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COVER 2 OF 2

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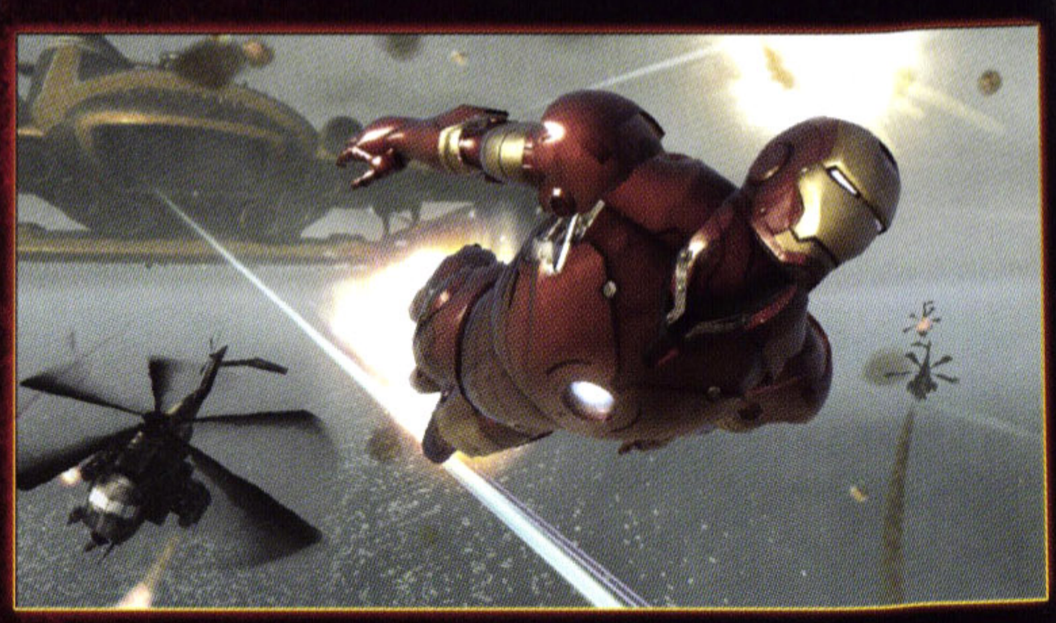

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Niko Bellic

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**April 29th 2008**

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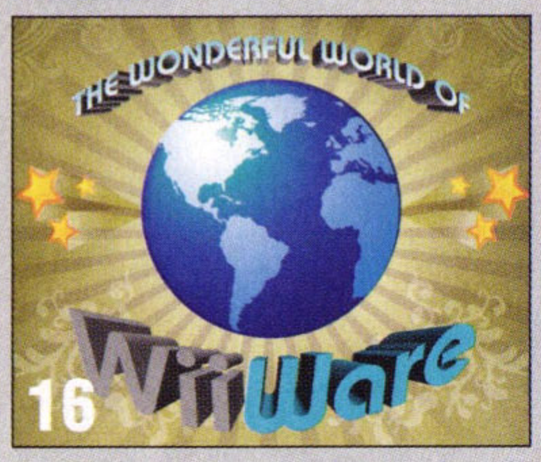
## features

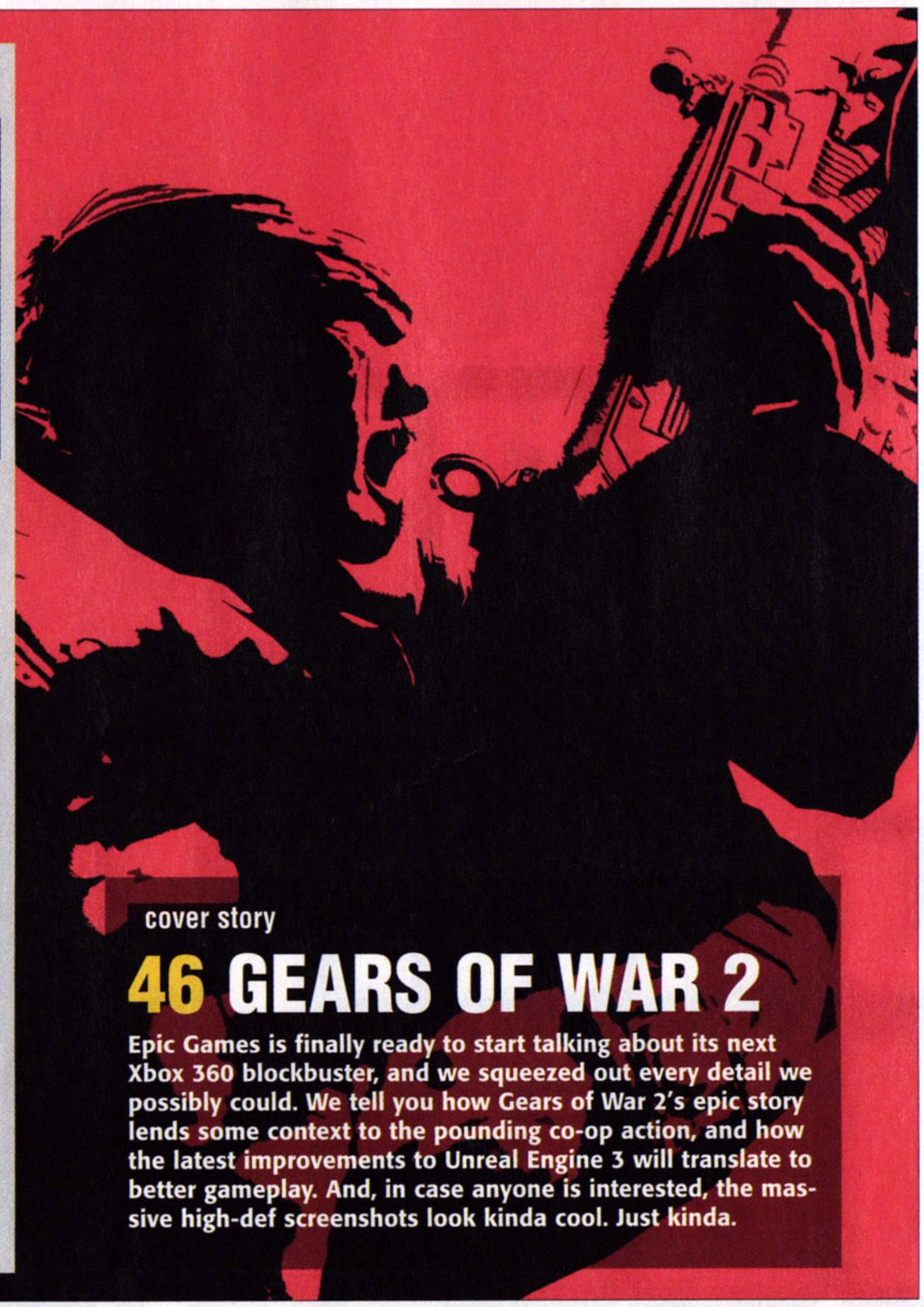



**Wii WARE**

Xbox Live may be the gold standard for online services, but Nintendo is gearing up to fully throw its hat in that ring at long last. We have the first word on 18 all-new original titles that will be available for download on the Wii, including fresh takes on Pokémon, Dr. Mario, and Final Fantasy.

**WHAT IF?**

Admit it: You've always been curious what would happen if the minds behind Resistance took on Rock Band. We talked some of the top creative talent in video games into telling us what they would do with other developers' franchises, and the answers might surprise you. Three words: Naked Lara Croft.



cover story

## 46 GEARS OF WAR 2

**Epic Games is finally ready to start talking about its next Xbox 360 blockbuster, and we squeezed out every detail we possibly could. We tell you how Gears of War 2's epic story lends some context to the pounding co-op action, and how the latest improvements to Unreal Engine 3 will translate to better gameplay. And, in case anyone is interested, the massive high-def screenshots look kinda cool. Just kinda.**

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# STAFF

**People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games**

## WHETHER YOU KNOW IT OR NOT, YOU LIKE RPGS

**ANDY McNAMARA**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I don't know who said it first – someone here at the office, a developer I was shooting the breeze with, or the most likely of choices: both of the above. Adding role-playing elements to games has been a slow but certain transformation the gaming industry has been coming to grips with, and, as the headline says – whether you know it or not – the change is what you want.

Now, I know someone out there is screaming that they don't fit the RPG stereotype, nor do they want to, and have "never played one of those nerd games." I certainly think the world would be a better place if everyone played a JRPG now and then, and spent some time in Oblivion, but I know that RPGs aren't exactly for everyone.

But the premise that these games are built on, character development, is now becoming a cornerstone of just about any kind of game you play, and with great success. From Puzzle Quest to Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, games of all types are experimenting with ways for you to invest time and effort (or, as we call it in the RPG world, experience) into your virtual persona to grow your avatar into something he/she/it was not.

These RPG elements not only invest the player into the experience, they give immediate feedback and both short- and long-term goals to attain. You know as well as I that these little rewards work. I know I've played Modern Warfare much longer than I originally planned, and I'm sure you have, too. And while the gunplay is certainly sweet, the attraction of gaining experience is what makes you stay up later than you should. Just one more level…just one more perk. It's even invaded sports gaming; this month's MLB 08: The Show is just the latest example. Like it or not, we're all RPG gamers now.

Cheers,

### Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** Reinocalypse 2012 **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Placing Bets On Smash Bros. Fights (Lucas Is A Money Maker!!!), The New *Serenity* Comic (Keep 'Em Coming, Joss), Watching PS3 Gain Momentum (Trust Me…You're Going To Need A PS3 This Year!) **Dislikes:** Not Being Able To Make Love To My iPhone, People Who Pick Up Your Action Figures (I Spent A Good Amount Of Time Posing Those!), Miis Being Used As Main Characters **Current Favorite Games:** Rainbow Six Vegas 2, Mass Effect DLC, MLB 08: The Show, God Of War: Chains Of Olympus

### Matt >> *matt@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** *National Treasure: Book Of Secrets* (Incomprehensible Adventure + Nic Cage's Bizarre Antics = Another Classic!), Watching DMX Videos On YouTube (STOP! DROP! SHUT 'EM DOWN, OPEN UP SHOP!), Michelob, Being An Audiophile Loser **Dislikes:** Endless Winter, Election Fatigue, Knee Problems (I'm In A Contract Year!), Day Trips, Lame Indie Rock Stars Going Gaga Over Lil' Wayne's Wack New Stuff **Current Favorite Games:** Professor Layton And The Curious Village, Mass Effect, Hot Shots Golf: Out Of Bounds, Okami (Wii)

### Kato >> *kato@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/RPG **Interests:** Duffy – *Rockferry*, Re-Buying Vagrant Story, Re-Starting The Metal Gear Saga (I Very Rarely Re-Play Games), The Retirement Of Bert Fart, Girl Scout Cookies, She & Him **Dislikes:** Friends Losing My Original Copy Of Vagrant Story, My Recent Lack Of Interest In Guitar Hero, Forgetting To Mention Earlier How Much I Like *Juno*/Diablo Cody **Current Favorite Games:** Skate, The World Ends With You, Hot Shots Golf: Out Of Bounds

### Adam >> *adam@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Joe Mauer, Joe Nathan, Michael Cuddyer, Justin Morneau, Matt Guerrier, Francisco Liriano, Delmon Young, Scott Baker, Boof Bonser, Carlos Gomez **Dislikes:** Mark Buehrle, Ozzie Guillen, Paul Konerko, Javier Vazquez, Bobby Jenks, Jose Contreras, Orlando Cabrera, Jermain Dye, Jim Thome **Current Favorite Games:** MLB 08: The Show, Sins Of A Solar Empire, The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap, Puzzle Quest: Challenge Of The Warlords

### Joe >> *joe@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Mass Effect's DLC, *30 Rock*, Awesome Sequel Announcements (More Persona And Valkyrie Profile? Sold!) *Wanted* **Dislikes:** Wanton Misapplication Of The Word "Monocle," My TiVo's Inactivity (Sigh. More *The Simpsons*, I Guess), Waiting For Fable 2 (Specifically Co-op. "You Have A Very Nice Home And Family Here, Miller." Bwa Ha Ha!) **Current Favorite Games:** The World Ends With You, Professor Layton And The Curious Village, Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Bully: Scholarship Edition, The Sims 3

### Miller >> *miller@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** Hotels With Free Spas, *Big Love* (I'm Ready For Season 3!), New Coworkers (Glad To Have You On Board, Jeff 2.0 And Meagan), The Increasing Frequency Of Co-Op Games **Dislikes:** Snow That Never Leaves, Confusing Anime Storylines (Structured Narrative Really Isn't That Hard) **Current Favorite Games:** Gears Of War 2, Lost Odyssey, Echochrome, Professor Layton And The Curious Village, Burnout Paradise, N+, Schizoid, Rock Band

### Bertz >> *mattbertz@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** Lord Gamington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** *Battlestar Galactica Season 4.0*, Jim Lahey – Trailer Park Supervisor, The Wild Finish To The NHL Regular Season **Dislikes:** Television Shows And Films That Revolve Around Dancing (When Will It Stop?!), Red Rings Of Death On My Xbox 360 Elite (Right Before GTA IV Hits? Nooo!), Missing The Pogues On St. Patrick's Day (Again) **Current Favorite Games:** Rainbow Six Vegas 2, Battlefield: Bad Company, Frontlines: Fuel Of War, Lost Odyssey, Bully: Scholarship Edition

### Ben >> *ben@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *Boldly Going Nowhere* (Fox, I Don't Really Trust You To Not Cancel What Will Undoubtedly Be An Awesome Show), *Veronica Mars* (It's Like An Epidemic Of Awesome In This Office) **Dislikes:** Losing Sleep During Deadlines, Energy Drinks That Give You Gas **Current Favorite Games:** Super Smash Bros. Brawl, The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap, God Of War: Chains Of Olympus, Mario Kart Wii, Civilization: Revolution

### Bryan >> *bryan@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** Mass Effect's "Bring Down The Sky", The WiiWare Version Of Dr. Mario, *It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia*'s Recent Season 4 Renewal **Dislikes:** Lack Of Standards For Difficulty Terminology (Why Is "Veteran" The Toughest Challenge In Call Of Duty, But Only Wuss-Hard In Mass Effect?) **Current Favorite Games:** Mass Effect, Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Street Fighter IV, The World Ends With You, Mirror's Edge

### Andy >> *andy@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Apple iPhone (Finally Broke Down And Bought One And Love It), *Lost*, *Battlestar Galactica*, The Rise And Fall Of Mortal Flametongue **Dislikes:** That I Tried To Fire Up Crysis At Home And The Stupid Game Ran Like Crap (And No, My Computer Doesn't Suck), *The Colbert Report*'s Dorito Product Placement **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Rainbow Six Vegas 2, Professor Layton And The Curious Village, Peggle, Hot Shots Golf: Out Of Bounds


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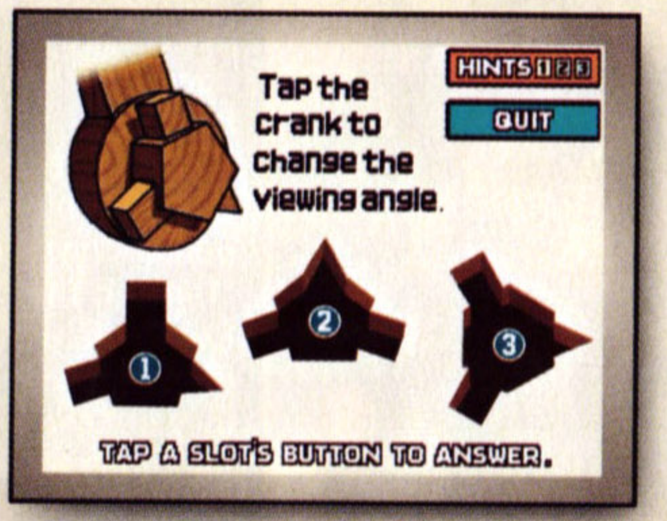

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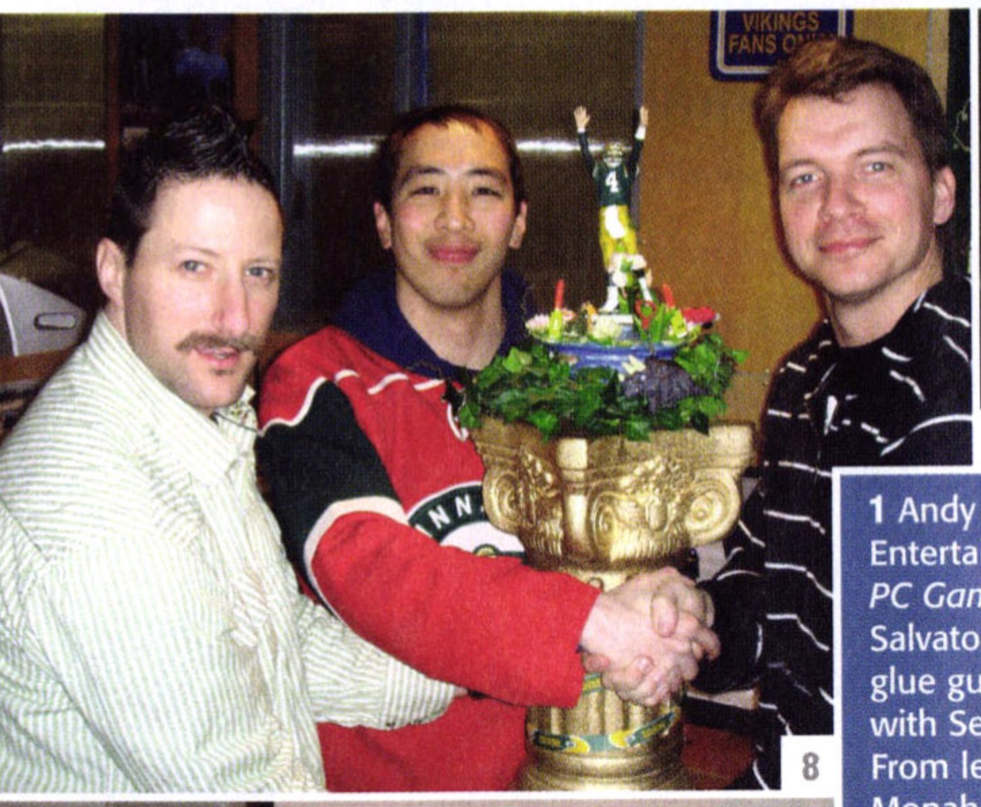
**Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry**



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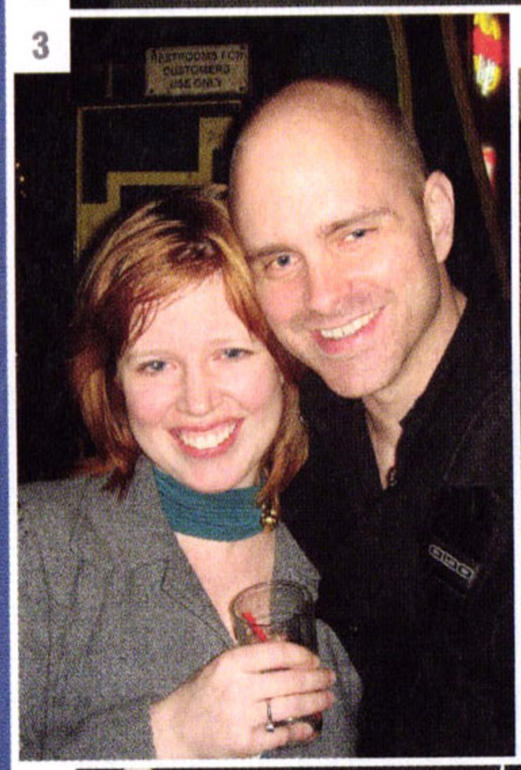

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5

**1** Andy shares the love with Brash Entertainment's Tiffany Spencer and *PC Gamer* editor-in-chief Kristin Salvatore **2** Joe (armed with a glue gun) and Nick get militaristic with Sega and the Obsidian crew. From left to right: Tim Ernst, Darren Monahan, Feargus Urquhart, and Chris Parker **3** GameTap's Dana Jongewaard and Pandemic's Cory Lewis are two peas in a pod! A crazy fun party pod! **4** Bryan and Atari's Alissa Bell ponder whether Bryan has a goatee or a beard. It's an enigma! The rest of us just hope that he brings back the 'stache **5** Q: Why does Matt look so glum? A: Because he's in the process of getting his ass handed to him by the NFL's greatest Guitar Hero player: Minnesota Vikings punter Chris Kluwe (yes, he's beaten "Through The Fire and Flames" on Expert!) **6** Nick peeks over Matt's office nemesis, our fairly creepy statutes of Kane & Lynch, while spying on Codemasters' Alex Grimbley and Lilit Baron. Fun Fact: Matt is now the only member of the GI Staff to have lost a fight with a statue **7** Epic's CliffyB always takes full advantage of the company's "Casual Fridays" policy **8** Sandbox Strategies Rob Fleischer officiates as Kato hands Sandbox's Jay Fitzloff the Trophy of the Jeweled Frog, his prize for winning their annual Vikings/Packers bet

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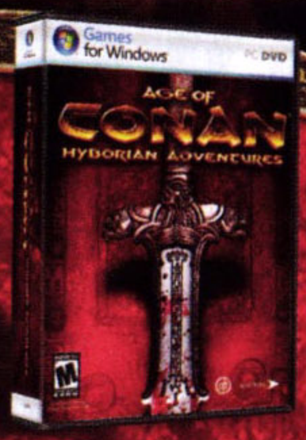

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# DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back

## GI COMMUNITY

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

**THE QUESTION:**
***Do you think casual gaming is helping or harming the industry?***

*The current influx of casual gamers brings our wonderful hobby that much closer to the kind of widespread acceptance and respect that movies, music, and television receive.*

Tanooki

*Both. It creates broader mainstream appeal for games, but is turning into a get-rich-quick scheme for developers looking to offload shovelware. Just because the Wii is easy for casual consumers doesn't mean that's all we want*

ResidentHazard

*Casual gaming is destroying the industry. Just look at the Wii. Nintendo's third-party support has always been bad, but never to the point of a Dancing with the Stars title.*

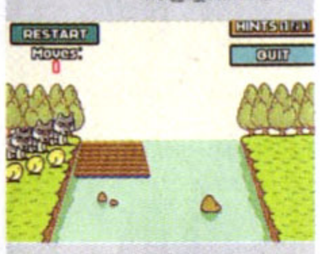
justinpf

*Casual gaming is fine when contained to the PC and online Flash games. Now that they are invading consoles, they are crowding shelves and sapping sales from more deserving titles. Every time I see a Wii minigame collection, I cry silently to myself.*

aubradley84

*I think it has had a negative impact on gaming. A lot of fly-by-night gaming companies are getting huge profits off cheaply made games, because the new game consumers can't tell Brain Age knock-offs and Bejeweled clones from quality casual gaming like Professor Layton and Lumines.*

not_a_bumblebee




*Casual games will never hurt the industry. Simple fact is that not everyone is into Zelda or Halo; some people get the most excitement out of games like Bookworms or Bejeweled. Different strokes for different folks.*

Super Pat Balls

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

## THEN I FOUND $50! FOR REAL!

Playing Brawl the entire day it came out wasn't enough, so I packed up my Wii and brought it to school. I quickly hooked it up during social studies, and when the teacher asked what I was doing I told her: "Play one match. If you think we shouldn't play, I'll go to detention myself." Long story short, we got a full period of intense Brawl play instead of class.

Marty R.
via email

■ **Are you sure you aren't confusing your life with a "radical" video game commercial from the '80s? We were half expecting a lame Smash Bros. rap to kick in at the end of this letter. Forgive our skepticism, but there are too many stories like this floating around for them all to be true. Of course, we've all embellished our gaming exploits at some point, but the trick is to keep your exaggerations believable. Don't say you've played Halo 4, say you *know someone* who has. You haven't met Ganon in real life, but maybe you've uncovered a way to unlock him as a playable character. Learn to walk the line between impressive and implausible and your blatant lies are guaranteed to gain the respect of your peers.**

## THE DEVELOPER DIFFERENCE

I don't understand something. The first Call of Duty game I played was Modern Warfare, and I give it a perfect 10. However, I rented Call of Duty 3, and it turns out I don't like it nearly as much. I can't quite pinpoint why. If I liked Modern Warfare, shouldn't I like the one before it?

Joel V.
via email

■ **Call of Duty is an interesting franchise in that it is in the hands of two different developers. Infinity Ward, the developer that created the series, was responsible for Modern Warfare. Call of Duty 3, however, was made by Activision's Treyarch studio. Treyarch's entry is far from bad, but it definitely displays a different philosophical approach to the art of warfare (though hardcore fans of the series may use less polite terminology). If you want another experience more along the lines of COD 4, you may have to wait a little while since Treyarch is also heading up the fifth Call of Duty installment. Infinity Ward's current plans are unannounced.**

## DOWNLOADABLE LOVE

Why don't you review games that release on PSN and XBLA? I know they aren't on the same tier as other big releases, but maybe you could give them their own rating scale. I was thinking maybe even give them their own section.

Joe DelFranco
via hotmail.com

■ **We were thinking the same thing. As you point out, it might not be fair to hold these games up to the same standard as full retail releases. However, they are becoming a larger part of the gaming consciousness, and our readers should know about all of the great experiences to be found via download. That's why we've started up a new section called Impulse, appearing for the first time in this issue. Turn to page 30 and read what Matt Miller, our in-house downloadable game guru, has to say about current and upcoming online releases on the various platforms.**

## OR WOULD WE?

Who writes the captions for your screenshots? I was just wondering, because sometimes I find myself rolling on the ground laughing at the things you guys say in those little boxes.

Anonymous
via gmail.com

■ **We employ a team of comedy chemists to make sure that each issue's caption composition maintains the proper balance of Internet memes, fart/crotch jokes (these are key), and obscure film references. It is a delicate and precise process, and we therefore would never, *ever* entrust it to whoever happens to be writing the particular review or preview in question.**

## ROCKING

Do you ever think that they will put an import a song feature into Guitar Hero or Rock Band? If so, why don't they have it now?

Simeon Robinson
via gmail

■ **We wouldn't be surprised to see this feature in a title down the line, but there are two main reasons you can't do it yet. The first one is technological limitations. Games like Harmonix's Phase for iPod can create gameplay from your music library by reading basic beats, but they can't generate the killer lines and solos that make you feel like a true part of the music – that takes a developer's touch. That being said, there is an extensive number of fan-created (and unlicensed) Guitar Hero cheats being distributed on the Internet. The second reason is finan-**

## THE ESSENCE OF GAMING

Shooters suck! It is the most redundant, pointless gaming genre ever to exist. All you do is shoot at an enemy, take their gun, then repeat. Over and over again. You often criticize RPGs (the best genre) for being repetitive, but the gameplay of most shooters is far more redundant than any RPG.

Josh Roeser
via hotmail.com

■ **This method of analysis will make any style of game sound terrible. Observe:**

- **RPGs suck! It is the most redundant, pointless gaming genre ever to exist. All you do is fight enemies, take their loot, then repeat.**
- **Puzzle games suck! It is the most redundant, pointless gaming genre ever to exist. All you do is move shapes around, score points, then repeat.**
- **Music games suck! It is the most redundant, pointless gaming genre ever to exist. All you do is hit notes, continue hitting notes, then repeat.**

■ Boring!

**You can't just dismantle a genre and judge it by its constituent parts. That would be like judging a painting by only looking at the colors that were used to create it. Playing a game isn't about the individual pieces. It's about how those elements interact with the player and each other to create a unified experience.**

**It's fine if you don't like shooters, but then it's also unlikely that you understand what makes them fun for others. So you keep enjoying role-playing games, and quit belittling shooters – they're insecure enough as it is. Why do you think they carry those big guns around?**

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

**cial; how can they charge you for weekly downloads if you can just pop in your own CD for free? Rather than importing your personal collection, we're betting that the next step for music games will be letting users create, play, and share their own music. That would give gamers more freedom while still leaving room for downloadable content upgrades...for a small fee, of course.**

## EVERYTHING ACQUIRED

I can't believe EA has the balls to call themselves a video game company. All they really are is the New York Yankees of the industry. If they can't beat the competition, they buy them out. Just look at BioWare and Take-Two. I was reading your Connect article entitled "EA's Grand Theft Auto," and I was just outraged. If EA gets a hold of some of the greatest video game properties like BioShock and Grand Theft Auto, I fear that all they will do is put a foul stench on them just like their own established series such as NBA Live, James Bond (before it went to Activision), Def Jam, and even newcomers like Army of Two. I hope that Take-Two and Rockstar tells EA to shove their buy-out deal up their asses.

Brian Smith
via yahoo.com

EA recently expressed interest in taking over Take-Two, and the first thing that went through the gaming community was "OMG EA sucks so bad." Look, all EA has done is attempt to expand its portfolio. Yes, buying quality is different from creating it, but nonetheless, this is still the video-game *business*. Stockholders have a right to do what they want with their investment. As bad as this sounds, it seems money outweighs games. In all fairness, isn't that why developers get into the business? To get paid what they love doing?

Ratha Chau
via email

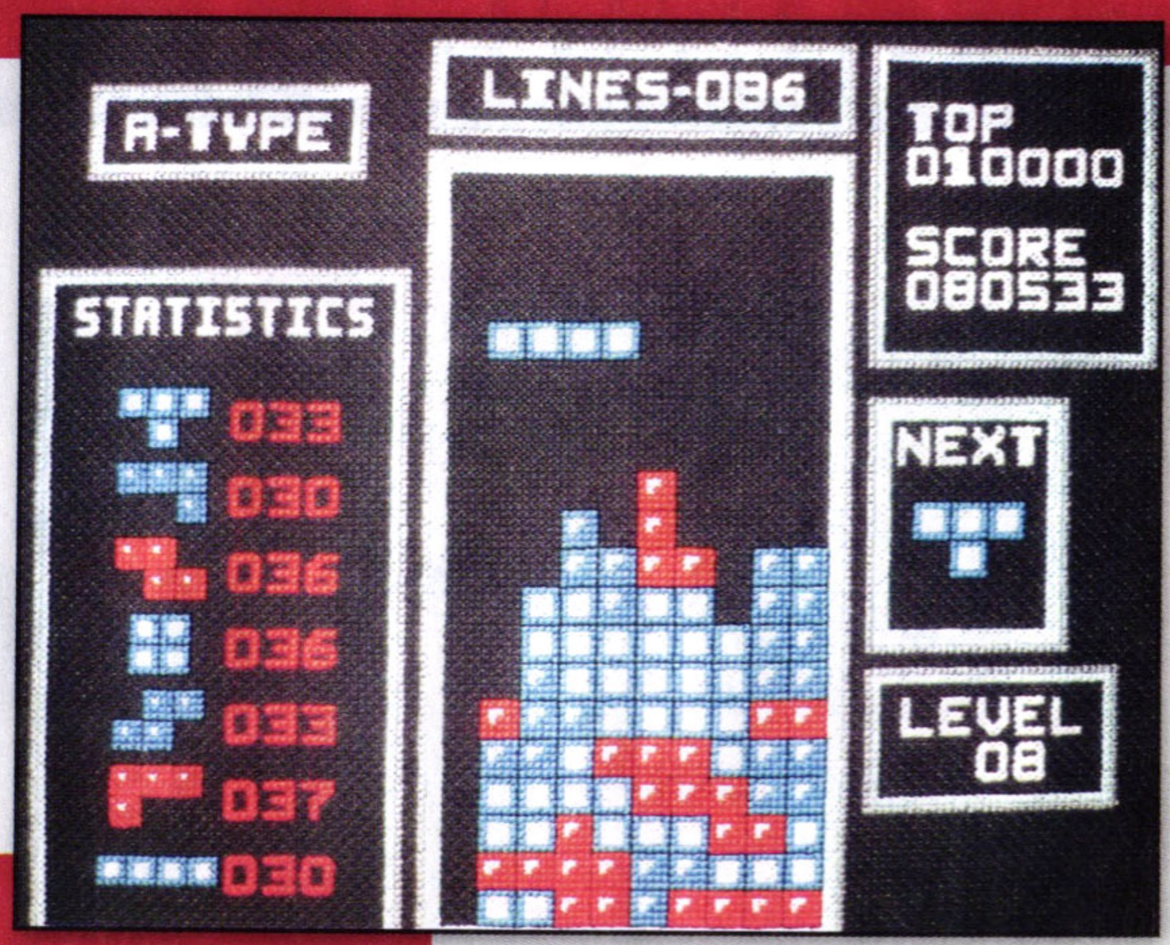
■ **When you stop looking at the stockholders' bottom lines and start looking at gaming as a form of entertainment, it is difficult to see EA's takeover attempts in a positive light. As a publisher and a developer, EA certainly releases some excellent games, but its reputation for being difficult to work with isn't wholly unearned, either. Remember Westwood and Bullfrog? However, EA's CEO John Riccitiello has admitted the company made mistakes in those cases, so we could be entering an era of a more cooperative and creativity-focused EA. That might not be much consolation to Take-Two and its subsidiaries, though. No matter how the situation is resolved, it's going to have an impact on the industry.**

■ Photo courtesy of Game Infarcer, from the article entitled "EA Buys Moon, Puts Logo On Surface"

## READER ART

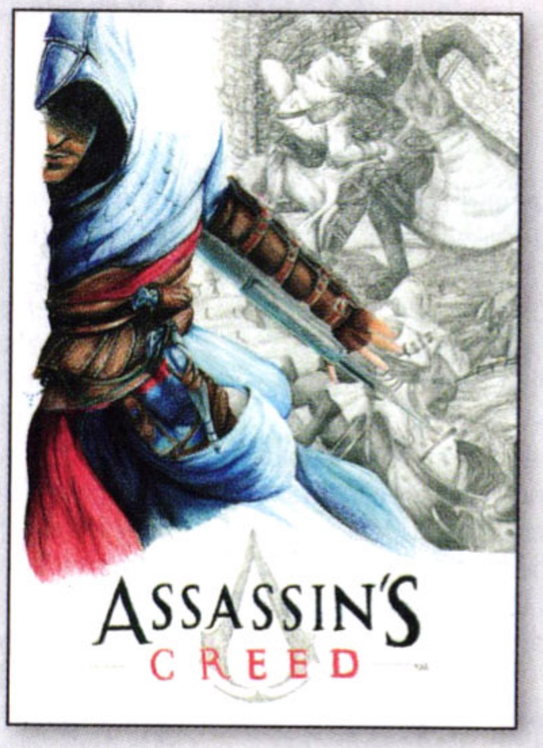
Enter the Game Informer Reader Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video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

**Send to:**
Game Informer
Reader Art Contest
724 1st St. N.,
4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401

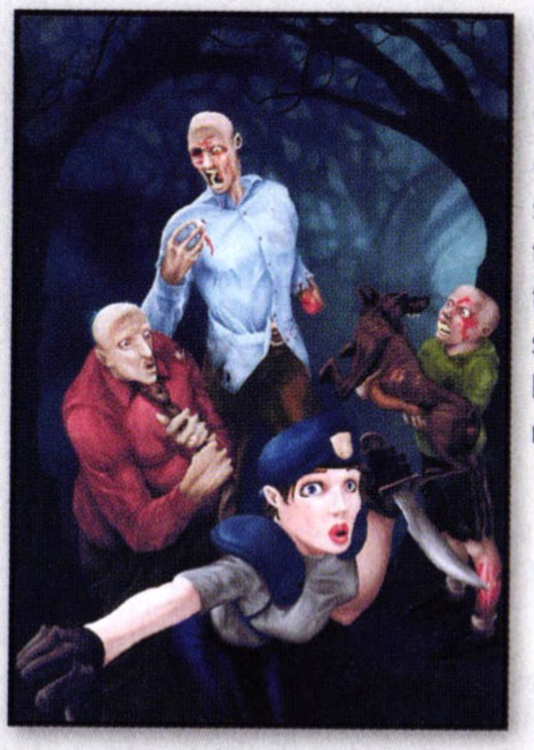



**THERESA SMITH**
Our minds are officially blown. Cross-stitched Tetris?! What's next, knit Shadow of the Colossus scarves? Please say "yes."

**JESSICA LUCCI**
Half of Altaïr has more awesomeness than most characters have in their whole body – or even multiple characters combined, if you're talking about Sonic's friends



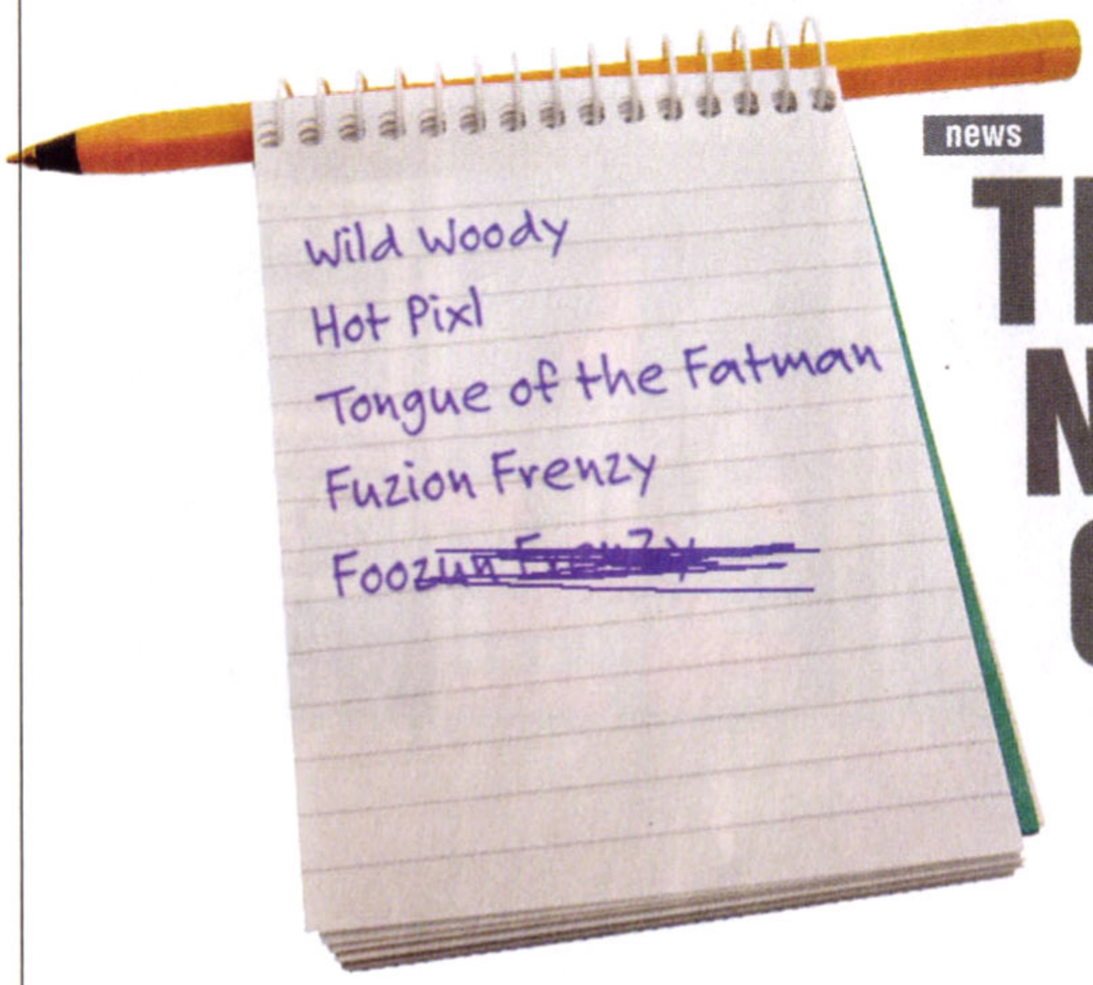
**ZACHARIAH BECK**
This looks like a better comic than some of the junk Miller reads. How many alternate universes could there possibly be?



**JULIO ESTRADA**
Here's a tip: If you're a zombie, don't bother straightening your tie. Your decrepit flesh and oozing sores make you look shabby no matter what

**MIKE GROVES**
We don't know who invited the Metroid, but the Big Daddy is probably the only guy walking out of that room with his health intact

**CORRECTIONS:**
In our Gear section of issue 179, we listed the Razer Mako 2.1 as having a price of $79.99. The correct retail price is $399.99. In the same issue, Thor Jensen's opinion essay "The Casual Crush" was amended with artwork and a sub-headline that suggested Mr. Jensen was writing about the mobile phone market, not the casual games market as was his intention. In issue 180, Chris Avellone was incorrectly identified as the creative lead for Alpha Protocol. Avellone is the game's lead designer, and Brian Mitsoda is the creative lead. Also in that issue, our review of Eco-creatures listed the game as 1-player Strategy. It should have read 1-player Strategy (2 to 4-Player via Wireless or Nintendo Wi-Fi). Additionally, The Spiderwick Chronicles review incorrectly states that the score was taken from the film. All music was entirely composed by Robb Mills. Game Informer apologizes for these errors.




news

# THE NAME GAME

## THE PROCESS, POWER, & PITFALLS OF VIDEO GAME NAMES

"It's really not about the title, it's about what's in it," says Andrew Hawn, vice president and consumer strategist for Iconoculture. Gamers know this to be true, but that doesn't make a game's title any less important. In fact, it's something that publishers and developers do not take lightly at all. Getting off on the right foot and defining the game experience to potential new fans – especially if it's a new IP – is crucial to a new product's success, and a game's title is a big part of that process. A name can be great, good, or just average, but it simply cannot be bad. At least not if the name has been properly scrutinized by all parties involved. "That's frankly an easy place to hide to say, 'Well, the title doesn't matter. Those who know the game will buy the game no matter what it's called,'" explains Hawn. "I think you're shooting yourself in the foot by not appealing to a broader set of consumer motivators around what the experience is likely to be."

"It's not scientific by any stretch," admits Jeff Reese, Sony's director of software marketing. In his position, Reese has a hand in every title that comes out from the company. Names start with developers, who naturally have a creative sense of their own project and what they want it to mean to gamers. From the codenames and early dead ends, however, a clearer idea starts to emerge as the game's story, prime features, genre, and broader marketing and branding plan mold the moniker. "The whole process is calibration," Reese tells us. "You are constantly culling down the list. 'There's no such thing as a bad name' is kind of the thesis we go from, and as you go down the process you realize there are such things as bad names, but you don't want to stop any kind of creativity."

Coming up with a name that everyone likes is just the beginning of the process. Sometimes legal issues come into play. Reese told us that LittleBigPlanet originally was named something else, but had to be changed due to trademark issues. Other times a subtitle is necessary to differentiate the product from another game in the same series on another system. God of War: Chains of Olympus is an example of this. Sometimes the name has to avoid sounding like something else or conjuring up the wrong imagery. "It's really important to imbed deeply in the consumer's mind at first glance," explains Reese. "To do that you have to break through a very cluttered environment. It's an important part of the process to see what's been successful, learn from that, but also make sure that when you come out and announce that name, you don't want someone trying to say, 'Well, it sounds a lot like X competitor.'" Finally, Reese tells us that work sometimes has to continue on a name even after it's been made public. He told us that PR and marketing had to go to work on behalf of LocoRoco and Patapon in order to get these games across due to their non-obvious names.

While catching a gamer's eye as they consider spending their money on a title they've never heard of may be one component of effectively naming a video game, the larger goal is to create an overall brand experience that you can trust now and in the future. Iconoculture's Andrew Hawn – whose clients include big-name publishers and developers in the industry, almost all the movie studios, and numerous television studios and consumer electronics companies (Hawn would not give specific names for confidentiality reasons) – says that trust, or the lack of it, is a problem with video game names.

"The whole industry has had sequelitis forever, and as the industry grows up it's gotta think long and hard how it names things. This is true of the consumer electronics industry as well. Everything coming out of Panasonic is a disaster." Hawn naturally points to Apple and the emotional tie its fans have with its products as the road to follow, where quality is (usually) in synch with expectation.

Trust isn't something that video games have always had. Until recently anything named Star Wars, mostly in the '90s, was an abuse to fans. "The video game industry has to realize they are playing in the big leagues right now, and you can't do that."

We asked Hawn about the Final Fantasy brand, which developer/publisher Square Enix affixes to a number of games in different genres and varying in quality, and whether it could be hurt by this inconsistency. "It is a universe and I think there's this core group of people that'll buy anything [with the name Final Fantasy], but I think it's a detriment."

Apart from those fans that would buy your title anyway, no matter how incomprehensible or awful its name, mass-market friendly titles are something that companies must be more conscious of as more non-hardcore gamers head into stores looking for stuff to buy. "The gaming industry will say things like, 'We are bigger than the movie industry,'" says Hawn, "but you can't put up an eye chart of a name of a game and expect people to know what it's going to be. I'm not saying you should name it something obvious or dumb. I think the simpler you keep it the better. The name shouldn't get in the way."

**The gaming industry will say things like, 'We are bigger than the movie industry,' but you can't put up an eye chart of a name of a game and expect people to know what it's going to be.**

– Andrew Hawn, vice president and consumer strategist for consumer researchers Iconoculture

Awesome Possum Kicks Dr. Machino's Butt

### THE S--- LIST

Here is a very abbreviated list of some bad video game names. Want to create your own hilarity? Check out this online moniker generator: http://www.norefuge.net/vgng/vgng.html

- Infinite Undiscovery
- Corpse Killer
- Awesome Possum Kicks Dr. Machino's Butt
- Wild Woody
- Irritating Stick
- Twin Eagle: Revenge Joe's Brother
- Tongue of the Fatman
- .hack//G.U. Vol. 2: Reminisce
- Viking: Battle for Asgard
- Hot Pixl
- Fuzion Frenzy

# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

**We asked consumer expert Andrew Hawn his professional opinion of some video game names.**

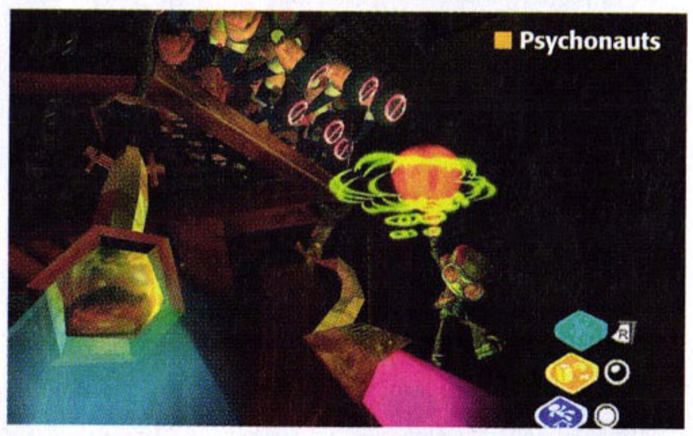
## Call of Duty

"It's this call to arms. This almost historic, nostalgic kind of approach to what you didn't live through. That's especially effective for millennials – generation Y, or under-30 year olds. They are one of the first generations that can be deeply nostalgic about a time that they never lived through because they have so much access to media and their approach to media consumption.

"One of the big trends in video game naming is the use of the possessive. Band of Brothers, Company of Heroes, Army of Two, Blank of Blank. It's this more formal way of getting consumers involved emotionally in the possibilities and aspirational approach to what this video game might mean to them. Call of Duty is a perfect example, this sort of call to action – come and get involved. It's probably been overplayed to such a degree that it's diluted itself."

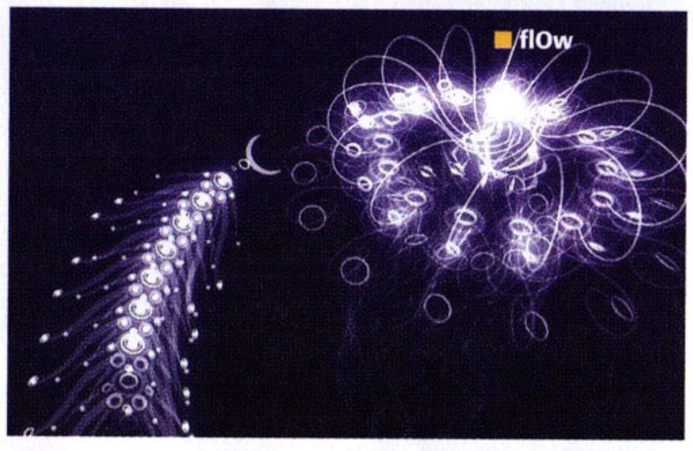
## Killer 7

"What was Killer number 6?"


Psychonauts

## Psychonauts

"Psychonauts is a really fantastic game. [The main character] is a sailor of people's psyches – it totally doesn't translate at all to regular human beings. You have no frame of reference to what it's going to be. What a great game that was, but I think a lot of its [commercial troubles] had to do with the marketing of it. It had brand legacy that it couldn't activate."


flOw

## DiRT, HAWX, flOw or Any Other Acronym Or Weird Use of Capital Letters

"I think the acronym game is a pretty funny one. I think there have been plenty of acronym-driven games that don't really mean anything to anybody other than the programmers. To gain popular media/cultural relevance, I don't recommend any of those groups. That's all I have to say on that."

## Mobile Suit Gundam: Gundam vs. Zeta Gundam

"To the Gundam fan, it doesn't really matter what it's called, they are going to buy it. On the other hand, it's something to point at in the store and laugh at if you don't know."

## A CLOSE CALL

It's not uncommon for a game to see a dramatic change in its name pretty late in the process. Last year, prior to Game Informer's cover story on Eidos' Kane & Lynch: Dead Men, word came down the wire from Eidos' European division that the game would be called Bad Bad Men. While that might have played effectively overseas, the bizarre connotations of the phrase in North America meant it wouldn't be a great global choice. Only days before GI's cover story went to the printers, the old name was scrapped in order to more faithfully convey the essence of the game in all regions.

# DATA FILE

**More News You Can Use**

### LET THE GAMES BEGIN

The World Cyber Games has announced its official lineup of tournament games – including debuts by Halo 3 and Guitar Hero III. Registration ends June 31 and this year's event includes over 14 PC and Xbox 360 team and individual titles (including old favorites such as Counter-Strike and WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne). For more info, head over to www.worldcybergames.com.

### HARRISON IN; ZUCKER OUT

Ex-Sony bigwig Phil Harrison has joined Infogrames as the company's president to try and bring Atari back from the brink. Harrison says part of this strategy will be via online games. Meanwhile, Midway's CEO David Zucker is out after five years.

### ACTIVISION'S CALL OF DUTY MMO

At a recent financial meeting, Activision CEO Bobby Kotick said that bringing Call of Duty and other franchises to the MMO space is something he foresees happening sometime in the future as a "natural evolution."

### LOST PLANET CONTINUES

Capcom just released the PS3 version of Lost Planet: Extreme Condition, but there's even more in store for fans. For a budget price of $29.99 on Xbox 360 and PC, you can pick up Lost Planet: Colonies, which features three new single-player modes, four extra multiplayer maps (including cross-platform play between the 360 and PC), and more. Lost Planet: Colonies comes out on May 27.

### MAD MAX RETURNS

God of War II's Cory Barlog has left Sony, but we haven't heard the last of him. *Newsweek's* N'Gai Croal reports that Barlog has hooked up with *Mad Max* director George Miller for a video game based on an as-yet-unfilmed Mad Max project (which won't star Mel Gibson).

# THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF WiiWare

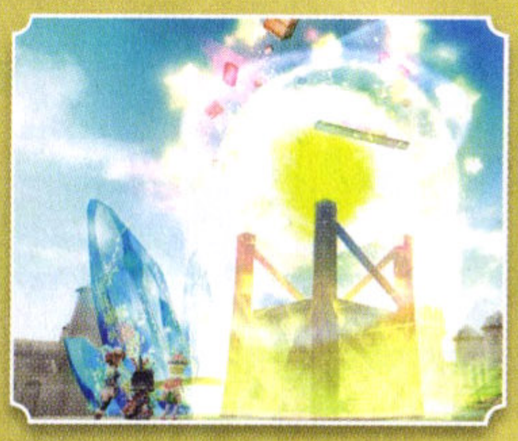
Thus far, most of the action in next-gen online has taken place on the Xbox 360, which links gamers around the world into Microsoft's groundbreaking Xbox Live service. While Halo multiplayer still rules the roost, the service has also seen the flowering of a new community based around Xbox Live Arcade, which offers a host of intriguing downloadable and casual games for purchase. Titles like Geometry Wars, Pac-Man Championship Edition, and the recent N+ have already become neo-arcade classics on the Xbox scene. For its part, Sony has offered up some bold original content for download, including Warhawk and the experimental Everyday Shooter.

Which begs the question: What has Nintendo been doing to address this burgeoning market? Well, May 12th will be the day that answers this question, as WiiWare, Nintendo's own outlet for new, original downloadable gaming content, launches. This service aims to provide gamers with new types of games, and developers with a way to experiment with new ideas in a low-cost environment. For around 500 to 1,500 Wii Points ($5 to $15, although very few games have official prices at press time), you'll be able to tap into a wide range of gaming experiences made by companies from upstarts 2D Boy to the venerable Square Enix. Game Informer has scoured the globe, trying to track down every WiiWare title we could get information on. To that end, these next three pages show you what the future of Wii online looks like. You might find it's a bit more interesting than you imagined.

## Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles – My Life as a King

**Developer:** Square Enix • **Release Date:** May 12

While many WiiWare titles are brand new franchises made by fledging game companies, Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles – My Life as a King lends a bit of star power to the WiiWare launch on May 12. While the graphics are definitely on par with the Crystal Chronicles tradition, the game takes a radical new approach to the Final Fantasy universe. Far from the usual Square Enix model of exploration-based RPGs, My Life as a King is more akin to a fantasy themed Sim City. As the king of the realm, you'll command warriors and villagers to carry out various tasks and military missions, helping you collect the raw material to build your kingdom into a regal powerhouse. Of course, as king, you'll be able to oversee and plan the construction of your castle and forts. This definitely looks to add an interesting new dimension to the Final Fantasy universe.



## Star Soldier R

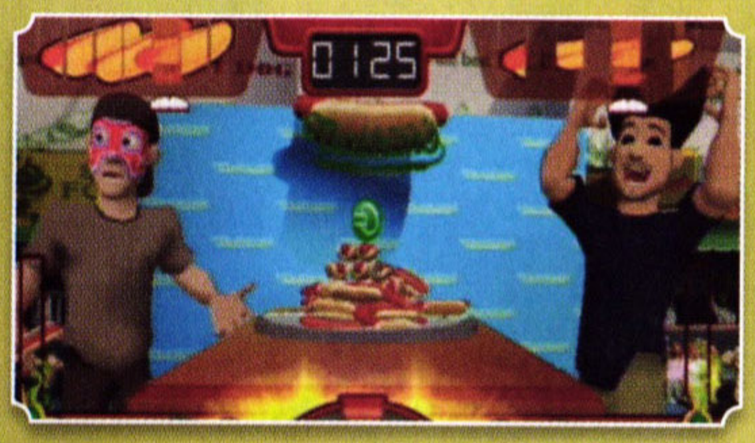
**Developer:** Hudson • **Release Date:** TBA

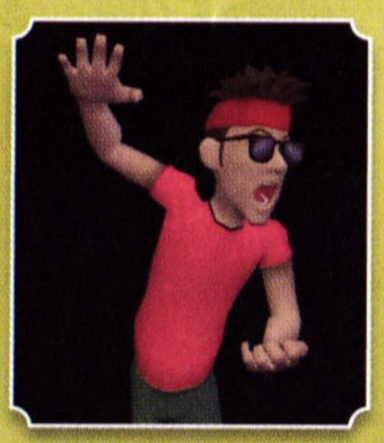
Hudson has a long tradition of creating great arcade experiences, and an equally long history with frequent partner Nintendo, so it's no surprise the company is an early adopter of the WiiWare service. Star Soldier R is the 12th edition in the stalwart shooter series. The game will offer the traditional vertical-scrolling space shooting that fans expect, although with a 3D graphical overhaul. Put it this way: this is old-school skill-based arcade action the likes of which we rarely see, so get ready to put your reflexes to the test. Similar to Pac-Man Championship Edition, the game will use a five-minute timed mode to see which gamers can create the most explosive, combo-laden run. The only bad news: For now, Star Soldier is only confirmed for Japan, but let's hope Hudson comes to its senses and releases it Stateside.

## Major League Eating

**Developer:** Mastiff • **Release Date:** May 12

Developer Mastiff brings us a licensed sports game that's well off the beaten path: Major League Eating. Yes, the same Major League Eating in which we've all seen surprisingly skinny dudes shove insane amounts of hot dogs and other goodies into their masticating maw. A little gross perhaps, but it sounds like just the kind of senseless fun that made Rayman Raving Rabbids and WarioWare into classics. In addition to two-player mode and online leader boards, Major League Eating promises novel uses of the Wii remote for eating moves such as "the cram," "the toss," and "the typewriter." Those sound like things that could get you arrested in some states, but color us intrigued.

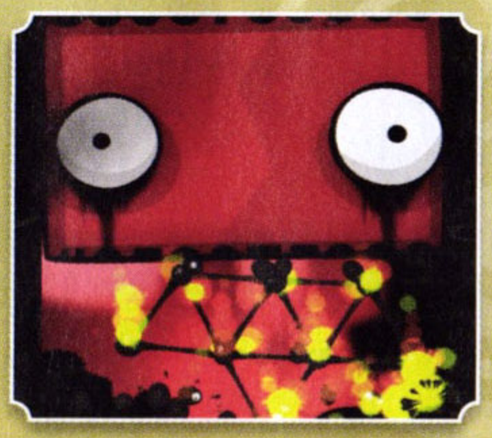


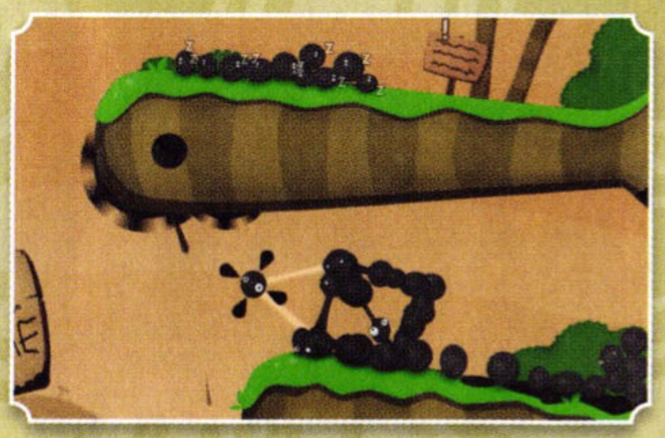



## World of Goo

**Developer:** 2D Boy • **Release Date:** Third Quarter

World of Goo exemplifies the classic garage development scenario. Two guys – in this case Kyle Gabler and Ron Carmel – started World of Goo as Tower of Goo, a prototype in the Experimental Games Project at Carnegie Mellon. Development was conducted largely in coffee shops (for the free wi-fi), and Gabler and Carmel have now turned this prototype into a full-fledged game to be distributed on WiiWare and PC. The basic premise is using balls of goo to build wobbly structures that eventually reach a pipe, which then sucks up the remaining goo. Although it's a strange premise, the gameplay has proven addictive enough to win awards for Technical Excellence and Design Innovation at the prestigious Independent Games Festival. Keep an eye on this one, it just might be the sleeper hit of the year.





## Everyone's Pokémon Ranch

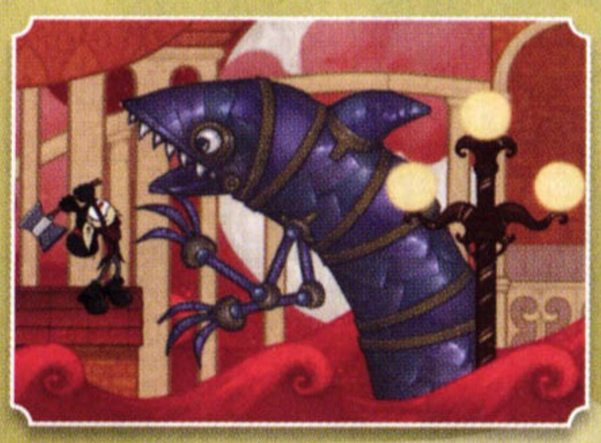
**Developer:** Nintendo • **Release Date:** TBA

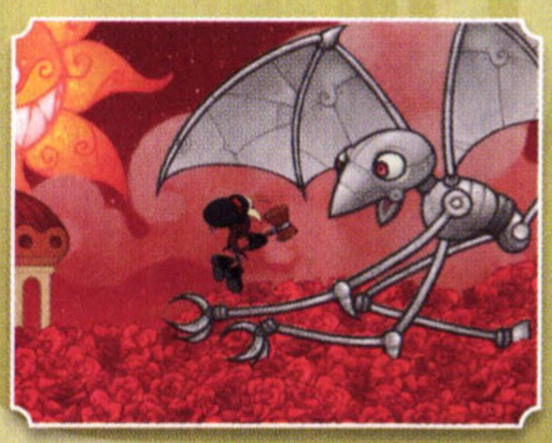
What would a new Nintendo gaming service be without a Pokémon title? One that failed to maximize profits, that's what! Never content to let Pokémaniacs go without another chance to spend their hard-earned dollars, Nintendo will be creating Everyone's Pokémon Ranch for WiiWare. At the ranch, you'll be able to store over 1,000 creatures from Diamond and Pearl, and even engage in exciting activities like...sitting around the campfire. You'll also be able to take and share photos with friends via an SD card. Not only that, but your Miis and Yukari (a character from previous games) can frolic and dance around with your fully 3D Pokémon. Given the somewhat slim features, there's been some speculation that this might be a free title or even end up being a channel on the Wii online service like the Mii Channel.

## Eternity's Child

**Developer:** Luc Bernard & Partners/Alten8 • **Release Date:** Second Quarter

This gorgeous-looking title was once bound for Xbox Live Arcade, but developer and cartoonist Luc Bernard and publisher Alten8 decided to switch over to WiiWare, making this an early coup for the service. The game is a side-scrolling platformer starring hero Angel, who explores and shoots his way through simply beautiful levels based on Bernard's hand-drawn artwork. The unique graphical look is definitely the big hook here, but the gameplay promises to be interesting as well. While the character's main movement is controlled with the nunchuk, the remote aims the onscreen reticle (or heart in this case). This opens up some nice possibilities for single-screen co-op, similar to what we recently saw in Super Mario Galaxy.





## Bruiser & Scratch

**Developer:** Steel Penny Games • **Release Date:** TBA

Bruiser & Scratch is the product of Steel Penny Games, a new studio based in the gaming hotbed of Austin, Texas and staffed by former members of Naughty Dog. This deep pedigree has produced a WiiWare title that combines the action, board game, and puzzle genres in an intriguing fashion. As either of the titular characters, you'll push pieces around on the game board, trying to solve a unique puzzle. As you combine pieces together, you'll eventually work your way down to only one piece remaining. Steel Penny dubs the game "the illegitimate son of mahjongg, solitare, and chess" which is about a good a summary as any for this interesting puzzler.

## Plättchen Twist n' Paint

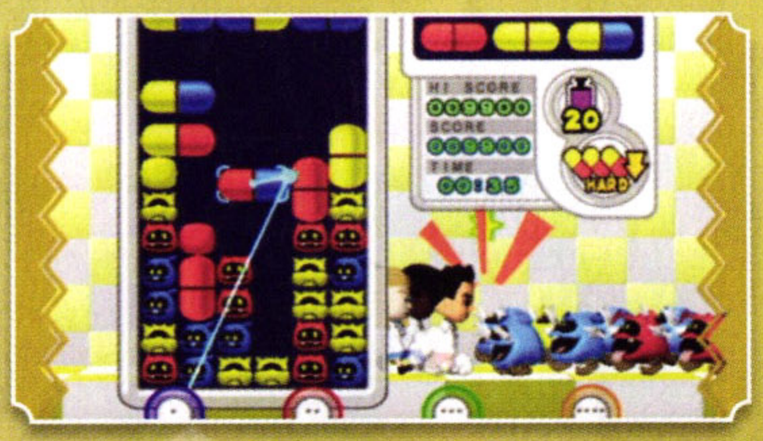
**Developer:** Bplus • **Release Date:** May 12

As one of the non-Nintendo titles that will be representing on May 12th, Plättchen Twist n' Paint has gotten quite a bit of attention on the Internet, and for good reason. Viennese developer Bplus has been crafting this title as a "puzzle-shooter" – a hybrid genre that promises to combine arcade speed with puzzle depth. The game is tailored to the Wii remote (you select the game pieces – "Plättchen" – and twist the remote to select a color from the wheel, then try to line up rows of like colors), but Bplus has delved deep into the Nintendo archives to allow special Wii Zapper moves and even Donkey Kong Bongo compatibility. Although no online is offered, up to 12 players can play at one time on the same console. We expect this to be the early cult hit of the WiiWare lineup.

## Dr. Mario (tentative title)

**Developer:** Nintendo • **Release Date:** TBA

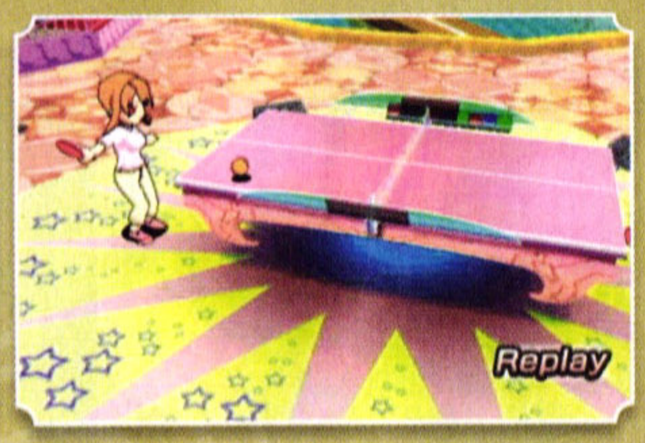
Every Nintendo console (or service, in this case) needs its own Dr. Mario title, and the WiiWare version of the game seems to be the most full-featured version of the classic puzzle game that Nintendo has released in years. Wii fans will be happy to have the ability to make their Mii stand on top of the board in place of the usual Nintendo characters. Most importantly, you'll also be able to play online with friends, as this is one of the few WiiWare titles to feature full Wi-Fi online support. If that's not your thing, you'll also be able to play with four-players cooperative or competitively in the included Virus Buster game (the variation on Dr. Mario recently included in Brain Age 2 on the DS). Expect this to be an early hot seller for the service.




## Okiraku Ping Pong

**Developer:** Arc System Works • **Release Date:** TBA

Hardcore fighting game fans will no doubt recognize this title's developer, Arc System Works, as the creators of the respected Guilty Gear franchise. However, Okiraku Ping Pong takes their experience in lightning-quick gameplay to a much different genre: table tennis. Although not confirmed for U.S. release, we have good reason to believe it will be making an appearance on the Stateside WiiWare service. The game will feature a minigame-centric Challenge mode, where you compete to unlock items, as well as more traditional singles and doubles modes. You'll also have the choice between a Wii Sports-style automatic movement control scheme and a more in-depth mechanic that allows you to move your character with the nunchuk.




## LostWinds

**Developer:** Frontier Development • **Release Date:** TBA

At first glance, LostWinds looks like a pretty standard action/platformer. A young lad with a strange name (Toku) must rid the world of an evil curse with a magical buddy (Enril). However, Frontier Development (which made the recent Thrillville: Off the Rails) has made something quite unique. Using remote moves similar to Okami, players will use Enril to "draw" streams of wind that float Toku through the levels and out of harm's way – think Kirby: Canvas Curse on DS. It's quite novel, and also notable for being a fully 3D experience that looks remarkably comparable to current disc-based Wii titles – no small feat given the size restrictions Nintendo has placed on Wii. For now, this is an encouraging sign that WiiWare can handle much more than just "casual" or puzzle titles.

## Mojipittan

**Developer:** Namco Bandai • **Release Date:** TBA

Mojipittan isn't well known in the States, but the popular word puzzle game (similar to Scrabble) has been around for years, starting life as an arcade title but seeing release on systems such as PlayStation 2, Game Boy Advance, DS, and PSP (where it was a day-one hit in Japan). We haven't confirmed this game for the U.S. service (although it's likely a Japanese WiiWare launch title), but here's to hoping. It's the type of classic, casual content that is perfect for WiiWare.

