

DEAD SPACE EXTRACTION

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RESIDENT EVIL 5 Reviewed!

Can **Capcom** Improve On **Perfection?**

GAMEINFORMER

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

BIOSHOCK 2

Big Sister Awaits Your Return to Rapture

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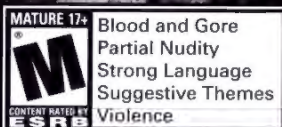
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APRIL 2009

HUMANITY'S HOPE BEGINS WITH ONE MAN'S RETRIBUTION

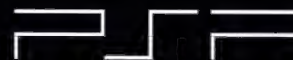
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BIOSHOCK 2

Did you ever wonder what would happen if the powers of a Little Sister were harnessed by someone a little more ambitious? As a special Big Daddy, you'll find out what exactly the Big Sister is up to in BioShock 2. Set in Rapture 10 years after the events of the original, this sequel looks just as amazing as its masterful predecessor. The world-exclusive first look at one of the most pined-for titles in the gaming industry begins here.

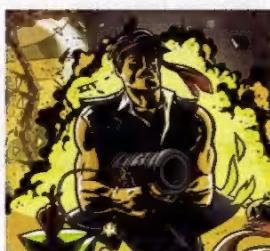
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DEAD SPACE EXTRACTION

Electronic Arts is expanding its epic sci-fi horror franchise onto Nintendo's juggernaut console. This on rails shooter is an all-new prequel featuring new weapons, enemies, and a brand new co-op mode. Could this be the third party hardcore blockbuster fans have been waiting for?



45

GAME INFARCER

Would you believe us if we told you that this year's Game Infarcer tops Master Chief riding a unicorn on the moon? One thing is for certain: we don't make any fun of the Alliance or fanatic Shenmue fans. That would be wrong.



50

INFAMOUS

We spent hours with Sony's upcoming superhero sandbox. A detailed report includes the consequences of good and evil actions, descriptions of the awe-inspiring high-level electrical powers you can earn, and teasers about the plot.

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People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



FORGE THE FUTURE

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I know you come to my column each month in great anticipation of the cutting editorial I normally deliver that expands your perception of video games (that's sarcasm, by the way). This month I have a different agenda.

This December, Game Informer will reach its 200th issue. This is a benchmark I never dreamed we would attain when I started working on the magazine back in 1991, but I can't wait to celebrate. The years have been good to us, as we have grown from a small bi-monthly publication into the 12th largest consumer publication in the United States and the largest video game publication in the world. However, we didn't reach those goals without the support of our readers.

So as I sit at my desk and ponder what Game Informer will look like over the next 200 issues and beyond, I can think of no better person to ask for feedback from than you, the reader. In our super secret labs here at GI HQ, we've started conceptualizing a magazine redesign that we intend to launch this year. But I don't want to finish this project without direct feedback from you. We have done plenty of reader surveys over the years, but most of the feedback we get is that people love the magazine just the way it is – and who am I to complain? But I know there are things you want to see that we may have overlooked. So please, take a moment to drop me a line at andy@gameinformer.com with what you want from the future Game Informer. If you have a memorable moment in GI's history that you want to pass along, I would love to hear about that as well. Who knows, it just may end up in our 200th issue this December.

I know this sounds incredibly cheesy, and please forgive me in advance, but Game Informer is your magazine, and we want to keep it that way. So I urge you to send in feedback and help us forge the future of the magazine for decades to come.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** My Twitter @GL_AndyMc, BioShock 2 (I Want To Play This Game So Badly), Red Dead Redemption, *Chopped* **Dislikes:** Comcast (I Can't Go A Month Without My Internet Acting Up With Some New Twist On Stupid), That Battlegrounds In WoW Take Forever If You Queue With Friends **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Left 4 Dead, Dead Space, Resident Evil 5, Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time



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Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** The Return Of Jason Voorhees, The Mountain Goats' *Heretic Pride*, Miller Falling For The Concept Of A Cool Bard (Sucker), *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The Universe* By Bryan Lee O'Malley, *Duma Key* By Stephen King (After All This Time, He's Still Got It) **Dislikes:** Waiting For BioShock 2, Crybaby Movie Protests, Status Update Spoilers, Ben's Interests, Ben **Current Favorite Games:** BioShock 2, Resident Evil 5, Street Fighter IV, The Majesty Of Colors, Death Tank



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Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Biding My Time With Other Survival Horror Titles Until Resident Evil 5 Arrives, Burning My Head With Chemicals To Make My Hair Obey My Will, Temble Mexican Food, Dance Movies, Bad Christina Aguilera Songs **Dislikes:** My Interests **Current Favorite Games:** Fallout 3, Dead Space, Burnout Paradise, Mirror's Edge, Halo Wars, Sims Of A Solar Empire



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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly
Of The Video Game Industry



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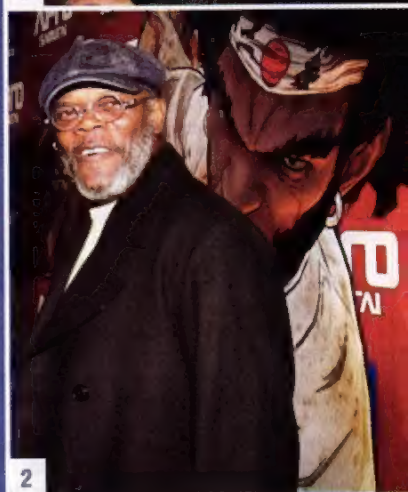
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1 The BioShock 2 team from 2K Marin gathers 'round the old Big Daddy 2 Samuel L. Jackson celebrates his amazing voicework in Afro Samurai with a stop at the game's launch party at the Geisha House in Los Angeles 3 "So...do you come here often?" Activision's Paul Murphy unsuccessfully tries to pick up Nick 4 Kato and Nick hang with Codemasters' Lilit Baron and David Brickley while Ben practices his patented "creepy stare into the middle distance." 5 The Army of Two team poses with Meagan and some fellow journalists 6 "Gentlemen, we can rebuild her...bigger, stronger, faster!" Meagan shows off her brand new bionic arm 7 Ubisoft's Hayden Walling looks on in horror as Epic's Cliff Bleszinski tries to eat PR guru Mariam Sughayer's head

1



2



3



4



Telling It Straight

I just read the Afterwords with Far Cry 2 creative director Clint Hocking (issue 190), and wanted to applaud his straightforward answers. Too many tough questions are usually dodged or flat-out denied during interviews with developers. It was refreshing to get some honest answers.

Eric Larbes
via email

We agree. On the other hand, the evasive answers developers have a tendency to provide aren't necessarily disingenuous. They spend years of time and effort working as a team to complete a project; it's not fair to expect them to trash-talk a game that represents such a significant investment. Hocking handled the balancing act perfectly, acknowledging Far Cry 2's flaws while giving compelling insight into the decisions behind the game's design.

wasn't an Oddworld game, and you said the correct answer was Abe's Odyssey. That isn't the right answer – they were all Oddworld games.

G. R. Sanders
via email

Or were they? The answer may seem incorrect, but a true Oddworld fan would have noticed that the original game was not called "Abe's Odyssey." It was "Abe's Oddysee," with the second word intentionally misspelled. Yeah, we'll admit it was a pretty dirty trick question. We offer only this in our defense: It was Miller's idea.

DLC MIA

Fallout 3 was an amazing game and went beyond my expectations. When I started to read about the DLC like Operation Anchorage, I couldn't wait for it to come out. Then I lost all hope; the extra missions and raised level cap aren't coming to PS3. The DLC would have made the game last so much longer and made it even more fun... how did PS3 owners get screwed over?

Michael Reno
via email

even without DLC, your \$60 still bought you a great game. Of course, that isn't much comfort to the thousands of PS3 owners who want to keep exploring the wasteland in Fallout 3.

Glitch In The System

I've been waiting for the day a punk glitcher writes in to you guys trying to defend himself, and it finally happened in issue 190. It's because of idiots like him that I had to hang up games like Halo and Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. These cheaters (yes, it's cheating) find unfair advantages, and then have the nerve to talk trash in the post game-lobby as if they were actually any good. Thanks, Game Informer, for siding with the honest gamers and letting the glitchers know they're tools.

Jason Sanchez
Bronx, NY

In your recent issue, a reader claimed that exploiting game glitches online wasn't really cheating. Now, I cheat in most of my single-player games – I'm just that way. But I would never, NEVER dream of cheating in a multiplayer game. That's just not the way it is done.

Audrey Tesch
via email

Tell me if this doesn't sound right: You call glitchers out for being cheaters, yet you still continue to print cheat codes in Secret Access for games like Soulcalibur and Battlefield: Bad Company. So you are against cheats in the first half of your magazine, and then give us cheats in the other? What side are you really on?

Kevin Brennan
via email

Cheating is a big issue for many gamers, especially those who play online. We are always on the side that allows you to play your game the way you want to, as long as you aren't keeping other people from enjoying their game in the process. When you start playing around with glitches and exploits in online matches, your entertainment comes at the expense of others – and that is not cool. On the other hand, using a code for infinite ammo in single-player is harmless. So is referencing a strategy guide to make sure you nail every side quest. Those decisions only affect your personal experience, so cheat away.

Corrected?

I just want to let you guys know that the trivia section in issue 190 was wrong. The second question asked which listed title



Control Freak

I didn't think it was possible for a magazine article to make my old gamer eyes water up, but Adam's opinion piece on customizable controls did just that. This option is almost a mandatory rule in the PC world. Console gamers pay \$10 more per game, so there is no excuse for console gamers not to get the option to customize their controller layout however they wish.

Anonymous
via email

I have to agree 100 percent with Adam's article on rigid console control interfaces. Players have individual control styles. Some people play southpaw, and others have disabilities

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 game that made you buy a system?



I remember my mom buying a new PC so we could play Diablo II, my first hardcore game. That game was so amazing, and I must have put 50-plus hours into it. Not bad, considering I was five at the time.

ElevenSeven

Final Fantasy VII for the PSone. Up until that point I had stuck with Sega and Nintendo, but when Squaresoft announced FF VII as an exclusive for the PlayStation, I decided it was time to buy one.

Quaanidodoir

Super Monkey Ball 2 made me buy the GameCube and got me back into video games

after sitting out the previous generation. I've since bought all consoles and handhelds except Wii. Still waiting for that special game.

Punjabidog

I wanted the PlayStation for PaRappa the Rappa and Tekken 3. Even though I was a little kid around that time, I wanted to play a game with a rapping dog and something grown-up like a challenging fighting game.

AngelGamer

I'm not going to lie. At the tender age of five years old, I wanted an N64 just for WCW Revenge. I was a little Hulkamaniac who was sick of WWF Super Wrestlingmania for my SNES, and

had the urge to spear the hell out of everyone as Bill Goldberg.

bph2 | B

After playing Tetris when I was five, I begged my parents for a Game Boy. Almost 20 years later, I'm still trying to recover from my Tetris addiction; it truly was my gateway game.

Testament_ggx2

This may shock and surprise, but it was Kataman Damacy that convinced me to buy a PS2. The first time playing that game remains one of the most joyful experiences I've had while gaming.

TrueNerd



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

Ever tried bodysurfing
a tropical tidal wave?



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Ever tried  Gum?
Stimulate Your Senses™

and cannot play certain games due to the lack of custom control options. Some have gone as far as having controllers modded to meet certain specifications. It says something when fans have to void the warranty on their hardware just to play a game.

Byron Bartlett
via email

Given the overwhelmingly positive response to Adam's opinion piece, we have even more trouble understanding why customizable controls aren't an industry standard. Gamers clearly want the option to tailor the interface according to their preferences, so what's the big hold-up?

Class Reunion

After playing GTA IV, I was excited to think how many of the game's concepts could be put into a second Bully game. Is there even talk of a sequel? I'd love to see more from the Bullworth students.

Anonymous
via email

So would we. Bully's combination of high school hijinks and comic mischief is something that no other sandbox title has even attempted to provide. Rockstar hasn't announced any plans for a sequel, but given the original's popularity on PS2 (and its expanded releases on 360 and Wii), we wouldn't be surprised if a successor was secretly in the works.



Just Breathe

Who has the worst gaming rage among the editors? I'm just curious because I have a serious love/hate relationship with my video games – especially racing ones. I wouldn't get so angry if those MotorStorm jerks were actually interested in racing, as opposed to side-swiping me and speeding past only to slow down six feet in front of my car!

Darrin Malter
Lynden, WA

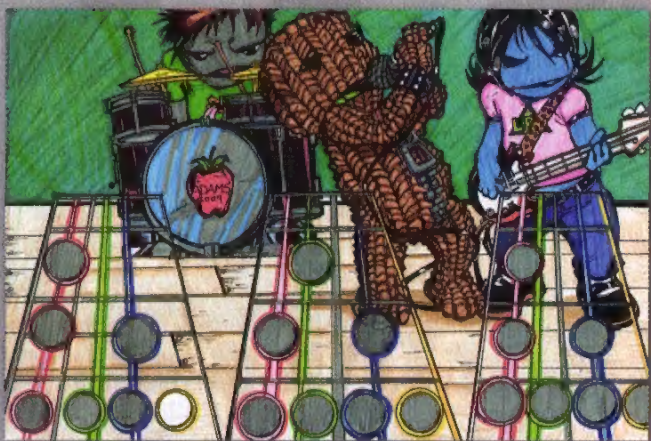
It all depends on what version of gaming rage you're talking about. When it comes to the kind that simmers slowly and quietly before suddenly exploding, that's Kato. If you're looking for strings of curse words that would make a Teamster blush, Adam's the guy. The most entertaining variety in the office is Bryan's, where his pleading and incredulous conversations with his television escalate with hilarious results. Actually, that's more like insanity than rage, isn't it?

WINNER



This month's winner receives a copy of Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X on Xbox 360.

Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X - Become an elite pilot of the future in this awe-inspiring air combat game. Available now on X360, PS3, and PC.



ANDRE ADAMS

The ironic thing? Rock Band's naming censorship won't let you take a band called "The Sackboys" online

reader art

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

Send to:
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JOE FISH

Until Mighty Muggs start coming in Extra Beefy, this is the best rendition of the Gears of War 2 cast you'll see



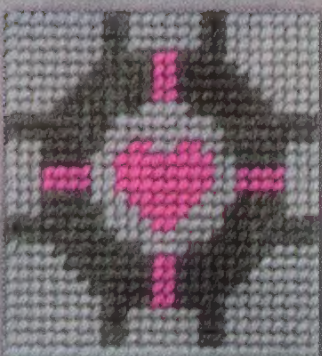
ALEC KOZAK

Despite their decaying flesh and appalling hygiene, Zombies are violently anti-smoking



SARAH ARCHAMBEAULT

The Thievius Raccoonus in its natural habitat



DANIEL NEWMAN

This needlepoint drink coaster is a triumph



FRANK R. ANGUS

Charlie Brown is the last airbender? Good grief



CORRECTIONS:

In issue 191, our review of Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box listed the game for the PS3 and Xbox 360. However, Electronic Arts cancelled the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions after our review deadline. The title is now only available on PC, while the game's party mode is sold separately on PSN and Xbox Live for console users. In the same issue, the screenshot for Name That Game (page 30) was from Alundra 2, not the original Alundra as indicated. We apologize for the error.



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news

The Games You LOVE & The Games You HATE

Surveying The Genre Landscape

You should never judge a book by its cover, but we all do it. For video games, genres are an ingrained way in which we categorize a title. Which are your favorites? Your least favorites? Which should we see more of? We polled over 2,000 readers to find out what genres mean to you.

What is your favorite game genre?

Although sports makes the top five, its low percentage is surprising given how lucrative the genre is for EA.

Racing (2.5 percent), fighting (3 percent), and platformers (1.3 percent) also came in on the low end.

Sports, puzzle games, and MMOs were at the top of readers' least favorite lists.

So were music games, surprisingly.

28.1%



First-Person Shooter

24.1%



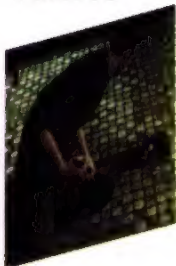
RPG

13.9%



Action

10.2%



Adventure

5%

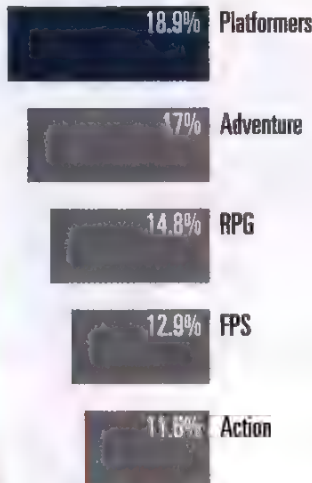


Sports

Which genre first captured your interest and got you into games?

5

The number of people who said that party games were their favorite kind of games



Time has been kind to some and cruel to others. Platformers showed a big drop off between those who said it got them into gaming and those who listed it as their current favorite genre (18.9 percent compared to just 1.3 percent). The relative popularity of RPGs and first-person shooters, meanwhile, has skyrocketed.

2,374

The total number of respondents

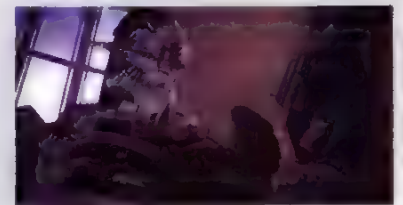
TRUTH IN ADVERTISING?

A clear majority – 68.9 percent – support listing a game's genre on its box. While you'd think this would clear things up, even more of our readers – 71.5 percent – admit that they've bought games based on its genre and found that it wasn't what they were expecting.

2K Games president Christoph Hartmann told us that putting a game's genre on the box would be "the kiss of death," he says. "I think it would be very limiting." Hartmann believes that there is a fine line between correctly informing consumers without underserving a game's potential unique qualities. He says the company thought about coming up with its own genre tag for BioShock, but decided not to do it. "If we as an industry want to reinvent ourselves, we probably have to start mixing up those genres. That's going to be trickier for the media as well as the buyer."

THE LAND OF THE SETTING SUN

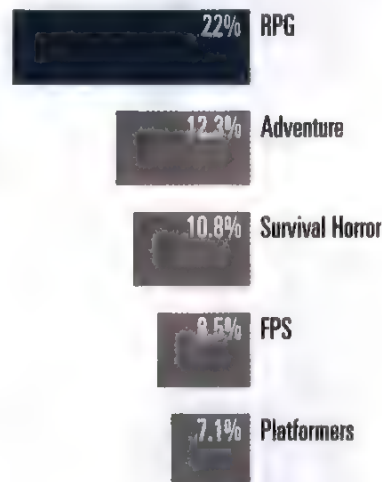
Japan is known for its RPGs, but with games like BioWare's Mass Effect (made in Canada), western RPGs are taking over. Over half of our respondents – 56.1 percent to 43.9 – said that they preferred western-made RPGs to those from Japan.



UNLIMITED ENABLED

To see the hard data and info culled from our reader survey, check out this month's Unlimited section at Game Informer Online.

Which genre would you like to see more games from?



RPGs garnered the most votes – almost doubling adventure games, which was the nearest response.

Whether those people were specifically referring to old-school point-and-click adventure games can't be determined.

6.1%

This percentage both represents the number of people who want to see more fighting games and those who said that the fighting genre is what first got them into video games



10 the top videogame shadow selves

In game worlds where you play as ultra-powerful heroes who can overcome any obstacle, nothing is more dangerous than facing off against yourself. At least, that's what game designers seemed to have decided, as there have been dozens of plotlines and fights over the years that explore the idea of combating one's dark inner self. Our favorites rise out of cliché to be some of the most memorable characters and moments in each respective franchise.

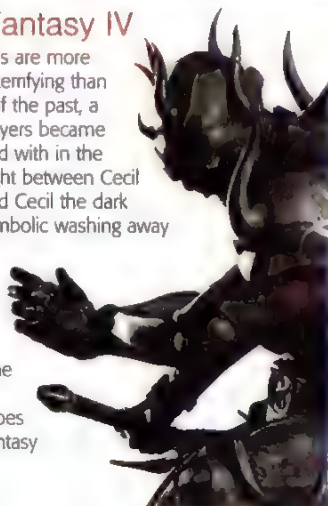
1 Metroid Fusion

You know that alien infection is serious when you wake up and learn that a mutated clone of yourself is running around wreaking havoc. That's exactly what happens to Samus Aran as she explores the abandoned biological space laboratories of Metroid Fusion. The dangerous X-parasites are the culprits, but players spend hours in terror of the powerful Samus copy before finally gaining enough abilities to fight back.



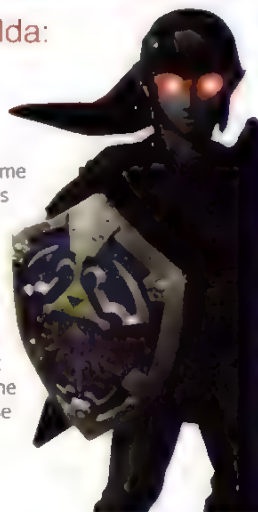
2 Final Fantasy IV

Few applanctions are more dangerous or tempting than the mistakes of the past, a lesson that players became well acquainted with in the memorable fight between Cecil the paladin and Cecil the dark knight. In a symbolic washing away of the sins of his questionable past, Cecil battles himself and emerges as one of the most renowned heroes of the Final Fantasy franchise.



3 The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

In a scene that may have been in homage to a similar fight in Zelda II: The Adventure of Link, the Water Temple in Ocarina of Time features a haunting and dangerous duel against Link's doppelganger. Here, Dark Link has a power level proportionally balanced against Link at the time he enters the fight. Countering normal sword swings easily, and brutally counterattacking after the slightest player mistake, the evil done is one of the most notable conflicts of the landmark game.



4 Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

Players who haven't downloaded the Jedi Temple expansion are missing out on one of the coolest boss fights in the game. Echoing Luke Skywalker's trial in the cave, the Apprentice completes his Jedi trials in the ruined temple and comes face to face with the dark future self that still might lie ahead for him.



5 Tomb Raider Underworld

She blew up our manor house! We've explored that house in every game since 1996! In one of the coolest opening sequences in years, we see a black leather-clad copy of Lara Croft detonate Lara's home, symbolically ending an era in Tomb Raider games and opening up a path to future adventures.



6 God of War

Those sure are a lot of Kratos copies. In a twisted attempt to defeat Kratos, Ares reunites the rage-filled warrior with his murdered family, only to force him to defend the helpless women from dozens of copies of the man who killed them the first time – Kratos himself.



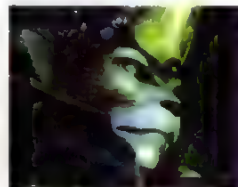
7 Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones

In the final installment of Ubisoft's Sands of Time trilogy, the prince finds his body infected by the sands after his disastrous failure to save Kaileena. As the prince struggles to stop the machinations of the villainous vizier, an equally dangerous foe is revealed as the dark prince – a dangerous and tempting vision caused by the sands' infection. Whispering dark promises, the dark prince must be confronted before the Prince can enact his heroic destiny.



8 Chrono Cross

In a strange twist of storytelling brilliance, the classic RPG establishes the villainous nemesis of Lynx, and then promptly sends main character Serge into a mind/body exchange with the cat-like man. With your own friends aligned against you, you must travel in the body of your greatest enemy, gathering power and new allies to confront Lynx, who waits in the guise of your former self.



9 Super Mario Sunshine

Nothing ruins a vacation like being accused of crimes committed by an evil shadowy copy of yourself. Mario's hoped-for getaway with Peach turns into just such a nightmare after Shadow Mario pollutes the idyllic Isle Delfino with his dark goo. Who is the real culprit? We don't want to ruin anything, but who is it that is usually out to foil Mario's otherwise peaceful life?



10 Afro Samurai

After the beautiful Okiku secretly siphons away Afro's accumulated combat knowledge, the Empty Seven Clan uses the information to craft the ultimate combat robot. The Afro Droid echoes every move players can make in this harrowing throwdown, and only after a desperate battle as they plunge through the sky can Afro prove that man still has the edge over machine.





games

SEGA ADDS TO ALIENS ALREADY ANNOUNCED GAMES IN LIMBO?

Gamers have waited eagerly for Sega's duo of games based on the Aliens franchise, but now the company is changing gears. Fans will have another Aliens game to look forward to as Sega resurrects the Aliens vs. Predator franchise that should hit store shelves in early 2010. Unfortunately, Sega also announced that Aliens: Colonial Marines (developed by Borderlands' Gearbox Software) has been delayed. Despite being just announced, Aliens vs. Predator will come out before both Colonial Marines and the Obsidian-developed Aliens RPG.

Recently, rumors about the two previously announced titles being cancelled have circulated the web. Sega confirmed that Aliens: Colonial Marines is still going forward, but the company won't comment on the Aliens RPG. The delay of Colonial Marines might not be good news for developer Gearbox, whose last title — Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway — was pushed back several times before selling in low numbers.

Aliens vs. Predator (working title) is being developed by Rebellion, the studio that worked on the first Aliens vs. Predator title back in 1999. Sega is saying little about the game at this point, although it seems like multiplayer will be a focus.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

In the U.S., the home console market is very robust. If the U.S. sold two or three times as much as Japan, it would be tolerable. Yet, I feel that something is wrong when the U.S. is selling 10 times as much as Japan on a weekly basis.

— Nintendo president Satoru Iwata



GOOD

Crysis Warhead (shown) creator Crytek has given TimeSplitters' developer Free Radical a lifeline. The German developer bought the company, preserving at least 40 jobs. Free Radical closed its doors before Christmas, laying off around 140 employees. Crytek's press release states that Free Radical will remain in the U.K., and it'll "now be integrated into Crytek's network," including "all assets." Whether Crytek rejuvenates the TimeSplitters franchise remains to be seen, but rumors abound that Free Radical will head Crytek's console development.



UGLY

It's a bloody massacre all right. Splat's publisher Namco Bandai has axed developer Botterocket from the project. The game will now be finished by Surge, the team behind sword slasher Afro Samurai. Word is the game was unceremoniously yanked from Botterocket when Namco swooped in and confiscated all the game's assets. Namco says Splat's publisher is still expected to release this year.



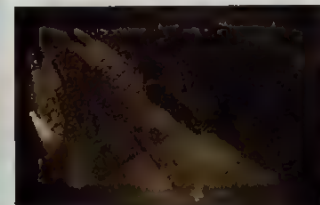
GOOD

Nintendo is releasing the Nintendo DSi for \$169.99 on April 5 in the colors of blue and black. The new iteration of the handheld features two cameras, a bigger screen, additional applications, and other features. We'll have more on the Nintendo DSi soon.



BAD & GOOD

EA has delayed a trio of games: Dragon Age: Origins (end of this year), Sims 3 (June 2), and Godfather II (April 17). Dragon Age: Origins' PC release will now coincide with the console versions. The good news, however, is that the company officially announced sequels for Battlefield: Bad Company (Shown). Turn to page 69 for more Battlefield) and Mass Effect. Also, a G.I. Joe game that will accompany the movie this fall, and EA is resurrecting American McGee's Alice.



GOOD

Dead to Rights made a minor splash when it came out in 2002, even if subsequent iterations ground the franchise down into steaming dog food. Later this year Namco Bandai is resurrecting the exploits of Jack Slate and his playable canine Shadow in Dead to Rights: Retribution. Hopefully this dog won't have to be put down in pity.

GOOD

Eidos has been on the auction block for a while now, and the latest suitor is Square Enix. The Japanese company is looking to acquire the Tomb Raider publisher in order to expand its western presence. Eidos' board is unanimously recommending Square Enix's offer of \$121 million. In other acquisition news, Namco Bandai plans to take over Puzzle Quest publisher D3.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

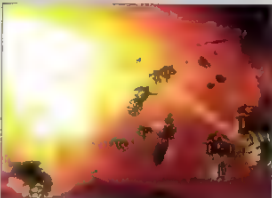
EA GETS BOURNE

Sierra released *The Bourne Conspiracy* last year, but Vivendi lost the rights when it hooked up with Activision. Now competing publisher EA secured the rights to the novel series from author Robert Ludlum. The first game from the multi-year deal is being developed by Starbreeze Studios, the outfit behind *The Darkness* (shown).



STARDOCK STARTS ON RPG

Stardock Entertainment's *Sins of a Solar Empire* (shown) was a 4X PC hit, and now the publisher is expanding its horizons with a new studio in Michigan. This new studio will employ 50 people and work on an unannounced RPG project.



ROBOT ON THE RISE

Robot Entertainment has risen from the ashes of Halo Wars developer Ensemble Studios. The new developer is headed by Tony Goodman, Ensemble co-founder, and features other members from the former Halo Wars and Age of Empires creator. Ensemble's demise has also paved the way for the newly minted Bonfire Studios.



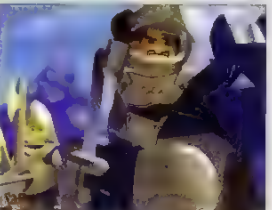
NEW FANTASY MODE FOR FIFA

EA is offering a new downloadable game mode for FIFA Soccer 09 this March. The Ultimate Team mode has you assembling a fantasy squad of players, staff, contracts, formations, and tactics that you play against others online and off. No price has been announced for the DLC.



THE LEGO BATTLE BEGINS

After conquering *Star Wars*, *Batman*, and *Indiana Jones*, Lego is finally building a game out of its own parts. *Lego Battles for the DS* uses the toy maker's *Castle*, *Pirates*, and *Space* series for more than 70 missions and six different storylines as players create bases and command armies.



NEED FOR SPEED SHIFTS INTO HIGHER GEAR

THREE NEW TITLES FOR '09

The Need for Speed series has been adrift in its last two iterations since making a splash with the dawn of the current generation of consoles. Now EA is trying to right the ship by imposing a clear focus. The company is splitting the franchise into three distinct games, all of which are coming out this year.

NEED FOR SPEED WORLD ONLINE (late 2009) • PC

Need for Speed World Online will be free to play. The game features the customization of licensed cars and their parts through its multiple game modes.

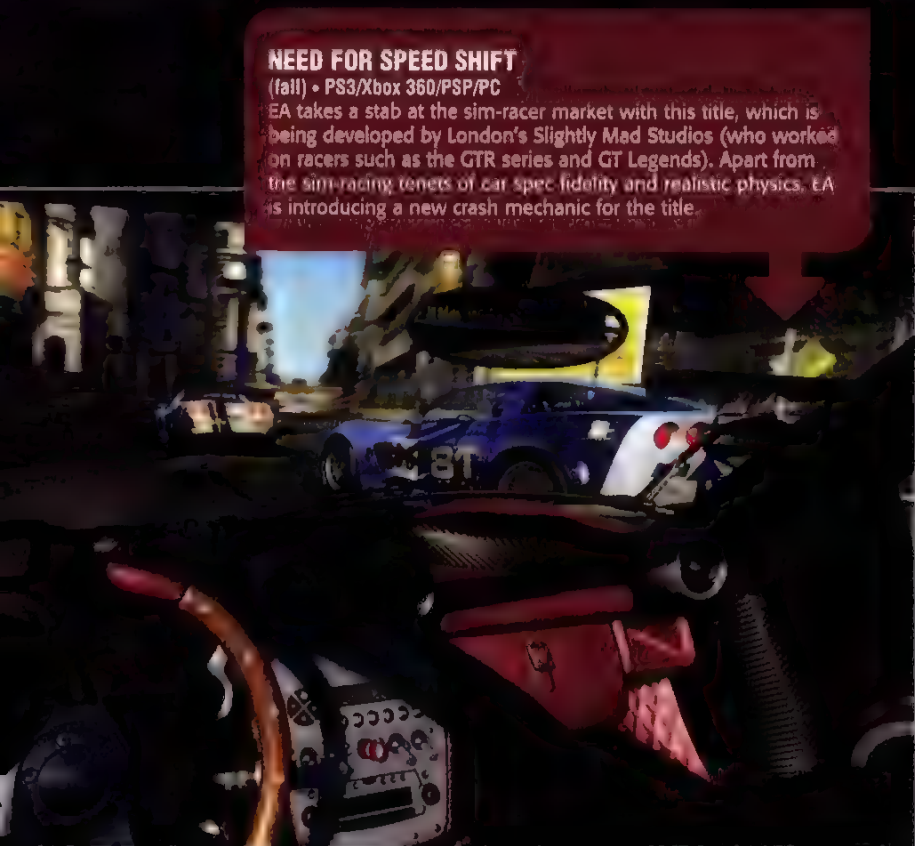




NEED FOR SPEED NITRO

(fall) • Wii/DS

This game focuses on what the Need for Speed franchise has been known for in the past, with its arcade racing philosophy and siren-blaring cops. Car customization is also a focus for Nitro, which is being handled by EA Montreal and members of EA Black Box.



NEED FOR SPEED SHIFT

(fall) • PS3/Xbox 360/PSP/PC

EA takes a stab at the sim-racer market with this title, which is being developed by London's Slightly Mad Studios (who worked on racers such as the GTR series and GT Legends). Apart from the sim-racing tenets of car spec fidelity and realistic physics, EA is introducing a new crash mechanic for the title.

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

THE NEXT PSP

Loose Talk has heard more about Sony's plans for the successor to the PlayStation Portable. The company intends to debut it in 2010, and the next full iteration of the handheld will not use UMDs, but will instead be a disc-less platform. Other rumors have been floating around regarding the next PSP having a touchscreen - which Sony has vehemently denied.

In other news, we're hearing more credible intelligence regarding a PS3 price drop. Sony is mulling over when exactly it'll take place. Our bet is after E3, but before the end of the year. Sony has previously stated that it needs to milk as much money out of the existing price point as it can.



PlayStation Portable



A BOY AND HIS BLOB AND THE WII

Fans cheered Majesco when it announced a Nintendo DS version of NES cult classic A Boy and His Blob, but those smiles were turned upside down when the company cancelled the game a few years back. Now the company is bringing the game to the Wii. The original side-scroller featured a boy and his friend Blobert, who could change into items like a blowtorch, trampoline, or bridge when fed jelly beans. This Boy and His Blob title shouldn't be confused with the original's rumored appearance on the system's Virtual Console.



MOVEMENT ON MICROSOFT MOTION CAM

Xbox insider and VentureBeat blogger Dean Takahashi says that Microsoft has acquired Israeli tech firm 3DV Systems to use its ZCam Camera to provide motion-based gameplay without the need for any supplemental peripheral such as a controller or wearable sensor. Takahashi says that the ZCam's motion detection is much better than that of the Wii.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Humor is a hard nut to crack in video games, and so is genre-blending. This title did both to critical acclaim when it hit stores as a PC title late in 2000 (and the PS2 in 2001). Developed by Planet Moon Studios, which featured team members who had worked on MDK, this game puts you in control of three different creatures as its story progresses: the water-laning Sea Reapers, jet pack-wearing Meccarays, and the lumbering bipeds that give this title its name. The game mixes third- and first-person action with RTS resource gathering and base building via the helpful Smarties.

(Answer on page 18)





In anticipation of the upcoming series reboot in The King of Fighters XII (see the preview on page 61), we spoke with two members of the development team primarily responsible for the new artistic direction and scored an exclusive piece of art showing SNK favorites Terry and Ryo locked in battle. Art director Nona creates the building blocks for all of the playable character designs and oversees the visual style, while illustrator Eisuke Ogura creates promotional art like posters and box design and in-game art like character portraits on the select screen.

What would you say is the overall tone of the new look you're bringing to KOF XII's illustrations and visuals compared to past KOF titles?

EISUKE OGURA: In this installment, many of the in-game character visuals have undergone a huge change. Along with expressing a new feel for the characters, I also had to consider not changing their image too much, so as to stay true to the KOF Saga. Since KOF XII is a title that expresses and beautifies "fighters' clashing of fists" in a simple, yet powerful way, I was conscious of making sure my illustrations represented this through strong, muscular characters.

How do you balance moving in a new direction against lofty fan expectations or those who prefer some of the classic designs?

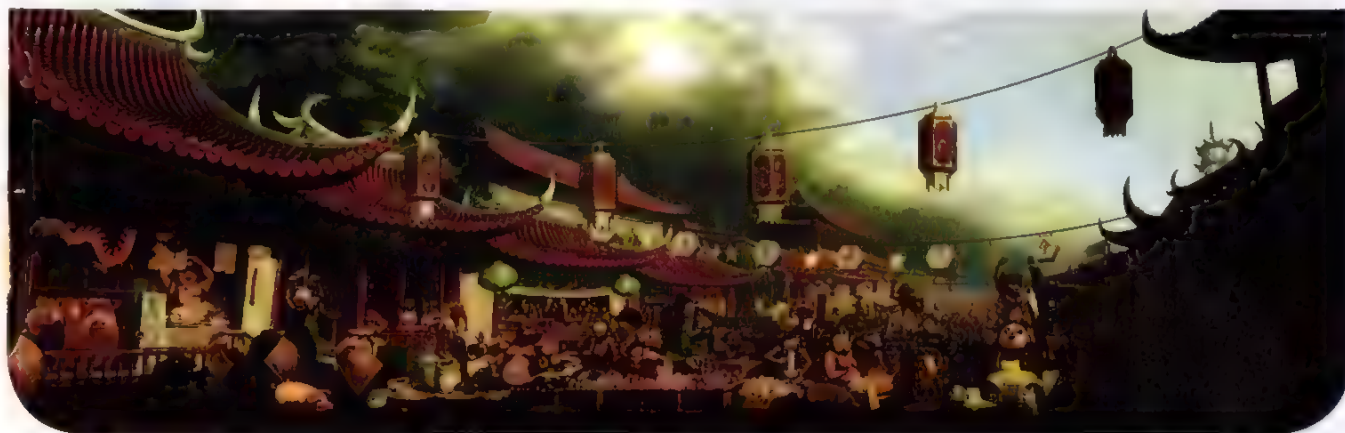
NONA: The important part of in-game graphics is asking yourself if you are staying true to the original concept. If you don't do that, you risk losing a unified feeling for the game. For example, we took Terry (from his bomber jacket design in Fatal Fury: Mark of the Wolves) back to his original red and white cap. We're using the most macho, stand-out, original

Terry. We wanted to keep in line with the original "clashing of fists" concept we're going for on KOF XII.

OGURA: When illustrating characters, it's important to keep in line with the game director's vision, and keep in mind our aim to please the fans. With a series like KOF, a good number of fans don't like it when you go and create something too far off the original art.

Does having more frames of animation allow the team to better express characters' personalities?

NONA: Yes, of course. A large number of frames give you more freedom to express to the player. That said, depending on the game's tempo, the number of frames needed will change. Games in the fighting genre often have a very high tempo to begin with, and too many frames of animation can add unneeded stress for the player. How we can bring out the best amount of detail and expression in a limited number of frames is a real pleasure for the developer. ■■■



CHARACTER CREATION TO IMPLEMENTATION

1 STARTING IN 2D: Nona designs basic 2D character graphics in dot-pixel form

2 3D MODEL CREATION: The team takes Nona's basic 2D designs, and uses 3D software tools to create an original 3D model for each character

3 2D ANIMATION: After animating the character in 3D and taking a series of movements from each model, the team selects a certain number of animations to use for each character. Each of those character animations are then rendered to 2D, which are used as a base for revised 2D character graphics

4 ADDING DETAIL: Using the data from steps 2 and 3, Nona makes additions to his original work, creating new 2D dot-pixel graphics for each of the characters' actions

5 REVISING ANIMATION AND DESIGN: Combining movements from step 3 and Nona's new details from step 4, the team creates a series of new revised 2D dot-pixel characters. They add a number of new details, brush up the characters' costumes, and add expressions with a greater level of detail

6 THE FINAL PASS: Adding in gradation and highlighting certain areas, the team perfects the detail, animation, and overall quality of each character





Terry vs. Ryo: Inspiration

OGURA: With The King of Fighters XII, we're emphasizing a return to KOF's roots. Back when I was a student and KOF '94 was released in the arcades, I still remember the strong impact it had. To me personally, KOF is more about the celebration of SNK's original characters than the story of Kyo Kusanagi, K', or Ash. With that in mind, I wanted to use this opportunity to try going straight with a "Fatal Fury vs. Art of Fighting" concept.

impulse

BY MATT MILLER

Kung Fu goes platforming, board games get digitized, and outer space proves itself to be anything but empty. Common thread? Playing with friends.



In recent months, I've found plenty to complain about with all three major consoles and their approach to this still emerging downloadable scene. Chief among my concerns remain the blithe disregard they have for the importance of publishing release dates; no one knows when to buy your game if you never tell them when it's coming out. I'm also concerned about how small developers get paid for their downloadable titles. Royalty rates for developers are often on a sliding scale. That scale is moving in the wrong direction for more than a couple of small teams, particularly in the instance of first-party publishing deals. Developers that opt to go through a third-party publisher can sometimes have an equally untenable situation, since the middle-man takes a cut. Those complaints aside, I offer props to all three big console makers for offering compelling content on a regular basis. Two years ago, it was easy to assume that services like Live Arcade would be a fad, and that support would fall away once media attention shifted. Instead, a month rarely passes that some new gems don't show up. Here's hoping these smaller, clever titles continue to get their due.

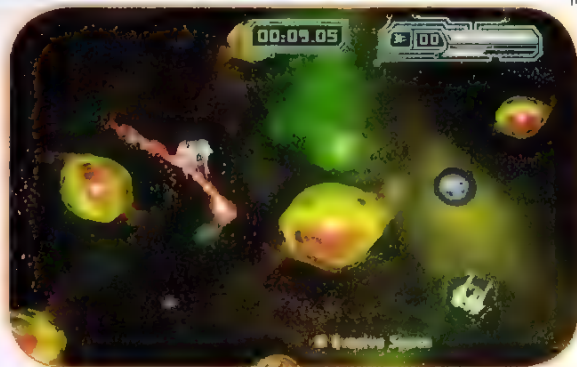
Invincible Tiger: The Legend of Han Tao recently caught my eye on both Live Arcade and PSN; I got even more excited once I played an early build. Martial arts combos and quick counters headline this slick platforming action title, which embraces the fine traditions of Hong Kong action movies. The unambiguously named Evil Overlord has stolen the Star of Destiny, and only the fallen warrior named Han Tao can get it back. Or, at least Han Tao and a buddy, since the game supports online or local co-op play. The action is fast and simple, as you punch and kick your way through dozens of henchmen while flipping up and down through the highly vertical stages. A '70s style video filter and kung fu disco music set the appropriate tone, and the game knows not to take itself too seriously. I love the constant nods to classic kung fu flicks, and the substance keeps up with the style through reactive controls and smart level designs. Fans of the genre should have

no compunctions about giving it a try.

While it falls somewhat out of the scope of games I often cover for this column, **Hasbro Family Game Night** has the potential to draw in a broad crowd. The game is set to release on Xbox Live Arcade, where Mr. Potato Head serves as a host for some of the most familiar tabletop games in history. Whether playing locally or online, games like Scrabble, Yahtzee, Battleship, Connect Four, Boggle, and Sorry! will be available for individual download, with additional games rolling out over time. With the exception of some added modes for party play, the games seem to be faithful interpretations of the classic titles, albeit

at a price tag far lower than purchasing each game's real-world version. If you're willing to sacrifice the tactile feel of plastic game pieces, this could be a great choice for parties and families.

