

FIRST DETAILS: **GUITAR HERO METALLICA** PG.40

GAMEINFORMER

THE WORLD'S #1 COMPUTER & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE



UNCHARTED 2

WORLD EXCLUSIVE **AMONG THIEVES**

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PORTRAIT OF A LEGEND

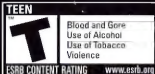
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Few bands can strike a chord like metal legends Metallica. The Bay Area band finally teams up with the music gurus at Neversoft to release a Guitar Hero featuring some of the band's favorite artists, such as Alice in Chains, Judas Priest, and Slayer.

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People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



GAME INFORMER 2.009

ANDY MCNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

As we approach the end of yet another amazing year in gaming, the staff and I spend a lot of time reflecting on the past looking for lessons that can help us improve the magazine for the future. One of our biggest challenges of the last year was covering the juggernaut of massively multiplayer online gaming, or the MMOORG.

Unlike other areas in gaming, this sector features games capable of completely changing their landscapes and play mechanics with a simple content update. After much reflection, we decided to change the way we review these games going forward, with the introduction of our new Connect feature simply called MMO Report (or MMOOR if we want to play along with the gamer's silly use of gibberish slang and acronym).

To give you a look behind the scenes, I wanted to thank this opportunity to explain why we felt this change was necessary. This year had two great examples of the challenges we face in Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures and Warhammer: Age of Reckoning.

Age of Conan, at first go, is a fairly entertaining MMO with a number of great innovations. Unfortunately, once you hit the level cap and start to unravel the endgame content, you quickly discover there is little to do. While the game is solid, over time the game world loses its luster. Unless we want to write multiple reviews in the months that follow, our original review ends up being just a snapshot of Conan in its glorious beginnings and isn't useful beyond that point in time.

On the other side of the coin, Warhammer: Age of Reckoning started off unbalanced with lots of unutilized potential, but through the patches that followed its release, developer Mythic addressed many of the issues that we had in our original review (though the game isn't quite where it needs to be yet).

Obviously, we want to get our impressions of these games to you as soon as possible so you can decide if the game is worth the massive time investment, which is why we wrote official reviews in the past. However, our previous system didn't enable us to revisit these games that, by their very definition as persistent worlds, significantly change from month to month. We felt the review format didn't give you all the information it should to help with your purchasing decisions.

With MMO Report, we finally feel we can cover these games the way they are intended to be played: as ever-changing worlds. We will deliver impressions of the launch period, then follow up each game when needed with interviews with the player base, updates on game mechanic changes, and our overall impressions of the games as they grow from retail copy to established (or uninhabituated) virtual worlds.

This is just the beginning of the changes you will find in the magazine in the months to come. Enjoy the issue, and as always we will bring you information on all the games that will shape 2009 and beyond.

Cheers,

Andy >>> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Homebre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** 3D Rock, Entourage, Rock Band DLC (Though Still Waiting for a Homebrew Idea... Someone Make The Heppies) **Dislikes:** That No Publisher Has Picked Up Tim Schler's Brotal Legend (What A Waste), Running Out Of Credits, Everfest Cops **Current Favorite Games:** World of Warcraft, Rock Band 2, LittleBigPlanet, Fall In, Gears Of War 2, Chrono Trigger DS, Dead Space

2 GAME INFORMER



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Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Picking Up Injured Stragglers In Left 4 Dead (Maybe They Came Will Heat That Noodle), Warren Ellis No Hero, The TV Show Brokop, My Heroics Of The Year, The Dogs From Call Of Duty: World At War (Get Into, Boy!) **Dislikes:** The Declining Number of Online Players (Squid's Anatomy), Rumors Of Hatcher's Ending Being Changed To Include A Warning About Today's World, Final Crisis **Current Favorite Games:** Left 4 Dead, LittleBigPlanet, Call Of Duty: World At War, Fallout 3, Gears Of War 2, Resistance 2, Tales Of Vesperia



Matt >>> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Gears N Roses - Chinese Democracy (It's Really... Something), Fringe, Quantum Of Solace, Caline **Dislikes:** Holiday Headlines, The Upcoming Holiday Season, Holiday Gas Stations, Miami Dolphins: De Vornie Holiday, Bible Holiday (No Wait, Actually She's Great) **Current Favorite Games:** LittleBigPlanet, Rock Band 2, Guitar Hero World Tour, Saints Row 2



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Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/RPG **Interests:** In Angus, Billy Bragg's "Love Subst", "Teas", "Achilles" & Designer Erico Santoro, Holden Jackies, Being Outdoorsy/Outdoor, About The Beatles Rock Band Game, Cocky Saying They Are Going To Break Up Next Year **Dislikes:** Activision CEO Kidding Warping Franchises To Be "Exploited Every Year", All Day Now Whistles, Instruction Manuals That Skimp On Game Info, Playstation **Current Favorite Games:** Fallout 3, Skate 2, Gears Of Rome, Left 4 Dead



Adam >>> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Level 40, Cheeseburgers (I Can Has!), The Elections Being (Mostly) Over, Hot Sauce Talk, Revolving Doors That I Can Now Crank, The Graphic User On, Public Radio **Dislikes:** Having Too Many Characters To Love (Going Back To Being "Circum-Bound Striker"), The Best Tailor In Minneapolis Calling It Quits, Move-Aging Veterans Brought In To Work, The Penis' Raptor And Rooster Spaw **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Wrath Of The Lich King, Newsweeker Nights: Storm Of Zehir, Puzzle Quest: Challenge Of The Warlords - Revenge Of The Plague Lord



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Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Halo (It's A Duh-ho-ho-ho-ho), Fols: Dislikes: The New Xbox Experience (Different or Better, Except For The Neefie Thing), Alan Protesting He Was Taken, "P's Or A (Once As An Excuse For Temble Endings (That's You, Prince Of Persia), Star Trek, Pre-Order Bonuses That Don't Involve In-Game Content, Celebrity Curses **Current Favorite Games:** Fallout 3, Persona 4, Street Fighter IV, Alpha Protocol, LittleBigPlanet, Mirror's Edge, Fall In, Portal: Still Aive, Quest For Glory II



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Bertz >>> mattbertz@gameinformer.com

Handle: End Garmington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** Alcatraz: M4 Trx (Super Super, Super Dead), The Power: Glenn Ballstrom 3, iTunes Center (It's Like Having An Exit Record First Crack Right In Your PC), Nicklas Backstrom (The Puck Stops Here), HBO Greenlighting A Game Of Thrones **Dislikes:** The Astroid Level In Dead Space, Bread Children (I Can't Stress This Enough), Microsoft Mee Rader (If You Want A TV, Buy A TV) **Current Favorite Games:** Left 4 Dead, Halo, DS, Dead Space, Gears Of War 2, LittleBigPlanet, Mirror's Edge, Call Of Duty: World At War, Fallout 3



Ben >>> ben@gameinformer.com

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Being Designated G's Romance Editor, The Sophisticated Vampire Movie Created In You In The Movies, Being Mistaken For The Dwindly Handmade Gays From Idle Hands **Dislikes:** Everyone's Lack Of Appreciation For A Good Fun Fang Foot Costume, Michael Gribbin's Strange (Code)epic **Current Favorite Games:** Fallout 3, Dead Space, Gears Of War 2, Castle Crashers, Mortal Kombat V, Darksound, Left 4 Dead, Fall In, Tomb Raider Underworld



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Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** Alan (Thanks For Plucking Ghostbusters And Riddick Out Of Development Hell), Refreshing Footing, New Dredge, Ties, Eri Braker And Sean Phillips' Criminal Series, Battle Royale Collection On Blu-Ray (Finally! An Actual Proper Treatment Of A Classic), **Dislikes:** Moving (Yes, I Still Suck), Touch-Up Parading **Current Favorite Games:** Fall In, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, The Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Aesha

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Jump in.

 **XBOX 360.**



1 Meagan is a "FeMario," while Sandbox Strat's Rob Fleischer is an old-time baseball player for Halloween. Matt opts for his usual "dork in a stocking cap" costume

2 Miller parties down with Sony's Jennifer Clark 3 Alpha Protocol programming producer Nathan Davis demonstrates a "close quarters Nerf kill" on Sega's Anthony Chau 4 Bang Camaro shows off its best poses for the GI Spy camera in the basement of the legendary 7th St. Entry in Minneapolis 5 Bryan hangs with the Halo 3: Recon team in its super-secret underground bunker facility (located beneath Mount Weather, but don't tell anyone!)

6 Ben gets down to some serious wrasslin' with THQ's Jaime Jensen and Bryan Williams 7 Capcom's Chris Kramer shows Nick and Jeff his high level advanced ninja chopstick eating techniques 8 The GI crew hangs outside of a Tokyo noodle shop with Insomniac's Johnny Byrnes



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More like "Dingers Egret"

We Missed One

I would like to suggest a runner-up for your "Top Ten Worst Character Names." Dingo Egret from Zone of the Enders 2. I know there are countless other horrible names out there, but there's something about this choice that makes me cringe. Undoubtedly, in foreign countries it is considered an insult of the highest order to call someone a Dingo Egret.

Aaron Buss
via email

We can admit when something slips under our radar. Consider Dingo Egret added to the list as an honorable mention. We may have let it slide if he were some kind of anthropomorphic dingo, but as a human being, that's just inexcusable.

Same but Different

My friends and I all agree that video game developers should bring back some of the classics with modern technology. Imagine how awesome it would be to play GoldenEye remastered with updated graphics and sound! Perfect Dark and Final Fantasy VII are other great examples! There are too many to name. Simply take the same game, don't change the gameplay, and rewrap the production values. Is this in the works anywhere?

Erich Mink
via email

At first, this may seem like a great idea. We all have games that we remember fondly, and we'd love to duplicate the experience of playing them for the first time. Unfortunately, old games are often best left as we remember them. By simply dressing up old mechanics, developers won't attract a new crowd with the antiquated gameplay. Furthermore, companies run the risk of ticking off longtime fans by making unwanted changes to a classic. For instance, GoldenEye was a great game for its time, but without the nostalgia factor, it's basically unplayable by today's standards. However, if a remake were to make the game more palatable to a modern audience, you and your friends

would cry foul because it isn't staying faithful to the original. Even so, if you still really want to re-experience the classics, Capcom has the best handle on the process. With recent downloadable games like Bionic Commando: Rearmed and Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD, the publisher has demonstrated an ability to put clever twists on old favorites while retaining their classic appeal.



Hip to Be Cube

What's wrong with you? In the Dear GI section of issue 187, you said there aren't 25 games on the GameCube worth mentioning. Personally, I think the GameCube is way better than the Xbox and PlayStation 2. Try that out. Do you seriously hate the GameCube that much? I hope you take into

consideration the fact that the GameCube has some of the best games in the world, and therefore, you have no right to ridicule it. Sometimes, I play my GameCube games more than my Wii games.

Benjamin Lin
via email

You have the audacity to say that the GameCube doesn't have 25 games worth mentioning? You guys must not have played many games at all last generation. I cancelled my subscription to your magazine due to it being entirely devoid of journalistic integrity.

Joe Lengerich
via email

If you are a video game "journalist" who won't even bother trying to list the top 25 titles for GameCube, you are a revisionist historian fanboy. You're letting the current generation's climate tint your already cloudy vision into order come off as eggy and keep your dying medium alive. If you got me drunk for three days straight and then beat me within an inch of my life, I would still have no trouble naming a longer list of must-win games for GameCube than I would for Xbox.

Marco Trazzo
via email

I thought that your crack about the

Nintendo GameCube in the Dear GI section was hilarious!

Alan Rosewicz
via email

Well, we saw that coming. All of you militant Nintendo fans can put down your Bob-ombs - it was just a joke. A GameCube Top 25 list was in the works all along, since it's sort of impossible to do a last-gen console roundup without one. Flip to this month's Classic GI section on page 84 to see if your favorites made the cut. Be warned: If your favorites include Tube Slider, you're in for a disappointment.

Wii Cacophony

Most of the time I'm content to agree with your reviews, but a 3 out of 10 for Wii Music? I understand the criticism the game received following its debut at E3. In fact, I didn't even plan on purchasing it, but I decided to give it a try, and it completely blew me away. The unprecedented amount of freedom the game offers, changing "La Bamba" into a techno rave song or "Yankee Doodle" into a rocking tune is amazing. To be honest, I believe people should rank this game based on their own creativity. I'm not trying to insult your review staff, but you out of Wii Music what you put into it.

Stevie Manning
via email

If you spend hours at a piano, you could theoretically compose grand symphonies to rival Mozart. Does that mean that a piano is a great game? How much credit does the instrument deserve for the sounds you create? Wii Music may be an interesting tool to experiment with various musical mash-ups, but the degree to which it stretches the definition of "game" is unprecedented. It provides no goals, challenge, or sense of achievement. It's even sub-par when viewed solely as a music creation device thanks to its controls: at least with a piano, you know what notes the different keys produce. If we wanted to hear a chorus of dogs

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

GI COMMUNITY

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



I've always gotten really into creation features in games, from skate parks in Tony Hawk to songs in Guitar Hero World Tour. It's always been a way of getting my ideas out there.

DeedyyDagger

I don't create content, I want to just sit and play and have the content created for me. It's cool that others do it though.

Tanooki

User-created content is fun to play around with, but right now there are too many games out that I need to play to be messing around with all that.

boogiemans29

It's really nice on the other side, as well. While I'm not the most creative person, it's nice to have access to all of the unbelievable creativity that other people have come up with... as well as make me feel inadequate.

Metalic09

I normally don't get involved too much in creating content. I remember starting to create a skate park on Tony Hawk. It only to quit when I realized how much work it actually entailed. It came a good one. I would much rather just play the game.

Rauros_B

THE QUESTION:

Games like *Spore*, *Guitar Hero World Tour*, and *LittleBigPlanet* have a heavy emphasis on user-created content. How involved do you get in the creative elements of gaming, and why?

I enjoy creating with creation tools in games, but what I enjoy most is expanding the creative tools users who choose their time and ingenuity into their creations.

E-wahle

I love user-created content. It lets me be creative and personalize the game. Creating your own levels in *LEP* is tons of fun in itself, not to mention a odd dose of replay value by getting to play others' levels.

lyps_88



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

singing, we'd dig out our old Casio key-boards and hit the "demo" button.

The Collector

I'm a huge gamer, but my friends make fun of me for only owning a handful of games. I try to explain to them that it's better to have a few great games than a bunch of crappy ones. Which would be better, owning a couple of excellent games like Mass Effect and Fable II, or every well-marketed, poorly made piece of crap that hits store shelves?

Jimmy Grenham
via email

There's nothing wrong with taking pride in your collection. Gaming is an expensive hobby, and only buying the best of the best can ensure that your money is well spent. On the other hand, you're not collecting rare coins to arrange in a display case. Games are meant to be played, and sometimes a little uncertainty can be a good thing. You shouldn't shell out for every bargain bin deal you see, but if you never take a chance, you'll never know the satisfaction of finding that underappreciated gem others have overlooked.

War of the Wars

Why does everyone hate World War II games? I personally love WWII FPS games, especially the Call of Duty series (although I still love COD 4: Modern Warfare). I understand that the market is a little overloaded with WWII games, but honestly, what other war are they going to cover? Good luck getting people to play a Revolutionary War game, where it takes 20 minutes to load your rifle each shot.

Alexander Judkins
Altoona, WI

People don't hate World World II games. The premise is just tired. Because of the historical setting, developers can't exactly create new WWII battles, so they need to keep going back to the well with a handful of established scenarios. Unfortunately, gamers can only storm the virtual beach at Normandy so many times before the process becomes routine. It's true that other wars wouldn't provide as many compelling gameplay opportunities, so the trick is to put a cool spin of familiar World War II moments. If that's what you're looking for, you should check out our review of Call of Duty: World at War on page 64 to read about Treyarch's successful approach to this common problem.



reader art

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



NICHOLAS ALDRIDGE

Of all its champions, the Marvel universe chooses Gladiator to face off against Superman? Way to miss your chance to kill off Jubilee, guys



MEGAN BECK

We'll bet you 10 Picarats that Luke needs to go crying for help from the professor on this one



ISAAC LARUSSA

Totally normal kids...and their android friend...and a demonic guardian that fights monsters for them



FRANK SOLDATO

To complete the ensemble, Snake just needs to find a smashing pair of Kuribo's Shoes



MITCHELL HILLMAN

We have some serious doubts that God is a Mac gamer



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NEWS

EXPERIENCING THE NEW XBOX THE DASHBOARD REVAMP EXPLAINED

After plenty of hand wringing and questions regarding Microsoft's New Xbox Experience, now it's here – avatars and all. The remodeling brings a lot of splash to old features, creates some new problems, and postpones other features for another day (are we ever going to get an Achievement leaderboard?). Here's a rundown of what it's all about.

Choose an avatar as a starting point



SETUP

Downloading the update with the New Xbox Experience takes less than a minute, and installing the dashboard takes only a few minutes more, depending on your connection speed. At launch, some users claimed reports of freezing issues at various junctures, from the user agreement screen to setting up an avatar.

AVATARS

After a splash video, you can begin to create your avatar. Players can select an avatar template from the random pool offered, or you can craft your own from scratch. The options are pretty straightforward, from choosing your hairstyle, clothes, and facial features to accessorizing. For those who don't want an avatar, it looks like you have no other option. We couldn't find a way to avoid making an avatar or delete the one we made.

lect  More Cho

LAY OF THE LAND

The new dashboard is segmented into channels that scroll vertically. Each individual channel has tabs within it you can get to horizontally—the reverse of PlayStation's cross-media bar. Three channels—Events, Inside Xbox, and Spotlight—represent game/media promotions or Live game events. The rest are explained here. For those looking for the old-school blade format, it is more or less intact when you press the Xbox guide button on your controller.

GAME MARKETPLACE

All the downloadable content associated with a game is handily grouped with that game, and the Marketplace sorts into different categories (arcade, add-ons, Xbox originals, etc.) and is searchable by title or genre. Thankfully, Microsoft added a manual text scroll feature for the content descriptions, so you don't have to wait for the system to do it for you like before.

MY XBOX

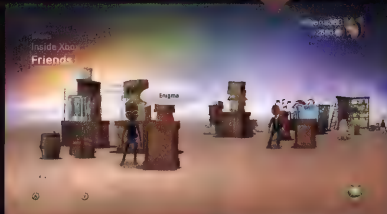
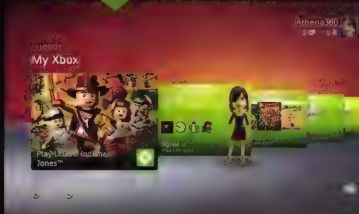
This channel gives you the basic system functions, which are also available if you hit the guide button, such as managing your settings, memory, avatar, profile, media, etc.

VIDEO MARKETPLACE

This is where you can buy TV shows or movies off of Marketplace, as well as access the Netflix streaming service (for more on this see below).

FRIENDS

Your friends and their avatars pop up as you scroll horizontally through them. Each friend's avatar stands in front of a pre-determined background based on whatever dashboard theme you are running. Unfortunately, your friends cannot choose their own background.



NETFLIX

One of the big features of the New Xbox Experience is the ability to watch streaming video content from your Netflix (and) Amazon queue. Microsoft even includes free 48-hour trial coupons in some games, so you can watch movies without excessive load times and it's not without its drawbacks.

You cannot order your queue of movies from the 360 itself. This must be done on your computer using the instant tab of your queue.

The quality of these streaming videos depends on your connection speed, which changes the resolution at which you view the content. We've noticed videos that started from good to poor depending on the connection.

Shortly after launch, users discovered that a few hundred films weren't available through the experience's Netflix streaming service. Some Pictures & Videos Columbia Pictures had pulled its films from Steambox's catalog.

My Xbox
Video Marketplace

PARTY TIME

If you select your Friends in the Friends channel, you can invite them to a party. At the moment, this doesn't do much other than enable eight-player party chat and allow you to look at party photos. After a later update you'll be able to watch Netflix movies with friends; in games, there are a few titles like *Uno* that let you bring you and your friends' avatars into the game. Otherwise, the party system lets you synch up party members as you head into multiplayer and chat amongst yourselves, including with those party members not playing.

DIGGING TOO DEEP

Although new features are included in the dashboard, what's striking is that for some functions, it's easier to hit the guide button and revert back to the old way of doing things.

For instance, if you don't want to suffer scrolling through everyone's avatars just to find someone on the Friends channel, you can hit the guide button and see everyone in a more user-friendly format. Shouldn't there have been a search or ordering function for the Friends channel? Similarly, for some reason you don't see your gamercard info when you're in the guide unless you scroll around.

It's great that all the same information is there, it just seems silly that you're now pressing more buttons to get to the same info that was more readily available before the new dashboard.

GAME DOWNLOADS

Many Xbox 360 games can now be downloaded onto the hard drive (although you still have to put the game in the tray to play it). This cuts down on the instances when the platform has to read the disc (thus creating a quieter 360), and for most of the games it shortens load times. One glaring exception is Halo 3. In fact, Bungie recommends that you don't install the game to the hard drive because it actually causes longer load times for the title.



DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

NO MORE HEROES

Despite the declining popularity of NBC's *Heroes* television show, Ubisoft decided to cut its plans to make a video game based on the program.

HEROES

4GB PSP AXED

Sony has cancelled its plans to offer a PSP Entertainment Pack featuring the system, a 4GB memory stick, and a download of *Everyday Shooter*. The Hatch & Clark Entertainment pack remains the only way to get the PSP-3000 with its new, brighter screen.



MICROSOFT'S 60GB STARTER KIT

Microsoft started selling a Xbox Live Starter Pack (SP9) complete with a 4GB hard drive, wireless headset, Ethernet cable, and a three-month Xbox Live subscription card for those Arcade members without a hard drive looking to get online.



TROUBLES AT THQ

THQ publisher/developer THQ closed some of its studios, including Summit (ignition) (shown) developer *Far Cry* studios. The company also laid off employees at developers such as *Rise of Nations* (60x, 4X), THQ CEO Brian Farrell said "several titles" were canceled, but clarified that none of them had been announced yet. The company expects to release fewer titles, but put more effort behind them.



NFL PLAYERS ASSOCIATION GUILTY FOR MADDEN

A group of retired NFL players were awarded a \$28.1 million judgment in a case involving the lack of revenue sharing in the licensing of the rights of retired players. The players alleged that the NFL Players Association gave Madden creator EA Sports preferential treatment to allow the rights of retired players that was below market value. This influenced EA's decision to quit making its All-Pro Football title.

games

A DAY IN THE LIFE

HARMONIX/MTV SCORES BEATLES LICENSE



MTV and developer Harmonix scored a huge coup for the Rock Band franchise with an exclusive game based on the music of the Beatles. No platforms for the title have been announced, and it's not expected to hit shelves until holiday 2009.

Although few details exist about the game other than it's a rhythm title that will certainly play into the strengths of Rock Band and original Guitar Hero creator Harmonix, the developer is quick to point out that it wants to make this a different experience than simply having Beatles songs featured in the current Rock Band format. "Let me make this clear, this game is not just a Rock Band expansion pack," said Harmonix co-founder Alex Rigopulos at a press conference unveiling the deal. "It's

a full, new music game built from the ground up! This seems to reference Harmonix's own AC/DC Rock Band title, which fits the more traditional expansion pack mold.

The Beatles don't give out their license very often, so this is a huge opportunity for the series to create something different. What that will entail, of course, remains to be seen. Nobody would comment on whether players will play the Beatles themselves, but the game will span the quartet's seven-year span of albums from *Please Please Me* to *Let It Be*. (Check out our sidebar for some of the songs we'd like to see in the game.) Harmonix plans to use the visual iconography of the band, which would show them switching styles from beat mop-tops to psychedelic pioneers to longhair rockers of the late sixties

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

Harmonix may not be talking much about this Beatles title, but there are certain things we'd love to see. The ability to use two microphones simultaneously would serve the Beatles' vocal harmonies, and it'll be interesting to see how the game assigns piano, keyboard, and orchestral tracks, as these become more prominent as the Beatles' career progresses. If this game is going to encapsulate the full breadth of the band's sound, it'll require more than the standard Rock Band instruments, but it is unknown if the game will introduce any new music peripherals.

This game is an excellent opportunity to tell the Beatles' story in more ways than just through the music. It's not hard to imagine using a wealth of archival footage to put the songs in context or even have you step into the shoes of the Beatles themselves onstage. It's one thing to have a yellow Submarine-themed background behind the familiar scrolling game. But it's another to convey the experience of the first meeting of John and Paul in Liverpool or what it was like to be in the studio with producer George Martin. Speaking of which, could we be allowed to break in the famous Abbey Road studio via some sort of producer/musical creator feature? And what about exploring the histories of other figures in Beatles history, such as Brian Epstein, Mal Evans, or other bands such as the Rolling Stones or Eric Clapton?

THE FAB FOUR

Together they are known as the four lads who shook the world, but individually, each of the Beatles will bring something special to players.

John

Known as more of a lyricist than a musician, John's guitar philosophy went back to straight rock 'n' roll. Still, the intricacies of songs like "And Your Bird Can Sing" or the finger picking of "Dear Prudence" prove John will be a great guitarist and songwriter.

George

George was the Beatles' least guitarist, and his chops show that the Beatles could rock out with the best of them. He even put front Eric Clapton on notice with his solo skills.

Paul

Paul's melodic bass lines will be a godsend to any Rock Band bass players looking for a challenge or something interesting. The only thing cooler than playing one of Sir Paul's bass lines would be if you could do it on a Holzer violin bass peripheral. Paul was also an accomplished guitarist in his own right, and played drums on a number of tracks in Ringo's absence.

Ringo

He wasn't flashy, but Ringo never put a bad foot forward. Exhorting the gruffness playing of a Keith Moon, for example, Ringo was more than capable of his own stylish flourishes and fills such as in "Hello Goodbye" or the brilliant "Rain."

A BEATLES ANTHOLOGY

It's not all the hits, and it's not the official set list, but these Beatles songs would make great additions to the game.

PLEASE PLEASE ME

"I Can Hear Standing There"
"Anna (Go to Him)"

WITH THE BEATLES



"All My Loving"
"Hold Me Tight"

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

"A Hard Day's Night"
"I'll Get It"

BEATLES FOR SALE

"I'll Follow the Sun"
"I Don't Want to Spoil the Party"

HELP!

"The Night Before"
"Ticket to Ride"

RUBBER SOUL

"Drive My Car"
"Nowhere in World"
"Think for Yourself"
"If I Needed Someone"

REVOLVER



"Taxman"
"The Sand Sea Sled"
"And Your Bird Can Sing"

Sgt. PEPPER'S LOVELY HEARTS CLUB BAND

"Getting Better"
"Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (Reprise)"

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

"Hello Goodbye"
"Strawberry Fields Forever"

THE BEATLES

"Dear Prudence"
"White Material"
"Everybody Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey"
"Helter Skelter"

YELLOW SUBMARINE

"It's All Too Much"

LET IT BE

"I Me Mine"
"I've Got a Feeling"
"After 900"
"Get Back"

ABEY ROAD

"Here Comes the Sun"
"Carry That Weight/The End"

PAST MASTERS VOLUME ONE

"The Boy"
"I Feel Fine"

PAST MASTERS VOLUME TWO

"Day Tripper"
"Rain"
"Revolution"

the top 10 lines in gaming

Games don't always need heart-pounding action or shocking plot twists; sometimes all it takes to make you remember a moment is a few simple words.

Whether they're in dialogue, shouted by disembodied announcers, or just written on walls, these are the lines that keep echoing in your mind long after you've stopped playing.

1 "Finish him!" –

Announcer, *Mortal Kombat*

The first time we prevailed in a bout of MK and heard this guttural command, we flailed and felled out our opponent with a mighty low kick to the shin. On subsequent victories, however, this intonation became synonymous with the best part of any video game disagreement: ripping out your opponent's spine.



2 "Would you kindly?" – Atlas, BioShock

We may have had our suspicions about a certain character not being on the up-and-up during our journey through Objectivist hell, but the reveal in *BioShock* went way beyond any of the theories we had. Realizing that the entire framework of your worldview is a fabrication is unsettling, to say the least. A calming round of golf soothed our souls afterward.



3 "Wizard needs food badly!" – Announcer, Gauntlet

Let's face it: It's always the freaky wizard who needs the food. And then shoots the food. And then whines when the valkyrie picks up all the good loot while the wizard covers in the back trying not to get hit. Gauntlet was one of the first competitively cooperative games, and this one sentence sums up why a fortune in quarters was fed into that arcade cabinet.



4 "Killing spree!" – Announcer, Unreal Tournament

Nothing like a little blatant self-aggrandizement to foster an atmosphere of good sportsmanship and healthy competition. The adrenaline rush that pounds through your veins as the faceless announcer booms this proclamation of your prowess can't be beat. Besides, you just pwned five scrubs without dying. This is your due.



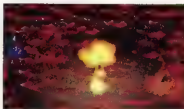
5 "Snake? Snake!? SNAAAKE!" – Metal Gear Solid

This line isn't technically part of *Metal Gear* canon, because it means you failed the mission and killed Snake. The real Snake would never make your bush-league mistakes, so he'd never hear the escalating cries of his allies. It's the game's way of saying "You blew it. Try again."



6 "Nuclear launch detected." – Adjutant, StarCraft

Something about that cool, robotic voice informing us of our imminent doom creeps us out to this day. You better hope you have a scanner sweep or two ready to find the Ghost putting that blinking red dot in the middle of your carefully constructed base, or you're done for. Let's be honest: You let your opponent build a nuke, get a Ghost into position, and launch it. It's over.



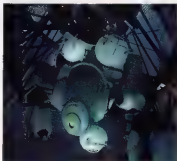
7 "... – Hundreds of NPCs. Most Japanese RPGs To Date

What is this even supposed to mean? A cool glare from a villager who doesn't trust you? A moment of silence from the elder whose daughter was killed in a bandit raid you couldn't stop? Fawning puppy dog eyes from a spunky kid who idolizes your free-wheeling ways? Most likely it's an overworked localization team taking shortcuts, but we'll never know. And it will bother us forever.



8 "The cake is a lie" – Portal

Yeah, we know the whole cake thing is played out... but this is the phrase everyone remembers. The malevolent GLADOS has some great lines, like "This next test is impossible. Make no attempt to solve it," and "Get comfortable while I warm up the neurotoxin emitters," but those need to be taken in context. Graffiti disputing the existence of cake is simple and catchy.



9 "War. War never changes." – Narrator, Fallout

This fatalistic declaration is the centerpiece of *Fallout*'s commentary on the human tragedy. Ron Perlman's dulcet tones deliver it with head-shaking regret and an undertone of anger that forcefully deposits players in *Fallout*'s desperate setting. From the first moments of the game, you know that this is going to be an experience unlike any other.



10 "You rock!" – Guitar Hero

Dam right we do. Sure, it was "Smoke on the Water" on easy, but we nailed that lick. As soon as this praise rained up on our screens, we were hooked. Plastic guitars seemed like another in a long line of gimmicky peripherals that only a handful of savants would buy, but *Guitar Hero* sold the experience far better than any other music game to date – and this line was the crux of its argument.



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

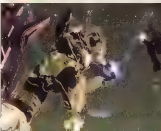
When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



UGLY

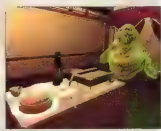
Guitar Hero comes out with its first drum kit, and it ends up failing the audition. A number of kits suffered from sensitivity issues, and the remedy requires a PC, downloadable Activision software, and a USB MIDI interface. Activision says it will replace any flat-out defective drum kits, and in some cases will supply you with the MIDI interface. Go to www.activision.com/support for more info.

In other Guitar Hero news, Activision Blizzard CEO Bobby Kotick said during an earnings call that the company might turn downloading user-created Guitar Hero songs into a subscription-based service. This would cost money, whereas now you can get those songs for free. Unfortunately, the history of rock 'n' roll is filled with people cashing in on the talent of others.



BAD

Bungie's Halo 3: ODST has changed its name to Halo 3: ODST. A game of featureless soldiers goes even more generic as the title goes from blind to worse.



UGLY

Brash Entertainment promised to elevate the deplorable state of video games based on movies, but putting out titles as bad as *Jumpin' Jack Flash* and *Alien & The Chipmunks* didn't help the cause. Now Brash has closed its doors, but not before firing a number of employees, losing a founder, and burning through \$400 million in funding.

UGLY

Choochiebots and The Choochiebots of Roblox: Assault on Dark Athena both found homes at Atari. Activision Blizzard CEO Bobby Kotick and these former Vivendi titles were dropped because they "didn't" have the potential to be exploited every year... Another classic World of Conflict developer Massive Entertainment was acquired by Ubisoft.



THQ's original Supreme Commander

GOOD

Square Enix's western development strategy is continuing. The publisher/developer recently pledged to make *Supreme Commander 2*—the original title in the RTS series—was put out by THQ. Square Enix is also starting a development studio in L.A., which is currently working on an action game and downloadable titles.



After conquering space in his 13-day stay aboard the International Space Station, Ultima creator Richard Garriott is leaving NCsoft to pursue "new interests."

Garriott's NCsoft title, *Tribes: Aerial Assault*, did not do well, and the game's servers will shut down February 28.

GOOD

Recently announced sequels: *LittleBigPlanet 2*, *Dead Space 2*, *Saints Row 3*, *Army of Two 2*, *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*, and *Mercenaries 3*.

games

IS EVERYONE FOR ALL-PLAY?

EA SPORTS' WII BRAND STILL LOOKING FOR SUCCESS

When Nintendo set out to win over non-gamers with the accessibility of the Wii, nobody knew how the system would be received. Now that it's a huge success, the question becomes: How accessible does the software have to be to match the system's philosophy? That's something Electronic Arts is trying to figure out with its All-Play sports titles.

This is the first year EA Sports branded its Wii sports games (*Tiger Woods*, *Madden NFL*, *FIFA*, *NBA*, and *NCAA Football*) as All-Play, and according to EA Sports president Peter Moore, "it's early days," as to whether the company's strategy is paying off. The All-Play titles differ from their counterparts on the other next-gen systems by offering more accessible, Wii-specific gameplay to non-sports gamers. At this year's E3, EA went out of its way to showcase *Tiger Woods' All-Play* swing system that levels the playing field with the traditional swing mechanic in the game. EA hired pro golfer Natalie Gulbis to demonstrate the title at the company's press conference.

EA switched over to the All-Play brand for its Wii titles (complete with custom cover art) after it determined that simply porting the next-gen version of its sports titles down to the Wii wasn't working. "It was pretty obvious to us that we weren't building something that was resonating with the Wii user," says Moore. "Sales are a great way of getting feedback. When it's not selling the way you'd like it to, you go into why."

Moore and the EA Sports teams decided these Wii sports titles needed to be more inviting to non-sports gamers in terms of controls and the size of the experience. Moore explained that EA found out players weren't putting in the multi-hour sessions with their Wii sports titles like they were with other EA Sports games, so the company needed to make the Wii experience more bite sized. Has the new strategy paid off?

