Guns 'N Roses And AC/DC, True Blood, The New Season Of Dexter, Sweet Tarts, In Bruges **Dislikes:** Brad Pitt, Blaming The Punter, Every Game Coming Out In November, Getting Sick **Current Favorite Games:** LittleBigPlanet, Sam's Row 2, Sonic, Chrono Trigger, Guitar Hero World Tour, Fallout 3, Resistance 2, Midnight Club: Los Angeles



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Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/RPG **Interests:** Paul Newman — A Natural-Born World-Shaker, Online Vinyl Store Aural Exports, Oasis — Dig Out Your Soul, Jeff's Insistence On Looking Like A Civil War Re-Enactor **Dislikes:** Feeling Embarrassed Walking Into A Leek'An Chin For No Good Reason, The World "Maverick" (In Singular Or Plural Form), The Fact That Bad Children Might Still Have A Job By The Time You Read This **Current Favorite Games:** LittleBigPlanet, White Knight Chronicles, Guitar Hero World Tour, Fallout 3, Valkyria Chronicles



Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Carer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** My New Awesome PC (It's Seriously The Fastest Thing In The History Of Fatness), Re-Reading A Soz Of Ice And Fire (I Still Hate Catelyn, But Tyrion is Even More Awesome: Than I Remember), The Silence Tree Not Being Apily Hamed At All **Dislikes:** Chatty Airplane Pilots, My DS Getting All NBS About Recognizing Cartridges, Slale Coffee, Console Games Adopting The Worst Parts Of PC Games (Patching, Crashes, And Installs) **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, LittleBigPlanet, Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3, Final Fantasy IV



Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Carer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** The Great Japan Toy Buy, Andy's Inability To Pull A Decent Prank, Going Roboschool For Soundwave, Creating Hideox And Disturbing Creatures In LittleBigPlanet **Dislikes:** Fable II's Insupportable Approach To Co-Op (How Can I Cause Any Trouble Like That?), Being Wrong About Prepositions, Waiting For The New Friday The 13th **Current Favorite Games:** LittleBigPlanet, Chrono Trigger, Valkyria Chronicles, Fable II, Muramasa: The Demon Blade, Star Ocean: The Last Hope, White Knight Chronicles, Persona 4



Miller >> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** Tokyo Toy Stores (You Mean There's Another Floor?), Red Dining Rooms, Battlestar Galactica The Second Time Around **Dislikes:** The Crowds In Tokyo (There Are A Lot Of People On That Train...), Publishers Releasing All Their Biggest Games Within A Week Of Each Other, The Fragmented Narrative Of Heroes Season 3 **Current Favorite Games:** Fable 2, Fallout 3, Far Cry 2, Rock Band 2, Chrono Trigger, World Of Warcraft, Bejeweled Twist



Bertz >> mattbertz@gameinformer.com

Handle: Lord Gammington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** Bob Dylan — The Bootleg Series Volume 8, Haberdasheries, The Avalanche Of Rock Band And Guitar Hero Downloads, Mikko Kohu — Force Of Nature, Chinese Democracy Release Date (What's Next, Duke Nukem Forever?) **Dislikes:** AC/DC Ticket Prices, The Vikings Lack Of A Quality QB, Pirata Politics, Quest DS's Mystery Drop-Out, Marian Gabon's Greed **Current Favorite Games:** LittleBigPlanet, Fallout 3, Fable II, NHL 09, Far Cry 2, Dead Space, Gears Of War 2



Ben >> ben@gameinformer.com

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival/Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Doctor Who Season 3 (I'm Slow), Buyer's Guide For, Jeff and Jay's Enthusiasm For Helping Me Find The Right Halloween Costume, Cupid **Dislikes:** Dressing Up As Cupid and Realizing I'd Been Duped, My Own Financial Stupidity (Why Am I Paying For WoW And Not Using It?), Being Velled At When I Got In The Battleable Character **Favorite Games:** Fable II, Dead Space, Fallout 3, Castle Crashers, Mortal Kombat VS DC Universe, Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts



Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival/Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** Copher Football, The New Stadium, Finding Wood Floors Under Carpet, Kings Of Leon — Only By The Night, Fast Forwarding Time A Month Or Two When All The House Stuff Is Settled **Dislikes:** The Scarcity And Higher Price Of Copher Tickets For The Next Season Onward, Dealing With House Stuff Every Moment I'm Not At Work Or Sleeping, Moving **Current Favorite Games:** Halo 3, Recon, Fable II, Pundi-Out!, Guitar Hero World Tour, Rock Band 2, Mega Man 9, Castle Crashers

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In memory of Paul Andersen

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1 Andy and BioWare's Matt Atwood cultivate a north-of-the-boarder bromance in Edmonton. 2 Ben and Jeff show Replay Studios' Inga Mittendorf and Gamecock's Mike Wilson and Nigel Lowrie one of our favorite dives, Cuzzy's Bar in downtown Minneapolis. 3 Some of Game Informer's best and brightest have a lovefest with Square Enix's Sonia Im and Klee Kuo. 4 The GI crew practices culinary stealth techniques at a ninja-themed restaurant in Tokyo. Sadly, our health coverage does not cover chopstick injuries. 5 Meagan, Destructoid's Nick Chester, and Activision's Robert Taylor kick it with Nintendo America's big cheese, Reggie Fils-Aime. 6 BioWare's Dragon Age team knows the secrets of high fantasy – and they aren't telling! 7 Nick gets to meet some skateboarding royalty: John Cardiel (also of MTV's Rob & Big fame) and Rob Dyrdek.



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Pre-Spoilered

I have come across a problem with prequel games like Star Wars: The Force Unleashed and Halo Wars. There is nothing a player can do to determine the outcome of the story. The originals, such as the first Halo and the Star Wars trilogy, had storylines that you couldn't anticipate. Prequels can't create any suspense. In Halo Wars, you fight on the colony of Harvest, when the player knows that Harvest is eventually destroyed by the Covenant. In Force Unleashed, we all know how the Emperor dies, and it's years later. The story is diminished by the fact that the outcome is already known.

Carl Jennings
via email

Is a story only about the ending? There are arcs between where events start and where they finish that are interesting to explore, and expanded content can provide a new lens through which to view things that are already familiar. Side stories aren't the best choice for every franchise, though. Remember the junior varsity fellowship from Lord of the Rings: The Third Age? Of course you don't, because they were stupid. Developers need to be sure to craft expanded

stories that fit with and enrich the fiction. For instance, fighting on Harvest becomes even more tragic if you know the fate of the colony, and Darth Vader's actions in The Force Unleashed make compelling contributions to his character. Just because you know how something ends doesn't mean you can't find new things to enjoy on the path to that conclusion.

Shame On Us

Have you guys ever reviewed an Adults Only Rated game? If so, what was it?

Ben Fullford
via email

Yep, once. It was called Singles: Flirt Up Your Life, and it was way back in August 2004 (issue 136). It was basically a pervy ripoff of The Sims, except you got nudity instead of good gameplay. Not worth it. You don't see many AO games because legitimate developers simply don't make them; that ESRB classification is the kiss of death, since it prevents the game from being sold at most retailers. In fact, even with Singles, the AO version was down-load-only. A tamer M-rated iteration was briefly available at retail. Don't bother tracking it down...you'll be sorry you did.

Sharp Dressed Man

After playing Professor Layton and Eternal Sonata back-to-back, I've come to a rather startling realization: Men in top hats are hot.

Megan Beck
Tacoma, WA

Ooh, be careful, Megan. A gentleman in a top hat may look all debonair and dashing, but what happens when you add a moustache? Instant evil, that's what. Unless you want to end up married to Snidely Whiplash (or a cosplayer...ugh), you might want to steer clear of dudes who wear top hats in real life.

Keep on Trekkin'

I haven't tried an MMO for a long while (pre-EverQuest), but Star Trek Online is the first one that has the potential to pull me back in — especially since it is going to be on the consoles. For such a rich universe there really is a dearth of quality Star Trek games that capture the aspects of the show that are most important: the characters, the ships, and the tactics. Thanks for bringing my attention to Star Trek Online!

Phil Florian
via email

I'm usually really excited about the cover stories you guys have in your magazine, but Star Trek? Who cares? Star Trek hasn't been relevant for, like, 20 years. Even then, it was only to a fringe group of people who spent their high school years at renaissance fairs with their names on their underwear. I'm not trying to be cool either; I've been reading comic books for years, I've been reading musicals, and I collect action figures...but Star Trek? Not even I'm that nerdy.

Jason M. Sanchez
San Antonio, TX

You can count on needs for two things. First, they'll pursue their obsessions with relentless zeal.

Second, they'll always assert that someone else is more nerdy than they are. Hey, we do it too. Did you notice that jab at cosplayers in the "Sharp Dressed Man" letter? Star Trek is often used as standard for measuring degrees of dorkiness, but some of the cool concepts at play in Star Trek Online definitely have the potential to attract gamers who don't know a Romulan from a Rodian. Wait, did we just mix up Star Trek and Star Wars? Whatever. They're basically the same.



Bad Buy

In the Breakdown section of issue 187, you said that 0% of your staff recommends buying the Xbox 360 Arcade bundle. Well, I bought the Arcade system because I hate co-op and multiplayer, so I'll never go online. Plus, I have never played a game that I've liked enough to play more than an hour or so. Yes, I have played Gears of War, Resistance, God of War, and Super Mario Galaxy. That is why I bought an Arcade...I don't like games enough to justify the larger investment.

Frank Allen
via email

Hold on. Why did you buy a console at all if you don't use it? If you want to spend as little money as possible on games, did

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THE QUESTION

What big announcement were you hoping for in 2008, but didn't happen?



I was hoping that Factor 5 would announce that their new project was indeed a Kid Icarus or Pitohoungs game for the Wii. I was a bit disappointed that neither was announced at E3 or TGS.

Hawk410pjs

I was hoping for some information of Half-Life: Episode 3, or even Half-Life 3 itself. Episode 2 was a real cliffhanger and I'm excited to see what's next.

forberg1785

I was really hoping that Team Ko would say just about anything about their next game. If their four-year cycle holds true for their PS3 entry, then it should come out next year. I'd eat up any info about it right now.

StrawBudd7

I was hoping (and still am hoping) for a big holiday announcement from Nintendo. A game of the caliber of Mario or Zelda, or even that long-awaited next-gen Kirby game. The Candies doesn't cut it.

halbrid

Sigh... No Duke Nukem Forever release date announcement was made. Actually, I'm kidding I stopped caring back in 2000.

MullikDuctor

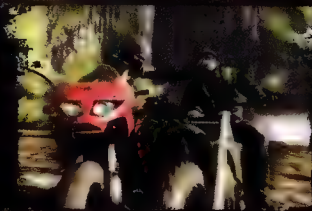
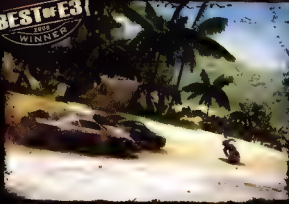
I was disappointed that there was no new info given about Mass Effect 2. Heck, I would have taken a photoshopped "2" at the end of the Mass Effect logo.

SuperPatfalls



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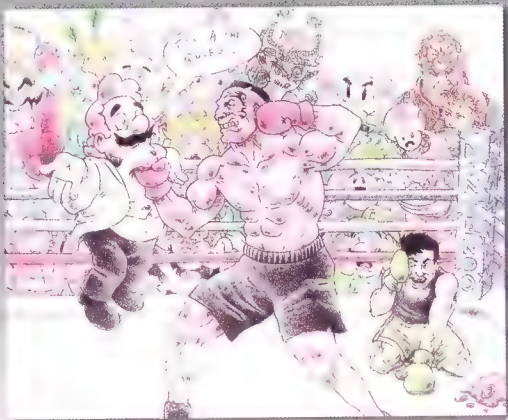
you consider spending zero dollars? As for the Arcade bundle, the big problem (for people who actually play and enjoy video games) is the omission of the hard drive. Even if you have no interest in online multiplayer, the lack of storage makes it nearly impossible to download certain Xbox Live Arcade titles (like *Castle Crashers* and *Braid*), plus it puts a tighter restriction on the space you have available for game saves. Sure, you can always buy a hard drive separately if you ever change your mind, but you'll get the most out of the console by having the options from the beginning.

Or Not?

If Patrice Desilets made the next *Metal Gear Solid*, I'd riot. That entry in your What If section was probably the worst idea for a game I've heard. I understand that he would want to incorporate elements for the games he's made, but what he described wasn't MGS by the director of *Assassin's Creed* — it was just *Assassin's Creed*! He even went as far as to say that Snake would look Middle Eastern, and be in some kind of memory machine. Try and stay close to the game's original story, man! And what's with Snake being able to run up walls and dodge bullets? Snake isn't super-human, he's just an excellent soldier. The whole thing was just way off.

Luke Garber
Weston, Ohio

Patrice Desilets' entry in the What If column was more tongue-in-cheek than previous ones, and a lot of readers didn't pick up on the shift in tone. As a way of showing his respect for the series and its creator, Desilets jokingly suggested that since he couldn't improve the current design, he'd just have to do what he could with what he knew. That's where all of blatant *Assassin's Creed* copying came from. Whether you think it's a good What If or not, Desilets wasn't actually suggesting re-skinning *Assassin's Creed* with *Metal Gear* characters. On the other hand, we're not quite sure that's such a terrible idea. A *Raiden* game using the *Assassin's Creed* engine could be seriously awesome.



TAISEN KATAKURA
Even though he had fewer cannibalistic tendencies, Mr. Dream was still a loser compared to Mike Tyson

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reader art

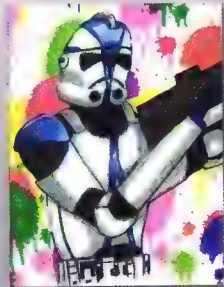
JOSE LUIS SORIANO
"Aww, I love you guys!"



CHAD BORGSCHAZ
Is there seriously not a new Friday the 13th game yet? Ridiculous!



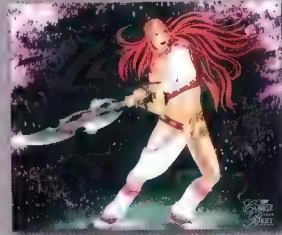
EMILY ASLURY
Early batches of clone troopers were strapped due to excessive festivity

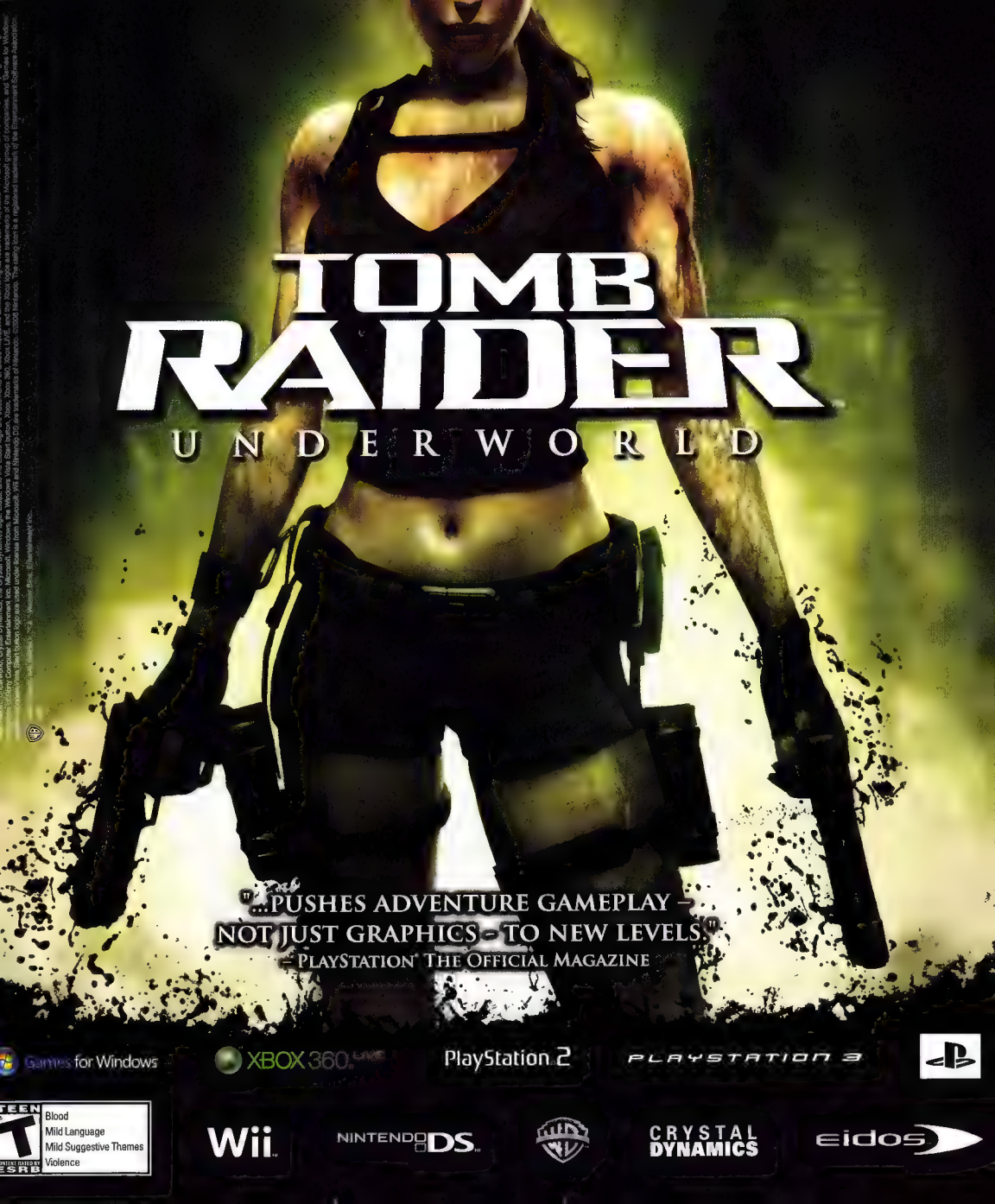


LYLHAN MOJUA LEE
People still like Yuna. Maybe it's because Square Enix hasn't put her in multiple spin-offs and slowly suffocated the fans' affection over several years. There's a lesson there somewhere...



CARRIE BEST
The Heavenly Sword is a cursed blade, gradually destroying your clothes until you are skanky and immodest. Then it eats your soul or something





TOMB RAIDER

UNDERWORLD

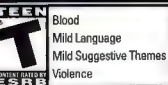
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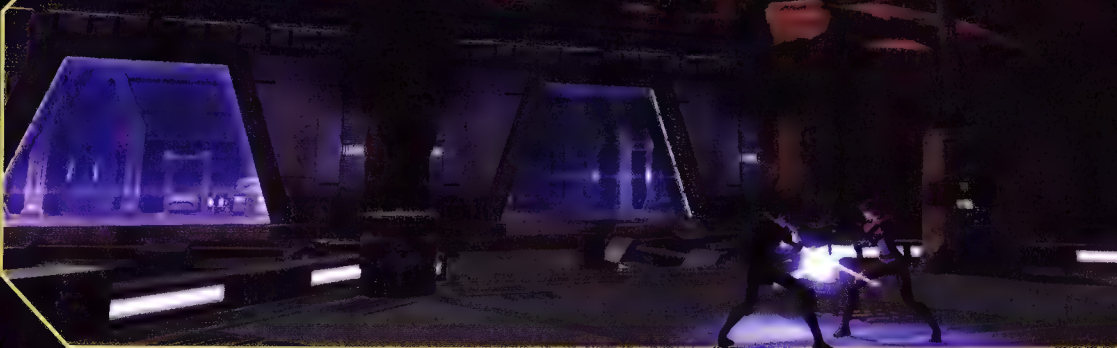


CONNECT

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

STAR WARS THE OLD REPUBLIC

BIOWARE ENTERS MMORPG SPACE



■ The panoramic vistas and play of light-saber flashes on characters stand out among the otherwise mundane visuals

It's not *Knights of the Old Republic III* – it's much more. BioWare and LucasArts announced recently that the role-playing giant's newest title is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game set 3,000 years before the events of the *Star Wars* films. PC is the only announced platform, but BioWare coyly avoided denying a future console announcement.

With *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, BioWare intends to bring true storytelling to the MMORPG genre. The developer says that each of the title's many character classes will feature its own full-fledged RPG story.

with all the forks and twists players expect out of any BioWare product. This tailored content will weave in and out of the main galactic storyline from each character's inception all the way to the endgame. How this story will be presented is unknown, but BioWare promises much more than the mute quest text we've seen out of the genre to date.

Unlike any MMORPG so far, *The Old Republic* will feature fleshed out companion characters that fulfill a similar role to NPCs in previous BioWare titles. During their adventures, players will choose one companion at a time to join them. These characters have their own stories, quests, and goals, and will react to the player's choices.

Taking place 300 years after the *Knights of the Old Republic* titles, this tale is set against the backdrop of an incipient war between the Galactic Republic and the Sith Empire. As heroes in the service of either faction, players will adventure throughout the galaxy solo and in groups. Like in BioWare's single-player RPGs, the choices players make will affect their storyline, their morality, and their companions' views of them.

BioWare says the amount of content in *The Old Republic* is far greater than all of its previous games combined. There are many unknowns about the game, but the developer's immaculate pedigree and the scale of the project bode well. If nothing else, this will be anything but another *World of Warcraft* wannabe.



■ The art style ably captures the feel of *Star Wars*

the top 10 worst character names

It's impossible to get immersed in a game's story when the mere mention of a name makes you laugh out loud. Lots of characters with ridiculous names have appeared over the years, but a few are true exemplars of lameness. The entries on this list practically dare you to keep a straight face.

1 Jet Brody (Fracture)

It's just insulting to assume that gamers are too stupid to recognize a name as transparently phony as Jet Brody. How is this supposed to work? The marketing folks hope we say, "Wow, Jet Brody! I bet he bleeds Mountain Dew and eats snowboards! One copy of Fracture, please." The sad thing? It was considered an improvement over the character's previous name, Mason Briggs. At least Jet is in the company of other "We want to sound cool so bad" dudes like Magnus Tide (Yager) and Max Cougar (Bullet Witch). In fact, they share an apartment. Their phone rings infrequently.

2 Waluigi (Garbage)

When you say this name to most civilized humans, they just stammer and glare at you cockeyed. That's because it is terrible. With Wario, it makes a little sense. Just flip the M in Mario, and you have a new character. But Waluigi is just a twisted mockery of language, kindling furnaces of rage in the hearts and minds of everyone.



4 EZ Wheeler (RTX Red Rock)

If you didn't have a picture of EZ Wheeler, you'd probably think he was a discount rent-a-trailer. It gets worse when you know what EZ stands for: Eugene Zeno. Think about this: At some point in his life someone must have said "Hi, Eugene," to which he responded "Naw, man. Call me EZ!" That was the day he died inside.



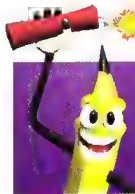
3 Butz (Final Fantasy V)

Sometimes you need to wonder if anyone actually reads these names during development. "Butz" is the kind of thing you end up with when a game lets you enter your own name, perhaps preceded by "Horse" or "Lick" it should never, ever be the character's actual name! A more recent North American translation of the story saw this changed to "Bartz," but it was too late. There's just no denying the appeal of Butz.



5 Wild Woody (Wild Woody)

We'll just get this one out of the way. If you don't understand why it's bad, we promise it will make sense once you get to fourth grade. If you like Wild Woody, you should check out Spanky the Monkey (Spanky's Quest), Dik Dik Van Dik (MUSCLE), and Seaman. Oh, that reminds us: You wanna join the pen 15 club?



6 Miles "Tails" Prower (Sonic series)

Yeah, yeah. We get it, Sega. "Miles per hour." It wasn't even funny the first time. If you're playing a game with Tails in it, your patience is probably already near the breaking point; just when you think there couldn't be another reason to despise this tagalong loser, you remember his full name. Core meltdown in 5...4...3...



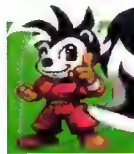
7 Boomer Kuwanger (Mega Man X)

First of all, Kuwanger isn't even close to a real word. Second, Boomer clearly didn't get the evil reloid memo that said "Please name yourself after an animal!" All of his peers, like Chill Penguin and Launch Octopus, seemed to figure that out no problem. He throws boomerangs, and he's a beetle...it's not exactly rocket science.



8 Punky Skunk (Punky Skunk)

Another embarrassing anthropomorphic mascot name, the main things Punky Skunk has going for him is a rhyming name and... well, that's all. Pathetic. Awesome Possum is in the same boat, but his name has "awesome" in it, so that's something. Don't even get us started on Trevor McFur.



9 Alucard (Castlevania)

Writing backwards is one of the worst secret codes of all time. Alucard may as well walk around shouting "Bleh!" and "I want to suck your blood!" We don't want to ruin anything in case you haven't figured it out yet, but he's related to a guy whose name rhymes with "Dracula."



10 Shoot Gunner (Metal Gear)

Seriously? This is just lazy. We like to imagine that a young Hideo Kojima, only minutes before the final code of the original Metal Gear was due, suddenly realized that he forgot to give this boss a name. "Oh, no! Quick, quick...um...ok, don't freak out. He has a gun. A gun...but what does he do with it? Ah ha! I've got it!"



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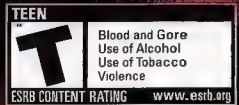
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Games for Windows

NEWS

THE LONG WINTER OF THE PSP

CAN THE SYSTEM SURVIVE?



DATA POINTS

Here are the top-selling PSP titles using TRS1 data and NPD sales figures:

1. Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories
\$1.1 million
2. Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition
1.1 million
3. Need for Speed: Most Wanted
1.1 million
4. Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories
\$950,000
5. Star Wars: Battlefront II
\$89,000



Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories

NEW PROBLEMS

We got our hands on the new PSP 3000, and while it's lighter and the colors are definitely more vibrant, you can also detect scan lines (check out this comparison shot from *Star Wars*). Sony says there is no remedy for this situation.



When you've sold over 41 million units of your handheld worldwide, including 13.5 million systems in North America, what is there to worry about? If you're Sony's PSP, it just might not be enough. Despite these excellent sales numbers since its release in North America in 2005, the system finds itself in a bind. Software for the unit has dried up this holiday season, and so far the prospects for early next year don't look great either outside of the standard first-party titles. Has the PSP's party turned into a funeral?

The holiday season is primetime for retail goods, and yet the PSP's software calendar is suspiciously light. Coming out of the fall with titles like *Buzz!*, *Master Quiz* and *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, the system is looking at only four significant releases: *Star Ocean: First Departure*, *EndWar*, *WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009*, and *Need for Speed: Undercover*. In fact, *NBA 09: The Inside* is the only game from Sony for the PSP this holiday, and it's already out.

So far, 2009 looks slightly better, but it's conspicuously lacking announced games on the retail calendar. While Sony is stepping up with titles such as *Resistance: Retribution* (spring), *Loco Roco 2*, and *Patapon 2*, Don Chaka (the latter pair are scheduled for some unspecified time in 2009), third-party titles seem noticeably absent.

The PSP Plan

Is the PSP being put out to pasture by third parties or Sony itself? Game Informer talked to John Koller, Sony's director of hardware marketing, who acknowledged that things could be better on the software side of the equation.

Koller says that because the console previously wasn't selling as well as it is now (it's been shifting approximately 200,000 units a month in 2008—sometimes more than the Xbox 360), publishers had transferred development dollars away from the system or changed their overall PSP strategy. According to Koller, this led to the relative drought of titles in 2008. Now that the handheld has been thriving, however, Koller says Sony is getting out in front with publishers to make sure we don't see a repeat of this year—one that saw a huge drop off in software as compared to 2007.

"Our objective at Sony has been to really re-engage with the publishers," explains Koller. "We just concluded our road show—we've gone out to every publisher—and have discussed our recipe for success; what it takes to both remain financially solvent on the PSP in terms of selling software, but also what types of games consumers are asking for."

Koller's "recipe for success" is targeting larger franchises without making them mere ports by creating unique gameplay for the PSP. Sony also wants to add "beyond gaming functionality," as Koller describes it: PSP features such as downloadable photos, videos, etc. He says that developers have already been receptive to plans to incorporate GPS functionality into the PSP, more downloads from PlayStation Network, as well as crossover gameplay with the PS3.

Dave McCarthy, vice president and executive producer at EA Sports, says that for its part, he believes EA has already adapted itself successfully on the PSP. "I think we've really started to nail what the winning formula for EA Sports is on the PSP," he says. "I think we've catered to how people play the device." McCarthy points out the streamlined play-calling without sacrificing full playbooks in Madden as an example.

Sony says publishers are jumping back on the bandwagon with EA. "Almost every publisher has said it's time to jump back on the PSP train. I know what you're going to see in 2009 is substantial, a much greater offering than what you have today."

Evan Wilson, analyst at Pacific Crest Securities, agrees with Koller. "It's likely that third parties will slowly move back to the PSP starting in 2009."

The Changing Times?

According to Sony, PSP owners haven't been discouraged by a 2008 software slump. "We have regular research with the core PSP consumer," Koller says. "The first thing we look at is: Does the PSP gather dust? The answer is no. About 70 percent of owners have used it in the past week."

Despite the system heading into its fourth year and its added functionality and changing demographics, it appears that gaming is still the installed base's primary use for the system. Koller says that a software-first strategy lead the company towards the PSP entertainment packs, which feature the system bundled with a game and other extras. These packs have sold well for Sony, accounting for two out of three PSPs sold in the last year, and they were led by core franchises for the handheld like *God of War*, *Madden*, and *Daxter*. More bundles are expected in the future as a part of this strategy.

As Sony and its partners prepare for 2009 and beyond, it must take into account what the fans want from their system while also realizing the fans themselves are changing. Both Koller and McCarthy see the unit changing its demographics—always an important tipping point for a platform as it goes from hardcore to mainstream and embeds itself in the fabric of our entertainment culture. "We're projecting a broadening of the audience," predicts McCarthy, "and that will influence our designs for sure."

Sometimes things get worse before they get better, and it seems like the PSP has absorbed some of its worst hits yet while still managing to sell units. If what Sony says comes to pass and this is just the beginning for the PSP, it could be a clear validation of Sony's belief in long platform cycles.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

VALVE VS PS3?

Although Valve has shown no love to the PS3 in the past, managing director Gabe Newell—who once famously called the PS3 a "waste of time"—recently admitted that *Left 4 Dead* partner EA would like to produce a version of the game for the PS3. Newell, however, said that Valve doesn't have the time to do a port of the game, and that it would have to be something EA handled on its own. EA had no official comment on the matter.



TECMO, KOEI TO MERGE

Following up a previous report, Japanese publishers/developers Tecmo and Koei have agreed to merge next spring. Definitive plans for the company's separate game franchises are still being ironed out, but no major series seem to be in jeopardy.



TRAVIS TOUCHDOWN SCORES AGAIN

The outrageous fortunes of Travis Touchdown continue in *Suda 51's No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle* for the Wii. The brief TGS trailer depicting Travis about to square off against a six-armed female demon showed that the series has lost none of its bombast.



TAKE-TWO TO REMAIN INDEPENDENT

After exploring its options, Rockstar parent company Take-Two says it will remain an independent entity. This comes after rival Electronic Arts withdrew its "toxic takeover" bid for the company. Previously, Take-Two executives said it was possibly looking to merge with another publisher such as Ubisoft.

EA BRAGS HOLLYWOOD DIRECTOR

300 and *Hitman* creator Zack Snyder signed a deal with Electronic Arts to create new IPs. Snyder will "lead the creative direction of the games while working in partnership with the production team at EA Los Angeles," according to a press release. It appears Snyder's relationship with EA will be similar to Steven Spielberg's.



A U.S. Marine officer in dress uniform stands in a dark setting, illuminated from the side. He wears a white-topped officer's cap with a gold band and a Marine Corps emblem. His uniform is dark with gold buttons and a white belt. He has several medals and ribbons on his chest. The background is dark with a vertical light source on the left.

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impulse

BY MATT MILLER

Bejeweled twists into a new form, Penny Arcade progresses apace, and words fail to describe World of Goo.



had the good fortune to wander the Tokyo Game Show this year, taking in the latest in the Japanese gaming scene. Mobile gaming dominated the landscape – whether it was games for phones or dedicated machines like the PSP or DS. Even so, console download services are gaining steam abroad the same as in the States, and TGS had nice spread of new titles on display. It remains to be seen how many will find their way stateside, but a few certainly generated excitement. Wandering through the Sony booth, the Lumines Supernova display gave me hope that my favorite falling block puzzle game might finally be making its way to the PS3. Amid the Microsoft array of titles was hidden *R-Type Dimensions* – the first new entry from the series in years.

In the more immediate term, I must give a nod to PopCap's latest bit of puzzle genius. First glance doesn't

Bejeweled Twist

paint a minor variation on the years-old formula, but the gameplay tells a very different story. While the primary focus is still on completing a three-gem color match, you now reach that goal through rotating any set of four gems into place. I loved the multitude of paths to success and higher points. There are

multipliers for successive matches, bonuses for completing certain color matches in order, an array of unique gems that dramatically alter the

playfield when brought into play, and half a dozen other small variations that add complexity without demanding

more attention than you'd

like to give them. The end result is the strongest and most strategy-driven title released in this ubiquitous style, and it's worth a look even from serious gamers. The game is already available for PC download, and history indicates we should see the title hitting console download services in the coming months.

As Episode 1 of *Penny Arcade Adventures* makes its way onto PlayStation Network, the second installment is arriving on Live Arcade. Players of *Tycho* and *Gabe's first*



■ Penny Arcade Adventures



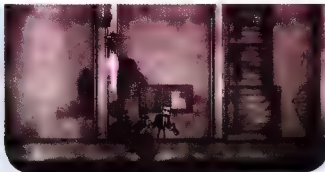
World of Goo may be the most charming title I'll talk about this year. The WiiWare and PC game is as cutesy as they come, but the puzzles that come along with the adorable balls of slime are anything but. With a simple click and drag mechanic, you move individual balls into place to create a structured lattice over which the other pieces of goo travel. Create a sturdy bridge, tower, or path, and you'll deliver enough goo to the vacuum pipe at the end of the level in order to progress. Variety appears through the ever-new types of goo you get to place, such as balloons that can hold structures aloft. The whole thing is wrapped in an excellent, upbeat musical score and an unusual, almost absurdist plotline. It's a strange, brain-teasing, treat of a game, and one of only a few wildly original titles that WiiWare can call its own this holiday. ■ ■ ■

ON
ES
ITS



Burnout Paradise Bikes

Never let it be said that Criterion isn't devoted to post-release content. The sprawling metropolis of *Paradise City* has seen a couple of big updates since the breakout racer released earlier this year, but the newly added *Bikes* expansion dramatically changes the game and adds a wealth of new races to explore. Oh, and it's free.



Dishwasher: Dead Samurai

Serving as the figurehead for the potential of XNA community games moving to Live Arcade, this strange 2D action-fest is lining up with the big boys for a full-fledged release. Combat is visceral and fast paced, and the art has a uniquely gothic flavor unlike any other title out there.



Crash Commando

If epic 2D multiplayer deathmatches are your thing, you'll have a hard time going wrong with this soon-to-arrive PSN exclusive. Fights are intense and fast, weapons are a blast, and the gameplay variety will keep your attention.

DAMNATION

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THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

Based on the record before it, the court agrees that respondent is not amenable to rehabilitation. Further, the court approves the referee's recommendation that permanent disbarment is the appropriate sanction.

—The Florida Supreme Court on its decision to permanently disbar anti-video game crusader Jack Thompson



GOOD

Square Enix is bringing cross-platform play to the Wii and DS with Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time. Not much is known about the game, as it was only shown at TGS in trailer form, but the company says the game's cross-platform play will be available via a local wireless connection. The game comes out in Japan early next year; there is no word yet about a U.S. release.

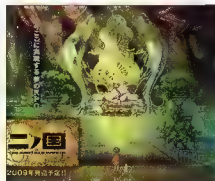


GOOD

The Xbox 360's fortunes in Japan are improving, with the system outselling Sony's PS3 for a two week stretch as this magazine went to print. Fans around the globe will be heartened to hear that the 360 will host Tekken 6 when it comes out—the first time the series has appeared on a non-Sony home console. Meanwhile, Microsoft reports sales of the 360 have jumped 62 percent since the latest round of price cuts.

BAD

While we're against piracy, the government's new PRO-IP Act goes overboard. It significantly beefs up the penalties for pirated material. For instance, stealing a 10-song CD makes you liable for 10 separate criminal counts for each individual song, instead of one count for the CD itself. Likewise, if you're busted for game piracy, you may also be charged with stealing the licensed music in the game as a separate charge. The law also expands what the government can seize as part of the crime. It will be interesting to see how the courts interpret this law and how/if companies apply this to individuals.



GOOD

At a pre-Tokyo Game Show event celebrating its tenth anniversary, Japanese developer Level-5 (White Knight Chronicles) unveiled its next wave of games, including DS titles such as Professor Layton and The Last Time Travel. With the exception of White Knight Chronicles, we're not sure which of Level-5's announced games will come to the U.S. The biggest news, however, was the announcement that Level-5 is teaming with legendary Japanese animation company Studio Ghibli (Spirited Away) to work on a new game. Studio Ghibli's first foray into video gaming will be working on animation sequences for the DS title Another World (shown).

GOOD

Advision's Vendi castoff 50 Cent: Blood on the Sand has found a home at THQ and will release early next year. There is also unconfirmed talk that Atari has picked up former Vendi title Ghostbusters. No word yet, however, about Brital Legend.



■ All-Pro Football 2K8

UGLY

A group of former NFL players is suing the NFL Players Association over alleged unpaid royalties—including the association's deal with EA for the Madden franchise. The lawsuit alleges that the NFLPA conspired with EA Sports to conceal players' identities so they wouldn't have to be paid. The suit also charges that EA paid \$400,000 to the NFLPA for the exclusive rights to several Hall of Fame members—a number the players say was well below what EA rival Take-Two offered for their rights in rival video game All-Pro Football 2K8.

games

STARCRRAFT II SPLITS

NEW GAME TURNS INTO TRILOGY

Starcraft II is generating a whole lot of excitement, but how fired up will the fanbase be now that it's three games? At BlizzCon 2008, developer Blizzard revealed that Starcraft II will be split into three titles, starting with Starcraft II: Wings of Liberty, followed by two expansions subtitled Heart of the Swarm and Legacy of the Void, respectively. The company says it chose this route because the game was shaping up to be quite an undertaking.

Each game will have its own focus, with Wings of Liberty focusing on the Terrans and Jim Raynor's conflict with Kerrigan, Heart of the Swarm follows the Zerg, and Legacy of the Void is dedicated to the Protoss. Blizzard says each game will deliver a lengthy single-player experience, and a multiplayer mode featuring all the races will be available from the beginning. The company estimates that the trilogy contains as many as 90 missions.

No pricing or release dates for the titles have been announced.

games

TIBERIUM'S RED ALERT

EA CANCELS GAME

A couple of months ago, we heard buzz around the industry that Electronic Arts was canceling first-person Command & Conquer console spin-off Tiberium. When contacted, a representative told us the game was definitely still in development (Loose Talk, issue 186). Now, however, it looks like our information was spot on. Electronic Arts has announced that Tiberium has been cancelled.

In an interview with site Gamasutra, EA CEO John Riccitiello was honest and unapologetic about canning the project. "Any company that serves every dish that comes out of the oven, whether it's burned or not, is not committed to quality...EA will kill a game or two a year. Forever," he declared.

**DOES HAVING THE FASTEST REFLEXES
IN THE WORLD MAKE YOU AN ATHLETE?**



The incredible multi-threaded Intel® Core™2 Extreme quad-core processor.
A NEW KIND OF GEAR FOR A NEW KIND OF ATHLETE. INTEL.COM/GO/GAMING



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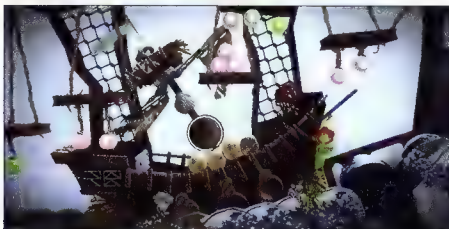
LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

NEW E3 NOT ENOUGH FOR ESA MEMBERS?

Next year's E3 will be held June 2-4 at the L. A. Convention Center. The industry lobby group that controls E3, The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) wants to bring back some of the glitz to E3, and it expects crowds of 30,000 to 35,000 people – as compared to an estimated 5,000 this year. However, Loose Talk has heard that not all of the ESA's constituent publishers and developers are happy.

Last year Activision, LucasArts, and id Software (among others) made news before E3 by leaving the ESA, and we're hearing that a number of publishers are unhappy with the ESA. The discontent mostly rests with the organization's perceived failure to stand up and protect their interests. For example, Loose Talk heard some companies were mad that the ESA didn't come to the defense of BioWare's Mass Effect when its content was mischaracterized and attacked. Under new president Mike Gallagher, the ESA's focus has been directed toward lobbying in the political realm. Perhaps these new efforts are not serving its member companies as much as they'd wish.



LITTLEBIGPLANET JUST THE BEGINNING

Media Molecule's LittleBigPlanet has charmed the pans of the gaming world, and we're hearing this is just the beginning for the English developer. According to our sources, Media Molecule landed a three-game exclusive deal with Sony, and better yet, each of the three games is going to be a new IP.



EA'S GIANT ONLINE INVESTMENT

When Electronic Arts acquired Mythic Entertainment, it was clear that the publisher had designs on the MMO space (see page 128 for our review of Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning). But EA's stake in Mythic is just the tip of the iceberg. Loose Talk has heard of a mysterious MMO at EA called Project B that is garnering a budget of \$160 to \$170 million.

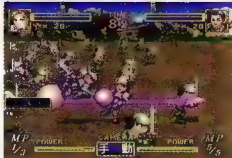
Get some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gamesinformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Maybe you only think of the title of this month's Name That Game in relation to an English Guitar Hero band, but back in 1996 it was a Sega Saturn game by Working Designs. This real-time strategy title features eight different rulers as they attempt to defeat Madrak. With formidable armies of varying classes, you capture and defend castles in the continent of Legendra. Not only are there hundreds of troops at your disposal, but the game also contains duels between spell-casting generals. A sequel was released in Japan – as well as a PS2 remake – but neither made it over.

(Answer on page 34)



news

XBOX LIVE PRIMETIME DELAYED

WHAT OTHER NEW FEATURES ARE MISSING FROM UPDATE?

Microsoft unveiled its vision for a new Xbox Live Experience at this year's E3, but the company has delayed the Primetime component of the November 19th dashboard redesign that includes the new cartoony avatars. Primetime – the interactive games based on real-world game shows like *1 vs. 100* for real prizes – will now come out in spring. Also missing the November unveiling is the ability to share and simultaneously watch Netflix movies with your friends. Users will still be able to watch Netflix by themselves. Microsoft says that not all of Experience's features will be available day one, and that the company is taking more of a rolling launch approach to the dashboard's offerings.

In other Xbox Live Experience news, Avatar customization will require a "256MB memory unit or greater," according to company materials. While this isn't an issue for Elite or Core owners with a hard drive, those who just bought the price-reduced \$199 Arcade unit may have to buy another memory unit or a hard drive if they want to customize avatars and keep game saves.

news

BRIDGING THE GAP

GAME INFORMER ATTENDS THE WORLD PREMIERE OF RESIDENT EVIL: DEGENERATION

This year's Tokyo Game Show played host to a big event for fans of Capcom's signature horror franchise – the first public showing of Resident Evil: Degeneration, the new CG film set in the universe of the game series.

