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PlayStation 2



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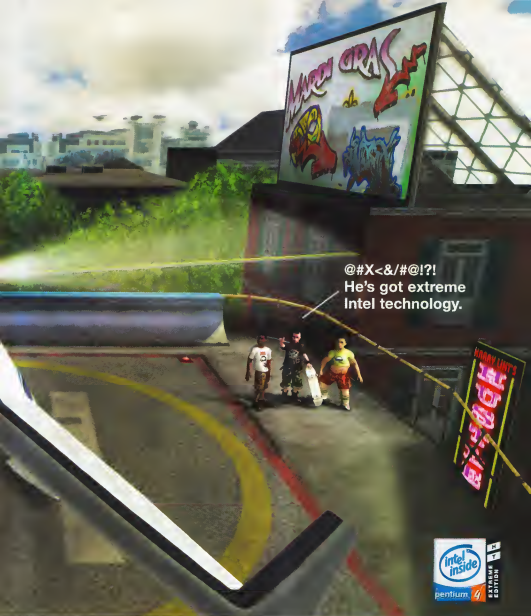
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FEATURES

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Tekken 5 may be about all the poor arcades have going for them, but what will this hefty of fighting bring to the PS2? Here's an exclusive hands-on preview look at what could be the best fighting game ever.



48 Secret Weapons of the PS2
Here are the killer games that will ensure that the PlayStation 2 remains a console-gaming powerhouse. Yes...Tekken 5 is one, but can you guess the rest?

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Everyone celebrates the holidays differently, but you'll all agree that these gifts for gamers are as good a reason for giving as any.

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Cover art courtesy of Namco

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Halo's House of Halo (California), and the No Limits Crew (Pennsylvania) at Xbox Headquarters.



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A few surprises turned up in Tokyo this year, but let's face it, the Nintendo DS and Sony PSP stole the show.

26 Nintendo DS Launches!

You aren't saying double...or maybe you are! The Nintendo DS is real, and for \$149, it's really cool.

26 The PS2 Spawns the PS two

Check out the newer, smaller, sleeker version of the PlayStation 2. There's no hard drive, but this baby is hot.

What do you think about the new Loading... section? Love it? Hate it? Let us know. E-mail us at letters@gamepro.com.

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Game Boy Advance

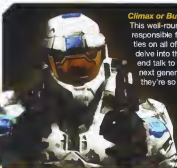
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Climax or Bust

This well-rounded developer has been responsible for some of the biggest titles on all of the major platforms. We delve into the history of the company and talk to its key players about the next generation of gaming and why they're so excited about it.

Halo 2 Reviewed

November 9 is do or die for the most hyped game of the year. Get the verdict before you buy, and find out if the Master Chief is a stud or a dud.



Nintendo DS In Hand!

We get our hands on the DS as well as some of the games. Is it worth owning? Should you stick with a Game Boy Advance? We tell it like it is in this online feature.

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HALO

Earth Will Never Be The Same

The Little Big Machines

So 2005 is shaping up to be the year of the little guys. "Is that a Game Boy in your pocket... or a DS or a PSP or a PS two?" may become the new pickup line of the 2000s.

Even though the countdown has begun for full-sized next-generation game boxes—more precisely, the Xbox 2/Xenon rumored launch for 2005—the PS3 and the Nintendo Revolution remain 2005 prospects. That's more than enough time for next-generation handheld gaming to establish itself as the next great thing, particularly if the new Sony and Nintendo portables have linkability with their bigger brethren, which almost everyone believes that they will.

The petite PS two looks so cool that you just want own it. Sony might be saying sayonera to the HDD experiment (of course, it will take more than that to shake you disheartened Final Fantasy XI fans), but it's reaffirming its dominance as the company with style.

And speaking of style, the PSP is looking like a formidable portable digital entertainment device by pecking in everything under the sun with MP3 files (joining Sony's proprietary ATRAC3 data format for downloadable music). You might even get movies for the UMD. Sick.

The Nintendo DS may be more revolutionary than anyone can imagine. With Pictochat in firmware, it promises to open up entirely new ways for people to communicate and interact via WiFi, especially for its targeted audience of teens and kids.

Oh yeah, and they'll play games, too. All the more reason for GamePro everywhere to plan to "get small" in 2005.

The GamePro,
Oakland, CA
letters@gamepro.com



For being forward thinking and a true sportsman, Raul will receive a Logitech Cordless Action Controller.

A Video-Game Olympiad

The Olympics got me thinking about the idea of video games as a sport. To many people, video games are still meaningless ways to keep young children entertained. Why not give more credit to what is a multibillion-dollar industry? After all, I've seen poker, spelling, fishing, and chess on ESPN! A true sport should require tremendous physical fitness, but then there are some mainstream sports, such as golf and baseball, where one can be morbidly obese and still be very successful. Defenders of those sports will claim that fitness doesn't matter because they are more about skills. If that is the case, then what about the hand-eye coordination and fast-out skill required to play video games? In my mind, the aforementioned activities shouldn't be considered sports, but because they are, why not video games? Do I get the gold medal for letter writing or what?

► Raul Garcia—Via Internet

Your idea has more than a sporting chance. The World Cyber Games recently took place in San Francisco, CA; and as you are probably aware, there are any number of video-game tournaments occurring throughout the land. To compete in these events certainly requires dedication, preparation, mental discipline, stamina, competitive fire, and as you put it, fast-out skill. Video games in the Olympics? It could happen. Your letter scored "10s" from everyone but the French judge.

Branded Loyalty

I have always wanted a gaming tattoo. After months of thought, I went with a Halo tattoo. I was never a first-person-shooter fan, and I always avoided them. Then along came this game, and it changed my thoughts about the whole genre. Halo had the greatest impact on me as a gamer; end that experience stretches almost 20 years. I am branded for life. It's all about loyalty.

► Daniel Courtney—Via Internet

Not bad, "but" you should see where Four-Eyed Dragon fronts his Halo tattoo!



Stand Up and Be Counted

I've uncovered a grand conspiracy. It's bigger than JFK, Roswell, or OJ. It will potentially reach all the way to the presidency of the United States. November 2 is general-election day in the good old U.S. of A, and it's also the release day for Metroid Prime 2, Metal Gear Solid 3, Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal, and possibly Half-Life 2. There is absolutely no way I'm gonna make it to the polling place with all of this gaming goodness, and I teach high-school government! It must be an attempt to silence the vote of gamers. Well, either way, get out and let your voice be heard. (Man, I hope those lines aren't too long).

► Ben Cantrell—Ypsilanti, MI

Well, for a minute there, you had us worried about the future of the high school-education system, but teachers are the country's unsung heroes, and because you say you're one, you get the benefit of this doubt. We hope the long lines you refer to are at the polling booths, and that the voices to be heard are those of concerned young citizens (and GamePro) everywhere.

Dragon Ball Z'd

I'm a big fan of GamePro, and I really love the previews and reviews you all have. There are hardly any mistakes ever in any of your issues, but clearly you all made one in your preview of Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3 (see October 2004 issue). On page 34, under "The New Characters," you clearly state: "Gogeta: Vegeta and Goku fused together—appears toward the end of Dragon Ball Z." This is untrue. The only fusion toward the end of Dragon Ball Z between Vegeta and Goku is to form Vegito using the "potara" earrings. Gogeta's only appearance in a Dragon Ball Z movie was in the movie with Janemba, and all the movies take place in a different time than the regular episodes. I hope not to see any of these mistakes in any future issues.

► Silent Bob—Woodbridge, Virginia

Your frightening display of Dragon Ball Z knowledge inspires us to tackle even more complex DBZ coverage in the future...or not.





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PlayStation.2



Michel- or Michaelangelo?

During my lifetime with video games, there have been games that have ignited angry politics and worried parents. They have caused people to rant about how violent video games have become and that they shouldn't be in our homes or in our arcades.

Now you guys know which games I'm talking about: the Mortal Kombat series, Counter-Strike, the Grand Theft Auto series, and most recently Manhunt, which I'm guessing took the cake this year. Some people say that they shouldn't be sold; but I think it is time to give respect to game developers for the hard work and creative inspiration they put into their games just like you would give respect to Mel Gibson for his movie *The Passion of The Christ* and Michelangelo's work on the David, which I might add were very controversial forms of art in their respective times.

Also, it is up to parents to regulate what their children buy. If your child is too young to buy a certain game, why do you give them the money to buy it? For most gamers out there, including myself, games are just a way to past time with friends, and of course, have fun! So, these people should stop and think before they make their posters and protest in the streets.

► Mercos Nieto—Via Internet

It's genuinely difficult for parents who don't play games to keep up with all the different types of video-game content; but, yes, you'd think that when someone sees that a game is M-rated, they wouldn't buy it for their children and then complain about the content afterward. No doubt, society is evolving to a point where the general public will become more sophisticated in its understanding of games.

Let's not kid ourselves: there's bad, stupid, tasteless stuff in some games. But it's also very true that video games are fast becoming a new form of creative expression, and as you point out, the case can be made that this interactive digital medium is also steadily approaching "art form" status. It's not hard to imagine that the work of great game developers like Shigeru Miyamoto, Peter Molyneux, or Yu Suzuki could one day be revered much like that of great filmmakers. However, just like with film and other art forms, it will always be important to distinguish between narrative media that aspire to be works of art, those that seek to be profit-generating popular entertainment, and those that are just plain stink-o.

Of course, you'd have to believe that great out-of-the-box thinker Michelangelo would see the humor in the idea that his David would be compared to Mortal Kombat.

For more letters,
go to GamePro.com!

Got a strange urge to communicate with the *GamePro* editors? E-mail them at editor's_name@gamepro.com!

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READER REVIEW

Tales of Symphonia

Think back to all the RPGs you have ever played... way back to the very first *Final Fantasy* for Nintendo. Think of the great graphics from *Super Mario RPG*. Think of a wonderful story from *Golden Sun*. Now, take the exciting turn-based



fighting from all of them and throw it completely away. *Tales of Symphonia* combines some of the best things from the games above with something completely different. A compelling story keeps you playing, and the exciting real-time battle system makes you addicted. It's not just rapid button tapping as casting spells is as easy as flicking the joystick and pressing B. Fighting normal monsters is great fun, but the boss battles are the most thrilling parts of the game. They pit four of your characters against some of the most diabolical, evil characters ever put onto the small screen. The story can be confusing at times, and repetitive conversations get slightly annoying, but as the plot deepens, you will find the most amazing twists and turns that you would never expect. All of the entertaining RPG clichés you ever knew, including a Chosen One sent to save the world, a close companion who betrays you, and even traveling on boats and flying machines, are present in this adventure, and the game poses fun at other overused clichés in the mix. What else can be said about this great two-disc adventure for the GameCubz? Oh yeah, how about this: Buy it! After completing it once, I am going back to complete the few side-quests I skipped before...—TinyTim53

FOR RECORD
5.0

Agree? Disagree? Or just think you can do better? Write your own user review at GamePro.com, and maybe you'll see your opinions here next.

Art Attack!



E. Luevanos—San Diego, CA

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October 2004

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PlayStation 2



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Tackling PC-related issues can be a gargantuan affair—oftentimes, there isn't a fix-all solution. And unfortunately, The Watch Dog isn't the all-seeing, all-knowing savior to all of gaming-life's woes. Nevertheless, this month, we check out Windows XP problems, giving a glimmer of hope to your licks and cries of bugging pain.

Secrets of Corruption

I recently got the "NET_Sendpacket ERROR: WSAEINTR" message while playing Counter-Strike just before buying issue 189 of your magazine. After a quick surf on the web, I found many of the answers your magazine offered except one: an old winsock32.dll. Both my mste and I have Windows XP Pro and Service Pack updates, but my winsock32.dll was written in 1980—his was 2000. The big problem now is how to update Winsock, considering Windows uses it, but I just can't find it going through MS-DOS. Not sure if this helps others, but I thought I'd have a shot.

► Dan McDonald—Via Internet

We did briefly go over damaged Winsock files but suggested to contact Microsoft's technical support—mostly because the solutions vary for each operating system. If you have Windows XP Pro, you can fix it using the System File Checker. Go to the Run option in the Start Menu and type sfc /scannow (insert a space only between the sfc and /). Windows will scan your system files for any files that are corrupted and replace them. You may need your Windows XP CD to replace the files it requires, so be sure to have that on hand. It's one of those spilly little Windows secrets that Microsoft keeps mum about.

The Drive That Won't Drive

I purchased Need for Speed Underground for the PC. After installing it, whenever I try to play, I get an error message to insert the correct CD. I called EA, who said it was my system, but the demo had worked fine. I saw on the Internet that Windows XP Pro causes this problem, and I tried the compatibility mode with no success. So now I go to you, the masters—that's right, GamePro.

► Anonymous—Via Internet

We'd like to take this moment to say that flouting letters never get preferential treatment (if it seems like we only put GamePro-positive letters in Buyers Beware). But they sure are a good boost to the ego and more pleasant to read than "you suck, GamePro, now research my stuff."

Anyway, EA actually does offer a solution for your exact problem. Its website states: There have been some known issues with CD-ROMs reading Safedisk (games that are copy protected) correctly for Windows XP. You can try the Safedisk Patch, and it should resolve your issue: <http://www.macrovision.com/products/safedisk/downloads.shtml>

Try setting the CD's drive letter to the first letter after the last hard drive.

1. Right-click on the My Computer icon and select Manage.
2. Click Disk Management in the left pane.
3. Right-click on the CD-ROM and select Change Drive Letter and Paths....
4. Highlight the drive letter in the list, click Remove, and then click Yes to confirm.
5. Right-click on the CD-ROM and again select Change Drive Letter and Paths....
6. Click Add, select the lowest possible letter, and then click OK.

With Windows XP, you'll also want to make sure that compatibility mode is not enabled for the setup program. To do this, follow these steps:

1. Put the game CD in the CD-ROM drive. Exit the autorun menu screen.
2. Double-click on the My Computer icon on your desktop.
3. Right-click on the CD-ROM drive icon. Select explore from the menu that appears.

4. Explore the CD and find the file SETUP.EXE.
5. Once found, right-click your mouse on the SETUP.EXE icon and then select properties from the menu that appears.
6. In the properties screen, select the compatibility tab at the top.
7. Uncheck the box for "run this program in compatibility mode."
8. Apply the settings, then hit the OK button.
9. Double-click on SETUP.EXE to start the install program

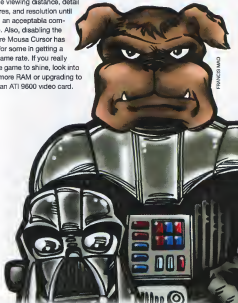
Force Lag

I recently got a cable modem connection to the Internet, and when I'm playing Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided, my game lags. Why is that? Isn't cable modem the fastest you can get? I have a GeForce 4 MX 440-SE graphics card for the computer if that has anything to do with the problem.

► Anonymous—Via Internet

Actually, a T3 connection is the fastest (at least so far in the mass market), but the connection is most likely not the issue—it's your rig.

Star Wars Galaxies can make even the best of computers chug and slow down, especially when you're in a major city like Theed and there are a lot of other players around. Go into the settings for the game and lower the viewing distance, detail of textures, and resolution until you find an acceptable compromise. Also, disabling the Hardware Mouse Cursor has helped for some in getting a better frame rate. If you really want the game to shine, look into buying more RAM or upgrading to at least an ATI 9600 video card.



FRANCIS MARO

Submissions

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Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence

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Up to 10 companions will follow
you into the Light Side and be affected
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Travel between 7 planets and
fight through 20 distinct levels on your
mission to save the Jedi Order.

Wield over 60 new forms and Force
powers like Force Sight, which allows
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OBSIDIAN



STAR WARS KNIGHTS

THE OLD REPUBLIC

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ALL WILL MAKE THE JOURNEY.
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Travel between 7 planets and fight through 70 distinct levels on your mission to destroy the Jedi Order.



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THIS TIME, YOUR CHOICES AFFECT EVERYONE AROUND YOU.

THE SEQUEL TO THE 2003 GAME OF THE YEAR.

PSP Star of Tokyo Game Show

The high-spec handheld gets a warm reception, but how long will the console last—literally?

Nintendo chose not to show the Nintendo DS at the Tokyo Game Show or have a Spaceworld (Nintendo's own game show), and as a result, much of the attention focused on Sony's upcoming PSP handheld. Sporting a dazzling 4.3-inch screen that can display 16.8 million colors, technophile-cool aesthetics, and great controls, the handheld is still plagued by two critical questions: battery life and price point. Unreassuringly, a Sony representative at the show said it could support approximately two hours of continuous gameplay—paling in comparison to the DS, which touts 6 to 10 hours of play. With a holiday release planned in Japan (and a U.S. one to follow in 2005), more details will be unveiled soon. Meanwhile, here are some highlights from hands-on time with a few of the games:



Metal Gear Acid

Metal Gear Acid is a card-battle game that plays like a turn-based Metal Solid. Players use cards to execute actions like shooting, hiding in boxes, laying Claymores, and calling for air support. Each card uses action points, and expending all points switches to the enemy's turn. The game is beautiful for a handheld, but the graphics fall short of the PS2 series'.



Lumines

Developed by Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the man behind Space Channel 5 and Rez, Lumines is a Tetris-esque puzzle game that has players drop down two-by-two orange and gray boxes to make stacks of squares and rectangles of the same color. A scan line that goes across the screen in a set music interval clears the blocks, giving bonuses for combos.



Need for Speed Underground Rivals

With graphics almost identical to those in the PlayStation 2 version and the same type of nitrous-fueled gameplay, the single-track demo of Need for Speed Underground Rivals wowed show goers.



Vampire Chronicle: The Chaos Tower

High-resolution 2D visuals and smooth animations made Capcom's fighting game shine at the show. Featuring gameplay depth typical to that in all of the company's franchises, Vampire Chronicle's only downside was its directional keypad being fust with the casing, making moves harder to execute.

TGS: Ico Creators Introduce Wanda and the Colossus

Following the critical acclaim of Ico, the makers of the adventure game immediately set out to create a new title that would capture the same awe-inspiring visual style but in a new setting—thus conceiving Wanda and the Colossus. Not a sequel of Ico, the latest creation has a more conscious focus toward gameplay compared to the original, which centered on the overall storytelling experience. The story puts players in the role of Wanda, who must defeat statues of mythically large proportions to bring back the soul of a girl. Riding on his horse, Wanda must explore the land to find the giants, which vary from metallic winged serpents to club-wielding hairy beasts.

The game wasn't actually shown at the Tokyo Game Show—only a trailer offering a tease of what is to come—so no gameplay details are known at this time. Still, what's been revealed so far looks very promising, so keep an eye out for the game in 2005.



TGS: Touch Girls in Quirky Nintendo DS Game

Although no DS games were playable at the Tokyo Game Show (Nintendo is planning its own little marketing blitz in the coming months), details of a bizarre game from Sega's Sonic Team called Kimi No Tame Nara Shinaru (which translates to I Could Die for You), unofficially dubbed Project Rub, were revealed. The game's premise suggests either a disturbingly perverted stalking simulation (something Japanese excel at with PC adult-romance games) or a sweet and lighthearted game of romance.

As the story goes, you are an average Joe trying to woo attractive women who are way out of your league. To win them over, you need to interact with them by touching, rubbing, shooting, picking up objects, and fanning.

Nintendo DS Marketing Manager Takeshi Shimizu demoed the game at the Tokyo Game Show, touching one of the "models" on her chest, elbow, and upper thigh. "You can get different reactions when you touch different places, and if you are lucky, you can even get a date," he said. It sounds bad, but the chances of Nintendo allowing

stalker games are close to none, and it's doubtful that Sega switched gears into making mature games, so there's bound to be negative consequences for touching the wrong places.

Sporting distinct Art Deco-style visuals and groovy 1970s tracks, Project Rub is appealing in the tactile, visual, and aural senses. Developers promise that it will create a "rhapsody" between the player and love when it goes on sale December 2 in Japan.



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PlayStation 2



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ProNews

Nintendo issues DS release date, price point; Sony unveils new PlayStation 2.

The Nintendo DS

Nintendo has announced a release date for its upcoming handheld gaming system, the Nintendo DS. The dual-screen handheld unit will hit retail on November 21 with a \$149.99 price point. No launch titles were announced, although Nintendo claims to have 20 titles in development with "more than 100 companies" offering third-party support. The console marks an historic first for Nintendo as it is the company's first game system to be released in America before its rollout in Japan. The U.S. DS will also have a Game Card bundled with the unit that features a playable demo of the upcoming Metroid Prime Hunters: First Hunt. The demo will support single-player and wireless multiplayer modes.

The Nintendo DS will include free embedded software called PictoChat, which enables DS users to write messages with an onscreen keyboard or the stylus and then send them to other DS owners. A DS handheld in sleep mode will be alerted if it senses another DS in transmitting range, allowing for on-the-fly chatting. The unit will be backed by the biggest launch budget for any of Nintendo's platforms at \$40 million with shipment projections upped from 3.5 million to 4 million units. The DS will have a battery life of 6-10 hours and will be offered only in the silver/black color—although more color variations will probably be introduced in the future.



Sony Unveils New PS two

Sony has unveiled the new PS two, revealing a svelte PlayStation 2 console that's 75 percent smaller than the original hardware. Designated SCPH-70000CB, the console is only 2.8-cm thick—it's thinner than the PS2 controller and features a Network Adaptor and IR receiver for the DVD remote. With its drastically diminished size, the PS two won't support a hard drive, but with few titles making use of the peripheral, it won't likely deter buyers this holiday season. As with the current PS2, the PS two will retail for \$149 and will launch on November 1 in the U.S. and Europe. The Japanese release follows two days later on November 3. Unlike the PS one, no accompanying LCD/speaker peripheral has been announced.

Art of the Game

Technological terror

Armed with a heat gun, acrylics, spare PC parts, and insane skills, mad scientist PloUX crafted this technological Frankenstein monster, known as the Black Mesa HL case, to the astonishment of the web-based PC-modding community. A lot of time, some money, and a little bit of patience went into the construction of the computer, which is easily one of the most mind-bending displays of an emerging 21st-Century art form—case modding. Case modding consists of trucking out a CPU tower to enhance performance and supply a healthy dose of eye candy.

Outfitted with switches, gauges, control panels, and fully functional 120-mm fans encased in rusted grills, PloUX's tower resembles something you might see if you were running around the mutant-infested Black Mesa Research Facility in Half-Life. While most modifications are purely cosmetic, the unit's water-cooling system, consisting of glowing green water that runs from nitrous-bottle reservoirs into silicon tubes throughout the CPU, serves a functional role as well. "The water-cooling system is nice for getting better performance from the CPU, but I also wanted the green UV dye to match the toxic liquid from Half-Life," explains PloUX.

PloUX layered multiple coats of paint to create the appearance of rusted steel, grainy textures, and acid burns, and even



had a friend bring over a 9mm Glock to shoot holes in the case panels. "We had a lot of fun shooting the panel," says PloUX, "but I think the neighbors weren't really enthusiastic about it."

PloUX documented the construction of the Black Mesa HL case on a project log, which can be found at <http://forums.bit-tech.net/showthread.php?t=52568&page=1&pp=20>. Read the full interview with PloUX online at GamePro.com.



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Written by Barry Green. Produced by Bob West, Founder of Photography: Joey Corbi. Music by Shears for Fruit.

THIS FILM IS NOT YET RATED

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10 YEARS AGO

Retro Corner

10 Years Ago (December 1994)...

...in GamePro

Donkey Kong Country (Super NES) was the prized main image on our December 1994 cover. The December issue is traditionally the biggest one of the year, and this one had 294 pages. DKC's ProReview netted the game all 5.0s except for Sound, which earned a 4.5.

