

WORLD EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK AT MODERN WARFARE 2

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PLUS:
DJ HERO
SIX-PAGE REPORT

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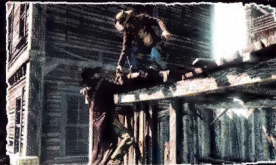
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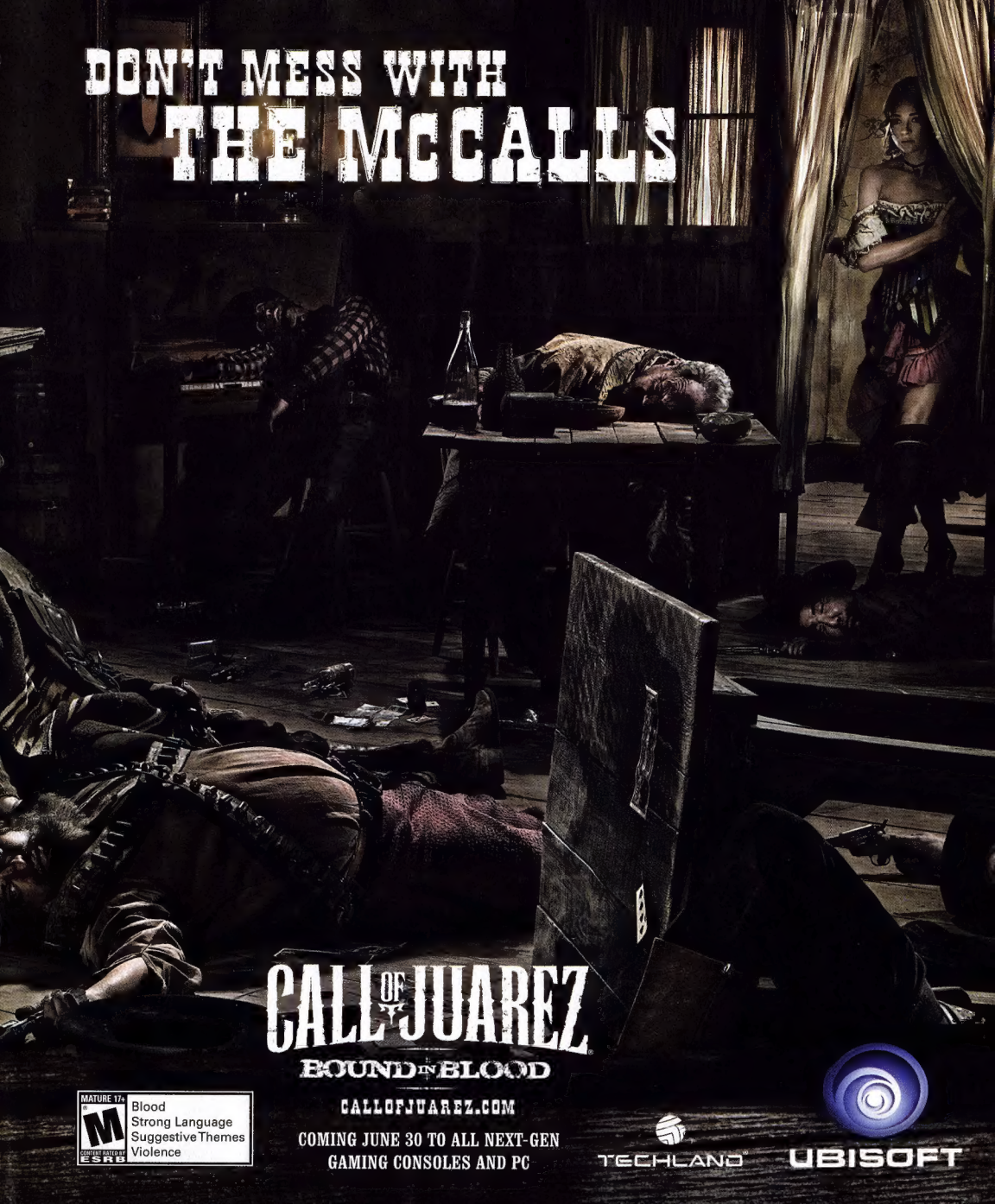


Choose to embody Ray or Thomas, each with a distinctive gameplay style



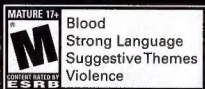
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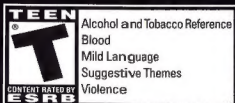
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PS3
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rocksteady

eidos

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MODERN WARFARE 2

Famed developer Infinity Ward has moved away from the Call of Duty moniker, but this is indeed the sequel to Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. The world exclusive first look is inside, with 10 pages of enormous screenshots and juicy details on gameplay. Infinity Ward's stock is as high as any in the industry after the massive success of its last title. Come see how the team plans to push that even higher.

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FROM CODE TO COMICS

From Atari Force to World of Warcraft, we explore the best and worst of video game comics of the last 25 years. We go deep into the crossover of the two mediums to explain the process by which game plots are adapted to ink and paper, and how comics have been able to expand upon and even change the original storylines.



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DJ HERO

We're proud to present the exclusive first details on Activision's next music game, complete with a partial tracklist and first photos of the new turntable peripheral. You can learn all about DJ Shadow's deep involvement in the game, as well as how the gameplay will be both familiar and new to anyone who's played Guitar Hero.

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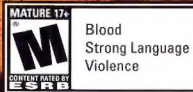
The end...or is it?

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GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly
Of The Video Game Industry



1 Meagan chills with the Naughty Dog crew 2 Reiner hangs with OnLive's Tiffany Spencer and Bethesda's Todd Howard 3 THQ's Jaime Jensen referees as Neven Dravinski puts a wicked arm bar on Ben while demonstrating UFC 2009 Undisputed 4 Nick enjoys the great outdoors with Bender Helper's Stacy Miles and Deep Silver Vienna's Martin Fillip 5 Miller represents Run-DMC-style with RedOctane's Doug McCracken and Activision's Will Townsend in memory of Radio Raheem (R.I.P.) 6 Legendary Final Fantasy composer Nobuo Uematsu has a slight disagreement with Arnie Roth, the conductor of the "Distant Worlds: Music From Final Fantasy" concert series 7 This picture of Golin *Photo: Andrew Kelly, Meagan* and Nintendo's Nate Robinson has not been hilariously altered using the Nintendo DSI in any way 8 Nintendo's Nate "Dogg" Williams and Andy Mac hang in the ultra-exclusive Game Informer kitchen





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Spoiled Rotten

I am thankful I had the chance to play through the original BioShock. Not because it was a great game (though it was), but because if I hadn't, your cover story on BioShock 2 would have ruined the entire experience for me. I don't think you left out a single plot twist from the first game. I feel bad for anyone who read that without having experienced the game for themselves, because they won't be able to enjoy it in the same way anymore.

Jason Roan
via email

We try to avoid printing major spoilers, especially when they aren't absolutely necessary. However, we make rare exceptions. In the case of BioShock 2, part of understanding what makes the sequel so compelling is the context from the original. Returning to Rapture is only exciting if you know what happened there before. Andrew Ryan's fate is a defining element of the setting, and mentioning the first game's big twist is necessary to address how the team at 2K Marin plans to keep players guessing with the sequel. All of those things aside, the original BioShock

came out over a year and a half ago. If you still haven't played the best game of 2007, and have somehow managed to avoid spoilers for such a widely discussed and analyzed title, you probably know better than to read a 10-page feature on the next entry in the series.

Retirement Fund

Hey, I'm a new subscriber and I just received my first issue ever of Game Informer. I was sitting in the living room reading your work when a question struck me: How much money would a current issue of Game Informer be worth 50 years from now?

Sergio Escobedo k
via email

Well, that depends. A number of factors can affect resale value. Are any of the pages bent or torn? Is the cover damaged at all? Have you spilled any liquids on the magazine? If you answered "no" to all of those questions, and if you can manage to keep the issue in pristine condition, you might be able to get between 25 cents and a dollar for it in 50 years. Unless you've crammed a bunch of gold between the pages somehow. Have you done that?

Nice Try

I only recently got the "New Xbox Experience" for my dashboard. While I was looking at the new features I found the one where you could install games to the hard drive. My buddy and I were talking, and we figured that if you went to rent a

video game you could just install it on the hard drive and then take it back, paying only a fraction of the game's cost. I personally haven't tried this yet - does the 360 have a blocker that prevents you from pulling it off?

Zachary Vesquez
via email

Sorry, Zachary. It doesn't work like that. Only certain files from the disc are copied over to your console's hard drive in order to ease loading and make the game play smoother. Even after installation, you still need the disc to play.

Paying Off

I am a fan of your Impulse page. I have a question for you, though. I want to know how you feel about Microsoft and developers jacking up the prices on most Arcade games. It seems like 1,200 points is the new 800, plus they have already started to charge 1,600 on select titles. This seems a little ridiculous to me.

Jim Gabriel
via email

Charging more money for downloadable games isn't inherently bad. We see no reason to complain about a shifting arbitrage class as long as gamers are still getting their money's worth. Xbox Live

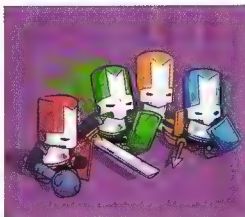
Arcade titles like Portal: Still Alive and Castle Crashers are a steal at 1,200 points (which amounts to \$15 in non-stupid currency), given the quality and amount of content they offer. However, it does feel like certain titles are trying to pull a fast one on unsuspecting gamers. For instance, Watchmen: The End is Nigh is a rip-off at 1,600 points, but because was clearly hoping the high-profile license would sucker gamers into shelling out the big bucks. Ultimately, you have to take each game on its individual merits. Download trial versions and judge a title's value for yourself. If people aren't downloading games at high price points, that's going to send a message.

It's Always Someone

At first, I was absolutely elated to hear about the idea behind Zipper's efforts in MAG. Lets face it; even excellent games such as Call of Duty 4 fail to deliver an experience remotely close to true modern warfare. However, I have one concern: Is Zipper's ingenious innovation going to fall prey to the nature of online gaming? Based on my prior experiences, the gamers you find online are idiots who try to Rambo it up in matches. This makes the dream of a realistic modern warfare impossible. Is my concern unfounded?

Adam C. Smith
via email

Your concern is not unfounded, but it is one that multiplayer designers have gotten better at addressing. No matter what game you're playing, there are always people who disrupt the experience. While developers don't have the power to directly ensure that everyone is playing "right," they can control the foundations of the game in order to encourage certain play styles. For instance, a lone wolf in MAG who breaks off from the group and runs guns-blazing into a group of enemy soldiers will get a little bit of experience for each kill. However, staying with the squad and taking a control point per your commander's orders has a much larger experi-



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

COMMUNITY

Comments are for a fun, lively, and respectful discussion. We reserve the right to remove any comments that are abusive, defamatory, or otherwise inappropriate.



I've wanted to ask so many development teams over the years if anyone on the team truly believed that the piece of crap they just released was actually playable.

Tanooki

Silicon Knights: Eternal Darkness will forever live on in my dreams as a beautifully created nightmare. Why haven't you made a sequel, or at least built off the premise or the mechanics the game introduced?

Classics

Visual Concepts: When EA's NFL deal is over, will you guys go right back to where you left off?

DollMeal_TesStreak

Hampton: When Frequency and Amplitude didn't really perform well at retail, were you afraid the rhythm genre would never catch on? At the time could you even envision the success and influence the Carter Hero and Rock Band franchises would achieve?

subradley84

Hey, BioWare! Where the hell is Knights of the Old Republic 3?

Deadraven2

THE QUESTION

If you could ask one video game developer a question, who would it be and what would you ask?

Morality: Soft, but it won't be a question. It'll be a demand "Give us a new Xenosaga!"

Xenosaga freak

I would ask Tim Schaller his feelings on creative and original IP's getting shelled, like Psychonauts, in favor of the next comfortable sequel.

DanteBunny

Cabe Newell and Valve: When and how did the idea for Steam come about?

forberg1785



Psychonauts

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

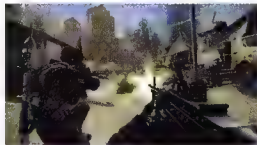
Ever tried bodysurfing
a tropical tidal wave?



©2008 Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company. 5, Lush and Stimulate Your Senses

Ever tried  Gum?
Stimulate Your Senses

ence payout. This means that the biggest rewards can only be gained through strategy, coordination, and cooperation. Players who aren't interested in that approach will likely get bored with their lack of progression and quickly move on.



Not Hurting Anybody

I really enjoyed David Smith's "Wasting the Day to Play: Does Gaming Need a Defense?" in issue 192. Video games have been a big part of my life since I was a kid, and in my four years in college they have been a great way to spend time with friends. It just seems strange to me that people are so quick to point out all the negative aspects of spending a night or afternoon playing video games, especially in comparison to more expensive and mind-altering hobbies

Will Xenos
via email

David Smith made some good points in his opinion piece "Wasting the Day to Play: Does Gaming Need a Defense?" What was once a hardcore gamer's hobby, kid's activity, or a waste of time has now become a hobby for all ages, races and backgrounds. When we are not working at our jobs or spending time with loved ones we want to do something fun with our free time. Men and women could be watching their favorite TV shows. They could be watching movies. They could even be out at bars and clubs until the wee hours of the morning. Yet we are at home, staying out of trouble, and doing something entertaining. What's wrong with that?

Drew Ross
via email

I'm an employee at a game retailer, and having just read the "Wasting the Day to Play" piece, and I wanted to share just how much gaming is trivialized right in my face every day. It seems as though games are no longer entertainment to many parents or uninterested (yet strangely opinionated) customers. My colleagues and I strive to be knowledgeable and informed, but some people will ask us a question about a game one minute, and the next they are telling us that video games are a waste of our lives. Mind you, they are doing this while standing in a video game store. It isn't just the hypocrisy that bothers me, I wish more people understood the frustration of dedicating so much time and effort to something only to have it sneered at.

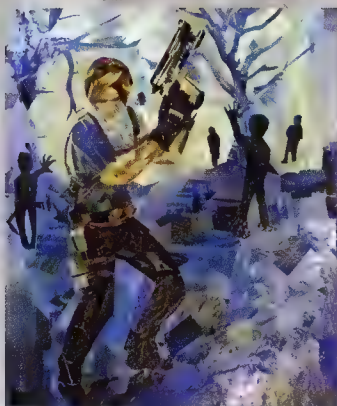
Ed Booth
Waterbury, CT

Since we're a video game magazine, we weren't surprised to discover our readers are enthusiastic about video games. Similarly, you shouldn't be surprised we're printing these letters illustrating that enthusiasm. It may be preaching to the choir, but gaming doesn't need a defense, and talking about gaming doesn't always need to have a point.



COLLIN CHRISTENSEN

Leon Kennedy rendered in magazine clippings, eh? It's certainly better than the Sheva sculpture Miller made from hair clippings



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reader art



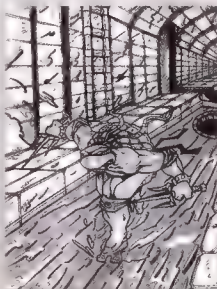
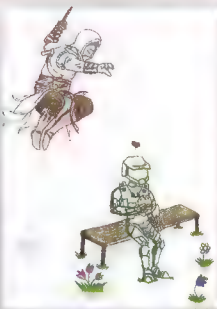
NICK JABLONSKI

Though he can pull off a classic Kool-Aid Man maneuver, his Big Daddy is less of a hit at parties



BOBBY WHITNEY

Anyone who thinks Raphael is not the coolest Ninja Turtle is either a moron or Michelangelo



ARIANA SEVILLA

So...Master Chief loves hamburgers, but he's about to get stabbed? It makes perfect sense



SAMUEL HERNANDEZ

Somewhere, an athletic supply shed is missing a pair of emo shoulderpads

CONNECTIONS:

In the Connect story entitled "Four's a Crowd?" in issue 183, Game Informer stated "one way OnLive is attempting to combat lag is by limiting online multiplayer to regional servers." In the press conference we referenced, OnLive founder Steve Paffenham was discussing the ability to have large geographic LAN parties, which are restricted by region. Hearden stresses that this does not preclude competitive online multiplayer across the country, which OnLive offers in tandem with regional LAN parties. In our feature on MAG in the same issue, we incorrectly spelled Zipper lead designer Andy Beardon's last name. Lastly, the preview for A Boy and His Blob in that issue should have listed WayForward Technologies as the game's developer and Majesco as the publisher. We apologize for the errors.

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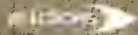
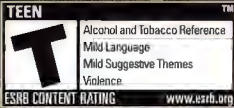


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The Fate Of A Generation

Game Informer Looks At Console Lifecycles

The current generation of consoles is in full swing, but how long will it last? Traditionally, a console generation lasts five years, but all the console manufacturers are talking about a longer cycle this time around. Whether that happens or not depends on a number of factors.

The Long Road

For many reasons, having a longer console generation this time around makes sense. With systems costing more to make, a longer cycle allows console manufacturers more time to recoup their investments. This is especially important because it takes years to get to the point where they've refined production techniques sufficiently to stop losing money on each system sold.

In the current economic climate, squeezing the most out of a console is in the best interests of the manufacturers. This may be particularly true seeing as how both Sony and Microsoft have losses in other divisions of their company to make up. Evan Wilson, senior research analyst for Pacific Crest Securities, says it's also a personnel issue. "I'm going to guess that within the massive amounts of layoffs that have happened within Microsoft and Sony, there have been R&D [research and development] people working on the game initiative."

Publishers and developers of games — the lifeblood of any platform — also have a vested interest in longer console lifespans. The more time spent with a system the better acquainted they become with it, and the more they can utilize the power within. Having to start over on a new system when you haven't even gotten the most out of the last one is a change of direction that eats up resources.

These days, with all three systems receiving updates via downloads, the possibility of a longer-than-normal console generation becomes even more likely. "We have already proven that we don't need to release a new console in order to significantly enhance the gaming and entertainment experience," explains Albert Penello, Xbox senior director of global marketing. This is also true for his competitors, whether it's Sony adding more cross-functionality between the PS3 and PSP or Nintendo building on the Wii after its release with new channels and memory storage options.

Sony's head of marketing, John Koller, believes it's all in the hands of the consumers. "It's less of a Sony dictate, and it's more of where we see the consumer demand curve landing — and we expect that to be a ten-year plus curve. That's the way consumers are moving."

The Future Is Now?

Wilson believes that gamers are the ones who benefit from having a shorter console cycle. "I think this industry is obviously driven by the enthusiasm of the gaming public," he says. "While there are people who will be satisfied with their PS3 games in the their tenth year, there's also a significant group of gamers that like to see the new innovation."

Moreover, Wilson believes that even with the industry's healthy sales, economic forces could force a more traditional lifespan. "I could paint a scenario that in 2010, we would have declining software on the platforms that represent maybe over 50 percent of industry sales. Even if we get growth out of the PS3 and Wii, I think that people looking at the industry at large may say to themselves, 'Shoot. It's starting to look like we need a catalyst.'" That catalyst, of course, is a new system.

Here's where Wilson thinks gamers come in. "Is that hardcore gamer who brought a 360 in 2005 going to be spending as much money on games in 2010 or 2011? You may be losing your audience to other forms of entertainment. That's not something that I think we've really started a discussion about."

When Will The New Systems Come Out?

None of the console manufacturers would divulge their current plans, but some facts are known. Microsoft has already approached publishers and developers about the next platform. What this tells us about how far along in the process the system is remains to be seen. Wilson says Sony is in a similar place, and that it's early in the game.

"The publishers have said that they haven't received any reference materials on the next consoles yet. Typically they do at least two years before the launch, so given it's the beginning of 2009 I think the earliest you'd see these would be the end of 2011. I think the most likely scenario is that we get at least one new console sometime in 2011 and 2012."

Of course, that's roughly the earliest we would see any new systems, which puts us on a timeline that eclipses the normal five-year cycle. How long after that it goes is anyone's guess.

MICROSOFT XBOX 360

Released: November 22, 2005
Approximately **28 million units**
sold worldwide

Current Position:

With last year's price drop spurring bigger sales, Microsoft has largely achieved what it set out to do with the release of the system: Make the 360 a significant force in the console landscape and capture the online mindshare with Xbox Live. Given this, it is unlikely that the company would cash its chips in early and release another system before the 360 fully runs its course. However, the wildcard in this thinking could be the console's hardware failure rate. The red ring of death could literally kill the 360 if gone unchecked.



The Company Plan:

Microsoft expects this console lifecycle to last longer than the traditional five-year span, and the company believes that regular updates to the 360 will push its life past that of the original Xbox and past the five year mark.

"Our consumers have made it clear," says Albert Penello, Xbox senior director of global marketing, "that they don't want to buy a new device for several hundred dollars every five years in order to get the best gaming and entertainment experiences. They want one device that can do everything well and will grow with them as their needs change. We're not even halfway through the Xbox 360 lifecycle, and we've been able to constantly update the system...something that benefits all of us."

NINTENDO Wii

Released: November 19, 2006
Approximately **50 million units**
sold worldwide

Current Position:

As the undisputed sales leader of this hardware generation, Nintendo would seemingly be in no hurry to make a successor to the Wii. However, given that the console has considerable graphical ground to make up on its competitors, it's not inconceivable that Nintendo could put out a Wii 1.5 capable of HD graphics. Rumors have already circulated about such a device coming in 2011.

Moreover, although the Wii is a phenomenal sales success, Nintendo president Saturo Iwata recently revealed during a speech to the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan his belief that in Japan in particular, fans might tire of the Wii sooner rather than later. "The speed with which people get tired of any new entertainment is faster in Japan than in overseas markets"



The Company Plan:

Nintendo officials did not talk to us for this article, but in 2007, president Iwata stated that manufacturers come out with new consoles because they need a "new weapon in the fight against other consoles." He then added, "But today's situation is such that we are not desperate for any new weapons at all."

SONY PLAYSTATION 3

Released: November 17, 2006
Approximately **22 million units**
sold worldwide

Current Position:

Out of all the console manufacturers, Sony is in the most delicate situation. With the PS3 in last place in sales, yet arguably the most powerful of the bunch, there are arguments both for and against coming out with a new PlayStation and starting the next console generation sooner rather than later. A price cut and continued first- and third-party software support would only give the system more shelf life.



The Company Plan:

Sony has expressed its firm commitment to a 10-year cycle for the PS3, and it believes that the continuing sales of the almost nine-year-old PS2 is the model to follow. Whether or not this means there is overlap between the PS3 and the next system within the PS3's lifetime (such as there currently exists between the PS3 and PS2, and a model Sony has always followed), Sony head of marketing John Koller wouldn't say.

When we asked Koller if being second out of the gate next time around scares them, he was confident. "You have to look at what the competition is doing, but does it dictate the decisions we're making? No."

THE HOME CONSOLE TIMELINE*

*The abridged version

1972

- Magnavox Odyssey

1976

- Atari Pong
- Coleco Telstar
- Fairchild Channel F

1977

- Atari 2600

1978

- Magnavox Odyssey 2

1978

- Zircon Channel F System II
- Mattel Intellivision

1982

- Atari 5200
- ColecoVision
- Mattel Intellivision II

1985

- Nintendo Entertainment System

1986

- Atari 7800
- Sega Master System

1989

- NEC TurboGrafx 16
- Sega Genesis

1991

- Super Nintendo Entertainment System
- SNK Neo-Geo

1992

- NEC TurboDuo

1993

- Atari Jaguar

1994

- SNK Neo-Geo CD

1995

- Sega Saturn
- Sony PlayStation

1996

- Nintendo 64

1999

- Sega Dreamcast

2000

- Sony PlayStation 2

2001

- Nintendo GameCube
- Microsoft Xbox

2005

- Microsoft Xbox 360

2006

- Sony PlayStation 3
- Nintendo Wii

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

EA KEEPS MADDEN

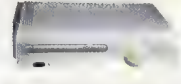
Longtime football color commentator and ex-Kaliders head coach John Madden has retired from television, but EA Sports says his relationship with the company will continue. "We're excited to see his legacy live on in the 21st year of Madden NFL football," says Peter Moore, EA Sports president. Although the company's flagship football franchise bears Madden's name, his presence in the games themselves has declined in recent years.



► Before this Hall of Fame edition, the last time Madden was on his cover was for Madden 2000

NEW 360, NEW WARRANTY

For a limited time, Microsoft is offering an Xbox 360 Elite Game of the Year bundle that includes the 120GB hard drive system with Halo 3 and Fable II. The Elite normally costs \$399 on its own, but for the same price here you get the games as well. If you're worried that this new 360 will die like all the other 360s you've owned, at least Microsoft has extended its three-year red ring of death warranty to include the new E74 hardware failure.



CODEMASTERS WAVES GREEN FLAG ON F1

Racing experts Codemasters landed the official F1 license covering all the teams, drivers, and tracks. Unfortunately, the only F1 action we'll see this year is on the Wii and PSP (shown) this fall with F1 2009. The company says that F1 2010 won't be available for Xbox 360, PS3, and PC until the middle of next year.

BATTLEFIELD 1943 PC DELAY

EA and developer DICE delayed the PC version of Battlefield 1943 from a June release into September. The \$15 digital download game is being pushed back due to the vagaries of using the game's Frostbite engine on the PC.



NEWEST FROM PROJECT GOTHAM STUDIO

Gamers were surprised when Microsoft let Project Gotham developer Bizarre Creations go to Activision. Now, early word from French magazine *Joypad* has surfaced on what the developer is working on: a vehicular combat title named Blur.



► The Wii MotionPlus peripheral attaches to the bottom of the Wii remote

NEWS

HIGH FIDELITY

NINTENDO'S WII MOTIONPLUS OUT THIS SUMMER

We've all had moments when using the Wii remote and nunchuk where we wanted a greater degree of control. That control arrives on June 8 with the release of the Wii MotionPlus peripheral for \$19.99.

You can still play any Wii title without it, and there will be no backwards compatibility for titles already out that don't support the unit. Sega's *Virtua Tennis* (out May 19) is the first game that uses Wii MotionPlus, followed by a pair of EA Sports games: *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10* and *Grand Slam Tennis* (both out June 15).

The fact that Nintendo won't release *Wii Resort* until July makes this feel like a soft launch, and EA Sports senior vice president Steve Chiang tells us that being out there with the peripheral before Nintendo surprised and worried them a little. "But," he tells us, "I think that shows Nintendo's openness to working with third-party." Chiang also says that availability of the peripheral is a slight concern. "For the standalone units, you're going to have to bustle."



DO THEY OR DON'T THEY?

Not all upcoming Wii games will support Wii MotionPlus. Here's a quick list of some upcoming games that do and don't use the peripheral.

The Big 2	NO
Boom Blox Bash Party	NO
Conduit	NO
Dead Space Extraction	NO
Dirt 2	TBD
Grand Slam Tennis	YES
Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings	NO
Madden NFL Football 2010	NO
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2	NO
Muramasa: The Demon Blade	NO
NBA Live 10	TBD
Need for Speed Nitro	YES
Overlord: Dark Legends	NO
Punch-Out!!	NO
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Smash Up	NO
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10	YES
Virtua Tennis 2009	YES
Wii Resort	YES



HOW IT WORKS

Wii MotionPlus adds three MEMS (micro-electro-mechanical) gyroscopes that allow games to determine the Wii remote's orientation and rotation in 3D space. The Wii remote itself uses just an accelerometer to facilitate motion control. Referring to the old Wii remote, Jason Shenkung, senior producer for Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 on Wii, tells us, "In the past, it really was an accelerometer that you were reading as opposed to an accelerometer and a gyroscope. Rotation and orientation were really difficult to read." Now, he says, "The gyroscope allows us to read that rotation perfectly, not just when you start your backswing. Not just when you're coming through the ball, but the entire time. It is very near 100 percent accurate."



HAPPY TOGETHER

Right off the bat, the Wii MotionPlus will be offered in two different bundles. EA Sports is pairing the peripheral with Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 for \$59.99 when the game releases on June 15. Nintendo is putting together its own bundle on July 26, for \$49.99, when Wii Resort hits shelves.

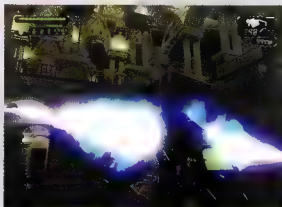


NOT FOR EVERYONE

Despite the fact that Wii MotionPlus improves the motion-sensing fidelity of the Wii Remote, not all developers are going to include it in their games. When we ask EA Sports senior vice president Steve Chiang if there was an EA Sports mandate to use Wii MotionPlus, he replies, "We've been doing more on what's right for each game."

Eric Nofsinger, chief creative officer for The Conduit (shown), says that the team at developer High Voltage actually created a melee weapon for the FPS that utilized Wii MotionPlus, but had to scrap it due to time constraints within the development schedule. Nofsinger says they were excited about the peripheral, but "found that it didn't offer a notable improvement to the input mechanisms of our primarily ranged combat game."

Likewise, Steve Papoutis, executive producer for Dead Space Extraction, says that not all games or genres would benefit from Wii MotionPlus. "The core mechanics of Dead Space Extraction utilize the camera on the standard Wii remote to detect relative position of the sensor bar, which is used for the placement of the game reticule for aiming. These mechanics would not benefit from the additional information provided by the MotionPlus, as we only need to know where the player is aiming."



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

The Wii is in the most unhealthy condition since it hit the Japanese market.

— Nintendo president Satoru Iwata after a consecutive week sales slump in Japan

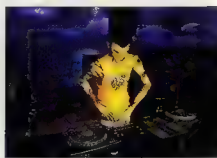


BAD

Two M-rated games on Nintendo platforms — Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars and Madworld (shown) — sold poorly their first months on shelves. Chinatown Wars sold just 89,000 units on the DS, and Madworld only 66,000 on the Wii. We're disappointed more people haven't picked up these standout titles. It's hard to lobby for more game diversity on Nintendo systems — third parties already have a hard time on the platform — when games like these aren't supported better.

UGLY

Hardcore games, please avert your eyes... Developers Traveller's Tales and Harmonix are teaming up for LEGO Rock Band this holiday on the 360, PS3, Wii, and DS. Looks like the Guitar Hero franchise isn't the only one being beaten into the ground.



GOOD

Flogging the dead horse that is Interplay could be in everyone's best interests, if our fourth-grade lawyer logic is correct. Interplay, which has a deal with Bethesda to develop an online Fallout project, has failed to do so in the time allotted in a deal. Now it looks like the rights for a Fallout MMO title are going to Bethesda — which opened up its own MMO studio in 2007. Right now, the different sides are hashing things out, and hopefully we'll soon be hearing about a result in Bethesda's favor and a Bethesda-made Fallout MMO to boot.

UGLY

It's a straight-up DJ battle between DJ Hero publisher Activision and competing game Scratch: The Ultimate DJ (shown. See last issue for our preview). Activision bought cash-strapped Scratch developer 7 Studios, which prompted its publisher Genius Products to sue Activision claiming that the company was trying to sink the game. Although a Los Angeles court judge ruled that Activision is free to own 7 Studios, it can't block Scratch's source code from returning to Genius so someone else can finish the game. Activision has decided any info sharing between itself and 7 Studios in regards to Scratch. For more on DJ Hero, check out our feature on page 46



STUPID

Video game legend Will Wright is leaving Electronic Arts to head up Stupid Fun Club, which will develop new IP across games, movies, toys, and more. EA owns part of the club, and retains the right to develop any games that come out of the venture. Wright is also still involved in helping with the Spore franchise.

I started this month with a pretty empty slate of new titles to explore, and I was a little worried about filling this page. Suddenly, over the last few weeks there was an explosion of new title announcements across several genres and platforms. This special expanded two-page edition of *Impulse* looks at the most promising new titles, most of which should be available for download before the end of the summer.

Final Fantasy IV: The After Years

WiiWare

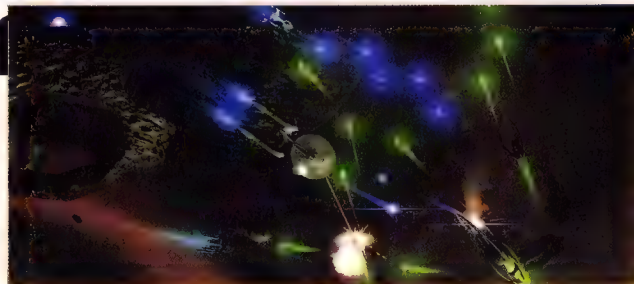
The sequel to the definitive classic role-playing game is exactly as it sounds. Cecil and Rosa have ruled the Kingdom of Baron for 17 peaceful years, and now their son Ceodore steps into an adventure of his own. The second moon has once again circled near, and monsters begin appearing with alarming frequency. A new battle system allows for true four-player multiplayer, with new combination attacks that involve multiple characters acting in concert. Changes in the lunar orbit also affect the powers of both the heroes and the monsters. Word is the game is being set up for episodic releases, with an initial release sometime in June.



Star Trek D-A-C

PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade

No big retail game release is accompanying the J.J. Abrams *Star Trek* reboot, but Naked Sky Entertainment has put together an arcade space combat title that may meet fans' hopes. Abandoning the slow-paced strategy affairs of many *Trek* games, *Star Trek D-A-C* is unabashedly fast paced, focusing on 12-person online battles where each team adopts one side of the conflict between the Federation and the Romulans. The war plays out in the expected team deathmatch sessions, as well as more strategic modes like Assault and Conquest, where players defend sectors or take over control points throughout space. The game hits Live Arcade first shortly after the movie launch - PSN and PC releases are expected soon thereafter.



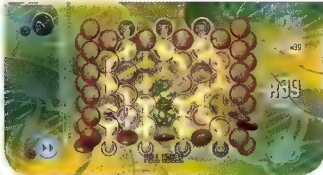
Super Meat Boy

Meat Boy began as a Flash title on newgrounds.com, and now it's headed to WiiWare. The bizarre 2D action game stars a cube of bloody meat out to save his girlfriend (who is made of band-aids) from her kidnapper, a suit-wearing fetus. Indie favorites Tim from *Brack* and Alien Hominid make special guest appearances!



Vandal Hearts: Flames of Judgment

Konami's long-dormant strategy series gets revived in this prequel story, which is coming to Xbox Live Arcade and PSN near the end of the summer. Turn-based strategy is a rarity in the downloadable space, and *Vandal Hearts* certainly has the pedigree to warrant a look.



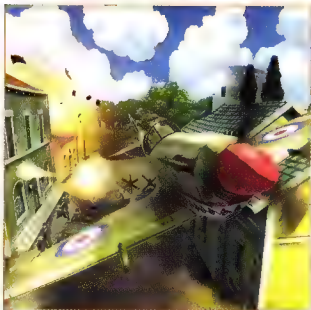
Droplitz

Allus premier's first downloadable title, *Droplitz*, late this spring on Live Arcade, PSN, and PC. Rotating pipe-filled dials channel liquid droplets along the desired path. Think Tetris with water instead of blocks, and you get the picture.

Battlefield Heroes

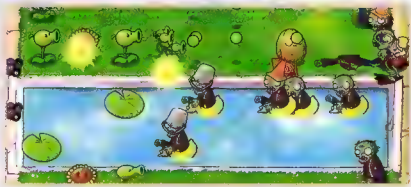
PC

EA's free-to-play Battlefield game is nearing completion, and I recently shot through several hours of the beta. You can dive right in once you download the game and set up an account. Multiple character classes include heavy gunners, stealth fighters, and support builds. The action is fast and cartoony; characters fling sticks of dynamite with abandon, and riding the wing of your buddy's plane is a great way to cross the level. As you help your team to victory, an XP system constantly runs in the background and accumulates based on individual mission goals you set, such as killing a certain number of enemies with a given weapon. If you enjoy the game, you're still likely going to give EA your money; microtransactions allow you to "rent" weaponry and skills for extended periods as you play. Even if that irks you, the core package is solid, and you can't beat the entry price.