The newly penned tale explores the timeframe after the fourth game, but before the African-set plotline of Resident Evil 5. In an interview with Game Informer Online, producer HiroYuki Kobayashi explained the choice in timeframe: "Primarily, I did not want to go back in time. I wanted to continue to move forward and I think that is what fans want. They want to see what happens next instead of simply going back into the past."

The new story stars series mainstays Claire Redfield and Leon Kennedy, along with a new heroine named Angela Miller. The film exalts in some explosive action scenes, and does a good job setting up a few of the plot points that are sure to dominate the next game.

After a short stint in Japanese theaters and mid-November theatrical premieres in New York and Los Angeles, Resident Evil: Degeneration will hit DVD and Blu-ray on December 30.



"This is the best video game about being in the movies that I've ever seen!"

—Burt Reynolds, Handsome Actor



1 The camera loves me—and now it's going to love you. It's a camera that films you while you're playing. Stand in front of it, I do. A lot. I love it. The camera's included with the game. I love that, too.



2 I don't have to audition, but you're not me. No one is. Don't worry, though—you don't have to audition either. You're going to get in the movies by playing a few of these 45 crazy mini-games while the camera rolls.



3 Those clips get dropped into one of these 30 movies, and now you've got a masterpiece you can share online with friends and fans. Remember: an actor acts, but a movie star gets in the movies.

Come see me, Burt Reynolds, on the Internet and I'll personally show you how to be in the movies. Drop by xbox.com/YITM.

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Jump in.

 XBOX 360.

Mega Man Master

Eric Martinez

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.



Eric Martinez with girlfriend Rachel Olaer

ALL CLEAR

Handle:

vGta7o2

Age:

23

Hometown:

Las Vegas, NV

Rivals:

Fanatig,
VivoVicko,
LoD HITMAN

Favorite Weapon:

Concrete Shot

Most Hated Boss:

Dr. Wily's
Final Form

Accomplishments:

At the time of this writing, Eric Martinez holds the number one spot on the All Clear leaderboard in both the Xbox Live and PlayStation Network versions of Mega Man 9. This board calculates speed runs of the entire game, though not necessarily uninterrupted gameplay. Martinez's current top completion time is 22 minutes and 51 seconds, but topping two leaderboards still isn't enough for him. "The best competition's on the Wii, which I don't have [Mega Man 9] for," Martinez says. "But I try to find those scores on the Internet and go for them."

Origin of Skills:

It's easy to assume that such a hardcore player would be a longtime Mega Man fan, but that's not always the case. "That's the funny thing, the only Mega Man I played was the third one back in fifth grade and I hadn't touched Mega Man since," Martinez says. He recalls being drawn in by the challenge and was eventually lured into time attack by a friend.

The Key to Victory:

- Go Online: "I look at time attack videos and I try to emulate them as best as I can and improvise here and there."
- Use Multiple Save Slots: "After every boss just make a save slot. That way if you find a video that's like, 'Oh, wow,' you can go back to that save file and play the game from [that stage onward]."
- The Menu Pause Trick: For weapons like the Black Hole Bomb, pausing and unpausing will let you shoot again instantly instead of having to wait a few seconds for the explosion animation to finish.

The Challenges:

Since he's so caught up in shaving seconds off of his speed runs, Martinez has only completed the hardcore in-game challenges that align with what he's already doing (86 percent at this time). He plans to go after the challenges eventually, but is particularly fretful about "Last Man Standing" in which players must beat all bosses with one pixel of health left.

Practice Time:

40 to 50 hours a week

Life Outside of Mega Man:

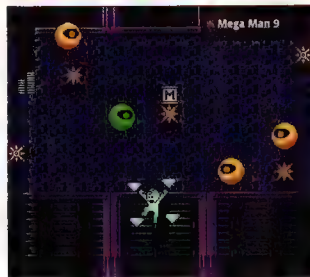
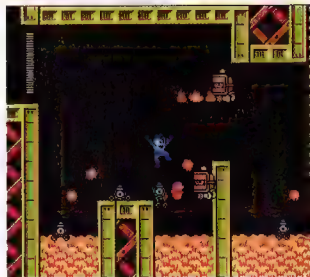
"At the moment, I'm just taking a break from work," Martinez says. "I'm just focusing on helping the family out with whatever they need whenever I can." He's worked a string of jobs up and down the Vegas Strip and is in the process of securing a job as a dispatcher with the hopes of getting his foot in the door at the fire department.

Other Games:

Martinez claims to be one of the top Beatmania IIDX players in the U.S. and ranks high on the Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo HD Remix boards. He also enjoys RPGs like Lost Odyssey and the Final Fantasy series.

What Should Be in the Next Mega Man?

"If they make some more female robots it would be wise for Capcom to be less sexist and have them take equal damage like the other bosses do," Martinez jokes. "Splash Woman takes two pixels of damage per hit with the Mega Buster and everyone else takes just one." What does he think about the NES-style graphics? "I'd say keep it old school, definitely."



THE NATURAL WARRIOR OF ANCARIA TELLS ALL

"...raises the bar in so many ways that it defies the inevitable Diablo comparisons."

—GAME INFORMER



FALLEN ANGEL Sacred 2

NAME:

Dryad

OCCUPATION:

Jungle Warrior

MY FAVORITE PLACE IN ANCARIA:

My home! The hightree house on Jungle Island

HOBBIES:

Voodoo, naturalistic magic and mastering the art of poison making!

MY IDEAL MAN:

Submissive (I tend to wear the pants in the family)

WEAPON OF CHOICE:

Blow Gun

Sword

Staff

I love ranged weapons

MY TYPICAL FRIDAY NIGHT INCLUDES:

Dinner and a movie

Cleaning

Battling the enemies of Ancaria



WWW.SACRED2.COM



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Games for Windows

XBOX 360 LIVE

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER

JUSTIN LEEPER
Creative Designer,
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009

- 1 Deus Ex – PC
- 2 Super Metroid – SNES
- 3 Snatcher – Sega CD
- 4 Disgaea: Hour of Darkness – PS2
- 5 WWF No Mercy – N64



READER

JOHN LANE
Port Deposit, MD

- 1 Halo 3 – Xbox 360
- 2 Kingdom Hearts II – PS2
- 3 Resident Evil 4 – PS2
- 4 Spawn: In the Demon's Hand – Dreamcast
- 5 Guitar Hero II – Xbox 360

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Things Overheard From Other Players' Orbs In Fable II

- 10 How do I get rid of an STD?
- 9 Hey, let's go sleep with your wife
- 8 I totally just saw Peter Dinklage! He gave me a million gold!
- 7 Why does my girl look like a gross bodybuilder?
- 6 Hey, turn your safety off
- 5 Can you kill your dog?
- 4 Aw, man! I lost my wood combo!
- 3 Why am I so fat?
- 2 Daing it, I'm already married. Can I still have sex with people?
- 1 Seriously, turn your safety off. I promise to behave

Name That Game Answer: Dragon Force

news

MEET THE NINTENDO DSi

NEW DS INCLUDES CAMERAS

Nintendo's DS handheld is a success by any measure, but that's not stopping the company from improving its functionality. We're used to seeing Nintendo offer new colors, but the Nintendo DSi's inclusion of cameras and an SD card slot marks the biggest leap forward for the DS since the release of the Lite. The Nintendo DSi is already selling in Japan for 18,900 yen, but Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aimé says the U.S. won't see the handheld until "well into 2009." If the Japanese price of the unit is any indication, we expect the system to sell for around \$180 – slightly more than the current \$150 price tag for the current DS. It is unknown if Nintendo plans to phase out the present DS Lite when the DSi releases.

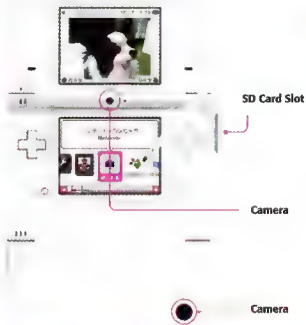
Bigger and Thinner

Here is a side-by-side comparison of the Nintendo DSi (left side) and the old DS Lite (right) showing off the increased size in the both the top and bottom screens. The DSi is 17 percent larger (going from 3 inches to 3.25 inches), and 12 percent thinner than its predecessor. Notice the new status indicators on the left-hand side of the hinge. These display the unit's power and wi-fi status, as well as an unknown third indicator.



Nintendo DSi

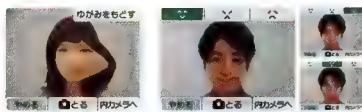
Nintendo DS Lite



SD Card Slot

Camera

Camera



Fully Functional

To augment the system's two new cameras, the DSi offers a program that lets you manipulate your pictures via the handheld's touchscreen. You can share your images with local DS users. AAC music files can also be stored on the SD memory card and played with built-in audio software that also lets you alter your songs' pitch and speed. Audio filters and a karaoke mode are also available. The DSi can also connect to the DSi Shop via a new online browser. Here you can buy and download games which are stored on your SD card. Nintendo says that the shop will feature redone versions of both Brain Age DS titles.

Candid Cameras

The Nintendo DSi has two cameras: a 3-megapixel one on the outside of the handheld's shell and a lower quality camera in the middle of the inside hinge. The right side of the unit houses a new SD memory card slot. This replaces the GBA backwards compatibility function enabled by the old GBA cart slot of the DS Lite. The new power button is located in the lower-left-hand corner of the bottom touch screen, and the mics are now placed on either side of the top screen.

UNCOVER THE SECRETS
OF THE PAST TO
SAVE THE FUTURE

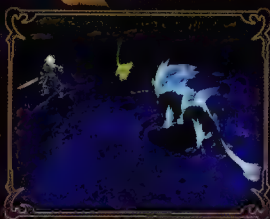
TALES OF SYMPHONIA

Dawn of the New World™

In the aftermath of the world regeneration,
a new conflict awaits. A young boy
confronts the heroes of the past to save
a world on the brink of destruction.



Engage in fast-paced real-time battles
utilizing the powers of the elements



Form pacts with, evolve and fight
alongside over 200 unique monsters



Alcohol Reference
Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes

Wii



www.TalesRPG.com



CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Ivy League

Price graduates from prestigious Princeton University with a degree in English

Med Tech

Price joins his uncle's medical company as a medical technician, but soon moves into the office as the company's financial controller. Here, Price writes his own database software

New Beginnings

Hoping to realize his dream of being a game developer, Price forms Insomniac, using his personal savings. Partners Al and Brian Haslings soon join him

Getting A Deal

Down to their last \$1,000, Insomniac signs a life-covering three-game development deal with the newly formed Universal Interactive Studios

First Blood



Insomniac debuts its first game, the PlayStation first-person shooter Drippler

A New Hero



Insomniac's second game is a blockbuster: Spyro the Dragon, a platforming series that becomes one of the signature PlayStation titles

All Guns Blazing

After parting with Universal and Spyro, Insomniac reinvents the platformer for the PS2 era with Ratchet & Clank, which melded shooter gameplay and depth with traditional platforming

Full Circle



Insomniac returns to the FPS genre with Resistance, one of the strongest and most popular early PS3 titles

The Next Hit



Ratchet & Clank Future, a gorgeous PS3 revival of the popular PS2 series, launches to strong reviews and sales

TED PRICE

CEO, INSOMNIAC GAMES

» Through three generations of PlayStation hardware, Insomniac Games has remained at the forefront of the industry. Before we sat down to review Resistance 2, we spoke with Insomniac's Ted Price about the company's past and its future. <<

You're one of the few developers still doing triple-A work in the action/platformer genre. Does it make you sad that the platformer has declined over the years?

Gamers change; their tastes change quickly. I think the audience's tastes have gotten more sophisticated, and platformers tend to be looked at as more puerile fare because of the colors and the more lighthearted stories. So, I think that a lot of the generation that originally picked up and loved the platformers has gotten older, and they haven't necessarily been replaced. I think that the younger kids today are more aspirational in terms of what kind of games they play. As a result, you've got younger kids picking up more sophisticatedly themed games. That's not to say that Ratchet doesn't have sophisticated themes, it's just in a wrapper that's a little bit less "adult" than most games today.

Ratchet has a big variety of gameplay, and a very complex weapons system like many FPS games. Did you feel like the platformer needed to emulate some of those other genres?

Our specific goal was to breathe life into the genre.

Resistance 2 is done; what were some of the things you were working on as you reached the finish line?

For the last couple of months, we spent a lot of time making small tweaks to weapons, load-outs, the amount of ammo we would give you at certain spots, and difficulty for the different levels. We spent a lot of time tweaking the pacing of the game.

A lot of people felt that the first Resistance was poorly paced. Did you take a different approach this time?

Yes. We heard that loud and clear from the fans. The first thing we agreed on was to have a different approach to the opening of the game. There's much more spectacle, and we do a better job of training the player and moving them through the game. They're not just dropped in.

The usual approach to co-op is to drop another player into the single-player experience. You are taking a different approach to deal with eight-player co-op.

to large numbers, we've remained small so that our communication could stay very open. We foster a very collaborative environment where everyone can have their say on the games. We worried that building out more space here in Burbank would have a negative effect on that culture.

With Resistance 2, you're really pushing a lot of the boundaries of console online. Do you ever get frustrated with the fact that Home is still not up and running?

I don't know; we tend to focus on our own community at myresistance.net, which has been a great destination for Resistance players. We're really excited about unveiling a new version of that in the coming weeks. That's what we've mostly been dedicated to. As far as Home, we're waiting like everyone else to see what it's going to be like when it's released. We got a taste of it at E3 and it's very cool. So, we'll just wait and see.

You've had a longstanding relationship with Sony, but you have maintained your independence. Why?

We foster a very collaborative environment where everyone can have their say on the games.

We felt that, at the end of PlayStation 1, it was growing stale. Most of the platformers that were released, including Spyro, were collect-a-thons where your goal was to collect all the gems, all the eggs, all the coins, et cetera. For the platformer to survive it had to embrace elements from other genres. More specifically for us, the RPG genre, the adventure genre, and the shooter genres. So, we gave Ratchet weapons and created an inventory system [and] an economy. The result was that people who would traditionally turn up their nose at platformers took another look at Ratchet and realized that there was a game that broke the mold.

You recently put out Ratchet & Clank: Quest for Booty. How has that done in terms of sales and response as compared to your expectations?

Well, it's been out for almost two months and I'm pretty sure we've sold close to 100,000 units. For a game of that size and solely offered on PSN, that's not too bad. We're happy.

We found that you couldn't stick eight players into the traditional campaign and expect it to work. Traditionally, that's what games do. That's what we did with the first Resistance. Spaces that are built for a solo campaign do not work when you start increasing co-op numbers. We had to, first, construct different levels for the co-op campaign, and second, take a very different design approach. With eight players, you've got to keep all eight players occupied and interested, and that requires a lot more enemies and tougher enemies. It also requires something to inspire teamwork. We'll have battles that involve 100 enemies fighting against eight guys. We also came up with different character classes, so each player is helping his team in a different way.

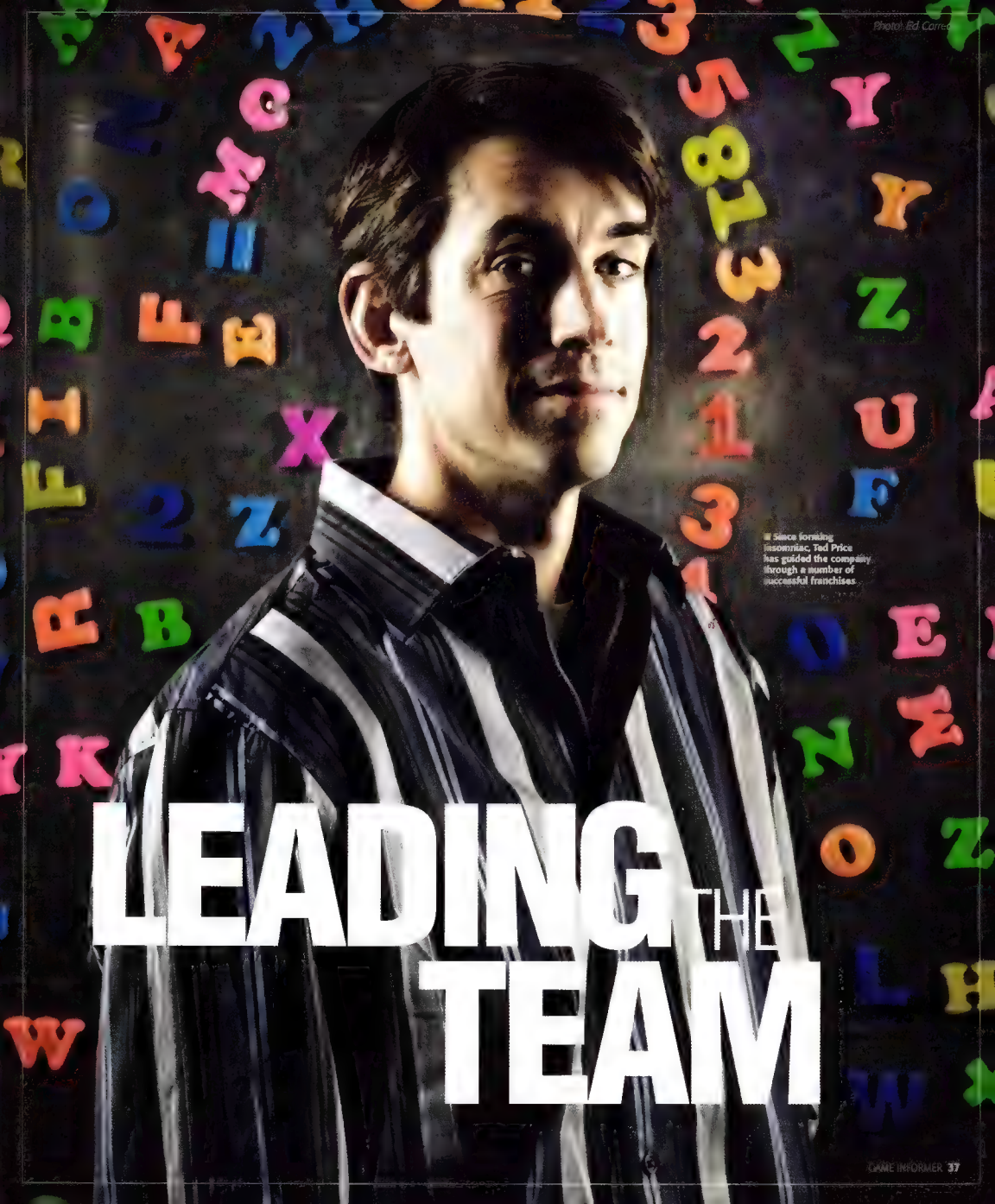
You're opening a new studio in North Carolina. Why did you decide to open a new studio somewhere else instead of just expanding your L.A. operations?

We've always had a very small company feel at Insomniac. Even though we could have expanded

Maintaining our independence gives us the opportunity to make the games that we want to make. It's really great knowing that, whatever our next new IP is going to be, we're the ones coming up with it and we're the ones that are going to be taking the risks and reaping the rewards. At the same time, we have a great situation with Sony and they've always been very supportive.

Have you ever considered expanding development to other platforms like the DS or 360?

The DS would be hard, because it's so different. But we've certainly considered going multiplatform and I wouldn't count it out down the road... I'm not saying we're going multiplatform, but never say never. Because we're independent, it gives us the choice of going with pretty much any platform. But we have developed an expertise here at Insomniac for working on Sony hardware, and in particular the PlayStation 3. That's an expertise we intend to maintain.



Steve Forming
innovative, Ted Price
has guided the company
through a number of
successful franchises

LEADING THE TEAM

GI'S 2008 HOLIDAY BUYING GUIDE

Need help creating that holiday shopping list this year? Or better yet, want to know what you should be asking Santa to throw down your chimney? You've come to the right place. Across the next 10 pages we've amassed the coolest games, gizmos, and gadgets that every respectable gamer would enjoy. You can thank us with candy.



1 HELLBOY SEED OF DESTRUCTION BOX SET

Sure, Satan is on our naughty list, but any demon that kicks ass for the U.S. government while fighting Nazis and evil monsters from historical fables deserves to be absolved in our book. This great collector's set from Dark Horse includes *Seed of Destruction*, the first volume in Mike Mignola's beloved Hellboy franchise, as well as a four-inch PVC Hellboy figure.

\$18.99 • www.darkhorse.com

2 THE DARK KNIGHT: THE JOKER POKER SET

Everyone knows that The Joker loves playing games — sounds like our kind of guy! This movie poker kit comes with a full 54-card deck defaced by the Joker, just like in the movie. The set also includes 100 Joker-themed chips and a black aluminum carrying case. Just stop asking us why we're so serious — this is poker, after all.

\$99.99 • www.dccomics.com/dcdirect

3 GAMES

LEGO Batman

PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PC • \$49.99

Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe Collector's Edition

PS3, Xbox 360 • \$69.99

Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness Episodes One & Two

PS3, Xbox 360, PC • \$19.95

4 TWIN BATARANG THROWING SET

Say goodbye to your apartment's security deposit. As soon as you get these bad boys, you'll be throwing them across the room to see how far you can drive them into the wall. (That's the first thing we did, anyway!) Constructed from grade 440 stainless steel and measuring 7.5 inches long, these suckers will do some damage, so it's probably best to give these to the safety-conscious Batman fans you know.

\$9.99 • www.trueswords.com



COMIC GEEKS

5 TRADES

Absolute Sandman Vol. 4
\$99.99
Daredevil Omnibus, Vol. 1
\$99.99

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Official Casebook
Vol. 1
\$14.95

The Starman Omnibus, Vol. 1
\$49.99

The Umbrella Academy: Apocalypse Suite
Limited Edition
\$79.95

6 JLA TROPHY ROOM: SUPERMAN'S CAPE AND BELT REPLICAS

You have to grow out of wearing a towel around your neck eventually. This full-sized cape stands 56 inches long and the belt comes complete with concealed pockets for storing your secret identity's personal effects. The cape is even embossed with the Man of Steel's trademark symbol. If you don't want to wear it, you could hang it on your trophy wall and tell all your friends that you killed Superman.
\$295.00 • www.dccomics.com/dcdirect

7 KOTOBUKIYA FINE ART IRON MAN STATUE

For almost three months, the Iron Avenger owned the summer. Fine statue manufacturer Kotobukiya has captured him here in all his Stan Winston Studios glory. Standing over 12 inches tall, this cold cast porcelain statue looks great with its sweet metallic finish. Powered by his internal awesomeness (and three AAA batteries), Iron Man's eyes, chest, and palms even light up.
\$179.99 • www.kotobusy.com

8 THE DC AND MARVEL VAULTS: MUSEUMS-IN-A- BOOK

History used to be a boring affair – something for stuffy adults to talk about using big words while smoking in parlors. Yawn! Then superheroes came along and now the past kicks ass. Learn the colorful histories of two of comic's largest publishers in these sturdy hardcover volumes. These tomes also feature an impressive collection of early sketches, covers, memos, press materials, and other historic memorabilia.
\$49.95 • www.persesusbksgroup.com

9 MEDIA SHELF

The Dark Knight Bat-pad Display Case Edition
Blu-ray • \$64.99

The Dark Knight: Featuring Production Art and Full Shooting Script
Hardcover • \$36.99

The Incredible Hulk
Blu-ray • \$39.98

Iron Man Ultimate Two-Disc Edition
Blu-ray • \$39.99



SCI-FI NERDS

1 GAMES

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed
PS3, Xbox 360 • \$59.99

Fallout 3 Collector's Edition
PS3, Xbox 360, PC • \$79.99

Gears of War 2 Limited Edition
Xbox 360 • \$69.99

2 EVOLUTION OF THE AT-AT SHIRT

As everyone knows, Star Wars was a historical documentary about what happened a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. This shirt provides a good example of what AT-ATs probably look like today. This isn't the only nerd shirt worth checking out at Red Bubble; designer James Lillis has plenty of

great gamer apparel for sale.

\$25.94 • www.redbubble.com/people/jameslillis

3 MINDZEYE STUDIOS GEARS OF WAR STATUES

The characters in Gears of War are all hefty guys, so they deserve some hefty statues. Created by Mindzeze Studios, these highly detailed cold cast bronze and platinum statues stand about a foot high. This is one toy you won't have to worry about your dog chewing on.

\$260.00 (Boomer) \$205.00 (Marcus or Dom) • www.mindzezestudios.com

4 KOTOBUKIYA CROSS SECTION

3-D X-WING

Comprised of six separate sets, this 1:55 scale model X-wing measures 12 2/3 inches long once completed. The full set contains over 100 removable parts that reveal the inner workings of the Rebellion's go-to starfighter. As an added bonus, you can give this to a friend in stages and watch them go nuts after you've hidden the pieces all over their house.

\$249.99 • www.kotouso.com/

5 WETA DOCTOR WHO STATUES

The talented folks at WETA Collectibles have immortalized two of the Doctor's oldest and fiercest enemies. Popularized in the Doctor Who series, these Dalek and Cyber Controller statues stand about a foot tall

and are made from high quality materials. "EX-TER-MI-NATE!"

\$297.00 (Dalek) \$270.00 (Cyber Controller) • www.wetanz.com

6 MEDIA SHELF

Alien-Predator Total Destruction Collection
DVD • \$69.98

Anthem by Neal Stephenson
Hardcover • \$29.95

Dr. Who: The Complete Fourth Series
DVD • \$99.98

The Ultimate Matrix Collection
Blu-ray • \$129.95

Mystery Science Theater 3000: 20th Anniversary Edition
DVD • \$69.99



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WAR DOGS

1 ALIENWARE AREA-51 MITX

If you need a rig that will carry you through the toughest deathmatches no matter where you're stationed, Alienware's got you covered. This DirectX 10-compatible laptop rig may be hefty, but that just means it's got enough muscle to handle any war you can throw at it. With dual Nvidia GeForce 9800M GTs in an SLI configuration, even graphical bruisers like Crysis Warhead will throw up their white flags in surrender.

Starting at \$3,849.99 • www.alienware.com

2 GAMES

Call of Duty: World at War
PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC • \$59.99
Battlefield: Bad Company Gold Edition

PS3, Xbox 360 • \$59.99

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
PS3 • \$59.99

3 MEDIA SHELF

Generation Kill
DVD • \$59.99

The History Channel Presents: The Vietnam War
DVD • \$29.95

In a Time of War: The Proud and Perilous
Journey of West Point Class of 2002 by Bill
Murphy
Hardcover • \$27.50

4 BT FM-7 COMBAT PAINTGUN

Here's how we'd deliver this present. Sneak into your friend's house through the chimney,

just like Santa. Throw a canvas bag over their head while they're sleeping and cart them out into the middle of the forest. After shouting some unintelligible gibberish at them until they've started to cry, yell "Merry Christmas!" and light them up with one of the three different firing modes on this BT combat paintball gun. Nothing says "I care" like scaring the jingle bells out of your best friend.

Starting at \$114.95 • www.btpaint001.com

5 EYECLOPS NIGHT VISION GOGGLES

Whether you're trying to infiltrate a secret Russian bunker or just want to make it to the bathroom in the middle of the night without tripping over the cat, it's handy to be able to see in the dark. These authentic IR goggles will let you see up to 50 feet in pitch black

and they're even a reasonable price. Plus, just think about how much you'll creep out your voyeuristic neighbors by running through your house with these on.

\$89.99 • www.thinkgeek.com

6 MCFARLANE CALL OF DUTY ACTION FIGURES

McFarlane, maker of the Halo and Guitar Hero figures, is releasing these detailed WWII-themed Call of Duty figures. This first wave includes a Marine Infantry, a British Special Ops, a Machine Gun Marine, and a Marine with Flamethrower. Each figure stands about six inches tall and comes eager to give those Krauts a good kick in the pants.

\$12.99 • www.spawn.com



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PLAYSTATION 3

Requires Internet for Windows



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ROCK FIENDS

1 GAMES

Guitar Hero World Tour Band Kit
PS3, Xbox 360 • \$189.99

Lite
Xbox 360 • \$69.99

Rock Band 2 Special Edition
PS3, Xbox 360 • \$189.99

2 MEDIA SHELF

Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S.
Thompson
DVD • \$26.99

Metalocalypse: Season 2
DVD • \$29.98

Rolling Stone Cover to Cover: The First 40 Years
Software • \$79.99

Soundstage Presents: Tom Petty & The
Heartbreakers Live
DVD • \$19.99

3 SKULLCANDY
METALLICA
HEADPHONES

Have a loved one who's not destroying their hearing fast enough? Give them these sweet Metallica cans. Skullcandy has a solid track record when it comes to headsets. Their Hesh set pumps out studio quality sound through two parabolic ear-cups, while the Lowrider offers a similar performance in a smaller, more portable, DJ-style package. Even when your friend is listening to Evanescence, at least they'll look like they're rocking out.

\$49.95 (Lowrider) \$69.95 (Hesh) •
www.skullcandy.com

4 FRETLIGHT
GUITAR

Nothing makes you more appealing to the opposite sex than placing a real guitar in your lap and hunching over it while looking introspective. These guitars have a patented light-up neck that helps eager guitarists learn finger placement. Each guitar kit includes 10 feet of Fretlight cable, interactive computer software, and access to Fretlight's online lesson store that helps you learn how to play your favorite songs.

\$499.99 • www.fretlightstore.com

5 MADCATZ TRIPLE
TREE GUITAR
AND MICROPHONE
STAND

With all the great music games out these days, you've probably amassed a collection of guitars that rivals Nigel Tufnel of Spinal Tap's collection. These guitar and micro-

phone stands are important for any self-respecting faux musician. After all, you don't want your musical equipment sitting on the floor; that's where your underwear and last night's pizza belong.

\$29.99 (Guitar Stand)
\$24.99 (Microphone Stand) •
www.madcatz.com

6 MUSIC

Bob Dylan - Tell Tale Signs: The Bootleg
Series Volume 8 Limited Deluxe Edition
\$129.99

Guns n' Roses - Chinese Democracy
\$15.98

Kanye West - 808s & Heartbreak
\$13.98

Video Games Live, Vol. 1
\$16.98

7 ROCK BAND
CUSTOM MERCH

Tired of your video game band feeling so small town? Sick of the lack of recognition

you're getting in real life for all that time spent in a famous imaginary band? It's time to make some real merch for your fake band. Create a bunch of shirts with your band name on them and give them to your little cousins, telling them it's the next hot group. Or you could make some Bandmate figures so you can role-play a few fights during practice. You've put a lot of work into these toy instruments. It's time you started to get your name out there.
\$69.00 (Bandmates) \$29.00 (T-shirts) •
www.rockband.com/merch

1 AUTHENTIC YANKEE STADIUM DIRT AND BASEBALL SET

What better gift could there be for the Baseball fan in your life than the actual dirt Babe Ruth spat on? None, as long as you don't look that hard. This two-ball set features a final season ball and a 2008 All-Star game ball by Rawlings with a patch of authentic dirt from Yankee Stadium. With Yankee Stadium dead and gone, this 5,000 limited run might be your last chance to

own, um, a dirt patch of baseball history. \$99.95 • www.bigtimebats.com

2 SONY 46-INCH BRAVIA XBR SERIES LCD HDTV

Warning: Sony's Bravia line of LCD TVs might ruin your life. You won't be able to go back to watching sports in real life, because reality doesn't look this good. Sony's Motionflow 120Hz technology helps double the framerate, creating smoother images that will help you keep track of those

fly balls. The Bravia line also reduces visual noise, enhances overall image details, and optimizes the contrast, so you get a picture so crisp you could count the hairs on Tiger Woods' head, something he gets really awkward about if you do in person. \$2,799.99 • www.sonymstyle.com

3 NEW ERA OFFICIAL MLB CAPS

Children perform better when you lie to them. Give these New Era MLB hats to

your kids during a little league game, tell them they've just joined a major league training camp, and then see how well they play. You can get these officially licensed hats in their original colors, or you can change things up with a more creative color pattern. So even if your kids lose, at least you'll still be confident that they looked better than the other team. Unless you gave them Padres hats. \$35.99 • www.neweracap.com

4 GAMES

NBA 2K9

PS3, Xbox 360, PS2 • \$59.99

NHL 09

PS3, Xbox 360, PS2, PC • \$59.99

Grid

PS3, Xbox 360, PC • \$59.99

5 DREAM ARCADE OCTANE 120 BEER ARCADE

This is the only time you should be drinking in the driver's seat. In addition to the two keg taps, this baby comes with a 120-inch HD projection screen, 12 classic and modern arcade racing games, and a 5.1 audio system. The Octane is compatible with PlayStation 3 and PC, and also interfaces with Hulu.com and YouTube so you can watch videos between races. \$6,995.00 • www.dreamarcades.com

6 MEDIA SHELF

Boys Will Be Boys: The Glory Days and Party Nights of the Dallas Cowboys Dynasty by Jeff Pearlman

Hardcover • \$25.95

Black Magic

DVD • \$19.95

A Team to Believe In: Our Journey to the Super Bowl Championship by Tom Coughlin

Hardcover • \$25.00

UFC Classics Collection: Gift Set Volume 2

DVD • \$34.99



SPORTS BUFF



FANTASY FREAKS

1 DR. DORNBORT'S RAYGUNS: THE UNNATURAL SELECTOR

Steampunk never seemed cooler than when WETA started making terribly strange deathrays. The Unnatural Selector measures 45" x 8" x 12" and is made from real metal, glass, and imitation wood. Each gun comes engraved with your name and edition number. Just looking at this thing gets us excited to go on an African safari and foil the schemes of a mad scientist and his army of clockwork baboons. Even though that's what we just did yesterday.

\$4,500.00 • www.wetan.com

2 UPPER DECK WOW MINIS GAME

Check it out, we just heard about this thing called World of Warcraft. This tabletop minis game uses an excellently balanced combat system. The game takes place in a land called Azeroth where a group of Orcs, Blood Elves, and Trolls – called the Horde – battle a bunch of dinguses called the Alliance. Maybe if this thing catches on they'll make a computer game?

\$39.99 (Deluxe Set) \$24.99 (Starter)
\$14.99 (Booster) • www.wowminis.com

3 MEDIA SHELF

300 Limited Collector's Edition,
DVD • \$49.99

Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian,
Blu-ray • \$35.99

D&D Roleplaying Game Starter Set,
Hardcover • \$16.99

Swords: An Artist's Devotion by Ben Bowes
Hardcover • \$24.99

4 WOW LIMITED EDITION EPIC STEINS

Drink your fruit juice like a real Orc with these high-quality German-style mugs that depict panoramic full-color bas-reliefs of everyone's favorite MMO. Illustrated by Blizzard Entertainment artists, these 11-inch authentic stoneware steins come complete with sculpted pewter lids and are only available for a limited time.

\$79.99 • www.3point.com/warcraftsteins

5 GAMES

Fable II Limited Collector's Edition,
Xbox 360 • \$69.99

Prince of Persia
PS3, Xbox 360 • \$59.99

World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King
PC • \$39.99

6 UNITED CUTLERY LICENSED SWORDS

Looking for a new set of steak knives? Why not eat your food like a true Barbarian? These swords are also great for slicing up fruit, bread, and the bones of your fallen enemies. United Cutlery has quite a collection of licensed fantasy swords ranging from Lord of the Rings to Heavy Metal and the TV show Heroes.

Starting at \$149.99 •
www.unitedcutlery.com

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Jump in.

 XBOX 360



TYKES

1 AIR HOGS ZERO GRAVITY MICRO RC CAR

For far too long, gravity has kept our cars on the ground. Lame! But now, thanks to vacuum technology and 6 AA batteries, these mini RC cars can drive over any smooth surface, be it on the wall or ceiling. Finally, physics no longer has such a harsh grip on our playtime, and we owe it to science!

\$40.00 • www.airhogs.com

2 GAMES

Spore Galactic Edition
PC • \$79.99

Boom Blox

Wii • \$49.99

Super Smash Bros. Brawl
Wii • \$49.99

3 PLAYSKOOL KOTA THE TRICERATOPS

When we were young, action figures and Transformers were the coolest toys around. Now, kids are playing with animatronic dinosaurs! Kota responds to physical touch, makes dino sounds, and even eats fake leaves. If we had this as a kid, we would have rode the thing until it broke (which probably would have only taken us 10 minutes).

\$299.99 • www.hasbrotoys.com

4 LEGO BATMAN'S TUMBLER

We know you still like to play with LEGOs. That's okay. But if you're planning on get-

ting this set for someone else, be careful. You'll bring this set home and the sexy rattle of little LEGO pieces will tempt you. You'll open the box, "just to check it out," and pretty soon the whole thing will be put together and sitting on the mantle next to your life-size statue of Salacious B. Crumb. Then you're going to have to go back to the store and buy another set, so do yourself a favor and buy two the first time around.

\$49.99 • shop.lego.com

5 NEAR W-STRIKE VULCAN 88F-25

The Vulcan is a fully automatic dart cannon that fires three darts per second! It comes with a tripod and belt feeder that holds 25 darts, so you shouldn't have any trouble keeping your sister out of your living room fort. Why don't you spend some quality time

with her instead? She'll probably want to play house and make you serve her invisible friend Bacon some tea. Arg! We hated that invisible bear. You know what? Let her have it.

\$39.99 • www.hasbrotoyshop.com

6 MEDIA SHELF

Avatar - The Last Airbender: The Complete Book 3 Collection
DVD • \$79.99

Kung Fu Panda
Blu-ray • \$39.99

The Tales of Beedle the Bard Collector's Edition by J.K. Rowling
Hardcover • \$100.00

WALL-E Three-Disc Special Edition
Blu-ray • \$40.99



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Sergeant James Jamerson

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1 MEDIA SHELF

Dead Space: Downfall

Blu-ray • \$34.99

Ghost House Underground: Eight Film Collection

DVD • \$159.99

Just After Sunset by Stephen King

Hardcover • \$28.00

The Nightmare Before Christmas Ultimate Collector's Set

DVD • \$179.99

Psycho Special Edition

DVD • \$26.98

2 SANDMAN 20TH ANNIVERSARY TAROT DECK SET

Based on the Vertigo Comics' masterpiece, this is a recreation of a long lost collector's set. Featuring artwork by Dave McKean and an introduction by Neal Gaiman, the full set includes 78 cards, a 128-page soft-cover book, a black velvet drawstring bag, and the unholy power of divination.

\$39.99 • www.dccomics.com/dcdirect

3 CTMULHU PLUSH

Just because he's an ancient baleful giant whose name is synonymous with terror and dread doesn't mean you can't cuddle up next to him while roasting chestnuts on an open fire. This fuzzy stuffed doll stands 12 inches tall, is filled with plush and beansies, and probably won't scare granny... too much.

\$19.95 • www.toyvault.com

4 GAMES

Dead Space

PS3, Xbox 360, PC • \$39.99

Devil May Cry 4

PS3, Xbox 360, PC • \$19.99

Left 4 Dead

Xbox 360, PC • \$39.99

5 NECA ARMY OF DARKNESS S-MART

ASH FIGURE

NECA's new Cult Classics line takes some of our favorite movie franchises and shrinks them down to collectible action figures. The set includes characters like Beetlejuice, The Exorcist, and Stuntman Mike from Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof*. We recommend this Ash figure from the *Evil Dead* series, which stands 7 inches tall and comes with its rifle, a water bottle, and a blue-light stock-art display base. Remember shop smart, shop S-Mart! (C'mon, you knew it was coming.)

\$12.99 • www.necaonline.com

6 PARADIGM PHANTOM GAMING AUDIO SYSTEM & SONY ES SERIES HOME THEATER 7.1-CHANNEL A/V RECEIVER

In space no one can hear you scream, but if you want an awesome surround sound system that you can hear from space then check out these gorgeous Paradigm Speakers. Perfectly optimized for playing

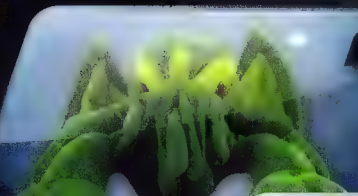
games, Paradigm makes some of the best speakers in the business. Couple these with one of Sony's ES Series Receivers – which has six HDMI inputs and a 120-watt power amplifier for killer sound – and you'll have a home theater system worth screaming about.

\$1,499.99 • www.sonystyle.com

(Receiver)

\$1,474.99 • www.paradigm.com

(Speakers)





EVERYMAN

1 GAMES

Resistance 2 Collector's Edition
PS3 • \$79.99

Grand Theft Auto IV
PS3, Xbox 360, PC • \$59.99

LittleBigPlanet
PS3 • \$59.99

2 ARCADE IN A BOX CUSTOM ARCADE STICKS

You know that friend who keeps playing the "controller wasn't responding" card when you smoke them in Soulcalibur? They'll have to think of another excuse once you give them an Arcade in a Box premium arcade stick. This is one of the finest arcade sticks we've used; it works on both PS3 and Xbox 360 consoles, and it's entirely customizable. You get to pick

the joystick, button layout, button shape, and edging color. For only a few bucks more, you can choose the art that goes on top.

\$219.99 (\$15.00 for custom art) • www.arcadeinabox.com

3 KNIGHT RIDER GPS

Navigating the city can be mundane, but when your GPS sounds like K.I.T.T. from the '90s classic Knight Rider, even a trip to the grocery store feels a little more epic. Voiced by the original actor, William Daniels, the Knight Rider GPS sounds authentic. Mr. Feeny from *Boy Meets World* can even address you from one of a hundred different names, but we suggest you stick with Michael. Now that we have a GPS system we just need a car.

\$299.99 • www.mio.com/us

4 SE2 LABS ITC

ONE HOME THEATER SYSTEM

Let that sticker shock settle in for a second. Now listen to what's included, and you'll realize that this is actually a pretty sweet deal. The ITC One has a built in Xbox 360, Blu-ray player, a DirecTV DVR, Bryston Audio surround processor, iPod dock, and an ICEpower high-end D-class amplifier (Wii and other options available). Sure it looks a little like a minifridge, but the ITC One is your one stop home theater shop.

Starting at \$30,000.00 • www.se2labs.com

5 GB BRAND CLOTHING

Take a look at your shirt. Is it stained with pizza and Mountain Dew? Does it smell like it's been through a few too many midnight deathmatches? Maybe it's time for some new duds. GB has stylish and affordable

gamer clothing based on franchises like Space Invaders and Counter-Strike. We know no one can see how you're dressed over the Internet, but someday you might want to go outside. Just trust us on that one.

\$30.00 (Shirts) \$45.00 (Hoodies) • store.gbbrand.com

6 MEDIA SHELF

The Big Lebowski 10th Anniversary Limited Edition

DVD • \$34.99

Freaks and Geeks: Yearbook Edition

DVD • \$169.99

Passive Aggressive Notes: Painfully Polite and Hilariously Hostile Writings by Kerry Miller

Paperback • \$13.95

Home Movies 10th Anniversary Set

DVD • \$129.99

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ENDWAR.GAME.COM

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XBOX 360 LIVE



END BEGIN

AVAILABLE NOW



PLAYSTATION 3



NINTENDO DS



UBISOFT

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JORDAN MECHNER
CREATOR, PRINCE OF PERSIA



GAME, GRAPHIC NOVEL, MOVIE

REINVENTING PRINCE OF PERSIA

...the challenge was to make something that would be true to Prince of Persia, yet stand on its own as an original creation.

Video games based on movies, movies based on comics, comics based on video games — these days, if a title is a hit in one medium, it's bound to be adapted into the others. The reason is, of course, money: More people will buy a game that's based on a blockbuster movie than an equivalent game they've never heard of.

