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Xenosaga

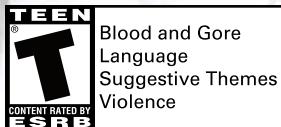
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- *XBN*

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- *Game Informer*

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- *PSM*



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102 COVER STORY: JADE EMPIRE

We sit with BioWare and discuss their much anticipated action-RPG. They didn't just run with the great game idea of becoming a martial-arts master; they ran up a damn wall and floated over rooftops. Plus, go ahead and stare at these new Zhang Ziyi—gorgeous screenshots.

WE'RE GIVING AWAY GAMES! SEE PG. 136 FOR DETAILS.

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The tasty cream-filling of the mag

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editorial



A couple of industry friends told me they love it when we tell it like it is, so this editorial's for you, Blake and Doug....

1) Developer

Bungie's policy on *Halo 2* cheaters (see pg. 64) is nice...and BS at the same time. So glitches that were left in the game engine (like being able to grab flags through walls) are allowed? Well, great. I hope any future *Halo 2* players that haven't read up on this stuff somewhere are OK with that, too, when their asses

are being handed to them and they don't understand why.

2) *Metal Gear Solid 3*: Plenty of my coworkers would shoot me in the face for saying this, but this game is way overrated. Nice graphics, cool story, great characters...sure, but that viewpoint on the action? Blah. I like to see the people who are trying to shoot me, please. And if it takes three buttons to do it (like aiming an assault rifle), it ain't worth doing.

3) Mainstream-success-wise, the Nintendo DS is in trouble. People are just too hyped on the PSP (a local EB Games already has over 100 preorders just

based on people walking in and seeing the manager's personal machine...for real). Hey Nintendo: Whatever you're working on next, make sure the screen is BIG, all right? It can be a deal breaker.

4) That said, while I own a DS, I won't be buying a PSP right away. Sure it's sexy and all, but Sony doesn't exactly have a good track record with first-generation gaming hardware. I can see it now...skipping drives, iPod-like battery life, etc. I haven't many complaints about the Japanese PSP (so far), so we'll see if my paranoia is justified....

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief



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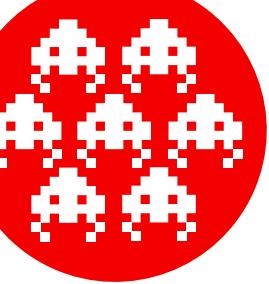
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DAN "SHOE" HSU, Editor-in-Chief

Do *EGM* editors really know their games, like Shoe claimed last month? Well, they did beat the *Halo 2* developers at their own game...six games to one. Or was Bungie being nice? Hmm... Read about the legendary battles on Shoe's blog. **1UP.com Blog:** egmshoe.1UP.com (check back to January) **Now Playing:** *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, *Halo 2* **Fave Genres:** Just about everything



MARK MACDONALD, Executive Editor

Attention gaming companies: How many times does Mark have to tell you? *He cannot be bought!* Especially not by sexy redheads (women) wearing only \$100 bill cash bikinis, that is for damn sure. Get the message? **1UP.com Blog:** mark.1UP.com **Now Playing:** *Ridge Racers* (PSP), *Lumines*, *Doom 3* **Fave Genres:** Action, Adventure, Shooters



JENNIFER TSAO, Managing Editor

One question has long puzzled scholars, scientists, and loyal *EGM* readers: Is Jennifer really Chinese? Writing this month's cover story inspired Jennifer to reveal the truth at last. Check her 1UP.com blog for answers...and photographic evidence! **1UP.com Blog:** egmjennifer.1UP.com **Now Playing:** *Jade Empire*, *Lumines* **Fave Genres:** RPG, Adventure, Action Sports, Rhythm-Action



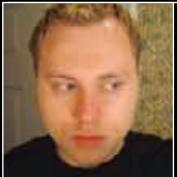
CRISPIN BOYER, Senior Editor

And to think Crispin was worried that the flow of great games dried up last November. *Resident Evil 4* sure obliterated that idea, and with *Doom 3*, *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, and *God of War* all hitting in March, it's like Christmas in spring. **1UP.com Blog:** egmcrispin.1UP.com **Now Playing:** *Doom 3*, *Rise of the Kasai*, *Project: Snowblind* **Fave Genres:** Action, Adventure, RPG



SHANE BETTENHAUSEN, Previews Editor

True story: Back in November, while Shane played *WarioWare Twisted!* at the office, accident-prone former intern Josh Cain asked if he could try it. Warily, Shane said, "OK, but don't drop my GBA." Within five GBA-spinning seconds, it hit the floor. **1UP.com Blog:** egmshane.1UP.com **Now Playing:** *Devil May Cry 3*, *Castlevania DS*, *Lumines*, *Aif* **Fave Genres:** Action, Adventure, RPG, Fighting, Karaoke



DEMIAN LINN, Reviews Editor

What a month. Playboy race car driver by day (*Gran Turismo 4*), special agent by night (*Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*), and hardcore nerd with no life for every other unaccounted-for minute (*World of Warcraft*)...someone needs to stage an intervention. **1UP.com Blog:** egmdemian.1UP.com **Now Playing:** *GT4*, *SC Chaos Theory*, *WOW* (PC), *NBA Street V3* **Fave Genres:** Action, Hockey, Racing, Fighting



BRYAN INTIHAR, News Editor

Bryan's attempts at updating his 1UP.com blog on a regular basis have been pathetic at best. But he promises to change all that. Just look at the boy—what drive, what determination, what unbridled enthusiasm! **1UP.com Blog:** egmbryan.1UP.com **Now Playing:** *Resident Evil 4*, *God of War*, *DK Jungle Beat* **Fave Genres:** Action, Adventure, Sports



ROBERT ASHLEY

MX vs. ATV helped Robert reclaim his redneck roots in Grand Prairie, TX.



JON DUDLAK

Jon just lays there with his arms crossed. Snow angels are for wussies.



SHAWN ELLIOTT

Shawn finds it strange that his plumbers unclog his toilet wearing oven mitts.



GREG FORD

Playing plenty of baseball games kept last season's celebration going strong for Greg.



KEVIN GIFFORD

EGM bids farewell to beloved Kevin, who's moving to Texas to become a ferret breeder.



JAMES LEE

The internship got weird for him when Crispin asked for the happy ending.



PATRICK MAURO

He thought about shaving the beard, until *MVP* and *MLB 2K5* came along.



CHRISTIAN NUTT

Going a month without an RPG to review, Christian feels completely lost.



JOHN RICCIARDI

Our man in Japan maintains the bridge of cultural understanding, a game at a time.



JUSTIN SPEER

On the exact day *Killer 7* is released, Justin will finish his novel. Maybe.



■ This month we decided to adopt a Korean boy and label him as an intern to help with reviews. The agency would only let us have one—so we decided to get more help from **OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE** and **1UP.COM**.

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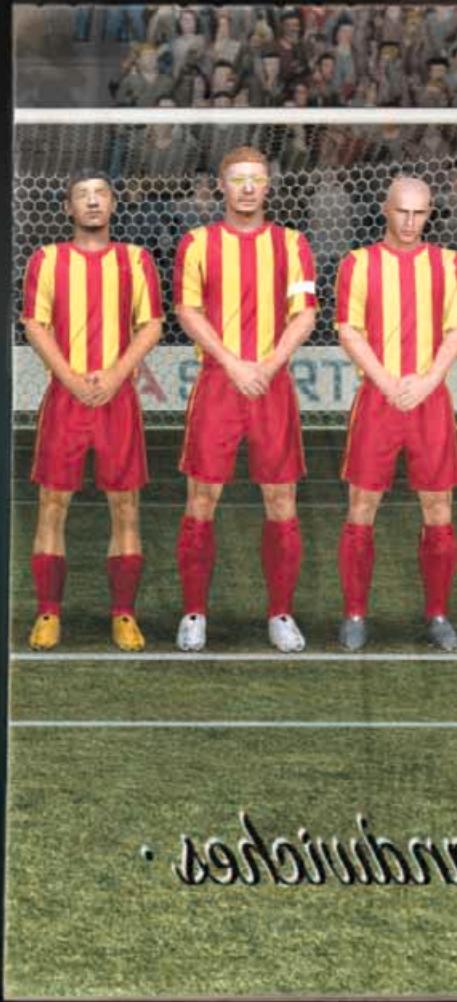
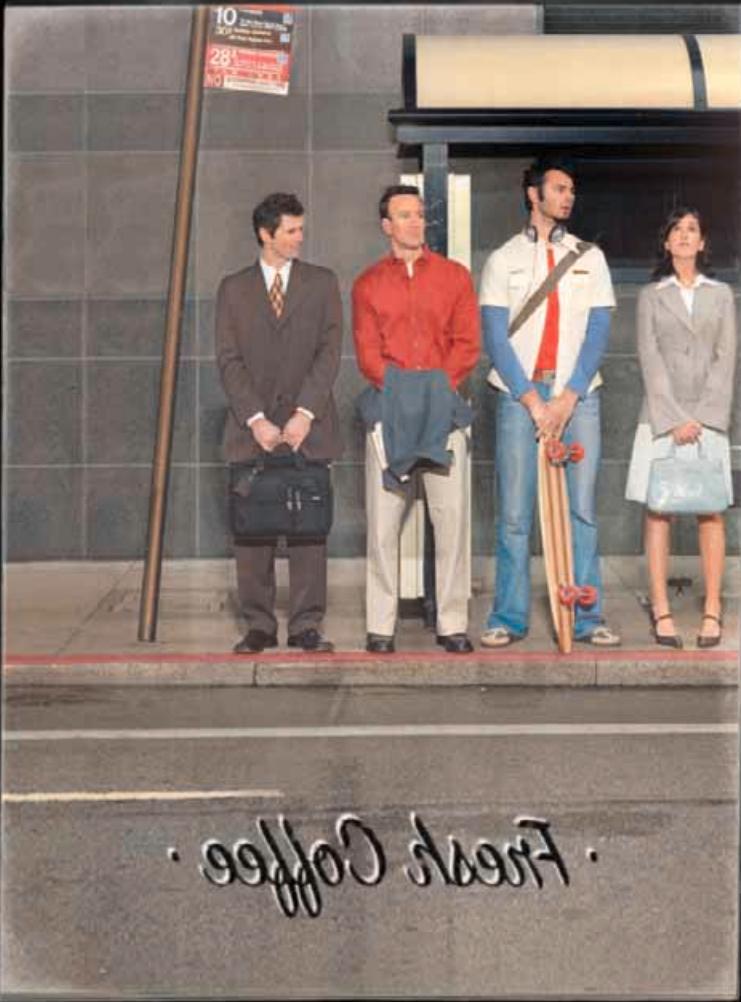
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Letters

ranting, raving, and a dualshock sock



EARTH IS NEXT

■ The world according to message board maven and *Battlefield Earth* fan n-sanic.

It's in the game. If not, it will be

First EA buys RenderWare, a set of software development tools used in everything from *Grand Theft Auto* to N-Gage games, then the NFL and ESPN licenses, and now 20 percent of competitor Ubisoft's stock. Sounds like a certain company that sells operating systems, don't you think?

—Jean-Daniel Rondeau

Meanwhile, rival Sega Sports starts talks with the WNBA and *A League of Their Own* bullpen...

Plea bargain

Ever since EA's NFL exclusivity agreement, everyone's been accusing the megapublisher of monopolistic practices. It was the NFL, however, that started shopping its license around to publishers, and pretty much everyone put in a bid. The blame lies with the league. EA simply did what it had to do—and what any company would have done—in order to stay competitive.

—Eric Hysen

Letter of the month

Sexes of the battle

The Grudge Match in your February issue [*Halo 2* vs. Your Girlfriend, *EGM* #188 page 27] was a hoot. On the other hand, I was disappointed that you didn't give equal consideration to us Spartans-in-pink. Here's my take on the contest from a girl's-eye view:

Preparation

Boyfriend: You spend two hours prepping for a night out, and he doesn't notice your new dress

Halo 2: Swank armor makes "bad hair days" things of the past

Point: *Halo 2*

Maintenance

Boyfriend: No amount of nagging will ever make him pick up those dirty socks

Halo 2: Pesky corpses spontaneously disappear

Point: *Halo 2*

Road control

Boyfriend: Will never, ever let you drive his sports car

Halo 2: Rear-mounted turret lures road hogs away from the driver's seat

Point: *Halo 2*

Undercover work

Boyfriend: Won't talk about his true feelings, even after years of dating

Halo 2: Ability to masquerade as a male online reveals that men really aren't that deep

Point: *Halo 2*

Staying power

Halo 2: Exciting rounds last as long as you'd like, even after months of play

Boyfriend: You wish

Point: *Halo 2*

Precaution

Halo 2: Picking up new friends is discreet and safe

Boyfriend: Picking up new friends can lead to painful rashes

Point: *Halo 2*

—Linnea Boyev



Touché, Linnea. Let the guys accuse us of giving all of our gifts to the girls, but it was your whip-smart wit that earned you the Letter of the Month and a free game of our choosing. Whisper "thanks" while snapping our necks online, won't you?

It takes a Raven to break a hex

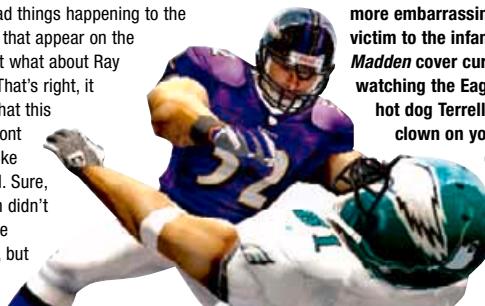
Eddie George, Daunte Culpepper, Marshall Faulk, and Michael Vick—all have fallen to the *Madden* curse (you know, the thing about bad things happening to the athletes that appear on the box). But what about Ray Lewis? That's right, it seems that this year's front man broke the spell. Sure, his team didn't make the playoffs, but blame

that on mediocre offense, not videogame mumbo jumbo.

—Jared Shull

Nice catch, Jared. But what's more embarrassing: falling victim to the infamous *Madden* cover curse, or watching the Eagles' resident hot dog Terrell Owens clown on your intro

dance after crossing the goal line? We say the latter.



Beat at their own game

According to Bungie.net, *EGM*'s *Halo 2* clan recently swept the developer at its own game in a series of multiplayer matches. One of their sullen members says it best: "Like that guy who shot himself in the face with a nail gun, we never knew what hit us, but the pain lingered on well after the fact." Sounds smoother than a Playboy wax, but I want the story from your perspective.

—Patrick Riley

Sure thing, Patrick. Visit Editor-in-Chief Dan "The Man" Hsu's January 27 blog at egmshoe.1UP.com for his humble take on the tournament. >

POST OFFICE

Ranting and raving from our message boards, boards.1UP.com (look for *Electronic Gaming Monthly's* forums)



If looks could kill
Resident Evil 4 collector's edition chain saw controller looks sharp, but can it cut it where it counts?

Darkslim: "With this, *Final Fantasy X2's* twin Tiny Bee controllers, and the colossal *Steel Battalion* cockpit, I could rule the universe."

SolidSnake64: "Someone splattered a jelly sandwich all over it."

CoRhyno: "I bought it. At the moment, I'm wishing that it were real so I could kill myself."

Chocmog 33: "Use it to introduce a pal to *Animal Crossing*; tell 'im it's the only possible way to play it."

SolidSnake64: "He'd be cutting down trees nonstop."

Sound off
Overhear something silly in *Halo 2* online?

MagicThighs: "Surprise them by surprise!"

Xavi: "'Dawg, swipe dat crip rag,' said a bozo referring to the blue flag. Also: Guy with a brute shot tries to melee an Aussie and misses. The Aussie, who's holding a plasma sword, says, 'That's not a knife; this is a knife,' and runs him through."

Spreet2Point0: "So this baby seal walks into a club...."

lamthegamer01: "One guy shoots me and says to his teammates, 'Quick, get his wallet!'"

Agonotheta: "I saw someone fragging fools while broadcasting the techno song from that bunk Six Flags commercial."

CONTACT EGM

How could we have rated that game so high/low? Where are x and y games? Contact us at EGM@ziffdavis.com and you might just find out, or write:

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■ Is there a gamer in the house?

► **Sweet medicine**

Saving you the dull details, I snapped my forearm, breaking both bones. But here's the thing—after putting plates in, my doctor tells me to do physical therapy, and that one of the best methods is to play videogames. Honestly, my arm healed in half the time it should have, all because I lounged around, controller in hand.

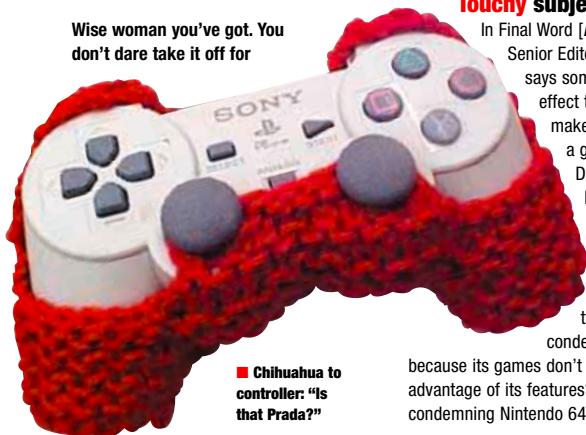
—Pete Battaglia

Quite the yarn

Peep this pic of my wife's latest creation: something to keep my controller warm on cold days.

—Eric Greaves

Wise woman you've got. You don't dare take it off for



■ Chihuahua to controller: "Is that Prada?"

SASQUATCH WATCH

Not yeti

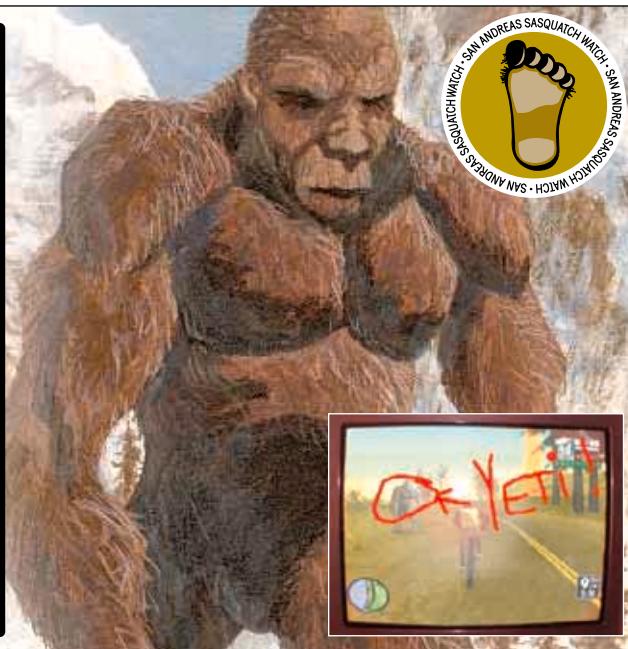
Reader Ryan Chacon supposedly "risked life and limb in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* to send in photographic evidence of the fabled San Andreas yeti." [EGM #188] I'm thinking he simply stole a Sasquatch painting from my website and Photoshopped it into his screenshot. The pic is blurry and it's hard to tell (probably a Bigfoot sighting thing), but the shape and shading look the same. Next time, don't settle for anything less than a man in a monkey suit.

—Jason

It's in the book

Publisher Rockstar denies the existence of Sasquatch in its game, but get this: *GTA: San Andreas'* instruction manual thanks "Big foot" on page 23. Can you say "cover-up"?

—Austin L.



fear of upsetting her; yet wouldn't be caught dead with it in the company of friends. The result: less play for you, more time for her. And the whole time you're thinking she did you a favor. Simply brilliant.

"...don't settle for anything less than a man in a monkey suit."

—Jason

Touchy subject

In Final Word [EGM #188], Senior Editor Crispin Boyer says something to the effect that "Until game-makers come up with a good use for the DS' touch screen, I'm not getting one." The statement needs some serious re-thinking. Why condemn a system

because its games don't take full advantage of its features? Isn't that like condemning Nintendo 64 because *Mario*

64 didn't use all four controller ports? Whether or not software uses the DS's touch screen shouldn't be a factor in determining its quality.

—Richard

Crispin sez: "I'd be with you, Richard, if you were talking about conventional hardware. But Nintendo's DS is built and marketed around a gimmick—a totally touchable second screen—that most of the games in its under-whelming library barely use. With the Game Boy Advance still fulfilling my portable needs just fine—plus a follow-up to that system in the works from Nintendo—why drop \$150 on another handheld that isn't living up to its potential?"

Oops!

In our 2004 Year of the Game awards, we mixed up *Metroid: Fusion* screens with handheld winner *Metroid: Zero Mission*. Sorry, Samus. Also, we mistakenly claimed Sophia Coppola didn't star in the original *Godfather* flick—turns out she portrayed Carlo & Connie's baby boy. Go figure.

He's not buying it

Some eBay seller says he's auctioning a setup that lets you play Nintendo DS games on your TV, along with *Ridge Racer* and *Rayman*. BS? You bet—it's a Nintendo 64—but the guy's got a point.

—Martin Tolby

GAME DESIGN-O-RAMA

For every witty, why-didn't-we-think-of-that Design-O-Rama entry, we receive a dozen or so flushable stinkers. Let this month serve as a cautionary tale:



MAX STRAYNE: THE FALL OF MAX'S TURD

Guess what vigilante cop Max did between sequels? S*** his ass out! Start off in a state of utmost constipation, searching for bottles of laxative, then perform exciting slow-motion dives over crappers. Timing is critical, as clean-up duty is a doozy.

—Levi Gehmair



■ Only on eBay: every bit as rare and real as the grilled cheese Virgin Mary.

FEATURING THE VOICES OF
ANNA PAQUIN ALFRED MOLINA AND PATRICK STEWART



FROM THE DIRECTOR OF AKIRA
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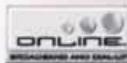


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PlayStation 2



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SYSTEM FORECAST 2K5

EGM breaks out the tarot cards and reads every major system's near future

>> ATTENTION ALL CHEAPSKATES: IF YOU'RE STILL WAITING FOR THE PRICE OF THE CURRENT CONSOLES TO DIP EVEN LOWER, WELL, YOU'RE PROBABLY OUT OF LUCK. THE FINANCIAL



XBOX



PLAYSTATION 2



PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Illustrations by Mike Reisel

It didn't take a late-night phone call to Miss Cleo to know that 2004 would be a banner year for the gaming biz. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and *Halo 2*, the two most anticipated releases of the year, more than lived up to the hype, while updates to other popular franchises like *Prince of Persia*, *Need for Speed*, and *Metroid Prime* made for happy holidays indeed.

But '05 looks to be a whole different animal. Sure, plenty of big sequels are on the way toward the end of the year, with new installments in the *Zelda*, *Final Fantasy*, and *Kingdom Hearts* series leading the charge. But thanks to development delays and games held back to avoid competing with *GTA* and *Halo 2*, the spring is uncharacteristically packed with triple-A hits; just check out this issue's preview and review sections

if you need further proof. And let's not forget the biggest handheld war in...well, ever, is almost here. On March 24, current console leader Sony enters the market with its supersexy and multifunctional PlayStation Portable. Nintendo will counter with some of its biggest franchises and exciting new games for its anything-but-conventional DS.

Throughout the next few pages, we'll take a look at where all the major systems

stand, and more importantly, grab our deck of custom-made tarot cards for a peek ahead at what's in store for the rest of the year. Oh, and if you're wondering why Xbox 2 ain't part of this reading (as rumors persist that Microsoft will launch its next console during the fall), even Miss Cleo's psychic powers aren't strong enough to predict the fate of a machine never before seen.

—Bryan Intihar ►

ANALYSTS WE SPOKE TO DON'T EXPECT ANY PRICE DROPS FOR PS2 AND GAMECUBE THIS YEAR. XBOX MIGHT SEE A SALE IF MICROSOFT DOES BRING OUT A NEW CONSOLE IN '05... >>



PLAYSTATION 2

It's good to be the king

Current Situation

More than 80 million PS2s sold worldwide in roughly five years—yeah, we'd say Sony has done a few things right with its current home system. "I think the biggest challenge that I face—right now, really—is the unprecedented demand for PS2 after the price dropped to \$149 [last May]," says Sony Computer Entertainment America President Kaz Hirai, "and trying to play catch-up with the demand." Whether you've just picked up Sony's console or have owned one since launch, you'll have several new high-profile titles to choose from this spring, including the ultimate driving sim *Gran Turismo 4* (finally!), plus the action games *God of War* and *Rise of the Kasai*.

Looking Ahead

As our tarot card clearly illustrates, PS2 will be overflowing with triple-A caliber games throughout the year, many of which are exclusive to the console. Square Enix will grab the spotlight on more than one occasion, thanks to its triple-headed RPG monster (*Final Fantasy XII*, *Kingdom Hearts II*, and *Dragon Quest VIII*) and the first *FFVII* spin-off, *Dirge of Cerberus*. For those who

desire something a bit...err, make that *really* different, keep an eye out this fall for *Wanda and the Colossus*, the next project from the team behind cult-classic *Ico*. And while nothing has been confirmed, don't be surprised to see some PS2 titles whose game saves are compatible with a PlayStation Portable version.

But everything ain't perfect. PS2 online gaming remains way below Xbox Live standards (in terms of feature set and ease of use), with no clear indication from Sony that things will improve anytime soon. Plus, the PS2 hard drive is quickly becoming a collector's item, as *Final Fantasy XI* is currently the only title that requires this pricey piece of hardware, with no other big games on the horizon.



Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII

Notable Games

Dirge of Cerberus: FFXII • Fall '05
Vampiric antihero Vincent Valentine assumes the lead role in Square Enix's third-person action game.

Dragon Quest VIII • Fall '05
Square's Enix's other gigantic RPG franchise gets a major graphical upgrade.

Final Fantasy XII • Fall '05
FF Tactics creator Yasumi Matsuno puts his own unique touch (like a new combat system) on the blockbuster RPG series.

Kingdom Hearts II • September '05
The wonderful worlds of Disney and *Final Fantasy* collide again in this action-RPG.

Resident Evil 4 • Fall '05
Let's hope Capcom's survival-horrorfest looks as damn scary on Sony's machine.

Wanda and the Colossus • Fall '05
The makers of *Ico* deliver an adventure in which you climb on top of creatures that dwarf the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man.



Conker: Live & Reloaded

XBOX

Only the good die young



Current Situation

Halo 2's release last November did more than please every Xbox owner patiently waiting for their messiah—Master Chief—to return. It also scared the pants off most publishers (with the exception of LucasArts and its follow-up to *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*) from releasing their top-notch Xbox-exclusive titles during the holidays. All of which have made this spring a great time to own an Xbox, with such releases as the beautiful first-person shooter *Doom 3*, the martial arts RPG *Jade Empire*, and the *Gran Turismo*-esque *Forza Motorsport*. And for all you *Halo 2* players still fraggin' via Xbox Live, developer Bungie will soon make available new downloadable maps for its popular first-person shooter.

Looking Ahead

Well you've got... Uh, well, let's see, there's always... Sorry, but aside from a port of *GTA: San Andreas* (coming in June), Xbox's next big visitor might be the Grim Reaper. "There are lots of good reasons why anybody would consider holding off on [new Xbox game] announcements," Microsoft Game Studios General Manager Shane Kim told us last November, before rattling off a few not-very-good reasons (timing concerns, changing schedules, etc.). When we inquired again recently, a Microsoft spokesbot replied only, "Right now we're focused on delivering incredible first-party games for Xbox including *Jade Empire*, *Forza*, and *Conker* in 2005. We are committed to providing current and future Xbox customers with exciting gameplay experiences in 2005." Mmm-hmm.

The company's continued refusal to reveal any new Xbox games (and we've received the same song and dance from third parties) has us believing the rumors: Microsoft will indeed launch its Xbox successor by the end of the year. ➤

Notable Games

Conker: Live & Reloaded • May '05
After first appearing on N64, the four-mouthed platformer comes to Xbox with spruced-up visuals and online play.

Doom 3 • March '05 — This first-person shooter is absolute hell...and that's a good thing (see our review on page 132).

Forza Motorsport • May '05
Microsoft's home-brewed driving sim laps *Gran Turismo* in at least one area—it features online contests.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas • June '05 — Carjack your way through three cities and become a gang star.

Jade Empire • April '05 — Read our cover story (page 102) to learn about the yin and yang of BioWare's action-RPG.

Splinter Cell Chaos Theory • March '05
Sneak around town with a pal in the all-new cooperative mode. And peep our exclusive review on page 126.

➤ HIT THE NITROUS—ELECTRONIC ARTS ANNOUNCED THAT *NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2*, ITS LIGHTNING-FAST RACER, WILL HEAD TO NINTENDO DS DURING THIS SPRING... ➤

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GERMAN

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ITALIAN

Nossignore, non ho mai avuto rapporti con sua figlia.

SPANISH

¡No señor, no he tenido ningún tipo de relaciones exteriores con su hija!

TAG CONSIDER YOURSELF WARNED



GAMECUBE

A glimmer of hope

Current Situation

Nintendo Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing Reggie Fils-Aime is very clear about the company's present console strategy: "We continually put games out there that show off what GameCube can do, show it off in a very strong way, and continue to push the envelope." Problem is, Nintendo is usually the only one believing in its approach, as third parties continue to throw most of their support toward the competing home systems in early '05. GameCube scored a major coup already this year with Capcom's *Resident Evil 4*, but all other notable exclusives due in the next few months come from the house that Mario built: *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat*, *Nintendo Pennant Chase Baseball*, and *Fire Emblem*.

Looking Ahead

Basically, look for a repeat of last year: GameCube will see only a fraction of the games that come to PS2 and Xbox, Nintendo still won't jump online (even though that whole GC-GBA connectivity feature turned out to be a bust), and strong first-party games will leak out every couple months. Probably no other title is more anticipated in '05 than the next *Legend of Zelda* adventure, which has a new, realistic visual style. Nintendo will also appease pocket-monster trainers with the first full console *Pokémon* RPG. As for the rest of the lineup, you'll see a number of familiar Nintendo characters and franchises in the form of *Mario Baseball*, *Advance Wars: Under Fire*, and a new *Kirby* game.



■ *The Legend of Zelda*

Notable Games

Advance Wars: Under Fire • Fall '05

The GBA-born strategy series gets more action with its move to the big screen. **Kirby • Fall '05** — The pink sucker returns to Nintendo's game box in an all-new action-adventure title. Expect some multiplayer modes, too.

Mario Baseball • Fall '05 — The gaming icon hopes a storylike challenge mode helps him clear the fences. **Odama • Fall '05** — It's a war-themed pinball game where banging on the DK Bongo controller raises your troops' morale. Yep, it's a weird one, all right.

Pokémon RPG • Fall '05 — Just like the GBA games, but now in 3D. **The Legend of Zelda • Fall '05** — Link gets a fresh coat of mature-looking paint. And the game may receive a Teen rating due to the increased violence—who says GameCube is only for the kiddies?



■ *Advance Wars: Under Fire*



■ *Castlevania DS*



■ *Mario Kart DS*

NINTENDO DS

Now the real test begins

Current Situation

"The consumer doesn't want more of the same," says Nintendo Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing Reggie Fils-Aime. "They want something truly innovative." So far, it seems like Reggie is right—Nintendo has sold roughly 3 million units of its dual-screen handheld worldwide since its debut last November. Take into account DS's relatively lackluster launch lineup, and those sales figures are that much more impressive.

Unfortunately, the DS software library isn't looking much better during these first few months of '05. As usual, it's a sprinkling of Nintendo-made games (such as the recently released *WarioWare: Touched!* and *Yoshi Touch & Go*, due in March), and that's

about it. This as Sony's PlayStation Portable arrives in game stores on March 24.

Looking Ahead

Like a distant traveler with his destination in sight, DS owners will definitely see a boatload of titles this fall that take advantage of the machine's capabilities (touch pad, microphone, and Wi-Fi). Nintendo will do its part with showstoppers like *Mario Kart DS*, a portable *Animal Crossing*, and a new *Super Mario Bros.* DS also has a spark of solid third-party support, including a new *Castlevania* from Konami and two *Final Fantasy* installments (*FF: Crystal Chronicles* and *FFIII*) from Square Enix.



Notable Games

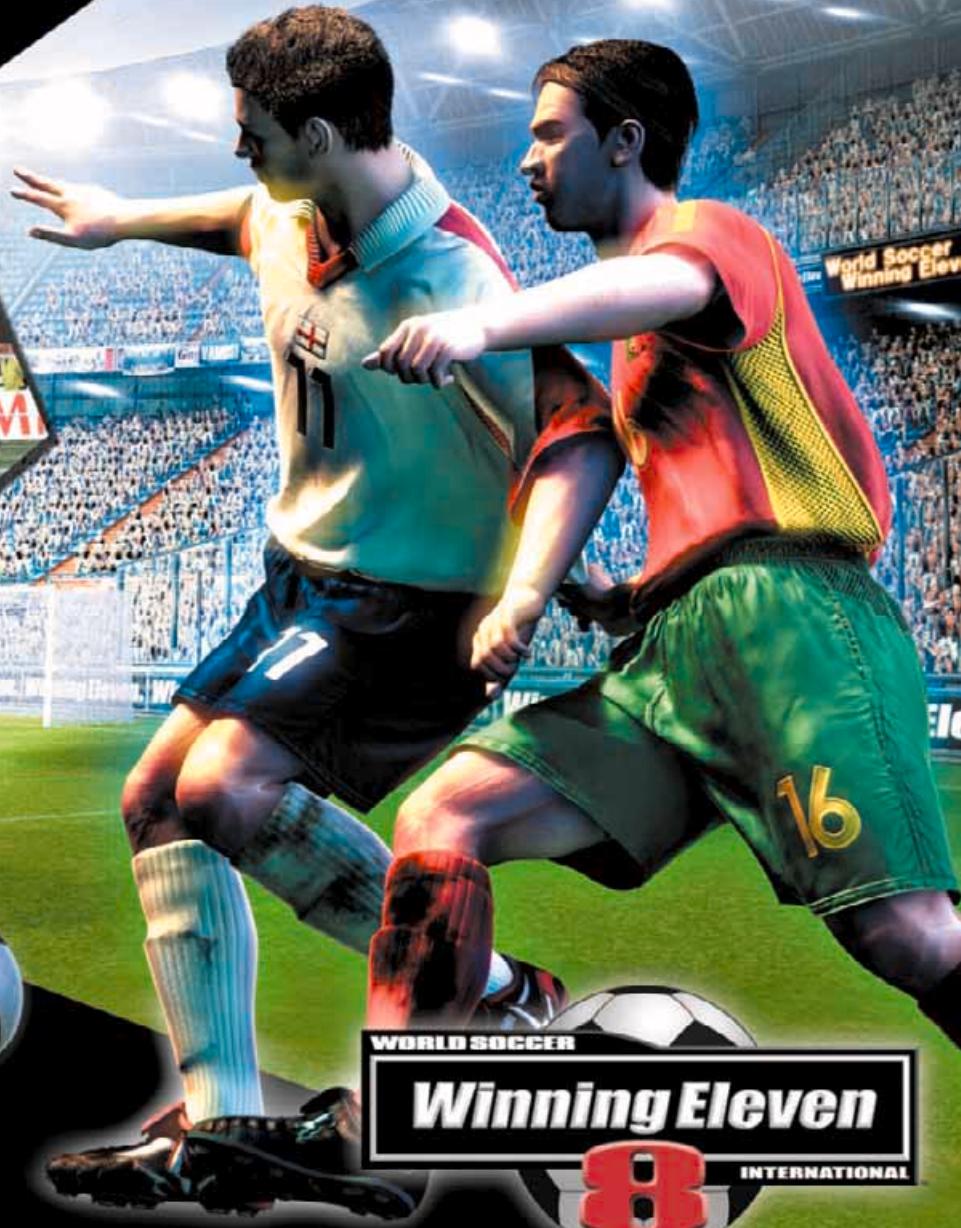
Advance Wars DS • Fall '05 — Thanks to the machine's two screens, you can keep an eye on both air and ground attacks in this strategy war game. **Animal Crossing DS • Fall '05** — Use the DS's wireless feature to visit your bud's village and trade decorating secrets.

Castlevania DS • Fall '05 — Konami's acclaimed adventure series uses the DS's lower touch screen to cast magic spells on the undead. **New Super Mario Bros. • Fall '05** This one looks more old than new, as the plumbers return to a life in 2D.