Sales numbers for some of the All-Play titles demonstrate that gamers aren't biting. According to NPD numbers for their first month on the market, the All-Play version of *Tiger Woods* sold only 41,000 copies, and *Madden 115,000*. When you consider that the Xbox 360 version of *Madden* sold a million units in its first month with a smaller installed base than the Wii's 12 million units in the U.S., you start to get some perspective on how the All-Play series is doing.

Game Informer Online forum members who've played the All-Play games don't seem surprised that the series is struggling. Leveling the playing field and failing to give the full sports game experience are the common complaints leveled against All-Play.

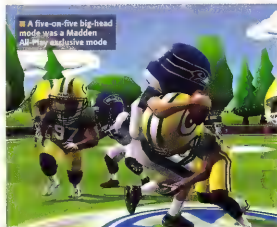
Peter Moore and EA, however, are still optimistic about the brand, particularly with the holiday season now upon us. "We're still not where we need to be, I think. But it's getting better and better," he says. Moore hopes that the All-Play titles back the normal buying trend of sports games, where titles shift most of their units in the first few weeks after launch and then quickly taper off. Moore says he doesn't expect such a precipitous decline post-launch with All-Play titles. However, with the NFL regular season almost over and college football heading into the bowl season, the window of interest for most All-Play titles may be shrinking.

Wedburn Morgan analyst Michael Pachter thinks the holiday season will be a big indicator for the health of the All-Play brand, and believes in EA's overall direction. "I think the strategy makes sense," he told us.

Apart from holiday sales numbers, one thing the imprint might have going for it in the future is Nintendo's Wii MotionPlus—a peripheral that makes the motions of your Wii remote more accurate. Moore says Nintendo is working with EA on the peripheral to get it implemented in EA's All-Play titles. Is engineering these titles to be more in harmony with the Wii the answer? Or do sports fans simply want a tried-and-true hardcore experience?



Different cover art and box branding (out of cover art and box branding) is used to set the All-Play series apart from the normal EA Sports titles. The company is also planning more point-of-purchase materials and different advertising.



A five-on-five big-head mode was a Madden All-Play exclusive mode.



"Microsoft's hero simulator amassed a fair amount of hype by the time of its release. Gamers couldn't wait to get their hands on the title to explore the enchanted world of Albion and interact with its often-hilarious inhabitants. Unlike its oft-maligned (but still good) predecessor, Fable II met expectations, as it sold more than 1.5 million units worldwide within its first month, making it the fastest-selling RPG for the Xbox 360. Still, the game's success hasn't come without complaint. Many gamers have questioned Lionhead's design choices. We grilled Fable II's design director, Dene Carter, about these issues using questions generated by Game Informer readers.



DENE CARTER
Design Director, Lionhead Studios

FABLE II

Tanooki: I love the game, but why no mini-map? The glowing trail is great for getting straight to the next objective, but the lack of a mini-map makes exploration a pain.
DENE CARTER: We tried to make the game more accessible for people who don't play games. The problem with a mini-map is that you're effectively playing the game twice: once in a 3D view and once in a 2D view, and having to do a kind of mental conversion. To hardcore players it's easy, but to non-core players it's actually quite a negative thing. That said, we have many ideas on how to improve on this feature in the future... whatever that might bring.

Ninjadamus: Was there ever point in development that the game had a more comprehensive property management system? Or at least one that let you tweak all of your properties at once?

DC: I think the enormous popularity of the property management is something we were slightly surprised by. Given our druthers, I think it's one of the aspects of the game we'd spend a lot more time on – that there are some really interesting opportunities to make it into something very unique and special.

Commander Pants: At the end of the game the heroes all go their separate ways to other parts of the world. Are you guys planning on releasing any downloadable expansions where players can go on those adventures with them? I'd love to go to Samarkand.

DC: Thank goodness you didn't say "Summer Camp," which is what a lot of people went around calling it for a while. Now we've finished the game, we've got some interesting ideas about what these folks went off to do at the end, especially Reaver. As for whether you'll come across them in downloadable expansions... who knows what the future might bring?

ItsameEddy: I love the game and can't stop playing it. However, after playing through several times I wonder about the weapons. I end up using the same one through most of the game, and all the legendary weapons I find are usually not better than the ones I buy. This is reverse from how it is in most games. Shouldn't the weapons you spend hours trying to find in the game be the best weapons in the game?

DC: This is a tough one. On one hand, if you make the Demon Doors so tough people can only get them at the end of the game, you end up with a bunch of pointless doors nobody approaches until after they've finished the game. If you make them a bit easier, then people feel it's odd to have underpowered magical weapons. Our view during development was that it was actually a bit more work to earn money, and so hard graft weapons should have a more reward.

moak11: Why did you add co-op functionality on the game if we could not bring our characters into the other player's game? It just would have been really nice if we could see how evil or good the other heroes looked.

DC: Our feeling on this was that – as a benchman – you're visiting another player's world. He's the hero in his world, not you, and we didn't want to confuse that message by making you both look and feel equally, it wasn't designed as an equal experience. However – as with many things – we've learned a lot about what people like and don't like about the multiplayer modes, and it's always something we take into consideration.

Super Pat Balls: One of the concerns I had with the game was that it was almost too easy compared to the first one. At any point of the development was there any consideration to make some of the well abilities have a slight cool down so it wasn't spamable?

DC: By comparison, I died about five times during shows in Moscow this week. Part of the reason for that is because I was trying to max out my experience gains by mixing up the combat. There are always ways to exploit systems, but we hoped the XP bonuses for chaining, head-shots, cliff-shots and others would be a suitable incentive. We decided to get rid of mana/recharge times on spells because it actively stopped players from being pure warriors (see the original Fable). This time, I'm happy to say, there are many more wizards in Albion.

Oreitt-Herx: I wish there was more of a focus on specializing in a certain combat aspect. You really can't just go true mage, archer/gunner, or fighter. You get so much of the other XP that you have to spend it on something. This just makes all characters pretty much good at everything by the end. Besides his good/evil status, your character ends up being the same as anyone else's.

DC: Low-level abilities in all the other trees remained (I'd still be alluring and encourage experimentation. However, this does lead to Jacks of All Trades. It's not something we consider to be "wrong" but more of a play-style issue, and thus

something we'll look at if we choose to do another Fable in the future.

Benster: Why do I need to go through several menu tiers every time I want to use an experience potion?

DC: This was initially because we wanted to ensure players were well aware that they'd used the item (e.g. see their health bar go up, XP HUD show up, etc.). You can, of course, use multiple potions from the d-pad, and when you gain points from the world there's a quick-use option on the X button.

Stay Puft Mushroom Man: Why isn't there more armor in the game? I understand the need to make defense something you earn with experience, but for aesthetic purposes how come I can't make my guy look like he's wearing armor?

DC: The world of Fable II is set in something approximating the 16th-17th century, when most people didn't use anything but very light armor due to gunpowder's increasing role in combat. We felt that adding heavy armor went against our notion of "clothing equality": Having a hero walking around in full plate, yet still being vulnerable to a quick stab in the ribs was ridiculous. [Note: Lionhead recently announced a downloadable pack for mid-December, which, aside from finally giving players the opportunity to wear armor, will feature new weapons, quests, and areas to explore. – Ed]

GearsGal983: I love most of the achievements in the game and thought they came at a good pace, but the The Dollcatcher achievement seems out of place. Why did you come up with this one?

DC: We view achievements as a way to reward players for sucking the marrow out of our game. As such, some of them will be easy, and others quite hard. If we'd made the Dollcatcher achievement easy, we wouldn't have people on forums talking to each other, making friends and bartering over LIVE, which we feel is pretty unique. Remember, it's optional! If you're not having fun with this achievement, then you don't lose anything but a few points (Was this convinced you to try for it yet?).



impulse

BY MATT MILLER

Fighting comes back to the streets, tower defense receives a fancy overhaul, and kingdom building gets a helping hand. Plus: readers talk back.



A couple of months ago, I asked for your opinion about the merits of downloadable releases over traditional retail games. You shared your thoughts on the matter, and the emails followed a couple of main themes. As one might imagine, expectations for a given game's quality is closely tied with cost – when you spend more, you want the game to be proportionally more polished. Here's the funny thing: Even though several readers said that was the case, they also shared my opinion that even the most inexpensive downloadable releases should deliver fun content from the moment you turn it on. It makes sense, since these are often games you're investing way less time in than your retail releases. But isn't that another way to say your expectations are higher, even though they cost less? It leads me to think that perhaps we evaluate downloadable games on a separate metric from other titles. Geometry Wars is, in almost every way, a simpler game than BioShock. But, pound for pound, is BioShock objectively a better game? Is it like comparing apples and oranges, or is there an objective scale of "fun" to which players should hold all games? Let me know your thoughts.

Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix should serve as an interesting case study on this exact question when it releases on Live Arcade and PlayStation Network. The dramatically redrawn characters and backgrounds look amazing, and the addition of remixed tunes makes the audio pop like never before.

Minor variations in controls distinguish this game from the original, and the freakishly high production values should bring gamers in the door. Most franchise followers currently have their eyes set on the pending Street Fighter IV, but in the meantime, this downloadable remix of the earlier game deserves better than to be lost in the shuffle.

PSN is playing host to an awfully familiar genre with **Savage Moon**. I'd heard it was a vanation on the tower defense concept, but it wasn't until I played the game this month that I realized "vanation" doesn't really come into play. This, for all intents and purposes, the definition of tower defense. That's not to say I don't like it. While trading familiar ground, Savage Moon has a clean

and easy-to-navigate control system for laying out your base protection and upgrades, and a smooth camera for zooming around the StarCraft-inspired 3D maps. Stopping the onrushing hordes of insect-like aliens

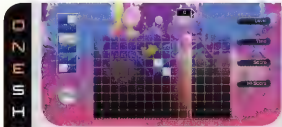
gets increasingly difficult (surprise, surprise), and it doesn't take more than a level or two for the addiction to set in.

NingyBee, the developer that previously delivered titles like Cloning Clyde and Outpost Kaloki X, released its latest game alongside the new Xbox Live Experience in November – a

Kingdom for Keflings. The timing wasn't coincidental, since the game supports in-game avatar play and parties of up to four online play-

ers. Thankfully, the game is far more than a gimmick to show off new Live features – the city building simulation is both clever and amusing. You control a giant, who instructs the little Kefling people to gather resources

as you arrange the layout of their charming town. Between the cutesy graphics and the acoustic "let's all just chill out, dude!" soundtrack, the game isn't exactly the height of frenzied action. But that's really not the point, and the game is ultimately a success. ■ ■ ■



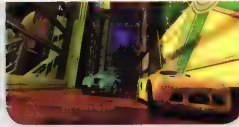
Lumines Supernova

Fans of the music-driven falling block puzzler should be stoked to hear that a new version is headed to PlayStation Network in the coming weeks. New music and backgrounds, a music-creating sequencer mode, and several other new modes are welcome additions. But the real win? Finally playing with a PS3 d-pad.



Meteos Wars

Entertainment has been busy this year. Even as it releases a new Lumines on PSN, Live Arcade receives a brand new version of Meteos. Instead of pushing falling blocks, you must blast them back into outer space. It's a unique puzzle experience heightened by the ability to play online with friends.



Things on Wheels

Remember X.C. Pro Am and Micro Machines? Welcome to the next-gen equivalent. A dozen minuscule cars zoom around a sprawling mansion and its environs. Controls are simple but precise, and the game supports co-op. How more do you need to know?

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



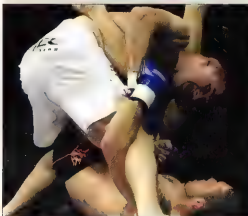
FINAL FANTASY XIII RELEASE UPDATE

We're hearing that the release date for Final Fantasy XIII is starting to come into view. Square Enix plans to bring the game out in Japan during the 2009 holiday season, with a U.S. release sometime in 2010. This could be as early as summer 2010 or as late as holiday 2010.



LITTLEBIGPLANET'S NEW WORLDS

LittleBigPlanet's themed worlds and myriad unlockables are ripe for expansion pack exploration, and that's exactly what Sony plans to do with the game. Expansions for the game will follow The Sims model, with each pack of extra content being tightly themed. Expect these to release in both retail and download forms.



EA MMA?

EA Sports is always looking for new sports opportunities, and we've heard a rumor that they are looking into doing a mixed martial arts title. We don't have any other details, but it'll be an interesting rumor to watch given that THQ still holds the license for UFC. And we all know how important a license is to EA.

Get some inside info? Email us at connect@gameinformer.com, and we'll be off.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Named God Seer in Japan, the SNK action/RPG released in 1990 for the NES. The game is set 300 years into the future, casting you as a young man who must combine four elemental swords into one to defeat Emperor Dragon. Like the original *Yakuza*, this title features top-down real-time combat, but opted for more traditional RPG spell casting and XP. An alternate Game Boy Color version of the game came out in 2002.

(Answer on page 15)



DOWNS

WHAT GAMES ARE MADE OF THE TALES BEHIND THE TITLES

UNLIMITED ENABLED

There are a 1,001 stories behind each game, and a lot of them never get told. We talked to a few developers and got some behind-the-scenes tidbits and factoids you otherwise wouldn't have known.



ENDWAR

The original working title of EndWar was "Objective Force."

The voice command in EndWar supports six different languages—English, French, Italian, Spanish, German and Japanese—as well as U.S. and U.K. English accents.

The art direction of EndWar was inspired by the movies of Poland Dziurich, such as the destruction of L.A. in *The Day after Tomorrow*.

The story of EndWar is inspired by the original Tom Clancy book *Red Storm Rising*, which imagined a near future non-nuclear World War III back in the 80s.

The military advisor for EndWar, Dutch de Gai, is a U.S. Army Ranger and was also the advisor for Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter II.



FABLE 2

Looney Studios was named after co-founder Mark Webby's pet hamster because the intended name, Red Eye, was already registered.

The dog from the 1987 game *NetHack* served as the inspiration for the dog in Fable II.

Looney employed a self-proclaimed Sword Master to work on the combat in Fable II.

Every tree in Fable II has approximately 120,000 registering leaves.

The design and look of the characters in Fable II are inspired by the film *Avatar* of the Wolf.

In the spirit of inspiring the combat design in Fable II, Looney had challenged fellow Microsoft Game Studios developer Rare to a soccer match. Looney won 2-0.



FALLOUT 3

In the world of Fallout, the bombs fell on October 23rd. Bethesda tried to coincide the release of Fallout 3 to that.

The original inspiration for V.A.T.S. was Burnin's crash mode replay.

Actress Courtney Cox worked at Bethesda briefly in the 1980s.

The bell that sounds after shooting the Fat Man nuclear catapult is the lunchroom bell at the Bethesda offices.

The Fat Man is based on an actual nuke launcher, the M-388 Daisy Crosscut Tactics Nuclear Recoilless Rifle, which was made in the 1950s.

The Huhne Comics building is a terminal in their computer games division that has an actual working test adventure in it called "The Rage of Griest."

The downtown D.C. area in Fallout 3 was twice the size at one point. The team decided it was too large and confusing and cut half the space out. The wasteland area was half the size, and the team felt it was too small, so the wasteland doubled.

The cars in Fallout 3 are based on the Ford Nuclear, a concept car built to run on a nuclear generator in the 1960s.



SAINTS ROW 2

The animation and over-the-top motion-capture team retained the same pornographic star from *Saints Row 1* to *Saints Row 2*. He is involved in almost every shot and animation scene, including the tea-bagging animation.

During motion capture for the fight scene between Maero and the player, the actor playing Maero landed headfirst while falling onto a mat from 20 feet, injuring himself in the process.

The underground Shady Town environment was inspired by Seattle's underground only.

Development team members make up four of the five Hitman kills. The final list was a team raffle of random target descriptions.

"Zombie Uprising" was originally a city-wide activity, then based in a mall, then ultimately moved to the run-down theater where it is today.

The fastest recorded play time for 100 percent completion in single player is 16 hours, 30 minutes (normal difficulty). The time was accomplished by the UK team. Comparatively, the *Saints Row 2* designers took more than 25 hours to reach 100 percent completion.

The design team originally considered adding in mine, pump, and copycat gangs before finally deciding on the Rowen, Brotherhood, and Sons of Samedi.



NHL 09

Accomplishments:

EA's NHL 09 is the first sports title to introduce online, six-versus-six league play, and the team Dream Killers has essentially held the number one slot on Xbox Live since the game's release. As co-general managers of the team (which fluctuates between 20 and 30 members) Chris Flinn and Irek Drabek have led the team to a record of 921-56-5 as of this writing, more than 200 points ahead of the nearest competitor. If their numbers hold, they'll fly out to the EA Canada offices to compete against the top PS3 and 360 teams for the real world EASHL Cup.

Forming the Team:

"Since 2005, I've known at least half the guys on the team. We were all top three ranks," Drabek says.

"The other guys actually contacted my brother and asked if we wanted to come together and make a 'super team,' if you will," Flinn says. "We all knew of each other for years. We've been enemies from '07 and '08, but we came together to fight for the same cause."

Player Roles:

"I play center or defense. Grubby plays right wing or defense," Flinn says. "That's probably the best part of our team — everybody can play defense. Everybody gets along, and we don't have any puck hogs."

The Key to Victory:

"It depends on what the defense is going to give us," Flinn says. "If they're going to stack the blue line, then we're going to dump [the puck] and work the puck deep, if they're going to give us room to set up plays on the rush, then we'll play like that. Primarily, I'd say we play defensive hockey and take advantage of what the other team gives us."

Goalie: Human or AI?

"We play maybe half our games with a goalie," Flinn says. "I've been trying out different guys, but haven't really found the goalie that's going to take us into the playoffs yet."

Practice Time:

Both players put in around 20 to 30 hours a week.

Other Games:

Most of Dream Killers took a break from hockey to dig into Gears of War 2.

Life Outside of Hockey:

Flinn was drafted by the Tampa Bay Devil Rays baseball team in 2001, and played seven seasons in the minor leagues as a pitcher until elbow problems forced him to stop. He recently underwent Tommy John surgery, in which an elbow ligament is replaced by a tendon from somewhere else on the body. "Right now I'm trying to do the best I can with rehabbing my arm so I can get the chance to play baseball again," Flinn says. "That's what I've always wanted to do. I had success doing it for my whole life and it's been taken away with me being hurt." Drabek works as a carpenter's assistant and aims to be a full-time carpenter or own his own landscaping business. He also plays soccer and enjoys working with computers.

What New Features Should Be in NHL 2010?

Both Flinn and Drabek agree that the goalies should be smarter. Teammate John Borg (GTA xLEG3NDx) has some serious ideas. "[EA should] make a few locker rooms so when we've got 20 guys online we can set up certain lines and get certain guys playing with certain guys as opposed to 20 guys trying to get into one locker room at a time. It's kind of confusing and unorganized," Borg says. "Also, being able to send players around your skill level so you're not playing the lower-end teams' hard is also like the ability to customize team arenas, some kind of online game scheduling, and a spectator mode where GMs could coach their team without playing."

UNLIMITED ENABLED

Hockey Heroes Dream Killers

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 peaky message over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network from GameInformerMag, please don't delete it. You could be the next featured gamer.

CLUB RANKINGS

Handle:

Grubasek

Name:

Irek Drabek

Age:

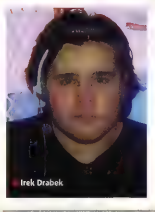
21

Hometown:

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Favorite NHL Team:

Pittsburgh Penguins



Irek Drabek



Chris Flinn

Handle:

FlinnpChimp91

Name:

Chris Flinn

Age:

28

Hometown:

Levittown, New York

Favorite NHL Team:

New York Islanders



games

THE FIRST GTA IV DOWNLOAD IS HERE

EXCLUSIVE EPISODE HITS 360 IN FEBRUARY

Grand Theft Auto IV's exclusive Xbox 360 downloadable content is finally around the corner. The first download, entitled *The Lost and the Damned*, will be available February 17. The expansion requires that you own *GTA IV* and have an online connection.

This episode features a new character named Johnny Klebitz, a member of *The Lost* biker gang, with 124 missions.

What you've done in the main game won't have any bearing on this new content, and there is no word on if Niko Bellic will make an appearance. *The Lost and the Damned* also features new multiplayer modes, weapons, vehicles, and soundtrack content.

No pricing, file size, or other details have been announced yet.



TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER
AKIHIRO HINO
CEO, Level 5

- 1 *Dragon Warrior III* - NES
- 2 *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* - N64
- 3 *Torenko's Great Adventure: Mysterious Dungeon* - Super Famicom
- 4 *Otagirisu* - PSone
- 5 *SD Gundam: Gachapon Senshi* - NES



READER
JOSHUA LOPEZ
(shows w/ Seth Green)
Los Angeles, CA

- 1 *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* - PS2
- 2 *Max Payne* - PS2
- 3 *Grand Theft Auto IV* - 360
- 4 *God of War* - PS2
- 5 *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men* - 360

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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email: topfive@gameinformer.com

(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists... Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Reactions To Microsoft's Stupid Avatars

- 10 Nintendo did it first, better, and they weren't even good then
- 9 They call that a beard? Amateurs
- 8 Cool! Now we all look the same! And awful!
- 7 It could be worse though... we could all look like Jet Brody
- 6 Well, look on the bright side... [hangs head]
- 5 So, I guess everyone shops at The Gap now?
- 4 Who made this garbage? Oh, Rare. Nevermind
- 3 I never knew I had so many cross-dressing friends
- 2 Stop waving, you horrible abomination!
- 1 How do I delete these?

Name That Game Answer: *Crystal*

Achievement

DO AND DON'TS

ACHIEVEMENT UNLOCKED

Read The Dos and Don'ts

Use achievements to lure players into checking out a game's entire feature set.

Burnout Paradise and Gears of War 2 are the perfect examples. With dedicated achievement sets for each mode (ranging from the "try it out" type of achievement to the "give it your all" style), these games effectively use achievements as a guided tour to new gameplay innovations.

Chart the player's progress toward unlocking achievements

Like Barry Bonds' race for the home run record, players should be able to track how close they are to reaching a milestone achievement — such as 500 headshots. Valve's The Orange Box was the first game to introduce an achievement-tracking menu that could be viewed during gameplay. Epic copied this system in Gears of War 2. Every other developer should follow suit.

Create achievements that encourage gamers to return to your game

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway hands out an achievement to players who play the game once a week for three months. This may seem annoying, but if the game has a strong multiplayer component, this achievement is the nudge that pushes for a strong community. Achievements like these could also play a large role in games with a steady stream of downloadable content.

Lead players through your campaign with incremental achievements

This is especially important for story driven games where you want the players to see the resolution. The entitlement of another 100 points can be the extra incentive needed for players who otherwise might turn their attention elsewhere.

Implement achievements that are unlocked after the completion of the game

If handled correctly, these bonus achievements would increase the replay value. Having achievements like "finish a level using only melee" and "insert your punter into the quarterback position" shouldn't be available from the outset, as they force players to play the game in strange ways.

Gamescore point totals should be based on a game's content, not disc versus digital distribution

Limiting a game like Puzzle Quest, which can suck away hundreds of hours of your life, to just 200 points is a travesty. This game deserves the 1,000-point max. Conversely, a game like Scene It, which can be completed in a few hours, shouldn't have anywhere near the max.

Reward players for challenging themselves

If players beat Rock Band's career mode on Expert, they also get the achievements for beating the game on the lesser difficulty levels. Just hand out the points, or change it to a single "beat the game" achievement.

Weight achievement points to properly reflect how people play your game

If it's a multiplayer heavy game, then make most of the achievements unlockable through competition. If you have story driven game, reward players for experiencing the story.

Make sure the achievements back up the time investment

If you can sink 80 hours into be NHL 09's Be A Pro mode, make sure there is a commensurate amount of achievement/points to go along with it. PlayStation 3 games won't run into this problem with trophies. As for Microsoft, an easy solution is waiving the maximum of 50 achievements per game. Some gamers will not invest time in specific modes if they are not getting rewarded with points/achievements frequently. We'd rather get one point every hour as opposed to a 50-point chunk after 80.

Defeating an end boss or recording a high score is no longer the end game — the landscape of gaming has changed. Many gamers spend hours behind the controller in pursuit of a higher gamescore, towering trophy counts, and the prestige that comes with earning unique in-game rewards. Though the idea of rewarding gamers for their exploits isn't new (remember the Activision badges?), many games still suffer from misguided or poorly developed achievements. When done right, achievements can greatly enhance a game and give developers another tool to keep players coming back. When done wrong, achievements can spoil an ending, ruin a multiplayer experience, and make players abandon a game in favor of a more rewarding title. Through discussions with gamers and other editors, we've compiled a list of common praises and pitfalls to give developers a roadmap to the proper implementation of achievements.

Force players to play a game in an unnatural way to get achievements

No one wants to play as the Miami Dolphins, let alone throw six touchdowns with a water-boy-turned-quarterback. If the achievements dramatically change the gameplay in fundamentally strange ways, can you really hand out an "achievement unlocked" message or a trophy?

Kill the gamer

There's a better chance of a gamer falling over dead from sleep deficiency than from earning the achievement for killing 100,000 enemies or playing in 10,000 online matches. The only way we'll back time-sucking achievements like these is if they are worth 3,000 gamescore points. In Gears of War 2, 100,000 kills nets you 50 gamescore points. Thanks for playing, chump!

Make the majority of your achievements dependent upon higher difficulties

Rewarding the hardcore player with extra achievement points is a noble gesture, but don't do it at the expense of the majority of gamers or the default setting. EA Sports, and oddly almost every soccer game released, are notorious for this. Don't earn the reputation of a game that puts a big, fat zero on a gamer's résumé.

Make farm-worthy multiplayer achievements

Total kill counts work for deathmatch, but don't create anything that takes away from the spirit of the competition. All too often we see people abandoning the team's goals to take on a quest of individual glory. Multiplayer achievements should be created for individual modes, not just multiplayer as a whole.

Have the "achievement unlocked" or "trophy earned" message reveal the ending

For the love of god, don't reveal that player has completed the game until the credits roll. Nothing says "buzzkill" more than seeing this message appear during a cinematic. Immersion gone!

Have the "achievement unlocked" message appear over text

Michael, I need you to go talk to "achievement unlocked" in Megaton City. Sam, the code to the vault is "achievement unlocked." Developers have the ability to place the achievement and trophy messages anywhere they want onscreen. Sounds like an easy fix. How is this problem in so many games?

Reveal major plots in the achievement text

Both Microsoft and Sony have systems in place for developers to create "secret" achievements. There's no reason to give bullet points of a game's plot in achievement text. "Complete chapter 4" will suffice.

Make all achievements boast-worthy/impossible challenges

For achievement farmers, nothing says game over like these achievements. A few brag-worthy achievements are fine, but don't go overboard.

Require people to spend a specific amount of time with your game unless you have the content to support it

Are you really going to play Call of Juarez for 24 hours? Are you really going to fly for 10,000 miles in Superman Returns, let alone spend 12 hours with it?

Make multiplayer achievements if multiplayer is an afterthought

We're talking about you Dark Sector, Overlord, Vampire Rain, Star Trek: Legacy, Stranglehold, The Darkness, Spidevick Chronicles, Turning Point: Fall of Liberty, Turko, and every Xbox Live Arcade game. If you only have a few people working on a multiplayer component, and just have multiplayer because you can, save all of your achievements for single player and the content that matters.

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI®

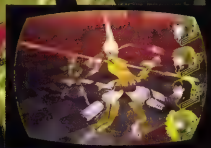
PA Persona⁴

EGM Game of the Month EGM Gold Award

— Electronic Gaming Monthly, January 2009

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an amazing game.”

— Play



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Warhammer: Age of Reckoning

As of press time, Mythic just released a major patch as part of its efforts to keep Warhammer on the right course. For all the things the game does right, Warhammer has caught flak for poor population balance, boring level grinds, and open realm-vs-realm combat with uninspiring incentives. Mythic has been fairly responsive to these issues, giving experience bonuses to under-populated factions on certain realms, boosting experience rewards for different types of content, and increasing the loot dropped during open PvR keep sieges.

Players seem divided on whether Mythic is going far enough in these changes or not. As is typical of MMO communities, the tone on many forums devoted to the game is overwhelmingly negative. In contrast, committed players like Caefer, a level-capped dwarfish engineer with the Inquisition guild on the Skull Throne server, seem to be having a good time despite recognizing its issues. "[The endgame is] very well done. When a lot of people are fighting and using the endgame as expected, it's fun," Caefer says. "[But] right now it seems to be more of a grind about getting the best gear. I'm sure it will be used as intended when people finish doing that."

Mythic seems very aware of the issues that players have with the game, and is taking steps to address them. However, the slow pace of the changes seems small comfort for players stuck on servers with poor population balance, and a 20 percent experience bonus for new characters on certain realms is hardly going to fix the soul-crushing midgame grind overnight. Warhammer is not without its charms, but ultimately the game's potential is locked within its players. As Caefer says, "I'd like to tell everybody to get off their asses and join some [open PvR]."

MMOreport

BY ADAM BIESSENER

Blizzard shatters its own sales records and pulls everyone back into Azeroth, while Mythic makes a bid to keep players in its war-torn world



If ever a game needed no introduction, it's World of Warcraft. Blizzard released its latest expansion to the gargantuan MMORPG on November 13, blowing away the previous record for single-day PC game sales (set by World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade with 2.4 million units) in the process with 2.8 million boxes sold. After leveling to the new cap of 80 and clearing the player-versus-environment content included in the launch, I have a whole lot of love for the game — and my share of frustrations as well.

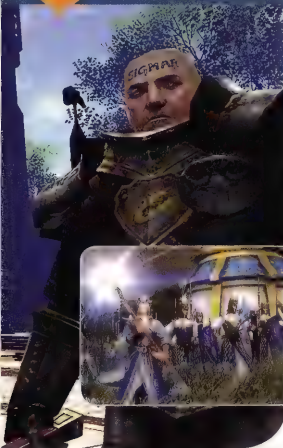
The leveling content in WotLK is without question the best to date in the genre. The game's storyline serves as a fitting epilogue to Warcraft III's epic events, and ties previously vague elements like the five dragonflights and the Titans into the world far more effectively than previous plots have. Innovative quests abound, from God of War-styled aerial encounters where heroes hop from drake to drake in a flurry of death to helping reppublice Northrend's seals by luring bulls across a strait with tasty fish. Dozens of daily quests for a variety of factions and rewards extend the viable solo content for months, and the new small-group dungeons are some of the best in the game. Quest lines that "phase" you (basically making things look different to you after you complete certain quests) make the world feel much more alive than in the past. This isn't a mere re-skin of a few models — you'll participate in and witness the aftermath of huge battles, and the world will forever reflect those events. Northrend is truly a casual MMO player's paradise.

With regard to PvE, the new public Lake Wintergrasp zone has a lot of potential. The siege engines and other special features like destructible bridges and walls are fun to play with and worth fighting over, and having worthwhile PvE content away from instanced, auto-balanced Battlegrounds

is a huge deal. At the time of this writing, only a small fraction of the player population had leveled to 80 and ventured into Wintergrasp. This prevented me from judging the zone's lasting entertainment value, but the pieces in place are compelling. A new Arena season should keep the hardcore PvP players occupied, though it's somewhat disappointing that the promised re-work of Battlegrounds (to make them more worthwhile than as a timesome grind for honor gear) didn't make it into WotLK launch.

Beyond the initial thrill of experiencing this fantastic new content, though, lies a problem that will affect more and more players as they enter the endgame. Large-group raids, encounters that require 10 to 25 heroes working in concert, have always been the pinnacle of player-versus-environment achievement in WoW. In Wrath of the Lich King, they're too easy. Top guilds already cleared all of the launch content by the time this magazine went to print, and the available raids at 80 — cool and fun as they are — will not last nearly as long as the initial endgame of The Burning Crusade. Blizzard must release the next content patch with new, challenging raids soon or risk disappointing its hardcore player base.

Regardless of whether or not high-end PvE players run out of content sooner than they'd like, it's impossible to argue that Wrath of the Lich King isn't worth the \$40. The solo and small-group content is the best the genre has to offer. The new Death Knight class brings a slew of awesome new abilities and tools to both PvE and PvP combat, like the ability to temporarily resurrect friendly players as shouls to continue the battle. The raids are a lot of fun, too, they're just tuned poorly in the other direction relative to previous content launches. WotLK was a long time coming, but it is more than worth it on balance. ■ ■ ■





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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1991
Art House
 Schofield, whose background is in visual art, does some art for Barbra Game Gel for the original Game Boy, which becomes a surprise hit

1992
Absolute Game
 Schofield, eager to join the game industry, moves west to join Absolute Entertainment, where he works on a number of franchises including *Ren & Stimpy*, *Rody & Bulwinkle*, and *The Simpsons*

1994
Moving Up

 After Absolute's partnership with Activision ends, Schofield moves to Capcom's new U.S. development studio. There he works on the first fighter movie game, as well as two canceled projects, *Major Damage* (pictured), and a wareznet game

1996
Crystal Clear

 Schofield leaves Capcom for a job at Crystal Dynamics, where he advances quickly and works on several games including *God of War* and *Max Payne: The Mephisto*

2000
Up The Ladder

 Schofield is promoted to vice president of Crystal Dynamics and oversees its Xbox launch title *Mad Dash Racing*, as well as new entries in the *Legacy of Kain* series

2002
The Big Boys
 Schofield moves from Crystal Dynamics to the industry's largest publisher/developer, Electronic Arts, where he begins work on the first *Knockout Kings* title

2003
One Ring
 Schofield helps produce EA's *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*

2008
Horror Business

 Schofield and his team bring out a successful new IP, the critically praised space horror game *Dead Space*

GLEN SCHOFIELD

VP AND GENERAL MANAGER, EA REDWOOD SHORES STUDIO

>> After heading the successful horror title *Dead Space*, Glen Schofield has been promoted to general manager of EA Redwood Shores. We spoke with Glen about the future of the studio and a possible *Dead Space* sequel. <<

In your new position as general manager, how is your approach different from what's been there in the past?

It's definitely different. "Hands on" can be termed as a negative, but in this case it's not. I walk around a lot. I know a lot of the guys pretty personally, because I've made games with them. I think coming up through the ranks from a junior artist all the way up helps me a lot. I think it gives me a bit of credibility. I can pick up any controller and play the games and understand them. We make games for a living, so I expect that anyone who's a GM should know games inside and out.

Now that you are managing Redwood Shores, are there things that bothered you as a team member that you're going to try to avoid as a manager?

One thing we're doing is that you're going to see a different style of game coming out of this studio fairly soon. We're probably going to be less about licensed games. The *Dead Space* team had a very close culture. There was a lot of camaraderie and a lot of humor. We had high morale and that's the thing I want to bring to this studio. We had an "all hands" meeting yesterday and all the hands have taken on a different flavor than they used to. We went open, honest, and direct communication.

The IP-cubed thing came up much later than *Dead Space*. I think that was just a term that [EA head] John Riccioello used when he came in. But he did validate what we were doing. When we went into *Dead Space*, we had no idea. We weren't planning any of this. We realized that we had written a huge backstory, but the game takes place on the ship after it's been overrun. We wondered, "Would people want to know why the ship was overrun or what happened to the planet?" So we floated the idea out there to the comic book companies, and it all kind of fell together that we could do a comic series that ran into an animated feature.