That's why every time I hear the word "convergence" I cringe a little bit inside. If the track record of movie-based games and game-based movies to date proves anything, it's that being adapted from something that was successful in another medium is no guarantee of quality.

From video games back to ancient Greek stage plays, the most enduring works of art have been those that pushed the envelope by taking advantage of the unique strengths of their particular medium. The irony of convergence is that when you adapt from one medium into another, the things you lose in translation are the things that made the original special in the first place — because they were unique to the original medium.

With Prince of Persia, I've had the opportunity and the challenge of recreating the character and story anew, not just once but several times, since the first Apple II version 20 years ago: As an Ubisoft console game (*The Sands of Time*), as a graphic novel from First Second Books, and as a Disney/Bruckheimer movie. Each of these projects gave me the chance to work with a great creative team in a new medium — a triple opportunity that in my Apple II days I could have only dreamed of. In each case, the challenge was to make something that would be true to Prince of Persia, yet stand on its own as an original creation.

The biggest difference between writing a video game and writing a movie: Movies are about the story and characters. Games are about playing.

The real story of a game isn't the one that's told in

the dialogue and cinematic cutscenes — "In a galaxy torn by civil war, one lone starfighter..." — but the story the player tells afterwards: "I was down to my last ship, 50 points short of getting an extra life... I'd cleared the screen all except for this one small rock going super fast — and then the flying saucer came..."

A trap for game creators is to think that by increasing the complexity and cinematic scope of that first narrative — or, if it's a film adaptation, by borrowing elements that worked great in the movie — they're making a better and richer game. The second narrative is the one that needs to be complex and gripping, if the game is any good.

It's when those two narratives work in sync that video games are capable of emotional effects that are unique to this art form. Like when you're down to your last few hit points, and your companion who's fighting alongside you accidentally shoots you in the butt with an arrow...then apologizes when you yell at her. Creating such moments requires teamwork, planning, and a solid understanding of game and movie craft.

LESSONS

A similar pitfall awaits screenwriters adapting a game to film. Many video games have the surface elements of a great movie: action, spectacle, a cool-looking hero, stuff blowing up. But a game is exciting because as the player you're doing it, experiencing the triumphs and setbacks yourself. Take away the gameplay, and you're left with a story — often the weakest element of the original game.

To write Prince of Persia: *The Sands of Time* as a screenplay, I took my own game script as an inspiration, not a blueprint. One of the great pleasures of a movie — especially on the scale that Disney, Mike Newell, and Jerry Bruckheimer can deliver — is seeing a fantastic ancient empire brought to life with epic scope and a rich, diverse, and human cast of characters. The *Sands of Time* video game script was tailored for the PlayStation 2, to be played with controller in hand — different constraints, different

objectives. Some game fans may wish we'd made a movie that literally followed the game plot. I think if we had, they'd be disappointed.

CONCLUSION

If video games are about the gameplay, graphic novels are primarily about the artwork and visual storytelling. The kind of action at which movies and video games excel is often difficult and unrewarding to portray on the page. And while movies and games are team efforts with multimillion-dollar budgets, graphic novels are an intensely personal form of creation, limited only by what an artist can draw.

For Prince of Persia: *The Graphic Novel*, Iranian poet A. B. Sina and I took a radical departure from the games and the movie. I asked A. B. to write a story that addressed the paradox of multiple coexisting incarnations of one character. Is there a sense in which all the princes of Persia in the different video games and the movie are the same person? That's a philosophical question not well suited to a game or a movie, since those art forms are about action. But it's a great subject for a graphic novel — and A. B. tackled it with a highly personal approach.

People sometimes ask me if I've ever got bored revisiting Prince of Persia. One reason I haven't is that I consider each new incarnation an original work, and I've had the good fortune to collaborate with talented and passionate people who felt the same. In the end, this is the advice I'd give to anyone adapting a property across multiple media: Respect each medium equally. Recognize that the original was shaped by the demands, strengths and weaknesses of the medium it was created in — and give yourself the freedom to do the same. **IG 100**

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Destroy All Humans 3 - 12/02

NEW RELEASES

- Build a Lot - DS
- The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian - DVD, Blu-Ray
- Destroy All Humans 3: Path of Fury - PS3, 360
- Happy Cooking - DS
- Imagine: Ballet Star - DS
- Immortal - Blu-Ray
- Meny Galin's Crossword - Wii
- Nancy Drew: The White Wolf - Wii
- Prince of Persia - PS3, 360, DS, PC
- The Tale of Despereaux - 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PC
- The X-Files: I Want to Believe - DVD



Rygar - 12/09

NEW RELEASES

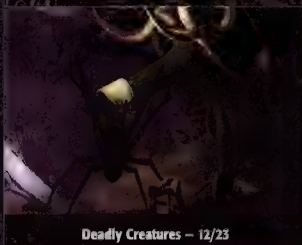
- Dungeon Maker 2 - PSP
- Imagine: Fashion Party - Wii
- Last Season 4 - DVD, Blu-Ray
- Rygar: The Battle of Argus - Wii
- Persona 4 - PS2
- Six Flags: Fun Park - Wii
- Tomb Raider: Underworld - PS2



Damnation - 12/16

NEW RELEASES

- Aqua Teen Hunger Force: Season 6 - DVD
- Damnation - PS3, 360, PC
- Death Proof - Blu-ray
- Gallop and Ride - Wii
- Planet Terror - Blu-ray



Deadly Creatures - 12/23

NEW RELEASES

- Deadly Creatures - Wii
- Matchstick Puzzle - DS



X-Blades - 12/30

02

WATCHMEN

Fox may be holding the release of the film back, but curious moviegoers need not wait for the film to experience this amazing story. Starting today, DC Comics is re-releasing the entire run of Watchmen at its original cover price of \$2.50 per issue. Many DC staffers consider this the greatest comic run ever. Don't miss it again.



09

PUNISHER: WAR ZONE #1

Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon, the creative team behind "Welcome Back, Frank" are reuniting and resurrecting Mike Garico for a special, six-part story. You won't have to wait six months to finish this story. It will ship weekly, starting today. And as a minor spoiler, Marvel tells us that part of the story takes place at the zoo.



16

Fan Assault



Persona 4 - 12/09

23

NEW RELEASES

- Deadly Creatures - Wii
- Matchstick Puzzle - DS



30

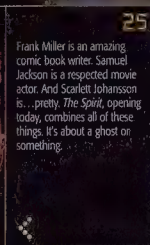
NEW RELEASES

- Skate It - Wii, DS
- X-Blades - PS2



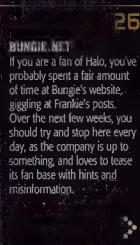
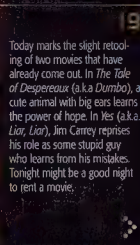
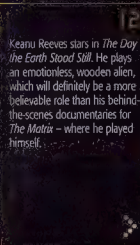
Skate It - 12/30

03



05

The Punisher: War Zone (now with less Thomas Jane!) shoots holes in theater walls today. Ray Stevenson (of HBO's Rome) puts on the skull shirt and does what the Punisher does best. Spoiler Alert: He will shoot a lot of dudes.



december

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

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This Month's Must Haves!

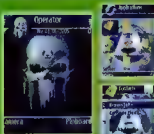


Wallpapers



wall8152

Themes



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Screensavers



move8936

Games



game3763

Realtones

SUPER MARIO BROS. THEMESONG

song2917

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wall8157 wall8158

wall8159 wall8160

wall8161 wall8162

wall8163 wall8164

WTF?!

HOT SURPRISE

PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT LYRICS

theme5406 theme5407

theme5408 theme5409

theme5410 theme5411

theme5412 theme5413

theme5414 theme5415

move8937

move8938

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move8940

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HOT SURPRISE

Poker

game3764

game3765

game3766

game3767

Askafti - Good Good	song2914
Ben Weir - Mince Me	song2915
Chris Brown - Forever	song2916
David Banner / Chris Brown - ...	song2917
David Banner / Lil Wayne - Shaky Say	song2918
Katy Perry - I Kissed A Girl	song2919
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LL Cool J - Baby	song2924
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Metra Station - Shave It	song2926
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Nelly - Body On Me	song2928
Nelly - Shaved On Me	song2929
Rihanna - Disturbia	song2930
Swayze / Corina And Lime	song2932
Sir Mix A Lot - Baby Get Back	song2933
The Dream - Livin' Your Best	song2934
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BABY GOT BACK

"I LIKE BIG..."

SIR MIX A LOT

REALTONE

song2912

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HALO 3

RECON

XBOX 360

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE)

> **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS

> **DEVELOPER** BUNGIE

> **RELEASE** FALL 2009

EXPANDING THE FIGHT



It's pitch black. You can hear voices coming from somewhere nearby, but can't pinpoint them. You are being watched. An escort of guards takes you down a series of corridors. A hand clasped on your shoulder is the only thing preventing you from slamming into a wall, or worse. Suddenly, everything comes to a halt. A door latches behind you. "Take off the helmet," someone says. You oblige and your eyes slowly adjust to the low lighting. Shadowy figures soon come into focus. Is this some dank storage room full of Covenant Brutes preparing to work you over for information? Nah, it's several members of Bungie's Halo 3: Recon team relaxing in the demo room located deep in the heart of the highly off-limits studio. Since the recently announced expansion pack isn't the only thing Bungie's working on, we've been cajoled into wearing a blacked-out ODST helmet from the live action Neill Blomkamp Halo shorts. This is a small price to pay to see the very first gameplay of this highly anticipated lost chapter in the Halo timeline.

Recon is a fresh departure for Bungie, the mega-developer that recently negotiated independence from Microsoft. Designing the studio's first Halo expansion has allowed an unprecedented freedom to tinker with the revered series. Master Chief and his bright galaxy-spanning locales have been traded for an Orbital Drop Shock Trooper dubbed "the rookie" who is searching for his missing squadmates on the open world night streets of New Mombasa. You will also play as other members of the squad with real names, faces, and boisterous personalities in scenes of classic linear Halo action. For newcomers who haven't memorized the Halopedia, it can simply be viewed as a story about a squad's downfall, while diehard fans of Halo lore can finally find out just what happened between Halo 2 and 3 following the Prophet of Regret's slipspace escape from New Mombasa.



■ This set of three screens shows New Mombasa and the slipspace rupture as seen in Halo 2, while the image on the far right is from the Recon trailer



THE BUILDUP

"What the hell kind of armor was she wearing?" asks an Orbital Drop Shock Trooper in regards to a new female soldier who recently arrived on the ship.

"I don't know," says another. "Wasn't looking at her gear."

Mickey, Dutch, Romeo, and Buck are doing their best to distract themselves before the big drop. After some chiding, the squad gets their straight-laced commanding officer to give up the woman's name. "Ms. Naval Intelligence, our new boss," he scolds. "So check your mouths, find your chairs, and get set for a combat drop."

The squad gathers their gear and dissipates. The only ODST wearing a helmet dozes in the corner. "Wake up, buttercup," Romeo shouts.

"Relax, rookie," another says. "He don't mean nothin'. Besides, now's one of those times it pays to be the strong silent type."

The player then gains control of "the rookie" and walks to his drop pod. "Latest intel reports Covenant troops are amassing beneath the carrier," says the female naval captain over the radio.

"They're pulling back? Why?" asks a soldier.

"We're not going to find out waiting up here," she replies.

"I should be burned out on Halo, God knows," says Recon creative director and writer Joseph Staten, who

has been with Bungie since before Halo. "But we're not because we think this is a cool idea."

"That was the directive from Harold [Ryan, studio manager]," adds Recon design director Paul Bertone, another pre-Halo Bungie veteran. "We obviously have contracts with Microsoft — what they want versus what we want to do — and Harold works on all that stuff. He comes down and says 'You have a month. Give me an awesome idea.'"

In February of this year Staten and Bertone sequestered themselves in a studio room and didn't share anything with the rest of the team until they had something they were both excited about.

"The first thing we said when we looked at each other was 'We're not just going to rehash some Halo 3 missions just to pump out an expansion pack,'" Bertone recalls. "If we're going to do it, we're going to do it the Bungie way. We're going to give people an expansion pack like they've

never seen before."

"We wanted to give people a story that was self-contained, compelling, fun to play, but which ended," Staten says. "There is no expansion pack to

an expansion pack. You gotta hit it right and it's gotta be good. From the very beginning we thought, 'Look, let's bring in a whole new cast of characters, let's put them in this interesting context, but then let's tie the knot. Let's make this story end.'"

THE DROP

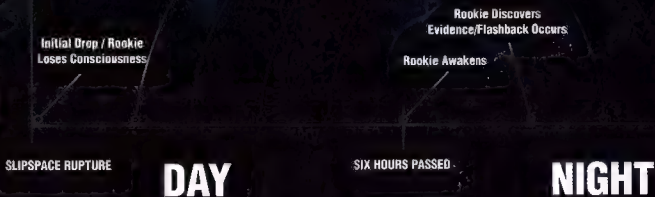
With a violent rumble, the rookie's pod rockets away from the dropship. Through the thin vertical window it's possible to see a swarm of other ODST pods raining down. The glistening city of New Mombasa materializes below, as does the target objective, a large Covenant ship transporting the Prophet of Regret. Though the pod can't be maneuvered, it's possible to look around and admire all of the knobs and readouts on the interior.

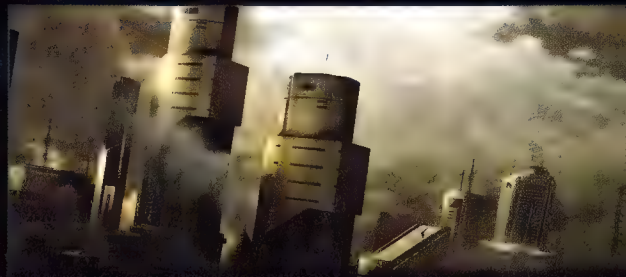
"Stand by to adjust trajectory on my mark," the captain shouts.

"What'd she just say?" an ODST asks.

RECON TIMELINE

Due to Recon's time jumping plot, it can be tough to grasp at first glance. As you can see from the graphic here, the in-game timeline begins at the slipspace rupture in New Mombasa in which Master Chief pursued the Prophet of Regret in Halo 2. At the same time, Recon's squad of ODSTs descended on the city. As the rookie, you remain unconscious for approximately six hours due to the rough landing. When he awakens, time moves forward to an uncertain end as he scours the now-dark city for evidence of his squad. Upon discovering said items, the rookie will piece together what happened while he was out through playable flashbacks. Any questions?





■ The Covenant search for ODST drop pods

"Mark!"

"We're way off course!"

"We're heading exactly where I need to go."

"We're going to miss the carrier!"

"Radiation readings? Did the Covenant just set off a nuke?" another ODST chimes in.

"No, the carrier's going to jump," replies the captain. "It's a slipspace rupture."

"Stabilize and pop your chute," shouts the squad leader. "We're going in hard."

The screen fades to black.

"The reason why we chose the ODST is it's absolutely a character that we've had ideas about how to develop and put more front and center in Halo games," Stanten says. "It's a character our fans are often asking to play so it was a natural fit. He's got an opaque visor so you don't see his face. It's perfect."

That's not to say that the Master Chief wasn't considered as the main character at one point, but eventually Bungie decided to forgo Halo's iconic character altogether. The team seems to be avoiding stepping on the toes of the Chief's



HALO 2

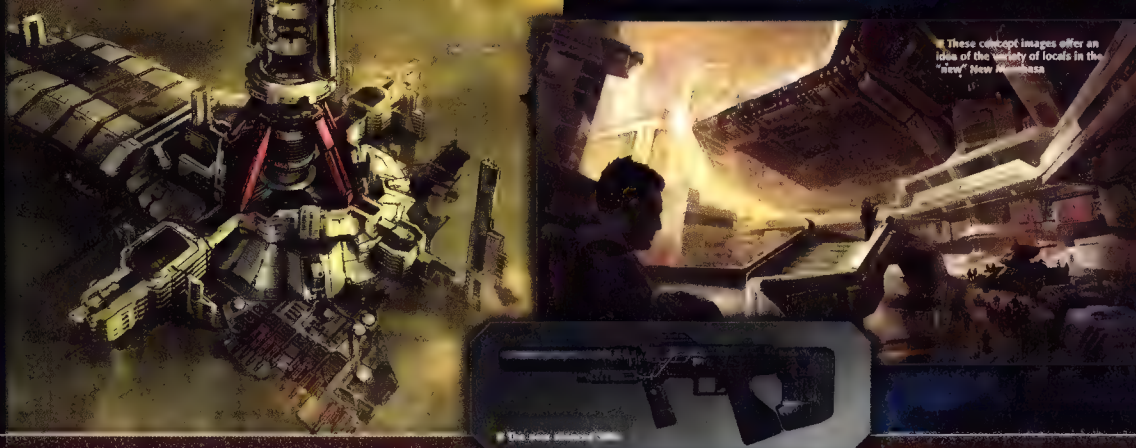


HALO 3



HALO 3: RECON

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ODST



next starring vehicle, whether it's Halo 4, a game bridging the Marathon and Halo universes, or one of the other popular theories running wild throughout the fanbase.

"When we were thinking about the Chief or the Arbiter stories that we could tell, there was just no story that fit into a three to five-hour expansion pack, which is what we're building here," Bertone says. "Even if we were excited about the Chief or the Arbiter, I don't think we would have been able to do it justice with the scope of this project and where it sort of sits with the projects that we're working on here."

12 HOURS TO COVENANT INVASION 6 HOURS FROM DROP

The sun has long set and New Mombasa is now draped in the cover of night. The rookie's been out for a while and his squad is nowhere to be found. He jumps out of his drop pod and first-person control kicks in. The streets are strangely calm, barely lit by a few glowing signs and lined with tropical palm trees and ferns. A space tether burns in the background (a massive tower that extends outside of the Earth's atmosphere). It appears that the shock from the Covenant's slipspace escape has snapped off the top half of the tether, causing several large chunks to crash down on top of nearby buildings.

For some sense of direction, he pulls out a PDA to see a topdown, 3D wireframe map of the city. A squadmate's beacon flashes a few blocks away and he sets it as a target. The marker appears on the on-screen HUD as he crosses a plaza. The rookie hears audible commotion up ahead so he turns on a filter called Visual Mode. While the look remains dark, unlike the green hue of night vision, everything appears outlined in glowing neon lights. A pack of Brutes outlined in red are holding position against a few glowing green ODST allies.

He presses on towards the beacon signal. Once he's within a couple dozen meters, a circular perimeter indicates he's getting close. After searching around in Visual Mode, the rookie locates an object highlighted in yellow hanging from a telephone wire overhead. A brief cutscene triggers showing him poking at the object with a long pole and catching it as it falls to the ground. He looks over the sniper rifle with a pronounced bend in the barrel. It's obviously Romeo's. The screen fades out as the rookie pieces together what happened.

A total of four beacons will be scattered throughout New Mombasa. Players can track them down in any order they choose in the open world map. Once they find one of these objects, players will jump back in time to earlier that day and control the missing squad member for an entire level up until they reach whatever event fate has

in store for them. These so-called "scenes" last for about half an hour and are structured more like traditional, action-packed, linear Halo. When they're complete, control returns to the rookie. All four scenes fill in the gaps as to what happened during the six hours he was unconscious and contribute to the overarching mystery of what happened to the city.

"This isn't a crazy dream sequence or metaphysical journey that this object allows you to do," Staten explains. "It works just like any detective show, *Cold Case* or *Law and Order* or whatever, where a detective can arrive at a crime scene, look at the chalk drawings and bullet holes and intuit what's going on. He hears some echoey voices and the camera crossfades and now you're at the scene of the crime two hours ago. The rookie's not really a detective. He's an ODST. But the way he interacts with the world fits that model."

Since gamers are playing as an ODST rather than a Spartan, the gameplay has changed in several subtle ways. While you'll gain new gadgets like the PDA, Visual Mode, and a silenced SMG, you'll lose shields (but not the ability to regenerate health), a motion tracker, and the ability to dual-wield weapons. The ODSTs are also shorter, slower,

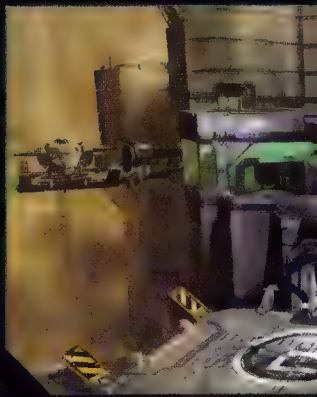
CONTINUED ON PAGE 64 >>



Actor Nathan Fillion



VOICE TALENT

Scanning the credits for recognizable voice actors has become a tradition for fans due to Bungie's under-the-radar style of sneaking in stars. We've all had that "Ha, I knew that was David Cross!" moment after a well-played Halo 2 campaign. This time around, however, the key actors are more front and center. Aside from significantly expanded roles, the four ODST squad members will all be based on the likeness of the actor portraying them. So far, we can confirm Nathan Fillion, known for his role as Captain Malcolm Reynolds in *Firefly* and *Serenity*, as the squad leader. But as eagle-eyed fans may already know, this isn't his first appearance in the Halo universe. "Some of the people who play ODSTs in [Recon] were just normal ODSTs in Halo 3, so if you like the voice cast in Halo 3, we have elevated some of them to a cinematic level," says creative director Joseph Staten. "Basically, we hired people to do voices in Halo 3 that were huge fans of the game. We talked to them and they wanted to come back and we, in some cases, wrote parts for them."



RECON ARMOR

Recon armor is unquestionably the most sought-after status symbol in the entirety of Halo 3 multiplayer. The problem is, players can only get it directly from a Bungie staff member, and this almost never happens (despite the constant flood of pleading emails and Live messages). All of that is about to change. Once the aptly titled Halo 3: Recon is released, players will finally be able to earn this coveted armor on their own. The best part is you can start working toward it now. Fans have been speculating on the newly added Vidmaster Challenge achievements featured in September's Halo 3 title update. We can now confirm that completing these four achievements, in addition to three new Vidmaster Challenges available only through the Halo 3: Recon disc, will unlock Recon armor at long last.



■ Visual Mods allows players to see in low light situations while maintaining a dark look



THE SUPERINTENDENT



Frequenters of Bungie.net will be familiar with The Superintendent's crazy programming code-style posts. He also made appearances in the teaser and announcement trailer for Halo 3: Recon. The Superintendent will play a large, yet unclear role in Recon.

"We talked about him as an infrastructure AI, but he is part of the city," says Recon creative director Joseph Staten. "He's responsible for a variety of tasks in the city. As the trailer suggests, he's not in the best of shape, but he's certainly capable of watching you at least. Keeping it clean. That's his job."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

and can't jump as high. While this sounds alarming at first, it's all part of the plan.

"[Imagine] you as the Master Chief are going up against a Brute Chieftain with a hammer," Staten says. "You're faster than him. You can jump over him. You have motion tracker. So if you run in and he pounds you, you can turn around, run to cover, look at the motion tracker and know exactly where he is. In Recon that's a lot different. The Chieftain's not only closer and taller, but you have no motion tracker. He's as fast as you. So if you manage to dodge him and turn around and run, you know he's going to catch you and you don't know where he is. It's immediately a very different feel. It's scarier. It's a lot more tense. You don't feel like a chump. You feel like a very capable ODST marine, but it's a different feeling."

ROMEO - TWO HOURS AFTER DROP

"Hey Rookie, you out there?" says the squad commander into the radio as he walks along the sun-drenched rooftops of New Mombasa with Romeo.

"Even if he ain't dead, he's lost in that stuff," Romeo says.

"Our comms can't cut through that."

"So give up, huh? What if it was you down there?"

"Just sayin'. I ain't dead."

"You're a piece of work, Romeo."

A transport ship pulls up next to the two ODSTs. "Welcome

aboard, ladies," the pilot radios. "First stop, anywhere but here."

A couple of purple forms drop out of the transport and approach the transport. "Banshees on your six," the squad commander warns. "Hit the deck!" The Covenant ships blast apart the unsuspecting UNSC vessel and the two ODSTs jump away from a fiery explosion. You gain control of Romeo as he hustles across the rooftops wielding the fateful sniper rifle the rookie discovers later that night.

During the demo, the rookie neither spoke nor removed his helmet. It was easy to assume that Bungie wants this character to be even more anonymous than the Master Chief.

"I think [the rookie's] even more choosy with his words than the Master Chief," Staten explains. "This starts to get into the philosophy of why we even made him so quiet. I mean the reality is that as you go through the scenes you're going to be jumping into the perspectives of four other members of your squad that have very distinct personalities. We wanted to make sure that as the player jumps back and forth between the rookie at night and these other guys during the day that that was a very obvious but easy transition for them to make, so they didn't have a bunch of baggage about their own character."

Controlling squad members means that fans will inhabit a character with a face and plenty to say on

the battlefield, a big departure from the traditional Halo protagonist.

"When you're fighting through this awesome encounter and you kill a Brute and you hear your character say 'Suck it down!' you're just like 'Yeah, that's right,'" Bertone says. "The great thing [the new dialogue] does is encourage the feelings that you already have. When we're play-testing missions, all you hear is people repeating the lines of dialogue that your character just said. At first when we implemented it everyone was looking around like 'Where's that marine at?'"

"Each scene is really set up to highlight the core aspects of that particular character," Staten adds. "Dutch is a big guy. He carries heavy weapons. His scene is one where you've got a Spartan Laser and a rocket launcher and you're taking on vehicles. Or you're Romeo. He's a sniper. He's kind of a dick. He's a wiseass. In Halo games you've been the Chief for a thousand years and the Arbiter for a little bit of time, too. It's a really nice feeling to jump into someone else's boots for a while."

"It still hopefully feels like Halo, but from a human perspective," Staten says. "People are concerned about whether their buddy lived or died — very granular day-to-day tactical things. They're not worried about where the Forerunners went or how the Flood began. That's not their concern. Their concern is 'What the f— happened to Dutch?' 'How did that tank get blown up?' 'What did you say to me, f—?' 'Let's get going.' It's that kind of thing... sort of without the swearing." ■■■

In these concepts illustrate how players will approach a beacon at night and then find levels to play and happen on.



© New Members as seen in Halo 3

HALO 3 STATS

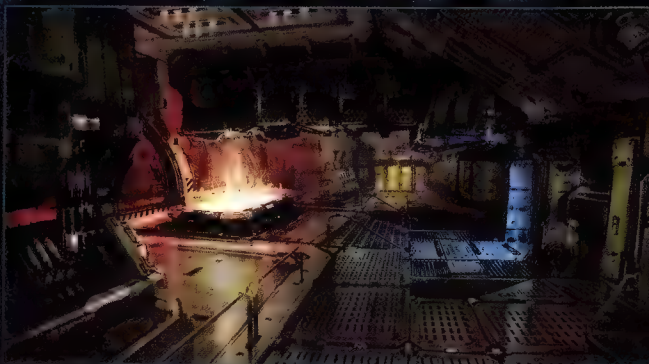
For the first year of Halo 3...

- Halo 3 has already surpassed the total number of online games played over the entire lifespan of Halo 2 (approximately four years)
- Total player games played online: **4.65 billion***
- Average total Bungie player games per day: **9.7 million**
- Average players per game: **5.7**
- Total unique online Halo 3 players since launch: **9.5 million**
- User-made files downloaded from Bungie.net to Halo 3: **533 million**
- Total screenshots currently shared in Bungie.net gallery: **20 million**
- Average daily unique players: **700,000**
- Average files uploaded per day: **82,000**
- Average files downloaded per day: **2.3 million**

* (A "player game" takes into account every player in a game, so a match with eight people would count as eight player games)

PRICING

Since Recon is considered an expansion pack, we asked if the game would be released at a lower price point similar to \$40 games like Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts and Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise, which were also published by Microsoft. "We don't know what the price will ultimately be," says community and PR director Brian Jarrod. "That's not something we'd be the final deciders of, but the spirit of this project is certainly an expansion of a smaller scope." Creative director Joseph Staten agrees. "[We] do not view this as a \$60 title, and not in any bad way," he says. "It's a great value pack thing that we want to do. We're going to make it worth a lot -- we just don't want to charge a lot for it."



HALO MULTIPLAYER UPDATE

In addition to the Recon campaign, the disc will include several new Halo 3 multiplayer maps. These will play, function, and integrate into Halo 3 just like any Bungie map pack released so far. In other words, players will control Spartans and Elites just like normal without any of the ODSI changes incorporated.

"Think about it as two games in one, where it's more Halo 3 multiplayer as you know it today with more maps and more goodness," says community & PR director Brian Jarrard. "But the Recon campaign is a whole different beast entirely."

Different indeed. All 1,000 achievement points are related to the campaign, while any feats performed

on a multiplayer map will contribute points to players' Halo 3 gamerscore (which currently maxes out at 1,750). But fans won't have to wait all the way to Recon's release to have some of the new maps. The Mythic Map Pack will release as downloadable content in early 2009, including three maps from the Recon disc. Assembly and Orbital have been confirmed as part of this pack, but the third slot is still up in the air. Though Bungie would not confirm one way or another, our theory is that the remaining map may come from the four remaining map names implicated in the recent title update achievements: Citadel, Heretic, Longshore, and Sandbox. It stands to reason that the final three would be held off until fall

as exclusives to the Recon disc.

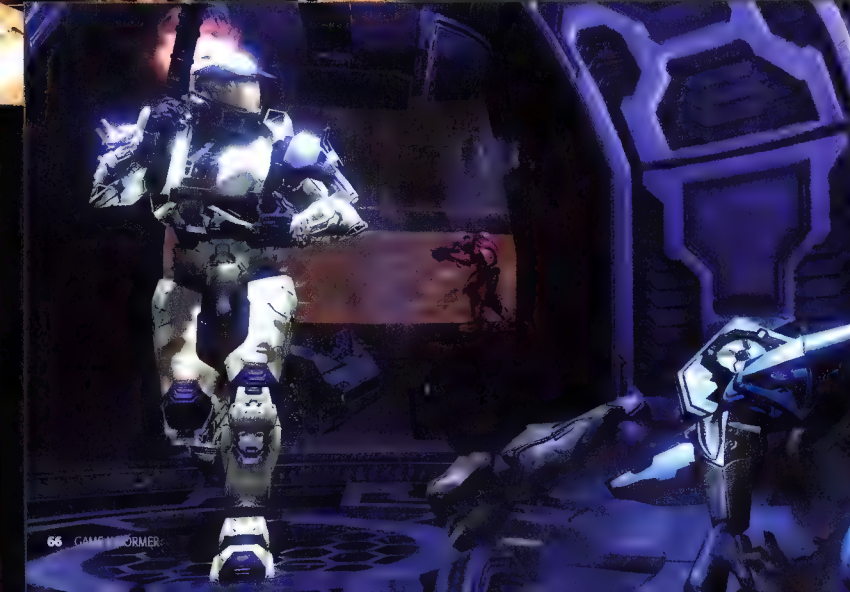
These maps technically count as Halo 3, but can you rip the maps or redeem some kind of code to get them on your hard drive to prevent the need to constantly swap discs? It was difficult to nail down a straight answer, but we eventually procured the following statement: "Halo 3: Recon is a standalone expansion of Halo 3 that can be enjoyed by everyone – even those who have not played or completed the original. This includes the multiplayer component. However, there will be surprises to be found in Halo 3: Recon for those who played and completed the original game."

ASSEMBLY

Hardcore Halo fans may have already heard about this map, but we got some serious playtime and a guided tour of all its secrets. In regards to speculation on the web, yes, this is a Covenant Scarab manufacturing facility. We can also clear up some foggy Halo lore. Lekgolos, the worms that make up Hunters, also control Scarabs. In the map you can watch the massive carapaces become infused with these beings via a liquid-filled tube.

"One of the things our fans have been asking for for a long time is some small symmetric or arena-style maps and this is an answer to that," says multiplayer design lead Lars Bakken. "We wanted to make another small to medium map that's good for slayer, good for capture the flag – you know, four-versus-four. Something that'll really fit the niche of what players really want to play right now."

While the overall shape of Assembly is circular, it's not completely symmetrical. One side contains a tower with a rocket launcher at the top, the other end has a flat area with pillars inspired by pinball bumpers. Flags spawn behind one-way mirrors, allowing defenders to see outward while offensive players can't see in.





ORBITAL

This map has never been publicly shown until now. It takes place atop the Quito Space Tether (basically a massive tower that transports cargo and people easily in and out of the atmosphere), so if you look out the windows you'll see Earth below. Particularly ballsy players can even stop to read plaques dedicated to Tobias Shaw and Wallace Fujikawa, inventors of the Slipspace Drive, which opened the door to human space exploration.

"The interesting thing about this map is that it's a pretty asymmetric space, but it's essentially two long tunnels overlapping each other," Bakken says. "The idea behind it is we wanted another medium map that's good for one-sided game types like one bomb, one flag, and territories. Each base has a big door that works well for [these] games. It's another obstacle to overcome when you're infiltrating the base. The first is just to get down to the base, pop open the door, and then open up the fastest possible route back. So you open up the door, grab the flag, and leave."

As apparent in the screens, the long hallways mix well with the sniper rifles and rocket launchers hidden throughout the station. Mongoose and Ghost vehicles offer a maneuverable, yet quick way to navigate the tunnels. Beware, they also tend to draw more attention from opponents.





PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Resident Evil 5

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE MARCH 13

GETTING A FEEL FOR THE ACTION

An extended hands-on session with Resident Evil 5 has amplified our already rabid excitement for the early 2009 release. This year's Tokyo Game Show afforded us several desperate attempts at two separate sections of the game. While we'd seen both areas before from a distance, this was the first time we had the chance to spend an extended session with the controller in our hands, playing both alone and with a partner online. The game is already in a state of high polish, with a focus on intense, terrifying action and remarkable visuals.

The first thing we noticed was the choice of controller layouts. A standard control scheme will feel familiar and comfortable to players of the fourth game in the series, while the new action/shooter scheme will be much more in line with the expectations from fans of that genre. This new controller layout emphasizes straightforward and easy

implementation of battle controls over other interactions – a shift that may be welcome if the game as a whole is as action packed as the areas we saw.

Whether playing alone or with an online partner, series mainstay Chris Redfield and his new partner Sheva Alomar, an Altran special agent, always move through the game together. In single player, the other character is fully AI controlled, but you'll still be responsible for keeping him or her alive, or else you can expect a quick game over screen. A quick inventory mechanic allows for sharing ammo and medicine, and you'll need to administer health power-ups to your partner when they suffer grievous injuries.

If our playtime was any indication, those injuries may be more common than you might think. In one familiar scene from earlier demos, we confronted a mob of transformed villagers as they assaulted our hut from every direction, breaking down barred up windows and ramshackle roofs. Among them, a hulking executioner with a bloody axe assured that we'd scatter to some other nearby building anytime he came near. The other section we played included a confrontation with the fast-moving chainsaw wielders seen at this year's E3. It doesn't take more than one slash from one of those to require a restart – chainsaws are hard to recover from.

Visuals are even better in motion than in stills. In particular, the reactionary animations are pretty amazing. Shoot a target in a specific area of the body, and his reaction is uncannily accurate.

March seems like an increasingly distant time to wait to experience the game in full. On the bright side, this most recent demo helps to reassure us that the wait will be worthwhile. ■■■





Chris

■ Capcom has been reticent to reveal details on the new story, but the African setting should certainly provide a rich backdrop



■ Zombie chiropractic adjustment has met with mixed reviews

Chris
COVER
Sheva



■ Like in its predecessor, some of the fights in the new game overwhelm simply with the number of enemies out for your blood

Chris
COVER
Sheva



■ A new control scheme is available for players looking for a layout more akin to other action shooters

Chris



■ Chris Redfield has often thought that barrels would be the most likely place for evil to reside, but his hypothesis has rarely panned out as he hoped

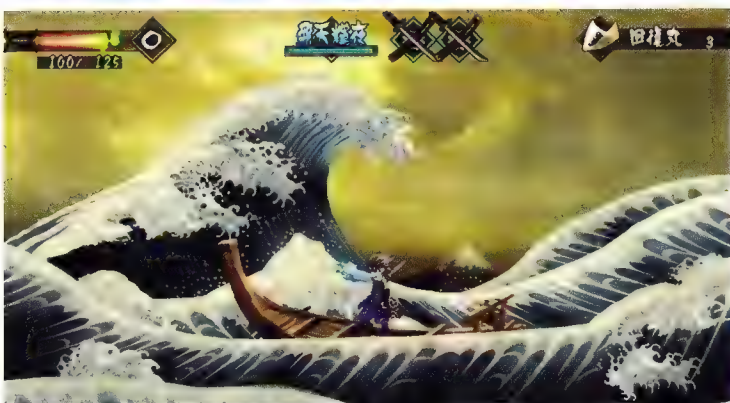


■ Whether playing alone or with a friend, keeping your buddy alive is a big focus of the gameplay



■ "Seriously, Chris, this is the least romantic walk you've ever taken me on"

Sheva



Wii

Muramasa: The Demon Blade

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER XSEED > DEVELOPER VANILLAWARE > RELEASE 2009

IF LOOKS COULD KILL

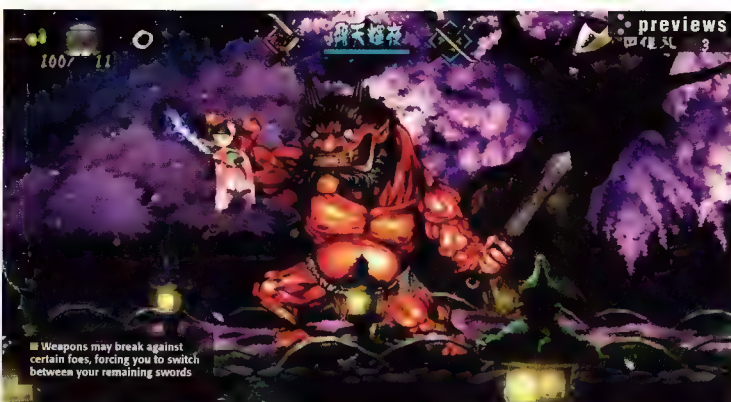
Some gamers like to talk about how graphics don't matter, and how it should all be about the gameplay. It's true that graphics aren't the prime concern, but you shouldn't underestimate how much a striking visual style can enrich a gameplay experience. This is a lesson that Vanillaware has clearly learned, as evidenced by the developer's distinctive and beautiful art in games like *Odin Sphere* and *Grim Gimoire*. Now, Vanillaware is bringing its next game — and its style — exclusively to the Wii.

Muramasa: The Demon Blade is a 2D side-scrolling action game set in mystical interpretation of feudal Japan. Demons, monsters, and magic are plentiful, and players will blast through them using multiple weapons, items, and magical attacks. You can switch between your swords on the fly, and the special moves you execute depend on which weapon is equipped. For instance, if you are using the

large and slow sword, your special attack will be a spinning leap with magical mirror images. A more traditional katana causes several columns of blue flame to erupt from the ground. You can choose one of two characters (male or female), but both seemed to have identical moves in the demo we played.

Two control schemes will be available — one using the remote/nunchuk combination and the other using the classic controller — but they offer the same basic functions. In other words, you don't have to waggle the remote around to swing your sword. That's a good thing; the action is just as intense as *Odin Sphere*, which doesn't leave much room for imprecision. *Muramasa* was one of the high-lights of the recent Tokyo Game Show, and definitely the best Wii game we played there. This is one to keep an eye on — but with looks this good, that shouldn't be hard. ■■■■

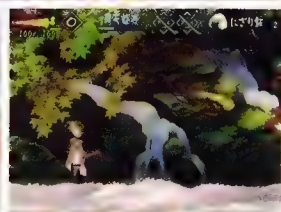




■ Weapons may break against certain foes, forcing you to switch between your remaining swords



■ The male character is named Kisuke. The female is Momohime



■ How Muramasa and swordplay work is still a mystery



■ Combat is fast and flashy. We didn't see an option to plant seeds that grow sheep



■ The entire game can be played with the classic controller, so there probably won't be any motion-sensing functionality



■ Hopefully the boss battles in Muramasa won't have slowdown like Odin Sphere



■ Edge Maverick, ladies and gentlemen

Do I Know You?
 The game's story is a blend of science fiction and fantasy elements, featuring a mix of futuristic technology and magical powers. The plot revolves around a global nuclear war that has devastated Earth, leading the survivors to search for a new home in space. The game's narrative is filled with emotional moments and a rich world of lore.



■ Special attacks and magic are mapped to the triggers



■ Players can control any of the four party members



■ This is how Earth looks during the events of The Last Hope

XBOX 360

Star Ocean: The Last Hope

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

EDGE MAVERICK?!

Yes, *Star Ocean: The Last Hope* stars a character named Edge Maverick. However, if our playtime with the game at Tokyo Game Show is any indication, that's probably the biggest strike against it. Despite the game's Xbox 360 exclusivity (*Star Ocean* has only appeared on Sony platforms until now), it is the same blend of science fiction, combat, and visual splendor that has set the series apart since it began.

Gamers who finished *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time* know that the first three *Star Ocean* titles form a complete arc. Therefore, instead of continuing the story, *The Last Hope* offers insight into how it began. Set long before the original, this game deals with humanity's first ventures into space, searching for a home after a devastating worldwide nuclear war on Earth. Edge (sigh) and his friends set off to explore the galaxy, fly spaceships, and land on uncharted worlds.

The battle system retains the same basic mechanics from *Till the End of Time*, with real-time combat that gives you the freedom to control any character in the group. This time around, your party consists of four members, and they all have unique skills and special attacks that you can map to the trigger buttons. Most of your attacking will

be done with the A button, but the combos you execute depend on the timing of your button taps. There will also be a new mechanic called blindsiding, which allows you to evade and counter enemy attacks to catch them off guard. With all of these options open to every party member, combat quickly becomes a dazzling array of sword slashes, magical bursts, and special effects that showcase the game's amazing graphics.

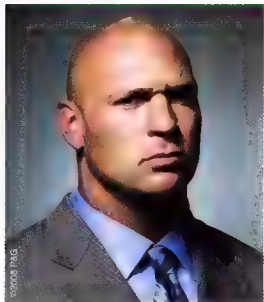
Many established traditions from the *Star Ocean* series will be reappearing in *The Last Hope*, like character dialogue, cooking and item creation, and multiple endings. Thankfully, all of the backtracking from *Till the End of Time* isn't something that's coming back. "Story-wise, the game is created to move forward and get to the next planet," explains producer Yoshinori Yamagishi. "However, we have created it so you will be able to go back to a planet if you'd like."

Star Ocean: The Last Hope is more than the Xbox 360's latest attempt to grab the attention of the Japanese audience. With all improvements to the structure and mechanics, plus fast and fluid combat, it is shaping up to be one of the standout RPGs of the coming year. ■■■■



■ The graphics look great, with a blend of science fiction and fantasy elements

BRIAN URLACHER, BEFORE



"OLD SPICE SWAGGER TRANSFORMED ME FROM THIS SAD LITTLE NERD PERSON INTO THE COLOSSAL MOUNTAIN OF AWESOMENESS YOU SEE NOW. THANKS, OLD SPICE." -BRIAN URLACHER

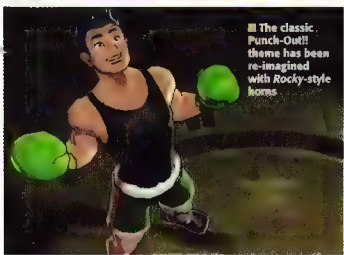
Old Spice
Swagger

THE SCENT THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

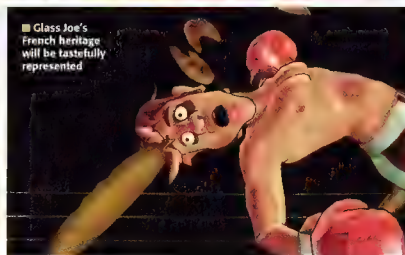




■ The new HUD is essentially a streamlined copy of the original NES game



■ The classic Punch-Out!! theme has been re-imagined with Rocky-style horns



■ Glass Joe's French heritage will be tastefully represented



Wii

Punch-Out!!