Mario Kart DS • Fall '05 — Not much changes as Mario and co. race to DS, which is just fine by us. **Metroid Prime Hunters • Spring '05** Rather than a solo adventure like the two console installments, this *Prime* is all about the multiplayer component. ➤

>>> FINAL FANTASY CREATOR HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI HAS CONFIRMED THAT HIS NEW DEVELOPMENT STUDIO MIST WALKER IS NOW CREATING A GAME FOR NINTENDO DS.... >>>

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PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Like father, like son

Current Situation

To say that Sony Computer Entertainment America President Kaz Hirai is confident about the company's chances in the portable market would be an understatement. "PSP will elevate portable entertainment out of the handheld-gaming ghetto," Hirai said this past January. "And Sony is the only company that can do it." While we question whether on-the-go gaming is really stuck in the slums, there's no doubt that Sony's slick handheld will instill a bit of high society into this sector of the biz. Thanks to the machine's raw power and big, beautiful screen, PSP can produce some truly incredible visuals. It also sports a plethora of nongaming features, including the ability to watch movies, play MP3s, and showcase digital pics.

The early days of PSP (which lands on store shelves March 24 for \$249.99—see sidebar for more info) will be as exciting as the months to come. Expect plenty of good titles at launch from Sony and third parties,

including *Ridge Racer*, *Wipeout Pure*, the strategic card-playing *Metal Gear Ac!d*, and a handful of EA Sports games.

Looking Ahead

Sony's success with both of its consoles is due in large part to the company's overwhelming ability to attract third parties and maintain a steady flow of new software throughout every year. PSP has learned from its other PlayStation family members and adopted a similar strategy, as its '05 release calendar is already looking full. Shortly after launch, we'll see new installments in Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto* and *Midnight Club* series, and later this year, Sony will bring out a PSP version of *Gran Turismo 4*.

Also, its '05 lineup should get even beefier after this May's Electronic Entertainment Expo (the industry's annual trade show), as several publishers tell us that they plan on supporting PSP as much as any home console. Let's just hope that includes more original titles and fewer PS1/PS2 ports.



■ Gran Turismo 4: Mobile



■ Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix

PSP: The Launch

The wait for Sony's handheld is almost over, as the company has announced a March 24 launch date for PSP. It'll cost \$249.99 and include a 32MB memory stick (which would've been a necessary purchase if you planned on saving your games' progress), headphones with remote control, a battery pack, an AC adapter, a protective case, and a sampler disc. Also, the first million peeps who prepurchase a PSP will receive a copy of the *Spider-Man 2* flick that you can watch on the handheld. As for the games, 24 titles (each costing \$40-\$50) will land on store shelves within a few weeks of the machine's release.

Notable Games

Grand Theft Auto • Spring '05

So far, all we know is that you'll grab your slim jim and head back to *GTA3*'s East Coast metropolis, Liberty City.

Gran Turismo 4: Mobile • Fall '05

Hone your driving skills while on the go (but not when you're really driving, silly).

Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition •

Spring '05 — Pimp out high-end rides in Rockstar's stylish street racer.

Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix •

March '05 — Activision's skateboarding franchise grinds onto the PSP with four exclusive city levels.

Twisted Metal: Head On • March '05

Engage in wireless vehicular combat with up to seven of your demented friends.

Wipeout Pure • March '05 — An absolute balls-to-the-wall futuristic racer that's brimming with eye candy and techno tunes.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Left howlin' at the moon

Current Situation

Sure, DS is currently the golden child of the Nintendo portable household, but the company hasn't completely forgotten about its other handheld...at least for the next few months. Arriving in March is the rapid-action *WarioWare*: *Twisted* along with the traveling board game *Mario Party Advance*. Later this spring, another strategy-filled war's a-brewin' in *Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones*, and you'll gotta catch 'em all (again) in *Pokémon Emerald*.

Looking Ahead

We've seen the future, and it looks bleak for GBA. While the DS will receive an abundant number of titles during the latter months, there's only one GBA game worth mentioning—*DK: King of Swing*. This lack of software can only mean two things: In its fight against PSP, Nintendo believes the smart move in '05 is putting most of its resources into DS, and it's busy working on the next Game Boy machine.



■ DK: King of Swing

Notable Games

DK: King of Swing • Fall '05 — The famous ape swings through a pint-sized jungle in yet another platformer.

Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones • Spring '05 — Hide the women and children—this strategy series heads back to war on Nintendo's inferior handheld.

Mario Party Advance • March '05

With 60 minigames, there's no need to stay home if you want to par-tay.

Pokémon Emerald • May '05 Has the thought of finally stopping Team Aqua and Team Magma kept you up at night? Yeah, same here. 🐉



■ Pokémon Emerald

>> ACTIVISION RECENTLY ACQUIRED DEVELOPER VICARIOUS VISIONS, WHOSE RECENT PROJECTS FOR THE PUBLISHER INCLUDE SPIDER-MAN 2 (DS) AND THE XBOX PORT OF DOOM 3... >>

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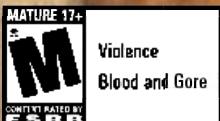
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PlayStation 2

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5

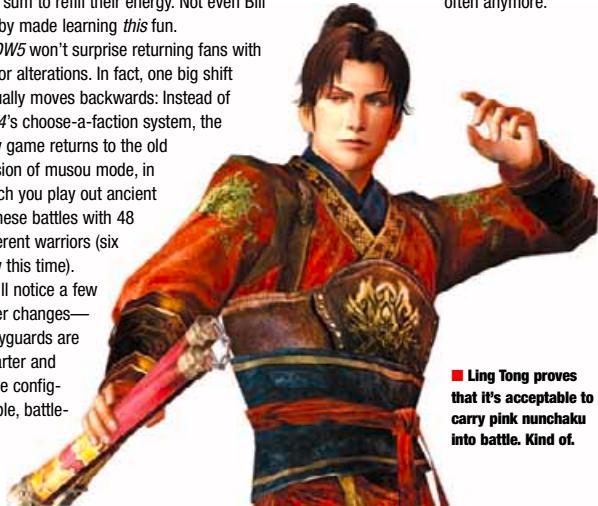
Chinese History 501

Publisher: Koei
Developer: Omega Force
Release Date: March 2005

No game series has done more to make sophomore-year world history more interesting than *Dynasty Warriors*. In the textbooks, all you see are these weird mustachioed guys with hard-to-pronounce names, but in the game they're alive—spearing five soldiers at once, landing nine-hit combos on enemy generals, and picking up plates of dim sum to refill their energy. Not even Bill Cosby made learning *this* fun.

DW5 won't surprise returning fans with major alterations. In fact, one big shift actually moves backwards: Instead of *DW4*'s choose-a-faction system, the new game returns to the old version of musou mode, in which you play out ancient Chinese battles with 48 different warriors (six new this time). You'll notice a few other changes—bodyguards are smarter and more configurable, battle-

field strongholds have greater strategic importance than before, and you can train tigers (yes, tigers) to fight for your side—but the adrenaline-laced fighting scenes remain largely unchanged, which means a whole lotta monotonous hacking and slashing. At least Koei's promised to improve the draw distance, which means soldiers won't disappear in front of your face so often anymore.



■ Ling Tong proves that it's acceptable to carry pink nunchaku into battle. Kind of.

GRUDGE MATCH

It's chaos!



SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

THE CHAOS THEORY

Spy vet Sam Fisher is a complex dude, but can he possibly be as hard to wrap your noodle around as a theoretical explanation of subatomic particulate behavior? Put on your thinking cap, Poindexter, and let's sort it out.

POSTER BOY

	Sneaky, sculpted danger-hound Sam Fisher Advantage: <i>Splinter Cell</i>	Ladies' man Henri Poincaré	
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FOLLOWERS

	Young fellas who can quote Col. Lambert like it's scripture	Eggheads the world over Advantage: <i>The Chaos Theory</i>	
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ON THE ONE HAND...

	Reinforces faith in American ability to covertly snap some necks	Explains life through pretty pictures Advantage: <i>The Chaos Theory</i>	
--	--	--	--

ON THE OTHER...

	Makes the real armed forces seem dull Advantage: <i>Splinter Cell</i>	Inspired Kutcher-laden pseudoscience movie <i>The Butterfly Effect</i>	
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COMPETITION

	<i>Metal Gear</i> 's Snake	God and his earthly posse Advantage: <i>The Chaos Theory</i>	
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WINNER: THE CHAOS THEORY

The third *Splinter Cell* may wow us with its intricate web of zigzagging, politically charged plotlines (not to mention Sam Fisher's hallway acrobatics), but we're still calling this Grudge Match for weird science.

NEWS TIDBITS: WHAT TO READ WHEN SITTING ON THE CAN



Mario Gets Jiggy Wit' It

Forget Trimsipa—Nintendo's plumber will help you bust a move to shed those love handles in *Dance Dance Revolution With Mario*. In this GC-exclusive edition of Konami's dance game (expected in late '05), you'll manipulate an onscreen Mario and others from the Mushroom Kingdom with your skills on the dance pad.

Alchemy Class Is Back in Session

Fullmetal Alchemist just came out in January, but apparently, it's never too early for a sequel. Square Enix's action-RPG follow-up—subtitled *Curse of the Crimson Elixir*—hits the PS2 in May with new cartoony visuals and a tweaked combat system, making it easier to command Edward's steel-plated younger bro, Alphonse.



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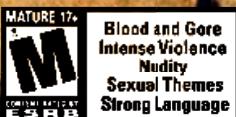
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TEAM LinG - Live, Informative, Non-cost and Genuine!



■ PSP

DEATH, JR.

His dad's totally gonna kill him if he finds out

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Backbone
Release Date: March 2005

This whimsical platformer initially turned heads in March 2004 when Sony showcased it as the first concrete example of the PlayStation Portable's graphical prowess. Yet, quickly after *Death, Jr.* appeared on the scene, it vanished—no screenshots, no hands-on impressions, no word on a potential publisher...nada. Now, with the PSP's American release mere weeks away, the gun-totin' son of the Grim Reaper (aka DJ) emerges at Konami ready to battle for your launch line-up dollars.

Despite its wacky characters and apocalyptic story line (DJ and his oddball pals accidentally unleash a horde of demons on earth), *Death, Jr.* isn't prohibitively weird. In fact, it's a fairly straightforward pick-up-and-play action game. "The concept started out as 'Mario with a gun,'" says Producer Chris Charla. "I always thought...wouldn't Mario be better if he had a gun?" So, DJ hops and bops, but he also dishes out hot lead with six different guns and shreds foes with his trusty scythe. And although the game adheres to some genre conventions

(jumping puzzles, bosses, weapon power-ups), you won't do any mindless collecting. "I promise that there's not 100 of anything in the entire game: no gems, rings, or coins," says Charla.

Assuming it's a success, developer Backbone plans a full *Death, Jr.* product frenzy (see sidebar) and future sequels. "We would love to expand DJ to every platform on earth," Charla says. "In fact, Game.com is probably the next version, followed by Lynx, Atari 5200, Supervision, and Game Gear." He's kidding. (Or is he?)

You can't escape *Death, Jr.*

Even though his game isn't even out yet, *Death, Jr.*'s lovable son is already planning his marketing blitz. First up is a *Death, Jr.* comic book series from Image that explains his bizarre backstory. Next up: a line of action figures from Gentle Giant (you might have seen its top-quality *Star Wars* statues and busts), a series of cuddly plush toys of DJ and his pals, and (eventually) a *Death, Jr.* feature film. Can a breakfast cereal be too far behind? We think not. 



■ It's not all gothic gunplay—DJ swings a mean scythe, too.



■ *Death, Jr.*, teaching kids to immolate overturned school buses.



►► WHEN THQ'S *MOTOGP* SERIES DRIVES BACK TO XBOX IN MAY, THIS THIRD EDITION WILL INCLUDE THE ALL-NEW EXTREME MODE, FEATURING STREET COURSES IN JAPAN AND FRANCE... ►►

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EGM INTERNATIONAL

Back to the days when arcades had ashtrays



■ PS2

THE KING OF FIGHTERS '94 RE-BOU

The original *King of Fighters*, huh? Yep—after 10 years and 11 arcade installments, SNK's just remade the original *KOF* for 2D-mad console owners. Marvel at alleged ninja Mai Shiranui's breasts! Stare in amazement at the "USA Team," an all-American fighting trio that attacks with sports-themed moves! It's all here in its original glory, and if you want some variety, set this fighter to arrange mode, which features 3D backgrounds and fully redrawn, high-resolution characters.

Sounds classic. Where can I get a copy?

In Japan, that's where. SNK's U.S. branch has no announced plans for this remake; it's got its hands full releasing ports of more current *KOF* games.



■ PS2

TECMO HIT PARADE

Tecmo made games before *Dead or Alive*?

It sure did. In fact, Tecmo is one of the oldest game makers around, entering the biz in 1981 with oft-overlooked shooter *Pleiads*. This collection of seven moldy arcade oldies covers nearly everything the company released in the '80s, from early first-person shooter *Senjyo* to better-known hits like *Solomon's Key* and *Bomb Jack*. Shame it had to cut out the latter's lovely rendition of the Beatles' "Lady Madonna" for copyright reasons.

I've never heard of any of these. Yeah? Well, that's not the only thing keeping this hit parade from the American charts—the price, a whopping 6090 yen (\$59), could be hard to swallow in this era of free emulation.

WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

When I was a boy, there were three things I wanted to be, but once my mother explained that one was medically and ethically impossible, I was down to two: pirate and superhero. And thanks to these games, I can now fulfill both dreams.

Sid Meier's Pirates!



It's got an exclamation point in the title, so it must be superexciting! It has courtly dancing minigames—how irresistible! OK, so maybe *Sid Meier's Pirates!* isn't a white-hot shot of adrenaline to the jugular; maybe it's just a bunch of straightforward minigames wrapped up in a very slick package—but when those minigames are this consistently entertaining, it's pretty easy to lose hours of your life happily succumbing to *Pirates'* overwhelming sense of delight.

Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich



The first *Freedom Force* lovingly lampooned and paid respect to classic Golden Age comics in a squad-based, strategy role-playing game—yeah, it's a mouthful, but it went down so very smoothly thanks to its superb graphics, great sense of humor, and deep strategic gameplay with tons of replayability. In this continuation of the series (hitting in March), our intrepid heroes are propelled back in time to fight alongside new '40s-style good guys and those most reliable of villains—the Nazis. This will be one of the best PC games of early 2005, guaranteed.

—Robert Coffey, Computer Gaming World

UNDER THE RADAR

Platform: PlayStation 2
 Publisher: NIS America
 Developer: Gust
 Release Date: April 2005

ATELIER IRIS: ETERNAL MANA

Even if you've heard of *Atelier Iris*, you probably can't pronounce it. It's easy to understand why NIS America is taking a chance with this strategy-RPG, though: *Iris* blends the beautiful, manga-inspired art and quirky characters of *Phantom Brave* with old-school *Zelda*-style dungeons and a *Final Fantasy X*-like turn-based battle system. A complex alchemy system could scare RPG newbies away, though: You'll have to carefully mix collected mana in order to create new skills and equipment, all of which can be used in vividly animated battle sequences. While *Iris'* name may be a tongue twister, its action is all about saving the world by kicking ass in style—something anyone can appreciate.



>> FIGHTING THE WAR ON DRUGS IS GETTING A WHOLE LOT CHEAPER, AS MIDWAY WILL RELEASE *NARC* (PS2/XB) THIS MARCH FOR THE WALLET-FRIENDLY PRICE OF \$20... >>>

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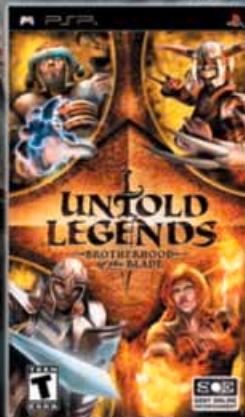
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■ Japanese criminal courts are like ours, just with better hair.

OBJECTIONS OVERRULED

Law & Order meets Dragon Ball Z as Capcom judges **Gyakuten Saiban** worthy of American release

Argue any reason why *Gyakuten Saiban* should never be released outside its native Japan—Capcom General Manager Tatsuya Minami is ready with a rebuttal. Take the genre: Courtroom dramas aren't exactly what Americans are used to in their Nintendo DS games. Minami counters that *Saiban's* appeal is universal: the tennis-match-like excitement of courtroom battle as you control rookie defense lawyer Phoenix Wright; the satisfaction of solving the mysterious crimes behind your cases; the pleasure of finding holes in witness testimony. After conducting an investigation, players can cross-examine witnesses in

court, "using" documents that contradict their statements. (i.e. a coroner's report that says the victim died at 4 p.m. against a suspect who claims it was 1.) "We all know how good it feels to catch someone lying," Minami says. "That's what this game is about."

Fair enough, but what about the translation? Not only does *Saiban* rely heavily on Japanese cultural references and language puns, but the court system itself works differently across the Pacific. "It's [still] a good game even if the legal system is a little different," Minami says. "People will still be able to enjoy it." As for the text, "A full-fledged translation project," he says.

"We [put together] a good team to make it appeal to Americans—not just do a word-for-word translation."

And finally, about the most obvious hurdle to *Saiban* being accepted by a U.S. audience when it debuts this summer: "It's just a working title," Minami says about that obstacle course of a name. "We assure you we will come up with [something] more Americanized in the future."



■ No one said *Saiban's* humor (above left) was necessarily sophisticated....



OVERHEARD

"I believe we made the most beautiful thing in the world."

Nobody would criticize a renowned architect's blueprint that the position of a gate is wrong. It's the same as that."

—Sony Computer Entertainment President Ken Kutaragi responds in *Nikkei*, a business magazine, to complaints that the Square button on the PSP sometimes sticks down due to its position near the handheld's giant screen.



"We probably benefit that Sony is fighting Nintendo

and has a real challenge on their hands with PSP versus DS, while our group is totally focused on the next-generation video console."

—Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates, in an interview with *gizmodo.com*.

"We're going for the extreme teen—the

Mountain Dew-drinkin', mountain-bike-ridin', backwards-baseball-cap-wearin' type. We want the game to be sold at Hot Topic."

—Backbone Entertainment Producer Chris Chara jokes about the audience for his company's upcoming PSP action game, *Death Jr.*



■ *Death Jr.*: supernatural being, juggalo.

>> ACCORDING TO *VARIETY*, SCREENWRITER ALEX GARLAND (*28 DAYS LATER*) WILL PEN THE SCRIPT FOR THE *HALO* MOVIE, WHICH WILL BE BASED ON THE FIRST TWO GAMES.... >>



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CHAMP CAMP

Your pro gaming career starts here

You might make beating your buds in *Halo 2* look easier than drunk girls at closing time, but bragging rights don't pay the bills, so it's off to that data-entry job in the morning. Buck up, Joe Cubicle: With more and more professional gaming leagues—from the Association of Gaming Professionals (AGP) to the globe-spanning World Cyber Games (WCG)—

scouting for talent, the job "pro gamer" has become a legit career choice. WCG champ Matt Leto won \$80,000 last year.

So we've tapped real console-gaming pros to get you prepped for the tournament season, which kicks off this summer. Just don't come crying to us if you get your ass handed to you by a 14-year-old girl from Idaho (see sidebar below). —James Lee



1

TRAINING

On a normal day, WCG *Halo* gold medalist Matt Leto practices five hours—and he's one of the best. To get that good, "one has to be dedicated...and treat it like any pro sport athlete treats their sports," says Jay Umboh, commissioner of the AGP.

While you can bone up in many league-supported games—including *Tekken 5*, *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, *Dead or Alive Ultimate*, *Burnout 3*, and *FIFA 2005*—*Halo 2* is the one they all have in common. As you practice four to six hours a day, focus on

fundamentals and your weak skills. Top-ranked Xbox Live *Halo 2* player Tom Taylor works on "map control." "I keep control of the power weapons," he says, "like the rocket launcher, sword, sniper rifle, and beam rifle. In many situations...it's a guaranteed win." Pick opponents who'll teach you a thing or two. "You have to practice with people better than you," says Major League Gaming pro Bonnie Burton. "You're not going to get better if you keep playing with noobs."



2

TOURNAMENTS

You've honed unstoppable skills. Now it's time to put them on the line at every tournament that your schedule and wallet will allow. "A good place to start is with your local game centers, which often have small tournaments," says WCG Executive Director Joe Moss. "The publishers of various games also may hold tournaments for a game they are trying to promote, such as EA's annual Madden Challenge." Leto suggests starting with Major League Gaming. "MLG has tournament stops all across the country," he says, "and most people should be able to find one within driving distance." Just start easy, with short-term goals such as a realistic jump in the pro rankings—or just promising

yourself no crying in public when you run out of ammo.

Check out the major leagues' websites (see sidebar) for schedules and listings of the games they support in their tourneys. And when you're getting ready for the week leading up to a big tournament, sit back down and put some serious practice hours in—we don't care if you miss a whole week of *Pimp My Ride*. "I'd say it's more practice than talent," says Leto. "Obviously, you need talent if you want to win, but there are a lot of people that I think have talent but never win tournaments." You'll come back home empty-handed if you slack off, and it'll be like the prom all over again.

Don't tell mom the baby-sitter's deadly: We talk trash-talking with a 14-year-old girl pro gamer



Heartland *Halo* hero Bonnie Burton, aka "Xena," is a Major League Gaming star. We find out why.

EGM: You're the top-ranked girl on Xbox Live?

Bonnie Burton: Right now, I'm a level 22. No girl has ever beaten me in competition and in MLG. I stick to *Halo* and *Halo 2*.

EGM: What are your days like?

BB: It depends. Some days I practice up to four hours and other days it'll only be a half hour. If there's a big tournament going on, I'm obviously going to be practicing a lot more than I usually do.

EGM: Do you have a ritual you do?

BB: I just do the Xena warrior cry. Hmm. No, not really, except—you know—trash talking. That helps during the game.

EGM: You a big trash talker?

BB: Well, you know, guys get pretty upset when there are girls playing and we're beating them, so they start trash talking.

And we can't let that go unnoticed.

EGM: Well, what goes down?

BB: [Laughs] I don't know if it could be repeated. The usual, like, "Oh my gosh—we're playing girls. You girls suck!" We'll [get] 20 kills, and we'll have, like, two deaths, and after the game we'll go, "You guys suck," and leave the game. We're the ones that end up on top so that's fine.

EGM: So what do guys say when they get beaten by a 14-year-old girl?

BB: At tournaments, guys are pretty nice. Some other guys are a little bit disap-

pointed. Sometimes they walk with their tail drooping between their legs. Some guys don't take it well at all.

EGM: No sponsors right now?

BB: Nope, unfortunately. Right now I'm trying to get my allowance saved up so I can buy a plane ticket to Orlando. I'm trying to calculate. I'm like, "OK, I get \$10 allowance, and if I baby-sit..."

EGM: Do you have a bedtime?

BB: No. Everyone always asks that. Or we're smack talking, [and] they're like, "Xena, isn't it past your bedtime?"



EQUIPMENT

Surprise, surprise—some pros can't stand the original supersize controller that came with the Xbox. Not so surprising: A few go to great lengths to wield customized controllers. *Halo 2* champ Taylor actually removes his pad's vibration mechanism, plus shaves down the tips of his analog sticks to custom fit his fingers. MLG's Burton imports her Japanese S-type Xbox controller, which has looser joysticks than the U.S. version. Experiment with your joypads if you like, but there's no reason to monkey around if yours feels right.

As far as gearing up before a big match, you don't need to bring much beyond your eye of the tiger. But if you need a little pep, Taylor suggests his own ultimate energy drink, a concoction of AMP, Red Bull, and crushed Smarties. Good luck ever sleeping again.



■ A new (used) car! GGL gave away this sweet Xbox-equipped '74 Monte Carlo.

SPONSORSHIP & PRIZE MONEY

You came, you played, and you kicked ass. Now it's time to get paid. But the cash prizes for winning tournaments—MLG alone is giving out more than \$250,000 this year—are only part of the pro gamer paycheck. Companies such as Converse, Samsung, MTV, and Nokia have latched onto the gaming leagues, offering sponsorship deals and other perks. Nokia takes care of Leto, PC-gaming league Check Six pays for Taylor's airfare, and Apple gave Burton an iPod.

Play hard and the sponsorships will come. "I practiced relentlessly and within eight months became one of the premier players in the world," Taylor tells us. "Then MLG approached me and offered me a contract. Things really started to fall into place, and that's when I knew I could turn professional gaming into a career." The leagues act as managers and shop their stars around to companies for sponsorships. The pro gamers in turn will be obligated to show up at press events, make in-store appearances at GameStops, etc.

So practice up and be prepared. Even as you read this, the Global Gaming League is scouring more than 700 colleges to find potential pro gamers. Maybe you'll be the first virtual athlete to wind up on a Wheaties box. 🍌



Illustrations by Nic Bence



Major Leagues

Wanna be a contender? Scan these sites daily to keep track of the largest leagues and find local tournaments.

- www.theagp.com
- www.worldcybergames.com
- www.ggl.com
- www.mlgpro.com
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GameCube

AFTERTHOUGHTS: RESIDENT EVIL 4

The rocky road leading to this year's best game

O K, so maybe it's just a *bit* too early to be deciding on 2005's game of the year, but that's just the kind of talk already surrounding *Resident Evil 4*. Outstanding graphics, a thick, creepy atmosphere, and white-knuckle gameplay—never before has so much pleasure been packed into three inches. (Well, six inches if you count both GameCube discs.) But behind the polished final product is a

HK: Part of the idea was to go for a movie-like effect, but the main reason has to do with the behind-the-back view. With that new viewpoint, a lot more of your surroundings become visible, especially when you're playing on a regular TV screen with a [standard] 4:3 aspect ratio. The main reason behind the cropping was to re-create the pressure and tension that gets lost with this view. It was done with the player's senses in mind; we wanted the player

“We [threw everything out and] started development over completely four different times.”

—Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi

chaotic tale of false starts, scrapped ideas, and *three* other versions of the game (not including the original design, which went on to become *Devil May Cry* on the PS2). To talk more about it we phoned Capcom Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi, who has worked on just about every *Resident Evil* for the past nine years:

EGM: Everyone is talking about how they never knew the Cube was capable of something like *RE4*.

Hiroyuki Kobayashi: Well, we've been involved with GameCube development from the system's infancy. Our programmers have been working with the GameCube ever since the original *Resident Evil* remake, so they've built up an extensive amount of know-how.

EGM: Was cropping the top and bottom of the screen a trick to make the game run faster, or was that just to create a more movie-like atmosphere?

to concentrate on what was happening on both sides of Leon.

EGM: We noticed a lot of different melee moves between all the various characters—kicks, the suplex, the neck-breaker, etc. Were there additional hand-to-hand attacks that got cut?

HK: Actually, it was the opposite case; none of those moves were there in the beginning. They just kind of gradually popped up during development.

EGM: The chain-saw guy didn't kill you instantly in earlier versions of the game—why'd you change that?

HK: Well, it's just a matter of forcefulness. Besides, if someone actually hit you with a chain saw, it's not like you'd be getting up anytime soon!

EGM: You've said before that you went through three other versions of *RE4* before you settled on this one. Can you tell us about those? >



■ Wondering if all the weapon merchants are the same guy? Try shooting him.

The good news and bad news about the import *RE4*

Bad news first: Those lucky fans who preordered *RE4* across the Pacific got a “secret” DVD with all sorts of goodies, including five minutes of video from an earlier version of the game, extended interviews, and other little extras. Compare that to the crappy 10-minute so-called “making of” DVD we got (more like an extended ad for the game). You win this time, Japan! Our only consolation is that Japanese gamers had to wait a few extra weeks for release, and their version is censored—Leon never gets his head lopped off by the chain-saw man, nor can he behead villagers with the shotgun. (Pretty sad when you can find much worse in almost any popular Japanese comic or anime.)



■ Japanese gamers also got a truly bizarre *Resident Evil 4* marketing campaign.

>> SIMPLY INCREDIBLE—COME THIS FALL, THQ WILL RELEASE ANOTHER GAME BASED ON *THE INCREDIBLES* FLICK FOR WHAT SEEMS LIKE EVERY PLATFORM KNOWN TO MAN.... >>>



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The Mercenaries: Playground of Destruction, indeed

Finished the main quest and unlocked The Mercenaries minigame? Good. Now you'll need a four-star rating (30,000 or more points) on each level in order to unlock the different playable characters. (Earn 60,000 on each level with each character to unlock the hand-cannon pistol.) Combos are key—always wait until another bad guy appears within striking distance before killing the last enemy nearby. Chain-saw guys, the blind dude with the claws, and other special enemies are worth major points, so save your grenades or more powerful weapons for them. A good character to unlock first is Wesker—his rifle, Magnum, awesome handgun, and physical attacks make for a well-balanced arsenal.



■ EGM reader and hard-core RE4 fan Kevin Chieng shows how it's done.



■ The first version of RE4 picked up directly from where Code: Veronica left off.

► **HK:** Well, the first version was the story of Leon as he infiltrated the headquarters of the Umbrella corporation. The enemies were completely different from what you see now....

EGM: Zombies and that sort of thing?

HK: That, and other monsters very close to that style. The twist was that there was some sort of hidden power locked inside Leon's left hand, and you'd discover what it was as you played through the game.

EGM: So no rescuing the president's daughter or anything.

HK: Not at all, no, although there was a different woman around at that time—a girl who actually never got revealed to the public, now that I think about it. The next major version [was] the one where Leon was inside a building with the dolls and the hook enemy. The idea here was to create a very otherworldly sort of game, one that was filled with flashbacks and camera shaking and odd color effects; the sort where you never knew whether what you were seeing was real or just a hallucination. It took much more of a strong RE-style approach to horror.

EGM: Ah, that hook guy was awesome!

HK: Thanks! I liked that guy too, but he ended up getting cut out.

EGM: What was the problem with the third revision?

HK: Well, by this time, we knew that the one thing we wanted *Resident Evil 4* to be was a revolutionary new experience. We saw that this version wasn't going to be a great leap forward, so we started over one more time. It was a very traditional *Resident Evil* sort of game.

EGM: In earlier versions of the game, there were dialogue choices available to the player in some of the cut-scenes. Why did you remove them?

HK: It was mainly a matter of concentrating the player's attention on what we wanted them to see. The conversation choices never really changed the situation all that much, although there were some choices you could make in the middle of the game that changed the experience.

EGM: What about the radio scenes in RE4, where you talked to Salazar and



■ The amorphous hook-man, complete with the "odd color effects" Mr. Kobayashi mentions, from an earlier version of RE4.

Lord Saddler? They reminded us a lot of the codec from Metal Gear Solid....

HK: I'm definitely familiar with [Metal Gear creator] Mr. Kojima and the work he's done. I think, though, that the objectives we were aiming for in our games are a little different. The radio was a relatively recent addition to *RE4*, and it was added mostly for utilitarian reasons, so Leon would have an idea of where to go or what to do next.

EGM: Some people think the final boss is too easy, especially considering how tough the early bosses are....

HK: Well, I think that may depend more on how the player goes through the game than on how tough the boss is. If you're a very careful player and you upgrade your weapons regularly and conserve all your ammunition, then it will be easy, but I think it's pretty difficult otherwise.

EGM: What can you tell us about the PS2 version of RE4 due later this year?

HK: Mmm...unfortunately, I can't talk about the PS2 version right now. [GC] *RE4* doesn't come out in Europe until March, so I think we will release some more information after that's safely released.

EGM: What about the rumors that an Xbox version is also on the way?

HK: Unfortunately, I can't really say much of anything right now except that a PS2 version will be released.

EGM: What about Sony's PSP or the Nintendo DS? Do you think a game like RE4 could work well on one of the new portable systems?

HK: Well, from a power standpoint I think

it's possible, considering that the PSP is comparable to the PS2 and the Nintendo DS is a little more powerful than the Nintendo 64. It's really just a matter of creating a game that's well suited for whichever platform it's on. It's something to think about, to be sure....

EGM: RE4 is such a radical design shift for the series—where do you see it going from here?

HK: Well, it's still hard to say since the game's only just come out in America. I don't want to make any fast decisions about our future plans until I get a good bead on what the players think about our current efforts. We're thinking about all sorts of paths, of course, but we haven't dedicated ourselves to one quite yet.

EGM: Do you think the gameplay, camera angle, and so forth will continue to evolve, or do you see RE4 as a sort of blueprint for where the sequels will follow?

HK: We are going to do a *Resident Evil 5*, of course, but as for exactly what it will be like...that's what we're busy thinking about right now. The first four *RE* games—1, 2, 3, and *Code: Veronica*—were more or less the story of Umbrella. *RE4* takes place six years after those games, and Umbrella's been completely destroyed; this is the start of a new story line, in other words. When you think of it that way, then it's safe to say that *RE5* will naturally proceed from where *RE4* left off. If you play through everything *RE4* has to offer, I think you'll get a taste of how this progression will work. I'll leave the rest to your imagination. ☺

—Kevin Gifford and Mark MacDonald



DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.

To those parties attempting to recreate the stunts contained in the new MX vs. ATV Unleashed, we offer this message: DON'T. While that seems fairly obvious to most, you'd be surprised how many people will contemplate emulating its dangerous intensity, vis-à-vis the realistic head-to-head racing experience. Ergo, THQ and Rainbow Studios put forth the following caveats to all parties: Do not attempt to make a golf cart do 70 mph, nor launch a sand rail over a moving plane. Moreover, do not undertake the recreation of any and all stunts from MX vs. ATV Unleashed in order to replicate its realistic rag-doll physics. The insane stunts and fierce racing is intended for the sole intent and purpose of an intense gaming experience, not for the discovery of clever ways to inflict bodily harm. Case in point, THQ and Rainbow Studios offer this photo as reference of the projected outcome of ignoring this warning. Honestly, what was this guy thinking? Said driver wasn't anywhere close to successfully completing the jump, nor is the other side of the canyon he was attempting to reach even in the aforementioned photo. In summation, MX vs. ATV Unleashed is not real, don't attempt to make it real.



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■ "That's no moon. It's a space pigskin."

EVIL EMPIRE?

Gamers and game makers see a dark side in Electronic Arts' recent history. We see if you'll feel a disturbance in your games

Electronic Arts started life in the '80s as a quirky-games publisher that treated its developers like rock stars. Twenty years later, things have changed—big time. Its employees gripe about working conditions. Its games are glitzy, Hollywood-style productions awash with movie licenses and triple-A stars. And its competition is very concerned about how to stay alive as the company buys up more and more of the industry.

Popular reaction has been critical of EA's recent five-year-exclusive purchase

in Europe and Japan—without the FIFA license—as an example of competition surviving an exclusive deal. Digital-grid-iron competitor Midway remains undaunted as well. It's planning *Blitz: Playmakers* for 2005, which takes the series in a new direction: raw and story-driven.

EA's deals certainly aren't confined to the sports genre. The publisher recently drew controversy for buying a 20 percent stake in *Splinter Cell* publisher Ubisoft. "It is still uncertain what EA plans to do...but we are prepared to counter this unsolicit-

of anonymity. "That means the games turn into vision-by-committee, driven by executives who know the market but only have a slim sense of what makes games special." Another former developer is more blunt: "Creativity at EA is squelched," he says. "Deadline cycles are to the bone. There's no time to sit around and riff on ideas on what to do creatively for a license." Current EA staff we spoke to say this isn't reflective of their experience.

Regardless of game quality, the company is pulling ahead of its competition. It has a slew of hot licenses (including *The Godfather* and *Batman Begins*), as well as hit series (*Need for Speed Underground 2* has sold over 8.4 million copies worldwide). "EA's just a force of nature," says one independent developer. "They'll do what they do. You'll just have to adapt."

So far, adapting seems to mean spending more money. Take *ESPN NFL 2K5* co-publisher Take-Two, which responded to EA's double-deal threat by snapping up the Major League Baseball license. Cash for these deals has to come from somewhere. "It appears that consumers will be left paying more for fewer options," says Wedbush Morgan Senior Analyst Michael Pachter. Other insiders worry that EA's tactics may leave gamers with no options at all. "If they keep buying studios and properties," says a former EA developer, "everything will be EA flavored." 

—Christian Nutt

"Creativity at EA is squelched."

