RESIDENT EVIL 5, GRAND THEFT AUTO IV: THE LOST AND DAMNED, BRÜTAL LEGEND *INSIDE!*

GAME INFORMER®

THE WO PUTER & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

GOD OF WAR III

ISSUE 191 MARCH 2009

WWW.GAMEINFORMER.COM

US $5.99 | CAN $5.99 | UK £3.99

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

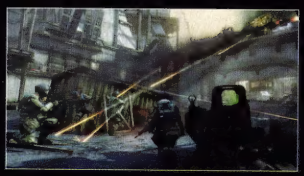
KILLZONE.COM

"PlayStation," "PLAYSTATION," and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks and "PS3" is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The PlayStation Network logo is a service mark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Killzone is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Developed by Guerrilla. ©2009 Sony Computer Entertainment Europe.

WAR. PERFECTED.

"5 out of 5 stars. Editor's Choice."
— PlayStation: The Official Magazine

"A guaranteed stunner for the PS3. 5 out of 5 stars."
— GamePro Magazine

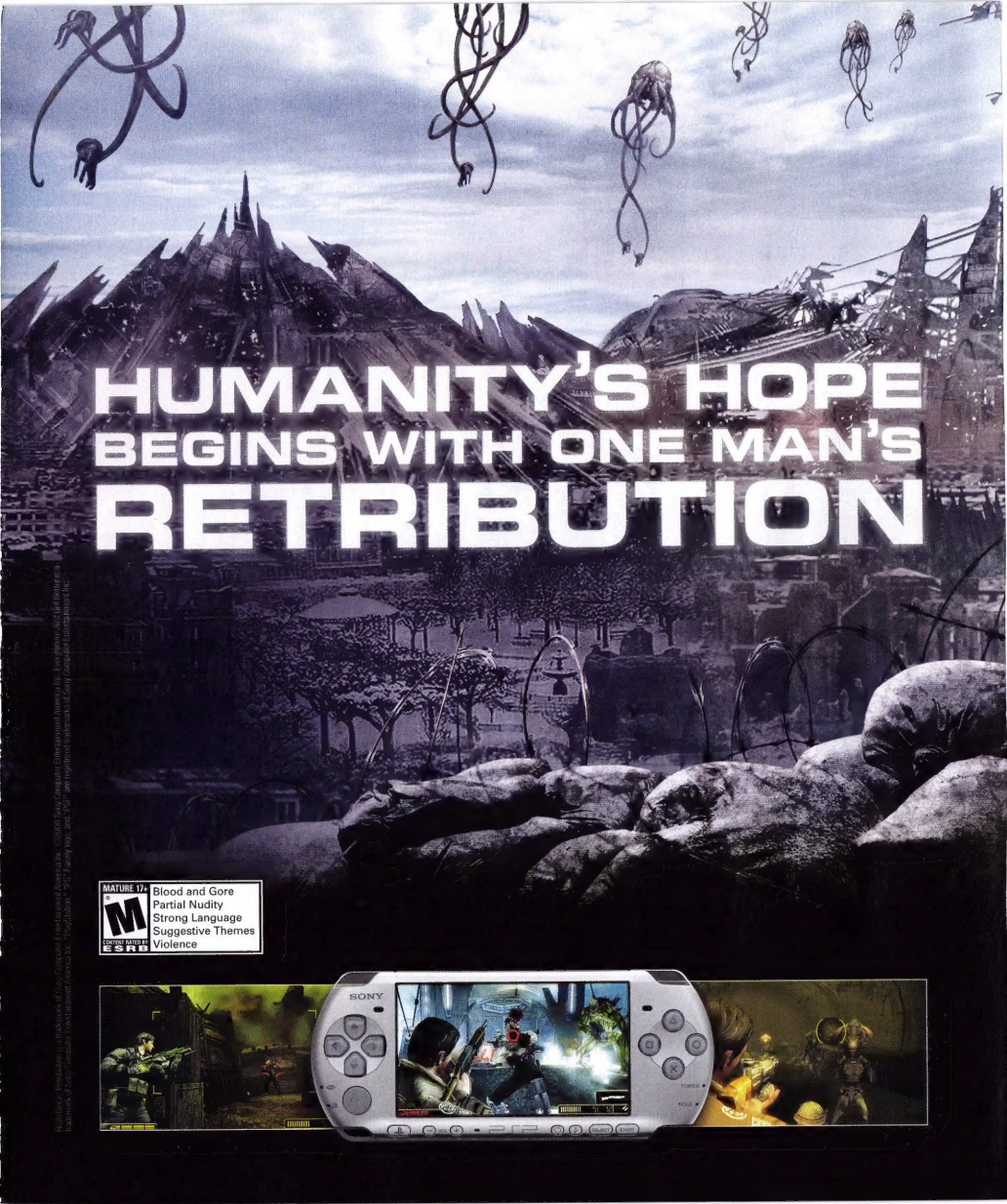


From your first step off the landing craft, you're thrown into the most intense battle of your life. Facing an overwhelming enemy on their own toxic planet, this is war at its best. And worst. And it's only possible on the PLAYSTATION®3 system.

Only On PlayStation

PS3™

PlayStation®Network


HUMANITY'S HOPE
BEGINS WITH ONE MAN'S
RETRIBUTION
MATURE 17+
M
ESRB
Blood and Gore
Partial Nudity
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence
SONY

www.myresistance.net

The Chimera have taken Europe. And for Lt. James Grayson, the battle just got personal. The fight for mankind continues in the newest Resistance chapter, and it's only on the PSP® system. This action-shooter features unique 8-player multiplayer and an advanced third-person targeting system. Connect your PSP to your PS3™ with Resistance 2™ and unlock additional features to help give humanity a shred of hope. The Resistance is now everywhere.

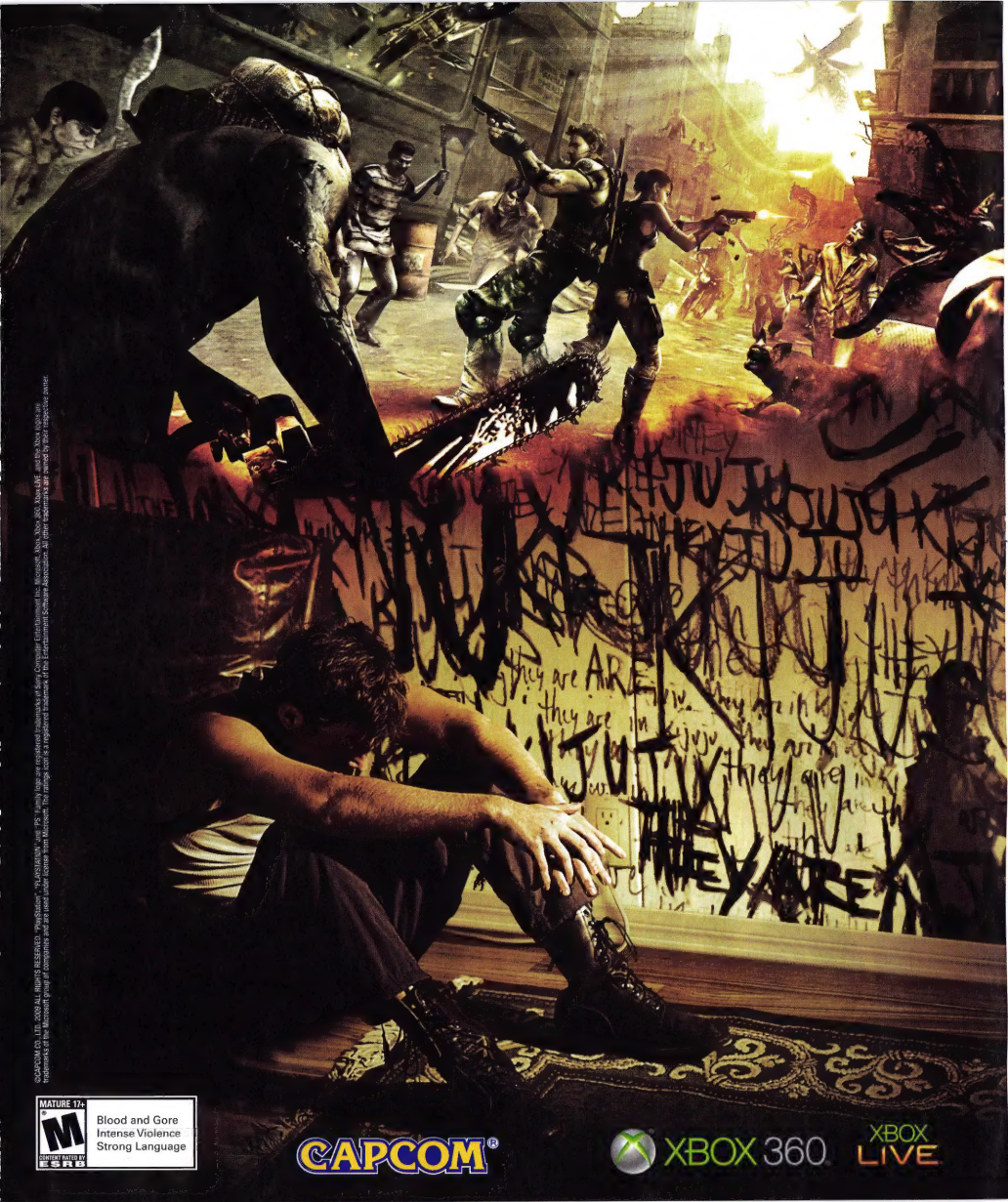
EVERYWHERE JUST GOT BETTER™

PlayStation®Portable

PlayStation®Network

LOOK UP.
SAY GOODBYE.
TEEN
T
ESRB
Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Violence
PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE
PLAYSTATION 3
XBOX 360
XBOX
LIVE

© 2008 Ubisoft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. H.A.W.X, Ubisoft, Ubi.com, the Ubisoft logo, and the Soldier icon are trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the U.S. and/or other countries. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. Software platform logo (TM and ©) EMA 2006.



©CAPCOM CO., LTD. 2009 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks are owned by their respective owner.

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

CAPCOM®

XBOX 360

XBOX LIVE

RESIDENT EVIL 5
FEAR YOU CAN'T FORGET
3.13.09
THEY ARE IN
KIJUJU
RESIDENTEVIL.COM
PLAYSTATION 3
resident evil
DEGENERATION
ALL-NEW CG MOVIE
ALSO AVAILABLE NOW

STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

DROP A 'D' PLEASE

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

For the past year, I have experienced the same exhilaration every time I look at Street Fighter IV. The first feeling I get is one of awe, as the game's flawless animations go through a beautiful ballet of fighting precision. A rush of old-school adrenaline quickly follows as I realize that even though the graphic presentation is modern in every sense, the game captures all the glory of its 2D past. I stare at the game's powerful presentation, and after a quick expletive, I utter the words, "If only other publishers would put this kind of effort and art into all the great 2D hits of gaming's past."

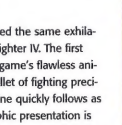
I write this letter as a simple wish and request. The wish is easy: I hope that gamers appreciate Street Fighter IV for all that it is, and that Capcom reaps the rewards with gigantic sales that indicate to the rest of the industry that 2D is not, despite all reports of its passing, dead. The request is perhaps a little more difficult, but a man can dream. I want the effort this kind of pseudo 2D artwork and animation demonstrates put toward some of my favorite games of all time. Imagine Metroid with this level of detail. I'm not talking about some handheld game either. I'm talking big-budget, high-definition masterpieces. Just the thought of picking up a controller with a fresh, new, and gorgeous 2D Samus Aran blazing across my HDTV with thunderous surround sound setting the mood makes the hairs on the back of my neck tingle.

But let's not let the dream end there. Picture Castlevania…or Mario…or Zelda (in all its top-down glory), getting the Street Fighter IV treatment. It simply blows the mind. Think about it, publishers (especially you, Nintendo), because I know I'm not the only one out there. In fact, I think there are millions of gamers just like me who would trade their sisters for a chance for these classics to return to their roots (I'm speaking figuratively here readers, so please don't end up on some nightly news trading your sister for 2D HD Metroid).

Cheers,

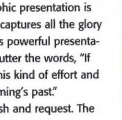
Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** *Burn Notice* And *Psych*, Devoting A Full Week To Leveling Up My Character In Killzone 2 (Hot Pockets, Here I Come!), The Chicago Cubs Landing Milton Bradley (Boardwalk & Park Place = World Series) **Dislikes:** PlayStation 3's Home (I Have To Wait In Line To Play Arcade Games?), My Xbox 360 Red Ringing Again, Paying $10 For One Hour Of DLC In Games **Current Favorite Games:** Killzone 2, Fallout 3, Resistance 2, Street Fighter IV, Chrono Trigger, Skate 2, Left 4 Dead



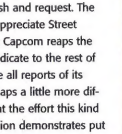
Matt >> *matt@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** *The Smithsonian Anthology Of American Folk Music* (Weird Old Dudes From The 1920s Rule), Minnesota Golden Gophers Basketball, Finally Finishing My BA (Took Almost As Long As *Chinese Democracy*), A New President **Dislikes:** The Cardinals Making The Super Bowl (Seems Unnatural), Brian Baldinger (Carrying On In The Dierdorf/Millen Tradition Of Meathead Announcing), Waiting For *A Dance With Dragons* **Current Favorite Games:** Burnout: The Ultimate Box, Afro Samurai, God Of War, Marble Saga: Koroninpa



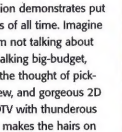
Kato >> *kato@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/RPG **Interests:** *Frost/Nixon*, Five Guys Hamburgers, Winter Classics, Fleet Foxes, George Harrison – *Living In The Material World*, Innocence Mission, *Hollywoodland*, Raphael Saadiq – *The Way I See It* **Dislikes:** Being Accused Of Not Being "From Around Here" – I'm Very Much From Around Here!, Keebler Screwing Up A Chocolate Cookie, Buyer's Remorse For Almost Anything Over $30 **Current Favorite Games:** Fallout 3, Left 4 Dead, Burnout: The Ultimate Box, Stoked



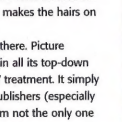
Adam >> *adam@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Heirloom Items (Because Leveling My Retadin Was Too Hard Before?), Headphones That Don't Suck, Canned Tuna (It's So Delicious In So Many Dishes) **Dislikes:** Joe's Misguided Love Of Brokencyde, My PS3 Deciding It Doesn't Want To Talk To Any Bluetooth Devices Any More, My 4850's Inadequate OEM Heatsink, The Twins' Pitiful Offseason **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft: Wrath Of The Lich King, Halo Wars, Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War II, F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin, Minotaur In A China Shop



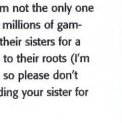
Joe >> *joe@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** *Gran Torino*, DM Power Trips (All Of You, Make Fortitude Saves), The Stack Of 40-Hour Games I Want To Play, Cheap DLC (Thank You, Castle Crashers), Hadokens, Shoryukens **Dislikes:** The Academy Snubbing *Gran Torino*, Admitting Childhood Classics Don't Hold Up (Poor *Voltron*), Dhalsim, Waiting For God Of War III **Current Favorite Games:** God Of War III, Street Fighter IV, Castle Crashers, Star Ocean: The Last Hope



Miller >> *miller@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** The Wealth Of Single-Player DLC This Year, The Return Of *Lost* And *Battlestar Galactica*, *Things We Think About Games* By Will Hindmarch And Jeff Tidball, Marvel's *Dark Reign* **Dislikes:** Joe's Repeated Attempts To Squeal Like The Guy From Brokencyde, Final Crisis (You Deserved So Much Better, Bats), Snow Shovels (An Annual Dislike) **Current Favorite Games:** Halo Wars, PixelJunk Eden, Lumines Supernova, Champions Online, LittleBigPlanet, Afro Samurai, Prince Of Persia

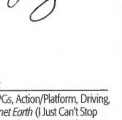


Bertz >> *mattbertz@gameinformer.com*

Handle: Lord Garnington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** Double Down Saloon, Andrew Bird – *Noble Beast*, GTA IV DLC, Lucid Absinthe, The Black Lips Playing The Turf Club, Mickey Rourke's Amazing Comeback **Dislikes:** Industry Layoffs, *The United States Of Tara*, Antony And The Johnsons (Seriously People? Like Dane Cook, I'll Never Understand The Allure), Minnesota Weather (Truly The Worst Of Both Worlds) **Current Favorite Games:** Left 4 Dead, F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin, Fallout 3, NHL 09, Rock Band 2

Ben >> *ben@gameinformer.com*

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *Bringing Down The House* By Ben Mezrich (Now I Know How To Destroy Vegas), *Doctor Who* Season 4, Oddworld Munch's Oddysee (By The Way My Faithful Readers, Joe Hates It. Can You Believe That?) **Dislikes:** Taco Bell's Bacon Cheddar Gordita Crunch (Don't Worry I Double Checked, I Really Don't Like It) **Current Favorite Games:** Fallout 3, Dead Space, Beyond Good & Evil, Mirror's Edge, LocoRoco 2, Left 4 Dead



Bryan >> *bryan@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** Remembering Kevin Larson (1984-2009), The New *Lost* Season, ABC.com's Episode Player (The Whole *Lost* Series Is On There For Free In Hi-Def!), Avoiding The Noid, Having A Reliable Girl Scout Cookie Dealer **Dislikes:** DVRs Crapping Out During The *Lost* Season Premiere **Current Favorite Games:** Resident Evil 5, LocoRoco 2, Wanted: Weapons Of Fate, Fable II, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, LittleBigPlanet

Andy >> *andy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Sharks, *Planet Earth* (I Just Can't Stop Watching Reruns), *30 Rock*, *Dexter* **Dislikes:** Patch 3.08 Was A Disaster (I Expect Better From You, Blizzard) And PVP Is Still An Unbalanced Mess, Teeth Bleaching **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Gears Of War 2, Fallout 3, Street Fighter IV

GAMEINFORMER

MARCH 2009
Volume XVIII • Number 3 • Issue 191

PUBLISHER
Cathy Preston

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Andrew McNamara

EDITORS
Executive Editor Andrew Reiner
Senior Editor Matt Helgeson
Senior Associate Editor Matthew Kato
Associate Editors
Adam Biessener • Joe Juba • Matt Miller
Ben Reeves • Bryan Vore
Content Manager Matt Bertz
Mascot Arthur

PRODUCTION
Art Director Thomas Blustin
Production Director Curtis Fung
Graphic Designer Jeff Akervik

CONTRIBUTORS
Photographer Sarah Kerver
Intern John Ondrey

GAME INFORMER ONLINE
Online Editor Jeff Cork
Media Editor Nick Ahrens
Associate Online Editor Meagan VanBurkleo

ADVERTISING SALES
MINNEAPOLIS
Rob Born
Associate Publisher
(612) 486-6155 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
rob@gameinformer.com

WEST COAST
Damon Watson
West Coast Advertising Director
(310) 450-3260 • Fax: (310) 450-3571
damon@gameinformer.com

Janey Stringer
West Coast Advertising Associate
(612) 486-6104 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
janey@gameinformer.com

EAST COAST
Suzanne Lang
East Coast Advertising Sales Director
(718) 789-0162 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
suzanne@gameinformer.com

MINNEAPOLIS
Amy Arnold
Advertising Coordinator and Online Sales
(612) 486-6154 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
amy@gameinformer.com

Rachel Nimerfroh
Marketing Coordinator
(612) 486-6109 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
rachel@gameinformer.com

CIRCULATION
CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT
For renewal, address change and Edge card details:
Visit: **www.gameinformer.com**
Email: **customerservice@gameinformer.com**

Or send correspondence to:
724 North First St., 3rd Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55401 • Attn: CIS Dept

For subscription inquiry ONLY:
1 (866) 844-GAME (4263)

Circulation Services
Ted Katzung • (612) 486-6107
ted@gameinformer.com

Information Systems Manager
Paul Hedgpeth
paulhedgpeth@gameinformer.com

In memory of Paul Anderson

Manufactured and printed in the United States of America The Editor welcomes company product information for all video game systems. Such materials should be addressed to: Editor, Game Informer® Magazine, 724 North First St., 4th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. Entire contents copyright 2008. Game Informer® Magazine. All rights reserved; reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Game Informer® is a trademark of Sunrise Publications. All products named in these pages are trade names, or trademarks, of their respective companies. PUBLISHER LIABILITY FOR ERROR The publisher shall not be liable for slight changes or typographical errors that do not lessen the value of an advertisement. The publisher's liability for other errors or omissions in connection with an advertisement is limited to republication of the advertisement in any subsequent issue or the refund of any monies paid for the advertisement. INDEMNIFICATION The advertiser and/or Advertising Agency agrees to defend and indemnify the publisher against any and all liability, loss, or expense arising from claims of libel, unfair competition, unfair trade practices, infringement of trademarks, copyrights, trade names, patents, or proprietary rights or violation of rights of privacy, resulting from the publication of the Advertiser's statement.

Member Audit Bureau of Circulations

INTRODUCING LIVE WIRE.

BODY WASH. MOISTURIZER. STRIPED TOGETHER. IT'S TWO PRODUCTS IN ONE AWESOME PRODUCT.

BODY WASH

MOISTURIZER

Old Spice

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

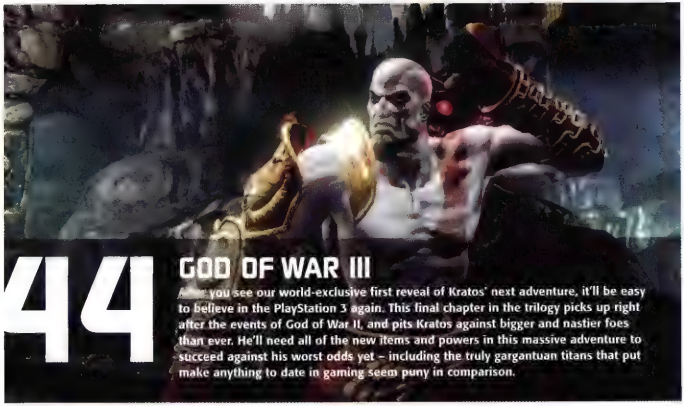
©CAPCOM U.S.A., INC. 2006, 2008 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Street Fighter is a registered trademark of CAPCOM U.S.A., Inc. CAPCOM and the CAPCOM LOGO are registered trademarks of CAPCOM CO., LTD. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. This ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks are owned by their respective owners.

STREET FIGHTER IV
LET'S DO THIS!
STREETFIGHTER.COM
CLASSIC MOVES. COOL CHARACTERS. IN A NEW, BIGGER, BADDER STREET FIGHTER.
PLAYSTATION 3
XBOX 360.
XBOX LIVE
CAPCOM

CONTENTS

The "Never Mind The Economy, Here Comes Kratos" Issue

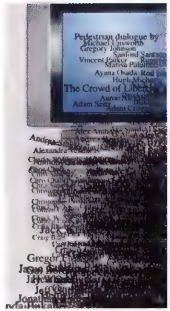
cover story



44 GOD OF WAR III

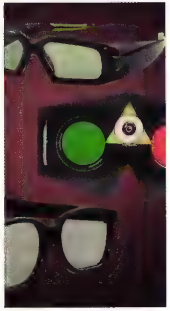
After you see our world-exclusive first reveal of Kratos' next adventure, it'll be easy to believe in the PlayStation 3 again. This final chapter in the trilogy picks up right after the events of God of War II, and pits Kratos against bigger and nastier foes than ever. He'll need all of the new items and powers in this massive adventure to succeed against his worst odds yet – including the truly gargantuan titans that put make anything to date in gaming seem puny in comparison.

features



24 WHAT'S WRONG WITH VIDEO GAME CREDITS?

Nobody likes to sit through 20 minutes of scrolling text to see if there's a hidden bonus at the end of a game. We dig in and try to figure out why video game credit sequences have gotten so out of control.



32 THE RISE OF 3D GAMING

We decipher reams of arcane technobabble and high-minded rhetoric to find out what the state of 3D technology is, and what it means to gamers. You may be surprised to learn that the future is closer than you think.

departments

8 Staff
Read the team's latest favorites

14 GI Spy
Silly pictures of our life and times

16 Dear GI
Your chance to fire back at us!

20 Connect
Where news, talk, and technology collide

36 Impulse
Your guide to the world of downloadable games

38 Interview
Dave Shippy, vice president of Intrisity and one of the core designers behind the CPUs of all three current consoles, gives his thoughts on video game hardware

40 Gear
Geeky gadget stuff for the masses

42 Calendar
Get hip to this month's happenings

54 Previews
2009 already looks awesome, and we have the previews of Resident Evil 5, GTA IV: The Lost and Damned, and Brütal Legend to prove it

80 Reviews
Game of the Month: Street Fighter IV for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360

96 Charts
Retail Sales Data and the GI editors' Top 10 Games

98 Secret Access
Codes, strategies, and passwords

100 Classic GI
Reliving gaming's greatest moments

103 Online
See what's happening at Game Informer Online

104 Game Over
The end...or is it?

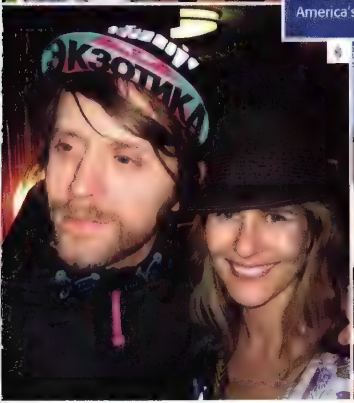
GAME INDEX

GAME	PAGE #
Afro Samurai	84
Arc Rise Fantasia	64
Blue Dragon Plus	95
Boing! Docomodake	79
Brütal Legend	58
Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box	85
Champions Online	76
Deadly Creatures	87
Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	94
Drakensang: The Dark Eye	92
Empire: Total War	70
F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin	83
Grand Theft Auto IV: The Lost and Damned	56
Guitar Hero: Modern Hits	78
H.A.W.X.	67
Halo Wars	88
Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure	71
I Am Alive	60
Killzone 2	86
Klonoa	72
Legacy of Ys: Books I & II	95
LocoRoco 2	94
Lord of the Rings: Conquest, The	85
Lux-Pain	78
Major League Baseball 2K9	75
Marble Saga: Kororinpa	87
Mario & Luigi RPG 3	79
Mini Ninjas	79
MLB 09: The Show	74
My World My Way	95
New Play Control Pikmin	73
Phantasy Star Ø	78
Prototype	62
Race Pro	89
Resident Evil 5	54
Rhythm Heaven	73
Star Ocean: The Last Hope	90
Stoked	89
Street Fighter IV	82
TMNT: Smash Up	79
TrackMania DS	95
UFC 2009 Undisputed	69
Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume	71
Wanted: Weapons of Fate	66
Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War II	91
Watchmen: The End Is Nigh	67
WWE Legends of WrestleMania	68

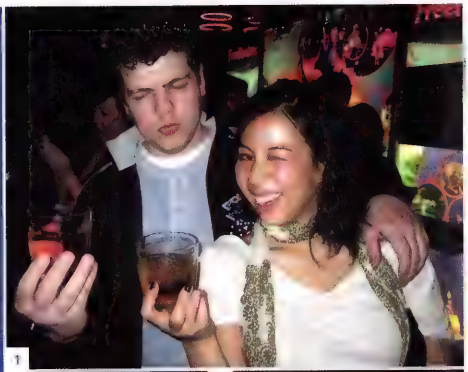
DEAD RISING
CHOP TILL YOU DROP
CLOSED
For Lunch
WILL RETURN
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language
Wii
CAPCOM
http://www.dead-rising.com/wii
SICK TO DEATH OF MUSIC GAMES?

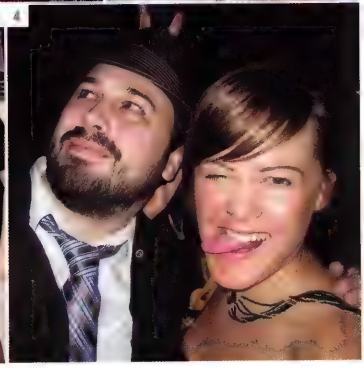
GI SPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



1 Ben "Big in Atlanta" Reeves and AOL Games' Robin Yang compare glasses of...apple juice...delicious, nutritious apple juice **2** Sony Online's Katie Hanson makes the nightlife scene at the annual CES convention with Capcom's Chris Kramer **3** EA's resident musical/PR genius Pete Nguyen hangs with the best looking man in video games, Will O'Neal **4** A stylish Bertz steps his hat game up and parties down with Namco's Melody Ann Pfeiffer **5** Matt shows Southpeak's Aubrey Norris and Sandbox Strat's John Kopp the prize of the Game Informer offices, Creepy Robotic Metal Parrot™ **6** Kotaku's Michael McWhertor keeps it gully with 47 Communication's Sibel Sunar **7** Ben and Bryan get their minds blown by 3D gaming, courtesy of Nvidia's Nick Stam and Bryan Del Rizzo **8** SOE's Courtney Simmons hangs with AOL's Libe Goad and CNET's Dan Ackerman **9** It's an international bro-down in the GI lobby with Sega America's Denny Chiu, Sega Australia's Vispi Bhopti, Creative Assembly UK's Kieran Brigden, Sega Europe's Wouter Van Vugt, and Sega America's Elvin Gee



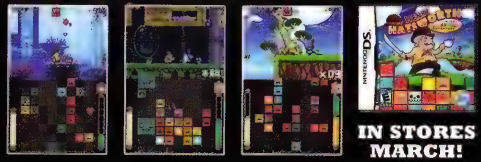


"...My Most Anticipated DS Game Ever"
— MTVNews.com

HENRY HATSWORTH IN THE PUZZLING ADVENTURE™

ADVENTURE GAMING & PUZZLE PLAY... JOINED AT THE HINGE.

Introducing Henry Hatsworth In The Puzzling Adventure™ –
Explore 35 levels in 5 exotic worlds with interconnected action-adventure and addictive-puzzle gameplay.



IN STORES MARCH!

EVERYONE
E
Cartoon Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

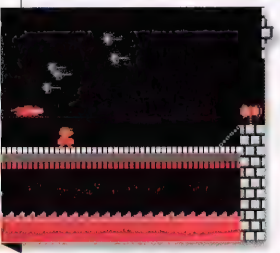
NINTENDO DS™

www.HenryHatsworth.com

© 2006 Electronic Arts Inc. EA, the EA logo and Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure™ are trademarks or registered trademarks of Electronic Arts Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. All Rights Reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Nintendo DS is a trademark of Nintendo. © 2006

DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back



Who's The Boss?

I recently finished Fable II, and I was kind of disappointed that there wasn't a final boss in the game. Fable isn't the only recent game that does this; Fallout 3, Halo 3, and Gears of War 2 all could have had amazing last battles, but instead they just have waves of wimpy enemies.

Rune Riesterer
via email

This trend is not a good one. The most disappointing thing about the games you mention is that each one sets the expectation for an epic battle. Through the storytelling, players are led to believe that the showdowns against the likes of Lord Lucien and Colonel Autumn will be the culmination of all their hard work. Instead, the battles are anticlimactic duds. Depriving gamers of the satisfaction of a final encounter just leaves everyone feeling cheated. Games should end with a bang, not with an unceremonious fizzle-out.

Sounds Good

I wanted to say how great it is to see the Sound Check column included in the Connect section of your magazine. Being a professional composer/sound designer who made the change from amateur to freelance to finally in-house three years ago, I can vouch for how inspirational and useful these kinds of interviews and spots can be.

Nathan Madsen
via email

We're glad you liked it, Nathan. Music is a facet of video games that is often overshadowed by flashier elements, but it remains a core component of the experience. Sound Check doesn't run in every issue, but alongside recurring features like Interview, Art, and Afterwords, we try to inject perspectives that explore the many aspects of gaming as a hobby and a profession.

Cut Some Slack

In your last Dear GI, you printed a letter from a boy named Matteo having problems in WoW. He was being kicked out of parties, ignored, and so forth. I don't agree with your response, where you basically assumed he did something to deserve it. There are too many stories, with too many situations and too many emotions running rampant for you to just make those assumptions. Just like I have no right to assume he didn't do anything wrong. Who knows, right?

Anonymous
via email

Some important details were conspicuously absent from Matteo's letter (mainly regarding the reason he was shunned), but you're right. The anonymity of the Internet gives people the ability to act like jerks for no reason, and there are probably more gamers who exercise that ability than we'd like to admit. Users being mistreated in any online game should notify the proper administrators – just remember that every little in-game spat doesn't necessarily qualify as a flagrant violation of the End User License Agreement.

That Voice!

I'm not saying that they actually are the same person, but it seems to me that the voices of Reaver from Fable II and the narrator from LittleBigPlanet are the same. Can you hear a resemblance?

A. Ballard
via email

You know the old saying: "Voices different, makes no difference. Voices alike, it's Stephen Fry." Okay, that's not really an old saying, but both roles are performed by British actor Stephen Fry. He has been in films like *A Fish Called Wanda* and *V for Vendetta*. Oh, who are we kidding? You saw him in *Thunderpants*.

Larsler

In your interview with Lars Ulrich in your Guitar Hero: Metallica coverage, he says that when Guitar Hero III came out, he called Activision and asked for a copy. Isn't that kind of a double standard? He is one of the most vocal opponents of free music. Yet, his first response was to get – but not pay for – a copy of the game with one of his songs on it. Don't the makers of the game and the rest of the artists with songs on it deserve to be paid, Lars? Didn't you just steal their music?

Pernell Marshall
via email

Your interview with Lars Ulrich made me mad. He asked for a free copy of Guitar Hero III!? Remember when he started a fight with Napster because the little people were stealing his music!? But, oh no, heaven forbid Lars Ulrich pay for a video game. I called Activision and asked for my own free copy of Guitar Hero and they told me to stick it. Weird, huh?

Eighn Cullinane
via email

Good catch, gentlemen. Of course, you're splitting ethical hairs with a man who has consumed multiple bottles of wine while auctioning off fine art for millions of dollars. The lesson is, um, when you're famous…you can do whatever you want?

The Numbers Guy

I just received the February Issue, with your Top 50 of the 2008 feature, and was completely confused by your choice of Game of the Year, so I decided to do some math. I took each editor's top 10, and assigned points to each title (10 for number one, 9 for two, etc). The clear overall winner by a landslide was Fallout 3. Your Top Five, according to this equation, broke down like this: Fallout 3 (57 points), Metal Gear Solid 4 (44 points), LittleBigPlanet (43 points), Braid (41 points), and Rock Band 2 (41 points). GTA IV was seventh, scoring only 36 points. Explain!

Sean
Raleigh, NC

Every year we get a few letters like this, and the explanation is pretty simple. You can stack the numbers however you want,

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

GI COMMUNITY

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

THE QUESTION:
What is the worst video game-based movie you have seen?

Doesn't get a whole lot worse than *Super Mario Bros.* It didn't even resemble the game in any meaningful way (although Princess Toadstool was hot). Dennis Hopper had perhaps the dumbest hairstyle of anybody, anywhere, at any time in that film.

Hallved

It is a huge tragedy that the great actor Raul Julia's last movie was *Street Fighter: The Movie*. What's an even bigger tragedy is I got a VHS copy of *Street Fighter: The Movie* for my birthday instead of *The Street Fighter* staring Sonny Chiba.

not_a_bumblebee

Resident Evil: Apocalypse is pretty awful, unless you watch it on basic cable. Then the awkward censoring gives it a life of its own: "That big motivator's got a rocket launcher!"

TheInvisMan

Postal. Although it is the only video game movie I saw, it was in fact the worst movie I have seen in my entire life. It is nothing more than failed political satire and a whole bunch of urinating.

Animan_Of_WoW

Spliced in scenes from the games, a party with a ton of girls, and even the lovable mug of Clint Howard couldn't save *House of the Dead* from being the flop that it was.

SmackeyTheFrog

The worst video game movie that I have seen is *Dead or Alive*. This movie was awful, with its terrible story and acting. The actors playing the characters didn't even fit them at all!

gamer009

Bloodrayne. That is all.

bpfx215

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

TRACKMANIA® DS

"...a blast to play...really, really addicting."
— Mark Bozon, IGN.com

"...an outrageously fun racer, with a highly original twist..."
— Official Nintendo UK magazine, Oct. 2008

TrackMania DS is the most heart-pounding, stunt-filled racing game ever to burn rubber on the Nintendo DS™!

Over 100 tracks loaded with jumps, loops, ramps, and insane stunts!

More than 300 unique pieces let you create, share, and race on your own tracks!

Challenge up to 4 players locally or up to 8 in Hotseat Mode!

Visit: www.atlus.com/trackmania

EVERYONE
E
Visit www.esrb.org for ratings information.
ESRB

FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE
NINTENDO DS™
NADEO
ATLUS®
WWW.ATLUS.COM
firebrand games

Available from these and other fine retailers:
GameStop power to the players
EB GAMES power to the players

© 2008-2009 Nadeo and Focus Home Interactive. All rights reserved. TrackMania, Nadeo, Focus Home Interactive and their logos are marks or trademarks of Nadeo and/or Focus Home Interactive. All other copyrights or trademarks are the propriety of their respective owners. Developed by Firebrand Games Limited. Licensed to and published in North America by Atlus U.S.A., Inc. Nintendo and the Nintendo DS logo are trademarks of Nintendo © 2006 Nintendo. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.

but Grand Theft Auto IV scored a 10 in the main review and a 10 in the second opinion. As the highest scoring game of 2008, it was awarded Game of the Year. The editor's personal lists, on the other hand, are not related to how a game scored – they just represent the games we played and enjoyed individually.

The Lone Gamer

What's with all these new games being made with so much attention to co-op campaigns and multiplayer? Left 4 Dead, Resistance 2, Call of Duty: World at War – they all are apparently better in co-op or multiplayer. As an offline gamer, am I to be left out of the best content my favorite games have to offer? I'm afraid that soon games will be entirely multiplayer, with a two-hour campaign that has no story or content. I've always been a bigger fan of single-player than anything else – please tell me there's hope for my gaming future.

Luke Garber
via email

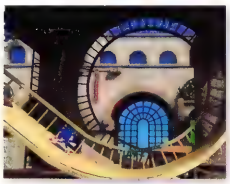
There is hope for your gaming future. Gamers are enjoying online play in greater numbers, but that doesn't indicate an industry-wide migration to exclusively multiplayer titles. Developers will continue to make single-player games. Online options don't negate excellent offline content, they just provide a more social avenue of gameplay, with an emphasis on competition and teamwork. Those features aren't necessarily better, especially if you prefer playing by yourself. Right now, gamers have more options in front of them than ever before: plenty of great systems, a wide selection of games, and numerous genres to fit any taste. Online games only represent a portion of that whole.

Every Time

I noticed how on your Sonic Unleashed review you pointed how the major downfall of the game was the Werehog levels, with their bulky, repetitive, and slow gameplay style, but nevertheless how does that mean the whole game itself deserves a 6.5? That's below average! The least you could've done was round it up to a 7. But a 6? That is an amateur rating for professional game reviewers like you. I say this with all do respect, please don't take offense.

Tyler Young
via email

Oh, don't worry. We stopped being offended by upset Sonic fans a long time ago. We've just seen the pattern too many times: A new Sonic game comes out, it isn't very good, and Sonic fans write half-defending/half-conceding letters. It's just lost all impact at this point.



JOSE DIAZ
It isn't often that Link looks this awesome. He's not even wearing pajamas!

Send to:
Game Informer
Reader Art Contest
724 [illegible] St.
4th Floor
Mpls, MN 5540[illegible]

reader art

[illegible] name, phone number, and return address. If you're the [illegible] All entries become the property of Game Informer and can't be [illegible]

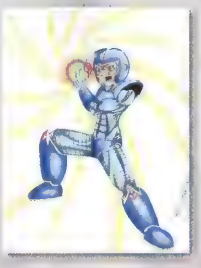
SAHRA GIERTZ
It's the witch! Run, you fools! Run!

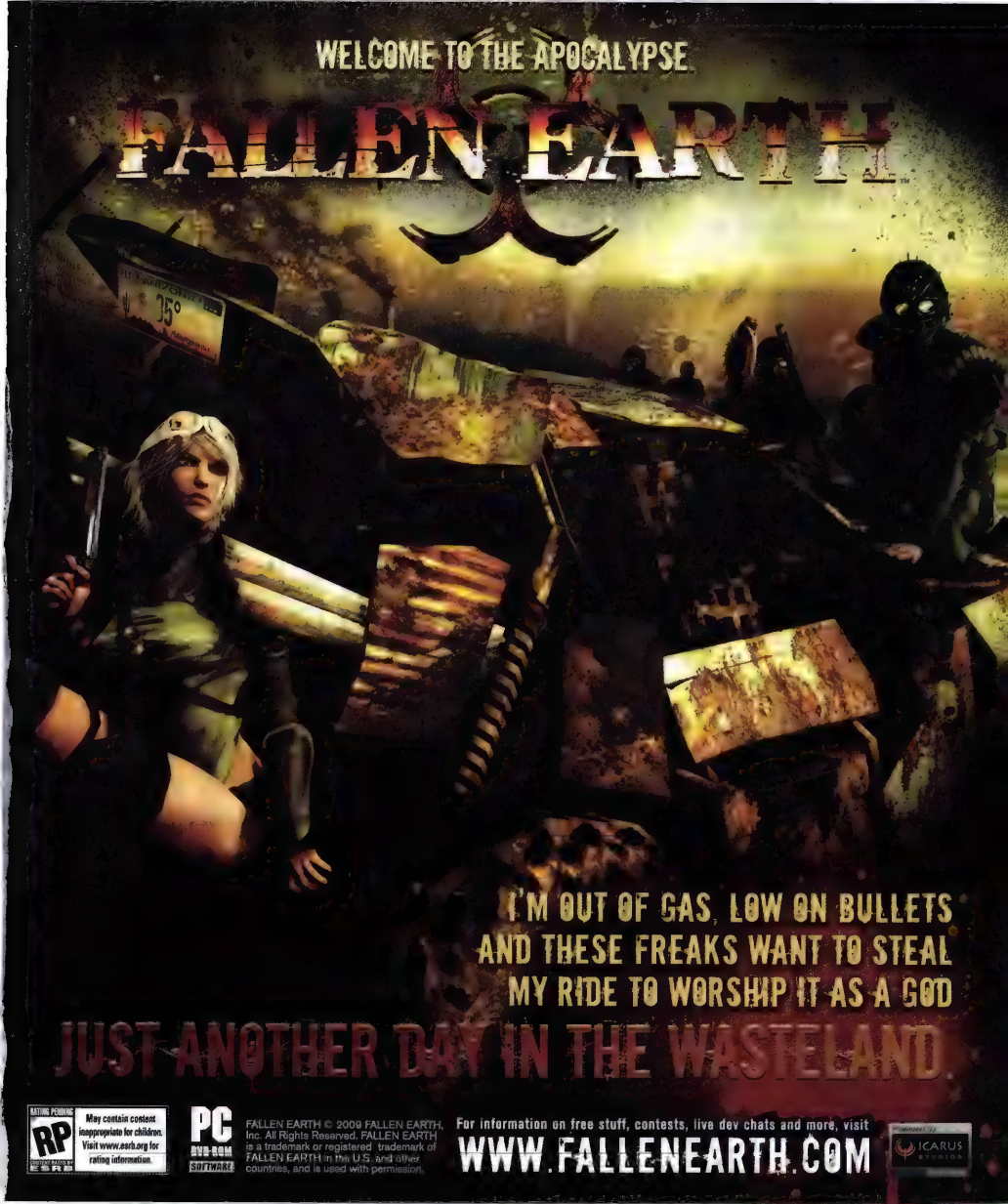
JACOB HOUSER
Someone's about to get Scorpwned

MELINDA HALL
Hope you've got some red blocks on hand. You're gonna need them

NOAH SUMMERS
That dude from Marathon is popularly known as the Marathon man

JOSEPH TREVINO
After he killed the Sun, Mega Man absorbed its power: being the Sun




WELCOME TO THE APOCALYPSE
FALLEN EARTH
I'M OUT OF GAS, LOW ON BULLETS
AND THESE FREAKS WANT TO STEAL
MY RIDE TO WORSHIP IT AS A GOD
JUST ANOTHER DAY IN THE WASTELAND
RATING PENDING
RP
ESRB
May contain content inappropriate for children. Visit www.esrb.org for rating information.
PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE
FALLEN EARTH © 2009 FALLEN EARTH, Inc. All Rights Reserved. FALLEN EARTH is a trademark or registered trademark of FALLEN EARTH in the U.S. and other countries, and is used with permission.
For information on free stuff, contests, live dev chats and more, visit
WWW.FALLENEARTH.COM
ICARUS STUDIOS

news

OPEN HOUSE

SONY OPENS HOME BETA'S DOORS TO THE PUBLIC

Sony's PlayStation Home social network open beta finally started, and we've recently spent some time with it. While showing plenty of promise, there aren't a lot of interesting things to do yet in the service. Here's a rundown of the what's going on and what's coming up.

