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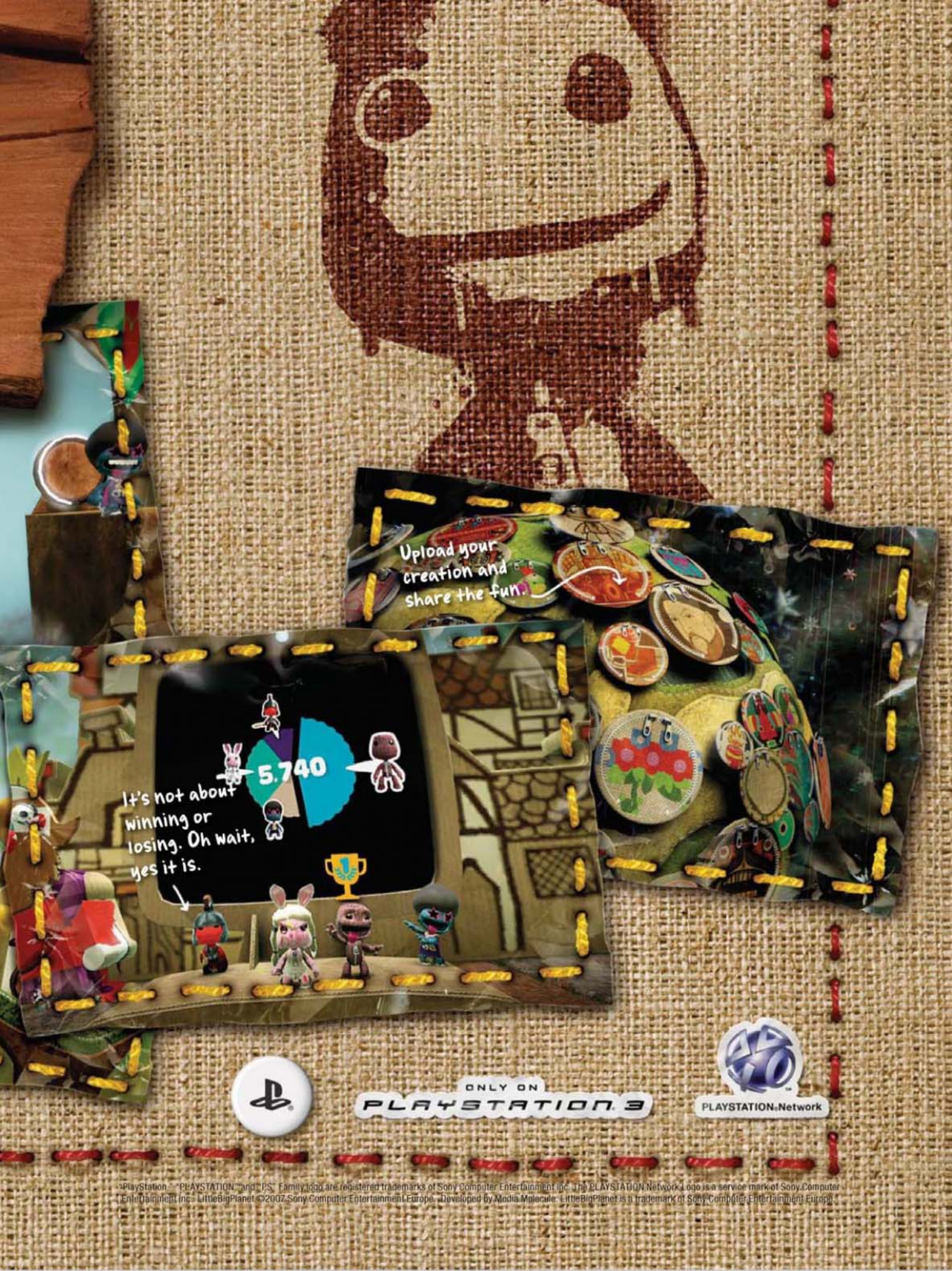

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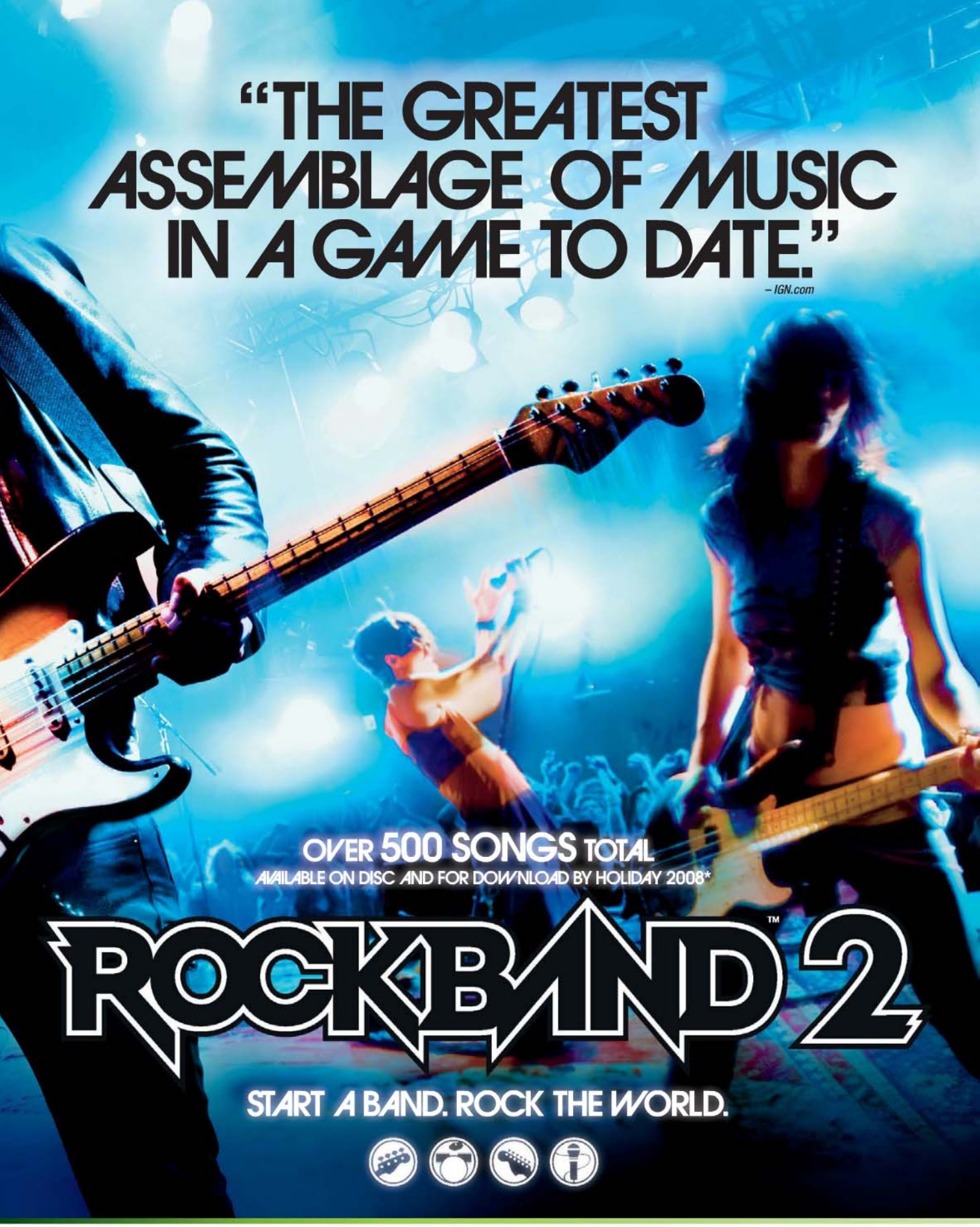

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MIRROR'S EDGE

EA has us jumping for joy in developer DICE's innovative building-hopping first-person action game

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> EDITORIAL

Just Do It

YOU LOVE THAT COVER, DON'T YOU? You're probably thinking, "Man, I've never seen a videogame magazine cover like this one"—or, at least, you should be. Yes, there have been many great gaming-magazine covers over the last 20 years, but I'm especially proud of this one because, like with many of our recent covers, we worked closely with the game's developer to make sure it represents something special. And if you like what's on the front, then you'll want to race to the story itself, because we go in-depth on what's shaping up to be one of the most original games of the year. Instead of just cranking out another *Battlefield* game, Swedish developer DICE decided to take a chance with the first-person genre, ultimately resulting in the parkour-meets-first-person-action hybrid you'll find in this issue. What's parkour, you ask? If you've seen *Casino Royale*, you probably remember that on-foot chase scene where they run and jump all over the place. That's pretty much it. A movement that started in France, parkour is the art of moving with and around any obstacle in your way, and its practitioners can do some amazing things. When you finally get your hands on *Mirror's Edge*, I'm sure you'll agree that the sense of movement is phenomenal—not only for how it translates into an exciting game experience, but also what it signifies for the genre. If DICE can do parkour with a first-person engine, imagine all of the other game concepts that could be applied to that perspective. It's something worth thinking about.

—James "Milkman" Mielke, Editor-in-Chief

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LETTERS

Journey, janitors, and the heavy metal umlaut

1UP Family
This month we meet 1UP user Erin Ali (Misato_Anami)

EGM: How long have you been a member of 1UP?

Erin Ali: I actually have been a member of 1UP since before the beta, and before 1UP had member pages and blogs. It was a time when the page was a turquoise background with the old-school yellow/black 1UP logo. I started blogging on the beta site in June 2004, making this a little over four years for me.

EGM: What games are you currently playing?

EA: I just finished *Mass Effect*. I'm currently playing *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *Portal*, and *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2* (*love* King and Pacifism!). I'm looking to start *Lost Odyssey* soon.

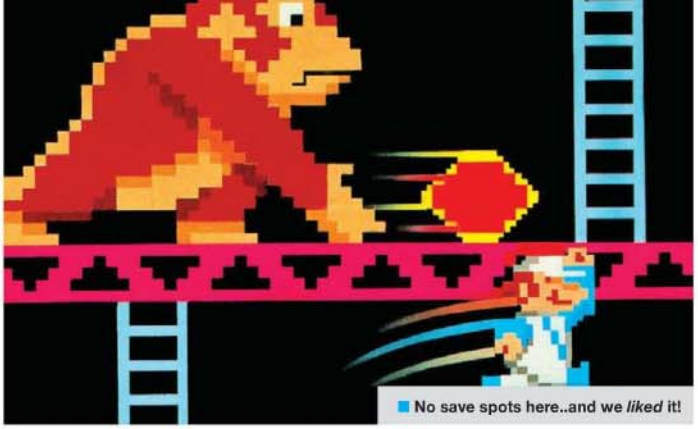
EGM: How many proposals have you received?

EA: No proposals, really, but I do get asked if I'm 12 and a boy when I play *Halo 3*. I just accept it and go with it.

Trivial Issue
This month's *EGM* question:
What city helped inspire the scale of *Mirror's Edge*'s city?

E-mail the answer to EGM@1UP.com (subject head: Trivia: *EGM* #233) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.

For writing this month's LOTM, Vince gets a copy of *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins*...or something else from our dusty old collection.



■ No save spots here..and we *liked* it!

Letter of the Month
Falling on hard times

I agree that people are complaining too much about the difficulty of games these days. In some ways, I sympathize. I have spent hours of my time going through the same level or boss fight because it's complex or just difficult. However, this doesn't mean I agree with them. Sure, I agree that games are meant to be fun, but they should be challenging, too. If anything, games have gotten easier over the years. As my parents are quick to point out, the original *Donkey Kong* had no save spots and no checkpoints. They had to take their little Mario uphill *both* ways barefoot through the snow while dodging barrels that could kill them. They would always get to the last level before losing their last life and going back to level one.

Don't be so quick to get angry just because you keep losing to Darth Charlie or whomever the antagonist is. At least you aren't going back to level one.

—*Vince Winkler*

Yeah, good point there—hang on a second. Your *parents?* Oh, crap, we're old.

Doing science

Your "The Story of Story" article [*EGM* #231] was good except for one critical omission: *Portal*. Telling a good story is an art form, and it's not easy. It involves knowing how to pace and structure a plot around a three-act framework of introduction, growth, and conclusion. No other game comes close to achieving what *Portal* has done in properly implementing the concept. It's done so well that even the gameplay follows the same pacing. (Act 2 starts after the player gains full control over the portal gun, and Act 3 begins with the escape from the testing area.)

Also, *Portal* is the best example of a game fully embracing the interactive medium of videogames to tell its story. It does not borrow from other media by having the player watch a cut-scene or read a diary. Rather, its plot is one that's *experienced*. So that's why I consider *Portal* the closest game we have to achieving "art" status. Not including it in an article about the evolution of how games tell stories is some sort of crime against journalism.

—*David Funtsch*

Considering the acquisition of the fully functional portal gun as the start of a second act is...well, it's a bit of a stretch, David. But your point about the artistry of *Portal*'s storytelling is well taken.

Get used to it, guys

This is a reply to the crybaby 12-year-olds whining that they're disrespected by older gamers online (*EGM* #230, Letters, "Aren't they precious?"). For one, don't think I'm the kind of 30-year-old guy these kids are complaining about. I am an 11-year-old female gamer.

I haven't ever really been into the games these guys are (for me, it's less *Call of Duty* and *Halo* and more *Animal Crossing* and *MySims*), but they are just being childish seeing as they are, well, children. Some adults are just like that—cupcakes. I'm terribly sorry that you feel that way, but in reality, you are screaming boneheads to them, and I highly doubt you have real skill. If you want to avoid people like this, get off of Xbox Live, or better yet, go play the SNES so you won't feel insulted.

—*Shelby Wazowsiki*

Wow, girls really do mature faster than boys, don't they?

Two great tastes that taste great together

I spend a lot of my time playing first-person shooters and real-time strategy games. Why has no one thought to combine the two? What I have in mind is something like

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■ *Journey Escape*: Watch out for those love-crazed groupies and shifty-eyed promoters!

Savage 2 (PC) but less medieval. For example, think of a game like *Company of Heroes* (PC) but with the ability to take control of the units and use them like in an FPS. There's an opportunity for an awesome multiplayer game there. Can you imagine how insane tournaments would be? What if a high-ranked *Counter-Strike* clan hooked up with some of those crazy Korean *StarCraft*ers?

I'm very surprised that no one has actually tried to make a game like that yet. What do you guys think? Would you play a game like that?

—George Stewart

Boy, are you in luck. Evolved Games is working on *Raven Squad: Operation Hidden Dagger*, which sounds exactly like what you're looking for. And unlike *Savage*, which requires you to pick one or the other, *Raven Squad* will require you to master both the FPS and the RTS elements. It comes out this fall for Xbox 360 and PC.

Don't stop believin'

In *EGM* #231, for Letter of the Month you gave out *Marky Mark: Make My Video*. I used to play that and *Power Factory Featuring C+C Music Factory*, and that brought back memories. I think that was the first music game I ever played. Were there any other music games before that? I've been playing games since the early NES days, and I do not recall ever playing a music game other than the *Make My Video* games. And after that, I do not recall any other music titles until the PS1 came out.

—Bobby Davis

Well, that depends on how you define music games. Since you're citing *Make My Video*, we're guessing your definition is pretty broad. In that case, you're forgetting about the unforgettable *Journey Escape* on the Atari 2600.

The Famicom (the Japanese version of our NES) also featured *Otocky*, a platformer that played notes every time the player fired a weapon. (Think *Rez*, only 1987.) But that one never made it out here.

Lighten üp

After seeing *Brütal Legend* featured on your cover, I feel it necessary to request that you notify developer Sierra that it is a stüpid name. If they really think that throwing an umlaut in the title lends any credibility to the game or makes it cooler somehow, they need to put away their Motley Crüe albums and join the rest of the world in the 21st century. Even if it turns out to be the greatest game ever made, I am unable to bring myself to spend my hard-earned dollars on a product put out by people who obviously hold my intelligence in such low regard.

—Scott Crawford

You are joking, right? It's a joke? Please tell us it's a joke.

Hail to the king, baby

Who doesn't love a great horror game? We all fell in love with *Resident Evil* the moment it hit the PS1 (even if the later ones are not so good), and others like *Silent Hill* prove games can be scary by using creative sound as well as visuals. So who is the master of scare? Stephen King, of course!

Anybody who has read his *Dark Tower* series can imagine how great of a game it could translate to. If done well it could also be very profitable for those companies who love to make sequels. Of course, doing it well would be the trick.

—Randy Griffiths

Well, the real trick might be getting King involved at all. Yes, he allowed a PC adaptation of *The Mist*, but that was back in the '80s. And sure, he devoted an entire *Entertainment Weekly* column to defending games from overreaching legislation.

The trouble is that he begins the column with, "I'm no fan of video-games; pretty much gave them up in the late '70s or early '80s."

Doesn't sound like he's keen on licensing his stuff for new games.

Sour apples

EGM #232 has an article regarding the iPhone's handheld-gaming capabilities. While the iPhone is certainly a great piece of technology, a handheld wonder it isn't. First, iPhones have a notoriously short battery life. This seems like a major problem for something that's meant to be used on the go. In addition, the iPhone isn't primarily used as a gaming device. If that's what a consumer wanted, they would have bought a PSP or a DS. A PSP can play movies, but that's just a little extra.

In my opinion, Apple just wants a bigger slice of the handheld pie. Do you really think the iPhone can compete with the big-name handhelds already out there?

—Jake LaFollette

In a word: maybe. It all depends on the software and how serious game developers are willing to get. We're certainly intrigued by the possibilities of the tilt functionality.

But don't discount the iPhone over just battery life. With all of the wireless stuff turned off, it should last about as long as a DS on full brightness or a PSP with Wi-Fi turned off and brightness turned down: around seven hours.

Seriously?

In Eric Neigher's review of *Spectral Force 3* in *EGM* #231, he says, "Another unexpected 'strength' is *SF3*'s unique approach to voice-talent casting; the developers obviously employed some sort of wide-open casting call for the janitorial staff. Kudos to Idea Factory for giving these needy souls a chance to display their acting skills on the national stage."

This is not the kind of nonsense I want to read in *EGM*. You may write for a magazine, but that doesn't give you the right to talk down to people. You imply janitors lack any skills besides sweeping and cleaning up vomit. People need to feed their families and thus must do less-than-favorable jobs, but you probably don't know anything about that.

—Josh

Funny thing about janitors: They're not usually known for their *voice acting* skills.

