

play



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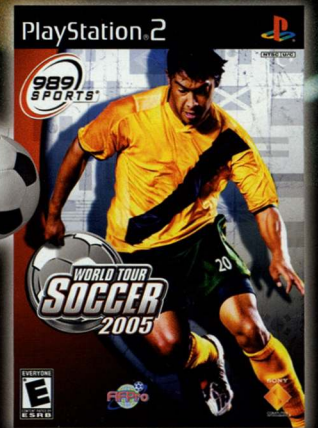
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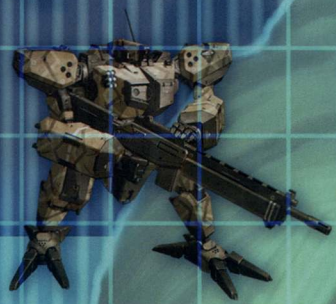
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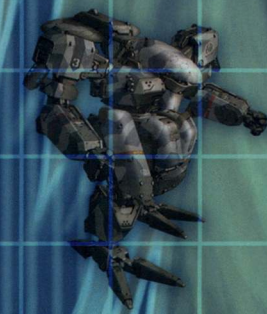
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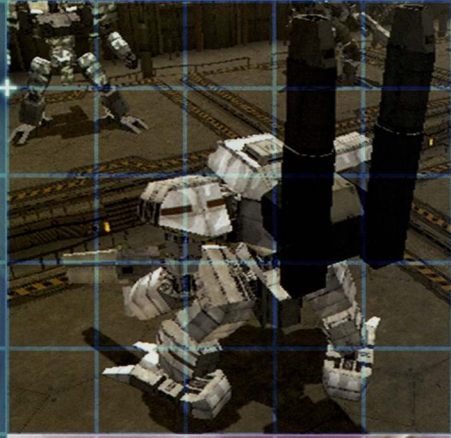
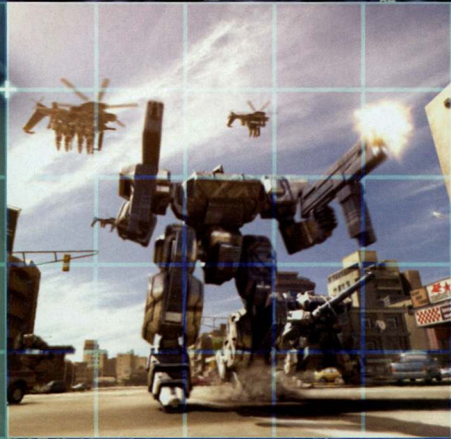
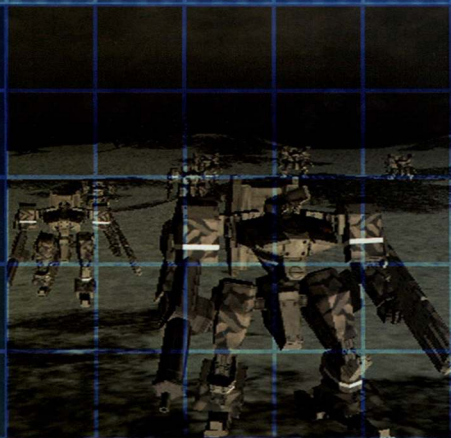
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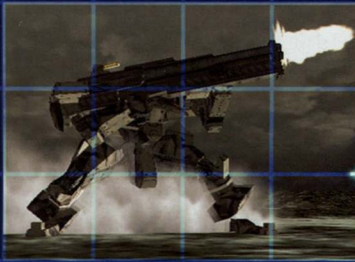


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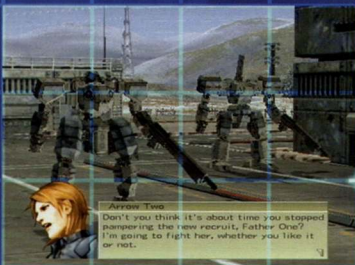


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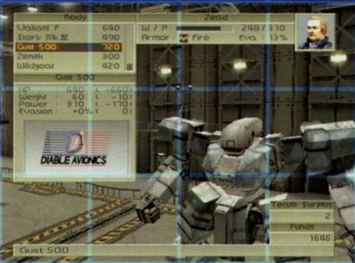
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Game show!



They've tucked away the massive facades that make up the game industry's temporary metropolis, carting the pieces off to their respective warehouses until further notice, and another E3 is in the books. There's enough E3 coverage in this

issue to choke a donkey, so for these proceedings I'll stick to what the big three are up to, breaking down their press conferences in my own gentle way.

Microsoft's event was packed and appropriately Live-ly, including a deftly written and produced parody of *The Apprentice* (called *The Novice*), in which top brass from MGS and Sony faced off in a challenge from Mr. Trump (*the Mr. Trump*) to design and integrate online gaming into their respective platforms. Back in the board room, Sony was, of course, fired (and Trump was in top form) and MGS awarded the anti-prize: the rights to create the Trump MMORPG. Funny? Oh yeah, hilarious actually, not to mention extremely well made. Although the PS2 was designed when online gaming was still a sparkle in gaming's eye, Microsoft was trying to make a point, and they succeeded. A million subscribers in a year is an amazing accomplishment and it's not like Sony is humble about their numbers, so, why not? I miss the console wars, so it's great to see they're back on, especially with such a shrewd opponent. Now if they'd only stop canceling all my damn platformers! Microsoft had a lot to celebrate in X year three, such as the upcoming largest single software launch in history with Halo 2, the success of Xbox Live, strong brands and third party support, and their new development standard to streamline game development, XNA. They even managed to find a cage for the 800lb gorilla. The last thing anyone expected was for EA president of worldwide studios, and resident press conference ping-pong ball, Don Matrick to come trotting out (let alone with a squad of pro athletes, including Muhammad Ali, which, although a bit sad, was an honor, indeed), but there he was, proclaiming that EA was going Live. Elsewhere, during a blazing game montage, Conker (among others) received a roar of applause, showing core gamer support from the peanut gallery, Jenny McCarthy got all X'y on us, and all was well in the kingdom of green.

The next morning (bright and too early), Sony was revved up for their annual "we are the world" speech, in which, par for the course, things got underway in the usual bookish manner as Kaz did his ceremonial reading of how badly Sony is kicking everyone else's ass. Oddly enough, however, Sony was also focused on their business model for online expansion, showcasing the new Ratchet & Clank:

Up Your Arsenal as the first online platformer, which, of course, it's not. It's going to be a gas for sure, but Ratchet & Clank (which I love; we all love) is an action-shooter, not a platformer. The first online platformer has yet to be made. It all became moot anyway as soon as Kaz held up the PSP (to a spattering of applause; the audience was DOA) and began articulating its capabilities (see pg. 28), which are staggering given its size. There was talk of the PS2's new \$149 price point and a crash course on Sony, SCEI and IBM's new "Cell" processor, the catalyst for future endeavors, but at the end of the day, it was all about the remarkable PSP. Sony shows no signs of weakening their resolve, clearly seeing themselves as industry leader and trend setter—a position they take very seriously.

Next on the cavalcade of press cons came Nintendo, MCed by Nintendo's executive VP of sales of marketing, Reggie Fils-Aime (who those in attendance will likely refer to as Crazy Reggie from now on). Reggie came out in a blaze of glory: "My name is Reggie and I'm about kicking ass, I'm about taking names, and we're about making games." He then proceeded to suggest that Nintendo needs to make games like Mario and Yoshi to appease the mainstream: "We're not going to run our company just for hardcore gamers. There are gamers out there who live for Mario and Yoshi and Pokémon. It's my and Nintendo's job to make sure we satisfy all of the gamers and to do it better than the competition." Reggie needs to wake up and smell the red and green from Mario and Yoshi that's ground into every hardcore gamer's fingers. Moving on, a montage that brought the house down showed the GameCube is on track for another solid year and change, leading up to the newly crowned most anticipated game ever, the latest in the Zelda saga. As for the DS, it was met with rousing applause, but I fear more due to being caught up in the moment than anything else, as it sounded a lot better than it actually play tested the following day. On its best day, the DS plays right into Sony's hands, almost exactly as the Saturn did to the PS. It's a move to 3D on a weaker platform that will have less third-party support, and more profoundly, it puts in peril what the Nintendo faithful love so much: 2D. Do I buy the Universal Media Disc-based, widescreen, USB 2.0, Memory Stick, PS2-powerful, wafer-thin movie machine that will likely give birth to a pile of killer apps, or the cart-based, wallet-fat, one-speaker, less powerful, voice-recognition, chat, handwriting, dual-screen system from Nintendo that has interesting potential? If nothing else, it will be an interesting battle.

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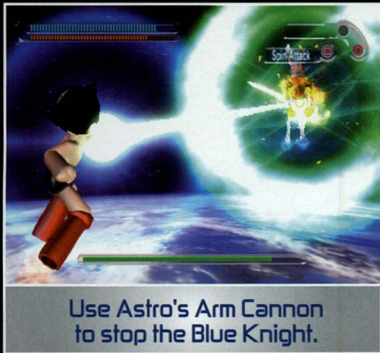
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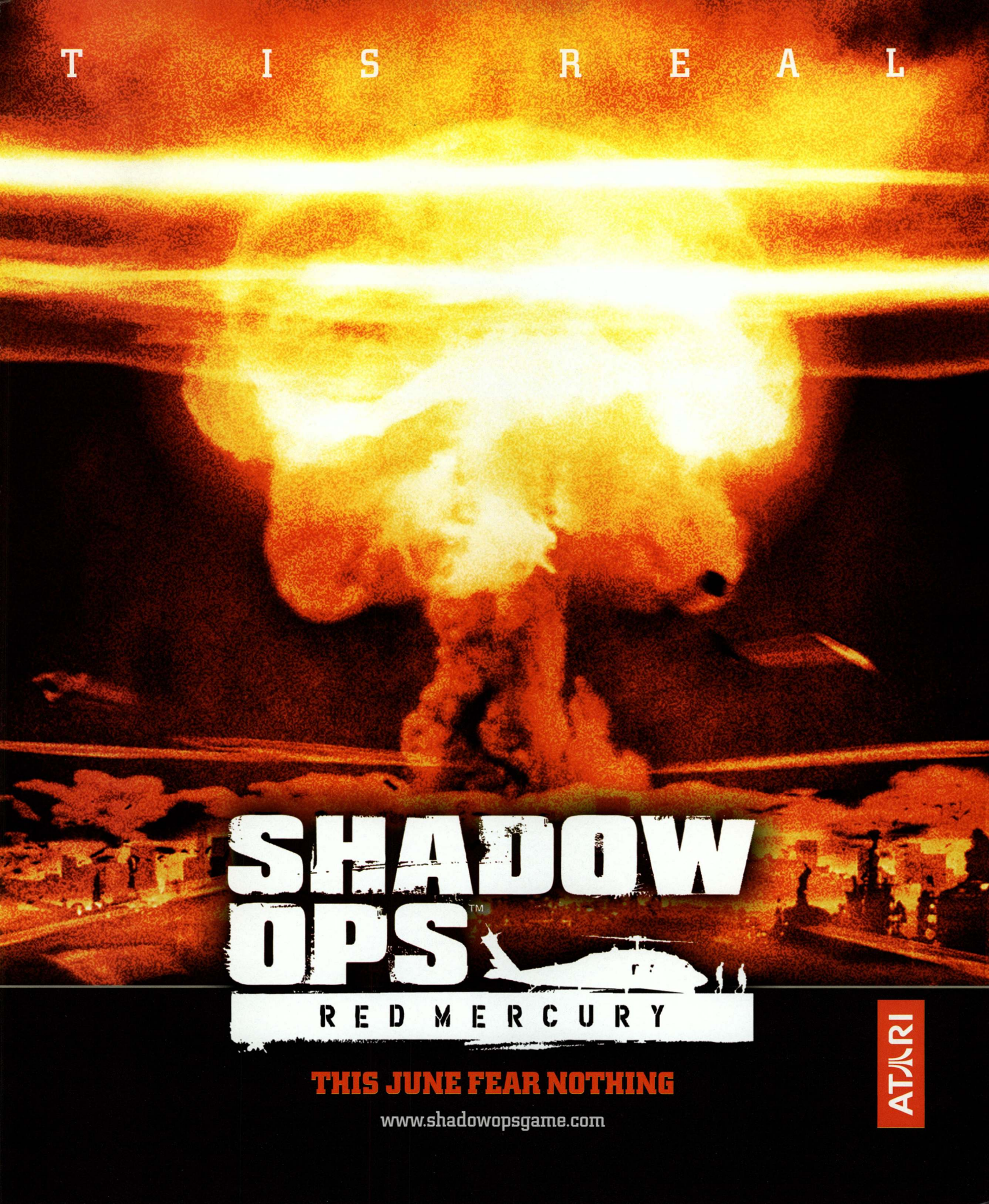


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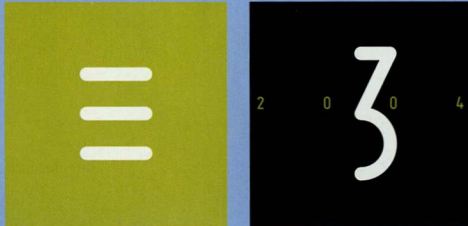
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Ghosthunter

First came MediEvil...then Primal...now Ghosthunter. Cambridge Studios have again turned game design into a majestic art form with their take on the adventure-horror genre.

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Everything you ever wanted to know about the biggest video game show of the year. Learn all about Sony's mindblowing PSP and Nintendo's innovative DS, check out our list of the best games E3 had to offer, peer into our editors' minds on their thoughts of the show, experience the madness in our photo gallery.

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The Chronicles of Riddick

We Invented Godmode.



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Featured this issue: a Cadillac. 'Nuff said.



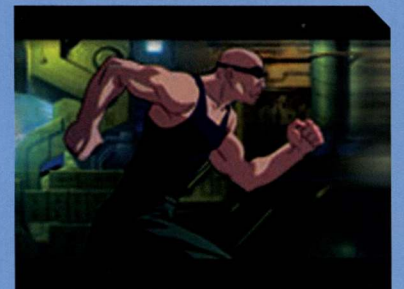
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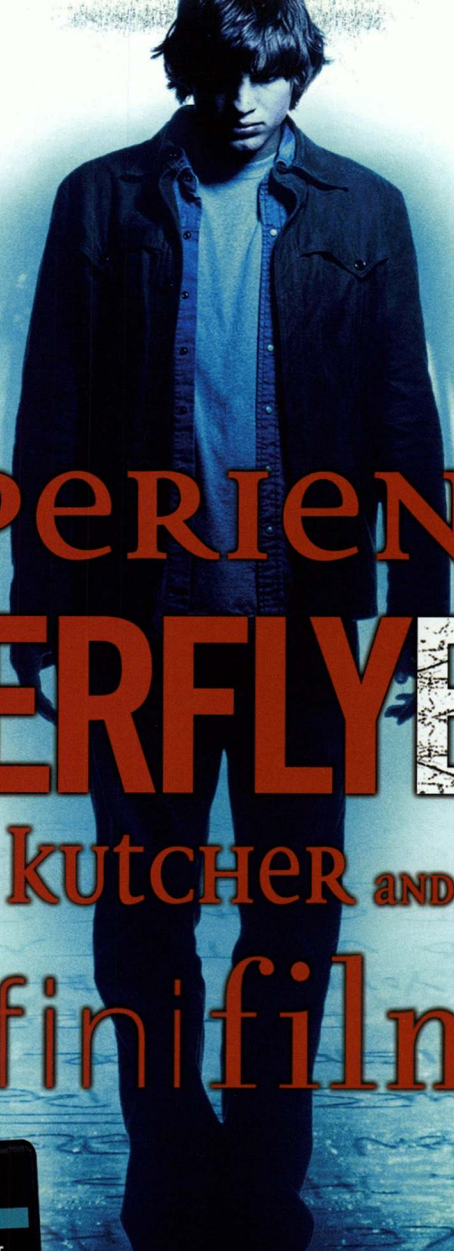
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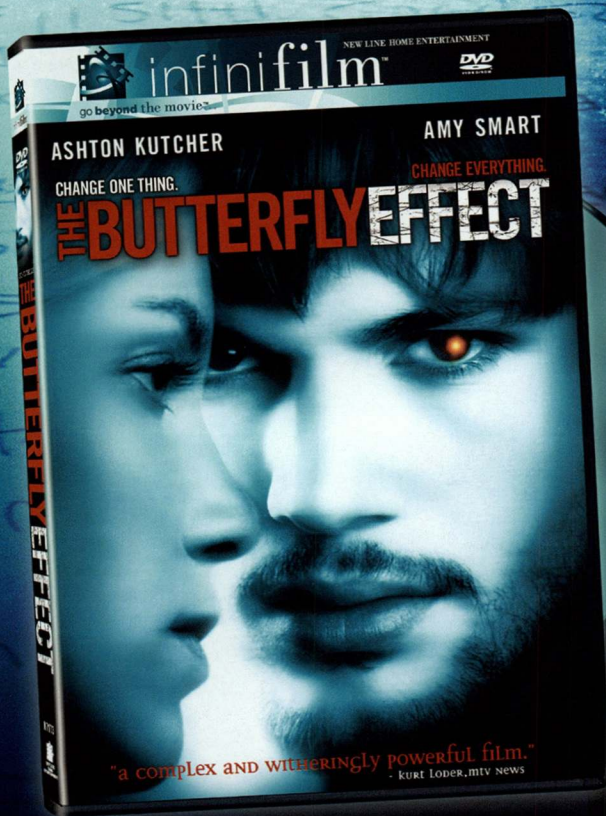


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Itchy scratchy

O.K., so I'm sitting here thinking of different ways to scratch my ass. Now I'm sure that over time I could think of hundreds of ways or possibly more, and I'm sure that some would be good, others bad, and some in between. But in the end, I still realize, that I am STILL only scratching my ass.

Now I bet you're wondering what video games and itchy asses have in common. Well, let me enlighten you. It seems to me that that's what all the video game companies have been doing, thinking of different ways to do the same thing. What is with the whole demon thing? Now a days it seems like you can't pick up any type of game that you don't kill demons in, or aliens. My point is, if you take a ball and bounce it against the wall for any length of time it gets boring, but why is it we can play a video game for hours on end, finish it, pick up a new one, that is so similar it hurts, play that one and finish it, and so on and so forth. Why? Because just like scratching your ass, it just feels good.

Adam C.

He's really Torked!

Looking at the screenshots in your June issue Malice review, I can't understand first why it took so long for this game to come out (I still have the May cover you did) and second why it's coming from someplace called Mud Duck. I know it's supposedly too easy (for you maybe), but it just looks so beautiful. That same year you gave a game called Tork game of the show (E3 2002) and it hasn't come out either. I keep reading here and there bits about its status (mainly from you guys) but having been mesmerized by the screenshots ever since that old issue, I have to say I'm starting to feel a little pissed off. Why is it that every game that seems to get the shaft is a platformer? Do we have targets painted on poor backs? I wander the isles at the local game store combing for new titles and I see so much crap. Why can't I play these games? Isn't there a way for anyone to do anything? Do you guys get lots of letters about this? You should start a petition or something. Maybe I don't know how the game business works but I sure know how it doesn't. Hell, I still want to play Evil Twin. I hope you print this because I really think something needs to be done. These games used to rule and now the best ones seem stuck in limbo. You say you're the platformer guys, so do something!

Rat Poison

We do get letters about this, but they're usually short and brutal, like "Where the f---k is Tork already!?" and so on. RP, you don't know the half of it. I've spent countless hours pursuing these games, looking for potential publishers and scraping for any information, and, as the injustice intensifies

(I get mostly "stay tuned" replies), more and more games get thrown on the pile—most recently Galleon (which has a UK publisher but nothing solid in the U.S.; it's only Toby Gard's first game since creating the original Lara Croft, so no rush) and Psychonauts, one of the coolest games on Earth. Do game execs have it in for platformers? You betcha, and I know why: it's because they don't know how to market them anymore. You see, they think platformer means aim that sucker directly at a 10-year-old, when most of the 10-year-olds we know are hanging outside of Wal-Mart trying to get someone to buy them a GTA. The people playing platformers are the people who grew up with them...namely us. Kids love 'em too (smart little buggers), but not enough to get the big-wigs' blood boiling. They're still trying to figure out why Tak and Ty Tiger are hovering around the million-sold club while games like Rayman 3, Kya: Dark Lineage and Voodoo Vince didn't fare nearly as well. We keep telling them why, but to say we're right would make it seem like, well, like they're boneheads, and those country club memberships don't come easy, you know. Stay tuned for more on this and other industry oddities in the months ahead. We're only getting started.

No-show woes

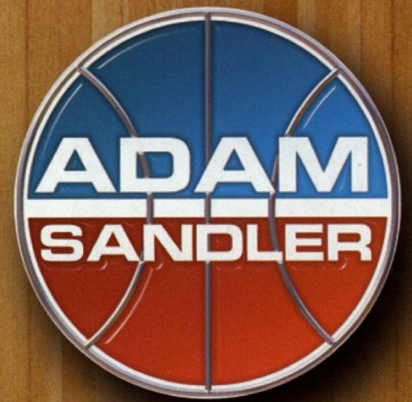
First of all; AWESOME magazine. I've been loving your stuff since Game Fan, and you've introduced me to a lot of wonderful games that I might never have considered if not for your honest and accurate reviews.

I'm concerned about this year's E3. I was expecting to hear some information about a couple of games that I have not seen discussed or listed anywhere, and this bothers me. The games in question are the Wind Waker sequel (yes, I'm amazed by the look of the new game, but I want the WW sequel we'd been told about not that long ago), Psychonauts, Oddworld's next game, and even Tork, which you had mentioned had a publisher before Tiwak was brought into Ubisoft. Are any of these games coming out any more? (Boy, I'm furious with Microsoft. I bought an Xbox because they had Oddworld, and Oddworld left Sony to support them! How could MS be so STUPID????) Your magazine is the only one that will hunt down the wonderful games that everyone else seems to be ignoring, so I'm hoping you will have good news about these indie titles. Keep up the good work; I LOVE it!

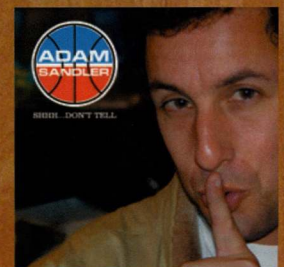
Lobo

MGS is shooting down games left and right, piling up casualties like we've never seen before, and this after waving the green flag for all to see. As for Link...Miyamoto stated that the new Zelda is indeed the previously mentioned sequel to Wind Waker; when director Eiji Aonuma discussed it a few months back, he just didn't tell the whole story. For what it's worth, the new game looks potentially like the new greatest game ever made.

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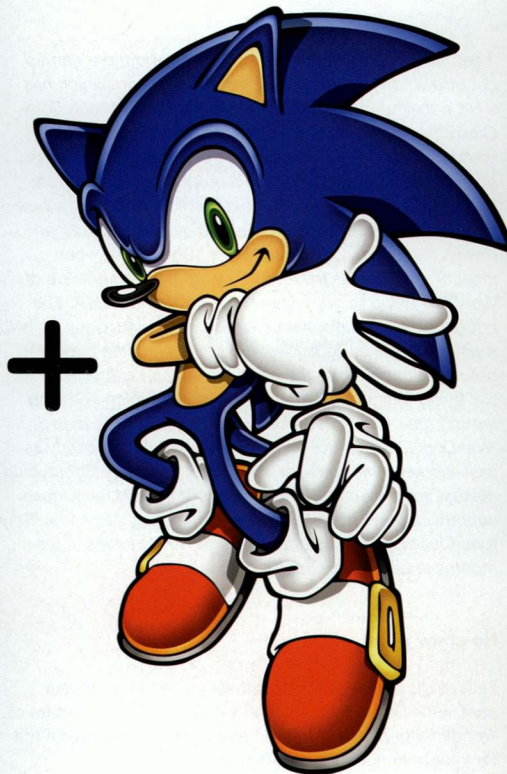
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Help Snake sneak

Budding designers take heed...

If you've ever wanted to be a part of one of the most renowned series in gaming history, now's your chance. As of May 11, Konami Computer Entertainment Japan began conducting their online camouflage campaign, in which fans are encouraged to create their own digital camouflage patterns for the upcoming Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater. Participants are required to submit a 640 pixel by 640 pixel camouflage pattern of their own design, the three best of which will be selected by MGS creator Hideo Kojima and his staff for inclusion into MGS3. Not only will the winning designers get to see Snake wearing their camo patterns in the game, but they will also have their names listed in the game's credits. The winners will be announced at this fall's 2004 Tokyo Game Show. Those interested had best get those creative juices flowing—the campaign ends June 29. More information is available at <http://www.konamijpn.com/camouflage/index.html>.



Sega to be acquired by Sammy

Two great companies merge to take on the future

Sega has been through a lot. Arcade kings that waged a tough 8-bit war...a rise to supremacy during 16-bit...a bitter defeat in the 32-bit era...their eventual withdrawal from the hardware market, becoming one of the gaming industry's most respected multiplatform developer/publishers...and now the shocking but not unexpected acquisition by Sammy Corporation, announced in mid-May. Pending stockholder approval, the companies will combine to form Sammy Sega on October 1, 2004, creating Japan's largest video game software company. Total cost to Sammy for the union: 165 billion yen, or about \$1.5 billion U.S.

Given Sammy's high profitability—they're the number-one manufacturer of pachinko and slot machines in Japan—and the failed 2003 merger attempt between the companies, as well as Sammy chief executive Hajime Satomi's appointment as Sega chairman this past February,

the writing for the merger was already clearly on the wall, but the question now is: what does this mean for gamers? It's hard to say. In the short term, Sega subsidiary developers Hitmaker, Sonic Team, Smilebit, Amusement Vision, Digitalrex, Sega WOW and Sega-AM2 will all be folded back into Sega. Also, Sega will very likely be encouraged to create new arcade games using Sammy's Atomiswave hardware, and the use of Sega brands—like Sonic the Hedgehog—on pachinko machines is essentially a given. It's also unknown if Sega of America and Sammy Studios will continue to function separately as distinct publishing entities or be combined under one roof; corporate restructuring is expected, but perhaps not before March 2007. For the long term, hopefully the merger will yield a bigger, better video game company and more great games for years to come.

Xbox price cut pays off

Can they hold the lead?

Ninja Gaiden 2's been announced, Halo 2 finally has an official November release date, Doom 3 is system-exclusive, along with gems like Conker, Jade Empire and Riddick. Now at \$149.99, can you resist owning Microsoft's Xbox? In April, it would seem many of you couldn't, pushing the sales of Microsoft's hardware past Sony's PS2, capturing 51 percent of the month's market share. Nintendo came in third with 17 percent, leaving Sony at 32 percent—second place for the first time. Worldwide, the PS2 still leads with a landslide of total sales of around 70 million to the 'box's 17. What to do about the continued soft sales in Japan? Hire softcore porn model Eri Kitajima to host a satellite television show that focuses on all things Xbox. Check out the SkyPerfect TV!-produced show on Channel BB.

THE FINE-TUNING WILL BE COMPLETE THIS WINTER.

FORZA
MOTORSPORT

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Death goes to Hollywood

Death, Jr. wastes no time making the jump to multimedia



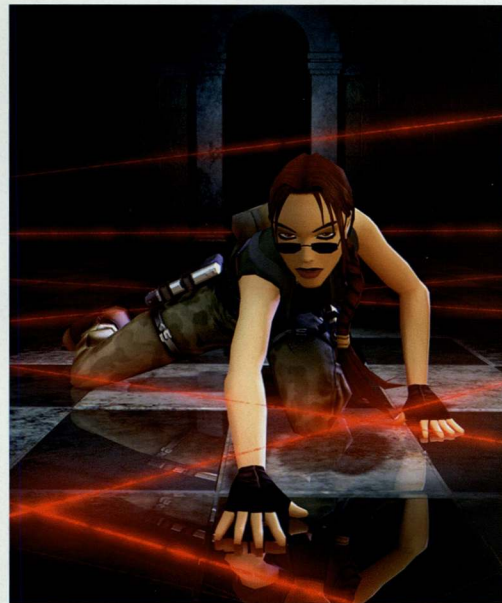
Sony's striking PSP has only just been revealed to the world, and yet one of its earliest announced titles, *Death, Jr.*, is preparing a multimedia blitzkrieg. Sony-based Circle of Confusion has snagged the movie rights to the game, which will possibly be handed over to the direction of Larry Gutterman (*Cats & Dogs*, the upcoming *Son of the Mask*). *Death, Jr.* had first been implemented as a demo to show

off creator Backbone's cross-platform 3D technology; the inventive character, fictionalized as the son of the Grim Reaper and good friend of Pandora, picked up enough buzz that the inevitable game was built around it. In addition to the film prospect, *Death, Jr.* is also coming to life as a comic, which is being written by Gary Whitta and drawn by Ted Naifeh (Courtney Crumrin, *Gloom Cookie*).

Eidos for sale?

Single white female seeks savvy publisher...

No news on Lara, no news on Kain, and the weakest E3 showing in memory...what's going on at Eidos? If recent rumors are true, the UK-based publisher could soon be up for purchase by a larger company. Speculation points to Ubisoft, Activision and Electronic Arts all as potential buyers, ready to gobble up Eidos like a pellet before a ravenous corporate Pac-Man. First order of business: bury that wrestling game back in the yard.



Is Lara sneaking away to a new publisher?

Capcom shows some skin...

...but we gave you Mega Man instead

Capcom's upcoming PlayStation 2 game, *Under The Skin*, is all about an alien invader wreaking comedic havoc on Earth. Unfortunately, it looks like the mischief began early, causing *play* to run a screenshot from *Mega Man X Command Mission* in our *Under The Skin* preview in our June 2004 issue. We apologize for the error.



Under The Skin. For real this time.

Make a bad game, pay the price!

Warner Bros. to penalize bad game-making

If a company makes a bad licensed game, should they be forced to pay a penalty? According to Jason Hall, senior vice-president of Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, the answer is "yes." Hall recently stated that, in an attempt to put an end to poorly made licensed games, Warner Bros. would begin instituting a new licensing fee policy in which games based upon WB properties that receive low review scores from critics would be subject to additional fees. Under the new policy, games that receive aggregate scores of 70 percent or less (using combined-score sites like *gamerankings.com* as a measuring stick) will incur penalty fees, with the amount increasing as the score declines. Looks like gamers' opinions do matter after all!

Nintendo, Sony drop console hints

New hardware's far down the line but already in the news

Amidst all the new game insanity and portable machine mayhem at the 2004 E3, both Sony and Nintendo quietly revealed hints about their next console endeavors at their respective press conferences. Toward the end of Sony's conference, SCEI chief technology officer Masa Chatani spoke on the incredible potential of the "Cell" processor, a collaboration between Sony, IBM and SCEA. Though Chatani didn't say that the powerful processor—which boasts vast floating-point capabilities, massive data bandwidth and parallel processing architecture—would be a part of the PS3 architecture, he stated that for their next-generation game system, "Cell"-based game development systems will be used. He also stated that "Cell" allows for CG development that can be shared between movies and games, bringing us ever closer to the (often dreaded) idea of the merging of games and movies. Nintendo, meanwhile, was less specific. Referring to their next endeavor as the "Nintendo Revolution," the Big N confirmed that they are working on a successor to the GameCube and claimed that the new console will innovate on unprecedented new levels, creating a system unlike anything gamers have experienced before. "Nintendo is working on our next system, and that system will create a gaming revolution," says Nintendo president Satoru Iwata. Recently speaking at a press conference in Osaka, Japan, Iwata mentioned that the company hopes to show their new hardware at the 2005 E3, although this is far from a guarantee.

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PlayStation 2



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Virgin Megastore Top Ten

| | |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay vu games / xb |
| 02 | Zelda: Four Swords Adventures nintendo / gc |
| 03 | Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow ubisoft / ps2 |
| 04 | Sudeki microsoft / xb |
| 05 | Full Spectrum Warrior thq / xb |
| 06 | Spider-Man 2 activision / ps2, gc, xb |
| 07 | Thief: Deadly Shadows eidos / xb, pc |
| 08 | Harry Potter: Azkaban ea / ps2, xb, gc |
| 09 | Karaoke Revolution Vol. 2 konami / ps2 |
| 10 | Rainbow Six 3 ubisoft / gc |



NPD/TRSTS Top Ten April Game Sales

| | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | Fight Night 2004 ea / ps2 |
| 02 | NBA Ballers midway / ps2 |
| 03 | Fight Night 2004 ea / xb |
| 04 | MVP Baseball 2004 ea / ps2 |
| 05 | Pokémon Colosseum nintendo / gc |
| 06 | Resident Evil: Outbreak capcom / ps2 |
| 07 | Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow ubisoft / xb |
| 08 | NBA Ballers midway / xb |
| 09 | Halo microsoft / xb |
| 10 | Hitman: Contracts eidos / ps2 |



Your Megastore Beckons!



The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures
nintendo / gc

Zelda returns, emphasizing multiplayer adventuring for the ultimate party experience.



Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow
ubisoft / ps2

Stealth has never been so pure and challenging, and now it's coming to PS2.



Malice
mud duck / xb, ps2

It's been a long, long time coming, but the absolutely gorgeous Malice has finally arrived. Where there's a big hammer, there's a way.