• **NHL '95** (Genesis) was the only game in the

issue to get a perfect score of all 5.0s. Other games came close to a perfect score: **Super Punch-Out** (Super NES), **Michael Jordan in Chaos in the Windy City** (Super NES), and **Alien vs. Predator** (Jaguar).



...in Gaming

The PlayStation Launches in Japan

One month after Sega released its Saturn system in Japan, Sony released its first home console, the PlayStation, on December 3, 1994. The system retailed for ¥39,800 (approximately \$390 U.S.), and some of the titles that released at or shortly after launch included Ridge Racer, Super Pac-Man Deluxe Pack, Crime Crackers, and Battle Arena Toshinden. In the first 30 days after launch, 300,000 PlayStation units were sold in Japan. The PlayStation would be released in the U.S. on September 9, 1995...and that, too, is another story.



The PlayStation was released, and the 32-bit console battle was joined.

The Last NES Game Is Released



The end, witness the last gasp of the mighty NES!

Nintendo released Wario's Woods for its 8-bit NES; it was the last game for Nintendo's dutiful system, which was officially "retired" the following month. The system was originally released in the U.S. in February of 1988, and a redesigned version appeared in 1993. The estimated worldwide sales of the NES are 60 million.

The Sega Channel Launches

Sega partnered with TCI and Time Warner for the Sega Channel, a type of cable service where subscribers could select and play games for a fee. With an adapter that fit into the cartridge slot on the Genesis, gamers could access the 24-hour service and select from a library of 50 games. The service also had a unique hook of exclusive titles, such as Mega Man: The Wily Wars, that were available only through the Channel.

• Electronic Arts brought Shaq to life in the fighting game **Shaq Fu**, so why not put another top NBA player in, say, an action/adventure title? The resulting **Michael Jordan in Chaos in the Windy City** (Super NES) was a game rife with product plugs (power-ups included Gatorede and Wheaties), and the laughable narrative (Mike must rescue his teammates from the clutches of the evil Dr. Cranium) didn't help either. Air's warrior: A basketball, of course, that could become imbued with the power of fire, ice, and earthquakes.

• Sony Imagesoft had the ESPN sports license, but the games—**National Hockey Night**, **Sunday Night NFL**, **Speed World**, and others—received average scores at best.

• **Way of the Warrior** (3DC) was reviewed in the December issue. There's no real reason to care...except that the game was developed by Naughty Dog—a company that would later create **Crash Bandicoot** for Sony.

• **X-Men: Children of the Atom**, **Ridge Racer 2**, and **The Flintstone** (pinball) were hot at the arcades.

Plus, the service featured a hints section with cheats, codes, and suggestions on how to complete a game. The service terminated in 1998.

The Street Fighter Movie Opens

On December 23, 1994, the celluloid version of the popular videogame franchise **Street Fighter** opened in theaters nationwide. Jean-Claude Van Damme played Guile with Australian pop star Kylie Minogue as Cammy and Wes Studi as Sagat—among others. Raul Julia played M. Bison, which was his last film role. Steven de Souza (author of *Die Hard*) directed the film, which would go on to gross \$33 million in the U.S. So how good was the movie? "You're pretty smart. Let's see how smart you are when you're not breathing!"



Bringing Snake into your living room.



Game over, indeed. Sorry, this was the last film role for Raul Julia.

Time Warner Interactive Gets "Dream Team Status"

In a ramp-up for the Nintendo Ultra 64 (later renamed the Nintendo 64) release, Nintendo announced Time Warner Interactive as one of its "Dream Team" developers. TWI signed NHL great Wayne Gretzky to a three-year deal in which he was directly involved with the creation of an original hockey title. Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey was released to arcades in the spring of 1996; the N64 version hit later that fall.



Wayne Gretzky: one of the chosen few.

...in Sales

Here are the top-five selling games of December 1994:

1. **Donkey Kong Country** (Nintendo/SNES)
2. **Sonic & Knuckles** (Sega/Genesis)
3. **Madden NFL '95** (EA Sports/Genesis)
4. **Mortal Kombat II** (Acclaim/Genesis)
5. **NBA Live '95** (EA Sports/Genesis)

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Futureworld/Point-of-Sale



Donkey Kong Country



Sonic & Knuckles

"Check out this wicked team move from Crash & Cortex!"

HUMILISKATE

We give this game
10 out of 10
crutches!

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PlayStation 2



EVERYONE
E
ESRB RATING

Cartoon Violence



Resident Evil 4

Capcom finally releases E3 demo ROMs to the gaming press; here are our reactions to "quality time" with the game.

Don't look for zombies in Resident Evil 4—there aren't any. What you will find, however, are demented villagers armed with farm tools and hell-bent on your demise...at least that's what we saw in the demo. Playing as Leon Kennedy, you stumble across a creepy foggy village somewhere in Europe. Your mission: find the president's kidnapped daughter. The demo featured only three areas to explore, and early obstacles included bear traps and explosives. The action really kicked in in the last area where Leon was pursued from building to building and even banging the doors and windows didn't delay the enemy advance for long. The demo included a Handgun, Shotgun, and Combat Knife, along with Band, Flash, and Incendiary Grenades. There were a host of other items, too, including herbs, ammunition, pesetas, and strange rocks (Capcom wouldn't reveal what the last two items will be used for, but they play an "essential role" in the game). The new "action-button system" also moved the gameplay along at a quick pace as an on-screen prompt let the player know if there was an item to be collected or object pushed, thus bypassing the time needed to randomly search. Moving Leon via an over-the-shoulder view took some getting used to, but the menu and map interfaces were easy to navigate and familiar to any RE fan. In short, the demo was gorgeous and scary...and just the beginning.—Major Mike



GamePro Labs MonsterGecko PistolMouse

PC

Rating: 3.0

Don't be fooled, the PistolMouse isn't a light-gun. It's actually an optical mouse for your PC with a spiffy but Carpal Tunnel Syndrome-inducing form factor. The pistol's main trigger is a left-click, while the secondary fire sits awkwardly under the trigger guard to be pulled by your middle finger. At first, holding a pistol grip in your hand while playing your favorite FPS is wicked cool, but the novelty quickly fades as wrist strain

and shoulder pain set in. Though the cursor tracks smoothly and reliably, be ready to relearn the way you "look"

around and target enemies. While pulling the trigger feels more true-to-life than left-clicking on whatever you want to die, aiming becomes more counterintuitive and the secondary fire is downright unwieldy. Ultimately, the PistolMouse looks a lot cooler than it plays.—Major Mike

Price: \$69.95

Contact: monstergecko.com

Delay of Game

"The waiting is the hardest part."

- **100 Bullets** (PS2, Xbox), **The Red Star** (PS2, Xbox), and **W.O.R.M.S.: Special Edition** (PS2, Xbox, GameCube) have all been delayed until further notice. The games' publisher, Acclaim, recently filed for bankruptcy, thus leaving the future of the three titles in limbo. The street-racer **Juiced** (PS2, Xbox), however, is still on track for an October release.

- **Area 51** (PS2, Xbox): Midway's latest incarnation of its classic arcade shooter, *Area 51*, has been given a new release date of sometime in the first half of 2005. The extra development time allows the team to add new features to the game, including a new alien weapon and alien enemy.



The emergency Area 51 has been delayed until early 2005.

- **Doom 3** (Xbox): The eagerly awaited console version of the PC smash *Doom 3* probably won't be released until 2005. No exact release date has been set, and in keeping with id's mantra, the game will ship, "When it's done."
- **Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition** (PS2, Xbox): Previously classified as a "Holiday 2004" release, the third entry in Rockstar Games' street-racing series is slated for a later January 2005 release.
- **The NBA Inside Drive** (Xbox), **NFL Fever** (Xbox), and **NHL Rivals** (Xbox) franchise titles have been cancelled as Microsoft Game Studios recently axed its internal sports game development team. The *Links* (Xbox) and *Amped* (Xbox) franchise teams, though, were retained.
- **Shadow of Rome** (PS2): "Due to marketing conditions this holiday season," Capcom's sword-and-stealth action/adventure set in ancient Rome has been moved from a November 2004 to January 2005 release date.
- **Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Chaos Theory** (PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC): The latest installment in the popular stealth/action series has been delayed until March 2005. The game's publisher, Ubisoft, claims the extra time is needed so the game can deliver "over-the-top quality."

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GTA WATCH

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Welcome to Las Vegas—I mean Las Venturas, where gambling and fashion are king.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is undoubtedly on most gamers' minds these days, and Rockstar revealed more of the game at a recent press stop. One new feature, as demonstrated in the Los Santos area, was "gang



territory management." C.J. can expand his territory in Los Santos and other heavily populated areas by invading rival turf and eliminating all the gang members there. Bigger areas call for strength in numbers, and C.J. can recruit people to his cause with the game's "respect" system [respect is affected by action C.J. takes, clothes he wears, and other factors]. The more respect he has, the easier it is for him to draw people to his gang. One mission has C.J. crashing a funeral in order to assassinate top rival gang members who have gathered there. Once C.J. enters the cemetery with his team, he can issue each member specific orders (not unlike Full Spectrum Warrior and other squad-based first-person shooters), thus adding depth to the action.



The city of Las Venturas was also revealed, and it's basically a casino-based city loaded with gambling halls, such as Caligula's Palace, Prates in Men's Pants, and other Las Vegas parodies. C.J. can enter almost every casino, and each one features everything from slots to blackjack, and, yes, gambling is allowed. C.J. can also buy new clothes in Las Venturas and customize his duds from sunglasses to vests. During C.J.'s travels, some of the music could be heard, including Bobby Brown's "Don't Be Cruel" and "Been Caught Stealing" by Jane's Addiction. According to Rockstar, the number of songs in the final soundtrack will be equal to—if not more than—those in Vice City.—Major Mike



GamePro Labs

Nyko SpeakerCom Xbox

Rating: 4.0

Ever have friends over to play on Xbox Live and then feel like a jerk because you're busily talking into the headset and they have no idea what's going on? With some games, you can route Live audio through the TV speakers, but for the rest of them, there's SpeakerCom. SpeakerCom enables everyone in the room to hear the chatter over its built-in loudspeaker. SpeakerCom plugs into the communicator module (not included) and works like a walkie-talkie; you have to push one of the buttons on either side of the speaker to talk. This will annoy some

gamers, but the buttons are well placed and easy to reach. Another benefit to the talk button is that it cuts out all the ambient noise that is normally picked up and broadcast by a headset mic, making your transmission much clearer. SpeakerCom-to-SpeakerCom communication results in the best possible sound quality. In a crowded Rainbow Six 3 session, it was much easier to hear the other SpeakerCom user amidst the cacophony of surly gamers. Once you get used to pushing the talk button, you won't miss the headset digging into the side of your head.

Price: \$24.99. Contact: Nyko, 866/444-6966, nyko.com



Hidden Characters



Bubble: McNetfy and Grazian; Double: Mao; Croyone: Hu

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For more information, visit sotatoys.com



GP Labs

Nuby Tech Street Fighter Controllers

PS2

Rating: 4.0

What better way to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the epochal franchise that is Street Fighter than with these collectible controllers from Nuby? You can get one with your favorite character on it (as long as your favorite character is Chun Li, Ken, or Ryu) and throw that Dualshock gear to your little sister. Each controller features a three-image lenticular hologram in the center (rendered by the master artists at Udon Studios) and an arcade-style button layout designed to keep you at the top of your game. There's one minor problem with the position of the start button—it's easy to slip your finger off the Δ button and pause the game by accident—but it's worth the tradeoff for better access to L1 and R1. They also lack the comfortable weight and grip of the Dualshock, feeling more like an oversized SNES controller. Still, everything you need to dominate your opponents is at your fingertips, and the fleshy hologram will surely dazzle everyone in the room. If Street Fighter is a staple of your gaming diet, these controllers should be at the top of your peripheral wish list. And if you're really lucky, you'll find the limited-release Akuma controller that was only distributed to Game Rush and Blockbuster stores.

—Super8 Samurai

Price: \$24.99. Contact: Nuby Tech, 310/302-9118, nubutech.com



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Secret Weapons Of the PlayStation 2

Some say the console wars are over; others say it's fiercer than ever. The PlayStation 2 is the dominant console at the moment, and here are five exclusive titles for the system that we think make it so.

#1 tekken 5

The Iron Fifth: Keeping to the franchise's tradition, Namco offers a slew of extras for the console version of Tekken 5.

By Funky Zealot and The GamePro Editors

Whenever a new Tekken is announced for the arcades, it usually means a bigger, beefier console version is on the horizon—and fortunately, that's what's happening for Namco's fifth installment of the fighting-game franchise. Learning from the feedback it received from Tekken 4 and seemingly taking cues from Virtua Fighter 4, Namco is making tweaks to Tekken 5 that are more of an evolution than a redefining of the art.

family business

As in previous games, the story revolves around the hopelessly dysfunctional Mishima family. Starting where Tekken 4 left off, Kazuya and Heihachi are duking it out in the "honmaru" (where Jin defeated Heihachi and flew off with his devil wings) when a large number of Jacks drop into the area and attack them both. Being the altruistic son that he is, Kazuya runs and leaves his dad in the heat

CONTINUED ►



According to the developers, Raven's recovery resembles Wesley Snipes as Blade in a comical way. "We wanted to make a cool-looking black guy, and it just ended up looking like the actor," says Game Designer Kazuhiko Nakada.

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of battle to be blown up by a self-destructing Jack. Is the resilient loincloth-wearing old fogey dead? "It's as you saw [in the trailer]," enigmatically replies Game Designer Katsuhiro Harada—but with the end of the intro trailer showing a pony-tailed figure rising from the burning rubble, it's unlikely. And despite the absence of Heihachi, somebody's still pulling the strings at the Mishima Zaibatsu with the company hosting the fifth Tournament of Iron Fist.

going for the jugular

The fighting mechanics are very similar to those in previous Tekkens. "We aren't making big changes [for Tekken 5] but are improving the fighting tools and mechanics," says Masahiro Kimoto, game designer at Namco. Air juggles are now easier to initiate and string hits to, bringing back the feel from Tekken 3. Characters have been rebalanced, addressing some of the weaker characters that weren't as popular. "We've changed the body shape and size of the characters, and have adjusted their reach," adds Kimoto. Sure enough, Marduk is now less "balled" and more Vale Tudo—he's bigger and has a noticeably longer reach in kicks and punches. This stance in fighting also plays a more significant role. "Within the fighting system, we are setting the moves and posture with more detail, so you can avoid lower kicks with jumps or lower yourself to avoid a higher punch and get closer to your opponent," says Kimoto. And although the returning characters haven't changed much for Tekken 5, each has at least two new moves. "Also, there are character-specific elements in the game that we are changing—for example, with some characters, you can throw an opponent who is already in the air," he adds.

Wall hits and uneven surfaces were one of the big changes in Tekken 4, but they unfortunately felt unrefined and irked fans. "Before, there were different levels and bumps in the ground, causing attacks to hit and miss—it was very bothersome not only for those playing it but also for those making the game—so we've got rid of that and have brought it closer to Tekken Tag and Tekken 3," says Kimoto. Wall hits no longer enable brutal lynchings—one or two blows against the wall, and opponents quickly slump to the ground. In addition to the walled-off stages, infinite levels make a return as well, and as clichéd as grassy-field stages usually are, there's an impressive one that takes place at night with dandelionlike white flakes blowing off as fighters brush by.

tekken to new heights

Although the arcade version sports an engine that's completely redone and upped a notch from Tekken 4's, Namco is confident that there won't be compromises in bringing it to the PS2. "We have no intentions of reducing the number of polygons and are transferring the graphics as is. As with each installment, the graphic quality will be even higher this time around," says Yoshihiko Mizushima, visual designer at Namco. He's not kidding either—despite being only 40 percent complete, the build re-creates the visual splendor of the arcade version, set back only by minor teething issues of polygon clipping and sharpness. Animations are more specific to each character, and body motions are less contorted with moves flowing more naturally. And even with the added complexity, Tekken 5 will still run at 60 frames per second and support progressive scan.

CONTINUED ►



Tekken 5 will have both walled-in and infinite stages.

the lineup

"We're not reducing the number of characters," says Game Designer Katsuhiro Harada, who was mum about characters from previous games. Here's a list of the characters known so far in Tekken 5.

Asuka Kazama: New character; her moves are reminiscent of Jun's.

Bryan Fury: He's a loose-cannon replicant who joins the tournament to gain eternal life.

Christie Montez: She joins the tournament to rescue her Capoeira-master grandfather.

Craig Marduk: Beaten by King, the Vale Tudo-fighter vows for revenge.

Feng Wei: New character; Feng fights in a kung fu style that emphasizes power over finesse.

Hwoarang: Finishing his military service, Hwoarang is once again free to take on his rival, Jin.

Jack-6: Jack-6 is yet another version of the android manufactured by the G Corporation.

Jin Kazama: Sensing the devil's gene within getting stronger, Jin sets out in search of answers.

Julia Chang: She enters the tournament in an effort to save her homeland forest.

Kazuya Mishima: He's the son of Heihachi Mishima and possesses the devil gene.

King: Masked wrestler from Mexico

Kuma: Unconfirmed; but Namco devs let out a hearty laugh when mentioning the fighting bear.

Lee Chaolan: He's the adopted son of Heihachi who fights to gain control of the Mishima Zaibatsu.

Lei Wulong: He's a Hong Kong police officer who joins the tournament looking for a wanted suspect.

Ling Xiaoyu: Wants to win the tournament to go back in time and prevent the Mishima family bloodshed.

Marshal Law: Flat broke, he enters the tournament to earn money for his son, who stole Paul's bike and was badly injured in an accident.

Nina Williams: An Irish assassin who specializes in the Koppo style, a deadly derivative of Aikido.

Paul Phoenix: Whooped by Kuma, Paul joins the King of Iron Fist Tournament to prove himself.

Raven: New character; Raven is an American ninja whose background is unknown.

Steve Fox: He's a British boxer who was adopted at an early age and seeks answers of his past.

Yoshimitsu: Joins the tournament to fight Bryan Fury and avenge members of his rogue group.



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Sony and Microsoft: You can't touch this.



Capcom's Resident Evil 4 can only be found here.

One thing's for sure: When it comes to first-party developed games, Nintendo is the hands-down winner as very few titles can match a *Metroid*, *Zelda*, or *Mario*. Plus, The Big N scored a sweet victory when Capcom decided the upcoming *Resident Evil 4* was to be released exclusively for the 'Cube: from what's been seen of the game so far, it's almost reason alone to buy the perpetually price-dropping console system.

Other Exclusive GameCUBE Titles:

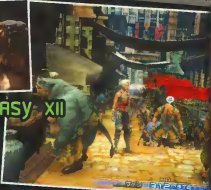
- Advance Wars: Under Fire
- Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat
- Gest
- Killer 7
- The Legend of Zelda (working title)
- Metroid Prime 2: Echoes
- Resident Evil 4
- Star Fox



#2 FINAL FANTASY XII

by SQUARE ENIX

You can debate the merits of *Knights of the Old Republic* all you want, but the core *Final Fantasy* games (i.e. the "numbered" games like *Final Fantasy* #6 or *Final Fantasy X-2*) are still the backbone of PlayStation role-playing. Whether you're playing *The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age* or *Suikoden IV*, there's always some huge chunk of gameplay that's "kinds like that of *Final Fantasy X*," some plot twist that's "sorts like that part in *Final Fantasy III*," or some character development that's "just like what happened to that girl in *Final Fantasy VII*." Heck, even *Final Fantasy XII*'s battle system is "kinds like the battle system in *Final Fantasy XI*." While the series used to be one of Nintendo's secret weapons, The Big N's decision to stick with a cartridge-based format for the N64 (among other things) led then-Enixless Square to exclusively shack up with Sony to house its multidisc magnum opus *Final Fantasy XII*...and the rest is history. While games like *Crystal Chronicles* and *Tactics Advance* have recently reappeared on the GameCUBE and GBA, the "real" *Final Fantasy* games are still PlayStation-exclusives—and even though not everyone has taken a shine to the series' recent flights of metrosexual, 4-poop fancy, that hasn't stopped them from playing.



#3 GOD OF WAR

by sony

Sony's first-party titles have been hit-and-miss (the merits of *The Getaway* are infinitely debatable and the *Twisted Metal* franchise does have its moments), but *God of War* is a real eye-opener. Playing as an ex-Spartan soldier, Kratos, your mission is to find Pandora's Box, which is the only thing that can destroy



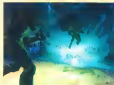
the god-gone-mad Ares. This action/adventure title is a hodgepodge of action facets—platform hopping, reflex testing, hacking-n-slashing, and puzzle solving—not to mention *incredibly violent*. For instance, one mission has Kratos taking on the stone-gazing Medusa in hopes of prying off the Gorgon's head to use as a weapon later. Then there's the "fire-puzzle," where the only object that can open a door is a cage with a prisoner inside of it. Once the cage is placed on the platform...well, we won't go into that. Yet, there's genuine techniques involved in order to successfully complete Kratos's quest as the character comes complete with combos and other skill-based attacks. Plus, the game is set against an atmospheric Greek-mythological background. *God of War* is from the creative director of the *Twisted Metal* franchise, which means Sony could have another long series of successful games with this one. Is it 2005 (A.D.) yet?



#4 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

by ROCKSTAR GAMES

Xbox Exclusives



Why the Xbox? Two words: Halo 2.



Someone's Dead or Alive Ultimate will give the Xbox third-party cred.

Microsoft's giant ace-in-the-hole exclusive title is undoubtedly Halo, and the first-person shooter will get its first sequel in early November. Yet, there's a strong third-party presence for the Xbox—especially from Tecmo (Ninja Golden, Dead or Alive Extreme Beach Volleyball), LucasArts (Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic), and others. The strong online following, thanks to the user-friendly Live interface, doesn't hurt the system's appeal either—especially since Halo 2 supports it.

Other Exclusive Xbox Titles:

File

Forza Motorsports

Halo 2

Jade Empire

Kameo: Elements of Power

Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords

Unreal Championship 2:

The Landin Conflict



Few people probably would have predicted that an old-school, overhead-view crime game would become one of the biggest-selling franchises when it went 3D, but that's exactly what happened when Grand Theft Auto III was released in October 2001. The franchise got an even bigger push when Vice City hit the following year (plus the multi-CD music soundtrack didn't hurt, either). What makes GTA so popular depends on whom you ask—some like the freedom of the open environments, some like to complete every single friggin' main and side mission, while others like to simply wreak havoc with any weapon or automobile. San Andreas is already expected to be the biggest GTA yet with over 100 hours of gameplay and a ton of tweaks and fixes (such as finally being able to swim) to the play engine. Then there's character maintenance where you gotta keep the man man C.J. in shape and even teach him new hand-to-hand fighting techniques. Sure, GTAIII and Vice City eventually surfaced on the Xbox, but San Andreas will be exclusive to the PS2 until further notice.

#5 METAL GEAR SOLID-3: SNAKE EATER

by KONAMI

The Metal Gear series has been one of the most enduring franchises, from its early 8-bit NES days to the huge splash it made on the PlayStation in 1998 when it went Solid. The sequel, Sons of Liberty, had its flaws—one of the biggest complaints was being stuck playing as a secondary character, Raiden, and not as Solid Snake, plus the "war-is-bad" speeches had a tendency to ramble on and on—but the core gameplay element, stealth, always took center stage. The games also began to take on the persona of a big-budget Hollywood action movie: the aesthetic voice casting, tight screenplay, and—especially—the music score. The third Solid, Snake Eater, retains the stealth-is-best philosophy, adds a jungle setting, and makes survival play a key role. Not only is sneaking essential, but equally important is finding food and mastering the game's complex close-quarters combat system (i.e. hand-to-hand fighting). Part of the series' success is the secrecy that surrounds each game as the games' creator, Hideo Kojima, remains notoriously tight-lipped throughout the development process so as not to ruin any plot twists or surprises.