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** TBA
> **RELEASE** EARLY 2009

I REMEMBER THAT PUNCH

Rather than announcing another game about cooking, math problems, or something with "Wii" in the title, Nintendo finally showed it hasn't forgotten how to rile up longtime fans. After a 15-year hiatus, *Punch-Out* is finally returning to the ring. While the developer still hasn't officially been announced, rumors point to Next Level Games, known for *Mario Strikers* and *Spider-Man: Friend or Foe*.

The debut trailer confirms a few returning pugilists (see sidebar), but offers few hints as to how the game controls. Will players shadow box using the Wii controllers or hold the remote NES-style? Our prediction (and hope) is that the game will allow players to choose either option. The timing and precision to take down Mike Tyson in the original console game just wouldn't be possible with today's Wii waggle. However, as we've seen with the boxing training in *Wii Fit*, it could be a fun alternate way to get sweaty — and Nintendo could finally deliver on the motion-controlled punching originally (and deceptively) promised with the *Power Glove*.

Nintendo, if you're listening, we've got a few suggestions. Please work out some kind of lag calibration for HDTVs. The Virtual Console edition of *Punch-Out* was essentially unplayable on some televisions. Also, include challenges and leaderboards for fastest knock-outs, best fight record, least damage, etc. As *Mega Man 9* has proven, the hardcore players on your system eat that stuff up. ■ ■ ■

★ BOXER KICKDOWN ★

Von Kaiser

• **Berlin, Germany**
• **Age: 42, Weight: 144**



This past-his-prime fighter telegraphed every jab with a vigorous headshake and was known for leaving his torso open to attack after uppercuts. As you worked the body, Von Kaiser's ridiculous mustache broke through the language barrier to convey the pain he was going through

Glass Joe

• **Paris, France**
• **Age: 38, Weight: 110**



Undoubtedly the worst boxer of all time, it was possible to knock out this fraidy cat with a single punch using the right strategy. Patient players held off attacking until Joe backed up, told you he was going to punch, and then socked him with a star punch right in the face.

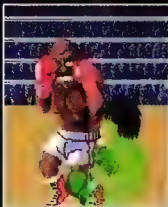
King Hippo

• **Hippo Island, South Pacific**
• **Age: 77, Weight: ??**

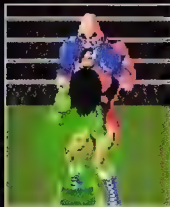


The secret to beating this flabby fighter was probably even more widely known than the 30-lives code in *Contra*. Sock him in the mouth and wall away on his obvious belly bandage weak point. While a gut shot will still probably take this guy down, it seems the King has a new double-punch ear boxing move that could scramble your overconfident brains.

HISTORY OF PUNCH-OUT!!



Punch-Out!!
Arcade (1984)



Super Punch-Out!!
Arcade (1985)



Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!
NES (1987)



Super Punch-Out
SNES (1994)

CAN YOU SURVIVE THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE?



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MATURE 17+
CONTAINS MATERIAL
RATED M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language

PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE

XBOX 360 LIVE

VALVE

source

STEAM

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Wii

The Conduit

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** TBA
 > **DEVELOPER** HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** EARLY 2009

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

High Voltage Software has set out to achieve a monumental task — to bring a level of legitimacy to FPS titles on the Wii. The developer started by analyzing the follies of its predecessors. After spending some quality time with the title, we think *The Conduit* has potential to fill the void.

The action unfolds in a fictional near future, when a series of strange occurrences centered in Washington D.C. puts the entire nation on edge. A flu-like virus brings the D.C. infrastructure to a standstill. A terrorist attack levels the Washington Monument, and a leading presidential candidate is assassinated. The terrorism conjures survivalist instincts in its citizens as the city falls apart. Martial law is enforced, and the city is planning a phased evacuation of the D.C. area. A government shadow organization known as The Trust determines that the attacks are extraterrestrial in origin — from an alien force dubbed The Drudge. A former Secret Service agent, Mr. Ford, is recruited to investigate the origins of this alien power.

On a console that isn't known for its graphics, *The Conduit's* visuals are impressive. High Voltage stretched the Wii's horsepower to accommodate advanced texture mapping, lighting details, and water effects in hopes of making *The Conduit* the best-looking game on the Wii.

Controls are pretty standard for a Wii FPS, using the remote to aim and nunchuk to move. The B button acts as a trigger, and the directional pad is used to sift through an arsenal of alien and human weapons. The A button triggers actions, and shaking the Nunchuck lobs a grenade. The controls take getting used to, but having the option to adjust controller sensitivity and remap the controls helps ease the learning curve.

Up to 16 players will battle it out online in classic deathmatch, capture the flag, and other-to-be-announced modes. In addition, *The Conduit* also supports the upcoming Wii Motion Plus and Wii Speak peripherals. While these features weren't implemented in the build we played, they should help with aiming accuracy and trash talking.

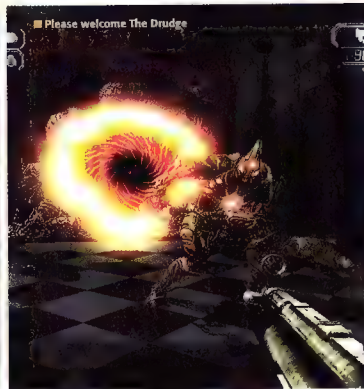
High Voltage has set lofty goals for itself. If it can actually produce the first decent non-Metroid FPS on the Wii, we'll be impressed. ■ ■ ■



■ Accurate depth of field is an issue high on the priority list.



■ "Say goodbye to your cufflinks, spaceman!"



■ Please welcome The Drudge



■ The Conduit features an arsenal of human and alien weaponry



The RPG of the Ages Returns.

Raise your very own beastly battler to pit against others in contests of strength. Make use of DS Wireless Communications, and challenge your friends!



Obtain rare and ancient treasures, and unlock your hidden potential through two new bonus dungeons, exclusive to the DS version!



Choose from two battle interfaces: DS mode, which enables the use of Touch Screen control, and Classic mode, which utilizes the window layout of the original SNES version.

November 25th, 2008 A.D.
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EVERYONE 10+

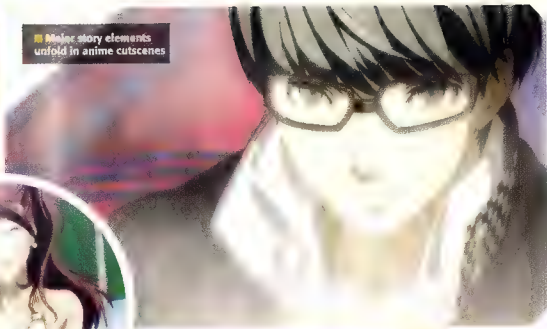
Animated Blood
 Mild Fantasy Violence
 Suggestive Themes
 Use of Alcohol

Attack



■ Your characters don't need to put guns to their heads to summon a persona this time

■ Multiple story elements unfold in anime cutscenes



■ Classroom simulation elements make a return



"Nice to meet you all."

"...You calling me a loser?"

Mr. Morooka

Tell 'em your name, kid, and make it quick.



■ This is one of the victims of the game's serial killer

PLAYSTATION 2

Persona 4

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER ATLUS > DEVELOPER ATLUS > RELEASE DECEMBER 9

BACK IN SESSION

If you still haven't played Persona 3, you're missing out. It was one of the most intriguing RPGs to hit store shelves last year, and features the series' hallmark simulation and collection elements, plus a disturbing supernatural story. With the next entry in this series practically on our doorstep, we sat down to play the first few hours to see how it is stacking up to its predecessors.

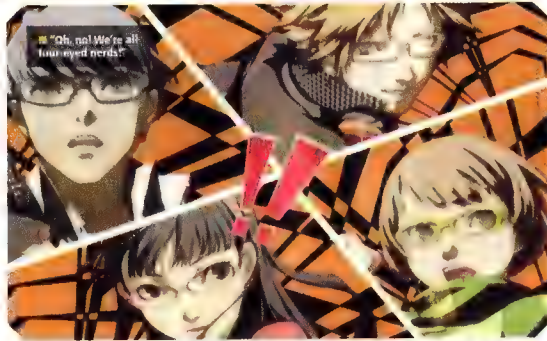
As excited as we were to dust off our PS2s and get our hands on Persona 4, it took a while to get any actual gameplay. Expect an hour or two of reading text and watching scenes before the game relinquishes any degree of control to you. This shouldn't be considered wasted time, however; the introduction does an excellent job of establishing the setting and supporting cast. Your main character is a transfer student to a small, rural town – but shortly after your arrival, things start to get strange. Residents start turning up dead, killed in unspeakably gruesome ways. Unlike Persona 3, your character is present for all of the important events from the beginning, so you feel more like a part of the story once it really gets going. Once that happens, you'll notice a few other important changes.

First of all, advancement no longer revolves

around a single location that you visit repeatedly. Instead, there are multiple areas and dungeons that open up as you progress through the story. Once you're actually in combat, you'll be happy to find that you have more control over your party members' actions. These changes aren't exactly innovative – they've been staples of the RPG genre since its inception – but their absence in the last game ruffled a few feathers.

There are even more ways to develop your social links in Persona 4, like taking part-time jobs at local businesses. The simulation aspect is still a primary component of the game, so you'll also be going out on after-school excursions with your classmates when you aren't busy solving the murder mystery. There will also be numerous stops in a remodeled Velvet Room, so you can create and fuse personas to use in battle.

Persona games typically develop a following among hardcore RPG enthusiasts. Meticulous planning, dark story twists, and plenty of tough battles are almost always a part of the equation. While this shouldn't deter gamers who are interested in trying something different, fans can rest assured that Atlus knows what its devoted followers want, and Persona 4 is poised to deliver. ■■■



NINTENDO DS

Valkyrie Profile: The Accused One

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER TRI ACE > RELEASE 2009

TOMORROW'S EINHERJAR

The problem with having a grudge against the gods is that it's hard to exact vengeance on immortal and omnipotent beings. Even so, there are ways. *Valkyrie Profile: The Accused One* follows the story of a boy named Wilfred seeking revenge against Lenneth, the Valkyrie who chose his father to become a soldier for the war in Asgard.

Though *The Accused One* is the third *Valkyrie Profile* title, it is set before the original in the series' timeline. The world is full of warring states and political strife in *Valkyrie Profile 1* and *2*, but this entry aims to establish the beginning of those conflicts and the descent into hostilities. Lenneth is the active Valkyrie during this period, and though she will make appearances, the story is told from Wilfred's perspective. The goal is to have players view the events through human eyes, rather than those of an impartial god.

At first glance, the combat system seems like a departure from the VP tradition. In the style of a strategy RPG, your characters tromp around on a grid in turns, and then the bad guys get their chance to move and attack. Once you engage your enemies, things start looking like VP again. Instead of just swinging your sword, the action cuts to a familiar combat view, with your selected character (and each

adjacent ally) mapped to one of the face buttons. By timing your attacks, you can build up a meter to execute impressive Soul Crush moves, which are the key to winning major encounters. You'll also gain certain formation bonuses depending on how your units are positioned around the enemy on the grid.

Though *Valkyrie Profile* changes a little with each incarnation, the team at Tri-Ace has experimented without sacrificing the series' mature tone and complex gameplay. *The Accused One* seems to be upholding that tradition, giving fans new combat mechanics to enjoy, plus more insight into *Valkyrie Profile*'s unique take on Norse mythology. ■ ■ ■



FIT
New from Honda



CAVERNOUS!

NINTENDO DS

Blue Dragon Plus

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** MISTWALKER/FEELPLUS/BROWNIE BROWN > **RELEASE** MARCH

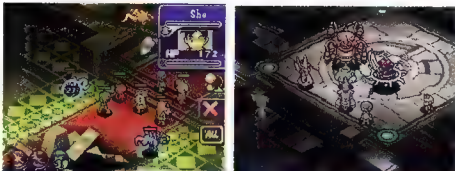
SHADOW OF DOUBT

Spin-offs aren't always bad. After a franchise has established an identity in one genre, it can be wise to spread out into different styles and try new things. It's worked for Super Mario Bros. and Donkey Kong, but is it too soon to experiment after only one game? Blue Dragon Plus might answer that question. After a strong debut in last year's Xbox 360 RPG, Shu and company are back to continue the story in a real-time strategy adventure for DS.

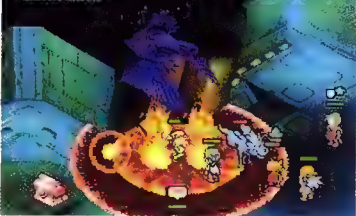
Taking place one year after the events of Blue Dragon, the story reunites the original cast, most of whom appear as playable characters in your army. As the game begins, Nene wakes up only to deal with a mysterious three-headed shadow dragon that poses a new threat. Shu, Marumaro, and Zola are sent by King Jibril to investigate, and it leads them down a path that reveals even more about the purpose of the shadow creatures they wield.

We played the first several missions, and found it to be a fairly simplistic strategy experience. Using the touch screen, you can direct units to move and attack, and each character has their shadows to execute special moves on a cooldown timer. It is also important to remember the characters' innate strengths (Zola is a good scout, for example), since combat can get dangerous quickly if you're careless.

Frankly, the gameplay in Blue Dragon Plus feels similar to co-developer Brownie Brown's previous titles like Magical Starsign and Heroes of Mana. That isn't a good thing; those games had serious interface and AI issues that could pose a problem if left unaddressed. We'd love to see more of Shu and his friends, but it might be good for them to return to more familiar role-playing territory. ■ ■ ■



■ Buttons in the corner of the touch screen will activate your shadow attacks



LAST TIME ON BLUE DRAGON...

Even though the story of Blue Dragon Plus is a continuation, playing the original isn't a prerequisite. The plot stands alone for the most part, and when new characters show up, you get a brief explanation of their personalities and roles. You may miss out on a few jokes and nods to fans, but you won't be completely lost.



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fit.honda.com



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER D3PUBLISHER > DEVELOPER VICIOUS@CIE > RELEASE EARLY 2009

GOB VERSUS DOOGIE HOWSER



■ Visit www.doyouremembermattazard.com for a tour of Hazard's fake gaming past



■ The Beefalm Bow are causing trouble again



SAME INFO

The "return" of Matt Hazard? The title makes you second guess your knowledge of video game history, but rest assured that while Hazard is a new character, the games he parodies are totally classic. As the story goes, Hazard starred in a string of top-selling games throughout the '80s and '90s including *A Fistful of Hazard*, *Matt and Dexter in Murder Force*, and *You Only Live 1,317 Times*. Over time, however, this Duke Nukem-style action hero lost his relevance in the gaming community, ending his career with a kart racer and a piñata title. Overweight and retired, Hazard gets a comeback offer from the new head of Marathon Megasoft, his longtime publisher. But this shot at redemption quickly turns out to be a trap, with all of Hazard's old enemies returning to take him out.

To fully sell the comedy, the team recruited plenty of respected names. Will Arnett (*Arrested Development*, *30 Rock*) voices Matt Hazard, and Neil Patrick Harris (*How I Met Your Mother*, *Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle*) portrays Marathon exec Wallace "Wally" Wellesley. Dave Ellis, who won a Writers Guild of

America award for his work on *Dead Head Fred*, is writing the script.

During a recent demo, we saw Hazard shoot his way through a meat packing plant. The duck and cover third-person shooting mechanics seem relatively standard. Where *Eat Lead* stands out is Hazard's amusing one-liners and the game-altering mid-level "hacks." After Hazard disposes of some meatpacking henchmen, an ominous force tinkers with the game code, inserting zombies from one of Hazard's old arcade games. As he moves into a back alley, it transforms the world into an Old West town full of cowboys. By the end of the stage you're fighting a strange mix of zombies, cowboys, and mafia wiseguys in some kind of '80s dance club.

No gaming staple is safe. While these enemies are more general, characters like Captain Carpenter and Master Chef are more overt references to specific franchises. So far it seems like *Vicious Cycle* has a deft hand at lampooning gaming's past. Let's just hope the joke manages to stay fresh throughout the whole game. ■■■■

The Classics

Ever played these classic arcade and console games? We would prefer you didn't. Why? Well, these are the classics.

SCORE 000000 TIME 00:00

the Adventures of Matt in Hazard Land
Hazard's debut hit arcades in 1983 with a take on Contra-style shooters.

TIME 0:00

Conflict of the Delibes
Released during the SNES/Genesis era, this title casts Hazard as a traveling badass who takes on the mythical beasts of ancient Greece.

■ Matt's nerd-hot guide, QA

Castlevania

Order of Ecclesia



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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Heroes Over Europe

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI/RED MILE ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** TRANSMISSION GAMES > **RELEASE** 2009

DON'T LET THE PREPOSITION
CHANGE FOOL YOU



■ The advanced damage system is a primary focus this time around



■ A target painted right on the plane? Pure balls

Only a few flight combat games over the last decade had what it took to earn their wings. One of those titles is *Heroes of the Pacific*, released in 2005 to positive reviews and a large cult following. Developer Transmission Games (formerly IR Gurus) has been working on a follow up for the last several years and is finally ready to talk.

Moving the theater of war from the South Pacific to new locales like London and Berlin required the team to dig into the past. "We sourced a whole bunch of historical footage turning up all this incredible gun camera film showing just how close the pilots got to their opponents," says lead designer Andy Symons. "You can see the tracers ripping panels off planes as well as the explosive effects of hits to the fuel tanks. How these pilots went up knowing they were sitting on such a volatile mix is incredible."

The team also read up on actual missions and reviewed old aerial photographs of bombed cities to get a sense of the damage. They even spent some time in the air. "We sent our sound designer up in a P-51 Mustang with the pilot performing evasive dogfight moves to get bona fide engine sounds," recalls Symons. "She still hasn't forgiven us."

The game includes dogfights over the British white cliffs of Dover, high altitude bombing runs inside massive cloudbanks, and tank busting in the snowy Ardennes. There's also a huge focus on an authentic battle damage system. "The damage states of our planes have an incredible level of detail," says Symons. "Tracers rip holes through the enemy planes. Panels and control surfaces flap, break off, and spin past the player plane. Hits to the fuel tank split the plane in half while a hit to an ammo box will cause the cartridges to ignite and shear off the wing."

One of the best ways to see this destruction in action is to perform the new Ace Kill. The dogfighting equivalent of a headshot, this system triggers a one-hit kill whenever shots come into direct contact with the engine, fuel tank, or even the pilot himself. These will undoubtedly become a sign of skill in multiplayer, which includes Dogfight, Team Dogfight, and a new Conquest Mode in which fighters and bombers must team up to destroy the enemy base.

Downloadable content is already being promised, though specifics are under wraps for now. "We have a number of [DLC] options under discussion," Symons says. "Hell, if we told you any more we'd be all out of surprises." ■ ■ ■

The Time For Judgment Has Come!



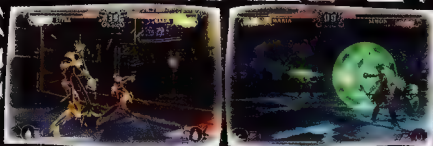
Available
November

Castlevania Judgment

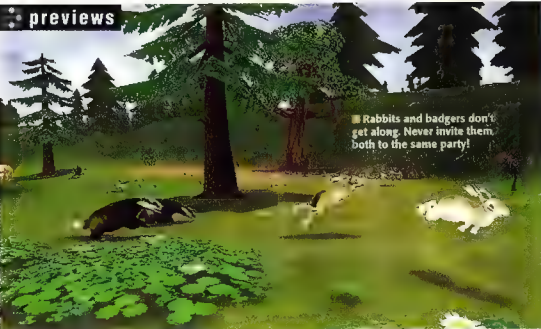


Wii

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TEEN
T
SUGGESTIVE THEMES
VIOLENCE
Online Interactions Not Rated by The ESRB



Wii DS

SimAnimals

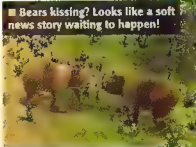
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE)
 > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** THE SIMS STUDIO
 > **RELEASE** WINTER

INTO THE WOODS

If you're tired of the daily SimGrind, maybe it's time to get out of the city and get a breath of fresh air. The latest entry in EA's Sims franchise takes players into the great outdoors and switches the focus from hip suburbanites to adorable woodland creatures.

With a floating hand representing your presence in the world, you'll interact with a variety of animals and pieces of the environment. You could pick up a bear cub to bring him to his family, or help a squirrel find some food. Alternately, maybe you want to cause trouble, like dropping a rabbit into a pack of wolves. Depending on your actions, the animals in your forest will fear or admire you, and develop their own personalities. These dispositions also affect how they get along with each other; it's unlikely that every fox, badger, and robin will coexist in harmony.

You can also manage the ecosystem, like placing trees near the water so they grow better, or putting fruit-bearing plants by animals for a ready food supply. While there will be specific challenges, the gameplay will largely be driven by your own will to explore and experiment in the wilderness. SimAnimals seems a little more simplistic than your typical Sims title, but it could be a good avenue for young gamers to give the simulation genre a try. ■■■■



POKE THE ANIMALS

Everyone knows that cuteness increases as size decreases. The handheld version of SimAnimals will have more cartoon-styled visuals, plus some special features specific to DS. In addition to the obvious stylus interactions, you can blow into the DS microphone to simulate wind. If there's one thing animals like, it's when you blow air in their faces.



Wii Cursed Mountain

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** DEEP SILVER
 > **DEVELOPER** DEEP SILVER > **RELEASE** 2009

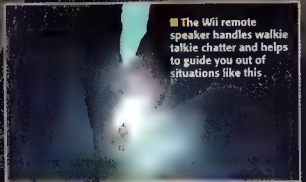
DEATH PEAK

Most horror games use a familiar mix of zombies, vampires, and demons to strike fear in the hearts of players. Cursed Mountain's chief antagonists are souls stuck between death and reincarnation. Instead of using shotguns or blunt objects, players will reenact Buddhist prayers with the Wii remote and nunchuck to move them on to the next life. This is definitely not your typical horror game.

Main character Eric Simmons has traveled to Cholomolozong mountain, part of the Himalayas, to search for his missing brother. He starts at a monastery in the valley and finds that the villagers refuse to go up. They say that the mountain goddess has been angered. You must proceed towards the summit without the aid of a guide or any modern technology like GPS, cell phones, or rescue choppers – it's set in the '80s for precisely this reason.

Throughout the entire game, you'll constantly move towards the summit, which will always be a visible goal. As Eric moves further upward, his skeptical side isn't sure if the crazy things he's seeing are real or some side effect of the thin mountain air. He eventually learns various Buddhist prayers and how to peer into the bardo (a transitional realm between life and death) in order to see the ghosts that are stalking him. Once a ghost attacks, players must target it and perform a pulling motion with the remote to extract prayer instructions. Once these appear onscreen you must follow the motions to push these former farmers and monks onto the next life. Motion controls also figure into navigation. Players will swing controls overhead to simulate ice pick climbing or simulate jogging arms to run away from dangers like falling rocks in prescribed cinematic sequences.

While the concept may be tough to grasp initially, we're interested to see if Cursed Mountain's creative ideas can come together as a cohesive and entertaining gaming experience. If so, this could be one of the big Wii titles of 2009. ■■■■



■ The Wii remote speaker handles walkie talkie chatter and helps to guide you out of situations like this.





08:16:49

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

Sonic Unleashed

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SONIC TEAM > RELEASE NOVEMBER 18

FEELING A NEED FOR SPEED

Despite all the tragedy Sonic has endured over the years, he's still good at one thing: running really fast. During our latest playable demo of his new game, we noticed that he's getting even faster. According to Sega, Sonic can now reach top speeds of 300 mph. At certain points, he gets going so fast that the camera actually has trouble keeping up.

Performing subtle directional changes can be difficult at such intense speeds. Fortunately, Sonic has a new sidestep move. By using the left and right buttons, players can give Sonic a slight nudge in either direction, which is extremely helpful when dodging enemies and obstacles on the fly.

Most of the levels are still laid out like tracks so Sonic can keep his momentum. Each area has a multitude of branching paths, and at many key areas the camera shifts to a 2D side view, giving the game a retro flair reminiscent of the 16-bit Genesis titles.

Sonic still collects rings, but they now serve a secondary purpose besides keeping him alive after he hits the spike pit. Each ring adds to a ring energy meter, which Sonic can use as a temporary boost for smashing through objects and enemies and to stay afloat while running across large bodies of water.

For every daytime level in which Sonic straps on his running shoes, there is an accompanying night level featuring Sonic's bestial werewolf form. These levels have a much slower pace and focus mostly on combat. Sonic takes on his foes dozens at a time, knocking many of them into the air and juggling them across the sky with his brutish Popeye arms. These werewolf levels don't look nearly as polished or compelling as the daytime levels Sonic sprints through. We'll see next month if Sonic's speed can overcome the lull. ■■■■



■ Unleashed's eight world-spanning acts will take Sonic all over the world, from Africa to Europe to China



NINTENDO DS

Suikoden: Tierkreis

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE WINTER

PARTY OF CORPSES

When role-playing fans pick up a Suikoden game, they expect certain things. The cornerstone of each title in the series is finding and collecting the 108 Stars of Destiny — heroes fated to change the course of history. In Suikoden: Tierkreis, this convention remains intact — with a twist. All but four of the 108 Stars of Destiny are dead.

An opening sequence depicts an epic battle in which most of the heroes are killed, and then the game begins. Players take control of the four survivors and set out to resurrect the 104 fallen warriors and restore balance to the world. As you bring their souls back, you will determine the form they take; they could be new party members, special weapons, or

monsters. There will even be a way to send your party members out on quests that other players can complete using the DS Wi-Fi connection.

The visual style closely resembles previous DS RPGs (especially Square-Enix's handheld Final Fantasy titles), with slightly exaggerated characters in a 3D world. Most of the action appears to take place on the lower screen, but how the game utilizes touch-screen features remains to be seen.

With its political twists and unique stories, the Suikoden franchise has carved out a following. The series' first foray into the handheld space may not be an officially numbered entry, but it looks like it has everything required to proudly bear the Suikoden name. ■■■■



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PLAYSTATION 3

White Knight Chronicles

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE)
> PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER LEVEL-5
> RELEASE 2009

THE MORE THE MERRIER

Some of the best video games and fairy tales begin with a captured princess, and Level-5 is sticking to that classic scheme with *White Knight Chronicles*. The introductory sequence features a boy named Leonard (accompanied by a companion character you create) trying to help the damsel Cisna escape her would-be captors. He ultimately fails, but discovers an ancient suit of armor that allows him to turn into the powerful and gigantic White Knight.

In addition to the transforming hero, Level-5 is integrating several cool features that put a spin on RPG standards. The avatar creation system provides tons of customi-

zation options to ensure that every one is unique. That might not be important if *White Knight Chronicles* were single-player only, but with the announcement of the game's four-player online mode, you'll want your avatar to look as distinct as possible.

For the multiplayer, you'll bring your created character into an online hub world where you can interact with other players and accept quests to undertake as a group. Many of the tasks will be similar to objectives from the single-player campaign, such as killing a large monster or collecting specific items. Once completed, your character will gain experience, gold, and items that can be

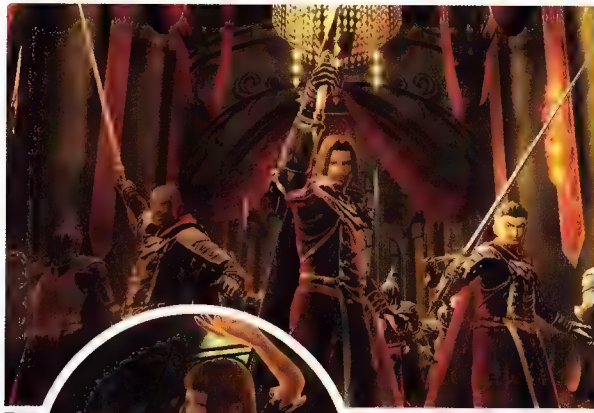
carried back into the offline mode. However, in order to prevent you from becoming too powerful too early, there will be a gradually increasing level cap as the story continues. New content will also be made available in multiplayer once you progress past certain plot points, so the most challenging and rewarding online quests will only be accessible if you get far in the story.

For a game so close to release (it hits Japanese shelves this holiday), there are surprisingly few details available about the plot. Leonard spends the first part of the game trying to rescue princess Cisna, but there is definitely more going on. He even-

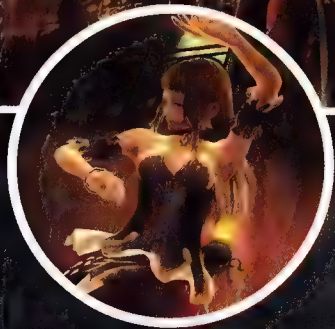
tually meets a rival who can transform into the Black Knight, and there is yet another armored beast called the Dragon Knight. Collectively, the three warriors are called Sin-Knights, but their exact connection (and whether there are more of them) remains unknown.

Despite the mysteries, rest assured that *White Knight Chronicles* is in good hands. Level-5 has a long history of quality with titles like *Rogue Galaxy*, *Professor Layton*, and *Jeanne D'Arc*. It may sound risky to take a traditionally single-player genre and use it to innovate in the online space, but Level-5's credentials speak for themselves. ■■■





■ That gauntlet on Leonard's arm allows him to transform



■ The Black Knight is one of the villains, and has some connection to Leonard

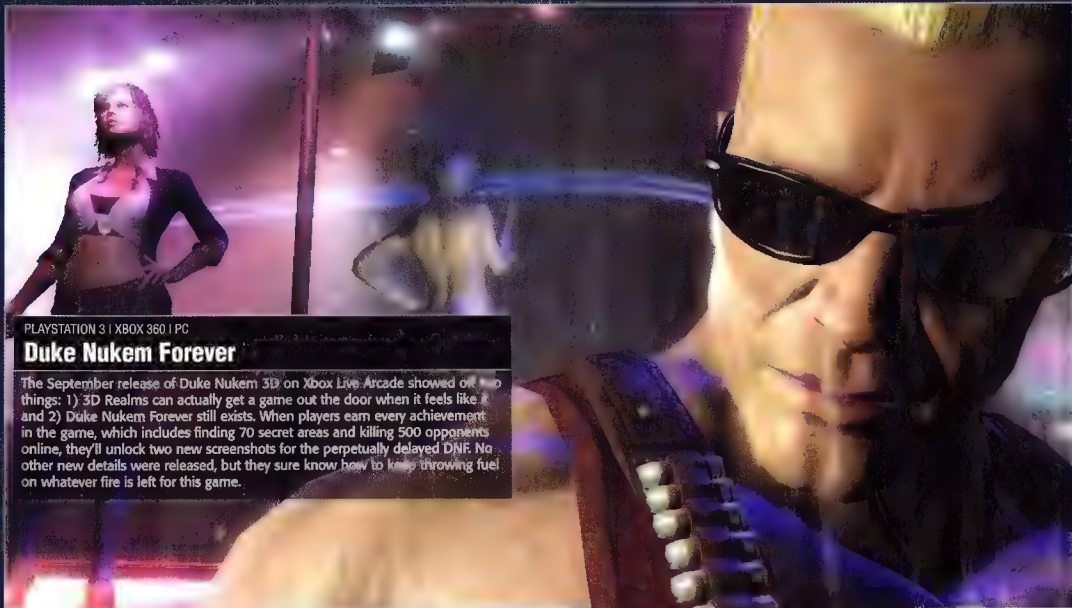


■ Wow, Kermit has really let himself go. Also, he cloned himself



ントビーに15ダメージ。
ヤードに4ダメージ。

■ Your created character fights alongside Leonard as a silent companion



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Duke Nukem Forever

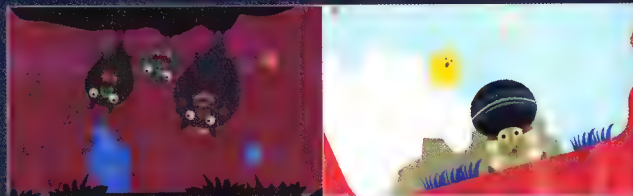
The September release of Duke Nukem 3D on Xbox Live Arcade showed off two things: 1) 3D Realms can actually get a game out the door when it feels like it, and 2) Duke Nukem Forever still exists. When players earn every achievement in the game, which includes finding 70 secret areas and killing 500 opponents online, they'll unlock two new screenshots for the perpetually delayed DNF. No other new details were released, but they sure know how to keep throwing fuel on whatever fire is left for this game.



PSP

Loco Roco 2

Who knew amorphous balls of goo could be so cute? In a new release that generated enthusiasm from young players and longtime gamers alike, Loco Roco's simple tilting mechanic and charming music were a huge hit last year. It found that rare combination of commercial and critical success, as evidenced by numerous awards for both its music and its appeal to children. Sony's sequel looks to capitalize on the success with features beyond the expected new songs and characters. A number of expanded options are available to send your colored blobs careening across the screen — we saw a section where the little guys had to bite down on the ends of grass-like stalks to swing up to a higher platform, and another where they desperately clung to a slowly falling dandelion fluff as it floated down the screen. More than anything, the game draws the most applause for its gorgeous visuals and upbeat soundtrack. These features should make it one of the standout PSP titles when it releases in America next year.



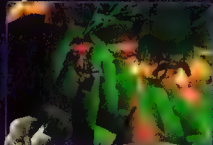
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MUSHROOMMEN.COM

Wii

Marble Saga: Kororinpa

Kororinpa: Marble Mania hit the Wii back in March '07 and remains one of the top titles on the system. Hudson is finally releasing a follow up next spring that evolves the addictive marble tiling gameplay even further. The list of new features is impressive, including over 150 new levels, Wii Balance Board and Mii support, four-player local multiplayer, online leaderboards, and a level editor. Hudson also adds a light story this time, following Anthony the Ant and his quest for the Golden Sunflower. Hmm, let's just hope this whole plot thing is kept waaay in the background.



NINTENDO DS

Mario & Luigi 3

Despite their humble profession as plumbers, Mario and Luigi are quite the renaissance men. They have dabbled in just about every gaming genre, from sports to kart racing, and they're getting ready for their latest foray into the role-playing world. Like Nintendo's previous two Mario & Luigi games (Superstar Saga and Partners in Time), this third entry emphasizes humorous writing, teamwork, and crazy antics. Of course, Bowser's got to show up to throw a wrench in things, but this time he's a playable character. In combat he'll use attacks that make use of his minions, like sending a stream of goombas hailing down on his foes. You can expect more details on Bowser's abilities — as well as what new tricks the plumbers have up their sleeves — as the game's vague 2009 release date draws closer.



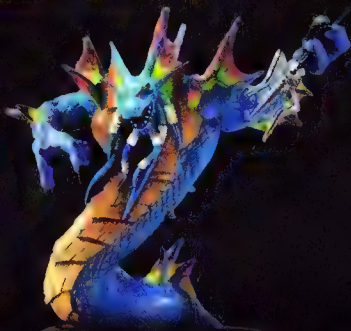
PLAYSTATION 2

Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories

Released on Game Boy Advance at the end of 2004, the original Chain of Memories served as a nice bridge into Kingdom Hearts II and introduced an alternate card battle system. This little brother of the KH franchise is finally receiving Square Enix's 3D treatment in North America nearly a year and a half after it dropped the remake in Japan. It seems this longer-than-usual localization delay is due to wrangling up voice talent like Haley Joel Osment (Sora) and David Gallagher (Riku) for the new cutscenes. Look for it on December 2 for a cheap \$30.



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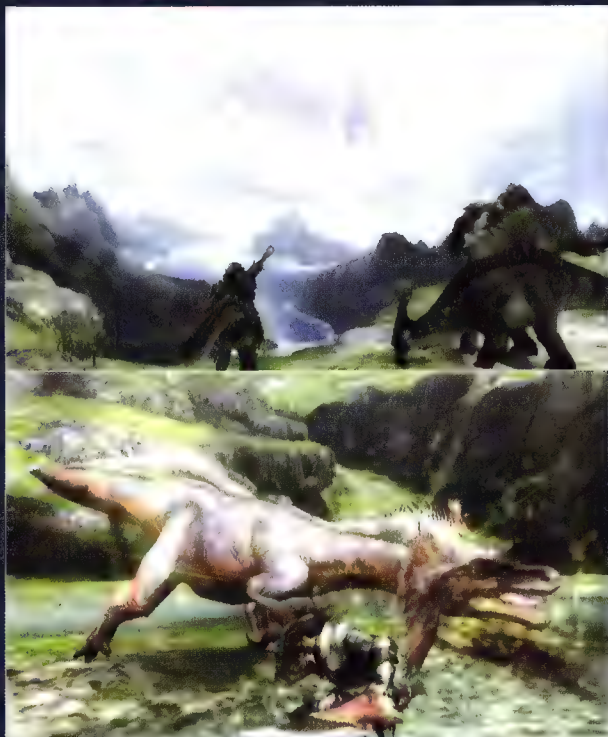
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NINTENDO DS

Ace Attorney: Perfect Prosecutor

After introducing the new hotshot defense attorney Apollo Justice earlier this year, one might expect the next installment of the Ace Attorney franchise to feature the rising star. Instead, fan-favorite prosecutor Miles Edgeworth is taking up the leading role. With gameplay more akin to classic point-and-click adventure games (rather than the first-person exploration of the series' previous games), you'll explore crime scenes, question witnesses, and engage in courtroom shenanigans. Familiar faces like Franziska von Karma and Dick Gumshoe play roles in the story, and others are likely to make cameo appearances. Perfect Prosecutor hasn't been confirmed for a U.S. release, but given Capcom's history and the series' success, you might want to warm up your pointing finger.



Wii

Monster Hunter 3

It may not have a release date here in the States, but Japanese gamers couldn't get enough of Capcom's latest Monster Hunter game during this year's Tokyo Game Show. Undoubtedly one of the biggest and most popular games in that country, its arrival on the Wii is nothing less than blockbuster news across the Pacific. We checked the game out and were impressed with some of the innovations, even if the core combat mechanics still feel a little clumsy. Four player co-op is always a plus, while the promise of underwater fights adds a new dimension to the combat. All those rampaging dinosaurs now chase you between zones, and competing monsters will fight amongst themselves when you encounter them in the wild, allowing you to exploit their inter-species conflicts. Add in some motion-controlled sword swinging, and it's hard to see where the game could go wrong for fans.



NINTENDO DS

Infinite Space

MadWorld and Bayonetta aren't the only games sprouting from Sega's partnership with Platinum Games. The union is also the source of this clever sci-fi RPG coming to the DS in 2009. Infinite Space allows you to build, customize, and staff your own spaceship using a variety of different designs and crewmembers. You'll notice the effects of these choices once you engage in ship-to-ship battles. New equipment leads to new attack options, while better crew members increase the rate at which you can issue commands — a critical advantage since combat occurs in real-time. Infinite Space is about more than shooting lasers at other vessels; the story explores some mature philosophical themes and weaves them together with the sci-fi setting. Hey, it worked for Xenosaga.



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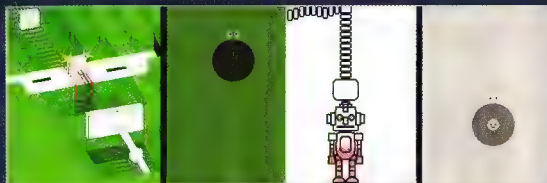
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PSP

Patapon 2 Don Chaka

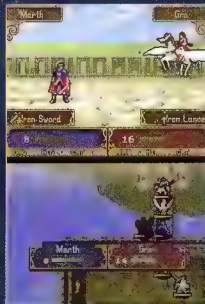
In 2009, the PSP is playing host to another adventure with the rhythmically marching little guys from Patapon. Everything we've seen of the game indicates a more robust experience this time around. Roughly twice as large as its predecessor, there are now over 80 missions instead of 37, and up to 23 huge bosses to fight over the original's 11. New characters like the bird rider, robot, and wizard patapons should be fun to explore, but it's the four-player multiplayer that has us really stoked. One of the modes we saw focused on getting all the players to press their buttons in unison to move and attack, where another section required us to play a tribal drum song with each other to hatch a giant egg. The game looks pretty hilarious and fun, as evidenced by the fact that we walked away from our demo muttering "pata-pata-pata" under our breath. We can't wait to see more of this charming upcoming import from Sony.



NINTENDO DS

Rhythm Heaven

One part music game and one part minigame compilation, Rhythm Heaven promises to be a simple yet addictive option for handheld toe-tapping tunes when it releases next year. Fun, playful tunes encourage you to keep the beat as you tap along on the touch screen through a variety of short events. From conducting a choir to rhythmically constructing objects on an assembly, each short vignettes is amusing and varied. Japanese gamers have been eating the game up for months now, and the U.S. release will reveal if American gamers have the same level of interest in this quirky release.



NINTENDO DS

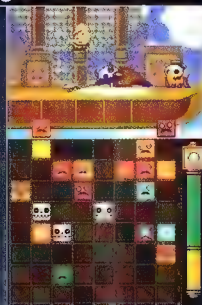
Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon

This remake of the original Famicom classic is finally making its way stateside, complete with a overhaul and update to take full advantage of its new platform, the DS. If you ever wondered how that fellow Marth managed to make his way to your Smash Bros. game, you'll finally get to witness the character's origin, along with the four newly added prologue chapters that flesh out his story. Above and beyond the expected touch screen control options, Nintendo has also promised online multiplayer, though details on that mode remain scarce. What isn't in doubt is the difficulty - Fire Emblem is well known for its hefty challenge, and players would be wise to expect this return to roots to hold up the tradition.

NINTENDO DS

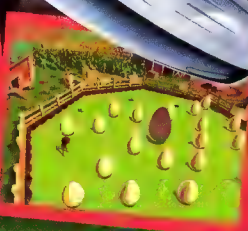
Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure

He may love puzzles, wear a hat, and have a distinguished name, but don't confuse Henry Hatsworth with Professor Layton. This monochrome wearing archaeologist is considerably more active; the gameplay has players controlling Henry on the upper screen, jumping around and attacking enemies like a regular action/platformer. However, when you defeat foes, they fall to the lower screen as blocks. If enough enemies happen to build up and re-enter the upper screen, they will be much harder to defeat. You prevent this by entering puzzle mode, where you swap the multi-colored blocks to create groups, thus clearing them from the board completely. Interestingly, the game is being developed at EA Tiburon (the studio behind Madden). We'll see how this inventive genre mash-up works out when Henry Hatsworth hits shelves early next year.



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Wii



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REVIEWS

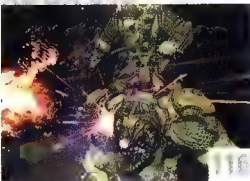
We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



Fallout 3

XBOX 360



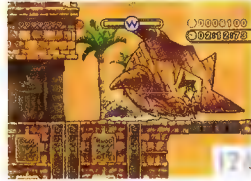
Gears of War 2

PLAYSTATION 3



Resistance 2

WII



Wario World: Shake It



LittleBigPlanet

Once you've played LittleBigPlanet, there's no going back. It invades every facet of your everyday life: You start thinking about normal objects – cars, doors, radios – in terms of proximity triggers and two-way levers. Long after you complete the single-player campaign, you'll be making your dreams a reality with the robust and intuitive creation tools, then sharing them with the world. Media Molecule's masterpiece is several revolutions in a single package: a fresh take on 2D platforming, groundbreaking implementation of user-created content, and a game that justifies a PS3 purchase all by itself.