## Maruboushikaku (tentative title)

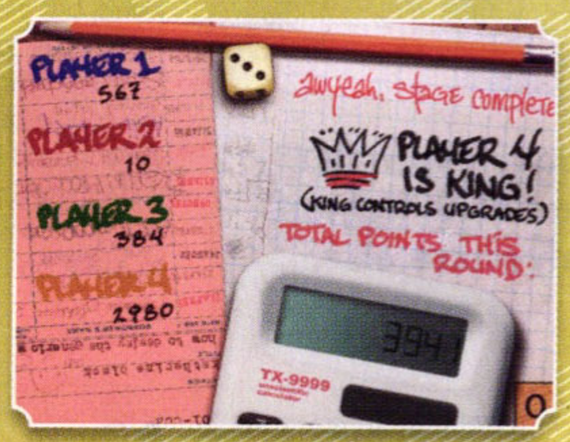
**Developer:** Nintendo • **Release Date:** TBA

Although little is known about Maruboushikaku (and Lord knows Nintendo isn't saying anything!), what we do know so far points to this being a puzzle title that should be well worth watching for in the future. The playfield is divided up into three sections, each of which is devoted to one of the three main "shapes" – circle, line, and square – that are the foundation of Maruboushikaku's gameplay. What's more exciting is the fact that you'll be able to play simulataneous three-player, with the action in each window affecting the others in real-time.

## Defend Your Castle

**Developer:** Xgen • **Release Date:** May 12

Defend Your Castle has earned a sizeable following on the Internet, where it began life as a free Flash-based browser title (still available at http://www.xgenstudios.com/play/castle). However, the game has received a significant changes in being ported to Wii, including four-player functionality and a major overhaul of the graphics. The basic gameplay is classicly simple Flash fare, as you use your Wii remote to grab and fling advancing troops away from your castle. However, earning points allows you to upgrade your castle walls, train archers who can defend from afar, and develop explosives and other military technologies.




## Minna de Puzzleloop (tentative title)

**Developer:** Nintendo • **Release Date:** TBA

Minna say what?! Although this game is currently saddled with a slightly unwieldy moniker (it means Puzzleloop for Everyone), this game should actually be familiar to DS fans, as a version of it has already been released for the system – the Touch Generations title Magnetica. The concept – easy to learn, difficult to master – of matching magnetic balls of like colors together worked great on the DS, allows you to quickly flick your balls around the screen. If it works as well with the Wii remote, this could be a must-play for WiiWare fans.

## Last Flight

**Developer:** Nibris • **Release Date:** First Quarter 2009

Nibris, a development studio in Krakow, Poland, is bringing Last Flight, one of the most unique titles announced thus far on WiiWare, to the service sometime in early 2009. The cel-shaded game, which combines the point-and-click mechanics of old-school graphic adventures with hack n' slash gameplay reminiscent of Capcom titles like Devil May Cry, revolves around the unlikely hero Larry Adelman, a pudgy, balding food critic. On a flight, he meets the mysterious Ana, a Romanian beauty who is traveling with her father's coffin on a trip to his final rest. The only problem? Well, Ana's father isn't really dead; he's a vampire. Also, he's escaped from his coffin and is infecting the passengers of the plane with vampirism. Can Larry and Ana escape their fate? Nibris promises many twists and turns, which will be ironed out in episodic releases, similar to what Valve has done with Half-Life. Vampires? Hot Romanian women? Nibris, you've got our attention.

## Pop

**Developer:** Nnooo • **Release Date:** Launch Window

Pop's title is truth in advertising. The game is about nothing but popping bubbles. While it's simple to be sure, developer Nnooo hopes that linking endless chain combos of like-colored bubbles will prove as addictive as titles like Rez or Geometry Wars. In one of three modes – Normal, Advanced, and the freeform, timer-less Chill – you'll quest through 16 looping levels of chaining bubbles. Of course, things become more complex when you begin to master the use of the game's power-ups and truly get in the zone. Although there isn't online multiplayer, the game will feature online leaderboards, and even send your friends taunting messages when you've bested their scores.

## Butterfly Garden

**Developer:** Autonomous Productions • **Release Date:** Spring 2009

The lower development costs of WiiWare make it friendly to more experimental ideas, and none of the titles announced so far are more esoteric than Autonomous Productions' Butterfly Garden. It's essentially a nature-oriented cross between Animal Crossing and Spore, allowing you to control, breed, and collect new types of butterflies (and send them to your friends via WiiConnect24) as well as help shape the ecosystem of the garden you occupy by contributing to the pollination of plants and flowers. The game won't be out until 2009, as the developers are working hard on laying the complex groundwork for this game's procedurally generated, ever-changing environment.

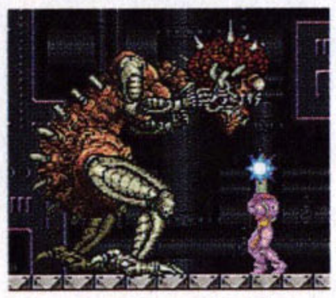
# the top 10 boss fights

***Boss fights are often the most memorable parts of any video game. These battles are awesome because they push your skills to the limit, catch you off guard, take your breath away, or simply represent the ultimate confrontation between good and evil. Here are our picks for the 10 best encounters with the characters you love to hate.***

## 1 Psycho Mantis (Metal Gear Solid)

**"You like Castlevania, don't you?" No boss battle has ever messed with anyone's mind quite like Psycho Mantis. His controller-moving and memory card-reading skills may seem to be mere parlor tricks by today's standards, but at the time they just made Psycho Mantis appear omnipotent. His main tactic was psychological warfare; gamers knew how to dodge attacks, but what are you supposed to do about a blank screen or the infamous controller port switch? It may not be a surprising choice for the number one boss fight of all time, but it is etched too deeply in our minds to be placed anywhere else.**

## 2 Mother Brain (Super Metroid)



It began by capitalizing on nostalgia, presenting a nearly identical fight as the first Metroid game. Then, when you thought you were victorious, the pulsating cybernetic matriarch rose from the ground and revealed her true form. You even thought you had a chance – until a single shot from her energy beam left you maimed and immobile. If it weren't for that "baby" metroid (and the kickass Hyper Beam), this would have been the end of Samus Aran.

## 3 Sephiroth (Final Fantasy VII)

If you're blood doesn't start pumping when you hear "One Winged Angel," then you haven't faced the wrath of Sephiroth. You're fighting an angelic incarnation of the man who incinerated your hometown, murdered your friend, and unleashed a potentially world-destroying catastrophe. For high stakes and a sense of dishing out justice, the battle against Sephiroth is top-notch. Also, let's not forget that his special summon attack eradicates the entire solar system before it even hits you.

## 4 Ganon (The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time)

Not to be confused with the human Ganondorf, this boar-like demon is truly Link's ultimate rival. While everyone loves the final scenes of Wind Waker, in terms of the actual confrontation, it's hard to top Ocarina's Ganon. Emerging from the rubble of his shattered tower and transforming into a hulking beast, Ganon was a terrifying and challenging (by Zelda standards) foe. Even when you managed to wear him down, it took the power of a bunch of sages to seal him away and contain his power.

## 5 Bowser (Super Mario 64)

Gone are the days when Bowser was just a slightly oversized turtle with a few hammers. This battle against the behemoth Bowser presented us with a new standard for epic boss fights, as the towering beast attempts to crush Mario underfoot and set his overalls ablaze. We especially loved the analog mechanic as we grabbed him by the tail and flung him around, making this the king of Mario boss fights to date.

## 6 Colossus #13 (Shadow of the Colossus)

Almost every boss in this game had a good shot at making this list, but the 13th colossus stands apart from the rest. As if riding alongside it and hopping on train robbery-style wasn't intense enough, you also needed to contend with the sense of vertigo that comes from flying high in the sky as the beast did barrel rolls to shake you off its back. It's not the biggest or the hardest boss in the game, but it was certainly the most fun.

## 7 Goro (Mortal Kombat)

He has four arms! Even better, he uses two of those arms to grab you while he wails on you with the other two! When you first saw how much damage his attacks did, you might have thought it was a glitch. Nope. He just wrecked you with ease, and beating him required timing, precision, and luck. There are other fighting games that perfected the brutally difficult boss (thank you, SNK), but Goro earns his place on this list through sheer might and fear factor. Four arms!

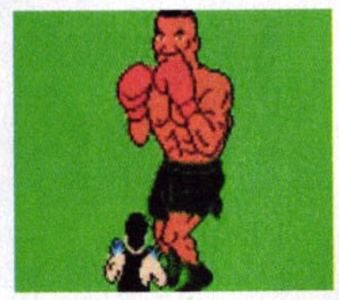
## 8 The Colossus of Rhodes (God of War II)

Usually boss battles are isolated fights that occur at the end of levels, but this guy *is* the level. Kratos was constantly fending off this ancient wonder during the course of the game's introduction, and it's surprising how something this big can just come out of nowhere. You know a fight is cool when the only way to defeat your opponent is to make his head explode from the inside.

## 9 Garrador (Resident Evil 4)

Of all of the tense battles in this game, there was nothing quite like the sense of being hunted in your first encounter with the vicious Garrador. These berserk and sound-sensitive gladiators could easily tear you apart with their metal claws, so you needed to drive them into a frenzy by ringing nearby bells. We still remember the terror in that brief moment when we realized the Garrador had pinpointed our location and was ready to strike.

## 10 Mike Tyson (Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!)

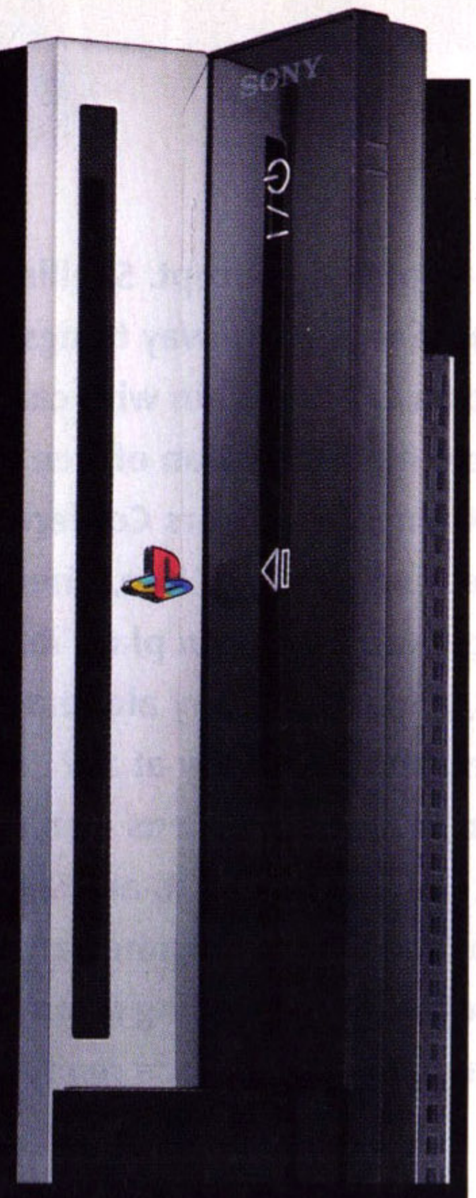


If you wanted real video game bragging rights on the playground, defeating Mike Tyson was the Holy Grail of NES achievements. One-hit knockdowns, lightning-quick punches, and extremely limited windows of opportunity made Kid Dynamite a true test of your reflexes, skill, and perseverance. Gamers everywhere mourn the day when that toolbox, Mr. Dream, took his place as the final bout.

news

# SPACES ARE FILLING FAST

## HARD DRIVE INSTALLS A PROBLEM FOR PS3?



It may seem like you'll never come close to filling up that 80GB hard drive on your PS3, but you may be more crunched for space than you think. Devil May Cry 4 is only the latest title for the system that requires you to install a multi-gigabyte file onto the hard drive before you can play, with others requiring just as much space without the need for an install. When you combine the growing list of games requiring hard drive installs with music, photos, demos, PlayStation Network titles, PSP/PSone titles, downloadable content, and movies (which Sony wants to make available in the future), it makes you wonder just how long your hard drive will last before it's filled up.

We talked to Eric Lempel, director of PlayStation Network operations, who told us that "at this time it's not much of a concern." Developers predominately use the data installs – which can get as big as 4.7GB in the case of Devil May Cry 4 – to cut down on load times and make the games run smoother. "Ultimately, it's up to the developer," explains Lempel regarding the installs, "but we do have some guidelines around how you use it and what you can do with it. This is an option for our developers, and we see it as an advantage we have over our competition."

Lempel says Sony offers tools that could make these installs become a thing of the past, but they could still continue to be a trick of the trade used by developers. "It's very possible," he told us. "I'm not a 100 percent sure how that would play out. I think in some cases people will find new uses for it and in some cases they won't need it at all."

For those worried about space, Lempel suggests swapping out the system's hard drive or using external storage methods like USB drives. The PS3's user manual explains how to replace the hard drive (the system will remain under warranty if you do this), and it accommodates 2.5-inch internal SATA hard drives. Prices for new internal drives range from $40 to $400, depending on size and speed.

Regardless of these alternative options, Sony – as Microsoft had to do in the past – will have to deal with the fact that neither console owners or the systems themselves will likely be equipped for the hard drive space required to handle all the multimedia download plans that the companies have in store. Sony may find that some PS3 owners are not happy that the vaunted 10-year lifespan Sony envisions for its console will require a bit more upkeep than they originally thought.

### PS3 Space Requirements

Here's a list of some of the PlayStation 3 games that require large amounts of hard drive space. Not all of them require an actual install on the hard drive (and thus will not permanently take up space when you're not playing the game). Game Informer contacted a number of publishers of upcoming titles, including the likes of Grand Theft Auto IV, but no company told us whether or not their games would require a hard drive install.

Capcom's Devil May Cry 4 has made waves with its 4.7GB required install, which takes an unusual 20-plus minutes

- **Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion** (Game of the Year) – 4.6GB space required
- **Devil May Cry 4** – 4.7GB 20-minute install
- **Full Auto 2 Battlelines** – 1.7GB space required
- **Spider-Man 3** – 2.3GB five-minute install
- **Heavenly Sword** – 2GB space required
- **Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds** – 5GB five-minute install
- **Skate** – 2.5GB five-minute install
- **WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2008** – 2.3GB space required
- **F.E.A.R.** – 2.5GB space required
- **NBA 07** – 3GB ten-minute install
- **NBA 08** – 1.5GB space required
- **Lost** – 3.6GB six-minute install
- **Conflict: Denied Ops** – 2.5GB space required
- **Beowulf** – 2.5GB five-minute install

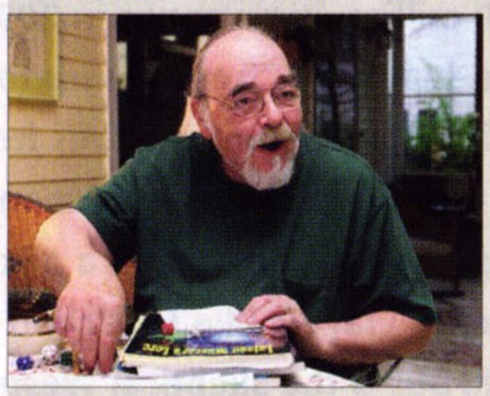
# THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

## QUOTE

**"We feel that your past statements – including false claims about content in our games – make any collaboration with you impossible."**

– EA tells lawyer and all-around ignoramus Jack Thompson to get lost after Thompson offers to help EA get rid of Take-Two chairman Strauss Zelnick should EA take over the company



## BAD

Recently video gamers lost two inspirations. Dungeons & Dragons co-creator Gary Gygax (pictured) passed away at the age of 69. Although a pen and paper RPG, D&D was vastly influential to the world of video games, and our industry owes a debt of gratitude to Gygax and his contributions. Weeks later, 90-year-old sci-fi novelist Arthur C. Clarke passed at his home in Sri Lanka. Among his many works are the novel inspiration and co-written screenplay for *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

## GOOD

Sony is pulling out all the stops for two of its biggest titles. God of War: Chains of Olympus is out, but in June the game will also come with a special red PSP bearing Kratos' menacing visage along with a UMD copy of *Superbad* and a coupon to download Syphon Filter: Combat Ops. The bundle will retail for $199. Not to be outdone, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots is coming packaged with an 80GB PS3 and a new Dualshock 3 wireless rumble controller for $499 on June 12 for the game's release.

## UGLY

Bullies rarely apologize, but that's exactly what Rockstar has had to do for Bully: Scholarship Edition for the 360, which was riddled with framerate issues and game-crashing bugs. A patch is available to deal with the problems.

## BAD

Trust us, we're all down for a Wii remake of GameCube's Resident Evil Zero. So why does Capcom of Japan say that the game – which will appear across the Pacific this summer – won't be coming to the U.S.? Who knows. Meanwhile, we're up to our necks in third-party Wii shovelware over here.

## BAD

Titan Quest developer Iron Lore Entertainment was forced to close its doors due to "several unrelated events which resulted in Iron Lore being unable to secure funding for its next project," reads a statement from the company.

## UGLY

Eidos' parent company, SCi, has cancelled 14 projects as part of a massive restructuring plan. Although no specific titles were mentioned, the Tomb Raider, Hitman, and Deus Ex franchises should still be a part of the company's future plans.

**To most of the Western game audience, free games are a foreign concept. Shelling out a few hundred bucks for a console (or more for a gaming PC) and up to $60 per game is just the way things have been since the dawn of the medium. Free games are often looked upon with suspicion or lumped in with casual, soccer mom puzzle games. But in several Asian markets, predominantly South Korea, the perception of free games is completely reversed.**

**During a keynote address at last September's Austin Game Developers Conference, one of the top free game makers, South Korea's Nexon, flaunted some impressive numbers. Min Kim, director of U.S. game operations, touted that approximately 25 percent of the entire South Korean population plays its MapleStory and KartRider titles. The company raked in $230 million in revenues in 2005, and MapleStory alone accounts for $16 million a month. How is it possible for these supposed "free" games to make any money at all?**

**For Nexon, 85 percent of its total revenue comes from microtransactions – small in-game items that mostly sell for no more than a couple of dollars. Nexon, and many companies like it, are taking dead aim on North America. Using microtransactions, advertising support, or a mix of the two, free games are starting to gain traction in the States – so much so that major players like EA and id Software are getting in on the action. Companies are lining up to hand out a free lunch, but is the skeptical Western gaming populace ready to accept?**

# the business of free games

## MAPLESTORY

Nexon started up in the mid-'90s, creating what it claims is the first graphic MMO, Nexus: The Kingdom of the Winds. The game was crafted as an online, subscription-based product to combat piracy. But it wasn't long before this online-only model was slightly tweaked in a new direction. "We actually pioneered this item-selling microtransaction business model in the late '90s, early 2000s with a game called BnB and a game called QuizQuiz," says Nexon's Kim. "Then it all just started taking off with MapleStory."

This manga-style 2D MMORPG has garnered 81 million users worldwide since its South Korean debut in 2003. After several years of growth in the Asian markets, MapleStory made the jump to North America in 2006 and currently boasts 5.3 million registered members – most of which are teens.

Since the game is free to play, no credit card information is required at sign up, effectively opening up the MMO space to a new younger demographic. "In terms of MMOs, everybody says they skew old. A lot of the people in the industry assume it's because older people like MMOs," says Kim. "That's not the reason. It's because younger kids don't freakin' have credit cards."

Of course, Nexon wouldn't make enough to stay afloat if their target audience didn't have some kind of alternate payment method for purchasing items like custom clothing, accessories, and pets for their online avatars. Enter the Nexon game card. Widely available at retailers like Target, Best Buy, and 7-Eleven, the cards enable younger gamers to pay cash and transfer the money into games like MapleStory, Mabinogi, and KartRider. In February 2007, the first month after cards appeared in stores, they helped bring in $1.6 million in virtual sales. By June, monthly sales rose to $2.6 million, and Nexon says it continues to rise.

## BATTLEFIELD HEROES

EA, a company known for large-scale distribution, has been monitoring the growing free games market and is hoping to capitalize on it with its first "Play 4 Free" release, this summer's Battlefield Heroes. "DICE decided to go with the Play 4 Free model for Battlefield Heroes because we had seen the success of this model in South Korea in recent years, and were simply curious as to whether it could work in the west," says senior producer Ben Cousins. "I think it is more the DICE studio's sense of experimentation and interest in new business models and ways of reaching customers which is driving this, rather than anything intrinsic in the Battlefield games, or anything specifically driven by the greater EA."

With an extremely simple signup and a light, cartoony graphical style, DICE is aiming directly at a previously inaccessible type of casual gamer while still promising hardcore Battlefield fans the same level of quality and challenge found in their retail releases. While the Battlefield series has featured in-game ads before, Heroes is taking a decidedly different approach. "In-game advertising in Battlefield 2142 was extremely successful," says Cousins. "But we don't expect exactly the same kind of system to work for Battlefield Heroes, as we have a fictional cartoon world, for which billboards and posters advertising modern products wouldn't fit."

Instead, ads will be confined to the Heroes webpage and match loading screens. Microtransactions will include unique items like hats, glasses, and facial hair, in addition to so-called "convenience items." These include features like a limited-time experience multiplier that allows players to catch up to buddies who have more free time to level grind.

## POWER CHALLENGE

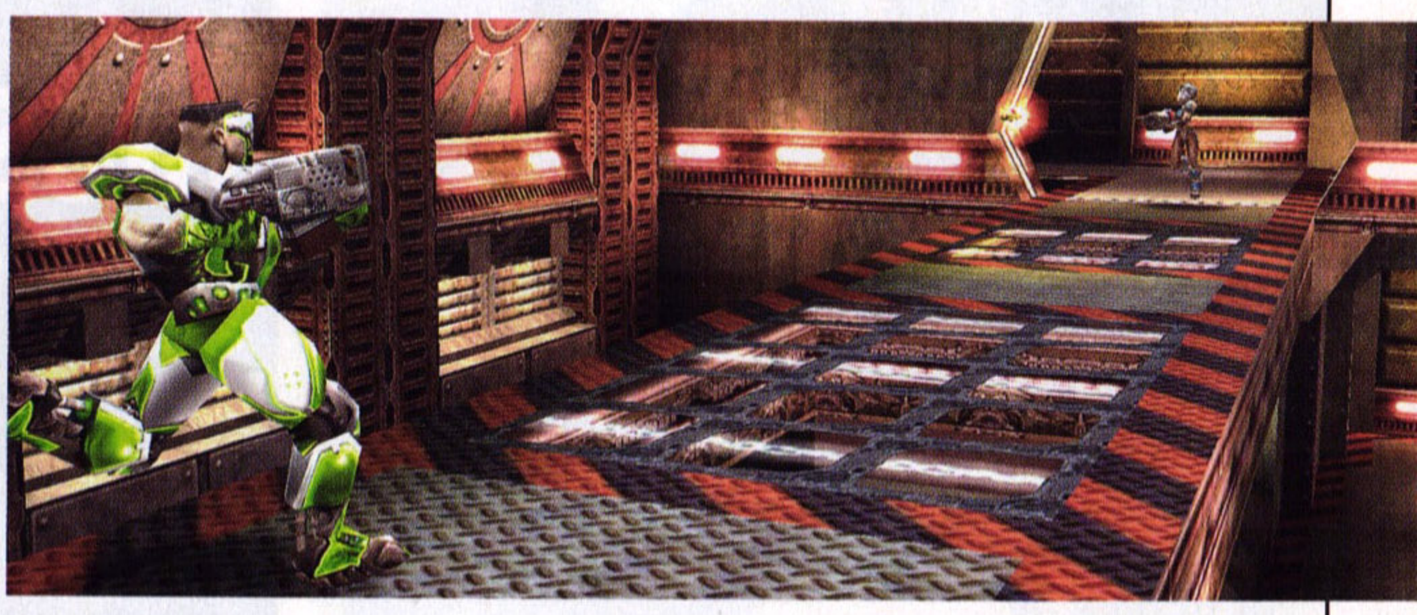
Swedish game maker Power Challenge uses a mix of in-game advertising, microtransactions, and a premium club membership to support free competitive online soccer matches and management sims, named Power Soccer and Management Zone, respectively. Since its founding in 2001, the company has experimented with several different business models before settling on its current cocktail.

"Today we have grown to feel that there are a couple of different ways to skin the cat," says Power Challenge CEO Johan Christenson. "We believe strongly that you can have a subscription type of package but do it on a voluntary basis. So most of the free features are common features that you need to have fun in a game. And then, of course, we and many other companies are trying to find those things that people are willing to pay for."

The $6-a-month club membership for more hardcore users grants higher priority access into game rooms, unlocks a team emblem editor, and allows more tactics options, among other things. The management game offers premium items for sale like special shoes and soccer balls for your team, and the action game will soon follow suit. In-game billboards from companies like Dell and Adidas appear around the stadiums, in addition to brief ads that play during loads and peer-to-peer initialization. "We believe that 2008 will be the year where the agencies look more seriously towards in-game advertising as TV numbers are starting to go down," says Christenson. "If you want to find that 15- to 25-year-old crowd we certainly have a nice way to reach them."

While 750,000 active worldwide users is nothing to scoff at, Power Challenge plans to expand the variety of sports it offers as well as expand the feature sets of its current titles. "We've learned that the games require more to truly hit the level that we want to hit," says Christenson. "So 2008 is hopefully going to be a big year for us to hit the trigger on getting the big distribution going."

## QUAKE LIVE



Battlefield won't be the only established shooter franchise making the leap to the free market. Id is readying a revamped, in-browser version of Quake III Arena called Quake Live for release this summer. "Quake III is still considered probably the best pure deathmatch game out there," says executive producer Marty Stratton. "And John [Carmack] thought with the new things happening in the online space – the opportunities for distribution and what's happening with advertising – that it'd be an interesting experiment for us to try."

Revenue will be completely dependent on website banner ads, in-game billboards, loading screen ads, and sponsored events all facilitated through ad firm IGA Worldwide. To entice longtime fans back into the fold, all of the classic maps will return with a slight facelift. "There are really nine years of play testing built into a lot of this stuff," says Stratton. "So we have this wealth of knowledge that the community's given back to us, and we actually have brought a lot of those people into our early beta program. We're going through and making tweaks to the levels, changing item placement, or even really drastically changing geometry."

After much discussion, id has decided to forego microtransactions altogether. "We're not going to get you on the site and say, 'Hey, you need to spend 25 cents for a rocket launcher,'" says Stratton. "For us it's enabling a much larger group to play without putting all of those roadblocks in front of them. It literally is as simple as going to quakelive.com, registering, and you're off and playing."

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

You can safely bet that EA and id aren't the only big companies testing the waters of free games. With the low cost of distribution, ease of access to consumers, protection against piracy, and fresh approach to moneymaking, we'd be shocked if there weren't at least a couple more familiar franchises going free in 2008. While advertisers will still need convincing in this new medium, perhaps the toughest challenge is trying to discern just what users will pay for. "It's definitely a minority that is paying for these items," says Nexon's Kim. "If a game is doing five to ten percent it's doing pretty good." Power Challenge's Christenson agrees. "You have those first few seconds to catch that user. With all of the choices that the user has today you've got to diligently guide that user through and ultimately find that trigger for those things they would want to pay for. It keeps everybody in the publishing business on their toes. So it should be an interesting year for sure." ■■■

# LOOSE TALK

## Hot Gaming Gossip

### SONY'S Wii-MOTE?

Sony is no stranger to courting casual gamers, whether you're talking about the EyeToy or quiz game Buzz. First the company tried to steal Nintendo's thunder by introducing motion control functionality to its PS3 controller, now Sony is working on a new device internally being called the Waggle. This controller will likely be packed in with a game (like Buzz is), and Sony is currently talking with a number of companies about titles for the controller. Although the full functionality of the controller is unknown at this point, it will contain motion sensing. Unlike the Wii remote, however, Sony's Waggle will not require a sensor bar or be based on IR. How this differentiates or expands upon the motion control of the PS3 controller is unknown at this time.

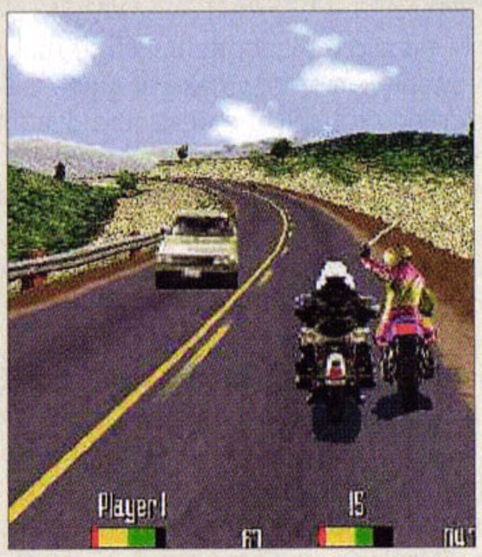
■ Sony's got a new dedicated controller in the works with similar functionality to Nintendo's Wii remote, shown here

### ACTIVISION CLEANING HOUSE

It's not unusual for a merger to cause an overhaul from within the new company, and that's exactly what appears to be happening over at Activision. *Variety* reports that all future projects at Vivendi's Sierra division are being reviewed. Although games set to come out this year such as Ghostbusters, Prototype (shown), and Tim Schafer's Brütal Legend are all safe, projects once scheduled beyond that are up in the air.

### THE RETURN OF ROAD RASH?

Last month word went around that EA was working on bringing back one of its old properties with the help of The Darkness developer Starbreeze Studios. Now perhaps a clue to this mystery game has been handed down via an unusual source. Skid Row singer Sebastian Bach recently told a radio show that one of his songs "just got picked up for some video game – Road Rage or Road Rash or something like that." Sebastian's involvement with a possible new Road Rash sounds plausible, especially given the series' early uses of licensed music with the likes of Soundgarden. Whether this is the same project as the one Starbreeze is tackling, however, is another question.



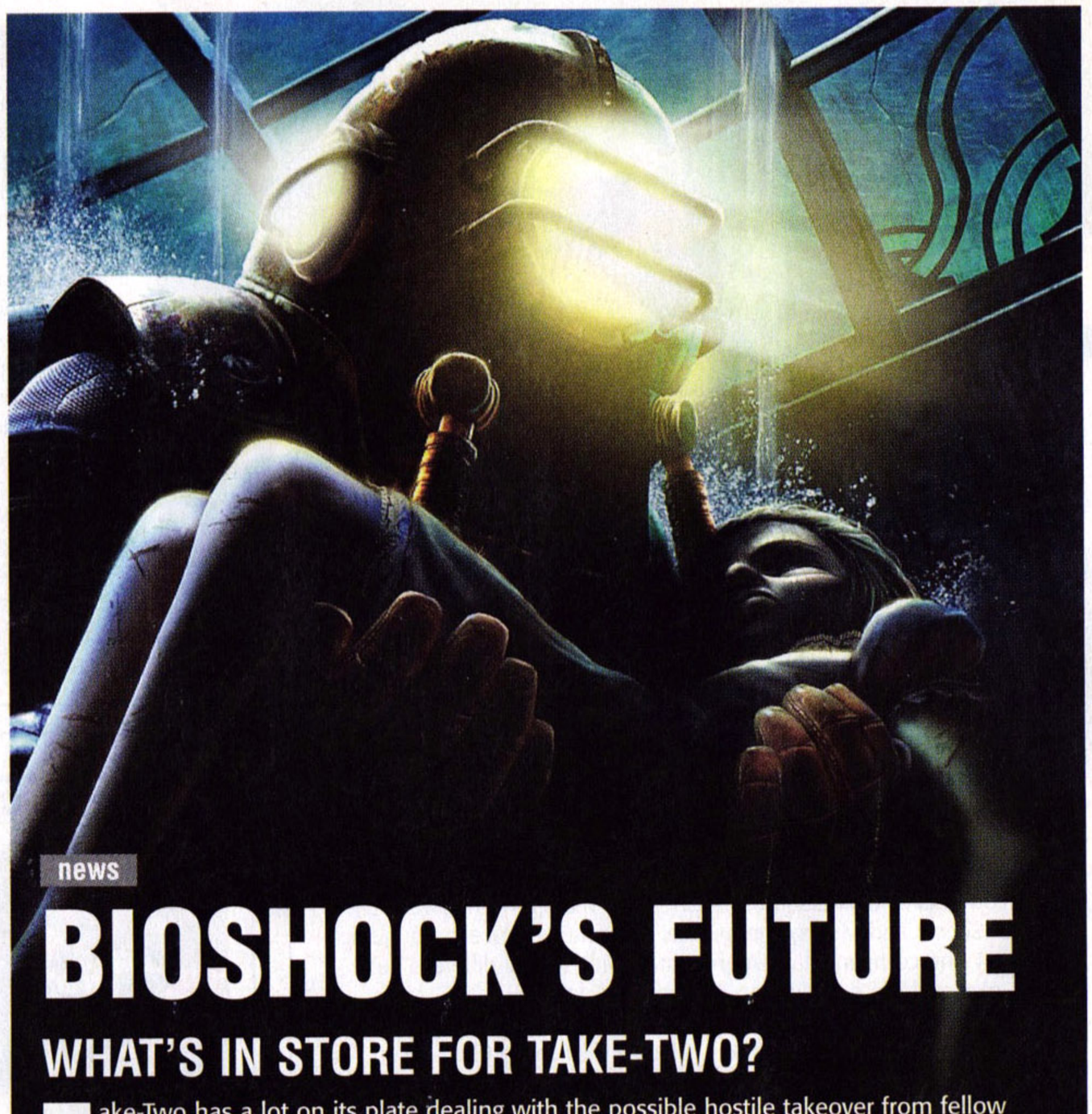

*Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.*

# NAME THAT GAME

## Test Your Sight

Some gamers out there will swoon for anything Japanese, and this is one of many instances where the rest of us get to point and laugh at their foolishness. This 3DO interactive anime game/movie plays like Dragon's Lair, and it takes about 15 minutes to get through. That's it. There's nothing much else to say about it, so quit stalling and tell us what game it is.

(Answer on page 28)



news

# BIOSHOCK'S FUTURE

## WHAT'S IN STORE FOR TAKE-TWO?

Take-Two has a lot on its plate dealing with the possible hostile takeover from fellow publisher Electronic Arts (see last issue, page 14 for more), but until then it's business as usual. During a call with analysts in which it reported a first fiscal quarter loss of $38 million, Take-Two chairman Strauss Zelnick ran down some news from the company, including upcoming games and some unfortunate delays.

It's no surprise or secret that Xbox 360's hit BioShock is getting a sequel, and Zelnick made it official. No particular platforms were mentioned, but one big surprise is that internal development studio 2K Marin – and not original developers 2K Boston (formerly Irrational Games) – will be handling this new BioShock title. However, 2K Boston creative director Ken Levine will have a hand in the project. The game will release sometime between August 1 and October 31 of 2009.

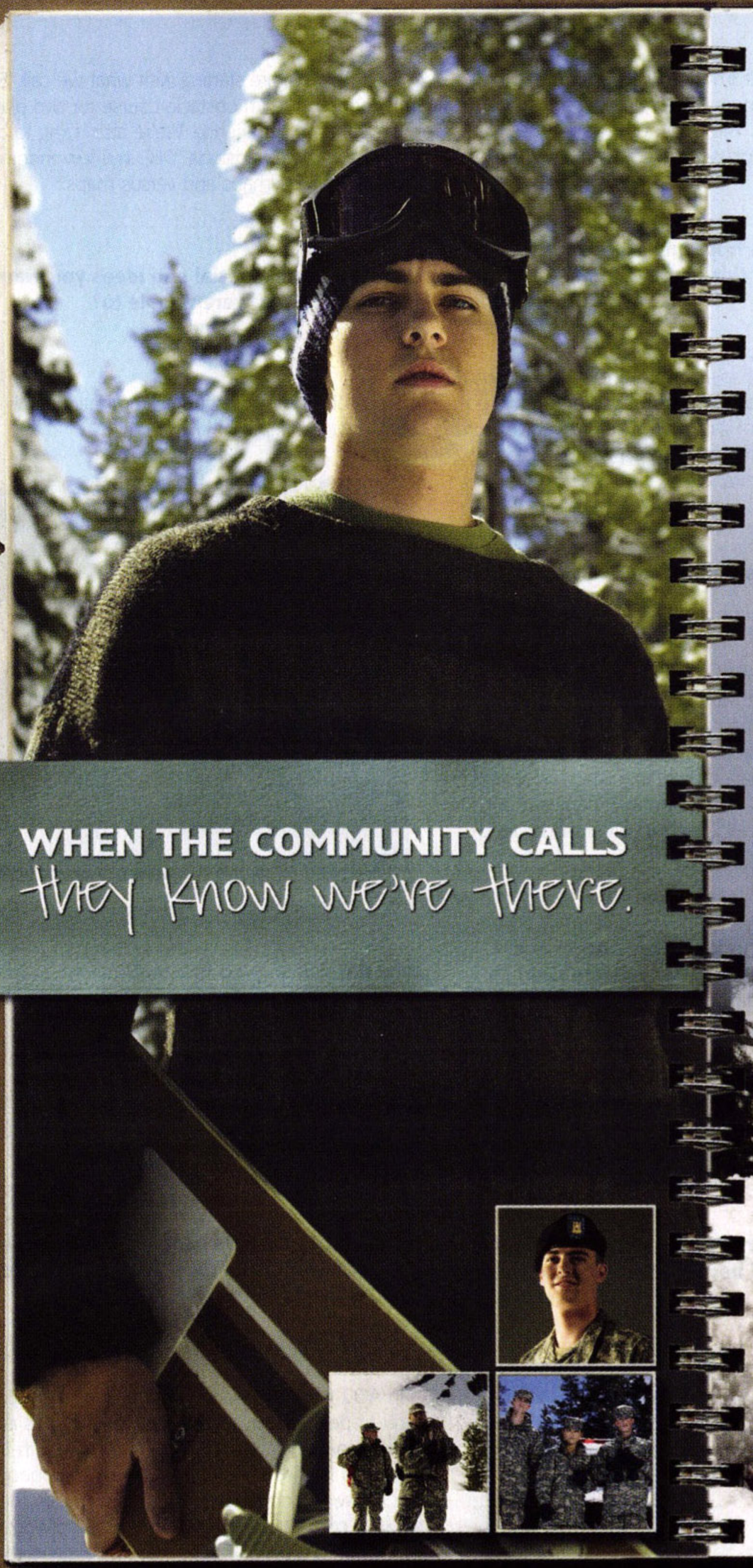
Before the next BioShock comes out we'll see a few already promised Take-Two games – assuming they aren't delayed ever further than they already have been. Borderlands has pushed back its fall/late 2008 date to 2009. Take-Two states this is to give the game more development time as well as "better balance" among its triple-A titles.

Meanwhile, racer Midnight Club: Los Angeles has been postponed until fall, while the outlook for 2K Sports' All-Pro Football is decidedly worse. A sequel to last year's title will not come out this year, and the company says that it is evaluating whether or not to continue with the franchise at all.

Despite All-Pro's possible demise, in general Zelnick promised a future for Rockstar's major series, although he wouldn't comment in particular on Max Payne when asked, instead quoting an '80's swill wine commercial: "We will sell no wine before its time."

### The New Gang In Town

A hostile takeover from EA isn't the only shady deal that Take-Two's got going down. The company announced the acquisition of Mafia developer Illusion Softworks – which is now being renamed 2K Czech. Mafia II is slated to hit multiple consoles and PC in 2009.



Recently, we were hit with a huge blizzard and the city was snowed in. The police couldn't get around, but they still needed to do their job.

So we were called out in our Humvees and we patrolled for them. We assisted with the police functions, and it was a great experience.

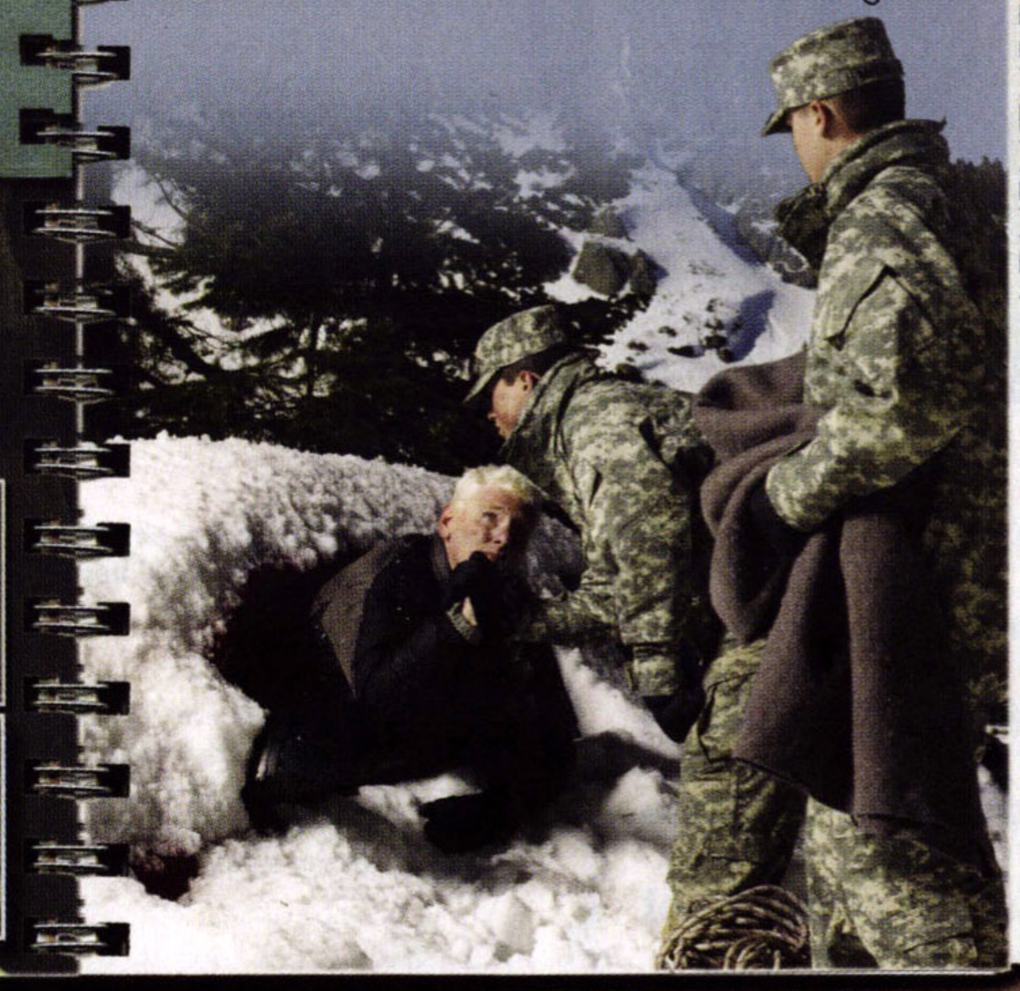
Helping out like that gives you ownership in your community. You're not just another person on the street. If the community calls on you, they know you're there. It's an awesome feeling.

**WHEN THE COMMUNITY CALLS**
they know we're there.









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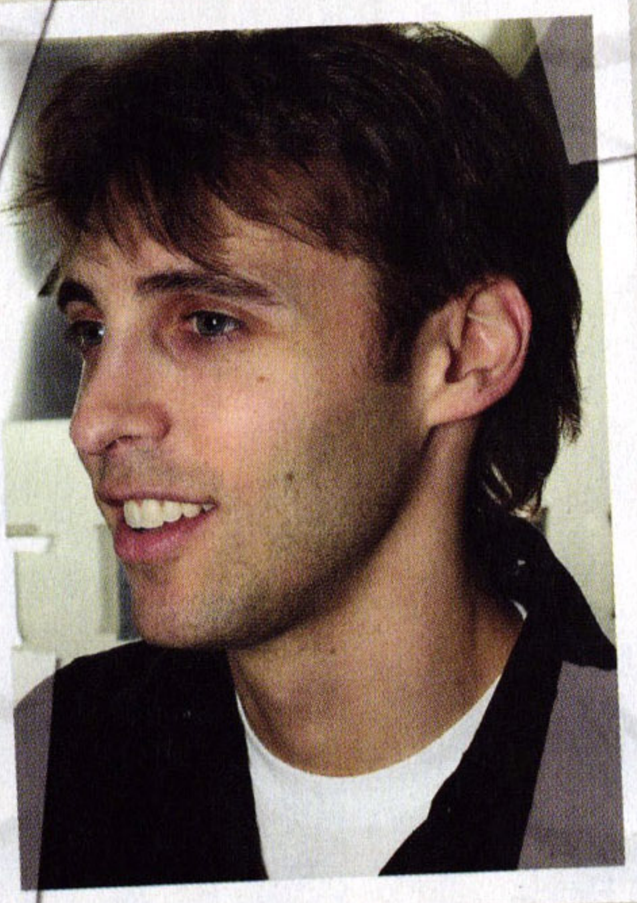
Afterwords

# ARMY OF TWO

Reid Schneider
Executive Producer,
EA Montreal



**Army of Two's blend of co-op gameplay and over-the-top action has earned it a following amongst fans of hardcore shooters, but the game is not devoid of questionable game design decisions. This month, GI readers ask executive producer Reid Schneider about some of their hang-ups with the game.**

**How much did you change the game from the original version to the retail version on store shelves now?**
**– thedoc.duc**

■ A decent amount changes from the initial vision of the project to the final release. Anytime we create something from scratch this is to be expected. The core of the game though, which is a game completely focused on co-op, did not change.

**Did you obtain inspiration from any other specific games or movies to make this game co-op?**
**– theorangebox**

■ Definitely, we took a lot of inspiration from movies like *Bad Boys*, *The Rock*, even the *Miami Vice* movies. We also looked at a variety of different types of games in different genres from RPGs to shooters, as well as the great co-op games of the past including Double Dragon, Contra, etc.

**With a co-op experience so great, why was the single-player AI so weak?**
**– babychance**

■ I don't think the single-player AI is weak per se, however he requires more management than a game like Gears of War, Call of Duty 4, or Halo. We wanted a partner AI that would feel like playing with another human. I think now when people play with a partner AI though, they don't want any management responsibility for him. We'll be closely evaluating gamer feedback for how to craft future games.

**Why did EA chose to cut the local play option and make it a requirement to have two separate Gold Live Accounts? Would they update this in a future patch?**
**– Super Pat Balls**

■ In terms of the Gold Accounts, this is something we're looking at with the team at EA Online. As you can see with our Playstation 3 version it can be played by anyone.

**Was there anything you couldn't include in the final game that you think could have made the game better?**
**– thehouse**

■ I don't think you can ever look back at a game and not want to change things. I think we have a lot of features in Army of Two, but it would have been cool to use some of them more often. For example, it could have been cool to use the heat-sinking stingers in a boss fight, or use co-op snipe more.

**If there were one thing you could change about the game what would it be?**
**– guildwarsfan**

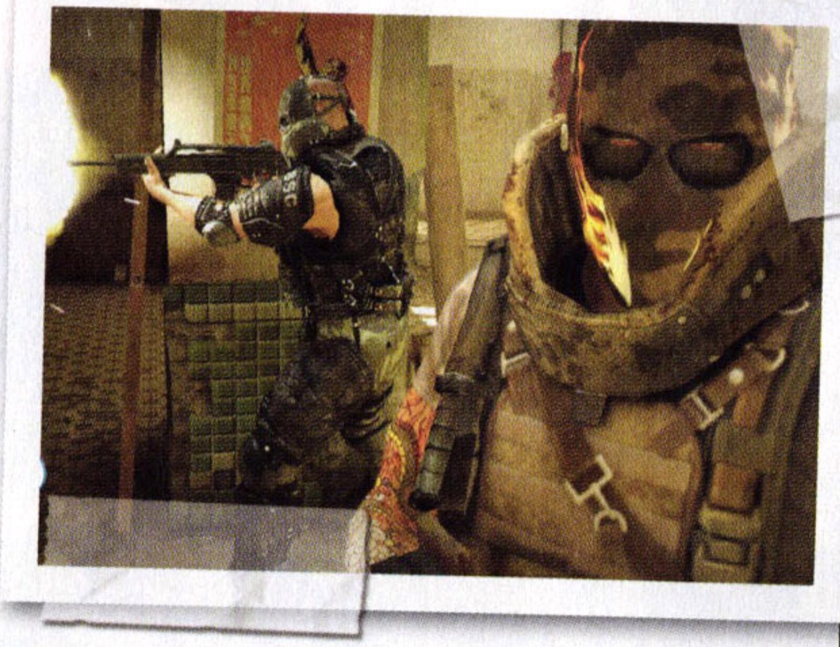
■ I think we began hyping the game really early. The expectations for the game also skyrocketed as well. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but if the game is not everything to everyone some people can feel disappointed. I also really want to streamline the versus mode for future iterations and make it easier to join a game.

**I've heard you're planning to offer an "avalanche" of downloadable content. Can you share any specifics?**
**– aubradley84**

■ Definitely. We are starting with what we call "SSC Challenge." This mode is like an obstacle course for two players. It's really different as an experience. We're also going to be coming out with some more traditional DLC in a few months: traditional campaign mode maps and versus maps.

**Were there any special gun ideas you wanted to include in the game, but weren't able to?**
**– supersnake**

■ Not really. I think the gun customization really blew people away with the depth of it.



**Why did you ship so few multiplayer maps? Only including four is kind of a rip off.**
**– Ninjadamus**

■ We would have liked to ship with more of them, but it was a question of how many we could build to the right standard of quality and within the development time.

**Why can't I play with people from other regions? I have a lot of friends in Europe that I cannot play the game with, which is frustrating.**
**– wingman**

■ In AO2 we have many synchronized animations that require peer-to-peer (deterministic) networking. This is less of a problem in co-op Mode (as you tend to play with friends), but in versus mode, when you're playing with people you might not know, performance is brought down by the guy with the slowest connection. In a deterministic networking model, the person with the slowest connection brings everyone down to his/her level. Now, if we take that one step further and have you playing with people on another continent, you could have really slow connections and high lag. We did this to limit lag potential.

**When I play versus online and someone from the other team bails because we're winning, we get nothing – no Achievements, no cash, no stats. Is this something you plan to fix?**
**– dagunna77**

■ Yes, we're actively fixing this. It will be part of the first title update.

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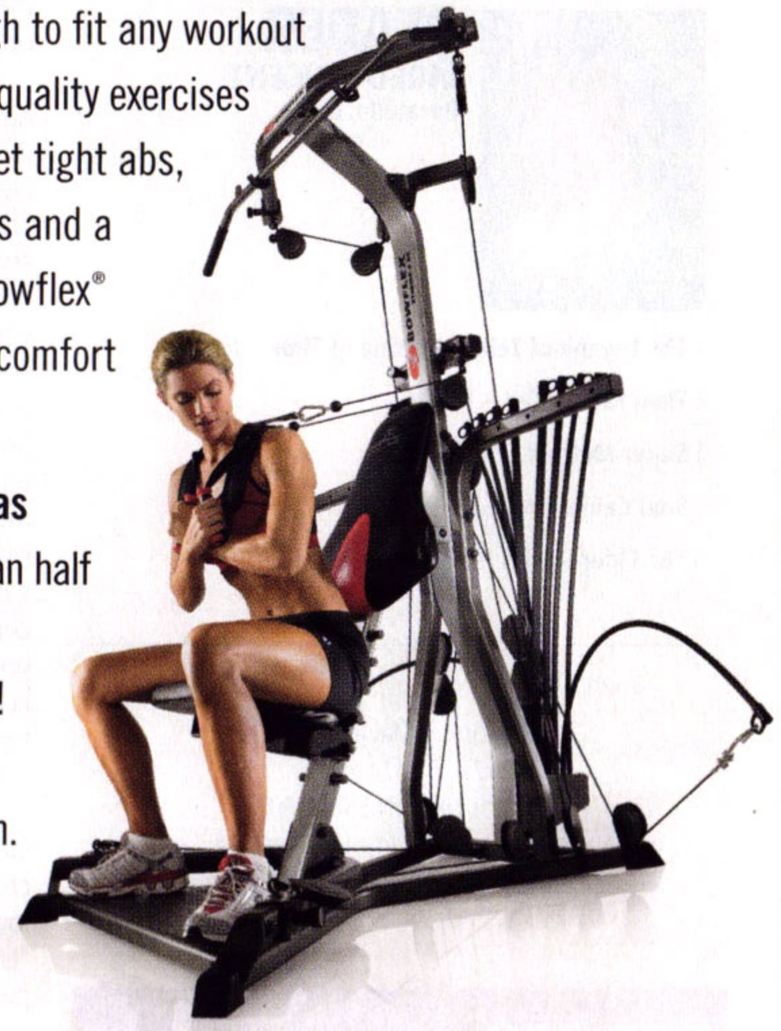

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## TOP FIVES

**Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers**

### DEVELOPER
**BRAD WARDELL**
**President and CEO of Stardock Corporation, Executive Producer, Sins of a Solar Empire**

1 Total Annihilation – PC
2 Sid Meier's Civilization – PC
3 The Faery Tale Adventure – Amiga
4 Star Control II – PC
5 Duke Nukem 3D – PC

### READER
**JARED VINCENT**
**Pocatello, ID**

1 The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time – N64
2 Final Fantasy VII – PSone
3 Super Metroid – SNES
4 Soul Calibur II – GC
5 The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind – PC

*Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:*

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

## TOP TEN

**Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...**

### Top 10 Unused Cover Headlines (McNamara Brand)

10 Gear up for spring!
9 Hide yer Gear Mamas... Here comes the Gear Daddy
8 It's Gear-8!
7 Gears for Fears
6 Better graphics? Check. Better story? Check. "Check" it out!
5 The COG are in motion!
4 It's Fenix, right?
3 In the rear with the Gear
2 Buy Unreal Engine 3!
1 Hocus-Locust! The magic is back!

Name That Game Answer: Strahl

news

# EXCEEDING YOUR REPUTATION

## WEBSITE GAMESTRATA TRACKS IT ALL

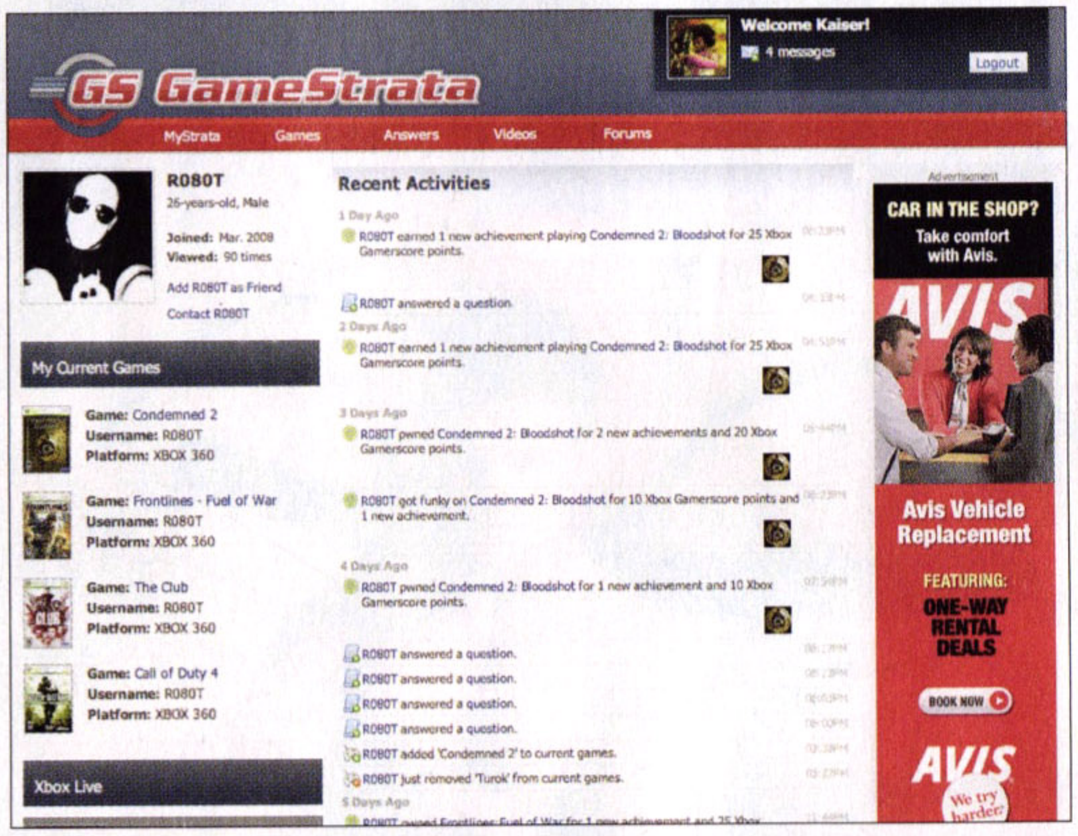
We bet you fancy yourself a pretty good gamer. What does that mean? Website GameStrata is letting you prove your skills with its all-in-one, cross-platform stat tracking and social networking. You can sign up for free and benefit from GameStrata's stat collection and leaderboards that sort data in categories which the developers themselves hadn't even thought of yet.

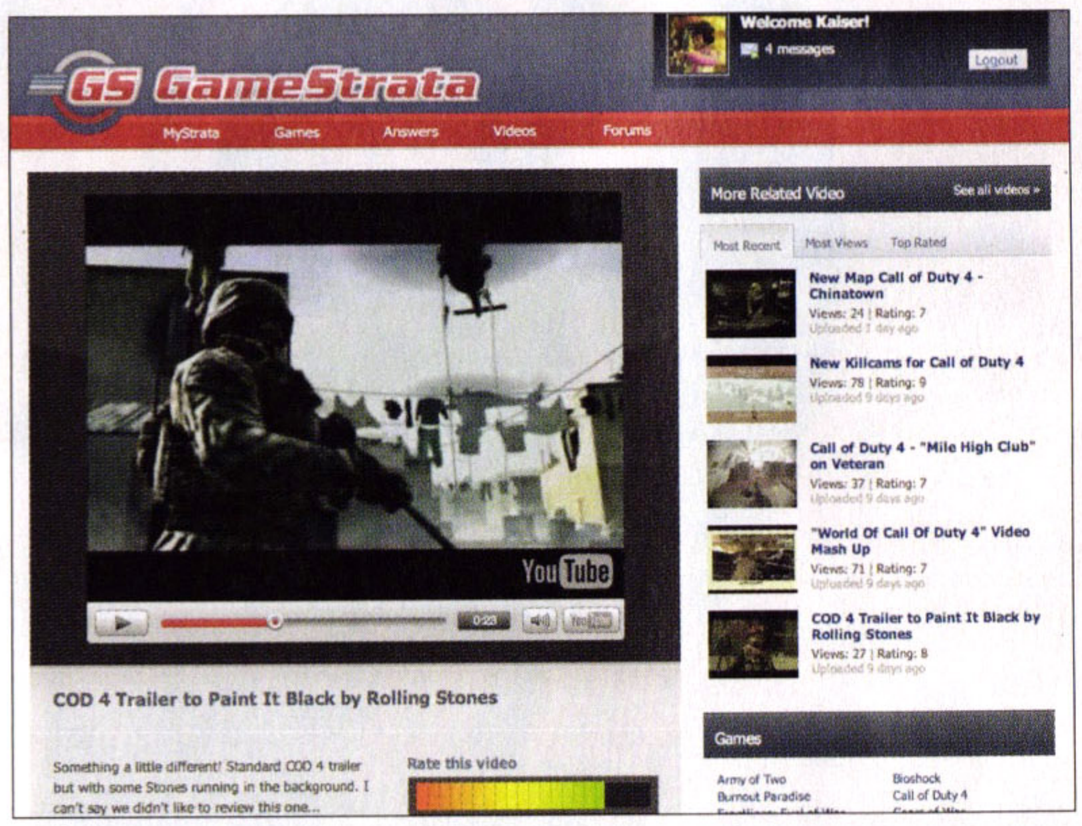
As of the time of this writing, GameStrata has individual game deals for Battlefield 2, Lost Planet: Extreme Condition, Guitar Hero III, Universe at War, and The Club. The site's leaderboards do more than just show you where you rank in the world. Your stats, which are pulled down by having your system(s) hooked up online (although stats are pulled for both online and offline play), are tracked over time so you can see how you and your friends have gotten better. More importantly, GameStrata's more refined stat tracking helps in matchmaking since it presents a more specific portrait of a gamer's skills. You may find you're good at certain parts of a game that would normally go untracked. For example, GameStrata tracks kill assists, heals, revives, and resupply stats for Battlefield 2 – categories that the official leaderboards do not.

As a social networking site, your GameStrata profile page integrates your cross-platform gamer IDs and lets you follow your friends' Achievements as well. "Users are incredibly passionate about the particular games that they are playing," says GameStrata co-founder and CEO Lance Smith. "They want to contribute and see elements in their game pulled out so they can be recognized for that."

Right now the site integrates your Xbox Live Gamercard (showing your Achievements whether they are for GameStrata-supported titles or not), Wii Friend Code, and PlayStation Network ID. Needless to say, GameStrata is waiting to see what Sony comes up with to compete with Xbox 360's Achievements, and the company says that it is working on creating its own Achievements as well. GameStrata also gives you GamerQ points for participating in the community (which includes getting help from your gaming peers) and much more. The company is currently working on how these points can be spent by the players.

Smith and COO Barry Dorf say they hope to extend their unique stat tracking to popular online titles like Call of Duty 4 and Halo 3, as well as some games releasing in the future. There are plenty of other big ideas ahead for the site as well, like being able to access GameStrata stats from in game or your console directly. "In a nut shell," says Smith, "Gamestrata is providing community tools to the gamer."




### Join The Club

Being in a clan is fun, but they don't set up themselves. Getting the team together at a specific date and time has always been the main hassle of leading an elite killing machine. "We looked at clans as being problematic or stale," declares Smith. To rectify this, the site is enabling a number of clan features for free. The site features easy-to-use tools, supports multiple consoles, enables clan member-created content such as videos, and offers a universal news feed and other communication tools for members. Of course, all this comes with GameStrata's statistical integration, which might help find that sniper you're looking to recruit.

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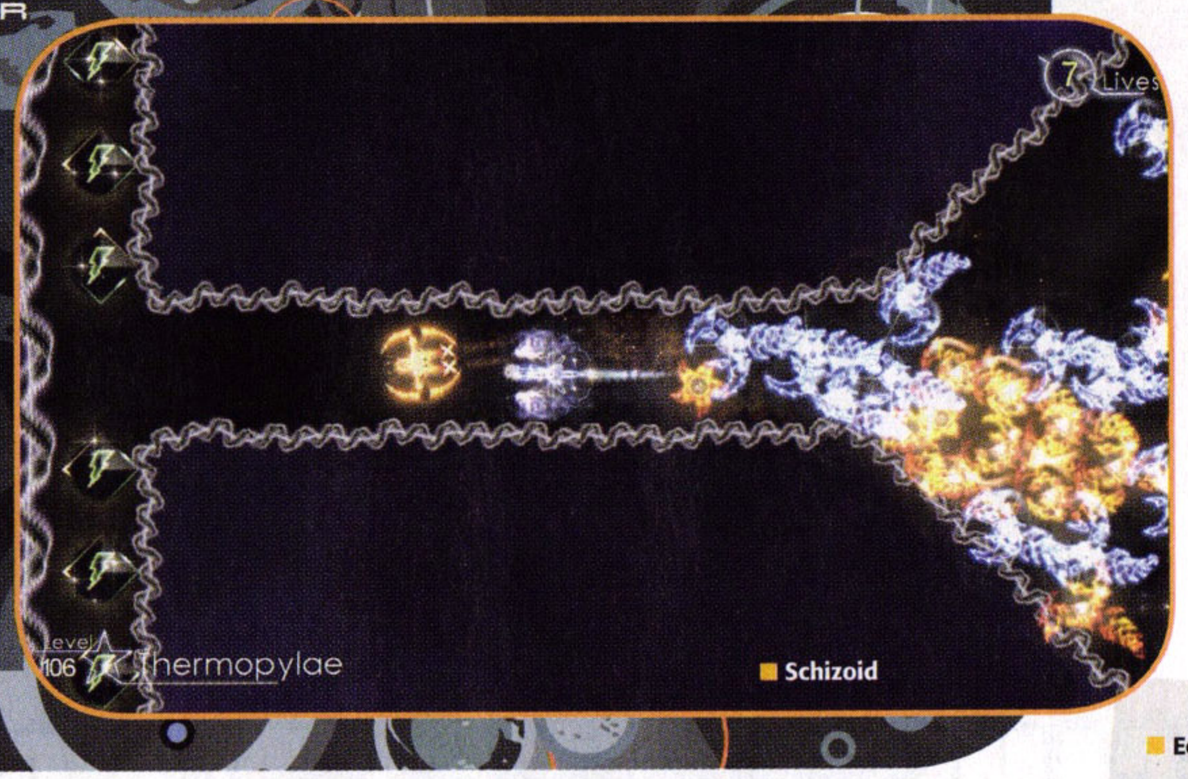
# impulse

BY MATT MILLER

A step into co-op nirvana with Schizoid, and the way Echochrome will change your perspective on puzzle games. "Casual" games enter the big leagues.



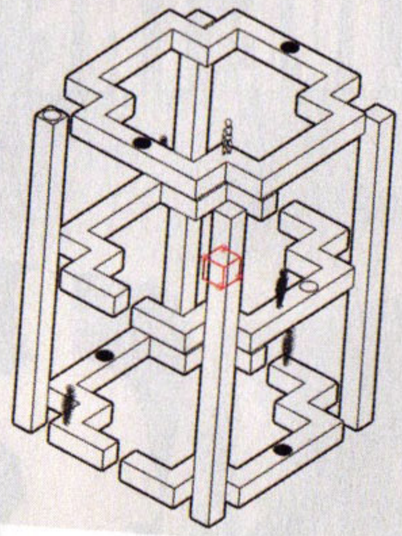

**A dirty little word has crept into common usage in our hobby during the last couple of years, and I wish it hadn't: casual. Casual games. Casual gamers. My first problem is its use as a catch-all for anything that isn't Halo, Metal Gear Solid, or Zelda – if it's small, independent, downloadable, and innovative, well then it must be casual. Which leads to my second dilemma: isn't the word just a little bit dismissive? It's unlikely that Oscar winning short film directors would be happy if the Academy changed the category to "Best Casual Film." The equivalent releases and downloadable content in the gaming world deserve a spotlight of some sort. After a lot of thought and some long conversations, this is our attempt at a solution. Impulse is here to take a look at the growing library of downloadable games, from the best in Live Arcade, PlayStation Network, and WiiWare titles to expanded content for larger retail releases.**

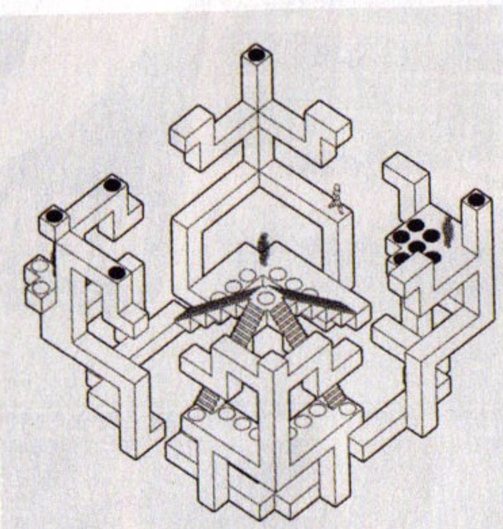
Where better to start than with **Echochrome**, the deceptively simple game that managed to eclipse dozens of much larger and more complex titles at last year's E3? At long last, I've gotten to play the final version headed to **PlayStation Network**. As puzzle games go, this one is going to be hard to beat. If M.C. Escher were around today, and worked in the gaming field, this is the game he would create. From its stark white backgrounds to the straightforward control mechanics (rotating the sometimes unwieldy camera is pretty much all you'll do) the game's seeming simplicity belies its true nature. As the camera moves, the image you see becomes the actuality of the level design. If there is a gap in the walkway, you rotate to a view where a column blocks the gap, and the gap is effectively gone. To put it another way, Echochrome posits the intriguing idea that perception is reality. With its gorgeous modern classical musical score and dozens of puzzles to wrap your mind around, this is as close to mind-expanding that you're likely to get without a visit to the 1960s.