Staff and reader selections

vote for your most wanted games! database@playmagazine.com

Readers' Most Wanted database@playmagazine.com

| | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater konami / ps2 |
| 02 | Final Fantasy XII square enix / ps2 |
| 03 | Metroid Prime 2: Echoes nintendo / gc |
| 04 | Spider-Man 2 activision / xb |
| 05 | Neo Contra konami / ps2 |



Dave Halverson editor in chief

| | |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay vu games / xb |
| 02 | Ghosthunter namco / ps2 |
| 03 | Gungrave Overdrive sega / ps2 (import) |
| 04 | Ghost in the Shell: SAC bandai / ps2 (import) |
| 05 | Psi-Ops midway / xb |



Brady Fiechter executive editor

| | |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay vu games / xb |
| 02 | Ghosthunter namco / ps2 |
| 03 | Shadow Ops: Red Mercury atari / xb |
| 04 | Silent Hill 3 konami / xb |
| 05 | Winning Eleven 7 International konami / ps2 |



Chris Hoffman some editor

| | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | Mega Man Anniversary Collection capcom / ps2 |
| 02 | Final Fantasy X-2 square enix / ps2 |
| 03 | Sonic Advance 3 thq / gba |
| 04 | River City Ransom EX atlus / gba |
| 05 | Metal Slug 3 snk / xb |

Michael Hobbs art director

| | |
|----|-------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | Final Fantasy XI Online square enix / pc |
| 02 | Metal Slug 3 snk / xb |
| 03 | Sonic Advance 3 thq / gba |
| 04 | Samurai Warriors koei / ps2 |
| 05 | Crimson Sea 2 koei / ps2 |

Nelson Lui associate art director

| | |
|----|---------------------------------------------|
| 01 | River City Ransom EX atlus / gba |
| 02 | Samurai Warriors koei / ps2 |
| 03 | Metal Slug 3 snk / xb |
| 04 | La Pucelle Tactics mastiff / ps2 |
| 05 | Onimusha 3: Demon Siege capcom / ps2 |



play games

Art: SCE's Ghosthunter

Ghosthunter

Sony Europe's Cambridge Studios bless us once again, with their most haunting vision yet



Whenever anyone asks me what really makes a great game, they get the same answer: provided all of the core elements are in place—good publisher/developer relations, strong character design and concept, sound technology, and a budget and timeframe conducive to creating something of value—I say the secret lies in the details, on which Cambridge Studios has pretty much written the book. Playing just about every game that comes down the pike for better or worse, be it for 10 minutes or 50 hours, I can't tell you how many games suffer dearly from a lack of realistic polish, from cheaply produced crap all the way up to big-budget epics. For me, there are few things more distracting than coming to rest on a slope or stairs only to have my character stand

flat-footed, hanging in the air like a puppet on a string. I also either detest or dislike dead carcasses with no collision (either by making them gel in the environment or have them disappear, I shouldn't be able to stand in them), appendages that leak into solid objects or walls, and/or the lack of walking, stopping or turning animation. There are few things worse than a character restricted to either running, or not, especially in a realistic setting.

Thus far in the annals of 3D gaming, the price we've had to pay for our beloved perspective is the loss of that almost unconscious connection we used to share with our characters. Where 2D characters lived and died by their connection to the environment, polygonal ones seem free to pirouette on an axis, often completely detached from their surroundings; and be it realistic or fantasy,

establishing a connection between the character and environment is a fundamental ingredient in game creation, at least in creating a good one. Cambridge Studios not only realizes this, they've actually turned it into an art form. Beyond slope and stair animation, they run their characters under sheets, over obstacles and up and down ladders as if they were real...which is pretty great, seeing as how their models are by far the best, most realistic in the industry. It's the first thing I noticed about Primal—okay, the second thing, Jen was the first—and it is even more apparent in Ghosthunter to the extent that when Lazarus bumps up against a wall, his arms and weapon actually react to the proximity. Mad scientists, I tell you, and dedicated to your pleasure I might add.

So then, if Ghosthunter is so great, why isn't





“Ghosthunter is stuffed with intelligent puzzles, character interaction and ambience so seamlessly woven into the fabric of the game you can’t help but almost lose yourself in it completely.”

She does a body good: Astral takes an out-of-body look around.

SCEA all over it? Well, that’s a good question, and one with several possible answers. On the one hand, the world wasn’t ready for Primal, and this is a similarly sophisticated and cinematic game, so it may just be a numbers thing. It’s also not a sequel, doesn’t feature any phoned-in Hollywood performances, realistic killing, maps of real cities or a movie license. Nope, it’s just a highly original, completely engaging work of interactive art. God forbid one of these gets acclaimed. My God, what in the world would become of the commercial enterprise gaming has become? But enough about the twisted politics of gaming; we’ve got a brilliant game to discuss.

Responding to a crank call about suspicious activity at a decaying high school—abandoned since the mass murder of 10 students, reportedly at the hand of one Professor Brooke—Lazarus Jones and his partner, the pretentious Ms. Steel, split up to investigate. Descending into the building’s darkened lower extremities, Laz stumbles onto a mysterious room filled with strange machines where he notices a large red button, which he, of course, presses, unknowingly emptying an entire array of captured spirits into the material world. If you’re harkening back to the big red lever that dickless had the power guy throw in *Ghostbusters*, you win the prize. This is pretty much the same deal, only without the comic relief. Gozer the Gozarian’s got nothing on the ghastly fury that Laz unleashes—an ancient evil that wastes no time hitching a ride on Steel’s flesh and vacating the premises. The only way for Laz to find Steel is to recapture all of the

freed entities by powering up the spectral gateway and reliving the horrors within, one by one. And so off we go, by this time completely mesmerized by arguably the best graphics ever on the PS2 and a soundtrack that immediately begins working its way under your skin. These guys know how to press gamers’ buttons like nobody’s business.

Thankfully, Laz is not alone. One of the rogue spirits, of some relation to the professor (who was obviously tinkering with some serious mojo far beneath the school), has entered his body, and in her Astral form has the ability to utilize the characteristics of captured ghosts and manifest herself into solid form, penetrate solid walls, etc., feeding off of the ghost energy Laz gathers by expelling spooks. Elsewhere, the way is opened by Digital, guardian of the array and guide to Ghosthunters—a computer program created by the professor to serve and protect whatever it is he’s unleashed on the world.

Laz captures ghosts by tossing a special grenade into their ethereal forms, which, once lodged, causes them to manifest into solid (and therefore killable) form, and then blasting them using spirit-charged and conventional weapons found along the way. But don’t expect the usual assortment of lumbering ghouls waiting to rejoin their unnatural incarceration; these are an assemblage of highly motivated, and oft times extremely scary, spirits. Some fly at you...angrily; some pin you down; and some will hunt you like a dog. Others, needed to open your way, can only be killed when sleeping, and some will actually assist you in exchange for

undoing whatever travesty trapped them in this ungodly purgatory in the first place. And then there are the poltergeists—nasty little bastards that feed off of your frustration—and, of course, the bosses, who I won’t even attempt to describe.

In between these moments of terror, Ghosthunter is stuffed with intelligent puzzles, character interaction and ambience so seamlessly woven into the fabric of the game you can’t help but almost lose yourself in it completely. Played with the lights off, hours fly by like minutes, a product of the team’s uncanny sense of pacing and tuning, combined with visuals that simply cannot exist on the PS2—yet, there they are.

Ghosthunter is simply the epitome of what action and adventure is all about, a game literally stuffed with character models and locations so stunningly gorgeous you almost feel guilty for passing through them without stopping to examine every nook and cranny—yet another cinematic achievement from one of the world’s most dedicated and talented design studios. If you want to keep enjoying these types of experiences—ones that actually have a profound effect on you—look beyond the pandering and TV ads and direct your attention this way...and then if you like what you see, have a go at Primal next. Any game Cambridge Studios makes is a timeless treasure. **Dave Halverson**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: SCEE Cambridge Studios
Publisher: Namco
Available: August

Anatomy of a masterpiece

Interview with Ghosthunter creative director James Shepard



"I started in the industry as an artist and was educated as a fine artist, so visuals are very important to me. Our games are about putting the player in a believable world..."

Give us some background on the Ghosthunter team. Is this the same group from MediEvil or Primal or a mix of both?

It's a mix, but the genesis of much of our studio's output can be traced back and branches out from MediEvil. Chris Sorrell, the lead on MediEvil, went on to make Primal. Ghosthunter's lead artist, Jason Wilson, was the lead designer/artist on MediEvil. I joined him as the lead designer on MediEvil 2, along with Julian Rex, who was lead programmer on MediEvil 2. After MediEvil 2 was complete, the core team stayed together to start the initial concepts for the game that would become Ghosthunter. So Primal and Ghosthunter had two distinct core teams with some shared heritage.

Primal was brilliant, by the way, simply brilliant. I pray we see Jen another day, perhaps more in her own skin.

Ha ha! I couldn't possibly comment, but our heroes can sometimes rise from the grave after a long rest. Take Sir Daniel Fortesque, returning on PSP next year, for example.

Everyone likes to use the word "cinematic" to describe their games today. Ghosthunter truly does play out with the dynamic presentation of a movie. Is that what your aim is? What is your

personal definition of "cinematic"?

Difficult question for me. My background is in film and television, so I guess by definition everything I do has some cinematic qualities.

In truth, I don't give it a moment's thought; my only concern is making a great game, and the only rule I apply is that a great game must be immersive. So for me, it's immersion rather than cinematic that I strive for. Think of that not just as immersive gameplay, but that you're going to be a character in the game so you're going to take on a role, so you say to yourself, "Let's make the role an interesting one; let's make you care about the character and the situation. Let's make the situation interesting with good supporting characters and good reasons to complete the objectives you have set." So suddenly plot, character and emotional connection to the situation you find yourself in become very important to the game, and they are the key things that make up a traditional film experience. So to recap, it's using the core "cinematic" feature set of one medium to strengthen the core feature, "immersion," of another.

I've seen some great PS2 visuals, but this one seems to be practically melting the console. Your character models, effects and architecture seem to stretch beyond the

system's capabilities. Where SCEA's first-party teams seem bent on massive expanses, you seem more dedicated to detailing smaller (although still quite large) ones with more ambience—similar to Kojima's work. Is there a core philosophy you follow? And who created this spectacular engine?

Well, I started in the industry as an artist and was educated as a fine artist, so visuals are very important to me. Our games are about putting the player in a believable world, so it better look good or, again, that "immersive" spell can be broken.

A lot of the credit has to go to both my lead artist Jason who tirelessly works on the style and graphic content of the game. And to the core effects and environment team that works tirelessly to bring his vision to life.

We made a definite choice with Ghosthunter to go small and detailed and have a few fantastic things on screen at a time rather than throwing heaps of mediocrity at the player. I use my younger brother as a good measure of these things. When we get together he often says, "Hey, did you see that game, the monster was 50 meters high and could change into a giant reptile," rather than, "Boy, they are throwing around a lot of enemies on-screen at once." So we tend to go for putting more effort into making each enemy more distinct and memorable.

Laz's facial detail and expression are the best on the PS2, hands down. How did you achieve this level of realism in real-time?

Two stages to this answer. Firstly, you need to prioritize the importance of certain elements in a game; secondly, you have to find people with the talent to realize it for you.

We made a concerted decision that it was highly important to the game. The story elements were always going to be important to us, so we labored long and hard over the script. When we were happy with this, we got some great voice talent—Joe Morton, Rob Paulson, Michael Gambon, to name but a few—to voice the characters. The result was we had a great script, great acting and had to have this reflected in the facial details and expression.

Key to making a good game is to get one element of a process working brilliantly, then you just have to bring everything else up to the same standard. Once we knew it was going to be so important, we put one of our best artists and one of our best programmers on the job and didn't let them out of the office until we were happy with the results.

How important is atmosphere and adventure to you guys? There's certainly a lot of action and confrontation in Ghosthunter, but it seems safe to say you want part of the appeal to be the



If you think this croc is cool, you should see the abomination it pukes up... Killing beasties has never looked so good.

“Sound is one of the undervalued elements in many games. In Ghosthunter, we have interactive music, so we can control what the player is hearing when.” —James Shepard, creative director

exploration, the moody fun of just existing in the universe.

It's a ghost game. It's got to be spooky. We want people to enjoy living in and exploring the worlds we have created, so the atmosphere is very important. We want to take people away from the mundane.

And then there's that balance. Some designers go all out with the action, kind of disarming the tension and mood. Is this something you just gotta feel out as a developer, kind of know what the balance is between direct confrontation and story and exploration?

Difficult to answer this one. To me it's like music, or the structure of a film. A sound is louder if it is surrounded by silence. We tend to chart the game out like a piece of music, making sure the highs and lows occur at the right places and we have the right mix of exploring, action and puzzles. My number-one concern is I simply don't want the game to be boring or too repetitious.

I like the system you've come up with when interacting with the environment—the way control icons pop up (although I do wish Laz had a jump). Did you toy around with this approach to climbing, hanging, etc.?

Context sensitivity is a tough subject in games, and one that goes in and out of fashion. We want Lazarus to do a lot of different things in the game but not have an “über-complex” control layout, so having a lot of different actions being activated off one button seemed to be the way to go.

Can you give us a little history on how you guys came up with the ghost-hunting concept?

Yes. We wanted to build on some of the horror elements within MediEvil 2. Some people had said to us that with a crazy world and a crazy character, Sir Dan, the game had got a little “crazy.” Also, we wanted a lead character that could speak. So that is how we decided to move towards a character like Lazarus, someone more normal who could anchor the player into the weirdness that was happening all around him. We wanted to make it more adult and we liked the freedom that fighting ghosts gives the player.

This led us having an initial catchphrase of “James Bond: Ghostbusters,” and the rest is history.

Your track record indicates you guys love adventure games with rich fantasy elements. Is that a fair statement? And what is it you like so much about this style of game?

Agreed, we like to twist things around and stand out from the crowd. Having some fantasy elements in the game gives the designers and artists more freedom to come up with something truly unique.

What to you defines scary? It's fascinating to think about what it takes to come up with completely original ideas that must pull the player in and play off his psyche. Maybe you can

talk a little bit about your design philosophy with such a project...

Interesting question. It's different for different people. For me it's about tapping into people's everyday fears. Fear of the unknown, fear of the dark, make the player scared to turn the next corner, as he doesn't know what to expect. So one of the main things to do is sidestep the player's expectations. In Ghosthunter there is an incredible amount of diversity. The player is always coming up against new enemies, new puzzles and new environments, so you never know what is going to hit you next.

Then there are the old, pantomime classics—things jumping out at you, scary noises going off to fall back on. Then finally, you just try and universalize your own personal fears. Without going into too much detail, at the time we were starting Ghosthunter, my wife gave birth to a baby boy. It wasn't an easy delivery, so I think subconsciously some of those fears and worries were directly translated into the game. Looking back at it now, I can see lots of monstrous births, transformations and imagery to do with children under threat that I think comes directly from this experience.

So my catharsis becomes your entertainment, and don't worry, my son is fine now. Too fine in fact. My next game will be titled “Terror Toddlers.”

You always seem to press just the right buttons with your scores and sound design, a hugely important element in a game such as this. Tell us about your process and how you work in conjunction with the dev process.

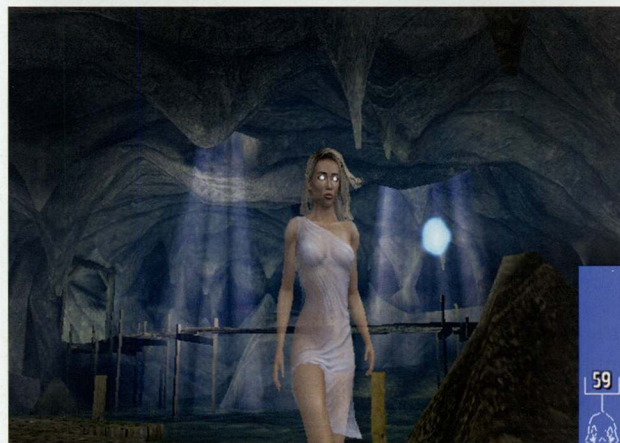
This is very important to us. It's a fact that if you are watching a film and you insert a frame of black into the picture, most people won't notice, but insert a frame of silence and everyone will spot it immediately.

Sound is one of the undervalued elements in many games. In Ghosthunter, we have interactive music, so we can control what the player is hearing when. Music can be cued to monsters appearing, the player's actions and locations. The aim was always to have the control a film composer has but not threaten the interactivity of the game world. So we wrote the music system from scratch, then found a composer who could work this way.

Every piece of music has to be broken up into small, distinct, looping segments that can be played repeatedly or then linked into any other loop in the piece. So structuring the music was a complex, evolving process that went on throughout the dev cycle. Every time the environments changed, the music had to be updated.

As for sound design, we treat it as an important aspect of every part of the game. If you schedule in sound design time for every entity and every environment, it is less likely to added at the end as an afterthought.

So, before we move onto character design, MediEvil for PSP has us beyond excited. Is this everything a PS2 version would have been? How's it going?



It's not my project, but from what I've seen, I say yes, it is. If you look at the tech specs of PSP, you'll see that it can do a lot of stuff the PS2 can do and a lot more that it can't, so I say it will be everything and more than you will be expecting.

It's borderline miraculous what these guys are able to squeeze out of the PS2.

Character Design

This is a sick and twisted bunch of ghouls and ghosts. What process do you go through when endeavoring to invent new, original monster/spirit types?

I work very closely with my lead artist, Jason Wilson. At the beginning of the project, we have design phase where we lock ourselves away in a room for weeks thrashing out a lot of the core gameplay, the look and feel, etc., of the game. When we have decided on the themes of the various levels, we then start to look at the characters inside each one.



Designs like these are only half the battle. Making them actually gel in-game and come across as foreboding is the real trick.

I'll give an example: in the Swamps, we knew that Lazarus would be hunting the ghostly children murdered by the Swamp Phantom. One of our top level goals is that the concept/story, the visual design and the gameplay should all complement and strengthen each other.

So the initial brief was for ghost children. How do you make that unique? We became interested in the ideal that living children project their own personality into their toys when they play with them. I see my own son doing this all the time. It followed that perhaps a ghost child would project their personality into their toys. Then we imagined that they projected so much ghost personality into a toy that the toy became the monster id of the child and took over.

So we have the idea of a two-stage ghost: a child with a toy and the toy with the child. What should the toy be: a clown, a doll? We settled on a Teddy bear because: 1. Old ones can look a bit rotten. 2. They sometimes have zips and stuffing



coming out.

All through this process, Jason is drawing concepts, and we settled on one where the stuffing could be like intestines spewing onto the floor if he got shot. (This is something else we like...things that are disgusting and disturbing without being overt; it's too easy to just throw blood and guts at a problem.) So we had a two-stage creature: a girl carrying a Teddy bear that, when scared, became a giant mutant Teddy throwing a rag-doll-like girl around. Then we start on the arduous process of realizing this in the game, but that's another story.

Some of the larger species and detailed ancillary characters seem like they'd chew up lots of memory, yet they appear in detailed environments often drenched in effects without a hitch. You obviously know where the line is and how to walk it. How are you achieving this level of model in these environments on PS2 without taking any hits?

Balance. The more detailed the monster, the more you restrict the environment. Then in the later stages of the game, you make your programmers optimize the game as much as possible, trying to squeeze as much "juice" from the machine as possible.

Also, a lot of it comes down to skill. The artists do a great job with restricted resolutions and palettes on the textures, and the models look more hi-detailed than they actually are. This is one of the key skills of the artists—making complexity seem to be there when it isn't. The simple answer is hard work, basically!

How did you go about designing Laz's monster/ghost-capturing system and weapons? Were you tempted to strap an unregistered nuclear accelerator to his back a la *Ghostbusters*?

Visually, we wanted to go for a low tech, "Heath Robinson" look, as we didn't want it going too sci-fi, and it tied in nicely with the story, as all the equipment has been made by one man in his spare time, cannibalizing other machines, etc. In terms of gameplay, we tried many different approaches. In the early stages, the grenade was thrown onto the floor and opened out like a lunar



It's a fact: UK developers keep much nicer cubicles than U.S. ones, and cleanliness leads to gaming godliness.

lander, capturing the ghosts if they ran or flew over it, but this proved to be too static for the dynamic game-play that we wanted, and was a little too much like *Ghostbusters*. So the grenade became more like the "Ouija board Frisbee" that you see in the final game.

You go for something visually unique and then prototype and test the gameplay until you are happy.

Astral is simply beautiful. How difficult a process was it getting her ethereal look just right?

Difficult. She has been through many reiterations. She had to look sexy without looking tacky, feminine yet ghostly. We tried many different costumes, from full outfits to totally nude, she had nipples, she didn't have nipples, she had tentacles instead of hair.

Then we settled that she should look like a girl in a night dress swimming underwater, and it was a case of balancing the underlying poly mesh with the textures and programmer effects that were placed on top. It took a long time, but we're happy with the results.

Phenomenal work, the gaming public again owes you a debt of gratitude.

Thank you. As long as they buy enough copies to keep us employed then we're happy.



The Art of character design

A word from Ghosthunter character artist Stuart Adcock

Working as a character artist on Ghosthunter has been my first experience of working in the industry and on PS2, and I can genuinely say there is no looking back. I have the opportunity to work closely with all departments and the variety of characters in Ghosthunter are challenging but extremely rewarding.

The process of creating a game character begins with discussions between myself, Jason and James Shepherd (creative director) to look over the concept artwork and learn more about the character. The aim is to do justice to Jason's designs and bring them to life. Questions will be raised, such as: how detailed can we make it? How many [characters] appear on screen? Can we afford to apply cloth dynamics?

Following the discussions, I then take the concept drawings and expand on the reference material. This may be in the form of texture details, anatomical/skeletal studies, clothing, hair or facial expressions. In the case of the "swampboss" we used photographs of body builders, dead crocodiles, piles of sick, cataract eyes and a newly born baby's wet hair—quite disturbing. It's funny to revisit these folders; it's like a photo album of the characters' history, ancestors and what ingredients make them the mess that they are today.

When fully prepared, I move onto Maya and begin the face and body modelling (see Figure 1). This could be an amalgamation of similar models or a mixture of extruding/cutting faces and manipulating vertices. No matter what methods are used, a good understanding of anatomy is crucial. Modelling is the first stage of seeing the concept in three dimensions, so I work

closely with Jason to get the proportions spot on.

Texture painting is the next stage, the model is unwrapped to a 2D equivalent. You end up with texture maps that can be painted in Photoshop. A typical texture is created from many layers, which are mostly hand-painted with some photographic detail. Texturing is where the "style" of the character can be defined; the goal is to make the texture look more like an illustration than a photograph (see Figure 2). I repeatedly check the texture back in Maya, as it is important to visualise it in 3D (see Figure 3).

After modelling and texturing is complete, I then have to create a skeleton for the character before it can be animated and brought to life. Lots of 3D joints are placed to best represent the real skeleton for a specific area of the body (see Figure 4). The model is then attached to the skeleton and skinned with a series of deformers, giving the impression that the model has internal mass and muscle.

The job isn't done yet; many characters require dynamic cloth/hair and multi-texture (shine). As the majority of the characters are ghosts, I work closely with programmers to apply certain ghostly effects.

The final stage is to create a facial setup. This involves using clusters (groups of vertices) to move areas of the face to define an expression. For months, I'd be looking at the expressions of every person I spoke to. This was subtle in the beginning, but by the end I'd interrupt them and ask them to re-create a certain expression or repeat a certain line. One thing I began to realise was the importance of facial wrinkles—the brow, frown and smile lines are all signatures of an expression. One evening I thought

of a way to emulate these wrinkles and within a morning we had it working in-game. It improved every expression and added a sense of maturity to the lead character. This was just one example of how we'd pushed the boundaries of character development on the PS2 (see Figure 5).

Creating digital characters is hard. It's a blend of science and art; understanding both sides of the coin is extremely important. I've had many sleepless nights thinking about technical issues such as: how do we get a character made up of scrapyard junk to collapse into hundreds of pieces, or how do we get a Teddy to morph seamlessly into a huge ferocious Teddy monster? These are the issues that keep the job fresh and challenging.

Sure, there are times when you need to relax. While modelling and painting textures, it's sometimes good to forget technical issues, as this is a creative process. That's the good thing about working at Cambridge Studio: it's full of lively characters that will even chase you around the office when they sense you're a bit tense—honest.

Ghosthunter has a relatively small development team. Being part of it gave me the chance to learn all areas of character development, rather than being pigeon-holed into doing just one thing. Perhaps one day this will change and I will be encouraged to specialize, but having this kind of experience is invaluable. Even the modelling process requires you to think about animation and texturing, where to apply extra resolution for areas that exhibit the most change, and where to model suitable texture seams.

Certainly the future for character artists is an exciting one. Towards the end of a project, I work on hi-res versions of the characters for marketing (see figure 6). With the new generation of consoles on the horizon, you'll soon see this kind of detail in-game.

Just remember one thing: the next generation of games will not simply arrive from better hardware; it's hard work that creates these wonderful worlds and characters. It blows my mind the amount of effort and talent that goes into every aspect of game development within our studio. **play**



"It's funny to revisit these folders; it's like a photo album of the characters' history, ancestors and what ingredients make them the mess that they are today."

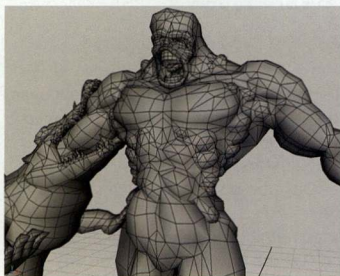


Figure 1

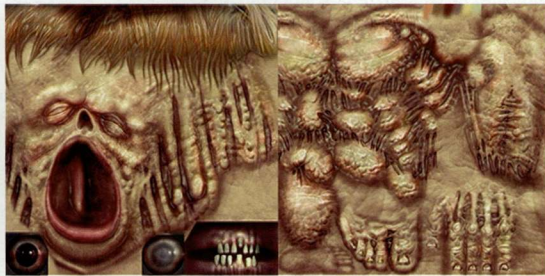


Figure 2



Figure 3

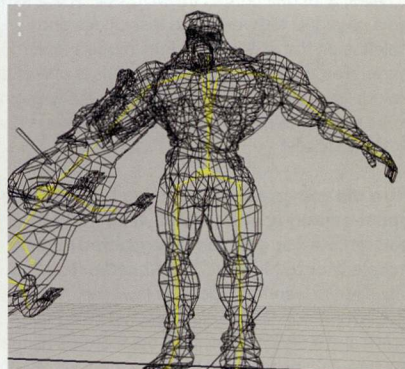


Figure 4



Figure 5

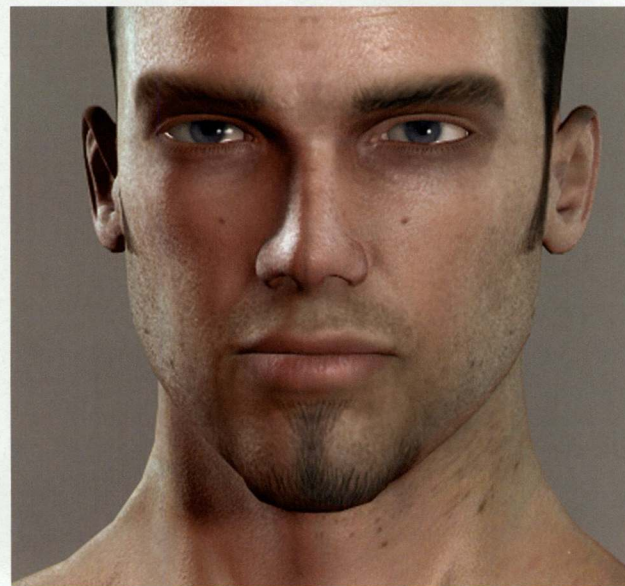
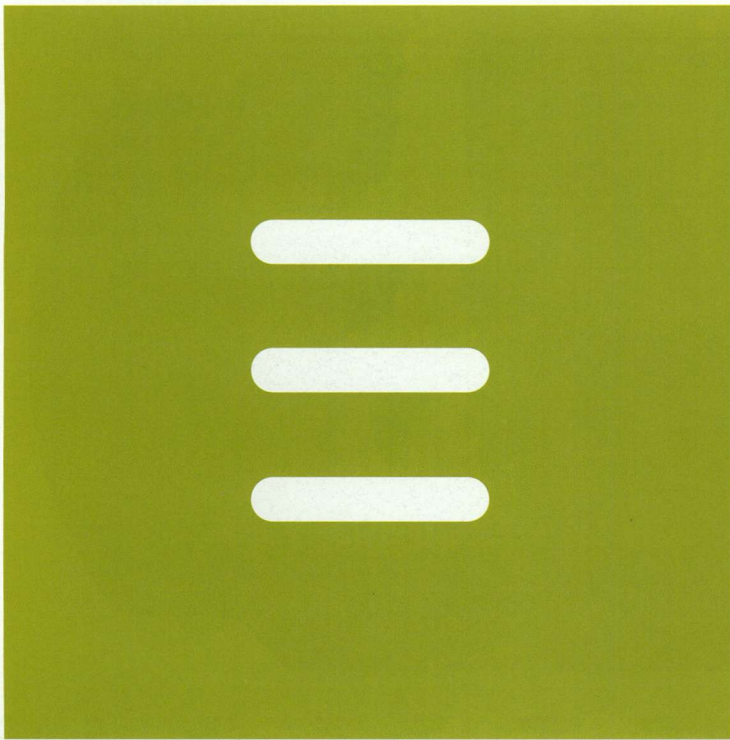


Figure 6



This year's annual pilgrimage to LA held little in the way of surprises, was as over-booked and over-crowded as ever, but somehow, once again, the games made it all worthwhile...

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The name nails it. Electronic: there's miles of electrical rigs running towers of high-definition televisions hooked up to millions upon millions of dollars worth of gaming gear set in a jungle of pulsating light and image, generating enough deafening noise to drown out LAX. Entertainment: if you're a gamer, you're not the kid in the candy store, you own the entire chain; this year's gonna be a blast and further cement video games as the premier form of fun for the world. Expo: yeah, as cool as it all is, E3's definitely an expo, and after a short while you want to get the hell out of the bloated nonsense of it all. But now that we've had a chance to regain our sanity and sift through all the information overload, it would seem that the industry is sitting in the most interesting and, without a doubt, most exciting spot it's ever occupied. In the following pages, we've sifted through the chaff, leaving what we believe to be the most important highlights of what was shown. Some predictions may turn out false; some of the games we dug may finally land with a dud; some of the hype may turn out to be just that. It's just not possible to properly judge a game from a few minutes of suffocating playtime, or soak in the most educated opinion with so much being hidden away behind closed doors. And who knows how a game like, say, *Zelda*, shown only on video, will turn out? Well, we think we know the answer for that, and that's all part of the fun: the beauty is in the anticipation. So check out the following exhaustive look at the best of E3 2004, and let the anticipation begin.





Sony PSP

With sleek design and slick games, the PSP appears to be the future of handheld gaming

On May 11, 2004, Sony finally lifted the veil of secrecy surrounding their PlayStation Portable (PSP)...and it's not just dramatic hyperbole to say that the landscape of portable gaming will likely never be the same again. To sum up the PSP in a single word: incredible. To embellish a bit more, the words stunning, jaw-dropping and sleek all come to mind. Sony has managed to take just about every feature a gamer could want and combine it into a portable machine that exudes "cool."

The PSP unit itself is both comfortable in the hands and aesthetically impressive—the ergonomically designed contours and predominantly black exterior make the PSP truly feel like a cutting-edge piece of personal electronic equipment. A large, backlit 4.3" TFT LCD screen, featuring a much-welcome 16:9 aspect ratio, dominates the face of the PSP, and the picture quality is second to none. 3D games shown running on the PSP were astoundingly impressive, featuring high frame rates, high poly counts and detailed textures—better than Dreamcast and almost up to PS2 quality—while 2D games featured a sharpness never previously imagined. Flanking the sides of the screen were the familiar PlayStation controls—the directional pad on the left, the Square, Circle, X and Triangle buttons on the

right, and the Left and Right triggers positioned comfortably on the top. But the most significant control component would have to be the analog thumbpad located below the directional pad. Unobtrusive to the point where many show goers mistook it for a speaker, the analog pad felt perfectly natural—in fact, it arguably felt better than any console analog thumbstick. It's worth noting, however, that the PSP only features the single analog pad; there's no dual-analog action here.

Of course, even the best hardware wouldn't amount to much without games to go with it, but Sony has that covered as well. Nearly 100 developers and publishers have signed on to create games for the PSP, and many are converting their most popular franchises into handheld form. From Sony favorites like Gran Turismo, MediEvil and Ape Escape to third-party legends like Darkstalkers, Tales of Eternia, Need for Speed Underground, Tony Hawk, Ridge Racer and Metal Gear, the PSP seems to already have gaming's most popular genres and series in the bag—too bad hardly any of them were playable on the E3 show floor.

Games will be distributed on a new 1.8GB-capacity optical storage medium called UMD (Universal Media Disc). At only 60mm in diameter, UMDs smaller than GameCube

discs, and in addition to games, they can also store movies and music, both of which Sony plans to cultivate to turn the PSP into the essential portable multimedia machine. Music videos and movie trailers running directly off the PSP looked nothing short of beautiful, and although most of the multimedia content has yet to be announced, Sony did reveal that Square Enix's much-anticipated, visually awesome Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children CG movie would be on its way.

And that's not all the PSP can do. Downloadable content is planned to take advantage of the PSP's built-in Wi-Fi capabilities, connectivity to PCs and the PS2 is likely, and potential peripherals like a USB camera, USB keyboard and USB GPS system could add even more functionality to Sony's "Walkman of the 21st century."

The one question remaining is how much it's going to cost to ride the next wave of portable gaming—Sony has not yet announced a price. Fortunately, they have confirmed a rough release date. Before the end of 2004 in Japan, and in Q1 2005 for North America and Europe, players will be able to experience what appears to be the next level of portable gaming.



Above: Sample PSP packaging and a UMD game disc. Right: Even though Sony press materials stated the PSP would only be available in black, white versions were certainly on display.