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News, previews, deadly tools, apple games, and other stuff

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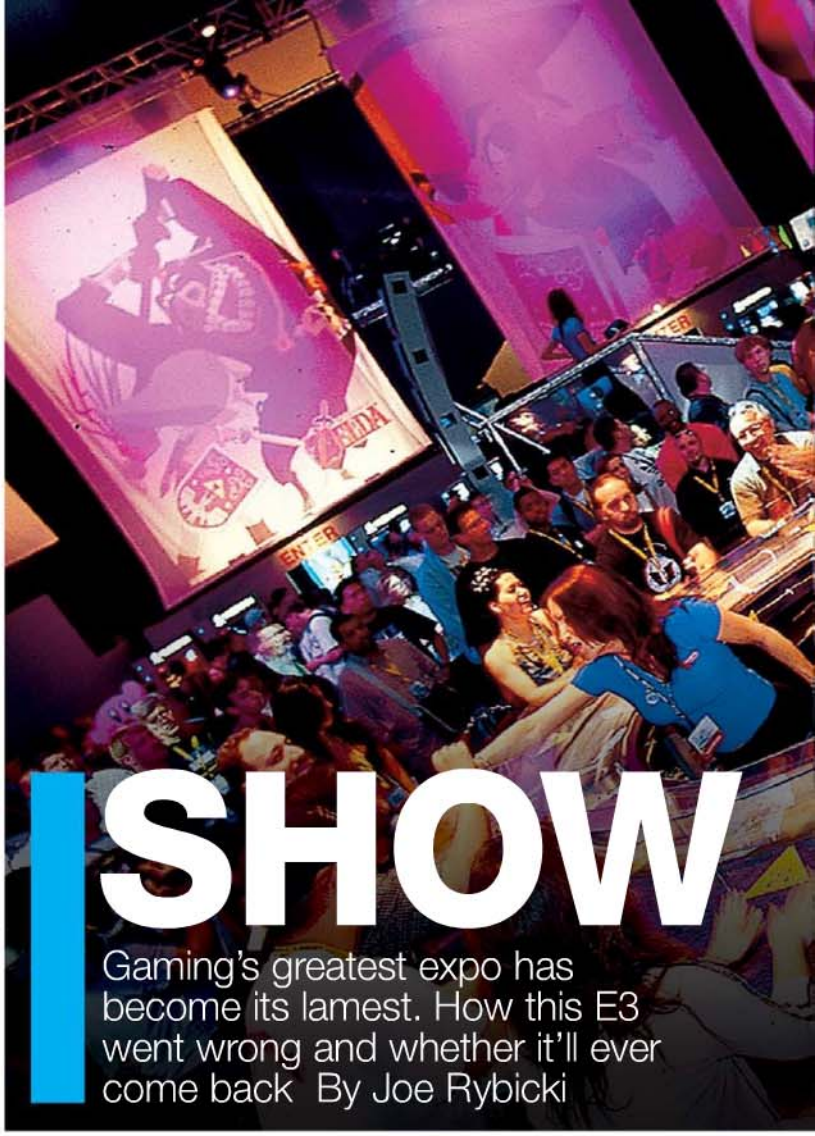

SHOW

Gaming's greatest expo has become its lamest. How this E3 went wrong and whether it'll ever come back By Joe Rybicki

THE HALLS OF THE LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER—site of the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo game-biz trade show—echoed strangely this July. In place of the pounding music, bright lights, and wall-to-wall people of past shows was...nothing. Tumbleweeds would not have seemed out of place.

This was the new E3 Business & Media Summit, the show's second major format change since the 2006 death of the original Electronic Entertainment Expo. And it's a change that's, by all accounts, almost entirely for the worse.

Glory days

E3 was born in 1995. Originally intended to give the budding game industry a more focused exhibition venue outside the megalithic Consumer Electronics Show, it quickly blossomed into *the* gaming event of the year. Investors, retailers, and media descended on L.A. (or, in '97 and '98, Atlanta) to research, plan, and network. These few days would set the course for a year's worth of investments, purchasing decisions, and media coverage.

Even better, by the turn of the 21st century, E3 was serving as an ambassador to the outside world; the show brought the industry into the public eye on a yearly basis.

In response, exhibitors became locked in a show-floor arms race, trying to outdo each other with fancier booths and after-hours parties. At the same time, organizers began to let in more noncredentialed attendees. By 2006, with attendance checking in at a staggering 60,000, the show had become both absurdly expensive for exhibitors and frustratingly unwieldy for legitimate attendees. Making matters worse, more game publishers had begun holding private "pre-E3" events, which began to sap the show of its relevance. E3 had become a victim of its own success.

OFF?

Dead show walking

As a result, the organizers at the Entertainment Software Association drastically renovated the show for 2007. Rechristening it the E3 Business & Media Summit, the ESA slashed attendance to 5,000 invitees and relocated the event to a string of hotels in Santa Monica, CA. Sadly, the lessened spectacle and constant shuttling between far-flung destinations wasn't a hit with attendees.

And so, for 2008, the show returned to the L.A. Convention Center while keeping the low profile and limited attendance from the previous year. The response was less than favorable. "I hate E3 like this," said Electronic Arts CEO John Riccitiello to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "Either we need to go back to the old E3, or we'll have to have our own private events."

Riccitiello isn't alone. In an interview with U.K. gaming trade site MCV, Sega of America President Simon Jeffery said the show "had all the atmosphere of a large hospital

corridor." In a postshow blog, EA Sports President Peter Moore called it "soulless" and noted "a palpable sense of frustration at the structure and logistics from all participants." And in a report entitled "E3 2008 Review: The Bad, The Great, and The Boring!" Wedbush Morgan Securities Analysts Michael Pachter and Edward Woo likened the show to "a college library during summer" and "a school cafeteria." Perhaps the most colorful description came from Laurent Detoc, president of Ubisoft North America, in an interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "The world used to come to E3," he said. "Now it's like a pipe-fitters show in the basement."

Clearly, the show is in need of a drastic change.

E3 is dead. Long live E3

We spoke to a number of industry insiders about the future of E3 and found one near-unanimous sentiment: If it's to survive and stay relevant, E3 needs to move back toward the spectacle of its glory days. "The greater the spectacle, the greater the [mainstream] media attention," Wedbush's Pachter tells us. "It's as simple as that." Sega's Jeffery expressed a similar notion when chatting with MCV. "We'd like to see something that represents the fun, dynamic nature of the industry a little better," he said, "without going back to the insanity that was E3 of old."

Hal Halpin, president of the Entertainment Consumers Association, a consumer-rights advocacy group, has some ideas for how to do that. "This is a pivotal year for E3," he tells us. "There are a lot of things with the event that need fixing." For specifics, he points us to a guest editorial he wrote for industry website GameDaily, in which he recommended returning to the format of the shows of 2006 and before, only with some key refinements. "Reduce the number of folks down to [25,000 to 30,000]," he wrote, "and then apply the Tokyo Game Show model—let consumers come in during the last few days." EA's Moore also feels that the public deserves a spot at the show. "Let's invite the community," he wrote on his blog. "With the right planning, involving our biggest fans in E3 would bring back some of the raw passion the event has lost."

Others have expressed less positive views about the show's future, theorizing instead that E3 would give way to individual events hosted by publishers. But Wedbush's Pachter suggests >

> SHOWS OF FORCE

Five other gaming expos that outshine E3

Tokyo Game Show
October 9-12, 2008
With its big booths, big crowds, and big spectacle, TGS is everything E3 used to be. It even opens its doors to the public at the end of the show.

Photo courtesy of the GDC
www.gdconf.com

Game Developers Conference
March 23-27, 2009
It started as a gathering of gamemakers who would talk shop and have a good group think, but recent San Francisco–based conferences have seen bigger booths and major announcements—to the chagrin of developers who lament the show's quieter days.

Consumer Electronics Show
January 8-11, 2009
This annual Las Vegas event predates E3 and used to be the only place where game companies could show off. Now that E3's stumbling, CES organizers are looking to swipe back a sizable game-biz contingent.

DigitalLife
September 25-28, 2008
Full disclosure: *EGM* publisher Ziff Davis organizes this NYC-based show, which is similar to CES but for the people. The public can browse the latest in electronics, from home theaters to digital cameras to, yes, videogames.

Penny Arcade Expo
August 29-31, 2008
Of all the shows listed here, only Seattle-based PAX caters to the gamers. Attendees can play games, attend panels, rock out at concerts, or compete in the appropriately awesome-sounding Omegathon gaming tournament.

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> SHOW OFF (cont.)

that's both unlikely and inefficient. "Yes, the publishers can replace E3 with several analyst and gamer days," he tells us. "I suppose all 50 of the United States could have independently tried to fight World War II, too."

The ESA, meanwhile, isn't saying how, or even if, it'll change E3's format yet again, but a spokesperson says the association is once again listening to feedback. "As it does every year," he tells us, "the ESA is currently undertaking a thorough research process to ensure the 2009 E3 Media & Business Summit meets the needs of attendees and exhibitors."

The show is, at least, scheduled to go on for the time being. But in what form is, at the moment, anyone's guess. One thing's perfectly clear: This year's event simply did not work. "E3 as currently configured is headed for extinction," wrote Pachter and Woo in their Wedbush report, "and the industry is quickly running out of time to fix the show."

> SHOW ME THE WAY

We wake up this year's sleepy E3 with our own show awards

Best Genre Bender: Mirror's Edge

Parkour in first person seems like a fast track to explosive motion sickness, but *Mirror's Edge* (see our cover story) is a lot more than just building-hopping. It brings sky-high adventure to first-person gaming, combining two genres that have grown moldy.

Mii-Too Award: Microsoft Avatars

They may feature fully formed fingers and snazzier wardrobes (pleated slacks!), but Microsoft's new Xbox Live Avatars—mega-meloned characters set to replace gamertags—are obviously cloned from the same superdeformed DNA as the Wii's Miis. After all, when you can't beat 'em....

Best Co-op Experience: Resident Evil 5

It's not enough that *Resident Evil 5* looks stunning; the news that's making junior zombie-slayers moan like the recently deceased is that the game's eye-candy-tastic heroine, Sheva, is a playable character—and not in the *RE4* Ada Wong side-mission kind of way. Full-blown two-player online co-op finally makes its way into the series, as players can enter and exit a friend's game on the fly to unravel the mystery of what zombies—and Chris Redfield—are doing in Africa.

Outstanding Achievement in Core-Audience Neglect: Nintendo

It's one thing to feel flush with the success of having won over the hearts of tens of millions of soccer moms in North America with your surprisingly dominant one-two Wii/DS punch. But it's another thing to turn your nose up at the diehards who stuck by you in those seriously crappy, one triple-A-title-a-year N64/GameCube days, Nintendo. Who do you think is camping by their monitors during your E3 conference, anyway? Marge Johnston in Sabina, OH? No. It's the rabid but increasingly irritated fan base that has stuck by you in the lean times, only to see "core user" acknowledgement dwindle over the last couple of years. Where are the *Zelda* announcements or glimpses into the future of *Metroid*? *Star Fox*? Yes, *Animal Crossing: City Folk* is a nice step in the right direction, but what was up with Ravi Drums and your dreadful *Wii Music* performance? Oh, the tears that were wept that day.

Game That's Got Us Worried: Castlevania: Judgment

A *Castlevania* fighting game with full 3D movement and simple controls doesn't sound like such a bad idea on paper—both *Power Stone* and the original *Bushido Blade* executed the idea well. Maybe it's the weird character designs or the Wii's not-so-friendly-for-fighting-games controls, but something about *Judgment* at E3 just felt off.

Best Gardening Game Since Pikmin: Flower

The Zen gaming masters who made microorganism cannibalism so relaxing in *flOw* return with another genre-bending downloadable offering, and this one has you germinating fields and triggering blossom bonanzas as a Sixaxis-controlled wind zephyr. It's simple, unique, and gorgeous—the perfect antidote to the plague of predictably gritty shooters and uninspired licensed swill hitting store shelves this fall.

Supersleeper Hit: Fat Princess

Thin is so out. A proud-to-be-portly princess acts as a prize in this madcap reinterpretation of capture the flag that pits two 16-player squads (each with its own castle and pampered princess) in an all-out war to capture the opposing side's increasingly hefty royalty. Cuddly (yet comically gory) cartoon-shaded visuals and an innovative real-time class-changing system further sweeten the deal.

The Looks That Kill Award: Killzone 2

Killzone 2 is gorgeous—in a very miserable, postapocalyptic, never-want-to-go-there sort of way. Forever mocked for its stunning E3 2005 trailer that ended up being little more than smoke and mirrors, it's finally, *for real*, looking the part three years later. Sporting some of the most stunning lighting, animation, and textural details we've laid eyes upon, *Killzone 2* should be labeled "HDTV required."

Too Late to the Bandwagon: Rock Revolution

The successful sounds of *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* can't be music to the ears of guitar-game creators Konami. After years of watching from the nosebleed section, the original music-game innovators are *finally* starting a band of their own. Only, uh, three years too late. Can you say one-hit wonder? We already have.

Best No. 2: The Whole Show

To be No. 1 at this year's E3, you actually had to be No. 2. Or three. Or, hell, even four. The biggest games this year were all sequels: *Gears of War 2*, *Resistance 2*, *Rock Band 2*, *Fallout 3*, *Killzone 2*—need we say more? We were going to, but we're saving it for the sequel....

Best Game We Couldn't Cover on 1UP.com: Heavy Rain

Publishers typically skip coverage-limiting nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) at E3, but Sony snuck one in for developer Quantic Dream's *Indigo Prophecy* follow-up. But now that the NDA has expired, we can tell you that Sony showed an incredibly tense scene where a female journalist snuck into the house of a taxidermist/murderer, only to then see him arrive home and have to think up an escape route. Swap around a few characters and some control ideas, and this is essentially *Indigo Prophecy 2*.

MIA Game Award: Aliens: Colonial Marines

Halo maker Bungie made big news at E3 by hinting at an announcement and then canceling it at the last minute, which was apparently Microsoft's decision. What didn't get as much attention: the absence of developer Gearbox's *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. Sega announced the game would be at E3 during a preshow press event—but ultimately declined to show it. Hmm.

Best Game You Wouldn't Think Was Good: Spider-Man: Web of Shadows

In addition to watching an awesome aerial boss battle against the Vulture, we recently got our first hands-on time with the latest *Spider-Man* game. *God of War*–style combos and on-the-fly switching between normal and dark-suit Spidey make this the first *Spider-Man* game we've been excited about in years—much to our surprise!

The Screens Don't Do It Justice Award: Prince of Persia

Don't be deceived by the screenshots. In motion, this *Prince* looks royally good and moves with the greatest of ease.

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> FAR-OUT FANS

Pixel Painter: Antoinette Citizen

Play videogames enough, and they might consume your life. Paint well enough, and they might consume your bedroom, too—that's the case with Aussie visual artist Antoinette Citizen. Inspired by a pixelized plumber, Citizen re-created World 1-1 of *Super Mario Bros.* on a wall as part of an art installation. We recently chatted with Citizen to hear more about her magic kingdom.

EGM: When you came up with this idea, you weren't, uh, on any magic mushrooms, were you?

Antoinette Citizen: I think it went something like this: "I want to make a life-sized *Mario* world." "But why?" "Because it would be so freakin' awesome!" And that was that.

EGM: Why go with *Super Mario Bros.*? Did you not dig the scenic landscapes of Atari's *Adventure*?

AC: Yeah, *Adventure* would've been great, too! Except it may have been mistaken for an abstract painting. I must say, I'm an avowed NES girl, born and bred. It's like home to me—fighting Bowser cross-legged on the living-room floor with a chorus of cheers from my brother and sister.

EGM: We didn't notice any enemies. Were any Goombas hurt in the making of this installation?

AC: They weren't being very cooperative, so I fired them.

EGM: No, really—can we try some of those magic mushrooms? We could use an extra life.

AC: I don't know if it's a good idea.... You'll probably end up spending three weeks painting a *Mario* wall because you wanted to reconnect with your inner child.

■ No, that's not a warp door.

> FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN

TATSUNOKO VS. CAPCOM: CROSS GENERATION OF FIGHTERS

Street Fighter's new challengers

Platform: Arcade

Likelihood it'll come here? Some kind of console port is guaranteed in Japan, but for now, you'll need to find an arcade that's hip with the fighting scene.

***What* vs. Capcom? Huh?** Are you saying that you haven't heard of Tatsunoko Production? Does *Gatchaman* ring a bell at all? Or *Yatterman* or *Casshern*? Or...uh, *Gold Lightan*? Anyone? Well, think about it this way: You know all of the clichés you've seen a million times in Japanese kids' action shows—color-coded heroes, giant transformable robots, and people shouting out the ponderously long names of special moves before executing them? Tatsunoko invented all that stuff with the anime they produced in the 1960s and '70s, finding time in between to come up with shows like *Speed Racer* and *Samurai Pizza Cats*.

What's this have to do with videogames? Think about it. What better bunch of characters to take on Ryu and the rest of the Capcom stable than the greatest metallic spandex-wearing superheroes that Japanese kids' TV ever had to offer? And so we have Capcom's first proper "versus" fighter since *Capcom vs. SNK 2* in 2001, one that features Chun-Li flexing her hips against Ken the Eagle and the ever-alluring Morrigan having her way with Yatterman No. 1, an anime hero straight out of your trippiest '70s hallucination. And even if you've never heard of any of these guys before, everything that made *Capcom vs. SNK* memorable—the massive finisher moves, the crazy aerial combat—is here, and it's just as addictive.

His list of demands is short and sweet.

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> FINAL FANTASY FEST

NOMURA'S HEROES

Square Enix's visionary creator showcases **Final Fantasy XIII**, **Kingdom Hearts**, and **Parasite Eve** at a private event

By Shane Bettenhausen and Jeremy Parish

AT MICROSOFT'S E3 2008 PRESS CONFERENCE, Square Enix President Yoichi Wada shocked attendees by revealing that previously PlayStation 3–exclusive *Final Fantasy XIII* would also be heading to Xbox 360 in North America and Europe. While this was certainly a startling announcement, it wasn't completely unexpected—rising development costs and a relatively slow start for the PS3 could've made it impossible for Square Enix to recoup their development costs on a platform-specific *FFXIII*.

But a few weeks later at the publisher's invite-only DKΣ3713 fan event, Square Enix seemed to be inching back toward Sony's good graces. This bizarrely titled showcase centered on the vast array of titles being developed by Tetsuya Nomura, the *FF* character designer and creator of *Kingdom Hearts*. First, he revealed that he's adding roughly 30 minutes of new content to the spruced-up Blu-ray release of the divisive *FFVII* motion picture, *Advent Children Complete*. But it gets even better: When the movie hits Japanese shelves in March 2009, it'll be bundled with a playable demo of *Final Fantasy XIII* for PlayStation 3. (Sony also plans to offer a PS3 hardware bundle with *ACC* in Japan.) There's no word on whether the U.S. version of *ACC* will ship with this demo, but rest assured that the Japanese disc will play just fine on your American PS3.

Nomura went on to confirm that *FFXIII* will definitely ship in Japan by the end of 2009, but he warned that the eventual U.S. date will be held back to coincide with the launch of the Xbox 360 release...which won't begin to be ported until the PS3 version's finished. He went on to reveal that *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*, the action-oriented offshoot of the larger "Fabula Nova Crystallis" multigame project, remains exclusive to the PS3 across all global territories. Nomura then wowed the audience by showing brief snippets of in-game footage from both *FFXIII* and *Versus*. The *FFXIII* clip showed heroine Lightning leading her party members around a lush wooded area; although no battles were shown, she has the ability to jump and roll while exploring the game's fields. Meanwhile, the fleeting *Versus* demo had the game's princely protagonist leaping around a vaguely Grecian ruin. While neither of these demos revealed terribly much, it was heartening to finally see the games up and running.

Nomura further re-upped his Sony allegiance by announcing that *Final Fantasy Agito XIII* (a card-based multiplayer "Fabula Nova Crystallis" offshoot) and *The 3rd Birthday* (a sequel to the sexy PS1 survival-horror series *Parasite Eve*) are no longer being developed as mobile-phone games but rather as PSP exclusives for 2009.

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> NOMURA'S HEROES (cont.)

Final Fantasy: Dissidia
PSP • Holiday 2008 (Japan)

1999's *Ehrgeiz* for PlayStation was a fighting game with *Final Fantasy* characters, but *Dissidia* is a step beyond: a fighting game *for Final Fantasy* characters. This is no technical *Virtua Fighter*, though; a better comparison would be Capcom's *Power Stone*, with flashy powers and effects and over-the-top chain combos. But you level up with the experience you gain after battle, and you can trick out your hero (or villain, including *FFVI*'s Kefka Palazzo) with new gear.

Kingdom Hearts: 358/2 Days
DS • 2009

An ambitious multiplayer take on *Kingdom Hearts*, the oddly named *358/2 Days* wasn't nearly as impressive as *Birth by Sleep*. Square Enix may simply be asking too much of the humble DS hardware, and the lack of an analog controller hurts, too. Worse, rather than making enemies clever and challenging for four players to take down, the developers simply bumped up their hit points. There's hope for this one, but it definitely needs work.

Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep
PSP • 2009

The standout title of the DK Σ3713 event, *Birth by Sleep* brings the polish and craftsmanship of *Final Fantasy VII*: *Crisis Core* to the oddball Disney/Square fusion of *Kingdom Hearts*. Oddly enough, this side story doesn't star Sora, Roxas, and the usual gang but rather a trio of unknowns named Terra, Aqua, and Ventus. It still plays like the PS2 games, but the skill system seems to have been derived from *Chain of Memories* for GBA—which is a good thing.

Sigma Harmonics
DS • Summer 2008 (Japan)

An oddball hybrid of *Phoenix Wright*–style adventure game, RPG, and card battle, *Sigma Harmonics* follows the adventures of a supernatural detective named Sigma and his flaky priestess pal, Neon. Battles play out through a music-driven card system, and you solve cases by collecting and placing clues. It's different—maybe *too* different to reach U.S. gamers.

EGM Extras: *Hit* **EGM.1UP.com** *for an interview with Square's merchandising division head, complete with photo tour.*

> THE SWEET SOUNDS OF YOKO SHIMOMURA

Composer Yoko Shimomura was an invisible but pervasive presence at the event; her music will grace both *Kingdom Hearts* titles, the new *Parasite Eve*, and *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*. In fact, her new CD, *Drammatica*, features the only piece of *FFXIII*-related *anything* available to the public: the track "Somnus." "I think it's very rare to put out just one track from a game way before its release," she says. "I'm grateful that Square Enix allowed it." But even with this one piece finished, her work on *Versus* is far from complete. "It's like there's a huge black mountain in front of me," she jokes.

> CATCHING UP WITH MOTOMU TORIYAMA

Final Fantasy XIII Director Motomu Toriyama isn't talking much about his game, but a look back at his career—which has been spent directing cut-scenes in *Final Fantasy* titles and overseeing spin-offs like *FFX-2*—suggests that he's more than up to the task. Of course, as *FFX*'s event director, he was responsible for that game's infamous, awkward "laughing scene." "But the laughter was *supposed* to feel unnatural," he says in defense. "Yuna had just experienced something terrible, and she was forcing herself to act cheerful even though she was devastated."

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Soulcalibur IV character combos
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Penny Arcade Expo: Gabe and Tycho
We sit down with the creators of *Penny Arcade* for hot chat and unsolicited back rubs.

Michael Donahoe vs. Comic-Con
EGM's own man-of-many-costumes infiltrates Comic-Con to rescue Princess Leia. He fails.

Games Convention 2008 Coverage
We've grabbed the best trailers and gameplay footage from this year's Leipzig Games Convention.

> ONLINE SCENE

NEW USERS

Online services try to connect with casual players

By Michael Donahoe

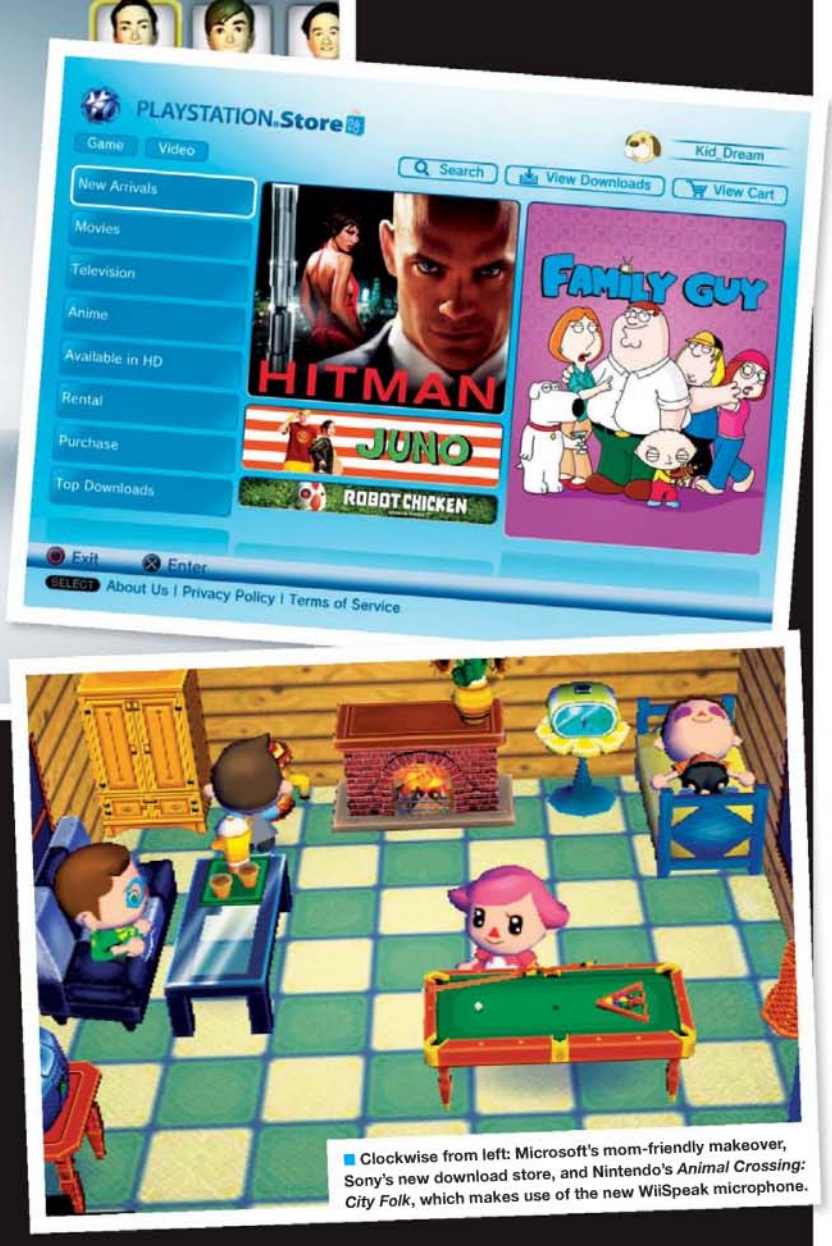
Still searching: The 360 is the only home console not to offer a web browser.

ONLINE GAMING USED TO BE DIRTY, reserved only for hardcore obscenity-hurlers. Not anymore—this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) proved that all three companies are scrubbing up their online services to provide a squeaky-clean experience that even your mom can enjoy. To see which system offers the best all-around features for casual newcomers, we graded each system using your mom as a constant (don't worry—we won't tell your pops).

Xbox Live

What will your mom like? Almost everything. In a move to make things simpler (i.e., easy enough for casual dimwits—your mom—to understand), Microsoft announced it plans to give Xbox Live a complexity downgrade this fall. "With the update coming this fall, we wanted to make Xbox 360 and Xbox Live more accessible and easier to navigate for everyone," says Marc Whitten, general manager of Xbox Live. In addition to the dashboard update, Microsoft also announced a partnership with online-movie-rental site Netflix and the option to create Avatars to take into new Live game-show titles like *1 vs 100*.

Will your mom use it? Definitely, considering she knows how to use a computer (or at least a microwave). Everything's so simplistically streamlined in a way that almost insults the intelligence of the people the 360 caters to. But, really, who cares about those crazy kids?



■ Clockwise from left: Microsoft's mom-friendly makeover, Sony's new download store, and Nintendo's *Animal Crossing: City Folk*, which makes use of the new WiiSpeak microphone.

PlayStation Network

What will your mom like? The stuff she can figure out how to use. Unlike Xbox Live, it takes a little time to understand all of the innovative features PlayStation Network offers, like the ability to transfer movies from the new download store to your PSP. Luckily, Sony is looking to help your mom learn. "In terms of [feature awareness], we're going to be doing a lot of education efforts on a retail level—and even our own website—that will break down everything much more easily," says Susan Panico, senior director of PlayStation Network.

Will your mom use it? Maybe, but your tech-savvy dad might dig it more. Options like the movie-to-PSP feature definitely set PSN apart from Xbox Live. Plus, the whole "being free" aspect doesn't hurt, either.

Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection

What will your mom like? Just about everything. Especially the new community blabber-box WiiSpeak. Too bad actually playing games online is hampered with needless friend codes. But, hey, at least your ma can check the weather online with ease.

Will your mom use it? Hell, your grandma can hop on your Wii without hesitation. But unlike the PS3 and 360, the Wii doesn't offer long-lasting noninteractive entertainment services (movies, TV, etc.).

> THE GAME OF LIVES

5 Lives: Denis Dyack

Outspoken developer Denis Dyack is brave. Even though his epic Xbox 360 action-role-playing game *Too Human* (reviewed on page 88) has endured many development demons, the man valiantly defends it like the brave Silicon Knight he is. So when we challenged him to a battle of wits, he gladly agreed. Is Dyack too smart or too stupid? Let's find out....

1. *Too Human* is intended to be a trilogy. So name the failed, trilogy-planned bomb publisher Majesco released.

Denis Dyack: God, yeah—it was worked together with [author Orson Scott Card]. Umm...*Advent Rising*?

EGM: Correct.

Lives Remaining:

2. Put these characters from *Eternal Darkness* in chronological order: Pious Augustus, Edward Roivas, Paul Luther, and Peter Jacob.

DD: Pious is first. Paul Luther, Peter Jacob, and Edward Roivas.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

3. You created the *Legacy of Kain* series, so tell us: Which of these *Legacy of Kain* game titles is correct?

A) *Legacy of Kain: Damnation*
B) *Legacy of Kain: Deliverance*
C) *Legacy of Kain: Defiance*
D) *Legacy of Kain: Destruction*

DD: *Defiance*. We didn't make that one, but it's *Defiance*.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

4. *Too Human* started on multiple systems before finishing on the 360. Name at least two other games that did the same.

DD: *Kameo* and *Perfect Dark*.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

5. What is the White Zombie song "More Human Than Human" referring to?

DD: He's talking about the Nexus-6 in *Blade Runner*.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

Game Over: Damn, either our questions were too easy, or Dyack's just too intelligent. Let's go with the latter, because the former makes us look stupid, and that wouldn't be smart of us.

What other people play

By John Davison

Since stepping out of the purely "hardcore" (an archaic tag that's losing its meaning) world a year ago and working with people that could be best described as more "casual" consumers, I've seen and learned *a lot*. It's been an eye-opening time, so I figured I'd spend each month reporting back to you what I've learned.

First, the obvious stuff—the Wii is hot s***. And so is the DS. The PS2 is still humongous, too, and during the quiet patches on XB360 or PS3, these three "lesser" systems play host to the vast majority of gaming experiences. PlayStation fanboys will hate me for saying this, but so far, I've only seen *one* PS3 game resonate with this crowd: *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

Games tied into significant pieces of youth-focused pop culture are more powerful than anything, and interest in the *SpongeBob* games or D3Publisher's *Ben 10* titles will pretty much always outweigh that of, say, *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*. This audience doesn't care about review scores, and they're as likely to buy a game a year after release as they are on the first day.

I could probably blow the next few columns on the power of *Ben 10* alone. Prior to launching What They Play, I'd never even *heard* of it. After a little research, I found that while the show is one of Cartoon Network's biggest ever, all of the associated media is even *bigger*. The game on Wii, PS2, DS, and PSP has been a consistent seller. The Flash-based game creator on the *Ben 10* website generates *a million* pieces of user-created content a month, and there's an upcoming MMO called *FusionFall* that brings together the *Ben 10* characters with those from *Dexter's Laboratory* and *The Powerpuff Girls*, among others.

More people are playing games, but the latest generation looks at them quite differently. As "aficionados," does that make us out of touch?

John Davison, former editorial director of the 1UP Network, is the cofounder of family gaming website What They Play (www.whattheyplay.com) and a regular guest on the 1UP Yours *podcast.*

THE BIG ONES

We grab new details and deliver them straight to your news box

Call of Duty: World at War

PS3/XB360 • Activision • Fall 2008

Activision recently showed off two of the coolest features for *Call of Duty: World at War*: co-op gameplay and Kiefer Sutherland. *24*'s Jack Bauer voices a commanding officer as two players zip through a scenario that involves a crashed American plane, a booby-trapped corpse, flamethrowers, and a massive battle over a contested airfield. Besides having players fight together while Sutherland yells, one of the levels demonstrated destructible environments, as players will need to burn the hiding spots of Japanese soldiers.

Resident Evil 5

PS3/XB360 • Capcom • 2009

Capcom finally confirmed an ongoing rumor: *RE5* will support online co-op. Chris Redfield, an agent for the Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance (BSAA), is investigating the Progenitor Virus in Africa. Local beauty Sheva Alomar, an operative from the organization's West African branch, tags along, and either the A.I. or another player can control her. The co-op emphasis opens up new features, such as the ability to share equipment between both characters, multipart puzzles that require two people, rescues, and good old-fashioned "two guns are better than one" gameplay.

Wolfenstein

PS3/XB360 • Activision • TBA

Id and codeveloper Raven Software finally showed off more of this game at id's annual QuakeCon event. *Wolfenstein* contains much of what we've come to expect from the series: dastardly Nazis, fancy graphics, and hidden caches of Nazi gold. What's new is the Veil, an alternate dimension that series protagonist BJ Blazkowicz can enter at any moment to access special powers. Raven only showed off one Veil power, Mire, which is Nazi-occult-dimension-speak for "bullet time."

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Jump in.

XBOX 360. LIVE

> PC CHATTER

Sid's Revolution

By Jeff Green

For many hardcore PC gamers, the coming of Sid Meier's *Civilization Revolution* was something discussed as if it would be accompanied by a plague of frogs. The granddaddy of all PC game developers making a console game? Apocalypse confirmed! The great news for everyone, when the game did come out, was that despite the fact that everything had been somewhat simplified for faster console play, it was still a great, addictive, and challenging *Civilization* game—completely worthy of belonging in the canon of this classic turn-based strategy series.

So this column is for console gamers who may have just been bitten by the Meier bug and want to know where to go next. First is the next *Civilization* game, due out this October from Firaxis and 2K Games: *Colonization*. Technically, it's another expansion to *Civilization IV*. But really, we're talking about a brand-new game, in terms of theme and gameplay, and it's a standalone game that doesn't require the original to play, making it a perfect jumping-aboard point for newbies. Actually, if you're as old as I am (107 this week!), you may already know that *Colonization* is a remake: Meier did this once before in 1994, and it was freaking awesome. Four European countries (Spain, France, the Netherlands, and England) vie for control of the New World, the land that will eventually give birth to McDonald's, Wal-Mart, and *According to Jim*. *Civ IV* fans will find lots new here, including a lovely new interface and many more diplomacy options, while new players may appreciate the somewhat-less-daunting playing turf.

But in my few remaining words, let me strongly suggest that new Meier fans (and old ones who missed it) seek out *Sid Meier's Pirates!*, a 2004 gem that blends strategy with puzzle gaming, adventure gaming, sword-fighting, and, uh, ballroom dancing. It's still available online (www.2kgames.com/pirates) and may be the best pirate game ever made. Yarrrgh!

1UP PC Editor-in-Chief Jeff Green still hasn't gotten a Domination victory in Civ Rev. *Point and laugh at him at Jeff_Green@1UP.com.*

> HANDS-ON

WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

Let's hunt some orc! By Jeff Green

Platform: PC
Publisher: EA Games
Developer: Mythic
Release Date: September 2008

SINCE ITS DEBUT IN 2004, Blizzard's *World of WarCraft* has so dominated the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) landscape that it's been almost sad to watch anyone else try. And certainly, Electronic Arts and Mythic both have a lot to prove with their upcoming *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning*, an ambitious MMO with a long four years of development, now finally coming out this September. The good news for both them and us? After extensive time spent with the beta, we're here to tell you: This one actually looks like it's bringing it. And while it'd be borderline moronic to deem any game a "*WOW* killer" at this point, we can say that *Warhammer Online* might be the first MMO since Blizzard's game to significantly advance the genre's gameplay conventions in ways that actually work—and are fun to play.

Based on Game Workshop's fantasy tabletop games, *Warhammer Online* depicts an endless, bloody conflict between the factions of Order (Dwarves, Empire Humans, and High Elves) and Destruction (Greenskins, Chaos Humans, and Dark Elves). If this sounds suspiciously familiar, be aware that *Warhammer* has been around since the early '80s, predating *WarCraft*—so if anyone has cause to complain, it may not be Blizzard.

In any case, yes, this is yet another online fantasy role-playing game in which you will be playing as a Goblin, Orc, Dwarf, Elf, or Human, killing things and leveling up so you can kill bigger things. We've done this before. But in every other respect, *Warhammer Online* is its own game. Mythic has smartly designed the game to help players overcome one of the biggest obstacles in MMOs: getting us to play with others and cooperate against a mutual enemy—including other players. Solo players needn't fret: Mythic says there's about 200 hours of PVE (player versus environment) content on your way from level 1 to level 40.

But the developers really don't want you playing by yourself all of the time and have made some great

■ While ganking your fellow players, be sure to stop once in a while to admire the beautiful scenery.

innovations to help ensure you won't. First—and easiest—are the public quests, which are chunks of content running on a repeated loop that you can participate in merely by being in the vicinity. You don't have to group up or even talk to anyone if you don't want to. Walking into a public-quest area automatically pops the quest's goals on your screen and immediately makes you part of the action. You can jump in and out at will, but the longer you participate and the more you contribute, the better chance you have of getting one of the three loot drops when the quest is over. And even if you just play for a minute, you still gain Influence points, which you exchange for goodies specific to your character class.

What *Warhammer Online* is really all about, though, is massive realm-versus-realm (RVR) combat. Mythic's paired up the game's six player races into three opposing factions: Dwarves versus Greenskins, Empire Humans versus Chaos Humans, and High Elves versus Dark Elves. Throughout the game, each pairing will be engaged in a constant tug-of-war battle for the control of zones, which grant everyone on the winning side character bonuses and buffs. To prevent high-level players from dominating, Mythic's divided each of the three pairings into four level-based tiers. And when a high-level player goes to a lower tier to "gank noobs"? He'll be turned into a chicken that can do exactly one point of damage.

RVR combat is fought on numerous fronts, from random skirmishes to 12-on-12 and 18-on-18 scenarios to full-on, massive 100-plus player assaults on enemy keeps and fortresses (manned by both players and NPCs). It all culminates in tier 4, when one side eventually battles all the way to the enemy's capital, looting and pillaging the city, shackling and dragging the opposing (NPC) king home, and locking all of the opposing players out of their home base for a set amount of hours, in shame, before Mythic resets the entire war to the beginning again.

Obviously, we're just scratching the surface here. We haven't even told you yet how players can level up cities—shoring up defenses, spawning more powerful defensive NPCs, and unlocking new public quests. Or that player guilds can capture enemy keeps and hoist their tabards on the walls. Like all MMORPGs, *Warhammer Online* is a humongous enterprise. It'll take months, at least, for players to fully explore and grasp it all. The great thing is that, for once, a game other than *WOW* is actually making us want to do just that.

When a higher-level player travels to a lower tier, he'll be turned into a chicken.

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GOING MOBILE

Highlights from the brave new world of iPhone gaming By Joe Rybicki

IN THE SHORT TIME SINCE THE LAUNCH OF THE IPHONE 3G and its App Store, the do-it-all mobile device's game selection has virtually exploded. Check out a few of the noteworthy offerings currently available for download.

Crash Bandicoot: Nitro Kart 3D

Vivendi • $9.99

If you've played...well, any kart racer in history, you know the drill: wacky characters racing around colorful tracks and throwing things at opponents. The gimmick is that the game's controlled almost entirely by tilting the iPhone, and it works surprisingly well.