Meanwhile, with its full year headstart on the competition, **Live Arcade** continues to deliver some remarkable gems and an unparalleled catalog of short-form games. If you've got a buddy handy, the clear choice du jour is **Schizoid**, a co-op game I can safely say feels different than anything I've played before. While familiar trippy backgrounds and colors evoke memories of everything from Geometry Wars to flOw, the required cooperation component sets Schizoid apart. Each player can destroy only enemies of his own color, so there's an endless back and forth dance of protecting your friend from one color while desperately fleeing the other. It is, in short, quite sweet. Plus, for the particularly masochistic among us, an Uberschizoid mode offers the nigh-impossible option to control both colored ships on one controller. Good luck with that.

In the suddenly crowded scrolling shooter scene on Live Arcade, the classic and brilliantly designed **Ikaruga** is a stronger choice than **Triggerheart Exelica**. The former holds up remarkably well and remains one of the most challenging shooters ever. The latter is an anime-themed smorgasbord of dodging projectiles that fails to live up to the hype. If you like your sci-fi shooter with a touch more 3D, the co-op enabled **Aces of the Galaxy** gives the StarFox brand of space combat a run for its money. The gameplay may feel a little shallow after a few hundred enemies fall to your laser blasts, but the colorful backgrounds and particle effects won't disappoint. Finally, I was stoked to see some new footage from one other shooter with a decidedly more familiar setting: **1942: Joint Strike**. This brand new installment of the classic WWII series looks amazing – word is it should be hitting both XBLA and PSN sometime this summer – more on this one in future months. In the meantime, welcome to Impulse. ■■■

■ Echochrome





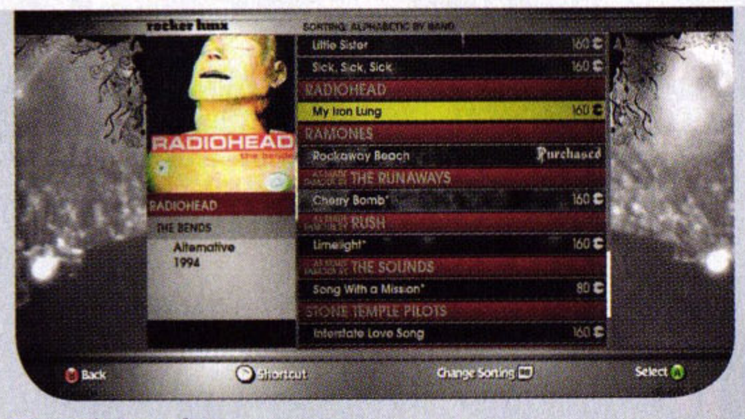
ONESHOTS

### > Mass Effect

"Bring Down the Sky" is the first big Mass Effect download pack, but expect more where that came from. For best results, it's best to integrate the pack with a full playthrough of the main game – it's somewhere between a side mission and a real story planet.

### > Lost Cities

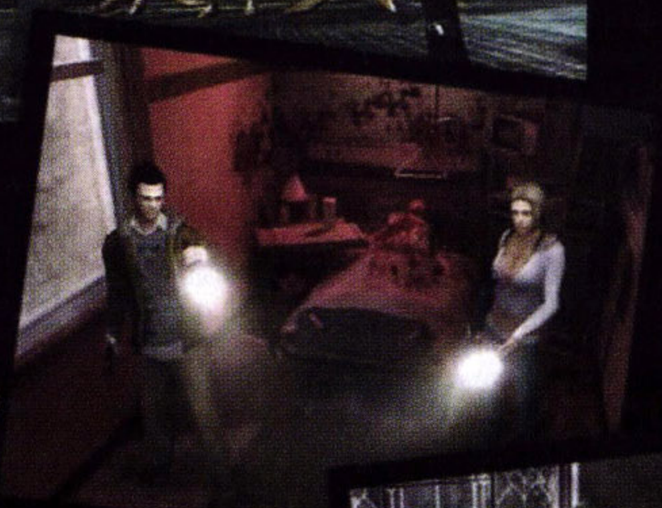
Ready for a new card game? This exploration-focused title on XBLA is a blast, and has some fun strategic elements to dig your teeth into.

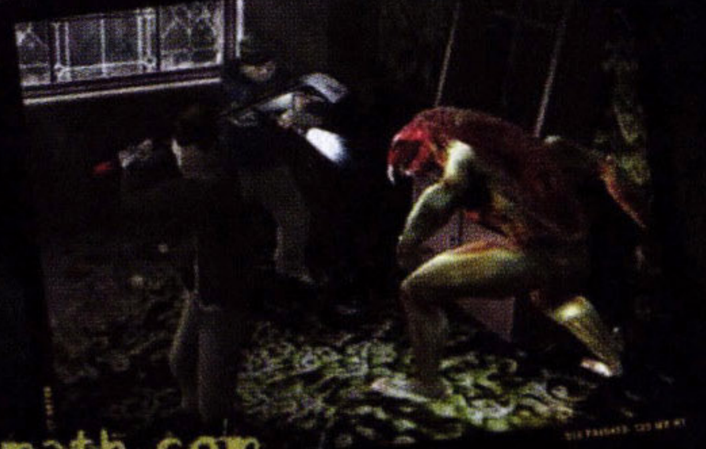



### > Rock Band

If you haven't checked recently, go explore the new in-game Rock Band store – the new songs keep flowing, and some recent entries like the Boston six-song pack are real standouts.

Reality Ends This Spring!





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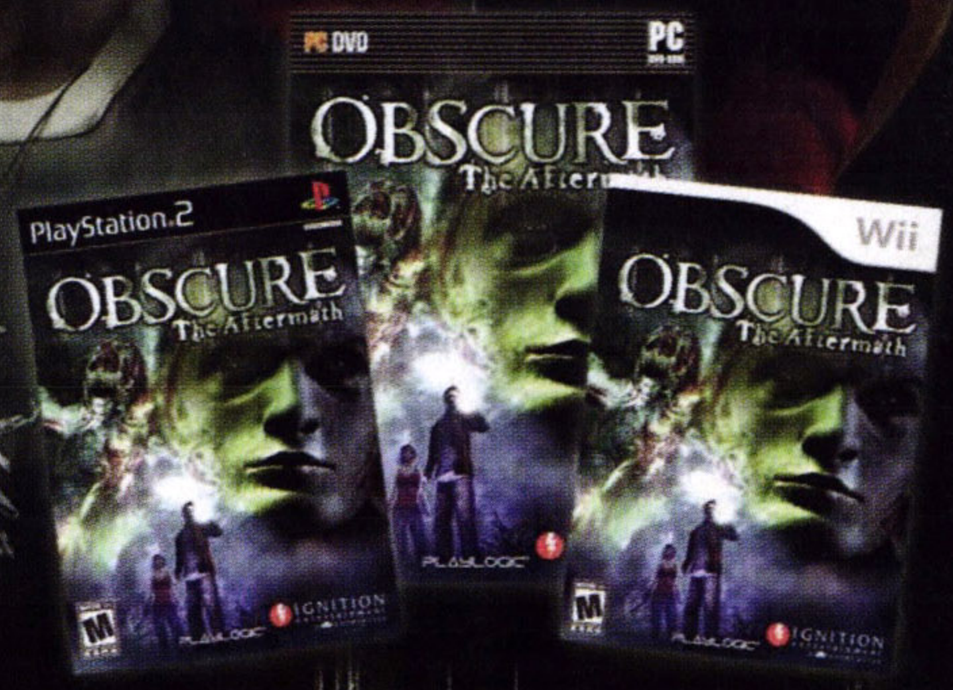


# OBSCURE

## The Aftermath

All is not right at Fallcreek University. Both students and faculty have begun experimenting with mysterious black flowers that have inexplicably sprung up on campus, and a dangerous, hallucinogenic substance is discovered within them. A handful of students soon learn there is much more to the flowers than once thought, and the bad trips suddenly turn into a horrifying reality...

IGNITION entertainment a UTV enterprise

hydravision

PLAYLOGIC®

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Drug Reference
Mild Sexual Themes
Violence

PlayStation.2

Wii™

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

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(L-R) Andy Ferlo and Connor Dion

Gamers

# Call of Duty Hall of Fame

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

## F.N.G.

**Handles:**
xUAx c0nNBr3n, ferloft1001

**Names:**
Connor Dion, Andy Ferlo

**Ages:**
14 (Dion), 15 (Ferlo)

**Hometown:**
Clifton Park, New York

**Rival:**
kcsf2243

**Favorite Weapons:**
.50cal (Dion), MP5 (Ferlo)

**Favorite Maps:**
Shipment (Dion), Crash (Ferlo)

### Accomplishments:
After plenty of controller passing between these longtime friends, Connor Dion completed an F.N.G. run under Andy Ferlo's gamertag (ferloft1001) in 9.7 seconds – the fastest time in the world. Both players have alternate tags (FNG OWNER and FNG PWNER) in the top 10 as well.

### Origin of Skills:
Both Dion and Ferlo got into the series with Call of Duty 2. Though they had predominantly been interested in multiplayer, something about the timed obstacle course run of F.N.G. caught their interest. "We were never exactly shooting for first place, we were just trying to get a good time," Ferlo says. "I remember in the beginning we were in, like, 13th place and we were really excited."

### Glitching Out:
Dion and Ferlo freely admit that all of the top F.N.G. players take advantage of a glitch that freezes the clock during the final run to the finish line. Even with the glitch, however, players still must have a perfect run through the main course to earn the top time.

### The Key to Victory:
Dion details the winning strategy: "In the beginning, you have to hit the first two guys with one bullet while you're running. Then you have to jump down the stairs, shoot the guy, and then instantly throw a flash. Whenever you shoot, never look one way and then look the other way. You just have to pan around [shooting in one smooth motion]. The last two guys you have to shoot through the wall at the end while you're backing up toward the circle."

### Life Outside of COD:
In addition to going to school, Dion plays basketball and Ferlo practices tae kwon do.

### Other Games:
Unsurprisingly, other shooters are on the top of their lists. Dion enjoys Halo 3 while Ferlo prefers Gears of War.

### Practice Time:
Dion and Ferlo estimate that they spend approximately 25 hours a week playing Call of Duty 4.

### What Should be in Call of Duty 5?
"I definitely like the modern [setting] over World War II," Ferlo says. "And making your own maps on the 360 [would be great]." Dion hopes for more customizable characters and 360 features. "PS3 got the double XP weekend. PC gets the mod tools," he says. "We don't get any of that."

## WINS

**Handle:** SwillNug

**Name:** Josh Huber

**Age:** 24

**Hometown:** Florence, Kentucky

**Rivals:** ParadoX Spa, nonphixionx

**Favorite Weapon:** M1014

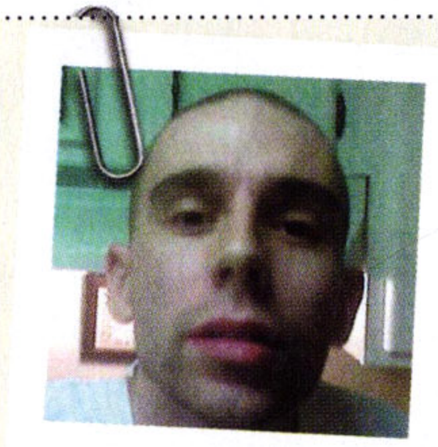
**Favorite Map:** Vacant

### Accomplishments:
While the Wins leaderboard has its problems (the top-ranked player has a ridiculous 75 million wins), Huber's number six ranking with over 28,000 victories is when things start getting realistic (the next best player trails by 2,000 wins). He also boasts an impressive undefeated streak of 36 matches.

### Origin of Skills:
"I started out with Call of Duty 3," says Huber. "I just played the first five levels and took it back. I didn't really like it at all. When Call of Duty 4 came out I liked it so much and just couldn't stop playing it."

### The Key to Victory:
"I would definitely suggest Search and Destroy because of the amount of time it takes," Huber recommends. "It's three minutes per match for one win. And a lot of times me and my buddies will go in and take out the whole team in just a minute or two."

### Life Outside of COD:
Huber is preparing to go to college soon, and enjoys snowboarding and writing music. "I like making beats on my computer, just instrumentals," Huber says.



### Other Games:
Grand Theft Auto (series), Mortal Kombat: Armageddon, Midnight Club (series), Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy, Cabela's Big Game Hunter (series), The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

### Practice Time:
"I play Call of Duty 4 at least 10 to 12 hours a day," Huber says. "Sometimes it's even more on weekends or any given day of the week."

### What Should be in Call of Duty 5?
"I would like there to be a co-op campaign and more customizable characters," Huber says.

## Parents' Perspective

### MARY DION

**M Ratings:**
"Connor is an excellent student. He's well-rounded socially, [and has] a lot of friends in and outside of the gaming world and I really trust his choices. I am a protective parent, but I haven't particularly said, 'Oh this says mature on it so you can't play it.'"

**Top of the Leaderboard:**
"It seems like a huge accomplishment. You don't think of it like there's a whole world of competition and levels and skills that you actually need in order to get somewhere with what you're doing."

**Game Time:**
"I hear him up [in his room] talking to people or saying 'I have to do this. There's something really important going on in the game right now.' And it would annoy me. But to see that he's actually had some accomplishment with it… it pleases me to know that it's beyond just playing a game."

### NANCY FERLO

**M Ratings:**
"I trust the manager of our local store. He's very well informed on the different games. I ask him, 'Is this appropriate? What kinds of things does it have in it?' And I do check in when he's playing to watch what's going on and I talk to him about it."

**Are You Surprised at this Accomplishment?**
"Well, not with the number of hours he spends in front of the game. [Laughs] And no it does not surprise me, because [Andy] does this with any challenge he has. He was in a pi contest; how many digits of pi can you memorize? And he was up in the hundreds. It's all about the game of who can do the most. I'm proud that he excels at this as well."

**Game Time:**
"It's funny because you're asking the parent who feels like 'What kind of parent am I to let him have all of those hours in front of the game?' But on the other side of that I feel that it is challenging the brain. I think it does keep your mind active."

## ARCADE

**Handle:** mauserman

**Name:** Daniel Tierney

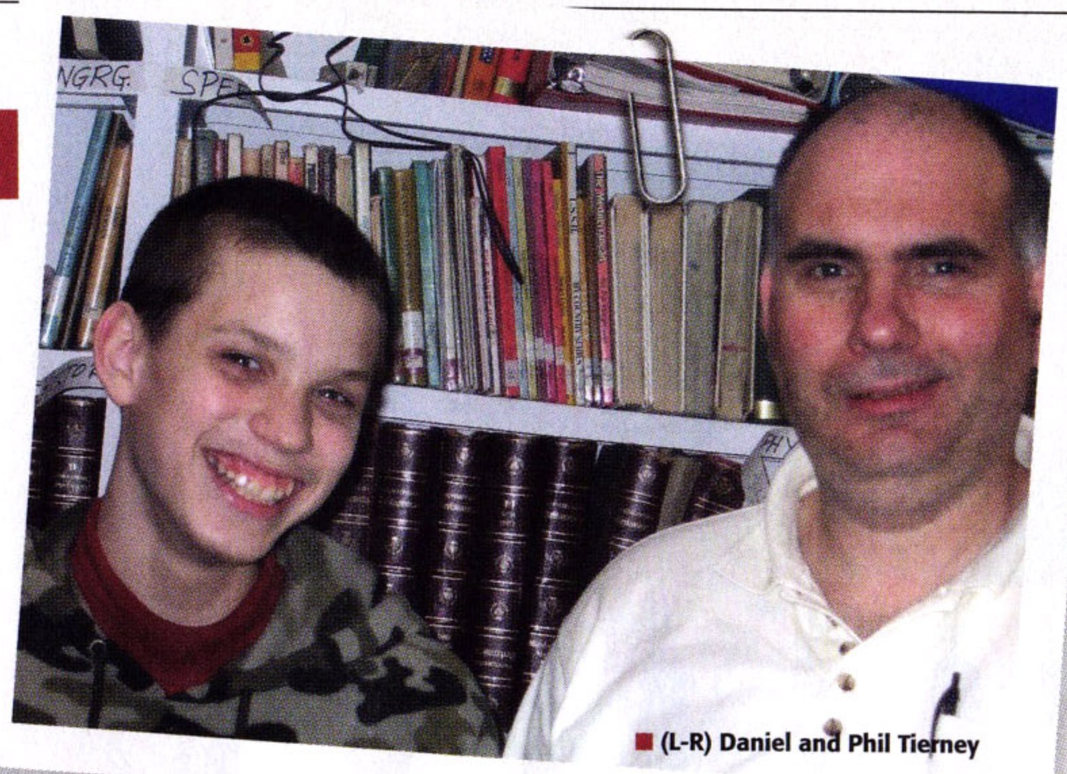
**Age:** 13

**Hometown:** Lusby, Maryland

**Rival:** yanXXX

**Favorite Weapon:** M4 Carbine

**Favorite Stage:** All In



■ (L-R) Daniel and Phil Tierney

### Accomplishments:
Ranks number one on five different stages in Arcade mode. The closest competitors rank first in only two stages. Daniel Tierney remains in the top five on the full Arcade playthrough leaderboard after recently losing the top spot.

### Origin of Skills:
Tierney first got into Arcade mode by watching his father, Phil, earn a number one ranking on Sins of the Father. "He did it on Veteran and his score was pretty good, especially for that level," Tierney remembers. "I did it on Hardened though and I got about 50,000 more points than what he had. After that I just tried to get more [number one rankings]."

### The Key to Victory:
"People think you've got to shoot tons of headshots. Don't go for them unless you actually have a clear shot," Tierney says. "It takes up too much time. What you want to do is just quickly shoot them and kill them so you keep up your multiplier." Similar to saving up star power in Guitar Hero, he says that waiting to deploy the 8X multiplier until there is a group of high value enemies (vehicles especially) is key.

### Life Outside of COD:
"I've got to keep up my grades at least 3.0 or higher otherwise I'm not allowed to play 360," Tierney says. He also plays football and runs on the track team.

### Practice Time:
"Since I still play Halo 3, Call of Duty 3, and Guitar Hero III right now, I guess I play Call of Duty 4 maybe an hour to two hours a day," says Tierney.

### Modern Vs. WWII:
"I liked the WWII [setting] because they actually taught history and the battles in WWII are fun," Tierney says. "I love the weapons that the Germans used in WWII like the K98, but the way they made COD 4 wasn't like normal modern [war] games. It's kind of tough to say."

## Parent's Perspective

### PHIL TIERNEY

### Gaming Policy:
"I play a lot of the games before my kids ever get a chance to. Some of the issues I have with games are language and gratuitous skin. Call of Duty 4 I ended up letting Daniel play because he's mature enough to understand what the world's like, and if you're playing a game that's dealing with current events I think it has some benefits."

### More Options:
"Gears of War has some serious language in it, some serious gore, but the people that made it give you an option to shut off the majority of the language, although not all of it, and you can eliminate the gore. So games like that I'm impressed with because it gives me some options. [More of] these kinds of options would be just a wonderful thing to have, both as a parent and as a gamer."

### Top of the Leaderboards:
"Isn't that mind-blowing? When I first got Sins of the Father number one, he promptly beat it a few months later. Just blew it away. I just shook my head watching him do it. I was like, 'Kid, I'm pretty good, but I can't compete with you.'" [Laughs]

## SCORE

**Handle:** Im Too Godly

**Name:** Steven Easton

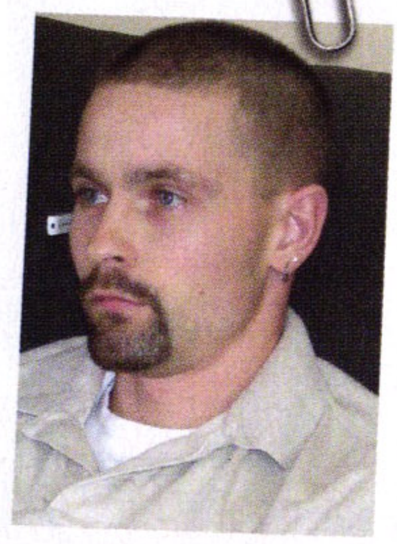
**Age:** 30

**Hometown:** Hampton Bays, New York

**Rivals:** NOX RYAN 2, xXGodOfPainXx

**Favorite Weapon:** P90

**Favorite Map:** District



### Accomplishments:
With a total of over 14 days worth of in-game play, Steven Easton has racked up 3.6 million points in multiplayer. As of press time, no one else has even crossed the three million mark, and most other players on the board have devoted 20 to 30 days of in-game hours. He's also in fourth place on the F.N.G. leaderboard.

### Origin of Skills:
"Before Call of Duty 4 came out I purchased Call of Duty 3 just to try it out, and a lot of people were telling me it's going to be totally different so I'm wasting my time," says Easton. "They were right. It's a hundred times different than COD 3. Four is phenomenal."

### Allegations of Foul Play:
"There are a lot of people who send me hate mail because I'm number one and they think I cheated," Easton says. "And I'm like, 'How is that even possible?'"

### The Key to Victory:
To earn big points quickly, Easton recommends the Hardcore Search and Destroy game type. "In Search and Destroy you get 50 points per kill," he says. "In Team Deathmatch you're only getting like five points per kill – and there are a lot of people who only like to play Team Deathmatch." Easton uses Hardcore's lack of enemy indicators and kill replay cams to stay stealthy, which is extra important since there are no respawns in S&D.

### Life Outside of COD:
Easton runs his own commercial locksmith business out of his home. "I install doors, hardware, and frames in public schools, post offices, government buildings, stuff like that," Easton says. "I'm going to expand sooner or later and then my video gaming goes down the tubes."

### Other Games:
"SOCOM is one of my old favorite games from PlayStation 2," Easton says. "That was like the best game I had ever played." He also enjoys Halo 3 and is looking forward to Rainbow Six Vegas 2.

### Practice Time:
"It depends," Easton says. "I'm older. I'm not a young kid. I'm married. I own a house. I own a business. So when I come home I do all my paperwork, take care of my bills, spend time with my wife, and play an hour or two of video games."

### The Future of Call of Duty?
"I'd like to change some of the perks, like get rid of Martyrdom where you drop grenades when you die," Easton says. "And Juggernaut, when you shoot somebody and they take extra hits, is not a problem for me, but I think they should run slower when they have that on."

# WHAT IF

WHAT IF JASON RUBIN MADE THE NEXT RESIDENT EVIL?

WHAT IF TED PRICE MADE THE NEXT ROCK BAND?

WHAT IF PETE WANAT MADE THE NEXT TOMB RAIDER?

WHAT IF TODD HOWARD MADE THE NEXT FINAL FANTASY?

**➤ If you are anything like us, you've sat around and talked games with friends late into the night, imagining what it would be like if your favorite game creator made a game for your favorite franchise. What if Shigeru Miyamoto made the next Sonic? Or what magic would Will Wright work with Civilization? This new Game Informer feature allows us to explore dream match-ups just like these by talking straight to the creative voices we would like to see involved. Mind you, these comments are purely for fun – this is an exercise in the hypothetical. ➤**

■ Pete Wanat's resume of games includes Scarface, The Chronicles or Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, and The Thing. He is currently working with Universal Picutures on upcoming movie-based games

# What if PETE WANAT Made the Next TOMB RAIDER

## THE PITCH

The camera trails a dolly shot down a long ornate hallway, slowly slipping by exhibits detailed with past accomplishments and trophies. Along the way, we see pictures of Lara Croft posing with presidents and prime ministers. The camera zooms to a door at the end of the hall and passes seamlessly through a keyhole into a giant bedroom.

The camera flies low over the bed. On it, a bra, panties, and a garter set – very lacy and high class, not the cheap Frederick's of Hollywood stuff. On the other side of the bed a man sleeps, exhausted. Panning over him, we slip through another door's keyhole into a bathroom filled with steam. The camera slows and pushes through the mist to a glass shower door. We see Lara, glistening with drops of water, but with steam shrouding her trademark assets. She starts to lather up, when suddenly….BANG! BANG! BOOM!

The camera quickly spins to the door, only to see it flying off of its hinges. Gunmen rush in, raise their weapons, and open fire. Lara dives out of the steam, curled, cold, and naked on the floor. She reaches up toward a towel on a bench, but instead of donning it, she pulls two Mac-10s from within.

Leaving the towel behind, the player is now given control of a totally nude Lara.

As bullets whiz overhead, the player is prompted to press a button to dive for safety through an open window. Climbing up the exterior Boston ivy, the gunmen are in hot pursuit. On the roof, Lara continues her escape (still in the nude), all the while tearing off shots at the assassins. As the encounter progresses, we teach the player the cover mechanic, shooting, and primary platforming, all the while rushing headlong into a totally new take on the classic character's relic hunting adventures.

This shocking opening tells the player in no uncertain terms that this not your daddy's Tomb Raider. It's not another generic exploration game. Seeing her naked, however, is not what this game is all about. It's just a great way to shake up the player's expectations.

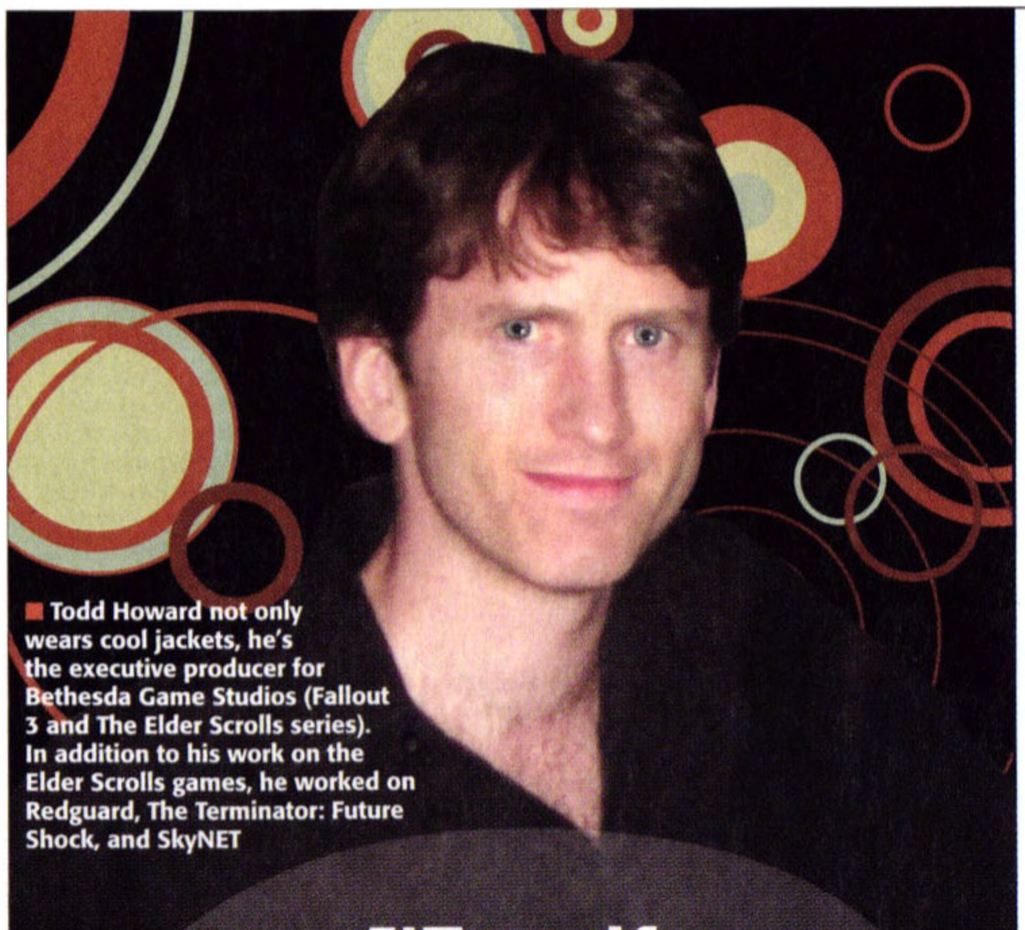
There are people who will try and dismiss this kind of move – these are the same corporate buffoons who are too conservative for anyone's own good to be making games. Naked Lara Croft is hot – give her two Mac-10s, a frantic chase, a gunplay pursuit, and you start to come up with a whole new spirit for the game. It's a surprise akin to the great adventure mechanics (minus the wonky controls) of the original game.

Far more important than LC in the buff is an improvement on the controls – remove excess button presses and give her Sam Fisher-style wall hanging. Make her running appear smooth as butter – the player should be more excited about her movement than seeing her without her clothes. In later levels, focus on expansive vistas with tons of open areas to explore. Keep the jumping and climbing situations easy to complete. The penalty for missing a jump shouldn't be death – don't make players replay areas they've already conquered. Deliver dangerous enemies who shrug off bullets, like a frenzied grizzly bear that chases Lara down a path which is torn apart in its passing. Give the player relationship choices – let Lara work her feminine charms on NPC characters. I'd probably offer the player two characters of each gender to explore relationships with. Through downloadable content, give players R-rated sexual content – think Mass Effect but less blue, and more choices for the player. Lara's romantic choices would affect NPC reactions. How far she goes is up to the player, but you have to give that control to the player, not steal it away.

Give the player real rewards – genuine content and achievements for going the extra mile to find all the secrets. Maybe the only way Lara disrobes again for the final level is if the player has found all the big secrets. You could have a great deal of fun if you let loose and explore the adult-themed side of Tomb Raider, rather than just teasing it. It would rattle people, maybe even piss them off. But it would also make Tomb Raider relevant again.

## DREAM PROJECT

X-Men has always been a total dream game for me, and I hope someday that I get a chance to work on that franchise. It's one of those massive universes that I would love to see set a new standard for action games. I have a unique concept for the X-Men that has never been done before. On that note, I would also really love to work with Infinity Ward. Other than this, I would love to oversee the new Tin Tin games (I was a huge fan of the books growing up), and I wonder if there's any hope of doing a game on *The Big Lebowski*.



■ Todd Howard not only wears cool jackets, he's the executive producer for Bethesda Game Studios (Fallout 3 and The Elder Scrolls series). In addition to his work on the Elder Scrolls games, he worked on Redguard, The Terminator: Future Shock, and SkyNET

# What if TODD HOWARD Made the Next FINAL FANTASY

## DREAM PROJECT

I've wanted to make a superhero game forever (we actually started one back in '95), so this one is easy – Batman. I've dreamt of the following game: Gotham City. I'm not kidding; I woke up one morning having played this in my head for hours. In a nutshell, it's a wide-open freeform Batman simulator. Presentation like Assassin's Creed and you can explore the entire city. Climb buildings, collect clues, capture criminals, and save the city. You have to manage your "Vigilante" level; the cops don't like it when you're careless. Reduce your Vigilante level by doing missions for Commissioner Gordon. Get in good and they'll put up the Bat-Signal. The game follows the entire career of Batman. You start as naive Bruce Wayne and develop your toys over time. It has parts similar to X-Com where you run Wayne Enterprises and allocate your money for equipment and R&D. You upgrade your costume, utility belt, Batcave, and several vehicles. The entire game looks like Alex Ross painted it. It's awesome; I've played it.

If I can't make that, I'll just go with Sweeney Todd the Wii game. SingStar meets Manhunt. Player two makes meat pies. That one designs itself.

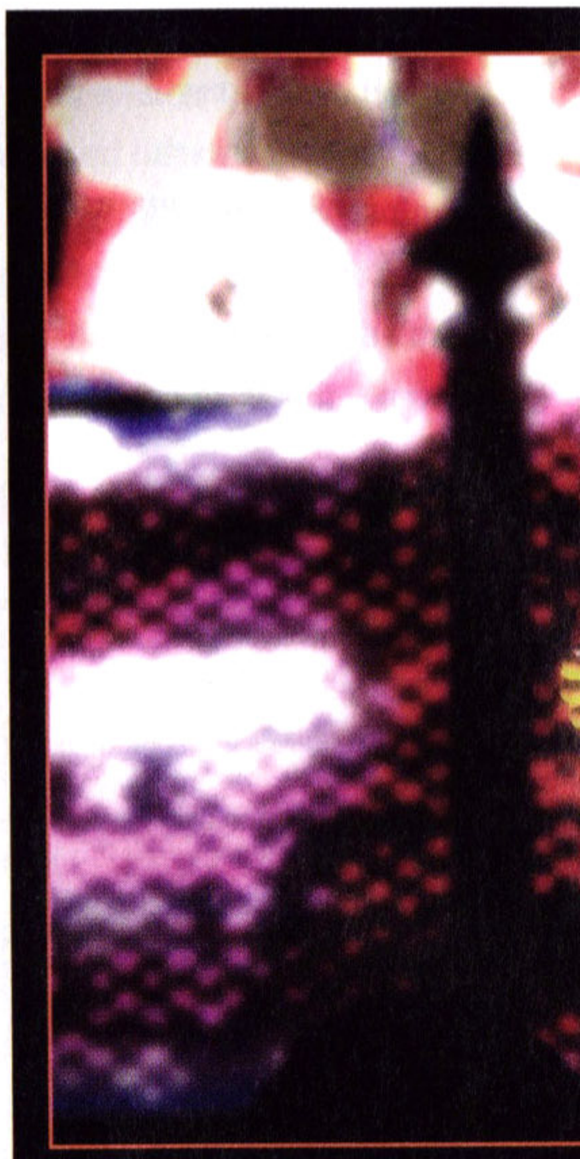
## THE PITCH

I've always had a love/hate relationship with the modern Final Fantasy games (from VII on). I'm in awe of the art, storytelling, music, and fantastic worlds they create. But I always have to sit through a half-hour cutscene before I get to actually play. Even in combat, I end up watching more then I'm playing. It's usually not until I'm further into the game that I realize just how mind-blowingly amazing these scenes are. I'm not sure anyone does it better. I end up loving what happens in them, and I love selecting attacks or spells in combat and just watching as my heroes summon demons or perform brilliantly animated attacks.

So, with my Final Fantasy, I'm going to embrace the glory of the Final Fantasy cutscene and storytelling, and make one giant, epic-interactive-movie.

As soon as the opening credits roll and Uematsu's score comes on, you're in control. Everything looks like a movie, but in real-time. Watch Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children and pretend you're playing the whole thing. Conversations are interactive cutscenes where you decide what to say; think Mass Effect taken several iterations beyond. Combat is phase based, you have a few seconds to decide who and how to attack; but it looks like a sword fight with motorcycles and guns directed by Paul Greengrass.

It's like watching a giant Final Fantasy movie you can play over and over and it changes each time with your decisions. How does it play out when you tell the love of your life you've found another? What if you simply "go on" when a key party member dies? Do you complete the game weary and alone or among a party of friends?



# THE PITCH

## What if TED PRICE Made the Next ROCK BAND

It's hard to imagine working on or improving someone else's IP, especially Rock Band since Harmonix kicked so much ass on it. But let's say Insomniac owned Rock Band…what would we do with it? Since we have a very collective design approach it's a tough question to answer without polling the whole crew. So for the moment I'll be selfish and tell you what I would suggest.

While the world tour and developing your band is well done, it'd be even cooler to flesh out the solo character development more. I think it would be a blast to have a single-player campaign where you're following your singer, drummer, or guitarist through the ups and downs of the music world. Yeah, I know everyone wants to get right to the songs, but I'd like to see my character experiencing more real-life moments as he heads toward stardom. I'd like to have some playable segments where I can interact with other characters and make some choices that will affect my music career.

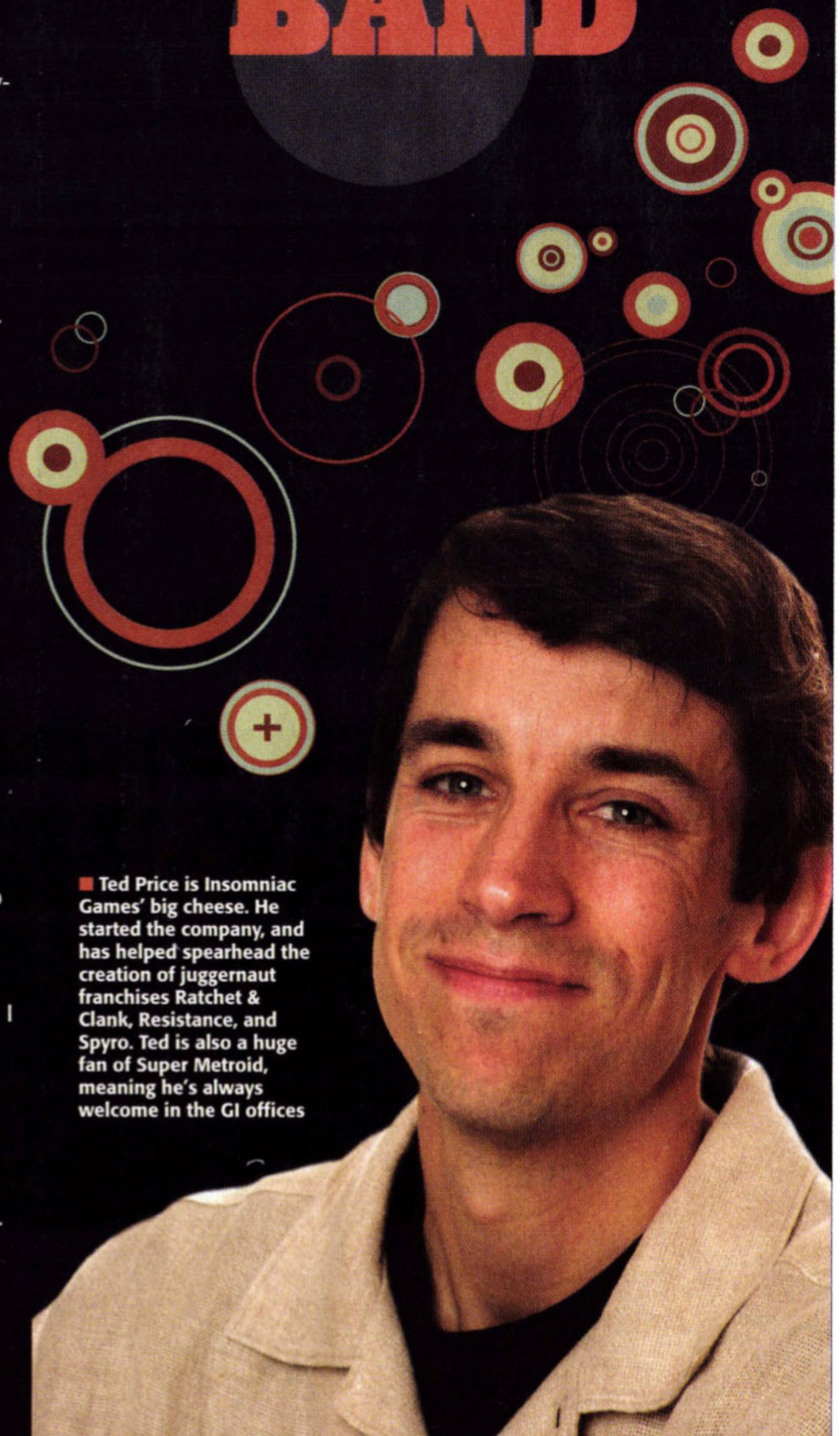
For example, I get a groupie pregnant. What do I do? Do I marry her or do I let my manager pay her off since I'm worried about my sex appeal decreasing? Or I hear a rumor that my manager is using hired muscle to pressure venue owners into letting my band play – but at the same time he's been setting up amazing gigs. Do I confront him or let it ride, hoping that his actions don't reflect on me down the road? Or I find myself in a five-star suite. Should I trash it? I'll pay a hefty fine but at the same time I'll earn excellent bad boy PR. And so on. No decision would ever be the "right" one but each decision would have obvious consequences in terms of the opportunities that pop up.

Some football games have started heading this route where you're spending as much time managing your players' careers as you are playing the games. And while some gamers may find this tedious, I think a lot of players would appreciate the extra depth. It would also be an entertaining way to show how nasty the music industry can be. Not that I know anything about the music industry. I've just heard some crazy stories…

Going even deeper, how about RPG-like stats for your characters? A high "solo skill" could get you extra multipliers for your solos. A solid "consistency" stat would forgive you a few missed notes on each song. Good "sex appeal" stats (earned from your wardrobe choices) would give you higher quality groupies – some of whom could provide you with special opportunities. For example, one of your groupies is a heiress who convinces her father to pay you a few hundred thousand to play her 18th birthday bash. (Oh yeah, and you have to sleep with her to get that gig – she's got a bad rep so you run the risk of losing fans). Good "PR" stats (earned from your non-concert activities) would give you better bandmates whose presence would get you more fans with each gig. This could go on and on.

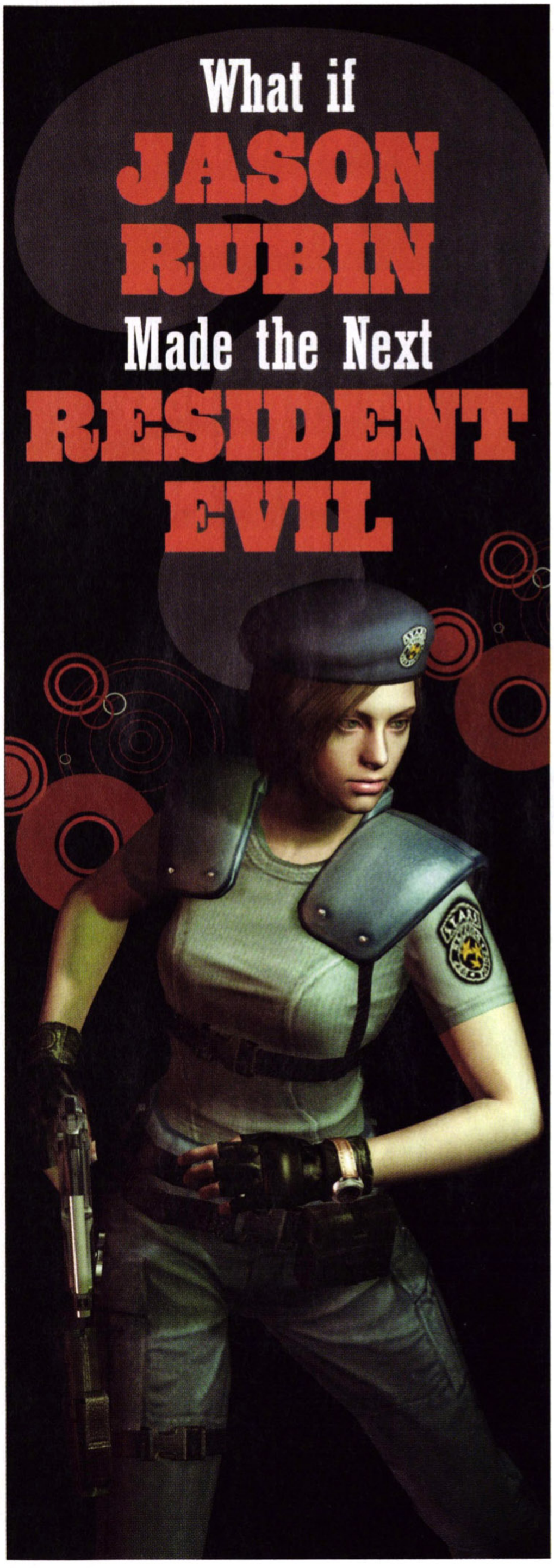
Even though this doesn't have much to do with game design, let's get real instruments in there. For any of us wannabe guitar players it's cool party trick to play on expert (not that I can). But it would be way cooler to pick up a real axe and shred in the game. In fact, whenever I play Rock Band, I feel kind of guilty – if I had been playing my stringed guitar for all of those hours, damn I'd be good. But unfortunately I'm still a lot better at hitting colored buttons than I am strumming the real deal. By the way, the drummers at Insomniac tell me that playing drums in Rock Band is actually a good primer for the real thing. And of course singing in the game can only help you the next time you're drunk at karaoke night. So I guess I'm just sayin' let's figure out how to hook up our real guitars. I'd like the fantasy that I'm actually learning a true skill that I can brag about. I don't know how the hell you'd do it. And I don't know how it wouldn't end up costing consumers even more money. But heck, people are already paying $130 for the game – I don't think it's about the money, not really.

Finally, let's let bands record original tracks. Maybe a deluxe version of the game could include some sweet samplers – drums, bass and guitar. Assuming you had support for input from real guitars you could give the player the ability to do multitrack recording and some rudimentary editing. Even if the quality wasn't that hot, uploading your finished songs to Rock Band central for others to check out would rule. Okay, we're probably talking about a small percentage of the audience who'd actually be interested in seeing a song through to finish. And Rock Band would never take the place of Pro Tools and real instruments. But if it gave people a really, really easy way to collaborate and record some stuff together, damn, I'd buy it.



■ **Ted Price is Insomniac Games' big cheese. He started the company, and has helped spearhead the creation of juggernaut franchises Ratchet & Clank, Resistance, and Spyro. Ted is also a huge fan of Super Metroid, meaning he's always welcome in the GI offices**

# What if JASON RUBIN Made the Next RESIDENT EVIL



■ Jason Rubin was one of the founding members of Naughty Dog, and is the co-creator of the Crash Bandicoot and Jak & Daxter series. Since taking a break from the game industry in 2005, he created Flektor (www.flektor.com), an online media mashup tool that he sold to Fox Interactive, and recently he made a splash in comics with the miniseries Iron and the Maiden (www.ironandthemaiden.com)

## THE PITCH

You wake up at dawn in a tiny hotel in a small town somewhere in Middle America – Raccoon City. We take advantage of the fact that Raccoon City has gone through many incarnations in the series. The streets, the layout of the buildings, and everything else is unfamiliar even if you have already played the game multiple times because it has been generated by randomization from a library of components. The core of the town is 5x5 blocks or so, plus some buildings and homes placed farther and farther apart on the outskirts. Eventually the distance between homes is too far for you to walk to the next one. You can't run away.

Back in the hotel where you started, you have stumbled into the lobby where you meet with seven other people – online players, maybe your clan. You can chat with them over the microphone you are wearing. The closer they are to you the clearer their voices can be heard. If this is your first time playing you may have stumbled outside unarmed and on your own, which is a very bad idea. The streets are filled with flesh-eating zombies. It is Resident Evil, after all.

Luckily the hotel owner is a bit of a hunting nut, so he has a good stash of guns and unlimited ammo. You and your fellow hotel guests could try to just hold the fort down, but unfortunately you are all hungry and the hotel owner is not a cook, so there is no food in the hotel.

Some of your team had better be at the windows because the zombies are on to you, and your brains are as enticing to them as that smell that a McDonald's pumps out when you pass it. Some of you should be at the windows, firing Resident Evil 4 third-person style at them. You know the drill, head shots are preferred.

Someone may have noticed that there is a market down the street. You're going to have to get someone over there. Try four people heading to the market and four back at the hotel. Or maybe you should all head out? You might run out of ammunition if the hotel is swarmed by zombies drawn by your lingering scent. Then again, more and more zombies will be coming to the hotel. Maybe you can retake it later when you need ammo.

Someone else may have noticed other non-zombie humans, probably a team, running down the street outside. That's your competition…or rather one of the seven teams of competition you have out there. There are seven other hotels, just like the one you are in, and the players that started there aren't wasting as much time as you getting out there.

The zombies are endless, literally. But the other online players are not. There are fewer markets than there are hotel/teams, so the first group to take the market (after clearing out the zombies) is going to have an upper hand – maybe. Your health/hunger is constantly drifting down. But then again, markets don't carry ammo, so they are vulnerable as well. Some of the homes around town have ammo, and there are more powerful guns strewn around. After all, this is America.

You might grab a vehicle and slam it into the market they have taken, or take a gas station. Or you might just keep moving around. The more time you spend somewhere the greater number and more powerful zombies come to find you. It's hard to hold a building with fewer than three players.

Taking the small hospital might let you upgrade the maximum health/hunger for anyone who receives the drugs you can find (and carry) from there. And the hunting store has ammo and body armor. There are many strategies for keeping your team alive, but death is always impending, because supplies are finite.

Eat the food, and it's eaten. Use the body armor, and it's used. Nothing in the town replenishes. Your health/hunger keeps relentlessly falling as you struggle harder and harder to boost it back up with food/drugs and other remedies.

Eventually one of the eight teams, with at least one surviving player, will be the last standing. As the sun sets, and the zombie virus kills the infected, the surviving team is awarded points and some of the players may be raised to the next rung in the skill ladder to play against better players…

…because the city resets and the zombies are back every time the sun rises.

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The views and opinions on these pages are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer Magazine or its staff.

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## //GAMES

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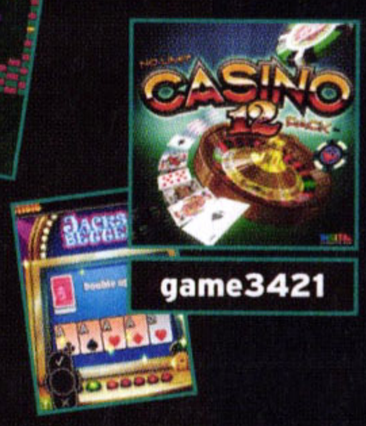


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## //WALLPAPERS

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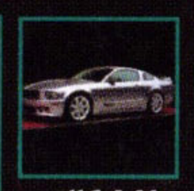

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## //REALTONES

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|---|---|
| Love In This Club - Usher Feat Young Jeezy | true9943 |
| Yahhh - Soulja Boy Tell ,Em | true9944 |
| The Boss - Rick Ross Feat T-Pain | true9945 |
| I Won't Tell - Fat Joe Feat J. Holiday | true9946 |
| I'm Me - Lil Wayne | true9947 |
| Who The Heck Is That? - Dolla Feat T-Pain | true9948 |
| I'm So Hood - DJ Khaled Feat T Pain | true9949 |
| Pop Bottles - Birdman | true9950 |
| Party Like A Rock Star - Shop Boyz | true9951 |
| Castlevania (Theme from the Game) | true9952 |
| Contra (Theme from the Game) | true9953 |
| Back In Black - AC/DC | true9954 |
| Welcome To The Jungle - Guns N' Roses | true9955 |
| Chop Suey! - System Of A Down | true9956 |
| Super Mario Bros. | true9957 |
| Sensual Seduction - Snoop Dogg | true9958 |
| Suffocate - J. Holiday | true9959 |
| Apologize - Timbaland | true9960 |
| Crank That - Soulja Boy Tell Em | true9961 |
| Snuggle Song - Schnuffel Bunny | true9962 |

## //THEMES

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## //SCREENSAVERS

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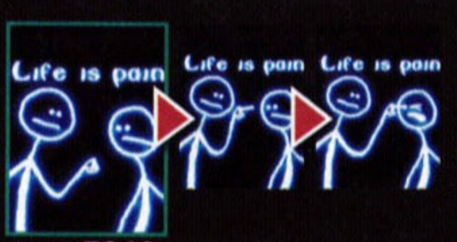


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# DAVID DOAK

## DIRECTOR, FREE RADICAL DESIGN

**>> Founded by core members of the GoldenEye team, Free Radical Design has earned a reputation for being one of the industry's most creative studios. We recently spoke to Free Radical director David Doak to get his perspective on the company's upcoming projects. <<**

### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**1995 ▶ The Rookie**
After receiving a degree in biochemistry and working at Oxford University, Doak takes a job as a systems administrator at another prestigious English institution, game developer Rare

**1996 ▶ Starting Lineup**
Frustrated with working on the system administration side, Doak plans to leave, but is talked into staying and given a place on the GoldenEye team, doing programming and design work

**1997 ▶ A Classic**
GoldenEye is released, and quickly becomes a worldwide blockbuster. The game helps establish the first-person shooter as a staple genre in console gaming

**1998 ▶ The Follow-up**
Doak and his team begin work on the early stages of Perfect Dark. Doak helps craft the story and the main characters, laying the foundation for another hit

**1999 ▶ Going Independent**
About halfway through Perfect Dark, Doak, Steve Ellis, Karl Hilton, and Graeme Norgate break off from Rare and found Free Radical

**2000 ▶ Just In Time**
Free Radical delivers its first title, the excellent PS2 shooter TimeSplitters, one of that console's first good FPSs. It also features a forward-looking mapmaker mode, rare on consoles at the time

**2002 ▶ A Stellar Sequel**

TimeSplitters 2 is released, building on the strengths of the first game

**2004 ▶ Underrated Gem**

Free Radical releases Second Sight, a quirky and unusual action title regarded as a cult classic by many

**2006 ▶ A New Chapter**

At E3 2006, Free Radical announces Haze, a politically charged shooter that deals with themes of drug abuse and mind control

**Free Radical is an interesting company. You have a great reputation in the industry, a good following, and solid sales, but you've always been a little shy of having a super-blockbuster like a Gears of War. Why do you think that is?**
TimeSplitters 2 was the closest we came to that. The game rated very, very highly. But we were never completely aligned with the publisher on the marketing of the game. Eidos didn't have the nerve to unashamedly say, "This is a quirky, but very excellent first-person shooter" and to follow through and be proud of that instead of slightly nervous about that. It didn't wear the humor or variety on its sleeve. We had the same thing with Future Perfect. EA had difficultly positioning it.

**With so many projects going on, what is your personal role in development these days on a specific project?**
It's changed enormously, because the whole challenge is not about the ideas or the software anymore; it's about people and process. Free Radical now has over 200 people. The way I describe it is that when I started, 10 people working on one thing seemed like a lot. [However], 10 people sitting together have a very good insight into what everyone is doing and what the challenges are.

**How hard is it to stay independent these days? Is it tempting to think about being part of a big publisher?**
It's tempting and it's not tempting. If we were going to be working with something larger, I would hope that in the future there would be the possibility of doing that while retaining some of the flavor of independence. When we were smaller, we were very fiercely independent. As it gets larger, you always have to be looking for what you're doing next. Planning for future security becomes a preoccupation. Obviously, that diverts your attention from what you're doing in the moment. So there are good reasons for having an "uncle" who looks after you.

**Let's talk about Haze. It's slipped release dates a few times, which some people perceive as a sign of trouble. What was the reason for the delays?**
Haze is our first project on completely new technology. That was a big task. We're not using someone else's engine; it's all in-house stuff. It took a lot longer to get that through to a state we could build a game on and ship a game on… If you look across at anybody's first project on this generation, I don't think anyone has hit [their] release dates. It's just changed. The game industry suffers terribly from "slippage." [Laughs] It's hard to think of any major product that hasn't slipped.

**Your game is a bit ambivalent about the ideas of who are the "good guys" and "bad guys." Do you worry that it will make it hard to market?**
I think it's interesting because, over the course of making the game, public opinion has changed quite a lot about war. When we were starting out, we had these strong ideas that it would be something that tried to ask the awkward questions about war. In the initial discussions, everyone said, "Well you must be careful not to, particularly, offend the American market." But, three years on, the average opinion in America, even amongst people who have relations in the armed services, has changed to the extent to where they think you should be questioning what you're doing and what it does to people. So, in that respect, we're quite timely. In fact, if I had a crystal ball, I would have made it more edgy.

> ***If I had a crystal ball, I would have made [Haze] more edgy.***

**What did you think about BioShock and Mass Effect? There seems to be more games these days that are presenting more "gray" moral choices? Is that encouraging to you?**
I think it's good. I really like twitch games. There's nothing like a really well-oiled piece of gameplay – shooting, whatever. I have no problem with that. What I do have a problem with is that it depresses me when I see the games industry making soulless action movies by rote because it's perceived to be safe. Nobody wants to rock the boat or lose some sales by offending someone. Nobody wants to do something too challenging. It's funny because some of the most successful properties actually do that, but the mass market doesn't notice. GTA is very anti-establishment and makes wry comments about video games and is very post-modern in the way it talks about itself, but most of that only gets noticed by the game players. The wider market just says, "It's some sick game where you murder prostitutes." Well, that's not really it, is it?

**A lot of developers don't feel it's worth the time, money, and effort to make their own tech anymore. Why is that still important to you?**
This is probably the first time where the effort that has gone into it made us think by the end, "Why did we do it?" Because it is a phenomenal amount of effort to get to a position where you're just in the same position everyone else is in. Except, they spent a lot more of that time designing their game. On the flipside of it, it's your engine. You can lift the hood and tinker with parts of it.

**In another five years, do you think you'll take a serious look at licensing engine technology?**
I don't think we'd be in a big rush to build engine technology from the ground up again. It's just a massive expense.

**You've posted a TimeSplitters 4 teaser that takes a bit of a swipe at Halo…you've often used film parodies in the series, can we expect video games to be targets this time around?**
I think we will, but I think we'll be more general about it than we might have thought we were going to be. In having looked into it a little bit, it's surprising how touchy people in the game industry are about their properties. It's bizarre actually, because if you look at the film industry, there are very aggressive parodies of things. But what research we've done leads us to think that there's probably not the appetite for doing that in the game industry. [Laughs] I'm not quite sure why. Certainly, we had no problem with the Halo stuff, but when you kick the tires on it, it may be something that's a bit too indulgent and industry-specific… I'd like to do it a bit. There's some fun to be had from doing it.

**You have a "top secret" project on your website for LucasArts that has been not so top secretly tagged as Star Wars: Battlefront 3. Is that the project you're working on?**
I can't possibly comment. [Laughs]

**Speaking hypothetically, if you had a project like Battlefront, do you have any ideas for a game like that?**
Hypothetically? Yes, but they're only hypothetical ideas. [Laughs] I can say that we're very much enjoying working with LucasArts.

Photo: Richard Tatham

Since 1999, Free Radical has grown from a core of less than 10 people to over 200 full-time employees

# RUNNING FREE

# THE LITTLE PCs THAT COULD

**Not everyone has the financial backing of NASA to spend on a state-of-the-art gaming PC. But are there modestly priced rigs out there capable of keeping up with power-hungry titles like Crysis? We kicked the tires and checked under the hoods of several PCs to find the perfect rig under $1,500. Most of these guys clock in with 2GB of memory, 500GB hard drives, dual core processors and a 512MB video card, which is plenty of juice to do some heavy lifting. So which one is best?**

## DELL XPS 630

GOOD

**Pro:** The metal-etched case and four customizable zones of illumination make the XPS 630 the best looking box of the bunch. It's also the only system with an ATI Radeon HD3870 Crossfire graphics array, which made it one of the top Crysis performers. The easy-to-open chassis makes the XPS optimal for upgrades, and the optical output delivers crystal clear audio.
**Con:** At only 320GB, the 630's hard drive is smaller than most of the systems here, and it doesn't have any SD card slots.
*3D Mark Score: 12998*
*PC Mark Score: 13061*
**$1,499.99**
**www.dell.com**

## FALCON NORTHWEST FRAGBOX

OK

**Pro:** The Fragbox's portable case makes it ideal for LAN parties. And despite its diminutive size, the system still has enough juice to run power-guzzling games like Crysis on higher settings.
**Con:** If you liked the GameCube's handle, this might be the system for you, but be prepared for your friends to laugh at you when they see it. This thing is ugly.
*3D Mark Score: 11801*
*PC Mark Score: N/A*
**$1,499.99**
**www.falcon-nw.com**

## GATEWAY FX7020

AVERAGE

**Pro:** The FX has more RAM than any other system (3GB), and is the only system other than the XPS to have an optical output. It's also $400 cheaper than any other PC here.
**Con:** The cheaper price comes with a performance loss. The FX7020 finished next to last in our 3D Mark testing, and its AMD Phenom 9600 processor didn't fare well in PC Mark benchmarks. The cheap plastic case matches its price. While the 500GB hard drive is nice, it's loaded to the gills with junky programs.
*3D Mark Score: 10782*
*PC Mark Score: 8157*
**$1,099.99**
**www.gateway.com**

## VELOCITY MICRO EDGE Z15

OK

**Pro:** The Edge's simple black box and subtle lighting earn it the second-best looking system award, which is a bit of a backhanded complement in this crowd. The system also performed solidly once we fired up the games.
**Con:** Nothing about the Edge makes it jump out from the others. Its loud DVD drive can be a little annoying, but otherwise the Edge seems to sit somewhere in the center of this roundup.
*3D Mark Score: 11722*
*PC Mark Score: N/A*
**$1,499.99**
**www.velocitymicro.com**

## WAR MACHINE M1 EXTREME

AVERAGE

**Pro:** Sadly, about all the love we can give the M1 Extreme is its easily accessible case makes it ideal for future upgrades, and the system looks sturdy enough to withstand an assault.
**Con:** The case may be large enough to occlude the sun, and looks plain enough to be at home in a marine bunker. This metal monstrosity was the poorest performing rig in the roundup. It also loses points for lacking an SD card slot and having the smallest hard drive in the bunch: only 250GB.
*3D Mark Score: 9585*
*PC Mark Score: 6612*
**$1,500.00**
**www.projectwarmachine.com**

toys

# ART FX DEVIL MAY CRY FIGURES

Art FX seems to have a decent collection of videogame statues for a reasonable price. These Devil May Cry figures, in particular, are awesome. Each figure is well detailed, comes with interchangeable weapons, and stands about 10" tall. Dante and Virgil from DMC 3 should be available by the time you read this, but the DMC 4 statue won't be out until July.

**$79.99; www.bigbadtoystore.com**

toys

## SIDESHOW COLLECTIBLES WOW DIORAMA

Sideshow Collectibles is getting ready to release its first Dioramas in a line inspired by some game called World of Warcraft. This Blood Elf Rogue versus Draenei Paladin statue may be a little pricey, but at a 1:9 scale, it stands 18" tall and weighs 20 lbs. Each piece is also hand-cast and hand-painted to meet Blizzard's authenticity standards. If you've actually heard of this obscure PC game, this might be worth checking out.

**$299.99; www.sideshowtoy.com**

tech

## SKYPE ON PSP

With Sony's 3.93 version update (check under the settings menu of your PSP to download it from any Wi-Fi environment), Skype is now available on all slim model PSPs. After you've installed the update, look under the Network menu to find a Skype icon. As long as you are within a Wi-Fi area, you can sign in to or start up a Skype account, then make free calls to anyone else on the Skype network. Sony will start selling a Skype headset kit in late April, but if you already have a PSP headset and the remote connector from the PSP-2000 headphones, you can start dialing now. For a good time call 867-5309.

**$29.99; www.us.playstation.com/PSP**

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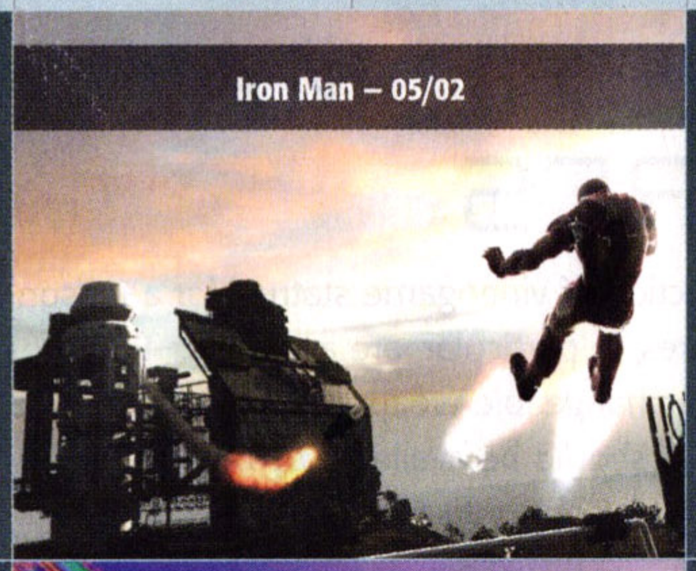



## 02

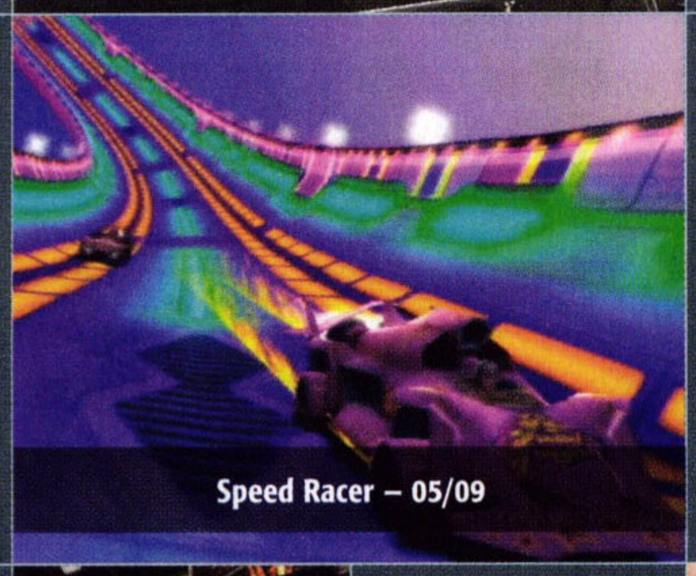
*Iron Man* (a.k.a. *It Has To Be Better Than Daredevil, Right?*) opens in theaters today. The video game adaptation is also crash landing on this very day for PS3, 360, Wii, PSP, DS, PS2, and PC. Collect them all!

R-Type Command – 05/06

## 06

**NEW RELEASES**

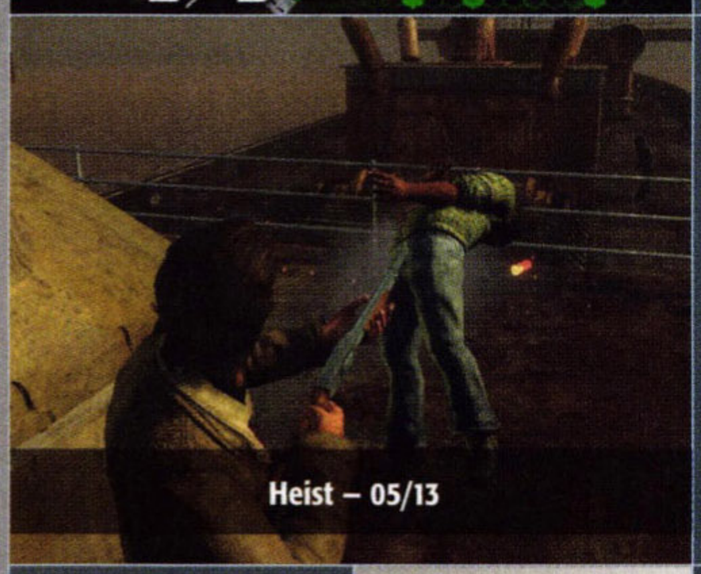
- Blast Works: Build, Fuse & Destroy – Wii
- Boom Blox – Wii
- The Dog Island – Wii
- Mass Effect – PC
- R-Type Command – PSP



Speed Racer – 05/09

## 09

*Speed Racer* makes its theatrical debut today. If only there was some kind of video game tie-in for this. Wait...there is! And you can get it today for your Wii and DS!!!

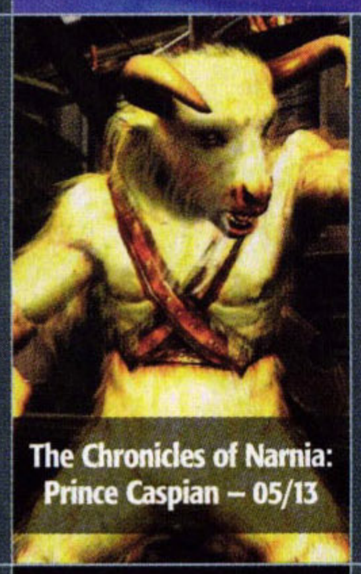


Heist – 05/13

## 13

**NEW RELEASES**

- Drone Tactics – DS
- Harvest Moon – Wii
- Heist – PS3, 360, PC
- Indianapolis 500 Evolution – 360
- Mr. Slime – DS
- Quick Yoga Training – DS
- Tamagotchi Connection Corner 3 – DS



The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian – 05/13

## 15

NO WAY!!! You're never going to believe this! Not only does *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* open in theaters, it also has a video game adaptation releasing for PS3, 360, PS2, and DS on this very day! This is definitely the best time to be a gamer!