Plants Vs. Zombies

PC



Until I played it, I wasn't sure what to make of this new game from PopCap, the makers of addictive puzzlers like Zuma, Bejeweled, and Peggle. It turns out the title is highly descriptive; you play as an army of protective plants, stationed in the back yard as zombies try to breach your defenses, enter the house, and eat your owner's brains. Riffing off the tower defense formula, the simple premise draws you in and won't let go as the set up grows more complex with each passing level. I scoffed at how simplistic the game was right until I looked at the clock and realized I hadn't moved in three hours. Night and day cycles alter the required strategies, and a nefarious new zombie type shows up for every new plant you unlock. My favorite is the Michael Jackson-style Thriller zombies, who dance across the yard in search of brains. The game's a blast, but be warned of the infectious theme song. It will never leave your head. Ever.

Marvel vs. Capcom 2

PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade



As much as it may enrage your buddy who just spent \$100 last month buying a used copy of the original, the classic 2D fighter is finally headed to Live Arcade and PSN. An absurd 56 playable characters show up to the fight in MvC 2, all displayed with an optional visual filter that makes them look even better than in the original release. The likes of Spider-Man, Iron Man, and Wolverine throw down with Ryu, Mega Man, and Jill Valentine in huge three-on-three team matches, which can be now be played online for the first time. With a slightly simplified control scheme over the traditional six-button Street Fighter, Marvel vs. Capcom 2 typifies the high-energy 2D fighter — easy to access for new players, but with enough depth and character-mixing strategies to keep longtime players fascinated.

Fat Princess

PlayStation Network



This clever multiplayer-focused action game is equal parts cute and gory. The premise establishes the blue and red teams on opposite sides of a large map, each ensconced away in fortresses. Teams begin the game having kidnapped the opposing team's princess. While she waits in the dungeon, you can feed her copious amounts of cake to fatten her up and make her more difficult for the opposing team to carry away. During the quest to save your princess, you swap between five character classes, like the Ranger and Mage, each of which has its own tactical advantages. Battles are frantic and bloody, especially when you get a full squad of 32 players scampering about the field. I spent several nights running through the beta, and I had a blast.



> Trash Panic

As endless piles of trash accumulate in your rubbish bin, you must arrange, smash, burn, and incinerate the items to make sure the trash gets taken out. This eco-friendly PSN exclusive has a quirky charm and plenty of challenge.



> Yosunin! Live

A rare puzzle release from Square Enix, Yosunin is all about finding like-colored blocks around the board in a box formation. Highlight them, clear the box, and get points for bigger boxes. Rinse. Repeat. Get addicted.



> WarioWare: Snapped!

Perhaps the most impressive of the DSiWare titles for Nintendo's new handheld, WarioWare takes full advantage of the built-in camera in its wacky minigames. See that shadowy face and hands in the screens? Yeah, that's you.

FROM CODE TO

COMICS

UNLIMITED ENABLED

VIDEO GAMES' ADVENTURES IN THE NINTH ART

Anyone familiar with Sonic the Hedgehog knows that the mythos of Sega's mascot doesn't exactly have a *Silmarillion*-like depth. However, according to a comic published just prior to the original 1991 Genesis title, the blue blur's history is more bizarre than one would ever imagine.

As the comic tells it, Sonic was originally a brown hedgehog who turned blue after he broke the sound barrier (on a treadmill, no less). Dr. Robotnik was once a kindly scientist called Dr. Kintobar (Robotnik backwards), whose noble aim was to rid Planet Mobius of all evil. The good doctor invented a giant evil-sucking machine powered by Chaos

Emeralds and gold rings, but when Sonic spilled soda pop on the device, it exploded, and all its stored evil escaped into Kintobar, driving him mad.

Comic books give us a chance to explore our favorite virtual worlds in ways not possible on a console. However, sometimes it can make us feel like we're staring into a parallel reality where our favorite characters aren't quite as we remember them. We combed through our long boxes to find the most notable gems—the best, the worst, and the oddest video game comics ever published.

ATARI FORCE

RELEASE: 1982-1986

During Atari's 2600 heyday, the publisher teamed up with DC Comics to produce a short run of books called *Atari Force*. Written by industry legends Gery Conway (longtime *The Amazing Spider-Man* writer and co-creator of the Punisher) and Roy Thomas (onetime Marvel EIC known for his runs on *The Uncanny X-Men* and *The Mighty Avengers*), *Atari Force* books were packed inside some of Atari's more popular titles, such as *Defender*, *Star Raider*, and *Galaxian*. The book's story followed a group of multinational heroes who traveled through dimensions looking for a planet to inhabit, since Earth was facing ecological devastation. The comics had loose ties to a variety of Atari's trademarks, and became so popular that they spawned a short-lived monthly series still sought by collectors today.



■ The *Atari Force* comic actually came full circle when it inspired the creation of a coin-op arcade game called *Liberator*. Characters in the game were pulled from the comic, which had originally been created to showcase Atari games.

SONIC MAKES GOOD

Though Sonic's comic roots started as a laughable backstory, he finally found his place. In 1993, Archie comics approached Sega about doing a Sonic comic. Even though the project was originally based off the '90s cartoon show, the comic actually came out first, leading many to believe that the show was based on the comic. More than 15 years later, this series is still running strong with a solid fan base. It holds the world record for being the longest-running comic based on a video game.

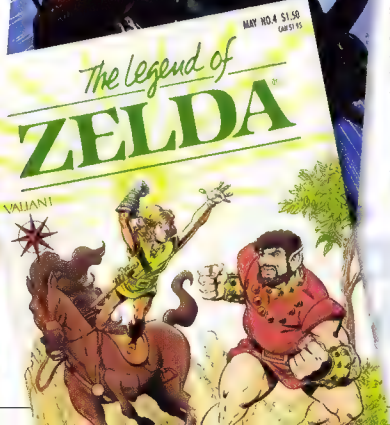


CENTIPEDE

RELEASE: 1983

In addition to its *Atari Force* line, Atan also made comics based on titles like *Yars' Revenge* and *Centipede*. The single issue of *Centipede* told a story revolving around a village of elves. When an evil wizard turned most of the villagers into mushrooms, the lit-tlest elf, named Oliver, had to save the day with the help of his animal friends Spider, Flea, Scorpion, and of course, Centipede.

Somehow, that's nothing like the story we invented after looking at the art on the side of the arcade cabinet.





CAPTAIN N: THE GAME MASTER

RELEASE: 1990

Based on the popular '80s cartoon, this five-issue run followed the exploits of Kevin Keene, his dog Duke, Princess Lana, King Charles, and Pit. For some reason, the comic forgot that Simon Belmont and Mega Man were a part of the show, and replaced that pair with Metroid heroine Samus Aran (who was never featured in the cartoon). The comic also humorously introduced new characters, such as Samus' insect partner Big Time, and included short stories about other Nintendo games like Punch-Out!!



SUPER MARIO BROS.

RELEASE: 1990-1991

Valiant Comics tried to feed off the success of *The Super Mario Bros. Super Show*. This book featured famous video game characters like Mario, Princess Peach, and Bowser, but also incorporated characters from the show such as Stanley the Talking Fish, King Toadstool, and Wooster. The comic even created a new character, Dirk Drain-Head, a plumber superhero Mario idolized. Later, Valiant released a four-issue miniseries based on the Game Boy's Super Mario Land titles, in which two kids summoned Mario into the real world to save them from the evil machinations of the mysterious space man Tatanga.



DOOM

RELEASE: 1996

Produced as a giveaway for a convention, *Doom* may be the worst video game comic of all time. Mocked for its inaccurate depictions of the game's popular weapons and its laughably bad dialogue, the story follows the insane quest of the nameless Doom guy as he runs through a space station trying to find one big weapon after another. Since he never crosses paths with another human, all of his dialogue comes across as the ramblings of a madman. At one point, his monologue actually devolves into a heavy-handed sermon about the environment: "Why can't we find a way to safely dispose of radioactive waste and protect the environment? Even if I personally stop this alien invasion, what kind of planet will we be leaving to our children? And our children's children, and...oh, the humanity!"



HALO: UPRISING

RELEASE: 2007-2009

Marvel's *Halo: Uprising* — a comic miniseries intended to bridge the gap between the second and third entries of Microsoft's blockbuster franchise — was helmed by industry giants Brian Michael Bendis and Alex Maleev. The series showed a lot of promise, and early issues were critically well received. After only two issues, conflicts between Marvel and Bungie saw the miniseries floundering in delay. It took nearly a year and a half for the entire four-issue run to reach publication.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

RELEASE: 2008-CURRENT

Fans who have been reading WildStorm's *World of Warcraft* comic will recognize events and the storyline from the books as they bleed into events in the online game. Blizzard actually has two staff historians — people dedicated to knowing the Warcraft lore — who ensure the property stays true across media. These historians often meet with WildStorm's creative team to help plot the comic's script. ■ ■ ■

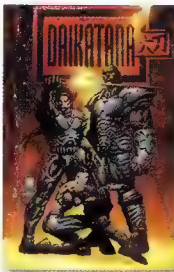
THE ANATOMY OF A COMIC BOOK DEAL

The world of video game development is filled with comic geeks, so it's not surprising that many game companies want to see their franchises in comic form. However, many video game comics fail to live up to their digital counterparts. Why does this happen? Part of the problem might have to do with the overcooking process video game stories go through on their way to the newsstand.

"There are factors that go into creating a video game comic book that do not factor in to a non-licensed book," says Hank Kanalz, vice president and general manager of WildStorm Productions. "You have timing issues, license fees, multiple approvals, game story issues — a lot of stuff that wouldn't play a role into producing the next issue of *Wildcats*, *X-Men*, or *Batman*."

Many comic companies build additional fees into their contract deal for game publishers who want to make changes and corrections to a book late in the game. In most cases, it's probably good that comics companies are given such an excess of game assets. This kind of hand-holding helps preserve the game property's identity, but it may hamper creativity. "I'm not even sure how much [comic creators] are limited by the property, and how much they are limited by their own ideas of being limited," says managing editor of *Wizard Magazine* Mike Colton. "Like, 'I don't want to get in a fight today with this company about doing this story, because this is a licensed property, and I only get paid this much to do it.'" Clearly not all comics are created equal.

Video game delays also cause problems with their comic counterparts. When Top Cow published the *Daikatana* comic 11 years ago, the book had to be redrawn three times because the story and characters in the game kept changing



For years, comic publisher Udon has released a series of fan-pleasing *Street Fighter*, *Darkstalkers*, and *Rival Schools* United By Fate comics, which all fit neatly into each franchise's canon



The original *Sonic* comic implied that since Robotnik was holding an egg when he got zapped with evil energy, he was turned into an actual giant egg



Developer Cryptic Studios supplied comic publisher Top Cow with a 500-page bible for the development of a *City of Heroes* comic

10

the top most pathetic enemies

Not every conflict in gaming can push your skills to the limit. Most enemies simply don't have what it takes to stop you; maybe they exist only to teach you the controls or to feed you experience so you can take on a real challenge. Whatever their purpose, gamers trounce hundreds of these hilariously inept foes without even slowing down. This month, Game Informer salutes/ridicules the weakest, sorriest, and most pathetic enemies ever to stand between gamers and victory.

1 Goomba (Super Mario)

The only way goombas could possibly be easier is if they somehow stomped on themselves. Displaying no initiative or intelligence, they trod along their set patterns just begging to be squished. So why are they at the top of the list? Because despite their lack of strategy and subtlety, they have still managed to kill you multiple times...and that's truly pathetic.



2 Glass Joe (Punch-Out!!)

France may have some good things going for it, but boxing isn't one of them. Pounding the daylights out of this Parisian pugilist is one of those things that every gamer, regardless of skill level, has accomplished. With a terrible super move and limited ability to block, the one and only victory of his career was probably against a goomba.



4 The 1990 New England Patriots (Tecmo Super Bowl)

The Patriots lost 15 games in 1990, a dismal season forever preserved thanks to Tecmo Super Bowl. Anyone can run circles around these chumps. Whether you're sacking poor QB Steve Grogan play after play or just intercepting all of his weak-armed throws, a match-up against the Pats is a free win.



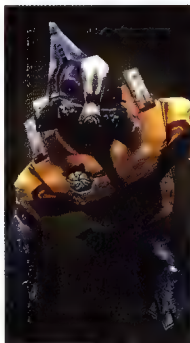
3 Slime (Dragon Quest)

Try as you might, you just can't wipe that smile off a slime's face. Their laughable attacks and short life expectancy should have these gobs frowning instead of wearing a vacant grin. Maybe your pain is funny to slimes...maybe they just delight in knowing you have to fight hundreds of them every time you start a new Dragon Quest



5 Grunt (Halo)

Also known as Covenant Comic Relief, grunts are filthy cowards who only succeed at distracting Master Chief with their annoying voice and lack of combat prowess. Running away at the first sign of trouble, grunts are more of a bother than a thrill to destroy. It's hard to feel cool while shooting fish in a barrel.



6 Stupid Elf (Golden Axe)

"Hmm. These legendary heroes are asleep. Maybe I should try to steal their stuff!" Who do these elves think they are? All they get for sneaking into your camp is a series of brutal kicks to the face, which causes them to drop all of their junk anyway. Better luck next time, suckers.



7 Johnny Sasaki (Metal Gear Solid)

Solid Snake first finds Johnny Sasaki stripped and unconscious...and things only get worse from there. Plagued by frequent gastrointestinal problems and prone to fall for the old "I'm bleeding ketchup" prank, Johnny is proof that genetically modified super-soldiers are no substitute for common sense.



8 Cellar Rat (RPGs)

They may be kings among rodents, but the rats inhabiting a typical fantasy cellar can't even stand up to a level one would-be hero; you can hack apart these vermin with ease using your starting weapons and spells. Your effort is better spent breaking the barrels and crates in the corner — at least those have decent loot inside.



9 Monster (Braid)

The fate endured by these creatures is one of the bleakest in all of gaming. Not only do they look like ugly grapefruits with dreadlocks, but their short lives usually consist of being shot out of a cannon, landing on flaming spikes, and then being forced to relive the experience in an endless loop. It could almost be sad, if it wasn't hilarious.



10 Bob the Killer Goldfish (Earthworm Jim)

We expect minions to be weak, but Bob the Killer Goldfish is supposedly a boss — though you wouldn't know it when you meet him. Your encounters with Bob aren't even real fights; Earthworm Jim just knocks over his fishbowl, or swallows the aquatic mastermind whole. Is a challenging battle against a goldfish too much to ask for?





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REPRESENT
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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



THE FUTURE OF WII NCAA AND NASCAR

NCAA Football isn't appearing on the Wii this year, but EA Sports senior vice president Steve Chiang tells us that the series would "absolutely" be back on the system if they could come up with a way to present an experience that fit for the system.

As for a more sim-based NASCAR title coming back, Chiang wasn't as optimistic. "The answer isn't obvious right now," he admits. Chiang says the series has struggled with sales below the Need for Speed series, which is going through its own overhaul.

NETFLIX FOR ALL?

A job posting by movie rental service Netflix for "developing and testing media rich applications on current generation gaming consoles" may indicate that the company is planning to offer its movie service to PlayStation 3 and Wii owners. Sony currently has its own downloading service, and in the past the company has stated that it was the reason that the PS3 didn't have a partnership with Netflix. Netflix has previously floated test balloons about its service and the PS3, so perhaps it is once again just flirting with the idea.



NEW WARHAWK?

Sony Computer Entertainment America has filed a trademark with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for the title Starhawk, according to net blog Superannuation, leading many to believe that the next Warhawk title takes place in space. The PlayStation 3 exclusive Warhawk (shown) features large-scale multiplayer-only online battles. Sony also registered a trademark for the title Dominion, but the company isn't commenting about the trademarks.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Although this mech game was published by Konami in America, it was not the puppet to Cybermat, as some believe. This LucasArts-developed SNES title put you in the cockpit of six different mech suits, and you could switch between them mid-stage if you could find another one to use. While out on foot looking for a new mech suit, you could even fight your way along with a pistol and jetpack in this platformer. The game also featured a head-to-head mode using splitscreen.

(Answer on page 27)



GAMES

BORDERLANDS' NEW FRONTIER

ART CHANGE ADDS TO GAME SAYS GEARBOX

Borderlands' underwent some changes since it appeared on our September 2007 cover – and we're not just talking about its release date. Recently, the game reappeared with a new, block-color art style that verged on, dare we say... cel-shading. We talked to Randy Pitchford, CEO and president of developer Gearbox Software about the new art direction.

What made you decide to change the game's art style? Was there something that influenced that decision?

The team wanted the look of the game to be as exciting and original as the gameplay, so they really dug in and did something unbelievable with it. I mean, look at it! What's come from their efforts is certainly incredible and original; it's so original, I think that we're now seeing a lot of it. I guess what you might call "controversy" on the Internet and people trying to find a label for it is over the top. I don't call this art style.

When was the decision made? Was this change in art style based a factor in the game's changing release date?

We made the decision last year to make gear up with the next generation. When we changed the release date, it allowed for the decision to be made, not the other way around. The changed release date gave us the time to invest more in the look of the game, so we're so thankful that we were able to have that opportunity, as we think we're able to bring more value and interest to customers as a result. The result of the Gearbox team's efforts is that the world of Borderlands got a lot bigger, and more interesting, and a new gameplay option, including the creation of "Brawl" as a brand. Please check out the new art style added to the process.

When you change the art style on this late in the game?

When you change your art style mid-project, you're committing yourself to a lot of work, and you're also bringing with that change a great perception and obscurity that adds value not just to the look, but also to the gameplay. Team Fortress 2 got a lot of value from their reevaluation of the art style and the value wasn't just in the look, but in the gameplay, too. I don't think there are many studios or publishers that can be so bold. We're proud not with the support of 2K Games we were able to take the risk and make Borderlands so much more interesting and exciting in the process.



games

KONAMI DROPS SIX DAYS IN FALLUJAH

MARINES' STORIES DRAW CONTROVERSY

Konami no longer plans to publish Atomic Games' *Six Days in Fallujah*, a realism-based shooter for Xbox 360, PS3, and PC revolving around 2004's urban conflict in Iraq. The publisher pulled out after controversy in America over the game's subject matter. Atomic Games president Peter Tamte told us that the developer is looking for a publisher for the game, and hopes it can still come out sometime next year.

Six Days in Fallujah is based on stories from real-life Marines who, as Tamte describes, "asked us after they got back from Fallujah to make a video game." The game explores the Marines' experiences as well as the perspectives of the insurgents and Iraqi civilians — which has generated controversy across the web. Tamte, however, defends the game's use of insurgents' motivation and tactics. "It's difficult to do the recreation without that. We are trying to tell the true story of a group of Marines. I have not had any Marine who said, 'Hey look, it's not appropriate to include the insurgents' perspectives.'"

Where Atomic goes from here is unknown. Tamte says a publishing deal from sister company Destineer is unlikely, and Atomic doesn't plan to change the game regardless of Konami's reaction. Is it too soon for a game like *Six Days in Fallujah*? Not for Tamte and Atomic. "Waiting takes away the opportunity to use this very powerful medium of video games to help people understand events that are still unfolding," he says.



games

NEW FALLOUT GAME ANNOUNCED

DEVELOPER OBSIDIAN TAKES REIGNS

Gamers are still sinking their teeth into *Fallout 3*'s Broken Steel DLC (see below), but Bethesda is keeping the content rolling. The company has announced *Fallout: New Vegas*, a new title coming for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and PC sometime next year. The game is being developed by Obsidian Entertainment (*Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II*, *Alpha Protocol*), but at this time little is known about the game other than that it will stick to the *Fallout 3* gameplay of *Fallout 3* and it's not a direct sequel.

THE BROTHERHOOD LIVES ON

Fallout 3: Broken Steel (shown) is available for 800 Microsoft points, and raises the level cap from 20 to 30 as it alters *Fallout 3*'s ending to enable you to continue playing your character. The DLC features a story line tasking you to complete the creation of a Tesla Cannon for the Brotherhood of Steel, and includes assorted new enemies, perks, and weapons.



TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER
KEN YEELEY
Punch-Out!!, Producer

- 1943 – Arcade
- Burnout Revenge – Xbox
- Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars – DS
- Halo 2 – Xbox
- Call of Duty 3 – Wii



READER
JOEL WATERMYER
Lancaster, PA

- The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time – N64
- Resident Evil Series – Multi
- Halo 3 – 360
- The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess – GC
- Star Wars: Jedi Knight – Dark Forces II – PC

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Things Less Stupid Than Bionic Commando's Twist Ending

- Bumblebee
(Also known as Whiz-on-John-Turturro-bot)
- M. Night Shyamalan's career
- The fact that no one ever made another *Zone of the Enders*
- The fact that someone did make another *Fuzion Frenzy*
- Vehicle Voltron
- Prince of Persia's ending
- Chocobos living in your hair
(See *Final Fantasy XIII* preview on page 52)
- Zubaz
- Microsoft Avatars (Now, just kidding. They are stupider)
- Rock Revolution

Name: That Game Answer: Metal Warriors

afterwords

READERS PUT DEVELOPERS IN THE HOTSEAT

**KIERAN BRIGDEN**

Communications Manager, Creative Assembly

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

Sega and Creative Assembly's ambitious *IX* title wowed critics with its sophisticated, layered strategy and entertaining battles, but its public reception was markedly different. Suffering from its troublesome Steam-reliant verification system, persistent crashes, and a laundry list of bugs, the fantastic gameplay has been dogged by glaring faults. Despite the hiccups, *Empire* catapulted to the top of the PC game sales charts in its first month. We grilled Creative Assembly's communications manager, Kieran Brigden, about the rough launch and the game's future using reader and forum-generated questions.



Bogaty: Why can't the AI do amphibious landings? Knowing that the British Isles are safe from any AI attacks makes it easy to crank up the economy and grab the victory areas you need in a very short period of time.

KIERAN BRIGDEN: This is a tough one, thanks for putting the question openly. Essentially it's something that we desperately wanted to get into *Empire* before it shipped (excuse the pun). The AI in *Empire* is a massive beast, it makes economic, military, diplomatic, and naval decisions. The capability for the AI to perform these maneuvers existed, but it wasn't balanced to ensure they happened regularly enough, therefore we knew that it could but it didn't. The upcoming gameplay upgrade will make naval landings more likely, but will not, in all honesty, completely address the issue. Very shortly afterwards you'll see a fix which makes these a regular AI tactic, and then...through is safe.

Bamb00zled:

Successfully capturing a capital? Game crash. Merging naval fleets? Game crash. End turn 50 years into a campaign? Game crash. How could so many crash bugs get through in the final version of the game?

KB: Stability is an issue we have been very concerned about post-release. *Empire* was tested extensively throughout all stages of development on a huge variety of machines. There are testers both inside CA and within Sega. When it became clear that a number of fans were having trouble with *Empire* we immediately began the hotfix-to-patch cycle which we're in now. Within the first week we'd patched *Empire* once and were working on a second raft of fixes. This has continued, and we've stamped out the vast majority of issues so far, but we will continue to listen to the feedback we're getting. There's no point in denying that *Empire* has had technical problems upon launch, but we're committed to getting these addressed as soon as possible and rewarding all those people who had the faith to buy the game in the first instance, and the patience to bear with us whilst we fixed any issues.

V Guard: In my current campaign I control all of Russia, Persia, and India with parts of Europe thrown in, and everybody hates me. They are all listed as hostile, except the Ottomans, and if even

one of them came after me I would be in trouble. But instead, the AI is complacent with sitting and hating my guts while I get stronger and stronger. Is it too much to ask for an AI that attacks you more often rather than easy, as this is the level we intend to balance on and you should see most improvement in. Improving the campaign AI is something we're still working on based on feedback, and it remains a focus in our patching schedule.

KB: The overall AI aggression and activity level is something you'll see a massive change in the next gameplay upgrade, which is due for release very shortly. We've had this in beta with our community, and they're reporting a much harder game experience and much more challenge from the AI in the later stages of the game. I recommend playing on normal rather than easy, as this is the level we intend to balance on and you should see most improvement in. Improving the campaign AI is something we're still working on based on feedback, and it remains a focus in our patching schedule.

but the character traits give Total War that human touch. Why did you scale it back?

KB: There was a more defined character trait system at one point, but this was removed for balance and accessibility reasons. Essentially we didn't want to give the player another set of dialog boxes for little addition to the gameplay itself. Also we ensured that all other characters including Rakes, Gentleman, and generals also gain traits over time. Giving these characters more depth at the working level is something we intended to do and delivered on. We want to continue to improve this system as we know it's something a lot of fans of the series really enjoy, so expect to see it revised and revisited in future.

Ads: The terrain you choose to fight on from the campaign map does not reflect on the battle map. I landed an army from a fleet and the enemy immediately attacked me, but the battle map location was the generic rolling countryside. Recent Total War titles featured maps where my back was to the sea. Do you think this needs to be looked at in conjunction with the bug about reinforcements always coming in from behind the enemy?

KB: The reinforcement bug has already been addressed and will be rolled out with the next gameplay upgrade which, as I've mentioned, is currently in our public beta test and is coming shortly. Making the maps more reflective of the environment was one of our principle aims with *Empire*, and it's a massive improvement over previous TW titles in this regard. Additionally, you'll find that we continue to focus on this aspect in future titles, making that connection between the two worlds (campaign and battle) ever more realistic.

Plangsty: After all that effort and countless hours of gameplay, all I get for my victory is a 30-second video? How about taking an idea from other strategy games and giving each victory a score, so that I can constantly try to beat it? Napoleon would not have conquered Europe if all he got was 30 seconds of congratulations.

KB: We aim for the games themselves to be fun. Great CGI and FMV is just that. What we aim for is that the majority of your time as a player is spent having fun, so we put the effort into the game itself. The ending is there as a celebration of your achievement but not as a 'culmination' to it. Your battles, maneuvers, and actions are the real story, a narrative you've written for yourself as you engaged in the epic conquest of the globe. In addition to the campaign victories, a prestige victory is also possible if you select this option at the outset. This will give you a 'score' based on your technology, military, navy, economics, and enlightenment. This total score allows you to pit yourself against other nations in the same vein and, of course, beat your own bests upon completing the campaign.



Zipp: If anything, the first patch seemed to introduce even more problems. The campaign map moves slower and there is a ton of lag in the battles. What gives?

KB: There was an issue that affected a minority of players with the first patch. A video fix had caused delay to some of their visuals. This has since been corrected and with the introduction of our own public beta group, should not happen again. Sometimes in the rush to make something right, you can cause unintended issues. We've since changed the process to ensure that doesn't repeat.

Groom: I miss the character traits; there are so few traits now. How could a king that's ruled for 20 years have only three character traits? I miss having a cruel king or an honorable king. The game is cool,

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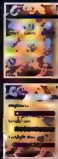


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Screensavers



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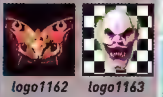


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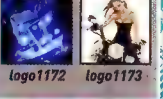
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Mystery GIRL

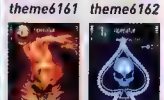
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ani1043



ani1044



ani1045



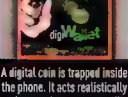
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game4229



game4230

Asher Roth - I Love Collage	song4878
Black Eyed Peas - Boom Boom Pow	song4879
Brow Waw - You Can Get It All	song4880
Clara Fest Justin Timberlake - Love Sex Magic	song4881
Eminem - My Style You	song4882
Eminem, Dr. Dre and 50 Cent - Crack A Bottle	song4883
Jay-Z - Home R.12.1	song4884
Kanye West - Heartless	song4885
Karl Robinson - Turnin Me On Over L.A. Woman	song4886
Kevin Rudolf and Lil Wayne - Let It Rock	song4887
Kid Cul - Bay 'N' Nite	song4888
Lady Gaga - Poker Face	song4889
No-To - Soul	song4890
Slur Thug - I Run	song4891
The All-American Rejects - Gives You Hell	song4892
The Fray - You Found Me	song4893

NEW!

SOUJA BOY

TELLEM

NEW!

Miss Me Like The Phone
Soulja Girl
Love My Dimes On
Sheppin' Spins
Crack That

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STEP 2 REPLY
OK
to the received message

STEP 3 CLICK ON LINK
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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Game Freaks

1989 Junichi Masuda joins his good friend Satoshi Tajiri at his new company, Game Freak.

First Contact



1990 Game Freak releases its first game, Quinty. The game is released as Mendel Palace in the U.S.

Birth of the Empire



1991 The Pokémon invasion of America begins with the release of Pokémon Red and Green, which quickly become hits. The strong sales are fueled by the popularity of the animated Pokémon TV show, which debuts in the U.S. around the same time.

Record Breaking

1999 Pokémon Yellow sells over a million copies in 14 days, making it the fastest selling Nintendo title released to date.

Anime Goes Hollywood



1999 The Pokémon hits the big screen with Pokémon: The First Movie, grossing over \$80 million in the U.S. alone.

Homebound

1999 Topping off a stellar 1999 was the release of Pokémon Stadium, the first home console title in the franchise released in the States.

Big In Retail



2001 Capitalizing on the massive popularity, Nintendo opens a huge Pokémon Center in New York City's Rockefeller Center.

Next Generation

2002 Pokémon makes its debut on the Game Boy Advance with the Ruby and Sapphire titles. The series would help the GBA become the most successful game console of its time.

Advancing

2010 Pokémon Platinum is released and receives some of the strongest reviews in series history.

JUNICHI MASUDA & TAKESHI KAWACHIMARU

GAME DIRECTOR & GAME DESIGNER, GAME FREAK, INC.

>> Both Junichi Masuda, the company's game director and board director, and Takeshi Kawachimaru, a long time designer and lead on the upcoming Pokémon Platinum, have played instrumental roles in Game Freak's tremendous success. On the eve of Pokémon's 10th anniversary, we spoke with the duo on the franchise's past and future. <<

Mr. Masuda, you've been at Game Freak since the very beginning. Could you talk about the early days when you were working with [Pokémon creator Satoshi] Tajiri and coming up with the ideas that would become Pokémon?

JM: Satoshi [Tajiri] and I were friends before Game Freak was established. Mr. Tajiri had lots of ideas, and one of the ideas was to exchange monsters to do battle. So that was one of the ideas that he had, and so I thought it was really, really interesting. After Game Freak was established that's one of the things we wanted to work on — that was six years before the first game came out.

Mr. Kawachimaru, when did you first become aware of Pokémon and how did you come to work at Game Freak?

TK: I was working for a different company when Game Freak was already established, and at that company I was already working on creating a game. That company actually had a working relationship with Game Freak. And, unfortunately, the company decided to stop creating games — still I was fascinated by creating games. I already knew some people

more complicated. However, I always keep in mind how the newcomers — beginner players — can enjoy the game. I think that's the strength of Pokémon. The young players grew up and in the end they become college students, adults. They still have an interest, but we like to focus more on younger players.

What is your core philosophy as a company when it comes to designing Pokémon games?

JM: One element that hasn't been changed since the launch of the first game is trading. In order to trade, you can actually collect Pokémon. You can have Pokémon with different abilities, and you can actually have a Pokédex so you can collect them all. We want to keep up with the need of players who want more, want to collect more, and that's one of the strengths of Pokémon, I believe.

Could you talk about some of the new things and new features that you're excited about for the upcoming Pokémon Platinum?

TK: There are a lot of elements that I would like to mention, but one of the exciting features is Battle Video. That's something that I always wanted, and

JM: Yes, I have thought of doing something new, and it makes me very excited to think of new elements for the game. There are fans who are anxious to get a new game, so for them I would like to do my best to create something very interesting for them.

Can you talk about what some of your ideas might be?

JM: This is just an idea but...as you know, Pokémon is a role-playing game. But, personally, I really like the action type of games, so we just talk about that sometimes. We probably want to add some kind of action element to the game.

How do you come up with ideas for new Pokémon creatures? Do you research the natural world to come up with inspiration?

TK: We don't want to just limit ourselves to something that is alive. Everything which exists in this world could be Pokémon. So when we think, "Okay let's see, what can we make of something you see in this world into Pokémon?" it doesn't have to be something already seen. We just want to make sure that can be adjusted to the Pokémon world.

The corporate culture is very, very open. It's almost like a family.

at Game Freak and they said, "Why don't you come over?" and that's how I got into Game Freak.

JM: We already knew each other so it was a very special relationship.

Pokémon became such a huge phenomenon. Was there a moment when you realized that Pokémon had become something much bigger than you could've imagined?

JM: In Japan, the first games red and green — here it's blue actually — started selling gradually. It wasn't a sudden sell. So in the beginning, I didn't realize it was such a big phenomenon. However, it was slowly going up. Then, when Pokémon was used for animation and movies, that's when I realized how big Pokémon is.

A lot of people assumed that Pokémon would be a passing fad, but 10 years later it is still here. Why do you think Pokémon has been such an enduring franchise?

JM: The important thing I always keep in mind is about beginner players. There are lots of core players, and if you think about core players, the game itself becomes more advanced, more detailed,

it's very exciting to see how other people are battling. I'm still enjoying watching the people all over the world, how they battle, and enjoy watching their strategy and what kind of Pokémon they pick.

Is it a challenge to innovate in a Pokémon game? It's also important that the games feel familiar to longtime fans. Are those two goals sometimes at odds with each other?

TK: Yes, it is challenging, but as Mr. Masuda said, we would like to keep drawing in the new players, at the same time keep the interest of core players. So what we do is, in the beginning of the game it's easier for the new players, and then as the story goes, the new player actually becomes very advanced. When you reach the end of the game that's when you can call yourself a core player. And on the other hand the core player will enjoy the achievement of the goal, the end of the game. But as Mr. Masuda said, we want to emphasize on the new beginner players.

Do you ever see a time when the core Pokémon games evolve into something completely different?

What is the culture at Game Freak like? How do you guys help foster creativity?

JM: It's very difficult to keep a balance between top-down and bottom-up. But personally, I think that bottom-up is very important as a creator — a team of creators — because you are making something new. If there is some really cool idea coming from the bottom, as the manager you want to make that idea better. Instead of judging right away — like "Okay, tomorrow we have to make a decision, so cut it" — we would like to take time and see what we can do to make that idea bigger and then make a decision. So, the corporate culture is very, very open. It's almost like a family.

Will we see an effort to bring more Pokémon titles to the Wii?

JM: Each game developer has their great ideas, and hopefully there are creators who have great ideas which fit into the Pokémon brand and the Pokémon world. We hope that we will see some very interesting games coming out soon.

Takeshi Kawachimaru and Junichi Masuda hope to continue to evolve the Pokémon franchise while maintaining its identity

THE POKÉMASTERS



tech

LOGITECH HARMONY 1100 UNIVERSAL REMOTE

Score: ★★★★★

Sick of shuffling between four remote controls to watch TV, a DVD, or play a game? Fret no more. The Logitech Harmony 1100 is the one remote to rule them all. After a brief setup, the Harmony had our A/V receiver, DirecTV DVR, HDTV, and Xbox 360 on the same page. With a simple button press on the full-color touch screen, the Harmony synchs the proper settings for each device, eliminating the hassle of changing your television input and audio channel each time you switch between watching a DVD and watching television. If the settings fall out of place from manual changes, the device uses its on-board wizard to recalibrate with a few short questions. Unfortunately, it has no Bluetooth capability and so requires an adapter for use with a PS3. The sleek surface collects too many fingerprints and the ridiculously steep price rivals that of a notebook, but eliminating your messy collection of controls in favor of one graceful interface makes it worth the splurge.

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MASTER CONTROL

toys

U.S.S. ENTERPRISE

This highly detailed 14.75" replica of the Enterprise is based off designs from the recent J.J. Abrams film. The model features authentic lights, sounds, and dialogue from the film. It also comes with a Delta Shield display base that lets you position the ship at any angle. Hopefully you will take better care of Starfleet's flagship than Kirk did. How many versions of the Enterprise has that fool let blow up anyway?