New worthwhile titles continue to sneak out for WiiWare every few weeks. My favorite recent entry is a challenging flyer called **Evasive Space**. Eschewing the traditions of the top-down space shooter, the game abandons high-powered weaponry and focuses instead on a simple piloting mechanic, where the ship rockets off in the direction of the onscreen pointer. Under some harsh but ultimately achievable time limits, you're forced to navigate twisting lunar passages and dodge through spinning asteroid fields. Many stages include a local four-player option, where you can compete for the best score. It's by no means the easiest game on the service, but the polished mechanic is worth a look for gamers who like precision gameplay. ■ ■ ■



Left 4 Dead

Last year's multiplayer zombie fest has a DLC survival pack headed to 360 and PC, and anyone who has played it knows that's something to be excited about. In addition to the new multiplayer Survival mode that pits players against waves of zombies, Valve is including two new versus campaigns to play through. Best of all, it's free!




Noby Noby Boy

The creator of Katamari Damacy brings us this absurd follow-up, coming exclusively to PlayStation Network. You play as a rainbow colored wormlike creature named Boy, who continually stretches out across a given stage in haphazard ways. Each player's length helps add to the size of Girl (who floats in orbit above Earth) unlocking new stages for everyone who plays the game. It pretty much makes no sense.



Watchmen: The End Is Nigh

This two-player beat-em-up will likely get some hefty attention this month, what with it being the only game out to accompany the big movie release. The Live Arcade and PSN title is set prior to the movie's narrative, and it delivers some frequently clumsy combat. However, it may be worth it if you just can't get enough of that Rorschach guy.



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TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

**DEVELOPER**
JUN TAKEUCHI
producer, Resident Evil 5

- 1 Wizardry – NES
- 2 Ogre Battle: March of the Black Queen – SNES
- 3 Wipeout – PSone
- 4 Grand Theft Auto III – PS2
- 5 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare – 360

**READER**
GRETCHEN KELM
Long Beach, CA

- 1 Pokémon Diamond – DS
- 2 Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise – 360
- 3 Fable II – 360
- 4 Me & My Katamari – PSP
- 5 Mario Party DS – DS

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Things Missing From Resident Evil 5

- 10 Video games' first human/zombie kiss
- 9 The president's daughter
- 8 Chris' alternate bikini costume
- 7 A coherent, non-ridiculous storyline
- 6 Dance/musical numbers. You know, like "Thriller"
- 5 That dumb shopkeeper
- 4 Super-sonic jetpacks. In fact, these are poorly represented in all games
- 3 Barry! Where's Barry?!
- 2 Halo controls. Also, Cortana
- 1 Zombies riding motorcycles. Naw, just kidding. They're in there

Name That Game Answer: Giants: Citizen Kabuto

news

"THE OLD ATARI WAS COMPLEX, CHAOTIC, AND SOMEWHAT DYSFUNCTIONAL"

ATARI PRESIDENT PHIL HARRISON LOOKS INTO THE FUTURE



Last year former Sony president of worldwide studios Phil Harrison took over as president of Atari, a company in need of a jumpstart. Between streamlining operations and signing MMO developer Cryptic, Harrison looks to take the company into the future by beefing up its lineup (with Ghostbusters and The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena), and exploring options such as non-retail game distribution and social networks. We spoke with Mr. Harrison about the company's new course.

You've talked about there being an old Atari and a new Atari. How would you characterize the differences between the two?

One of the things that we wanted to clean up as soon as David [CEO David Gardner] and myself got on board – in fact, before we got on board – was to make the company act like one business. If you look at the history of Atari in the last four or five years, it had Atari Inc., it had InfoGames, it had the various business units around the world, and it was not acting and performing as a single entity with a single strategy and with a clear management structure. In not so many words, the old Atari was complex, chaotic, and somewhat dysfunctional, and we are taking steps to make that lesser.

Some publishers are closing studios, while Atari just acquired MMO developer Cryptic Studios. Is there any particular cycle in the industry at the moment, or are companies just reacting to their own circumstances?

It's a good question. I think it's a very intense situation for a lot of companies. There's obviously a global economic downturn and no company is immune from that, and no industry is immune from that. So I think different companies will make whatever decisions they have to make in order to match their costs to the level of business they are projecting to enjoy. The industry has always been buying studios, selling studios, hiring people, laying off people. I think there's a natural ebb and flow to any creative industry like that. I think what we're seeing right now is an awful lot of activity happening in a fairly concentrated period of time.

Does Atari want to own more internal IP or have externally developed products such as Ghostbusters?

It's a balance. That's, once again, driven by creative vision and economic reality. We can't afford to do everything that we want to do, but I don't think any company can afford to do absolutely everything that they want to do. So you have to make some bets in as balanced a way as you can to deliver a portfolio of games that are going to do as well as they can do. As you know, in the past, Atari had a lot of studios around the world, but through its own previous financial challenges, had to sell them all or close them. In addition to the team we have in Eden [Test Drive developer Eden Games], we're working now with Cryptic, we're building a studio in London and it takes a little bit of time, but we think there will be more opportunities to come.

Will that new London studio have a specific focus for all its products?

The leadership of the Atari London studio is Paulina Bozek, and Paulina has a very successful track record in creating the Sing Star franchise for Sony. So I think it's unlikely that I'm going to ask her to do a first-person shooter. I don't think you're going to see a singing game necessarily out of that studio, but I think definitely [what you'll see is] what I'll call mass market and entertainment focused.

You've said you want Atari to utilize Facebook and other social networks with its games. Is this about capturing more mass-market fans or about offering hardcore players more ways to extend their experience? Is there a contradiction between the two?

I don't think there is a contradiction at all. I think the ubiquitous nature of the internet transcends all user categories. Imagine if you have a Facebook account, or MySpace page, or your own personal blog page, and imagine if you got an RSS feed from Champions Online saying that your buddy in your clan just leveled up to a level 25 super hero and defeated the arch enemy at the end of a particular level. You'd want to check that out. I think what the social networks provide is just a channel to maintain the communication with the player long after they've walked away from their PC or their console.

Atari's Alone in the Dark game was structured in episodes. Do you think future games will be digitally distributed episodically instead of simply offering new content added to the retail box copy?

In the past, I think a lot of people thought about episodic [games], meaning take a big single-player game and chopping it up into little pieces. I'm not sure that's necessarily going to be where the market is. I don't think that players are going to be interested in that on a single-player experience. If it was a multiplayer experience, definitely.

In hindsight, are there things that you wish Sony would have done differently with respect to the PS3 now that you're on the publisher side of the equation?

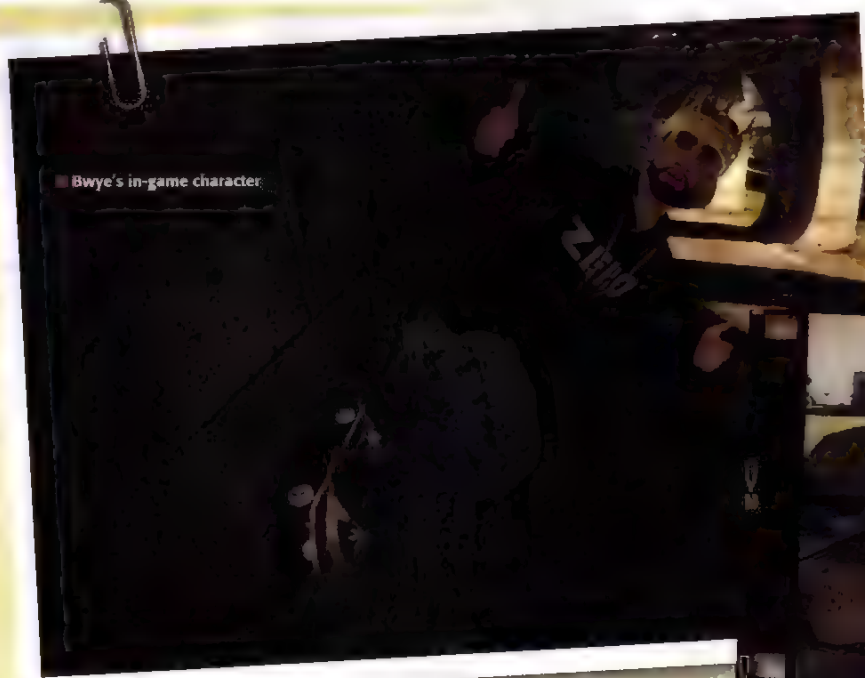
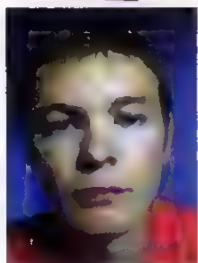
I'm sure there are plenty of things that Sony themselves would acknowledge could be improved; probably the most notable one is the price, but that's not something I can control or that they can easily control. I think that the PS3 is an outstanding format and presents great opportunities for all of us as game creators and players, but the biggest barrier is getting it into as many people's houses as possible.

Gamers

Skate 2

Mike Bwye

Game Informer scours the leaderboards to find the best of the best, uncover the people behind the handles, and learn their strategies. 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.

VITAL
STATS

Handle:
Teri_Yakimoto

Age:
26

Hometown:
Barnstaple,
United Kingdom

Favorite Area to Skate:
The Rez

Accomplishments:

A couple of Mike Bwye's videos have risen to the top of the Highest Rated leaderboards on the PlayStation 3 edition of Skate 2. Easily viewable on the Skate website (skatereel.ea.com), Bwye's runs include a lengthy sequence in which he chases his board downhill and lands on it from 20 feet up, and an impressive skitch up a massive sculpture. He also has earned every trophy in the game.

Origin of Skills:

Bwye played every Tony Hawk that came out, but things changed when EA's franchise launched. "I haven't been back to Tony Hawk since. Skate just blew me away," he says. "I need to make the best video I can. I have to get the number one video. On Skate 1 I didn't quite achieve it. But from there I've pulled the craziest tricks I can, the best lines, the most original thing I can do, and get it up for everyone to see. I just hope they love it as well."

Other Favorite Games:

Fallout 3, F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Life Outside of Skate 2:

Though Bwye doesn't skate in real life, he was into BMX biking for a long time. He's currently looking for a new job, but he's worked as an engineer, which basically involved "using small metal components for airline systems, hydraulic systems, things like that."

Glitch Abuse:

"I don't like those videos at all," Bwye says. "You could never do it twice. Someone's just playing and it's just glitched. It's annoying when I see a video like that go up to the top because it's just completely random. It's not even supposed to happen."

Practice Time:

Eight hours a day.

The Sculpture Jump:

"It probably took me an hour or two," Bwye recalls. "Mostly just waiting for cars. But when that car came along I actually pulled it the first time. It's the original video for it. That's why there's only a kick flip and pop shuv-it in it. I was so impressed with it I was just like, 'That's got to come up.' I don't think anyone has even attempted to make a video like it either, which is quite good because a lot of videos do get copied."

Editing Finesse:

Bwye definitely recommends the Filmer Pack DLC for its expanded video options. "I will sit down and edit a video for quite a while until I'm happy that the camera is free flowing around my skater," he says. "In some of the [videos] that people are loading their cameras aren't even looking at the skateboard half the time. For me, camera placement is very important."

Improvements for Skate 3:

Bwye would like to see changes to the off-board controls and faulty markers. "So many times I've set up something, gone back to my marker, come down to skate it, and it's disappeared and reset to where I pulled it from even though I put a marker on it," he says. "Obviously, they've done really well with the new San Vanelona, but I think it's time they changed to a different location."

■ Bwye's signature sculpture jump



CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1994 End of an Era



Miller gets a position at 20th Century Fox helping to usher out the Laserdisc format with acclaimed special editions of *The Abyss* and *Aliens*.

DVD Dawning



Moving to Warner Bros., Miller is part of a small team at the company that coordinates the launch of the DVD format, which changes the movie business forever.

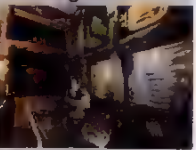
1997 Marketing Game

Miller has a brief stint at MGM, where he handles the company's DVD marketing.

1998 New Technology

Miller leaves for a tech startup, Rotor Communications, which offers then-groundbreaking live chat and webcasting technology for television shows. Sadly, the company goes down in the dot-com meltdown.

2001 Convergence



Miller lands a position at NBC Universal, coordinating "event release" DVDs. Here he helps pioneer the practice of including playable game demos on DVD releases, which Universal did for *The Chronicles of Riddick* and *The Hulk*.

2005 In The Game

After reconnecting with his childhood hobby of gaming, Miller gets a job at THQ, overseeing the company's racing franchises.

2008 New Territory



Miller takes a position at Codemasters and is tasked with setting up the company's first U.S. headquarters.

DAVEMILLER

VICE-PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, CODEMASTERS

>> Codemasters' Dave Miller has been charged with establishing the long-running U.K. publisher's new stateside offices. We spoke with Miller about the challenges of game publishing in 2009 and the future of Codemasters. <<

Coming into Codemasters to set up their American office, what did you see as the primary areas in which you had to help the company improve?

When I took a look around, it was clear that Codemasters had built great products. They have fantastic internal development. But there hadn't been a lot of effort put into building a publicity campaign — things like supporting the press with assets, getting the game out to retail in advance. It was basically: "We'll build great games and people will find us and it will all work out." They knew that wasn't working, which is why they wanted to establish a staff in the U.S. The U.S. was always seen as an offshoot of whatever was being done in Europe. Things were being done too late; there wasn't enough support being given to retail or publications here. It was a huge opportunity and one of the things that drew me to the company. There aren't many places where you can establish something from the ground up anymore.

Codemasters seems like part of an increasingly rare breed — the independent, mid-level publisher that competes with triple-A franchises from the large publishers.

What about Eidos? What about Midway? [Laughs] You've been reading the news. It is challenging, because we don't have the leverage at retail that some of our competitors do. That's why we need to rely on having more robust publicity and market-

ing campaigns to get the word out. The press really made *Dirt* work in the U.S. It was a much bigger hit than we expected. The press really embraced the game. Because of our size compared to EA, Activision, and Ubisoft, we need to keep a strong focus on the quality of our products and getting the message out early and consistently. We can compete with publishers that have a lot more resources than we do.

How scary is the current business environment and economy right now?

If our lineup for 2009 wasn't as strong as it is, we might be worried, but we have some incredibly strong products coming out in '09. What it's going to come down to is producing high quality products. If you look at the last half of 2008, the really strong products did really well and the weaker products didn't. The gap has grown. Normally, you'll see products that are ranked 80 and above will do very

well, and below that it drops off like a regular curve. But what's been happening in the last six to nine months in the U.S. is that the gap is increasing. It's almost like the depression of the middle class.

Codemasters is profitable and has a very strong following, particularly in the racing market. Has the company been approached with a buyout deal by a larger publisher?

Regularly, yes.

Do the owners just value their independence too much?

Well, we're really focused on building the company right now to become a strong mid-tier publisher for the next 12 to 18 months. At that point, we'll probably take a look around at what's happening in the market. We take it month by month. We do get approached regularly by other companies of various sizes that are interested in us, but we haven't allowed ourselves to be distracted by that yet. We have a goal, which is to build Codemasters into a top-tier publisher in North America, and we're improving our revenues by double digits year over year. Talk to me in 12 to 18 months and I may have a different answer.

So it sounds like a buyout is something you're open to down the road?

Well, we're privately held. We have investors that have put capital into the company and are

Codemasters has always had a strong presence in the PC market. With PC game sales down so sharply, do you have to start looking at downscaling your PC product line?

We do believe there's room. Operation: Flashpoint is going to have a strong PC presence, as it is a shooter. However, having a strong focus on Europe, and given the fairly low development costs PC has when it is combined with other platforms, you'll still find most of our products on PC. Most of the racing brands, except *Need for Speed*, have given up on their PC ports. You will see a PC version of *Dirt 2*. There's a PC version of *Fuel*. We don't expect it to have large distribution in North America, because PC in particular has not done well. For boxed product, the PC market is somewhat smaller than it was a few years ago. At the same time, we are launching new MMO properties like *Jumpgate*, and we manage *Lord of the Rings: Online* and *Dungeons & Dragons Online* in Europe for the rights holder. So, to answer your question, PC is getting less of a focus. We will be looking carefully before we greenlight PC products, but we will continue to have more PC support than our competitors, especially in Europe.

What's your take on the Wii? It seems like the Wii would be a real challenge for a company like Codemasters, which has been constructed to make high-production value, hardcore simulation games.


We can compete with publishers that have a lot more resources than we do.

eventually going to be looking to get that capital out. There's a couple of different options for doing that in the financial markets, and right now given the way the economy is some are more attractive than others. But, in the next 12 months, we're very focused on growth adding value to the company. That's unfortunately about all I can say about that topic.

Deals of that magnitude aren't put together quickly. Do you already have some suitors that you are in preliminary talks with?

It's really not something I can go into. But you can imagine that being one of the few small publishers with decent brands and being profitable, there's probably been a fair amount of interest in us. And everyone has their price. [Laughs]

We've stayed out of the Wii market for a while, focusing on our core strengths. That said, the *Overlord* version for the Wii is called *Overlord: Dark Legend*, and we premiered it at the Leipzig show, and Nintendo told us that it was the best-looking third-party game that they saw on the Wii. We're going headlong into developing two dozen casual games on the Wii with big heads. We're trying to be careful; look at our existing brands, and look at what we can move to the Wii. We're always evaluating new IPs, but there are not a lot of strong pitches on new Wii IPs. Some developers just don't get the Wii; others just want to port existing games over, which has not been successful. We're probably being more cautious than most on the Wii, because we don't have resources to throw away on bad games and bad designs.



■ Dave Miller and Codemasters are looking to make the venerable U.K. publisher a major force in the U.S.

CODEMASTERS' RACE FOR AMERICA

IF LOOKS COULD KILL

GI compares two 3D-ready monitors

Whether 3D is your bag or not, these monitors deliver crisp, detailed visuals. Both have a 5ms response time and a 120Hz framerate, making them compatible with Nvidia's new GeForce 3D Vision glasses. These 22-inch monitors have a 1680x1050 resolution, and display a rich range of colors and natural deep blacks. However, neither system has a HDMI port or any other jack aside from the basic DVI. At least the Viewsonic has a headphone output. While the Samsung has a lighter, smoother design, the Viewsonic sits a few inches higher off the desk, which some might prefer. It's hard to find discrepancies in two displays whose specs are so evenly matched. The lesser price gives Samsung the nod; otherwise this is a draw.



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figures

SAM & MAX STATUE

No, that's not old tuna you smell. It's the aroma of justice, and this statue reeks of it. Symbiote Studio captures the essence of Steve Purcell's 1987 comic about two crazy anthropomorphic detectives. Made from polystone, this hand-numbered run of 1,000 stands a little over 17 inches and weighs 15 pounds. Put on your lobster bib, because who knows how wild it might get with Sam and Max around.

\$75.00 • www.symbiotestudios.com



software

BADABOOM

VERY GOOD

Are you sick of waiting endlessly for your computer to convert the final episodes of *Battlestar Galactica* into an Xbox 360-compatible file? Try Badaboom. This slick app uses Nvidia's CUDA technology to offload the heavy lifting from your processor to your graphics card, cutting video transcoding times drastically. We burned a 30-minute episode of *Trailer Park Boys* into a PSP format in under 4 minutes using an Nvidia 8800GT. The process couldn't be easier — the intuitive interface lets you select the correct device (including Xbox 360, PSP, PS3, and iPhone, among others) at the click of a button. Badaboom is not without its faults — you need to disable SLI for the program to run correctly, it doesn't support surround sound, and it has no batch encoding or file queue — but if you're looking for quick fix for converting video files, the free trial is worth a look.

\$29.00 • www.badaboomit.com



etc.

FPS AND SPEED FRECKS

WIRELESS ■■■■■■■■■■

KontrolFreek hopes to improve your game using basic physics. By adding extra leverage to your analog sticks, the FPS Freck effectively slows down your aiming in shooters, while the Speed Freck adds a U-shaped lip that improves your reactions times in racers. Both units snap firmly onto the top of your PS3 or 360's analog sticks, and have comfortable non-stick grips. We're not sure if it was just some kind of mental placebo, but these analog nubs seemed to give us better accuracy while playing games. While we were a little skeptical at first, these are a cheap experiment for those looking for a leg up in competitions. **\$9.99 • www.kontrolfreek.com**

cute

SHAWNIMALS NINJATOWN MICRO PLUSH

Ninjas don't always have to kill silently; sometimes they can kill with cuteness. Hot on the heels of the DS title comes the Ninjatown Micro Plush Series 1.5 and 2 from designer toy maker Shawn Smith. Unlike Series 1, these silly goofs are completely embroidered, adding more detail to the plush. Since each one comes in a mystery box, you'll never know what to expect...aside from a smile on your face. **\$5.95 • www.shawnimals.com**



übernerd

D&D PLAYER'S HANDBOOK 2

The fourth edition of the Dungeons & Dragons ruleset is receiving its most important expansion since the initial launch last year. The new content dramatically expands the existing lineup of core races and classes. The new primal power source includes classes like the shaman, druid, and warden, while old favorites like the bard and the sorcerer finally get the full treatment. New racial options include everything from gnomes and half-orcs to the stone-like goliaths and the angelic devas. We grilled Wizards' lead designer Mike Mearls about the new book, and you can check out our full interview with him in this month's Unlimited section. **\$34.95 • www.wizards.com**

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Before Alan Moore changed the comic world with *Watchmen* he primed us with titles like *Swamp Thing*, collected here in this special hardcover edition. **\$24.99 • www.dccomics.com/vertigo**

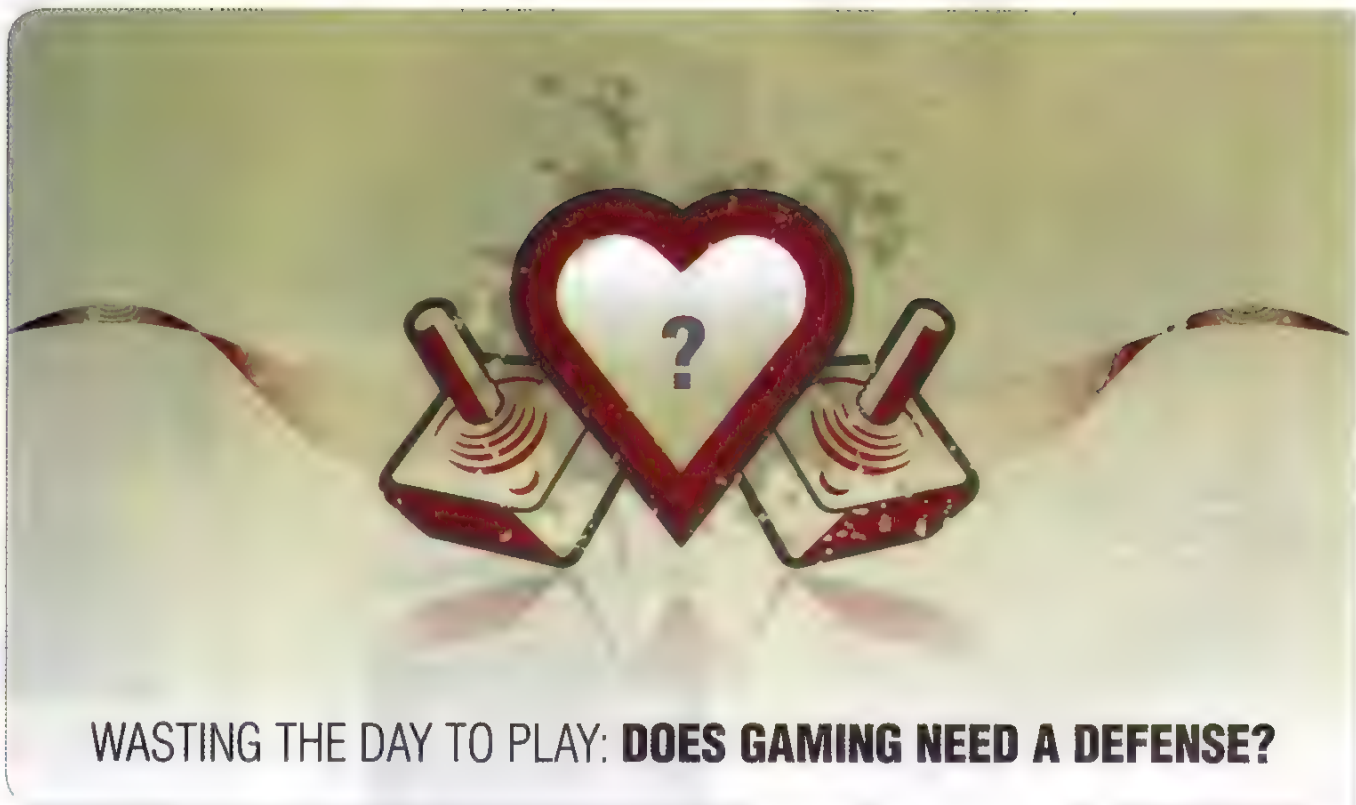
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The offbeat and irreverent Adult Swim sketch comedy show returns for a hilarious second run. **\$44.98 • www.williamsstreet.com**

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DAVID SMITH
CO-FOUNDER, MEDIA MOLECULE



WASTING THE DAY TO PLAY: DOES GAMING NEED A DEFENSE?

Few activities are truly a waste of time if taken in moderation.

Aren't games just a waste of time? I've heard this question a few times in my life, and I rarely find myself prepared with a good answer. Perhaps many of you have wonderfully concise answers, but if you'll forgive this brief existential bout of naval gazing, I'd like to earnestly mull over the question and try to work out what my answer should be. More to the point, why does it seem important to me that there be a good answer?

At least the second question is straightforward. I make a living making video games, so it would be nice if I could justify all the late evenings I spend at the studio. People throw around impressive numbers about how profitable the games industry is, usually compared against the film industry. This helps to validate our industry but it doesn't quite address the deeper issue of value. I should point out that I have no intention of turning this article into an "Are games art?" debate. Even now, there is little consensus on whether the content of our art galleries are worthy of that strangely alluring label. How could we have a chance of resolving a more specific inquiry?

But perhaps there is an interesting point buried within the "Are games art?" misadventure. We might ask the question, "Is art a waste of time?" More specifically, "are music, films, and books wastes of time?" You could provide many examples of these that aren't a waste of time, but there is still so much rubbish that much of it seems to have no value beyond being momentarily distracting. In the same vein, I readily agree that many – if not the majority – of games lining the shelves of our local game stores are just one short evolutionary step away from the landfill. So perhaps the answer to our initial question is, "Yes, but some of them are rather good and don't even involve murdering prostitutes." But what's the unspoken basis of this objection

to video games? Let's observe a gamer through the distorting lens of the original question. Here you should imagine the rather unfair stereotype of a slack jawed, grunting adolescent male, pale of skin and tending towards either gauntness or obesity. Look at him. He should be at the park playing with his friends where he would grow healthy of body and become properly socialized. Observe the games he plays. Once you see past the alluring glow of the moving shapes on the TV screen to the underlying entertainment, it all seems based on repetition. In the mind's eye, this squalid character takes on the appearance of a monstrous battery chicken or lab experiment. Every second or so, he pecks at a button that furthers him towards his arbitrary and pointless goal. After every 20 or so button presses, the screen flashes with a comforting sequence of lights which informs him that some unit of success has been achieved. Every 10 flashes, a fanfare plays and – as predictable as one of Schrödinger's dogs – his brain briefly emits a burst of chemical pleasure and a faint smile creases the corner of his lips. Surely there can be nothing commendable about this activity. What's worse, many books on game design actually encourage this sort of mindless, rigid reward structure.

But from this deconstruction of games, it doesn't take a large conceptual leap to jump into the language of cinema and television. Are films not structured in a similar way? You have these same sort of "beats" at the low level which are related; not to jumping or shooting, but to a line of dialogue or a car crash. These build up into scenes, which in turn build up into story arcs and plotlines that have the same sort of compulsive appeal. You watch the next few lines of dialogue, knowing that it will reveal some interesting plot point. After you've witnessed enough of these plot points, they will culminate in a cliffhanger that draws you onto the

next episode, towards the end of the season, and on to the next. Is our slack-jawed hero not equally at home in this tedious procession of drip-fed stimulus? Even worse, a film or TV show is entirely lacking in any form of interaction. Here, the mental exercise provided by a game or the exotic form of social contact found while playing online are both entirely missing. How tragic a figure the filmgoer must be. Of course, the key difference is it's been many years since the cinema began to replace the theatre and bingo halls, a time when people might have felt this dim view of movie watching was generally true. While some people may watch films until they are entirely useless to society, the same may be true of games or any other activity.

So where does this get us? Perhaps we need to take a step back. Our game-obsessed (or indeed, our film-obsessed or car-obsessed) social misfit is in truth equally as perverse a creature as a person who disdains all forms of entertainment and by an attempt to only indulge in "important" activities presents an equally abhorrent role model. Something akin to the Buddhist notion of the "middle way" suggests that life requires balance. Few activities are truly a waste of time if taken in moderation. So are games a waste of time? No, though many of them are, so I'd have to forgive you if you didn't know better. Do I play too many games and does my life lack balance? Perhaps a little, but nobody's perfect. ■■■

The views and opinions expressed on this page are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer Magazine or its staff

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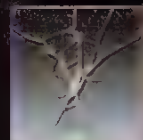
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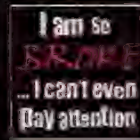
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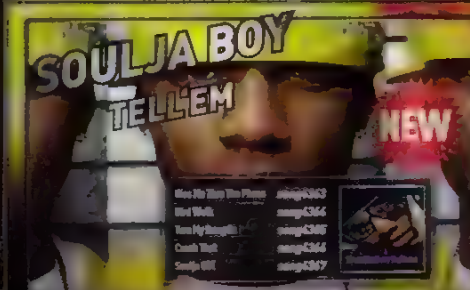


game4088

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Themes



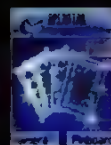
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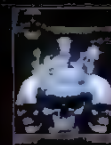
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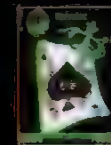
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theme5929



theme5930

Animated Screensavers



move9636



move9637



move9638



move9639



move9640



move9641

Ringtones

Akon - Right Now (Na Na Na)	song4368
Akon - Beautiful	song4369
Akon / Lil Wayne - I'm So Paid	song4370
Eminem / Dr. Dre / 50 Cent - Crack A Bottle	song4371
Jay Z / T.I. - Swagga Like Us	song4372
Kanye West - Heartless	song4373
Katy Perry - Hot N Cold	song4374
Keri Hilson - Turnin Me On	song4375
Kevin Rudolf / Lil Wayne - Let It Rock	song4376
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Lil Wayne - Prom Queen	song4378
Lil Wayne / Bobby Valentine - Mrs. Officer	song4379
Ludacris - One More Drink	song4380
M.I.A. - Paper Planes	song4381
Ne-Yo - Mad	song4382
Ne-Yo - Miss Independent	song4383
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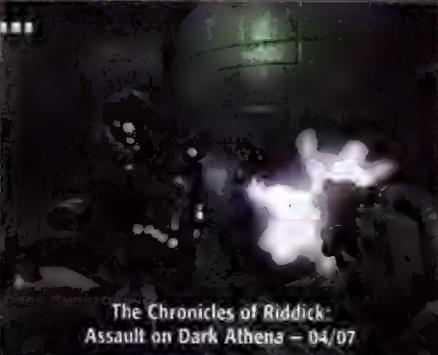
april

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

We originally thought that *Marvel Zombies* was going to be a standalone story. Flash forward two years and the concept has stretched to a trilogy of books. Today, the fourth installment starts, this time focusing on undersea zombies! Long-time comic fans will also see the re-emergence of *Midnight Sons*, a team consisting of a witch, devil, werewolf, and sea monster. And you thought the *Saw* sequels were awesome?



Remember when Vin Diesel was too good for *Fast & Furious 2*? He's come crawling back for the fourth installment, which opens in theaters today. What's wrong, Vin? Are your royalties from *The Pacifier* not paying the bills? Rather than being Paul Walker's lackey, why not make another Riddick film. Those draw well, right?

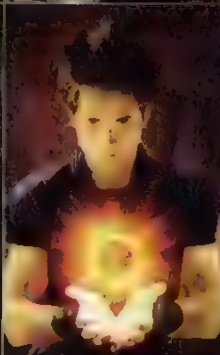


The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena – 04/07

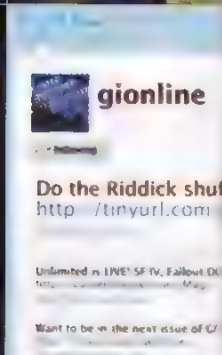
NEW RELEASES

- The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena – PS3, 360, PC
- Dance Dance Revolution: Grooves – Wii
- Grand Theft Auto IV – Wii, DS
- The Godfather II – PS3, 360
- My Horse and Me 2: Riding to the Gold – Wii, DS
- X3: Terran Conflict – PC

A film means sure to whip over-civilized teenage spazzes into a Super Saiyan frenzy, *Dragonball Evolution* hits theaters today. It follows in the footsteps of other cartoon-to-film adaptations such as *Spider-Man*, *RoboCop*, *Godzilla*, and *Ultraviolet*. The bar has been set pretty low, and we doubt that spiky haired dudes in pajamas will be able to clear it. Also, *Dragonball* sucks.



Need an up-to-the-second fix on your Game Informer news? Never fear, Game Informer is posting breaking news as soon as it happens on Twitter. Editors like Reiner, Bertz, Meagan, and Nick are also tweeting away, often detailing what is happening around the office and in the industry. Head to Twitter, com/gionline to start following the action!



Velvet Assassin – 04/14

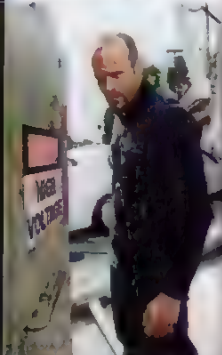
NEW RELEASES

- Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor – PC
- Demigod – PC
- Dreamer: Top Model – DS
- Flower, Sun and Rain – DS
- Puchi Puchi Virus – DS
- Still Life 2 – PC
- Velvet Assassin – 360, PC



Final Fantasy XIII probably won't be releasing stateside until 2010. Japan, on the other hand, will likely be playing it this year. In fact, they'll get a taste of it on April 16 through a demo exclusively packed in with a limited edition of the film *Advent Children*. Import away if you're dying for a taste. We recommend purchasing the Cloud Black, a new PS3 bundle featuring a Final Fantasy XIII-themed matte black system, *Advent Children*, and six hundred dollars of buyer's remorse.

Jason Statham is indestructible. The biographical film *Crank 2: High Voltage* tells the inspirational tale of how the stuntman-turned-actor stays alive by channeling electricity into his robotic heart. True stories are always the best ones.

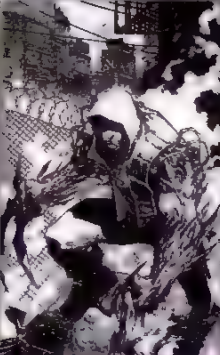


Damnation – 04/21

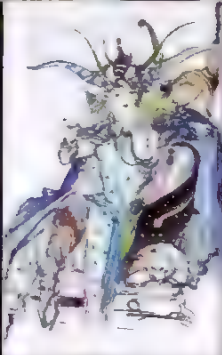
NEW RELEASES

- Prototype – PS3, 360, PC
- Rogue Warriors – Wii
- Pirates Vs Ninja Dodgeball – Wii

On June 16, you finally get the chance to play *Prototype* – a game that follows the exploits of the world's first super hero serial killer. If you can't wait until June to get your fix, you could always read Wildstorm's comic adaptation. This six-issue limited series kicks off this month. Keep your eyes peeled for variant covers by one-armed pushup guy Jim Lee!



If you work at Barnes and Noble, don't be surprised if you see a bunch of people with 10-foot long swords and blue cloaks lining up outside your store. Yoshitaka Amano's newest book, *Down: The Worlds of Final Fantasy*, hits streets this month, and takes fans on an illustrated tour of the making of the first four Final Fantasy games. You'll see his sketches, line art, and paintings in this incredible 116-page book.



Battlestations Pacific – 04/28

NEW RELEASES

- Battlestations: Pacific – 360, PC
- Dynasty Warriors: Strikeforce – PSP

Today, Dark Horse's *Star Wars: Dark Times* comic kicks off a new long-spanning story called *Blue Harvest*. *Star Wars* nerds will recognize the name *Blue Harvest*, as it was used as the codename for *Return of the Jedi*'s production. This story takes place after the fall of the Jedi Order, and focuses on former Jedi Dass Jennir. We also see what happens when Darth Vader returns to Coruscant. Our guess is a slumber party with senator Jar Jar Binks.



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Rapture barely survived.

A surface-dweller came down almost 10 years ago and struck at the heart and mind of the once-beautiful underwater utopia, plunging its inhabitants further into the depths of desperation.

BIOSHOCK 2

First he assassinated the city's founder, Andrew Ryan. Next, he killed Frank Fontaine, the man who controlled the Adam. Then, with a cavalier disregard for the chaos his actions had triggered, the surface-dweller left — and so did the Little Sisters. That's when things in Rapture really got bad. Trapped in a dead man's crumbling dream, the frantic splicers fought savagely over the dwindling Adam supply, killing friends and family to feed an appetite for perfection. Big Daddies continued their lonely patrols with no one to protect... until *she* showed up. Now, Big Sister has brought the little ones back to Rapture, and the Adam is flowing again. A forgotten lust for the substance has reignited, and the Little Sisters are its gatekeepers. You need the precious substance as much as anyone: Adam fuels your plasmids and superhuman strength, but unlike the crazed splicers, you don't need to attack the young girls for a fix. After all, the Little Sisters trust you. **You're a Big Daddy. You're family.**



BioShock's twisted and philosophically charged narrative introduced gamers to a new breed of storytelling. At the center of the fiction was Rapture, a collapsed paradise rotting beneath the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. The underwater city became a major character in its own right, concealing countless mysteries within the confines of its leaking walls. The original BioShock conveyed just one piece of Rapture's legacy: the return of a prodigal son who ended the reign of the city's ruthless tyrants. A multitude of other tragic and triumphant stories remain untold, like the one about a Little Sister who left Rapture as a confused child, only to return years later as its master – and the renegade Big Daddy who opposed her. Later this year, gamers will experience this haunting tale first-hand as they descend into Rapture again with BioShock 2.

"BioShock is a bit of a strange beast," muses Jordan Thomas, BioShock 2's creative director. "Everyone comes away with it with a different impression, and it means different things to different people." When it first released in August 2007, some gamers delved into BioShock's choice-laden combat mechanics, and others simply



■ The Big Sister's metal basket is used to carry Little Sisters through Rapture. The young girls, who see the Big Sister as their protector, have even tied little pink ribbons on it, contrasting sharply with the character's potential for violence

“You don't play just any Big Daddy in BioShock 2. You play the first ever.”

— Jordan Thomas, Creative Director

became absorbed in the chilling and hypnotic surroundings. Regardless of how you conducted your personal journey through Rapture, you crossed paths with the city's most powerful and terrifying denizens: the Big Daddies. These lumbering warriors were more than tough battles; they were the game's most iconic feature. Jack, BioShock's sweater-wearing protagonist, doesn't even adorn the game's box art; a Big Daddy is front and center.

"They are our key characters," admits Thomas. "People have fallen in love with the Big Daddy a little bit, and we felt like it was an obvious place to go when thinking about BioShock 2 and how the player's role in the ecology can change."

In terms of pecking order, Jack occupied the lowly position of a vulnerable stranger – prey looking in from the outside. BioShock 2 lets you perceive the world of Rapture from the perspective of a Big Daddy. From that angle, the city understands you to a degree and has space for you to occupy in its system. Or rather, it would if you were following the rules.

"Big Daddies are like automators – they are slavishly conditioned to follow Little Sisters around and protect them at all costs. You have been cut off your leash," Thomas explains. "You don't play just any Big Daddy in BioShock 2. You play the first ever."

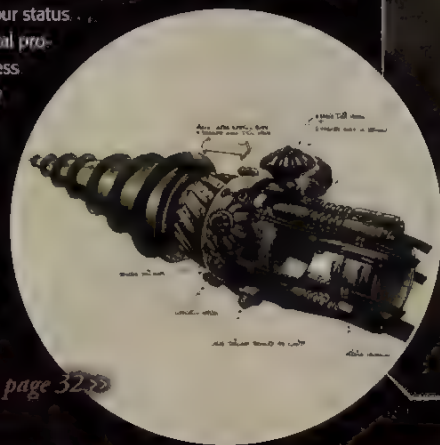
Players may have impersonated a Big Daddy in the previous game, but they did not get to wield the full power these vigilant sentinels possess. "It's less that we built on when Jack became a Big Daddy at the end of BioShock 1, and more like thinking about what we need to do to make players really feel like a Big Daddy," states lead level designer J.P. LeBreton. That means giving players access to the same kinds of weapons, abilities, and tactics that make the iconic creatures so intimidating.

First and foremost, you get a huge motorized drill. This tool replaces the wrench as your basic melee attack, but it is far more than a bludgeoning weapon. By turning it on, you can auger the faces of anyone who comes within striking distance, and the only restriction is an overheat meter preventing constant use. When used in conjunction with the Big Daddy's signature shoulder dash, the drill becomes a brutally effective method for clearing an entire room of splicers in seconds. "As a prototype Big Daddy, you aren't quite as burly as the other ones, but your weapons have been upgraded and they're more effective," Thomas informs us. "So you have this balance of brute physical power versus agility."

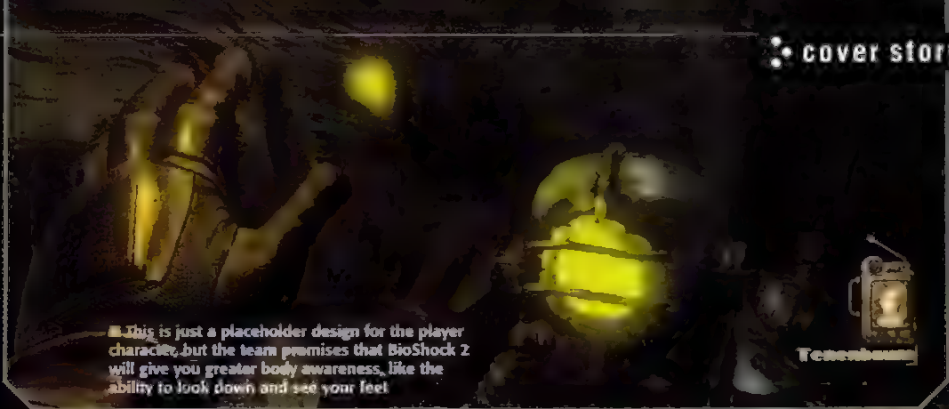
The drill is great for up-close assaults, but you'll also use an array of ranged weapons specifically manufactured for Big Daddies.