## 18

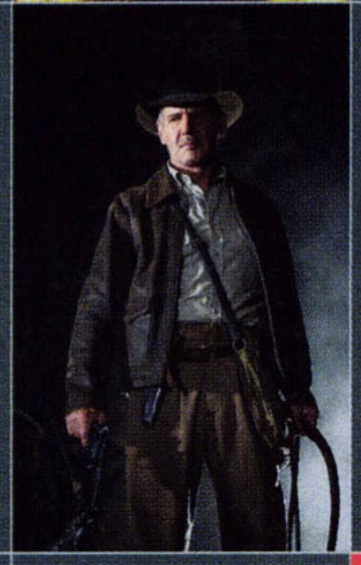
**INDIANA JONES TOYS**

Star Wars fans have been handing over their paychecks to Hasbro for decades. Now, it's time for Indiana Jones fanatics to empty their wallets. This line of toys is the same exact scale as the Star Wars toys, and starts out with a hefty (fund-stealing) 12 figures. In addition to Indy, this wave offers Marion, Belloq, and three mystery figures. Come on, Short Round!

## 20

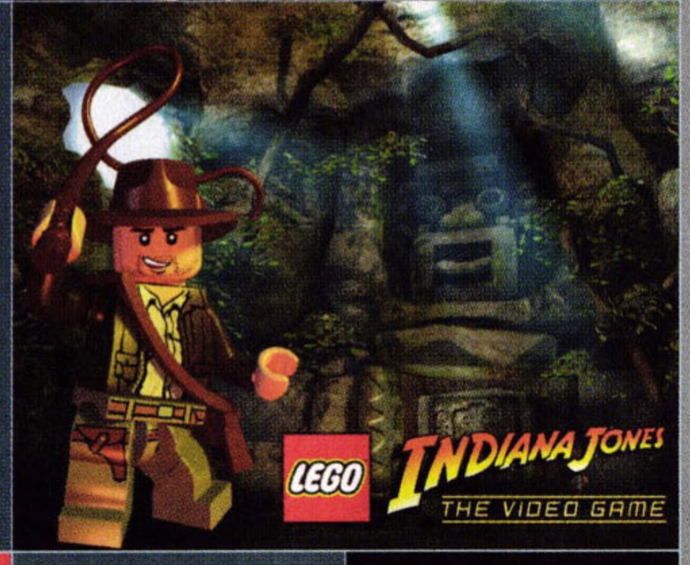
**NEW RELEASES**

- Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures – PC
- Backyard Baseball 2009 – Wii
- Battlelord: King's Bounty – PC
- Destroy All Humans: Big Willy Unleashed – PSP
- Supreme Ruler 2020 – PC
- Top Spin 3 – PS3, 360, Wii, DS
- UEFA Euro 2008 – PS3, 360, PS2, PSP
- We Ski – Wii



## 22

The highly anticipated *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* hits the silver screen today. After watching this film, you'll likely want to relive it again in a video game. Too bad! There isn't one, but coincidentally, LEGO Indiana Jones hits store shelves today! What timing! Now you don't have to go see *Postal*!



Lost Planet: Extreme Condition Colonies – 05/27

## 27

**NEW RELEASES**

- Emergency Heroes – Wii
- Hail to the Chimp – PS3, 360
- Kung Fu Panda – 360, Wii, DS
- Lost Planet: Extreme Condition Colonies – 360, PC
- The Sim City Box – PC
- Shattered Suns – PC
- Super Dodgeball Brawlers – DS

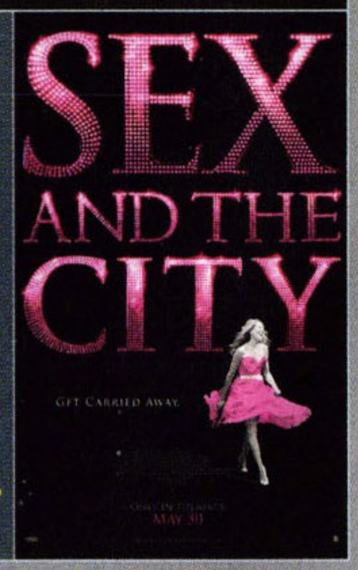
## 28

**FINAL CRISIS #1**

For those of you who read all 104 of DC Comics' weekly events, this is the moment you've been waiting for. This final installment to the Crisis trilogy is penned by Grant Morrison, and kicks off with 40 pages of universe-changing moments. Don't miss it.

## 30

A bunch of old chicks in New York whine and wine in the theatrical release of *Sex and the City*. Thankfully, there is no video game adaptation. By the way, are you a Charlotte or a Miranda? If you even have an answer to that question, turn in your Gamer's License right now. Sissy.






All release dates subject to change. For future release dates, go to www.gameinformer.com

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Prom '08

"A Night to Remember"

# IS IT REALLY FUN IF YOU DON'T REMEMBER?

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GEARS OF WAR 2
Great Expectations

# GEARS OF WAR

**UNLIMITED ENABLED**

XBOX 360
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** EPIC GAMES
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

## Sequels are a tricky business.

**When there's a clean slate and no one's heard of a game before, success can be measured on its own merits. As soon as that game sells enough copies, garners a high enough review aggregate, and fosters enough conversation, then the debate really begins: What will the sequel change? How could it be better? Can it live up to the hype? Suddenly, there are all sorts of expectations, and that's where things can get messy. Epic Games is well acquainted with high expectations. As the font from which the ubiquitous Unreal technology flows, people have some lofty ideas about what one of Epic's in-house titles should look like. For the team behind Gears of War, the stakes are even higher. After selling over four million copies and generating some of the highest critical praise of any title in this console generation, it's no exaggeration to say that a lot is riding on a sophomore effort. However, to hear them talk about it, meeting or bucking expectations is the least of their worries. They're too busy building one of the most kick-ass games that we've seen in years.**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 49 ▶▶

# THE NEW FACES

## TAI KALISO

While Cole and Baird are still a big part of the story, they won't be attached to Delta Squad as the new game opens. The reunion with those popular characters will have some lead up first, and until then, you'll be meeting some new personalities. The most memorable of these new additions may be Tai, a spiritual and meditative warrior from a tradition of honor-bound fighters. This familiar archetype should add a fun and perhaps mystical dynamic to the squad.

## CHAIRMAN PRESCOTT

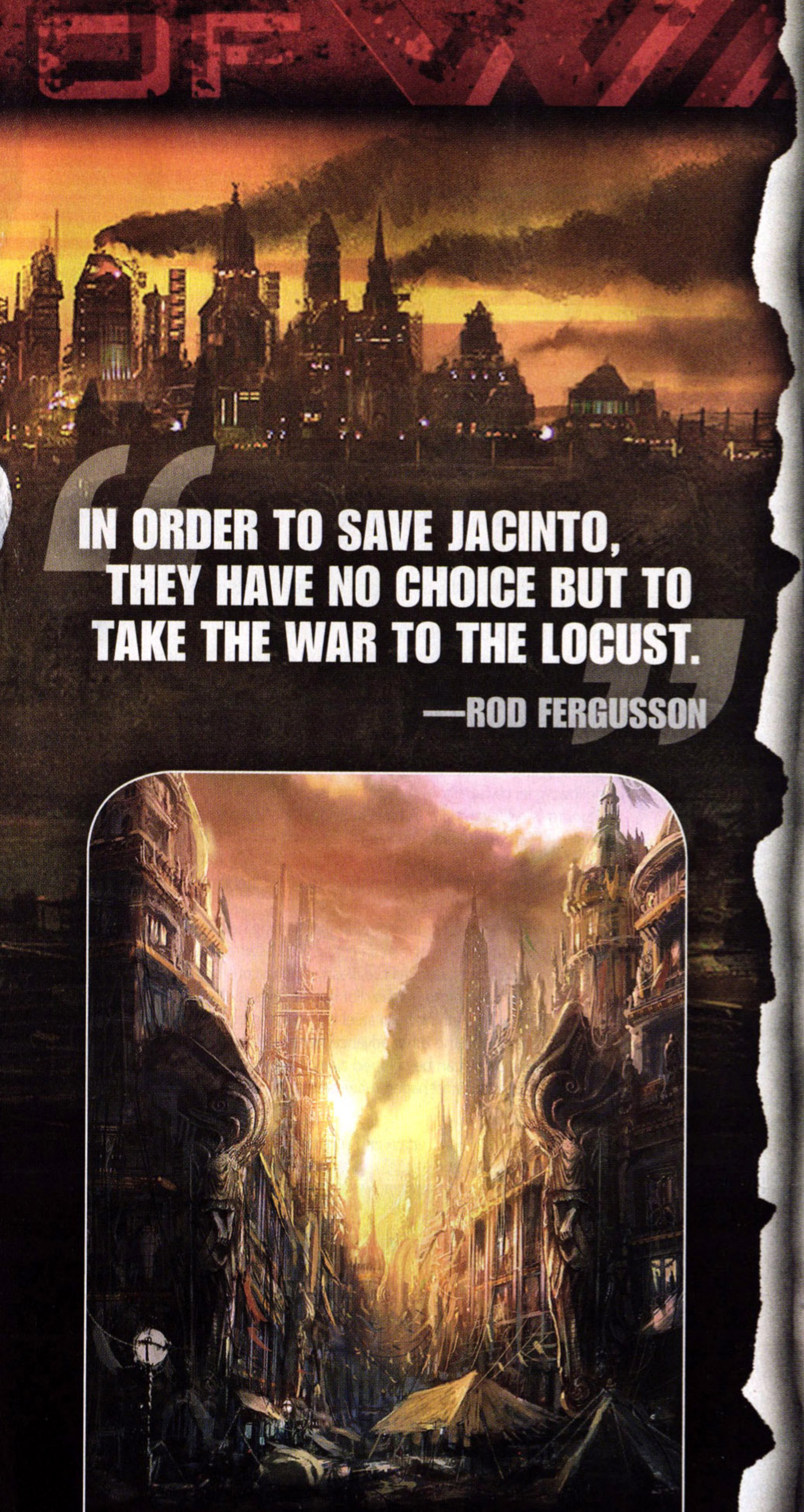
Lots of gamers found themselves wondering if Marcus' domineering superior officer was the head of the human government. It turns out that Hoffman is only second in command. Above him stands the Chairman, an almost dictatorial military leader who nonetheless has made the hard choices necessary to keep humanity alive through decades of warfare. As Gears 2 opens, this leader of the COG forces will deliver a speech to the troops before sending them reeling into the suicidal mission ahead.

## DIZZY

In the seemingly unending struggle with the Locust Horde, the military forces of the COG have taken massive casualties. Somewhere along the way, Operation Lifeboat was enacted to bring in some fresh blood. Under this new act, the Coalition government will rescue a Stranded family and bring them into the relative safety of a COG-protected zone. In return, the able-bodied men of that family join up and contribute their skills to the war effort. Such is the case with hardened soldier Dizzy, a new character who drives the massive Derrick on which Delta Squad ascends into the mountains. With a trademark drawl and an insistence on calling his truck "Betty," he's a colorful new addition to the cast.

## MARIA SANTIAGO

When Emergence Day struck, Dom's wife Maria became a victim as surely as if she had died in that first attack. On that day, her children were killed. Unable to deal with the shock and loss, Maria lost herself in the ruins of civilization. For Dominic, who joined the COG to protect his family, no priority is higher than to retrieve his lost love – his very personal quest to find her is a major part of the story that unfolds in Gears 2.



"IN ORDER TO SAVE JACINTO, THEY HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO TAKE THE WAR TO THE LOCUST."

—ROD FERGUSSON



## JACINTO

Jacinto is the last safe haven for humanity. Hard bedrock beneath the city makes it more challenging for the Locust Horde to move in from below, but the entire city could still be sunk like so many others. The city was once a rich subsection of a larger metropolis – now the poor and wealthy alike survive together behind its walls.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 47

**While there was enough testosterone flowing through the game that you might not have noticed, Gears of War left a lot of questions unanswered.** Keen-eyed players could tell there was a lot more to this dark and warlike science fiction epic than what was materializing between machine gun reloads and endlessly churning chainsaw blades. Why was Marcus Fenix imprisoned as that first game began? Who was the mysterious woman his fellow soldier Dominic Santiago was searching for out among the Stranded survivors in the wastes of the city? If this war was so massive, where was all the large-scale fighting? "We had a wish list of stuff coming off Gears 1 of things we wanted to do," lead designer Cliff Bleszinski tells us, "and we all just sort of sat around and did an assessment: what went right and what went wrong?" Aside from the stellar nuts and bolts gameplay mechanics, the first game did two things remarkably well. First, it swept players into this mysterious science fiction world of Sera with ease through fast-paced gameplay and a steady learning curve, even if some story components got lost in the shuffle. Second, it provided an intimate tale of just a few soldiers on a single, straightforward mission. Gears of War 2 aims to repeat both of those previous successes, but expand in the opposite directions at the same time. Gameplay is still front and center, but a surprising depth of narrative and story now rides shotgun; the mysteries of this world and its unanswered questions are a central feature of the game. And while the personal journey of Marcus, Dom, and the rest of Delta Squad remains the heart of that narrative, you won't have any doubts about the massive size of the war at hand by the time the credits roll. "It's simply a bigger scale and scope this time around," Bleszinski assures us. "What we want to do is get a sense of that entire war going on around the player. Not only moment to moment, where you're looking over and seeing another squad at a distance, or some choppers that are supporting you, but also within the fiction – getting radio transmissions from other guys, giving situational awareness of what's going on in other parts of the level, which is also a great tip-off to let the player know that bad things are to come."

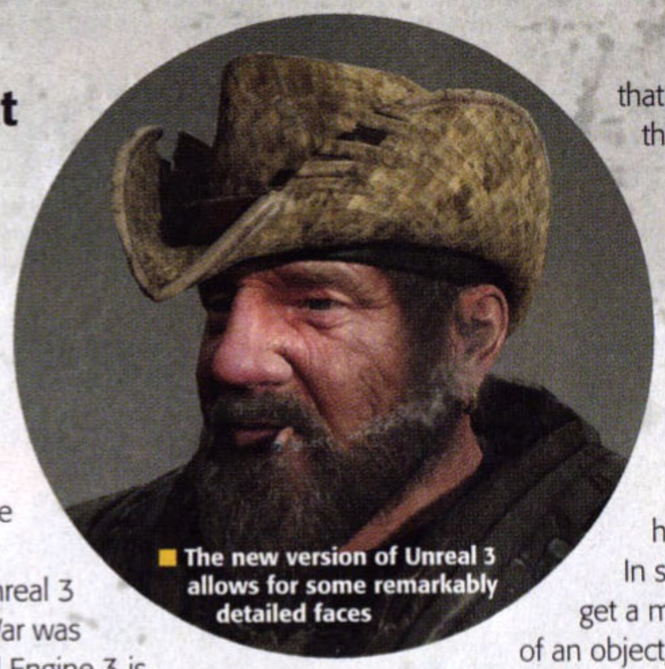
Gears of War 2 begins six months after the deployment of the Lightmass bomb at the end of part one. Uncounted numbers of the Locust Horde were destroyed in the underground blast, and the COG finally has a genuine victory on their hands. Unfortunately, for the marginal remnants of humanity, all is not well. An unintended consequence of the massive explosion beneath the earth is the normally liquid energy called Imulsion that has turned gaseous as a result of the blast. Consequently, increasing scores of surviving humans have been afflicted by a disease called Rust Lung, and the already fragile population is dwindling. Simultaneously, the resurgence of the Locust horde has intensified in a horrific way. One by one, the few remaining human cities are collapsing into gigantic sinkholes as some unknown Horde weapon succeeds where whole armies failed before. A final bastion of safety remains in Jacinto, a small, fortified borough of what used to be a much larger city. With this last sanctuary threatened by the same fate that has come to those other sunken metropolises, the COG makes a desperate decision to go on the offensive and strike back in force. It's right about then that you'll turn on your Xbox 360 and step into Delta's iron-shod, curb stomping boots. "We want to fulfill the promise – it is a war. It's more than just these four guys. The first game felt very personal, and in a lot of ways that was good," senior producer Rod Fergusson tells us. However, it's clear from our time with the team that Gears 2 will shoot for a much larger conflict. "In order to save Jacinto, they have no choice but to take the war to the Locust," Fergusson continues. "They're going to push back and go underground, and bring the battle to them."

■ Kantus

**The story and gameplay that follow are a pretty major leaps forward from the original game, but an equally large step is being made in the behind-the-scenes tech.** Epic doesn't change the version number of the Unreal engine with quite the same frequency as some technology programs, but don't be fooled. A lot has changed about Unreal 3 in the two years since Gears of War was unleashed on the public. "Unreal Engine 3 is designed for this entire console cycle," explains Epic CEO and technical director Tim Sweeney. "From now until 2012 there will be major games shipping using Unreal 3, and there will be major new features at every juncture along the way."

The first game was a visual tour de force, and its sequel is set to impress in equal measure. In many ways, the surrounding screens, pulled from the actual gameplay, speak for themselves. However, Sweeney is more than happy to run us through the details.

One noticeable shift is in the newly advanced approach to character lighting. In some ways, it's a step away from realistic lighting and towards cinematic lighting. Anyone who has ever been to a movie set has seen the huge number of angles and lighting techniques used to perfectly frame an actor. The new version of Unreal 3 emulates that approach by constantly shifting the lighting technique in order to make a character stand out in the environment.



■ The new version of Unreal 3 allows for some remarkably detailed faces

Another seemingly minor adjustment goes a long way towards creating that perfectly lit environment: ambient occlusion. This complex technology takes into account all the geometry in an environment when determining how light affects any given point. In simple terms, this means that you get a much better sense of the 3D shape of an object, since the interplay of light and shadow on the object emulate the way they would actually appear in real life. Edges are dramatically highlighted, and light falls with an eerie realism across tiny bumps and crevices along a wall. As Sweeney describes the tech behind the system, Bleszinski half-jokingly interjects that ambient occlusion "really ties the room together," but his description is more than apt.

If light/object interaction seems like a small addition to you (it isn't), then perhaps you'll appreciate Unreal's new ability to render huge numbers of individual creatures at the same time. In a stunning display of the engine's horsepower, Sweeney showed us a demo of hundreds of Locust troops as they poured out from around a building and into the streets. Each was moving independently and following its own path. In the ultimate application of the tech, those hundreds will eventually all have individual models and animations that set them apart as functioning unique individuals. It doesn't take much imagination to see how this particular addition to the Unreal toolset will come into play when trying to boost the scope of the battles in Gears of War 2.

Beyond that, we were also privy to the startling new water and soft body physics the new engine can create. The latter allows for some disturbing applications on gel-like, fleshy, and viscous substances, particularly in reaction to gunfire. For harder objects, the destructibility factor of everything from steel to rocks and trees is moving forward apace with the other advancements. Behind a massive pillar, a character's cover can be chipped away piece by piece until all that remains is the misshapen rebar beneath and a clean shot for enemy snipers.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 52 ▶▶

■ As the years pass, the distinction between concept art and screenshots narrows

■ This breathtaking mountain screenshot will look a lot different as it decays into the destruction and chaos of a clash between the COG and the Locust Horde

# A SLICE OF ACTION

***As seen in the second level of Gears of War 2, Assault:*** The sun-dappled pine forests are in stark contrast to the roiling convoy of human machinery as it rolls up the pristine mountain pass. Fenix and his squad stand atop their massive wheeled transport. Dizzy, the driver of their derrick, is shouting curses over the roar of the engine. As a breathtaking valley vista opens up to the west, the first mortar slams into a nearby derrick, leaving behind a flaming husk. The flying nemacyst and their explosive assaults are only the spear point of the Locust defense. After some near misses, the derrick tumbles off the dirt road and stalls. An emergence hole opens up nearby and Locust infantry begin to pour out. Firing wildly, Marcus and his team push back the assault. Even as Dizzy gets the truck running, a Brumak appears and gives chase. Crashing headlong through the cracking and snapping trees, Dizzy forces the derrick into high gear, even as the transport across the way is overrun. Leaping from their new attack platform, enemy troops attempt to board, and Marcus rushes out from cover to curb stomp the assailants. Ahead, in the distance, a narrow bridge stands, wide enough for only one vehicle. The Locust driver sneers and speeds up his derrick as the drop into the gorge up ahead looms large.

## THE DERRICK

These overwhelmingly powerful transport trucks have multiple purposes. They serve as a formidable vehicle for moving COG troops, but they also include a mechanism to shoot small two-person pods deep underground, like paratroopers being flung into the depths of the earth.

■ BRUMAK

## GRIDLOCK COMPARISON

Most multiplayer details remain under wraps, but we got a glimpse of the remade multiplayer map favorite called Gridlock. The step up in technology in the last two years is more than obvious. We hear hints of all sorts of new multiplayer features, from dramatically expanded co-op modes to multiplayer content that takes advantage of Unreal's new ability to deliver huge numbers of the Locust Horde at one time, but confirmed details will have to wait until a later date.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 50

**While much of the behind-the-scenes technology will be new, the gameplay of Gears 2 will appear mostly familiar to fans,** with a few small variations. The core cover/shoot mechanics remain largely intact, but the use of cover has been carefully retouched so it will be harder to get hit while protected, as the character will rest a little further back from corners. Active reloads won't be dramatically altered, particularly with the returning weapons. However, some of the new arsenal may vary the way in which active reloads are used. New chainsaw duels expand that gruesome combat mechanic to deliver even more excitement. Boss battles return, but a big push is geared towards refining them, making them more fun and epic in scale. "We have creatures that make the Brumak look like a baby panda bear," Bleszinski exclaims.

While the core experience upholds many traditions, a number of additions should change the flow of the Gears universe. Chief among the gameplay innovations is the new approach to cooperative play. While we haven't yet heard about any plans to expand beyond the two-person play options of the first game, the way that the cooperative campaign will flow has shifted in some important ways. Drop-in and drop-out options mean a buddy can show up at any time, then leave without interrupting the flow of the game. Also, the seemingly minor addition of multiple save files means you can maintain the integrity of each playthrough without abandoning your other attempts. Most significant is the handling of difficulty settings in cooperative play. "For Gears 2, we have this notion of individual difficulties. I can play on Hardcore, and Cliff here can play on Casual," Fergusson laughingly tells us amid a quick objection from Bleszinski. Fergusson corrects himself: "Or, you know, he can play on Insane. When we're together, the game will understand what that means, but when we split, we'll each have our individual experiences." While some players may be of the same ability level, the team recognizes that for others there might be a wide gulf separating player skill. If a significant other, parent, or inexperienced friend wants to join in now, they won't feel like they're being punished for their enthusiasm. The details of how this system will work remain under wraps, but in communal combat situations, players on a lower difficulty will have just the right challenge even as their more experienced co-op buddy throws down at the Insane setting. To address what will hopefully be an influx of these new players, a fourth difficulty is being added for the most casual gamers, even as the harder difficulty settings remain truly devastating. "One of the things we took away from the first game was that Casual wasn't casual enough. We actually overshot on that difficulty and made a game that was a little harder than we intended," Fergusson explains. The new game will try to embrace any and all who are willing to pick up the controller.

# GEARS OF WAR

**"WE HAVE CREATURES THAT MAKE THE BRUMAK LOOK LIKE A BABY PANDA BEAR."**

**—CLIFF BLESZINSKI**

Gorgon Burst Pistol

Hammer Burst

Poison Grenade

At whatever difficulty you choose to play, expect all the old enemies and weapons to be present right beside some dramatic new toys. Chief among these is the COG Centaur tank, a hybrid beast of a machine that takes the best parts of both a monster truck and a military tank and combines them for the dedicated level in which you'll pilot one. Meanwhile, far beneath the ground is the best place to look for new opponents and the weapons they'll use to take you down. We were shown a vast underground cave level wherein Marcus and his companions will take the fight to the Locust. Unlike the sometimes cramped and linear subterranean paths from the first game, this cavern complex is vast and breathtaking. Branching levels and open spaces give players true tactical choices as they decide which way to tackle an assault. Whatever path you choose, bio-luminescent plants light the faces of the new Locust Kantus enemies. These monk-like devils hum low and droning chants that can be focused into sonic attacks against you. They wield weapons like the new Gorgon burst pistol and poison grenades, both of which can become part of your arsenal if you play your cards right. However, the Kantus' true danger lies in their ability to revive their fallen brethren from afar. Where before you could rest easy after taking down an enemy soldier, now there is the constant danger of them rising back up to continue the fight. The only alternative is to brave the hail of gunfire to break through enemy ranks and kill the Kantus skulking in the rear. Along the way, you may not have access to stable cover anymore, so you'll have to make do with the moving kind. Massive Locust rock worms will emerge from the cavern walls during battle, guided by the Kantus' chanting. Luckily, the creatures are so large you can hide behind them as they slither about, and you too will be able to guide them to an advantageous firing position.

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“THE STAKES ARE RAISED.
THIS IS HUMANITY’S LAST STAND.
EVERYTHING IS AT RISK.
NOTHING IS SAFE.”
—JOSHUA ORTEGA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 53

**Even as the gameplay is bolstered by these exciting new additions, the team at Epic is well aware that many players out there hunger for a deeper and more involved storytelling experience.** "At the end of the day, we loved Gears 1 and we loved the amount of story we had in it – it contributed to its pace," Fergusson reveals. "The fact that we didn't have five-minute cutscenes every 20 steps meant we were able to have that blockbuster summer movie pace that we were going for. But at the same time, obviously we left some people behind." Unwilling to make that mistake again, they've brought on novelist and comic writer Joshua Ortega to serve as a dedicated advocate for story and narrative throughout the process. In our conversations, Ortega is eager to relay the sense of depth he is trying to evoke with the established characters of the series. "Thematically, it's just heavier. There's a lot of weight – a lot of emotional resonance," he tells us. "The stakes are raised. This is humanity's last stand. Everything is at risk. Nothing is safe." Despite the sci-fi nature of the game world, Ortega is insistent about the potential to find genuine drama in this world that shares a wealth of parallels with our own. "There are so many human elements that really resonate and hook people, and I think we're really exploring a lot of that."

A big part of that added emotional context is delivered through the right combination of dialogue and quality voice acting. "It's amazing what you can do with careful dialogue. Just one little line here or there can tell you so much about a character, if you pick the right moment and the right words," Ortega says. While there is still a strong effort to have storytelling that doesn't break the pace of the combat, the spoken dialogue this time around is much more geared towards revealing a plotline that is both coherent and entertaining. The second ingredient of that recipe is quality acting, and the cast is seeing the return of the two headlining voices from game one: John DiMaggio as Marcus Fenix, and Carlos Ferro as Dominic Santiago. The pair has worked together on numerous voiceover projects before, and this time they'll be recording side by side. "We felt like we had scenes of such emotion in them that we had to bring them in together to work it out," Fergusson says. "We didn't want to do it separately." The hope is that amid the cacophony of destruction inherent to a Gears of War game, players will encounter

■ This tiny hamlet deep in the mountains is the best place from which to launch an underground assault on the Locust tunnels. Getting there is another story entirely

some visceral and heated character interactions they may not be expecting. "You're dealing with these very thick, steroid-ish guys, and trying to have this meaningful best friend relationship – it's hard to write that out of the gate, without knowing and having their history and understanding their backstory and their lives together," Fergusson continues. "So now that we have that relationship, and we have this understanding of how these two people communicate and work together, now we can take that a step further."

Beyond a shift to a darker and more heartfelt narrative, other additions are planned to deliver that added shade of depth to the world. The static, forced walking scenes of the first game have been replaced by a dynamic conversation camera system that will deliver focused facial close-ups and shifting dramatic angles even as the player continues to be in control. "The problem was, in third person, the entire conversation would happen to the back of the person's head," Fergusson says. "We're working on this system to change that." Gamers who love the expanded story content will rejoice. Meanwhile, a newly added "Shut Up" button will let more impatient players have Marcus end the conversation early and get back to the action. "There's a certain percentage of the audience that wants to skip all that, and they just want to shoot some s—, and we're more than willing to cater to that," Bleszinski adds. "But, with that said, we're doing a far better job with the narrative this time around. Those that want to take a little time and invest themselves, they'll have that much more of a rich experience."

The COG tags of game one have been replaced by a wide array of story-relevant collectibles, from personal letters and medical records to new COG tags that can actually be examined to learn about their fallen owner. A war journal is available on the pause screen that tells you what items you've found, and more importantly the ones you're still missing, as well as the locations in which to search for them. Many of the game's Achievements can be worked towards in both single and multiplayer, and the game will track your progress in the war journal towards each of them. For instance, if you need to nail 1,000 headshots, you can do so in any game mode, and the war journal will tell you how close you are to completion. From this scrapbook journal, you'll also be able to examine maps, histories, and story-related content about whatever locale you're currently in, thereby delivering a deeper grounding in the area in which you're fighting. Finally, the return of the multi-use floating robot Jack includes a newly added feature – a video screen. Thus, when the ever-helpful Anya has a mission update for you, you'll chat with her face to face.

It's likely that's exactly what happens when the game begins, as we're told it's a clue from Anya that sends Dom and Marcus out on the first leg of their journey. The mysterious figure in Dom's past hinted at in game one turns out to be his long-lost wife, Maria Santiago. After losing their children on Emergence Day, Maria faded to a shadow of her former self, and disappeared into the war-torn world. Since then, Dom has been ceaselessly searching for her. As the game begins, a piece of intel from Anya sends the estranged husband and his best friend Marcus to a hospital where she may have been sighted. Unsurprisingly, the Locust Horde chooses that inopportune moment to attack, and the battle unfolds. From there, the two find themselves at the spearhead of an invasion into the Locust tunnels. As part of a massive assault force, they depart Jacinto and head into the snow-tinged mountains beyond, towards a tiny village called Landown. From the soft ground there, they can

drill down into the caverns below, where the real war gets underway.

The team at Epic knows they made a great game in the first Gears of War. They know a lot of gamers loved it, and they know what people desperately don't want to see changed. More uncommon is the fact that they know where they need to step up and improve. Open about their need to move past the machismo-laden chest thumping to a narrative of more significance, they've maintained the over-the-top drama but added a more human component. Aware of the call to expand the scope and scale of their world, they've upheld the qualities of squad-based combat while throwing it headlong into a gargantuan war effort. They know the wildly high expectations that come along with a sequel like this, but they've been at this too long to let them be anything more than sheer motivation. Gears of War 2 is real, and it looks every bit as formidable and impressive as we hoped. It's bigger and better than before, and the people making it are insistent that you'll be playing it in its entirety in just over half a year. ■■■

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PC

# Tom Clancy's HAWX

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT BUCHAREST > **RELEASE** FALL 2008

## FLYING HIGH

The newest chapter in the ever-evolving Tom Clancy universe will have gamers taking to the skies. HAWX (High Altitude Warfare, umm, X) appears at first to take a page from Namco Bandai's popular Ace Combat series. While this new release may share many traits in common with that and other familiar combat flight sims, HAWX is branching into some brand new territory in an attempt to redefine the genre. Early reports liken the experience as much to a first-person shooter as traditional flight games.

"HAWX is strongly connected to the Clancy universe," creative director Elie Benhamou tells us. "The game takes place between GRAW 2 and EndWar and brings a new dimension to Clancy's global storyline." Leading up to the world-shaking conflicts of EndWar, HAWX details the rise of private military contractors (PMCs) as heavy war materials like jet fighters are deregulated. Gamers play as a former U.S. pilot who joins a newly created PMC seeking to help stabilize countries around the world. "The first part of the game will show the progressive rise of the PMCs until they become real armies, capable of handling every type of modern conflict and strong enough to challenge even the most powerful states," Benhamou explains. "The second part of the game is a much faster-paced military thriller showing where such a dangerous situation could lead the world."

From a gameplay perspective, HAWX will implement a brand new approach to air combat, where players can toggle an Assistance mode on or off. This isn't a switch between easy and hard. Rather, you're expected to regularly toggle the option. "Assistance On makes the player safer thanks to some dedicated anticrash and antistall systems," says lead game designer Thomas Simon. The planes are also equipped with the Enhanced Reality System. This HUD-based info is an ever-present ally to confront dangerous situations. The computer can calculate an emergency evasion course, and it can also track enemy fighters to predict their upcoming moves. Meanwhile, switching the assistance mode off deactivates the plane's safeties, allowing for dangerous maneuvers that are often the only way out of a sticky situation, such as a 180-degree turn to lose a persistent missile. "The Assistance Off comes with a revolutionary external camera giving a real perception of what your plane is doing; you can compare it to a fully playable replay camera."

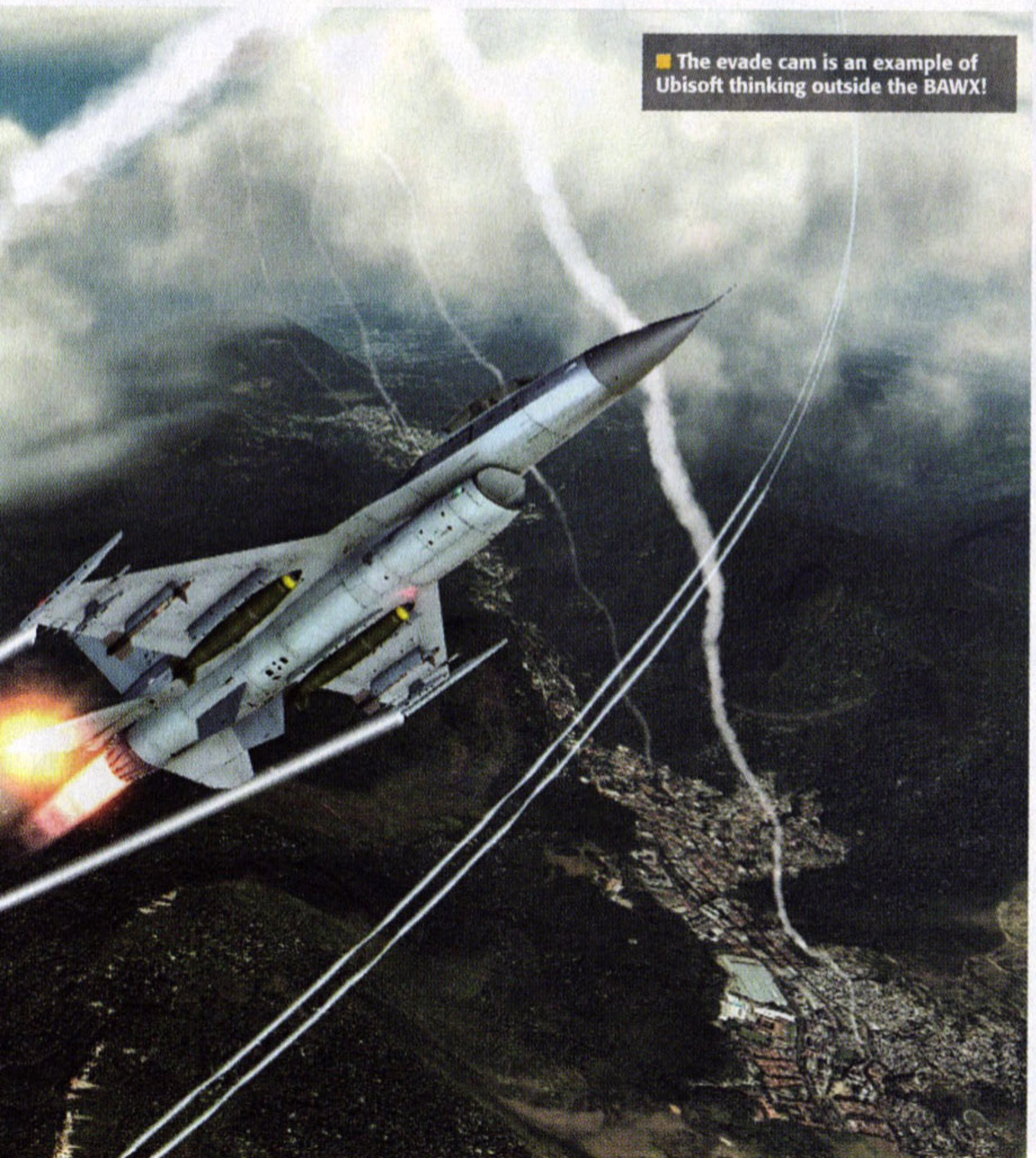
Look no further than the surrounding screens for evidence of the jaw-dropping tech at work in the title. What isn't obvious from the screens are the plans the team has to have the game run at 60 frames per second. In addition, actual military satellite data is being used to create the landscapes – some of the ground maps will be 120 square kilometers.

Throughout the single and multiplayer components of the game, you'll play as a single pilot who will evolve as you gain experience points through completing objectives in any game mode. While multiplayer details remain under wraps, we've been assured about the presence of a full co-op mode. We haven't heard such good news since the end of the Cold War. We'll fill you in more as soon as we've gotten to play this exciting new Clancy offshoot. ■■■

■ The best flying weather is after the spring EQUINAWX!

■ Soaring through the air at high speed RAWX!

■ You know who would have been good in *Top Gun*? Michael J. FAWX!



■ The evade cam is an example of Ubisoft thinking outside the BAWX!

■ With action this fast, you'll have to hold onto your SAWX!

■ Try to avoid flying into groups of birds. You know, FLAWX!

PC

# StarCraft II

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
**> PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT **> DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** TBA

## WE REQUIRE MORE VESPENE GAS

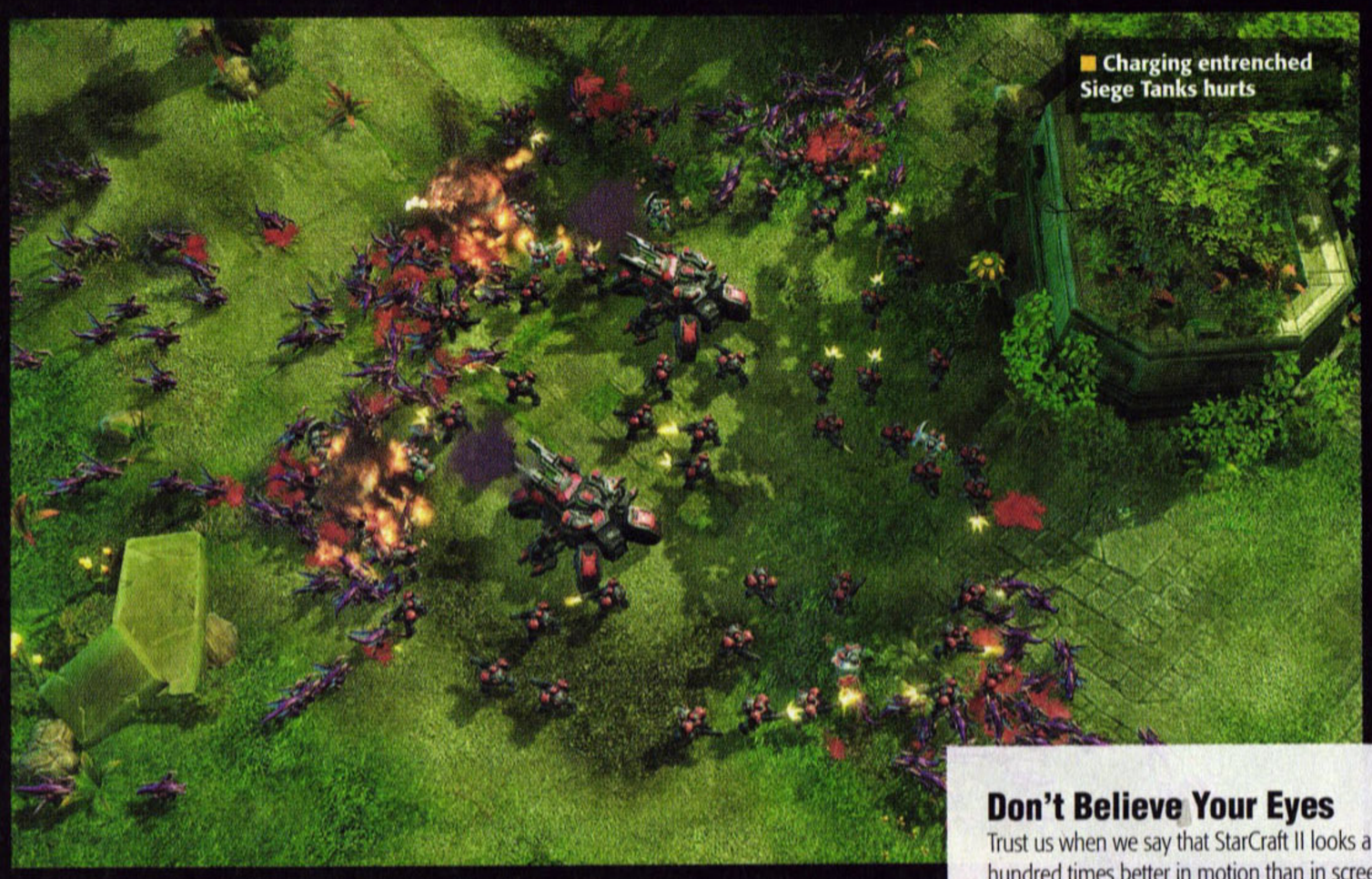
At a recent Blizzard event at the company's shiny new headquarters, we got our hands on the legendary developer's next real-time strategy title. Somehow, the game simultaneously feels like classic StarCraft and a fresh new title at the same time, even in its current pre-alpha state. And yes, it totally rocks.

At long last, Blizzard showed off the third and final faction in the game: the Zerg. This super-evolved, purely organic horde of aliens plays very similarly to its original incarnation, leveraging parallel unit creation and sheer numbers to overcome Protoss and Terran high technology. However, the Zerg's approach to base defense is radically different now. Each Zerg player can have a single Queen out at a time, which functions as a self-contained, teleporting, one-alien base defense. Queens can heal friendly Zerg units and structures, activate swarms of suicide defenders from nearby buildings, and spawn detectors and turrets – on top of tearing apart enemies in melee with fearsome spikes. It's a cool mechanic that serves to further differentiate the already distinct factions from one another.

This sequel also introduces some new mechanics to map layout. Yellow high-yield minerals appear on some, giving players an incentive to expand to their invariably difficult-to-defend locations. Breakable barriers seal off sections of other maps and allow players to open new paths at the cost of some of your army's time. Xel'Naga observatories offer stealth detection and a large vision area to the player who parks a unit nearby. These may seem like minor changes, but after several dozen multiplayer matches, we can safely say they add a nice twist to the existing StarCraft gameplay.

Two small but impactful changes to the interface make us very happy. First, you can select a nearly unlimited number units at a time now – no more swearing as you leave behind a half-dozen Marines or Zealots. Second, multiple buildings can be selected at once, meaning that hotkeying production just got a lot easier. Once you play with these additions, it's really tough to go back.

The Zerg are (unsurprisingly) awesome, the game already plays and looks great, and even in its current state we couldn't get enough of StarCraft II. What else is there to say? ■■■

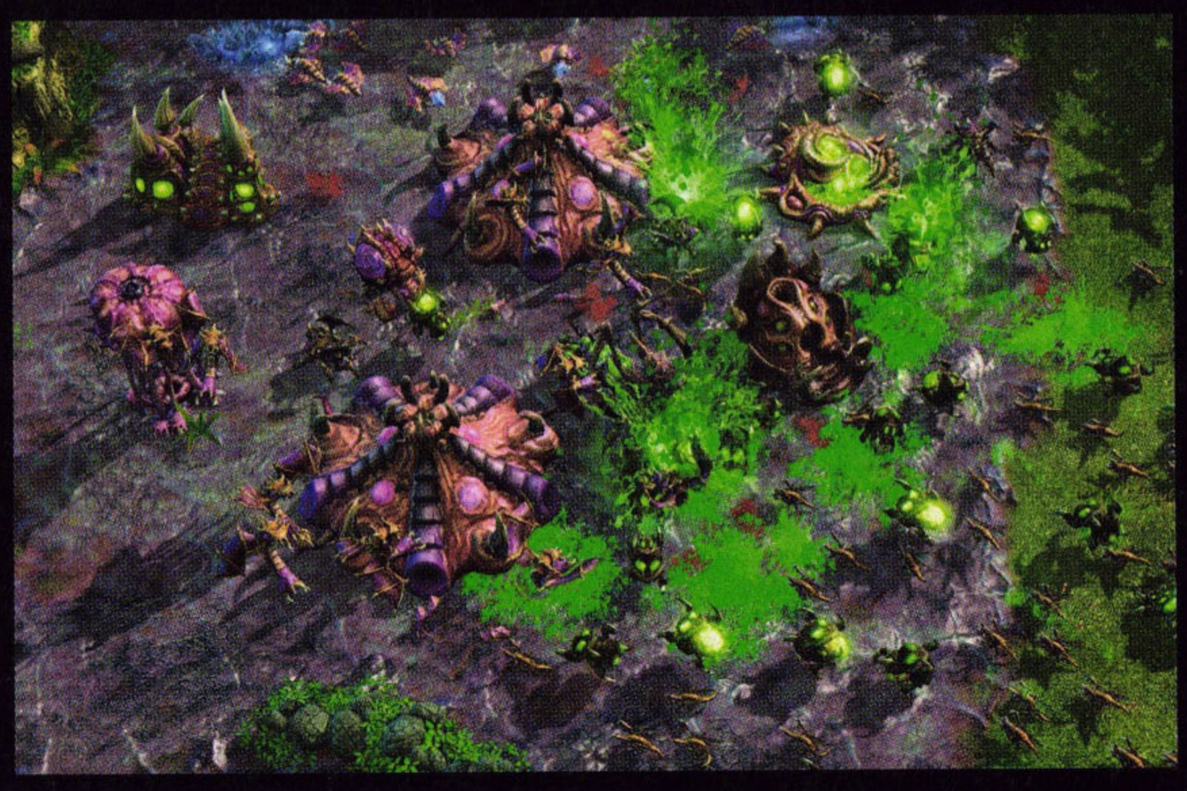


■ Charging entrenched Siege Tanks hurts

■ Everything is rendered in gorgeous full 3D now, but the camera is still static

### Don't Believe Your Eyes

Trust us when we say that StarCraft II looks a hundred times better in motion than in screenshots. The outstanding unit animation, explosive effects, and detailed shadowing combine to make this one of the best-looking RTS titles to date. Go check out the gameplay footage at Game Informer Online if you don't believe us.



■ Fast-regenerating Roaches make excellent raiders

## Battle.net 2.0

In typical closemouthed Blizzard fashion, the company mentioned there are "big plans" in the works for its Battle.net service but refused to go into specifics. The developer's interest in competitive gaming with both the original StarCraft and World of Warcraft should tell you something, though, as should the fact that the StarCraft II team are big Defense of the Ancients fans.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# World in Conflict: Soviet Assault

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE, OR UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PC INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** SIERRA
> **DEVELOPER** MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT/SWORDFISH STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FALL

## WORLD WAR 3.5

■ As in most games, combined-arms forces are generally the way to go

Last year's World in Conflict on PC was well-received by critics and consumers alike, and now Sierra is bringing the real-time strategy title to console as well. We tried our hand at the control scheme for this tactical RTS in an early Xbox 360 build, and though a gamepad can never replicate a mouse/keyboard setup, we were nonetheless able to crush the opposition without swearing at the interface.

World in Conflict works a little differently than traditional RTS titles. Players don't create buildings or train troops; instead, when units are destroyed, their reinforcement cost slowly trickles back into a pool from which you can spend points to airdrop in new troops. Thus, everyone is more or less operating with the same objective force strength, and how well you command those forces determines the outcome of battle. Calling in offscreen support powers like airstrikes and artillery barrages with points earned by killing enemy troops is also key – and gorgeously rendered by the game's outstanding graphics engine.

This new release, Soviet Assault, adds a Russian perspective to the formerly U.S.-only single-player campaign. These new missions are interspersed with the original sequence, and should offer some extra incentive to play through the already-lengthy campaign. A few new support powers (but no new units) will be added as well, though Sierra wasn't ready to release any details about them as of press time.

Navigating the game using a gamepad feels remarkably natural. The two analog sticks control the camera similarly to a first-person title, with the left stick moving along the horizontal plane and the right stick altering the angle. Control groups can be quickly set and recalled with the d-pad, and reinforcements can be set to join any of the four groups when they land. The face buttons give orders and activate special abilities, while the shoulders pull up the reinforcement and support menus and act as modifier keys for advanced commands like force-move and attack ground. It's a slick scheme, and our money's on it enabling a painless experience once the learning curve is conquered. We certainly didn't have any trouble commanding our forces after a few initial mishaps, though the lack of a mini-map is unfortunate.

Online is a big part of World in Conflict's appeal, and Sierra is thankfully integrating party support, dedicated servers, and more into the game. As good as the multiplayer in the original version is, we have very high hopes for this release. Soviet Assault already looks and plays wonderfully, so strategy gamers should have quite a treat in store barring any missteps between now and its fall launch. ■ ■ ■

They may not be as sexy as tanks, but well-utilized infantry wins battles

Jets only show up when support powers are used

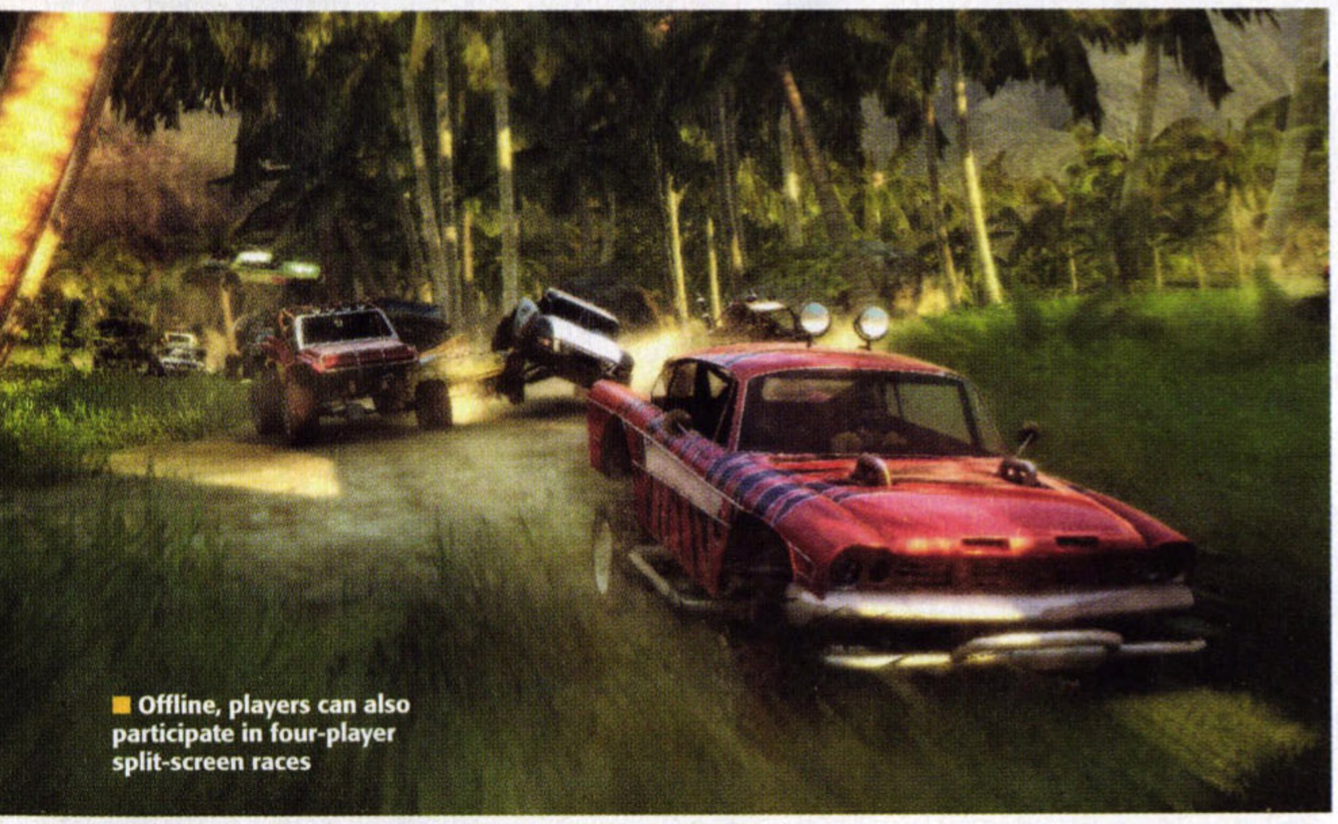
Clever use of defensive abilities like chaff or smokescreens is key

PLAYSTATION 3

# MotorStorm 2 (working title)

**> STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT **> DEVELOPER** EVOLUTION STUDIOS **> RELEASE** FALL

## FANTASY ISLAND



■ Offline, players can also participate in four-player split-screen races

The MotorStorm franchise is clearly important to Sony. According to the company, the first game was the PS3's bestseller, and last year Sony bought developer Evolution Studios. Now it looks to pay back its fans the only way it knows how – by ramming your buggy off a cliff at high speeds.

The first MotorStorm made good on a few basic promises: It looked great and produced some unpredictable, hairy racing. With the sequel, Evolution Studios looks to provide variety and depth, which will hopefully make it a more full-featured title. Sony recently released the game's first trailer, and we combed it for some clues.

MotorStorm 2 picks up the stakes and heads for a tropical island. This new locale keeps the mud, which was a game-changing variable in the first game, and adds shadows and dense foliage to obscure your view. If the trailer is accurate, players will now be able to make use of environmental obstacles. One sequence shows a truck barreling through the wilderness

■ MotorStorm 2 takes place entirely on this remote tropical island. Are volcanoes just the beginning?

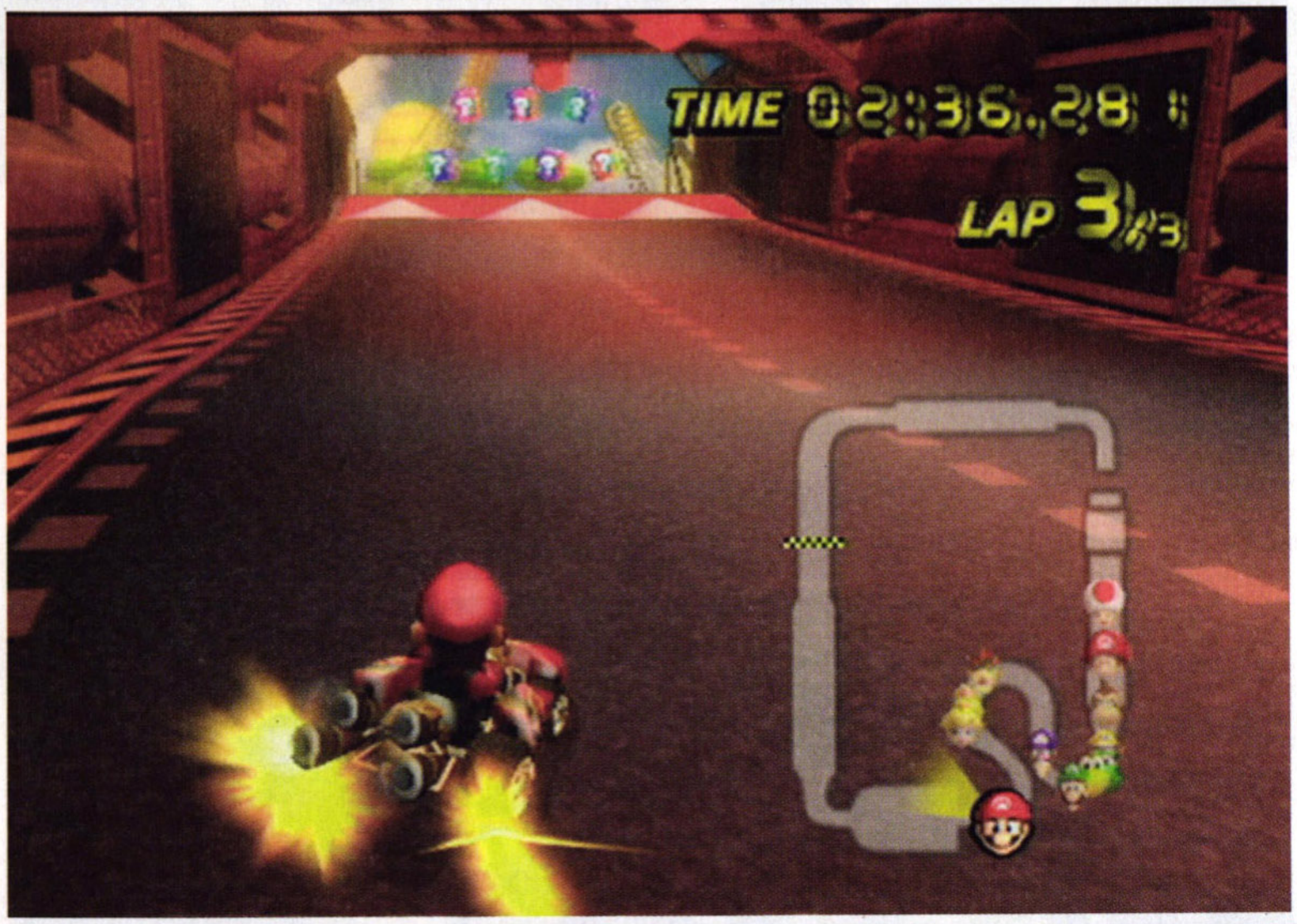
■ Monster trucks' appetite for destruction knows no bounds

and striking a tower, which falls, takes out a trailing competitor, and remains littered on the track for subsequent racers to avoid. Sony says the game contains rivers with quick currents, lava pools, and volcanic clouds, so it sounds like this title will continue the unpredictable nature of its predecessor in fine form while ratcheting up the drama quotient.

The tracks for the first MotorStorm were reused too frequently, which stood in contrast to the surprises being thrown at you while you raced. Hopefully MotorStorm 2's new location offers not only more tracks, but some variety as well. Point-to-Point rally lines, large circuits, shortcuts, and more elevation changes would be very welcome. The game also introduces monster trucks into the mix, and it will be interesting to see how this new ride is balanced with the rest of the vehicles and the tracks themselves – something that the original MotorStorm did very well. ■■■

■ This sequence from the game's first trailer shows that MotorStorm 2 will have more environmental interaction

This isn't the best-looking game on the Wii, and since this is a Nintendo product, that's a little surprising. What it may lack in detail it makes up for in framerate. The game runs as smooth as a buttered pig




Wii

# Mario Kart Wii

**> STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA WiiCONNECT24)
**> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** NINTENDO **> RELEASE** APRIL 27

## DON'T STOP FOR DIRECTIONS

With two major Nintendo pillars, Super Mario Galaxy and Super Smash Bros. Brawl, firmly behind us, it's time to look ahead to see what the company has planned next for its little white box. We recently had a chance to tour the Mushroom Kingdom with Nintendo's perennial racer, Mario Kart, and the game looks like it's shaping up nicely.

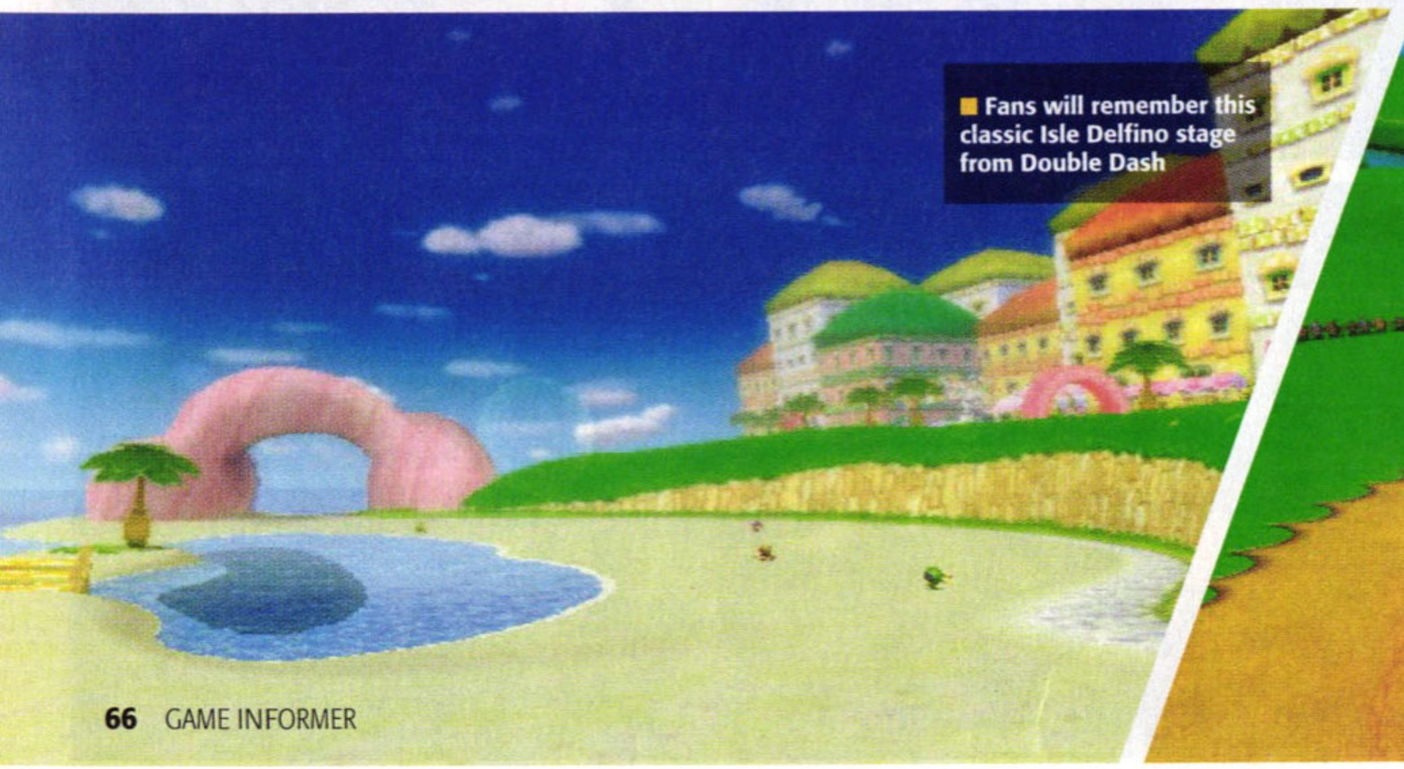
Mario Kart Wii is essentially the same game we've been playing for years, but there are small innovations. The first new feature gamers will encounter is the inclusion of motorbikes. Though the bikes turn quicker and slide less around corners, there isn't a huge difference in playability between them and the standby karts.

Creative courses are a hallmark for any Mario Kart, and the Wii version is no different. We dodged parking traffic in a Super Mario Sunshine-themed Coconut Mall, did a few tricks in a half-pipe on the mountainous DK Summit, and avoided speeding mine carts and poisonous bats in Wario's Gold Mine. All told there are 16 new tracks, but in addition to those, 16 classic tracks from the series' past titles have been revamped and put in the Wii version with improved graphics.

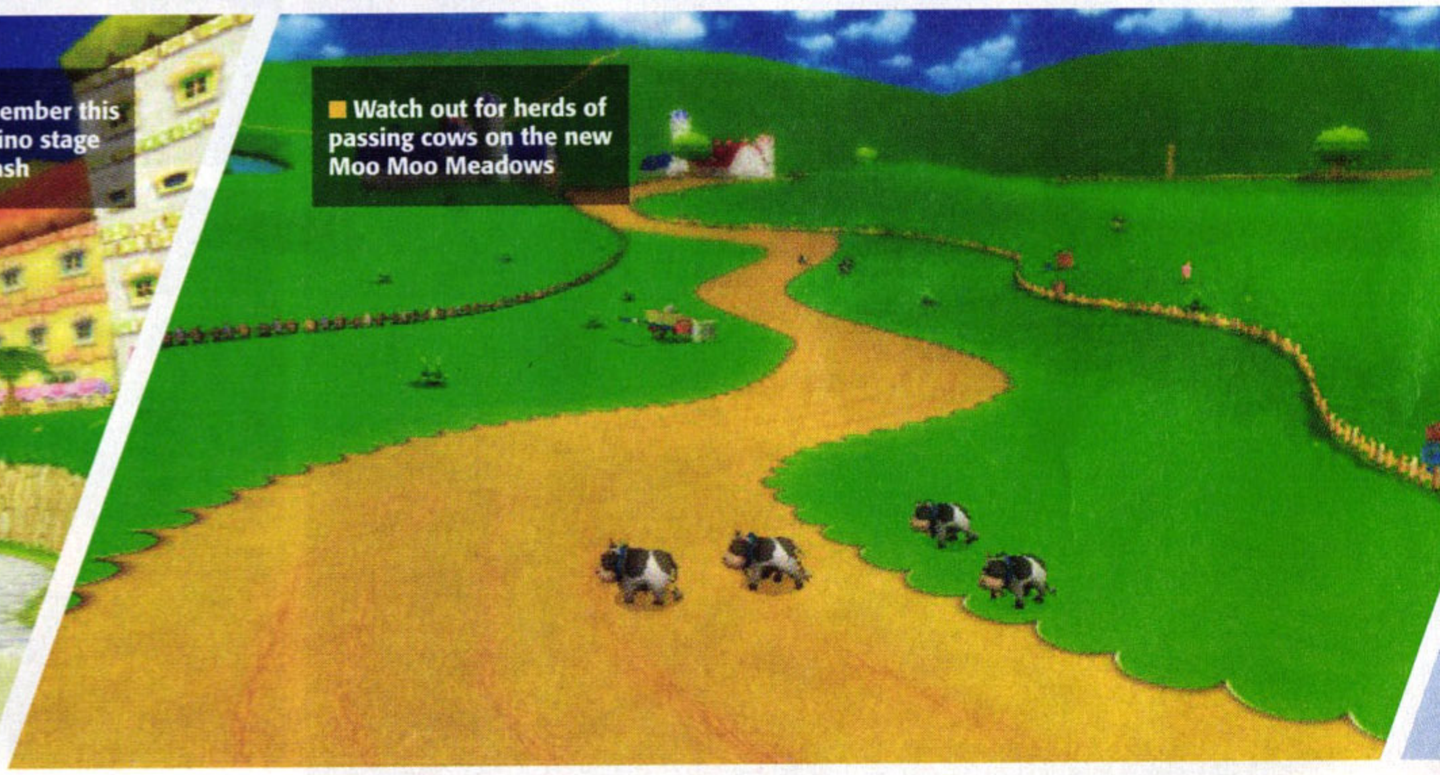
It looks like there will be at least 18 competitors this time around, including new additions like Baby Peach. The ever-popular Balloon Battle mode is still present, and we got to play a new battle mode called Coin Runners — a game where two teams battle over coins strewn across a level. The team to collect and keep the most coins at the end of a time limit wins. We don't know if Shine Thief or Bob-omb Blast will return, but they weren't in the version that we played.

Double Karting has been removed, but otherwise the game controls a lot like the last console entry, Double Dash. Using the Wii remote like a steering wheel works all right, but generally feels a bit loose. While some might prefer this style of play, the vast majority of players will probably still prefer the responsiveness of a controller. Remember those GameCube controllers you dug out of the attic for Smash Bros. Brawl? Keep them handy, because Mario Kart will use several different control inputs, including GameCube pads, WaveBirds, and the Wii's classic controller.