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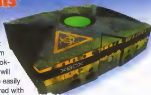


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Halo 2 Action Figures

Beautifully sculpted and highly articulate, these figures bring to life one of the most anticipated video games ever. The re-modeled Master Chief and Brute will be part of the first wave, which also includes the Hog and Warthog vehicles. Master Chief boasts not only a gorgeous sculpt and 18 points of articulation, but also a pair of sub-machine guns. The Warthog is sculpted at 1:24 scale and has working suspension, a rotating machine gun, and three figures. The second wave will feature a White Spartan and a secret Covenant alien.

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BattleStar Galactica Figures

If you grew up in the late 1970s—before VCRs—having BattleStar Galactica on TV was like being able to watch Star Wars every week. These toys are based on that classic show, notable for its awesome ships, Egyptian-influenced designs, and fearsome Cylon Centurion robots. The first wave, which will be released before the holidays, features Cylon Centurion, the Colonel Viper, and the Cylon Raider. The vehicles feature display stands and removable pilots, and the Centurion comes armed with a rifle with a working bayonet.

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Game Art: The Graphic Art of Computer Games

Much more than a mere showcase of the most delicious eye candy put to polygon, Game Art is also a history lesson and an in-depth examination of the aesthetic unlikeliness of interactive entertainment. This tome is not only filled with superlative visuals but also with fascinating interviews with artists, animators, and programmers that encompass many facets of video-game design and production. Read this, and you'll never think of games the same way again.

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No more cables or sweaty hands! Nyko's line of Wireless Air Flo EX controllers combines two sought-after features in one glorious package. Though they may appear unwieldy at first, the fans don't get in the way of the action and the wireless range is more than adequate. The Xbox model is based on the S-controller, and Nyko has added extra black and white buttons above the analog triggers for PS2 experts. In another nod to Sony's formidable industrial design, the GameCube controller is shaped like a PS2 unit. Here's your chance to jump on two trends at once—don't miss the toy!

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Nintendo "Know Your Roots" T-shirt

OK, maybe this isn't the place to pontificate about how a guy named Miyamoto and a little company called Nintendo have been defining what we call "video games" for the last 20-odd years. Instead, ponder the immortal words of Bob Marley:

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Jaks Pacific TV Games

Plug one of these systems in, sit back, and prepare to be taken back to a simpler time, when gameplay was what made the game and not big-budget effects and multi-million-dollar licensing deals. Our pick is the Ms. Pac-Man 5 in 1, which, in addition to the titular dot-gobbling opus, contains Galaga, Mappy, Pole-Position, and Xevious. It's just like having an arcade in your living room without the second-hand smoke...uh, you do remember arcades, don't you?

\$24.99 • Jaks Pacific • jaks.com



Blankets



Blankets

Clicking in at a whopping 600 pages, Craig Thompson's (*Good Bye Chunky Rice*) semiautobiographical story about a boy who contends with high-school alienation, lost love, and winter Christian camps under the thumb of fundamentalist parents in the rural Midwest is a high point of sequential story telling. Emotionally expressive black-and-white artwork and an intelligent script coalesce into a synergistically beautiful narrative that manages to be smart and sentimental without degenerating into maudlin heart tugging. Some sequences are intended for mature readers but are handled very sensitively and respectfully. Deservedly nominated for an Ignatz award.

\$29.95 • Top Shelf Productions
topshelfcomix.com



Atari Flashback

Patterned off of a classic Atari 7800 system (which, admittedly, most of us skipped over for a NES), this plug-and-play machine has over 20 vintage games from the Atan 7800 and the Atan 2600 consoles built right in. The killer roster of games, including *Asteroids*, *Centipede*, *Desert Falcon*, *Adventure*, *Air-Sea Battle*, *Battlezone*, *Breakout*, *Crystal Castles*, *Gravitar*, *Yars' Revenge*, and the previously unreleased *Saboteur*, are some of the most nerve-sizzingly difficult ones ever made. Intimidating? Hey, you want your money's worth, nght?

\$45 • Atan • atan.com



Action Replay Max

The Action Replay Max for the PS2 opens up a world of possibilities for PS2 owners. Not only does it give you access to a massive number of cheat codes and game saves, but it also ships with playback software that actually lets you play CD-Rs on your PS2. Use the included Media Creator software to encode your movie or music files, and play them back on your PS2 from either a CD-R or USB storage device. The Action Replay Max comes prepackaged with a USB memory key (except for the entry-level \$24.99 kit).

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\$99 • Wow Wee • wowwee.com

Race Pac

For the diminutive racing fan, the Race Pac provides a surprisingly portable seat/wheel/pedals combo unit. Stability and comfort is an issue if you're tall, and the pedals are on the small side, so this one is definitely for the kids. If you fit comfortably in the Race Pac, it brings new life to your racing games.

\$99 • Gamester • radiogames.com



UNDER \$100

Gamer's Keyboard

Aside from just plain looking cool with the lights on, the Gamer's Keyboard offers two levels of glowing blue LED backlight for those who like to play in the dark. It also comes with a programmable nine-key pad that sits apart from the keyboard, providing easy access to your most critical in-game commands. Now your keyboard can look as tricked out as your fly street-racing car!

\$59.99 • Satek • satekusa.com



H-530 5.1 Surround Speakers



Logitech leads the pack in affordable quality. Case in point: the X-530 5.1 Surround Speaker system for your computer or console. You no longer have any excuse for hanging on to those sorry cardboard monitors that came with your PC that you've been meaning to replace or listening to your games over the sonic sledge-pump that is your TV's built-in mono. Warning: You'll need a multichannel sound card on your PC or an adapter (sold separately) for your console. If you don't find that \$10,000 dream home-theater system under the tree this year, just go out and buy the X-530s yourself, dammit.

\$79 • Logitech • logitech.com



CONTINUE ►

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- PREVIEW, GMR JUNE 2004



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PlayStation 2



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www.thq.com

Classic NES Limited Edition Game Boy Advance SP

And there's no arguing that this limited edition Game Boy Advance SP, painted to resemble an old NES controller, has got cool oozing from every orifice. Of course, "limited edition" means that it's no longer in production, but look around online and you can usually find these for under \$100. Trust us, your friends will drool.

UNDER \$100



Evo Sport Wireless Racing Wheel

The Evo Sport Wireless Racing Wheel may be the perfect peripheral for those who take their GTA seriously. With a left-analog stick on the face of the wheel and a steering-sensitivity dial, the Evo Sport caters to the needs of the popular action/driving genre. Add a realistic gearbox for manual shifting, a battery meter that looks like a fuel gauge, and full-sized pedals, and you'll be steady mobbin' up and down the streets of San Andreas like a true playa. Not included: glove box for stashing your loot.

\$59.99 • Pelican • pelicanperformance.com

XaviX

Get into the game like never before with the XaviX system. XaviX uses an IR sensor and a camera to track movement and translates the results onto the screen. The base unit and game cartridges are sold separately (parts come with the necessary equipment). Currently available games include baseball, tennis, and bowling. So if you can't sing or dance, you now have new ways to work up a sweat while playing video games.

\$79.99 (console)/\$49.99 (games) • SSO • xavix.com



FLCL (Fooly Cooly) Volume 1-3 DVDs

Produced by Gainax (Neon Genesis Evangelion) and animated by Production I.G. (Ghost in the Shell), this manic coming-of-age story about a boy who grows robots from his head (and you thought your pubescence was tough) is simply unlike any other anime ever made. Sure, the plot makes no sense, but everything about this series screams "insane," from the brilliantly quirky animation to the visual parodies, not to mention the wildest robot designs since Pallador. Pacific rockers Pillows provide the fantastic soundtrack.

\$29.95 each



20th Anniversary Optimus Prime

Celebrating 20 years of Transformers coolness, Hasbro has released Takara's Masterpiece Convoy here in the States. Prime is the first-ever true redesign of the original Optimus Prime toy and transforms from a foot-tall robot to a big rig. As the greatest leader in any children's cartoon series ever, Prime features a die-cast chest and leg parts, real working suspension, two communicator ports, an Ion Blaster, a Megatron pistol, an Energon Axe, and a lighted Matrix chest compartment with removable Matrix of Leadership. Prime is a true necessity for any Transformer fan.

\$79.99 • Hasbro • hasbro.com



CONTINUED ►

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Nintendo DS

Dual screens, wireless connectivity, chat functions, voice recognition... this one's no brainer. The Nintendo DS promises to change the way games are played with its touch-sensitive second screen and is a must for any handheld gamer. Nintendo has a killer lineup on hand, including *Viewtiful Joe*, *Need for Speed Underground*, *Final Fantasy*, and *GoldenEye*, plus it's backwards compatible, which means it will play all your GBA games. The system will be available on November 21 for \$149.99. **\$149.99 • Nintendo • nintendo.com**



Single Speaker Surround Sound System

With its 300-watt surround sound system, the surround setup quality from the previous generation is back. The surround setup has a subwoofer, 5.1 speakers, and a 5.1 receiver. The setup works with PCs, Macs, and DVD players. The sweet spot from 5 to 10 inches wide. The 600 (\$600), 1.1 Pro II (\$800), and Reference (\$800) models are designed for use in home-theater systems and offer a deeper sound field. **\$450 and up • Harman • har.com**



Ultimate Gaming Chair

This is for those who have been extra good this year. With the Ultimate Gaming Chair not only can you rock Halo like never before, but you can also pretend you're Captain Kirk with a green-skinned beautiful baby on your lap, barking orders at Salu to set a course for the Alpha Centauri System. The chair's wireless controllers are compatible with the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube. It has twin speakers mounted to provide a surround-sound experience, and a built-in vibrator lets you know when it's time to duck for cover. The \$799 price tag is a bit steep, but if you've got the cash then tread lightly—you may find yourself never wanting to get out of the living room again. **\$799.99 • ultimategamingchair.com**



OVER \$100

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Moto 2 Action Figures
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 Give Get

Action Wiping Max
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H-530 5.1 Surround Speakers
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Nintendo DS
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Ultimate Gaming Chair
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Single Speaker Surround Sound System

\$450 and up
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Ten Can't-Miss Holiday Games

1) Warcraft 3: Reign of Chaos
\$49.99
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2) The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay
\$49.99
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3) Doom 3
\$54.99
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4) ESPN NFL 2005
\$19.99
 Give Get

5) Full Spectrum Wipeout
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6) Phoenix 2
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7) Splinter-Man 2
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8) Tales of Symphonia
\$49.99

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9) Thief: Deadly Shadows
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10) Uncharted Joe
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Ten Can't-Miss Holiday Games

Sure, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, and Halo 2 will be required gift giving this holiday season, but here are some other strong offerings that may have slipped under the radar in 2004 (in alphabetical order).

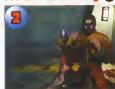
Burnout 3: Takedown



The jury's still out on Need for Speed Underground 2 and Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition, but for high-adrenaline thrills and addictive smash-and-crash mayhem, Burnout 3 is the racer of choice. Not only does the game come with a ton of racing modes (including the all-essential Crash mode) that seem to never grow stale, but it also features head-to-head online races, which also add a crucial aspect of replayability. Even nonracing fans will find the Crash mode pre-ups impossible to resist.

\$49.99 • EA Games • ESRB: Teen

The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay



Games based on movie characters have a pretty bad reputation (case in point: Catwoman), but Riddick surpassed its expectations and even set some standards. Sure, Riddick is a first-person shooter in a year of a seemingly million FPSs, but the awesome graphics, excellent voice-acting, and clever level designs make this game one of the best action titles you're likely to play in some time.

\$49.99 • Vivendi Universal Games
ESRB: Mature

Doom 3



Developer id's retelling of the classic you-against-the-forces-of-hell plot is infused with eye-popping visuals, unique weapons, creepy monsters, and enough scares to make the most hardened trigger-happy vet flinch. The only drawback (if any) to Doom 3 is that you need a pretty powerful graphics card to make it run, but otherwise, get ready for one awesome, scary ride.

\$24.99 • Activision • ESRB: Mature

ESPN NFL 2K5



ESPN NFL 2K5 powers forward thanks to fine X's and O's with a formidable running game, impressive offensive and defensive line play, a good passing attack, and strategy that is true to the real game. The ESPN show is top-notch, too, with excellent graphics and eerily right-on commentary.

\$19.99 • Sega/Globol Star
ESRB: Everyone

Full Spectrum Warrior



Wannabe Rambo's need not apply for Full Spectrum Warrior's tour of duty as this FPS relies more on teamwork than an itchy trigger finger. As the commander of two four-man squads, you constantly try to outfox the enemy by relying on

strategy as much as firepower. If strategy is a true military experience without going through boot camp, Full Spectrum Warrior is it.

\$49.99 • THQ • ESRB: Mature

Pikmin 2



Pikmin collect shiny things, reproduce, and kill (and are occasionally killed by) all manner of surreal bugs in order to maintain the bittersweet circle of life. The sequel improves upon the already-fun play engine and adds in subterranean maze levels and two-player modes.

\$49.99 • Nintendo
ESRB: Everyone

Spider-Man 2



Playing as Spidey, the city is all yours as you can travel anywhere in the game's half-scale model of New York City. Add in a robust combat system, plenty of bosses, and the sheer exhilaration of swinging from Harlem to Ellis Island, and you have what Dan Elektro called "the best Spider-Man game yet." And we believe him.

\$49.99 • Activision • ESRB: Teen

Tales of Symphonia

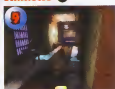


A deceptively cute, anime-inspired RPG, Tales of Symphonia is one of the best-written games ever (and we all know how key the plot is to any role-playing offering). The story centers around a lone swordsman who must escort "the chosen one"

on her journey to regenerate the world. GameCube owners have very limited RPG choices, and that is what makes a gem like Symphonia a welcome quest.

\$49.99 • Namco • ESRB: Teen

Thief: Deadly Shadows



Before Metal Gear made stealth games "cool," Thief paved the way on the PC with its philosophy of sneaking rather than fighting. Deadly Shadows updates the classic PC franchise with dynamite graphics and an awesome new play engine. As Garrett, you must sneak through several missions and rely on your senses, instincts, and shadows. Impatient gamers need not apply.

\$39.99 • Eidos Interactive
ESRB: Mature

Unlabeled Joe



If you missed the craze on (or don't own) the GameCube, here's your chance to get one of the most original games of 2003. Let's get this out of the way: Joe is a 2D side-scroller, but it's also one of the most original, cleverly designed, and visually striking games to be released in years...plus, the \$30 price tag isn't bad, either (and you get to play as Dante from Devil May Cry). If you're already a huge Joe fan, the sequel is due out before the end of the year.

\$29.99 • Capcom • ESRB: Teen

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www.com2games.com



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Need for Speed Underground 2



As *Need for Speed Underground 2*'s race time approaches, there's one thing that can be safely ascertained about the game so far: Even now, this *Need for Speed* has the engine to outpace anyone in the genre, including its predecessor.



The Night Belongs to You

There's something to be said about games that feature free-roaming worlds. It's the idea of exploring a piece to discover something new without the hassles of worrying about completing anything specific. In *Underground 2*, it's the free-roaming world that gives the engine a powerful boost to pass everyone else. Even at an early stage, this sequel rips with excitement in this world. Hours can be spent solely cruising around the massive fictitious city of Bayview, speeding on the highways that give access to the various neighborhoods without any load time. Each neighborhood reflects the realities of an actual city—the expensive hillside residences that can be accessed only via snaking roads; a dockyard with narrow passageways and unpaved paths; and a



downtown full of 90-degree turns and constant cross traffic. More impressive are the time and weather changes as an onslaught of rain can suddenly appear while the sky slowly changes into brilliant colors from dusk to dawn.

Tricked and Treated

Besides the open-ended world, *Underground 2* also relies heavily on what made the first game so successful: pimping out your ride. You can customize cars with just

about anything that exists in the real-life car tuner culture, including serving out trunk space for an audio system, adding scissor doors and hydraulics, increasing rim sizes, and sporting wide body kits. Vehicles like American muscle cars and SUVs are now selectable, which will round out the expected show of popular autos from manufacturers like Ford, Nissan, Toyota, and Mitsubishi. You can then race your custom creation in eight different competitions, four of which are new this year.

Don't let evil street racers like Juiced and Street Racing Syndicate slow you down. Your need for speed will almost certainly be fueled by *Underground 2* this November.—Four-Eyed Dragon

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by EA Canada
 ■ Published by EA Games ■ Target release date: November



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www.esrb.org



PlayStation 2

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www.konami.com/usa

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Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

Samus Aran is going to left the GameCube onto her armor-clad back and carry it through the 2004 holidays for Nintendo, and the preview version reveals that fans of the first game will be dancing in the streets for Metroid Prime 2: Echoes. This time, Aran's mission is to discover what happened to a squad of Galactic Federation marines sent to investigate mysterious occurrences on the planet Aether.



Creatures of Light and Darkness

It's not spoiling anything to share the fact that Samus encounters a millennium-long war between beings called the Luminoth and the Ing. The battle rages across two dimensions of reality on Aether, and the split between "light" and "dark" worlds is key to understanding the gameplay and structure of Echoes, which is not unlike that in The Legend of Zelda. Neither Nintendo nor developer Retro Studios was ready to reveal how many levels there are in the game, but you start out searching for four temples in "dark" side of Aether.

The graphical improvements to the game are dramatic with brand-new character models, more textures in the graphics, and augmented particle effects in explosions and other lighting effects. Echoes also features three times as many cinema scenes as in the first Prime.



How She Handles

The first-person-shooter combat is the same as that in Metroid Prime, utilizing the same basic control scheme. Samus's visor has a few enhancements, such as being able to identify objects that have already been scanned. Probably the most notable additions are the two types of weapons, both light and dark. Once you find them, you can easily switch between the two by toggling the C Stick, but you'll need to find light and dark ammo for each, too.

There's also a fair amount of exploration required in Echoes. As with The Legend of Zelda, the game requires interaction between the light and dark dimensions, too...but enough said.

Samus Times 4

Get ready for Metroid parties! You can play four-player deathmatches across a variety of maps featuring open and closed terrain with light and dark weapons, including a death's head morph ball that zaps opponents with one touch.

With Echoes, Metroid Prime is bigger and Samus is definitely badder than ever before.—Undercover Lover

- Hands-On ■ Developed by Retro Studios
- Published by Nintendo
- Target release date: November



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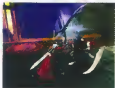
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Devil May Cry 3

PS2 The Sons of Sparta are coming to bring the pain in Devil May Cry 3, a prequel to the original game that further reveals the arcane back story revolving around Dante's demonic bloodline and the fate of his enigmatic twin brother, Virgil. In keeping with the Devil May Cry time line, a much younger and cockier Dante has just set up his investigative agency and hasn't yet been awakened to his demonic powers when a mysterious tower appears in the middle of the city, spewing forth hell spawn that are searching for the twin amulets of Sparta—massive combo action and one liners ensue.

The Game of Death

Devil May Cry 3 is a welcome return to the original title's gothic, arcane style and features a revamped graphics engine and numerous gameplay augmentations. As Dante has not been awakened yet (although



the preview version's Control Setting screen still maintains a designated button for Devil Triggering), the game starts out with a new customizing system—dubbed "My Dante." Players can choose from several "style" categories, including Trickster, Swordsmaster, and Gunslinger, each with its own exclusive set of upgradeable moves. Trickster style, for example, enables Dante to run on walls and dodge more readily,



while Gunslinger and Swordsmaster styles augment Dante with a couple of new nifty attacks.

It's Party Time!

The preview build sported two complete levels that featured new graphics with enhanced visuals, better camera angles, more compact level designs—which lead to a lot of frantic, close-up combo moments—a wider variety of moves, and an easier combo system. While the new changes are extremely welcome and an improvement on the less-than-stellar Devil May Cry sequel, a few problems did arise with the hands-on version. The tweaked camera engine always stayed either behind or to the side of Dante, giving players a better chance to face their foes. However, when backtracking in a level, the camera position became extremely squirrely. Also, the early build had a minuscule amount of slowdown when there was an inordinate amount of action onscreen. If these deficiencies can be dealt with, Devil May Cry 3 may be at the



- **Hands-On**
- **Developed and published by Capcom**
- **Target release date: February**



top of its genre when it comes out this February.—*Rice Bumer*

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Mercenaries

X The open, free-roaming, car-jacking-friendly world is once again blatantly copied from the Grand Theft Auto garage (which isn't necessarily a bad thing), this time in the form of *Mercenaries*. But can this ride expand beyond the proven gameplay formula and turn into a real steal?

Guns for Hire

At first look, *Mercenaries* seems like an obvious GTA imitation. You can jack vehicles, attack without prejudice using high-caliber weaponry, and complete a mission in various ways. Seen that, done that, you say? Well, once you immerse yourself in the story, then *Mercenaries* can be one tedious third-person shooter with lots of action, which an early build of the game clearly displayed.

It's the near future and North and South Korea are about to unify into one nation until a hard-liner general wreaks havoc and threatens nuclear missile launches. Choose from three soldiers-for-hire, then drop into Korea and start collecting the bounty, which is capturing the crazed general and 51 of his henchmen. But you can't complete missions alone. You'll need to get valuable intelligence from and make allegiances with the four factions that have the biggest stakes in the countries: North Korea, China, the Russian Mafia, and the United Nations. Be careful, though: Who you partner with will affect how the rest of the groups will react to your presence (i.e., pump you full of lead if they see you).

Commander of Commandeering

Perhaps the most noticeable feature in *Mercenaries* so far is the ability to hijack vehicles and use them to your advantage, much like in the Grand Theft Auto games. Different, however, are the type of vehicles available, such as Hummers, Jeeps, tanks, cargo trucks, and helicopters—most with mounted guns that you can get some of your buddies to jump in and man while you drive.

Mercenaries definitely embodies much of what we've played in past games with similar styles, but it also has the potential to stand out as an innovative and creative title that surpasses the GTA formula. Let's just hope this mercenary is worth the money.—Four-eyed Dragon

- Update
- Developed by Pandemic Studios
- Published by LucasArts
- Target release date: January

All screens shown here are from the PlayStation 2 version.



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The Urbz: Sims in the City

PS2 How many different ways are there to spin out The Sims? EA's gonna find out or die trying! The Urbz: Sims in the City is the company's latest attempt at taking its super-popular people-wrangling simulator for the PC and translating it to the slippery "console experience" without losing its essential Simness...and adding some "attitude" along the way.

Urban Renewal

The Urbz plays out a lot more like an adventure than previous Sims games. At the beginning of the game, you're charged with the task of taking your Urb to the top of the social ladder, earning the highest possible reputation in the city. You do this by networking, socializing, wearing hip clothes and fashionable jewelry, and performing all the goals in each of the game's districts—master a job as a sushi chef through a button-tapping mini-game, learn special socials (i.e. communication options) from other Urbz, earn your way into the VIP room, or take down the "villain" of the district, Urbz with bad attitude that cramps the others' style.

The designers have taken to heart the criticisms leveled against Bustin' Out, which suffered because you really had no home to call your own—a big no-no for a game series that's got its roots in home life. In Sims in the City, even though the bulk of the game takes place in unchangeable urbanite, your Sim is given an apartment to decorate and can relocate to different pads depending on his or her current reputation.