Unlike the improvised versions of flamethrowers and grenade launchers Jack used in BioShock, the guns you use in BioShock 2 have a sturdy and engineered aesthetic. They're not cobbled together by mentally unstable drug addicts; they're designed to be weapons. One example that will be familiar to fans of the first game is the rivet gun. The weapon was too big and cumbersome for a human to wield, but that isn't a problem anymore. In fact, along with the drill, it's a mainstay of your arsenal, complete with its own upgrades and custom ammo.

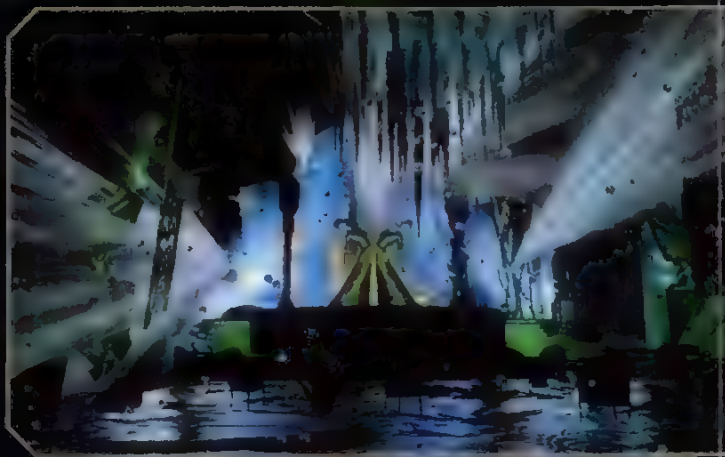
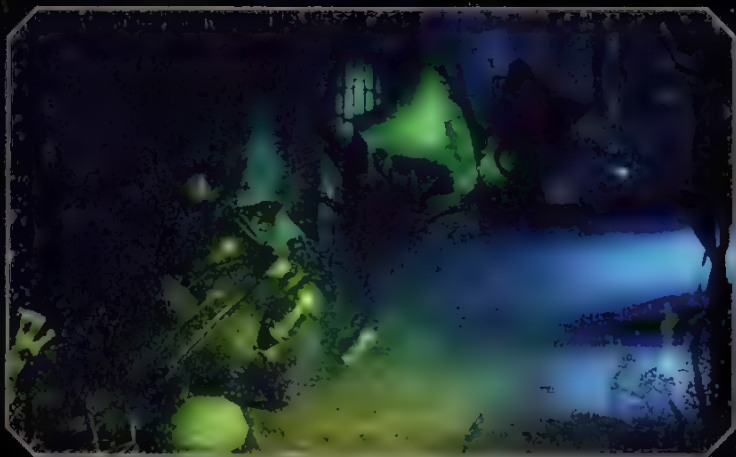
Carrying huge guns is just one perk of being a Big Daddy. Another advantage branches from your status as an experimental prototype: You possess the unique ability to use plasmids, a feature genetically engineered out of the production-model Daddies. In fact, you can even use them.



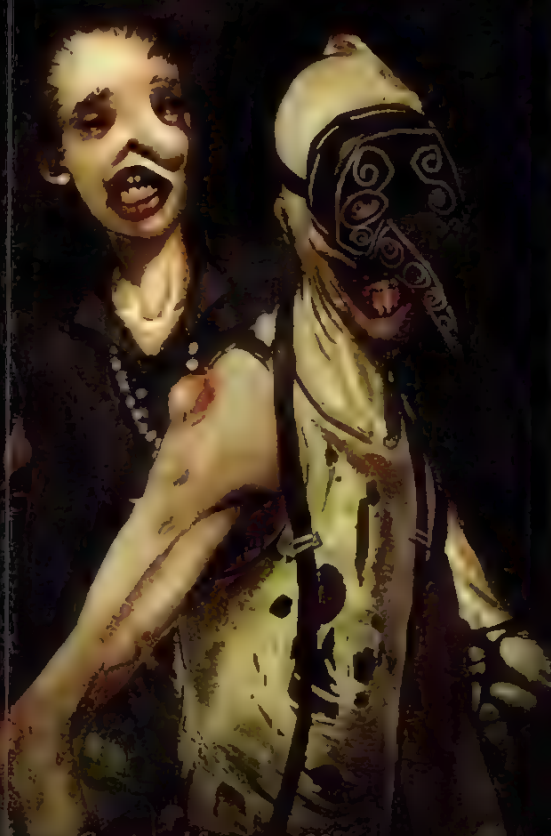
Continued on page 32 >>>



■ This is just a placeholder design for the player character, but the team promises that BioShock 2 will give you greater body awareness, like the ability to look down and see your feet



■ With a giant drill in one hand, regular splicers are less of a threat



Continued from page 30

more effectively than Jack could. For *BioShock 2*, all of the new and returning plasmids will have more versatility, receiving upgrades that change the way you use the powers rather than just increasing the damage they do. The classic Incinerate ability still sets things on fire in a snap, but with an upgrade to the next tier you can hold the button down to charge up a powerful fireball. If you invest in the plasmid all the way up to its final incarnation, you can sustain a steady jet from your palm and paint the world with flames.

"As you go through the ramp and upgrade all the plasmids, there are different tactical possibilities that open up, different gameplay possibilities — offensive and defensive," reveals lead designer Zak McClendon. "It gives you the opportunity for a different kind of play, and to use a lot of the exciting *BioShock* tools, because there is so much diversity."

The team is also focusing on expanding various playstyles, making them more viable through the introduction of new tonics and plasmids. Last time, hacking turrets and security bots was helpful, but it was a situational solution rather than a reliable path to success. Now, with the addition of powers to heal your hacked companions, it is possible to adopt a pet-master playstyle, letting your minions do your fighting for you.

Alternately, if you are the devious type of player who likes setting traps and baiting enemies, you'll want to explore the ability to combine certain plasmids to increase their effectiveness. Charging up the formerly weak Cyclone Trap power with a blast from Incinerate allows you to send careless splicers flying



■ The splicers that have survived the 10 years since the original *BioShock* have serious problems.



■ Plasmids new and old will have tiers of functionality. This incinerate upgrade essentially turns your hand into a flamethrower.

through the air in a whirling tornado of flame.

The team also hinted that other plasmids and weapons might be combined in various ways, an interaction made possible by the ability to wield plasmids and weapons simultaneously rather than the one-or-the-other philosophy employed by the first game. This translates into even more dynamic combat options; you can shoulder-dash up to a splicer, send him flying backward with a heavy blow from your drill, then immolate him with a snap of your fingers before he even hits the ground.

Of course, the most powerful skills don't come cheap. "We do really want you to invest in some of those top-end rewards," Thomas states. Despite favoring different powers during the course of the game, players all acquired a similar set of abilities by the end of *BioShock 1*. This time, the goal is to





■ The Little Sisters have been redesigned to look less monstrous. Since you're seeing them through a Big Daddy's eyes, they should be sympathetic characters



give players more ways to differentiate themselves through plasmid and weapon upgrades. By the end of *BioShock 2*, you should not only feel like you have a specialization, but also that your investment in your high-level abilities is constantly paying off.

No matter what powers it uses or weapons it wields, a Big Daddy is incomplete without a Little Sister by its side. In the first game, your interactions with the ghoulish children were holed down to a binary choice: You could save them, or you could kill them. In *BioShock 2*, Little Sisters become more than mobile treasure chests; they are your allies, and they need you. You also need them – or more accurately, you need their Adam. As a renegade Big Daddy, players aren't assigned their own ward to protect, which means you'll have to steal one away from your brothers.

The opt-in boss fights from *BioShock* are back, with Big Daddies guarding their Little Sisters all over the city. When you feel prepared, you can choose to take down one of these facsimiles and steal his Little Sister for yourself. Of course, the playing field will be more level in these encounters than before, but they aren't easy battles. "You still have to invest in taking one out," Thomas points out. "It's like fighting yourself – that's still a fairly significant problem."

Once your foe lies defeated, the Little Sister is yours to deal with. The girls do not comprehend that you just killed their protector, since they are

conditioned to trust Big Daddies implicitly. In our demo, we saw the player approach a Little Sister mourning the loss of her Big Daddy. As soon as she saw the replacement, her eyes lit up as she exclaimed "Mr. B? Mr. B! You're all better!" Then, two options appeared: harvest and adopt.

Harvesting Little Sisters functions just like the first game, where you sacrifice a girl's life to get at the Adam slug inside her body. It's a morally reprehensible act – even more so considering that they trust you now – but it pays big dividends by providing you with a boost to your Adam supply. By adopting the Little Sister, you become partners. She rides on your shoulders, and you tromp through the world looking for "angels," or corpses that still have Adam inside. When you find one, you can opt to have your companion hop down and begin extraction. These situations should be approached with caution, however, because a Little Sister with Adam is a tempting target for splicers.

While harvesting, your partner is at risk, and plenty of Rapture's denizens will take advantage of the situation. In an evolution of the concept of roving boss fights, extracting Adam from a body is another kind of opt-in encounter. Once the process starts, splicers will start attacking, and you will need to keep them at bay long enough for the Little Sister to finish.

The feat is easier said than done. "When splicers gang up against a Big Daddy, the Big Daddy has to keep on its toes," LeBreton remarks. "It's a fine

Linking The Great Chain

During the development of the original game, series creator Ken Levine became closely associated with *BioShock*, championing his title at every opportunity. In the wake of the game's success, gamers are undoubtedly wondering about Levine's involvement in the sequel.

"I've been speaking informally with Ken; the arrangement is very much voluntary. I respect his opinion," acknowledges *BioShock 2*'s creative director Jordan Thomas. "He's not substantially involved in *BioShock 2*, but we all have a ton of respect for him and *inspired* it."

Levine tells us: "Right now, I am focused on making our next big project at 2K Boston. While I'm not involved with *BioShock 2*, I'm really excited to see what the talented team at 2K Boston, some of whom worked on the original *BioShock*, comes up with. I can't wait to play it."

Though Levine is currently guiding the 2K Boston studio (formerly Irrational Games), the fate of *BioShock 1* has fallen into worthy hands. 2K Marin started as a group of core *BioShock* team members, and they know the world of Rapture inside and out. Additionally, the staff members who have joined the studio since its inception are incredibly talented and imbued with the same passion. "We have the benefit of having everyone who has joined this team has come on because they're excited about *BioShock*," says executive producer Alyssa Finley. "This is a game that they want to be working on, and that's been amazing."



"...She is taking girls and turning them into...creatures like her. All of this...it is my fault."

— Dr. Tenenbaum

line between empowering the player and making them feel like a big metal badass, but also making them not feel overpowered." If a drill and rivet gun don't cut it, players should consider rigging the battlefield in their favor. Fire-charged cyclone traps, electric trip-wires, and other defensive measures can be taken before the fight begins, allowing you to focus your attention on the enemies that slip through the cracks. If you succeed, your Little Sister gives you some of the Adam she acquired, then hops back up on your back to continue the hunt.

You'll get some Adam through these sequences, but the only way to get enough to carry you through the game is to deal with the Little Sisters permanently. You don't necessarily need to harvest them; you can also help them escape Rapture. This good-or-evil choice mirrors the morality of the first game, but gamers can be confident that their choices will have a more significant impact on the world, and that they will know if they're heading for the "bad" ending. "We're trying to make the choices surrounding the Little Sister feel more differentiated in a meaningful way while still making sure no one is screwed," discloses Thomas. "If the player is moving toward a result, you let them know that they're on that course, and you afford them the opportunities to make tradeoffs."

Through the glowing portal of a Big Daddy's helmet, Andrew Ryan's forgotten utopia takes on an intriguing new luster. Little Sisters, who once recoiled as you approached, now cry out to you for help, calling you "Mr. Bubbles." Enemies that would have attacked Jack on sight will think twice

before provoking your ire. Average splicers only pose a threat to you in large numbers; alone, they barely even rate a glance.

"Your weapons are pretty much strictly superior to those of the splicers," Thomas says. "You can still make use of what you pick up, but you've sort of got an analogue for all the weapons out in the world that is beefier and requires the strength of a Big Daddy to hold." Why would you use a homemade shotgun when you can wield a massive rivet gun loaded with exploding ammo?

Before you start thinking that your superiority will go unchallenged, remember the many Rosie and Bouncer corpses found lying around the world in *BioShock 1*, or the ones Jack killed to get at their Little Sisters. Big Daddies may be Rapture's elite guardians, but they aren't invincible. "Because you're this unstoppable juggernaut, there has to be something out there that can terrify you — something tougher than a Big Daddy that can take one out," Thomas teases. That's where the Big Sister comes in.

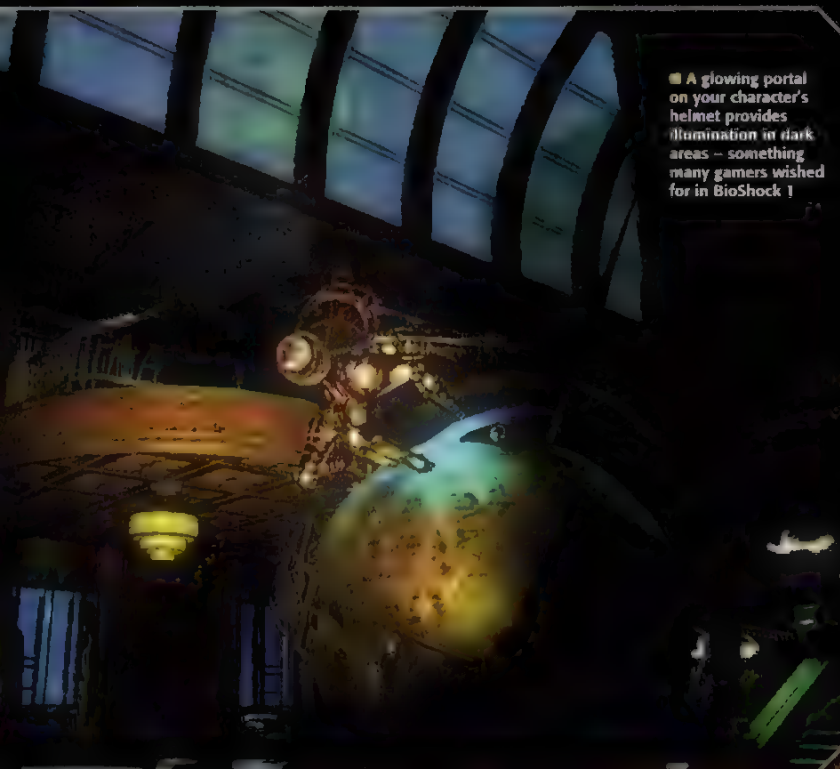
No matter how high up Rapture's power hierarchy someone climbs, the Big Sister is always higher. The city belongs to her now. A lithe, vaguely feminine shape covered in armor and reinforced with metal braces, the Big Sister is incredibly agile and frighteningly powerful. A helmet hides her face, and a wicked harvesting needle extends from her left arm. Any Adam she extracts is funneled directly into her bloodstream, fueling telekinetic abilities beyond anything previously thought possible. Even more threatening is the fact that she knows every inch of the city, since she was

once a Little Sister herself.

"She is the spine of the story," reveals Thomas. "She has all these memories relating to how Rapture used to be, and that's why she starts taking the little girls from all over the coast and bringing them to Rapture and turning them into Little Sisters." At one point, as you are pursuing the Big Sister through the hallways of Rapture, Dr. Tenenbaum speaks to you via radio, hinting at tragedy in your target's past: "This monster you chase, she is like the golem story. Not understanding this thing that she does. She is taking girls and turning them into...creatures like her. All of this...it is my fault."

Since the events of the last game, when Dr. Tenenbaum left with all the Little Sisters, Rapture slowly adapted to the absence of Adam. "Things about Rapture are sustaining themselves," says lead artist Hogarth Delaplante. "It's been 10 years, and it feels like it's found this kind of equilibrium. The ecology is working in this cycle, whereas before, you got the idea that in six months, no one was going to be left."

A large part of Rapture's newfound balance is due to the interference of the Big Sister. Since she returned and started creating new Little Sisters, she has been enforcing a kind of order within the city, bending it to her will. "From her point of view, everything is good when Little Sisters are with their Big Daddies and Rapture just flows as Rapture always did," Thomas tells us. The Big Sister isn't necessarily evil — she just does what is required to maintain order. However, if you do something



■ A glowing portal on your character's helmet provides illumination in dark areas – something many gamers wished for in *BioShock 1*

to upset that order, you can expect to witness her unparalleled combat prowess in person.

The original *BioShock* had pervasive elements of psychological horror nestled in the midst of the action and adventure, and players can count on a similar intense atmosphere this time around. "I'm very interested in making sure that *BioShock 2* is scarier than *BioShock 1*," Thomas proclaims. "Given the fact that you're a Big Daddy, that means we're going to have to come at you sideways."

To experience terror, you first need something to fear. The Big Sister isn't like Andrew Ryan, detached from the world she controls. She lives in the ecology, actively maintains the city's infrastructure, and viciously hunts down anyone who disrupts the balance of power. If you start separating Little Sisters from their Big Daddies – a necessary act to gain Adam – the Big Sister begins to take

notice. She might not do anything at first, but once she determines you are a real threat, she hunts you down with a vengeance. No place is safe; she will find you anywhere you hide, and she is a foe beyond your ability to completely defeat.

"The Big Sister will always be a desperate, desperate fight," reveals Thomas. "She can find you wherever you are, so you have to prepare for the fact that the hardest thing in the game is on the scent."

Players are given some forewarning. With each Big Daddy you kill, the game communicates how close you are to calling down the wrath of the Big Sister. Once you cross that threshold, you know she is after you, and the best outcome you can hope for is to choose the battleground and survive. We saw one of these harrowing confrontations in action, and your odds are not good.

A metallic skittering noise is followed by an agonized scream. In a concerned and sing-song tone, the Little Sister on your shoulder says "Mr. B, Mr. B... Big Sister doesn't want you playing with me..." Then, you see a red eye glowing directly in front of you, and the Big Sister springs

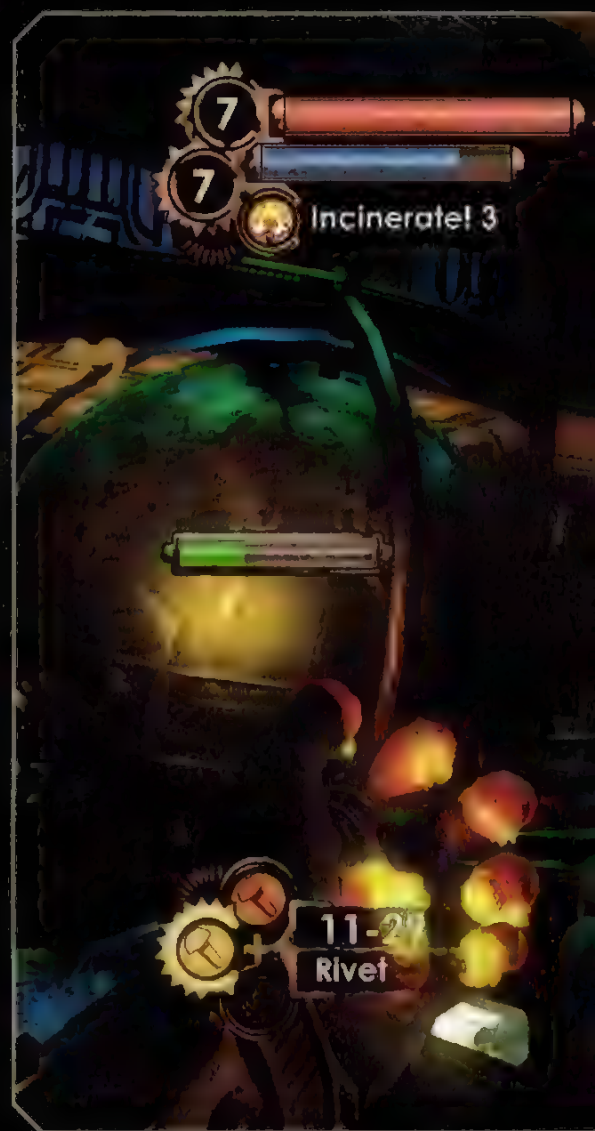
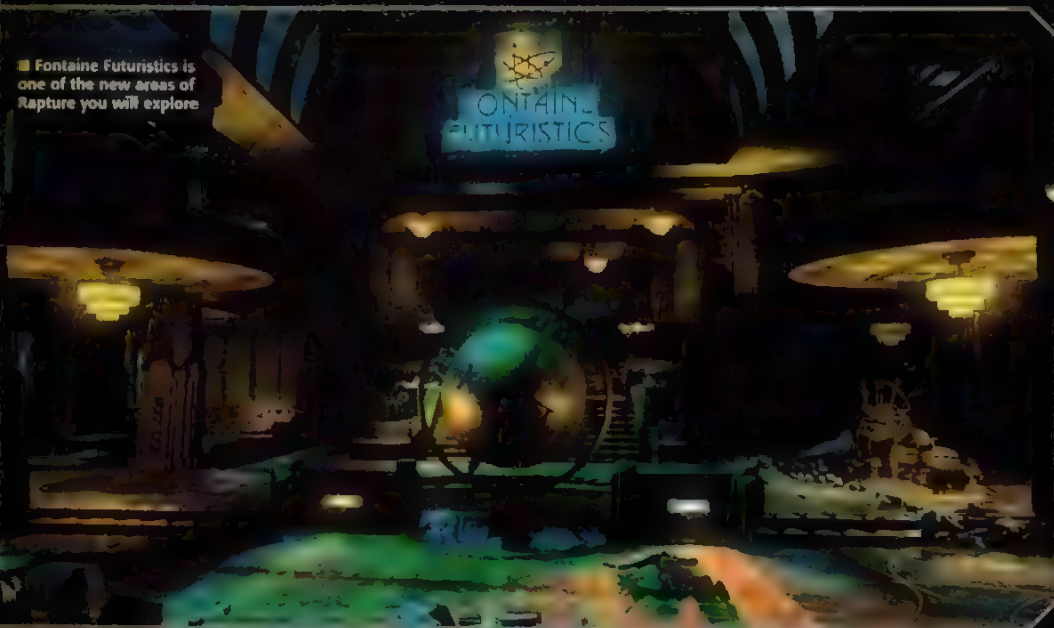


■ Whether you saved or harvested the Little Sisters in the first game, some of them still managed to escape with Tenenbaum. The Big Sister is one of those girls who has returned to Rapture and transformed herself

“ We believe the radio drama is very complimentary to the shooter play. It stays out of your way, but it keeps you reminded of the emotional motivation for all the...well, murder ”

— Jordan Thomas

■ Fontaine Futuristics is one of the new areas of Rapture you will explore



into motion. She is amazingly fast and agile, able to leap across an entire room with a single jump. She uses the Adam-harvesting needle on her arm as a blade, driving it into your body, and jumping away in an instant. The debris in the area starts to shake – boulders, furniture, and fixtures circle her as a protective barrier. She launches them at your head in rapid succession – and then the screen goes dark.

Presenting these terrifying encounters is just one more way BioShock encourages players to use everything at their disposal in order to survive. What could have driven a young girl, once an innocent victim of Rapture, to transform herself into the city's most savage defender? And what role did Tenenbaum play in the warping of her mind? “I can't say too much about her backstory,” evades Thomas. “But she is someone with history in Rapture.”

One of the most astonishing moments in the original BioShock was the revelation that your character's will was not his own. When Jack was given commands including the phrase “would you kindly,” he was literally forced to obey. While that shocking moment is indelibly etched into the minds of gamers, it creates an interesting challenge for the team in BioShock 2. Players of the first game will be expecting

another surprise twist, scrutinizing every phrase and ally in an effort to put the pieces together.

Apart from flat-out lying, the only way for the developers to avoid spoiling any potential plot twists is to avoid discussing the subject altogether. However, Thomas explains the philosophy behind the team's approach to the fact that gamers will be on lookout for curveballs. “It wouldn't be BioShock if it didn't surprise you,” he says. “It wouldn't be BioShock if the mechanical experience you're having and the fictional experience you're having weren't kind of married in the themes.”

LeBreton adds: “In BioShock, you started knowing nothing. You were in the mid-Atlantic, and everything from there was discovery. That's what kept a lot of people pushing through the game, and what made the world rich.” That rich setting is one of the major elements that distinguished BioShock from its peers, and it will not be falling by the wayside for the sequel. “There's still so much uncharted territory in the world of Rapture,” says McClendon.

Think back to BioShock's dramatic introduction as Jack first descended into the city – you saw a sprawling metropolis that clearly extended beyond the areas you visited during the course of the game. In a city that size, there must be other people like Sander Cohen or Frank

Fontaine – insane individuals who have twisted the world around them to reflect their whims. BioShock 2 will continue to delve into the ideals of these damaged minds in its new locations.

“Keeping the Rapture setting fresh is a driving motive here. There are surprises still to come,” Thomas assures us. “One of the things that sequels allow you to do is take what is known and build on it in ways that can tug at your heartstrings in a new way. You can build off of the emotional investment players have already got in various concepts, and to twist them in new and interesting ways, that refer back to what they know from before.”

One such callback is the inclusion of Fontaine Futuristics as a full level. The facility was referenced multiple times in the first game; it was responsible for the extraction and regulation of Adam before Rapture collapsed. Its founder may be long dead, but the Big Sister has reactivated the equipment inside – after all, the Little Sisters need to have their Adam extracted, and players still have not seen the horrific process by which that occurs.

In addition to investigating new areas, players also get a chance to see old locations from a fresh angle. As a Big Daddy, you can exit Rapture's interior and walk along



■ Wielding weapons and plasmids simultaneously gives players even more choice in how to deal with encounters.

Rapture Gets Wired

The original *BioShock* was an outstanding single-player story. Regardless, the game faced criticism in some circles for not including a multiplayer component like many of its FPS brethren. That complaint will not apply to *BioShock 2*. "There is multiplayer in *BioShock 2*," reveals creative director Jordan Thomas. Beyond this admission, the team isn't discussing the inclusion of any specific features. However, fans of the original can rest assured that the solo campaign remains the central focus of the experience. Thomas affirms that "single-player is obviously *BioShock's* legacy, and it's extremely important to us."

the ocean floor to reach another part of the city. Ironically, these underwater sequences are designed to give players time to breathe, since you won't encounter any splicers in the middle of the ocean. The solitary treks beyond the confines of the city also give you an opportunity to look in at Rapture from the outside. Peeking through one multi-story window, we saw a room containing a giant statue of Atlas – the same room Jack explored shortly after arriving in Rapture. "There are certainly going to be elements of Rapture that you'll see and recognize, if not fully intact locations," says Delaplante. Senior character concept artist Colin Fix adds: "I think it's really important to have iconic landmarks that anchor you to the original place."

When a game receives *BioShock's* degree of acclaim, the key aspects that drove that success are likely to make reappearances. One prime example is the presence of audio logs, which created persistent characters and drama to fill gaps in the story without taking players out of the action. Those recordings are returning for *BioShock 2*, providing context and backstory for the new locations and people you see. "We believe the radio drama is very complementary to

the shooter play. It stays out of your way, but it keeps you reminded of the emotional motivation for all the...well, murder," Thomas laughs.

The Vita-Chambers also return, at least in concept. These objects functioned as respawn points for the player in *BioShock*, allowing you to die and come back to find the world in the same state you left it. According to *BioShock* lore, these chambers can only revive someone who carries Andrew Ryan's genes (Jack was his illegitimate son). Your Big Daddy won't respawn using Vita-Chambers, but the idea of not punishing players remains intact.

"The core structure of having you not really lose progress in the quest is something we really want to maintain," McClendon says. Thomas adds: "One of the things we dig about *BioShock* is that a lot of people can finish it. A lot of that comes from a hard-line commitment to accessibility. So, the Vita-Chambers have changed form, but there is a similar mechanic in the game. You can still turn them off, which was added late in DLC and is now a mainstay."

Most importantly, *BioShock 2* retains a commitment to seeing ideals made manifest. Some gamers had never heard of Ayn Rand before the original *BioShock*, and the Objectivist notions she shared with Andrew Ryan were

equally foreign. The process of playing through the first game provided an education of sorts – it built a vocabulary of philosophical ideas set against the backdrop of Rapture. Using that familiarity as a base, now the team can use Rapture to expand on how those concepts interact and conflict. "We're using what players understand of *BioShock 1* and what they understand about Rapture to spring into other ideas," clarifies Thomas. "It wouldn't really be *BioShock* if you don't end up thinking about it and the ideas behind the environment you're standing in."

Between the integration of philosophy, storytelling, and gameplay, *BioShock 2* will include countless nuances to absorb. Even with the Big Sister hunting you through the remnants of the city, you may be tempted to move slowly to make sure no clue goes undiscovered. Even in its ruin, the world of Rapture tells a story full of ambition, violence, and tragedy. The original game introduced you to that story, and your new role in *BioShock 2* will shape its future – but in the morally ambiguous universe of *BioShock*, you may find yourself adjusting your definition of success. Rapture didn't live up to the lofty ideals of its founder, but at least it does one thing incomparably well: It survives. ■■■



> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
> PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER ELECTRONIC ARTS REDWOOD SHORES
> RELEASE FALL



Redwood Shores knows scary. Last year, the studio delivered *Dead Space*, a fresh spin on the survival horror genre that wowed critics, pleased gamers, and sold over a million copies. Not bad for a new IP. Now the studio turns its gaze to the Wii, where it plans to push the limits of what the system can do and reinvent yet another genre. >>



DEAD SPACE EXTRACTION

Does the Wii limit a game's capabilities? Does any series, once ported over to the system, have to sacrifice the mechanics which made it unique? Does a system's power have to match its competition's in order to provide undiluted entertainment? The survival horror studio at EA doesn't think so, and it's busy constructing its argument. The prequel, *Dead Space Extraction*, sets out to bring all of the scares and sensibilities of the original title over to the Wii.

While recent titles like *The House of the Dead: Overkill* and *MadWorld* show the Wii has what it takes to please a hardcore crowd, *Extraction* looks to go one step further, proving that a series based on frightening visuals and haunting atmosphere can retain its emotional impact even as it transitions to a new genre. *Extraction* won't be a traditional survival horror title or a traditional on-rails shooter. It will be a unique fusion of the two.

"There are a bunch of different rail shooters out there, but we're calling this a guided first-person adventure because we're not going to be your typical rail shooter," says Glen Schofield, former *Dead Space* executive producer and current vice president and general manager of EA Redwood Shores. "We still have the zero G moments, we have all these branching paths, and we have a few other things up our sleeve to make sure that we're evolving the genre just like we did with *Dead Space*."

For *Extraction*, that evolution starts with finding new ways to frighten players. "You have to evolve how to scare someone," Schofield says. "If you only have guys jumping out in front of players, it stops being terrifying. Scary is a series of one-offs. It's like a punch line. I can maybe tell the joke twice and you'll laugh, but by the third time, you're done. So you have to constantly change, and constantly come up with new ideas to be scary." These new ideas come from a trip into the past; *Extraction*'s story unfolds three weeks before the events of the original *Dead Space*.

Those who played *Dead Space* are already familiar with the derelict mining vessel the *USG Ishimura*. This giant "planet cracker" ship was designed to tear open planets and smelt their guts into valuable ore. But a lot happened before *Dead Space* hero Isaac Clarke set his boots down those bloodstained corridors.

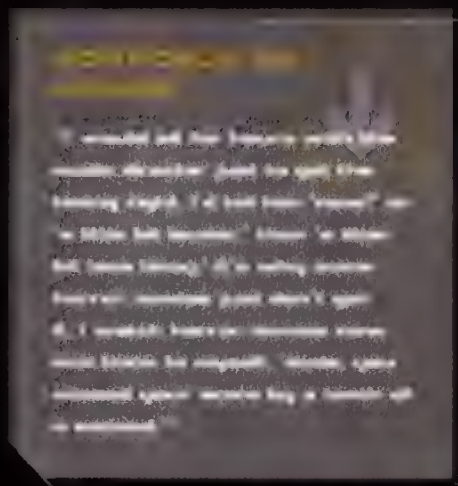
As the *Ishimura* tears into the crust of Aegis VII, it releases an ancient evil — something meant to stay buried. Everything quickly goes to hell — thousands are infected and those closest to the outbreak mutate into alien monsters called Necromorphs. A mad dash ensues as survivors rush to the closest boarding shuttle, frantic to make it back to the orbiting *Ishimura*.

"The story is much bigger than the first game,"

Schofield says. "There were well over a thousand people on the ship itself, and a few thousand on the planet, so we were only able to tell part of the story in *Dead Space*. Isaac didn't go through the whole ship before getting the hell off. *Extraction* is just a different part of the whole arc. Now we get to show a different slice."

Players jump behind the eyes of several survivors who are all connected in some way. However, attentive fans will recognize a few returning faces. Dr. Kyne, the eccentric science officer who appears late in the game to ask Isaac for help, is just one of the returning characters involved in *Extraction*'s narrative. The larger ship population increases the number of interactions with NPCs, which in turn makes the *Ishimura* feel more alive. But don't expect it to stay that way for long; *Extraction* is the story of how the great ship dies. "You will go into a few places that you saw in *Dead Space*," Schofield says, "but this is all before the war happened, so you'll get to see how that battle goes down."

■ Audio logs, which help divulge extra details about the game's backstory are still scattered throughout *Extraction*'s levels, but now the Wii's controller emulates the in-game voice recorder, allowing players to listen to these hissed recordings through the unit's tiny speaker



CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

■ A slider allows players to adjust the head bob of their first-person movements

Whipping it out April 9th

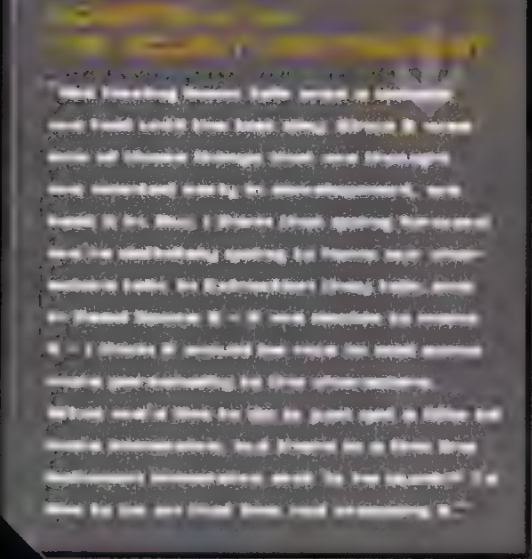


KRÖD
MÄNDOON
AND
THE FLAMING SWORD OF FIRE

New Series Thursdays 10/9c



■ "Some of the stuff we've added in this game, such as the added character dialogue moments, comes from us reading thousands of blogs and comments, and then focus testing again and again," says Schofield



(continued from page 40)

AIMING HIGH

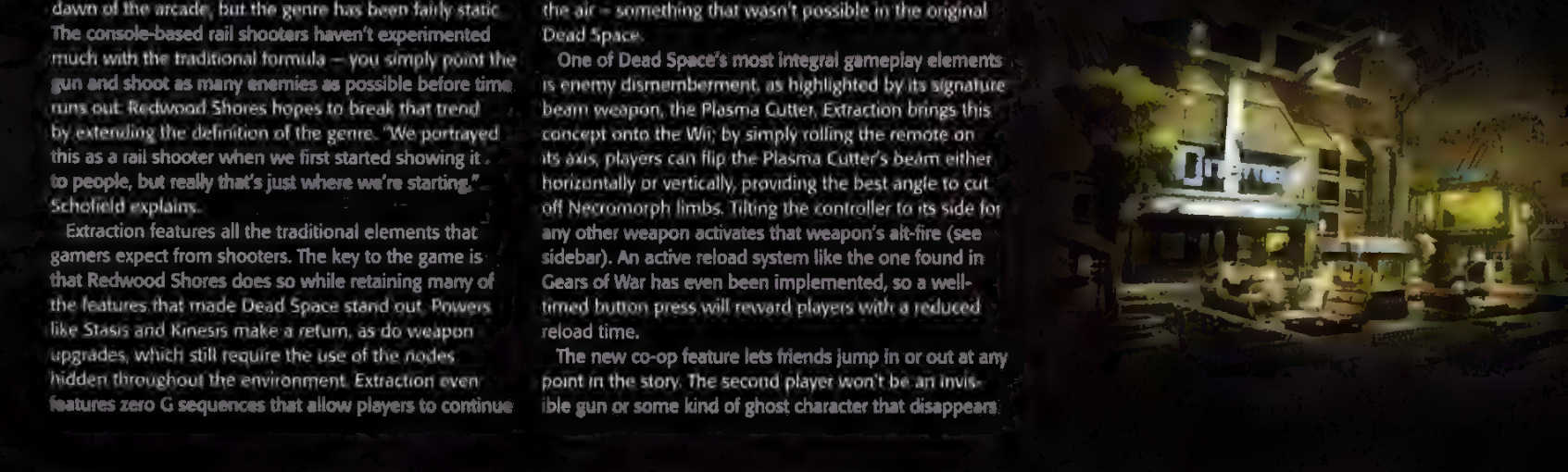
On-rails shooters have been around almost since the dawn of the arcade, but the genre has been fairly static. The console-based rail shooters haven't experimented much with the traditional formula — you simply point the gun and shoot as many enemies as possible before time runs out. Redwood Shores hopes to break that trend by extending the definition of the genre. "We portrayed this as a rail shooter when we first started showing it to people, but really that's just where we're starting," Schofield explains.

Extraction features all the traditional elements that gamers expect from shooters. The key to the game is that Redwood Shores does so while retaining many of the features that made Dead Space stand out. Powers like Stasis and Kinesis make a return, as do weapon upgrades, which still require the use of the nodes hidden throughout the environment. Extraction even features zero G sequences that allow players to continue

blasting away at their target even as they drift through the air — something that wasn't possible in the original Dead Space.

One of Dead Space's most integral gameplay elements is enemy dismemberment, as highlighted by its signature beam weapon, the Plasma Cutter. Extraction brings this concept onto the Wii, by simply rolling the remote on its axis, players can flip the Plasma Cutter's beam either horizontally or vertically, providing the best angle to cut off Necromorph limbs. Tilting the controller to its side for any other weapon activates that weapon's alt-fire (see sidebar). An active reload system like the one found in Gears of War has even been implemented, so a well-timed button press will reward players with a reduced reload time.

The new co-op feature lets friends jump in or out at any point in the story. The second player won't be an invisible gun or some kind of ghost character that disappears



■ At one point, players will end up outside the ship, exploring its hull in zero G

STYLING

Just like in *Dead Space*, all of the weapons in *Extraction* are reimagined, many look both modern and old-futuristically, and designer EA Schofield hopes to bring all these futuristic weapons. Below is the list of reimagined guns and their secondary firing functions.

PLASMA CUTTER One of Extraction's new weapons, this high-powered device discharges a cone of electrical energy.

PLASMA CUTTER Dead Space's iconic and iconic tool of destruction returns. This engineering implement has a cutting barrel that allows players to slash either horizontally or vertically across.

LINE GUN Similar to the Plasma Cutter, this tool has a much wider beam, making it great for taking out multiple enemies at once. Its secondary fire launches a miniature version of the Plasma Cutter for precision work.

PLASMA RIFLE Fully automatic, the Plasma Rifle releases a steady stream of fire. Its secondary mode shoots out a large wave of force that does peripheral damage.

PULSE BATTLE One of the game's new actual guns, the Pulse Rifle is a futuristic machine gun whose secondary fire turns it into a bullet magnet, attracting enemies in all directions.

PLASMA RIFLE Reimagined how will incorporate the new pistol from the original film. Unfortunately, EA wouldn't show us this one because it's still in development.

during cutscenes. Extraction has no shortage of characters, and even when you play solo, these characters will travel with you through the ship.

Though the game is still in its early stages, it looks like Extraction dramatically alters the frantic pacing of traditional rail shooters. Like any good survival horror title, Extraction slows down the action at key moments to set up the big scares. The game even lends a touch of exploration with a multiple path structure. If players see an opportunity to branch off – like a door to the side that they would like to enter – they can either open the door or continue down the hall. Astute viewers will be rewarded, as not all branching paths are easily spotted.

While anyone can point a gun and shoot, Aegis VII and the *Ishimura* aren't inhabited by a bunch of gun-toting space marines. The crew consists of engineers, doctors, and scientists, so some moments are tailored to match. Extraction's puzzles are more involved than "pick up the

yellow key card." These problems offer great opportunities for players to work together. "Some puzzles will use the Wii remote, and some will be timed," Schofield explains. "That's when it's good to have a friend to watch your back, because you could be getting mauled while you're trying to get a door open, and if you screw up, it might close again."

GRAPHICAL TOUCH

Just as with its attention to detail in gameplay, EA Redwood Shores isn't using the Wii's inferior power as an excuse to forego great visuals. "One of the first things we started working on in Extraction was getting water that looked right," says Schofield as he takes us through a guided tour of an area that looks like the ship's oversized sewage system. Though the graphical qualifier "for the Wii" is a phrase that won't likely ever

HUMAN HANGLING

Even though you play Extraction with your standard controller, Extraction's new major innovation is a virtual hanging system. With the new feature, "The whole game is basically about you trying to protect Isaac and get his body to the end," Schofield explains. "Remember, you might be the first thing to see him, you might be the last. You'll be right behind you and you'll have to keep his body, but the strategy will be to get his body to the end. It's very important that you get his body to the end." This arching body of narrative adds a new dimension to the survival horror experience. It won't be long to get Isaac's body to the end, but the whole experience is about protecting their body.



■ Players will pass through areas that Isaac visited in the first game, but from different directions. Even though some of the game's environments are repeats, they'll feel fresh.

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go away, Redwood Shores comes as close as anyone to crossing the technical gap between Nintendo's system and the other two consoles. Dead Space Extraction is a great looking game. Objects that connect with rippling streams of water cause splashes of tiny particles. A quick shake of the Wii remote activates a glow stick that casts a green hue over the water's surface, and does its best to penetrate the deep shadows where deadly monsters lay. The player's reflection can even be seen as they walk by reflective objects such as glass. The result is a title that looks good enough to terrify.

"Scary is hard," says Schofield. "Scary is meticulous. If you don't do it at the right moment – and I'm talking a tenth of a second – if the sound effects and the lighting and the visuals don't all happen at the exact right time, it's not scary." Of course, a few good scares can only take a game so far, and EA wants this game to be so much more. It won't be easy to wrap the entire Dead Space package up in an on-rails bundle and deliver it to expectant Wii owners, but then again scary isn't supposed to be easy. And Redwood Shores knows scary. ■■■■

■ No messy HUD here. Extraction's screen is clean; tiny bars to the side of the players' reticles will represent their ammo and health



■ Schofield hinted that the addition of water will likely bring new enemies that live under its surface



ABOUT DEAD SPACE 2

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Raiden: "Who Sucks Now?"