Game Line-up

Gran Turismo 4 Mobile (Sony/Polyphony)
 Hot Shots Golf (Sony/ClapHanz)
 Ape Escape (Sony)
 Twisted Metal: World Tour (Sony/Inco)
 MediEvil (Sony/Cambridge Studio)
 Death Jr. (Sony/Backbone)
 Fighting Spirits (Sony)
 Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow (Sony/SCE Bend)
 ATV Off-Road Fury (Sony/Climax)
 NHL Face-Off 2004 (Sony/989 Sports & Blue42)
 NBA Shootout 2004 (Sony/989 Sports)
 Hard Corps (Sony/SCE Studios London)
 World Tour Soccer 2005 (Sony/Studio Soho)
 Wipeout Pure (Sony/SCE Studios Liverpool)
 WRC (Sony/Evolution Studios)
 Formula One 04 (Sony/ Evolution Studios)
 Ten No Kagi, Chi No Mon (Sony)
 Dokodemo Issho (Sony)
 Metal Gear Acid (Konami)
 Ys: The Ark of Napishtim (Konami)
 Frogger (Konami)
 T.O.E. (Namco)
 Ridge Racer (Namco)
 Puyo Pop Fever (Sega/Sonic Team)
 Darkstalkers Chronicle (Capcom)
 Tony Hawk's Underground 2 (Activision)
 Spider-Man 2 (Activision)
 NBA Street (EA)
 NFL Street (EA)
 Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf (EA)
 Need For Speed Underground (EA)
 Armored Core: Formula Front (From Software)
 Dynasty Warriors (Koei/Omega)
 Mercury (Ignition Entertainment)
 Metal Shell (Tantalus)
 Free Running (Eidos)
 Sticky Balls (Warthog)
 Zero Hour (Argonaut)
 BG (Seed9)
 Crazy Racing Kart Rider (Nexon)
 Super Star Studio (Coong)
 Volcanus Online (Zepetto)
 Ren-Goku: The Tower Of Purgatory (Hudson/
 Suemi Jun)

Developers

The following list represents only a fraction of the developers signed on to create games for PSP:

Acclaim
 Activision
 Atari
 Atlus
 Backbone Entertainment
 Bandai
 Capcom
 Eidos
 Electronic Arts
 From Software
 Hudson
 Konami
 LucasArts
 Majesco
 Midway
 Namco
 Nippon Ichi Software
 Rockstar
 Sammy
 Sega
 Square Enix
 Tecmo
 THQ
 Ubisoft
 Yuke's



Playable

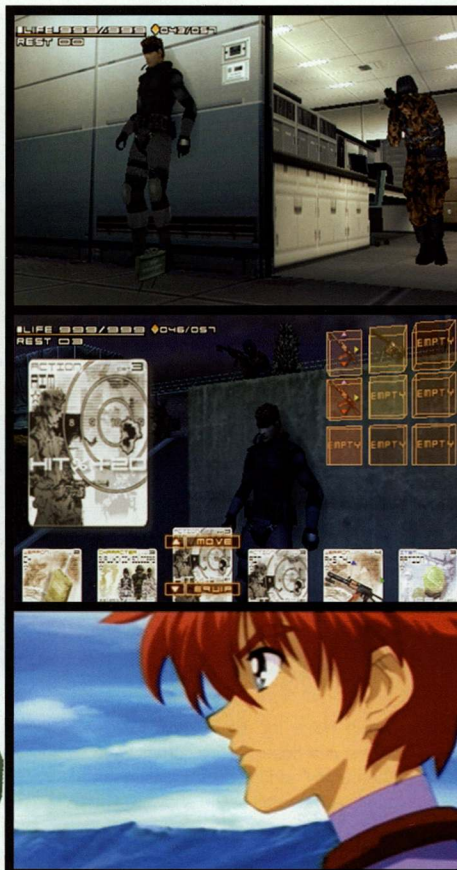
Lots of games were announced and shown for the PSP, but only a couple were playable on the E3 show floor.

Metal Gear Acid (Konami)

This all-new Metal Gear game might not be exactly what you're expecting. In its E3 form, Acid Metal (as series creator Hideo Kojima likes to call it) actually played like a board game: you'd take turns with the enemies, moving limited spaces at a time and using cards to attack. A very interesting take on the Metal Gear formula.

T.O.E. (Namco)

One of the few playable PSP games at E3, this not-so-creatively code-named port of Tales of Eternia, also known as Tales of Destiny 2 in the U.S., looked gorgeous. I don't think I've ever seen such vivid 2D visuals. As with the original, T.O.E. combines real-time action-packed battles with traditional RPG exploration.



Just Announced...

Konami revealed several months ago that they would be bringing Ys: The Ark of Napishtim to next-generation consoles, but it was only at E3 that they announced it would be on PSP.



Nintendo DS

Are gamers ready to play in a whole new way?



The buzz on the DS had been building for months, and when Nintendo finally revealed the mysterious system the week of E3, it could truly be said that, if nothing else, the DS is unlike any other gaming device yet attempted. Boasting stand-out features like touch-screen technology, a built-in microphone and wireless multiplayer in addition to the previously announced dual screens, the DS is designed to be a “third pillar” to sit alongside the GameCube and Game Boy Advance in the Nintendo pantheon. “Nintendo DS is a third way to play,” says Reggie Fils-Aime, Nintendo executive vice president of sales and marketing. “It defines its own category. It re-invents portable entertainment...”

With graphical power greater than a Nintendo 64 but a few notches below a Sega Dreamcast, the DS’ dual backlit screens can be programmed independently to showcase reasonably impressive 2D or 3D visuals. As expected, in almost all cases of demonstrated software, one screen was primarily used for actual gameplay, while the second screen was utilized for alternate views, maps or status screens.

However, it was the realization of touch-sensitive control (which had been previously rumored but not confirmed) on the DS’ lower screen that the software designers utilized the most. Almost every title on display took advantage of the included stylus, which truly does allow new ways to experience gaming. In *Metroid Prime: Hunters*, players turn by dragging the stylus along the screen, and open fire on their opponents by tapping toward their foes; in the *Submarine* tech demo, the touch-screen acted as a control panel for the complex sub controls

while the action played out on the upper screen.

The DS also has multiplayer gaming covered: the unit features Wi-Fi capabilities so players can link up from virtually anywhere, as well as local wireless gameplay for up to 16 players within a range of 30 (possibly up to 100) feet. Players will even be able to engage in wireless competition and software sharing with only a single copy of a game.

The games themselves will come on small cards (smaller than a GC memory card) that use semiconductor memory—featuring more than a gig of storage capacity and allowing for lower manufacturing costs—which plug in at the hinge of the unit. In addition, the DS will feature a secondary slot to play GBA cartridges, though classic Game Boy and Game Boy Color games will not be compatible.

While the DS is inarguably unique in many ways, the question is, will that be enough for it to revolutionize gaming the way Nintendo envisions it will? The DS features some odd design choices: the system itself looks lifted out of the '80s, and the lack of a second speaker, permitting only mono sound without headphones, seems like a blatant oversight. In terms of both graphics and hardware design, Sony’s PSP far surpasses the DS, making Nintendo’s new machine feel like a toy compared to Sony’s slick piece of consumer electronics.

Nonetheless, Nintendo reaffirmed that the DS would be released in North America and Japan before the end of 2004—complete with a new name—though they did not reveal the price for the system. (Industry analysts predict it will come in around \$150.) A European and Australian release will follow in Q1 2005.

Super Mario 64x4

A port of the genre-defining *Super Mario 64* with a brand-new multiplayer versus mode.



Metroid Prime: Hunters

This all-new 3D *Metroid* will have both a complete single-player mode and multiplayer chaos.



New Super Mario Bros.

An all-new, 2D *Super Mario* sequel. Gamers have been waiting ages for this; too bad it wasn’t playable.



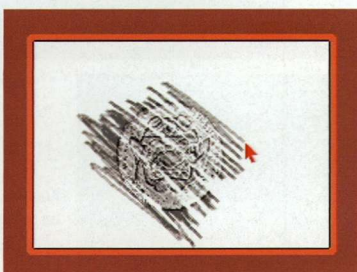
Mario Kart DS

Hideki Konno, the mastermind behind *Mario Kart*, is bringing the fantastic series to the DS.



Wario Ware, Inc. DS

The stylus-based micro games were thoroughly addictive—the best use of the touch-screen at the show.



Animal Crossing DS

The design and community features will be even more prominent in this sequel to *Animal Crossing*.



Games Revealed

- Nintendogs (Nintendo)
- PictoChat (Nintendo)
- Balloon Trip tech demo (Nintendo)
- Mario’s Face tech demo (Nintendo)
- Table Hockey tech demo (Nintendo)
- Submarine tech demo (Nintendo)
- DS Pikachu tech demo (Nintendo)
- Sonic the Hedgehog (Sega)
- “Project Rub” (Sega)
- Spider-Man 2 (Activision)
- Bomberman (Hudson)
- Dynasty Warriors (Koei)
- Mega Man Battle Network (Capcom)
- Viewtiful Joe (Capcom)
- Gyakuten Saiban (Capcom)
- Mobile Suit Gundam Seed (Bandai)
- Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicle (Square Enix)
- Egg Monster Heroes (Square Enix)
- Dragon Quest Monsters (Square Enix)
- Pac Pix (Namco)
- Pac N Roll (Namco)
- Mr. Driller (Namco)
- “Unnamed RPG” (Namco)
- Frogger 2005 (Konami)
- Yu Gi Oh: Nightmare Troubadour (Konami)
- Need for Speed (Electronic Arts)
- Dragon Ball Z (Banpresto)
- Monster Rancher (Tecmo)
- Spongebob SquarePants (THQ)
- Rayman (Ubisoft)



Final Fantasy XII

For years now I've been harping on how badly turn-based role-playing needs to evolve, and Square has answered the call. In a similar vein to KOTOR—which really began the evolution—the turn-based battles in FFXII play out in-engine, allowing for the seamless integration of battles amidst all of the turn-based trappings of the world's most celebrated RPG franchise, in which the character designs—an

unparalleled celebration of the female form and creature concepts—may be Square's best yet. The end result is simply God's gift to role-playing and a gateway to future generations of Final Fantasy to come. **Dave Halverson**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Square Enix
Publisher: Square Enix
Available: 2005



「この金はモトモトオレオラダゲルマスカ人のもんぢ」



Loudest Booth: EA

EA's gargantuan TV wall delivered decibel readings in the red zone. You couldn't even hear yourself think about how much you wish you'd never see another football game again as long as you live.



Samurai Legend Musashi

Fond memories of Square's first platforming adventure, Brave Fencer Musashi for the PlayStation (get it if you don't have it), came rushing back the second I laid eyes on Samurai Legend Musashi in all of its cel-shaded glory. Leave it to the artisans at Square to revitalize cel-shading. Looking uncannily like traditional anime puffed into 3D, the gameplay offers up a similar variety

of puzzle-solving, platforming, action and combat as did the first, only now Musashi can learn his opponents' moves and carry fallen friends to safety—a major theme in the game. **Dave Halverson**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Square Enix
Publisher: Square Enix
Available: Winter



Best Chill Zone: Atari

Atari broke tradition by showing us the games before the show, and then sinking their E3 efforts into the ultimate Kubrick-inspired VIP chill zone, complete with open bar and tasty food. A step towards a more professional-oriented E3? If only.



Darkwatch: Curse of the West

Just days before announcing their merger with Sega, Sammy had an exceptionally good showing at E3, highlighted by a 33-foot-tall Gothic church, within which people were treated to a sermon of Darkwatch, their explosive, new, dark FPS. While DW doesn't allow you to gaze at your appendages like Riddick, it does allow you to blow lots of them off, howling with its own brand of resident evil—the vampiric and the Western united.

Dave Halverson

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: Sammy Studios
Publisher: Sammy Studios
Available: TBA

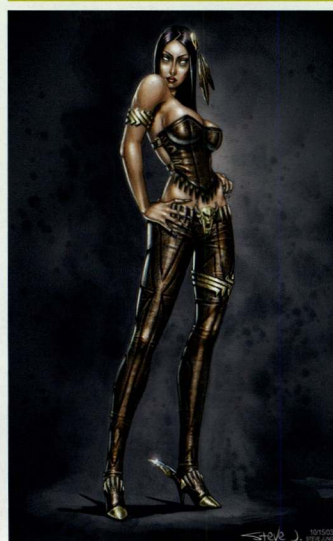


Red Ninja

Red Ninja was one of the surprise games of the show (for me at least) more for its gameplay than its graphics. It's a good-looking game for sure, but it's all about the gameplay—a combination of grappling and combat using the Tetsugen, a wire weapon used for grappling and julienning opponents. New developer Tranji is also building in plenty of fan service for the anime set, whether they know it or not. Panty shots are at an all-time high.

Dave Halverson

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Tranji
Publisher: VU Games
Available: Q4



Kameo: Elements of Power

It's been so long since the last original Rare epic that my visit to their Kameo room was like a reawakening. "Oh yeah, now I remember, you're the guys that make the best games in the world." Kameo is, in a word, magic. It's everything that is good and right about gaming and none of what isn't, on a level all alone, untouchable by anything else at E3. An embodiment of the story-book charm of Rare games gone by, married with a more edgy and dark aesthetic (these are the best visuals you will see this generation). What looked overly complex a short year ago has been honed to perfection. Now I understand why Rare prefers to keep their games under wraps until they're ready to show. They truly do work in mysterious ways.

Dave Halverson

System: Xbox

Developer: Rare

Publisher: MGS

Available: When it's done (app. Q1 2005)



Spy Fiction

Anyone who says Spy Fiction is a poor man's Metal Gear is smoking paint. This is a game blazing its own trail in the spy game by employing several unique systems, most notably the ability to steal and assume appearances from anyone you encounter, including voice and mannerisms. SF also played remarkably fast-paced given its stealthy nature, and seems like the kind of branching, open-ended adventure no two people will play alike. Insertion is just months away—exciting news for super spies.

Dave Halverson

System: PlayStation 2

Developer: Access Games Inc.

Publisher: Sammy Studios

Available: September



Jade Empire

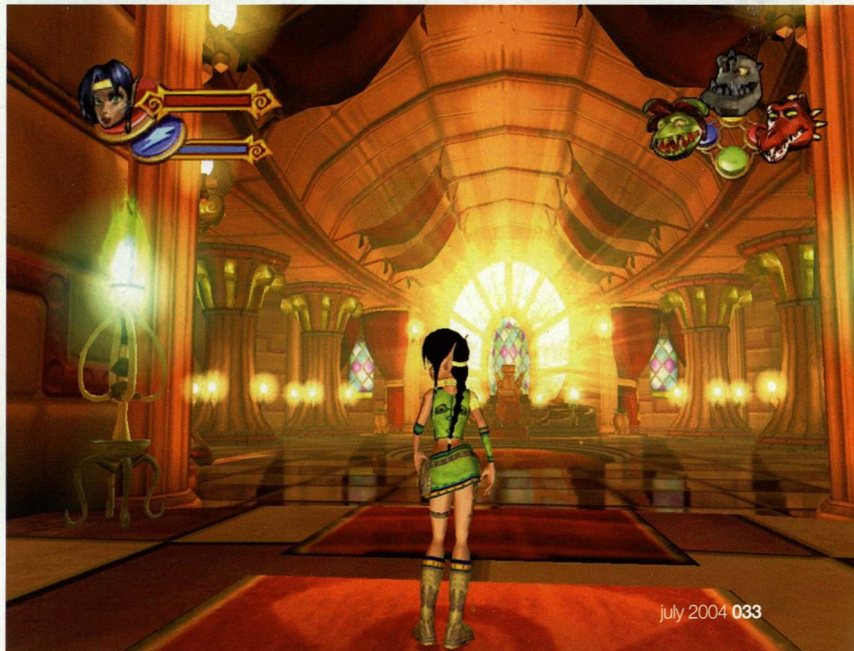
What I didn't like about KOTOR (rigid animation, repeating faces on different characters and excessive loading) has all been addressed in Jade Empire, BioWare's crowning achievement, riding on an engine light years better and a real-time combat system as deep as it is simple and engaging. Jade Empire is the company's ultimate vision brought to life painstakingly over half a decade, and it shows in every facet of the game. Imagine the scope and integrity of Halo, only in a third-person game steeped in Eastern mythology; now that's grand. **Dave Halverson**

System: Xbox

Developer: BioWare

Publisher: MGS

Available: Winter



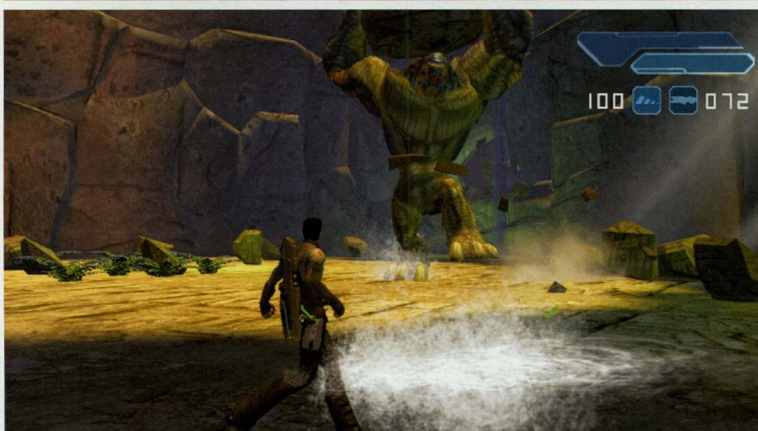


Blood Will Tell

"First and foremost, we are telling a story," says Sega Wow's Yuji Horikawa of Blood Will Tell, based on Osama Tezuka's (Astro Boy) manga, Dororo, about a samurai named Hyakkimaru, robbed of his limbs as an infant, on a quest to uncover his past and reclaim his body parts. Bloody, demon-filled and wrought with pain and suffering, the tale is sheathed inside a highly original action-adventure, where you

(and a friend if you're so inclined) play in unison with the sprightly yet deadly Dororo, among awe-inspiring Eastern panoramas, intricate battles, insane bosses and distinctive action play mechanics. **Dave Halverson**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Sega Wow
Publisher: Sega
Available: Fall '04



Advent Rising

You gotta love Donald Mustard. If they gave out awards for passion, it'd be no contest. The last time I saw him, we played bits of, and discussed, his ambitious vision for Advent Rising. At E3 we sat down and played it. Surprisingly enough (he's fought for every inch), Donald's vision of gaming your way has actually become reality—apparent even though the game is many months from

shipping. Advent truly is a game no two people will play alike, full of cinematic expression, real-time twists and turns, multiple paths and more ways to skin a Seeker than you can possibly imagine. **DH**

System: Xbox
Developer: Glyph
Publisher: Majesco
Available: TBA 2004



Special Claustrophobia Award: Sega

Entering Sega's booth was like negotiating an ant farm...if ants played really cool video games.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

Finally revealed in playable form as a 20-minute demo, MGS3 is shaping up to be just as grand as fans of the series could hope for. The new game elements—the hunting of food, the camouflage, the close-quarters combat—all made for interesting additions to an already great formula, but they're really just enhancements for the stealthy action and assortment of weapons that make up the heart and soul of Metal Gear. An extensive trailer revealed awesome story elements—a young Revolver Ocelot appears as one of the game's key villains—as well as excellent environments (the remains of ruined buildings made for some very cool stealth possibilities) and a high-tech enemy arsenal that's based upon actual experimental vehicle concepts from the Cold War era. Other pivotal characters include a villain by the name of The Colonel and a woman called The Boss—the main character's mentor, who may or may not betray him. **CH**

Interview

Kyle Cooper, designer of the Metal Gear Solid 3 title sequence

Kyle Cooper is known for his introductory title sequences in numerous Hollywood blockbusters, ranging from *Braveheart* to *Mission: Impossible* to *Spider-Man*. Cooper also created the title sequence for MGS2, and is in the midst of creating the *James Bond*-like sequence for MGS3, in which the main visual component is a writhing snake skeleton.

play: Could you explain the metaphor you used with the snake in the opening to Metal Gear Solid 3?

Kyle Cooper: The snake has always been. That's the existing metaphor, and in the first one [the intro to MGS2], I wanted to have more of the snake. You know, there's a few CG shots of the snake; the shapes come off his scales. But it just seemed really interesting. Camouflage looks like snakeskin, and I've always just been really interested in snakes. I actually bought a couple of Burmese pythons I was looking at for research, and I got a snake skeleton... The idea that it's dead, you know...it's the funny analogy or metaphor: that he's eaten it, and that's the bones left over. But also it's these ghosts of all the carnage that's taken place, just sort of moving over this landscape and, you know, the text that I read suggests that the first spy was the snake in the garden of Eden. Is it the first traitor or is it the first spy? I think it's the first spy. ...We talk about the snake in Eden...at some point that is going to be over and

goodness is going to win out. It's like in Tolkien, where it says "deep roots are not reached by the frost, the crownless again shall be king." OK, the snake was evil, but now it's dead, but then it's back to life. Just looking at that metaphor and what was provided by Mr. Kojima, and looking at the camouflage thing, I was trying to make something that'll play and be interesting and [I'm] trying to find ways to make it interactive.

Was there anything else you studied for inspiration when creating the intro?

Mostly just the game itself, the information and the script and the things I've been provided, but we've been looking a lot at iconography of the Cold War—graphic symbols. There's another layer of graphic symbols that we're gonna add. You know, the hammer and sickle and fallout graphics and all of that and headlines...doing the research into the iconography of that the same way that we researched the genetic code for the last one. ... And just the idea of the mushroom cloud. The thought was that the mushroom cloud would explode at the beginning; you'd create this sort of smoky environment and so it's bombs and it's dead snakes that are reanimated.

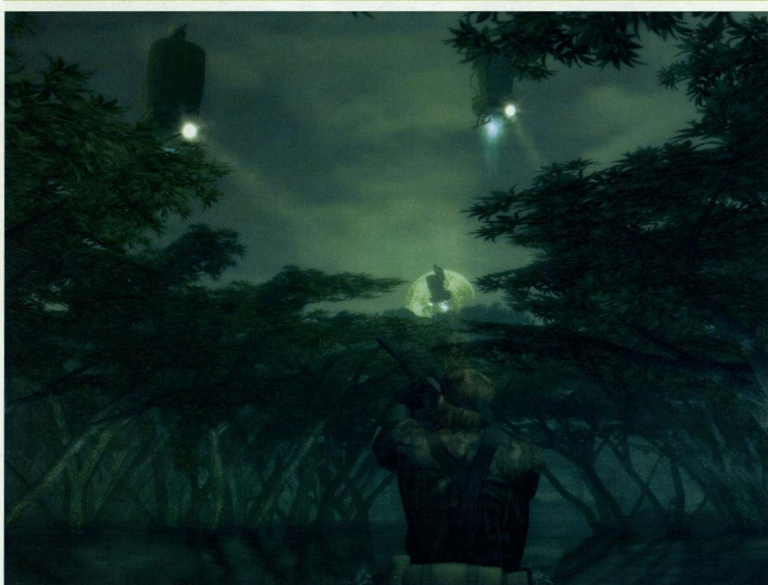
What's the difference between making a title sequence for a game and movie? Is it any different?

Well, the thinking, at least in the first one, is pretty much the same for me. The process is the same. It's still trying to create a metaphor for something else, an introduction to something else, or a prologue for something else. This Metal Gear Solid 3 is extremely different because I haven't done any interactive [sequences before]. In my [work], it usually is what it is, there isn't any interactivity in it, so this has kind of been a learning process for me... Some of the variables are the same, but it's significantly more challenging.

So you'd say it's much tougher than what you did on MGS2?

Yeah, I do. It's interactive. In part 2, we didn't have to design any interactivity, and also, the challenge of wanting to do something better, wanting to make it more—we don't have cut footage, but to make it more than an edit of footage, make it something you can participate in and that you can choose not to jump over. We want people to want to spend time in it rather than jump over it, so it is more challenging.

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: KCE Japan
Publisher: Konami
Available: November

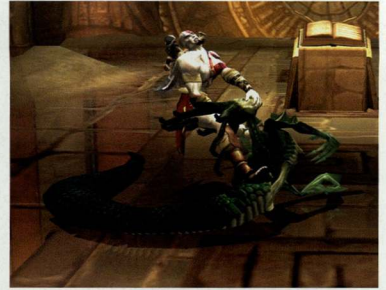
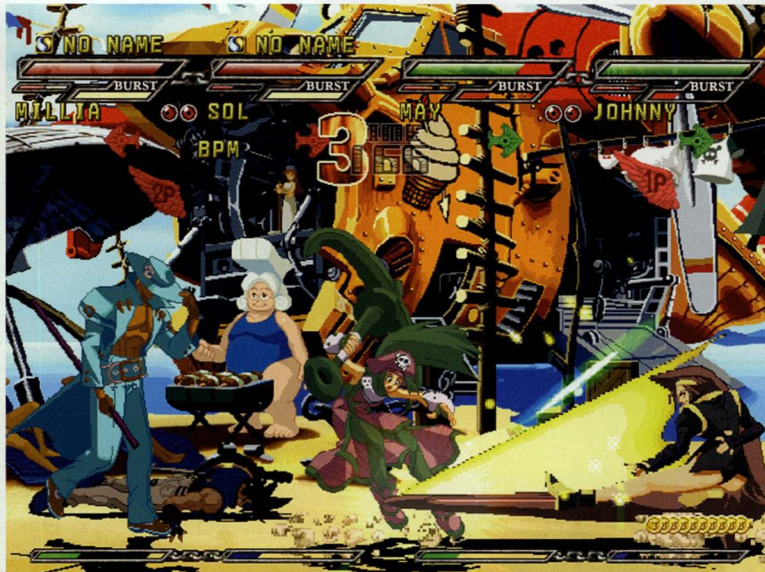


Guilty Gear Isuka

It's Guilty Gear taken to the next level! While GGI still features the drop-dead-gorgeous graphics and amazing animation that helped put the series on the map, Isuka raises the bar by introducing four-player simultaneous combat into the mix. In addition, three new characters are included (bringing the total to 23 fighters), and a new side-scrolling Boost Mode will provide a different type of single-player experience.

Chris Hoffman

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Arc System Works
Publisher: Sammy Studios
Available: Winter 2004



God of War

The comparisons to Devil May Cry are reaching a little, yet you can't deny the influences Capcom's seminal combo-heavy action title has had on games like God of War. It was hard not to walk away impressed by the blending of mythical settings (welcome to the newest trend in our follow-the-leader industry), bloody action and brutal in-your-face battles.

Brady Fiechter

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Sony Santa Monica
Publisher: Sony
Available: Winter



Metroid Prime 2 Echoes

Metroid Prime 2 tells a story of paradoxical opposites—a story of dark and light, of a planet that's both good and evil. The setting for the new first-person adventure is a world called Aether, which exists in two dimensions—one of light, the other of darkness. Only by exploring the dual worlds, gaining familiar abilities like the Charge Beam, missiles, Grapple Beam and Morph Ball, as well as the new Light and Dark beams, will Samus be able to prevent Light Aether from being consumed by the evil forces of the Ing Horde and a mysterious dark creature that's on the loose. Other than the addition of multiplayer versus combat, the E3 demo felt very much like the original, but if it ain't broke, why fix it? **Chris Hoffman**

System: GameCube
Developer: Retro Studios
Publisher: Nintendo
Available: November



Thief: Deadly Shadows

Thank God for Thief: Deadly Shadows, because otherwise stepping into Eidos this year was a saddening experience. No Fear Effect (are they insane?), no Tomb Raider anywhere, and nothing groundbreaking from Crystal D: no new Gex, no new Kain...nada, besides another FPS for the pile. Thief, however, is simply awesome. If you're playing right, you never fight, and the visuals are on par with Doom III and Riddick. I miss Core deeply and I fear that the new Fear Effect, one of the sexiest games I've ever seen, is gone forever.

Dave Halverson

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC
Developer: Ion Storm
Publisher: Eidos
Available: May



Sly 2: Band of Thieves

Does Sly 2: Band of Thieves feel a little more nimble, a little more alive than the original adventure? First impressions say "yes," but beyond the subtle improvements that will surface with a more complete run-through with the game, expect at the very least more robust action, new characters and added teamwork, and a demonstrably improved engine on Sly's already

wonderfully original look. This one was perhaps one of the lower-profile games at the show that could end up at the top of the action-adventure heap when the year is done. **Brady Fiechter**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Sucker Punch
Publisher: Sony
Available: October



Metal Slug 4 & 5

As if we didn't have enough to be excited about with the recently released Metal Slug 3 on Xbox, SNK is also bringing its sequels, Metal Slug 4 and Metal Slug 5, to home consoles in one convenient double-pack. Maintaining the Metal Slug tradition, both games feature wonderfully detailed hand-drawn 2D visuals and intense, pattern-based action, along with multiple

selectable characters, 2-player co-op gameplay and those spectacular Metal Slug vehicles. All-new enemies and a total of 11 challenging stages await. **Chris Hoffman**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: SNK Playmore
Publisher: SNK
Available: Spring 2005



Rumble Roses

We already knew that Konami's sexy all-female wrestling game looked amazing; now we know it plays well too. What Rumble Roses (formerly WWX: Rumble Rose) lacks in match variety and on-screen characters (only one-on-one action is featured), it hopes to make up for with its 10,000-polygons character models and unprecedented down-and-dirty mud matches. The linear but dramatic story mode will feature unique cutscenes for each character, while players will be able to unlock face and heel versions of each diva depending on their fighting style in exhibition matches. **Chris Hoffman**

Interview

KCE Tokyo's Akari Uchida
producer of Rumble Roses

play: OK, this just needs to be asked. How many breast polygons?

Akari Uchida: [laughs] We haven't been able to count the number of polygons in the breasts, but actually, if anything, the effort went into the movement algorithm. We're still working on it, but, for example, let's just say she punches to the side, then it swings one way...but if she's on her back, they're going to flatten out a bit. We don't want it, like, rubbery, like silicone! We want it to be realistic!

Did you have to do a lot of research for that portion of the game?

[laughs] That's private!

Seriously though, how do you balance the voyeuristic part of the game with wanting to make a strong wrestling game?

Trial and error. Working with the team. Seeing what works, what doesn't, and trying to find balance there. So what's important is to have sexiness, sex appeal, come across, however, not be aggressive or, like, skanky. It's gotta be sexy. I guess a part of it [is] just to make the appeal that these girls are serious about their wrestling and that they're trying, going all-out. ... That's what we think is cool...that's what is sexy about it. Even when they're covered with mud, they're still serious!

Are you a big fan of women's wrestling?

I don't like the American-style female wrestling all that much. I understand the entertainment value, which I enjoy, but it just comes across more as a catfight than wrestling. 'Cause I mean, I don't know if you're aware of how women's wrestling in Japan is, but it's really acrobatic, it's almost like Lucha style—and there's some cute girls that're doing it. And they're serious! So that's what we're trying...doing that mix. The entertainment part but also the serious part of wrestling.

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Yuke's
Publisher: Konami
Available: November



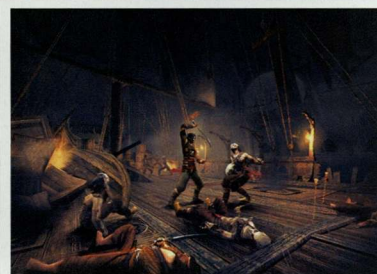


Prince of Persia 2

First glance shows the obvious similarities to the original: gorgeous looks, spirited setting, wild fighting acrobatics. But dig deeper and you see a ton of changes, beginning with a newly designed character and altered art style. The game takes place several years later, with a more somber mood and an increased emphasis on combat and combos. The dagger

has been replaced with a mysterious artifact, which lets our hero rewind time through the centuries. Boss battles will also bring added intensity. **Brady Fiechter**

System: Xbox, PlayStation 2, GameCube
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Publisher: Ubisoft
Available: November



Enthusia Professional Racing

With hundreds of gorgeously rendered cars from more than 40 manufacturers around the world, Konami enters the highly competitive realistic racing-sim circuit with Enthusia. Producer Manabu Akita states that his goal is to create the most realistic racing game ever in order to "show the greatness of cars," and is going to great lengths to accurately recreate physics—the real-life-to-game comparison was quite impressive. The developers have even included a Visual Gravity System that indicates on-screen how G-forces are affecting the car.

Enthusia will include approximately 50 courses, including tracks based on real courses, fictional tracks set in real cities, and randomly generated wilderness tracks. Konami has also developed a special steering wheel controller for Enthusia that will let users attach a real steering wheel from an actual car.

Chris Hoffman

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: KCE Studios
Publisher: Konami
Available: 2005



ENTHUSIA
 PROFESSIONAL RACING



Jak III

Players lined up at E3 to experience the next evolution of the Jak franchise, where Jak has been cast into the vast, unforgiving Wasteland for wrongdoings he didn't commit. The character-driven action from Jak II has been given the proper fine-tuning to be even better and more balanced this time out, and variety is still the name of the game, as more vehicles, more mission types, new weapon upgrades and new Light Eco powers

have been added to the mix. There's also more happening under the hood, including ragdoll physics, new cloth movements and improved enemy AI. It all culminates in great revelations and the end of the Precursor storyline. **CH**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Naughty Dog
Publisher: Sony
Available: October



The Red Star

Acclaim's Austin arm is so dedicated to bringing old-school gamers (and those with a penchant for 3D/2D) something to cheer about that it's almost humbling, and they're doing so with their own unique stamp (the gameplay is beyond sticky, sending up everything from Contra to Gunstar Heroes) and art ripped from the pages of one of the coolest comics in recent years. They've had to fight to keep the game alive, but believe me, it shan't fall on deaf ears. The one game Acclaim has concerns about is by far the best thing in their arsenal. **DH**

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: Acclaim Austin
Publisher: Acclaim
Available: September



Headhunter Redemption

First a Dreamcast game, then a quiet port to PS2, and now a full-blown sequel. Welcome to Headhunter: Redemption, where Leeza X takes the role of headhunter in training, efficiently armed with the usual assortment of pistols, machine guns, rifles and other instruments of death. The big thing here is her IRIS, a device built in to her glasses that scans the scene for nasties. **Brady Fiechter**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Amuze
Publisher: Sega
Available: July



B.C.