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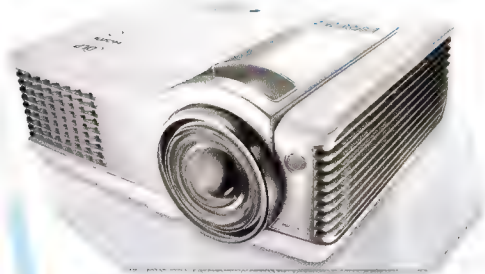
tech

BENQ MP512 ST DIGITAL PROJECTOR

INFO: APPL. ★★★★★

Most things look cuter the smaller they get, but BenQ's new short throw projector eschews image for the sake of size. The unit only needs to be positioned a few feet from its projection surface, yet still can display an image size of up to 25 feet. But with a paltry native resolution of 800x600, it's best if you keep things smaller. As a mid-range projector this device works fine, projecting honest blacks with a negligible amount of color fade, and you can expect the average lamp life to last around 3,000 hours. Considering this projector is priced lower than most large screen LCDs, it could be a working portable projector for LAN party nights, but people with high-def appetites will want to pass.

\$599.00 • www.benq.us



MATT MILLER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR, GAME INFORMER



Find me a development studio that doesn't have some devoted role-players somewhere near the creative process and I'd be amazed.



On April 7, Dave Ameson passed away after a long bout with cancer. He wasn't a familiar name when I was a kid, despite the fact that I've engaged with his most prominent work for as long as I can remember. Like many tabletop RPG players, I considered his one-time business partner, Gary Gygax, the creator of *Dungeons & Dragons*. It wasn't until I was older that I grasped the full story of the legal battle that ensued over rights to the game in the late '70s. Learning the history, it became apparent both of them had an equal hand in shaping the game.

In the early '70s, the role-playing game didn't exist. Large-scale war and miniature games were popular with hobbyists, but their complex setup and lack of story framework doomed them to a niche audience. Tolkien's hobbits, elves, and magic rings were still growing in popularity, and Robert E. Howard's pulp Conan stories had thrilled young readers – and scandalized parents – for years. No doubt inspired by those foundational fantasy fictions, Ameson started sculpting a game where characters could explore a dungeon filled with monsters and traps, fighting together to defeat threats and gain fortune. Merging his ideas with elements borrowed from Chainmail, a miniature game Gygax helped develop, *Dungeons & Dragons* took shape. A thousand copies of a hand-made box set hit shelves in 1974. Today, current publisher Wizards of the Coast estimates 6 million active players around the world.

It's not hard to expound upon the historical significance of the game that Ameson and Gygax created. *Dungeons & Dragons* didn't just birth the tabletop RPG scene. It helped popularize the fantasy book scene in the '80s, as kids like me flocked to

read the stories that would fuel their next session. It served as inspiration to countless movies and TV shows, as professed by their creators. Its framework contains the basis of character leveling, cooperative play, and story-driven video games. Even sports games, racing games, and online multiplayer shooters now implement role-playing concepts, making the ideas first pioneered in *D&D* a pervasive component of modern gaming. Find me a development studio that doesn't have some devoted role-players somewhere near the creative process and I'd be amazed.

I met Ameson a few years ago, when fellow editor Joe Juba and I drove to a local comic book shop where he was making an appearance to interview him for *Game Informer*. I remember wondering what the man would be like. Part of me imagined this fellow who laid the foundation of the role-playing scene as some sort of misunderstood genius. I half expected him to answer every question I posed with some sort of riddle-like query of his own – the ultimate dungeon master smiling cynically from behind his screen.

Upon arriving, we were ushered into a cluttered back office that doubled as a storage room. As it turned out, Ameson was who the rational part of my head expected – a quiet, smiling man without pretensions, who answered our questions directly and enjoyed talking about the hobby he helped create. There was no lingering mystique. No enigmatic responses.

Perhaps you can excuse my false presumptions. Growing up, *D&D* was a bastion of entertainment and creativity for me; the game had taken on a nearly mythic stature. It entranced me from the moment my older brother refused me entry into the

D&D sessions he played with his friends. After an absurd amount of whining and cajoling, he finally ran an adventure for me, and I was hooked. At the time, I wasn't acquainted with the idea that the game might brand me a social outcast and incurable nerd. With that first game, I only remember how excited I was – I was in the story! This wasn't watching Luke Skywalker or reading about Bilbo Baggins. I was there – a participant in the tale.

Many of us have more invested in the game than its mere historical significance implies. I was rarely the misfit that my role-playing hobby labeled me to be. I found friends, girls, sports, music, and all the other trappings of growing up, even with the *D&D* albatross hanging around my neck. But my best friends were those I found at the gaming table. A strange camaraderie was found there which led to lasting companions – some shared secret that made it worth all the ridicule we might suffer if someone found out that we played. It was a process of shared creation and storytelling, as if we'd all worked together to hammer out a novel that only existed in our heads.

At the end of this year I'm getting married. Five of the men and two of the women standing up for us once played *D&D* with me or still do. Maybe I just have a lot of nerdy friends, but I'm of the mind that Dave Ameson and Gary Gygax created a form of entertainment that results in those sort of lifelong friendships. Either way, I owe much to the game I played around the table with those friends, and to the men who made that possible. ■ ■ ■

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

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The Bigs 2 — 06/02

NEW RELEASES

- The Sims 2 — PS3, 360, Wii
- Champions Online — PC
- Realm Week: Junior Sylvis — DS
- Final Fantasy: Advent Children Complete — Blu-ray
- Knights in the Nightmare — DS
- Pez Fashion: Dogz & Catz — DS
- Red Faction: Guerrilla — PS3, 360
- The Sims 3 — PC
- Storm of War: Battle of Britain — PC
- Street Fighter IV — PC
- Virtua Tennis 2009 — PS3, 360, Wii

02

The Electronic Entertainment Expo kicks off this week, and Game Informer Online will bring you all the breaking news and game announcements as they happen. And if you want 22 hours of live coverage tune in to G4 from June 1-4. We'll also be introducing Reeves Vision, a state-of-the-art camera affixed to Ben's forehead. What makes this camera special? It can read his thoughts. Our first test run produced this gem: "Cake. It's good. Winnie the Pooh."



When was the last time you saw a movie where the Earth cracked open to reveal a lost world? When was the last time you saw one without Brendan Fraser that could easily be spoofed? *Land of the Lost* opens in theaters today, and features Will Ferrell stretching his acting abilities by playing a goofy dude who seems to improve more than act. Way to go out on a limb there, Will.



Prototype — 06/09

NEW RELEASES

- Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood — 360
- Dreamer Series: Teacher — DS
- Guitar Hero On Tour: Modern Hits — DS
- Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings — Wii, PS2, DS, PSP
- The Legendary Starfy — DS
- LEGO Battles — DS
- Majesty 2 — PC
- Miami Law — DS
- Prototype — PS3, 360, PC
- Rock Band: Unplugged — PSP

09

Bruce Wayne is dead, yet Batman lives on. Who's behind the cow now? Read DC's three part miniseries, *Battle for the Cowl*, to find out. Whenever it will be watching over Arkham full time starting with *Batman issue 687*, starting today. Later this month, the DC mythos will further be unraveled at *Intellect Comics*, (featuring *Batman*, *Streets of Gotham*, *Red Robin*, and *Gotham City Sirens*).



The digital age begins! Starting today, federal law requires that all television stations must broadcast in a digital format. Analog TV viewers have two options: purchase a digital-to-analog set-top converter box, or get with the times by investing in a new HDTV. The new show will come in 10 years, when we replace televisions altogether with cerebral implants. *Brain: Serenifed* will rule.



Ghostbusters — 06/16

NEW RELEASES

- Classic World Games — DS
- Diva Girls: Divas on Ice — Wii, DS
- Disney Warriors 2: Empires — PS3, 360
- Flower, Sun and Rain — DS
- Ghostbusters — PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PC
- Grand Slam Tennis — Wii
- Guitar Hero: Smash Hits — PS3, 360, Wii, PS2
- My Sims Bowling — Wii, DS
- Ropogo: Twisted Towers — Wii, DS
- Sushi Academy — DS
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 — PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP

16

Have you ever wondered what Charlie Brown looked like after Lucy pulled the football out from under him? Check out this Sagat figure. It's a dead ringer for Brutalized Brown. Sagat is just one of four Charlie Brown-like figures in this series of soft vinyl toys. You can also add Chun-Li, Ryu, and Guile to your shelf. We love it when Ken gets the shaft!



Hollywood doesn't realize this yet, but Michael Cera is the key to box office success. We propose that all films abide by the Cera Initiative, a mandate that requires all founding movies to perform an emergency recasting with Cera in the lead role. Maybe then we would have gone to see *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li*. Cera's new film, *Year One*, opens today. We wonder who originally was up for the lead role in this one?



Year One



Batman: Arkham Asylum — 06/23

NEW RELEASES

- Batman: Arkham Asylum — PS3, 360, PC
- The Conduit — Wii
- Green Lantern: First Flight — DVD
- Jumpgate Evolution — PC
- Little King's Story — Wii
- Monster Hunter Freedom Unite — PSP
- Overlord 2 — PS3, 360
- Overlord: Dark Legends — Wii
- Overlord: Minions — DS
- Pangea: Fantasy Golf — PSP
- Ray the World — Wii

24

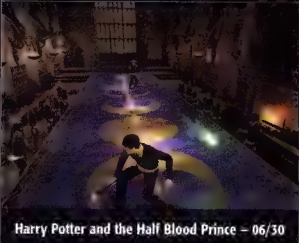
- Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor — DS
- Spore: Galactic Adventures — PC
- Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen — PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PC, PSP, DS
- Treasure World — DS



The final battle of the X-Men epic "Messiah War" takes place in *X-Force 16*. In this issue, expect to see the long-awaited showdown between Cable and his evil clone, Stryfe. Punches will be thrown, but ultimately, we predict that this battle ends with the clones singing the Doublemint theme song as they hug, chew gum, and walk off into the sunset.



26




Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince — 06/30

NEW RELEASES

- BlurBlue: Calamity Trigger — PS3, 360
- Fight Night Round 4 — PS3, 360
- Garfield Gets Real — Wii, DS
- Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince — PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS
- Ice Age: Dawn of Dinosaurs — PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PC
- Street Fighter 4 — PC

30

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



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
(MULTIPLAYER TBA)

> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION

> **DEVELOPER** INFINITY WARD

> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 10

MODERN



WARFARE 2

The mountain ice cracks and splinters under the assault of your twin ice tools. Howling arctic winds can't quite dampen the crunch of Captain "Soap" MacTavish's crampons mere feet above you. Upon reaching the summit of your vertical endeavor, another obstacle impedes you: several yards of the path are missing. MacTavish's mad leap ends with his tools buried in the opposite wall. Following his example, you fling yourself into nothingness amid the intensifying storm. The two of you are on your way to assault a fortified, secret enemy base with no support - a little thing like a mountaintop blizzard isn't about to stop you. For international elites like Task Force 141, this is one of the many faces of modern warfare.

■ Enemies carry weapons customized similarly to multiplayer weaponry from the first game



WALKING AMONG THE PEOPLE

"We've learned a lot from having 12 million people interested in our game – how to reach out to them, how to communicate with them, and most importantly how to listen to them," says community manager Robert Bowling. Once the "forum guy," his mission is greatly expanded with *Modern Warfare 2*, both with gathering feedback from *Modern Warfare* players as well as creating a greatly improved and expanded community site that will launch with *Modern Warfare 2*. Infinity Ward hopes to gain a more comprehensive view of their fanbase by engaging players in new mediums like Twitter. "From a community standpoint, you get stuck in a rut of always having the perspective of your hardcore players. The hardcore guys always want the same thing," Bowling says. "Sometimes you might get skewed towards that opinion. When you reach out to these other social spheres and other people that don't go out of their way to get on your site, you get a lot more diverse blend of opinions."

"It's about initial, massive impact," declares Infinity Ward president and CCO Jason West. Any one of the more than 12 million gamers who completed a tour in the company's previous game, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, can attest to the developer's skill in that arena.

That title punctuated some of the tightest combat in the business with shocking, dramatic moments that pushed the boundaries of interactive experiences. A nuclear blast or public execution can be turned into a powerful moment in film. When interacted with in first-person perspective, *Modern Warfare* demonstrated that these moments can be transcendent.

This philosophy of integrating strong storytelling with a slickly engineered technical foundation underscores the sequel as well. While *Modern Warfare 2* shares a basic formula with its predecessor, it is grossly unfair to assume the game is merely a set of new content wrapped around an old infrastructure. "We talked about leveling in single-player and customizing your character and

doing all the stuff we do in multiplayer. Basically, while it was fun, it broke down the story and immersion," notes West.

Infinity Ward's development cycle involves coming up with a ton of ideas – and then throwing a bunch of them out because they don't fit with the experience the developer is trying to create. "I [hope that] when we're done, people feel like everything is cohesive and integrated, so it feels like an evolution," says West. "I think the reality of it is that there's a lot of innovation there and those things are crazy different, and you almost have to trick people with the new things and make them seem not so different so they're not intimidated."

On the surface, it seems that as our heroes assault the enemy base atop a frozen mountain, they're going to enter a firefight any FPS gamer would be familiar with. In fact, the way the mission plays out illustrates Infinity Ward's subtlety in crafting new experiences. MacTavish – a playable character from the original *Modern Warfare* who now plays the role of grizzled NPC vet – sends the player to rig up the encampment's fuel supply with explosives while he provides thermal vision-aided overwatch. The near-whiteout conditions and the radar-like heartbeat sensor on his weapon allow players to avoid conflict if they choose. However, dodging patrolling vehicles requires quick reflexes, and an enemy neutralized now means one less to deal with as the mission continues. West explains, "The gameplay is wide open and has a lot of variety. In terms of the story...well, any good story is on rails."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40 ►►



*"The gameplay is wide open and has a lot of variety.
As to the story... well, any good story is on rails."*

—Infinity Ward president and CEO Jesse West



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

Modern Warfare 2 promises to take players along for a ride as enthralling as any summer blockbuster. It continues the narrative begun in Modern Warfare, with the world facing dangerous political instability in Russia. Ruthless, amoral men are taking advantage of a strong nationalist bent in public opinion to secure the former superpower's deadly stockpile of weapons. Though radical warlord-turned-revolutionary Zakhaev is dead thanks to the heroics of Sgt. Price and company, the situation hasn't

improved. The new face of global terrorism is a brutal former associate of Zakhaev named Makarov. "You basically martyred Zakhaev in the last game," West notes. "He is using the fact that you killed Zakhaev as an excuse." Despite being a murderous sociopath with imperial ambitions, Makarov has secured a significant power base in Russia and is embarking on a plot to threaten global security.

Though Infinity Ward isn't sharing the specifics of Makarov's plan, it's something deemed dangerous enough to convince the international community to dispatch the elite badasses of Task Force 141 to stop him. Even TF 141 might not understand the true nature of the threat. Infinity Ward is laying out the narrative from the perspective that real-world intelligence is imperfect; the CIA operative feeding you information isn't guaranteed to have accurate knowledge or the whole story. West states, "It's not the game voice of God saying, 'Here's the objectives and here's the situation.'"

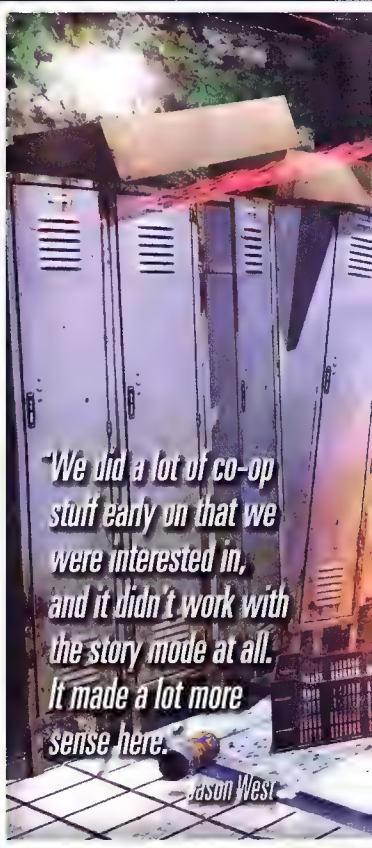
This uncertainty is played up in the development of the mountaintop mission. Having moved past the perimeter patrols and planted the charges on the fuel supply, the player sees something disturbing in one of the inner buildings: a crashed satellite, clearly the reason for the mountaintop base's secrecy. Sneaking into the operations center next door, the player downloads critical information from the Russians' mainframe while MacTavish keeps an eye out for trouble. However, trouble finds him first—a megaphone-amplified voice demands MacTavish's surrender as the huge bay doors slowly open to reveal a few dozen Russian weapons pointed his way.

MacTavish tersely advises the player to keep his head down and go to plan B on his count. On "three," the Captain dives for cover as the player detonates the charges. The blizzard is temporarily drowned out by a man-made firestorm, and our heroes make a mad dash for freedom. Reinforcements zoom in on snowmobiles, quickly flanking your character as he tries to make his way out of the burning base. After dropping a few drivers, a new avenue for escape presents itself:

JOINING THE SPECIAL FORCES

If you had to pick one thing to differentiate Modern Warfare 2 from its predecessor, the new Special Forces mode is the obvious choice. Accessed from the main menu, this mode combines several of the defining features of Modern Warfare. "They're in the spirit of Mile High Club," West explains, calling out the incredibly difficult Xbox 360 achievement granted for completing the bonus airplane hijack level from the first game on Veteran difficulty.

Infinity Ward investigates many more ideas than could possibly fit in the single-player game, so the developer ends up with a lot of cool scenarios that don't fit in the campaign for one reason or another.



"We did a lot of co-op stuff early on that we were interested in, and it didn't work with the story mode at all. It made a lot more sense here."

Jason West

CATCHING FLAK

As lauded as Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare was, it wasn't entirely without blemish. Two aspects in particular were heavily criticized: infinitely spawning enemies who only stopped coming once the player crossed an invisible line, and the short 6-10 hour length of the single-player campaign. The developer is addressing the infinite spawn issue. "We are aware of it, and we're actively trying to eliminate it," West notes. "I think we agree that it's not good." However, Infinity Ward is sticking to its guns when it comes to single-player length. "For the story, we want that to be this awesome experience that you have that you can talk with your friends about, and that you remember fondly," West proclaims. "It's not about dragging it out or playing the same thing over and over. I was very happy with Modern Warfare 1 and the length of it. We let the story drive the length, and we had the story we wanted to tell, and it took the number of levels it required, and we think it worked out. If people wanted more when they were done, I'll take that as a compliment," West says. "Stretching out the story seems like the wrong way to go."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42 >>>

"You get attached to these great moments and you don't want to lose them even though they might be a touch too hard or too easy. Now you can take that and make it a special op," says West. "It gives us the opportunity to do lots of different types of things, and also things that may have been difficult peaks in the past." Free of the constraints of narrative and difficulty curve, the designers can create one-off missions that would never exist otherwise. It's too early in the development process to say how many Special Forces scenarios will be included out of the box, but West assures us that the mode is a major part of Modern Warfare 2.

Seeing Special Forces in action is an eye-opener. Using a breaching charge to force entry into the showers of a hostile base, the player has a few seconds of slow-motion to take advantage of the shock and confusion.

As soon as normal gameplay speed resumes, it's on. Catwalks on either side of the rectangular room host enemy overwatch. Riot shields provide ample cover for advancing hostiles. A few alcoves along the wall are relatively safe, but nasty fields of fire and flanking bad guys constantly deny protection to the player. It's a good thing you can bring a friend along.

"We did a lot of co-op stuff early on that we were interested in, and it didn't work with the story mode at all," West says. "It made a lot more sense here." Many Special Forces levels are designed specifically with two-player co-op in mind. The "showers" map we saw practically demands it—there's no way to approach it without a buddy to watch your back. On the other hand, the way you look at a room drastically changes when you have a human partner. From basic tactics like bounding

between cover to more advanced approaches like suppression and overwatch, the player's toolbox is hugely expanded in co-op.

Modern Warfare 2 makes adapting to the cooperative experience easy. A colored arrow shows your partner's relative position to you, while a mini-map in the corner of the screen displays both of your locations. Downed players slowly bleed out, giving their partners a chance to revive them if they can avoid getting shot while bandaging their comrade.

Infinity Ward declined to discuss whether Special Forces co-op can be played with friends online, how it ties into the upgraded community site, and downloadable content possibilities, but these ideas are such no-brainers that official comment is hardly required.



■ Those laser beams are sights from enemies in the upper levels. Special Forces levels are going to be hard.

■ Riot shields offer significant protection—blasting them to make their wielders stagger, then taking a shot at an exposed body part is often your best bet.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40

the snowmobiles. Barreling down the opposite side of the mountain from their icy climb on their new rides, Task Force 141 eventually loses the pursuit by making a nearly suicidal jump over an icy chasm.

As you would expect from Infinity Ward, the player controls every second of the action. Control is never taken from the player, from alternating triggers to climb the ice wall to setting off the charges on MacTavish's cue to shooting the pursuit while driving the snowmobile. West says, "We want to put the player in those interesting situations and have them feel what the person in that role would really feel."

Like the Call of Duty games before it, Modern Warfare 2 puts players in a variety of perspectives and locales. Far from the frigid Russian peak, Task Force 141 has tracked ballistics data from a different scene to an arms dealer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Here, the player becomes embroiled in a running firefight with the local militia as they make their way up a hillside covered with ramshackle shanties. The famous O Cristo Redentor statue looks on as civilians flee from the soldiers, barely distinguishable from the militia with which the soldiers are exchanging fire.

While the dramatically larger scale of Modern Warfare 2's levels was not immediately apparent in the mountain level, venturing through Rio's favela puts it front and center. New streaming techniques give the developer much more room to play with. Though you're moving toward a concrete goal, players can explore an entire hillside and choose the path with which to reach the objective. West points to the hill as a designer's best friend – since the player knows he has to move upward, the level layout doesn't have to lead him along by the hand as much. This allows the shantytown to sprawl to an extent that wouldn't have been possible in earlier titles.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44 ▶▶

WHAT ABOUT ONLINE?

As thrilling as Modern Warfare 2's offline campaign promises to be, fans are clamoring more than anything for details on the multiplayer. Infinity Ward is keeping its online cards close to the vest for the moment, but a few interesting tidbits are out there. The most intriguing one on the table is the Special Forces mode [see sidebar, page 41], which introduces a co-op element to the game without compromising the ambitious storytelling of the single-player campaign. Other things confirmed to be in the offline game, like moveable turrets and heartbeat sensors, have obvious implications for multiplayer, though the developer declined to comment on their inclusion. A few of West's statements hold promise for online players as well. "One of my favorite things about multiplayer is making people famous," he teases. "We briefly broached it in the last game, but we didn't get it anywhere near where we wanted it, so we're putting a lot of effort into that. When people do things that are noteworthy, you hear about it in a way that's easy to remember." It would be strange if this idea of calling out player accomplishment didn't tie into Modern Warfare 2's revamped community site [see sidebar, page 38], but the developer again declined to give further details.



■ The camera angles are unusual, but all of these screenshots are taken directly from the live game



■ Seeing a MIG go up in flames and take out a platoon of enemies isn't even in the top five moments that we saw...in a single level



DOING IT LIVE

Making changes to a game after launch is often a difficult problem that requires exhaustive certification from console manufacturers for the internet-distributed updates. However, Infinity Ward knows how, invested their multiplayer community is and intends to keep working on the online experience after *Modern Warfare 2* ships. "We have a technological solution to that problem. What will first-party [Microsoft and Sony—ed.] say about it, we're not entirely sure yet," laughs West. This built-in mutability allows Infinity Ward to tweak things like spawn logic or certain aspects of maps without requiring a full-on patch. Some of this capability was present in the game's predecessor, but West assures us that the solution in *Modern Warfare 2* is much more comprehensive.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

Another example of the sheer size of the maps is the trackless Afghan desert setting. When Task Force 141 receives intelligence that another element of Makarov's conspiracy is taking place at a specific latitude and longitude, the player drops in on the coordinates to track it down. At first, it seems the wasteland goes on forever with nothing but scrub and dust to mark the distance. After a lengthy trek, however, the horizon reveals a hidden valley. Players must navigate the dizzying heights on rickety bridges and scaffolding that cling to the steep slope. A set of caves that could have been ripped from the set of *Iron Man* hold your goal. The entire valley is fully rendered, despite the fact that the opposite side looks like it might be half a mile away. Many developers would fake the distance by drawing a detailed texture on a fake wall to create the illusion of a full valley, but that's not Infinity Ward's style.

Back in Russia, a snowed-in village further shows off Infinity Ward's meticulous attention to detail. West jokes, "I'm a sucker for snow globe levels," and the stately beauty of this environment underscores his point. Sent in to disable the anti-air weaponry preventing UAV-launched Predator missiles from striking

their targets, Task Force 141 navigates a snowy wood (which itself is the size of full levels in many current games) on their way in. Tracks cut through the frozen landscape, with iced-up wheel ruts whose realism blows away the snow effects in any game to date. It sounds like a small thing, but the culmination of dozens of minor details like this has powerful results.

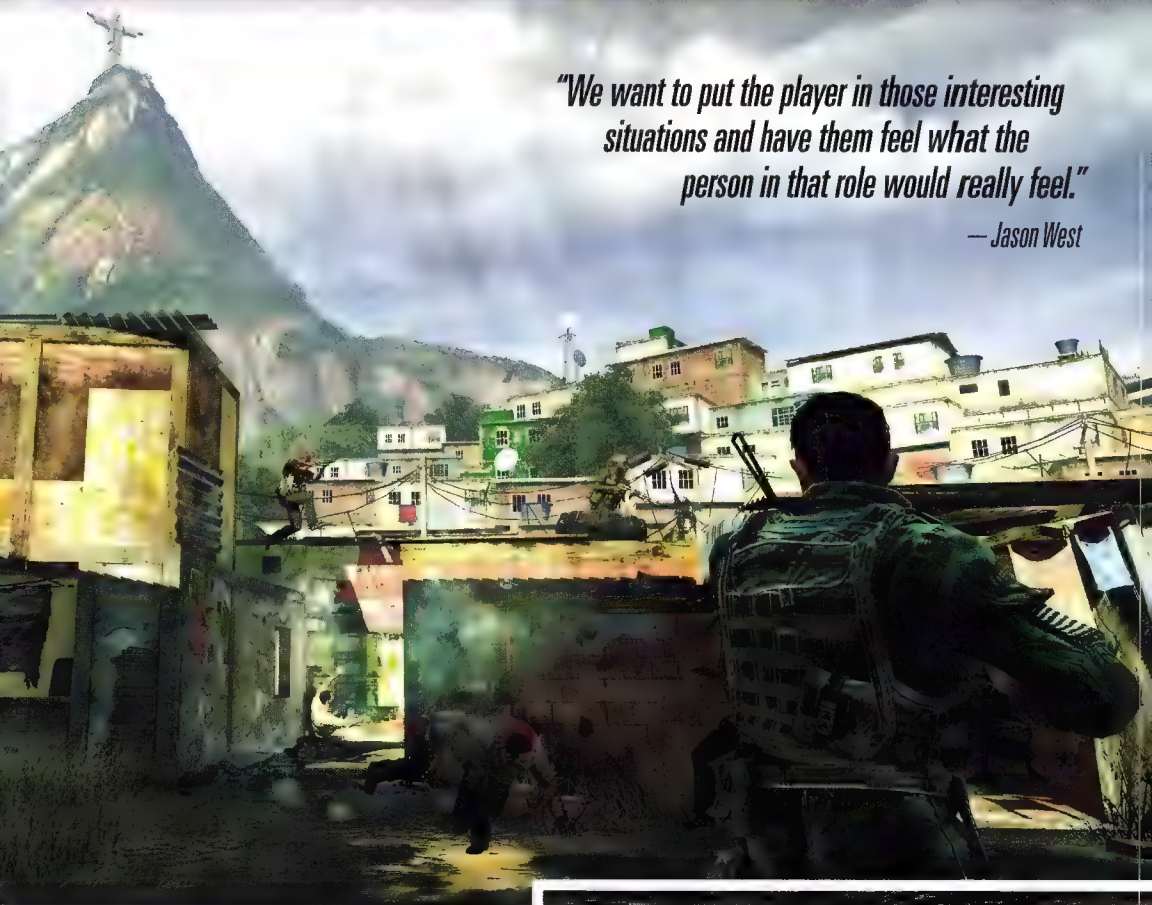
Modern Warfare 2 may seem like more of the same on a surface level, but the depth and breadth of Infinity Ward's revamped design becomes apparent once you start digging in. This evolution of the tense, dramatic single-player experience is primed to raise the bar for video game storytelling yet again. Extensive co-op via the Special Forces mode is a direct answer to one of the fans' most frequent requests. Competitive multiplayer, though the developer declined to divulge much related information, is clearly a focus and has an unparalleled foundation to build upon. Infinity Ward is one of the most successful studios in gaming, and its next project looks ready to meet the highest expectations of even the most rabid fans. ■■■■



Picking out militia fighters from civilians is no easy task in a chaotic battle

"We want to put the player in those interesting situations and have them feel what the person in that role would really feel."

— Jason West



TOY BOX

Transformers spark and explode, dust and debris clog the air, and water shoots skyward from a toppled fire hydrant. Jason West is showing off his "toy box": a test level filled with dozens of Modern Warfare 2's interactive objects. The destruction is impressive, all the more so for a framerate that stays stable at 60 frames per second, even with dozens of concurrent explosions. More intriguing, though, is the second test level. Enemies spawn in waves from predetermined points only to be gunned down by automated turrets that West has set up in a perimeter. The laser-sighted miniguns make quick work of the incoming hostiles, and we can't help but wonder where they'll be used in the game, both in single-player and multiplayer — though West again declines to elaborate.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2
-> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC 2-PLAYER ONLINE
-> PUBLISHER ACTIVISION/REDUCED JANE
-> DEVELOPER FREESTYLE GAMES
-> RELEASE FALL 2009





DJ HERO

drop the needle...

For years, there were the people who made the music, and the people who played it to the masses. The artist recorded tracks. The disc jockey put those tracks on the radio and played them at the club. As the years passed, the lines of creativity began to blur. DJs began to tie together different songs, matching up the beats and extending the in-song breaks. They added scratches and mixed different music together to create distinct tracks. The separation between artist and presenter disappeared. The DJ in the 21st century is a new kind of musician, with unique tools at his or her command. What if game players could tap into those tools and blur those same musical lines?

Far from the dance and hip-hop music scene, Guitar Hero and Rock Band have been a phenomenon for four years now. An ever-broadening audience of young and old fans has reconnected to music through colored buttons and a plastic strum bar, generating billions of dollars in sales. The question has recently emerged: Is there anywhere to go from here? Waiting to see DJ Hero in action, it

seemed hard to imagine a title that could do more than emulate the existing formula – perhaps with a plastic turntable instead of a guitar to offer the illusion of difference. Then we spent hours locked away with DJ Hero. We discovered that there is indeed somewhere to go in the genre, and the folks at Freestyle Games have found it. >>



DJ Hero has a familiar setup that belies the new mechanics that make it so fascinating. A flowing highway of icons still drops toward the player, filled with colored notes and score-enhancing multiplier opportunities. Vibrant, exaggerated characters fill the backgrounds, even if they now wield vinyl records instead of guitars and drum sticks. The layout makes the game instantly accessible to music game players.

However, that familiarity won't allow expert Guitar Hero players to leap onto the turntable at the highest difficulty. DJ Hero embraces the unique mechanics of turntablism in the same way the original Guitar Hero emulated rock guitar with its hammer-ons and pull-offs. The first fundamental difference is that most songs in the game are a mix of two existing tracks. Whether it's Marvin Gaye and the Gorillaz, or Rick James and Nirvana,

the music of DJ Hero is entirely new, but based on the master tracks of dozens of famous songs. "Not every song has to be a two song mix," producer Will Townsend explains. "We sometimes play the same record on both tracks, and it's more the cutting and scratching that goes back and forth." In many cases, these tracks are crafted by the world's foremost DJs, and chosen particularly for DJ Hero. The game offers a chance to hear an entirely new collection of music, but one based in recognizable riffs and tunes. "With any music game, our goal is to make sure that everybody has something in there that they want. We went for a lot of variety of the music styles, with hip-hop and electronic, rap and pop," Townsend says. "But we're also not painting ourselves into a corner by focusing on only one of those." Activision licensed over 100 individual songs, allowing

participating DJs to create over 70 mixes on the disc.

With each song mix, the DJs worked with Activision and Freestyle from the beginning to make the music both great to listen to and exciting to play in the game. This is a luxury rarely afforded to other music games, since they're working with static tracks from the get-go.

The two-track mix is the lynchpin feature that makes mechanics of DJ Hero so different. Rather than strumming a bar in time with guitar notes, the new turntable peripheral has a crossfader, which controls the volume of both songs. Slide the crossfader to the middle, and you've got an even mix. Left pulls up the volume of the left-most song track on the screen, and right does the same for its side. Onscreen prompts demand a constant adjustment between left, right, and center in order to keep pace with the unique mix being played.

The Turntable

Hidden d-pad and face buttons

Effects dial

Stream buttons

Platter

Detach point, enabling a lefty flip

Euphoria button

Crossfader

The Breakdown

1. COLORED BUTTON PRESSES

There are only three scrolling tracks, but either of the outside tracks must be pressed with the crossfader in the correct position in order to count

2. CROSSFADING

The track slides left and right to indicate where you should have the crossfader set at each moment

3. REWIND METER

Consistent playing builds up the rewind meter, which can be triggered to send the song back to an earlier section

4. SCRATCH SECTION

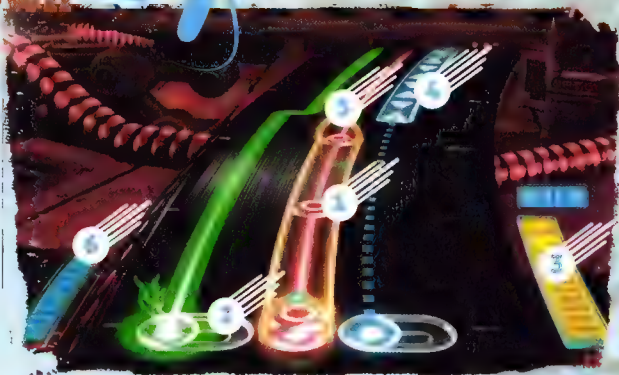
Hold down the note, and push or pull the record in the indicated direction – an X means you can scratch either up or down

5. EFFECTS

Orange overlay indicates an opportunity to customize the track with effects, which are set with the effects dial

6. EUPHORIA BAR

This meter increases with certain perfectly played phrases, just like Star Power. Trigger with the Euphoria button to double your multiplier



As you juggle the crossfader, you're also playing one or more of the stream buttons – the same recognizable beat-matching we all expect in a music title. However, in this case, each button corresponds to a particular track. The green button goes with the first song, the blue with the second song, and the red button in the middle represents a sample, which adds flavor to the mix.

The final major game mechanic shouldn't come as a surprise; a game called DJ Hero wouldn't be complete without scratching. "When you ask anyone, what does a DJ do? They immediately pantomime the headphone on the ear and the scratching motion. It's our air guitar. Scratching had to be key," Townsend tells us. The stream buttons lay atop a record-like platter, which spins all the way around. As the falling highway sends colored notes your way, it will sometimes extend those notes and add in lines of Xs, indicating a scratch passage. Hold down the appropriate stream button and flip the platter forward and back to scratch. Just as Guitar Hero adds the fifth fret on higher difficulties, DJ Hero adopts a similar approach to scratching; the X phrases begin to evolve into arrow-like triangles, indicating up or down scratches. "Some of these triple-A DJs in the game have specific scratch techniques that they do, and we're giving the user the chance to mimic and perform just like they do,"

Townsend says.