GETTING SET UP

After the initial download and character customization run-through, you're dropped into your private Harbor Studio space. In the Home mall you can also purchase the Summer House for $4.99 if you want. You can use this space to host friends, but for now there are no video or photo viewing capabilities. Feel free, however, to rearrange your furniture.

OUT AND ABOUT

Home features a handful of spaces where you can meet people or, in some cases, play arcade minigames. Unfortunately, each space must be downloaded the first time you enter it. This will be required whenever Sony makes significant upgrades to Home. You can, however, queue these downloads in the background.

CENTRAL PLAZA – This is the main common area from which you can get to other locations like the bowling alley and the theater. One corner features a listening station where you can vote on tracks to hear, and the plaza's big screen hosted a Capcom *Resident Evil Degeneration* quiz for an exclusive t-shirt for your avatar.

MALL – Here's where – you guessed it – you buy stuff. Home features some free clothes and items, but you can also spend $1.99 for shirts at the Diesel store or get a table from European home furnishings store Ligne Roset for the same price. There is a chess game on the upper level if you're looking for less materialistic pursuits.

UNCHARTED GAME SPACE – Featuring Sully's Bar, this game-themed area contains three rooms that were initially locked until the Home community solved the puzzles to open them. The artifact and film rooms upstairs let you look at art and items from the game, as does the Smuggler's Den downstairs. The bar also includes cabinets of the Naughty Dog-made game called Mercenary Madness.

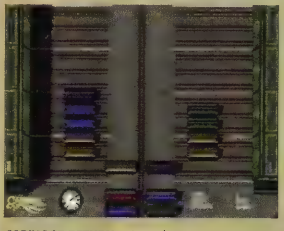
You can manually type in chat text (with or without the PS3 chat pad) or choose from pre-scripted text. You can also pick avatar gestures, including different dancing options

STRANGERS & FRIENDS YOU HAVEN'T MET YET

The social aspect of Home is one thing the service's director Jack Buser says has been a success. Buser says that gamers are using Home to find new people to play online games with instead of just populating their friends' list with people they know.

It wouldn't be an online space without some grief, and Home's open social interaction certainly exposes you to some jerks. Interacting with others is up to you, and your desire to do so will go a long way to determining how interesting Home is to you.

If you want to make things more exclusive, you can start or join a club. Unfortunately, starting one will cost you a one-time fee of $4.99, followed by a monthly upkeep charge to be determined at the end of March. For this you'll get a Clubhouse location where up to 32 members can meet in private.



ARCADE GAMES

Here's a list of the arcade cabinets in Home so far, apart from the standard games available (like pool, chess, and bowling). Arcade games like Ice Breaker and Echochrome even deliver Home apparel prizes for good scores.

CARRIAGE RETURN – A puzzle game like a two-sided Tetris where you have to stack sets of three color-coded carriages into rail cars.

ICE BREAKER – It's like Breakout with a few power-ups.

ECHOCHROME – This is a simplified, three-level version of the PSP/PSN title.

MERCENARY MADNESS – This blocky, 8-bit side-scroller features simple platforming and gun-shooting mechanics.

BOWLING ALLEY – Apart from featuring bowling, this area also has three arcade games (Echochrome, Ice Breaker, and Carriage Return) as well as pool tables.

FAR CRY 2 GAME SPACE – The train station section contains a count-and-capture mancala game, while Rubin's office features an interactive map for Far Cry 2.

RED BULL AIR RACE – Here you can play the Red Bull Air Race World Series flight game and post your best time.

THE WAITING GAME

Sony carefully clarified that at this point Home is considered a work-in-progress beta open to the public. However, Home director Jack Buser doesn't anticipate the service having a set-in-stone grand opening when the beta training wheels are officially taken off. Instead, we can expect new features and fixes to roll out on a continual basis.

One aspect of Home that perfectly symbolizes this in-flux state is the fact that to play any of Home's minigames you have to physically wait in line at the finite virtual representations of the arcade games in order to play. Buser said this kind of logjam simply didn't happen in the closed beta, so Sony didn't anticipate it being a problem. However, Buser promises that these kinds of kinks will be worked out in the future. "You're going to see us bring more minigames that can accommodate more people. You're going to see more minigames in general."

The trophy case, being able to post photos or stream music from your hard drive, and other promised features are still on their way, and should help the service fulfill people's expectations. Buser says that the Home team is listening carefully to the Home community to see what it wants and what it thinks needs to be fixed.

In general, Sony plans to roll out more contests, tournaments, events, exclusive content, and even opportunities to meet and talk to famous people via Home. More interaction between the service and games is also on tap. Buser tells us that Home will feed off your game save data and that there will be things you do in a game that will unlock things in Home and vice versa. "What you see now is only the tiniest fraction of where we're going to be moving towards the end of the year."

The EA Sports arena will feature a bunch of different sports minigames, including poker, an F1 driving course, basketball court, and a golf driving range. Sony's Home director Jack Buser expects such multi-game or franchise-based game spaces to grow in the future

AS EARTH FALLS,
A NEW BREED OF
HERO ARISES.
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Alcohol Reference
Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes

Jump in.

© SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved. Developed by tri-Ace Inc. SQUARE ENIX and the SQUARE ENIX logo are registered trademarks of Square Enix Holdings Co., Ltd. STAR OCEAN and THE LAST HOPE are registered trademarks or trademarks of Square Enix Co., Ltd. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. The ESRB rating icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.

You just finished wiping out remnants of the Covenant and Flood forces, only to see Master Chief make the ultimate sacrifice to save the human race. Halo 3 is over, Master Chief is dead, and the credits start rolling. Game over, right? That's what many players thought, until their friends who were patient enough to sit through the credits told them of a new beacon of hope delivered through the post-credit cutscene that clearly shows that Master Chief survived the shipwreck.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH VIDEO GAME CREDITS?

Fading to black and rolling the credits no longer means the show is over. If anything, it now tells theatergoers and gamers to sit tight, hold the bladder for a few minutes longer, and prepare for some bonus footage.

Some movies and games effectively use the lengthy credits scroll to establish the passing of time in their stories. For instance, the underappreciated PlayStation 2 adventure ICO concluded with a heartfelt goodbye. Had gamers turned the game off then, they never would have seen the post-credit reveal of true love being reunited. All that crying was for naught. Conversely, Gears of War 2 uses the time divide provided by the credits scroll to tease the plot of Gears of War 3 – a reveal that would have been out of place if it were incorporated into the Gears of War 2 story.

Credits are also used to deliver light-hearted content, such as Marvel Ultimate Alliance's super hero prank calls, The Movies' home videos, and Freddy Pharkas' character outtakes. Call of Duty 4's credits show us that lead animator Mark Grigsby has talents outside of creating realistic grenade throwing animations. The game's credits sequence is accompanied by a Grigsby rap that paints the game in a new light with lines like, "Sgt Griggs reporting for duty/ Some say this belong in a movie/ But this the third installment of Infinity Ward sh–/ Don't soil your drawers, because it's deep and it's hard, bi–." This amusing rap was just a primer for the best post-credit reward of all – a bonus level of high-altitude excitement.

Just knowing that there's a possibility of an additional level, new cutscenes, or a sequel tease has most gamers sticking around to pay their respects to the people who make the games. But how much time are we willing to devote to the outside chance of there being bonus material? As the technology in games improves, credits sequences seemingly get longer as more names are added to the scroll. Many credits running times are now reaching into the realm of the absurd. You can watch an episode of *The Office* in the time it takes Resistance 2's credits to conclude, and several credit scrolls in Xbox 360 games activate the system's built-in screen dimming functionality, triggered by an inactivity timer.

Is it unfair to suggest that gamers in the United States shouldn't need to sit through 20 territories worth of localization credits? Do we need to know the publisher's entire corporate structure? Gears of War 2's lead designer Cliff Bleszinski believes that the potential problem of credit length could be solved by developers separating the names into primary and secondary lists. "Hollywood studios have dealt with the issue of billing for years now," he says, "and we're starting to sort through these issues as we grow. My advice would be to make sure that game developers are listed primarily followed by contractors and then publishing partners." Bleszinski's proposed "secondary" credits may not make the cut for the game, but could conceivably still find life in the game's manual.

Newsweek's N'Gai Croal adamantly believes credits shouldn't be cut just to save the gamer a few minutes of his or her day. "I don't think that credits getting longer and longer is a problem," Croal says. "The first and most important function of credits is to acknowledge everyone who worked on the game. Credits should be as long as they need to be in order to perform that function."

Selective or all-inclusive recognition may not be the answer. Maybe game developers should ask themselves the question: why are video game credits mimicking motion picture credits? Interactive mediums allow players to absorb action and storytelling in different ways than cinema allows, and this unique experience translates well into credit sequences. "Video game credits should be interactive," Croal says. "That would persuade more people to view them rather than skip them, and it provides another level of gameplay," Super Smash Bros. and Guitar Hero both embrace this idea with playable credits sequences. The only drawback is from the creator's perspective; gamers likely can't read more than a few names while DragonForce's "Through the Fire and Flames" is kicking their asses up and down the fret board.

Critics praised the recently released Prince of Persia on numerous fronts, but one area that deserved mentioned was its handling of credits. Players retain control of the Prince, but rather than bouncing off of walls and flipping across caverns, his acrobatic prowess has been reduced to a slow shuffling of feet. As the Prince inches forward, the credits begin to roll on the side. The action is subdued to a point that players can soak in the name of each contributor, and the action isn't secondary, as there is still a goal to complete. The PlayStation Network title Flow also strikes a balance in maintaining gameplay and readable acknowledgements.

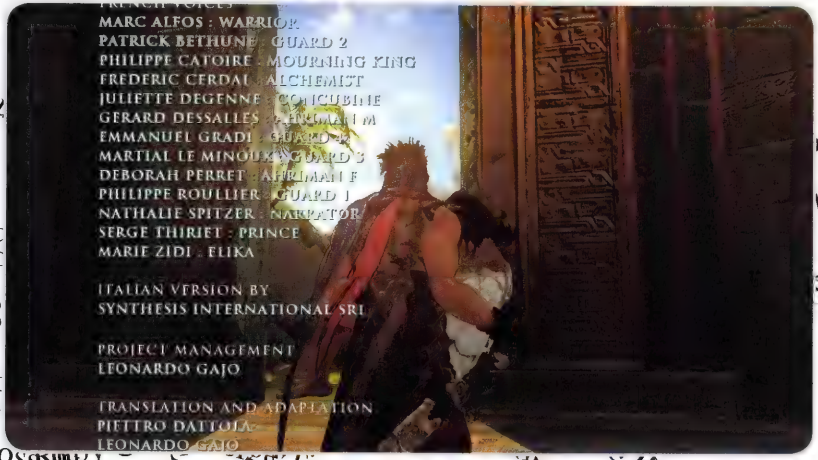
Obviously, not every story is geared for a playable credits sequence. Croal points out, "As the cost of game development continues to rise, I suspect that a lot of publishers and developers will find it hard to justify the expense of creating a separate playable level solely for the purpose of having an interactive credits sequence."

The interaction can be as simple as manual control over the speed of the credits scroll – something Star Wars: The Force Unleashed offers. If you want to take the time to memorize every programmer's name, you could pause the scroll. If you just want to get through them in a minute or two, hold down the analog stick to make them fly by at a breezy clip.

But does the credit acknowledgement always have to be after a game's conclusion? Books and magazines get the names out of the way before you reach any content. Games could do the same. "This is certainly an interesting option that must be figured out on a case-by-case basis," Bleszinski says. "GTA IV's in-world opening credits were very compelling and well done, and I'd like to see more developers taking this sort of risk when appropriate." ■■■

GI OPINION

Whether we like it or not, the possibility of hidden content makes watching credits a necessity. If developers intend on hiding content at the end, there's no reason credits shouldn't be entertaining. The Oscars cut off long acceptance speeches, and the same should happen to game credits. Rather than rolling our eyes the next time we hear, "Make sure you watch the credits," developers need to find new approaches that make us say, "Don't worry. I wouldn't miss them." A more simple solution could be a collective agreement between all developers to not hide anything after the credits. If this impossibility ever came to fruition, you could watch them if you wanted to, or skip them without the fear of missing something. —REINER



DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

CAPCOM INKS U.K. MMO DEV

Capcom signed a development deal with U.K.'s Monumental Games for a multi-platform game scheduled for release later this year. Monumental has already done back-end work in the MMO space.

UBISOFT'S FRANCHISE FARM

Ubisoft CEO Yves Guillemot revealed that through March 2010 the company will release "seven franchise titles." Guillemot went on to mention four of them: Assassin's Creed 2, Splinter Cell Conviction, Red Steel 2, and a Ghost Recon title.

MORE SPORE SPAWNED

The Spore franchise is evolving with three new titles: Spore Hero (Wii, fall), Spore Hero Arena (DS, fall), and Spore Creature Keeper (PC, no release date). Spore Hero features more of an adventure bent, Hero Arena sounds like a Pokémon-influenced title, and Creature Keeper is aimed at the younger audience.

SONY AND MICROSOFT FEEL THE PINCH

Both Sony and Microsoft have admitted that they are going to have to scale back in the face of the current world economy. While Sony is cutting back in a variety of areas, it appears as of the time of this writing that the video game portion of its business will not see any dramatic changes. Microsoft, meanwhile, is cutting 5,000 jobs over the next 18 months, with the bulk of them reportedly coming from the Entertainment and Devices division, which is responsible for the Zune, Windows Mobile, and the Xbox 360.

MASS EFFECT 2 ROLLING OUT

We all knew BioWare would be making a Mass Effect 2, and it'll make its first public appearance at the Game Developers Conference in late March. A session featuring the game's level design is on the conference docket.

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

AS RECESSION DEEPENS, GAME PUBLISHERS AND DEVELOPERS FACE TOUGH CHOICES

Last year may have been another record year for video game sales (see page 30 for more), but not everyone is celebrating. The dark side to the industry's success is that 2008 was also a year that saw a significant number of development studios close their doors or be absorbed into larger publisher structures. Scarily, some of these developers were making top-flight games. Is this the new reality or just a cyclical aberration?

Iron Lore developed the well-liked PC title Titan Quest for publisher THQ, but that didn't stop them from having to close up shop in 2008. Arthur Bruno, ex-Iron Lore lead designer (now with Crate Entertainment), tells us that a game's success can unfortunately have little to do with a studio surviving. "Well, I think people assume that because a game is good, the developer must have profited from it. This isn't necessarily the case. When an independent studio signs a publishing deal, they're taking advances on royalties to cover the cost of development. Depending on how the development deal was structured, the publisher may have to earn back the cost of development and marketing before the developer receives any royalty payments. With the average full-scale console or PC title now costing around $14 million to develop, plus additional marketing expenses, a game could potentially sell a million copies without the developer earning any royalties."

Bruno explains that due to the time that elapses between when a project ends and when royalty payments – if any – are finally paid out, how a developer transitions between two projects can mean life or death. Perhaps they're burrowing into potential profit, cash reserves, or an upcoming advance just to retain staff members before the next project gets off the ground. Bruno says that trying to juggle multiple projects can simply be too much. "Trying to put together a proposal for a second project on a tight budget while your team is stretched to the limit trying to finish the current project can be like trying to squeeze blood from a rock." The second project itself often suffers as a result.

Wedbush Morgan Securities analyst Michael Pachter believes this rash of studio closures would have happened with or without the current economic recession. He points to companies such as EA and THQ and their failed efforts to grow their business by putting out more titles as one part of the reason why we're seeing the contraction of some developers.

> **Business isn't about fair competition. You don't get a handicap for being small and poor.**
>
> – Former Iron Lore lead designer Arthur Bruno

Overall, Pachter believes that this will force snake-bitten publishers to take fewer chances and simply make fewer games. "The economics of publishing are now to the point where it doesn't make sense even to outsource a game – the reward is just not great enough, so you just don't make it."

This trend has already started – this year companies like Sony and EA announced the closure of both announced and unannounced projects. Moreover, Pachter thinks that things will get worse before they can get better. "Fewer overall games means less internal development, and that means consolidating studios, closing studios, and letting people go."

This is something Halo Wars' Ensemble Studios has already experienced (see page 88 for our review). Microsoft disbanded Ensemble for financial reasons before the game was even released. Age of Empires' creator Bruce Shelley of Ensemble posted on his blog that he thought the developer was "immune to shut-down talk" because of the success of the Age of Empires series and that the team was profitable. "We thought we were among the best studios in the world, and that may be true, but we don't fit in the future plans of MGS [Microsoft Game Studios] as an internal studio, so we're out."

PINK SLIP BLUES

It's been a rough year for many studios. Below is a sample of some of the developers that have closed their doors.

ENSEMBLE
(Halo Wars)
Ensemble head Tony Goodman is starting a new independent studio which includes former Ensemble employees.

EA BLACK BOX
(Need for Speed)
Black Box's projects and some employees were brought internal to EA Canada. As many as 300 employees lost jobs during the restructuring.

FREE RADICAL
(TimeSplitters, Star Wars: Battlefront III)
See page 34 for more.

FACTOR 5
(Lair)

IRON LORE
(Titan Quest)
Ex-Iron Lore members just started Crate Entertainment. They are shopping an Xbox 360 action game titled Black Legion.

PARADIGM
(Stuntman: Ignition)

MIDWAY AUSTIN
(BlackSite: Area 51)

STORMFRONT
(The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers)

PERPETUAL ENTERTAINMENT
(Star Trek Online)
Perpetual originally was handling the Star Trek MMO before it changed hands to current developer Cryptic. Perpetual was also working on Gods & Heroes.

PSEUDO INTERACTIVE
(Full Auto Franchise)

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II – Copyright © Games Workshop Limited 2009. Dawn of War, the Dawn of War II logo, GW, Games Workshop, the Games Workshop logo, Space Marine, 40K, Warhammer, Warhammer 40,000 Device, the Double-headed Eagle device and all associated marks, logos, places, names, creatures, races and race insignia/devices/logos/symbols, vehicles, locations, weapons, units and unit insignia, characters, products, illustrations and images from the Dawn of War II game and the Warhammer 40,000 universe are either ®, TM and/or © Games Workshop Ltd 2000-2009, variably registered in the UK and other countries around the world, and used under license. All Rights Reserved. Developed by Relic Entertainment. NVIDIA, the NVIDIA logo, GeForce and "The Way It's Meant to be Played" logo are registered trademarks and/or trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation in the USA and other countries. THQ, Relic Entertainment and their respective logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of THQ Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks, logos and copyrights are the property of their respective owners. Windows and the Windows Vista Start button are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies, and "Games for Windows" and the Windows Vista Start button logo are used under license from Microsoft.

Games for Windows LIVE

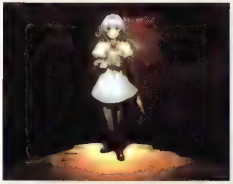
THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

Just coming up with something that's faster and prettier isn't going to be sufficient.

– Robbie Bach, president for Microsoft's entertainment and devices division, on the next console generation

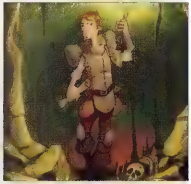


BAD

Japanese publisher AQ Interactive have cancelled the Xbox 360 RPG Cry On. The game was being developed by Blue Dragon and Lost Odyssey development studio Mistwalker – featuring Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi.

GOOD

The White House has become the House of Wii. First daughters Sasha and Malia Obama got a Wii for Christmas, and now it's hooked up in the White House. Luckily for him, the president says his bowling score in Wii Sports is better in the game than it is in real life.



GOOD

Dublin's Jolt Online Gaming is bringing back the text-based adventure Zork in Legends of Zork. This title is a persistent browser-based game where you'll explore the Great Underground Empire for loot. A release date for Legends of Zork has yet to be announced.

GOOD

Electronic Arts has put Command & Conquer Red Alert 3 for the PS3 back on the map. The Ultimate Edition of the game will appear exclusively for the system in March. This version of Red Alert 3 features bonus content, better graphics, and an unspecified promise of improved performance.

GOOD

EA Partners agreed to distribute newcomer Red Eagle Games' line of titles (including an MMO) based on of Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time book series. Red Eagle's entertainment wing also plans on producing films based on the franchise. The series' final book, *A Memory of Light*, is expected to come out this fall by Brandon Sanderson based on notes from the original author, the late Robert Jordan.

LARA CROFT'S MAKEOVER

EIDOS MULLS SERIES CHANGES

Lara Croft is famous the world over, but Lara as we know her may never be the same again. "We need to look at everything as we develop the next game," says Eidos CFO Robert Brent.

Brent attributes the oncoming change to worse-than-expected sales of Tomb Raider: Underworld, which reportedly sold 1.5 million copies worldwide in its first six weeks on sale. According to U.K.'s *The Times*, this is half a million fewer units and over $25 million dollars less than what was expected. Brent points to waning interest in the adventurer's exploits in the U.S. as the culprit. "Europe was fine, but America was not as anticipated. You would normally expect Tomb Raider sales to be split half and half between Europe and North America, but this time America was considerably below that."

Eidos is reportedly considering changing Lara's curvaceous look to apparently make her more friendly to female gamers, as well as changing the gameplay. We contacted Eidos for confirmation on this point, but received no reply as we went to print.

Ironically, it is Lara's last makeover – when the series was handed over to Crystal Dynamics (Legacy of Kain) for Tomb Raider Legend – which helped resurrect her in the video game realm. Legend sold over three million units worldwide.

Jump in.

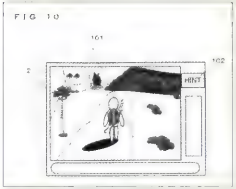
XBOX 360

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

HOW LOW WILL THE 360 GO?

Console price cuts are often fodder for rumors, and in this month's installment, industry analyst Michael Pachter takes a stab at not one, but two, price cuts. Pachter believes that the 80GB PS3 will drop $100 in April to $299, with the 60GB Xbox 360 model following suit and going to $249.



NINTENDO PLAYS THE GAME FOR YOU

Nintendo has a patent in the works, which if implemented (many patents aren't), would take the company's casual approach to a new level. Dubbed the Kind Code, this would be a way for players to jump in and out of action within a level like the scene-selection option of a DVD. The skipped portions of the game would then be watchable via pre-recorded footage, although you couldn't save after watching these clips. This new mode would also include an in-game walkthrough.

UBISOFT ON THE NEXT ROUND OF SYSTEMS

Over the past year or so we've heard various predictions about the next round of consoles – everything from rumors that Nintendo wanted to come out of the gate first to the gossip that Microsoft was already talking to developers and trying to sketch out the next Xbox. Now, Ubisoft CEO Yves Guillemot says that the company is anticipating the next round of home systems to hit in 2011 or 2012. Speaking on Ubisoft's positioning for the future, Guillemot said, "…we have now enough to help us to grow the company for not only next year but to get ready for the coming of the next generation consoles that are probably going to happen 2011, 2012."

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

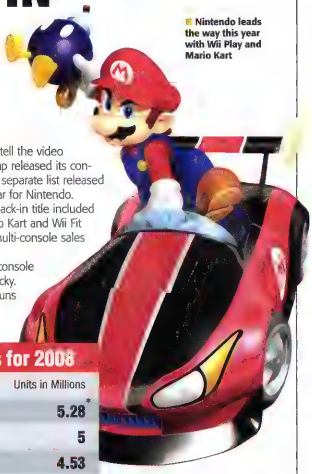
This game, published by Working Designs, is an action-RPG featuring real-time combat for the PlayStation. Released in 1997, it casts you in the role of the titular mean character who is a Reliever – a person who can enter people's dreams and free them from their nightmares. Apart from the top-down action, the game also features a number of Zelda-esque puzzles.

(Answer on page 34)

news

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

NPD RELEASES YEAR-END TOTALS



Nintendo leads the way this year with Wii Play and Mario Kart

The economy might not be great, but don't tell the video game industry. Sales tracker The NPD Group released its console sales year-end totals (PC games are a separate list released later), and – no surprise – it was another big year for Nintendo.

Even if you exclude Wii Play for being a free pack-in title included when Wii owners buy an extra Wii Remote, Mario Kart and Wii Fit hang tough with Grand Theft Auto IV – whose multi-console sales numbers put it at 5.18 million units sold.

Although both Nintendo and Microsoft boast console exclusive titles in the top 10, Sony was not so lucky. Neither LittleBigPlanet nor Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots made it onto the list.

Top Ten NPD Console Games for 2008

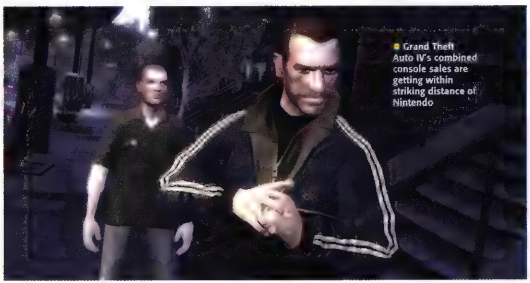
Rank	Title	Units in Millions
1	Wii Play with Remote (Wii)	5.28*
2	Mario Kart Wii (Wii)	5
3	Wii Fit (Wii)	4.53
4	Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)	4.17
5	Grand Theft Auto IV (360)	3.29
6	Call of Duty: World at War (360)	2.75
7	Gears of War 2 (360)	2.31
8	Grand Theft Auto IV (PS3)	1.89
9	Madden NFL '09 (360)	1.87
10	Mario Kart (DS)	1.65

**Wii Play is a pack-in title included with the Wii Remote*

2008 Fast NPD Facts

- Total U.S. sales of hardware, software, and accessories in 2008: $21.33 billion – up 19 percent from 2007
- Game software sales in 2008: $10.96 billion – up 26 percent from 2007
- All of Sony's systems sold fewer units in December 2008 than in December 2007

	PS2	PS3	PSP
2007	1.1 million	798,000	1.06 million
2008	410,000	726,000	1.02 million



Grand Theft Auto IV's combined console sales are getting within striking distance of Nintendo

the top 10 video game cheat codes

Sure it's lowdown, rotten, and dirty, but sometimes being a cheater is just plain fun. With the advent of game saves and downloadable content, video game cheat codes have become less prolific, but that doesn't mean they aren't an important part of our industry's history. Here's a list of some of the most important and useful codes that helped us get to that final boss.

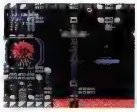
1 Konami Code Crazy – Everything

Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A, Start

Was there any question when you first saw this list that the Konami Code wouldn't be number one? No other code has been influential or popular enough to appear on bumper stickers and T-shirts. It's also the most utilized code in history. From giving extra power-ups in Gradius to granting extra lives in Contra, the full list of games that support Konami's code runs a hundred deep, and has even expanded into non-Konami titles.

2 Who is That Guy? – Metroid

Enter Justin Bailey at the Password menu



Few codes were as eye-opening as this one. Even though Metroid has several different codes – some of which are actually more useful than this one – back in the late '80s there was only one that people actually knew about. This code let Samus start the game outside of her suit and with a handful of upgrades.

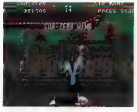
3 OMG – Doom

IDDQD

Id wasn't the first developer to use god mode, but it was the company that popularize the invincible state with its iconic first-person shooter. Rumor holds that the DQD stands for one of its programmer's college fraternities (Delta-Q-Delta), a group where each member would quit a class before receiving an F.

4 Blood Mess – Mortal Kombat

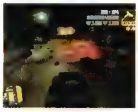
At the story line screen, press: A, B, A, C, A, B, B.



Mortal Kombat created such a fuss over violence in video games during the '90s that when it hit home consoles the blood had to be hidden behind a code. Nintendo wouldn't allow blood on its console at all, which only helped boost the Genesis sales of the title. In a way this code helped turn the console tide – if only for a time – in Sega's favor.

5 Tanks For The Memories – Grand Theft Auto III

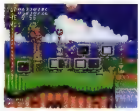
○, ○, ○, ○, ○, ○, R1, L2, L1, △, ○, △



Grand Theft Auto III influenced gaming in many meaningful ways, but it also helped carry the tradition of cheat codes into a new console generation. One of the favored pastimes in GTA has always been racking up a high wanted level then running from the feds as they tear apart the city coming after you. The best way to even the score – and add to the chaos – is to hop behind the wheel of the game's heaviest armored vehicle.

6 Bugging Out – Sonic the Hedgehog 2

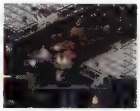
Enter 1,9,9,2,1,1,2,4 in sound test mode



Debug mode was one of the wildest codes we had seen in the early age of the Sega Genesis. No only did it allow you to place any object inside one of Sonic's levels, but you could then play the level to take advantage of your generous redesign. The code also happens to coincide with the game's release date.

7 'Till the Cows Come Home – StarCraft

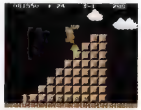
There is No Cow Level



This code was unique in the fact that it was created in response to an internet rumor about a secret cow level in the first Diablo. As the rumor snowballed, Blizzard decided to add an actual cow level to Diablo II. Before that, they poked fun at the message boards with this instant victory code for the original StarCraft.

8 Stepping Up – Super Mario Bros.

Jump repeatedly on a Koopa's back



Super Mario Bros. was famous for all the hidden secrets it packed into a level, but there is one special cheat that rises above the others. Ironically it isn't one the developers intentionally added. At the end of World 3-1, continually jump on top of a koopa's back as he comes down the stairs and watch the 1-Ups start racking up.

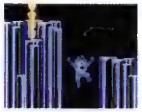
9 Play as Slick Willy – NBA Jam

Enter ARK as your name

This arcade phenomenon had a bunch of great codes, such as big head mode and being able to play with your ballers always on fire, but none were more bizarre or amusing as playing as our 42nd president. By entering certain letters at the name select, gamers got to play as Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, and Al Gore.

10 Super Jump Invincibility – Mega Man 3

Hold right on controller number two before jumping to your death



Mega Man was already super in our book, but this code turned him into a superman. While holding right on controller number two, if Mega Man jumped into a pit he essentially became invincible. This cheat also gifts Mega Man with a super high jump and the ability to walk over spikes, making the rest of the game a cakewalk.

The Rise of 3D Gaming

New PC Tech Coming to Home Consoles

According to Dreamworks Animation CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg, three revolutions have ocurred in the film industry: the introductions of sound, color, and now 3D. Katzenberg stumped for the 3D cause in a worldwide tour in advance of this spring's *Monsters vs. Aliens*. Starting with this movie, all Dreamworks animated features will be made and released in 3D (Pixar has made a similar vow). But for all of the campaigning to get the industry and the public behind 3D in theaters, he also looks further down the road to 3D's further widespread acceptance in the home, proclaiming that "3D in the home will be led by gamers."

James Cameron, director of the blockbusters *The Terminator*, *Aliens*, and *Titanic*, has been beating the 3D drum for years with his long-in-production epic, *Avatar*. He, too, is championing video games as the next level in 3D, calling them "the ultimate immersive media." He adds that the Ubisoft-developed game based on *Avatar* is already running in 3D on standard Xbox 360 development kits.

Despite all of this talk about the 3D future of gaming, many PC gamers have been playing in 3D for quite some time. "In the news, 3D is talked about like it was just invented yesterday, but in practice it's been around in gaming at least for well over 10 years," says Neil Schneider, CEO of Meant to be Seen, a 3D gaming advocacy organization. For years, graphics vendor Nvidia has offered drivers that automatically create the illusion of depth on most games, and are compatible with a wide variety of specialized monitors and glasses.

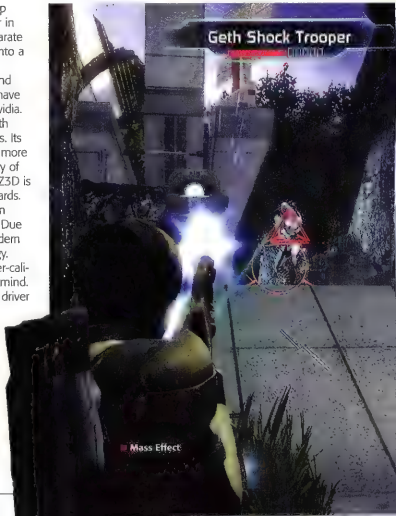
In its most basic sense, simulated 3D is made possible by layering two slightly different images (one from a left eye perspective and one from the right) on top of each other. Some type of filter either onscreen or in glasses ensures that each eye gets its intended separate message. The brain combines these mixed signals into a single stereoscopic 3D image.

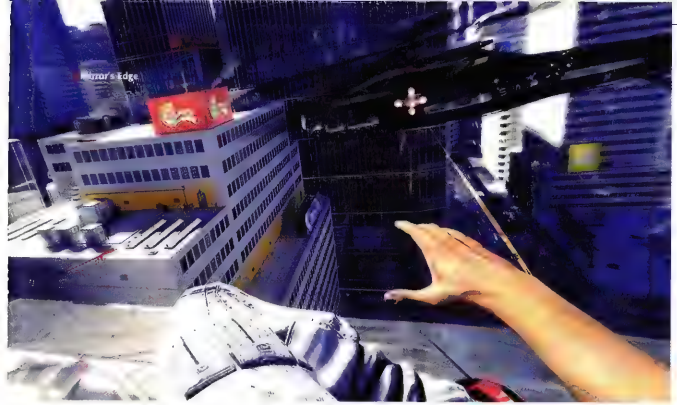
In the midst of higher resolution, decreased cost, and faster LCD refresh rates, two major hardware players have emerged with varying approaches to 3D: iZ3D and Nvidia. Over the last couple years, iZ3D has gained steam with its custom polarized LCD monitors and passive glasses. Its 22-inch display has recently dropped from $999 to a more mass-market friendly $399. The company's own library of drivers is compatible with most modern games, and iZ3D is able to run its tech on both ATI and Nvidia graphics cards.

Nvidia jumped into the hardware game with its own GeForce 3D Vision shutter glasses in January ($199). Due to its long history of crafting 3D drivers, over 350 modern games already feature 3D effects using this technology.

However, there is a clear difference between driver-calibrated 3D effects and games developed with 3D in mind. "The driver is, I think 'hack' is a strong word, but the driver is a stop-gap measure to make 3D possible today," Schneider says. "Long term, we want to see the game developers support 3D right out of the box without additional drivers being necessary."

World of Warcraft developer Blizzard recently issued a patch for Nvidia's glasses to smooth out how 3D effects are presented. This approach allows for out-of-screen effects, whereas driver-crafted 3D is more like looking into a dimensionalized world through a window that can't be breached. We played WoW and several other games with Nvidia's shut-





ter glasses and Samsung's 120Hz display, and the effect is impressive. Full high-resolution textures, spot-on colors, and a complete lack of flicker (a problem with older shutter glasses) make you feel like you've taken a step closer to the in-game world. Highlights include looking through the sniper scope in Mass Effect, taking that fateful car trip in Call of Duty 4, and riding a zipline between two buildings in Mirror's Edge. While the native 3D support gives WoW an obviously more sophisticated look, all of the games suffer from the same double-edged sword. To get a more satisfying 3D effect, it's tempting to bump up the depth settings. This puts you at a higher risk of double-image ghosting and going cross-eyed while switching from far away viewing to looking at something close up (i.e. shooting from the hip to iron sight aiming). While the experience wasn't perfect, we did find ourselves missing the depth when returning to normal gaming.

Stereoscopic 3D could be an option for console gamers as soon as this year; iZ3D had 3D prototypes at the most recent Consumer Electronics Show running on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and Wii. The company plans to release the console-specific polarized monitors in late summer. "It's exactly the same monitor that you see right now [for PCs], but the only difference is it will have a special board built in to make sure it's compatible with consoles," says David Chechelashvili, iZ3D's marketing VP. "Basically, the biggest obstacle we have with game consoles is that they have just one output. With PC you can get the graphics card with two outputs. So we need a way to design a board to take one signal and to extract it to two." This monitor-integrated board will contain iZ3D's library of 3D drivers to make it work out of the box with most already released console games.

iZ3D has reached out to all three major hardware manufacturers to mixed results. "Microsoft is being the most responsive out of the three. We are talking with them and they are ready to support us," Chechelashvili says. "Sony also realizes it's the future, but they're working alone on that," Indeed, Sony showed 3D videos of Gran Turismo 5 Prologue, Motorstorm: Pacific Rift, and Wipeout HD at CES using prototype displays combined with RealD's polarized glasses, but declined to comment for this story on any future 3D plans involving the PS3. "The Wii has always been the most simple out of the three, so its games are not as graphics intensive [which makes them] a little bit behind in 3D," says Chechelashvili. "In my opinion, it's most impressive with the games that are more graphics intensive. However, we had a frisbee game on the Wii and it was very impressive. The disc was coming out of the screen."

With or without support from the big three, iZ3D can move forward with its plans regardless since all of the 3D tech is outside of the consoles themselves. Blitz Games is taking a different approach from the software angle that would write 3D into the games themselves. Blitz co-founder and CTO Andrew Oliver describes the tech behind the company's 3D demo that was running on PS3 and Xbox 360 at December's 3D Entertainment Summit in Los Angeles. "We developed the game in normal 3D, but then rendered the whole view twice from two slightly offset cameras," Oliver explains. "These two views were then converted into one view in the required display format." Blitz's tech requires 1080p resolution to work and games must run at 60 frames per second. On top of this, gamers must be sure they have a 3D-ready DLP TV from Mitsubishi or Samsung that supports shutter glasses or certain 3D PC monitors. "We do hope to be releasing games with 3D as a feature in the menu option," Oliver says. "However, with 3D screens fairly new to the market and many different standards available, it is extremely complicated. We're talking to all the major players about how to best tackle these issues." He says that Blitz is already developing a 3D game adaptation of an upcoming animated 3D movie, and that other developers are already licensing its 3D tools.

It looks like this March's Game Developers Conference in San Francisco could be the unofficial coming out party for 3D console gaming. Oliver is giving a talk titled "Console Games are Entering a New Dimension," and Chechelashvili will offer a tease of iZ3D's plans. "I cannot talk a lot about this, but there are a couple of game developers that will be supporting 3D natively." ■ ■ ■

3D Pitfalls

- **NO UNIVERSAL STANDARD.** While PC has always been a wild frontier, home console 3D will have limited applications until Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo declare 3D standards for their systems.
- **PRICING.** Nvidia shutter glasses bundled with the required monitor cost $600. 3D-capable DLPs start at $1,500. iZ3D monitors with three sets of glasses cost $400.
- **COMFORT.** People who wear glasses may not be interested in adding a second set of glasses atop their original spectacles. Adding decent headphones into the mix creates quite the apparatus.
- **CONSUMER FATIGUE.** 3D proponents face an uphill battle against poor consumer experiences during 3D pushes in the '50s and '80s. It didn't take then. Has the technology improved enough to win over weary consumers?

POLARIZED:

WHAT IT IS: You may have already tried out polarized "passive" glasses just like these to see movies like *Beowulf* and *My Bloody Valentine* in 3D. These particular specs come courtesy of RealD, whose 3D tech appears in over 1,400 theaters worldwide. Each lens in the glasses is polarized to only let in specific light from the display intended for each eye, achieving the stereoscopic effect required for 3D.

HOW IT'S USED: iZ3D uses polarized glasses like these in combination with its custom 22" monitor to deliver 3D effects in PC games. This display requires two video cables (DVI or VGA) connected to the same PC. These separated images are shown on two separate LCD displays within the monitor that are layered on top of each other.

ANAGLYPH:

WHAT IT IS: These two-color, paper glasses have been around for decades and their less-than-stellar color distortion and ghosting are what many people associate with 3D. Cyan and red (or green and red in this case) images are overlaid and slightly offset. While using these glasses, each eye only sees one, which the brain translates to 3D.

HOW IT'S USED: Anyone play Rad Racer on NES with these bad boys? Blech. While this is the easiest form of 3D to pull off, it isn't much of a factor in modern 3D gaming.

SHUTTER GLASSES:

WHAT IT IS: These "active" glasses receive a signal from an infrared emitter synched to the screen refresh rate that tells the lenses to alternately darken and become transparent so that only one eye receives information from the display at any given time in imperceptibly rapid succession.

HOW IT'S USED: Nvidia's recently released GeForce 3D Vision setup utilizes this tech in combination with specialized 120Hz monitors from Samsung and Viewsonic to provide 60 frames per second to each eye. Shutter glasses also work with many currently available 3D-ready DLP TVs from Mitsubishi and Samsung.

AUTOSTEREOSCOPIC:

WHAT IT IS: See 3D without using glasses! Using a parallax barrier or lenticular lenses, displays direct the light from alternating vertical columns of pixels to either eye to simulate 3D. Think of it kind of like vertical blinds where every other slat aims sunlight at your left eye and the others point at your right.

HOW IT'S USED: Some autostereoscopic monitors have appeared on the market, but the viewing angle is limited and vertical resolution is essentially cut in half to accomplish the 3D effect. To counter this, Philips has unveiled a 56-inch Quad Full HD 3D Display (above) that features an over-the-top 3840x2160 resolution to counter the vertical loss and a wider 160-degree viewing angle. Philips' display was built mainly to show off 3D ads to passersby in airports, malls, and other public places where users can't be expected to have polarized glasses on them at all times. The estimated $25,000 price tag will scare off even the most tech-savvy gamer.