The survival horror genre has been very dominated by Japanese developers — Resident Evil, Fatal Frame, and others. How did you take their influence and put a more western spin on it?

We are huge fans of the Japanese games, whether it be survival horror or otherwise. They invented it, and we pay homage to them throughout the game. I've always felt that the Japanese do survival horror games very well and they do great horror movies. But their horror movies also have a very different flavor. So we took the Japanese survival horror type game, but infused it with American horror movie influences. Like the chase sequence in the begin-

design, or could this game be scary in a larger environment?

No, we could do different things in bigger areas. Imagine a huge zero gravity area with no lights on, or just your flashlight and you're hearing sounds around you. We could scare you in big places, too. I've got a list of over 200 things that we never got into the game, just scary ideas. Being claustrophobic helped us, but we could also do this on a bigger scale.

You had some problems with the game being banned in Germany, Japan, and Korea.

Germany finally came around, because the bottom line is that they take it into a whole context. Isaac is not a murderer, he's not killing humans and he's trying to save his friends. At the end of the day, Germany said they would take the game untouched, which is fantastic. I was very surprised with Japan. In finding out exactly the reasons why, it kind of makes sense. There is a cultural difference dealing with the dead. They just had something that we could not overcome and we didn't want to compromise the game. Hell, [Takashi] Miike is the king of horror over there, and if you watch any of his films they are fuckin' insane. So, for us to get banned, I was a bit surprised.

If you can't have fun making games... you might as well be a bricklayer.

EA has had a reputation for a very assembly line development process. Was *Dead Space* a test run for changing the development culture at EA?

I don't know if it was a conscious decision. In the case of any team, I think you take on the personality of the leader. I think you let the guys do what they do best, you have a sense of humor, and you enjoy what you're doing. We make games. If we can't have fun making games, if you turn it into an assembly line... you might as well be a bricklayer. I wake up every day and think I'm one of the luckiest guys on the planet. I think that kind of attitude gets through to the team.

You've already had a comic book and animated film attached to *Dead Space*. Within EA there is a big push to think of new properties as multimedia brands, something they call "IPs." How does that affect your development process?

ing of the game, which was based on a great chase scene in *High Tension*, which was actually French, and the original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. I believe that we evolved the survival horror genre because we made it a little faster paced. On *Dead Space 2*, if we have one, I might consider it more of an action-horror game.

Do you see *Dead Space* as an ongoing series? I would love for this to be a series. That's your goal when you go into it. The critical reviews and the sales will dictate whether we have a sequel or not, but there is such a rich story here that it would be fairly easy. As you're doing this, you have a lot of ideas that don't get used in game one and you hope there is going to be a second so you can put these ideas into it.

***Dead Space* used the classic horror technique of having very confined environments for the most part. Do you think that's a necessary**

You've worked on a lot of original IPs and a lot of licensed games. What are the differences between the two?

With the case of *Godfather*, they are a great license. They're not totally hands-off but they don't get in your way. There are others where you have to ask permission for everything. That's why this studio wants to learn more towards new IP. It's a breath of fresh air — you can come up with some crazy mechanics that the licenses wouldn't let you do.

What's your overall vision for the EA Redwood Shores studios to be five years from now?

My goal for the studio is for us to be edgy, M-rated entertainment. We're not going to be making Disney games here. *Dead Space* was just the start, but we have a couple of things coming down the pipe that are in its vein — and I don't mean science fiction. They are violent, M-rated games and that's where I want to take this studio.

■ Glen Schofield is looking to recast EA Redwood Shores as a studio specializing in original, mature, and violent games

NEW DIRECTIONS



rock out

MAD CATZ CYMBAL EXPANSION KITS

OS: PC, PS2, XBOX 360

This Mad Catz set simulates the crash, ride and hi-hat cymbals of a real drum kit by duplicating the yellow, blue, and green pads on the Rock Band kit. The cymbals only work on Rock Band 2 kits, and they don't make your set equivalent to the Guitar Hero drums since they don't add any outputs. However, unlike most peripherals, these cymbals add extra dimension to the Rock Band gameplay, making you feel more like a real drummer. After only an hour of play we were already kicked out of the band and our IQ had dropped 30 points.

\$19.99 (single) \$29.99 (double) \$39.99 (triple) • www.madcatz.com



peripheral

NYKO WING WII CONTROLLER

OS: WII

Nyko's new Classic-style controller should appeal to those who spend most of their Wii time with the Virtual Console. The Wing has a comfortable ergonomic design and a d-pad that's great for classic titles, but the best feature is how it syncs wirelessly with your Wii remote. Too bad the analog sticks are placed so close together, and the shoulder buttons are oddly positioned. Still, it's fairly compatible to Nintendo's Classic controller, and it feels good to not have a Wii remote dangled over your knees.

\$29.99 • www.nyko.com



tech

T-MOBILE G 1

OS: ANDROID

T-Mobile and Google team up to release this fully featured smartphone that houses a full QWERTY keyboard, 3G network support, and GPS. The most exciting aspect of the new G1 is its Android operating system. This open platform OS already has some great apps, and its future could be very bright if it attracts more programmers to its cause. The touchscreen interface works great for browsing the web or checking emails, even if it's not as versatile as the iPhone's multi-touch display, but we never warmed up to the phone's unique layout (we kept hitting the trackball by accident). The G1's lack of true video playback, shorter battery life and smaller base storage (2GB) also come up short compared to Apple's smartphone juggernaut. The phone clearly wasn't built with gamers in mind, which might explain its weak offerings. The G1 is a competent competitor to most smartphones, just don't think of it as a gaming device or iPhone killer.

\$179.99 (with two-year agreement) • www.t-mobile1.com

peripheral

LOGITECH WII KEYBOARD

OS: WII

This device may not have any bells and whistles, but when you're talking about a wireless keyboard for the Wii, how much do you really need it to do? The keys feel great, and the unit has a simple plug-and-play setup, which also works with PCs and Macs. If you find yourself using the Wii's Opera browser a lot, this would be a respectable purchase. But we'd respect it more if it didn't cost so much.

\$49.99 • www.logitech.com



toys

NERF N-STRIKE

VIDEO ONLY

Don't deny it. You've always wanted to turn your Nerf gun into a video game blaster. With Nerf's N-Strike Switch Shot EX-3, your locked-and-loaded Nerf firearm acts as a Wii remote peripheral that works as well as any of the others on the market. The full package includes an on-rails shooter developed by EA. The game is basically a glorified target game, but it's still more entertaining than we expected, featuring four-player action and more than 25 red Nerf weapons. Still, the \$60 price tag seems a little steep, even if it does satisfy the destructive toddler in all of us. **\$59.99 • www.eastore.ea.com**



furniture

STAR TREK CAPTAIN KIRK'S CHAIR

This replica throne of sci-fi's original space cowboy oozes retro appeal — just wait until it lights up and produces sound effects from the '60s show. We don't normally succumb to ridiculous product claims, but surely this chair will help you match wits with the most intelligent minds in the universe, make you irresistible to exotic women, and get you out of every godforsaken impossible situation you find yourself in.

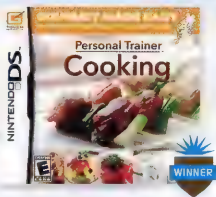
\$2,700.00 • www.dimonselecttoys.com



cook off



VS.



WHAT'S COOKING? WITH JAMIE OLIVER

This sim boasts some serious star power, but the controls are awkward and there is nothing fun about cooking time trials. What's Cooking features some decent recipes, but if that's all you want, why not buy one of Jamie's books? They have better pictures.

\$29.99 • www.atari.com/us

PERSONAL TRAINER: COOKING

Nintendo knows its way around the kitchen. Personal Trainer: Cooking is an exhaustive cooking tool that includes an excellent collection of more than 200 recipes from around the world. With step-by-step video instructions and bonus software like a calculator, a timer, and a digital shopping checklist, this is a welcome addition to any kitchen.

\$19.99 • www.personaltrainercooking.com

media shelf

1. *Heavy Liquid* by Paul Pope

The cult favorite comic by Eisner Award winner Paul Pope has finally been re-released in hardcover. The high concept crime/chase story details the mysterious nature of the addictive titular substance.

\$39.99 • www.dccomics.com/vertigo

2. *Rogue Leaders: The Story of LucasArts* by Rob Smith

Written by Rob Smith, the editor-in-chief of *PlayStation: The Official Magazine*, this historical account details the creation of game studio LucasArts and its development of everything from the Secret of Monkey Island to Star Wars: The Force Unleashed.

\$60.00 • www.chroniclebooks.com

3. *Reaper* by Chronicle One

When Sam's parents sell his soul to the devil, he must become a bounty hunter of escaped souls in one of last year's most original shows.

\$39.98 • www.lionsgateshop.com

4. *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons

Required reading for every comic fan, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' classic has influenced the industry since the '80s. If you haven't read it yet, feel shame.

\$39.99 • www.dccomics.com

sun

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sat

january

For more information on these games and movies, go to www.ign.com



Star Ocean: Second Evolution - 01/06

NEW RELEASES

- Academy Zoo Quest - DS
- Big Bang Man - DS
- Brain Challenge Deluxe - PS3
- Deltas: Adventures of Kai & Zoro - DS
- Mirror's Edge - PC
- Paws and Claws: Pampored Pets - DS
- Paws and Claws: Pet Resort - Wii
- Saints Row 2 - PC
- Star Ocean: Second Evolution - PSP
- Storm of War: Battle of Britain - PC

NEW RELEASES

- Fantasy Aquarium - Wii
- Heat for Dogs - Wii, DS
- The Lord of the Rings: Conquest - PS3, 360, DS, PC
- Max - DS
- Mole CP DS - Wii
- Neighborhood Games - Wii
- PictureIt - PC

The Lord of the Rings: Conquest - 01/13

NEW RELEASES

- 50 Cent: Blood on the Sand - PS3, Wii
- Burnout Paradise - PC
- Criminal Minds - PS3
- Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop - Wii
- Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure - DS
- Legend Alliance - PC
- Skate 2 - PS3, 360

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand - 01/20

NEW RELEASES

- Afro Samurai - PS3, 360
- Baklogage - PC
- The Chase: Felix Meets Felicity - DS
- Contain - Wii, PS2, DS
- Jake Power: Fireman - DS
- Jake Power: Policeman - DS
- King of Fighters '98 Ultimate Match - PS2
- Mana Khemia: Alchemist of Alhena - PSP
- MLB Front Office Manager - PS3, 360, PC

Afro Samurai - 01/27

MASTER CHIEF AND ARBITER STATUS

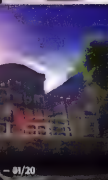
This issue should appeal to two groups of people: those who wore cardboard Master Chief costumes for Halloween, and those who have fallen hopelessly in love with the You Tube sensation Kelly 'in the Chief' (more audiences only). The Master Chief and Arbiter sculpture is the first in a new line of Halo statues by Neos Collectibles. It stands 12 inches tall and will set you back \$250.



Skate 2 - 01/20

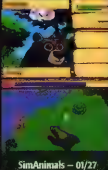
DARK AVENGERS #1

Secret Invasion ended with huge surprises, and in the aftermath the Marvel universe has been shaken to its core. One of the biggest changes is famed comic scribe Brian Michael Bendis' departure from Mighty Avengers at issue 20. His slot on the brand new series, Dark Avengers begins today. Who is this shadowy figure named Iron Patriot? How good is he, good as ours (ough Steve Rogers)?



FINAL CRISIS CONCLUSION

Assuming DC Comics actually has its release date, today marks the conclusion of comic's most convoluted story ever. Inside sources tell us that the big twist ending involves all of the heroes (including J'onn) from Hellwar and saving & not all a dream (ghett).



SimAnimals - 01/27

01



Kingdom Hearts Play Arts

BEN REEVES DAY

Some people call this the greatest holiday of the year. By "people" we mean "person" - Ben Reeves. When celebrating this grand occasion, remember your unfortunate foreheaders who never had a Ben Reeves to celebrate. Don't worry about your descendants, though; they'll have a cybnetic version of Ben to guide them through the darkness. Ben Reeves 2.0 has the future locked up, you

KINGDOM HEARTS PLAY ARTS

Who is the video game equivalent of Barbie? Lara Croft? Wrong. James Bond? Wrong again. The correct answer is a blocky, it's Sora from Kingdom Hearts. He dons a new costume every time you blink. Thankfully, his new 'Halloween loam mold' will probably be relegated to the bargain bin, as fans will surely pick him up for Cloud and Sephiroth. These figures should be on store shelves as you read this.



Ninja Assassin? If you don't go see this movie based on its name alone, you are a noob. For the cool people: Ninja Assassin is about a ninja who kills people (do ninjas do anything else). The Wachoski brothers are involved, and we've heard one of them plays the love interest in the film. He's the one who wears crosses.

Underworld 3: The Rise of the Lycans

Underworld 3: The Rise of the Lycans replaces former lead actress Kate Beckinsale with Ronna Milni, a woman who was given in a suit for the purpose of playing a young Kate Beckinsale in an Underworld prequel. This film, which opens today, has vampires and werewolves. They fight each other. This film.



SimAnimals





Wallpapers	Themes	Screensavers	Games	Realtones
wall36097	theme5373	move9098	game3838	song3216

wall8406	wall8407
wall8408	wall8409
wall8410	wall8411
wall8412	wall8413
wall8414	wall8415
wall8416	wall8417

theme5534	theme5535
theme5536	theme5537
theme5538	theme5539
theme5540	theme5541
theme5542	theme5543

move9099
move9100
move9101
move9102
move9103

game3839

game3840

Digi Wallet

A digital coin is trapped inside the phone. It acts realistically and moves in sync as you tilt, shake and rotate the phone. A final tilt kicks the coin out of the screen, causing it to materialize as a real coin in your hand!

game3841

Alicia Keys - Right Now (U.S. Mix)	song3224
U2 - Rattle and Hum	song3225
De La Soul - Doctor's Office	song3226
Boyz n the Bay - Single Ladies	song3227
M.I.A. - Paper Plane	song3228
Boyz n the Bay - 911 Wreck & Day	song3229
Kanye West - Live Forever	song3230
Kanye West - Love Lockdown	song3231
Britney Spears - Womanizer	song3232
Jay-Z ft. Linkin Park - Rock Bottom	song3233
Linkin Park - Inhibitor	song3234
Acid Head / Trey Songz - Side	song3235
The Roots - The Roots	song3236
Selling Away - Addicted	song3237
Linkin Park - Inhibitor	song3238
Selena Gomez & The Scene - Let It Rock	song3239
Selena Gomez & The Scene - Rock Around	song3240
Young Jeezy - Krazy West - Put On	song3241
Kanye West - Paper Plane	song3242
LL Cool J - Get Meazy	song3243
Shade She Spins - Shade	song3244
Taylor Swift - Love Story	song3245
John Mayer - Where the Love Takes Over	song3246

	song3247
	song3248
	song3249
	song3250
	song3251
	song3252
	song3253

THE ROOTS

STEP 1 TXT KEYWORD
e.g. GAME3839 to 75555

STEP 2 REPLY
OK to the received message

STEP 3 CLICK ON LINK
http://www.jamster.com/75555/75555

STEP 4 ENJOY!

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In Service to Story

UNCHARTED 2

Among Thieves

Over 700 years ago, young Venetian explorer Marco Polo joined his family as they set out to journey among the wonders of China, witnessing a culture and sights that few Europeans had ever laid eyes upon. After more than a dozen years in the exotic court of Kublai Khan, Marco Polo prepared to return home with a vast fortune of jewels and gold. He departed the far eastern lands with hundreds of passengers aboard 14 sailing vessels. Two years later, he arrived home in Italy with one ship. Most of Marco Polo's writings include intricate accounts of his extensive travels down to the last mundane detail. Yet, those writings fail to chronicle the fate of the 13 ships that didn't arrive with him to port all those years ago. Many believe scurvy and cholera took a horrible toll. Some say pirates caused untold losses. But what if something else happened to those lost ships? What if those forgotten treasures hid a deeper secret? One enterprising treasure hunter is clever (or foolish) enough to dig that secret up...

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3

- > STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION
- > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- > DEVELOPER NAUGHTY DOG
- > RELEASE FALL



In November 2007, a similar historical mystery introduced Nathan Drake in *Uncharted*. The occasionally unscrupulous Drake found himself drawn into a personal quest surrounding his famous ancestor, Sir Francis Drake. While Drake is still unearthing hidden treasures, Naughty Dog's newest adventure entrenches its hero more firmly in the seedy criminal underworld hinted at in game one. A decidedly capable, world-wise, and attractive partner joins him as he sets out to solve the long dormant question of Marco Polo's lost fleet. A ruthless paramilitary leader has the same goal in mind. Along the way, Nathan Drake will learn that 13 missing chips are only the beginning of the enigma Marco Polo left behind centuries earlier.

"We really wanted to get him back in his element," explains creative director Amy Hennig. "We want to see him back in the real world that he regularly inhabits. What drives him is the solving of this historical mystery — figuring something out that's been left unsolved for so long." Along the way, Naughty Dog plans to take Drake into unfamiliar territory, while breaching new ground for the PlayStation 3, as well.

"We're pushing the PlayStation 3 tech to the max. We got about 30 percent of the power out of the [synergistic processing units] on the first game," explains Naughty Dog co-president Evan Wells. "We think we're going to be really close to maxing it out this

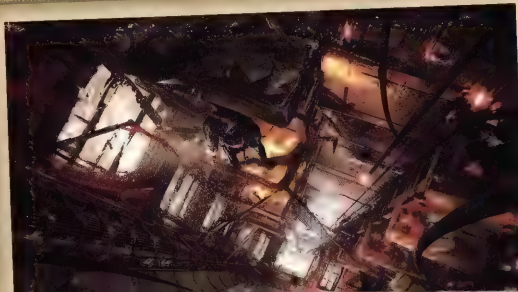
time around. So, potentially for the first time, you're going to see the Cell pushed to its limit." The first *Uncharted* was frequently cited for its impressive tech, and its sequel is raising that bar in some noticeable ways. The screens and levels we saw appear remarkably sharper and more detailed, mostly thanks to the improved lighting, shadow, and occlusion technology apparent throughout the game.

Once the game starts, there's no visible loading — the first of many gameplay features that raise the greater goal of delivering a compelling narrative. With less loading, the team thinks it's easier to be drawn into a cinematic story. The effect is most apparent in the move between cutscenes and gameplay — a seamless transition keeps the flow of the game

going all the time. "The game is load-free," explains co-president Christophe Balestra. "It's like having a commercial on TV when you see a loading screen in a game. It's a good reason to just stop. We don't give you that option."

The impressive shader work that made the first game's pools and rivers so amazing is now being harnessed on another form of water. Ice and snow look incredibly vivid and realistic. Snowy fields have a shifting sparkle to them as the light plays across individual crystalline shapes. Subsurface lighting gives depth and a frigid blue coloration to the heavy flows of ice that Drake encounters amid mountain caves. Snowdrifts will build up on the ground over time, and frost gathers on Drake and other characters as they move through the environment.

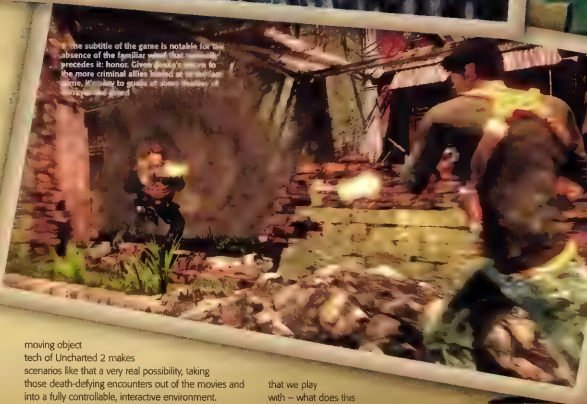
Of all the technical feats at play in the new game, the way characters interact with





Exciting old places and cinematic moments are central features in Drake's new adventures.

moving objects deserves the most attention. Whether Nathan Drake, one of his occasional allies, or any of the dozens of enemies they face, every character is capable of interacting with other moving objects in the world. This seemingly simple idea is a lot more complicated than it sounds. Think about a game where you see a character on a moving vehicle, like a car or train. Usually, one of a couple things is going on. Sometimes, the vehicle is effectively a static object, and you see a moving background zooming by to give the impression of movement. Alternately, a character might be attached to something moving through the world, but he usually needs to detach from the object to regain any sense of real mobility, such as by leaping from a moving car. In Uncharted 2, every character fully interacts with the dynamic geometry moving around them, and the environments in the background are real parts of the game world. The contextual movesets for the characters make it seem like they are genuinely grounded in their current environment. "If Drake's on the top of a train, he's going to be shaking with the train as it moves around," says game director Bruce Straley. "As he gets inside, his moveset is going to change, and he's going to be a little bit more secure, because the wind's not blowing." What's the result? Imagine scenes as Drake precariously clings to the exterior of the shaking old train, even as enemies clamber along after him. As he crawls towards the next train car, the locomotive makes a sharp right turn around a treacherous mountain cliff. Drake is flung to the side, even as the sharp drop-off looms beneath him, and less sure-footed foes go flying past into the void. The



The subtitle of the game is notable for the absence of the familiar name of its predecessor. Given Drake's return to the more criminal allies based on violence, it's likely to speak of some feature of the game's design.

moving object tech of Uncharted 2 makes scenarios like that a very real possibility, taking those death-defying encounters out of the movies and into a fully controllable, interactive environment.

A recognizable theme surrounds the technical features implemented in Uncharted 2. Whenever possible, the technology serves the advancement of the story. "It's all nuts and bolts, but it comes back to execution," Straley tells us. "How do we integrate the story and the gameplay? These are just tools in the kit

that we play with — what does this story call for Drake to feel right now? In one place, we might want a lot of traversal because we're infiltrating an area, while another moment we'll lay a lot of explosives around because we just want to kick some ass. We really want to switch it up." Furthering the cause of exciting narrative is a big goal



at Naughty Dog, and several of the chief team members tracing Drake's story have gone so far as to research Hollywood screenwriting techniques to aid in the process. The ideas they've brought back from seminars and writing workshops helped guide the creation of *Uncharted 2*. In a sprawling Nepalese city, Drake sees a heavily armed helicopter zoom by overhead — an early introduction to a dangerous encounter that won't show up until later in the game. A quaint and quiet hamlet of happy villagers is encountered intact before Drake returns later to see it ravaged and dismantled, upping the emotional impact of its destruction. Players are confronted by constant shifts in their expectations of a situation, such as seeing a clear path to an objective that is suddenly blocked by a massive explosion. "It's all about pacing. There's never a dull moment," Staley continues. "It's about creating this excitement of what's going to come next. It's layering all these little moments so that you can get to the big crescendo, only to bring it back down again." These familiar but powerful screenwriting tools are only sparsely included in this average video game story. In contrast, *Uncharted 2* builds a

Old and New Faces

Nolan North (Prince of Persia, Assassin's Creed) reprises his role as irascible treasure hunter Nathan Drake. Capitalizing on his humor and enthusiasm, several of the brief interjections of dialogue throughout the new game emerged from North watching the game while the team recorded his reactions to onscreen events. These ad-libs are woven into the game audio to great effect.

Joining Drake is a new partner equally enmeshed in the seedy underworld of treasure hunting, Claudia Black (*Stargate SG-1*, *Farscape*) plays Australian Chloe Frazer, a tough but reckless treasure hunter who cooperates with Drake on his quest to unravel the mystery of Marco Polo's missing fleet. As for familiar faces like Elena and Sully, Naughty Dog has remained notably silent in response to queries about their inclusion.

To act out the cinematics of the game, Naughty Dog performed full body motion-capture on the characters and recorded extensive voiceover sessions on set as the actors delivered their scenes. Frequently, motion capture is completed separately from voiceovers, sometimes even by other actors. Naughty Dog went to the expense and difficulty of recording dialogue live to capture the real moment-to-moment chemistry between the actors.



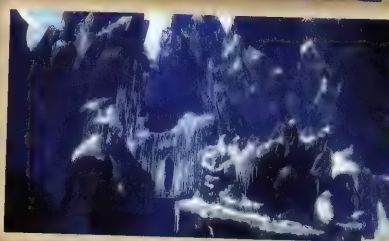
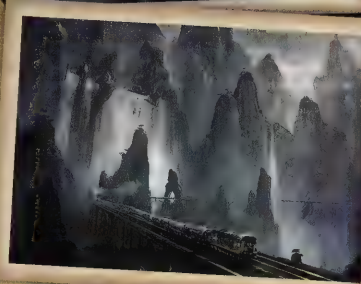
game around these narrative hooks.

The narrative integration with gameplay is clearly on display in the action-packed demo Naughty Dog revealed to us. As a cinematic opens, we see Drake in a jeep, disguised as a journalist while he seeks entry into an ancient Nepalese city. It appears Drake's competing paramilitary interests have already arrived, and have a more explosive approach to revealing the next clue to the missing treasure — the city is in ruins. Within moments of arrival, it's clear Drake's disguise isn't fooling anyone, and he ends up crashing through the city and into a tattered dead-end alley. Control shifts to the player, and Drake sets off to meet up with his partner. Moving from the abandoned vehicle, Drake slips effortlessly between barricades and destroyed vehicles. The new cover mechanic assures you only stick to walls you want to, and you have a broad range of mobility once you're there. Unlike in the last game, you can strafe along the wall while holding down your aim button, or even back off from cover while still zoomed in on a target. Along the busy city streets, Drake slips from wall to doorframe to rubble pile, and makes

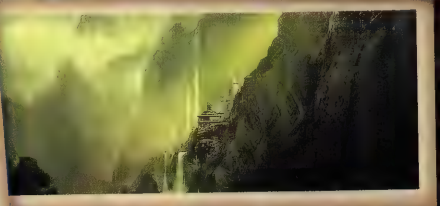
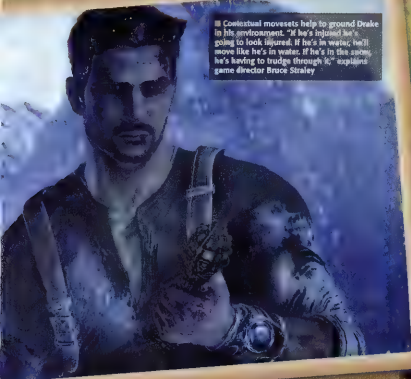
short work of the squad of enemy soldiers searching for him. Running down the road to his rendezvous, a formerly clear path suddenly becomes an impassible obstacle as a crashed bus explodes in a shower of debris. Drake ascends a light post and leaps to a nearby building.

Platforming and level traversal remains one of the central components of *Uncharted 2*, and Naughty Dog has worked hard to polish the experience. To let their hero scramble along rough walls and passages, the developer is introducing a new free-climbing mechanic. Drake can swing and leap from poles and scramble along monkey bars. Balance beam sections are now much faster, abandoning the PS3 controller's tilt functionality for a more exciting and speedy run. In the live demo, Drake utilizes all these newfound abilities as he hurries along the rooftops and building walls, bypassing the flanking truck below.

Continued on page 36 >>



Contextual moves: help to ground Drake in his environment. "If he's injured, he's going to look injured. If he's in water, he'll move like he's in water. If he's in the snow, he's having to trudge through it," explains game director Bruce Straley



Oh, the Places You'll Go

Uncharted 2's plot unravels like an onion, layer by layer. The initial search for Marco Polo's fleet takes Drake into a lush green swamp, and from there launches into a quest to uncover the legendary wish-fulfilling Cintamani Stone. Cryptic clues lead him to a Nepalese city under attack by paramilitary forces after the discovery of some priceless treasure. Later locations include a massive ice cave, a mountainside village, and finally, high in the Himalayan peaks, the fabled lost city of Shambhala. A train takes Nathan Drake part of the way, but it doesn't look like it makes it all the way to the destination if the cover of this issue is any indication.



■ Any illusions that Uncharted was simply a "single" game should be washed away when this sequel releases.

Continued from page 34

Beyond small adjustments to his movement, the biggest shift in the climbing and leaping portions of Drake's adventure are the new interactive cinematic events. As he vaults to a hanging electrical sign above a doorway, the bolts give way and the sign begins to spark and collapse under his weight. As he tumbles through an open window into a bombed-out apartment, the bathroom tile floor beneath his feet cracks and shatters, sending him tumbling down to the next floor below. The constant anxiety and excitement of these shifting situations becomes increasingly potent as we watch the demo — the game is built to deliver these kinds of

abrupt departures from expectation in rapid-fire succession, not just every hour or two. They aren't quick-time button press cutscenes; the player remains in control at all times. However, a mundane wall climb is rarely what it seems at first glance, and quick reactions are often a must. "It's expecting the way you're going to accomplish this puzzle is by going through that building over there, and coming to realize it's thwarted through some other event that happens — which means you'll have to go around," Wells says. "We're always challenging the player's expectations."

After Drake navigates building tops, he spies a lone guard patrolling a balcony. Clambering along the nearby ledge, Drake grabs the man and yanks him from his post to the ground below. This is the first glimpse of a major adjustment to the combat system in *Among*

Thieves. "We've added a new feature inside of *Uncharted 2*, which is the ability to stealthily approach combat scenarios," Straley explains. "We're definitely not trying to go for slow paced stealth, like *Metal Gear Solid* or *Splitter Cell*. The stealth is there to give you an option." After dispatching the

guard, Nate makes his way to the ground and towards the largest concentration of troops in the area. The first enemy he encounters is unluckily facing the opposite direction in a doorway. Drake grabs the back of his shirt and the man collapses into a heap. Another heavily armed opponent patrols the interior of a blasted-out tavern. Leaping onto his back, Drake slips an arm around the soldier's neck and dispatches him. There's little in the way of waiting around or slow stalking involved in Drake's approach to a fight, but a few quiet takedowns go a long way to alleviating the inevitable blow-ups that follow. "You have a gun, so if you want to start balls out and let it rip, go for it," Straley tells us. "But if you want to engage by stealth, there's a lot of variety available there."

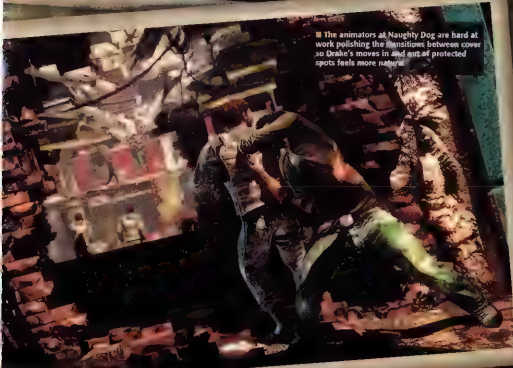
Back in the bar, the fallen enemy's buddy turns the corner and sees Drake. As the bad guy reaches for his rifle, Drake charges him and a furious scuffle begins. The melee system has taken some big leaps forward for the new game. Enemies now actively fight back, trying to pin Drake's arms or slip out of grapples. Only careful observation on the player's part enables the rifle button responses to each attack. The enemies outside the building are now clued in to Drake's presence. Before the firefight begins, Nate grabs a grenade from one of the fallen troopers and flings it outside into a car. It explodes, and more enemies go flying. The new grenade mechanic is dramatically simplified — no



Continued on page 38 >>



■ The new melee combat system is more dynamic and better polished, and the new stealth options make melee a more viable option than before.



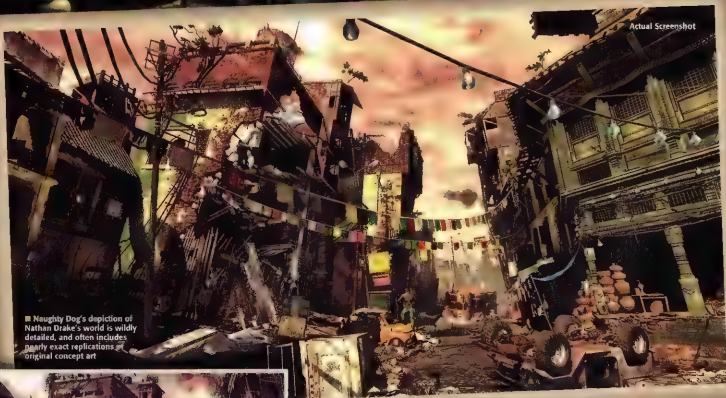
■ The animators at Naughty Dog are hard at work polishing the transitions between cover, so Drake's moves in and out of protected spots feel more natural.



■ Chris Young is returning to compose the music for *The Last of Us* — a welcome announcement to anyone who recalls the great score from the last game.



■ Drake's movement has received a major overhaul and expansion. This sequence shows off one of his new context-sensitive takedowns: the stealthy elimination of one of the enemy guards.



■ Naughty Dog's depiction of Nathan Drake's world is wildly detailed, and often includes nearly exact replications of original concept art



Concept Art

Continued from page 36

controller tilting involved. Now, the grenade is mapped to a single button anytime you aim, and it travels to wherever you point the rebble.

Snatching up a shotgun, Nate leaps between cover points as the squad organizes outside. In *Uncharted 2*, the advanced AI now attempts to flank and take you out, but they can also be tricked if you play your cards right. Throw down a spray of blindfire from one location, and they'll think you're at that spot, even if you've since snuck away to another location. As they close in, you spring the trap. After pulling this trick, Nate climbs up to a nearby roof and fires off a shotgun blast that sends a turret gunner flying off the building, even as Nate remains safely hanging from the ledge. Traversal and combat are intentionally intertwined in *Uncharted 2*, encouraging constant movement through the environment and frequent weapon change-ups. Aiming and shooting can be completed from any state, whether hanging, climbing, or running.

Drake runs to cover in another nearby building as reinforcements arrive. Suddenly, the troop transport goes up in a burst of flame. Turning

around, Nate sees Chloe Frazer, his new and equally brash partner, rocket launcher in hand. Laughing, she leaps down from the car hood and into his arms, wrapping her legs tight around him. As the demo comes to a close, it's clear the two may be more than just business partners.

The most striking aspect of *Uncharted 2* doesn't lie in the myriad gameplay improvements implemented in this sophomore outing. Instead, it's the way the team at Naughty Dog almost subconsciously relates everything they say about the game back to their desire to pull players into the narrative. By shaping the main character, building the baseline tech, and designing the principles that govern the game world in *Drake's Fortune*, Naughty Dog could afford to spend the last year wholly focused on how it wants to tell Drake's new story. The result is shaping up to be a game with unprecedented focus on cinematic action and thrills, but with a level of interaction and immersion Hollywood blockbusters can only envy. ■■■■





■ Naughty Dog has increased the enemy variation. Many will collapse from just a few shots, a welcome change for some players frustrated with seemingly invincible enemies in the first game. In Uncharted 2, only well-armored foes will stand up to repeated gunfire.

■ "Nathan Drake as a character makes Uncharted stand out from other action-adventure games out there. He's a flawed and fallible hero," says Naughty Dog co-president Evan Wells. "What defines him is his uncanny ability to overcome insurmountable odds."



■ From navigation to combat, Uncharted 2 provides increased player choice at every turn.