Everyone On Friends List Watching Netflix
BOY'S GAME INVITES GO UNANSWERED

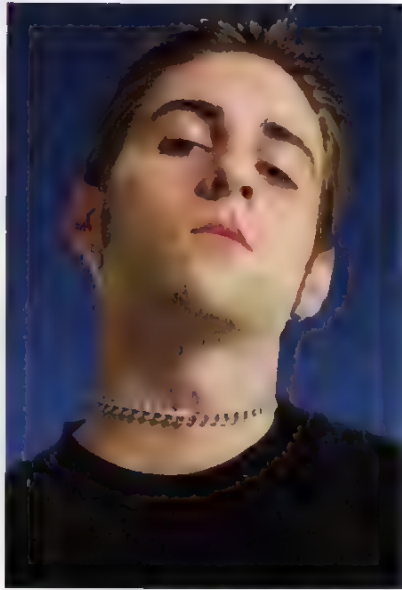
GAMEINFORMER

THE WORLD'S #1 COMPUTER & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

Braid II
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New One!



7 20150 85057 6 04
FOOLIN' SEASON 2009



LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

I know most of you see me as the consummate writer and thinker in gaming journalism. While I appreciate the thousands of congratulatory emails you send me, I thought I'd take this opportunity to treat everyone to a brief retrospective of my career.

Growing up, I always knew I was destined to be the Editor-in-Chief of a gaming magazine. I mean, I'm a great writer and I know some Japanese dudes; it just makes sense. With this in mind, I walked right into the publisher's office and said, "Dude, why have Gamadan when you could have me?" The publisher basically said "I know you're good, man. But I can't step on any toes," and he didn't give me the EIC job right off. Of course, as soon as people read my reviews, they told me "Hey, DarthClark, you're the best thing Game Infarcer has going. They don't know what they've got." Pretty soon, people from all over the industry were praising my work. Will Wright even volunteered to officiate my wedding (once I get a girlfriend). Of course, Gamadan didn't always understand my genius and would criticize me for petty things like not showing up at work until 4pm. What a square! Thankfully, the other bros on the staff recognized my gifts, like Chad. Now, Chad wasn't exactly the best writer, but I have to give him credit: he could always see that I was right. I remember him saying to me once, "Gamadan's scared of your potential. That's why he gives you a hard time."

Looking back over my awesome career, it's definitely a humbling experience. Despite the worldwide acclaim I've received, I always remember that being awesome is not a privilege, but a responsibility. You will never be more awesome than you are today, except for how awesome you will be tomorrow. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think I just blew my own mind.

DarthClark,
Editor-in-Chief

DarthClark

connect opinion



YUJI NAKA



The Sonic franchise must die,
no matter the cost.

WHAT DOES IT
TAKE TO KILL
SONIC?

I admit to being a little saddened when I left Sega to form my own studio, but not because I was abandoning the company and co-workers who had supported me for years. I was dismayed that I did not fulfill my ultimate goal: to kill Sonic the Hedgehog.

I had made significant progress; abysmal titles like Sonic Shuffle and Shadow The Hedgehog went a long way to erode confidence and test the limits of gamers' patience. However, the job was far from done. Before I left Sega, I secretly met with Sonic Team to deliver one final directive: The Sonic franchise must die, no matter the cost.

They embraced their mission with alarming enthusiasm. The team devised terrible and incongruous concepts, then cobbled them haphazardly into a loose approximations of games. They expanded the cast of Sonic's repulsive anthropomorphic friends, included hedgehog-on-human romance, and even threw him on a hoverboard - twice! I was overjoyed. "This is barely even playable," I laughed as I played Sonic and the Secret Rings. "Mission accomplished."

I hadn't counted on you, the gamers, ruining my plans. No matter how hard Sonic Team tries to create a game not even a diehard fan could love, you stupid goons keep buying this garbage. Seriously, they turned Sonic into a "werehog," whatever the hell that is. Think about that for a second; what part of "werehog"

sounds even remotely not stupid? That doesn't matter to you, apparently. As long as it has Sonic (or one of his insipid friends), you'll eat it right up and ask for seconds.

This is my plea: Stop. I beg you, let Sonic die with some dignity. Don't make the team suffer the humiliation of creating yet another game where Sonic transforms into some kind of genie or dragon...or something with a magic butt. Because that's where things are going, and if that doesn't stop you, heaven help us all. ■ ■ ■



Baldur >>

baldurboi@asgard.com

Handle: The Resentful Gamer

Expertise: Hammering Robots

Interests: Finishing Off Trilogies,

Running Norse Mythology

Dislikes: Broken Promises,

Retirement, Mass Effect, Unreal Engine

Current Favorite Games: Too Human, Advent Rising



Eddie >>

good@nothing.com

Handle: The Unimpressive Gamer

Expertise: Beating Levels That

My Six-Year-Old Niece Can't, Being

The Only Person In Polk County

To Beat Prince Of Persia

Interests: My Six-Month Speed Run Through

LEGO Star Wars, Finally Taking My Hunter Up To Level

23 In WoW

Dislikes: Games Where "Normal" Means

"Hard" (All Of Them)

Current Favorite Games: Wii

Music, Fusion Frenzy 2, Imagine Wedding Designer



Microsoft Avatar >>

notmi@ripoff.com

Handle: The Lamer Gamer

Expertise: Looking Stupid, Having

Stupid Hair, Having a Stupid

Face, Making Stupid Expressions

Interests: Generic Jeans, Generic

Shirts, Generic Shoes

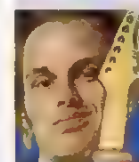
Dislikes: Miis, Therapy Sessions

(What Is "Mii Envy Anyway?"), People Bad-Mouthing

Rare

Current Favorite Games: Perfect Dark Zero, Viva

Pinata, Kameo: Elements of Power, Uno



Wolfgang >>

rockin@midnight.com

Handle: The Music Gamer

Expertise: Pretending To Be A

Real Musician

Interests: Rocking,

Totally Rocking, Proclaiming To

Friends How Hard A Song Is And

Then Nailing 100% Of The Notes

Dislikes: Actual

Instruments, No Fail Mode (Everyone Should Practice

More), Familiar Toe-Tapping Songs That Everyone Can

Play On Their First Try

Current Favorite Games:

Anything That Declares "You Rock!"



another way to look stupid

NINTENDO SAYS "SAFETY FIRST"

ANNOUNCES WiiBODYPOD

We've all seen the YouTube videos of televisions ruined by an overexacted gamer throwing a Wii remote through their set. Nintendo initially sought to combat this lack of general motor skills by encouraging gamers to use the remote's wrist strap, but clearly it didn't take. As a response, Nintendo is launching a new "Play It Safe" initiative.

"Many of our customers are very fragile, due to lack of exercise and low bone density caused by a lack of sun exposure," commented company spokesman Reggie Fils-Aime. "Frankly, most of them look like dudes I used to give swirties to in high school - I was all-state football, two years. We've had a lot of reports of broken ankles, sprained wrists - and that was just people playing Tetris Party! Man, you should see the pictures we get of Wii Fit injuries; it looks like the aftermath of a soccer riot."

The linchpin of the "Play It Safe" campaign is the WiiBodyPod, a new full-body version of the Wii remote jacket. By stepping into the WiiBodyPod, gamers will be protected from injury by a polyurethane shell as they flail and flop their way through a game of Rayman Raving Rabbids. "Hey, it's the best we can do; I hope it works. But these people are amazing. One guy managed to cut off his thumb with the nunchuk! How do you even do that?" marveled Fils-Aime.



keep hoping

MARIO AND ZELDA TEAMS NOT HARD AT WORK

Nintendo president Satoru Iwata assured gamers at E3 2008 that the teams behind all-new Mario and Zelda games were "hard at work." However, recent candid photos of the teams reveal the exact opposite: They are, in fact, barely working at all.

The photos, snapped between the daily foosball competition and the chair-spinning contest, depict a sorry scene. Instead of working on Mario and Zelda, games that form the backbone of Nintendo's hardcore appeal, the teams are totally just jerking around. Judging by the Wii's success among casual gamers, the teams don't seem to think their games are a priority. Office boredom has not yet reached dangerous levels - the conference room TV hooked up to Wii Sports remains unused - but work ethic continues to plummet.

We tried to contact the teams for comment, but the office answering machine picked up indicating that all staff was out of the office "doing research" at Spring Break 2009.

DATA FILE

The Tiniest Text Has The Biggest Heart

ROCK REVOLUTION NO LONGER COMPATIBLE WITH ANYTHING

In a rare show of unity, Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo have jointly issued a patch that renders Konami's Rock Revolution incompatible with all other music game peripherals and, as an added bum, the consoles themselves. "Even if someone, for some unknown horrible reason, tried to play Rock Revolution or those hilarious drums, the Xbox will immediately melt the disc and eject it," says a Microsoft spokesperson.



MERCENARIES 2 RELEASED, APPARENTLY

Escaping the notice of gamers everywhere, Pandemic's explosion-filled follow-up to the original Mercenaries supposedly came out sometime last year. Sources living close to a local game retailer confirmed that the game is on shelves and available for purchase. The \$29.99 sticker suggests several price reductions, placing the game's release somewhere around August or September, but game historians may never know the exact date.



more like L.F.Job!

ECONOMIC DOWNTURN HITS WOW

Met Chaos_Forge. Last year at this time, he was a guild officer pulling in 200 gold a day from daily quests, plus up to another 500 in auctionable drops. Today, he is just one among thousands of jobless high-level toons who have fallen on troubled times in WoW's current harsh economic climate.

With raid slots scarce and few guilds recruiting, characters like _Forge find themselves swallowing their pride and resorting to scrub pick-up groups just to have a job - any job - to do. "I would have considered this beneath me last month," _Forge admits. "Seriously, I have Illidan's war-glaives, and now I'm back to running Maraudon again? Humiliating."

"If I had known this would happen, I never would have wasted my time leveling my engineer ing up to 450 last winter," laments _Forge. "Pfff. I may as well have gotten a liberal arts degree for all the good that profession'll do me now."

The situation is also presenting new challenges for online families, but _Forge's wife is staying optimistic. "Things could be worse," she reflects. "We could be Alliance."

Wii

Star Wars The Force Released

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SHAMELESS SEQUEL > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS CASABLANCA
> **RELEASE** BEFORE THE NEW LIVE ACTION TV SHOW RUINS EVERYTHING

MULLIGAN

In the wake of fan outrage, the team behind *The Force Unleashed* announced plans for a sequel that will address the many canon-breaking story points of their first game, revealing it was all just a bad dream.

In the sequel, Vader wakes up from his nightmare and begins training his "real" secret apprentice. Thankfully, the other implausible events from the first game are also being nullified. For instance, we learn that the Force can't really be used to pull a Star Destroyer out of the sky. "That was pretty crazy, right?" laughs creative director Haden Blackman. "And what about him beating up Vader? Ha! Can you imagine if we'd said that was for real? That some snot-nosed apprentice could do stuff Yoda couldn't even do?"

Other revisions include the "real" origin of the rebellion, the "real" death of Shaak Ti, and a new Jedi master named Jet Kenobi. ■■■



Kingdom Hearts

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER HUGE MISUNDERSTANDING
> **PUBLISHER** HEARST CORPORATION
> **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
> **RELEASE** BEFORE THE EVENING EDITION

READ ALL ABOUT IT

In the next logical step in the *Kingdom Hearts* franchise, Square Enix has announced that its Disney/Final Fantasy mash-up action/RPG franchise is expanding to include the adventures of old-timey newspaper baron William Randolph Hearst. Sora, Donald, and Goofy rendezvous with Hearst in the hub world of Hearst Castle as he coerces the lovable characters into completing quests like union-busting, covering up the murder of producer Thomas Harper Ince, and igniting the Spanish-American War. Boss battles include wizard Joseph Pulitzer and both a human and demon form of Orson Welles. Fans con-

cerned at the lack of cartoons will be excited to know about the stage based entirely on the world of that rascally Yellow Kid.

Kingdom Hearts series mastermind Tetsuya Nomura explains the inspiration behind the new direction. "I wrote an email to my staff instructing them to begin preliminary work on a new 'Kingdom Hearts' game, and then I got caught up in *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* for a couple years," Nomura says. "Before I know it, they've got a game that's 90 percent complete. I just didn't have the heart to tell them it was a typo." ■■■

Wii

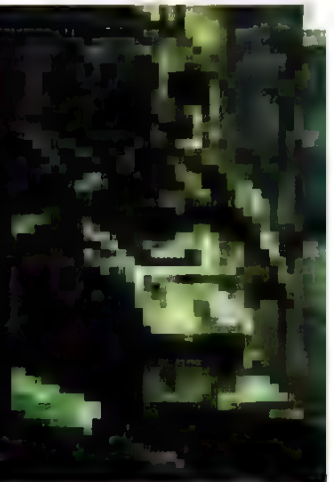
Fallout 3: Vault Party

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER DISASTER > **PUBLISHER** CASH COW STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** BETHESDA VALU
> **RELEASE** NOT LIKELY

FAILOUT

Hot on the heels of the Wii version of *Dead Rising* comes this sorry port of Bethesda's stellar RPG. "This is still *Fallout 3*," says executive producer Todd Howard. "Sure, we had to cut a few things to fit the game on a Wii disc, but you'll barely notice." Among the things that have to go are many of the game's side quests, plasma weapons, super mutants, radiation, the VATS combat system, the main story line, and Liam Neeson.

"Certain parts of downtown DC had to go," Howard confesses. "Okay, all of DC is gone. You won't miss it, though, since you can't go outside anymore. We also had to cut the character models in half, so no one has any legs." Despite the changes, the team is still committed to capturing the feel of a post-apocalyptic wasteland, with lots of desolate and trash-strewn environments. "Trust me," Howard smiles, "this game looks like garbage." ■■■



connect gear

basically fan fiction

PAC-MAN: RISE OF THE GHOST LORD

Joining the ranks of Master Chief, Solid Snake, and that dude who isn't Commander Shepard, Pac-Man is diving into the world of expanded universe storytelling. Players know all about his unrelenting quest to gobble dots and various fruits, but the gameplay feels hollow without context. *Rise of the Ghost Lord*, by George R. R. Martin, tells the chilling backstory of the spheroid hero, including the origins of his long-standing hatred of ghosts and the true identity of "Ms. Pac-Man" (Spoiler alert: It's Pac-Man wearing a dumb ribbon).

\$14.99 • gameofghosts.com



aah! my eyes!

PSP 4000

Searing the eyes of all who would presume to behold its glory, Sony unveiled its new PSP-4000 at a recent press conference. The 4000, which burns with the light of a thousand suns, is fueled by a nuclear/ion battery still under review by the EPA. "We believe the PSP-4000 represents the bright, scorching future only Sony can provide," explained Jack Tretton, being careful to speak from behind a lead shield. When asked whether the software-starved PSP would have new games to accompany the launch of the redesign, Tretton humedly flashed the blinding screen at his audience. When attendees' vision cleared, Tretton had vanished.

\$199.99 • sony.com/itburns



REVIEWS

Invalidating Your Opinions



Wii U AND SOMEHOW DS

Madden NFL All-Play 2010

> STYLE 1 TO 4-NON-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER TAKE IT EASY STUDIOS
> RELEASE THE HOUNDS > ESRB E FOR EASY

BUTTON MASHING

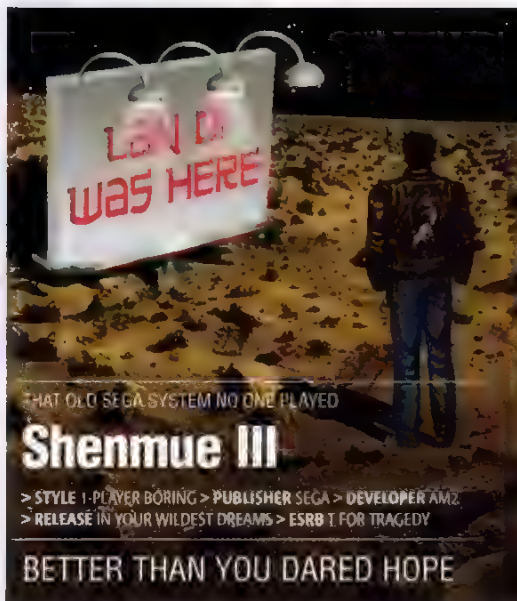
As the shallow product of a transparent attempt to appeal to the lowest common denominator, I can identify with what EA has done with Madden this year. The All-Play brand has become even simpler; you don't need to worry about waggle, rules, or even playing much at all. You basically just use the d-pad to issue one of four commands: first down, touchdown, kick the ball into the giant Y thingy, and halftime show. Apart from that, the game sort of controls itself. It's kind of like watching a football game on TV if ESPN were all pixellated and gross.

Though I hardly played the game, I was hoping the AI would be better. Most of the time my quarterback ran in circles with the ball (No, I didn't choose the Packers) until the opposing team ran up to me and asked if I'd like to be tackled or if I needed help throwing the ball. Eventually I just fell asleep with my forehead on the controller. When I woke up from my nap, I was on a seven game winning streak.—MICROSOFT AVATAR

BOTTOM LINE **Big Deal**

Second Opinion 100%

This game is all right, I guess. I plugged in my guitar controller, started to shred, and when I was done I'd won the Super Bowl. I guess I'm just as good at this game as everything else I play. By the way, did you hear the rumors about Zeppelin in the next Guitar Hero? That would be so sweet, right? I'd never really heard their music until last week, but everybody tells me they totally rock, so now I'm pissed that they haven't been in before now.—WOLFGANG



THAT OLD SEGA SYSTEM NO ONE PLAYED

Shenmue III

> STYLE 1-PLAYER BORING > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER AMZ
> RELEASE IN YOUR WILDEST DREAMS > ESRB T FOR TRAGEDY

BETTER THAN YOU DARED HOPE

BOTTOM LINE **11**

Second Opinion **A**

So I'm banned from video games forever, but this Fonzie-looking turd ball gets to finish his trilogy? What in Helheim is that? Let's compare. Baldur talks to severed heads. Ryo talks to housecats. Baldur fights with the Gouging Claws of Fenrir. Ryo fights with white tennis shoes. Am I missing something here? Someone call a valkyrie. I need to be cradled.—BALDUR

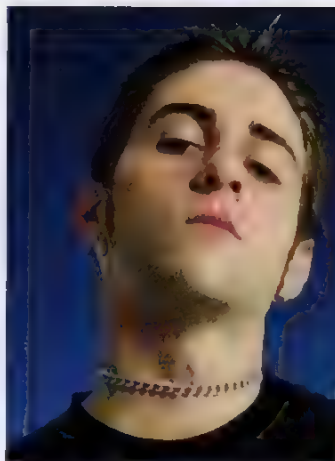
Finally! After years of angry letters and online petitions, Sega has triumphantly vindicated the dreams of dozens of Dreamcast fanatics. Ryo is back, and Shenmue III might just be the most important piece of entertainment ever produced by human hands.

Shenmue III goes deeper into the human psyche than any game before it, exploring the often-overlooked realities of life. Ryo pulls weeds. Ryo cuts his toenails. Ryo waits in line at the grocery store. The doopy roustabout even gets a job changing the bedpans in an old folks home. All the while, the murder of his father goes unsolved. Should we cry for this broken soul as he spends all his money buying toys out of vending machines? Should we mourn with him as he spends long lonely hours defrosting his fridge? Yes, because this game takes place in Japan — and that is awesome.

You can tell Ryo is a broken man by how poorly he interacts with others, like this snippet of dialogue. Ryo: "Can you direct me to the local store?" Random woman: "You are looking for a local store?" Ryo: "Yes, can you give me directions? I would like to purchase something from a local store." Those who think Shenmue doesn't have its share of exciting moments should know that Ryo goes to the moon, where he collects rock samples and measures radiation levels. Absolutely nothing has been done to differentiate this from the first two titles; this is exactly the game fans have been waiting more than seven years to play.—EDDIE

CLASSICGI

Where Nostalgia Conquers Logic



Game Informer Editor-in-Chief, Darth Clark (above) interviews Shigeru Miyamoto (inset)



Some people in the gaming industry need no introduction, and Game Informer editor-in-chief DarthClark is one of them. With his poignant observations and obvious rapport, no one conducts a better interview. His legion of famous game developer friends make DarthClark a living legend, as inseparable from the industry as the video games themselves — maybe even more so. This month Shigeru Miyamoto had the honor of answering DarthClark's insightful questions.

GI: The last time I interviewed you, we talked about your hobbies and how they influence your approach to development — especially as it pertains to the elusive nature of "fun" in an entertainment medium full of shifting paradigms. The problem, of course, is complicated by the bourgeois desire for fantasy-fulfillment, obfuscating truth and purpose in the midst of flying bullets and buxom harlots. Whether this cures the malaise of the mouth-breathing ravenous masses in unclear. How long will your next game be?


Miyamoto: Well, it's interesting you should mention that.

GI: Thank you. I know. ■ ■ ■

CHARTS

TOP 5

Rank	Title	Score Based On Units Sold
1	Wii Play	Denial
2	Wii Are Still Playing	Anger
3	Wii Play Together With Friends	Bargaining
4	Wii Play Controller Only Edition	Depression
5	Wii Play After Dark	Acceptance



Large-scale open world games are tough to distill into a 30 minute demo. Fortunately, Sucker Punch and Sony let us sit down with Infamous for several hours of uninterrupted hands-on play. A massive explosion in Empire City has killed thousands, the government has quarantined the area due to a plague, and sole survivor Cole emerges from ground zero with newfound electrical powers.

RIDE THE LIGHTNING

PLAYSTATION 3

- > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
- > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- > **DEVELOPER** SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS
- > **RELEASE** JUNE

■ After trash monsters receive enough damage, a brief opportunity to attack the driver arises.



It starts as Cole awakens two weeks after the explosion at his survivalist friend Zeke's place, a makeshift living room on the roof of a skyscraper. Your first mission as an electrified superhero? Power up the TV! After zapping some car batteries, the boob tube flickers to life displaying an old-timey black and white cartoon. Before you can get too into the show, a masked man calling himself the Voice of Survival issues a citywide alert concerning a shipment of food recently delivered via air-drop. Cole, Zeke, and the rest of the now-starving populace rush to the plaza. To everyone's dismay, the drop is tangled on top of a twisted structure hundreds of feet in the air. After you climb up and chop the shipment down, you're faced with your first moral choice: let everyone eat, or kill them all and take the food for yourself.

We took the good guy route and were awarded 10 karma points. These contributed to a U-shaped morality meter in the upper right corner of the screen. Depending on how good or evil you are, you'll gain different electrical powers, exclusive quests, and plot outcomes.

As everyone is chowing down and talking about how awesome you are, the

INFAMOUS



■ Cole can zap enemies while climbing with his free hand.

Voice interrupts with a video broadcast that makes it look like you set off the explosion that ruined everyone's lives. It gets ugly fast. Before you know it, the whole crowd of citizens is coming after you. Even though we could have easily zapped these people to oblivion, we decided to take to the rooftops before anyone got hurt.

Cole is surprisingly adept at going vertical. When you jump towards a building, he'll automatically latch on to any kind of grip point. As you continue to tap the jump button, he'll zip from one ledge to the next until you make it to the top. Once you're on the rooftops, you can jump to nearby buildings or run quickly along electrical wires connecting skyscrapers throughout the city. Cole doesn't even have to worry about balance. At first, there isn't a fast way to navigate the city comparable to Spider-Man's web swinging or Hulk's super jumps, but later on Cole gains the ability to do a speedy electric slide along the high wires, and he can briefly coast through the air on an electric field.



Outside of electrified melee combos and a high-flying ground slam, most of Cole's offense is handled through over-the-shoulder aiming by holding down the L1 button.

Through the onscreen reticle you can shoot quick laser-like blasts of electricity, use prolonged Emperor Palpatine-style shocks, perform a telekinetic push, or chuck electrical grenades. As expected, you can't just go nuts with your powers. Instead of going with a time-based refill, players must find an electrical source like a light post or transformer. If you're feeling particularly devious, you can even drain the neuro-electric energy from citizens and enemies. If you do run completely out of juice you'll always have an unlimited supply of the basic shock shot as a last line of defense.

With every kill, experience point descriptors appear onscreen, encouraging players to experiment with various power combinations to gain bonuses. It's fun to push goons off rooftops for the high fall bonus, but you can really rack up XP by flinging enemies into the air and blasting them several times before they hit the ground. The dev team likes to call this skeet shooting. You can also keep an eye out for environmental assists like water or metal grate flooring that are great for taking down entire squads with a single zap. Your accrued experience points can be spent on new electrical powers, some of which have separate good and evil branches. For example, the electrical grenades grow in range and safely incapacitate enemies on the good branch, but on the evil side it will splinter into seven separate explosive pieces.

The basic mission setup has Cole working with an FBI agent named Moya, who promises to grant him freedom from the quarantine in exchange for some favors. He has to investigate the disappearance of her husband, John, who was looking into a group called the First Suns and a mysterious object called the Ray Sphere. Players looking to get deeper into the story can track down John's encrypted voicemail drops scattered throughout the city. Other collectibles include glowing green shards that will expand electrical capacity.

The early mission flow tasks Cole with bringing back power to various regions throughout Empire. This helps the citizens, but most importantly it provides crucial power recharge stations in restored areas. To accomplish this, Cole will have to venture down into the sewers, lit only by the crackling sparks surrounding his body, to kick-start the power grid. Once an area is back online, you're free to roam, confident in a ready supply of juice.

Throughout *Infamous'* game world, 100 distinct side missions figure in to your control of the city. The Reapers, a gang clad in red hoods, has overtaken one of Empire City's three islands in the wake of the explosion. Free a makeshift hospital from Reaper control and that area will change colors on your map. As you perform more tasks like rescuing hostages or tracking down an undercover Reaper, your control will spread throughout the city; enemy presence will be reduced, the



The trash monster is the toughest enemy we've seen so far



■ At certain sections of the game, players will face linear platforming sequences.



city will become more vibrant, and you'll unlock new spawn points.

The real bread and butter, of course, is in the main story missions. We stormed a heavily fortified bridge in a failed island escape attempt. We read the memories of a dead woman and followed a transparent green "echo" man to track down her killers. We got blasted with hallucinogenic black goo that left us staggering around through freaky visuals while a strange voice messed with our minds.

The biggest set piece of the day happens when we skip to a much later point in the game, where Cole is tasked with guarding a prison holding the second island's major crime lord. The boss' troops, the Dust Men, have launched a major raid on the makeshift stronghold. Fortunately, a large electrified floor grate allows us to spam the hell out of our powers without any risk of running out of charge. To soften us up, the Dust Men launch a series of flaming balls of wreckage. Cole must run back and forth along the grid and deflect the projectiles.

As enemies start barging through the outer walls and the charging station is destroyed, we try out the new sniper ability. By pressing up on the d-pad you can zoom in on foes and slow time down slightly. This allows you to line up headshots with ease, but it drains your power quickly. While these troops go down easily, the reinforcement robotrash creatures can sure take a punch. Between unloading lightning and electric grenades, you'll have to dodge projectiles and ground quakes. Once they're down on health, a hatch opens and you have a brief window to zap the guy inside.

Our time with infamous answered many of our lingering questions and showed that the game seems to be on pace to become a fun superhero experience. It's still understandably a little rough around the edges at this point, but the several months of polish in store should do the trick. We're looking forward to getting back to Empire City as soon as Sony lets it out of quarantine again. ■■■■

■ "Young fool. Only now, at the end, do you understand"



■ Most of the story plays out in slightly animated comic book-style cutscenes.





PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming

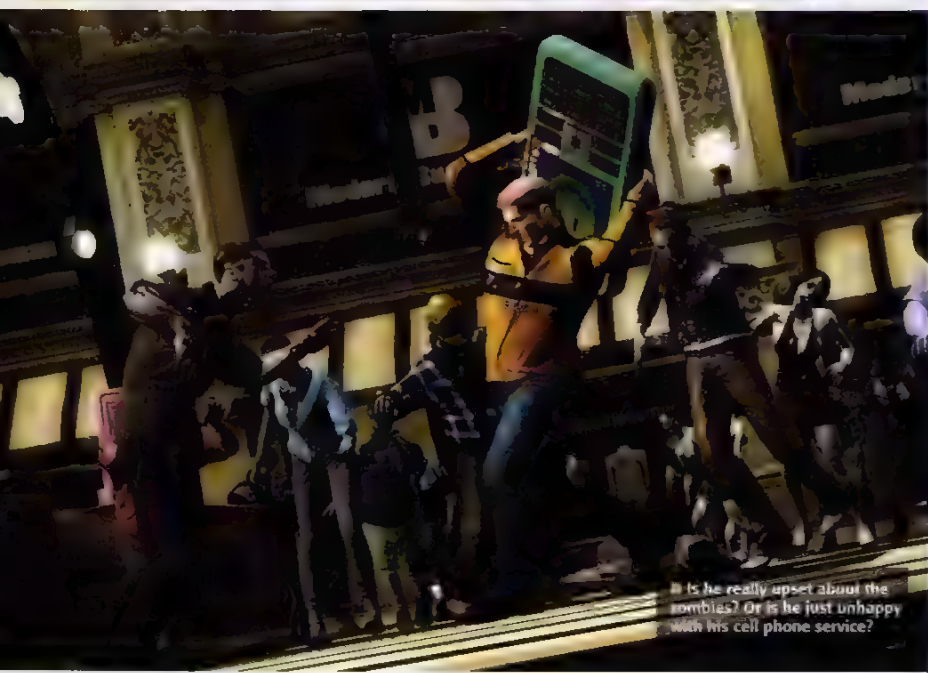
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Dead Rising 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM
> DEVELOPER BLUE CASTLE GAMES > RELEASE TBA

JACKPOT

■ What are you doing, dude?!
You grabbed the wrong axe!



■ Is he really upset about the
zombies? Or is he just unhappy
with his cell phone service?



■ Sore loser



Remember in Michael Jackson's *Moonwalker* how Jako could kill zombies with the power of dance magic? Why don't more games use rhythmic hip thrusts as a weapon?

With a horde of zombies stretching the length of a mall, an anything-you-can-grab arsenal, and a campy horror movie vibe, Capcom's *Dead Rising* sold over 1.5 million units on the Xbox 360. Well, it looks like Capcom is through teasing us with rumors and ports and is finally ready to bet big again with a sequel. This time around the environment is bigger, flashier, and filled with even more over-the-top makeshift weaponry.

Set years after the incident in the small Colorado town of Willamette, it appears that the zombie outbreak has only worsened. The whole country is in a state of panic as the shambling masses continue to grow. The gambling paradise of Fortune City, *Dead Rising*'s parallel to Las Vegas, is one of the most highly infected areas on the continent. No word yet on whether or not we'll see

a return of burly photographer Frank West. It appears that *Dead Rising 2*'s new protagonist is an unnamed blond-haired biker. A brief teaser trailer for the game also mentioned Hispanic hottie Isabela Keyes, who fans will remember from the first title. The last time we saw her – in the true ending to *Dead Rising* – she had helped subdue Frank's infection and was escaping with him from the Willamette Mall. Since then, Isabela has been instrumental in the development of a new drug called Zombrex, which has been used to help stem the zombie plague. Whatever her involvement now, it looks like both Isabela and this new drug might be key elements to turning the zombie tide in the sequel.

The new Vegas-like setting promises to up the ante in terms of providing everyday items for players to stuff through zombie heads.

Capcom is pretty tight-lipped about details, but the teaser trailer showed our new hero running around inside a large Atlasphere-like thing, similar to a motorcycle cage that a daredevil might use in a stage show. Safely encased like a hamster inside a ball, the hero flattened any corpse that shambling across his path.

Development of this sequel has been handed off to Canadian developer Blue Castle Games, but several key members from the original team – as well as producer Keiji Inafune – are helping to ensure this title stacks up to the original. Unlike the first game, it looks as if PS3 owners can plan to participate this time around. Unfortunately, we don't have a release date yet, but we're hoping the chaos comes to town in time for another summer zombie BBQ. ■■■

WEAPON WISH LIST

The original *Dead Rising*'s list of weapons was already fairly robust, but it was by no means exhaustive. Here's a small sample of things we'd like to see in the sequel, along with the Vegas odds on how likely we think it is they'll actually make it into the final game.

VEHICLES

This one is a gimme since the first game already had them, and you can see the main character's motorcycle in these screens, but we're hoping *DR 2* ups the ante with some monster trucks, bulldozers, and prize sports cars that will really make a Vegas-sized zombie mess.

Odds: 2:1

NEON SIGNS

Vegas is the city of lights, and we're betting Fortune city is, too, so what better way is there to corral a bunch of zombies together than to smash a giant electric "O" over their heads.

Odds: 3:1

LINE GUN

Dead Space showed us just how fun it could be to hack zombies into little pieces, but the mechanic would be a great fit for *Dead Rising*. We're hoping the sequel beefs up the supply of guns anyway, but how sweet would it be if one of them let you take these shambling meat bags apart at the seams?

Odds: 20:1

A VEGAS SHOW

It may be a little unorthodox, but after three hours of Louie Anderson at the Luxor any zombie would be willing to eat his own brain.

Odds: ...



Oh yeah, because that would be stupid



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Red Dead Redemption

► STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) ► PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES
► DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO ► RELEASE FALL

GUNPLAY GETS ANSWERED

Though Westerns are a tried and true film genre, the seemingly natural transition to video game consoles hasn't produced an experience that rivals the power of films like Sergio Leone's *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* or the critically acclaimed HBO series *Deadwood*. Though games like *Gun* and *Call of Juarez* have teased gamers with the taste of the unbridled frontier, we're still waiting for the true six-shooter masterpiece. Rockstar's *Red Dead Redemption* is the next cowboy set to meet us at high noon.

Rockstar Games rescued the abandoned *Red Dead Revolver* from Capcom in 2003 and released a reconfigured version of the

third-person shooter to modest critical fanfare and 1.5 million copies sold. *Redemption* marks the first time Rockstar is building a western from the ground up with its own RAGE technology, the graphics engine that powered hits *Grand Theft Auto IV* and *Midnight Club: Los Angeles*. *Redemption* is also Rockstar's first open-world sandbox adventure outside the boundaries of its epic crime series.

"The team at San Diego have massively exceeded our expectations with the sheer depth of experiences in *Red Dead Redemption*," said Rockstar Games co-founder Sam Houser in a press release statement. "The seamless combination of

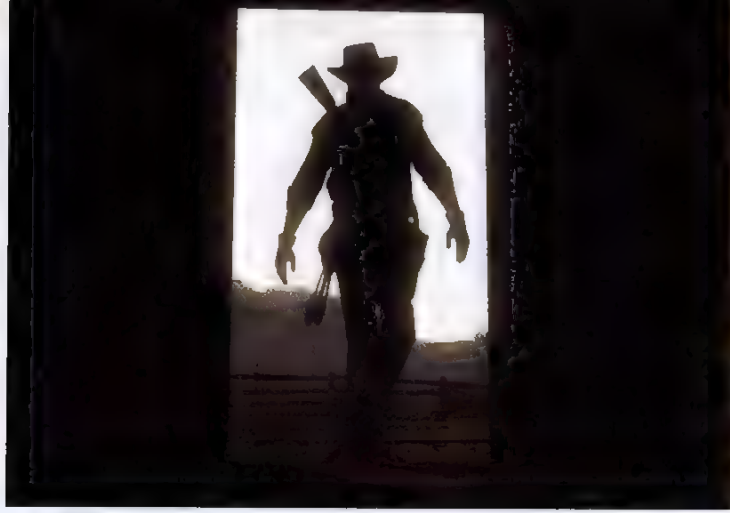
brehtaking beauty and intense action, all woven together with strong plotlines in a massive, vibrant, rural environment is mind-blowing. We think this game helps to push the limits of what an open-world gaming experience can be."

With a wealth of archetypal experiences to choose from including train robberies, Native American tribes out for scalps, attacks from wild animals, and saloon shootouts, the western genre is ripe for the open-world treatment. This isn't completely unfamiliar territory for Rockstar, as it demonstrated the ability to deliver a powerful experience incorporating vast expanses of land with *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*.

Like *Deadwood*, *Red Dead* is set in early 20th Century America, a time of expansion where formerly lawless frontier towns must come to grips with the inevitable annexation into the republic. Rockstar has yet to divulge plot particulars outside of revealing the main character, former outlaw John Marston. Through Marston's adventures, he must contend with dangerous open ranges filled with antagonist animals, treacherous mountain passes, and border towns filled with unsavory characters armed with six-shooters and a taste for blood. We hope to explore Rockstar's ambitious new western in more detail in the coming months. ■■■



■ *Red Dead Redemption* covers a vast expansion of frontier land, from rolling prairies to dangerous mountain passes.

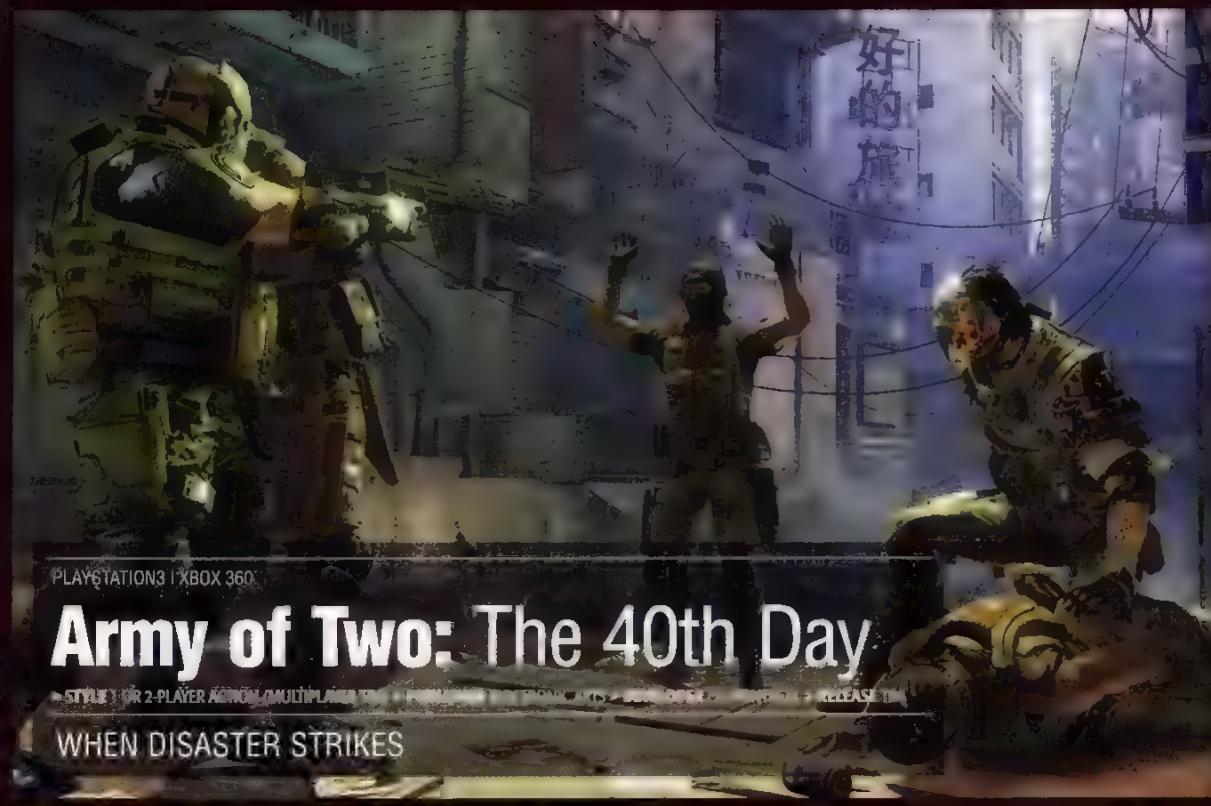


■ Clint Eastwood's too old to save this wagon!



■ While there's no doubt you'll be hunted down by a posse (this is a Western after all), we hope Rockstar lets us control them as well





PLAYSTATION3 | XBOX 360

Army of Two: The 40th Day

STYLE 1 FOR 2-PLAYER ACTION/MULTIPLAYER | FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS GAME AND OTHER EA GAMES | RELEASE TIME

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES



You can now temporarily snag weapons from downed enemies, bringing your total arsenal to four firearms at a time



The first step on the path to recovery is admitting you have a problem. While it might have been tough, EA Montreal had no qualms in picking apart their 2008 best seller *Army of Two*. Despite the commercial success of the title—with over two million units sold—*Army of Two* was bashed by unforgiving critics who felt the cheap humor and sketchy controls derailed an otherwise fun co-op game. But that isn't deterring the team behind *Army of Two: The 40th Day*. Instead, they're using the feedback to push the fledgling IP to a new level.

Departing from a strict mercenary focus, *The 40th Day* isn't intended to feel like every other war game. The goal is survival when Rios and Salem find themselves in Shanghai in the midst of a disaster. As for story specifics, we're being kept in the dark. The game is said to unfold in a relatively short period of time, with the pair searching for a way out of the collapsing city.

The direness of the situation is reflected in one particularly intense co-op set-piece. Salem and Rios split to opposite sides of a rooftop in Shanghai. Moments later the city begins to fall apart. Planes fly overhead and bomb the city indiscriminately, causing skyscrapers to domino into one another. One unlucky plane diverts course and crashes into Rios and Salem's building, cleaving it in two. The chaos in the surrounding city is agitated by the arrival of other mercenaries, who seem determined to pick off Salem and Rios.

After watching the scene unfold, we had a brief chance to get our hands on the game. The refined controls now only require one button for any particular action. Melee is mapped to a face button, and rifling through weapons can be done with one hand. Characters now automatically take cover against barriers, and EA Montreal has added a sprint function. Partner AI has also been revamped to be more responsive and intelligent. Now you can direct your partner to perform specific actions, including stealth kills and feigning surrender, by placing crosshairs on an enemy.

Displaced citizens roam through the streets, giving you the choice to save or execute them as you desire. Material penetrations has also been implemented, meaning that if an enemy ducks behind a wooden plank you still can pick them off. The mechanic also applies to some less glamorous situations, such as shooting through human shields, if deemed necessary.

Several of the defining characteristics from the first game also return. One of the first game's standout features, weapons customization, is promised to be bigger and better than before. EA Montreal also plans to make multiplayer a higher priority in the game this time around. Unfortunately, the Aggro system, the ludicrous concept that allows one player to turn invisible if the other player is drawing all the fire, is still a central mechanic in the game, though EA promises a refined experience that may or may not include the invisibility.