Chrono Trigger

Good morning, Crono! This franchise has been asleep for years, but it hasn't aged a bit. Chrono Trigger DS is wonderfully faithful port of the original SNES game, with only a handful of new features. That's not a bad thing; the minimal changes help preserve the integrity of the original experience. Sure, Chrono Trigger DS is a re-release of an old game, but it's also the best portable title this month, and a perfect opportunity to play one of the greatest RPGs of all time.

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.

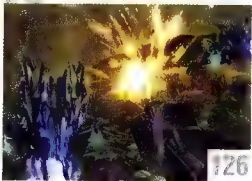
THE SCORING SYSTEM

- 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** Vehicle Voltron. What a poser.

- > **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**

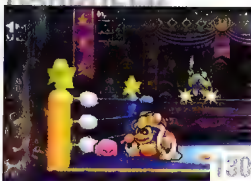
- High** – You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.
- Moderately High** – Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.
- Moderate** – Good for a few months or a few times through.
- Moderately Low** – After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.
-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

PC

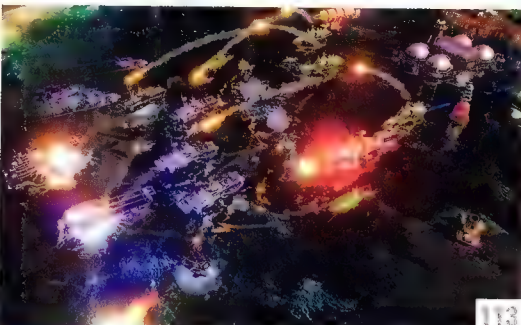


Crysis Warhead

HANDHELD



Kirby Super Star Ultra



Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3

Pushing even the most tolerant gamers' boundaries of credulity, Red Alert 3 gets as gonzo as possible in the pursuit of wacky fun. Luckily for us, EA managed to pull it off. Gaming doesn't see releases as purely amusing as this very often, much less in the dour, serious real-time strategy genre. Turn to the full review on page 113 to find out why you should look forward to spending your evenings dropping space junk on spider-legged battlecruisers.

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g. 119

the edge

When All Games Are! Control 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.

ES ESRATED FOR EVERYONE	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older
E EVERYONE	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.
TEEN TEEN	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older
M MATURE	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.

M MATURE	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
RP RATED PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTION	Content suitable only for adults.
RP RATED PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTION	Product is awaiting final rating.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

board – A term we use for games like Scene 17 and Mano Parly.

cell 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 expansions or free add-ons to existing games.

E3 – Electronic Entertainment Expo. A gaming convention held every year since 1995. It is one of the largest events in the gaming industry.

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

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

FPS – First-Person Shooter. Describes games like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty. Also used to denote the phrase “frames per second,” or how many animation frames happen in one second.

frame-rate – The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement.

friend – 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.

Lion Force Voltzorn – The real defender of the universe.

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

motion blur – A 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.

Puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Pac-Man.

raging – 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 Halo and Gears of War.

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

strategy – A term we use for games like Diablo and Warcraft.

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



Fallout 3

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
> DEVELOPER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS > RELEASE OCTOBER 28 > ESRB M

BRING ON THE APOCALYPSE!

If *Fallout* fans could travel back in time to alter one event in our world's history, the Black Plague, the meteor that supposedly wiped out the dinosaurs, and all of world's catastrophic events would remain the same. The one thing that would change, however, is defunct developer Black Isle Studios would be alive, well, and proficient enough to pump out a *Fallout* sequel every year. Watching Black Isle close its doors marked a dark day for video games. We lost one of the industry's most talented role-playing studios, not to mention any hope of spending another day in *Fallout*'s post-apocalyptic world. As much as we wish we could go back and chart a different course for *Black Isle*, the future holds unexpected surprises, like Bethesda Softworks, a development studio filled with *Fallout* fans intent on keeping this sacred franchise alive.

Taking on a game like *Fallout 3* is a risky venture for Bethesda, as hardcore fans will deem any variation from the original games' formulas a monumental disaster. Like all creations imitated by another hand, *Fallout 3* retains elements from the original games' source material, and continually reminds you of why you loved playing these games, but not without setting itself aside as a largely different experience. Make no mistake, this is a Bethesda Softworks game first and foremost. As you journey from the sunless haven of Vault 101 to the irradiated wasteland of Washington D.C. you are reminded of Bethesda's latest work, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, just as much as you are of *Black Isle*'s

Fallout catalogue. It really is the perfect marriage of the two games; a chemistry that seamlessly unites *Fallout*'s fiction and atmosphere with the first-person gameplay and open world questing of *Oblivion*.

This amalgamation leads to an exhilarating adventure that lives up to the namesake of big-budget gamut franchises. The game begins in Vault 101, showing your character (whom you mold through a moderately deep creator) coming of age. You control this male or female protagonist as an infant (which is hilarious), a teenager, and a young adult. The decisions you make in these growth sequences directly affect your character's skills and standing in the world. When your father suddenly flees the Vault, you hastily give chase. From here, the character you created must fight for survival in the Capital Wasteland's harsh climate. I found myself drinking dirty water, eating irradiated meat from animal corpses I found on the road, and I even stole rations from the home of a kind-hearted citizen that put his trust in me. In the early stages, your weapons don't pack much of a punch, and ammo is extremely scarce. Enemies, which range from chain gun-wielding super mutants to giant ants, are far more aggressive than any of *Oblivion*'s foes. Their lunge attacks make melee difficult, and their firearm accuracy had me scrambling to find cover. This fight for survival is extremely challenging, yet is captured in a way that is captivating and true to the atmosphere of the world.

While I found scavenging to be oddly satisfying, the true heart and soul of *Fallout 3* is how player choice

is incorporated into the questing and combat. Every mission puts your alignment in the world on trial. Given how tough some of the choices are, it's difficult to play the entire game with the ideology of "I'm a good Samaritan" or "I'm a ruthless killer." I entered the game with the hope of being as evil as possible, but ended up being a gray in-between. This falls squarely onto the shoulders of the phenomenal writing. The dialogue is brilliantly penned, some of the situations couldn't be more precarious, and the game has a knack for making you feel guilty and/or foolish. Unfortunately, as strong as the dialogue is, it's hard to embrace its emotional moments as all of the acting is incredibly wooden.

Fallout 3's gameplay embraces freedom of choice just as much as the mission structure. As you gain experience and level up, you can select from a continually enlarging pool of amazing perks that can completely change how you play the game. The combat system allows players to alternate on the fly between traditional FPS running and gunning, and an RPG-like system called VATS, that freezes time and targets specific limbs. I learned how to use both systems effectively, but found the FPS play to be a greater risk, as the targeting system is a little shaky, and the performance of each firearm is all over the place. When you are in the zone, the FPS play can be a blast, but when it doesn't click, you'll jump right into the beautifully crafted VATS system. I preferred VATS, mostly because it produced a greater spectacle, and also upped the intensity dramatically.

While I did see some texture popping and enemy weapons passing through objects in the environment, *Fallout 3* is a remarkably polished and smooth running game. Those annoying mid-gameplay loads that frequented *Oblivion* are nowhere to be found, and the combat balancing as you level up is greatly improved.

Trekking through the wasteland is one of my top experiences of the year, and it just happens this game also produces some of my top moments, like the communism-hating robot, the pint-sized slasher, Gay, and the enabling of the Cannibalism perk. This game is massive, and as your character's stature in the Wasteland grows, so does the excitement. It's not a true sequel to the *Fallout* series, but as a fan of the games of old, I found it to be every bit as good.—REINER

BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

> **Concept:** Bethesda has forged an incredible adventure that brings out the best from both *Fallout* and *Elder Scrolls*.

> **Graphics:** It turns out wastelands can be beautiful. Every environment and character model is detailed to the max—rooms are cluttered, and arms show battle damage.

> **Sound:** The voice acting is fantastic, and goes a long way to pump life into the stiff actors. The soundtrack is mostly subdued, but like *BioShock*, a classic melody from a radio did put a pump in my step.

> **Playability:** The FPS play is a bit shaky, but the VATS system works incredibly well. The missions are also very well done. They offer variety and are usually set in some eye-popping sets.

> **Entertainment:** This game gets better as it goes, and has enough content and alternate paths to keep players playing for hundreds of hours.

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9

War never changes. Neither does the appeal of *Fallout*, even in a borderline scrupulous remake that plays more like *Elder Scrolls* than its legendary lineage. *Fallout 3*'s slow start may alienate casual gamers, but when the game starts introducing genuine quests, your dedication will undoubtedly pay off. The Capital Wasteland is a stark and barren world where supplies and friends are tough to find. Enemies are fierce and unrelenting, but in you choose the right experience perks to boost your ammo and stimpak stocks while leveling up, the battles ultimately swing in your favor. *Fallout 3*'s gameplay has plenty of flaws that slightly hinder the experience. The poor aiming mechanics, which operate more like shooting arrows in *Oblivion* than shooting bullets in the FPS crowd. The game has a classic RPG pace, so the awesome VATS targeting system. *Fallout 3* also loses steam under the weight of glitches (frequent pop-up, floating characters, and dipping) and lacks emotional impact during major plot moments, mostly due to poor presentation. Regardless, the time I spent hunting subarbitants, wiping out a clone clan with a power glow, and fighting alongside a giant freedom spreading, laser-eyed robot made the technical flaws feel like minor hindrances to an otherwise fantastic experience.—BERTZ



Using VATS triggers a slow-motion kill cam

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TEEN
T
 Cartoon Violence
 Mild Language
 Suggestive Themes
 Use of Alcohol
 ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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NINTENDO DS

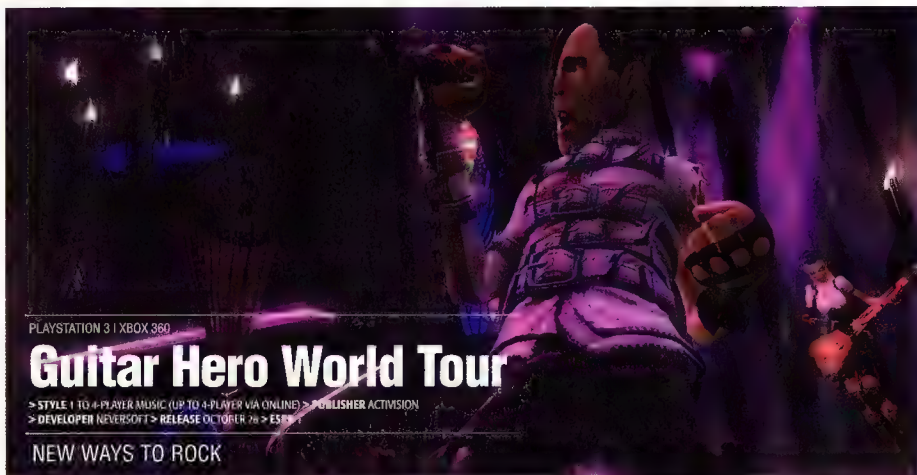


SEQUEL TO THE
BLEACH

BLEACH: THE BLADE OF FATE™



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BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

- > **Concept:** Take on Rock Band head-on, with new drum and guitar peripherals, and a brand-new music studio mode
- > **Graphics:** While the character creation mode is very complex, sometimes these rockers look a bit uggo, something more a result of art direction than graphical detail
- > **Sound:** The soundtrack is more diverse and robust than GH 3, but lags behind what was presented in Rock Band 2
- > **Playability:** The new touch-screen, open note, and held note mechanics are a welcome addition to the familiar gameplay formula
- > **Entertainment:** It's far above GH 3 in terms of ambition, but struggles to compete with Rock Band's downloadable content. Let's hope the audience embraces the groundbreaking studio mode
- > **Replay Value:** High

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Guitar Hero World Tour

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
 > **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7th > **ESRB** E

NEW WAYS TO ROCK

The industry has been closely following the showdown between dueling blockbusters Rock Band 2 and Guitar Hero World Tour.

Having played both of them, it's clear that — while they both work from the template Harmonix created with the original Guitar Hero — these games have two different visions for how the genre is going to evolve. At this point, neither is a clear-cut winner.

Harmonix, with its overwhelming selection of downloadable tracks and streamlined interface, clearly views Rock Band as a music service first and foremost — the iTunes of video games. Neversoft, industry veterans used to delivering Tony Hawk sequels year after year — approach this new Guitar Hero from a gamemaker's perspective, adding new features and gameplay mechanics in hopes of invigorating the long-established "falling jewels" design formula.

The changes start with the new hardware peripherals Red Octane created for the game. The drums appear to be a solid first entry for the manufacturer — the raised cymbals add a touch of realism to gameplay and they generally feel solid, if not as quiet as we had hoped for. The bigger news is in the guitar controller. The new touch pad (located just above the fret buttons) allows for new tapping and sliding mechanics, the first real innovations in the genre to date. As the notes fall down the fretboard, you'll notice clear jewels stitched together by lines. This signifies it's time to get rad, effortlessly sliding on super fast runs, which proves invaluable when tackling some of the Randy Rhodes and Eddie Van Halen offerings on the soundtrack. There are other welcome gameplay touches, like the open notes for bass (displayed as a line across, like the kick drum), and the ability to activate star power by hitting both cymbals instead of Rock Band's awkward fill system.

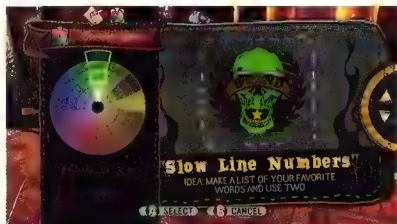
While Neversoft does more to improve the basics of the music genre than anyone in a long time, there are some fairly obvious ways in which it still lags behind Rock Band. For one, the career mode, though now divided into gigs, doesn't do enough to convince you that you're doing more than just playing through a list of songs. Although the numerous celebrity

cameos are entertaining, it feels more like licensing department window dressing than actual substance. As far as the soundtrack goes, it does a much better job of expanding beyond GH's metal core; I loved the addition of acts like Willie Nelson, Steely Dan, and CCR to the mix. That said, far too many songs have already appeared in Rock Band or previous GH games. Even with its largest tracklist to date, it's hard for World Tour to compete with Rock Band 2's enormous amount of downloadable content. One wonders if the time spent making the recent Aerosmith edition would have been better spent getting their download ducks in a row.

If World Tour has a trump card, it's the groundbreaking new GHMIX studio mode. It's basically a full-on set of music creation software, that allows you to write, arrange, and record your own songs, then upload them to be freely shared with fellow players. Even better, the game instantly translates them into fully playable jewels charts on the fly. As much fun as I had tackling "Hot For Teacher," this mode feels like the future of the franchise. After about a day of experimentation, I had created two songs that — if I do say so myself — would have made pretty good theme songs to an '80s cop show. If recent history has shown us anything, it's that putting your tools into the hands of your audience can result in things far greater than you can imagine. For this, one has to applaud Neversoft... and wait for what all the digital shredders out there have in store for us. —**MATT**

Second Opinion **9.25**

After hours of play, I'm not convinced this is the title that wins the "best music game ever" crown, but the two big music game franchises are now in a dead heat for the moniker. An occasionally frustrating UI, some questionable note chart layouts, and the absence of a significant downloadable catalog at release are enough to tarnish what is otherwise a phenomenal release for Guitar Hero. While the core mechanics is a virtual copy of the formula and screen layout devised by Rock Band, Neversoft wisely innovated on the specific play style for each instrument. From the new open bass string to the three-dimensionality that comes with the addition of cymbals on the drums, these tweaks expand your repertoire of actions in ways that are both exciting and challenging. The music studio will be a godsend for those willing to put in the time needed to lay down something worthwhile, and the rest of us will have the good fortune to download and play through their long hours of work. There are undoubtedly competing visual aesthetics and music styles between Rock Band and Guitar Hero. Individual players will rightfully gravitate to one or the other as a result, but from an objective, qualitative view, gamers really can't go wrong with either choice this year. —**MILLER**



BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

> Concept: Take the GTA template in a completely gonzo (and often ludicrously entertaining) direction

> Graphics: The first Saints Row benefited from being the first next-gen sandbox-style game. This time around, it suffers in comparison to the gorgeous GTA IV

> Sound: A very solid soundtrack balancing well- and little-known tracks in a variety of genres. The voiceovers won't win any Oscars, but they are fine in context

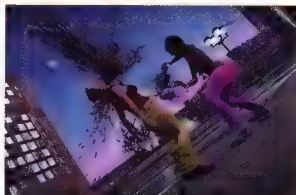
> Playability: It's a bit rough around the edges, especially online, but you can drive and shoot things just fine

> Entertainment: In its own silly, B-movie way, it's a damn fun game

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8.5

Who needs realism? It's hard not to imagine those three words guiding the development of Saints Row 2, which proves itself as one of the most ridiculous, stupid, laugh-out-loud, and fun game experiences you're likely to find this year. Big explosions, unbelievable gunfights, samurai sword duels that show up out of nowhere, even the option to streak the city streets—here is a title unafraid to embrace its own bombastic silliness and play it up to the nth degree. Behind the over-the-top action lies a pretty clever design, where almost every action you take helps to build your character, and you're never more than a block away from some new mission, activity, or crazy diversion. Technical bugs are pretty common throughout the game, but I rarely encountered any that actually affected my play-through or ability to progress. Whenever the game occasionally lags in polish, it makes up for with incredible customization tools for your character, a great co-op and competitive multiplayer experience, and an addictive system of upgrades that will keep you coming back again and again. Carving its own identity out of a genre that rarely sees any interesting innovation, Saints Row 2 manages to impress all on its own, independent of any comparisons that could be made to its more well-known gaming cousin.—MILLER



like a bit less of a chore than GTA does.

While—both graphically and in gameplay—Saints Row feels behind the standards set by GTA IV, it has an ace up its sleeve in the online arena: true online co-op. And it works. Going through the main story mode with a friend is a hoot, plain and simple, even if you might find yourselves getting off track in search of that elusive five-star wanted level. Is it genius? Probably not, but it's a feature that will go far in further establishing Saints Row identity amongst gamers. While it might not be as important as some of this year's big games, Saints Row 2 is a profanely good time.—MATT

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Saints Row 2

> STYLE: 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12 PLAYERS VIA ONLINE OR SYSTEM LINK) **> PUBLISHER:** THQ **> DEVELOPER:** VOLITION **> RELEASE:** OCTOBER 14 **> ESRB:** M

RE-DONK-ULOUS

During the long wait for GTA IV, Saints Row was a perfect stopover for many of us. Outside of an entertaining activities system, it didn't really bring anything new to the table—and that was fine. I was just happy to have high-resolution textures and a targeting system that wasn't actively annoying. Its sequel might find the current climate a little more challenging—there have been a lot of great games released since 2006. Still, it's clear that developer Volition hasn't rested on its laurels; Saints Row 2 is more ambitious and in many ways a better game than its predecessor.

The basics are the same: You start out creating a custom character and then begin wrecking shop in the fictional berg of Stilwater. The character creation is even more robust than last time; you can even choose your voice and walking animation (pro tip: fat dude + swishy female walking animation = major laughs). As before, there are a ton of clothes and other options available, and now you can actually customize the look of your gang and the cars they drive.

From there, you can engage in whatever types of mayhem you wish. The activities are back, and include some hilarious new tasks like streaking and tapings of the COPS-style show *Fuzz*, where you abuse hapless pedestrians dressed as a policeman

for big ratings. If this all sounds a bit juvenile, believe me, it is. Within my first hour, I had earned some cred on the streets by spewing liquid poo all over a suburban housing development with a waste truck. Occasionally, the frat boy humor crosses over into cheap nastiness; broad stereotypes are, as always, plentiful.

However, there is evidence of growth in the main story missions. There are fewer generic "pizza delivery" missions this time around and more complex, interor-based raids and shootouts. Volition has also included a good variety of set pieces—from a samurai sword fight to a helicopter attack on a drug facility, creating a more cinematic flair and pacing to the action this time around. While it's still essentially a series of missions, each gang's storyline has a unique feel, and acquiring and defending property and hoods adds to the sense that you're building a criminal empire. It's not the most polished game in the world (the car handling could really use an overhaul), but it succeeds in being a consequence-free playground for your id to run free. Put it this way: if GTA IV aspires to the high drama of crime epics like *Carlito's Way*, Saints Row emulates the gonzo antics of '80s cop flicks like *Doggett* and *48 Hours*. Also, it must be said; due in large part to its breezy pace and mid-level checkpoints, sometimes it feels





XBOX 360

EndWar

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER UBISOFT SHANGHAI > RELEASE NOVEMBER 4 > ESRB T

WAR FOR DUMMIES

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> Concept: Make real-time strategy work on consoles with extensive use of voice commands and no base building

> Graphics: The impressive details on everything and a healthy dose of environmental destruction are great when you can spare the attention to appreciate them

> Sound: Units constantly updating you on their status is a fantastic addition to the RTS interface toolbox

> Playability: Most things work well, but the low ceiling for the camera can frustrate

> Entertainment: A little more depth could have made this a classic, but the simplistic strategies here don't have much staying power

> Replay Value: Moderately High



■ Taking out the cover enemy infantry are hiding behind—works quite well



■ The camera can only move a few meters from one of your active units

Second Opinion **7.75**

EndWar's fantastic vocal interface gives it a tactical edge over every other console-based real-time strategy game to date. By allowing gamers to shout out commands as quickly as they can think them, the game allows armchair generals to issue orders at a breakneck pace that forges the troublesome pointer-based interface of its competition altogether. Unfortunately, the soldiers don't react with the same sense of understanding as their commander. Your rifleman unit will move to its target objective, but the lazy way they move across open fields rather than sticking to cover makes them look more like Cub Scouts than trained Marines. Choppers also move with abandon, frequently flying directly over enemies primed to take them out on their way to an objective rather than avoiding the unplanned skirmish. The paper-rock-scissors strategy provides a simplistic formula for understanding tactical situations, but upgrading your units with special abilities (like stealth and shields) and launching WMDs when you're facing defeat doesn't give the game enough strategic variance to last the long haul. This ultimately sabotages the smartly implemented online campaign that should otherwise be a stand-out innovation. —BERTZ

Coming out of this year's E3, I was incredibly high on EndWar. The title's focus on small-group battle tactics, robust voice control, and intriguing online component made it a real-time strategy title worth following. After putting the final version through its paces, those qualities still stand out and make EndWar an entertaining way to pass the time. However, the dearth of unit types and simplistic relationships between the handful of units make the strategy too shallow to hold up in today's RTS genre.

Everything about EndWar's presentation screams quality. The camera smoothly flies from unit to unit on your command, constant explosions buffet your ears and keep the intensity high, and the information you need to know is never more than a quick glance or flick of a thumbstick away. Certain orders are easier via either voice or gamepad, but once you learn your way around the game it's simple to

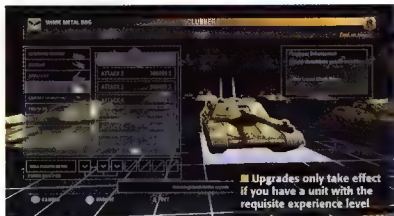
use a combination of the two to quickly and easily command your forces. Units not under direct orders have awful AI (take cover behind that wall two feet from you, morons!), but as your attention is only split between a half-dozen units it's not a game-breaker. What faults EndWar has have nothing to do with the interface or audiovisual fidelity.

With no base building whatsoever, players are tasked with completing their objectives (nearly always a variation on holding control points) with a handful of units at a time. Helicopters beat up on tanks, which take out transports, which in turn wail on helicopters. Infantry are slow and worthless outside of cover, but a total pain to dig out once they're entrenched (and are the only units that can capture control points). Artillery units are great distance attackers with no close-combat capability, and command vehicles enhanced interface elements. This bare spread makes up the sum total of EndWar's armies. There are no "soft counters" — being on the wrong end of any of these relationships invariably results in getting your butt kicked. As you only have access to a few units at a time, what you bring to the fight is very often more important than how you conduct battle. Couple that with the scant number of gameplay verbs — for the most part, "attack" and "retreat" are as complex of maneuvers that you can execute — and you've got a

polished but shallow experience.

Off-map support powers like air strikes or EMP bombs break up the plodding action, and can turn the tide of battle in a heartbeat. As a match enters its closing phases, players gain access to WMDs (though the losing side gets them first) that can render huge sections of the board sterile. Like the basic gameplay, these powers are either simple or elegant depending on whom you ask — though I find it all to be a washed-out reflection of the true potential of the RTS genre.

Once you break into multiplayer — which dresses up its team-based skirmish gameplay with a moderately amusing persistent world map — things get more interesting. The persistent army customization is a fun hook to maintain interest, the ebb and flow of battle is more dynamic (fighting the AI quickly becomes a tedious slog through its long stream of reinforcements), and the usual RTS pacing metagame becomes something of a remedy for the tepid notes and bolts of battle. Flanking maneuvers and misdirection can be brutally effective tactics against human opponents, and the thrill of working as a team is the best EndWar has to offer. The simplistic mechanics, however, make it unlikely that EndWar online will have the kind of staying power as the genre's biggest hits. Even with all these caveats and complaints, console players interested in seeing what all the fuss about RTS is about are probably best served here rather than with the other mediocre efforts to date. —ADAM



■ Upgrades only take effect if you have a unit with the requisite experience level



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Far Cry 2

► SINGLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/16-PLAYERS ONLINE | PUBLISHER UBISOFT | DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL
 ► RELEASE OCTOBER 11 ► ESRB M

THE GOOD AND BAD OF AN OPEN WORLD

Far Cry 2 is one of the most ambitious game releases in years. It nabs the gold medal spot for the biggest and most expansive first-person shooter ever, with a sprawling world filled with options, upgrades, and missions. Sadly, it's also plagued by a combat system that rarely elevates itself past basic gunplay. The game's open nature belies a core combat experience that doesn't change very much as the game progresses. There's a huge amount of content, but the straightforward nature of the fights makes those events blend together, particularly since so many battles occur for no reason whatsoever.

To be clear, my negative feelings are tempered by my amazement at the world's size and the presentation of the experience. As the sun sweeps up over the savannah horizon and light rays flit across the shadowed grass of the plains, it's hard not to stop and stare. It's easy to be overwhelmed by the scope of this beautiful world. You'll likely spend a dozen hours playing (about the length of most other games in the genre) before you realize the true size of this huge world. Every primary mission offers at least one significant choice that alters the narrative path, and numerous optional side missions could keep you busy for hours.

The story of a mercenary playing both sides of an African war is both relevant and emotionally powerful. Ubisoft is exploring some compelling themes

here—from an exploration of the roots of war to the nature of human barbarism. The thematic content would carry a lot more weight if there were any other option except to blaze across the country shooting anything that moves. What at first appears to be a complex interplay of competing factional powers reveals itself to be an unfortunate slog through endless firefights with endlessly respawning gunmen. Nearly everyone you encounter in the world is firing military-grade weaponry at you. Missions often have interesting objectives, but simply getting to the mission sites can be a profound frustration—random encounters with wandering enemies occur almost every minute. The action feels tight and responsive, but changes little over the course of the game. Expensive upgrades mean that the stealth path really isn't viable until many hours into the game, so the default option of charging in and hoping for the best becomes the standard. As a result, the fights are always challenging, but they often feel repetitive. Ultimately, the grating frequency of the fights is at odds with the tense desperation of the individual encounters.

It will surprise me if the multiplayer portion of the game garners nearly as much attention as the sprawling campaign. While competent, the competitive matches are pretty straightforward. The most notable feature is a robust map editor, which could extend playtime significantly.

BOTTOM LINE 8

► **Concept:** Wander the deserts and grasslands of Africa in one of the largest first-person shooters ever made

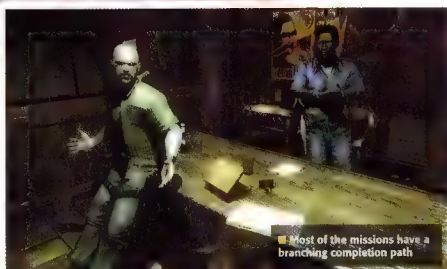
► **Graphics:** Breathing vests and fantastic lighting effects make this a sight to behold

► **Sound:** Evocative voice work weaves its way throughout the game, which is punctuated by an ever-adapting soundtrack that changes with the flow of action

► **Playability:** Some complicated controls aren't always mapped in the most intuitive ways, but you'll have many hours to get the hang of them

► **Entertainment:** A mammoth game, it is nonetheless hampered by some inky enemy AI, repetitive combat, and strange design choices in regards to the frequency of enemy encounters

► **Replay Value:** Moderate



Most of the missions have a branching completion path

The most affecting moment of Far Cry 2 hit me during a random mission I was completing with one of the several NPC buddy characters you work with throughout the game. After a brutal fight, I found him on the ground bleeding out. No amount of medical attention I could provide was enough to save him, so the only choice I had was to expend enough of my own medicine to ease his passing. Ubisoft has managed to strike some potent emotional chords with Far Cry 2. Combined with the depth and breadth of the sweeping African environment, they may very well be enough to overcome a combat system that isn't nearly as intricate as the game world in which it is housed.—**MILLER**

Second Opinion 7.5

I admire the ways Far Cry 2 differentiates itself from other first-person shooters. The lush open-world setting provides a cool sense of exploration, and the buddy system is an interesting way to provide alternative paths through missions. Despite these structural innovations, the basic gunplay remains decidedly average. The shooting mechanics are fine, but inconsistent enemy AI and few set-piece battles means every encounter starts to feel like the one before it. The distance between interesting locations contributes to the problem and makes the world feel bloated—especially since you need a vehicle to get anywhere effectively. The other side of that coin is Far Cry 2 can't be beat for sheer size, which makes it a decent project for dedicated gamers who want to chip away at it piece by piece. Numerous side missions and various factions mean you always have something to do, but when it comes to quantity versus quality, the latter loses out.—**JOE**



Nearly omniscient enemy AI makes the careful, quiet approach almost impossible



Interesting mission sites help to break up the monotony of nearly constant firefights

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009

> **STYLE** | 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** YUKE'S MEDIA CREATIONS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** T



HITTIN' THE ROAD

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

Professional wrestlers participate in a lot of matches throughout their storied careers, but none are more important than Westlerneria. The most successful, longest-running professional wrestling event in the world, "The Granddaddy of Them All," is the WWE's premier event. SvR 2009's new Road to Westlerneria mode touches on its importance by following seven different wrestlers on their journey to the main event (full disclosure: this story mode was written by former GI staffer Justin Leeper — *Ed*).

Some might be disappointed that you can't take any professional wrestler into this story mode — the Undertaker, CM Punk, Chris Jericho, Triple H, and John Cena are the featured wrestlers, with an extra co-op campaign featuring Rey Mysterio and Batista. However, these segments stay true to the real-life personalities while paying homage to the wrestling drama it mimics. This is a big improvement over last year's 24/7 mode, and I hope it makes a comeback next year.

While Road to Westlerneria is a nice diversion, the real

multiplayer draw is the new tag team match. Friends can build up their momentum and attributes together to perform devastating double team moves and finishers. A new inferno match even heats up the action by lighting the ring on fire.

Among its myriad create-a-features, SvR 2009 finally introduces a create-a-finisher mode, giving you more than 600 animation sets to construct brand new moves to put the final hurt on your opponents. Yuke's has even thrown in a highlight video creation system to round out the set, letting you create short reels using a built-in video editor.

SvR's great right stick grapple system has't been changed much in the last few years, so it's hard to say the series has evolved much on the mat. I'd still love to see a tutorial system to help newcomers ease into play. But I have a feeling this game appeals primarily to the male soap opera crowd, and SvR still has plenty of high class drama and sweaty mat action to please them. —*BEN*

> **Concept:** The king of the ring returns, ditching 24/7 in favor of a stronger story mode.

> **Graphics:** The in-ring action looks good and some of the animation and hit detection problems from last year are fixed.

> **Sound:** Same as it ever was, a solid rock soundtrack backs up the annoyingly repetitive commentary.

> **Playability:** SvR's controls have a learning curve, but you'll be dominating the ring in no time.

> **Entertainment:** THQ will offer further support for the game with future downloads.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **8**

In what seems to be a pretty reliable occurrence, THQ has put together another solid wrestling title. I really dug the depth of the career mode and as always, the creation system rivals most titles in the industry. Getting in the ring, the slow but sure improvements throughout the series becomes apparent in things like animation, crowds, and learning curve. The hilariously stale commentary and prehistoric UI are purely cosmetic gripes that won't detract from the fun to be had by wrestling fans. —*NICK*



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe

> **STYLE** | 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY GAMES > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY GAMES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** T

EARTHREAL ELSEWORLD

The Mortal Kombat characters have been shooting fireballs out of their hands and teleporting through flashes of light for so long it's only natural that they're finally fighting superheroes. Thankfully, Midway has respectfully integrated DC's most popular icons into the fighting fold, so the overall experience doesn't feel like a cheap licensing cash-in.

The violence may be slightly toned down, and a lot of the blood and gore is gone, but the superheroes aren't pulling any punches and the action remains unquestionably MK. The name of the game is dialing combos and quick, rehearsed moves.

With 22 combatants, the character list is fairly diverse. Fan favorites like Scorpion and Liu Kang still do their thing, but it's the DC newcomers that steal the show. The DC roster feels fresh and a lot of work has been done to making sure their moves reflect their comic identities. Sure, some fancy footwork was needed within the game's fiction to make everyone evenly matched in battle, but every character performs like they should. Superman is a lumbering pow-

erhouse with a lot of devastating three-hit combos, while the Joker is a trickier combatant who relies on change-up moves. Even characters I've never cared much about, like The Flash and Captain Marvel, are a blast to play.

The new mid-battle sequences, called Freefall Komat and Klose Komat, mix up the action. These segments vary in execution — you might end up crashing out of the ring and freefalling to the next stage — but they are all basically minigames. While they look cool, blocking your opponent's attacks is mostly a guessing game, and you feel cheated when the roles are reversed at the last minute and you take the damage you were dishing out. Thankfully, this doesn't ruin the overall combat, which is solidly balanced.

The game offers two different story modes that each last a couple hours, but aside from a thin combo challenge there isn't much to do here other than test your might online. Still, fans of both universes are sure to squeeze hours of entertainment out of this package. —*BEN*

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Throw some of the most powerful, iconic comic characters in the ring with a blood-hungry batch of video game fighters.

> **Graphics:** The character models and the environments look good, but Mortal Komat's lighting system has always looked off.

> **Sound:** A great collection of sound effects makes these matches sound like the clash of the titans.

> **Playability:** Even with a half cast, this is a Mortal Komat game in every sense of the word.

> **Entertainment:** Fans of both worlds will find plenty to enjoy here.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **8.5**

While fans worried about the T rating and the inclusion of the squeaky clean DC crew, those concerns prove false. Rest assured, this game is true to the spirit of the series, albeit a little less gory.

The DC characters, while inserted into the MK mythos through an extremely silly plotline, fit in with Raiden's crew well. Each DC character has some amazing "wow" special moves and finishers, and each is worthy of facing old favorites like Scorpion and Jax. The basic control mechanics are the same bread and butter, lightning-fast fighting you expect, although new "Test Your Might" and dual level falling sequences add some eye candy. Nothing really new here, but it's a campy good time, just like any good comic crossover should be. —*MATT*



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Spider-Man: Web of Shadows

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** TREVARCH
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 21 > **ESRB** I

A SLOW STARTER

Venom is no longer satisfied with eating human brains. His latest play is to turn the citizens of New York City into his followers. His methodology? Infect everyone with a symbiote strand. The thought of battling an entire city of Venoms is certainly exciting, but Web of Shadows dances around this conflict. If not for an energetic third act, the game would be a total snooze-fest.

In the first two acts, players are tasked with completing missions for Luke Cage, Black Cat, and in a twist, Kingpin. Since the game doesn't offer any interior-based gameplay, every fight takes place on the streets of New York City. Most of these brawl are against gangs or guards in powered armor. The catch with these fights is Treyarch has developed

new gameplay mechanics that take the fights to the sky and onto the vertical walls of buildings. The combat mechanics are extremely fluid, allowing players to transition from sky to ground to building with ease. You can also switch costumes at any point to access another set of moves. Combo strings can reach into the hundreds, and the arsenal of attacks (which grows as you cash in experience points) is acrobatic and fun to exercise. Unfortunately, the game wastes these skills with the lack of variety in its fights. They all end up being short bouts against small groupings of enemies in ordinary city streets.

As amazing as the web-swinging mechanic is, it's used primarily to get players from one mission to the next or to scour the city for hundreds of hidden tokens (ugh). The only interesting moments in the first two acts revolve around the player's choice to be good or evil. Your choice affects the story and the companions you have available to assist in a fight.



Bill Cosby's advice: finally pays off. Pudding really does make everything better...even face punches!

Defeat the Electro-Hunter 312

BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

> **Concept:** A combat-focused game that gets old quick
> **Graphics:** Camera orientation problems and animation glitches abound
> **Sound:** The voice acting is as bad as it gets
> **Playability:** Reptition is the name of the game. An explosion as the new combat is, it's all this game has to offer
> **Entertainment:** The game eventually delivers some thrills, after six hours. You'll have to endure a slow building grind to get any satisfaction
> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **6**

I know Spider-Man likes to joke around, but he should start taking his video game career more seriously. Web of Shadows plays like a bad joke. Spider-Man's voiceover is so whiney and coddled his sounds like he lost his puberty, the missions are repetitive, the framerate chugs in certain spots, and the game's story and dialogue made me groan more than the cast of *Night of the Living Dead*. The action looks cool, but you're really just spamming the same attack over and over. Sure, the animation looks great and it's fun to swing around the city like the world's coolest superhero, but there are a half-dozen games that do that already, so why should we bother with this one?—**BEN**



In the third act, Venom's control over New York City is clearly felt

MULTI QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Armored Core: For Answer

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** FROM SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16 > **ESRB** I



BOTTOM LINE **6.25**
For Answer's single-player campaign is a wasteland of poorly constructed levels and brain-dead mechanized adversaries. Playing with a friend in co-op doesn't add to the excitement. For some strange reason, you must wave goodbye to your friend to complete mandatory single-player levels before being able to join up in co-op again. If your interest lies in competitive multiplayer, For Answer's online battles are enthralling tests of twitch reflexes and intelligent engineering. The boost-filled controls are solid, the maps are built with specific mech types in mind, and success is directly tied to players diving into the insanely deep mech customization. Basically, play it for the multiplayer, or don't play it at all.—**REINER**

110 GAME INFORMER

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Rock Revolution

> **STYLE** 1 TO 3-PLAYER MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** JOE MOORE > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE **7**
There's a temptation to completely trash Rock Revolution on PS3 and 360 simply because it doesn't meet the high quality bar set by the other two big music franchises. However, in all fairness, Konami's attempt to embrace the full band experience (minus vocals) can be pretty enjoyable at times. There are some stellar songs to play, even if many of the cover versions are awful. The menu reveals occasionally interesting variations on the gameplay, though at least some, like the studio mode, are laughably bare bones. At least you can use your existing music game peripherals, which will likely be a more popular choice than tackling the challenge of Konami's seven-input drum pad. All told, Rock Revolution is exactly what you'd expect from the music game genre, assuming the last three years never happened.—**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Golden Axe: Beast Rider

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SECRETE LEVEL > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14 > **ESRB** M

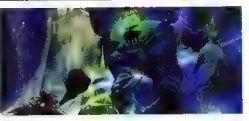


BOTTOM LINE **6**
Fans of brown and dusty wastelands have a lot to look forward to in this attempted revitalization of the Golden Axe franchise. For everyone else, the formula might wear thin after a few hours. It's not just the visuals—Golden Axe has very few tricks up its sleeve. Kill a wave of enemies to open a gate, and run forward. For variety, you can instead gallop forward on an unwieldy beast. The increasingly frustrating fights are filled with an endless flow of disposable bad guys, ever the hallmark of a game that has too little content and needs to fill space. It's unfortunate, because I actually enjoy the core combat mechanic. Eschewing the expected hack-'n'-slash mindlessness, a timing-based evasion and blocking system is required to master the melee. It's not enough to save an otherwise lackluster effort, but Secret Level was definitely on to something with the combat.—**MILLER**

XBOX 360 | Wii

Crash: Mind Over Mutant

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 17 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE **4.75**
The back of Mind Over Mutant's box is misleading. It lists two-player co-op, monster control, and Crash's signature fighting style as the game's standout features. These elements are certainly present, but they take a beat to see the real feature set: unpredictable framerate, extensive backtracking, and the guarantee of one death caused by faulty camera positioning for every platforming segment. These inexcusable qualities corrupt the entire experience. Thanks to the shoddy camerawork, co-op is mostly unplayable with the framerate fluctuating like a yo-yo, it's nearly impossible to find a rhythm in the platforming and combat. Getting a new monster should be a joyous affair, but its acquisition usually leads to a lengthy hike through a previously conquered area. From design to execution, this is a mess of a game, and a new low point for the once-loved marsupial.—**REINER**



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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

FIFA Soccer 09

> **STYLE** 1 TO 7-PLAYER SPORTS (PS3), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (360) (UP TO 20-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14 > **ESRB** E



■ While playing for your country, there are no qualifying stages. Only friendlies lead up to the big international tournament

FLY YOUR FLAG

Getting called up to the national squad is every soccer player's dream. You've made a name for yourself over in Europe, and now you're ready to use what you've learned from the best and take on the world's finest on the international stage. FIFA 09 wisely expands its exciting Be a Pro mode to a four-year timeframe in which you play club fixtures and don your country's colors. The game also expands to 10-versus-10 online competition where you can create a team that moves up and down divisions, which tests whether you've got the mettle to bury the ball in the corner instead of putting it over the crossbar.

Every touch counts in soccer, as you'll soon learn while playing Be a Pro mode. This mantra extends to every situation on the pitch, whether you're on the ball moving around the defense or just calling for a pass from a team-mate. The reward you feel when executing a perfect run onto the ball that ends in a shot on goal is tempered only by the feeling that the AI players show little imagination in their positioning, ball support, and runs.



How your players interact with and support each other can be tweaked with a handful of new strategy options that include player creativity (in both passing and taking runs), frequency and distance of your passing game, and how teammates fall back in defense and push forward on offense. These mostly work, and I recommend configuring these settings to accommodate how you want to play the game. However, some strategies, such as asking your AI players to perform freeform offensive runs, aren't really executed, and I found that they expressed themselves better in the traditional playing mode rather than Be a Pro.