There are rock bands, and there are rock legends. The Bay Area metal legends Metallica fall squarely in the latter category. Formed in 1981 by guitarist James Hetfield and drummer Lars Ulrich, the band clawed its way out of the thriving thrash underground to become the leaders of a worldwide movement, delivering a quartet of classic albums — *Kill 'Em All*, *Ride the Lightning*, *Master of Puppets*, and ... *And Justice For All*. The band's blistering brand of rock was faster and louder than anything that came before, merging the speed of hardcore punk and black metal to the ambitious, neoclassi-

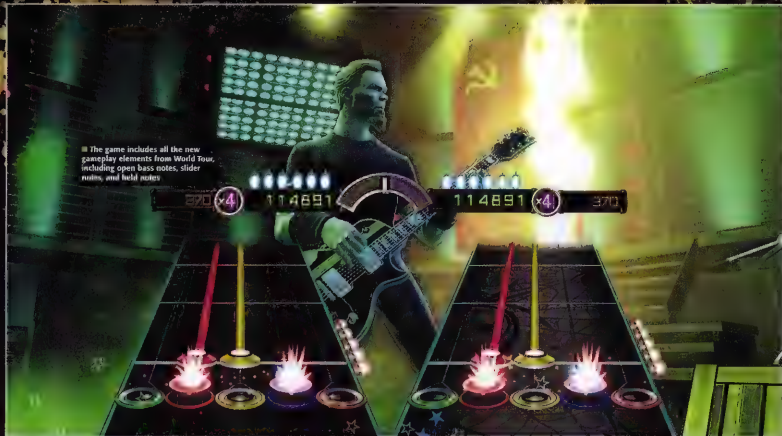
cal song structures of British bands like Iron Maiden. *Master of Puppets*, the band's third album, is still considered by many to be the greatest metal album ever released. After slowing down their trademarks and with an increasing emphasis on pop songwriting, the band struck commercial gold with its umpteenth-platinum self-titled album (called "The Black Album" by fans) in 1991, fueled by the radio hit "Enter Sandman."

Recent years have been tumultuous for the band. Longtime bassist Jason Newsted, who replaced the beloved Cliff Burton following his tragic death in 1986, left the band in 2001. A slew of recent albums... received less enthusiastic responses by the press and fans, especially 2003's embattled *St. Anger*. A documentary about the making of the album, *Some Kind of Monster*, displayed a band in turmoil, a PR nightmare compounded by drummer Lars Ulrich's unpopular comments regarding the Napster file-sharing service.

However, metal is a genre where redemption is always possible (just ask Ozzy), and 2008 marked a tremendous renaissance for Metallica. In September, the band released its long-awaited new album, *Death Magnetic*, recorded with famed producer Rick Rubin. A return to the band's thrash roots, it's the heaviest and fastest Metallica album since ... *And Justice For All*. Critics and fans praised the album, earning Metallica over half a million in first-week sales and the number one spot on the Billboard charts. Interestingly, the album was also available on day one as a digital download for Guitar Hero III. This move foreshadowed a new project, Guitar Hero: Metallica, a new Metallica-themed music game that should stand as the ultimate interactive experience for fans of the band. Read on as we get the inside scoop on this ambitious title from the development team at Neversoft and Metallica's Lars Ulrich.

GUITAR HERO METALLICA

THE
GODS
OF
METAL
Join
FORCES
WITH
GUITAR HERO



■ The game includes all the new gameplay elements from World Tour, including open bass notes, slider notes, and hold notes

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

There are a lot of other bands out there that people love, and we love them too, but there's something about Metallica," says Guitar Hero: Metallica producer Alan Flores. "I don't want to slight any other band, but Metallica's songs play really well in the game. The songs aren't one beat the entire time, not one riff the whole time. There's a lot of great, fun

stuff to play there. When you start going down the list of songs you want to put in the game, it winds up being bigger than you can actually accomplish."

Suffice it to say the crew at Neversoft is excited about the prospect of finally sharing its baby with the world. As a company of self-proclaimed "psycho" Metallica fans, the studio has been buzzing in recent weeks with anticipation. "Every so often, we have play days, where people can actually play the game and just enjoy it. It's awesome to walk around the build-

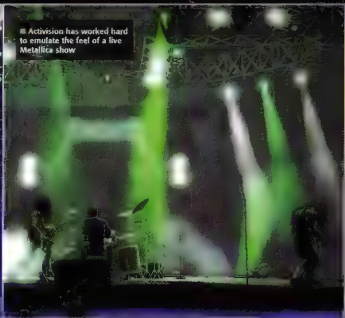
ing and see how much people are into it. They're screaming into the mics and jumping up and down. For the guys here who are working on it to be so into it, I think that makes a statement for how fun it will be for the players," observes senior producer Aaron Habibipour.

Despite the big names involved, the project came together naturally. Guitar Hero III and World Tour featured the Metallica songs "One" and "Trapped Under Ice," respectively, establishing a good relationship between Activision

and Metallica's management. For the band's part, starring in a video game had been a long-held goal. In fact, they once began production on a Metallica-themed car combat game with Vivendi Universal, which was ultimately cancelled. "They always wanted to be in a video game," recalls Flores. "Then, Guitar Hero: Aerosmith came out and people saw what we could do if we were focused on one band. Lars' and James' kids, both play Guitar Hero, so it seemed to fit."



■ Activision has worked hard to emulate the feel of a live Metallica show





James Hetfield's ESP Trucker guitar has been sampled for the studio mode.



Expect a lot of pyro.

DAMAGE, INC.

This mutual enthusiasm resulted in a very close partnership between the band and Neversoft. Flores comments, "I think we're more involved with the band this time than before. We spent a lot of time at a motion capture studio we set up by them and had them come into our studio. They really helped try to make the game with us, not just say 'Okay we'll give you the music and m-cup and you can go and do your own thing.' They were really involved with the story progression, the cutscenes, and the bands that are going to be in the game."

The most important aspect was coming up with a song list that summed up Metallica's prodigious output as well as its musical inspirations. As in *Guitar Hero*:

Aeromsmith, the band selected tracks by outside artists that had either inspired or played a key role in the band's history.

"We had this list of songs we wanted in the game," Flores says. "It was a combination of songs you'd expect to be there, and songs that you'd really want to see as a fan. We got together with Lars Ulrich and he showed us his handwritten list. Once we got those 500 songs, we had to whittle it down. [Laughs] It was hard because they were like, 'You have to have that song - it's f--- awesome!' But we had to sit there and try to scope things down into something we could actually get done. James Hetfield and Lars are pretty passionate about all of them.... You see the pain on their faces; it's like slaying their babies. But you have to get it done."

Ultimately, the band and Neversoft arrived at what they felt was an accurate representation of the band's nearly 50-year career. The band held the non-Metallica songs in equal importance, which they saw as a tribute to their heroes. "It's bands that Metallica is really excited about," Habibipour says. "Talking to Kirk Hammett, Michael Schenker is his all-time favorite guitarist, so not having him in the game would just be weird. It's cool, because if you're playing through the game and you don't understand the relevance of the Michael Schenker group, you can go back and find out the influence he had on other guitar players."

While the basic progression is similar to *Guitar Hero*: Aeromsmith (you play as GH characters during the opening band section, then close out each venue as

Metallica), the band adamantly stated it didn't want to follow the documentary-style format of the game. Instead, the band and Neversoft based the career on a true-life story of a European band that followed Metallica around, angling for an opening spot. At the end of the tour, they were rewarded with a gig opening for their heroes. Along the way, you'll play in a number of real-life venues that have a special significance to the band's career, including the LA Forum and Trishie Wainfield in Russia, where Metallica and AC/DC played to over 500,000 fans as military helicopters flew overhead.

THE SONGS

The final tracklist features over 45 songs, comprising of about 60 percent Metallica tunes and 40 percent by outside artists.

Action revealed the initial selection of tracks. Each song was selected by the band itself, and features many of their personal favorites and influences from over the years. Although the game won't work with *GH1* (even *Guitar Hero III*), as *World Tour*, the game automatically incorporates your purchased *Death Magnetic* songs into the game experience.

- Alice in Chains - "No Excuses"
- Bob Seger - "Turn the Page"
- Judas Priest - "Hell Bent For Leather"
- Kyuss - "Demon Cleaner"
- Lynyrd Skynyrd - "Tuesday's Gone"
- Mastodon - "Blood and Thunder"
- Metallica - "Enter Sandman"
- Metallica - "For Whom The Bell Tolls"
- Metallica - "Eyez"
- Metallica - "Hit The Lights"
- Metallica - "King Nothing"
- Metallica - "Master of Puppets"
- Metallica - "No Life 'Over"
- Metallica - "Nothing Else Matters"
- Metallica - "Sad But True"
- Metallica - "The Unforgiven"
- Metallica - "Wherever I May Roam"
- Michael Schenker Group - "Armed and Ready"
- Samain - "Mother of Mercy"
- The Sword - "Black River"

Other artists to be included:
• Foo Fighters
• Queen
• Slayer

METALLI-EXTRAS

While the game is based on the *Guitar Hero: World Tour* engine and includes all of that title's new gameplay features (like the open bass notes, music studio, and guitar slider functionality), Neversoft added a few new features for hardcore Metallica fans.

Expert Plus

This new drum difficulty setting allows players to finally play Lars Ulrich's parts as they appear on the record. If you have a splitter and two bass drum pedals, you can access Expert Plus, which provides notation for every single blistering double kick pattern on the original songs. While it will be scored, Expert Plus is not compatible with the *World Tour* online leaderboards.

DVD Style Content

Neversoft promises a "Pandora's box" of extras for the game, including photos, set lists, fan club videos, and rare live and behind-the-scenes footage.

New Tones

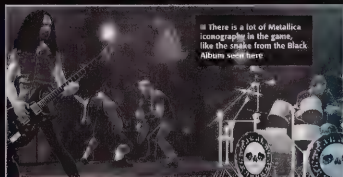
Unlike the stripped-down *Guitar Hero: Aeromsmith*, the game features the complete *GH* lanes studio mode from *World Tour*. Even better, it features new guitar and bass sounds sampled directly from James Hetfield's signature ESP Trucker guitar and Slayer bassist Tom Araya's ESP bass. These sounds will work with created sprouts loaded from *World Tour*'s *GH* lanes flashbang service.

Drum Fill Mode

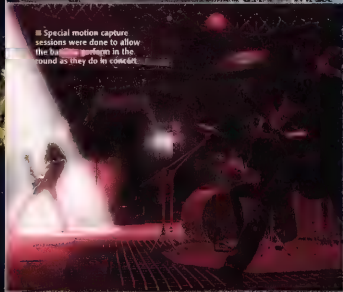
This new cheat allows you to turn the drum track completely off and freely play along to any song on the soundtrack using Metallica drum sounds. A nice new feature for amateur stickmen everywhere.

Metallifacts

For the trivia-minded, Neversoft added a new playback mode called "Metallifacts." Much like the *VH1* show *Pop-Up Video*, in *Metallifacts* you watch performances of each track overlaid with pop-up windows that point out facts and Metallica trivia related to the song.



There is a lot of Metallica iconography in the game, like the skulls from the *Black Album* seen here.



Special motion capture sessions were done to allow the band's motion in the round as they do in concert.



ENTER STAGE RIGHT

Metallica's insistence on recreating the look and feel of its live shows forced Nevsoft to make some pretty radical changes in its motion-capture and camera systems. "[They do] 'in the round,' where their stage is set in the center of the arena," Habibpour says. "That's pretty different from the other games, where the stage faces out to the audience. In this round, they can run around and look at the crowd in any direction. We

motion captured the guys doing the performances in the round, so they can run around from mic to mic."

The look of the game also changed to better incorporate a "Metallica feel." "It's a little bit less exaggerated than World Tour," Habibpour continues. "We tried to make the venues look more realistic in the materials and textures we used." It's still in the Guitar Hero style, but you're not going to see as many huge stage props and stuff like that. We tried to make the stage shows interesting with lights and presentation rather than stage props and theatrics. The characters are exaggerated, but not to the point where they seem cartoonish. We want Metallica to look badass, not like cartoons."

Expect to see a host of Metallica iconography in the game, from including album covers, artwork, and logos. The result is a game Nevsoft hopes will be the ultimate Metallica fan experience. "Metallica has a very established aesthetic, and we've nailed that aesthetic," Flores claims. "What you're going to see more than any other of the Guitar Hero games is that the aesthetic of the game is 100 percent Metallica through and through."

For much of the team, the game is already a success, as it's given them a chance to work with some of their musical heroes. "They were actually really easy to work with in a lot of ways," Flores says. "As soon as we got there, James Hetfield walked up to us, introduced himself and started talking to us about things. He really wanted to get into the process. There was a moment when they were doing the motion capture, and James turned to Kirk and said, 'Hey we're in a video game. That's awesome!' That enthusiasm was pretty cool!" ■■■



When did you become aware of Guitar Hero?

My kids had Guitar Hero II over at their mom's house. All of a sudden, they started asking me about Glen Danzig, of all people. True story... out of nowhere it was like "Glen Danzig! Glen Danzig! Mother!" I traced it down, because at my house we didn't have any video games allowed. I'd heard about the Guitar Hero thing, but it was still not really the phenomenon it is now. I realized quickly that this was a very cool way for them to be introduced to music. So when Guitar Hero III came out I broke my own rule and I asked our friends at Activision if it was possible to get one of these since there was a Metallica song on there. They sent me one, and we haven't looked back since. It's a cool thing on two fronts, as something to share as a family and it also became a great vehicle to introduce them to a bunch of music.

Working with the Nevsoft guys, it sounded like you had a real partnership with them in working on the game.

It started with making the decision, just a little while before the Aerosmith game was done. Obviously, we'd heard about that and we were pretty keen on being a part of the first wave of this stuff. They came up to San Francisco around March and we met with a couple of the guys. We talked for a while and we realized that these were guys that we could work with. They were music fans that grew up on the same music that we grew up on and had the same kind of passion. They were just like kids, they weren't like all these suit guys and high-know business people and all that crap. It made us fall in love with the idea even more, because it seemed like we were all on the same page instead of it being us versus them that we ran into in our early years in the business.

How did you find the experience of doing motion capture?

I tell you — 27 years into this, and to be able to have new experiences is a luxury. I never had any mo-cap suit on before. Once I learned to move my elbows around and restrict myself with the tightness of the whole thing, it was fun. We hit the ground running. It wasn't a lot of trial and error or sitting around.... The mo-cap is fun. You feel a little silly sometimes when you are sitting playing your own songs and miming along to the recorded version from 1985. We had to sit there and re-learn drum fills from 1985 and re-learn ad-libs or guitar solos.

Obviously, the soundtrack is the most important part of a Guitar Hero game. How did you come up with a tracklist you were satisfied with?

To me, it wasn't radically different than putting a set list together. We want to represent all the different things we've done. I knew that we had to pick songs from throughout our career, not just focus on the records in the '80s. It had to be evenly balanced between the hits and songs that are more geared toward the Guitar Hero challenge. That's what we called the "Dragonforce elements," where people feel like — from a video game point of view — they are really being challenged by doing something that's completely next-level. That's all well and good when you put it on a piece of paper. Then, you sit there a month later and you realize you have no idea where half these f— master tapes are. [Laughs] That threw a bit of a wrench into things. There were a few things that had gone astray over the years, but we put our detective hats on and through some miracle we actually found all the original master tapes. As far as all the guest slots, that

was easy — that's your dream come true, sitting down and picking all the bands you love and you want to share with your fans.

Were there any bands for you personally that you really wanted on there?

I'm super psyched that we got Slayer in there. Slayer's got to be a part of any heavy metal video game. There had been some issues with their lyrics. That gets into a whole slew of stuff like "Microsoft won't do it if this lyrical content is in there." There's all this bulls— you have to deal with, but we stood up for Slayer, and we finally got Slayer cleared like a week ago. The only band that's missing that I really wanted was Iron Maiden, because they are one of my favorite all-time bands. It didn't happen for reasons that I don't even know. Other than that, I think we're pretty well represented.

The game is different from Guitar Hero: Aerosmith, which was done with a chronological, documentary story mode. Why did you want to go with another route?

The chronological Metallica story doesn't feel fresh. For the endless WH1 Behind the Music episodes, it's a story that's been told a million times. We're just sick of it. I don't mean that in a bad way. The objective was to come up with something that was fresh and had a new slant on it. We came up with putting on a competition within the game itself to find a band to come and open for us. We don't want Metallica to be perceived as something that's always relying on our past. It's keeping one foot in relevance. [Laughs] We're proud of where we are today and the fact that we survived and the fact that we're still kicking as much as.



PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Skate 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION SPORTS (UP TO 6-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EA BLACK BOX > RELEASE JANUARY 20

NEW TRICKS

EA Black Box took advantage of something developers rarely get to do when working on a sequel — starting over. Because of the less-than-serious storyline behind the Skate games, the company destroyed the fictional city of San Vanelona to have it rebuilt by a faceless corporation. But why stop there? Why not add a bunch of new features and make the city bigger? That's precisely what Black Box is doing with Skate 2.

The previous Skate featured a hefty move set, but it definitely wasn't complete. This time around, players have twice as many tricks as before. Because nearly every modern trick had already been included, the focus is going old school. While tricks like the kickflip and 50-50 grind are standard, lesser-known moves like the boneless or hippie

jump are not. Since Black Box had the base set done, it had time to focus on these more obscure moves to expand the bag of tricks. The best part? The company only added one button to the mix and didn't change the functions of the rest. Because the controller mapping is designed to represent the skater, implementing the moves only had to be done on the back end. The rest is up to the player to just grab the right way or take their foot off the board at the right time.

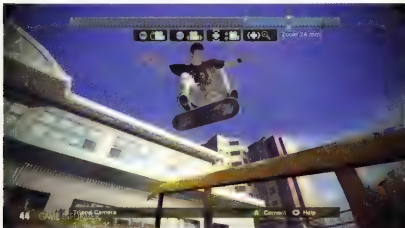
The rebuilt New San Vanelona feels fresh. While its predecessor was modeled almost perfectly after "somewhere in California," the new version feels more fictional. The level designs in the various areas of the city are top notch. Each rail, ledge, gap, and bump seems to have been made by a skater, not an architect. Yet the environments still feel

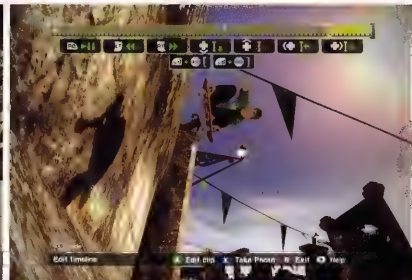
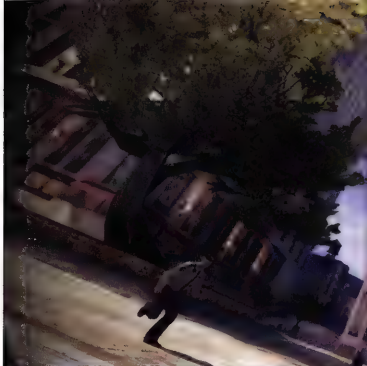
organic, like a city rather than a game level. Fans of the first title will see a few familiar key spots like the downtown spotlight Matrix Plaza. While some of it has changed, other parts remain original, almost serving as a nod to the old-school skaters.

Another big change to New San Vanelona is the player. Not what he (and now she) looks like, but the fact they can hop off the skateboard and move stuff around to create new lines. Rails, benches, kickers, trashcans, and anything else not nailed down is fair game. There's no snap grid or zone limits, either. If you want to drag a picnic table to the other end of the map and pull it up on a ledge at a weird angle, the game won't stop you. Obsessive skaters can take advantage of this to create epic runs or faithful skate video recreations.

Budding skate filmmakers will love the enhancements to the replay editor. The feature set from the previous game returns along with some enhancements. The controls for the system have been tweaked to allow more precise video cuts, and the UI is less cluttered. Black Box also greatly improved the camera control with tripod shots and options to fine-tune the perfect angle. Expect even more creative user videos on EA's Skate site.

Skate 2 has the same effect the first game did: making the ollie and kickflip fun again. By listening to the fans for improvements and not fixing what wasn't broken, Black Box is on track to create a great sequel. If you liked the first game, make sure you save some of that sweet holiday money for Skate 2 when it hits stores this January. ■ ■ ■





Video done right

While the world gave EA plenty of crap in the past about its live-action cutscenes, the publisher hit it on the nose with the first *Skate* intro. By hiring a skate and snowboard video veteran, they got the proper mind behind the projects. This time EA brought in 12-year skate and music video guru Reb "Whitey" McConomy to take Black Box's idea and put the signature skate quality on it as one of the directors. Snowboarding culture has always looked past current trends to create new ones, and these fun and humorous videos represent this. While we don't want to spoil the fun of the newest video, trust us when we say it's just as awesome as the first.





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Street Fighter IV

> STYLE | 1R 2-PLAYER FIGHTING | 2-PLAYER ONLINE | PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
 > DEVELOPER: CAPCOM/DIMPS | RELEASE: FEBRUARY 17

THE QUARTER-CIRCLE OF LIFE

Waiting in line with a pocketful of tokens was as much a part of the original Street Fighter II experience as actually playing the game. Crowded arcade cabinets may have been the birth of this fighting series' popularity, but they don't appear to be its future. With Capcom announcing that Street Fighter IV won't be released in arcades in North America, the home versions are the only way to play. At least we don't have long to wait; with the February release approaching, most of the character roster has been confirmed and the features are set. All that remains is to spend time playing the game, so we got our hands on the latest 360 and PS3 builds to see how things are coming together.

The list of playable characters on consoles has swelled to an impressive 25 (compared to 18 in the arcade iteration). All 12 of the Street Fighter II characters are back, alongside some new challengers and old favorites — including Akuma and Gouken (see sidebar). Even when using one of the brand new fighters, the gameplay is immediately familiar to anyone with Street Fighter experience. Despite its gorgeous 3D graphics and stylish artistic direction, the game is firmly rooted in the 2D fighting tradition, and most of the charac-

ters' moves rely on the same classic combinations that have been burned into our memory. If you were good with Blanka before, your skills transfer with little trouble.

The core fighting mechanics stay true to the series, but there have been a few changes to some of the other systems that may alter the way you play. The abundant parrying of Street Fighter III is nowhere to be found, but moves called Focus Attacks allow you to avoid incoming attacks and then launch a counter. Their execution is not as precise as parrying was, but they still require careful timing. When you manage to create an opening, you'll still have the opportunity to pull off ridiculous super moves if the meter is full. There are even new ultra combos that you can only execute when you've taken enough damage.

As beautiful as Street Fighter IV looks in screenshots, it is even more impressive in motion. Certain moves leave an irky black trail in their wake, the camera zooms in for cinematic super combos, and finishing blows are accompanied by dramatic slo-mo. Hand-to-hand battles for supremacy have never looked so amazing, and the game isn't even finished yet. Fighting fans of all sorts should mark February 17 on their calendars and get ready to hit the streets. ■■■



■ Chun-Li has the mightiest hands on the street fighting circuit. Even C. Honda is bummed



■ Ken's Chiropactic: Where "Chiropactic" means "I kick you in the neck"



A MYTH REBORN

In *Street Fighter II*, one of Ryu's victory phrases cryptically reads "You must defeat Sheng Long to stand a chance." Who is Sheng Long? The answer is disappointing: He's a mistranslation. Ryu was actually talking about his signature move, the shoryuken. However, fan speculation at the time led to the conclusion that Sheng Long was Ryu and Ken's sensei. The myth was perpetuated by an April Fools joke in *Electronic Gaming Monthly* claiming Sheng Long was a nearly impossible hidden boss in *Street Fighter II*. At this point, fans became so interested in the character that the common conception of Sheng Long – a white-bearded man capable of throwing fireballs with one hand – was merged with Gouken (Ryu and Ken's actual master), giving rise to the current design and moveset for the character. *Street Fighter IV* marks the first time gamers get to play as this legendary figure.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Dirt 2

> STYLE: 1-PLAYER RACING (ONLINE: 10A) > PUBLISHER: CODEMASTERS
> DEVELOPER: CODEMASTERS > RELEASE: 2009

RACE DAY IS HERE AGAIN.



■ All of the shots shown are concept art to represent visual targets for the game.



■ London's Battersea Power Station monument is turned into a nighttime rally cross track.

Codemasters' Grid pleasantly blew us away with its great racing, and now the dev team is returning to the franchise that served as a stepping stone to Grid's greatness. Dirt 2 looks to expand upon the off-road racing of the first Dirt title, and also apply the lessons learned from Grid. If that doesn't get your heart racing, then you need more than just an oil change.

One of the common complaints about Dirt was with its bare bones experience. People talked more about the game's slick menu system rather than the career structure, which was telling. That should change this time around. In Dirt 2, players travel around the globe in a custom

RV, which will serve as your career menu and a reflection of your progress. "As the player's career develops," says Gavin Raeburn, Dirt 2's executive producer, "the RV also evolves to reflect his travels and experiences — wherever the player goes in the game the RV travels with him, allowing him to collect prizes, friends, and souvenirs from all over the world."

Earning and buying the cars you drive in Dirt 2 also gives you a better sense of progress and accomplishment — something missing from the first game. "I know what you mean," Raeburn admits, "and I think we've addressed this point in Dirt 2." Raeburn explains that instead of buying cars for races of a specific class, you can






Grid's flashback feature—which allows you a limited number of chances to rewind and re-see portions of an event—returns in Dirt 2, and the game adds increased flashback functionality.

upgrade your cars to make them eligible for different race types. "This way, you literally get a lot more mileage out of every car you purchase. Hopefully by making these kind of decisions about the cars you own, you'll grow attached to them over the course of your career, which should make winning a bit more memorable." Another improvement upon the first Dirt title comes in the online department. This sequel features head-to-head online racing for almost all of its forms of off-road racing. This includes the new canyon racing of Utah's Creek Trailblazer and the muddy rainforests of Malaysia. The series' traditional rally racing typically doesn't make for a fun online event, and

the original Dirt merely had you competing against others' online times. Now, however, you'll share the track with other players. Although time is still your main enemy, the staggered starts of other cars on your rally track will only increase the pressure. Codemasters also says it is working on a variety of community features to augment the online racing and appeal to fans. Reading between the lines of what Raeburn says, it sounds like sharing videos could also be in the company's plans, so far it looks like Codemasters has planned Dirt 2 well. ■ ■ ■



Codemasters wants to bring the atmosphere of race day to your trailer. "All the noise and excitement of the race, music, and racing can be heard and seen from the RV," says Gavin Raeburn, the game's executive producer.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Alpha Protocol

> STYLE: PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER: SEGA
> DEVELOPER: OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE: SUMMER

ESPIONAGE MEETS NERDERY

■ Shouting and splatting doesn't improve accuracy, but it does make you look like an action hero

What is Jack Bauer's fortitude save? How many skill points does James Bond have in diplomacy? We usually don't think about the world's greatest secret agents in role-playing terms — we just want them to shoot some dudes and stop the nuke. Sega and Obsidian Entertainment are ready to change that perception with Alpha Protocol, a modern spy-themed action/RPG that emphasizes stat-based character building just as much as high-octane action. It may seem like an odd pairing, but after playing the first two hours of the game, we can say that spies and RPGs form a promising team.

Alpha Protocol stars Michael Thornton, a rookie agent with a top-secret black-ops organization. As you start the game, you'll have the opportunity to choose a specialization for Thornton by distributing experience points among ten skills. You can assign ranks in areas like infiltration, pistols, and hand-to-hand combat, or you can choose one of three preset spreads that define you as combat, stealth, or tech focused. Since one of the team's goals is to allow gamers to make the choices they want, these abilities don't confine you to any particular path through a level. They may open up certain options, but they don't necessarily close the door on others. We chose the stealth template, but still held our own in a firefight.

Combat feels like a more layered version of Mass Effect's system; the general strategy is to fire from cover and keep an eye open for opportunities to use your special abilities. However, because the enemies have varying stages of alertness, the division between combat and exploration isn't as strict. In a level in Saudi Arabia, we took out a sentry with a silenced pistol and then crept by his comrades unseen. However, one false step

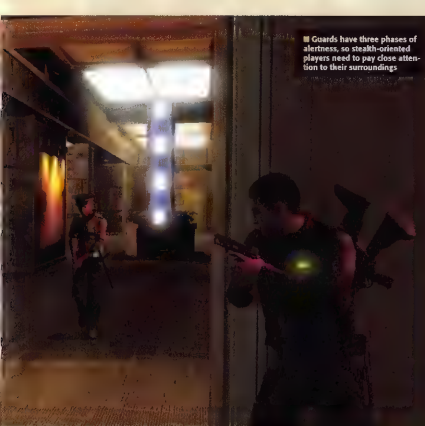
could have landed us in a full-blown encounter. Regardless of how you handle these situations, you'll still get rewarded; players gain experience for sneaking past foes as well as killing them, so they aren't penalized for avoiding entanglements.

Another feature that ties into player choice is the dialogue system. Unlike many RPGs, you won't have the option to repeat conversations endlessly, so your interactions deserve special attention. You gain (or lose) reputation points with NPCs based on your conversations, so if you keep throwing sass at an informant who doesn't like sarcasm, you'll need to find another way to get your info. However, a positive reputation isn't always the goal. Sometimes fear is the answer, as certain characters will only help you if your reputation is low enough. In gameplay terms, this philosophy really just means that are no right or wrong dialogue choices. If you say what you want to, different options will present themselves.

Originally slated for spring 2009, Alpha Protocol's release has since slipped a few months into summer. Don't worry — a Sega representative assures us that the extra time isn't an ill omen. From our time playing, everything seems to be on the right track; the game is certainly in better shape than its somewhat shaky E3 incarnation. Alpha Protocol has the potential to be a breakout title, and we'll gladly wait a little longer if it means a tighter and more polished final product. ■ ■ ■ ■



■ Innocuous safehouse catwalks unfold into high-tech weapons lockers



■ Guards have three phases of alertness, so stealth-oriented players need to pay close attention to their surroundings.



■ Points in the Super-Noogie skill let you bully and humiliate enemies. No, not really.



■ A single conversation can improve or damage your reputation with a character by several points.



■ Never bring a gun to a fist fight! Wait a minute...



■ For Michael Thornton, the answer to every question is "judo chop."



■ Killzone's checkpoint system is well-spaced and forgiving



■ These mirrored sunglasses hide the eyes of a true poet



■ Look at all those open zones for killing



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Killzone 2

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

FEELING LIBERATED YET?

Since we've just glutted ourselves on the holiday feast of awesome game releases, maybe now would be a good time to take a look at what we have to look forward to in the coming months. One game still on many gamers' radars is Killzone 2, so we sat down with the newest build of the single-player campaign to see how it's progressing.

Killzone 2 takes place two years after the Helghast's assault on Vekta as described in the first Killzone. It's only fair that the Interplanetary Strategic Alliance returns the favor by invading the Helghast home world of Helghan. Players step behind the eyelids of a battle-hardened soldier named Sev as he infiltrates the capital city in a harrowing attempt to kidnap the Helghast's emperor.

Even without all the airborne cannon fire, Helghan isn't a hospitable place. All the levels we've seen so far are dark, gritty, and urban. The overwhelming tones of gray may wear down some players, but it's hard to argue that the game doesn't look good. Guerrilla Games has done a beautiful job with the lighting, making the world of Helghan really come alive. Thin wisps of smoke steam gently off the heated battlefield, and hot sparks bounce off concrete from every bullet that misses its mark.

In terms of gameplay, Guerrilla Games is crafting a fully featured FPS. You can expect greater scope they enable on impact—revive fallen teammates, and fire your AI compatriots boost you up to otherwise unreachable ledges. The Sixaxis controls are even used for certain actions like planting bombs and turning valves.

The cover system doesn't shift the camera into a traditional third-person view. Instead, you are always planted in the middle of the action, looking through Sev's eyes. Your enemies use cover intelligently, as well, shifting behind objects if their position becomes compromised or a limb is exposed. While in cover, Helghast soldiers move around so you never know where they'll pop up.

While we enjoyed our time with Killzone 2, a few things nagged at us during the early levels. Your friendly AI companions don't seem very intelligent and are all too willing to plant themselves in your line of sight. Even though the levels seem fairly linear, the game could use a guidance system or map to help you gain your bearings when you get turned around. Otherwise, the game looks like it's coming along well. A few more months of polish should ensure that Killzone 2 will be one of the hot titles in early 2009. ■■■■

NINTENDO DS

Flower, Sun, and Rain

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT/SEED GAMES
> DEVELOPER GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE > RELEASE MARCH

PUT YOUR LITTLE HAND IN MINE...

Before he was known for titles like *Killer7* and *No More Heroes*, Goichi Suda (a.k.a. Suda 51) made a quirky adventure game for the PlayStation 2. *Flower, Sun, and Rain* was previously exclusive to Japan, but this new DS remake finally gives North American gamers a chance to experience its bizarre mixture of puzzles and mystery.

Flower, Sun, and Rain (or *FSR*) is the name of a luxury resort on a tropical island where the game's protagonist, Sumio Mondo, arrives to investigate a string of odd occurrences. Mondo is a searcher—a kind of private detective who specializes in unconventional cases. At the end of the day, a group of terrorists cause an explosion that destroys the island...but when Mondo wakes up, it's the morning before the disaster.

The majority of *FSR* occurs in a time loop similar to the movie *Groundhog Day*: Every day, Mondo tries to prevent the explosion, but various obstacles prevent him from succeeding. However, unlike the hilarious antics of Bill Murray,

there's nothing funny to Mondo about reliving the same day again and again. With each successive morning, the world begins to distort, representing how Mondo's mind is warping from the repetition. Your time to solve the case isn't infinite, since Mondo will eventually crack from the strain.

While each day ends with an explosion, the events leading up to it can vary, presenting different circumstances and people in need of Mondo's unique skills. As a searcher, he possesses a special computer briefcase, Catherine, which allows him to plug into the people's minds and uncover information. If he and Catherine assist the island's inhabitants, they show their thanks with clues (like hidden numbers and codes) that he can use in his investigation.

They may not always make sense, but Suda 51's games have a reputation for being stylish and offbeat. Expect *Flower, Sun, and Rain* to leave you wide-eyed and slightly confused when it hits this spring. ■ ■ ■



■ Subject appears to be dead. The likely cause is murder...by me?

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Edge of Twilight

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE
> DEVELOPER HUEYHEEZE > RELEASE FALL 2009

THE STEAMIEST OF PUNKS

Dante may have established guns and swords as mainstays in the stylish action genre, but has he ever used them as a single weapon?

Though some undeniable thematic similarities exist between *Edge of Twilight* and *Devil May Cry*—including a half-breed hero with a love for blades and bullets—this new action title isn't just another imitator. With a rich fiction behind its steampunk-meets-fantasy façade, *Edge of Twilight* banks on more than hack n' slash gameplay to set itself apart.

Years ago, an event called *The Rift* tore the world into two separate planes, one light and one dark, existing in the same physical space. *Edge of Twilight*'s hero, Lex, has a parent from each of these planes, giving him the ability to travel between realms. Players use this to their advantage, interacting with objects in one plane to affect the other, but Lex's abilities also change

depending on his location.

In the night realm, Lex takes on a bestial form capable of clambering and climbing through the world, though it's weak in combat. In the day realm, Lex wields a massive gumbatle that he uses to slice and blast foes in stylish battles complete with special powers and gory finishers. Players can't switch between these modes on the fly, which means the action trades off between platforming and combat-oriented gameplay.