Pull all these features together, and the result is a unique challenge for music game enthusiasts. The visual vocabulary is the same, but a whole new system of motions must be learned to keep up with the action on screen.

If those fundamental gameplay mechanics aren't enough, several other features flesh out the experience. Sitting above the crossfader is an effects dial. In any song, it can be used to flip between various samples mapped to the red button. During onscreen phrases highlighted in orange, the effects dial lets players choose between a number of effects, from echo to flange. Orange phrases can overlay the left track, the right, or the entire mix, delivering a compelling way to customize

the track each time you play.

Finally, two meters allow players to further alter the experience. The Euphoria meter and its corresponding button act exactly like Star Power. Build up Euphoria along special phrases in the song, and then trigger it with a button press to double your score and send the mix surging into overdrive.

Meanwhile, the Rewind meter delivers a new option – charge it up through strong playing and you can spin the record back. "I'll add this cool performance piece," Townsend says. "You actually rewind the track to somewhere earlier, to a favorite part, or the beginning of the chorus, or some big buildup, and you can play it all over again, just like a real DJ would do in the club."



Know Your History

DJ culture has evolved dramatically over the years from its birth in the early 20th century, always moving in the direction from simple purveyors of music to musicians in their own right.

- In December 1906, Reginald Fessenden broadcasts music on record over the radio for the first time. Within years, radio music is commonplace.
- By the 1940s, England's Jimmy Savile is playing jazz records at a dance hall, switching back and forth between two turntables for a continuous mix of music, and the crowds begin to flood in.
- 1969 finds American DJ Francis Grasso unveiling the technique of beatmatching, as he creates unbroken transitions between songs with similar rhythmic structures.
- The early '70s see the rise of German band Kraftwerk. They lay the foundations for numerous branches of electronically created music.
- DJ Kool Herc finds the earliest recognized beginnings of hip hop in the '70s, even as he develops the break, which uses identical records to extend the rhythmic instrumental section of a song.
- Teddy Livingstone develops the technique of scratching in the mid '70s. Supposedly, he happens upon the idea when he is startled and bumps his turntable after his mother shouted for him to turn his music down.
- Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five show up on the scene in the late '70s, and begin the practice of freestyle battles.
- In 1986, "Walk This Way," a collaboration between Run DMC and Aerosmith, becomes the first hip-hop song to break the Top 10 on the Billboard Hot 100.
- The late '80s and early '90s see the rise of the rave scene. Artists like Doc Martin, Daft Punk, Fat Boy Slim, Chemical Brothers, and Crystal Method rise to prominence.

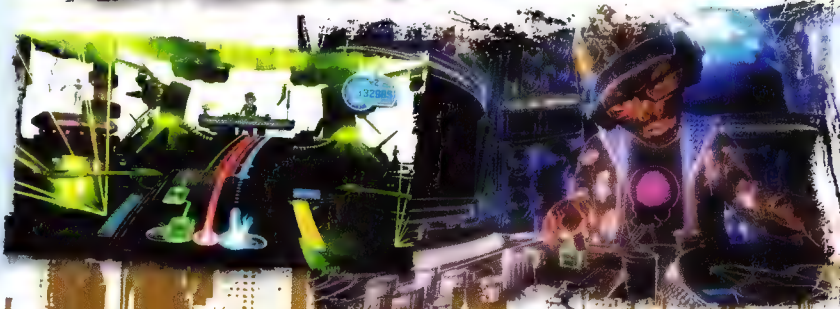
It's a lot to keep track of. Freestyle Games has recognized the potential barrier to entry, and has implemented several features to help pull you into the DJ booth without frustration. An integrated tutorial system walks you through all the features as soon as you start playing. A beginner difficulty mode involves only straightforward beat-matching, using little more than the three buttons on the turntable platter. This makes first-time play accessible even to kids. Jukebox mode allows you to listen and grow familiar with any track before you play it, and doubles as a great party mix of music when friends are over. "With the Jukebox mode, you can have your setlist and your favorite songs on in the background on your living room TV set. If you want to, you can jump in and start playing right there, with drop-in play," explains Townsend. Finally, in another nod to making the game accessible, the majority of songs are unlocked from the beginning. While there is a career mode to play through and unlock additional characters, venues, and a final few songs, most of the game's music can be played at any time. If one track confounds you, there's nothing

stopping you from jumping over to something else.

Guitar Hero has always been about the fantasy of the rock star – playing on stage to the adoring masses. DJ Hero adopts a different goal. "It's about being the life of the party," Townsend says. "You are the center of attention, in control of the music, and in control of what that music is going to be!" In a dance club, the DJ is part of the scene, listening to his crowd and allowing it to shape the flow of music. As much as possible, Freestyle Games wants to emulate that sensation. Beyond the customization elements of choosing your samples and effects, the game aims to integrate DJ Hero as a party-worthy experience through its multiplayer features. Every mix in the game can be played online or locally, both cooperatively and through competitive DJ vs. DJ throw-downs. Microphone support allows enthusiastic vocalists and rappers to add their own flavor to the tracks being played, though there is no dedicated vocal track on screen. Finally, 10 songs in the game support duet play with a guitar peripheral – mixing the established gameplay of Guitar Hero with the new style of DJ Hero.



■ Like in the early Guitar Hero games, you'll pick between several pre-made characters, and travel the world to reach unique venues



The last piece of the puzzle involves remaining authentic to the DJ scene and drawing in the musical flavor that goes with it. To do so, Activision and Freestyle have partnered with a number of internationally known DJs, both to create mixes for the game and advise on the tone of the gameplay. Among these music heavyweights is DJ Shadow, whose 1996 album *Endtroducing* is considered a landmark of turntablism. Beyond serving as an overall advisor to the project, he's also put together at least three full mixes for inclusion in the game — new tracks that have never been heard before. His contributions are representative of the broad talent participating in the project. Just as real DJ culture has often pulled from wildly divergent sources to craft new music, DJ Hero includes music from any number of genres. Grunge rock, soul, R&B, techno, early '80s rap, house — the genres are many, and the chance to integrate them together is unprecedented.

Perhaps the most exciting feature of DJ Hero is its

potential appeal. The challenging field of true turntable DJ work is a mystery to many, even those who count themselves fans of the scene. "What Guitar Hero has done for rock and roll, we hope DJ Hero is going to do for hip-hop, rap, and dance music culture," Townsend tells us. DJ Hero represents a chance to break open that growing branch of music, offering a window into the artistry of music shaping and creation that DJs do every day. The game offers an exciting mix of established music game conventions beside a whole new gameplay mechanic. If the game crystallizes into what it promises to be, it has the power to reinvigorate a genre that in only a few short years has fallen into a bit of a rut. From one group of skeptical but enthusiastic music game fans to another, DJ Hero certainly surprised us; it's the newcomer to watch as we ramp up into another music-filled holiday gaming season. ■ ■ ■

Time for the Remix

The following are all confirmed mixes created exclusively for DJ Hero:

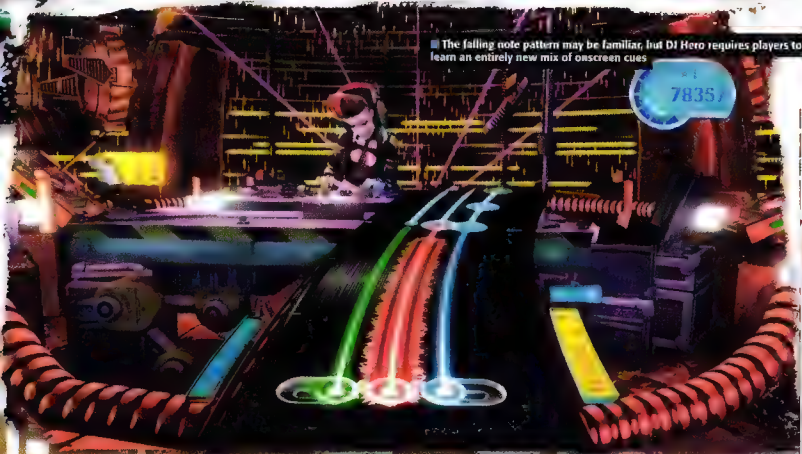
- Gorillaz "Feel Good Inc." vs. Marvin Gaye "I Heard It Through The Grapevine"
- Chuck Brown & the Soul Searchers "Bustin' Loose" vs. The Zombies "Time of the Season" (DJ Shadow Mix)
- David Bowie "Let's Dance" vs. KRS-One "Jack of Spades" (DJ Shadow Mix)
- Nivvana "All Apologies" vs. Rick James "Give It To Me Baby" (DJ Shadow Mix)
- Jurassic 5 "Jayou" vs. Herbie Hancock "Rockit"
- Tears for Fears "Shout" vs. Eric Prydz "Pjanoo"

Other Confirmed Artists:

- Beastie Boys
- Beck
- Blondie
- Billy Squire



The falling note pattern may be familiar, but DJ Hero requires players to learn an entirely new mix of onscreen cues





PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Final Fantasy XIII

> STYLE | PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX > RELEASE 2010

IT'S REAL!

Final Fantasy fans don't want to be reminded how long ago the latest numbered installment was announced. At this point, they just want to know that Final Fantasy XIII exists. Perhaps to assuage the fears surrounding the game's long development cycle, Square Enix has given gamers hope in the form of a Final Fantasy XIII demo packed in with the Japanese Blu-ray release of *Advent Children: Complete*. We played through the hour-long demo (which unfortunately won't be included with the U.S. version of the movie), and we can safely say that Final Fantasy XIII is on its way to being one of the biggest games of next year.

Even though the demo covers the opening section of the game, the biggest revelations aren't related to the story—they are

nestled in the combat mechanics. After the last installment, fans have wondered how FF XIII will reconcile real-time combat with the series' turn-based roots. The solution is an intriguing compromise that keeps battles exciting while staying true to the traditional command entry.

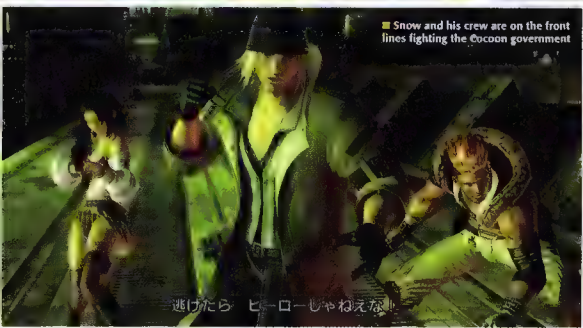
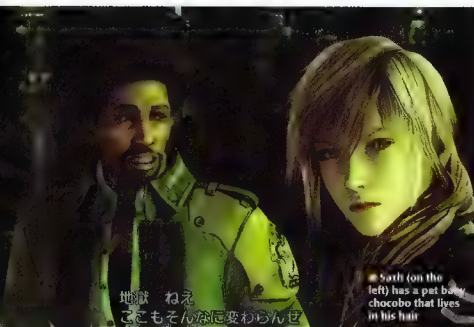
Instead of passively selecting your moves while the enemies patiently wait their turn, the battle gauges are always running. In this sense, combat resembles Final Fantasy XII; attack order depends on when individual meters have charged, not on a turn-based structure. Unlike the last game, however, players are no longer responsible for handling movement during battle. This eliminates characters' awkward shuffling and jockeying and allows the camera to adjust to create the most cinematic angles, making many normal

attacks look like cutscene fight sequences.

The sensation of choreographed combat is heightened by the fact that you now queue up multiple moves at once. The familiar ATB gauge is split into multiple sections, and each action consumes a set number of slots. In the demo, characters have three action points to expend on attacks, black magic, and white magic, and all three categories can be mixed into one continuous chain. For example, you can perform three weapon strikes in a row since they only cost one action point each. Alternately, you might blow all three points on a single powerful magic spell, or mix and match various physical and magical attacks. As characters level up, the ATB gauge is split into more pieces, permitting increasingly numerous and powerful actions per turn.

For all of the light the demo sheds on the Final Fantasy XIII's battle system, details regarding the story remain sparse. The main characters are fighting against the government of the city of Cocoon, and some even belong to an organized military resistance. During the beginning of the game, they work to disrupt trains that are transporting citizens from Cocoon to Pulse, the dangerous landscape beyond the city's protection. How events escalate beyond that remains to be seen, but you can expect more information when game hits Japanese shelves late this year. Assuming a normal localization time, U.S. gamers should be playing FF XIII somewhere in the second half of 2010. ■■■■





WORK IN PROGRESS

While Final Fantasy XIII is certainly different from its predecessors, some of the changes in the demo aren't representative of the finished product. Since the goal is to give players a taste of the gameplay, certain elements are simplified to make the demo easier and more accessible. Here are a few features from the demo that we assume will be removed before release:

- Players can only control one predetermined character in the party
- Ally AI behavior cannot be modified
- Only three attacks can be queued at a time
- Items cannot be used in battle
- There are no experience points, leveling up, or ability progression
- Back attacks and preemptive strikes are not possible when initiating encounters





Wii

Muramasa: The Demon Blade

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER VANILLAWARE
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER

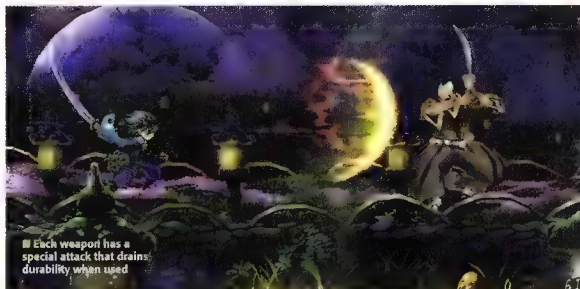
THE CUTTING EDGE

Current technology allows video game consoles to produce realistic visuals, but rendering the sweat on a character's brow isn't the only way to achieve astounding graphics. With the release of *Odin Sphere* in 2007, developer Vanillaware proved its ability to combine artistic direction and stylish 2D illustrations to create one of the best-looking games on the PS2. The studio's next game, *Muramasa*, has a similar visual flair—but how does it play? That's a question we can finally answer now that we have the final Japanese version.

Before you start, you must select one of the two main characters. Each has a unique storyline; Kisuke is a fugitive who has lost his memories, and Momohime is fleeing her castle after being possessed

by a spirit. While the plot varies depending on your choice of protagonist, the action-heavy gameplay is unchanged. You wield two types of swords—slow but strong and fast but weak—to slice through hordes of attacking ghosts, demons, and ninjas in short bursts of combat.

You can switch among three equipped swords, each with a durability meter that decreases with each attack and defensive maneuver. This is where swapping weapons becomes critical in managing the often-hectic onscreen action; when a sword's durability is depleted, it breaks and becomes less effective. Since durability recharges while you use another weapon, you're frequently switching from one blade to another in order to pull off flashy combos while keeping them all in



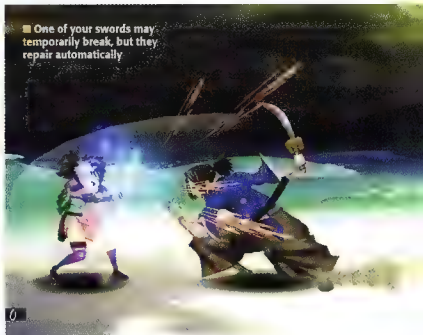
good condition.

The side-scrolling stages are composed of small linked areas punctuated by discrete pockets of action. Groups of enemies jump out as you move from area to area, and as in *Odin Sphere*, you are free to continue exploring once you defeat them. The two main characters begin in different locations, but their destinations eventually overlap as they progress. However, most of the boss fights are unique to each character, and require players to observe patterns and whittle down the hulking creatures' multiple life bars. We fought a demon, a fiery head in a metal wheel, and a giant foot.

As outlandish as some of the boss encounters are, most normal battles don't last more than a minute or two. Even so, every fight

is infused with old-school style. The mode we played required precise attacks and careful timing, though there is an easier setting better suited for button mashing. As we cut through multiple groups of foes, we preferred using the classic controller peripheral, but holding the Wii remote sideways also gets the job done.

Amid the flying projectiles and slashing swords, *Muramasa* is consistently beautiful. The environments and characters look just as great in motion as they do in screens. Even better, we didn't notice any of the slowdown that plagued *Odin Sphere*. The game's September release in North America isn't too far away, but with *Muramasa*'s classic action and gorgeous visuals, the wait won't be easy. ■■■







PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Red Dead Redemption

▶ SINGLE-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER CO-OP) ▶ PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR GAMES ▶ DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO ▶ RELEASE: 9/7

SHOOTING FOR A BETTER SEQUEL

In the five years since *Red Dead Revolver*, Rockstar always planned to return to the franchise. A sentimental favorite in the office, the team wanted to revisit the Western genre and give it the proper treatment with an ambitious scale that rivals their flagship game, *Grand Theft Auto*. Judging by our first look at *Redemption*, Rockstar is clearly on to something.

While its predecessor took place in the heyday of the Wild West, *Red Dead Redemption's* tale begins during the declining years of frontier life, the first decade of the 20th century. Riding the coattails of industrialization, a burgeoning federal government

is clamping down on the unruly frontier, annexing reluctant territories and ridding the backcountry of lawlessness. To aid the process, the Feds form The Bureau — a seedy precursor to the FBI, composed of ruthless arbiters willing to go beyond the bounds of the law to protect it.

To adapt to the rapidly changing landscape, John Marston does the right thing, giving up the life of a ne'er-do-well and settling peacefully into family life. Only the weathered scars on his face tell of his roughshod past that involved running with a notorious band of outlaws. But when the Bureau offers an unsettling proposition to Marston in relation

to his newfound happiness, he reluctantly takes up the six-shooter once again.

If our first excursions with Marston are any indication, he's in for a rough ride. The first mission Rockstar shared has him shooting his way to save a friend from hanging after a hostage trade goes awry in a ghost town. The next time we run into him, he's stuck defending a shady snake oil salesman from a cantankerous crowd of rifle-wielding rabble in a dust-kicking horse chase. Our experience culminates with Marston riding alongside a posse, struggling to protect a mail train from waves of bandits through a barren, rocky frontier region.

Despite the drastically different settings, similarities between *Red Dead* and *GTA IV* are evident throughout the game. *Red Dead* uses the same *RAGE* game engine, Euphoria physics technology, targeting mechanic, and cover system as last year's game of the year. Rockstar still has many elements of *Red Dead Redemption* under wraps, and we can't wait to learn more about this ambitious Western in the coming months leading to the full release. ■ ■ ■



THE OPEN TRAIL

Red Dead features a huge playable world divided into three sections: the Frontier, Mexico, and the North. Train tracks and telegraph posts that litter the landscape signal the creeping modernity, but traveling between towns is still a dangerous undertaking. The world of *Red Dead Redemption* features a day/night cycle, weather variations, and an ecosystem of threatening animals on the prowl. While Marston rides through the frontier, we witness a man on a mountain lion jumping down from its perch atop some rocks and mauling the poor chap. We also see a stagecoach robbery and a posse of horse-riding outlaws dragging a man behind their horses with a lasso. The world is filled with these dynamic events; it's up to the player to take sides or stay out of the fray.

■ The townsfolk speak with a bastardized English vocabulary straight out of *Deadwood*

THE RIGHTS

Red Dead lraides in the common mid-1800s setting of most Western games in favor of the turn of the 20th century, a pivotal time in the nation's history. Though the tale of protagonist John Marston is fictitious, Rockstar says some side missions incorporate real historical events. These notable events take place in the same time period as Marston's life unravels:

- Theodore Roosevelt presides as the 26th President of the United States
- Henry Ford forms Ford Motor Company and begins mass production of cars
- The Wright Brothers take flight at Kitty Hawk
- Albert Einstein publishes the Annus Mirabilis papers, establishing the Theory of Relativity
- Joseph Conrad publishes *Heart of Darkness*
- The Boston Americans defeat the Pittsburgh Pirates in the first World Series

Players can buy horses, steal them, or brawl in wild ones found on the frontier. Different horse breeds have varied traits for speed, strength, and endurance.



The startling realism of Natural Motion's Euphoria physics is on display as bandits fall from saddles, get trampled by stage-coaches, and get killed by wildlife.

STARK RAVING MAD SKILLS

Red Dead Redemption is a markedly different game than its predecessor, but one feature preserved from the title is the Dead Eye shooting mechanic. Rockstar has altered the skill so players can use it in two distinct ways. The first ability allows Marston to activate slow motion to get a bead on his aggressors with any weapon in the game. The second ability, which is relegated to pistols, gives Marston the option of painting targets and subsequently unleashing a chain of deadly accurate shots.



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

Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (4-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > GENRE ACTION > VISIONS > RELEASE

WHAT IF?

Readers' interactions with comics are inherently passive, with pre-determined narratives held captive by the creative visions of those at the helm. This often leaves readers with the ever-looming question: What if? Marvel's blockbuster crossover Civil War was no exception; while fans were marked and divided by their association with pro- or anti-registration factions, they never had to face the consequences of their moral standing. Vicarious Visions aims to change this by further fleshing out the mega-event and introducing splitting narratives, personal choice, and the chance for the everyman to leave his mark on the Marvel universe.

Drawing both from Secret War and Civil

War events, Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2 features set pieces directly from the books, including the assault on Castle Doom, the attack in D.C., and the ambush at Geyfen-Meyer. But don't expect to know what's behind every corner, as the events were used as inspiration, not a walkthrough. Eventually you must choose to fight alongside Captain America to repeal the Registration Act or with Iron Man to enforce it. Your affiliation directly changes how the game unfolds and dishes out unique gameplay rewards. NPCs also react differently based on your team's lineup.

Fusions – super moves created when two heroes work together – are a vital element of gameplay. These are broken down

into three categories: cleaning, guided, and targeted. Cleaning moves are perfect in an ambush. In one example, Daredevil tosses opponents into the air and Deadpool guns them down. Guided fusions are controlled by the player and have a more focused damage radius, such as the flaming tornado created by Storm and the Human Torch. Targeted moves inflict massive damage on a single baddie, most often mini-bosses. The Fastball Special, where Hulk tosses Wolverine, makes a kabob out of whoever's on the receiving end. To encourage experimentation with fusion attacks, characters can now be swapped out on the fly without having to wait for checkpoints. The new heroes start with the same amount of health as your

previous team, so don't get too excited about exploiting the system.

Equipment has been eliminated and replaced with boosts, which do everything from increasing the melee damage of your party to adding elemental charges to their weapons. Three boosts can be active at any given time from a pool of hundreds, earned through defeating bosses, choosing responses in conversations, doing heroic deeds, winning simulator missions, and so on. The environment is also more interactive, allowing Iron Man, for example, to hurl a car instead of just smashing it. Combat and destruction now land you ability orbs, which can be spent on upgrading passive powers. ■ ■ ■



■ Players are rewarded for strings of successful fusions. A high fusion score will yield revival tokens, which are new to MUA 2.



■ Performing heroic deeds unlocks new costumes, which don't incorporate upgrades this time around. This means you won't have to change your ensemble just for the perks



■ The camera angle is slightly lower and moves in closer when the action warrants

■ Over 250 fusion combos are available. If playing alone, fusions are initiated by pulling the left trigger and choosing the desired teammate. If playing with a friend, both must pull the left trigger



YOUR DREAM TEAM

A total of 24 characters have been confirmed for launch. We're told that popularity and personality have an influence on the selection process, but gameplay diversity took the driver's seat in this iteration.

Many characters from the debut title are new to this sequel, but Songbird and Iron Fist are new to this sequel. Although Songbird is an unknown outside the printed Marvel universe, her ability to use sound as a weapon made her fusion-friendly. Pairing her with Storm will stop enemies in their tracks as a diamond-shaped construct disperses lightning in all directions. Iron Fist is a flexible character thanks to his chi-based attacks and hand-to-hand prowess. He is also one of a few characters able to heal teammates. Vicarious Visions confirmed that Deadpool will be returning and that Juggernaut will join the roster as an exclusive pre-order promotion. The current revealed roster is as follows:

- Spider-Man
- Wolverine
- Iron Man
- Captain America
- Hulk
- Human Torch
- Invisible Woman
- Thing
- Thor
- Daredevil
- Luke Cage
- Storm
- Mr. Fantastic
- Songbird
- Iron Fist
- Deadpool
- Juggernaut (pre-order exclusive)



Grand Slam Tennis

Wii | STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) | PUBLISHER EA SPORTS
DEVELOPER EA CANADA | RELEASE JUNE 15

SECOND SERVE

McEnroe erupts after the ball boy fails to procure a towel fast enough. You should see him when his steak is cooked wrong.



THE LEGACY LINEUP

Grand Slam Tennis features 23 current and former tennis stars:

- Boris Becker
- Bjorn Borg
- Pat Cash
- Lindsay Davenport
- Novak Djokovic
- Stefan Edberg
- Chris Evert
- Roger Federer
- Justine Henin
- Lleyton Hewitt
- Ana Ivanovic
- John McEnroe
- Andy Murray
- Rafael Nadal
- Martina Navratilova
- Kei Nishikori
- Andy Roddick
- Pete Sampras
- Maria Sharapova
- Michael Stich
- Jo-Wilfried Tsonga
- Serena Williams
- Venus Williams

Wii Sports proved that tennis is a perfect fit for the Wii control scheme, but while its simplistic gameplay opened the door for everyone to enjoy a quick set against friends, it lacked the depth to keep tennis aficionados hooked. With Grand Slam Tennis, EA Sports plans to keep players on the court for a lot longer than 10-minute sessions.

Grand Slam Tennis adopts the basic Wii Sports tennis foundation, but fleshes out the experience to include a larger arsenal of shots and more control over your player. Using the Wii remote, players can hit slice, top spin, and flat ground strokes by turning their wrists to mimic how real tennis players hold the racket for those shots. The basic swing produces a deep baseline shot, but players can also draw opponents toward the net with a well-placed drop shot, which is employed by holding down the B button during a shot. If your opponent is a serve and volley player, you can lob the ball over his head by holding the A button while swinging the remote. The game plays with the standard Wii remote, but gamers who purchase Wii MotionPlus will benefit from more precise shot selection and ball placement. As in Wii Sports, sideline-to-sideline movement is automatically handled in the standard control scheme, but gamers can move between the baseline and net using the up and down buttons on the d-pad.

Once you get comfortable on the court, you can create a player to take on current and legendary tennis stars in the Grand Slam career mode. Players start with a very basic skill set, but as they rack up winners on the court their star ratings will rise. To round out their traits, players can also learn special abilities from the pros by completing Legend Challenges. Each pro has unique skills the player can adopt, such as Andy Roddick's serve, John McEnroe's net volley, and Maria Sharapova's backhand.

No Wii game is complete without a party mode, and Grand Slam Tennis fulfills the requirement with Tennis Party. This collection of minigames features a dozen multiplayer-friendly minigames based around — wait for it — tennis drills. Look for Grand Slam Tennis to take the court June 15, just in time for Wimbledon. ■ ■ ■



With a turn of the wrist, players can slice the ball instead of hitting a flat shot.



The game features all four Grand Slam venues.



Wii | PSP | PLAYSTATION 2

Silent Hill: Shattered Memories

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER KONAMI
> DEVELOPER CLIMAX STUDIOS > RELEASE FALL

REIMAGINING A CLASSIC

With Silent Hill V: Homecoming, the new western development team, Double Helix, took the series in a new direction, placing the gameplay focus on combat and action. While the effort was genuine, many fans ultimately ignored it. Konami goes back to the drawing board with its new title, Silent Hill: Shattered Memories.

Much like the Sci-Fi Channel's reimagining of *Battlestar Galactica*, Silent Hill: Shattered Memories puts a new twist on familiar characters and scenarios. The game still follows Harry Mason as he searches for his daughter Cheryl after a car accident, but outside of the narrative and setting, prepare for a brand new experience. Before Silent Hill fans cry

out, rest assured Shattered Memories still retains the elements that make the franchise popular — messed up creatures, insane characters, and unexplainable, brain-melting events.

The most evident changes deal with how the game is played and presented. The Wii remote serves as both the flashlight and the static radio enemy radar. While the nunchuk handles the movement, the remote's pointing ability allows players to explore as if they were in the world. With the game's impressive lighting system, everything casts shadows and reacts in a realistic way to light. If you look at an object and Harry has something to say, he'll say it — no need to push a button

Shattered Memories forgoes using a HUD, inventory, or standard game menus. In their place, Harry has a cell phone the player can use for changing game settings, saving, and making phone calls (dialing 911 didn't seem to work too well in our demo). Players can find numbers around the world on billboards and fliers and call them for audio clues that move the story along. The entire game streams with no loading screens to worry about. When you open a door, the character walks right in. This allows the team to create intense moments reminiscent of the chase scenes in *28 Days Later* as Harry moves seamlessly from room to room to escape the approaching monstrosities.

Konami is taking cues from the director

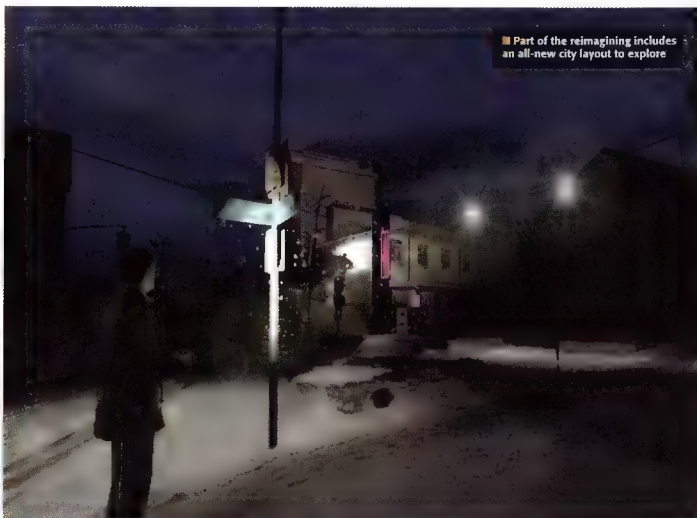
feature in *Left 4 Dead* to ramp up the horror with Psyche Profiles. While most choice-based games only present options A, B, or C and then unlock a predetermined path, Shattered Memories watches the choices the player makes, notes how they react to certain situations, and then creates a unique nightmare for that particular situation.

While the Silent Hill series has always been good about giving different endings based on player choices, it will be exciting to see how those choices shape the game before the credits roll. Konami's not only returning Silent Hill to its survival horror roots, it's also pushing the Wii hardware further than most developers. ■ ■ ■

■ The cell phone has been added to the Silent Hill survival kit



■ Part of the reimagining includes an all-new city layout to explore



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Batman: Arkham Asylum

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER EIDOS > DEVELOPER ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS > RELEASE JUNE 23

CHECKING IN SOON

We recently played through the first several hours of *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, and it may be the best Batman game ever made. That's not a particularly enormous hurdle to clear, but *Arkham* makes one wonder why the Dark Knight has been relegated to brawlers and platformers all his gaming life.

THE SETUP

The game opens with Batman hauling Joker away to the asylum and, of course, everything goes horribly wrong, leaving our hero trapped on the island with all of his worst enemies. After the audio placeholders in earlier

builds, it's exciting to hear Kevin Conroy, Mark Hamill, and Arleen Sorkin reprise their roles from the animated series (*Batman*, *Joker*, and *Harley Quinn*, respectively).

MISSIONS

Aside from beating the living hell out of Joker's goons, *Batman* finds plenty to do around the island, which includes containment areas, botanical gardens, and open outdoor areas. You must sneakily swoop down on Zsasz before he electrocutes a guard, grapple up to silently take out snipers, maneuver extended vertical platforming areas, stop enemies from screwing with the Batmobile, and follow the evidence trail with special detective vision.

COMBAT

All straight attacks are mapped to one button, but *Batman*'s moves vary depending on how an enemy is facing him. While you fight a large group an icon appears over the head of the next attacker, allowing you to time the counter button and string together punches and reversals until everyone's down. A quick

cape stun and diving dodge also provide some defense. Once you create a big enough combo (eight hits to start), advanced moves like the throw and instant finishers become available. Longer combos also impart more experience at the end of a fight.

LEVELING UP

Batman's experience ring fills any time he knocks out a dude or picks up an item. Interestingly, health regeneration is directly tied to experience gained. Once the ring is full, you can choose one of 20 total upgrades like new fighting moves, remote-controlled Batarang, and additional armor.

PREDATOR

When you enter a new area, it's always smart to flick on detective vision for a rundown of the number of armed and unarmed villains close by. Thugs with guns can mow you down almost instantly, so it's best to take them out first. Armed enemies show up in bright red when your visor is on, and the game gives you plenty of attack options. Will you glide down and kick him in the face? Maybe blow up the roof over his head? How about hanging upside down and grabbing him, leaving him strung up by the legs?

SECRETS AND UNLOCKS

Those looking for more to do outside of blasting through the main adventure can thank the Riddler for placing trophies, villain interview tapes, and minor riddles throughout the complex. Many of these are hidden Metroid-style behind impassable barriers that you must return to later once you have the right gadget. Over the radio he occasionally drops hints like, "Don't cut yourself on this sharply observed portrait." When you find the answer, a painting of Warden Sharp, hold down the left trigger to scan it and earn a nice dose of XP and sometimes even unlock a new character action figure, bio, or challenge room. These rooms task players with beating down waves of goons or taking out armed guards as quickly as possible, and high scores are tied to online leaderboards. ■ ■ ■



■ *Batman*



■ *Joker* is playable in the challenge rooms exclusively on the PS3 edition



■ *Detective vision*



■ *Harley Quinn*

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Fight Night Round 4

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
 > **DEVELOPER** EA SPORTS CANADA > **RELEASE** JUNE 30

UNDER THE BRIGHT LIGHTS

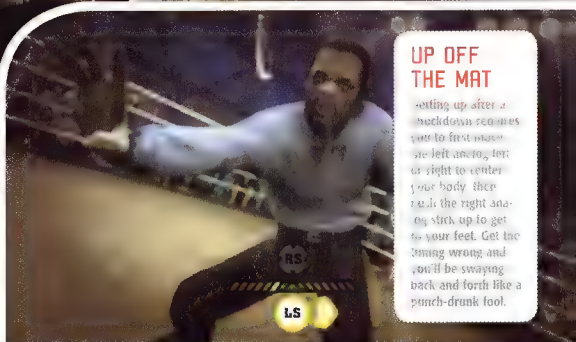
We've already had the weigh-in with *Fight Night Round 4*, and now we're finally stepping into the ring. We've been told the game's new physics system has changed the dynamics of landing and receiving blows, so we're excited to see how it's shaping up.

Fight Night Round 4 feels just as responsive and intuitive as previous games in the series, except now it's even more dangerous. Long-armed opponents will break down your blocks and keep you at arm's length unless you figure a way to get in close and make them pay. The game's new weave move allows you to duck and move at the same time — an instrumental action when you're trying to get inside a stick-and-move fighter while avoiding a jab to the face. Once you're in close, however, you're still not safe. The new physics system produces miss-hits and weak shots when you throw ill-advised punches, which in turn open you up for counters.

The game's tweaked controls let you coordinate your punches easier; body blows are thrown by abbreviated analog strokes that differentiate them from headshots. It sounds confusing, but it's very intuitive. Since it's easier to throw body blows (straights to the body still use the shoulder trigger as a modifier) with these new controls, we used them more often.

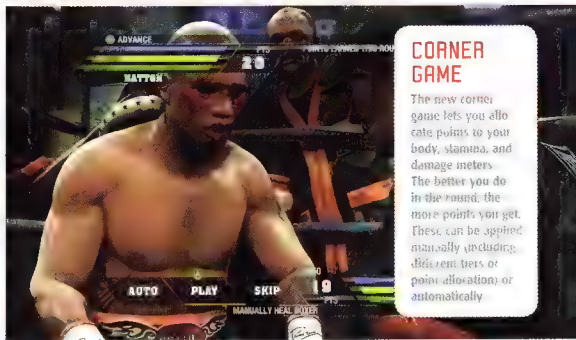
Your player starts his career path on the amateur circuit, participating in a tournament that can net him some unlockable gear and a ratings boost should he win. After this tourney you turn pro. The revamped career mode features specific challenges that you must overcome to reach the next rung on the ladder of your weight class (there are eight in all, with three belts per class). These include criteria such as getting a pay-per-view event, being on ESPN, and a certain win/loss ratio. Similarly, the game presents you with occasional surprise events, such as being called out to fight by a rival, a rematch, as well as a rare Rocky fight where the champ invites a lowly ranked nobody for a shot at the title. *Fight Night Round 4* invites you to craft your own career arc and write your own legacy, including jumping up weight classes. Your success in your former weight class determines your initial rank in the new one.