The PlayStation 2 preview build we played had a few hitches: the same slightly troublesome control scheme from previous Sims games (read: more PC-friendly than console-friendly) and some frame rate and frequent disc loading issues, but all that's being optimized and should be eradicated by the game's release.



EAttitude

If you're thinking everything The Urbz knows about attitude it got from a Mountain Dew commercial, then the game's not quite as out of touch as it may seem. Maxis says The Urbz is as much a parody of celebrity culture (and its own Sims games) as it is serious; and every "power social" and piercing comes with a wink and a nod. But a wise man once said there's a fine line between clever and stupid. The Urbz is definitely walking that line.—Star Dingo

- **Hands-On** ■ **Developed by Maxis**
- **Published by EA Games**
- **Target release date: November**



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DRAGON BALL Z
BUDOKAI
3



Violence



PlayStation 2

 **Funimation**
Productions, Ltd.

atari.com

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2

X Based on Tom Clancy's ferocious Army Special Forces units (Ghosts to you), Ghost Recon 2 is a highly tactical squad-based shooter. Notable improvements over the first title include a third-person view, voice commands (input through the Xbox Live headset), and even more dazzling graphics.

Watch Your Six!

The third-person over-the-shoulder view is an invaluable addition—it makes finding cover much easier. When you click to zoom, the camera shifts into a first-person view, or you can opt to play entirely in first-person mode from the get-go. The new voice command system enables you to issue orders to your squad, switch out weapons and equipment, toggle the map screen, reload, and even change your weapon's firing mode. In the preview build, voice recognition was still a little dodgy and didn't always respond, but this issue will likely be addressed in the final version. Once fully operational, it should have a positive effect on gameplay.

Though the environments are beautifully rendered on the Xbox, Ghost Recon 2 is no walk in the park. If you don't stay frosty, it's easy to get picked off by enemies that you never even knew were there. The AI is generally vicious, and rival forces will shift their tactics in response to your own. The preview presented challenging opponents at every turn, and the unforgiving nature of Special Forces warfare meant that it was very easy to be killed. Staying low to the ground and/or behind something solid was of the utmost importance.

The Friendly Ghost?

And what would a squad-based tactical shooter be without a bedded online component? Xbox Live players can download new content, set up competitions, check their standing on the leaderboard, leave messages for friends, and, of course, play a variety of multiplayer games, such as co-op, solo vs., and team vs. matches. PlayStation 2, GameCube, and PC versions of Ghost Recon 2 are also in the works, but they will be slightly different from the Xbox release. —Supers Samurai

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by Red Storm
 ■ Published by Ubisoft ■ Target release date: November





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2. FOLD THE PAGE IN HALF LENGTHWISE. THE RED AND WHITE WILL BE ON THE INSIDE.
3. FOLD THE BOTTOM CORNERS UP TO THE CENTER FOLD.
4. FOLD THE SIDES UP TO THE CENTER FOLD SO THE EDGES MEET.
5. FOLD THE SIDES UP TO THE CENTER FOLD AGAIN SO THE EDGES MEET.
6. UNFOLD WINGS HALFWAY AND FLY.

Fight Club

PS2 **X** Leave it to the literary scholars, film critics, and pop philosophers to debate the merits of reinventing Chuck Palahniuk's parable of schizophrenia, modern anxiety, and the perils of Ikea as a Tekken-style fighting game—leave it to us to discuss its merits as a game!

Vivendi Universal's *Fight Club* is an easy-to-get-into fighter that will likely find its audience in the mainstream more than in the hardcore set. The control scheme is pretty streamlined and simple—the characters have a weak and strong punch and kick, two-button grapples, and timing-based counters similar to those in *DOA*. The game's 14 different characters are all based on three different styles



so that you really only need to solidly learn three types of play before you can really get into the game. The game plays great over Xbox Live with no noticeable lag; and beating strangers down to the breaking point so you can snap their bones (complete with X-ray vision) is a crunchy, satisfying treat.

While a lot of critics would have predicted such an undertaking to be a blueprint for disaster, *Fight Club* is turning out to be a pleasant surprise—an easy-to-learn fighting game with good looks, a solid feel, and a more casual appeal.—*Star Dingo*

■ **Hands-On:** Developed by Genieue Games
 ■ **Published by:** Vivendi Universal Games
 ■ **Target release date:** November

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.



Capcom Fighting Evolution

PS2 **X** *Street Fighter* never feels to reinvent itself, even if it has nothing particularly new to offer. Such seems to be the case with *Capcom Fighting Evolution*, the umpteenth all-star teaming of 2D brawlers from the company's vast franchise archive. Here, the amalgam features *Street Fighter II*, *III*, and *Alpha* along with *Darkstalkers* and the little-seen *Red Earth* with two fighters representing each series (although there are additional unlockable ones). The gameplay will be immediately familiar to anyone who's played a 2D Capcom fighter: two-in-one combos, super moves, and plenty of delicious 2D-sprite splash. The ability to mix-and-match the two-person teams is the most arresting option, as all characters retain their series-specific moves and techniques.

From the hands-on bulk, the fighters were fairly equally matched, save the *Red Earth* characters who are outlandish and awkward (especially the tyrannosaurus-like *Hauser*). But the gameplay was spot-on as all the moves were easy to execute, and the analog-compatible controls made moves such as Zangief's spinning piledriver simple to pull off in a clinch. It's all very fun, but in a déjà-vu-all-over-again kinda way, and *Capcom 2D* fanatics may find *Evolution* to be a little too routine.—*Mejor Mike*

■ **Hands-On:** Developed and published by Capcom ■ **Target release date:** November

All screens shown here are from the PlayStation 2 version.



WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw

PS2 THQ's wrestling games are always evolving, striving, changing... straddling the line between trying to appease voracious wrestling fans and just trying to be a good fighting game. This year's PS2 game is a pretty big step in the right direction as a lot of the big features fans have been clamoring for are finally in the game.

The SmackDown! series has always been known for its surprisingly fun, deep story mode—a pseudo-RPG with a WWE theme. This year's big change is honest-to-goodness voice work from pretty much every wrestler in the game (even Vinny McMahon, too), which adds a ton to the authenticity. You're also able to more clearly define your role as a face or heel and actively use your managers to your advantage during a match; for instance, having her grab a chair for you and distract the ref so you can properly use it. The game also lets you create custom championship belts, which can be transferred from memory card to memory card if you manage to beat the current holder in a match.

The next big thing is, of course, head-to-head online play, though you can't bring the belts online (yet). The fighting engine handles a lot like that of the last game with some little tweaks to the grappling system, but the presentation and feature set is the best THQ has yet to offer.

—Star Glingo

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by Yuke's
■ Published by THQ ■ Target release date: November



Rumble Roses

PS2 Wrestling. Mud. Humiliation Moves. If your hormones aren't raging already, just look at the screen shots. Rumble Roses is WWE meets DOA: a teenage boy's dream filled with "good girls" and "bad girls" getting down and dirty with each other.

Buried somewhere underneath the skin of this sizzling fleshfest is a wrestling game, and it's shaping up to be a decent one at that. The preview build showed off the Roses', um, talents, including their patented Lethal and Humiliation moves. The controls performed

fantastically, and matches felt both fast and strategic. Submission holds could be targeted at the head, body, legs, or arms. Each appendage has its own life meter; wear any one of them down in a submission hold and your opponent will give up.

At the outset, each of the 10 available wrestlers is either a face (good girl) or a heel (bad girl). A character's alter ego is unlocked by either beating Lady X (story mode) or fulfilling pre-match vows (exhibition mode). Gallery mode gives you a peepshow of the girls warming up in their Underdolls.

If you're only buying SmackDown! for bras and panties matches, keep your eye on the Roses. It looks like it will provide a tight one- or two-player wrestling experience filled with sexy surprises. Besides, watching Rumble Roses in action is infinitely more enjoyable than an eyeful of The Rock's Speedo riding up on him.—Super8 Samurai

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by Yuke's/KCET ■ Published by Konami ■ Target release date: November



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Mortal Kombat: Deception

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Round 7: Fight! Mortal Kombat: Deception comes on strong with several diverse modes of play, but the series still remains as bloody as ever.

PS2 **X** **Mortal Kombat** has been one of the most popular fighting franchises since its humble arcade beginnings, and love it or hate it, it deserves props for enduring against such seasoned competitors as *Soul Calibur*, *Street Fighter*, and *Tekken*. Part of its success is the violent content and grisly fatality finishing moves, but cheap thrills aside, a robust fighting system has emerged through the years and been honed to near perfection in *Deadly Alliance*. *Deception* continues the legacy and lives up to its name with additional play modes outside the fighting genre.

Make Mine Mortal

The 3D engine from *Deadly Alliance* remains relatively unchanged. Each character still has three stances—one is weapon based—but each fighter has an extra fatality and a new suicide move to deprive a victorious opponent the glory of a gruesome finale. Other key additions include a combo Breaker move and multibred fighting stages, which enable you to defeat an opponent instantly (it's the same effect as a *Soul Calibur* ring-out except the loser dies a gruesome death). The controls do an ample job of keeping the action flowing, but some of the flashier, multistyle combos can become a guessing game.



Oh—that's fair. Some Konquest challenges are truly over the top, but completing them is necessary if you want to unlock all of *Deception's* 24 fighters.

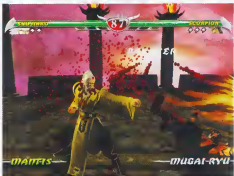
Puzzle Kombat is a *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* clone where two superpowered combatants try to bury each other underneath a pile of multicolored bricks. Sure, it's similar to Capcom's puzzler, but nevertheless it's highly addictive. Chess is a cool spin on the ageless board game but with spells, bombs, and fighting thrown into the mix. And, yes, there's blood aplenty and other MK carnage—even in *Puzzle Kombat*: decapitations, disembowlings, you name it. *Kombat*, *Chess*, and *Puzzle* are all online ready, too.



If you're looking for Deyr Kabas, they're frequently given as a reward for defeating opponents in *Puzzle Kombat*.



PRO TIP: In *Konquest* mode, punch everyone that you meet. You never know what items they may drop.



PRO TIP: Mastering the Breaker counter move is essential for stopping combos. To execute one, press Block and forward your opponent the moment they strike...but you can only perform three Breakers.



PRO TIP: In *Chess Kombat*, always go for the power squares first and hold them at all costs.



PRO TIP: In the *Dark Prison* stage, don't get too close to the imprisoned characters because they can grab you through the bars.

Deception's drop-dead gorgeous graphics are loaded with clever details (Mileena's thinly veiled mouth or razor-sharp teeth for instance) and vibrant colors. The Xbox version has the edge over its PlayStation 2 brother with sharper graphics; otherwise, the two console offerings are identical. The audio's equally effective, and it has the right mix for blows being delivered and taken.

What Lies Beneath

Then there are the secrets—lots of 'em, and what had to be done in *Deadly Alliance* was a cakewalk compared to the flaming hoops one must jump through here. Sure, the *Krypt* (where you can spend Kurrency that's earned through the various play modes) is back, but *Konquest* mode is where the real secrets are revealed. In it, you take a wannabe combatant through six time-consuming MK realms, converse with characters, complete various tasks, train for the tournament (by learning every fighter's special moves and combo strings), and find *Krypt* keys. But the difficulty gets ramped up to a near-impossible degree as you eventually fight enemies under increasingly ludicrous conditions. It's *Deception's* biggest giving faw.

"Get Over Here!"

Deception gives gamers a lot to digest, as it cleverly weaves multigenre offerings under a fighting-game roof. Fans of the series will doubtlessly be pleased, and attracting nonfighting fans to the MK universe doesn't hurt either.—Major Mike

M # Developed and published by Midway # \$49.99
Available now # Fighting/strategy # 3 players

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	FIVE FACTOR
	SOUND CONTROL	4.5	
		4.5	
X	GRAPHICS	4.5	FIVE FACTOR
	SOUND CONTROL	4.5	
		4.5	

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Tony Hawk's Underground 2

The soul of skate is back as THUG2 makes the world its playground to deliver the most satisfying thrashfest yet.

PS2 **X** Tony Hawk defines the phrase "old school" in the realm of professional skating—his accomplishments and exploits are legendary. Hawk's notoriety is also attributed to the franchise of video games that bear his name, and it's very appropriate that his latest, Tony Hawk's Underground 2, is in its own rights "old school," thanks to its solid, familiar gameplay and the inclusion of Classic mode.

Viva La Hawk

Okay, before getting nostalgic and teary eyed, THUG2 isn't a rehash of Pro Skater's glory days but rather quite the contrary—it's a wild two-team, six-city romp around the world as you create a persona and shred it up with the Brdman, Bam Margera, and a motley crew of skating degenerates in the World Destruction Tour. The gist of the WDT is simple: accumulate points by completing an exhausting list of objectives so you can unlock other parts of the globe. Along the way, playable special guests like hot-rodder Jesse James and a host of skating pros lend a hand, board, or customized rigs to further help your team's cause.

As in the original, the environments in THUG2 are pretty expansive, and there's no time limit, leaving you free to map out the level and systematically complete the tasks at hand. However, there's nothing in THUG2 that should surprise anyone remotely familiar with the gameplay: see it, skate it, thrash it, or bash it—we're talking places and people.

Like the Hawks before it, THUG2 introduces new control features that up the ante on the already exciting action, the most significant being Focus Control.



Any time Bam Margera's involved, slick and twisted humor is readily abundant as evidenced by his Grand It Surf trick.



PRO TIP: Tantrums are oh so juvenile, but by throwing one during the game, you can actually earn a Freak Out bonus, which can then be used to start a combo.



PRO TIP: Focus Control is one of the greatest features ever to appear in a Hawk game, and it's especially effective when grinding light ropes and rails, and while grinding seesaw series ab.



PRO TIP: Some goals require you to actually hop off your board and do a little climbing, so exhaust every option before destroying your controller.



In addition to THUG2's 23 skaters and special guests, other crazy characters pop up in unusual places—like the Star Wars kid in Sausalito.

Kickin' It With The Bones Brigade

Story mode and unparalleled customization features, such as the new Create-a-Graphic feature and the ability to implement your face into the game via the PlayStation 2 EyeToy (sorry Xboxers) aside, THUG2 also includes Classic mode—yep, the two-minute timer and the all-time favorite goals like spelling S-K-A-T-E and finding the secret tape are back! In addition to the levels found within the game, there are also a host of levels from the previous Pro Skater games to make you feel old warm and cozy inside. Three words: outstanding replay value!

Technically, THUG2 is an exceptional game thanks to great sound, which includes a topnotch soundtrack; outstanding controls; and, end, except from some awkward clipping, crisp graphics. Both the Xbox and PS2 versions compare favorably in every department, and the only advantage at all lies with the PS2 version but only because of its online components.

Hawk and Roll All Night, And Party Every Day

If there's a reason to get excited about the franchise again, THUG2 is definitely it. The Story mode is decidedly different in that it doesn't feel like a rehash of THUG, and the inclusion of Classic mode is brilliant—that's without accounting for the expensive customizable and multiplayer options. Simply put, this game is skating nirvana.

—The Enforcer

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GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE			
PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	4.5
	SOUND CONTROL	4.5	
X	GRAPHICS	4.0	4.5
	SOUND CONTROL	4.5	

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Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal

Up Your Arsenal is the place to be if you seek thumb-blistering shoot-em-up action that doesn't take itself too seriously.

PS2 It's fun to blow up stuff, and Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal is more fun than a bag of dynamite. The series has left a trail of twisted metal, alien ecstasium, and goofy laughs strawn throughout the galaxy, and while this third adventure is pretty much of the same, you also get online gameplay that's guaranteed to keep you blasting on well into the future.

Mo' Better Blasting

As is the goal of most PlayStation 2 sequels these days, Up Your Arsenal is bigger and badder than the previous two installments in many ways. Ratchet and his sidebot, Clank, are chasing after Dr. Nefarious, who has unleashed a robot scourge to rid the universe of the organic life he calls "squishies." The game covers much of territory across 18 worlds with 29 single-player missions. Online, you get 10 maps and three types of games to play. It's monstrous.

The online game is new territory for Ratchet and Clank, but the guys have it down. You can play deathmatches (of course), capture the flag, and a siege, where you try to overrun an opponent's fortress. Eight players can compete at a time, but you can set up 64-person clans, too. Plus, you can fly two-man vehicles for spectacular dive-bombing attacks. Multipla skins are unlockable, including the snowman, so the battles can be crazy looking and fun as well.

Nefarious Schemes

The nefarious army of mechanical soldiers and yucky space creatures is similarly numerically awesome, not to mention aggressive and bloodthirsty. You take them on with the biggest R&C arsenal, yet: 20 weapons that can be upgraded five levels.

The firefights are intense, but the workmanlike controls do their duty. A new and improved weapons interface enables you to set up an inventory of 16 weapons and gadgets, and quickly cycle through three at a time with a single button press. This firing system works pretty well, and you'll need it to because (as with the other Ratchet games) the 360-degree game cam still backs you into some hard-to-manage viewing angles, particularly during fierce ambushes and the challenging boss battles.



PRO TIP: A good defense is the best offense. Always check on the availability of new armor whenever you're back on board the Phoenix. Save your bolts for armor.



PRO TIP: The Spitting Hydra is a great weapon to use when you want to shoot from behind cover or around corners.



PRO TIP: When you become Giant Clank at Helostar Studios, use your wrist rockets to bring the winged meester down, then paralyze it with your fists.



PRO TIP: Don't underestimate your NGG Storm as a long-range weapon. You can find hiding places with good angles to shoot without being shot, too.



PRO TIP: When you're trying to beat the boss at Avastition Nation in order to meet Squirmy Gear, try charging in and fighting with him too...er, track to toe.

Up Your Fun

At least you'll enjoy the scenery. The colorful extraterrestrial environments make this an eye-catching animated romp through outer space.

There are some excellent and funny comic book-style storyboards, and a whopping three hours of toponotch cinemas to move the wacky tale along. Ratchet & Clank regulars like the egomaniacal Captain Quark and laid-back Skidd McManx are back for laughs, and you know the humor-o-meter's set to "goofy" when space monkeys are on the prowl.

There's enough cartoon carnage going on to warrant a Congressional investigation, albeit by a jury of 'toons, of course, but Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal is a glorious blastfest that only asks that you loosen up your thumbs, put your mind in park, and have a good time. Remember: It's fun to blow up stuff!—Brother Buzz

T Developed by Insomniac Games
 Published by Sony # \$39.99
 Available November # Action/adventure
 #1 player: 8 online



GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.5	FOR FACTOR
	SOUND	5.0	
	CONTROL	4.0	

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Jak 3

The sequel introduced it, and this follow-up only expands on it—"it" being terrific gameplay from beginning to end in Jak 3.

PS2 As expected in any trilogy, the third's always a charm, so it shouldn't be any surprise that the finale of Jak and Daxter's adventure is also the best of the bunch. There's much more of the tried-and-true gameplay that made the sequel so refreshing, plus there are plenty of new ideas to give Jak 3 that extra appeal.

So the World's in Peril...What's New?

Jak 3 starts right where Jak II finishes. Jak and Daxter have been banished from the city only to end up in another town where the skills of a seasoned hero fit in perfectly among the citizenry. Much like the sequel, Jak and sometimes Daxter must accomplish a variety of tasks to prove their worth, which include everything from driving challenges and arena fighting to hang gliding and just shooting things to smithereens. It's literally more of what made Jak II so popular: having all sorts of gameplay modes that smoothly mesh with the entire story. Halfway through the game, the story actually starts to unfold, and the two heroes find themselves uncovering a plot that not only connects the politics of the old city but also somehow involves the fate of the entire world.

Jak's world is essentially two worlds in one. You can shuttle between both free-roaming towns and explore or take on various tasks at your leisure. There's a lot to see, too. Each town is designed to have distinct neighborhoods that come alive with their own detailed structures, colorful topography, and wandering inhabitants. And like in the sequel, you can get around the environments faster by "borrowing" a hovercraft, or, if you're in the countryside, a two-legged oversized rosent.



PRO TIP: In the Old Mine, avoid this old legger's fiery column creatures by standing on the edge of the platform rather than frantically running around.



PRO TIP: The mini-mechanized creatures can't harm you if you're sitting on a hovercraft. In fact, if you just sit in one place, they'll destroy themselves by leaping at your vehicle.

Three Jaks And An Engaging Pair

Indeed, the core of Jak 3 is the multifaceted gameplay. But if you thought some of the challenges tipped your frustration level to high last time, just wait until you play through this third round. While completing most objectives can be moderately challenging, there are a handful of missions that can easily fill your rage meter, which newcomers to the series might not appreciate. Jak 3 also tries to utilize every type of button combination—a trying task especially when you need to quickly remember how to switch between four weapons (with multiple variations), dark and light power, your hoverboard, and various fast and jump attacks. Still, although the gameplay can be overwhelming at times, being a part of all the different action is actually a fun experience.



PRO TIP: See those pesky critters running around? They're a good source of Dark Eco, plus they don't fight back if you agitate them.



PRO TIP: An effective close-range combo: Perform a split attack and then immediately discharge your shotgun.



PRO TIP: The Dune Hopper is the most reliable vehicle to use for desert missions. It has the firepower to quickly dispose of enemies and can hop to islands the farthest.



PRO TIP: If you grow tired of jumping from platform to platform, just whip out the hoverboard and glide over to the other side.

I ■ Developed by Naughty Dog ■ Published by Sony
 ■ \$39.99 ■ Available November ■ Adventure ■ 1 player



GAMEPRO EDITOR'S CHOICE

PS2	GRAPHICS	5.0	FIVE STARS
	SOUND	5.0	
	CONTROL	4.0	

5.0

WHAT TO DO AFTER MIDNIGHT???

Presented by the editors
and readers of **GAMEPRO** magazine

ALL-NIGHTER GAMES

1. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (PS2)
2. Halo 2 (Xbox)
3. Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (PS2)
4. Resident Evil (GameCube)
5. Fable (Xbox)
6. Doom 3 (PC)
7. Silent Hill 4: The Room (PS2, Xbox)
8. Viewtiful Joe (PS2)
9. Persona 2 (GameCube)
10. Spider-Man 2 (PS2, Xbox, GameCube)

COOL GAME CODES

1. True Crime: Streets of L.A. (PS2)
All Moves, Cars, and Weapon Parts: At the City Map screen, press Up, Right, Down, Left, Up, X. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a sssst.
2. Brink (PS2)
Invincibility: At the main menu, press O, □, L1, R1, L2, R2, R2. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming tone.
3. Catwoman (PS2, Xbox)
Unlock the Vault: At the main menu, select Vault, and at the Vault screen, enter 1998. If you entered the code correctly, you'll see a confirming message envelope.
4. Karaoke Revolution Volume 2 (PS2)
All Characters: At the title screen, press Up, □, Right, O, □, Left, O, Up, L3, R3. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming tone.
5. Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy (PS2, Xbox)
All Powers: At the main menu, highlight "Extra Content" and then press R1 on the PlayStation 2 or R on the Xbox to bring up the cheat-entry screen. At the cheat-entry screen, enter 5337853 to unlock all powers.
6. Rise to Honor (PS2)
Unlock Everything: At the main menu, simultaneously press and hold L1 and R1, and then press □, Up, Down, O. If you entered the code correctly, all levels and special codes will be unlocked.
7. Full Spectrum Warrior (Xbox)
Unlimited Ammo: At the main menu, select Extra Content and then select Cheat Codes. At the cheat-entry screen, enter MERCENARIES to unlock unlimited ammo.
8. Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell (GameCube)
All Levels: Start a game, and at the Profile screen, enter fwwk_thru (e - "e" designates a blank space) as a profile name. If you entered the code correctly, all levels will be available at the Load Level screen.
9. Hitman: Contracts (Xbox)
Unlock All Levels: At the main menu, press X, Y, B, Left, Up, Right, L, R. If you entered the code correctly, a level select menu will appear.
10. Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku (PS2)
Full Zen Meter: Pause the game, simultaneously press and hold Left on L2 and Right on R3, and then press O, X, □, A. If you entered the code correctly, your Zen meter will be full.