EA Montreal's frankness regarding the shortcomings of the original *Army of Two*, combined with a long list of new features aimed to help avoid past pitfalls, leaves us with high hopes for *Army of Two: The 40th Day*. ■ ■ ■

ADDRESSING GUFFAW FLAWS

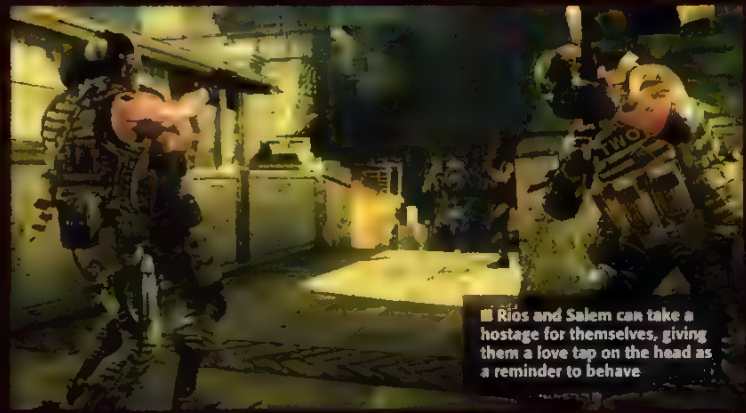
Yes, the humor that divided audiences last time around is still present in *The 40th Day*. However, EA Montreal realizes that the cheesy one-liners and meathead banter rubbed some gamers the wrong way. The goal this time around is to embrace each character's personality without crossing into annoying territory. Displacing some of the more questionable humor onto secondary characters was discussed as a route to avoid this happening again. Additionally, to infuse tangible personality back into Salem and Rios, they'll lift their masks when they're not fighting.



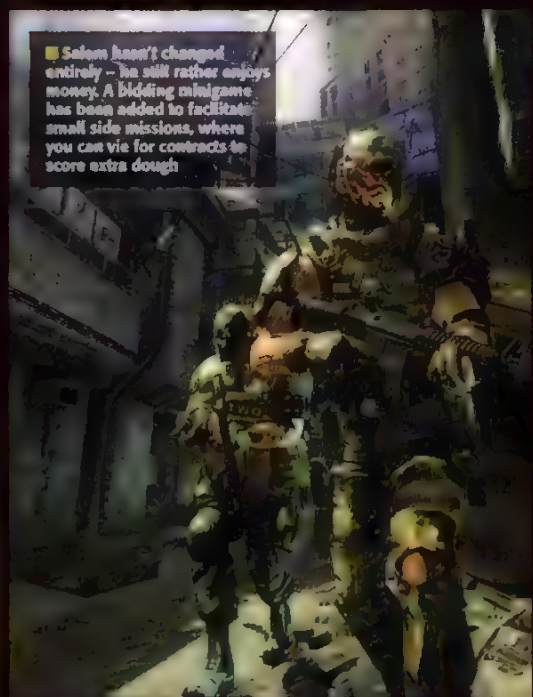
■ The atmosphere of the 40th Day is one of recent and massive destruction. The city looks like it was abandoned only moments ago, with displaced citizens covered in soot wandering in shock throughout the city



■ Rios and Salem can take a hostage for themselves, giving them a love tap on the head as a reminder to behave



■ EA is attempting to make each environment unique, trying their best to avoid stereotypical shooter settings



■ Salem hasn't changed entirely - he still rather enjoys money. A bidding minigame has been added to facilitate small side missions, where you can vie for contracts to score extra dough



The motley group of animals you see at the bottom of the screen are the members of your band. The little shapes over their heads indicate how well they are keeping up with your beat.

Wii

Major Minor's Majestic March

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC > PUBLISHER MAJESCO ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER NANAON SHA > RELEASE MARCH

MARCH ON

During the PSone's heyday, back before music games took our country by storm, there was a little dog who rapped for the affections of a girl flower. While PaRappa the Rapper's goofy art style and catchy rhythms may feel dated today, the game helped pave the way for modern music giants like Rock Band and Guitar Hero. Masaya Matsuura, the visionary musician behind that title — and other fan favorites like Umlammer Lammy and Vib-Ribbon — is teaming back up with famed New York artist Rodney Alan Greenblat to release another unique music title: a marching band game for the Wii.

The village of Marchtown doesn't idolize rock stars or professional athletes like any normal city. Instead it shows all of its affection on drum majors. One young boy, named Major Minor, has always dreamed of being the best drum major his town has ever seen. Unfortunately, he has always struggled to find musically talented marchers willing to follow him. His luck all changes one day when he inherits a magical baton containing the essence of his great grandmother. Now it's up to him to unite the villagers of Marchtown in song and spread the joy of marching with the rest of the world.

Anyone familiar with PaRappa's whimsicality should feel right at home. During his journey, Major travels through

seven colorful locations, encouraging his followers to march down everyday streets, pass through political rallies, and even under large bodies of water, picking up a few fishy instrumentalists along the way. Major and his makeshift band play more than 20 "well-known" marching tunes from around the world, but don't expect any of them to sound the same twice. The song's composition will change as Major picks up different members, varying with the size of the band and the instruments they carry.

Every song starts by letting players set the tempo by moving their Wii remote up and down like a real baton. As the platoon marches forward, players can pick up other animals to add to their band by waving their wand at them. If the song's tempo gets too fast or too slow band members will get frustrated and start to drop off.

If nothing else, Major Minor seems set to prove that it is not interested in following trends. Even though each song is only a few minutes long, they all require a fair amount of stamina since you'll have to keep your arms moving up and down the whole time. You can put down those barbells, as Major Minor promises to give our arms a workout. ■■■



A competitive multiplayer mode allows two people to compete to see who can amass the largest procession.



As you pick up different members for your band, the song arrangements alter to include all the instruments you possess.



You can use a whistle to halt your band when obstacles appear.

VOTE for the nice PARTY



KEN KOA



CONFIRMED ROSTER

- Ash Crimson
- Duo Lon
- Shen Woo
- Kyo Kusanagi
- Benimaru Nikaido
- Goro Daimon
- Iori Yagami
- Athena Asamiya
- Sie Kensou
- Chin Gentsai
- Terry Bogard
- Andy Bogard
- Joe Higashi
- Kim
- Raiden
- Ryo Sakazaki
- Robert Garcia
- Ralf Jones
- Clark Still
- Leona Heidern

BOOSTED VISUALS

"The size of each character is much larger than before with a much higher level of resolution. Both their length and height are almost twice as big. However, the density (detail) of the dot-pixels are about four times as much. The color palette has also increased. With these character graphics you can say the level of expression has expanded a great deal."
 - Nona, art director

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

The King of Fighters XII

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER ONLINE)
 > **PUBLISHER** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SNK > **RELEASE** JUNE

REBIRTH

It may have taken 15 years, but SNK is finally scrapping all of the character sprites, backgrounds, and game assets that have been reused ad nauseum over the years in its King of Fighters franchise. For The King of Fighters XII, the team has crafted the art completely by hand. "Our development slogan for KOF XII is 'KOF Rebirth,' and we've aimed to create an entirely new King of Fighters with this title," says producer Masaaki Kukino. "It has been a challenge in terms of development time, budget, and patience [laughs]. I must be grateful for the hard work our designers have put into this installment"

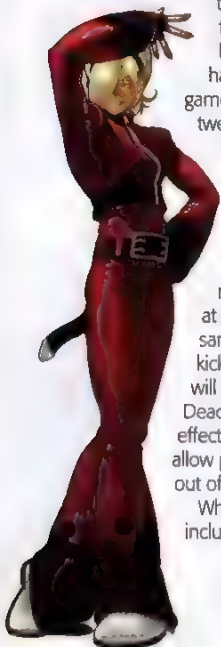
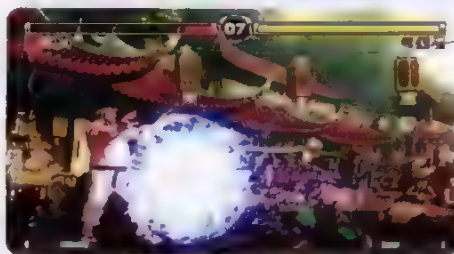
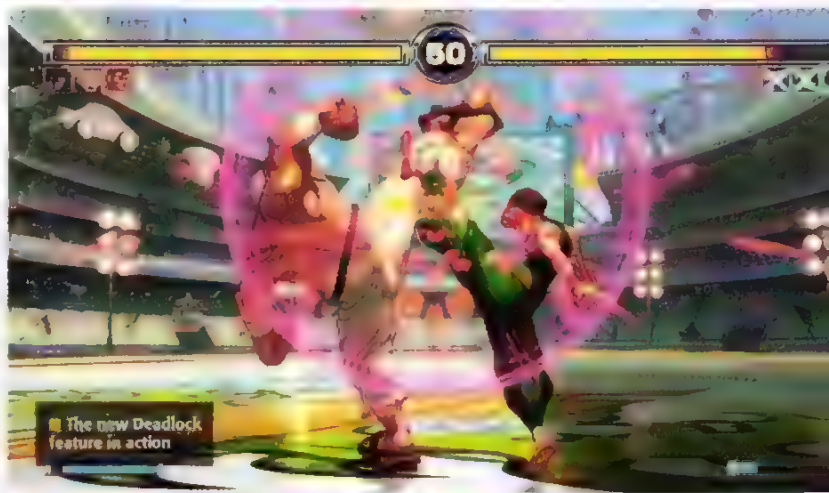
Despite all visual upgrades, the traditional three-on-three 2D combat felt like classic KOF in our hands-on time with the game. However, some new tweaks help bring the fighting forward. Critical Counters allow players to stun attacking opponents if they connect with a strong short-range attack just before the hit connects. If players both strike at the same time with the same type of attack, a high kick for example, the attacks will cancel each other out in a Deadlock with a vibrant spark effect. Finally, Guard Attacks allow players to counter directly out of a blocked attack.

While KOF XI's roster included over 40 characters,

the team is scaling back to just over 20 fighters this time around, all of which have previously appeared in an SNK fighting game. "With KOF XII, we have pursued a very high level of quality for each individual character, giving them all their own new original graphics, a strong presence, and making sure they all control in a unique way," Kukino says. "All of the 20 characters have their own district traits, and we decided to go with them not because of their popularity, but rather by their presence in the KOF universe." Though all of the arcade version characters have been revealed (see sidebar), Kukino confirms that additional fighters will appear on the home console editions.

King of Fighters XII includes online versus play as well as the option to watch online matches or record and post your own battles for others to see. "There is also an option where multiple friends can gather and create a room for team battle," Kukino adds. "Voice chat may be enabled after entering the room and online matches as well."

While Kukino preferred not to comment directly on Capcom's design choices in the recently released Street Fighter IV, he did offer some overall thoughts on the genre. "Nowadays you see many companies innovating their fighting series, just as we are with KOF XII. I truly believe amongst all of this, we at SNK Playmore are paving our own path, and innovating in ways that no other developer can," Kukino says. "We can't afford to settle for the same old standards anymore." ■■■■



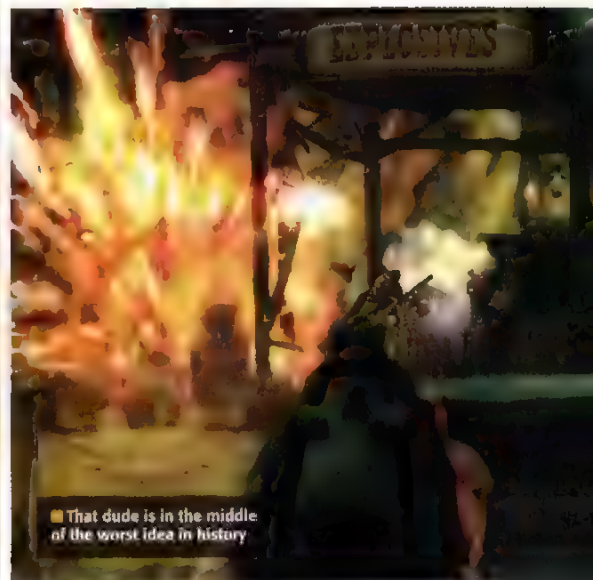


PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER TECHLAND > RELEASE SUMMER

TWO GUYS, SIX-SHOOTERS



■ That dude is in the middle of the worst idea in history

Billy Candle didn't exactly set the gaming world ablaze. If there was a standout character in 2007's Call of Juarez, it was Billy's crazed co-star, the reverend Ray McCall – a grim figure with a bible in one hand and a revolver in the other. Unfortunately, McCall didn't live through the first game, but developer Techland is exploring the character's tumultuous history in its upcoming prequel, Bound in Blood.

Like the original, Bound in Blood focuses on two characters; this time, players control

Ray McCall and his brother Tom (too bad, Billy) as they fight through the frontier during the Civil War. The duo undertakes a quest for the Gold of Juarez, which lands them in all kinds of trouble. Tom and Ray have different gunslinging styles and specialize in particular weapons and abilities, and you must choose which one to use in specific situations. Unlike the first Call of Juarez, the characters aren't segregated. You'll choose one to control at the beginning of a level, but the brothers are working together, so each mission is a collaborative effort where both characters' skills

will come in handy.

Bound in Blood's emphasis on familial connection may seem like a golden opportunity to include co-op, but that feature isn't in the cards. However, you still can take the McCalls online. The new multiplayer component includes a clever incentive called the Bounty System. When you take down enemies, you get points equal to the bounty on their heads. However, as you string together kills, the price on your head goes up, making you a higher value target for other players. If the gameplay is well implemented, this could

add an interesting hunter/hunted dynamic to the deathmatch and objective-based online modes.

Westerns occupy a hallowed place in cinema history, but their performance in gaming is worse than a no-armed man at a quick draw competition. Even with a spotty track record, the genre's blend of iconic Old West situations and exciting gunplay has tons of untapped potential, which is enough to keep us hopeful whenever a new hombre like Bound in Blood appears on the horizon. ■ ■ ■



■ The shooting gallery formation is not a great offensive tactic



■ "It's time to wake up, guys. Guys? Aw, nuts."



■ It appears that Ray McCall isn't a reverend at this point in his life



■ In the Old West, most life insurance policies contained a "cowboy clause"



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Fuel

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

HAVE WORLD, WILL TRAVEL

Four years ago, French developer Asobo envisioned Fuel as a racing MMO. Over the course of its development, however, good reasons emerged to shift away from this philosophy. What if you could take some of the benefits of an MMO – scale and the multiplayer experience – and fold them into a more comprehensive title?

Fuel thinks big and has a world map that is even bigger. Encompassing over 5,000 square miles and larger than the entire state of Connecticut, Fuel's world spans multiple terrain types and lets you bomb canyons, carve desert sands, burn asphalt, and climb mountains with no loading in between. Based on an America laid to waste by the ravages of global warming, the game features representations of Mount Rainier, Yellowstone National Park, the Grand Canyon, and much

more. If you thought that Burnout Paradise was big, your head is going to explode when you see the size of Fuel.

They say size isn't important; it's what you do with it that counts. Fuel tries to tackle both at the same time. The career mode features 75 multi-class vehicle races, including checkpoint runs, open-ended long hauls, and circuit courses. The set-piece "boss battle" events task you with racing while a raging twister shreds the land and throws buildings, for instance.

Players can freely switch between pursuing career growth and exploring a world littered with hundreds of additional challenges. Let your wanderlust take you where it may to discover the liveries, new cars, secret scenic spots,



■ Each of Fuel's vehicles will have optional GPS tracking arrows that show a specific route for that type of vehicle, be it a buggy, bike, ATV, etc.

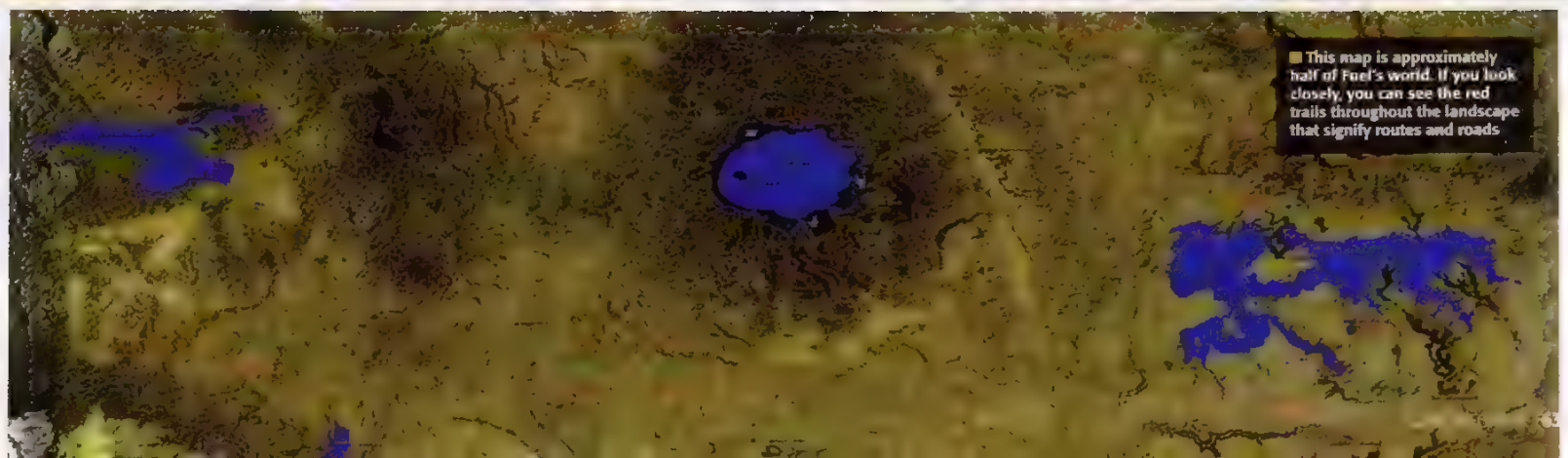
and racing contests placed throughout the world. If you don't want to aimlessly roam the environment but still want to explore, the game contains heliports that serve as drop points to various sectors of the map.

All the work that developer Asobo and Codemasters have put into this game is at your fingertips with the race editor, which lets you create and store online multiplayer races where you can place up to 32 check-

points throughout the world and tweak a wide variety of race perimeters. Similar to Test Drive Unlimited, online players will populate the environment with you in real time, and you'll be able to hit up races and events with them at any time. Just get in your car and go. ■ ■ ■ ■



■ The game features a 24-hour day to night cycle as well as weather. Larger events such as tornados are contained to specific races



■ This map is approximately half of Fuel's world. If you look closely, you can see the red trails throughout the landscape that signify routes and roads



PC | UNANNOUNCED CONSOLES

Star Trek Online

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

NEW LIFE, NEW CIVILIZATIONS

Even as Cryptic Studios creeps closer to its impending launch of *Champions Online*, details on its other big project continue to emerge. Coming to both PC and unannounced consoles, *Star Trek Online* has a number of elements that may make Trek fans squeal with embarrassing glee, but one of the coolest of these is the character creator. Cryptic elaborated on the system at this year's New York Comic Con.

All of the expected facial morphing tools are available to players, albeit with a greater

flexibility than is offered in most MMOs. You'll pick any of the hallmark *Star Trek* races, from vulcans and klingons to gorn and andorians. For many players, the more exciting option will be to craft their own race, intermingling facial and body features from several different races, and morphing those parts to create a brand new alien species within the sprawling *Trek* universe.

No matter your extenor appearance, you'll have some other big choices to make as the game begins. Set 30 years after the end of *Star Trek: Nemesis*, much has changed



■ After building a character, you'll also help build your ship.

in the Alpha Quadrant. The Klingon Empire and the Federation are about to enter into all-out war, and players must decide which faction to join. Though you'll begin play with a small ship of your own to command, every character still chooses a baseline career path, such as tactics, engineering, or science. This helps determine your unique skill set as you advance, even as you add bridge crew to supplement those abilities.

The general game design concept has remained largely intact since our cover story on the game last October. The game offers a

mix of space exploration and planetary excursions, with an episodic structure that keeps the story moving forward. Any given scenario might involve a trip between multiple worlds, a tactical battle amid a spinning asteroid field, followed by a harrowing chase across some crystalline alien landscape. If the new *Trek* movie manages to garner some enthusiasm this summer, *Star Trek Online* may turn more than a few heads when it releases several months later. ■ ■ ■

FIT
New from Honda



CAVERNOUS!

Wii

Let's Tap

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER PROPE > RELEASE SUMMER

DON'T TRASH THE BOX

Sonic creator and industry old boy Yuji Naka got fed up with the business side of gaming and wanted to get back to a more creative role, so he left Sega a few years back and started Prope. Now his studio's first game is headed to North America. Let's Tap proves that not every possible use of the Wii remote has been tapped just yet. Players must place the remote button-side-down on top of a cardboard box. As you drum your hands on the box, vibrations register with the controller and affect onscreen events in five different game types.

Tap Runner – Up to four players race through an obstacle course swinging on ropes, jumping hurdles, and dodging crushing blocks. Drumming makes your stick figure run, and slamming both hands down initiates a jump. A wealth of courses adds some depth to this competitive mode.

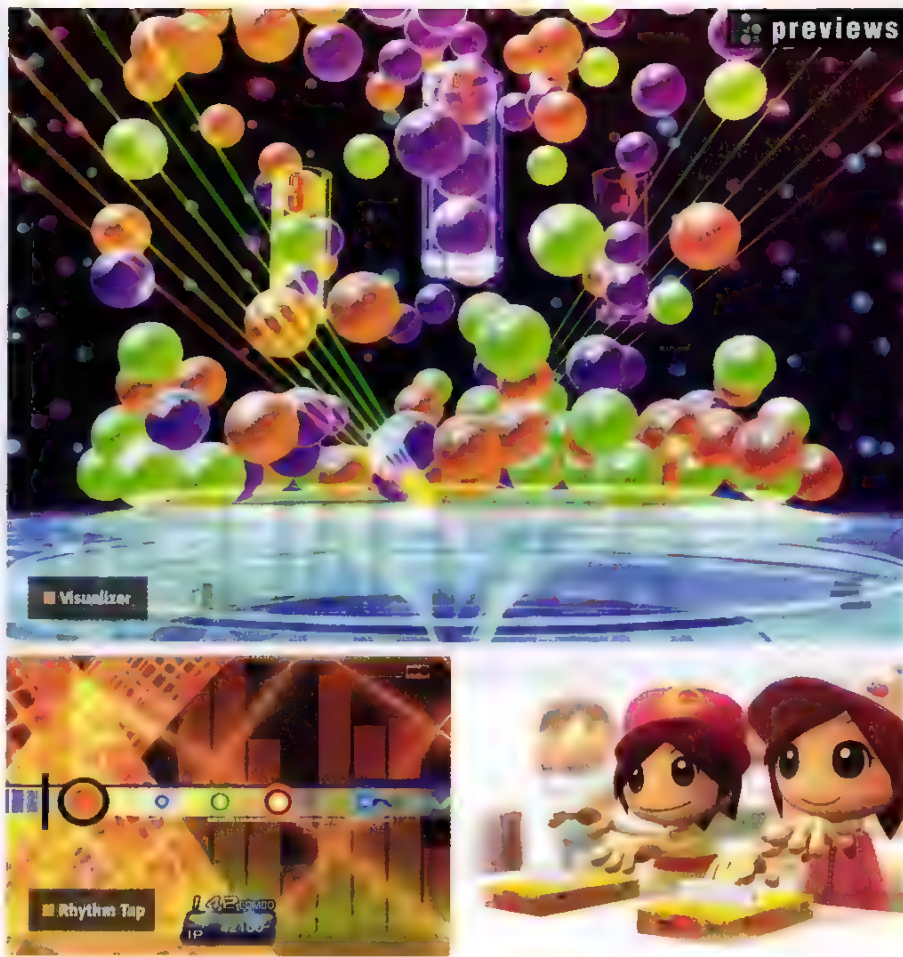
Rhythm Tap – Minus the clapping, this is a wholesale rip-off of bongo

game Donkey Konga. Up to four players drum along to the beat as it flows from right to left. The Japanese version features electronica songs with titles like "Coconut Airport."

Visualizer – Using a mix of fish, bouncy balls, and fireworks, players affect what's happening onscreen by tapping along with the beat in what looks to be a glorified screensaver.

Silent Blocks – Kind of a mix of Jenga and Tetris. Using gentle taps, players must pull out blocks without knocking the stack over. If you remove a block and the remaining ones match they will clear out like in a puzzle game, setting up a potential cascade of combos.

Bubble Voyager – In this 2D shooter, you must navigate through a spiky path blasting enemies with missiles and collecting stars. Tapping will float your character upwards, while taking a break sets him on a controlled descent. ■ ■ ■ ■



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fit.honda.com

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Tekken 6

► STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER ONLINE) ► PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI
 ► DEVELOPER NAMCO BANDAI ► RELEASE FALL

NOW ON A REAL DISC

While Tekken fans haven't had to wait as long as the Street Fighter set for a new installment, it's been a while since Namco Bandai's fighting series has brought a new numbered entry to North America. Tekken 5 hit PlayStation 2 back in 2005, and the series' only current generation appearance was the download-only Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection on PlayStation 3 in 2007. We checked in with the team to see what they've been up to.

"We released Tekken 6 in arcades at the end of 2007," explains project director Katsuhiro Harada. "Soon after we began work on an arcade update with Tekken 6: Bloodline Rebellion and helped with Soulcalibur IV. If it weren't for the work we had with Bloodline Rebellion, we probably could have already made a Tekken 6 for consoles." Harada says that instead they wanted to release a single definitive version of Tekken 6 that includes all of the Bloodline Rebellion content and then some.

"This time, we focused on one of the most important ele-

ments of a fighting game: the character animation," Harada says. "This is one area that really sets Tekken 6's graphics apart from those of Dark Resurrection. We managed to implement a full motion blur effect that other fighting games haven't accomplished while still maintaining 60 frames per second."

In addition to the previously available aerial juggles and wall combos, players will now be able to bounce opponents off of the ground and break through floors. "You can chain ground attacks to an aerial juggle, slam your opponent to the ground, pick them up once they've bounced off the floor of the lower level, and carry them into a wall combo for a spectacularly damaging combo," Harada says.

The new Rage System gives a strength boost to characters low on health to increase the chance of a last-minute comeback, and throwable items add a projectile element not usually seen in this franchise. "There are unique moves in the game like Kuma's attack with a fish, Nina and Anna have the

Tekken 6 includes an impressive 40 playable characters. Here are six of the new ones.

Bob



Zafina



Miguel



Lars



Leo



Anna



ability to equip a bazooka, and Raven has a gigantic throwing star," Harada says.

Online versus play is a given, but another online mode could change up the formula. "This feature is for fans who want to play Tekken online but want something other than versus," Harada says. "However, I can't go into details at the moment."

But perhaps the most surprising aspect of Tekken 6 is its appearance on Xbox 360. "The team, including myself, has been making Tekken games for Sony platforms for many years. Because of this we all have special feelings for the PlayStation consoles," Harada explains. "There have been requests for many years to release outside the Sony platforms. As the 360 install base spread throughout North America and Europe, those voices gained in number dramatically. Eventually, opinions changed as well, and we thought it was time to reevaluate our stance." ■■■■



■ "It's important not to judge from screenshots and trailers," Harada says. "I think it's fair to say that the beauty of a still image is almost meaningless for an action game."





**BACK!
PAIN?**

SNIPER

OUT OF IT!

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Blood and Gore
Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Mature Humor
Sexual Themes
Strong Language

**COMING
MARCH 2009**

P+

Wii

SEGA

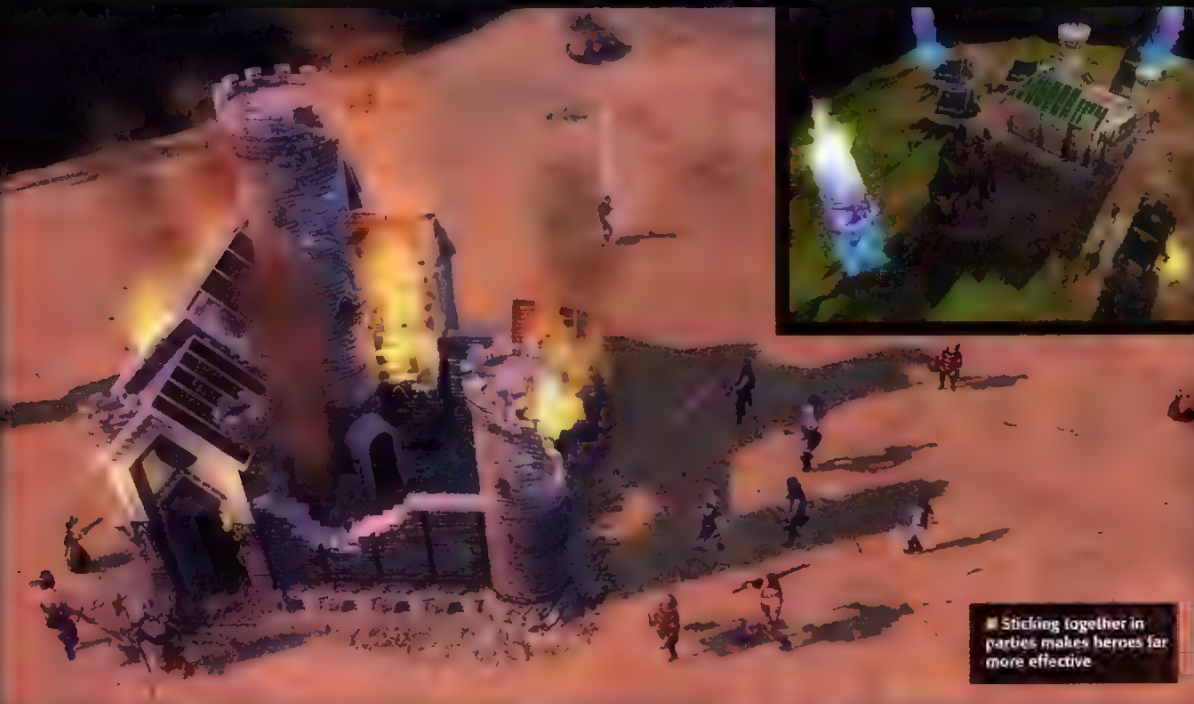


UNLIMITED ENABLED

Majesty 2: The Fantasy Kingdom Sim

> STYLE: 4-PLAYER STRATEGY/SIMULATION (MULTI-PLAYER) > VISUALS: 3D (LOOK UP)
> DEVELOPER: INO-CO > RELEASE: SUMMER

TAX COLLECTOR!



■ Sticking together in parties makes heroes far more effective



■ Warriors are cheap, doughty fighters for the front lines



■ Rangers are excellent scouts; they love nothing better than exploring

The cult hit Majesty: The Fantasy Kingdom Sim challenged players to look at the typical problems of a fledgling medieval nation from a different perspective: the king's. With original developer Cyberlore now defunct, European strategy house Paradox Interactive is working with Ino-CO on a sequel. Our recent playtime with an early build of Majesty 2 encourages us that the game will be a good time in its own right, as well as retaining what made the original unique.

The ground-level gameplay in Majesty 2 is nearly identical to its predecessor. With a military entirely staffed by heroes over whom you have no direct control, it's not enough to have a powerful wizard in your employ – you've got to give him a reason (i.e. treasure) to go after the troll ravaging your peasantry. Players choose locations for various buildings: economic centers like marketplaces and smithies, guild halls to house heroes, and defensive emplacements. You also research armor and weapon upgrades or improving guild halls to unlock new hero abilities. Reward flags can be set to encourage heroes to explore, hunt, protect, or stay away from just about anything on the map. The team behind Majesty 2 clearly has some fans of the original on staff, as anyone who played the first game will instantly recognize the broad mechanics here.

Aside from the obvious graphical improvements that come from nine years of gaming evolution, Paradox is improving the game in some key areas. Taverns aren't simply places for your heroes to kick back and waste some money on ale (which you collect taxes on); they're meeting places for adventurers to form parties now. While a healer will occasionally follow a warrior around and heal him on his own, putting the two in a party will ensure that they stick together and boost the other's effectiveness. Some heroes give global benefits to the whole party, like elves who increase slower members' foot speed.

After beating a mission in the single-player campaign, players can designate one of their heroes as a Lord. While normally you'll only be able to hire level one scrubs during play, building a Hall of Lords will allow you to call these powerful champions back into your service. This persistence in the campaign was sorely lacking from the original.

Though the version that we played is very early and lacks significant elements of the interface, it's already fun. We yomped through the handful of missions available to us, and appreciated the gameplay remaining true to the spirit of the original as well as little tweaks like limiting players to a single Marketplace and only allowing Trading Posts in certain areas. Majesty 2 has a very good chance to make a splash later this year in a sparse PC landscape. ■ ■ ■



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Battlefield 1943

> STYLE UP TO 24-PLAYER ONLINE ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER DICE > RELEASE SUMMER

SHOOTIN' IT OLD SCHOOL

While Battlefield PC fans wait impatiently for the third installment of the blockbuster multiplayer franchise, DICE is wooing console and computer gamers alike with a return to its World War II roots in Battlefield 1943.

True to its namesake, this download-only title re-imagines the vaunted game that started it all, Battlefield 1942. Using the engine that powers Battlefield: Bad Company, DICE is resurrecting the popular Wake Island, Guadalcanal, and Iwo Jima maps from the Pacific Theater. "We wanted to go back to our roots to deliver an amazing mix of WWII Battlefield gameplay with the awesomeness of Frostbite destruction," says associate producer Gordon Van Dyke.

The core 1942 gameplay is still intact, but series veterans will notice several changes. Players still take the roles of Japanese and American soldiers to commandeer jeeps, tanks, and planes in the name of capturing strategic posts. The game replaces the five available player classes from the first game with three more streamlined kits: infantry, rifleman, and scout. The infantrymen are

armed with a submachine gun, bazooka, and a wrench to fix vehicles. Riflemen use semi-automatic rifles and grenades, while the scouts are armed with sniper rifles and TNT for taking out tanks. Each weapon has unlimited ammo. This could make the game more accessible to a wider audience, but it also may irk battle-hardened elites.

Though the original game featured 64-player skirmishes, the new version only supports 24 players. Why the smaller scale? "Frostbite is a powerful game engine," Van Dyke says. "With destruction, vehicles, planes, boats, and intense infantry action, 24-player maps give users the best Battlefield experience."

Other changes DICE promises include a faster pace, better balance between air and ground units, improved physics, greater line of sight, a more intuitive spawn system, persistent player rankings, and stat tracking. DICE currently has no plans to expand the amount of maps, but if the game is successful this summer we can always hope for the return of Operation Market Garden. ■■■



PSP | NINTENDO DS

Duke Nukem: Critical Mass

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER APOGEE SOFTWARE/DEEP SILVER > DEVELOPER FRONTLINE STUDIOS > RELEASE FALL

A PEACEFUL SIDE OF DUKE

Just kidding. Duke Nukem has no intention of doing anything but blowing up pig aliens and saving babes when he shoots his way onto the DS and PSP later this year. Critical Mass is the first in a planned three-game trilogy, none of which have any relation to the long-rumored console reboot, Duke Nukem Forever.

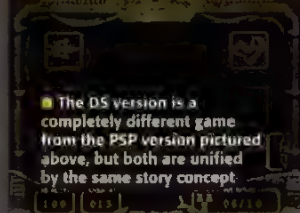
The DS and PSP versions are unique games unified by the same basic story. In this first game, Duke travels into the future and learns that through some action of his own in the past, he has inadvertently brought about an alien invasion. Details beyond that are scarce, but the punchline is that Duke has to start shooting pig aliens until they're all dead.

The PSP version allows for either first- or third-person play as you defend cities like New York, Paris, and Tokyo. A control scheme modeled on the Syphon Filter PSP games should give players a good means to navigate the 3D environments, including the option to hide behind cover before peeking up to blast some aliens. Giant boss battles against the likes of a titanic mechanical spider creature look like they could be fun. In addition, Duke's trademark jetpack makes an appearance, ratcheting the action up into amusing absurdity.

The DS version of Critical Mass is a more entry-level, arcade-style side-scroller, albeit with some 3D elements. While running left and right on the screen, you can peak down alleys and passages to attack enemies down those paths. Holding the shoulder buttons tilts the camera left or right to give you a better glimpse of what lies ahead or behind. Levels are built with verticality in mind, with plenty of paths to take you to building tops where you can snipe targets from afar.

We're too far out from the game's release to know whether Duke's latest

portable adventures will have the thrills to carry him into the new millennium. Lots of AI and control issues had yet to be finalized in the build we saw, but what we saw made clear the game was on track to be everything we expect from this '90s era gaming star. ■■■



■ The DS version is a completely different game from the PSP version pictured above, but both are unified by the same story concept.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Dragon Age: Origins

► STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ► PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
► DEVELOPER BIONHAIRE ► RELEASE FALL

THE DELAY DILEMMA

Like everyone else, we've watched powerhouse developer BioWare like hawks in the hopes that more details on its next project slip. This month, we bring you a wealth of information gleaned from a recent hands-on session with the PC version of *Dragon Age: Origins*. To nobody's surprise, this heroic fantasy epic still looks incredible despite a delay that indicates the PC and console versions will release simultaneously.

Our hands-on session begins as our party treks through a dark forest to confront an ancient evil. This segment gave us a good sense of the moment-to-moment combat. The flow of battle is natural to anyone familiar with *Knights of the Old Republic* or *Baldur's Gate*, with characters executing actions in real-time while hidden die rolls control the attack's success or failure. An AI scripting interface strongly reminiscent of *Final Fantasy XII* (in a good way) makes the ability to pause at any time and issue new party orders less necessary than in previous titles, though it's still there for sticky situations. Even so, not knowing how to exploit our party's special abilities gets us killed more than once when blundering into hostile creatures. There's no doubt that *Dragon Age* requires a modicum of tactical thought to conquer its challenges.

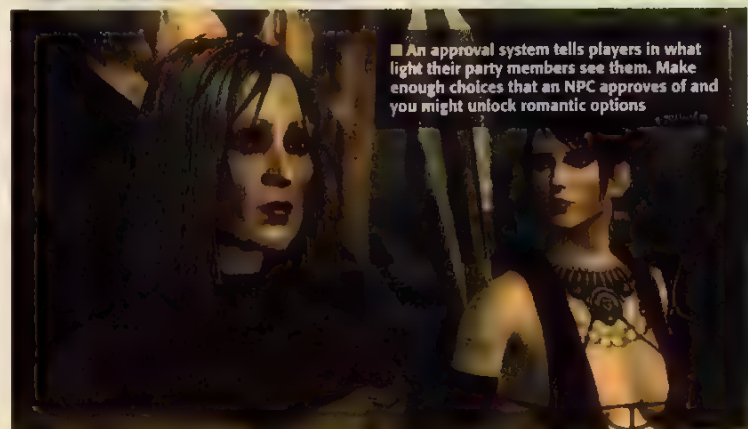
In the center of the dark forest, we encounter ruins full of monsters that we need to fight through. The rogue shines in these battles, luring enemies into traps and making liberal use of his backstab damage multiplier. Nasty werewolves make shifting our mage into a less-fragile bear form frequently necessary, since frontline fighters lack the ability to reliably prevent enemies from charging right past them. An MMORPG-style taunt ability serves a similar function,

but in most cases our mage must attend to her own defenses. Getting through the forest and into the dungeon brings a subtler encounter than a simple boss fight. Upon meeting the antagonist we were sent to eliminate, she tells us a far different version of events than the original quest giver had supplied. Whether we accept this alternate explanation or continue on our mission of annihilation dictates the quest's climax.

This decision is far more important than choosing between two pieces of loot. Our overarching quest remains to raise an army and help the Gray Wardens turn back the Darkspawn; the choice we make will no doubt affect us later in the quest, as our chosen allies inevitably become a matter of dire importance. To avoid plot spoilers we'll stop the narrative here, but let's just say that whichever course is chosen, a satisfyingly epic battle concludes this plot thread.

The sense of being part of a larger war comes through in *Dragon Age's* gameplay as well as its narrative. The scale of combat that *Dragon Age* can depict is impressive. We witnessed situations where an entire village is blanketed in chaotic battle, with forces both hostile and friendly to the player doing their best to slaughter their enemies.

Any project from BioWare will pique most gamers' interests, and our time with *Dragon Age* reinforces why the developer has so much automatic credibility. Nobody loves it when an exciting game gets delayed, but we have no fears whatsoever about *Dragon Age's* quality. ■■■■



The first several hours of gameplay will be determined by which of the six titular origins you pick for your main character:



The Human Noble's material advantages from being a high-class citizen of the dominant culture mean little against the Darkspawn



Despite a humble background as a lowlife thug, the Dwarf Commoner has a chance to prove his worth to the world



Born a second-class citizen, revenge on the oppressive human hierarchy drives the City Elf



Dalish Elves live in the wild away from human-dominated civilization and dream of restoring their culture's lost splendor



Mages have to undergo a horrific trial to prove their ability to resist the temptations of demons...but can attain great power nonetheless



Surviving the cloak-and-dagger politics of dwarven royalty gives the Dwarf Noble an inside track to glory



■ The zoomed-out tactical view is ideal for setting up battle plans...

■ ...but the third-person view is great for exploration and cinematic views of the action





PHOTOPHILE

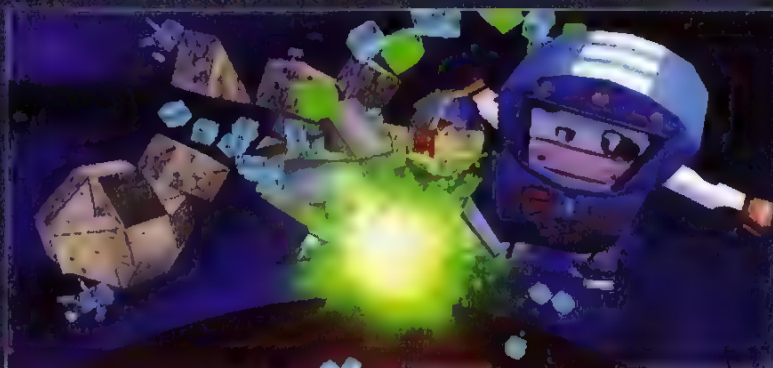
Mini Previews With Big Pictures



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP | NINTENDO DS | PC

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

Releasing on pretty much every console you could possibly imagine, *Revenge of the Fallen* looks to capitalize on the successes of the first Transformers game. Single-player action once again focuses on devastating building-destroying fun in locales such as Cairo and Shanghai. While character names are scarce, developer Luxoflux promises a dramatically expanded roster of playable transformers with special abilities and both good and evil storylines. Activision's sequel also features a new online multiplayer component, which enables some hot robot-on-robot duels with your favorite autobots and decepticons. The game has no confirmed release date yet, but we'll bet you our mini-condition, in-box Fortress Maximus toy that the game hits shelves within a week of June 26, when the movie arrives on the big screen.



Wii

Boom Blox Bash Party

One of the Wii's most creative original titles is getting a sequel this spring. EA and Steven Spielberg's Boom Blox franchise won us over with its intriguing mix of action and Jenga-style puzzle gameplay. Soon, you can play your way through 400 new levels of blox-busting action in *Boom Blox Bash Party*. In addition to new levels, the game features more multiplayer modes, new characters, and new types of blox like Cylinder and Paint. EA also promises to increase replay value with myriad unlockables and a revamped Create mode that allows you to make and share levels with friends online.