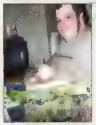
TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

ROBERT SIWIAK
Producer, TimeGate Studios (Section 8)

1 **X-COM: UFO Defense – PC**
2 **Chrono Trigger – SNES**
3 **Battlefield 2 – PC**
4 **GoldenEye 007 – N64**
5 **Warcraft II – PC**



READER

JOSEPH MARTEL
Clinton Twp, MI

1 **Final Fantasy XII – PS2**
2 **Pokémon series – Multi**
3 **Jak 3 – PS2**
4 **Blue Dragon – Xbox 360**
5 **Halo 3 – Xbox 360**

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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

TOP TEN

Lists…Everybody Loves Lists…

Top 10 Things To Do In The Home Beta

10 Ask everyone "r u girl???" If yes, follow up with "r u hawt?"
9 Wait patiently (Whooo!)
8 Watch trailers readily available in better resolution on the Internet
7 Dance in celebration of finally getting to play an arcade cabinet
6 Hang out in game-themed rooms instead of playing those games
5 Buy fake furniture for your fake house… but with real money!
4 Have stilted text-only conversations with other losers
3 Watch Netflix streaming movies while downloading the Central Plaza (on another TV hooked up to Xbox Live, of course)
2 Try to make a guy that doesn't look like he belongs at a Panic at the Disco concert
1 Log out

Name That Game Answer: Alundra

STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT III'S LAST STAND

EX-DEVELOPER FREE RADICAL STRUGGLES WITH PROJECT

■ This Star Wars: Battlefront III character art from 2007 was created by artist Richard Smith. The game and the art likely went through changes since that time, but here is a look at one of the title's new characters

Wondering what might have been is an easy question when talking about the closing of famed U.K. developer Free Radical. The now-defunct studio behind the TimeSplitters franchise was well regarded, and our interest was piqued all the more since they had been working on Star Wars: Battlefront III for close to two years when they closed their doors. Recently a video surfaced showing gameplay from the title, but despite the excitement it generated, a source close to the project told Game Informer that all was not well.

The video that was leaked online – as poor quality as it was – highlighted the series' emphasis on wide-open battles and seamless transitions between ground and air combat and exteriors and interiors. Battlefront III would have spanned a wide range of characters and locations throughout all six of the movies (in both first- and third-person camera perspectives), including Jedi duels, a rancor, and epic space battles. Early artwork for the game even depicted an old Obi-Wan Kenobi who had turned to the dark side of the Force.

As tantalizing as all this sounds, Free Radical's Battlefront III dream was having trouble being realized. The video footage leaked online was supposedly captured from the PC version of the title, and even that wasn't an accurate portrayal of the true state of the project. It was, in fact, a mess. The design was said to be overly ambitious, aiming to support 100-player online battles with the ability to seamlessly transition between ground and space combat. Free Radical shrank this number as development progressed due to the technical limitations it encountered, and Game Informer has heard that this number fell to 16 players, but even this was too much for the console versions to handle. To counter the falling number of human-controlled players, Free Radical tried to implement an AI NPC system that also proved too unwieldy.

Regardless of the state of the project during Free Radical's tenure, we may yet see some version of Battlefront III. Rumor is that Oxford studio Rebellion – developers of Star Wars Renegade Squadron for the PSP – has been handed the development reins. We shall have to wait and see if Rebellion's vision of the project succeeds where Free Radical could not.

EverQuest

Apprentice Fisherman Tnexus the Riftwalker of the Planes, Scoundrel of the Oathbreakers

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

EverQuest: Seeds of Destruction

VITAL STATISTICS

Name:
Ryan Tirrell

Hometown:
Los Angeles, CA

Age:
25

Guild:
Hand of Ka

Server:
Prexus

Playtime:
30-40 hours/week [peak]; 10-15 hours/week [current]

Ryan Tirrell

Favorite Raid Encounter:
Portal of War

Accomplishments:

The text above is not a typo; Ryan Tirrell has accumulated that many titles for his Ranger in EverQuest, Tnexus. A hardcore EverQuest player for over 10 years running, Tirrell was named 2008 Player of the Year by Sony Online Entertainment. This netted him complimentary airfare, limo rides, and an all-access pass to that year's EverQuest FanFaire. He is a longstanding figure in the EverQuest community, being recognized as a class correspondent (and later a community leader) for the Ranger class on the official community site, as well as a Ranger class administrator on the popular unofficial EQOutrider fansite. For years, Tirrell has been an officer in his guild, the Hand of Ka, and led successful raids on much of EverQuest's prodigious raid content. Tirrell's main character, Tnexus the Ranger, boasts an impressive collection of rare items, including a Mosscovered Twig, Sceptre of Destruction, Mask of Tinkering, and a Staff of Forbidden Rites.

Sticking To EverQuest:

"After 10 years, I still have so many friends and a lot of people that I see as family. We still play. We still have adventures together. We still try to gear up," Tirrell says. "Even if we don't go out and adventure somewhere, we just talk and hang out and chat. It's something to do, and it's practically free. And even after 10 years there is still stuff I haven't completed in the game that I still want to do."

Ninja Looting:

One day in 2001, Tirrell randomly came across a rare spawn, Lodizal, that drops a quest item he wanted. Unfortunately, the rest of Hand of Ka was deep in the Plane of Sky and couldn't make the trip to help him destroy the beast. Tirrell looked on as rival groups formed and engaged the monster. However, they failed and the last of them fell as they were luring some hostile gnolls to assist in the battle. By random chance, the monster fled due to low health just as it wiped out the gnolls. With little to lose, Tirrell finished off the boss's last sliver of health by himself and claimed rewards intended to be split among 40 or more players.

Naturally, the rival groups were rather upset at this kill-stealing. "At first people thought I had stolen their kill," recounts Tirrell. When he handed over the loot (minus the quest item he was primarily after, of course), all fences were mended. Tirrell laughs, "They gave me a nice dagger as a thank-you for that."

Life Outside of EverQuest:

Tirrell is pursuing a career in technical theater, where he works with electrics and dabbles in stage management. The hours are inconsistent at times, which suits Tirrell's EverQuest binges just fine. "In theater, since a lot of the stuff happens at night, there are points where I can't really raid for like two months, but then I'll have the following two months to raid and play to my heart's content," he says.

Best Moment:

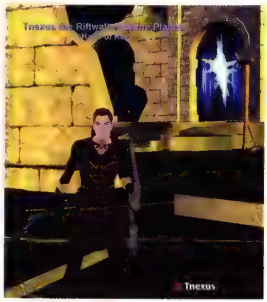
Of all the memories created by 10 years of EverQuest, Tirrell fondly recalls the battle against Overlord Mata'Muram. "He's one of the toughest encounters in the game, so when you actually beat him it's a huge accomplishment." Everyone currently in that expansion's areas learns of this heroic exploit, as well. "It's announced that you've beaten him. We've only done it once, but it was one of my very favorite moments in EverQuest," Tirrell says. "When you feel you've lead 50-some other individuals to all work together as one collective unit to beat a final boss or big raid encounter, it's just very satisfying."

What Should Be In The Next Expansion?

"I'm hoping that they would continue some of the lines they've done with the dragons and such," Tirrell declares. "I'm kind of open. I like a bunch of the lore, and they could take it in a whole lot of other ways. I do also hope they eventually come back and revisit Firiona Vie and that whole storyline. There were some events a couple of years ago and you don't quite find out what happened, but they leave the door open for some big battle at some point."

Other Games:

Tirrell primarily enjoys console games in his non-EverQuest gaming time, including Zelda, God of War, BioShock, and Super Smash Bros. "I tried out a few other MMOs, like City of Heroes and Guild Wars, but I just kept coming back to EQ," he notes.



Tnexus

impulse

BY MATT MILLER

Fallout 3

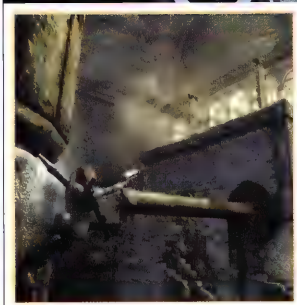
UNLIMITED ENABLED

Each month, this is where you'd normally look for the latest news on Live Arcade, PlayStation Network, and WiiWare titles. However, the ever-growing library of downloadable content includes another major component in the form of expanded content for existing retail releases. This month, I'm highlighting my favorite downloadable packs from recent weeks, as well as some exclusive first glimpses of content coming in the next few months. While prices are still in flux, most of the download packs fall around $10.

Fallout travels to Pittsburgh, Mirror's Edge goes surreal, and the Prince makes amends. DLC is on the rise.

Tomb Raider Underworld

Xbox 360



Beneath the Ashes, the frequently rumored first expansion to Lara Croft's latest adventure, will release in February 10. The level is set in a newly uncovered labyrinth of caverns beneath the destroyed ruins of Croft Manor. Along with the sprawling level, Lara gets six new costumes and another 125 achievement points.

The other 125 expanded points are likely being saved for Lara's Shadow, a second expansion set to release on March 10. Rumors indicate a new playable character for this second pack, but further details remain under wraps.

Fallout 3

Xbox 360, PC

Xbox 360 and PC players (sorry PS3 owners) of Bethesda's post-apocalyptic masterpiece have a wealth of new content to explore throughout 2009. First up is Operation: Anchorage, which focuses on a computer simulation of the liberation of Alaska from the Chinese army as depicted in Fallout lore. Snowy northern environments in a time before the entire world was blown up give the gameplay a totally different vibe.

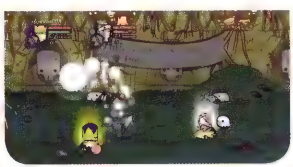
The second pack, called The Pitt, is set in the irradiated city of Pittsburgh. The city avoided a direct nuclear bombardment, but decades of decay have taken a heavy toll on the once industrialized metropolis. Raiders now govern a slave-fighting ring in which the player gets involved. Perhaps the new AutoAxe weapon (shown above) will help solve any disagreements that come up.

Little is known about the third DLC pack entitled Broken Steel, but it's not hard to imagine a conflict involving the familiar Brotherhood of Steel. Apparently, this third pack somehow alters the original game ending, and offers a new continuation of the story through some intriguing twist. We do know Broken Steel will expand the current level cap up to 30 – a welcome announcement for players who've maxed out their existing character's abilities.

ONESHOTS

Burnout Paradise • PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

This long-lived racer is showing no signs of slowing down. The downloadable party pack updates your old copy of Paradise to gain the new content otherwise only found in the new Burnout: The Ultimate Box (see our review on page 85). What's up after that? Big Surf Island, a new area featuring crazy jumps and insanely fast races, is set to release in the first half of this year.



> Castle Crashers • Xbox 360

Last year's most played Live Arcade game has received its first piece of expanded content. While there are no new levels, you finally get to play as the blustering King, whose magic can heal characters. The new sword and lollipop make great level one weapons, and a baby seal is available as a new animal orb.

> Far Cry 2 • Xbox 360

The four new multiplayer maps packed into Ubisoft's first expansion to their African epic should be worthwhile for dedicated skirmishers, but even single-player devotees may want to check out the three new vehicles and four new weapons (including the silenced shotgun and crossbow) that come with the pack.

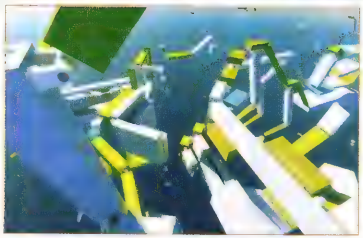
Fable 2
Xbox 360

Knothole Island released several weeks ago, and is worth a look for big fans of Lionhead's stellar action/RPG. While the pack only takes a couple of hours to finish, it includes a gorgeous new landmass to explore and three major new quests to complete. The addition of new clothing options (including an armored knight option) as well as new weapons, augments, and appearance-altering potions should give you some cool accoutrements to drag back into Albion.

Gears of War 2
Xbox 360

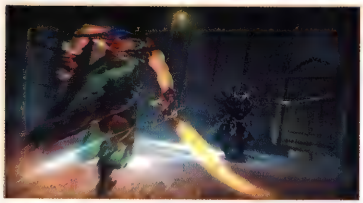
Two downloadable multiplayer map packs entitled Flashback and Combustible dramatically expand the number of multiplayer maps for the game, and a recent title update adds 175 new achievement points for the new content. Combustible delivers three totally new environments. Our favorite is a battlefield called Flood, where dangerous pools of emulsion overwhelm the stage, forcing the action into pitched conflicts near the center of the board. Meanwhile, the Flashback pack (which came with the game if you purchased it new) adds five classic maps from the game's predecessor into the mix. Perhaps more importantly, the free title update has addressed a wealth of exploits and balancing issues, making a return to the game a worthwhile proposition if you were frustrated by early cheaters right after launch.

Mirror's Edge
PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

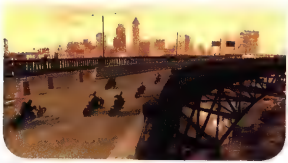


For many players, their favorite part of Mirror's Edge didn't unlock until they completed each level to earn its time trial. DICE got the message, and released a wild-looking new pack of content focused on nine races spread over seven surreal maps at the end of January. The abstract colors and shapes of the new pack look almost like a whole new game, but one that is drawn in the artistically minimalist style of the original game. PlayStation 3 players will receive one additional map for free as well.

Prince of Persia
PlayStation 3, Xbox 360



The end of February promises an expansion to both the storyline and gameplay of Ubisoft's fantasy adventure. The Underground Palace is a brand new region to explore, and I'm told it should amount to at least two full hours of new platforming and combat. The two luckless protagonists find themselves locked in the corrupted compound, and must seek an escape. Elika gains a new power that lets her temporarily reconstruct shattered structures, and the Prince has an added sprint attack to help confront the new shape-shifting enemies he'll run into. Complete the expansion to unlock the prototype character models of both the Prince and Elika for use in the game.

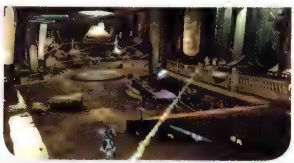


> **Grand Theft Auto IV** • Xbox 360

The Lost and Damned pack is such a sweeping expansion to the existing game content that we opted to cover it in a more complete preview later in the magazine. Make sure and check out the full write-up on page 56.

> **Rock Band 2** • PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii

At long last, owners of the Wii version of Rock Band 2 can download new songs. As of this printing, 56 songs (20 for free) were available for download, including everything from Boston to Nine Inch Nails. Meanwhile, the 360 and PlayStation 3 have had some classic hits show up recently, including the Steve Miller Band and Roy Orbison.



> **Star Wars: The Force Unleashed** • PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

The Jedi Temple expansion sends Vader's apprentice back to the ruined remnants of the Jedi Temple on Coruscant, searching for clues to his father's identity. The great new level also comes packed with several new character skins, including favorites like Mace Windu and Darth Maul.

DAVE SHIPPY

VICE PRESIDENT, INTRINSITY

>> At IBM, Dave Shippy lead the team that designed Sony's Cell processor. Two years in, a shocking deal between Microsoft and IBM resulted in the team's chip being also used to power the Xbox 360, Sony's biggest rival. This tale of corporate betrayal and technological derring-do is detailed in his new book *The Race for a New Game Machine*. <<

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1983 ▶ School Daze

Shippy receives his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the University of Kentucky

1985 ▶ Big Blue

Upon graduation, Shippy gets a job working on designing mainframe processors for the computer giant IBM in New York

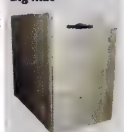
1988 ▶ Higher Ed

While at IBM, Shippy completes his master's degree in computer engineering at another basketball powerhouse, Syracuse University

1989 ▶ Home Computing

Shippy moves to IBM's Austin, TX facility to do pioneering home PC work on the company's new RISC PowerPC chip architecture

1997 ▶ Big Mac



Still in Austin, Shippy helps design the powerful PowerPC G5 chip, which was used in Apple's very popular line of Macintosh desktop and later the stylish iBook laptop. The chip is used to this day, in adapted form, in the Nintendo Wii

2001 ▶ Into the Cell

After leaving the company for a few years, Shippy is recruited back to work on a joint venture between IBM, Sony, and Toshiba to develop the Cell processor for the PlayStation 3

2009 ▶ Author! Author!

Shippy publishes a book, *The Race for a New Game Machine*, which details his team's struggle to develop the core processor that was used in both the PS3 and Xbox 360

What was the appeal of taking on such a huge and ambitious project as the Cell?
I looked at it and it was really a once-in-a-career opportunity. I knew that it was a high visibility product and that it would be leading edge technology. We'd be pushing the edge. I could really put my name on history, working on a start-from-scratch design that was this supercomputer on a chip.

The way that the Cell was designed was a different approach from conventional chips. Could you talk a little bit about how that developed and how successful it was as a design?
It really started with Sony. Ken Kutaragi came to IBM and we showed him all the processors in our portfolio, including the Power4, which I had worked on. Ken said, "I don't want anything you have; I want something new." That led to us investigating new technologies at IBM to push this high frequency at a low power, but also develop a multi-core solution. What ultimately got designed was this new multiprocessor environment where you have the PowerPC core, which has its own set of instructions, and you have the SPUs, which have a brand-new instruction set. I think, in the end, the Cell architecture was very unique and successful in what it set out to achieve.

it definitely changed the dynamics of the design center. There were a lot of secret IBM meetings at that point. As soon as it was announced publicly that IBM had been awarded the Xbox 360 contract, our partners at Sony and Toshiba started catching on that they may be designing their competition's processor chip. Then they started having a lot of secret meetings. There was an air of distrust in the design center.

Ultimately though, since the chip was started as a collaboration between Toshiba, Sony, and IBM, those employees really did do a lot of work on their biggest competitor's system.
They did. It was a joint effort. There were IBM, Sony, and Toshiba engineers working on the initial PowerPC core. That was designed for the Cell. But when Microsoft came in and said, "We want something similar, but with all these extra enhancements," we convinced the Sony and Toshiba partners that we wanted to do this one, common core that had these new features and they agreed to that. Those same engineers that had been working on that original design worked on this new common core that went into both processors. The interesting thing was that, even though they eventually figured it all out, they were really great about it. They just wanted to deliver a high-quality, leading edge design and it really didn't matter whether it was for a Sony box or Microsoft box. They put their 100 percent effort into it, despite knowing that it was going into their competitor's box.

I think there were compromises and tradeoffs. It was pretty equal. It was a tough road of serving multiple masters. We actually formed this committee within IBM that had people representing the PlayStation side and people representing the Xbox side. Requests came into the committee saying they needed this new feature for the Xbox or a new feature for the PlayStation. We weighed it out, and all in all, it was pretty equal in terms of what got in and what didn't, but there were certainly compromises.

Towards the end of the book, the atmosphere at IBM seemed pretty poisonous, with different factions being for Sony or for Microsoft. How difficult was that experience and what did you learn?
It was a very complex corporate environment and there were a lot of politics within IBM. I would say that it was a fairly painful time. We got to a point where we literally had a product status review every single day with somebody. We had a status review for the Xbox executives, for the PlayStation executives, for the IBM executives. I came out of it with the understanding that it's very difficult to serve multiple masters. The amazing thing is that we still delivered this high performance, new technology in a record-breaking schedule in spite of these issues and all these people watching our every move.

All of a sudden, this Microsoft thing came in. For a lot of us, it felt like we were betraying our partners.

The dramatic turn in the book happens when your boss comes to you and says that IBM has agreed to allow Microsoft to use the core you were developing for the PS3 Cell chip in their Xbox 360. Suddenly, you're working with Sony's main competitor. How did you feel about that personally? Did it cause dissention in the team?
Absolutely. The initial reaction was shock. We'd been working for two years with Sony and Toshiba in the design center. They were our partners and friends. All of a sudden, this Microsoft thing came in. For a lot of us, it felt like we were betraying our partners. They were asking us to design a chip for our competitor. I had to shift out of that very quickly, because I had been given a job to do. That was to satisfy both these customers. I went to my team and said, "Hey, let's get over this. It's no different than when Intel has a chip and they sell it to HP and Dell and it goes into two different personal computers." I tried to get my team in the mentality that this was the best thing for IBM. But

Microsoft used your processor in a more traditional way than the Cell. Looking at how the processor was used in both systems, which one was the more effective or powerful?
I think they're fairly equal. The interesting thing is that the PowerPC that's common to both is used in completely different ways. If you look at the CPU chip for the 360 and PS3, and the programming models and architecture, they came up with completely different solutions. And yet they use this same common core.

Did having to serve two companies' needs – Sony and Microsoft – result in compromises that negatively affected the chip's performance for either console?

Having dealt very closely with Sony and Microsoft's executives, how would you characterize their differences in philosophy and approach in the game console business?
My first interaction with Microsoft and Robbie Bach, who was head of the division, was when he came in. Bach was maniacally focused on Christmas of 2005. They were very willing to take risks. They had backup plans upon backup plans. They always said, "Anything you can't fix on hardware, we'll fix in software." They were aggressive and they hit Christmas 2005. On the Sony side, they started two years earlier and had plans to get it out on Christmas 2005, and we delivered the CPU chip [in time]. That really wasn't what held up the launch, there were other factors that came in, including the graphics chip and Blu-ray and not having games that caused it to slip to Christmas 2006. I would say they were more conservative in management style. That led to some of the delays.

Photo: Sarah Kerver

Dave Shippy played an instrumental role in developing the chips that power all three of the major consoles in the marketplace

THE MAN WHO POWERED THE PS3 AND XBOX 360

FINAL FIGHT

GI goes three rounds with the hottest new arcade sticks to see which one deserves to be crowned king of fighters

VS.

HORI REAL ARCADE PRO.EX

AVERAGE

Hori has always been an exceptional purveyor of arcade sticks, and it hasn't changed its tune recently. In fact, that may be the problem. The joystick is smooth and its eight face buttons feel solid, but it lacks the bells and whistles serious fighting fans are looking for like turbo and programmable buttons. The headset jack, which juts out too high from the board, is positioned so close to your left hand that you might smack into the cord a few times while playing online. It may lack some the extra features the Mad Catz stick has, but if you are looking to save a few bucks the Pro.EX is a perfectly functional arcade experience.

[illegible] • www.[illegible].com

MAD CATZ ARCADE FIGHTSTICK: TOURNAMENT EDITION

VERY GOOD

The Mad Catz officially branded Street Fighter IV stick beats Hori in nearly every category. The joystick feels tighter and the buttons have a slightly shorter throw, which makes them seem more responsive. While this stick also lacks a programmable feature, we appreciate Mad Catz's sleeker, modern design, the cord hideaway, and its turbo functionality (complete with a lock so you don't turn it on or off accidentally). The only thing that might annoy some is the location of the start button (it was moved to the back of the box), but we liked having it out of our way. Mad Catz is the way to go if you're looking for that true arcade feel without leaving the house. For those not worried about the authentic arcade guts, Mad Catz also has a trimmed-down model available at a reduced cost ($70 for PS3, $80 for 360).

$149.99 • www.madcatz.com

absurd

3RD SPACE GAMING VEST

MEDIOCRE

Peripheral makers manufacture all kinds of gloves, goggles, pads, and rumble devices in an attempt to make games feel more immersive. TN Game's 3rd Space Gaming Vest uses a compressed air system to deliver up to five pounds of force feedback across your torso, and it already works with dozens of games including Call of Duty 4, Crysis, and World of Warcraft. The effect is jolting but not painful, and the system syncs up well with the onscreen action. Too bad the vest comes with such a hefty price and is so noisy, cumbersome, and ridiculous looking. If you don't mind gearing up before you play, the 3rd Space Gaming Vest isn't as bad as many of the other gaming gimmicks out there.

$169.99 • tngames.com

toyz

WATCHMEN PROP REPLICAS

With all the hype surrounding the new Watchmen movie, it's reasonable to want to own a piece of the action. DC Direct has three high-quality pieces of memorabilia ready for comic fan consumption: a framed set of the Comedian's guns and dogtags, a 1:24 scale model of Nite Owl's Ship, and a replica of Rorschach's grappling gun and mask created from the actual digital files used for the movie.

$295.00-325.00 • www.dccomics.com/dcdirect

etc.

REDBUBBLE T-SHIRTS

If you haven't checked out redbubble.com yet, you should. The site is filled with all kinds of crazy t-shirt designs. Each shirt comes in a variety of sizes and colors. We recommend You Can't Park Here Sir! and Arcade Henge, both designed by the talented rubyred.

$26.53 • www.redbubble.com

peripheral

PLAYSTATION 3 AC ADAPTOR

It's about time we got one of these handy little chargers. Sony's new first-party AC Adaptor works great for charging PS3 controllers, Bluetooth headsets, Sony's new wireless keypad, or any other compatible device that uses a USB connector. It also lets you charge two devices at once without turning on your PS3. The full set includes a 4.92-foot mini-USB cable and a 6.56-foot AC cord.

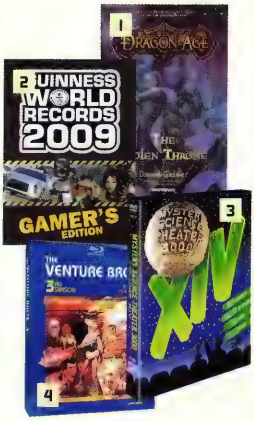
$24.99 • www.us.playstation.com

toys

STREET FIGHTER IV FIGURES

It's Street Fighter madness. You probably have a dozen Street Fighter figures buried somewhere in your house already, but like versions of the second game, you can never have enough Street Fighter. This Series One set from NECA, based on the new game, includes Ken, Ryu, and Crimson Viper. Each figure stands 7" tall. We only wonder why NECA didn't include the best character from the Street Fighter mythos, Dan.

$14.99 • www.necaonline.com



1. *Dragon Age: The Stolen Throne*

After his mother's assassination, a young rebel rises up to free his country from the rule of a foreign tyrant in this paperback prequel to BioWare's hot new RPG.

$14.95 • www.tor-forge.com

2. *Guinness World Records Gamer's Edition 2009*

Bone up on your useless video game trivia with this game-specific version of everyone's favorite record book.

$21.98 • gamers.guinnessworldrecords.com

3. *Mystery Science Theater 3000: Volume XIV*

The only time talking during a movie isn't annoying is when the boys on the Satellite of Love are aping cinematic classics like *Final Justice* and *Manhunt in Space*.

$59.99 • www.shoutfactorystore.com

4. *The Venture Bros.: Third Season* on Blu-ray

The third season of Adult Swim's hilarious parody of *Johnny Quest* delves deeper into the histories of its goofy but lovable characters.

$44.98 • www.adultswim.com

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat

Halo Wars – 03/03

03

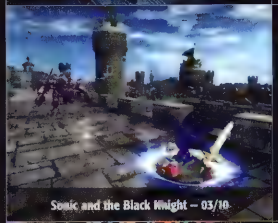
NEW RELEASES
- BattleForge – PC
- Brain Challenge Deluxe – DS
- Brave: A Warrior's Tale – 360, Wii, PSP
- Brave: Shaman's Challenge – DS
- Damnation – PS3, 360, PC
- Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard – PS3, 360
- Empire: Total War – PC
- EndWar – PC
- Gardening Mama – DS
- Halo Wars – 360
- H.A.W.X. – PS3, 360
- Jumpgate – PC
- Littlest Pet Shop: Spring – DS
- Major League Baseball 2K9 – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP
- MLB 09: The Show – PS3, PS2
- Peggle – DS
- PopCap Arcade Hits Volume 2 – 360
- Scrabble – PSP, DS
- Shellshock 2: Blood Trails – PS3, 360, PC
- Star Ocean: The Last Hope – 360
- Storm of War: Battle of Britain – PC
- *Wonder Woman* (DC Animated Movie) – Blu-Ray, DVD

05

Hironobu Sakaguchi, the mastermind behind Final Fantasy, Chrono Trigger, and Lost Odyssey, is hard at work on his next project. Fans can follow along with the creation of this game on Sakaguchi's blog at www.mistwalkercorp.com/en. The blog chronicles the challenges of game development, and also shows us how he unwinds – by playing with LEGOs. Be sure to check out the gallery for what is believed to be concept art for his new endeavors.

06

Zack Snyder's super hero epic *Watchmen* will give theaters nerd cred today. We hear that DC Comics is spinning this movie off into a comic series or something. Here's hoping that they get the rights to use the likenesses of the actors. They better not change the story too much.



Sonic and the Black Knight – 03/10

10

NEW RELEASES
- Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor – PC
- Docomodake Boing! – DS
- Grey's Anatomy – Wii, DS, PC
- MadWorld – Wii
- Mario Tennis – Wii
- My Horse and Me 2: Riding for Gold – Wii, DS
- My Sims Party – Wii, DS
- New Play Control! Pikmin – Wii
- Resistance: Retribution – PSP
- Samurai Shodown Anthology – Wii, PSP
- Sonic and the Black Knight – Wii
- *South Park: Season 12* – Blu-Ray, DVD
- Trivial Pursuit – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2
- Zubo – DS

11

Bruce Wayne is dead, fried crispier than Colonel Sanders' original recipe. His death is bringing an end to all Batman series, including related titles like Robin and Nightwing. A new three-part series, titled Battle for the Cowl, will take their place, leading up to what is rumored to be a different character wearing the Batman suit. Will it be Dick Grayson? Jason Todd? Catwoman? You'll have to read this series to find out!

13

Holy crap! Resident Evil 5 releases today for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360! Shut down the schools! Board up your doors! Stock up on red and green plants! If you're not playing this game throughout the weekend, you're obviously stupid.

Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars – 03/17

17

NEW RELEASES
- Cardio Boxing – DS
- Dream Day: Wedding Destination – DS
- Flower, Sun and Rain – DS
- Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars – DS
- Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure – DS
- Heroes Over Europe – PS3, 360
- Legends of Wrestlemania – PS3, 360
- Lux Pain – DS
- Marble Saga Kororinpa – Wii
- My Pet Shop – DS
- Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 – Wii
- Ready 2 Rumble – Wii
- Rune Factory: Frontier – Wii
- Spore: Galactic Adventures – PC
- Sukoden Tierkreis – DS
- Trackmania – DS
- We Ski & Snowboard – Wii
- Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume – DS
- Yu-Gi-Oh! 4D's Stardust Accelerator – DS

19

Square Enix's long-running Play Arts series returns this month with three figures from Final Fantasy: Crisis Core – Aerith, Zack, and Cloud.

20

Nicolas Cage, who has a lot of experience with disasters (*Ghost Rider*, *Next*, *Bonkai Dangerous*), stars in the disaster movie, *Knowing*. Apparently he can foresee the deaths of people. Maybe someday he'll learn how to read so that he can avoid bad scripts in the future. You know what they say: knowing is half the battle. The other half is Nicolas Cage.

Dragon Age Origins – 03/24

24

NEW RELEASES
- Broken Sword – Wii, DS
- Dragon Age Origins – PC
- Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 2 – PS3, 360, PS2
- Dynasty Warriors: Strikeforce – PSP
- Heroes Over Europe – PC
- Imagine: Family Doctor – DS
- Infinite Space – DS
- Jake Power: Handyman – DS
- My Fashion Studio: Paris Collection – DS
- Ninja Blade – 360
- Phantasy Star Portable – PSP
- Pokémon Platinum Version – DS
- Sacred 2: Fallen Angel – PS3, 360
- Stormrise – PS3, 360, PC
- Warlord: Weapons of Fate – PS3, 360, PC

25

Secret Invasion was awesome, and the follow-up event Dark Reign is proving to be just as tasty. The best part of the series thus far is unexpectedly found in the new Punisher series. Frank Castle wants Norman Osborn dead. How far will he go to see this through? Issue three hits stands this month, so snatch it up, but not before picking up the outstanding back issues.

27

Animated films not made by Pixar are usually garbage, but this one has a shot at not sucking. It's about – surprise, surprise – monsters fighting aliens. It's basically the plot of *Hellboy* with a few poop jokes thrown in to make your idiot kids laugh.

Monsters Vs Aliens

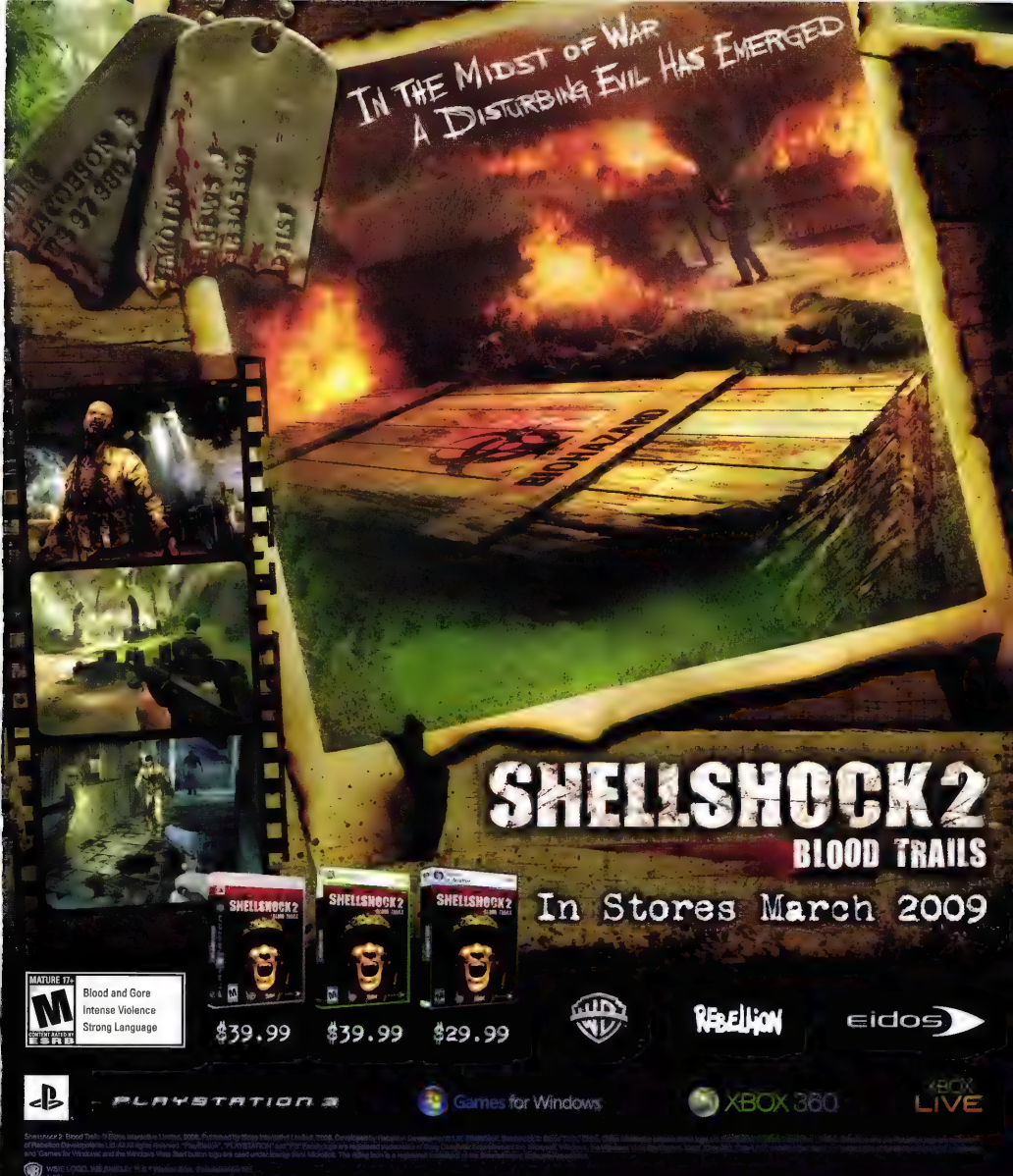
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time – 03/31

31

NEW RELEASES
- Don King Boxing – Wii, DS
- Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time – Wii, DS
- Guitar Hero: Metallica – PS3, 360
- Touch Mechanic – DS
- Velvet Assassin – 360, PC

march

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

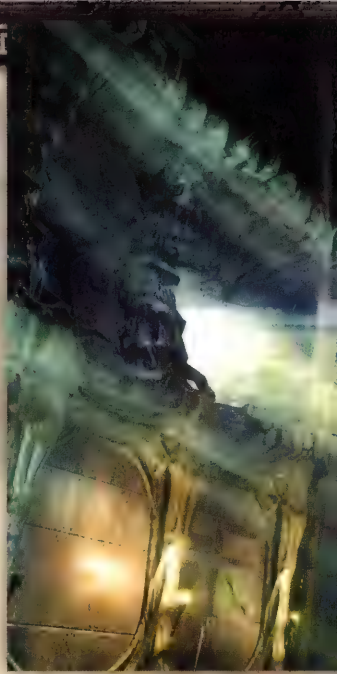

In The Midst of War
A Disturbing Evil Has Emerged
SHELLSHOCK2
BLOOD TRAILS
In Stores March 2009
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
$39.99
$39.99
$29.99
REBELLION
eidos
PLAYSTATION 3
Games for Windows
XBOX 360
XBOX LIVE

PLAYSTATION 3
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** SONY SANTA MONICA
> **RELEASE** TBA

KRATOS STANDS BEFORE A LEGION OF ZEUS' UNDEAD CHAMPIONS IN THE MIDDLE OF A ROCKY FOREST. THE GHOULISH SOLDIERS HAVE BEEN COMMANDED TO KILL THE LEGENDARY GHOST OF SPARTA, BUT WITH HIS BLADES OF CHAOS IN HAND, HE ISN'T GOING DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT. AS HIS GROTESQUE FOES DRAW CLOSER, KRATOS SPRINGS INTO ACTION – THE DEGRADED AND SHAMBLING ARMY IS NO MATCH FOR A FORMER GOD, BUT EVERY WALKING CORPSE HE EVISCERATES IS REPLACED BY ANOTHER. TO COMPLICATE THE BATTLE FURTHER, A HULKING CYCLOPS BURSTS THROUGH THE TREES, GIVING THE UNDEAD WARRIORS AN OPPORTUNITY TO PILE ON TOP OF KRATOS. THESE PITIFUL FOES ONLY DELAY KRATOS' INEVITABLE VENGEANCE; HE BURSTS FROM UNDERNEATH

GOD OF WAR II

THE SERVANTS OF ZEUS AND RUNS TOWARD THE CYCLOPS. LEAPING ONTO ITS SHOULDERS, HE DOES NOT PLUNGE HIS BLADE DIRECTLY INTO ITS EYE AS USUAL. INSTEAD, HE HOLDS ON AND STICKS A BLADE INTO THE BEAST'S NECK. IT SHRIEKS IN PAIN, INADVERTENTLY SWINGING ITS CLUB INTO ZEUS' MINIONS. WITH A YELL, KRATOS JABS HIS BLADE IN FURTHER, AND THE CREATURE PLOWS FORWARD, BOWLING OVER ALL OPPOSITION. THE CYCLOPS AND ITS GRIM RIDER RUN INTO THE FOREST, WHICH HAPPENS TO BE SITUATED ON THE BACK OF THE TITAN GAIA, WHO IS CLIMBING MOUNT OLYMPUS TO END THE GODS ONCE AND FOR ALL.



Until Kratos, Sony lacked a mascot that could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the likes of Mario and Master Chief. Crash Bandicoot had a good run on PSone, and Jak and Ratchet gave it their best team effort during the PS2 era, but the first God of War rallied Sony's user-base like never before to became the newest flagship franchise in the industry. As the most popular and identifiable character in Sony's line-up, Kratos seemed like an ideal candidate to help launch the PlayStation 3, which created confusion when God of War II was announced for PS2. Why was the follow-up to Kratos' first blockbuster success coming out for a system in the last phase of its life?

"The great thing about God of War II being on the PlayStation 2 was that we had the engine and we knew what we were doing," explains Steve Caterson, senior producer for God of War III. "We took out a lot of the unknowns – questions about what we could and couldn't do – because we already knew. We had a really strong foundation to build on, and that's why God of War II was as successful as it was."

God of War II pushed the boundaries of what anyone thought was possible on the PlayStation 2, especially in terms of graphics and animation. However, releasing God of War II on the PS2 had another advantage: It allowed the team to get a head start on developing the technology that would become God of War III. During the development of the second game, a small group of key staff kept busy building the foundations of a brand new engine to compete with other companies' third-generation games on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. God of War III may be Sony Santa Monica's first game on new hardware, but the years of preparation mean the team is already intimately familiar with the system.

"We want this to be the game that shows people what the PS3 can do," declares game director Stig Asmussen. "We set the expectations with the end of God of War II; Kratos is riding a titan into war on Mount Olympus. If we were to do something different, like show that in a cinematic and then he gets hit by a lightning bolt and falls down to Hades, that would feel really cheap. The reason we set the expectation is because that's where we wanted to go with God of War III."

Asmussen stepped into his current role after God of War II director Cory Barlog left the studio. Barlog had previously inherited the position from series creator David Jaffe. With the previous two God of War titles, the game directors rose to a form of celebrity within the gaming industry; Jaffe and Barlog became mouthpieces for their respective entries, outspoken and enthusiastic individuals who garnered attention for the series. Though having a single person closely identified with a game has benefits, it also has drawbacks. When that person leaves the company, fans of the series wonder about the fate of future installments.

The majority of the team that made the series a hit remains at Sony Santa Monica. "Part of the overall success of God of War has been the result of a group of creative individuals," Caterson says. "While I totally support the director standpoint, there are a ton of people beside him that, if they weren't there, the level of success would be limited." Sony tells us

CONTINUED ON PAGE 48 ▶▶

The Wall of Tisiphone is a massive gate in Tartarus that requires combat and puzzle gameplay to open

"WE WANT THIS TO BE THE GAME THAT SHOWS PEOPLE WHAT THE PS3 CAN DO"

— STIG ASMUSSEN
GAME DIRECTOR

This is Kratos' in-game model. Fans will notice evidence of God of War II is still visible on his body: He still carries the Golden Fleece, and the scar from Zeus runs across his abdomen

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 46

approximately 70 percent of the original God of War staff is working on God of War III; Asmussen himself was the lead environment artist on the first game. Remember the time when you first see the enormous Ares wrecking armies in the distance? That was Asmussen's handiwork. He then became art director for the second installment. As a longtime member of the team, Asmussen knows Kratos inside and out, and recognizes the high standard set by his predecessors.

"Dave created the series, and Cory pushed it even further. For me, it's good and bad," Asmussen reflects. "It's good because those two guys have set this thing up with so many rich, incredible ideas. There are so many things that have already been figured out. But it's bad because the expectations are so high."

Asmussen and the God of War team are up to the challenge. "My goal is to make this the best God of War game," he clarifies. "You're going to see a lot of things that we weren't able to do in the past that we thought would be natural to the gameplay and the experience. We aren't going to be doing anything that seems like spectacle for the sake of spectacle. It's all a part of the story."

God of War II ends with two murdered gods, a wounded Zeus, and Greece on the brink of repeating an ancient war. Riding atop the titan Gaia as she climbs Mount Olympus, Kratos leads the offensive to end the reign of the gods and have his ultimate vengeance…and then the credits roll. While many fans were stunned by the cliffhanger, Kratos' bloodthirsty roar also served to promise an epic beginning to the third and final installment of the trilogy. The sheer scale of the battle is amazing – minions are attacking, gods' jaw-dropping powers are being fired off left and right, and the enormous titans are ascending relentlessly. Asmussen states: "The best way I can describe it, since there are these big titans involved, is that you take the battle of Normandy, combine it with the movie *Cloverfield,* and throw Kratos right in the middle of it."

Increasing the game's scope to a point where the protagonist routinely kills deities may seem difficult, but the inclusion of titans provides an avenue for God of War III to expand to daring heights the previous games were unable to reach. "Do you remember the big chamber where you fought the fat medusa in God of War II?" asks Asmussen. "That room could fit in the palm of one of the titan's hands."

The titans, who lost their war against the gods long ago, are far more than static background elements. They will rock and heave as Kratos fights atop them, and some will even aggressively attack him as he traverses their bodies. Action sequences involving the titans were previously the realm of rendered cinematics, but they are now integrated into the moment-to-moment gameplay.

"It's something we've always wanted to do – and we've had Atlas and Kronos – but they've always been static," laments Asmussen. "It's not just a set-piece anymore… it's a living, breathing character."

"We consider the titans moving levels," adds design director Todd Papy. "What we did in God of War I, with Kratos climbing on the back of Kronos, that was all faked. Now we can do it for real."