Critter Crunch

Publisher X • $9.99

Though the premise of *Critter Crunch* is a little odd (you feed little creatures to bigger creatures to make them explode), the gameplay is pure puzzle bliss. In a twist on the falling-block formula, you aim for big combos via careful overfeeding of the colorful creatures above you: Grab a small one, suck it down, then spit it into the mouth of a bigger one. Sick? Sure. But it's fun.

De Blob

THQ • $7.99

It's pretty much a 2D re-creation of the Wii game: You control a ball of goo trying to add color to a black-and-white world by rolling through globs of paint while avoiding or battling the dreary forces of the Big Brother-like INKT Corporation. But the inclusion of optional tilt control brings something new to the game, making painting the monochromatic cities a breeze.

Texas Hold'em

Apple • $4.99

Normally, these sorts of titles tend to be shovelware on mobile platforms. But *Texas Hold'em* has been dominating the App Store charts. Sure, that's probably largely thanks to its dirt-cheap $5 price tag. But the game actually has something under the hood, including nine-player Wi-Fi play and a novel first-person perspective that shows opponents' "tells" through full-motion video.

Vay

SoMoGa • $4.99

A port of a cult-classic Sega CD role-playing game? Yes, please. *Vay* follows the story of Prince Sandor as he attempts to rescue his beloved from the hands of evil robots. Sure, it's as straightforward as Japanese role-playing games get, but there's something about mixing old-school flavor with hot new tech that can't be beat.

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RUMOR MILL

Your monthly dose of gaming gossip By Quartermann

Resurrected Rumors: Back in our May 2008 issue, we spilled the beans on Insomniac's plans for a downloadable expansion/sequel for *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction*. Now, mere months later, we're all diggin' into the bargain-priced (and wisely stand-alone) *Quest for Booty* on PSN.

GOSSIP CAN BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH. And I don't mean *my* health—it's my intrepid informants I'm worried about. I've recently heard horror stories of game developers being raked over the coals by their superiors after choice bits of insider intel appeared in this column. The Q's not trying to put anyone out of a job with these tantalizing nuggets of wisdom, but I'm prepared to do whatever it takes to get the juiciest rumors to our readers month after month.

Your Guitar Hero gently weeps

This year's E3 gaming conference proved that our beloved industry is threatening to morph into one huge plastic-toy drum circle, as Activision, EA, Konami, Disney, and Nintendo all vie to capture your living-room jam-session dollar. As the plastic-instrument arms race heats up, signing exclusive contracts with big-name bands is becoming more and more crucial...and our spies tell us that one of the music industry's holy grails—the Beatles—will be landing in the *Guitar Hero* camp. It's unclear whether the famous lads from Liverpool will simply get their own stand-alone version à la Aerosmith, a suite of downloadable tracks, or perhaps...something much more ambitious altogether. Considering how carefully the Fab Four license is controlled, don't expect to see the fruits of this union until 2010....

Rockstar's secret weapons

A few months back, Q-Mann revealed that Rockstar was clandestinely working on a third *Max Payne* offering that's poised to release alongside the DVD of the Marky Mark–starring Hollywood adaptation. Here's an update: Don't expect *Max Payne 3* to hail from series creators Remedy Entertainment, as those wacky Finns are (allegedly) still hard at work on *Alan Wake* for Microsoft. Nope, the internal Rockstar team responsible for *The Warriors* is handling the development of this new entry. Upgrade? All signs point to yes.

Oh, and as for that mysterious Rockstar-developed PlayStation 3 exclusive that Sony blabbed about back in 2007? We definitely know that it's not *L.A. Noire* (that's going multiplatform), but our agents tell us that, whatever it is...it's currently being made by Rockstar North, the fine Scotland-based lads behind *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

Duel of the duels

Neither of the studios making *Star Wars* games for Wii knew about the Wii-mote accuracy upgrade MotionPlus ahead of Nintendo's E3 announcement, and the team working on *Star Wars: The Clone Wars—Lightsaber Duels* was especially annoyed when they found out. So now LucasArts is considering developing yet another Wii lightsaber game—a *real* lightsaber game that uses MotionPlus—for next year.

Q-TIPS

- WiiWare will get some serious indie street cred when fan-favorite PC adventure *Cave Story* makes its way to Nintendo's download service this fall.
- Don't worry about the fate of Tim Schafer's *Brütal Legend*. Even though Activision recently dropped the title, look for MTV Games/EA to publish it in 2009.
- The slick CG teaser Sony recently showed for *God of War III* has everyone stoked...but belay that enthusiasm, as the game probably won't ship till 2010.

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COMING SOON

October's gaming harvest

Fable II

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios

"Be careful whom you invite into your world," Lionhead Designer Peter Molyneux warned the audience at a Game Developers Conference 2008 presentation. In *Fable II* (read more in our Legends of the Fall feature on pg. 54), the ambitious role-playing game where all your actions will reportedly affect the world for better or worse, events that play out during a jump-in-or-out-at-will co-op session carry over into your single-player world. In a game that lets you flirt, get married, have children, and go on eventful—or not-so-eventful—adventures, you don't really want a jerkface neighborhood kid to come in and spoil it all by accidentally (or so he *claims*) setting your house and family on fire. And, yes, your dog, too.

Saints Row 2

PS3/XB360 • THQ

OK, we already know what the coolest feature in *Saints Row 2* is: customizable gangs. You can personalize your gang's car, graffiti tags, colors, hand signs, and, best of all, outfits. The game has plenty of options, but we're confident our favorite, the ninja, will be immensely popular. Finally—a game that lets you park a DeLorean knockoff on the curb and have a pack of pink shinobis jump out to start claiming the streets.

Cooking Mama: World Kitchen

Wii • Majesco

Everyone's favorite over-encouraging chef is back for her second Wii outing, with the expected recipe additions to the cookbook and a new art style. With difficult-to-execute tasks from the first Wii game—like cracking eggs—receiving new and easier motion controls and secondary minigames that let you salvage would-be mistakes, *World Kitchen* seems intent on giving even the most inept virtual chefs a chance to match whisks with Mama. We just wonder if it's too soon—*World Kitchen* is the fourth entry in the series in three years!

MORE OCTOBER RELEASES

SOCOM: Confrontation
PS3 • Sony CEA

Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia
DS • Konami

Guitar Hero: World Tour
Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2 • Activision

Spider-Man: Web of Shadows
Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/PSP/DS • Activision

Dead Space
PS3/XB360 • EA

Project Origin
PS3/XB360 • Warner Bros.

MotorStorm: Pacific Rift
PS3 • Sony CEA

NBA Live 09
Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/PSP • EA Sports

NBA 2K9
PS3/XB360/PS2 • 2K Sports

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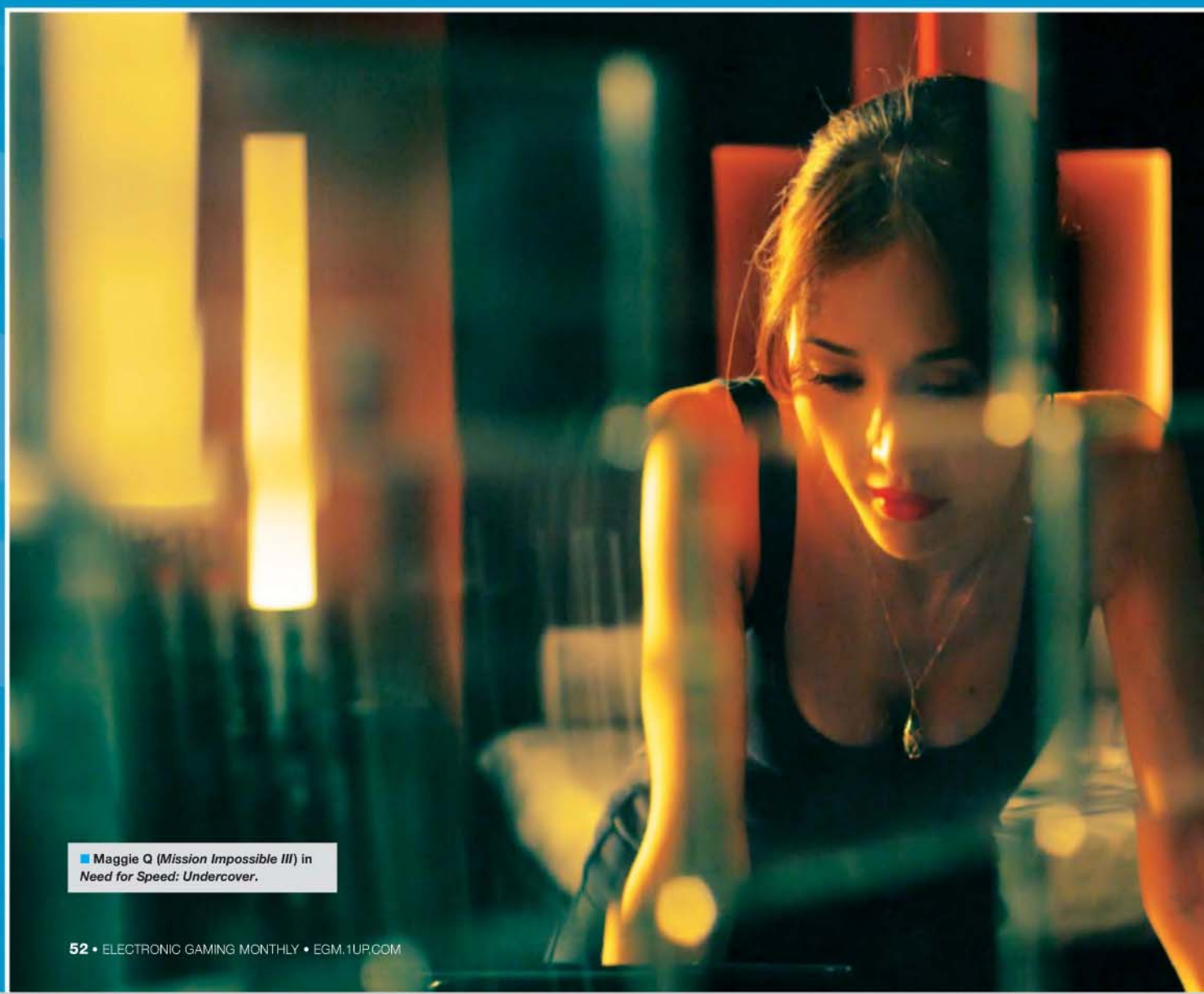
LEGENDS OF THE FALL

By the EGM and 1UP all-stars

We're not trumpeting the phrase "Legends of the Fall" because it's a fine film starring both the dazed stoner from *True Romance* and the mead-loving King Hrothgar from *Beowulf*. No. Rather than just writing goofy-yet-useful blurbs about the 700 or so games slated for release this fall, we put a much tighter focus on titles worthy of your attention. We've pared it down to 16 games (including this month's cover story, *Mirror's Edge*, and *LittleBigPlanet*), in addition to a half dozen downloadable games, that we feel will earn the title of "future legend"—games that will be fondly remembered in the far future when we're flying around with our personal jetpacks.



Maggie Q (*Mission Impossible III*) in *Need for Speed: Undercover*.

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERCOVER

■ **Platforms:** PS3/XB360 (also on Wii/PS2/PSP/DS) ■ **Publisher:** EA Games ■ **Release Date:** November 2008

A return to form

Fifteen years. Tens of millions of units sold worldwide. How can Electronic Arts' near-ubiquitous *Need for Speed* franchise be considered anything *but* legendary in terms of popularity? Well, we've watched EA shift the concept from arcade thrill ride to pseudo-simulation and back again...not always with stellar results. We've blazed trails through some of the most spectacular locales in the world, however, driving the most exotic vehicles imaginable. We've witnessed mysterious storylines and even an all-Porsche installment. In last year's *NFS: ProStreet*, EA downplayed the chase, the story, and the underground ambience, focusing instead on a realistic ride and sanctioned events. Critical reception was mixed, with some feeling that the game was too conservative and the driving too clinical.

That definitely won't be a problem when *Need for Speed: Undercover* emerges this fall. We got the chance to tinker with a preview copy at developer Black Box's studio, and we quickly realized that *Undercover* signals a return to the fast-and-furious ways of yesteryear, complete with oodles of police pursuits, more crashing and banging than an anger-management convention, and heavy doses of style. Indeed, the game's central mode works harder than ever to make us think we're in the midst of a movie. Gone are the computer-generated cut-scenes of old; they're replaced by full-motion video featuring such talents as Maggie Q (*Live Free or Die Hard*) and singer/actress Christina Milian.

We're also pumped about the game's revised physics model. Granted, *Undercover* is a far more action-oriented experience than *ProStreet* ever was, but let's just say that bootleg turns and all the other wheelman gymnastics necessary for survival are satisfying. Toss in the certifiably wild Highway Battle mode, which smashes through the high-speed thoroughfares of *Undercover*'s massive, free-roaming world and challenges you to inflict as much body-crumpling damage as possible, and you might just have a recipe for the most adrenaline-pumping *Need for Speed* yet.

■ **Platform:** XB360 ■ **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios ■ **Release Date:** October 2008

Could all the hype actually be justified?

For the past few years, we've heard Peter Molyneux, the head honcho over at developer Lionhead, go on and on about *Fable II* essentially being the second coming—how every single aspect of his game would be so revolutionary that it'd put all other titles to shame. It was starting to get really old—but having played the final game, we're starting to wonder if the hype, or at least a good portion of it, is actually justified. The surprisingly fluid combat engine features simple-to-execute—yet extremely rewarding—attacks and combos. And the story and interaction with the other characters are both remarkable—the game's scope boggles the mind. But most impressive is *Fable II*'s polish, from the voice acting to the sharp visuals. The entire thing just feels like something incredibly epic. The proof will, of course, come from long-term play with the game, but from what we've seen, this tale should have a happy ending.

■ **Platform:** PS3 ■ **Publisher:** Sony CEA ■ **Release Date:** November 2008

Releasing the beast

The gigantic *Cloverfield*-esque monster shown smashing open buildings during the *Resistance 2* demo at Sony's E3 press conference is impressive enough on its own, but what's most exciting about the game is how much other stuff that developer Insomniac's promising. The single-player campaign spans across the United States, and an equally ambitious co-op campaign features two to eight players intersecting with main character Nathan Hale at key points. And if you think eight-player co-op's a big increase from the norm, just check out the multiplayer—up to 60 players will square off in squad-based online combat with unique objectives that go beyond the average "kill anything that moves" vibe of most shooters. Throw in plans to build a strong community through official fan site MyResistance.net and you've got the formula for what should be a very long-term shooter sensation on the PS3.

FALLOUT 3

■ **Platform:** PS3/XB360 ■ **Publisher:** Bethesda ■ **Release Date:** October 2008

Finally, it's the end of the world again! Yay!

Fallout fans have waited a long time—10 years, to be exact—for a follow-up to this classic PC role-playing series set in a postapocalyptic America. But this October—barring, say, a real apocalypse—*Fallout 3* is finally arriving, and for consoles as well as PC this time. And it looks better every time we see it.

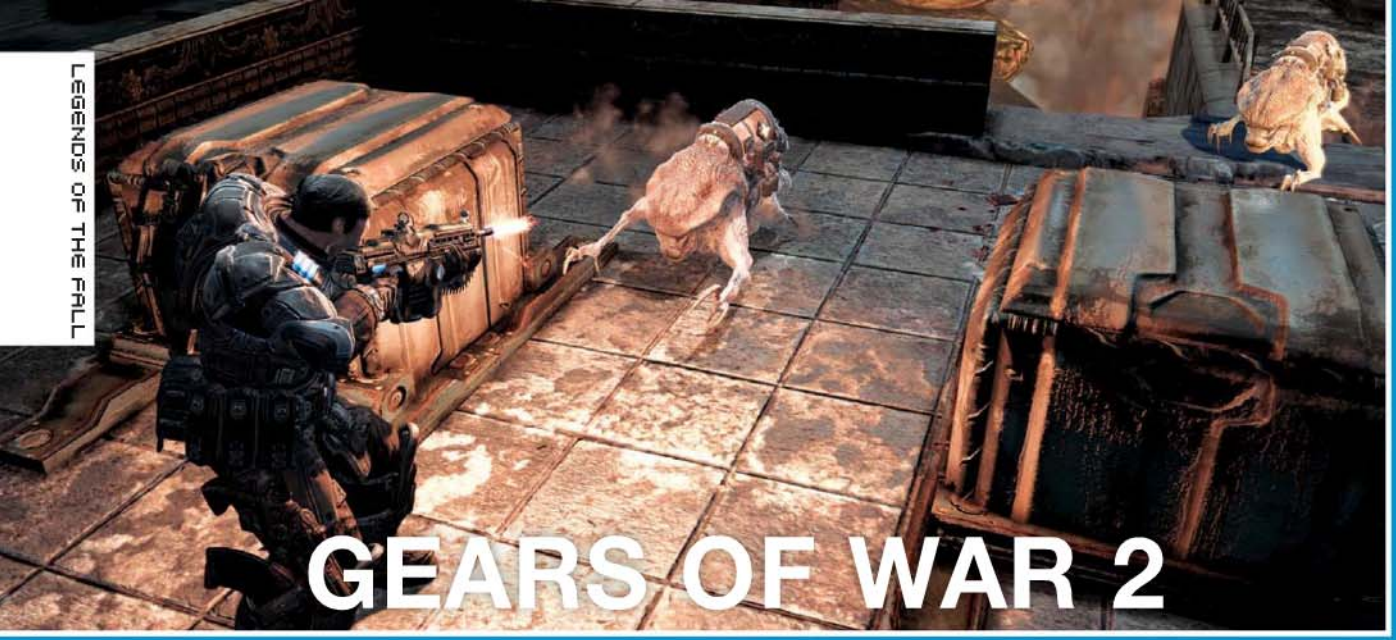
With original developer/publisher Interplay in limbo, Bethesda, makers of 2006's outstanding *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, are helming this one and have given it a modern facelift, turning the formerly isometric, turn-based game into a stunning first-person affair. Dedicated fans needn't fret, though: Bethesda's reimagined *Fallout*'s singular look faithfully, and recent demos have proven that the combat—while more action-heavy—still allows for the tactical decision-making that helped make the originals so great. *Fallout 3* has lots of haters in the fan community, but we're hopeful. After 10 years of waiting, we want to believe.

THE LAST REMNANT

■ **Platform:** XB360 (and eventually PS3) ■ **Publisher:** Square Enix ■ **Release Date:** November 2008

East does West

Sure, this is a risky prediction—but just like the mavericks behind this ambitious Japanese take on Western role-playing, we *don't* play it safe. Inspired by the deep customization in fare like BioWare's *Mass Effect*, Square Enix aims to fuse expressive Japanese visual design with Western gameplay sensibilities—and on a grand scale, too. We're talkin' army versus army in epic, full-on *war*. Don't take this for some throwaway vanity project, either—Nobuyuki Ueda shows true passion, describing the fight to green-light *The Last Remnant* as "one of the toughest things I've had to do as a producer." Also, Executive Producer Akitoshi Kawazu is famed for his bold design decisions—and while he did helm the disastrous *Unlimited Saga*, he also guided the vastly underrated *Romancing Saga* series. His teams do *nothing* halfway, either succeeding brilliantly...or failing spectacularly. We're betting on the former here.



GEARS OF WAR 2

■ **Platform:** XB360 ■ **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios ■ **Release Date:** November 2008

War—what is it good for? Vehicles and more multiplayer mayhem

Gears of War 2 has plenty to live up to—the first offering was surprisingly popular online despite its barebones multiplayer offerings. The sequel looks to add more features with A.I. bots and a new five-player cooperative mode called Horde, in which you hop online with up to four squadmates and battle through waves of enemies in an experience that's described as "*Geometry Wars* meets *Smash TV*." If it captures *Geo Wars*' just-one-more-game addictive nature, consider us hooked. Meanwhile, the single-player campaign will pick up where the original left off, as Delta Squad attempts to take out the Locust invasion before the human enclave of Jacinta is destroyed. Luckily, our heroes won't have to hoof it everywhere: They get the chance to pilot a flying Reaver and eventually a gargantuan Brumak to rain destruction from on high.