While the basic mechanics aren't totally unique, the game's aesthetic is distinctive. The steampunk themes come through in the character designs and environments, and Lex doesn't have any of the manufactured attitude often associated with the genre. We're not sure evil beings can be truly killed without a cheesy one-liner to follow the final blow, but anything's possible. ■ ■ ■



■ The same area takes on a different look depending on which realm Lex is in



PG

Elemental: War of Magic

STYLE: 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) PUBLISHER: STARDOCK > DEVELOPER: STARDOCK > RELEASE FEBRUARY 2010

MASTER OF CIVILIZATION OF MAGIC

Sins of a Solar Empire publisher/developer Stardock recently pulled the curtain back on another project, and it looks like the kind of turn-based 4X strategy game we don't see very often. Drawing inspiration from genre stalwarts like *Master of Magic*, *Civilization*, and *Heroes of Might & Magic*, *Elemental: War of Magic* has the potential to surpass anything in the genre to date.

In *Elemental*, players take the role of a channeller, which Stardock compares in power to Sauron before he lost the One Ring. From the start of the game, a channeller can wipe out entire armies with a wave of his hand. The trick is that you've got a finite amount of essence to spread around different paths to victory. Keep it bound up in your own avatar, and you're capable of godlike feats. Infuse it into your armies and champions, and they gain significant advantages on the battlefield. Focus

on the prosperity of your empire, and your lands become more fertile as your people work harder. This balancing act is core to *Elemental's* gameplay.

The massive power levels of channellers, champions, and fantastic armies featuring everything from pikemen to dragons do much to shape the largely traditional turn-based 4X framework. Players can raise mighty empires by growing cities and founding new ones, and ultimately clash with rival nations as they pursue one of the several victory conditions. Exploration, conquest, diplomacy, and questing with your champions each offer a different way to win, so the determining factor isn't always the strength of one's economy like it is in many 4X titles.

When armies clash, the game switches to a Total War-esque battle scene. Unlike that franchise, however, combat is ultimately turn-based — turns come up and rounds pass in real time as in *Neverwinter Nights*.

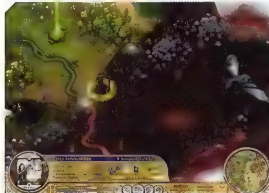
Players have the option to command their armies personally in tactical combat, have the AI handle it while they sit back and watch the carnage, or have the computer auto-resolve the battle directly from the main screen.

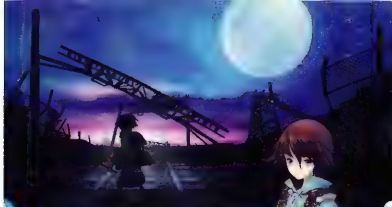
In the endgame, the rules get thrown out the window as channellers approach godlike levels of power. The spells available in the end times are intentionally unbalancing, so leaving a rival unmolested to focus his power into massive incantations is a bad idea. *Elemental's* engine is written to allow Populous-like levels of damage to the world: raising a volcano under your enemy's capital city is not out of the question, nor is dropping a meteor on his advancing armies.

When the game launches, players will have access to two factors: the humans and the fallen. However, *Elemental* also features a Spore-like technology that can incorporate player-created content down-

loaded through Stardock's Impulse service. When someone uploads a piece of content to Impulse, be it a new spell, new race, new monster, or something else, a board of moderators at Stardock will review it, rate it, and open it up to the community for use if it meets their guidelines (i.e. no vulgarity). The community can also rate uploaded content, and within *Elemental* you can choose what sorts of filters to apply to downloaded content (high ratings, only spells, no races, etc.). If the game acquires a fanbase, this could be the feature that gives it legs unlike any other 4X title to date.

Elemental's feature set reads like a strategy gamer's wish list. Hopefully Stardock's experience with *Galactic Civilizations* and *Sins of a Solar Empire* allows it to deliver on its many promises, but we won't know for sure for quite a while as we wait for *Elemental's* 2010 release. ■ ■ ■





Wii

Fragile

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ► **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
► **DEVELOPER** TR-CRESCENDO ► **RELEASE** TBA

MUST BE ITALIAN

If you're anything like us, your parents often threatened to move to another home while you slept, leaving you to wake up scared and alone. No? Well, imagine they did. The latest title from Elemental Sonata developer Tr-Crescendo attempts to tap into that kind of fear and isolation. *Fragile* is a post-apocalyptic RPG that casts players as a young boy named Seto in a desolate world looking for clues as to where everyone went.

While the events that ravaged the landscape are unclear, the results are apparent. The light has gone out of the world, replaced by a fog that hangs over everything. With darkness so prevalent, Seto relies on his trusty flashlight, which players direct with the Wii remote. The illumination can reveal hidden foes, as well as help with solving environmental puzzles. Despite the ruins around him, Seto knows he isn't the

only one who made it through the apocalypse, and he is determined to find others. Though the decayed setting may be similar to that of a survival horror title, *Fragile's* gameplay is closer to classic action/RPG conventions. As he explores abandoned cities, Seto encounters other survivors and interacts with them. Monsters haunt the barren wasteland, which players confront in real-time combat involving objects found in the world. For instance, an old golf club Seto picks up can be an effective bludgeoning weapon.

Namco Bandai hasn't confirmed that we'll see *Fragile* on our shores — and even if we do, the localization process means that it wouldn't be anytime soon. Still, we're holding out hope; it would be a shame to miss out on the game's cool premise and intriguing art style. ■ ■ ■



■ "Be quiet, everyone. I can't listen to you all at once. Mr. Birzlebee, you have the floor."



■ Seto's flashlight is an important part of gameplay, and a great prop for spooky stories



The Sky Crawlers: Innocent Aces

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) ► **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
► **DEVELOPER** PROJECT ACES ► **RELEASE** TBA

WAITING TO LAND

The developer behind the great *Ace Combat* games on the PS2 and 360 is migrating to the Nintendo world with its latest project for the Wii. The anime-styled aerial combat game looks great and is based on the award-winning book and animated movie. The bad news? As of press time, Namco Bandai has no plans to bring the game stateside.

The Sky Crawlers is based on a celebrated Japanese graphic novel series by Hiroshi Mori. The first book published in the series (*The Sky Crawlers*) was actually the last in the five-book chronology. The story details the experiences of a group of top-young pilots through an alternative history that shares a lot in common with World War II. The dramatic and philosophical underpinnings of the plot garnered great interest, and the book was eventually adapted and

released as an animated movie. The movie received several international awards since its release earlier this year, and recently a U.S. release was announced.

The Japanese version of the game is one of the better looking Wii titles we've seen, and its dogfighting system should be instantly familiar to players of the *Ace Combat* series. The game supports motion controls and a more traditional input style, and the game structure offers varied missions, including everything from bombing runs to up-close mid-air duels.

We hope the movie does well enough in America to warrant reconsideration from Namco Bandai on the viability of a stateside launch. Until then, it's important for what might be the best flight game to yet hit the Wii. ■ ■ ■



■ *Ace Combat* players should feel right at home if *Innocent Aces* ever releases in the States



Admit it. You can't wait to knock out some of this dude's Chisel-sized teeth.



Wi

Ready 2 Rumble Revolution

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER: ATARI > DEVELOPER: AKI CORP > RELEASE: SPRING 2009

DON'T CALL IT A COMEBACK

Ready 2 Rumble Boxing is pulling itself up from the mat on a nine count — nearly the number of years it's been since it was last seen. When Ready 2 Rumble 2 came out, the Dreamcast and Nintendo 64 were still alive and well and the PlayStation 2 and Game Boy Advance were shiny and new. Technology has obviously changed, and the next installment in the arcade boxing series is coming out exclusively on the Wii with all the motion-sensing bells and whistles.

Players take on AI opponents or their friends by punching in the air with their Wii remotes and nunchuks. Players execute

uppercuts, hooks, and jabs by swinging in the appropriate fashion. Punches can be charged up for a more powerful hit, but be careful. If you telegraph your moves too often, expect to have your blow parried and be forced to watch helplessly as your stunned boxer takes a beating.

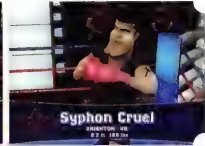
We played a few rounds recently and found the same hectic action we remembered from back in the day. Successful punches fill up the familiar Rumble meter, which can be used to unleash devastating combo attacks. Pugilists have their own unique moves that draw from a variety of influences such as kung fu, wrestling, and

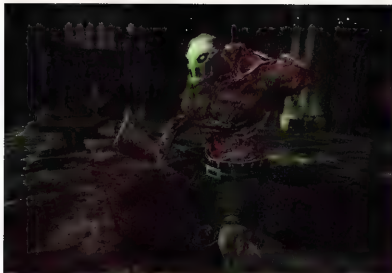
other martial arts. Kaiser Kong's rumble attack flings his hapless opponent high into the air and out of the ring, for example.

The controls weren't very precise in the version we played, but even if you release an uppercut when you meant to jab, you're still throwing some kind of punch. The original was a button-masher, and Ready 2 Rumble Revolution has that same overall feel. If you want to practice your moves, there are a handful of minigames based on various boxing skillsets, like jumping rope and working the speed bag. In addition to honing your gaming skills, you can also use them to upgrade your custom-created boxer in the

all-new championship mode.

We only saw a glimpse of the character roster, and it's filled with celebrity parodies. There's action hero Kaiser Kong, extreme-sports star Red Dermato, and Dewie Struedel, a washed up B-lister with tan lines who bears a passing resemblance to the star of a certain show about legguards. The boxers start off as fairly grotesque caricatures, and the bruise-inducing matches don't help their looks (that's a compliment). We were a bit surprised that Alto Thunder, the series' de facto mascot, wasn't shown anywhere during our demo. Maybe he's in training. ■ ■ ■





UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Splatterhouse

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
> **DEVELOPER** BOTTLEROCKET ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** SUMMER 2009

GRATUITOUS

Anyone with a long enough memory can recall the gory thrills of the original *Splatterhouse* games. Content to appeal to the base excitements of dismemberment and bloody death, the game upped the ante for gory violence. That same philosophy is guiding the remake, as described by Namco Bandai co-producer Mark Brown.

"From the get-go we embraced the mature audience...which allowed us to be very liberal with our usage of blood and gore. The game is, after all, called *Splatterhouse*," Brown says. "Botlerocket's CEO Jay Beard has always referred to our enemies as 'fleshy bags of blood and guts just waiting to be spilled out.' They have put that thinking into every death and dismemberment, which I assure you is a lot."

The game echoes the original tale of Rick and his girlfriend Jennifer's unfortunate experiences in a demon-inhabited mansion. After a devastating mauling, Rick's only chance at surviving and rescuing Jennifer is

through donning an evil mask and laying waste to everything that gets in his way.

Combat promises to be brutal and messy, taking inspiration from the horror movies of the '70s and '80s. "This time around Rick has the new ability to dismember his foes and use their body parts as weapons," explains lead designer Tim Donley. "All of our weapons are designed to give the player the maximum sense of carnage and power and each weapon set provides its own specific 'Splatterkill'—an especially brutal and custom enemy death." The carnage extends even to Rick, since the mask allows him to regenerate limbs even after they've been shorn away.

It remains to be seen whether Botlerocket can deliver more than cheap thrills with its take on the fondly remembered title. If nothing else, *Splatterhouse* should serve as a fitting barometer of how much or little your entertainment tastes have changed in the last 20 years. ■■■

We

Tenchu 4: Shadow Assassins

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CRUISEFT > **DEVELOPER** FROM SOFTWARE/ACQUIRE > **RELEASE** SUMMER 2009

TREAD SOFTLY, STAB VIOLENTLY

Over the last few years, *Tenchu* faded from view like a ninja disappearing into the shadows. A string of mediocre entries in the series combined with better options for stealth gameplay have left it struggling for relevance. Still, if novelty websites have taught us anything, it's that you should never count a ninja out of the fight.

Tenchu 4 marks the return of the series' original creators. Acquire. The ninjas are heading exclusively to the Wii with all of the motion-controlled trappings you would expect. We got our hands on a level at the Tokyo Game Show that features a goal that should be familiar to series veterans: Punish the evil merchant. As Rikimaru stalked the hallways of the compound (*Yayumaru* is also playable), we experimented with the new control mechanics, most of which involve shaking the remote in various contexts.

While standing, shaking the remote will make your character roll. If you do it while behind cover, however, you will crouch to the next available hiding place (like a shadowy bush). To perform stealth kills, you must sneak up to your target, at which point you'll get a prompt telling you which direction to shake the remote. More precise elements also exist in the control scheme, such as first-person dials that require you to hold the controller in certain positions to block incoming attacks, as well as death-from-above moves that require specific placement. However, the overall feel of the game is definitely more forgiving and accessible.

The ninja are warriors of discipline and tradition. Maybe that's why, as the rest of the stealth genre has evolved, this series has clung so tightly to its PlayStation roots. The controls may be different, but the gameplay is still undeniably *Tenchu*—for better or worse. ■■■

■ "No, dummy, not like that! Here, let me do it!"



■ The Frosted-Hair Assassin was the most deadly and stylish in ancient Japan.





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | NINTENDO DS

Ghostbusters

▶ STYLE | 1 PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER 10A) ▶ PUBLISHER ATARI ▶ DEVELOPER TERMINAL REALITY ▶ RELEASE 2009

RISE FROM YOUR GRAVE

According to developer Terminal Reality, the reports of Ghostbusters' unfortunate demise were greatly exaggerated. When Activision Blizzard passed over the game after gobbling up previous publisher Vivendi Games, executive producer Brendan Goss became anxious about the project's future — albeit temporarily. "While there was a certain amount of nervousness, that went away the morning it became public knowledge and it was announced," Goss says. "I probably had 25 calls that day from publishers saying, 'Who do we need to talk to?'"

With input from the original cast and a

script co-written by Dan Akroyd and Harold Ramis, why did Activision decide against publishing such a seemingly sure thing in the first place? According to Goss, it was a matter of the game not gelling with the company's overall philosophy. "How are you guys doing a movie IP without a movie?" Goss recalls Activision asking. "It doesn't make sense — it doesn't fit our model, so you're not going to make the move over to Activision."

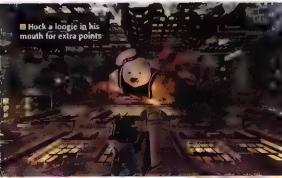
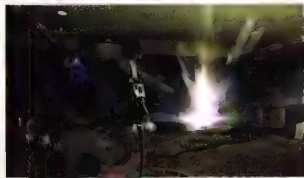
Atari won the courtship between several other publishers, and the game is set for a 2009 release, just in time for the 25th anniversary of the first film. "We know that

Sony has huge plans for that, and also Atari," Goss says.

We recently got our hands on the game again, and while there wasn't much new content since we last saw it, it's looking as good as ever. Players can expect to spend an hour or more in each of the game's eight levels; the library level we played took almost two hours to complete. Wrecking things with the Ghostbusters' Proton Packs is so much fun that we expect to squeeze even more time out of each destruction-prone environment.

With the game originally set to come out this fall, we asked the team at Terminal Reality if they've been taking it easy with that

extra time. "We're definitely not sitting idle," says producer Michael Fetterman with a laugh. Goss says having those extra months of development time has been a godsend for the team. "It's given us the opportunity to go back through — as every developer wants — and have more time to put in more polish and to also take a look at some of the feedback that we've had and identify if there's low-hanging stuff that we can do that the fans will respond well to. I think we've got some tricks up our sleeve that people are going to be pleasantly surprised by when the game does come out." ■■■■





EVERYWHERE JUST GOT BETTER™

Whoever you are. Wherever you play. Whatever you're into. The PSP™-3000 system will get you where you want to go. Built around an ultra-crisp and super-widescreen display, there's simply no better way to play all the best games and biggest movies. So check out our lineup and grab yourself a PSP system. Because everywhere just got better.



PlayStation 2™ Final Fantasy VII



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PLAYSTATION 3

Quantum Theory

After teaming up with Nintendo for the latter half of 2008, Tecmo returns to PlayStation 3 next year with a big-budget new IP: Quantum Theory is a third-person shooter in which Syd, the dark destroyer, must battle his way through a living tower using a big old gun and his crazy fist. Along the way, he'll meet a woman named Filena, who aids him with co-op moves to take down enemies. No word yet on whether two-player co-op will be available, but online versus play includes both one-on-one fights and some kind of army command mechanic.



PSP

Dead Knights

Why is it that when people run into the Devil they always make deals with him? Whatever the reason, it usually makes a compelling story. Such is the case with Tecmo's new PSP title, Dead Knights, in which the antihero protagonist trades his eternal freedom for magical powers. By merely touching his foes, he can drain their life force, turning them into zombies who then fight at his side. As the game progresses and he builds an undead army, players can issue commands to the groups under their command, giving this action title some strategic flair. Since the game is still early in development, details are pretty scarce, but given the lack of good PSP titles lately, we hope Dead Knights delivers on its promise.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

MLB Front Office Manager

Is your favorite team's general manager an idiot? Do you think you could do a better job? Of course you do — that's the general outlook of every fan for every sport. As the GM of your struggling team in MLB Front Office Manager, you must scout minor league talent, kick overpaid veterans to the curb, and do everything you can to not make the same mistake the Cubs made when bidding for an unproven player from Japan. You'll have 30 years to get it right. During your tenure, your time vested will gain you points that can help your club in specific areas. If you're feeling cocky, you can challenge fellow GMs in a 30-man online league. Developed by Blue Castle Games and published by 2K Sports, MLB Front Office Manager will release on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC this winter.



Wii

EA Active

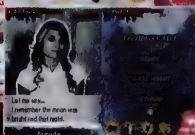
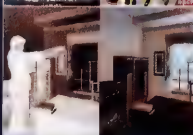
Now that Wii Fit has been pushed to the wayside just like your Bowflex and the All-Haggis Diet before it, EA is here to get you back on the good health wagon. EA Active is a fitness program that doesn't use the Wii balance board, but instead uses included leg straps (to holster the Wii nunchuk) and a resistance band to get you fit. The \$59.99 game does what Wii Fit can't: It provides structure. EA Active allows you to build a custom regimen from over 20 exercises and activities towards a 30-day workout goal. Your virtual trainer provides onscreen motivation and feedback, including how many calories you've burned. EA says that EA Active is just the first title in a series designed to get people going, so start saving your pennies and your energy.



Nintendo DS

Again: Eye of Providence

Adventure games have found a good home on the DS, drawing players in with clever characters and situations rather than exciting gameplay. Cing, the developer behind Hotel Dusk and Trace Memory, contributes even more to the genre with Again: Eye of Providence. This interactive story focuses on FBI special agent Jonathan Weaver as he investigates the circumstances of his parents' deaths 18 years ago. Weaver was the sole survivor in a series of linked murders that claimed his family, and the game allows players to peer into the past to compare evidence and solve puzzles. Tecmo is publishing this unique title in North America this summer, so get ready to don your detective hat and unravel a mystery. Incidentally, if you actually have a detective hat, that's awesome!



XBOX 360 / PC

Kingdom Under Fire II

Korean companies Blueledge and Phantagram reunite once again for the next chapter in the Kingdom Under Fire series. A U.S. publishing deal is still in the works, but a Blueledge rep tells us that the PC version should release in late 2009, followed by a 360 iteration soon after. A PS3 release is also still possible. The game returns to the RTS roots of earlier games of KUF: The Crusaders and KUF: Heroes rather than the more action-focused KUF: Circle of Doom. A recent trailer showed off massive battles, stylish combat, giant war beasts, and controllable dragons. While this sounds great for the single-player campaign, we're interested to see how it all plays into the persistent-world online multiplayer clashes.





REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

WII



Call of Duty: World at War

XBOX 360



You're in the Movies

PLAYSTATION 3



Persona 4

WII



Animal Crossing: City Folk



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** Pissable. 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** Xbox avatars. Unoriginal and ugly.

> **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.

> Reply Value

High - You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.

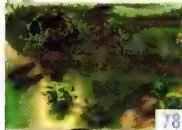
Moderately High - Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.

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



Neverwinter Nights 2: Storm of Zehir

HANDHELD



Star Wars: The Clone Wars - Jedi Alliance



Left 4 Dead

Zombies? Check. Guns to shoot said zombies? Check. Working together with other zombies to kill the survivors before they will you with said guns? Checkmate. Whether you're fighting through swarms of the brain-hungry brain-dead with three friends or coordinating attacks on the survivors with other elite zombies, Left 4 Dead's continual stress on cooperation makes this the most rewarding multiplayer experience of the year. Medical supplies, ammo, and hope for survival may be scarce, but praise for Left 4 Dead's visceral experience is in abundance.

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pg. 72

the edge

Below All Games Award Credits 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.



Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.



Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.



Product is awaiting final rating.



Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.

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

1080i - A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080 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 videorecord, 1080p generates an image at resolution of 1920x1080 in progressive format.

4096 - Progressive scanning. This action ("Y" in progress), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture. 4096 ("Y" in interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 4096 image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 60Hz/60p 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.

4X - A term we use for games like Civilization and Total War. The abbreviation means "expansive, repeated, explicit, extensive."

advice - 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 wars with human allies.

adventure - A term we use for games like Myst and Escape from Monkey Island.

blurred - An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of light reflecting off of surfaces.

bound - A term we use for games like Sonic R and Mario Party.

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

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

CDG - Downloadable content. Usually adds the form of inexpensive or free add-ons to existing games.

EA - 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.

framerate - The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement.

front-end - A game's menus and options.

HDTV - High Definition Television.

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

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-quarter top-down view, like Warcraft 3 or Baldr's Gate: Dark Alliance.

lag - A condition of free that lags/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.

Microsoft Points - A stronger currency than the U.S. dollar.

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

motion blur - Playstation feature used to help 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 disappear suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance.

PS2 - Sony PlayStation 2.

PS3 - Sony's PlayStation 3 console.

quest - A term we use for games like The Sims and Pictos.

ragdoll - A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart.

RPG - Role-Playing Game. A term games like Final Fantasy and The Elder Scrolls.

RIS - Real-Time Strategy. A genre of strategy games including titles like StarCraft and Command & Conquer.

shooters - A term we use for games like Star Wars and Halo.

strategy - A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Top Spin.

strategy - A term we use for games like Digimon and Fire Emblem.

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

Complete the campaign to unlock the Nazi Zombies mode.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

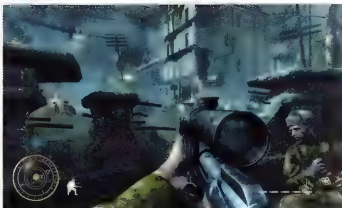
Call of Duty: World At War

STYLE | 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) | PUBLISHER | ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER | TRINITY STUDIOS | RELEASE NOVEMBER 11 | ESRB | M

RIISING IN THE EAST

make the rest of the game — basically a steady dose of refashioned greatest hits missions from previous Medal of Honor and Call of Duty games — all the more disappointing. Across the Pacific and European Theaters, players will feel like they're having flashbacks as they land on a heavily fortified beach, fend off attack dogs, clear trenches, undergo an against-the-odds sniper mission with a tank (the World War II equivalent to the obligatory Hoth level in Star Wars games). These missions so deliberately try to cash in on COD's previous successes that they stand in stark contrast to and diminish the sense of wonder of the new experiences.

The campaign receives a boost with the well-implemented four-player co-op mode. Much like Rainbow Six Vegas, four friends fight alongside one another for a vast majority of the campaign (the solo sniper and PBY missions are excluded for obvious reasons) and compete for the high score by racking up kills and reviving buddies after they fall prey to banzai attacks. As a bonus, the experience points you earn by completing missions filter into your overall multiplayer

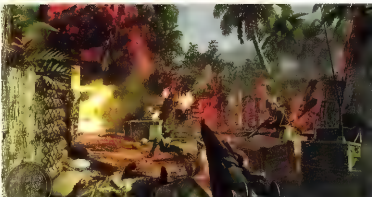
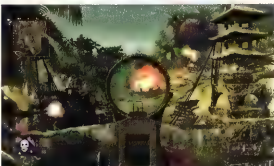


BOTTOM LINE 8.75

- > **Concept:** A greatest hits collection of high-octane WWII missions with a few new ones sprinkled in for good measure
- > **Graphics:** From moonlit Pacific islands to war-torn German cities, the Call of Duty 4 engine renders stunning environments
- > **Sound:** The cheery rock and techno soundtrack seems better fitted for a so-far game, but the historically accurate sound effects and 5.1 surround speakers from Sucker's Sandbox and Gary Oldman compensate
- > **Playability:** The solid gunplay and great weapon variety rest the war outcome on your trigger finger
- > **Entertainment:** Going back to WWII should be a drag, but Treyarch squeezed the last drop of fun from this overdone premise
- > **Replay Value:** High

Previous World War II games have tackled the Pacific Theater, but each sustained mortal injuries in the process. Despite this theater's great opportunity for unique tropical gameplay environments, naval skirmishes, and enemies with unique attack strategies, no one has captured the spirit of the American retaliation to Pearl Harbor in a way that resonated well with gamers. Treyarch employs a scorched earth policy with Call of Duty: World at War, and the result is decidedly more favorable.

The thrill of using a flamethrower to burn out an enemy hidden in a tree, the wonder of fighting a sea battle from the gunner seat of a PBY Catalina, and the scare of seeing Japanese soldiers rise unexpectedly from the grass and charge at you with bayonets are each new experiences that you could not find in the beaten dead horse of the European Theater. These short bursts of genuine gameplay



rank. To up the replay value further, World At War also includes Death Card Collectibles in the levels. Finding them unlocks cheats that alter the co-op campaign in creative ways, such as letting you revive teammates by shooting them or turning Nazis into the evermore scary Nazi zombies.

World At War's multiplayer largely preserves the brilliant "level up to unlock new weapons and perks" structure of Call of Duty 4, while making the necessary adjustments to retrofit the experience with World War II-appropriate weaponry. Three- and five-kill streaks still award players with a recon plane to spot enemy troops and artillery strikes. Rack up seven kills and you can unleash a pack of attack dogs on enemies, which is a great diversionary tactic that will earn your team easy kills. Watching a hapless enemy try to fend off a rabid dog is one of the highlights of the year. The multiplayer includes several well-designed maps that reward teams for working together and keep the fights centralized. A few maps also add tanks to the mix, but these metal jalopies move so slowly they are basically fodder for bazookas and they don't improve the gameplay in any meaningful way. Treyarch also added the popular War gameplay mode from COD 3, in which teams vie for control points to rack up points. Following a title as massively successful as Call of Duty 4 is no short order. World at War finally gives us a reason to visit the Pacific Theater with its fun cooperative and multiplayer modes. But 'been there, done that' single-player missions and overall derivative tone keep this very good game from achieving the greatness of its predecessor. —BERTZ

Second Opinion 9

Call of Duty: World at War rewards you in the best possible way, with the ability to sic a pack of rabid dogs upon your enemies. Call it morbidly appalling, if you must, but I really got a kick out of watching my kill count climb as I sat back and let my hungry canines do all the work. From the generic mission to the emotional cooperative campaign, Treyarch does a phenomenal job of breathing new life into the stagnant World War II setting. This game also reaps all of the rewards you would expect from the Call of Duty 4 engine: satisfying weapon play, awe-inspiring level architecture, and an extensive leveling/perk system for multiplayer. The majority of the multiplayer maps are towering successes, as they provide intimate battles and allow players to bring any weapon into the fray. A few sadly embrace the annoying "design of you could be attacked from any angle" philosophy that always makes for sloppy matches. Other than featuring the voice of Jack Bauer, the story is mostly forgettable, but it does deliver a consistent stream of teeth-gritting awesomeness in almost every battle. Is this game as good as Call of Duty 4? No, but it is in the same league, and is a great game to hold you over until Infinity Ward returns with Call of Duty 5. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

> **Concept:** Begin a new journey with a new prince, and explore a drastically different approach to the platforming genre.

> **Graphics:** Like a living painted canvas, Ubisoft's illustrative art style is evocative and colorful.

> **Sound:** A memorable musical theme and strong chemistry between the two lead character voices leave little to complain about.

> **Playability:** Fluid and easy to understand controls, but there's a disconnect between player and character, since so much of the action isn't in your control.

> **Entertainment:** An innovative and visually arresting experience, but some new gambler ideas won't please some players.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate.

Second Opinion 7.75

Prince of Persia can be an exhilarating game. As you dangle over yawning chasms, cling to precarious ledges, and run across dill faces, you'll experience breathtaking cinematic thrills. These moments are great to behold, especially with the game's amazing art direction, but the relentless duels when you try to play. The Prince may be more acrobatic than ever, but your control over his maneuvers is simplistic and minimal. The act of scaling a tower can just be a series of single button presses, so it feels more like a minigame routine than a daring feat. When traversing more traditional platforming surfaces, no skill is involved since you snap right to your targets. Further eliminating the need for precision, it's impossible to die in Prince of Persia. While this alleviates the frustration of errant jumps, it also removes any challenge — especially in the rare instances of combat, where perseverance equals victory. Throw in a bunch of glowing orbs that gate your progression, a total lack of character growth, and a ridiculous conclusion to the story, and you're left with disappointingly sterilized gameplay that outweighs the game's visual splendor and high-flying ambitions. —JDE



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Prince of Persia

> STYLE: 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE: @CEMBER 23 ESRB: T

GIVING UP CONTROL

Ubisoft Montreal implemented a wealth of new ideas in this relaunch of Prince of Persia, abandoning many traditions from both the genre and previous Prince games to deliver something fresh. The chief innovations include an evocative art style, freedom approach to gameplay, and a cinematic battle system. The game frequently favors exciting visual displays of acrobatics and combat over light moment-to-moment controls, which has the potential to frustrate. At its best, the new Prince is a thrilling tale that sweeps you up in its romance, adventure, and fantasy. At its worst, it can feel like a formulaic romp where you're only along for the ride.

The new Prince begins his adventure amidst a blinding sandstorm. Stumbling into a forgotten valley, he's unwillingly dragged into a desperate struggle to prevent the release of an imprisoned god. The girl who joins him in this sojourn is his romantic foil, and also a gameplay component fit to replace the sands of time. Eikha saves him from deadly drops, weaves magic to aid in battle, and helps traverse the world through spells and special powers. As a constant-companion, she defies the expectation of bad AI-driven partners, and instead feels like a natural extension of the player's will in the game world. More than that, with frequent optional conversations between the two, the game communicates believable affection between the characters — no small feat in this medium.

The development team lets you opt out of much of their story and character development, and also set up a structure that lets you tackle the game's levels in any order you wish. As the dark god's corruption spreads across the world, the Prince and Eikha must heal discrete areas one by one with her magic, gathering the resulting light spheres to grow Eikha's powers and gain access to more levels. As healed lands increase, the corruption

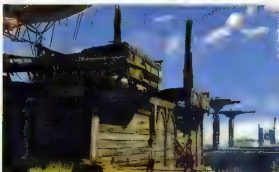
becomes more concentrated in the remaining areas, which in turn makes those areas more difficult to traverse. It's a clever design ultimately hurt by its reliance on formula. After enough levels, repetition takes away some of the charm.

Combat has seen a similar level of revision. This game ditches the sprawling multi-energy fights of the last series in favor of dramatic duels between the Prince and a few repeated bosses. Encouraging the exact opposite of button mashing, these fights hearken back to the timing-based fights of the original Mechwarrior games, rewarding observation and varied attacks. Most any combination of the four attack types results in a unique combo — the trick is figuring out which to use and when to trigger them.

As the developers loosen their control of how you experience the game, they ask a similar sacrifice of the players. It's here that the game's merits will be most heatedly debated. The game is controlled through quick button presses, followed by several seconds of watching the action unfold. This intermittent control feature holds true whether platforming along a crevice or fighting in one of the movie-like duels. It's an elegant and simple way to show off thrilling acrobatics, but it also steers control away from the player. For me, the tradeoff is worthwhile, if unconventional, since the more relaxed control

still demands skill and careful timing.

While the virtues of the control mechanics and gameplay are up for debate, the value of the presentation and production are not. A stirring orchestral score is the perfect accompaniment to the breathtaking environmental backdrops. Stop nearly anywhere in the game, and it looks like you're staring at a still painting. Menus and navigation are equally friendly, and new abilities and skills are well explained and easy to grasp. With its valuation of story and cinematic presentation over player control, Prince of Persia's not a title for everyone. However, it can claim one thing for sure: It's unlike any other game you'll play this year. —MILLER



■ A great map system makes the game easy to navigate, and the ability to teleport to any completed level eases the burden of backtracking.

■ You'll never die, but when Eikha saves you from death you return to a recent checkpoint, much like in any other game in the genre.





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Legendary

> STYLE | PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER GAMECOK
> DEVELOPER SPARK UNLIMITED > RELEASE NOVEMBER 4 > ESRB M

IN NAME ONLY

The first time you face one of *Legendary's* werewolves, they're terrifying. The strange beasts are much larger than you, and their unwavering determination to shove you down is unsettling. Once the novelty of that encounter wears off, you'll spend the next few skirmishes focusing on headshots—the only actual way to kill them. Eventually you start wondering just how many more of the stupid things are crammed in Pandora's Box.

When at last Charles Deckard opened the mythical container for a shadowy client, he probably had no idea that the legendary item was essentially a down car full of a handful of repeating enemies. Aside from the disconcertingly bald werewolves, players will blast their way through hordes of the same griffins, minotaurs, and fiend Order operatives. Even the few epic boss encounters can't save the otherwise generic gameplay.

Legendary has a fairly interesting story, but the by-the-books gameplay is in dire need of some caffeine. Deckard gains a few mysterious abilities at the beginning, including the ability to heal himself and use a Force-push like movement that's basically worthless. The levels take place around the world, but they're basically the same rumbled cities with different textures and color palettes. The destruction and chaos at the very beginning of the story is amazing, but everything that follows feels mundane in comparison. If you've cleared one room of werewolves and soldiers, it feels like you've done them all.

Legendary is by no means awful—it's just about as vanilla as first-person shooters get. It all wraps up with a completely unsatisfying "wait for the sequel" type cliffhanger. We'll see. —JEFF



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Quantum of Solace

> STYLE | PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR SYSTEM LINK) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER TREVARCH
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 4 > ESRB T



As far as you see, neither enemy is hiding.

BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

NEITHER SHAKEN NOR STIRRED

In the few seconds it takes an Aston Martin DBS to accelerate from zero to 120 miles per hour, James Bond can flip from a debonair womanizer who can charm his way into any dress to a remorseless killer who can put a bullet between two eyes. Theatrogues have come to expect this dual persona since Sean Connery popularized it in the 1962 film, *Dr. No*. Unfortunately, gamers won't be seeing this Bond in Activision's first 007 title, *Quantum of Solace*.

In this game, the Bond you control is a sympathetic coward. You don't feel sorry for him as he shoots brainless foes so dense they fail to realize that they are "hiding" with their heads fully exposed. His spinelessness is established by his need to duck behind every object in his path. These elements form a botched game of cover and shoot that distills Bond's persona to that of a generic video game character.