—A former EA employee who spoke on condition of anonymity

of NFL rights for its juggernaut *Madden NFL* series. The company followed up by snagging Sega's cherished ESPN brand, now in EA's corner for 15 years. "I think people are concerned about a long exclusive like the one with the NFL because it does not give [EA] much incentive to make the best game they can," says EA founder Trip Hawkins, who left the company years ago. EA, of course, disagrees. "All of the deals that we have done related to football are to make the *Madden* franchise better and stronger," says Trudy Miller, EA's senior manager of corporate communications. EA also points to Konami's *Winning Eleven* soccer series, which sells very well

ed share acquisition," says Ubisoft founder and CEO Yves Guillemot. "Our concern about this purchase is the risk that we may no longer have the freedom to be the creator of high-quality games that we are today and want to continue to be."

Quality is the key issue among gamers, the most vocal of whom gripe that EA's titles lack the artistic verve of the competition. Critics point to the publisher's reliance on licenses, annual sequels, and a perceived assembly-line development process of tight deadlines and marketing-driven finagling. "They don't trust the vision of their best people," says one former EA developer who spoke on condition

Tractor Beamed: EA's Three Best Grabs...

NFL/ESPN—EA locked up rights to the NFL for five years and ESPN for 15. Put in perspective, that latter deal spans the probable life cycles of the PlayStation 3, 4, and 5.



Criterion Studios—EA's most far-reaching acquisition, *Burnout 3* developer Criterion created RenderWare, the suite of world-building software behind such series as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Tony Hawk*.

Maxis—In 1997, EA acquired Maxis, which went on to create *The Sims*. Including expansion packs, *The Sims* has sold over 41 million games worldwide.



Illustration by Terry Wong/goodson.com

► MORE EA HAPPENINGS: A JOB POSTING REVEALED THAT EA TIBURON—BEST KNOWN FOR ITS WORK ON THE *MADDEN* FRANCHISE—IS STAFFING UP FOR A SUPERMAN GAME.... ►►

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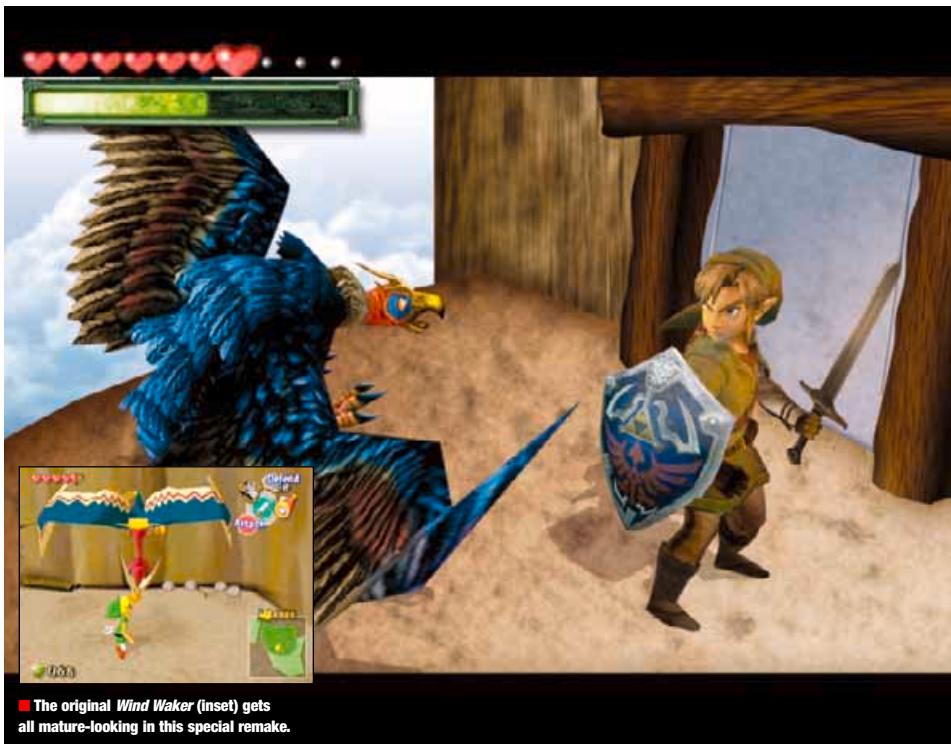
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IN STORES THIS APRIL

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■ The original *Wind Waker* (inset) gets all mature-looking in this special remake.

CHANGING COURSE

As part of a preorder bonus, **The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker** receives one helluva makeover

Preorder deals for videogames tend to fall into three categories: enticing (like the *Resident Evil 4* making-of DVD), typical (the *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes* T-shirt), and incredibly lame (one extremely useless *Need for Speed Underground 2* cheat code). But not Nintendo's upcoming giveaway—this one's easily in a class of its own.

Beginning the first day of April, those who plop down at least \$10 on this fall's highly anticipated and mature-looking *The Legend of Zelda* for GameCube will receive a bonus disc that features a visually remade version of Link's 2003 adventure, *The Wind Waker*. So instead of a cartoony look, the ever-popular elf will be traveling the ocean blue in search of his little sis with the same superslick and

grown-up graphics as the next console installment.

But that's not all: The game will also include two full-length dungeons that were cut from the original *Wind Waker* because series creator and legendary game designer Shigeru Miyamoto felt "it had gotten too big for all ages to play." Told you this oh-so-sweet deal deserves its own category.

REALITY CHECK

Experts explain what happens when videogames get real...

Q: In games like *Electronic Arts' Medal of Honor*, I can endure more shots than I can count wearing very little armor. Just how tough are U.S. Army soldiers?

—Mikey Laasko

A: Military expert James Dunnigan, author of *How to Make War* and *The Perfect Soldier*, says better training, medical aid, leadership, and armor make today's GIs



tougher than previous generations', but he notes that survival ultimately depends on where and how you're hit. "If you are pumped [with adrenaline] and determined," he says, "you can take multiple bullets and shell fragments and still keep fighting." Sounds like games have it right after all.

—Lauren Gonzalez

Got a game scenario you want tested in real life? Send it to EGM@ziffdavis.com with the subject "reality check."

Illustration by Garth Baxter/Altoops

CHARTS

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES FOR DECEMBER 2004



1 **Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** PS2 • Rockstar

2 **Need for Speed Underground 2** PS2 • EA Games

3 **Halo 2** XB • Microsoft

4 **Madden NFL 2005** PS2 • EA Sports

5 **Call of Duty: Finest Hour** PS2 • Activision

6 **Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories** GBA • Square Enix

7 **Need for Speed Underground 2** XB • EA Games

8 **NBA Live 2005** PS2 • EA Sports

9 **Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater** PS2 • Konami

10 **Mario Party 6** GC • Nintendo

TOP 10 GAME RENTALS FOR THE WEEK ENDING 1/30/05



1 **Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** PS2 • Rockstar

2 **The Punisher** PS2 • THQ

3 **Mercenaries** PS2 • LucasArts

4 **NFL Street 2** PS2 • EA Sports Big

5 **The Punisher** XB • THQ

6 **Mercenaries** XB • LucasArts

7 **Need for Speed Underground 2** PS2 • EA Games

8 **Halo 2** XB • Microsoft

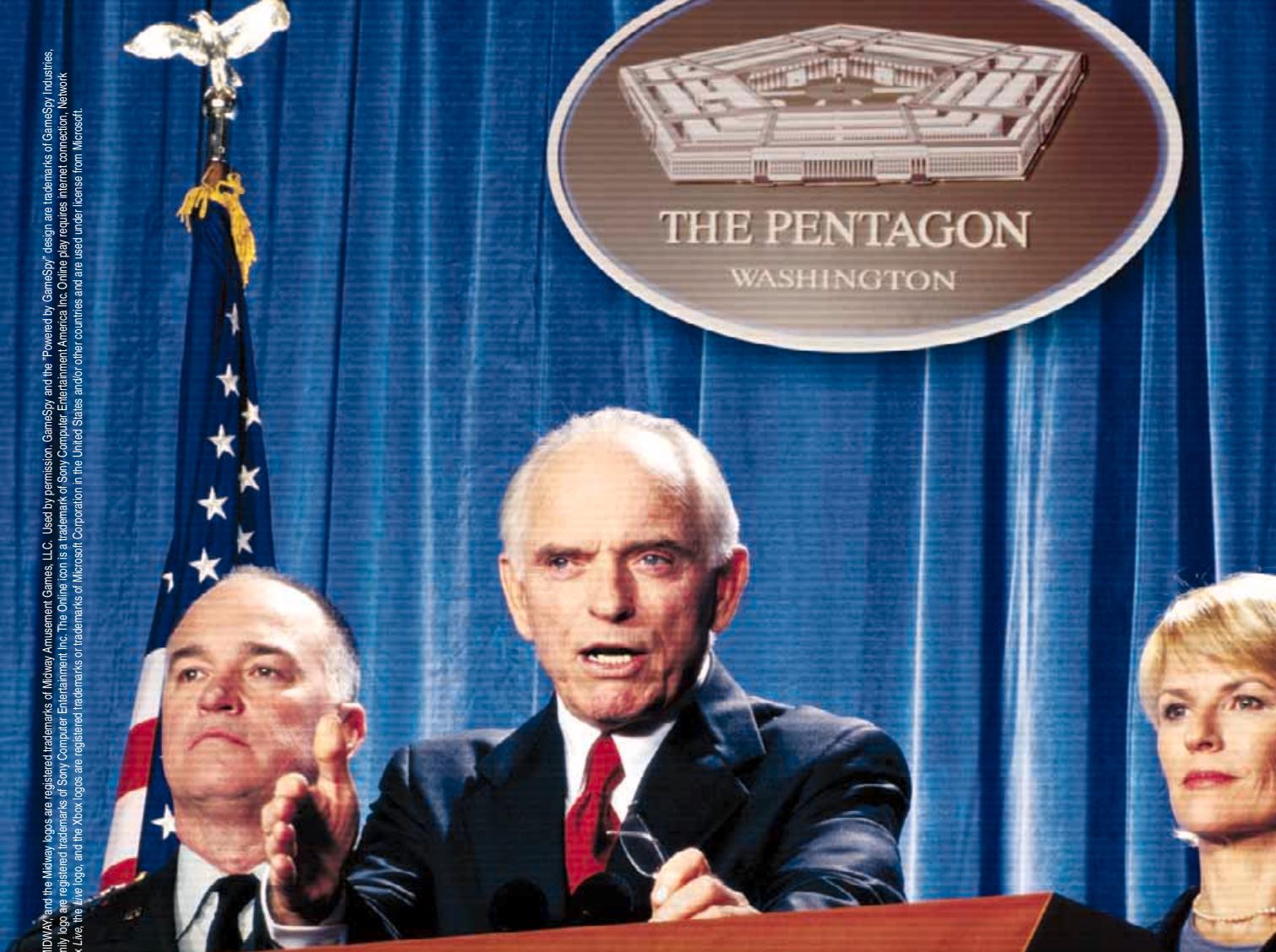
9 **Call of Duty: Finest Hour** PS2 • Activision

10 **The Getaway: Black Monday** PS2 • Sony CEA

Source: NPD TRSIS Video Games Service. Call (516) 625-6190 for questions regarding this list. And I'm sorry to say that you are wrong.

Source: Blockbuster Video

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■ Meet *Curse of Darkness*' hero, Hector the devil forge master. He used to be on Dracula's payroll, but now Hector treads his own morally ambiguous path.

■ PlayStation 2

CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami Tokyo
Release Date: Fall 2005

Reprising your favorite symphony

Konami's *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* proudly stands as one of the best PlayStation games ever created: It's a complex, challenging 2D adventure that's still a blast to play through today...if you can find it. This renowned heritage weighed heavily on the series' first PS2 installment, 2003's *Lament of Innocence*—a game that delivered solid gameplay and keen visuals but simply couldn't capture its forerunner's sense of adventure or awesome level design. "We certainly got a lot of feedback from the press about what was missing in *Lament*," laughs Koji Igarashi, *Castlevania* series producer. "And we're working very hard to have those things in our next chapter, *Curse of Darkness*."
Curse doesn't continue the 11th century narrative of *Lament*. Instead, it leaps ahead

to the year 1479—three years after Trevor Belmont defeated Dracula in the 8-bit classic *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* (NES). "Originally, I was planning to remake *Dracula's Curse* in 3D, but I wanted to have a hero more suited to an adventure game than a whip-wielding Belmont." So, instead, this all-new game introduces an original protagonist, Hector the devil forge master. For years, Hector punched the time clock at Drac's abode, summoning demons in the basement...until one day he became fed up with the count's tyranny and left that evil life behind. Shortly thereafter, good ole Trevor Belmont smites Vlad with a whip, the iconic castle crumbles, and a grim curse falls across all of Europe. With his job at the devil factory on hold, Isaac, another of Dracula's forge masters, decides to wreak havoc on his former coworker. Isaac's wicked designs



■ Hector wields a variety of different weapons including swords, spears, and axes.

>> SO, WHY ISN'T THIS NEW CASTLEVANIA SPORTING A MUSICALLY THEMED SUBTITLE LIKE SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT, HARMONY OF DISSONANCE, AND ARIA OF SORROW? "I RAN OUT OF



■ Hardcore *Castlevania* fans will recognize this hulking wyvern as the first boss from the import-only *Dracula X* for PC Engine.



■ (Below) Innocent Devils can fight alongside you during battle (the knight with the glowing pink center is on Hector's side) or help you reach previously inaccessible areas (scope the bird).



■ Feast your eyes on *Curse of Darkness*' villain, Isaac. Try not to look at his crotch area. Tough, huh? We're totally not looking forward to people cosplaying as this dude.

pay off—crazed townsfolk mistakenly execute Hector's ladyfriend as a witch. Our antihero takes the bait...heading off on a mission of crazed vengeance.

Unlike *Lament*, *Curse* promises to import every aspect of *Symphony's* respected gameplay. "In this game, you'll be able to equip many different weapons and items, traverse huge interconnected maps [both inside the castle and in the surrounding countryside], gain levels through experience points, and gain new abilities as you progress," says Igarashi. Combat will play out much as it did in the previous game—branching combos of linked moves with two attack buttons. One all-new gameplay element will mix up the action a bit, though: Innocent Devils, familiars that Hector summons to do his bidding. Not only will these devils help you in battle, but they'll also help

you progress through the game's labyrinthine levels by opening locked doors or carrying you across ravines. Plus, these demonic pals power up and evolve along with Hector—some simply become larger and more powerful, but others will actually transform into entirely different creatures if the proper criteria are met.

Seeing as how the game takes place three years after the events of *Castlevania III*, you might be wondering if we can expect cameos from that game's quartet of heroes: Trevor Belmont, swarthy thief Grant DaNasty, sorceress Sypha Belnades, and Drac's dashing son (and *Symphony* protagonist) Alucard. "Certainly, some of those characters will make an appearance," muses Igarashi. "But you know, Alucard's taking a rather deep nap at that time." 🐉

—Shane Bettenhausen

**"BEFORE NORMANDY WE WERE JUST SOLDIERS,
BUT EIGHT DAYS IN HELL MADE US BROTHERS."**

- SGT. MATT BAKER



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TOP THIS!

Enough isn't enough for one California game collector. But if your hoard beats his, we'll make you a star!

Abandon hopes of one-upmanship, all ye who enter Mike Mika's Oakland, CA, basement—a 300-square-foot digital dustbin accessed via a trap door. It's an archive of videogame history, crammed with an ever-growing collection of anything

game related. "I'm always finding stuff I didn't know I had," says Mika, creative director at developer Digital Eclipse (which, appropriately enough, makes old-school videogame collections).

Beyond the games, spanning every era and every system, there's hard-

ware, peripherals, magazines, books, soundtracks, tchotchkes—even four years of game-company Christmas cards and binders of Atari computer marketing materials. Mika estimates he has at least 5,000 games and spends about a grand a year on his hobby.

But if you've got the goods to call his hoard "paltry," prove it by sending digital pics to EGM@ziffdavis.com, with the subject "Top this!" Impress us and we'll feature your collection—but only if it packs crap more impressive and/or scarier than this.... —Carrie Shepherd

Photographs by Michael Sefton

TOUR DE CRAP...

Secret level

This ladder leads from Mika's bedroom closet (left) to "The Gimp Room" (right), his name for the game bunker.



The good, the bad, and the unreleased

Among Mika's rarest items: games that never shipped, including *Half-Life* for Dreamcast. "I have some stuff I don't want to mention," he adds, "because [someone will] want it back." He also owns rarities that probably shouldn't have come out, such as the X-rated Atari game *Custer's Revenge*. "The graphics are so abysmal," he says, "you don't even know what's going on."



Cosplay in a box

Remember that *Pac-Man* costume you wore in the kindergarten Halloween parade? Your mom sold it to Mike Mika at a garage sale.



For shame

Mika's most embarrassing items are from his Jaguar collection. "You know it's a bad system when *Bubsy* is one of the best games," he laments. "I'm a glutton for punishment; I keep buying games for it." (In case you were wondering, Mika really does play his games, randomly choosing a system and playing through all the games for it.)



Gaming goblets

His collection of Sturpee cups dates from 1981. The free refills, unfortunately, have expired.

Free play

A *Pong* coin-op (right) might be worth major dough, but Mika got it for free. Oh, and he has *three* of them. He also has a *Star Wars* arcade unit (left), which he had dreamed of owning since he was a kid. See—dreams do come true.



Analog gaming

Mika's good to game even after we run out of fossil fuel, with a board-game collection that includes *Pole Position*, *Pac-Man*, *Defender*, *Zaxxon*, and *Donkey Kong*.



Rarest of the Rare

These 1994 Macintosh games—the first mass-market attempts at arcade emulation—may be the most valuable in Mika's collection. This same package of *Joust* and *Defender*, shaped like the arcade cabinets, fetched \$300 on eBay years ago. Lucky for Mika, they were Digital Eclipse's first foray into game-making, so he got this set free of charge.



>> ACCORDING TO THE NPD GROUP, U.S. GAME SALES (BOTH HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE) IN 2004 HIT \$9.9 BILLION. THE TOP-SELLING GAME: *GTA: SAN ANDREAS* (PS2).... >>>

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Blue Team has your Flag!



What a bunch of cheaters: Blue team gets a boost from a Warthog and grabs its opponent's flag through the ceiling.

ONLINE THIS MONTH

Hustling Halo 2

Blue team bombed your base, but there are still several minutes on the clock—more than enough time to stage a comeback, that is if your underhanded opponents hadn't buried the bomb inside of the map. *Halo 2* hustlers, unscrupulous players (and possibly whole clans) who exploit programming glitches for guaranteed wins, aren't as uncommon as you'd hope: According to its website, developer Bungie has "been banning Xbox Live accounts regularly when [it] finds clear evidence of cheating." But in matches equivalent to ball games played in parks where fished balls and corked bats are prevalent, and in which off-field referees make calls from replay footage alone, officials are hard pressed to catch every cheater online.

What Bungie is doing

"We're doing everything in our power to investigate, alleviate, and remove the problems," says an anonymous rep on the

developer's site, but this person admits that even downloadable patches won't curb some dastardly deeds. The good news: The most effective form of cheating so far—becoming both invisible and invincible by mucking with your modem—is a bannable offense that breaches specific terms of use for Live's online service. The bad news: Bungie says it can't blame folks for abusing "minor" software bugs (such as sequestering bombs and snatching flags through walls) which are technically part of the game and thus "its responsibility entirely." One recently discovered back door produces results similar to the modern cheat's but falls under the protected software bug category.

What Microsoft is doing

Snitching on *Halo 2* hooligans might do more than make you feel better, at least according to Microsoft, whose reps tell us the hardware giant not only "relies heavily on its community providing feed-

back about fellow gamers," but also has "banned tens of thousands of gamers using this policy." How does the company sort the bogus complaints made by sore losers from the serious stuff? Its spokespeople won't provide a straight answer but insist that watchdogs have ways of identifying legitimate offenders.

What you can do

"If you are cheating, quit now," advises Bungie. "Firstly because we're politely and respectfully asking you to do so, and secondly because it's very often a terms of use violation that we can act upon by banning you." When you've been swindled, simply send negative user feedback, and if all else fails, try waiting it out: Even if Bungie can't find ways to fix what's broken, the developer believes "cheating will in all likelihood decrease with the life span of the product, as cheaters become bored or move on to their next 'project'." —Shawn Elliott

Sketchy Swordplay

Set your rocket sights on a target until he turns red, then switch to your sword while swinging it at the same time and you'll sail across the screen to stab him. Bungie won't ban you for exploiting this built-in-the-game glitch, but then it's hardly a game-breaker. Sadly, other bugs that give abusers much more power fall under the same protection. (You didn't think we'd tell you how to perform those, did you?)



You can use *Halo 2*'s sword glitch to travel very long distances in a split-second.

WHAT'S UP AT

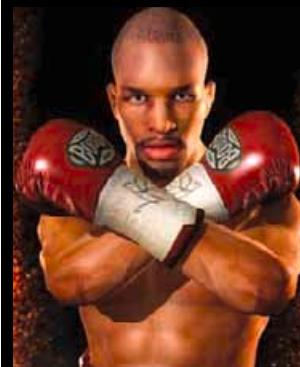


A Collector's Paradise



This month, set your web browser to egmextras.1UP.com for additional pics of Mike Mika's massive (and quite impressive) game collection. And if you're whining about the absence of a tricks section in our mag, we're sure cheats.1UP.com can help you solve *Ping Pals* and much more.

Club in the Spotlight: Fight Night Round 2



Even developers are clubbin' these days, as *EA Sports Fight Night Round 2* Executive Producer Kudo Tsunoda has created a hangout for wannabe pugilists (fightnight-club.1UP.com). Tsunoda will answer questions about his latest project and reveal all sorts of boxing secrets, such as how legendary promoter Don King gets his hair looking so...uh, stylish.

Must-Hit Blog

New *EGM* intern James Lee is forced to bow down to head honcho Dan "Shoe" Hsu every day. He thought it was because they were both Asian, until Shoe began whipping him for an honest punctuation error. Find out what our benchmarker is up to at egmwiley.1UP.com.



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Alien Attack
Fight against Alien scum in a ruthless attack! Defend your planet! Fight in the air, clouds and space to keep your planet. Exploration of Mars has caused a war between aliens and humans.



Combat Fighting
Fight in the underground fighting championship against the top fighting masters in the world. Can you fight your way to the top?



Boarder Fun
Grab your board and get stoked! This Boarder session is all about speed. Tuck and race through the gates, hit a mogul and bust a huge air.



Grand Slam Tennis
Play with the best ranked tennis opponents in the world in single game mode or compete in the Grand Slam Tennis.



Air Raid
Incoming! Get in the hull sailor and stay there! Using your gunship, shoot down as many enemy planes as you can.



Street Brawl
The best fighting game for phones!
Are you tough enough?



Mortal Tower
Fight your way and proceed on to the next higher level of challenges in the River, Lobby, Palace and Roof. Exert your powerful fists and kicks to knock down your enemies.



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Control the skies above a busy airport as planes enter your airspace. You'll need to lead the planes to their destination and guide the pilots to their final approach so they can safely land. Good Luck!



Vegas
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Appearance
 From practical (tiger stripe camo for tropical settings) to purely cosmetic (beetle brows and a bushy beard), the robust character creator mode lets you make over your freedom fighter's costume and facial features. Settling on a signature style with a custom clan logo will help your squad identify you when things get hectic.

Commando
 These Special Forces soldiers wield heavy weapons and wear sturdier armor. Upgrades include the ability to minimize machine gun "climb" (the tooth-rattling recoil that sends sights skyward) and a bullet-blocking shield perfect for protecting the back of a bomb-prepping ally.

Medic
 Life-taker and lifesaver alike, a medic can man field clinics to keep his fellows in the fight even after they've been perforated with gunfire. Plus, medics pack a nasty pray-and-spray nerve agent that screws with an opponent's vision and retards his reaction time (it's perfect for overcoming shield-bearing commandos).



PS2/XB

RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN

Publisher: Ubisoft
 Developer: Ubi Montreal
 Release Date: April 2005

Rewriting the rules of Live engagement

Whether working within our own borders or abroad, successful bands of black operatives need both high-tech tools and serious training. *Lockdown* isn't just another *Black Arrow*-style expansion pack masquerading as an original game: New guns and gadgets deepen the combat, and the ability to build persistent online personas lets players experiment with different duties on the battlefield. Here's how the latest entry in the long-running *Rainbow Six* series of tactical shooters hopes to retain its recruits this spring.

—Shawn Elliott



■ Successful online play isn't about solo heroics, but rather skillful teamwork. When the leader issues the "Zulu go" command, know your role.

>>> MICROSOFT HAS REVEALED THAT ITS UPCOMING RACER FORZA MOTORSPORT WILL OFFER 230 DIFFERENT REAL-WORLD CARS, CULLED FROM OVER 40 MANUFACTURERS. ALSO, ABSURDLY

Body armor

As always, head shots are fatal, but body armor can buy you a split-second chance when bullets strike anywhere else. It also degrades as it absorbs damage, and you'll want to set aside some of your earnings to replace it after the wear and tear of multiple matches.

Goggles

Rainbows see across the spectrum with all-purpose goggles. Infrared and low-light vision return, but *Lockdown* immerses you further by framing your view with lenses that fog up in freezing cold, collect droplets under a downpour, and crack with damage.

Spec Ops

Packing silenced submachine guns, these cutthroats shoot from shadows dark enough to disappear in, and slice through Kevlar with a combat knife. They can also use sensor scramblers and other cloak-and-dagger doohickeys to dupe enemies. Spec Ops add deadly precision to any well-coordinated unit.

Sniper

These long-distance assassins provide invaluable support in a multiplayer match, and *Lockdown* expands the single-player sniping experience. In this arcadey *Silent Scope*-inspired mode, you'll snipe your way through seven special missions, taking aim from rooftops and helicopters.

Engineer

Like all of *Lockdown's* specialists, engineers hold their own in firefights, but they're just as lethal behind laptops. Masters of machinery, they can hack into computer-controlled cameras to monitor the enemy's movement and relay his coordinates to squadmates; open and close remote doors to funnel tingos into traps; and set up automated sentry turrets to cover crucial areas.



■ Battle terrorists in exotic locales...and this crate-filled warehouse.

What's the difference: Lockdown on PS2

It's possible to personalize your appearance on PS2's *Lockdown* (also set to deploy this spring), but instead of the Xbox's persistent promotion system and variety of specializations, this version offers 16-player Rainbow-versus-mercenary matches in unique maps and modes. Each online faction fights with its own weapons and widgets, including:

Motion detector and surveillance PDA

Counterterrorists can holster their weapons to spot enemies through walls with a motion detector (also available on Xbox), while mercs reveal the Rainbows' whereabouts by accessing remote cameras.

Door hinge fuser and forced-entry hammer

When your foes repeatedly run the same route, fusing doors shut with a special device will slow or stop 'em. When you find yourself on the other side of a door that won't budge, the SWAT-approved forced-entry hammer will batter it (and anyone behind it) down. 



How to handle annoying solicitors.

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NEXT-GEN CONSOLE REPORT

Get a fork ready—your current machine is almost done

If you ask us, it's never too early to look ahead. Feel the same way? Then keep your eyes here, as this little slice of the mag

is dedicated to all the latest next-gen happenings. This issue, we learn how these yet-to-be-seen machines (and their games) could max out your credit

card, discuss Xbox 2 control issues, hear about another head-scratching Nintendo Revolution theory, and more.
—Bryan Intihar

Hardware and its sticker price

Reports abound that beginning with Xbox 2 (which is heavily rumored to launch in late '05), the upcoming batch of consoles could carry a price tag of \$400—that's about \$100 more than the initial cost of both PS2 and Xbox. Could this really happen? Well, opinions vary on Wall Street. While Michael Pachter, an analyst from Wedbush Morgan Securities, tells us that "[the console manufacturers] seem intent upon a \$300 price point," another member of the financial community believes a steeper console price is "certainly possible because the first wave of people buying these systems are the hardcore gamers, and they are usually willing to pay \$400." Let's hope (for our wallets' sake) that the first guy is right.

■ Unreal tech makes big boys with big toys.

OK, so what about the cost of games?

During a recent financial meeting, Activision CEO Bobby Kotick said that he expects next-gen software to retail for around \$10 more than what we pay today (which is typically \$50). Unfortunately, analyst Michael Pachter agrees. "Development costs should be double what they are now, so the consumer is going to have to pay. The average game today costs around \$4 million to make and sells around 350,000 units, so call that \$10 per unit. If next-gen games cost double—that's \$20 per unit—the publishers will pass the cost on to the consumer."



Improved control

Some development folk who are hard at work on Xbox 2 projects tell us that Microsoft is making some minor (but needed) modifications to its controller for the next generation. The latest design has the Black and White buttons positioned up top, giving it two extra shoulder buttons (similar to the PS2 gamepad). It also has a built-in jack for your Xbox Live headset, thus freeing up a memory card slot. Good changes indeed.

Kombat series) and Midway Austin (Area 51)—will now use to create next-generation console games.

Just rub it

Nintendo has promised something "different" with its next console (code-named Revolution), and this would definitely fit the bill: One report has the industry mainstay bringing out a machine that can communicate with others in your local area via a network similar to what cell phones use. Also, the controller would allow you to rub its surface to, say, move an onscreen character. Sure it sounds crazy, but remember, this is the same company that brought us Virtual Boy and Nintendo DS.



Show Us Some Emotion

Rory Armes, managing director of Electronic Arts' U.K. studio, told news service Reuters that the power of next-generation consoles will enable game developers to create characters "with realistic emotion." He added, "It's the subtleties, the eyes, the mouth—5,000 polygons don't really sell the emotion. With Xbox 2 and PS3, we can [build] the main character with 30,000 to 50,000 polygons. With that increased firepower, the *Finding Nemo* videogame can look just like the movie, but in real time." Don't get too excited, though—a while back, developers also said that visuals of *Toy Story*—quality were possible on PS2. So we'll believe it when we see it. 🐟

Midway adopts the Unreal method

Not only will Midway publish Epic Games' next few titles (beginning with the online-centric *Unreal Championship 2* for Xbox in April), but the company will also take advantage of the developer's impressive homegrown technology. Midway has licensed Epic's Unreal Engine 3, a development tool that its internal studios—including Midway Chicago (*Mortal*



>> IN JANUARY AT THE CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW, SOME GUY NAMED BILL GATES SAID THAT ALL GAMES FOR MICROSOFT'S NEXT CONSOLE WOULD SUPPORT HDTV.... >>

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PlayStation 2



PS2/XB

MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION

Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Rockstar San Diego
Release Date: April 2005

The original street racer aims to retake the lead



If *Gran Turismo* is "the ultimate driving simulator," then *Midnight Club 3* is the ultimate ballin' simulator, a glorious tribute to the art of taking fast cars and making them into *flashy* cars. How many other games let you take a '64 Chevy Impala (one of the six rides you can afford at the start of the career mode) and outfit it with two-tone luminescent purple paint, banana-yellow tire rims, your name in Gothic lettering on the back, and exhaust tips so huge you could use them as blunt weapons?

Thought so. At first glance, *Club* doesn't seem so different from *Need for Speed Underground*, does it? The two games undeniably share similar arcade-style dri-

ving controls and neon-lit street scenes. But take a closer look at the cars themselves. You aren't just racing ricemobiles in this game—in fact, *Midnight Club 3*'s 60 or so vehicles include everything from SUVs to Cadillacs and *American Chopper*-style bikes. "The variety of licensed vehicles sets *MC3* apart," says Producer Mark Garone. "There is a whole spectrum of car and bike culture out there, and we are capturing all of it." Even better, every car type has a "special feature" you can unlock in career mode, including bullet time (a forgiving snippet of slowdown allowing you to squeeze into tight turns you would completely miss otherwise) and "roar" (a sonic wave that sends any nearby cars flying). In a way, all



You probably don't want to get behind someone whose plate means "crazy drunk."

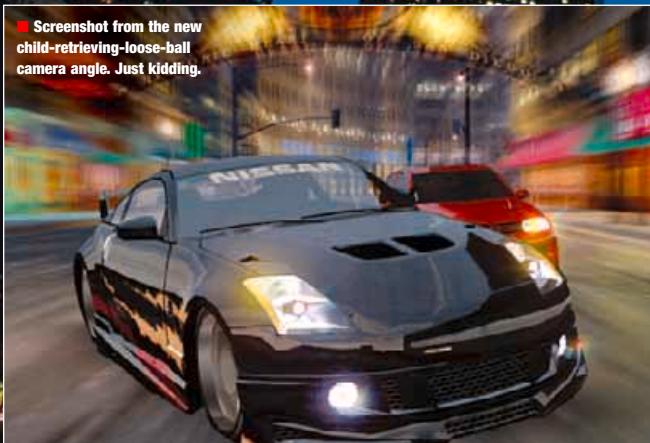
>> UBISOFT HAS SIGNED A DEAL WITH SONY PICTURES TO MAKE GAMES BASED ON THE STUDIO'S FIRST TWO ANIMATED FILMS, *OPEN SEASON* (DUE IN 2006) AND *SURF'S UP* (2007).... >>

You got high before shop class.
You thought you could handle the saw. You were wrong.
Weed can make you do stupid things like that.





In *MC3*, bikes and cars race side by side.



Screenshot from the new child-retrieving-loose-ball camera angle. Just kidding.



► this customization makes *Midnight Club 3* one of the most versatile racers around—you can either play it by the book or use it to build that block-rockin' sky-blue Corvette you drew in your notebook during grade school.

Of course, all your gleaming bling

belongs on city streets, not antiseptic racetracks. "We're offering three entirely open, independently living cities [San Diego, Atlanta, and Detroit] to tear through, each designed to give you the ability to choose your own route to the finish line," explains Garone. "While some

games coming out this fall talk about open city racing, they are in reality only traditional races with branches off of the usual path—we offer evolved, true open city racing that no one else can." Each metropolis packs various club races, large-scale tournaments, and little back-

woods drags for you to conquer, but you can't begin to seriously dominate your opponents until you know every back alley and improbable shortcut like the back of your hand. Expect to spend quality time just cruisin' the streets in your pimped-out ride.... — Kevin Gifford



Bling Online

You'll find a whopping 11 race modes in *Midnight Club 3*, all available for up to eight players online. Some are straight-up races, but several tweak the rules to create totally wild minigames. Our favorite: frenzy, in which you zoom from checkpoint to checkpoint while your car's spurting out an almost constant stream of nitro boost. Is it any wonder this game's from the makers of *Midtown Madness*? 🏎️

► THIS MAY, NAMCO WILL PUBLISH *ARC THE LAD: END OF DARKNESS* (PS2), THE FIRST GAME IN THE ROLE-PLAYING SERIES TO FEATURE REAL-TIME COMBAT AND AN ONLINE MODE.... ►

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PAC IN ACTION

25 years later, Pac-Man still has gamers chomping at the bit

The delicious taste of pizza only partly accounts for its status as the greatest food in the world. Further evidence: Without it, there would be no Pac-Man.

As the story goes, one day in 1979 Namco developer Toru Iwatani removed

a single slice and, after looking down upon the rest of the pie, saw what was to become one of the most popular characters in gaming history. The release of *Pac-Man* to arcades a year later ushered in the era of Pac-Mania, which over the next few years would

yield everything from character-based board games and breakfast cereal to a top-40 song and a popular Saturday-morning cartoon.

Now at 25 years old, our yellow (and you could say overweight) friend is up to more than enjoying lower

car-insurance rates. We bring you an exclusive first look at *Pac-Man World 3*...as well as glance at some of Pac-Man's greatest hits and misses over the last quarter-century. Cut yourself a slice and enjoy.

—Chris Baker



The Pac effect

Give it up for the chomper—who would've thought that an ever-hungry yellow ball could leave such a lasting mark on the videogame industry. Take a look:

The mascot character: Though one could argue the iconic value of certain invaders from space, *Pac-Man* was the first iconic videogame character.

The power-up: Before Mario did some 'shrooms, Pac-Man powered up with tasty power pellets.

The bonus item: Fruit such as cherries or strawberries appear on the board for extra points. Why? Who cares?

The cut-scene: Between stages 2 and 3, we're treated to a 12-second animation. Who knew this concept would evolve into 12-minute sequences in games like *Metal Gear Solid*.

The female lead: If not for Pac's better half, our *Playboys* would only be full of real naked ladies.