MIDNIGHT CLUB: LOS ANGELES

■ **Platform:** PS3/XB360 ■ **Publisher:** Rockstar ■ **Release Date:** October 2008

The best way to drive around L.A. without actually going there

It's not any one particular thing that makes *Midnight Club: Los Angeles* a standout title—it's one of those "everything comes together so damn well" situations. Think of the fun you had racing around *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s fictional Liberty City in snazzy fake-but-obviously-based-on-the-real-thing cars. Now, change that to racing around a fine, open-world re-creation of Los Angeles in real cars. Throw in some crazy-in-depth car customization that lets you create sparkly purple on gold Aston Martins, and a wide variety of race types (including a freeway race that has you zipping around and against freeway traffic like in *To Live and Die in L.A.*). Finally, top it all off with some snazzy looks and you've got *MC:LA*. Of course, none of these things individually make this a standout racer, but like *GTA4*, the way they all come together will result in comments like, "I remember *Midnight Club: Los Angeles*. Now *that* was a damn fine racing game."

■ **Platform:** PS3/XB360 ■ **Publisher:** Ubisoft ■ **Release Date:** December 2008

Welcome back to the jungle

Far Cry 2 just might pull off that whole "let's make a gigantic open-world first-person shooter" idea. The concept's certainly ambitious: dump players into 50 square kilometers of Africa, tell them "All you have to do is find and kill an arms dealer named the Jackal," and let them make their way from there. Crazy technologies like fire propagation, A.I. buddies that live or die based purely on your decisions, jammable weapons, roaming animals, destructible environments, and a self-generating story are there to make everyone's *Far Cry 2* experience a combination of the words "unique" and "awesome." If Ubisoft's Montreal A team pulls off all these ideas, *Far Cry 2* will be remembered as the definition of the open-world FPS.

■ **Platform:** Wii ■ **Publisher:** Nintendo ■ **Release Date:** November 2008

Shake, shake, shake. Shake your Wii-mote

We know—your no-doubt hardcore tastes have you shaking your head in disgust. After all, in a gaming generation where popular rhythm-action and music-simulation games come with instrumentlike peripherals and focus on complex gameplay, *Wii Music*'s polar-opposite approach almost seems like a slap in a core gamer's face. But its "music for dummies" controls—no matter how you shake and twirl your Wii Remote, you'll still successfully play any song from the preset list of tunes—and seeming lack of challenge are exactly *why* we think *Wii Music* will reign supreme. It's a given that it'll sell like hotcakes—and, for better or worse, we're predicting that it will see action at every family get-together. Can't you already see the YouTube videos of "Baby plays 'Mario Theme Song'"? We can.

DLC SIDEBAR

Get acquainted with the finest downloadable fare headed to WiiWare, PlayStation Network, and Xbox Live Arcade this fall.

SOCOM: Confrontation

PSN • October 2008
Sony's squad-based online shooter finally advances to the PS3, offering 32-player action across 12 international locales. Homebodies can download the full game from PSN, but diehard fans will want to cop the Blu-ray release to score the new PS3 Bluetooth headset.

Fat Princess

PSN • Winter 2008
This 16-player offering blends a class-based capture-the-flag concept with a cartoony, blood-soaked top-down action-RPG. The goal is to fatten up your royal (making her harder for foes to lug) while trying to kidnap the opposing side's (ideally svelte) damsel.

Flower

PSN • Winter 2008
Games rarely get as trippy (or relaxing) as this esoteric offering that has you directing a gust of wind via Sixaxis motion controls. It's your job to guide airborne petals across landscapes, germinating blossoms in your wake.

Banjo-Kazooie

XBLA • Fall 2008
Rare's beloved Nintendo 64 classic will bring its time-tested, *Super Mario 64*–inspired hop 'n' bop action to the platformer-deprived Xbox 360 to coincide with the launch of *BK: Nuts & Bolts*.

Super Street Fighter II: Turbo HD Remix

PSN/XBLA • Fall 2008
This high-resolution, online-play-enabled remake has been delayed to hell and back...but we remain hopeful for a bug-free launch this autumn.

Mega Man 9

WiiWare/PSN/XBLA • August 2008
Capcom's blue bomber kicks it really old school in this all-new yet purposefully antiquated tussle against Dr. Wily's evil robot creations.

NARUTO: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM

■ **Platform:** PS3 ■ **Publisher:** Namco Bandai
■ **Release Date:** October 2008

You can't keep a good orphan down

To ignore the fourth game in developer CyberConnect2's long-running *Naruto* series on PS2—and now PS3—would be folly indeed. Whether you're invested in the motivations of Naruto and company or not, this is one of the hottest-looking games we've ever seen. While the previous PS2 games owed a bit to Nintendo's *Smash Bros.* series, *Ultimate Ninja Storm* breaks free of the former games' side-scrolling trappings and explodes into full-3D water-running, monster-summoning, jutsu-using, tag-teaming, all-combat, all-the-time mayhem. Yeah, we've all seen the stylish cel-shading visual technique before, but not like this. In what's gotta be the ultimate measure of fan service, CyberConnect2 has taken each of the character's signature moves and gone crazy with them. Play this game around people who aren't into *Naruto* and watch as their eyes pop out of their head. A true showcase for a high-def entertainment system and a hell of a lot of fun to play, *Ultimate Ninja Storm* will be *the* manga/anime-based game that actually stays in your collection.

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

■ **Platform:** PS3/XB360 (also on Wii/PS2/DS)
■ **Publisher:** Eidos ■ **Release Date:** November 2008

The best of both of Lara's worlds

We've mentioned before how developer Crystal Dynamics' takeover of the *Tomb Raider* franchise was going to be huge. And if any game's going to define that decision, it'll be *Tomb Raider: Underworld*. Crystal's previous entries, while good, never excelled in all facets. *Tomb Raider: Legend* was great at turning Lara into a bona fide action-movie heroine—at the expense of exploration. *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* was a fantastic exploration game that neglected the combat side of the formula. In that whole "third time's the charm" type of deal, *Underworld*'s going to blend the two together. Based on Crystal's track record, we're confident that *Underworld* will be remembered as the one where Crystal got everything right—and kept Lara relevant.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

■ **Platform:** PS3/XB360 ■ **Publisher:** Ubisoft
■ **Release Date:** November 2008

Even the Prince could use a hand

Plenty of games have attempted the computer-controlled-partner thing—with mixed success. Either your A.I. counterpart required far too much hand-holding (making you play the role of babysitter) or had too much freedom (inevitably leading to frustration when your partner acts like a fool). *Prince of Persia* may just have A.I. co-op nailed, though, with the introduction of its female support character, Elika. Dressed in white and possessing some magical powers, she feels very reminiscent of *Ico*'s Yorda—except Elika actually, you know, *does stuff*. She can help you cross chasms, fight in battle, or even save your life if you step off a cliff. But the beauty is that it's all kept straightforward—calling on her requires a simple button push, which, in various contexts, performs different actions. Combine that with the sweet-looking cel-shaded animated style and we smell a winner.

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ANIMAL CROSSING: CITY FOLK

■ **Platform:** Wii ■ **Publisher:** Nintendo ■ **Release Date:** November 2008

Another addictive stroll through town, but with big-city dreams

It's hard to pinpoint what, exactly, is so captivating about this social-simulation series. Is it the endless hours of fishing, bug catching, fossil digging, and gardening? The strange and humorous neighbor animals—nosy and needy but nevertheless charming? Or is it your bulbous-headed in-game character and its increasingly cluttered house that ultimately keeps us visiting our *Animal Crossing* towns day after day? Regardless of the reason, one thing's certain: It's addicting. From the series' start on GameCube through its handheld success on the DS and now to its return to home consoles on Wii, we have no doubt that *Animal Crossing* will, yet again, charm the pants off us. Besides the new city area to explore—full of boutiques and relatively bustling with action—*City Folk* adheres to the series' formula. And the ability to chat online via the WiiSpeak microphone is a (small) step in the right online-multiplayer direction.

LEFT 4 DEAD

■ **Platform:** XB360 ■ **Publisher:** EA Games ■ **Release Date:** November 2008

They had us at "co-op multiplayer zombie apocalypse shooter"

We're pretty much mad fiends for anything involving zombies, so *Left 4 Dead*, which is about four players—called Survivors—cooperatively going through a level teeming with the undead and merciless Infected, already has the concept going for it. The fact that it's coming from the team behind *Counter-Strike* just cements its future-legend status. Because teamwork's ingrained in the fundamental design (you'll need to work cooperatively for healing purposes and for handling certain ambushes), going lone wolf translates into instant death. What also helps is the A.I. director system, which somehow manages to maintain perfect horror-movie tension by pacing out the Infected to come in waves—while also giving Survivors a "breather" in between. During our hands-on time, the game realized that every player was near death and extremely low on ammunition, so it responded by doling out the Infected in smaller and slower groups.

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1930's
ALL BLACKS
JACK GRIFFITHS

> EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON PREVIEW

LEVEL HEADED

A primer on getting creative with Sony's innovative DIY platformer, **LittleBigPlanet** By Shane Bettenhausen

Platform: PlayStation 3

Publisher: Sony CEA

Developer: Media Molecule

Release Date: October 2008

GOING PLANETSIDE

Ever since it first debuted to rapturous applause at 2007's Game Developers Conference, *LittleBigPlanet* has become the industry's most hotly anticipated, paradigm-shifting buzz magnet. As a simple side-scrolling platformer starring an expressive anthropomorphic beanbag named Sackboy (or Sackgirl, for those seeking burlap-sack gender equality), *LBP* appears modestly charming, but the game's true depth lies in its stunningly deep level editing and sharing tools. *LBP* allows you (and up to three friends) to simultaneously create your own original stages, objects, and enemies in real time, either while you're all huddled around one TV or online via the PlayStation Network.

But before you can even begin to wrap your head around *LBP*'s elegant level-creation toolset, prepare to undergo some crucial on-the-job training. After customizing and accessorizing your avatar, you'll then have to complete the game's first set of professionally constructed Story Mode stages, which are accessed from a branching map screen straight outta *Super Mario World* (complete with a visual cue denoting if a level has multiple exits). Here, you'll learn the gameplay basics: running, jumping, grabbing, dragging objects, and the crucial foreground-to-background 3D movement (despite the apparent 2D gameplay, action takes place on three distinct horizontal planes). Since a realistic physics system underlies *LBP*'s hop 'n' bop action, don't expect it to feel exactly like an everyday *Mario* or *Sonic* jaunt. Jumping, in particular, requires a little practice, as your vertical leap goes considerably higher than a lateral one.

As you venture through these stages, you'll also uncover oodles of raw materials, decorations, and functional objects for use in Create Mode. Plus, you'll get to see how these elements have been implemented in functional stages—the game is scalable enough to allow for levels ranging from simple, single-screen coordination challenges à la *Mario Party* to complex, multipath platforming stages rife with enemies, vehicles, secret areas accessible only by multiplayer posses, and massive boss monsters. Once you've experienced enough to get inspired, it's time to get your hands dirty with your own *LBP* masterpiece. While you'll certainly want to return to Story Mode later to unlock additional construction fodder, you should prepare to lose several hours forging your first creation. Turn the page to gaze upon our virgin voyage into the stormy waters of creative freedom....

I MADE THIS

When you first venture into *LBP*'s Create Mode, prepare for a battery of hands-on tutorials that teach you the ins and outs of creating, deleting, and modifying items. While the prospect of forging a level that's unique, fun, and attractive might seem daunting, these bite-sized editing lessons (triggered whenever you try to use one of the various tools in your handy "Popit" menu) are an absolute must. Seriously, you're forced to ace each exam before you can actually utilize individual editing instruments. But don't fret: These lessons are brief, entertaining, and best of all, worthwhile, as you'll unlock a bundle of additional goodies after solving each one.

Also, while you may be tempted to fly solo in order to convey the purity of your grand inspiration, we suggest inviting a buddy or two along for the ride—having multiple Popits going in unison allows for more efficient construction...assuming your pals are willing to go along with your master plan. And even if they're not cooperative (very possible with four players onscreen, all trying to impose their will), at least Player 1 has the sole ability to undo any edit by simply pressing left on the D-pad.

Look in horror at my senses-shattering first attempt at an *LBP* level using only the materials I'd unlocked after playing the first set of Story Mode stages. I (along with GameVideos.com's David Ellis) crafted this monstrosity over the course of three hilarity-filled hours, and I was pleasantly surprised by just how playable it turned out. Perhaps the lessons I learned will help prepare you for your new career as a freelance level designer.

EDITING TIPS:

1 Choosing the right material

You'll amass a vast assortment of different building materials, but use care when choosing the right one for your level. *LBP* features a highly realistic physics system, so flippantly placing big, heavy slabs of concrete around your stage will quickly result in a domino effect that leads to tragically flattened Sackboys. Here, I've chosen to begin my level amid ribbons of lightweight polystyrene packing material. It's both harmless and fun (because you can pick it up and toss it around), and I've placed it on two of the game's three horizontal planes to give players a quick heads-up on the importance of 3D movement in this world.

2 Get ready for your close-up

If you want to import your own images into *LittleBigPlanet* (and trust me, you do), you're going to need a PlayStation Eye camera. Plastering objects with whatever you hold in front of the lens is a cinch, and it's the simplest way to give your creations a personalized edge. Here, I've created some spongy wheels adorned with Angelina Jolie, a tower featuring *The Hills*' Lauren Conrad (check out the zoomed-in shot below), and some additional architecture emblazoned with a tasteful *Playboy* centerfold.

3 Create multiple paths

I love platformers that encourage exploration by offering multiple paths of varying degrees of difficulty, so I've created a few options here. Less adventurous Sackboys can stick to the ground-level seesaws, but more daring folks can attempt to grab on to the spongy pink cylinders and scale the wall. But the true daredevils will latch on to those wildly spinning windmills, using their momentum to take the expert-level high road.

4 Simple obstacles can be fun

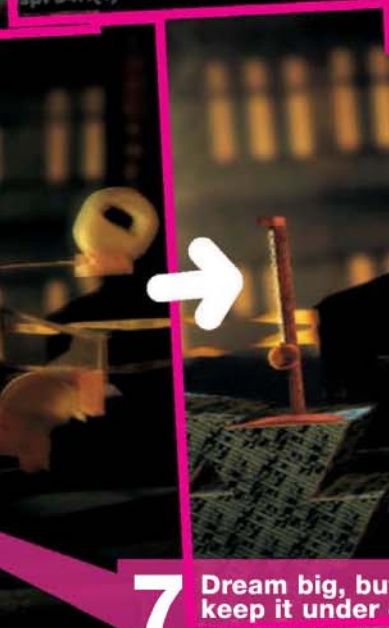
When you first start editing, you'll soon learn that forging complicated, multipart obstacles isn't always easy—expect to routinely switch into Play Mode in order to test-drive your creations. Sometimes simple challenges can provide surprisingly fun gameplay. Here, a random red stiletto heel, a steep hill, and a precarious chicken drumstick collaborate to offer a potentially tricky jumping hazard.

5 Those aren't mistakes—they're opportunity-stakes

This crumbling mountain of crap didn't start out looking like this. But you'll soon discover that the best-laid design plans often end up collapsing after you take too many liberties with *LBP*'s grounded-in-reality physics. My attempt to offer a hidden subterranean passageway went awry, causing my huge hill to collapse onto itself. Rather than rewinding that misstep, I opted to embrace the "destroyed beauty" aesthetic that made *Gears of War* so damned popular. Perhaps, one day, I'll go back and try to complete my alternate path. But until then, I've used the game's music-editing tool to remix one of its peppy tunes into a dissonant, spacey jam that's triggered as you scale this summit.

6 Add a wicked jump

After you blaze through the Story Mode's exhilarating skateboard jump, you'll be totally inspired to replicate (or even outdo) that awesome stunt. Turns out it's not as easy as it may appear—I made multiple edits to this leap, switching it from tandem motorcycles to a lone skateboard and then carefully shaving down the ramp to assure that it had enough momentum to clear the jump. Unfortunately, you need at least two players to operate this in its current form. I'm disappointed that I wasn't able to forge the spectacular, roller coaster–like track of my dreams, yet I'm determined to work up to that in the coming months.



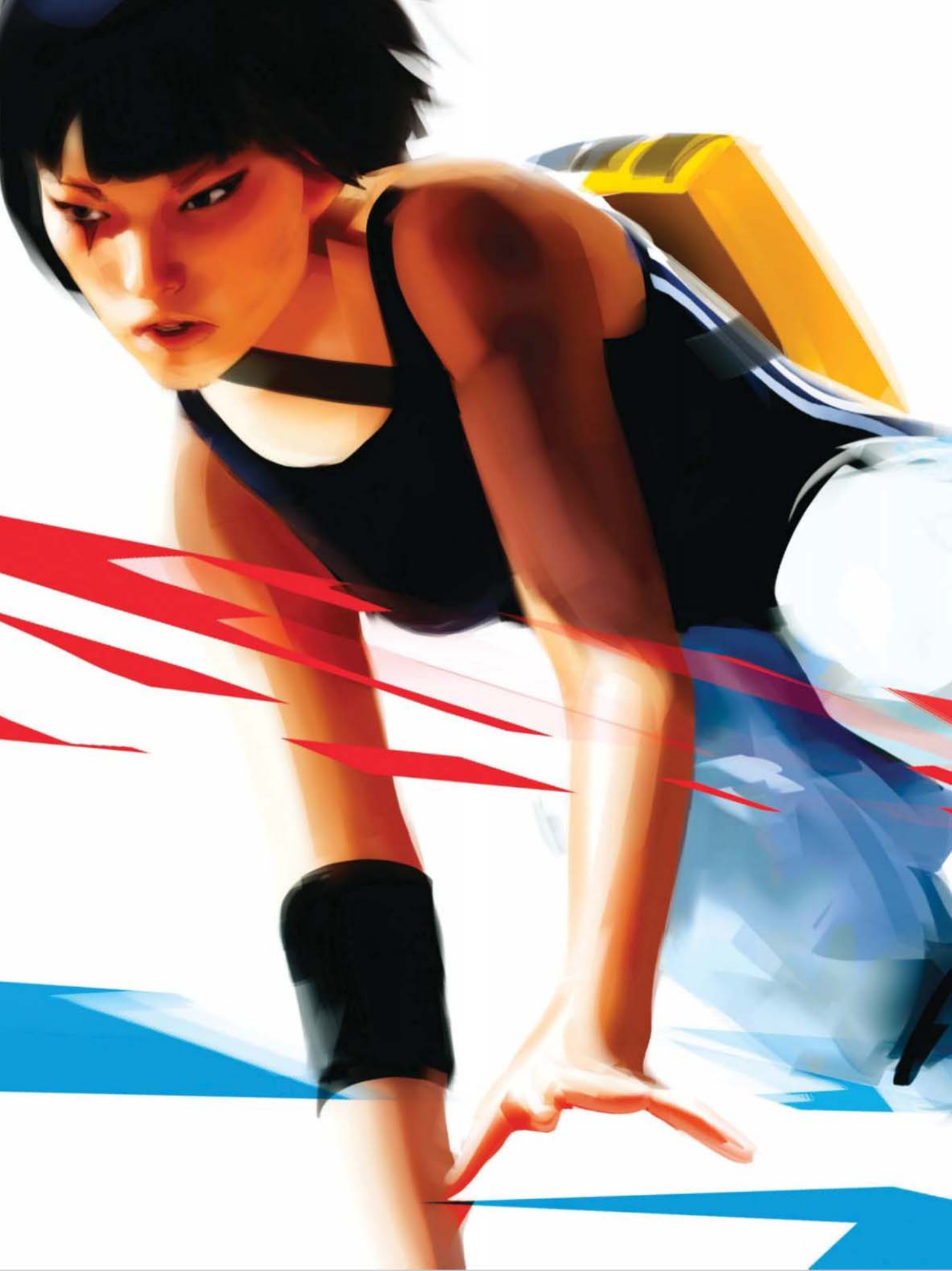
8 Bring the pain

Even though players will likely freak out when they reach my level's sadistic final act, I simply had to experiment with some of *LBP*'s more pernicious elements. This includes the lazily swaying (yet totally invincible) ghost that provides the final line of defense before the level's end. A more advanced brand of enemy creation allows you to make foes with specific weak points and abilities. The stage ends, appropriately enough, with a triumphant flagpole.