B.C. has undergone quite a few changes since last year's E3, most notably a shift from being management/evolution-heavy to more of a living action adventure. The framework is still the same—realistic survival, battling the elements and anything that can eat you, while keeping the tribe alive and moving ever closer to the prehistoric promised land—only now it looks and plays even better, with far less head-scratching in the prehistoric mix. **Dave Halverson**

System: Xbox
Developer: Intrepid
Publisher: MGS
Available: Q1 2005

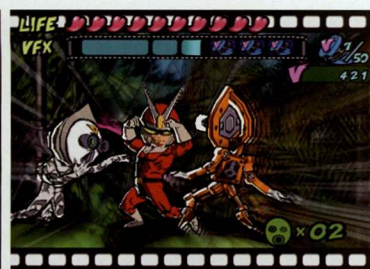


Doom III

Opinions were a little mixed on Doom III. Some left the playable teaser with the same grimy high as from the interminable demos; some thought the game lacked that same initial wow factor. It's no surprise that the PC version looks better, but from where I was playing, the game seems to pack everything I wanted. High

praise for the AI actually interacting with the shadows, not simply wading through inconsequential darkness. **Brady Fiechter**

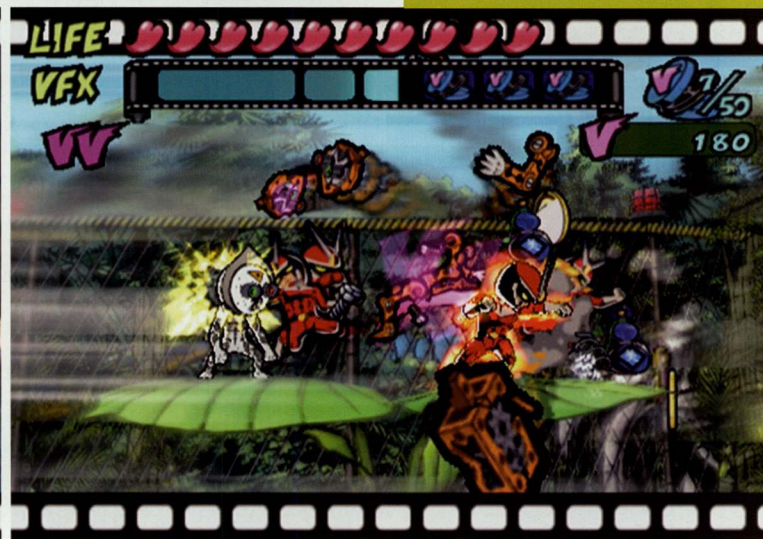
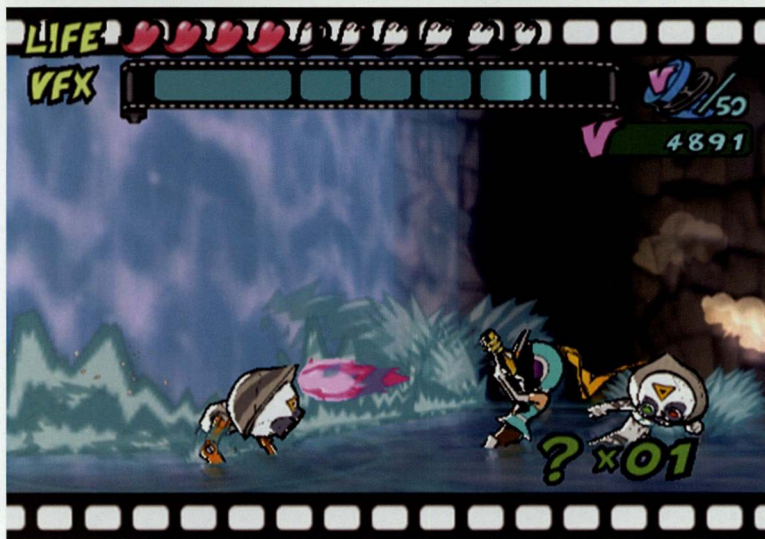
System: PC, Xbox
Developer: id
Publisher: Activision
Available: 2004



Viewtiful Joe 2

Last year, Kamiya commented that if Viewtiful Joe didn't do well, he may be looking for a job, and here we are just a year later looking at a viewtiful sequel that takes Henshin-a-go-go to entirely new levels. Playing as Sylvia is beyond cool (she wields pom-poms; respect it) but there is also plenty new to sink your teeth into, like all-new VFX powers—including a Replay function to soften things up a bit—dozens more freakish enemies and even crazier diorama backgrounds, from jungles to snow-covered peaks. VJ2 defines “more of the same only better.” **DH**

System: PlayStation 2, GameCube
Developer: Clover Studio
Publisher: Capcom
Available: October



Star Wars: Republic Commando

RC is a *Star Wars* FPS so deftly executed, aficionados may stop reliving KOTOR for a few days to savor its intense squad-based revelry. While squad-based play is nothing new, the one-touch squad control definitely ratchets things up a notch in terms of both simplicity and game flow, and it's hands-down the best-looking *Star Wars* game ever made.

Face time with RC left our resident squad leader wanting more. This almost makes up for the cancellation of Full Throttle...almost. **Dave Halverson**

System: Xbox, PC
Developer: LucasArts
Publisher: LucasArts
Available: November





Silent Hill 4 The Room

So you start in your apartment room, and your mission: get the hell out alive. What's happening all around you is absolutely vile, absolutely horrific, absolutely messed up in the perfect Silent Hill way. Yes, the impressively atmospheric trailer didn't show much, other than a return to more inspired macabre artistry, but the brief gameplay and overall look will excite fans. This series has been fizzling, but veteran sound producer and new series director Akira Yamaoka spoke very promisingly of the new additions, like more enemy variety and character interaction and redirected puzzles.

Brady Fiechter

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC

Developer: KCE Tokyo

Publisher: Konami

Available: September



Sudeki

By now I feel like a part of this game, having raved about it for well over a year. Climax came through for E3, presenting a demo that addressed several concerns, most notably how they're going to get this mass of detail and expanse to run at 30 fps. Not the type of game conducive

to E3 play, Sudeki continued to stop traffic regardless. **Dave Halverson**

System: Xbox

Developer: Climax

Publisher: MGS

Available: July

Fable

For all the stink about Peter Molyneux, I've never cared much for any of his concepts, until now, with Fable and BC, which I think are going to be great because they represent only a smidgeon of what he's all about (incessant micro management), alongside generous portions of action and adventure. Console lead times and demographics being what they are, Big Blue Box has sculpted plenty of console-friendly gaming into the Molyneux

mélange, resulting in an ambitious, rich and almost bottomless adventure game. Fable is absolutely gorgeous and almost illegally fun to explore and grow with as you endeavor to be all that you can be, whatever that may be **Dave Halverson**

System: Xbox

Developer: Big Blue Box

Publisher: MGS

Available: July



Nano Breaker

Nano Breaker's silky-smooth slicing action is nothing short of a pure adrenaline rush. Although outwardly simple, the thrill of slicing through legions of cybernetic OrgaMech foes using cyborg soldier Jake Warren's transformable Plasma Blade is fantastic, and the branching, customizable combo system allows for hidden depth. By inputting various combinations of the basic slashing moves, players can transform the Blade into a

sword, axe, hammer (cool), sickle (even cooler), spear and more. Throw in occasional platforming elements, monstrous bosses and a story of inner conflict and man versus machine, and you've got one of the best action games of E3. **CH**

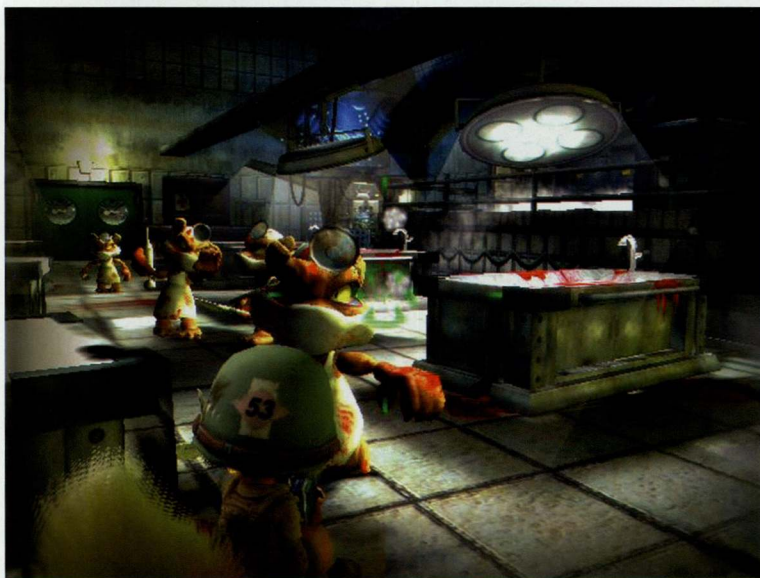
System: PlayStation 2

Developer: KCE Tokyo

Publisher: Konami

Available: Winter 2005





Conker: Live and Reloaded

Conker's online debut (amidst Team Green's human zoo, an ant farm of humanity negotiating a maze of arteries like stunned lab rats), accompanied by behind-the-scenes demos of the single-player action in Rare's backstage sanctum, was a resounding success. We just

did the cover story, so you already know why; now everyone else does too. **DH**

System: Xbox
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Microsoft
Available: TBA



StarCraft: Ghost

Every time StarCraft: Ghost pops up for a sneak preview, the game seems to have some major change in tow. And once again, change is good. One of the biggest points of focus has become the balance between action and stealth, giving you a more personalized approach to passing an area. Lead character Nova's mind powers are still in the tooling stages, but what's here as a whole

is nothing short of enticing. Whatever its final gameplay depths and final execution, StarCraft: Ghost already offers an intriguing setup of rich sci-fi locales and engaging conflicts. **Brady Flechter**

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube
Developer: Nihilistic
Publisher: Blizzard
Available: 2004



Square Footage: Phantom

Aside from a massive lounge where people could congregate and play Phantom, Infinium labs brought an F1 car. Believe!



Destroy All Humans

The folks at Pandemic either watch way too much old sci-fi or they're just plain stoned all the time, because you just don't see games like Destroy All Humans. Starring a thought-sucking, havoc-wreaking alien more evil than Burton's *Mars Attacks* anal-probers, in DAH, amidst an engine that chuckles at the likes of GTA, a single invader—armed with a rocket pack, psychic powers and the UFO equivalent of an Apache attack chopper—goes ape-sh*t on mankind

(alien payback time!) while writing his way into gaming legend: this one has franchise written all over it. As technologically advanced as it is pure, unadulterated fun, DAH is a return to the fun and frolic of *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* only with sick visuals to boot! **Dave Halverson**

System: PlayStation2, Xbox
Developer: Pandemic
Publisher: THQ
Available: 2005



Mega Man X8

Seeing Mega Man X8 at E3 was a bit of a surprise, but even more surprising is that the game seems to be eschewing the 3D elements of X7 and returning to the classic 2D gameplay that made the series great to begin with. One element from X7 that will be returning is the tag-team feature, now enhanced with rescue moves and double-team attacks. X, Zero and Axl will all be playable throughout the game's 12 stages, set against a backdrop of a war on Earth, an exodus to the moon and Sigma's inevitable return. **Chris Hoffman**

Interview

Tatsuya Minami, producer
Manager of Capcom R&D Studio 1

play: Is it easier or harder to be working with such an established character like Mega Man?

Tatsuya Minami: As far as the franchise goes, it was very difficult. Because, you know, starting out here, it's one way, then you've got to bring it up to the next level, and you've got a new audience, and you've got all of these things, and so it was very hard for us to take an established franchise and bring it up to the next level.

Is it tough living up to the player's expectations?

The balance is difficult. For example, with X7, there was, we were doing this in 3D, and there were some users who really liked, some users who really didn't, so we had to take their opinions, distill and synthesize all of that, and move forward into the next one, and so, yeah, it was very difficult.

Speaking of which, I was playing X8, and I really like it. It seems to be more like the older X series rather than games like X7. Why is that?

With X7, we were going into this 3D world. But with X8, we are taking all of these classic elements from previous games, like, for example, the horizontal scrolling and stuff like that, and bringing it up to the future, bringing it up to speed.

So have developments like the 3D stages and the auto-targeting been done away with completely?

If I tell you that, I would give it all away, so I don't want to tell you too much about that. But I can tell you that there's been some considerable changes from previous systems.

Was there anything else you learned through the creation of X7 that affected the development of X8?

So X7 was in itself a very revolutionary, very innovative game. ...There was some good parts to that...part of it was good, part of it was bad. So we



had to take what was bad, we had to pay attention to that, look at what was good, what was bad, and go with what was good, put it into the new one.

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Available: November



Donkey Kong Jungle Beat

Get this: Donkey Kong Jungle Beat is a side-scrolling platformer...that you control by hitting bongo drums. It sounds strange, and it is, but it's actually pretty fun. Using the same controllers that come with Donkey Konga, players control DK by thumping the drums and clapping, making the big ape run, jump, swing, climb, attack and interact with his environment in numerous ways, such as collecting bananas and riding vehicles. And pounding the drums to punch out opponents—definitely cool.

Chris Hoffman

System: GameCube
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Available: 2005



Goldeneye: Rogue Agent

Yes, Bond isn't so likeable anymore and has basically been banished from his usual post, but this new antihero looks to star in yet another great first-person shooter. Immediate changes show up in the dual-weapon system, and the game showcases more of a lean on environmental interaction and working around expansive set-pieces than straight-ahead blasting. Enemy patterns look interesting and intelligent, and all the staple *Bond* touches are being fully loaded into the gameplay. **Brady Fletcher**

System: Xbox, PlayStation 2, GameCube
Developer: EA LA
Publisher: EA
Available: Fall 2004



Devil May Cry 3

If you're of the opinion that Devil May Cry 2 didn't quite live up to expectations, you'll be pleased to hear that DMC3 is returning to the series' roots—the environments are more confined, allowing for a better mix of swords and gunplay, the challenge level appears to have been kicked up a notch, and the action is as stylish as ever. Storywise, however, DMC3 is going into very cool new places. Set before the first DMC, this game introduces Legendary Dark Knight Sparda's other son, Virgil—who wants demons to once again lay claim to the Earth. Needless to say, all hell breaks loose between Virgil and his twin brother, the younger, redesigned Dante. **Chris Hoffman**

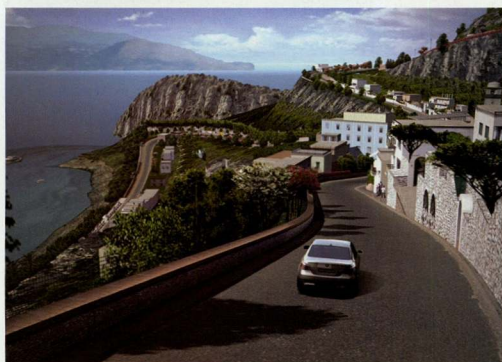
System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Capcom Production Studio 1
Publisher: Capcom
Available: Winter



Otogi 2

Raikoh, along with five additional undead warriors who commit ritual suicide to resurrect him (now that's devotion), must rise from their graves to save Japan from demonic overthrow—only this time how you play directly affects progression and how the game ends. If Otogi: Myth of Demons was a pleasant surprise, Otogi 2 is a mallet to the cranium. Rather than craft their sequel from hand-me-downs, From Software actually built it from the ground up, and the result is a special-effects blitzkrieg that would be overwhelming if it wasn't so damn beautiful. **Dave Halverson**

System: Xbox
Developer: From Software
Publisher: Sega
Available: Fall



Gran Turismo 4

There were many pretenders to the throne at this year's E3, and while some showed sparks of greatness, in the end, none could hold a candle to Gran Turismo 4. The staggering attention to detail never ceased to amaze, and while there was not much new to talk about other than the Photo Mode, which will allow players to take in-game snapshots and share them with friends, there is little doubt that GT4 will conquer all. **MH**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Polyphony Digital
Publisher: Sony
Available: November

Neo Contra

E3 was my first chance to finally play Neo Contra, and I discovered that, true to their word, Konami has indeed retained the Contra feel despite the return to 3D and the removal of jumping, while the added dimension of using charge attacks to shoot down airborne foes adds a new intensity to the already challenging gameplay. Konami revealed that Kazuyoshi Katayama (director of *The Big O*) is storyboarding intro and ending action sequences for each level to give the game an extra-exciting punch, while comic book artist extraordinaire Jim Lee is designing the box art. "There are games where you, as a player, you actually

sit back and watch," says director Nobuya Nakazato. "Contra is asking players to make an effort to do a challenge, [but] the game itself will return it to you in the end. Maybe casual gamers will find this game hard to purchase, but [for] anyone who loves action games, I think Contra will respond to their expectations."

Chris Hoffman

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: KCE Tokyo
Publisher: Konami
Available: November





Paper Mario 2

Picking up where the original left off, Paper Mario 2 seems to be another fantastic combination of traditional role-playing, skill-based action and pure Mario charm. The storybook theme will be explored even further, as players will be able to turn Mario sideways to slip into small cracks, into a paper airplane to fly, or into a tube to roll away. Once again, ally characters will help Mario in battle with various skills, and in a strange twist, an audience will watch you in battle and help you build power for attacks. A hilarious video clip shown at E3 even featured Bowser getting in on the action as he leapt his way through his own version of the original Super Mario Bros. **Chris Hoffman**

System: GameCube
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Available: October



Ys: The Ark of Napishtim

The first game I ever played on CD, Ys was as rudimentary as you can possibly imagine. However, the combination of one of the best compositions of all time (by the incomparable Yuze Koshiro) and actual voiced anime cinemas was so astonishing, it resonated like the greatest game ever made. The Ark of Napishtim is a next-generation return to that magic. If you like Ys, forget everything that's come in between and flock to this; it's something special.

Dave Halverson

System: PlayStation 2, PSP
Developer: Falcom
Publisher: Konami
Available: 2005



Unreal Championship 2 The Liandri Conflict

For me to like a game with Unreal in the title, they'd have to inject burning-hot females, a third-person camera and a solid one-player campaign, making The Liandri Conflict as awesome as it is hard to believe and simply breathtaking to behold. This one takes fragging to new heights, although the jury is out on whether or not traditionalists will embrace it. I say they've had their fun; let the rest of us take a stab at it. **Dave Halverson**

System: Xbox
Developer: Epic Games
Publisher: MGS
Available: October

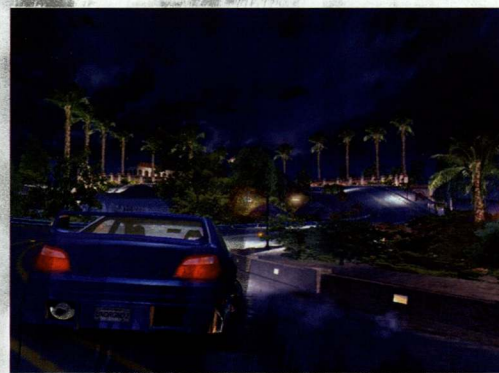


Midnight Club 3

The smack-talk was flying behind the scenes with the latest in Rockstar's arcade racer. As much as the first sequel was an improvement over the original—and it was huge—Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition is being touted as yet another radical step for the series. The new engine is a good start.

Brady Flechter

System: Xbox, PlayStation 2
Developer: Rockstar
Publisher: Rockstar
Available: Fall



Need for Speed Underground 2

As good as the first one was, this next installment in the ever-changing Need for Speed series already looks that much better, sticking with the tricked-out cars, dark city streets and endless upgrades while basically just adding more of everything. An added emphasis to online play bumps up the appeal.

Brady Flechter

System: Xbox, PlayStation 2, GameCube, PC
Developer: EA
Publisher: EA
Available: Fall



Coollest Booth: Square Enix

Aside from a rotating theater where Advent Children previews were showing, Square central included comfy play zones and a sloped environment with a decidedly retro-modern finish.

Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex

Finally, a great anime series has been met with a great anime game. To go with the new series, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, available on DVD and airing on Cartoon Network this fall, and the new *Ghost in the Shell* animated feature film, *Innocence*, the PS2 game features both the barely human Batou (star of *Innocence*) and everyone's favorite cyber girl, Colonel Kusanagi, in a stellar combat action game developed by cavia Inc., whose members have roots in Sega GT, Ridge Racer and Ace

Combat. Their third PS2 release, on the heels of *Resident Evil Dead Aim* and *Drakengard*, is by far their best—a fresh take on third-person adventure that fuses Matrix-style melee, shooting and platforming within the context of Masamune Shirow's cyber-epic. **Dave Halverson**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: cavia Inc.
Publisher: Bandai
Available: October



Pikmin 2

The domestically overlooked Pikmin will get another chance to prove its worth as a series, and the demo shown at E3 certainly had this Pikmin fan excited. With the previous game's time limit removed and the addition of two-player cooperative and competitive play, *Pikmin 2* had a lot to offer over its predecessor. **Michael Hobbs**

System: GameCube
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Available: August



FFXI: The Chains of Promathia

The massive online world of *Final Fantasy XI*'s Vana'diel is about to grow. This fall, an expansion disc entitled the *Chains of Promathia* will introduce brand new areas, NPCs and quests, all in a bid to steal even more time away from hapless players. Rumors of new job classes abound, with talk of a Blue Mage being added to the ranks. Can it be true? **Michael Hobbs**

System: PC, PlayStation 2
Developer: Square Enix
Publisher: Square Enix
Available: Fall 2004



Halo 2

Guess what? Halo 2 is really good. The single-player version remains a mystery, leaving all the E3 "oohs" and "aahs" up to the outrageously fun multiplayer component. Teams of six went at it in a capture the flag scenario, where the pursuit to grab the heavily locked-down prize and run it back to the beachfront starting point left most players yelling and screaming

in the pursuit. One word is needed: awesome.

Brady Fiechter

System: Xbox
Developer: Bungie
Publisher: Microsoft
Available: November 9



Most Annoying: Prince of Persia 2 demo area

Prince of Persia 2 was a fantastic-looking title, but it was squeezed into a fraction of the space it deserved, with the game being presented on tiny screens while a completely over-acting jackass babbled on the mic.



The Lord of the Rings The Third Age

On the plus side, The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age is a truly unique rarity: a classically styled turn-based RPG from an American developer. It also looks great, oozes production values and happens to be based upon one of the greatest licenses of our time. On the negative side, the characters featured in the E3 demo were not LOTR mainstays, and the story did not exactly follow LOTR continuity, as one of the featured battles pitted Gandalf and these new characters against the dreaded Balrog in the Mines of Moria, rewriting one of the book's most treasured scenes. If that doesn't bother you, The Third Age is sure to please. **Chris Hoffman**

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube
Developer: EA Redwood Shores
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Available: November



King of Fighters Maximum Impact

Now that I've finally played it, I'm pleased to report that King of Fighters: Maximum Impact is definitely headed down the right path. It may not quite have the responsive precision of the 2D KOF games, but it's close. Pretty much all the familiar moves from previous KOF games still work, so vets will feel right at home, and many of the old 2D combos still function too! A few new characters have also been revealed since last month's preview: Chae, a student of Kim Kaphwan, Rock Howard and, not surprisingly, eternal antagonist Iori. If that's not enough KOF for you, SNK also announced a double-pack of KOF '02 and '03, coming to PS2 and Xbox this winter. **Chris Hoffman**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: SNK Playmore
Publisher: SNK
Available: September



Capcom Fighting Jam

A dream come true for the 2D fighting faithful, Capcom Fighting Jam takes characters from Street Fighter II, Street Fighter III, Street Fighter Alpha, Darkstalkers and the obscure Red Earth and mixes them together for an intense, classically styled 2D brawl. Favorites like Chun Li, Guile, Demitri, Felicia, Guy and the ubiquitous Ryu will duke it out in two-on-two action; players will be able to swap fighters between rounds. Each character will retain his or her original fighting style, and the high-res backgrounds are simply gorgeous. Too bad it was only shown on video. **Chris Hoffman**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Available: Winter 2004



Tekken 5

Though only shown on video, Tekken 5 was looking beautifully drawn and animated, if not a whole lot different from its predecessors. This time around, Heihachi Mishima is apparently dead—killed by an explosion. The tournament that follows will pit returning Tekken characters like Paul, Jin, Marduk, Christie, Kazuya, Julia and King against mysterious newcomers Asuka Kazama, Feng Wei and Raven (who looks like Wesley Snipes in *Demolition Man*). Tekken 5 will hit arcades this year before coming to unnamed consoles in 2005. **Chris Hoffman**

System: Arcade, consoles TBA
Developer: Namco
Publisher: Namco
Available: 2004 (arcade); 2005 (console)



Dead or Alive: Ultimate

Never one to run low on confidence, Team Ninja leader Tomonobu Itagaki discussed in behind-closed-door comfort the many virtues of Dead or Alive: Ultimate, the online sequel to the 3D fighter you've all come to either love or snub your nose at in Tekken- and VF-snobbery disgust. The gameplay looks familiar, highlighted by even more environmental hazards and wild falls through the stage. And for the first time in a fighting game: pummel your feeble opponent into a herd of elephants. **Brady Fiechter**

System: Xbox
Developer: Team Ninja
Publisher: Tecmo
Available: September



Resident Evil 4

Resident Evil 4 was yet another one of those E3 games easy to get excited about for no other reason than five minutes of play that seemed to raise more questions than answers. One of those questions: what's the deal with presidential daughter, Ashley? Apparently she becomes a big part of the plight halfway through the game, joining Leon as he fights through the army of freaks. And all these scripted Shenmue-like button-tap moves: just how do they ultimately affect the course of play? Definitely not in question is the usual Resident Evil visual power, which, despite moving away from the aesthetic we might be used to, is absolutely at full force. As a gargantuan fan of the series, probably the biggest impression I was left with is that we're getting something completely different from what we might have expected. A true sequel. **Brady Fiechter**

System: GameCube
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Available: Winter

Half-Life 2

Once again in private-demo form, Half-Life 2 made a rousing argument to win the honor of most dramatically innovative first-person shooter at the show. While taking us through a remarkably rendered, insanely textured opening sequence through a subway station, a representative at Valve pointed out the return to extensive dialogue and casual-paced setup. When the action did begin to heat up, destructive encounters with towering aliens and aggressive soldiers immediately showed the game's creative use of 3D objects as weapons and a keen sense of pulse-pounding action. The progressive physics engine was also given emphasis. And beyond all the technical achievements, the quick gameplay demo hinted at fantastic level design. Still no signs of an Xbox version. **Brady Fiechter**

System: PC, Xbox
Developer: Valve
Publisher: Sierra
Available: November





Suikoden IV

The latest in Konami's understated RPG franchise is shaping up to be another treat for fans of the series. The wonderful character designs, compelling drama and variety of battle types (traditional turn-based, strategy, and one-on-one duels) will all be returning, but in other ways the formula has changed in surprising ways. Aside from a completely free 3D camera and voice acting for many of the cutscenes, the battle party has now been slimmed down to four characters, and thankfully a group inventory replaces the personal inventories of games past, making item management much easier. With Junko Kawano (concept and character designer of Suikoden I) at the helm, we have high expectations for the tale of the Rune of Punishment and the 108 Stars of Destiny who gather around it. **Chris Hoffman**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: KCE Tokyo
Publisher: Konami
Available: Winter 2004



Kingdom Hearts II

Carefully produced demos can create deceptive anticipation. Imagine seeing Kingdom Hearts II for the first time, wonderfully displayed over an enormous theater screen at the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, director Tetsuya Nomura touting its achievements. Quick cuts of gameplay and world scenes appear as if they were brushed from the palette of a setting sun. Kung-fu Mickey lays the smack down, Sora and Donald and Aladdin and Ariel join a bevy of Final Fantasy characters, popping up in all sorts of

wild situations. Magic attacks flash across the screen, a few monsters show an imposing presence, and just about the time you want more, the screen fades to black. And that's about all we get from a game that's still months away. **Brady Fiechter**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Square Enix
Publisher: Square Enix
Available: Winter 2005



Ratchet and Clank Up Your Arsenal

Looks familiar, feels familiar, but wait: why does it just feel that much better than before? Because if you're a fan like me, the refinements that keep on coming to this series blow everything else away. The dramatic shakeup imposed by the last sequel's RPG elements aren't present this time, leaving the online combat to take charge. New weapons like the plasma whip are a blast, and with the development-team size now almost doubled, you can expect the biggest and baddest Ratchet and Clank adventure yet. I love this series. **Brady Fiechter**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Insomniac
Publisher: Sony
Available: November



Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone

Stemming off the Forgotten Realms arm of D&D lore—the game's original title was of the same name—the fastidiously crafted Demon Stone didn't show us much more than we already knew: heavy straightforward action, an original, detailed story, lovely visuals that paint the mystique of the time fantastically. Sitting down with Wizards of the Coast, who are intimately involved in ensuring the game is

accurate and true to the D&D universe, the prospects for Demon Stone as an unusually enriched action title are high. **Brady Fiechter**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Stormfront Studios
Publisher: Atari
Available: August

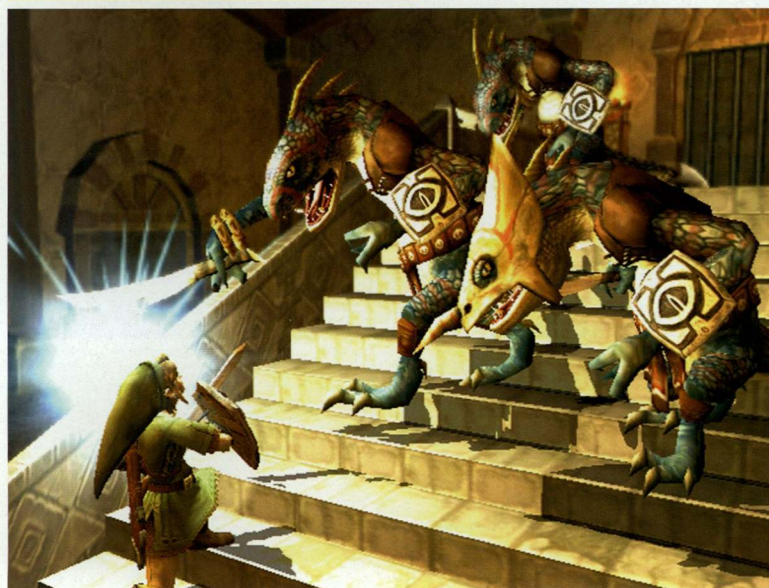
The Legend of Zelda*

Magical, vivid, rich, unparalleled... words simply cannot do justice to the newest Legend of Zelda installment that Nintendo has presented. Featuring an older Link in a more realistic world, the new Zelda is closer in style to Ocarina of Time, yet still maintains a colorful, animated look, creating what may very well be the most incredible visuals I've ever witnessed—all this running in real-time on the actual game engine. This looks to be the Zelda game the world has been waiting for. The short but stunning trailer showed Link battling vicious-looking enemies both on foot and on horseback, amidst beautiful indoor and outdoor environments (where sunlight poured miraculously through trees), while also hinting at a much darker story. Though the animation appeared similar to that of The Wind Waker, the glimpse of Hyrule Castle and the horseback riding (on Epona?) indicated that the game may in fact be a sequel to Ocarina of Time. Unfortunately, Nintendo isn't saying just yet. However, the game's director, Eiji Aonuma, has revealed that to go with the more mature character and more mature graphics, the game may feature more complex control, while legendary producer Shigeru Miyamoto says that he'd like to see "new ideas implemented, especially in the realm of puzzle solving and that sort of thing." It will be agonizing waiting until next year to see how it all comes together.

Chris Hoffman

System: GameCube
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Available: 2005

"This looks to be the Zelda game the world has been waiting for."

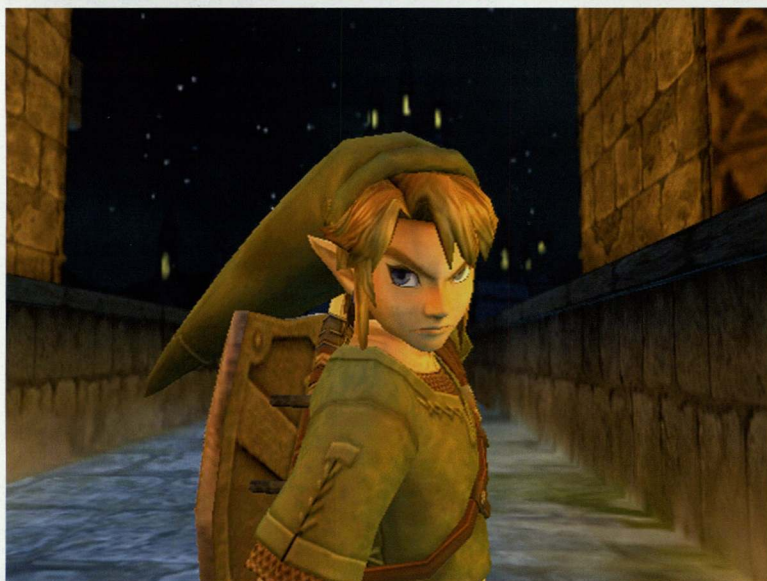


* Working title

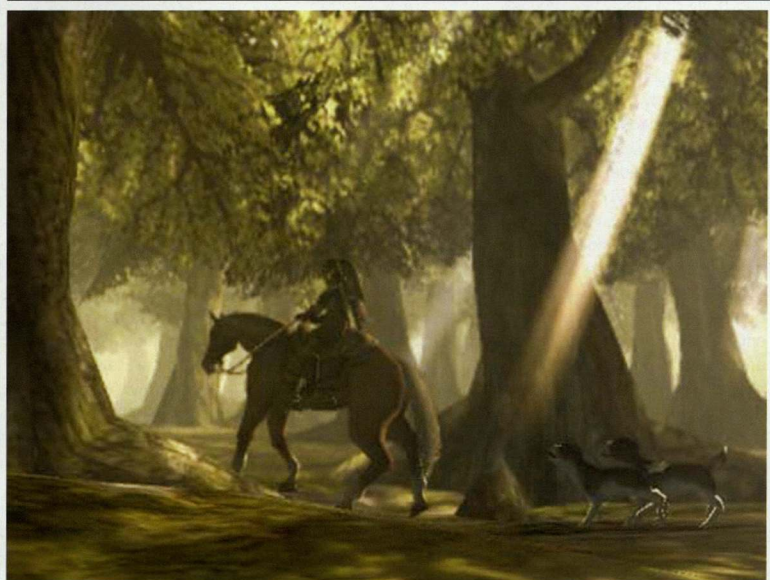




In this scene reminiscent of Lord of the Rings, Link demonstrates his newfound ability to swordfight while on horseback.