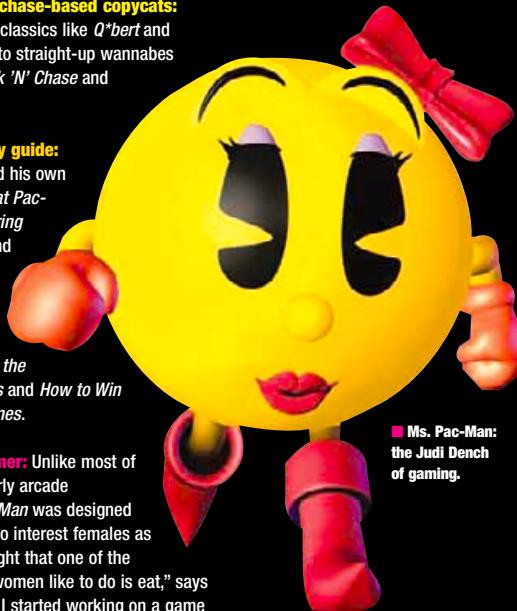
A bunch of chase-based copycats:

From actual classics like *Q*bert* and *BurgerTime* to straight-up wannabes such as *Lock 'N' Chase* and *Lady Bug*.

The strategy guide:

Pac-Man had his own books (*Win at Pac-Man*, *Mastering Pac-Man*) and was the main draw in titles such as *How to Beat the Video Games* and *How to Win at Video Games*.

The girl gamer: Unlike most of the other early arcade games, *Pac-Man* was designed specifically to interest females as well. "I thought that one of the things that women like to do is eat," says Iwatani. "So I started working on a game concept based on eating." It worked.



■ Ms. Pac-Man: the Judi Dench of gaming.



"I thought that one of the things that women like to do is eat. So I started working on a game concept based on eating."

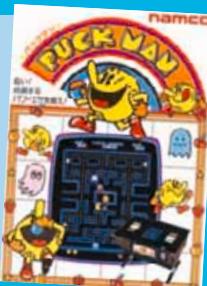
—Pac-Man creator Toru Iwatani



A FEW MORE STEPS DOWN MEMORY LANE

Did You Know?

Pac-Man's original title was actually *Puck Man*. Then arcade manufacturer Bally/Midway realized that the "P" could be easily vandalized to a certain other letter. And the name "Fac-Man" just isn't as funny.



Most Sexually Confused Ghost

Pinky, though as androgynous as any other ghost, was the tough-guy baddie in ABC's Hanna-Barbera *Pac-Man* cartoon. But starting with *Pac-Man World* (PS1/GBA), he had clearly become a she. Pinky even now harbors a serious crush on the birthday boy.



Best Effect on Corporate America

A "Pac-Man defense" is a term used in the business world and, according to dictionary.com, is defined as a stratagem used to prevent a hostile takeover, by which the target company tries to acquire the bidder.

BY THE NUMBERS

Snack on these powerful figures



■ *Pac-Man* master Billy Mitchell: secret agent or your next presidential candidate?

3,333,360

A perfect *Pac-Man* score. In 1999, Billy Mitchell became the first to achieve such a feat.

256

Stages in *Pac-Man*. Near the end, half of the screen gets garbled so that you can't see where Pac-Man is going.

244

Number of pellets on a standard *Pac-Man* level (240 Pac-dots, four power pellets).

100,000

Number of *Pac-Man* arcade machines that were sold from 1980 to 1981. Only *Ms. Pac-Man* (more than 115,000) has ever outsold it.

9

The highest spot that "Pac-Man Fever," a novelty song by Jerry Buckner and Gary Garcia, reached on the Billboard pop chart in 1982.



What's next

Our dot-gobbling hero has some allies in *Pac-Man World 3* (coming this fall to PS2, Xbox, and GameCube)—and they're not the kind you might expect. With the threat of Pac-Land's destruction looming (thanks to a guy named Erwin, no less—*Erwin!*), ghost monsters Pinky and Clyde have enlisted the help of their sworn nemesis in order to save their captured comrades and their world.

Pac-Man returns with his patented rev roll and butt-bounce, which now becomes a more powerful attack after he collects fruit. He also has some new *Prince of Persia*-inspired wall jumps and pole swings for puzzles, and he might come pac-in' a mighty punch (Namco's still on



■ It's ain't easy imitating the Prince when you're pushing this much weight.

the fence about that one). And even though Pac-Man is pals with the ghosts this time, he's got plenty of chomping to do against Erwin's Spectra creatures, which are rather ghostly in their own right.

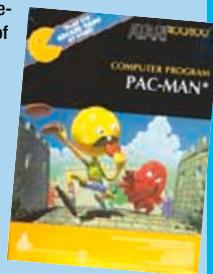
Namco says that roughly 30 percent of the game casts you as Pinky or Clyde, each with aptitudes of their own: Pinky can possess enemies and materialize platforms so he can clear obstacles, while



Clyde makes things explode and scares foes with a spectral boo. Could this mean a truce between the Pacs and ghost monsters for years to come? We can only hope not.

Worst Box Art

Reverend Shoebox puts it best on his hugely entertaining Pac-site, The First Church of Pac-Man (<http://www.flamingmayo.com/firstchurchofpacman>): "Ignoring the fact that the maze is now a CASTLE and the ghosts all look like GRIMACE, let's discuss Pac-Man, shall we? Note the mitten-like hand, the Campbell's Kid cheeks, the freakin' buck teeth, and the thoroughly unnecessary TORSO. **PAC-MAN DOES NOT HAVE A TORSO, ATARI!!!!!!**" Amen, Reverend.



What Would the Ms. Say?

Ever wonder why "the Stork" delivered the babies to the parents of Pac-Land? This scandalous sticker that came with Fleer trading cards might hold the answer!



Pac on the Big Screen?

In '02, Crystal Sky LLC announced it had purchased the rights to produce a *Pac-Man* movie. It's '05 now, though, and we ain't heard squat since. Probably for the best. 🍷

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5

The title 'DYNASTY WARRIORS 5' is rendered in a bold, stylized font. 'DYNASTY' and 'WARRIORS' are in white with a red outline, while the number '5' is in white with a red and gold outline. A sword is positioned horizontally across the '5'. To the right, a square frame contains the Japanese characters '真田' (Maeda) in a calligraphic style. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky.

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- More powerful attacks!
- Enhanced tactical gameplay!

PlayStation[®]2



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COUNTDOWN TO 200 | TOP 10 MISTAKES

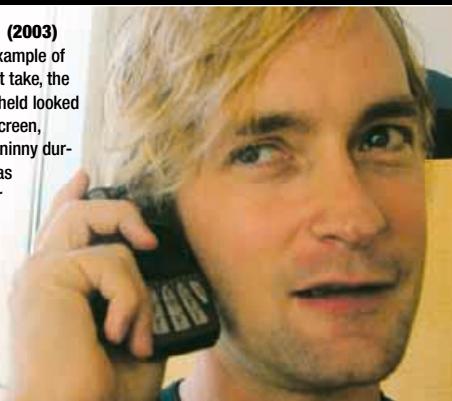
The road to videogame greatness is paved with equally great failures—some merely ill advised, others so comical that you'll wonder why the people behind them aren't now working the grill at your local burger joint. As we inch closer to our 200th issue, here's what we think are the top 10 blunders in game history—visit the 1UP.com message boards and bring up your own favorite mistakes.

10 **Sony's PS2 online hype (2000)**
During the PlayStation 2's infancy, Sony promised console owners a future of online Web browsing, video downloads, streaming music, the works. A few years later, it gave us...well, nothing even close to the features found on Xbox Live.

9 **Microsoft's enormous Xbox controller (2001)**
The butt of jokes immediately after its unveiling, the first-generation Xbox gamepad was the console equivalent of a Hummer—huge, ostentatious, and a total waste of space. Microsoft quietly replaced it with the trimmer Controller S in 2002.



8 **N-Gage (2003)**
Another example of a poor first take, the original N-Gage handheld looked ugly, had a blinding screen, made you look like a ninny during cell-phone calls (as ex-EGMer Joe Fielder beautifully demonstrates here), and cost \$300. Nokia rectified some of these problems with the quick release of its cheaper and smaller QD model.



7 **Nintendo chooses cartridges for N64 (1994)**
Even though CDs were less expensive and held more data, Nintendo thought cartridges were the way to go with its N64 console. End result: Third parties flocked to PS1, creating a hole that Nintendo is still digging its way out of.

6 **Sega launches Saturn early (1995)**
Sega released its 32-bit system four months early, but it didn't tell *anyone* beforehand, including game makers and most retailers. Add to that a steep price, and Saturn was dead in the water by PS1's launch.

Jaguar showed just how clueless Atari was during the '90s.



5 **Atari Jaguar (1993)**
The first "64-bit" system showed just how clueless Atari was during the '90s—Jaguar looked nondescript, had a terrible dial-pad controller, and its game library included such "classics" as *Club Drive* and *White Men Can't Jump*.

4 **Sega 32X (1994)**
Let's say you're a Sega fan 10 years ago. Which do you want: the powerful 32-bit Saturn or a dinky little Genesis upgrade that could play a slower-than-molasses *Doom*? Sega figured consumers would shoot for the latter and buy its \$150 32X, but gamers took one look at the "advanced" software and turned up their noses, leading to the most public failure in Sega's history.

3 **Virtual Boy (1995)**
Brainchild of Game Boy creator Gunpei Yokoi, VB let you play games in honest-to-God 3D. Unfortunately, that's the only nice thing about the most colossal Nintendo flop ever: The system was ugly, the games were unmemorable, and the thing literally gave you headaches if you played it for more than 30 minutes.



2 **Nintendo abandons Sony partnership (1992)**
The first PlayStation actually began life way back in 1991 as a super-charged add-on to the 16-bit Super NES. Nintendo, leery of Sony's intentions, backed away from the concept and signed on with European outfit Philips to make the CD-ROM attachment instead. The deal with Philips went nowhere, and Sony realized that nothing was stopping it from releasing PlayStation independently. You know the rest.



1 **Atari turns down deal with Nintendo (1984)** — Nintendo was *this close* to letting Atari distribute its first console—but talks fell through after an unrelated spat over an unauthorized home port of *Donkey Kong*. Nintendo launched the NES itself in '85, revolutionizing the industry and making the name "Nintendo" synonymous with videogames and "Atari" synonymous with ancient beep-boop hardware.

Honorable Mentions



■ Tiger releases the hideous Game.com portable (1997)

■ Nintendo tries to sell "connectivity" to uninterested GameCube owners (2003)

■ EGM puts Bruce Willis bomb *Hudson Hawk* (NES) on the cover (1991)



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THE RUMOR MILL

You'll find gold-plated gossip at the end of this rainbow

Man, I wish all months were like March (and I'm not just saying that 'cause St. Patty's Day gives me an excuse to make a bumbling idiot out of myself). Apparently, the luck of the Irish has helped deliver a ridiculous number of can't-miss hits (*Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* and *Gran Turismo 4* to mention just a few) during what tends to be the driest season for gaming. Plus, it's brought some truly wonderful rumors that are easily worth their weight in gold. So while I track down the *Leprechaun: Back 2 the Hood* DVD (thus making my planned celebration for March 17 complete), please send your comments to quartermann@ziffdavis.com. —The Q

PlayStation 3 > Xbox 2

Every time I've chatted about next-gen consoles with the development community, nobody has really been able to tell me which machine has the most horsepower...until now. One high-profile developer

who has seen both PS3 and Xbox 2 technology recently whispered into my innocent ear, "The next PlayStation is way, way more powerful than Xbox 2. It's *insanely* powerful." But don't cry, all you Xbots out there—my source promises that we'll still be quite impressed with the capabilities of Microsoft's Xbox successor.

Slight change to one next-gen timetable

In past rumor mills, The Q's reported that Bill Gates' gang would more than likely unveil its next console in March at the Game Developers Conference. Well, change of plans: It now looks like Microsoft wants to make a superhuge Xbox 2 splash at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (this May's trade show extravaganza). Oh, and I'd bet my piggy bank—all \$43.82—that the next-gen machine will be under Christmas trees in '05, as my best friend's sister's boyfriend informed me that two Xbox 2 games (sorry, I'd get a pair of cement boots if I told you their names) are already confirmed for this holiday season.

Nintendo finally catches the online bug

Before you go sprinting out the door to purchase a GameCube

■ When DS heads online, expect to do a lot more than *PictoChat*-ing.

broadband adapter, allow me to clarify: Nintendo plans to support DS's—not Cube's—online capabilities. Supposedly, the company is putting the finishing touches on its "Nintendo DS Network," which will let you play online-compatible titles for its dual-screen handheld via Wi-Fi hot spots. And I hear Nintendo and several key publishers will soon reveal some big (and I'm talkin' *big*) titles that'll take advantage of this most-wanted feature.

Where's Half-Life 2?

I don't really consider myself a big PC gamer (hey, I write for a console mag for crying out loud), but even I can't deny the greatness that is *Half-Life 2*. So what's up with the Xbox version? In my best Spanish accent—nada. It appears the project has moved to Xbox 2, and if everything goes accordingly, the first-person shooter could be out the door by the console's launch.

■ Look for *HL2*'s Gordon Freeman swinging his crowbar on Xbox 2.

This soul just keeps on burnin'

Yours truly is an absolute *Soul Calibur* junkie (let me play as the silent but violent Voldo and I'll make anyone my beyotch), so it brings me great pleasure to deliver this scrumptious piece of gossip: It seems Namco is prepping another edition of its weapon-based fighter for release this fall (on PS2, Xbox, GameCube, and Xbox 2), and just as in *SC2*, each version's roster will include one exclusive character. Who are these extraspecial pugilists? Well, I'll leave that subject for another time....



Believe It or Not

Q: Will we ever play the GameCube project best known as *Mario 128*?

A: That's a big 10-4, good buddy. Word around town is that Nintendo will use this May's E3 trade show to debut the plumber's next platforming adventure, which will then land on store shelves in early '06. Some other *Mario 128* info: Apparently, a new director and development team are working on the game, and it may feature some sort of fixed camera.

>> STILL WONDERING ABOUT THOSE EXCLUSIVE *SOUL CALIBUR 3* CHARACTERS? MAYBE ONE'S GUMBY, AS NAMCO HAS NABBED THE LICENSING RIGHTS TO THE GREEN PIECE OF CLAY... >>>



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PS2/XB

SHOW AND TELL: PSYCHONAUTS

Publisher: Majesco
Developer: Double Fine
Release Date: April 2005

After this camp, you'll need counseling

With its creepy kids at a psychic summer camp, oddball mental powers, weirdly mutated creatures, and bizarre levels set in the twisted minds of clinically insane freaks, *Psychonauts* makes even the weirdest action games seem pedestrian in comparison. Iconoclastic, outspoken, and somewhat insane (in the best possible way) creator Tim Schafer steps in to help explain his experimental new platformer.

—Shane Bettenhausen



Words Can Kill

Tim Schafer: It may look like this Censor is trying to kill Raz with his bad breath, but please! Ha! That would be ridiculous. What he's really doing is saying the word "no" really loudly, in such a way as to kill our hero dead. I'm not sure why Raz is glowing in this shot, but I think it's because he's about to do something badass.



Matador Style

TS: OK, if I explain this move to you, you have to promise not to try it at home. Raz has mentally locked on to the bull, which allows him to tumble quickly to the side and circle around behind the beast known as El Odio. While his head is near the ground, Raz notices that the bull has on exceptional boots.



Kill Your TV

TS: One of Raz's superspecial secret moves—watching TV. Raz is not mystified by the TV itself, but rather by why all the kids in camp are watching it with their jaws open. What he doesn't know is that they're missing their brains. Oh, wait, he does know that at this point, but he doesn't care because his favorite show is on.



Don't Drink the Water

TS: The animals at Whispering Rock Psychic Summer Camp mutated after drinking psitanium-laced water. This one has learned pyrokinesis, making it a huge pain in the ass. You can see that Raz has his invisibility power mapped to the black button. Why doesn't he use it on the cougar to avoid being burned? Stupid Raz!



Undersea Peril

TS: OK, so you invaded the private underwater air bubble of the Huling Lungfish Monster, and you didn't expect it to spit some jagged lake debris at you? Come on, the poor thing was sleeping and you rudely woke it up just because it ate your girlfriend? Of course it's mad!



Summer Fun

TS: Ah the simple joys of summer camp: chirping birds, noble pine trees, friendship bracelets, and sneaking up on unsuspecting little girls from behind. Wait, what is Raz doing here? Does he mean them ill will? Is he going to hurt them? Only if the player wants to. So, I guess that means yes.



Meat Circus

TS: I can't even begin to tell you about this screenshot because this particular level is totally supposed to be a secret. I don't even know how this got in here. Oh man. C'mon please don't print this. Man oh man. Looking at it, though, I have to admit I'm getting kind of hungry.



Dream Diary

TS: Tremendous effort went into creating environments that all players could easily relate to. Case in point: That's a man-eating plant on the left, of course. And behind Raz you'll spy a tornado and the egg that our hero just hatched out of. We've all had this dream, right? It's not just me...I hope...



Help the Aged

TS: Ford Cruller only looks crazy. Well, actually he is pretty damned crazy, but not all the time. And he has a colossal, life-alteringly shocking secret that will totally blow your mind. Except you find it out pretty early in the game, so it's not *that* big of a secret. So I might as well just tell you...whoops! Out of room!



Egg-celent

TS: This is the part where Raz hatches out of an egg. Hmm. I don't think I'll explain *why* he hatches out of an egg. I'll just point out that he's holding the *cobweb duster*. Raz uses that to pull down the *mental cobwebs* that clog up the minds he's exploring. Oh, man. Look at that tornado coming to get him! Run, Raz, run!



Freedom Fries

TS: Here Raz enters the mind of Fred Bonaparte, where he's waging war with the tiny Napoleon in Fred's head. First step: Raz telekinetically moves the carpenter playing piece over to the broken bridge to fix it. That move is straight out of the *Art of War*. Everybody knows it. Next step: Kicking le ass and taking le names. 🍌

IN THE HOT SEAT: A TOTAL PSYCHO



Every so often, *EGM* chats with big-time gamemakers and asks for their preferences on different subjects. Sitting in this month's burning chair: Double Fine head Tim Schafer, who is using all of his brainpower to finish the trippy platformer *Psychonauts* (PS2/XB) by this April.

Really Psycho



Anthony Perkins

Miss Cleo

Tim Schafer: Careful. She's listening. But even if she weren't, I'd still think the same thing: "Hi, Miss Cleo! Please don't kill me!"

Platformer



Mario

Sonic

TS: Our lead tester has a Sonic tattoo, so please don't tell him I picked Mario. I mean Sonic is made up. Mario is a *real* guy.

Summer Camp Activity



Making macramé owls

Raiding the girls' cabin

TS: Trust me, if you've got a nicely made macramé owl, then the girls will come to *you*.

THE HOT TEN

You'd kill to have these games... but that doesn't mean that you should

Disagree with the list? You're the ones who created it. Choose and/or lose at egm.1UP.com.



■ Link once again sits comfortably atop the chart.



1 **The Legend of Zelda**
GC • Fall 2005

2 **Castlevania**
DS • Fall 2005

3 **Final Fantasy XII**
PS2 • Fall 2005

4 **Wanda and the Colossus** ➔
PS2 • Fall 2005



5 **Animal Crossing**
DS • Summer 2005

6 **Kingdom Hearts II**
PS2 • September 2005



7 **Fire Emblem**
GC • Summer 2005

8 **Dragon Quest VIII** ➔
PS2 • Fall 2005

9 **Jade Empire**
XB • April 2005

10 **Killer 7** ➔
GC • June 2005



■ These days, Link's not the only hero with a trusty steed.

WANDA AND THE COLOSSUS

PS2 • Fall 2005 — *Wanda* brings fresh blood to the old countdown: This new adventure from Sony (specifically, the guys behind PS2 cult-classic *Ico*) casts you as a boy who must battle massive stone giants to save a mysterious princess. You'll face

several living statues, including giant bipedal beasts, flying dragons, and huge bull-like creatures. Luckily, our hero isn't alone—just as *Ico* had aid from the linguistically-impaired beauty Yorda, *Wanda's* warrior gets help from his (equally eloquent) horse.



DRAGON QUEST VIII

PS2 • Fall 2005 — Talk about a ragtag questing party: In *DQ8*, you journey with a princess who's been turned into a horse, a saucy fortune-teller, a strange green-skinned old man, and a tiny pet rat that lives in the hero's pocket. These lovable odd-balls spring to life with the distinct style of *Dragon Ball Z* artist Akira Toriyama, but don't worry—*DQ's* turn-based battles move much faster than a martial-arts soap opera.



KILLER 7

GC • June 2005 — This bizarre, artsy shooter places you in the twisted mind of a hit man with seven distinct personalities. And we do mean *distinct*, like Con Smith, a blind kid with a funky pair of headphones. Exceptional hearing makes up for his lack of sight, and he moves quicker than the human eye can follow—visualizing sound and emptying pistol clips with the speed of an automatic weapon.

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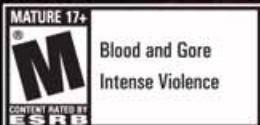


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“David Duchovny, why won't you love me?”

<p>APRIL 2005</p>	<p>Area 51 Midway • PS2/XB — Voice work by David Duchovny and Marilyn Manson make this alien shoot-em-up even more otherworldly.</p>	<p>Cold Winter VU Games • PS2 — This brutal first-person shooter mixes James Bond-style espionage with lots of dismemberment.</p>	<p>Dead to Rights II: Hell to Pay Namco • PS2/XB — Jack Slate and his canine companion indulge in more <i>Turner & Hooch</i>-esque law-enforcement hijinks.</p>
<p>Delta Force: Black Hawk Down NovaLogic • XB — Bored with WWII and Vietnam War shooters? Dabble in a these 1993 Ranger campaigns in Somalia.</p>	<p>Donkey Konga 2 Nintendo • GC — Dust off the bongos and beat along to a new batch of tunes in this beatnik-friendly follow-up.</p>	<p>Lego Star Wars Eidos • PS2/XB — George Lucas has been criticized for infantilizing the new <i>Star Wars</i> trilogy, and this game certainly doesn't age the flicks up. Shockingly, though, turning <i>Episodes I-III</i> into Legos looks like less of a choking hazard than the upcoming film.</p>	
<p>Fahrenheit VU Games • PS2 — Play as both fugitive and hunter in this low-impact interactive thriller. Hand-eye coordination optional.</p>	<p>Frogger Konami • DS — The classic hopper leaps onto dual screens but lacks touch-panel play. Maybe if you lick a frog first....</p>	<p>Metal Slug 4 & 5 SNK • PS2/XB — Engage in back-to-back side-scrolling fun with this cartoony arcade shooter double pack.</p>	
<p>Nintendo Pennant Race Nintendo • GC — After six years of riding the pine, Nintendo returns to the diamond with an RPG-esque career mode, a detailed stadium creator, a cool way of speeding up (but still playing through) games, and simple yet deep pitching/batting mechanics.</p>		<p>Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Rockstar • PS2/XB — Lots of games offer tricked-out street racing. But only this one carries the blessing of <i>DUB</i> magazine.</p>	<p>Still Life DreamCatcher • XB — Break out the luminol to solve grisly, M-rated murders in this <i>CSI</i>-inspired adventure game.</p>
<p>Predator: Concrete Jungle VU Games • PS2/XB — Hunt prohibition-era bootleggers as Predator with an arsenal of alien weapons. It hardly seems fair.</p>		<p>Still Life DreamCatcher • XB — Break out the luminol to solve grisly, M-rated murders in this <i>CSI</i>-inspired adventure game.</p>	

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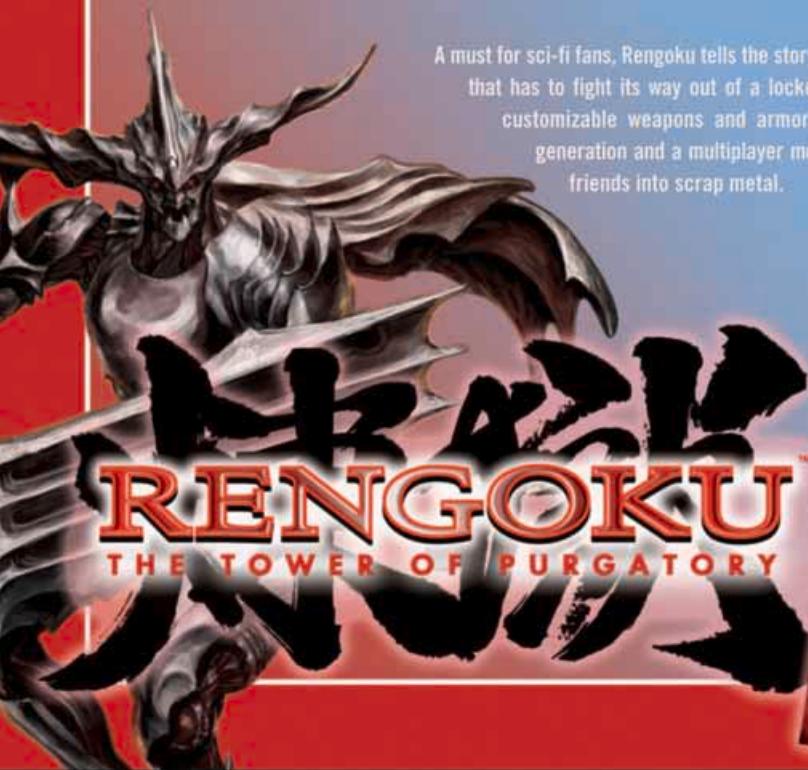
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PAGE	GAME	CONSOLE	PUBLISHER	ETA	DELAY	
● ●	097 Area 51	PS2/XB	Midway	2005 Apr	06 mo.	Delayed
● ●	---- 4 Horsemen of Apocalypse	PS2/XB	3DO	----	02 yrs.	Cancelled
● ●	099 Advent Rising	XB	Majesco	2005 May	15 mo.	Delayed
● ●	098 Kameo: Elements of Power	XB	Microsoft	Unknown	02 yrs.	Delayed
● ●	096 25 to Life	PS2/XB	Eidos	2005 Apr		On time
● ●	094 Killer 7	GC	Capcom	2005 Jun	06 mo.	Delayed
● ●	---- Nightmare Creatures 3	PS2/XB	Ubisoft	----	12 mo.	Cancelled
● ●	098 Destroy All Humans	PS2/XB	THQ	2005 Apr		On time
● ●	---- 100 Bullets	PS2/XB	Acclaim	----	06 mo.	Cancelled
● ●	---- Juiced	PS2/XB	THQ	2005 May	08 mo.	Delayed
● ●	094 StarCraft: Ghost	PS2/XB/GC	VU Games	2005 Fall	02 yrs.	Delayed
● ●	094 Nightmare Before Xmas	PS2/XB	Buena Vst	2005 Fall	12 mo.	Delayed
● ●	---- Plague of Darkness	PS2/XB	Namco	----	12 mo.	Cancelled
● ●	096 Conker: Live & Reloaded	XB	Microsoft	2005 May	18 mo.	Delayed
● ●	---- Chulip	PS2	Natsume	2005 Fall	12 mo.	Delayed
● ●	---- Vectorman	PS2	Sega	----	02 yrs.	Cancelled
● ●	097 Altered Beast	PS2	Sega	----	12 mo.	Rerouted
● ●	---- Battlebots	PS2/XB	THQ	----	02 yrs.	Cancelled

DEPARTURES



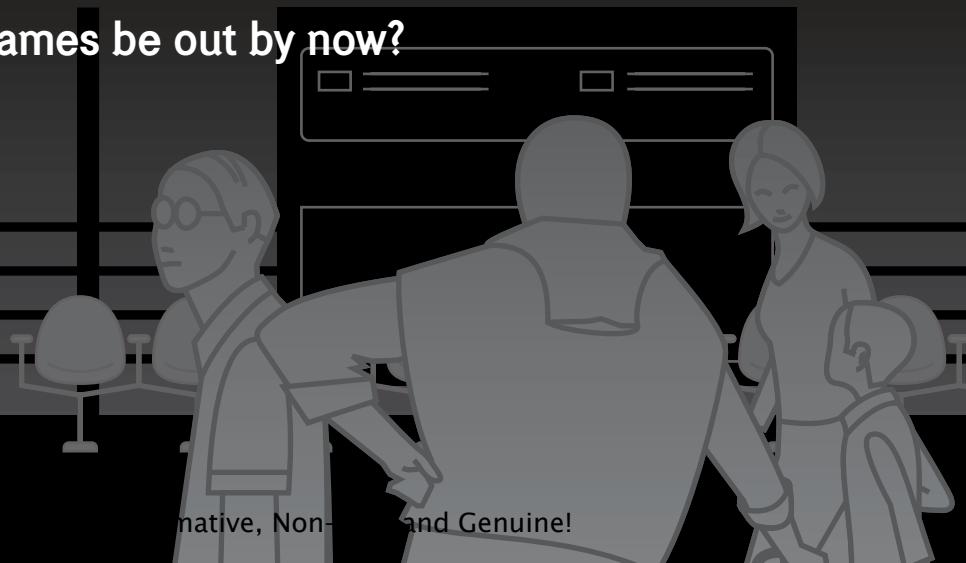
TERMINAL 1

ABC

HOLDING PATTERN

Hey, shouldn't these games be out by now?

In some exceptionally rare cases, games actually land on store shelves precisely at the time their publishers promised. The majority of the time, though, the hot titles you're craving experience troubling delays. And while release-date slippage certainly sucks, it's not the worst thing that can happen: Many games tumble off the radar entirely, and some face the dire specter of cancellation. Here's a heads up on those games that are taking forever to come out, the ones that never committed to a firm arrival time, and the tragic victims that never made it off the ground. >



Game status



Now On Time — These oddly punctual games only *seem* late



Circling — Minor delays keep these games from landing

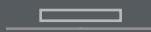


Turbulence — Serious shake-ups threaten these projects



Terminated — These games crashed and burned mid-flight

PAGE	GAME	CONSOLE	PUBLISHER	ETA	DELAY	
● ●	---- Fire Emblem	GC	Nintendo	2005 Summer	06 mo.	Delayed
● ●	---- Giftpia	GC	Nintendo	----	06 mo.	Cancelled
● ●	---- Stage Debut	GC	Nintendo	----	03 yrs.	Cancelled
● ●	096 Geist	GC	Nintendo	2005 Summer	06 mo.	Delayed
● ●	097 Advance Wars: Undr Fire	GC	Nintendo	2005 Summer	06 mo.	Delayed
● ●	---- Frst Strk: Grnt Cty	PS2/XB	Namco	----	02 yrs.	Cancelled
● ●	---- Far Cry: Instincts	PS2/XB	Ubisoft	2005 Summer	06 mo.	Cancelled
● ●	---- The Movies	PS2/XB/GC	Activision	2005 Fall	12 mo.	Delayed
● ●	---- True Fantasy Live Online	XB	Microsoft	----	02 yrs.	Rerouted
● ●	---- Unity	GC	Lionhead	----	12 mo.	Cancelled
● ●	---- Black 9	PS2/XB	VU Games	----	02 yrs.	Cancelled
● ●	099 Odama	GC	Nintendo	2005 Summer	06 mo.	Delayed
● ●	---- Dead Rush	PS2/XB	Activision	----	08 mo.	Cancelled
● ●	---- The Lost	PS2/XB	Crave	----	03 yrs.	Cancelled
● ●	099 Battlefield: Mdrn Cmbt	PS2/XB	EA Games	2005 Nov	12 mo.	Delayed
● ●	---- Fear Effect: Inferno	PS2/XB	Eidos	----	02 yrs.	Cancelled
● ●	098 The Red Star	PS2/XB	Acclaim	----	06 mo.	Cancelled
● ●	---- The Adversary	PS2/XB	Namco	----	06 mo.	Cancelled

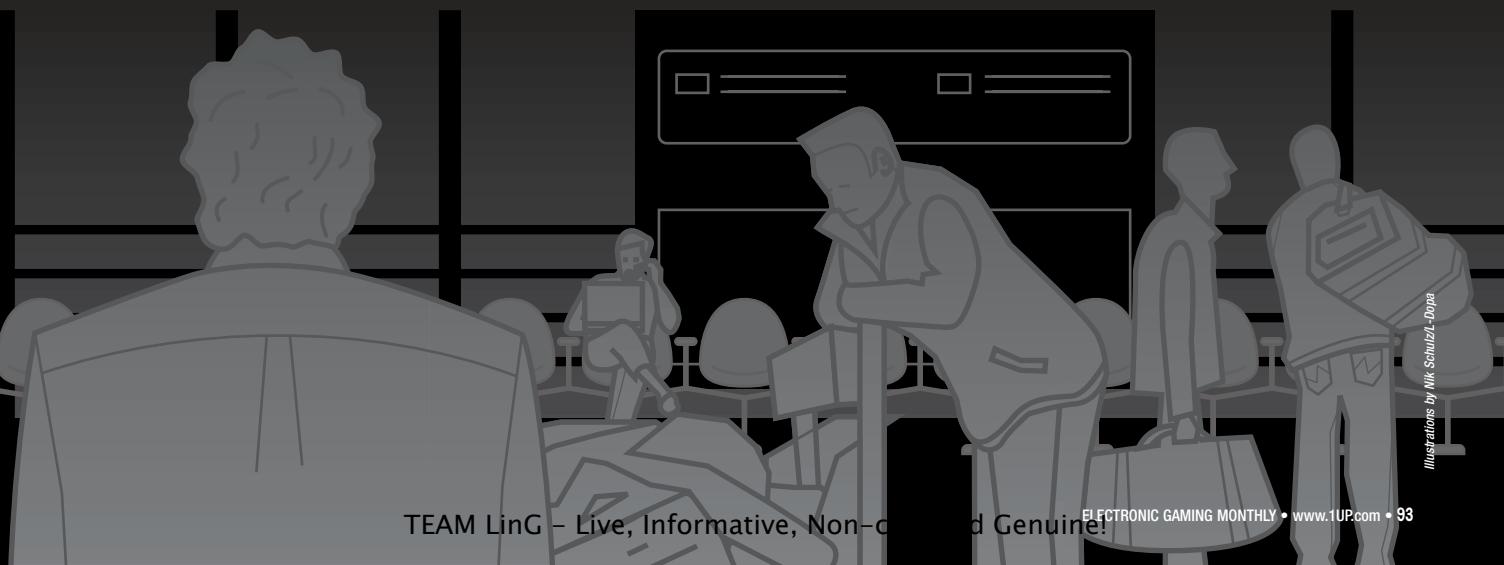


ARRIVALS

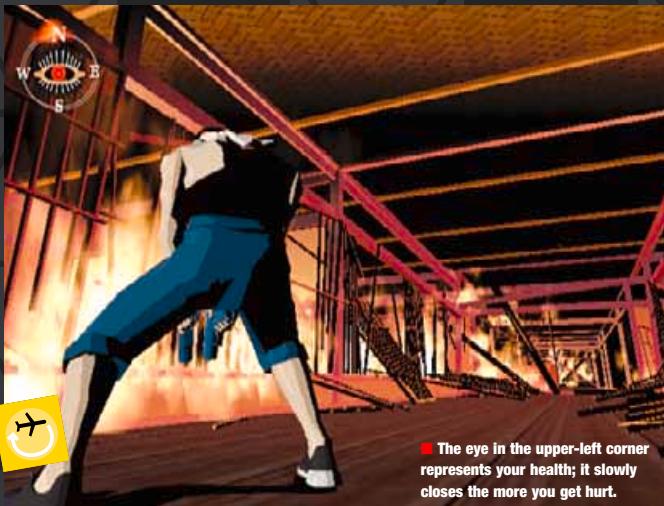


TERMINAL 1

ABC



Illustrations by Nik Schultz-Dopa



■ The eye in the upper-left corner represents your health; it slowly closes the more you get hurt.



■ Hit your enemies in the sweet spot (that yellow area) to take them down with a single shot.

KILLER 7

PS2/GC • Capcom • June 2005

High hopes: “Yes, crazy. Crazy!” Capcom Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi doesn’t wait for the question to be translated—he doesn’t have to. “Mr. Suda is crazy.” Apparently, we aren’t the first to inquire about the mental stability of enigmatic director Suda 51 after finally seeing his freaky “post-modern” game, *Killer 7*, in action.

On paper, the premise seems simple enough: a shooter where players swap between the titular seven characters on the fly, each toting guns with different strengths and weaknesses, and all with upgradeable abilities (strength, speed, etc.) of their own. Most everything takes place on rails; the player’s only option is to go forward or back on a predetermined path, switching into first person to aim and blow away enemies.