We saw the proof of this technology in action with one of the titan character models, which had a tiny white dot on its chest no bigger than a few pixels. "See that?" asks Caterson, pointing to the dot. "That's Kratos." The camera then zooms in and we see the Ghost of Sparta slowly scaling the gigantic torso in real time. As the view continues to get closer to Kratos, we see tendons moving and flexing under his skin as he makes the arduous climb.

To say that God of War III has impressive graphics is an understatement. The level of detail on Kratos' in-game model is breathtaking – even his teeth are individually modeled. "Kratos on PS2 was probably about 5,000 polygons, and now he's 20,000," elaborates art director Ken Feldman. "We wouldn't even be able to load him on PlayStation 2. His total memory footprint is more than we were ever able to load at any one time for any asset." This level of fidelity extends beyond Kratos as well. One of Poseidon's minions – a cross between a horse and a giant insect – has a body made of water that flows beneath its skin with amazing realism.

The visuals only get better with the additions of fluid animation and dazzling effects. While raising the graphical standard is expected on the PS3, there is another reason the team wants to make sure Kratos looks fantastic up close: All of God of War III's movies are handled with in-game assets. The line between

You will face drastically more enemies at one time, giving the sensation that Kratos is fighting an entire army

The Cestus is just one of the new weapons Kratos wields. The team is putting special effort into giving players a reason to use weapons besides the Blades of Chaos

what can be accomplished in hi-res rendered cutscenes and in God of War III's engine is blurry, so the team opted to keep the visuals consistent throughout the entire experience.

Though it is undeniably beautiful, God of War III isn't just a bigger, prettier version of God of War II. The gameplay makes strides forward in all of the areas fans could hope for. Kratos once again wields his signature Blades of Chaos, but he also acquires new weapons during the adventure. This may bring about mixed feelings from fans who still remember the Blade of Artemis or the Spear of Destiny – weapons from previous games that gave players little incentive to use anything but Kratos' standard chain blades.

"We want to make it feel like if you have a different weapon, you have a different play style, not just a couple different attacks," says lead combat designer Adam Puhl. One of these new weapons is a pair of massive gauntlets called the Cestus. This brutal weapon was briefly visible in an early trailer for the game, but it takes on a new dimension in the heat of battle. Spiked balls on chains extend from the toothy maws emblazoned on the front, though they don't extend as far as the Blades of Chaos. This makes the powerful Cestus great for close-quarters combat, and they have the added advantage of emitting a small shockwave with every impact. On any hit, the metal rings that extend up Kratos' forearm come together with concussive force, keeping nearby enemies at bay.

The ability to repel advancing enemies would not have been incredibly useful in previous God of War titles; Kratos' normal arsenal was usually enough to deal with any number of foes he faced at one time. Players no longer have this luxury in God of War III. "We maxed out, in God of War II, around 12 or 15 enemies," Asmussen tells us. "We did a lot of other stuff to make it feel bigger than that. Now, we can probably get 50 guys out there."

The increased numbers result in a variety of new combat situations facing the player. When confronted with a swarm of grunts, they may jump up on Kratos, burying him under a heap of undead soldiers and forcing the player to wiggle the left analog stick to break free. Enemies can also coordinate their attacks; if several shield-toting soldiers come together, they can make formations that make them nearly impervious to damage in addition to blocking Kratos' progress.

Riding beasts like the cyclops gives you even more options in battle, and you can just dispatch them when they've served their purpose

Three's A Crowd

The God of War series' outstanding gameplay is the main reason for its success, but it has the dubious honor of another signature element: sex minigames. All three installments (including developer Ready at Dawn's God of War: Chains of Olympus) have included one of these sequences, so it stands to reason that God of War III will continue the trend.

"The sex minigame is an interesting thing, because you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't," game director Stig Asmussen laughs. "A lot of that stuff, we've got to worry about the ESRB. If we don't add something to it, then people are just going to say 'Oh, they just did that again' and it's going to be silly. But if we don't do it at all, then people are going to say 'Where the hell is the sex minigame?' So I can say that there is a lot of planning going on in the sex minigame right now."

God of War II (PS2)

Improved AI behaviors like these occur naturally during the course of combat, but certain enemies will act as commanders, further enhancing the tactics and making encounters more dynamic. A group of regular grunts won't be too difficult to tear through, but when a centaur shows up and orders them all to attack at once, the threat level increases significantly. Kratos' skill-set has expanded as well, giving the players more options aimed at dealing with his foes' newfound intelligence – and sometimes even subjugating them to his will.

Kratos' most brutal and exciting new maneuver is the ability to control certain monsters, steering them around the environments like mythological tanks. As the cover of this issue illustrates, one creature you can control is the cyclops. After wearing down its health with normal attacks, a familiar prompt will appear over its head, but instead of performing a context-sensitive kill, Kratos will hop aboard. Once you're in charge, pressing an attack button will make Kratos deliver a ruthless stab to the cyclops' neck, causing it to roar in pain and lash out with its weapon – a motion that results in a ferocious attack on nearby foes. Besides being fun, this technique also has applications in puzzles and navigation.

The team also showed us a puzzle referred to as the Door of Tisiphone, where Kratos is faced with an enormous armored door that retreats into a defensive position as soon as he draws near. On either side of the mechanism stand huge chains, but hordes

New items, like the fire bow, use a regenerating power bar so they don't eat into your mana reserves

Kratos moves won't be drastically changed, but expect to see some updates, tweaks, and additions to your favorite combos

of skeleton knights guard them by forming a barrier with their enchanted shields. Then enemies start pouring in. A cyclops lumbers among the ranks of undead, so Kratos jumps on top of the beast and barrels toward the guarding skeletons, crushing them with the cyclops' oversized maul. This allows Kratos to get close enough to the chains to pull them down, but the door remains closed. In order to reach the final lever, Kratos grabs the feet of a nearby harpy – another monster you can control – and makes it carry him upwards by dishing out repeated punches to the creature's underside.

As fun as it is to get back at these perennial God of War enemies, the process of adding or changing mechanics in a popular series is not something to take lightly. If too much stays the same, diehard fans complain about stagnation. On the other hand, if too much changes, developers risk disappointing their core users – not to mention that steps should be taken to bring new fans into the experience as well. "Fan expectation is an interesting conundrum," Caterson muses. "On one hand, we really focus in on the things that work, and we don't try to rework them. The combat system is great example of that – it's straightforward, easy to pick up and play, and very enjoyable. But it also has a layer of depth. That helps the more hardcore players get a more enjoyment without alienating the more casual player."

In God of War III, much of the additional depth is delivered through bread-and-butter combat mechanics. Improved environmental interactions (bashing enemies against walls), combos (including more ways to get Kratos and his foes airborne), and grapples are just a few new tricks. Others involve rearranging the way previous elements of the game functioned – like separating the resources used for items and powerful magic. "In the past, we would have the bow that, when you fire it, it takes away magic. Though people enjoyed the weapon, they were also very conservative," Puhl remembers. "We want people to feel more free with that, so now that meter regenerates." For instance, Kratos has a bow that shoots burning arrows that you can fire repeatedly until the meter is depleted. After a short break, the weapon is ready to go again without eating into your precious mana reserve, making ranged combat tactics a more viable option in any fight. The fire bow is a good reincarnation of a familiar weapon, but not all of Kratos' tricks are new ones.

The Evolving Kill

Context-sensitive events might be pervasive in modern games, but God of War is responsible for popularizing the mechanic in its current form. It is not surprising that these vicious kill sequences are making a return in God of War III. "In God of War II, there was still room left for us to keep pushing the [context-sensitive] moves forward in the direction we had set in the first game," game director Stig Asmussen says. "Now, in GoW III, I think we need to enhance them and be more clever with them and move them in a slightly different direction in order to stay clever." The team is currently experimenting with variations on the old pattern, like branching paths through the sequences and the use of Sixaxis controls to mimic ripping and pulling actions.

We saw two brutal examples of these kills that put a new spin on what gamers have seen in the past. In one, Kratos approaches a soldier on the ground and, with a foot planted in the small of his back, grabs the poor sap's head and begins to pull. As players tap circle repeatedly, the scene becomes a gruesome showcase for the PS3's visual capabilities. The guy's neck slowly splits and his tendons break as Kratos rips off his head.

The other example literally offers a new perspective on the kill. As one of the bosses – who appears to be an old man (though gods have been known to change forms) – nears death, the camera switches to first person. Kratos approaches and begins to beat the boss with his bare hands. While players still enter the button inputs as normal, the entire scene is viewed and heard from the perspective of the victim, complete with the wet crunches of every solid blow. If this is what the team has completed at this phase of development, we can't wait to see how the other sequences shape up.

Unlike games like Zelda and Metroid, God of War III lets players retain many abilities acquired in the previous installments.

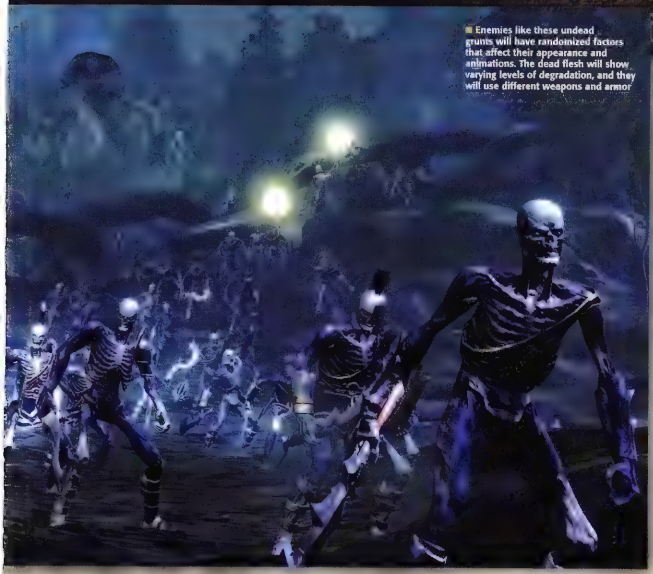
The Golden Fleece and Icarus Wings are returning, and there may be others. Don't expect to begin with the might of an end-game character – the team still wants room to introduce cool new powers – but you won't be faced with a contrived all-your-powers-are-gone scenario. "You're not going to have the exact same powers, but you're going to have a lot of them," Asmussen assures us.

The team remains conspicuously quiet on the subject of God of War III's magic system and how it carries over to the latest entry. We definitely saw a blue bar in the upper-left corner of the screen, but it will adhere to a slightly different concept. "You can expect Kratos to do ethereal stuff," Asmussen confirms. "There are things beyond brute force, and at the end of the day, they function like magic. It's not handed down, so we had to come up with a different way for Kratos to gain his powers." That makes sense, considering that Kratos eventually finds himself fighting against the titans and gods in the war. It's unlikely they'll want to pass any more magic to him directly. In fact, they are more likely to attack him on the spot.

"In God of War you fought Ares. In God of

"I'M NOT GOING TO SAY WHETHER HE'S ALIVE OR DEAD, BUT THE STORY IS DEPENDENT ON KRATOS, RIGHT? AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, THIS STORY IS WRITTEN TO CLOSE THE BOOK ON THE TRILOGY."

– STIG ASMUSSEN
GAME DIRECTOR



Enemies like these undead grunts will have randomized factors that affect their appearance and animations. The dead flesh will show varying levels of degradation, and they will use different weapons and armor

War II you fought Zeus. Now, this is going to be the epic climax," Puhl tell us. "You're going to be taking down gods beyond just the final fight." As if that weren't promising enough, not all of the boss characters are taken straight from the Greek pantheon. "You can look at the cast of characters from the end of God of War II, and you can kind of deduce [the bosses] from that," hints Asmussen. "There are a handful of gods, and there might be some other ones waiting in the wings. There are obviously a lot of titans, and Gaia. There are going to be more people that you aren't expecting involved in this as well. It's safe to say we aren't going to have as many boss battles as God of War II. In God of War I we had three or four…we're going to be somewhere between the two games."

One confirmed boss is the god Hades, who has appeared in the series before. At some point, Kratos' quest takes him to familiar territory: Tartarus. This section of underworld, Hades' seat of power, also appeared in God of War: Chains of Olympus. Fans of the first God of War needn't worry; there aren't any spinning blades to tiptoe across in the land of the dead this time. However, that is a small comfort considering Kratos must contend with Hades himself.

The fight against the lord of the dead takes place in a dark, circular chamber as he whips his own chain blades (used at the end of God of War II) at Kratos. The chamber starts to crumble as you deal damage, and chunks of Hades' skin – which resemble half-cooked meat – will fly off and then try to wriggle their way back to their master. Attacking these tiny pieces of flesh plays a role in ultimately defeating Hades, though the team didn't want to reveal the trick to beating one of the coolest fights in the game. "You can expect to see boss fights more in line with the Minotaur or the Kraken, where you're using environment-based stuff more than technical stuff," discloses Asmussen. "Though we will have technical battles, like [God of War II's fight] against the Sisters of Fate."

We witnessed another confrontation set late in the game that demonstrates how God of War III builds on the already over-the-top action. Kratos enters a white rotunda built into the architecture of Mount Olympus and confronts Zeus. At first, the battle appears similar to the last battle from God of War II…until Gaia shows up. As Kratos and Zeus exchange attacks, the titan violently tears the rotunda from the face of the mountain and turns it sideways. As the arena goes vertical, Kratos digs his blades into the floor as control seamlessly shifts to the wall-fighting mechanics, with Zeus floating freely in the air behind him. The odds don't stay uneven for long, since Gaia flips the structure yet again, this time grabbing it by the pillars and delivering repeated head-butts that send Kratos and Zeus reeling. The events occur without a single break in the combat, making players feel like they are in control as an action-packed cutscene unfolds.

"That would have been a fairy tale on the PlayStation 2," Asmussen admits. "People would have laughed if we wanted to do this before. Gaia is six times the size of the Colossus [from God of War II]. She's taller than the Empire State Building."

As the size of the God of War universe increases, many fans have wondered whether another player might fit somewhere in the action. Rumors of multiplayer have dogged God of War III since its announcement, but you shouldn't believe them. "It is a solo experience," confirms Sony Santa Monica's director of internal development John Hight. "In Kratos' world, there isn't room for somebody else."

However, that does not mean God of War III won't support the PlayStation Network in some capacity. "I can't give you specifics on what God of War has in store, if anything," Caterson teases, "but we recognize where the industry is going and what is being deemed valuable. We've heard what a lot of fans have asked for and we've heard what's been said, and we're going to have to leave it at that."

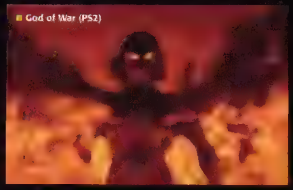
Even in the face of its gorgeous visuals and numerous improvements, God of War III may be a bittersweet moment for action/adventure fans; the game marks the end of an era for Kratos. "The story we started telling with God of War is over at the end of this," asserts Asmussen. "I'm not going to say whether he's alive or dead, but the story is dependent on Kratos, right? As far as I'm concerned, this story is written to close the book on the trilogy."

Obviously, Sony isn't eager to abandon one of its most popular and acclaimed series. Hight adds: "We're not interested in killing the franchise, but we're also not going to run it into the ground. We're looking at ways to leverage the brand, but we really care about the consistency of this world. Our job is to represent the fans…they don't want some bull— coming out that doesn't make any sense that just has Kratos slapped on it. Sony has respected that and passed up financial opportunities because they believe in our right to create this brand over time."

Whatever the future holds for Kratos beyond the trilogy, God of War III serves as the conclusion to a saga that took the gaming world by storm, redefined cinematic gameplay, and made "visceral" a ubiquitous adjective in the gaming media. Thankfully, due to the efforts of the dedicated team at Sony Santa Monica, Kratos is getting a send-off fit for a god. ■■■

Hidden Gems

The first God of War had an array of special features, including the gaming equivalent of deleted scenes. These outlined a series of concepts that didn't get included in the game, including the Icarus wings and the revelation that Zeus is Kratos' father (both of which made it into the sequel). Others, like the possibility of Kratos having a brother, remain non-canon. We asked game director Stig Asmussen about the chances of these elements being incorporated into God of War III: "They're definitely cool ideas, and we always look at them," he admits. "I think you'll find some parallels – there's good stuff there, no doubt."



God of War (PS2)

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Resident Evil 5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER ONLINE OR SYSTEM LINK)
> **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** MARCH

ALMOST THERE...

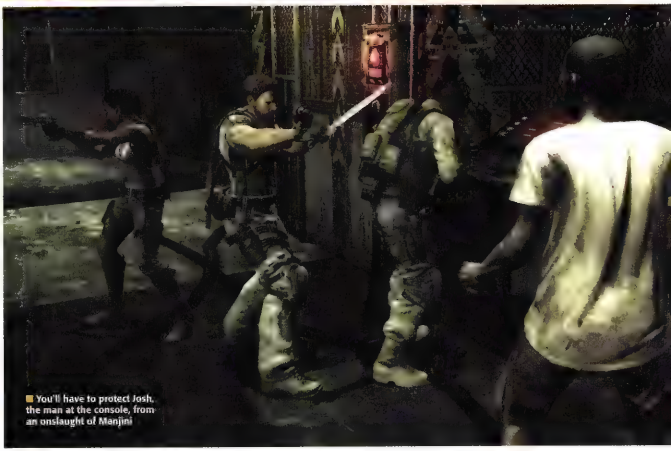
■ This bruiser is just a mini-boss, but you'll get some sweet treasure if you can take him down before time runs out

We don't usually like to tease our readers about the hot new games we're playing. But holy crap, we just played through the first half of Resident Evil 5! We're going to keep this mostly spoiler-free and focus primarily on new mechanics and features, so just relax, fanboys.

The game begins with a Chris Redfield voiceover as he rides into in a small African village. He explains that despite Umbrella's end, the company's technology has filtered down to bioterrorists. As part of BSAA, an anti-terrorist strike force, Chris travels the world putting down potential flare-ups in order to prevent another Raccoon City incident. He meets up with co-op partner Sheva Alomar right away, and it doesn't take long before they're blasting zombies — we mean Manjini.

Remember the creepy merchant from Resident Evil 4? Capcom has replaced him with an out-of-gameplay shop that appears between every level and after every death. Here you can buy extra health spray, ammo, and guns to help power through what's to come. A new ranking system also appears between levels that judges accuracy, kills, lives lost, and clear time. We earned up to 1,500 points on one stage from an "S" ranking. These points can apparently be spent on unlockable bonus content like costumes.

For some insight on big moments from the game, check out some of the gorgeous screens on these pages. We'll be back next month with a full review. ■■■



■ You'll have to protect Josh, the man at the console, from an onslaught of Manjini

Achievements & Trophies

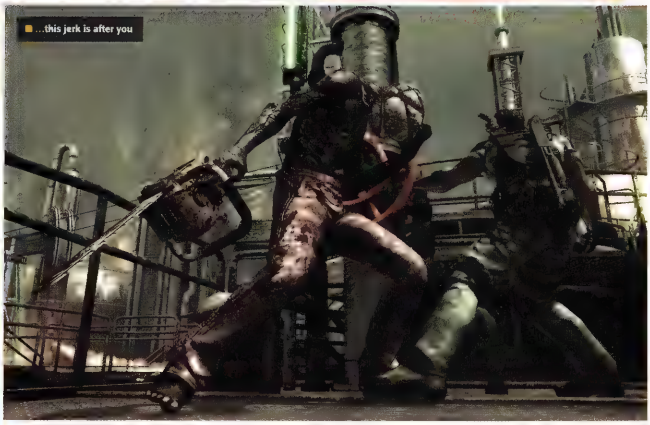
Resident Evil 5 has a nice mix of things you'll do naturally during your first play-through and other objectives that take serious skills. Here's a small sample of what's in store:

- Separate rewards for completing chapters 1-1 through 6-3
- Beat the game on "X" difficulty
- Buy all alternate costumes
- Get all weapons
- Shoot all BSAA emblems
- Save partner 10 times
- 30 longbow kills
- Deflect an arrow with your knife
- Kill three Manjini with one grenade

These puppies don't play nice

An extended turret sequence adds some variety to the gameplay

You'll have to pull levers and turn valves while...



...this jerk is after you

The scourge of air and land

XBOX 360

Grand Theft Auto: The Lost and Damned

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR
> **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 17

EXPANDED CONTENT? MORE LIKE A NEW GAME

If you had to pick one innovation that defined a generation, the Wii's motion-based gameplay would be the choice most people would jot down first. But does it define this entire generation or is the real story downloadable content? Music games Rock Band and Guitar Hero are updated weekly with new content. Burnout Paradise's expanded content kicked cars to the curb in favor of new experiences on bikes and in airplanes. The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion received numerous updates, including Shivering Isles, a content expansion so large that it could easily be called The Elder Scrolls V.

Grand Theft Auto's first downloadable offering, The Lost and Damned, could be the title that sends DLC through the stratosphere. From the content included in this download, this title could be Rockstar's new way of releasing sequels like Vice City and San Andreas. Rockstar representatives say that The Lost and Damned's new story will offer roughly 10 hours of gameplay for seasoned GTA vets, and around 20 hours if you want to see everything included in this campaign.

Niko Bellic, GTA IV's protagonist, makes his return, but only in a cameo role. This new story is seen though the eyes of the meat-eating, beer-chugging, hog-riding American biker, Johnny Klebitz. Since this story runs parallel to Bellic's, you will see him periodically as missions from The Lost and Damned intersect with those from GTA IV. In one mission, which you see from a different perspective, you'll run and gun with him – a hilarious reminder of how foul-mouthed this Eastern European can be during a firefight. Unlike Bellic, Klebitz's journey isn't a personal one. He's a part of a bike gang, and his actions are usually made in unison with his leather-clad cronies. This dynamic has a profound effect on the gameplay. For many of the missions, when you travel to a destination, you'll be asked to ride in formation with your buddies – a task that rewards the player with a health boost. The sight of six bikes rolling down the highway as a flock is the definition of badass.

Klebitz isn't a reskinned model of Bellic. He has his own animations, attitude, and way of carrying about his business. His personality is also reflected in the look of the game. Rockstar dirtied up the HUD, altered text in the menus, and applied a grainy film-like filter to the entire presentation. His phone is also a pile of junk.

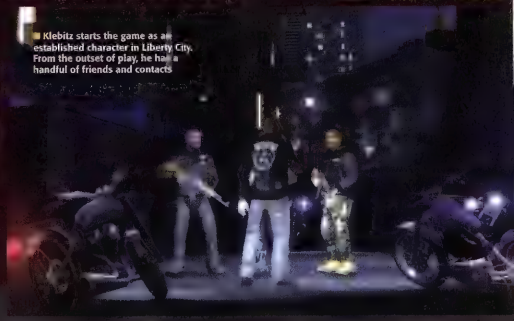
In terms of real estate, The Lost and Damned uses the same game world that Bellic blazed a trail across – although new interiors, such as a biker bar, have been added to fit with Klebitz's story. And no, Bellic won't be able to enter them if you go back and play GTA IV again. The new content you stumble across is strictly for use with the expansion.

In addition to the new interiors, players will be able to drive a handful of new vehicles and wield a powerful new arsenal that includes a grenade launcher, auto-pistol, and sawed-off shotgun, a weapon Rockstar thought fitting as it can be fired while riding a bike. When Klebitz downs a foe from the seat of his one-of-a-kind bike, there's a chance that he'll celebrate with a fist pump.

All of the radio stations from GTA IV return in The Lost and Damned, and all of them have been updated with new songs, talk radio, commercials, story-related DJ chatter, and promos. Players can also kick back with new activities like arm wrestling and card games. The TV boasts new shows, the Internet has been updated with additional websites, and even the comedy clubs offer new laughs. Klebitz, of course, has different friends he can call for favors or a night on the town.

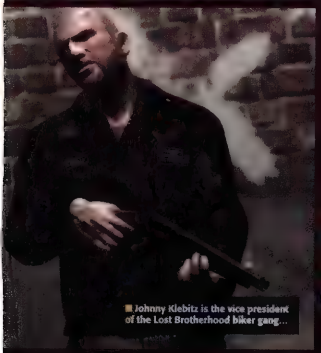
The Lost and Damned's coding showcases a number of improvements, such as greater draw distances, improved streaming, and new techniques for recording the actors. Rockstar hasn't revealed any multiplayer details, but it is believed that The Lost and Damned will offer a variety of new multiplayer modes, maps, and co-op missions. Rockstar did confirm that all of the new vehicles and weapons are shared between single and multiplayer.

You'll need to have a GTA IV disc spinning in your Xbox 360 if you want to venture back into Liberty City. As of press time, Rockstar seemed confident that this exciting DLC will be ready for download on February 16 for roughly 20 dollars. ■■■

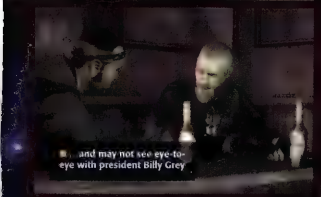


■ **Klebitz starts the game as an established character in Liberty City. From the outset of play, he has a handful of friends and contacts**

Playing "Pipe Bomb Panic" while driving? Not a good idea



Johnny Klebitz is the vice president of the Lost Brotherhood biker gang...

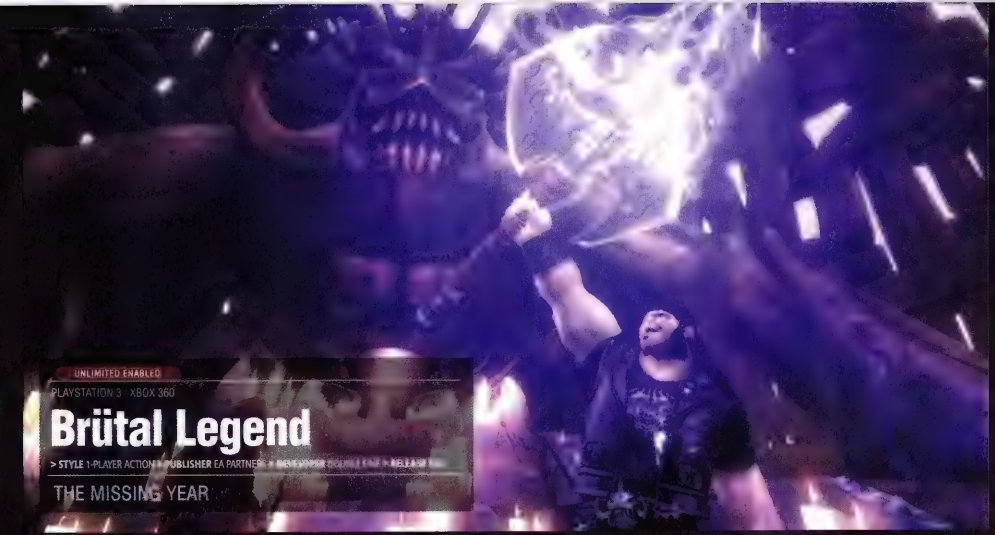


...and may not see eye-to-eye with president Billy Grey

In addition to the story-based missions, players should keep an eye on their map for new pedestrian missions

Klebitz isn't the free spirit Niko was. He rides in formation, and usually has a gun or three to back him up

New clothing options are available to Klebitz, although we doubt he'll ever lose his jacket



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 · XBOX 360

Brütal Legend

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **PUBLISHER** EA PARTNERS **DEVELOPER** [illegible] **RELEASE** [illegible]

THE MISSING YEAR

"It's all been going exactly according to plan," Tim Schafer jokes. "I think a lot of developers don't really think of the multiple publisher plan when they're first starting out, because it sounds hard. But trust me. It's the best way."

Schafer has a lot to feel jovial about; after months without a publisher, the recently announced deal with EA Partners assures that Double Fine's tale of a heavy metal roadie's epic adventure will see the light of day. We talked with Schafer about the challenges of the past year, and asked about the interesting journey the game has made over the last several months.

"We were suffering from the same lack of information that everyone was for a long time," Schafer explains. "We'd heard there was going to be a merger, and we thought, 'Oh, there'll be shenanigans around the bend.' Sure enough, shenanigans came." The Activision/Vivendi merger saw numerous game casualties, among them Ghostbusters and Brütal Legend. With no publisher but an increasingly polished game already in hand, Double Fine opted to buckle down and continue building the game even as operating funds became increasingly scarce. "We'd been through something similar to this before, and we got through it that time, so we knew we could get through it again," Schafer says. "So we mostly just kept our nose to the grindstone and kept working on the game."

As Eddie Rigg's rock n' roll journey continued to take shape, Schafer and his team set to work finding a new business partner. He told us about the strange experience of shopping the game around a second time, with a far more polished and clear vision of its potential. "The second round of showing the game to publishers was so different from the first time. The first time we had this crazy idea; it's an action game about rock. Remember, this was before Rock Band or anything came out. People didn't really want to talk about hard rock. Now, all of a sudden, rock and heavy metal are cool again," he says. "What is the real pitch? It's really about Eddie, and the story of this roadie. Whereas when we first pitched the game we might have had a million other ideas, too. But now it is focused. It's about a man, his axe, his guitar, and his car." At long last, Double Fine struck an arrangement with EA Partners, and the game should finally hit store shelves in the second half of this year.

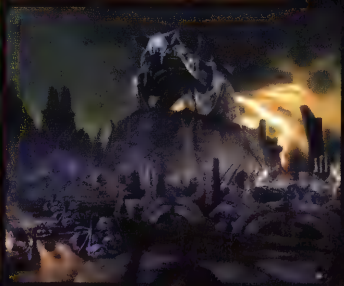
In the meantime, the game has entered a stage of polishing and balancing that can best take advantage of a helpful publishing partner. "Ideally, publishers are really helpful in tuning your game, and homing in on what is fun about it," Schafer tells us. "But it's great to do that after the game has had a chance to figure out what it is. Games need a little space to thrash around and pursue some dead ends before they figure out what they're really all about."

Regardless of the setbacks the game encountered throughout 2008, Double Fine avoided shutting down production, though Schafer admits the potential was looming in the final weeks before the deal was struck. Even so, he remains upbeat about the experience. "I never felt like Brütal Legend wasn't going to happen. As soon as rumors went around that we were available, there was a lot of interest," Schafer says. "Although, looking back, it was probably scarier than I wanted to admit at the time. But it couldn't die. The game is just that good. The universe wanted it to happen. Metal prevailed in the end, as it always will." ■■■

■ Eddie is going to shred this rock, and from there head out to find some roll

■ Sorry Eddie, the studs and leather don't make the soul patch any cooler

Time to set some cities on fire with rock and roll



Eddie finally gets to play the big arena show he'd dreamed of

An earthquake has turned Chicago into an urban jungle where violent groups dictate their own laws

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

I Am Alive

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER DARKWORKS **> RELEASE** LATE 2009

OR AM I?

January 23, 1556, an earthquake presumed to be over eight on the Richter scale shattered the Shansi Province in China, racking up a death toll of more than 800,000. April 18, 1906, another earthquake registering 7.9 tore through the heart of San Francisco, igniting a fire that lasted four days and razed more than four square miles. Thousands ended up missing or dead. History is marked with devastating events like these, but what would happen if an epic quake tore through an American city today? What would happen if the city was filled with millions of inhabitants and unprepared for such a tragedy? What if it happened to be the biggest earthquake in human history?

In I Am Alive, an earthquake registering a phenomenal 10.9 erupts underneath Chicago in June 2009. The city – one of the most important financial centers in the country that features some of the loftiest and most impressive skyscrapers on the planet and is home to more than 8.7 million people – falls to its knees.

Adam Collins, a 27-year-old junior executive, spends three days digging himself out of a buried street corner. He emerges into a city that's getting worse by the hour. Chicago has pancaked into a massive pile of rubble, and it continues to fall apart as aftershocks rock through building husks. Surviving the initial quake was just the beginning; Adam is now caught inside a city-sized sinking deathtrap.

I Am Alive's hero sets off on a journey to find his ex-girlfriend Alice, a girl for which he still has feelings. As the game progresses he'll have to band together with several other survivors if he wants to make it out alive. The earthquake has turned Chicago into a chaotic no man's land. Ordinary everyday people – manic with survival instinct – are killing each other over water.

Ubisoft remains tightlipped on many of the game's mechanics, but throughout this first-person adventure, players gather information and explore for tools needed to survive. Word has come in over the wire that a rescue attempt will be coming in seven days, so Adam must make sure all the survivors are unified in one base camp and gear up to fight off those who are more interesting in saving themselves. Meanwhile, the city is still falling apart around them, so the most dangerous enemy in the game is often the ground under their feet. ■ ■ ■

EPIC DISASTERS

Epic disasters get your blood flowing? Maybe these disaster films will help wet your appetite for the game's release.

THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW (2004)

This eco-conscious film isn't a narrative masterwork, [illegible] blockbuster [illegible] of the most [illegible] out there.

INDEPENDENCE DAY (1996)

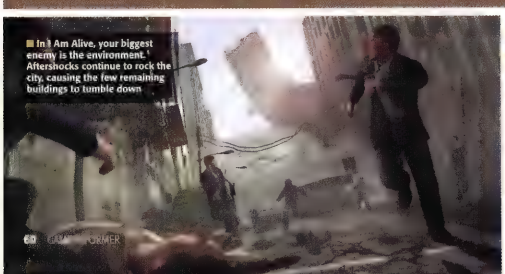
The big budget disaster that started the late '90s rush. When aliens finally visit Earth, they don't just blow up one city, they blow up all of [illegible]

THE TOWERING INFERNO (1974)

A dedication ceremony turns sour [illegible] a simple electrical flare-up turns [illegible] world's tallest skyscraper into a [illegible]

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD (1998)

Carrot Top tried to make a film. This is the biggest disaster of them all.



In I Am Alive, your biggest enemy is the environment. Aftershocks continue to rock the city, causing the few remaining buildings to tumble down

In this post-disaster Chicago, a bottle of water can buy a bag of gold

Jamster

Over 100,000 downloads at www.jamster.com

TXT to 75555*

Get 20 downloads with this plan, just $9.99 / mo*

PICK UP LINE ALERT!

NEW PICK-UP LINES ON YOUR CELL – EVERY DAY!

Text Orderword	To Number Below
LIN4444	95555**

Get 30 alerts with this plan, just $9.99/mo***

Games

Celebrity Wrestling

game4009

Tomb Raider Legend

game4010

Sexy Pillowfight

game4011

Tomb Raider Legend © 2006 Eidos Interactive Ltd. Lara Croft and Tomb Raider are trademarks of Core Design Limited. Eidos and the Eidos Mobile logo are trademarks of the Eidos Interactive Ltd. All rights reserved.

Video Game Sounds

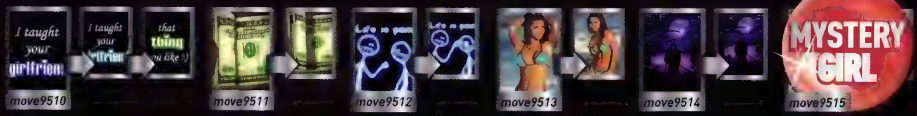
song4073

song4074

Ringtones

50 Cent - Get Up	song4075	Katy Perry - I Kissed A Girl	song4085	Ne-Yo - Miss Independent	song4095
Ice Hood Feat Trey Songz - Ride	song4076	Kevin Rudolf / Lil Wayne - Let It Rock	song4086	Rihanah - Bartender Song	song4096
Akon - Right Now (Na Na Na)	song4077	Lady GaGa - Poker Face	song4087	Rihanna - Rehab	song4097
Akon - Beautiful	song4078	Lady GaGa / Colby O'Donis - Just Dance	song4088	Rihanna - Disturbia	song4098
Akon / Lil Wayne - I'm So Paid	song4079	Lil Wayne - Got Money	song4089	Swagg / Soulja Boy Tell Em - Swing	song4099
Jay-Z / T.I. - Swagga Like Us	song4080	Lil Wayne - A Milli	song4090	Taking Abet - Addicted	song4100
Kanye West - Heartless	song4081	Lil Wayne / Bobby Valentino - Mrs. Officer	song4091	Soulja Boy Tell Em - Kiss Me Thru The Phone	song4101
Kanye West - Love Lockdown	song4082	Ludacris - One More Drink	song4092	Soulja Boy Tell Em - Gucci Bandanna	song4102
Kanye West - See You In My Nightmares	song4083	M.I.A. - Paper Planes	song4093	The Game - Camera Phone	song4103
Katy Perry - Hot N Cold	song4084	Nelly - Body On Me	song4094	Young Jeezy / Kanye West - Put On	song4104

Animated Screensavers



move9510 move9511 move9512 move9513 move9514 move9515

Wallpapers

wall9186 wall9187 wall9188 wall9189 wall9190 wall9191 wall9192 wall9193 wall9194

wall9195 wall9196 wall9197 wall9198 wall9199 wall9200 wall9201 wall9202 wall9203

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3
TXT KEYWORD e.g. WALL9186 to 75555	REPLY OK to the received message	CLICK ON LINK loading... http://jamster.com/coolwallpaper/love

A cellphone with the correct WAP or GPRS configuration is required. If you have problems downloading, contact our Customer Care hotline at 866-856-JAMS, or email us at info@jamster.com.

*Alltel customers please download Jamster World Application from your Alltel Access deck.

Want to order from Canada? Check out www.jamster.ca

* You must be 18 years old to sign up. If between 13-18 years old, you must have parental consent to sign up. By entering your mobile phone number and submitting PIN code sent to your mobile phone, you certify that you are the account holder or all have account holder's permission to do so and you expressly agree to these terms, as well as, the Jamster Terms of Service. You will be charged **$9.99 per month** for the Jamster XXL Subscription Plan which includes credits 6 ringtones, 10 graphics and 4 games/apps (games/apps not available for Verizon Wireless & Virgin Mobile customers). Unused credits roll over to the next month. The XXL Plan automatically renews if not cancelled. Charges will appear on your cell phone bill or will be deducted from your pre-paid balance. Standard text messaging rates, data charges and other charges may apply. A carrier data plan is recommended. Not available on all carriers or on all cell phone models. To cancel your plan, text **STOP** to 75555. For help, email info@jamster.com or call **(866) 856-JAMS(5267).**

** With the Jamster Alert Subscription Plan you receive credits for 30 alert messages for **$9.99 monthly.** Subject to the terms of service available at jamster.com. Standard text messaging rates and data charges apply. All charges will be reflected on your wireless phone bill or be deducted from your prepaid balance. Users under 18 years of age require parents permission. Cancel plan by sending „STOP" to 75555. Questions: Call 866-856-JAMS or mail to info@jamster.com.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Prototype

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> DEVELOPER RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** SUMMER

Alex's new glide move in action

WHAT'S GOING ON?

The last time we heard anything new about Prototype, it was in our August 2007 cover story (#172). During the prolonged merger period when the new über-publisher Activision Blizzard was deciding which games to keep or set free, all Prototype info went dark, just like every other Sierra title swept up in the mix. Prototype was one of the few titles to remain under the Activision umbrella. We spoke with Radical executive producer Tim Bennison to find out what happened when the game went dark.

What has the last year been like for the Prototype team in light of the big merger and uncertainties in regards to having a publisher?
We've had a big year – no doubt about it. Even without the events of the past 12 months happening around us, we would have had a challenging time simply because of the scale of Prototype. We're now somewhat heading into the home stretch with the game planned to launch this summer, so it's definitely nice to be moving from "hard work" to "hard work plus a little fun mixed in" now that we are back out there showing off the game in action.

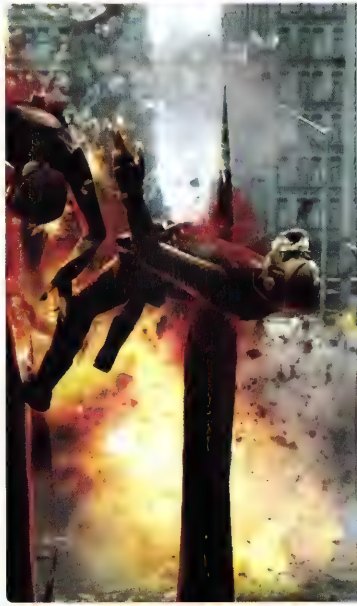
What is it about Prototype that helped it survive the Activision merger when other games were cut loose?
I think there were probably a few contributing factors. First off was the amazing level of support it had garnered from the video game press and fans prior to the merger, so that's definitely something we truly appreciate. The fact that we're offering something different from the typical "hero saves the day" scenario also makes Prototype interesting – the chance to play an anti-hero where nothing is black and white. Finally, I think we've got something unique with the level of visceral, balls-to-the-wall action that you just typically don't see in many other games.

In our original story on Prototype, the game was said to feature two-player co-op, only to have Radical announce that wasn't going to be the case. Has the extra development time allowed you to reintegrate this feature?
Unfortunately, the answer is still no. As we announced last year, we're still focusing Prototype solely on the core single-player experience.

Are there any features you have added to the game with the extra time?
Yes, definitely. It's been a phenomenal opportunity to continue to hone and polish Prototype's fundamentals. We've added to the range of Alex's over-the-top locomotion abilities to include things like gliding. Additionally, jacking vehicles like the Apache helicopter can now be done via unlocking an upgrade to Alex's tentacle-like "whipfist" power. We've also been able to really put some key focus into the game's side missions like the events that happen outside of the core story arc experience. One of my favorite events is where Alex finds a grenade launcher with unlimited ammo and has to withstand an all-out infected assault for 60 seconds.

Rumors spread across the Internet that Prototype was being adapted to a more traditional superhero property like Spider-Man. Was this ever the case?
No. Prototype has always remained firm to its goals of delivering an over-the-top action game with an anti-hero at its core. I think the world of Spider-Man and Prototype in terms of flavor, morals, and choices are best kept separate from each other.

What did you think of the recent Incredible Hulk movie game that may have taken a few things from Ultimate Destruction (Radical's 2005 hit)? Heck, even the film stole your car-metal boxing gloves!
It was really cool to see that up on the big screen. Our designers and animators were amazed. I think this clearly shows how games can influence movies to some degree, rather than exclusively the other way around. By the way, since we're on the subject, we'd love to collaborate on a movie based on Prototype…any takers? ■ ■ ■



Look closely and you can tell that's not just a car blowing up

Somthing tells us this won't be rated "E"

IT AIN'T TRULY METAL WITHOUT THE SECOND PEDAL.

GET A FREE DOUBLE BASS DRUM PEDAL WHEN YOU PRE-ORDER GUITAR HERO METALLICA, ONLY AT GAMESTOP.

UZ IF YOU REALLY WANT TO PLAY FAST AND HEAVY LIKE LARS AND GET THE TRUE METALLICA EXPERIENCE, YOU GOTTA USE BOTH FEET.

TEEN
T
Lyrics
Mild Suggestive Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

GUITAR HERO
METALLICA

GameStop
power to the players

Arc Rise Fantasia

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER IMAGE EPOCH > RELEASE SUMMER

BY THE BOOK

Old School Questing

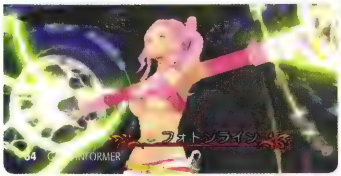
The world of Fulheim is filled with many wild beasts, but the most dangerous monsters are Contaminant Dragons, lumbering behemoths who pose an extra deadly threat since their bodies poison the air the second they die. Players take control of a motley crew of characters, including an imperial soldier named Bright, the second prince of Meridian named Alse, and an unnamed mystery girl with a secret past. When word comes that dragons are bearing down on the capital city, this crew of younglings must repel the beasts and find a way to heal the land.