FIFA changes the way you experience the game whether you're playing Be a Pro or are online trying to play cohesively as a team with nine friends, but the core remains the same. This series plays even more deliberately than rival Pro Evolution because you have to execute moves earlier than you think to compensate for the pre-scripted animations. Add in the still-odd AI behavior (like dribbling the ball straight out of bounds), the less-than-spot-on passes and shots on

goal, and a jostling feature that is inconsistent at best, and it feels like all of FIFA's amazingly fun new moments cannot escape the game's legacy problems. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Online and off, FIFA's new features center around the Be a Pro concept

> **Graphics:** A custom celebration option offers some variety to the presentation, but that's it

> **Sound:** It would be cool if there was different audio commentary for the Be a Pro mode, perhaps giving tips and positional hints

> **Playability:** Some of the new strategy options are helpful, while others are too subtle

> **Entertainment:** The full-fledged online sides and Be a Pro mode make this series more fun than it's been in a while

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

The growth of Be a Pro into an enjoyable and fully featured mode this year is a welcome surprise. Some notable gameplay adjustments also bring several new dynamics into play. The most enjoyable additions are the expanded defensive options, including more concrete ways to jostle for the ball and stay steady with an opponent during man-to-man coverage. Niggling AI problems are as much of a dilemma as ever—why is my sweeper hanging around by the post when the ball has entered his penalty box? The broader view, however, reveals a smooth and attractive game playing out on the pitch, where straightforward controls and tactics deliver an increasingly fun and accessible take on the sport. —MILLER



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Baja: Edge of Control

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** 2XL GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 8 > **ESRB** E

ARE YOU READY?

Gamers are increasingly accustomed to codding. With "dynamic" difficulty, checkpoints every five minutes, and recharging health bars in many games today, failure is literally not an option. 2XL's Baja: Edge of Control takes the opposite strategy—offering hardcore challenge—to both good and bad effect.

As a debut title, it's a straightforward affair. The eight classes of vehicles can be purchased and upgraded with points you earn from events as you advance through various point-to-point and standard race modes. Aside from the normal online features, that's about it, but hardcore off-road fans still have a lot to love. It's challenging to the point of frustration, and filled with scanning courses and super aggressive AI competitors (they race dirty—believe me!). However, if you stick with it, you'll find some of the year's most thrilling vehicular competition. There's nothing like the feeling of thundering over

hill and dale, barely in control. There's a lot of strategy in how you use your handbrake during corners as well; the game allows you to veer off course for a limited time frame. Do it right, and you can cut valuable distance off a chicane; make a mistake, and you'll be rest, losing at least a couple of positions.

That being said, the game could use some polish and—yes—a little less challenge in the early stages. Sadly, the Baja Bug class puts its worst foot forward; it's by far the least enjoyable class of the game. I didn't start enjoying the game until I had left those bouncy buggies in the rearview mirror. Also, it's a temble mistake that you only get coaching through loading screen tips; a good tutorial mode would really help in a game where technique is so important. Despite my respect for its no-holds-barred attitude, maybe mixing in a bit of sugar to make the medicine go down better is just what the doctor ordered for the next Baja title. —MATT



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** A no-frills off-road racer focused on last-paced, hardcore gameplay

> **Graphics:** It's not nearly as pretty as Pure, but the visuals belie the game's gritty approach

> **Sound:** Love the breezy flamenco guitar in the menu

> **Playability:** It's difficult, but that's due to the challenge courses, not any delicacies in the control mechanics

> **Entertainment:** Although casual fans may be put off by challenges, this is a satisfying, deep, and diverse racing experience

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.5

This isn't just a game about off-roading. It's literally a crash course in the fundamentals of driving. Given the developer's MX/ATV background I expect nothing less. The importance of proper throttling, how to take a curve, clutch control, and using bumps were preached and perfected in the MX vs. ATV series. You'll re-learn them all in Baja's first racing series, which for my taste included too much re-racing of events due to the need for both money and XP to advance in the bare bones career mode. However, there's a big payoff when you tackle the point-to-point rally races around cliffs and the long official Baja races against the tough and unpredictable AI. Baja is fun but demanding. It's not for the faint of heart, and it requires both hands on the steering wheel and a steady focus. —KATO

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Need for Speed: Undercover

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** BLACK BOX
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17 > **ESRB** T



THE BROKEN SPEEDOMETER

On a fundamental level, we don't need a whole lot of reasons to play a racing game. Mashing the gas and running from Johnny Law (or smashing into them at top speed) just comes naturally to most of us. Still, I'm always intrigued by racing games that try to incorporate some kind of story in an attempt to smooth the rails of the player's progression. Need for Speed tries to address both aspects of racing games, but the problem with Underground isn't its attempt to provide context for your actions. Even though I've got the gas pedal down as far as it'll go, the game fails to salivate either the need or speed parts of the equation.

Part of the problem with Undercover is that it has no clear focus. After taking a detour with NFS: ProStreet, EA seems content to return to the pre-ProStreet era like it never happened. While this may not be a bad thing, Undercover refuses to move the needle forward from 2006's NFS: Carbon, and in some ways is a step back. The game's biggest assets are its large world, which encompasses three cities, and the way you can freely pick up races

of different types at any time. This lets you experience things continuously (unlike Burnout Paradise, for example), but there could have been more payoff in the races. You earn Wheelman reputation points that improve your handling and lower the cost of parts, but you don't get to apply them yourself and you never know what kind of points you're racing for until the event is over.

This disconnect is furthered by the uneven racing. While some thrilling races up the ante with trigger points in the environment that rain down destruction on chasing cops, it's also hampered by a lack of polish. Environmental pop-up, even for objects as important as oncoming traffic, is common. Despite the bucket full of visual effects, the graphics only make the game jump off your screen in a bad way. Our review build suffered from senous framerate issues, which I hope are ironed out before the game releases.

Where EA goes from here is anyone's guess. Will we see ProStreet or Carbon return? I'm not going to make a prediction, although whatever it is, it better have more acceleration than this game does. —**KATO**

■ The Online Cops and Robbers mode is fun, as are the spontaneous chases that can occur while you're in the game world, like this



BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **Concept:** Race around a large world as an undercover cop in order to attract the attention of smugglers

> **Graphics:** The overuse of bloom lighting is not a good choice, and overall the game looks unrefined and suffers from pop-up

> **Sound:** As always, the cop chatter in the game is excellent. One snippet even included a reference to the 'Skate series' New San Velona

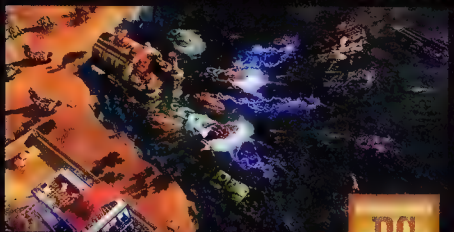
> **Playability:** Undercover lacks a smooth racing feel, you must play with the bumper camera to get a good sense of speed

> **Entertainment:** It's hard to find the quality in the quantity of Undercover's races

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **7**

With Need for Speed Undercover, this series is just spinning its wheels in the mud. While the return to the open-world format is nice, the game never requires the player to explore. The single-player features what could be labeled as the same storyline as the five previous titles, featuring silly characters and even sillier cut scenes. The mission objectives are repetitive (even for a racing title) and offer no motivation to go beyond the critical path. Undercover delivers a solid driving experience, but it's just buried within so many vanilla design choices. —**NICK**



XBOX 360 | PC

Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3

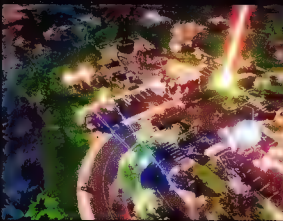
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA GAMES > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28 (PC), NOVEMBER 11 (360) > **ESRB** T

LUDICROUS SPEED AHEAD

The Red Alert offshoot of Command & Conquer has never taken itself seriously, and this new entry is no exception. Firing bears out of cannons, leveling a base in seconds thanks to Tanya's explosive talents, and transforming jet fighters into landbound mechs are only a few of the moments that will have you grinning ear to ear. I'm not convinced this is the most balanced or nuanced game around, but it's a hell of a lot of fun.

The majority of Red Alert 3's design is textbook real-time strategy stuff, with complex unit relationships, off-screen support powers, and unit specials for everyone. However, the co-op nature of the campaign sets it apart. Every single mission (and there are enough to deliver dozens of hours of playtime) has two commanders working side by side, and it's an absolute blast to pound the AI with a buddy. Flying solo with an AI-controlled ally is less awesome, as they're fairly brain-dead, but still results in an above-average single-player campaign.

Competitive multiplayer is amusing but nothing special, offering the usual permutations on deathmatching. The good bits of Red Alert 3, though, are more than worth the price of admission. —**ADAM**



the edge **7**

When All Games Are Not Created Equal

The 360 version of the game is identical to the PC incarnation, but the control blows. Setting up bases and giving bread-and-butter attack-move commands works fine, but Red Alert 3 places a lot of focus on unit special abilities and offscreen support powers — which is where the gamepad control really falls apart. It's a decent title on 360, but don't kid yourself: Playing on PC is the correct way to experience Red Alert 3.

BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

> **Concept:** Get as gonzo as possible in the best Command & Conquer title to date

> **Graphics:** Colorful and vibrant, this has a more cohesive and enjoyable art style than C&C has ever had

> **Sound:** Campy accents and explosions. What more is there?

> **Playability:** The otherwise brilliant interface is hampered by its failure to let players effectively queue orders

> **Entertainment:** It's not serious in any way, in tone or in balancing, but this is the most flake-out fun RTS in some time

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **8.5**

Red Alert has always been over the top (even by Command & Conquer standards), and the third installment is no exception. During the course of the three campaigns, I took on Soviets, Allies, and the Japanese with ursine companions, weaponized dolphins, and transforming robots. I didn't have to do it alone, either, since the missions are designed for co-op — either a friend or a competent AI buddy. Gameplay balance is solid, and each faction has their own little quirks, from how they build bases to how they upgrade units. The 360 version's controls are a slight improvement over past installments on the platform, though it still pales in comparison to what can be done with a good old mouse and keyboard. While the drive-theater quality FFAV includes aren't going to win any awards, they're so overwrought and goofy that it's hard not to enjoy them — just like the game as a whole. —**JEFF**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Mirror's Edge

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER DICE > RELEASE NOVEMBER 11 > ESRB T

BETWEEN THE GLOSS AND THE EDGE

Players have become so proficient with first-person shooters that they can lob grenades with pinpoint precision and de-helmet an enemy on the run with a sniper shot from a mile away. So why do these players, who are completing superhuman feats within the harsh conditions of war, look like fools whenever they try to jump from one point to another? Watching a player try to leap across the rooftops often ends up being as comedic as a Benny Hill skit. You'd think that waging a one-man war against the Nazi army would be first-



person's greatest challenge, but as we've all learned through some frustrating moments in our gaming careers, it's making a simple jump.

Enter *Mirror's Edge*, a game that pushes gameplay to the periphery to show gamers (and game developers for that matter) that jumping from the first-person perspective can be just as easy and satisfying as pulling a trigger in *Call of Duty 4*. As a helicopter gives chase with a chain-gun ablaze, you'll be racing at breakneck speeds across vertigo-inducing vertical spaces. As you fling from flagpole to drainage pipe and run along a wall to a door you can put your shoulder through, you never once have to stop dead in your tracks to line up a jump or reposition the camera. Every movement feels natural, and is incredibly easy to pull off—and it doesn't automatically handle the platforming like *Assassin's Creed* does. You have complete control over the fast-paced parkour, and learn quickly (and often) that the slightest miscalculation in timing will turn you into an unrecognizable spatter on the pavement. Thankfully, checkpoints are frequent and load

times are minimal. The acrobatic maneuvers are amazingly fluid and responsive, but their true success lies in the outstanding camerawork, which does a great job of framing the shot. You also never feel like a camera floating along the terrain. You see your arms pump as you run, and your legs kick out in front of you as you leap and slide under objects. It really does a great job of establishing your character and making you feel like a part of the world. Sound goes along with pulling the player in as well. You can hear the squeal of your flesh squeaking across glass, and as you pick up momentum, your breathing labors and you can hear the wind in your ears.

The game places you in the fleet feet of a runner (or tracer) named Faith, who transports data in a day and age where information is monitored as heavily as terrorist activity is today. Her rooftop delivery service is booming until her sister is framed for a crime. For whatever reason, Faith now finds herself in a world of trouble, as armed forces are in hot pursuit and shooting to kill.

This chase unfolds on rooftops, in a subway (complete with a harrowing race across moving trains), and into a number of posh office interiors. No matter what the environment may be, you turn it into a playground. To guide players along, environmental objects that lead toward the objective are highlighted in red. In any other game this would seem a bit distracting, but the red breadcrumb trail fits with *Mirror's Edge's* art style. Most of the buildings are bleach white, and if they have any color on them, it's always one solid primary color. This effect creates one of gaming's

finest spectacles, and a surreal world for gamers to navigate. As striking as it is, the dark tones do lead to some moments of disorientation and confusion as to where to jump or run next.

By weaving in and out of enemy fire, players can complete the game with little blood on their hands. There is, however, the option to deliver killing blows. Faith is a skilled combatant, who can punch her way out a conflict, and also disarm without breaking a sweat. When she steals a weapon, she can either toss it, or empty the clip into her aggressors. The gameplay, as limited as it is, is quite good, and if anything, makes you think about what a game would be like if it combined *Mirror's Edge's* movement with *Call of Duty 4's* wars.

Mirror's Edge's gameplay is adrenaline-filled and beautifully tailored, but the experience does end up feeling a bit hollow as the game runs out of new tricks to show the player. In the second half of the game, I started second-guessing if I had already run across a particular section. I also became so in-tune with specific challenges that I could do them with my eyes closed.

Regardless, this is one of those genre-defining games that everyone needs to see. DICE has pulled off a miraculous feat that hopefully will inspire other FPS developers.—REINER



> **Concept:** Take the opening scene of *Cyano Royale* and extend it into a full-fledged parkour game

> **Graphics:** Vivid backdrops and the sense of scale make each stomach-dropping jump memorable

> **Sound:** Sharp sound effects help orient you during fast-paced chase sequences

> **Playability:** Nice touches to the FPS camera and the sense of momentum make navigating rooftops a blast. More variety in the challenges is needed though

> **Entertainment:** This genre breaker may have faults, but it's a new experience both gamers and developers need to try

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

Part *Run Lola Run* and part parkour puzzle game, *Mirror's Edge* breathes new life into the platformer genre. DICE may be known for gunplay, but in this game bullet exchanges take a back seat to avoiding fire while making treacherous jumps to safety. Running, climbing, and jumping across building tops gives you an extreme sense of the impossible, and the momentum Faith can achieve is remarkable. The first-person camera works perfectly until you move in tight spots, such as ventilation systems, which are mildly disorienting. From the sun-drenched exteriors to the vibrant, sanitized offices, every environment Faith navigates during her quest to find out who killed a mayoral candidate pops off the screen. The later levels slow the fast-paced chase sequences with troublesome platform puzzles, which devolve into tedious trial-and-error exercises in twitch control. These stand in stark contrast to the rewarding mind-bending puzzles of titles like *Portal*. A series of time trials and speed runs supplement the short campaign, but Faith's chaotic journey through the city, which is highlighted by a frantic subway sequence, remains the centerpiece in this ambitious and unique experience.—BERTZ



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!

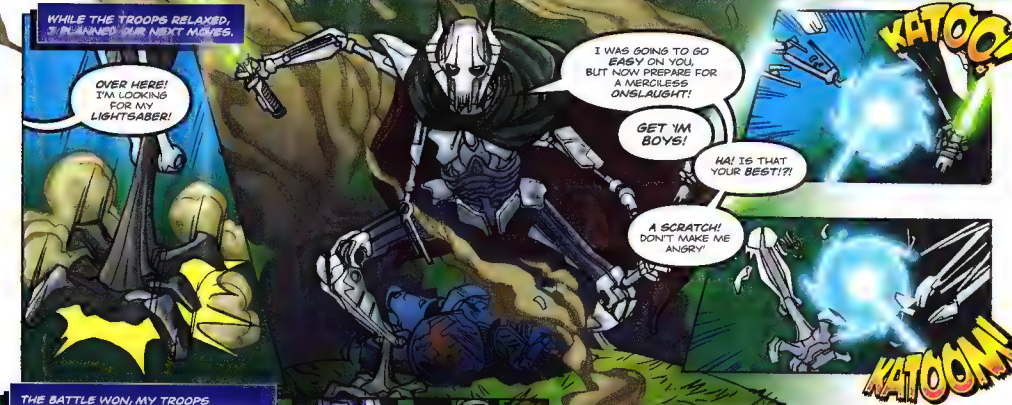
MUAWAAA!

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 -
KARGGH!

WHERE'S ANAKIN?



WHILE THE TROOPS RELAXED, I PERMANENTLY DESTROYED THEIR MINDS.

OVER HERE! I'M LOOKING FOR MY LIGHTSABER!

I WAS GOING TO GO EASY ON YOU BUT NOW PREPARE FOR A MERCILESS ONE-SLAUGHT!

GET 'EM BOYS!

HA! IS THAT YOUR BEST?!

A SCRATCH! DON'T MAKE ME ANGRY!

KATOO!

KATOON!



THE BATTLE WON, MY TROOPS REFLECTED UPON THEIR ACHIEVEMENT.

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

WELL, THAT WAS FUN.

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

WHAT ARE WE UP TO NOW, 64? 65?

WHO KNOWS WHAT'LL HAPPEN NEXT?

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XBOX 360

Gears of War 2

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 10-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAMES STUDIOS > DEVELOPER EPIC GAMES > RELEASE NOVEMBER 7 > ESRB M

CURB-STOMPING YOUR BRAIN

When you drove your chainsaw through someone's sternum in the original Gears of War, did you think the game just wasn't bloody or visceral enough? How about that time when a dozen eight-foot-tall super-warriors ambushed you in a dimly lit alien cavern; did you wonder if the intensity needed to be ratcheted up a notch? You may not have asked yourself these questions, but Epic Games apparently did. Gears of War 2 is video games' equivalent of *Jurassic Park*: a title that overwhelms you with its impeccable polish and grand set-pieces. This game is carefully crafted to not give the player a chance to catch his or her breath and wonder how much substance lies behind the facade.

Gears of War 2 gives every impression that the designers at Epic sat down with a huge pile of money and a list of everything that could be improved from the first game, and spent all those dollars addressing that list. Technical improvements like foolproof drop-in/drop-out during co-op and faster loading smooth out the experience. Design missteps like an incoherent story and the awful Kryll levels and final boss fight have been avoided for this sequel. From cover mechanics to weaponry, the gameplay is nearly identical (if smoother and better-paced) to the original, but Gears 2 is as polished

a title as exists in gaming, and the many improvements and optimizations are great.

As a single-player game, Gears 2 delivers enough amazing moments over its eight to twelve hour campaign to satisfy most gamers. Taken online where it belongs, however, it has the potential to have a Call of Duty 4-like longevity. Excellent and creative modes like Wingman, where five teams of two vie for killshots (and you can revive your partner indefinitely, barring an execution), get lots of mileage out of Gears' unique mechanics and provide an outstanding contrast to vanilla deathmatch or capture-the-flag scenarios. The Horde mode, which made a big splash at this year's E3, is a fantastic way to take Gears' excellent cooperative play out of the campaign and enhance replayability for gamers who might pass on more competitive modes. The only thing stopping this online offering from taking a clear lead in the genre is a

BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **Concept:** Polish up the rough patches from the first game and throw a ton of new content at players

> **Graphics:** Unreal Engine 3 looks better than ever, and the Gears team knows how to make it sing

> **Sound:** The dialogue is still fresh out of a seventh-grader's notebook, but during battle the audio landscape is outstanding

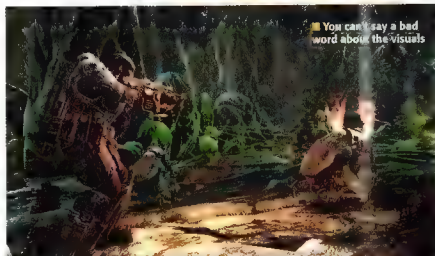
> **Playability:** The cover system frustrates less often this time, and aside from that you can't ask for a better or more responsive interface

> **Entertainment:** Single-player is good, but co-op is amazing. The Gears formula still works very well

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High



■ The story gains some emotional resonance this time, but only by taking some cheap shots



■ You can't say a bad word about the visuals

Second Opinion **9.25**

During my second tour of duty on the crumbling planet of Sera, I piloted a Reaver, performed heart surgery on a giant worm, and rode a Bumer to victory. It's just another day at the office for a roid raging sci-fi super-soldier. Gears of War 2 evolves from its impressive predecessor in every sense of the word. The sequel features better narrative pacing, deeper multiplayer options, and larger set-piece battles than the original. While the gameplay may lack revolutionary innovation, and the major plot twist failed to inspire shock or excitement, I can't deny the polish and refinement that oozes from every exit wound. Gears of War 2 is the Ferrari of gory action shooters, a ride everyone should take at least once. The high-octane story campaign delivers water-cooler worthy thrills, and the great co-op Horde multiplayer mode will keep die-hard score seekers battling Locust waves well into 2009. Gears may not rewrite the book, but the artistry of its execution makes it a powerful experience. —BERTIZ



■ New enemies like Bloodhounds are vicious foes

lack of the persistent stats and upgrades that make Call of Duty 4 and Rainbow Six Vegas so endlessly addicting.

The title's relentless immaturity can grate after a while, though. Gruesome executions and grunted, testosterone-soaked dialogue sloppily plaster over the campaign's heavy-handed morality play. While the plot makes sense this time around, its clumsy mysteries are old hat to anyone moderately well read in science fiction. Still, finding bad things to say about Gears of War 2 is like trying to hate on the '07 Patriots. The game is impeccably engineered to dominate everything it sets its sights on, and yet ultimately falls short of achieving true immortality. Still, there isn't a game out there that can compete with Gears on its home turf. The bombastic co-op action, impressive presentation, and unique multiplayer will thrill gamers as well if not better than the latest indie thought piece. Popcorn it may be, but Gears of War 2 is delicious nonetheless. —ADAM

BOTTOM
LINE

8.5

> Concept: An enjoyable vehicle-based action game that pushes players to build their own rides from scratch.

> Graphics: You'd be hard-pressed to find a bag of Slinkies this colorful. The vibrant hues bring out the cartoon qualities of the character models and turn ordinary words into a work of art.

> Sound: While the mumbling characters get old quick, Nuts and Bolts' catchy soundtrack quickly makes you forget about them.

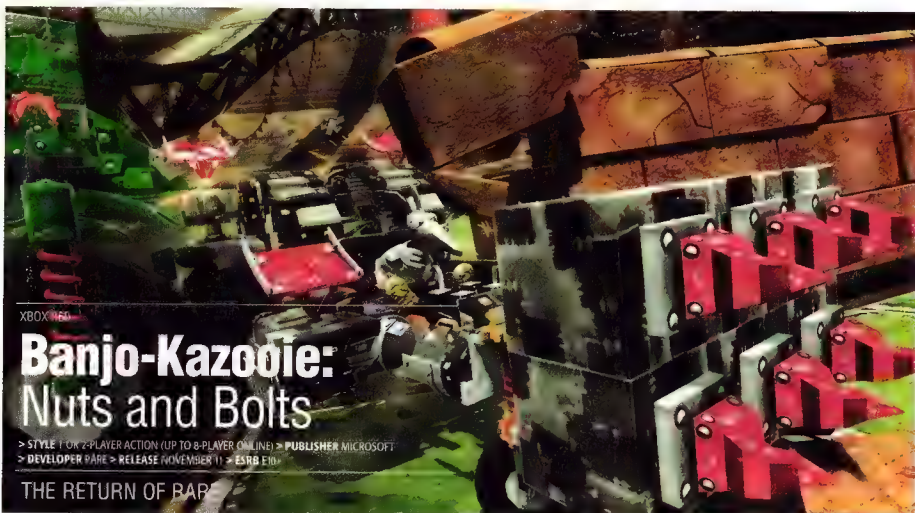
> Playability: The building tools are easy to use and no matter what vehicle you make, the controls always seem like a perfect fit. Nuts and Bolts also has a nice mission variety.

> Entertainment: I would recommend this game if it were just the building tools. The game around them makes it a shame for any gamer.

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8.25

Banjo and Kazooie weren't even considered relevant 10 years ago, so I don't know how much enthusiasm there is for resurrecting this series. But that doesn't matter, because the real star of this game is the vehicle creation system. Nuts & Bolts skips directly into your natural human compulsion to create. I just couldn't stop tinkering with my cars. I spent hours on my vehicles trying to squeeze out that last bit of speed, or make one of my duties just a little bit more maneuverable, or mentioning new uses for the unique parts. The game's writing is also hilarious, and its willingness to lampoon video game stereotypes and Rare itself is utterly charming. The in-vehicle missions are a mixed bag, but for every derivative repeated race challenge there is a mission that requires genuinely creative problem solving. I know it's not quite the same thing, but 360 owners longing for the PS3's LittleBigPlanet should give Nuts & Bolts a spin. —BEN



XBOX 360

Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts and Bolts

> STYLE: LOCK-2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
> DEVELOPER: RARE > RELEASE (W/NUMBER 1) > ESRB: E10+

THE RETURN OF BANJO

In an interview with UK newspaper *The Guardian*, Peter Moore reflected on Microsoft's relationship with Rare, stating Rare's "skill sets were from a different time and a different place and were not applicable in today's market." Moore's harsh critique is hard to refute, as Rare has not delivered a blockbuster since joining Bill Gates' regime in 2002. This prized developer has slumped under Microsoft's guidance, peaking with the moderate success of the *Viva Piñata* series.

Even Rare agrees with Moore's negative assessment in the long overdue third installment in the Banjo-Kazooie series, *Nuts and Bolts*. As players follow the zany exploits of gaming's only bird and bear duo, Rare openly lampoons itself for having an outdated development philosophy. This game harps on Rare's insistence to make every game a collect-a-thon, and even goes as far to show one of the company's least popular games (*Grabbed by the Ghoules*) buried in a cat's litter box. Protagonists Banjo and Kazooie, who are introduced as lazy, out-of-wus pizza-guzzling fatsoes, are also thrown under the bus as archaic characters that no one could possibly love.

Rare's self-inflicted stoning ends in an amusing history lesson that deftly blends legitimate laughs with a compelling commentary on the state of video games. This spoof cleverly pokes fun at the past and present, but the gameplay that goes along with it is firmly planted in the future. *Nuts and Bolts* throws Banjo's platforming exploits into the fires of mockery, and instead latches onto the next big trend in gaming, user-created content.

Like *Spore* and *LittleBigPlanet*, *Nuts and Bolts'* gameplay is dependent on the player's imagination. Through remarkably deep building tools, players are tasked with building vehicles from a pile of parts. Picture, if you will, having access to the world's largest LEGO box, and having a skilled instructor at your side for any help you may need.

If you are creatively challenged, you can always use one of the game's many blueprints. Should you choose to get your creative juices flowing, the building process is as easy as snapping two LEGO bricks

■ The game continually challenges gamers to think about what type of vehicle functionality is best suited for each challenge.



together. The wide parts selection is broken up into categories that make finding pieces easy. The game also does a nice job of detailing when parts can or cannot be attached. To avoid trial and error, quick-loading test track is a click away.

It's easy to lose your life in these excellent building tools, as you really can build any vehicle you want — be it an airplane, boat, an airplane/boat hybrid, or even a robot with rocket skates. It's really a game in and of itself.

All of the vehicle types control amazingly well (unless of course you build 10-ton boxes that can't turn), and it's usually easy to pinpoint where a

vehicle is failing and what you need to alter to improve its design. Projectile targeting is a bit suspect, but at the same time, your targets are rarely of the speedy type.

The vehicles you create are used for a wide variety of goals in a game best described as *Grand Theft LEGO*. You won't be running down hookers with cars made of bricks, but you will be traversing massive open worlds as you take on missions from hubs scattered across the maps. Since the gameplay directly reflects the building component, players are encouraged to tinker with their designs

to excel at different mission types. You'll end up building a racecar for speed runs, and a vehicle armed to the teeth for combat, and even a vehicle that can catch soccer balls. You never really know what to expect from the missions, but one thing is certain: They push your skills to the limit, and pump out fun.

In addition to the challenging single-player adventure, players can put their creations to the test in enjoyable online matches. If you are feeling generous, you can share your blueprints with other players.

Nuts and Bolts shows that Rare is still a respectable think tank capable of delivering experiences unlike anything else, but this game also clings onto a few annoying elements from the company's past. The biggest one, which the game openly ridicules, is the concept of scouring environments to collect items. Sadly, the items you must collect are new part types for your vehicles. If you want to have a deep LEGO box, you have to dedicate time to hunting for them.

Annoying collect-a-thon aside, *Nuts and Bolts* is a rare delight that offers up big laughs and inventive gameplay. It also ends up being the closest thing there is to a virtual LEGO set. —REINER

■ A vehicle's parts can be jettisoned to reveal hidden functionality.





XBOX 360

Fable II

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** LIONHEAD STUDIOS > **RELEASE DATE** OCTOBER 21 > **ESRB** M

RICH HISTORY

I found him in the slums of my hometown when he was just a pup – rescued him from a band of bullying orphans who thought it was funny to pick on a defenseless animal. He was my unwanted companion at first, and though we never spoke, something amazing happened during our travels; I actually started caring for him. I sacrificed random villagers at the Temple of Shadows, I cheated on my multiples wives, and virtually ignored my children, but I couldn't help but feel a certain protective ownership for my faithful companion.

It's interesting that the often mundane events like playing with your dog, buying up businesses and managing their profits (your shops actually make money when the game is off), or arranging the furniture within your house can be so compelling that the "main" story often takes a back seat. But this happens all the time in Fable II. What's also strange about this is that there is usually very little reward for your effort. Your wife might give you presents from time to time, for example, but there's really no persuasive reason to start a family. Your side life in Fable never intrudes on the main arc, but it helps the world of Albion feel all the more immersive. This is Fable II's most impressive feat.

You start out as an impressionable youth who – through fortune – crosses paths with the wrong man. Without revealing too much, your life quickly changes forever, and your epic story of vengeance and honor begins. While the narrative has its moments, it touches on many of the same beats as the first game and falls on its face at the end with an anticlimactic finale.

Fortunately, it's the hero's journey, not the hero's end, that makes this game worth playing. That path will have you rescuing slaves from a group of bandits, working your way through a gladiatorial-like



A golden trail now leads you to your next objective, cleansing up the HUD by removing the onscreen map. Part of the time that's great, but you still have to go to the map screen often enough when looking for certain missions or trying to find certain shops



funny, but if you are extra frugal you can save more money by waiting for your favorite item to go on sale

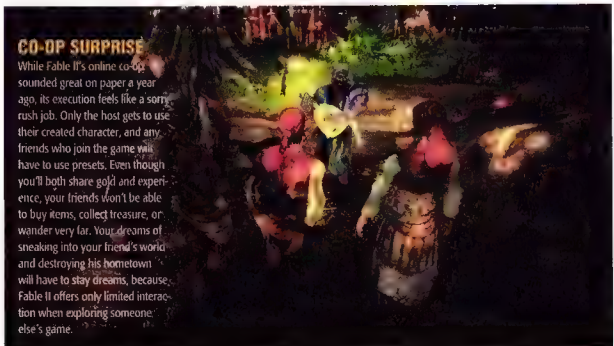
crucible, and infiltrating your enemies' prison fortress in an elaborate rescue mission. The variety of trials you face is rich indeed, and though the story rarely ties back to the original game, there are a few nifty references for the fans.

Fable II boasts an impressive list of improvements. Instead of the bite-sized areas from the first game, the world now feels open and more worthy of exploring. In battle, you now gain bonus experience based on how well you perform, onscreen messages tell you when you can purchase that ability you're saving for, and you can even cash in old skills for some extra experience. On a whole, the combat system is more balanced, and all three combat options are equally viable, so evicting your enemies is entertaining no matter how you choose to do it.

Unfortunately, not everything is better this time around. At various points in the game you must perform side quests before proceeding with the story. While many of these quests are fun, some players will balk at running through the motions in order to progress the main plot. There aren't many boss battles to speak of, and the few larger encounters you find are copied and pasted throughout the game – be prepared to fight a few trolls. But one of my biggest gripes is that appearance options feel sadly limited. In a game that puts such importance on making your character your own, it's odd that there aren't more ways to alter how you look. Still, through it's richly interactive world, gorgeous art design, and often-humorous writing, Fable II crafts a world where you'll quickly feel at home. — **BEN**

Second Opinion 9.25

Like a band that opens a set with its biggest song instead of waiting for the encore, Fable II allows players to get in on as soon as their character is an adult. Instead of dangling this horn dog prize in front of you for most of the game like Mass Effect or Harvest Moon, Lionhead's latest gets the novelty of PG-rated sex out of the way so you can concentrate on the good stuff like exploring bustling cities, investing in real estate, and, of course, going on an addictive string of quests. The main arc is brief compared to most RPGs, but a lot of it is due to excellent time-saving features like warping, a glowing guide trail (which can be turned off), and the ability to skip most conversations. Most of the main story is vanilla and predictable (save the intro and Spire sections) and even major events lack impact due to lackluster presentation. However, charming writing and creative side-quests help balance things out. While co-op is slightly gimped, it's still fun to visit friends' worlds (especially if you can convince them to turn the safety off). — **BRYAN**



CO-OP SURPRISE

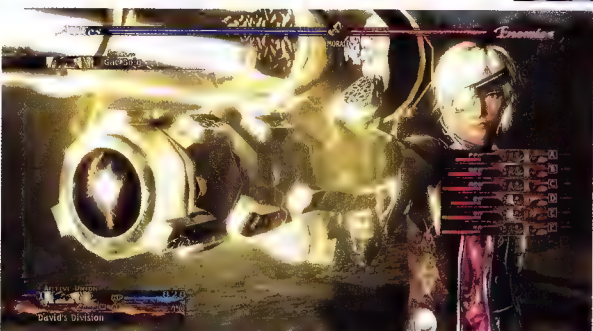
While Fable II's online co-op sounded great on paper a year ago, its execution feels like a sorry rush job. Only the host gets to use their created character, and any friends who join the game will have to use presets. Even though you'll both share gold and experience, your friends won't be able to buy items, collect treasure, or wander very far. Your dreams of sneaking into your friend's world and destroying his hometown will have to stay dreams, because Fable II offers only limited interaction when exploring someone else's game.

XBOX 360

The Last Remnant

> **STYLE** | PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
 > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 20 > **ESRB** M

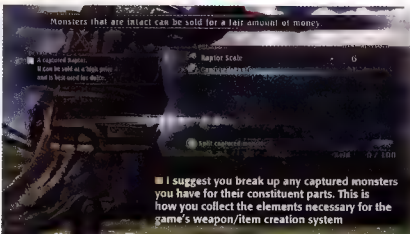
ONE OF THE MASSES



Heroism is by and large a relative thing; it is defined in contrast to the actions of those we call normal. RPGs in particular trade in heroism as a stock feature of the genre. The stories and actions of the characters are over the top and ply heavily on stereotypes to elicit specific feelings from the player. When done properly, I have no problem sinking 40 to 60 hours grinding levels, gaining loot, and hanging on every word of every townspeople. When done wrong, however, you're left with an uninspiring protagonist and a long, slow journey ahead. The Last Remnant is a title whose failure to elevate itself above the normal makes it decidedly less than heroic.

At least The Last Remnant's unremarkable nature is not for a lack of trying. There is an item creation system that uses found materials, plenty of side quests to partake in, and the obligatory unlikely hero. However, the item creation isn't integral to your combat arsenal (and takes forever to accumulate enough materials/dough for), the side quests are boring dungeon crawls, and hero Rush Sykes... well, the name truly says it all.

Perhaps the single most illustrative example of



how this game fails to inspire is exemplified by the combat system. Filled with good intentions, The Last Remnant's battles leave you wanting more. In an effort to give you large-scale battles, the game groups up to five characters in a single union, and you can control up to five separate unions. This puts a lot of units on the map, but the game doesn't deliver the payoff you'd expect from these brahms.

Part of this is because The Last Remnant — as a turn-based strategy title — neither rewards players with real-time action (although there is a timed-button component), nor with tactical prowess.



The game's simultaneous resolution of everyone's combat orders (friend and foe alike) creates a shifting battlefield. This prevents much in the way of tactical choices — despite the developer's obvious laboring over a strategic system that includes flanking situations, the battles transpire in static turns anyway, thus blunting its own possible effectiveness.

The fact that you don't choose which specific actions your units will perform in combat will chafe off some RPG fans. Most of the time I didn't have a problem with this, as the game gives you a range of generic battle choices, such as being able to heal and attack in the same turn. However, The Last Remnant's handcuffing can bite you in the butt since you can't count on being offered the same combat commands every turn. One time I wasn't able to cast a poison-cure spell when I was poisoned simply because the game never gave me the option.

There are important decisions to make in how you group your unions, but switching your party members' formations around and seeing if your attack rating goes up or down is too little too late when it comes to delivering real gameplay depth. Likewise, the city environments are basic, the over-world locations (like dungeons, mines, etc.) are no fun to adventure through, and the story manages to make the concept of mysterious, epic Remnants altogether dull. In short, The Last Remnant that has all the trappings of a game in the RPG genre, but fails to stand out from the crowd. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE

7

> **Concept:** The Last Remnant introduces larger scale multi-party combat to the RPG genre. Overall, however, the results are mixed

> **Graphics:** Unlike some Square Enix titles, the cutscenes use the in-game graphics engine (Unreal Engine 3) and show some popping in of textures

> **Sound:** Studio musician metal guitar riffage runs roughshod over the game. This is unfortunate, but it does suit the often hammed-up dialogue

> **Playability:** Timed-button presses for both offense and defense break up the turn-based attacks

> **Entertainment:** This game's attempt at RPG innovation doesn't hit the bull's eye, and the rest of the game — while solid — doesn't distinguish itself enough

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6

The greatest military conflicts in history were not won with vague commands and finger-crossing, the commanders had helpful battlefield intel, capable officers, and control of the situation. Even though The Last Remnant focuses on large engagements, it has none of those things — it is more concerned with conveying a fuzzy battle feeling than providing a fun combat system. You control groups of units rather than individuals. Their available actions change from turn to turn, and there's no reliable in-combat heal. You'll enter your commands and watch the round unfold... and trust me, you do a lot of watching. You feel like a helpless onlooker as your characters eat damage, even though there are some unpredictable and sporadic button-press events that aren't worth the trouble of paying attention. The story and characters had potential, but they become inconsequential under the crushing weight of the frustrating combat. I like the idea of Square Enix introducing a new franchise, but unpublished efforts like The Last Remnant will never be the next Final Fantasy. —JOE



LittleBigPlanet

► STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) ► PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT ► DEVELOPER MEDIA MOLECULE ► RELEASE OCTOBER 27 ► US\$49.95

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

LittleBigPlanet is a gaming epiphany — one of the rare titles that opens new horizons on the landscape and changes the way you think about interactive entertainment. It blurs the lines that have traditionally separated single-player, multiplayer, creation, and community in a brilliant and refreshing twist on the familiar 2D platformer. Using this classic genre as a vehicle, Media Molecule has developed a charming adventure that mines the past to give gamers a glimpse of the future.

No matter what aspect of the LittleBigPlanet appeals to you, it all starts with the game's infrequently adorable mascot, Sackboy. He doesn't talk, but you can add tons of personality through customization, emotes, and hilarious arm-flailing (which is especially fun in co-op). He is easily one of the most likeable characters I've ever controlled — but even with this precious little hero, it would be a mistake to say LittleBigPlanet is aimed at a younger audience. Underneath the cute aesthetic is a wildly inventive and challenging game that requires genuine skill.

As in every platformer, your goal is to move from point A to B and overcome obstacles along the way. In LittleBigPlanet, the distance between those points is full of unique gameplay that goes beyond simple "jump over the pit" solutions. Every rope, lever, and crazy contraption relies on a realistic physics engine; get suspended platforms swinging to reach hidden items, pilot a dirigible through the sky, or grab a spinning wheel and let go to propel Sackboy upwards. Those are just a few

examples of the great moments scattered throughout the game, and the stages become progressively more amazing and imaginative. What begins as simple grab-and-pull puzzles culminates in some of the best platforming to date, with whirling cages of death and awe-inspiring boss battles.

Unfortunately, the same physics engine that allows for so many great interactions is also the source of the game's only glaring problem: short jumps. Precise landings are frustratingly difficult to negotiate — a flaw that will force you to replay a handful of levels multiple times. It's even worse

when you're playing co-op with a group of varying skill levels. However, the number of spots where this is an issue is astronomically small when compared to the number of times you'll say "Wow, that's awesome."

After you've admired Media Molecule's work, it's time to start doing your own. The creation tools included with the game allow you to make anything you see in the single-player story, plus just about anything else you can conceive. Spend your time creating unique levels, focusing on bizarre vehicles, or give rise to deadly enemies — the whole process is remarkably easy thanks to the intuitive interface. The tools are complicated enough to perform complex tasks, but simple enough to be accessible to any motivated gamer.

Multiplayer has a fun, competitive/co-op slant

BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

► **Concept:** Redefine the 2D platformer, then give players the tools to do the same

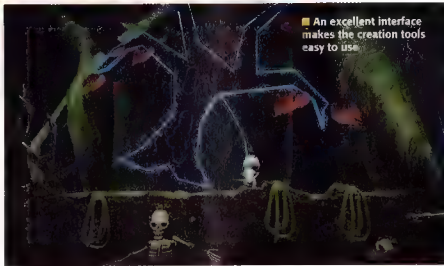
► **Graphics:** A deliberate and gorgeous mixture of realistic and cartoonish design

► **Sound:** Whether you're swinging in the trees or deep in a fiery cave, the music selection matches the situation perfectly

► **Playability:** Excellent physics makes the world easy to grab, drag, and blow up. Precise jumps are harder to land than they should be, though

► **Entertainment:** Whether it's the gameplay, humor, or sheer cleverness, this game will keep you smiling

► **Replay Value:** High



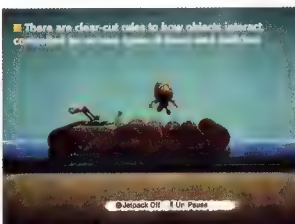
An excellent interface makes the creation tools easy to use

Uploading your creations or checking out what other users have made (the community has already generated some astounding stuff) is as simple as a few button presses in the main menu. You can enjoy other users' content without making anything yourself, but you should at least play through the creation tutorials for yourself. By peeking behind the curtain and understanding how all the parts interact, the elaborate and mind-bending contraptions you encounter later become even more inspiring.

LittleBigPlanet's design is so clever that even if it were just the single-player story mode, I'd still recommend it to anyone. But the game's greatest achievement is how its multiple layers feed into each other. It's easy for co-op buddies to jump in and out of your single-player game, and all the while you're unlocking objects you can use in the creation mode. The whole experience is seamless, and it sets a new standard for how different modes can come together. In fact, I think LittleBigPlanet sets a lot of new standards that other titles will be striving to emulate in the coming years. —**JOE**

Second Opinion **9.5**

LittleBigPlanet is the most charming game I've played in years. From the adorable Sackboy characters to the dizzying visual style that permeates every level of this title, it's an easy game to love. With its realistic physics and ingenious level designs, it breathes new life into a genre that many had thought dead, the 2D platformer. For me, it was an experience akin to playing Super Mario Bros. as a kid; it's nostalgic, while at the same time completely fresh. However, it does have its flaws. Sometimes, Sackboy's movements (especially jumping) feel too imprecise for some of the more challenging levels, and the game's difficulty balancing is all over the place — the steep jump in difficulty that comes in the Master Sensei levels will be a shock to more casual gamers. If it only contained the surprisingly long single-player career mode, it would be a fine platformer. When you throw in the brilliant and innovative level creator and multiplayer functionality, you have a title that feels like a rebirth of an entire genre. —**MATT**



There are clear-cut rules to how objects interact

© MARCH 07 1 Up: PlayStation

PLAYSTATION 3

Resistance 2

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 60-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY
 COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** INSOMNIAIC GAMES
 > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 4 > **ESRB** M

MULTIPLAYER MANIA

When you look at the top-line bullet points for Resistance 2, the list is impressive: a single-player campaign combined with an eight-player co-op mode and a competitive multiplayer that pits up to 60 players against each other. It's even a mouthful to say, and once the words leave your lips, you have to dabble off that bit of drool left behind. This is a feature set that any gamer will find hard to, well, resist.