But take a closer look and you’ll see why even Kobayashi admits the game is “difficult to describe in words.” Those seven

playable characters, for example: One’s a madman decked out in a cape and Mexican wrestling mask; another is a blind, dual-pistol-wielding adolescent; another is a woman who uncovers secrets by slashing her wrists and spraying blood everywhere. It’s even more bizarre when you learn these aren’t real people at all, but different personalities of the one true main character—a schizophrenic wheelchair-bound old man named Harman Smith. Our hero may drift in and out of consciousness, but don’t worry, a young nurse waits by his side to take care of him. That is, when she’s not having sex with him or savagely beating him.

The list goes on: Those “people” you’re shooting? Insane demonlike specters from a terrorist cult called Heaven Smiles who laugh maniacally whenever they appear or get shot. The “points” you earn for killing them and use to heal yourself or bump up your skills are actually blood—the enemies

explode into thousands of bits of it, which you collect. And of course then there are the visuals: a surreal mix of hand-drawn animation, CG cinemas, and the stark, stylized real-time graphics you see here. “We were tired of seeing rehashes time and time again, so we wanted to do something really unique,” says Kobayashi. “As far as games go, it really is a work of art.”

What took so long?: “It took a little longer than planned to get the story, as well as the overall quality of the game, to the level we wanted,” says Kobayashi. We also hear rumors the numerous delays have to do with the PS2 version; not so much getting it to work on the system as convincing Sony America to approve a game with such wild content. This summer we find out if Sony, and Capcom, made the right decision—if Suda 51 is the mad genius Kobayashi claims he is, or just plain mad.



■ Harman Smith: Just your typical geriatric, wheelchair-bound schizophrenic sniper-assassin game hero.



WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO...



StarCraft: Ghost

PS2/XB/GC • VU Games • Fall 2005 — Originally announced way back in 2002, this stealth-action evolution of Blizzard’s megapopular PC strategy hit has trod a winding, bumpy path to completion. Last year, the game’s original developer got the boot, and a new team (Swingin’ Ape,



the dudes behind sleeper hit *Metal Arms: Glitch in the System*) came on board. Word on the street is that it couldn’t salvage much of the previous work and instead reset the project entirely. Look for more info on the reborn *Ghost* very soon....



The Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge

PS2/XB • Buena Vista • Fall 2005 — This action-packed sequel to Tim Burton’s memorable claymation flick was supposed to scare up business for Capcom last Halloween but instead mysteriously slipped off release lists (although the PlayStation 2 version did



come out in Japan, oddly enough). It has now resurfaced with a new publisher (Disney subsidiary Buena Vista) and an Xbox port, but U.S. players will have to wait until this year’s All Hallow’s Eve for a chance to control Jack Skellington. >

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25 TO LIFE

PS2/XB • Eidos • April 2005

High hopes: Played *SOCOM*? What about *GTA: San Andreas*? You probably at least played a little cops and robbers at recess. Assuming you enjoyed any of these games, *25 to Life* should work for you. The basic idea is to pull that addictive *SOCOM* squad action out of Turkmenistan and dump it into the gritty ganglands of South Central L.A.

The focus here is on online urban car-

nage. You can indulge in a single-player story mode, but it's hardly *San Andreas'* lead C.J.'s Orange Grove Families saga. Instead, this straightforward, mission-based mode gets you pumped to play against real humans online—the meat of the game. Eight players per side can control cops or gangbangers. Deathmatch is key, of course, but the game's draw will likely lie in the other modes, which mix

the urban flavor with ideas cribbed from *Counter-Strike*. The raid mode has cops breaking into the gangsters' cribs, while robbery has the crew ganking loot and hauling it back to their base. Cops have a highly versatile arsenal, thanks to taxpayer dollars; the thugs, on the other hand, have the powerful illegal street weapons you'd expect, making your choice more crucial than cosmetic.

What took so long?: "Who wants to release a game in November?" developer Hwy 1's Jake Neri quips. "Seriously, we've been fortunate because Eidos has always had the attitude that we should ship this game when it is ready.... It is a luxury that most teams don't have, and we have tried to use the time wisely." Hopefully, we can expect a bug-free gang war when *25 to Life* hits the streets this April.



■ Prepare to get gunned down by gangstas...well, actually, whiny 12-year-olds from Nebraska.



WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO...



Conker: Live & Reloaded

XB • Microsoft • May 2005 — Porting the bawdy exploits of this foul-mouthed squirrel from the Nintendo 64 to the Xbox has turned into a much tougher endeavor than expected—developer Rare first showed *Reloaded* in playable form nearly two years ago. The single-player



game required only a graphical face-lift (although, admittedly, updating the antiquated *Matrix* and *Saving Private Ryan* parodies would be welcomed), but building the online multiplayer modes has slowed progress to a glacial pace. The fur should finally fly this May.



Geist

GC • Nintendo • Summer 2005 — *Geist* is not your average Nintendo title. It's ostensibly a first-person shooter but with a wacky twist: You portray a spectral entity that possesses people, animals, and inanimate objects in order to fend off evildoers. Maybe it's the ambitious



scope of the project (how do you make playing as a fire extinguisher fun?) or the seemingly inexperienced development team (N-Space, the guys behind *Mary-Kate and Ashley: Sweet 16*), but for some reason, this game seems destined for even more delays.



■ ROM: Space Knight, pulled from Radio Shack's dumpster for one last, tragic mission.



AREA 51



PS2/XB • Midway • April 2005

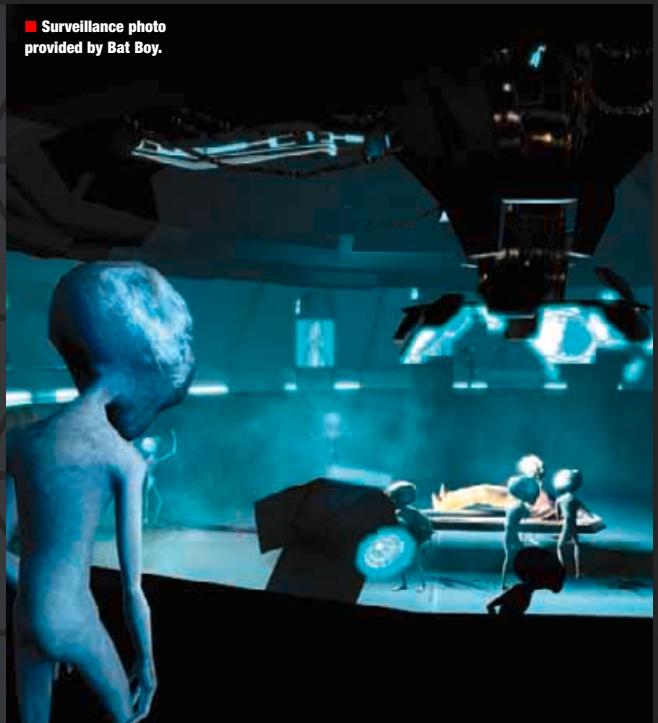
High hopes: Although it carries the somewhat embarrassing DNA of its old arcade light-gun game cousin, this new *Area 51* impresses as a thoroughly modern first-person shooter driven by scripted events and a good, creepy ambiance. The setting: a secret military base that's not only overrun with aliens, but froths with a viral outbreak that makes vicious man-mutants out of stationed military personnel. Sounds like a bitch of a conspiracy to suppress.

Following standard gaming procedure, you'll start with conventional weapons, including pistols, shotguns, and rifles, before encountering exotic alien armaments and the mixed blessing of parasitic mutant powers. As for backup, your expendable squad buddies do their best to stay alive...until they're eventually replaced by a smallish gray alien named Edgar—fittingly voiced by Marilyn Manson (the musician says he identifies with his character, as they both share “a distaste for mankind

in general”). The lead role employs the vocal chords of David Duchovny, famous for his calm, low-key performances in *The X-Files* and soft-core cable serial *Red Shoe Diaries*—but you speak the loudest with your shooting and/or parasitizing.

What took so long?: *Area 51* missed its holiday ship date, meaning no cuddly mutant parasites busted out of anyone's abdomen on Christmas morning. But it sounds like the delay was actually a boon for the project. “The extra time allowed us to make almost every facet of the game a *little* better, which tends to make a game *much* better,” says *Area 51* Creative Director Jim Stiefelmaier. “We crafted a more robust, polished multiplayer experience; we spent time building more multiplayer maps, doubling the number we initially intended to ship with; we bumped up the enemy A.I.; plus we increased the single-player maps from 14 to 18.”

■ Surveillance photo provided by Bat Boy.



WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO...



Advance Wars: Under Fire

GC • Nintendo • Summer 2005 — Fans of the *Advance Wars* GBA strategy games swooned over the potential for a GC version...until they actually saw it. Bearing little resemblance to the series' traditional turn-based tactics, *Under Fire* dishes up frantic real-time warfare on 3D battle-



fields. Gameplay actually feels a bit like *Pikmin*—you command troops with a circular cursor—but the heavy artillery and comical casualties remind you that this is war, not gardening. New screens prove cancellation rumors to be untrue, but a release date remains elusive.



Project Altered Beast

PS2 • Sega • Cancelled — Sega's getting cold feet about reinventing its classic franchises: First it cancels the planned PS2 *Vectorman* game, and now it quietly silences the 3D update of *Altered Beast*. Unlike *Vectorman*, *Beast* is actually finished—it recently came out in Japan—



so chances are decent that another publisher might take a chance on it. Oldsters looking for a direct sequel to the classic game are in for a shock: This update eschews the classic game's mythological trappings in favor of modern-day genetically engineered manimals. ➤



■ Crypto displays blatant disregard for our treasured pieces of patriotic art.



DESTROY ALL HUMANS!

PS2/XB • THQ • April 2005

High hopes: *Destroy All Humans!* takes the *Grand Theft Auto*-inspired free-roamin' "sandbox" concept in a wild new direction: You're an alien sent to terrorize unsuspecting Americans in the 1950s. Sure, the big-headed extraterrestrial known as Crypto 137 brings otherworldly destruction to the blue planet in the form of screaming green death rays, taking names and harvesting brainstems (redeemable for useful alien upgrades).

But your advanced alien brain is capable of much, much more. For example, one could levitate a puny human with psychokinetic energy and repeatedly slam his frail, flailing body into a barn until he acknowledges your superior intellect by going completely limp.

OK, so the end result is a destroyed human. However, when you'd rather your malevolent presence go undetected, the power of hypnosis allows you to walk

among mankind undetected or implant powerful suggestions into the minds of individuals—insidious suggestions like "dance, you fool" or "follow me...to your doom!" could create a less methodical, more improvisational kind of stealth gameplay. And since you're trying to harvest genetic material to save your home planet, plan on carrying out a few abductions as well. Unfortunately, it appears that everyone's favorite brand of alien investi-

gation—anal probing—will not be an option in the game....

What took so long?: Actually, *Destroy* hasn't really been delayed...it just feels that way: THQ never officially announced a set date outside of the vague "Spring 2005." That way, the guys at developer Pandemic had plenty of time to develop Crypto's unique powers and flesh out the whimsical world he gleefully invades.



■ Wreak havoc on national monuments in Crypto's saucer.



WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO...



The Red Star

PS2/XB • Acclaim • Cancelled — Now this is a real tearjerker—struggling publisher Acclaim finally crafts a kick-ass game, but the company goes belly-up one month before it's scheduled to ship. Yep, *The Red Star*, a creative brawler/shooter hybrid based on a cool



indie comic book, was all but finished before the project was halted. Everyone expected this promising release to end up at another publisher (THQ scooped up Acclaim's street racer *Juiced*), but we're hearing that now, *Star* will probably never make it to store shelves. Bummer.



Kameo: Elements of Power

XB • Microsoft • Unknown — Unquestionably the game with the longest, strangest trip to completion in recent memory, Rare's *Kameo* debuted as a GameCube title in 2001. It seemed to be a straightforward affair—you control a fairy who transforms into various beasts



in a whimsical, *Zelda*-like adventure. When Microsoft purchased Rare from Nintendo in 2003, *Kameo* leapt onto the Xbox. Development seemed to be progressing nicely...until late last year, when Rare placed the game on "indefinite hold." Will *Kameo* land on Xbox 2?



Peaceful negotiations don't always end quite so peacefully.

ADVENT RISING

XB • Majesco • May 2005

High hopes: When first shown in 2003, *Advent Rising* impressed with its tight integration of melee combat, third-person gunplay, and superacrobatic evasion moves. But the game's epic story line—a sprawling three-game narrative that branches depending on the player's choices—redefined “ambitious.” *Rising* creator Donald “Colonel” Mustard first mapped out the plot as a teenager, and now he's getting the chance to bring that vision to life

in high style: He's enlisted Orson Scott Card, noted author of the sci-fi classic *Ender's Game*, to flesh it out for him.

All that ambition comes through in the final product: Expect a massive, varied gameplay experience as you bust caps in aliens *Halo* style, commandeer various aerial and ground-based vehicles, master creative psychic powers à la *Psi-Ops*, and journey to ethereal alien worlds in massive starships.

What took so long?: All that early attention was both a blessing and a curse—gamers were instantly psyched about the next big Xbox title, but the buzz may have peaked too early to give the game a boost when it does come out this spring. “A May 2005 release date was a good fit,” says Mustard. “We knew that if we pushed for that and put all the features in that we wanted, the game would show well and we'd nail it.”

The long development cycle granted the team the opportunity to put in some things they really wanted, specifically destructible environments. “We wanted to have areas where a boss would be ripping through the level...[and] punching down walls and ripping through stuff,” Mustard explains. We have to wonder, though, how long it will take for the trilogy to be completed given how long the first chapter took. Will we see *Advent 2* by 2010?



You'll master an arsenal of psychic powers, including this bulletproof shield.



WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO...



Odama

GC • Nintendo • Summer 2005 — As part of its continuing effort to announce absurdly weird games that will probably never come out (see: *Stage Debut*, *Giftopia*, *Roll-a-Rama*), Nintendo presents *Odama*, the world's first and only military pinball simulator. In traditional pinball



fashion, you hit a ball with flippers...but here, the ball smashes battalions, decimates troop barracks, and frees prisoners of war. Oh, and a second player can plug in bongo drums to beat out confidence-raising war marches. If this actually comes out, we'll be amazed.



Battlefield: Modern Combat

PS2/XB • EA Games • Fall 2005 — EA's inaugural console entry into its popular PC shooter series—in which 24 players simultaneously wage war online—didn't suffer your usual release-date setback of one or two months...it was pushed back an entire year to fall 2005. But not



without good reason, at least: EA originally intended the game to be online only, with absolutely no way for offline gamers to play. After wisely rethinking this strategy, the team set out to craft a single-player campaign, even if it meant a major release-date slip. 

ON A HELLBOUND VESSEL,



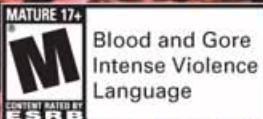
UNLEASH A TORRENT OF WEAPONS:
CREATE FATAL TRAPS AND USE SHOTGUNS,
FLAME THROWERS, OR ANY OBJECT YOU CAN
FIND TO SURVIVE.



KEEP YOUR BEARINGS:
BATTLE AGAINST INCREASINGLY MUTATED
ENEMIES IN TREACHEROUS, UNSTABLE
ENVIRONMENTS.



BRAVE DANGEROUS WATERS:
ROCKED BY HUGE BREAKERS, YOU MUST
STEADY YOUR NERVES - AND AIM - TO EVADE
A WATERY GRAVE.

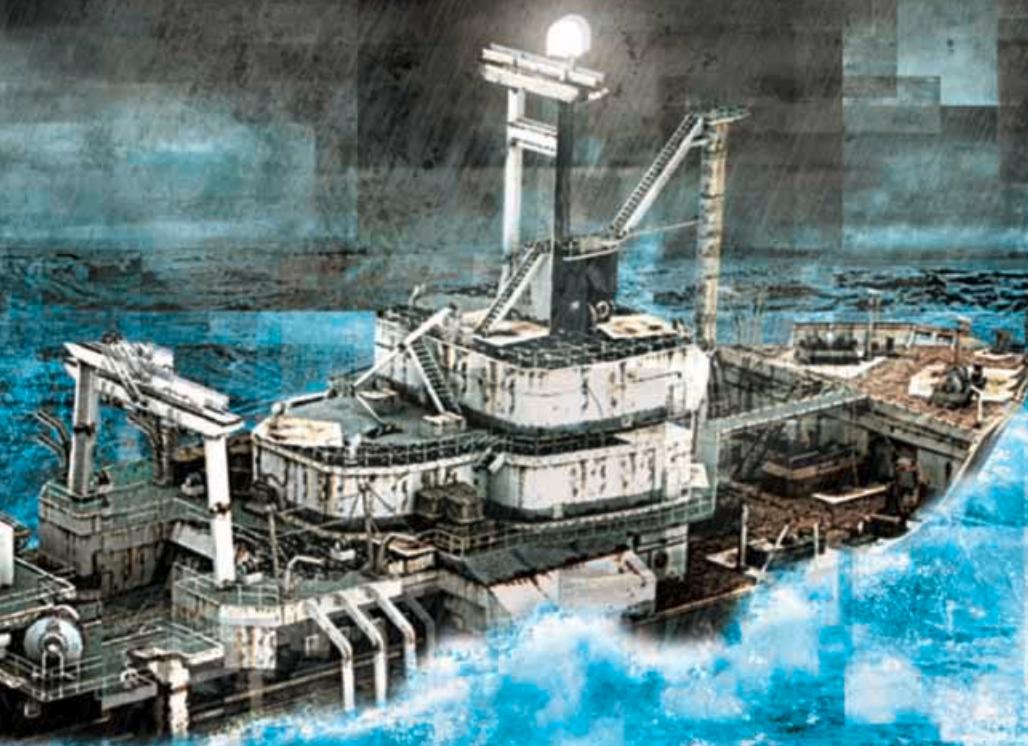


PlayStation 2



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LIVE YOUR DARKEST DREAMS

EVERYONE IS DEAD WEIGHT.



COLD FEAR

IN THE VIOLENT STORMS OF THE BERING STRAIT, DISTRESS CALLS ARE A DIME A DOZEN. BUT WHEN COAST GUARD VETERAN TOM HANSEN BOARDS A SEEMINGLY ABANDONED WHALER, NOTHING CAN PREPARE HIM FOR THE HORRORS LURKING BENEATH ITS BLOODSTAINED DECKS. HE WAS THE LAST TO RESPOND TO THE CALL. WILL HE BE THE FIRST TO SURVIVE?

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EAST MEETS QUEST

Yin and yang collide in the ancient Chinese Xbox epic **Jade Empire**, from the makers of *Knights of the Old Republic*

By Jennifer Tsao

Balance. It's not something we experience all that often in our modern lives—sitting in traffic jams, waiting in lines at bustling malls, eating super-sized meals.... Our games don't always exemplify the ideals of yin and yang either. They're laser-targeted at particular markets: sports, roleplaying, first-person shooter, stealth-action—even karaoke has its own genre.

So it stands out, when you're talking to the folks at BioWare developing *Jade Empire*, that they can't seem to give you

the usual black-or-white, market-tested answer to any of your questions. Due out April 14th exclusively for Xbox, *Jade Empire* isn't one of the company's classic role-playing games, but it's much, much deeper than your average action-RPG. It's meant to be frantic and fast paced, but it's also quiet and meditative. It's short, but it can also be long. You're not necessarily even making choices between good and evil. It's a balanced experience the company hopes will have unprecedented broad appeal, almost a *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* for gamers.

Fine China

Glimpse *Jade Empire* and you'll see a world of ghosts—the spirits of mythological ancient China, with its imperial architecture festooned in jade, mahogany, and paper lanterns. Its grassy countryside crawls with peasants in tattered clothes, scruffy troops of bandits, and fantastical mythical beasts. Its village streets are lined with tea houses and brothels where men come to drink and courtesans greet them in pearls and silk brocade gowns. It's a world seen through an artful lens, with soft-focus graphics that seem more appropriate in a Chinese water-

color painting, not a videogame.

"I really like all the moments of exploration," says BioWare's Ray Muzyka, "where you stop, turn on the first-person camera mode, look around the scene, and just enjoy it.... There's just moments of," he pauses, looking for the right word, "maybe transcendent beauty." It's clear that *Jade Empire* is the game he's been waiting more than a decade to make. "In a sense, we almost formed the company with a few game ideas in hand," says Greg Zeschuk, joint CEO (with Muzyka) of BioWare. "We thought, wouldn't it be cool to become a



martial-arts master? Over the years, we massaged [the idea], thought about it, and waited for the point at which we

everything from the toad demons you fight and the Dire Flame attacks to the little Pekingese dogs you see along the side of

Jade Empire is the game BioWare has been waiting over a decade to make.

thought...we could actually do it."

What BioWare has done is remarkable. The *Jade Empire* universe is the company's first original intellectual property—so

the road are unique to this game. But perhaps more noteworthy is the gameplay—a balance of action and roleplaying unlike anything BioWare has done. The company

built its reputation on acclaimed PC turn-based RPGs (most notably, the *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights* series, both based in the *Dungeons & Dragons* universe). Combining that expertise with lessons learned from its first console role-playing game, 2003's pivotal *Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic* (XB), the company has created its first RPG with real-time, rather than turn-based, combat. "We got feedback from people who played *KOTOR* that...they were a little surprised that it was phased, turn-based combat," says Muzyka. "Maybe they wanted it to be

real time." The team set about giving audiences what they thought they wanted. Now, with *Jade Empire*'s mixture of role-playing, story-based exploration, and frenetic, fast-paced, yet still highly tactical action, BioWare is striving for the perfect balance—a veritable yin and yang of action and story.

Fists of fury

Jade Empire starts out much like any role-playing game. You choose from six characters, each representing a different style of gameplay: male or female, fast, strong, ►



■ Wu the Lotus Blossom starts with a balanced skill set, but any of the starting characters can be customized to play how you want them to.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Creating a new intellectual property is no simple task—at least not the way the BioWare team does it. Lead Writer Mike Laidlaw says they've produced reams of background info about the *Jade Empire* universe. "Maybe the players only see 10 percent of the information we've put into the world," he says. "But it'd be great if, when people go through *Jade*, they'll see not only what's in the game, but also the things that are hinted at, that are out there, that are still waiting to be explored." (Sounds like *someone's* ready to do a sequel...)



■ We got the world's first look at the Quarry Cave, a mysterious area inhabited by some very pissed-off ghosts.



► or magical. You're quickly immersed in the story: As a student at a martial arts school where strange things are afoot—evil spirits wreaking havoc and such—you are, naturally, compelled to investigate the occurrences. Right away, you'll gain followers (party members who can help you in combat) and start building relationships with them through the dialogue choices you make. And then, after taking a few turns in the sparring ring at the school, you'll be thrust into your first real battle.

On the beach as an invading bandit ship attacks, gamers accustomed to *KOTOR's* strategic turn-based battles may find the real-time combat initially overwhelming. "You've got more immediate things to worry about," says Zeschuk, "like the guy trying to punch you." But the balanced gameplay—and the choices it gives players—quickly becomes apparent. Some may want to pause the action, take stock of their enemies, and get their best fighting options assigned to a quick-key (on

the D-pad). Others will just do their best Bruce Lee battle cry and enter the fray without hesitation. "We're really trying to enable different people to play the game in different ways," says Muzyka.

The combat in *Jade Empire*, like any sophisticated fighting system, takes a bit of getting used to, but the basic controller layout is simple and elegant. It's with the fighting styles available to you, rather than the actual button-pressing, that the true strategy occurs. You need to become famil-

iar with the different genres of fighting styles and the individual styles themselves (see sidebar, opposite page). You'll also have to learn about focus and chi—the life forces that power your health and fighting energy—and blocking and evading are crucial, as well. Combat circumstances change and evolve throughout the game; enemies get smarter, more powerful, and more resistant to particular styles, so you'll need to use a variety of styles and attacks to be effective. This means action gamers will



■ Transformation styles, which enable you to morph into defeated enemies (like the demon shown here), were inspired by *Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow's* soul system.

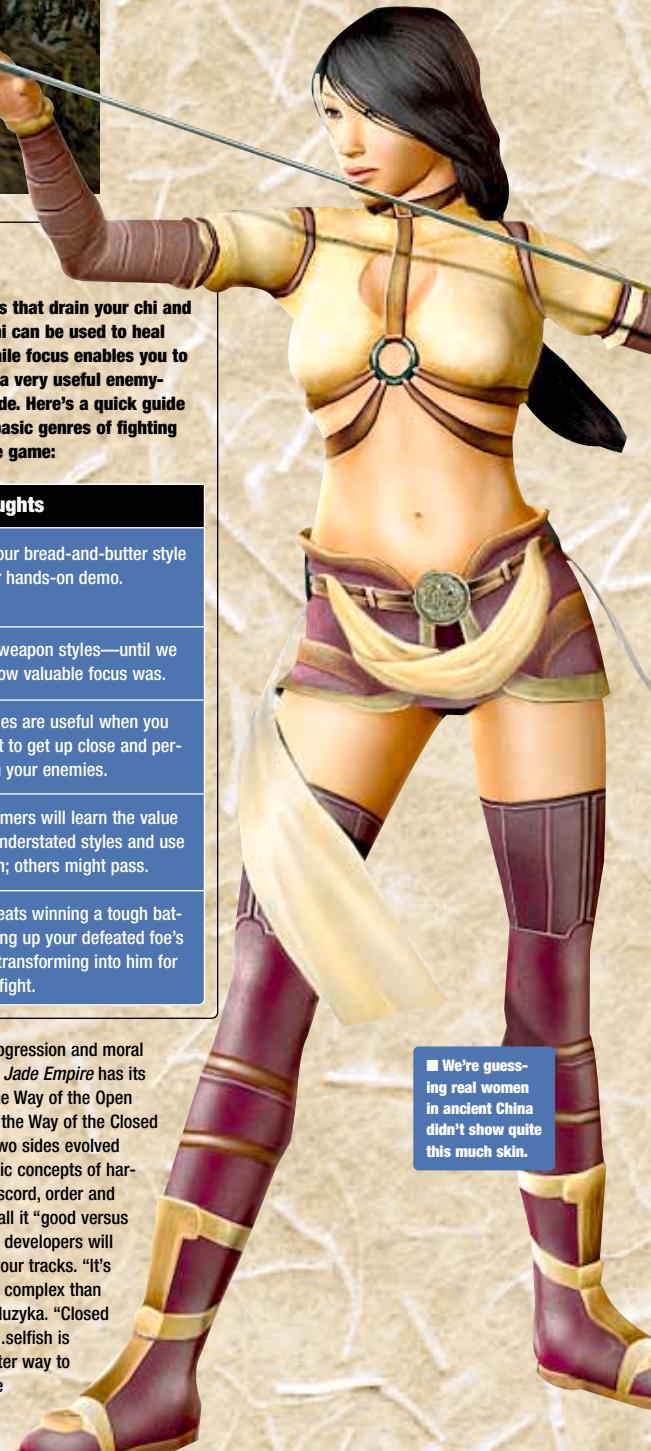
STYLE GUIDE: FIGHTING IN JADE EMPIRE

With its combat system, *Jade Empire* turns the ultimate role-playing cliché on its head: This game is not about getting a bigger, faster +736 Fire Sword that does massive criticals. Instead, your character learns “styles” as you progress through the

game—and you’ll have dozens to choose from. Each style has a regular attack and a power attack, and you can have four styles quick-mapped to the D-pad at any one time. The key is to figure out the best tactics to use in a particular situation—and not to rely

on the styles that drain your chi and focus, as chi can be used to heal yourself, while focus enables you to switch into a very useful enemy-slowing mode. Here’s a quick guide to the five basic genres of fighting styles in the game:

Genre	Example	Pros & Cons	Our Thoughts
Martial	Thousand Cuts	These quick, short-range punches and kicks might not be that powerful, but they don’t burn any chi or focus.	This was our bread-and-butter style during our hands-on demo.
Weapon	Golden Star	Weapon styles give you a long range and do a lot of damage, but they require focus to use.	We loved weapon styles—until we realized how valuable focus was.
Magic	Ice Shard	Putting the power of the elements at your fingertips, these devastating ranged attacks drain your chi.	Magic styles are useful when you don’t want to get up close and personal with your enemies.
Support	Heavenly Wave	Support styles don’t do direct damage, but they can set up lethal combos.	Patient gamers will learn the value of these understated styles and use them often; others might pass.
Transformation	Toad Demon	These superstrong styles allow you to transform into enemies you have defeated—for as long as your chi holds out.	Nothing beats winning a tough battle, scooping up your defeated foe’s soul, and transforming into him for your next fight.



■ We’re guessing real women in ancient China didn’t show quite this much skin.

“The tactics don’t come from how good you are with the controller.” —Lead Designer Kevin Martens

still have to think about what styles they’re using even if they want to power through the game, while roleplayers may become familiar enough with the options available to them that they can quickly assess what combination of styles best suits a given situation. “The tactics don’t come from how good you are with the controller; rather, the tactics come in with all the different things

you can do at any given moment,” says Lead Designer Kevin Martens. Muzyka adds, “Really, *Jade* is quite revolutionary. I don’t think we’re aware of any RPGs that have this kind of dynamic combat mixed with a strong story line.”

Have it your way
It wouldn’t be a BioWare game without

character progression and moral choices, and *Jade Empire* has its own code: the Way of the Open Palm versus the Way of the Closed Fist. These two sides evolved from the basic concepts of harmony and discord, order and chaos. But call it “good versus evil” and the developers will stop you in your tracks. “It’s kind of more complex than that,” says Muzyka. “Closed Fist is more...selfish is maybe a better way to put it. People should be ►



■ Your followers, like ol' Sagacious Zu here, assist you in battle, though you won't be able to control their movements directly.



■ The guy in the clown suit is actually a very arrogant-seeming, British-sounding Outlander voiced by the original arrogant-seeming, British-sounding actor, John Cleese.



► strong, and people that are strong should be able to stand on their own." Open Palm, on the other...uh...hand, means you tend to be more generous, and you realize some people need your help, which you are more than willing to give.

"It's kind of like evil and good, but a different take on it, one we thought was more appropriate for the Asian setting," says Muzyka. "There are situations where either approach is equally valid and

neither is really good or evil, and frankly it's a little more interesting that way." Of course, Muzyka admits, there are some points where it's a little more clearly good and evil—like when you can buy an injured schoolmate healing herbs, or herbs that will poison her—and then there's always that puppy-kicking thing (see sidebar, above). But in general, he says, "There's more of a moral choice."

In this way, the game harkens back to *Knights of the Old Republic* and its light and

DO THE WRONG THING

Lead Designer Kevin Martens tells an anecdote that illustrates the differences between the two ways of *Jade Empire*. "Let's say you have to catch a murderer, and you go out into the wilderness and find him, and he's drowning in the river. Do you save him and take him back to be executed? Or do you let him drown? Which is right and which is wrong? We didn't want it to be black and white," he says. "We didn't want it to be all easy choices." But our choice became a tad bit easier when Martens shared one juicy secret: If you become a master of the Way of the Closed Fist, the shih tzu dogs in the game become selectable, and then you can kick them.

dark sides; Muzyka specifically mentions his fond memories of playing through that game, the difficulty he had making choices for his characters. "*Jade* presents similarly challenging moments," he says. "We really want to have those emotional moments where if you feel like you care about a character and something bad happens to them or a betrayal happens, you feel like it means something emotionally to you. That's one of the ways you can measure a good story, if you have moments like that."

Where the game doesn't echo *KOTOR* is in your character's appearance throughout the adventure. Just as a villain in a martial arts movie doesn't actually grow horns or break out in massive acne when he turns evil, your character's moral tendencies won't be manifested in his or her physical appearance. If you let your character stand still for a bit, his shadow may grow tendrils—a gorgeous, subtle effect—or she may do a little flourish, absorbing harmonious energy from the surrounding environs, but that's about as far as it goes. "Because we're trying to do something ►

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■ You'll think you're so tricky holding enemies with this whirlwind attack. Until they unfreeze and cast it back on you.



■ Older people and many spirits in the world speak a language, *The Fan*, created by a professional linguist (and Tolkien nut) specifically for *Jade Empire*.

RECOMMENDED VIEWING

Chinese martial arts purists need not fear that the team working on *Jade Empire* hasn't done its homework. These may be *Dungeons & Dragons* geeks with supreme *Star Wars* cred, but *Jade Empire's* martial arts completes the, as Lead Designer Kevin

Martens calls it, "nerd trifecta." Though they cite three classic series in Chinese literature (*Outlaws of the Marsh*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and *Journey to the West*) as the primary source material for the *Jade Empire* universe, the designers

can easily rattle off dozens of movies that served as inspiration for the game. We asked them to put together a list of those films—all ranked in order of accessibility—they'd recommend for people trying to get in the *Jade Empire* mindset.

Category	Title	Developer's Comment	Chinese Food Equivalent
Fun for the Whole Family	<i>Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon</i> , <i>Hero</i> , <i>Iron Monkey</i> , <i>Shaolin Soccer</i> , <i>Fist of Legend</i> , <i>Kill Bill Vols. 1 and 2</i>	"Everyone will like these, even if they don't know the genre at all."	Beef with broccoli
Feeling Adventurous?	<i>Master Killer</i> , <i>Swordsman II</i> , <i>Wing Chun</i> , <i>The Legend</i> (a.k.a. <i>Fong Sai Yuk</i>), <i>Drunken Master 2</i>	"Not the main course, but will fill you with a warm, fuzzy feeling no less."	Mongolian beef
Proceed With Caution	<i>Five Deadly Venoms</i> , <i>Five Fingers of Death</i> , <i>Master of the Flying Guillotine</i> , <i>Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain</i> , <i>Fist of the White Lotus</i> , <i>The Prodigal Son</i>	"All the movie-going adventurer needs is a little acclimatization...before jumping in."	Soup with beef balls
Do Not Attempt!	<i>Shaolin Dolemite</i>	"Only watch this to say you have seen a proud man fall."	Exploding beef brain*

*indicates hot and spicy

CENSORED!!

► more realistic with the choices you're given in the game," Martens says, "we keep the character's appearance more realistic as well."

Messing with success

Past BioWare games appeal to gamers with a lot of patience, gamers who enjoy a good story, gamers who like highly tactical, potentially slow-paced combat. But with *Jade Empire*, the developers sound dangerously like they are trying to do the impossible: please all the people, all the time. "We are trying to...make a game that appeals really broadly," says Zeschuk. "On the one hand, it'll appeal to RPG fans, people who like stories with character development. But we also want to appeal to the action fan, and someone in the middle, an action-RPG fan..."

That approach has even had an impact on one of the hallmarks of BioWare's

"Believe it or not, *Jade* is actually conscientiously shorter."

—Joint CEO Ray Muzyka

games—their length. Sure, if you do every optional quest and really explore all your dialogue options, *Jade Empire* could easily devour over 40 hours of your life. But, "Believe it or not, *Jade* is actually conscientiously shorter," says Muzyka, noting that the critical path through the main story can probably be completed in under 20 hours. "It's one of the shortest RPGs BioWare's ever made," he says. It could be sacrilege, folly, a fool's errand. Or perhaps it's a bit of genius, especially when you're talking about BioWare—a company with an impeccable record of producing award-winning games. "We're really trying to get

the quality bar to a really high standard and keep it up there," says Muzyka, "so you have 20 to 30 hours of...the best





■ They may not call it a Fireball, but that space-clearing blast of flame probably looks suspiciously familiar to D&D fans.



@#\$\$% CAMERA!

At the stage we saw the game, the 3D camera in combat still needed a fair bit of work. A few tough battles became even tougher when you had to adjust the camera or try to wade through enemies. But the team's still working on it, right? "Oh God, yes," says Producer Jim Bishop. Lead Designer Kevin Martens concurs: "The camera has been our obsession.... It'll be one of the last things touched, I imagine."

possible game we can make."

Spend any time with the people at BioWare, though, and you become familiar with one of their company's core values: humility—most optimistic statements are quickly subdued by disclaimers. "[*Jade Empire*] could really expand our audience," says Muzyka. "That's our hope. We don't really count on anything, though. You're only as good as your next game." Still, they admit they're extremely proud of what they've created. "I think it's in a pretty sweet spot," says Zeschuk. "People here in some ways think it's our game that almost has the most potential to help break the company even bigger, and show what we can do. Is it going to work? I think our gut tells us it will." ✨



■ Henpecked Ho's got friends in every town and village from here to Stam, he speaks a dozen languages, knows every local custom. He can blend in, disappear.... Or not.