Crafting your reputation online is a little different. You can fight head-to-head with created or real boxers, but to compete for the online world championship you can only use your created boxer. The online boxing federation has three weight divisions (lightweight, middleweight, and heavyweight) and one belt per class. Apart from gunning for the online title fight, EA plans to support tournaments and give other awards you can earn. ■■■■



UP OFF THE MAT

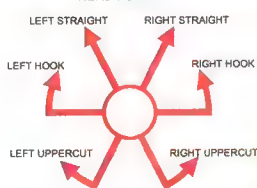
Getting up after a knockdown reanimates you to first stance. We left analog, for or right to center your body then stick up to get to your feet. Get the timing wrong and you'll be swaying back and forth like a punch-drunk fool.



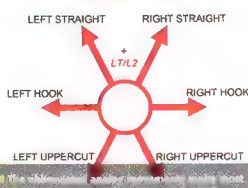
CORNER GAME

The new corner game lets you allocate points to your body, stamina, and damage meters. The better you do in the round, the more points you get. These can be applied manually (including different tiers of pain allocation) or automatically.

HEAD PUNCHES



BODY PUNCHES



Use the left shoulder trigger for head punches and the right shoulder trigger for body punches (except head punches of course).



Free-running meets superpowers to shape the movement style



New York transforms over the course of the game from a troubled city into an all-out warzone

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Prototype

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER RADICAL > RELEASE JUNE 9

FREE TO DESTROY

We've waited a long time to play in Radical's ambitious open world, and Prototype is finally on the home stretch. We recently dove into several levels of the game, trying out Alex Mercer's devastating collection of powers and free-running skills while wandering through the decimated streets of Manhattan. We were excited for the game before we played. Now we can't wait to see the complete package.

Alex Mercer is a dark and merciless protagonist who wanders New York, seeking to uncover the truth behind his transformation into a living weapon of mass destruction. Switching between powers is a breeze using a power wheel mapped to one of the shoulder buttons. Four abilities can be set to the d-pad from this wheel at any time, and each one has a place in combat. The gory messes left behind after a bout with the claws is a testament to their value against infantry, and the hammer fist power smashes through tanks with ease.

The disguise ability brings an entirely new element to gameplay. While being pursued by a powerful strike squad of enemy vehicles, it's easy to slip around a corner and transform into a civilian, walking away unharmed. This ability is invaluable as you approach heavily defended fortifications. During one mission, we morph into a common soldier and drop down onto a helicopter pad. Moving near to the chopper

pilot, we grab him and absorb his body and memories. Now equipped with the skills needed to pilot his helicopter, we hop in and take off.

It's equally fun to navigate the streets and skyscrapers on foot. Wild leaps land you a block from where you push off, and heavily congested ground areas offer no impediment as Mercer punches past pedestrians and leaps over cars and trucks with ease. Ascending a building, Mercer seamlessly transitions around corners and leaps obvious blockades automatically. This leaves the player free to focus on larger navigation concerns and deal with the constant attacks headed his way.

There remains little doubt in our minds as to the high quality of the free movement and combat controls at play in Prototype. Moment-to-moment interactions of all types feel responsive and smooth. Our lingering questions concern the wider mission structure and story components. We've yet to see the flow of gameplay over long stretches, and the variety of these experiences makes or breaks open world games. The clever "Web of Intrigue" storytelling device has a lot of promise. Nodes on the web unlock as you absorb memories, filling in gaps and fleshing out characters and plot. If the mission variety and story are up to snuff, Prototype may be one of the must-play games of the summer. ■■■■



The game is unabashed in its depiction of brutal violence, and the main character looks to define the concept of the anti-hero



Alex Mercer has much more than normal human enemies to face



Later powers add defensive abilities in addition to attack forms





■ Shoot the Scribes first



■ Milk grenades aren't necessarily deadly, but they are a good source of calcium.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Wolfenstein

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
 > **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE/1D SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** SUMMER

BUSTIN' THE SS

When the demo for id and Raven's upcoming Wolfenstein entry first kicks off, the game looks just like any other World War II shooter we've all played a million times. Fortunately, it doesn't take long until series hero B.J. Blazkowicz uncovers a mystical amulet that grants him access to a green-tinted alternate dimension called the Veil. We watch Blazkowicz escape from an Indiana Jones-esque ancient temple, blasting Nazis and dodging spike walls and flying arrow traps using his newfound amulet to temporarily slow down time with its Mire ability.

We grab the controller for a more combat-

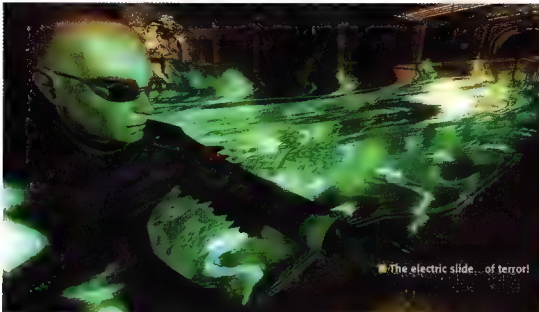
oriented stage near a church. A group of standard issue Nazi grunts has dug in at a courtyard, so we make our way through gradually picking off soldiers. Surprisingly, the iron sight view has no aim assist, so it can be a little pesky if you just played Call of Duty 4 or Chronicles of Riddick. Exploding barrels are scattered liberally throughout the stage, and their generous splash damage results in plenty of satisfying Nazi screams.

Things start to get hairy when the Scribes show up. These sorcerer Nazis cast shields on allies, blast you with energy, and zip across the screen like Johnny Cage doing a shadow kick, so it's not easy to get a

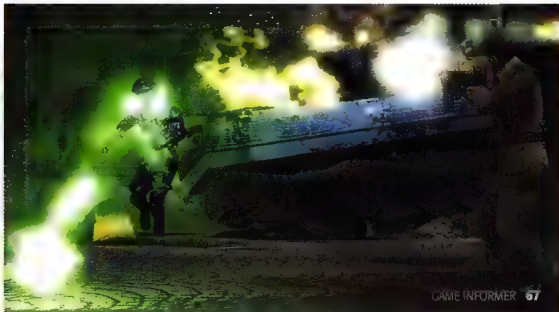
bead on them. But the most deadly foe we encounter is the heavy trooper. Fully decked out in armor, this guy carries a devastating particle cannon that disintegrates anyone it touches (think a Ghostbusters proton pack). We scurry between buildings to dodge his attacks, slowing time to target his two shoulder weak points, and refill Veil energy at pools scattered throughout the area. Eventually, his weak spot emerges after the others are destroyed and we take him down once and for all. The best part? You can nick his gun afterward. The warehouse full of Nazis nearby does not appreciate this.

The only disappointment is that a

weapon this powerful runs out of ammo quickly. Thankfully, the game allows you trade in collectible treasure and Nazi gold on the black market to upgrade the particle cannon or any other weapon. Blazkowicz can do this type of business in various hub towns and also receive missions from the three underground factions in the game. We can't wait to explore more of these open world elements in the future. The impressive action has us looking forward to the release window this summer. ■ ■ ■



■ The electric slide... of terror!



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Dante's Inferno

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE** 2010

GOD OF HELL

Last issue we laid out the initial details of EA's *Inferno* adaptation. This month we got hands-on time with the game and spoke with executive producer Jonathan Knight. Our first question is self-evident — why turn a legendary poet into a battle-hardened warrior? "I think the main reason we haven't seen more of Dante's *Inferno* in mainstream entertainment — games, movies, etc. — is because the story isn't particularly ripe with drama and conflict," Knight says. "It's basically Dante and Virgil walking through the afterlife describing what they see. We've had to adapt the story to bring in that action and conflict. But, I think we've done it in a way that's reasonably deferential to the core narrative of the poem."

Knight claims that other than the core changes to the plot, everything else about the game is pretty faithful to source material. "The geography, locations, and major landmarks come straight from the poem," Knight proclaims. "Dante had a vision for the nine circles of hell, the sequence, and the order in which people are punished, and we are sticking to that."

We played a chunk of the limbo level to see how Dante handles in combat. It's hard not to instantly think of Kratos. Dante's bone scythe has wide area attacks, focused swipes, button mash decapitations, and more. His defensive roll and double jump seem almost precisely tuned to God of War's feel. "To be honest, any comparison is extremely flattering because we know that if our game wasn't fun to play, or wasn't delivering a great combat system, then those comparisons just wouldn't get made," Knight says. "No one would care about us." He points to the unique story and setting, giant demon control, and full commitment to 60 frames-per-second as major differentiating factors.

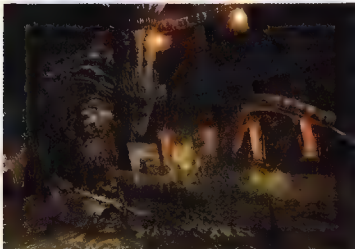
Demon riding is certainly more involved than the typical strong basic attacks and easy knock-offs of Golden Axe. Demons' fire breath and arm smashes will tear up enemies, but Dante can't perform certain actions without the added strength. After fighting several waves of smaller demons on the deck of an evil ship with a smack-talking magic head attached to the bow, Dante knocks a rider off a huge beast and uses it to rip the head off and toss it away. Then they jump off the ship before it crashes and proceed to climb up a sheer cliff.

One of the freakiest parts of the demo came when babies with glowing eyes and blade arms jumped out of a hell crib and started attacking. Dante's guide, Virgil, explains that these unbaptized babies are stuck in limbo. Did EA have any concerns about this type of enemy during development? "[There was] no reservation about the babies," Knight says. "They are based in the mythology of the medieval time, and they have nasty swords for arms and try to kill you, so basically they are just another crazy enemy. Our enemies are one of the things that make the game unique. It's been really fun to come up with enemies themed after sins, and we didn't want to hold back, because our adult audience expects hell to be a pretty messed up place."

In Dante's original epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*, his character only finds redemption after journeying through purgatory and paradise. Does this spell sequels for *Inferno*? "You can expect the game to generally follow part one of *The Divine Comedy*, in terms of scope," Knight says. "For what it's worth, I have conceived of the game as part one in a trilogy, so some thought has gone into parts two and three. But given how important it is that we get this game right, all the energy is going into *Inferno* right now." ■ ■ ■



■ Scythe in the brain
= total battle control



■ The cross weapon is a mix of
projectile and area attacks



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

Guitar Hero Smash Hits

> **STYLE** 1-TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION/RED OCTANE
> **DEVELOPER** BEYONX > **RELEASE** JUNE 16

THE CLASSICS?

It may seem early to get nostalgic about a series that only first came out four years ago. Even so, Activision knows some of its audience would love to play the full band and master track versions of the best titles from the early Guitar Hero games. Enter *Smash Hits*, a collection of the biggest and best tunes from the first

four games, but with all the added features introduced in *World Tour*, including the character creator and Music Studio. The new game includes 48 full tracks, all original masters from the actual artists. Rather than bore you with another description of how the game works, (it hasn't changed), check out the game's full set list. ■ ■ ■

THE SET LIST

GUITAR HERO

- Pantera - "Cowboys From Hell (Live)"
- Franz Ferdinand - "Take Me Out"
- Queens Of The Stone Age - "No One Knows"
- Joan Jett & The Blackhearts - "I Love Rock 'N' Roll"
- Boston - "More Than A Feeling"
- White Zombie - "Thunder Kiss '65"
- Blue Oyster Cult - "Godzilla"
- Helmet - "Unsung (Live)"
- Queen - "Killer Queen"
- Incubus - "Stellar"
- Ozzy Osbourne - "Bark At The Moon"
- Deep Purple - "Smoke On The Water"
- The Donnas - "Take It Off"
- The Exies - "Hey You"

GUITAR HERO II

- Avenged Sevenfold - "Beast And The Harlot"
- Rage Against The Machine - "Killing In The Name"
- Rush - "YYZ"
- Lynyrd Skynyrd - "Free Bird"
- Foo Fighters - "Monkey Wrench"
- Iron Maiden - "The Trooper"
- Nirvana - "Heart-Shaped Box"
- Lamb Of God - "Laid To Rest"
- The Police - "Message In A Bottle"
- Wolfmother - "Woman"
- Kansas - "Carry On Wayward Son"
- Stone Temple Pilots - "Trippin' On A Hole In A Paper Heart"
- Warrant - "Cherry Pie"

- Alice In Chains - "Them Bones"
- Danzig - "Mother"
- Jane's Addiction - "Stop!"
- Reverend Horton Heat - "Psychobilly Freakout"
- The Sword - "Freyra"
- Mötley Crüe - "Shout At The Devil"

GUITAR HERO ENCORE: ROCKS THE 80S

- Twisted Sister - "I Wanna Rock"
- Anthrax - "Caught In A Mosh"
- Judas Priest - "Electric Eye"
- Extreme - "Play With Me"
- Poison - "Nothin' But A Good Thing"
- Ratt - "Round and Round"

GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK

- Pat Benatar - "Hit Me With Your Best Shot"
- Living Colour - "Cult Of Personality"
- Heart - "Barracuda"
- Kiss - "Rock And Roll All Nite"
- AFI - "Miss Murder"
- DragonForce - "Through The Fire And Flames"
- Priestess - "Lay Down"
- Slayer - "Raining Blood"

GUITAR HERO: AEROSMITH

- Aerosmith - "Back In The Saddle"



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

The Saboteur

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** WINTER 2009

EAT MY DUST, NAZI!

Back in April 2007, we debuted the first details on *Saboteur's* racecar driving World War II spy hero Sean Devlin. Since then, while the dev team quietly worked away, EA acquired developer Pandemic and added "the" to the name. "In a way, everything and nothing has changed since then," says lead designer Torn French. "Every system, mechanic, story point, and mission have all gone through iterations and changes, but at the core, we're still making an open world action game with Sean's revenge story and a WWII setting. With all of these tweaks and changes though, the game now definitely feels like the game we wanted to make."

Sean manages to handle his role as an Indiana Jones-style action star well. He transitions easily between explosive gunplay, bone-cracking punches, sneaky building climbing, and pedal-to-the-metal getaways. The game begins at a big race in Saarbrücken, a town on the German/French border Sean dives for Monni Racing, a major rival of the Nazi-backed

Doppelseg team, and gets caught up in some serious trouble. "It escalates very quickly and builds up to something gone horribly, horribly wrong," French says. "What starts out seemingly innocent turns out to be something very fatal and essentially sends Sean on his revenge spree to right what was wronged."

Sean must fight his way across several locations in Germany and France, but Paris is the largest and most detailed city in the game. The team went as far as basing the layout on real 1940s maps. As the player fights to free the people and clear the Nazi occupation, city zones change from a black and white color palette to vibrant color at the precise moment of a major Nazi crushing event. "These moments range from breaking out resistance members to blowing up a giant cannon installed on a city building to taking down a Nazi train to wiping out a base full of Nazi defenses and more," French says. We're excited to get our hands on this one soon. ■ ■ ■





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Battlefield: Bad Company 2

BY EA GAMES (MULTIPLAYER) > PUBLISHED BY EA GAMES
> DEVELOPER: DICE (MULTIPLAYER) > RELEASE: WINTER

IN A MARCHING ORDER

■ With disintegrating cover, the boys of B Company must stay nimble on the battlefield



■ "Do I use the bazooka or the rocket launcher?"



■ With Destruction 2.0, air strikes can level entire buildings

Bad Company was the first Battlefield console game to combine the series' trademark multiplayer with a compelling single-player experience. Giving players the freedom to attack objectives with tactics of their choice and adding destructible environments proved to be a successful formula, earning the game broad critical praise. With Bad Company 2, DICE is bringing even more explosive action to the fore, and it has invited the forgotten PC faithful along for the ride.

The debut Bad Company 2 demo starts with nincompoops Marlowe, Sweetwater, Haggard, and Sarge stationed near a Russian border village surrounded by snow-covered

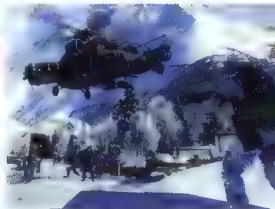
mountains. The squad is tracking enemy activity in the region; when the team sees soldiers loading something suspicious onto a truck, HQ gives them the green light to move in. Sarge sneaks ahead and silently slits a patrolman's throat, but before long the enemies spot the infiltrators and the firefight begins. As the Joes eliminate soldiers and move through the village they encounter a tank blocking their progress. Marlowe pulls out a laser designator and paints the target for an air strike. While the team peeks from behind cover, two jets scream toward the tank and deliver the payload, resulting in an epic explosion that bombs the tank into oblivion and decimates the two adjacent

buildings in the process. This is our first glimpse of Destruction 2.0, DICE's refined damage modeling. In the last game you could blow through walls, but Bad Company 2 allows you to raze entire buildings.

By the time Marlowe and the gang reach the end of the village, the truck is already headed out of town. As it disappears down the road, the team jumps into a vehicle. Marlowe takes position on the truck bed, shooting at pursuing enemy vehicles as the team scrambles frantically to catch up to their target. The demo culminates with a helicopter joining the chase, which Marlowe must take out with a well-placed missile. This sequence hints at the new direction

DICE is taking Bad Company. While the game still takes place in an open world, the developer is making scripted sequences a priority to deliver the explosive and memorable moments that the first title lacked. While the tone of the game has shifted slightly away from its buddy comedy flavor in favor of more intense drama, DICE assures us that the game preserves B Company's trademark personalities.

DICE is keeping multiplayer details under wraps, but insists that the popular mode is the main focus for the sequel. Stay tuned for more details at E3. ■ ■ ■





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Red Faction: Guerilla

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (16-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER VOLITION > RELEASE JUNE 9

BREAK STUFF

After a seven-year absence, Red Faction is back. Thankfully, a new generation of technology is allowing developer Volition to deliver on the promises it made early in the decade. Red Faction: Guerilla, powered by the brand new GeoMod engine, is taking the concept of destructible environments to a new level, leaving the FPS roots of Red Faction behind in favor of an enormous open-world, third-person shooter experience. Everything can be hacked to bits, smashed to smithereens, or blown to kingdom come – and we mean everything.

"We're letting you tear apart every man-made structure in the game: walls, buildings, bridges, everything," comments producer James Hague. "In lots of games touting destructible environments, destruction is just a special effect. In Red Faction: Guerilla you're doing the destruction yourself." The options are endless. Players can sledgehammer through walls, knock out a building's supports to make it collapse, blow out roofs so they cascade through the floor, and jump trucks into the second story of a building. "This changes everything you expect from a game world," Hague says.

Judging from our time spent with the game, this is no idle boast. Whether armed with your trusty sledgehammer, remote charges, or one of the game's numerous improvised weapons, you can cause a remarkable amount of damage to the environment on Mars. This is all done through real structural physics, which creates highly entertaining emergent gameplay with light puzzle elements as you figure out just which

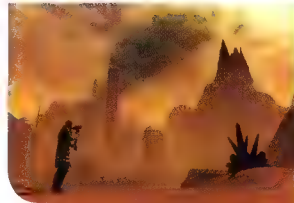
load-bearing beam to take out for maximum damage. In one instance, we stand beneath a large tower we had just applied charges to, wondering which part to hit next. Suddenly, a massive steel groan belts from the structure as we realize it is coming down right on top of us. Near misses like this can't be duplicated by mere scripted events.

This flexibility extends to the mission structure, which has more in common with sandbox games like Grand Theft Auto and Volition's Saints Row than its FPS predecessors. From your rebel home base, you and your Red Faction cohorts must help take down the Earth Defense Force, corrupted heroes that helped take down the Ultron Corporation in the original games. Whether it's bombing EDF structures to create havoc or rescuing prisoners, there's always a new way to help sow the seeds of dissent.

Multiplayer offers most of the familiar modes you'd expect for online play, but the real gem here is an offline mode called Wrecking Crew. Wrecking Crew is a collection of classic pass-the-controller minigames that reminds us of Bomout's storied Crash mode. This explosive free-for-all pits players against one another to see who can cause the most destruction. Strategy comes into play as you figure out ways to get your limited weapons loadout to cause the most chain-reaction destruction possible. It's one of the best new modes we've seen in a while, and the topper to what looks to be an extremely well-done shooter. ■■■



■ As you can see, the destruction in Red Faction: Guerilla is very real



■ As in GTA, you can jack any vehicle you see



Aion

► **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
 ► **PUBLISHER** NCSOFT ► **DEVELOPER** NCSOFT ► **RELEASE** FALL '09

TO THE SKIES!

NCsoft's Aion hopes to be the first Asian MMO since Final Fantasy XI to strike it big in the U.S. The game's potent combination of varied PvP and PvE content is already a success in its native Korea, and aims to land stateside later this year. We spoke to producer Brian Knox to get a feel for the philosophy behind Aion's ambitions, and to learn how integrating player flight into every level of Aion changes the game.

"The development team looked at games from all across the world, and what was working and what was not. As the world becomes more globalized, so too are games," Knox says. With its Miyazaki-inspired world that is home to races based on ancient Greco-Roman cultures, and reworked UI and controls for Western markets, Aion takes this lesson to heart. NCSoft is even re-scripting entire questlines and encounters for Western gamers.

Rather than carving a focused niche within the MMORPG scene, Aion welcomes players of all kinds. Knox touts the game's 1,500 quests as a counter to the perception that Korean-developed games require massive amounts of grinding to advance in levels, and notes that the endgame embraces both PvE and PvP play. "We didn't want players to have to pick a path in our game by just choosing a route of PvP or PvE," he declares. "Players will need to prepare for both PvE and PvP when laying siege to fortresses, artifacts and general exploration and hunting."

As mentioned earlier, everyone gets to fly, and not in the World of Warcraft sense where it's window dressing on travel con-

venience. Knox explains, "Each and every system is enhanced by flight: quests, harvesting, exploration, raids, PvP, sieges, loot." Taking to the air has advantages and disadvantages; ground-pounders are necessary for PvE raids and PvP sieges. It's hard to say much more about how flight impacts Aion's gameplay until we muck around in the world, but it certainly sounds promising.

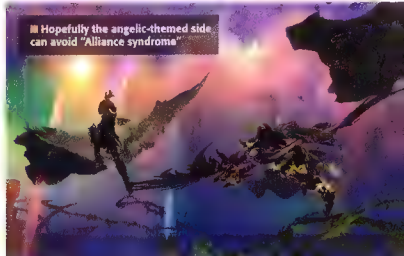
We've seen a lot of MMORPGs try to bridge the Pacific, and all have failed to gain footholds in North America. With Aion, however, NCSoft is taking a different, more comprehensive approach than has been tried in the past. Despite the history in place, the company's commitment to the title, as well as the interesting concepts in play, make Aion worth keeping tabs on. ■ ■ ■



■ What is it with MMORPGs and purple landscapes?



■ Reactor Core Breach is probably a strong attack



■ Hopefully the angelic-themed side can avoid "Alliance syndrome"



■ You can create your own adventures and edit the planets where they occur.

PC

Spore Galactic Adventures

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION/STRATEGY > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER MAXIS > RELEASE JUNE 23

BEAMING DOWN

If you want to, you can spend all of your time in Spore playing with the creature creator or building an armada of airships – but you won't see the best the game has to offer. Spore's most compelling gameplay occurs once you reach the space phase, and that portion of the game is about to get even bigger with the release of the first major expansion pack. Galactic Adventures integrates seamlessly into your Spore experience, giving you more ways to explore and interact with the final frontier.

As you travel the galaxy, other sentient races will now present you with missions that involve going down to a planet and accomplishing tasks as your ship's captain. Controlling like the creature phase of the game, these segments are a series of various objectives. In a *Romeo and Juliet*-inspired adventure we played, we reconciled the families of two sweethearts by talking to the star-crossed lovers and their parents. Another quest had us escorting a young creature out of a disease-ridden research post, fighting off infected aliens along the way. Each mission you complete rewards you with experience, and as your

captain levels up, you'll have access to extra weapons and ability enhancements.

Galactic Adventures comes with a handful of ready-made quests, but the built-in adventure editor can keep you busy indefinitely. You can create your own objectives, build towns full of NPCs, and even edit planet terrain. The interface is more complicated than the standard creation tools, but it also gives players more freedom; you can write dialogue, assign behavior patterns to creatures and vehicles, and craft multi-part objectives that span several acts. The whole process has a higher learning curve than the main game, but devoted fans will be thankful for the new options.

As with everything else in Spore, you can share your completed quests with the community or play through others' creations. This expansion's success will ride on a stream of fun user-made adventures, but it means to be seen if more casual players will embrace the increased complexity of the adventure editor. We enjoyed our time with the Galactic Adventures, but we'll just have to wait to see if it re-energizes Spore's fanbase. ■ ■ ■



■ Your captain takes center stage in the new missions



PC

America's Army 3

> STYLE 126-PLAYER ONLINE ACTION > PUBLISHER U.S. ARMY > DEVELOPER U.S. ARMY > RELEASE SUMMER

BASIC TRAINING

Seven years have passed since the debut of America's Army, the free online shooter created to aid military recruitment by combining information about the U.S. Army with entertaining firefights. In the years since, competitive multiplayer titles like Battlefield 2, Rainbow Six Vegas, and Call of Duty 4 have changed the dynamics of online games with sophisticated progression systems, team chat, and popular new game modes. Never content to lose a technology war, the U.S. Army adopted the Unreal Engine 3.0 and started building America's Army 3 from scratch in hopes of competing with these online juggernauts.

After listening to concerns from the America's Army community, the developers integrated team chat, achievements, and a comprehensive stat tracking system on par with Halo 3. America's Army 3 also eliminates the barrier to entry by making the previously required introductory training levels optional. You still have to complete training courses to learn new skills and earn ribbons, badges, and medals; but new players can jump immediately into battle to get a feel for the combat before deciding to make the commitment.

The U.S. Army spent a lot of time tweaking the engine to try to make this the most realistic combat game ever created. The team removed jumping altogether to rid the game of bunny hoppers in favor of a contextual vaulting system. Characters now move fluidly throughout the world, with seamless transitions between full sprints,

prone positions, and a crouching position. To make the battlefield feel real, the Army took the time to integrate all of its ballistic information into the game. Grunts can now tell how close or far away a shot is taken from based on its sound. Each bullet has true physical properties that are taken into account for path alterations from ricochets and penetration. With bullets now capable of ripping through drywall and wood, soldiers must learn the difference between cover and concealment very quickly. A new dynamic lighting system also takes into account eye adjustment when moving from well-lit exteriors to low light interiors, giving the soldier concealed in dark a beat on the infiltrator.

America's Army's dedication to realism extends to the damage models for each character. If your leg is wounded, your movement will be impeded. Conversely, a bullet wound in your arm will decrease your firing accuracy. Real injuries require real medical treatment. If you go too long without being healed by a medic, you may bleed out or become incapacitated. The Army also raises the stakes by removing instant death messages – the only way to make sure you killed that soldier firing from the second story window is visual confirmation on his remains.

The deep character development and impressive dedication to realism vaults America's Army 3 up our watch list. We'll follow up with more details as we get closer to the summer release. ■ ■ ■



■ The exercise in hitting the broad side of a barn is going poorly

Brütal Legend

> STYLE | PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER DOUBLE FINE > RELEASE OCTOBER 13

RAISE YOUR GOBLET OF ROCK

Back on track after switching publishers, Brutal Legend, Tim Schafer's face-melting ode to all things metal, is getting closer to taking the stage. At an event during this year's Game Developer's Conference, Schafer showed the title for the first time since our 2007 cover story.

Brütal Legend begins backstage with Eddie Riggs, the world's best roadie who is stuck tuning guitars and wiring amps for the worst metal band of all time. When a stage mishap causes Eddie's blood to land on his badass belt buckle, he awakens the fire beast Ormagöden, Creator of the Sky, Destroyer of the Ancient World. This mythical metal creature transports him to another dimension, and Riggs awakens at a temple that coincidentally looks just like the stage set from the metal show. Unlike the stage, however, this temple is set atop a mountain of skulls and bones deep within a mythical land. As druids shrouded in red cloaks close in on his position, Eddie grabs the legendary axe stuck in the ground and starts raining blood.

In battle Eddie has two basic attacks. He can use his axe (dubbed The Separator) to cleave limbs from his enemies or use his "axe" (a guitar named Clementine) to unleash ranged magical attacks by rocking killer chords. Tapping the guitar attack button results in a lightning burst, and holding it down unleashes a devastating pyrotechnic attack. As Eddie battles through waves of druids and demon nuns in the temple, he crosses paths with Ophelia, a female rock chick disguised as a druid. When she pulls back the hood of her red cloak to reveal a stunning beauty rivaling the sexiest vixens in rock lore, Eddie (voiced by Jack Black) quips, "Oh man, don't tell me I've been slaying hot girls this whole time."

To escape the temple, Eddie must play riffs to raise pieces of a mythical hotrod from the ground. Using his vast roadie skills, Eddie quickly assembles the hotrod, dubbed The Deuce, and hits the accelerator with Ophelia riding shotgun. After defeating a towering snake monster at the temple gates, Eddie and Ophelia race across a crumbling road, dispatching enemies as they speed toward the safety of her base camp, Bladehenge.

At the camp, Ophelia introduces Eddie to the leader of the resistance, Lars Halford. Standing atop a stone blade with his hair blowing in the wind, Lars is a natural frontman in the vein of Robert Plant and David Coverdale. Lars explains that Doviculus and his demon army, The Tainted Coil, have enslaved most humans. Lars and his sister Lita also recount an ancient fable of a warrior summoned by Ormagöden to either destroy mankind or deliver it. Lars wryly observes "there's some dispute over the translation." Eddie pledges to use his roadie skills to aid the rebels.

Eddie's first task is to recruit an army for their uprising. Lars mentions a mine where indentured humans toil away mining ore by banging their heads

against the walls. Ever the oblivious frontman, Lars asks, "What do you do with a bunch of kids who don't know how to do anything but bang their heads all day long?" Eddie knowingly replies, "You start a revolution, Lars!" You are then greeted by a "Start a Revolution Now or Later" option.

When Eddie arrives at the mine, he's greeted by the screeching voice of villainous turncoat General Lionwhyte blurring out motivational corporate-speak through towering speakers. Lionwhyte, voiced by Rob Halford of Judas Priest, is just one of many rock 'n' roll cameos awaiting gamers. Eddie plays a banging solo to direct his slaves' attention and urges them to break their chains of servitude. As Eddie's army of thick-skulled rebel youth grows, they are met by Lionwhyte's minion detachment of make-up wearing, spandex sporting glam rock soldiers. Eddie must then direct his newly recruited army of head-bangers to dispatch their hair-sprayed rivals. Eddie can control up to 30 allies at once, instructing them to follow, attack, defend, and protect.

Several moments of this opening sequence had us laughing out loud, confirming Tim Schafer is still at the top of his game as a scriptwriter. Questions still surround the depth of the battle system and the diversity of quests in Brutal Legend's open world, but this opening teaser was enough to confirm the game's standing as one of our most anticipated titles in 2009. ■ ■ ■





START A REVOLUTION
NOW OR **LATER**



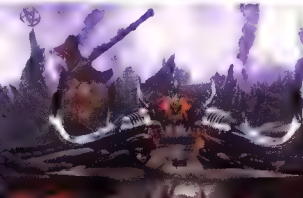
Brütal Legend also features a "battle of the bands" versus multiplayer mode that allows 40 vs. 40 combat



Tim Schafer's art direction goal is to make each setting look like it is ripped straight from a metal album cover



Eddie Riggs can explore the world's 64 square kilometers to unearth side-quests, discover tab slabs that unlock new abilities, and collect several new metal songs hidden across the landscape



ROCK OF AGES

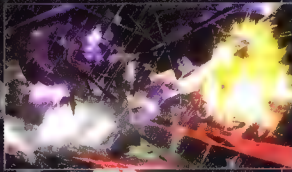
One of the central tenets of the Brütal Legend experience is the battle for rock supremacy between heavy metal and hair metal. Though there are several rock references for metal-hardened fans to enjoy throughout the game, you don't need to know about Pantera's hair metal era or the lineage of Ozzy Osbourne's lead guitarists to play Brütal Legend. "You didn't need to be a pirate to enjoy *The Secret of Monkey Island*," creator Tim Schafer jokes.

Eddie's hotrod has a radio with several metal channels focused on sub-genres like classic metal, glam rock, black metal, and industrial



PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



PLAYSTATION 3

Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2

Just like the original *Ninja Gaiden Sigma*, PlayStation 3 owners are getting a upgraded version of last summer's *Ninja Gaiden II* in exchange for having to wait over a year since the Xbox 360 release. Ryu returns with new playable characters Ayane from *Dead or Alive* (the one with purple hair above) and Momiji (black hair) from the recent DS *Ninja Gaiden* title. Online two-player co-op is available in 10 side missions complete with scoring and online stats. New foes appear as well, the most impressive of which is a demon-possessed Statue of Liberty. We can't wait to battle the old broad this fall as long as it doesn't involve pink slime and a boom box pumping out "Higher and Higher."



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Saw

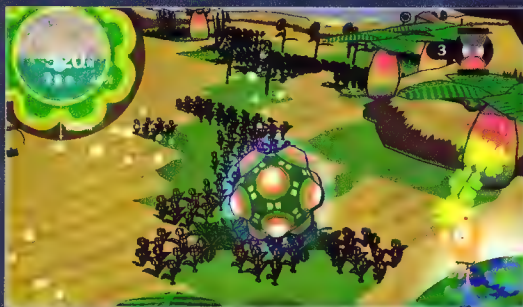
It's surprising to think the *Saw* movies haven't been translated to video games until now. The series is the largest horror franchise of all time, eclipsing favorites that have stood tall for decades. Konami and Zombie Studios plan to scare some gamepayers off by creating an interactive version of the terror. Set between the first and second film, *Saw* takes place in a rundown insane asylum that serial jerkface Jigsaw has turned into his own form of hell. The game uses clever techniques to present puzzles, and the clues for solving them are always somewhere in the environment. This should keep players on their toes to avoid a messy, gruesome demise. Look for the game to release around Halloween.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

R.U.S.E.

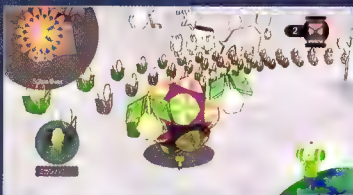
Ubisoft's love affair with acronyms continues with *R.U.S.E.* (too bad it hasn't decided what it stands for yet), an RTS that embraces military deception as a tactic used to change the tides of war. Deploy decoy units to bait the Axis into a trap, decipher radio chatter to see their moves in advance, and scatter camouflaged troops along the enemy path for a surprise blood bath. With maps that stretch for miles and units possessing the ability to launch strikes from afar, developer Eugene Systems (*Act of War: Direct Action*) has implemented a unique Iris Zoom feature that works much like Google Earth, allowing players to view the action up close or from the clouds. In addition to the campaign, players can play cooperatively, or join seven other military masterminds for an adversarial skirmish when *R.U.S.E.* hits retail either in late 2009 or early 2010.



PLAYSTATION 3

Katamari Forever

The newest Katamari title is more of a tribute than a full new game (it's actually called *Katamari Damacy Tribute* in Japan). Of the game's 25 levels, about half of them are remastered versions from previous Katamari titles. A new jump mechanic takes advantage of the PS3 Sixaxis controller. In an effort to showcase the game's high-def 1080p punch, *Katamari Forever* comes with a variety of new graphical



modes, such as canvas, comic, and colored pencil. Some areas even start out in black and white and color themselves in as you collect objects. Expect this entry in Namco's quirky franchise to release near the end of the year.