The title, *Quantum of Solace*, is equally disingenuous. While the feature film of the same name inspires some of this game's stages, an equal number are stripped from the previous film, *Casino Royale*. Rather than walking the player through these films in order, developer Treyarch mashes the two stories together. The result is a plot that bounces chaotically like a rubber ball in a stairwell. It's impossible to comprehend what is going on in this game unless you have seen both films.

The experience is dis eased in numerous ways, but the gameplay behind the turmoil is fantastic—thanks largely to Treyarch's firm grasp on exploiting the Call of Duty 4 engine. Weapon play is particularly strong, player movement is silky smooth, and the intuitive third-person cover mechanic blends nicely with

the lightning-quick firefights. But sadly, these standout qualities fall into the "what could have been" category. The battles rarely deliver a spark of excitement, largely due to the problematic enemy AI and the by-the-numbers design of each fight. All the battles blend together into the same pop and shoot structure, and the break out gameplay, like the quick transition chase boss fights and free running press, lack excitement and are far too simplistic in their implementation.

Enjoyment is fleeting for solo players, but Bond delivers moderate thrills online. Aside from the standard mix of deathmatch, team deathmatch, and conflict modes, two others stand out: *Bond Versus* and *Golden Gun*. In *Bond Versus*, human-controlled hermitsmen are pitted against a human-controlled Bond (control over the double agent is passed to different players after each round). Taking down Bond is an empowering experience, and conversely using him to mow down intelligent foes is a prowess-worthy feat.

Golden Gun is fun solely because the gun (which one player tracks down and wields) is ridiculously overpowered, making for high kill counts. If you get into the multiplayer component, which shares the solid single-player gameplay, you can log countless hours to earn the cash needed to buy all of the weapons, attachments, and Call of Duty 4-like perks. The only huge setback for online play is the fact that every avatar gets "target eliminated," "reloading," and "flash" far too often.

Bond has had a tough stretch in video games, and *Quantum of Solace* isn't a step in the right direction. The gameplay shows potential, but the rest of the game isn't strong enough to lift it up into an experience that any gamer needs to see. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

> Concept: An art that opens Pandora's Box. Myriad enemies

> Graphics: Adequate, but there's little that stands out in the crowded FPS market

> Sound: Solid, with a strong score

> Playability: Coaxers as well as you'd hope from your average FPS

> Entertainment: Fun enough, but offers little in the way of innovation

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion **6.25**

Legendary's unique concept (mythic beasts running rampant over a modern metropolis) and flair for the dramatic make the game more than a few memorable moments. I don't doubt there is a great FPS to be made from the parts found in this title. Sadly, *Legendary* falls in the same way most mortal games do: poor execution.

Much of the experience is a mess of pedestrian mission goals, sloppy targeting, annoying deadpoint problems, and ineffective weapons. It's a bad sign when the best weapon in your shooter is an axe. The plot is boilerplate sci-fi drivel, but that doesn't take away from some of the more grand set pieces—it's amazing to see an enormous piston or griffin laying waste to the city. In many ways, it reminds me of *Fracture*—a great concept gone wrong. —MAT

> Concept: Call of Duty's engine isn't enough to get Britain's spy extraordinary through this confusing mission

> Graphics: Otherwise gorgeous locales are compromised by boring level design

> Sound: Great voice acting in single player, but the constant and unnecessary "reloading" in multiplayer grates the nerves

> Playability: Solid controls and weapon play, but brain-dead AI hardly puts up the fight

> Entertainment: The worst thing a gamer can ever say "Stick to the movies"

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion **6.75**

Unlike its desecrated namesake, *Quantum of Solace* does little to distinguish itself. While James Bond bows audiences by wooing gorgeous ladies, racing luxury cars in high-speed chases, and besting enemies with savvy and futuristic gadgetry, this game seemingly features Bond's boring stepbrother, Steve. The gameplay, while competent, suffers from a lack of imagination, most of your encounters are by-the-book cover and shoot sequences in closed environments. With the occasional quick-time light, small sequence, or cheesy attempt at parkour sprinkled in for variety.

The game's title also misleads—most of the plot simply reshapes the Bond reboot. The multiplayer fares slightly better with a slew of gameplay modes, but crumbles under the pressure of poor level design and balancing. Shotgun are too overpowering, grenades do minimal damage, and the reward system is so broken it once features Bond's first in between two enemies. Bond—and you—both deserve better. —BERTZ

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

Sonic Unleashed

> STYLE | 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER | SEGA > DEVELOPER | SONIC TEAM > RELEASE | NOVEMBER 16 > ESRB | E10+



BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** It's been about a year, so it's time for Sega to shake another Sonic game off the tree.

> **Graphics:** The "Hedgehog engine" impresses with bright cartoonish graphics that buy with a stutter.

> **Sound:** Like death and taxes, annoying voiceovers from Sonic and his pals are inevitable.

> **Playability:** Sonic's rock-act levels require few inputs, and even on the Wii the controls feel fine.

> **Entertainment:** The game is certainly fast, but speed has never been the problem. Sonic's Werewog levels and the explorative hub world squeeze the entertainment out of this package.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low.

Second Opinion 6.75

Another game, another new Sonic character. This time it's our hero's alter-ego Sonic the "Werewog," who (ha!) only comes out at night. This split personality concept transfers to the game design, as the levels are divided up between the speedy, traditional Sonic levels and the platforming and lightening-oriented Werewog levels.

As you might expect, it's a mixed bag. The Sonic levels deliver a modicum of high-speed thrills, but sadly the Werewog's botched gameplay (wacky platforming and/or long cutscenes) show an exit underside. If the Sonic levels are just more of the same, at least they show a certain level of polish—I'd rather have the same old thing done fairly well than the failed experiments of the Werewog levels. Interestingly, the Wii version is actually better—its unique levels are better designed and implemented than on PS3 or 360. Still, after the triumph of Sonic Chronicles for the DS, this is a bit of a letdown.—**MATT**

HOG STY

Every time Sega plans a new Sonic game I hear someone talk about how they are fixing Sonic, and every time the game releases the developers do something new to mess it up. Look Sega, I don't want to play as Sonic's annoying animal friends. I don't want to wander around town talking to people about ice cream or hand puppets. And I don't want to play as some howling bestial, slower version of Sonic. I play Sonic games because I like to go fast.

Sonic is certainly good at going fast. Sega's tech is

the only gameplay in this disc I might have walked away amused. Sadly, they only make up about a third of the overall experience.

After Dr. Eggman uses the Chaos emeralds to split open the Earth's crust, thereby releasing a horde of evil spirits, Sonic becomes infected with some strange disease.

This disease turns him into a super stretchy Werewog monster whenever the moon is out. These Werewog segments play like a poor man's God of War. You fight hordes of enemies and level up his Werewog attacks, but many of the enemies look the same. Sonic's pace is plodding, and the platforming is frustrating.



Even worse are Unleashed's hub world areas, which have Sonic holding inane conversations with random pedestrians in tedious adventure-style quests. As much as I disliked lumbering through levels as Sonic's hulky Werewog, I disliked hunting through the hub worlds looking for coins even more. Sega, if you really want to fix Sonic, the first thing you should do is stop trying to fix him.—**BEN**

The Wii Difference

6.5

The Wii version has less annoying traits than the others and still retains all the usual mediocrity. The motion-control elements in the Werewog levels add an extra dimension to the action, and the hub worlds are entirely text-based and aren't nearly as annoying. If you can stand the diminished graphics, the Wii version actually edges out the PS3 and 360 entries.

You can create online sessions with friends that cover the entire mountain. This way you can duck into and out of challenges or just goof around and freeze the mountain. The choice is yours.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Shaun White Snowboarding

> STYLE | 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER | Ubisoft > DEVELOPER | Ubisoft Montreal

I NEED AN AIRLIFT OUT OF HERE

Shaun White Snowboarding is a chairlift full of possibilities. Ride around it and get off when you see something you like. This game is stuffed with things to do, but it doesn't take long to figure out that you're just going around in circles. The gameplay fails to elevate this title, and players are unable to take advantage of the possibilities all around them.

Like Amped 3 before it, Shaun White fills its mountains with different runs and events that you can drop in and out of. This format served Amped 3 well, but that game had much larger maps and its challenges weren't as mundane as Shaun White's. Races and trick contests are the main fare, and these quickly wear thin. To make matters worse, you must find medallions within each of the environments before you can advance the storyline—a buzz-killing tedium if there ever was one. Events are activated as you pass them going down the mountain. This organic setup makes sense, but given how often you fly right by and miss the event triggers, it's a mistake that there's not a way

to activate them straight from your map.

The sketchy gameplay is the main culprit as to why the challenges fall flat. Getting on and off jibs (as well as staying on them) feels skittish and inconsistent. In general, this mirrors the trouble the game has with pulling, combining, and landing tricks. You're not smooth in or out of your moves, and landings are often mangled but made. You can even suddenly lose speed while cruising down a hill reminding your own business.

Despite these drawbacks, there's plenty here to build off for a sequel. The architecture of the mountains, with their secret areas and plenty of random jibs and jumps to play off leave you with plenty to do, and the multiplayer is well implemented. Friends can join you for free runs or challenges at any time, and both private and public chat radio extend for a wide area around the slopes. Regardless, it's inevitable while you're playing this game that you'll realize you're not really having fun, you're cold, and your butt hurts. That's when it's time to get off the mountain.—**KATO**



BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Let players run wild on entire mountains filled with runs and events to plunder for points, medals, money, and glory.

> **Graphics:** The game stutters occasionally, but it moods runs smooth and has a crap art style that pops.

> **Sound:** The soundtrack is about all you're going to care to hear.

> **Playability:** The speed trick function would be better served if it wasn't on the left analog. It can get in the way of your tricks.

> **Entertainment:** Even if this game were more playable, it still wouldn't make enough of an impact.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High.

Second Opinion 6

Shaun White dominates snowboarding competitions on the real slopes, but it will be a cold day in hell before he does the same for video games with this disappointing mess of shallow controls, ugly graphics, boring missions, and poor game design. While the mountains feature some of the best level designs in winter sports games to date and it's a blast to share the experience with friends online, the simplistic, unrefined controls fail to compensate for the price of the lit tablet. Ollie controls (which are handled with the right trigger) often conflict with the direction you're pushing, the grabs are limited, precision turning is lacking, and the game often robs you of your sense of speed. Thanks for the invite, Ubisoft, but I think I'll stay in the chair.—**BERTZ**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Tomb Raider Underworld

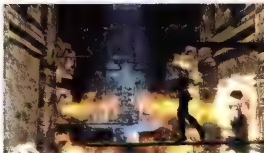
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE | PUBLISHER EIDOS > DEVELOPER CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 18 | \$59.99

CULMINATIONS

Tomb Raider is certainly ready to move in new directions. However, before it does, *Underworld* serves as a suitable exclamation point to wrap up old ideas before moving on to the next big thing. In that capacity, the game is a huge success, delivering the best of what makes Tomb Raider games fun while exciting most elements that have irked players in recent years. This game won't likely change your opinion of the character or her adventures, but it's a grand ride for those who still look forward to globe-trotting with the British heiress.

Crystal Dynamics acknowledges from the start that it's time to sweep out the old and bring in the new, opening the game with a bang (bye-bye Croft Manor), making it abundantly clear that things are changing for Lara. *Underworld* features the most cinematic and exciting Tomb Raider plot yet, filled with tense drama and awe-inspiring scenes of discovery. Without explicitly saying so, *Underworld* serves as the final act of the seemingly disconnected stories presented in *Legend* and *Anniversary*. Culling characters and unanswered questions from both, this closing chapter won't leave fans hanging.

The series' basic design tenets remain intact, but they are more polished here than ever before. Clambering along ledges, leaping across dangerous gaps, dodging ancient mechanical traps, and culling endangered animal species — it's all here. What



has changed is the sense of scale. *Underworld* is all about huge mechanisms and sprawling levels. The platforming is top notch, and navigating the varied locales of the game world has never been more fun. Lara's actions feel and look more natural, thanks to some excellent motion-captured animation; cracks only show during occasional transitions between animations. Her movement is also dramatically expanded, giving her more facility to interact with the environment in the way you want.

The mind-bending puzzles are fun, particularly the impressive number of optional challenges scattered throughout the game to find extra relics and treasures. If anything, some of the puzzles may be too big. I'm as much of a fan of gigantic, pulley-yigged ancient statues as anyone, but there are times where the scale of these contraptions is too massive to even understand what you're doing when

■ The new slow-time action scenes are a much more involving solution than the button press minigames of previous installments, injecting exciting cinematic moments into the action.



■ Lara's animations look fantastic, and there are more of them now than ever before.

you place widget A in slot B. Beyond this frustration, most of the puzzles are a blast to solve — delivering repeated "aha" moments that puzzle gamers can't help but love.

Combat is a marginal step up from previous incarnations, but is still heavily focused on wild leaps around the environment as you hold down the trigger. Unlike before, these combat encounters frequently pop up while you're in the midst of hanging off a ledge or leaping between posts, upping the excitement significantly. Legacy camera problems, meanwhile, haven't improved significantly — probably the biggest problem still facing the talented development team.

In tone, *Underworld* hits the target dead center, delivering the perfect mix of isolation and discovery with larger dramatic encounters. No modern cities mar Lara's excursion this time — this is tomb raiding from beginning to end. Remarkable visuals sell the experience, and a moving score deepens your involvement. The formula behind the game is ready for some fresh ideas, but as a wrap up of old ideas, *Underworld* hits the sweet spot. —MILLER

8.75

> **Concept:** Explore the hidden ruins of the ancient past in one of Lara Croft's best adventures

> **Graphics:** Gorgeous environments, moody lighting, and slick animation make this a surprise contender for one of the finest looking games of the year

> **Sound:** A leitonic score sets the mood for exploring mysterious ruins and shooting in desperate gun battles

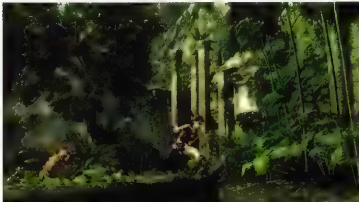
> **Playability:** Lara reacts with ease and precision, but the camera is somewhat frustrating

> **Entertainment:** A thrilling adventure for any game, but long-time tomb raiders will especially love it for the nods to previous narratives

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

In *Tomb Raider Underworld*, Lara Croft is at the top of her game. She may be better on cougar status, but her acrobatic prowess is invigorated with newfound youthfulness and the determination to never miss. This translates to pinpoint platforming precision and hassle-free gangplank mechanics. Her athletic grace is constantly put to the test, yet never falls into a redundant trap thanks to the wealth of creativity found in both the platforming challenges and architectural composition of the level. Not since *God of War* have I had my breath taken away so frequently by a game's level design. Lara's polyprene life never once seal your eye from the magnificent sight-seeing from forbidding skyscraper-deed statues to lush jungle backdrops. As an adventure game, *Underworld* is a towering success that raises the bar for the series. Unfortunately, it also appears to be a shooter. Whenever a gun is fired, the immersion factor is lost. The gangplank is antithetical to the point of absurdity, with enemies bouncing in place as they are noded with bullets. Regardless, *Underworld* remains exhilarating, and is one of Lara's finest efforts to date. —REINER





■ Liverpool and Manchester United lead a slew of licensed teams and players in Pro Evo 2009's UEFA Champions League mode

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Pro Evolution Soccer 2009

> **STYLE** | 1 TO 2-PLAYER SPORTS (PS3), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX 360) (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE NOVEMBER 11** > **ESRB** E

COMPETITION C R E F

For so long the Pro Evolution series (or Winning Eleven, as it was formerly known in America until last year) has been made in a vacuum. But EA's FIFA franchise has slowly made strides, and is now forcing Konami to acknowledge that it's not the only company capable of making a good soccer game.

Like FIFA, Pro Evo has become a Legend mode, where you play as a single player on the pitch trying to achieve international stardom and score a spot on your national team (including—unlike FIFA—international qualifiers). While this game plays better on the pitch because AI teammates are smarter at taking runs, distributing the ball, and springing others with through balls, it lags behind FIFA in its feedback to the player and the fact that it has a better sim feature while you are on the bench.

The other way this game keeps up with FIFA is with its UEFA Champions League mode, which uses real teams and players to let you recreate the summer tournament in reasonable fidelity. Manchester United and Liverpool are the only officially licensed Premiership clubs, unfortunately.

These additions and the slight graphical update mask a game that feels relatively similar to its previous incarnations. Most of the time it's a very smooth, extremely responsive experience, although the animations are dated and the AI can lose its plot when pulling the trigger around the box. With EA hot on its heels, this isn't the time for Konami to lose its resolve. —**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** PES 2009 boasts impressive improvements, including the new Increate A Legend mode and adding the official UEFA Championship (with a slew of real teams and players)

> **Graphics:** Slightly improvement from years past, but not enough to represent real progress

> **Sound:** Unlike most of the game, this area doesn't show much improvement

> **Playability:** I'm disappointed that the right analog passing lacks the touch of the aged—especially since the analog stick is so easy to use

> **Entertainment:** The development of the annual series took the year seriously, providing players with plenty to chew on

> **Replay Value:** Modestly high

Second Opinion **7.75**

Konami has done a great job of moving forward in all the exterior elements of Pro Evo. The menu look great, several new modes come as welcome additions, and the four-player online mode is a great step up. Unfortunately, the core game feels increasingly lackluster as the years pass. Overall visuals aren't up to snuff with the competition; animation in particular looks far too stiff. Player control is precise as always, but also feels overly mechanical. Of the new features, I was the most excited to dive into the SE Legend mode. It doesn't always feel like you're receiving individual advancement rewards for achieving except your team's victories, but the mode as a whole is still a fun excursion into the fantasy of diving a career from scratch.

Meanwhile, the vader game needs to consider some dramatic retooling to recapture the excitement of the sport. —**MILLER**

MULTI QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 3

Alone in the Dark: Inferno

> **STYLE** | 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** GIGAWATT > **DEVELOPER** ESOB GAMES > **RELEASE NOVEMBER 17** > **ESRB** M

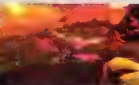
BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

I have to applaud Atari and ESOB for fixing so many of the problems present in previous releases of *Alone in the Dark*. The new camera system feels more natural for the gameplay style, cars drive smoother (and chase scenes are more forgiving), strafing and first-person speeds have increased considerably, and the new 10-minute gameplay sequence will get your blood pumping. Most importantly, the root burning is now incorporated directly into the plot and the requirements for accessing the final area are drastically reduced. Unfortunately, the clumsy story remains the same, and I still care about the occasional glitch. But make no mistake, *Inferno* is the definitive version of *Alone in the Dark*. —**BYRAN**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon

> **STYLE** | CR-2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVATION > **DEVELOPER** EMERGENT BEHAVIORS > **RELEASE OCTOBER 21** > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE **4**

I can now see why purple dragons are associated with drug use. In this final installment of the Legend of Spyro series, the player's quest to rid the world of the evil taint a backbone to the useless battle against the game itself. The longer you play it, the more it breaks and aggravates. Your AI partner has a knack for getting stuck on geometry, the framerate chugs and audio slips near their ugly heads far too often. Combat is more of an exercise in simply hitting an enemy than doing something cool. Most of the levels require guesswork, which leads to aimless exploration in vast environments. The missions within these areas can be tedious and equally confusing. Long story short, this is a flawed game throughout and through. Even the most devoted *Spyro* fans should avoid it. —**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NCAA Basketball 09

> **STYLE** | CR-2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE NOVEMBER 17** > **ESRB** E



ONE VERSUS NONE

BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

With 2K Sports' College Hoops bowing out of the competition, NCAA Basketball 09 is the only hoops game dedicated to March Madness. Even without the pressure of a competitor, the publishing juggernaut EA didn't stay stagnant, but the end result is far from a blue chip prospect.

The gameplay still suffers from some legacy problems (players stepping out of bounds, excessive backcourt violations, players slowing on fastbreaks, players getting locked into animations), but the general gameplay is adequate. Posting up on the low block, cutting to the rim with a freestyle move, calling for a pick and roll, and jumping passing lanes to create turnovers on defense are all easy to execute. The teams also make better use of their benches this season.

The on-court presentation has also improved. Dick Vitale's boisterous shriek is an acquired taste, but Brad Nessler does a great job of play-by-play and the game makes better use of stat boxes to update you on fouls and player performances. The crowd also reacts more in tune with the rhythms of the game, standing to applaud a come-from-behind basket or thundering dunk.

EA's marketing feature du jour is "Set the Tempo," which is showed down your throat via a pre-game tempo checklist, coaching tips, a tempo meter, and Vitale's vocal obsession with the imaginary struggle to control the pace of the game. Keeping the game in your team's ideal tempo (half-court, balanced, or fast-break) supposedly earns you team shooting bonuses, but this failed to materialize in any meaningful way. Whether I was running and gunning or setting up offensive plays and slowing the pace, the difference seemed negligible.

Dynasty mode features a drastically improved recruiting system more akin to its football brethren, but its clumsy interface doesn't make the job easy. Every time you drill into a player's menu to check out his current standing or scouting report, you list out of targeted players resets as you exit, meaning you must once again drill into the specific view you previously occupied. Unfortunately, the dynasty mode is offline only. EA once again skipped on the multiplayer options and limits you to player-versus-player matches. At least they let players share rosters.

NCAA Basketball 09 may not offer the wealth of options or polished gameplay of its former competition, but it's still a decent barrel worthy of a look from hardcore college hoops fans. —**BERTZ**

> **Concept:** The lone kid on the court explores its game with a deeper recruiting system and greater attention to detail

> **Graphics:** The crowd emulates college big plays and the players move across the court gracefully

> **Sound:** In case you couldn't tell by the tempo meter, tempo checklist, and coaches' pep on preserving your tempo, Dick Vitale and Brad Nessler also stress the importance of tempo five or six times a game. Swoosh

> **Playability:** This is still ground he learned the basics, but I'd prefer to backcourt violations and midpays along the sidelines

> **Entertainment:** If you love college hoops, this is the only game to own

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **7.25**

NCAA is starting over again with its new game engine, and the game isn't exactly smooth in transition. The new tempo system isn't the sexiest feature you're going to see, but the one thing I like about it is that you'll have to adjust your playing style to suit different teams. I tired a lot more when teams were playing up-tempo or full court press on me. Beyond the lack of new eye-popping features, I don't like how my defenders were on rails as times or caught in animations. It's not a deal breaker for this game, but given that this franchise has been relatively subdued since coming over to next-gen, I'm disappointed that it isn't set to take off. —**KATO**



GAME INFORMER
TEAM OF THE MONTH

XBOX 360

Left 4 Dead

> **STYLE 1** OR **PLAYER ACTION** (UP TO 8 PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** VALVE
 > **DEVELOPER** VALVE > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17 > **ESRB** M

PUMPING LIFE INTO ONLINE

▶ **Playing as the elite zombies is an empowering experience unlike anything you've seen in other multiplayer games.**

BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

▶ **Concept:** Fighting alongside three friends to stave off the zombie uprising is the multiplayer experience of the year.

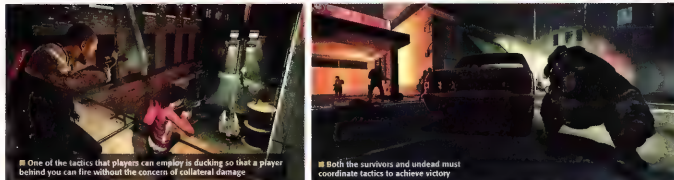
▶ **Graphics:** Every level is re-created in time to half-Life 2's Ravenholm. The lighting effects and number of characters onscreen at once are impressive.

▶ **Sound:** The different sounds emanating from the elite zombies will make you tense up. The survivor voice acting, as sparse as it is, is used effectively to help players.

▶ **Playability:** Even without iron sight targeting, the gunplay is smooth and solid. Playing as the elite zombies is equally fun.

▶ **Entertainment:** It doesn't offer much content, but regardless, this is the type of game you can play over and over again.

▶ **Replay Value:** High



▶ **One of the tactics that players can employ is ducking so that a player behind you can fire without the concern of collateral damage.**

▶ **Both the survivors and undead must coordinate tactics to achieve victory.**

If your Xbox 360 isn't connected to Xbox Live, fang your head in shame and moan like a flesh-starved zombie. You offliners are missing the multiplayer event of the year. Whether you assume the role of a human fighting for survival within the wastes of a dead city or the zombie who's this walking meat buffet as a tasty appetizer, Left 4 Dead's online battles will consume your soul and bathe you in the blood of one of video games' most imaginative, visceral, and indecently impactful experiences.

When you fire the game up, three additional players join you. If you select cooperative play, you and your teammates must blaze a trail through AI-controlled zombie forces to a safe house where weapons, ammo, and precious health packs await. If you select competitive play, the goal for your team remains the same, but a second team of humans now controls the elite zombies (which I'll detail later). The goal for each team is simple: survive, or on the contrary, kill.

The gameplay for the two factions is completely different, but at the same time, unified by the game's strongest component—teamwork. If you wander off for just one second, you could endanger the lives of everyone on your team, or if you are the zombies, allow the humans to reach the safe house. Even if you've played through a particular level 100 times, it's impossible to predict when and how the zombies will attack your squad. The level's geometry never changes, but the zombie spawns do. In one playthrough, a street may be calm and quiet; in another, it could look like a rolling river of undead. Thus, it is imperative that you stick together, and

better yet, coordinate your tactics.

Survivors can only carry two weapons: a default pistol and your choice of an assault rifle, shotgun, or sniper rifle. The sniper rifle may seem like an odd weapon to use against zombie hordes that are faster than Carl Lewis, but this weapon's lightning-quick reloads make it reliable. The control mechanics are mapped strangely (with reload on B, and no iron sight), but perfectly fit the action. Targeting (with a little aim assist) is spot on, pipe bomb grenades are easy to place, and the melee gun bash is a highly effective way to keep zombies from gnawing on your bones.

If you are playing as the undead axis, each respawn places you in the body of either a smoker (who grabs survivors with his tongue from afar and slushes them when they get near), a hunter (who punches onto survivors and claws them to death), a boomer (a ball of fat that moves slowly and blinds survivors with his pukey breath), or on rare occasions, a tank (a Hulk-like abomination that can smack humans into next week). The tank's movements are sluggish, but each bubble is a riot to fly, especially when your team strategizes to launch full-on assaults against the survivors.

After playing just one match, you'll think twice before mocking the cheesy dialogue found in *Left 4 Dead*'s moves again. Given the intensity of each fight, you'll find yourself screaming "get it off me, man!", "eat lead, fleshbag!" or whatever groaning one-liner your brain can produce after a hard fought victory. If you don't say anything, there's a chance a smoker may make off with you, or a teammate may not get the ammo or health he or

she needs to hold off a swarm.

While the competitive and cooperative modes deliver a thrill a second, both are limited in content. The game only consists of four levels, each lasting about an hour. With that said, the amazing level designs will remind you of every zombie movie ever made. All of them conclude in style as well, with survivors barring themselves in a building as zombies tear through the doors and windows, and also a rooftop showdown that ends with undead bodies pouring off its sides with the consistency of rain. The lack of levels is a major letdown, and the fact that each level recycles the same five enemy types doesn't help matters. Let's just cross our fingers and hope Valve quickly delivers downloadable content and/or expansion packs.

I've neglected to talk about single player, which the game lists as the third option on its title screen. There is no story to soak in, and sadly, it's just not the same game without buddies at your side. If anything, this mode is worth a look just to witness Valve's amazing teammate AI. They are almost too good, often shooting a little too quickly and taking down elite zombies before you see them (which sucks for multiplayer matches without eight players). The split-screen co-op is fun, but suffers from a drop in graphical fidelity.

If you are even thinking about playing this game, pony up for the Xbox Live Gold membership. It's just as necessary as the controller. While light on content, Left 4 Dead needs to be in everyone's library, not only because it innovates in ways that will shape the future of gaming, but also because it's so damn fun. —REINER

Second Opinion **9.25**

Consider me infected. Left 4 Dead's creative brand of human-versus-zombie gameplay is the year's best team-based multiplayer experience. The premise is simple: Like *28 Days Later*, an infection creates a legion of zombies who overrun the (geographically rendered dry and countryside) and four survivors must work together to shoot their way through the brain-dead masses and escape. Your chances of survival are extremely compromised by limping teammates or drained humans, so the game encourages players to cover each other's backs, haul those in need of medical attention, and wander guns blazing into hordes of flesh-starved zombies to save the unfortunate survivor who gets overwhelmed. Taking up the cause of the infected in multiplayer is even more fun. The creative gameplay structure allows you to pick your exact spawn point and plan out attacks with your three zombie cohorts. The only serious gripe I have with Left 4 Dead are its dearth of content (only four campaigns, each of which takes a little over an hour to complete) and its paucy weapon selection (this game is screaming for a flamethrower and more melee weapons). But the pure fun of the gameplay experience is tough to refute. This is the best zombie game ever made. —BERTZ

XBOX 360

You're In The Movies

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER BOARD > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS/MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** ZOÉ MODE
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18 > **ESRB** E



BECOME A C-LISTER

With all of the attention and money pouring into music games, it's interesting to see the performance game play spotlight turned towards movies. For the uninitiated, *You're In The Movies* tasks players with participating in a series of EyeToy-style minigames in front of the Xbox camera (punch some targets, shoo away bugs) and brief acting challenges like "look scared" or "do an evil laugh." After 20 to 30 minutes of acting, the footage is recopied into one of 30 fake movie trailers ranging from sci-fi to horror to romantic comedy.

If you're willing to loosen up and act silly, the end product can be hilarious, especially if you completely ignore the "director's" instructions. While you can't send these videos over Xbox Live, you can easily download them to your computer (the .wmv files dock in just under 20MB). Handy FAQs make uploading to YouTube a snap, which is technically impressive and also a great way to embarrass friends from last night's party.

The gimmick loses its luster after a few sessions. Minigames start to repeat (be prepared for a lot of giggling), standard gaming camera

issues (like constant calibration and missing torsos) pop up, and once you know how the whole process works the end products aren't as satisfying ("Oh, I'm turning a walkie. I guess there's a driving scene in this one). There's no option for a shorter session like in *Buzz* or *Scene It*, so the rounds begin to drag. With half-hour sessions at parties, larger groups can't rotate people in and out of participation like with *Rock Band*, and even if you just have four people, I can't see anyone wanting to play more than two sequences in a row.

While single player is an option, it's sadder than singing karaoke alone in your living room. Director's mode allows you to mash up your own scenes and add narration via a headset, but inflexible tools and lo-fi sound quality ensure that few will invest much in this feature.

You're in the Movies' biggest fault, however, is that it doesn't put people in real movies — just cheesy fakes. Why can't we deliver any lines? It's just a bunch of miming around, imagine how sweet it would be if you could say "Hasta la vista, baby" before blasting the T-1000 in *Terminator 2*. —**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Make wacky movies at home using weatherman-style green screen technology

> **Graphics:** Look in the mirror. That's pretty much what you're in for

> **Sound:** Purposely over-the-top narration and dinged game music

> **Playability:** If you can wave your arms and jig in place, you're set

> **Entertainment:** While it's amusing and cleverly constructed, this probably can't hold up in a social party

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

This is a difficult game to assign a numerical score. Measured alone, the minigame selection is uneven in both challenge and entertainment value. However,

when you get down to playing the game, you're in the Movies offers some of the most unbridled fun you can have while sober. The disarming quality to the game is perfect for reeling in your casual or non-gamer friends, and once the game gets rolling, even the sub-par minigames can amuse. It's always hilarious to watch your goofy improvisations compiled into a kind of visual Mad Libs at the end of every session with a fake movie trailer. If nothing else, this game deserves credit for presenting a great atmosphere where you and your friends can have a good time. —**BEN**



XBOX 360 QUICKIES

XBOX 360

Scene It? Box Office Smash

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER BOARD (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** KROME STUDIOS/SCREENLIFE > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 28 > **ESRB** T

The only glaring omission from the original *Scene It* was online play. Now that it's implemented well in *Box*

Office Smash, you won't have to cajole your friends and family into a game every time you want to play a session. Questions encompass classics like *Creature from the Black*

Lagoon all the way to more contemporary flicks like *Juno*. New game types add more variety, of which *Fuel Fix* is the best (picture an 8-bit animated rendering of *Total Recall*). It strikes to be stuck with default character models, but you can use Xbox 360 avatars. Hopefully downloadable question packs, unlike with the first game, will come out at some point. —**BRYAN**



XBOX 360

Lips

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** INIS
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18 > **ESRB** T



Hero... yet), and motion sensors allow you to trigger "Star Stream" among other neat functions. Three party games add that strange iris twist (one involves making an onscreen couple smooth), but probably won't get a ton of play. You can import tracks from your iPod and sing along to them, but without lyrics this feature becomes a trumped up visualizer. The small offering of online tracks run \$2 each, and Live functionality is mostly dry stats and friends-only challenges. Lag calibration is a pain, especially compared to SingStar's easy system. I have a feeling that Lips has plenty more cards up its sleeve, but the initial release leaves much to be desired. —**BRYAN**

The foundation of *Lips* is identical to any other karaoke game; it's the little things that make it stand out. This is the first title to detect and reward vibrato (this is big for singing games). The wireless mics are a dream (no, they don't work with *Rock Band* or *Guitar*

XBOX 360

Naruto: The Broken Bond

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18 > **ESRB** T

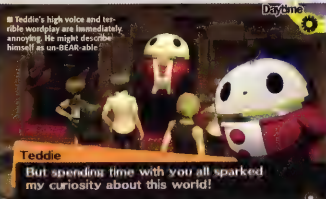
It's refreshing to see this much care given to a property I have no attachment to; all licensed games deserve to be treated like this. Ubisoft Montreal has clearly put in some effort into creating this game, which is a unique blend of rich one-on-one fighting and adventure elements in a larger RPG structure. Unlike last year's *Naruto* title, this time we get to play as Naruto and several of his friends, one of whom begins a journey down a darker path. The story (which covers episodes 81-135 of the anime) feels a little disjointed but also has some compelling moments. I just wish the missions had more variety, because many of them boil down to simple fetch quests. Otherwise, there isn't much else that bugged me about the game other than *Naruto* every time he opened his mouth, and that's not Ubisoft's fault (in fact, they were kind enough to include the original Japanese VO). For fans this is a no-brainer, but even those looking for a fighter or RPG with some interesting twists should give this a try. —**BEN**



PLAYSTATION 2

Persona 4

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



■ Teddie's high voice and terrible way of play are immediately annoying. He might describe himself as un-BEAR-able.

Teddie
But spending time with you all sparked my curiosity about this world!

HORROR AND HOMEWORK

Even if it's most disturbing when viewed through pure eyes, and Persona 4 delves into the subject with haunting effectiveness. The game's morbid story juxtaposes the innocent lives of high school students with brutal crimes and hidden shame, filling the plot with discordant and compelling moments. Supposed best friends bury resentment for each other, outwardly happy kids wrestle with intense fears of rejection, and ordinary people become the centerpieces of gruesome crime scenes. This isn't an RPG for anyone who is content to manage a princess or save some crystals.

The stylish narrative gets more inescapable as it goes on, but it doesn't come without a hefty investment.



■ Holy crap... I think this is all too much for my bladder...