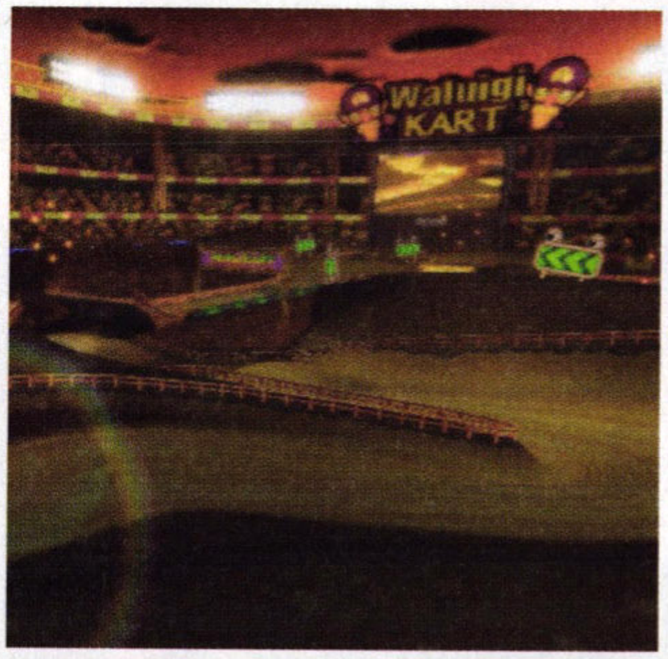
If you can't handle Mario Kart's special brand of chaotic stress then you probably already know the game is not for you, but if this is the kind of racer of which you have a lot of fond memories, chances are you're already getting goose bumps. Let's just hope Mario Kart Wii has enough gas in it to last until Nintendo's next big thing...probably something with Mario. ■ ■ ■

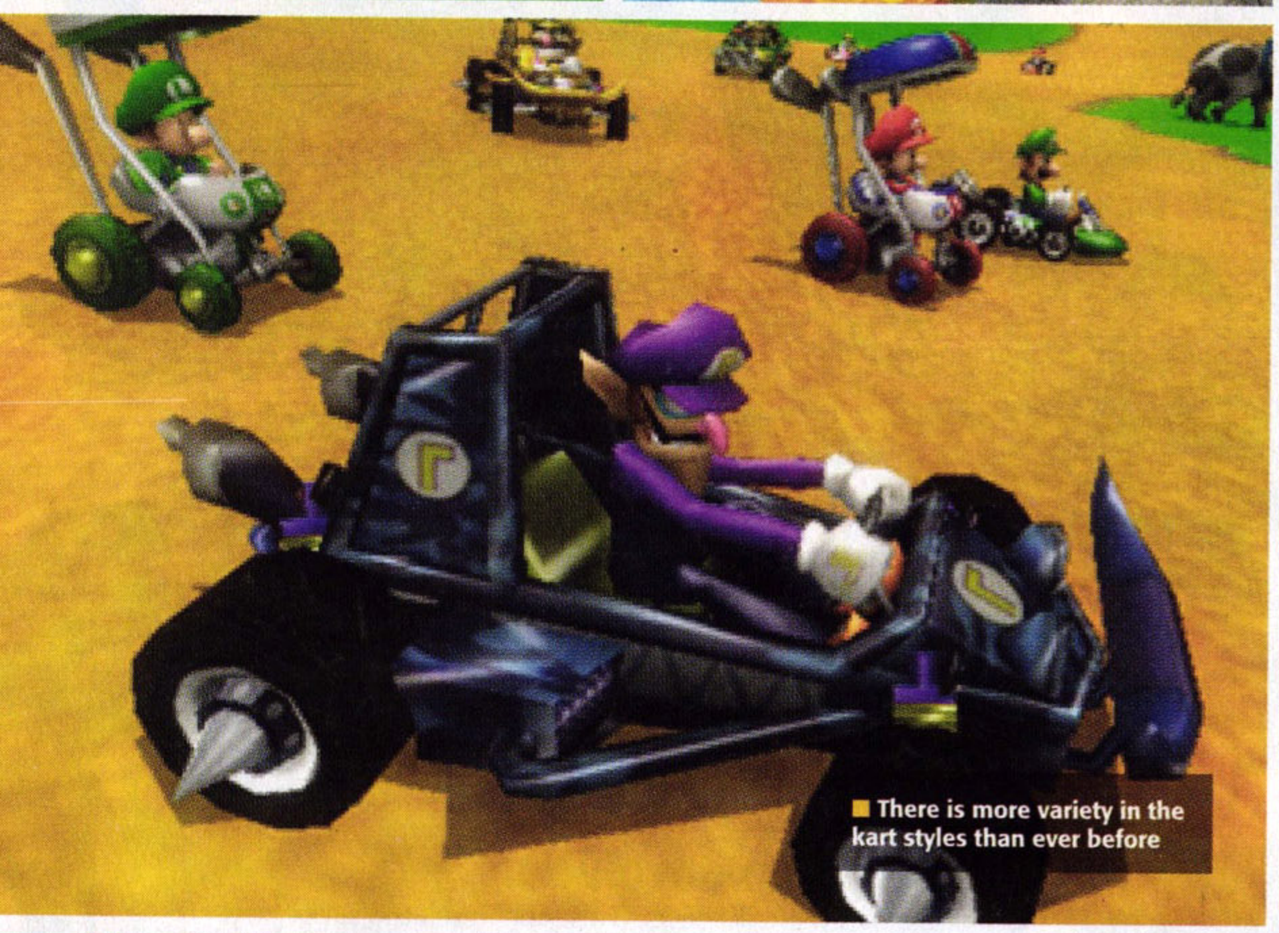


Fans will remember this classic Isle Delfino stage from Double Dash



Watch out for herds of passing cows on the new Moo Moo Meadows

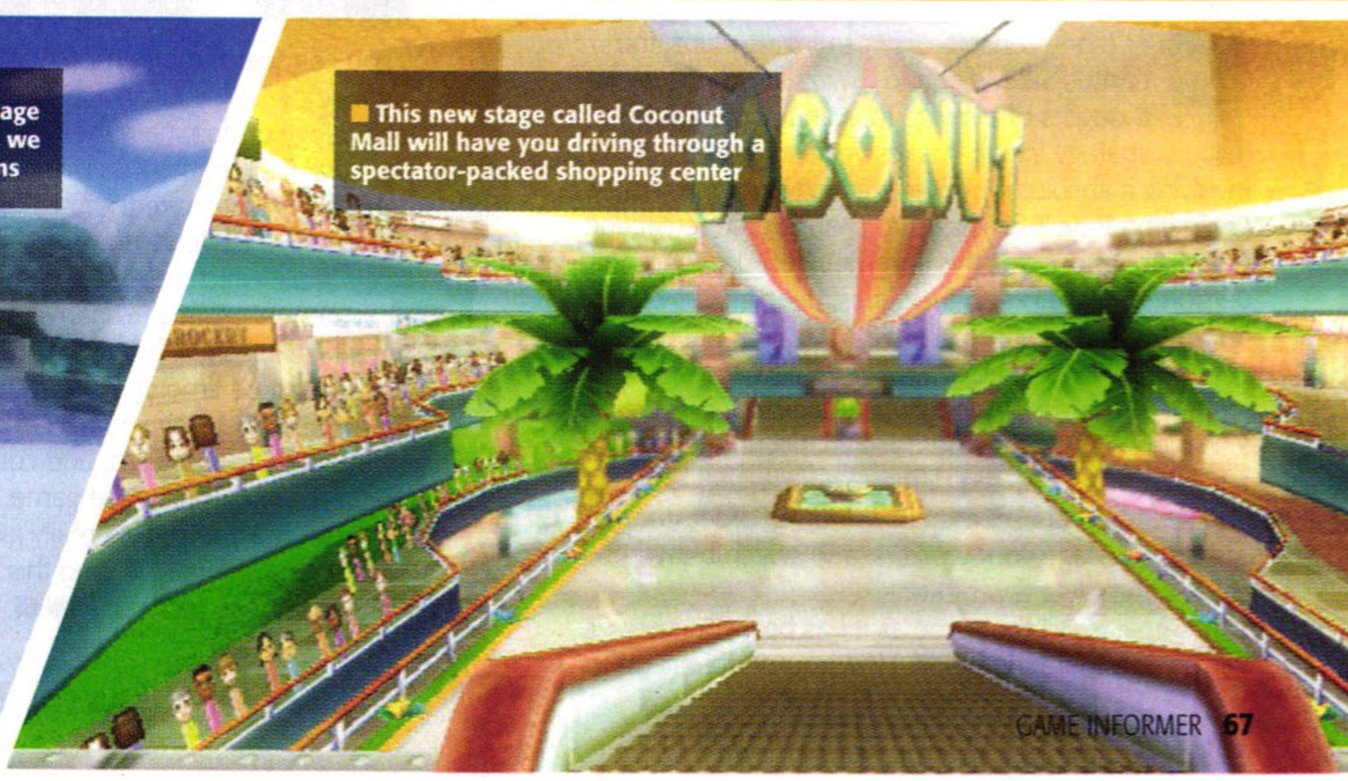




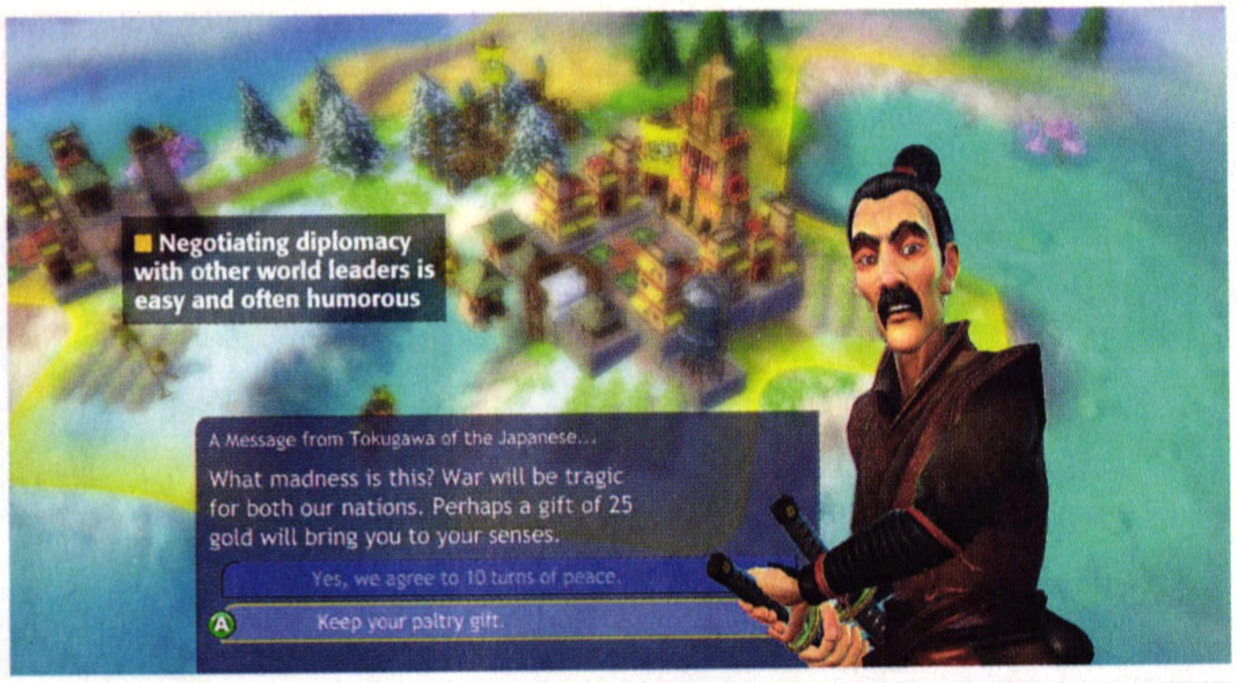
■ There is more variety in the kart styles than ever before

■ We haven't gotten to check out the game's most promising feature yet, but we're sure online play will offer up plenty of fun

■ Remember this stage from the N64? Man, we hated those penguins




■ This new stage called Coconut Mall will have you driving through a spectator-packed shopping center



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | NINTENDO DS

# Civilization Revolution

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR NINTENDO WI-FI) **> PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES **> DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS GAMES **> RELEASE** JUNE 2

## IT'S YOUR WORLD. CONQUER IT

For many console-only gaming veterans, the names Sid Meier and Civilization might evoke thoughts of a mysterious and complicated strategy title that takes years to master, and is so involving it absolutely requires a keyboard and mouse. Civilization Revolution looks to change that perception when it hits consoles this summer, because while this version of Civ will keep the series' deep strategy intact, it's nothing if not approachable.

Our first few minutes with the game were spent finding our way around the new interface, but it was a painless process as the game does an elegant job of leading a player through all the different actions they can take. The slick control scheme allows you to order troops around, manage your workers, and switch between cities with only a few buttons.

The goal is still the same as it has been in every Civ game: dominate the world. How you do that is up to you. Will you conquer through military might or through cultural superiority? Will your society become the masters of technology or dominate the world through economic strength? Each of the 16 civilizations has its own skills and bonuses that make them different to use. We played as Rome, which leans towards military might, so we stomped India, which is better suited for a cultural conquest, under our mighty Roman sandals.

Early turns take seconds, but the farther into the game you venture the more time you'll spend researching new technologies, tweaking your cities' build queues, exploring the globe for bonuses, and conquering or befriending new nations. Like the game, we could go on and on here, but you should really just trust us when we say that when June rolls around this is one title you're going to want to pick up. ■■■

### Share The Revolution

Like a bed with silk sheets, Civilization Revolution's multiplayer is easy to jump into. You can join or leave online games whenever you want, since the game's AI will take over for you if you, say, suddenly need to take the dog for a walk. Online will have three primary modes: Head-to-head, where you battle one other person for world dominance; Team Play, where you and three friends join forces and take on the rest of the world; and Free for All, which is pretty much just like it sounds.

Since waiting for other players to finish their turn can often be annoying in online strategy games, Revolution will let everyone start the turn together with an unlimited amount of time to issue orders. As soon as the first person has finished their turn a timer starts to tick down and the rest of the players have about a minute to finish making their selections. This keeps the action moving along and helps insure that you're never stuck waiting too long for an opponent's next move.

Though we didn't get to test it out, the game will reportedly come with both headset and camera functionality. Downloadable content such as new maps and scenarios is also being planned.

# NINJA GAIDEN II

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Battlefield: Bad Company

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 24-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE > **RELEASE** JUNE

## ARE YOU A GOLD DIGGA?

Who knew Julius Caesar from HBO's *Rome* was good with an assult rifle?

With a lousy base salary, poor health benefits, and a working environment that rewards its employees with post-traumatic stress disorder more often than it does medals, the life of a soldier isn't always as glorious as Rambo makes it out to be. So, if you happen to find an abandoned enemy outpost with a few crates of gold, why shouldn't you and your comrades grab a few bars for your next R&R? With a defense budget larger than the next nine countries combined, does Uncle Sam really need the extra scratch? Your squad mates in B Company don't think so.

Comprised of standard squad stereotypes, the members of B Company include the tough-as-nails commander, the nerdy support guy, and the standard issue demolitions expert. Your company's quest for a payday is only part of the single-player experience; the team also has to complete standard military assignments like taking down supply lines or infiltrating enemy bases. If you happen to find some gold bricks during a mission, you can tuck it away for the early retirement fund.

The action takes place in a sandbox world that allows players to choose how they will attack their objective, and is broken up via small set-piece skirmishes. Your team is also prone to the occasional ambush. Bad Company's gameplay is classic Battlefield; the guns shoot fast and accurately with fluid movement between your standard aim and your sights, and vehicles like humvees, tanks, and speed boats are littered throughout the environments. Though there isn't a true cover system, finding a rock or wall to hide behind while engaging enemies is as important to surviving the battles as having a steady shot. When you do take damage, you can heal yourself with an injection straight to the heart, and if you die you will respawn in a location away from the firefight.

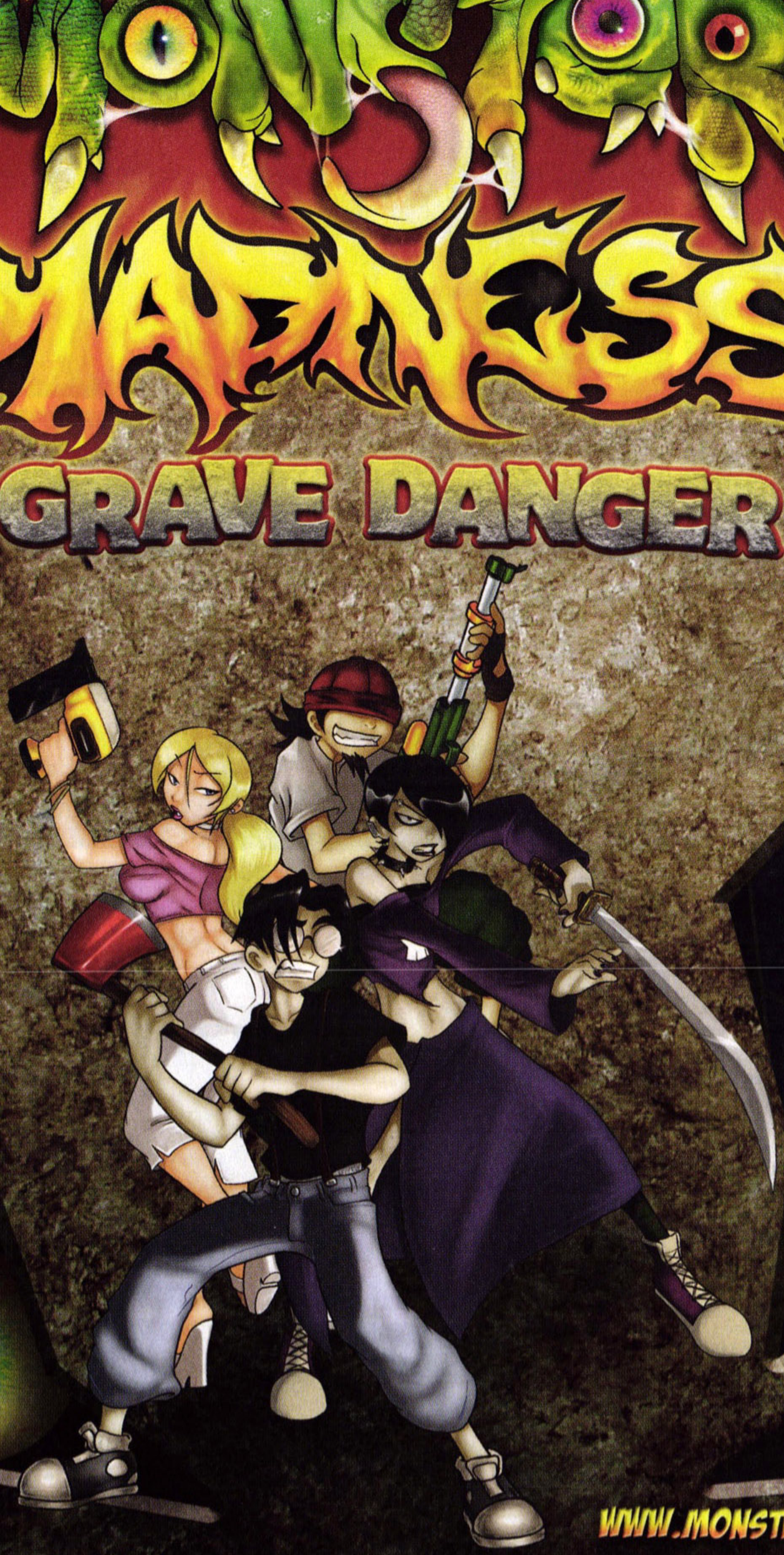
The cacophony of explosions is some of the best sound work we've heard

The proprietary Frostbite engine developed by DICE looks great in action. The most impressive feature is undoubtedly the destructible environments, which immediately become a part of your war strategy. You can destroy enemy cover like fences and barricades, blow holes into building walls to expose snipers or provide new points of entry for base attacks. The havoc this creates on the battlefield encourages players to use their grenade and rocket launchers much more frequently, which is never a bad thing.

The multiplayer strays slightly from the traditional Battlefield concept. Instead of taking flags, one team must find and secure the gold from stash houses while the other team defends. The multiplayer mode also features weapon classes, ranking progression, unlockables, and rewards your battlefield actions with trophies and patches. With this much depth online and a single-player mode that finally seems to be worth a look, Bad Company has jumped high up our summer wish list. ■ ■ ■

# MONSTER MADNESS

## GRAVE DANGER



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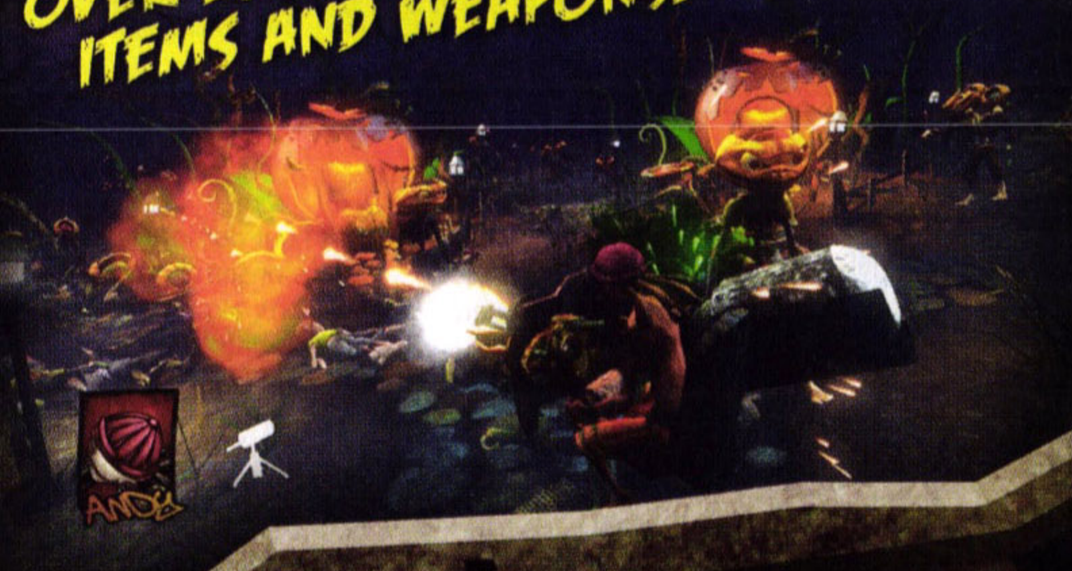

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PLAYSTATION 3

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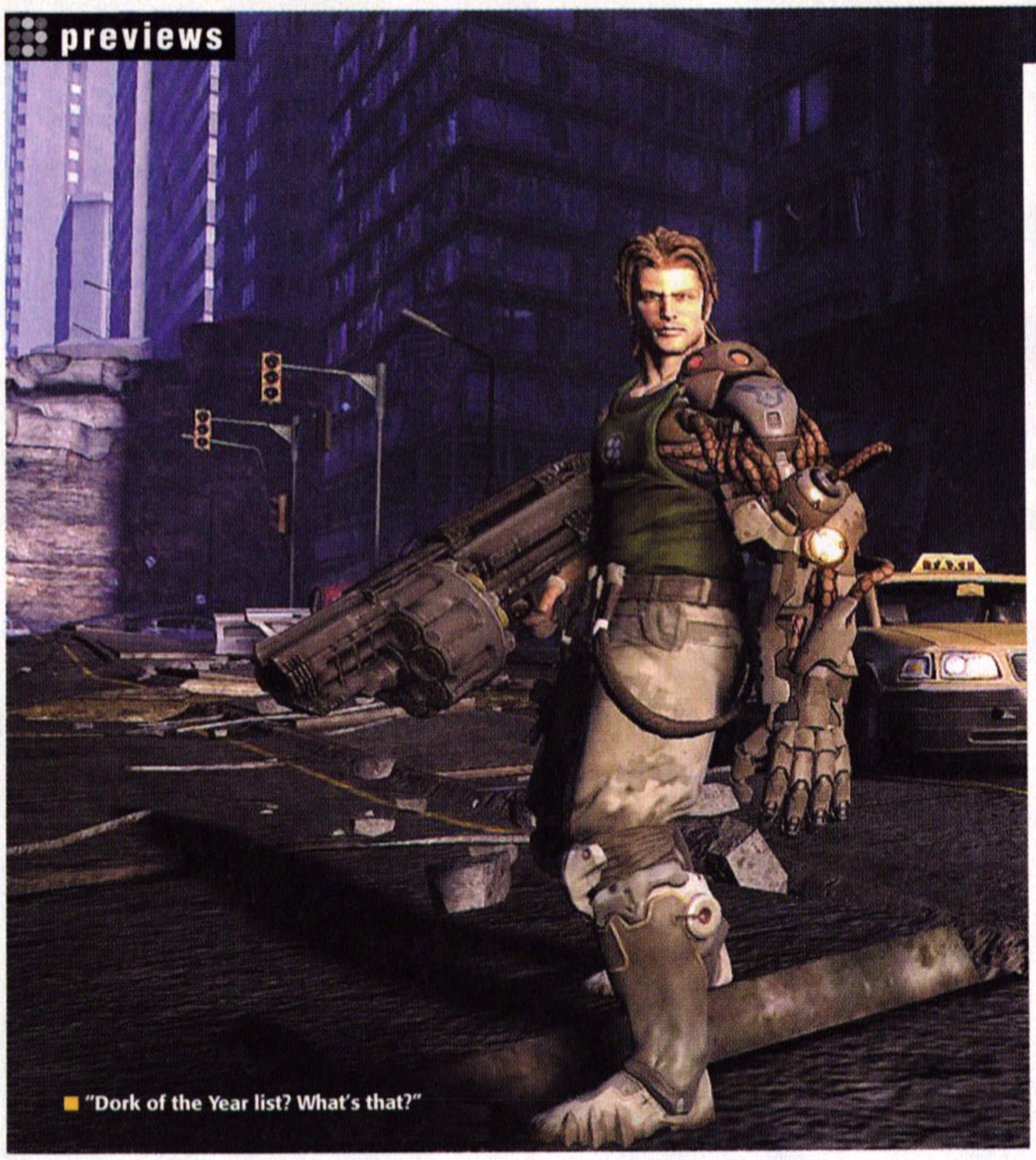
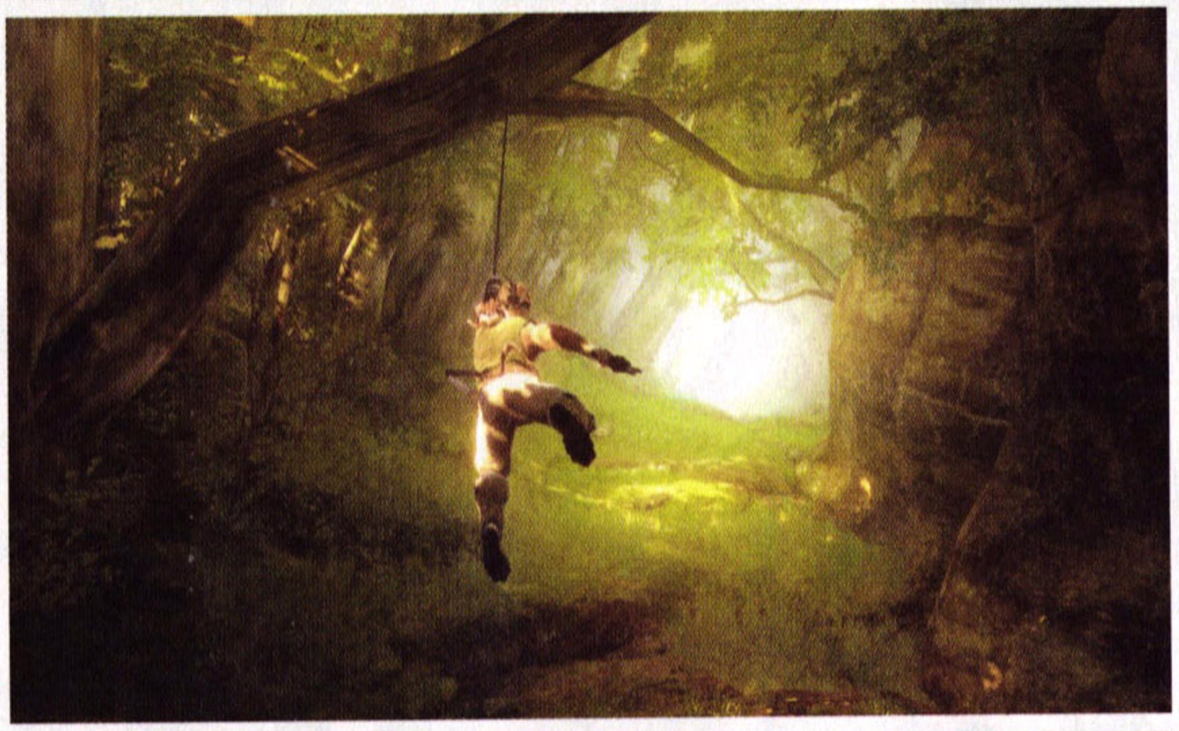


■ "Dork of the Year list? What's that?"



■ Bio-mechs are actually dudes in hi-tech suits rather than straight up robots

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# Bionic Commando

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** GRIN **> RELEASE** FALL

## WILD ARM

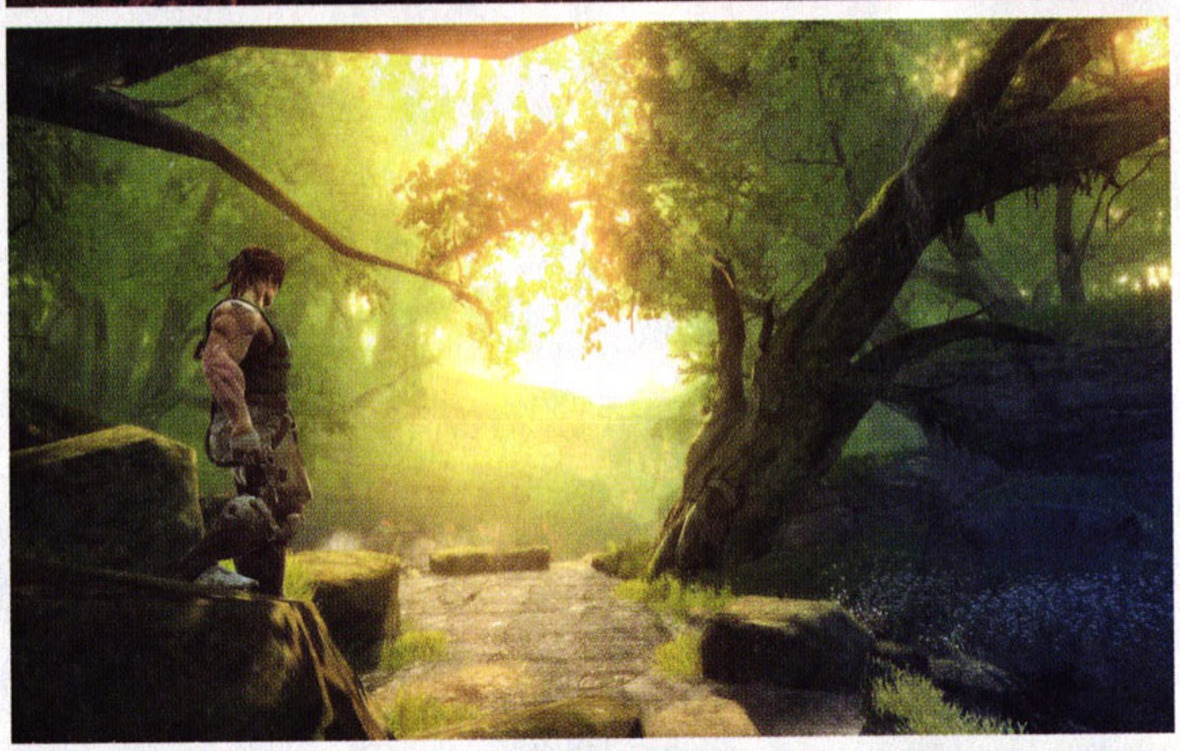
When a cherished game franchise gets resurrected after a 20-year hiatus, it's not surprising when fanboys scrutinize every little detail of the upcoming project. Fortunately, Capcom and developer GRIN taking a refreshingly open stance on reasonable consumer feedback. While Nathan Spencer's dreadlocks are most likely here to stay, the so-called "hotdog" appearance of his bionic arm tubing has been noticeably downplayed (see above). Plus, old school fans can always play with the classic character model if they download Bionic Commando Rearmed.

We also got to take a look at the latest spruced-up Ascension City environment in which complaints of it looking too drab and gray were addressed with a wider paint palette, bright neon signs, and a blazingly sunlit blue sky. As Nathan fought his way down a decrepit street, a skyscraper began to topple in the background. Here a button prompt invited a closer view of the destruction, similar to Gears of War. Once the building hit the deck, a rush of smoke and ash swept toward Nathan, setting off a few surrounding car alarms in the process.

A lush forest zone provided the backdrop for some of the swing and combat mechanics in our demo. Rather than using flashing hooks or some other kind of limited grapple locations, almost the entire world can be latched onto. Pulling the left trigger will shoot out your grapple line, which will remain fastened until you release it (most likely at the end of a swing). A tap of the jump button while hooked onto an object will quickly pull you towards the grapple point, similar to Lost Planet's zip line.

Shooting your line at enemy troops will pull you in close for a chest-cracking dropkick. You can also pull boulders and other random debris toward you for chucking purposes. This comes in handy especially against the tougher Bio-mechs. If you try to zip-kick these guys, they'll pull you in for a nice punch in the face, so it's best to circle behind them and throw something heavy at their weak point. But that doesn't mean your bionic arm gets all the fun. A variety of guns ranging from pistols to grenade launchers provide a good long-ranged counterbalance.

We're looking forward to getting some hands-on time with the game as soon as Capcom's ready to pass over the controller. After two decades of waiting for another Bionic Commando, these last few months seem like an eternity. ■■■



■ The swing mechanic looks to be smoothly transitioning into 3D space

All three versions of Rearmed will contain different exclusive content

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# Bionic Commando Rearmed

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
**> DEVELOPER** GRIN **> RELEASE** MAY

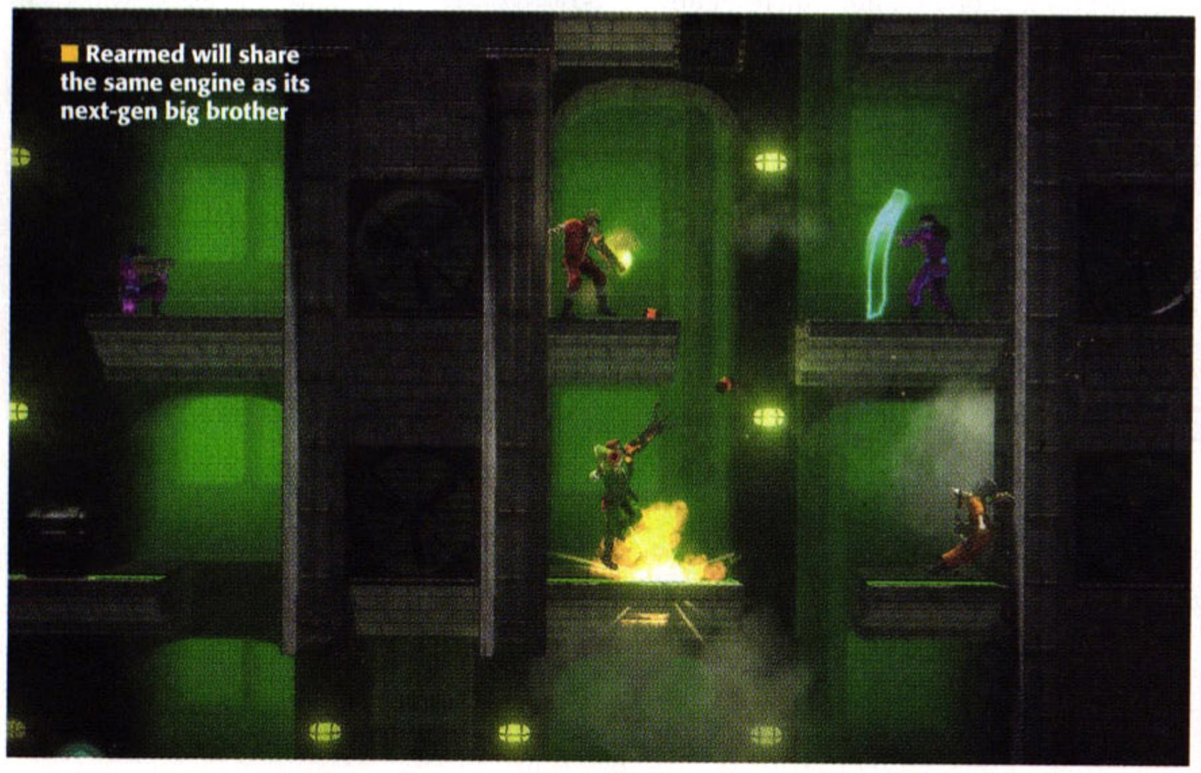
## LET'S GET RADD

To drum up nostalgic excitement for the new Bionic Commando title, Capcom is releasing a fully revamped version of the NES classic for just $10 (800 Microsoft Points). Set 10 years before the all-new game, Rearmed has been infused with additional story elements to tease out plot points and connections. Capcom describes this old-school Nathan "Radd" Spencer as more of an '80s action hero compared to the jaded and vengeful character he becomes in the upcoming sequel.

Co-op play has been added, giving the game somewhat of a Contra feel (unfortunately, online play will not be supported). While most of the action will take place on a single screen, players who wander too far from each other will notice an automatic vertical or horizontal split-screen take effect. Bosses will also be specially modified for co-op play. We reached a mechanical boss whose weak point shifted back and forth, forcing us to toss explosive barrels at its undercarriage while our partner threw them at its top.

While the basic vertical and diagonal grapple swings remain faithful to the original, a new horizontal swing shot has been added to allow for more maneuverability. Purists can rest easy, however – Radd still has a strict anti-jumping policy. This additional move comes in handy, especially in the new Metal Gear VR-style challenge missions. In the 50-plus stages, players will take on time trials, swing puzzles, collection tasks, boss battles, and more, with the best times being posted to online leaderboards.

Early word on Rearmed indicated that the Xbox Live version would release with lower graphical quality due to Microsoft's strict 150MB file size limit. But a recent Capcom statement assures that the issue is cleared up. "Given the huge amount of content going into Bionic Commando Rearmed and Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix, Microsoft has allowed Capcom to work with a larger file size limit for both games," reads the statement. "Microsoft is going to continue working with all their partners – not just us, mind – and if a game warrants a file size exception, they'll provide one on a case-by-case basis." ■■■

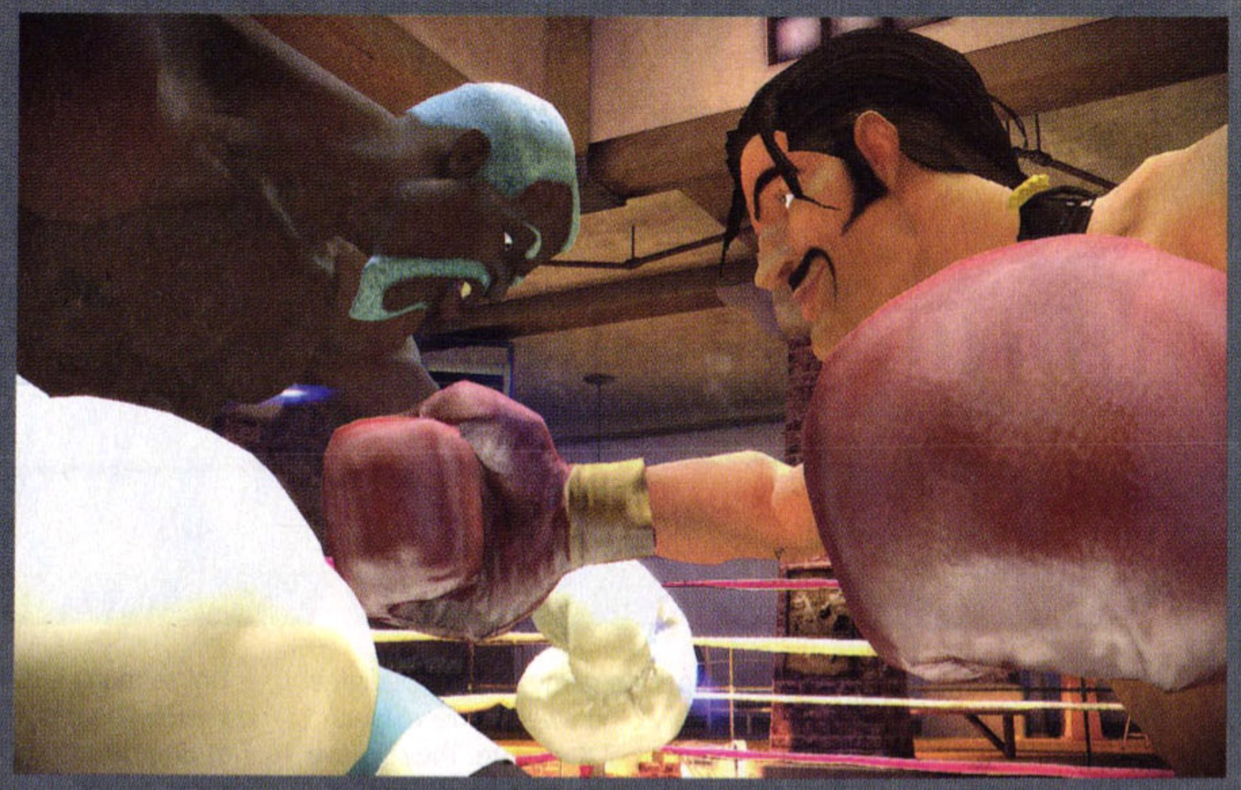


Rearmed will share the same engine as its next-gen big brother

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

# FaceBreaker

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



## MEAT-FILLED BALLOONS

Boxing fans were disappointed when Electronic Arts announced the closing of EA Chicago – the studio behind the popular Fight Night franchise. Although the franchise has moved up to EA Canada (which does some fine work itself), its official status is unknown. Fight fans, however, might want to take a look at EA's new arcade boxing title, FaceBreaker, which is being developed by the team behind Fight Night Round 3.

"From the get go, we were thinking Super Punch Out on a next-gen system," says Greg Juby, FaceBreaker's art director. "If Nintendo made that game today, what would it look like?" Would it contain Molotov – the Russian bruiser who sometimes looks outside the rules for an edge? What about Romeo – the lover-turned-fighter whose biceps aren't the only body parts that bulge? What about using facial deformation technology, taunts, or the ability to put your own picture in the game?

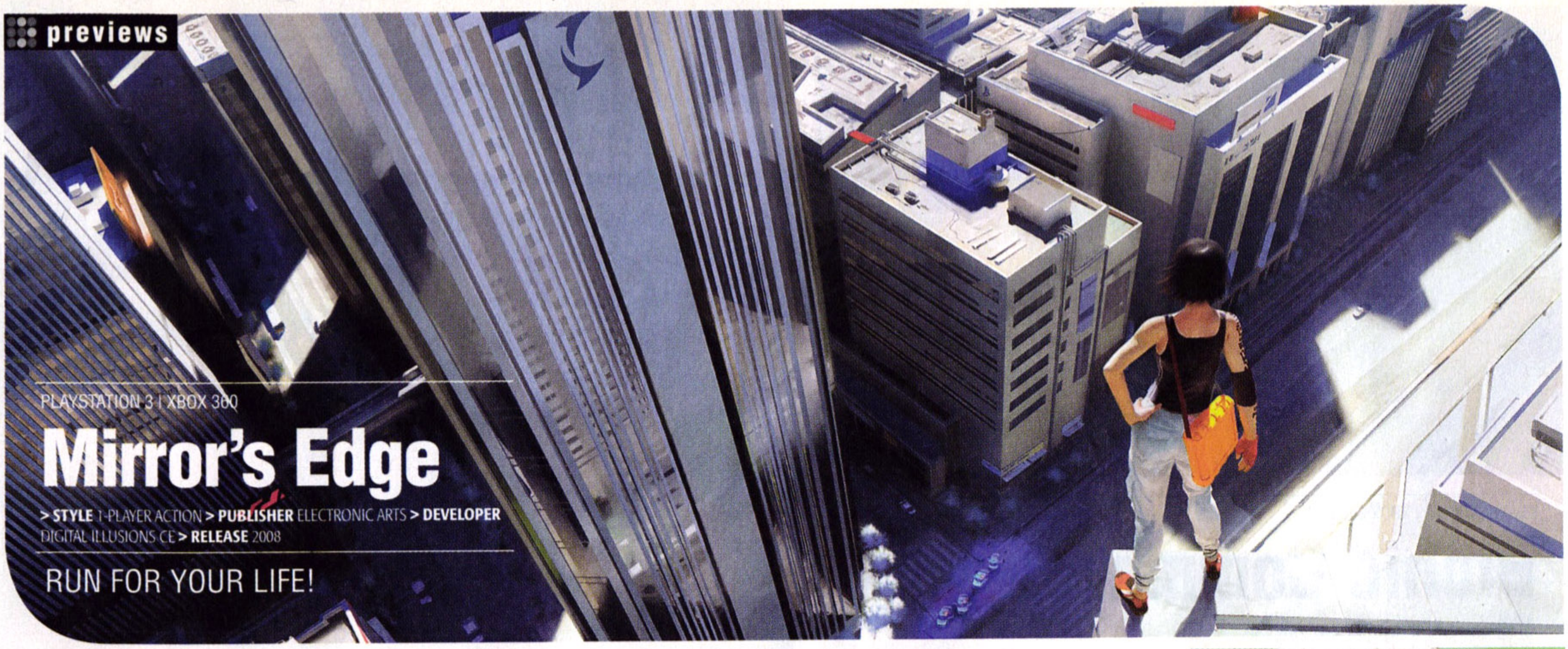
EA Canada's Greg Juby tells us more about FaceBreaker.

### Somewhere Between Funny and Grotesque

"Our goal from the beginning was to have gratuitous deformation. To figure this out we started with 3D sculpts to see what would happen if you punched the face. We tried all sorts of things from dislocated jaws, eyes popping out, and the head twisting around (like in *The Exorcist*). During this time there was a lot of investigation into at what point does this stop being funny and starts to become grotesque – grotesque being somewhere we didn't want to go. One of the cooler things we did to get the physics of face breaking right was we put different materials in a balloon to see what would happen when they were punched. We used stuff like meat and molasses, and then filmed the balloon getting hit in slow motion. This gave us a real indication as to how the actual deformation should look like in the game. I like where we are with the deformation stuff right now, so all in all the mess in our studio was worth it."

### Enter the Ring

"With all the fighting games out there, gamers have fought in almost every conceivable location, so we had quite a few discussions with the team around environments. The one thing we unanimously agreed on was that the environments needed to be fresh. Also, we wanted to have humor be a large part of this game, so it was important that the environments also reflect this. In the end, I think we have hit both goals. I can't really go into it now, but let's just say the environments in FaceBreaker are made for the third person on the couch. The guy who is waiting for his turn in the ring is going to be thoroughly entertained by all the crazy stuff that will be happening behind the fight." ■■■



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Mirror's Edge

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE **> RELEASE** 2008

## RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!

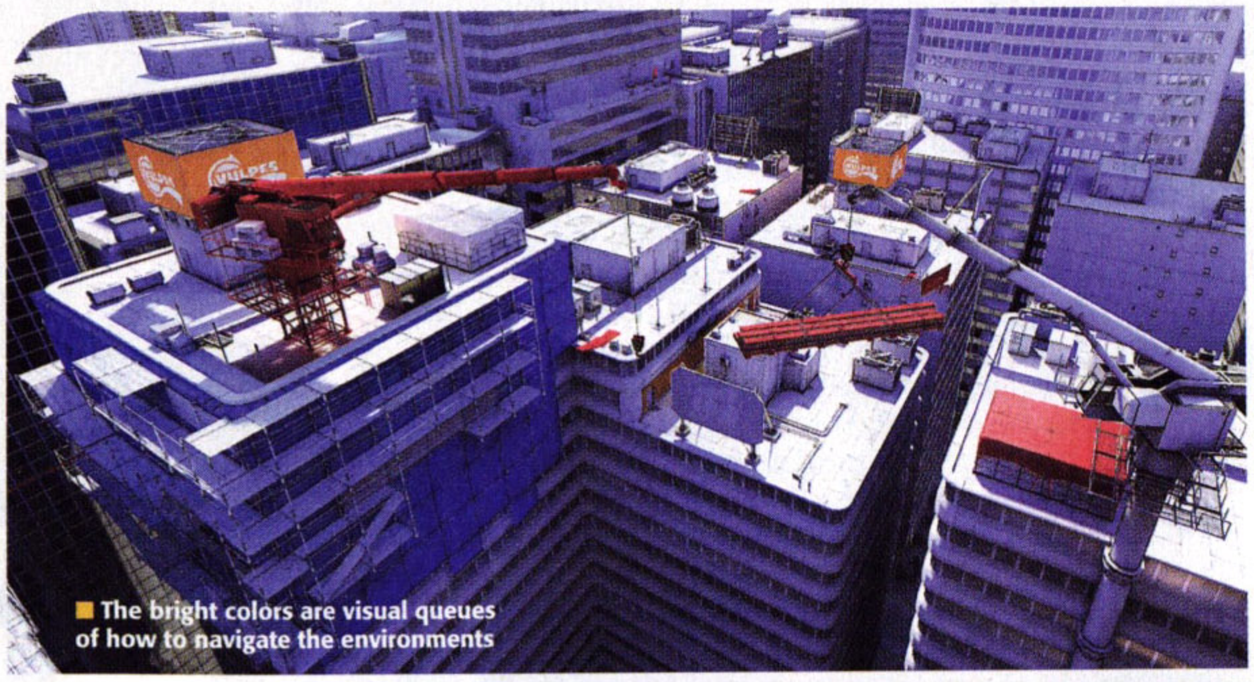
DICE knows its first-person perspective games. With a pedigree built upon the Battlefield franchise, the Swedish developers have a valued insight into the state of the genre. They believe something is missing, and with Mirror's Edge the developers plan to address the oversight; they are putting the "person" back into the first-person equation.

Mirror's Edge takes place in a near-future world where technology, bureaucracy, and consumerism have combined to create a "utopian" society loosely held together by surveillance and conformity. In this hyper-monitored world, resistance to the fascist police state is tough to organize since every digital message is likely to be intercepted. In response, underground organizations have turned to runners, parkour messengers who must take to the rooftops, sewers, and alleys to deliver information between conspirators. Mirror's Edge centers on Faith, a young woman who risks her life delivering these messages.

Unlike many first-person games, Mirror's Edge isn't explicitly concerned with gunfights. The game plays out like a *Run Lola Run* meets *The Bourne Identity* hybrid, where the majority of the action comes from fast-paced chase sequences and hand-to-hand combat. As she runs to complete her transmissions, Faith must avoid police forces, security teams, and even the occasional news chopper hovering overhead. To make it to the drop point, moving quickly is key. Faith will climb fences, power slide underneath low-hanging walls, zip down crane wires, and perform an occasional wall run to make it across a gap.

To help you navigate the urban terrain, DICE has created environments that direct you via bright colors and dark shadows. You want to keep away from shaded areas, as they often provide dead ends, whereas if you run toward the bright red objects on the screen you'll likely be able to sustain your momentum. For very tricky situations, like jumping across extra-wide gaps between buildings, Faith can activate a slo-mo cam so she can perfectly time her launch. The major gameplay challenge for DICE is to avoid making the player feel disoriented as they perform somersaults or scale walls while moving at a breakneck pace through the world.

Since Faith's main goal is to move a package from point A to point B as quickly as possible, she's not carrying an arsenal. Most of her encounters with enemies will be of the close combat variety, but she will also grab the occasional weapon to take out enemies in the distance. If you pick up a machine gun while moving through the environment, you can certainly hang on to it, but navigating the rooftops while carrying a 10-pound rifle will prove tricky. And at the end of the day in Mirror's Edge, kill counts don't matter. You're better off running for your life. ■■■

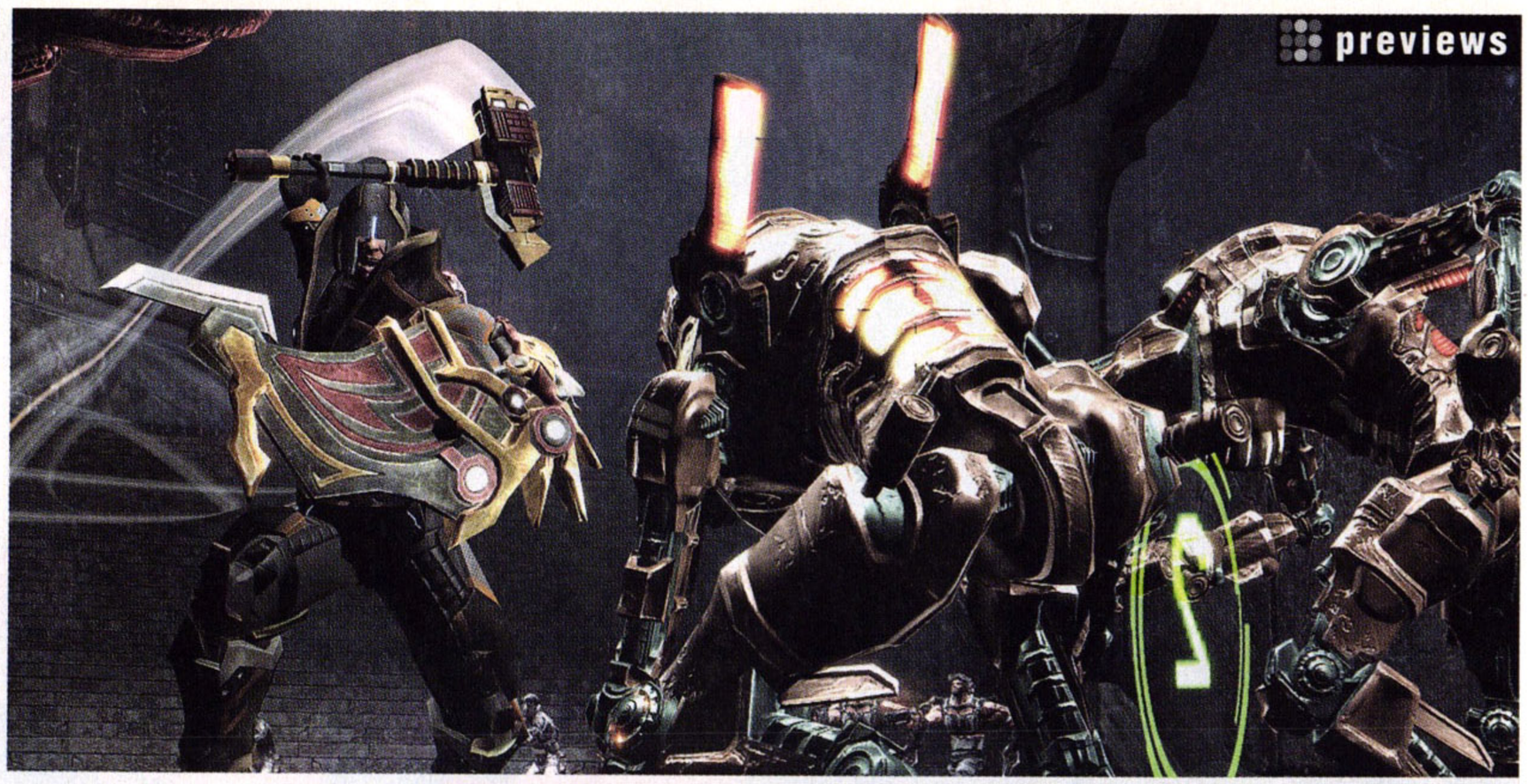


■ The bright colors are visual queues of how to navigate the environments

■ If you think your job is tough, try crossing this chasm while bullets are whizzing by your head

■ The key to surviving is preserving your momentum, which means you'll be power sliding and jumping all over the place

As attacks fill up the combo gauge, players will gain experience bonuses for every kill. But unleashing a room clearing "ruiner" like the one seen here will drain the gauge completely



XBOX 360

# Too Human

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
**> DEVELOPER** SILICON KNIGHTS **> RELEASE** 2008

## GREAT ODIN'S BEARD!

After almost 10 years in development and three console generations, the time of Too Human is finally at hand. According to Silicon Knights, the game is in the post-beta stage and undergoing some final balancing. Even though the project sounds fairly complete, the company has yet to announce a solid release date as of press time.

Despite its futuristic look, Too Human is actually set 20,000 to 50,000 years in the past and based heavily on Norse mythology. The Ragnarok, or final battle, wiped out most of civilization and its technological advancements, leaving behind only the mythology we know today. In the pre-Ragnarok world the game takes place in, nuclear war has triggered an ice age and humans fight for survival against an army of machines. Players will take control of Baldur, a god/soldier faced with the choice to further his cybernetic enhancements or remain as human as possible in an epic war where every advantage counts.

On the surface, Too Human's mix of guns and melee combat appears to be a high-tech Devil May Cry. But a mix of deep RPG elements and a Geometry Wars-style control mechanic should set it apart. Playing through a cavernous ice palace gave us a chance to experiment with the unique controls. Rather than control the camera, the right stick handles melee attacks. Pointing in the direction of robotic enemies will unleash a barrage of combos, while double tapping will launch them into the air. The two triggers will independently handle dual-wielded guns like pistols or primary and secondary fire for larger weapons like rifles. The setup takes some getting used to, but once it clicks, it shows some promise and provides an interesting alternative to button mashing.

On the RPG front, thousands of pieces of unique loot ensure that your appearance will constantly be in flux. To maintain the fast pace of an action game, items automatically float to your character and an auto-salvage mechanic sells off lesser equipment once you hit maximum carrying capacity. Weapons will feature varying amounts of enhancement slots in which you can place stat-boosting runes. To unlock the power of these runes, however, players will have to complete Achievement-like objectives like killing 50 of a certain enemy type.

Leveling is handled via a branching skill tree as players progress to the level 50 cap. While maxing out is expected to take three to four playthroughs, the lure of up to four-player online co-op should be a nice replay incentive. Plus, players can bring their beefed up characters into the second and third game. Currently, Silicon Knights claims the entire trilogy will appear on Xbox 360, but the nearsighted side of us just wants to be sure game one really is coming soon. ■■■

### CLASSES

The five available classes are tailored to various play styles

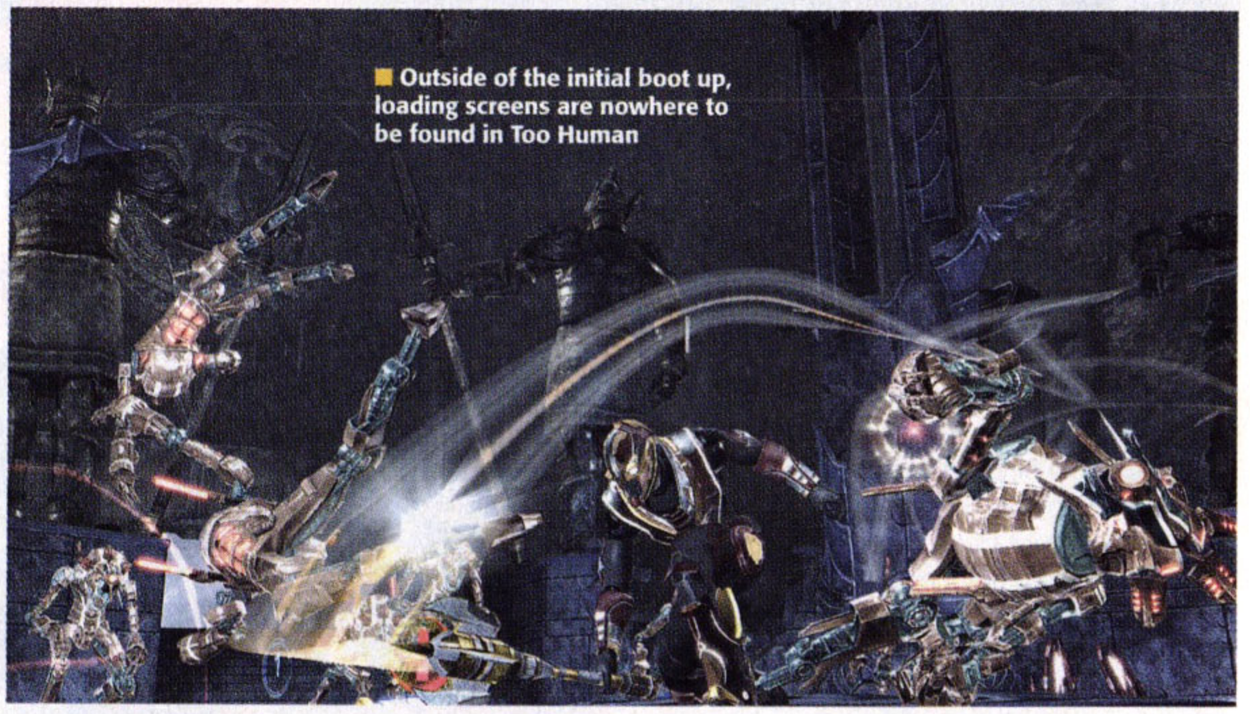
**CHAMPION:**
The only class that can perform melee attacks in the air.

**COMMANDO:**
Specializes in explosives and long-range attacks

**BIO-ENGINEER:**
The healer

**BERSERKER:**
Has the ability to dual-wield melee weapons. Relatively low defense

**DEFENDER:**
Able to equip heavy armor. Relatively low offense



Outside of the initial boot up, loading screens are nowhere to be found in Too Human

While these images only show a close up action view, Diablo fans can pull the camera out for a top-down perspective

Players can equip items such as "Shoulder Pads of Growling" and "Fine Rifle Beam of Wailing." We're not kidding

TBA

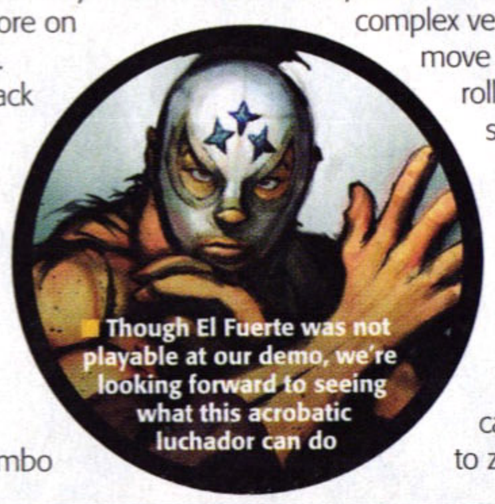
# Street Fighter IV

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** TBA

## NEO-CLASSICAL

After some recent hands-on time with the Japanese arcade version of Street Fighter IV, we're happy to say that everything's coming along nicely. Trailers and screens are having a tough time capturing just how good this game looks in person. While the game uses 3D characters and environments, the controls and gameplay are completely grounded in classic 2D. Hardcore Street Fighter fans will find plenty of new content to dig into, while the feel is familiar enough for players who haven't touched the series since Street Fighter II to jump right in.

The fighting pace in this early build is definitely untouched by any "Turbo" speed boosts, focusing more on strategic play than frantic button mashing. Simultaneously pressing the two hard attack buttons triggers a taunt, while hitting two weak strikes initiates a grab. However, when you press the two medium attack buttons things start getting fresh. These so-called "saves" allow you to bypass a single attack and strike while your opponent is open. They can also be charged up fully to unleash an unblockable strike.



■ Though El Fuerte was not playable at our demo, we're looking forward to seeing what this acrobatic luchador can do

Over-the-top combinations are split up into two distinct categories. The super combo meter across the bottom of the screen fills up with every attack, and can be unleashed by inputting more complex versions of a character's signature special move (i.e. players must perform two forward rolls and hit a punch button for Ryu's super). More powerful ultra combos are tied to a circular revenge meter up near your health bar that fills whenever you take damage. While the joystick maneuvers remain the same as super combos, players must hit two attack buttons simultaneously to trigger these devastating onslaughts. During ultra combos the camera briefly breaks the traditional 2D plane to zoom and pan around the ridiculous beating you're unleashing.

All eight of the original Street Fighter II cast members were fully up and running during our time with the game, in addition to two all-new characters (see sidebars). Thai fighter Sagat and Mike Tyson look-alike Balrog have also been spotted on test units in Japanese arcades (and on YouTube), and we'd be very surprised if M. Bison and Vega didn't show up eventually. Speaking of quasi-guarantees, you can pretty much count on Street Fighter IV appearing on PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 despite Capcom's silence on the home console front. The only real question is when. ■■■

### ABEL

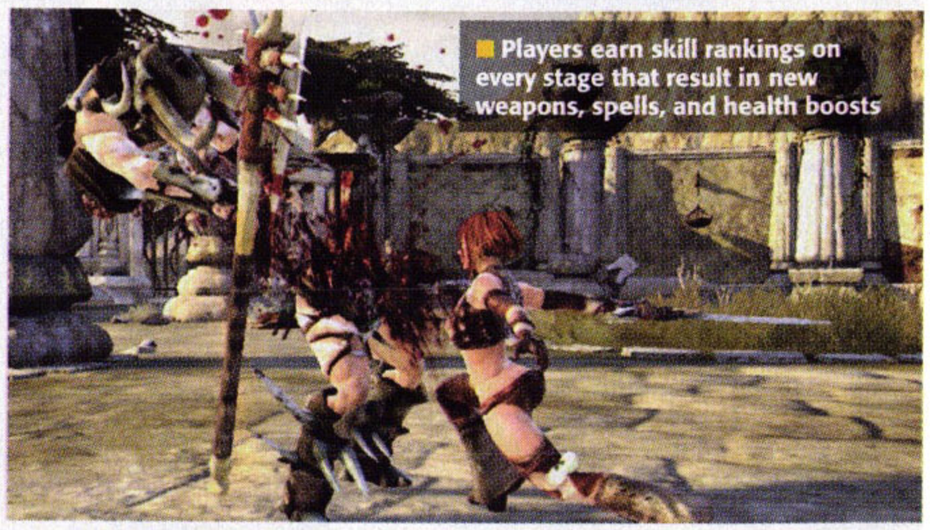
Abel is said to have some sort of military background, mixing hefty strikes with plenty of grapples and throws. His attacks include a three-hit combo in which the last two attacks can hit mid-range or low, a forward roll for dodging projectiles, a flying overhead kick, and a throw that can pluck opponents out of the air.

### CRIMSON VIPER

This mysterious agent utilizes technology in her gloves and boots to dish out elemental punishment. Her specials consist of a flying flame kick, a versatile electric punch that can strike either below the belt or repel aerial attacks, and a seismic ground punch.

■ Mirigore is described as a "huge mutant gorilla" that can rip enemies limb from limb

■ Both tail-whipping and fire-breathing are blended together in Abrax



■ Players earn skill rankings on every stage that result in new weapons, spells, and health boosts

■ Gnomes return for another hilarious beating

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Golden Axe: Beast Rider

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** SECRET LEVEL **> RELEASE** FALL

## BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS

Released in 1989, the original Golden Axe was a seminal title in the brawler genre. After selecting the Conan-esque Ax Battler, Gilius Thunderhead the dwarf, or the bikini-clad Tyris Flare, two players could battle through legions of knights and skeletons, occasionally on the backs of fire-breathing dragons. While plenty of homage will be paid to the classic, Beast Rider takes some surprising turns to bring the franchise into the modern era.

Beast Rider will focus completely on Tyris' tale of vengeance against an evil force that will eventually bring her into contact with Ax and Gilius later in the series. "It's a serious, violent, and bloody game," says Secret Level's Nigel Cook. "That being said, we have tried to add some less serious elements." Fans can look forward to bashing gnomes over the head for mana and health, for example.

Though it pains us to say, multiplayer is completely absent this time around. "The decision was made so that we can build a competitive combat system for today's marketplace for a single character, rather than develop a shallower combat system for three players similar to hack n' slash games," says Cook. "Our intention all along was to kick off this first game and use our melee, magic, and beast combat systems as a foundation for future titles which will include a selection of characters, co-op mode, and online play."

Combat is a mix of button mashing and skill-based counters. Parries and evades provide some quick defense, but must be followed up by a well-timed counterattack that can potentially lead to decapitations and dismemberment. Hitting the "sweet spot" between combos will light Tyris' sword on fire for extra damage and devastating cinematic kills. Magic attacks work much like before, with three tiers of ever-increasing power (no word on whether the giant dragon head will return).

Over the course of the game, Tyris will collect five different beasts that can be summoned into battle at any time. "The beasts are not pets; they are weapons of war," Cook says. "We consider our beasts full-blown playable characters and we treat them with as much care and attention as Tyris."