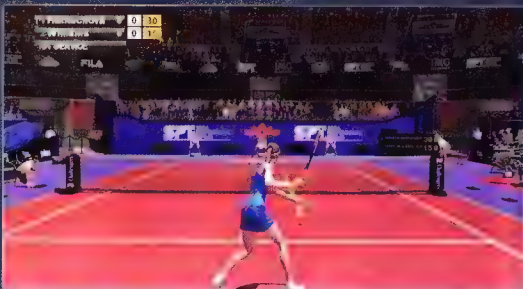
PLAYSTATION 3

Cross Edge



Combining various game series, genres, and graphical styles, *Cross Edge* might be the biggest mash-up in history. Publisher NIS America is bringing together characters from titles like *Disgaea*, *Darkstalkers*, and *Ar Tonelico* in this strategy/RPG hybrid. In the turn-based battle system, players use action points to perform attacks, then quickly switch to other party members to create

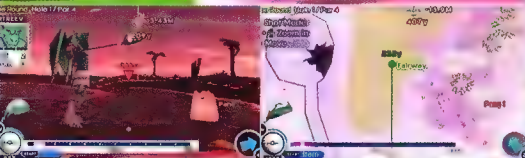
combo chains and execute special moves. The graphics mix 2D sprites with 3D environments and enemies, creating a unique (though not unified) visual style. Considering how much fans love seeing crossovers of their favorite series, *Cross Edge* could make a lot of PS3 owners happy when it releases in mid-May.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

Virtua Tennis 2009

Sega's long-running tennis series returns with *Virtua Tennis 2009*, a fresh sequel that makes some welcome improvements to the franchise. Start with the expanded character creator and take your very own pro up the ranks to battle over 20 real-world stars, including Roger Federer and Maria Sharapova, while learning techniques from legends like Stefan Edberg. The famous minigames are back, including four new contests, but the real news is online, where you can compete in weekly worldwide Sega Professional Tournaments. The game also includes the storied Davis Cup competition. The Wii version is the first third-party title to feature Wii MotionPlus capabilities, allowing you to apply spin on your shots by controlling your racket motion in real time. Look for the game to hit store shelves in early summer.



PSP

Pangya: Fantasy Golf


Gamers may be more familiar with the Pangya series under its other name, *Super Swing Golf*, from its recent appearances on the Wii. Tomi acquired the publishing rights from Tecmo for this Ntreev Soft-developed game and changed the name back to the original title. Pangya features nine fantasy courses, thousands of unlockable items, and 18 playable characters. Story mode features the careers of eight key characters, while tournaments reward winners with exclusive items that can't be purchased in the shop. Up to eight players can compete locally if you can find that many people with the UMD and a PSP. Fans of wacky golf games should keep an eye out for Pangya in late June.





theoretically,
it seats 6.75 billion.

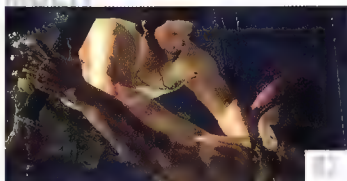


the INSiGHT. a new hybrid from Honda. The more
hybrid drivers, the better. For all of us. So we made the Insight appealing
to everybody, with an i-VTEC® engine, the new Eco Assist™ system and,
most importantly, an affordable price tag. It's the hybrid designed
and priced for us all. The new Insight.  from Honda. for everyone.



REVIEWS

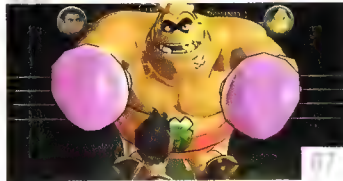
We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To



X-Men Origins: Wolverine



Sacred 2: Fallen Angel



Punch-Out!!



Infamous

Empire City needs a hero, and you might be the one for the job. Comic book action and open-world exploration collide in this fantastic PS3 exclusive from Sucker Punch, placing an array of explosive superhuman abilities at your disposal. As you scale the heights of the city and rain electric death down upon the forces that corrupt it, you choose whether you are liberating the citizens or subjugating them to your will. Be careful – the ability to throw lightning bolts from your hand may blur your perception of good and evil.

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

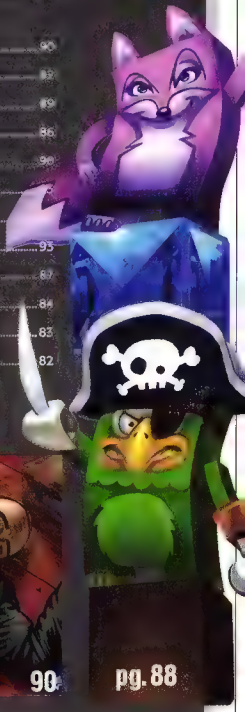
- 10** Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.
- 9** Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
- 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** Possible. 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** That thing on the ground over there. Even if it's free, it's probably not worth picking up, smelling, or even touching.

- > **Concept:** What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.
- > **Graphics:** How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.
- > **Sound:** Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?
- > **Playability:** Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.
- > **Entertainment:** Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.
- > **Replay Value**

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

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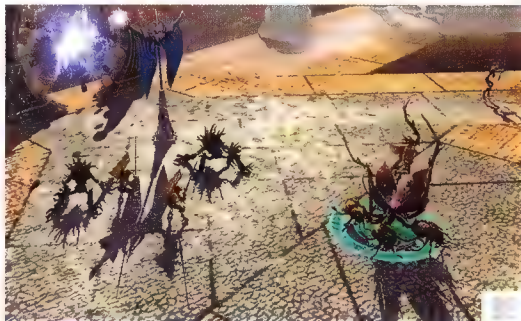
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Patapon 2

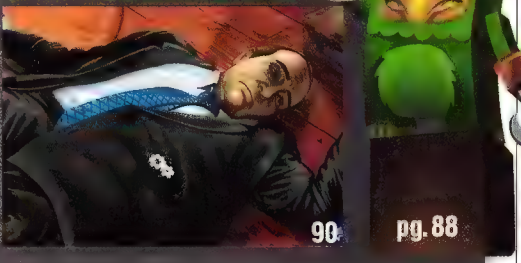


Knights in the Nightmare



Demigod

One of the biggest draws of any role-playing game is the quest to become overpowered through combinations of abilities and items. Demigod squeezes that entire journey into a hectic half hour. The kicker is that you start out able to crush normal foes with a single hit – as you can imagine, the heights of power you can aspire to are legendary. It's not really an RTS despite armies clashing, it's not really an RPG even with the leveling up, but Demigod pulls off its unusual mix of gameplay with aplomb.



90

pg. 88

edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

PLAY ON PC PS2 XBOX	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older	MATURE M ESRB RATED FOR MATURE PLAYERS ONLY	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
ESRB RATED FOR TEEN AGES	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older	TEEN T ESRB RATED FOR TEEN AGES	Content suitable only for adults.
ESRB RATED FOR CHILDREN AGES 7-13	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older	RP RATING PENDING	Product is awaiting final rating.
ESRB RATED FOR ALL AGES	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.		

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

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

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

480p – Progressive scanning, this option (“p” = progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture; 480 (“p” = interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates visually 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.

4K – 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 Mario Party.

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

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

DLC – Downloadable content. Usually takes the form of impromptu free add-ons to existing games.

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

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

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

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

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

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

HDTV – High Definition television.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

pop-up – When objects concern suddenly appear, typically due to poor design distance.

PS2 – Sony's PlayStation 2.

PS3 – Sony's PlayStation 3 console.

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

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

Recapping – According to Mt. T, there is no problem that cannot be solved by break-dancing.

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 Ikara and Counter-Strike.

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

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

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



BOTTOM LINE **8**

- > **Concept:** An openly violent and bloody comic book game that allows players to sharpen their daws through frenzied hack 'n' slash combat.
- > **Graphics:** No details are spared in the blood splatters, bullet wounds, torn flesh, or mangled corpses. The environments and cinematic sequences are equally as pleasing to the eye.
- > **Sound:** Hugh Jackman nails his role, and the screams of agony made me swallow hard as I continued my onslaught.
- > **Playability:** Unbridled rage accompanies every action, making for one of video games' most intense experiences.
- > **Entertainment:** This game is nearly impossible to put down, even when some fights are overly repetitive.
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

X-Men Origins: Wolverine

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** MAY 1 > **ESRB** M

HIDE THE KIDS

Raven Software's depiction of Wolverine has more in common with slasher-flick icon Freddy Krueger than the PG-13 hero Marvel Comics has portrayed in its movies and cartoons. Where the two identities differ is in the follow-through of his claw attack. The family-friendly Wolverine has been known to take a life from time to time, but rarely will you see any blood on the adamantium. Raven's version applies real-world consequences to flesh meeting razor-sharp blades. Most fights conclude with impaled faces, cleanly amputated limbs, and environments doused in buckets of blood. Wolverine's healing factor is also explored on a graphic level. Bullets tear holes into his flesh, and a rocket blast exposes bones, muscles, and a mess of organs. As time passes, his wounds heal—a process backed by amazing visual effects.

Violence is the driving force behind this experience. Raven did a fantastic job of exploring the untamed animal in Wolverine, and left few stones unturned in searching for creative ways for him to kill, or in turn, be subject to excruciating pain. I don't think there's been a character in video games that has taken this much punishment. What a strange joy

it is watch him rise from a disfigured mess to exact unfettered revenge.

The gameplay that accompanies these acts channels a high level of intensity, and empowers the player with the feeling that nothing can stop a six-clawed crusade. That's not to say the game is easy, but I did find myself doing things that I normally wouldn't in games, simply because I knew Wolverine would regenerate health in seconds. I punched explosive barrels to take out a group of enemies in one blast, and let bosses have their way with me just so I could see the cool beat down animations that accompany their move sets.

Watching Wolverine get his ass kicked is admittedly fun, but doling out the pain is a more satisfying affair. He moves with the grace of a lion and can tap into a number of beautifully orchestrated combos to dispatch enemies. Alternating between buttons forms deadly strings, and charging an attack will launch your enemy into the air, where a killer aerial combo can be initiated. This game also has a satisfying throw mechanic. Enemies don't magically block your throw attempts, and can be dispatched in a



■ **Wolverine may have lost his memories, but you never forget the joy of a purple purple**

number of ways, like being picked up and slammed down on a spike. The most satisfying means of attack comes from Air Wolverine's ability to pounce upon foes from great distances. This action features an easy-to-use lock-on targeting system that allows the player to cover ground quickly, and bounce strategically across the battlefield. Altogether, the

combat sizzles with exuberance, and proves to be a worthy competitor to other games in the genre like *God of War* and *Devil May Cry*. Most of the enemy types are fun to combat, but frustration does sink in when a mid-boss surfaces. The mid-bosses are exercises in repetitive tactics and nipping away at health bars. Fighting them once or twice is fine, but battling them every 15 minutes or so is overkill.

The game also dabbles lightly in puzzles tied to locked doors. Before you let out an earth-shaking groan, it should be noted that most of these puzzles are either creative in composition or so short in their solving that they don't impact the experience. They serve their purpose of breaking up the action, but don't feel like they are included just to give the player a breather.

If this game had a definable Achilles' heel, it would be the storytelling. With flashbacks, flash-forwards, and what might even be flash-sideways, the narrative is a knotted mess. The last two acts, centering on the movie versions of Gambit and Deadpool, are mind-numbing atrocities. If I could play this game again, I would stop playing after the Sentinel battle, as it is a far better conclusion.

The story jumps the shark, and manages to mangle two of Marvel's most cherished characters in the process. The game may lose steam as it goes, but the excellent combat still makes it worth the price of admission.—**REINER**

Second Opinion **9**

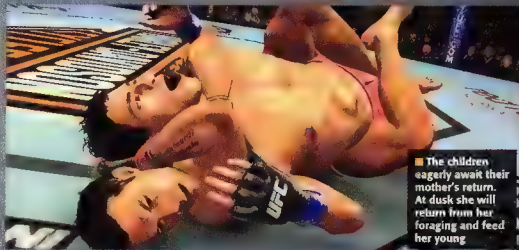
Forget all the stigma normally associated with comic book and movie licensed games. Even if this was called the Adventures of Mr. McClawhands, old man Logan would still hold his own against video game elites like Kratos and Dante. From the bloody, theatrical combat to the larger-than-life boss encounters, Wolverine provides a non-stop thrill ride. One moment you're jumping from boat to boat in a white-hot race through the heart of the jungle, and the next you're skydiving through the Earth's atmosphere as you pummel an exploding Sentinel. What the game does better than most action titles is seamless transition between gameplay and scripted sequences; you rarely feel pulled out of the action since you have some control over many of the cinematic sequences. The only complaint I can level against Wolverine is its pacing. Even though a few puzzles and platforming bits break up the action, you won't learn many useful moves after the opening hours, so the game loses its sense of rewarding progression. It's probably best to savor this game in shorter chunks, but maybe that's not a bad thing.—**BEIN**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

UFC 2009 Undisputed

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER THQ
> DEVELOPER YUKE'S MEDIA CREATIONS > RELEASE MAY 20 > ESRB T



■ The children eagerly await their mother's return. At dusk she will return from her foraging and feed her young



■ How's the script? We'll let it speak for itself. Here's one of Spencer's lines: "Whoa, is that a long health bar, or are you just happy to see me?"

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Bionic Commando

> STYLE 1 PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER GRIN
> RELEASE MAY 19 > ESRB M

DROGGED UNDER

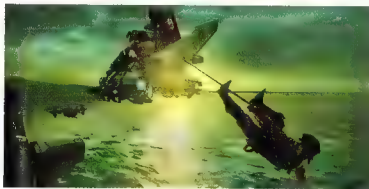
Nathan "RAD" Spencer has a bionic arm, and he's been pressed back into service after five long years in prison. His arm is a miracle of science, allowing him to do things no other man could manage. Unfortunately, it has a number of flaws, not the least among them is that its great weight pulls him under if he falls in the water. At times, you wonder whether Spencer would be better off without his bionic enhancement. The game suffers from a similar dilemma—a lot of great ideas and mechanics are trying to rise to the surface, but fundamental flaws inevitably pull it down.

The more you play Bionic Commando, the more you scratch your head. Why is Spencer fighting? What is his ultimate objective? Why do we care? These questions are best left for a different game where the plotline is more than an excuse to swing into the next stage. Tack on the most idiotic twist ending in years, and the game seems more like a parody than straight-faced action fare.

The core experience of swinging through environ-

ments should be the heart of the game; if done correctly it's more than capable of making up for a lackluster story. At times, careening through the air is fast and thrilling. Then you fall into a pit, your arm can't reach a cross beam, some enemy guns you down, or (my personal favorite) you swing into a radiation zone and die. The game conspires against you freely navigating the environment, instead making you feel fragile and clumsy. It's not the sensation I'm looking for from my machismo-laden killing machine.

Despite my obvious frustration at the title, I can't disregard Bionic Commando's strengths. Environments look great, and the voice work and music are top notch. Watching a bunch of commandos swinging around the same stage trying to blast each other in multiplayer is also fun. However, it's hard to forget the unresponsive controls, ludicrous story, and questionable combat encounters. The game is uneven and inconsistent enough to scare away even eager fans who have patiently waited 20 years for another swing.—MILLER



BOTTOM LINE 6.25

> **Concept:** Swing your way through this follow-up to the 1988 NES classic

> **Graphics:** An impressive array of background environments and fine details make the game look great

> **Sound:** A strong musical score and consistent voice work

> **Playability:** An extremely challenging and frequently clumsy control mechanic drastically hurts the experience

> **Entertainment:** A fun idea, but too many things go wrong in the execution

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 5

Imagine you are playing a Spider-Man game, but half the buildings are missing, the swing mechanic doesn't work nearly as well, all of Spider's witticisms are replaced with juvenile military angst, and someone keeps slapping the back of your head with a waffle bat. This is Bionic Commando. Capcom's attempt to revive its 8-bit classic fails thanks to lackluster combat, a clumsy swing system that often results in

frustrating instant death, and a conclusion so laughably stupid it borders on insulting. Lifting cars into the air with your bionic arm and tossing them at your foes can be fun, and the multiplayer is amusingly different because everyone swings across the map like crazy. But as a whole, this update doesn't do the lovable classic any justice.—BEN

GROUND AND POUND

UFC athletes spend months—even years—on special diets, working out and practicing their martial arts; they train their bodies until their whole routine flows like a well-oiled machine. Anyone interested in dominating the Octagon in THQ's new UFC 2009 Undisputed will need a similar prizefighting spirit if they want to master the complexities of the combat system.

Like most good wrestling titles, UFC has a full-featured career mode that will have you training and sparring to climb the championship ranks. The game's AI is pretty easy to exploit early on, but this mode is a good way to learn Undisputed's complicated fundamentals. Retired career fighters can be taken online in a series of exhibition matches, but if you want the real deal, you can step into the skin of masters like Georges St-Pierre or Forrest Griffin in the Classic Fights mode—a collection of scenarios that let you reenact some of the UFC's more historic rumbles.

The game's wealth of combos and grapples are made even more impressive by Undisputed's nearly flawless collision detection and

animation. These brawlers move convincingly like the real thing. It doesn't hurt that this is one of the best-looking wrestling titles to date; never thought I'd be drooling over a bunch of half-naked men jumping on top of each other, but THQ has proven me wrong.

The meat of the game is deep—though not easily mastered—grappling ground combat. After you take your opponents to the mat, you'll be in a constant battle for the best position to hock them in a submission hold. The mechanics for this portion of the game feel a little awkward at first, but you'll eventually get the hang of how to deliver the pain. Once you start to go up against more skilled opponents, the ground combat becomes a strategic battle of blocks, reversals, and escapes.

Given that the standing combat and the ground game play out differently, this is kind of like two fighting games in one. You'll have to master them both if you want to be the ultimate fighter. If THQ's history with the WWE is any indication, Undisputed is likely the first entry in what will be a yearly franchise. Thankfully, the series has started off with a solid foundation.—BEN



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** The rising star in professional fighting, the Ultimate Fighting Championship, gets a rich fighting system courtesy of the developer behind WWE VR

> **Graphics:** The animation system and collision detection are impressively realistic

> **Sound:** Announcers Joe Rogan and Mike Goldberg do a great job telling the play-by-play without being overly annoying. We still wish you could knock Joe Rogan around in the ring...maybe next year

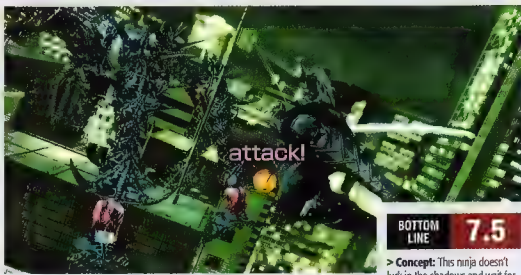
> **Playability:** A steep learning curve, but it's something that fighting fans can really embrace

> **Entertainment:** The disposable story is wrapped around a good career mode that will have you training your fighter until he earns the belt

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

Undisputed is certainly a good start if THQ is hoping to kick up a yearly UFC gaming franchise. The character models look fantastic, clipping is almost a non-issue, and the fighting system offers some serious depth. This is by no means a pick-up-and-play fighter, though. Your created character will take plenty of lumps in the early career with the perfect storm of waxy stats and a tough learning curve. But once you gain some traction, the thrill of victory snowballs and you feel like all of the training is paying off. I wish there were more modes like Classic Fights that show real fighter personalities. As it is, it's difficult to differentiate generic challengers from some of the lesser-known names in the sport.—BRYAN



XBOX 360

Ninja Blade

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** FROM SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** APRIL 7 > **ESRB** M

GODZILLA-SIZED CRAZINESS

Ninja Blade adheres to video games' ninja creed: The character must wear a black costume, carry at least three swords, be nimble enough to run along walls, and, above all, channel the corpse-like chasmata of Keanu Reeves or *Twilight* star Kristen Stewart (who I'm convinced is Keanu Reeves in drag). From these descriptors, protagonist Ken Ogawa may sound like a Ryu Hayabusa surrogate. Ogawa's dry personality could induce a coma of boredom, but any notion of him being clichéd is stomped to death by his unlikely targets: skyscraper-sized mutants. The scale of these battles, which in our world would be comparable to a single ant slaying a human, lifts Ninja Blade out of the derivative ninja pool, offering a unique treat that any action junkie would be foolish to miss.

In one battle, Ogawa must take down a giant worm burrowing through Tokyo's streets, leaving nothing but crumbling buildings and explosions in its wake. How does a ninja carrying only a sword and a shuriken defeat a foe thousands of times his size? I won't ruin the surprise for you, but it involves a motorcycle, rockets fired from a helicopter, and a flying bus. This is the beauty of Ninja Blade: nothing about it is predictable.

A level may start out in typical Ninja Gaiden fashion with Ogawa using a combo flurry to cut down a hord of enemies. What comes next is anyone's guess. It could be a fast-paced descent down a building's

exterior, a defense mission to protect an object, or a turret sequence on a truck where you fire a rocket storm at a mutant crab.

The wealth in gameplay scenarios is heightened by cinematic interludes effectively used to frame scenes or transition to another ridiculous moment. Most of these interludes unfold as interactive quick time events (requiring timed button presses). Given how often these events occur, stretches of the experience feel more like an interactive movie than a game. These moments don't offer much of a challenge (as there is no penalty for failure), and mostly draw attention away from the amazing cinematic sequences occurring under the button icons.

While the gargantuan monsters steal the limelight, Ninja Blade's gameplay can stand on its own. The swordplay is silky smooth, and surprisingly deep—allowing players to upgrade weapons with experience earned to unlock additional attacks and powers for three swords. Enemy types force you to switch weapons and use different mystical powers, derailing any chance of the action becoming a mindless button-mashing affair. Framerate issues and moments of slowdown do occur at the most inopportune times, which did lead to restarts on tough platforming segments and boss fights. It has unwanted bugginess, but not enough to detract from the joys of slaying Godzilla-sized beasts. —**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** This ninja doesn't lurk in the shadows and wait for the opportune time to strike. He kills everything...even towering titans and godlike beings

> **Graphics:** From Software has a keen eye for framing action in both the gameplay and cinematics. With the brilliant camera work and gorgeous animations, the developer's intent to destroy everything in Tokyo makes for a great visual package

> **Sound:** The voice work is awful, and I swear I heard this soundtrack in a Steven Seagal movie

> **Playability:** The controls are intuitive, the enemies demand different tactics, and no movie could replicate the scale of the boss battles given that each one would likely require a \$100 million budget

> **Entertainment:** Quick time events are overused, but they don't do this game back from being flat out fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **8.25**

Absurd, exaggerated action is the status quo in Ninja Blade, and I'm taking a missile like a surfboard to throwing down with a 50-story ninja master. A deep and rewarding combat system backs up the over-the-top situations. Unique weapon and power choices feel each tight, and every enemy type takes careful observation and skill to defeat. When the action escalates beyond high-speed ninja maneuvers into the realm of superhero acrobatics, the game inevitably falls back on quick time events to deliver the drama, this game features more button pressing mirmiganes than any other title that comes to mind. Though this approach sometimes feels disconnecting, it works in Ninja Blade since it keeps players involved in long sections of the game that would otherwise be merely cinematic. I'm impressed how much fun the game delivers, despite a barely passable story and some frustrating design mistakes (like the inability to save in the midst of a mission). The game is a wild thrill ride, and pulls off the part with ease. —**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Sacred 2: Fallen Angel

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** CDV > **DEVELOPER** ASCARON ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** MAY 12 > **ESRB** M



TOTALLY WORKS

I can hardly believe it: Sacred 2's interface almost universally works better on console than it does on PC. Maybe it's the extra development time, but everything from inventory management to potion usage and skill activation flows better on a gamepad. Throw in the four player online co-op, and this is a fun action/RPG regardless of its myriad technical problems.

As one of the game's six archetypes, you'll wander the vast world of Ancania in a quest to do something or other. The spotty localization drags the stupid story down even further, but who reads quest text anyway? The real star here is exploring the gorgeous and varied world, killing most of its denizens, and then taking their stuff.

Ancania's size should not be underestimated. It's no exaggeration to say that you could easily dump north of a hundred hours into the game and not run out of content. If you do, of course, there are higher difficulties to conquer with your tricked-out hero.

Bread and butter combat tends toward the formulaic, but it works well enough to not stand in the way of enjoying the outstanding character progression and delightfully realized world of Sacred 2.

On a gamepad, the combat feels much like a slower-paced Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance, with skills ranging from fireballs to melee combos punctuating the drone of basic attacks.

Sacred 2 is fun for what it is, but ultimately fails to capture the old Diablo magic. Combat is nowhere near the tight, tactical paradise that Diablo II could reach in its better moments, and the framerate is a constant drag. Targeting spells like meteor showers or teleports is slow and clumsy on a gamepad, and the AI for followers is pretty braggart. Still, you're not going to find a comparable title on 360 or PS3, and Sacred 2 is a decent enough way to get your experience grind on. —**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **Concept:** Port last year's PC-only German fantasy action/RPG to console

> **Graphics:** Great detail and art direction, but I wish I could turn some settings down for a more stable framerate

> **Sound:** The voiceovers are gems of poorly localized unintentional comedy

> **Playability:** With the exception of the few ground-targeted skills, this plays better with a gamepad than a mouse and keyboard

> **Entertainment:** Where else are you going to get your loot and level-grinding fix?

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **7**

R. Kelly once said that, "I don't see nothing wrong with a little bump 'n' grind." Fans of hack 'n' slash games like Sacred 2 must feel the same way. The premise is simple: Grind for loot by dispatching AI enemies so dumb they may as well be treasure bags, bump your level to learn new skills for hacking the puzzle strings, and repeat. With enemies this dense, the game's flexible skill and combo systems feel wasted. But if you care more about the post-combat payoffs than trudging through monotonous button-mashing combat scenarios and suffering from banal storytelling, Sacred 2 delivers. The vast world features a startling bounty of quests, a deep inventory of goods, and thousands of treasure-procuring minions for you and your friends to slay. As for me, another K. Kelly lyric from his epic hip-hopera "Trapped in the Closet" comes to mind: "Cause this is way more than I bargained for." —**BERTZ**





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PS3



Wii



XBOX 360

XBOX LIVE



PC



BOTTOM LINE **9**

- > **Concept:** Play the role of hero or villain in a super-powered sandbox.
- > **Graphics:** The city's color palette is a little bland, but contrasts nicely against the vibrant electrical effects.
- > **Sound:** Solid voice acting, although Cole's coarse whisper doesn't fit the character. The avant-garde industrial soundtrack isn't what you'd expect either, but fits perfectly.
- > **Playability:** Intuitive controls facilitate the city navigation and electrical combat.
- > **Entertainment:** Worth playing through twice to see how good and evil powers develop.
- > **Replay Value:** High.



Second Opinion **8.5**

Whether you want to save the world or bring it to its knees, you'll need a lot of power. *Infamous* isn't an open-world title that creates the sensation of a living city; the game's vitality comes from the diverse and wildly entertaining abilities of its electrified protagonist, Cole McGrath. Grinding on power lines, launching explosive orbs, and zapping foes with chain lightning makes you feel like an unstoppable force of nature in the remains of a blasted metropolis. A healthy variety of story-based and optional missions ensures you always have fun ways to customize your superhero power, and the enemies offer enough resistance to make it satisfying when you turn them into sparks and dust. I love acting in my whirrs in combat, but I'm less pleased with how *Infamous* handles morality. Your options are either sanity or diabolical, with very little context as to why Cole would choose one versus the other, with only a few (admittedly cool) exceptions. This makes him fall flat as a character, and the graphic novel-styled cutscenes give many important events an abbreviated and glossed-over feel. You should play *Infamous*, but do it for the thrill of being a superhero—not for all the black and white choices in the job description.—JOE

Infamous is a reimagining of age superhero story that's been masterminded by Stan Lee's nephew, Spider-Man line "with great power comes great responsibility" to the city. In the game's heroes, developer Sucker Punch has created a naturalistic character in Cole McGrath, a middle-aged, young slacker, burdened with the weight of the world on his shoulders. You cannot blink an eye at Cole if you saw him walking down the street—but there's enough electricity flowing through his veins to power a city. He has the power to save and the power to kill. Lee dictated how his characters would use their powers. Sucker Punch is leaving this decision up to the player, the somewhat chore turns *Infamous* into an ethically ambiguous street brawler. "at what length will you go to obtain power?"

But even when *Infamous* can be completed using either a good or evil approach. This morality system isn't as black and white as it sounds. Cole's evolution in power is tied to the decisions he makes. If Cole is good of heart, his lightning bolt strike restores his health. If he is evil, this same attack creates an electric explosion that can harm enemies and even civilians. The variance between the two paths presents two distinct ways of playing the game. The good path is intertwined with precision and protection and precision. The evil path is intertwined with speed and aggression. Even how you exchange your elements for powers, Cole is continually gaining possibilities throughout the course of the

adventure, making for a great sense of progression. Temptation is also a driving force. To unlock arc lightning, a power awarded only to evil players, Cole just had to dabble in the dark ways by completing five evil side missions. Five little evil acts won't tarnish a soul, right?

Cole's position in the world is fully explored within the story and mission objectives. Most plot threads resonate well, and many of the choices I had to make made me pause for a few seconds to think about how they could possibly alter the path ahead. Other decisions don't carry much weight, but help emphasize your morality. Do you let starving people raid your food supply, or do you send an electrical charge through one of them to scare off the herd? If only all of the choices were this easy to make. Sucker Punch isn't afraid to throw world-shattering *Sophie's Choice* style moments at the player. The plot makes some disturbing turns, and a lot of the story development is dependent on the player's input.

The narrative forms a fascinating superhero/villain origin story, but some of the plot threads are left dangling. Zeke, who is basically Cole's wingman, delivers a hilarious performance until a confusing plot point ruins his role three quarters of the way through the game. Both endings deliver a clever twist that I didn't see coming, but both seem to think about a sequel more than they do finishing the story for the good or evil path. Moreover, I don't see how the good ending justifies Cole's actions.

Regardless of digestible plot points, *Infamous* offers a satisfying gameplay package. The open world, which stretches across three



metropolitan islands, is the perfect playground for a parkour-influenced character, who can scamper up buildings, slide across power lines, and glide over rooftops. The speed and ease to which you can scale a building is remarkable, even with Cole's animations appearing a little too bouncy for certain actions. This is how Assassin's Creed's Altair would climb a building after slamming 10 cans of Red Bull. Granted, the game cheats a bit by pulling Cole toward objects he is jumping toward, but knowing that the game has your back allows you to be overly daring in your vertical platforming. Like the Xbox 360 game *Crackdown*, *Infamous* finely honed parkour makes the daunting side activity of collecting orbs fun.

Combat is equally as enjoyable. Launching lightning at attackers has a satisfying Sith-like quality to it. Other actions, like sniping and grenade tossing, are backed by solid targeting systems. Many of the battles bring massive destruction, and the swarms of enemies that ambush you or lay in wait push you to use the environment for strategic positioning. The end result is a nice balance between run-and-gun action and fleet-footed platforming.

Infamous empowers you with a god-like stance over a corrupted world, and lets you dictate how you lord over it. Will you be a hero of the people, or will you be their reaper? From the moment I made my first choice, I knew I had to play the game twice to see how the other decision played out. When the gameplay is this entertaining, that's a welcome invitation.—REINER

Each one of Cole McGrath's powers has a good and evil variation. Your actions in the game determine which version becomes available.

> **Concept:** Classic Punch-Out gameplay, with a modern coat of paint
 > **Graphics:** The wacky animations and crisp cel-shaded look add to the fighters' personalities
 > **Sound:** All of the boxers speak the language of their home country
 > **Playability:** Feels like you're back on the NES, motion controls are functional for the most part
 > **Entertainment:** The best arcade-style boxer out there
 > **Replay Value:** Moderate
 H 37



Wii

Punch-Out!!

> **STYLE** 1 TO 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NEXT LEVEL GAMES > **RELEASE** MAY 19 > **ESRB** E10+

A PUNCH YOU'LL LOVE TO TAKE

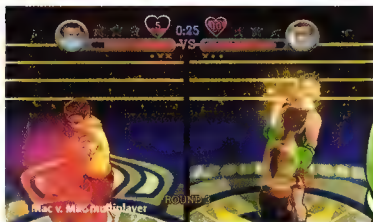
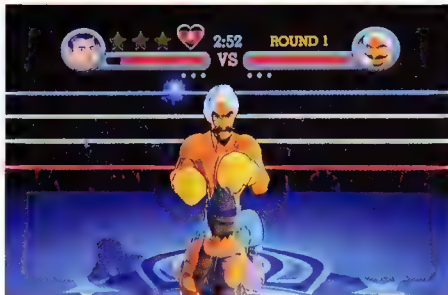
I've dreamed about a new Punch-Out ever since the Super Nintendo. The N64 and GameCube came and went without even a boxing-related rumor. Three consoles later, Nintendo finally caved and hired the development house from *Major Stinkers* to reinvent this beloved franchise. So many things could have gone horribly wrong, but the core single-player experience gets everything right.

Every boxer from the original *Punch-Out* on NES is here except Mike Tyson, and the traditional high

punch, low punch, dodge, block, and duck moveset is still in place. As you progress through the roster of rivals, the difficulty ramps up at an even pace (okay, Glass Joe is still tremendously easy). You can cruise through the first few fights, but things start to get tricky in the Major Circuit. The good news is an effective practice mode allows you to take on a hologram version of the boxer currently giving you trouble.

Determine the timing to halt Bald Bull's charge, count how many uppercuts Popinski performs after you punch the soda bottle out of his hands, or learn how to dodge Macho Man's hurricane punch without the threat of getting knocked out.

The pre-match cutscenes and comical fight animations add dimension to the boxers and manage to steer clear of stereotypes for the most part. You learn that Glass Joe likes to wear black turtle-necks out of the ring, Bear Hugger trains with real bears, and King Hippo's diet consists mostly of meat and tropical fruit. After you defeat every opponent it gets even better: New cutscenes in the second career show how they've dealt with defeat at your hands and what they're planning for revenge. These guys must have trained well, because the second career is incredibly difficult. Boxers have added defense skills, new attacks, new looks, and more strength to their punches. It's almost



like you're fighting a new set of rivals.

Using the motion controls, players swing the remote and nunchuk to punch and use the analog stick for defensive maneuvers. These controls hold up during the first round of bouts, but you're better off using the NES control scheme in the challenging second career. Balance board control is also an option, but it isn't accurate enough for the careful timing required in *Punch-Out*. Sometimes I would lean right and Mac would dodge left. You just can't ask that kind of imprecision in a fight.

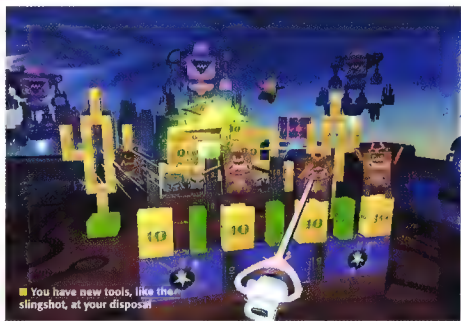
At any time you can schedule an exhibition fight with any previously defeated character to attempt three achievement-style challenges. I loved trying to KO guys in under a minute or discovering their one-hit kill, but the only reward is a lame set of audio files.

Multiplayer finally comes to *Punch-Out* in the form of split-screen Mac versus Mac battles. Wildly flailing your arms like a *Wii Sports* boxing reject won't work here. Fights are more about timing and predicting opponents' moves like in a traditional game of rock, paper, scissors. Skilled players can fill up a blue gauge and transform into a hulking Giga Mac capable of crushing blows. While it's amusing to unleash this kind of power on your friend, the multiplayer doesn't have the legs to keep it interesting. This could have been the chance to finally play as enemy characters or to take the franchise online somehow, but it ends up feeling like the team settled for the easiest route.