PC

CrimeCraft

Despite a name that implies some kind of mafioso real-time strategy game, *CrimeCraft* is an online-only third-person shooter from startup developer/publisher Vogster. The premise adapts the Guild Wars structure to Unreal Engine 3-based twitch combat. Players can earn new equipment, distinctions, and other rewards for their persistent avatars through participating in arena-style battles with rival players or bots. Communal lobbies also offer a venue for social mingling and trading. *CrimeCraft* sounds like a title that would work perfectly on consoles as well, but Vogster will only comment on a PC release for now. Keep an eye out for this to launch (likely primarily through digital distribution) later this year.



Wii
Our House: Party

This summer, aspiring handy-men will only need one tool in their belt: a Wii remote. Majesco's new party game lets up to four friends take a virtual hammer to their house, renovating the property in a variety of construction styles that include modern, Victorian, and Asian. After laying waste to their old digs, players must make a trip to the local home improvement store to grab special tools and upgrades that will aid them throughout the 175 minigames. Ty Pennington wannabes can even show off their finished dream homes using WiiConnect24 when *Our House: Party* comes out this June.



NINTENDO DS
Sands of Destruction

If you had the power to destroy the world, would you do it? If you lived in a world populated by anthropomorphic animals that enslaved humanity, you might have good reason to. When a young man named Kyrie discovers he possesses mysterious godlike powers, he becomes involved in a plot that sees him traveling across oceans of sand, battling colossal monsters, and unraveling the mystery of the world's creation. *Sands of Destruction's* turn-based battles also incorporate fighting elements; during skirmishes, players accumulate points, which can be spent on special techniques and combination attacks. Well-timed button presses can deal massive damage. Sega released this title last year in Japan, and we expect its U.S. release sometime this summer.



PC
Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor

The second standalone expansion to Relic Entertainment's critically acclaimed World War II real-time strategy title is coming April 8, and it's bringing the goods. Three separate single-player episodes (consisting of nine total missions) follow the exploits of some of the war's legendary units, while three fresh multiplayer modes give online players what they want. New maps and vehicles change up the combat equation as well. Finally, *Tales of Valor* allows players to take direct control of their units, providing a ground-level perspective on the action.



Wii
Cate West: The Vanishing Files

Super sleuths hungry for a mystery to solve might should keep *Cate West: The Vanishing Files* on the top of their case file when this PC and DS adventure series makes its way to the Wii. With five different investigation types covering 15 chapters, players must use the Wii remote to clean away dust from crime scenes, shine flashlights into darkened corners, and examine the tiny details with a magnifying glass. Detectives who don't want to sleuth alone can work alongside their own Dr. Watson in the co-op story mode, or go head-to-head to see who's the better Sherlock in the game's versus mode this spring.

REVIEWS

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Resident Evil 5

Grab a buddy and get ready for the fight of your life. The newest entry in Capcom's groundbreaking survival horror franchise embraces high action and intense co-op to deliver an expertly paced adventure. Series mainstay Chris Redfield and newcomer Sheva Alomar journey into Africa and find themselves surrounded by infected villagers, horrendous abominations, and the most dangerous version of the virus to date. Resident Evil 5 is an amazing achievement that is not to be missed, whether you're a longtime fan of the series or you just love great games.

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** Medicine ball. To the face and groin.

> **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.

PLAYSTATION 3



MLB 09: The Show

HANDHELD



Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon



Puzzle Quest: Galactrix

Embracing all the familiar themes of science fiction storytelling, Galactrix mashes together color-matching puzzle gameplay with role-playing exploration and leveling, resulting in an addictive blend that serves as a worthy successor to the last Puzzle Quest. We traveled the stars and fought the alien warships of the DS version of the game, and you can check out our full mission report on page 89.

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the edge
 When All Games Aren't Created Equal
 This is where G1 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 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).

- 1080p** – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080p stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The 'p' 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 17 and Mano Party.
- cel shading** – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cels.
- CG** – Computer Generated. Usually refers to cutscenes that don't use in-game graphics.
- DLC** – Downloadable content. Usually takes the form of inexpensive or free add-ons to existing games.
- E3** – Electronic Entertainment Expo. A gaming convention held every year since 1995. It is one of the largest events in the gaming industry.
- first-party** – A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system.
- fighting** – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive.
- FPS** – First-Person Shooter. Describes games like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty. Also used to denote the phrase "frames per second," or how many animation frames happen in one second.
- 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.
- new play control** – If you haven't played it before, it's new to you!

- 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 Pac-Man.
- 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 Gears of War.
- 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.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazzard

STYLE 1-OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER D3 PUBLISHER
 DEVELOPER VICIOUS CYCLE > RELEASE MARCH 3 > ESRB T

IT EATS SOMETHING

A few timed button press events are scattered throughout the game, which are usually just an excuse to provide some hilarious slapstick

Humor covers a multitude of sins. As any comedy club owner knows, if you keep the crowd laughing they won't notice the watered down drinks. *Eat Lead* is aware of this phenomenon as well, as it comes out of the gate with a strong opening set and sprinkles in a good joke every time the audience gets restless. But the gameplay itself is as diluted as a happy hour special in an 18-and-over club.

Set in a fictional video game realm, players fill the shoes of Matt Hazzard, a washed up action hero who thinks his stupid catch phrase still holds some cachet. After a few years outside of the limelight Hazzard is making a comeback, but not everyone is fond of Hazzard or his extensive geography. A shadowy figure has hacked into the code in an attempt to kill our hero. This mysterious puppet-master works from behind the scenes, altering all of Hazzard's levels, creating a mishmash of crazy environments. For example, after Hazzard takes down a few cowboys, he makes his way through the swinging doors of an old west saloon only to emerge into the glitz and flash of slot machines as construction workers and white-clad soviet soldiers attack from all sides.

Eat Lead has no qualms about making fun of itself; it takes a virtual wrecking ball to the fourth wall and never lets you forget you're playing a game. Matt Hazzard has an extensive history in almost

every genre, and it all comes back to haunt him. He uses super soakers from his kid-friendly water gun title as deadly weapons, he drop kicks slowly moving zombies who rise from the grave of his single arcade outing, and he protects a William Shatner sound-alike wizard who teleports in from some odd fantasy adventure. Hazzard even spouts off wonderfully temble one-liners like "Don't lose your head...oh too late." Watching



Along the way Hazzard earns fire and ice powers that help him take out his competition



You may be laughing because this guy looks like a douche... but he's laughing because he just farted

what this game will do next is almost worth the price of admission.

Sadly, if you take off *Eat Lead's* charming veneer you wind up with nothing more than a sub-par, straightforward shooter. Each level is little more than a shooting gallery with enemies who head straight for you or sprint across the room before taking cover. The aim assist — if there is one — doesn't do its job, so you have to be dead on with all your shots. Your reticle also moves every time you peak out of cover, making it hard to keep a lock on your target.

To add ugly insult to injury, the game's animation looks sloppy, and it has the graphics to match. I'd like to think the game was made intentionally bad to complement the hokey story, but that's just a cop out. A clever story should never excuse weak gameplay. —BEN

> **Concept:** A by-the-numbers shooter that apes nearly every video game convention in the book

> **Graphics:** Bland and flat. I wish someone could hack into Vicious Cycle's art department and add some more detail

> **Sound:** The game uses a wide range of generic musical styles, making you wonder if Vicious Cycle used a stock soundtrack

> **Playability:** This would be an average shooter if I weren't for a few annoying technical issues

> **Entertainment:** You'll laugh when you see the opening scene, then cry after seeing the potential this title squanders

> **Replay Value:** Moderately low

Second Opinion 6.75

This biographical parody of fictional game star Matt Hazzard delivers big laughs...within the first few minutes. The opening sequence is a joke-a-second stroll down video game lane, poking fun at every blatant misuse of character right down to the licensed kart racer. Once this sequence concludes, Hazzard's laughs are mostly found through the spoken dialogue and achievement/trophy text. There's little to laugh at or applaud in the gameplay. The basic design of the firefights calls for a by-the-numbers classification, but I can't even award the game that when it struggles so mightily with hit recognition. The boss fights also fall flat, either due to repetitive gunplay or poorly animated sequences with simplistic timed button presses. I hate to say it, but the premise and setup are the best parts. For the remainder of the game I found myself tolerating bad gameplay just for the hope of another laugh. These laughs don't come frequently enough. —REINER

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** SWORDFISH STUDIOS.
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 24 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE 8

CREWED UP

So 50 Cent and G-Unit just finished a Mideast tour, waxing booties from Dubai to the United Arab Emirates. The only problem? A shady promoter had planned to pay the crew with a diamond-encrusted skull worth \$10 million, only to have some armed goons steal the goods. The only solution? 50 and his crew strap up and go on a rampage across a host of war-torn urban environments, blowing up everything in their path. A bit ridiculous? Sure, but I hardly expected a troubling mediation on social control and the writings of Ayn Rand.

With this silliness in the background, you can get down to the basics of the game — killing the living hell out of every enemy, helicopter, and Hummer that crosses your path. To its credit, the game gets most of the genre basics right. There's a good selection of weapons, some track shooting sequences for the sake of variety, and more carnage than you can shake an M4 at. The basic cover and aiming mechanics will be familiar to anyone who has played Gears of War, as

will the easy-to-use melee combat. The level designs aren't much more than shooting galleries, but the gameplay is consistently fun and engaging.

Single-player is fun, but the game really shines in the two-player co-op mode. Players can instantly jump in and out of a friend's saved game and join the fracas. Having a partner is a blessing, as the game's enemies frequently assault from all angles, often from protected positions high above or from armored gun turrets. While it's not exactly tactical combat, there's a distinct benefit from taking down foes from multiple attack routes. Even better, you have someone to laugh with when 50 drops a line like "T'mma destroy your whole m—g generation, m—!" The game also puts the Unreal engine to good use, displaying a host of gorgeous onscreen pyrotechnics.

50 Cent's first foray into video games (50 Cent: Bulletproof) was a hot mess of action clichés and poor control, so kudos to new developer Swordfish Studios for delivering a vastly

improved sequel. It's a thuggish, high production value exercise in excess — not unlike the music of the man that inspired it. —MATT

> **Concept:** A slightly ludicrous turn of events has 50 and the G-Unit shooting their way through the Mideast in search of a jeweled skull

> **Graphics:** Puts the Unreal engine to good use. The character models and copious explosions look great

> **Sound:** An awesome selection of G-Unit affiliated tracks both old and new. The voiceovers walk a thin line between loveably campy and totally laughable

> **Playability:** It does absolutely nothing new, but the controls are solid and responsive

> **Entertainment:** It's not a work of art, but it's a damn good time

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

Blood on the Sand's narrative is as absurd as a summer comedy. Thankfully, this shooter warrants about as much introspection as the last Judd Apatow production. As soon as 50 Cent leaves his latest Middle Eastern concert he runs into a Hummer full of gun-toting, profanity-spouting video game clichés. Fiddy breaks open crates to uncover fountains of collectible bling, shoots hidden targets to collect secret posters, punches dudes in the groin with timed button presses before sending them to the ground with a follow-up uppercut. This is the kind of action title you play because you want to shoot fools with rockets and watch them fly 10 feet into the air. It's fast, violent, and ridiculous. But, you know what? It's also fun. —BEN



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Wanted: Weapons of Fate

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE
> **DEVELOPER** GRIN/UNIVERSAL PICTURES DIGITAL PLATFORMS GROUP
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** M

A BULLET TO THE HEAD

Wanted: Weapons of Fate sidesteps the pitfall that sinks most licensed games. It doesn't recycle the narrative of the film it draws inspiration from, and it doesn't turn a memorable scene — such as Wesley Gibson's one-shot assassination from the roof of a moving train — into a fiction-breaking and unnecessarily long 200-body massacre through miles of Chicago's redline. Warner Bros. has positioned this game as a successor to the film — a sequel of the truest sense that doesn't retrace the same scenes.

The plot picks up right where the motion picture left off, exploring Gibson's positioning within the French quarter of the Fraternity. This fiction is fleshed out further through the eyes of Wesley's father, Cross, who players control for a few levels. This story hits on a number of its larger setups and successfully adds layers to the existing fiction, but it's pieced together in a disjointed way that is difficult to follow. Time that could have been used to better stitch together the narrative is dedicated to Wesley's twisted inner-dialogue, which is good for a laugh or two, but is mostly way over the top.

Grin successfully dodged one bullet that has been known to kill licensed games — one bullet in a hail of fire. The action is stunted to the film's framework, relying almost exclusively on the ability to curve bullets. This power is abused to its fullest, and why

wouldn't it be? Foes are helpless against its implausible power. Coiling a shot's trajectory takes time and patience, but the pay off is well worth the effort. Periodically, a slow-motion kill cam accompanies a curved shot. Now, I know what you're saying, "slow-motion techniques are as old as the pixel." True, but I doubt you'll find one as cool as Weapon of Fate's stylistic approach.

The game never rises above the curving bullets mechanic. The action flatlines early on, and runs into a repetitive cycle. The other abilities, such as the advanced quick movement, fall flat in functionality and lack excitement. The remainder of the game stands on weak legs, such as a sluggish targeting system, wobbly movement for both characters, and sequences that give turret and sniper shooting a bad name. Did I mention that you only wield two firearms for most of the game?

Your fodder suffers a similar fate, growing as dull as a slab of meat hanging in a freezer. Roughly 90 percent of your foes are identical in design. The other enemy types, such as the distinguished man in a three-piece suit, bring nothing but frustration, as they require more bullets to drop. Boss fights fully embrace the idea of repeating tactics. The good news is that the game, as dull as it gets, doesn't last for more than five hours. It's quick and dirty. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 6.25

> **Concept:** A sequel to the feature film that expands upon the mythology, but regurgitates the action

> **Graphics:** Beautiful lighting and texture work, but what's with all the enemies wearing hoodies? Did TJ Maxx have a clearance sale?

> **Sound:** The voice work brings emotion to the story sequences, and the pounding beats go nicely with the action

> **Playability:** The curving bullets gimmick isn't enough to lift a game that limps along with repetitive firefights and subpar gunplay

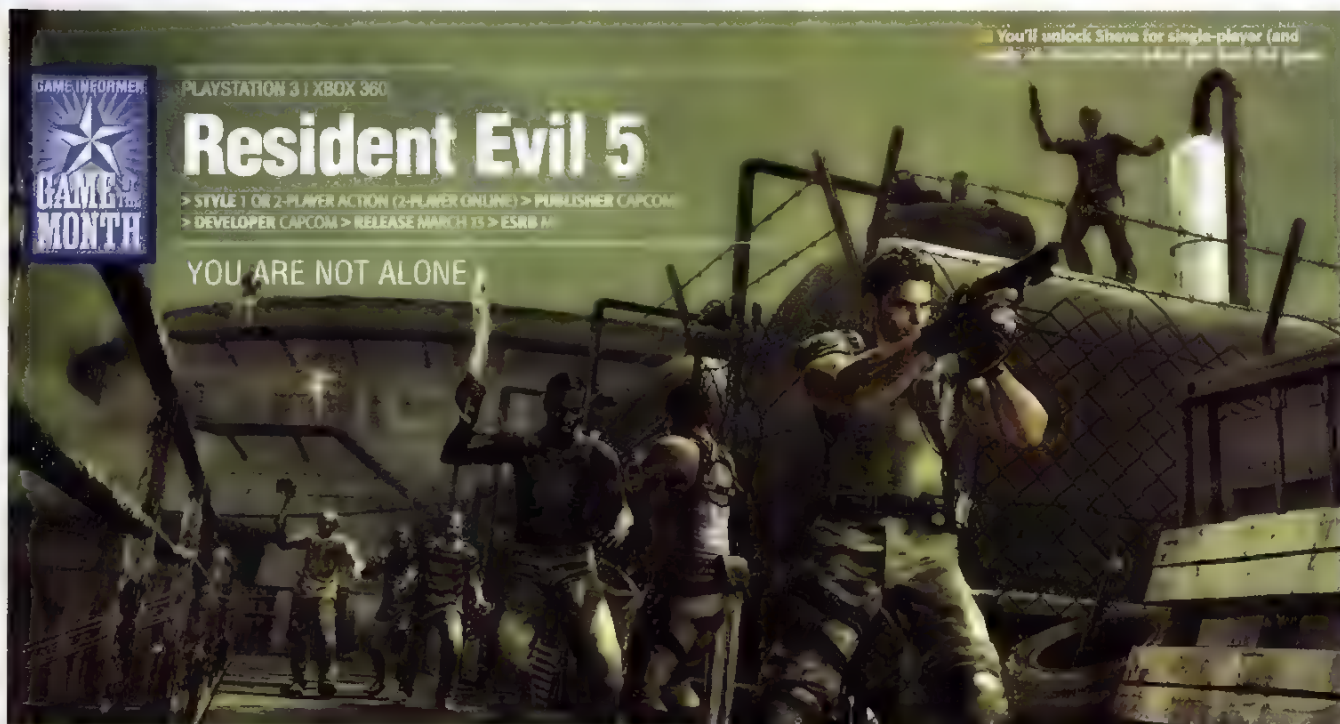
> **Entertainment:** Stay for the story, leave for the action

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 6

With its *The Matrix* meets *Fight Club* presentation, assassin's narrative, and badass curving bullet technology, *Wanted* is ripe for a video game translation. Unfortunately, *Weapons of Fate* plays like it was created using the Token Action Game design template. The gameplay is marred with many common mistakes, such as staid level designs, laughable enemy AI that sticks to the strength-in-numbers theory, and constant gameplay interruptions for unnecessary cutscenes. A slow aiming mechanic plagues the simplistic cover-and-shoot gameplay, it even feels sluggish after jacking the sensitivity to the max. Exiting cover is a sloppy affair, and aiming from cover completely breaks down when enemies are nearby. The bullet curve mechanics and the stylish camera pan that follows the flight paths are ingenious, but the unreliable control scheme makes using it a hit and miss affair. Fans of the comic and film surely wanted better. —BERTZ





GAME INFORMER
GAME OF THE MONTH

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Resident Evil 5

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

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

You'll unlock Sheva for single-player (and

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Resident Evil once again earns its place as the king of survival horror

> **Graphics:** The writhing abominations and gory details are among the best (and most disturbing) in gaming to date

> **Sound:** Creepy music and sound effects establish an ominous atmosphere, and solid voice acting makes the characters come alive

> **Playability:** The series continues to evolve, especially with respect to co-op and inventory management. Legacy mechanics still cause occasional problems, though

> **Entertainment:** Alone or with a friend, RE 5 is an intense and action-packed experience that you simply need to play

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.5

Cooperating to reach a common objective is fun, and Resident Evil 5 is built to prove the point. In a move that could irk some long-time fans of the franchise, this latest installment eschews the big scares and isolated terror of most of the earlier games in favor of constant action and a nearly pitch-perfect approach to playing as a pair. You'll save your partner from the ravenous beasts that tackle them, furiously cover them with your machine gun as they make a run for the door-opening lever, and hold the lantern aloft as they delve through the pitch darkness of an abandoned cave. If you can't find someone to play with, the strong AI partner is still helpful. Resident Evil 5 closes the book on most of the lingering questions of the long-running series, even if the storytelling too often gets lost in the midst of motorcycle-riding zombies and exploding tentacle monsters. A new (and better) control scheme, faster pace, and nearly super-heroic characters move the game away from its survival/horror roots. As an action game, it excels.—MILLER

Isolation is a powerful tool for instilling fear. Staring down an overwhelming horde of supernatural foes with only a handgun at your side isn't enough; true terror dawns when you realize you are alone, and no one is coming to save you. Until recently, if you had told me that it was possible for Resident Evil to harness dread and desperation by giving players a competent ally who can bail them out of trouble, I would have rolled my eyes in thinly disguised disbelief. Now I've played Resident Evil 5, and I believe.

The latest entry in Capcom's zombie-infested juggernaut pairs special agent Chris Redfield with Sheva Alomar, allowing you to play co-op through the entire game. If you think having a buddy in the field diminishes the stakes, think again; working with your partner explores new avenues of fear and intensifies every encounter. It was terrifying to see a chainsaw-wielding, burly-freak bearing down on you, but wait until you see it happening to your partner only feet away. You'll watch through a sniper scope as an infected mob surrounds your friend, and frantically lob grenades at hulking abominations to buy time for your partner to line up a clear shot. The presence of another player transforms Resident Evil's signature style of combat into a harrowing mixture of tactics, cooperation, and survival—all while retaining the same carefully crafted atmosphere of looming horror and anything-can-happen thrills. If you aren't playing Resident Evil 5 with another person, you're really missing out—not only on the best this title offers, but also on one of the best multiplayer modes in gaming period.

Even if playing co-op isn't an option for you, the inventive gameplay and heart-stopping action still put Resident Evil 5 ahead of the competition. The pacing is nothing short of brilliant, with pockets of desperate combat and surprise encounters separated by almost enough time to catch your breath. One moment, you're slinking through dark and abandoned mining tunnels, and the next you're in a full-blown firefight with tentacle-head zombies and dynamite flying from all directions. Great set-piece sequences, explosive boss fights, and run-ins with familiar foes are liberally placed from beginning to end. Things sometimes go a bit far afield; zombies wielding machine guns and taking cover behind crates make the later levels feel more like a shooter than survival horror, but the gameplay is so tight that the genre distinction is irrelevant.

It doesn't even matter if you aren't a diehard Resident Evil fan. The story bears the heavy burden of the series' extensive lore, and newcomers (or even just RE 4 fans) will be totally perplexed by the convoluted connections between characters and events. Thankfully, the gameplay is much more of a draw than the narrative; once you start playing, you won't want to stop. The game leads you from one jaw-dropping moment to the next with remarkable ease.

If you opt for a single-player run-through of these events, the computer-controlled Sheva is surprisingly competent (though she has an inordinate affection for her handgun even when better weapons are available). Unlike many games with AI companions, the action never degenerates into



Yes, zombies with chainsaws are still terrifying



An improved inventory system makes weapon-switching and item management a breeze

an escort mission. Sheva can take care of herself, but she is generally unobtrusive and only occasionally helpful. This lends the single-player experience more of a Resident Evil 4 flavor, which delivers a different—but still mesmerizing—brand of white-knuckle gameplay.

While retaining much of the spirit of the previous entry, Resident Evil 5 is unquestionably an evolution. A revamped inventory system keeps you in the moment by eliminating the heavy item-management requirements, and the control scheme ditches most of the archaic holdover mechanics from the series' past. However, games like Dead Space have proven that moving while aiming does not kill the mood in a horror game; at this point, rooting Chris and Sheva in place while firing seems more like a cheap and artificial way to increase difficulty than a technique to enhance tension.

Resident Evil 4 was among the best games of the last generation, setting unprecedented expectations for the next entry in the series. Resident Evil 5 succeeds in staying close to what gamers loved about the last title, but it also takes risks that pay off in unexpected ways. Co-op changes your approach to survival horror, and the masterful pacing ensures you never take your eye off the action. Like its predecessor, Resident Evil 5 is destined to be remembered as one of the best games of its time.—JOE



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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

H.A.W.X.

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER UBISOFT ROMANIA > RELEASE MARCH 3 > ESRB T

H.A.W.X. (RAW)

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

- > **Concept:** Cruise the skies in the best flight combat game of this generation
- > **Graphics:** Integration of satellite imagery with detailed plane models combine to great effect
- > **Sound:** Strong, consistent voice work is on par with any other Tom Clancy game
- > **Playability:** Clear explanations and reactive controls make what might otherwise be a challenging learning curve a steady and comfortable climb into skill
- > **Entertainment:** A great flight game, both for fans of the genre and new players looking for a different kind of action
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

The Blue Angels are some of the premier aera acrobats in the world. Their death-defying sky ballets have been awing crowds of thousands since 1946. They are amazing, highly skilled pilots, but they've got nothing on me. With a racer's style, I swing the overstuffed caboose of my F-22 in a 180 degree arc, forcing my engines to stall and causing my plane to sink. My opponent's missiles pass overhead, missing me by feet. In a matter of moments I'm off again like a rocket, emerging behind the enemy bird with missiles locked. The Blue Angels can have their country fairs, I'm taking care of business. H.A.W.X.'s Assistance Off mode gives you heretofore unseen control over your aircraft, turning an otherwise solid flight sim into a visually thrilling experience. It doesn't hurt that H.A.W.X.'s controls are tight, its four-player co-op is a blast, or its visuals pop with life. Like many flight games, the story is pretty ignorable, but H.A.W.X.'s multiplayer will keep you leveling up to unlock new secrets: even after you've grown tired of whipping your plane across the sky in Assistance Off mode. If that's even possible. —BEN

There's no denying the debt that H.A.W.X. owes to the excellent Ace Combat series, upon which its core gameplay and design ideas are based. In particular, the fundamental idea of looking like a combat flight simulation while playing like an arcade game remains intact. At the same time, Ubisoft Romania has gone far beyond crafting a copy, adding in plenty of innovative ideas, fun game modes, and an integration with the wider Clancy mythology that gives weight and depth to the experience.

The near-future setting tells the story of a squad of ace pilots who join up with a private military contractor after completing illustrious careers in the U.S. Air Force. As anyone who follows today's zeitgeist can guess, the insanely powerful PMC turns out to have some sinister motivations, and lo, we've got ourselves a plot. It makes for some epic conflicts over Tokyo, Washington D.C., and Rio de Janeiro, all of which are displayed in glorious, breathtaking detail thanks to extensive satellite imagery data. Thankfully, the planes, weapon effects, and HUD show an equal level of polish.

The flight combat rises to the challenge presented by its visuals through well-balanced and varied missions. As you switch between desperate dogfights

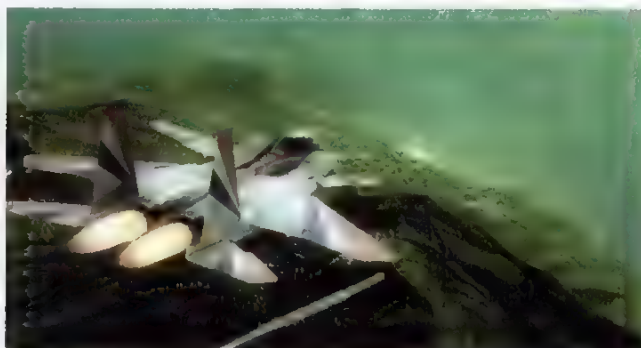
and furious bombing runs, you have the option to do it all with up to three friends. A thrilling two-to-four-player cooperative mode turns the air fights into titanic affairs, since more enemies show up for every player in the game. There's an exhilarating high to be found in covering a buddy's bombing run with a blast of missile fire, or calling out that you've got the MiG squadron at 8 o'clock as your wingman zooms off to tackle the tank squadron rolling in at 2.

The game also innovates through its Assistance Off mode, which delivers big thrills despite its dreary nomenclature. By double tapping one of the triggers, players disable the safety locks on their plane, sacrificing a degree of control for increased mobility

and evasion. The camera pans back to a wide third-person angle, and suddenly it feels like you're drift racing a jet plane, as you veer wildly through the skies to zero in on targets, while warding off stalls that could send you spinning into a nearby mountain.

Like some of the recent Clancy games, H.A.W.X. also offers a leveling mechanic, based on both in-mission kills and larger challenges that are completed over time, such as perfecting the use of a particular missile type. As you level and unlock new jets and weapon load outs, you can use those unlocks in either the campaign or in the eight-person competitive dogfights. Along with multiple difficulty settings, there's plenty of reason to continue ranking your pilot, since every game mode contributes to your growth.

So much about the game is well done, it's easy to not notice that almost everything is a little too scripted. It'd be nice to see a little more creativity and adaptability in the enemy AI, but it's a small complaint when stacked against the impressive feature set of the wider game. H.A.W.X. is the best flight game so far this generation, and a worthy addition to the best in the Clancy stable. —MILLER



■ Controls and HUD management are more straightforward than you might expect



■ Single-player uses checkpoints, but cooperative play utilizes a basic respawn system



XBOX 360 | Wii

Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** D3
> **DEVELOPER** TAMSOFT > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10 > **ESRB** M

YES, BUT TELL US WHAT YOU REALLY THINK

It's hard to know which is more laughable: Onechanbara's story of sisters who absorb zombie blood through their skin or the fact that this game is so shallow. I'd tell you more of the story involving zombie killers Aya and Saki and their need to stay as lightly clothed as possible, but I have a feeling you simply wouldn't believe me.

Onechanbara's gameplay, on the other hand, is easy to describe. Its brutally repetitive combat system only registers a few combos, and is augmented by a basic item inventory and an attribute system for power and health. The supposed bonus for killing a horde of zombies is the Rage mode, which lets you move faster and adds more power to your swing. Unfortunately, it depletes your health, which is only regained by using one of your gems. That's a reward?

Being simple isn't this game's only sin. The levels are little more than mini-arenas designed to spawn more zombies, and even for these small zones the loading is frequent and annoying. Onechanbara only gets worse the more it tries to do — whether that's the strained gunplay of third-playable character Anna or the unwieldy motorbike segments.

It's not surprising that a game that foists this kind of repetitious gameplay also thinks schoolgirl fantasies and tramp stamps are sexy. If only this kind of Japanese pap could be prevented from hitting our shores with a bigger, deeper ocean. —**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Scantly clad sisters soak up spewing zombie blood through their bare flesh

> **Graphics:** The graphics are sharp, but it suffers from small, barren environments and frequent loading

> **Sound:** Keeping the native Japanese voice acting is surely better than any attempt they could have made at Westernizing this title

> **Playability:** Having to wipe the blood off your blade isn't a substitute for gameplay depth

> **Entertainment:** Even though this game appeals to the basest of desires — sex and violence — it hits a different primordial nerve: anger

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 5.5

Regardless of how much you love the low-budget aesthetics of the typical "so-bad-it's-good" experience, you should not play Onechanbara. Despite a hilariously campy premise, truckloads of blood, and co-op gameplay, Onechanbara never pulls it together. Simplistic and silly gameplay offers some fleeting entertainment, but none of the mechanics cooperate long enough to let you enjoy the mindless, zombie-slaying swordplay and immodest heroines. Playing around with the dress-up mode — which is probably a big plus for the pervert crowd — just left me feeling skeezy and gross. Even I can't recommend this B-movie pretender, and I've put dozens of hours into Earth Defense Force 2017. —**JOE**

MULTI QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION OR PUZZLE, AND 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 8

This nearly perfect translation of some of the greatest classics of the Genesis era — including

all of the 16-bit entries in the Streets of Rage, Phantasy Star, and Golden Axe series — is an essential item for any Sega fan. Each title has updated graphics to fit high-definition and wide screen televisions. While some of the games don't hold up as well as you might hope, this is your best chance to dive back into everything from Ecco the Dolphin to Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine. The lack of online play is a shame, but the list of titles included here is a true all-star lineup from the Genesis era. —**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

X-Blades

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** SOUTHPeAK GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** GAJIN ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE 5.5

Ayumi is a sassy treasure hunter who prefers to explore by herself. Nobody holds her back,

and she doesn't have to split any loot. After playing through X-Blades, I'm confident that most players would be well served leaving her alone, too. It's a shame, since there should be plenty to love. Unfortunately, the good parts like the unlockable skills are obscured by generic enemy designs, monotonous combat and the most tedious boss battles I've seen. Enemies — and their annoying spawn pods — take way too long to kill unless you pause the action and remap the controls for the nth time, making combat more of a chore than a thrill. Worst of all, before the end credits roll, you have to trudge through the same uninspired levels twice. —**JEFF**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

Major League Baseball 2K9

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



BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Easy pitching has sucked the life and challenge out of this year's game

> **Graphics:** Animation hiccups abound, but player models details are still top notch

> **Sound:** The play-by-play calls are right on the money

> **Playability:** The pitching and batting mechanics have been simplified too much

> **Entertainment:** People that didn't like last year's game might enjoy this one

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7

2K treads water this year, but the product on the field is still solid. The pitcher/batter duel is outstanding as usual, though the revamped pitching interface gives far too little feedback. Visual Concepts reworked the front-end for this year's game, and it's definitely improved, but the underlying content is still lacking with a bare-bones franchise mode and nothing to compete with Sony's excellent Road to the Show. Legacy issues abound, with fielding suffering from locked-in animations and awkward transitions that result in multiple realism-breaking plays in each game, brain dead general manager AI in franchise mode, and a terrible in-game menu structure. 2K is still the go-to series for pick-up-and-play baseball simulation, but it's lagging behind the competition in every other area. —**ADAM**

TIME TO FAKE A HAMSTRING INJURY

Will someone please slip Major League Baseball 2K9 a syringe full of steroids and a tub of Barry Bonds' mysterious cream? Within a span of a year, this series has gone from a viable contender to an underperforming worrywart.

In a bid to make this year's game more accessible, 2K Sports makes concessions all across the diamond, often with disastrous results. The pitching mechanic was hit the hardest. The default system is now a simplified two-step process, requiring players to master the art of "hold and gesture." This system is so simple that a blind ape could master it. Heck, Carlos Silva could! Veterans of last year's game can jump into the options to bring back the release point functionality, but it doesn't work as well as it did last year. Gestures are not shown and the ball icon is the size of a softball, which makes it difficult to determine if you are painting the corners or not. For whatever reason, 2K thought it would be cool to have every pitch conclude immediately with a firework-like explosion of color. Green! Red! Blue!!! What in the world happened to this game?

The analog batting system is also simplified to a state where a coma victim with a periodic twitch could likely get good wood on a ball. The only area of this game that is dramatically improved is the fielding. The new pulled out view helps in reading the ball off of the bat, and the framerate is silky smooth. Transition animations for fielders and base runners are still lacking, and the game's taste for the dramatics still needs to be dialed down. Fielders always seem to have ESPN's Top 10 plays of the day on the mind, even on routine plays.

If you are connected online, 2K promises living rosters that will be updated as soon as trades are made. As trivial as this may be, it is the only standout menu item. Franchise mode offers new menus, 30-player support, and enhanced CPU logic, but little in terms of new content. For the collectors, baseball cards are easier to earn this year. This is great since you won't want to spend much time with the gameplay anyways.

I was hoping that 2K would build on last year's foundation. Instead, the foundation has been altered to be more appealing to the masses. That's difficult logic to argue with, but 2K's approach is way off the mark. —**REINER**

THE Wii DIFFERENCE

6.75

Inferior play mechanics and a shoddy framerate limit the appeal of this year's Wii version, despite the nearly complete feature set and satisfying batting mechanic.

The Edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The Wii version is notable for using motion-sensing on both the nunchuk and remote, although the attacks you generate aren't that sophisticated. The game's areas are also slightly bigger and require less loading on the Wii.



BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

- > **Concept:** Improve the weak Crystal Chronicles series and allow four-player gauntlet-style co-op across both the DS and the Wii
- > **Graphics:** Depends on which system you're using on DS it looks good, on Wii it's almost passable
- > **Sound:** The voice work and music are generic, but they get the job done
- > **Playability:** The controls have been smoothed over from the last entry, but the game generally handles itself better on the Wii
- > **Entertainment:** A fun dungeon crawl, but as usual it's made more entertaining when you include your friends
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate

WII | NINTENDO DS

Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
 > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E10+

TIME TESTED

Final Fantasy has always taken us into fantastical otherworldly realms. With beauty and craft the series has never been afraid to explore uncharted territory. The brave new world where Echoes of Time takes us is one of complete system interactivity — a magical place where Wii's and DSes play the same game, where handheld owners can adventure together with those sitting at home in the comfort of their home theater.

This exciting system-linking multiplayer technology works flawlessly, with no need for Wi-Fi and no frustrating friend codes. Yeah, it has all that if you want it, but the basic power and play co-op is surprisingly easy to use. Play solo and the game lets you form a team of AI allies who are still fairly useful.

You start the game on the morning of your coming-of-age ceremony, just as one of your childhood friends is struck down with a mysterious disease called Crystal Sickness. Oddly enough, you're the only person in town who's capable of leaving, so you set off from your hermit village in search of a cure. Along the way you'll start running errands for a librarian with a strange German accent whose motives remain mysterious. The narrative earns a passing grade thanks only to Square's superb localization. Its

ability to write amusing dialogue amid mundane situations adds a tinge of invention to the otherwise banal story.

This gameplay follows in the footsteps of last year's Ring of Fates, but with a few important enhancements. Spells are now a learned skill, and replenishing your MP is quick and easy, so you no longer have to worry about your magic well drying up. On top of that, you can combine spells, laying one on top of another, creating a double threat for any monster vulnerable to both ice and lightning. The combat is less sloppy this time around, and while the action is still simplistic, there are some entertaining puzzles scattered across the game's varied locales.

Crystal Chronicles has a history of imperfection, and Echoes of Time continues that tradition with a few technical annoyances. On both systems, there is only one save slot, and no way to pause the game even when you're playing by yourself. It also would have been nice to adjust the fixed camera, which makes platforming a chore. The game was clearly developed for the lowest common denominator, which is a shame, because, while the graphics look fine on a handheld, they'll make you wince on a big screen. It may be far from perfect, but Echoes of Time's amusing gameplay and groundbreaking multiplayer make this the most noteworthy Crystal Chronicles title to date. —**BEN**



■ In single-player you can recruit AI allies and program them with different routines to suit your attack style



■ ... but the Wii has to spread both of those screens across your TV. You can choose to enlarge one over the other, but you can't have only one up at a time. You'll be stuck with this goofy layout through the whole game

Second Opinion 8

I hereby award Square Enix the Nobel Prize* for its scientific breakthrough in video game connectivity. For the first time, Wii and DS players can quest together in the same world. The only noticeable limitation is the Wii version's playfield only takes up 50 percent of the TV screen. With this constraint in place, the interaction between the two versions works amazingly well. An intelligently designed text system makes communication easy, but strategizing is a different story, as bosses will beat the mana out of you if you attempt to rally the troops through a message. The quests thrown at you are amusing, largely because the environments you enter are teeming with challenging fights and teamwork-infused puzzles. Spell casting is handled cleanly, but frustration rears its head through the unresponsive swordplay. That's not to say it's bad, however. You have a wide arsenal of attacks to play with, and the depth of weapon customization opens up a world of satisfying experimentation. The jump mechanic is also hard to manipulate, but thankfully, there isn't much penalty for falling off of cliffs. If you enjoy loot fests and cooperative play, don't hesitate in giving this whimsical adventure a whirl. It offers plenty of replay and, just as many thrills. —**REINER**

(*Reiner is not authorized to hand out any Nobel Prizes, even fictional ones)

The Edge
 When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **Concept:** Take the reigns of a biker gang and wreak havoc on Liberty City

> **Graphics:** Rockstar used the extra time to cut down on pop-up

> **Sound:** New rock and rap tunes, including guest L.C.H.C DJ Max Cavalaria from Sepultura

> **Playability:** The solid controls from GTA IV carry over in excellent fashion

> **Entertainment:** A must for Grand Theft Auto fans

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **9**

Life in Liberty City hasn't changed. Most hot dog vendors end up as shoot-out casualties, helicopters spend more time in the river than they do in the air, and you can't travel too far without hearing a familiar Eastern European accent. You may know the lay of Liberty City better than your hometown, but when this thriving metropolis is viewed through the eyes of biker Johnny Klebitz, it feels new again. In *The Lost and Damned*, Rockstar shows us a fresh perspective: it's all it needs to create a profoundly different gaming experience. The big difference between Niko and Klebitz is that Niko preferred the Rambo approach, whereas Klebitz almost always has a gang at his side. You ride in formation with them (which is a surprisingly powerful way to travel), you rely on them in gunfights (which now feel more like small wars), and will even decide if an ill-behaving member should stay or leave in a body bag. The new bike controls are beautifully sewn into the mix, and I love how Klebitz's arsenal gets more powerful as the game moves along. Rockstar also did a great job of tapping the biker theme for fresh missions and killer new multiplayer modes. Klebitz's story isn't as fleshed out as Niko's, but is still a well-written riot. This expansion is every bit as good as *GTA IV*, and should be a priority for every self-respecting gamer. —REINER



XBOX 360

Grand Theft Auto IV: The Lost and Damned

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) ► **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES ► **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH ► **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 17 ► **ESRB** M

ROARING INTO HELL

Hunter S. Thompson, the famed gonzo journalist who rode alongside the Hell's Angels during its rise to infamy, once said, "in a closed society where everybody's guilty, the only crime is getting caught. In a world of thieves, the only final sin is stupidity." This is the rule that Johnny Klebitz, vice president of The Lost biker gang's Alderney chapter, tries to live by. The only problem is his girlfriend is a meth-head who constantly puts him in compromising situations, some of the guys he rides with couldn't spell Lost if it wasn't stitched on the back of their leather jackets, and the drugged out leader he takes orders from is hell-bent on drawing heat with a very public war on a rival bike gang. Being surrounded by this much stupidity doesn't help keep you from getting caught.

Grand Theft Auto: The Lost and Damned throws out the "American Dream gone awry" theme of Niko Bellic's tale for a much darker look at a fading chapter of the nation's crime lore. Once heralded as the biggest threat to American society outside of communism, the dwindling leather-clad biker gangs now settle for small headlines and even smaller scores. For Johnny, the strength of The Lost is brotherhood — an unbreakable bond where you stick up for and take care of one another down to your dying breath. This oath becomes increasingly difficult

to uphold as those around Johnny continually test his allegiances.

The brotherhood theme shines through most brightly in the new biker crew system. Unlike Niko, Johnny is seldom left on his own. Lost your ride and need a chopper? Call Clay, he'll drop off a new one. Need some new weapons and ammo? Meet Terry by his van and he'll sell to you at a discount, including explosive new weapons like the grenade launcher and pipe bombs. Even during missions, Johnny can recruit bikers to aid him in criminal exploits. Make the call for backup and within minutes your gang of badass bikers on choppers will take up formation behind you on the highway. These goons may not be sharp shooters, but those who survive gunfights become hardened soldiers with much larger health bars. Rockstar missed a great opportunity to give the players more control over their gang — changing their weapon load-outs and battle strategy would have greatly aided the fights — but having more guns at your side helps regardless.

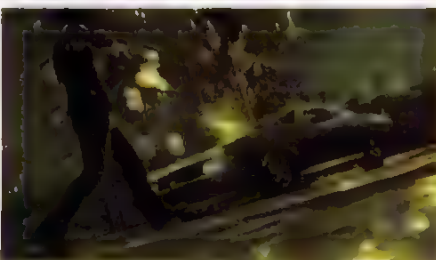
The gang fellowship is also on display throughout Liberty City. The boroughs are littered with optional territory missions and road-rash style biker races that allow you to club competitors with a baseball bat. The Lost headquarters in Alderney is always

filled with jovial bikers participating in arm wrestling, hi-lo card games, and memonams for their fallen comrades. Johnny can join his brethren for any of these activities, but these minigames are more of a pleasant distraction than a destination.