What unholy pacts has Nintendo made to create a game that looks this good?



Dave Halverson, Editor in Chief

Top Ten Games of E3

- 10. Ys: Ark of Napishtim // PS2 // Konami
- 09. Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone // PS2 // Atari
- 08. Advent Rising // Xb // Majesco
- 07. Jade Empire // Xb // MGS
- 06. BC // Xb // MGS
- 05. Fable // Xb // MGS
- 04. Samurai Legend Musashi // PS2 // Square Enix
- 03. Viewtiful Joe 2 // GC // Capcom
- 02. Final Fantasy XII // PS2 // Square Enix
- 01. Kameo: Elements of Power // Xb // MGS

As expected, there were few surprises at this year's E3, replaced by lots of really good, and some great, almost finished games, most of which are headed our way inside of a year, although it seems many a publisher learned a valuable lesson from last year's Q4 glut, where too many games fought for limited space, chasing those elusive holiday dollars (which never seem to go to the right game anyway). Situations like 12 pockets of NBA Street vs. one pocket of Beyond Good and Evil saw countless AAA titles fall by the wayside—a mistake this industry seems intent on not repeating. More positive signs came by way of no new console hardware. New tools and techniques are rampant, but thankfully, no one seems bent on delivering a new console anytime soon, which is great news for developers, the industry and, most of all, gamers.

There were a few unexpected games on the show floor, like Samurai Legend Musashi, Destroy All Humans, Phantasy Star Universe and, most of all, the Zelda we've all been waiting for since the GameCube debut, but for the most part, this show was all about two things (for me): the future of handheld entertainment and what wasn't on display.

As excited and just plain amazed as I am by the PSP, I am dismayed in nearly equal proportion by the DS. Sony's wafer-thin widescreen seemingly handheld PS2/movie machine was like stepping into the future, where the poorly designed DS seemed more show than go, relying on lesser 3D technology than the Sony machine and a gimmick that makes the Virtual Boy look like a cure for the common cold. Flat buttons, no analog stick, a single exterior speaker and control via stylus? I'm as happy as anyone to have Mario 64 on handheld (albeit in slightly pixilated form) and onscreen maps and items seem pretty neat, but I was expecting true dual-screen innovation. Honestly, I like the SP design much better. With the introduction of the DS, I fear 2D may be lost forever, and controlling games with a stylus is just wrong. They need to make this an option. Just as Sony stole the console market, it seems they may snatch away the handheld market too, unless Nintendo has a few more tricks up their sleeve—which they very well might. Regardless, the PSP is a revolution in the making. When it comes to R&D, Sony is second to none. Nintendo, on the other hand, by my estimation, may be in trouble. With Microsoft blazing the online trail and Sony everything else, Metroid, Paper Mario and Zelda (although all phenomenal titles) aren't enough to get the job done. I shudder at what my beloved Nintendo has become. Why am I playing Donkey Kong with bongo drums? They can't make a real sequel? Imagine what a side scrolling DKC on GameCube would be like. Whoever is pulling the strings at Nintendo

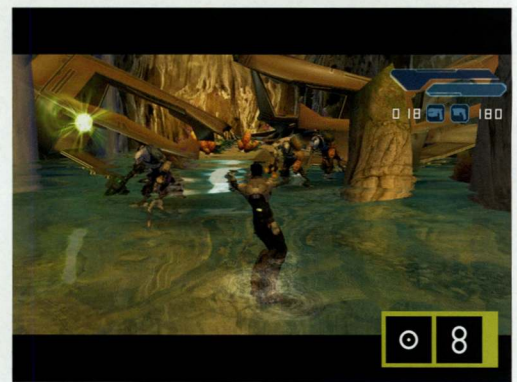
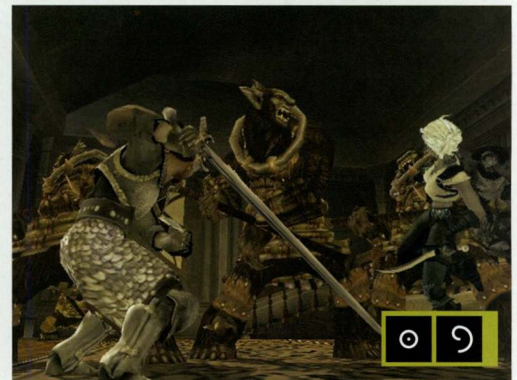
needs to look at the mistakes of the past and try to *not* repeat them. Nintendo is so pulling a Sega... We lost one mainstay; can we please not lose another? Jesus, people, pay Treasure whatever they want and get this thing rolling again!

I was also disheartened that Tork, Fear Effect, Psychonauts and Galleon were all no-shows. MGS certainly is leaving a lot of carnage in their wake. Abandoning Tork may go down as the biggest slap in the face to platforming fans ever (if abandoning Psychonauts isn't) and Oddworld's Alf was nowhere to be seen. Elsewhere, Ubisoft, Tork's current owner, certainly isn't talking about it (although they should be; if not for PoP 2, they had their weakest show in a decade), Galleon has found a home in the UK but remains a mystery in the U.S., and Fear Effect, I fear, is gone forever. Meanwhile, Take Two is publishing the Playboy game? The end is nigh. I had plenty to choose from when selecting my top ten (trying to stick to new games as to not repeat myself, which explains why games like Conker, Ghosthunter and Sudeki are sitting it out), but it might have been a different story if only someone would rescue these amazing games.

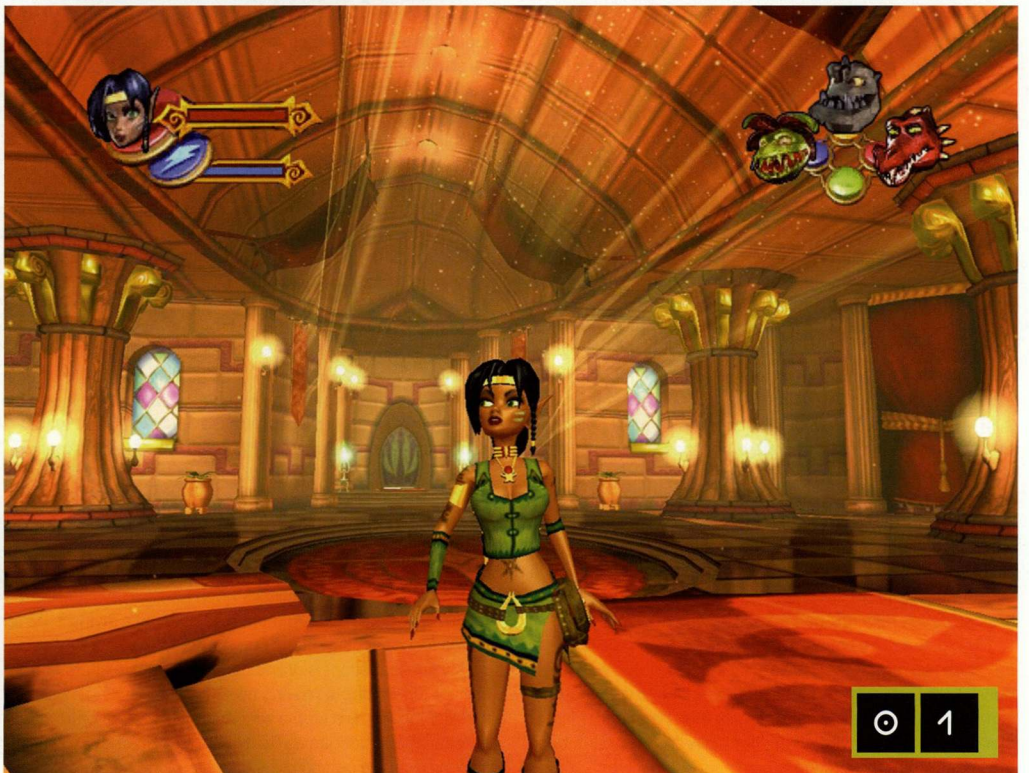
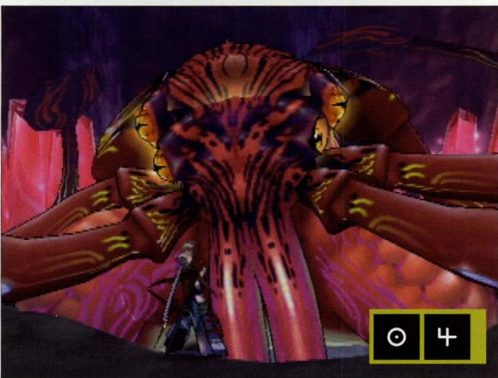
As for online MMORPGs, this year's other big push: I'm still way up on the fence. Perhaps True Fantasy Live Online will bring me down, although it wasn't there either.

My E3: Defining moments and afterthoughts

Phantom is real, and I actually want one... People will congregate in front of any giant screen, regardless of what's playing on it... The Big Three's spin doctors should be writing the president's speeches... Plastic surgeons in LA are making way too much money, but deserve every penny... Who the hell are all those people playing games with nothing else to do, and how many really need to be there? It's nearly impossible for press to play a game at E3 outside of a meeting room, which is pretty f-----d up when you think about it... There are too many damn war games. Aren't we getting enough war as it is? I get it already... Two words: air conditioning... The secondhand smoke outside the South Hall is like London fog; find these people a place to die away from the main thoroughfare... Donald Trump's hair is truly frightening on a theater screen... LA still sucks; one wrong turn and you're in Beirut... I love games more than ever, but next year I'm sending Gary Coleman in my place.



"New tools and techniques are rampant, but thankfully, no one seems bent on delivering a new console anytime soon."



Brady Fiechter, Executive Editor

Top Ten Games of E3

10. Jade Empire // Xb // MGS
09. Prince of Persia 2 // PS2 // Ubisoft
08. Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal // PS2 // Sony
07. Silent Hill 4: The Room // PS2-Xb-PC // Konami
06. Metroid Prime 2: Echoes // GC // Nintendo
05. Doom 3 // PC-Xb // Activision
04. Halo 2 // Xb // MGS
03. Final Fantasy XII // PS2 // Square Enix
02. Resident Evil 4 // GC // Capcom
01. The Legend of Zelda // GC // Nintendo

Responses to my enthusiastic praise that this tenth E3 was the best yet seem to be universal: long pauses accompanied by blank stares followed by politely subdued laughter. Let me explain. My definition of "best" simply means there have never been so many great games built around such swiftly advancing technology. Wherever it is this awkward industry needs to go while obviously stumbling hard to get there isn't the point. The point is: the bar undeniably has a long ways to travel, yet it's as high as it's ever been, and there are more games coming in 2004 I want to play than ever before. After last year's giant yawn, I'm enthusiastically reenergized.

Sequels reigned supreme—this continues to be the industry's interminable disease—but there were enough fantastic new entries to get worked up about—the delightful alien destruction of *Destroy All Humans*, the rousing adventure of *Jade Empire*, the new standard for first-person adventure, *Riddick*. Yeah, most of the original works aren't so original, mainly feeding off staple ideas and genre convention just as diligently as any of those sequels. Instead of innovation, we're getting prettier games that shine up perfectly fine old ideas. So will be the order of the year, probably indefinitely. I'm OK with that. It's up to the continued move toward storytelling and more dynamic, world-centered presentation to inevitably provide the emotional weight that's going to carry this industry into its next evolutionary stage. Walking away from this latest and most obnoxiously overbearing greatest show, I saw all this, no matter how open for improvement—and folks, do we ever have a long ways to go—coming together just well enough to keep the faith. More than ever, I'm a believer in the power of video games to rule.

A believer with a lot of questions. How much longer must this obsession with military games last? This year was worse than last, and I'll play them all, probably enjoy most of them, simply because they're well crafted by top-tier developers. I love first-person shooters; I wish I had more choices than popping a sniper shot in the skull of another historical human being, the typically awful super-duper-soldier-spy dialogue working to give it all some sort of moral uplift. But hey, it's not all that bad when you look at the enormous array of games that stuck to the fantasy I still prefer. Take a look at *Doom 3* and *Killzone* to see how this genre should be handled.

My big question: are we about to further reinforce our reputation as puerile, emotionally stunted little boys with swill like *Leisure Suit Larry* and the smattering of sexually charged games that offer less creative integrity than hotel porn? Not that many games played off the humanity-free sex card, but the Vegas smut-show stage is being set—and it won't surprise

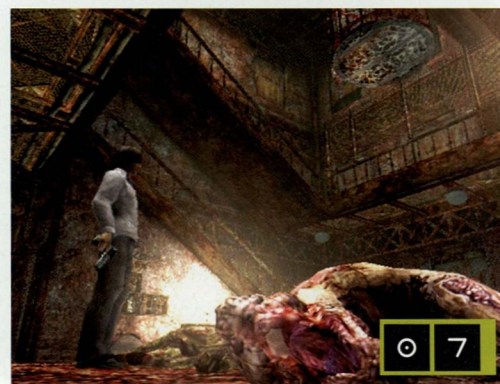
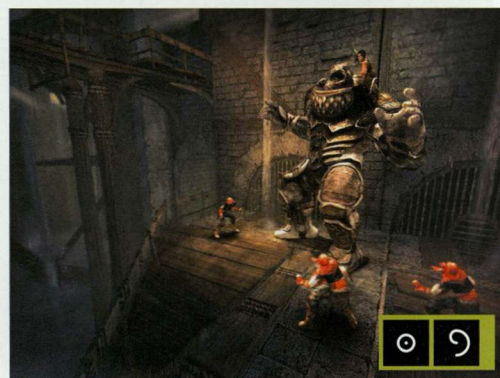
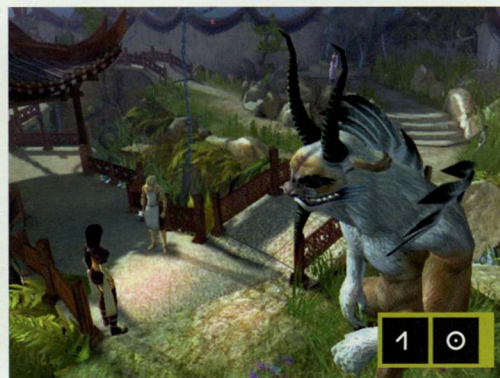
me if it's overflowing sooner rather than later. Every form of entertainment, every artistic medium, has its lowest common denominator, and lord knows America will devour anything wrapped in a swell package, but like anything else: you don't like it, stay away. But what about the stuff I do like, where pointlessly revealing women increasingly take center stage? I mean, I love watching women—check out the Rockstar ads now appearing in strip clubs—but this is not what I need in my important entertainment.

Not so hot was the continued trend of damagingly poor voice acting. Even low-budget cartoons do better than this. Come on guys, it's not that hard to find talent out there. As the games at the show foretell, dialogue continues to get heavier, and so does my patience having to suffer through already inept writing. With too many games at the show—games I loved, like the sequel to *Norrath*—a few lines of babble was all it took to see that little has changed. If we're going to fashion stories around this fun gameplay, as we most certainly should, must it be so difficult to bust out a snappy, simple tale that at the very least can hold our attention?

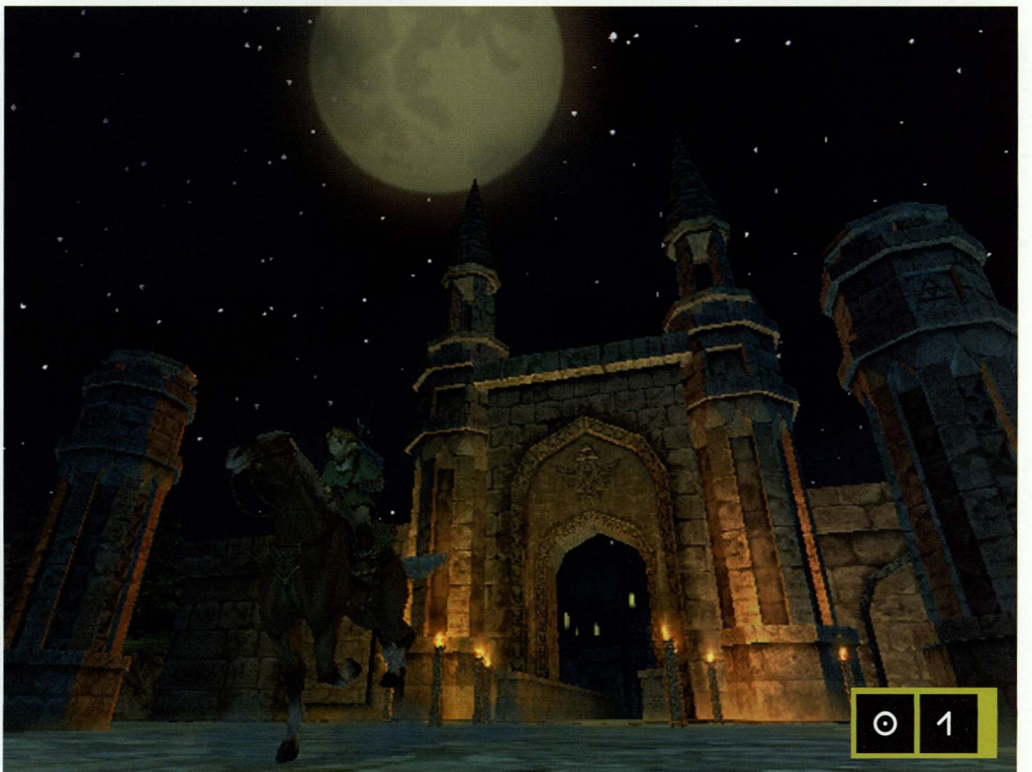
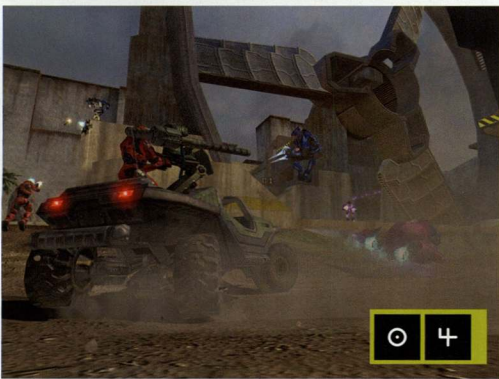
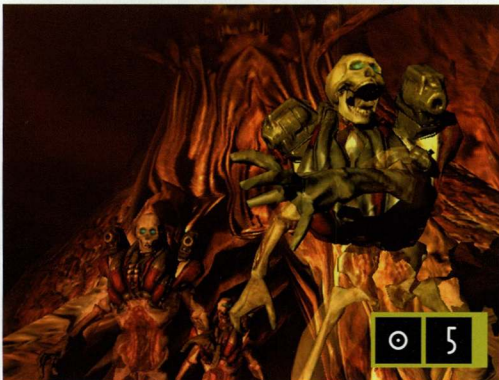
If you think I'm being too hard on our wonderful industry, my criticism runs as strong as it would for film. Dominant movies like *The Day After Tomorrow* yearn to put our brains in the same deep freeze. And so the audience labeled as "mainstream" continues to march into the cooler. At the Sony press conference, a call for reaching a more mainstream gamer was a bullet point for perceived success. Ouch. Rhetoric especially damaging to my hardcore ears in the wake of Microsoft dumping titles like *Oddworld's* latest adventure and Tim Schaeffer's *Psychonauts*. Look, I understand the machinations of big business, but it seems like the industry can do better than this. Right now, confusion seems to reign in a lot of areas.

If Sony wants to capture the mainstream, and any sensible gamer who wants to be cool, the only net they need is the PSP. You've already consumed all the praise you need about this slick powerhouse, so I'll refrain from explaining why this was the remarkable highlight of E3. Once it's in your hands and you're not a believer, maybe you're the right guy for Nintendo's DS. My first impressions: that guy's not me. The system will certainly have some great games, but it has absolutely nothing I want out of a portable system when portable systems aren't my thing to begin with. And the idea of using a stylus is better suited for scratching off my purchased groceries for the week.

My final question: is online gaming really the future? I'm still not thrilled about moving away from immersing myself in a solitary world as a staple way to fulfill my need for enriching entertainment, but games like *Halo 2* and *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal* are getting me there. It's gonna be a great year.



"The point is: the bar undeniably has a long ways to travel,
yet it's as high as it's ever been..."



Chris Hoffman, Senior Editor

It's only stating the obvious to say that this year's E3 was loaded with great games. A lot of sequels, true, but considering the quality of the franchises and extra programming punch that comes with experience, I hypocritically welcome them with open arms. The video of GC *Zelda* blew everything away, while games like *MGS3*, *Final Fantasy XII*, *Metroid Prime 2*, *Suikoden IV*, *Neo Contra* and *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal* seemed honed to perfection. An extra shout out to Konami—thanks for including the classic 1989 *TMNT* arcade game in the brand-new *TMNT 2*. I just hope the rest of the game is up to task. Also, an apology for the lack of Xbox games on my list: the show seemed bigger than ever, and most of the time with Microsoft fell to my colleagues.

But aside from the console software, this E3 was all about the next generation of handheld gaming, a branch of our industry that's especially close to my heart and doesn't always get its due. When I was given a chance to play the DS a day before the official unveiling, I was actually pretty impressed. The 3D graphics were far beyond what I was expecting, and the touch-screen controls really do live up to Nintendo's promise of delivering an all-new gaming experience. Sure, the dual screens seem like an unnecessary novelty (come on; have you ever found yourself in need of the constant presence of a sub-screen or map...OK, except maybe in *Jak II*?), but many of the games were highly enjoyable. *Wario Ware* was ludicrous fun and you can't go wrong with a portable Mario 64.

Of course, that was before I experienced the PSP. With its large screen, slick design and seemingly limitless power, the PSP made the DS seem like a gimmicky toy. So the DS will take handheld gaming down new roads with its interface, but the PSP will take handheld gaming into places previously unimaginable through sheer force alone—the games looked amazing and the machine was sheer bliss in the hands. Now, given that only a couple games were playable, it's just a tad early to declare PSP the new leader in handheld gaming, but it seems to have all the tools to claim the crown. I'm just not sure the game-playing populace is ready to spend time playing games with a stylus, while I have no doubt that a lot of gamers are hungry for the cutting-edge multimedia experience the PSP will deliver. I mean, come on: is there really that much demand for controller-free gaming? It will certainly be interesting to see if the market is ready for innovation on this level. However, when it comes down to consumer acceptance, the one deciding factor may be price. If the PSP isn't able to come in at a competitive price point, Sony may have a hard time getting its foot in the mass-market door.

Personal Top 10 Games of E3

10. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2 // Konami // GC-PS2-Xb
Putting *TMNT2* on my list is a bit of a cop-out. I'm glad to see that the sequel features platforming elements and four-player gameplay, but it's really only on here thanks to the promise of the classic arcade games being included as unlockable bonuses. I've been waiting 15 years to play a perfect home version of the original coin-op!

9. Destroy All Humans // THQ // PS2
It's the next evolution of the GTA-style video game. You're

the bad guy, only with a dryly humorous alien twist—you can possess humans, levitate cattle, get into your spaceship and decimate the city. The Agent Smith clone hosting THQ's presentation of the game didn't hurt things either.

8. Wario Ware, Inc. DS // Nintendo // DS
Out of all the DS games at the show, only *Wario Ware* made me keep coming back for more. The instant-gratification micro-games are perfectly suited for use with the stylus, making an innovative concept even more creative. I can't wait to see where it goes from here.

7. Metroid Prime 2: Echoes // Nintendo // GC
The original nabbed the honor of being called Play's 2002 Game of the Year. So far, this seems like more of the same, but that's a good thing as far as I'm concerned.

6. The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap // Nintendo // GBA
Zelda has never led me wrong, and this latest top-down 2D offering appears to be another winner. The gimmick this time is the Minish Cap, a hat that lets Link shrink to microscopic size, allowing for some especially creative scenarios and environments.

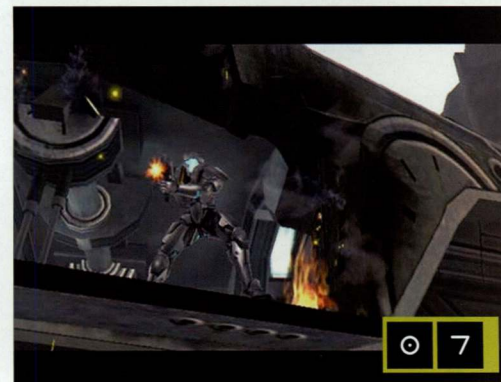
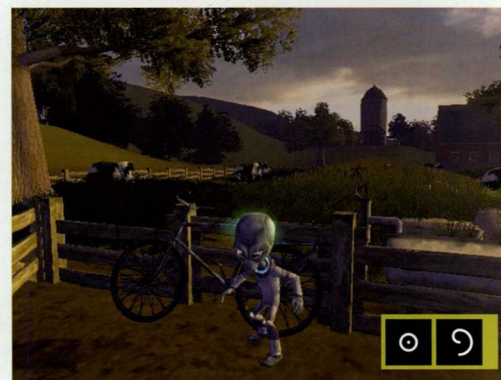
5. Nano Breaker // Konami // PS2
There's just something about the feeling of slicing through waves of techno-organic foes that Konami manages to nail just right in *Nano Breaker*. The action is smooth and natural, and the way the hero can transform his Plasma Blade into various implements of death is wickedly cool.

4. Paper Mario 2 // Nintendo // GC
When I put my hands on the GC controller to play *Paper Mario 2*, it was like visiting an old friend. This sequel plays a lot like the N64 original, meaning game is full of Nintendo charm, and the battles are based on timing and skill instead of just a traditional RPG menu system. It works beautifully, and I'm thrilled that it's back.

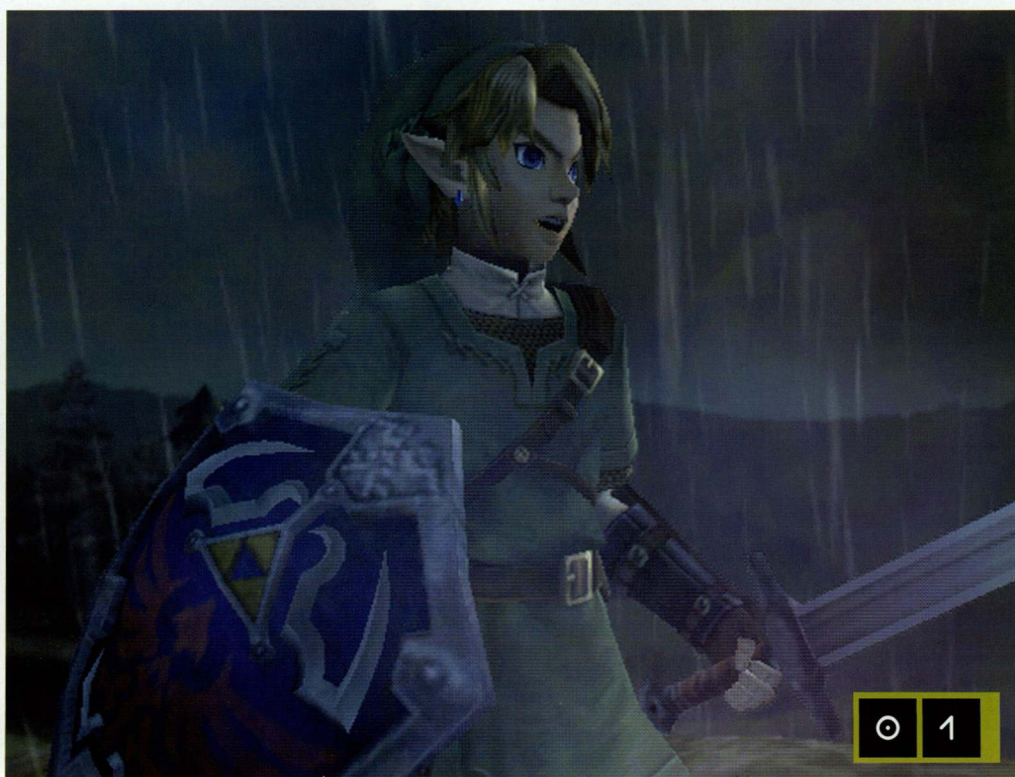
3. Kingdom Hearts II // Square Enix // PS2
Even though *Kingdom Hearts II* was only shown on video, the presentation sent chills down my spine. Looking simultaneously dark and beautiful, *Kingdom Hearts II* appears nothing short of captivating.

2. Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater // Konami // PS2
MGS3 scored for me on two fronts. The playable demo clearly showed that *Metal Gear*'s signature gameplay is still as fun as ever, only with intriguing new elements and more challenge than ever before. The video, meanwhile, showed the incredible intrigue and action that lies ahead. Hideo Kojima is truly a master of his craft.

1. The Legend of Zelda // Nintendo // GC
Is it fair to give my top pick to a non-playable video containing about only a minute of footage? When it looks as amazing as *The Legend of Zelda*, I think so. *The Legend of Zelda* graphically shamed everything else at the show, and looks to give fans exactly what they want from a *Zelda* adventure. If I could only play a single game from the entire E3 show, *Zelda* would be it.



"A lot of sequels, true, but considering the quality of the franchises...
I hypocritically welcome them with open arms."



3 Press Conference Highlights

Gaming's triad of power flex their respective muscle.



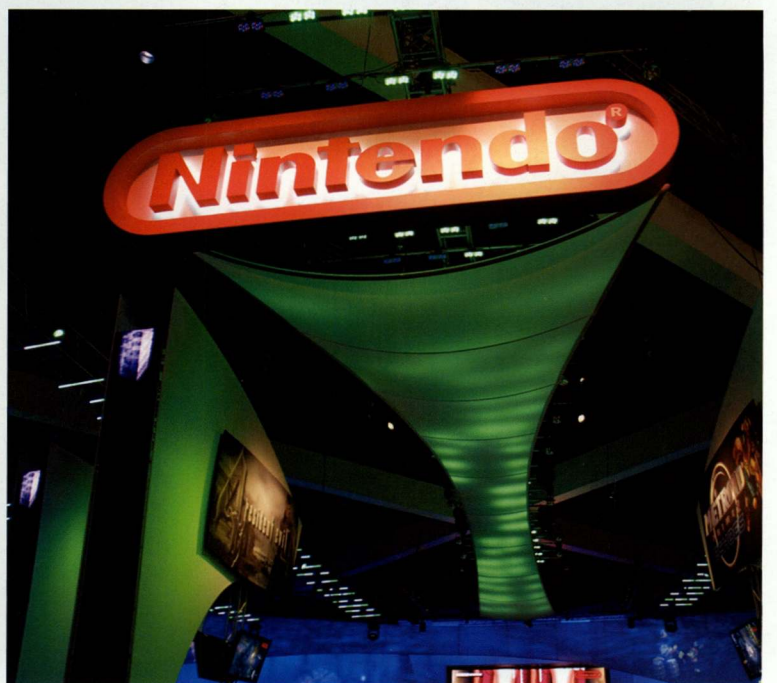
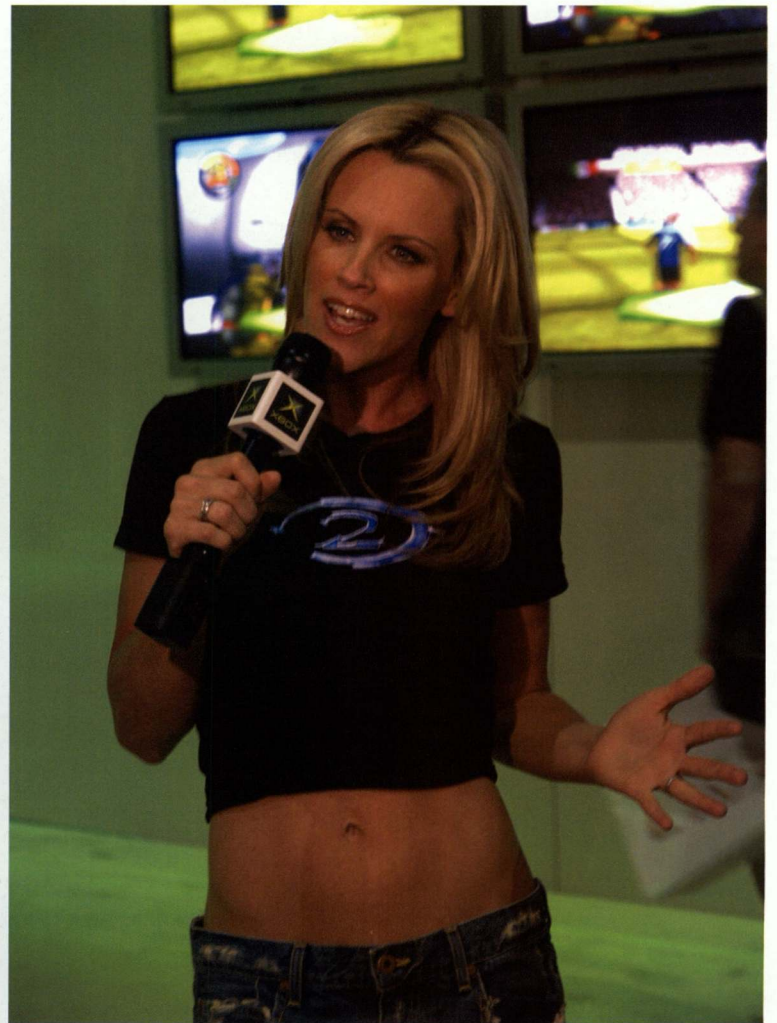
Nintendo (above): Miyamoto celebrated his latest and greatest Zelda, brandishing Link's sword and shield proudly after Reggie got all Reggie on us and Iwata unveiled the much-anticipated DS.