In addition to the brutal violence seen in similar games like God of War and Conan, Beast Rider will also share their penchant for skin. "The characters that are seen nude are from warm climates and their attire matches their surrounding, which gives the game a primal and nomadic feel," Cook says. "It's not about 'getting some boobs in there,' it's about making our vision of this world and its cultures a reality." ■ ■ ■



■ Lynth's speedy nature makes him the ideal choice for crossing large tracts of terrain



■ Tyris' trademark red and white bikini is confirmed as an unlockable

XBOX 360

# Fable 2

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** LIONHEAD STUDIOS > **RELEASE** 2008

Our money is on the guys with the guns

## A QUEST FOR TWO

Fences are no longer boundaries. In the new Albion, you can go wherever you want

Despite being derided by some critics for failing to live up to the lofty goals set by game creator Peter Molyneux, Fable's rich world, deep levels of interaction, and deft RPG action offered a rewarding experience for those willing to take the game at face value. As we move closer to the release date for the highly anticipated sequel, it looks as if Fable 2 has just as many ambitious ideas at work.

Set in Albion 500 years after the first game, Fable 2 begins in a drastically different world than that of Jack of Blades and his bandits. Culture has gravitated away from the legends of great adventurers, and the Heroes Guild lies in ruins. Albion is now a fully realized society centered on commerce and governed by monarchy, with the size to go along with the civilization's progress. The new Albion is 10 times larger than its original conception, and players are no longer constricted to traveling on roads. As with Cyrodiil in The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, you can travel anywhere you see along the horizon. Players will start as an eight-year old scamp in the big city. Whether you play as a boy or girl is up to you. Along your journeys, you can marry, have children, buy houses, and own businesses. You also may run into a few characters from the first game.

The 500-year advance in the storyline has inspired Lionhead to introduce new weapons, such as pistols and muskets, though these ranged weapons won't dominate the field of battle. The new crescendo combat system aims to provide ease of play without sacrificing a degree of depth for seasoned adventurers. Three face buttons will command your melee, magic, and ranged attacks, respectively. The combat system doesn't have traditional combos, but as your attack develops a rhythm it will be reflected in the music score. Molyneux has compared the sword to a conductor's baton; as your attack becomes more frenzied, the music will pick up the tempo as well.

Most video games aren't known for epic, emotional moments, but Molyneux hopes to engage players on this level with the introduction of a canine companion. Your dog is a fully actualized AI entity that offers the unconditional love of a pet as it vies for attention, spots danger as you travel the countryside, and fights at your side when you appear overmatched. When you're not fighting enemies, you can reward, punish, or play with your dog. If you're more of a lone wolf, you can also ditch the dog. We just hope Molyneux isn't planning a *Where the Red Fern Grows* moment to get the tears flowing.

Man's best friend won't be the only sidekick during your adventures; a friend can join your game at any time so you can quest together. Any experience, renown, or gold your friend earns can be ported to his or her own game, and double experience will be rewarded for taking down enemies together. While Fable 2 is only a single-screen co-op experience right now, Microsoft hasn't ruled out online co-op yet.

Co-op interaction doesn't stop with simple combat rewards. During the GDC demo where Molyneux was playing as a female hero, he finally returned home after six months of adventuring only to be chewed out by his husband for being away so long. Sick of the domestic dispute, Molyneux's co-op sidekick shot the husband and went into a fit of laughter as the young son ran away into the woods. With the door open for this sinister level of interaction between characters, we don't recommend anyone inviting Joe over to play. ■■■

### A SMART GAMBLE

Fable fans, I hope you're familiar with gambling addiction. A few weeks before Fable 2 hits store shelves, Microsoft will release Keystone on Xbox Live Arcade. This fictionalized gambling game created by Carbonated Games takes its cues from roulette and craps and will allow players to win gold that can then be ported over to their Fable 2 character for use in the game world. Two more XBLA games, Wizard's Tower and Mage Dice, will also be Fable 2 compatible.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# Pure

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR PC INTERNET) **> PUBLISHER** DISNEY INTERACTIVE STUDIO
**> DEVELOPER** BLACK ROCK STUDIO **> RELEASE** FALL

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH

When Disney Interactive Studios purchased the Climax development team responsible for racing games like Moto GP an ATV Offroad Fury, the staff didn't know what to expect. "I was dreading Disney wanted us to make Mickey Car or Donald Racing," jokes game director Jason Avent. Instead, the studio allowed the team — which changed its name to Black Rock Studio — to choose its next project. That choice is Pure, a trick-based ATV racer with the heart and soul of an SSX game.

Hardcore recreational vehicle racing sims aren't for everyone, but no one can deny the fun of screaming down the side of a mountain at a breakneck speed and catapulting off jumps for vertigo-inducing air. This is the type of experience Black Rock Studio captures in Pure. "We always wanted to do a game that's just fun," says Avent. "Something more fast paced, more arcadey." Pure forgoes the constraints that most ATV games suffer from in service to realism to tap into the essence of pure adrenaline. Sure, there are races to be won, but Pure is all about linking sweet tricks together while flying through the air.

At face value, the trick system seems simplistic. The A button controls basic tricks, the B button handles advanced tricks, and the Y button unleashes pro tricks. You can tweak each trick by using the d-pad and holding down the modifier button. As you continue to perform tricks with each button, you fill up the trick bar on the bottom-right corner of the screen. You can use the boost at any time to either get ahead of the pack or beat other racers to a choke point and properly line up your next monster jump. But if you save those boosts and max out the trick bars, you unlock bankable signature tricks that can be used at any time. These insane tricks also fill your boost bar faster than using standard tricks. The strategy lies in finding the balance between using the short boosts at opportune times and saving the boosts to unlock the new tricks.

Pure ditches the standard dirt stunt tracks in favor of wide-open vistas at real-world locations across the globe that offer just as much eye candy as they do heart-pumping moments. The scale in Pure is epic; the game engine draws environments 30 miles into the distance, giving you breathtaking views as you careen through the air pulling off sick trick combos. Black Rock Studio is also using a small instance rendering technology that can produce up to 200,000 individual twigs, branches, boulders, gravel, or grass blades in every frame. Couple this with the particle system that allows tires to kick up gravel as you move across the track and you have one of the more beautiful offroad racing experiences this side of MotorStorm.

Many details about Pure, such as player customization and a list of the different game modes, should be revealed as we move closer toward its fall release. ■ ■ ■

■ All that's missing from this scene is a can of Mountain Dew

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# Grid

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR PC INTERNET) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS > **RELEASE** SUMMER

## YOUR STARTING GRID

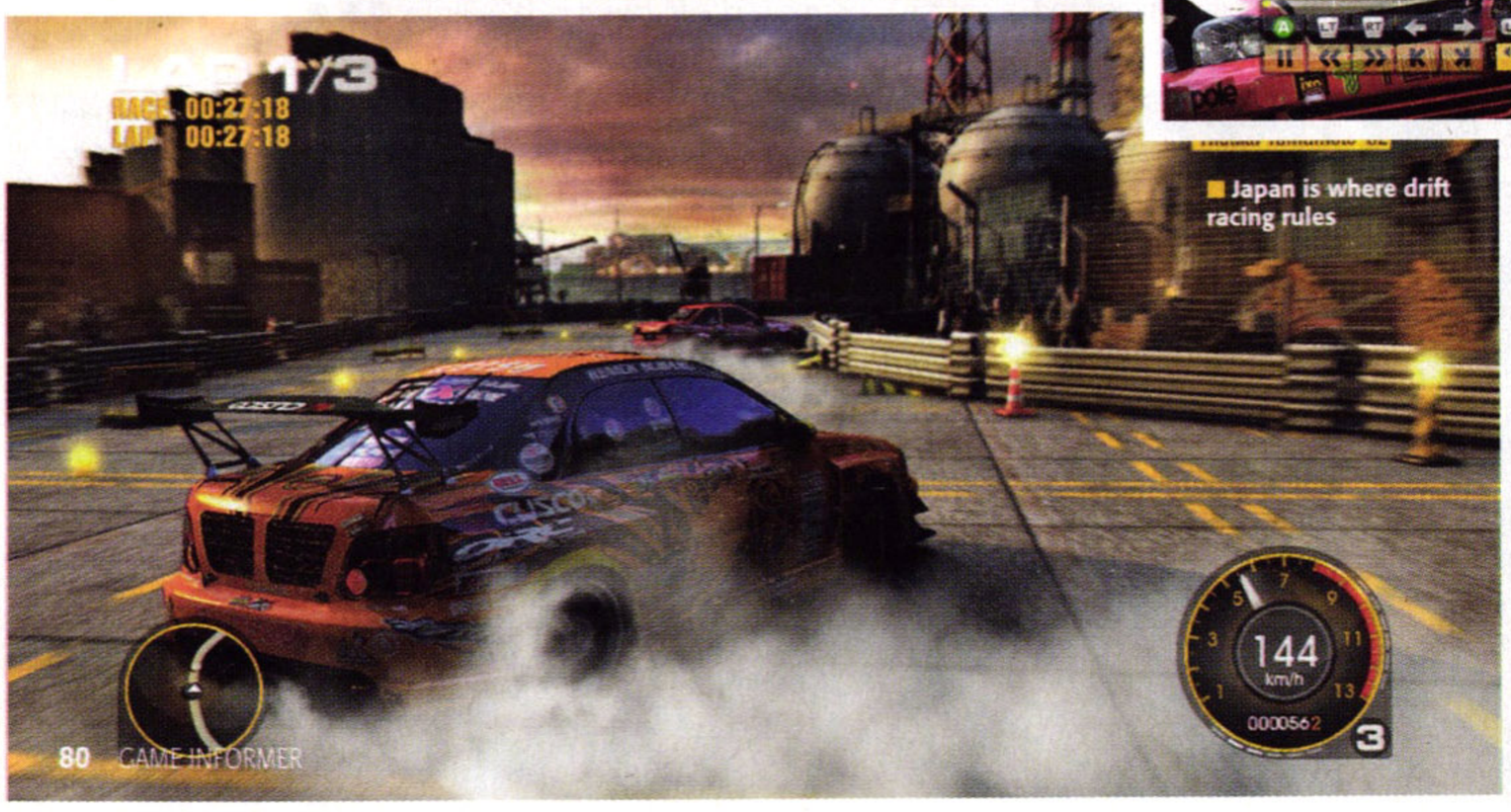
Codemasters struck gold when it released Dirt last summer, and now it's only fitting that the game is giving something back to another Codemasters title that helped it out. Dirt's lineage can be tracked back to the Pro Race Driver franchise, which has now evolved into Grid. But whereas Dirt offered little else but a slew of races, Grid is going one step further and offering context – your racing career.

You start out as a rookie driver in search of wins and a reputation. The better you do in the game's three racing territories (U.S., Japan, and Europe) and their different styles of tracks and races, the better licenses you'll get. Soon enough, you'll be fielding your own race team complete with sponsor obligations to meet. While some games show progress by the number of cars you have, Grid goes about this in a different way. The title has its share of cars to earn, but your progress is measured in the growth of your racing organization as a whole, not by just some number in your garage. Similarly, this game isn't about tricking your car out; it's about racing. You tweak your car settings and design your team's look to suit your racing style.

Once you get beyond the career structure, the racing must be pretty self-explanatory, right? Wrong. It wouldn't be a Codemasters game without an attempt to move the genre forward. First of all, this title books. It's normal in a racing game to slow down to 35 mph for some of your tighter turns. In most titles this feels like coming to a dead stop followed by a slow start as you accelerate out of the turn. While Grid still demands you hit your corners at the right angle and speed, your sense of speed doesn't come to a standstill – which is refreshing since it doesn't hamper the high-speed action.

Grid also sports a feature called Flashbacks. Earn one of these while you're racing and it will enable you to rewind and replay your race before a crash or a disastrous corner. This may sound too arcadey for a racer of Grid's pedigree, but it makes sense. After all, you were going to restart the race after you missed that corner and went from first to eighth anyway – admit it. And racing's what Grid's all about. ■■■

■ Grid features a new damage system which includes more parts that fly up in the air when things don't go as planned

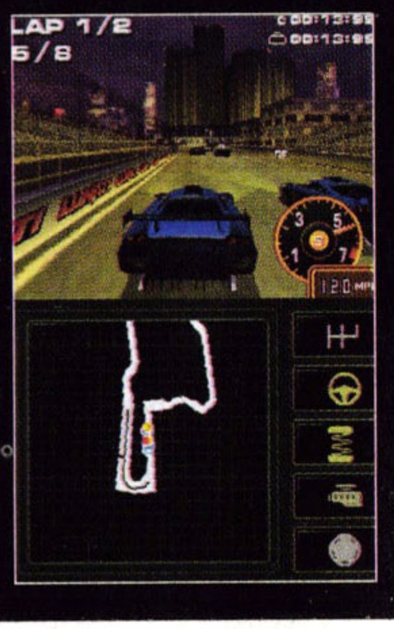


■ Japan is where drift racing rules

## RACING WITH THE TOP DOWN

Most racing games on the Nintendo DS are about as fun as a car with blocks for wheels, but Grid is different. Featuring a good sense of speed for the handheld, minimal graphical pop-up, and good d-pad steering control, this is beyond your average DS racer.

If you don't like the racing, the one thing you can't blame is the tracks. Grid DS features a track editor, so it's all on you.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# NFL Head Coach 09

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
**> DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON **> RELEASE** FALL

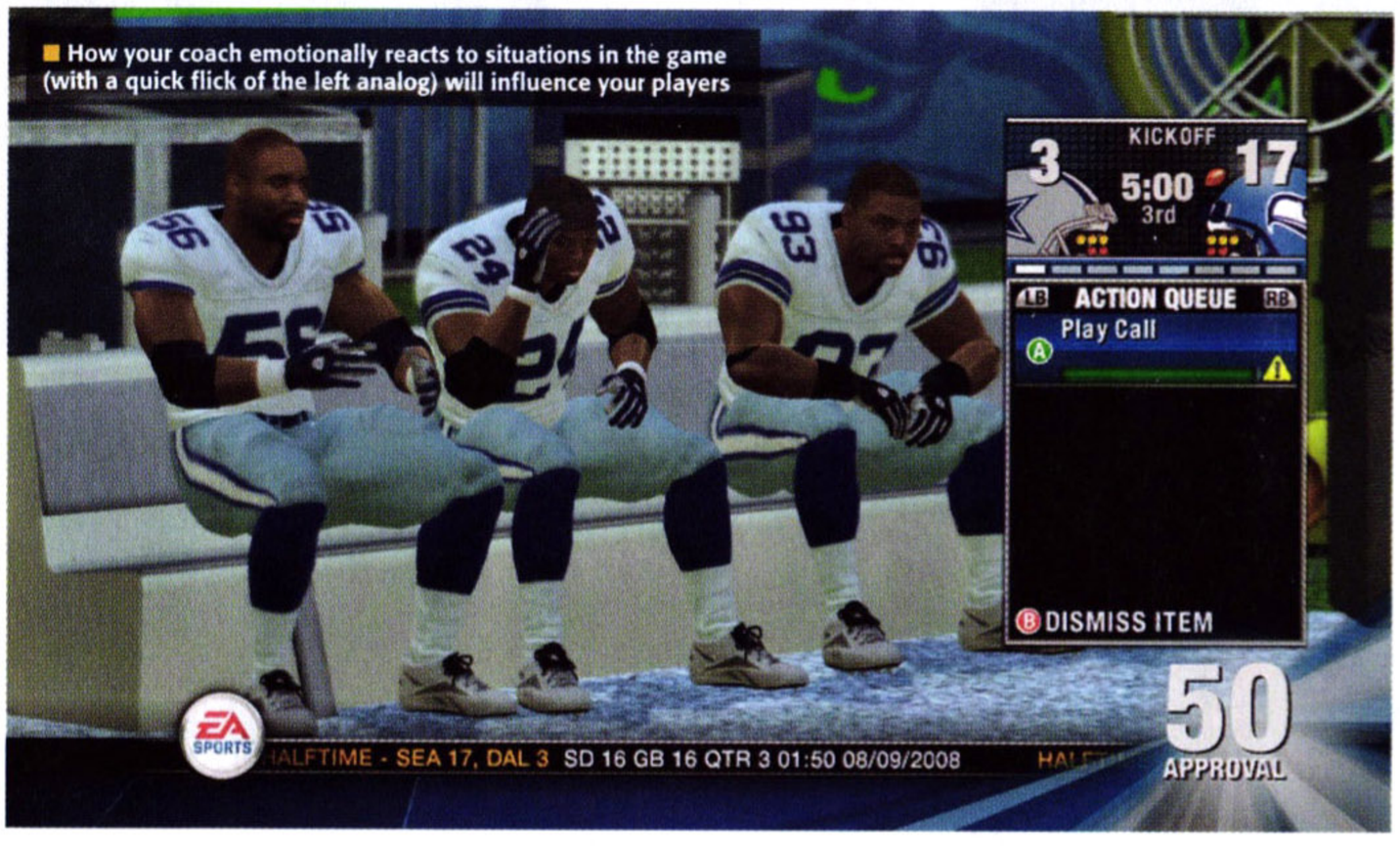
HEADSET NOT INCLUDED

Football fans want the NFL Head Coach series to succeed because it's a game we want to play. This franchise is attempting to give you what you always wanted – the chance to guide your team better than _____ (fill in blank with the name of the appropriate coach, GM, or team owner. We suggest you write in pencil). Of course, EA tried to do this a few years back and failed miserably. But hey, even Bobby Petrino had good intentions at one time. Probably. Unlike the ex-Falcons coach, who ditched his team when the going got really rough, EA Sports isn't giving up on this franchise.

The two main problems with the first Head Coach were time management and results. Instead of requiring you to parse out mundane tasks in an insane calendar format, NFL Head Coach 09 constantly keeps the offseason/off-the-field/in-game clock running, automatically presenting you with pertinent decisions via the action queue. The action queue is a simple way to keep on top of your franchise without much effort. You can dig plenty deep into Head Coach if you want, but this is a surface way to keep the game flowing without you missing any key decisions.

In-game coaching has been also streamlined. Instead of spending time talking to your players in ways that don't make any sense or not getting the on-field results you thought you would, EA has scrapped this feature and reduced games to being almost strictly about play calling, time management, etc. The difference is that now there will be one or two moments you will be asked to make a possibly game-altering choice, like going for it on a late fourth and goal. These crucial decisions will be dramatically highlighted and will figure largely into your approval rating, which is tracked throughout all phases of the game and determines whether you're fired or not.

Even though it doesn't come out until the fall, the game is already very playable, which is unusual and speaks to the fine-tuning that the developer wants to put into this game. The large changes made have already created a title that is a clear improvement over its predecessor. It will be interesting to see, however, whether the on-the-field action can carry the game and how well the AI runs the team behind the scenes. But Head Coach 09's improvements more clearly put your own fate in your hands. Now it's time for you to put up or shut up. ■■■




■ How your coach emotionally reacts to situations in the game (with a quick flick of the left analog) will influence your players

## NO FUN LEAGUE? NO CHANCE

*The NFL offseason is chock-full of stuff to do. Here's a quick rundown of some of its highlights.*

### NFL: THE RPG

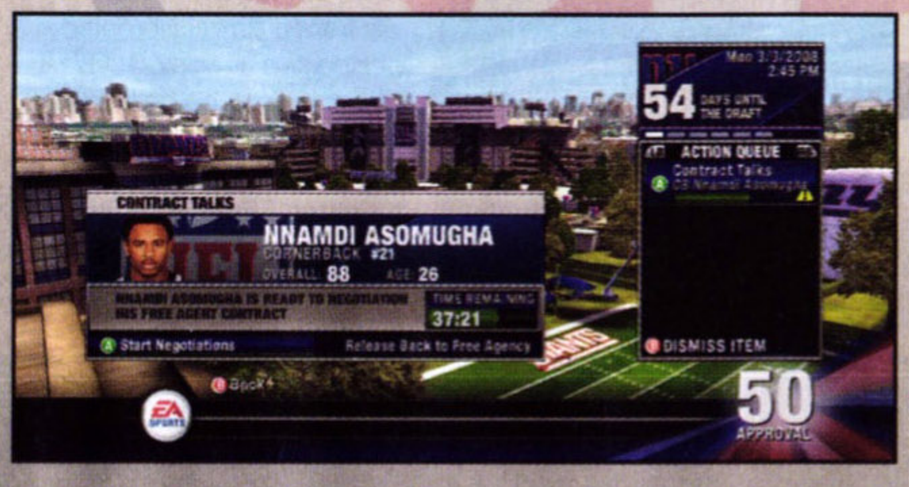
You'll be able to pour a wealth of points into a large skill tree as your coach progresses. How large? You won't be able to master every skill. Coordinators have agendas of their own, and can demand responsibility over certain tasks or playbooks.

### THE DRAFT

In Head Coach you can either start the game at preseason or rewind the clock to February 2008 before the draft. Via the combine, pro days, and personal workouts, you'll scout prospective college players. A bunch of new ratings have been added, including Learning and Potential. It's the Potential and not the Overall rating that will give you the clearest indication of whether players are booms or busts.

### FREE AGENCY

What playbooks and philosophies your team uses (you can change both to your liking) determines what your players are rated. Thus, you don't want to sign free agents or stock your roster with guys who can't play your offensive system. Teams must bid on free agents before they start contract negotiations with them, and negotiations are represented in a back-and-forth format of exchanging offers.




### TRAINING CAMP

Training camp is where you build your playbook. During the season, instead of physically practicing, you'll pick plays you want your team to become well versed in. During games, picking these plays will give you a bump for your hard work. The game also allows you to create plays and share them online.

■ "We like doing things that make people go 'What? That's craziness!'" says BioWare's Greg Zeschuk

NINTENDO DS

# Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** BIOWARE **> RELEASE** 2008

## OUT OF THE BLUE

Top-tier RPG developer BioWare is making a Sonic game — we know, it doesn't seem possible. But it's probably the best shot the Sonic franchise has had at greatness in a long time. So how did it all come together? BioWare heads Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka are longtime friends with Sega of America president Simon Jeffery. "I think it just kind of came up at one point in a conversation," recalls Zeschuk.

Zeschuk and self-professed Sonic fanboy Muzyka jumped at the chance to work on a Sonic title. "Our feeling is that it's still a pretty compelling property," says Zeschuk. "Obviously, there have been some games that haven't been as good as some of the classics, but we think it's still ripe for being really successful."

The game begins as Sonic is on vacation, kicking back after Dr. Eggman's latest trouncing. But it's not long before our hero is summoned back to investigate Knuckles' kidnapping at the hands of a group called the Marauders. Players will undertake a sprawling adventure that spans 10 chapters, several classic locales, and an ominous alternate dimension. "This is dark for a Sonic game," says Chronicles producer Mark Darrah.

The environments are all hand painted by BioWare artists from a similar isometric perspective as Sonic 3D Blast. Chock full of loop de loops and bounce pads, these settings will still put Sonic through his paces. "The big important thing is to evoke Sonic's speed without being a platformer game," says Darrah. But Sonic's speed can't handle every obstacle. Players will have to toggle in characters like Amy to smash away boulders or Tails to fly over large gaps. More complex puzzles will require the skills of all four party members to work in tandem.

### RETURN OF THE CHAO

Players will be able to collect various Chao eggs, grow them in a Chao garden, and use them to boost stats like fire damage and luck. BioWare hints that the Chao will be tied into multiplayer, possibly for trading purposes.

Combat takes on a traditional turn-based approach, with Elite Beat Agents-style shrinking rings and object tracking for using or defending against special attacks. Characters can also team up for moves like Sonic and Tails' Blue Bomber (see screens). Mass Effect fans will recognize classes like engineer, though they won't work quite the same. Instead of turning synthetics against each other, Tails' Tinker ability debuffs robots' attacks, speed, and accuracy,

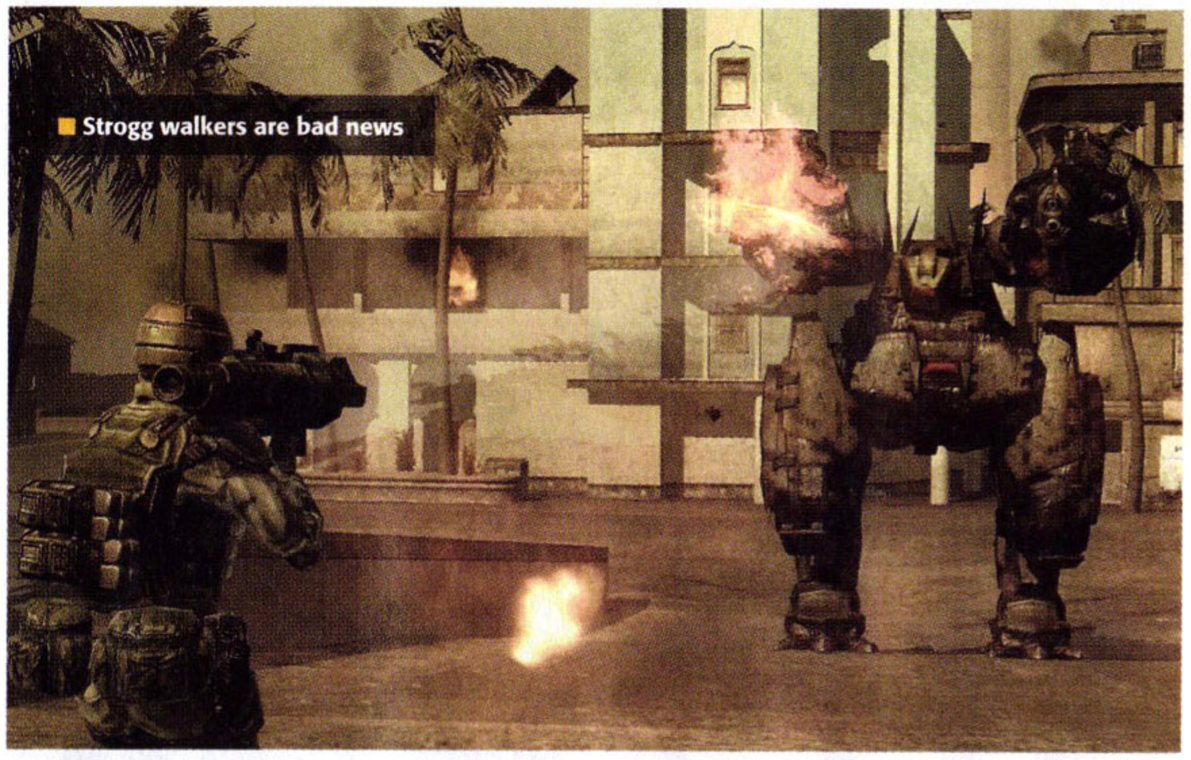
Leveling up is again based on a points system, though casual players can choose to automate distribution if they wish. More hands-on players will have to choose whether to throw points into speed, attack power, luck, and defense. Or you can save them up for the 10 different special abilities per character. With 10 different party members to recruit, that adds up to 100 total specials. Like with Mass Effect, BioWare has set up experience distribution so players won't be able to max out their characters upon the first playthrough.

BioWare's trademark active conversation system will return, albeit in a simpler form. For example, there won't be any Paragon or Renegade meters to fill. "Sonic's ultimately the good guy at heart," Darrah says. "He can be a little bit more attitudey Sonic or a little bit more goody-two-shoes Sonic, but ultimately he's still Sonic." ■■■

■ The first look at the reimagined Blue Ridge Zone

■ As players navigate the world, fog of war will clear away on the top map

■ Combat in action



■ Strogg walkers are bad news

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Enemy Territory: Quake Wars

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR SYSTEM LINK)
**> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** UNDERGROUND/ID SOFTWARE (PLAYSTATION 3), NERVE SOFTWARE/ID SOFTWARE (XBOX 360) **> RELEASE** 2008

## A STROGGING WE WILL GO

Splash Damage's 2007 team-based online shooter, Enemy Territory: Quake Wars is set to appear on consoles later this year. Based on our recent first-hand experience, this port should capably fill 360 and PS3 owners' needs for a fast-paced, team-based online shooter.

After selecting one of five classes, players must fight to complete a series of objectives like capturing guard towers, rebuilding bridges, and hacking installations. Each goal typically requires a specific class to complete it – for instance, only the soldier's heavy explosives can blow a hole in a critical wall. A vast array of deployable equipment, from covert ops' radar to engineers' autofiring turrets, is available to assist in combat. Likewise, a wide variety of vehicles, including tanks, hoverpacks, and giant walking mechs, is there to play with. Putting together the pieces of a successful strategy is half the fun, and none of the game's depth has been lost in transition to consoles.

Like anything else attached to id, Quake Wars will release "when it's done," but the late beta we played was already running as smoothly as most released titles. A few minor differences between the versions should be noted, though. Both consoles feature dramatically improved bot AI that automatically acts as support for human players, a welcome addition for offline or co-op minded players. On 360, a new training level and three-map campaigns add some single-player value, but the innovative mission assignments from the PC version have been removed. The PS3 edition keeps these missions intact, but lacks the offline campaign and training modes; the only way to play single-player is on instant-action solitary maps.

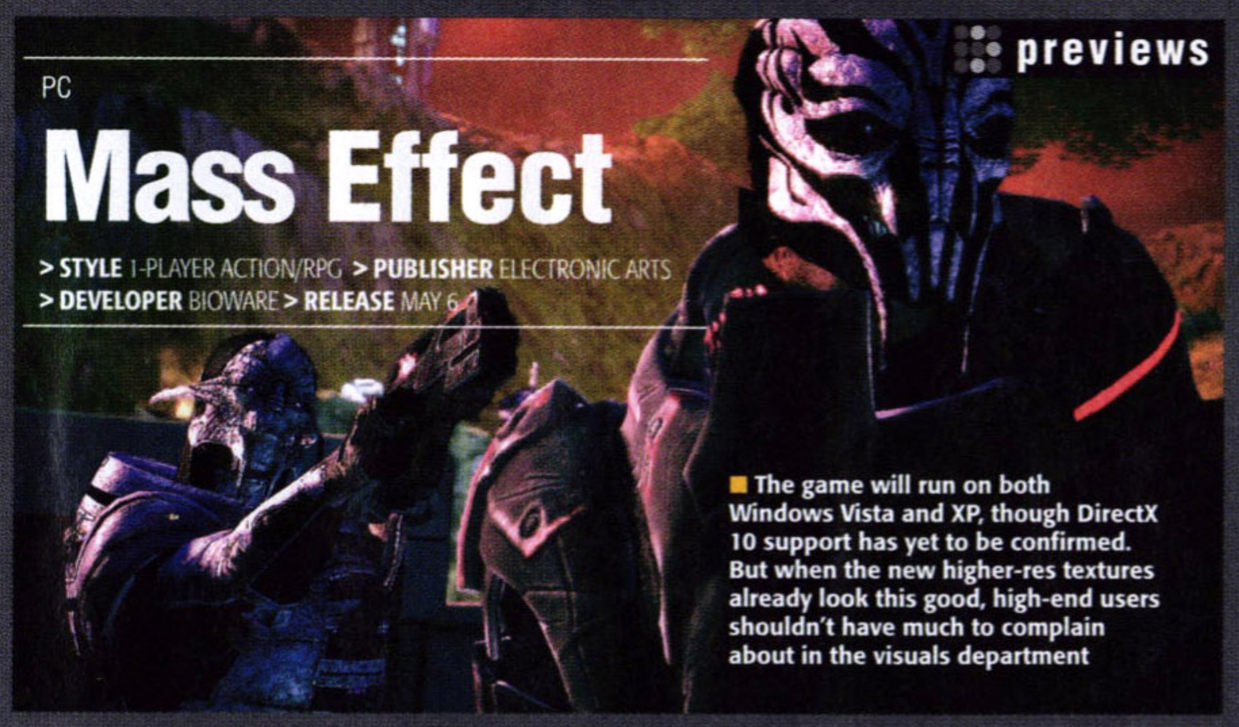
Though the bot AI is the only notable addition to this console port, it's a nice one. The overall solid execution, with around 1,000 stats persistently tracked online and full party support to keep friends together between matches, should make this a solid option for console FPS fans. ■■■

■ Vehicle combat is a huge part of the game

PC

# Mass Effect

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
**> DEVELOPER** BIOWARE **> RELEASE** MAY 6



■ The game will run on both Windows Vista and XP, though DirectX 10 support has yet to be confirmed. But when the new higher-res textures already look this good, high-end users shouldn't have much to complain about in the visuals department

## MASSIVE TWEAKS

PC gamers will finally get the chance to experience one of the best titles of 2007 when Mass Effect lands this summer. But BioWare isn't just slapping together a quick and dirty port. "One of the big things that we're doing for the sequel, and we did it for the PC version, [is take] all of the review comments, a lot of fan comments, and comments from internal playthroughs, and we had this giant rank order list of things that we wanted to improve," says BioWare president Greg Zeschuk. "We've got some great ideas for the sequel, and some of them we're going to try here."

After seeing over a half-hour of gameplay, the tweaks we witnessed were subtle yet exciting. Loads have been drastically shortened and texture pop-in and frame rate stutters have been completely eliminated. While elevator scenes were carefully avoided, BioWare reps say they are still working out how to incorporate faster loads with the dialogue and broadcasts that occur mostly in the Citadel lifts. The inventory screen has been elegantly streamlined, placing all items and upgrades within easy reach on a single screen. But perhaps the biggest change to gameplay is the revamped decryption minigame. Instead of copying a button pressing sequence, players will navigate an arrow towards the center of a circle through a series of moving blocks (see screenshot).

As far as PC-specific enhancements go, the mouse and keyboard control scheme has allowed for several new options. Up to eight abilities can be assigned to numerical hotkeys, and guns can be cycled through with the scroll wheel or using the F1 through F4 keys. The Mako's new WASD controls are now camera independent, which should result in more efficient Thresher Maw takedowns and fewer awkward undercarriage views. Those interested in the classic control scheme, however, can still use a 360 pad if they'd like. ■■■

■ The inventory system has been revamped

■ The new decryption minigame should provide an additional challenge

■ Abilities can now be dragged over to quick slots in the upper left corner of the screen. This also provides a constant update on cooldown times

UNLIMITED ENABLED

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

# Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** LUCASARTS (PS3, 360), KROME (Wii, PS2, PSP), N-SPACE (DS) > **RELEASE** SUMMER

## CUE THE IMPERIAL MARCH

■ Your Force grip can affect multiple oppenents

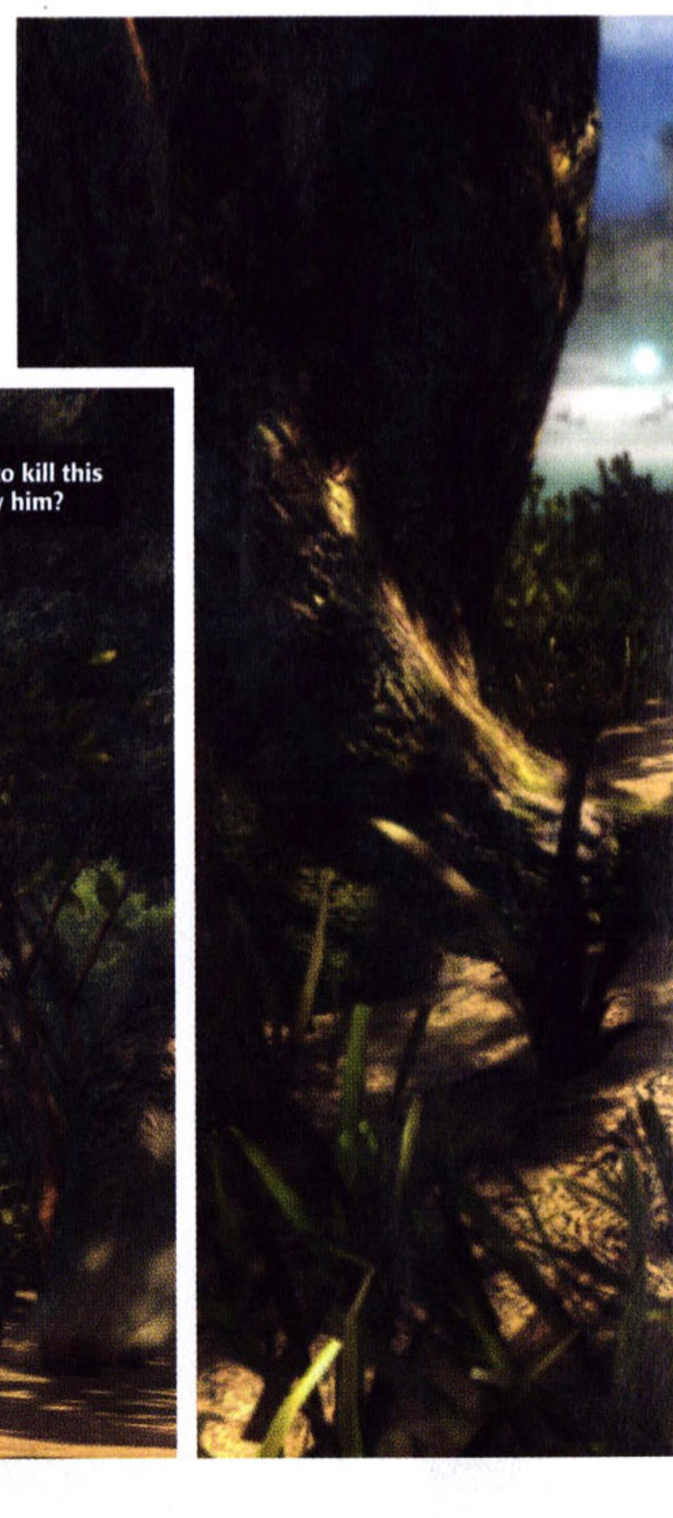
Some Star Wars fans were less than pleased (or outraged, depending on the depth of their obsession) to hear about Darth Vader's upcoming appearance in Soulcalibur IV. But don't get too upset. Hacking through Voldo won't be your only chance to take control of the legendary fallen Jedi; Darth Vader will also be a playable character for the opening level of The Force Unleashed, the next chapter of the Star Wars saga.

"Darth Vader is sent by the Emperor to the planet of Kashyyyk to hunt down a Jedi in hiding," reveals project lead Haden Blackman. We witnessed the Dark Lord of the Sith in action as he tore through legions of Wookiees with a full complement of Force powers, and the resulting carnage is just as amazing as you would imagine. When he throws his lightsaber, it cuts through the trees in its path. As a group of Wookiees run across a rope bridge to attack him, he can use the Force on the bridge to slingshot them into the air. He doesn't run up to his foes and start slashing – they come to him, voluntarily or not.

"Vader moves and plays quite a bit differently than the secret apprentice," explains Blackman. "We wanted to capture the sense that Vader is a hulking figure who moves deliberately and with a sense of purpose and determination, while the apprentice is much faster – more acrobatic and more agile." Vader doesn't even have a run animation; even with the analog stick full forward, he moves with a steady step. This makes perfect sense for his character; despite Vader's combat prowess, his true strength is his mastery of the Force.

As a way to acclimate players to the game mechanics, Vader will have most of the powers that the apprentice will learn and utilize, like Force choke and Force push. Of course, when Vader uses these abilities, they are more powerful than the versions the apprentice begins with. "Vader is also meant to give the player a glimpse of what the apprentice can ultimately become," explains Blackman, "but both characters have combos and powers that are unique."

Vader becomes a mentor after Kashyyyk, as character control transitions over to the apprentice, but his role is far from over. In fact, we're willing to bet that some of the coolest story moments revolve around the man once known as Anakin Skywalker. For instance, if you've seen the Force Unleashed toy line, you may have noticed a new Darth Vader, clearly damaged and falling apart after some kind of battle. We can't wait to learn the story behind that, though we'll have to spend a few more months in the dark. "Some things are going to have to remain a mystery until the game comes out," Blackman teases. "We have a lot of great surprises in store." ■ ■ ■



■ So, is Vader going to kill this guy, or totally destroy him?

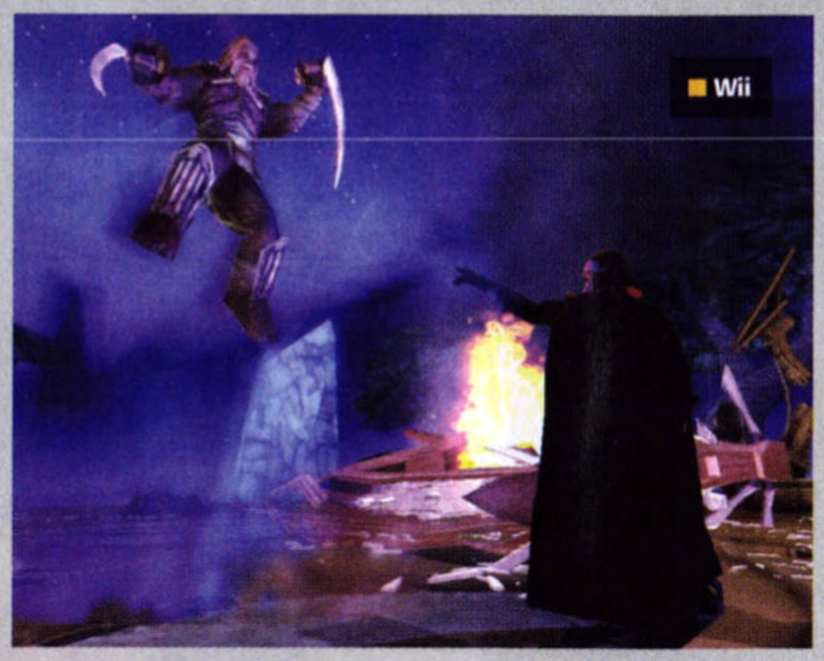
■ Vader will be voiced by Matt Sloan, who played the part in Empire at War, as well as the popular Chad Vader videos on the Internet

## The Force Surrounds You

Versions of The Force Unleashed for other platforms are also coming along well. While the Wii, DS, PS2, and PSP iterations aren't being developed internally at LucasArts, they all share the same storyline and an introductory level that puts players in control of Vader. In fact, there will even be additional opportunities to play as Vader in these versions. "On the Wii, he's available as one of the characters in Duel mode, and on PSP we have a historical mission in which you play as Vader against Luke on Cloud City – but you have all of the 'unleashed' Force powers." This contrasts to the PS3 and 360 versions, where Vader is only available in the prologue level.

■ Wii

■ Very few Padawans learn the smoking crotch Force power



■ Wii

■ Wii

# PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3

## Naruto (working title)

The lines between video games and other forms of media continue to blur. We've seen Namco's newest Naruto fighter in motion, and it impressively looks like actual hand-drawn animation. Fans will play through the storyline of the Japanese manga in this title, which is actually a successor to the PS2 Naruto: Ultimate Ninja series. Battleground environments are much larger this time around and rendered in 3D, allowing players to unleash additional moves such as crazy ninja flipping sidesteps. Naruto will also have help from allies who each have their own special jutsu. Anime fans can looks forward to playing this game before the end of the year. Hopefully it can match the quality of last year's entertaining Naruto game created by Ubisoft.

PLAYSTATION 3

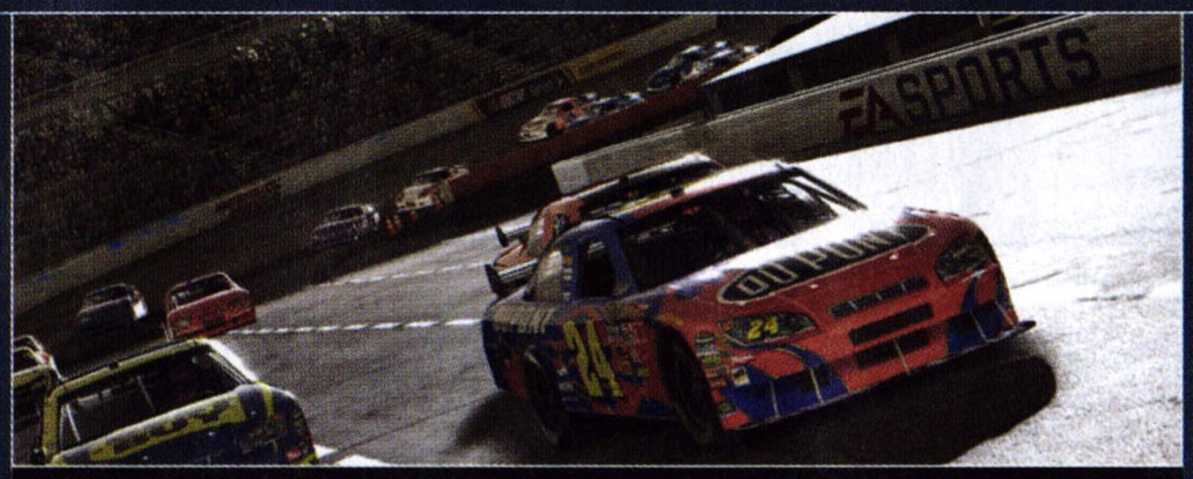
## Wipeout HD

Coming exclusively to PlayStation Store, Wipeout HD should be just the ticket for futuristic racing fans. While the game culls all its tracks from earlier Wipeout titles, every course has been reworked to take advantage of the PS3's vast technical capabilities, so you'll see the game running in both 1080p and at 60 frames per second. While it's hard to imagine the incredibly fast and precise driving will be aided by the bump in frame rate, you also can use the Sixaxis motion control to maneuver your vehicle. Sure, Wipeout HD isn't going to redefine the way you think about racing games, but it sure looks pretty.

PC

## Battlefield Heroes

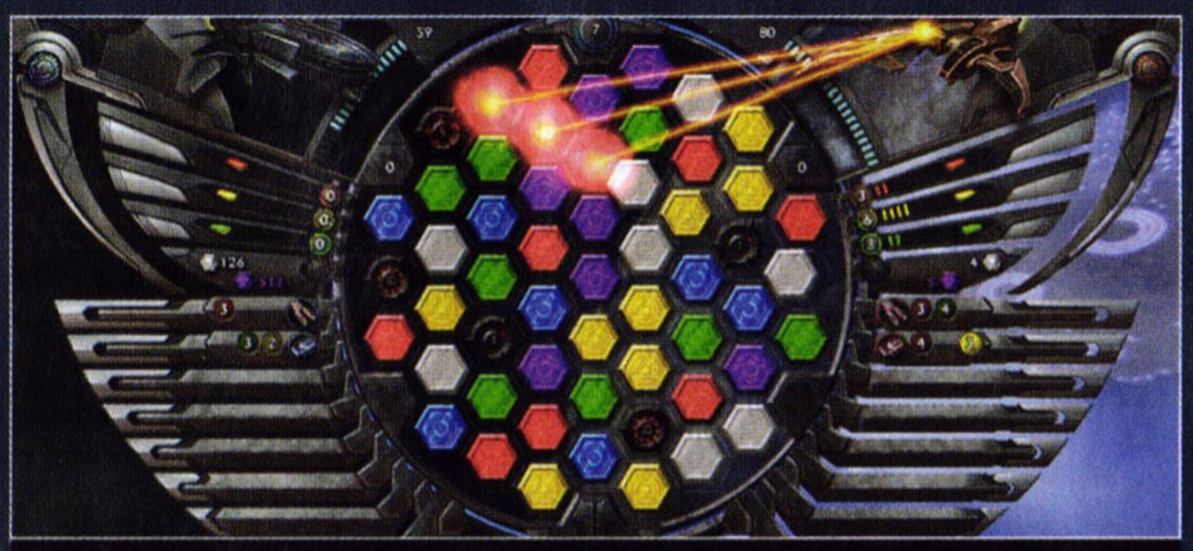
When EA announced that DICE's next PC Battlefield would be free and cartoony, many hardcore fans cried foul. But a recent look at the game has us hopeful. Players will visit the game site, click on a big red "play now" button, and create a character. No credit card info is required and ads will not appear in game. You'll side with either the fictional Royal or National Army and choose a stealthy commando, standard soldier, or heavy gunner. Vehicles include Advance Wars-esque tanks and fighter planes (which can hold two passengers on its wings). Two large maps, up to 16-player battles, and one match type (50 respawns per team mixed with CTF) will be available at launch this summer.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2

## NASCAR 09

When it hits stores in June, NASCAR 09's cover boy Jeff Gordon (great, but where's Ingrid?!) will serve as your guide in the game's new career mode. As in some previous years, you'll work your way up through the truck and Nationwide series (if that's where you want to start) and earn a reputation that will follow you on the track. Speaking of reputations, first-class punk Carl Edwards is now included, but we doubt he'll be trying to sucker punch Matt Kenseth – at least not in the game. EA is also working on offering a more accessible driving option to newcomers, although it isn't sacrificing the hardcore end (all of your car setup options are still available). Speaking of options, EA is promising a wealth of paint job choices, and has even hinted at a big surprise in this department.



XBOX 360 | NINTENDO DS | PC

## **Puzzle Quest:** Galactrix

The original Puzzle Quest was the undeniable surprise hit of last year, so it was only a matter of time before Infinite Interactive and D3 Publisher teamed up for a sequel. Trading fantasy for sci-fi, Galactrix puts players in the role of a space pilot who will collect a variety of ships instead of choosing from character classes at the outset. The same "match three" gameplay is still at the core, but a new hex orientation allows for vertical, horizontal, and diagonal matches. Adding another degree of strategy, blocks will now fill in from all directions (depending on how players choose to match colors) instead of just from the top. Look for it this fall on the consoles listed above, and most likely a few more shortly thereafter.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

## **Recoil:** Retrograd

In the year 2052, the oppressive organization Gloria Mundi has risen to power through its use (and abuse) of time travel. Protagonist Davi Atman must travel back to several time periods to defeat GM agents and make things right. However, the decisions he makes in the past will literally transform the present day city, resulting in high potential replay value. Crowd control, weapons spanning multiple eras, steam-powered mechanical suits, and zeppelin dogfights are just a few of the concepts we're excited about. Developer ZeitGuyz has yet to land a publisher for this early 2010 title, but we're very anxious to see how it comes along in the meantime.

NINTENDO DS

## New International Track & Field

Are you looking for ways to improve your time in the 100-meter dash? Just put Pyramid Head hot on your heels! Konami is bringing back its classic Track & Field franchise later this year, including a number of popular characters…well, Konami characters, at least. You can choose from the likes of Simon Belmont, Sparkster, and Frogger as you compete in events such as long jump, weightlifting, and breaststroke. The rapid button-tapping gameplay this series pioneered is being replaced with touch screen mechanics, though there will be a classic arcade mode that replicates the original style. The game has a single-player career, but the online and local multiplayer is where most of the action will be, especially since there will be worldwide rankings for the events. It might be too much to hope, but we'd love to see the javelin throw replaced with the Raiden throw.

PC

## Shattered Suns

Developer/publisher Clear Crown Studios has a lofty goal for Shattered Suns: shake up the real-time strategy genre's conventions by utilizing all three dimensions of interplanetary space to the fullest extent. Not only will players have to be more Kirk than Khan and think along the z-axis, but they'll have to contend with planets moving in orbit around their suns – which will dramatically change the tactical situation as a game progresses. Additionally, ships and space stations will be fully customizable along a variety of vectors, and a uniquely organic approach to storytelling promises to make the single-player campaign stand out. Shattered Suns is set to release May 30, so it shouldn't be too long until we have a final word on it to share with you.

# REVIEWS

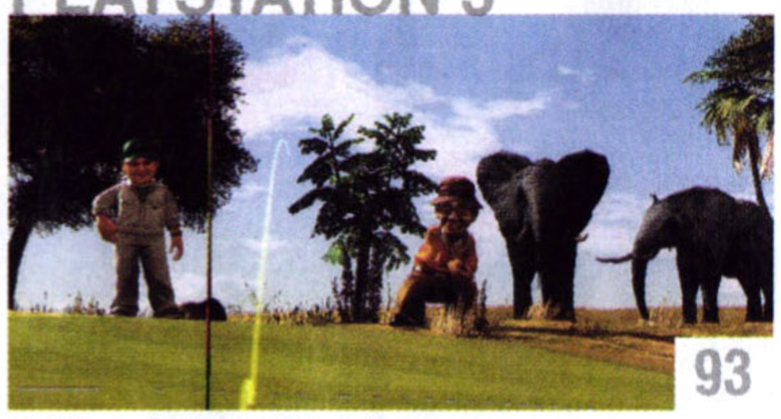
We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

## MULTI

90

**Dark Sector**

## PLAYSTATION 3



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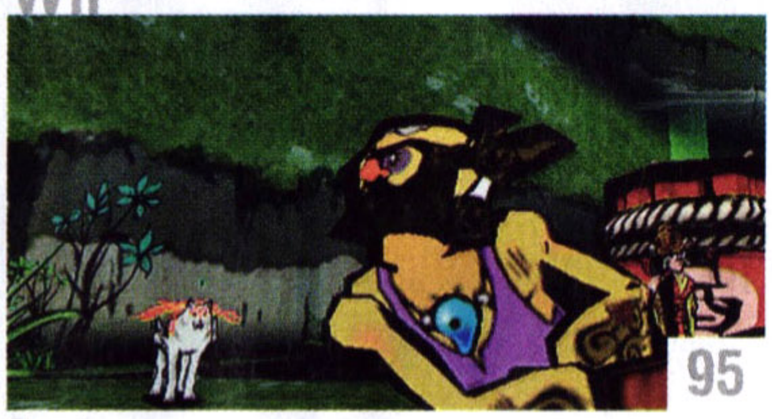
**Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds**

## Wii



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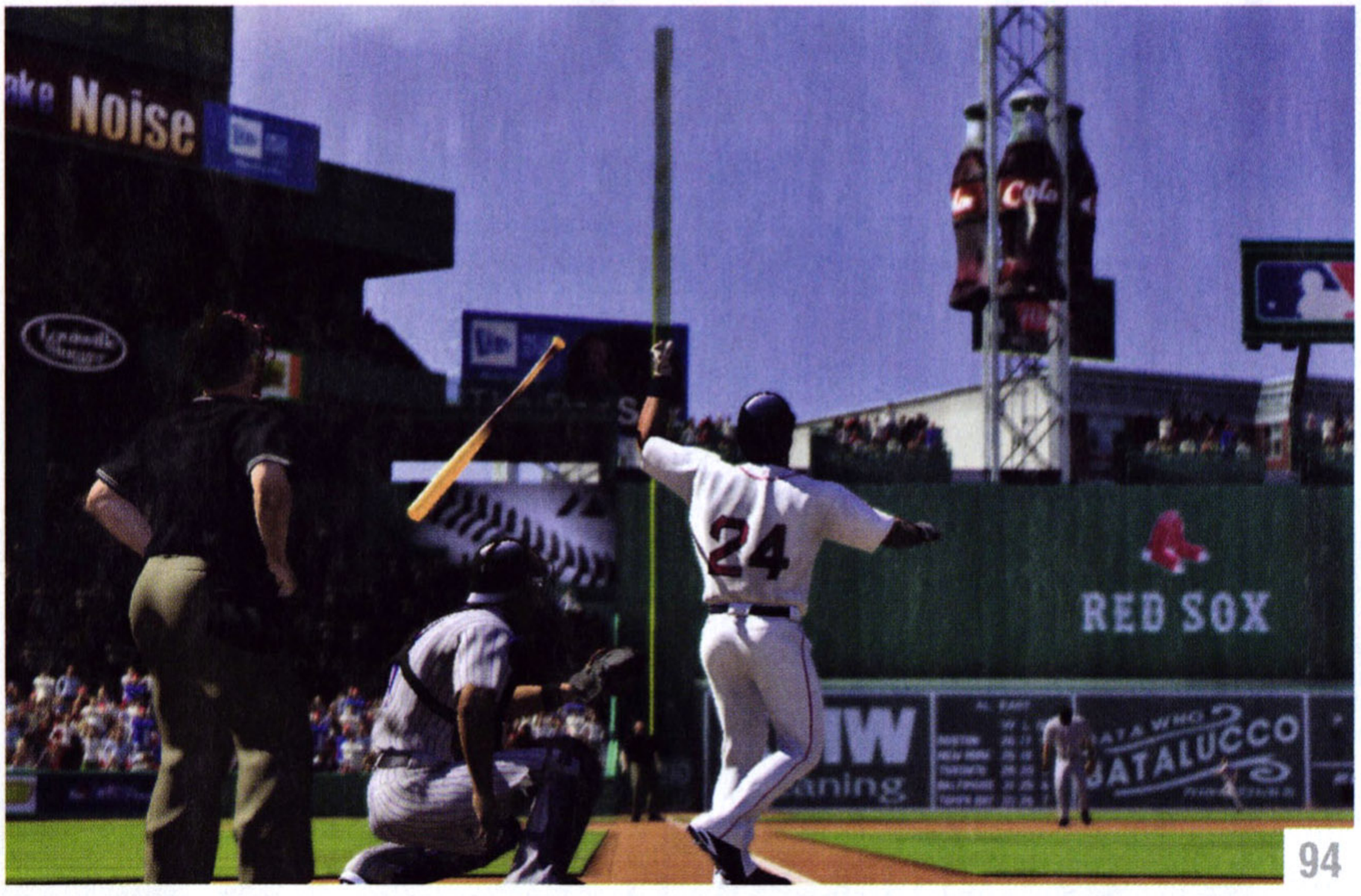
**Okami**

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GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

# MLB 08: The Show

The immense relief as a slider that you *know* caught way too much of the plate is watched for strike three. The satisfaction of turning on an inside fastball you saw coming all the way down the pipe. The crushing agony of watching a leadoff walk turn into the go-ahead run on a double to the gap. No baseball sim has captured these moments and presented them in a way that engenders a real emotional response in players until Sony's latest effort, MLB 08: The Show. The brilliantly executed Road to the Show mode, solid fundamentals, and all the depth a sabermetrician could ask for make this an easy choice for Game of the Month honors.

***Note:*** *Because Okami originally received Game of the Month in issue 162, the Wii port was not eligible for the award this month.*

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

## THE SCORING SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

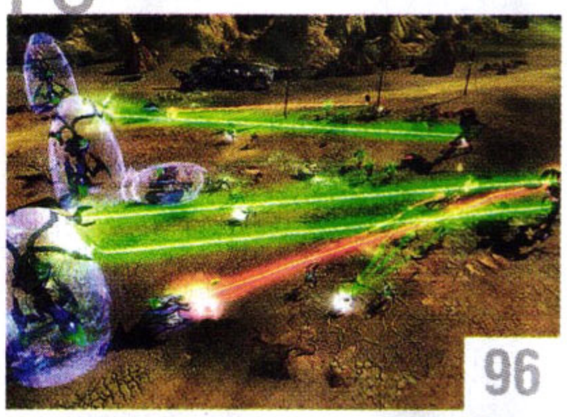
**> Playability:** Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

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

**> Replay Value**

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

PC



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**Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath**

HANDHELD

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**Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword**

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GAME INFORMER HANDHELD GAME OF THE MONTH

# The World Ends With You

In his twisted struggle for existence, a young man named Neku isn't too busy to do a little shopping. It sounds bizarre in concept, but The World Ends With You artfully blends role-playing, combat, and simulation elements to create a stylish and entertaining world. Taking advantage of both DS screens, controlling Neku and his partner simultaneously stands out as one of the most imaginative applications of the system's capabilities to date. It may be a little strange, but this adventure from Square Enix is difficult to ignore.

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## theedge

*When All Games Aren't Created Equal*

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

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|---|---|---|---|
| EARLY CHILDHOOD eC | Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older. | MATURE M | Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older. |
| EVERYONE E | Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older. | ADULTS ONLY AO | Content suitable only for adults. |
| EVERYONE 10+ E10+ | Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older. | RATING PENDING RP | Product is awaiting final rating. |
| TEEN T | Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older. | | |

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**frontend –** A game's menus and options

**HDTV –** High Definition Television

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**PS2 –** Sony PlayStation 2

**PS3 –** Sony's PlayStation 3 console

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

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

**RPG –** Role-Playing Game. A term we use to describe games like Final Fantasy and The Elder Scrolls

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

**Search –** It's a function. Get it on Xbox Live, Microsoft!

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

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

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

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

■ The bladed glaive is not just a long-range weapon. Like Gears, you can leap over cover and use your particularly nasty weapon to exact brutal close-range executions

**BOTTOM LINE 7.5**

> **Concept:** The story leaves too many questions unanswered, but the gameplay, primarily the bladed glaive weapon, paves an enjoyable path of destruction

> **Graphics:** Although it was announced over four years ago, Dark Sector amazes with visuals on par with the best that video games offer

> **Sound:** A decent score, but the real ear-turning experience here is the remarkable sound effects work, which is only heightened through a great surround mix

> **Playability:** It taps into the best third-person action titles (Gears of War, Resident Evil 4) to deliver reliable targeting and cover systems. The game does, however, grow repetitive as it progresses

> **Entertainment:** The story-challenged campaign is backed by strong gameplay, but you'll likely get seven to eight hours out of this game, as multiplayer should be a destination for no one

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Dark Sector

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** D3
> **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL EXTREMES > **RELEASE** MARCH 25 > **ESRB** M

## A ONE-TRICK PONY

Dark Sector wastes no time piling on intrigue. In its first minute, set during the Cold War, an American submarine surfaces off of the coast of Lasria, a fictional Eastern European city. This vessel's intent is not to attack or survey. Rather, it has risen from the murky depths to signal defeat. Its hull has been breached, not by a torpedo or a depth charge, but by something that physically tore it open like a can of beans. It doesn't take the Lasrian military long to investigate, but the only thing they learn is that the cause of the breach is still nestled within the submersible, waiting for human contact.

After this heart-pounding tease, the game flashes forward 20 years. Hayden Tenno, an American operative sent to gather intelligence, is understandably on edge. But it's not what hides in the shadows that worries him; it's the air he breathes. Within this first level, the game successfully creates an unsettling atmosphere that makes you think this rabbit hole must be incredibly deep. With an agitated Lasrian army standing between you and your job, it also doesn't hold back from throwing you into the fires. Even in this introductory zone, the gunplay is very impressive, and should make anyone who has played Resident Evil 4 and Gears of War feel right at home. It offers a beautifully designed over-the-shoulder targeting system, visceral pop-and-shoot gunplay, and plenty of fodder to mow down.

This early gameplay, as entertaining as it is, is just a prelude to greater things. The game really doesn't begin until Hayden is infected at the end of the level. Rather than developing a cough or the sniffles, his right arm mutates it a hulking mess of flesh, metal, and something alien. This should be reason for concern, but this gross mutation does bring a profound advantage – one of the coolest weapons in recent memory, the bladed glaive. It functions like a boomerang, but before returning to your mutated hand, it usually cuts into an enemy with the remorselessness of Wolverine's claws. Once this weapon is introduced, the gunplay is pushed to the side. The developers have placed this unusual weapon on a pedestal and spend the rest of the game worshiping it. As the enemies pour in, it gains new powers, such as the ability to channel fire, ice, and electricity, and also the ability to slow time so that you can manually control its flight path.

It becomes such a focus, in fact, that even the story, which had such promise, is tossed into the trash. I couldn't even begin to tell you what the game ended up being about. Did it deal with aliens?

■ At long last, we know why *Airwolf* was cancelled

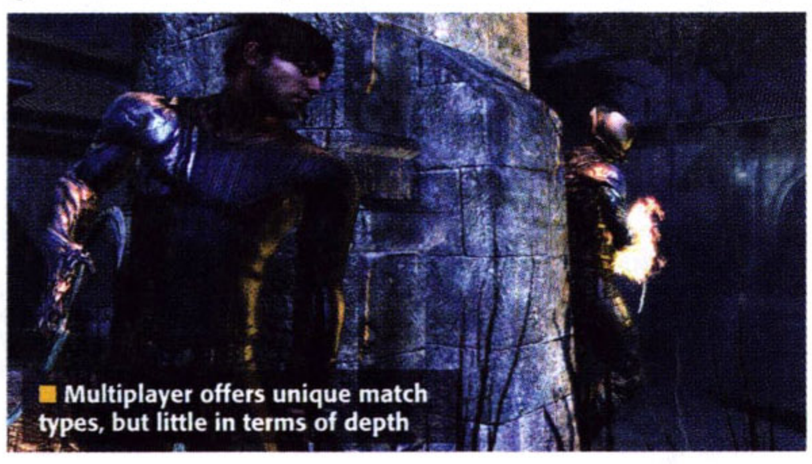
A disease? Something from hell? I have no idea.

With everything vanishing into the glaive's shadow, Dark Sector becomes a one trick pony. It's a fun trick, but I tired of the glaive about three quarters of the way through the game. The vehicle segments, which I won't ruin for you, add some rocket-powered spice, but they aren't used enough to be satisfying diversions. After a few minutes, it's back to throwing the glaive and wishing that the game didn't limit firearm ammo so much.

Dark Sector's multiplayer doesn't get the blood pumping, either. The two modes, Epidemic and Infection, support 10 players and focus specifically on Hayden and his amazing powers. In Infection, one player starts out as Hayden, and the other players must hunt him down. Whoever finishes him off with a close-range melee attack becomes Hayden next. In Epidemic, two teams of five square off against each other. One of the players from each side is, you guessed it, Hayden. The goal for each team is to take down the opposing Hayden. These matches don't last long, and truth be told, they bored me to death.

As negative as I have been, I still feel that Dark Sector is worth checking out. The glaive is something that every action nut has to wrap his or her hands around. Like the BFG or the cerebral bore, you'll remember this weapon forever. Sadly, you'll remember the weapon more than the game itself.—**REINER**

**Achievement Detail**
**In my first play, I tallied 620 points. Most of them came from completing levels and eliminating enemies. If you play the game again on the Brutal difficulty setting, you'll net another 125 points.**



■ Multiplayer offers unique match types, but little in terms of depth

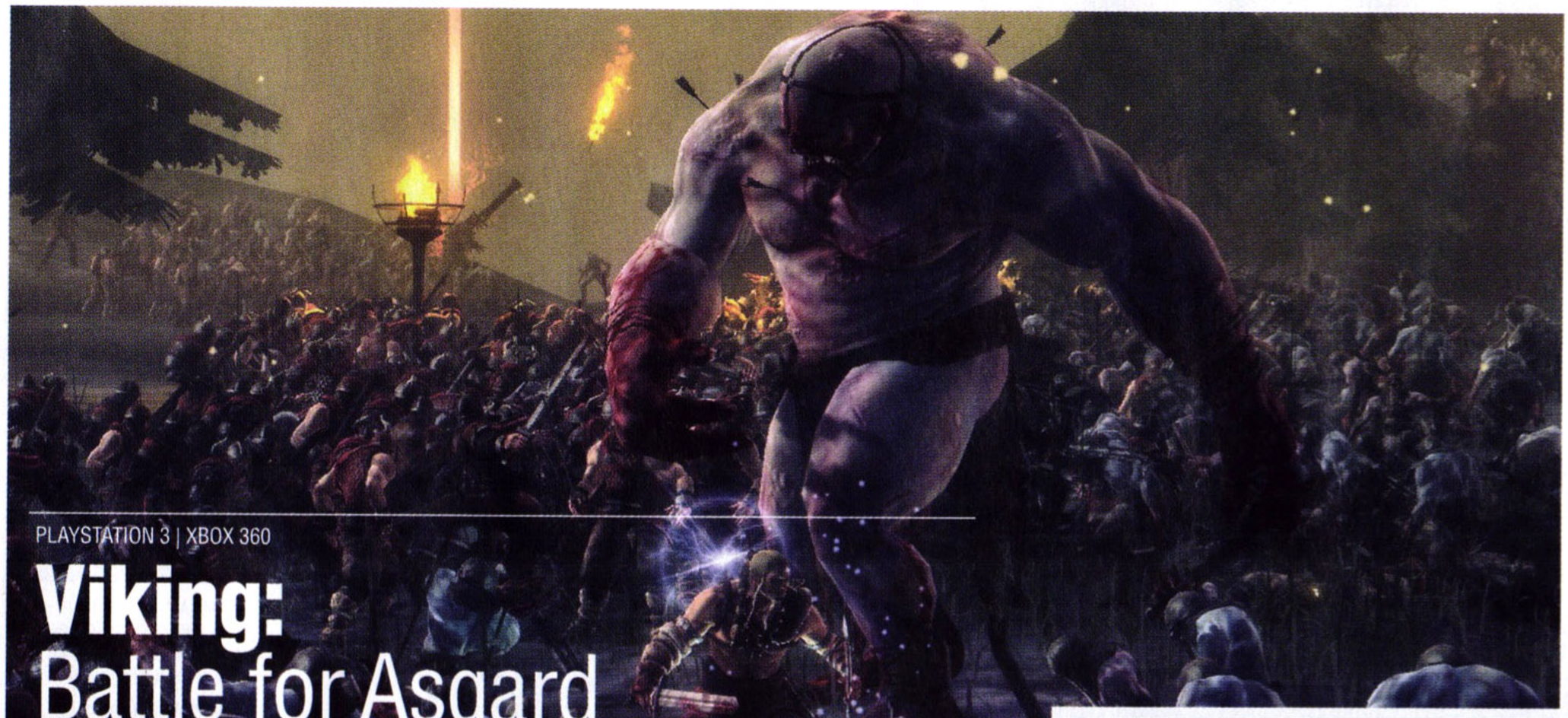
**theedge**

*When All Games Aren't Created Equal*

I compared the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions on three different TVs (a CRT, an LCD, and a 70-inch DLP whopper). On all of the sets, the PS3 version displayed a truer black. The developers confirmed that the PS3 version has richer dark tones. Other than this miniscule difference, both games are identical.