Despite these complaints, the single-player has always been the focus of *Punch-Out*, and *Next Level* delivers. What better way to show your buddy up than to totally annihilate the boxer that just KO'd him? —**BRYAN**

Second Opinion 8.25

I played the original *Punch-Out* until I could pull off the moves in my sleep. *Wii Punch-Out* is similar to the NES title, but if you think nothing can top that classic, then you're underestimating this game. *Punch-Out* relies on decades-old gameplay—even in its career format—and yet remains engaging, demonstrating that you are not served by memories of “the good ol’ days” alone. Hats off to developer Next Level for keeping the gameplay so tight that even when you’ve memorized everyone’s attack patterns, the game still demands the skill and timing to win. The lack of more features—despite the fun multiplayer—keep this title from being a new classic, but my memories of it are already surpassing those from the NES *Punch-Out*. —**KATO**



You have new tools, like the slingshot, at your disposal



BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

- > **Concept:** Expand the first game's successful formula with new gameplay, greater variety, and online level sharing
- > **Graphics:** It's hardly high-end stuff, but the colorful Bash Party has adorable character designs
- > **Sound:** For such a distinctive title, the music is drab and forgettable
- > **Playability:** Making subtle movements can be difficult, requiring unpleasant camera wrangling — especially on the Jenga-style levels
- > **Entertainment:** Developing franchises for the Wii hasn't been easy for third parties, another reason to celebrate a charming game like this

Wii
Boom Blox Bash Party

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CASUAL STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MAY 19 > **ESRB** E

THROW, GRAB, EXPLORE

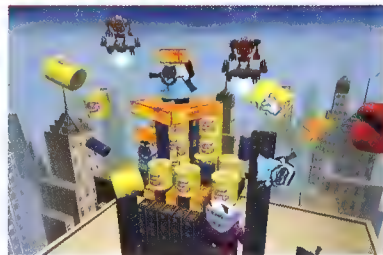
While it wasn't the blockbuster hit EA hoped for, Boom Blox's unique, motion-based puzzle action impressed many gamers. The sequel, Bash Party, builds on the considerable strengths of its predecessor. Boom Blox Bash Party follows the textbook from Intro to Successful Sequels 101: Keep the good things about the first title, fix some of the flaws, and add new features. The gameplan is solid, and the game reflects this commitment to quality. If you enjoyed the first, rest assured nearly all of what you loved is still present. From the wacky, destructive multiplayer battles to the exacting, Jenga-style physical puzzles, Bash Party recaptures that sense

of endless and addictive fun. Even better, there's a whole lot more of it this time around. The game features 400 new levels, many of them specifically created for both co-op and competitive multiplayer. In addition, players can now upload their created levels to share with everyone (not just people on your friends list, as before). EA has already seeded the server with several fun and challenging new levels in a variety of different gameplay types. If the community embraces these tools, this new feature could grant players a ton of added value to an already huge game.

The gameplay also receives many welcome new additions. New types of blox, like the virus and paint blox, add new wrinkles to the experience. Virus blox infect nearby blox; using them correctly allows you to quickly decimate a level. Paint blox must be matched in color to explode, adding a Dr. Mario quality to some of the contests. As always, using point blox and multipliers is key. Some of the new blox aren't blocks at all, rather cylinders and wedges. These new shapes translate into more interesting levels, forcing you to account for physics and momentum

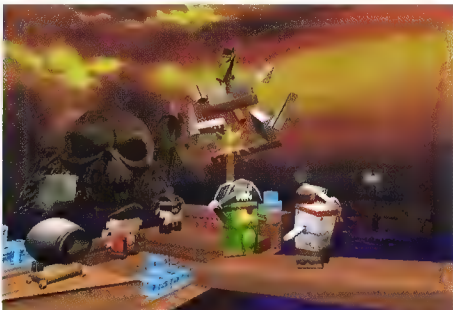


New blox like cylinder add a twist to the gameplay



In many ways, Bash Party is a more challenging game. Perhaps sensing this, the developers added a money system that allows you to pay to unlock levels. While hardcore gamers may see this as a cop-out, I think it's a perfect compromise for the Wii's casual audience.

All this said, I do have my quibbles. The enjoyable Lemming-style levels from the original, in which you'd clear a path for a wandering gonilla, are sadly absent. Also, the cool new tool — the slingshot — is difficult to aim at times. This flaw is probably due less to the tool itself than the continuing motion sensing issues from which the game suffers. The Wii struggles to convey fine adjustments and even blinks out at certain angles, adding a degree of frustration. I suspect these faults rest more with the Wii than the developer, but sadly Bash Party isn't compatible with the upcoming Wii MotionPlus add-on. In the end, these are minor complaints. Boom Blox Bash Party is an engaging and well-done casual title, and stands as one of the best Wii franchises on the market. —**MAIT**



Second Opinion **8.75**

The first Boom Blox earned its way onto the short list of good third-party Wii games with its simple yet innovative block puzzle gameplay. Despite its robust level editor, however, the lack of worldwide level sharing was one big missed opportunity. Bash Party remedies this, and I can't wait to see what players come up with once it hits retail. The pool of community stages queues up quickly for instant play, and players can easily save the levels for offline access later. Search options are limited, but looking under "highest rated" and "most popular" sorting tabs helps. This potentially limitless source of gameplay doesn't even take into account the hundreds of single player, co-op, and versus stages on the disc. New paint balls add a block-matching element to puzzles, cylinders introduce an element of unpredictability, and the increased focus on tormenting block animals satisfies thoroughly. I miss a couple modes from the first game, but overall Bash Party surpasses the original in the ways that count. —**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

Wii

Excitebots: Trick Racing

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (6-PLAYER ONLINE)
 > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** MONSTER GAMES
 > **RELEASE** APRIL 20 > **ESRB** E

TRANSFORMERS

I loved the blazing speed and big air of Monster Games' Wii launch title *Excite Truck*—I just wanted some depth and a reason to keep coming back for more. *Excitebots* fills out *Excite Truck*'s basic premise in predictable and gloriously unpredictable ways. Before inserting the disc, I would never have imagined kicking soccer balls, fishing, or making sandwiches in the service of racing faster and grabbing more stars. The surprises keep coming in this game, and so does the fun.

Players race world locations earning stars for everything from where you finish to drifting to getting air. Given the large number of opportunities to earn stars, the game smartly balances how many



you need for the commensurate grade that determines if you move up the racing tiers. I can't tell you how many times I failed to get a passing grade because I left five or fewer stars on the table—only to re-race a track and pick up the necessary stars or realize how lucky I had gotten the first time. While



Excitebots relies on a bit of luck, you always feel capable of making a more star-studded run.

Getting enough stars is only a part of the story. How you get them is everything. *Excitebots* introduces a number of novel ways to pick up stars during a race. At first, you won't know why you just picked up a tamboourne or a pie and what you're supposed to do with them,

but it's all about earning more stars. Whether you're plucking the string of a high wire like a piano plonking out a tune or hitting a football through a pair of goalposts, this game never bores you. These

activities are so well integrated into the normal flow of racing that it doesn't take long to adapt your thinking and racing lines to participate in them.

The loose and pivoty feeling of the bot vehicles, as well as the motion controls, could be improved. Which of the animal bots you select influences this loose feeling. I mainly stuck with the frog, as many of the other bots can be too squirrely. The collision is also inconsistent, which means the vicinity in which you have to be to get some stars isn't always the same. Regardless, *Excitebots* won't slow you down. The game's thrilling racing continues in online and offline multiplayer, as well as in various standalone minigames and an impressive poker mode where you race around collecting and cashing in poker hands during a timed run.

Excitebots succeeds where *Excite Truck* didn't. Monster Games didn't just add features, it improved the whole formula.—KATO

> **Concept:** You spend as much time dealing with all the crazy goings on as you do racing. That's a good thing

> **Graphics:** Things haven't changed much from the first game, but I'll take the basic look given all the action onscreen

> **Sound:** I wanted to turn the sound off because the music was so bad, but I couldn't because the gameplay sound effects are useful

> **Playability:** The mid-air spins reveal an inconsistent and underdeveloped trick system, and the cars intentionally feel loose

> **Entertainment:** Whether it's the moment-to-moment racing or the feature set, *Excitebots* is a deeper and more satisfying experience than *Excite Truck*

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

About 10 minutes into this game, I thought Monster Games had taken leave of its senses. Instead of a monster truck, I'm racing a goofy, frog-shaped ersatz Transformer? Two hours later, I was hooked. While it still features the fun, speed, and welcoming environments from *Excite Truck*, the game throws you curveballs at every turn. Suddenly, you're throwing a pie into a giant down face at 100mph, gliding off a ramp to save butterflies, or kicking an oversized football through a goal post. While these activities are all available as minigames, the real thrill comes from having to tackle them in the heat of the race. While the steering will sometimes make you wish *Wii MotionPlus* was already here, the new walking and swinging mechanics use the *Wii's* motion control to add — not detract — from the experience. That's a rare achievement these days: *Excitebots* is deliciously silly from beginning to end.

While I wasn't always sure just what the hell was going on, I was always having a good time.—MATT

STAR STUDDED?

You can earn stars in many ways *Excitebots*, but depending on where you are on the track and what place you're in, some might be more worth it than others. Here's a list of just a few.

THE BUTTERFLY RAIN

Hitting a red wrench in the environment allows you to walk on your legs and slomp along at a high speed by tilting the sides of the *Wii* remote up and down. Leap off the nearby cliff and you'll transform into a glider where you can collect floating butterfly orbs. Each one is worth five stars, for a total of 20. This is a huge pickup, and is worth hitting every lap.



GOAL

Ramming a soccer ball into a wide-open goal seems like a no-brainer for the five stars it nets you, but I suggest you only do it on your first lap. The ball is usually set up slightly out of the way, and breaking your speed to get the stars on the last lap usually isn't worth the risk of losing places to your competitors. The same goes for the hitting the football through the uprights.



FISHING

Press boxes by rivers will give you a fishing pole. When you're by water hit *A* to start the gauge on the side of your screen. Hit *A* again to stop on the red marker for five stars. Fishing is fun, but seeing as how it takes your attention off the track, it can be a bit of work for just five stars.



■ Run over the card you want to add to your hand. You can choose which card you want to replace or simply lock your entire hand if you don't see anything you want



THE ULTIMATE CONTENDER RETURNS!!

Little Mac is back with trainer (and cycling enthusiast) Lougois to reclaim the World Video Boxing Association championship title. This reboot of the Punch-Out!! series features most of the original lineup of long-time rivals like Glass Joe, Von Kaiser and King Hippo, in addition to new boxers like Disco Kid. These classic characters look better than ever before in deftly animated 3-D bouts.

Players can swing the Wii Remote™ to personally dish out every punch or relive the '80s with classic NES™ controls. Either way, this large roster of fighters will not go down easily. Pugilists with the skill to make it to the top of the World Circuit, however, face the hardcore challenge of defending their title in Title Defense mode. Opponents strike back with completely revamped tactics, added defensive maneuvers, and surprising new attacks.

For the first time ever in the Punch-Out!! series, friends will be able to box each other in a unique split-screen Head-to-Head mode. Do you have what it takes to outwit your opponent?

GO TO GAMEINFORMER.COM TO ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A COPY OF PUNCH-OUT!! AND OTHER PRIZES PROVIDED BY GAME INFORMER.



BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Make gamers feel like they're solving the Broken Sword, plus a few extra scenes

> **Graphics:** The low-res moose show their age, but the environments still look good. Facial expressions are drawn by Dave Gibbons (of Watchmen fame), but the character portraits don't change often enough to showcase the art.

> **Sound:** The voices' audio quality is uneven at best

> **Playability:** The rotation-based puzzles control terribly

> **Entertainment:** Any point-and-click adventure fan will find something to enjoy

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Wii

Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars – Director's Cut

> **STYLE:** 1 OR 2 PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER:** REVOLUTION > **RELEASE:** MARCH 24 > **ESRB:** T

OLD AND IMPROVED

Characters, puzzles, and story are the core of any good adventure game. The years since Broken Sword's 1996 release on PC haven't changed any of those qualities, and it remains an excellent example of that era in gaming. However, if you aren't already a fan of the genre, this re-release won't do much to draw you in.

As with most point-and-click adventure titles, you spend time talking to colorful characters and using items to overcome obstacles. While investigating an ancient conspiracy, likeable sleuths George and Nico encounter several fun, clever

puzzles to unravel. Fans of the original will notice that several puzzles have been updated and made more intuitive, and new segments starring Nico fill in some narrative gaps.

While those improvements are a good start, Broken Sword's presentation is incredibly shoddy. Poor video quality, uneven voice recording, and juggy graphics left me wondering why so few updates were made to the experience as a whole. A solid story and cool puzzles only go so far when the production values scream "low budget" every step of the way. —**JOE**



BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Revive a cult PSone platformer on a family-friendly platform

> **Graphics:** Much improved from the original. Think modern Sonic games

> **Sound:** Annoying voice acting replaces the nonsensical blathering from before

> **Playability:** Hold the remote NES-style and you're good to go

> **Entertainment:** You don't see many decent old-school platformers like this around anymore

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Wii

Klonoa

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO BANDAI > **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO BANDAI > **RELEASE:** MAY 5 > **ESRB:** E10+

THE FUR FLIES AGAIN

When the original Klonoa: Door to Phantomile came out over 10 years ago, the 2.5D mechanic was innovative, the graphics were slick, and anthropomorphic animals with fude were so in. But times have changed, and despite a visual overhaul and some meager additions, Klonoa feels behind the times in the modern gaming climate.

The dialogue and story are ridiculous; don't feel guilty about skipping the cutscenes. It's obvious what's going on the whole time except for the idiot characters in the story.

Instead of jumping on enemies' heads, Klonoa picks them up and throws them at each other. The faux 3D mechanic allows for multiple branching paths and

other snazzy tricks while maintaining the feel of a 2D platformer. The game consists of only 13 levels, so it's easy to blow through quickly. Most of the stages are tremendously easy, with the challenge focused around late boss battles and cheap bottomless pit deaths.

A few new features appear when you finish the main quest — boss rush mode, lame costume changes, hidden challenge rooms, and mirror mode. Despite all of these complaints, I can see fans of the original game enjoying this revival. It's faithful to a fault, and I can think of plenty of older niche games that I would love to see get similar treatment. But if you've got no connection to the original, you'll likely wonder what all of the fuss is about. —**BRYAN**

LITTLE MAC
VS.
KINGHIPPO



THE GLOVES ARE ON.

FIGHT 12 CLASSIC CHARACTERS OR CHALLENGE
YOUR FRIENDS IN THE ALL-NEW PUNCH-OUT!! GAME.

PUNCH-OUT!!

PunchOutComeback.com



Wii



Demigod

> STYLE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY (UP TO 10-PLAYER ONLINE) • PUBLISHER: EA GAMES
 > BENCHMARK: CAS POWERED GAMES • RELEASE: APRIL 13 • ESRB: T

YOU AND WHAT ARMY?

Fast-paced, competitive multi-player strategy is not often found outside traditional real-time strategy titles. Though it's an RTS in a broad sense of the term, Demigod plays nothing like the Warcrafts or Command & Conquer of the world.

Inspired in part by the successful Warcraft III mod Defense of the Ancients, Demigod asks players to shape an ongoing war through the use of a single unit (though some demigods have access to a handful of lesser minions). Every so often, AI armies spawn and run toward each other. It's up to the player-controlled demigods to upset the balance between these evenly matched forces. A single blow is enough to fell most troops, and unleashing a special attack often slaughters an entire wave in an instant.

Players have three resources to manage: money, experience, and time. Money is gained over time and by dropping demigods. Experience is earned by stomping on opposing grunts. Time is more complicated—deciding where your talents are most needed, staying on the battlefield instead of retreating to a base for healing, and making good use of teleportation all contribute to an involving strategy layer.

Players evolve their demigods by buying items



Powerful static defenses and influential flags provide conflict points to the battlefield



Stardock says its soon-to-be-deployed Impulse Reactor technology enables an unprecedented level of community additions to Demigod

and assigning skill points. The game is well balanced; each of the eight unique demigods has multiple viable builds that can be tweaked any number of ways. Multiple paths of improvement encompass damage, defense, regeneration, movement debuffs, silences, and death explosions. The Queen of Thorns, for example, can be an army destroying area-effect powerhouse, a building-crushing siege engine, or a powerful support unit that focuses on damage mitigation and map control—but not all at the same time. Global upgrades to buildings and grunts are also available. Experimenting with the myriad combinations of spells and items, especially

when you start looking into team composition and inter-demigod synergies, is a deep and compelling metagame.

Though the basic gameplay is entertaining, the polish is uneven. Larger demigods often occlude smaller units, forcing you to mess with the camera to select what you want. The UI lacks crucial feedback for minion-using demigods, like how many of each summon are active and their current status.

The otherwise solid AI for computer-controlled demigods becomes predictable quickly, and single-player consists solely of customizable skirmishes (or sets of skirmishes) with almost no persistence between matches. Offline play does not have the staying power gamers rightfully expect out of a modern strategy title.

Demigod is a solid implementation of a unique concept. When you find a good team online and coordinate advanced build synergies and tactics, it's amazing. The game should have good legs in multiplayer, but I wouldn't recommend spending the \$40 if you're not planning on taking it online.—ADAM



You'll rarely have time to appreciate it, but the detail work is impressive

BOTTOM LINE 8

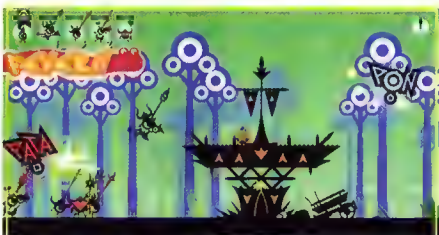
- > **Concept:** Turn the tide of battle between two AI-controlled armies with a massively powerful hero unit
- > **Graphics:** Unique art and impressive technology make this a gorgeous title
- > **Sound:** The worst voiceovers I've heard in years hurt the presentation
- > **Playability:** Odd interface oversights make playing the more complicated heroes harder than it should be
- > **Entertainment:** It's all about the online. The single-player AI can't sustain a reasonable challenge
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

Demigod eschews many RTS conventions to mold itself as an experience based on a single hero unit, and it's better for it. The game puts its weight on your combat prowess—the ability to capture and maintain control of flags, accruing gold via kills, and honing your Demigod appropriately through upgrades. It's satisfying to build your hero into an ass-kicker, but you're never fully in control over your destiny. While I'm grateful for the help through other friendly Demigods and units auto-spawned from set portals on the map, success is reliant upon going with the flow of ally units. Relying on teamwork can make the constant back-and-forth of the tides of war a little trying, and waiting for respawns to access Gladiol upgrades and shop items is annoying. Demigod may be a game of carefully crafted limitations, but it still puts a fair amount of power at your fingertips.—KATO

Patapon 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY (4-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN STUDIO
> **RELEASE MAY 5** > **ESRB** E



THE THRILL IS GONE

Sometimes developers play it too safe. While it's important to maintain the fans you won with a successful first game, sequels need to distinguish themselves enough to justify another go 'round. Patapon 2 feels like an enjoyable half measure, but one that loses a lot of the freshness the first title had.

Sony includes a lot of new content here, and hardcore players should find lots to dig into. A new skill tree system allows you to evolve your Patapon, which gives you specifics on their various pros and cons as well as what items you need to craft for them. In addition, three new units—flying Tonipons, mechanical Robopons, and magic-oriented Mahopons—add new wrinkles to the action. The most important new features are the four-player ad-hoc play and the Hero class. Heroes can be changed to different classes at will, an important strategic decision before any battle. In Fever mode, Heroes can deliver powerful special attacks that are key to survival.

Unfortunately, these great additions don't make the core experience any different than last time. Plus, you need to grind through a lot of the



game before you even scratch the surface of the new content. While the game adds a few new commands, the core of Patapon still revolves around three commands—attack, defend, and advance. After two games, these rudimentary rhythms are beaten into your skull to the point they barely even register. The game's novel appeal was enough last time; in Patapon 2, I noticed just how gruelingly repetitive this game can be. In addition, even the load screen tips don't make up for the fact that much of the game's content is not explained to the player. The myriad evolution paths for Patapon are intriguing, but learning which units work best in particular situations is essentially a trial-and-error process—forcing you to squander resources in the process. Too frequently, the only answer is to go back to previous levels to grind for more loot. This makes the fairly simplistic game even more tedious.

In the end, this game serves its audience of hardcore fans well. However, at this point Patapon needs to take a cue from its titular characters and start the evolution process. —**MATT**



BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Add depth and new features to the Patapon formula, but not enough to distinguish it from the first

> **Graphics:** Features some of the most entertaining and quirky visuals you'll see all year

> **Sound:** While the base rhythms are the same, the music is catchy and even incorporates some odd world and surf music flourishes

> **Playability:** It's still fun, but this sequel illustrates the repetitive nature of the game

> **Entertainment:** If you loved the first and aren't averse to grinding for items, it's fun. However, for me the charm has worn off

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

NO USAID FOR PATAPON 2

Patapon 2 is available only through download. The game can be purchased through your PSP or PPS at the PlayStation Store. At retail, a voucher coupon will be sold in a conventional PSP box that contains an instruction booklet. This coupon can be redeemed at the PlayStation Store. The game requires 60MB of Memory Stick space.

Second Opinion 8.25

The first Patapon was an innovative blend of music, RTS, and art design. The sequel, however, feels more like a loaded expansion pack than something that pushes the envelope. The new Hero makes a huge difference on the battlefield with his special moves during Fever mode, and the handful of new units and beats are fun to experiment with. The evolution board adds a nice level of customization to your troops, but once you're with your army becomes blurred with all of the classes it becomes a pain to micromanage every individual soldier. Multiplayer is just another excuse to re-right old bosses and usually works better when you have at control the other characters. Fans will find plenty of game for their money, and the Patapon-curious should definitely start here instead of the first game. —**BRyan**



NINTENDO DS

Knights in the Nightmare

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/ACT > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** STING
> **RELEASE JUNE 2** > **ESRB** E

SOMETHING ELSE

Knights in the Nightmare is not as familiar as it looks. Despite an emphasis on strategy and grid-based combat, this game is a far cry from turn-based titles like Final Fantasy Tactics and Fire Emblem. Knights in the Nightmare takes a traditional strategy framework and twists it beyond recognition to create a clever and bizarre experience that defies classification.

Combat is impossible to describe point-for-point. In fact, it is so complex that you'll need to play about an hour of tutorials before you even start the game. Using only the stylus, players guide a glowing ball around the screen. By hovering over stationary units, you command them to attack enemies moving around the grid. Here's the catch: Energy volleys that damage the glowing ball—not the individual units—are constantly flying around, so you need to dodge bullets as you try to execute your commands. Battles are hectic, fast-paced balancing acts that have you managing multiple tasks while threading the needle on the touch screen.

The novelty of the encounters is entertaining for a while, but the fusion of top-down shooter elements and tactics would have more longevity if the controls worked better. As it is, you'll accidentally activate units and grab the wrong items thanks to the cluttered interface, which seriously damages the strategic component—as does the fact that most of your units can't move. I was also disappointed to discover that permadeath is one of the holdovers from the tactics genre; your units aren't attacked directly during combat, so every action they take (including basic attacks) depletes their life. If you let it hit zero, that unit is gone for good, along with all the experience you spent on them.

With so many grid-based games mired in tradition, Knights in the Nightmare is an intriguing excursion into uncharted territory. The hail of bullets and onslaught of special moves definitely make combat exciting, and while the game has some serious flaws, I can guarantee that you've never played anything quite like it. —**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Grid-based strategy with a top-down shooter elements

> **Graphics:** Since the top-screen gets overly crowded with effects, you'll be thankful for the bare-bones grid on the bottom

> **Sound:** Like so many soundtracks, there are a few good bits and lots of bland ones

> **Playability:** Precision can be a big problem, especially when you're accidentally activating units and items while trying to dodge enemy bullets

> **Entertainment:** The unique concept is interesting, but the gameplay has trouble backing it up

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6

This is the ultimate expression of offbeat JRPG sensibilities. The story is horribly presented in language that can't be far off from phrase-for-phrase translations of the original Japanese. The combat mechanics are as complex and unusual that you have to spend a solid hour reading text and watching demonstrations to get your feet under you. The relationships between weapons' many stats and the attributes of heroes and monsters are like a genealogy of European nobility if it works well within the confines of its obtuse internal logic, for what that's worth. This is Mount Everest for the type of gamer who likes to master arcane battle systems just for the sake of doing it. To the rest of us, it's just another mountain that we have to navigate somehow to get where we want to be. —**ADAM**



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For March 2009 Based On Units Sold

1 RESIDENT EVIL (360)



Lies my video game told me #1: Zombies can do whatever the hell they want. We all know zombies are slow, shambling corpses with a one-track mind, so why do Resident Evil's infected masses now drive motorcycles, fire crossbows, and seem articulate enough to run for a seat in the Senate? Don't buy into these lies. If you see zombies, laugh at them. Their life is pathetic.

2 POKEMON PLATINUM (DS)



Lies my video game told me #2: Gotta catch 'em all. Nintendo wants you to believe that your life will be empty until you own all the Pokémons. Trust us, after you catch them all, you still feel hollow. Pokémons are like Chinese fast food. So put your DS down and go clean your room. By the way, if anyone has Registeel, we're willing to trade.

3 HALO WARS (360)



Lies my video game told me #3: Aliens are evil and want to conquer Earth for no apparent reason. This is ridiculous. What about Superman or the Doctor from Doctor Who? They save the planet on a daily basis. Sure, a few shady characters like Mook, Jar Jar Binks, and Michael Jackson try to ruin it for everyone, but not all aliens are deplorable losers. Remember how comical Ali was? He ate cats!

4 RESIDENT EVIL 5 (PS3)



Lies my video game told me #4: Zombies are scary. In truth, zombies are people just like you and me. Incidentally, zombies can be quite hilarious. A zombie once told us this joke: "Hraaaaaa Megga GRAMMA GRAMMA laugh rrrrrrr, and then the chickens said, 'foopa fringga.' Oh, man. That one gets me every time.

5 Wii Fit (Wii)

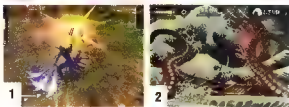


Lies my video game told me #5: Video games will make you healthier. Actually, this is true. Not only can video games make you fit, they make you smarter, increase your self-esteem, and make you more appealing to the opposite sex. What? You haven't had these results? Keep trying. You're obviously playing them wrong.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	Resident Evil 5	N/A	360	9.5	03-09
2	Pokémon Platinum	N/A	DS	8.5	03-09
3	Halo Wars	N/A	360	9	03-09
4	Resident Evil 5	N/A	PS3	9.5	03-09
5	Wii Fit	1	Wii	8	04-08
6	MLB '09: The Show	N/A	PS3	9	03-09
7	Killzone 2	5	PS3	8.75	02-09
8	Wii Play	4	Wii	7	02-07
9	Mario Kart Wii	6	Wii	8.5	04-08
10	Major League Baseball 2K9	N/A	360	7.25	03-09
11	Guitar Hero Metallica	N/A	360	8.75	03-09
12	Call of Duty: World at War	7	360	8.75	11-08
13	Street Fighter IV	2	360	9.25	02-09
14	Mario Kart DS	8	DS	8.5	11-05
15	Street Fighter IV	3	PS3	9.25	02-09
16	New Super Mario Bros.	9	DS	9.25	05-06
17	Professor Layton and the Curious Villiage	N/A	DS	7.5	02-08
18	MLB '09: The Show	N/A	PS2	N/A	03-09
19	Halo 3	15	360	9.75	09-07
20	LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	17	Wii	N/A	11-07

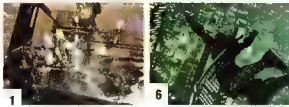
TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Sengoku Basara: Battle Heroes	PSP
2	Muramasa: The Demon Blade	Wii
3	Mario & Luigi RPG 3	DS
4	Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G	PSP
5	Pro Baseball Famista DS 2009	DS
6	Kido Senshi Gundam: Senjo No Kizuna Portable	PSP
7	Suggoi! Arcana Heart 2	PS2
8	Powerful Pro Baseball 2009	PS2
9	Warriors Orochi Z	PS3
10	Wii Fit	Wii



TOP 10 GI

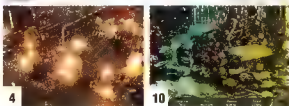
Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Infamous	N/A	PS3
2	Empire: Total War	1	PC
3	X-Men Origins: Wolverine	N/A	multi
4	Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	2	DS
5	Boom Blox Bash Party	N/A	DS
6	Ninja Blade	N/A	360
7	Exitbots: Trick Racing	N/A	Wii
8	Resident Evil 5	3	multi
9	The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena	4	multi
10	Peggle	5	multi



The Staff's favorite titles

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Empire: Total War	N/A	\$48
2	World Of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King	1	\$38
3	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	2	\$19
4	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War II	3	\$48
5	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	4	\$38
6	World Of Warcraft	7	\$20
7	The Sims 2 Apartment Life	8	\$19
8	Spore	6	\$49
9	World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	10	\$29
10	Mystery Case Files: Return To Ravenhearst	N/A	\$20



Based On Monthly Units Sold

VIEWS ARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand	8	Apr-09
Afro Samurai	775	Mar-09
Alone in the Dark: Inferno	725	Jan-09
Armored Core: For Answer	625	Dec-08
Baja: Edge of Control	8	Dec-08
BioShock	9	Nov-08
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	775	Nov-08
Buzz Quiz TV	825	Nov-08
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena, The	9.5	May-09
Dead Space	9.25	Nov-08
Earl Bait: The Return of Matt Hazard	7	Apr-09
Fallout 3	9.5	Dec-08
Far Cry 2	9	Dec-08
FEAR 2: Project Origin	8.25	Mar-09
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	775	Nov-08
FIFA Soccer 09	8	Dec-08
Godfather II, The	5.5	May-09
Golden Age: Beast Rider	6	Dec-08
Guitar Hero World Tour	9.25	Dec-08



The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena - PlayStation 3 - Apr-09

Guitar Hero: Metallica	8.75	May-09
H.A.W.X.	8.75	Apr-09
Killzone 2	8.75	Mar-09
Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The	4	Jan-09
Legendary	6.5	Jan-09
LittlePlanet	9.5	Dec-08
Lord of the Rings: Conquest, The	4.75	Mar-09
Major League Baseball 2K9	7.25	Apr-09
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	9	Nov-08
Mirror's Edge	8	Dec-08
MLB 09: The Show	9	Apr-09
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe	8.5	Dec-08
MotoStorm Pacific Rift	7.25	Dec-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
Prince of Persia	8.75	Jan-09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	8.5	Jan-09
Quantum of Solace	6.5	Jan-09
Resident Evil 5	9.5	Apr-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
Skate 2	9	Feb-09
SOCOM: Confonation	6	Dec-08
Sonic Unleashed	6	Jan-09
Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection	8	Apr-09
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	6	Dec-08
Stomise	4	May-09
Street Fighter IV	9.25	Mar-09
Tom Clancy: Rainbow Six: Underworld	8.75	Jan-09
Valley's Chronicles	8.5	Dec-08
Wanted: Weapons of Fate	6.25	Apr-09
Wheelman	8.5	May-09
WWE Legends of WrestleMania	8.5	May-09
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08
XBlades	8.5	Apr-09

XBOX 360

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand	8	Apr-09
Afro Samurai	775	Mar-09
Alone in the Dark: Inferno	625	Dec-08
Armored Core: For Answer	625	Dec-08
Baja: Edge of Control	8	Dec-08
Bajo-Kazeo: Nuts and Bolts	8.5	Dec-08
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	775	Nov-08
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena, The	9.5	May-09
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	8.75	Dec-08
Dark: Mind Over Mutant	4.75	Dec-08
Dead Space	9.25	Nov-08
Destroy All Humans!: Path of the Furor	4.5	Feb-09
Earl Bait: The Return of Matt Hazard	7	Apr-09
EndWar	7.75	Dec-08
Fable II	9.25	Dec-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
Giars of War 2	9	Dec-08
Godfather II, The	5.5	May-09
Golden Age: Beast Rider	6	Dec-08

Grand Theft Auto IV

The Lost and the Damned	9	Apr-09
Guitar Hero World Tour	9.25	Dec-08
Guitar Hero: Metallica	8.75	May-09
H.A.W.X.	8.75	Apr-09
Halo Wars	9	Mar-09
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
Los	7.5	Jan-09
Lord of the Rings: Conquest, The	4.75	Mar-09
Major League Baseball 2K9	7.25	Apr-09
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
Need for Speed: Undercover	7	Dec-08
Onochebari: Bikini Samurai Squad	6	Apr-09
Prince of Persia	8.75	Jan-09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	8.5	Jan-09
Quantum of Solace	6.5	Jan-09
Race Pro	7	Mar-09
Resident Evil 5	9.5	Apr-09
Rise of the Argonauts	6	Feb-09
Rock Revolution	7	Dec-08
Saints Row 2	8.75	Dec-08
Scene It? Box Office Smash	8.5	Jan-09
Shaun White Snowboarding	6.75	Jan-09
Skate 2	9	Feb-09
Sonic Unleashed	6	Jan-09
Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection	8	Apr-09
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	6	Dec-08
Star Ocean: The Last Hope	7	Mar-09
Stoked	7.5	Mar-09
Stomise	4	May-09
Street Fighter IV	9.25	Mar-09
Tom Clancy: Rainbow Six: Underworld	8.75	Jan-09
Wanted: Weapons of Fate	6.25	Apr-09
Wheelman	8.5	May-09
WWE Legends of WrestleMania	8.5	May-09
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08
You're in the Money	7.25	Jan-09

Wii

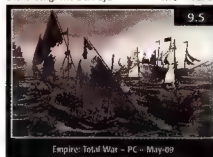
Animal Crossing: City Folk	7.5	Jan-09
Brothers in Arms: Double Time	5	Dec-08
Carnival Games: Mini-Golf	5	Jan-09
Castlevania: Judgment	5	Jan-09
Cooking Mama: World Kitchen	5.5	Jan-09
Crash: Mind Over Mutant	4.75	Dec-08
Deadly Creatures	7	Mar-09
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	7.75	Apr-09
Guitar Hero: Metallica	8.75	May-09
House of the Dead: Overkill, The	8.5	Apr-09
Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The	4	Jan-09
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
MadWorld	9	Apr-09
Major League Baseball 2K9	7.25	Apr-09
Major Mon's Majestic March	3	May-09
Marble Saga: Kororipa	8	Mar-09
Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars	5.75	Dec-08
MYSims Party	6	Apr-09
NASCAR Kart Racing	6.75	Apr-09
New Play Control: Mario Power Tennis	8.25	Apr-09
New Play Control: Pikmin	8	May-09
Onochebari: Bikini Samurai Squad	6	Apr-09
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	7	Jan-09
Ready 2 Rumble Revolution	1	Apr-09
Run Factory: Fomber	6.75	Apr-09
Rygar: The Battle of Angus	5.5	Feb-09
Shaun White Snowboarding	6.75	Jan-09
Road Trip	7.75	Jan-09
Skate It	5	May-09
Sonic and the Black Knight	5	May-09
Sonic Unleashed	6.5	Jan-09
Spyro	7	Dec-08
Star Wars: The Clone Wars - Lightsaber Duels	5	Jan-09
Ten Pin Alley 2	5	Jan-09
Tenpin: Shadow Assassins	6.5	Apr-09
Ultimate Band	7.5	Dec-08
Wario Land: Shake It	6.75	Dec-08
We Ski & Snowboard	6.75	May-09
Wii Music	3	Dec-08
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08

PLAYSTATION 2

Guitar Hero: Metallica	8.75	May-09
Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories	6.75	Jan-09
LEGO Batman	7.5	Nov-08
Persona 4	8	Jan-09
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	8.5	Dec-08

PC

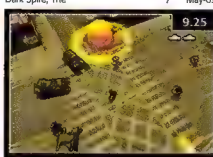
BatlinForge	6	May-09
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena, The	9.5	May-09
CodeName: Panzers - Cold War	6	May-09
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	8.75	Dec-08
Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor	7.5	May-09
Cyris Warhead	8.75	Dec-08
Draekening: The Dark Eye	6.75	Mar-09



Empire: Total War	9.5	May-09
Godfather II, The	5.5	May-09
Legendary	6.5	Jan-09
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
Newvenier Nights 2: Storm of Zahir	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
Spore	8.75	Nov-08
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II	8.75	Mar-09
Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning	8	Dec-08

WII END IS

Age of Empires: Mythologies	8.25	Feb-09
Avallen Code	7	May-09
Big Bang Mini	7.75	Feb-09
Blue Dragon Plus	5.5	Mar-09
Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	8.25	Nov-08
Chase: Fable Meets Felicity, The	6	Feb-09
Chrono Trigger	9	Dec-08
Cradle of Rome	6.75	Jan-09
Dark Spire, The	7	May-09



Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	7.5	Mar-09
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	7.75	Apr-09
Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon	7.75	Apr-09
Gardening Mama	6.5	May-09
Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	9.25	Mar-09
Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades	7	Jan-09
Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure	7	Apr-09
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
Metal Slug 7	6.75	Dec-08
My Pet Shop	5	May-09
My World: My Way	6	Mar-09
Ninja Town	9	Dec-08
Peggle: Dual Shot	8.25	May-09
Pokémon Platinum	8.5	Apr-09
Pokémon DS	7	Dec-08
Prince of Persia: The Fate of King	6	Feb-09
Puzzle Quest: Galactrix	8.25	Apr-09
Retno Game Challenge	8.5	Feb-09
Rhythm Heaven	7.5	May-09
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
Tokyo Beat Down	7	May-09
TrackMania DS	6.5	Mar-09
Valley's Profile	7	Jan-09
Covenant of the Plume	6	Apr-09

PS2

Lollipopz 2	9.25	Mar-09
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	8	Apr-09
Resistance: Retribution	8.75	May-09
Star Ocean: Second Evolution	7	Feb-09

UP TO THE HONOR NEWS

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Empire: Total War

Conquering the World by Land, Sea, and Air



By Creative Assembly

CAMPAIGN MAP TIPS

Raiding Trade Routes – Raiding an enemy's trade route cripples their economy. If enemies and allies share a trade route, you will only raid enemy ships and never those of your allies or countries with which you are not at war.