Microsoft (left): Peter Moore is so serious about the Halo 2 launch date, he's had it tattooed on his arm—and if you believe that's a real tat, we have a Half-Life 2 date for you as well. And there's that EA guy...again. Ali came out for EA; that's power.

Sony (below): Kaz gently sets the future of handheld gaming down on its pedestal for its first close-up. Smile and say, "Gonna make Sony a billion more dollars." Don't think we didn't ponder rushing the stage.



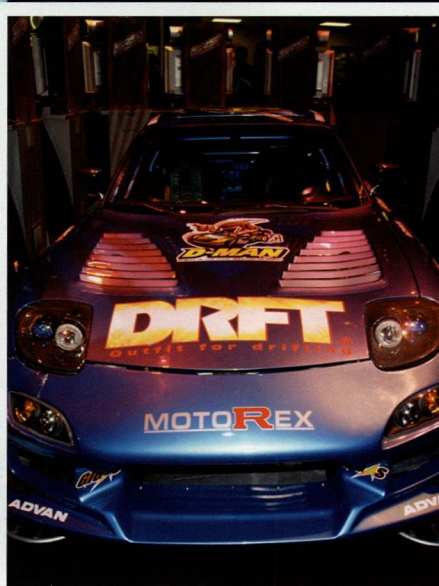
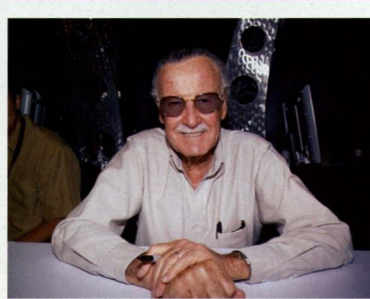
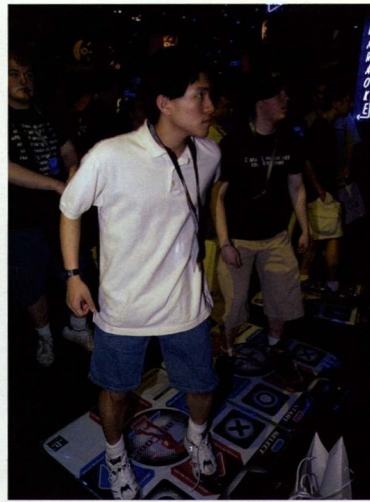
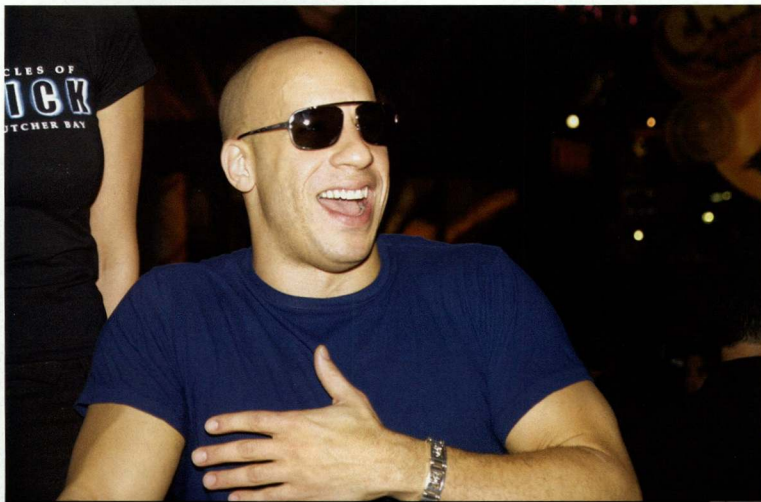
Jenny, our Alias buddy, Chris Seavor signing...



3 Show Floor Highlights

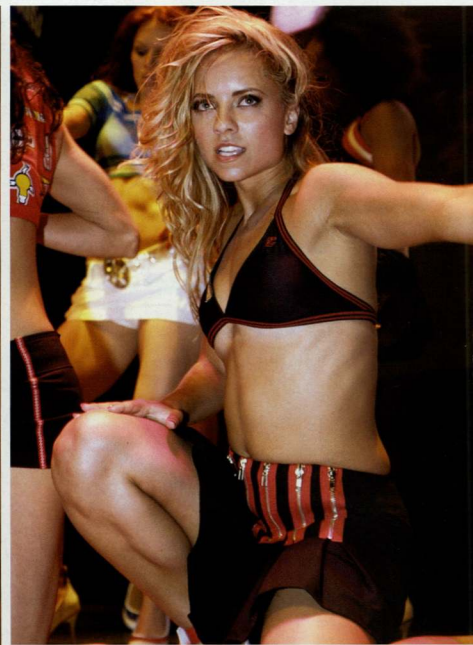
Random sightings and general mayhem





3 Fembots

Wanted: Smoking hot girls capable of enduring extreme heat and ogling...



Girls on film:
Namco got its SRS groove
on over and over and over...
Elsewhere, things were looking
good...really good.



It was impossible to get near most of the games, but E3 wasn't a total loss. If nothing else, the game industry just made rent for a city's worth of American beauties.

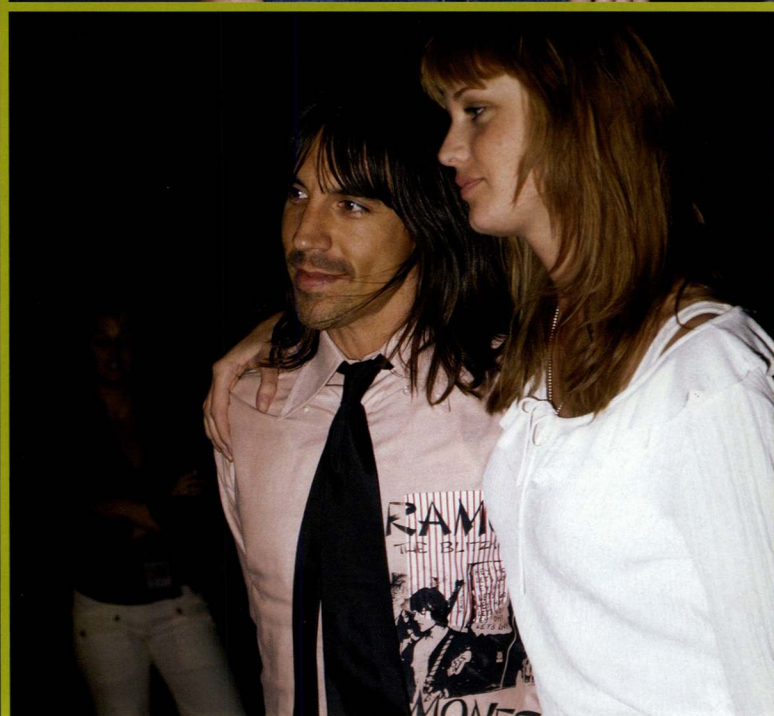


3 Shooting Stars

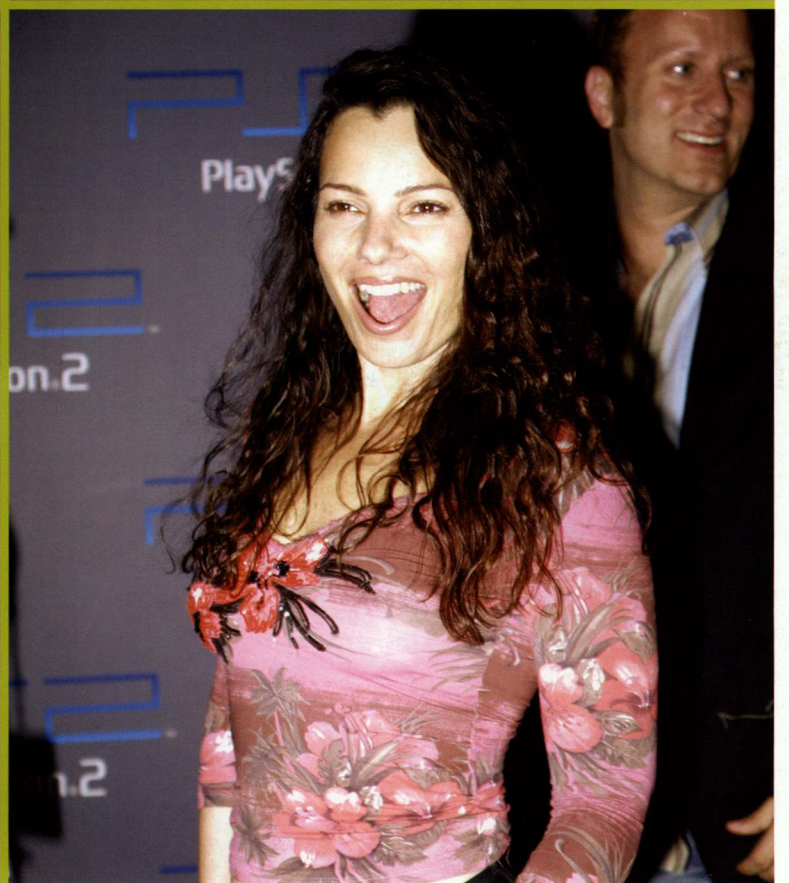
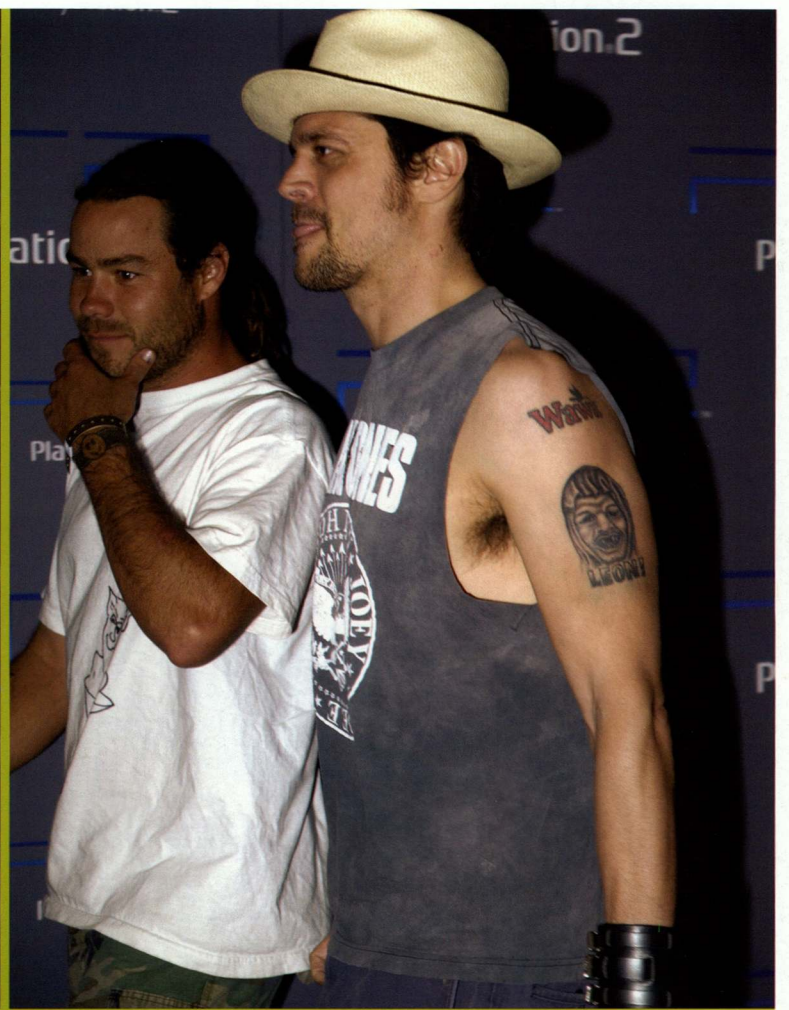
When Sony says party, people listen...



Clockwise from above: Sophia Bush, Tara Reid, and Anthony Kiedis with guest.



Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Crispin Glover, Chris Pontius and Johnny Knoxville, Fran Drescher, and Iggy Pop with guest.




 Astro Boy is depicted in a dynamic, forward-leaning pose, appearing to be in motion. He has a determined expression with large, expressive eyes. He is wearing his signature black and white striped collar and red boots. The background is a simple blue and white geometric design.

Astro Boy

A closer look at the original atomic robo-kid

He's got "100,000 horsepower strength and a heart of gold." He's often considered, in terms of longevity and popularity, to be the Japanese equivalent of Mickey Mouse. He's set the standard and been the inspiration for a generation of anime and game creators. Who is he? He's Astro Boy, of course. Originally known as Tetsuwan Atom in Japan, this wildly popular anime series was symbolically born out of the atomic era as black-and-white sequences of simple but adorably realized images of the hero, Astro Boy, a robot fashioned after the deceased likeness of its creator's son, setting out to save the world from danger in the 21st century. The show was the first animated series to come out of Japan, as well as the first manga to be given life through animation, introducing what is now a trademark of Japanese animation—large oval eyes. Bringing Astro Boy to the world was the legendary Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989), who drew and animated his beloved creation through his own Mushi Productions. After first showing up in the Tetsuwan Atom manga in 1951, Astro Boy became Tezuka's love for more than 21 years, showing up in 150,000 pages of the prolific artist's work.

If you speak with anyone involved in the many current projects surrounding the Astro Boy theme, they evoke Tezuka's name with a god-like reverence. So passionate are

some people about circulating the spirit of Astro Boy that a currency has been created in Tokyo's Takadanobaba district, with denominations of 10, 100 and 200 horsepower representing the yen-equivalent. Not every store in the area will accept the currency, but those that do are hoping their efforts will help preserve the spirit of the world-famous figure.

Certainly Astro Boy is far from fading. For a fitting birthday celebration—the original Astro Boy story tells of his birth on April 7, 2003—Sony began airing a new anime series on Japanese television last April, and you can still pick up the original episodes on import DVD. On June 5, the brand-new animated series chronicling the adventures of the atomic-powered robotic hero began airing on the Cartoon Network. Faithful to the original, Astro Boy maintains his signature look and powers, from the rocket-powered feet and super arms to his incredible strength and artificial intelligence.

With this newfound interest in Astro Boy, Sega's currently crafting two fantastic video games around the unwitting superhero—Astro Boy for PS2 and Astro Boy: Omega Factor on Game Boy Advance—which were both shown at E3. Astro Boy fans have never had it this good. **Brady Flechter**

Interview

Tetsu Okano

Director of Astro Boy: Omega Factor on GBA

Mie Kumagai

CEO and General Manager, Hitmaker

Mie Kumagai: First of all, Osamu Tezuka, he's the god of animation circles. We've always wanted to do a game according to his stories. Sega luckily got the licensing permissions to publish both the games based on old Tezuka stories. So Astro Boy's birthday was April 7, 2003, in the original story. To commemorate this birthday, Tezuka Productions decided to do the animation first, and as a dream project, they decided to merchandise the game based on this remake.

play: The game really hearkens back to the Mega Drive. Was that a deliberate intention?

Tetsu Okano: I love Mega Drive games! This was actually based on the old Treasure games from the Mega Drive. We wanted that feeling and tone of those great games. I'm such a big fan of Treasure, so I just decided to ask them to help out with the game.

Did you always want to make a 2D side-scroller from the start?

Okano: This was actually her [Mie Kumagai's] idea. What she heard first was that the PS2 version based on Astro Boy was going to be done by Sonic Team, based in 3D. So we thought it would work better in 2D, and since I'm very knowledgeable about 2D animation games, it just made sense to go ahead and create the game the way we did.

Astro Boy has a very devout following. Was there pressure having to please the fan base first and foremost?

Okano: I think that I'm the master of Astro Boy—very fanatic! I think I know everything on top of all fans! There's actually an encyclopedia of Astro Boy that's been made. Tezuka Productions saw this character chart and was very, very impressed. They were very impressed with how well this has been organized, how detailed it all is. We're very on top of all things Astro Boy. So we believe fans will be very pleased.

What do you believe were the most important elements of Astro Boy that had to be implemented?

Okano: The biggest thing is his heart. He is a robot, but he also has a human heart. He is also very strong, stronger than Mario, stronger than Sonic. [Shows me the very first concept art ever made for the original Astro Boy.] In addition to preserving these themes, especially that 100,000 horsepower heart, Astro Boy has a very strong story. There is the dilemma between what side to take, the robots or the humans. Extreme evil exists. Astro Boy deals with psychological turmoil. We really wanted to convey this.

There's so much of an original universe, with so much art and history already present. Did you have much liberty to provide your own interpretation?

Okano: Well, this game can fall in a different category than the original Astro Boy. We wanted to balance a different consistency, between the black and white and the color. There are different phases of Astro Boy. I always wanted to try something new, but also wanted to maintain what Tezuka would have wanted. We consulted a lot too. They loved the idea.

Because Tezuka passed away, he doesn't know the ending of this game. It is very different from the ending of the original Astro Boy. My hope is that the audience will greatly enjoy it.



Though the PS2 and GBA games are quite different, both capture Astro Boy's look and powers extremely well.



Astro Boy / PlayStation 2

For a franchise that's sold more than 80 million comics, inspired a cartoon running in more than 40 countries and raked in \$3 billion in merchandise, you'd think the wildly popular Astro Boy would have found a home on console a long time ago. No matter: the PlayStation 2 debut is on the way from Sonic Team. One of the main play mechanics will be his use of his super-strength to throw massive objects and enemies; according to the developers, this was inspired by children playing catch, since Astro Boy is essentially a child himself, albeit a robotic one. *-B/F/CH*

Developer: Sonic Team

Publisher: Sega

Available: Summer



Astro Boy: Omega Factor / Game Boy Advance



Co-developed by Hitmaker and Treasure, Astro Boy: Omega Factor draws inspiration from the long-lost days of the 16-bit era. Omega Factor's gameplay encompasses both traditional side-scrolling action—in which Astro Boy can utilize an arsenal of punches, kicks and trademark special moves, like his arm cannon and finger beam—and aerial levels, where classic shooting takes center stage. Massive, multi-jointed bosses offer up pattern-heavy gameplay, and Astro Boy's attributes can be customized to the player's liking. Of course, all the famous Astro Boy supporting characters appear as well. *-CH*

Developer: Hitmaker/Treasure

Publisher: Sega

Available: August





The Chronicles of RIDDICK


Escape from Butcher Bay

Riddick Shines

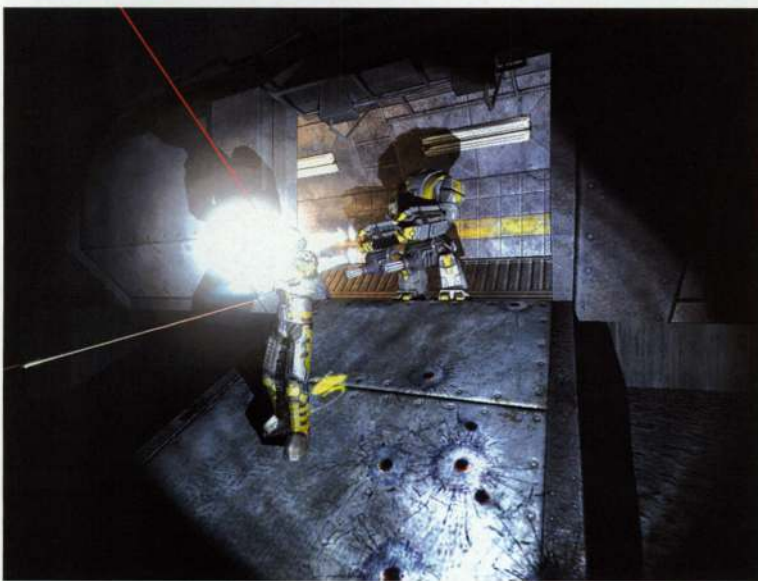
First-person shooters—a genre I was beginning to loathe—have been steadily evolving to the point that they're now among my favorites, thanks to the advent of more adventure elements. Now *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* pretty much seals the deal, renewing my faith in both FPS and celebrity-based movie games in one fell swoop. What Namco began with *Breakdown*, introducing lower extremities into the mix to go with those staple floating forearms, Starbreeze has now perfected with *Riddick*. By seamlessly shifting to a third-person perspective for assorted grappling moves, such as climbing ladders and crates and negotiating parallel bars—feats normally accompanied by a strange floating sensation sans any perspective change—and adding details such as elbows that come to rest on knees when Riddick is crouched, Starbreeze draws the player in like never before, and the result is a refreshing FPS experience, which also happens to push the graphics and immersion envelopes at the same time.

It all goes down in *Butcher Bay*, a gritty, high-security galactic prison colony where Riddick's captor from *Pitch Black*, Johns, intends on depositing him...for a fee, of course. Soon after Riddick is incarcerated (which is pretty much his idea of a vacation), beyond the game's initial paces, Riddick obtains the Shine (his ability to see in the dark), and as intriguing as things are up to that point, the gist of the game begins to really come into focus. That's Starbreeze channeling your psyche into their polygonal hell—and one of the most realistic-looking versions of one ever devised at that. You can

almost smell the fear, were it not for all the cold, hard steel, concrete and blood. So this is what happens when a great developer teams up with a celebrity that gets it? I like this.

Butcher Bay is a deadly place, where shadows and brute force are your only solace. You can apply stealth—snapping necks and dragging your limp prey into dark recesses—but you'll be constantly thinking too, forced to bear arms, infiltrate high-security zones like a human cockroach or, if the situation deems, run like hell. Ventilation shafts, dark corridors, infested sewers and underground labyrinths are your friend; heavily armored mechs, alarms, turrets and swarming guards your enemy. Simple enough odds, but man, is the execution ever well devised, culminating in a finale that will literally make you cheer: the last hour or so of *Butcher Bay* is one of the most memorable ever. This game is everything FPS and movie games need to be, chewing up and spitting out the vast majority of the competition. They tasted great, but now they're less filling. **Dave Halverson** 

System: Xbox
Developer: Starbreeze
Publisher: VU Games
Available: June



Twenty months by a team of 25-30...and just look at it. Doom who?

Interview

Lars Johansson Producer

Jens Matthies Art Director and Lead Texture Artist

Magnus Högdahl Technical Director and Lead Engine Programmer



First Enclave and now this. The brain trust at Starbreeze on all things Riddick and beyond...

play: First, our compliments on Enclave. What an amazing game. We're holding a vigil for a sequel.

Lars Johansson: Thanks. Who knows? Maybe there will be another Enclave.

Your approach to first-person adventure is both welcome and engaging. We saw a glimpse of it in Breakdown, but you've taken it a step further with touches like the way Riddick's elbows come to rest on his knees when he crouches, and the third-person zoom during climbing and grappling. How difficult is this to achieve compared to a straight, impersonal FPS?

Lars Johansson: A lot of trial and error, but we did go for the personal FPS from start. We prototyped the game to see how this would function. It worked well but required a lot of tweaking. Iteration for this kind of design is a requirement. It might look good and be functional on paper; however, making it work in a game is something completely different. When you play the game you will get to see this yourselves, as the prototype movies are in there as unlockables. You will get to see how the fighting was working early in the project. You will also note that the prototype was running on the "old" technology used in Enclave.

How large a team worked on Riddick over what length of time?

Lars Johansson: We worked on the game during a period of 20 months. Average team size during that period was around 25-30 peeps.

Did you receive regular input and cooperation from Vin Diesel and/or the people at Tigon? It certainly seems as if Vin took his role in the game very seriously. I'd say it's the best representation of a real actor in a game to date.

Lars Johansson: Tigon supplied us with information on who Riddick is, what his goals are, how the character would respond to certain situations and so on. We also got a lot of input on how the universe works, but most importantly and most obvious for the player is the fact that Mr. Diesel took the role as Riddick in the V/O booth. Mr. Diesel did a great job and revisited the booth several times to nail all the V/O required. The Riddick character was built by Pelle Tingström, who did a superb job, and I have to agree with you that it must be the best representation of a real actor in a game to date.

"It was always our intention to let the story be as non-intrusive as possible..."

-Jens Matthies, art director

You've managed to integrate story without stifling the action and create a very personal, almost claustrophobic, experience. Is this something you set out to achieve or just the by-product of quality design and implementation?

Jens Matthies: The main flow of the story throughout the game was settled very early on in the design process. This was the backbone on which all content in the game rested, and we knew that it was important to have this as solid as possible as early as possible. During the creation of the game, a thousand small modifications were made to the story in order to solve the different gameplay and scheduling conflicts that arose and to refine the quality. It was always our intention to let the story be as non-intrusive as possible, but to really make this happen involves some measure of trial and error.

The normal-mapping technique in Riddick, coupled with the dark veneer and insane character models, make for a stunning overall visual assault. Is this a very new or difficult process? Why don't we see it more often?

Magnus Högdahl: Normal mapping isn't really all that new. Many games, including Enclave, have used normal maps for various things, such as water surfaces. What's

new in Riddick is how we use them, and that everything in the game is normal mapped. Earlier, normal maps had mainly been used for environment map effects here and there. In Riddick, we use the normal maps with a high-quality per-pixel lighting model and full stencil shadowing. The reason we don't see many games with these techniques is because of all the performance issues that come with them. For example, for each light affecting a triangle, the triangle has to be drawn three times to be able to calculate the light contribution. On top of that, we have to render stencil shadow volumes for each light source for proper shadowing (i.e., if you have four lights affecting a character, you'll see four shadows). Making Riddick run at 30fps hasn't been an easy process.

Is it possible to apply this technology to more organic environments, like the trees and villages you might see in a platformer, or is better suited to simple (hard, concrete and metallic) surfaces?

Jens Matthies: Organic materials are equally suitable for this technology as non-organic ones. Organic objects do, however, tend to be less square in their appearance than non-organics, and thus they often require more geometry on the low-res models.

Is it more or less memory-gobbling than bump mapping?

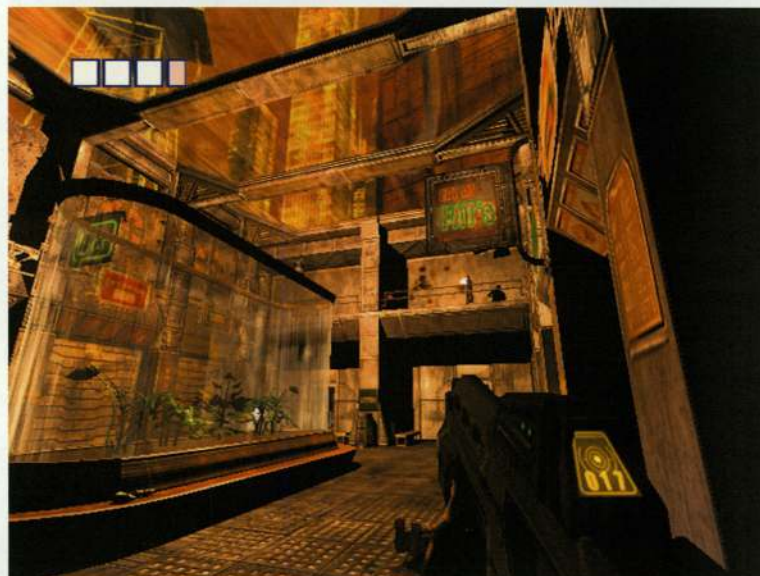
Magnus Högdahl: It is essentially the same. Typically, gray-scale height map images are called bump maps. However, before you can use a bump map in an engine, you need to convert it to a normal map. The difference lies in the content creation process. Instead of drawing bump maps, we generate all our normal maps from high-res geometry. The normal maps for our characters were created from models with over a million polygons.

Will you continue to work on more mainstream properties in the future? Do you see Riddick as your gateway to cleaning up the movie game trade?

Lars Johansson: Yes, we will definitely do more cool stuff in the future, and yes, we did clean up the movie game trade.

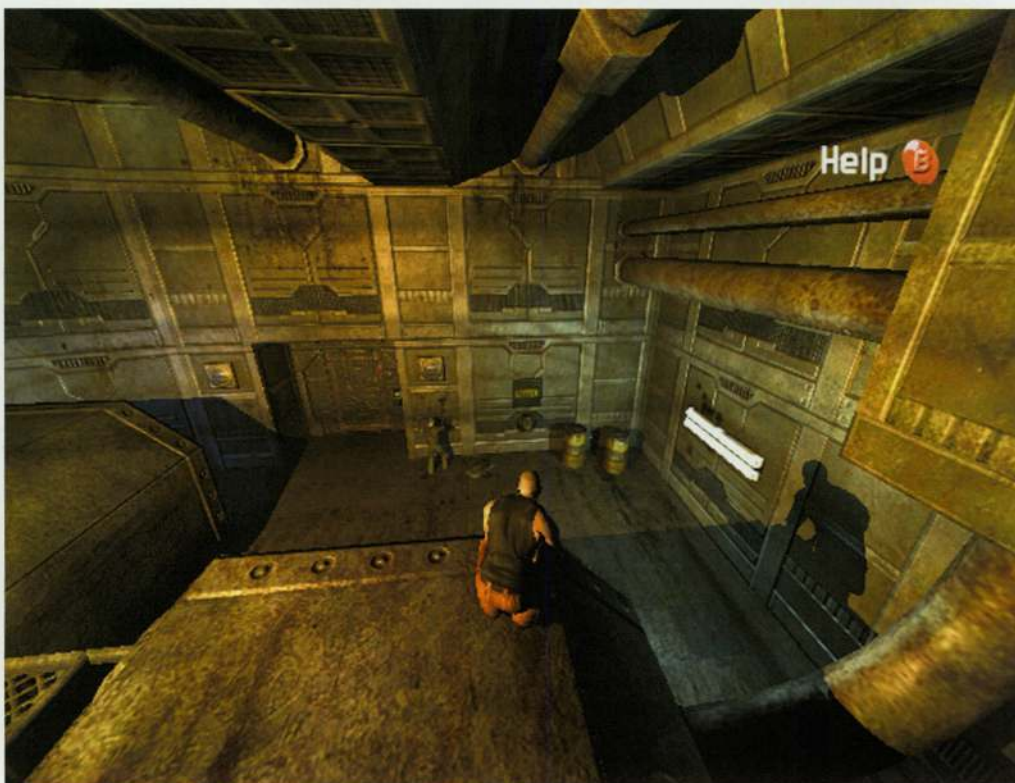
That's been a double-edged sword of late. These types of projects have become conducive to sick lead times and creative restrictions, but Riddick seems to have sidestepped that. Is this a product of VU Games' commitment to quality or just a sound design doc and great input from all fronts (VU, Starbreeze and Tigon)?

Lars Johansson: A lot of good people have been involved in this project. Together with the VUG production team with Pete Wanat as producer, we early outlined what we wanted to do with this project. To ship a great game day and date with the movie was our main goal. Tigon helped us out with intel on the Riddick universe, who Riddick is, what his goals are, etc. The talent at Starbreeze is very impressive. That together with the enormous willpower and dedication makes it a pleasure to be a part of the team. Good developer to publisher collaboration is as important as talent, dedication and willpower. **play**



"Mr. Diesel did a great job and revisited the booth several times to nail all the V/O required. ...I have to agree with you that it must be the best representation of a real actor in a game to date."

-Lars Johansson, producer



Sonic Advance 3

The world's fastest hedgehog does it again

Something old, something new, something fast and blue...that's Sonic Advance 3, and the combination yields another excellent game from Sega and THQ. Right off the bat, SA3 ups the ante by adding partner characters into the mix, essentially letting players customize their fuzzy hero (Sonic, Tails, Knuckles, Amy or Cream) to their liking with new moves, introducing interesting new layers to exploration and enemy-smashing.

When it comes to the levels, Sonic Team is functioning at their 2D best. Each themed level (including traditional concepts like an ice stage, as well as creative new ideas like a cyberspace world) is filled with multiple routes, providing an ideal balance between exploration and the lightning-quick loops and corkscrews Sonic is famous for. A renewed emphasis on clever obstacle placement, includ-

ing spinning gears, switch-activated platforms and the occasional spinning bobsled, adds to the fun; I daresay this is the best level design since Sonic CD. I can't say I really care for the mazelike nature of the newly added world hubs though, as it seems to distract more than add anything to the gameplay, especially when you need to continue.

Graphics and sound are, as expected, top-notch (I love the remix of the old Green Hill music), and the bosses are outstanding. Sonic Advance 3 is another great outing for everyone's favorite hedgehog. **Chris Hoffman B+**

System: Game Boy Advance
Developer: Sonic Team
Publisher: THQ
Available: May



Sabre Wulf

Review

When I reviewed Sabre Wulf way back in our November 2003 issue, the folks at THQ told us afterwards that our review was premature and that the game was only a preview copy. More than six months later, I've got my hands on an official reviewable version, and guess what? Nothing's changed. But that's OK; Sabre Wulf was a fun little adventure then and it's still a quality game now. The unique mix of platforming and strategy (by way of animal helpers) makes for a clever, increasingly challenging time that will be enjoyed by players looking for something a bit different. Too bad THQ didn't remove the wacky Rare vocal sound effects though—they definitely get on the nerves.