**Second Opinion 8.25**

In my mind, Dark Sector has remained a wild card since I first heard about it – one of those ideas that sounded fun, but whose execution seemed tricky to pull off. Happily, the finished product is well worth the long wait. Dark and gory visuals are delivered through a wealth of remarkable graphical flourishes, from amazing rain effects to stunning textures and shading throughout. Hayden's meandering tale is sadly quite forgettable, but at least the gameplay is a blast. That's mainly because of the glaive (I think it's okay if you call it the Krull) and the powers that come along with it, which slowly build up to an almost ridiculous level of destructive power. Pacing throughout the well-designed action levels is top notch, as it intermixes new enemies and abilities with the occasional and very satisfying boss fight. So what if the three map multiplayer mode is a little throwaway? Dark Sector's unique take on third-person action is worth the price of admission.—**MILLER**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Viking: Battle for Asgard

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** CREATIVE ASSEMBLY > **RELEASE** MARCH 25 > **ESRB** M

## GO VIKES!

I've long found something appealing about Viking history and myth. Vikings were a special breed of warrior pirates. They lived out a rough and rugged existence, but they celebrated life and viciously sought personal glory. There was something brutal, even disgusting, about their displays of strength and courage. I hoped Sega's new game would explore these dark facets of Viking life. I also hoped for a cohesive story, an immersive open world, and some heart-pounding, epic confrontations. What Creative Assembly ended up creating was a passable combat system, a huge but lifeless world, and some good ideas that desperately need more fleshing out.

Viking's large-scale confrontations, where you have two armies facing off against one another, are sweet. These are the big payoffs for all the time you spend wandering the game's large environments and building up your troops. Unleashing dragon strikes on groups of archers, powering up your troops with ice magic then watching them break through the lines of your enemy's war machine, or taking down a 25-foot giant in the eye of a castle siege storm are rewards in and of themselves.

It's just too bad that most of the time you're flying solo, since the action is more rewarding with an army at your back. Still, even alone, you're a force to be reckoned with. Combat is fairly solid, if a little basic, and your variety of combos, magic, and items make you a destructive force. So, what's the problem? That depends. Does repetition bug you? Does repetition bug you? Does repetition bug you?

Viking uses the same gameplay devices throughout its 12-to-15 hour span. Sure, you gain a few new moves, and the battles get bigger, but your goal is always the same: Make it through the hordes and take out the enemy's shamans, who are resurrecting troops. All the missions are some variation of "kill all the enemies in the area and rescue your fellow warriors." The God of War-style kill combos for bigger foes – as sweet as they are – remain the same throughout the game, and even the later dragon strikes function just like the first one.

The story is paper-thin and often leaves you with no idea of what exactly is going on. I probably knew more about the plot going into the game than I did after the closing credits. There are also a few missions that involve stealth and platforming. While these are a welcome change of pace, they're rare, and the stealth gameplay in particular is underdeveloped.

A few other odds and ends also tarnish Viking. The undead warriors you fight seem to be mute, because they charge at you, die, and even call for help silently. This is a unique take on the undead, and I would have gone along with it if it was addressed in the game, but it wasn't so it just feels unfinished. The camera can also be an issue at times. In conjunction with the silent enemy factor, this results in some surprising moments where an enemy you didn't know was there jumps you from behind. Kind of sounds like a horror game, doesn't it? Maybe Viking missed its calling.

As it stands, Viking is a solid rental if you like bloody action games. If you enjoy the first few hours and can imagine replaying them six or seven times and still have fun, then it's probably worth your money.—**BEN**

**BOTTOM LINE 7.25**

> **Concept:** Take on the role of a Viking warrior and battle the goddess Hel's troops through three massive islands

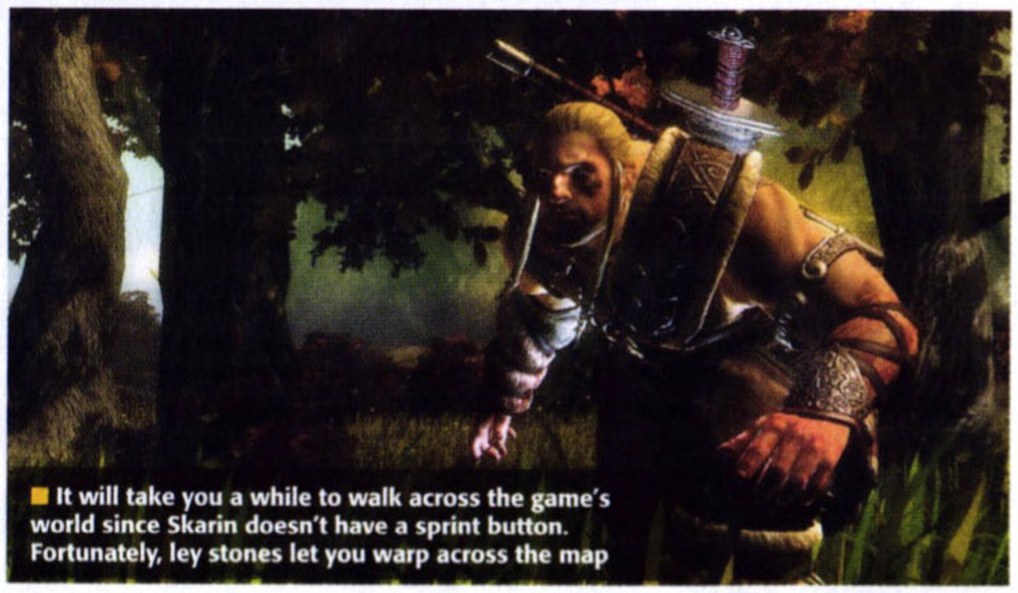
> **Graphics:** Considering how many troops the game puts onscreen at one time, the game looks pretty good close up

> **Sound:** Your enemies are oddly quiet, leaving the impression that Creative Assembly didn't have time to implement all the sound effects

> **Playability:** Combat is brutal and fun, but grows stale near the end since it doesn't evolve

> **Entertainment:** The game has its high points, but those points are repeated a lot throughout the course of the game

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low



■ It will take you a while to walk across the game's world since Skarin doesn't have a sprint button. Fortunately, ley stones let you warp across the map

■ Skarin is the silent type, so he doesn't spout off cheesy one-liners like, "Try to stay level headed," after he beheads someone

**Achievement Detail**

In a single playthough of the game we scored 790 Achievement points, most of which were earned by naturally playing through the game's story. If you play on the Hard difficulty you can expect to gain an additional 135 points.

■ One dragon really does the work of about three in this game

**Second Opinion 5.5**

After playing through the first of three zones in Viking, it seems like there's plenty of promise in store. But as you get deeper into the game, the small annoyances that could have been smoothed out never are, and potentially awesome features never become fully realized. It's clear that the mechanics are built around fighting four to five enemies, not taking down armies or participating in the half-assed stealth and platforming objectives seen here. Missions consist of extremely repetitive fetch quests and jailbreaks. Massive sieges are virtually impossible to lose, catapults and battering rams are only represented in cutscenes, and gaining multiple dragons is useless since they all strike the same spot. The pointless story is told through static concept art. Bosses are all just reskinned standard enemies (even the last one). And I'd kill for some kind of run button or horse to ride. In fact, killing yourself is the fastest way to get around in many cases. There are so many more awful things to talk about so I'll just leave it at this: do not buy.—**BRYAN**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Sega Superstars Tennis

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SUMO DIGITAL > **RELEASE** MARCH 18 > **ESRB** E10+

## RACKET ATTACK

Usually when Sonic and friends get together, it's for some bad futuristic racing. But it turns out that the blue hedgehog has some decent tennis skills. Developer Sumo Digital's history with Virtua Tennis is on display with intense, precise volleys and easy to pull off lobs and drop shots on the Wii version (see below).

Singles play against the AI is challenging, yet fair, but watch out for inconsistent partners in doubles matches. Sometimes they'll kick ass up and down the court, while other times the ball will pass right through them. As per the mascot requirement, powered up Superstar shots result in plenty of zigzagging balls and status effects, but it's nice to be able to toggle them off for more straightforward play.

Quick matches, multiplayer, tournaments, and minigames are all easily accessible, but the Superstars mode is where most of the depth is centered. Scrolling through various Sega franchise zones ranging from Samba de Amigo to Space Channel 5, there's always a wide selection of tournaments, exhibitions, and minigames to beat at any given time. Challenges range from fun (a Hogan's Alley inspired Virtua Cop game and PuyoPop Fever puzzles) to pesky (Sonic's ring collection and House of the Dead's zombie slaying). Overall, they aren't too shabby. That is, until you have to repeat them 10 times. Despite the repetition, the constant barrage of unlockable characters, stages, and music will keep fans playing.

The 16-character roster is more than 30 percent Sonic characters and includes old-school surprises like Golden Axe's Gilius and Alex Kidd. Unfortunately, rather than including as many franchises in the roster as possible, Sega added a bunch of lame sidekicks like MeeMee, Pudding, and Gum instead.

Online matches include standard singles and doubles matches and tournaments with plenty of customization options. The spectator mode allows you to watch others play tennis (yawn). Basically, multiplayer does its job as expected, but I'm surprised minigames weren't taken online as well.

Sega Superstars Tennis is by no means amazing, but it should manage to satisfy Sega and tennis fans alike.—**BRYAN**

**BOTTOM LINE 7.25**

> **Concept:** Take Mario Tennis and swap in Sega characters

> **Graphics:** The cartoony style works well even when scaled down for the Wii

> **Sound:** Loads of unlockable music from Sega history

> **Playability:** The Wii waggle controls feel better than the more traditional schemes

> **Entertainment:** Solid tennis gameplay mixed with generally amusing minigames

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

### Second Opinion 7.5

I've been pretty hard on Sonic and many of his compatriots in recent years. Okay, so the gang isn't exactly on par with Super Smash Bros. in terms of star power. However, this new tennis title manages to present gamers with some solid, casual sports entertainment. While the minigames are a mixed bag, the tennis is surprisingly well done, if a bit shallow. It's far from perfect; some of the computer AI is a little suspect at times, the minigames get fairly repetitive, and I found the power-up "superstar" shots for the characters are unbalanced. However, especially on the Wii (which I preferred), the game provides a lot of fun for those looking for a mix of tennis gameplay and Sega universe shenanigans.—**MATT**

### ADVANTAGE Wii 7.5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS

While the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 versions include online play and improved graphics, I surprisingly had a lot more fun on the Wii. The Wii Sports-style tennis controls feel great, especially when you add in a nunchuk to control character movement (players can also hold a remote sideways if they just want to press buttons). Each option works well, but it's easy to accidentally press the camera change button during motion-controlled swings. It felt like there were a lot more randomly missed shots on PS3/360, and lobs and drop shots are much more of a pain to pull off. —**BRYAN**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Pro Evolution Soccer 2008

> **STYLE** 1 TO 7-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
> **RELEASE** MARCH 11 (MARCH 18, Wii) > **ESRB** E

## LIKE OLD MUD STUCK TO YOUR CLEATS

This franchise (formerly known in the States as Winning Eleven) is getting to be a lot like the car you probably drive right now. It doesn't look like much and might not win a lot of style points, but it's just so…reliable. I continue to be a fan of this franchise because it offers the best soccer gameplay, hands down. But that sexy, albeit underperforming, ride on EA's lot may win me over if Konami doesn't step up and offer a better package soon.

With the jump to the PlayStation 3 (the series has been out on the Xbox 360, but the PlayStation family is this franchise's first allegiance), maybe you think this series is now screaming into the current generation complete with sweet graphics and all sorts of bells and whistles. Instead, it's crickets. Now, that's not to say this is a bad game. Konami still has its finger firmly on the pulse of the series' lifeblood — gameplay — but with scant noticeable changes from 2007, it's hard to recommend that series stalwarts pick this up.

I'd be remiss in not mentioning that the Master League mode has undergone some slight upgrades, but these mainly amount to window dressing. Pro Evo 2008 now includes official clubs such as Totthenham and Newcastle, but this is at the expense of Manchester United. This, unfortunately, is another strike against the game if you're a Man U fan.

With rival EA exploring new facets of the sport with its Be A Pro mode, I'd love to see Konami take notice and compete, but until it fixes some of its legacy problems (such as catch-up AI, players taking the ball right out of bounds, etc.) and truly gives us a new game, I won't be convinced that the company is serious in moving the franchise forward.—**KATO**

**BOTTOM LINE 7.75**

> **Concept:** It's hard to know what the intention of this game is since it's so much like last year's – except for the Wii

> **Graphics:** This series has always had average graphics, and this hasn't changed on the new systems

> **Sound:** I'm surprised they haven't included on-pitch chatter from the players yet, but I can see purists not liking that

> **Playability:** Still going strong, although I'd like to see the magnetic properties of the touchlines toned down

> **Entertainment:** Can you call a plate (albeit an overstuffed one) of meat and potatoes "entertaining"?

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

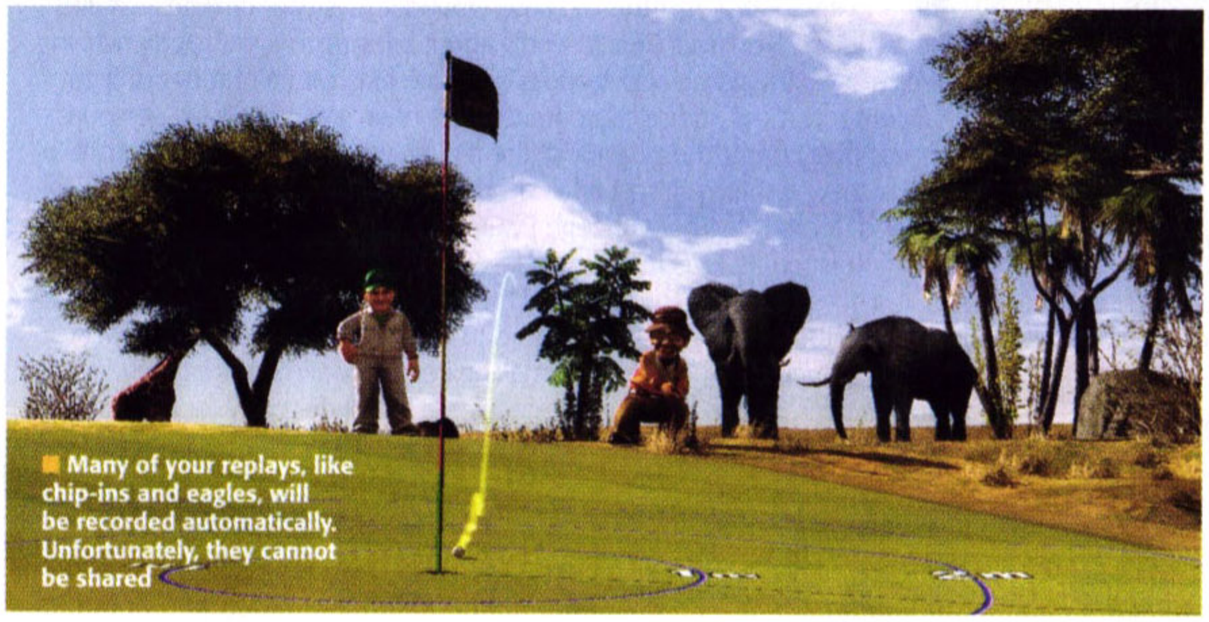
### Second Opinion 8

It's around a dozen iterations in and it has a new name here in the States, but Pro Evo is still the place to go for precise and tactical soccer. A flashy new front-end menu system is attractive, but the rest of the menus and the gameplay haven't changed dramatically. Matches are smooth and exciting, and control over the ball is limited only by your willingness to spend the time to get it right. In particular, the passing and shooting game feels more spot on than I remember. The ball moves where I want it to go when I want it to go there. Unfortunately, visuals aren't keeping pace on the newer consoles – for examples, look no further than the lack of facial details on players, frequent frame rate stutters, and a crowd made up of blocky, pixelated faces. Up the ante on the production values, and this one could go for the Cup next year.—**MILLER**

### Wii'S WINGER WORKS WELL 8

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA WIICONNECT24)

Unlike many sports titles, the Wii version of Pro Evo is different, but definitely not inferior. Using the Wii remote and nunchuk to point and direct your players around the pitch, the gameplay is not unlike an RTS. You're able to think tactically on a big picture scale, which is different than playing on the other consoles – even though players' execution is often just as smart. Although the game takes over for actions like targeting the goal, the normal list of soccer moves is not hamstrung, and I applaud Konami for its thoughtfulness in how to bring a game to the Wii with a new vision.—**KATO**



■ Many of your replays, like chip-ins and eagles, will be recorded automatically. Unfortunately, they cannot be shared

■ What good's a caddy if he won't help you cheat to get out of the rough? Help a guy out, why don't ya?! Light a brush fire; cause a distraction or something!

**BOTTOM LINE 8**

**> Concept:** The optional new swing mechanic offers a welcome addition for this traditional series

**> Graphics:** Hot Shots' cutesy style still looks good, even if it's not maxing out the PS3

**> Sound:** In the Advanced Shot mode be sure to listen for the chimes denoting 25 and 75 percent power

**> Playability:** The new Advanced Shot mode offers some clear benefits and is worth the early challenge

**> Entertainment:** Always a fun golf outing, but I wish this series hadn't cut back on its characters and courses

**> Replay Value:** Moderately High

PLAYSTATION 3

# Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds

**> STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
**> DEVELOPER** CLAP HANZ LIMITED **> RELEASE** MARCH 18 **> ESRB** E

## A NEW SET OF CLUBS

Before Tiger Woods took the video game golf world by storm with his analog swing, Hot Shots and its three-click meter was the standard for the sport. Until now, the Hot Shots series has been loathe to change its formula. While this has created a consistently fun links experience, I've always wanted the series to take some chances and go from being good to great. This year's Advance Shot mode doesn't solve all of the game's problems, but it's a surprisingly effective addition.

At its most basic, the optional Advance Shot mechanic is still a three-click experience. One button press starts your swing, another selects power, and a final press lines up your impact. Only instead of trying to time these actions with a sliding meter along the bottom of your screen, you're watching the arc of your golfer's swing animation and using a few visual cues as your guides. This makes gauging your power harder at first, but after just a few holes, you'll find that you actually have more control over how hard you hit the ball versus the traditional swing method. Furthermore, since this new shot mechanic is tied to your golfer's swing animation, it brings you closer to the onscreen action – just like Tiger tries to do with its physical analog swing, albeit in a different way.

While you won't hear me complaining about Hot Shots' new swing, the game has lost a little of its verve in other areas. The chock-full items shop from Hot Shots Fore is gone, and while you can still get outfits and clubs, I don't feel like a kid in a candy store or that I'm being spurred on in my career like I used to be. This is one small thing that makes this year's career mode a little less engaging, but the pacing of the courses also puts a damper on it. After my first few hours of playing, I was still only playing on two courses.

These details by no means make Out of Bounds a bad game, I just wish that at a time when rival Tiger Woods has created a new, well-paced career structure, Hot Shots would step up and compete. However, I do enjoy this game's loyalty system (encouraging repeated plays with the same golfer) and special condition matches. Sony says that it plans to offer more characters and courses via download, which is good news since the game comes with fewer numbers of both compared to the last Hot Shots. Hopefully we can look forward to the return of Ratchet or Clank in cameo roles as they have done in the past. Regardless, this game's online lobby allows you to create your own characters through an avatar creation process while you wait to play in its 50-person tournaments, complete with online tee times.

Any golfer will tell you that their game could use a little work. While this newest version of Hot Shots ushers in a welcome new swing mechanic, it's unfortunate that other areas have been neglected. Out of Bounds is worth getting, but what it gains in its drive distances it loses in its short game.—**KATO**

**Second Opinion 8.75**

Hot Shots presents the reviewer with a bit of a quandary. Do you review in comparison to Tiger Woods, which recently presented gamers with possibly the greatest total video golf experience to date, filled with depth, a brilliant career mode, and groundbreaking online features? Or do you just accept Hot Shots for what it is: an ingratiating and superbly fun casual sports experience? After playing this most recent edition, I'm inclined towards the latter viewpoint. While much is missing – the online portion doesn't offer much besides basic tournaments, and miniature golf is sadly absent – the basic gameplay, now improved by a brand-new version of the classic three-click swing mechanic, is so much fun I can't help but forgive Hot Shots for failing to innovate. Who knows, maybe I have a thing for pumpkinheaded duffers? Either way, the best casual golf series in history (sorry, Mario Golf!) remains a distinctively good time.—**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 3

# MLB 08: The Show

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SCEA SAN DIEGO STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MARCH 4 > **ESRB** E

■ In a perfect world: He's a Cub, so he's safe

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** After a rough first outing on PS3, The Show is back on track with the most rewarding mode in video game sports and a tight gameplay package

> **Graphics:** Hones in on the realism of the sport with accurate player modeling, signature animations, and incredibly fluid movement

> **Sound:** The commentators call what occurs, but rarely add insight. If you don't like the soundtrack, this year's game allows players to listen to their own music

> **Playability:** The AI is smarter, and pitching and batting analysis add to the strategy. The gameplay mechanics, while largely unchanged, are better balanced and remain fun

> **Entertainment:** It pounds out thrills in Road to the Show, and its gameplay is solid, but if you are looking for a game of skill, MLB 2K8 is the way to go

> **Replay Value:** High

## THE BEST EXPERIENCE IN BASEBALL

In the 119th game of the season, my rookie pitcher finally developed command over his curveball. As a result, his WHIP dropped, he was offered a spot in the starting rotation, and he began tallying more experience points for goals attained and successful results. Think about this for a second. In all of the baseball games you've played over the years, how many times have you played 119 games and still found progression, uncertainty, and an urgency to keep going? This is where the MLB series, particularly this year's iteration, stands head and shoulders above every other baseball game. Its Road to the Show mode, which has now been upgraded to 2.0, is immensely rewarding, unbelievably deep, and one of the most enjoyable experiences I've had with any sports game, period.

The new Road to the Show showcases a few fun innovations, such as having to read signs from the third base coach, but its true strength lies in the polish and balance. In years past, player progress was based solely on completing goals that often required an all-star like performance. This year, nearly every success on the mound, at the plate, or in the field contributes to your development. Skill progression feels more natural, and is not tied to arbitrary challenges. It also feels like it moves faster, and you are always gaining momentum. If you have the game set to focus only on your player's appearances, pre-game loading is lengthy, but it is better than last season.

Outside of this finely made mode, The Show's on-field performance resembles a well-worn glove. Batting still relies on a guess-the-pitch mechanic, and pitching is still a point and click affair. It's nothing new, but they are reliable systems that, with time, have become amazingly balanced and true to the sport. A new wrinkle of strategy has been added with an easy-to-read pitcher and batter analysis.

The visuals accompanying the tried-and-true play showcase a high level of realism; fans lunge for foul balls and knock a beach ball around, while star players have their signature swings. The most impressive aspect, however, is the fluid player movement. Fielders don't always make the correct decisions, but they move with the grace of Ozzie Smith and rarely make boneheaded decisions like they did last year. The game also transitions nicely between batting and fielding, which allows players to get a good read on the ball right off of the bat. The CPU AI shows some smarts while pitching, and the ratio of home run balls seems right on.

The Show also excels with its Franchise options, allowing players to track every stat and look back at previous game box scores. This year's iteration also offers custom soundtracks, which, sadly, I would recommend given how often the commentators point out the obvious.

Since I am hopelessly addicted to Road to the Show, MLB 08 gets my nod for the game you'll get the most out of – but you really have to be into the concept of creating a player and raising him from a minor league hopeful to a major league all-star. When it comes down to gameplay and multiplayer sessions, however, I have to lean toward MLB 2K8, simply because it's a greater test of player skill. The Show is a better balanced game that is easier to pick up and play, but it's running on old fumes and it doesn't quite have that next-gen bite to it yet. Regardless of what route you take, this is a hell of a year for baseball fans. Both games offer something different, and both are fantastic.—**REINER**

### Second Opinion 8.25

While gameplay mechanics are a wash this year between 2K Sports' MLB 2K8 and Sony's MLB 08 The Show, the vastly better franchise mode structure and excellent Road to the Show mode in this release give it the edge for 2008. I miss the analog pitching and batting from 2K8, but the easier time I had picking up the ball off the pitcher's hand makes up for it here. Fielding is still sometimes sloppy, and the camera does some unfortunate things when tracking fly balls from the fielder's point of view, but it's no worse than in the competition. Running a franchise, on the other hand, is much easier in The Show – the logically laid out and easy-to-navigate menu screens alone give armchair general managing a leg up. And finally, Road to the Show is starting to flash its true potential this year with a revamped progression structure that smoothes out the sometimes rough road from last year. Online play, both in league and quickplay formats, is smartly implemented here and delivers a great experience over PlayStation Network. Hardball enthusiasts have two good options this year, but Sony's sophomore effort on the PS3 plays Chase Utley to 2K's Brian Roberts for 2008.—**ADAM**

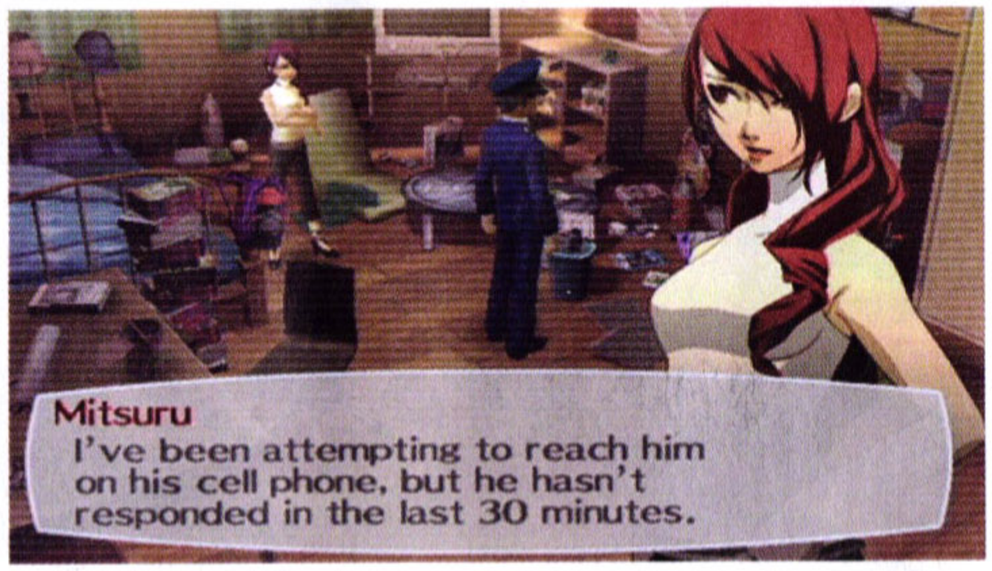
# PS2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

## Persona 3: FES

BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** ATLUS > **RELEASE** APRIL 22 > **ESRB** M




Just playing through the opening sequence of this game again sends shivers down my spine. Persona 3 was one of the best RPGs of 2007, and if you missed it the first time around, this is your chance to make amends. However, FES isn't only about bringing in a new audience. In true Atlus style, the game also services hardcore fans with a number of great enhancements. Cool additional content to the main story (like new personas to obsess over) is just the beginning; the real draw for veterans is the entire epilogue chapter that is almost a full-sized game itself. Aigis is awesome as the protagonist for this segment, though I was a bit disappointed to see most of the school simulation aspects fall away in favor of a purer dungeon-delving experience. It makes sense for the story, but the academic and social elements are highlights in the base game, so it's weird to lose them. Thankfully, the original adventure is included in its entirety, making Persona 3: FES more than just an expansion pack. With a mere $30 price tag, it's the perfect way for fans and newcomers to experience this exceptional RPG.—**JOE**

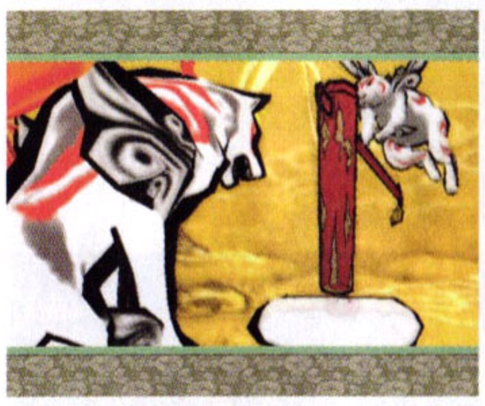
PLAYSTATION 2

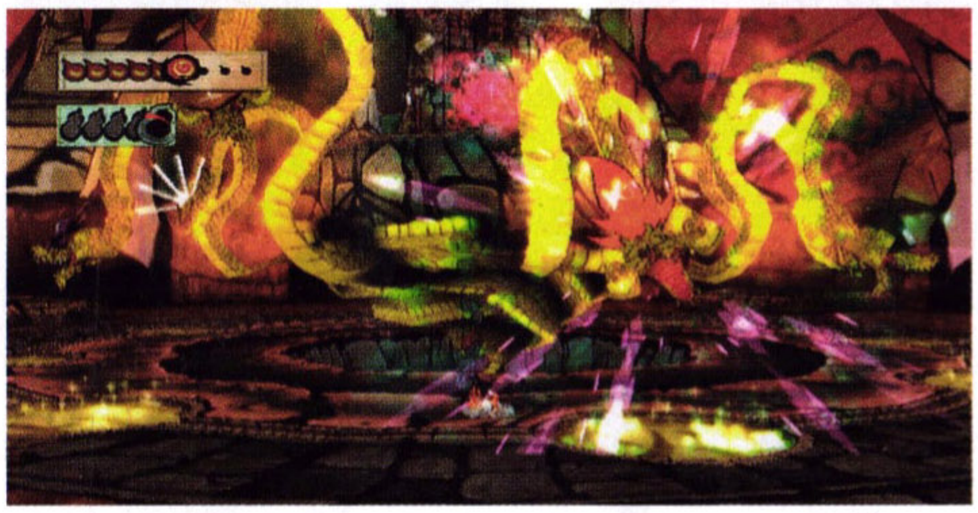
## Mana Khemia: Alchemists of Al-Revis

BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NIS AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** GUST > **RELEASE** MARCH 31 > **ESRB** E10+

After three Stateside releases in the Atelier Iris series, it's about time for developer Gust to switch things up. Mana Khemia is different in name and structure, but it still hangs on tight to the process of item synthesis that drives Atelier Iris, making it a spiritual sequel in most respects. You take up the role of a young orphan attending a magical academy, but the school setting only serves as an excuse to limit your enjoyment. Classes are usually just various kinds of fetch quests, and you never get a real sense of progress or exploration since you are always tethered to the school as a hub. The mechanics of battle are by-the-book, but they work well. The colorful sprites dish out hits quickly, and the powerful Burst attacks are cool. I especially liked the way you improve your skills, which involves creating new items to unlock nodes on a chart, then investing points in various bonuses. It provides its fair share of fun, but of the two "strange boy with special powers attending school" PS2 games on this page, Mana Khemia lands in second (a.k.a. last) place.—**JOE**





Wii

# Okami

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** READY AT DAWN/ CLOVER STUDIOS **> RELEASE** APRIL 15 **> ESRB** T

## A MASTERPIECE

The original Okami is a stone cold classic in my book, right up there with any game of the last generation. However, its classical Japanese themes and gorgeous hand-painted graphics failed to strike a chord with gamers when it was released in 2006 on the PlayStation 2. In the time since then, its creator, Clover Studios – Capcom's "art house" wing which also made the Viewtiful Joe series – has been sadly dismantled. Thankfully, Okami is being re-released on the Wii in a lovingly done port by Daxter and God of War: Chains of Olympus developer Ready at Dawn.

Okami casts the player as Amaterasu, a white wolf possessed of magical powers implemented through the Celestial Brush. This tool allows the player to paint on the game screen like a canvas, using it to repair in-game objects, make trees bloom, or perform slashing attacks on enemies. There's really never been anything quite like it before, and the balance between deliberate brush strokes, puzzle-solving, and hectic action Okami achieves is quite remarkable.

While the novel gameplay and awe-inspiring art style will be the hook for many, the tale told here is one filled with heart and humor. Inspired by a deep love of nature, Okami spans the centuries, unfolding a complex battle between good and evil. There's an almost silly sense of humor at play too, mostly due to Issun (your pint-sized companion) and Susano (a vain drunk who's convinced he's a legendary warrior). Even better, all the characters and events of the game reveal a surprising and hidden depth. Trust me, by the time you've vanquished the eight-headed dragon Orochi and the forces of evil, nothing will be quite what you thought it was in the beginning.

While I'd like to go on pointing more amazing things about Okami, I must say that the Wii is not my preferred console on which to play this game. While the motion controls seemed like a perfect fit, in practice it's much more imprecise than the PS2's analog stick, making many moves more difficult to perform accurately (this is especially frustrating during the scripted Susano events). I did manage to get used to it, and – in the end – it's a small blemish on what is otherwise a full-on masterpiece.——**MATT**

**BOTTOM LINE 9.25**

**> Concept:** This Wii port of a PlayStation 2 classic allows you to explore your inner artist

**> Graphics:** Okami's gorgeous watercolor look is a singular achievement.

**> Sound:** The affecting score effortlessly melds traditional Japanese music and modern film soundtracks

**> Playability:** The Wii's motion controls make some brush strokes a bit more frustrating, especially the slash move

**> Entertainment:** If you're looking for another sprawling, Zelda-style adventure on Wii, you can't afford to miss this

**> Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 8.5**

When Okami first came out on PS2, there was a lot of talk about how its draw-on-the-screen mechanic would be a perfect fit for the Nintendo Wii. A year-and-a-half later, the game has made its way to the Wii, and it turns out we were all...surprise, wrong. The game still has amazing story, watercolor visuals, and Zelda-inspired action/RPG gameplay, but a few technical fumbles make this an inferior port. The Wii version doesn't register your Celestial Brush techniques very well, and this sours the experience quite a bit. Still, even with faulty tech, you shouldn't pass over this game a second time.—**BEN**

# Wii QUICKIES

Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

## Obscure: The Aftermath

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT, PLAYLOGIC ENTERTAINMENT **> DEVELOPER** HYDRAVISION ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** MARCH 25 **> ESRB** M

**BOTTOM LINE 3**

You know that awful third-rate teen horror flick you watch with your buddies because it's just so bad? Well, welcome to the gaming equivalent. Laughably bad dialogue combines with broken combat and tedious gameplay to create one of the worst games in years. Choose the Wii version, and you're in for a special form of torture, as your camera wildly wheels about and an added layer of stupidity is included while aiming a weapon. You know what I love? When I get to go back to a save point because my dumbass AI partner gets her head bitten off. At least that problem can be avoided if you convince a hapless buddy to join in the "fun" for some co-op. They say misery loves company.——**MILLER**

Wii

## Destroy All Humans: Big Willy Unleashed

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** LOCOMOTIVE GAMES **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 28 **> ESRB** T

**BOTTOM LINE 5**

A few weeks ago, I made the mistake of watching one of the direct-to-DVD *American Pie* sequels. Outside of Eugene Levy reprising his role, this film had no business calling itself *American Pie*. Big Willy Unleashed is a similarly painful gaffe. Crypto is back to torture the human race, but new developer Locomotive Games couldn't find his pulse for either the gameplay or the humor. The entire package, whether it's boring fetch missions or jokes that fall flat, feels uninspired and rushed. The only enjoyment comes from the senseless destruction that is heightened by the ability to control a towering Big Willy robot. Nonetheless, this is a sad day for humanity haters.——**REINER**

Wii

## Worms: A Space Oddity

**> STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER STRATEGY **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** TEAM 17 **> RELEASE** MARCH 17 **> ESRB** E10+

**BOTTOM LINE 6.75**

For a series that has always been about multiplayer, it's very disappointing to see the latest entry contains absolutely no online play. If that hasn't completely thrown you off, you'll find the classically addictive wackiness and strategy here. Beware, waggle controls go from amusing (hammering with the dropship) to pesky (the shoulder-dislocating astro punch). Plus, it felt like I was tweaking the screen almost every turn just to see enemies. Decent minigames and a robust map creator will provide some variety for when all of those Worms fans you know come over for a visit.——**BRYAN**

Wii

## Major League Baseball 2K8

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS **> PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS **> DEVELOPER** 2K LOS ANGELES **> RELEASE** MARCH 3 **> ESRB** E

**BOTTOM LINE 6.75**

Major League Baseball 2K8 is an enjoyable (albeit flawed) baseball simulation. Its motion-based swing mechanic is the centerpiece. Every at bat is a satisfying test of speed and timing. Pitching, on the other hand, is a breeze. IR is used effectively for placement, but the timing-based meter moves slowly, making it far too easy to master. Fielding is unreliable, but the idiotic AI, who sometimes won't take extra bases on balls hit to the wall, balances the scales. In terms of depth, the Wii version doesn't offer much outside of a barebones Franchise mode. It's a good game for batting practice, but if you want more, look to the greatly enhanced PS3 and Xbox 360 versions.——**REINER**

Wii

## Castle of Shikigami III

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** AKSYS GAMES **> DEVELOPER** ARC SYSTEM WORKS **> RELEASE** MAY 8 **> ESRB** T

**BOTTOM LINE 6.5**

It's hard to take issue with the basic mechanics of Castle of Shikigami III; this series has always been about pure, top-down arcade action, and this entry won't let you down in that department. It has several playable characters, frantic bullet evasion, and dialogue so hilariously incomprehensible that it can't be accidental. However, Castle of Shikigami III is alarmingly thin on content. It feels like something I should be downloading instead of taking to the checkout counter; it's only got five levels and a handful of modes (including co-op). The mere fact that it fills a niche on the Wii doesn't excuse this disappointing lack of substance.——**JOE**

For being a decentralized rabble insurgency, Nod sure does have some awesome tech

PC

# Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** EA GAMES > **DEVELOPER** EALA > **RELEASE** MARCH 25 > **ESRB** T

## DEATH FACTORY

**BOTTOM LINE 7.75**

> **Concept:** Add some new subfactions and a turn-based strategy layer to Command & Conquer 3

> **Graphics:** Still a strong point. Units and explosions are wonderfully detailed

> **Sound:** A guitar-driven score and voiced alerts get the job done

> **Playability:** If unit AI were better, I'd have no complaints

> **Entertainment:** This will surely entertain the C&C faithful, but won't convert many doubters

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

This expansion to EA's newly revitalized Command & Conquer franchise is pretty typical stuff. For your $30, you get two subfactions each for the GDI, Nod, and the Scrin; a campaign detailing Kane's latest insanity; and a turn-based conquer-the-world mode similar to that offered in fellow EALA title The Battle for Middle-earth II. While certainly a good deal for fans, the year since C&C 3's release hasn't made its flaws any more forgivable.

The subfactions add some needed definition to C&C 3's army sets, but fail to change the fact that the game is the Serious Sam of RTS in a lot of ways. That's not to say it isn't amusing to go a-stomping with 12 huge Purifier walkers, but nuanced tactical decisions are not exactly C&C 3's forte. Often-moronic unit AI, particularly in the area of target acquisition (why will half my army sit and watch while their compatriots mere meters away fighting for their lives unless I tell them differently?), is a continual annoyance. The countering system, where certain units are good at killing specific others but weak against their "counter," is set up so hard-and-fast that what mix of forces are on each side of a fight is the primary determinant of victory. Watching my overwhelming force of Mammoth Tanks tear apart an enemy base is entertaining, but this is much more popcorn than it is a fine créme brûlée.

I enjoy the cheesy live-action cinematics as much as the next guy, but Kane's Wrath features a campaign that ranks low among triple-A RTS titles. Balancing is all over the place; you'll sleepwalk through two or three scenarios and then spend two hours trying to get your base off the ground in the next. Sometimes this rollercoaster of difficulty even fits peaks and valleys into the same mission – strong, frequent raids made me struggle to establish an economy on one notable map, only to spend five minutes twiddling my thumbs during a five-minute timed "defend the lab" phase where I had to fend off a grand total of 20 or so units. The story's not bad, and fans of the series get a nice inside look at Kane's character and inner thoughts, but EALA dropped the ball in scenario design this time around.

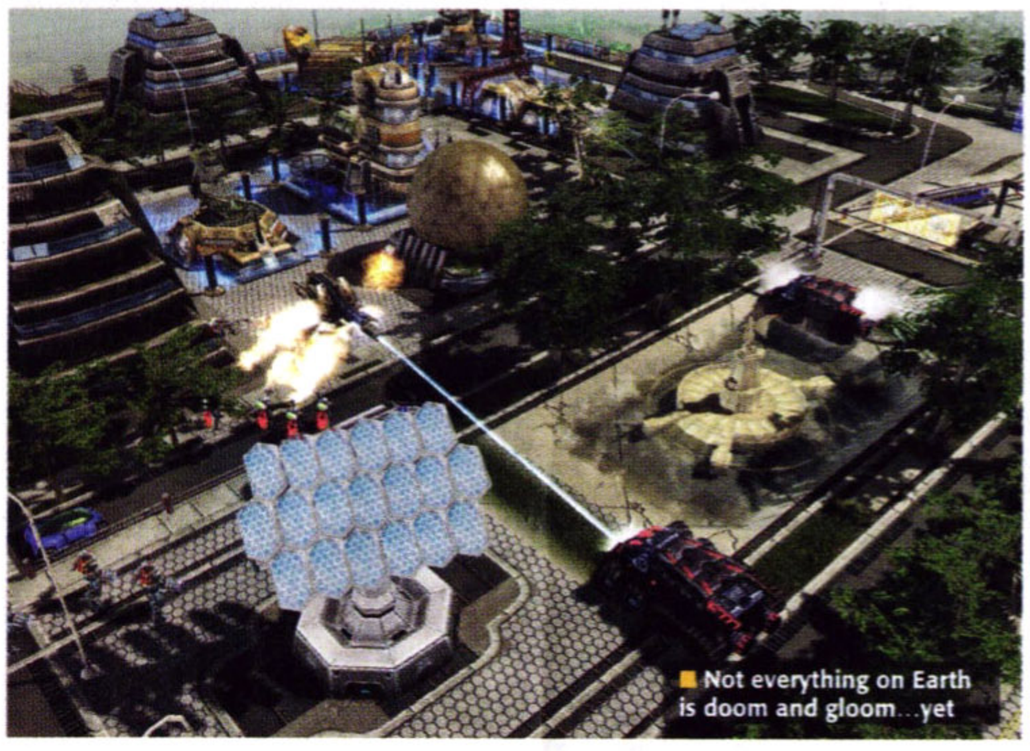
The strategic global conquest mode is a decent distraction, and certainly a better single-player mode than the lackluster campaign, but Total War this is not. Nobody is going to mistake this thin conquer-the-world construct for a full-featured turn-based game. Like the rest of C&C 3, it's got all the subtlety of 50 Cent – but also similarly astronomical production values. There are all of three to five meaningful decisions to make per turn between building and upgrading bases and managing strike forces, and none of them are particularly deep or difficult to fit into your overall strategy.

Ultimately, the worst thing you can say about Kane's Wrath is that it doesn't fix any of the niggling and admittedly minor issues of the original Command & Conquer 3. At the same time, it offers a fair amount of content that anyone who enjoys this style of game should be quite content to spend a few Hamiltons on. In short, it's a typical expansion pack.—**ADAM**

Where could the inspiration for the Scrin have come from?

**Second Opinion 8**

Kane's Wrath is a hardcore expansion pack that skips the handholding and goes straight for the jugular. The story chronicles Kane's reemergence after his presumed defeat during the Second Tiberium War and brings the Brotherhood of Nod up to speed via the cheesy full-motion videos the series is known for. Each of the 12 missions challenges your strategic versatility. Sometimes you must amass an epic army and crush your foes in one fell swoop, while other battles are better fought with an emphasis on defense. Unfortunately, some of the problems of C&C 3 haven't been fixed, most notably the poor building queue system and your army's defensive AI. Kane's Wrath also includes a bare-bones global conquest mode, which plays out like a simple board game that substitutes RTS battles for dice rolls. You won't find much innovation in Kane's Wrath, but the handful of new subfactions and multiplayer maps will likely satiate the hardcore C&C constituency.—**BERTZ**



Not everything on Earth is doom and gloom...yet

Alaskan property values are in the tank

This view shows only a small portion of a mature empire

PC

# Lost Empire: Immortals

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** PARADOX INTERACTIVE
**> DEVELOPER** POLLUX GAMELABS **> RELEASE** MARCH 18 **> ESRB** E

## SOOOO BIG!

Diving into a new turn-based strategy game can be a daunting endeavor. Just to name a few tasks, you've got to figure out how the economy works, what rate of expansion is optimal, and how diplomacy is handled. Lost Empire: Immortals, for all of its nifty features and new ideas, makes things much harder on new players than it ought to due to minimal tutorials and a decidedly sub-par interface.

More than anything else, scale defines this game. The smallest maps contain hundreds of stars to colonize, and even on default settings a game can take dozens of hours to complete. To make running an empire this large feasible, colony management is very hands-off. Beyond deciding what the world's focus will be (agriculture, mining, trade, etc.) and which, if any, static defenses or ships to build, individual colonies run themselves. Players' decision-making is focused on choosing research paths, designing and moving fleets of ships, and diplomatic relations.

Lost Empire's approach to technology is pleasantly novel. A bare few dozen techs are available, with almost none of the branching tier climbing that nearly every other title in the genre uses. Instead, further research into a specific technology improves its efficacy; for instance, fifth-level laser beams do much more damage than first-level weapons. I'm not convinced that this is necessarily a better way to do tech, but it's at least a different set of problems and options than we're used to.

The two titular Immortals make themselves known relatively early in each game. These warring superpowers will give you missions, with obvious diplomatic effects should you complete or ignore them. Allying with one or the other has benefits (including, perhaps most importantly, good relations with other empires allied with that Immortal), as does trying to remain neutral (notably, neither of them will attack you with their vastly superior technology if you don't piss them off). This twist adds needed flavor to Lost Empire's otherwise vanilla gameplay.

Beyond these standout features, Lost Empire is a fairly traditional 4X title. You'll use your fleets to conquer minor races and rivals, manage your economy and research, and try not to have everyone declare war on you at the same time. Unfortunately, a boneheaded interface that makes selecting fleets and sorting through uncolonized planets a giant pain constantly frustrates. Also, it's a bit disappointing that you can't command your ships in battle after designing and building them – all combat is automatically resolved. Still, 4X fans should be able to extract plenty of entertainment from this Danish import.—**ADAM**

**BOTTOM LINE 7.25**

**> Concept:** Put entire galaxies in play for the most massive 4X around

**> Graphics:** It's just space, but it is surprisingly pretty

**> Sound:** Trippy '90s-style MIDI synth is somehow fitting for the great cold darkness

**> Playability:** The several large blind spots in the UI are the biggest problems here

**> Entertainment:** This is a unique take on the genre with some interesting ideas, but its flaws can't be ignored

**> Replay Value:** Moderately High

You can watch battles, but can't control them

**Second Opinion 7.5**

I like that Lost Immortals has the scale and ambition of Sins of a Solar Empire, but while Sins gives you lots to do and easy ways to do it, this game puts layers between itself and the player. For example, unlike Sins, Lost Immortals lets you design your ships. But I hated having to always go back to the base design doc to outfit my ships with the latest upgrades or even basic components. I also don't feel the turn-based combat is conducive to the strategy options. What remains is a sometimes non-intuitive experience that can obscure the galactic fleet building and colonization that you want to dive into.—**KATO**

PC

# Seven Kingdoms: Conquest

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER
**> DEVELOPER** ENLIGHT **> RELEASE** MARCH 18 **> ESRB** T

## BLECH

It's not terribly surprising when another me-too RTS comes out these days; the genre is one of the few remaining bastions of PC gaming, and as such it sees a lot of releases. Seven Kingdoms: Conquest, however, buries its few novel ideas under such a fetid layer of unplayable garbage that it's a wonder it is being released at all.

On the surface, it sounds somewhat interesting. Warring demon and human empires do RTS battle, fighting over cities and trying to claim the power of the demon stones that are scattered across the land. Suck enough juice out of these magical rocks and you can unleash massive supernatural barrages to supplement your troops in the field. Unfortunately, convincing your army to carry out your commands is like trying to get a Japanophile to agree that Shenmue isn't all that special.

It's simply unacceptable for a retail game to have a major component of gameplay be as broken as Seven Kingdoms' pathfinding and unit AI. Troops will literally walk 30 yards at right angles to a move order you give them…across open ground. Telling wounded units to retreat requires that you set their AI stance to "passive," unless you want them to stop after two steps to re-engage the enemy despite a direct order.

An embarrassingly small amount of content (the "campaigns" are a mere dozen or so glorified skirmish maps) means you won't spend much time with Seven Kingdoms even if you do buy it – but I'd suggest the obvious solution of avoiding this like a bipolar ex instead.—**ADAM**

**BOTTOM LINE 4**

**> Concept:** Make a half-hearted attempt to mimic Age of Empires with a fantastical Egyptian flavor

**> Graphics:** It won't make your eyes explode or anything, so that's good

**> Sound:** There's probably an audio component, but it leaves no impression

**> Playability:** I haven't seen pathfinding this broken since…well…ever

**> Entertainment:** Nowhere to be found

**> Replay Value:** Low

**Second Opinion 5**

If you primarily play console games, you might think that the RTS genre is all that exists on PC nowadays. And who could blame you, with uninspired derivative clones like this one multiplying on store shelves with the speed and virility of Tribbles. Seven Kingdoms does nothing to break away from this pack. It hardly feels like a full game; it's more like a collection of sidequests with loosely tied story bits like you find in most throwaway strategy titles. The espionage, trading, and diplomacy elements help make this a more rounded experience, but they don't solve the major combat issues. Your motley bunch of troops follow orders about as well as a class of preschoolers and move like a pack of drunken rattlesnakes. It's best if you just forget about Seven Kingdoms.—**BEN**

Depending on how you move the stylus, you'll perform one of up to six equipped attacks

If you're having trouble with a fight, get a friend to control your partner on the top screen. You have to share the same DS, though

NINTENDO DS

# The World Ends With You

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
**> DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX/JUPITER **> RELEASE** APRIL 22 **> ESRB** T

GAME INFORMER HANDHELD GAME OF THE MONTH

## STYLE AND STYLUS

This is a weird one. The World Ends With You is kind of about shopping, kind of about being fashionable, and mostly about using psychic abilities to fight extra-dimensional monsters so you don't get erased from existence. It's a game heavy on style – in several senses of the word – which might have been a bad thing without the substance to back it up. However, The World Ends With You also has some astounding depth, making it an intriguing fusion of action and role-playing that is both successful and unique.

An inventive combat system is the most prominent feature of this title, and is the point into which the numerous other mechanics flow. You command two characters simultaneously: Neku is on the bottom screen (controlled via touch screen), and his partner is on the top (controlled via the d-pad or face buttons). It takes a couple of hours of practice to learn how to divide your attention efficiently between your characters, but once you do it provides a rare breed of satisfaction. The touch screen mechanics finally nail stylus-based spellcasting, with cool psychic powers that you can pull off quickly and effortlessly in the heat of battle. The strategy will occasionally get overwhelmed by the frenetic nature of the encounters, but victory feels consistently rewarding.

The really interesting thing about The World Ends With You is the numerous layers of complexity it incorporates, and how those ultimately feed into your performance. Your attack power is affected by the kinds of clothes you are wearing, but their popularity changes depending on what area of the city you're in. To perform at your peak, you need to constantly visit shops, buy the right brands, and keep an eye on trends – especially before major battles. There are also a few clever and addictive diversions, like a food system that boosts your stats, and the ability to make your preferred equipment more powerful by raising its brand popularity.

The World Ends With You just has a bizarre and magnetic kind of charm. Its captivating combat, stylish aesthetic, and strange story (it reminds me of the anime series *Gantz* [Nerd! – *Ed.*]) set it apart as one of the most distinctive RPG experiences on any platform. This is the stuff cult hits are made of.—**JOE**

**BOTTOM LINE 8.25**

**> Concept:** Fight bad guys, and look good doing it. Also, discover the true meaning of friendship

**> Graphics:** The stylized backgrounds and characters are cool, and the decision to go with a 16-bit look was a wise one

**> Sound:** I wouldn't buy the CD or anything, but the soundtrack does a good job contributing to the overall atmosphere

**> Playability:** Touch-screen controls are generally responsive, though the interface is often clunky and muddled

**> Entertainment:** It takes a while to get accustomed to the controls, but it's a blast when it all falls into place

**> Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 8**

This game is as busy as Shibuya is crowded, and if you look closely, you'll see it's a war between style and substance. As much as I loved managing both the top and bottom screen for combat, the items for sale, and the game's thoughtful intricacies (such as how players eat food), the stylus gameplay during combat falls just short. It's great that you have a number of actions to perform during battles with your stylus, but the overall effect is like button mashing. You're doing a lot of work, but the payoff isn't equal to the task. But even with its flaws, the game holds up on many fronts and has plenty of cool features to have fun with.—**KATO**

NINTENDO DS

# Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** TECMO **> DEVELOPER** TEAM NINJA **> RELEASE** MARCH 25 **> ESRB** T

Bosses are a visual treat

Ryu closes to attack range in an instant, so travel time is a non-issue

## TOUCHED BY A DRAGON

It's not fair to judge a game by the first few minutes, which is really too bad for Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword. It opens strong with fast and ruthless combat, and instantly amazed me with a clever solution to touch-based combo action. As I played the rest of the game, however, I felt like a deprived junkie; that initial high is all the game provides, and it is intended to carry you through several more hours of practically unchanging combat.

Of all the things Dragon Sword attempts, the controls are the real triumph. Team Ninja has devised a deceptively elegant solution for fast-paced battles on the DS. Holding the system vertically like a book, you move and attack entirely with the touch screen. Combos are just a matter of repeatedly slashing the stylus over the enemy you want to hit. It sounds simple, but it works well. Some circumstances require more precision than the game can accommodate – especially with aerial attacks – but even that isn't too bad. A few retries will get you through almost any roadblock.

As much as I enjoyed the control scheme, I wasn't such a fan of the opportunities the game gave me to use it. The pacing is uninspired; you're mainly fighting palette swaps of the same few enemies, and you stop getting new abilities way too soon (except magic, which is more for puzzle-solving than combat). The structure isn't bad, but it is very familiar – travel to various zones in a specific order (the ice and fire levels are accounted for, of course), fight the bosses, and keep going. The boss designs are impressive, though the battles themselves aren't tough until the very end. This game definitely never reaches the heights of difficulty seen on the Xbox entry in the series.

Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword is a commendable attempt at making a straight-up action game on the DS. I like the combat and the mechanics, and even though the battles get repetitive, it's frantic and fun enough to occasionally make you forget that fact.—**JOE**

**BOTTOM LINE 7.75**

**> Concept:** Hardcore ninja Ryu Hayabusa becomes a little more approachable on the DS

**> Graphics:** Wonderful. You'd have a hard time finding a DS game that looks this good while maintaining such solid animation

**> Sound:** The background music fits well, but I got really tired of most of the sound effects

**> Playability:** Innovative controls for combat, though I could take or leave the gimmicky magic system and secret collecting

**> Entertainment:** It doesn't quite follow through on the potential it demonstrates, but it's still a good time

**> Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 8**

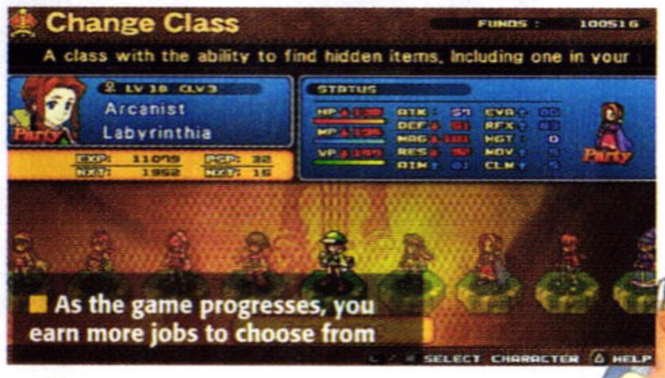
Dragon Sword looks good, but I guess that shouldn't surprise me from a Team Ninja game. The action can get pretty intense, and I liked using all of the game's different magic by drawing their symbols on the screen. Using the touch screen to perform actions works well most of the time, but it's also fairly easy for your commands to get mixed up during the heat of battle, so you might occasionally end up slashing when you really wanted to run, for example. I also don't like that you hold the DS sideways, because it gives you a narrow view of the action. But all in all, I had a blast playing through Dragon Sword, even if that was for only six hours.—**BEN**

PSP

# Wild Arms XF

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG **> PUBLISHER** XSEED **> DEVELOPER** MEDIA VISION
**> RELEASE** MARCH 11 **> ESRB** E10+

## HEX IS THE NEW SQUARE



My favorite new feature of the last two Wild Arms games was the hex-based battle grid, but the traditional RPG framework didn't fully utilize the tactical possibilities of the system. That's why this strategy-heavy spinoff is an interesting direction for the series; Wild Arms XF focuses solely on that potential, and though it ends up being the best Wild Arms game in a while, it doesn't stack up to the juggernauts of the genre.

Following in the footsteps of games like Final Fantasy Tactics and Disgaea, XF is turn-based strategy that leans on a variety of classes and the special abilities associated with each. I had fun experimenting with new skills and customizing my party, especially since victory hinges on striking a balance in the classes and abilities you bring to the fight. The balancing is solid, and the core combat is fun, often inspiring that "just one more battle" fervor. Unfortunately, the thrills don't come without baggage.

My biggest issue is with the constantly depleting Vitality Point gauge. Each character has one of these meters that goes down a little with every action (even guarding), and when it hits zero, they start losing HP. This essentially puts a round restriction on every fight, unless you want to burn resources to keep your troops standing. This makes the longer fights incredibly frustrating. To compensate, you get tactical pointers at the beginning of each encounter, but that substantially diminishes the satisfaction of devising a successful plan of attack yourself.

Smart playing can minimize (but not eliminate) the annoyance of the VP gauge, leaving you with an entertaining strategy experience. However, with Level 5's Jeanne D'Arc out there, Wild Arms XF certainly wouldn't be my first recommendation to someone looking for an original, tactics-oriented PSP game.—**JOE**

**BOTTOM LINE 7.5**

**> Concept:** Less RPG, more strategy

**> Graphics:** Wild Arms' signature western style adds a cool backdrop to the action

**> Sound:** The soundtrack is often the best part of a Wild Arms title, and this one is no exception

**> Playability:** An ever-draining Vitality Point gauge takes too much attention away from the more interesting tactical elements

**> Entertainment:** Plenty of fun opportunities to vanquish an army of foes, but it sticks pretty close to the familiar

**> Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 6**

If your idea of a strategy game consists of long-winded conversations followed by frustrating trial-by-error battles, you might like Wild Arms XF. Conversely, if you're looking for something that falls more into the "entertaining" category, you might want to throw your cash at Disgaea, Jeanne D'Arc, or Final Fantasy Tactics. With your characters losing Vitality Points after every action, Wild Arms quickly becomes a game of eating healing berries and swearing like a sailor. The poorly designed mission objectives, uneventful story, and forgettable characters further cement this game as a unfortunate bust.—**REINER**

# HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

## Lost in Blue 3

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS OR NINTENDO WI-FI) **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI **> DEVELOPER** KONAMI **> RELEASE** MARCH 18 **> ESRB** E10+

**BOTTOM LINE 6.25**

I am a terrible survivalist. Less than an hour in and I get sick off the first jungle mushroom I stuff down my throat, then spend the night cold and alone on a fireless beach. Lost in Blue's simulation/adventure gameplay let's you lead one of four playable characters, who each have their own story and skill set, through the trials of surviving on a desert island. The virtual companion, whom you can send on errands, comes in pretty handy, and I actually enjoyed cobbling together new tools with twigs and vines. On the whole, however, the game is tiresome and repetitive; even the 20 brief minigames are fleeting in their entertainment. Maybe I'm not so bad at surviving. Maybe I'm just bored.—**BEN**

NINTENDO DS

## Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Thingys!

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT **> DEVELOPER** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** APRIL 15 **> ESRB** E10+

**BOTTOM LINE 6.75**

If this game's title made you chuckle, chances are the game will, too. The story about invading alien brains and their natural predator, the zombie, is humorous and does a nice job of spoofing old EC horror comics. Unfortunately, "it's funny" isn't high enough praise alone for me to recommend playing Teenage Zombies, since the rest of the game is a mediocre 2D side-scroller. Using the different character's skills in concert leads to some decent puzzle-like situations. But the slow pacing and bad combat tarnish what otherwise might have been a portable gem.—**BEN**

NINTENDO DS

## Puchi Puchi Virus

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) **> PUBLISHER** NIS AMERICA/JALECO **> DEVELOPER** KEYS FACTORY **> RELEASE** APRIL 29 **> ESRB** E

**BOTTOM LINE 7.5**

Given its novel gameplay and absolutely off-the-wall, Japanese sense of humor, there's little doubt this will be a cult classic in years to come. It is a novel puzzler; you use the stylus to make triangles on the board, thus eliminating the "viruses" contained within. Things get a bit trickier when you realize you can make further triangles by connecting more dots to the ones already frozen, leading to cool multi-triangle chain combinations. However, once you get that down there's really not much in the way of advanced strategy, and sometimes the touch screen seemed too imprecise. Still, it's addictive, and the humor on the patient cards you unlock is motivation to keep going after the gameplay grows stale.—**MATT**

PSP

## FlatOut Head On

**> STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) **> PUBLISHER** EMPIRE INTERACTIVE **> DEVELOPER** BUGBEAR ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** JUNE 24 **> ESRB** T

**BOTTOM LINE 7.5**

FlatOut's inaugural run on the PSP is just as much of an action-packed, feature-rich event as you'd expect. The fun throw-the-driver-from-the-car minigames are all here, and the developer has kept a lot of the unpredictable crashes and trash-strewn environments. The sense of speed isn't as good as the console versions, but that's not a major crime given how much action's been packed onscreen. Unfortunately, the series' annoying wonky car handling has also migrated over, which makes you biff even routine jumps unexpectedly. FlatOut manages to plow through wrecked cars and almost anything else in its way, but this problem remains as a last obstacle.—**KATO**

NINTENDO DS

## Insecticide

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE **> PUBLISHER** GAMECOCK **> DEVELOPER** CRACKPOT ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** MARCH 11 **> ESRB** E10+

**BOTTOM LINE 5.75**

With its cool film noir presentation and emphasis on sleuthing, Insecticide could have been an excellent adventure game. Instead, it's a platformer, and a bad one at that. The game squanders its stylish setting, writing, and entertaining puzzle solving by minimizing the fun investigation segments, focusing squarely on broken combat and platforming. The fact that you can run through most encounters without firing a shot makes the action element feel even more tiresome and pointless. Insecticide has some nuggets of adventure game goodness, but they are buried deep in something that even dung beetles wouldn't bother carrying home.—**JOE**

# CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

## TOP 20

**Listings Based Upon NPD Data For February 2007 Based On Units Sold**

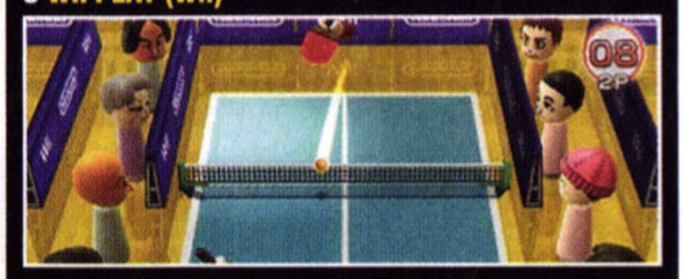
### 1 CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE (360)

Here are some Charts video game quick tips. If you're like us, you've been playing COD 4 since launch. In order to keep your copy lag free, make sure your game disc stays fresh by storing it in a cool dry place, like the refrigerator. And here's a trick you might have seen your grandmother use. Put a piece of bread inside the game's case. In a week the bread will be hard, but your game disc will still be nice and moist.

### 2 DEVIL MAY CRY 4 (360)

Having problems with some of DMC 4's more difficult sections? Maybe you're just not fast enough. A chemical called trioxyphormine will help speed up your nervous system's synapses. Trioxyphormine is found in most cabbages, and raw cabbage preserves the chemical in great quantities. Eat as much as you can stomach. When your farts start to smell like they could kill a small animal, you're ready to take on Dante Must Die mode.

### 3 WII PLAY (Wii)



Now is the time of year that Wii Play infestation really becomes a problem. Don't panic, but your home may already be infested. Wii Play seems to be attracted to young people and the elderly, so try to prevent these people tracking Wii Play into your house. If this isn't feasible, you can create your own Wii Play repellant by mixing lemon juice with garlic. Spray the mix around your entertainment center. If you begin attracting ants, you know you've done your job.

### 4 DEVIL MAY CRY 4 (PS3)

Here's a great cabbage recipe to try out. Mix one cup of sauerkraut, a fourth of a cup of hot sauce, a tablespoon of horseradish, and a scoop of chocolate chip ice cream into a blender for about 30 seconds. You've just made a Chocokraut shake. For a Yule time treat, microwave the mixture for two minutes, add a splash of eggnog, and garnish with nutmeg. You're ready to go a-wassailing.