Nintendo seems to have all but abandoned traditional Japanese RPGs. During its the NES and SNES heydays, the consoles were the go-to destinations for turn-based battles, stereotypical fantasy characters, and worlds full of airships, dragons, and children who save the world. But in this industry it only takes one generation for things to change. Where the genre was once as virile as rabbits on Nintendo consoles, they are now as common as the flightless dodo on the Wii. Nintendo owners who are still fans of the old genre should take note of Image Epoch's new title, Arc Rise Fantasia.

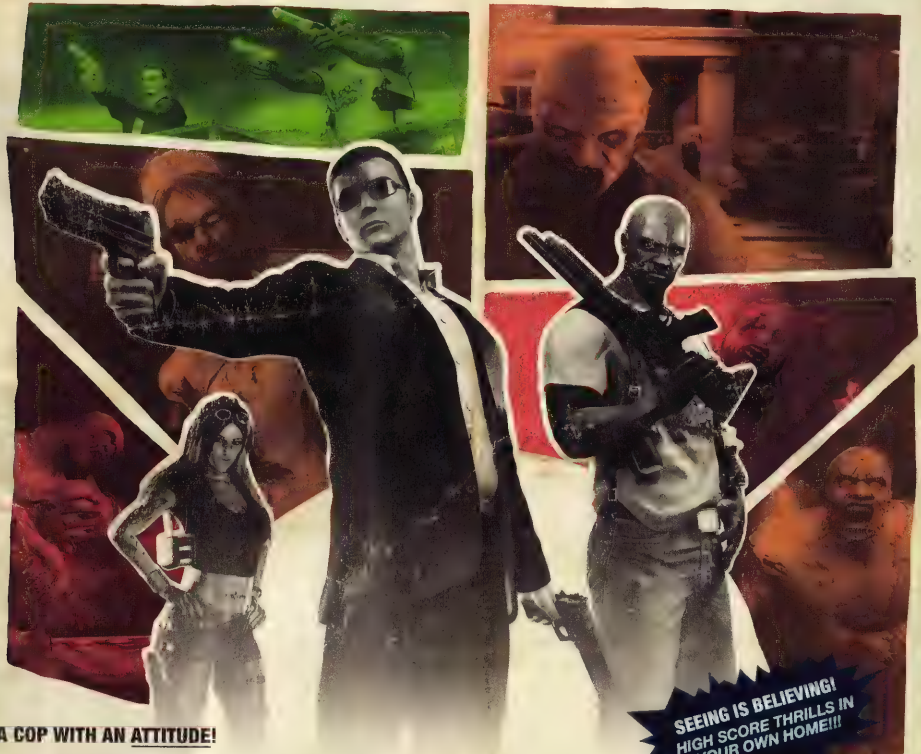
Arc Rise is set in the colorful world of Fulheim, a land where humanity has prospered thanks to a mysterious technology called leys – ancient luminescent artifacts that serve as the source of all magical energy. This idyllic society is on the verge of political turmoil, however, as mysterious monsters are tearing apart the surrounding land, crystallizing the environment in their wake.

While the story is torn from the annals of Generic RPG 101, the battle system is unique. The system is turn based, but unlike traditional RPGs, every character draws from the same AP well. This is the crux of the battle strategy. Players have the option to use one character to dish out a single large attack or to spread the love by having the whole group participate in a longer string of attacks.

Summoned monsters also play into action. While details are limited, we hear these summon creatures will be good for more than just causing havoc in battle. They provide useful knowledge to help players outside of combat. With its traditional narrative and game mechanics Arc Rise Fantasia certainly won't appeal to everyone, but hopefully it will strike enough classic RPG chords to satisfy old school fans. ■■■



THE MOST HORRIFYING GAME OF THE DECADE!



SEEING IS BELIEVING!
HIGH SCORE THRILLS IN YOUR OWN HOME!!!

A COP WITH AN ATTITUDE!
A MYSTERIOUS AGENT!
A STRIPPER WITH TWO DEADLY WEAPONS!

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD OVERKILL™

STARRING SPECIAL AGENT G AND DETECTIVE WASHINGTON

in color

MATURE 17+ ™
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Partial Nudity
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Wii

WWW.HOUSEOFTHEDEADOVERKILL.COM

HEADSTRONG GAMES

SEGA®

© SEGA. SEGA, the SEGA logo, THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD and THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKILL are either registered trademarks or trademarks of SEGA Corporation.
Headstrong Games Ltd. is a registered subsidiary of Kuju PLC, part of Catalis NV group company, and is a trademark of Kuju PLC in the U.K. and other countries. All Rights Reserved. Wii and the Wii logo are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2006.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Wanted: Weapons Of Fate

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE > DEVELOPER GRIN > RELEASE MARCH

I WANT THAT

■ Sorry, fellas, a digital Angelina Jolie doesn't seem to show up in this one

If you haven't seen the movie *Wanted* yet, go watch it and come back. Finished? Great, no one can complain about spoilers. The game is both a sequel and a prequel to the film, jumping back and forth between Wesley as he goes after the French chapter of the Fraternity and his absentee father Cross as he presumably unearths Sloan's corruption in the Chicago branch.

We played a preview version of Weapons of Fate that included a few snapshots of levels with almost the entire story excised out, but plenty of action left in. The tutorial scenes have players curving bullets around hanging bodies while Wesley delivers a suitably snarky voiceover courtesy of surprisingly accurate fill-in Jimmi Simpson (see sidebar).

The first stage we sampled looked to be a vaguely European town that was straightforward enough to allow us to get used to being an assassin. The intriguing cover system allows players to stick to most any flat surface, peek out for pot shots, and easily zip to the next cover point with the flick of an analog stick and press of a button. After killing just one enemy, you'll have enough adrenaline to perform the signature bullet curve. Holding down the right bumper brings up what looks like a laser pointing at the red outline of the closest target. Maneuver the bullet arc with the left stick until the line turns white and then let go of the button. The whole process feels really smooth and allows you to take out foes firmly entrenched behind cover with ease and style.

Outside of straight combat, we also enjoyed turret and sniper sequences where we protected a woman named Alyse from an army of hooded goons. The next stage places you back at the ruined Chicago Frathouse and includes an interesting take on the overused bullet time/timed button press mechanic. Wesley enters a warehouse full of SWAT guys and you'll watch him perform all manner of fancy kills interrupted by playable slo-mo scenes where you must shoot a number of enemies (and their midair bullets!) in a matter of seconds.

The final sample stage placed us in a hijacked jetliner that progressively fails apart the further you get into it. The two narrow aisles don't offer much route flexibility as you move to take down masked gunmen, but fortunately the drink cart serves as an adequate form of mobile cover. The thugs themselves also make a great human shield if you can get your hands on one.

This quick taste of Weapons of Fate has us hungry for more, so hopefully we'll review the full game in our next issue. ■■■

THE CAST

While the developers secured James McAvoy's likeness for main character Wesley, they weren't able to get his voice. Nevertheless, many other actors from the film reprise their roles and some convincing impersonations step up to the plate.

Wesley
REPLACED
Jimmi Simpson – Liam McPoyle in *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, roles in *Zodiac*, *CSI*, and *My Name is Earl*

Cross
RETURNS
Thomas Kretschmann – returns both in likeness and voice acting, appears in *Valkyrie*, *King Kong*, and *The Pianist*

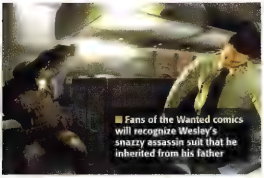
Sloan
REPLACED
Tom Kane – accomplished voice actor did a spot-on imitation of Morgan Freeman on *Robot Chicken*, longtime voice of Yoda after Frank Oz

Pekwarsky
RETURNS
Terence Stamp – respected actor is back as the wise bullet-maker, also voice of The Prophet of Truth in Halo 3

New Characters

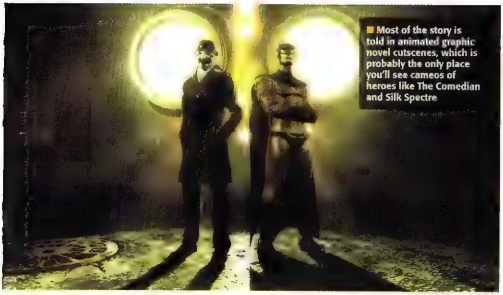
Brummel
Common – famous rapper returns to the Wanted universe as a new assassin

Araña
Paz Vega – bigtime Spanish actress plays a femme fatale, known for roles in *The Spirit*, *Spanglish*, and *Talk to Her*



■ Fans of the Wanted comics will recognize Wesley's snazzy assassin suit that he inherited from his father

■ Difficulty settings include "The Killer," "Assassin," or a third amusingly derisive substitute for "Easy" that we can't print in a family magazine



Most of the story is told in animated graphic novel cutscenes, which is probably the only place you'll see cameos of heroes like The Comedian and Silk Spectre

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Watchmen: The End Is Nigh

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE
> **DEVELOPER** DEADLINE GAMES A/S > **RELEASE** MARCH

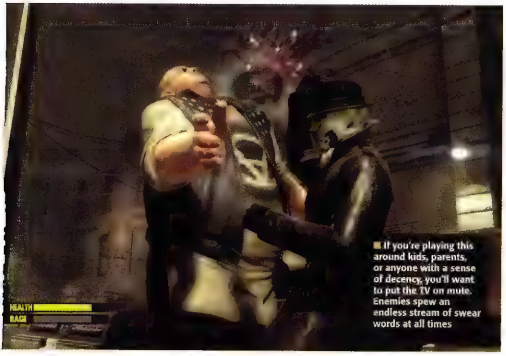
WATCH OUT

Though the Watchmen film may have had its legal battles, the downloadable game is still taking the fight to the streets. For $20 (or 1,600 Microsoft Points), players can don the masks of Nite Owl and Rorschach in a series of six co-op beat-'em-up chapters. The game takes place in 1975, 10 years before the movie's setting, when masked heroes have yet to be banned by the Keene Act. However, it seems anti-hero sentiments are already in the air.

The first mission involves the super-duo responding to a prison riot, and the warden couldn't be more contemptuous of your offers for help. Throughout our hands-on time with the first three chapters, we beat up angry convicts in a burning penitentiary, angry thugs in rainy back alleys, and slightly different-looking angry thugs by the docks. Two attack buttons can be combined to form various combos, but we found that throwing dudes and kicking them while they're down is the most efficient means of disposal. Eventually, enemies learn to block this attack, but then you can simply switch over to unstoppable counterattacks.

The two heroes have only marginally different abilities. Nite Owl tazers people and utilizes luchador-style acrobatics, while Rorschach beats thugs with crowbars and bottles and occasionally flies into a blind super-powered rage. They also differ in how they get around. Nite Owl uses a grappling hook, while Rorschach can climb drainpipes (woof). There are quite a few situations where players are separated from each other. One will run off, fight dudes, and pull a lever while the other player… just sits there doing nothing.

Sure, there is still some time for polish before The End is Nigh is released, and we've only played half the game, but we'd recommend Watchmen fans think twice before throwing down the cash. ■■■



If you're playing this around kids, parents, or anyone with a sense of decency, you'll want to put the TV on mute. Enemies spew an endless stream of swear words at all times

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

H.A.W.X.

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT ROMANIA > **RELEASE** MARCH

TRADE IN YOUR GLAWX FOR H.A.W.X.

After some extensive hands-on time with the latest addition to the Tom Clancy franchise, it looks as if Ace Combat finally has some competition. H.A.W.X. may not have been our name of choice for Ubisoft's new air combat arcade/sim, but it's hard to argue with the polished gameplay we saw on display during our early play through.

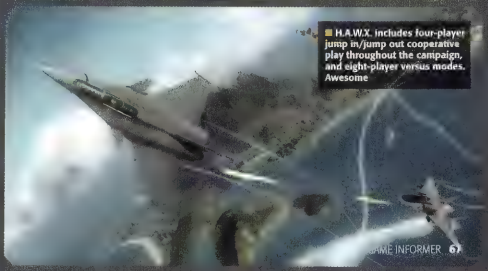
An initial test flight with the controls feels familiar. Basic control over pitch and yaw are accompanied by an absurd load of missiles and bombs to unload onto enemy forces. It's the small adjustments that really spice up the experience. For instance, a single button press will overlay an interception path onto the HUD, revealing the most advantageous course to zero in on your current target. This feature comes in extremely handy, especially when tracking ground units obscured by skyscrapers or mountainous terrain.

The game's real innovation lies in the "Assistance Off" feature. By disabling your jet's safety features, you enable high-speed turns and wild adjustments in speed and trajectory, but with the added risk of increased stalls. To communicate the clever mechanic, Ubisoft Romania pans the camera into a wide third-person angle on your plane during this mode, where you can watch as your fighter drops into ill-advised dives and wild 180-degree turns. It's an exhilarating addition to the standard formula, especially during heated dogfights.

H.A.W.X. is on track for its March release which should come as welcome news to anyone hankering for another entry in the genre since 2007's Ace Combat 6. With some added polish and some tweaks to the mission balancing, we have high hopes that H.A.W.X. may be the flier to beat in 2009. ■■■

Clancy Univ[illegible] Expands Again

[illegible] is set in the Clancy [illegible] universe after the year 2015, when p[illegible] military [illegible]



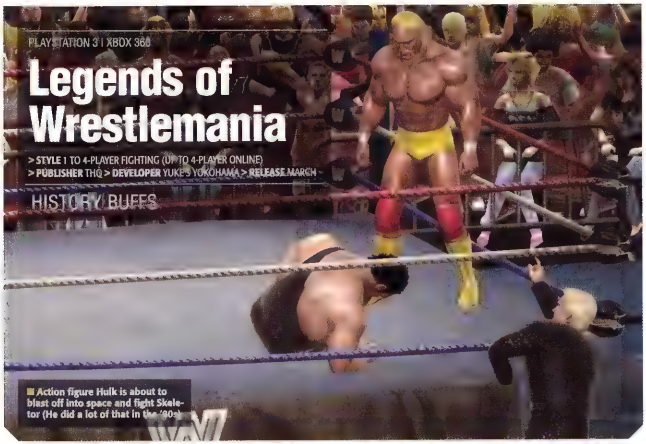
H.A.W.X. includes four-player jump in/jump out cooperative play throughout the campaign, and eight-player versus modes. Awesome

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Legends of Wrestlemania

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** YUKES YOKOHAMA > **RELEASE** MARCH

HISTORY BUFFS



Action figure Hulk is about to blast off into space and fight Skeletor (He did a lot of that in the '80s)

Memory is a funny thing. A big event can seem larger than life when viewed through the lens of nostalgia. A hero's legacy may enlarge to 10 times its former size in a fuzzy childhood recollection. This is the very reason why THQ's new Legends of Wrestlemania character models look so outrageous. Legendary wrestler Hulk Hogan is more beefed out than normal because he's not supposed to be the Hulk Hogan from history, he's the Hulk Hogan from our childhood.

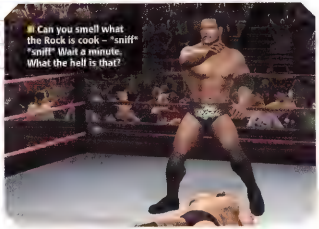
Legend's gameplay holds true to its over-the-top look. The streamlined interface uses the four major face buttons to control all the action, resulting in some easy to pick up, arcade action. To further break down the action, mini-objectives are scattered within each match. Completing these objectives, which are based off real historical events, determines the winner's score. For example, you might be asked to scoop slam Andre the Giant as Hulk Hogan, just like it happened in their 1987 Wrestlemania III match. This was a notable historic feat, as it was the first time the Giant had ever been taken off his feet.

Wrestling managers also play an important role in the outcome of each match. You'll see flamboyantly dressed gentlemen like Jimmy Hart and Bobby "The Brain" Heenan interrupting submission holds and doing other things to interfere with their wrestler's opponent.

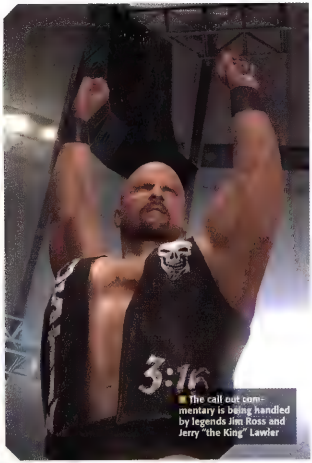
It's clear even after just a few minutes with the game that the developers want Legends to be a tribute to the sport. With its arcade action and silly atmosphere, this tightly focused fan service title might be one of the first wresting games that appeals to non-wrestling fans. ■ ■ ■

The Rs of Wrestling

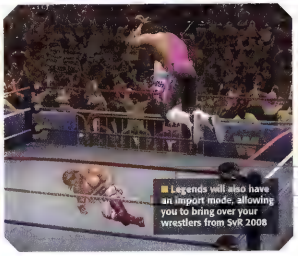
Legend's feature game mode is called Relive, Rewrite, and Redeem. The basic premise allows players to relive all the classic matches from yesteryear's Wrestlemania events. Want to take down The Rock as Stone Cold Steve Austin in their classic Wrestlemania XV match? That's one option. Maybe you didn't like how Shawn Michaels beat the tar out of Bret Hart back in Wrestlemania XII – this is also your chance to rewrite that page of history by taking control of Hart and making sure the match swings back in his favor. Things get even more interesting when you change the rules of the matches. With certain bouts you can alter the battle conditions. For example, you could turn Andre the Giant's 1985 brawl against Big John Studd into a steel cage match and see if that affects the outcome. The wrestlers and the venue will always stay the same, but otherwise wrestling history is ripe for the changing.



Can you smell what the Rock is cook – "sniff" "sniff" Wait a minute. What the hell is that?



The call out commentary is being handled by legends Jim Ross and Jerry "the King" Lawler



Legends will also have an import mode, allowing you to bring over your wrestlers from SvR 2008

If Three's a Crowd...

Think Wrestlemania started out small? Think again. In March of 1985, the original The Grandaddy of Them All packed 19,121 people into Madison Square Garden. By the time Wrestlemania III rolled around, the pay-per-view event had exploded to 93,173 attendees, filling the Pontiac Silverdome in Michigan and making it the largest recorded attendance for a live indoor sporting event in American history.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

UFC 2009 Undisputed

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** THQ
> DEVELOPER YUKE'S OSAKA **> RELEASE** SPRING

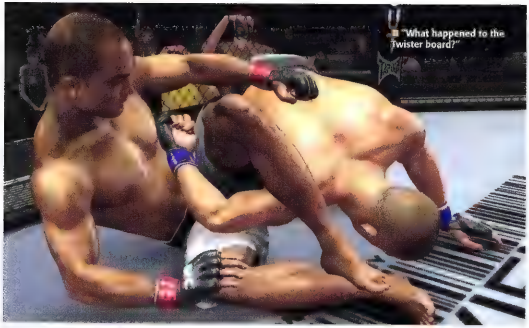
THE NEW KID

A few Ultimate Fighting Championship titles have come and gone over the last decade, but none of them had the fighting chops to survive. With UFC continuing to rise in popularity, THQ – no stranger to the ring with its Smackdown vs. Raw series – is stepping up, and might have what it takes to weather more than a few rounds in the Octagon.

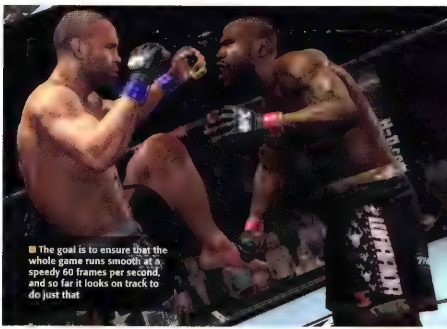
Thanks to developer Yuke's impressively detailed character models and animation system, these fighters look real. The developer has worked hard to ensure that each fighter's body moves and reacts like it should in combat. These digital reconstructions sweat, breathe, and bleed like the real deal, and they also interact well with each other. Limbs no longer clip into the body or stop just short of connection. Every impact looks firm. When a fighter blocks a devastating kick, his arms press back against the body and face realistically – jaws snap back with force after an uppercut. The animation holds up even as these brawlers battle back and forth with athletic speed.

The control system is easy to pick up, with the face buttons handling all the basic attacks while the left and right buttons handle modifying basic attacks and blocking. Anyone who has watched UFC knows that eventually most bouts devolve into a rolling match on the floor, so plenty of effort has gone into making sure the ground game is just as deep as the traditional fighting. A new grapple system has been created using the right analog stick, so fighters will have to strategically position themselves in the best spot to put a submission hold on their opponent while dealing with his attempts to block, counter, and escape.

Like most wrestling games, UFC features robust career and create-a-fighter modes. Joe Rogan and Mike Goldberg also provide hours of commentary. The final release will pack an extensive roster of 80 of the best mixed martial arts fighters in the world. Across five weight classes you'll see names like Wanderlei Silva, BJ Penn, Frank Mir, Rashad Evans, and Quinton "Rampage" Jackson. Undisputed looks promising so far, but we won't find out until later this year if it really lives up to its name. ■■■



"What happened to the twister board?"

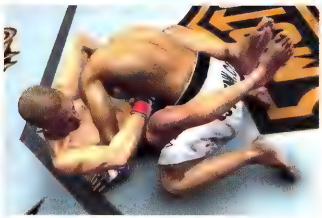


The goal is to ensure that the whole game runs smooth at a speedy 60 frames per second, and so far it looks on track to do just that

Fighting Style

UFC isn't made up of any one fighting style; the sport covers a wide range of disciplines. Any fighter worth his weight class mixes and matches a few techniques to come up with a style uniquely his own. Here's a breakdown of some of the major styles found in the sport that Yuke's is specifically including in the game.

- **Boxing** – The gentleman's sport's history goes all the way back to ancient Greece, and uses elaborate foot maneuvers and quick jabs to mount a powerful offense.
- **Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu** – Developed to take down larger opponents, this Brazilian spin-off of Japanese judo focuses on grappling and ground fighting.
- **Judo** – In competitive judo, striking is not allowed (something that's not a problem in the UFC), as this Japanese martial art emphasizes throwing your opponent.
- **Kickboxing** – A broad descriptor that that can cover a variety of martial art forms, but generally ones that integrate boxing punches and martial arts kicks.
- **Muay Thai** – Also known as Thai Boxing. Thailand's most popular spectator sport, this form of kickboxing utilizes elbows, knees, and low kicks.
- **Wrestling** – Quite possibly the world's oldest sport, contestants take down their opponents using hand-to-hand maneuvers and no striking blows.



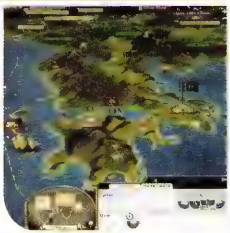
PC

Empire: Total War

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** CREATIVE ASSEMBLY > **RELEASE** MARCH 3

THE WHITE GLOVES ARE OFF

With a battle system that renders every musket ball and handles large-scale battles up to 10,000 troops, Empire: Total War's skirmishes are nothing short of spectacular



Though Empire: Total War shares many similarities with its critically praised predecessors, for all intents and purposes Creative Assembly has rebuilt its strategy series from the ground up. The addition of gun warfare, naval battles, and more intricate diplomacy from the age of colonization practically necessitated it.

One of Creative Assembly's larger focuses for improving Total War is to streamline the experience by reducing micromanagement chores. Tax, trade, and government decisions are now handled at the faction level rather than at every city. Faction leaders can also recruit new troops directly from generals instead of doing it city-by-city and setting waypoints to guide them to the frontlines.

More so than any other Total War game, politics is paramount to success in Empire. Players must be careful how they go about diplomacy, as their populations will react to every decision. Declaring outright war is messy, but sophisticated leaders can use the black arts to prompt enemies into declaring war on them without firing a musket. The agents from previous games are now replaced by two more useful new classes. The rake is your devious tool for spying on cities, assassinating enemies, and sabotaging important buildings. The gentlemen, on the other hand, grant productivity bonuses to cities and can challenge enemy gentlemen to a duel, Zell Miller style (watch it, Chris Matthews!). This is a great apolitical way to weaken your enemy by eliminating the bonuses his gentlemen impart.

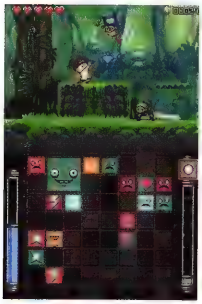
With 12 playable factions and 50 total factions vying for supremacy, economic and political relationships can get hairy in a hurry. To better recreate the intricate level of diplomacy during the era, Creative Assembly completely scrapped its AI system. Enemy factions now have two intertwining brains. An over-arching AI handles long-term, turn-based campaign objectives, while the supplemental logic handles more goal-oriented action planning during real-time battles.

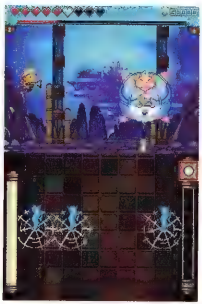
In addition to the popular global conquest mode, Total War is spreading its wings with a dedicated narrative campaign called The Road to Independence. These three mission-centric episodes focus on the creation of Jamestown, the French and Indian War, and the Revolutionary War. This campaign is a great way for new players to learn the nuances of Total War without feeling the pressure of taking on the world. All of this adds up to one of the most promising strategy titles to date. ■■■

Protecting your trade routes from blockades and hijackings will be paramount to your economic success

To The Poopdeck!

Previous Total War games featured naval battles resolved by AI, but Empire allows gamers to take to the seas themselves to control the outcome of each battle. You can build your naval fleet out of 25 ships, each offering a unique tradeoff between firepower and maneuverability. Each sloop, brig, and frigate has been historically researched and rendered down to each plank of wood. These seemingly minor details become critical during naval battles, as every mast, hull, and sail has been modeled with realistic physical properties. Cannonballs deal massive damage to hulls, chain shots weaken sails and masts, and grape shots are perfect for targeting on-deck crews. You can also completely destroy a ship by landing a critical hit on its gunpowder magazine. Considering the massive value of ships, however, it's often better to send your scalawags aboard the enemy ship to commandeer it in the name of your nation.





NINTENDO DS

Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure

> STYLE 1-PLAYER PLATFORMER/PUZZLE **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EA CASUAL STUDIOS **> RELEASE** MARCH

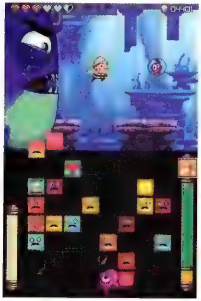
THE POMPOUS PLATFORMING PUZZLER

If Mario and Luigi attended Oxford instead of plumber school, chances are they'd end up like Henry Hatsworth. This esteemed explorer also dons a fabulous moustache, but you won't find overalls in his refined wardrobe. His Bond Street sensibility prefers indubitably classy haberdasheries like bucket hats, bowties, and monocles.

As a member of the Pompous Adventurers' Club, Hatsworth spends his days platforming through exotic locales looking for long-lost artifacts. His latest exploit entails finding a golden hat said to have powerful magical properties. Hatsworth is far too educated to believe in hocus pocus theories, so he's in the hunt purely for the sport. But when he locates the hat, it indeed reveals itself to be a magical creation granting its wearer untold powers. Hatsworth then sets out to find the rest of the golden wardrobe.

Hatsworth's quests unfold on two distinct planes. Like Mario, Henry spends much of his time jumping from platform to platform while stomping enemies or shooting them with a ranged weapon. But as he dispatches the various beasts that stand in his way, they relocate to a rising box puzzle on the bottom screen of the DS. Hatsworth must split his time between the puzzle and the platforming to prevent the enemies from returning to the action realm. By swapping boxes with the stylus to align three or more blocks of the same color vertically or horizontally, they disappear and charge Hatsworth's super meter. Filling the super meter allows Henry to trigger a special Tea Time mode where he dons a robot suit to make quick work of his foes. Eliminating boxes with special power-up signs can also replenish Hatsworth's health or grant other bonuses.

In the platforming realm, Hatsworth collects coins and gems from dispatched enemies and treasure chests, which he can then use to upgrade his melee, ranged, and puzzle-solving abilities. Ladies and gentlemen can join the Pompous Adventurers' Club to experience this unique genre mash-up in March. ■■■



NINTENDO DS

Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY **> PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX **> DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE **> RELEASE** MARCH 17

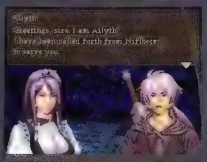
FEATHER IN YOUR CAP

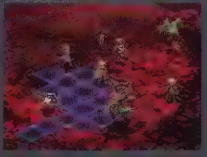
The Valkyrie Profile series has forged its identity by doing things differently. Unique battle systems and bittersweet storylines set the first two games apart from their peers, and the third entry is already shaping up to surprise gamers with its unorthodox approach. Set before the first Valkyrie Profile in the timeline, Covenant of the Plume (formerly subtitled "The Accused One") abandons most of the RPG trappings of its predecessors in favor of grid-based strategy warfare.

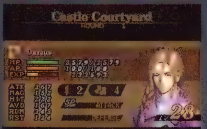
Covenant of the Plume stars a warrior named Wylfred who has sworn to get vengeance on the valkyrie Lenneth. To accomplish his goal, Wylfred makes a deal with a goddess of the underworld, who gives him a feather as a symbol of their pact. As the battles unfold, this plume becomes one of the key weapons at your disposal. You can use it on allies to grant them superhuman strength, virtually guaranteeing victory for that fight. However, any ally that uses the power dies after it fades, permanently removing them from your party. This forces the player to weigh the importance of immediate success against the long-term cost. The number of times you use the feather will also affect which of the multiple endings you receive.

Combat is structured like most grid-based battle systems, with your army and the enemy's taking turns advancing and attacking. The major difference is that once you are in position, your attacks take place using a combat system similar to the first Valkyrie Profile. Allies are mapped to one of the four face buttons, and you time your presses to maximize damage and initiate powerful super moves. Though only four characters can attack at a time, more than that can join Wylfred's cause, and some will tag along as guests. You can forget about using the plume on one-shot guest characters, though. We tried it, and the game clearly states that the plume can only be used on Wylfred's trusted friends, because sacrifice without significance is meaningless.

With its combination of strategy and story, the time we spent playing Covenant of the Plume has us eager to dig deeper into the experience. Valkyrie Profile isn't one of those RPG series that sees multiple iterations every console generation, so a new entry is something to keep an eye on. ■■■

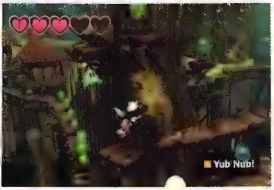




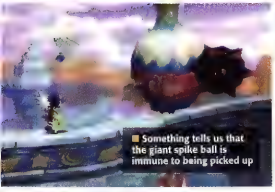


Surely there will be no mine cart rides

What the heck kind of animal is Klonoa, anyway?



Yub Nub!



Something tells us that the giant spike ball is immune to being picked up

Wii

Klonoa

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO BANDAI **> RELEASE** 2009

NO GIMMICKS, JUST GAMEPLAY

It may not have the name recognition of Mario or Sonic, but Namco Bandai's Klonoa franchise quietly delivered top-flight 2D platforming action on Sony's first two PlayStations, as well as the Game Boy Advance. Klonoa hasn't seen a new release since a 2005 entry on GBA, but is now poised to give gameplay-starved Wii owners a respite from mindless waggle.

Klonoa is faithfully carrying over the platforming formula established by earlier titles in the series. The anthropomorphic cat-like hero can grab enemies and use them for a variety of purposes, including flinging them downward for a double-jump or tossing them forward to take out an obstacle. Klonoa can perform a whirlwind maneuver that slows down nearby enemies, and his weird floppy wing-ears can be used for brief mid-air glides as well.

Several interesting ideas are at play in the game's level design, with 2D platforming staples like slides and flowing water making appearances, among many others. There appears to be an exploration mechanic as well, where curious and skilled players can take creative routes to hidden doors and secret areas.

Gamers will be glad to know that Klonoa features no mandatory motion controls; it is designed to play well with any of several control schemes. A single Wii remote, remote and nunchuk configuration, a GameCube controller, and the Classic controller should work equally well.

Though the gameplay takes place in two dimensions, everything is modeled in 3D. As in many so-called "2.5D" titles before it, this gives Klonoa a great combination of old-school platforming gameplay with a modern visual look. The colorful, inviting art style shouldn't scare off more mature gamers, either. If this Klonoa is anything like its predecessors, it'll offer plenty of challenge to dedicated players.

No specific U.S. release date has been announced yet, but Klonoa has already released in Japan. We expect it to easily land in the top tier of third-party Wii titles when it launches Stateside this year. ■ ■ ■

This is 100 percent 2D gameplay, clever visual tricks notwithstanding

NINTENDO DS

Rhythm Heaven

> STYLE 1-PLAYER MUSIC **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** NINTENDO **> RELEASE** 2009

LET THE RHYTHM HIT 'EM

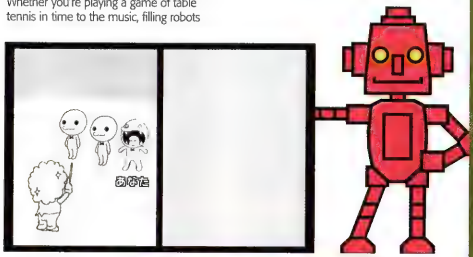
Game Informer has a very low opinion of Wii Music, so when we received another Nintendo music game that claimed "If you can tap your finger in time to music, you'll get the hang of Rhythm Heaven in no time!" we weren't exactly stoked. Which is exactly why you shouldn't judge a game by its cover – or its press materials.

Upon getting a playable build of the game, we were pleased to find a title that uses two simple mechanics – tapping and flicking the touch screen in rhythm – to achieve surprisingly interesting music gameplay. The game combines the best elements of Elite Beat Agents and Wario Ware, resulting in a charming collection of rhythm-based minigames that keep you in the groove and constantly interested in what's next.

While the mechanics are fairly standard, the visuals for each stage are wildly varied. Whether you're playing a game of table tennis in time to the music, filling robots with fuel on an assembly line, or making Easter Island statues harmonize, the game constantly presents you with both amusing eye candy and challenging syncopation. Even better, the original soundtrack is very catchy, evoking styles from J-pop to Russian folk music.

The art style is as varied as the soundtrack. One level might be made of nothing but simple geometric art, while the next offers animated characters akin to cartoons like Powerpuff Girls.

Even better, this game seems to remember the latter half of the adage "Easy to learn, difficult to master" – something too many recent Nintendo casual titles conveniently forgot. If the finished product lives up to the promise of what's already been done, Rhythm Heaven could be the quirky, engaging music game for everyone that Wii Music was supposed to be. ■■■



New Play Control Pikmin

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** NINTENDO **> RELEASE** MARCH 8

EXACTLY HOW IT SOUNDS

When Nintendo originally announced the Wii, one of the first-party franchises that got fans excited was Pikmin. Nintendo's unique hardware seemed like fertile ground to grow another quirky plant-based strategy title. Now, two years after its launch, Nintendo is finally delivering on those dreams, though it may not be quite as you envisioned. As you can probably discern from the title, New Play Control Pikmin is a re-release of the original GameCube title with revamped motion controls.

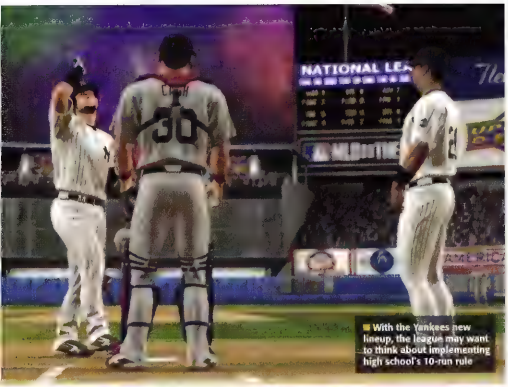
One might think that after being ported to the Wii, issuing commands or throwing Pikmin around would require some kind of controller motion, but Nintendo chose to keep most of the game's actions mapped to buttons. The only noticeable change in this version of the game is the cursor, which can now be controlled by aiming the Wii remote at the screen. This makes dishing out your army of Pikmin faster and more precise, but it isn't a noticeably innovative difference from the 2001 release.

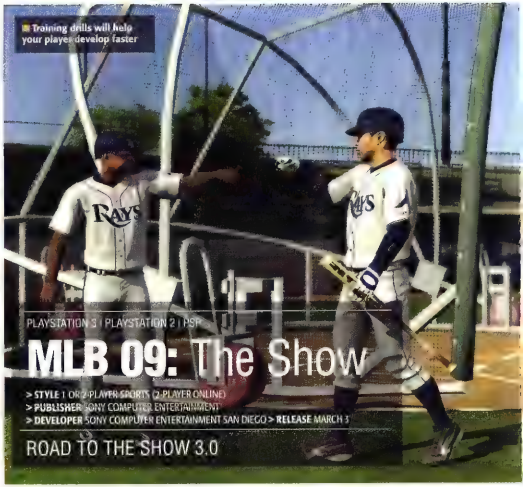
For those who need the history lesson, Pikmin is the story of a bug-sized alien named Captain Olimar, who accidentally crash lands on a planet filled with dangerous wild creatures and oddly earth-like garbage. To help rebuild his ship, the little astronaut enlists the help of some very impressionable ant-like plants, called Pikmin. Olimar must nurture these Pikmin, using all of their unique talents in conjunction to build bridges, destroy walls, and fight local monsters with the ultimate goal to find the missing pieces of his ship before his 30-day supply of oxygen runs out.

The fact that this game is being re-released on the Wii might be good news for those who didn't get a chance to play Pikmin the first time around, but it's also a bit of a disappointment for those eager for a fresh release. Let's hope Nintendo is just teasing our appetites for greater things to come. ■■■

■ As you can see in this screen the innovation of the Wii's new cursor really ...um effects the oh boy .. flow of the action

■ Hey remember that guy? Yep, you guessed it, he's still there, and he's still doing exactly what he did last time you saw him. What a crazy guy!


With the Yankees new lineup, the league may want to think about implementing high school's 10-run rule


Training drills will help your player develop faster

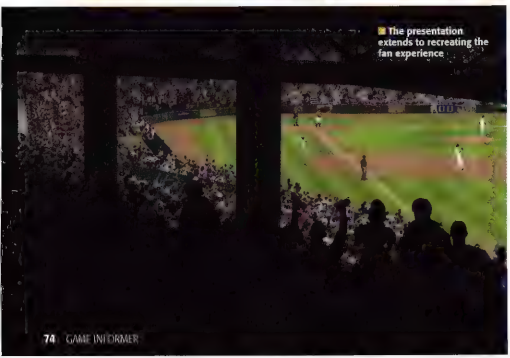
PLAYSTATION 3 | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP

MLB 09: The Show

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2 PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SAN DIEGO > **RELEASE** MARCH 3

ROAD TO THE SHOW 3.0

Fielders will now position themselves correctly for incoming throws


The presentation extends to recreating the fan experience

In this preview we won't waste your time with an analytical introduction, or a joke about the Chicago Cubs (100 years, huh?). We know you want us to jump right to the Road to the Show, a mode that reviewers and readers alike have deemed the most rewarding experience in video game baseball.

This year's Road to the Show showcases a number of upgrades, including tweaks to the lead-off/steal mechanic, deeper coach interactions (such as manager's evaluating other players against you), and new training minigames that can improve your created player's abilities and performance if you meet the listed goals.

If you're the type of player who doesn't enjoy creating a player and would rather just play with the same team you see in real life, Sony has put a ton of work into this year's Franchise mode. This mode introduces 40-man rosters, authentic salary arbitration, Type A and B free agent compensation, release waivers, and September call-ups. The only thing missing is general managers debating trades as they dish up mashed potatoes at a Vegas buffet during the winter meetings.

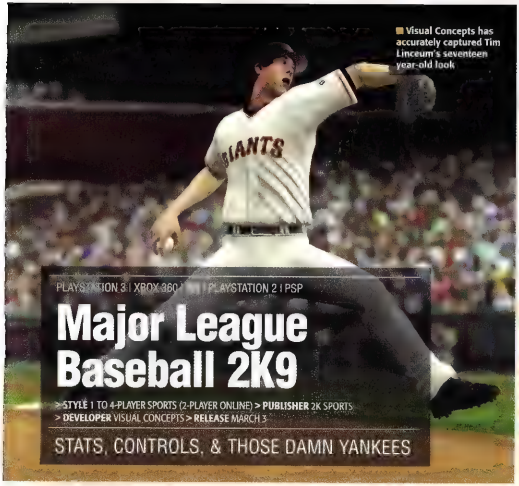
On the field, Sony is paying attention to the little details that fans likely didn't know existed. Pitcher grips and arm angles are being tweaked to simulate the delivery of 17 different pitches, including the knuckle-curve and gyroball. For fielder tags, new player positioning has been calculated for every throw direction to every base. This includes pick off and back pick attempts. In past MLB games, players could gobble up everything hit in their range. This year, players will react realistically to balls that are hit far too hard to handle cleanly. This means that balls will bounce off of your players, and perhaps lead to an error or an amazing play.

Jason Villa, producer of MLB 09: The Show, tells us that realism is needed to balance the game. "In order for our batters to reach the correct amount of doubles and triples in our game, we needed a few things to happen. The batter needs to get out of the box appropriately, round the bases correctly, and have his true-to-life times from home to first, first to third, etc. The fielders need to react naturally, the same way they do in real life." infielders and outfielders track balls hit down the lines and in the gaps just like they do in the majors. This includes outfielders rounding the ball and playing the back angle.

The pitcher and batter duel is receiving a year of improvements as well, but we'll have to wait to get our hands on the game next month for the review before we can accurately dissect how it differs from last year's game. Pitcher comfort levels and hitting slumps and streaks are now factored into the equation.

The heightening of the on-field experience extends to the presentation. Players can record their own chants and edit the music that is played throughout the course of the game. To get started, might we recommend, "Hey A-Rod! If you enjoyed dating Madonna, I could give you my grandma's number!" and to inspire confidence, "Hey C.C.! If you strike this batter out, I'll give you my nachos!" Hundreds of new animations are being introduced to further capture the realism of this sport.

To round out this experience, online league seasons are available with live drafts for up to 30 players. In the spirit of competition, MLB 09: The Show will once again launch on the same day as its rival on March 3. ■■■



Visual Concepts has accurately captured Tim Lincecum's seventeen year-old look

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP

Major League Baseball 2K9

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS > **RELEASE** MARCH 3

STATS, CONTROLS, & THOSE DAMN YANKEES

In 2003, The Onion ran a satirical article titled "Yankees Ensure 2003 Pennant By Signing Every Player in Baseball." Flash forward six years and this article has suddenly lost all of its humor. For the 2009 season, the Yankees cleaned up on the free agent market, signing C.C. Sabathia, Mark Teixeira, and A.J. Burnett for a combined $423.5 million. Note to Bud Selig: Maybe a salary cap wouldn't be a bad idea. The Yankees are poised to make a run for the pennant, but not necessarily in Major League Baseball 2K9. With improved control mechanics for both pitching and batting, casual and hardcore players alike can witness David versus Goliath-like miracles, such as the lowly Baltimore Orioles winning the division, or the Kansas City Royals playing at a major league level.

The one complaint every player had about last year's game was the difficulty balancing for pitching. If you weren't grooving your fastball and placing your breaking balls in the perfect spots, your starter would be tagged for at least three blasts a game. This year, balls will remain in the park thanks to the new two-step "hold and gesture" pitching system. The odds of serving up a meatball are greatly reduced with this simplified system, but at the same time, precision is still required for a Cy Young-like performance.