7 Dream big, but keep it under control

While messing around with some moving platforms and conveyor belts, I discovered that they could be fused together with spongy material... and that their innate movements combined to form this giant, unpredictable platforming puzzle. Scaling this constantly shifting monstrosity requires some serious dexterity. But be careful when crafting such autonomous structures—before I corralled this beast to a relatively safe section of my stage, it leapt to the left and began wreaking havoc on my previous architecture.

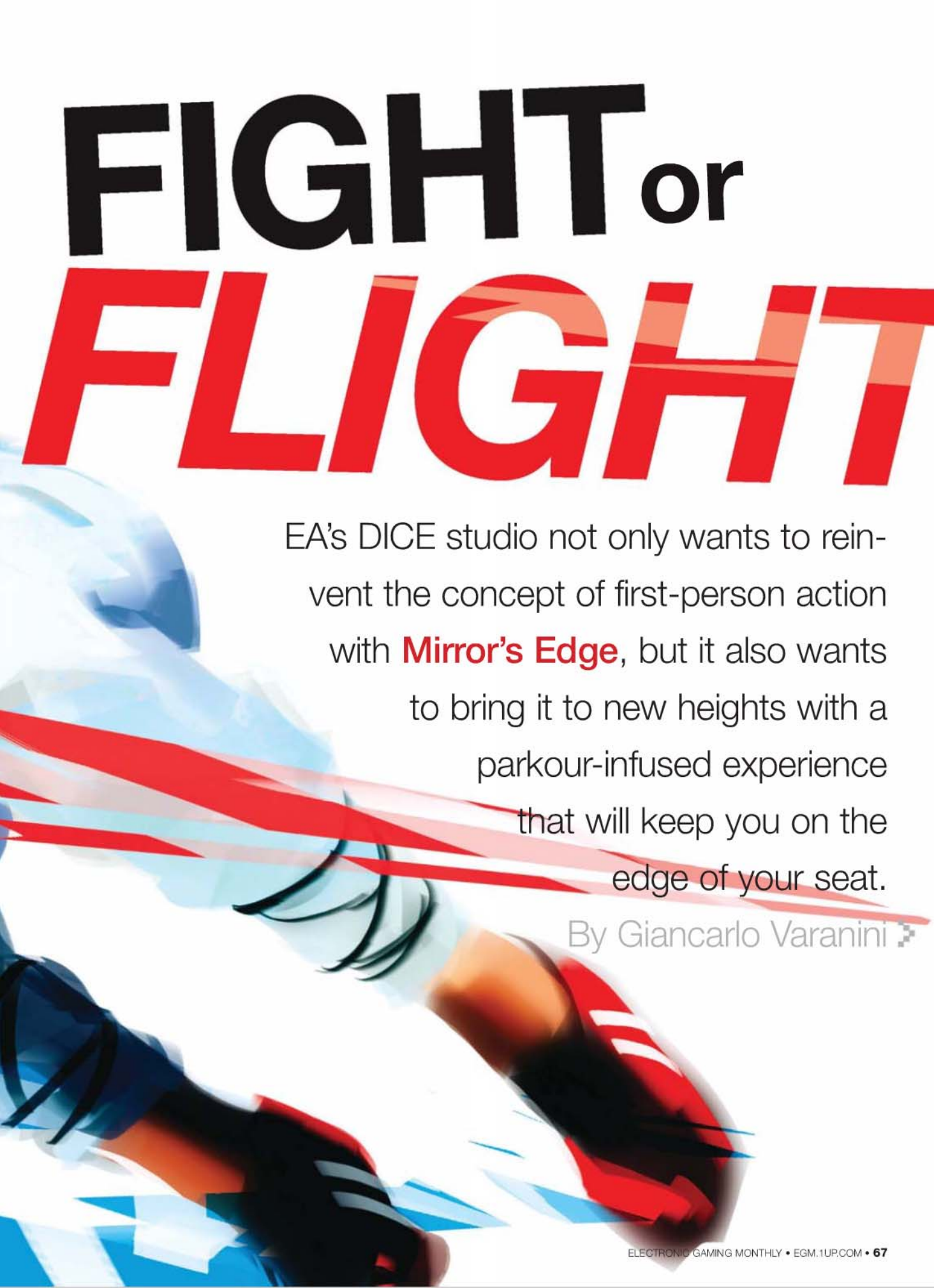
EGM Extras: *Can't get enough* LittleBigPlanet*? Head to* EGM.1UP.com *to monitor our progress as budding level creators.*



FIGHT or FLIGHT

EA's DICE studio not only wants to reinvent the concept of first-person action with **Mirror's Edge**, but it also wants to bring it to new heights with a parkour-infused experience that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

By Giancarlo Varanini



THE POLICE COME BARRELING OUT OF A DOOR on the far end of a pristine rooftop, forcing you to run toward the opposite end, where death stares at you from the concrete 40 stories below. You take cover behind some air ducts to hide from the gunfire and hope that some kind of exit presents itself, but there's nothing—that is, until a helicopter swoops down to monitor the situation. With no other choice, you take a deep breath and sprint toward the aircraft, thinking that this might be the end—you might not make it. But with a leap of faith and a little luck, you grab hold of the helicopter's landing struts as it flies away, which grants a brief respite until the cops track you down again.

That's just one of the many heart-pumping scenarios that Faith, the quick and nimble protagonist, faces throughout *Mirror's Edge*, a first-person action game that appears to have been inspired by a number of elements, not the least of which is the awe-inspiring—and often dangerous—experience known as parkour. But, as it turns out, *Mirror's Edge* originally didn't have a magic-bullet idea behind it—no one on the development team at Sweden-based DICE woke up one day and said, "We're doing a first-person parkour game." According to Senior Producer Owen O'Brien, even from the beginning, they felt a clear need to do something that wasn't simply another *Battlefield*, DICE's first-person shooter series. "It's risky having a studio built on one franchise, because if that franchise fails, then everything fails. It's a desire not to have all your eggs in one basket," he says. "The easiest thing for us to do would've been a *Battlefield* redressed, or a clone, and say it's our new [intellectual property]. We probably would've been quite successful, but it wouldn't really be a new IP. People would've just thought it's another version of *Battlefield* with cowboys and Indians or whatever... which might actually be cool."

Still, *Mirror's Edge* partly owes its existence to *Battlefield*. "We started off prototyping this game in *Battlefield 2*," O'Brien says. "We built this urban environment, and we saw these people jumping out of jeeps, running into the buildings or the underground. Vehicles became less important, and what we wanted to do was move up and down quickly on foot. That's where the desire to do something with movement in first person came from. It kind of grew out of that."

Taking a look at the track record, most first-person games that focus on traditional action elements as opposed to shooting typically haven't been received or executed well, with the possible exceptions of Namco Bandai's *Breakdown* and Nintendo's *Metroid Prime* series. But, surprisingly, this wasn't DICE's biggest concern in the early stages of the game's development; rather, it was the idea that if the team couldn't get first-person movement to work—and work well—then the entire project would be a failure. "I'm paraphrasing, but there's something along the lines of 'If you want to discover new land, you have to lose sight of your own homeland for a long time.' That's kind of where we were, because we left the first-person shooter and went off to the mythical island of first-person movement—not knowing if it existed or not," O'Brien says. "The problem with first-person

■ Parkour creator David Belle jumps around in French flick *District B13*.

What's Parkour?

The art of movement

The modern version of parkour was developed by French actor/stuntman David Belle (pictured above)—it's based on the idea of using only your natural athletic ability to move from one point to another, emphasizing fluidity and efficiency to keep injuries at a minimum. Most popular displays of parkour, as seen in films like *Casino Royale* and numerous Nike commercials, show people leaping from rooftop to rooftop, but the idea can be applied to everyday exercise, too.

movement before was that it was always something other developers tried to add on to a first-person shooter, and when it didn't work well, they just fell back to bigger guns or whatever. We didn't have that, so we just had to keep going. There wasn't just one thing that made it work; there were lots of little problems to solve, whether it was simulation sickness, the field of view, or the feeling of moving."

In fact, motion sickness—the feeling of nausea some people experience while playing first-person games—proved to be of particular interest to Art Director Johannes Söderqvist. "I've been thinking about this a lot, since I have this tendency to get carsick. To me, it comes down to the amount of control that I have—the predictability of the moves. I've noticed it in games where the controls aren't based around skill. The game does something for you while you're running, or you have a lot of outside influences on the body or car or whatever you're using. Then I have problems," he says. "But I think in *Mirror's Edge*—what people don't get from the trailers and so on—is how much skill is involved and how much you actually decide on your own. When I play the game, I decide what's going to happen, and I know what's going to happen. My brain blends in with what the game does, and it becomes predictable. I don't get sick."

The reticule in the center of the screen may have something to do with this as well. While it mainly indicates when you can use the game's version of slow-mo bullet time (called "reaction time" in *Mirror's Edge*), turning it off may not be such a good idea for those prone to motion sickness. "It's like a ballerina doing pirouettes," O'Brien points out. "If you have a focal point, it's OK. Also, the camera is simulating eye movement rather than head movement, and I think one of the mistakes people made in the early days of first-person movement was to stick a camera on [the chest as opposed to the head]. So even if you're vaulting over something, your eyes stay focused on where you're going. The other thing is the field of view, which is 90 degrees in *Mirror's Edge*. But in most first-person games—because of the atmosphere those games want to create—they want claustrophobia, but for us, we want you to see the whole world and more of your body."

Aside from its combination of first-person perspective and acrobatic action, something else that sets *Mirror's Edge* apart is its world—or more specifically, its vibrant look—which emphasizes relatively simple and straightforward visuals as opposed to the grittier look found in most of today's first-person shooters. "[O'Brien] told me early on that when we take screenshots from the game, 'I want people to recognize it almost instantly.' That's a great start. That sets *Mirror's Edge* up for being kind of bold—it really had to look different," Söderqvist says, recalling the initial planning phases for *Mirror's Edge*'s look. "And my wish was to get away from the standard gaming template of that juvenile, pubescent look of big, hulky guys and T and A. We wanted to do something that would attract even a broader audience. Plus, I came from *Battlefield 2142*, which was very gray and drab, so I really wanted to do ›

■ *Mirror's Edge*'s story includes other runners—most notably Celeste.

something with color."

And he did exactly that. "[Söderqvist] produced this mock-up of a white city with vibrant colors and said it was an example of what the setting could look like," says O'Brien. "And I asked, 'What? A very white city?' and he said, 'I'd like to do that so the colors would jump out at you.'"

The colors in *Mirror's Edge* do more than serve as accents for walls, billboards, pipes, or staircases. Colors direct you and give subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) hints of paths that are available to Faith. But, by Söderqvist's own admission, working with a relatively limited palette to create a unique look while blending it with the gameplay was quite difficult. "Part of it is doing color in a way that it doesn't become too vulgar. Some of our areas are really strong and in your face, but at the same time, it can't look garish, like a circus tent—all colors, all the time," he says. "It has to be balanced with something that's very monochromatic. I think one of the main things that's made this possible is the lighting technique, so we can get the color balanced and stuff like that. Without that and without the gradients and shadow detail, the game wouldn't look as good as it does."

"There's a phrase we use in Swedish—'damaged by your work,'" Söderqvist says. "You get really anal about details. You see faults in fonts, colors, or whatever. I see that instantly because I'm trained to do that. Now, you can imagine a highly skilled criminal or a SWAT guy would develop similar skills. They'd have a way of seeing the environment. [O'Brien] compares it a lot to Jason Bourne. Where you might see a pen, Jason sees a stabbing weapon. We wanted to bring that thought into the game using color and art style, so the theme of the art direction is ultimately centered on heightened senses—what it would be like to be that person."

Of course, the fact that this person, Faith, is essentially as agile as Spider-Man didn't make things any easier, not to mention that her movements must react to just about everything in the environment, whether it's a fence, a set of stairs, or simply a single pipe. "In a sense, we're actually making a skateboarding game. You should be able to interact with everything. It's really strange if you can jump over one obstacle, but you can't jump over another because it's a little bit higher," says Senior Animator Tobias Dahl. "We have to think about that constantly and place stuff where it feels natural and where you can interact with it without having too much difficulty."

What really seems to pull all of the action together is how much of Faith's body you see at any given time—and how it looks when you see it. When her arms pull up on a ledge or her legs compress when she hits the wall after speeding down a zip line, it looks incredibly convincing and goes a long way toward connecting you to Faith and her skills as a parkour specialist. But, interestingly, none of these movements are actually natural, as *Mirror's Edge* uses very little motion capture—most were hand-animated. Additionally, the animators had to manipulate Faith's model in such a way that it looks natural from a first-person perspective, but if you

Rollin' with DICE

Senior Producer Owen O'Brien shows us around DICE HQ and tells us what you need to check out to get into the Mirror's Edge mood

Imitating Life

To say DICE employees have a nice view is an understatement. The company's Stockholm, Sweden, headquarters not only overlooks a major waterway, but it also has a clear shot of the city's beautiful Old Town. Interestingly, this location and *Mirror's Edge* have something in common—Sweden's legislature recently passed a law enabling the country to monitor e-mail and phone calls for security purposes, much like the government in the game.

Read

"I think a lot of people on the team are avid comic book fans, so you can see it seeping into various aspects of the game. But there was no specific comic or book that influenced the game. Having said all that, I would recommend the *Lucifer* comics from the point of view of a world where good and evil are not as clearly defined as you'd think."

Watch

"*Run Lola Run* was an influence for the urgency and pace of the chase as well as the humanity of the lead character. The *Bourne* films have also had an influence when it comes to Faith's ability to disarm enemies and quickly perceive features of an environment that wouldn't be obvious to a normal person. I'm a big Joss Whedon fan, so *Serenity* was an influence for the story setup—you can make other people live by your rules even if your society is better. Also [check out] *Buffy*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Alien* for strong female characters that appeal to females as well."

Listen

"An unpredicted and simple texture of sounds trigger instincts; your body has already reacted to what your mind is still trying to process. With these tools of inspiration, Audio Director Magnus Walterstad aims to immerse the player into the world of *Mirror's Edge*. Key influences are *Soil Festivities* by Vangelis and *Leaving Home* by Solar Fields."

Visit

"New York [shown here] was one inspiration for the scale of the game and the powerful sense of vertigo. Tokyo's organic structure, particularly when it came to the rooftops, has lent a lot to the level-design process. There was no one big influence on the visual look of the game, as it's really an amalgam of all kinds of things, from the clean streets of Singapore to the whitewashed villas of Greece."

■ Sometimes, there's just no place to hide. The best way to take on enemies is to isolate them and then finish them off.

were to view that same model in third person, it would look completely awkward. "We did pencil drawings of what people would see onscreen and asked if they understood what was going on because you have to get more of the body visible onscreen than you normally would," O'Brien says. "Normally, when you're hanging, you wouldn't see your arms, but [you see them] in our game. It's cheating, but it feels right."

"We tried motion capture, but that's not what's happening. Your eyes compensate in weird ways by looking at stuff while running in real life," Dahl explains. "It's easy when you have a gun sticking to the bottom-right side of the camera, but now, from time to time, we have to cheat and show hands there to indicate to the player that you're doing something."

Still, guns are very much a part of the recipe in *Mirror's Edge*, and they appear onscreen much like they do in any other first-person game. Whenever police or SWAT members confront Faith, she can either run (a smart alternative when enemies come in groups) or fight. Naturally, she has a number of acrobatic melee moves in her arsenal, including a slide kick and off-the-wall jump kick, as well as standard punches. But by far her most effective move is the disarm—a maneuver that not only takes out enemies in a single, fluid animation but also gives Faith the ability to take and use whatever gun the enemy was carrying.

Weapons played a bigger role in the game early on, but as development progressed, members of the team recognized that it didn't fall in line with its "opposite of *Battlefield*" approach. "It took a long time for people to get their heads around the idea that DICE was going to do a game without vehicles, and it took an even longer time to get their heads around DICE doing a game that wasn't focused on guns," says O'Brien. "We were going for the 'female Jason Bourne' kind of thing. It's not that Bourne doesn't use weapons, but he just uses them as a means to an end and then usually dismantles them and throws them away. That's what I wanted to go for. I still wonder if we should've done it without any weapons whatsoever, but I like giving the player the option. If we get a lot of feedback from people saying they'd like a game with no weapons, maybe that's what we'd do for the sequel."

But right now, DICE has all of its energy focused on tweaking and perfecting what's there in the current incarnation of *Mirror's Edge*, and there's certainly no denying that they've come up with something that'll appeal to a broad spectrum of people not just because of the way it looks but also because of the way it plays and how fluid it all feels. Even in the first several minutes, there's an immediate temptation to go as fast as possible—the game does such an excellent job of conveying a sense of urgency and making you feel as though you can do just about anything. Your only limit is your skill—something that becomes abundantly clear when you hold your breath and take that first major leap from one skyscraper to another while a helicopter tries to hunt you down.

The Story So Far

The mind behind the mirror

Mirror's Edge is set against the backdrop of an enormous city under the tight control of a totalitarian government that monitors information exchanges and other activities under the guise of a safe, clean metropolis. Protagonist Faith is one of several "runners"—members of an underground association that relays information while avoiding government detection. Her sister, who happens to be a cop, is framed for a murder she didn't commit, so Faith sets out to free her and uncover what really happened. We spoke with Rhianna Pratchett, daughter of famed sci-fi author Terry Pratchett and writer for *Mirror's Edge*, to get her thoughts on the story, its characters, and its overarching message.

EGM: How do you approach writing for a game like this?

Rhianna Pratchett: Each project's different for a huge number of reasons. Often, this is down to how much work's already been done on the story prior to your involvement, the way in which the narrative folds into the gameplay, and the general roller-coaster ride that is game development. Usually, my job is to work with what's already there in the game—be it characters, story ideas, level design, etc. If it's not there, then I have to help create it. So, sometimes you're just adding flesh, and sometimes you're working from the bones up. There's usually a lot of back-and-forth work trying to make gameplay and story sit together well, and that's not always an easy partnership at even the best of times.

EGM: The themes in *Mirror's Edge* seem to deal with hot-button issues, such as government control over information. Will we see an emphasis on that throughout the game, and how do you balance between trying to convey a message and lecturing people about the potential dangers of such a world?

RP: For my part, the themes were very much born out of quite small and subtle changes that I saw in my home city of London or read about around the world, spun forward to the extremes. Although, what we've tried to emphasize with the story is that what's sinister about this city isn't so much the authorities taking control of people's lives, but the people letting them do that. Surrendering almost intangible liberties for tangible benefits: good schools, safe streets, clean and reliable public transport, or the best housing. This is a city that really *works*—and, in many ways, can be seen as good. But "good" isn't the same as "right."

This is certainly reflected in the story, but it's not something that we've tried to hammer home. We're not trying to be preachy. This is a game, after all, and players can interpret as much as they wish; we don't force that on them.

EGM: What's the most rewarding aspect of being able to help bring a world like *Mirror's Edge* to life? Do you have any favorite characters?