Unlike the last entry in the series, Persona 4 takes three or four hours to get going, leaving you with little to do but read text until then. However, when the gameplay finally opens up, it all pays off. With the creepy premise and cool characters firmly established, you're free to explore the rural town of Inaba and discover how the game elements fold into one another.

Your days are filled with a school simulation where you make friends and build social links, which indirectly increases your combat prowess through your persona (a power

creature born from a character's psyche). When school is done, you work through randomly generated dungeons using standard turn-based mechanics, though your foes often require intricate strategies to defeat (including lots of buffs and debuffs). Upon victory, you're sometimes awarded a new persona, which you can fuse with others to form an even more awesome entity. Each aspect, from simulation to combat, feeds into the next so well that I found myself absorbed in no time.

The interplay of the simulation and combat elements form an addictive cycle that makes it easy to immerse yourself in the surreal world of Persona 4, but it isn't for everyone. The game implements a deliberate and regimented structure, requiring a lot of planning, repetition, and level grinding. On the other hand, it rewards your effort with a compelling story, rock solid combat, and a fanatics-inspiring persona fusion system. If you've got the time and dedication, Persona 4 will not disappoint.—JDE



■ Those glasses actually play a significant role in the plot.



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Take Persona 3, tweak some mechanics, add a chilling new story, and you've got another sequel.

> **Graphics:** Stylized visuals can't completely mask the fact that you're playing on outdated hardware.

> **Sound:** Despite a lot of repetition, the musical score is evocative. The voice acting is also exceptional for most characters.

> **Playability:** The mechanics are improved over the last entry, but the rigid structure and time-line still feel restrictive.

> **Entertainment:** You'll need a lot of determination to see the best that Persona 4 has to offer. The story and gameplay are engaging, but the pacing can be pretty rough.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



■ A persona will cast spells and use skills for characters in battle.

Second Opinion 7.25

From the hours-long introduction to the experience grind necessary to progress through the randomized dungeons, Persona 4 is a massive trial of patience. Your reward is a well-written and engrossing tale that mixes the realities of adolescent school life with a surreal dreamscape coming of age metaphor. It's heavy stuff, but even as I cursed the endless dialogue, I was drawn into the nitrate chambers and bizarre plotlines. It's just too bad the gameplay is a tedious slog. You must often battle through dozens of multiples times to build experience before tackling the next story event. Non-combat development is also necessary, so you'll spend time building your friendships and abilities through school clubs, doses, and other activities for devoted players. It's a rewarding but slow-paced narrative; other games will shake their heads and wonder why they're still not actually playing the game four hours after turning on their PS2.—MILLER



I don't know whether to say "nice to meet you" or "good to see you again."

PLAYSTATION 2

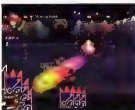
Kingdom Hearts Re:Chain of Memories

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
> **RELEASE** DECEMBER 2 > **ESRB** E10+

TOO LITTLE TOO LATE

Back in 2004, the original Game Boy Advance Chain of Memories served a useful purpose. A nice snack for starving fans left hanging after the ending of the original Kingdom Hearts two years earlier, the game set up mysteries leading into Kingdom Hearts II and introduced Organization XIII, Naminé, and DZ. Sure, it tugged back through many of the same worlds as KH 1, but at least we saw everything re-imagined in sprite form. However, like watching foreign films, some people just don't play portable games. So now we have what is essentially a "Hollywood remake" of CoM on PS2.

The added voiceover and 3D presentation is cool in some respects, but fans already know what happens on both ends of this story even if they haven't played the GBA version. The text-heavy dialogue and fading memory plotline will have you mashing X to bum through it, especially during scenes like this: "Who are you?" "Don't you remember me?" "I think I do... maybe." "Well, you



seem like a nice person." Almost all of the in-game assets are recycled from previous games and the world-by-world stories are

dusty rereads of KH 1 setups (which are already rereads of Disney movies). The card battle system, love it or hate it, remains with some additional contextual text bits returning. If you've never tried it, be prepared for plenty of deck organizing and more strategic combat. While the former 2D battle plane kept almost all of the enemies in view, with the new 3D system they can sneak up on off screen due to the occasionally wild targeting system. The annoying door card system still forces you to pick a fight with every enemy or risk getting screwed out of forward progress.

In the end, Re:Chain of Memories is a servicable, inexpensive RPG that will satisfy fans curious about this "lost" chapter in the KH series and the few people who really enjoyed the original CoM.—BRYAN

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Reread a four-year-old game on an eight-year-old console.

> **Graphics:** Identical to Kingdom Hearts I and 2.

> **Sound:** Holey Joe Coomer's return to work is great. Most of the soundtrack is recycled from previous games.

> **Playability:** The card battle system remains eerily unchanged, so beware if you're expecting traditional Kingdom Hearts combat.

> **Entertainment:** Easily the weakest link in the franchise.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



Second Opinion 7.25

Even as a Kingdom Hearts fan, it's hard to get excited about a remake of a CoM card game that sets up the plot for a game well over two years old at this point. Regardless, this is a fun little title. I dug the environment, system that has you creating every world as you explore it, and the Slight system had me strategizing how to most effectively utilize my cards to pull off special attacks. Unfortunately, the action gets a little repetitive. Hardcore fans might be interested in the revamped graphics and animated cutscenes, but if you already played your fill of the GBA version I'm not sure there was much reason to revisit the past.—BEN



Wi
Animal Crossing: City Folk

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO
 > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** E

HEAVEN IS A PLACE WHERE NOTHING EVER HAPPENS

I gave the original *Animal Crossing* for GameCube a 9 out of 10. So why is this Wii edition leaving me bored and disinterested? Instead of a tearful reunion, it feels more like meeting an old high school friend and having that uncomfortable feeling that there's nothing left to say. Sure, we had some good times in the past, but I've changed. *Animal Crossing*, on the other hand, has studiously avoided paying attention to any of the innovations that happened since its release in 2002.

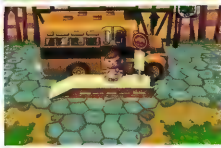
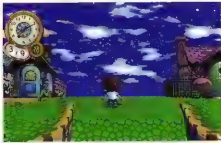
Instead of following the original *Animal Crossing*, *City Folk* is an extension of the 2005 DS release *Animal Crossing: Wild World*. It features the same odd "rolling barrel" perspective, which is a distinct change from the original GameCube title (and, it should

be noted, a viewpoint more appropriate for the DS than the Wii). In a neat twist, the game allows you to transfer data from your DS game, allowing you to have a leg up in your new life. For most of us, however, the game begins much as the first did: You name your town and your character, then start delving into goods for Nook's Cranny as a part-time job. Soon, you get your first mortgage and you can begin

decorating your bachelor(ette) pad.

And then...well, it's up to you.

Animal Crossing: City Folk isn't really a game. In retrospect, the original was probably Nintendo's first experiment with its new philosophy of creating entertainment for non-gamers. Most of your time is spent wandering around much as you would in a real town. Talking to your neighborhood charms is a big part of the experience, and one of the areas in which the game shines. Nintendo's classic, offbeat sense of humor is apparent in every line of dialogue. From a bus driver who spouts pirate slang to any number of eccentric *Animal Crossing* denizens, the game's speech bubbles are frequently full of laughs.



Sadly, the rest of the game doesn't captivate me the way it once did. While some will appreciate the game's free-form structure, I found myself wanting more of a purpose than tracking down the odd lost item for a friend or scavenging shells to sell and pay off my mortgage. In the city (a new location added since the first game), you can shop, bid on items your online friends put up for sale, buy new clothes, or even get a haircut. Your house is customizable with an astonishing supply of furniture, decorations, and other items. You can also catch fish, use a net to catch bugs, or plant and water trees. For the first time, voice chat is available through the new WiSpeak microphone, but Nintendo did not provide us with one for this review (We did see a demonstration at E3 that appeared to be working well, although with some suspect sound quality).

If you think the last paragraph sounds more like a list of random features and activities than an actual game, you're right. Compared to *Animal Crossing: The Sims* series as reimagined as a tactical first-person shooter. For some, this is the charm. While it's certainly neat when the game, for example, has a New Year's Eve celebration, this practice is now commonplace in games like *World of Warcraft*. A lot has happened in gaming since 2002. When you compare the shallow ways you interact with the world in *City Folk* to a game like *Fable II* or *Grand Theft Auto IV*, there's no comparison. Too often, it felt like I was playing an endless loop of "town exploration" segments from old-school Japanese RPGs — only without the actual gameplay. Also, where the first game gave you nearly 20 old-school NES games to collect and play, *City Folk* gives you none. The reason? Nintendo wants you to buy them on the Virtual Console.

Times change, and games must change with them. *Animal Crossing*, while still a charming and often engaging experience, seems stuck somewhere in the last generation of gaming. —MAT

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** A return to the freeform, pastoral universe of *Animal Crossing*.

> **Graphics:** The graphic detail, character models, and environments are decidedly old school, but the game is more about Nintendo's classic charm than tech specs.

> **Sound:** The soundtrack is fairly forgettable. The WiSpeak microphone (sold separately) slows down the chat.

> **Playability:** While it's more of an "experience" than a "game," I don't see why activities like fishing or the basic menu design couldn't be better.

> **Entertainment:** While I loved the original, and this sequel will still charm the faithful, the passage of time lessens the waning magic from *Animal Crossing*.

> **Replay Value:** Modest



Second Opinion **6.5**

Animal Crossing gives players a ton of things to do from the moment they create their town and start paying off their first mortgage. Meeting new townspeople, planting foliage, removing weeds, and endlessly collecting the many fossils, bugs, fish, and furniture in the game will keep players busy for as long as they care to play. Unfortunately, none of these activities are any fun. Anything resembling gameplay here is implemented with the dull and cutesy of a week-old puppy. It's cute that they tried to make interactive activities like fishing and bug catching. Engaging in any of these pursuits, however, holds the appeal of cleaning up after a dog that got a little too excited when *Darby* came home. Likewise, you can learn new moves in the big city's theater or change up your look at the salon, but I just can't think of any reason you would want to. The title's much-wanted online capabilities would have been cool in 1997, but the tiny amounts of online interaction are a pitiful reward for the hassle of dealing with friend codes and the rest of Nintendo's tedious connectivity barriers. At its best, *Animal Crossing* is a relaxing way to play around in a neat little sandbox, albeit one with incredibly restricting rules. Most of it, however, it's an endless, boring slog as you search for something genuinely interesting to do. —ADM



Wii

Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip

► **STYLE** | TO A-PLAYER SPORTS ► **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT ► **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT
 ► **MONITOR** | ► **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 ► **ESRB** E

SOFT AS SNOW

There isn't a lot of mystique to video game snowboarding, given how easy it is to translate the mechanics of the sport onto a controller. This is even more evident with the Wii remote in your hand. Shaun White does just enough to capture the attention of a gamer looking to carve and pull off tricks with a minimal amount of fuss. Beyond that, however, the game misses an opportunity to expand our experience with the sport.

Simple trick point challenges, timed races, and collect-a-thons are scattered among mountains across the globe, and these events quickly become repetitive. Being able to free-roam these locales would improve that situation, but only marginally. Shaun White doesn't have its sights set as high. Instead, you must be content getting around with smooth carving by twisting and moving the remote from side to side or through the game's simple set of tricks.



► **Co-op** | In split-screen co-op, you and your friends track and race for combined point totals.

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

► **Concept**: Shaun White leads a charmed life hopping the globe looking for fresh powder, and now you can, too.

► **Graphics**: The textures are blurry enough that you'll think you've been white washed.

► **Sound**: A good soundtrack featuring Modest Mouse, Kasabian, Mooney Sucks, and more.

► **Playability**: The Wii balance board does not handle the double duty of movement and tricks well enough to recommend it over the Wii remote control scheme.

► **Entertainment**: Too interested and simplistic to be much more than a bunny hill.

► **Replay Value**: Moderate.

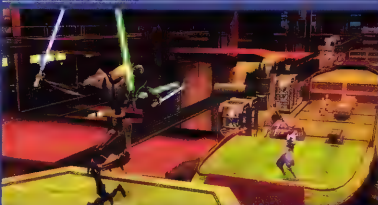
Second Opinion **6.5**

Road Trip is the arcade-leaning bunny hill to the Xbox 360 version's simulation-flavored black diamond. The game ditches the open world snowboarding in favor of closed events challenging your racing, big air, half-pipe, and trick skills. I missed the option to just shred down a mountain, but the game's cartoonish approach means more genuine than the oddball, marketing-heavy tone of the other versions. The Wii remote controls make turning and jumping easy, but rotating your board while in the air is an inexact science. Road Trip also mixes use of the Wii Balance Board, which works well for turning but makes it much harder to generate velocity than with the remote. This is by no means an X Games favorite, but if you're a Wii balance board owner looking for a casual experience, you could do much worse. —BERTZ

Wii

Star Wars: The Clone Wars — Lightsaber Duels

► **STYLE** | OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING ► **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS ► **DEVELOPER** KROME STUDIOS
 ► **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11 ► **ESRB** T



SWINGING WILDLY

In the original Star Wars, Obi-Wan bludgefists Luke and makes him block incoming blaster fire from a training droid. I never knew how Luke felt until I played Star Wars: The Clone Wars and found myself wildly swinging my Wii remote, trying to tap into a mysterious unseen force that would let me execute one of the game's evasive combos.

Clone Wars' biggest failure is its broken combo system, which is composed of a string of directional Wii remote swipes. Using motion controls in a fighting game requires thinking outside the box. Instead, Clone Wars attempts a quick and dirty swap of traditional button combos with inaccurate motions. You'd have to be a Jedi Master to play this game flawlessly.

It wouldn't be much of a Star Wars game if you couldn't tap into Force powers. I love the idea of grabbing objects out of the air with my remote and throwing them at my opponent, or knocking them out of the ring with a powerful Force push, but the Force is a difficult beast to tame. This

feature should have provided plenty of excellent moments, but it's bogged down by poor targeting and lengthy animations.

The broken core mechanics are especially shameful since the game is so skeletal. The story follows the plot of the recent movie, which means there aren't many characters for Krome to tap for the game, so you end up repeatedly facing off against the same opponents over and over again. While a few character-specific challenges flesh out the single-player experience, they aren't creative enough to be entertaining.

The graphical style of the show works well on the Wii, and the fighters' mid-battle bender adds some flavor to the action. I was even amused by the Lightsaber Clash minigames that occasionally interrupted the bouts, even though these sometimes falter due to poor motion control recognition. While these few gameplay elements help make the experience more digestible, it hardly matters because the basic mechanics are a mess. —BEN

BOTTOM LINE **5**

► **Concept**: Cartoon Network's CG series gets the cheap video game treatment with a 3D fighter.

► **Graphics**: The show's exaggerated style works well on the Wii.

► **Sound**: During battle the characters talk to each other, which adds some depth to the action.

► **Playability**: Clone Wars' use of motion controls to implement combos is a frustrating experiment I hope no one else attempts.

► **Entertainment**: Bits of the show might enjoy dipping around with this for a weekend.

► **Replay Value**: Low.

Second Opinion **5.5**

LucasArts and Krome's latest effort game takes the dream of authentic lightsaber combat and impales it like so many Jedi Masters. Without a one-to-one correlation between your gestures and the position of your saber, the Wii remote is just a poor substitute for button presses in less-hungry duels. Even simple "left, right, left" combos are difficult to reliably execute. While sluggish mechanics are the main problem, Lightsaber Duels is also thin on content: a repetitive campaign (Do I really need to fight Acay Wrenthris three times?) and unvaried challenges are the main attractions outside of versus battles. Unless you need something to make your 5th anniversary give in to anger and hate, don't give your son this game. —JOE



► **Gameplay** | Levels have short animated sequences, but the game won't always let lightning in the same way.

Wii

Skate It

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA BLACK BOX > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17 > **ESRB** T

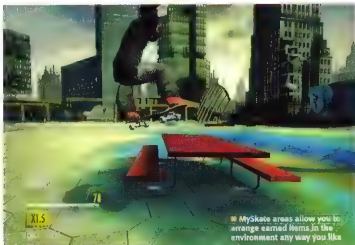
KICKFLIPPING IT NEW SCHOOL

Skate took the video game world by storm by representing the sport via analog stick tricks. This felt so familiar to players that it quickly seemed like this was the way it should have been done all along. Now the franchise is going back to square one with the Wii to craft a control scheme just as natural.

The Wii controller—which is notorious for a level of inaccuracy that muddies player motions into onscreen gibberish—may seem a poor choice to translate the myriad moves in a skater's bag of tricks. However, Skate It is more than up to the task of laying the world at your feet... or fingertips (see sidebar for more). Your trick book is filled with moves, and pulling them off—particularly with the remote and nunchuk setup—is relatively easy. Skate It's controls don't suffer from a lot in translation effect, nor are they just a poor substitute for the analog sticks of the other consoles. They represent skating's acrobatics and are much more fulfilling than the usual lazy uses of the Wii remote as either a toy sword or a glorified light gun/laser pointer.

Skate It's ease of use comes at a cost. The developer has (wisely) papered over some of the vagaries of interpreting player motions by sometimes giving you tricks you had not intended. At least the game's challenges don't often ask to perform spe-

dic moves. Still, I miss the satisfaction in the original Skate of mapping out a series of tricks in your mind as you approach a curb and then executing them perfectly. Furthermore, the game requires you to pull tricks earlier than you'd think due to slight lag. This means judging rails trickier and your combo strings shorter. Finally, the ramps and keepers don't deliver enough air, making these setups less fun than traditional street rails and curbs.



My skate areas allow you to arrange earned items in the environment any way you like.



Ramp skating isn't as satisfying as hitting the streets due to the inconsistent amount of air you get off the lip.

The best part about Skate It is that it doesn't feel like a translation of another game. It's its own beast. Granted, this means it comes with its own problems, and EA has its work cut out for it as it tries to iron out the game's kinks for future titles. These include the sometimes skittish nature of your board's movements, the simple challenges, and the small skating arena, which removed the exploratory, open world appeal of Skate I loved so much. Still, the game makes you want to hop on your board, because you never know where it's going to take you.—**KATO**

Second Opinion 7.5

As someone who cut his virtual skateboarding teeth on the Tony Hawk series, I really appreciate Skate It's more realistic take on the sport. Instead of cartoonish stunts, the game forces you to master the basics of the sport, making every good trick line seem like a real accomplishment. On the Wii, the realism is even greater, as you use the Wii remote much like an actual skate deck, mimicking the motions required to pull off ollies, nollies, grubs, and kick flips. It's a great design move the way that the Wii's notoriously loose motion sensing hampers the actual gameplay. Too often you feel like you're just flailing about, and pulling off a good run often seems more a matter of good luck than good skating. However, there are a wide variety of challenges and events for those men (or women) eager to master the erratic controls (though I could do without the overly long ball animations and the annoying voiceovers). This is a solid game begging for the promised increase in precision from the upcoming Wii Motion Plus attachment.—**MATT**

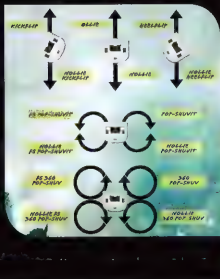
GOOFY FEET

Skate It features three different control schemes:

Wii Remote & Nunchuk: I recommend you use this control scheme since it has no mechanical drawbacks, unlike the others.

Wii Remote Only: Since you turn the remote to turn your board, when you tilt it to do a varial kickflip, for instance, your skater will also swerve the board before performing the trick. This makes tricking onto rails and curbs unnecessarily difficult.

Wii Fit Board & Wii Remote: The Wii Fit board offers a very natural feel and instant gratification when it comes to maneuvers and basic tricks. The problem is that steering can be a little annoying as you try to remain centered on the board and keep your avatar from veering left and right. Furthermore, you can't access all the game's tricks at once. You must hit the d-pad on the Wii remote to switch between flip, shove, and varial tricks. This makes it very hard to string together combos of differing types of tricks. This setup has great potential, but it feels like it's more trouble than it's worth.





Wii

Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER BOARD > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT PARIS
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11 > **ESRB** E10+

BORED WITH THE BOARD

If you've played either of the two previous Rabbids titles, you have a general idea of what you're in for here: some laughs, a decent party experience, and a few clever minigames. The biggest changes are the incorporation of the Wii balance board (and some limited online functionality) and a lame dress-up contest similar to the Check Mi! Out channel).

Using the board, you'll steer a wildebeest with your butt, surf through space on an ironing board, and stomp on it like the pedals of a tractor. This control method works fine, but eventually you'll get sick of the required calibration before every minigame and find that it's much easier to get a better score using the standard remote controls.

The solo campaign consists of a herd of Rabbids pestering Rayman with a week's worth of TV programming. Monday starts

with a deluge of minigame options, but as the days wear on you end up burning through the enjoyable modes and are eventually stuck playing junk and repeating songs just to finish up. Star Wars, for example, has you drawing shapes to blast asteroids, which, in concept, sounds cool. But it simply doesn't recognize 60 percent of what you're scrawling with the remote.

Throwing this in a party, however, is a different story. The dancing game has that perfect mix of embarrassment and fun that makes it just as entertaining to watch as it is to play. Seeing four of your friends perform a disco point and butt slap combo is hilarious. Even some of the games that don't work as well get more of a pass in multiplayer since everyone's shared control issues throw a large of random luck into otherwise skill-based proceedings.—**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Wii's the race to incorporate the Wii balance board into a minigame collection

> **Graphics:** The trademark cartoon look is enhanced with hilarious 2D animated fake ads

> **Sound:** You'll have Betty White "Toto" in your head for an hour afterward

> **Playability:** Unless you really want to dust off the Wii board, stick with the standard controls and make your life easier

> **Entertainment:** Decent multiplayer, dull single player

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

After a group of Rabbids got trapped in Rayman's TV, he is forced to watch them race lawnmowers, cook hamburgers, and keep chickens off of a zombie film set. Most of TV Party's 65 minigames are entertaining and offer the usual demented wit of those disturbingly adorable Rabbids. However, some of Rayman's programming is just begging to get canceled: the dancing game has especially poor recognition, particularly using the balance board. The single-player mode gets repetitive near the end, but like most party games, this is an experience best played with a gang of friends.—**BEN**

Wii QUICKIES

Wii

Ten Pin Alley 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** 50 GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** OTHER OCEAN INTERACTIVE
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 18 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 5

You could say a lot of games are a snap to play, but Ten Pin Alley is literally just a flick of the wrist. Once you get the motions down, it's easy to nail strike after strike in this content-free bowling game. The production values are so unimpressive the game looks like it was built in some guy's basement, and the AI is terribly inconsistent. There is a fun challenge mode where you jump balls off ramps and hit exploding pins, but any potential this mode had to be scuttled in the execution. If you spend months bowling in Wii Sports, then this will be an upgrade. Otherwise, it isn't worth your time.—**BEN**

Wii

Carnival Games MiniGolf

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** 2K PLAY
> **DEVELOPER** CAT DANCY GAMES
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 20 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 5

It's hard to believe this game scores up an easy layup like mini golf, but Carnival Games MiniGolf goes out of its way to make things hard for itself. Golf has a natural resistance to the Wii, but this game's swing mechanic is frustrating, for some odd reason it's not based on the motion of the Wii remote, but rather the controller's internal accelerometer. Likewise, the limited camera system is more hindrance than help. The courses themselves are not great shades, although I applaud the game for including minigame diversions during the Adventure holes. When minigames not involving golf are the standout parts of a mini golf title, you know you've missed the mark.—**KATO**

Wii

Cooking Mama World Kitchen

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** MAGESO
> **DEVELOPER** COOKING MAMA LIMITED
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 5.5

The first Cooking Mama on Wii showed that the senses could effectively jump to a home console attempt to shake things up. Unfortunately, World Kitchen pees in the stew. The most obvious change is the switch from first-person cooking to watching a created character go through the motions (and new minigames within minigames, barf). Cooking controls are only slightly tweaked, and for a game that prides itself on being "intentional," the game only features Caucasian and Asian character models. Magesco also added the competitive multiplayer as a favor of a throwaway co-op mode. Even serious fans should rest before buying the half-baked cash in.—**BRYAN**

Wii

Castlevania: Judgment

> **STYLE** OR 3-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PLAYER** ONLINE
> **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 5

Fighting games should be about balance, precision, and skill. If any one of those areas falls short, the whole experience suffers. In Castlevania: Judgment, they all fall short. First of all, the Wii remote control scheme is unflatteringly broken; to play this game, you should use a classic or GameCube controller. Even then, you must contend with spastic combat, a terrible camera, and uninstinctual button combinations you can't remember. I'd like to say there's at least some decent Castlevania fan service, but the character designs are awful—the Simon Belmont in Captain N: The Game Master was a cooler incarnation of the legendary vampire hunter. The end product falls as a fighter, as a part of the Castlevania series, and as a video game in general.—**JOE**



PC

Neverwinter Nights 2: Storm of Zehir

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (LIP TO 64-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER:** ATRI > **DEVELOPER:** OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE:** NOVEMBER 10 > **ESRB:** M

YOU MUST BE THIS NERDY TO RIDE

Do you know the mechanical differences between Sorcerer and Wizard spellcasting in 3rd Edition Dungeons & Dragons? How about the exception to the basic rule about stacking bonuses to a single die roll? If you know what I'm talking about, this new expansion for Neverwinter Nights 2 is for you. Gamers who don't know the difference between a *fireball* and a *fireburst* may as well turn the page, because there is nothing for you here.

Storm of Zehir has players create a four-person party of adventurers (a first for the series) and dumps them in the middle of a hostile landscape, where the heroes forge alliances with dubious powers and rely on spells and blade skills to survive daily life. A spiffy new overland map makes use of the party's secondary skills like survival, spot, and listen, and along with giving players a ton of real estate to search for and inevitably find dungeons, treasure, and monsters aplenty. Since resting is no longer trivial, building a party that can handle the challenges without blowing through half its spells every time it comes across a wandering group of kobolds (and believe me, you'll find lots) is critical.

It's a fantastic Dungeons & Dragons simulator, and for rogans like me who need out over winging every last ounce of character power out of the rulebook, it's a dream. Mind you? It's cool, I have magical mental defenses just in case. Dragons? No worries, we have resistance gear somewhere on this pack mule. Conquering challenges like this is what drives a certain segment of the D&D populace, and few video games to date serve that demographic as well as this title.

Anything ancillary to the pure expression of D&D 3.5 Edition rules is an afterthought. The story is serviceable in a D&D prefab adventure sort of way, but this is more like Icewind Dale than Baldur's Gate. Beyond that, it's like Obsidian made the awesome framework for celebrating the Die & Destroy system and then went down a checklist before sending it out the door. Storm of Zehir has dialogue, cutscenes, voice acting, and tutorials, but only in the barest of senses.

I can't stress enough that this expansion is for hardcore Dungeons & Dragons nerds. Go into it knowing what it is, though, and this will deliver the kind of no-frills classical Western fantasy RPG experience that made series like *Might & Magic* and *Wizardry* great. —**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Seek fame, fortune, and survival in the Forgotten Realms with this Dungeons & Dragons adventure.

> **Graphics:** Great if you can create them up, though it can be hard to tell what's happening in a heated battle.

> **Sound:** Inconsistent voiceovers, but the music and effects get the job done.

> **Playability:** Adapting Long, K&A modes to a long overdue improvement, and the interface has come miles since *NWN 2*'s original release.

> **Entertainment:** Sometimes needing out over D&D is the only thing to do. This is a great way to do that.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate.

Second Opinion **7.5**

I love the setting for Storm of Zehir—the dangerous jungle backdrop is a great change of pace. I also appreciate the meticulous level of attention that has been paid to delivering an authentic D&D experience, even if a few allowances had to be made for the change in medium. Sadly, one of the worst elements of the old tabletop game is also present here—random encounters. While the developer attempts to add to these extra encounters is initially novel, it's easy to grow tired of the constant dialogue from the heartier story-based fights. More than anything, this game squarely targeted at its core audience of D&D enthusiasts. That's great for pen-and-paper players like myself, but even fans of table role-playing games will have a hard time penetrating the layers of dice, combat rules, and character progression presented here. —**MILLER**

PC

Sacred 2: Fallen Angel

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (LIP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER:** CDV SOFTWARE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER:** ASCARON ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE:** NOVEMBER 11 > **ESRB:** M



HALF-BAKED

Judged solely on a technical scale that punishes missteps and rewards well-executed ideas, Sacred II is an abject failure. However, accepting that verdict utterly misses the forest for the trees. Sacred II's world is a treasure house of forgotten ruins, civil strife, wondrous magic, and sinister technology that is a blast to adventure through. You'll delight at every new discovery even as you're cursing the many technical flaws along the way.

The gameplay faithfully follows the textbook that Blizzard North wrote with Diablo. You click on monsters, slaughter them by the dozens with an array of fantastic weapons, and continually upgrade your avatar with new abilities and loot. Countless quests litter the landscape, and most break out of the "kill 10 foosles" mold and give players reasons to find out what's over the next hill. The sheer scale of the world is impressive, a single playthrough is worth dozens of hours of entertainment, and much more if you indulge your completionist tendencies. The world is not randomly generated, and locales have enough variety that you rarely feel as though you're exploring the same boring area over and over again. More than anything, the experience feels like the single-player aspect of a

modern fantasy MMORPG like World of Warcraft.

The aforementioned technical problems, however, will prove challenging for many players to forgive. Targeting is erratic, with the wrong monster getting hit or a spell inexplicably failing to cast. Many hardware configurations have serious stability issues with the game. NPCs, particularly companion ones, exhibit bafflingly nonsensical AI behaviors and frequently fall through the world and render a quest unfinished. The documentation for how the under-the-hood systems work—from how stat scores affect damage to what secondary skills practically do—is incomplete and poorly translated to the point that you often feel blind when assigning skill points or choosing equipment. Mounts, ostensibly a major feature of the game, are bugged forward, backward, and sideways such that they're practically unusable. This will test even the most stoic gamer's patience.

Sacred II nails the unfettered joy of exploring a wide-open fantasy world and ties it to the always-amusing process of building a heroic avatar to meet the stiffest of challenges. To dismiss it merely because of its (dozens of) missteps is to lose out on the many things it does well. —**ADAM**



BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **Concept:** Cve players a huge colorful world to grand levels in Diablo style.

> **Graphics:** Apart from a few hilariously weird animations, the is a pleasure to behold.

> **Sound:** The voiceovers are awful to the point of amusement.

> **Playability:** Actively limiting players' handful of available skills is arbitrary, unnecessary, and frustrating.

> **Entertainment:** A ton of wars, but this is a real world to explore nonetheless.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate.

Second Opinion **7**

There are few things I enjoy more than taking a well-constructed (i.e. over-powered) character and steamrolling over a bunch of thugs. Sacred 2 enables this grating process, but with considerably less grace and justice than other games built on the Diablo II model. Each character has three skill trees to explore, but many powers are total garbage, leaving you to work with practical options for advancement. Even the decent skills are difficult to use thanks to the game's obtuse interface, which artificially restricts your access to abilities. Even if you come to terms with those design problems, you still have a lot of technical errors to confront, like bugged quests, toggle-able AI, and other assorted glitches. When it comes to hacking and looting, you're better off restraining Titan Quest. —**JOE**



NINTENDO DS

Star Wars: The Clone Wars — Jedi Alliance

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS SINGAPORE > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11 > **ESRB** E10+

JEDI POO-DOO

Jedi Alliance is the hand-held companion to the recent Clone Wars animated movie and TV series. Using the TV show as a motif, each of the levels is designed as a stand-alone episode. The overarching story that LucasArts weaves into each level/episode is free of the childish camp found in the movie, and ends up being an intriguing journey delving into one of Star Wars' most mysterious factions, the Nightsties. DS tides are not generally known for their cinematic flair, yet Jedi Alliance's strongest element ends up being its storytelling, which is captured in beautiful animated sequences and extensive voiceover.

While Jedi Alliance captures the essence of the show, it makes a mockery of the Force. You won't be asked to levitate a slice of fruit across the table or grab a tongue mid-air, the Force just doesn't work in this game.

You may be trying to gain a lightsaber into the back of a Sith wight, but instead your character jumps into a pool of water. The touchscreen spot recognition is way off the mark. Every lightsaber battle, mini-game, and acrobatic maneuver usually devolves into the player mindlessly mashing the stylus against the screen.

This nearly broken gameplay made me fink and scream with annoying fury of a teenage Anakin, but at the same time, this game's experience tickled the fancy of my inner Star Wars fan boy. I got a big kick out of playing as C-3PO, and LucasArts depicted the Nightsties in an interesting way. If you sleep on Star Wars sheets, give it a try. If not, pretend it doesn't exist—just like the animated movie.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE **6**

> **Concept:** The ambitious handheld adventure soars in its storytelling, but hits rock bottom with aggravating stylus-based play

> **Graphics:** High production values in the character models, environments, and animations. These impressive visuals faithfully capture the look of the show

> **Sound:** A rich distortion drenches the excellent voice acting and orchestrated score, but isn't enough of a distraction to ruin the experience

> **Playability:** This is where the entire game falls apart. The touchscreen recognition is inconsistent, making for some screen-worthy disasters

> **Entertainment:** The original story is something every dedicated Star Wars fan needs to see. It's just prepared for the problems surrounding it

> **Play Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **5.5**

Imagine you're trying to Force choke an insubordinate officer, but instead of his windpipe, you crush the shoulder of the person next to him. Whoops! The Force should never be that erratic and unpredictable, but it is in Jedi Alliance. Whether you're fighting battle droids or solving weak press-the-button "puzzles," the controls just make tapping the screen, and the game doesn't even do that right. The detection is way off, making each encounter and minigame an exercise in frustration. Even if you get through a level, the next one just promotes more of the same with a different cast. Some of the dialogue between characters is entertaining, but not enough to justify spending any time with this scrap pile.—**JOE**

DS QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER MUSIC (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** VICarious VISIONS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE **7**

As the second Guitar Hero DS title released in less than six months, you might expect that Decades is fairly similar to the original *On Tour*. Mostly, you'd be right. However, Vicarious Visions deserves praise for improving this game in a couple of areas. Firstly, the soundtrack is much more appealing to fans of the '70s-'90s, featuring some dynamic rock songs new and old. Secondly, the new song-sharing feature allows you to stream songs off a friend's copy of the original (and vice versa) for multiplayer. However, the sad fact remains that I don't think there's really anything that the developers can do to fix the game's true problems: the frustratingly imprecise touchscreen strumming and the fact that playing this game is an ergonomic nightmare, especially for those with larger hands. Ultimately, what I remember most about this game is the worst and rock part.—**MATT**

NINTENDO DS

Robocalypse

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** TECMO > **DEVELOPER** VIGORSTER ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18 > **ESRB** E10+



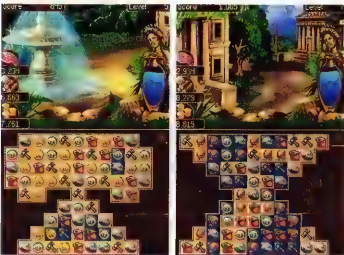
BOTTOM LINE **7**

Given its unique dual-screen and touchscreen interface, the DS should be flush with quality strategy titles, but they scarcely find their way to the handheld, likely due to hardware limitations. Robocalypse relies on action flags — markers players position on the battlefield to give your troops general orders — to circumvent this problem. It's a workable solution, but not nearly as thrilling as the game is ended up doing most of the work for you. Robocalypse's story is penned by the talent behind SpongeBob Squarepants, but the game's slapstick narrative, about World War II veterans possessing robot soldiers, is in no danger of being funny. With smarter AI and more diverse challenges, this title would be worth noting. As it stands, Robocalypse merely exists.—**BEN**

NINTENDO DS

Cradle of Rome

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** PUBLISHER OF AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** CERASUS MEDIA > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18 > **ESRB** E



MORE LIKE CRADLE OF BORING

Everyone knows Bejeweled, right? You've got a 2D grid with several colors of tiles on it, and the only moves you can make are flipping two adjacent tiles to make sets of three or more of the same color. As those tiles disappear, random tiles fall from the top, and you repeat until time runs out or you hit your score goal. It's a great formula, and like all top-shelf puzzle games, it's been copied ad nauseum. The latest pretender is Cradle of Rome, and let me tell you, it's no Puzzle Quest.