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NIGHT TUNES

1. Night Fever - The Bee Gees
2. Night Train - James Brown
3. Goodnight Sweetheart - Sha-Na-Na
4. Night of the Living Baseheads - Public Enemy
5. Running With the Night - Lincolnton Ritchie
6. Last Night a DJ Saved My Life - La Deep
7. Rhythm of the Night - DeBarge
8. Lady's Night - Kool and the Gang
9. After Midnight - Eric Clapton
10. Night Moves - Bob Seger

FEED THE MUNCHIES

LATE-NIGHT SHOWS

1. Late Night With Conan O'Brien
2. Letterman
3. Aqua Teea Hunger Force
4. SpongeBob SquarePants
5. Three's Company
6. The Tonight Show With Jay Leno
7. Carson Daily
8. SNL
9. Mad TV
10. The news

1. Cheesos

2. Salted peanuts

3. Doritos 30s

4. Cracker Jacks

5. Cold pizza

6. Mom's mashed potatoes

7. Popcorn

8. Baked Lays

9. Chocolate chip cookies

10. Brownies



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Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War

There are plenty of new features added to this latest Ace Combat, but most importantly, the arcade-shooter feeling has remained intact.

PS2 After three years of waiting, the fifth instalment in the classic aerial-combat shooter series finally takes to the skies. Ace Combat 5 certainly maintains its air superiority over other (and the few) flying games, but you can't help wonder if you flew on this airline already.

War, Self-Reflection, Blah, Blah, Blah

So why take so darn long to develop the next Ace Combat? As a departure from the usual short cinematic cut-scenes that tell the story, Namco has decided to not only tell this tale of heroism in-between missions with...well, cinematic cut-scenes but to also interject a story of war, terrorism, and morality during in-flight sessions. Through continuous radio chatter, your wingmen begin to develop distinct personalities—criticizing an order, yelling at new plots, and bragging about their kills. You can even jump into conversations, though you're limited to yes and no answers, but depending on what you choose, you'll receive a variety of comments. While it may seem cheesy at first, listening to all of the talking actually slowly brings you closer to your teammates and gives more depth to the entire story in The Unsung War.

Of course, the story isn't the only feature that's been improved upon during the three-year hiatus. Visually, the planes look absolutely gorgeous and seem to reflect their real-life counterparts with amazing accuracy. Missile launches and exploding enemies make the ride even more enjoyable. Ground environments are finally lush with organic life and not totally barren like those in previous Ace Combat games, too.

Just Following Orders

New to this Ace Combat is the ability to issue orders in real-time to your wingmen. You can tell them to cover your six, attack a cluster of targets at once, or engage the enemy on their own. The commands, however, are limited. For instance, you can't order your comrades to attack just the ground targets or just the planes. Still, having the ability to command the wingmen makes your flight more interesting and the missions more challenging.

If you need a break from the story, there's an Arcade mode where the emphasis is solely dogfighting. Your success is determined by the number of planes shot down in an allotted time. This is the best option for those who crave a fast, arcade airplane-shooter experience.

This experience, though, can feel like déjà vu. Despite all the additions and improvements, Ace Combat 5 still feels like an Ace Combat game. Take away the story line, and the core of the game is to literally just blow up things in the air and on the ground using simple flight controls. For rookies to the series, that shouldn't matter, but for veterans, it will feel like the same gameplay found in all previous Ace Combat games—and that's not necessarily a bad thing considering this is a shooter that's still worthy of sitting in first class.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

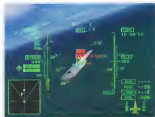
IT ■ Developed and published by Namco ■ \$49.99
 ■ Available now ■ Aerial combat shooting ■ 1 player



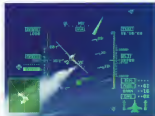
Subsiding wingmen is another responsibility taken on when you accept the role as aerial combat sky king.



PRO TIP: Have your crew fly different types of airplanes, especially if there's a mix of air and ground targets in the following level.



PRO TIP: To end a mission faster, order your wingmen to use their Special Weapons on the primary target.



PRO TIP: In Mission 10, you'll find the red-jawing airplanes at 20,000 feet.



PRO TIP: Don't be a push rat. Sell old, inferior planes so you can buy the better aircraft as soon as they're opened up.

Flightstick 2

Rating: 3.5

For an extra Ace Combat experience, Namco is releasing a limited supply of this Ace Combat 5 special bundle package, which includes a HORI's Flightstick 2. Solid and durable overall, it performs well with Ace Combat 5 and feels good with your hands wrapped around it. The only disappointment: unlike other flight sticks, the controller doesn't twist at its base for yawing.

Price: \$129.99 (includes Ace Combat 5, Making of DVD, artwork, patches, and HORI's Flightstick 2)



PS2	GRAPHICS	4.5	FIVE PLAYERS
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	4.5	
4.0			



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Men of Valor

Your tour of duty is an up-and-down ride with great effects but also some disappointing gameplay.

X Men of Valor certainly takes the lead as the most anticipated Vietnam-era game in what has now become the peak in a surge of first-person war shooters. The strength of an army, however, doesn't solely rest on its reputation—effectiveness on the battlefield is certainly much more valuable. For Men of Valor, the battlefield is stained with annoying blemishes, but the game still performs courageously.

Honor and Valor

The frenetic wartime chaos in Men of Valor is tactfully portrayed with sweat-and-blood intensity. Playing as a young Marine recruit, you're thrown into the throngs of the Vietnamese playground rife with clomping bullets, constant artillery barrages, and shrieks from wounded comrades. Imagine Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (developer 2015's previous project) but set in a much more unwavering and mature environment, and you'll have an idea of the fervor of this Vietnam conflict. A lot of the scripted events, such as helicopter raids, tanks blowing up, and men dying in front of you, add tons of depth—and in surround sound, these occurrences are just awesome to witness, too.

Coming Out of the Woodwork

In Men of Valor, you'll be directed to clear bunkers, man a turret on a gunship, and rescue POWs—basic objectives for a lonely grunt like yourself. Completing such duties is also standard fare: just aim and shoot.



PRO TIP: Go prone in the bushes, and you won't be noticed as you move toward those pesky soldiers.



Powerful issues, such as ethnicity and morality, are sensibly touched upon, which contributes to the game's depth.



PRO TIP: It may seem cruel and cowardly, but use your injured comrades as cover.

Despite the tired-and-true point-and-kill mechanics, the A.I. on both sides still needs to graduate from boot camp. Your squad's poor firing techniques redefine the Marines as the worst riflemen in any military group. Because of their shoddy gun skills, you aren't adequately supported, nor can you control your squad's movements, which makes it even more frustrating because they'll usually step in front of you as you attempt to take out Charlie. Simply, your men suck.

The enemies perform a little better in the technique area, but their constant respawning just makes the fight unbearable. Not until you reach a predetermined point in a level will the Vietcong magically stop coming out of the bushes.

Levels aren't open ended, which translates to linear hell. It's dumb that you can't flank the enemy and even more doltish that in one level, you're forced to walk along a riverbed knowing full well that you'll be ambushed on both sides. That's just poor level design.

Purple Heart

Fortunately, Men of Valor has the theatrical wartime fireworks to make you sit still for at least a bit. At some points in the game, you're in the middle of a chaotic, shrapnel-crazed area where pumping lead in every direction is the only offense you have. Times like these are when Men of Valor shines, and you'll forget for a minute the things that are frustrating. At the very least, Men of Valor deserves a full-night rental, but don't count on being a war hero in the morning.



PRO TIP: You're better off fighting alongside a teammate than going solo.



Raw, unscripted war acts in Men of Valor illustrate the realities of a battle that was never lost.



PRO TIP: Although levels are restrictive, there's some room for flanking. Just remember to run for cover as you move forward to the left or right of the opposition.



IM ■ Developed by 2015
 ■ Published by Vivendi Universal Games
 ■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ Shooting
 ■ 2 players; 12 online

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BloodRayne 2

The vampiress with the mostest returns in **BloodRayne 2** with more blood, more sex, and more fun for older gamers.

X If you're a man of many tastes, you may have noticed BloodRayne, the heroine of 2002's hyper-violent action game, popping up a lot more often lately like on MTV2, lopping off heads to the tune of Evanescence's "Everybody's Fool" or perhaps in *Playboy*, showing off some of her more interesting assets. It's all part of the push Majesco is giving the sprightly little lady for her big sequel—and while BloodRayne 2 borrows all of its new features from other, more successful games, it will still likely keep the hormones of her fan base raging for months to come.



"Is this how you say hi to everyone, honey?"



PRO TIP: While you're grinding rats, you can press the Action button to stick out your blades and decapitate anyone nearby.



PRO TIP: Your "vampire sense" is the only way to accurately pick out certain enemies from the sky.



PRO TIP: "Blinded Perception" (a.k.a. ballal time) is the most practical way to deal with any gun-toting enemies.

Not into Long Walks at the Park

Thankfully for BloodRayne's fans, the days of her punching out Nazis in the swamps of Louisiana are finally over. BloodRayne 2 is set in the modern age with everyone's favorite demi-vampires sinking among the gothic elite and trying to off her siblings before they can take over the world by using a substance that eliminates their vampirelike weakness to sunlight.

Like any character-driven game sequel, the core gameplay remains mostly unchanged. Rayne still has a killer set of blades that slices and dices anything in her path, as well as a handy harpoon and a few supernatural powers like bullet time. The main new addition is a gun—a haunted one, of course, which runs off the blood of hapless enemies and is quite useful for picking off flying bosses. You've also got some more acrobatic bits in the sequel with Rayne spinning on poles and flipping up to high areas—a trick that works exactly as it did in last year's *Prince of Persia*.

The funny thing about all this, though, is that it demonstrates how much the action-game genre has seemed to advance over the past few years without actually advancing much at all. The graphics are nearly immaculate with lovely lighting tricks and all manner of destructible objects. The cut-scenes and intermittent dialogue are equally fantastic as long as you don't mind the *Gothier*-than-thou tone sprinkled over everything. It's just that, despite Rayne's new abilities, you're still doing pretty much the same thing as before—slashing up winpy guys, defeating bosses, and then doing it all over again after the next save point. (Even worse, the old camera problems are still there—you'll get blind-sided by enemies all the time simply because you had no advance warning of their presence.)

Elvira? Whatever

Of course, all of this could be said for the original BloodRayne, too. This series isn't meant to forge new design breakthroughs; it's meant to feature a pretty girl doing all sorts of nasty stuff to enemies. If you enjoyed BloodRayne for what it was, then there's no way its sequel will disappoint you.—Clockwork Crew

Also on the PlayStation 2



Developed by Terminal Reality
Published by Majesco
\$49.99 Available now
Action 1 player



PRO TIP: You can "feed" on almost any enemy in the game to refill both your gun's ammunition and your own energy.



PRO TIP: You can't feed on anyone carrying a baseball bat or other melee weapon. Knock it out of their hands with a kick combo first.



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X	GRAPHICS	4.5	FOR FACTOR 3.5
	SOUND	3.5	
	CONTROL	3.0	

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Neo Contra

Switching to 3D is a risky gamble, but it pays off in this killer shooter.

PS2 In a way, the Contra games have grown into self-aware organisms. As relentlessly paced and very hard 2D shooters, they know what their job is, they do it, and for the most part, they've done it well. And with a switch to quasi-3D, shifting perspectives, and some heavy control alterations, Neo Contra refines and champions the series' philosophy of *pow*. Hordes of enemies ceaselessly attack as before, bosses ranging from rogue bioroids and mech-piloting pit bulls to telepathic tree huggers are as algebraically precise as always, and explosions like time-lapsed blooming flowers bloom around you in an all-too-familiar yet thoroughly mesmerizing synchrony of slaughter. The gameplay blows minds. The lush, detailed graphics and driving soundtrack are the icing on the cake.

Math Gaming

Before leaping into the fray, you get your choice of which character to control and one of three weapon configurations. Each setup consists of a primary weapon, such as a machine gun or spread gun, a secondary weapon like grenades, and a lock-on projectile for airborne enemies. The initial four missions are modular in nature so you can choose to play them in any order, but to unlock the realer missions, you have to make it through the initial four without using up all of your continues. This is the only way to beat the game, no slight feat, but added to the incentive are bonuses like more continues and extra characters such as Katana Jaguar, whose melee-based attacks usher in a whole new way of plying Contra—head to hand.

Set It Off

Accompanying the switch to 3D is a retooled control scheme. First, you can no longer jump, but you can roll away quickly instead. By holding down the shoulder buttons, you can either strafe from side to side and fire in one direction or stay locked in place and shoot in a 360-degree circumference around you. So you're constantly juggling back and forth between different types of weapons, strafing, and locking yourself into place depending on the type of adversaries you're up against.

At first it feels awkward, and indeed there is a steep learning curve at work here. But like everything else in the game, practice makes perfect, and once you get the hang of it (something which mysteriously happens without you realizing it) you enter this strange stage of nonaction, altering your technique—strafe then stick, strafe then stick—on the fly without thought. It's this type of unthinking altered-state action games aspire to immerse you in and which Neo Contra delivers.

New World Order

Some may level complaints at the game's duration, and technically speaking, the game is quite short. You can blow through all of the missions within an hour. However, to do so, you need to play through each one repeatedly to hone your skills and memorize the attack patterns and placement of your enemies. Take into consideration the high degree of difficulty and combine that with unlockable missions and characters, and the actual replay value is quite high. In short, Neo Contra is not only a great follow-up to Shattered Soldier that will please longtime fans, but it is definitely recommended for newcomers as well.—Iron Monkey

EM ■ Developed by KCEP
 ■ Published by Konami
 ■ \$39.99 ■ Available now
 ■ Shooting ■ 2 players



Call us Jaded, but now we've seen it all.



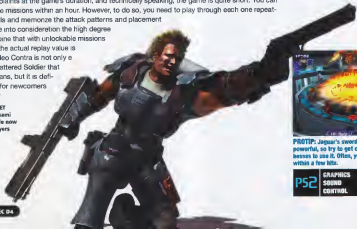
PRO TIP: The best weapon configuration is the default one: machine gun, grenade bomb, and lock-on missile.



Jaguar wants to know how it feels to be on the other side of the barrel.



PRO TIP: Watch for the red patches in the force field—they will open up and leave this boss vulnerable.



PRO TIP: Jaguar's sword attacks are very powerful, so try to get close enough to heroes to use it. Often, you can kill them within a few hits.

PS2 GRAPHICS 4.0
 SOUND 4.0
 CONTROL 4.5
4.0



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Guilty Gear Isuka

The 2D fighting-game genre still has a strong following, and that audience should really appreciate Sammy's efforts to dish out fresh gameplay.

PS2 Despite the fact that most of today's video games are pushing massive amounts of 3D around the screen, there's still a die-hard audience clamoring for old-school 2D games—especially in the fighting genre. One series that's kept that torch lit is Guilty Gear, and with the most recent episode—Isuka—Sammy Studios has shown that the well is far from dry.

Defend Yourself

Some would say that 2D fighters are "pure" fighting games—combatants need to prove their offensive and defensive skills with very few (if any) places to run and hide. To a small extent, Guilty Gear Isuka betrays its roots with a touch of 3D. Fighting can take place on two distinct planes, one in the foreground and one slightly behind it. With a quick button combo, an on-screen character moves to the rear plane and then just as quickly moves to the front again. It adds to the strategy but also risks that a more offensive-minded player would end up "chasing" a more elusive opponent.

For 2D punks, though, the gameplay still reigns because to counter the two-plane design, Sammy and developer Arc Systems Works added a four-player mode that assures the "runner" only short-term safety. Matches can be set up as two-on-two, three-on-one, or everyone for themselves.



PRO TIP: Peeping over to the list of buttons and the offensive moves to which they're tied is valuable information for improving your chances to make it to the next match.



PRO TIP: When the going gets tough, such as in a four-person free-for-all, a solid mix of offensive attacks and counters will keep bigger numbers in your tiles column.



PRO TIP: A really good fighting-games player may quickly turn an opponent into chopped beef, but a three-on-one match just might be what's needed to keep it competitive and entertaining.



PRO TIP: The R1 button also flips your character 180 degrees so that you're facing the other way. Quick use of the command is essential—but so is knowing how to do a back attack.



PRO TIP: The first thing to make a reflex in order to improve your survival is simultaneously pressing R1 and [] to move from one plane to the next, and careful timing can help you avoid some attack damage.

More Than a Trial Run

That's just one segment of a title that offers a lot of gameplay under the hood. In addition to the standard Versus and Arcade modes, Guilty Gear Isuka's creators also added a mode called GG Boost, which greets the fighting action onto a side-scrolling structure. Boost should have some appeal to those more into action games.

The game features brightly colored characters and environments, though some will find it more than a little busy. The "loud" backgrounds also mean that key elements can be hard to read quickly while in combat—such as the arrow indicator above the character's head, which is important now that you have to press the R1 button to switch which direction you're facing. The animation, while clean and smooth, doesn't break any new ground, and the repetitive sounds quickly become annoying, showing that the obvious desire for gameplay innovation didn't inspire similar improvements in other aspects of the game.

And The Final Verdict...?

Simply put, if you're already a fan of 2D fighters, you'll love what Guilty Gear Isuka has to offer. However, if you're hoping that the other facets of the game will be enough to keep you interested...well, the jury is still out on that one.—Manny LaManche

T Developed by Arc Systems Works
 Published by Sammy Studios
 \$39.99 Available November
 Fighting/Action ■ 4 players



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PS2
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Conflict: Vietnam

PS2 **X** Much like the protracted and difficult war on which this game is based, Conflict: Vietnam is an altogether ugly and unsatisfying experience. Those familiar with the previous Conflict games might enjoy the funky squad-based gameplay, but gamers who prefer dealing death to delegating responsibilities will find the infatigating control scheme to be a nearly insurmountable shortcoming.

Control Conflict

You control a four-man team of American commandos who fight together throughout the course of the bloody war, starting with the Tet Offensive of 1968. On the plus side, you can switch between any of the squad members at will while alternating between first- and third-person perspectives on the fly. But on the negative side (which encompasses just about everything else), controlling your team and issuing complex orders under enemy fire is a teeth-grinding, sprint-crushing exercise in aggravation. The difficulty of successfully surviving enemy attacks and maintaining some semblance of order is exacerbated

by the clumsy real-time command and inventory menus, which force you to focus on your idiotic allies while you take a few clips to the head. Unlike in the popular Tom Clancy tactical-shooter games, Conflict's friendly A.I. is worthless as even the simplest actions require you to micromanage the action while trying not to let any of your zombie-like buddies wander into any of the well-hidden booby traps.

Beaucoup Bad News

Aesthetically, Conflict: Vietnam is a mixed bag. The mediocre graphics do an adequate job of rendering believable jungle environments, but the unattractive artistic style tends to jar with the hardboiled atmosphere. The sound, however, is one of the game's strongest points with an absolutely rocking 1960s soundtrack and great character dialogue that manages to be both convincing and entertaining. But even golden oldies by the Rolling Stones can't save this sinking swift boat as Conflict: Vietnam drowns under the weight of its poorly conceived control scheme, faulty targeting system, and ho-hum visuals.



PRO TIP: Try letting your auto-aim feature take over your cursor to locate enemies hidden in the dense jungles.

Ultimately, Conflict: Vietnam is an ambitious but fatally flawed game that reaches for the impact and entertainment value of films like *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket*, but ends up feeling like *Hamburger Hill*. This is one tour of duty you may not survive.—Bones

ESRB ■ Developed by Pivotal Games ■ Published by Global Star ■ \$39.99 ■ Available now ■ Tactical action ■ 4 players



PRO TIP: Be sure to straggle up the items you find as fallen enemies and in supply dumps as your allies will never help themselves.

PS2	GRAPHICS	3.5	MIN FACTOR	2.5
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	2.0		
X	GRAPHICS	3.5	MIN FACTOR	2.5
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	2.0		

Demon Stone

PS2 **GET MORE gamepro ONLINE** Demon Stone, a third-person actioner fraught with echoes of *The Two Towers*, takes place in Dungeons & Dragons' Forgotten Realms. Though the art and storytelling in *Demon Stone* are magnificent, the all-important gameplay never materializes.

One Hit of Melf's Acid...

Behold the tale of Rannek, Zhai, and Ilfus, a fighter, thief, and wizard, respectively, who embark on a perilous quest to save the Realms from two bellicose planar entities bent on destruction. To do so, our heroes must acquire a *Demon Stone* and trap the warring deities inside it for eternity. The story, scribbled by *Forgotten Realms* mainstay R.A. Salvatore, is standard high-fantasy fare with fairly interesting characters and a guest appearance by the reclusive *Drow* antihero Drizzt Do'Urden. Character art, creature design, environments, and the sweeping orchestral score are all masterfully crafted. Unfortunately, *Demon Stone* isn't as much fun to play as it is to look at.



PRO TIP: Knock enemies off edges or into the fire pit in the Yuan-Ti temple—it's the easiest way to dispatch them.



PRO TIP: In *Cedarford*, don't forget to rescue the elves in the burning buildings behind you!

...Arrow, and You'll Swear It's D&D!

The player is given the opportunity to switch between the three main characters at any time, leaving the other two under A.I. control. At the end of each level, experience points and gold are divided among the three characters. Experience and gold are spent in a baffling skill and item upgrade system that is at most nominally reminiscent of D&D. Gameplay falls almost immediately into a repetitious pattern that features wave after wave of homogenous enemies. Occasionally there's a minor twist, but you never stray far from the formula. The player can't control the camera, and the forced perspective often causes the characters to disappear behind hordes of swarming attackers. All you can do is mash the controller and hope some space clears; forget about using special abilities.

Underneath the gloss, *Demon Stone* is an average action game that feels too much like *The Two Towers*. The upgrade system tries to be "D&D for Dummies" but ends up being awkward for both neophytes and hardcore RPG fans. This recipe needs a little more work before it's ready to be served as a main dish. You can look for Xbox and PC ports to arrive in November.—Superf Samurai

Also on the Xbox

ESRB ■ Developed by Stormfront Studios ■ Published by Atari ■ \$49.95 ■ Available now ■ Action ■ 1 player

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.5	MIN FACTOR	3.5
	SOUND	5.0		
	CONTROL	3.5		

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Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus

PS2 Based on the new cartoon series, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus is the sequel to last year's lackluster console title, and despite the inclusion of a number of cool extras and some great cut-shading, this year's installment isn't much of an improvement.

Shell-Shaded

TMNT2 lets up to four players battle together through routine stages littered with swarms of idiotic bad guys in an effort to save Master Splinter and defeat the evil Shredder and his Foot Ninjas. The turtles are all about action, and accordingly, the story (a disparate collection of adventures from the new TV series) is barely there but hardly needed. Put simply, there isn't anything here that action fans haven't seen before in better incarnations, and the addition of tons of lengthy cut-scenes from the poorly animated TV series does little to remedy the dull and repetitious gameplay.

However, what the game lacks in substance it nearly makes up for in style. TMNT2 boasts some rather outstanding cel-shaded graphics that capture the cartoon style of the show and actually look better than most of the cut-scenes. And with tons of great dialogue from the show's voice actors and an abundant use of the catchy theme song, TMNT2 looks and sounds every bit the great game it could have been.



PRO TIP: In the sewer escape stage, it's best to avoid any fighting and instead focus on jumping over obstacles and avoiding attacks.