For batting, players no longer need to blindly guess a pitch's location. The new Zone Hitting mechanic places a bat icon, which players freely move to the location where the believe the pitch is being thrown, is plainly visible, and also highlights where you sweet spot is in the zone. If you get good wood on the ball, players can use the left stick to influence the flight of the ball. For instance, tapping up will produce a fly ball. These minor tweaks go a long way to giving the game a pick-up-and-play quality.

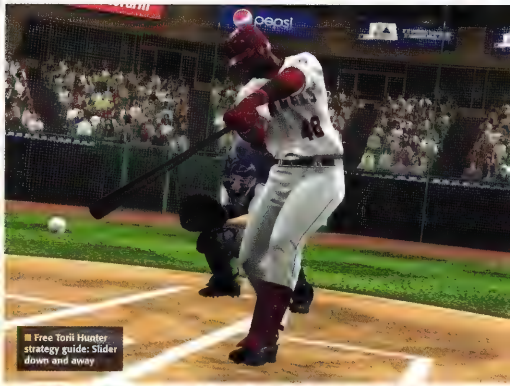
Even in our preview build for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, the game is running much smoother than the previous edition ever did. The framerate holds steady for the switch between pitching and fielding, and the linking animations for players have been smoothed out. Some kinks still remain for base running, outfield catching, and home run celebrations. Hopefully Visual Concepts can iron these out between now and the game's March 3 ship date.

The biggest addition to the front office is Living Rosters. Much like NBA 2K9, this feature authenticates player attributes to the real MLB season through daily updates. Basically, as the season goes on, Barry Zito will drop 10 points a month, and Derek Jeter's abilities will skyrocket come October. Franchise mode is now open to multiple users. If you live in a frat house with 30 people, you can set up a league with 30 user-controlled teams. In the clubhouse, player ambitions are finally factored into the mix. Some players are looking for fat wallets. Others want to play for a contender. This should put some strategy into the free agent signing game.

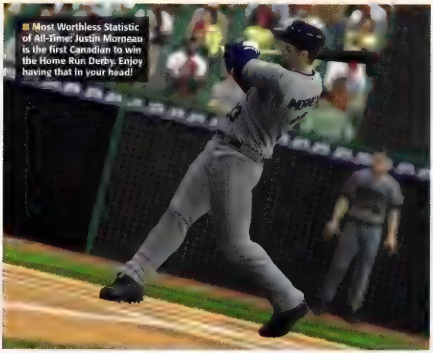
To further bypass the uncanny valley, Visual Concepts has upped its number of signature animations to 300. Crowds are no longer clap-happy drones, either. They'll move and even put a glove up for a foul ball.

The best addition in our opinion is the subtraction of Joe Morgan. He was a hell of a player, but not much of an announcer (at least when it comes to this series). The commentary team now boasts Gary Thorne on the play by play, and Steve Phillips on the color analysis.

If you often spend hours a day online dissecting statistical data for fantasy or fun, Visual Concepts has implemented a ton of sabermetric statistics, allowing players to track and analyze almost every number associated with a game. And for that frat house mentioned earlier, let us know when you are holding that 30-person dynasty draft party. We'll be there! ■ ■ ■



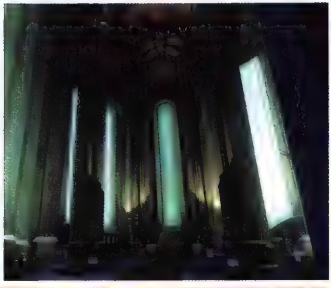
Free Torii Hunter strategy guide: Slider down and away



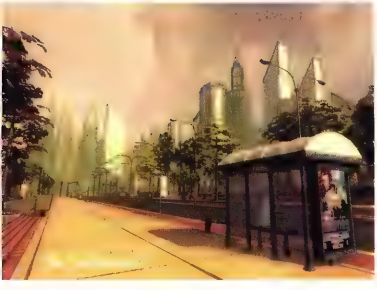
Most Worthless Statistic of All-Time: Justin Morneau is the first Canadian to win the Home Run Derby. Enjoy having that in your head!

Pictured is one of 25 players who will take this September off

Players will have enormous flexibility in customizing their character's powers and appearance



Every hero will have a corresponding nemesis created by the player

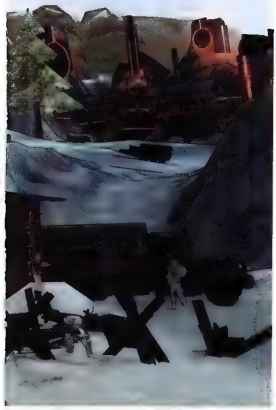


PC

Champions Online

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> PUBLISHER ATARI **> DEVELOPER** CRYPTIC STUDIOS **> RELEASE** SPRING

COSTUMING UP



After months of waiting, we dove into the limited beta of Cryptic's new superhero MMO this month. We were disappointed to learn that the game won't be simultaneously launching on both console and PC, but we did get a chance to chat with design director Bill Roper about the status of the console version. After our conversation, we fired up the game, relished in the insanely flexible character creator, and fought our way through the first several hours.

The PC version is still expected to ship by the end of this spring, but the tentatively planned 360 version is now steering towards a fall launch, presuming the business deals get hammered out. Other consoles? Roper keeps hope alive: "We're exploring our options on both the Xbox 360 and PS3. Basically we'd love to get the game into as many players' hands as possible." As for the slightly more assured 360 version, a delay definitely doesn't imply a lack of focus. "We've done a lot of work ensuring that our engine and game mechanics work well on the Xbox 360," Roper says. "Our design considerations have taken console into account, and we spin up a console code build every night." While cross-platform play is still being discussed, Roper assures us the console and PC versions share nearly identical gameplay and mechanics, but may have UI differences to take advantage of the differing resolutions of TVs and computer monitors.

As for our time in the game, it was hard to extricate ourselves from Cryptic's highly customizable character creator. You start by choosing a basic power set, including everything from brawling claw fighters to ice blasting powerhouses. With a basic structural build decided, it's time to shape your character's look. Hundreds of costume pieces and body shape adjustments let your imagination go wild. Our favorite character emerged into the game with cyborg leg enhancements, shock-blasting arm bands, a skintight metallic bodysuit, and towering feathered wings.

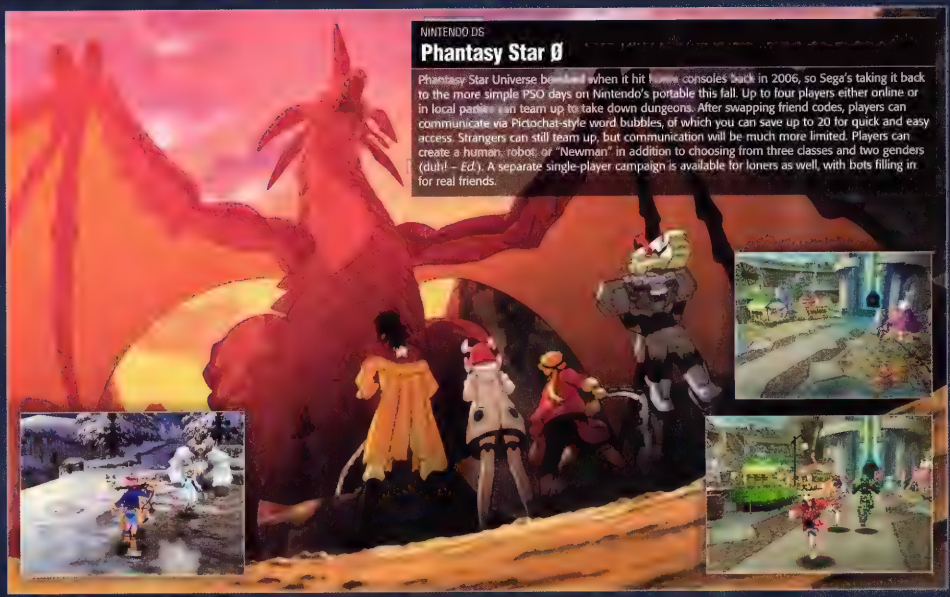
Once in the game, we began the investigation of a mysteriously crashed airliner deep in the Canadian wilderness. Blasting the ice demons assaulting the plane's survivors, we found the action-based controls mapped quite well to the 360 controller we plugged into the PC. Continuing play, we tapped into our flight travel power, and were excited to see that the game recognized our wings as something more than just a costume piece. Leaping into the air, the wings automatically became our primary means of locomotion, flapping in graceful arcs through the air. Had we chosen a jetpack, the visuals would instead have shown a blast of smoke and fire.

During our hours of gameplay, we saw several other cool set-piece areas. Deep in the desert, Area 51 offers up its secrets. Elsewhere, a prison for supervillains was in the midst of a massive inmate escape. We even encountered a strange region that seemed like a town out of the old west, populated only by robots. Like many MMOs at this stage, Champions Online is still hard at work implementing major elements of the user interface, power balancing, and bug fixing. Cryptic is still in the process of implementing the nemesis system, which will allow every player to craft an archenemy for their hero. If everything comes together, this action-focused variant on the MMO formula may steal a good chunk of our time when it releases in a few months. ■ ■ ■

■ The game will ship first on PC, but a console version is almost assured at a later date

PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



NINTENDO DS

Phantasy Star Ø

Phantasy Star Universe bombed when it hit home consoles back in 2006, so Sega's taking it back to the more simple PSO days on Nintendo's portable this fall. Up to four players either online or in local parties can team up to take down dungeons. After swapping friend codes, players can communicate via Pictochat-style word bubbles, of which you can save up to 20 for quick and easy access. Strangers can still team up, but communication will be much more limited. Players can create a human, robot, or "Newman" in addition to choosing from three classes and two genders (duh! – *Ed.*). A separate single-player campaign is available for loners as well, with bots filling in for real friends.

NINTENDO DS

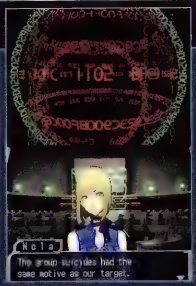
Guitar Hero: Modern Hits

Activision is going back to the well with Guitar Hero: Modern Hits, the third GH title for the Nintendo DS. As the title suggests, the game's soundtrack is collected from some of the new millennium's biggest bands, including Fall Out Boy, Tenacious D, The Strokes, Coldplay, and Weezer. Like the last version, it features streaming multiplayer, while adding new "Fan Request" that allows you to win new followers and unlock challenges like playing songs in hyperspeed or having to whammy every single held note in a song. Multiplayer is compatible with Guitar Hero: On Tour and Decades, meaning that you can stream songs from a friend's cart, essentially tripling the number of songs available for play. Look for Modern Hits to release later this year.

NINTENDO DS

Lux-Pain

Fans of Phoenix Wright may have a darker adventure to look forward to on March 24 courtesy of Killaware and Ignition. As part of a secret high-tech organization of telepaths called FORT, main character Atsuki tracks down brain parasites for a living. These beings, called Silent, cause their hosts to commit strange crimes, and most victims end up killing themselves. Everyone you talk to brings you closer to the original infected person, the key to stopping the parasites. Players will gain access to thoughts by scratching off people's skin (don't worry, it grows back) and pinning down the glowing orbs beneath.



NINTENDO DS

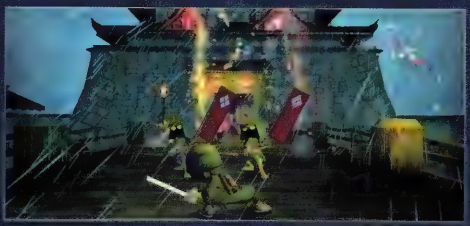
Mario & Luigi RPG 3

Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time hit the DS over three years ago, so it's about time that developer AlphaDream got around to releasing another hilariously whacked-out RPG featuring gaming's most recognizable handymen. This time around a giant Bowser sucks up all the inhabitants of the Mushroom Kingdom, so Mario and Luigi must work together to bust out of Bowser's bowels. But Bowser is more than just a foil for our heroes; he'll also be a playable character. When he's out for battle, players will hold their DS sideways, using the touch screen to issue commands, and blowing into the microphone to perform fire breath attacks. The game just released in Japan, so except it to hit our shores this year.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | NINTENDO DS | PC

Mini Ninjas

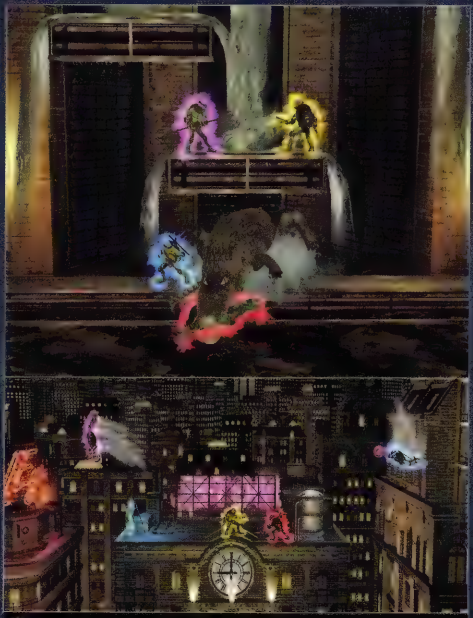
Hitman and Kane & Lynch developer IO Interactive is changing gears for its next project. Utilizing a cute *Kung Fu Panda* look, Mini Ninjas puts players in the role of the diminutive Hiro as he takes on evil samurai forces. Blending katana combat and Kuji magic, Hiro will bust up these bad guys and transform them back into the happy forest animals they once were. Look for Mini Ninjas this fall as part of a co-publishing deal from Eidos and Warner Bros. Interactive.



NINTENDO DS

Boing! Docomodake

Full disclosure: this AQ Interactive/Ignition game is based on a Japanese cell phone mascot. That doesn't necessarily mean, however, that we're wandering into Yo! Noid territory here. We played the first part of the game, and it's actually a decent platform/puzzle experience. Using a combination of d-pad and stylus control, players must bust their big mushroom into a squad of minis to squeeze through tight spots, throw at enemies, and stack up to form ladders. Things start out simple and cute, but as you gain more minis and the puzzles get more complex it becomes a nice little brainteaser. Expect these 'shrooms to surface March 10.



Wii

TMNT: Smash Up

A Wii fighting game based on the TMNT franchise being developed by members culled from teams that worked on Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Ninja Gaiden, and Dead or Alive sounds like a strange April Fools' joke. But it's March, so you'll just have to trust us on this one. This as yet unnamed title features four-player Super Smash Bros.-style fighting, interactive stages, and a robust online mode which promises to be better implemented than Brawl's. Ubisoft hopes to launch this one around September, so we should be getting our hands on it soon.

REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI

F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin

PLAYSTATION 3

Killzone 2

Wii

Deadly Creatures

XBOX 360

Halo Wars

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

Street Fighter IV

After years without a numbered entry, Street Fighter IV marks the return of the classic 2D fighting series. A gorgeous art style blends seamlessly with familiar combat mechanics, creating intense and responsive battles at home and online. Whether you're a fighting fanatic or just an enthusiastic gamer, Street Fighter IV lets you experience pure competitive bliss without the musty stink of an early-'90s arcade.

GAME INFORMER HONORED GAME OF THE MONTH

LocoRoco 2

This sequel to one of the most charming and original titles on PSP hits a home run with a winning combo of enchanting artwork, tight platforming, and a lovable soundtrack. As if that wasn't enough, Sony packs in a handful of new minigames, loads of unlockables, and some brand new moves for these bouncy blobs. Turn to page 94 to find out why buying this is a no-brainer for PSP owners.

Our crack (or crackhead, we can never decide which) review team rates games in a number of categories to help you sort out the great from the stuff you'll hate. Most games are reviewed by two staff members, and you will find both their opinions on each review. To make things a little easier we have put together some definitions of what the numbers mean, what we look for in a game, and also a cheat sheet so the newbies can understand our advanced video game jargon. It is important to note that the Game of the Month is determined only by the main review score, not an average of the two opinions.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.
5	Passable. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
4	Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
1	Heroes. NBC should follow Ubisoft's lead and stick Kryptonite down this show's pants.

> Concept: What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

> Graphics: How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.

> Sound: Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?

> Playability: Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

> Entertainment: Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.

> Replay Value

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

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

Moderate – Good for a few months or a few times through.

Moderately Low – After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.

Low – You'll quit playing before you complete the game

PC

92

Drakensang: The Dark Eye

HANDHELD

94

Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride

91

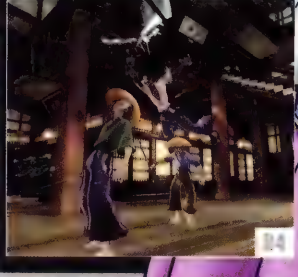
GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II

It's a good day whenever a studio the quality of Relic releases a new title. Dawn of War II is arguably the most intense real-time strategy title to date, with peerless presentation and turbocharged gameplay. There are a lot of new ideas at work here, with only a handful of units at your command and a single-player campaign that goes farther down the RPG road than the genre has previously seen. Relic has can add another resounding success on its resume.

REVIEWS INDEX

Afro Samurai 84
Blue Dragon Plus 95
Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box 85
Deadly Creatures 87
Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride 94
Drakensang: The Dark Eye 92
F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin 83
Halo Wars 88
Killzone 2 86
Legacy of Ys: Books I & II 95
LocoRoco 2 94
Lord of the Rings: Conquest, The 85
Marble Saga: Kororinpa 87
My World My Way 96
Race Pro 89
Star Ocean: The Last Hope 90
Stoked 89
Street Fighter IV 82
TrackMania DS 95
Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War II 91



84

Pg. 94

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.	Content suitable only for adults.
Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.	Product is awaiting final rating.
Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.	

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

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

1080p – Currently the best resolution for gaming on an HDTV. In widescreen, 1080p generates an image at resolution of 1920x1080 in progressive format

480p – Progressive scanning, this option ("p"= progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture. 480i ("i" = interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting

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

4X – A term we use for games like Civilization and Total War. The abbreviation means "explore, expand, exploit, exterminate"

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

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

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

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

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

board – A term we use for games like Scene It? and Mano Party

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

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

DLC – Downloadable crime. When you shell out a decent amount of cash for an experience that lasts less than an hour. We're looking at you, Fable II and Force Unleashed

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

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

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

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

framerate – The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement

frontend – A game's menus and options

HDTV – High Definition Television

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

HUD – Heads Up Display. The various status indicators overlaid on the screen, like mini-maps and health bars

Infrastructure – A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances

IP – Intellectual Property. A single game or franchise encompassing the ideas and characters contained within

Isometric – Three-quarters top down view, like Warcraft 3 or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance

jaggies – Graphical lines that look jagged when they should be straight

LAN – Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast, simultaneous gameplay

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

motion blur – Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed

music – A term we use for games like Guitar Hero and Rock Band

NPC – Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans

particle effects – Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time

platform – A term we use for games like Super Mario and Ratchet & Clank

pop-up – When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

PS3 – Sony's PlayStation 3 console

puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Picross

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

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

RTS – Real-Time Strategy. A subgenre of strategy games including titles like StarCraft and Command & Conquer

shooter – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius

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

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

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

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** Bring back the most influential series in the 2D fighting genre

> **Graphics:** Top-notch character models, animation, and an astounding art style make this one of the best-looking games of the generation

> **Sound:** Grunts, shouts, and cries of victory will emanate from you and the game alike

> **Playability:** Controls this smooth and responsive are unprecedented for 2D fighting games

> **Entertainment:** Fun to play alone, but an absolute blast to play with others online or on the couch

> **Replay Value:** High

Some of the greatest moments in video game history continue to live on in the muscle memory of gamers. Who could ever forget the Konami code or where to get the first hidden 1-up in Super Mario Bros.? Among these classic motions burned into our minds is the Hadoken: A simple quarter-circle forward (plus punch) introduced a new era of precision combat to the generation of gamers crowded around Street Fighter II arcade cabinets. Street Fighter IV remembers those days just as fondly as you do. Even if years have passed since your last fireball, the knowledge will come rushing back to you the instant you start playing. With a harmonious balance of nostalgia and innovation, Street Fighter IV triumphantly recaptures the competitive excitement responsible for so many spent quarters in the early '90s.

Bringing together old and new elements is one of the greatest successes of SF IV, and nowhere is it more apparent than the roster of playable fighters. You'll see all 12 classic members of the Street Fighter II crew, each one with a few new tricks to master. This provides an excellent entry point for gamers who have played the series before, since familiarity with a character's moves will ease the transition into the new mechanics. After you learn the difference between a super combo and an ultra combo, check out the four new challengers to see how they stack up to the competition. They are pretty stupid characters, but I love the way they fill combat gaps and force you to learn new techniques. Playing as Abel (a grappler) is much more interesting than another re-skinned Ryu.

Lots of fighters from the series' history fill the roster

Additional characters contribute some depth, but most of Street Fighter IV's longevity comes from its rock solid mechanics. The controls feel fluid and responsive on the analog sticks, whether you're executing a precisely timed combo or pulling off a Shoryuken. If you're more of a button-masher (or have never played the series before), SF IV is an excellent place to hone your skills. A set of character-specific training challenges start out by teaching you basic moves, but you'll soon graduate into more complicated techniques like combos and cancels. I particularly like the addition of focus attacks, which are essentially strategic counters that figure into many advanced maneuvers. Thankfully, you don't need to master the upper tiers of combat just to enjoy the game; the fighting system accommodates various skill ranges, so a newcomer can have just as much fun as an experienced veteran – providing they aren't fighting against each other.

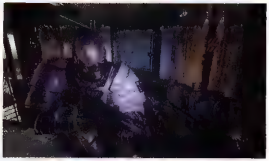
The game looks amazing, and is even more gorgeous in motion

You could spend hours mastering the moves and mechanics in single-player, and you would only be experiencing a fraction of what Street Fighter IV offers. Staying true to the series' arcade roots, the new characters and techniques ultimately just facilitate outstanding head-to-head battles. With so many other multiplayer games focusing on teamwork and tactics, I love the pure competitive spirit SF IV fosters through its online offerings. You can fight in ranked matches, set up bouts with friends, and even allow other players to interrupt your single-player game to challenge your skills mid-battle. The result is a near-perfect replication of the arcade experience, complete with all of the glory and humiliation that can bring.

Fighting games can be intimidating. Many are littered with impossible final bosses, overwhelming character selections, and complicated mechanics, but Street Fighter IV is a distillation of everything the genre does right. It delivers the intensity of competition and the thrill of victory, all through elegant techniques that are easy to learn and difficult to master. Street Fighter IV is more than mere nostalgia – it's the best thing to happen to fighting games in years.—**JOE**

Second Opinion 9.5

In recent generations, the market share for fighting games has shrunk, leaving the genre dwindling in niche fanfare. Street Fighter IV's nostalgic design acts as a wakeup call, a reminder of what we've been missing. We've lost the spirit for head-to-head competitions, and this release brings back the fervor of the arcade scene. The game design shuns a deep single-player experience with the hope that players seek out competition online. But labeling it "classic" is misleading, as it has all the makings of a sequel – blending the old with the new to make this entry the deepest and most rewarding one yet. Ultra combos and focus attacks alter the way you use your favorite characters, but the newfound depth is exhibited mostly through the new characters who pull the combat in different directions without disrupting the series' delicate balance. The term "arcade perfect" is achieved by the recognition of movement intent, meaning you'll be able to perform your moves just as easily on the standard controller's d-pad and analog as you would a special joystick. Call this a call to arms if you must, but this game should be spinning in every machine, as this is both Street Fighter and multiplayer at their absolute best.—**REINER**



BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

> **Concept:** Alma returns to wreak havoc on your psyche and feed enemies to your gun

> **Graphics:** Fantastic explosions and eerie environments overcome the less impressive textures

> **Sound:** Soundtrack alternates between creepy mood-setting effects and uninspired battle music

> **Playability:** Tight controls, save for the annoying movement bounce

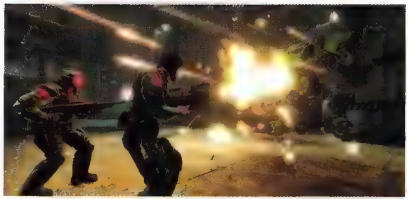
> **Entertainment:** Not frightening enough to make you sleep with the lights on, but a solid shooter

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** MONOLITH > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10 > **ESRB** M



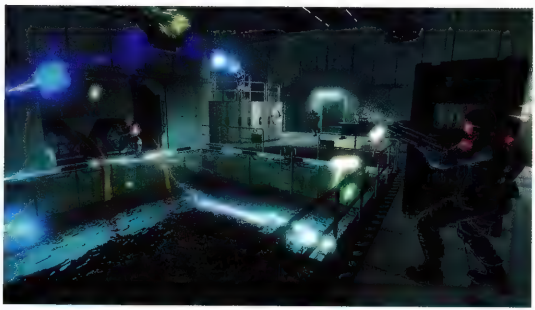
DADDY ISSUES

Not many daughters had worse fathers than Alma. One could make a case for Josef Fritzl, the incestuous Austrian who kept his daughter under locks for 24 years and fathered six of her children. But outside of that, don't tell your sob story of neglect and abuse to Alma — she doesn't want to hear it. Neither would you if your father locked you up for the formative years of your life, harvested your psychic powers while using your womb for test tube babies in the name of secret military programs, and left you for dead. Now that she's free, Alma isn't interested in therapy; she's reached Freud's famous "obliterate city blocks and turn those who oppose her into a bloody mulch" stage.

After two moribund expansion games, F.E.A.R. finally returns to its mother studio, Monolith. The stark contrast in quality between the last titles and Project Origin is immediately evident — F.E.A.R. 2 feels much more in tune with the successful first title. The story picks up minutes before the cataclysmic psychic explosion that concluded the first game. A special forces team is sent to arrest Genevieve Aristide, the president of the company responsible for turning Alma into a supernatural freak capable of turning Delta Force soldiers into oozing piles of bones and blood with her mind. As new protagonist Michael Becket tries to detain the wayward executive, he encounters an older, exhibitionist Alma who, out of the vault after 17 years of imprisonment, is ready to unleash a fury unlike anything the world has never seen.

Like the Point Man before him, Becket eventually learns a psychic skill that slows time, which makes dispatching large groups of enemies easier. Using the ability is a must, as your foes are some of the smarter soldiers in the genre. The agile enemies move quickly from cover to cover, create new cover positions when one doesn't exist, and communicate verbally to indicate your position to fellow squad mates.

Thankfully, enemy skirmishes aren't relegated to monotonous offices with crème colored walls like the first game. F.E.A.R. 2 takes its haunting narrative across the ruined cityscape. Becket fights through a luxury penthouse, secret science facility, elementary school, and through the crumbling city blocks and subway system. The new environments also bring about new enemy types, as Becket comes across freakish science experiments gone awry that bring to mind some of the chilling enemies in The Suffering.



F.E.A.R. 2 goes about spooking the gamer in a disjointed way. The pacing transitions from hallucinogenic sequences that wouldn't be out of line in *The Ring* and encounters with supernatural beings to intense firefights with skilled soldiers. During these pacing shifts, the eerie mood often gets lost in the cacophony of gunfire and explosions. One particular sequence, where you take control of a mech and lay waste to everything around you, completely betrays any sense of horror the game otherwise imparts. There isn't anything frightening about controlling a nearly invincible death dealer. Some of the wince-inducing attempts at humor on the commlink (particularly from the horribly named character Snake Fist) also betray the atmosphere and sense of tension. While this schizophrenic approach robs the game of escalating tension, the game isn't without some frightful moments. One particular poltergeist-heavy moment in the darkened elementary school hallways made me jump out of my seat.

Most of the other game faults are minor — the console control scheme is unalterable (the weapon swap system in particular is frustrating), and I wish the game had an option to turn off the sloppy and mildly disorienting movement bounce.

The multiplayer seems to be an afterthought. The game smartly uses a unique points-based system for selecting your weapon load, but the six vanilla multiplayer modes, limited weapon selection, and lack of a serious progression system keep this from being a destination.

After the embarrassment of The Perseus Mandate, F.E.A.R. 2 should be in consideration for comeback player of the year. While the multiplayer is weak and the mood won't make people forget Dead Space any time soon, the solid action core makes it worth a play. —**BERTZ**

Second Opinion 8.5

F.E.A.R. 2 avoids the pitfalls of its predecessor while throwing in a few tricks of its own. As with the original game, the audio work is superlative in and out of combat. Cinematic tools like pacing and lighting are utilized with great skill to evoke moods that range from the creeped-out willies to abject terror. The story is much more interesting and less obvious in its twists. Reasonably intelligent enemies will suppress and flank you, if for some reason you let them live long enough to do so. The nicely varied environments are handcrafted to create both fun firefights and intense thriller sequences. F.E.A.R. 2 has all the elements of a great FPS package, but a few very noticeable warts bring it down. The egregious head bob can cause headaches or nausea while playing, and there's no way to turn it down or off. The combat feels great with a mouse and keyboard, but often finicky and annoying on a gamepad. Ultimately, the game never escapes feeling like a re-hash of the original, with the same ideas, themes, and gameplay elements repeated throughout. Nonetheless, F.E.A.R. 2 does what it does with great skill, and successfully delivers one of the better single-player FPS experiences around. —**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Afro Samurai

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SURGE
> **DEVELOPER** SURGE > **RELEASE** JANUARY 27 > **ESRB** M

BLOOD AND STEEL

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Slice through your enemies in this bloody but imaginative retelling of the stand-out animated show

> **Graphics:** A slick, stylized art style carries the game a long way, suitably evoking the feel of the original animation

> **Sound:** A fantastic score combines hip-hop sensibilities with traditional Japanese themes to great effect, and the voice acting is superb

> **Playability:** A stubborn camera and touchy controls can be frustrating, but the combat system is intricate and engrossing

> **Entertainment:** This is a great accompaniment piece to the animated show, with a few notable problems that hold it back from greatness

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

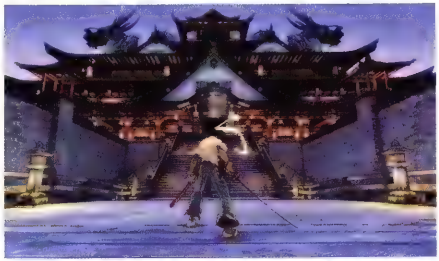
Licensed games rarely exhibit this much style and unique content. Afro Samurai succeeds by delivering on the promise of the work it is based on while expanding the storytelling in memorable ways. A few technical flubs and design choices can make the gameplay frustrating, but the experience as a whole is one of the better attempts of transitioning between the anime and gaming mediums.

The meat of Afro Samurai lies in its complex sword battles, which require careful timing and astute observation of enemy techniques. Combos unlock over time, and there is an increasing level of skill involved in mastering combat – the hack and slash approach won't cut it. Fast-paced juggling of enemies must be alternated with frequent use of a powerful slowdown mechanic to finish off foes. This technique makes most encounters challenging and enjoyable. Sadly, you'll struggle with the viewing angle a lot, since the developer opted for an approach that sometimes leaves the perspective in your hands, and sometimes snatches it away. The result is that you always have one extra enemy to confront – the camera.

Even as combat generally shines, the frequent devolutions into platforming don't hold up to scrutiny. Falling during simple leaps is far too easy, and the movement controls feel too stiff to provide a sense of freedom and agility that befits the character. The quality of the boss battles lies somewhere between that of the platforming and the overall combat experience. Several are genuinely exhilarating, particularly a certain midair meeting. Others are painfully tedious, thanks to some punishing individual attacks that have an arbitrary counter that can take numerous deaths to uncover. These barriers to progression feel less skill-based and more like trial and error.

Stepping past mechanics, the game hits its stride through its sophisticated script and intriguing story. The main character's quest for revenge feels all the more powerful because he is so unhinged. Teetering on the edge of sanity, he's an anti-hero who you don't necessarily want to see succeed, even as you control him throughout his journey. Anyone who has seen the animated version will enjoy the way this game expands the mythology in meaningful ways, and diverges from the animated story at key moments.

With the remarkable hip-hop infused soundtrack and strong voice acting from all the lead actors of the show, the game is worth it for action fans willing to tackle this bloody exploration into the nature of vengeance.—**MILLER**



Normal enemies in large groups are a challenge, but some of the bosses are infuriating

Second Opinion 7.75

Licensed games get tagged as being "all style and no substance," but let's be honest: most of them don't even get the style right. Afro Samurai, featuring an amazing soundtrack, hilarious (and sometimes poignant) voiceovers by Samuel L. Jackson, and a cool cel-shaded anime look, has style in abundance. Its combat system, which balances button mashing with more precise "focus" maneuvers, delivers a surprising amount of depth and flexibility. Sadly, much of the game doesn't live up to the promise of the plot or the combat mechanics. The level designs flit between painfully dull and confusing, and there's usually little more to progressing than killing all the enemies in a particular area. Throw in some cheap boss fights (made worse by the game's odd camera issues), and you've got a title that both captivates and frustrates. Still, Afro Samurai has enough charm and engaging swordplay to make it worth your while.—**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

The Lord of the Rings: Conquest

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS **> RELEASE** JANUARY 13 **> ESRB** T

WORSE THAN A JOB AS A HOBBIT PEDICURIST

When Electronic Arts announced that Pandemic Studios, the developer behind the Star Wars: Battlefront series, was working on a game based on The Lord of the Rings, I rubbed my hands together greedily and whispered "my precious" from a dark corner of my office. On paper, this seems like the perfect pairing of a franchise and developer. From Helm's Deep to the assault on Osgiliath, most of Middle-earth's battles are large-scale skirmishes, the very foundation that turned the Battlefront series into a runaway success. Aragon replaces Luke Skywalker. Slow-moving oliphaunts take the place of lumbering AT-ATs. Orcs step into the "we're just fodder" boots of stormtroopers.

Envisioning a re-skinned Battlefront is easy, but executing on this concept is a different story. Conquest retains the Battlefront identity of large-scale conflicts that can be played from the either side. All of the major battles depicted in The Lord of the Rings have been recreated, many placing the player at the pivotal turning points. In these epic wars, players can choose from four different classes: a warrior who charges headfirst into the fray, a mage who can heal troops and cast fire and lightning, a scout who can perform stealth kills, and a fleet archer who can down three foes with a spread shot. When a player performs well, they are granted access to a hero like Gandalf or a balrog.

The pieces are all in place, but none of these aspects play out like I had hoped they would. If anything, the turmoil on the battlefield made me want to flee Middle-earth faster than the elves that sailed for the undying lands. Engaging a large group of enemies is similar to playing Russian roulette, in that one out of every six encounters is bound to leave you dead. The reaper visit can occur when your character is yanked off of a ledge by a mysterious force, when the game fails to recognize your move inputs and leaves your character motionless in a sea of hostiles, and when hordes of enemies don't let you get up after being knocked down. As this is happening, your AI teammates do nothing to help, and often seem like they are tripping on acid as they stare blankly at walls and sunsets.

These gameplay issues corrupt the entire game, be it single-player, the four-player split-screen, or the 16-player online bouts. Had this functionality been stable, would it even have mattered? Not really. None of the objectives offer any excitement. Most of the game forces players to stand in a circle until a timer ticks down. When it reaches zero, whether the battle is over or not, the stage is complete.

Outside of dips stolen from the motion picture, you won't find any kind of story here, either. Pandemic worked wonders with Star Wars, but couldn't grasp the One Ring. Conquest is a joyless trip through familiar territories, and sadly, nothing more than that.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 4.75

> Concept: Star Wars: Battlefront meets The Lord of the Rings, only to show us that ewoks and hobbits shouldn't wear the same cloaks

> Graphics: The dreary, foreboding look of Peter Jackson's films is captured within the environments. The characters, however, tap into flashy moves that seem more appropriate for Dynasty Warriors

> Sound: An ESPN-like personality commentates over the battles, delivering the sensation that you watching football, and not saving the world

> Playability: Let's just say that spending a few hours on the battlefield will leave your hair thinner than Gollum's

> Entertainment: Both online and off, this game brings nothing but frustration

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 6

The legacy of developer Pandemic's Star Wars: Battlefront history comes through in Conquest. The different playable classes used in conjunction with the maps' spawn points is a welcome feature, allowing you to mix up your attack strategies mid-battle by using different characters. It also helps that that the classes are fairly well balanced. The gameplay itself, however, is sloppy. The too-tight camera, lack of lock-on targeting or a quick turn, and poor hit detection and command responsiveness often spell doom for the player. The journey of the Ring Bearer is long; but this game falls on its own sword pretty quickly.—**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box

> STYLE 1 TO 8-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** CRITERION GAMES **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 3 **> ESRB** E

FUEL ADDITIVE

Who knew there was so much more to a car? Sure, you can drive it, but this game also proves that you can have even more fun if you slide it, spin it, crash it, jump it, flip it, toss it, and of course, burn it. You can do that with the four new bikes and at night, too. Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box combines all the downloadable content so far from last year's hit game into one convenient package.

The Ultimate Box's triumph is that it draws even more attention to the game's open world structure, adding 70 Freeburn multiplayer challenges for you and your friends to conquer. A multi-stage challenge might have everyone first meet at a certain spot, and then gun it in reverse down a tricky mountain pass or complete 10 barrel-rolls as a team. These challenges codify what already makes Burnout a success; you simply never know what kind of crazy fun you'll come across from moment to moment. You can take on Road Rules challenges with the pressing of the d-pad, or drive down the street nailing all the billboards and shortcuts you can find. These features are in other games, but Burnout puts it all together (including seamless toggling between online and off) in an open world format that rewards you for constantly prowling around for the next big thrill at breakneck speeds. Ultimate Box also gives you a party mode where you can hit dozens of challenges by yourself or by passing the controller. Furthermore, the game turns the Marked Man, Stunt Run, and Road Rage Event modes into multiplayer contests.

The Ultimate Box even adds a restart for events, fixing the major annoyance of Burnout Paradise. Although this doesn't apply to the Freeburn or Road Rules challenges, it's a nice concession. Wish you could restart that chasm jump? That's alright, you know there's always another one just around the corner.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 9

> Concept: Criterion bundles all its download content so far to give you an amazing Burnout Paradise package

> Graphics: The game doesn't skimp on the details, no matter how fast you go. And this game is fast

> Sound: The PS3 version offers customizable soundtracks straight from your hard drive

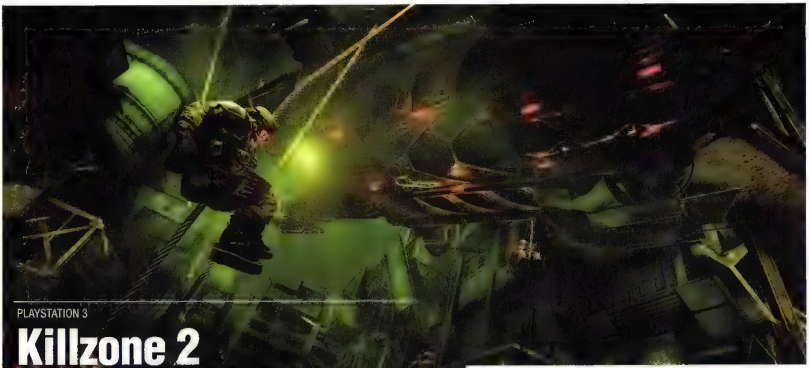
> Playability: The bikes are crazy, but they aren't too wild or impossible to use

> Entertainment: You'll get whiplash from the game's speed and all the challenges and events this title throws your way

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 9.25

Burnout Paradise was one of last year's best-reviewed games. Personally, while I admired the sheer amount of racing goodness, I found the poor navigation system and lack of race restarts to be unduly frustrating. In this new deluxe edition, which compiles all of the free and for-pay online packs that have been released for the game today, Criterion (thankfully) adds a restart on single-player events. It's a great fix; though the wonky street sign turn indicators are still present. Still, I'd have to be a real grinch to focus on that when faced with an unprecedented amount of content like bikes, new time and weather cycles, and a great new offline Party Mode, which provides a load of randomized pass-the-controller set-ups like "land a barrel roll" or "drive the longest distance in reverse." Party mode goes a long way towards replacing the much-missed Crash mode from previous Burnouts. The bikes are almost improbably fast, and like the rest of the new content, go a long way towards making this one of the preeminent racers on the market. Consider me impressed.—**MATT**

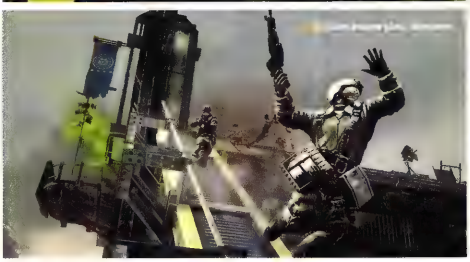


PLAYSTATION 3

Killzone 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** GUERILLA GAMES **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 27 **> ESRB** M

THE BIG LEAGUES



Killzone 2 is the best-looking shooter on the PS3, which puts it in the running for best looking shooter ever. Even better, the game doesn't fall back on its visual splendor, but offers tense, polished gunplay that sets it beside the other great console combat games. The campaign is a machismo-laden chest thumper, with a story that exists largely to move the character from one impressive locale to the next. A frequently intense but occasionally frustrating multiplayer component fleshes out the experience. With the exception of its stunning graphics, Killzone 2 doesn't do a whole lot that you haven't seen before in other titles. But what it does do, it does with aplomb.

The first Killzone involved an invasion by the vicious, red-eyed Helghast onto the planet of Vecta. This sequel turns the tables, with the ISA military soaring across space to depose the dangerous dictator who started the war in the first place. As Sev, an elite soldier in the invasion, you're thrown into one desperate scenario after another, from breaching a city's defenses to a running firefight along a speeding cargo train. While the game tries hard to give some credence to the characters, most of them exist to do one of two things: shout inflammatory curses at the bad guys or get blown up in a dramatic explosion. The campaign never ceases overloading your senses with constant action, and the chaos outdoes most games on the market. Simultaneously, there's a disregard for any sense of pacing in the gameplay. It's hard for that exploding building to have much "wow" effect when another building just exploded 10 seconds ago. Still, it's hard to level too much criticism at an action game for having too much action.

Combat feels tight and the AI is suitably cunning, but too many of the commonly available firearms feel like a machine gun variant. I found myself wishing that the more unique weapons, like the electricity gun or the brutal flamethrower, showed up more frequently. The enemy Helghast are fast, vicious, and clever, and have the unfortunate characteristic of all looking almost identical to each other. Only a few occasional enemies are fundamentally different, which is frustrating in a sci-fi setting where more imaginative enemies would hardly stretch the fiction.

The strong multiplayer game plays out across sprawling levels – it's clear that Guerilla envisions large-scale conflicts as their bread and butter. Objectives are constantly shifting, from demolition tasks to assassination targets to straightforward deathmatch scenarios. Static spawn points are a real drag during some objectives, when a single death sends you back for another two-minute run to get back into the fight. Even so, the PvP combat is solid and engaging, and a robust class and leveling system equals any of its competitors.