Chris Hoffman B

System: Game Boy Advance
Developer: Rare

Publisher: THQ
Available: June



Mario vs. Donkey Kong

Review

For all the complexity in modern video games, there's still a lot to be said for the pure satisfaction of rudimentary gameplay when applied with the ample charms of Nintendo's beloved plumber and ape. Taking the basic premise of what hooked us all so many years ago—chasing the elusive monkey—Mario vs. Donkey Kong inserts evolving play mechanics into the mix, incorporating grappling, platforming, conveyor belts, switches, you name it, along with Mini Mario levels (priceless!) and DK boss battles at the end of each themed world. The end result is a fresh take on an old premise that's impossible to put down, filled with old friends (Shy Guys, Boos, Ram-Rams, Monchees...), crisp, vivid graphics and sound, and some yummy cinemas. **Dave Halverson B+**

System: Game Boy Advance
Developer: Nintendo Software Technology Corp.

Publisher: Nintendo
Available: May



Reviews

Rating Scale

Excellent **A**
Very Good **B**
Average **C**
Poor **D**
Worthless **F**



Game of the Month

» The Chronicles of Riddick p 068

"This game is everything FPS and movie games need to be..."

Also notice...



Sonic Advance 3

p 071

The Blue Blur makes another entry on the GBA, boasting a great new partner system and deep, rewarding level design.



Smash Court Tennis 2

p 078

Namco exercises their ample tennis skills yet again, along with added innovation and a generous array of top players.



Shrek 2

Shrek 2 is exactly the game it needs to be. Just as the film bridges the gap between kids and adults, so does the game; maybe not to quite the same extent, but if you like the Shrek universe, you'll have a good time here. Luxoflux has loaded things up nicely by presenting nine characters in revolving teams of four (along with themed levels to match) that you can activate on the fly, often needing to act quickly, switching from one to the other to overcome obstacles. Picking up characters and listening to them chatter along the way (and these are some seriously good impressions) is good fun; the gameplay changes gears nicely once you reach the land of Far Far Away, and the visuals have their respective platforms humming at their storybook best. **Dave Halverson B**

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, PC
Developer: Luxoflux
Publisher: Activision
Available: May



He's the big, green, money-printing machine. Dgres have layers, all right...thick green ones!





Onimusha 3: Demon Siege

After the most technically impressive opening CG sequence in gaming, it's off to slay an engaging army of imaginatively designed demons in *Onimusha 3: Demon Siege*—a gorgeously crafted sequel better than its predecessors in most ways and floundering as a vehicle of story integration. If you're able to escape the vacuum of the silly, overwrought dialogue and its sabotaging of the pacing, this fantastic action game thrills you with one visual wonder after another, while the nicely balanced action between the alternately playable heroes provides the motivation to fight to the end. With excellent depth, a supremely satisfying feeling of brutal combat and varied, interesting level design—the game incorporates a nice adventure feel—*Demon Siege* is a classically charged action game. **Brady Flechter B**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Available: May



Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

Anyone who's traversed the hallowed halls of Hogwarts knows full well that Mr. Potter's biggest enemy in the game world isn't large or scaly, or even Slytherin, but rather off-putting load times. Getting to the action in HP has always meant getting to class first, and does that Grand Staircase ever love to load...both ways. On Xbox, this is almost moot; on PS2, however, bring a book or get an SP game going on the side. Otherwise this is arguably the best HP game yet. The lock-on fighting, flying and team play (utilizing Hermione and Weasley both solo and all together) are great, the Tomb Raider-lite gameplay and RPG elements very well executed, and the graphics and character animation nicely polished. I only wish they didn't vocally prod you to death to such a mind numbing degree. **Dave Halverson B**

System: PlayStation 2, GameCube, Xbox (reviewed), PC
Developer: EA UK
Publisher: EA
Available: June



Van Helsing

First, if you're going to copy a game, try not to choose one of the most gorgeous and lush ones ever created. Second, if you are going to clone, at least build in some innovation. VH does neither...and I may now be done collecting things forever. This is a repetitious, laborious adventure, riddled with poor character models (what they've done to Kate Beckinsale is a crime...that hair!), shoddy collision and sub-par animation. The evolving arsenal of weapons is cool, but by the time you obtain them, you need the next way too quickly, and the level design is just so canned and plagued with bad angles it's not even funny. *Van Helsing* was a great anime series (totally unrelated, I might add), but as a film and game, it's just so much Jackman cheese.

Dave Halverson C

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: Saffire
Publisher: VU Games
Available: May



Metal Slug 3

How nice to get a neat little 2D game on Xbox, and even nicer that it's *Metal Slug 3*. For me, I can get nearly as much aesthetic pleasure out of a game like this as with a polished 3D shooter. I just love all the animation happening on-screen with the enemies, backgrounds and vehicles. I like to imagine these crazy Japanese artists with a fetish for animation just seeing how many frames they can put into a submarine blowing up. It's just great. As a continuation of the series, *Metal Slug 3* hits all the right notes with the same simple stay-alive-power-up-kick-ass formula that always brings me back for more. It's not great like a *Treasure* game, but it's a lot of fun to look at and to play.

Michael Hobbs B

System: Xbox
Developer: SNK Playmore
Publisher: SNK
Available: May



Shadow Ops: Red Mercury

A fully competent, by-the-book, military first-person shooter with an emphasis on relentless action, *Shadow Ops: Red Mercury* drops you into a variety of hostile settings, from the engagingly designed jungles of the Congo and the labyrinthine depths of a nuclear research facility to the more underwhelming streets of the Middle East. The game takes a while to find its way, asking you to put up with a clunky presentation and off-putting enemy animations before discovering the strengths of the intense shootouts with smartly placed resistance locked down in superbly designed structures. A linear approach to design and the tired reliance on ubiquitously placed exploding barrels will raise red flags for some, but I'm always down for an intense march through a shooting gallery. **Brady Flechter B-**

System: Xbox
Developer: Zombie
Publisher: Atari
Available: June



Custom Robo

I wasn't looking forward to tinkering with "nearly 200 specialized parts" until I discovered that *Custom Robo* was actually a great, although linear, throwback Japanese action-RPG, loaded with genius battles and the kind of vitality only Nintendo still provides. The way in which your robotic counterpart evolves is integrated in such a way that it not only becomes an obsession but creates an endless stream of possibility for an already large game, and the characters are just awesome—easily some of the best of the robotic variety ever. Graduating from story mode into *Grand Battle*, you can lose yourself in the game's meticulous art of fighting if you so desire, via a level of give-and-take that knows no bounds (this game could last you months). **Dave Halverson B+**

System: GameCube
Developer: NOISE
Publisher: Nintendo
Available: May

All games play tested on Falcon Northwest systems powered by nVidia



Thief: Deadly Shadows

Review

Still thieving and thriving

There's no denying that, in spite of personnel changes or the types of games they produce, Ion Storm remains a significant force of talent to be reckoned with. The developer responsible for *Deus Ex: Invisible War* has certainly produced a sequel worthy of the *Thief* namesake in this, the third game in the series. All the trademark strengths of the series are intact and expanded in *Deadly Shadows*, and in a remarkable case of progress through technology, the stealth gameplay has undergone a healthy evolutionary leap thanks to a powerful new engine. He has few allies in the tangled web of factions, but the dark corners of Garrett's medieval hometown have never been so inviting.

Like previous *Thief* games, there is a surprising depth to the plotline and loads of dialogue to follow, and it's often imbued with a subtle, dark humor, despite some heady themes. Led by Garrett's wry analysis of the tasks at hand, guards and citizens can be heard harping on about low pay, sore backs, rodent infestations and seedy intentions. The game only takes place at night, with Garrett sleeping away the days in his apartment (the between-mission hub), so the mood is suitably somber and sardonic among those walking the graveyard shift. Religious factions play a key role in the story, and as these fanatics conduct dubious rituals, they carve out their presence and motives through distinct modes of speech, such as the Pagan's strange Gollum-style inflections. Overall, *Deadly Shadows'* writing and voice acting are quite good, helping to breathe life into the city and story.

With so much activity occurring under the cover of night, it becomes a playground for Garrett and his selection of tools and abilities. Prowling between shadows feels good when you know you're a master thief, not some trained government operative, and the sneaking, climbing and lock-picking controls are intuitive. Working the stealth gameplay to rob purses, unlock chests and dispose of enemies—using knockout club blows and dagger stabs from behind—is consistently satisfying. And despite the medieval era, you have gadgets like a mechanical night vision eye to zoom in on foes, a light gem to gauge your visibility, all manner of specific-use arrowheads for your bow and various explosive and stun implements to deter pursuers in the event of detection. You can easily restock your items at vendors, a new feature to the series, and it provides motivation to seek out extra loot sources. The Havok physics provide welcome opportunities for creative distraction and subterfuge using objects. Enemies are sensitive to sound, light, line of sight and anomalies like blood pools you've left behind (easily cleaned up with a water arrow). The missions and varied objectives are



well designed, visiting locations above and below the entire city, built around the aforementioned sensory guidelines to provide maximum reward for proper use of Garrett's full arsenal of skills.

Thief: Deadly Shadows showcases one of the better applications of the Unreal 2+ engine to date. Excellent per-pixel lighting effects are meticulously integrated into the architecture and level design, successfully treading the line between high style and captivating gameplay implementation. The quality of character model lighting and certain bump and displacement maps is commendable, though some animation is oddly jittery. Regardless, the entire premise of a *Thief* title, and the clandestine nocturnal adventure it entails, marries itself perfectly to this engine's best features. The presentation is complemented by brief sequences of deep and layered ambient music and a constant stream of environmental effects—best enjoyed on a good multi-channel EAX set-up. Finally, the cinematics between missions are unique, opting for artistic finesse and stylized close-ups instead of excessive splendor.

It's easy to recommend *Thief: Deadly Shadows* to any action-adventure fan, provided you have a high-end PC with the horsepower to run the game properly. This is a case where the synergy between compelling gameplay and environment design, enabled by great technology, is too important to compromise. It's good to see this series evolve and produce a title that can still rival many games in the genre while living up to most fans' expectations. **Mike Griffin 8+**

Developer: Ion Storm
Publisher: Eidos
Available: May



City of Heroes

Review

This genre has been plagued by a somewhat restrictive choice of themes and leveling options, and massively multi-player gamers pay the price. We have the common high fantasy medieval setting and the familiar future sci-fi, with several games that fall plainly into each category. Many of these titles have emulated each other's features for years, back and forth across patches and expansions, in an attempt to balance depth and lore versus level-grinding and item collection. The superhero element and impressive metropolis in City of Heroes brings a huge injection of originality into the genre. Character creation options are incredibly varied, and the system of progressive skill pools and Enhancements, in place of linear level-raising and equipment,



effectively abolishes the antagonism and materialism plaguing other online RPGs. And while CoH doesn't revolutionize gameplay in the genre, everything about it works very well—it feels extensively tested and buttoned-up—and advancement through the early to mid levels of the game is extremely polished and playable. The instanced content often provides gameplay that rivals many new single-player games, and the engine looks great. Even if you only play CoH for the duration of the first free month, it's well worth the purchase. Chances are you'll be sticking around, though. **Mike Griffin B+**

Developer: Cryptic Studios
Publisher: NCsoft
Available: April



Besieger

Review

Besieger takes real-time strategy into a castle-building, siege-filled, Viking-era fantasy world. The game's terrain engine is good, drawing clean, color-saturated textures across a well-shaded landscape, and while several particle effects are impressive, the character models are rudimentary at best. In fact, many technical elements of Besieger are simply underdeveloped, frequently hampering its intentions. The pathfinding around elevated areas in outdoor maps is often poor, and although several camera options do exist, the tracking doesn't always cooperate as you pan across the land. Another slight annoyance involves the game resetting your entire force's behavior status to "aggressive" following certain cutscenes. If enemies are within range, your army instantly

moves to attack them. Besieger provides a solid resource- and town-building game, though. You can raise many heavily fortified walls, and as each resource becomes upgraded, your melee and ranged troops improve and level up while various siege armaments and edifices gain new abilities. This depth and the strong design of many large-scale missions helps to compensate for the oft-clumsy execution and presentation. Ironically, some of the most enjoyable levels were the sub-missions, where just your heroes and a small band of troops must crawl through monster-infested caverns. **Mike Griffin C+**

Developer: Primal Software
Publisher: DreamCatcher
Available: May



Perimeter

Review

It all begins with a distinctive synth piano roll in the opening theme, a musical element that calls again later on, camouflaged within a different track—yet instantly recognizable in the mix. Such is the case with many aspects of Perimeter, an RTS game with an intriguing (and bizarre) planet-seeking storyline that manages to draw you in, not necessarily through overall polish, but instead via idiosyncratic details and bits of gameplay innovation that excel. There are three big hooks here: terraforming the environment to create energy and to shape your surroundings, using this energy to build a power grid that can activate a massive shield, and producing nano-units that can morph into completely different attack machines on the fly. Each of these play mechanics is well-executed, and de-



spite some repetitive maps, slight control miscues and minor interface problems, the dynamic interdependence of resources acts as a potent motivator to press onward. Aesthetically, Perimeter might be too polygon-heavy for its own good, given the high overhead view most often used, and when that complex geometry is laced with maxed-out texture, shadow and bump map settings, the framerate takes a significant dive. In any case, Perimeter is a solid sci-fi themed RTS with a few really great ideas, but it lacks the extra layer of refinement that would allow it to join the upper tier. **Mike Griffin B**

Developer: KD-LAB/1C Company
Publisher: Codemasters
Available: June



The Suffering

Review

Midway and Surreal Software's bloody, mature-rated, action-horror game has made its way to the PC by way of publisher Encore, featuring increased resolution, more gore and enhanced effects. The responsive controls have improved using the mouse and keyboard, an ideal mechanism for The Suffering's fulltime third- or first-person camera options. Circle strafing, side rolls and tight-quarters aiming transpire efficiently while switching between camera modes. There's an issue with limited variety and flow within this control system, however, despite really satisfying gunplay. Torque has very little in the way of stylized moves to add flair to the third-person action. Contributing to this stiff presentation, reactive char-



acter and object physics are minimal. Also, cycling weapons can be cumbersome until you've successfully tweaked the controls. The Suffering succeeds regardless, rising above its idiosyncratic weaknesses thanks to effective sets and grisly scenarios, superior creature designs and animation, and a powerful trump card: it tells the chilling tale of a deeply haunted man and a cursed island steeped in aberrant history, executed with competence through a raw, adults-only script, good voice acting, and well-integrated peripheral characters. **Mike Griffin B+**

Developer: Surreal Software
Publisher: Encore
Available: May

Postscript

Post-E3: The state of PC-to-console game design

Interview with Croteam's Davor Hunski, lead designer and programmer, *Serious Sam 2*

In the aftermath of E3, we spent some time with *Serious Sam 2* lead designer and programmer Davor Hunski to gather his thoughts on the unique technological dichotomy present in PC and console game design. We also secured the requisite *Sam 2* update, and although an Xbox version is scheduled, Croteam are in the midst of full Dx9 exploitation—buffing up the second coming of their powerful *Serious Engine* for PC.

play: Do you think PC gamers have become complacent about upgrading, with such potent console hardware available?

Davor Hunski: I think PC gamers will always want to upgrade their machines to have the best performance and visuals that exist.

PC gaming hardware has certainly progressed beyond console capabilities this year. Do PC developers feel pressured to release console versions, and vice-versa?

In the past, due to long console lifespans, the hype of new hardware wasn't so prevalent, and they focused more on gameplay. Lately, many PC games end up looking and playing almost the same on consoles, and successful titles often appear at the same time on both formats. Releasing multi-platform titles this way is a common business model these days.

So there's inevitably some compromising during conversion. Is this correct?

The process definitely has a few consequences: 1) PC titles that are to be converted to consoles can't be built on bleeding-edge technology, because the console lacks the hardware features to make such a conversion possible. 2) Console games, when converted to PC, don't usually exploit the latest hardware features, since it's too difficult (or not worth it) to update the game content to meet the newest PC standards. The big difference between the very latest PC and current console

capabilities can mean bad news for developers and development times. As if new technologies and quality standards haven't set high enough system requirements for games, and these advanced games call for massive development efforts (as we approach film-like graphics quality), we're also obliged to compensate for the ever-growing gap between gorgeous PC capabilities and consoles.

How profound is this discrepancy now, and does it act as a deterrent to creating optimized versions across PC and console?

Here are some examples: on PC, polygon counts have multiplied hundreds of times, texture sizes have grown immensely, available memory is counted in several hundreds of megabytes, while consoles feature significantly lower polygon counts, important missing features and 32 to 64 megs [ram] for the whole game. So in the end, it's very hard to simultaneously develop games that take advantage of the latest PC hardware and current consoles.

Clearly then, Croteam won't be holding back when it comes to *Serious Sam 2* on PC. How is the next-generation Dx9 engine going to enhance the patently outrageous action this series is known for?

Sam 2 may have a fragment or two of dark and atmospheric environments, but Dx9 will totally improve the overall action. We have some *verrrry* nice Dx9 features that *Sam 2* will use, like blooming, distortion effects, depth of field, per-pixel lightning, normal maps, realistic water, some massive poly counts, major particle effects and more. Each of these features is part of a mosaic that will, when combined, paint a completely new action picture.

Many thanks to Davor for his time and insight. The original Croteam-developed *Serious Sam* titles were excellent, and that crew is fully intact and hard at work on this wild sequel.

“We have some *verrrry* nice Dx9 features that *Sam 2* will use... Each of these features is part of a mosaic that will, when combined, paint a completely new action picture.”

—Davor Hunski, lead designer and programmer, *Serious Sam 2*

NPD Top PC Games

Sales figures 4/5/04 to 4/11/04

| | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | City of Heroes NCsoft |
| 02 | Far Cry Ubisoft |
| 03 | Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots Microsoft |
| 04 | Battlefield Vietnam EA Games |
| 05 | Unreal Tournament 2004 Atari |
| 06 | Rise of Nations Microsoft |
| 07 | Age of Mythology Microsoft |
| 08 | Counter Strike: Condition Zero Sierra Entertainment |
| 09 | The Sims Deluxe EA Games |
| 10 | Drop! eGames |

Far Cry to receive major patch

The highly anticipated *Far Cry* v1.2 patch is set to be available for download in mid-June. Among multiple bug fixes and graphics card compatibility tweaks and enhancements, dedicated Windows and Linux servers will be released, and Crytek is delivering the much-anticipated Mod SDK (Software Development Kit). This pack compliments the Sandbox editor that ships with every copy of the game, containing a ton of extra components that aspiring game designers can use to build complete *Far Cry* game modifications. Though only a few months in the making, it looks like Ubisoft and Crytek are ready to take the *Far Cry* community to the next level.

The Unreal Engine 3.0



Epic Games recently unveiled their next generation Unreal Engine 3, alongside some obscenely nice in-

development images. The technology behind Unreal Engine 3 is designed for Dx9-ready PCs and the next generation of consoles. It fully embraces every modern per-pixel lighting and rendering effect available. The real-time shader system is so advanced, its power is being compared to non-real-time Maya functionality. The engine also features full content creation tools, including cutting-edge physics, animation, AI, networking and sound. According to Epic, as they begin content creation for their first Unreal Engine 3-powered game, “Our characters typically have 100 to 200 bones, and include articulated faces, hands and fingers.” And more unbelievable: “We are authoring most character and world normal maps and texture maps at 2048x2048 resolution.” As this revolutionary engine might indicate, we'll be getting very close to feature film-quality CG fidelity in real-time with the next generation of games.





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Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2

Much love for Namco's new slice of tennis life

review

Let's face it: no one is going to threaten Top Spin for quite some time...but it isn't available on the PS2, so Smash Court gets an easy love victory, provided you're up for something a little bit different. While the game serves up top seeds from the male and female draws, including Davenport, Kournikova (must have laid down that code while she was still active), Capriati, Hewitt and, as they say, many more, the Pro Tour is what it's all about, and it is here Namco has endeavored to innovate. Character creation (that's just comprehensive enough), skill parameters and realistic progression aside (all handled deftly, I might add), rather than competing in traditional fashion, games, sets and matches are determined by turning points, just like the real thing. At the end of the day, great tennis matches are determined by key points in each set, and so Namco has made these moments the foundation of the game, saving big on tedium, while forcing you to learn good technique for a more comprehensive tennis experience. So,

for those who just want to get in there and hit, there's the sweet arcade mode, but for those who really want to live and breathe a realistic career, there's a super-realistic sim in here too, incorporating shops, rankings, training, the works. You might begin a match at set point in the first set with a mission objective to break serve in order to turn the tide; succeed and you're on your way to a straight set victory with the crowd behind you; fail and you're forced to come from behind by winning clutch points—very cool. Gameplay-wise, there's great variation on touch for every shot, the models are seamless and nicely proportioned, the animation is tops and, because it's Namco, the music is appropriately casual. This is just a great all-around tennis game.

Dave Halverson B+

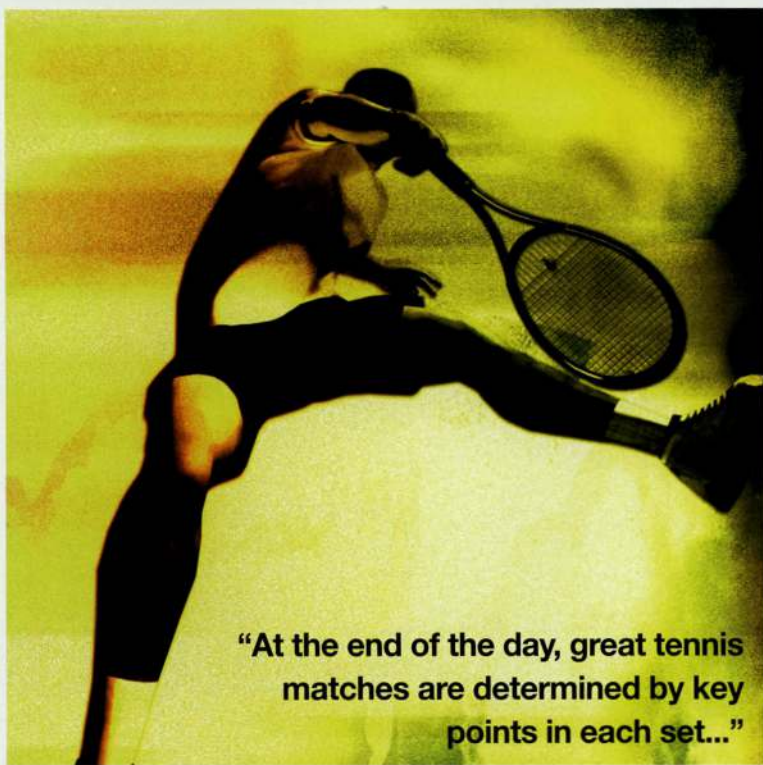
System: PlayStation 2

Developer: Namco

Publisher: Namco

Available: June

Hidden characters? What hidden characters?



“At the end of the day, great tennis matches are determined by key points in each set...”





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Ninja Scroll TV

More demons for the grinder

For years, the anime faithful waited patiently for their beloved Jubei to return for another bout of *Ninja Scroll*, and after over a decade of waiting, we find ourselves at the bittersweet end of that second chapter; time flies when you're casually slaying demons. Kawajiri and Madhouse, not to mention Rintaro for yet another memorable theme, together with character designer and series animation director Takahiro Yoshimatsu, have once again left many demons in their wake and, par for the course, left things wide open for yet another turn.

Ninja Scroll TV suffered a bit of a mid-journey lull, but as Jubei, the irrepressible Dakuan, the Light Maiden Shigure

and Tsubute make their way closer to the showdown between the Hiroku and Kimon clans, the series howls with all of the demonic verve and twists that made the original so compelling. Volume 3 is truly memorable, and a fitting curtain call to the second act. Where Jubei goes from here is anyone's guess. **Dave Halverson B+**

Studio: Urban Vision

Rating: 16 & Up

Running Time: 125 Minutes

Volume: 3

Interview

Takahiro Yoshimatsu

Character Designer and Series Animation Director

play: Transitioning *Ninja Scroll* from a movie to a TV series 10 years after the original, what types of adjustment did you make and what was your biggest challenge?

Yoshimatsu: I've made the drawing a little bit "softer" than the original one. Since it's a TV series, I've tried to make it easier for more people to watch.

Madhouse adhered to a mostly traditional look, rather than going with heavy digital effects, CGI or cel shading. Was this to match the style of the original or to better showcase the intricacies of the characters?

I think it's because Mr. Maruyama, the producer, likes cel animation. The digital animation's quality wasn't that fascinating in the early days, but now digital animation's technology is much better. Madhouse's work is digital now.

Working as animation director on a series such as this, how much emphasis is placed on making sure the first and last episodes shine brightest?

It's the most important thing. For the first episode, a motivation for the new project functions, and for the last episode, I convince myself that this is my last episode for this series.

There are surprisingly few anime around these days that do what *Ninja Scroll* does so well, as a simple story of warring clans—a succession of scenes of demon disposal interspersed with pockets of teamwork and lore. As a character designer, do you prefer cooking up lots of creatures and demon forms, as opposed to concentrating solely on a few core characters?

I had real fun creating a variety of characters this time. On the other hand, it's sad to see characters die so quickly and never appear again.

Your designs this time out depict a huge dichotomy of monster types, from twisted, upside-down infant heads to expanding freaks (Roki) to the irrepressible Yamidoro, who seems to have his own





“I had real fun creating a variety of characters this time. On the other hand, it’s sad to see characters die so quickly...”

-Takahiro Yoshimatsu, character designer

Force-like powers. Did you draw inspiration from any films or genres in particular or just come up with all of this madness on your own?

I think I get inspired naturally from the films, comics and games that I see on a daily basis. I think I unconsciously rebuild images that have been piled up in my head. These days, the costumes of the samurai dramas are my references and, as for the mad demons, I’ve just liked making them since ever.

Would you consider the overall look and feel somewhat neo-Western/mythical? Did you have a clear vision going in before the story was fleshed out?

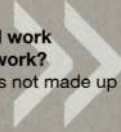
Even though it’s a “ninja” animation, I wasn’t obsessed by the typical samurai drama costumes and brought in Western taste to it and put “interesting design” as first priority.

How does the process work? Do you read a script and then create characters, create characters and then write a script, or work simultaneously as a whole?

Basically, the script comes first, but some of the characters’ (like Rengoku) designs were already made up. We build the image from the descriptions of the characters in the script.

Do the animators work from episode one on, or begin at the end and work backwards? Does Madhouse have a set way of approaching series work?

Basically, we work from the first episode. Occasionally, the last episode is not made up at that point.



Remember the tubby flying man in Dune? Well, this guy could kick his ass.



“I would love to do a Dakuan series! It’ll be the world’s first-ever old man starring as a main role in action animation.”

-Takahiro Yoshimatsu, character designer



The last episodes really tied things up nicely, and the ending was great. Like with *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust*, Madhouse always seems to leave an opening without making the endings gratuitously sweet. Do you envision working with Jubei, Dakuan and Shigure again?

It depends whether it's good or bad to end the story clearly, but I want to leave people some resonance (aftertaste). If there is going to be a sequel, I would love to do it.

Dakuan deserves his own series. I love the old fart! Why does he hang upside-down like a bat all the time?

I would love to do a Dakuan series! It'll be the world's first-ever old man starring as a main role in action animation. He hangs upside-down probably because he's gathering blood to his head and is trying to make his brain work better. I guess (ha ha ha)!?

And finally, what are you most proud of, looking back at the entire series?

Anything you regret or wish you'd have done differently?

I am most proud of being able to design interesting monster characters. My regret is that I wish I had done more "chanbara" (sword fights).

Thank you for your time and bringing your creatures into our homes.

You are welcome. I thank everybody who enjoyed watching *Ninja Scroll*. play



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GUNGRAVE

Dead and loving it

In the battle for crossover success between core gamers and anime, no other title bridges the gap quite as well as *Gungrave*, the new gold standard. What *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* does for movie-based games, *Gungrave* does for game-related anime, namely bringing it to fruition with the utmost respect for the original work. *Gungrave* is a fairly basic story about an undead hero, Brandon Heat, betrayed by his best friend, Harry MacDowel, back from the dead for a little payback. It's the journey and the way he goes about it that is so riveting. What begins as an atypical creature feature segues into a compelling story about two friends working their way up in a criminal organization, Millennium, and the girl Brandon loves, Maria, leading up to the ultimate betrayal and subsequent (very) bad blood.

In the present, Brandon, aka Beyond the Grave, spends most of his time plugged into a kind of intravenous throne monitored by "Dr. T," unplugging only to protect Mika, a young girl caught up in the chain of events, and to wreak vengeance on Millennium (which Harry has taken over) by way of his twin hand guns, "Cerberus," and a coffin loaded with heavy munitions strapped to his massive frame. Whether his attackers pump him full of lead or drive his chiseled body into the ground with the force of a steamroller, he always gets up, expelling bullets and returning the favor with chilling resolve. He's truly a one-man army.

Part foreboding carnage-fest and part drama, *Gungrave* relies heavily on character development and art direction, and it is here where series creator Yasuhiro Nightow (*Trigun*) has made sure the game and now anime shine their glossiest black, with character designs that ooze style and a story that stretches well beyond the boundaries of typical tales of revenge. **Dave Halverson A-**

Studio: Geneon Entertainment

Rating: 16 & Up

Running Time: 100 Minutes

Volume: 1 - "Beyond The Grave"



Mika takes aim, further demonstrating why she should leave the revenge to the big guns of BTG.



"...he always gets up, expelling bullets and returning the favor with chilling resolve."



NICKELODEON

...THE MADNESS CONTINUES
AUGUST 31 2004

INVADER ZIM



VOLUME 2: PROGRESSIVE STUPIDITY

Anime Works

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R.O.D. THE TV

Reading really can be fun!

As expected, *R.O.D. TV* is a great show, unique in both style and substance from the very first frame. The series begins sans any familiar faces, most notably everyone's favorite bookworm Yomiko Readman, focusing instead on her best buddy (before she disappeared four years prior, that is) Nenene. Touching down in Hong Kong to do some PR for the book she wrote just before Yomiko's disappearance, which is being made into a major motion picture, she's met at the airport by a pair of unassuming girls, hired by the studio as her guides. The chain of events that follows—penthouse suite blowing up, finding out that her guides (and their younger sister) are actually Paper Masters (the Paper Sisters Detective Company to be exact) and a murder attempt—sets in motion everything that made *R.O.D.* so captivating, leading up to an initial high-flying paper manipulation that, if you've never seen one before, is one serious paper trail. For the un-initiated, Paper Masters can control paper to do pretty much anything they command, from creating weapons to massive conveyances, and it's one of the most spectacular, and I'm sure challenging, animated offensives you will ever see. This being the first episode of a major new series, we can't expect the level of detail and animation quality presented in volume 1 for the duration, but every other facet of the show shines just as brightly. The intrigue created in episode 1 alone is enough to hang your hat on (Will Nenene and Yomiko meet again? Why are people trying to murder her? And what's Michelle's trip?) and the look is everything you'd expect coming off of one of the best OVAs ever created. Who knew literacy could be this much fun? **Dave Halverson A**

Studio: Geneon Entertainment

Rating: 13 & Up

Running Time: 115 Minutes

Volume: 1 - "The Paper Sisters"



The Paper Sisters live knee-deep in books, and they'll need every page...



"...the look is everything you'd expect coming off of one of the best OVAs ever created."



《DEAD LEAVES》

PRODUCTION I.G



AUGUST 2004



FROM JAPAN'S AWARD-WINNING PRODUCTION I.G
(KILL BILL / GHOST IN THE SHELL / BLOOD: THE LAST VAMPIRE)

Demon Lord Dante

An order of abominations please, with extra cheese

Demon Lord Dante, the prequel to the classic *Devil Man*, is the most dated-looking modern anime I have ever seen. Produced in 2002, beyond designing in retro Go Nagai style (normally a very good thing), Magic Bus has actually animated DLD like a cheap '80s TV series, complete with poorly drawn, misshapen art and visibly choppy frame rates. What a shame, given its hyper-cheesy '50s monster-movie feel that plays like a one-way ticket to bad cliché town. On the one side you've got Ryo Utsugi, a high school kid with the world's bushiest premature sideburns, haunted by premonitions of demons ripping the hearts out of young ladies, and on the other, a congregation of Satanists who like to show up on the sides of assorted sea creatures (God, I love this scene; I laughed so hard I had to leave the room) to hold meetings about resurrecting their lord, Demon Lord Dante, and bring about the era of demon reign. But it gets better. Ryo's dad is the head of a Christian order of gun totin' altar boys and his sister the target for ritual sacrifice to none other than (dun-dun-dun!) DLD, who just happens to be (insert obvious plot twist here). Ed Wood, eat your heart out! Go Nagai may be regarded by some as an anime horror legend (I'm still trying to figure that one out), but I've never laughed so hard or heard a cheesier white-bread script in my life. The Cleavers have got nothing on the Utsugis. Classic stuff.

Dave Halverson **C+**

Studio: Geneon Entertainment

Rating: 16 and up

Running Time: 100 minutes

Volume: 1 - "Dante Resurrects"



"...I've never...heard a cheesier white-bread script in my life."



"Part Karate Kid, part Rocky, and all heart..."