The twist on the Bejeweled formula here is in the boards. Every one of the dozens of levels has a unique layout, and to pass it you must match tiles on certain spaces, usually all of them. Chains may lock tiles into designated spaces until you make a match using that tile, restricting your available moves until you can free up that tile. Some tiles fill up special power meters rather than scoring points, which allow you to drop bombs, shoot lightning, or the like.

Sounds good so far, right? Sadly, the mechanics only add difficulty and frustration as they get more complex, never becoming much more interesting than the first hour of play. The nature of the gameplay, with random tiles falling in whenever you remove others, prevents any but the most basic strategy from taking hold. The handful of special powers, which you'll use at most two or maybe three times per level, are nothing on the level of Puzzle Quest's dizzying array of spells. Far too often, you'll be reduced to hoping for a particular tile to drop rather than planning a sequence of moves, especially on the harder boards where a single space frequently gates a large section of the level.

Cradle of Rome is far from terrible, but it has neither the strategic depth nor the Pavlovian addiction required to be a worthwhile puzzle game.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

> **Concept:** One Bejeweled clone with new window dressing

> **Graphics:** I'll never get over the fact that the most cool-looking tile is a balloon. It's just creepy

> **Sound:** Turn it off

> **Playability:** Somehow touchscreen inputs are miscalculated, because about four or five times per level the game doesn't do what I ask to

> **Entertainment:** You should play more Puzzle Quest or Bejeweled rather than bother with this

> **Play Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **7.75**

They say that Roman emperor Nero fiddled while Rome burned, but it was probably just playing Cradle of Rome. It's hard to find fault with Cradle's tried-and-true match-three gameplay, especially when the boards show increasingly difficult challenges that you and you access weapons to counter their difficulty. The only problem I have with this game is that the obsessive resource gathering you perform to build your Roman structures is a shallow shell that doesn't lead to strategic gameplay. This is a lost opportunity to make the title more than just another puzzle game — no matter how addictive it seems to be.—**KATO**



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 29

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

1 FABLE II (360)



Fable II gave players a great opportunity to walk around in the shoes of a hero, but how accurate was it for the lives of real heroes? To talk about these issues and others, please welcome a very special guest back to CHARTS. All the way from Manhattan, the one and only Spider-Man... Okay Spider-Man, time to wake up. (Gigg) Huh, where am I?

2 WII FIT (WII)



Wii Fit? Why is this game still selling so well when all these great holiday releases are coming out? Does Wii Fit let you swing through the city on threads like a spider's web? No. Does it let you throw cans of poor Bopple among ants dressed like giant robot bees. Then it's not better than Spider-Man's game. What do you have to say for yourself, Spidey? How did I get here? Why am I tied to this chair?

3 FALLOUT 3 (360)



In fact, there are no Spider-Man games on this list at all. Guess what, charts readers: for every month that goes by where he isn't on this list we are going to torture Spider-Man. Who? Let's see, Fallout. Spider-Man wasn't in that game. Looks like he's gonna get a walk from Mr. Baseball Bat. Ow! Please, stop hitting me. It's not my fault. We've heard that before. Like the jazz scene. Is Spider-Man's wasn't your fault. And from here on out we're only for the DVD outlets!

4 MARIO KART Wii (WII)



How this isn't even close to a Spider-Man game. You think we like being thorough and Mario Kart courses. Nintendo? Well, how would you like it if we took a car battery and hooked it up to Spider-Man's teeth? Aghhhhh! Why are you doing this to me? How much pain can your spider senses take, Spider-Man? Please stop! The jokes are the worst part!

5 Wii PLAY (WII)



Damn it, how did this game get back on the list? Wii Play makes CHARTS so mad, we're turning into the Hulk. Ruff! Hulk-CHARTS (over) Punny title bug man. Please, I'm not Spider-Man. My name is Arale. I'm just a copylayer from Jova. You're not bug man? No! Then Hulk-CHARTS apologize, because this is going to hurt a lot more. No, please! Someone save me from this delectable set of game roller data!

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	Fable II	N/A	360	9.25	10-08
2	Wii Fit	2	Wii	8	04-08
3	Fallout 3	N/A	360	9.5	10-08
4	Mario Kart Wii	4	Wii	8.5	04-08
5	Wii Play	7	Wii	7	02-07
6	Saints Row 2	N/A	360	8.75	10-08
7	SOCOM: Confrontation	N/A	PS3	6	10-08
8	LittleBigPlanet	N/A	PS3	9.5	10-08
9	NBA 2K9	N/A	360	8.5	10-08
10	Dead Space	N/A	360	9.25	10-08
11	Guitar Hero World Tour	N/A	360	9.25	10-08
12	Guitar Hero World Tour	N/A	Wii	N/A	10-08
13	Kirby Super Star Ultra	15	DS	7	09-08
14	Fallout 3	N/A	PS3	9.5	10-08
15	Dead Space	N/A	PS3	9.25	10-08
16	Rock Band 2	N/A	PS3	9.25	10-08
17	NBA 2K9	N/A	PS3	8.5	10-08
18	Far Cry 2	N/A	360	8	10-08
19	FIFA Soccer 09	N/A	360	8	10-08
20	Guitar Hero World Tour	N/A	PS3	9.25	10-08

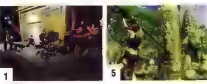
TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Kirby Super Star Ultra	DS
2	Rhythm Heaven	DS
3	My Fashion Girls Mode	DS
4	Pokémon Platinum	DS
5	Grand Theft Auto IV	PS3
6	Yakkyu Profile: The Accused One	DS
7	Monster Hunter 2nd G	PSP
8	Aruke Wakaru Seikatsu Rhythm DS	DS
9	Gran Turismo 5: Prologue Spec III	PS3
10	LittleBigPlanet	PS3



TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Left 4 Dead	N/A	multi
2	Call of Duty: World at War	N/A	multi
3	LittleBigPlanet	1	PS3
4	Fallout 3	3	multi
5	Tomb Raider Underworld	N/A	multi
6	Guitar Hero World Tour	2	multi
7	Prince of Persia	N/A	multi
8	Fable II	4	360
9	Gears of War 2	5	360
10	Dead Space	6	multi



TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Fallout 3	N/A	\$49
2	Spoor	1	\$49
3	Honey Brew: The Hunting of Castle Malloy	N/A	\$16
4	Far Cry 2	N/A	\$50
5	Wahnamer Online: Age Of Reckoning	2	\$49
6	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	6	\$38
7	The Sims 2 Apartment Life	3	\$26
8	Fallout 3 Collectors Edition	N/A	\$79
9	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	8	\$25
10	Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	N/A	\$48



Based On Monthly Units Sold

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Forward™ (EBC)*

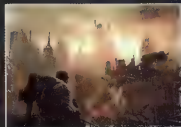


Gears of War 2

Dominating Multiplayer

UNLIMITED ENABLED

By Chris Mielke, art production manager, with special thanks to Bryan Gages



MASTER THE NEW MODES

Guardian – Respawning is enabled in Guardian mode, but only while your team leader is alive. Once your leader is killed, team respawns are disabled. As long as your team leader is standing, your team can still make a comeback, even if all of your other players are taken out. If you are a team leader, immediately move to an easily defensible position (preferably one with a higher elevation from which to view approaching enemies), or one with a chokepoint through which attackers must funnel. An ideal location is near a grenade spawn. Have an escape route in mind in case the enemy team breaks through your defenses.

Wingman – Moving together and flanking opposing teams is the path to victory in Wingman. While most deathmatch tactics and strategies apply, the greatly increased number of hostile targets make moving from point to point much more dangerous. Keep the scoring system in mind. Unlike the round-based scoring in other game modes, the winner of a Wingman match is the first team that reaches a designated number of kills. This takes place over as many rounds as necessary to reach that total. Also, remember to plant grenades behind you as you go, as it's very easy to be flanked playing Wingman.

Submission – The Stranded that serves as the target in Submission matches is extremely deadly up close, but he can't take you down outside the range of his shotgun blasts. Take him down from a safe distance, and dash in to claim him while he's out of commission. If you manage to take the Stranded hostage, stick to the simple logic that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Take the most direct route to your goal. It's also definitely worth the effort to pick up an upgraded pistol if you are going to be "flag running."

MAP OUT YOUR STRATEGIES

Avalanche – After the Snow: An air raid siren that precedes the avalanche is the

easiest cue that it's coming. After the snow pile comes to rest, you can mantle into the middle from the spawn building balconies, and two other snow lumps provide access to the plaza top so you won't have to take the stairs.

Blood Drive – *Said the Spider to the Fly*: Because grenades play such a huge role in the outcome of this match, counter your opponent's hunger for these explosives by immediately planting one back at the grenade spawn point as a proximity mine, and work towards earning that achievement!

Day One – *Last Stand*: Head inside the arcade under the blue neon lights and take up positions behind the counter. Use the Boomshield to block enemy fire from the side door and place your grenade on the fogball table. The interior of the arcade offers full protection from the Mortar and Hammer of Dawn, forcing your enemy to draw in close.

Hail – *Boombastic Beacon*: There are ways to be very sneaky when dealing with the Boomshot, both from a defensive approach and when on offense. For starters, teams spawning in the warehouse should go up the stairs and take cover behind the wooden crates on the pavilion's left side. This is the perfect place to attack the opposing team as they go for the Boomshot. On offense, take the Boomshot over to the south side of the circular pavilion. Find cover near the short wall near the large container. This vantage point gives you a clean shot at the combatants taking cover in two of the three train cars below.

Jacinto – *Murderer's Row*: It's not by coincidence that the Mortar, Torque Bow, and Boomshot weapon pickups are aligned

in a row. It's possible to fire on the Torque Bow/Longshot location from both of the other two major weapon pickup spots.

Pavilion – *Grab and Go*: Never leave the spawn area without first grabbing the grenades near the shack. They are key to winning the initial fight for the Mulcher. Toss one at the cupola as you reach the bench to send the opposition scurrying.

BATTLE THE HORDE

Communication is Key – Always call out where enemies are located, where breaches in your defenses are, and keep everyone updated on your status. Radio silence usually means a quick death in later levels.

Know your role and position – In *Hardy*, you need to assign areas to defend and call out what weapons you prefer. Keeping everyone in one area will be hard to defend, so spreading out your enemies will be easier. If people prefer certain weapons, let the best man wield them!

Use those Boomshields – You can plant Boomshields (Left Trigger and A button) to funnel enemies and block corridors, which allows for easy kills. Always remember to pick up the Boomshield after the round ends, because it will be removed when the next wave spawns in if it's still planted.

Plant those proximity mines – Use grenades as early warning devices to indicate where the enemy is coming from. This could give you a few precious seconds to react to a defensive breach.

For the rest of the map strategies, see our *Unlimited Section* this month.

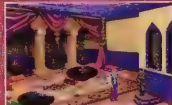


Mod World

QUEST FOR GLORY II: TRIAL BY FIRE
<http://www.agdinteractive.com>

ADVENTURE GAME STUDIO
<http://www.adventuregamestudio.co.uk>

If you were a fan of adventure games in the early to mid '90s, you don't want to miss this one. *Quest for Glory II: Trial by Fire* is the third remake from Anonymous Game Developers Interactive, who previously released enhanced versions of the first two King's Quest games.



The original version of *Quest for Glory II* was released in 1990, featuring 68000x VGA graphics and text-based commands. This remake brings the experience up to the standards of the series' later entries, using a point-and-click graphical interface (with walk, look, use, and talk icons) and VGA visuals.



As a hero in the strange land of Shaper, you'll use the QFC series' trademark combination of combat and ingenuity to defeat the elemental fiends that are terrorizing the region. AGDI Interactive has lovingly recreated all of the settings and characters while remaining faithful to the original vision, even with a few updates to the text and dialogue. The remake also simplifies the game's notoriously complicated alleyways and lets you import a saved hero from *Quest for Glory I*.



The team at AGD Interactive used Adventure Game Studio to develop the game, a fantastic (and free!) tool for anyone who wants to try making a point-and-click adventure. After you finish *Quest for Glory II*, check AGS and do your part to keep adventure gaming alive.

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@gamenformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!



MULTI-SYSTEM

LEGO Batman

While playing the game, access the computer in the Batcave then select the Enter Code menu to input these codes to unlock new characters, vehicles, and other extras.

CHARACTERS

Alfred Pennyworth – ZAQ637
Batgirl – JKR331
Bruce Wayne – BDJ327
Catwoman (classic) – MIAAWW
Clown Goon – HJK327
Commissioner Gordon – DDP967
Fishmonger – HG7748
Freeze Girl – XW541
Freeze Henchman – NJL412
The Joker (tropical) – CCB199
Joker Goon – UT762
Joker Henchman – YUN924
Nightwing – MV7759
Mad Hatter – JCZ833
Man-Bat – NYU942
Military Policeman – MKL382
Penguin Goon – NKA238
Penguin Henchman – BJH782
Penguin Minion – KJP748
Poison Ivy Goon – GTB899
Police Marksman – HKG584
Police Officer – IRY983
S.W.A.T. – HTF114
Riddler Goon – CRV928
Riddler Henchman – XEU824
Sailor – NAV592
Scientist – JFL786
Security Guard – PLB946
Yeti – NJL412
Zoo Sweeper – DWR243

EXTRAS

Area Effect (Sonic suit) – TLSEKT
Armor Plating (Demolition suit) – NLZKEZ
Batman (Sonic suit) – XFP4E2
Decay (Technology suit) – TQ09K3
Disguise – GEC3MD
Extra Hearts – ML3KHP
Fast Batarangs (all suits) – JRBDCB
Fast Build – GH2DYD
Fast Grapple (all suits) – RM4P88

Code of the Month

Dead Space



Has Dead Space scared you so much that you just don't have the spirit to go on? Maybe these fresh cheats can give you that extra bit of courage to keep going. While playing the game, pause then enter these codes. Note that many of these can only be used once per game.

PS3

Gain 1,000 credits – □ □ □ □ △ □
Gain 2,000 credits – □ □ □ □ △ □
Gain 5,000 credits – □ □ □ □ △ □
 □ □ △
Gain 10,000 credits – □ □ △ □ △ □
 □ □ △ □
Gain Five Power Nodes – △ □ △ □ △ □

Fast Walk (Magnet suit) – ZDLMGN
Faster Piece (Attract) – EYG26J
Flaming Batarangs (Heat protection suit) – DBNVVH
Freeze Batarang (Water suit) – XPN4NG
Ice Ring – KIKL4G
Immune to Freeze – JXUJ76
Invincibility – WYDSCP
Minikit Detector – ZGJH9J
More Batarang Targets – XWP645
More Detonators (Demolition suit) – TTN788
Piece Detector (Attract suit) – KHU544
Power Brick Detector – MMN786
Regenerate Hearts – HH7H7J
Score x2 Multiplier – NANK3E
Score x4 Multiplier – OSMAT
Score x6 Multiplier – MLVNF2
Score x8 Multiplier – WCCDB9
Score x10 Multiplier – 18HW07
Silhouettes – YK4TPH
Slim (Glide suit) – BBD7BY
Sonic Pain (Sonic suit) – THTL4X
Stud Magnet – LK2DY4

Catwoman's Motorcycle – HPL826
Garbage Truck – DUS483
Goon Helicopter – GCH328
Harbor Helicopter – CHP735
Harley Quinn's Hammer Truck – RDT637
The Joker's Van – JUK657
Mad Hatter's Glider – H500D9
Mad Hatter's Steamboat – M4MDMAN
Mr. Freeze's Iceberg – ICYCE
Mr. Freeze's Kart – BC7229
Penguin Goon Submarine – BTN24D
Police Bike – LJP234
Police Boat – PLS999
Police Car – KJL832
Police Helicopter – CWR732
Police Van – MAC788
Police Watercraft – VJDS28
Riddler's Jet – HAHAHA
Robin's Submarine – TTF453
Two-Face's Armored Truck – EFE933

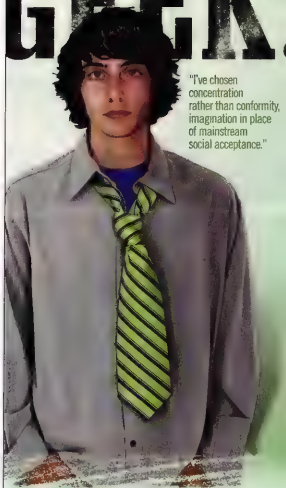
VEHICLES

Bat-Tank – KN1T48
Bruce Wayne's Private Jet – LEA664

Gain Two Power Nodes – □ □ △ □ △
 □ □ △
Refill Oxygen – □ □ △ □ △ □ △ □
Refill Stasis – △ □ △ □ △ □ △ □
 Xbox 360
Gain 1,000 credits – X, X, X, Y, X
Gain 2,000 credits – X, X, X, Y, X, Y
Gain 5,000 credits – X, X, X, Y, X, Y, X
Gain 10,000 credits – X, Y, Y, Y, X, X, Y
Gain Five Power Nodes – Y, X, X, X, X, Y, X, X, Y, X, Y, X
Gain Two Power Nodes – Y, X, X, X, Y
Refill Oxygen – X, X, Y, X, Y, Y
Refill Stasis – X, Y, Y, X, Y

"Gl Did making (location unknown – Last seen making vampire movie trailers of himself humping everything)"

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GAMECUBE

TOP 25



It wasn't the most popular console of the last generation, and even stalwart Nintendo fans admit that the system had its share of dry spells. But while supporters in both Sony and Microsoft camps liked to point and laugh at the little purple box with a handle, this list of 25 titles proves the GameCube was no joke.

1 Resident Evil 4

There is a reason the upcoming Resident Evil 5 doesn't stray too far from the formula established in this game — it's already pretty close to perfect. A few other RE titles appear further down this list, but Resident Evil 4 stands out from the pack. When Capcom rebooted the series, it made all the right choices, designing a fresh control scheme, setting a tense action-packed atmosphere, and crafting some of the most impressive graphics of its generation. These changes not only made RE 4 the finest title in an already excellent series, but the best GameCube title period.

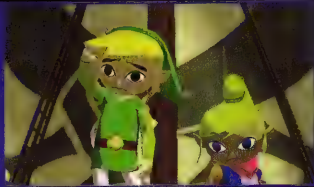
This Month in Gaming History

On January 25, 1947, two physicists, Thomas T. Goldstein Jr. and Eslie Ray Moore, filed papers for a device called the Cathode-Ray Tube Amusement Device, inspired by World War II radar technology. Goldstein, who served in the military, was the inventor of the first video games in the world. The device, which was used to train pilots, was the first video game console.



2 The Legend of Zelda series

Few series manage to be as consistently stellar as The Legend of Zelda. If Nintendo continues to innovate its gameplay with creative puzzles and dungeons, fans may never grow tired of Link's adventures. The GameCube was blessed with two such adventures. The cel-shaded Wind Walker gave us a chance to control the wind and explore a vast ocean, and the gritty Twilight Princess saw Link exploring his animalistic nature as he transformed into a wolf and traveled into a parallel twilight universe.



3 Super Smash Bros. Melee

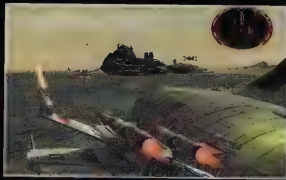
There are games that focus on fan service, and then there is Smash Bros. When it came to giving bright-eyed Nintendo fans what they wanted, Melee was in a league of its own, as it threw every popular Nintendo franchise into one big melting pot. Many deride the game for its spastic nature, but whether you're pitting video game legends like Pikachu and Donkey Kong against each other or working your way through the myriad challenges it offered, the game was just plain entertaining. How do you complain about that?



4 Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem

Eternal Darkness didn't just scare you; it haunted you. The game featured a layered plot that sent gamers all over the world to different historical periods, but the real draw to Silicon Knights' masterpiece was that it screwed with your head more than a gallery of M.C. Escher paintings. The game convinced many players that their system was possessed when their world turned upside down or the controller suddenly "disconnected." We're surprised no one has tapped into this kind of madness since.





5 Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader

It's strange to think a Star Wars game that didn't feature lightsabers, Jedi, or even the Force would be one of the franchise's premier titles. But if you've played this gorgeous space shooter, you understand why. As one of the only GameCube titles to use bump mapping and multi-texturing, *Rogue Leader* looked stunning. The flight combat offered a big challenge, but that just made commanding your squad behind the tight controls of these Rebel crafts all the more thrilling.



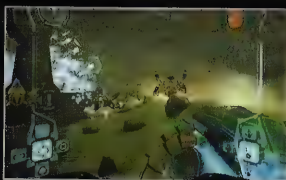
7 Super Mario Sunshine

Not many people argue that *Super Mario Sunshine* is the best Mario title ever, but even a sub-par game starring the mustachioed plumber ends up being one of the most memorable games of its generation. This time Mario traveled across the exotic locals of a tropical resort, cleaning up graffiti with a giant Super Soaker. What else can we say? Even the guy's terrible vacations are a blast.



9 Mario Kart: Double Dash!

Mario Kart games are always more fun with a group of people, but *Double Dash* actually played differently when you were with friends. By throwing two people in the same kart, players could focus on specific tasks and dominate the tracks together.



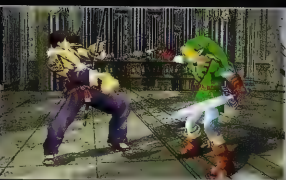
6 Metroid Prime series

How do you revive one of the most beloved 2D franchises after an eight-year hiatus? Give it to an unknown Texas studio, Retro, and turn it into a first-person shooter. The development of *Metroid Prime* certainly didn't take the obvious route, but its results were impressive. These two *Metroid Prime* titles gave players a giant web of interconnected levels to explore, filled them with creative and puzzle-laden environments, and wrapped it all with a memorable art style that still holds up.



8 Viewtiful Joe series

Devil May Cry and *Okami* mastermind Hideki Kamiya delivered these comic-themed side-scrolling brawlers, and we never thanked him enough. *Viewtiful Joe* won over gamers with its inventive use of 2D sidescrolling in 3D panoramas. The remarkable series also featured a deep combat system that let players control time, and was so full of charm it broke into the mainstream media with its own anime spinoff.



10 Soul Calibur II

The *Soul Calibur* franchise is Namco's love letter to the fighting game community. *Soul Calibur II* was one of the most beautiful and balanced 3D fighters on any system, but the GameCube version had the added bonus of letting us play as everyone's favorite green tunic-wearing elf.

11 Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes

Silicon Knights' update to what is arguably the PS2 era's finest live-action FPS, *Twin Snakes* gave us sharper graphics, better snaking controls, and redesigned cutscenes.

12 Beyond Good & Evil

This unique action-adventure title attracted a strong cult following for a reason. The kid-friendly atmosphere and dapper humor were supported by ICE's deeper narrative and well-constructed puzzles.

13 Animal Crossing

We can pay off our mortgage, we letters to our friends, and run errands for our neighbors in real life, but somehow doing it in Nintendo's anthropomorphic world was more fun.

14 Pikmin series

Leave it to Nintendo to create one of the best, but only needed one reason to create the winner: The bizarre Pikmin plant creatures to dig up the missing pieces of a spaceship is the only kind of weird we're okay with.

15 SSX 3

With peaks this high and tricks this outrageous, EA only needed one reason to create the winter-snowboarding game to ever hit the slopes.

16 Skies of Arcadia Legends

This fine Dreamcast RPG featuring sky planes and large ship battles got a second life with this GameCube remake. This version also fixed some of the original's problems and came packed with a slew of new events and characters.

17 Resident Evil and Resident Evil Zero

Resident Evil fans were well off even before RE 4. In the span of less than a year, the GameCube became home to two exclusives: a terrifying remake to the 23-bit survival horror classic, and a revealing prequel.

18 F-Zero GX

Wonder what it's like to race hovercrafts at warp speed? F-Zero has you covered. Not many games could keep up with this futuristic racer's smooth, cinematic, challenging courses, or four-player switch gameplay.

19 Prince of Persia series

The Prince of Persia franchise was all but a dead franchise until Ubisoft delivered this a trilogy of time-bending action platformers that reinvented the series—and the genre.

20 Persona

Another fine Dreamcast port, this chaotic top-down role-playing redefined postmodernism, allowing players to swap the color of their shops in order to absorb different types of enemy fire.

21 Super Monkey Ball

While many companies focused on production value and narrative during this console generation, Sega put a monkey inside a ball and focused on a simple play mechanic that was surprisingly fun.

22 Killer 7

Original? Yes. Containing? A little. Insane? Definitely. Killer 7's stylish cel-shaded graphics, intriguing story, and unorthodox gameplay made it a standout title.

23 TimeSplitters 2

Who knew that venturing into the Wild West to take a laikaotic Tokyo, this often-billy FPS had some great multiplayer and a control system that felt just right.

24 Tales of Symphonia

Symphonia received praise for its beautiful art style and engaging real-time battle system, and rightly so. This was one of the finest RPGs for the system.

25 Luigi's Mansion

Another not quite measure up to his older brother, but Luigi held his own in this delightful adventure, which saw him sucking up ghosts with a Kelly Dert Devil.

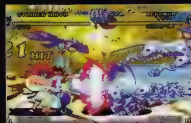


DREAMCAST

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM: CLASH OF THE SUPERHEROES

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 1999

Realm is rarely a selling point in games, but *MvC* took exaggerated flashy violence to an extreme. This casual disregard for reality was probably best for balancing the fight mechanics; by all rights the Hulk should have been able to snap Chun-Li's overripe thighs across his knuckles like a wishbone. This Dreamcast version was a near-flawless port of the adrenaline-fueled arcade fighter, which already featured fluid animations, vibrant 2D sprites, explosive super attacks, and seamless tag team action. The character roster might not have been as robust as its sequel, but the first *MvC* was unique in the fact that four players could each pick a character and duke it out in a single match. For multiplayer mayhem, this was one of the Dreamcast's standout titles.

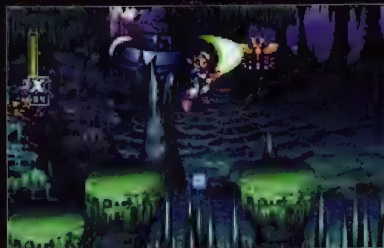
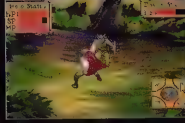
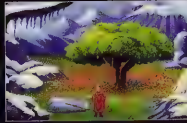


PC

QUEST FOR GLORY: SO YOU WANT TO BE A HERO

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE/RPG > PUBLISHER SIERRA > DEVELOPER SIERRA > RELEASE 1992

The puzzles may have been tricky in the early days of adventure gaming, but the formula was simple: Get an item, then use that item on something else. *Quest for Glory* (originally released as *Hero's Quest*) was among the first to break that tradition by integrating an array of stats and abilities more along the lines of a role-playing game. As the would-be hero of Spielburg Valley (either a magic user, a thief, or a fighter), it's your job to solve problems using your unique skills. Since most obstacles have several solutions, the progression feels less prescribed and more natural than other adventure games, and the inclusion of combat — though somewhat sluggish — requires you to use brawn as well as your brains. With its revolutionary visuals (clay models were used for portraits and monsters) and wry humor (try using the lockpick on yourself for hilarious results), *Quest for Glory* can make you wish that the 486 never went out of style.



PSONE

MEGA MAN X6

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 2000

Few titles throughout the years have had so much go right, and yet nearly flush it all away with a handful of terrible mistakes. *Mega Man X6*, the series' last entry on PSone, presented players with the pinnacle of outstanding 2D art and precise controls for its turbo-charged side-scrolling action. Hidden upgrades (ninja armor) and mutable levels rewarded exploration and replay, and some of *Mega Man X6*'s most memorable fights took place in *X6*. However, the punishing mechanic of permanently locking players out from upgrades if they failed to rescue the good robots before the bad robots got to them was incredibly frustrating. Difficulty was all over the map, with some tasks relying on pixel-perfect split-second feats of dexterity and entire levels offering little challenge even to novices. There's a lot to love in *X6*, but nearly equal amounts to hate — even *Mega Man* creator Keiji Inafune despised the plotline, which he since retconned out of *X* canon.

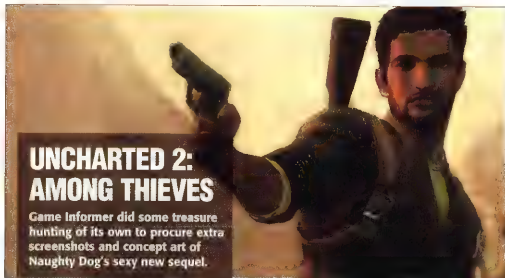




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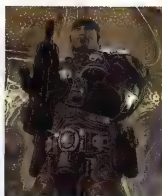
UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

Game Informer did some treasure hunting of its own to procure extra screenshots and concept art of Naughty Dog's sexy new sequel.



EA Sports Hockey League

Read about EA Canada's plan for the EA Sports Hockey League in this exclusive interview with producer David Litman.



Gears of War 2 Tips

Learn more tricks of the multiplayer trade from Chris Mielke, the art production manager from Epic Games.



Guitar Hero: Metallica

Controversial drummer Lars Ulrich pontificates about Metallica's involvement with Guitar Hero and the band's amazing longevity.



Platterhouse

Namco Bandai co-producer Mike Brown shares more gory details about the vaunted honor series' resurrection.



Gaming Fun Facts

Discover more interesting tidbits about your favorite games in this collection of little-known facts.

Also Online This Month:

Game Informer Online wraps up 2008 and looks forward to next year with previews of highly anticipated games.

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LEGENDARY INTERVIEWS

HI-RES MOVIES & DOWNLOADS

INTERACT IN THE FORUMS



WWW.GAMEINFORMER.COM

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Gosh, there sure are a lot of games demanding you make moral choices for your character. We hear some games even let you set off nuclear bombs on unsuspecting townspeople. Can you imagine? That's just mean. But maybe fun? Take this quiz, and check your score to see what choices you should be making in your video games.

1 Upon completing the original Metroid in less than one hour, speedy gamers were rewarded with what extra ending?

- A. A cinematic of Planet Zebes blowing up
- B. Samus removing her armor and wearing only a bikini
- C. A cinematic of Ridley escaping to planet SR388
- D. An image of a metroid hatching an egg



2 The Japanese version of Bionic Commando on NES featured Nazis led by Hitler.

- A. True
- B. False

3 Grand Theft Auto IV contains a slew of hilarious easter eggs. One of these secrets demands that you walk through a door and climb a tall ladder to reveal what secret deep inside the Statue of Happiness?

- A. Snakes. I hate snakes
- B. Infinite grenades
- C. A beating heart
- D. Hot coffee



4 What are the names of the two main heroes in Gears of War 2?

- A. Marcus Aurelius and Dominic Rodriguez
- B. Bill Rizer and Lance Bean
- C. Marcus Fenix and Dominic Santiago
- D. Bill S. Preston Esq. and Ted Theodore Logan

5 We've got your Command & Conquer right here, buddy. Or do we? Which one of these wasn't a game in the vaunted RTS series?

- A. Generals
- B. Tiberian Sun
- C. The Covert Operations
- D. Rise of Kane

6 Oh, Joanna Dark. How loved there, until you came to next-gen consoles. Hidden within every level of the N64 shooter Perfect Dark players could find what?

- A. An RCP90 machine gun
- B. A piece of cheese
- C. A poster of James Bond
- D. A poster of Joanna Dark

7 Lammy sure knew how to make it sweet! What was the name of her band in the early music game cult hit, Um Jammer Lammy?

- A. PaPaRoa
- B. MilkCan
- C. Got To Move
- D. Katy & the Sunny Funny Band

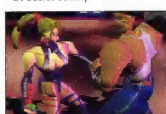


8 Who or what is Vexx?

- A. A graphics technology many originally believed would show up throughout next-gen gaming
- B. A racing game on Super Nintendo with futuristic cars and impossibly sharp turns
- C. The main character in a failed Acclaim 3D platformer
- D. The correct spelling of a verb that means to irritate or distress

9 What is the name of the secret society that hosted the Battle Arena Toshinden?

- A. The World Combat Organization
- B. Toshinden
- C. Iron Fist
- D. Secret Society



10 How frequently does War change, according to Ron Perlman?

- A. War is a mutable thing, it's totally different every time.
- B. War is just a figure of speech. How can you change something that doesn't really exist?
- C. War spelled backwards is raxw.
- D. Wow. Pretty deep, huh?
- E. War. War never changes.

BREAKDOWN

3,558 is the number of Nintendo DSi sold per hour in the first 18 hours it went on sale in Japan, according to Enterbrain.

5 minutes is the current world record completion time for Super Mario Bros. on NES, as played by Andrew Gardlisk, according to Speed Demos Archive online.

28.1% is how much lower October 2008 video game hardware sales were in Japan compared to last year, according to Famitsu.

267.7 million dollars is the approximate value of the recent stock deal which merged Koels and Techno.

267 cents is the approximate value of our combined bank accounts after purchasing holiday games this year.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1 You might be okay in the outside world, but you are the bane of all virtual lads. Children fee before you. You have regularly been forced to restart games, as all of the questgivers lie dead at your feet. Final bosses would like to consider an alliance.

2-3 Maybe you're not evil for the sake of evil, but violent mischief suits you just fine. Townspeople cover their eyes as you approach. Your allies would like you to stop shooting them. You're all out of the power or device that delivers electric shocks.

4-5 You make the right choice, so long as no power or money is involved. Throw in some loot and a nice suit of armor, and you'll be happy to slaughter that innocent farming family down the road. Classy.

6-7 Make a choice, man! You are the gaming equivalent of Switzerland. You often wonder why your buddies' characters always look so profoundly good or evil and yours are always so boring.

8-9 It's good to be the hero, within moderation. You're not out to destroy the local populace, but you're also not a stick in the mud. When a snarky comment is available, you take it, and to hell with the barkeep's daughter if she's offended.

10 As a paragon of virtue, you have suffered for your art. When asked to give up your totally sweet ride to save that inconsequential secondary character, you don't blink an eye. You approach gaming as a sort of virtual penance for your sins. Congratulations!

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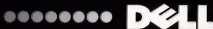
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