I put the disc in my PlayStation 3 ready to experience the true next generation of first-person shooters, from a developer I consider to be one of the best in the business: Insomniac Games (Ratchet & Clank is still one of my favorite series of all time). Unfortunately, my journey with the single-player campaign didn't go exactly as I had hoped. Insomniac has altered a number of the basic mechanics I loved in the first game. The weapon wheel, which let you choose from a number of ingenious weapons, has been removed and replaced with the classic Halo two-weapon loadout that is still but standard in today's first-person shooters. This works wonderfully in multiplayer, but ultimately removes one of the things I admired about the original Resistance. The strategy of figuring out which weapons work best for each encounter is gone. In a game where the weapons are the stars, limiting the player's choice nullifies one of the standout features.

The rest of the single-player experience continues down that same road. I often found upcoming encounters telegraphed by the weapons I found in the area (oh look, a rocket launcher—a big dude must be just around the corner). Other encounters are a process of trial and error; some enemies jump out and zap you for an instant kill, but next time you know where he is coming from, so you simply blast

the dude and move on.

The production values are phenomenal; the graphics are among the best you'll see this year, and the soundtrack and sound effects also impress. Enemies like the chameleon emanate an eerie, frog-like gurgle that gives away their presence, and later moan as they lay dying on the floor.

While Insomniac could have done more to make the war for our planet against a Chimera invasion feel far more epic, the story of Nathan Hale's defense of America in the face of enemies attacking from all sides does pay off. I was impressed with the game's dark conclusion, as Insomniac didn't take the easy road and prop up some flimsy plot twist to ensure a pat Hollywood ending.

All told, the single-player experience is definitely better than most, but it was not the knock-down, drag-out experience I had hoped it would be. Luckily, I can't say the same for the game's multiplayer modes, which are easily the best part of Resistance 2.

The cooperative mode in particular is especially addictive. Before going into battle, players choose from three classes: soldier, medic, and spec ops. In classic RPG terms, the soldier is the tank class with a shield for taking damage and a chain gait gun for dealing pain. The medic uses a gun to both damage enemies and heal the group, while the spec ops class fills the glass cannon requirement. With 30 levels for each class and unique rewards for each, it's easy to sit with buddies and grind through the six different zones. These zones feature a random



The amount of detail you will find in R2, from the character models to the environments, is impressive

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Use guns to shoot things across a number of different modes, most notably the cooperative campaign

> **Graphics:** With a large variety of environments, each with a unique look and feel, the game is gorgeous from beginning to end

> **Sound:** A good soundtrack, great sound effects, but only mediocre voiceover work

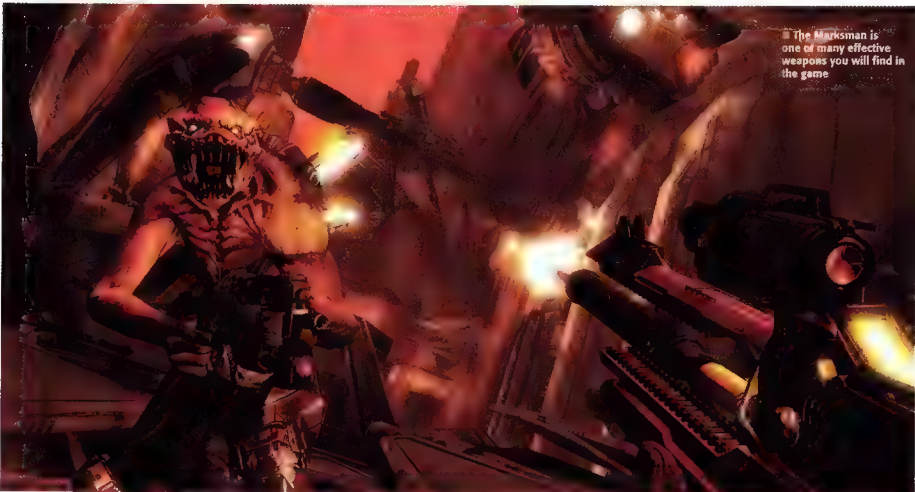
> **Playability:** The control is solid, but the slower movement is noticeable and the lack of a weapon wheel limits strategy

> **Entertainment:** The single-player campaign is good, but the true draw of this game is the cooperative and competitive play

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **8.5**

The novel approach to cooperative gameplay in Insomniac's juggernaut game could keep you busy for dozens of hours all by itself. Randomized level layouts and three class types that each level up independently combine to make an endlessly replayable mode. The explosive co-op lights are often frantic, but they lose some punch without more narrative context to tie it all together. Competitive play offers huge 60-player wars waged across sprawling battlefields, as dynamic objectives respond to the action at hand and send small squads running to keep up with the action. The ebb and flow of contained skirmishes that roll into much larger configurations makes for quite the rush. But I can't be quite so effusive about the core game experience, its single-player campaign. It delivers dramatic locales, a lengthy story, and some of the best weapons in the genre, but I just couldn't shake the feeling that the game has lost touch with its own identity in an attempt to be more like other shooters. I miss the variety offered by the weapon wheel—in its place is the two-weapon system of so many other games. It's a problem that feeds into the game's biggest dilemma—the whole experience is consistently on rails. It is so heavily scripted from moment to moment that it's hard to feel like you're doing more than going through the motions. Tack on some wildly inappropriate difficulty balancing, and the experience is often extremely frustrating—a sensation at odds with the high polish exhibited in the rest of the game.—MILLER



The Marksman is one of many effective weapons you will find in the game

PLAYSTATION 3

Valkyria Chronicles

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA WOW
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11 > **ESRB** T

HIGHLY DECORATED

It doesn't have sprites or grid-based combat, but Valkyria Chronicles is pure strategic bliss. Sometimes it looks like a third-person shooter. At other moments, it appears to be about tank combat. You interact with and control your units in unconventional ways, but these mechanics are all just skins overlaying a classic and familiar strategy framework that puts players in the trenches like no other entry in the genre.

Valkyria Chronicles has you making tactical decisions from two points of

view instead of a traditional isometric grid. The first is the battle map, which is a top-down abstract representation of the battlefield, your troops, and all visible enemies. The second perspective is right down in the action as you manually control your troops, line up their shots, and keep them behind cover. These two approaches work remarkably well together, giving players the sensation of being a commander while also forging a connection with individual units and their capabilities.

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individual units and

their capabilities.

The balance of power among the

units is a twist on the common

rock-paper-scissor mechanic, and I love

how combat is about more than

jockeying for these advantages. There

are multiple types of infantry (like

scouts, snipers, and engineers) to

work with, terrain advantages and

handicaps, soldier personality

traits, plus you start

with only one tank that you need to

protect at all costs. In other words,

even though the 'paper beats rock'

elements are there, they are aug-

mented by a much deeper and more

compelling array of options. Even

your activities off the battlefield, like

learning skills and upgrading weapons,

are entertaining.

That isn't to say Valkyria Chronicles

isn't always deep; the tactical map

doesn't always do its job, and can

lead to you wasting a command point

(one unit's turn) just to see what the

real situation is on

the ground. It would

also have been

nice to get a miss

chance percentage

before you attack;

it's clear that range

affects your power

and accuracy, but

the details are vague

Lastly, there isn't

much depth in the

character progres-

sion — especially

when compared to

Final Fantasy

Tactics A2 — but I

can't harp on that

too much since

I like the middle

ground where this

game landed.

There are some things you never

knew you wanted in a strategy game.

The third-person view does wonders

to get you invested in every decision,

and it's great to have a worthwhile

story. The gorgeous presentation

and versatile combat make Valkyria

Chronicles one of the best surprises

of the year. It may not have been

of your radar before, but you definitely

shouldn't let it pass you by. —JOE

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Direct your troops in a simultaneously traditional and innovative strategy game

> **Graphics:** Incredibly stylish. It's amazing how a few filters can make standard anime look like a painting in motion

> **Sound:** Occasionally (but not frequently) solid voice work. The music gets repetitive quickly

> **Playability:** The interface could use some streamlining, and you don't get certain bits of key data in combat

> **Entertainment:** Cheering isn't something I normally do in strategy games, but it's hard to avoid it when your tank or your sniper lands that one-in-a-million shot

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **8.75**

War is never pretty, but Valkyria Chronicles makes a case that it could be. The spirit of a hand-drawn children's book runs deep within this game's graphics and gameplay, turning the cold, hard reality of war into a surrealistic and strangely beautiful affair. The story clings tightly to the bright pastel coloring, giving players an amiable and personable view of a group of people who must drop everything to fight for their country. Oddly enough, the combat is also about

visualization. The gameplay falls into the turn-based strategy genre, but rather than just directing where each unit must go on an overhead map, the game zooms down to the battlefield, placing players directly in control of their units. From this vantage point, you get a good feel for the battle, as you are directly in control of lining up sniper shots, seeking cover, and spying your surroundings

for hidden enemy nests. The tactical play is highly versatile, allowing players to mold any strategy they see fit — even moving the same unit multiple times if the situation calls for it. As engaging as the gameplay is, it produces some targeting irregularities, such as a tank missing another tank at point blank range. In these instances, your strategic planning falls victim to chance. This can lead to frustration, but frequent mid-battle saves can correct any situation deemed unfair. Valkyria Chronicles is a sleeper hit, and a must for any strategy nut. —REINER



■ Rosie is one of your story characters, but even your generic recruits have cool personal skills



■ Your turns aren't risk-free, since enemies will shoot whenever they see you move

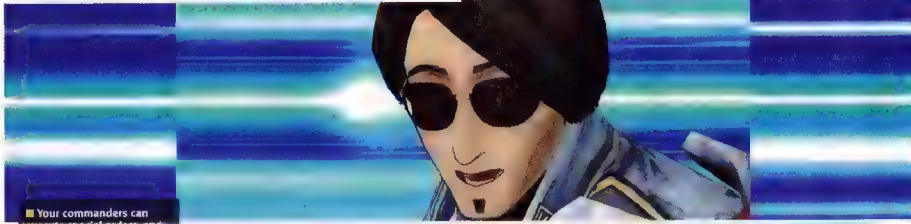


■ Mission objectives aren't incredibly varied or surprising

Occupied enemy camp.



■ The tactical map is the best way to view your strategic options and check up on your units



■ Your commanders can execute special orders, and other units' abilities activate under specific circumstances

Ammo Refil



PLAYSTATION 3

MotorStorm Pacific Rift

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** EVOLUTION STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28 > **ESRB** T

ALL REVVED UP WITH NOWHERE TO GO

As I tore through the dense undergrowth on a remote volcanic island with a giant monster truck tailing me, I realized that I was definitely in a race, but my heart wasn't racing. MotorStorm Pacific Rift is a bigger, better game than the original, but it is far from a turbo-charged, edge-of-my-seat, ass-kicking racer.

The greatest boon for Pacific Rift is the increase in the track sizes — it's like night and day compared to the first MotorStorm, and there are time-of-day changes, too. The new tracks boast more mud valleys and ridge jumps, which ultimately equates to more diverse routes through a given track. Sometimes you don't always know where a road is going to lead, which can be dangerous if you end up taking your big rig into cave-m-jumping territory tailor-made for high-flying and nimble bikes, but that's all part of the fun.

With this increase in size, however, comes an unfortunate side effect. In the first MotorStorm I enjoyed the unpredictable nature of the pack racing that the tighter tracks produced. You never

knew if the person ahead of you was going to shred their ride into a million pieces right in front of you. While Pacific Rift does a good job with the AI so you're never really out of the race, this kind of frantic competition is lost since it doesn't take long for the field to spread out over the larger courses.

Perhaps more than anything, however, I wanted to feel a sense of drama from Pacific Rift, and that's largely missing. Sony added a nominal vehicular attack to the left and right shoulder buttons, which causes your ride to swerve into opponents. There are also ways to set your car on fire (and waterfalls douse the flames), but these additions lack the visceral punch this game needs via some wicked, heart-racing set pieces. On one track I barely noticed a collapsing house; I flew right by it like it wasn't even there, and that's a problem for a game in need of some spectacular moments.

As a racer, Pacific Rift hits all the gears — it just lacks that extra oomph to kick things into overdrive. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** MotorStorm returns with an island location and a host of new tracks, but this game needs more than just a change of scenery

> **Graphics:** Slight pop-up is the price you pay for densely packed, larger tracks. The sense of speed is okay

> **Sound:** Bowie's "Queen Bitch" is an awesome song, but not one I'd peg for a racing game. However, you can add your own songs off your hard drive

> **Playability:** A new attack button has been added, but its influence is negligible

> **Entertainment:** Compared to other recent racing offerings like Pure, Pacific Rift fails to get the heart pumping

> **Repeat Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

In life, you have to take the bitter with the sweet. Never was this old saying as true as it is in the case of MotorStorm 2. It had me breaking a sweat as I caromed down bered mountain passes, keeping my barely in control dune buggy way past the red. Other times, the only thing red was my face as I screamed obscenities on the screen, cursing the big rig that just ran me off the road, a randomly placed rock, or the constant and jaw-dropping crash animations.

The game has some of the most ingenious track designs I've ever seen. The complex, multi-path courses are pleasingly varied and challenging. It's too bad much of winning or losing depends on random chance. Because it's so easy to wreck and the AI is so aggressive, you often feel like a rail shooting some rapids — if you happened to survive and place first, it's more because of random physics than your own skill. That's where frustration sets in, a feeling I felt far too often in Pacific Rift. Still, the best moments of this game are as good as it gets. —MATT

PLAYSTATION 3

SOCOM: Confrontation

> **STYLE** UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** SLANT SIX GAMES > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 14 > **ESRB** M



SOCOM RE-UPS

SOCOM: Confrontation gives the series a PlayStation 3-worthy makeover, but it plays like it was forged out of a rusting boilerplate. Everything from the interface to the controls to the game modes screams old-school, which is bound to please the built-in SOCOM fanbase. Newcomers might be turned off by its lack of innovation and of any kind of single-player experience.

The series felt outdated even on the PS2, so it's a shame that Slant Six didn't take this as an opportunity to revisit large parts of the game's design. SOCOM apologists oddly keep clinging to many of the especially outdated portions of the gameplay, repeating the mantra that it's just the way the series is. The thing is, now there are so many better alternatives available that it's tough to justify some of the series' quirks.

Take the controls, for instance. If you've equipped a scope, you're required to tap up on the D-pad twice to look through it. You can swap between two weapons relatively quickly, but grabbing anything else in your arsenal requires a visit through a clunky radial menu. If you run while your night-vision goggles

are on, they turn off, requiring you to flip the switch again. Players can create custom control schemes that alleviate some of these issues, but not all of the default commands can be changed. Fans will tell you that these are concessions toward keeping things realistic, but I doubt that a game that has a jump button and the option to dance on enemy corpses is fully committed to that vision.

While the game's modes are standard fare, the maps are some of the best I've played. They've been designed with multiple routes and have plenty of places for camping and for sneaking up on campers. The larger ones are huge, but they're not so big that you won't ever find anyone to shoot. Weapons are varied, though they don't seem to be as effective (or consistent) as you might expect. For all the talk of accurate bullet modeling, something doesn't seem right, demonstrated by people absorbing and surviving multiple headshots.

If you've enjoyed past SOCOM games and are looking for a better-looking version of what you've played before, check out Confrontation. It's fun in a way that just about all multiplayer games are —

you're sharing an experience with real-life opponents. If you'd like to play something with fresh ideas and a thick sheen of polish, though, keep marching. —JEFF

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** The military shooter hits the PlayStation 3 in a multiplayer-only offering

> **Graphics:** Linear, ranging from good (environments) to awful (character faces)

> **Sound:** Fantastic all around. With the right setup, you'll be surrounded by boot-loosening explosions, ping-pongs, and all manner of gunfire

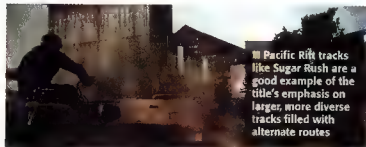
> **Playability:** The game's peculiar controls haven't been resisted in any meaningful way, which could keep newcomers away

> **Entertainment:** If you've liked past SOCOM games, rejoice. SOCOM Confrontation provides much more of the same

> **Repeat Value:** High

Second Opinion 6

Nope. SOCOM hasn't gotten any better. The control scheme still beggars belief with its awfulness — even though it lets you remap functions wherever you like, the horrendously cumbersome zoom mechanic still constantly gets in the way. The front end is archaic as ever, forcing users to choose a "chassis" with a 256-player cap and then browse for a game within that. On the plus side, the map design in this online-only iteration is great — if I could play Counter-Strike on these boards, I'd be ecstatic. Fans of the franchise, questionable though their taste may be, will have a blast with Confrontation. When the game is at its best, with massive battles being decided by the skills and teamwork of close-knit groups of players, it's easy to see why it has a dedicated fanbase. Unfortunately, the game's many mechanical issues prevent it from hitting those highs far more often than not. —ADAM



■ Pacific Rift tracks like Sugar Rush are a good example of the title's emphasis on larger, more diverse tracks filled with alternate routes



Wii

Wario Land: Shake It

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** GOOD-FEEL > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** E

GWAAAAH!!

Two-dimensional platforming fans have had no choice but to stick with handhelds for the past decade. Nintendo's big return to the genre on home consoles comes in the form of Mario's flautendoppelganger. Thankfully, the thin treasure-hunting plot (told through traditionally animated cutscenes) is confined to the very beginning and end. However, instead of using localized voice-work, Nintendo just paid some clumps to grunt into

the microphone while subtitles flashed along the bottom. The cost cutting doesn't stop there. When playing on a 16:9 TV, you'll still see a 4:3 gameplay screen with crappy borders on the side. Everyday Shooter supports both fatos, for Pete's sake, and that was made by one guy!

For every non-boss stage, you'll collect treasure and coins, rescue an impish Merfle creature, and dash back to the beginning as fast as you can. The title "Shake It" refers to the wagging needed to empty coin bags, smash the ground, or ruffle up an enemy. If you complete all of the level's tempting achievement-like missions (e.g. don't take damage) and collect its three treasures you might even unlock...music tracks.

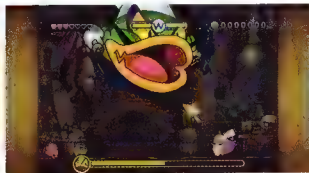
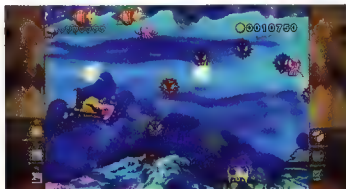
Most of the game is a relaxed, easy jaunt where it's almost impossible to die. Like a

sucker punch to the neck, however, some of the later bosses become surprisingly difficult. The game is either extremely easy or extremely hard with no middle ground. It's like developer Good-Feel couldn't decide between the Super Princess Peach and Mega Man audience.

However, for a quick five to eight hour experience, you'll find a few clever puzzles, see some slick character animation, and mess around with some random subgame side-missions. If you're looking for a weekend rental, this could be an okay retro choice. You can beat this on Saturday and, if you still feel like playing, go after some extra levels and uncompleted missions on Sunday. —**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Bring old-school 2D platforming back to the home console
> **Graphics:** Hand-drawn characters, especially bosses, look great
> **Sound:** Much of the tunes sound like '80s sitcom outro music
> **Playability:** Sideways remote running and jumping is neat, but anything involving tilting or shaking drops in reliability 35 percent
> **Entertainment:** Prepare for plenty of purple ass giggling
> **Replay Value:** Moderate



Second Opinion 7

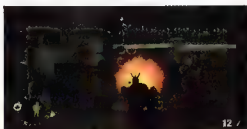
Everything about this game — its low frame animation, short levels, and lazy excuse for a story — screams handheld game. I imagine this was originally planned for DS, but someone at Nintendo thought it would be better served with tacked-on motion controls and a subtitle to match. I don't agree, because the motion controls are rarely used in inventive ways. Shake It would benefit from some graphical polish and difficulty balancing. Still, this is a serviceable platformer that invites you to explore and replay its imaginative levels. Traditionally, trudging back through an area I've just finished is a pain, but Shake It managed to make speed-running back out of levels I'd just explored my favorite part of the game. —**BEN**

Wii QUICKIES

Wii

Brothers in Arms: Double Time

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** OCEANING/EA GAMES/EA GAMES SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23 > **ESRB** M

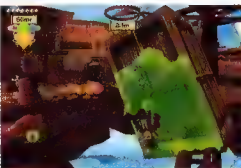


BOTTOM LINE 5
Congratulations, Wii owners! While Xbox 360, PS3, and PC owners are enjoying the latest chapter of Brothers in Arms in high definition, you get to relive the glory of the first two games in this buggy, ugly-as-hell port that eliminates the multiplayer and sabotages the single-player campaign with frequent stutters and framerate issues. Controlling your unit through flank and suppress maneuvers is easy enough, but killing Nazis can be an exercise in frustration mostly due to the poor hit detection. With a refined game engine, improved hit detection, and some sorely needed multiplayer modes, this would have had a chance of survival. But in its haggard current state, the only people remembering this soldier's sacrifice will likely be its parents. —**BERTZ**

Wii

Spray

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** GENIUS PRODUCTZ > **DEVELOPER** INMILE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 7
When you hear the words vomit-infused gameplay, do you think, "hilarious" or do you turn a little green and say, "what the deuce? That's disgusting!" If it's the latter then this isn't the game for you. As a spirited young prince named Ray, you travel a fantasy realm with an angel and a demon over your shoulder who each puke everything from slime to water to ice. Using these different liquid elements, you can stick to walls and uncover hidden paths. Many of the game's puzzles have clever solutions that require you to explore your environment thoroughly. But while the overall concept is imaginative, Spray's action and story aren't nearly so, leaving us with a game that's a little difficult to digest. —**BEN**

Wii

Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** GAMECOCK > **DEVELOPER** RED FLY STUDIO > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 5.75
Mushroom Men has a few things going for it, like cool characters and clever sound design. Unfortunately, none of the good stuff has any bearing on the gameplay, which is a total mess. The camera is awful, the level designs are boring, and combat is comprised of whipping the remote around and hoping that you hit something. The addition of telekinesis might have been cool if it worked well, but it's just frustrating. Throw in some rote collection goals and you'll find yourself wondering why you're subjecting yourself to this. Even in the realm of sub-average platformers, you have several better options than Mushroom Men. —**JOE**

Wii

Ultimate Band

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** DISNEY INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** FALL LINE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 7.5
As simple, easy-to-grasp music games go, Ultimate Band deserves a nod of appreciation. Sure, these are simplistic cover versions of pop songs, the story is juvenile, and overly easy gameplay dominates the game. But it also doesn't cost \$160, and it plays on a game system nearly every family in America with small children has in their living room. Understanding the game is largely targeted to this audience, the pros and cons are a wash, and families should have a pretty good time. A band creator allows you to deck out some zany musicians, and the straightforward, pick-up-and-play motion controls work successfully. Four-person band play is the way to go (no singer, just an arm-swinging frontman), and every instrument feels unique. Keep expectations in check, and your band should have a good time, even if it's nowhere near the "ultimate" music game experience. —**MILLER**

WING

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Wii Music

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO
> RELEASE OCTOBER 20 > ESRB E

I HATE MUSIC (IT'S GOT TOO MANY NOTES)

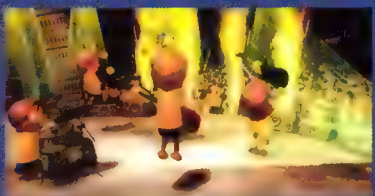
Finally, Nintendo has seen fit to deliver us from the honors of Guitar Hero and Rock Band's intuitive gameplay, accurate mechanics, and great song selections. Thank god. Now I can stop pretending that I was having fun rocking out to Metallica and live my dream of playing backup cowbell in a cruise ship band version of "Yankee Doodle."

Yes, folks, *Wii Music* is here. Here are the basics (and believe me, it's all basics): You select a song and one of dozens of instruments. Then you and up to three friends can waggle your remotes and press buttons in time, and begin creating what can only be described as a god-awful racket. The notes are automatically generated, but do change in pitch along to the prescribed melody (and slightly altered by holding-down buttons at random). In addition, well, no that's pretty much it, actually. You can save these performances for posterity, but haven't we suffered enough already?

My problems with the game's design aside, it's necessary to point out that *Wii Music* just doesn't work very well. Wind instruments are the most responsive because

they only involve pressing the 1 and 2 buttons. Any stringed or percussion instruments involve swinging the remote, which doesn't sense well enough to allow you to follow the note patterns with any accuracy. With each person adding another layer of inconsistent timekeeping, the songs devolve into what sounds like a particularly spastic rehearsal of an elementary school band. While it's somewhat amusing to hear what "The Entertainer" would sound like with a sitar, it's not enough to make this anywhere near compelling. A few of the minigames are more useful, particularly the pitch trainer and the bell choir (which uses [gasps] actual note tablature). These aside, *Wii Music* is nothing more than the digital equivalent of buying your child a toy drum set to freak out on, and possibly as annoying.

More importantly, *Wii Music* is a poor solution to an imaginary problem. Rock Band and Guitar Hero have gotten more non-gamers and casual gamers into the hobby than any titles I can think of in the last 20 years. And guess what? They like actual guitar, just like us. —MATT



BOTTOM LINE 3

> **Concept:** Make a music game, but dispense with all that "skill" and actual gameplay nonsense.

> **Graphics:** Utilizes *Wii Sports* level graphics in a simple environment. Fans of *Wii Sports* will be right at home.

> **Sound:** Random public domain folk and classical songs, Muzak versions of light-weight pop tunes and some Nintendo theme songs — All being strangled within an inch of their lives.

> **Playability:** On a standard television, the control is impressive. On our two different models of HDTVs, lag renders it nearly unplayable (and it does not let you calibrate).

> **Entertainment:** Recommending this title would require me to radically change my definition of the words "music," "game," and "fun."

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 4

ever wanted to play "Little Hans" or "The Entertainer" in a video game? Well now you can. *Wii Music*'s song list contains 15 public domain hits, 15 "contemporary" tunes, and 7 Nintendo themes. Even if the list weren't terrible, the best sound you can hope to create out of the game edges up to Muzak. If there's any fun to be had here, it's in the handheld minigame or crafting the most obnoxious song possible to annoy your friends and family. The balance board-supported drums aren't much better. For a company that's prided itself on making gaming accessible to everyone, Nintendo has somehow managed to make a drum simulator that's more complicated than real-life drumming. —BRYAN

PC

Crysis Warhead

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER CRYTEK
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 16 > ESRB M



BOTTOM LINE 8.75

MEANWHILE, ACROSS THE ISLAND...

Crytek's follow-up to *Far Cry* was a beautiful open world, Warhead's well-packed missions are action packed and still give you plenty of options as to how you can approach the objectives. That never hit critical mass. In this respect *Crysis Warhead* fares much better. You finally don't need a NASA supercomputer to experience the thrill of eliminating a squad and disappearing into the jungle like the Predator.

This standalone side campaign follows Sergeant Michael "Psycho" Sykes on his mission to secure an alien specimen currently in the hands of the North Koreans. Like *Nomad*, Psycho dons a nano-suit that lets him run faster, jump higher, aim steadier, hide better, and absorb more bullets than his enemies. Psycho also has access to a few new toys that *Nomad* never used, such as an impressive new grenade launcher that turns your enemies into mulch.

Warhead carefully blends the sandbox gameplay that made Crytek famous with a more streamlined campaign featuring larger set-piece battles involving North Korean regiments, aerial alien attacks, and

fast-paced chase sequences. While I missed the completely open world, Warhead's well-packed missions are action packed and still give you plenty of options as to how you can approach the objectives.

Somewhere along the line the North Koreans secured nano-suits of their own, but your adversaries rarely use the more impressive functions like speed and cloaking to create the frantic battles seen in games like *FEAR*. Then again, neither do the fellow elite soldiers you fight alongside during certain missions. The normal difficulty setting also seems pared down — Psycho can absorb a lot more bullets and ion pulses than *Nomad* could.

On the multiplayer front, Warhead introduces a team deathmatch mode, revamped balancing, and a handful of better maps, but does little to match the depth of other online shooters like *Call of Duty 4*'s persistent rankings, perks, and unlockable arsenals. Thankfully the action-packed single-player campaign hits the sweet spot that the multiplayer misses, which makes *Crysis Warhead* an exceptional value. —BERTZ

> **Concept:** Square off against North Koreans and hostile aliens in a new side-story campaign.

> **Graphics:** Don't be fooled, the game's amazing graphics still push your rig to the max. Cutscenes also look great, but the latter "emotional" moments are spoiled by overacting and poor direction.

> **Sound:** In case you can't tell by his accent, Psycho will consistently remind you that he's British, you muppet.

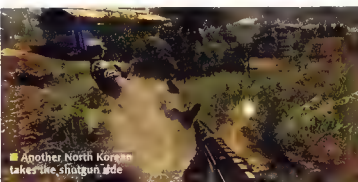
> **Playability:** Scales down to accommodate weaker PCs, but finding the right setting for silky smooth gaming can be troublesome.

> **Entertainment:** Fans of the early levels of *Crysis* should definitely pick this up.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.75

Whatever else it may have been, *Crysis* was a blast when it got out of its own way and allowed players to creatively abuse their nano-suit granted super powers to dominate anything in their path. This standalone expansion aims to focus in on that aspect of the gameplay, and it largely succeeds. The story is still throwaway, but the action is more explosive than ever, the new weapons are fun, and not having null-gravity sections is a very good thing. At the same time, the gameplay hasn't changed at all and often times gets just as formulaic as it does in the original. If you've got the rig to run it, though, Warhead is a fun way to blast through a dozen hours or so. —ADAM



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scene it?

IS THERE
A BLACK BELT
FOR MOVIE TRIVIA?

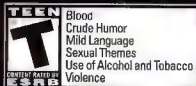
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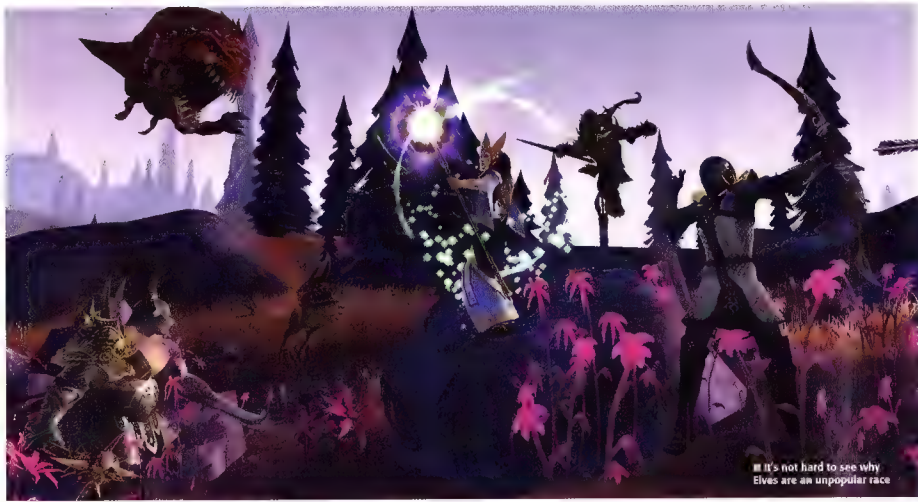


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game studios

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Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE



It's not hard to see why Elves are an unpopular race

BOTTOM LINE

8

- > **Concept:** Cleave closely to traditional MMO design, but with greater integration of player-versus-player combat
- > **Graphics:** Decent with everything turned up, but the relentlessly dreary world and art style will wear on some
- > **Sound:** No integrated voice chat is a mistake these days
- > **Playability:** You'll have to mod the interface to get it where you want it, but fortunately that's an easy process
- > **Entertainment:** You have to really love PVP to make this worth the time—but for those that do, this is the one game to rule them all
- > **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion

7

Warhammer Online is a two-headed beast that enrages me with its (mostly) balanced class mechanics and innovative public quests, and forces me to throw my keyboard in frustration with its poor balancing in PvE, PvP, and realm-versus-realm battles. Playing Order in this game, which was unfortunately a mistake I made, magnifies the problems even further. Even on my Open RvR realm, there was little open warfare in the world, mostly due to the fact that Mythic made Destruction a far too attractive faction. Better-looking models and classes will always trump spissy looking elves in Conehead helms. Throw in poor quest design, and too much focus on Scenarios (Warhammer's version of the Battleground from World of Warcraft), and we have a potentially great game that doesn't reach its promise due to poor design decisions. Mythic is addressing many of the problems with each new patch, but the product out of the box is flawed in many ways. —ANDY

PC

Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA MYTHIC > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 18 > **ESRB** T

HAMMERED HOME

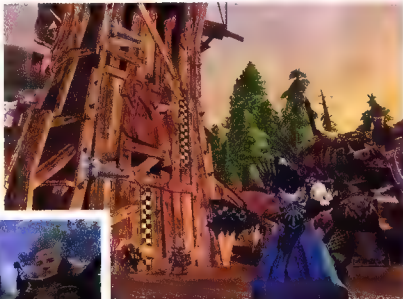
Warhammer Online is a well-made, deeply entertaining game that may provide an unparalleled experience for years to come—for a small subset of hardcore player-versus-player gamers in good guilds on balanced servers. For most everyone else, Warhammer will be a reasonably fun time for a month or two before it's time to move on. The game does one thing better than anyone else: open, non-instanced, public realm-versus-realm combat. However, the good design that underlies Warhammer's RvR gameplay only shines through on servers that have a relatively even population of Order and Destruction players. Unfortunately, there aren't many of those.

Thematically, Warhammer's dark aesthetic will appeal to people turned off by World of Warcraft's cartoony style. Mechanically, the game works nearly identically to WoW, with the exceptions that tanks have an extremely fun role in PvP and the player-versus-environment content is boring. The mechanics of the various classes work together to create an endlessly mutable combat dynamic, where teamwork and player skill determine the outcome of the frantic battles. Abilities are varied and fun to use, the community features are second to none, and the servers are largely stable and lag-free.

None of that matters when, as is all too often the case, the only PvP gameplay to be found is in the instanced minigame sessions called Scenarios. On most servers, Destruction badly outnumbers Order, making it an utterly futile gesture for Order to take the field in public RvR spaces. Scenarios, with their enforced even teams, lend themselves to much better gameplay. However, the gimmicky setups (most of them are knockoffs of FPS match types, with analogues to everything from Murderball to Territories) get old after a few dozen rounds. At this point you're stuck grinding out your levels via crappy

PvE or in rethread scenarios.

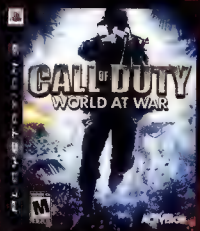
When Warhammer works as it's intended, though, it's amazing. Keep sieges and battles for control of objectives in non-instanced combat is an absolute not when the factions are evenly represented. On those few servers where this situation crops up regularly, WAR reaches its potential and offers an experience as good as anything on the market today.



Standard MMO review caveats apply here (it's a living game, so keep an eye on the patch notes), and Mythic is aware of the problems Warhammer is encountering. It is clearly designed with endgame play as the primary focus—that's where you'll find the best public RvR content, like city sieges—so hopefully these issues will dissolve as the game matures. Unfortunately, with slow leveling between the teens and a level cap of 40, a lot of players will burn out long before the endgame. The foundation is very strong, though, so hopefully Warhammer Online can someday reach its potential for everyone, rather than the lucky few.—ADAM



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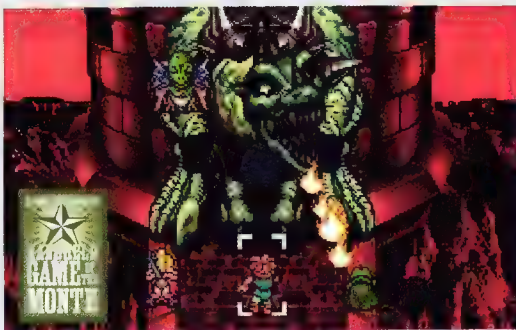
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NINTENDO DS

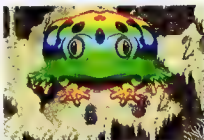
Chrono Trigger

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (2-PLAYER VIA LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 25 > **ESRB** E10+

TIMELESS

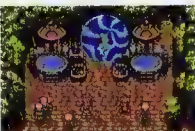
I don't think I stopped smiling for a minute as I played Chrono Trigger DS. With its mix of nostalgia and straight-up excellent design, this is one of the best role-playing games ever made. A great cast of characters, cool story, and excellent combat mechanics—Chrono Trigger is one of those games that has it all.

In case you missed it the first time, Chrono Trigger is the adventure of a time-traveling boy and his companions who hail from various historical eras. An extra-terrestrial beast named Lavos destroys the world in the distant future, so Crono and his pals go to different periods in time to find the root of the disaster and stop it before it can happen. The party members are far more than traveling buddies; Chrono Trigger uses an inventive combat system that allows you



to perform cooperative attacks with allies for a dizzying variety of potential maneuvers. I don't know why this system hasn't been used in more RPGs since—it's ingenious.

Chrono Trigger hasn't changed much since it was first released for the SNES in 1995. The interface is cleaner since all of the battle stats are on the bottom screen, and there are a couple new bells and whistles, but that's about it. That's not necessarily a bad thing—the gameplay withstands the test of time, but you shouldn't expect any drastic improvements. Then again, there aren't many ways you could improve on Chrono Trigger. It's a true classic, and playing it should be a government-mandated rite of passage for any role-playing fan. —JOE



OLD GAME

As with many of Square Enix's classic ports, there are a few new features in Chrono Trigger DS, but they don't add much. The two new dungeons are interesting and offer some cool rewards (including a new ending), but they only become available at or near the end of the game. There is also a monster training diversion, but it's flat-out boring. These additions aren't exactly selling points, but I can't fault them too much since they are on the periphery. They don't interfere with the core experience in the slightest.

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept** Remind gamers why Chrono Trigger is almost universally adored

> **Graphics:** Akira Toriyama's character designs come through in clean, classic sprites. There are even some anime-style cutscenes thrown in

> **Sound:** So good. One of the best RPG soundtracks ever, hands-down

> **Playability:** There's no tacked-on touch screen garbage, and the dual screens mean that the battle screen is undistracted

> **Entertainment:** Regardless of whether you've played Chrono Trigger before, it delivers constant enjoyment

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

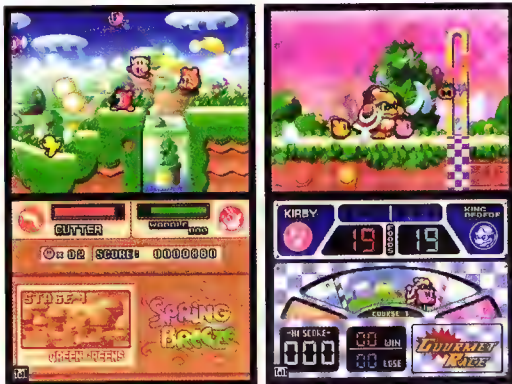
Second Opinion

Some games don't stand the test of time. Chrono Trigger is not one of those games. A standout title that remains one of the most cohesive and entertaining entries in console RPG history, it's a game that simultaneously embraces familiar mechanics while broaching new narrative territory that hadn't been attempted at the time of its original release. This new DS version is a remarkably faithful port, except for some more interface options that take advantage of the double screens, as well as a couple of minor expanded content pieces. The battle system, with its cooperative strikes, is both entertaining and engaging. A perfectly paced story delivers simple but memorable characters and just the right amount of flexibility versus linear paths. About the greatest frustration that arose as I played was the sense of tawdriness that we haven't yet seen more games with a "Chrono" prefix.—MILLER

NINTENDO DS

Kirby Super Star Ultra

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** HAL LABORATORY > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** E



KIRBY IS ALRIGHT WITH ME

Kirby has had his ups and downs in his video game career, but many of his peaks happen in games that eschew his traditional platforming gameplay—most notably Kirby Canvas Curse, Kirby's Dream Course, and Kirby Tilt n' Tumble. The reason for this should be pretty obvious to anyone who plays Kirby Super Star Ultra. Simply, his floaty, slow controls make him a fairly unexciting platforming character. While his habit of inhaling

is that this pokey, fairly easy platformer often isn't difficult enough for one player, let alone two. While the Gourmet Race level is much better for duos (especially the versus mode), this feature doesn't impact the gameplay enough to truly elevate the overall experience.

What's left is a game that is clearly a few generations behind the times. Like most HAL Laboratory titles, it's well made, but the craftsmanship doesn't equal much excite-



ment, especially when compared to DS titles like New Super Mario Bros. or Kirby's own innovative Canvas Curse. If you're looking for an old-school experience of exploring 2D levels while collecting various trinkets and avoiding enemies you (for its day) innovative co-op gameplay. With the DS wireless connection, this feature is still present; you can also spawn an AI-controlled competitor for solo play. While it makes a great bullet point for a press release, the reality

could be worse. It's certainly a fun and solidly made title. However, there are plenty of similar DS games that I would recommend over Super Star Ultra. —MATT

could be worse. It's certainly a fun and solidly made title. However, there are plenty of similar DS games that I would recommend over Super Star Ultra. —MATT

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** An enhanced port of a little remembered SNES platformer, with two-player co-op support

> **Graphics:** Fans of the colorful 16-bit days, its revamped graphics are beautiful. Also features new animated cutscenes

> **Sound:** Minimal sound effects, forgettable music. Kirby is no Mario in the sound department

> **Playability:** Kirby's not the most nimble platformer hero on the block, but the basic gameplay is sound

> **Entertainment:** Kirby will be nostalgic fun for some, but its new features don't do enough to make it relevant for today's gaming scene

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.25

While this remake may not have the impact that the original SNES version did, its use of multiple "games" remains cute and clever on a macro level. But after plenty of suck, swallow, transform, kill, the various ways HAL Labs frames these packs of stages lades into the background and you're left with a relatively simple and easy platformer by today's standards. However, the punchy graphics and new endgame content will do the trick for nostalgic gamers, and Smash Bros. fans might enjoy seeing where a lot of the Kirby content and music came from. —BRYAN

BOTTOM LINE **6.25**

NINTENDO DS

Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA LOCAL OR ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** TECMO
> **DEVELOPER** POLYGON MAGIC > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11 > **ESRB** E

FROM SUPER BOWL TO TOILET BOWL

As a kid, my dedication to Tecmo Super Bowl bordered on obsession. The game didn't keep year-to-year season data, so I created my own NFL almanac, noting the record performances for passing, rushing, and receiving that I would try to best during my next season with a new team. All these years later I still couldn't wait for the remake, but in losing the NFL license, Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff also lost much of its allure.

Sure, the game includes 32 teams that just happen to be from the 32 other cities of NFL franchises. The game also lets you customize every team name, color scheme, and player name. Unfortunately, the customization also limits what you can do to alter player stats and abilities, so recreating Tecmo Bowl legends like Bo Jackson, Christian Okoye, and QB Eagles is not entirely within your power. The lack of roster shading also means you must manually edit every generic player name if you want to relive Tecmo Bowl's glory days or create an up-to-date pro roster. With the generic preset rosters, you have no idea who is good at what unless you spend hours learning the idiosyncrasies of each team.