Killzone 2 is a fantastic addition to the PS3 catalogue. It makes good on the promise of its original unveiling nearly four years ago through unceasing action and breathtaking visual fidelity. It doesn't change our level of expectation for all first-person shooters, but it does give us all a good reason to keep playing them.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> Concept: Continue the war against the Helghast in the best-looking shooter on the PS3

> Graphics: Phenomenal visuals shine a spotlight on this system's capabilities

> Sound: Sound effect work is a standout success, while the constantly shouted voice acting leaves a little to be desired

> Playability: Numerous control schemes and the clean only-shows-up-when-needed HUD are both welcome

> Entertainment: Intense, frantic, and technically polished, this is a great addition to Sony's lineup of exclusives

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 9

Killzone 2 was designed with a singular vision: throw players headfirst into hellfire, and keep them pinned down until the credits roll. Through thunderous gunplay and a new benchmark for PlayStation 3 visuals, this game never wavers in its ability to produce heart-pounding excitement. The intensity is suffocating, making you feel that every shot matters, every move must be carefully orchestrated, and that it's going to take every bit of your mettle to survive. The single-player campaign story is forgettable, and the squad banter beats you over the head with the stupid-stick far too often, but the weapon play and epic firefights are more than enough to keep you charging into battle. The multiplayer component is equally powerful, offering an extensive ranking system, and the same amazing level of graphical fidelity found in the campaign. The maps are designed to create bottleneck firefights, but spawn points tend to be too far removed from these locations. Killzone 2 doesn't hit the target with all of its shots, but when it does, it blows the target away.—**REINER**

Anthony is cute, but not all that helpful. After offering a bit of encouragement, he usually defaults to talking about cookies

Wii

Marble Saga: Kororinpa

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** HUDSON ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** HUDSON SOFT > **RELEASE** MARCH 17 > **ESRB** E

SOUNDS LIKE NOSTALGIA

Like its predecessor, Marble Saga Kororinpa is disarming in its simplicity; players must safely navigate a marble through a maze, collecting gems and items along the way. The formula earned Kororinpa: Marble Mania mild critical praise, and Hudson Soft has added a slew of fresh content to the sequel.

The most blatant new feature is the unsuccessful inclusion of a narrative in a game that doesn't warrant one. Instead of being driven by simple fun, you are now motivated to move through the puzzles by an ant named Anthony, whose colony is in peril and can only be saved by securing the mythical Golden Sunflower. While Anthony and his plight are endearing, interaction with him is severely limited. The story merely end caps an otherwise self-contained game.

Beyond the fledgling story, Marble Saga: Kororinpa succeeds where its predecessor fell flat. Saga includes more than 150 levels in seven unique areas. Taking advantage of all of the Wii's capabilities, 30 of these levels are specifically designed for the Wii Balance Board, which trades precision for novelty. Online leaderboards allow you to compare your high scores to others worldwide, and a new level editor lets you design your own unique stages and share them with friends. Even Miis are integrated in a small way.

The intelligently designed stages offer a well-balanced challenge even without bumping the difficulty to hard. The intuitive controls react well, tainted only with the occasional perspective issues that turn some tricky corners into exercises of luck rather than skill. At times this issue is further aggravated by an inconsistent checkpoint system – they are entirely absent from some levels and over-abundant in others. Still, Marble Saga: Kororinpa's simple concept and complex execution make marbles fun again – no plastic toys needed.—**MEAGAN**

Four-person local multiplayer lets you take on your friends from the comfort of your couch

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Guide a marble through an array of quirky mazes. Essentially Marbleworks without the training wheels

> **Graphics:** While rich in color and texture, they are kept simple to fall in line with the easy-going gameplay

> **Sound:** Generic music complemented by charmingly realistic marble sounds. Oh, and the gassy panda marble is back

> **Playability:** Aside from infrequent perspective and camera issues, controls are intuitive and play like other Wii games should

> **Entertainment:** Simple, but increasingly challenging. Well-designed puzzles grab your attention, but whether or not they can keep it is a matter of taste

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

A sequel to Kororinpa: Marble Mania, one of the most overlooked games in the Wii catalogue, Marble Saga succeeds in matching that game's exacting tilt-control gameplay while exceeding it in nearly every respect. This is the game Super Money Ball should have become. Aside from a few slight camera issues, the controls are remarkably precise, allowing you to accurately maneuver your marble through the game's harrowing courses. While many of the new features, like being able to "fuse" parts for the new level creator and the tacked-on story, feel like little more than bullet points for the press release, the core game adds some cool new wrinkles to an already great formula. Your ball can now shrink and grow, allowing you to access different parts of the levels, which are better designed than the last game. But mostly, it's the same addictive gameplay that made me a fan of the original.—**MATT**

Wii

Deadly Creatures

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** RAINBOW STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 9 > **ESRB** T

A REDDER SHADE OF NECK

Deadly Creatures is a fascinating game. In a lot of ways, it harks back to the N64/PSone era, a time before the genres in gaming were established and publishers were more willing to take chances on a left-field concept. The game tells a story of two rednecks, voiced by legendary actors Billy Bob Thornton and Dennis Hopper, who bicker and double-cross each other while in search of a buried case of ancient gold coins. Players experience this tale as a scorpion and a tarantula, two creepy crawlies who intersect with the plot at key moments, altering the events in inventive (and sometimes hilarious) ways. It's definitely a unique concept, and I enjoyed seeing the game from a bug's eye view. The sheer scale of something like a motorcycle tire in comparison to your onscreen character is very striking.

While the story and premise are strong, the gameplay is a mixed bag. Alternating between the spider and scorpion characters, you traverse tunnels and up and down walls, occasionally observing snippets of dialogue that further the story. There's no puzzle solving, outside of figuring out how to get through the level. The spider has the ability to web-swing up to certain prescribed points, which is about the extent of problem solving in the game. Each character has its unique combat moves (with more unlocked through gameplay), but they aren't radically different from each other. While it's reasonably fun to dispatch various insects and vermin with your venomous attacks, too many of the special moves are assigned to Wii remote motions, which are very erratic and sometimes frustrating to perform – stop me if you've heard that one before. Too often, the game becomes a muddle of poor camera and unresponsive control. While the game builds to a gonzo final boss battle, the pixilated, short end cinematic feels like a huge letdown.

Despite my criticisms, there's something genuinely charming about Deadly Creatures that I can't quite put my finger on. For gamers looking for something different on the Wii, this might be the ticket – provided that you're willing to cope with the unpolished mechanics.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Foil the plans of some hillbillies as a scorpion and tarantula while fighting your way through a desert environment (no, seriously!)

> **Graphics:** The gameplay sequences and character models are nice, although the cutscenes are sometimes plagued by scan lines

> **Sound:** The minimal synth soundtrack is very evocative and the often-hilarious dialogue is delivered in a way that gives you a great sense of scale and space

> **Playability:** The basics work fairly well, especially considering the Wii doesn't have a second analog stick for camera control. However, the motion sensitive moves are as wonky as you've come to expect

> **Entertainment:** While it's got some serious issues, somehow Deadly Creatures' unique concept results in a game that feels more compelling than it sounds on paper. Watch the interviews with Dennis Hopper and Billy Bob Thornton in the "extras" menu – they are bizarre comedy gold

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 7

A Bug's Life, this is not. Rather than give us cutesy versions of shiver-inducing arachnids, Deadly Creatures delivers a tarantula and scorpion that are just as fascinating (or revolting) as the real deal. Rainbow deserves credit for taking chances – telling a tale of greed and betrayal as seen through the pair's multifaceted eyes – but its execution ultimately suffers from iffy controls and a maliciously indifferent camera. Combat is challenging, but mostly because some of the more powerful moves don't work often enough to bother using. Those issues aside, there's still something wondrous about being a little guy in a great big world, even if you're fanged and covered with bristles.—**JEFF**

XBOX 360

Halo Wars

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 6-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** ENSEMBLE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MARCH 3 > **ESRB** T

A FINAL OPUS

Longtime real-time strategy house Ensemble Studios has been shut down by its parent company, Microsoft, much to the dismay of its legions of Age of Empires fans. After playing the developer's last game, Halo Wars, the studio's closure is even more baffling. Halo Wars isn't perfect, but it's a huge step in the right direction for console RTS. For the first time in the sub-genre, I felt like I was playing a game instead of wrestling with a kludged-together control scheme.

The beauty of Halo Wars is its simplicity. There are no modifier keys on the controller, no mutable unit AI stances, and no resource collectors to babysit. More than anything else, the game is reminiscent of StarCraft in that it has just enough depth to be interesting and lets player strategy take care of the rest.

Both the UNSC and Covenant have access to three each of infantry, vehicles, and aircraft (plus über-units, leaders, and special commander-specific units). The tech trees are streamlined but important; upgrades like the marines' rocket launcher and the Jackals' deflector gauntlet are huge.

Special abilities and support powers are likewise streamlined. Units have one ability apiece on a cooldown, with no energy bar to manage. Support powers like calling in orbital artillery are also restricted by cooldowns, but also cost resources to use.

This all adds up to a gameplay formula that is light on the boring kind of micromanagement (tech trees, resource gathering, and base building) and heavy on using awesome units to blow the hell out of the enemy. Along with having few interface problems to contend with, this allows your time to be put to use formulating and executing strategies. All by itself, this fact makes Halo Wars the best RTS on console to date, bar none.

The single-player campaign is relatively replayable, with higher scores to attain and difficulties to conquer, as well as black boxes and skulls to collect. The 15 missions tell a story that Halo fans will dig, though they often rely too much on gimmicks and endlessly spawning enemies to cover up for a lackluster AI.

Offline skirmishes are a disappointment, with that same lame AI (I should not be able to crush a Legendary opponent 100 percent of the time with ease) sapping the mode of its potential. Using skulls to up the difficulty helps offset this, but it's no substitute for a challenging, fair match.

Online, however, is outstanding. The maps are varied and well-designed, and the factions and commanders seem balanced. Against human opponents, Halo Wars' excellent gameplay is free to shine without annoying campaign gimmicks or bad AI to hold it back. Co-op campaign play is fun as well, though all it does is let both players control the same units – nothing else changes in co-op.

Though Halo Wars is a vanilla RTS at its core, it's a solidly made one that proves that traditional genre mechanics can work on console. This is a fitting send-off for one of the best-loved RTS studios in the world.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Build an RTS for console from the ground up, rather than shoehorning a PC design onto a gamepad

> **Graphics:** You can't reasonably ask for more than this solid framerate and gorgeous presentation

> **Sound:** Voice cues give needed updates on the strategic situation, and the music does the Halo franchise proud

> **Playability:** Could it be? A control scheme that works reasonably well? Why, yes, it just might!

> **Entertainment:** There is no reason to look elsewhere for console real-time strategy

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.25

Halo Wars does for the RTS genre what Halo did for console FPS. This is neither the most nuanced or complicated strategy game on the market, but Halo Wars succeeds as no other title before it in building a functional and fun mechanic using little more than a d-pad and some face buttons. Fantastic between-mission cutscenes highlight a story that will please any Halo junkie, and everything from the music to the Spartans' animations are awash in the familiar themes of that fictional universe. Like its FPS cousin, Halo Wars is equally accomplished in its cooperative and competitive multiplayer. In every instance that the game simplifies a mechanic, it makes up for it through thrilling battles and accessible controls. This is the first console RTS that I can recommend to friends without reservation, and a huge achievement as the final project from Ensemble Studios.—**MILLER**

Buildings can only be built into slots on bases, and there is no "peon"-type unit.

If you can bring out Scarabs, it's pretty much over

No single unit dominates quite as badly as the good ol' days of massed Protoss Dragoons

XBOX 360

Stoked

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** DESTINEER GAMES
> DEVELOPER BONGFISH **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 24 **> ESRB** T

A SOLID START

Snowboarding games have definitely had their ups and downs. The last few generations had no shortage of titles in the genre, but lately we've suffered through a minor drought. The same could be said for action sports games as a whole, until Skate showed boarders that there is still room for improvement. Developer Bongfish took this to heart and created Stoked, a game that combines core snowboarding culture with big mountain riding.

The focus on huge, open mountains is nothing new to snowboarding titles, but Stoked wisely offers terrain variety instead of repeating one mountain six times. Dropping in from the top reveals a bevy of objectives and lines to ride – one mountain has over 90 objectives alone. As I got to the bottom of the mountains, however, the activities became a little scarce; it would have been a smart place to throw in some park stuff like half-pipes and rail runs.

As for the objectives, the basic "do this trick" events are entertaining enough, but the media challenges, which you unlock later, are far more interesting. Taking the game online with friends reveals even more challenge types, like the always fun Ground is Lava mode. Including modes like this could have given the single-player some needed spice.

Stoked takes a page from Skate in the control department, incorporating the concepts behind that title's excellent interface. These basic ideas are solid, but Stoked stumbles in their implementation. The ollie, rail slides, and off-axis spins in particular are all in need of some polishing; as it stands, executing these maneuvers is often harder than it needs to be.

The two branching riding styles, Hucker or Styler, change passively based on how you ride. Snowboarding Hucker style means you spin fast and easy, but in a sloppy way. The Styler option requires plenty of discipline to pull off slow, smooth spins and flips. These choices, along with completing challenges, earn you chances to show big sponsors you have the chops to be a professional rider.

With all of the cool ideas in Stoked, including the real-time weather and snow types that affect the game, Bongfish has taken steps in the right direction for setting the new standard for snowboard titles. I just would have liked to see more time devoted to cleaning bugs and buffing out the core riding mechanic.—**NICK**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> Concept: Mix Skate and Amped into a big mountain snowboard title

> Graphics: Average overall, with goofy looking character models but great draw distance

> Sound: Huge, diverse soundtrack full of indie bands

> Playability: The controls are a step in the right direction, but the user interface is inconsistent

> Entertainment: Average implementation, but a fun game that offers a ton of challenges. Hardcore snowboarders should give it a try

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

When you land face-first into a bank of snow, the only thing you can do is get back up and try it again. Stoked regularly throws obstacles in your way, but persevering through them is worth it. Even with its problematic jibbing and inconsistent trick detection, I had a lot of fun with this title. The size and flow of the mountains, along with the passive challenges, makes it easy to get into the groove. I also appreciated the dual-trigger trick system, which offers challenge without frustration. More variety among the challenges would have been nice (especially given how inventive some of the multiplayer games are), but the number of runs per mountain spurs your imagination, and in the end, gives Shaun White a snowball to the face.—**KATO**

XBOX 360

Race Pro

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE OR SYSTEM LINK) **> PUBLISHER** ATARI
> DEVELOPER SIMBIN **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 17 **> ESRB** E

FOUR TIRES AND A STEERING WHEEL

I never played any of SimBin's previous PC racers, but in this game it's clear that somewhere along the way the developer honed its craft. Race Pro does a good job of handling a number of racing tenants to deliver a simulation-based racer that is fun despite its lack of features. Unfortunately, its bare-bones nature is simply unacceptable in this day and age when racing games are getting more interesting.

The only concession Race Pro makes to choice is a contract system that lets you choose a racing series in which you want to participate. Since each car you get handles differently, this isn't a small decision. Thanks to SimBin's physics and car handling, take the assists off and you'll have to adjust how you drive each one.

Unfortunately, the track repetition bogs down the game – particularly early on, which is a shame since it has 15 in total. It's at times like these, or when you notice there's no real car damage, that you want more from Race Pro. Sure, you're challenged on the track, but you also want to be excited off of it as well. Codemasters' Grid does a good job of this in its use of sponsorships and teammates.

Race Pro's anonymous-sounding name mirrors a game that you might otherwise forget about. This isn't a crime so much as it is a shame. At the very least, Atari has created a ground floor for a franchise that could have some legs thanks to its bedrock developer.—**KATO**

The Hot Seat feature has co-op and versus modes where control of cars passes between you and a friend. Race Pro also feature traditional multiplayer racing modes, including 12-player online contests

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Swedish PC racing developer SimBin brings its brand of sim racing to the console for the first time

> Graphics: Competent enough to be average, but not close to eye-poppingly good

> Sound: I don't know if the lack of a music soundtrack is good or bad. Do you really need music in a racing game?

> Playability: Standard differences in car handling and car setup options make you alter your approach to the tracks depending on what you're driving

> Entertainment: About as much fun as you can squeeze out of a lump of meat and potatoes

> Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7.25

The pedestrian title should be your first clue of what to expect from Race Pro – a whole lotta closed track, simulation racing and not much else. Outside of a points system based around signing contracts with various sponsors and deciding to either do a qualifying lap or just pay a higher entry fee, there's really nothing except a series of races. All this said, I really enjoyed the on-the-track experience. The medium (Semi-Pro) difficulty is excellently balanced, providing that crucial feeling of being challenging but not frustrating. If Race Pro isn't exactly a steak dinner for driving fans, it's at least a tasty grilled cheese sandwich and a hot cup of tomato soup.—**MATT**

XBOX 360

Star Ocean: The Last Hope

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
> **DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 24 > **ESRB** T

Dialogue like this isn't even acceptable by Saturday morning cartoon standards

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** A prequel story that details mankind's departure from Earth

> **Graphics:** Sharp texturing and colorful worlds sadly set the stage for choppy animations

> **Sound:** Decent voice work is joined by a highly clichéd and fairly irritating score

> **Playability:** Combat is easy to handle and loaded with depth. Field movement is far too sensitive, which causes problems in tight areas

> **Entertainment:** It never quite reaches the highs of Star Ocean: Till the End of Time, but this is a nice addition to the series

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

A LATE BLOOMER

Three hours. This is the approximate amount of time that Star Ocean: The Last Hope nuzzles players under the smelly armpit of protagonist Edge Maverick. Few game introductions drop players into such a repellent and uncomfortable atmosphere. Ham-fisted dialogue, character designs that make you say "is he supposed to be taken seriously?" and groan-inducing plot developments (I'm awarded the rank of Captain because the other Captain has a broken arm?) are just a few of the areas where this game gets off to a shaky start. As character introductions are made and the plot starts to take shape, players are thrust into a combat tutorial – a sequence that abruptly breaks up the flow of the story and seems to have been blindly placed by the development team, as the first combat scenario is not to be seen for another 20 to 30 minutes. Adding to the first taste misery, the introductory environment, a narrow-quartered ship, is in exact opposition to the game's bullish camera tracking and lightning quick character movement. I was running into walls and fussing with the camera to track my movements.

Three hours. Three long hours. If you weather this storm and don't succumb to playing something else, The Last Hope eventually pulls out of its train wreck state, rights itself on the rails, and gains a nice head of steam for the remainder of the quest.

This prequel story, which takes place before Star Ocean: First Departure, tells the tale of humanity scorching the Earth with World War III and in the aftermath searching the cosmos for a new planet to call home. This story fits nicely into Tri-Ace's canon. Although it never loses its knack for delivering painfully bad dialogue (including a "pervert claim" that comes out of nowhere), the plot captivates, mostly because it takes the road less traveled of not highlighting an antagonist. Like the TV show *Lost*, The Last Hope keeps its secrets shrouded long enough for players to build theories and invest in the lore.

Of the cast of characters, Edge Maverick is the most compelling. The voice actor fits him well, and his approach to situations often reflected my thoughts. Edge is a unique voice, however. The majority of the characters are comical, or worse yet, unintentionally comical, making them better fits for an episode of *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* than a serious science fiction drama. They manage to pull drama out of the story, but at the same time, give it a fun side, whether it was intentional or not.

This tale bounces from one mystery to the next, but the combat in between those events points players down a clear and well defined path. This is the game's heart and soul, and the reason why you'll come back and play more. The hack n' slash combat has evolved significantly since the last Star Ocean game, expanding in areas that bring depth to the mix. New additions like the Blindside strikes, Rush mode, and Bonus Board – a system that grants combat bonuses for specific feats – change the dynamic, allowing players to formulate high end strategies, pinpoint enemy weaknesses, and dictate character development. This new combat system is exceptionally well made, and never something I tired of. Unlocking new skills and abilities, such as being able to pickpocket townsfolk or summon creatures, made me want to level up as much as I could. I didn't feel the urge to avoid standard encounters in the field for a change.

Landing blindside attacks gives you an uncontested shot at the enemy and will also open a blue E.X.P gem on your Bonus Board

Combat is also enhanced by the support AI, which is intelligent and just as eager to drop foes as you are. Additional depth rears its head here, as you can tweak the protocols for your teammates.

Tri-Ace spares no detail in the character models and texturing. The worlds you visit are varied in design, and nothing short of breathtaking. Unfortunately, the same sentiment cannot be said of the animation. The running and walking animations skip as they loop, and little effort has been made in lining up the lip-syncing. In cutscenes, the characters end up looking like puppets with flapping jaws.

The Last Hope is plagued by a number of problems, but if you can invest the time needed for this game to blossom (that's a big if), the combat system and mysterious plot reward you well for your time.—**REINER**

Second Opinion 7.75

From Star Wars to *Ender's Game*, the greatest sci-fi epics roll characters, conflict, and technology into one captivating story. Star Ocean: The Last Hope does not. Riddled with unbearable dialogue and awkward plot points, The Last Hope's narrative flubs up almost every opportunity to forge a connection with the player. A weak story is a critical flaw in any RPG, but Star Ocean makes strides towards redemption with its gameplay. The real-time combat is more than just button-mashing thanks to excellent additions like the Bonus Board and Blindside strikes, and the array of special skills means you've always got cool options available. I also was happy to see the backtracking issue from Star Ocean: Till the End of Time addressed; the sense of progression and accomplishment is now more defined. Once the game opens up and lets you explore its mechanics, Star Ocean: The Last Hope is hard to put down. The real challenge is fighting the urge to give up during some of the more strained verbal exchanges and ludicrous story developments.—**JOE**

PC

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 6-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER THQ
> DEVELOPER RELIC ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE FEBRUARY 17 > ESRB M

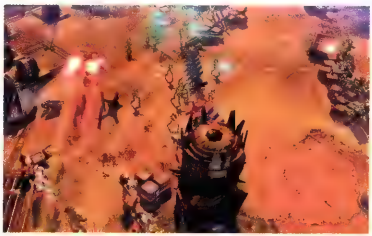
FRESH EYES

Vancouver-based developer Relic Entertainment has pushed the evolution of the real-time strategy genre for years. Its last few efforts – Homeworld, Company of Heroes, and the first Dawn of War game – play a large part in defining what we think of as RTS. With Dawn of War II, the company takes that expertise and re-imagines the most basic tenets of the genre. Only letting players control a few squads at a time is a major change, but Relic managed to craft a unique game out of it.

At a basic level, the combat in Dawn of War II is just plain fun. It's a blast to give your Assault Marines a combat jump order and watch them use their jetpacks to slam into an enemy formation with literally explosive force. Watching your heavy bolters tear through the most robust of enemy troops is a joy, and seeing your Force Commander go toe-to-toe with a hostile mech is awesome. These examples are of Space Marines, but the other factions' units fulfill largely the same roles. The abilities of the various squads at your command mesh together in a tightly interlocked engine of destruction when used properly, and the low-level tactical gameplay is unmatched.

The Space Marine-only single-player campaign offers dozens of replayable hours of entertainment. There is no resource gathering, but randomized loot drops allow you to equip your squads with powerful war gear. The Mass Effect-like leveling system strikes a brilliant balance between giving you access to sweet powers and forcing you to make choices as you customize your units. The rating you receive after each mission (which also ties into bonus rewards) constantly pushes you to improve your game.

The biggest downfall of Dawn of War II is a lack of variety. Though different enemies populate each mission, you'll still conquer the same handful of maps over and over during the campaign. Despite getting new weapons with better stats, you'll use the same basic tactics repeatedly for the vast majority of the game. Even while fighting on different planets, you'll have the same objectives and fight bosses with carbon-copy abilities over and over again. It's a good thing the basic gameplay is so amusing, because there isn't much else to keep it fresh.



Multiplayer is another departure from genre norms, and includes some basic resource gathering via strategic nodes. Compressed forms of the leveling and item systems are also present. Players have a choice between builder, brawler, and special-ops archetypes, and must work together to secure victory in three vs. three matches. Many interesting ideas are at play here, but I'm not convinced that no base-building and few units per side is a superior model for RTS multiplayer. More maps than the five out of the box (plus three more in the launch-day patch) would be nice as well.

It feels weird to me to not be falling head over heels for a Relic title out of the gate, to be honest. Still, this is an amazingly visceral title with a second-to-none presentation that delivers some of the best tactical action we've seen to date. I applaud the developers for moving the staid RTS genre in a new direction, even if I feel that Dawn of War II stumbles a little bit along the way.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Look at real-time strategy through a different lens, restricting players to a handful of squads at a time

> **Graphics:** Relic has always been a leader in the genre, and this holds up that tradition

> **Sound:** The voice work is outstanding, as are the in-game audio effects

> **Playability:** Powers and tactics are varied enough that controlling only four units is a unique and exciting gameplay model

> **Entertainment:** A lack of mission diversity in the single-player campaign and an unproven multiplayer model are this title's roadblocks to classic status

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

Still not sick of hulking space marines wearing ridiculously oversized armor after Gears of War, Killzone, Command & Conquer, and Halo? Check out Dawn of War II. These testosterone-fueled genetic freaks are facing the gravest danger of all – alien races raiding their recruiting planets. Oh, the horror! Vapid plot aside, Dawn of War II delivers the goods on the battlefield. Commanding several small tactical units with various strengths – such as melee combat, stealth, suppression, and jetpack-fueled surprise attacks – you must crush waves of enemies to secure checkpoints, commandeer strategic targets, and fight the occasional boss battle. Along the way your squad leaders gain experience points that can be used to improve their skills and unlock new traits. This RPG-meets-RTS progression system, which also includes adopting new weapons and armor, kept me coming back for more Ork blood, and even helped me slightly forgive the heavily recycled maps.—**BERTZ**

Drakensang: The Dark Eye

> STYLE: 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER: [illegible] > [illegible] LABS
> [illegible]

FANTASY 101

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Adapt a weird European pen-and-paper RPG in the style of Neverwinter Nights

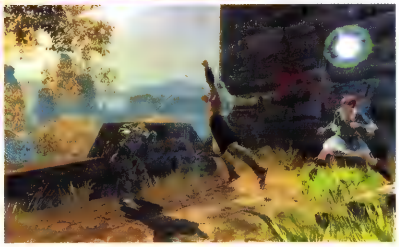
> **Graphics:** Impressive environments lose little by being incredibly static

> **Sound:** Mediocre-at-best voice acting does nothing to facilitate the presentation, but the score is solid fantasy fare

> **Playability:** The interface is usable, if primitive, but the underlying game systems are needlessly opaque

> **Entertainment:** Some neat moments and interesting plot threads are hidden in this hopelessly generic medieval fantasy

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low



Though The Dark Eye pen-and-paper role-playing system has an extensive following in its native Germany, it has never broken through in the U.S. This title is the latest in over a decade of attempts to bring The Dark Eye to the attention of American gamers. While Drakensang easily exceeds any expectations regarding presentation and scope, the finer points of RPG design – notably combat and player-driven interactions with the game world – are lost on the game.

Drakensang's rule set is deep and well balanced, but even players used to delving into the arcane bylaws of Dungeons & Dragons supplements will be hard-pressed to grasp the structure of The Dark Eye. Characters have a whopping nine basic attributes, dozens of talent and spell-casting scores, and access to melee, ranged, and defensive special power trees. To further complicate things, attempting any roll relies on your talent or spell score, three different attributes, plus external factors. Oh, and the cost to improve a talent, attribute, or spell is determined by an equation based on its "upgrade classification" and current value. Ultimately, the rule set allows a lot of freedom in how you build your characters, but it's a Byzantine nightmare for newcomers to decipher.

After choosing your avatar's class and gender, the incredibly generic fantasy setting of Aventuria awaits you. Archetypical companions, from rough-edged amazons to charming rogues, will join you. You'll meet gruff dwarves, ambitious humans, and aloof elves. You'll kill rats (oh, how you'll kill rats), solve murders, and rescue maidens. Through it all, the experience points and loot flow in. If you've done it in a dozen RPGs before, you'll more than likely do it here. With one exception, Drakensang's execution of these standard tropes ranges from solid to good, and role-playing fans will enjoy exploring the many side-quests and areas available.

The environments are pretty but non-interactive

That single exception, however, is combat. Though battles play a smaller role in Drakensang than in most RPGs, they're nearly universal wastes of time. Tactics count for nothing, as there is no way to control the positioning or flow of combat, and each character has a bare handful of possible actions. The occasional set-piece battles are fun, but most adventure areas consist of the same environment tiles repeated ad nauseum, and populated solely with hordes of identical foes. Dungeon crawling may only make up a third or so of the game, but it's a terrible third.

With its emphasis on non-combat gameplay, one would hope Drakensang had a novel or interesting approach to NPC and world interactions. Unfortunately, it does not. Conversing with NPCs is little more than pressing buttons on an information-dispensing machine. Asking the priest why we have to go into the catacombs may fill in a little backstory, but provides no gameplay – and that's the model that nearly all conversations follow. The main plotline is a linear affair that tells a moderately interesting story, but it is hardly the second coming of Knights of the Old Republic.

Players who can't get enough heroic fantasy and enjoy exploration and storytelling above all else might get their money's worth out of Drakensang. More casual RPG fans, and those whose tastes run more toward battle and less to deciphering the geneology of the dwarven nobility, should take a pass on this.—**ADAM**

Second Opinion 7.5

Drakensang embraces the roots of fantasy gaming rather well. The setting, characters, and plot all come off as generic. If these familiar tropes are still enjoyable for you, this could be worth the hefty time investment involved in a play-through. The visual presentation is strong, the quests are frequently engaging, and the underlying game system is deep. The game world is large, and numerous class options expand the wealth of character customization that comes as you level. Combat and exploration are balanced in equal measure with conversations and in-town tasks like crafting and shopping. Overly open paths between encounters and a quest structure that involves a lot of running back and forth are features that don't combine well; far too much of the game is spent traveling between locations you've already seen before. Combat encounters feel overly simplistic, and it's only after a long while that one begins feeling truly invested in the commands available during a fight. You've seen what this game has to offer before, but that doesn't make it bad by any measure.—**MILLER**

[illegible] looked. This is no Oblivion-style open world

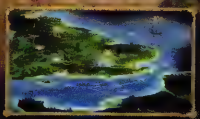
[illegible] many subplots to explore

WAR MAKES GIANTS OF MEN
AND EMPIRES OF NATIONS

EMPIRE
TOTAL WAR™

Engage in intense naval battles across stunning seascapes

Lead your men in massive land battles featuring thousands of troops



Control your empire with the innovative campaign map

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION ALSO AVAILABLE.

PRE-ORDER EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR AT GAMESTOP AND GET A DOWNLOADABLE COPY OF ROME: TOTAL WAR GOLD FOR FREE!*

GameStop
www.gamestop.com/empiretotalwar
*Limited Time Only

RATING PENDING
RP
RATED BY ESRB
May contain content inappropriate for children. Visit www.esrb.org for rating information.

HISTORY · BLAVS · The Creative Assembly · TOTAL WAR · SEGA

www.totalwar.com

© SEGA. The Creative Assembly, Total War, Empire: Total War and the Total War logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of the Creative Assembly Limited. SEGA and the SEGA logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of SEGA corporation. All rights reserved. Windows and the Windows Vista Start button are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies, and "Games for Windows" and the Windows Vista Start button logo are used under license from Microsoft. ©2008 A&E Television Networks. All Rights Reserved. HISTORY and the "H" Logoare Registered Trademarks of A&E Television Networks. All Rights Reserved. Art and Design ©2008 A&E Television Networks. All Rights Reserved.

Games for Windows

PSP

LocoRoco 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10 > **ESRB** E

BEYOND CHARMING

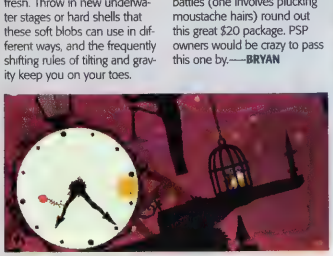
The original LocoRoco blended cute graphics, catchy music, and an innovative simplistic control scheme to make it one of the PSP's early greats. With this year's true sequel (the PS3 DLC Cocoreccho doesn't count), fans will find the ultimate LocoRoco experience. Newcomers should jump right into the sequel despite the "2" on the box.

The core mechanic still consists of tilting the game world with the shoulder buttons to roll and bounce happy blobs around levels in search of more blobs to merge and grow with. The type and number of LocoRoco onscreen affects the tone and complexity of the music, making it somewhat interactive.

The hefty batch of new levels offer familiar locales (like a lush garden, frozen mountain, or the inside of a giant sick penguin), but the constant barrage of new puzzles, platforming challenges, and hidden paths keep things fresh. Throw in new underwater stages or hard shells that these soft blobs can use in different ways, and the frequently shifting rules of tilting and gravity keep you on your toes.

The core game is one of the strongest platformers out there, and the mountain of extras pile on the enjoyment. Finding hidden locations or creatures now triggers a quick rhythm game instead of making you just listen like before. These notes contribute to "leveling up" the current stage, which lets you eventually earn easier item collection, resistance to spikes, and a map of the stage with all the power-ups marked on it. Items collected during stages can be used to help fill in puzzles and also contribute to the MuiMui house – basically an ant farm for tiny blue creatures that you can expand and deck out with cosmetic and useable items like a music player or in-game camera. LocoRoco 2 even includes a cannon defense game where you blast attacking planes out of the sky. This is just a small sampling of the replay-friendly tasks.

Improved minigames (including a traditional shooter) and entertaining boss battles (one involves plucking moustache hairs) round out this great $20 package. PSP owners would be crazy to pass this one by.—**BRYAN**



BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** Polish the LocoRoco concept to a brilliant shining gem

> **Graphics:** Adorable art design blended with fantastic physics

> **Sound:** Some themes are revisited, but the catchy soundtrack will have you whistling afterward

> **Playability:** The tilt control method returns with a few new tricks

> **Entertainment:** Beating the game is only half the fun of this content-packed UMD

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

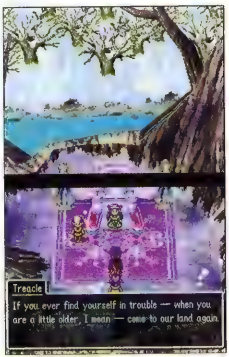
Second Opinion 8.75

LocoRoco was the most adorable game I actually enjoyed playing. With the sequel, I was looking forward to exploring more secret-laden levels to the hum of groove-worthy music. The skillful level-tilting action hasn't changed, but these little LocoRoco have learned a wealth of new moves that let them swim, jump higher, and participate in musical minigames. Unfortunately, these little blobs still like to dance around when they're not being coddled, which means they can get a little too friendly with hungry enemies. Otherwise, it's all too easy to get infected by LocoRoco's child-like cheer.—**BEN**

NINTENDO DS

Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** ARTEPIAZZA
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 17 > **ESRB** E10+



THE LONG ROAD TO ADULTHOOD

Like many North American players, this was my first time diving into the world of Dragon Quest V. The DS remake of the Japanese Super Famicom original (and more recently a Japanese PlayStation 2 remake) does a fantastic job of updating the game, with some gorgeous and amusing character designs and a couple of new additions that make the game feel like new. Its quaint and familiar coming-of-age story doesn't break any ground, but it is well told and it's clear that the localization folks put a lot of love into crafting clever dialogue. The only place the game hasn't seen a suitable adjustment is in its slow and laborious climb through levels. The game demands a devotion that old-time RPG fanatics will be familiar with. Other players may balk at the intense grind necessary to progress.

Dragon Quest V was unique at its time for the sprawl of its timeline, and this element still delivers effective drama. The main character is viewed throughout the passage into his adulthood, and that concept alone helps lend weight and drama to the affair. Combat is par for the series, with monsters appearing in a first-person view on the screen, and some basic commands available for taking them down. This installment adds variety through the ability to recruit enemy monsters, a feature that later installments would embrace.

Enjoyment is reliant on a willingness to face the game's steep difficulty and unforgiving approach to balancing. Grinding for levels is a basic necessity before moving on to a boss, save points are infrequent, and death is both common and taxing on the bank account. Push through those challenges, and the vibrant game world is filled with well-drawn and well-written characters.

Despite a clear desire to update, Square Enix and ArtePiazza have left the flow of gameplay much closer to a classic RPG than any recent Japanese RPG. Old-school fanatics should enjoy the gorgeous audio and visuals, but beware the slow crawl to victory. —**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Find your bride in a beautiful but grind-heavy remake of the original RPG classic

> **Graphics:** Toriyama's art style shines through in the colorful characters and monsters

> **Sound:** The musical score is a suitable accompaniment, and a newly recorded orchestral version of the opener sounds great

> **Playability:** Everything works as it should, but expect a painful amount of experience grinding in order to progress the story

> **Entertainment:** This charming but familiar storyline had some firsts for the series, and should be especially welcome to American fans who've never played this installment

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

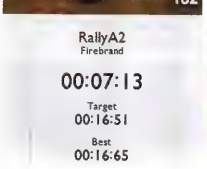
Second Opinion 7

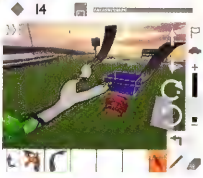
Dragon Quest V is a game from a bygone era – a time when rampant fantasy tropes and clichéd story points were not only expected, but celebrated in role-playing games. The legendary father, the childhood crush, and the pet-turned-ally are all accounted for. In battle, you have a spread of predictable options as you fight the same monsters that appear in every Dragon Quest. The line between nostalgia and punishment can get pretty thin at times – especially with all the grinding – but the basic mechanics and cool art style are still solid. The design may be dated, but this remake of DQ V ultimately succeeds at delivering a faithful old-school adventure.—**JOE**

NINTENDO DS

TrackMania DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS
> **DEVELOPER** FIREBRAND GAMES > **RELEASE** MARCH 17 > **ESRB** E





LOW OCTANE

TrackMania DS kicks off with some decent potential. Through a mix of F-1, muscle, and rally car arcade races, the game shows off its slick DS engine. Players perform big jumps and loop-de-loops with the goal of landing gold medals, which are key to unlocking more difficult races. A separate currency can be spent on car skins and other bonuses. If you screw up, resets can be triggered instantly so you can grind away until you beat a challenge. Even losses earn you money, so you don't necessarily feel like you're wasting time as you shoot for a new record. There's always something to unlock.

However, the veneer starts to crack as you spend more time behind the wheel. Racing against these intangible ghost cars (basically, the clock) is not as fun as a competitor you can slam into. The difficulty ramps up very quickly, so you're forced to race perfectly on the line to beat the top time and earn the medals you need to progress further. If you're even slightly behind the leader, it's usually not worth finishing the race. You'll be mashing that reset button again and again. This is supposed to be an arcade racer, for Pete's sake!

This philosophy unfortunately applies to the other modes as well. Platform mode tasks you with maneuvering through roads with huge holes cut out of them and maintaining enough speed to make extra long jumps. Even one mistake takes you out of the running for gold in a world that tries to go beyond its physics capabilities and sometimes is completely unclear on where to drive next.

Puzzle mode allows you to build tracks with a limited number of pieces and strict objectives, but manipulating 3D space on the tiny DS screen is an exercise in frustration. You must constantly zoom and rotate the camera to make sure that track pieces line up correctly (especially when it comes to height). These editing problems extend to creating your own tracks, which can only be shared locally. In this day and age, you just can't get away with not sharing user-created content online.—**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Bring the popular PC racing franchise to DS

> **Graphics:** Simple, yet surprisingly smooth

> **Sound:** Zippy engine noise mixed with Euro techno

> **Playability:** Racing controls smoothly. The same cannot be said for the track editor

> **Entertainment:** You'll be fine if you focus on the racing mode

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 6.5

Trackmania is hit or miss for me. The standard arcade racing is simple, if shallow, fun. The platform levels are a unique attempt to do something different, requiring you to navigate tricky tracks filled with sky-high jumps and fifty-foot pot-holes, these levels' cheap "deaths" are little too frustrating. The puzzle bits allows you to assemble uncompleted tracks and make race courses with a limited toolset. The idea is cool, but the level editor is too much of a bear to be fun. While Trackmania gives you plenty of content for your dollar, you might now like how each part of that dollar is being spent.—**BEN**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Blue Dragon Plus

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY
> **PUBLISHER** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** MISTWALKER/FEEL PLUS/BROWNIE BROWN
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 24 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

I love how Blue Dragon on the Xbox 360 took classic RPG conventions and made them feel new again. Blue Dragon Plus also borrows from its predecessors, but the games it emulates are bad ones. Like Brownie Brown's previous RTS titles for DS (Heroes of Mana and Magical Starsign), the botched and imprecise touchscreen interface makes even simple actions like movement and unit selection unpredictable. Once you throw in a crowd of enemies and multiple characters to manage, it explodes into a frustrating mess. The story doesn't even make the pain worthwhile; after the events of the first game, the plot feels unnecessary and tacked on. As much as I enjoyed the world of the original Blue Dragon, I'm just going to pretend this dismal follow-up never happened.—**JOE**

NINTENDO DS

Legacy of Ys: Books I & II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** FALCOM
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10 > **ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 5

Buried under Legacy of Ys' redesigned graphics, music, and touch controls still lies a very old game. Legacy revolves around wanderer Adol Christin and his search for a legendary Atlantis-like land of Ys. Gamers raised during the *Thundercats* era of cartoons might remember these Japanese RPGs, but both games have been re-localized with new, albeit still brief, scripts. Many other relics of '80s game design persist as well. You often don't know where to go next, exploring the game's giant entangled world is tiring, and you'll spend much of your time grinding just to beat a boss or buy a new weapon. Legacy is a little too "classic" for its own good; it needs more than a facelift to appeal to the modern gamer.—**BEN**

NINTENDO DS

My World, My Way

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS
> **DEVELOPER** GLOBAL A ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 3 > **ESRB** E

THIS IS HOW YOU WANT IT?

My World, My Way would not exist in the fictional world it presents. The fickle princess at the heart of the story has the ability to manipulate reality, getting rid of anything that annoys her. If she were to play her own game, she'd be lucky to get 20 minutes in before willing it out of existence.

The story is heavy on charm in the beginning, introducing players to the spoiled and selfish princess Elise through funny dialogue and a ridiculous premise: She wants to make herself more attractive to a prospective beau, so she becomes an adventurer. That's when the gameplay begins, and the charm dissipates.

You travel from village to village, performing dull fetch and kill quests to progress to the next town where you'll do more of the same. Tongue-in-cheek attempts to lampoon the RPG genre are littered about, but they fizzle out in the face of the game's design; just because a game pokes fun at its own generic quests and characters doesn't change the fact that players have to deal with them. A chuckle here and there doesn't make up for hours of tedium.

Elise acquires a standard selection of combat abilities, but only the Pout system stands out as particularly clever. In addition to your magic, you can use Pout Points to gain advantages like acting first in battle, getting more experience from kills, or automatically completing a quest. The idea is that Elise throws a tantrum, and the world responds by giving her what she wants.