PRO TIP: Utilizing each turtle's specific skill, such as Donatello's protective shield, can help you overcome seemingly overwhelming odds.

Headache in a Half Shell

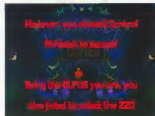
Monotonous and unrememorable button-mashing brawling aside, TMNT2's biggest problems come by way of the wacky camera and the targeting system (or lack thereof). In nearly every stage, the camera angle zooms out to a ridiculously wide-angle shot to display the entire environment and show all four fighting turtles, but such an extreme viewpoint makes for teeny-weensy characters and lots of squinting eyes (don't even think of playing it on anything smaller than a 20" TV). Plus, the surprisingly sluggish and nonintuitive fighting is worsened by the straight-ahead targeting that consistently misses the surrounding enemies and leaves you open to cheap and unrelenting counterattacks.

Still, diehard fans will appreciate the high production value and the inclusion of the early 1990s Konami arcade classics. But behind the flashy extras and cool license, TMNT2 remains an utterly forgettable (albeit forgivable) example of the modern gaming mediocrity.—Bones

Also on the Xbox and GameCube

T Developed and published by Konami
\$39.99 Available now **Action** 4 players

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	FOR FACTOR	2.5
	SOUND CONTROL	3.8		



PRO TIP: In Total Carnage, be sure to collect as much money as possible; otherwise, you won't be able to enter the Pleasure Gardens at the end of the game.

Midway Arcade Treasures 2

PS2 **X** **GC** Raiding the arcade vault for a second time, Midway has compiled an eclectic mix of 20 games that span almost every genre. But the choices are hit and miss as some of the titles remain strong today, while others haven't aged well...at all.



"Rage!"

The highlight of the collection is the two Mortal Kombat—II and 3—which benefit from perfect arcade translations, right down to the A.I. cheapness that was necessary for arcade games to thrive. For quarter-crunching (or continue-crunching) mayhem, Total Carnage is as mindless as one can get: shoot enemies, save babes, and grab cash—all done against a Gulf War-esque backdrop.

For sports, you can see the influence that Arch Rivals would later have on NBA Jam and its successors, and APB remains fun despite its very un-p.c. suspect-beating sessions. Rounding out the strong titles is Gauntlet II—one of the best four-player time wasters ever created. Each game has a host of supplementary materials—press sheets, designer biographies, release dates, and more—that should undoubtedly appeal to any one interested in video-game history.

"Wizard Is About To Die..."

Not all of the games have aged particularly well. Pit Fighter, Kazmik Krooer, and Primal Rage are almost unplayable, and the obnoxious taunts of Wizard of War will send you scrambling for the mute button. Of the three versions, the Xbox one has a slight edge with the cleanest graphics, but the PlayStation 2 one benefits from slightly tighter controls than in the other two. The button scheme on the GameCube controller doesn't work well with the Mortal Kombat titles.

The compilation is absolutely worth the green for fighting-game fans and video-game historians—and the \$20 price is hard to beat.

—Major Mike

IM Developed by Backbone Entertainment
 Published by Midway **\$19.99** Available now
 Action/Adventure/Fighting/Driving 4 players

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.

PS2	GRAPHICS	3.5	FOR FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND CONTROL	4.5		
X	GRAPHICS	4.0	FOR FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND CONTROL	4.0		
GC	GRAPHICS	3.5	FOR FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND CONTROL	4.0		



PRO TIP: In Mortal Kombat II and 3, the "neck tick" is an essential skill. When you jump over an opponent, press High Kick before you land.

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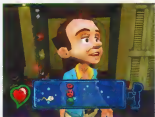
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude

Although Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude is nowhere near the best game of 2004, it may rank among this year's biggest surprises. Despite being based on a long-dead PC game series—and for that matter, not being much of a game at all—Leisure Suit Larry succeeds in the one area it's always succeeded: It's funny. Really.

Your Lips Look Lonely...

The original Larry is too old to be chasing women around, so Magna Cum Laude stars his nephew Larry Love, a dorky college student trying to score with every chick on campus. The game itself is really a sprawling collection of mini-games—to bag each girl, you'll wedge through several conversations, a dance sequence or two, and perhaps a round of quarters, the classic drinking game.

Talking to the ladies (Leisure Suit Larry's chief activity) involves controlling a little sperm around screens, dodging poor conversation choices (the red marks), and trying to hit the interesting topics (the green marks). Even if you screw up a conversation—and you'll want to, given how hilarious



PRO TIP: The drunker you get playing quarters, the harder it is to control yourself in conversations. Just like real life, you know.

the results can get—you're allowed essentially infinite tries to get it right again. In fact, this "do it over if you screw up" approach applies to nearly every facet of the game—if you suck at a certain mini-game, you have the option of playing at an easier skill level or even skipping it entirely if you have enough secret tokens.

Word Japanese Vending Machine Theory



PRO TIP: Too drunk to party? Go buy some coffee at one of those vending machines to sober up.

...Would They Like To Meet Mine?

Doesn't sound like much of a game, does it? Well, it isn't—and the graphics aren't exactly what you'd call titillating either. However, it is extremely funny in a way that college humor-laden titles like The Guy Game aren't. You'll end up talking to girls over and over again just to hear all of Larry's horrible pick-up lines, but the rest of his dialogue is frequently laugh-out-loud funny, too. This ribald comedy makes Leisure Suit Larry a must if you're the right age to appreciate it—it's almost like they came up with the jokes first, then hastily built a game framework around it. —Clockwork Crew

Also on the PlayStation 2

IM # Developed by High Voltage Software
Published by Vivendi Universal Games
\$49.99 # Available now # Adventure # 1 player

X	GRAPHICS	2.5	FOR PS2
	SOUND	3.0	
	CONTROL	2.5	
			3.5

Karaoke Revolution Volume 3

Konami and developer Harmonix have again teamed up for a third instalment in this performance series, and it's obvious that they aren't simply putting out new versions presenting different songs. They're adding new modes and challenges for the closest singer—or singers—to get into



PRO TIP: Don't be afraid to use Practice mode with a song if you're not familiar with it or you need to refresh yourself before heading to perform.

Turn Up the (Third) Volume

The latest take on the game lets you pick from 35 songs and does a great job of tracking your pitch as you go, then converting that into a score. It also once more updates the tune library with a mix of classic (Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York," B-52's "Love Shack") and current (Hooobester's "The Reason," Evanescence's "My Immortal") titles, and male and female songs, so there's something for all ages and genres. And there are plenty of options that enable you to battle it out in different gameplay modes or simply sing for fun with friends.



PRO TIP: In Knockout mode, it can be hard to sing the right notes if the person next to you is off, so try your best to tame your opponent out.

One of the exciting new additions is a selection of duet duels, where two crooners compete: Sing-Off has foes trading off phrases for the best score, while Knockout is a head-to-head battle with the weaker singers getting the boot midsong. There's also a Duets mode that has the pair working as a team for the best collective score.

And on That Note...

While Volume 3 still has some of the foibles found in the previous versions, such as opting to clean up the lyrics to "Why Can't I" in order to keep the game's Everyone rating, and there's still no way to pitch-adjust a song to better fit your singing range (as you can do in a "real" karaoke setting)—there's no doubt that it's yet another improvement on the concept. The game rocks... and so will you. —Manny LaMancha



PRO TIP: Be sure to set up your mic level so the game picks up your voice clearly at the volume you'd be singing, or you may miss out on all your points.

IE # Developed by Harmonix Music Systems
Published by Konami # \$39.99
Available November # Music # 2 players

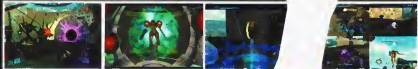
PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	FOR PS2
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	5.0	
			4.5



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The Sims 2

The Sims return in a triumphant sequel that significantly expands the challenge and gameplay of the original while maintaining its quirky sugar and spice.

The Sims started a gaming revolution when it was released in 2000, managing to reach a vast audience of nongamers en route to becoming the top-selling PC game of all time. The overly simple, nonviolent title with open-ended goals and no endgame was off-putting to many hardcore gamers, but The Sims 2 will probably change a lot of minds.

Time May Change Me, but I Can't Trace Time

The Sims 2 improves upon the original in subtle, organic ways that deliver tremendous impact. The biggest one is that your Sims now age through five



PRO TIP: A dining room table is important to maintain the beauty's social network during meals. Look for other activities that fill more than one need at once.



PRO TIP: The love tab speeds along the romantic process. Let's get it business, babe!



PRO TIP: Keep areas of your house's necessities simple and centralized to accentuate your working Sims' lives.

stages of life, then they're off to the of database in the sky. The challenge is

to help your Sims realize their aspirations like becoming a rock star or having a giant family before the grim reaper comes calling. Families can have or adopt children, and the next generation grows up to pursue their own challenges. If you can't stand the gravity of watching your beloved characters grow old and die, you can always turn off this feature and just aim away with eternal youth.

The Sims Rejuvenated

The Sims 2's vibrant new 3D engine delivers a spectacular amount of detail. Zoom in to find ticking clocks, zits on teenagers' mugs, and even a realistic portrayal of SSX 3 on the TV (which even goes into split-screen mode when two Sims play). But it's the Sims themselves that are truly the stars of the show. The Sim creation tool offers a remarkable level of detail, from eye shape to hair color to clothing, for a variety of occasions. Your characters' emotions and disposition play out on their expressive faces and even their physical appearance. If you don't keep your Sims in shape, they'll develop a beer belly. Keep them spiritually cleansed through yoga and meditation, and they'll hold onto their youth longer. Tease their innermost desires, and they'll snap! One lady, unlucky in love and childless, started carrying around a flour sack as a surrogate baby.

Completing the fantastic audio package are charming sound effects that expand the characters' "Simlish" outbursts, which convey their personality, while the chipper, relaxing music sets the scene for a classic family sitcom.

Come Sim Away

The game's interface is the only stumbling block. Despite intuitive camera controls and user-friendly expanding windows, some commands and features are inexplicably hidden in arcane locations, such as buying a baby's crib or asking parents to help with homework. Still, this is a fantastically

complex game, and with a multistep tutorial, the learning curve is virtually nonexistent.

A strategic challenge, a living soap opera, and an interior designer's dream sandbox, The Sims 2 elaborates upon the original and many of its expansions (although there's a 3D room for improvement as there are no pets yet). Far more than the original, this truly is a game that can be enjoyed by anyone and should be tried by everyone.—Boba Fett

T • Developed by Maxis
 • Published by EA Games
 • \$49.99 • Available now
 • Simulation/strategy • 1 player

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PRO TIP: Take the last in hot spots to meet new people. Focus on one or two to get enough trust for friendship.



PRO TIP: Take the last in hot spots to meet new people. Focus on one or two to get enough trust for friendship.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PC	GRAPHICS	5.0	TOP CHOICE
	SOUND	5.0	
	CONTROL	4.5	

Recommended System Specifications:
 Windows XP/Vista • Processor: 1.6GHz
 • 256 MB RAM • 2 GB HD • 32 MB video card

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Call of Duty: United Offensive

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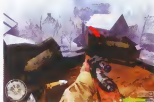


PROTIP: During the first scenario with the mortar strikes, there's one particular molehill you must enter—follow the star on your compass.

B Good news! Call of Duty: United Offensive's white-knuckle WWII scenarios will blow away even jaded FPS veterans. And that's no small achievement, especially for a mere expansion pack.

Do the Duty

United Offensive serves up several new WWII scenarios, including The Battle of the Bulge and the Invasion of Sicily. You won't always be stuck in the trenches, either—in one nail-biting sequence, you must man the tail gun of a B-17 Flying Fortress while soaring over Eastern Europe. But even amidst all the confusion and carnage, United Offensive's responsive control scheme is completely reliable. In fact, the intuitive Aim Down the Sight ability (familiar to Call of Duty vets) is still the best aiming system to grace the FPS market. On the online front, United Offensive's multiplayer modes have also received an overhaul with new games like Capture the Flag and the tank-focused Base Assault. The modes are a nice addition, but they're not interactive enough to defeat Battlefield Vietnam, the current king of online warfare.



PROTIP: In the church's tower, you must wipe all seven of the bazooka-bling Paratroopers to protect the tanks and complete the mission. Reinforcements will sneak in from the sides, so look sharp.

As in its predecessor, Call of Duty, United Offensive uses a retrofitted version of the Quake III graphics engine. While the sharp textures and characters look convincing, the outrageously detailed special effects simply steal the show. Mortar explosions, for instance, send vast clouds of dirt and debris billowing realistically into the sky. These gorgeous visuals come at a steep price, but if your system can handle UT 2004 and Battlefield Vietnam, you have no worries. On the sound front, expect to hear chattering machine guns and booming explosions, all presented with convincing 3D effects.

Silver Star

Of course, you'll need the original Call of Duty to play this expansion. But that's a small price to pay, especially for insatiable FPS players. Battlefield Vietnam may rule the online roost, but United Offensive's gripping single-player campaign is second to none.—Vicous Sid

T **Developed by** Gray Matter Studios
Published by Activision **\$29.99** **Available now**
First-person shooter **1 player; 32 online**

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

GP	GRAPHICS	4.5	FOR FURTHER 5.0
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	5.0	

Recommended System Specifications
 • Windows XP/VISTA/7P • Processor 3.0 GHz
 • 512 MB RAM • 2.5 GB on HD • 128 MB video card



PROTIP: When the going gets tough, the tough go indoors. Humans can garrison themselves into various buildings, offering temporary protection from a handy saving point to boot.

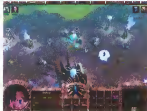
Armies of Exigo

B With the arrival of Armies of Exigo on the PC, strategy gamers may finally have a semi-viable alternative to the Warcraft III Juggernaut.

Three's a Crowd

Exigo pits three races—the Beast Horde, the Empire, and the Fallen—against each other in a hardcore RTS brawl. The single-player game features 36 total missions (12 for each faction), and multiplayer matches include games like Capture the Flag and King of the Hill. But Exigo's main selling point is the fact that units are able to head underground to bypass obstacles, steal precious resources, and spring sneak attacks (like poison gas clouds that seep up to choke surface enemies). While the dual-layered gameplay isn't quite as amazing as it first opens up—your're limited to pregenerated underground catacombs—it does open up new strategic avenues.

Otherwise, Exigo receives only mixed marks for its cumbersome control scheme. While the point-and-click interface is intuitive, the expansive keyboard commands would be more streamlined and accessible. It should also be noted that Exigo is definitely geared more toward experienced strategy veterans; though there are a few tutorial levels, they only demonstrate the most basic techniques.



PROTIP: The Soultzap acts as a reservoir, storing shared experience points and resources for the Fallen army. If it's destroyed, the Fallen will weaken dramatically. Use this to your advantage.

Further Down the Rabbit Hole

In the graphics department, Exigo's detailed environments and sparring special effects add a noticeable coat of luster. But more importantly, the performance is smooth and steady, meaning that players on modest PCs can expect decent frame rates. Exigo's audio is less impressive, offering a generic, epic-tinged soundtrack and a standard array of clangs and thuds. There's also the usual collection of awful faux-British accents—feel free to silence them via the options screen.

Exigo's multileveled gameplay is a good first step in an interesting direction, but unfortunately, that's not always enough to compete in the brutally competitive RTS genre. With more tweaking, Armies of Exigo could definitely give Blizzard a run for its money. Until then, it's a perfectly entertaining strategy exercise

—Vicous Sid

T **Developed by** Black Hole Entertainment
Published by EA Games **\$49.99**
Available November **RTS** **1 player; 12 online**

GP

GRAPHICS	4.0	FOR FURTHER 4.0
SOUND	3.5	
CONTROL	3.0	

Recommended System Specifications
 • Windows XP/VISTA/7P • Processor 3.0 GHz
 • 512 MB RAM • 2.5 GB on HD • 128 MB video card



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PRO TIP: Attacking en masse is usually your best bet. Pathetically build up your Marines and Scouts, and remember to max out the squad size (up to eight marines per company, four scouts per squad). Now, retreat!



PRO TIP: Mechs are highly resistant to bullets and flames, and can easily shred through your front line. Stay at a distance and harrow them with plasma and missiles.

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War



It's about time. After several disappointing video-game adaptations, patient Warhammer: 40K fans finally have a reason to get excited. Really excited. Honest.

Sledgehammer

After seeing the shockingly brutal opening cinema, Warhammer: 40K fans will breathe a collective sigh of relief—clearly, this is one adaptation that wasn't sanitized in the name of higher sales. Dawn of War's attention to detail extends to the battlefield as the gritty, bomb-blasted cityscapes lovingly re-create W40K's battle-scarred universe. And despite rendering vast numbers of units on screen, Dawn of War's frame rate stays consistently smooth and playable. There's also good news in the audio department as the stirring battle anthems and crisp sound effects create an immersive sonic environment. The voice acting is also memorable, a rarity in many titles these days.

Thanks to its effortless interface and simple mission objectives, Dawn of War is the perfect introductory strategy game for casual PC players. As a plus, it retains enough tactical flexibility to keep the interest of more experienced strategy buffs. Units are arranged into squads so you'll never feel overwhelmed by the number of troops on the field. Though there are occasional problems with squad navigation, it's nothing that poses a major problem. On the multiplayer side, Dawn of War offers several playable races, including the Chaos Space Marines, Orks, and the Eldar. The single-player campaign limits players to controlling one individual Marine clan, but that sacrifice is made in the name of a detailed story line. And, as every W40K fan knows, the story line is half the fun.

There's no question that Dawn of War will turn even the meekest, mildest players into bloodthirsty battle addicts. Jaded, hard-to-please RTS snobs may turn their noses up at this novice-friendly title, but that's no reason for the rest of us to sleep through this Dawn. —Vedius Sid

"Victory Is Mine!"

There's no question that Dawn of War will turn even the meekest, mildest players into bloodthirsty battle addicts. Jaded, hard-to-please RTS snobs may turn their noses up at this novice-friendly title, but that's no reason for the rest of us to sleep through this Dawn. —Vedius Sid

IM ■ Developed by Relic ■ Published by THQ ■ \$49.99
■ Available now ■ Real-time strategy ■ 8 players

GAMEPRO
EDITORS' CHOICE

PC GRAPHICS 5.0
SOUND 5.0
CONTROL 5.0

Recommended System Specifications
■ Windows XP/MS/2000/SP ■ Pentium 4 2.2 GHz
■ 512 MB RAM ■ 1.5 GB on HD ■ 32 MB video card

Evil Genius

It isn't easy being an evil genius these days so it's a good thing that the madman at Elixir Studios have cooked up Evil Genius, a game where eager evildoers can test their mettle before trying to take over the world.

Chaos Incorporated

Evil Genius cherry-picks some elements of standard real-time strategy games, such as technology trees and resource management, and wraps them in a stylish package somewhere between Austin Powers and James Bond. You start off with some cash, a few thugs at your disposal, and an island volcano for your secret base. You have to blast away at the mountain, building rooms from sleeping quarters to laboratories and even training rooms. You'll need to train your henchmen to upgrade their skills, and along the way, you can recruit some particularly nasty sidekicks with special abilities.

Mostly, you have to fight off the waves of enemy do-gooders who slip into your base in real-time. One of the highlights of the game is setting traps for enemy agents. All kinds of dastardly devices from spinning blades to carnivorous plants are available. The traps are a nice touch, and building a

clever base defense is essential, but overall, the traps are a relatively small part of the game.

As the game progresses, your options, evil toys, and fiendish objectives increase. Unfortunately, some of even the more simple tasks can be vague and difficult to achieve. For instance, one objective had me building a fake research machine and conning enemy agents into stealing it. Sounds simple, but numerous teams of thieves stole just about everything in my base but the bogus science equipment.

Brains...and Beauty, Too

Evil Genius has a nice look to it. The animations are fun, but overall, don't expect to be wowed by detailed models and lush textures, even if you have a high-end PC. Audio in the game is clear and crisp and the music is excellent, but it's quite sparse.

The concept behind Evil Genius is a great one, but the individual pieces of the game don't balance as well as they could. Even so, if you're looking for a unique strategy game, Evil Genius is a fresh spin on a genre that's become overly standardized.—Humar Tomaso

T ■ Developed by Elixir Studios
■ Published by Vivendi Universal Games ■ \$49.99
■ Available now ■ Real-time strategy ■ 1 player



PRO TIP: Place your Evil Genius in a high traffic area where your assorted goons will stay motivated by your evil circle of influence.



PRO TIP: Setting up a maze of traps at the entrance to your base is an excellent way to keep the enemy at bay. The flip side is that your own men can get caught when they're careless. However, you could build a "stun base entrance" just to trap enemy agents.

PC GRAPHICS 3.0
SOUND 4.0
CONTROL 4.0

Recommended System Specifications
■ Windows XP/MS/2000/SP ■ Pentium 4 1.5 GHz
■ 256 MB RAM ■ 300 MB on HD ■ 32 MB video card



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The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth

B For a long, long time, real-time strategy games had a fairly predictable rhythm to them—build a base, generate a peon, harvest a resource, build a bunch of guys, go out and conquer. Then along came games like *Ground Control II* and *Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War*, which mixed things up a bit by eliminating the resources or adding something like squads to the mix.

The Battle for Middle-Earth marches to a bit of a different drum, too. Instead of building bases anywhere, you capture “base points” and then click on special circles on the ground and choose what kind of building goes there. The intention is to make the “resource grind” less a part of the game and the battles more important, but it also keeps the interface less cluttered and forces you to think about what structures are really important. The single-player campaign is governed by a giant Risk-style map of Middle-earth as you move different troops into different territories to take control—you get to choose your battle based on the kind of reward you’ll get (more resources, better powers for the heroes, etc.).

Even if these gameplay nuances don’t prove to be the genre’s savior, *The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth* still

gets an A++ and nine gold stars for presentation. It’s easily the best-looking RTS game we’ve ever seen with beautifully animated units and cool movie clips that play in the corner to complement the action. The battle for Helm’s Deep is quite a sight as a sea of hundreds and hundreds of orcs break against the walls and throw up ladders (without any slow-down, we might add). Worthy of the license it’s wrought from.—Star Dingo

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by EA LA
■ Published by EA Games ■ Target release date: November



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Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django

Boktai revolutionized the handheld genre with its solar sensor gameplay, but can the follow-up bring the same ingenuity as its progenitor to the table?

The original Boktai revolutionized the handheld genre with its solar sensor gameplay, eroding the natural gamers perspective and breaking the barriers between the fictional world and reality. Can the follow-up to last year's smash hit bring the same ingenuity as its progenitor to the table?

In an age of continual darkness, the end of the world has arrived. The Dark Immortal Vampires have gathered their strength and brought forth the Undeathering—a process of mass extinction to all life and eventual resurrection of the deceased as undead servants to the Immortals. The legendary vampire hunter Ringo, who defended the City of the Sun, San Miguel, against the Vampires for countless years, has fallen to the Counts' mischievous plots, but all is not lost. The son of Ringo, Django, has inherited his father's weapon, the Gun Del Sol, and together with an emissary from the sun, Mester Otenko, they've defeated the Counts and their Queen of Darkness Hell. However, things are still amiss: the world hasn't reverted back to its normal state, and there is still evil in the land.



What kind of hero allows himself to be shot with his own weapon?



PROTIP: Flatten yourself against the wall and press A to knock to harm enemies.



PROTIP: Use the Enchantment Sol to increase your damage when attacking undead monsters.

Tai-Yo to You, Too

Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django continues the adventures of Django and Master Otenko as they return to the city of the sun to investigate why the Undeathering has not ended. During their journey, they're confronted by an immortal who steals the Gun Del Sol and promptly uses it to defeat our hero. Django, now weaponless, must gather his strength and continue the battle by alternate means to finally end the Undeathering nightmare.