Though *The Lost and Damned* is a standalone experience, fans of *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s story will appreciate the occasional nods to Niko's exploits. During his missions, Johnny comes across many familiar faces, including Elizabetha Torres, Ray Boccino, Roman, and Niko himself. Viewing the characters from a different angle gives new insight to their personalities and motivations. The missions themselves are by-the-book GTA fare — steal some vehicles, shoot some baddies, score some scratch — but an intense motorcycle police chase after a drug deal gone bad and a prison break of a different nature stand out as highlight moments.

The expansion also features five new multiplayer modes centered on the motorcycle experience—including a gimmicky Chopper vs. Chopper mode where a player in an unwieldy helicopter must hunt down a motorcyclist, an entertaining road-rash style Biker Races, and co-op missions that allow you to roll with a few other friends to earn your chapter some money. The standout mode is Witness Protection, where a biker gang must overrun a convoy of cop cars protecting a bus full of witnesses about to turn state's.

The Lost and Damned makes me feel bad for PlayStation 3 owners everywhere. Gamers on the GTA hate train won't find anything to change their minds here, but series fans shouldn't miss this incredibly deep expansion pack. —BERTZ



Wii

MadWorld

> STYLE 1 OR 2 PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER PLATINUM GAMES > RELEASE MARCH 10 > ESRB M

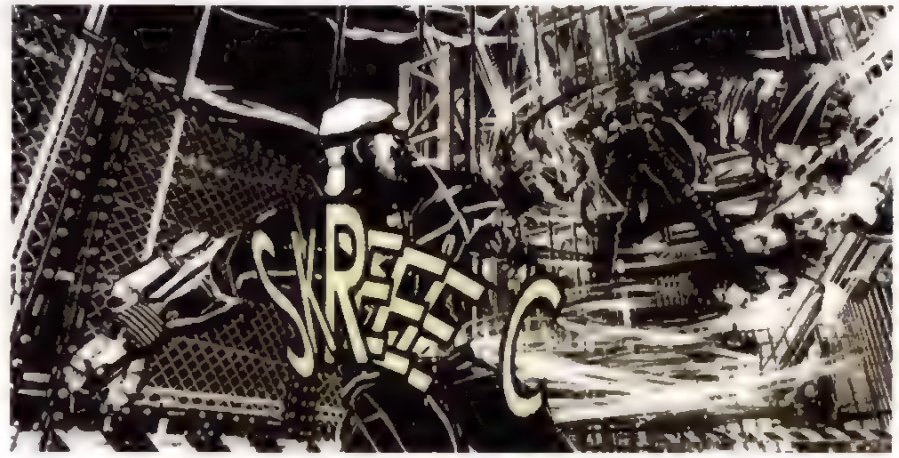
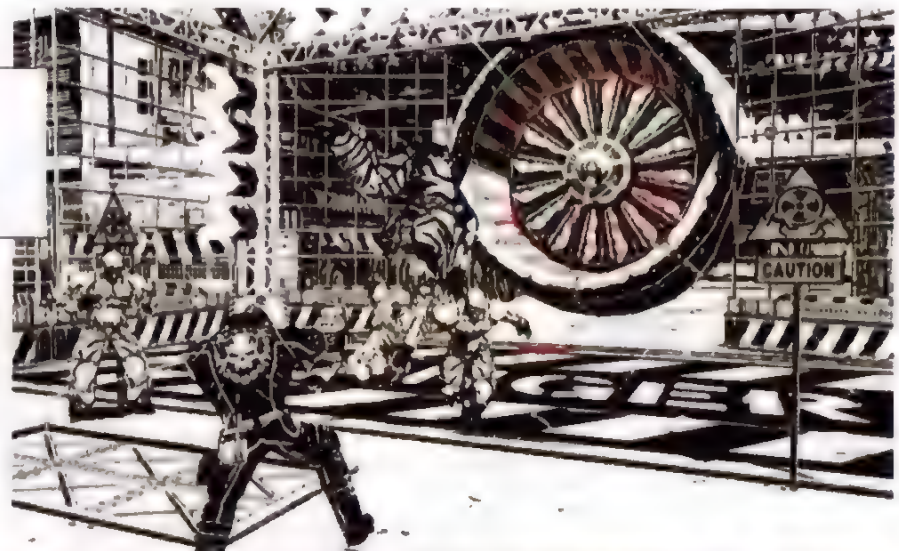
LET THE GAMES BEGIN

An Olympic-sized pool cannot contain the amount of blood spilled in MadWorld, a game that earns the right to be called the most violent ever made. It throws gratuitous violence into a meat grinder, telling players that murder with a chainsaw is fine and dandy for an amateur – to become a talented executioner, you'll have to lash out creatively, prolonging your victim's death through multiple phases of pain.

MadWorld runs the gamut in violence, taking an encyclopedic approach to its variety in kills. Some of the bloodletting will make you squirm uncomfortably. Do we really need to learn how many times a person can be impaled on the same spike before drawing a last breath? Can a chainsaw cut through bone that quickly? While these moments recall memories of *Manhunt*, other deaths fall more into the *Itchy & Scratchy* universe of absurdity. Place a victim on a catapult, and they'll launch to the moon. Why play golf with tiny white balls, when you can use a human skull instead? This variety in tone leads to a grandly sinister experience that keeps you guessing what's coming next.

In many ways, MadWorld can be viewed as a spiritual successor to Midway's classic arcade game, *Smash TV*. Your avatar, Jack, is a contestant in a game show that is televised across the world. The game is simple: kill for the right to live longer. Jack enters the game at the lowly rank of 256. His mission is to kill his way up to the top seed.

Climbing the ranks isn't as simple as killing everyone you see. To earn the right to challenge



a ranked opponent, Jack must first earn points by mowing down human fodder. Sure, a chainsaw strike can make a hell of a mess, but it doesn't offer much when it comes to points. Like many games, MadWorld embraces the concept of combos, only in a much more sadistic way. Before you toss someone into a burning trash can or kick them into a jet's afterburners, why not give them a little bling bling – like a trumpet jammed into their skull?

If you play this game the way you should – by slaughtering

victims in the most foul of ways – it ends up being a non-stop highlight reel. The ranked boss battles are especially entertaining – think *Mortal Kombat Fatalities* with the budget of a *Star Wars* movie.

All of the accelerometer-based shaking and slashing works without a hitch, but the enemy lock-on system is an uncooperative mess, and the grab mechanic, which is used for almost every action, is unreliable, often making the simple action of picking up a club seem like you are attempting it blindfolded with oven mitts on.

If you have a stomach for gore and extreme violence, MadWorld is video game popcorn. It pops and sizzles in ways you wouldn't expect, and ends up being a unique treat. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Everyone must bleed. This game turns the most gut-wrenching kills into modest routines.

> **Graphics:** A black and white comic book soaked in blood red.

> **Sound:** The announcers add hilarious color to each massacre. Beneath their rambling, the game offers a long-winded but original hip-hop score.

> **Playability:** The camera coupled with a wayward grasp mechanic makes for some frustrating moments, but the top-notch motion-based functionality is the driving force behind this bloody show.

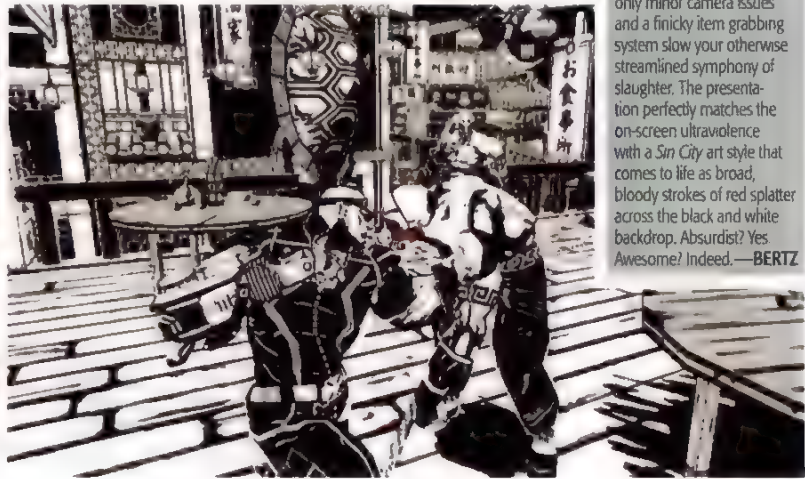
> **Entertainment:** Roughly six to seven hours of manic mayhem, plus the ability to replay Blood Bath challenges with a friend.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion

MadWorld is a playful, absurdist celebration of the playful, absurdist celebration of violence in video games. The violence is your playground, as long as your idea of play involves outlandish bloodletting and dismemberment. Each game environment contains creative new hazards to aid the dispatching of your enemies, whether it be impaling them on spikes, churning them through turbine engines, or slinging sign posts through their skulls.

Your enemies are a greatest hits collection of adolescent fantasy mainstays including samurai, ninjas, punks, aliens, robots, zombies, werewolves, and vampires. This band of fantastical misfits are jammed into a paper-thin plot that finds the protagonist, simply named Jack, participating in a brutal *Running Man*-style competition broadcast to the masses for their sadistic pleasure, running commentary and all. Platinum Games' fantastical combat works well on the nunchuk and remote; only minor camera issues and a finicky item grabbing system slow your otherwise streamlined symphony of slaughter. The presentation perfectly matches the on-screen ultraviolence with a *Sin City* art style that comes to life as broad, bloody strokes of red splatter across the black and white backdrop. Absurdist? Yes. Awesome? Indeed. —BERTZ

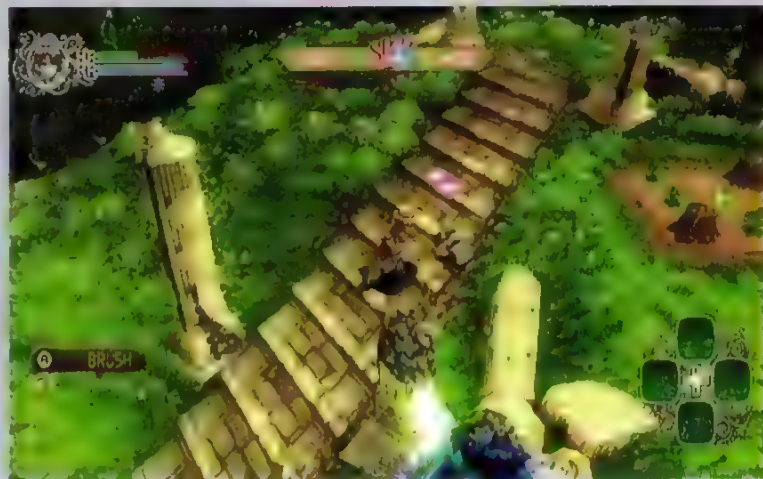




Wii

Rune Factory: Frontier

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT USA/XSEED
> **DEVELOPER** MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MARCH 17 > **ESRB** E10+



FIGHT, HEAL, FARM

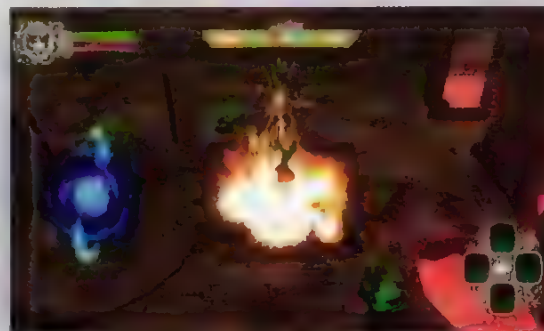
Like the Harvest Moon games before it, the Rune Factory series somehow manages to squeeze entertainment out of what would be considered tedious drudgery in real life. Unlike the farm-focused gameplay of its older brother, Rune Factory: Frontier adds light RPG elements to, well, much of the same farm-focused gameplay.

If you've had trouble in the past balancing your virtual chores against your make-believe social calendar, you might want to purchase a day planner before proceeding. In addition to keeping your crops (and wallet) healthy and charming the townsfolk, you'll also need to spend hours exploring dungeons, forging items, and leveling up your skills. After a few days of trying to do it all, I nearly gave up on socializing entirely, settling instead on a routine of watering plants to the point of exhaustion, taking a rejuvenating bath at the spa, and getting grimy in battle until I

nearly collapsed. There's only so much you can do in a day, real or not, and wasting time repeating the same dialogue with the same neighbors in the hopes of eking out a new story branch didn't seem like the best use of my time.

The game's pacing is slower than slow, with a few fun diversions sprinkled in between long stretches of sameness. That said, toiling in pretend fields all day is relaxing and oddly rewarding. If only the same could be said for the dungeons. Combat is too simple to remain interesting, and the grind is unbearable at times. It's a shame, since those combat and RPG elements are supposed to set the game apart.

Even when it fails, though, Rune Factory: Frontier is packed with so many other activities that there's always more than enough to do. Just don't be surprised if you eventually stop sweating invading monsters in favor of watering your turnips.—**JEFF**



Wii

New Play Control Mario Power Tennis

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** CAMELOT SOFTWARE PLANNING > **RELEASE** MARCH 9 > **ESRB** E

THE ART OF REPACKAGING

I'm a little tom. On the one hand, I want to tip Nintendo for doing a cheap and easy cash-in title — this game is nothing more than a slightly enhanced port of the old GameCube title with motion controls. On the other hand, the Wii is drowning in poorly made "casual" titles that provide neither the depth of an actual game nor the family fun promised on the back of the box. While it's disappointing that this is a reread and not a proper new Mario Tennis title, Nintendo knows how to craft a quality game.

I've always been a fan of the Mario Tennis series, and I am impressed by the responsive motion controls. The basic swing works well, and by swinging in diagonal motions you can apply top and back spin. Special shots are performed by holding A or B and quickly flicking the remote up or down. Players can select

from four different difficulty levels, allowing them to make some functions automatic for novice players. This is one of those rare cases where the motion controls add something fun to the experience, rather than detracting from it. After playing so many Wii games with horrid response times, I wish Nintendo would share whatever secret it has with other developers.

The game doesn't have much new content. A few new courts and characters won't attract anyone who's spent serious time on the GC version. Still, I couldn't help but find myself getting wrapped up in the game again, even if I had the nagging feeling that this version seemed a little easier than it had before. But let's be honest: I'd rather have leftovers of last night's steak dinner than today's lunchroom goulash.—**MATT**



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** "Hey, I bet people would totally buy a Wii version of Mario Tennis. All we have to do is add some motion controls and we're ready to go!"

> **Graphics:** In the classic Mano sports style (read: slightly archaic). Still, it's running real widescreen and 480p resolution, so it looks crisper than before.

> **Sound:** If you're not expecting cartoon grunting and chirpy Muzak, you're playing the wrong game.

> **Playability:** I'm happy with the implementation of motion controls. They are surprisingly intuitive and responsive.

> **Entertainment:** Mano Tennis has always been one of the strongest spin-off franchises, and this redux is no exception.

> **Replay Value:** High



Second Opinion 7.25

This title is superior to the tennis game in Wii Sports in every way. Perhaps Mario Power Tennis is a better candidate for being a free pack-in game, seeing as how it's criminal that Nintendo is charging you for a port of the GameCube Mario Tennis with some so-so motion controls. While adding definite drop shot and lob motions is an unrivaled bonus, I was disappointed in the unresponsiveness of some basic backhand and forehand motions. In particular, the game would sometimes mix up backhands and inside-out forehands, totally screwing up your positioning and return. Perhaps Wii Motion Plus would have smoothed over problems like this, or maybe Nintendo could get crazy and make an entirely new Mario Tennis game.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Like Harvest Moon, but with swords.

> **Graphics:** Like Harvest Moon, but slightly less cute.

> **Sound:** Like Harvest Moon... a lot like Harvest Moon.

> **Playability:** Like Harvest Moon on Wii, motion controls are largely pointless.

> **Entertainment:** Like Harvest Moon, you'll either love or hate the grind.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately high.

Second Opinion 7.25

There's very little to recommend Rune Factory from a traditional gamer perspective. The one-button combat and dungeon crawling aspects would have been laughable five years ago. Interactions with the inhabitants of your town are incredibly limited, and the farming is little more than endless repetition of tedious tasks. And yet, for all that, this is a strangely compelling game. Progress and rewards are expertly paced to give a sense of accomplishment without feeling cheap, and slowly changing your farm from a barren, chaotic field to a vegetable paradise satisfies a person's basic desire to impose order and neatness on their surroundings. This title is far from perfect, but it admirably serves its mission as a relaxing way to kill some time.—**ADAM**

Wii QUICKIES

Wii

MySims Party

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** THE SIMS STUDIO
> **RELEASE** MARCH 10 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE

6

The MySims franchise started off well with two games that offered unique building-focused

and RPG takes on the Animal Crossing formula. So why does this game feel like they just gave up? If you take away the village overworld, all that's left is a lowest-common-denominator collection of minigames. Even with these lowered expectations, the minigames themselves aren't particularly well done or entertaining. It's odd that a franchise that has been so creative with its game designs would settle for such pedestrian pursuits. Putting toppings on a pizza? Carrying luggage? Watering plants? Sounds more like "chores" than a party to me. —**MATT**

Wii

Tenchu: Shadow Assassins

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** ACQUIRE
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 5 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE

6.5

Shadow Assassins continues the tale of Rikimaru and Ayame, two deadly ninjas

struggling to keep the peace in feudal Japan. The game puts you in the shoes of a skillful ninja who can perform group stealth kills, run up walls to lay in wait for a passing guard, and bounce silently across the rafters while stalking evil merchants. The Wii's motion controls add an extra dimension to the creative stealth kill animations. However, the clunky controls, frustrating camera, and broken combat all spoil the game's flow. The unintentionally hilarious Hanna-Barbera voice work ruins the mood. Acquire, developer of the original Tenchu, has tried to point this series back in the right direction, and Shadow Assassins provides some fun moments, but you'll have to sneak past all the annoying bits to experience them. —**BEN**



Wii

The House of the Dead: Overkill

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** HEADSTRONG GAMES > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10 > **ESRB** M

PROFANE AND PROUD

Finally, a Wii game that speaks my language. From the racy striptease opening sequence to its profanely incestuous conclusion, House of the Dead: Overkill fully embraces its mature rating. If you're averse to excessive swearing and gore, dose your eyes and put on your earmuffs — Overkill drops more F-bombs than Christian Bale when his DP walks through his scene

Like *Grindhouse*, the Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez homage to the forgotten pulp genre, Overkill employs campy narration, cheesy dialogue, intentionally poor direction, and retro music to create a comical gorefest that keeps you laughing throughout the four-hour bloodbath. The ludicrous story serves as a prequel to *The House of the Dead*; Super Agent G teams up with foul-mouthed Detective Washington

and curvaceous stripper Varla Gunn to hunt down Burt Reynolds look-alike Papa Caesar, who is linked to a rash of mutant outbreaks in the bayou. When Caesar escapes the initial arrest, the unlikely team tails him through a mutant-infested hospital, carnival, train, swamp, and prison. Along the way, the revenge-driven Detective Washington drops enough F-bombs to send the FCC scrambling for a SWAT team.

Under the stylish and profane veneer lives an able-bodied rail shooter that takes few chances. The by-the-basics shooting gallery rewards players for paying attention to their surroundings — shooting golden brains imparts score bonuses, and hitting the green glowing icons unleashes Mo-Fo time, a time slowing device that makes it easier to rack up headshots. Stringing together



BOTTOM LINE

8.5

> **Concept:** Lay waste to mutants in this campy ode to '70s horror flicks

> **Graphics:** Mimics the grainy film quality of the era, perfectly masking the Wii's visual deficiencies

> **Sound:** More curse words than a remake of *The Big Lebowski* starring Joe Pesci

> **Playability:** The well-implemented gun controls, however basic, match the best of its genre

> **Entertainment:** Fans of Quentin Tarantino and light gun shooters shouldn't miss it

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion

B+

House of the Dead: Overkill is sanguineous and profane, twisted and appalling; a blood-spewing, F-bomb-abusing goregasm of pulp horror. It's shocking and over-the-top, but the intent isn't to offend you to the point that you write your senator. The content in question is used for comedic purposes. Profanity replaces nearly every adjective, yet most of the jokes are intelligently written and original. Comedic material also flows through the gameplay, turning a typical rail shooter into a laugh-out-loud blast. The dismemberment-heavy action doesn't offer much of a challenge, especially once the assault rifle is unlocked, but the gameplay mechanics are rock solid. While it delivers the sensation of shooting fish in a barrel, the experience never wavers from being entertaining. Director's Cut mode, co-op, and dozens of unlockables give players reason to come back for more. Video game comedy is rarely done well, but House of the Dead: Overkill handles it with bloody aplomb. —**REINER**



Wii NASCAR Kart Racing

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS > DEVELOPER EA NORTH CAROLINA > RELEASE FEBRUARY 10 > ESRB E

TROUBLE QUALIFYING

Perhaps kart racing is more spiritually related to stock car racing than you or I think. After all, we've come to expect dramatic worst-to-first finishes at restrictor plate tracks like Daytona or Talladega as drivers work with teammates and the draft to sling themselves to the head of the pack. If only this game spent more time exploring such connections and catering to the sport, it would be more than a by-the-numbers copy of previous kart racers.

Teammates are a big part of NASCAR, and this game smartly makes it a focal point of the gameplay. Drafting with your partner earns you boost, and the game even awards you a win if your partner comes in first and you don't. Apart from drafting, however, the game doesn't make use of the sport. Pit road isn't integral to the racing, and there aren't even any power ups or attacks involving both teammates. Hell, the multiplayer isn't even co-op.

Whatever opportunities this game misses, it does just enough to make itself play-

able. Power-ups are a random bag of missiles, oil slicks, vision-obscuring ads, and more. Driving can be handled quite capably with either a Wii remote or a dual remote/nunchuk setup, and it includes the ability to powerslide. It would have been nice, however, if the controller functionality included motion-based power-up attacks.

This standard kart racing setup isn't helped by the fact that the track selection over the game's 13 racing series (mainly road courses) gets old fast regardless of the reverse course layouts. Scant few special racing events are included, and even these aren't enough to alleviate the racing boredom that quickly sets in. Turning left for 600 miles at Charlotte seems like a thrill a second in comparison.

One of the more unfortunate things about this game is that for a supposedly comical kart racer, the drivers' personalities rarely come through. At its worst, NASCAR Kart Racing stands out as little more than a marketing opportunity in a sport already filled with them. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Make a NASCAR-themed version of Mario Kart. Who's the NASCAR version of Luigi in this game? Elliot Sadler? Yeah, Elliot Sadler

> **Graphics:** Funnily enough, the cartoon look isn't out of line with the way a sponsor-splattered stock car usually looks

> **Sound:** The game uses Sims-speak gibberish, but it's not like it really matters to a kart racer

> **Playability:** Play with the nunchuk controller for steering — versus just using the Wii remote — as it makes powersliding and other controls easier to pull off

> **Entertainment:** More gameplay-related NASCAR touches would have made this a better title

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

While I'm not exactly in the target market for a Wii NASCAR kart racing game, I can recognize quality when I play it. Is it going to make anyone forget Mario Kart? No, but if you have a younger gamer that loves Wii and Jimmie Johnson in equal portion, this game fits the bill nicely. The main gameplay has the formula down pat; power-sliding, power-ups, and power boosting is the order of the day. The most interesting facet of the game is the teamwork concept, you can charge your boost by drafting in proximity to your pre-selected teammate, allowing skilled gamers to "ladder boost" their way to victory. It's a gimmick tailor-made for great co-op gameplay, it's a pity this feature is entirely missing from NASCAR Kart Racing. —MATT



Ready 2 Rumble: Revolution

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER SYN SOPHIA (AKI) > RELEASE MARCH 17 > ESRB E



UNTHINKABLY AWFUL

BOTTOM LINE 1

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd encounter a game so thoroughly terrible. Where do I even start? The racial stereotypes? The positively broken controls? The revolting art design?

Ready 2 Rumble sucks in every conceivable way. The controls rely almost completely on remote and nunchuk swings that are so similar that the Wii cannot keep track of what you want to do with any consistency. Pulling back on both is supposed to initiate a backwards dodge, and maybe once every five times it actually works. The rest of the time your character lets loose a flurry of random punches. Harder hits require you to pull back your arm first and then punch forward but most of the time the backwards motion triggers a weak punch that cancels the wind-up. This is just a small slice of the complete mess. Of course, the AI has no problem blocking and countering most of what you dish out (on purpose or acci-

dentally). If your opponent's Rumble meter fills up it's basically curtains unless you can run away until the round timer runs out.

The career mode is the crowning achievement in this massive train wreck. You start out with a created character who is somehow even less responsive than the default hideous celebrity parodies and offensive racial stereotypes. I chose punch power as my fighter's specialty. Not only was he still a weak piece of crap, he moved like he was wading through a pool of Jell-O and became tired after a single punch. Sure you can try to power this bastard up in training minigames, but the motion sensing is flat out broken on all but two of these. Try to match up movements to onscreen arrows in jump roping and jogging and you'll wonder if your remote batteries are dead. Then when you inevitably fail most of these training sessions, your stats get even worse and you're expected to fight progressively tougher opponents.

It's like Satan is beta testing Ready 2 Rumble: Revolution on Earth for its prolonged tenure in hell. —BRYAN

> **Concept:** Take a franchise that hasn't been around for nine years and crush any goodwill left in fans.

> **Graphics:** The art sets up racial stereotypes done by that caricature artist from the mall.

> **Sound:** The voice acting knocks those caricatures out of the park.

> **Playability:** None.

> **Entertainment:** See above.

> **Replay Value:** Low.

Second Opinion 3.5

Ready 2 Rumble Revolution is exactly what you'd expect — super deformed characters running the gamut of comedic stereotypes, over-the-top super punches, and the ring announcing of Michael Buffer. A new character creator is a welcome addition to the aging formula. Boxing is definitely a niche that needs filling on the Wii, so it's unfortunate that the game's controls completely miss the mark. The Sweet Science is a game of lightning fast reactions, and although the game emphasizes the importance of dodging in order to set up combos, the Wii can't detect the various upwards, downwards, and sideways motions required to pull off basic punches and defensive moves. This sloppy control is exacerbated by the fact that the AI opponents can duck your punches and counter with ease. Ready 2 Rumble ends like far too many Wii games you stand there, waving your arms like an idiot. —MATT





BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **Concept:** The gameplay hasn't changed, but the experience has. As *The Show* proves, little touches can go a long way

> **Graphics:** Players seamlessly transition between movements. Most of the players feature signature animations. You'll even see little things like players wearing long sleeves during cold weather

> **Sound:** Rex Hudler, Matt Vasgersian, and Dave Campbell often cite the obvious (like foul balls five seconds after they happen), but also provide compelling commentary

> **Playability:** In terms of user interaction, not much has changed. The game is better balanced, however. The new Legend difficulty also provides greater challenge

> **Entertainment:** The enhancements to *Road to the Show* and Franchise mode offer plenty of reasons why no other game should spin in your PS3 during baseball season

> **Replay Value:** High

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 > **ESRB** E

THE LITTLE DETAILS THAT COUNT

Thank the makers for steroids and human growth hormones! As a Cubs fan, I owe Alex Rodriguez a debt of gratitude. All eyes will now be fixated squarely on him — not a team that deserves to be mocked for its 100-year streak without a World Series championship.

If you don't wear the colors of the loveable losers and are tired of hearing about "juiceball," *MLB 09: The Show* opens up an avenue for you to vent. Players who own a PlayStation 3-compatible microphone can record their very own chants, yells, cheers, and jeers. Depending on how you record your tracks, you may hear one fan yell "A-Rod and Barry sitting in a tree, R-O-H-D-I-N-G!" For his next at bat, the entire crowd might mockingly chant "A-Fraud! A-Fraud! A-Fraud!" Don't worry; you won't have to round up every friend you know for the recording session. The game automatically turns your single voice into a varied group of hundreds. More impressive yet, if you have a ton of time on your hands, you can assign up to 12 tracks for each player and record up to 256 tracks for the entire game.

As minor of an addition as this may be, this year's game is all about the little details. For the core gameplay, interaction remains largely unchanged, but the experience feels quite different due to the minor tweaks. One big enhancement is how fielders read

balls. They now play back angles and caroms, positioning themselves correctly to field throws from all angles on the field. Hard hit balls are accompanied by realistic fielder reactions, such as balls bouncing off of the body and misplays. Nice touches like pitchers ducking to allow a catcher to make a throw on a bunt are present throughout the entire game. The timing of base running has also been fine-tuned to accurately reflect the time on the base paths, as well as leaving the batter's box.

I can't quite place my finger on what changed with the pitching — whether it's extended pitcher stamina or a minor tweak to the timing meters — but I felt more in command over my destiny this year. This is a nice change from feeling like the pitcher productivity is run by statistical data.

Batting is the one gameplay area that hasn't changed. The mechanic feels like a hold over from the last generation. There has to be a better solution than the "power swing," especially when the remainder of the game explores nuances that I didn't even know existed.

Road to the Show, the mode I call the baseball RPG, is also bolstered by minor additions. Your user-created player now has to deal with 40-man rosters, September call-ups, contract renewals, waivers, and salary arbitration. When negotiating a deal, you'll



learn that baseball is a business first and a game second. Your team may offer you a respectable deal, or they may try to undercut you, string you along until they can renew your contract, or slap you in the face with a buyout of your remaining years.

In terms of your player's development, if the coach sees a hole in your game, he'll pull you aside for extra batting and base running practice. These drills are no longer handled exclusively through menus; they are now interactive. Every swing made either adds or subtracts experience points from the field of note. Can't hit a changeup? You'll be asked to learn how, or you'll likely be looking for work next season. This expanded content makes player development a more enjoyable and varied process. I hope the interactive training is an even bigger focus next year — especially for pitchers.

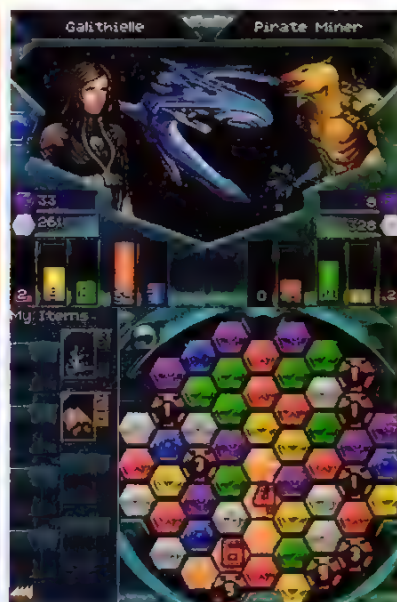
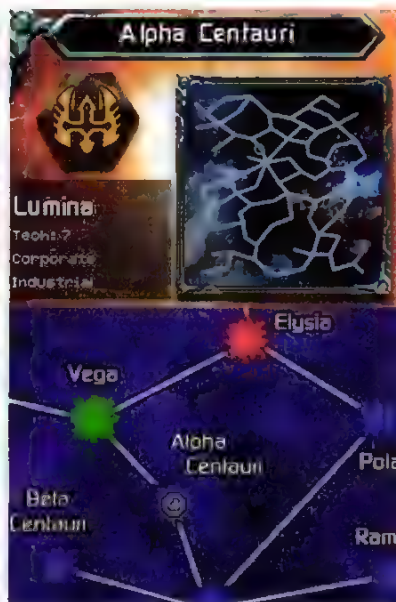
Franchise mode features all of the roster bells and whistles found in *Road to the Show*. I found that I kept better tabs on my minor league player development, knowing that I could tap into that well come September. These additions mean more time spent in the menus and analyzing stats. If you loathe this aspect of baseball, the computer assistance makes some logical moves, but it doesn't explore every option when filling roster spots. This can lead to minor leaguers and useless free agents getting playing time on your squad.

Like this year's New York Yankees team, *MLB 09: The Show* is stacked with unrivaled gameplay, simulation, online, and presentation. With Major League Baseball 2K9 underperforming this year, the choice for baseball fans is easy. The only logical choice is *MLB 09: The Show*. —REINER

Second Opinion

Impressive strides on the franchise and *Road to the Show* fronts define this year's baseball sim from Sony. The inclusion of rules like salary arbitration and September call-ups makes a huge difference in selling the general manager experience, and improved interactions and minigames make the already-great *Road to the Show* mode better than ever. The menu systems — particularly when it comes to managing player movement between the MLB, AAA, and AA levels — badly need work, but the foundation is there. Unfortunately, the basic hardball action is effectively unchanged. The one-dick batting interface is straight out of *RBI Baseball*, and throwing the ball in the field is still overly touchy. Nonetheless, this good baseball simulation is clearly the best overall outing for the sport this year. Now we just need the team to get over their big-market team bias (seriously, the Red Sox are the best at everything?) (mon) —ADAM





NINTENDO DS

Puzzle Quest: Galactrix

> STYLE 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (2-PLAYER LOCAL) > PUBLISHER D3 > DEVELOPER INFINITE INTERACTIVE > RELEASE FEBRUARY 24 > ESRB E10+

NEW FRONTIERS

The first Puzzle Quest was one of those ideas that worked so well it was hard to understand why it hadn't been done before. The game found success integrating match-three color puzzle gameplay with traditional role-playing components like character leveling, special abilities, and world exploration — as if RPG or puzzle games on their own didn't have enough addictive qualities. Infinite Interactive now launches out of the world of swords and sorcery to deliver a sequel in the sprawling reaches of space.

Galactrix, like its predecessors, requires little in the way of tutorials; match same-colored gems together and defeat your opponent. The variety emerges through the numerous situations in which players complete the familiar puzzle mechanic. Your space-faring character must mine asteroids, hack leap gates, haggle with alien vendors, craft impossible to pronounce sci-fi items, and, of course, battle enemy ships. All of these tasks feature variations on the formula, such as one that demands a certain number of matches with only limited gems. Only the hacking attempts left me cold; these are timed, and the random lay of the board means any given attempt may fail no matter how fast you match.

The shape and movement pattern of the board sets Galactrix apart. Like its gems, the hexagonal gameplay surface is more dynamic than the square layout from the last game. Specifically, new pieces fall into place in the same direction as you move your piece. Thus, it's not only which gems you trade, but in which direction you trade them that shapes the board layout after your turn. This clever mechanic takes time and patience to master.

The single-player campaign details a sci-fi galaxy of cookie-cutter alien cultures and familiar storylines. A dangerous experiment has escaped the confines of the space station and killed all the experimenters? Gasp! Even so, it's entertaining enough to keep players engrossed for the dozens of hours it could take to complete the whole affair. The multiplayer mode extends the gameplay by letting you show off your ship's abilities to a friend or play as the enemy ships from the story.

Galactrix succeeds in all the ways a sophomore entry should. It maintains the core approach of its successful forebear, but isn't afraid to integrate a bevy of new ideas along the way. Not every one of these new concepts pans out, but it hasn't lost the flavor that made so many devote themselves the first time around. —MILLER



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Take the color matching gameplay of the original game out into space, with plenty of new so-fi touches
> **Graphics:** Other than the static character and ship images, there's not much in the way of high-end visuals

> **Sound:** I swear some of these tunes have been ripped wholesale from other so-fi properties

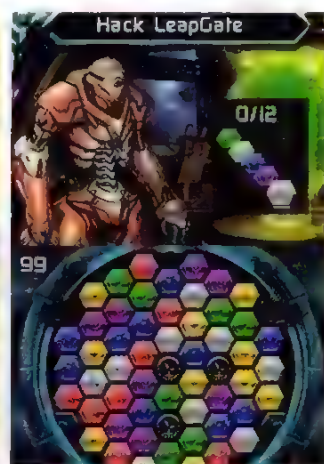
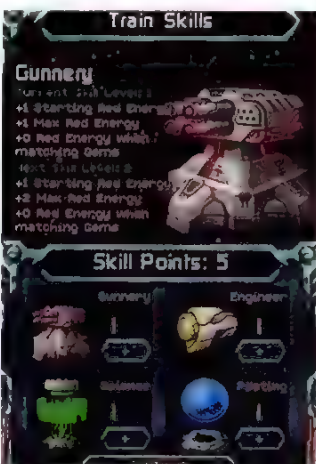
> **Playability:** Instantly familiar gameplay draws you in, but the game's true depth and challenge roles out over many hours

> **Entertainment:** It may be lacking the innovative zing of the first Puzzle Quest, but a few new ideas at play here are a lot of fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

Galactrix is a game full of possibilities. Packed with places to explore, items to craft, shops to haggle in, strategies to execute, and aliens to engage in diplomacy, this match three title throws features at you from all sides. Galactrix amits itself, however, by tunneling its most adventurous features into the same few gem-based puzzle types. Given how much you have to hack leap gates to travel around the galaxy you can get burned out on Galactrix's puzzles too fast — especially since these time-based boards put you at the mercy of the random luck of the falling gems. At least there is strategy in the ship-to-ship battles, where effectively using your weapons and ship augments always give you something to think about and a plan of attack. Galactrix is an absorbing puzzler that easily puts itself above the competition. —KATO

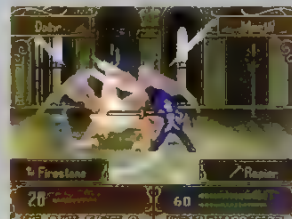


HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG (2-PLAYER VIA LOCAL OR ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 16 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

Does finally meeting Super Smash Bros. Marth in his native context set your tummy a-flutter? This remake of an old Japan-only NES title is competent, but outside of adding some concessions to a new generation of Fire Emblem players, Shadow Dragon does nothing to change the staid Fire Emblem formula. The turn-based tactical battles and permanent character death are as unforgiving as ever, and the story is banal as only mediocre heroic fantasy can be. Fans will love this for being a nicely updated piece of history; the rest of us will wonder why Nintendo is re-skinning this venerable franchise yet again. —ADAM

PSP

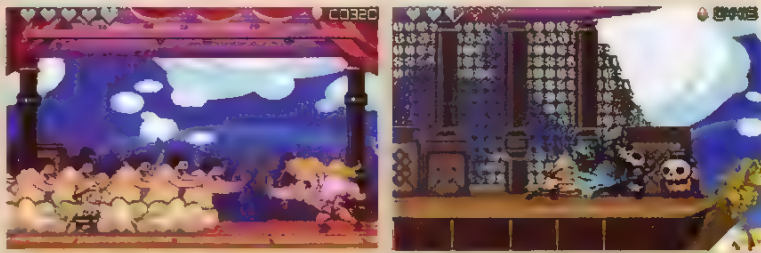
Prinny: Can I Really Be The Hero?

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
> **PUBLISHER** NIS AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 17 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 8

This action-platforming Disgaea spinoff is a throwback to a far more challenging gaming era. On the default difficulty level, you start with 1,000 extra lives — and you'll be glad of that as you slowly make your way through the unapologetically lethal levels. To Prinny's credit, it rewards dedication with inventive stages, clever boss battles, and an enduring sense of accomplishment. Nippon Ichi's beautiful hand-drawn 2D art and the excellent Disgaea-flavored score shine on the PSP, and will entrance players with the intestinal fortitude to handle the abuse to which this title constantly subjects them. —ADAM



NINTENDO DS

Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CASUAL STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 17 > **ESRB** E

POPPYCOCK

Henry Hatsworth is on a mission to collect all of the components of a magical golden suit to cement his number one ranking in the Pompous Adventurer's Club. Every step of the way, a Willy Wonka-looking jerk named Weasleyby comes after him with menacing machinations or outrageous boss characters.

The top screen's platforming plays like old-school Ninja Gaiden plus guns. But when an enemy is defeated, it floats down to the bottom screen and becomes a colored block. Down here the mechanics work exactly like Planet Puzzle League, lining up colored blocks to eliminate them from the board before they rise to the top to terrorize you again. Essentially, you'll kill a few guys, make some jumps, clear out the puzzle, and repeat.

Initially, this unique mechanic, the cute animations, and the over-the-top British-isms charmed me. Like trying to keep spinning plates from crashing down, the gameplay gimmick demands

constant focus on two fronts. This is used best during boss battles against the likes of a robotic top hat, a vain singing sky pirate, or an old man in a wheelchair and his beefy nurse. It's quite satisfying to dodge lasers and melee attacks up top while also trying to handle vines or a cracked screen messing with your puzzle.

The level designs are fine at first, but it's not long before they get overloaded with cheap instant deathtraps. Imagine dying after a series of tricky jumps in Super Mario Bros. and instead of being able to run back there and try again, a Tetris screen pops up every 20 seconds and you have to clear a few lines before it'll let you control Mario again. A pit that once took a minute to get back to now seems to take 10 as you have to stop again and again to fiddle with the blocks.

You'd think that the ability to save up power to craft an invincible suit of armor would help with the tough spots, but it is terrible for navigating platforms and only helps you find the bottom of a pit faster.

If you're a huge Planet Puzzle League fan and have a large well of patience to draw from, Henry Hatsworth might be up your alley. Similarly, hardcore platformer fans will find this a trying test of skills. Henry Hatsworth could have been one of the most unique and interesting games on the DS, but some baffling design choices hold it back from greatness. —**BRYAN**



BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Blend Brit-themed platforming with Planet Puzzle League

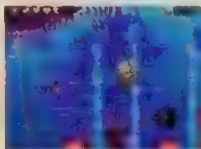
> **Graphics:** Sick animation and amusing characterizations

> **Sound:** The puzzle songs get old fast, but the Charlie Brown nonsense talk charms

> **Playability:** Puzzle controls are spot on. It's the top screen that's the trouble

> **Entertainment:** Falls into the genre mashup trap of not fully satisfying either side

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



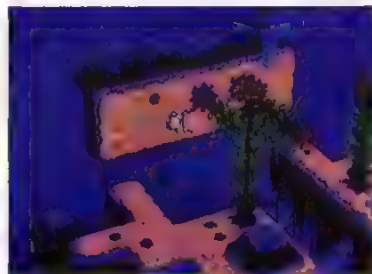
Second Opinion 7.5

Henry Hatsworth charms players with its colorful cast of well-to-do Brits, imaginative worlds, and its creative blend of platforming and puzzle gameplay. But much like a night in the company of Sloane Rangers, the game's pompous charm dissolves into intolerable elitism. The good chap is traveling the globe in search of a magical golden wardrobe. Along the way he leaps pitfalls and collects treasure on the upper screen while solving puzzles to unlock power-ups on the lower screen. As the levels rise in difficulty, however, the gameplay transitions into a cruel test of skill that strains your platforming and boss fighting abilities. These later stages blitz Hatsworth with environmental hazards, increasingly difficult puzzles, and overwhelming swarms of powerful enemies. Even Hatsworth's robotic armor power-up - his weapon of choice in treacherous situations - can't save him from these against-the-odds situations. —**BERTZ**

NINTENDO DS

Pokémon Platinum

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 8-PLAYER LOCAL, UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** GAME FREAK > **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** E



POKÉ-MORE

I placed Pokémon Platinum next to Diamond playing on another DS, and was surprised at the slight changes. Your playable characters now sport more wintry outfits. A bumbling investigator bumps into you from time to time, and the game shows you more things rather than simply telling you. For example, there's less "Your best friend just came through here and said to meet up at the next gym" and more "Hey, pal, I'll see you at the gym." But if I hadn't done the side-by-side comparison I probably wouldn't have noticed these small tweaks on a game I hadn't played for over a year.