PlayStation 2

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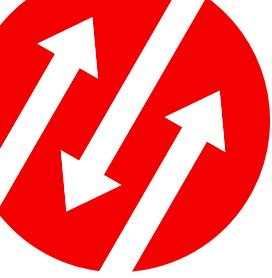


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PS2/XB/GC

ONLINE
(PS2/XB)



MVP BASEBALL 2005 VS.

Bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, and here comes the...



Field of Your Dreams

MVP's biggest additions, such as its ballpark creator, happen off the field. Nearly everything is customizable, from the size of the scoreboard to the pattern the grounds crew cuts in the grass. Too bad this feature is accessible only through *MVP's* exhausting owner mode.

Yankees-Red Sox—it's arguably the greatest rivalry in sports. And for the past few seasons, EA and 2K Games (formerly ESPN Videogames, formerly Sega—confusing, we know) have been playing the parts of New York and Boston on the virtual diamond. But sadly, this is their last showdown for some time, as a recent seven-year MLB licensing deal with 2K Games is forcing EA's *MVP* series into early retirement. Let's find out who walks away from this Game 7—as Pedro would say—as the other's daddy.

G. FORD: After watching EA's game walk off the diamond victorious the last few seasons, it initially looked like *2K5* had turned the tables on *MVP*. Its

ESPN-broadcast-style presentation—with its fancy replays and fan cutaways—is sublime. Also, commentators Jon Miller and Joe Morgan do a great job filling dead time.

BRYAN: I second that; other than the trio filling *NCAA Football's* booth, Miller and Morgan are hands-down the top broadcast team in sports gaming. *2K5* also really pays attention to the little visual details—you can even see the veins in Jeff Bagwell's forearms as he readies for a Randy Johnson heater. Very impressive.

PATRICK: OK, so presentation goes to *2K5*, but in terms of gameplay, I give *MVP* the nod. Sure, this edition mostly takes an if-it-ain't-broke-don't-fix-it approach, but at least I can now hit home runs

with my talented left-handed hitters—a rare occurrence last season.

BRYAN: But *2K5* does make some strides, especially with its pitching mechanics. The new KZone (simply line up the horizontal and vertical markers on the target) replaces last year's archaic point-and-press system, and it proves to be just as effective as *MVP's* golf-swing-inspired pitch meter.

G. FORD: It's great, but I'd still say *MVP's* system is better...barely. Also, *2K5's* fielding—which was well balanced last year—has become too slick. It still feels great and moves fast, but unless you adjust some gameplay sliders, expect plenty of web gems—too many to be realistic.



MVP BASEBALL 2005

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

8.5	8.5	9.0
BRYAN	PATRICK	G. FORD

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Players: PS2/XB 1-2 (2 online), GC 1-2
ESRB: Everyone

www.easports.com





■ **Doom 3** guy says: "You think my grotesque hands are scary? Behold my lack of wedding tackle."

THE RATING SYSTEM

0-4.5
BAD

5.0-6.5
FAIR

7.0-10
GOOD

At *EGM*, we evaluate only games that have been deemed final and reviewable by their publishers. Three editors rate each game independently, and we use the whole scale. **5.0 IS AVERAGE.**

AWARDS



Platinum — straight 10s. For games that are life-changing.



Gold — for games with an average score of 9.0 or higher.



Silver — for games with a mean score of 8.0 or higher.



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ESRB KEY (Also check out www.esrb.com)

E-Everyone: Saccharine fun for the whole family: dancing elves, rampant sharing, and possibly Smurfs.

T-Teen: Like PG-13 movies, Teen games often feature fisticuffs, mild violence, and madcap antics.

M-Mature: For the 18-and-over crowd. Intense violence, gore, pixilated sex, drugs; parents no likey.

GAMECUBE

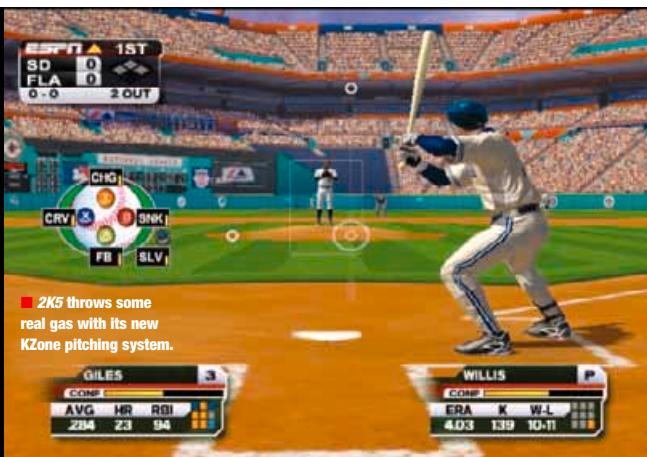
134 Donkey Kong Jungle Beat

DS

135 Yoshi Touch & Go

GAME BOY ADVANCE

135 WarioWare: Twisted!



■ **2K5** throws some real gas with its new KZone pitching system.



ONLINE
(PS2/XB)

■ PS2/XB

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K5

hey, who turned out the lights?

BRYAN: Also, too many balls are hit right back to the pitchers in *2K5*, who field them with depressing accuracy. During several games, three-quarters of my infield could've taken the day off, and I still would've won.

G. FORD: What'd you guys think of the hitting, specifically *2K5*'s slam zone, in which the batter zooms in on a mistake pitch and charges up a power shot, and *MVP*'s all-new hitter's eye, which turns the ball a different color based on the pitch type?

PATRICK: I like the idea of slam zone, but unless I crank up the difficulty, I'm going yard at a ridiculous rate.

BRYAN: I'm actually a big fan of both. The hardcore *MVP* player will dig getting a read on the ball as it leaves the pitcher's hand. Maybe 2K Games can steal this feature next season—EA surely won't need it...or those new minigames, either. I couldn't get enough of *MVP*'s *Tetris*-like pitching challenge, and it turned me into a more consistent hurler.

G. FORD: Yeah, I could play the minigames all day. But then there's the issue of franchise modes, which can conceivably keep you playing all season. I like the idea behind *MVP*'s owner mode—in which you build a park and try to make a successful franchise in 30 years—but it takes serious dedication and micromanagement to get

out of the early money hole. I enjoy the traditional franchise mode more, which both games handle just fine and fill with all the neurotic tweaking you could want.

BRYAN: I've said it in other recent sports reviews and I'll say it again: Franchise modes bore the hell out of me. I mean, who wants to play (or even simulate) 30 years of 162 games plus playoffs? The payoff simply isn't worth the huge commitment.

PATRICK: You mean setting the price of your ballpark's hot dogs or deciding which game is "jersey day" doesn't sound fun, Bryan?

BRYAN: Don't even get me started.... 🚗

What a Steal
No, we're not talking about *2K5*'s \$20 price tag. The game includes a new base runner mode that puts you in control of the man on base while the CPU controls the batter. It's also a cool new way to view the action while being part of it (much better than last year's god-awful first-person mode).



MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K5

THE VERDICTS (out of 10)

8.0 BRYAN **8.0** PATRICK **8.0** G. FORD

Publisher: Take-Two
Developer: 2K Games
Players: PS2/XB 1-2
(2 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.espnvideogames.com



■ Ah, romantic talk, the sexiest of talk options....

■ PS2/XB

PLAYBOY: THE MANSION

Don't hate the playboy, hate the game

Good: ...if you like pixilated jubeles

Bad: ...if you like good gameplay

Unexpected Dialogue Option: "Have Sex on the Couch"



DEMIAN: Within the first five minutes of *Playboy: The Mansion*, a chick wearing only a thong should "have sex" with your virtual Hugh Hefner, although Hef will be wearing knee-length shorts at the time. If not, you totally aren't playing it right.

Your appreciation for this game depends entirely upon your desire to see freakishly large cartoon boobs, because almost everything else in *Playboy* is a limp *Sims* rip-off. You'll furnish your mansion with gaudy art and trampolines, and keep your many party guests amused with witty conversation—the point is to make sure everyone *else* is happy, because like some robo-Hefner, you never need to sleep, eat, or shower. Unfortunately, that means 80 percent of the gameplay boils down to clicking through dialogue menus.

Throughout this relentless partying, you'll also assign articles and direct photo shoots for the mag, as publishing issues earns cash. This part's kind of fun, though the centerfold and cover shoots (the game's T&A tour de force) get old quickly, since the models strike the exact same poses every time. *Playboy* is mind-blowing...for Internet-innocent 12-year-olds.

CRISPIN: Bazookas, torpedoes, cannon balls—*Playboy: The Mansion* has more big guns than the *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell* series squeezed lusciously together, and you can ogle these biological weapons at will. Thing is, *Playboy* wants you to like it for its mind as well as its bodies, putting you in the pj's of Hugh Hefner, randy boobmaster general of a magazine empire. That means R-rated fornicatin' takes a back-seat to hiring staff, assigning stories, throwing parties, making friends, and snapping photos—repetitive tasks so clinical you'll never need a cold shower.

JENNIFER: Is Hugh Hefner really this bad in bed? I'd always thought of him as the ultimate, well, playboy—the guy any woman would get down with if she had the chance. But seeing his uncreative ways with the ladies in this game (sure, he can go for hours, but it's short, repetitive, and the girl does all the work...typical!) ruined Hef for me. Shooting centerfolds and putting together a magazine is halfway interesting, but the gameplay is nothing more than a third-rate *Sims* clone.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	5.0	4.5	4.5
	DEMIAN	CRISPIN	JENNIFER

Publisher: Arush
Developer: Cyberlore
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.arushgames.com

■ PS2/XB/GC

EA SPORTS FIGHT NIGHT NIGHT ROUND 2

Prediction: pain



ONLINE (PS2/XB ONLY)



Good: Even smoother control and graphics

Bad: Wimpy career mode

Still Oddly Missing: The referee



KEVIN: I try playing *Madden* with some of my equally non-sporto friends and the score's always 0-0 after 20 minutes of comedy offense. Boxing, on the other hand, is immediately approachable by anyone, and no boxing sim has ever made the sport more accessible in all its bloody glory than this year's *Fight Night*.

The changes to the second installment in EA's new boxing series are mainly tweaks to get rid of last year's problems. The analog-stick punch system is back, and it's now easier to throw combos, which is vital for dealing with button-mashing clowns online. The previous game's hip-hop guy commentator has been replaced with a real boxing announcer, and your fighter can finally move and punch at the same time, so Muhammad Ali can actually fight like Muhammad Ali. Spend a day or two learning the controls; the experience is addictive and as smooth as the business end of your gloves. The only thing I missed was the lack of much truly new with this version—I'd kill for a sleazy, mobster-ridden promoter mode, for example.

BRYAN: When I play *Fight Night*, I'm a bad, bad man. My opponents stagger out of the ring so battered, bruised, and bloody that I actually feel kind of guilty. The facial damage here is unmatched; you'll cause cosmetic devastation with greater ease thanks to swifter ring movement and the all-powerful, all-new hay-maker punches that can send even a stone-chinned pugilist's mouthpiece flying through the air. Sure, the career mode

is a bit lean, but at least I can replay the 16-bit classic *Super Punch-Out!!* in the Cube version.

G. FORD: Last year, *Fight Night* made an amazing debut, thanks to some purdy graphics and keen controls. And while a new version isn't really needed just a year later, there's no doubting the quality of what's here. The impressive character models, amazing analog control system, and gameplay tweaks kept me hooked till my created character stood atop the pro ranks. Yeah, *Round 2* lacks that first-time wonderment of last year's rookie effort, but it still towers over the mediocre competition.



■ The GameCube version includes one of the best games ever—*Super Punch-Out!!*

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.5	8.0	8.5
	KEVIN	BRYAN	G. FORD

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Chicago
Players: PS2/XB 1-2 (2 online), GC 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.easports.com



PS2/XB/GC



TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

Sidesplitting



■ Pink Floyd's laser-show robot (right) guards the room where you get the flux capacitor.

Good: Wide variety of wacky weapons
Bad: Linear levels, abnormally dumb A.I.
Only on PS2/XB: Play and swap the maps you make online



SHAWN: Man of tomorrow teams up with himself to take down foes in the past, present, and future: Here, the sci-fi chestnut serves as an excuse to shoehorn a series of far-out settings into a single campy story and that's it. But what clever things *Future Perfect* does within its trek-across-the-space-time-continuum framework.

Cortez, an adventurer of Bill and Ted's aptitude, bats the heads off of brain eaters in one level, only to confront sexy criminals in psychedelic jumpsuits and a jive-talking secret agent in the next. It works in the only way it can: with a whole lot of humor. Take, for instance, your break-dancing robot buddy, or even the overzealous scientist to blame for the aforementioned zombies, who you can electrocute and shrink in a series of cruel experiments. If not for the bewildering array of weapons, the shoot-outs might've fallen flat, what with foes as brainless as they are funny. "Fair," however, is neither here nor there when the fight involves time-retarding grenades, stake launchers, ghost guns, Louisville Sluggers, and DNA-disrupting darts.

G. FORD: The *TimeSplitters* series has always been a multiplayer mecca, and *Future Perfect* finally takes the fragfest online. But while EA assures us that Net games run beautifully, our tests were mixed. Sometimes it was great; other times it lagged to the point of unplayability (splitscreen co-op and versus play worked perfectly, though). These problems may be on the server side and could be fixed down the line; if so, mentally add another point to my score, because then this one's an award winner in my book.

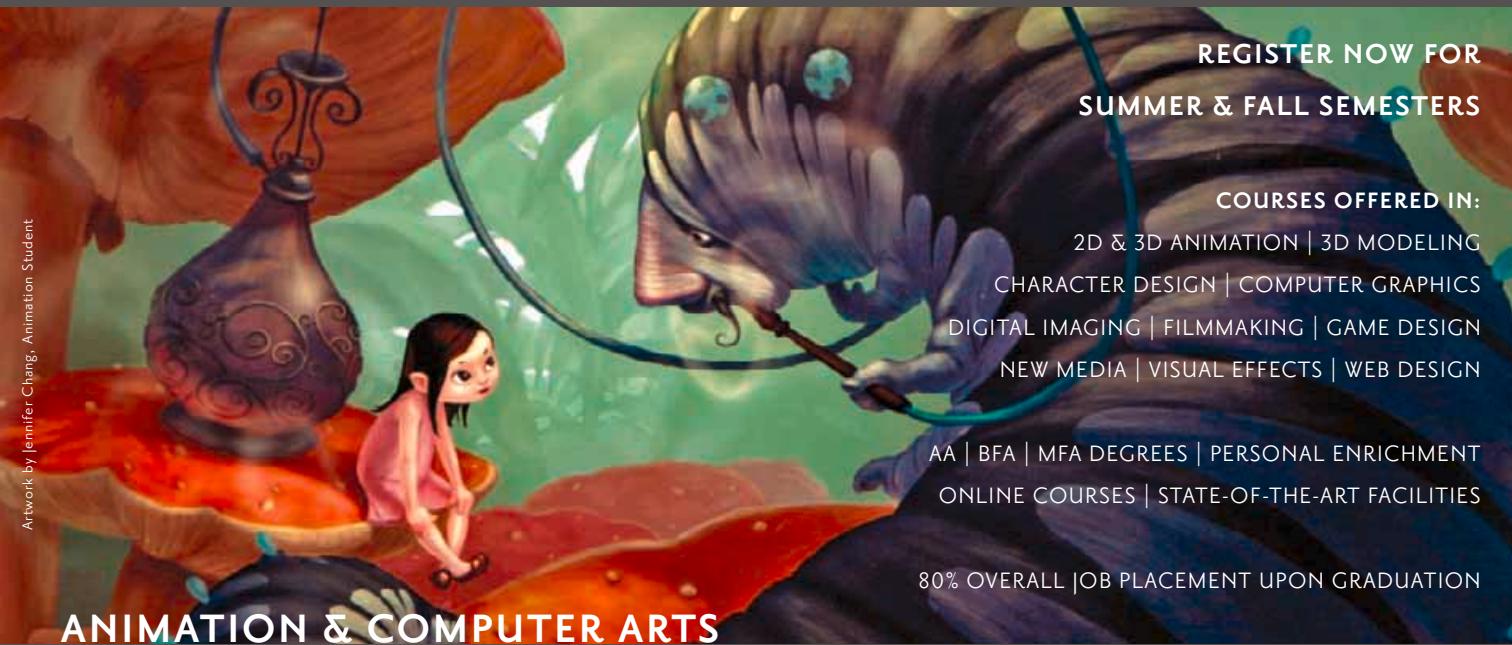
OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE: To my mind, this is one of the best shooters ever. *Future Perfect* is fast, gorgeous, funny as hell, and has loads of extras (minigames, an awesome mapmaker mode, etc.). The biggest improvement, though, has to be the story; for the first time in the series the levels actually hang together. My only warning echoes G. Ford's—online play was spotty in our tests. It may or may not work better for you, but regardless, single player is great.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	7.5	9.5
	SHAWN	G. FORD	JOE

Publisher: EA Games
 Developer: Free Radical
 Players: 1-4 (PS2 3-4 w/Multitap)
 PS2/XB 2-16 online & system link
 ESRB: Mature
www.eagames.com

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Artwork by Jennifer Chang, Animation Student



PS2/XB/GC

FIFA STREET

Not quite Shaolin Soccer



The game also includes a few soccer street legends—not that you will have heard of them...

Good: Create-a-character fat guys with excellent mullets
Bad: No club teams, gameplay not up to *Street* standards
The Soundtrack: Will remind you why you aren't out clubbing



DEMIAN: Soccer has been *Street*-ified...and it is decent, but not great. The 4-on-4 matches are heavy on the fancy footwork and the goals come in (relative) bunches, so even nonsoccer fans will be able to pick it up and have a good time. *Street* actually feels a lot more like the old *NHL Hitz* series—with its lightning passing, defensive take-out moves, and withering shots on goal—than traditional soccer.

And that would be OK, except that *FIFA Street*'s controls aren't nearly as perfect as *NBA* or even *NFL Street*'s—and that's not surprising, considering we heard the game was developed in under a year. Some of the problems are rookie mistakes, like players not always going after stray balls, while others are more serious: *Street* has a tendency to slow down at the worst moments, like during a mad scramble at the goal mouth, and that just plain sucks.

The main single-player mode is fairly short and repetitive as well, so with no online play, *FIFA* won't be in your rotation for long unless you've got some soccer-obsessed pals. Hey, at least there's plenty to work on for next year's installment.

BRYAN: One day—that's how long I lasted playing recreational soccer as a kid. Now, years later, *FIFA Street* reminds me of that tough afternoon. Suspect dribbling mechanics compromise your control over the action; too often I'd be cruising down the pitch in style with no defenders in sight, only to lose the ball to some mysterious force and whiff a shot. Erratic goalies don't help either; they'll be brick walls on a Beckham-esque blast but total sieves on what should be a sure save. From frustrating gameplay to a limited feature set (no online play?), this one feels rushed.

PATRICK: I'm having trouble imagining David Beckham or Thierry Henry playing 4-on-4 in the dangerous Brazilian Favela, but that said, *FIFA Street* is well done and loads of fun. I like passing the ball off the architecture, which can serve as almost a fifth guy. Chain together enough combos and it's Gamebreaker time, equating to a monster shot on goal (but *FIFA* doesn't possess the variety in Gamebreakers of its *NBA* or *NFL Street* counterparts). Too bad we can't play online.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	6.5	5.5	7.5
	DEMIAN	BRYAN	PATRICK

Publisher: EA Sports Big
 Developer: EA Canada
 Players: 1-2
 ESRB: Everyone

www.easports.com



PS2/XB

MX VS. ATV UNLEASHED

Sunday, Sunday, Sunday



Ironman Ivan Stewart (of arcade classic *Super Off Road*) gives two thumbs up.

Good: Tons of tracks, miles of air
Bad: Soundtrack full of horrible alt-rock (as in, Papa Roach)
Oddest Rides: Golf carts, dune buggies, helicopters, planes



ROBERT: I've always been the black sheep of my family, not into hunting, trophy belt buckles, or "The Boot Scootin' Boogie." But I feel just a little redneck when I play *MX vs. ATV Unleashed*, a racer that stuffs all things oil-splattered and muddy (dirt bikes and four wheelers, mainly) into one disc.

MX vs. ATV does one thing really well: the Zen feeling of hitting a jump just right, catching the curve of the dirt like a stylus in a record groove. Some clever combination of track design and physics makes it seem easy but always fun.

With 32 tracks, a small army of vehicles, and an array of modes (including six-player online), you won't run out of stuff to do, but still, it feels like something is missing. *Tony Hawk* has its prankster sense of humor. *Gran Turismo* has the sleek cars gearheads drool over. But *MX vs. ATV* comes off stylistically generic, all Day-Glo body suits on 30 shades of brown and silly set pieces (the medieval castle level, for example). The game badly needs a dose of character.

JON D: Flying in a biplane race is a welcome break in the monotony that plagues

motocross racing. But the inclusion of ATVs, planes, and choppers in this year's *MX* is testament to the fact that there's just nowhere left to go with this genre. Rainbow has officially exhausted all activities tangentially tied to dirt biking, but loads of unlockable goodies, solid in-game physics, and evergreen online play help keep *Unleashed* at the top of its game for true MX fans, as well. This one's a great rental, but if next year's game has a dance mode, I'm quitting the biz.

JAMES: Mashing up *MX Unleashed* with the *ATV* series and piling on monster trucks, buggies, and just about everything else with wheels minus a Segway and a Vespa ain't a half bad idea. It's fun pulling off double backflips and doing stuff that X-Games darling Travis Pastrana lays out only in his foam pit, but alas, freestyle is only a small part of the game—the races eventually got really repetitive for me (especially with the qualifying heats). Still, the jumps are a blast and the unlockables should keep you going even if you don't pray to Jeremy McGrath before going to bed.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.0	7.0	6.5
	ROBERT	JON D.	JAMES

Publisher: THQ
 Developer: Rainbow Studios
 Players: 1-2 (2-6 online)
 ESRB: Everyone

www.thq.com



■ **Space Camaro:** We like *Snowblind's* drivable vehicles, including tanks (left) and mechs. We just wish more levels had 'em.

■ PS2/XB

PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

Who wants tickets to the gun show?

Good: Massive armory, extensive multiplayer

Bad: Ugly character designs, some blah levels

Only on Xbox: A bonus multiplayer mode, downloadable content



CRISPIN: Let it never be said that *Project: Snowblind*, an ambitious futuristic shooter with roots in the *Deus Ex* series, sends players into battle unprepared. By the last level of its fun but breezy single-player campaign, your bioluminescent hero humps around nearly a dozen dual-function weapons—including a crate-hurting kinetic gun and a rifle that launches swarms of lightning bolts. Top that off with chuckable riot walls, grenades, and canisters that unfold into attack robots, and you have a soldier with a million combat options before you even consider his assortment of offensive and defensive bioimplants.

If only the game put you in a few more situations that demanded strategy. I had a fun enough time sprinting from one massive firefight to the next, nailing glowy-eyed enemies like paper targets, but I only

felt the need to pick a particular gun or change bionics about half the time. Fortunately, the extensive multiplayer modes more than take up the slack. With its massive levels, cool vehicles, character classes, and play modes that range from quick and dirty to needlessly complicated, *Snowblind's* online game itself is reason enough to lock and load.

SHAWN: *Snowblind's* tactical moxie is more *Metal Gear* than nickel-ante shooter. Look at the options in one level alone: Stay concealed and scramble security cameras, swipe a set of wheels and hightail it through heavy fire, or reprogram a sentry bot to perforate the baddies it's supposed to protect. Multiple paths and a cyborg protagonist with more enhancements than an episode of *Extreme Makeover* make it possible. Crispin settled for heroics and full-

auto fragging, but the choice was his, even if the ham-fisted story supported it.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE: Hardcore first-person-shooter fans are going to like this more than the average blaster due to the mind-boggling array of weapons, gadgets, and powers. You have so many choices at any given point in the game that it becomes almost an FPS-strategy hybrid. You *can* run and gun, but you're better off making each move methodically, switching up weapons and gadgets often in order to pick the right tool for the job. This makes online play a ridiculously complex affair—but it also creates some really unique matchups. It's a shame that the story is so forgettable, or else *Snowblind* might appeal to a much wider audience. 🐷

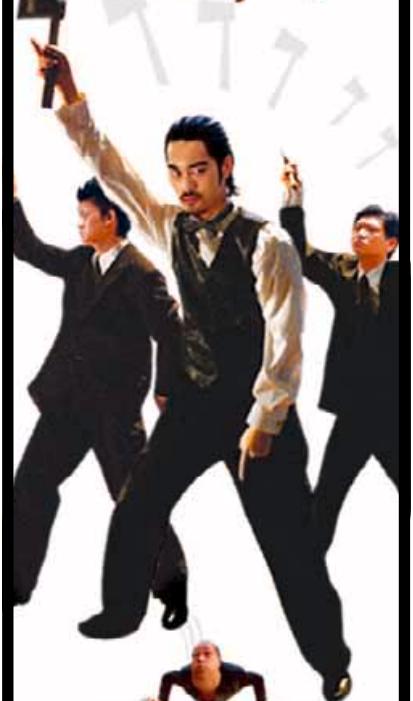


■ Zapping foes with your bionics (left) is one of a million ways to make them lie down and quit breathing.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.0	8.5	7.5
	CRISPIN	SHAWN	JOE

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Players: 1 (2-16 online and system link)
ESRB: Teen
www.eidos.com

Roger Ebert says,
“Imagine a film in which Jackie Chan and Buster Keaton meet Quentin Tarantino and Bugs Bunny.”



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PlayStation 2



GRAN TURISMO 4

The scenic route

Save that Save
In classic *Gran Turismo* tradition, players with *GT3* saves can transfer their B and A license qualifications and up to 100,000 credits from *GT3* to *Gran Turismo 4*. It's highly recommended if you have the means; that's a ton of cash.

DEMIAN: *Gran Turismo 4* is like a museum, or a church devoted to the holy automobile. It's a little sterile in the same way a museum is, too, and people who don't like the series' technical approach to driving won't be won over. But, especially with the sublime Logitech Driving Force Pro wheel, no other game comes anywhere close to replicating what it feels like to lay down two streaks of rubber in a '69 GT40 when the green flag drops, or hit 200 mph on the back straight at Le Sarthe. There are few games that can draw you in so completely that you forget you're playing a game in the first place, and this is one of them.

I could go on and on about what an amazing job *GT4* does at simulating what it's like to drive almost any car on a racetrack, but you know all

that already. It's *Gran Turismo*. But I have to admit, after 10 minutes of stick time a little disappointment began to creep in. *GT4* feels almost exactly like the 4-year-old *Gran Turismo A-Spec*. That's not a bad thing, of course—until now, *A-Spec* was still the best driving sim on any console—but after all this time, it would've been nice to be surprised with something really new. Instead, *GT4* is a tweaked, expanded, and highly polished version of what you already know and probably love...and it's tough to stay disappointed for long when the core gameplay is this good.

Yeah, the license tests are back, and though the menu system in *Gran Turismo* mode looks a bit different, your progression through the countless race events will feel quite familiar, aside from the

addition of B-Spec mode (more on that in a sec). A series of "mission" races, in which you're given tasks like chasing down a '65 Shelby Mustang with a Ford GT, are very challenging and sometimes add a bit of historical context. And in a tip of the hat to the street-racing scene, you can now fit a nitrous injector and bolt an enormous rear spoiler to your trunk if you so choose. Don't expect spinner rims, neon, or gaudy vinyls, though.

What was supposed to be *Gran Turismo 4*'s big selling point—online play—was axed late last year, although it sounds like an online-enabled version is coming sometime later in 2005. So now the main additions to the *Turismo* formula are the all-new B-Spec and photo modes. In B-Spec (see sidebar, page 120), you don't actually drive the car;



The HUD now includes a G-force indicator, and as you approach a turn, the recommended gear you'll want to be in flashes onscreen—handy when learning new tracks.



■ Listen up, HDTV types: You can play GT4 in 480p and 1080i modes, in 16:9 widescreen. Read it again if you have to.

you're the pit boss, issuing orders to the faceless drone behind the wheel who's doing the hard work. It may not sound terribly compelling—and it isn't, at least not in the viscerally intense way that driving is—but B-Spec races actually manage to be both fun and relaxing at the same time. And lucrative, because you'll still earn credits when you cross the finish line. If you're so inclined (as in lazy), you can play through a huge chunk of the game this way.

The appeal of photo mode is a little more arcane. It lets you place any car in your collection in a variety of highly detailed real-world locations, posing them just so and tweaking tons of variables, from lens focal length and aperture to the sound your virtual camera shutter makes when you tap X. The images you create can be quite stunning (and you can print them out if you've got a compatible photo printer), but photo mode really feels more

like an application you'd play around with on your computer than part of a game. Some people will spend hours messing with this. Me, I'd had enough after about 20 minutes—I'd rather be bouncing off the rev limiter in top gear.

There was some talk earlier on in GT4's development about how the game was going to bring the human aspect into the Turismo series. It doesn't, really. You'll catch a glimpse of the driver behind the wheel from time to time, and spectators will crowd the track and run out of the way in rally races, but A.I.-controlled cars will still broadside you if you're on their racing line. And in almost all race types, you can return the favor, bouncing off of other cars to make otherwise impossible turns (in head-to-head rally races you'll get a five-second 30 mph max-speed penalty if you hit the other guy).

Even though GT4 offers only minor, incremental >



Forget everything you know about samurai...





Some of GT4's environments look suspiciously like postcards.

What's a B-Spec?

Second place again? If your car's competitive but you aren't, run the race in B-Spec mode and leave the pesky driving to the A.I. You'll adjust your virtual driver's speed setting—from slow down (1) to push (5)—and decide when to go for the overtaking move.

B-Spec's a good money earner, too—some races that you can't access with your current license qualification will still be open in B-Spec. It almost makes that 24-hour Nürburgring endurance race (1,200,000 credits for first place!) sound doable. Almost.



> improvements over *GT3*, it's still incredibly good. But casual fans may want to wait until the online version comes out... whenever that may be.

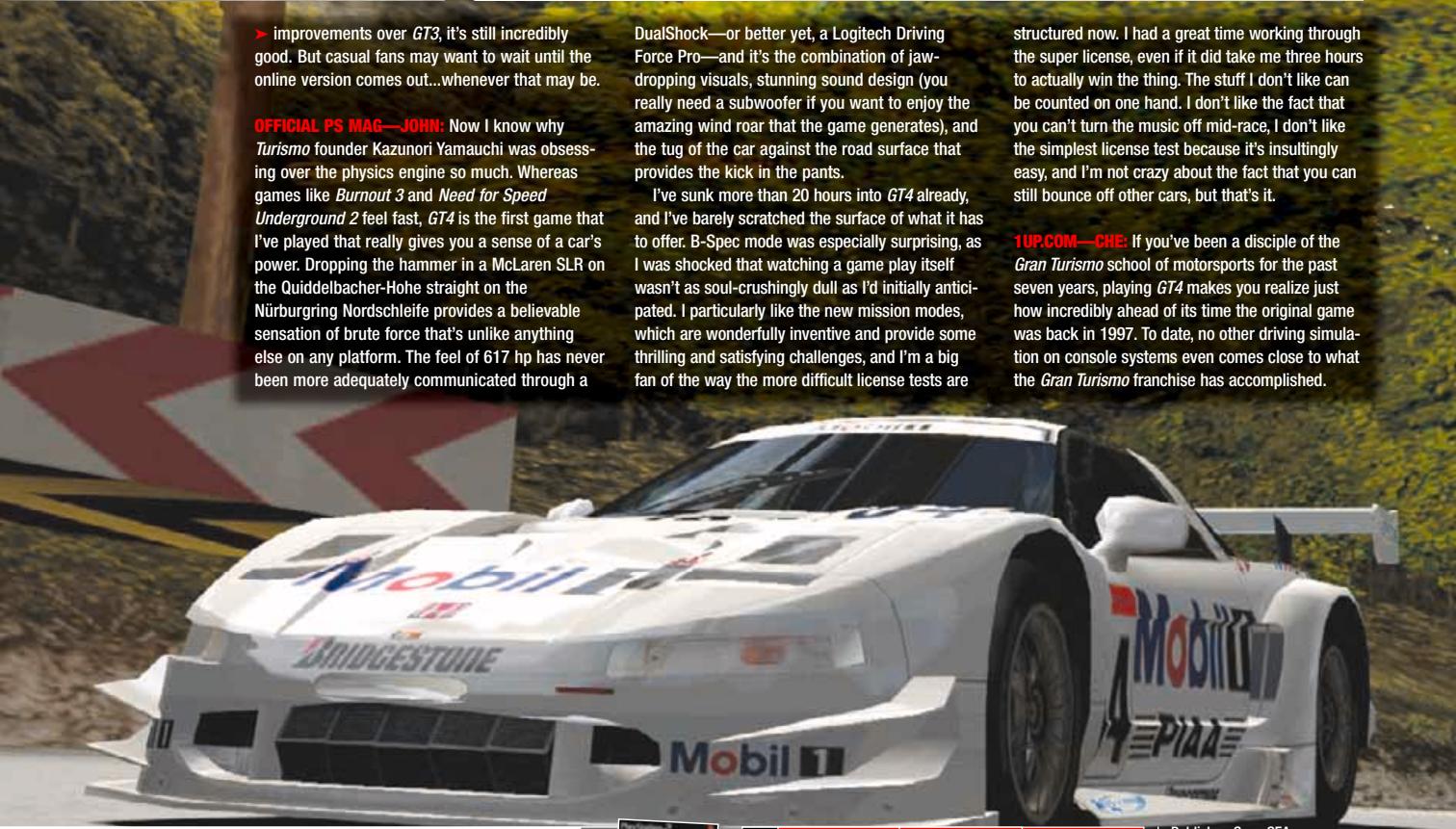
OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOHN: Now I know why *Turismo* founder Kazunori Yamauchi was obsessing over the physics engine so much. Whereas games like *Burnout 3* and *Need for Speed Underground 2* feel fast, *GT4* is the first game that I've played that really gives you a sense of a car's power. Dropping the hammer in a McLaren SLR on the Quiddelbacher-Hohe straight on the Nürburgring Nordschleife provides a believable sensation of brute force that's unlike anything else on any platform. The feel of 617 hp has never been more adequately communicated through a

DualShock—or better yet, a Logitech Driving Force Pro—and it's the combination of jaw-dropping visuals, stunning sound design (you really need a subwoofer if you want to enjoy the amazing wind roar that the game generates), and the tug of the car against the road surface that provides the kick in the pants.

I've sunk more than 20 hours into *GT4* already, and I've barely scratched the surface of what it has to offer. B-Spec mode was especially surprising, as I was shocked that watching a game play itself wasn't as soul-crushingly dull as I'd initially anticipated. I particularly like the new mission modes, which are wonderfully inventive and provide some thrilling and satisfying challenges, and I'm a big fan of the way the more difficult license tests are

structured now. I had a great time working through the super license, even if it did take me three hours to actually win the thing. The stuff I don't like can be counted on one hand. I don't like the fact that you can't turn the music off mid-race, I don't like the simplest license test because it's insultingly easy, and I'm not crazy about the fact that you can still bounce off other cars, but that's it.

1UP.COM—CHE: If you've been a disciple of the *Gran Turismo* school of motorsports for the past seven years, playing *GT4* makes you realize just how incredibly ahead of its time the original game was back in 1997. To date, no other driving simulation on console systems even comes close to what the *Gran Turismo* franchise has accomplished.



Good: Upgraded graphics; amazing with the Force Pro wheel
Bad: Not much has changed in the last four years
Still No: Porsches (aside from RUFs), Ferraris, or Lambos



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

9.0	9.5	9.0
DEMIAN	JOHN	CHE

Publisher: Sony CEA
 Developer: Polyphony Digital
 Players: 1-2 (2-6 system link)
 ESRB: Everyone

www.playstation.com



■ A.I. drivers have no qualms about smacking right into you. It's just how they were raised.

Two Hands on the Wheel

We cannot stress this enough: If you love *Gran Turismo*—really love *Gran Turismo*—you need to drop the \$150 on a Logitech Driving Force Pro wheel. It's like playing a completely different game. Forget seesawing a lesser wheel back and forth, trying desperately to go in a straight line—the Force Pro actually makes *GT4* easier.