Fighting Spirit

From zero to hero

Ippo Makunouchi is a kind-spirited, somewhat reclusive, high school kid who attends classes by day and helps his mother with the family fishing business by night, and that's pretty much it. He's also diminutive and just a bit odd, which, combined with his lack of self confidence, makes him the perfect target for bullies who commence beating the crap out of him for sport. One day, after a decidedly brutal beating, Ippo is rescued by Takamura, a rising boxing star, who through a chain of events and trials takes Ippo under his wing and into the gym where he trains amidst a colorful assortment of boxers and trainers. It is here we discover that underneath that meek exterior lies a fighting spirit with boundless potential. Part *Karate Kid*, part *Rocky*, and all heart, *Fighting Spirit* embodies the same uplifting tone as those bittersweet fighting franchises but does so within a much cooler framework, veering from the cheesy into a more comprehensive mold. *Fighting Spirit* is filled with vivid characters and expression, set to a fantastic soundtrack (including one of the stickiest opening themes in recent memory), but could just as easily double as a training video for up-and-coming boxers. We're by Ippo's side every punch of the way, for better or worse, and it's a very realistic road. *Fighting Spirit* will have you up and shadow boxing in between feel-good moments, laughter, and just maybe a few lumps in your throat. Wax on! Dave Halverson **B+**

Studio: Geneon Entertainment

Rating: 13 and up

Running Time: 115 minutes

Volume: 1 - "The First Step"

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Gravion

United they stand, scantily clad

You gotta love Masami Obari (*Fatal Fury*, *Voltage Fighter Gowkaiser*, *Toshinden*, *Virus*). He's like the Paul Verhoven of anime. He likes his shows full of sexy guys and girls, a few nut cases and lots of sexual tension, interrupted only by the occasional over-the-top battle. So he wanted to make his own Eva-lite; so sue him. At least he's got his own unique sense of style. His version of NERV is the secret lair of a reclusive, extremely odd billionaire, Klein Sandman (Think he knows? Nah!) who's crafted the only thing that can stop the impending alien invasion in the form of a massive, giant robot, which looks like a cross between a Gundam and Tutankhamen, named Gravion. Stomping further down the Eva path, Obari's created Angel-like aliens called Zeravire that take on non-descript, often phallic, forms, and, of course, enlisted a squad of super teens who must carry a special enzyme (the G Factor!) to pilot the Sandman's attack force, since Gravion can only reach full power when all of its individually piloted pieces come together. (What, building them in wasn't an option? Design faux pas!) Once the G-Striker, G-Attackers and the G-Driller combine, to which Klein strikes a pose and exclaims, "Soldiers of the Grand Knighthood, combine!" it's all systems go! Launch key canned animation sequence and battle hymn—the deity for the modern age is going to work! And if that doesn't get your blood boiling, mission control is made up of a squad of scantily clad operator maids... You go, Obari!

It's really a shame the animation quality dips so much after episode one, but hey, if you like fan service, wall-to-wall freaks, mecha melee and plenty of cheesy battle cries, you'll love it anyway. **Dave Halverson** B

Studio: ADV Films

Rating: 13 & Up

Running Time: 125 Minutes

Volume: 1 - "Divine Steel"



"And if that doesn't get your blood boiling, mission control is made up of a squad of scantily clad operator maids..."



DRAGON BALL GT

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Lady Death

Drop-dead gorgeous



Riding on the success of bringing the video game "sin" to vivid animated life, ADV Films is set to make an even bigger splash with their second in-house OVA, the U.S./Korean joint, *Lady Death: The Motion Picture*, available this fall on DVD. We sat down with ADV resident artisan and visionary, director producer Andy Orjuela, for a little back-and-forth about all things animation and how he's breathing new life into *Lady Death*. **Dave Halverson**

Interview **Andy Orjuela** Director/Producer

play: Taking a dark, sexy, mature comic book property into the animated realm is one thing; taking it into the anime realm is quite another. How did you approach this project considering the dichotomy between anime fans and mainstream U.S. comic book/animation fans?

Orjuela: Actually, *Lady Death: The Motion Picture* isn't your traditional type of anime...meaning, it's not done in Japan and there are no "famous" Japanese directors attached to the project. Regardless, it's always been my belief that "anime" is more of a film/directorial style than a label given to the "cutesy, big-eyed" characters associated with Japanese animation.

The film's storyline is strongly influenced by the comic origins. Pre-production designs [and] storyboards were done at ADV, and the animation was made in Korea. We utilized several animation techniques more widely used in traditional Japanese anime, but since the film's storyline is a re-telling of her origin, the story is catered more towards a Western audience.

Concerning mainstream comic/animation fans and hardcore otaku, I think we will have a harder time trying to please the otaku simply because of their fanaticism towards the anime art form and all things Japanese. That's why I usually refrain from labeling this film as "anime." However, I think animation fans in general will see something really original and unique. As a comic book fan myself, I'm always interested in seeing my favorite characters as animation. Anyone who is an avid fan of comic book literature knows that many of the storylines are not catered to younger audiences. Unfortunately, when comics go to animation, the storylines and character designs are "diluted" to attract a younger audience and to appeal to parents and ratings boards. Not to say all comic-to-animation has been bad, but I think with the exception of maybe *Spawn* and *The Maxx*, most comic fans have been let down a bit when it comes to animating comic books. In working with *Lady Death*, I decided to treat it as a live-action film and draw from the comics (no pun intended) her essence and foundation. I did a lot of research on her and the Chaos! universe and spoke in great detail with [Chaos! Comics founder] Brian Pulido and [Lady Death creator] Steven Hughes about what they would like to see on the screen. After all, no one knows her better.

Would you say it turned out more for one than the

other?

Definitely more for the comic book fans. I really tried to bring to life what the original fans saw in her. I mean, for a character to stay within the comic book industry for over 10 years and still retain some of the most loyal fans, that says a lot about the character. That's what I wanted to put into the film. It was really great working with Brian on the initial treatment, and then Carl [Macek] took over, writing a great screenplay that gives a new spin on her origin so that new fans can relate more to the character.

Tell us about your role in the project and how you've evolved with the process since its inception.

Wow, long story short (ha!). I play director/producer on the film. About four (maybe five) years ago, I was in the midst of wrapping up my first production, *sin*, when I was approached to seek out any comic book properties I felt would make good animated features. I was in Dallas working on *sin* when I heard that the Chaos! crew was going to be in town for a comic book convention. I was really heavy into comics and was well aware of Lady Death's "Bad Girl" craze at the time. Not to mention, I was looking for characters with some longevity for marketability purposes. In the comic book industry, unless you are with Marvel or DC, that kind of thing was really rare. Until, of course, Chaos! Comics, one of the most successful independent comic book publishers, introduces a brand new "anti-heroine" that really rocked the industry...timing couldn't have been better. I met with them and after a few days flew to Phoenix with the president of ADV Films to meet with Brian and his staff.

After shopping the idea to a few Japanese studios, we weren't satisfied with some of the designs we were receiving. I then submitted a few character designs of my own to Chaos!, and that's when ADV really began pre-production of the film and when I knew in order to do this film right, we would have to handle all the pre-production requirements ourselves. Creatively, it was a dream come true. I wanted to really give this film some weight and create a whole new world unlike anything anyone could imagine. The rest is history.

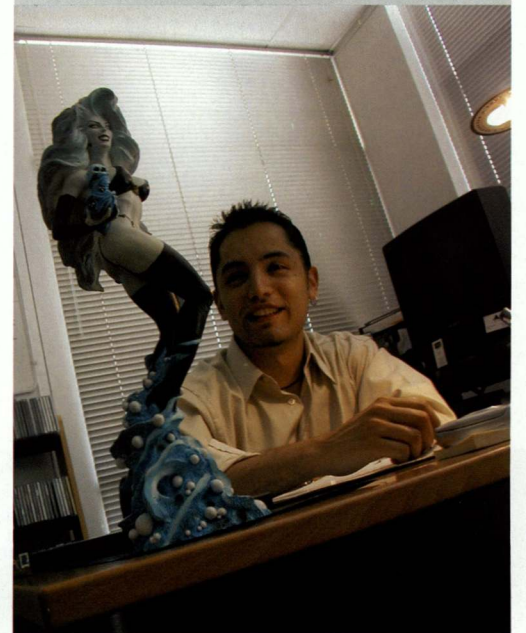
Do you anticipate it having the same type of draw in Japan as it will in the U.S.?

Sure. I think what most people don't realize is that they are

just as fanatical about American films and characters as we are about theirs. After spending some time in Japan, I went to a few stores that carried a ton of American toys and comic books. Just like many of the Japanese artists we draw our inspiration from, they too reference Western designs and techniques. The main difference is that the art form is taken more seriously overseas and the audience is not only limited to children, but adults as well. I like to make the analogy that anime films in Japan are like soap operas here in the states.

Lady Death is obviously very, very sexy and very, very bad (as in naughty). How do you bridge the gap between fan service and just plain sexy?

I tried to stay true to the basis of her origin. Carl's script never really emphasizes her sexiness, simply because it



was a given. Just like Jessica Rabbit said: "I'm not bad; I'm just drawn that way." One of the most important elements I stressed when discussing character designs with the Korean animators was that Lady Death needs to always look strong, regal and feminine. Thankfully, it wasn't too difficult referencing from the more modern version of Lady Death, drawn by Ivan Reis, and then simplifying some of her lines for animation.

How dark would say the show is? In line with the comic or darker? Will it be rated 15 and up or higher?

Since the story mostly takes place in hell, I wanted to make it really dark. Not the typical "fire and brimstone" hell, but a dark, cold, lonely hell that could really establish a dark mood for the film. Regardless, the tragic storyline defined that art for the film. Even in the one scene where we have a bright blue sky at the beginning, by the end of the scene, storm clouds cover the sky and the whole mood changes. This is really the only time we depart from the designs in the comic. I thought it was really important in order for the audience to relate to some of the events that take place in her life, the backgrounds and surroundings needed to reflect a sense of realism, both physically and historically.

Any nudity, courtesy jiggles and the like?

Well, we did create a harem of demon concubines for Lucifer. In designing the costumes, I was thinking of the old "Bride of Dracula" outfits that drape over the body... then I made them transparent. No, there's no nudity, just "strategically placed" folds and creases.

Did Chaos! have any hand in the movie? Did you have a hand in the writing? Tell us about the writing process.

Brian Pulido wrote an initial treatment for the story. Since the beginning, I knew I wanted to tell her origin, so I told Brian that this would be an excellent time to revisit her past and elaborate or expand upon some of the smaller plot points that were illustrated in "The Reckoning" (the trade paperback telling her origin). After which, Carl Macek took the initial treatment and reformatted it for an animated film. After reading Carl's script, I could visualize more creative settings and environments, ultimately evolving the script and giving the characters their voices. As with any script, characters need to evolve their personalities through their dialogue, which undergoes some evolution throughout the production process.

How much does this story tie into Storm Queen and Four Horsemen lore? Does the story take place before, during or after the comic?

The story is strictly her origin. I would love to work on something as big as Judgment Wars, but I think that storyline would exclude, maybe even shun, new and potentially bigger audiences from relating to her and her world. Origins are a great way to re-invent characters for new audiences while maintaining the true essence which attracts her loyal fans. I've also made it a point to include small "tidbits" of fanfare only the true Lady Death fan would recognize.

What kind of budget does it take to bring a co-op project of this nature to fruition?

We were very careful in planning the budget for the film. Since animation is such a technical art form that requires a lot of manpower and expertise, we were fortunate enough to plan ahead with a script that was specifically formulated for a film that did not require the millions of dollars most Disney/Pixar films are known for. Carl's experience in the animation industry really shows in the details in the script, thus providing a foundation for how the animation direction should go. In other words, specific scenes were designed to limit the amount of animation (which costs more time and money) than other scenes that required high levels of character movement and action. In turn, this



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allowed me to visualize certain scenes and make them look bigger and more impressive than what is really being seen.

If it takes off, might we see a series, merchandise or perhaps a sequel?

Well, I know ADV Films is always looking to create and produce more animated films. It would be nice to pursue a television series for cable or even a feature-length sequel, but it's too early to speculate. We have begun a merchandising campaign that includes posters, wall scrolls and a really good music soundtrack with many more items on the way.

How difficult (or not) was it working between the U.S. and Korea to achieve the quality of animation and story you envisioned?

Korean animation studios have always done some level of work for some of the leading animation studios in Japan. In the past several years, they have begun to really make a name for themselves as original animation producers working alongside Disney, Warner Bros. and other popular animation studios around the world. Honestly, I was a little nervous at first simply because of the subject matter, but after our first meeting with Sunmin Image Pictures, they proved to be as excited about this project as we were. They saw a great potential in creating something really big and unique, so they put in extra effort in producing a higher level of animation than what they are used to. The only difficulty was explaining some of the key plot points in the story that needed to have a real subtle edge in the animation. Because of the differences in our cultures and storytelling methods, I really wanted to spend as much time with the sequence directors so they could *understand* her actions and not just move her from one position to another.

What types of modern techniques did you employ? Did you integrate any CG, pre-rendered BGs or cel-shading, or is it strictly digital animation with traditional hand-painted backgrounds?

Honestly, I'm not a huge fan of 3D or high-level CG animation. Only recently are we seeing some nice blends of 2D and 3D animation, but for the most part, I think it takes you out of the picture too much. Audiences are either [so] overly impressed with the CG that they are removed from the storyline, or the 3D designs are too "low-end" to provide the sense of realism to keep the audience interested. For *Lady Death*, we are doing traditional hand-drawn animation, with digital ink and paint, meaning this broadens our color palette and really adds some nice lighting effects to our scenes. Likewise, we



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are implementing some CG animation for special effects, mixed with 2D animation effects. I'm a big fan of traditional hand-painted backgrounds. Although, to the dismay of some of the Korean illustrators, I upped the ante by adding more detail and scale to traditional animation backgrounds. However, they met my challenge and have produced some of the nicest backgrounds I have ever seen.

What was your single biggest challenge in bringing the whole thing to life?

Dealing with my worst critic...me. I usually don't spend this much time on any one project, and as any creative person can attest, burnout is inevitable. Likewise, as a first-time director and second-time producer, you are always questioning yourself and hoping you are making the right decisions. Regardless, as a lifelong movie fan, I have a true respect and love for the art form—both live-action and animated. At times, I can walk away from this project and go hide in a dark theater, escaping into another world, absorbing everything that movie has to offer. It's like recharging my batteries. Likewise, when I watch the progress on this film steadily grow and come closer to its fruition, I feel more like a parent raising a child, only to one day release it to the public to find a way of its own. It's truly a labor of love.

Are you pleased with the end product? Is it a good representation of your vision?

I'll let you know when I see it! Kidding, it's definitely taken a life of its own. When you incorporate the wonderful music and sound design to the moving pictures, it really brings everything to life.

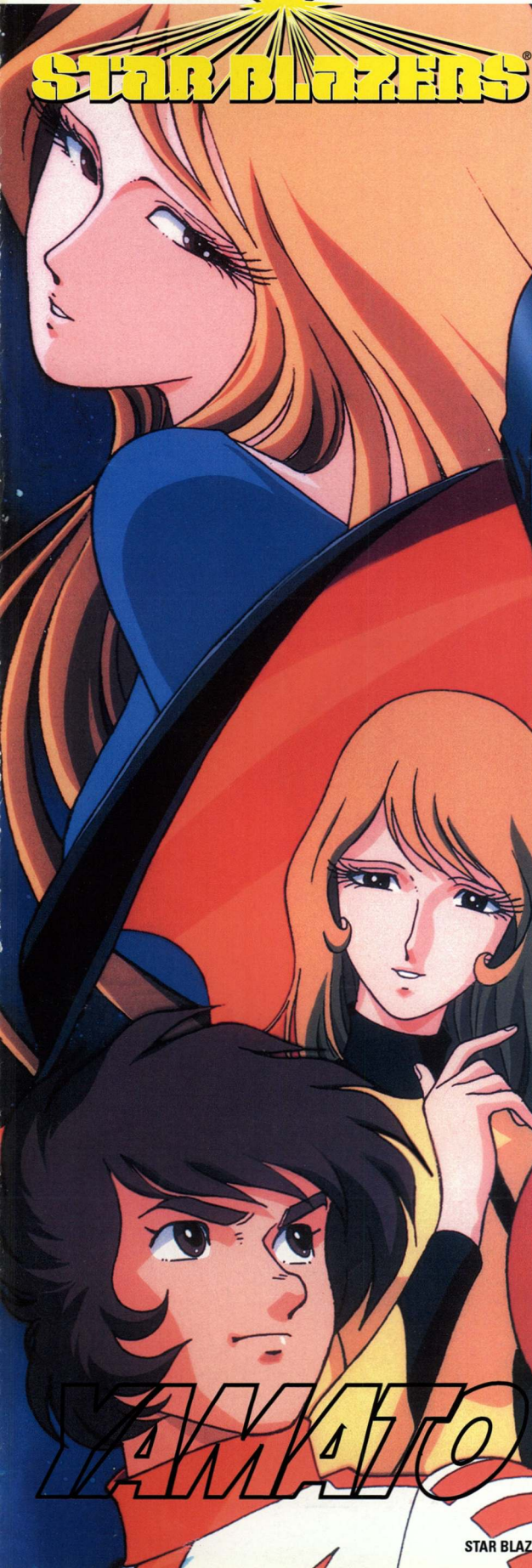
I don't know if I ever had *one* vision for this film. I know that I wanted to give the fans something that they could really enjoy and introduce new fans to her world.

I made it a point to keep in line with Brian Pulido's original vision of Lady Death, while adding an additional dimension to her personality that isn't always so violent, but more *driven* to achieve her desires. As a whole, I really wanted to introduce a new form of animation storytelling that ultimately provides a few moments of entertainment and escapism for others to enjoy. **play**

"I mean, for a character to stay within the comic book industry for over 10 years and still retain some of the most loyal fans, that says a lot about the character." -Andy Orjuela, director/producer

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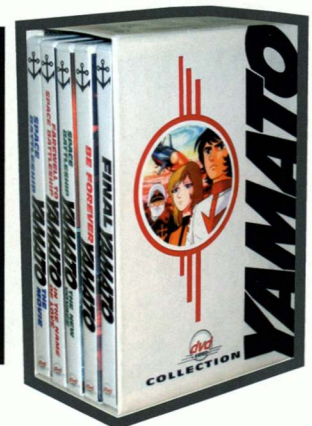
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play MEDIA



The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

Starring: Elijah Wood, Viggo Mortensen, Ian McKellen, Sean Astin, Liv Ullmann

Director: Peter Jackson

Released By: New Line Cinema

Rated: PG-13

As part of a hefty trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* is one of the great achievements in cinema. In this final, 11-Oscar-nabbing chapter, director Peter Jackson grabs us with one visual wonder after another while never straying from the intimacy and subtle depths of the cherished Tolkien novels. Each of the films making up the complete whole exist in their own special way, but it is *The Return of the King* that finally becomes the most satisfying and unforgettable journey through Middle Earth; the mixture of elegant CG and beautiful New Zealand location shots could not have been more tastefully done. As a work of pure fantasy, the film avoids overindulgence, wrapping every frame with grace and perfect suspension of disbelief. If the story is simple, so be it—its universal truths of good versus evil resonate within the expansive energy of its visions. Not to be denied their own strength are the religious implications bubbling under the surface. What makes *The Return of the King* ultimately soar is the long reach of the rich cast of characters, from the complex psychological sparring of the classic Gollum—we see a bit of us all in his struggle to avoid the temptations of greed and power—to the determined, faithful heart of the hobbit Sam. And how about the exciting, climactic Battle of Pelennor Fields, which gives new meaning to female independence? There's a little piece of magic in *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* for us all to touch. Precious indeed.

Extras: Patience will reward you with the complete set of extras coming in a few months. But if you can't wait, what's here will suffice, including two decent documentaries, *Quest Fulfilled: A Director's Vision and Filmmaker's Journey: Making the Return of the King*. A few other featurettes pass as filler, but considering the impact of the film, even the more redundant stuff is worth a look. **Brady Fiechter**

Movie: A- DVD: B-

Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Season Six

Starring: Sarah Michelle Gellar, Alyson Hannigan, Nicholas Brendon, Anthony Stewart Head, Michelle Trachtenberg, James Marsters

Director: Joss Whedon, David Grossman et al

Released By: 20th Century Fox

Rated: TV-14

Who can ever forget season six? At the outset, Buffy was dead, having sacrificed herself to save the world from über-goddess Glory, and replaced by the Buffy-Bot (some serious android technology happening in Sunnydale) only to be resurrected (and left in her casket!) by a snake-spewing Willow, just as the Hellion demon gang finds out the Slayer is a robot (after a navigational system malfunction sends her slamming into industrial barrels like a wind-up toy) and starts looting stores... That's the thing about Buffy: nothing has ever walked the line between actual substance and extra cheese so vicariously and actually gotten away with it. Mutated, allegedly super-human demons come to invade and all they do is break



windows and loot stores like common thugs. How broken is that? Later (much later), when Tara (Willow's lover) is killed, hell hath no fury like a lesbian witch's scorn, as Willow goes completely berserk, telekinetically controlling a semi like a death-dealing hood ornament, coming full circle from Buffy's savior to her would-be slayer. Network TV will never be this cool again, ever. Pray for a movie.

Extras: Six loaded discs with way too much to list, although all you need is the widescreen musical "Once More, With Feeling!" **Dave Halverson**

Season: A- DVD: A



Wizards

Starring: Jim Connell, Steve Gravers, Angelo Grisanti, Mark Hamill (voice)

Director: Ralph Bakshi

Released By: 20th Century Fox

Rated: PG

When I was a little kid, *Wizards* was my *Finding Nemo*. We didn't have frolicking fish and friendly sharks; we had underpinnings of Nazi Germany and wholesale good vs. evil slaughter. We rode anything with wheels without any protective gear, got stitches every month, and took them out ourselves. Show me a fearless kid on a Big Wheel with a pendant for monsters and I'll show you a future achiever. Told through still images, traditional cel animation, old film footage and rotoscoping, *Wizards* is a mish-mash of fantasy, humor and sexuality, all wrapped up in a classic tale of good vs. evil as only Ralph Bakshi can ever deliver. This was his first "family" film, and serves as a great barometer of the duplicitous IV drip that's slowly whitewashing American animation. If released today, it would garner an R, if it got made at all, which it probably would not. Bakshi's blatant disregard for the straight and narrow, as the anti-Disney, presented kids like me with an alternative to the fruity crap of the day, showing us a world where Mickey Mouse would be served on toast. *Wizards* doesn't "hold up" because it doesn't play by any rules. It's as cool and fresh today as it was the day it stumbled into theatres.

Extras: An extremely rare visit with Bakshi is a treasure. Not flashy in the least, just a treasure. One of a rare breed of early animators—his kind, and his style, replaced by shiny, politically correct CG, is all but lost. This is the best 15 bucks you'll ever spend. **Dave Halverson**

Movie: A DVD: B

City of God

Starring: Matheus Nachtergaele, Seu Jorge, Alexandre Rodrigues

Director: Fernando Meirelles

Released By: Buena Vista Home Entertainment

Rated: PG-13

Compactly distilled from Paulo Lin's fact-based novel, *City of God* unflinchingly details the lives of Rio de Janeiro gang members with a brutal intensity. Unfolding in blazing swaths of violence and tragedy, the convincing portrait of the slums impacts like a shot in the gut, making the usual made-up fiction seem trivial and weak. First-time director Fernando Meirelles, hailing from the commercial world, emblazons the suffocating setting with urgent style—the film is captivating to look at—yet he doesn't bury *City of God* in typical excess; the profound human element is what ultimately resonates. People live their lives with the limited, misplaced joy they find in each other, holding onto family and friends as diligently as they can in the midst of their extreme circumstances. One of the more determined inhabitants searching for survival on the streets is Rocket (Alexandre Rodrigues), a young boy who decides to make something more of his life by chronicling the chaos around him with a stolen camera. He eventually lands a job as a helper for a newspaper, which leads to his photographs unwittingly landing on the front page of the news. He believes this will cost him his life, but the inevitable celebrity the shots bring for the local gangs afford him deeper access into the culture. We watch *City of God* through the eyes of Rocket, hear his narration of the hardships of the city, waiting for some revelation or neat conclusion to reveal the expected light at the end of a dark tunnel. When you're lucky to come out of this place alive beyond your teens, the truth of such a life is rarely a nice Hollywood ending. *City of God* sticks with you.

Extras: There's not much, but what's here is unusually affecting: "News From a Personal War" is an hour-long doc chronicling Brazil's favelas. **Brady Fiechter**

Movie: A- DVD: B-



Interview

Peter Chung



Dark Fury

The *Chronicles of Riddick: Dark Fury* puts a new face on Riddick and his dark universe.

Animator and director Peter Chung isn't afraid of letting his visuals take us into amazingly abstract realms of pure fantasy. His work comes alive with a wildly distinct imagination, where the images tell the strange, elliptical story. He entered notoriety with the MTV series, *Aeon Flux*. You can also find his transfixing take on the *Matrix* world on the *Animatrix*, where he directed the final episode of the collection of meditative shorts, "Matriculated." For his latest project, *Dark Fury*, which lands on DVD June 15, Chung interprets the world of *Pitch Black* and *The Chronicles of Riddick*, bridging the story gap between the two feature films. **Brady Flechter**

“...the whole point of doing animation is that you create a whole world.”

—Peter Chung director, *Dark Fury*



However you describe Chung's visual style, it's certainly unmistakable—and oddly beautiful.

play: You've said before that you're moving into a point in your work where you want to focus on communicating more. What would you say is the most important thing you're driven to communicate?

Peter Chung: Oh, well, I could spend a long time talking about that [laughs]. To me, that's what using mass media is for, as a viewer and as a filmmaker. I'm not that interested in simple entertainment or escapism, per se. I'm really interested—because I come from an art-school background, I guess—I was always interested in making art using whatever means were the most effective and available to artists in the generation you happen to find yourself in. I think if you're an artist working today, it doesn't make sense to not use the [electronic medium], television, film, video. A lot of people I went to art school with were interested in showing their work in galleries. But to me, it doesn't make sense now, with the way our culture is set up, not to use other avenues, especially the electronic medium. So I guess the things that motivate me are the same things that might motivate me if I were a painter or a sculptor or a more traditional kind of artist—and that is to affect culture in some way. To affect people's consciousness about how they portray the culture that they live in. I could get more specific, but my work encompasses a lot of different themes, depending on the project I'm on.

Looking at your latest work, *Dark Fury*, you're again in the realm of extreme science fiction, of complete fantasy. Do you prefer working with something far removed from our reality, rather than trying to portray something familiar? Something, I guess, completely made up?

As far as settings and characters, yeah. I don't really have any interest in doing animation set in the real world. To me, the whole point of doing animation is that you create a whole world. If I wanted to do that, I'd just shoot a live-action film. I think live action is just better at portraying that. So as far as setting and characters, yeah, but when you look at the storylines, they're based on some sort of real-life

observation. And it's always rooted in some kind of issue I'm interested in addressing. You get translated through a visual language which encompasses everything animation is good at portraying. This actually applies to all forms of art to me. The purpose is to make the subjective experience objective, which other people can observe and experience. It's hard to externalize the internal. Which is taken for granted when it comes to literature, for example. For some reason, movies are generally thought to only deal with the external. I just don't see the need to impose such restrictions. A movie should be free to go in and out of a character's objectives and experiences. I guess that's kind of a long-winded way of saying, “Yeah.” [Laughs]

So is it safe to say your focus is more on visual storytelling than traditional dialogue, and having to have that traditional structure? Maybe a good recent example is the *Triplets of Belleville*, which had very little dialogue; everything was spoken through the images. Is that your approach; are you more interested in telling your story through your animation, your characters, the movement?

Yeah, I think that one of the issues I'm interested in doing with my work has always been that our thought processes are so dependent on language and words, a system that's been imposed on us. And which doesn't necessarily reflect what our real experience is. Because it has to be filtered through this code of language. Trying to access people's subconscious directly through something that's not such a rigid system can be much more emotionally effective. I think the way I use images is very much the same way a composer uses music. Music can be very expressive and evocative without using lyrics. The feeling in a carefully written piece of music is much richer to me than listening to something where there are specific lyrics that can say, or are trying to say, very specific emotions.

It sounds like you embrace working with a blank canvas. For *Dark Fury*, how rigid was the process? Did you have



complete control?

Oh no, *Dark Fury* was unusual for me, because it was based on something that was created by someone else. It was based on an existing series of films, *Pitch Black* and *The Chronicles of Riddick*. But that was itself, in a way, a challenge. It was interesting to me to see how I could put my own stamp on it and still find ways trying to express what interests me. They had very specific requirements of what the movie should convey. It's supposed to bridge the storyline between *Chronicles of Riddick* and *Pitch Black*. And so I was handed a script which was very carefully worked out. As far as having input into the story, one major change was made with making the main villain a female character, who was originally a male. I thought this would help inject some sexual tension into the situation. In terms of directorial, we had a very strict running time, and the script was pretty long to try to fit in. There was a lot going on, so part of my work was to compress and cut and make it all fit.

There must have been some inherent frustrations, but did you find that you could take something away from this experience to your next project?

Well, my feeling about animation and filmmaking in general—I like to make the experience as compact as possible. And as much as you can, add layers of story within the scene, so the scenes aren't just conveying one thing. To me, it makes the film more watchable multiple times. And this is kind of an odd reason, but making animation is such a laborious process that, since the beginning, when working on *Aeon Flux*, I was always trying to convey the most in the least

“He’s discovering for himself what his own moral boundaries are. I think that’s what’s interesting about the character.”

—Peter Chung director, *Dark Fury*

amount of animation. And that’s a process that takes place in the writing and the storyboarding. So that had become a part of my process, compacting and condensing.

You mentioned changing a villain character in *Dark Fury* to a female, for a little sexual tension. One thing I wanted to ask you was: do you look at your characters as an exaggeration of what you find to be ideal sexuality in the human form?

Well, it’s not really a conscious process. When it comes to design, what you strive for is what works on a visual level. I try to put myself in the position of the viewer as I’m designing. I make my decisions based on what impact my own drawings have on me as a viewer as opposed to trying to rationalize everything logically. Now if you do that—and very often designers can do that, trying to work out all the mechanics of how a costume works, how a hair style works—you can end up being very literal and end up with a lot of unnecessary detail, which to me, in animation, is to not take advantage of what the medium can afford. A costume, for example, has to make sense if you actually make it and put in on an actor. But it doesn’t when it comes to animation. For example, the costumes in *Reign: The Conqueror*, a lot of those would be impossible to actually make, but they look right, they look interesting. And that was the most important thing.

So you say it’s not such a conscious decision when you’re making your designs. When you go back to when you first started dabbling, first started to explore your artistic side and learn your craft, is this distinct style pretty much what came out instinctively?

Yeah, but you’re not working in a vacuum is the thing. When you’re working as a designer, it’s not possible to not be influenced in some way. The way you try to use that influence can either... Well, let me put it this way. In my case, I’d look at a lot of designs other people have done, and learn what to avoid doing myself. I think when designers start feeding off each other too much it can get very mannered, get stuck into a particular formula of how things should look. To me, the whole idea of creating art... is to expand people’s range of experiences, not to narrow it. There are two different ways of approaching it. I know that some artists, designers or directors think very deliberately and consciously to work within an established genre. For example, something in the fantasy genre, there are certain visual strokes or visual motifs you have to hit to stick within that category. Or if you’re doing a detective story, the characters have to dress a certain way, things like that. I’ve just never been interested in doing that. I’m interested in exploding those categories rather than reinforcing them.

That seems so limiting too. Getting into that mindset puts a roadblock on what can be imagined.

Yeah, and like I said, different artists focus on different things. It’s fine if that’s what people want to do and that’s what viewers want to see, but in my case, it’s just not what I want. It’s less challenging and less stimulating and motivating.

And going back to what you said earlier, it can be a torturous, very painstaking process doing what you do. With technology the way that it is today, how much has that process truly changed or helped with the load? On *Dark Fury*, did you find the process affording doing more

things in perhaps less time?

Well, it’s difficult to compare. There’s a lot more you can do with digital technology. But what I like about it is that you can... For example, using traditional methods, say you wanted to have a camera move through the background, I used to have to calculate, pull out a ruler and actually draw increments on the artwork where I wanted the camera to slow down, speed up. Using digital technology you can do it on the fly. The computer shows you what it all looks like and you can revise it. And that makes the process more of an organic one as opposed to, traditionally, you had to figure everything out beforehand. You had to preplan exactly. It was a much more mechanistic process.

The new use of digital technology obviously is good in a lot of ways, but what do you see as the downside right now? Maybe in more of a macro sense, this push for reality doesn’t work for me. Like in the “Final Flight of the Osiris” from *The Animatrix*, it looks impressive, the facial details and likeness of a human is definitely impressive, but it still is off; there’s still that artificial look that I don’t want. I want exaggeration and fantasy.

Well, I agree with that. I think if you’re going to go that realistically, why you don’t just use live actors, who can act and look like people and do a better job of it than an animated model? I see that technology being very useful where you have to blend live action and animation, which is being done more and more. But I think that animation properly should be applied to things you can’t see.

In *Dark Fury*, did you use any new techniques you haven’t explored before?

The basic technique used for producing animation these days is completely undefined, and is different depending on the project. There are so many different tools available to animators now that you can pick and choose which tool you want to use. I can’t really say that there were things that were absolutely new to me, although we did play around a lot with lighting effects. With *Riddick*, this character who can see in the dark, we had to portray his point of view versus the alien creatures, the camera’s point of view of things happening in the dark. That was an area where we really got to do some experimentation. I tried to create a really new look that was unique to this project.

I can observe your work and say, “This is what I see.” But what, in your words, defines your work,

what makes you tick?

It’s difficult to analyze myself. There are several things. One would be my approach to characterization and making the characters really strong and expressive and memorable. And to a degree, psychologically complex. Which in the case of animation is not often the case. Very often you’re dealing with stereotypical, one-dimensional characters. For me, it’s how I would define animation that’s for adults as opposed to for kids: characters have a certain psychological complexity and depth, as well as having kind of a moral ambiguity. Most of that’s not allowed in animation for kids. In that instance, *Riddick* is a good example, because he’s such a morally ambiguous character, he’s a murderer who has to be cast into the role of a hero. He’s discovering for himself what his own moral boundaries are. I think that’s what’s interesting about the character. **play**

Chung lends his sharp touch to the characters of *Reign: The Conqueror*.



edited by Tom Ham



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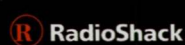


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