Foreign Policy – If your rake succeeds in an act of sabotage, the faction you attack automatically blames its greatest enemy, and the relationship between those two nations suffers as a result.

Clamor for Reform – Enlightenment technologies normally lead to a more enlightened populace. However, an enlightened people often chafe against the bonds of their lot in life, leading to unrest. To restore order in regions affected by such dissatisfaction, it may be necessary to increase your military presence or even destroy educational buildings.

A Nation of Trenchermen – Not using characters to their full potential results in them gaining a negative trait. If you have a nine star general, but leave him to fester in some backwater province, he will gather negative traits and slowly slide into obscurity. Making sure your best generals and agents are in constant use will improve them and result in a much more effective character.

Money Makes the World Go Round – When offering any diplomatic proposals, sweeten the deal with a little cash incentive.

Quick Reference – For those wondering what happened to double right-click zoom-to-camera functionality, this has now moved to double mouse-wheel-click.

NAVAL BATTLE TIPS

Maintain Station! – Grouped ships try to

maintain relative positions and follow the lead ship around. If you group your ships in a line they will then move in a line around the map.

Fire! – The stern is the weakest part of the ship, so concentrating fire on the weak spot deals the greatest damage to an enemy ship. Conversely, this is the weakest point on your own ship, and must be protected at all times.

Chain Shot! – Using Chain shot to take out the sails of the first ship in an enemy line slows down the whole line as they regroup.

Beware the Broadside! – Try to keep your fleet to the stern or the bow of enemy ships. All their firepower rests in their broadside.

Concentrate Fire! – By holding down the Alt key and clicking on an enemy ship you can order any ships you currently have selected to concentrate all their fire on that one ship.

Divide and Conquer! – When commanding a large naval force, it is advisable to split it into three separate groups; one to approach the enemy fleet's port side, one to approach from starboard, and a third to cover any gaps which may appear.

Stay Upwind! – Always keep your ships upwind of the enemy. It gives you the upper hand and allows you to maneuver into position much quicker than your enemy.

Come About! – When using line astern make a conscious effort to turn ships around periodically in an attempt to distribute hull damage equally. If one side is allowed to take the bulk of the damage, the ship will go down.

LAND BATTLE TIPS

As One! – When you group units they remember the relative position of each

other, so when you give them a move order, they will reform in the same positions at your chosen destination. This, in combination with the new rotate/move buttons on the HUD, allows you to quickly and easily move groups and even to break off parts of a formation into a new group!

At Ease! – Hitting the enter key deselects all the troops you currently have selected.

Flanking Fire! – Forming a horseshoe around enemy units gives your men maximum coverage and increases enemy casualties. Positioning light infantry in trees to the left and right of your main force will give them the opportunity to get a couple of rounds off before the enemy even knows they're there.

Deploy Defences! – When defending an area that has limited routes in and out, it is often best to deploy chevaux de frise, followed by a line of earth works. This protects your army from cavalry and infantry, and creates an easily defensible position.

Skirmishers! – When confronted by a complex enemy formation, use light infantry to lure enemy units out. Once this is achieved, your light infantry can skirmish away from the attackers, leaving supporting units to deal with them piecemeal.

Dig In! – Earthworks are particularly effective against an enemy heavy on line infantry. Your men will be safer from the barrage of bullets!

Dragoons! Flanking Maneuver! – Dragoons provide an excellent opportunity to outflank an enemy. Ride your dragoons around the back of the enemy and once there, dismount and begin firing into his rear.

Take Cover! – Deploying your men behind walls provides essential cover from enemy bullets!

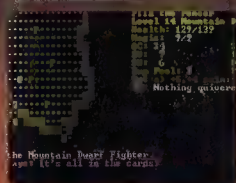
Form Square! – Square formation is particularly effective against Dragoons and other cavalry units!

Cannon Fodder! – If you're willing to lose men for the greater good, send your militia or a similar unit down the center of a battlefield to draw enemy fire. Then, while they're engaged, bring your better troops around the sides to deal a devastating blow to the enemy's front ranks.

Up Close and Personal! – Press the insert key with a unit selected to get a first-person view of the battlefield!

Mod World

Dungeon Crawl Stone Soup
<http://crawl.akrasiac.org>



Sick of hearing about roguelikes in this column? Too bad! Dungeon Crawl Stone Soup devoured way too many editors' hours over the last month to not merit inclusion. In a game known for chomping at a sub-glacial pace, Stone Soup brings needed change.

Reverend the primitive graphics. Think of Stone Soup as a turn-based Diablo with far more depth to character progression, monster variety, and tactical combat. A large free-form skill system lets you build the hero you want, while the large pantheon of gods offers gifts from undead slaves to powerful evocations. Stone Soup is as hard if not harder than most roguelikes, but in contrast, it's almost always your own fault when you die, not the whims of the random number generator.

Especially when using the tiles interface, Stone Soup has a UI that is literally decades ahead of other roguelikes. More important than the vastly improved presentation of information, however, are the navigation controls. A relatively smart auto-explore function takes the tedium out of dungeon crawling, and numerous last-travel options allow you to easily backtrack to item stashes or important shops. Combined, these two features cut the amount of time not spent making fun decisions to a tiny fraction of similar titles.

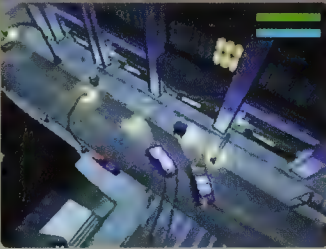
It's been around for some time, but Stone Soup development recently started up again after a lengthy hiatus. There's never been a better time to get into the fantastic roguelike genre, with free projects like this offering more depth than most full-priced releases.



Code of the Month

Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars

DS



Star Color - Red, Red, Yellow, Red, Blue, Red, Red, Blue
Vocal Fireball - Red, Green, Green, Yellow, Blue, Green, Yellow, Green

Adrenaline Rush Mode - 0110100
Airplane Bodyguard - 0101011
Cinematic Mode - 01110100
Close Combat Mode - 01100101
Cross - 01010100
Headshot Mode - 01100111
Health Improvement - 01001100
Infinite Ammo - 01101111
One Shot One Kill - 01110010
Special Suit - 01100001
Super Weapons - 01001111
Unlimited Adrenaline - 01101101
Unlock Janice - 01000100
Unlock Wesley - 01000111

Star Color - Red, Red, Yellow, Red, Blue, Red, Red, Blue
Vocal Fireball - Red, Green, Green, Yellow, Blue, Green, Yellow, Green

Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gamenformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

PS3 • XBOX 360 • Wii



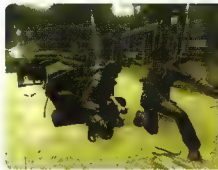
Guitar Hero: Metallica

From the Main Menu enter the Cheats Menu to enter the following codes

Additional Line Six Effects (Music Studio) - Green, Red, Yellow, Blue, Red, Yellow, Blue, Green
Air Instruments - Red, Red, Blue, Yellow, Green, Green, Green, Yellow
Always Drum Fill - Red, Red, Blue, Blue, Green, Green, Yellow
Always Slide - Green, Green, Red, Red, Yellow, Red, Blue
Auto Kick - Yellow, Green, Red, Blue, Blue, Blue, Red
Black Highway - Yellow, Red, Green, Red, Green, Red, Red, Blue
Flame Color - Green, Red, Green, Blue, Red, Red, Yellow, Blue
Gem Color - Blue, Red, Red, Green, Red, Green, Red, Yellow
Hyperspeed (all instruments) - Green, Blue, Red, Yellow, Yellow, Red, Green, Green
Invisible Rocker - Green, Red, Yellow, Yellow, Yellow, Blue, Blue, Green
Performance Mode - Yellow, Yellow, Blue, Red, Blue, Green

Star Color - Red, Red, Yellow, Red, Blue, Red, Red, Blue
Vocal Fireball - Red, Green, Green, Yellow, Blue, Green, Yellow, Green

PS3 • XBOX 360



Wanted: Weapons of Fate

From the Main Menu, enter the Secret Codes menu to enter the following codes.

Adrenaline Rush Mode - 0110100
Airplane Bodyguard - 0101011
Cinematic Mode - 01110100
Close Combat Mode - 01100101
Cross - 01010100
Headshot Mode - 01100111
Health Improvement - 01001100
Infinite Ammo - 01101111
One Shot One Kill - 01110010
Special Suit - 01100001
Super Weapons - 01001111
Unlimited Adrenaline - 01101101
Unlock Janice - 01000100
Unlock Wesley - 01000111

"GI Droid"

(location unknown - Last seen twittering about your life)

It's the first time in my life
 that I've felt like I actually fit in
 Or at least in happy now that I don't
 Truly **OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE**
 dedicated video **MANIAC**

who has spent the last 10 years
 & that means 
 a career in **GAME DEVELOPMENT**
 State of the Art hardware and software
 AT MY DISPOSAL

Game Development is a Game Art
 Incidentally I am a programming geek
 Until you want about you?

The LAN
 tournament
 I ROCKED

My demo reel turned them
 into web monkeys
 So you want to learn how to create bug hair
 using Maya, power objects and cloth



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PS3 • XBOX 360



Godfather II

While playing the game, enter the Don's view to enter the following codes. There is a five-minute cooldown before a code can be re-entered.

PS3
Earn \$5,000 - □, △, □, □, △, L3
Full Ammunition - △, Left, △, Right, □, R3
Full Health - Left, □, Right, △, Right, L3
Unlimited Invulnerability - Down, Down, Up, Left
XBOX 360
Earn \$5,000 - X, Y, X, X, Y, L3
Full Ammunition - Y, Left, Y, Right, X, R3
Full Health - Left, X, Right, Y, Right, L3



THE ODDWORLD GAME THAT NEVER WAS

The Brutal Ballad of Fangus Klot

In April of 2005, Game Informer announced Oddworld Inhabitants' newest game: *The Brutal Ballad of Fangus Klot*. However, just as the issue left for the printers, Oddworld Inhabitants abruptly shut down production and closed its doors. The development studio had long pleased fans with creative and humorous titles such as *Abe's Oddysee* and *Stranger's Wrath*, often weaving smart social commentary throughout its storylines. *Fangus Klot* looked to be its most ambitious venture; it featured a darker tone, a more intense combat system, and was poised to take on real-world issues still relevant today. So why did its developer suddenly put the game on the shelf? Oddworld mastermind Lorne Lanning answered our questions about the lost Oddworld title, the trouble with publishers, and the future of gaming.

What was the original idea behind Fangus Klot?

We wanted to explore some other territories of Oddworld. We had always created this idea of a planet that multiple things can take place on, multiple possibilities. On Earth we can have Eskimos on one continent, on another we have tribes in Africa, and in others there are New York City and Tokyo. All these different worlds exist on one world. So we wanted to head somewhere radically different from the Oddworld characters we knew, move away from the quirky edge, and take things somewhere more hardcore.

What we were inspired by at the time — I was watching these documentaries of these Russian cities that were basically prison cities, which were discovered after the Cold War. These cities were built in this Siberian climate or a mining area, and there would be 10 million living in the city. Everyone was a prisoner. They would build these prison cities to become sort of their own economy. They had their systems of justice, but if you were in that city, you were basically a prisoner. You didn't get to leave that city. What blew us away was the idea that there would be entire territories that were basically imprisoned.

At the same time we wanted to play with another dynamic, the timeless mythical battle between cats and dogs — immortal, timeless enemies forever. In a general sense, Oddworld had these Homosapien-like creatures that had evolved out of dogs and cats. They've become intelligent, become strong, and built civilizations, but the timeless battle of cats and dogs still existed. The hatred between them was still to the bone. It's kind of like Oddworld's version of Palestine and Israel.

We wanted it to be really hardcore. When I say cats and dogs it sounds kind of light-hearted, but that's not what we wanted, and I think the cover of Fangus Klot illustrates that. We wanted to take Stranger's engine and basically re-skin something more hardcore, not have live ammo, and just be like, "Here's a guy fighting for his life, for his people, for his territory, and the escape of his land being taken over."

Sounds like you guys invested a lot into the game's history.

Yeah, the idea of what is happening here — this canine-ish race had been like sheepherders. They'd been closer to the land, a little bit more aboriginal. Think of them a bit like — not so much Native American — but very indigenous on that respect. Very close to the Earth. Herdsmen. They were nomadic. They moved with their herds.

Whereas with this other race — the cats — we were fascinated about playing with this idea of the Russian mafia. This post-war, Russian intelligence gone rogue into mafia and criminal behavior. Fangus Klot was a nomadic herdsman who had a huge flock, but that was his previous life. His country had since been invaded by this Russian mafia — this cat race.

If you think about all the Oddworld voices and stuff, imagine hardcore gameplay, but when you come around corners and surprise one of these heavily armed feline-evolved characters, you hear this "Hssssss Rwaatt!" The cat noises would be intertwined with their language — barking, growling, hissing — and that timeless hatred we would encapsulate with Russian mafia sensibility where they basically took over this entire territory and enslaved it. They were setting up these catnip labs, which for them were kind of like meth labs.

So the main character, Fangus, became a slave to this new government?

Well, they were making fodder out of those who lived on this land before. If you remember *New Jack City*, it was kind of like that. His people were in the labs, but others, like Fangus,

were relegated to pit fighting for entertainment. It's kind of like gladiators for a post-Soviet era of collapse and corruption of unimaginable magnitudes.

I wanted to have this really dark tone of industrial civilization coming into what was basically — almost like Afghanistan has been in tradition. For thousands of years it lived the same way, it had shepherders, crop growers and things like that. Then all of a sudden it turns into this whole other country, which is illicit drug trade and hardcore bastards that couldn't give a s— about anything but themselves.

That is the theme of Fangus Klot. As the later designs started coming in, we started giving the design team more latitude with the project, and the team wanted to go more humanoid. We started seeing designs that were coming out that way. At that point, I thought if we continued in that direction, it wouldn't be on Oddworld. It would become its own place. If [our characters] were going to start looking like bald humans then it would not be an Oddworld game. It would be somewhere else, not even in the Oddworld universe. In some ways, it held less appeal for me that way.



"I'm always interested in shining a light on the dark side of human behavior. The reason is so that we can see it coming."

— LORNE LANNING

When did you decide to make this the team's game? When did you finally hand it over to them and let go of the reins?

We knew they wanted the game from the beginning, and so I started to shape it into a big package for them. But then it was like: we wanted to give them more freedom, but at the same time they thought, "Well, I don't know. Cats and dogs kind of sounds childish." You know, when you want to do something really innovative and creative, most people are not going to get it. So you have to bake it up to a certain point before they start going. "Oh! That's why it's going to be cool and not childish."

The team that was working on it basically wanted to, in my opinion, just use all the Stranger mechanics to make a more traditional shooter. In some ways, the company was a little split — not in terms of intent — but we said, "Okay, if you guys want to do what you want to do, that's fine, but it's not going to take place on Oddworld, and you'll have more creative freedom that way. Go ahead and run with this project." That's where it was eventually headed.

Was the game's attention to politics in response to the cultural climate of the time?

Yes. Always. To me that's the purpose. I don't feel like, "Let's go blow stuff up," if it doesn't have a purpose. Our world has enough problems, and when we do that — although it may be fun — it sort of furthers the psyche that we can just go blow the s— out of people as long as we have a good enough excuse. I don't believe that personally. So from my design of sensibility, I'm always interested in shining a light on the dark side of human behavior. The reason is so that we can see it coming.

For me, it's always about creating entertainment that is more nutritious to the mind, the psyche, and our general awareness in life. If it's not about that — to a large degree — I haven't been interested. I don't slam people that are just about making games that are fun; I love those games, too. I played Doom to death when it came out. I played Halo to death. I love those games. I'm thrilled that people make them, but for me it's about something else as well.

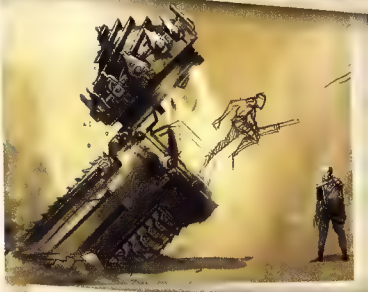
To me, I believed for a long time, it's up to the storytellers; it's up to the news makers to help show us the truth, to

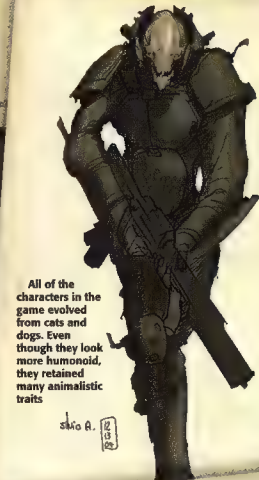
FLOCKING AROUND

Fans of *Stranger's Wrath* might be interested to know that living ammo — the mechanic that gave the game such a unique flavor — wasn't going to return in *Fangus*. In its place, *Oddworld Inhabitants* was developing a herd management system. *Fangus* would control a flock of ravenous sheep-like creatures to take down enemies and solve puzzles. Destructible environments also played a large part of the now defunct gameplay.



These concept art designs show how *Oddworld* explored early gameplay ideas. Vehicles might have played an important role in *Fangus* — if it had ever been finished.





All of the characters in the game evolved from cats and dogs. Even though they look more humanoid, they retained many animalistic traits

skio A. 2002



help inspire us to do the right things because it's not going to come in the form of traditional packaged entertainment. But when someone looks at it and says, "You know what? There's no reason why we can't make a movie that makes a lot of money and have it really make us more sensitive beings, more aware beings, more intelligent beings." As storytellers, as myth makers, it's our genetic role to try and create content that inspires people out of the dark times they face and to be something better.

OddWorld started as a goofy franchise, but over time it seemed – especially with Stranger – that the stories got darker and more serious. With Fangus, you had even said it was going to be darker than Stranger. Why that trend?

Because that was the trend in the market. In 1994 when we started building Abe, the number one game property was not Grand Theft Auto. It was Mario. The other big success was Sonic. We had to design to a limited resolution, limited computing power. Things still needed – for lack of a better word – a more cartoony design so they read better as graphics moving on the screen.

When we started with Abe – at that time, one of the most gratifying games I had ever played was Flashback – there was this idea of trying to capture something other than just 3D frenetic play. I was thinking I wanted to capture more storytelling. It still seemed very viable in the day, and so at that time it seemed appropriate that the gaming age was largely a younger skew.

Just look back – how much controversy surrounded Mortal Kombat? It was huge. Why? Because those cartoony-looking characters, those 16-bit characters were getting their spines ripped off and being decapitated. "Oh my gosh, this is the end of the civilized world!" Well, look at where we're at now. That stuff's happening in almost every game out there, so it's not so much an issue anymore. The shock value is gone. We could say we are desensitized, that that's the norm. The appetite of gamers is changing rapidly.

With Stranger's Wrath you guys were working with EA. When you started work on Fangus you switched over to Majesco Entertainment. Why the switch?

With EA, personally, we found the situation unworkable. We found that if the publishers don't own your IP, they don't have any incentive to push your game. Stranger was a big game, it was an expensive game, and it was a really hard game to build. But what we didn't realize is that since the publisher didn't own it, they weren't going to support it on the marketplace. That has totally changed my thinking on how you should approach a game.

We could build a game like that, and they could make the choice to support it the way that they did. That's not a business relationship. That's a master-slave relationship – one that we had no interest in continuing. So we were willing to test the waters with some other publishers, and we got

started on Fangus when another pattern crept in. This made our final decision to basically shut down the studio on the central coast.

What was that other pattern?

I have to be careful about how I say this stuff, because the gamer hears it one way, but game developers know exactly what I am talking about. Publishers use your own company against you because they know that you have a burn rate. They know that this is your family of kids that you need to feed every month. So if they make a deal with you, then they realize, "Oh, you know what? We should have done this thing in that deal, too." They might start playing games with you.

I'll give you a hypothetical situation: "Oh, we're having some accounting issues, the checks are a little late, but they'll be coming. We're sorry for the delay, but you know what? There's this other thing in the contract we'd like to renegotiate. We realized after we made the deal that we really would like to have some different terms on that." And then you find

that your check is not showing up because they want to renegotiate.

That's holding your own company as a gun to your head and going, "If you want to pay your people, you keep on doing anything we say no matter how unreasonable it is, and if that's a situation you can't win, then too bad because we'll win. We're the ones with the gold and gold rules."

"Publishers use your own company against you because they know that you have a burn rate."

– LORNE LANNING

It almost sounds like the Russian mafia.

[Laughs] Maybe it's not that diabolical, but I think it comes more out of incompetence than deviousness. I'm not saying that this is the evil intent out there, but it is the common behavior. There are some slime balls in the industry that have done some slimy things, but as far as industries go, this industry is good about being authentic. It's pretty decent. It's not nearly as ugly as the music business or as one-sided as the film business. There's good things and bad things about the industry. But incom-

petence is really big in this industry. We're talking about a huge industry that, even in this global financial crisis, is still showing growth, one of the only sectors still showing growth. That's huge, but it was only 20 years ago that this industry was in garages – not in big companies.

It seemed like the hammer came down pretty quickly. Only a month after announcing Fangus the studio was closing down.

Yeah, we had every intention of building the game, and then the shenanigans started, so we just said, "We're not going to play this game. If that's how you want to play, then we'll go play with someone else. We're going to take our ball and go home." Because what I saw, down the road, eventually our IP would wind up hostilely acquired by people who cared less about it. In many ways, while Oddworld has been sitting on



the shelf, it is still something we have a huge belief in. So we're not willing to compromise that belief.

So in Fangus, while we were still excited about it, while we were still building it, I would say it this way: Sometimes developers get fired by publishers and sometimes developers fire publishers – and that's probably all I should say about it.

Do you think, since you guys still own the property, that you'll ever go back and revisit Fangus Klot? At some point, will you ever try to make that game or one like it?

Well, what we've done is put our games up on Steam – the first two Abe games. We have a lot of interest in seeing how the digital distribution mechanism really works. I've got to tell you, we were blown away. For the first time, we're able to tell where our sales were coming from, how many dollars we were making per day. What territories sold better last night than the night before – was it Eastern Europe, was it Southeast Asia? We're able to see it all. We never got to know who our customer was before.

So, if you go back to Fangus Klot, you'll sell it through digital distribution?

Yes, but we are not focused on doing story games in that way anymore. That doesn't mean that we wouldn't license the property to another developer who does very good story games. But we're aiming for a different type of chemistry all together. We're looking more at where social gaming and networking is colliding. We're looking more at free-to-play item sales rather than \$60 of product.

A gamer buys a game, and a gamer spends \$50 on that game. If they didn't like it, that was a big output for something that they didn't like. I believe the future of gaming is going to be based more on usage – it's more like our electrical bill. At our house we only pay for what we use.

If I give gamers something that's free to play, they can get engaged – that's like the free demo, right? But if they want to get more engaged, then they start micro-paying, so they might find after \$10 into the experience, they've gotten plenty, and that was enough and that was fine. It didn't cost them much to have that experience.

Our focus is not to build big, long story games. Our focus is to build a really rich mythos where people get to engage in their own narrative, and that sounds abstract – I can't say much more about it, but that's where we believe things are heading. So the idea of building another Stranger, for us personally, is not even on our radar. It's a whole different chemistry coming. And that's what we're interested in. ■ ■ ■



■ Oddworld inhabitants created a mechanic called Gamespeak. As a prominent feature in several of its titles, the mechanic allowed players to use prescripted dialogue to converse with NPCs. The system was being further refined for Fangus Klot.

STORY IN SHORT

The game's original story revolved around a shepherd named Fangus who was enslaved after his land was seized by an invading government. After years of brutal gladiatorial combat, he escaped a much colder and angrier beast. The game detailed his pursuit to seek vengeance on his capturers and lead a revolt. Unfortunately, he had to work fast as a rabies virus slowly consumed his body.

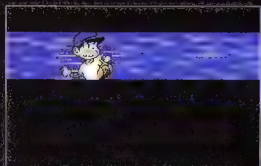


NES

BAD NEWS BASEBALL

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER TECMO > DEVELOPER TECMO > RELEASE 1990

Hiding in the dugout from bigger and better NES baseball sluggers like Baseball Stars and Baseball Simulator 1,000 is the light-hearted Bad News Baseball. It pitches a solid game, but Bad News Baseball's best feature is its comic book-like snippets of action that sizzle across the screen when exciting plays occur. Home runs scream into outer space, runners dive into bases, teammates high-five each other – and when the dramatic action unfolds as an outfielder guns a runner out at home plate, it's like Ninja Gaiden on a baseball diamond. The vibrant cutscenes are reminiscent of the ones gamers would see in Tecmo's football title, Tecmo Super Bowl, which released the following year. For all of its strengths, Bad News Baseball doesn't have much depth. It features 12 playable teams, limited season play, and no stat tracking. However, there is still a ton of fun to be had with its in-your-face style and simple gameplay.

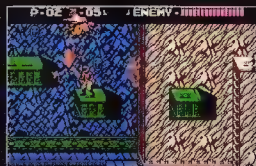


NES

NINJA GAIDEN

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER TECMO > DEVELOPER TECMO > RELEASE 1989

While Ninja Gaiden's current-gen incarnation reminds gamers what it means to be hardcore, the original NES title helped coin the term. Though the game's health bar is generous, getting hit usually paralyzes Ryu and knocks him back just far enough for another enemy to spawn and attack, making this a game where the enemies air-juggle you for a change. Thankfully, infinite continues guarantee that decent timing and enough practice will have you jumping and slicing your way through levels with duly satisfying speed and grace. The cinematic cut scenes between acts provide enough humor and nostalgia to keep you retrying stages until you've mastered them. However, your initial attempts will leave you suffering the incalculable shame only an 8-bit platformer can provide, as you are pushed off countless cliffs by hawks, pumpkin-headed sword throwers, and acrobatic frogmen straight out of design hell. With three final boss battles before the credits roll, Ninja Gaiden remains a frustrating staple of video game history that is ultimately still rewarding – if you can manage to beat it.



NES

PAPERBOY

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MINDSCAPE > DEVELOPER MINDSCAPE/TENGEN > RELEASE 1988

Paperboy is the ultimate paradox: It's one of the most frustrating games of its day, yet everyone seems to remember it fondly. Paperboy sports a ridiculously high difficulty level, and not just because of the questionable hit detection – players are constantly plagued with a dwindling number of lives, papers, and subscribers to deal with, all while dodging the most nonsensical bunch of morons ever crammed into one neighborhood. Maybe that's why it is so fun being a complete jerk; breaking windows, knocking over gravestones, and hitting anyone who gets in your way with a fresh copy of The Daily Sun is deeply satisfying – and nets you senous bonus points. But the brutal difficulty level dilutes the fun, and ultimately we're left with a series of haunting questions: Why do homeowners paint their houses red when they cancel a subscription? Why is that guy break dancing on the sidewalk? And why is that old lady chasing you with a knife? After returning to this paperboy's route, we're okay with not knowing.





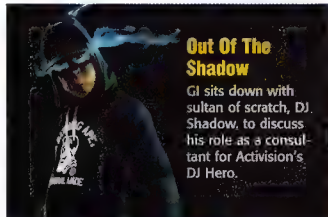
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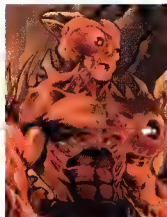
MODERN WARFARE 2

Gather more intel on Infinity Ward's latest military triumph by sending your questions to modernwarfare2@gameinformer.com and reading our responses in Unlimited.



Out Of The Shadow

GI sits down with sultan of scratch, DJ Shadow, to discuss his role as a consultant for Activision's DJ Hero.



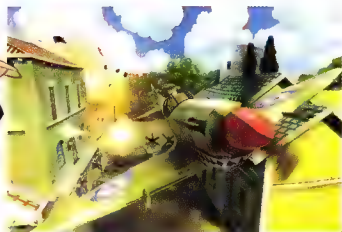
Graphically Novel

Discover more about the world of video game/ comic book crossovers in our interviews with World of Warcraft comic book writers Walter and Louise Simonson and WildStorm Productions vice president and general manager Hank Kanalz.



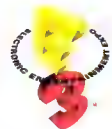
The King Of Fighters XII

Learn more about the online multiplayer and exclusive console characters in our interview with Shane Bettenhausen, Ignition Entertainment's director of new business development.



Arcade Gallery

Impulse spills over into Unlimited with more art and screenshots from the hottest games coming to Xbox Live Arcade, PlayStation Network, PC, and WiiWare in the near future.



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Follow our GI staffers as they relay news about all the new games being announced at E3.

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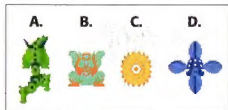
GAMEOVER

For A Future Without Fear... Yeah, It's Worth It

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

After the awesomeness of the original BioShock, we can't wait for BioShock 2. In fact, we were so giddy for a sequel that we decided to pitch developer 2K Marin our ideas for the next installment. Sadly, none of these brilliant concepts made the cut (yeah, seriously!), but 2K Marin probably benefited from not listening to us. Now, we can freely share our rejected concepts with you. The better you perform on the quiz, the cooler our BioShock 2 ideas become.

1 Which of these bosses in The Legend of Zelda for NES requires the use of the recorder (flute) to defeat?



2 In Resident Evil 5, you can earn a bronze trophy or 15 gamer points by completing "Traitor In Disguise," which has you murdering your partner.
A. True
B. False



3 Think you know your guitar games? This opening note on Rock Band and Guitar Hero belongs to what song on Expert mode? You'd KILL for a hint, wouldn't you?
A. "Mississippi Queen"
B. "Paranoid"
C. "Cherub Rock"
D. "When You Were Young"

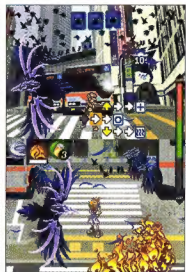


4 What forgettable 2004 PS2 title set in the 19th century allows you to control a party of four monster hunters with different fighting abilities?
A. 7 Sins
B. GoDai: Elemental Force
C. McFarlane's Evil Prophecy
D. Final Armada



5 What muddy N64 racer featured Season Mode, Uphill Climb, Soccer, and Track Editor?
A. Monster Truck Madness 64
B. Excitebike 64
C. Roadsters
D. Beetle Adventure Racing

6 Judging from the looks of this screenshot, this must be a DS game called...
A. Dragon Dance
B. The World Ends With You
C. Ener-G Dance Squad
D. Blue Dragon Plus



7 What happy-go-lucky PSP title has you take control of "the planet" to guide certain musically-inclined inhabitants to defeat the Moja Troop and restore peace to the planet?
A. LocoRoco
B. PaRappa the Rapper
C. Traxxpad
D. Gitaroo Man Lives!

8 The NFL 2K series on Dreamcast is adored by those who played it. Which famous wide receiver graced each cover on DC?
A. Randy Moss
B. Jerry Rice
C. Isaac Bruce
D. Terrell Owens

9 Excluding Metroid Prime Pinball, Metroid has four titles in its mega-hit Prime series. Which Metroid Prime is this screenshot taken from?



A. Metroid Prime
B. Metroid Prime Hunters
C. Metroid Prime 2: Echoes
D. Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

10 What is the key to happiness?
A. Playing more Xbox 360.
B. Playing more PS3.
C. Playing more Wii.
D. Cleaning your room.

BREAKDOWN

2.5 billion achievements have been unlocked by Xbox users, amounting to 52 billion gamer points, according to Microsoft.

300,000 DSi units sold in the U.S. and Europe each in the first two days the handheld went on sale.

85 million units of Final Fantasy have been sold over the lifetime of the franchise, according to Square Enix.

23.7 percent of gamers used their PS2 the most in January, followed by Wii (20.7%), Xbox 360 (18.2) and PS3 (9.0), according to media-usage tracking firm Nielsen.

Like, a million is the number of times Bryan got knocked out by Piston Hondo (version two) while reviewing Punch-Out!! on Wii.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

0 **BIOSHOCK 2: SIM RAPTURE** - Build and maintain your own Rapture City. Keep splicers happy to earn more Adam and expand your underwater metropolis. Unlike Sim City, you have to build around Big Daddies and hordes of Little Sisters instead of weak tornadoes and overrated earthquakes.

1-3 **BIOSHOCK 2: BIG GRANNY** - Jack's grandmother investigates Rapture and turns into Big Granny. With help from Little Sisters, Granny bakes apple pies and throws them at you. You can hack ovens to bake blueberry pies or cook lasagna and throw them back at Granny, dealing insane amounts of damage.

4-6 **BIOSHOCK 2: BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS** - Swap those guns and plasmids for a mop and paintbrush as you come back to Rapture to clean it up. Scrub blood-stained walls, redecorate 1960's wallpaper and change the lives of splicers in this first-person simulation sure to please all.

7-9 **BIOSHOCK 2: START YOUR ADAMS** - Fueling sea creatures with Adam, slow and boring fish become super-powered racers. Ride atop giant, mutated whales, sharks, sea horses and more as you whiz in and around Rapture City buildings to become champion of Fontaine Races. You can race online against another player.



10 **BIOSHOCK 2: THE SHOCK OF ALL BIOS** - Set 32 years after the events of BioShock, Jack gets really bored one day and decides to read some quality books. He remembered a robust library existed in Rapture, so he puts some flippers on and swims back to the underwater city. Your mission is to find the library and read every biography in it. You'll be shocked by what you read, no doubt. Think The Neverending Story. Now think of it as even better than that.

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