### 5 GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK (Wii)

It's not a well-known fact, but Guitar Hero guitars have to be tuned just like real guitars. The tools needed for this are pretty expensive, but most guitar shops will now service toy guitars for a nominal fee. When you take yours in, ask them for the rockstar calibration, which is a little bit looser than the factory settings. You won't feel this slight change, but it might improve your score.

| Rank | Title | L. Mo. | System | Score | Release |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare | 1 | 360 | 10 | 11-07 |
| 2 | Devil May Cry 4 | N/A | 360 | 9 | 02-08 |
| 3 | Wii Play | 2 | Wii | 7 | 02-07 |
| 4 | Devil May Cry 4 | N/A | PS3 | 9 | 02-08 |
| 5 | Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock | 3 | Wii | 8.75 | 10-07 |
| 6 | Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games | 11 | DS | 4 | 11-07 |
| 7 | Lost Odyssey | N/A | 360 | 8.5 | 02-08 |
| 8 | Turok | N/A | 360 | 7 | 01-08 |
| 9 | Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock | 6 | PS2 | 8.75 | 10-07 |
| 10 | Rock Band | 4 | 360 | 9.25 | 11-07 |
| 11 | Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock | 5 | 360 | 8.75 | 10-07 |
| 12 | Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare | 9 | PS3 | 10 | 11-07 |
| 13 | Super Mario Galaxy | 7 | Wii | 9.75 | 11-07 |
| 14 | New Super Mario Bros. | N/A | DS | 9.25 | 05-06 |
| 15 | Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games | 15 | Wii | 4 | 11-07 |
| 16 | Carnival Games | 17 | Wii | 5.5 | 08-07 |
| 17 | Mario Party DS | 10 | DS | 7 | 11-07 |
| 18 | Rock Band | 14 | PS2 | 9.25 | 11-07 |
| 19 | Game Party | N/A | Wii | N/A | 11-07 |
| 20 | Frontlines: Fuel of War | N/A | 360 | 7.25 | 02-08 |

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

## TOP 10 JAPAN

| Rank | Title | System |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ryu Ga Gotoku Kenzan! | PS3 |
| 2 | Super Smash Bros. Brawl | Wii |
| 3 | Wii Fit | Wii |
| 4 | Gundam Musou Special | PS2 |
| 5 | Metroid Prime 3: Corruption | Wii |
| 6 | Wii Sports | Wii |
| 7 | Soma Bringer | DS |
| 8 | Doraemon DS | DS |
| 9 | Warriors Orochi | PSP |
| 10 | Everyone's Common Sense Television | Wii |

1

10

## TOP 10 GI

| Rank | Title | L. Mo. | System |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Super Smash Bros. Brawl | 1 | Wii |
| 2 | Rainbow Six Vegas 2 | 2 | multi |
| 3 | MLB 08: The Show | N/A | multi |
| 4 | Okami | N/A | Wii |
| 5 | The World Ends With You | N/A | DS |
| 6 | Sins of a Solar Empire | 3 | PC |
| 7 | Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds | N/A | PS3 |
| 8 | Devil May Cry 4 | 4 | multi |
| 9 | God of War: Chains of Olympus | 5 | PSP |
| 10 | Condemned 2: Bloodshot | 6 | multi |

4

8

The Staff's Favorite Picks

## TOP 10 PC

| Rank | Title | L. Mo. | Price |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | World Of Warcraft | 1 | $20 |
| 2 | Sins Of A Solar Empire | N/A | $40 |
| 3 | Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare | 2 | $47 |
| 4 | The Sims 2 Free Time | N/A | $29 |
| 5 | World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest | 3 | $40 |
| 6 | Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell/Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow | N/A | $10 |
| 7 | 15000 Games | 7 | $10 |
| 8 | World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade | 4 | $31 |
| 9 | The Sims 2 Deluxe | 5 | $30 |
| 10 | The Sims: Castaway Stories | N/A | $29 |

2

4

Based On Monthly Units Sold

# REVIEWSARCHIVE

## PLAYSTATION 3

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Army of Two | 7.5 | Apr-08 |
| Assassin's Creed | 9.5 | Dec-07 |
| Beowulf | 5.75 | Jan-08 |
| BlackSite: Area 51 | 7.5 | Dec-07 |
| Burnout Paradise | 8.5 | Feb-08 |
| Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare | 10 | Dec-07 |
| Clive Barker's Jericho | 6 | Dec-07 |
| Club, The | 8.75 | Mar-08 |
| College Hoops 2K8 | 7.75 | Feb-08 |
| Condemned 2: Bloodshot | 8.75 | Apr-08 |
| Conflict: Denied Ops | 5.75 | Apr-08 |
| Devil May Cry 4 | 9 | Mar-08 |
| Dirt | 8 | Nov-07 |
| Dynasty Warriors 6 | 7.25 | Mar-08 |
| Eye of Judgement | 8 | Dec-07 |
| FIFA Street 3 | 7 | Mar-08 |
| Folklore | 7.25 | Dec-07 |
| Kane & Lynch: Dead Men | 7 | Jan-08 |
| LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga | 7.5 | Dec-07 |
| Lost Planet: Extreme Condition | 8 | Mar-08 |
| Lost: Via Domus | 6.75 | Apr-08 |
| MLB 2K8 | 8.5 | Apr-08 |
| MX vs. ATV Untamed | 8 | Jan-08 |
| NBA 2K8 | 8.25 | Nov-07 |
| NCAA March Madness 08 | 7.25 | Feb-08 |
| Need for Speed ProStreet | 7.5 | Dec-07 |
| NFL Tour | 5 | Feb-08 |
| Orange Box, The | 9.25 | Feb-08 |
| Rainbow Six Vegas 2 | 9.25 | Apr-08 |
| Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction | 9.25 | Dec-07 |
| Rock Band | 9.25 | Jan-08 |
| Sega Rally Revo | 6.5 | Dec-07 |
| Simpsons Game, The | 7.25 | Dec-07 |
| Time Crisis 4 | 4.25 | Jan-08 |

Lost Planet: Exteme Condition - PS3 - Mar-08

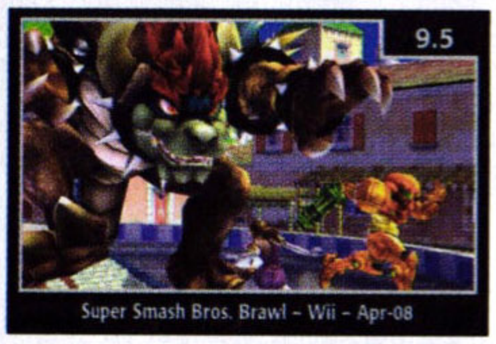
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Tony Hawk's Proving Ground | 7.75 | Dec-07 |
| Turning Point: Fall of Liberty | 3 | Apr-08 |
| Turok | 7 | Mar-08 |
| Uncharted: Drake's Fortune | 8.75 | Dec-07 |
| Unreal Tournement 3 | 8.5 | Feb-08 |
| WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw 2008 | 8 | Dec-07 |

## XBOX 360

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation | 8.75 | Nov-07 |
| Army of Two | 7.5 | Apr-08 |
| Assassin's Creed | 9.5 | Dec-07 |
| Beautiful Katamari | 7.25 | Dec-07 |
| Bee Movie Game | 6.5 | Jan-08 |
| Beowulf | 5.75 | Jan-08 |
| BlackSite: Area 51 | 7.5 | Dec-07 |
| Bully: Scholarship Edition | 8.5 | Apr-08 |
| Burnout Paradise | 8.5 | Feb-08 |
| Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare | 10 | Dec-07 |
| Clive Barker's Jericho | 6 | Dec-07 |
| Club, The | 8.75 | Mar-08 |
| College Hoops 2K8 | 7.75 | Feb-08 |
| Condemned 2: Bloodshot | 8.75 | Apr-08 |
| Conflict: Denied Ops | 5.75 | Apr-08 |
| CSI: Hard Evidence | 4 | Dec-07 |
| Culdcept Saga | 7 | Feb-08 |
| Dark Messiah of Might & Magic: Elements | 8 | Apr-08 |
| Devil May Cry 4 | 9 | Mar-08 |
| Dynasty Warriors 6 | 7.25 | Mar-08 |
| F.E.A.R. Files | 6.5 | Jan-08 |
| FIFA Street 3 | 7 | Mar-08 |
| Frontlines: Fuel of War | 7.25 | Apr-08 |
| Golden Compass, The | 3.25 | Feb-08 |
| Halo 3 | 9.75 | Nov-07 |
| Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights | 8.25 | Nov-07 |
| Jumper: Griffin's Story | 1.25 | Apr-08 |
| Kane & Lynch: Dead Men | 7 | Jan-08 |
| Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore | 7.5 | Apr-08 |
| Kengo: Lengend of the 9 | 2 | Dec-07 |
| Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom | 5.25 | Feb-08 |
| LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga | 7.5 | Dec-07 |
| Looney Tunes: ACME Arsenal | 1.75 | Dec-07 |
| Lost Odyssey | 8.5 | Apr-08 |
| Lost: Via Domus | 6.75 | Apr-08 |
| Mass Effect | 9.75 | Nov-07 |
| MLB 2K8 | 8.5 | Apr-08 |
| MX vs. ATV Untamed | 8 | Jan-08 |
| Naruto: Rise of the Ninja | 8 | Dec-07 |
| NBA 2K8 | 8.25 | Nov-07 |
| NBA Live 08 | 7.5 | Nov-07 |
| NCAA March Madness 08 | 7.25 | Feb-08 |
| Need for Speed ProStreet | 7.5 | Dec-07 |
| NFL Tour | 5 | Feb-08 |
| Orange Box, The | 9.75 | Nov-07 |
| Project Gotham Racing 4 | 8.75 | Nov-07 |
| Rainbow Six Vegas 2 | 9.25 | Apr-08 |
| Rock Band | 9.25 | Jan-08 |
| Scene It? Lights, Camera, Action | 8.5 | Jan-08 |
| Sega Rally Revo | 6.5 | Dec-07 |
| Simpsons Game, The | 7.25 | Dec-07 |
| Soldier of Fortune: Payback | 4.25 | Feb-08 |
| Spiderwick Chronicles, The | 6.5 | Apr-08 |
| Thrillville: Off the Rails | 7 | Dec-07 |
| TimeShift | 7.75 | Dec-07 |
| Tomb Raider Anniversary | 8.25 | Dec-07 |
| Tony Hawk's Proving Ground | 7.75 | Dec-07 |
| Turning Point: Fall of Liberty | 3 | Apr-08 |
| Turok | 7 | Mar-08 |
| Virtua Fighter 5 | 9 | Dec-07 |
| Viva Piñata: Party Animals | 5.5 | Jan-08 |
| WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw 2008 | 8 | Dec-07 |

## Wii

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Battalion Wars 2 | 7.25 | Jan-08 |
| Bomberman Land | 6.5 | Apr-08 |
| Bully: Scholarship Edition | 8.5 | Apr-08 |
| Cranium Kabookii | 6.75 | Feb-08 |
| Dancing With the Stars | 5.25 | Jan-08 |
| Donkey Kong Barrel Blast | 5 | Dec-07 |
| Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors | 7.75 | Mar-08 |
| EA Playground | 7 | Dec-07 |
| Endless Ocean | 6 | Jan-08 |
| Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn | 7 | Dec-07 |
| Geometry Wars Galaxies | 9 | Dec-07 |
| Ghost Squad | 7 | Jan-08 |
| Godzilla: Unleashed | 4 | Dec-07 |
| Golden Compass, The | 3.25 | Feb-08 |
| Harvey Birdman: Attorney At Law | 6 | Feb-08 |
| House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return | 7.5 | Apr-08 |
| Jenga | 2 | Jan-08 |
| Jumper: Griffin's Story | 1.25 | Apr-08 |
| Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore | 7.5 | Apr-08 |
| LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga | 7.5 | Dec-07 |
| Link's Crossbow Training | 6.75 | Feb-08 |
| Looney Tunes: ACME Arsenal | 1.75 | Dec-07 |
| Manhunt 2 | 7.75 | Dec-07 |
| Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games | 4 | Dec-07 |
| Medal of Honor Heroes 2 | 6.75 | Jan-08 |
| Need for Speed ProStreet | 7 | Dec-07 |
| Nights: Journey of Dreams | 6.5 | Feb-08 |
| Nitrobike | 4.25 | Mar-08 |
| No More Heroes | 6 | Mar-08 |
| Opoona | 5.5 | Apr-08 |
| Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection | 8.5 | Apr-08 |
| Rayman Raving Rabbids 2 | 7.75 | Jan-08 |
| Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles | 8.25 | Jan-08 |
| Samurai Warriors: Katana | 6 | Mar-08 |
| Sega Bass Fishing | 5 | Apr-08 |
| Simpsons Game, The | 7.25 | Dec-07 |
| Smarty Pants | 7.5 | Jan-08 |
| Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity | 6 | Mar-08 |
| Soulcalibur Legends | 4 | Jan-08 |
| Star Trek Conquest | 5 | Feb-08 |
| Super Mario Galaxy | 9.75 | Jan-08 |



Super Smash Bros. Brawl - Wii - Apr-08

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Super Smash Bros. Brawl | 9.5 | Apr-08 |
| Super Swing Golf Season 2 | 8.5 | Feb-08 |
| Table Tennis | 6 | Dec-07 |
| Thrillville: Off the Rails | 7 | Dec-07 |
| Trama Center: New Blood | 7.5 | Jan-08 |
| Winter Sports: The Ultimate Challenge | 6.5 | Mar-08 |
| Zack & Wiki: Quest For Barbaros' Treasure | 8.25 | Nov-07 |

## PLAYSTATION 2

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore | 7.5 | Apr-08 |
| Looney Tunes: ACME Arsenal | 1.75 | Dec-07 |
| Manhunt 2 | 7.75 | Dec-07 |
| Simpsons Game, The | 7.25 | Dec-07 |
| Star Trek Conquest | 5 | Feb-08 |
| Thrillville: Off the Rails | 7 | Dec-07 |
| Twisted Metal: Head On: Extra Twisted Edition | 7.25 | Apr-08 |

## PC

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ages of Empires III: The Asian Dynasties | 8 | Dec-07 |
| Beowulf | 5.75 | Jan-08 |
| BlackSite: Area 51 | 7.5 | Dec-07 |
| Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions of WWII | 7.5 | Nov-07 |
| Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare | 10 | Dec-07 |
| Clive Barker's Jericho | 6 | Dec-07 |
| Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts | 8.25 | Nov-07 |
| Conflict: Denied Ops | 5.75 | Apr-08 |
| Crysis | 9 | Jan-08 |
| Empire Earth III | 6.5 | Jan-08 |
| Enemy Territories: Quake Wars | 8.5 | Nov-07 |
| Frontlines: Fuel of War | 7.25 | Apr-08 |
| Fury | 5 | Jan-08 |
| Gears of War | 8 | Jan-08 |
| Hellgate: London | 8.5 | Jan-08 |
| Medieval II: Total War Kingdoms | 9 | Nov-07 |
| Neverwinter Nights 2: Mask of the Betrayer | 9 | Nov-07 |
| Orange Box, The | 9.75 | Nov-07 |
| Painkiller: Overdose | 6.75 | Dec-07 |
| Settlers: Rise of an Empire, The | 7 | Dec-07 |
| SimCity Societies | 8 | Jan-08 |

Sins of a Solar Empire - PC - Apr-08

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sins of a Solar Empire | 9 | Apr-08 |
| Supreme Commander: Forged Alliance | 8.5 | Dec-07 |
| Tabula Rasa | 8 | Jan-08 |
| TimeShift | 7.75 | Dec-07 |
| Turning Point: Fall of Liberty | 3 | Apr-08 |
| Turok | 7 | Mar-08 |
| Universe at War: Earth Assault | 8.25 | Jan-08 |
| Unreal Tournament 3 | 9 | Dec-07 |
| Witcher, The | 8 | Dec-07 |

## NINTENDO DS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Advance Wars: Days of Ruin | 8.75 | Mar-08 |
| Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney | 8 | Mar-08 |
| Assassin's Creed: Altaïr's Chronicles | 6 | Apr-08 |
| Contra 4 | 9.25 | Jan-08 |
| Cooking Mama 2: Dinner With Friends | 7 | Dec-07 |
| Dementium: The Ward | 5.75 | Dec-07 |
| Draglade | 6.75 | Feb-08 |
| Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker | 8 | Dec-07 |
| Eco-Creatures: Save the Forest | 3 | Apr-08 |
| Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates | 6 | Apr-08 |
| Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings | 7.5 | Dec-07 |
| Jam Sessions | 6 | Dec-07 |
| Left Brain, Right Brain | 5 | Feb-08 |
| LifeSigns: Surgical Unit | 6 | Jan-08 |
| Mario Party DS | 7 | Feb-08 |
| Master of Illusion | 8 | Jan-08 |
| Mega Man ZX Advent | 8 | Nov-07 |
| My Word Coach | 8 | Feb-08 |
| Nanostray 2 | 7.25 | Jan-08 |
| Orc & Elves | 6.75 | Jan-08 |
| Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trials & Tribulations | 8.25 | Nov-07 |
| Prism: Light the Way | 7.5 | Dec-07 |
| Professor Layton and the Curious Village | 7.5 | Apr-08 |
| Turn It Around | 4 | Dec-07 |
| World Jong | 8 | Dec-07 |

## PSP

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII | 7.25 | Apr-08 |
| Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness | 9 | Nov-07 |
| Dungeon Explorer: Warrior of Ancient Arts | 6 | Apr-08 |
| Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions | 9.5 | Nov-07 |
| God of War: Chains of Olympus | 9 | Mar-08 |
| Jackass: The Game | 6.25 | Dec-07 |
| Manhunt 2 | 7.75 | Dec-07 |
| Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops Plus | 7.75 | Dec-07 |
| Patapon | 8.75 | Mar-08 |
| Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice | 7.25 | Feb-08 |
| Silent Hill Origins | 7.75 | Dec-07 |
| SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Tactical Strike | 8 | Dec-07 |
| SWAT: Target Liberty | 5 | Dec-07 |
| Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow | 8.75 | Nov-07 |
| Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command | 8 | Jan-08 |
| Wipeout Pulse | 7.75 | Apr-08 |

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(pwner)

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# Lost: Via Domus

## Island Travel Guide

*By Kevin Shortt, Lead Script Writer*

If you know the TV show, you know that the island is loaded with all kinds of bizarre, unexplained sights and sounds. Likewise, Lost: Via Domus gives you some unusual ways to earn those precious Xbox Achievements and unlock concept art in the Extras section. I'm here to give you the heads up on how to get them.

### DHARMA RIDE

What's a Lost island without a Dharma Initiative micro-bus? But you'll need to venture off the beaten path to find it. In episode five, you'll be heading through the dark jungle towards the Black Rock. Follow the tree markers to the fourth one. Once you reach the fourth marker, head to your left. You'll walk over a small rise and arrive at a bashed up micro-bus. Something obviously pummeled the crap out of it. Okay, now get your camera out and grab a fast photo. The black smoke is roaming the area, and if you're spotted it's *sayonara*, Ansel – as Sawyer might say. Once you get the photo – bingo! You've got your Dharma Ride Achievement.

### THE MEDICAL STATION

As you play through the game, you'll find your way to almost every Dharma Initiative station from the TV show. But a couple of them require a bit more work to reach. The Medical Station (aka The Staff) is probably the toughest station to find. This one's a true easter egg. Either you know how to get there or you don't. So here's the how-to.

In episode four, you start on the castaways' beach. If you look around the campsite you'll find various items with numbers on them. Yes, the same cursed numbers from the TV show. You'll need to examine each number in the correct sequence (4, 8, 15, 16, 23, 42) to unlock access to the Medical Station:

4: Examine the suitcase in a small tent that says "Love 4 Ever." It is found at the far side of the beach from your spawning location.

8: This number is made with seashells by the water's edge near number 4.

15: Examine the number 15 on a plane panel used to build part of a tent near your spawning location.

16: Examine the number 16 on a crate close to the number 15.

23: Number 23 is on a food trolley next to Hurley.

42: Number 42 is on a "Texas 42" domino game on a table near Charlie.

And presto, a menu appears with a link to the Medical Station. Once you load up the station, head on in. The first thing you'll see is the Dharma Initiative Staff emblem. Grab a snap of that and you've got your Achievement!

### THE PEARL STATION

The Pearl is another D.I. station that's a bit off the game path. You can access the Pearl in episode six.

In this episode, you'll meet Juliet at the sonic fence. Once she lets you across the fence, she'll walk off to your left. But you want to go to your right into a small field. Search the field for a small Dharma Initiative pneumatic tube capsule (yes, the same kind found inside the Pearl). Pick up the capsule and you'll be sent straight to the Pearl. Once the station loads up, grab a photo of the D.I. Pearl emblem for your next Achievement. And while you're there, check out the computer.

### LOCKE'S BLAST DOOR MAP

Fans of the show will remember a strange map that Locke discovered on the blast doors inside the Swan Station. Well it's faithfully recreated in the game – as you'd expect. But there's more...

Once you solve the three fuse puzzles inside the Swan, you'll get full access to the geodome's computer. So bring up the computer menu. Open Blast Door 2. This will give you access to the central room in the Swan. Now go to the computer's Black Light menu and select Black Light 1. Okay, now head to the Swan's central room and there on the blast door you can see the same map Locke found. Grab a photo for your Achievement.

But here's the bonus: Head back to the computer's Black Light menu and select Black Light 2. Now take a second look at Locke's map and you will see new details that have never been seen before on the TV series. This layer was specially created by Lost's production team exclusively for the videogame. So analyze and hypothesize away!

### RADZINSKY'S BRAINS

Now here's an Achievement for the die-hard Lost fans. In season two of the show, we learned that a guy named Radzinsky blew his brains out inside the Swan Station. He put a gun to his mouth and splattered his brains all over the ceiling. Well, at Ubisoft, we go for the details. So when you're in the Swan, head for the stereo in the bookshelf and look up. Grab your camera, get a nice snap of Radzinsky's exit strategy, and you've got your Achievement.

### CHARLIE SINGS!

This one's not a biggy, but hey, it's fun. When you're at the beach in episode five, find Charlie and start a dialogue. Go to General Topics and select, "You All Everybody." And with that, Charlie launches into the chorus of his one-hit wonder song.

### CHOCOLATES AND BOOKS

If you want to keep yourself well stocked with supplies on the island, you'll need to gather lots of fruit and water bottles for trading. But there are two things to watch for: Apollo Chocolate bars and books. After all, this is a remote island and books and chocolate are rare, so they're much more valuable than any fruit or water. But where to find them?

You'll find Apollo bars in the Swan Station of course. But you can also find them in the Pearl and the Medical Station (see above for access to these stations).

For the books, you can grab one in episode two at the cockpit. Head to the nose of the plane where you'll find a copy of Homer's *The Odyssey*. Sawyer should like that. In episode three, Locke sends you into a cave. It's here that you'll find two more books. It's a tricky spot to reach and hard to describe. You need to travel down one of the many arteries of the cave to a dead-end where you'll find your books. Get yourself any of these items and you'll be flush with island cash for trading. Happy hunting.

Now there's one other book you might want to track down. In one of the Swan Station bookshelves, you'll spot a copy of *A Turn of the Screw*, a novel that the show has mentioned a few times. Grab a snap of that for more Achievement points.

### BEAM OF LIGHT

In season one of *Lost*, a frustrated Locke bangs his fist on the window of the Swan hatch. Seconds later, a beam of light shines out from inside the hatch. It's a beautiful moment in the TV series that deserved a home in the game.

So in episode three, you'll meet Locke at the hatch, but there's no beam of light. You need to talk with Locke and let him lead you to a cave. But before you enter the cave, turn around and head back to the hatch. When you arrive at the hatch alone, you'll find a beam of light shooting into the heavens. Grab your camera and earn your next Achievement.

### FLASHBACKS

Of course, a Lost game has to have flashbacks, and it's during the flashbacks that you can scoop up a few more Achievements. But if you're too quick, you'll miss them. So here's how to grab them. First, complete the photo challenge in each flashback. Once you've done that, you'll watch a brief cutscene that shows you the memory you've just unlocked. To complete that memory, you'll need to talk with one of the characters in each flashback.

But wait! Before you do that, search the location. You'll find three items in each flashback (except episode seven). These items give you more background on the story you were chasing in the past. Once you've examined all three, you score your Achievement. Now you can finish out the flashback and get back to the island.

**Attention All Cheaters!**

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

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

## MULTI-SYSTEM

### Lost: Via Domus

> **PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, PC**

During gameplay, use this trick to help you out with the game's fuse puzzles.

**Extra Fuses –** After completing the game's first fuse puzzle, go back and grab all of the fuses. These will stay in your inventory and you can use them on later fuse puzzles

## PlayStation 3

### Lost Planet: Extreme Condition

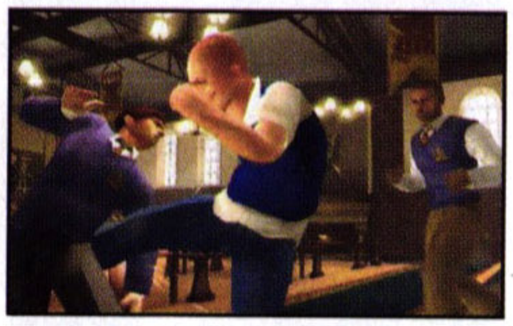
During gameplay, pause the game then enter these codes. A sound will confirm that you entered them correctly. Codes only work on easy mode.

**Gain 500 T-ENG –** Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, □, △, R1 + L1

**Unlimited Ammo –** R2, R1, △, □, Right, Down, Left, L1, L2, R2, R1, △, □, Right, Down, Left, L1, L2, R2, L2, L1, R1, △, Left, Down, □, R1 + L1

**Unlimited Health –** Down, Down, Down, Up, △, Up, △, Up, △, Up, Up, Up, Down, □, Down, □, Down, Square, Left, △, Right, □, Left, △, Right, □, R1 + L1

## XBOX 360



### Bully: Scholarship Edition

Any time during gameplay, use a second controller to enter these codes.

**Extra Money –** Hold LB, Y, X, B, A

**Infinite Ammo –** Hold LB, Up, Down, Up, Down

**Refill Health –** Hold LB, RT, RT, RT

**Unlock All Weapons –** Hold LB, Up, Up, Up, Up

## Wii

### Winter Sports 2008: The Ultimate Challenge

From the main menu, go into the challenges menu then use the d-pad to enter these codes.

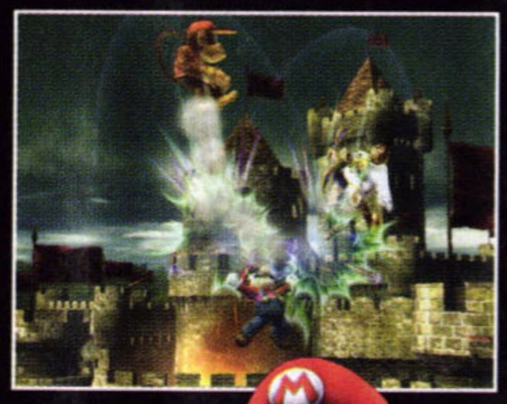
**All Challenges Open –** Right, Left, Down, Up, Up, Down, Left, Right

**All Venues Available –** Up, Down, Left, Right, Right, Left, Down, Up

## Code of the Month

Wii

# Super Smash Bros. Brawl



Need help unlocking the secret characters in Brawl? There are actually a couple of ways to unlock each character, and many of them can be be found by playing through the Subspace Emissary mode, but here are some other ways to unlock your favorite character.

**Captain Falcon –** Complete Classic Mode in 12 minutes or less or participate in 70 vs. matches

**Falco –** Complete 100-Man Brawl or participate in 50 vs. matches

**Ganondorf –** Complete Classic Mode on Hard difficulty using either Zelda or Link, or participate in 200 vs. matches

**Jigglypuff –** Complete Subspace Emissary then complete Event Match 20, or participate in 350 vs. matches

**Lucario –** Complete five Target Tests, or participate in 100 vs. matches

**Luigi –** Complete Classic Mode on Easy difficulty without using a continue, or participate in 22 vs. matches

**Marth –** Complete Classic Mode, or participate in 10 vs. matches

**Mr. Game & Watch –** Clear Target Smash with 30 different characters, or participate in 250 vs. matches

**Ness –** Reflect 10 projectiles in battle, or participate in five vs. matches

**R.O.B. –** Get 250 different trophies, or participate in 160 vs. matches

**Snake –** Play 15 matches on Shadow Moses Island, or participate in 130 vs. matches

**Sonic –** Complete Classic Mode with 10 characters, or participate in 300 vs. matches

**Toon Link –** Finish Subspace Emissary then find him in "The Forest," or participate in 400 vs. matches

**Wolf –** Finish Subspace Emissary then complete Boss Battle Mode using Fox or Falco, or participate in 450 vs. matches

## NES

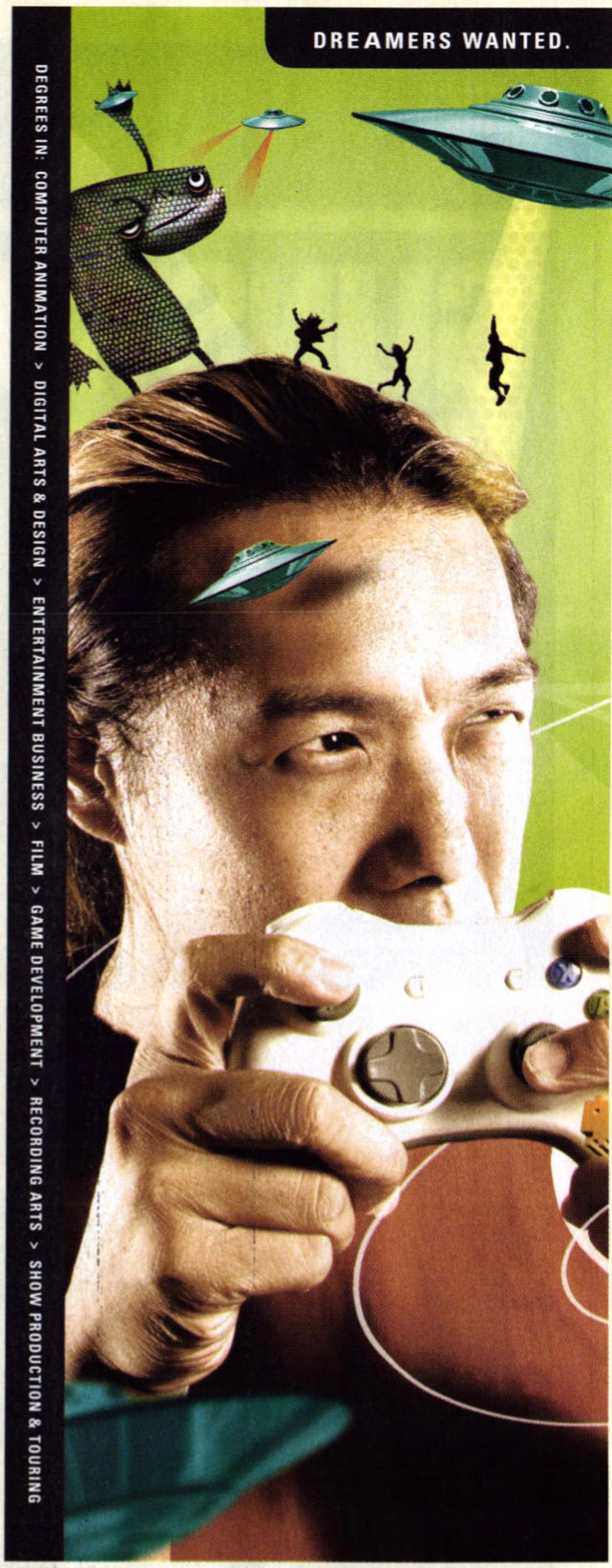
### Metroid

Everyone knows about Justin Bailey, but this NES classic has another awesome password you should dust off your old cartridge or download to the Wii's Virtual Console and try. To start at the beginning of the game with unlimited missiles, invincibility, and every power-up, enter the following code at the password screen:

**Unlock All Upgrades –** NARPAS SWORD0 000000 000000

*"GI Droid"*

*(location unknown – last seen standing on the corner trying to get people to join the pen 15 club)*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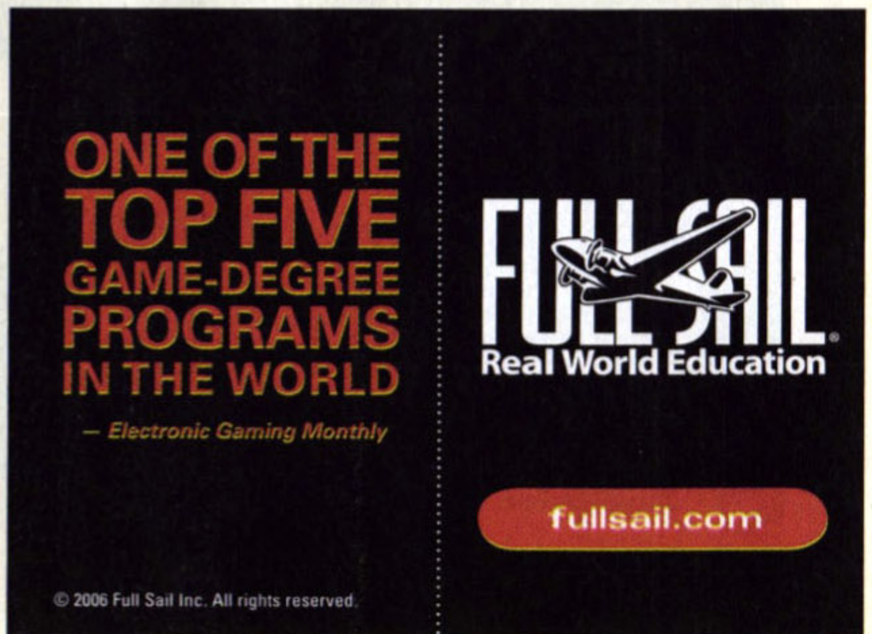
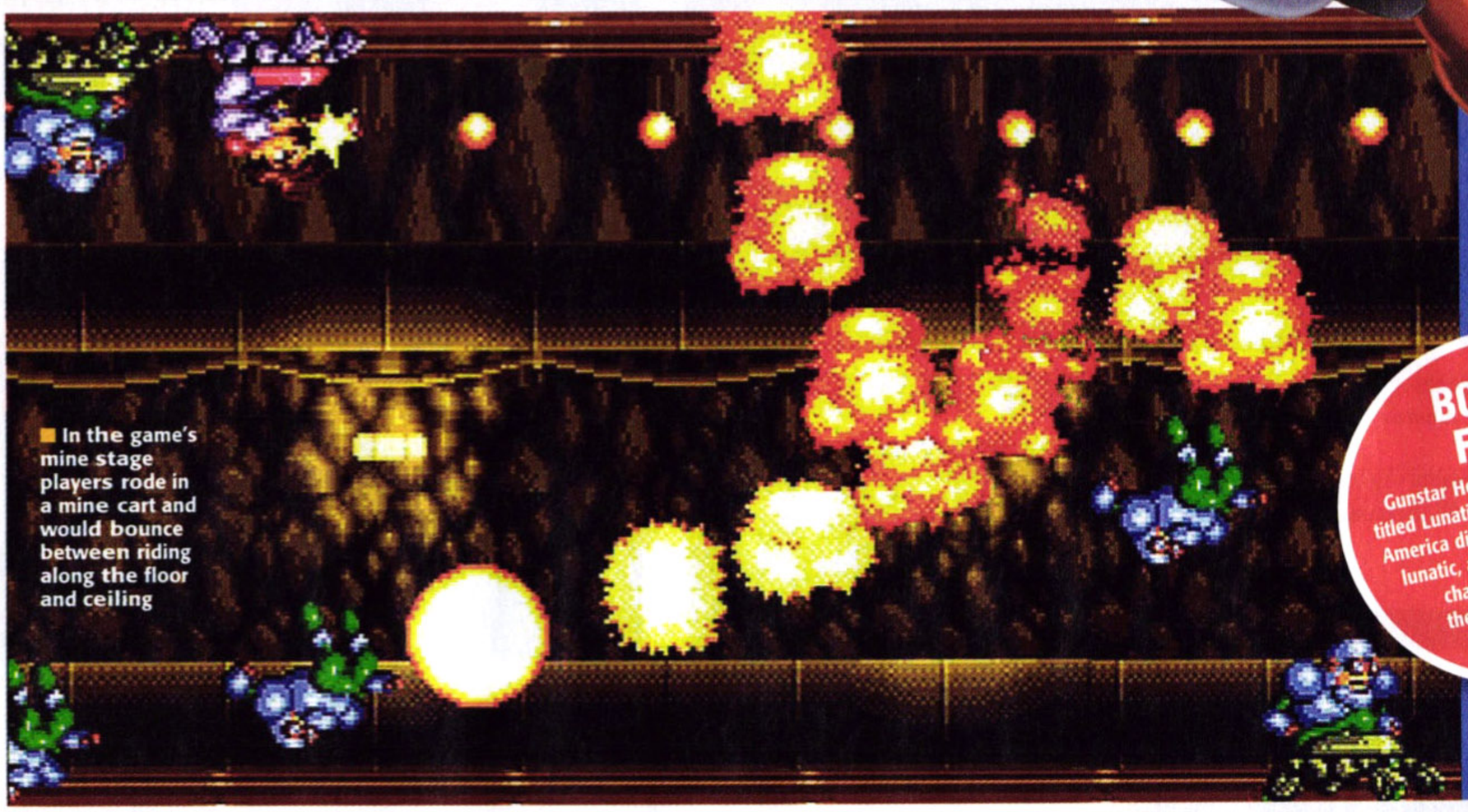


# GUNSTAR HEROES

## LOOKING BACK AT A 2D CLASSIC

**The air is filled with more ammunition than a John Woo film. Like bloated flies feasting in a landfill, your bullets buzz across the screen. Adding to this chaos are exploding enemies and blurred backgrounds that you speed past on your way to the next challenge. You're playing one of the Genesis' best titles, an intense 2D shooter that plays like Contra on crack, has plenty of intense boss fights, and is one of the best looking games on the system. It all makes an intoxicating potion that ensures that after you've put down Gunstar Heroes, you'll never forget its name.**



■ In the game's mine stage players rode in a mine cart and would bounce between riding along the floor and ceiling

### BONUS FACT

Gunstar Heroes was originally titled Lunatic Gunstar, but Sega of America didn't approve the word lunatic, and the resulting title change was made to the Japanese version as well.

### Sega's Treasure

Gunstar Heroes was the debut title from a Japanese developer called Treasure. Formed in June of 1992 by a group of defected Konami programmers who'd worked on the Contra franchise, Treasure is now well known for its classic arcade-style shooters like Radiant Silvergun and Ikaruga, and also for its oddball GameCube release Wario World. But in September of 1993, back before the company had any credibility, Gunstar Heroes was a surprise breakout success.

■ In classic Mega Man style, players could actually choose which stage they wanted to take down first, making it easy to jump right into their favorite level

■ These screens don't show the game's great animation. Gunstar Heroes looked fantastic considering how fast it played

## Color Us Confused

The story behind Gunstar Heroes might easily be mistaken for some forgotten children's show of the '80s. The word Gunstar is actually a family name given to the guardians of the planet Gunstar-9. A long time ago, Professor Gunstar White defeated an evil android called Golden Silver (and if you're tired of the silly names, we're not done yet). Fast-forward to the present day, and a new evil called Smash Daisaku threatens to resurrect the infamous android. Players take on the role of two Gunstars called Red and Blue who must defeat Smash and their brainwashed brother Green. Fortunately for gamers, Treasure knew to keep its game's cutscenes brisk and absurdly spectacular.

■ Seven Force, a standout boss, in a title already filled with amazing boss battles

## Never-Ending Battle

The game featured some memorable boss battles, most of which were composed of multiple sprites working together to form giant writhing enemies. In the Underground Mine stage, players went up against a juggernaut called Seven Force. As the name implies, Seven Force went through seven forms as it was damaged. Starting off as a walking mech, it would morph into a bird, a tiger, a spinning sawblade, a crab, a snake-like machine with a spiked tail, and finally a giant gun before it eventually succumbed to defeat in an impressive fireworks display. Back in 1993, Seven Forces' seven-stage battle wasn't just memorable; it was epic.

**BONUS FACT**

Think today's marketing tie-ins are strange? The original U.S. release of Gunstar Heroes was packaged with a Fruit Roll-Up.

## Weapons Detail

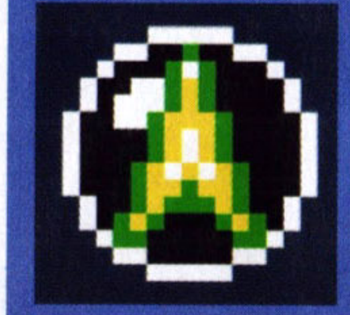
There were only four basic weapon types in Gunstar Heroes, but combining them to make different bullet streams was one of the game's standout features. Here's a break down of the game's four starting power ups.

### Force:

Force created a generic machine-gun style of fire. The weapon was fast and strong, and worked best when taking down lots of little enemies, but required the most aiming.

### Lightning:

Lightning was actually slower and weaker than the others, but it passed through enemies hitting multiple targets at once. This was a great choice when facing hordes, but made a poor selection for bosses.



### Chaser:

The Chaser was also weak, but like it sounds, it was a homing weapon. When you were surrounded on all sides, the Chaser would watch your back for you.

### Flame:

Flame produced a devastating stream of continuous fire; it was basically a flamethrower. Its only downside was its limited range.

## Run and Gunstar

Gunstar Heroes' action follows the story's formula of speed and spectacle with much greater success. Like most action shooters at the time, players could collect weapon power ups that did different things. But unlike other games of the day, Gunstar Heroes allowed them to collect two power-ups at a time, mixing and matching the weapons to create up to 14 original creations (see sidebar). Hand-to-hand combat was also useful, as players were able to grab enemies, execute jump attacks, and nimbly perform slide maneuvers across the bottom of the screen.

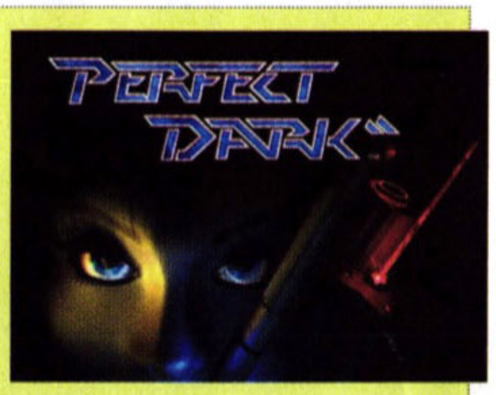
■ Gunstar Super Heroes on GBA

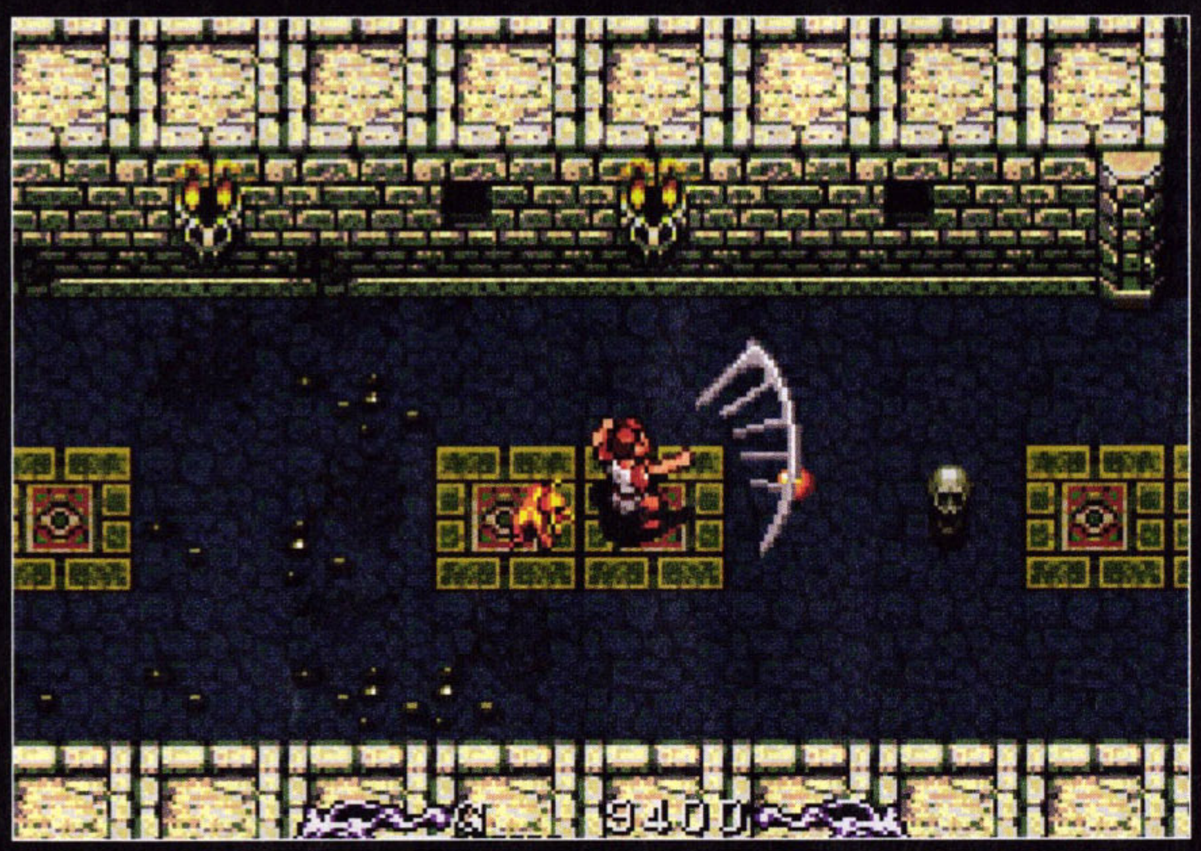
## Super Sequel

In 2005, Sega released a sequel, called Gunstar Super Heroes, for the Game Boy Advance. The sequel had a greater emphasis on melee combat, but axed the weapon-combining element that was such an important part of the first game. Super Heroes still featured Treasure's special brand of fast-paced action and is worth picking up for any fan of the series. The original game can also be downloaded for the Wii's Virtual Console, and anyone looking to have some nostalgic fun or who might have missed the game the first time around should check it out for a relatively cheap download: 800 points, or eight Earth dollars.

**This Month In Gaming History**

*On May 22, 2000 Nintendo published Perfect Dark on the N64, Rare's much-hyped follow-up to 1997's enormously successful GoldenEye 007. The game ran on a modified version of the GoldenEye engine, but since Nintendo had lost the James Bond license, Perfect Dark featured a futuristic sci-fi setting. The game would go on to sell well over a million units in the U.S. alone, receive rave reviews, and spawn a lackluster sequel five years later.*





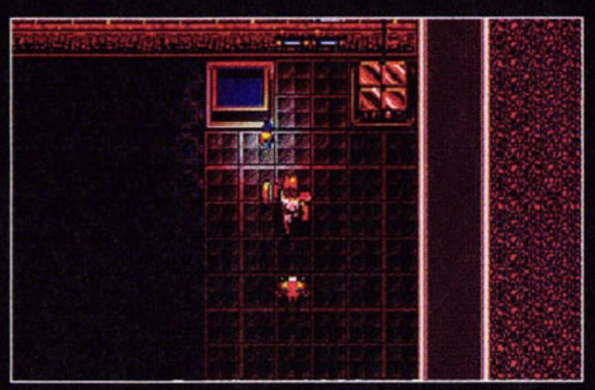
SNES

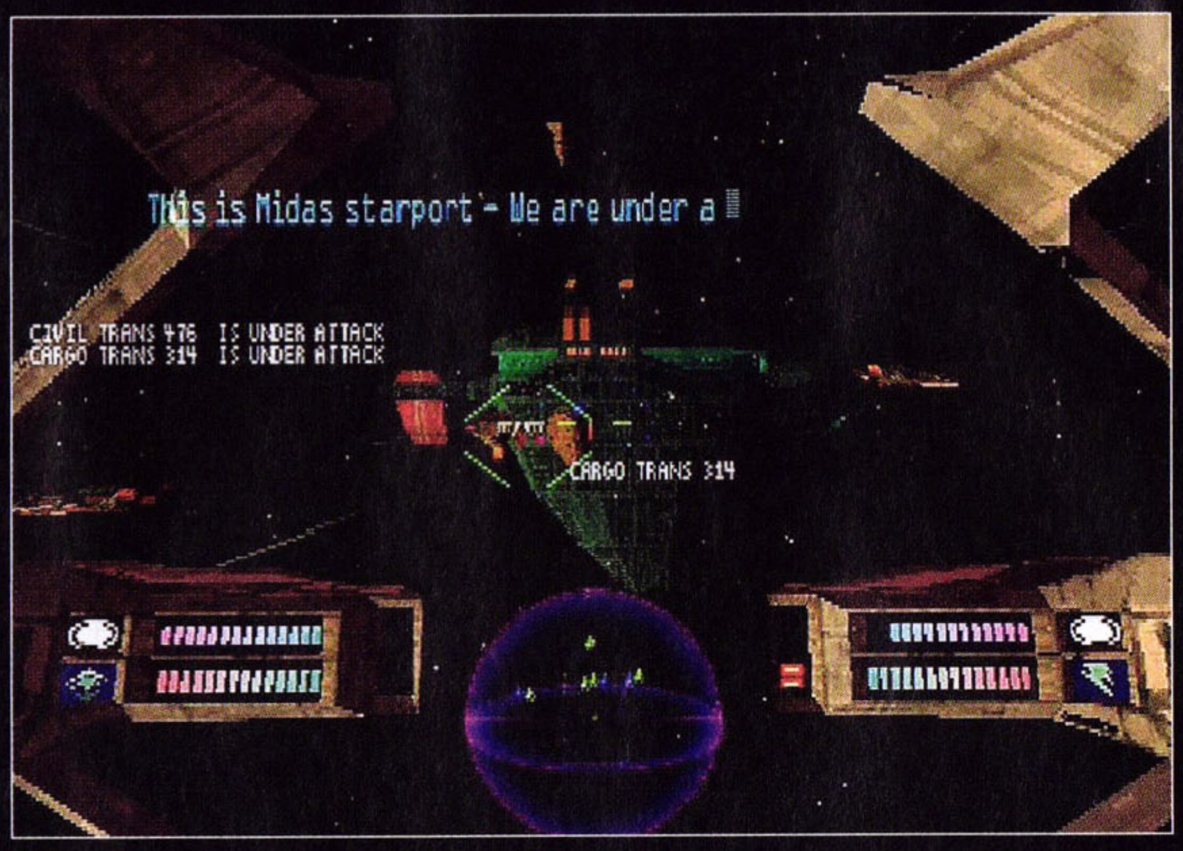
## BRAIN LORD

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE **> PUBLISHER** ENIX **> DEVELOPER** ENIX **> RELEASE** 1994

RETRO RATING
NOW 8
THEN N/A

The title sounds more like a low-budget Ed Wood movie than a video game, but even without Bela Lugosi, Brain Lord is awesome. It plays and looks a lot like a primitive version of The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past, except for one major difference: logic puzzles. Good ones – not just stupid two-step switch puzzles. The tasks range from basic rock pushing to algebraically determining a specific button sequence. It's an action/puzzle game that goes light on the story elements (and character progression), so when you aren't working through riddles, you're exploring castles, dungeons, and caves fighting monsters with a variety of weapons and magic. Unfortunately, the game has nasty tendency to make you replay long portions if you die, and the graphics were sub-par even when it first released. But you don't play Brain Lord for the graphics – you play for your brain.






PSONE

## COLONY WARS

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER SHOOTER **> PUBLISHER** PSYGNOSIS **> DEVELOPER** PSYGNOSIS **> RELEASE** 1997

RETRO RATING
NOW 7.75
THEN* 8.5

In this age of analog movement and pressure sensitive thrusters, Colony War's space combat still feels surprisingly responsive for a game that only uses the good old d-pad. The story – about a League of Free Worlds united in rebellion against the oppressive Earth Empire – is told through a remarkable amount of CG, and narrated by some guy who sounds eerily like James Earl Jones. Designed with a unique branching mission structure, the game's 60 different missions can lead to one of six alternate endings. Features like this give the game some solid replay, and are sadly missing from more modern shooters. Conversely, Colony Wars lacks many of today's standard conventions. All of the game's weapons are placed on two buttons, requiring you to scroll through the full list whenever you need to switch over, a tiresome and distracting task. Encounters are fairly small, limiting you to only a couple dozen enemy craft at a time. Despite its limits, it's still fun to line up your shot and blow the larger ships to space dust. Too bad this series has faded into the ether; it still has potential.

PC

## MASTER OF MAGIC

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY **> PUBLISHER** MICROPROSE **> DEVELOPER** SIMTEX SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** 1995

RETRO RATING
NOW 8.25
THEN N/A

One of the earliest complex 4X titles, Microprose's Master of Magic is widely regarded as one of the landmarks of the genre. Similar to Civilization in that players found and grow cities while moving armies about in the field and conquering ever more territory, MoM breaks far away from that mold with its deep fantasy elements. Rather than researching technology, players research magic spells. Special units from, ghouls to basilisks, can be summoned to augment your mortal troops, powerful enchantments can aid cities or rend the earth, and doom can be rained down upon your foes during the tactical battles. A hugely ambitious game for its time, MoM also suffers from an impressive amount of balancing issues and bugs. Heroes and other powerful units can become practically unkillable thanks to absurdly stacking magical effects, several of the races are nearly unplayable due to restrictions, and "primitive" is the kindest word you can say about the interface. Still, MoM was way ahead of its time and worth a look back just to see how many cool ideas could fit into a game, even in 1995.



*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Colony Wars (GI #55 11/97)

# GI ONLINE

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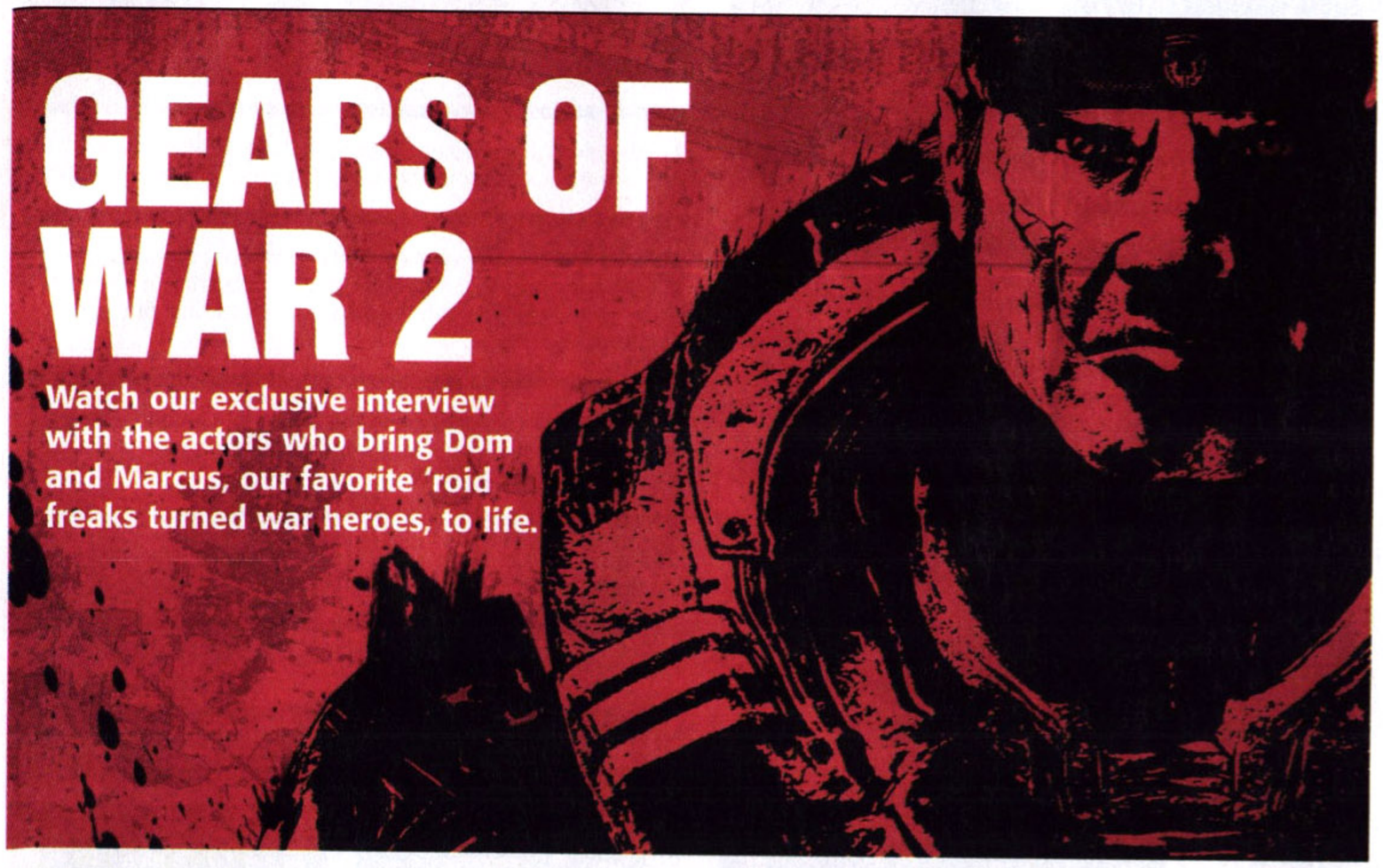


# GEARS OF WAR 2

**Watch our exclusive interview with the actors who bring Dom and Marcus, our favorite 'roid freaks turned war heroes, to life.**

### Dark Sector

Learn more about the glaive-wielding badass Hayden with our exclusive five-page preview of the new Top Cow comic book.

### Places: Blizzard

We check out the swank headquarters of the money printing operation known as Blizzard Entertainment, home of World of Warcraft and Starcraft II.

### Places: Epic Games

Blizzard isn't the only developer with deep pockets and swank office space. Tour the lavish pad that Mark Rein and Cliffy B call home.

### Unleash Your Inner Sith

Forget Soulcalibur IV. If you're looking for a true Darth Vader experience, The Force Unleashed is the game of choice. Read more about our favorite villain in an extended interview with project lead Haden Blackman.

### HAWX!

Read more about Tom Clancy's first foray into leet speak, er, air combat in our interview with the creative team that has their hands on the flightstick.

### ALSO ONLINE THIS MONTH:

***Game Informer Online heads to Vegas to check out Midway's 2008 game lineup, and to bet the over on the amount of times a GI editor looks at Ben quizzically after something he says.***

MIDWAY

## VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

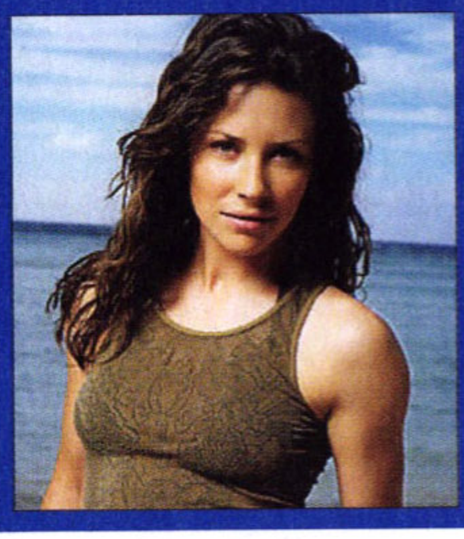
**Sometimes, despite our best intentions, we just don't live up to the expectations people have for us. Through careful scientific research, we've developed a quiz to help you figure out which poorly performing or failed video game console you would be on your worst day. Don't worry, you'll always be a PlayStation 2 in our minds.**

**1 AeroGauge, released in 1998 for the N64, copied the popular F-Zero in a number of ways. Even so, AeroGauge had some pretty cool features. Which one of these wasn't one of them?**

**A.** Time Attack mode
**B.** Split-screen competitions
**C.** Vehicle damage
**D.** 32 AI-controlled opponents

**2 While she didn't have a speaking role, *Lost* actress and geek crush object Evangeline Lilly got one of her early on-air appearances on what video game TV show?**

**A.** *Cheat!*
**B.** *GamePro TV*
**C.** *Judgment Day*
**D.** *Game Head*



**3 All of the following were subtitles to a Resident Evil game except one. Name it. Or, uhh, we'll send the zombies after you.**

**A.** Survivor
**B.** Deadly Silence
**C.** Dead Aim
**D.** Uprising

**4 The Kilrathi were the dreaded enemies of humanity in the Wing Commander gaming universe. What Earth adjective describes them best?**

**A.** Feline
**B.** Vulpine
**C.** Canine
**D.** Bovine

**5 Gauntlet: Dark Legacy had all sorts of different characters to choose from. Which of these was selectable the first time you played?**

**A.** Minotaur
**B.** Jester
**C.** Medusa
**D.** Unicorn

**6 In Spider-Man and the X-Men: Arcade's Revenge, which character was forced to swim through underwater levels while juggling a limited air supply?**

**A.** Wolverine
**B.** Cyclops
**C.** Storm
**D.** Gambit

**7 King's Field cast you as Alexander, the king's best friend. From what view did you battle dragons, skeletons, and other baddies?**

**A.** First-person
**B.** Third-person behind the back
**C.** Overhead top down
**D.** The game was text based, and had no visual perspective

**8 Which Mario game first included the Carrot power-up, which would turn our favorite little plumber into a bunny?**

**A.** Super Mario World
**B.** Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins
**C.** Super Mario Sunshine
**D.** Super Mario 64

**9 What is the central urban setting for Naughty Dog's Jak II?**

**A.** New York City
**B.** Kras City
**C.** Ottsel Town
**D.** Haven City

**10 Have you found the super secret message about everyone's most-anticipated game that we've hidden in code throughout this issue of Game Informer?**

**A.** Yes! I can't believe they're finally making a sequel!
**B.** Yeah, but I kind of saw that coming. Wake me when you've got some real news.
**C.** No, I can't find it, and I'm beginning to doubt such a code exists.
**D.** No, but many hours of my life went into the fruitless search for this info. Thanks a lot.

## BREAKDOWN

**40%** was the jump in Xbox 360 sales in the UK after a recent price cut across Europe

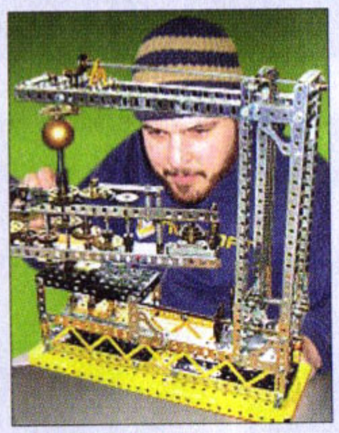
**3** new Halo 3 maps will be included in the Legendary map pack – the content should be available by the time you read this

**$10,000** is being offered to a qualified student in the 2008-2009 Penny Arcade Game Education scholarship. Incidentally, we're pretty sure you can't use the money to "just buy a lot of games"

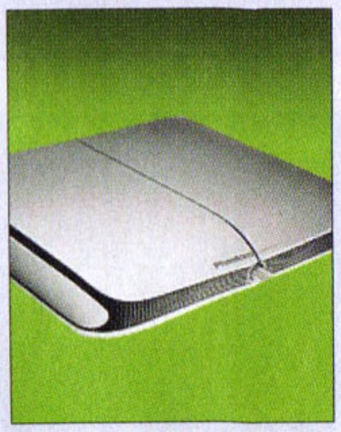
**$14.5 million** in royalties were the stakes in a recent lawsuit filed and subsequently withdrawn by Harmonix against its former publisher, Activision

**3** is sometimes company, usually a crowd, but it's never the loneliest number. Now you just think about that.

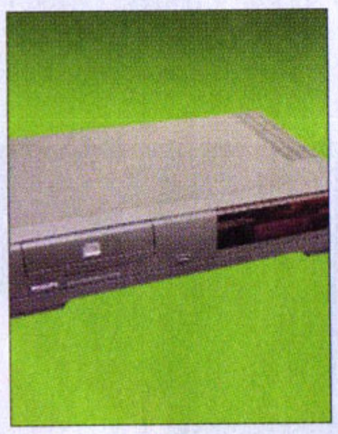
## ★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



**0-1:**
**The Adam Box 1.0**

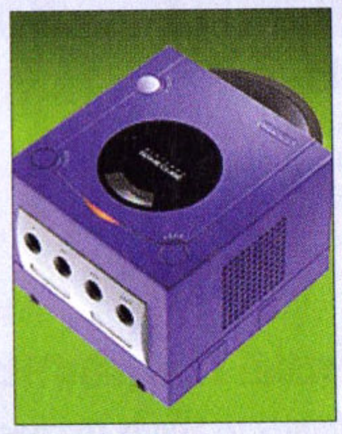


**2-3:**
**The Phantom**

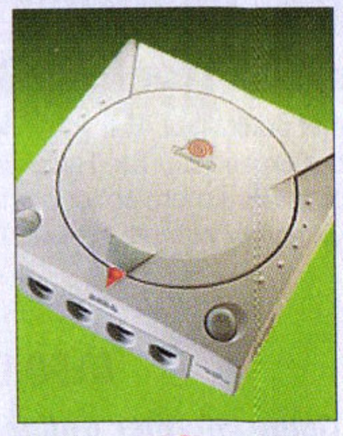


**4-5:**
**Philips CD-i**

**6-7:**
**Atari Jaguar**



**8-9:**
**GameCube (lol)**



**10:**
**Sega Dreamcast**

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**Video Game Trivia Answers:** 1. D 2. C 3. D 4. A 5. B 6. C 7. A 8. B 9. D 10. C or D

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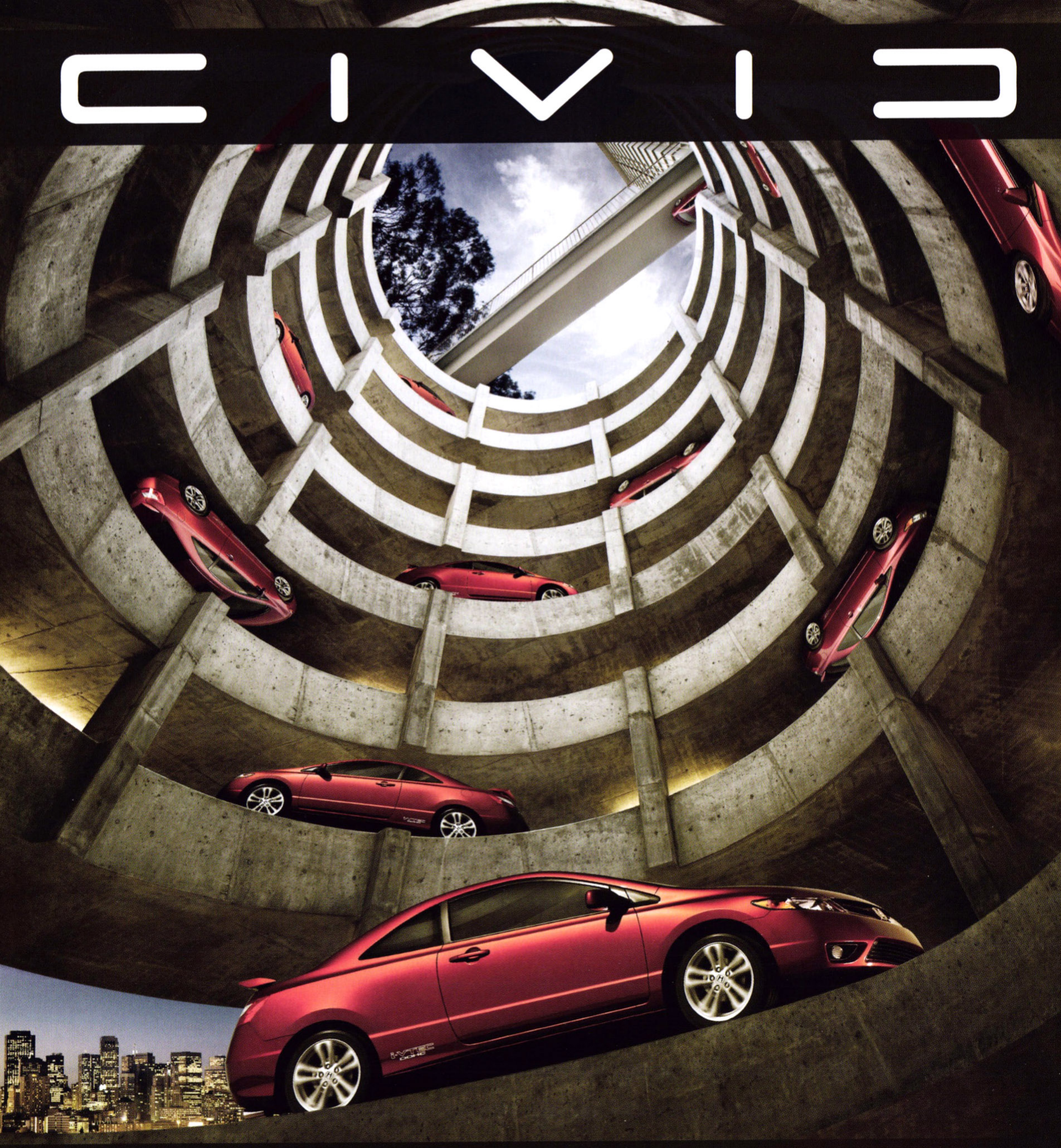
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