Between the hashmarks, not much has changed from the glory days—for

better and for worse. The plays are the same, the controls are the same, and the same maneuvers result in epic runs and ridiculous sack totals. I added a few special abilities for star players, which is a nice evolution, but that's about it.

The biggest bone I have to pick with Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff is its overall lack of refinement; most of the major problems with the original game are still intact. Players injured during the season mode also cannot play during quick games, injured players step on the field to return kicks even though they can't otherwise play, and the game never tells you the length of a player injury. The stats are also a mess. Statistical juggernauts putting up record-worthy numbers will often fail to appear on the leaderboards. You would think Tecmo would hire at least one (just one!) person familiar enough with football to know it's a rushing "attempt," not "completion." They even call two-point conversions touchdowns! And why can't I pick both teams for the quick play mode?

I had high hopes for the return of my favorite childhood football game. But without any meaningful new features or the NFL license to prop up the game on nostalgia value, it fails to turn in a memorable performance. —BERTZ

> **Concept:** Resurrect a legendary football franchise but tip its best aspect away without compensation elsewhere

> **Graphics:** The same blocky blockades and receivers you remember from the NES days, plus a few new cutscenes

> **Sound:** Classic 8-bit theme, but I chose to play on mute

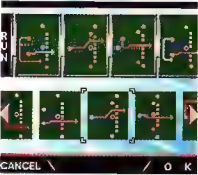
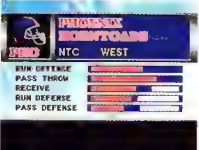
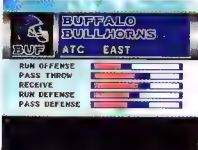
> **Playability:** Stylus controls work well until you want to perform a diving tackle

> **Entertainment:** Most of the nostalgia is lost with the absence of the NFL license

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **6**

Tecmo Bowl's brand of Keystone Kops football is charming, but it simply cannot stand up to its own brainless bumbling. The addition of player special abilities is welcome—especially as highlighted by the game's familiar stop-motion cutscenes—but it's not enough embellishment to the simple gameplay. I had a hard time adjusting to either the button- or touch screen-based passing controls, and the classic guess-the-play strategy was boring even back in the day. There's no masking that there's not much to this game, and its prominent presence in your memory is stronger than its fleeting substance. —KATO

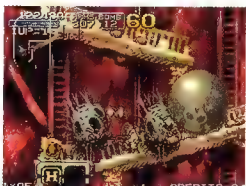


HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Metal Slug 7

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA LOCAL OR ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** GUNTER & GUNTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SINK PLAMORIC > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 10 > **ESRB** E

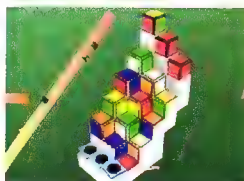


BOTTOM LINE **6.75** Buyer beware: Metal Slug 7 has absolutely no two-player co-op. If you're still willing to give the game a shot, you'll find some snazzy animation and impressive set-piece moments like controlling a screen-filling Slug. The main campaign is relatively average, but it's nice that you can jump into any mission once you've beaten it. Unfortunately, the bottom screen contains a useless lives map instead of incorporating the action somehow and the "Training Grounds" bonus challenges feel too similar to the main game. —BRYAN

NINTENDO DS

Rubik's World

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** GAME FACTORY > **DEVELOPER** TWO TRIBES > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 20 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE **8** Welcome to Rubik's World, where you'll find both brain-bruising puzzles and pointless, casual fun all in one cart. The game's more traditional puzzle modes feature tributes to titles like Mario Picross, Tetris, and Enochrome. Rubik's isn't just one big digital cube to solve (although it's included), as the individual cubes start in sideways takes on different puzzle conventions. While this vanity makes Rubik's World a versatile title, some of the modes are throwaway material, like the music-maker and the create-a-picture mode. Still, there's plenty here to twist and turn your brain. —KATO

NINTENDO DS

Ninjatown

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER VIA LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** SOUTHPeAK GAMES > **DEVELOPER** VENAN ENTERTAINMENT, INC. > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 20 > **ESRB** E

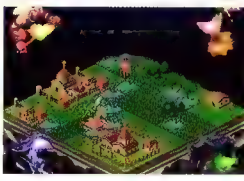


BOTTOM LINE **9** Don't let the cute-pie exterior fool you—Ninjatown is a gamer's game through and through. The units in this tower-defense title are versatile and useful, enemies are diverse and deadly, and there are enough power-ups and options to keep things fresh. Best of all, levels don't seem to have a preset way to beat them, unlike many tower-defense games on the market. Some strategies may work better, but as long as you put some thought into your actions you're bound to do all right. Whether it's to improve your score ranking or to check out multiplayer, Ninjatown will pull you back again and again. —JEFF

NINTENDO DS

Populous DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** KESHO GAMES > **DEVELOPER** EA GAMES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE **7** Populous is one of the most revered classics in all of gaming, and this DS remake retains the flavor of the original to a fault. Dropping divine wrath on the heads of your enemies' hapless worshippers and molding the land to better suit your desires—are the only interactions you have with the game world—are still great hooks. Additions like the new miracle sets are also nice. Unfortunately, flaws that were non-issues in 1989 are less forgivable now. The erratic, jerky behavior of your worshippers, ultra-simple gameplay mechanics, and complete lack of story or context will be significant barmers for anyone, nostalgia or no. —ADAM



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

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

1 STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED (360)



Since Christmas is all about family, we decided to let our Dad help us put together our 7th Annual Holiday Charts rap. So without further ado, 1,2,3...

My name is Dad and I'm here to say...
I live a hard Jedi life, and I've been working like a dog.
I'm a tough Jedi knight, I should be sleeping like a log.
(Dad, are you stealing lyrics from the Beatles?)

2 Wii FIT (Wii)



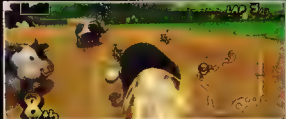
My name is Dad and I'm here to say...
I got a huge gut and a double chin
No more cake for me, that would be a sin
Every night I sit down to play Wii Fit
Even though we think it's a big pile of (hey, watch your mouth)

3 ROCK BAND 2 (360)



My name is Dad and I'm here to say...
Rock Band is rad in every way
So when you're feeling blue and about ready to pout
Turn that frown around and rock out with your clock out (that's not the expression)

4 MARIO KART Wii (Wii)



My name is Dad and I'm here to say...
I think I'm gonna be sad, I think it's today yeah.
Cause that Mario's driving me mad, and now he's pulling away, yeah.
Mario's got a ticket to ride, Mario's got a ticket to ride,
Mario's got a ticket to ride, and he don't care
(Stop stealing from the Beatles, Pop)

5 STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED (PS3)



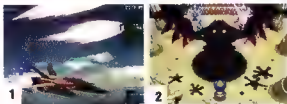
My name is Dad, and I'm here to say...
I play Force Unleashed nearly every day
Cause I'm hip, I'm slick, and I ain't no fool
And playing in school is very cool
Ward!

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release
1	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	N/A	360	8.75	09-08
2	Wii Fit	4	Wii	8	04-08
3	Rock Band 2	N/A	360	9.25	09-08
4	Mario Kart Wii	5	Wii	8.5	04-08
5	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	N/A	PS3	8.75	09-08
6	Mercenaries 2: World in Flames	N/A	360	7.25	09-08
7	Wii Play	6	Wii	7	02-07
8	Madden NFL 09	1	360	8.25	06-08
9	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	N/A	Wii	N/A	09-08
10	Madden NFL 09	3	PS2	8.25	06-08
11	Madden NFL 09	2	PS3	8.25	04-08
12	LEGO Batman	N/A	PS2	7.5	09-08
13	Super Mario Sluggers	11	Wii	5.5	06-08
14	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	N/A	PS2	N/A	09-08
15	Kirby Super Star Ultra	N/A	DS	7	09-08
16	Mercenaries 2: World in Flames	N/A	PS3	7.25	09-08
17	NHL 09	N/A	360	9.25	09-08
18	LEGO Batman	N/A	Wii	7.5	09-08
19	LEGO Batman	N/A	360	7.5	09-08
20	Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	N/A	360	7.75	09-08

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Forecast™/NPD™

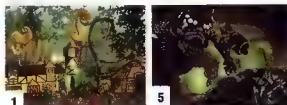
TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Macross Aca Frontier	PSP
2	Pokémon Platinum	DS
3	Rhythm Heaven	DS
4	Shin Sangoku Musou 5 Special	PS2
5	Super Robot Taisen Z	PS2
6	Wii Fit	Wii
7	Mario Kart Wii	Wii
8	Powerful Major League Baseball 3	PS2
9	Dragon Ball DS	DS
10	Daigasso! Band Brothers DX	DS



TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	LittleBigPlanet	N/A	PSS
2	Fallout 3	N/A	multi
3	Guitar Hero World Tour	N/A	multi
4	Fable II	N/A	360
5	Gears of War 2	N/A	360
6	Dead Space	1	multi
7	Midnight Club: Los Angeles	2	multi
8	Chrono Trigger	N/A	DS
9	Spore	3	PC
10	Rock Band 2	5	multi



The Staff's Favorite Peds

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	Spore	N/A	\$50
2	Warhammer Online: Age Of Reckoning	N/A	\$49
3	The Sims 2 Apartment Life	1	\$30
4	Warhammer Online: Age Of Reckoning Collectors Edition	N/A	\$80
5	Spore Galactic Edition	N/A	\$79
6	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	2	\$37
7	Crysis: Warhead	N/A	\$29
8	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	3	\$30
9	World Of Warcraft	4	\$20
10	Spore Creature Creator	5	\$10



Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Battle Fantasia	7.5	Oct-08
Battlefield: Bad Company	9.25	Jul-08
BioShock	9	Nov-08
Blitz: The League II	7	Nov-08
Bourne Conspiracy: The	6.75	Aug-08
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	7.75	Nov-08
Buzz Quiz TV	8.25	Nov-08
Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian, The	6.25	Jul-08
Civilization Revolution	9	Jul-08
Condemned 2: Bloodshot	8.75	Apr-08
Dark Sector	7.5	May-08
Dead Space	9.25	Nov-08
Dogma 3: Absence of Justice	8.25	Sep-08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	8	Jul-08
FaceBreaker	7.75	Oct-08
Ferran Challenge: Trofeo Pirelli	7.75	Nov-08
Fracture	7.5	Nov-08
Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	7.75	Jul-08
Grand Theft Auto IV	10	Jun-08
Grid	9	Jul-08
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	8	Aug-08
Hail to the Chimp	4	Jul-08
Heat	6.25	Jul-08
Hellboy: The Science of Fw	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 Batman - PlayStation 3 - Nov-08

LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Walden NFL 09	8.25	Sep-08
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames	7.25	Oct-08
Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	10	Jul-08
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	8	May-08
MLB 09: The Show	8.5	Apr-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
Monster Madness: Grave Danger	7.25	Aug-08
NASCAR 09	8	Jul-08
NBA 09: The Inside	6.5	Nov-08
NBA 2K9	8.5	Nov-08
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	6.75	Jun-08
NBA Live 09	7.75	Nov-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	8.25	May-08
Silent Hill: Homecoming	6.5	Nov-08
Soulcalibur IV	8.75	Sep-08
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	8	May-08
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	8.25	Oct-08
TNA Impact	6.75	Sep-08
Top Spin 3	7.75	Aug-08
Viking: Battle for Asgard	7.25	May-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08

XBOX 360

Alone in the Dark	6.5	Aug-08
Battle Fantasia	7.5	Oct-08
Battlefield: Bad Company	9.25	Jul-08
Blitz: The League II	7	Nov-08
Bourne Conspiracy, The	6.75	Aug-08
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	7.75	Nov-08
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Apr-08
Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian, The	6.25	Jul-08
Civilization Revolution	9	Jul-08
Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	7.25	Aug-08
Condemned 2: Bloodshot	8.75	Apr-08
Dark Messiah of Might & Magic: Elements	8	Apr-08
Dark Sector	7.5	May-08
Dead Space	9.25	Nov-08
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	7.5	Aug-08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	8	Jul-08
FaceBreaker	7.75	Oct-08
Fracture	7.5	Nov-08
Grand Theft Auto IV	10	Jun-08
Grid	9	Jul-08

Gully Gear 2: Overture	6.25	Oct-08
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	8	Aug-08
Hail to the Chimp	4	Jul-08
Hellboy: The Science of Fw	7	Jul-08
Incredible Hulk, The	6.75	Aug-08
Infinite Undiscovery	8	Jul-08
Iron Man	3.75	Jul-08



Dead Space - Xbox 360 - Nov-08

Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-08
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Lost Odyssey	8.5	Apr-08
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	8.25	Jun-08
Colones Edition	8.25	Jun-08
Midnight NFL 09	8.25	Sep-08
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames	7.25	Oct-08
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	8	May-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
NASCAR 09	8	Jul-08
NBA 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	6.75	Jun-08
NBA Live 09	7.75	Nov-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	9.25	Oct-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.25	May-08
Silent Hill: Homecoming	6.5	Nov-08
Soulcalibur IV	8.75	Sep-08
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	8	May-08
Supreme Commander	5.5	Sep-08
Tales of Vesperia	7.25	Oct-08
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	8.5	Oct-08
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
Top Spin 3	7.75	Aug-08
Universe at War: Earth Assault	5	Jun-08
Unreal Tournament 3	8.5	Aug-08
Viking: Battle for Asgard	7.25	May-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08
Warhammer Mark of Chaos - Battle March	5	Nov-08
Zoids Assault	5	Oct-08

Warhammer Mark of Chaos - Battle March	5	Nov-08
Zoids Assault	5	Oct-08

Wii

Active Life: Outdoor Challenge	7	Nov-08
Battle of the Bands	6	Jun-08
Blast Works: Build Trade Destroy	8	Jul-08
Boom! Blop	8.5	Jul-08
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Apr-08
Castle of Sengami III	6.5	May-08
de Blob	7.75	Oct-08
Death Jr. Root of Evil	7.25	Jul-08
Deca Sports	3	Jul-08
Destroy All Humans: Big Bigly Unleashed	5	May-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
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-08
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08

LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Line Rider 2: Unbound	6.25	Nov-08
Major League Baseball 2K8	6.75	May-08
Mario Kart Wii	8.5	Jun-08
Mario Super Sluggers	5.5	Oct-08
Ninja Reflex	5	Jun-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Clann	9.25	May-08
Order Up!	7.75	Sep-08
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	6.5	Apr-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	8.5	Apr-08
Rock Band	8.25	Aug-08
Rock Revolution	4.75	Nov-08
Sam & Max Season One	7	Nov-08
Samba de Amigo	6.75	Nov-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.5	May-08
SmilyCracker	3	Nov-08
Super Smash Bros. Brawl	9.5	Apr-08
Target Terror	4.5	Jul-08
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08

Wall-E	4	Sep-08
We Love Golf	6	Jul-08
We Sk8	6.25	Jun-08
We Fit	8	Jun-08
Wild Earth: African Safari	5.75	Jul-08
Worms: A Space Oddity	6.75	May-08

PLAYSTATION 2

LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-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: FES	8.25	May-08
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08

PC

Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures	8	Aug-08
Alone in the Dark	6.5	Aug-08
Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut Edition	9	Jun-08
Civilization IV: Colonization	9	Oct-08
Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	7.75	May-08
Lost Empire: Immortals	7.25	May-08
Mass Effect	9.5	Jul-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky	7.75	Nov-08
Seven Kingdoms: Conquest	4	May-08
Silent Hill: Homecoming	6.5	Nov-08
Sins of a Solar Empire	9	Apr-08
Space Siege	6	Oct-08
Sport	8.75	Nov-08
Warhammer Mark of Chaos - Battle March	5	Nov-08

NINTENDO DS

Away: Shuffle Dungeon	7.5	Oct-08
Bangai-O Spirits	7.5	Sep-08
Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	8.25	Nov-08
Civilization Revolution	8.5	Aug-08
Dogma 3	8	Oct-08
Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen	7	Oct-08
Drone Tactics	7	Jun-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: Island of Happiness	6.75	Oct-08
Insecticide	5.75	May-08
Like a Hunter: Detective Chronicles	6.5	Jun-08
L.O.L.	1	Aug-08
Lost in Blue 3	6.25	May-08
Major League Baseball 2K8	5.5	Jun-08
Fantasy All Stars	6.25	Nov-08
Master of the Monster Lair	7	Oct-08
Mystery Case Files: Millionaire	8.75	Oct-08
N++	6.25	Oct-08
New International Track & Field	7.75	May-08
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	7.75	May-08
Pop Cutie Street	7.5	Oct-08
Fashion Simulation	7.5	Oct-08
Puchi Puchi Virus	7.5	May-08
Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure	5.5	Oct-08
Some Chronicles	8.5	Nov-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08
Summer Night: Twen Age Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Thingies!	7	Jun-08
Time Hollow	6.75	May-08
Time Hollow	7	Nov-08
Tauma Center	8.25	Aug-08
Under the Knife 2	8.25	May-08
World Ends With You	8.25	May-08

PSP

FlatOut Head On	7.5	May-08
Hot Shots! Golf: Open Tee 2	8	Jul-08
N++	8.25	Oct-08
R-Type Command	7.75	Oct-08
Secret Agent Clark	8.5	Jul-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08
Star Ocean: First Departure	7	Nov-08
Wild Arms XF	7.5	May-08

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Dead Space

Surviving Your Time Aboard the USG Ishimura

By Rich Briggs, Producer



Dismember, Dismember, Dismember – Head shots are not the answer in Dead Space. In fact, taking off an enemy's head will likely send it into a berserker rage. You need to tear off their limbs if you want to succeed. If you see a yellowish area on a Necromorph – shoot it. Some weapons are more effective than others at damaging certain Necromorphs, and each enemy has a weak spot. When you fight a new Necromorph, try different weapons on it and target different limbs to see what rips it apart the best. However, it's worth noting that most enemies have an over-the-top kill for Isaac. Save your game often and don't be afraid to let yourself die the first time you encounter an enemy.

Love Your Locator – The locator is your best friend when you get turned around, or are not sure where to go for your next objective. Since Isaac's RIG is synched with the *Ishimura*, the ship will draw a glowing hologram on the floor showing you the proper path, and will even auto-face you in the right direction. You can go into the map screen and select which objective you are working on to ensure that you are never lost.

Use Preemptive Strikes – Not every corpse is a potential Infector target, but it never hurts to give a corpse a stamp if it's right in your path. Infectors will leave a completely dismembered corpse alone, and if they animate a corpse, any damage you've inflicted remains. So taking off a corpse's legs means the resulting Necromorph will be dragging itself after you instead of running after you.

Power Node Placement – As you are powering up your weapons, you will notice that there are multiple paths through the weapon schematics. You can max out a weapon without filling every single node, and you'll waste power nodes if you fill unnecessary nodes. Once you commit to a node placement you cannot go back, so think carefully about the path you want to take. Plan ahead to ensure you are powering up the weapon to support your playing style. In addition, be sure to keep one power node in your inventory at all

times if possible. You never know when you'll come across a locked door that requires a power node to open it. Sure, this means you may be giving up an immediate upgrade on a weapon, but the items behind the locked door will usually be worth more than the 10K credits it costs to purchase another power node from the store.

Treasure Hunting – You can choose to follow your locator from one objective to the next, but going off the beaten path can sometimes lead you to events you wouldn't otherwise experience. It is also a great way to find semiconductors that are scattered around the *Ishimura*, which can be sold for substantial credits at the store.

Telekinesis = Resource Management – You will almost never run out of ammo if you use TK. When you are getting low on ammo, start using objects in the environment as projectiles. Don't fire your last shot then look around for something to throw. Machine blades on the ground, fire extinguishers, and of course, the holy grail of explosive canisters will all do damage to an enemy. Even a tool box can knock an enemy back and give you some breathing room. Slasher and Pregnant arm blades can be used to deal out damage, and you can even shoot out a vent and use the fan blade that falls among the pieces.

Environmental Weapons – Any time you see a malfunctioning gravity panel or a fast moving door, see if you can use it to your advantage in combat. Using a TK projectile to knock an enemy into a malfunctioning gravity panel not only saves ammo, it's also cool.



The Many Joys of Stasis – Never underestimate the combat applications of Stasis. Use it for crowd control or to keep enemies burning on a napalm patch or in range of a Line Gun Mine. Remember that unlike TK, Stasis is a finite resource, so keep an extra recharge pack in your inventory. A slow enemy is a strategically dismembered enemy.

Airless Combat Rookie Mistakes – Don't bother pulling out your flamethrower in an airless or poison-filled environment.

It won't ignite, and you'll just waste time having to switch to another weapon. Also, keep an eye on your oxygen meter to ensure you don't defeat wave after wave of Necromorphs only to choke to death in front of the airlock.

Fighting in Quarantine – During a quarantine battle, all exits are sealed until the enemy threat has been eliminated. When you hear the sirens blare, see shutters close over the windows and doors, and the Ship Computer tells you it has detected "unknown bioforms," quickly get away from any vents, reload your weapons, and make sure you have plenty of room to maneuver.



Master Zero-G Movement – The very first time you experience zero-G is in Chapter 2, and no enemies will attack you until after you pick up the shock pad. Take some time to learn how zero-G works. Figure out what surfaces you can walk on, how much clearance you need to make a jump, etc. You want zero-G movement to be second nature when in combat, so you can soar through space with the greatest of ease and blast Necromorphs in 360 degrees. Heh, that rhymes.

Rich's Preferred Load-out – If you are looking at your arsenal and wondering which four to carry, consider the trusty Plasma Cutter, the Line Gun, the Ripper, and the Contact Beam. It's fun to play with all of them, but those are my go-to weapons. The Plasma Cutter has an instantaneous shot, which means you don't have to account for distance when aiming. The Line Gun is the weapon I max out first – its utterly devastating beam rips through every enemy in its path. The Contact Beam is higher-risk, higher-reward, since the charge takes time, but is very powerful even when not powered up. It makes short work of bigger, slower enemies, and its alt fire is great when you are surrounded. Finally, the Ripper takes some practice to use effectively, but it is great for pushing your way through a crowd of enemies. Get that spinning blade in front of you and hack off limbs right and left as the blood goes flying.

Mod World

WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

Modding Your Interface
<http://war.curse.com>

Like World of Warcraft before it, Warhammer: Age of Reckoning features an extremely mod-friendly interface. Like WoW, it's awfully hard to go back once you've grown accustomed to the convenience of good mods. Here are a few of the more popular ones available from Curse.com, a well established site we recommend for its ease of use and comprehensive offerings. Many excellent add-ons beyond these few are available, so take a minute to poke around, it'll be worth it.



Squared

Similar to WoW's Gnd add-on, Squared is primarily useful for healers who don't want to go blind trying to use the default raid unit frames. Packing a ton of information in a highly customizable, compact frame, Squared is highly recommended if you're getting frustrated trying to heal effectively in chaotic battles.

BuffThrottle

The mod authors have a wonderfully detailed technical explanation of what BuffThrottle does, but basically it drastically increases performance on certain machines in large battles. Check it out if having more than 20 players onscreen kills your framerate.



KillingBlow

Solely for flexing your e-muscles, KillingBlow puts a big announcement on your screen and plays a victory sound when you finish off another player. As if the screams of dying Witch Elves weren't enough.

Code of the Month

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed



Need help mastering the Dark Side in the Force Unleashed? To enter these codes, start a game then go into the pause menu and select the Input Code menu. Note: These codes only work for the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions and will disable your save, preventing you from earning achievements.

All Force Powers At Maximum Power - KATARN
All Force Talents Maximized - JOCASTA
Deal Extra Damage - LIGHTSABER
Force Repel At Maximum Power - DATHOMIR

Force Push At Maximum Power - EXARKUN
Force Saber Throw At Maximum Power - ADEGAN
Mirror Levels - MINDTRICK
Unlocks Aerial Combo Move - FREEDON
Unlocks Aerial Ambush Move - VENTRESS
Unlocks Aerial Assault Move - EETHKOTH
Unlocks Aerial Blast Move - YADDLE
Unlocks All Databank Entries - OSSUS
Unlocks All Force Combos - MOLDYCROW

Unlocks All Lightsaber Crystals - HURRIKANE
Unlocks Force Combos - MARAJADE
Unlocks Lightning Bomb Move - MASSASSI
Unlocks Lightning Grenade Move - RAGNOS
Unlocks Lightsaber Stab Move - BRUTALSTAB
Unlocks Saber Slam Move - FLOKDON
Unlocks Saber Sling Move - KIFFISTO
Unlocks Sith Saber Flurry Move - LUMIYA
Unlocks Sith Slash Move - DARAGON
Unlocks Sith Throw Move - SAZEN

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!

XBOX 360

UNLIMITED ENABLED



Viva Pinata: Trouble in Paradise

You can never have too many candy-stuffed animals in your garden, but Rare's got an extra special treat for you with these Pinatas based on the classic Killer Instinct character's Tusk and B. Orchid. With your 360 vision cam plugged into your system, just scan these cards to unlock each character. Check out our Unlimited section online to get all six cards.

"GI Droid"
(location unknown - Last seen making home movies of himself doing stupid stunts just to prove he's badass)



Tusk



B. Orchid

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INTO THE DARKNESS

HOW THIEF HELPED CREATE A GENRE

The late 1990s saw an explosion in the first-person action genre. A heated rivalry between Nvidia, 3dfx, and ATI spurred development of a brave new world of 3D rendering technology, and game developers were all too happy to take advantage. Mega-franchises like Unreal (1998), Half-Life (1998), and Quake (1996) were born out of this unique environment, but no less worthy of attention is Looking Glass Studios' 1998 medieval stealthier, Thief. By combining a focus on stealth and trickery with innovative use of lighting as a gameplay mechanic, Thief played a major role in the birth of the stealth/action genre.

While the vast majority of the first-person offerings of the time were dedicated to providing the highest-octane alien-blasting thrills, Thief went in an entirely different direction. Cynical, sarcastic protagonist Garrett lent a distinct anti-hero vibe to the game, and apt storytelling brought Thief's medieval fantasy setting to life. Most important, however, were the game's unique play mechanics. By staying out of sight in the shadows, using special arrows, and distracting guards, Garrett avoids the battles that he's not particularly adept at fighting.

A deep fiction surrounded Garrett's exploits, full of shadowy organizations and sinister plots. An age-old struggle between proponents of order and chaos inexorably drew Garrett into its skirmishes.

The Hammerites, a religion-cum-engineering guild, seek to better the human condition through machinery and strict adherence to the law. The Mechanists, an amoral offshoot of the Hammerites that see progress as its own reward, cause all kinds of problems for Garrett with their dogmatic crusades. Pagan chaos-worshippers

march to the beat of a mad drummer, and constantly seek to return the land to its natural, wild state. Watching all of this throughout the ages are the Keepers, a secret organization dedicated to maintaining balance in all things that taught a young Garrett many of his skills before he went AWOL to pursue a life of creative wealth redistribution.

This backdrop provided Garrett plenty of opportunity to define himself to players through snarky quips and observations. Cleverly written dialogue and a diverse cast of supporting characters wove the tapestry that Garrett carefully picked his way through, and along with Half-Life proved that action games could tell a story worth experiencing.

When it came to accomplishing his missions, Garrett's most useful tool was his bow. With it, he was able to manipulate any number of situations to his benefit, provided he was toting the right ammunition. Moss arrows masked footsteps, water arrows snuffed torches, and gas



Thief

PSone Prowling

Sony's console got two stealthers a year before Thief's release. 1997's Tenchu: Stealth Assassins and Metal Gear Solid both emphasized sneaking and cunning tactics over direct violence, and contributed to the formation of the stealth/action genre in their own ways. Arguing that game "started" things is an activity best left for angry forum posts.



arrows incapacitated guards. His trusty blackjack was more than enough to take out an unsuspecting foe from behind. Failing all else, Garrett knew his way around a sword – but taking it out nearly always meant that he had bungled a more elegant solution.

The game's powerful lighting engine enabled an entirely new gameplay vector in that staying out of line-of-sight was no longer the only way to avoid detection. Just as importantly, Thief integrated sound in innovative ways. Listening for patrollers' footsteps, mind your own, and distracting guards with noisemaking arrows were all critical to success. Modern stealth/action games like the Splinter Cell series can trace their lineage directly to Thief's many innovations.

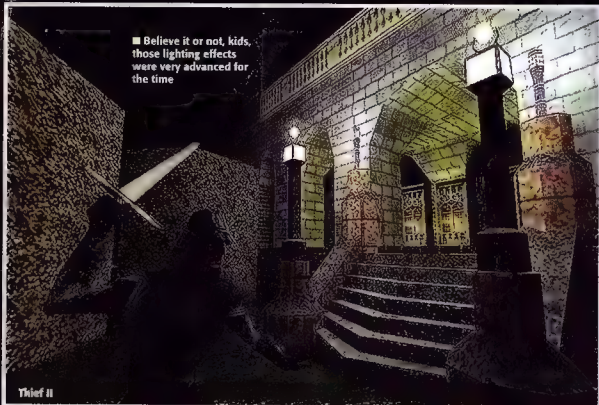
Thief forced players to think laterally and approach situations in a completely new way. Getting past a pair of soldiers guarding an entrance wasn't a matter of lining up quick headshots – perhaps a rope arrow could find purchase on a second-story window, or a distraction down the street could pull one guard away and leave his companion open to a blackjack from behind. We take this kind of thing for granted these days, but Thief was one of the first games to demonstrate that a more cerebral approach to first-person gaming could be more fun than a railygun killing spree.

The Thief franchise continued with two direct sequels: 2000's *Thief II: The Metal Age* (also by Looking Glass Studios) and 2004's *Thief: Deadly Shadows* (developed by Ion Storm). *Thief II* was loved perhaps more by fans, as it contained more of the eponymous thievery and omitted the oft-tedious undead fighting that the original contained. *Deadly Shadows* garnered critical acclaim, but is less lionized than its predecessors by hardcore fans

for a bevy of subjective reasons. The latest rumors have Eidos' Montreal studio working on a fourth title in the series, but no announcements have been made.

Gamers owe much to the Thief franchise, whether you've played them or not. Design concepts popularized by Thief permeate

the stealth scene, and have been adopted by nearly every sub-genre within the first-person continuum. Like all well-loved older PC games, a significant online community still exists to help get the games running on newer hardware in case you get the itch to go back and play through them — which is definitely worth doing. ■ ■ ■



■ Believe it or not, kids, those lighting effects were very advanced for the time

Thief II

Through The Looking Glass

The company is long dead, but Looking Glass had a surprising concentration of top-tier video game talent. Here are a few of the most notable names:



Seamus Blackley
Played a key role in the original Xbox's creation at Microsoft, and is now working to get developers the recognition they deserve at Creative Artists Agency.



Ken Levine
Toiled for years making more well-loved but underselling games at Irrational, before finally striking commercial gold with BioShock.



Warren Spector
Was a core talent behind the immortal *Deus Ex* at Ion Storm, and is now working with Disney Interactive on an unannounced project.



■ Leaving a trail of dead bodies is a good way to get caught

Thief: Deadly Shadows

This Month In Gaming History

On December 5 of 2000,

Microsoft continued its run of buying up developers for its upcoming Xbox platform with the announcement that Wang Games developer Digital Anvil was to join the Microsoft fold. Founder and gaming luminary Chris Roberts continued to consult through the completion of Freelancer, leaving after that title's 2003 release. Digital Anvil's May 2003 launch of the much-hyped *Brute Force* for the Xbox was to be the developer's last hurrah, as Microsoft officially shut Digital Anvil's doors in January of 2006.



The Love Of The Fans

Nothing speaks to dedication like a full fan-made expansion pack, especially when its creators suffered through a buggy and inconsistent editor to create it. Entitled *Thief 2X: Shadows of the Metal Age*, this freeware expansion was released in 2005 to critical acclaim and a gushing Thief fan community. *Shadows of the Metal Age* tells a story parallel to *Thief II*'s campaign through 13 lengthy missions that chronicle the exploits of a young lady named Zaya as she is drawn into a nefarious plot. Download it at www.thief2x.com — but note it requires *Thief II* to play.



Thief II



Thief IV

The Original Thief IV

This piece of art was leaked as the concept for a modern Garrett in a *Thief IV* project at Ion Storm Austin. Two forum posts, accepted by the Thief fan community as genuine, stated that the developer was working on a fourth *Thief* game when it was shut down by owner Eidos. The title was to be a modern "reboot" of the series, though with numerous callbacks to the original saga.



GENESIS
TAZ-MANIA

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SEGA > RELEASE 1992

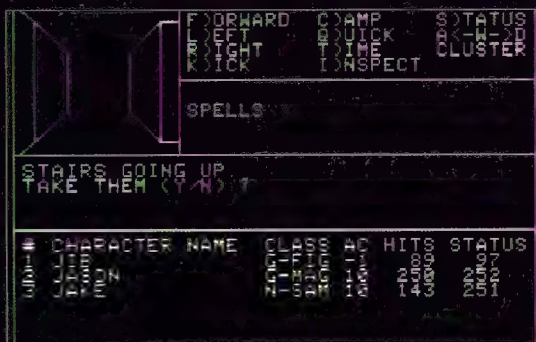
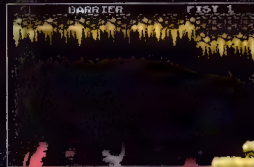
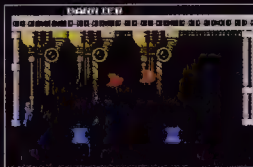
One day Taz's dad tells the family about a long-lost valley of ancient birds whose eggs were so large they could feed a small family for years. Being a stupid little marsupial who always follows his stomach, Taz immediately sets off to find this all-you-can-eat omelet garden. Thanks to Taz's patented tornado spin, he can move across the screen at near Sonic speeds. Unfortunately, the game isn't designed around this kind of play style, and trying to speed through a level is the quickest way to reach a game over screen. Hidden traps await Taz at every turn and he's constantly required to jump on unseen platforms somewhere off-screen. The game devolves quickly into a trial-and-error game of memory where you practice exactly when and where to jump. Fans of the show might remember Bull Gator and Axl, the two alligator animal hunters obsessed with catching Taz. They're still at it in the game, but after Taz mindlessly eats every bomb he walks past, you'll be ready to skin his hide yourself.



NES
DYNOWARZ: DESTRUCTION OF SPONDYLUS

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER BANDAI > DEVELOPER BANDAI > RELEASE 1989

In retrospect, Dynowarz seems slightly ahead of its time, beating Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers to market by just a few years. Players control Professor Proteus as he seeks to eliminate the virus that's infected his man-made solar system of Spondylus. Traveling from planet to planet, Proteus beats the crap out of giant robotic dinosaurs in his custom mech named Cyborasaurus and then hops out to raid Artificial Intelligence Compounds on foot. Perhaps the good professor should have stuck to making planets: His gun can only shoot once every five minutes, his jump is positively unswifty, and his Robosaur has a terrible set of weapons. Of the bomb, flying fist, fireballs, and beam weapons, the upgraded beam is the only one that really works. Unfortunately, all of the power-up icons look identical and they never fade away, so it's easy to get screwed into taking the god-awful bombs. Throw in cheap pit deaths, the fact that you only get one life, and the repetitive use of the same five dinosaur character models and you've got once huge pile of "dyno" dung.



APPLE II, COMMODORE 64, PC, NES

WIZARDRY: PROVING GROUNDS OF THE MAD OVERLORD

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SIR-TECH SOFTWARE > DEVELOPER SIR-TECH SOFTWARE > RELEASE 1981

It doesn't get any more old school than the original Wizardry. Though it had little to no plot (oh noes, evil wizard!), Wizardry helped set the stage for the entire role-playing genre with its then-unique electronic representation of Dungeons & Dragons-like rules. The mechanics of combat and exploration worked quite well. As in the much later Icewind Dale series, messing around with party configurations is half the fun. Surprisingly complex for its time, Wizardry's party system allowed players to create up to six characters in any of its several classes – and potentially upgrade them to prestige classes later on. There are plenty of dungeon crawlins in recent years that could learn some things by looking to this 1981 classic, painfully primitive graphics or no. As a side note, the Wizardry series was massively popular in Japan and is often cited as a direct inspiration for the Japanese RPG genre.





ONLINE

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UNLIMITED LAUNCH: NOV. 17



We do some recon of our own with Marty O'Donnell, the famed composer of the Halo theme



B. Orchid

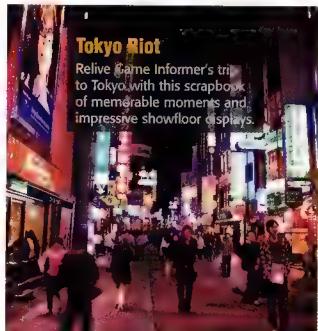
Viva Piñata

Scan these extra cards to add Killer, instinct characters to your growing garden of sexually charged piñatas!



White Knight Chronicles

Joe sits down with Level-5 CEO and president Akihiro Hino to discuss his company's latest epic RPG.

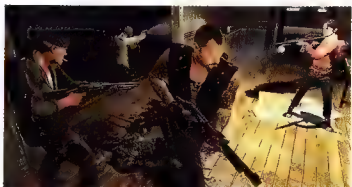


Tokyo Riot

Relive Game Informer's trip to Tokyo with this scrapbook of memorable moments and impressive showfloor displays

Also Online This Month:

Game Informer Online works around the clock to keep you up to date with the latest holiday game releases. Seriously. We chained Nick to the desk and fed him those Marine pills that keep you awake for weeks.



UP TO THE MOMENT NEWS

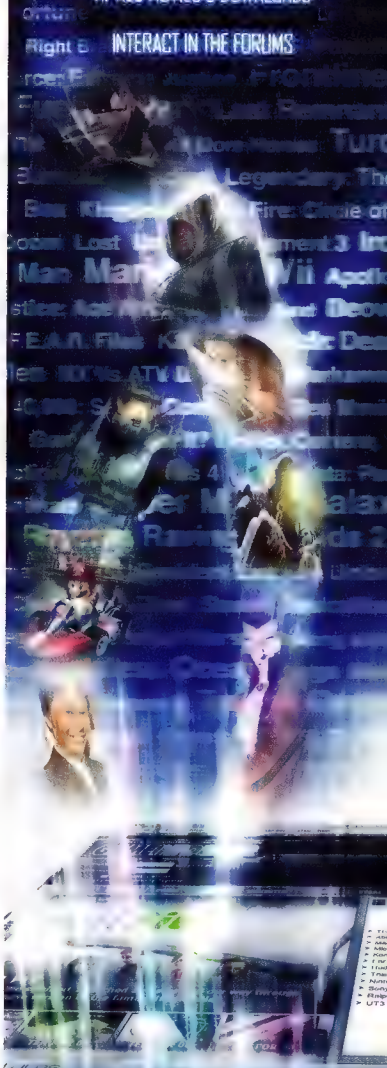
IN-DEPTH FEATURES

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INTERACT IN THE FORUMS





GAME OVER

No More Moves!

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

We're sad to report that the world's financial crisis has snuck into your favorite hobby – games. No, we don't mean sales numbers – the actual game worlds are in the midst of a major recession. Sucks to be you. Take this quiz, and learn just how hard the economic crunch is hitting your vids.

1 Beginning with the second installment, Namco's celebrated jet combat series has gone by the title *Ace Combat*. What was the game's name on the original PlayStation?

- A. Afterburner
- B. Air Combat
- C. Top Gun
- D. Tale Spin



2 Who was the final boss in *Final Fantasy IX*?

- A. Necron
- B. Kuja
- C. Exdeath
- D. Ultimecia

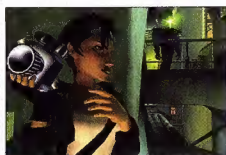


3 In later *Halo* games, you could generally only carry two weapons at a time, but how many could you carry with you in the original?

- A. Only one, but you could drop it and pick up a different one
- B. As many as you could find, but they often ran out of ammo
- C. You had a set weapon load out in single player, but you could change weapons in multiplayer
- D. You could only carry two, just like in the later games

4 *Beyond Good & Evil* was a sweet game that other gamers will regularly ridicule you about if you haven't played. Its title also happens to be based on an important philosophical treatise by which author?

- A. Søren Keirkegaard
- B. Immanuel Kant
- C. Friedrich Nietzsche
- D. Albert Einstein

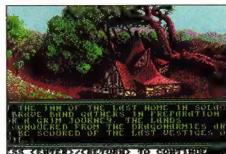


5 You think you're pretty smart because you got that last one right, huh? Well, which game used the original German phrase meaning "Beyond Good and Evil" as its subtitle?

- A. Einhänder
- B. Shin Megami Tensei
- C. BioShock
- D. Xenosaga Episode II

6 Which of these games doesn't occur on the same fictional world as the other three?

- A. Eye of the Beholder
- B. Neverwinter Nights
- C. Champions of Krynn
- D. Curse of the Azure Bonds



7 Which product's popular advertising mascot has never gotten its own video game?

- A. 7-Up
- B. Burger King
- C. Cheetos
- D. Planter's Peanuts

8 The arcade hit called *Beastorizer* eventually became what popular fighting game series, spawning a number of sequels?

- A. Killer Instinct
- B. Bloody Roar
- C. Fatal Fury
- D. Budokan

9 Oh, Lara. You're always raiding those crazy tombs. Which one of these wasn't a subtitle to one of your games?

- A. The Last Revelation
- B. The Prophecy
- C. The Angel of Darkness
- D. The Emperor's Tomb



10 Man, we're tired. You know how many games we reviewed this month?

- A. 10
- B. 20
- C. 41
- D. Seriously. 41

BREAKDOWN

2 years, and E for All is calling it quits. Only days after the announcement that E3 would be returning to a larger format next year, the organizers of E for All announced the show would not return in 2009.

37 percent up – Ubisoft happily reported its second quarter results: were that high, largely in thanks to sales of *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* and *Soulcalibur IV*, which they distributed in Europe.

55 percent of gamers are married, and 48 percent have kids, according to a recent study conducted by IGN Entertainment and Ipsos Media CT.

1,090,000 dollars were spent on federal lobbying by the ESA in the third quarter of 2008.

0 dollars were spent on lobbying for free donuts in our office every morning. Suspicious.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



- 0-1** Your *Gears of War* chainsaw has been repossessed. When the Locust horde charges your scantily defended foxhole, we suggest polite negotiation. Let us know how that turns out for you.
- 2-3** Yeah, we're going to have to hold on to that Rock Band guitar until you finish paying back the debt for that last gig you smashed up. Try a kazoo. The crowd will love you!
- 4-5** I see you purchased all your *Table II* houses through adjustable rate mortgages. Do you want the good news or the bad news? Good? Hmm. Yeah, there really isn't any good news.
- 6-7** I'm sorry, Sackboy. We'd love to keep you on. We just don't have the bandwidth right now to maintain another adorable little puppet with strong platforming skills. We're going to have to let you go.
- 8-9** The Ironforge auction house is closed, due to volatile market conditions. We're sorry for the inconvenience. Please look for your 1351 gear elsewhere.
- 10** Wario – you're pretty much screwed.

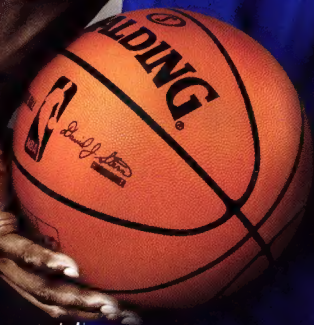
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