Clip the rumble strip on the inside of a turn and the wheel jolts in your hands. Pass 85 mph in a Caterham Fireblade (or 130 in a Mercedes) and you feel the car getting a little squirrely. It's incredibly immersive stuff. Our only complaint: When you hit a series of hairpins in a rally race, turning the wheel lock-to-lock in time is really tough.



But has top-dog status made developer Polyphony Digital complacent? Well, graphically, it's clear the game is a significant step up from its predecessor; not only do each of the car models look more lifelike, they're also coated with a more natural layer of environmental reflections that give the proceedings a jaw-dropping photorealism not seen in any game this generation. At a glance, *GT4* could pass itself off as video footage of a six-car blacktop battle on a sunny afternoon at Laguna Seca.

But then again, this is *GT*, and mind-blowing visuals are just par for the course. Unlike the jump from *GT2* to *GT3*, *GT4*'s biggest contribution to the franchise is the game's fine-tuned vehicle handling which, after a week of road tests, was clearly Polyphony's central focus and the product of much tweaking and love. Unfortunately, this subtle upgrade can only be experienced by using

Logitech's awesome steering wheel peripheral, which features drastically improved wheel resistance and heavier, no-slip pedals. The result is that *GT4* has become a much more physically demanding game, in which you drive on pure tactile instinct and feel actual exhaustion after a lengthy race.

For your average couch driver who will never have a wheel setup, *GT4* does feel somewhat like a car roster update, however. The opening of the game is still dragged down by seemingly endless license tests, computer opponents still (still!) lack decent A.I., and the axed online mode is a criminal shame. The absence of real car-damage modeling also makes *GT4* feel oddly dated despite its state-of-the-art good looks. At the end of the day, however, *GT4* remains the best driving simulation on consoles and a true swan song for the aging PlayStation 2.



...the term just got redefined...





It's at about this point—the second level—that you realize this game is going to kick your ass for you.

PlayStation 2

DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING



Gamers will cry—it's that tough

SHANE: While the original *Devil May Cry* proved that 3D action-adventures could be fast, tough, and beautiful, its sequel proved that repetitive levels, dull bosses, and designer-jean product placement could quickly sour the formula. With *DMC3*, developer Capcom successfully brings back the series' rich gameplay and lush visuals...but also pumps up the challenge to near-fatal levels.

If, like the rest of us, you don't really remember what happened at the end of *DMC2*, you're in luck: As a prequel to the entire series, *DMC3* stands solidly on its own. Well-directed (and surprisingly hilarious) cut-scenes frame the action of each of the game's stages, but the narrative rarely intrudes on the combat. And what splendid combat it is—you'll be stringing together amazing combos within the first five minutes of play. After a few hours, it's just plain sick: Soften them up with sword swipes, a shotgun blast, a few knocks with the ice nun-chaku, and finish with an electric guitar to the head...totally artful gameplay. New fighting "styles" allow you to customize your skill set based on your preference (swordplay, guns, defense, agility, or

magic), but it's not terribly practical to keep switching, as you'll want to master your favorite.

A warning: *DMC3* will mutilate beginners and vets alike. The second and third missions both offer a shockingly intense challenge: You'll actually want to "level up" on the first stage a few times before pressing on. In fact, the game's so hard that you'll probably need to switch over to easy mode (which you unlock after the second brutal stage).

MARK: I'd like to address *DMC3*'s development team directly. To all the artists: Congrats on a truly gorgeous game. Whether it was the gaudy interior of a strip club or the pulsing intestines of a gigantic whale-beast, your detailed graphics, awesome lighting effects, and thrilling cut-scenes brought everything to life. To the gameplay designers: Not bad! Despite periodic camera issues and the bigger problem of mixing up the roll-away dodge and jump moves, the combat is strategic yet intense. The various fighting styles, upgradeable weapons and attacks, and simple puzzles kept it all from getting (too) repetitive as well. Finally, to whoever

balanced the difficulty: *I hope you burn in hell you sadistic freak.* The frustrating part isn't that the game is hard, it's that the lack of save points requires replaying whole levels over and over and over. Even easy mode fluctuates between pathetically simple and annoyingly tough! A great game held back by a total lack of play balancing.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: My faith has been restored in the *DMC* franchise. OK yeah, the game's tough—as in *Ninja Gaiden*, you'll have to learn certain techniques to beat particular enemies. But the action is so much more interesting and entertaining in *DMC3* than it was in the previous games, thanks mainly to the new fighting-style system, I didn't really mind the difficulty. And it's worth noting that Capcom didn't just right *DMC2*'s gameplay wrongs: The gothic-inspired levels are extraordinarily detailed and well designed, the story is surprisingly good, and the cut-scenes offer truly jaw-dropping moments that action-movie fans will drool over.



Good: Impressive visuals, killer gameplay
Bad: Absurdly steep normal difficulty, god-awful music
Best Boss: Vampiric hooker who turns into an electric guitar



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.0
SHANE

7.0
MARK

9.0
GIANCARLO

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.capcom.com

SAMURAI LEGEND

MUSASHI

CUTTING EDGE
SAMURAI ACTION!



PlayStation 2

SQUARE ENIX

www.square-enix.com
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THE INDEPENDENT GUIDE TO TECHNOLOGY



■ Ninjas are great, but a squad of *just* ninjas? That's way too much sneaking and smoke bombs for one battlefield.



■ PlayStation 2

KESSEN III

Rock out with your pikes out

Good: That classic *Kessen* "chaotic battlefield" feel

Bad: That classic *Kessen* "man, this is slow" feel

Beware Of: That classic cheesy Koei voice acting



KEVIN: It's lucky that *Kessen III* is such a different game from the last two titles in the hardcore military strategy series (both high on visuals but low on quality gameplay). This *Kessen*'s attraction mainly stems from its new action-oriented style, which borrows freely from *Dynasty Warriors*—though it's still far slower than that hack-and-slashathon.

Instead of meekly giving orders to generals, you're actively controlling big-time warlord Oda Nobunaga and his armies, clop-clopping across ancient Japan and scoring "combos" (sort of) on enemy generals. In fact, just about every *Dynasty Warriors* feature, from bodyguards to musou finishing moves, has a direct equivalent in *Kessen III*. This doesn't totally eliminate the plodding pace of most battles, but it does lend a bit of variety to the core gameplay of setting up units and trying to out-

flank your opponent.

Have I lost you yet? No? Good, because here's the payoff: The atmosphere in *Kessen III* is excellent, from the *Final Fantasy*-style summons to the feeling of utter pandemonium whenever three or so battalions clash at once. It's an acquired taste (like, well, pretty much all Koei games), but it's still a title worth delving into if you're the hardcore type.

JUSTIN: Despite the period-piece charisma in its competent character-driven intermissions, Nobunaga's drive to unite Japan is a tough sell for action or strategy fans not named Kevin. *Kessen III*'s abstract, quasi-action warfare rarely looks or feels like armies clashing and is awkward enough to preclude much tactical grace. The idea is to ride into war in real time leading one unit, but

the flow is constantly broken as you pause and switch to take over for the honorable but not-so-bright A.I. generals. Bring your own mattock (or adze, or...OK, fine, *shovel*) if you plan to dig this one.

ROBERT: *Kessen III* bravely straddles the border between action and strategy, but it needs to take a step deeper into both territories. I dig the hugeness, the hundreds of soldiers onscreen dukin' it out to the timing of your button presses. When more than a couple of units pile into one another, though, seeing where you end and the other guys begin gets confusing. The needy manual camera doesn't help, either. Strategy-wise, troop types and commanders aren't different enough to matter, and terrain doesn't really figure in. Clearing maps of all those messy soldiers really satisfies my OCD, though. 🐉



■ Trigger "rampage" mode and you'll play as one of your generals (right), collecting power-ups and smiting peons with impunity.

THE VERDICTS
 (OUT OF 10)

7.5

KEVIN

6.0

JUSTIN

6.5

ROBERT

Publisher: Koei
 Developer: Koei
 Players: 1
 ESRB: Teen

www.koei.com



What's that Alien Hominid dude doing in here?

PlayStation 2

MUSASHI: SAMURAI LEGEND

Not quite 7.0 samurai



Good: Tight control, plentiful moves
Bad: Repetitive missions, abysmal voice acting
Unexpected Sequel to: *Brave Fencer Musashi* (PS1)



SHANE: Talk about frustrating—this follow-up to one of Square's lesser-known PS1 role-playing games manages to counter nearly every one of its good points with a serious screwup. It's a veritable war of attrition: Attractive, "manga-shaded" visuals fill the screen with fluid, anime-style action...until crippling slowdown randomly chops up the beauty. Endearing, funny characters bring levity to the cut-scenes...but their god-awful voice acting kills the mood. Well-designed levels offer a good mix of combat, platforming, and puzzling...that you'll quickly tire of since you're forced to traverse each one several times.

This plentiful failure is really a cryin' shame, 'cause the game's basic mechanics rock: Musashi learns tons of killer moves from his foes, so you're constantly itching to take on each new baddie to expand your arsenal. And the boss fights bristle with creativity—when you're freezing the limbs of a giant lava beast in order to scamper up his arm and whack his head or hopping across the backs of flying beetles while slashing a huge flying fish, it's momentarily easy to overlook the game's flaws.

ROBERT: Musashi, the character, irritates me to no end—his eight-foot ponytail, little girl's tank top, and amateur Dennis the Menace voice acting pummel the senses like a yapping dachshund. *Musashi*, the game, isn't much better.

Now to my lightning round of complaints: perpetually respawning enemies, a stock story, uninspired boss battles and puzzles, and long stretches of helpless-maiden carrying make this one for Square's true believers only.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: What's most irritating about *Musashi* is that it's a pretty good idea surrounded by a wealth of annoyances. I think the focus-and-then-duplicate mechanic for learning new moves is pretty smart. Picking up, carrying, and wielding princesses (!) is both cool and kinda baffling, as hitting baddies with a Japanese maiden apparently hurts more than your sword. I just wish the camera weren't so horrid (especially during boss fights) and that the leveling and backtracking weren't so tedious. It's solid enough, but it could have been so much more.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	6.5	5.0	6.0
	SHANE	ROBERT	SCOOTER

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.square-enix.com

Xbox

AMERICAN MCGEE PRESENTS SCRAPLAND

Chuck it on the heap



It's so easy to earn ship upgrades that *Scrapland's* flight missions quickly become massacres.

Good: Charming visuals and dialogue
Bad: Repetitive gameplay
Resist the Urge: To cross the "S" off the title, please



KEVIN: Even if you do know who American McGee is (he worked on PC classics like *Quake*), you'll be forgiven for wondering where on Earth *Scrapland* came from. No game looks quite like this one—it's set on a vast, metallic colony populated exclusively by screwy robots, and every character (yours included) looks like he was made with old car parts and electric cables. Traversing this planet, either on foot or by personal spaceship, is a surprisingly deep visual treat, with tons of finely detailed environments and a sense of humor in the conversations that'll remind old-timers of bygone LucasArts adventure games.

This visual package is so powerful, in fact, that it helps mask *Scrapland's* bigger faults—like the *Grand Theft Auto*-style mission system, which will often have you performing the exact same task several missions in a row (hey, Mr. McGee, no padding the script). The ability to steal other robots' identities and wreak havoc is fun, but it's rarely used to innovative effect in the story mode. The backdrops are fascinating; it's just a shame the stuff you actually *do* in them gets mundane.

JAMES: I'm not feelin' it. *Scrapland* is set on a planet where robots used scraps to build a new world. And it seems like the developers took a similar approach, grafting the leftovers of stealth games (including lazy cops that give up once you turn a corner) to tedious, mind-boggling *GTA*-like minimeissions (after defeating a boss, you must travel across the world to apologize to him). The futuristic flight combat might have saved *Scrapland* from mediocrity, but the dog-fights are so cake you'll hardly care.

1UP.COM—CHE: *Scrapland's* open-ended design, quirky cast, and decent story tickle the side of me that loves to find an unhyped sleeper gem. The game's main conceit—taking over the bodies of other bots to gain their abilities—adds needed variety. But that variety only goes so far; missions become repetitive too quickly, and the vehicle combat aspect feels thin and unrewarding. Sadly, *Scrapland's* cool murder mystery plot is wasted on a series of lame fetch quests. It's got a lot of heart—just not a lot of brains.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	6.5	5.5	6.5
	KEVIN	JAMES	CHE

Publisher: Enlight
Developer: Mercury Steam
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.scrapland.com

Xbox

GAME OF THE MONTH

ONLINE



SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

Theory of awesometivity

SHAWN: It's a full-scale firefight between the Koreans—in short, more ballistic zap-pow in one late scene than the series' previous installments put together—and the perfect place to play secret operative. As silent-but-deadly superspy Sam Fisher, you'll shoot out streetlights, scale fire escapes, and stealth-kill guards by the dozen; the raucous machine guns and men in the do-or-die grip of adrenaline overdose just make your job all the easier. Sam can even take potshots at warring soldiers from either side of the DMZ (the demilitarized zone dividing the north's dictatorship from the south's democracy) without his previously touchy handlers at HQ pulling the plug. *Chaos Theory* isn't the cruel, ball-busting taskmaster of *Splinter Cells* past—the exacting details don't

matter so long as the duties get done, and it's a better game because of it.

Chaos Theory's best bits occur between battlefields, but the rest is right on, too. Case in point: Chief spy Lambert details the workings of an alarm system about which Sam assumes, "triggering three means the mission's over." Not so: "This isn't a videogame," says Lambert. And in some ways it almost isn't—certainly not where rendering a realistic world is concerned, what with its rained-on rocks, crashing waves, and cobblestone walkways done up in makes-you-wanna-touch-it texture; the terrified peepers of the terrorists in Sam's strangleholds; and a camera—the most flawlessly functional in its genre—that captures every atmospheric detail

from every conceivable angle.

What looks lifelike also acts it (maybe not flesh and blood, but more on that in a moment). Snuff candles to create cover, track a shadow across the walls of a teahouse and punch through the paper to get at the guy on the other side—some of it works to your advantage. Other stuff works against it, as anything out of the ordinary—open doors, lights unexpectedly turned off—sets your enemies on edge, at which point they'll use flares and flashlights, or, based on the severity of the situation, create ramshackle barricades with overturned shelves and bookcases. The result: You're constantly wary of possible repercussions, always prepping a countermeasure for the next contingency. And when guards who somehow gurgle for

After knocking a spy to the ground, mercs can now choke the shifty buggers to death in versus mode.





■ It's three, three, three games in one. From left to right: solo, two-player co-op (a completely separate campaign about half as long as solo), and four-player versus.

■ Sneaking isn't what it used to be. Now enemies can surprise you by lighting up flashlights or flares in the dark.

backup through slit throats do blow Sam's cover (a snafu as old as the series), the new save-when-and-where-you-want feature makes it (almost) OK.

Don't let what little hair-pulling that does happen put you off. Even the intimidatingly technical spies-against-guards versus game—now with even more complex levels, objectives, and tactics—offers tutorials to get you started. And if its tangled hunter-and-prey intimacy proves too intensely competitive, you can share the shadows in cooperative mode (playable via splitscreen, system link, and online). Its four-mission search for a bioweapons black marketer is so contagious that I wished I could've played Sam's entire solo campaign with my partner in crime preven-

tion. How's this for high-five collaboration? Shoe and I each grabbed an enemy, pulled out our silenced pistols, and shot one another's captive dead on the three count so that they both slumped at the same time. Joint acrobatics—think cheerleaders turned covert operatives—make getting from point to point as gripping as sussing out attack schemes, and the same cause-and-effect that makes every move count in Sam's outing carries over here (sometimes with unforeseen consequences, as I learned when yammering too loudly over my headset rattled a watchman).

SHOE: My dilemma was as big as this game. Dare I score this review a 10? For its predecessor,

Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow, that was easy. The revolutionary four-player spies-versus-mercenaries mode alone justified the big one-oh. But now that's been done, so some of the oomph is gone—and I sure hate giving a game a 10 unless I seriously, seriously mean it.

So I think back to my week of playing through *Chaos Theory*. I saw bugs—nothing world-ending, but bugs nonetheless. The first half of the solo game, although solid, didn't show me anything mind-blowingly new. The co-op campaign—which has horrible voice acting, by the way—ended on quite the whimper (this could have something to do with it having no ending whatsoever). I knew most players would have a tough time with the versus game, a hardcore ▶

What About...

PlayStation 2?

We didn't get a reviewable *Chaos Theory* for PS2, but we did spy it in action. What we saw looked good: The same amount of enthusiasm some old people have for I Can't Believe It's Not Butter!, we have for the graphics here. New techy tricks give this a visual boost over PS2 *Pandora Tomorrow*, and that game already looked hot. And...hold on to your seats! Like before, the PS2 version gets something the Xbox game doesn't have. This time, it's a special stealth-kill move where main man Sam Fisher can drown enemies in water, which you won't see that often. Yeah, who needs new levels anyway?

On the multiplayer side, the PS2 gets the versus mode for four (online only) and co-op mode for two (unfortunately, it's splitscreen only—no online or local network).

GameCube?

GameCube *Chaos Theory* is MIA (to our ever-curious eyes), but Ubisoft insists it's still coming out March 31 like the other versions. The GC *Pandora Tomorrow* looked and played great, so we're not too worried for this sequel. GC *Chaos Theory* gets the same new water stealth-kill move (see PS2), and like before, has Game Boy Advance connectivity for monitoring sticky cameras, checking out your map...you know, the usual.

Also as usual, GameCube owners get the bird from every Nintendo executive ever involved in making the system Internet-phobic. Like before, GC *Chaos Theory* won't see any of the fantastic versus play modes, but at least you can co-op with a buddy via splitscreen.





■ **L1 help:** Spies can get an FDA-approved boost from their teammates, the better to reach high ledges with.

▶ mode that requires patience, newbie-friendly tutorials (of which there are plenty), and hours of practice. And why are the controls slightly different from mode to mode? That won't allow anyone to ride the steep learning curve more easily. Maybe this game isn't a 10, huh?

But then I remember the highlights of my week, and it hits me like I've opened up a long-lost photo album of my most memorable gaming moments. I remember, in single player, being in a dark room when suddenly, power came back to the office complex, lights turning on all around me, doors opening, guards approaching, and my radio contact yelling for me to get out. I panicked and froze up, not knowing what the first action item was on my immediate to-do list. For the

briefest of moments, I felt like I was *there*. I remember being pinned down in an alley by a guard unloading clip after clip at me, then looking over at the other half of the splitscreen to see my co-op partner Shawn creeping up behind the guy to snap his neck, and smiling, knowing my bro would get me out of that mess.

I remember cursing that same bro when he blew me and Mark up with one well-aimed frag grenade in versus mode. But later, I got my sweet revenge when I turned on my thermoptic camouflage suit at just the right time, became see-through like a Predator alien on a jungle safari, let Shawn run right past me, then ran up behind him to grab him by the neck to talk some trash through his headset before I snapped *his* neck.

So I will give *Chaos Theory* that 10. It's simply brilliant. The modes, graphics, gameplay, sound, music, acting, dialogue, and every other little piece in between all come together to create a tense, sweaty-palm experience you can't find anywhere else.

MARK: No argument here: *Chaos Theory* online is genius. I want to stress that it takes time to learn versus multiplayer's convoluted maps (even with the new, much-needed walkthrough tutorials), discover the rules and gadgets that suit your style, and find other players at your level, but once you do—and the game helps you do all three—the payoff is incredible. Co-op is even better. You and a buddy boosting each other up to ▶

Ménage à...uh...Four: What's New in Versus Mode

Splinter Cell's been an awesome series, but it's really the four-player versus mode introduced in *Pandora Tomorrow* that propels it to legendary status. Two stealthy spies, two heavily armed mercenaries, and a whole lot of gadgets, strategies, and tension-filled moments make this one of the best multiplayer games ever. If you're a PT vet, here's what *Chaos* brings....

Maps: 11, but only six are new. The rest are taken from *Pandora* (Museum, Deftech, Warehouse, Bank, and River Mall). Boo.

New spy equipment: Heartbeat detectors aren't that handy with their limited range, and the thermoptic camouflage suit (think Predator invisible) seems to get us into trouble more often than not.

New merc equipment: Spy smoke grenades aren't so bad now because gas masks are real lifesavers (when we remember to activate them). And our Reviews Editor Demian Linn is in love with the Camera Network Browsing Device, which lets you scan the different areas of each stage. Team players will appreciate the new backpack, which replenishes grenades and mines.

Mercs get new guns (assault rifle, shotgun, and submachine gun), though none of us like the shotgun.

Upgraded gadgets: Mines now have three functions (the new one is a poison that drains a spy's health), and spy traps (now "spy finders") have two (you can now set them for proximity detection).

New moves: Boost your spy teammate to reach new heights, share equipment, heal

your partner, spin 360 degrees in a "berserk attack" to nail that pesky spy sneaking up on your six, and more. We like.

Modes: Story combines all of *Pandora's* modes into one: Deactivate computers, sabotage targets, and extract discs to deposit them somewhere else—depending on the stage, it's a mix and match. Some objectives even cause reactions in the level (for example: blow up the water heaters and you can release blinding steam everywhere). Disc hunt mode has spies running around in an Easter egg hunt, picking up discs everywhere. Deathmatch mode says good-bye to any objectives; just kill the other guys.

In all modes, you can edit the rules: limit gadgets, ban certain

moves, etc. The replayability here is *Pandora* times 100.

Help: An unlockable tutor mode and guided level walkthroughs help agents-in-training get used to the stages.

Fixed: All previously known bugs are fixed here. So all you cheaters out there will have to find new exploits to take advantage of.

Or better yet, just bugger off.





She has seen her brother's fate. Her fight is to ensure he never will.



All her life Rau has watched over her. Now Tati is returning the favor. The struggle to prevent the dark magic of Kri from spreading returns, with four playable characters, each with their own menacing weapons and deadly combos. Unique collaborative gameplay pairs you with a fellow warrior, making teamwork essential as you scout, plan and fight your way through breathtaking 3-D environments. This time, the only way to preserve your future is to fight it.



Blood and Gore
Violence

PlayStation 2

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To truly appreciate versus mode's genius, play only with the nice kids that are on your same skill level.



➤ otherwise inaccessible spots, covering each other's backs, flanking enemies, causing diversions, sneaking and whispering—the teamwork possibilities are as limitless as the fun you'll have exploring them.

But I had expected the online game to be brilliant. As for single player...well, frankly I thought Mr. Fisher was getting "a little too old for this s***," as the scruffy middle-aged special agent himself might say. So little had changed between the original *Cell* and the not-even year-old *Pandora Tomorrow* that I wasn't really itching for more of the same. But *Chaos Theory's* admittedly minor tweaks—a gun to suppress electronics and lights, a few new moves, small interface issues finally smoothed out—taken together

make what's basically the same game exciting again. More than ever, the levels brilliantly encourage and allow for stealth, no matter which of the various possible paths you take through them, so they rarely devolve into the big shoot-outs my previous *Cell* missions always somehow became (though that option is certainly still available for you Rambo types). You're also now constantly eavesdropping on enemy conversations and interrogating guards at knifepoint, which works along with the ridiculously sharp graphics to pull you into the game like never before. Even the story, though still a little dry and a lot convoluted, has more of the charm and genuine humor the previous games only hinted at. The old man's still got it. 🍌



Comic Relief
Take a break from the heady, sometimes too-real Tom Clancy spy-thriller stuff and head over to www.splintercell.com to download some ha-has. The cynical (and sometimes plain evil) *Penny Arcade* guys supply some funny spy-training manuals and a surprisingly (but not always) serious comic series, while the jackasses (that's a compliment, mind you) from *Mega64* risk community service to show what real-life *Splinter Cell* would be like in our nation's strip malls and parking lots.

In the diagram below, we can see that Spy A is "chunky," and has a "poor diet" which no doubt consists of "hippo lard" and seasoned "curly fries."

Spy B suffers from "poor self-image," and is a "diagnosed bulimic" whose crippling depression and frail, "bird-like" bones make him uniquely unfit for this task.

To prove that *Third Echelon* is not without a sense of humor, we continue to issue Spy A smaller and smaller uniforms, which he then attempts to wear.

Good: Three games in one
Bad: Versus mode is incredibly complex and intimidating
Multiplayer Mileage: Depends on whom you're playing with



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

9.5	10	9.0
SHAWN	SHOE	MARK

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal/Ancey
Players: 1 (2 co-op splitscreen, system link, Xbox Live); 1-4 versus system link, Xbox Live)
ESRB: Mature
www.splintercell.com

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Xbox

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DOOM 3



Get your ass to Mars



MARK: Purely in terms of gameplay, *Doom 3*'s lack of ambition is astonishing. Id Software's latest first-person shooter doesn't just remind you of its infamous decade-old forefathers—it is *the same damn game*. Demons spawn ahead of you or suddenly pop out of "monster closets" behind you as you cross invisible lines. Locked doors wait for you to find keys or kill all nearby enemies before opening. Bad guys beeline at you with all the intelligence and subtlety of a charging bull. Every weapon in

your huge arsenal is straight out of the FPS handbook, save one novelty item at the end of the game and the series' trademark chain saw. None of this is necessarily a bad thing, mind you—the classic guns and timeless twitch gameplay are the reason *Doom* went on to define the genre after all—but in this age of *Riddicks* and *Halos*, it's a bit disappointing.

Or rather it *would be* disappointing if the rest of the game didn't build so perfectly upon that basic foundation, creating one of the most frightening and visceral experiences in gaming. Mostly due to its insanely detailed environments and outstanding state-of-the-art lighting effects, *Doom 3* succeeds better than any game I've ever played at making you feel like you are *living* the game. It's *you* wandering the dark, claustrophobic tunnels under Mars City where top-secret experiments have gone horribly wrong, emergency lights flick-

ering over satanic symbols scrawled on the walls in dried blood. *You* listening to the audio log of a doctor describing his patient going mad and eating his own fingers as those blinking lights suddenly go out. *You* wildly scanning the darkness for whatever just made that sound (you did hear something, right?), debating if it's worth it to lower the shotgun for a second to check with your flashlight. These moments when you forget you're holding a controller in front of a television and just react are what *Doom 3* is all about (and why the game is 10 times better alone with all the lights out). Atmosphere shoots out of every leaky steam pipe, drips down every gore-specked wall, and flashes with every strobing lightbulb.

For about 12 hours straight (or more, thanks to the brilliant online co-op mode), you're scared as hell of what waits around the next corner and yet can't wait to see it at the same time—a feeling

Multiplayer: Doom 3 vs. Halo 2—Fight!

Although *Doom 3* can't compete with *Halo 2* in terms of strategy, vehicles, or modes, its lightning-fast pace and well-designed maps (complete with traps and power-ups you trigger manually) make it a nice alternative for small death-match games. In one-on-one and ladder tournaments, the other two players can even watch from spectator mode. Unfortunately, explosive weapons can cause the game to stutter, even in system link matches, but it's not so bad that it ruins the overall experience.



■ The \$60 collector's edition includes *Doom I and II* as a bonus, so you can remember what Hell looked like when it was just a bunch of brown corridors.

Good: Unbelievable graphics, spooky atmosphere
Bad: Key-fetching errands, simplistic enemy A.I.
Freakin' Awesome: Online co-op



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

9.0

MARK

9.5

CRISPIN

9.5

SHAWN

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Id Software/
Vicarious Visions
Players: 1 (2-4 online or system link)
ESRB: Mature

www.doom3.com



■ Tor Johnson, what are you doing here?!? You've lost weight.

Online Co-op? Praise Jesus!

Not only does *Doom 3* include the awesome ability to play the single-player campaign along with a buddy online (insert nasty look at *Halo 2* here), but developer Vicarious Visions really went the extra mile by customizing the experience for co-op. Less ammo, tweaked boss fights, simplified key hunts, and best of all, lots more darkness ("I'm not holding the flashlight, *you* hold the flashlight!") emphasize the strategy and teamwork aspects perfectly. You'll want to play through this way at least once.



■ "I still say these helmets would work better if we could see out of them."

worth sacrificing fancy A.I., innovative gameplay, and certainly 50 of your hard-earned dollars for.

CRISPIN: I thought I beat my fear of the dark when I was 5. But there I was with sweat-slicked palms and a yammering heart as I crept through *Doom 3*'s steel-and-shadows Mars base, my flashlight barely denting the coal blackness, when—aiiiieeee! The game got me again, making me jump for the 20th time. Because when things go bump in *Doom 3*'s perennial night, they're usually very bad things that pop out of floor panels, leap from ceilings, or bust through windows. I haven't felt this kind of slow-burn dread since the original *Resident Evil* pioneered such frights.

It's true that, when reflected upon in the reassuring light of day, *Doom 3* relies on fun-house tricks to jump-start your heart. Sinister laughter, nearly subliminal hallucinations, monsters

that burst from metal closets (how were they passing the time until I stumbled along? Playing *Yahtzee?*)—*Doom 3*'s frights are the types that make you leap now and laugh about it later. But just when you get used to its tricks, the game switches to straight-up action in a vision of hell that would make Ronnie James Dio shout "Amen," plus it's got a series of spectacular boss fights. And when you're done with all that, the ultrafun co-op mode will have you and a bud whistling in the dark.

SHAWN: It can come anytime, anywhere—crawling, charging, and hovering—half machine and all monster. In lesser shooters, you're safe unless a cut-scene says otherwise and until you willingly walk through the next door. Here, hellknights (a hodgepodge of HR Giger and Marilyn Manson) batter it down before you can decide. And because danger does come from all angles,

sometimes announcing its arrival with little more than a fleeting shadow or faint stir, every harmless flicker and hydraulic hiss sets you on edge. Your brain says, "Face your fears by flashlight." The back of your neck says, "Shoot now and have a look-see later." It wouldn't work if *Doom 3* weren't so drop-dead (and walk-again) gorgeous: Now the old *Doom* formula of bogeymen overrunning a Martian marine base is seriously unsettling.

Despite its cramped corridors, *Doom 3* isn't confining, even if survival sometimes requires a running back's ability to sense and get through gaps with the Sprint button. (The speed burst feature also lets you fall back fast so that a bounding imp, for instance, lands at your feet instead of in your lap.) Deciding where to be and when is even more exhilarating (and exhausting) in the devilishly good co-op mode, where you'll need to differentiate between friend and demonic foe in the dark. 🐉



■ Hotlegs McGee: Some pitch-black areas are only lit by the glow of your attacking foes. This guy here cranks out about 2,500 lumens on a good day.



■ Why did they even let toddlers into a secret research facility on Mars anyway? Not smart.



■ Best-case scenario: Donkey Kong is administering one of those "how about I walk on you" massages.



■ GameCube

DONKEY KONG JUNGLE BEAT

Brassy monkey

BRYAN: Looking at the screens on this page, you might think *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* is just another garden-variety, side-scrolling platformer sporting stunning graphics. It ain't. Nintendo has replaced analog sticks, D-pads, and face/shoulder buttons with bongo drums, and the result is an unconventional yet must-play experience for Cube owners.

Don't misunderstand, this one's still rooted in platforming soil, as the famous ape runs, jumps, swings, and bashes his way to the end of each level. But it's how you execute these moves—pounding the appropriate bongo drum and clapping your hands—that's such a departure from the norm. Sure, these kindergarten control mechanics may feel alien at first, but give 'em a few levels and you'll be leaping over bubbling lava pits and dodging the roundhouse jump kicks of a kung fu fighting primate with ease, grace...and impeccable rhythm. Also, the game continually rewards those who play well; after defeating the final boss, you can unlock a bunch of bonus stages that require

some serious mastery of the bongo controller. It's just a shame the bosses don't reflect the creativity of the controls and level design—you'll face the same four foes, and as you progress, each one makes minimal alterations to its fighting style.

MARK: I agree. *Jungle Beat's* bongo control setup is entertaining in itself—the timing and just the physical feeling of banging and clapping add unique new layers of enjoyment to this stale genre. But remove that one aspect (or get tired of it when your hands get sore about an hour in) and you're left with a solid, largely predictable game we've all seen before. I wish the gameplay focused more on mechanics like when Donkey Kong jumps on and pummels his opponents or when he grabs enemy projectiles and tosses them back; unfortunately, *Jungle Beat* merely hints at these elements before quickly retreating back to safe run 'n' jump (or maybe I should say tap 'n' clap) ground. Great, casual gaming fun...for a couple days.

CRISPIN: So maybe bongo-based control isn't the wave of gaming's future (a few hours of furious *Jungle Beat* beating absolutely agonized my hands). But for now, I'm happy to quirk out with a fun gimmick—the drum-slapping control feels surprisingly natural after a few minutes of play.

Oh, there's some awkwardness—I never got the hang of swimming and flying areas. Bryan's right about the repetitive boss battles, too. But the levels themselves deliver a decent variety of challenges, including races, long-distance leaping contests, and obstacles right out of platform gaming's good ol' days. The stages are also short and sweet—perfect for replaying until you ace them with the game's deep combo system. Or until your bruised hands cramp up. 🐒



How Should You Beat It?

Even though *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* is designed for the bongo controller (which is sold separately or with copies of *Jungle Beat* and last year's music-based *Donkey Konga*), you can still play through the game using the standard-issue GameCube joypad. But we don't recommend it—the button layout makes it difficult to keep DK on the move (thus reducing the chance for high-scoring combos), and you'll never register as many knuckle sandwiches when pummeling a beast as you can when slapping the bongos.



Good: Strange new twist to controls, beautiful visuals

Bad: Recycled bosses

The Next Bongo-Controlled Game: *Donkey Konga 2* (April)



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

8.0

BRYAN

7.0

MARK

8.0

CRISPIN

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo Tokyo
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com



■ That's nice, but the Gillette Mach X9 has seven vibrating strontium blades and a night-light.

■ GBA

WARIOWARE: TWISTED!



Sit 'n' spin

Good: Creative gameplay, hilarious microgames
Bad: You'll look like a crazy person while playing
Best Microgame: Playing *Super Mario Bros.* by tilting your GBA



SHANE: The original GBA *WarioWare* proved that Nintendo could successfully distill gameplay into wild, three-second bursts—call 'em microgames. Surviving these wacky, rapid-fire challenges felt phenomenally fresh and inventive, and you had to wonder if the formula could retain its charm in the inevitable sequels.

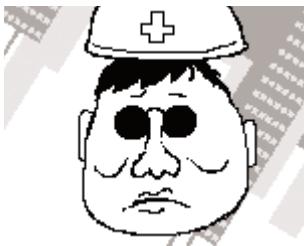
Twisted! manages to pull off this daunting feat by revolutionizing how you play the games: Instead of using your GBA's D-pad, you rotate the GBA itself (the cartridge packs a massive, rumbling motion sensor). The technology works perfectly—spinning your GBA around feels utterly alien yet supremely fun.

Some will argue that the 200-plus

microgames here don't offer enough variety—you're twisting your GBA in some manner during nearly all of them—but clever methods of using that motion keep it entertaining. Whether you're making toast, punching candy out of a little girl's mouth, or playing NES classic *Excitebike*, you'll be having a blast...and making an ass of yourself by wildly gyrating your body. And fans who found *Touched!* (DS) too easy, take heart: *Twisted!* offers a much deeper challenge.

SHAWN: Who says you need that DS doohickey for a whole new method of hands-on microgaming? *Twisted!*'s double-sized, motion-detecting cartridge turns your GBA into a hundred airport gift-shop gizmos (my fave: slowly spinning the device a full 360 degrees to get a tipsy moonwalker across topsy-turvy terrain). It's one of a kind and charmingly intuitive: The move-it-to-make-it-happen interface means that the grandpappy beside you on the bus can stop wondering what you're doing and see for his geriatric self.

JENNIFER: Whether or not you've already played through *Touched!*, you really have to get your grubby little paws on this one. Twisting and turning my GBA wasn't at all intuitive initially; for the first time in my life, I actually understood that start-up warning about games causing physical injury. A couple rounds in, though, the barrage of minigames (with a perfect difficulty level even for a spaz like yours truly) had me completely hooked, sucked in yet again by that old *WarioWare* magic.



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

9.0	9.0	9.0
SHANE	SHAWN	JENNIFER

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com

■ DS

YOSHI TOUCH & GO

Looks like a baby game...fights back hard



■ Yoshi promotes dental health by eating apple, ignoring chocolate wall.