Fortunately, Nintendo includes a few more obvious additions. If online social interaction is your thing, you can now hang out in the Wi-Fi Plaza with up to 20 other people. Here you can have strange multiple choice conversations ("Do you want to be an A) inventor B) artist..."), stamp pokémon footprints on a board, or face off in three different multiplayer touch screen minigames. There is a time

limit on how long you can stay, but nothing kept my interest long enough to warrant testing the boundaries.

Aside from the plaza and battle video sharing, most of the big time bonus content is loaded toward the end. The new Distortion World dungeon is an intriguing labyrinth of floating platforms that involves walking on walls and ceilings (breaking the camera out of its top-down view), riding an upside down waterfall, and battling it out with the "Origin Forme" of Giratina, the creature on the front of the box.

After the main quest, a new Battle Frontier offers plenty of tournament variations that will keep you busy for a while. As you fight trainer after trainer, you'll be subjected to rules like random good or bad status effects, using stock pokémon, spending custom battle points wisely between battles, and more.

If you haven't played Diamond/Pearl and are looking for a good RPG, Platinum is absolutely the way to go. Superfans are probably already

playing the game, but the average Pearl owner should think twice before starting over with a blank pokédex to experience what amounts to about 10 percent new content. —**BRYAN**



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Release a Diamond/Pearl director's cut two years later

> **Graphics:** Slightly tweaked graphics and animations

> **Sound:** Mostly unchanged

> **Playability:** We still don't get an eight-way walk or more hotkeys?

> **Entertainment:** Not worth playing mostly unchanged content all over again unless you're a superfan

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.75

Platinum's familiar gameplay combined with improved graphics and sound will undoubtedly make Pokémon fans feel at home. Still, the minor tweaks and gameplay additions don't add up to a tangible amount of new content. The Wi-Fi Plaza is a great for making things more social, but otherwise the big changes - the Distortion World and Battle Frontier - are pushed to the end of the game. If you have patience, the long journey may be worth it. Otherwise, it's hard to recommend Platinum to anyone who played Diamond or Pearl. However, if you missed the last iterations of the handheld RPG behemoth, Pokémon is a great pickup. —**MEAGAN**

Your Brain on Peggle



NINTENDO DS

Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
> **DEVELOPER** TRI ACE > **RELEASE** MARCH 17 > **ESRB** T

FALLING OUT OF FAVOR

Turn-based strategy revolves around two concepts: moving and attacking. Games in the genre layer other tactical elements on top of those basic tenets, and those layers set the good strategy titles apart from the rest. Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume is one of "the rest." In its attempts to fuse grid-based combat with the series' RPG roots, Covenant of the Plume doesn't capture the essence of either, descending into a jumble of mismatched design decisions.

In other strategy games, your primary concern is winning battles. Here, you need to worry about a bunch of meta-game annoyances. For instance, each battle requires you to collect a certain amount of Sin — which accrues by doing damage to enemies after they're defeated — in addition to meeting the victory conditions. In other words, just killing an enemy isn't enough; you have to blow entire rounds to set up massive assaults against weakened foes. If you don't, you might not hit your Sin requirement — for which you're punished in the next fight with a "bonus" boss enemy.

Gathering Sin isn't the only thing that poisons the combat. Difficulty balancing is all over the board — a mistake made worse by the fact that you can only bring four characters into combat, limiting your strategic options. If you feel outmatched by a fight, there is no way for you to take time to level up, since your sidequest options are extremely limited. You also have a super weapon — the plume — that is basically unusable; it secures victory by permanently killing one of your party members, but it also ruins your shot at seeing the best ending.

The shame is that Covenant of the Plume's other innovations could have made for a good game. Setting up formations and delivering multiple attacks per turn adds an interesting twist to the formula, and I really liked the story of Wylfred and his grudge against Lenneth. Unfortunately, these redeeming qualities suffocate under an avalanche of extraneous junk, ruining even the simple process of moving and attacking. I hope there is another true Valkyrie Profile sequel in the works, because fans of the series deserve better than this. —**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Focus on the mortals instead of the gods in a grid-based Valkyrie Profile spin-off

> **Graphics:** Good character art, though the in-battle sprites are nothing special

> **Sound:** The soundtrack is occasionally excellent, but there are plenty of generic tunes

> **Playability:** Though the controls are easy to learn, poor balancing makes each fight hit-and-miss

> **Entertainment:** Some great ideas are overshadowed by the cumbersome mechanics

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



Second Opinion 6.5

I like many things about Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume, and one thing drives me crazy. Horrendous misbalancing moves the tactical action out of the realm of acceptable challenge and into the arena of absurdity. After the first few hours of play, battles demand a near-perfect run to complete, usually met only after numerous trial and error attempts. Further, side quests that allow players to increase skill levels to confront these hefty challenges are rare. The alternative is making a choice that automatically deprives you of the most desirable endgame. As for my likes? That's what makes this game so unforgivable. I love the original story, the intentionally anachronistic writing, and the clever character-combining battle mechanic. But it all comes to nothing when the game values the punishment of its players over the strengths of its own gameplay. —**MILLER**

All-New Bonus Underground

120 Levels + 90 Challenges

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PopCap

Q?

EVERYONE

E

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

"...ideal for your gaming-on-the-go needs."

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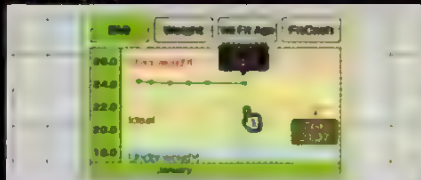
CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For January 2009 Based On Units Sold

1 WII FIT (Wii)



Swing your partner, do-si-do, it's time to game swap hoedown. Games move up, games move down, some of them make us frown. We used to be lazy; yes, we're as plump as a chicken. But with Wii Fit, we've given our fat a quick whippin'!

2 WII PLAY (Wii)



Wii Play's an odd formula: no action, no guts, and no guns. But the game's lack of depth makes us sick out our tongues. When Nintendo stumbled on this they cheered, "What luck!" But it's just a controller in a box, so come on! What the... whoa!

3 MARIO KART WII (Wii)



So here we are drinking another dinner from a bottle. Wondering why we never get to date a supermodel. We spent all weekend eating beans and playing Mario Kart. Our tummy gave us pain until we ripped a huge tear in our penis. (What did you think we were going to say?)

4 LEFT 4 DEAD (360)



This is our kind of game; zombies as far as you can see. We play all day long, never even stopping to pee. We don't want to be vulgar, we don't want to be rude. But if zombies were real, wouldn't they be rude?

5 CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR (360)



Playing COD all day would be our kind of life. But in practice it's why we don't have a wife. We don't know how to say this, we're running out of rhyme. So how can we end this...um...at...time?

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release
1	Wii Fit	3	Wii	8	04-08
2	Wii Play	1	Wii	7	02-07
3	Mario Kart Wii	4	Wii	8.5	04-08
4	Left 4 Dead	7	360	9.25	11-08
5	Call of Duty: World at War	2	360	8.75	11-08
6	Skate 2	N/A	360	9	01-09
7	Guitar Hero World Tour	5	Wii	N/A	10-08
8	Personal Trainer: Cooking	13	DS	N/A	11-08
9	Mario Kart DS	8	DS	8.5	11-05
10	The Lord of the Rings: Conquest	N/A	360	4.75	01-09
11	Call of Duty: World at War	9	PSP	8.75	11-08
12	Gears of War 2	6	360	9	11-08
13	Fallout 3	15	360	9.5	10-08
14	Jillian Michael's Fitness Ultimatum 2009	N/A	Wii	N/A	10-08
15	Link's Crossbow Training	17	Wii	6.75	11-08
16	My Fitness Coach	N/A	Wii	N/A	12-08
17	Rock Band 2	N/A	360	9.25	09-08
18	Guitar Hero World Tour	12	360	9.25	10-08
19	Call of Duty: World at War	20	Wii	N/A	11-08
20	LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	N/A	Wii	N/A	11-07

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Tales of the World: Radiant Mythology 2	PSP
2	Demon's Souls	PS3
3	World Soccer Winning Eleven 2009	PSP
4	World Soccer Winning Eleven 2009	PS2
5	Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	DS
6	Melting! Conan & Kindaichi Shounen no Jikenbou	DS
7	Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G	PSP
8	Taiko Expert Wii	Wii
9	Rhythm Heaven	DS
10	Wii Fit	Wii



TOP 10 CH

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Resident Evil 5	N/A	multi
2	MadWorld	N/A	Wii
3	Street Fighter IV	1	multi
4	Grand Theft Auto IV: The Lost and Damned	N/A	360
5	The House of the Dead: Overkill	N/A	Wii
6	Halo Wars	2	360
7	Puzzle Quest: Galactrix	N/A	DS
8	LocoRoco 2	3	PSP
9	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II	4	PC
10	Skate 2	5	multi



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	World Of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King	1	\$38
2	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	2	\$19
3	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	8	\$36
4	Spore	3	\$48
5	World Of Warcraft	9	\$20
6	Left 4 Dead	6	\$46
7	The Sims 2 Apartment Life	4	\$20
8	Fallout 3	7	\$48
9	Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	13	\$32
10	Call Of Duty: World At War	5	\$49



Based On Monthly Units Sold



Street Fighter IV - PlayStation 3 - Mar-09

PLAYSTATION 3

Afro Samurai	7.75	Mar-09
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
FEAR 2: Project Origin	8.25	Mar-09
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	7.75	Nov-08
FIFA Soccer 09	8	Dec-08
Fracture	7.5	Nov-08
Golden Axe: Beast Rider	6	Dec-08
Guitar Hero World Tour	9.25	Dec-08
Killzone 2	8.75	Mar-09
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
Lord of the Rings: Conquest, The	4.75	Mar-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
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
Need for Speed: Undercover	7	Dec-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
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
Street Fighter IV	9.25	Mar-09
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	8.5	Oct-08
TNA Impact	6.5	Nov-08
Tomb Raider Underworld	8.75	Jan-09
Valkyria Chronicles	8.5	Dec-08
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08

XBOX 360

Afro Samurai	7.75	Mar-09
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 Furor	4.5	Feb-09
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
FEAR 2: Project Origin	8.25	Mar-09
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
Guitar Hero 2: Overture	6.25	Oct-08



Halo Wars - Xbox 360 - Mar-09

Guitar Hero World Tour	9.25	Dec-08
Halo Wars	9	Mar-09
Infinite Undiscovery	8	Oct-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
Lord of the Rings: Conquest, The	4.75	Mar-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
Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	6.75	Oct-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
Marble Saga: Kororinpa	8	Mar-09
Mano 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 Revolution	4.75	Nov-08
Rygar: The Battle of 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 II	7.75	Jan-09
Sonic Unleashed	6.5	Jan-09
Spray	7	Dec-08
Star Wars: The Clone Wars		



Deadly Creatures - Wii - Mar-09

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
Race Pro	7	Mar-09
Rise of the Argonauts	6	Feb-09
Rock Band 2	9.25	Oct-08
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 Ocean: The Last Hope	7	Mar-09
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	8.75	Oct-08
Stoked	7.5	Mar-09
Street Fighter IV	9.25	Mar-09
Tales of Vesperia	7.25	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
Viva Pinata: Trouble in Paradise	8.25	Oct-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
Deadly Creatures	7	Mar-09

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
Wario Land: Shake It	6.75	Dec-08
Wii Music	3	Dec-08
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08

PLAYSTATION 2

Kingdom Hearts Re Chain of Memories	6.75	Jan-09
Star Wars: The Clone Wars Jedi Alliance	6	Jan-09
Tecmo Bowl Kickoff	6.25	Dec-08
Time Hollow	7	Nov-08
TrackMania DS	6.5	Mar-09

PC

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
Drakensang: The Dark Eye	6.75	Mar-09
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 40,000 Dawn of War II	8.75	Mar-09
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
Blue Dragon Plus	8.5	Mar-09
Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	8.25	Nov-08
Chase: Felix Meets Felicity, The	6	Feb-09
Chrono Trigger	9	Dec-08
Cradle of Rome	6.75	Jan-09
Disgaea DS	8	Oct-08
Dragon Quest IV Chapters of the Chosen	7	Oct-08
Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	7.5	Mar-09
From the Abyss	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
Legacy of Ys: Books I & II	5	Mar-09
Master of the Monster Lair	6.25	Nov-08
Metal Slug 7	6.75	Dec-08
Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir	7	Oct-08
My World, My Way	6	Mar-09
N+	8.75	Oct-08
New International Track & Field	6.25	Oct-08
Ninjabowl	6.5	Dec-08
Pop Cutiel 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 World	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
TrackMania DS	6.5	Mar-09

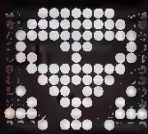
Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2	8	Jul-08
LocoRoco 2	9.25	Mar-09
N+	8.75	Oct-08
Secret Agent Clank	8.5	Jul-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08
Star Ocean: First Departure	7	Nov-08
Star Ocean: Second Evolution	7	Feb-09

PSP

Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2	8	Jul-08
LocoRoco 2	9.25	Mar-09
N+	8.75	Oct-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



LocoRoco 2 - PSP - Mar-09



Afro Samurai

Training for the Number One Headband

By game designers Patrick "Caso" Santiago and Robert Cogburn, and game programmer Justin Pease.



In a fresh take on the action genre, Afro Samurai's Dynamic Slicing system along with the Perfect Slice mechanic ensures that dismemberments are the key to precision, progression, and several achievements.

PERFECT SLICE

Possibly the most important skill to master is the Perfect Slice. Hold the focus and an attack button at the same time, then wait until a shimmer reaches the tip of your sword (you can take this opportunity to aim the sword with the analog stick while waiting), then release the attack button exactly when the sword tip starts shining. If done correctly, you will instantly slice any normal foe in half with a single attack. Be careful not to release the attack button too early or too late, or you will only do a regular attack that's much weaker than a Perfect Slice. However, releasing too early can be the best course of action if an enemy is about to hit you before you can finish charging. Releasing too late can also be useful to conserve your focus if you realize a Perfect Slice would not hit the enemy. Perfect Slice is available as soon as the game begins so you can start practicing it right away. You gain more experience as it becomes more powerful, slicing through multiple enemies at a time and smoothly following through into more slices.

DEFLECT AND DELIVER

Fighting aggressively is good, but don't forget to block if an enemy is going to hit you. If you time your block perfectly, it turns into a parry, which not only deflects their attack and leaves them off balance, but also rewards you with enough focus to perform a Perfect Slice to finish them off or time to deliver an awesome combo. The Daimyo shows you how to use the parry technique, and it will serve you well throughout your many battles. The most reliable way to parry is to wait until the enemy starts swinging his weapon, and then hold the block button. If the enemy's attack is too

fast, you can try slowing down time with the focus button to make it easier.

DAZED AND DEFUSED

If you parry an enemy that's already low on health, the enemy will enter a dazed state, which lasts longer and opens them up to even more attacks than the usual stun. Some enemies, such as the armor-clad samurai, are only vulnerable to certain slices during this dazed state.

HEADSHOTS

Aiming a Perfect Slice across an enemy's face will give you extra experience, health, and focus. The amount of each depends on the enemy. These deadly decapitations are one of the only ways to restore health in hard mode. Slicing vertically between the eyes gives an even bigger bonus, but it's harder to pull off.

MIX IT UP

Afro Samurai has a deep combo move-set with launches, clearing moves, and brutal combo-enders. So check out your move list and try them all.

MEMENTOS

Collect the crows. Although not necessary to finish the game, these "Father's Legacy" moves will up your fighting skills by several notches. Two notable moves include Aerial Slicing, which allows you to perform Perfect Slices in the air, and Easy Make Combo, which lets you do shortcuts in the combo strings.



DRIVE BY SLICING AND DICING

Use dash attacks to quickly get enemies off guard and to get out of sticky situations.

HEAD TO TOE

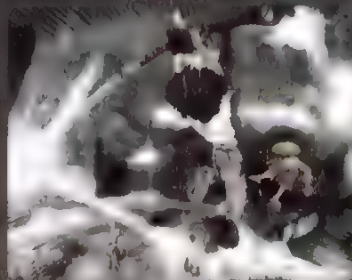
The Head to Toe achievement requires you to slice your foes exactly down the middle. It can be one of the most difficult achievements in the game, but one trick to making it easier is to launch android ninjas into the air and perform an Aerial Vertical Slice on them.

BODY PART POKER

Experience is awarded for any valid hand, but true gamers will shoot for straight flushes in this brutal minigame. This gives the biggest bonus and also unlocks an achievement for each type of enemy. To pull it off, you must slice off one head, one pair of legs, and one pair of arms.

NINJA NINJA BOSS BATTLE

This boss battle has a puzzle element that will leave some baffled. On the plus side, his quirky gimmick is a sure fire way to obtain certain achievements such as Kengo, Kensei, and Let it Flow, although it's best to do these in your second play-through.



YOU'VE GOT TO FOCUS

Over Focus is a very valuable thing. When you've laid out enough fools to leave Over Focus primed and ready, do not use it immediately. Instead, consider keeping it until the start of the next major battle. When you feel all available enemies have presented themselves, activate it. Once activated, use the Drive By Slicing attack and let the blood spill to the floor in a very satisfying fashion.

FIND THE SWEET SPOT

A samurai can be a difficult opponent. Aside from his deadly blows, he has the strong capability to block. While using combos against him will eventually lead to victory, there are far more efficient ways of killing him. Every samurai has a part of his body exposed and without armor. Try and find these weak spots - then slice right at that spot. If done correctly, you can take down the Wild 5 in no time.



Mod World

Spelunky
www.derekyu.com



What do you get when you cross a roguelike (e.g. the Mystery Dungeon series or Nethack) with an 8-bit platformer? Derek Yu, whose previous title Aquaria was honored as the 2007 Independent Games Festival Game of the Year, finds out with his new project Spelunky. There isn't an official final version yet, but as of this writing it's free to download in a near final state.

Spelunky attempts to combine the best parts of roguelikes - randomly generated levels, inventive application of tools to solve incredibly lethal problems, and serious depth - with the twitch-based moment-to-moment gameplay of 2D platformers. For the most part, it succeeds. Collecting treasure and learning how to cope with the many challenges Spelunky throws at you - from rolling boulder traps to aggressive spiders three times your size - is addictive. The game also tempts gamers with secrets and unique items.



Though Spelunky is more accessible than traditional roguelikes with their arcane interfaces and ASCII graphics, it is not a game for the faint of heart. The game features no saving option (though you can unlock shortcuts to later levels), and even the earliest stages can be as tough as the most punishing NES classics. Even so, indie games rarely feature this level of quality, charm, and replayability.

Code of the Month



Street Fighter IV



Look at your thumbs. They're all worn and beaten from throwing fireballs. It's time to get some new blood to practice with. Here's how to unlock all the secret characters in Street Fighter. To make this easier, set the difficulty to easiest and the number of rounds to one.

Cammy – Beat Arcade Mode with Crimson Viper

Fei Long – Beat Arcade Mode with Abel

Gen – Beat Arcade Mode with Chun Li

Rose – Beat Arcade Mode with M. Bison

Sakura – Beat Arcade Mode with Ryu

Dan – Beat Arcade Mode with Sakura

Akuma – Unlock all the characters above then start up a new game of Arcade Mode with any character. Set the match to a single 30 second round on the easiest difficulty and beat arcade mode with one perfect using no continues. Once you have defeated Seth, Akuma will appear, and once you beat him he's unlocked.

Gouken – Unlock Akuma then start up a new game of Arcade Mode with any character. Set the match to a single 99 second round on the easiest difficulty and beat arcade mode with 2 perfect getting 3 Ultra or Super finishers, scoring 5 first strikes, and using zero continues. Once you have defeated Seth, Gouken will appear, and once you beat him he's unlocked.

Seth – Beat Arcade Mode using all 24 other characters.

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!

HAGGLE MAN 1 CODES

Continue – at the Game Over Screen, hold Left then START

Restore Life – Enter three doors in reverse alphabetical order

Secret Power Up – at the Pause Screen, Down, Right, Left, Up, B, B, B, A, A, A, A

Summon Allies – at the Pause Screen, Up, Right, Down, Left, A, A, A, A, B, B, B

HAGGLE MAN 2 CODES

Continue – at the Game Over screen, hold Left then press Start

Get Three Scrolls – at the Pause Screen, Down, Up, Down, Up, A, A, B, B

Infinite Time – at the Stage Demo screen, hold Left + UP + A + B

Secret Power Up – at the Pause Screen, Up, Down, Up, Down B, B, A, A

Stage Select – at the Title Screen, hold A, Up, Up, Right, Right, Right, Down, Down, Left, Left, Left

HAGGLE MAN 3 CODES

99 Lives – at the Pause Screen, A, B, A, B, Left, Right, Left, Right

9999 Nuts – at the Pause Screen, B, A, B, A, Right, Left, Right, Left

Warp to Boss – at the Pause Screen, B, B, A, A, Left, Left, Right, Right

RALLY KING AND RALLY KING SP CODES

Enemies Wiped Off the Face of the Earth – at the Title Screen, hold Down + Right + Select

Invincibility – at the Title Screen, hold UP + Left + Select

Skip to Stage 2 – at the Title Screen, press A, B, A, B, Up + Select

Skip to Stage 3 – at the Title Screen, press A, B, A, B, Left + Select

Skip to Stage 4 – at the Title Screen, press A, B, A, B, Down + Select

STAR PRINCE CODES

Invulnerability – at the Title Screen, hold Up, A, A, A, release Up and hold Down, B, B, B

NINTENDO DS



Retro Game Challenge

Enter these codes at different points during the game to unlock the following goodies for all the games modes. Note: some codes will only work once per game.

COSMIC GATE CODES

Continue Game With 000 Score – at the Game Over Screen, Left + Start

Hard Mode – at the Title Screen, Down, Down, B, B, A, A, Start

Powered Up Form of Infinity – at the Pause Screen, Up, Up, A, B

Ship Power-Up – at the Pause Screen, Up, Up, A, A, B, B

Wii



Build-A-Bear: A Friend Fur All Seasons

At the main menu screen enter the following

Unlock All Mini-games, Outfits, and Islands – Up, Down, Left, Right, A, B

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – Last seen tracking down the source of all his problems... and eliminating her!)

Mountain Dew 24/7
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A Fortune in Pixels!



Nintendo World Championship Cartridges

NES • \$20,000 (Gold Cartridge) • \$6,100 (Grey Cartridge)

In a strange twist, a movie may be responsible for the most sought after collectibles in video games. In 1990, Nintendo held a video game competition that drew inspiration from the film *The Wizard*.

Contestants had 6 minutes and 21 seconds to complete a series of three minigames. The first minigame was to collect 50 coins in Super Mario Bros. Once this was completed, the game transitioned to a special Nintendo Championship-themed course in Rad Racer. After completing this, the player had to play Tetris until time expires. Scoring totals factored in the Mario Bros. score, Rad Racer score times 10, and Tetris score times 25.

The Nintendo World Championships were held in 30 locations spread across the United States. The competition was split into three age groups. The winner from each was invited to the finals, held at Universal Studios in Hollywood. The winner for each age was awarded a \$10,000 U.S. savings bond, a 40-inch rear-projection TV, a 1990 Geo Metro convertible, and a trophy.

The cartridges used in this competition are fetching top dollar among collectors. Nintendo only manufactured 116 cartridges, of which 90 are grey, and 26 are gold. They were handed out to winners and runners up.

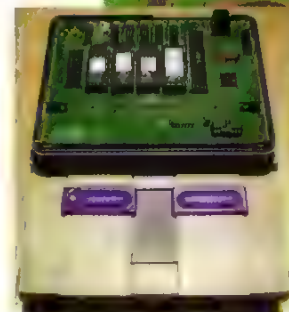


Nintendo Powerfest 94

SNES • \$300,000*

Nintendo held another competition in 1994, but it wasn't as highly publicized. Only 33 cartridges were made for this event. The rules for Powerfest 94 were similar to the original Nintendo World Championships. Players had six minutes to complete a series of three minigames. This time trial began with a stage from Super Mario Bros.: Lost Levels. The next leg was a five-lap race in Super Mario Kart. The final task was to hit as many dingers as possible in a Ken Griffey Jr. home run derby.

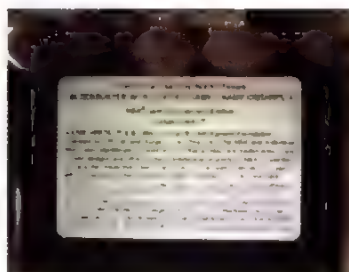
Of the 33 cartridges made, 32 were shipped back to Nintendo, where they were dismantled for parts. The one known copy that still exists in the wild recently appeared in an auction on myebid.com with the "buy it now" price of \$300,000. To no surprise, it wasn't sold.



Genesis Blockbuster World Video Game Championships II

Sega Genesis • \$2,200

The rules for this Genesis tournament were similar to the ones that Nintendo laid out for its competitions. It never took off, however. Maybe it had something to do with the selection of games on the cartridge. NBA Jam is a fine choice. Judge Dredd isn't. This cartridge was never distributed, but it was apparently stolen twice, as two copies have been spotted.



Neo Turfmasters

Neo Geo • \$1,950

We never understood the logic behind the roster of characters, but there must be a market out there for people who want to golf as British technicians. This golf game is extremely rare, but can be played today on the PlayStation 2 in SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1.



Air Raid

Atari 2600 • \$3,500

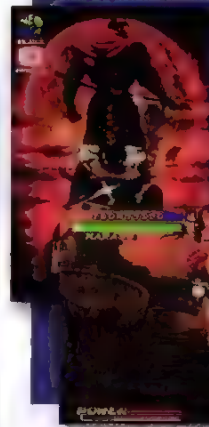
This is known as the rarest commercially released game for the 2600. This classic 2D space shooter is prized by collectors for its sky blue cartridge, which is outfitted with a cool handle (although no actual label).



Ninja Masters

Neo Geo • \$1,800

This little-known 2D fighter was created by ADK, the same team that brought us the World Heroes series. The weapon-heavy ninja play didn't draw much of a following at the time, but is now making a name for itself with collectors. It was re-released in Japan in 2008 as a part of the ADK Damashii compilation for PS2.



Mr. Boston's Clean Sweep

NES • \$3,000

This game is a puzzle game that involves cleaning up a city. It is a very rare game and is highly sought after by collectors.



Nintendo Campus Challenge

NES • \$12,000

SNES • \$10,000

The Nintendo Campus Challenge was another competition that pushed players to work against the clock to tally as many points as they could in three different games. The NES version consists of Dr. Mario, Pinbot, and Super Mario Bros. 3. The Super Nintendo cartridge features Super Mario World, F-Zero, and



Pilotwings. Only one copy of the NES Campus Challenge cart is known to exist.

Ultimate 11: SNK Football Championship

Neo Geo • \$1,500

This game is a football simulation game that is highly sought after by collectors. It is a very rare game and is highly sought after by collectors.



Metal Slug

Neo Geo • \$2,850 (US) • \$1,800 (JP)

This isn't the rarest Neo Geo AES, but it is the prized item for U.S. collections. This was one of the best games for the system, but was limited in production due to overall lack of demand for Neo Geo products at the time.



Kizuna Encounter

Neo Geo (PAL) • \$13,500

Rumor has it that the PAL version of Kizuna Encounter was only sold for three days in Austria before SNK recalled it. Only a handful of copies are known to exist today.



Pepsi Invaders

Atari 2600 • \$1,200

Created for Coca-Cola's 1983 sales convention, this Space Invaders adaptation replaced the lines of descending aliens with the letters "P-E-P-S-I" (plus an alien on the end, as the original code required six enemies per row). Only 125 were ever produced, most of which were discarded by disinterested salesmen, making Pepsi Invaders one of the rarest 2600 carts ever.



Tetris

NES • \$1,500

This game is a puzzle game that involves cleaning up a city. It is a very rare game and is highly sought after by collectors.



Ultima: Escape from Mount Drash

Atari 2600 • \$2,500

This game is a puzzle game that involves cleaning up a city. It is a very rare game and is highly sought after by collectors.



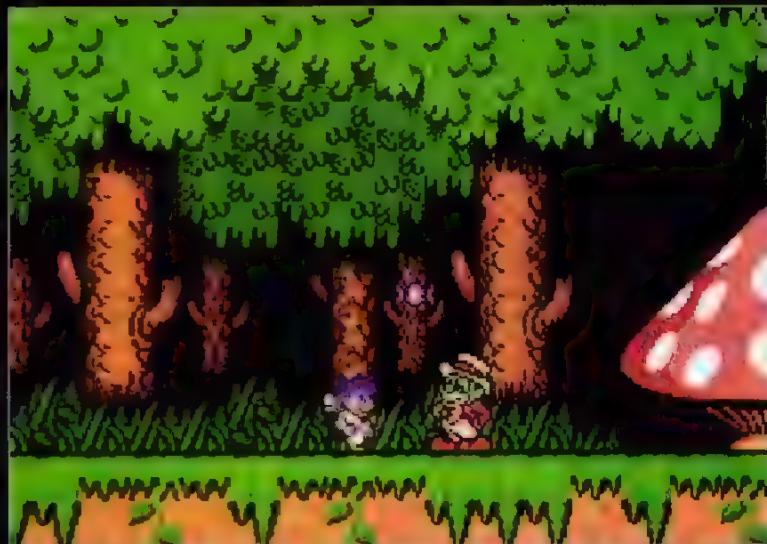


GENESIS

MICRO MACHINES

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING > PUBLISHER CODEMASTERS > DEVELOPER CODEMASTERS > RELEASE 1993

Long before Codemasters wowed racing fans with *Grid* and *Dirt*, the developer rewired its engines creating a title based around Galoob's popular miniaturized car sets. *Micro Machines* originally appeared on the NES, but the Genesis and SNES versions feature improved 16-bit graphics. This top-down racer buys into the miniature-racing concept by placing players in unique racetracks like bubble baths, breakfast tables, concrete garage floors, and pool tables with obstacles like spilled OJ, super glue, and eight balls. Each race features different mini vehicles like powerboats, turbo wheels, ruff trux, sports cars, and choppers. By participating in the *Micro Machines Challenge*, players add cars to their collection after each race. The game is at its best in two-player matches, as the single-player races stick to rather brutal design philosophy. With no catch-up AI, one or two mistakes can cost you the race, and there are no save files to track your progress. Despite these classic 16-bit hang-ups, *Micro Machines* is an entertaining racing title that showcases the early years of a developer still living on the track to this day.

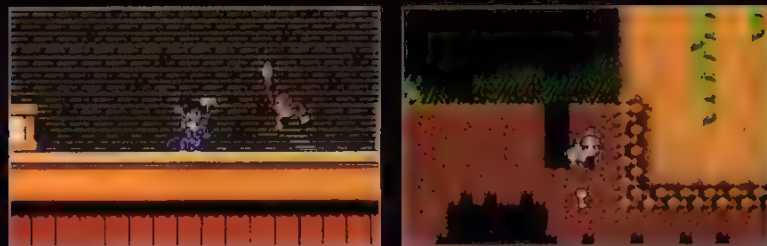


NES

LITTLE NEMO: THE DREAM MASTER

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 1990

One of the most graphically impressive titles for the NES, *Little Nemo* was an offbeat platforming treasure. As a young boy stuck in the world of dreams, players navigate a series of incredible stages, from a forest of oversized mushrooms to a sinister interior filled with malicious animated toys. The variety of environments and challenges is top-tier for the 8-bit era. A number of suits, similar to *Super Mario Bros.* 3's transformations, provide one-off sequences that keep the action from becoming formulaic. Unlike the martial abilities of many platforming stars on the NES, Nemo's only attack is to throw candy, which allows him to stun or befriend the creatures he encounters. This unusual mechanic gives the action a unique feel and is a key factor in separating this title from its many contemporaries. Barring a disappointing final sequence that dramatically changes the gameplay by replacing the candy with a poorly implemented attack ability and throws players into frustrating boss fights, this is one of the very best platformers of its time.



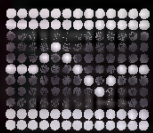
MASTER SYSTEM

ALTERED BEAST

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SEGA > RELEASE 1989

In 1989, Sega released what would become its most popular console in North America — the Genesis. But before Sonic was even a blue glint in Sega's eye, *Altered Beast* was the pack-in game that moved systems with its relatively close arcade presentation. The company also released a low octane version on its 8-bit Sega Master System console. While it still technically feels like *Altered Beast*, it's ridiculous how many signature elements are missing from this edition. There's no two-player mode, no "Wise from your gwave" voice sample, no level three, no were-bear, no continues (outside of secret codes), and no end credits. Since the Master System controller only has two action buttons like the NES, you have to awkwardly mash them both to jump. Previously menacing undead creatures are now cuter and tiny. The majestic two-headed white wolf is the size of a terrier, so you almost feel guilty kicking it in the face. At least your noble Centurion still proclaims "Power up!" when his muscles burst out of his shirt. If only Sega would've taken these wise words to heart.





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UNLIMITED LAUNCH: MAR. 16



BIOSHOCK 2

Want to learn more about the most anticipated sequel of the year? Send your BioShock 2 questions to bioshock2@gameinformer.com and we'll do our best to answer.



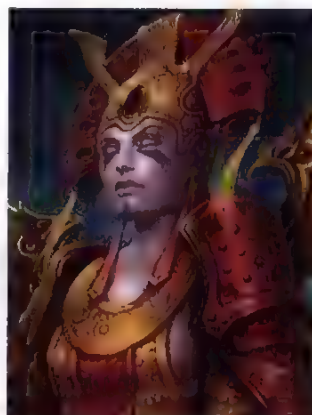
Survey Says

Delve deeper into the Game Informer reader survey on genre perception.



Heir Majesty

Adam explores Majesty 2's new features in this exclusive Q&A with game producer and Ino-Co founder Alexey Kozyrev.

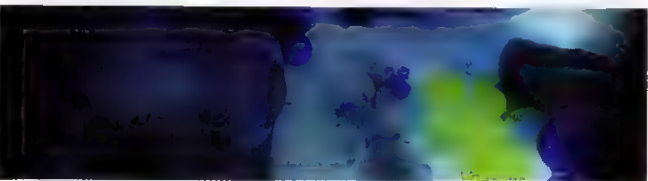


Fellowship of the Dice

Read more about the Player's Handbook 2 for 4th edition D&D in our interview with Mike Mearls, lead designer from Wizards of the Coast.

Also Online This Month:

Game Informer Online reports from the 2009 Game Developer's Conference in San Francisco.





GAMEOVER

The Secret Password Is: Sekipsoa

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Brrr! We can't wait to get out of this freezing weather and into the scorching summer of *Wii Sports Resort* – if for no other reason than to see our sexy, oval-shaped Miis wear skimpy clothes and throw frisbees in 99-degree heat. The better you perform in the quiz, the likelier you'll be playing something really special with the new 1:1 MotionPlus competitions we thought up. Then again, maybe we should stick to writing and not designing...

1 The password "DFFFI" allows you to skip to any stage in what NES game?

- A. Bubble Bobble
- B. Faxanadu
- C. Gauntlet
- D. Shadowgate

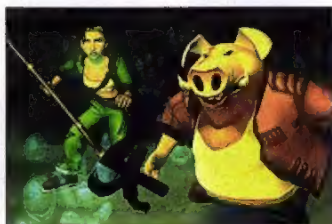
2 According to developers 2K Boston and 2K Australia, *BioShock* is a spiritual successor to what sci-fi action-adventure?

- A. System Shock
- B. Half-Life
- C. Myst
- D. Doom II



3 Perhaps 2003's most underrated title, *Beyond Good and Evil* features a pig-like mechanic alongside heroine Jade. What's the boar's name?

- A. Porkins
- B. PeyJ
- C. Pigster
- D. PeT



4 Which of these Atari games was completely fabricated just now by our precious brains?

- A. Acid Drop
- B. Holey Moley
- C. Kaboom!
- D. Fishers of Men

5 Originating on SNES and seen in *Super Mario Kart*, this term refers to a technology that gives the impression of a 3D environment using 2D graphics.

- A. Super FX
- B. Mapping 4 Point
- C. Mode 7
- D. Kart Layer



6 The best part of waking up is *Folgers* in your console. The coffee company published a game on NES.

- A. True – You guys aren't crazy enough to make that up.
- B. False – Yeah, you guys are nuts.

7 Name that game:



- A. Secret of Evermore
- B. The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past
- C. EarthBound
- D. Secret of Mana

8 What character graces the box art found on *Soulcalibur IV* for PS3?

- A. Yoda
- B. Hilde
- C. Darth Vader
- D. Maxi



9 This science fiction title features the likes of confederate general Edmund Duke, Sons of Korhal leader Arcturus Mengsk, and psychic espionage agent Sarah Kerrigan.

- A. Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords
- B. Phantasy Star Universe
- C. Mass Effect
- D. StarCraft

10 Video games...

- A. rot your brain!
- B. make you fat!
- C. waste time!
- D. offer a combination of emotional experiences no single medium can achieve!



BREAKDOWN

8.94 million Mario Kart Wiis sold globally in 2008 according to Top Global Markets, making it the highest-selling game of the year.

823 million dollars were spent promoting video games in the U.S. in 2008, according to Nielsen Company's Monitor-Plus.

1 million dollars was given to the estate of Mario Puzo, author of the original *Godfather* novels, as a settlement for revenues derived from EA's video game adaptations.

256,000 gamers bought *Grand Theft Auto IV* in Japan, compared to 5.18 million purchases in the U.S., according to Top Global Markets.

177 gajillion is the number of numbers we've made up on this last breakdown, according to Miller.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1:

Drowning Victim. Raise remote super high, wait for rescue



2-3:

Sandy Towel. Flap remote like crazy to get the stupid sand off



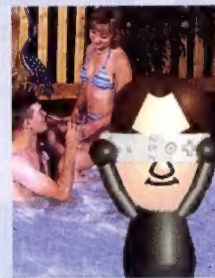
4-5:

Corn On The Cob Eating Contest. Rotate Wii remote across face!



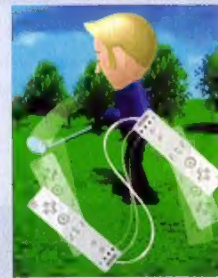
6-7:

Metal Detector. Hold remote like a vacuum and listen for a noise



8-9:

Mii Spotting. Hold remote close to eye; B zooms in on hunks and babes



10:

Ladder Golf. Tossing of remote is mandatory

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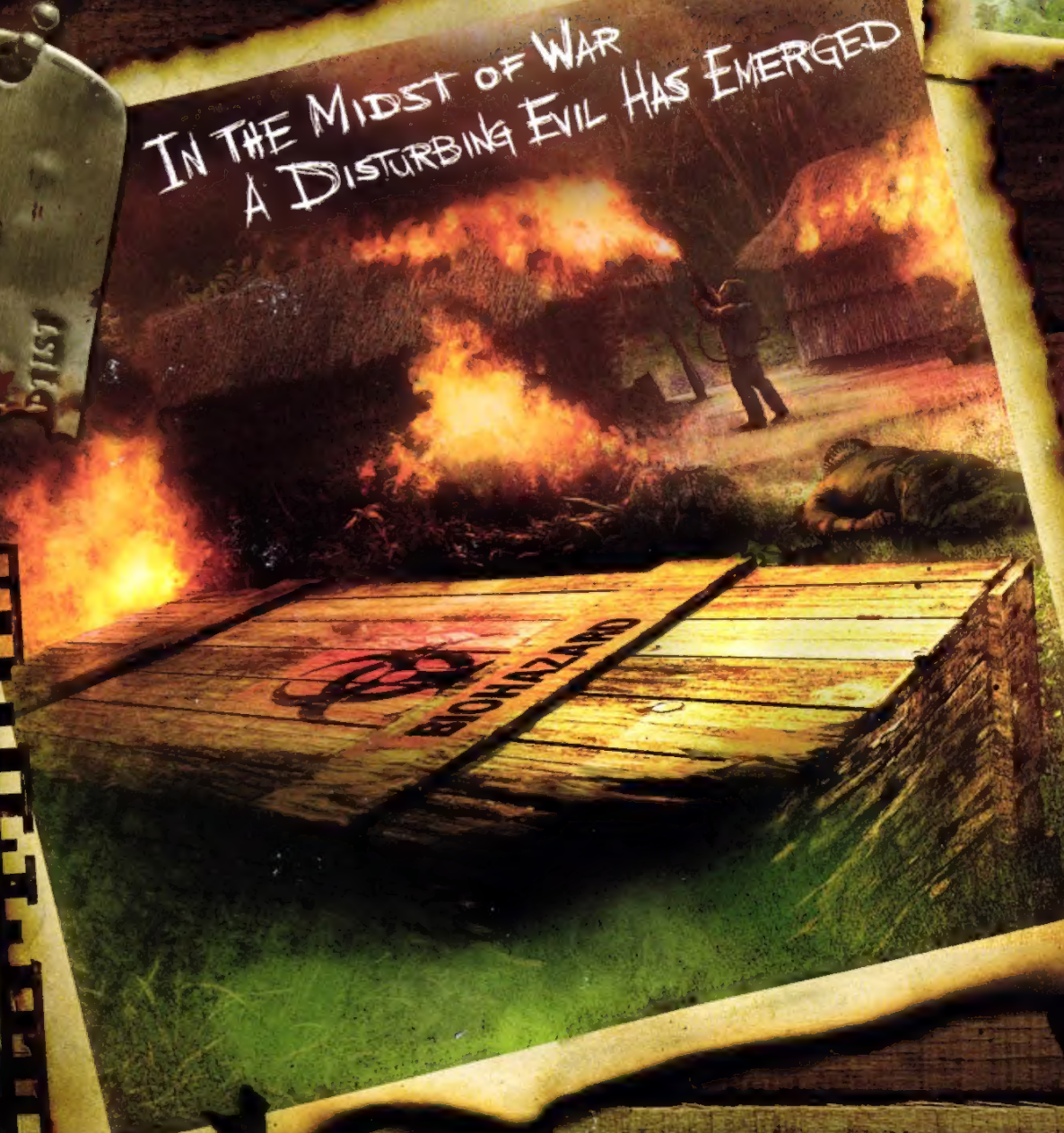
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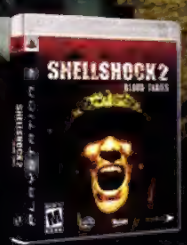


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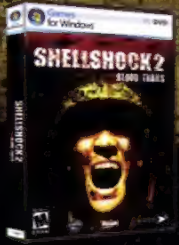
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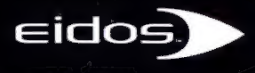
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