I'd love to see something similar to the Pout system implemented in another, better title. When you look past the mask of satirical humor this game puts on, My World, My Way is just a parade of tired mechanics orbiting a single cool concept.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Even selfish princesses like getting loot and gaining levels

> **Graphics:** Expect to see generic characters, towns, and monsters. They're even re-used frequently

> **Sound:** While the game technically has music and sound effects, they don't warrant any special mention

> **Playability:** The interface is pretty simple, but it does the job just fine

> **Entertainment:** Bending the rules with the Pout system would be a lot more fun if the rest of the game weren't so boring

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7.5

My World My Way's spoiled-princess-turned-adventurer story is part *Mulan*, part *Legally Blonde* (not that I know anything about that movie). Despite how bad that sounds, the game is amusing. Your regal superiority has granted you supernatural pouting abilities, so you can alter the environment and effect battles by just complaining. Otherwise, this is a fairly generic RPG. The quests get repetitive and the battle system is pretty straightforward. Role-playing gamers secure in their sexuality might want to give this one a try.—**BEN**

CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

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

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	Wii Play	3	Wii	7	02-07
2	Call of Duty: World at War	2	360	8.75	11-08
3	Wii Fit	4	Wii	8	04-08
4	Mario Kart Wii	5	Wii	8.5	04-08
5	Guitar Hero: World Tour	7	Wii	N/A	10-08
6	Gears of War 2	1	360	9	11-08
7	Left 4 Dead	8	360	9.25	11-08
8	Mario Kart DS	16	DS	8.5	11-05
9	Call of Duty: World at War	6	PS3	8.75	11-08
10	Animal Crossing: City Folk	11	Wii	7.5	11-08
11	Wii Music	10	Wii	3	10-08
12	New Super Mario Bros.	N/A	DS	9.5	05-06
13	Personal Trainer: Cooking	N/A	DS	N/A	11-08
14	Fallout 3	12	360	9.5	10-08
15	Club Penguin: Elite Penguin Force	11	DS	N/A	11-08
16	Link's Crossbow Training	N/A	Wii	6.75	11-08
17	Guitar Hero: World Tour	17	PS2	N/A	10-08
18	Madden NFL 2009	20	360	8.25	08-08
19	Call of Duty: World at War	N/A	Wii	N/A	11-08
20	Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip	N/A	Wii	6.75	11-08

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS.®

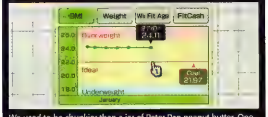
1 Wii PLAY (Wii)

Madness has taken its toll. Please have exact change. Keep your arms inside the cabin and enjoy the ride. Speaking of rides, Wii Play is certainly on a roll. People just can't stop buying this thing. They say you can't buy happiness, and clearly you keep shopping in the wrong place.

2 CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR (360)

This is as close as we ever want to get to a real war. Except *Bride Wars* — Anne Hathaway vs. Kate Hudson means we all win. But in a real world war, we'd die within the first five minutes because we'd still be trying to figure out how to type "lolz ur suxor." We'd rather die in our sleep like our grandfather, not screaming in terror like the passengers in his military jeep.

3 Wii FIT (Wii)



We used to be chunkier than a jar of Peter Pan peanut butter. One day a week our body was a temple, and the other six it was an amusement park. Thankfully, Wii Fit came along to save our sinner's diet and redeem our bodies for valuable cash and prizes.

4 MARIO KART Wii (Wii)

Ninety-nine percent of all Wii games give the rest a bad name. Thankfully Mario Kart is the other one percent. Are you too comfortable playing your collection of minigame collections and avoiding trying new things? Maybe it's time to branch out. Just remember, if you are the kind of person who fails at new things the first time around, skydiving is not for you.

5 GUITAR HERO: WORLD TOUR (Wii)

We've used up all our sick days staying home to play Guitar Hero, so now we have to start calling in dead. Thankfully, Guitar Hero has given us so much confidence we think we're ready to start a real band. Know anywhere we can play? We don't even need a heads up; we can start tomorrow. How does that saying go? "Practice makes perfect…but nobody's perfect…so why practice?" We are dummies.

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Dissidia: Final Fantasy	PSP
2	Rhythm Heaven	DS
3	Kirby Super Star Ultra	DS
4	Wii Fit	Wii
5	Animal Crossing: City Folk	Wii
6	White Knight Chronicles	PS3
7	My Fashion Girls' Mode	DS
8	Mario Kart Wii	Wii
9	Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G	PSP
10	Momotaro Dentetsu: 20-Shuunen	DS

1

6

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Street Fighter IV	N/A	multi
2	Halo Wars	N/A	360
3	LocoRoco 2	N/A	PSP
4	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II	N/A	PC
5	Skate 2	1	multi
6	Left 4 Dead	2	multi
7	F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin	N/A	multi
8	Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box	N/A	multi
9	Killzone 2	N/A	PS3
10	LittleBigPlanet	4	PS3

1

3

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	World Of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King	1	$39
2	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	7	$18
3	Spore	4	$47
4	The Sims 2 Apartment Life	9	$18
5	Call Of Duty: World At War	3	$47
6	Left 4 Dead	8	$46
7	Fallout 3	5	$47
8	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	6	$38
9	World Of Warcraft	11	$20
10	The Sims 2 Mansion & Garden Stuff	12	$18

2

7

Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Alone in the Dark: Inferno	7.25	Jan-09
Armored Core: For Answer	6.25	Dec-08
Baja: Edge of Control	8	Dec-08
Battle Fantasia	7.5	Oct-08
BioShock	9	Nov-08
Blitz: The League II	7	Nov-08
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	7.75	Nov-08
Buzz Quiz TV	8.25	Nov-08
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan 09
Dead Space	9.25	Nov-08
Disgaea 3: Absence of Justice	8.25	Sep-08
FaceBreaker	7.75	Oct-08
Fallout 3	9.5	Dec-08
Far Cry 2	8	Dec-08
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	7.75	Nov-08
FIFA Soccer 09	8	Dec-08

Skate 2 – PlayStation 3 – Feb-09

Fracture	7.5	Nov-08
Golden Axe: Beast Rider	6	Dec-08
Guitar Hero World Tour	9.25	Dec-08
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	8	Aug-08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-08
Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The	4	Jan-09
Legendary	6.5	Jan-09
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
LittleBigPlanet	9.5	Dec-08
Madden NFL 09	8.25	Sep-08
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames	7.25	Oct-08
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	9	Nov-08
Mirror's Edge	8	Dec-08
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe	8.5	Dec 08
MotorStorm Pacific Rift	7.25	Dec 08
NBA 09: The Inside	6.5	Nov-08
NBA 2K9	8.5	Nov-08
NBA Live 09	7.75	Nov-08
NCAA Basketball 09	7.25	Jan-09
NCAA Football 09	8.25	Aug-08
Need for Speed: Undercover	7	Dec-08
NFL Head Coach 09	6.75	Sep-08
NHL 09	9.25	Oct-08
NHL 2K9	6.75	Oct-08
Prince of Persia	8.75	Jan 09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	8.5	Jan-09
Pure	8.5	Oct-08
Quantum of Solace	6.5	Jan-09
Resistance 2	8.5	Dec-08
Rise of the Argonauts	6	Feb-09
Rock Revolution	7	Dec-08
Saints Row 2	8.75	Dec 08
Shaun White Snowboarding	6.75	Jan-09
Silent Hill: Homecoming	6.5	Nov-08
SingStar	8	Aug-08
Skate 2	9	Feb-09
SOCOM. Confrontation	6	Dec-08
Sonic Unleashed	6	Jan-09
Soulcalibur IV	8.75	Sep-08
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	6	Dec-08
Star Wars The Force Unleashed	8.75	Oct-08
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	8.5	Oct-08
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
Tomb Raider Underworld	8.75	Jan-09
Top Spin 3	7.75	Aug-08
Valkyria Chronicles	8.5	Dec-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08

XBOX 360

Armored Core: For Answer	6.25	Dec 08
Baja: Edge of Control	8	Dec-08
Banjo Kazooie: Nuts and Bolts	8.5	Dec-08
Battle Fantasia	7.5	Oct-08
Blitz: The League II	7	Nov-08
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	7.75	Nov-08
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	8.75	Dec-08
Crash: Mind Over Mutant	4.75	Dec-08
Dead Space	9.25	Nov-08
Destroy All Humans!: Path of the Furon	4.5	Feb-09
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	7.5	Aug-08
EndWar	7.75	Dec 08
Fable II	9.25	Dec-08
FaceBreaker	7.75	Oct-08
Fallout 3	9.5	Dec-08
Far Cry 2	8	Dec-08
FIFA Soccer 09	8	Dec-08
Fracture	7.5	Nov-08
Gears of War 2	9	Dec-08
Golden Axe: Beast Rider	6	Dec-08
Guilty Gear 2: Overture	6.25	Oct-08
Guitar Hero World Tour	9.25	Dec-08
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	8	Aug-08
Infinite Undiscovery	8	Oct 08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug 08
Last Remnant, The	7	Dec 08
Left 4 Dead	9.25	Jan-09
Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The	4	Jan-09
Legendary	6.5	Jan-09
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
Lips	7.5	Jan-09
Madden NFL 09	8.25	Sep-08
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames	7.25	Oct-08
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	9	Nov-08
Mirror's Edge	8	Dec-08
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe	8.5	Dec-08
Naruto: The Broken Bond	8.25	Jan-09
NBA 2K9	8.5	Nov-08
NBA Live 09	7.75	Nov-08
NCAA Basketball 09	7.25	Jan-09
NCAA Football 09	8.25	Aug-08
Need for Speed: Undercover	7	Dec-08
NFL Head Coach 09	6.75	Sep-08
NHL 09	9.25	Oct-08
NHL 2K9	6.75	Oct-08
Prince of Persia	8.75	Jan-09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	8.5	Jan-09
Pure	8.5	Oct-08
Quantum of Solace	6.5	Jan-09
Rise of the Argonauts	6	Feb-09
Rock Revolution	7	Dec 08
Saints Row 2	8.75	Dec 08
Scene It? Box Office Smash	8.5	Jan-09
Shaun White Snowboarding	6.75	Jan-09
Silent Hill: Homecoming	6.5	Nov-08
Skate 2	9	Feb-09
Sonic Unleashed	6	Jan-09
Soulcalibur IV	8.75	Sep-08
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	6	Dec-08
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	8.75	Oct-08

Tomb Raider Underworld – Xbox 360 – Jan-09

Supreme Commander	5.5	Sep-08
Tales of Vesperia	7.75	Oct-08
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	8.5	Oct-08
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
Tomb Raider Underworld	8.75	Jan-09
Too Human	6.75	Sep-08
Top Spin 3	7.75	Aug-08
Unreal Tournament 3	8.5	Aug-08
Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise	8.25	Oct-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08
Warhammer Mark of Chaos - Battle March	5	Nov-08
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08
You're In The Movies	7.25	Jan-09
Zoids Assault	5	Oct-08

Wii

Active Life: Outdoor Challenge	7	Nov-08
Animal Crossing: City Folk	7.5	Jan-09
Brothers in Arms: Double Time	5	Dec-08
Carnival Games MiniGolf	5	Jan-09
Castlevania: Judgment	5	Jan-09
Cooking Mama World Kitchen	5.5	Jan-09
Crash: Mind Over Mutant	4.75	Dec-08
de Blob	7.75	Oct-08
Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	6.75	Oct-08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-08
Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The	4	Jan-09
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
Line Rider 2: Unbound	6.25	Nov-08
Mario Super Sluggers	5.5	Oct-08
Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars	5.75	Dec-08
Order Up	7.75	Sep-08
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	7	Jan 09
Rock Band	8.25	Aug 08
Rock Revolution	4.75	Nov 08
Rygar: The Battle or Argus	5.5	Feb-09
Sam & Max Season One	7	Sep-08
Samba de Amigo	6.75	Nov-08
Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip	6.75	Jan-09
SimCity Creator	5	Nov-08
Skate It	7.75	Jan-09
Sonic Unleashed	6.5	Jan-09
Spray	7	Dec-08
Star Wars The Clone Wars – Lightsaber Duels	5	Jan-09
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	7.75	Oct-08
Ten Pin Alley 2	5	Jan-09
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
Ultimate Band	7.5	Dec-08
Wall-E	8	Sep-08
Wario Land: Shake It	6.75	Dec-08
Wii Music	3	Dec-08
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08

Rygar: The Battle or Argus – Wii – Feb-09

PLAYSTATION 2

Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories	6.75	Jan-09
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
Persona 4	8	Jan-09
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08

PC

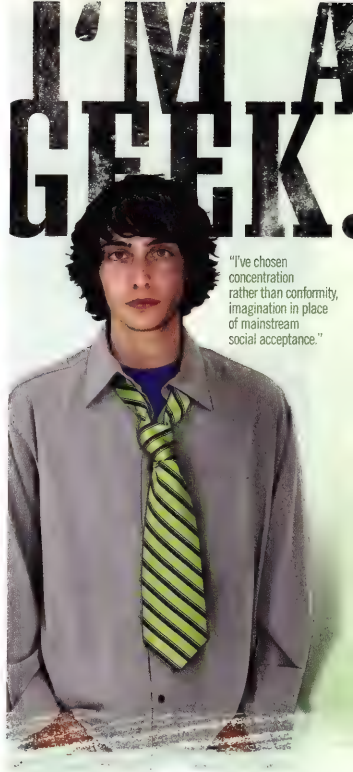
Age of Conan. Hyborian Adventures	8	Aug-08
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Civilization IV: Colonization	9	Oct-08
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	8.75	Dec 08
Crysis Warhead	8.75	Dec-08
Legendary	6.5	Jan-09
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
Neverwinter Nights 2: Storm of Zehir	7.5	Jan-09
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky	7.75	Nov-08
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	7	Jan-09
Saints Row 2	8.75	Dec-08
Silent Hill: Homecoming	6.5	Nov-08
Space Siege	6	Oct-08
Spore	8.75	Nov-08
Warhammer Online Age of Reckoning	8	Dec-08
Warhammer: Mark of Chaos – Battle March	5	Nov-08

NINTENDO DS

Age of Empires: Mythologies	8.25	Feb-09
Away: Shuffle Dungeon	7.5	Oct-08
Bangai-O Spirits	7.5	Sep-08
Big Bang Mini	7.75	Feb-09
Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	8.25	Nov-08
Chase: Fehx Meets Felicity, The	6	Feb-09
Chrono Trigger	9	Dec-08
Civilization Revolution	8.5	Aug-08
Cradle of Rome	6.75	Jan-09
Disgaea DS	8	Oct-08
Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen	7	Oct-08
Final Fantasy IV	8.5	Aug-08
Guilty Gear	5	Oct-08
Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades	7	Jan-09
Guitar Hero: On Tour	7	Sep-08
Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness	6.75	Oct-08
Iron Chef America: Supreme Cuisine	4.5	Feb-09
Kirby Super Star Ultra	7	Dec 08
Master of the Monster Lair	6.25	Nov-08
Metal Slug 7	6.75	Dec 08
Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir	7	Oct-08
N+	8.75	Oct 08
New International Track & Field	6.25	Oct-08
Ninja Town	9	Dec-08
Pop Cube! Street Fashion Simulation	7.5	Oct 08
Populous DS	7	Dec-08
Prince of Persia: The Fallen King	6	Feb-09
Retro Game Challenge	8.5	Feb-09
Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure	5.5	Oct-08
Robocalypse	7	Jan-09
Rubik's Puzzle	8	Dec-08
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood	8.5	Nov-08
Star Wars: The Clone Wars – Jedi Alliance	6	Jan-09
Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff	6.25	Dec-08
Time Hollow	7	Nov-08
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	8.25	Aug-08

PSP

Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2	8	Jul 08
N+	8.75	Oct-08
R-Type Command	7.25	Jul-08
Secret Agent Clank	8.5	Jul-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08
Star Ocean: First Departure	7	Nov-08
Star Ocean. Second Evolution	7	Feb-09



University of Advancing Technology
UAT
Learn. Experience. Innovate.

Come get your geek on.

UAT is a community of geeks—passionate seekers of knowledge and truth in an ever-expanding universe of technology.

LEARN:

ADVANCING COMPUTER SCIENCE
ARTIFICIAL LIFE PROGRAMMING
DIGITAL MEDIA
DIGITAL VIDEO
GAME ART AND ANIMATION
GAME DESIGN
GAME PROGRAMMING
NETWORK ENGINEERING
NETWORK SECURITY
ROBOTICS AND EMBEDDED SYSTEMS
TECHNOLOGY FORENSICS
TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT
VIRTUAL MODELING AND DESIGN
WEB & SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

www.uat.edu > 877.UAT.GEEK
877.828.4335

Skate 2

Breaking the Rules

By producers Jay Balmer and Chris Parry

Skate 2 is full of possibilities and many things have been purposely left open for play and creativity. The goal was to keep the possibility space as wide open as possible and avoid placing limitations beyond the general laws of physics, but even those get broken sometimes. Our biggest tip is to get creative and embrace the chaos, including the glitches. We are constantly learning new tricks and useful glitches from the skate community. After all, breaking the rules is what skaters do.

GENERAL TRICKERY

It is all about timing and rhythm. If you are running into stuff, you should probably set up and ollie earlier. You really don't have to push all the time, so stop pushing and set up for your tricks. If you are wiping out on landings then stop doing as much stuff and let yourself land smoothly. As you get better you can start to squeeze more tricks in.

Handplants are new to Skate 2 and can be a nice break to throw into a line. They are not that hard, just find the right speed and head fairly straight up. The challenge is finding cool places to do them. The big trick to handplants is you have to commit before you leave the ground. If you want to air up to a handplant, get enough speed and press the button before you leave the ground. Then style it out with a tweak or a one-foot.

The controls for the coffin have changed, but it is still there and ready for use and abuse. Grab with both hands and then kick both feet off using both feet buttons.

The scoring system has also slightly changed. Doing flips in and out of manuals and grinds earns you less of a bonus. Linking tricks into a sequence is still the best way to score. Keep your speed a little higher to get the full points; slow tricks just don't have enough risk.

Pedestrians, security guards, and traffic got you down? Head into Freeskate where you can play god and turn them off.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

The city of New San Vanelona offers some hidden treats for those willing to explore. At the risk of blowing these spots up, here are a few hidden favorites:

- Head to City Hall, then take a look across the street to find a couple of new hidden courtyards with surprises for both street and transition-inclined skaters.
- An homage to Whistler, B.C.'s snakerun is hidden on Cougar Mountain. Keep your eyes peeled for an off-road path as you bomb down the mountain.
- Slappy bought the old Reg's mini-ramp, tweaked it a bit and hid it near his shop. Complete all the paths in the game and he may give you the keys.

SKITCHING

Cars go about twice as fast as you can push yourself on flat ground. It is a good way to get an extra boost during a race, find some extra speed for a big gap, escape a chase, or just get around New San Vanelona faster. Press and hold the world grab button (same button for hand plants and grabbing objects) to hitch a ride onto the back bumper of cars. You can grab onto them at a stoplight or a stop sign, and cars will also slow down when you swing in behind them with some speed while holding down the world grab button. Once you grab on, the cars will start to speed up. However, they still have to obey the rules of the road and they might get stuck behind a slower car ahead or stop at a light. So, keep your eyes on what is happening ahead and be ready to let go. When you let go from the side, hanging on with one hand, you pull yourself forward for an extra boost. Make McFly proud and watch for sports cars, they drive faster.

OBJECTS EQUAL CHAOS

About 100 different objects exist in the world, and thousands of them are spread all over the city. They tip, slide, bounce, roll, and sometimes just flip into the air. You can move most of them and position them wherever you want. Here are a few tips to make the most out of the wonderful world of objects.

If you want to session an object or group of objects over and over again it may help to add them to your session marker. First, set your own session marker. Then grab on to the object and add it to your session marker. Whenever you go to your marker the objects will also go back to their position. Very helpful when you are hitting a rail or something that gets easily knocked over.

You can also upright objects on the spot using your powers of the Force (it is a video game). Handy when you accidentally push something over.

Generally objects stay where you left them unless it was on a road, in a no-skating area, too much time passed, or you reset them yourself. Then the object is returned to where it was when the game started. Resetting objects is super useful when you accidentally push them into a pool in which you want to skate.

Although you can't lift them, you can slide objects onto each other. With some creative bashing, pushing, and jamming you can even wedge them into some pretty crazy positions. This is where it gets interesting, and mastering the use of the session marker and righting objects definitely helps. It is all about the means to an end. Embrace the chaos and remember to share whatever you manage to create with Skate.Reel. Without footage it's fiction.

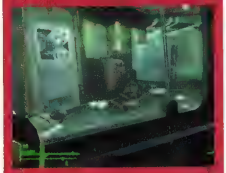
Mod World

FALLOUT 3
www.fallout3nexus.com

Sometimes it's good to be a PC gamer. The wealth of mods already available for Fallout 3 beggars the imagination, and the majority can be found on this one convenient site. The ability to tweak just about anything in the game is waiting for you, from adjusting the weight of items to making guns more or less accurate. Bethesda recently released the Fallout 3 mod development kit (nicknamed the G.E.C.K.) into the wild, so we will hopefully see more comprehensive mods released soon. Here are two easy mods we suggest for starters. Just search or browse for the names on the above site and you'll find them.

FALLOUT MOD MANAGER

This handy mod gives you one central location and a nice interface for enabling, disabling, and compiling mods. We recommend this as your first download on your path to setting up Fallout 3 the way you like it.



FREE PLAY AFTER MAIN QUEST

This mod allows you to mess around in Fallout's world after you've completed the storyline. We know you want a way to overpower Super Mutants with your endgame badassery to your heart's content.

Code of the Month

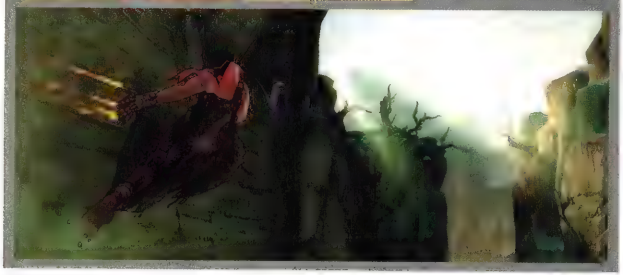
Prince of Persia

Tired of looking at the prince's amazing technicolor costume and eager to give him a fashion makeover? Check out these costume change cheats. From the main menu, go into extras to select your skins.

Altair – In the extras menu register your copy of the game, linking your console to [illegible]

Classic Sands of Time Prince and Farah – Enter [illegible] to the game's manual

Jade Shaard from Beyond Good and Evil – Enter the game story



Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

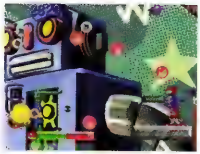
XBOX 360

Gears of War 2

The game's 11 unique executions can be a little tricky to figure out. Once you've downed an enemy and he is crawling along the ground, approach him and perform the following actions to pull off all 11 unique executions.

Bow Whack – B while holding the Torque Bow
Curb Stomp – X while holding any weapon
Decapitation – Y while holding the Torque Bow
Golf Club Kill – B while holding the shotgun
Lancer Whack – B while holding the Lancer
Neck Snap – A to put up an enemy as a hostage, then hit X
Punch Combo – Y while holding the shotgun
Refined Pistolwhip – Y while holding the Boltok Revolver
Shield Smash – Y while holding the Boomshield
Sniper Sledgehammer – Y while holding the Longshot Sniper Rifle
Sniper Whack – B while holding the Longshot Sniper Rifle

Wii



Planet Pachinko

While in the main menu hold the Wii remote horizontally to enter the follow code.

Six Lives Every Level – B, A, B, A, Up, Right, Minus, Left, Minus

NINTENDO DS

Alex Rider: Stormbreaker

From the main menu go into the passwords section to enter the following.

10,000 Spy Points – 5204025
Buy Black Belt – JESSICA PARKER
Buy Disc 6 (after beating the game) – 6943059
Buy Fugu – RENATO CELANI
Buy M16 Badge – VICTORIA PARR
Buy Sunglasses – SARYL HIRSCH
Toy Shop Items Half Off – 4298359
Unlock Gallery – 9603717
Unlock Hard Mode – 9785711
Unlock Outfit Change – 6894098

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – Last seen wearing shorts! They're comfortable and easy to wear!)

ANIMATION | DESIGN | ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS | FILM | RECORDING ARTS | SHOW PRODUCTION | VIDEO GAMES | WEB

Create the Game

Game Art

Game Development

Game Design

FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY.

Online Programs Available

Master's | Bachelor's | Associate's Degrees

800.226.7625 • 3300 University Boulevard • Winter Park, FL 32792

Financial aid available to those who qualify • Career development assistance

Accredited University, ACCSCT

fullsail.edu

WORD ON THE STREET

THOUGHTS ON THE PREMIERE 2D FIGHTING FRANCHISE

Now that Street Fighter IV has given gamers the series' first new game in over eight years, this is the perfect opportunity to reflect on the whole franchise and how it got to where it is today. We talked to Capcom community manager Seth Killian, a member of Street Fighter IV's R&D team and a former champion on the Street Fighter tournament circuit, about the history of Street Fighter and the qualities that have made it the reigning king of 2D combat.

Seth Killian

How would you describe the ways the original Street Fighter II influenced the fighting game landscape?

It was a megaton bomb. Of course, the game was a huge financial success and a lifeline to an arcade industry that was on the verge of collapse. It also revolutionized head-to-head gaming, put the fighting genre on the map, and inspired an endless string of clones. However, I think people don't really appreciate how deeply Street Fighter impacted not only the fighting game landscape, but the gaming landscape as a whole. Just look at the list of concepts Street Fighter invented and/or popularized: the idea of combos, canceling one attack into another, special moves, blocking, human-versus-human competition where the opponents weren't carbon copies of one another, the quarter-circle forward motion. There are so many games today that would be basically unimaginable without these things, but they just weren't around before Street Fighter.

Fighting Fact:
Dee Jay's pants say "MAXIMUM" down the legs because the letters can all be mirrored. That way, the word reads fine no matter which way the sprite is facing

In your opinion, what is it about Street Fighter II that made it appeal to so many gamers?

I think it was a combination of things – or at least it was for me. First, the look. The game was visually stunning, and really made the Ms. Pac-Man machine sitting next to it look like a little kids' game. SF II looked like anime before I even knew what anime was, and that was exciting all by itself. Second was the air of mystery. There were six buttons, amazingly different characters, and special techniques that you only ever seemed to pull off by accident. Basically, the more time you spent with the game, the deeper it drew you in, and the more you felt you could finally control the crazy on-screen action. Finally, there was the brilliant element of competition. Of course there's all the in-depth strategy and mind-games, but more than that, there was some sweaty dude standing next to you trying to take your money! The "winner-stays, loser-pays" tension created a real feeling of electricity around the game.

Fighting Fact:
Dan Hibiki, with his embarrassing pink outfit and pathetic fireballs, was created as a joke character as a jab at SNK's Ryo (an obvious Ryu imitator)

The series ventured into 3D briefly for the EX games. What was your reaction to that decision? What about the fanbase in general?

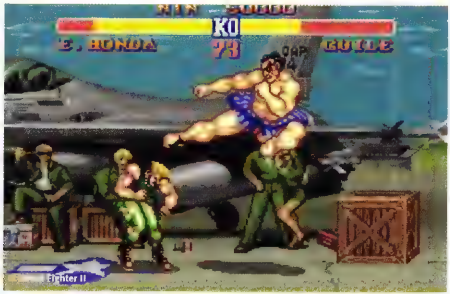
As a Street Fighter fan, I was not into it at all. Going from the prettiest 2D sprites of all time to some rather bulky polygons was alienating. Skullomania? Pullum? I was a total fighting game junkie, so I admit I did end up playing the games a fair bit. They had some good ideas, but they didn't feel like Street Fighter to me. Overall, it definitely seemed like a step in the wrong direction – we felt we were giving up the wonderfully tight feel of Street Fighter for a flavor-of-the-month kind of eye-candy. That's what I've been most pleased with about SF IV – we've worked really hard to recapture that tight and responsive feeling that was missing from the EX series and other 3D fighting games.

Balancing a game for every character at every skill level seems like a monumental task. For any of the pre-SF IV titles, is there any character that stands out to you as particularly powerful? How about weak?

Balrog the boxer was pretty weak in SF II Championship Edition, R. Mika struggled in Street Fighter Alpha 3, and Twelve usually gets worked in SF III: Third Strike. Akuma in Super Street Fighter II Turbo was almost unbeatable in the hands of a great player – he's probably the strongest playable character in SF history. In other competitive games, like an FPS, everyone is playing a character

Killer Comeback

One of the greatest moments in Street Fighter history happened at the Evolution 2004 tournament, where Daigo Umehara (playing Ken) pulled off a jaw-dropping comeback against Justin Wong (playing Chun-Li). Down to his last sliver of life, Umehara parries each potentially lethal hit of Wong's super attack, only to counterattack with a super move of his own and win the match. "What a lot of people miss is that you cannot parry that super art on reaction," explains Capcom community manager Seth Killian. "If you see the super flash, then try and tap forward to parry, you are already too late, and will die. This means Daigo was parrying that super before Justin did it. This is where the moment starts to get really incredible." Killian can offer some unique perspective, since he was the man holding the camera that recorded the footage, which has since made the rounds on the Internet. Be sure to check out this month's Unlimited section at Game Informer Online to see the full video and to read more of Killian's interpretation of the event.



with the same attributes, so you can focus your balancing on universals like weapons that every player can access and use. In a fighting game, however, you have to balance a large number of unique characters, each of which has a totally separate set of tools that all interact with each other. The margins for error are also really slim – character balance in the fighting genre is truly one of the dark arts in game design.

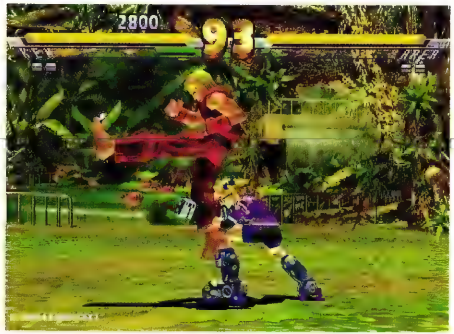
Fighting Fact: Dhalsim has a secret grudge against Balrog because the boxer punched an elephant to death – the best friend of one of Dhalsim's elephants (the second one on the right in his stage)

What do you see as the best (pre-SF IV) iteration of Street Fighter?
The two historical candidates are usually Super Street Fighter II Turbo and Street Fighter III: Third Strike. For me, it goes to SSF2T, not only because I'm much better at that game, but also because I think it has a great balance of up-close footsie games and cross-screen space control with real fireball traps. Fireballs don't really matter much in SF III since you can just parry them, but SSF2T is a delicate balance where every mistake can cost you the round – you're always in danger anywhere on the screen and I love that rush.

What is your opinion of the original Street Fighter today? How does it hold up?
Although it contains a bunch of the key insights of later great games, Street Fighter I today is not so fun. The controls were brutal! Without SF II, SF I would have been played by few and remembered by even fewer as "that game with the giant pads you could pound." The weird part is that in many ways, SF I actually had a bunch of the genius bits of SF II, they just didn't have the magic formula quite right.

The Evil...Seth?

The final boss of Street Fighter IV is a living weapon bent on destruction called Seth. It's no coincidence that he shares his name with Capcom's community manager Seth Killian. "Early on in the development, somebody over at Capcom Japan suggested it, and producer Ono-san was sold," Killian explains. "I owe associate producer David Crislip (a native English-speaker who works at Capcom Japan) a great debt for not telling everyone over there that 'Seth' sounds more like an accountant than an unbeatable gene-swapping demi-god."



CORE SERIES TIMELINE:

1989
- Street Fighter

1991
- Street Fighter II

1992
- Street Fighter II: Championship Edition
- Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting

1993
- Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers

1994
- Super Street Fighter II Turbo

1995
- Street Fighter Alpha: Warrior's Dream
- Street Fighter: The Movie – The Game

1996
- Street Fighter Alpha 2
- Street Fighter Alpha 3
- Street Fighter EX

1997
- Street Fighter III: New Generation
- Street Fighter III: 2nd Impact
- Street Fighter EX Plus

1998
- Street Fighter EX2

1999
- Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike
- Street Fighter EX2 Plus

2000
- Street Fighter EX3

2008
- Super Street Figher II Turbo: HD Remix

2009
- Street Fighter IV

This Month in Gaming History

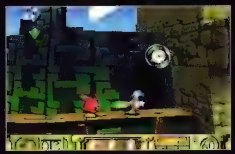
Ares who? On March 22, 2005, the gaming world received a new god of war in the form of the tortured Spartan Kratos. With its brutal action and innovative (for the time) contextual button-press sequences, the original God of War released to widespread enthusiasm and acclaim and set the bar for all action/adventure games to come.

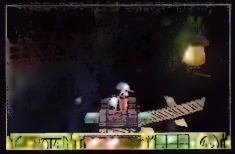
PSONE

KLONOA: DOOR TO PHANTOMILE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO **> RELEASE** 1998

The original PlayStation had an aversion to 2D graphics. With the rise of 3D graphics almost overnight, the industry seemed to turn its back on the animated sprites that were once video games' brightest stars. Sony actually made an effort to avoid releasing 2D titles on its system. Klonoa skirted that issue with its 2.5D environments, but even though Klonoa's levels are on fixed rails through winding 3D environments, at its heart, Klonoa is still a classic 2D platformer. The game's story, about a magical land fueled by the dreams people have at night, stars a young anthropomorphic cat with rabbit-like ears. Unlike the Mario school of platformers, jumping on enemies only hurts Klonoa. Instead our little friend grabs his opponents and uses them to destroy other baddies or to gain some extra hops as he makes his way up to higher ground. The game takes full advantage of these mechanics, innovating in every level so there is always some new twist on the action. Like many 2D platformers, Klonoa's solid gameplay stands up to the tests of time.



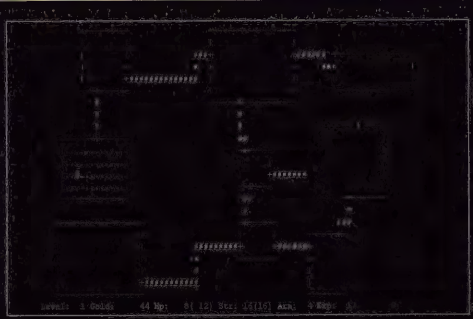


PC

STAR WARS: DARK FORCES

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS **> DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS **> RELEASE** 1995

Star Wars: Dark Forces was an important release for a number of reasons. Although it was often called a Doom clone, it was one of the forerunners in implanting the ability for the player to look in all directions, run, swim, jump, and duck. These maneuvers translate to gameplay that explores vertical space, another area new to the genre at the time. The innovative play delivers in a big way, and makes shooting stormtroopers one of the era's most memorable feats. Star Wars fans also latched onto this game for its story, which breaks free from the movies and brings the expanded universe to games – a move LucasArts needs to keep fresh in their minds. We'd gladly suit up again as Kyle Katarn, especially if given the choice of revisiting Hoth instead. Today, Dark Forces remains fun, but strictly in a "look how far we've come" way, as the primitive technology and experimental controls don't hold up.



PC

ROGUE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** EPYX **> DEVELOPER** A.I. DESIGN **> RELEASE** 1980

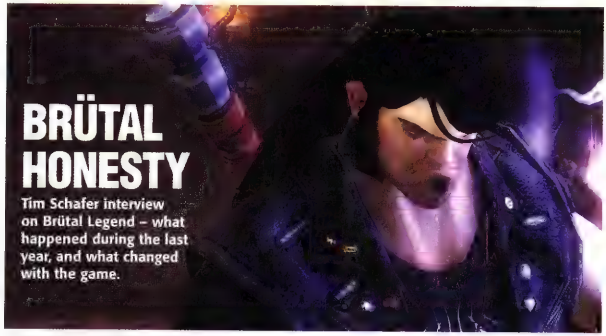
A case can be argued that Rogue is an ancestor of every role-playing video game ever made. Its randomized dungeons, self-directed play, and amazing variety of challenges were unheard of in 1980. Rogue is one of the very first computer adaptations of Dungeons & Dragons concepts like inventory management, experience, and stats-based combat modeling. Moving one turn at a time through the Dungeons of Doom, players are confronted with traps, hunger, cursed items, and 26 varieties of monsters. These dangers are no joke; even experienced players only win a fraction of games that they start. Don't let the text-based graphics get in the way of appreciating this giant of gaming history. The "roguelike" genre is alive and kicking today (particularly in Japan), with free online spinoffs like NetHack and console adaptations like the Mystery Dungeon series. This is one of the original dungeon crawlers, and it deserves respect and reverence.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Klonoa: Door to Phantomile (GI #90, 04/98).

ONLINE

Extra Content You Can Find At www.gameinformer.com

UNLIMITED LAUNCH: FEB. 13

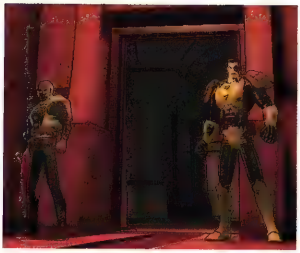


BRÜTAL HONESTY

Tim Schafer interview on Brütal Legend – what happened during the last year, and what changed with the game.

BOSS BATTLIN'

Game Informer reminisces about the Street Fighter glory days with Capcom community manager Seth Killian.



HEART OF A CHAMPION

Read our full interview with Cryptic Studio's Bill Roper about the pending console version of Champions Online.

DLC FTW

Learn more about the pending Fallout 3 downloadable content package, The Pitt, in our interview with Bethesda lead producer Jeff Gardiner.

Also Online This Month:

Game Informer Online travels to the D.I.C.E. Summit to hear from the best and brightest minds in video games.

Announcing an

Associate of Science Degree in

GAME PRODUCTION

If playing games isn't enough, start building the next generation of video games at **The Los Angeles Film School!**

Design, develop, program, and **create** games for **networks, personal computers,** and **gaming consoles.**

All within a 200,000 sq. ft. mega campus in the heart of Hollywood.

All in 14-months.

For tour details and more info call **877.9.LA.FILM** or visit **LAFILM.COM**

THE LOS ANGELES FILM SCHOOL

6363 Sunset Blvd. Hollywood, CA 90028

GAMEOVER

Push Any Key To Start The Next Rounds. Good Luck.

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Time to get serious. The following quiz will determine once and for all just how l33t you really are. Are you a true gamer? The inane and mostly useless information you will answer to below reveals in no uncertain terms the truth about your gaming ability. If you think the below questions have nothing to do with what makes you a gamer, then that only proves your lameness. Shove that into your cartridge slot! (Please blow out dust first.)

1 What long-running space combat series included the character pictured below? (A billion extra points if you can name him)

2 Only one of these sergeants gruffly ordered soldiers around in the Halo series, but do you know which one?

A. Tomas Sevchenko
B. Avery Johnson
C. Roebuck
D. RL-3

3 Which of these games is the best-selling first-person shooter, having sold 8.1 million units worldwide?

A. Half-Life 2
B. Halo 3
C. Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
D. Doom

4 This best-selling cartridge for Intellivision was also (thankfully!) the only game to use the system's sound chip for speech synthesis when it came out in 1980.

A. Pitfall
B. Boxing
C. Las Vegas Poker & Blackjack
D. Major League Baseball

5 Which of these dark and powerful characters wielded the titular mace and acted as the final boss in the N64 fighting game Mace: The Dark Age?

A. Asmodeus
B. Al'Rashid
C. Namira
D. Mitsurugi

6 Sadly, only one of these games isn't real. Can you name the fictional pop star video game?

A. Spice World
B. Britney's Dance Beat
C. High School Musical 3: Senior Year Dance!
D. Every one of these games is real. We weep for the children.

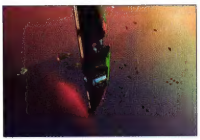
7 Who developed The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap?

A. Nintendo
B. Capcom
C. Sega
D. Square Enix

8 In which game do you first find Samus Aran decked out in this little specially colored number?

9 The very first Homeworld game was from which genre?

A. 2D, turn-based strategy
B. 2D, real-time strategy
C. 3D, turn-based strategy
D. 3D, real-time strategy



10 These are the last words you're likely to read from us for a whole month. Does that make you sad? Will you miss us?

A. Desperately. I'll write every day.
B. Um, I don't like your magazine like that.
C. Only when I'm in the bathroom.
D. Nope. See ya.

BREAKDOWN

1 million units of Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots have been sold since its June release, according to the NPD group.

1 Xbox 360 game made Japan's list of best-selling video games in 2008. Tales of Vesperia landed at number 82.

34,000 employees will be laid off by the end of March as a result of the closure of major electronics retailer Circuit City.

47 percent is how much the Australian game industry grew in 2008, according to information provided by the Interactive Entertainment Association of Australia.

10 years is a long time to still be playing the original Everquest. We're just saying.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

0-1 You have all the gaming acumen and skill of a diseased river otter pumped up on morphine and hung upside down in a vat of grape jelly. Try a new hobby.

2-3 You have grown accustomed to the jeers and catcalls of your gaming opponents, who belittle your pitiful gaming accomplishments and underdeveloped reflexes. When they have finished insulting you, they return to their preschool recess.

4-5 There may be hope for you, but it's not likely. By memorizing which buttons are where on the controller, you no longer have to stare at your hands while fighting a boss. Stop leaning into your turns on racing games, and you'll finally get somewhere. (Note: If playing on Wii, lean into your turns on that racing game and you may get somewhere.)

6-7 Many years of passion and dedication have brought you to a comfortable status quo in your skill level. You have come to realize that wins and losses are two sides of a coin – to appreciate the one, you must regularly experience the other. At least, that's what you told yourself when that kid started jumping up and down on your corpse in last night's Halo match.

8-9 Dang, playa. You got some mad skillz. People need to adapt hip phrases to describe your feats of gaming finesse.

10 You dream more regularly about your game characters than real people. You stand undefeated on every online leaderboard you can find. You scoff when people speak about difficult games, for you no longer perceive such petty distinctions in the titles you obliterate. You should probably go outside for a little while.

Game Informer Magazine® (ISSN 1067-6392) is published monthly at a subscription price of $19.98 per year, or twenty four issues for $24.98 by Sunrise Publications®, 724 North First Street, 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. (612) 486-6100 or FAX (612) 486-6101. For subscriptions, back issues, or customer service inquiries Toll Free (866) 844-4263. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing offices. SUBSCRIBERS/POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Game Informer Magazine®, 724 North First Street, 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. Foreign or Canadian orders must be prepaid in U.S. dollars. Canada & Mexico Orders: $35/yr additional postage. All other Foreign Orders: $55/yr additional postage. CANADIAN SUBSCRIBERS SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40064408. RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO: EXPRESS MESSENGER INTERNATIONAL P.O. BOX 25058 LONDON BRC, ONTARIO, CANADA N6C 6A8 Game Informer® does not claim any copyright in the screenshots herein. Copyright in all screenshots contained within this publication are owned by their respective companies. Entire contents copyright 2009. Game Informer Magazine®. All rights reserved; reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Game Informer® is a trademark of GameStop. Products named in these pages are trade names, or trademarks, of their respective companies.

Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. Wing Commander, Melek nar Kiranka 2. B 3. B 4. D 5. A 6. D 7. B 8. Metroid Fusion 9. D 10. A, B, C, or D

ALIENWARE PRESENTS
BREED
A 3D-ANIMATED SHORT
WATCH THE ANIMATED SHORT, GET WALLPAPERS & EXCLUSIVE BREED RINGTONES AT:
ALIENWARE.COM/BREED
The Area-51® ALX desktop is Powered by the Intel® Core™ 2 Extreme Processor.
intel
Core™ 2 Extreme
inside™
Extreme Performance
Alienware, Alienware Alien head and Area-51 are registered trademarks or trademarks of Alienware Corporation. Intel, the Intel logo, Intel Core and Core Inside are trademarks or registered trademarks of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries.

LOSE 20 LBS IN
5
SECS
ASK ME HOW
FOR SCREENSHOTS & VIDEOS,
VISIT MADWORLDGAME.COM
MADWORLD
COMING
MARCH 2009
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Mature Humor
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Wii
Developed by PLATINUMGAMES INC.
SEGA
© SEGA. All rights reserved. SEGA is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. SEGA, the SEGA logo and MADWORLD are either registered trademarks or trademarks of SEGA Corporation. Wii and the Wii logo are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2006 Nintendo.

Made with love by

Our goal is to preserve classic video game magazines so that they are not lost permanently.

People interested in helping out in any capacity, please visit us at retromags.com.

No profit is made from these scans, nor do we offer anything available from the publishers themselves.

If you come across anyone selling releases from this site, please do not support them and do let us know.

Thank you!