The original Boktai title could be described as a pseudo-western horror game, combining different aspects of Castlevania and Metal Gear with the feel of a traditional action/RPG. It was touted as an ingeniously revolutionary step toward sheltering the fourth dimension, which borders between gameplay and reality—players had to use actual sunlight to recover spirit energy and power the File Driver mechanism to defeat boss characters. Boktai 2 has not strayed far from its progenitor in terms of gameplay, although there is definitely an increased RPG feeling with the new additions—but the enemies still squeak.

Go Away Bee, I'm Trying to Play... Shoo, Shoo!

Since Django has lost the Gun Del Sol in Boktai 2, you must acquire and master new weapons. The new battle system enables players to combine weapons and Enchantment Sol (elemental magic), which uses solar spiritual energy to spellbind your weapons to attack monsters and solve puzzles—certain monsters and puzzles react differently to the elemental magic used against them. Additionally, this sequel has a new level-up system. Django can enhance his stats in four categories, which affect his life gauge, spirit energy gauge, attack power, and movement, every time he levels up.

While the newest additions and enhancements are very cool and give a refreshing level of playability to the series, Boktai 2 still retains some of the less stellar aspects from the original title. The movement controls are still clunky—players will find it awkward to position Django in certain directions—and puzzle difficulty ranges from unintuitive to downright frustrating, although the upped difficulty leads to a certain satisfactory allure when you actually find the right formula.

Boktai 2 may not be as revolutionary as the original, but it's still a solid gaming experience and a good bridge between the gaming world and reality.—Rice Bumer

■ Developed by KCEI ■ Published by Konami
■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ Adventure ■ 1 player



PROTIP: Use the Enchantment Flame and the spear to light out-of-reach torches.



PROTIP: In the cemetery, move the tombstones, which are located second from the bottom of each row, to trigger the underground passage to the Cathedral.



All right—more crate moving puzzles!

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Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2

The totally tubular heroes in a half shell have returned in Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2, which expands on its predecessor while adding some key elements to the action-packed gameplay.

The Turtles vs. Sam Fisher

When a group of hostile extraterrestrials abduct and imprison the Turtles, they must sneak through puzzle-ridden worlds and soar through enemy-infested skies to find their way back to Earth. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2 is no longer a simple beat 'em up due to the sequel's new stealth abilities. While the Turtles still live in 2D on the Game Boy Advance, most stages are now duo-planar. The second plane often suggests a place of hiding from guards and is sometimes used to travel to specific places. Meanwhile, you're often required to revisit certain areas time and again. Additionally, given that each Turtle is charged with his own distinct abilities, some stages require more than one Turtle to complete it.

Whether your objective is to collect all the missing crystals or to go through the level the first time to retrieve your weapon and then a second time to eliminate all the guards, busting baddies on foot is definitely one of the more refined and dominant modes in the game. As you cruise through the missions, you'll eventually come across other modes, such as a side-scrolling shooter and hoverboard challenges. The shooter is really just a cheap knockoff of Gradius minus the options and weapon expansions, while the hoverboarding action is also sadly done in a side-view angle.



PRO TIP: Taking advantage of all the speed boosts on the ground is your key to victory in hoverboard races.

Tonight, I Dine On Turtle Soup

The graphics have slightly improved from those in the first game, though not enough to notice. Unfortunately, the same can be said about the music. There is a voice that reads the narrative during the intro, but after that, each screen contains short subtitles, which comes off as dull and boring.

While the incorporation of stealth may not be the strongest feature in Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2, it's probably the only change to the game worth noting. Although there are other modes for you to try, they're really not worth the time.—*Best Monkey*

E ■ Developed and published by Konami
 ■ \$29.99 ■ Available now ■ Action ■ 4 players



PRO TIP: Hide in wall cracks. Enemies will never find you in them.

	GRAPHICS	3.0	3.5 <small>PER FACTOR</small>
	SOUND	2.0	
	CONTROL	2.5	

TRON 2.0: Killer App

Unlike the Xbox version, TRON 2.0 for the GBA is not a port of last year's PC hit. Rather, it is something of a sequel, chronicling the adventures of Tron and Mercury as the two warriors fend off yet another attack on the ENCOM system.

Return to the Game Grid

Splitted into two concurrent adventures, the game lets players adventure through the system as Tron and then experience things from the other side as Mercury (or vice versa). Both play in a similar manner, though Tron's disc does handle differently than Mercury's rod weapon. Unfortunately, there is no overall ending to the game, even after you have completed both quests.

Presentation is a high point here with fully voiced interludes and vibrant visuals representing the insides of the computer system. Most of the game is played from a third-person perspective with a number of min-games thrown in for variety. For the most part, these work well, but the "hacking" puzzle game is a wee bit overused. Control is tight and responsive with the exception of jumping on an angle, which is a minor frustration.

Vintage Tron

All three of TRON 2.0's combat modes (Tank, Recognizer, and Light Cycle battles) can be played via link cable with up to four players (real or virtual) outside of the main game. The 3D engine powering the Tank and Recognizer modes is basic but functional—however, the Light Cycle battles are an utter blast. "Just one more round" is a common sentiment when playing them.

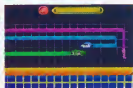
As a bonus (although some would see this as a reason to buy the game), TRON 2.0 also includes the full versions of both the original TRON arcade game and the Discs of TRON arcade game. Control in both is spot on with Discs of TRON using the shoulder buttons for targeting.—*Symel*

E ■ Developed by Digital Eclipse
 ■ Published by Raven Vista Interactive
 ■ \$39.99 ■ Available now ■ Adventure ■ 4 players



PRO TIP: Use the R shoulder button to lock on to enemy programs while strafing. This makes it much easier to time your shots.

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PRO TIP: This phase shift upgrade is the one to have when racing light cycles. It allows you to pass through an enemy trail unharmed.

	GRAPHICS	4.0	4.0 <small>PER FACTOR</small>
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	3.5	



TRON 2.0 includes both original arcade games—you don't even have to unlock them.

Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls

■ Square Enix is taking RPG fans back to their roots. Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls contains remakes of the first two Final Fantasy adventures and tosses in a bestiary so you can go over the stats of creatures you've already encountered. If you've played these seminal RPGs before and the pure nostalgic joy of replaying them doesn't whet your appetite, the extra features—spruced up visuals and audio, new monsters and dungeons, and the ability to save anywhere—should. Sure, some elements are evidence of a nascent genre in the throes of infancy—magic is purchased in shops and the simplistic leveling-up system automatically improves your abilities depending on how you fare in fights—but at the time, this stuff was the best in pixelated sword and sorcery, and it still holds up magically.—Iron Monkey

■ **Hands-On** ■ **Developed by Square Enix**
 ■ **Published by Nintendo**
 ■ **Target release date: November**



Donkey Kong Country 2



■ Released at the tail end of the 2D era, the Donkey Kong Country games blew minds not only because they pushed the envelope in terms of graphical design but also because of their refreshingly challenging gameplay, action-packed levels, and tons of unlockable secrets. The GBA port of the Super NES Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest adds the allure of two-player co-op and a slew of bonus games in which you race ostriches, pilot a helicopter through rings, and collect bugs without being crushed to death by a walking alligator. The playable build of DKC2 controlled smoothly, and the visuals were just as beautiful in that quasi-realistic way—even though they may suffer a bit in comparison to more modern GBA releases. Donkey Kong Country 2 is being rereleased for a reason—it's classic platforming at its best and most innovative.—Iron Monkey

■ **Hands-On** ■ **Developed by Rare**
 ■ **Published by Nintendo**
 ■ **Target release date: November**



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NBA Live 2005

NBA Live adds some Hollywood for its 2005 edition, but there's enough going on inside to keep the gym rats happy, too.

PS2 **X** **C** Even when you're a basketball powerhouse, making improvements to your overall game is the way to keep the competition on its toes. NBA Live 2005 is going for the crown this season with its flashy All-Star Weekend mode. But gym rats are going to appreciate the improved artificial intelligence, a new inside game, and graphical touch-ups working behind the scenes.

Court Sense

The A.I. has picked up its game again this year. On defense, for example, the pro hop move is no longer a gimmie, and in fact, unless you establish a clear path to the basket, expect to lose that bet. The CPU offense also feels like it received a shot of adrenaline. It will try to run you ragged with its quick-hitting transition game, and it sets some murderous picks if you aren't paying attention.

In fact, the action might feel a little lopsided at first. A.I. players seem like souped-up versions of their real selves. Is Shaq really that dominant inside the paint? Maybe he is, but Live's serving up some slick inside moves for you to use in the battle down low. Rebound the rock, and you can choose to attempt a put-back, a dunk, or a tip-in with a single button press.



PRO TIP: The pro hop remains a good move. Just don't try to force it, or they call you for a foul.



PRO TIP: Accurate three-point shooting requires timing and rhythm. To avoid embarrassment, practice before you take on the contest by disabling all the other contributors. Be sure to hit that money ball shot!



PRO TIP: Slam dunks score higher if you bounce the ball off a structure, and you can bounce it off almost any place in the gym. Experiment.

The A.I. gives you a hand, too. If your player is making an offensive move with his back to the basket, he automatically seeks out the best path to the hoop. Overall, the controls do a pro job of managing the action, but the PS2 controller feels particularly well tuned for this game.

The show looks and sounds great as well. EA Canada used a new render engine this season, and they've also redone all the player models from scratch. The Xbox and GameCube versions get a slight edge in visuals, but the PS2 looks aren't bad at all.

The audio is spot on. With Marv Albert and Mike Fratello calling the action, the sounds like the NBA. But for additional vocal support, this year Ernie Johnson and Kenny Smith of TNT join the team for the All-Star Weekend.

All-Star Potential

The NBA All-Star Weekend mode is the added flash for 2005. On top are the Rookie Challenge, the three-point Shootout, the Slam Dunk Contest, and oh yes, the actual All-Star game itself.

The slam dunk mode, however, is where All-Star Weekend really struts its stuff. You can learn to pull 360, between the legs, two-handed rim rockers or go for a flying jam from the top of the key. The complexity and creativity of the moves is impressive, and it's not hard to imagine this feature becoming a contest in itself. Part of the attraction is experimenting with practically every button on the controller to master the dunks. Here, the PS2 controller is a much more intuitive fit for this contest than the Xbox or the GameCube units.

All the Way Live

The slam dunk matchup is a slick game within the game, but let's not forget what got you to the gym in the first place. NBA Live 2005 is an all-pro caliber b-ball game that continues to show improvements...a winner all the way.

—*Brother Buzz*

E ■ Developed by EA Canada ■ Published by EA Sports
 ■ \$39.99 ■ Available now ■ Basketball ■ 4 players



PRO TIP: Learn to get back on defense quickly when you miss a shot. The A.I. will own you with its transition game if you don't.



PRO TIP: If the opposing team is making an inbounds pass from the side, attempt it by moving up in the passor and then quickly backing off into the passing lane or to double-team the point guard.



PRO TIP: Use your go-to guy. If you're playing with Shaq (Ward Haer) or Kevin Garnett (Minnesota Timberwolves) get those rocks!

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	FOR PICTURE
	SOUND CONTROL	5.0	
X	GRAPHICS	4.5	FOR PICTURE
	SOUND CONTROL	5.0	
C	GRAPHICS	4.5	FOR PICTURE
	SOUND CONTROL	5.0	

"Never Fear the dark Again!"



boktai 2

Solar Boy Django



Revolutionary solar powered gameplay



New weapons include swords, hammers, and spears



RPG elements build character character levels and skills



Multiplayer fun for up to 4 players

Boktai 2 enhances the revolutionary experience of using sunlight during gameplay!

Continuing the vampire hunting adventures of Django the Solar Boy, players will once again explore the world of Boktai with over 60 new magic-powered weapons, a larger game environment and even deadlier enemies!



Animated Blood Violence

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PRO TIP: The pro hop is a good move in the loss, but be ready to follow up if you miss the shot.



PRO TIP: When you find yourself double-teared like Shaq in this screen, look to pass to an open man (like 6-03 Ramon here).



PRO TIP: When you get serious about playing a season, be sure to map your favorite offenses and defenses to the action buttons.



PRO TIP: Use the pump fake to set up a lay-up. Tap the shot button and make your move.

ESPN NBA 2K5

ESPN NBA 2K5 has its fundamentals down pat, and that makes for a great game of basketball.

ESPN NBA 2K5 isn't backing down from anyone. Having built its reputation on solid basketball fundamentals, this season's offering features a revamped software engine that tightens up the game another notch. Oh yeah, and that \$19.99 price tag is pretty darn aggressive, too.

Leadership on the Court

There's a lot of subtlety to the improvements in 2K5. Even veteran players will notice that the game just "feels" different. That's because developer Visual Concepts has tuned movement to the actual physical attributes of the real players, so big guys move a little slower during gameplay than small guys. It doesn't sound like much, but it actually effects your strategy at both ends of the court.

The offensive and defensive A.I. is also a little smarter and consequently much more realistic. On defense, for example, you'll notice that defenders away from the ball are watching the ball handler like real players do and positioning themselves to guard the passing lanes. The improved smarts make some cool gameplay nuances possible, such as forcing a driving player to change his shot in the air by making an aggressive defensive move at him.

The visuals also augment the effect. Player models, already a 2K5 strong suit, have been redone, and according to Visual Concepts, all the animations have been replaced with improved versions. You also get some great details on the players themselves, right down to the ripple of their jerseys and the sweat glistening on their forearms.

The Give and Go

With ESPN NBA 2K5, the series takes another evolutionary step forward with its controls. For instance, now there's a whole set of interior post-up moves available to centers and forwards.

Moreover, the pro hop is a little less effective (and more realistic), while the pump fake is a little more effective.

Additionally, the Isomotion feature adds new sets of moves to the cross-overs and between-the-legs dribbles to set up a sort of b-ball combo system. And while you can still map offensive and defensive sets and plays to the action buttons, all the playbooks are tuned according to the actual styles of the different NBA teams.

All the Right Moves

Franchise mode gets a name change, so this year call it "The Association," but the game features some good strategic improvements, too. If you decide to simulate games, you can still make coaching decisions, such as making substitutions or changing offensive tactics, to affect the outcome of the sim. As the coach, you can also affect team chemistry during the season both positively and negatively, and thereby affect performance on the court. Factors like training regimen and the assistant coaches you hire make an impact. Also, players will ask for one-on-one meetings to air a gripe or concern they have. You select your responses during this question-and-answer session from a set of answers. Choose wisely, though, or you'll soon have a bench full of unhappy campers.

No one's going to beat 2K5 on price, and the game's as tough as nails on the court. ESPN NBA 2K5 proves that hard work both on the court and off can get you to the top.

—Brother Buzz

• Developed by Visual Concepts
 • Published by Sega/Global Star • \$19.99
 • Available now • Basketball • 4 players



PRO TIP: Get in the habit of making your big men go back up for a shot after rebounding, especially if you have a good cover like Rashawn Wallace on the court.



PRO TIP: Make sure you work on your Isomotion moves. They can open up a lane to the basket or set up a defender for your outside jumper. Moray!

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.5	FOR FACTOR	5.0
	SOUND CONTROL	5.0		
XBOX	GRAPHICS	4.5	FOR FACTOR	5.0
	SOUND CONTROL	5.0		

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REVIEWS

ESPN NHL 2K5

For the best on-ice action this season, real-life or otherwise, NHL 2K5 nicely fills the net.

PS2 **X** The actual season may be in serious jeopardy, but at least puck heads can count on getting their virtual fix, and it doesn't get much better than ESPN NHL 2K5. Thanks to stellar graphics, an in-depth control scheme, and solid features, it sets the bar for what a hockey game should be, providing gamers with the best sim on the market this year.

Twisted Wrister

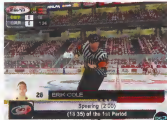
Truth be told, NHL 2K5 isn't much different than last year's offering—it still has great gameplay options, including a deeper Franchise mode and the addition of a new party mode (because those are all the rage these days). There's even the Dream Team Challenge, which is a compilation



PRO TIP: Look to create open space near your opponent's net, then try a slap shot home!



PRO TIP: When using a prolike scorer such as Super Mario, maneuver your way around the back of the net and try to sneak one in, fire-hole style.



PRO TIP: Sparingly use Intense Contact Control, and only when absolutely necessary. Otherwise, you'll be spending a lot of time in the sit-ble.



PRO TIP: Use the right analog sticks on either the Xbox or PS2 controller to execute a manual stick move to split the defense and create a great scoring chance.

of all-star teams hand-selected by some of the NHL's more notable stars like poster boy Martin St. Louis. It basically makes up for the omission of a World Cup of Hockey mode. However, when NHL 2K5 really shines is with its core gameplay, which is really what's important.

For starters, the control scheme has been enhanced to enable players to perform even more on-ice actions. On offense, you can now perform a pass and go, which is very similar to NHL 2005's Total Control feature in that a player can give the puck to a computer-controlled teammate, create space, and then call for a return pass. On defense, it's now possible to control when a player skates backwards, and that works perfectly with the new Total Stick Control function, which enables defenders to waive their stick back and forth in front of the offensive player to cause a little disruption. NHL 2K5 also includes Intense Contact Control, which lets players bump up the physicality during each contest.

Like other hockey games in the franchise, NHL 2K5 still retains its more in-depth strategy features, such as the ability to match the best players on your squad with the best players on the opposing team, on-the-fly play calling, and the ever-important ability to make independent

offensive and defensive line changes. Furthermore, the graphics are just as polished, including some exceptionally lifelike animators, but the nod definitely goes to the Xbox version in this respect. Other than that discrepancy, both versions are right on par with one another.

Unfortunately, not everything is perfect on this frozen pond. The action still moves at a slower clip than we would have liked, even when bumping up the Game Speed slider, and the players don't make quick, crisp cuts—instead, they tend to glide a little too casually. Ideally, if a balance could be found between NHL 2K5 and NHL 2005 in this regard, it'd be darn near perfect. And while the commentary is superlative, the in-game effects could use a bit of work as they just aren't dynamic enough.

Lighting the Lamp

Despite the game's shortcomings, ESPN NHL 2K5 is the Cup champ because it really plays and, aside from the rather sluggish-moving players, feels like a hockey simulation should. The game is feature-rich, the controls are the most comprehensive around, and with a \$19.99 price tag, there's no reason for hockey fans not to own it.

—The Entorver

- E** ■ Developed by Kush Games/Visual Concept
- Published by Sega/Global Star
- \$19.99 ■ Available now ■ Hockey
- 2 players, 10 online (PS2); 4 players (Xbox)



For the most realistic hockey simulation on the market, you need look no further than ESPN NHL 2K5.



PRO TIP: Because braking happens way too often, go into Options/General and decrease the Fighting slider all the way down.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	FIVE FACTOR
	SOUND <td>4.0</td> <td>4.5</td>	4.0	4.5
	CONTROL <td>4.0</td> <td>4.5</td>	4.0	4.5
X	GRAPHICS	4.5	FIVE FACTOR
	SOUND <td>4.0</td> <td>4.5</td>	4.0	4.5
	CONTROL <td>4.0</td> <td>4.5</td>	4.0	4.5

NHL 2005

PS2 Fortunately for puck fans, "it's in the game" doesn't wholeheartedly apply to EA Sports' latest hockey offering—otherwise, the box would be empty thanks to the lockout. Unfortunately, NHL 2005 still falls short of being the complete game we've been waiting for as it relishes more in vicious hits and arcade-style action than being a true simulation of the sport.

Puttin' On the Foil

NHL 2005 contains a solid feature set of expected options, including a World Cup of Hockey mode and its Free4All party game. The graphics are also some of the finest around: The top stars and animations are strikingly lifelike, and the frame rate pumps at a blazingly smooth clip. When comparing the Xbox and PS2 versions, both are virtually identical in every way.

However, being beautiful doesn't always mean being better. For all of NHL 2005's slick polish, it's the gameplay that needs a little more work. For starters, controlling the players is sometimes an exercise in frustration—as in recent EA Sports' hockey offerings, skaters shoot forward past the puck at inopportune moments, and there are those awkward moments after taking control of a player when they seem to have a mind of their own and remove themselves from the play altogether. There is also the little matter of line changes. For some reason, EA Sports has yet to incorporate separate offensive and defensive alignments, which is simply unacceptable.

Conversely, the new Open Ice Control, which, by hitting a button, enables players to create space on the ice and switch between players with or without the puck to set up plays, or call for a defensive double team, is actually pretty decent. However, it will take practice to master as it's incredibly easy to lose track of where the skaters are, which leads to a lot of miscues.

It's off the Post!

When the final horn sounds, NHL 2005 comes up like the Calgary Flames—a very close second—because ESPN NHL 2K5 is the better game due to its overall complete package. However, like the San Jose Sharks, EA Sports' hockey franchise is definitely poised to take home the virtual Cup, provided it steps up next year by adding the finishing touches to an already solid effort.—The Enforcer

Also on the GameCube

EA GAMES ■ Developed by EA Canada ■ Published by EA Sports ■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ Hockey ■ 2 players (PS2), 4 players (Xbox)

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version



PRO TIP: As soon as you're open, fire off a shot and crash the net in case of a rebound.



NHL 2005 sports some of the finest graphics around—including incredible-looking player models.

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.6	4.0
	SOUND	3.5	
	CONTROL	3.8	
X	GRAPHICS	4.5	4.0
	SOUND	3.5	
	CONTROL	3.0	



Earning and spending Gretzky Challenge points enables you to unlock cool items, including jerseys, cheat codes, and even Gretzky himself!



PRO TIP: It's a scoring chance, inverted the stick and shoot a slap shot from just beneath the blue line, then wait for a rebound and knock the puck home.

Gretzky NHL 2005

PS2 With the ongoing labor dispute, 999 Sports is looking to the Great One to help fans forget their woes. However, for all the good things the game brings to the rink, Gretzky NHL 2005 just isn't as refined as ESPN NHL 2K5 or NHL 2005.

Slushy Ice

Like the two front-runners, Gretzky 2005 contains a respectable list of options and features that most fans expect, including online play and a cool Rivalry mode. Best of all, Wayne himself is an unlockable player. Yet not even the healthy features set and Gretzky's own star power can help bring home this year's virtual Cup.

Right from the faceoff circle, Gretzky 2005 suffers from rather stiff-looking animations and bland player models, which is unfortunate considering that the overall graphical polish compares favorably with the competition's. Furthermore, the game's A.I. isn't up to snuff as players frequently wander out of position and goalies often let the puck sit inside the crease without covering it up—end when that happens, it usually results in a goal.

Equally as disappointing, the control just isn't as responsive as it needs to be for such a fast-paced sport, and because of this, unwanted miscues frequently occur. These problems are compounded by the game's overall lack of control depth, which just can't compare with ESPN's or EA Sports'. There's also the issue of the game's targeting and power-meter shot system, which just weren't good ideas at all—the visual bull's-eye isn't that helpful, and charging up for an effective slap shot just takes too long.

Exposed Five-Hole

With stronger competition dominating the rink, Gretzky NHL 2005 comes up as this year's third star—too bad it's a three-puck race. While it does offer some solid features, including the fact that it's the only hockey title with Wayne as a playable skater, the overall gameplay just can't compete with the other two titles due to Gretzky's stiff-looking animations, limited control options, and suspect A.I.—The Enforcer

EA GAMES ■ Developed by Page 44 Studios ■ Published by 999 Sports ■ \$49.99 ■ Available November ■ Hockey ■ 2 players

PS2	GRAPHICS	3.5	3.0
	SOUND	4.8	
	CONTROL	2.5	

GAME PLANS *By The Water Boy***Straight to the Street**

EA Canada continues to groom **NBA Street V3** for the EA Sports Big brand for an early 2005 release. A new game engine gets its heart from NBA Live 2005 (see ProReviews, this issue), resulting most notably in more-realistic player models. LeBron James, Tracy McGrady, Steve Francis, and an all-star of the usual suspects are on the court. Look for a slam-dunk contest taking off with the slam-dunk mechanic from Live, too. EA is sticking by the GameCube with versions for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox, of course.