Good: Unexpected depth and addictiveness
Bad: It's way tougher than you think
Yoshi's Island: Still has no true sequel



CHRISTIAN: Despite its appearance, *Yoshi Touch & Go* isn't a new Nintendo platformer—but, strangely, I'm not really complaining. Instead, it's a brain- and finger-cramping action/puzzle game in which you try to keep baby Mario and his steed alive with the stylus. You draw clouds to walk on, drag coins to our heroes, and target encroaching enemies with eggs.

Unlike most games these days, *Touch & Go* is about gradually honing your skills through replay—teeth clenched, stylus gripped tightly. Whenever Yoshi and baby Mario bit the dust, my reaction was "Aaagh! Now...how far can I make it this time?" I even reset the level if I wasn't doing well; it's meaningless to continue if you aren't racking up points.

Yes, *points*. Remember points? Progress in *Touch & Go* requires lots of 'em, but that's part of what makes it addictive. You really have to concentrate intently and become a multitasking fiend—it may look simple, but there's a lot of strategy. Don't buy a DS for it, but if you already own one and are starting to wonder why, this is the game to get.

SHANE: Despite the facts that you can't directly control Yoshi or Mario, you replay slight variations of the same level over and over again, and any grown man would be embarrassed to be seen playing this in public, you'll still have a hard time kicking the *Touch & Go* habit. The cloud-drawing, egg-tossing gameplay feels obtuse at first, but after a few attempts, it clicks—transforming the game into a frantic quest for perfect performance. It's a shame that

the four modes feel so similar, but at least the addictive multiplayer versus mode invites infinite replay.

JOHN R: On the surface, *Touch & Go* looks simple, but don't be deceived. Hidden behind the candy-coated graphics and seemingly straightforward gameplay lies surprising depth and playability. The only goal in each of the game's four modes is to get the highest score possible, but they sure as hell make you earn it. And just like the best old-school arcade games, the more you play, the more techniques you uncover to help better your score. It's surprisingly addictive, a lot of fun, and definitely my favorite DS game to date.



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

7.5	7.5	8.5
CHRISTIAN	SHANE	JOHN R.

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The games that were too little or too late

We couldn't cram everything into this issue—sorry to all of you who were really pulling for a full-page review of *Rugby 2005*. Blame *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, *Gran Turismo 4*, and all

those other triple-A games coming out in...March? It's a little weird, but we're all for it. We tried like crazy to get *Rise of Kasai* and *God of War* in our reviews lineup, too, but the dang games

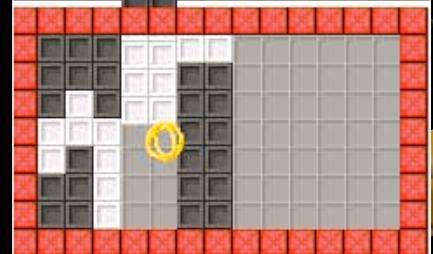
just didn't show up in time. We did get some serious stick time in with near-final versions of both titles, though—check our extended impressions on the next page.



Worms 3D • XB • Sega • ESRB: T — The strategy series with squirmy soldiers and down-to-earth battlefields went extra-dimensional on GameCube and PS2 in 2004. This is the same can of *Worms*—a guaranteed good time, even if targeting became tougher in the translation to 3D—plus hilariously fun online play for four. We dig!



Worms Forts: Under Siege • PS2/XB • Sega • ESRB: T — Dirt farming (strategy game lingo for collecting wood and gold) gets literal when violent invertebrates aerate the soil to build bases, catapults, and cannons in this segment of the formerly flat series. *Forts*, which wriggled in at the last minute, gets a full review next month.



Polarium • DS • Nintendo • ESRB: E — Attention freebie-PC-game lovers: Tired of *Minesweeper*? *Solitaire* addiction run its course? Maybe you, and only you, will appreciate this *very* simple puzzle game. Make complete rows by drawing over squares and flipping their colors (black or white) to match—and that's it. Not much to *Polarium*, really. For some strange reason, though, chicks totally love it...



Super Monkey Ball Deluxe • PS2/XB • Sega • ESRB: E — GameCube owners agree: Simple all-analog-stick controls make guiding monkey marbles through Escheresque mazes as girlfriend-accessible as it is addictive. *Deluxe* throws the two previously Nintendo-only titles together in one barrel along with all-new levels and minigames for even more monkey business.



Rugby 2005 • PS2 • EA • ESRB: E — Rugby in brief: You can only pass the ball backward. Apart from that, it's two teams of 15 big, bruised men, mauling (that's a technical term) and rucking (technical term) in scrums (technical term). It's fast-paced and tactical, but having no knowledge of "the rules" won't hinder your enjoyment of this quality sport sim.

WIN THE GAME OF THE MONTH CONTEST

Hey, old-tyme readers, remember that "Eat My Shorts" *Simpsons*-quote contest deal we used to do? No? Well good, because this isn't it. But it's similar. Our pop-culture scientists have secreted away one movie quote (or more! We might do more, don't think we won't!)

somewhere in this issue. Find it, and you may have already won our Game of the Month. All that's left to do is e-mail the quote, the movie it's from, and the page you found it on to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject: Movie Quote: EGM #190. Include your full name and mailing

address (no stinkin' PO boxes!) in the e-mail. Also, don't send us any swear words because our e-mail filter keeps us blissfully innocent. And that's it! We'll pick three winners at random and send them a copy of our GOTM. This issue's prize: *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*.





■ This is what Kratos from *God of War* would look like as an action figure with 12 points of articulation. Barbie's got a new dreamboat.



God of War • PS2 • Sony CEA • ESRB: M — If your appreciation of Greek culture begins and ends with the fried-cheese appetizer at your local Mediterranean restaurant, then here's something to really make you shout, "Opal!" *God of War*—a heavily hyped action game crammed with *Clash of the Titans* all-stars—hits your PS2 on March 22, which means we didn't get the finished game in time for this issue. Read the full review next month, but for now we can say that missing *God of War* would be a real Greek tragedy.

That's not just because the game looks spectacular, or that its three bosses—including a Hydra and a titanic Minotaur—are killer (if only there were more). *God of War* offers an ultraslick combat system that lets you string together attacks like a toga-wearing Tony Hawk. (We've seen 500-hit combos.) The largely linear quest even delivers some *Tomb Raider*-style puzzling in a massive temple perched atop a colossal, walking...oops! Out of space! See ya next issue.



Rise of the Kasai • PS2 • Sony CEA • ESRB: M — Unfortunately, *The Mark of Kri's* sequel wasn't quite ready for a full review, but we did spend a few hours with a nearly complete version. The good news: What most folks enjoyed about the first game is back in this long-awaited follow-up, including the lovely Disney-like visuals with Mature-rated bloodshed, as well as a fine balance between hack-n-slash and stealth combat. OK, now on to the bad: The CPU-controlled character that accompanies you on every level (which is a new feature in *Kasai*) still needed a lot of work. Even during our brief stint with the game, too often our partner stood around watching the fight rather than giving us a much-needed helping hand. Let's hope Sony corrects *Kasai's* buddy system before its release. 🐻

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REVIEWS ARCHIVE

All of our recent reviews for one toilet sitting



Hey, chick from *Phantom Dust*: Stop trying to make belt headbands happen.

EA'S NHL SERIES VS. SEGA'S NHL GAMES

Maybe you're hockey starved due to the lockout, or you couldn't give less of a damn—either way, hockey video-games have been around longer than a well-groomed mullet. Here's how EA's and Sega's *NHL* series face off.



Average score for the 18 EA *NHL* games reviewed by EGM: **8.09** (OUT OF 10)

Best score: EA *NHL 2001* (PS2); 9.0, 9.5, 10



Average score for the six Sega *NHL* reviews by EGM: **7.83** (OUT OF 10)

Best score: *NHL 2K3* (PS2); 8.5, 9.5, 9.5

greatest hit or miss?



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

■ **XB**
 ■ Released: March 2004
 ■ Original Scores: 8.0, 8.0, 8.5
Deus Ex: Invisible War didn't revolutionize the gaming world like some thought it would, but it's still a kick-ass game to play. The fun choose-your-own-adventure gameplay and engaging story line make this game worth picking up. For all the great graphics and a price tag below \$25, it's like buying eye candy in bulk.

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)	AWARD
Asphalt Urban GT	DS	■ If you're looking for a great racing game for DS...keep lookin'	6.5 5.5 6.0	
ATV Offroad Fury 3	PS2	■ Enhanced online options and deeper customization flesh out the four-wheelin' thrills	8.5 7.5 6.5	
Backyard Wrestling 2	PS2/XB	■ Everything wrong with professional wrestling tied up in a mediocre package	5.5 5.0 6.5	
Baten Kaitos	GC	■ An RPG with totally innovative card-based fighting and a totally crappy story	8.0 7.5 6.5	
Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space	XB	■ Janitor cats and fabulous leather-clad pigs! What doesn't sound fun about that?	7.5 6.0 6.5	
Champions: Return to Arms	PS2	■ Hack and/or slash to find cooler stuff to let you hack and/or slash some more	7.5 7.0 6.0	
Dead or Alive Ultimate	XB	■ The bouncing boobs of <i>DOAs 1</i> and <i>2</i> look way nicer revamped for Xbox	7.0 7.5 7.5	
Death by Degrees	PS2	■ We're grateful to have Nina on board—too bad decent gameplay didn't come with	5.0 5.0 6.0	
Donkey Konga	GC	■ (Mostly) great songs and a quality bongo controller make for a lively party game	8.0 7.0 7.5	
Feel the Magic: XY/XX	DS	■ A stylish mix of romance and minigames that takes advantage of the DS' abilities	8.0 9.0 7.0	Silver
Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls	GBA	■ Spectacular remakes of the first two <i>Final Fantasys</i> shoved into one tiny cartridge	9.0 8.5 8.0	Silver
Fullmetal Alchemist	PS2	■ Rabid fans of the <i>Alchemist</i> anime show will lap it up; everyone else...not so much	6.0 5.5 6.0	
The Getaway: Black Monday	PS2	■ Potty-mouthed gamers can learn some new words from this so-so cinematic caper	4.5 7.0 6.5	
Ghost Recon 2	PS2	■ This PS2 team shooter wouldn't pass Game Programming 101	2.5 3.0 5.5	
Ghost Recon 2	XB	■ Nothing remarkable about the Xbox version either, save its solid online play	6.0 6.0 7.0	
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	PS2/XB/GC	■ Not quite the killer app <i>GoldenEye 007</i> (N64) was, but single player is still fun	7.5 7.5 7.5	
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	PS2	■ Three massive cities and hundreds of diversions make this sequel larger than life	10 10 10	Platinum
Growlanser: Generations	PS2	■ Sure, the visuals are cutesy, but this RPG will test the hardest of the hardcore	7.0 7.0 8.0	
GunGriffon: Allied Strike	XB	■ One of the Dreamcast's finest-looking robot shooters. Wait, this is an Xbox game?	3.5 2.0 5.0	
Halo 2	XB	■ The second coming of the Xbox's savior lives up to the hype, both online and off	10 10 10	Platinum
The Incredibles	PS2/XB/GC	■ A superhero game for the little 'uns, but with a decidedly adult difficulty	5.5 6.5 7.5	
Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories	GBA	■ The cards say you'll experience a bit of action-RPG déjà vu...which isn't so bad	7.0 7.0 7.5	
The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap	GBA	■ Shrinky Link reinvents himself in this surprisingly deep pocket-sized adventure	9.0 9.5 8.5	Gold
Mario Party 6	GC	■ Still fun, but the reshaped board-game antics linger like an uninvited guest	6.0 6.5 8.0	
Mario Power Tennis	GC	■ Mario packs so much fan service, you won't want to return this ace of a game	9.0 7.5 8.0	Silver
MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf	XB	■ Online robot battles crush <i>Lone Wolf's</i> single-player game under 40 tons of steel	8.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
Mega Man X8	PS2	■ Mega Man takes another shot at the third dimension and gets it right this time	6.5 6.5 7.0	
Mercenaries	PS2/XB	■ Go anywhere, steal any vehicle, blow up any building in this awesome actioner	8.5 8.5 9.0	Silver
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	PS2	■ Venture back to the idealistic '60s for Snake's most ambitious stealth-action epic yet	9.0 9.5 10	Gold
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	GC	■ Samus looks smokin' hot even in the dark...world, that is	9.0 9.0 10	Gold
Mr. Driller: Drill Spirits	DS	■ Simple, addictive puzzle-action that truly shines in its wireless multiplayer mode	7.5 7.5 7.0	
Nanobreaker	PS2	■ Go on a one-man blood drive in this wildly gory hack-n-slash adventure	7.5 6.5 4.0	
NBA Street V3	PS2/XB/GC	■ Only His Airness soars higher than this arcade-rich roundballer	9.0 8.5 9.0	Silver
NFL Street 2	PS2/XB/GC	■ Backyard football for the big boys...and it's good	8.0 8.0 9.5	Silver
Oddworld Stranger's Wrath	XB	■ Action, platforming, and first-person shooting meld in this refreshing, bizarre game	8.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
OutRun 2	XB	■ The graphics say 2004, but the arcade handling still says 1986	6.5 6.0 8.0	
Pathway to Glory	NG	■ While calling it the best game on N-Gage isn't saying much, it's still pretty good	7.5 7.5 7.0	
Phantom Dust	XB	■ Amass more psychic powers than Miss Cleo in this slick arena-combat game	8.5 7.5 8.0	
Ping Pals	DS	■ Be a pal and tell others to not waste an Andrew Jackson on this poor text messenger	1.5 0.0 0.0	
Pocket Kingdom: Own the World	NG	■ The N-Gage's first online RPG, not that you can tell while playing	5.0 4.0 7.5	
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	PS2/XB/GC	■ Boy, is this prince in a bad mood. Maybe it's because adventure No. 2 isn't as fun	8.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
The Punisher	PS2/XB	■ <i>Punisher</i> fans should play this ultraviolent shooter; others can pass	6.5 8.0 6.0	
Resident Evil 4	GC	■ <i>Witness the near-perfect rebirth of Capcom's venerable survival-horror franchise</i>	10 9.5 10	Gold
Ridge Racer DS	DS	■ Six-player wireless LAN races (on one cart): good; bad graphics and bad control...bad	6.5 6.5 2.5	
Rumble Roses	PS2	■ Luscious ladies lock limbs in this wonderfully smutty (yet bare-bones) grappler	7.5 6.5 6.5	
Sega Classics Collection	PS2	■ Awesome Sega coin-ops are "updated" into monstrosities, while Sega fans weep	4.5 6.0 4.5	
Sega Superstars	PS2	■ This EyeToy game collection is moderately entertaining for the hour it takes to beat it	5.0 7.5 4.5	
Shadow of Rome	PS2	■ Blood spills, skulls split, and meat falls off the bone in this fun gladiator adventure	6.5 7.0 8.0	
Shining Tears	PS2	■ Dumb-as-dirt A.I. muddles this otherwise likable action-RPG	6.5 6.5 5.5	
Spider-Man 2	DS	■ If your spider sense is on the fritz, let us warn you to avoid this ho-hum adventure	6.0 5.5 3.0	
Sprung	DS	■ Hook up with young hotties at a ski resort. Slightly more fun than chlamydia	4.0 5.0 1.0	
Star Fox	GC	■ "Dogs of war" takes on new meaning in this Nintendo comeback shooter series	8.0 8.0 6.0	
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II	XB	■ Not as good as the first game, but still, a <i>Star Wars</i> game that doesn't suck!	8.5 7.0 9.0	Silver
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	XB	■ <i>Street Fighter II + Street Fighter III + Street Fighter Awesome</i> . But where's <i>Alpha</i> ?	8.0 8.5 9.0	Silver
Suikoden IV	PS2	■ Uneventful yet functional RPG set adrift on the choppy seas	6.5 6.0 5.5	
Super Mario 64 DS	DS	■ It's-a remake of one of the best platformers ever! Only it's-a much harder to control	8.0 8.0 9.0	
Tenchu: Fatal Shadows	PS2	■ Slick-looking stealth kills can't make up for a catastrophic camera	4.5 6.0 4.5	
Tork: Prehistoric Punk	XB	■ The platforming clichés in this punkosaurus have been around since the Stone Age	7.0 6.0 5.5	
Tron 2.0: Killer App	XB	■ The more apt name, <i>Tron 2.0: Better Than Average</i> , probably wouldn't have sold well	7.0 6.0 7.5	
The Urbz: Sims in the City	PS2/XB/GC	■ <i>The Sims'</i> suburban theme gets kicked uptown and outside but loses something	7.5 5.0 7.0	
The Urbz: Sims in the City	DS	■ Now with fewer bodily functions and more button-mashing minigames	8.5 7.5 9.5	Silver
Viewtiful Joe 2	PS2/GC	■ More of what you (hopefully) know and (should) love from <i>Joe's</i> first outing	8.0 8.0 8.5	Silver
WarioWare Touched!	DS	■ Its wacky minigames keep you—and those watching you play—entertained	9.0 8.5 9.0	Silver
World Soccer Winning Eleven 8	PS2/XB	■ Sorry, John Madden, but this is the new poster boy for sports-gaming realism	9.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
Xenosaga Episode II	PS2	■ Not <i>Xenosaga Episode II</i> , but more like <i>Xenosaga Episode I: The Deleted Scenes</i>	7.5 6.5 7.0	
Ys VI: Ark of Napishtim	PS2	■ A solid, challenging action-RPG the way they used to make 'em	7.5 6.5 8.0	

*Games in red denote previous Game of the Month winners

Games in red denote previous Game of the Month winners

Let the games begin.



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SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP



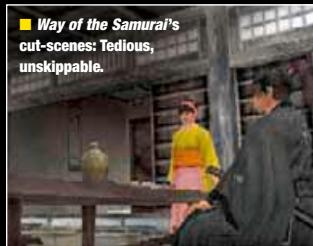
Do not pass "Go," do not collect a royalty check

There are many reasons to hate videogames, and my job has put me in the unique position to experience a record-breaking 1,387 of them. But this month, I'm not talking about how a game based on dreaming my way into unicorn splendor missed the mark. I'm talking about the crap everyone has to deal with even in good games. For reasons known only to their black hearts, game developers have been punishing the people who buy their products for years. That's why

I've developed this code of laws that will criminalize this behavior and bring the developers to justice. —Seanbaby



■ Monopoly Seanbaby drags another fatty to game developer jail.



■ *Way of the Samurai's* cut-scenes: Tedious, unskippable.

Crime: Unskippability

I'm sure all game writers think that their stories are fascinating. However, on the 104 percent chance that they're wrong, maybe they should let the player choose between hack preteen fiction and getting back to the damn game they bought. If I want to sit through a fruity exchange of uninteresting dialogue, I can go to a recipe-swapping party with my grandmother. At least I have a chance of getting laid there.



Punishment:

Convicted developers will be locked into a special feedbag for one year to 18 months, and every time a player presses a button in a futile attempt to skip a game's unskippable cut-scene, live cockroaches are dropped into the developers' mouths. If it's a felony offense, such as placing an unskippable sequence before a boss battle that's likely to kill the player, their sentence will be upgraded to 30 years of staring at a picture I drew of their mother wearing only a full beard.



■ *Def Jam's* tutorial: No avoidin' it.

Crime: Mandatory Tutorial

Hey, developers, we do not need to be told to grab the spinning, glowing stars, and there's no need to show us the complicated button we have to push to make our character hop. Even if I was the thawed caveman befriended by a wisecracking teenager and placed in front of a Nintendo you thought I was, my primitive brain would eventually form the link between my hammering on the strange and frightening "conn...tro...ler" and my character's actions without your condescending help.



Punishment:

Developers guilty of this crime will be denied food for one to three weeks, then placed in front of a buffet and allowed to eat only after attending a 16-hour seminar on chewing safety and fun facts about the region of each food's origin. Also, to the guy who designed *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles's* tutorial, I challenge you to a fistfight. Anywhere, anytime.



■ *Resident Evil's* ridiculous puzzles: Not pictured.

Crime: Infant Puzzles

If you're going to make me take a break from my ninjao to solve a puzzle, fine. I'll shove some crates around for a few minutes. But if your puzzle is based on my ability to decipher what to do with an eagle-shaped hole in a fireplace when the only things my character is carrying are a shotgun and something called an "Eagle Crest," eat me. My brain is already a coiled spring of basic toddler skills; I don't need *Resident Evil* keeping my shape-matching skills honed.



Punishment:

A conviction for this crime brings with it a prison sentence of two years. The only personal items offenders are allowed are crib toys, and if they exhibit any basic shape or color recognition abilities, all nearby prison guards clap for them. Wilford Brimley is the sadistic prison warden, and he will deliver frequent, impassioned lectures on the importance of eating oatmeal.



■ *Metal Gear Solid's* Awesome mushroom-gathering sim.

Crime: Maintaining Food and Items

Repairing your helmet and sword every few minutes is so fun in real life, it should be fun in a videogame, right? Strangely, it's not, and yet videogames are still desperate to simulate the delightfulness of wear-and-tear. For the record, game designers: Videogame characters do not get hungry. Food is only there to repair bullet wounds and heal broken bones. I know that until Jean-Claude Van Damme gives me a position as Timecop intern, there's nothing I can do about games in the past. I can, however, do my part to ensure that future games will treat man's dislike of nuisances with respect.



Punishment:

Designers found guilty of including hunger or decaying weapons must either vacuum a dirt road for 3 to 6 months or spend this time locked in a virtual simulation of a kick-ass astro warrior who dies if he ever stops picking strawberries.

Crime: Genre Mix-ups

Not everyone is born with the gift of spotting lameness. For example, many people don't realize that stealth games are as dull as televised golf with the TV off. I'm not judging stealth fans, though. If you like standing still and waiting for searchlights to get out of your way, go for it, you tiptoe-walking boredom enthusiast. But if you're going to surprise me with a stealth mission in a nonstealth game, or a race mission in a nonracing game, or God help you, a rhythm-action sequence in a non-rhythm-action game, could you also surprise me with my goddamn money back?



Punishment: For the next 10 years, every item purchased by the guilty parties will be replaced with a low-quality imitation of a randomly selected, completely different product.



■ Monopoly Seanbaby will deliver the finger-waving of a lifetime.

Illustrations by Nicc Balce

Crime: Condescending Menus

So let me get this straight, game developers: My thumbs are capable of turbo double-jumping a robot boy through 10 exciting worlds of villains and lava traps, but every time I want to save my game, you double-check that I hit the right button. I beat Zorga the Klorp to get to this save point; the signal between my brain and hands is working. It's insulting enough to ask if I want to overwrite my save game at all since in the history of my videogame career I've NOT wanted to overwrite my save game almost once. But to make my default response to each item in the save menu questionnaire "I'm the idiot who hit the wrong button" is openly mocking me.



Punishment: Forty lashes for each offense. Also, there is a special condition for this crime. If there is ever an unskippable sequence where the player must PRESS X TO CONTINUE after each line,

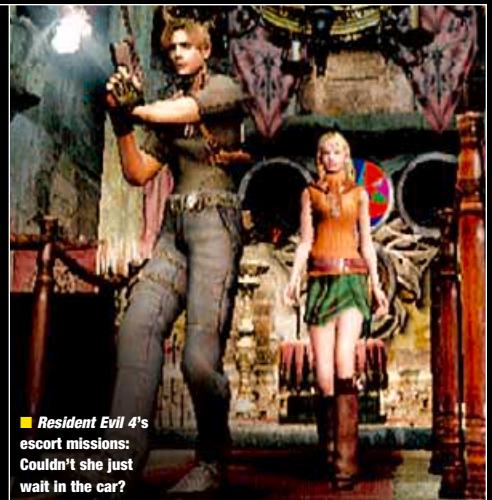
and then, at the end someone asks, WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR THAT AGAIN? and your response defaults to playing the entire thing again, all people involved with the game, from concept brainstormer to retail clerk, will be sentenced to death by way of electric chair dressed up as a clown.

Crime: Escort Missions

Nothing ruins an awesome war faster than suddenly having to protect a target that can't fight. We get enough of this in real life, with nature making our babies incredibly fragile yet so delicious to all predators. So speaking for all pilots, if we're flying a spaceship, we are willing to do any or all of the following missions: kill other spaceships. That's it.



Punishment: If level designers like putting our mission's success in the hands of a helpless victim, then it's only fair to give the same chance to them. So they can avoid all punishment as long as they can keep a group of polar bears away from a penguin-covered orphan. 🐻



■ Resident Evil 4's escort missions: Couldn't she just wait in the car?



FINAL WORD

Two editors enter, one editor leave



■ So many choices....

Every month, we lock two editors in a room together with a bottle of champagne, and an hour later, *voilà!* Out pops a beautiful Final Word. This month, we see what News Editor Bryan Intihar and Editorial Director John Davison (he's, like, everyone's boss around here) have to say about EA, handhelds, and more.

What do you think of this "Electronic Arts taking over the world" business?

Bryan: I'm sure gobbling up licenses like the NFL and ESPN are smart business moves, but as a gamer, I'm worried. If EA's only competition is itself, what's the real incentive for EA's developers to push themselves? And if you look back at the history of *Madden*, the franchise's best

John: I think you're right up to a point, although EA Sports is going to be under a lot of different types of pressure in the next few years. The most obvious is the transition to new systems. The 2006 sports games on the next-gen platforms will be a toe in the water, and if it's like last time, it'll be the 2007 games that really push things creatively. At this point, EA will be nearly halfway through the exclusivity period already. Then, of course, there's the fact that the deal with John Madden is up soon. That has to be a big reason behind the ESPN deal.

PSP vs. DS: Who's going to win the battle of the portables?

John: The PSP, without question. It's the most obviously significant thing to happen

"Everyone's saying 'WTF?' now, I'm sure, but wait till you play it. It's awesome."

installments came after it felt pressure from *NFL GameDay* (during the PS1 era) and, more recently, the *ESPN* games.

to videogames for years. I think the only thing that will slow it down is how fast Sony can build the little things.

Bryan: I second that. Nintendo really dropped the ball with its lack of must-have DS titles at launch (*Feel the Magic?*

I don't think so). I only hope PSP doesn't become flooded with PS1/PS2 ports.

John: It's not looking that way right now, and even the "duh, I guessed as much" stuff has some unique hooks. The EA stuff like *NBA Street* is really amazing, especially with all the minigames. Then, of course, there's *Lumines*...beautiful, wonderful *Lumines*. Bravo to Ubisoft for picking that one up.

Xbox 2 may come out first, PS3 may be more powerful, and we don't know jack about Nintendo's next system. It's too early to call it, but let's do it anyway: Who has the upper hand with the next generation of consoles?

Bryan: That's simple: Sony. Until Microsoft and Nintendo prove that they can secure those triple-A third-party exclusives (like *Final Fantasy*, *Grand Theft Auto*, etc.), both of them will be stuck fighting for second and third place.

John: I've been told by folks in development that the PS3 is "orders of magnitude" more powerful than Xbox 2, which I wasn't expecting to hear. I pretty much thought they'd be the same.

As for Nintendo's box, right now it seems like a quirky curio that's not in the "real" race. I know the push for Nintendo is toward innovation, but all the pad-tilting and screen-fondling in the world isn't going to help if the company doesn't wake up and pay attention to who's actually playing games these days.

EGM just gave Halo 2 Game of the Year honors. What would you have picked instead?

Bryan: *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*. The game's gorgeous—the best-looking PS2 game to date—and nothing comes close to its compelling narrative. It even made this tough nut get a bit choked up.

John: Wasn't it just *Metal Gear Again*, though? *Halo 2* and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* were so obvious, you almost don't need to give them awards because everyone bought them anyway—6.4 million copies of an Xbox game represent just about everyone who gives a rat's ass. I think *Katamari Damacy*, in particular, deserved more recognition, but *Burnout 3* was the real killer. I had more fun with that than anything else.



■ Porta-crack? Addictive PSP puzzle game *Lumines* has got half the editors around the offices hooked in a bad way.

What's the next online game you'll be playing after you tire of Halo 2?

John: I know the fashionable thing for me to say would be *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, but I only ever liked prequel *Pandora Tomorrow* when I was playing with real-life friends, and playing on Xbox Live sometimes got obnoxious. So, I'm going to go with something terribly unfashionable and say *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect*. Everyone's saying "WTF?" now, I'm sure, but wait till you play it. It's awesome.

Bryan: I'd go with *Area 51*, because what's more fun than aliens, Marilyn Manson, and blowin' s*** up? ☹

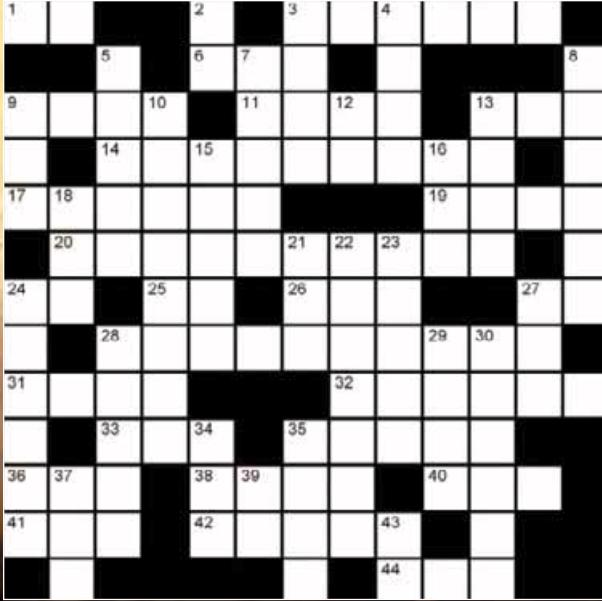


■ To answer Bryan's question: nothing.



MADE IN THE JADE

(Solution on page 144)



ACROSS

1. *Jade Empire* lotus blossom gal
3. He and his friends ate your neighbors on the Genesis
6. Silver, for one, in GBA *Harvest Moon*
9. Console brain
11. Like PS2's *Wild* or Xbox's *Metal*
13. PS2 headset interface
14. Helpful friends in *Jade Empire*
17. PS2 equestrian *Racer*
19. Super Nintendo *Acro-Bat*
20. *Jade Empire* bad dude
24. Model for one *San Andreas* city
25. Online text abbreviation for "are you?"
26. Another name for a *DDR* dance pad
27. What the "251" refers to on a GameCube memory card
28. Fog makes this a problem in *Silent Hill*
31. Targeted in Atari's *Empire Strikes Back*
32. *MGS3* edible, for one
33. Unlockable fighter in *Fatal Fury Special* (NeoGeo)
35. Defeat the champion
36. *Madden's* Giant Manning
38. Place to rob in *Vice City's* Little Havana
40. *FIFA* soccer-league acronym
41. Xbox fighting series
42. *Fable* composer Elfman
44. Mission type in *Zone of the Enders 2*

DOWN

2. Like Manowar in *Heavy Metal* (PS1)
3. *Mega Man X* sidekick
4. *Suikoden* city
5. "Plasma" or "sniper" in *Halo 2*
7. *King of Fighters'* Jones
8. Behave like SpongeBob?
9. *Castlevania* clock-tower gear
10. Selectable property of an *Ikaruga* ship
12. Short for Xbox's *Elder Scrolls*?
13. What a "previously played" game really means
15. 20 across is the head of these *Jade Empire* assassins
16. Held be while moving in *Super Mario 64 DS*
18. Pops up periodically in *Resident Evil 4*
21. 8-bit NES pack-in game, for short
22. Tight turn in *GT4*
23. Special *Outlaw Golf* driver
24. Gory PS1 on-foot shooter
27. *King of Fighters* poster boy
28. Protective *Metroid* suit
29. Like a *Resident Evil* box
30. Words to accompany box art?
34. Like Abe's *World*
35. *Mr. Bones'* (Saturn) inner arm
37. Rolls down *Super Mario 2* waterfalls
39. *Burnout 3* publisher
43. *_: The Ark of Napishtim*

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NEXT MONTH: MAY • ISSUE #191



ON SALE APRIL 5

PREVIEWS

- The Incredible Hulk (PS2/XB)
- Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith (PS2/XB)
- Batman Begins (PS2/XB/GC)
- Fantastic Four (PS2/XB/GC)
- Fire Emblem (GC)



PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

We'd like to keep your nail-biting condition under control, but the anticipation of Sega's *Phantasy Star Universe* might leave your cuticles screaming for help. Yes, we know we're going to be hitting you with another action-RPG, but it's not our fault that this is **one of the best-looking games we have ever seen**. *Phantasy Star Online* gave us our first real-time online console game and surprisingly hit a home run on its first swing—you can't chalk that up to beginner's luck. We don't want to give away too much about the online play and profile configuration, but we're going to leave you with one word: **breasts**.

Speaking of things we can't wait to get our hands on—we're going to show you all the bells and whistles of the PSP

by reporting on its hardware and features, and we won't forget to give you **reviews of all the PSP launch titles**. Plus, we'll give you a peripheral roundup of wacky gaming accessories to see if any of this junk actually helps you get your game on or if it's all useless like a Braille *Playboy*.

We all know that movies and videogames have an incestuous media relationship: Movies turn into videogames and vice versa. Sometimes it works out (*Chronicles of Riddick*) and sometimes it's just plain wrong (*Catwoman*). We're going to give you a **private screening of all the 2005 movie games** from *Batman Begins* to *Harry Potter* and show you which games should and shouldn't have made the transition.

REVIEWS

- God of War (PS2)
- Resident Evil Outbreak File #2 (PS2)
- Star Wars Republic Commando (XB)
- Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition (PS2/XB)
- Red Ninja: End of Honor (PS2/XB)



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ANSWERS TO MADE IN THE JADE

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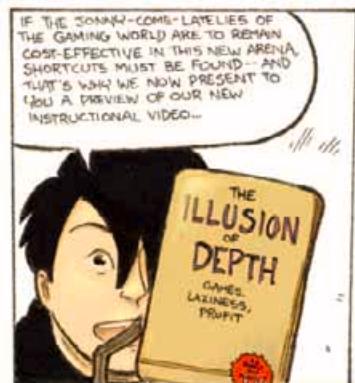
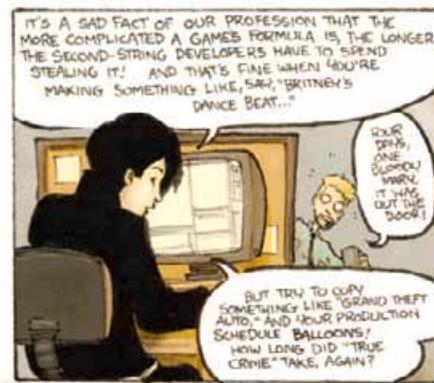
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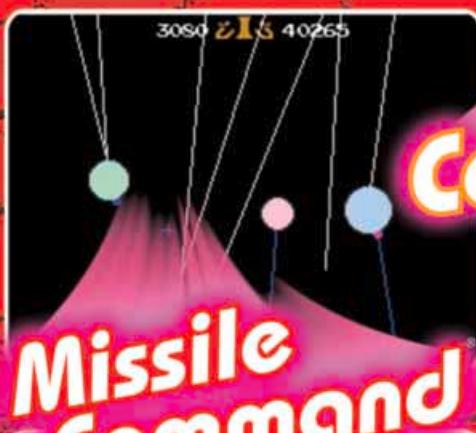
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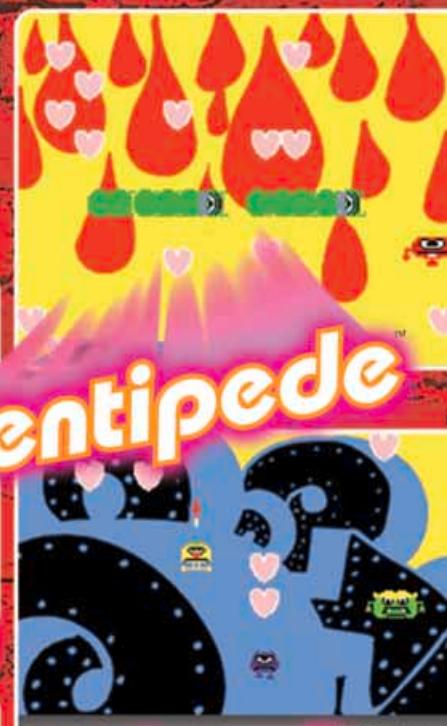
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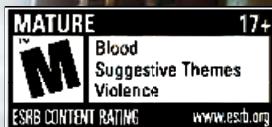
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