RP: It's rewarding when you can get people exited about a narrative world and genuinely interested in the adventures of the characters that inhabit that world. As far as my favorites go, Faith's great, and so is Mercury, her tracker, who's one of the main voices you hear in the game. But I always have a soft spot for the bad guys, and a lot of stuff I've done previously—*Heavenly Sword* and *Overlord*—had a lot of emphasis on its antagonists.

EGM: Do you ever play through the games that you've written scripts for?

RP: Sometimes, yes. Although, from a narrative perspective, I think it's great if you get to do that while the game's in production—that's the best way of telling what's working and what isn't. But that's not always possible. I helped beta test parts of *Overlord*, which was an interesting experience. I'll definitely play *Mirror's Edge*, although I'm not entirely sure how good I'll be. I foresee a lot of falling off buildings in my gaming future.

■ About half of *Mirror's Edge* takes place out on the rooftops, while the other half's indoors—like in this massive storm-drain tunnel.

Speed Racer

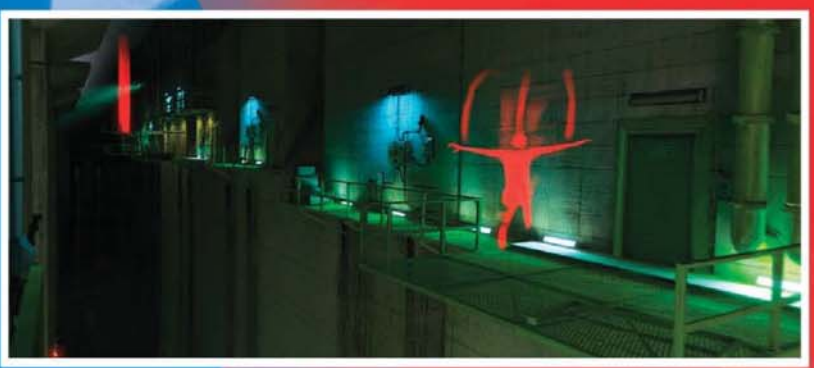
Just do it...time attack style

■ *Mirror's Edge* Producer Tom Farrer

In addition to a full single-player mode that spans several levels, *Mirror's Edge* also includes a time-trial option where you race to secure the best time in sections derived from various parts of the game. You can also upload your time and ghost data and race against other competitors from around the world. "We've taken all of our favorite sections, stretches, and parts of the game, and we've cut them into a whole series of courses that are unlocked as you play through the single-player game, but also as you play through the time-attack mode itself," says Producer Tom Farrer. "If you want to unlock the more advanced and difficult tracks that have higher qualifying times, you need to play both. We kept them bite-sized and short so you can grind them and play them and get faster and faster. It's not like playing an entire level. That's going to take you a long time to nail perfectly. Obviously, we've got the qualifying times and the star rating for every player, so the faster you are, the more stars you get."

A word of warning: This mode is incredibly addictive. It's one thing to play through a level alone, trying to get your own personal best time as you hit all of the checkpoints, but once another player's faster ghost data is thrown into the mix, it turns into an entirely different beast. Not only will you see some moves and shortcuts you never thought were possible, but you'll also spend a good amount of time attempting to create new ones that the other player didn't even think to try in order to shave a few milliseconds off your time. Let's put it this way: It's one of those modes where, if you screw up even once, you'll go directly to the menu and hit restart so you can do it over and over again until you get it right.

"This was one [of] the things that we really had to think about while building the single-player maps as well, because a lot of the routes and spaces are really subtle," Farrer says. "Even in a small space, there's a way to do it quickly if you can find it. On the first playthrough, you're not going to find those kinds of things, but here, they're all there to be found, explored, and exploited, so you can go as fast as you can."



■ Ghost data in a time trial is represented by a red figure that leaves behind footprints, so you can literally follow in its footsteps to each checkpoint.

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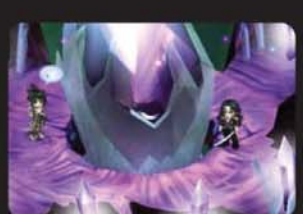

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Cutting Edge

A cover is born

Since EA and DICE were kind enough to make this month's *EGM* cover to our specifications, we thought we'd show you some of the initial mock-ups they did based on our original concept. With few dynamic angles left to exploit, we didn't want to follow the same path as previous *Mirror's Edge* covers out there. So, taking the "mirror" concept to the extreme, we suggested seeing Faith's face reflected in pieces of a shattered mirror—which, after considerable tweaking, resulted in the explosive cover image you see now.

Gotta Have Faith

How the lead character in Mirror's Edge came to be

Faith owes her existence in *Mirror's Edge* to a happy accident. She wasn't the intended lead, but when she first appeared, everyone knew she was a perfect fit. "We had a multiplayer mode as part of the game early on; she was one of the multiplayer characters, and we just fell in love with her. We took her out of that context and worked on her some more and made her the lead," says Art Director Johannes Söderqvist. "Faith's grown a lot through the two years since she was 'found,' so to speak."

And where'd her look come from? "Her shoes—that was just the concept artist having some fun, and the split toes are cool. And the tattoo on her arm came from her being a tech girl, like a hacker. We didn't want something like the yakuza—the dragons or the flowers," he adds. "I wanted something more unique that would key into who she is as a person. If she was into electronics, she'd have a tattoo that looks like a circuit board. You can interpret it as a map of the city. It just ties in with her and the city."

It's a Brave New World

Sid Meier's classic strategy game reinvented in the world of Civilization IV.

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Tobacco Reference
Mild Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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Civilization IV Not Required For Play

FIRAXIS GAMES

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Games for Windows

REVIEWS

Sabers of light, piñatas of might, a Dyackian plight, and good games for geeks

Not to make a habit of it, but consider last issue's *Soulcalibur IV* scores—from Shawn Elliott and myself—amended. In light of *SC4*'s fantastic online play (which, as disclosed in our review, wasn't implemented in our early review copies), we hereby bump our respective B+ scores to As. Incidentally, this new trio of As (taking into account lead reviewer James Mielke's own A score) also earns *SC4* our coveted Gold award. Trust me—if you haven't picked up *SC4* yet, you're *really* missing out.

—Ryan Scott
Executive Editor, Reviews

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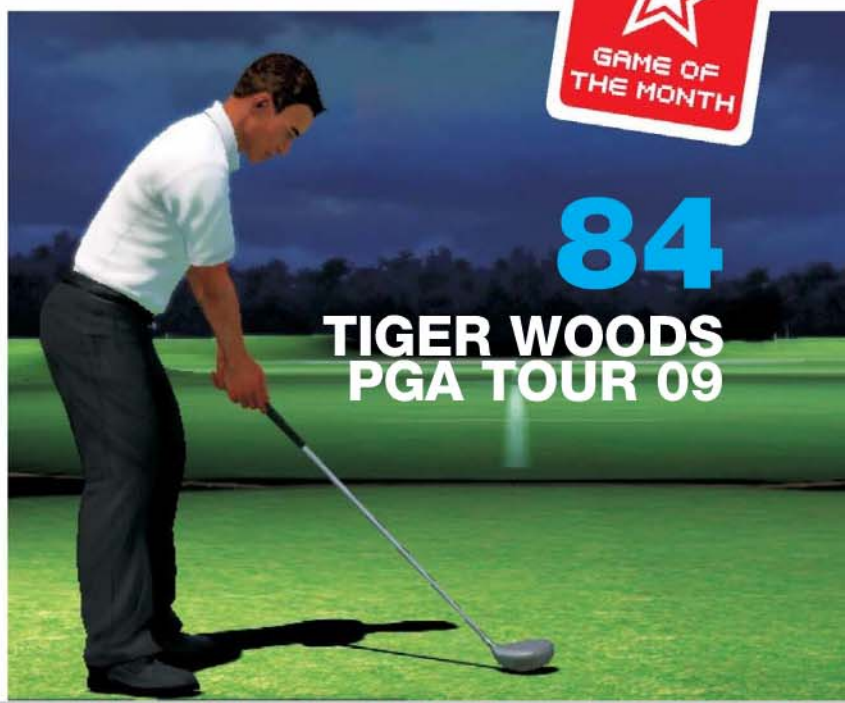
VIVA PIÑATA: TROUBLE IN PARADISE

TIE
GAME OF THE MONTH



84
TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 09

REVIEW CREW
1UP NETWORK

ABOUT OUR REVIEWS

We believe that games are more than the sum of their parts, so we tackle them subjectively, as experiences.

You can always find our reviews (or lead reviews, in the case of three-man reviews) on 1UP.com, as well as reviews we didn't have room for in print.

GRADES/AWARDS

A+ to **A-** EXCELLENT
B+ to **B-** GOOD
C+ to **C-** AVERAGE
D+ to **D-** BAD
F TERRIBLE

The following awards are based on these grades:
Platinum: All A+s
Gold: All A-s and up
Silver: All Bs and up
Game of the Month: Highest-rated game with all "Good" scores
Shame of the Month: Lowest-rated game with all "Bad" scores

THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

Check out all editor blogs and bios at ReviewCrew.1UP.com

James "Milkman" Mielke
Editor-in-Chief
Mielke's recent Journey marathon has prompted him to go on a *real* journey—to Japan, during picture-taking time. Jerk!
Now Playing: *Journey*

Greg Ford
Managing Editor
Geometry Wars 2, *Space Invaders Extreme*, *1942: Joint Strike*...Ford hopes the cheap/awesome trend continues for, like, ever.
Now Playing: *Arkanoid DS*

Jennifer Tsao
Group Managing Editor
Jennifer's getting excited for the busy season—not just all the new games, but massive, massive amounts of television.
Now Playing: *Geometry Wars 2*

Giancarlo Varanini
Senior Editor
Giancarlo visited Sweden for this month's cover story, and all he got was this stupid Allen wrench.
Now Playing: *PixelJunk Eden*, *Soulcalibur IV*, *Lego Indiana Jones*

Ryan Scott
Executive Editor, Reviews
Deep in the eye of the storm, Ryan's making preparations for the hairy holiday-review season.
Now Playing: *Soulcalibur IV*, *Galaga Legions*

Nick Suttner
Associate Editor, Reviews
Nick spent the month giving Batman voice lessons, to sound less stupid in the next film....
Now Playing: *LittleBigPlanet*, *Psychonauts*, *Braid*, *Geo Wars 2*

Anthony Gallegos
Reviews Assistant
Anthony's Mexican heritage always taught him that piñatas are for beating, not for breeding.
Now Playing: *Viva Piñata: TIP*, *Braid*, *Space Siege* (PC)

Jeremy Parish
Senior Editor
8-bit *Mega Man 9*, a new *Bionic Commando*, but no Servbot-based RTS? Capcom, Jeremy's tears are *everyone's* tears.
Now Playing: *Dragon Quest IV*

Also on deck...

Shane Bettenhausen
Sr. Executive Editor
Philip Kollar
Editor, News
Andrew Pfister
Producer, Podcasts

Ray Barnholt, David Ellis, Andrew Fitch, Gord Goble, Joe Rybicki
Staff Reviewers

■ Bowser's throwing gas... for all the wrong reasons.

Wii

MARIO SUPER SLUGGERS

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo ■ **Developer:** Namco Bandai ■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

G. FORD

B

GOOD

The Good: Solid controls, player chemistry
The Bad: Brain-dead baserunners, not very balanced
Please Use: The optional Nunchuk controls

Power surge

+G. FORD: *Mario Super Sluggers* has all the markings of a typical Mario sports game, with chirpy voices, saccharine eye candy, special-move-busting characters, and fun, arcade-style gameplay...which isn't a bad thing. And thankfully, this brand of baseball makes a nice transition to Wii, utilizing simple *Wii Sports*–esque pitching and swinging motion controls, which are usually on the mark (though frustratingly, the occasional flick doesn't register). Whether it's due to more-forgiving motion controls or just some tweaking, hitting's much easier and rewarding here than in its GameCube predecessor.

The one-player challenge mode is nothing special, featuring some fetch quests and menial baseball tasks, but the on-field action is always enjoyable, especially since *Super Sluggers* adds some depth by making player chemistry a factor. Match up characters (a couple of Kongs, for example), and they'll receive jumping and throwing boosts in the field—and bonus items to use at the plate. The fields also show some creativity—while Mario Stadium's expectedly bland, parks like DK Jungle have barrels rolling through the outfield and giant flowers that put players to sleep if they tread too close. Baseball's a sport with unique fields, and that's embraced here—to an almost absurd degree.

The requisite minigames round things out, each focusing on different gameplay mechanics, such as hitting Bob-ombs for home runs or delicately throwing pitches through multiple walls of ice for maximum points. Meanwhile, the Toy Field game is a little more fleshed out and certainly entertaining, supporting up to four players in a hitting and fielding game with a goal of earning the most coins.

Super Sluggers succeeds and fails as most Mario sports games do: Its quick, arcade-style action is easy to get into and fun, but this comes at the expense of the nuances you'll find in a sim. Between the creative fields, chemistry boosts, and supermoves, any given contest has a lot going on, delivering a hectic but entertaining experience. Lousy A.I. baserunning and some balance issues can dampen the excitement, but *Super Sluggers* is good for a matinee.

■ We went to a fight, but a hockey game broke out.

Xbox 360 (also on PS3)

NHL 09

■ **Publisher:** EA Sports ■ **Developer:** EA Canada ■ **Players:** 1-12 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone 10+

GORD

B+

GOOD

The Good: Be A Pro mode is both innovative and appealing
The Bad: Occasionally weep-worthy A.I.
Rookie Alert: More tutorials, more guidance, clearer button-assignment explanations

Bigger, better, and still quirky

+GORD: What can you say about a game that delivers *so* much, institutes *so* many new features, and looks *this* fluid yet continues to exhibit several of the same maddening gameplay glitches we've seen for years? You can say it was expected.

NHL 09 is a stunningly grandiose affair. It doesn't so much allow you to play hockey—it allows you to experience it from every angle. If you're a control freak, you'll love the new dump-ins, stick lifts, 360-degree sweep checks, and defensive-posturing opportunities—all of which build upon an already colossal roster of actions. If you're old school, set the gamepad to *NHL '94* and travel back to a simpler time when two buttons did it all. Budding management types will flock to the game's Dynasty mode, and multiplayer fans should appreciate the lag-free environment and unadulterated immensity (including 6-on-6 team play) of its online component.

Now, if you prefer seeing hockey through one pair of eyeballs, the new Be A Pro mode covers you. Here, you begin your professional hockey life on an NHL farm team (or alternately, you can adopt an already established player) and progress through a career where gameplay experience and favorable coaching reviews garner apportionable attribute upgrades. Granted, those reviews *are* pretty darn forgiving—yet it's surprisingly challenging to control just a single player, adhere to on-ice visual cues, and get all of the little things just right.

But wouldn't it be nice if more time was spent fleshing out long-running gameplay quirks? Wouldn't it be nice if bizarre last-minute goals and empty-net whiffs weren't so frequent, if the best defensive approach weren't to hack players to the ice, and if the programming didn't so often dictate which shots bulge the twine?

Still, *NHL 09* proves more than ever that a gamepad makes a great hockey stick. It welcomes veterans, newcomers, and front-office suits with equal enthusiasm. And when you're totally consumed with moving Columbus left winger Rick Nash toward the net, pushing off a defenseman with one hand, pulling a deke with the other, and burying it over a prone goaltender, much can be forgiven.

PS3/XB360

STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

Midi-chlorian count: pretty low

■ **Publisher:** LucasArts ■ **Developer:** LucasArts ■ **Players:** 1 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

GIANCARLO
C
AVERAGE

MILKMAN
C
AVERAGE

ANDREW P.
B-
GOOD

The Good: Force powers
The Bad: Combat
The Horror: Sound glitches in PS3 version, and getting stuck in walls in both

+GIANCARLO: Sadly, we're not treated to any real unleashing of the Force in this latest entry to the *Star Wars* saga, which delves deeper into previously unexplored post–*Episode III* and pre–*Episode IV* plot territory. In fact, a better name for the game would've been *Star Wars: The Force Mildly Contained*—only in the first few levels does the Force truly feel like the ultimate weapon, something that separates you (Darth Vader's not-so-secret apprentice) from the rabble of stormtroopers, Rodians, and Felucians. As it turns out, some of these enemies find a way to negate your best Force powers with energy shields and other technical sorcery, which effectively gimps the one genuinely entertaining aspect of *TFU*'s third-person action.

Sure, it makes sense that you can't just pick up every single enemy and fling them around—the game would've been way too easy if that were the case—so you're forced to find other ways of defeating your dumb opponents. Still, it's just not very fun when a game called *TFU* falls back on sloppy combat mechanics as a means to challenge you...especially when vaguely unresponsive controls (imagine playing an online action game where a slight bit of lag haunts you the entire way) render combo attacks less than useful.

Still, it's a nice-looking game, and *Star Wars* geeks will undoubtedly enjoy the story to some extent—as long as they can excuse some manipulation of canon to accommodate it. Just don't expect the action to back it up.

+MILKMAN: I'm conflicted about *TFU*. On one hand, it's easy to see the effort that the developers put into things like the story (making it feel as plausible a part of the *Star Wars* mythology as *Knights of the Old Republic* ever did), the ambitious graphical detail, and the significant use of the actual Force; it all makes *TFU* seem like a game deserving of the *Star Wars* name. On the other hand, it's hard to overlook the rough execution. The levels are so huge that they border on sprawling—but in that bad way that makes you wish the level would just *end* already. The cam-

■ Regular stormtroopers are the best fodder for your Force powers.

era forces you to do *all* of the work, too, making every step feel twice as laborious as it should. Finally, character animations and enemy A.I. are so clunky that the whole thing feels like a mediocre third-person action game from 1999—when, in reality, it's a mediocre third-person action game from 2008. An ambitious—yet ultimately dissatisfying—effort.

ANDREW P: To expand on what Giancarlo said, it's a bit of a tease to give me these amazing grip and push Force powers, only to then introduce an enemy type who just *happens* to have an energy shield that can negate them. Admittedly, it makes sense to encourage players to vary combat tactics, but when all of these enemy variations attack at once (and then continue to hit you while you're down), it's precisely the time when you want to really unleash. Instead, I made for the nearest hiding spot while my Force energy recharged and looked for stormtrooper fodder to pick off so I could replenish my health. Some fearsome Sith I turned out to be.

Even if the combat pretends to be smarter than it actually is, the surroundings are still beautiful enough to smash your way through, and the plot—while I'm not sure my inner geek can accept it as official *Star Wars* canon—is interesting enough to see through to completion...especially the climactic fight, which occurs at a very familiar location for fans of the *Star Wars* films.

> COOL CAMEOS

Like pretty much every *Star Wars* game in existence, *The Force Unleashed* features a shocking amount of fan service—but in this case, it's clear that the developers had some fun with the lore. Keep an eye out for Jar Jar Binks frozen in carbonite, a mounted Salacious Crumb head, and the appearance of a very popular character that hasn't been seen for a while. And, no, we're not talking about that rather portly dancer from *Return of the Jedi*.

EGM Extras: *Trouble finding secret costumes for Vader's apprentice or extra lightsaber crystals, you have? Visit* **EGM.1UP.com** *and our SuperGuide to find them and to unlock other secrets of the Force, you will!*

PS3/XB360

FACEBREAKER

■ **Publisher:** EA Sports ■ **Developer:** EA Canada
■ **Players:** 1-2 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

DAVID
C-
AVERAGE

The Good: Personalized fighters
The Bad: Repetitive, button-mashing pugilism
Reality Beatdown: Fight as Heidi and Spencer from *The Hills*

If you ever wanted to punch Peter Moore...