NBA Street V3: "I want Kobe."



How would you like to have this guy on your team in Madden 2007?

More Street Action

EA Sports Big is making more moves on the streets in early 2005. **NFL Street 2** is ready for action. So many *Streeters* got their asses kicked by the running game in the first *Street* that developer EA Tiburon decided to juice the passing game this time by adding something called wall moves. These slick tricks are just what they sound like. Ball carriers and passers can run up the sides of walls or tippy-toe along the tops of fences as part of their offensive repertoire. Plus, you'll be able to build up a player and then import him into Madden NFL 2005. Spoiler alert: There will be a Madden 2006!

Hoop Dreams

ESPN **College Hoops 2K5** remains on track for a November delivery. Former Stanford star Josh Childress, now of the Atlanta Hawks, will beautify the box, and Mike Patrick and Jay Bilas of ESPN are returning as commentators. You won't have to look much further than NBA 2K5 (see ProReviews, this issue) to get a sense of *College Hoops*. According to developer Visual Concepts, *Hoops* will feature the latest tweaks to the NBA game engine, including a new free-throw system and the latest tuning of the IsoMotion2 ball-handling feature modified for college-style gameplay. Not returning are the Slam Sessions, but dunks must be lurking somewhere.



ESPN may return to the First Four in ESPN College Hoops 2K5; Slam Sessions and slam dunks will not.



Winning Eleven 8 will feature the first onscreen ref for the series. He should be appearing in the next screen shot after this one.

New Kicks

Soccer is one of the most underappreciated games in America...and after that comes Konami's Winning Eleven series of football games (that's soccer to you). **World Soccer Winning Eleven 8 International** is already a million-seller in Japan, where it's been out since October, and it's on track to be the most popular game in the series. American soccer players can get their kicks in the spring of 2005. Licensed international leagues are in this version, so you'll get 57 national teams, 136 club teams, and 4500 soccer stars. The new game engine also features new dribbling techniques, new free-kick styles, and a gang of tricks only a real soccer fan could appreciate.

Something Like Tennis

Nintendo is on track to deliver its uniquely "Mario" brand of tennis in **Mario Tennis**. Camelot, the company who crafted *Mano Golf*, will continue its round of freaky Nintendo-branded courts like the DK Jungle Court where alligators attach themselves to you. The folks at Camelot also have a few tricks up their collective sleeves like far shot reaching techniques. For example, Luigi whips out his vacuum (from Luigi's Mansion) to snag hard-to-reach lines, and Donkey Kong snags 'em with a banana boomerang. The fun will be ready to serve in November.



You might not stand a ghost of a chance when you face Boo in Mario Tennis.

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Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords



X Before moviegoers "learn" Anakin Skywalker's fate in *Revenge of the Sith*, gamers get to battle the forces of evil in LucasArts' *Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords*, the follow-up to 2003's multiple award-winning game. While it's similar to its predecessor in a lot of ways, *The Sith Lords* looks to entertain and excite Jedi the galaxy over with a more perilous story line, an expanded list of Force powers, and 100-plus hours of gameplay.



Release Your Anger

Fans of *KOTOR* will be instantly familiar with *The Sith Lords'* execution. The menus are very similar, albeit updated, as are the commands to perform specific actions. However, LucasArts and developer Obsidian Entertainment have added a few nuances that are definite improvements, all of which are most welcome.

Firstly, you can have up to 10 members in your party, and each will have his own unique personality, motivation, and abilities. *KOTOR*'s Aton, who is similar to Certh from the original *KOTOR*, is more resilient than any other character and won't become incapacitated during a fight as long as he isn't the last one standing. When embarking on one of the many side-quests, your party can split up to tackle the challenges concurrently, which should add even more gameplay depth.



Secondly, and most importantly, the choices you make will actually effect gameplay. For example, some NPCs may refuse to join your party depending on your light or dark side alignment with the Force. Also, if your character begins to sway one way or the other, some members of your party will be influenced by your decisions and become good or evil with you.

Other improvements include two weapons configurations per character, the ability to make repair parts and medpacs, new feats, 30 new Force powers (including the devastatingly powerful Force Crush), and six additional character classes like Jedi Weapon Master and Sith Assassin.

The Power of the Dark Side

Right now, *Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords* looks and plays great, and the level of action from the get-go should please fans who are looking for a good, solid adventure. If LucasArts can pull it off in time for the scheduled release, you can forget about socializing with sentient life forms come December.—*The Enforcer*



- **Hands-On**
- **Developed by** Obsidian Entertainment
- **Published by** LucasArts
- **Target release date:** December





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Ys: The Ark of Napishtim

PS2 When you think of great storytelling, usually the Final Fantasy or Wild Arms series are the first to come to mind. But back in the day, before those trend-setting games evolved into fabulous prose, there was an underrated, little-hyped RPG on the TurboGrafx-16 system that told a wondrous and captivating tale of good and evil. Although the follow-up on the SNES failed miserably, the grand story of Ys still lives on (thanks to huge support in Japan), which is why any RPG enthusiast should take notice of the latest Ys game.

In *The Ark of Napishtim*, you follow the recheaded hero, Adol Christin, to a mysterious tropical island in the vortex of Canaan. You'll duke it out in real time with some very bizarre and murderous creatures as you attempt to discover the secrets of Canaan's whirlpools. Your unique offense consists of swinging three magical swords that each possesses special abilities, combinations, and attacks; of course, you can throw in a bit of spell casting and item collecting for variety, too.

It's just hope that the story has as much variety as well, along with distinct and engaging qualities to continue the fabled Ys legacy.

—Four-Eyed Dragon

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■ First Look ■ Developed and published by Konami
■ Target release date: First Quarter 2005



Baten Kaitos

GC The Xbox has *Knights of the Old Republic II*; the PS2 has *Final Fantasy XII*, and the GameCube has, er, *Baten Kaitos*—a strange little RPG that melds fast-paced card battles into an easily recognizable FFX-style structure. Fundamental to the *Baten Kaitos* world is the concept of Magnus Cards, which are used not only in combat but also to capture "essence" from a wide variety of objects. In order to

place items into your inventory, you have to capture them into blank Magnus Cards. Your weapons, armor, and spells are also contained in Magnus Cards. To earn money, you must play your "camera" card to take photos during battle and then sell the resulting picture cards in town.

The card-based combat system felt nimble and surprisingly natural in the preview build. At the beginning of a fight, you're dealt a hand of cards. You choose a target



and then select a sequence of attack cards to unleash on that target. Once the first card is chosen, the rest of the combo must be selected quickly, or you'll miss out. The same goes for defense: When attacked, you choose defensive cards from your hand that will best cancel out the damage.

Simplistic dialogue and linear missions made the *Baten Kaitos* preview version feel like it was targeted at a younger audience. And as kids are impressionable, it was disturbing to find books with reactionary messages like "How to be a perfect wife: Be totally obedient to your husband!" lurking in the corners of the game. That aside, *Kaitos*'s environments looked great, and the monsters were impressively surreal in a peculiar Japanese-fantasy style reminiscent of Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*. Here's hoping that the finished game will appeal to role-players of all ages and genders. —Super! Samurai

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by Monolith Software ■ Published by Nemo ■ Target release date: November

Kingdom Hearts II

PS2 As unlikely pairs go, there are few unluckier than Square Enix and Disney, who pooled their resources (and famous characters) to generate one of the best action/RPGs of the PS2 era. Not too long ago, the fine folks at Square Enix came by to let us play their latest Disney-lova child, Kingdom Hearts II, the continuing saga of Donald, Goofy, and Sora in the magic kingdom. We got a chance to play two familiar areas—Beast's castle, where something sinister has taken hold of the Beast, and Olympus Coliseum, where FFX's Auron (freshly summoned from the afterlife) joins you to take on Hades after rejecting the baddie's offer to join him.

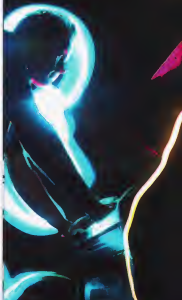
The graphics in the demo were, as you'd expect, impeccable, and the animation Disney-divine. The simple, actiony gameplay fundamentals were still basically the same—you retain direct control of Sora, smashing things with devastating midair combos using your Keyblade and calling on magic spells, while Donald and Goofy do their own thing. Sora did have some new tricks up his sleeve, including a dash-behind move that quickly positioned him behind his enemies when you tapped the Δ button and a midair recovery move that let him land safely on the ground after he'd been knocked in the air. Most importantly, Sora had a new Drive ability that let him merge with one of his friends and transform into a sort of Super Saiyan Sora—revved up, berserk, faster, meaner, and a lot cooler. But not as cool as listening to Donald Duck speak Japanese.—Star Dingo

■ **Hands-On**
 ■ **Developed and published by Square Enix**
 ■ **Target release date: Summer 2005**



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X-Men Legends

Legends manages to successfully blend the action and RPG genres into an enjoyable and highly engrossing game despite bearing the typically fatal curse of a big-name license.

PS2 **X** **C** Having first appeared as a Marvel comic more than 40 years ago and recently starring in two highly successful movies, dozens of comic spinoffs, and video games on nearly every platform since the 8-bit NES, the X-Men have broken out of the geek-chic mold of the comics universe to become modern pop-culture icons. And thanks to their new digital debut in the action/RPG genre with X-Men Legends, you've never seen Xavier's men (and women) quite like this before.

X Is for Excellence

X-Men Legends is equal parts super-powered team-brawler and carefully customizable RPG. It's in the vein of successful genre-benders like *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* yet mixed with the familiar flavor of the Marvel universe—meaning Legends is saturated with atmospheric authenticity and comic-book continuity. The exciting and original story (penned by former X-Men comic authors) starts when Magneto's minions try to kidnap a powerful young mutant named Alison Crestmere for use in his attempts to rule the world and subjugate humanity.

In order to combat Magneto and his evil Brotherhood of Mutants, you assume control over a group of four X-Men selected before each mission stage from a pool of over a dozen of these famous fighters, and you have the ability to switch between each character on the fly. Perhaps the coolest part of X-Men Legends is the handy Dynamic Joining feature, which lets you and up to three friends each take control of an X-Man at any time and come and go as you please without disrupting the progress of the story mode missions, thereby effectively transforming a simple single-player game into a multiplayer maelstrom at a moment's notice. Fortunately, the friendly A.I. is also quite bright, enabling your uncontrolled characters to follow your lead intelligently without being distracting or requiring any substantial coding.

Each individual X-Man also has a set of upgradeable and unique mutant abilities that are useful both in heated battles

and in solving small puzzles and overcoming otherwise impassable obstacles, making the character selections a crucial part of precombat customization.

"I'm the Best There Is at What I Do!"

Legends also packs a plethora of side-quests, unlockable items, mini-games, hidden bonuses, and multiplayer modes to keep you busy well beyond the scope of the primary missions in story mode. One of these extras is the inventive Skirmish mode in which you and your pals import your saved character data and individual statistics to battle it out in a head-to-head duel; the myriad of entertaining and addictive Danger Room challenges comes in as a close second.

X-Men Legends isn't quite perfect, but it comes pretty damn close. A few notable gripes do arise, such as the abhorrently sluggish and leisurely loading times, and the unimpressive and outdated cinematic sequences that jar with the otherwise slick visual stylings. The camera also hangs at an awkward three-quarters perspective and occasionally moves too far out to cover all the action, leaving you with a screen of indistinguishable mini-mutants. Such complaints, however, seem petty and are entirely forgivable when juxtaposed with the stellar cut-shaded graphics, excellent voice acting (with Patrick Stewart reprising his on-movie role as Professor X), and multiplayer mayhem that make Legends look and feel like the A-list game that it is. Whether you're a long-time X-Man or simply an action/RPG enthusiast, X-Men Legends is an outstanding addition to any gamer's library. —Bones

T Developed by Raven Software ■ Published by Activision
 ■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ Action/RPG ■ #4 players



PRO TIP: Remember to set your ally's healing frequency in the character menu so they will heal themselves, but always keep an eye on how many healing potions remain.



PRO TIP: When facing powerful opponents like the Sentinels, try to perform as many special combos as possible by tapping L2 while using your special move.



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GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE			
PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	4.5
	SOUND	4.5	
X	GRAPHICS	4.0	4.5
	SOUND	4.5	
C	GRAPHICS	4.0	4.5
	SOUND	4.5	

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	4.5
	SOUND	4.5	
X	GRAPHICS	4.0	4.5
	SOUND	4.5	
C	GRAPHICS	4.0	4.5
	SOUND	4.5	

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PROTIP: When fighting alongside Brals, let him do the bulk of the fighting—the quest isn't over until he racks up 25 kills.

The Bard's Tale

PS2 A wise monthly tome of easily digestible articles and anecdotes once suggested that laughter is the best medicine, and that's definitely the case with *The Bard's Tale*—it's a fairly generic action/RPG that gets a big dose of help from its scribe sense of humor.

Rat Slayer

Anyone who's played a few RPGs in their lifetimes is bound to find something to laugh at in *The Bard's Tale*, inXile's bitter homage to every cliché in the book—Chosen Ones, trapped princesses, magic swords, and haughty narrators are all dutifully skewered by the game's grown-up, knowing wit. The voice-acting is topnotch, and Cary Elwes (a.k.a. the lovable Wesley from *The Princess Bride*) is a natural fit in his role as The Bard.

Slightly less lovable is the game that's wrapped inside the funny package—a fairly standard, repetitive, and sometimes frustrating action/RPG in the *Baldur's Gate*, *Dark Alliance* vein. The camera is too inflexible to show off the game's graphics; the level designs and enemies aren't nearly as clever as the writing (wolves, goblins, and soldiers in forests and now... boring); and *The Bard* is often subjected to the very forces of gameplay that he's

satirizing (randomly imposed time limits, etc.). As a result, the game winds up feeling inconsistent or maybe just unwilling to fully trust its own sense of humor. Imagine Excalibur as the gameplay and *Monty Python* and the *Holy Grail* as the cut-scenes, and you've kind of got the picture.

The gameplay does benefit from a unique summoning system, which lets The Bard call a good variety of healers, fireball-hurling elementals, trap detectors, and other fantasy archetypes to fight by his side—it's a lot of fun to find the right balance of party members. The game also features a nicely tuned character-development system that accommodates several fighting styles, though magic-happy types will be upset that *The Bard* doesn't have any fireballs or lightning bolts of his own.

Halfway to Python

While *The Bard's Tale* isn't consistent enough to be *The Princess Bride* of gaming, it definitely has plenty of hilarious moments that role-players will love—and in the end, it's worth going through the hacking and slashing to get to all the winking and nodding.—*Star Dingo*

Also available on the Xbox

T ■ Developed by inXile ■ Published by Vivendi Universal Games
■ \$49.99 ■ Available November ■ Action/RPG ■ 1 player

PS2 GRAPHICS 4.0 FOR FASTER SOUND 4.5 CONTROL 3.5 **4.0**

Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door

While Mario and friends have seen many an adventure on the GameCube, they haven't done the RPG thing in three years (or ever, if we restrict our focus to the GameCube). Enter *Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door*, incorporating all of the cute, action-oriented elements that made Super Mario RPG and the original Paper Mario instant classics. Combining classic RPG story depth with familiar, lovable characters and a turn-based battle system that is anything but dull, *Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door* earns some serious Fun Factor cred.



PROTIP: When the enemies flee up, don't hesitate to bust out a Pow Block on 'em!



PROTIP: Don't be scared by the evil boxes; their curses are never really so bad as they sound.

The Plot Thickens, But Mario Does the Opposite.

As with most Mario titles, this one focuses on the perpetual penis of Princess Peach, who is precariously perched by the cruel and heartless Bowser. Surprisingly, King Koopa is not behind Peach's princess-snapping this time. Instead, we are introduced to a band of salute-happy weeble people called the X-naughts, who conspire to capture poor Peach for a nefarious purpose. Of course, Mario's only hope of rescuing his fair lady is gathering a bunch of stars (surprise!) from various ne'er do wells occupying the surrounding environs of Rogueport. On his familiar star-seeking saga, Mario is joined by a motley collection of good-hearted ruffian who assist in his battles and puzzle solving. Granted, there is a tremendous amount of supercuteness infused into every game frame, but when has an "M" rating ever stood for "Mario"?

3, 2, 1...Power Shell!

While this game's story is intriguing and hilarious, it's the unique battle system that takes center stage. Utilizing precisely timed button presses (that vary according to which character you're using!), players can do extra damage or even avoid getting hit. This action-oriented approach to the standard RPG formula is probably the most engaging feature of *The Thousand-Year Door* (right next to the superclean graphics) and succeeds in relieving the tedium that sometimes accompanies turn-based battle systems. Classic RPG elements (like turn-based battles, item stores, and a rich plot line) flesh out classic Mario elements (like star/coin collecting, pipe traveling, and jumping on things' heads as a means of violent retribution) to create a thoroughly enjoyable gaming experience (as long as you can tolerate the cuteness).—*Starfury*

E ■ Developed by Intelligent Systems ■ Published by Nintendo
■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ RPG ■ 1 player



Sarcus has nothing on Mario...check out that swing!

PS2 GRAPHICS 4.5 FOR FASTER SOUND 4.0 CONTROL 4.5 **4.0**



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READER OF THE MONTH TIP

PLAYSTATION 2
STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION



Play as Akuma in Hyper Street Fighter 2: At the game-selection screen, select Hyper Street Fighter 2 and then select Super Turbo mode. At the Player Select screen, move the cursor from Ryu to T.Hawk to Guile to Cammy and back to Ryu, and then simultaneously press Δ , \square , **R1**, and Start. If you entered the cheat correctly, Akuma will automatically be selected.

Tag McCurdy—Walnut Creek, CA

PLAYSTATION 2
DIGITAL HITZ FACTORY



Hidden Skins and Song: At the main menu, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the code correctly, you'll see a confirming message.

Hidden Skin #1: Press Select, L, R, L, R, L, R, L, R, L, R, L, R, L, R

Hidden Skin #2: Press Select, L, R, R, L, L, R, R, L, L, R, R

Hidden Skin #3: Press Select, L, L, L, R, R, L, L, R, R, R

Hidden Skin #4: Press Select, L, L, L, R, R, R, R, L, L, L, L

Hidden Song: Press Select, Up, Down, Left, Right, Up, Down, Left, Right, Up, Down, Left, Right

GHOSTHUNTER

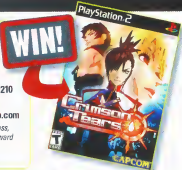


Immortality: During gameplay, simultaneously press and hold Right and L3 for five seconds, and then press Δ . If you entered the cheat correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

Increase Damage: During gameplay, simultaneously press and hold Right and L3 for five seconds, and then press \square . If you entered the cheat correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

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Please include your name, address, and phone number so we can award you your prize.



HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE!



Unlock Cheats: At the Main Menu, select Options and then select Passwords. At the Passwords screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the cheat correctly, you'll see a confirming message.

Gadisa Mode: HXPPFA
HSG CD/MUSIC: PAJELI
Pinhole Clubs: DMRPKP
Western Valley C.C.: LIH7FL

XBOX
COUNTER-STRIKE



Purple-Hair Terrorist: Start a game, and at the Profile screen, enter P1 ueRug0D0000 (case-sensitive) as a profile name. If you entered the code correctly, all terrorists in the Prodigy level will have purple hair.

Shaky Text: Start a game, and at the Profile screen, enter 1110000K11 (case-sensitive) as a profile name. If you entered the code correctly, all text in the game will now shake.



MULTIPLATFORM PS2 XBOX
MADDEN NFL 2005



Unlock TJ Duckett Gold Card: At the main menu, select My Madden and then select Madden Cards. At the Madden Cards screen, select Madden Codes and then enter P5TELL (case-sensitive). If you entered the cheat correctly, you'll see a confirming message.

STREET RACING SYNDICATE



Unlock Cheats: At the Main Menu, press Up, Down, Left, Right to access the Enter Cheat screen. At the Enter Cheat screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the cheat correctly, you'll see a confirming message.

3 Free Police Warnings: L6TK000

Free Car Repair: F1K1TUP

Mazda RX-8: SENE555 (Arcade mode only)

Mitsubishi Eclipse GS-T: I0GT0T5

Mac-Man Win! G08E2D0

Police Car: G0TPOPO (Arcade mode only)

Subaru Impreza S202 STi: S1CK0D6 (Arcade mode only)

Toyota Celica G1-S: MYTC0T5 (Arcade mode only)

Toyota Supra RZ: S1CK3EA (Arcade mode only)

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Why GP Editors Aren't Going Home for the Holidays

1. Fable (Xbox)
2. Call of Duty: United Offensive (PC)
3. Mortal Kombat: Deception (PS2, Xbox)
4. The Sims 2 (PC)
5. Street Fighter Anniversary Collection (PS2)
6. Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal (PS2)
7. Metroid Prime 2: Echoes (GameCube)
8. Rome: Total War (PC)
9. Doom 3 (PC)
10. Ace Combat 5 (PS2)

Top 10 Best-Selling Console Video-Game Titles August 2004

TITLE	PLATFORM	LAST MONTH
1. Madden NFL 2005 EA Sports	PlayStation 2	NEW
2. Madden NFL 2005 EA Sports	Xbox	NEW
3. ESPN NFL 2K5 Sega/Global Star	PlayStation 2	2 ▼
4. Madden NFL 2005 Collector's Edition EA Sports	PlayStation 2	NEW
5. ESPN NFL 2K5 Sega/Global Star	Xbox	4 ▼
6. Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Black Arrow Ubisoft	Xbox	NEW
7. Spider-Man 2 Activision	PlayStation 2	3 ▼
8. NCAA Football 2005 EA Sports	PlayStation 2	1 ▼
9. Halo Microsoft	Xbox	12 ▲
10. Madden NFL 2005 EA Sports	GameCube	NEW

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld/Point-of-Sale

6



Ever since *Rainbow Six* arrived on the Xbox, it has been consistently hitting the target as the top Xbox Live game. The recent addition of *Black Arrow* only solidifies the series' reputation as a true masterpiece.

9



After years off the charts, *Halo* makes a heterogeneous resurgence. Maybe it's because *Halo's* \$39 price tag makes the best deal in town for perhaps the best Xbox shooter of all time. Or is it because *Halo 2* is just around the corner and the hype over *The Master Chief* is starting all over again?

1

Madden NFL 2005



It's no surprise that this year's *Madden* for all platforms occupies the top 10 chart. Even the Collector's Edition is there as it's targeted at the die-hard followers who can't get enough of *Madden* extras like art galleries, making-of movies, and the option to play past *Madden* games. Nevertheless, *Madden NFL 2005* certainly deserves the spotlight as it continues to improve and refine the virtual football field, which, with no surprise, judges out rival ESPN's NFL series...again.

Readers' Favorite Fighting Games of All Time

1. **Street Fighter II**
2. **Mortal Kombat**
3. **Soul Calibur II**
4. **Tekken 3**
5. **Marvel vs. Capcom 2**
6. **Mortal Kombat II**
7. **Dead or Alive 3**
8. **Killer Instinct**
9. **Samurai Showdown**
10. **Capcom vs. SNK**

Source: GamePro.com Reader Poll



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