DAVID: At first glance, *FaceBreaker* looks like a spiritual successor to cartoony arcade-boxing games like *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* or *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing*. They all feature diverse casts of eccentric boxers with bombastic moves that you've gotta learn how to counter in order to move up the ranks and win title belts. That's pretty much where the similarities between *FaceBreaker* and its predecessors end.

FaceBreaker is more casual fighter than pugilist-laden spectacle. Basic attacks—high punch, low punch, throw, and the all-powerful haymaker—can be charged up for more powerful blows, and each character sports their own variation on this move set. Steve, the bulbous Karate Math-lete, eschews the haymaker punch in favor of a crane kick, and his ninja abilities allow him to teleport. Fights are a button masher's dream: The action unfolds too fast for any serious strategic play, and attacks follow a rock-paper-scissors approach (jabs beat haymakers; haymakers stop throws).

If you grow tired of beating down the available characters, though, you can create your own fighters. The game stitches together a reasonable facsimile from photos uploaded to your system; the process takes a long time, but it's worth the effort. Pounding your buddy's virtual doppelgänger—then laughing at him while he sits next to you—is pretty damn satisfying. Several included custom characters make perfect sense (like EA Sports head honcho Peter Moore), while other inclusions (*The Hills*' Heidi and Spencer and Kim Kardashian from *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, among others) are completely baffling.

Despite *FaceBreaker*'s simplistic fighting mechanics, the computer-controlled characters get pretty relentless. Even at the lowest difficulty, winning the higher-rank championship belts borders on impossible. It's frustrating to watch opponents suddenly block, parry, and counter almost any attack, making for a minimal chance of victory. *FaceBreaker* is fine if you want to mindlessly mash buttons and beat the hell out of friends, but if you want a deep, balanced boxing game, look elsewhere.

PS3/XB360

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 09

■ **Publisher:** EA Sports ■ **Developer:** EA Tiburon
■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

JOE
A
EXCELLENT

The Good: More reliable controls, simultaneous multiplayer
The Bad: New commentators are simply awful
The Troubling: No skills? No problem! Just buy top-notch gear online!

Links reawakening

JOE: Though I'm a big fan of the *Tiger Woods* series, I wasn't thrilled with last year's edition. While the game packed in lots of new features, the designers' tinkering resulted in a clunky marriage that combined an unpredictable, *Hot Shots Golf*–style "three-click" system with an oversensitive analog swing.

Well, this year brings more tinkering, but this time, the planets appear to have aligned just right. The issues with swing sensitivity are addressed with a swing-feedback meter, which clearly illustrates any deficiencies in your swing (plus, the game throws in a robust club tuner to help counteract any tendencies to draw or fade your shots). And the three-click meter seems a bit more forgiving this time; while it still goes supersonic if you break 100 percent power, I found it easier to make clean shots than in last year's game.

This strong foundation makes it easier to appreciate all of the extras layered on top. Take the enhanced integration with EA's GamerNet: Now, when playing a hole in any game mode, you may see a message pop up indicating that another player has issued a GamerNet challenge for your current location. Top it and your feat's automatically entered in the books.

I also dig the new skills system. Each of the four categories (power, accuracy, short game, and putting) adjusts based on your in-game experience: Simply perform well and your skills improve. Even better, your skills actually decrease if you don't stay on top of your game. It provides a surprisingly powerful impetus to approach each shot with care.

I'm also particularly pleased with one major change to the multiplayer options: simultaneous play, where all four players take shots at the same time, with opponents' shots indicated by colored trails. This makes it possible to polish off a full 18-hole game without committing an entire evening to the enterprise.

Sadly, the previous games' excellent voiceovers have given way to two new (and embarrassingly wooden) commentators...but, really, aside from that, *Tiger 09*'s a wholehearted improvement. I'm curious to see how (and if) EA tops it next year.

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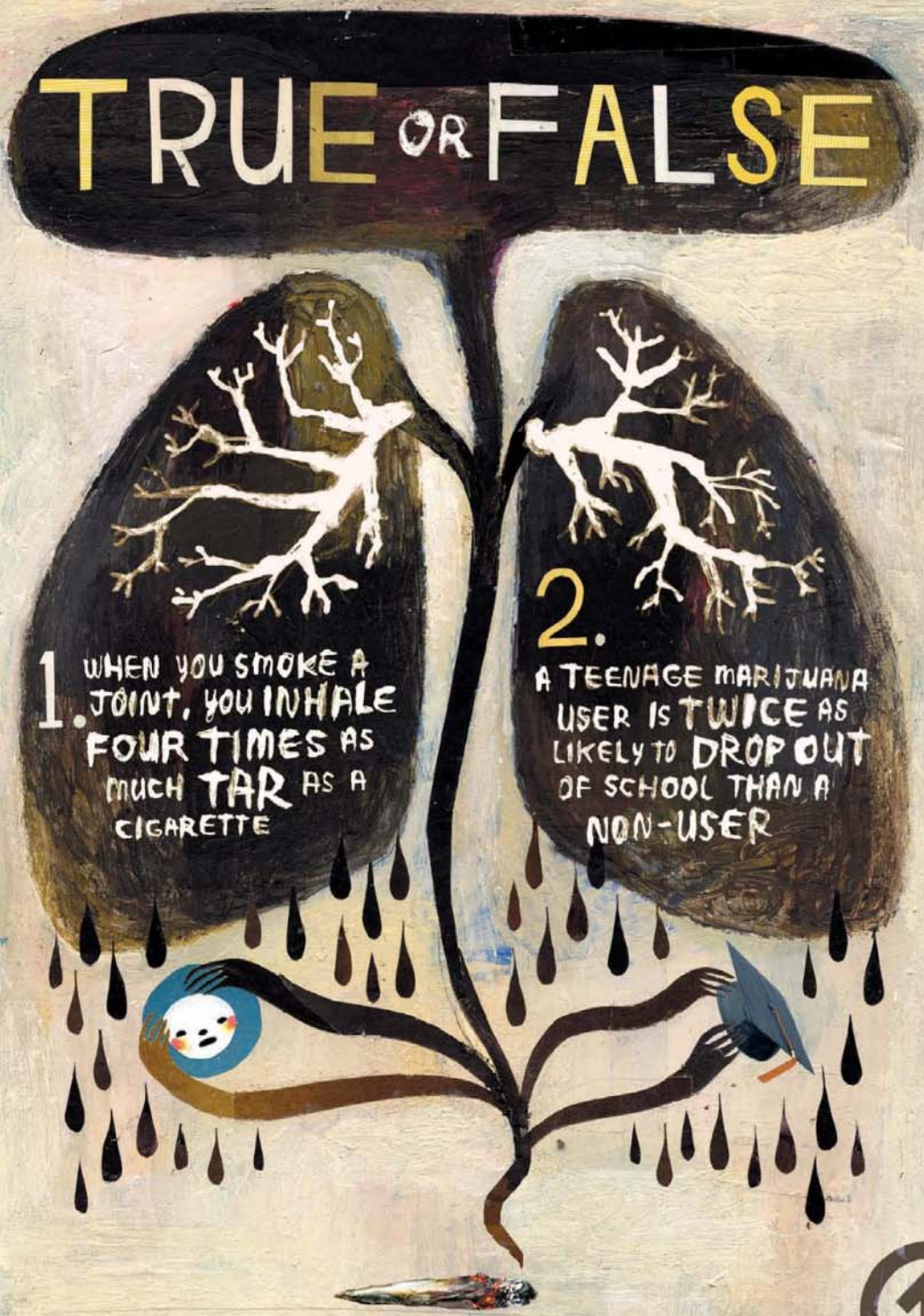

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PlayStation 3

DISGAEA 3: ABSENCE OF JUSTICE

■ **Publisher:** NIS America ■ **Developer:** Nippon Ichi
■ **Players:** 1 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

If you say you don't relate to this RPG hero...you're lying

A. FITCH
B-
GOOD

The Good: Wicked spoof on RPG clichés, smart writing
The Bad: Could've been done on PS2... or PS1
At $50: Not a bad PS3 deal

A. FITCH: Some love Nippon Ichi tactical-role-playing favorite *Disgaea* for its hardcore strategy elements—this is a series that sees you traverse 100-level gauntlets inside your own weapons in order to power them up, after all. I play mostly for the silly, over-the-top plots that ruthlessly savage stale Japanese-RPG conventions, though—much as I love the genre, I'll be the first to admit that it needs a good mocking from time to time. On that note, *Disgaea 3*'s demonic-schoolboy protagonist, Lord Mao, doesn't disappoint: He's an awkward, nerdy social recluse who's hopelessly addicted to manga and videogames. Oh, and he's also sworn vengeance on his father—who just happens to be Overlord of the Netherworld—after he deletes our young antihero's save-game data. Frankly, that's a helluva lot more relatable to the target audience than any plucky, world-saving teen.

Lord Mao plots his devilishly delicious revenge from the halls of the Netherworld's Evil Academy, which serves as *D3*'s hub area and stands in for the castles and towns of previous games. But don't expect any social-sim elements or *Persona*-style succubus dating; the new setting's mostly window dressing, and the classroom simply serves as a tactical war room.

The strategy doesn't feel quite so fresh, either, though *D3* offers a couple of twists on the formula: Geo symbols, which imbued the battlefield with myriad status effects in previous *Disgaea* entries, are now geo blocks that you can throw around and climb on. Additionally, humanoid characters can join forces with monsters to craft some pretty bizarre weaponry. The series' trademark Prinnies—exploding demonic penguins—can transmogrify into badass, laser-spewing guns. After five *Disgaea* releases in five years, though, it all feels very familiar, and I worry that the hardcore bent might leave casual players behind.

Still, while the setting, strategy, and sprite-based visuals are a tad disappointing here in 2008, they're also all quite serviceable. They're really just a means to an end: *D3*'s wacked-out, literally laugh-out-loud tale is the real star. If you're an RPG fan who's sick of feisty tomboys and spunky, giggling kids, give this one a shot.

Xbox 360

TALES OF VESPERIA

■ **Publisher:** Namco Bandai ■ **Developer:** Namco Tales
■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

A traditional triumph?

A. FITCH
B+
GOOD

SHANE
B-
GOOD

PHILIP
C
AVERAGE

The Good: Fast-paced battles
The Bad: Story deserves a better script
Bonnie Pink: Her J-pop theme rocks

A. FITCH: With its choppy, chugging overworld and interminable loading, *Tales of the Abyss*—the previous console release in Namco Bandai's decade-old action-role-playing series—felt like a modern jet trapped in the chassis of a WWII fighter plane, an intended epic constrained by its antiquated PS2 hardware. *Vesperia* takes the otherwise solid foundation laid by *Abyss* and crafts perhaps the finest franchise entry to date.

Sure, Shane might mock the traditional tropes and nitpick alleged "lo-fi" visuals, and while the game's got its lows (an uneven translation and not quite as many endgame goodies as I'd like), the highs shine so brightly that any extended criticism feels silly. From the snappy, strategy-laden, fighting-game-style combat (more *Soulcalibur* than *Suikoden*) to the quick, intense pacing to some surprisingly mature plot twists, *Vesperia* delivers. In fact, I'd say this tops *both* of *Final Fantasy* mastermind Hironobu Sakaguchi's Mistwalker efforts on 360.

SHANE: Allow me to confirm Fitch's clairvoyance by deriding *Vesperia*'s standard-issue narrative and blurry, detail-deprived graphics that seem to have crawled their way back from 2003. After a decade of playing *Tales* titles, I've come to expect minimal innovation from this prolific yet unadventurous franchise. Series vets should expect déjà vu from *Vesperia*'s linear town-dungeon-town progression, superfluous cut-scenes, and lame cooking minigames. Luckily, *Vesperia*'s remarkably speedy, action-packed battles elevate the otherwise average adventure into something weirdly exhilarating and addictive; level grinding is rarely this fun.

PHILIP: *Vesperia* is my first *Tales* game, so for all I know, Fitch may be right in calling it the best in the series—but that doesn't speak very highly for it. Combat flows smoothly, and some environments are a blast to explore. But these good parts are interrupted too often by droning cut-scenes that rarely lead anywhere interesting. I realize Japanese RPGs aren't known for their brisk pace, but *Vesperia*'s is so molasses-slow that it will bore most players to tears.

YOU HAVE MONSTER TALENT. TURN IT LOOSE.

This artwork was created by a graduate with monster talent.
Joe Thiel, Game Art & Design, 2007 Graduate, The Art Institute of Portland

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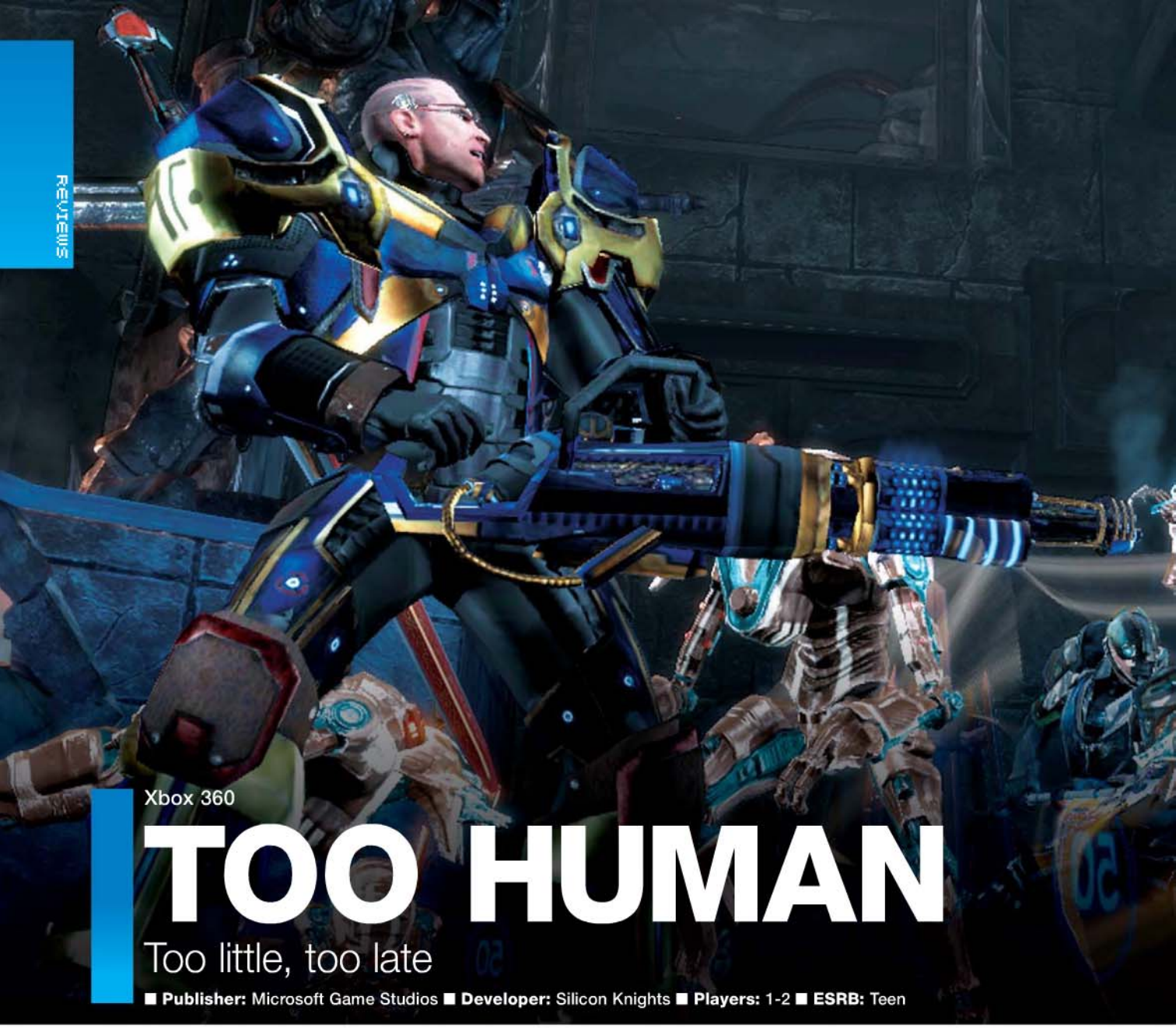

Xbox 360

TOO HUMAN

Too little, too late

■ **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios ■ **Developer:** Silicon Knights ■ **Players:** 1-2 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

GIANCARLO
C-
AVERAGE

MILKMAN
C-
AVERAGE

RAY
D+
BAD

The Good: Cool premise
The Bad: Everything feels so tedious
The Very Bad: Falling through the floor is so 1998

+GIANCARLO: *Too Human* is *not* a good role-playing game. The five available character classes (Berserker, Defender, Champion, Commando, and Bioengineer) initially offer some strategic gameplay differences because of their proficiency in certain skills. But beyond the first level, these differences become less substantial; methods for defeating enemies are largely the same for all classes because almost *every single enemy* attacks with the same rushing-horde mentality. It also doesn't help that the skill tree is limited and doesn't offer much in the way of variety for combat. But the most disappointing thing, by far, is the loot factor. The game offers no shortage of weapons and armor, but the fact that you're *always* finding better equipment makes even crafted blueprint items seem ordinary, and the whole process of sorting and equipping items—thanks in part to an inelegant inventory system—feels tedious.

Too Human is also *not* a good action game. While it deserves some applause for a reasonable translation of PC classic *Diablo*'s mouse-driven controls, its reliance on the right analog stick as a means for attack only works at the most basic level. Attempting fancy aerial attacks exposes just how inadequate and unresponsive this control method is, and long-range attacks aren't any better—it's often a struggle to get the camera into an optimal tactical position and to manually select targets. Interestingly, multiplayer action fares a little better, as long as one player focuses on guns and the other on melee weapons.

This game's simply schizophrenic; it attempts to be all these things to all people, so the end result is in dire need of polish and focus.

+MILKMAN: *Contra*, *Devil May Cry*, *Diablo*, *Halo*. *Too Human* wants to be all of these things—and ends up being none of them. The game's biggest problem is its unsatisfying controls, which rely partially on *Monster Hunter*–like melee combat mapped to the right analog stick. Feeling like a PC game shoehorned on to a console, *Too Human* tries to mix juggle-worthy melee combat with third-person shooting that recalls long-lost BioWare title *MDK2*...but gone horribly wrong.

■ *Too Human* tries a lot of things, but it doesn't do any of them particularly well.

As much of a fan of dungeon-crawling, loot-whoring games as I am, the nightmarish camera angles, lack of an overhead map (to track your partner with), and mediocre high-level loot drops sent me flying back to my experience-grinding games of choice. Conceptually, it's obvious that a lot of work went into the storyline and visual reinterpretation of Norse legends...but perhaps more effort should've gone into developing simple, satisfying controls. After all, *Diablo II*'s still popular for a *reason*.

RAY: *Too Human* starts out decently, with a nicely paced first level that makes the combat feel fast and fun. But after that, nearly everything takes a nosedive: The art design gets uglier, the dialogue cheesier, and the deaths more frequent. That last one's the real problem—whether I was spamming powerful attacks or honestly trying to be smart with combos, it barely mattered in a hailstorm of enemy arrows that would inevitably clip my character and force me to watch the excruciatingly long death sequence...*again*. And the loot whore in me didn't feel too satiated by drops that all used the same long, goofy naming structure, which makes everything blend together and feel less than special. I had no problem with the game's general length (about 15 hours), and I could deal with the camera most of the time, too—but they're not part of the big picture. If only the whole game was like the first level.

> WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED?

Too Human has an interesting cyberpunk/Norse mythology backdrop, but it's hardly explored or really even explained properly within the game. Some may have a hard time following what's going on, but it's not like it matters—the story ends abruptly and with a pretty lame and predictable climax. But what's worse is that it feels like it was cut off just so developer Silicon Knights could have something to save for future titles in what's supposed to be a trilogy of games.

EGM Extras: *Need help finding that special armor or having trouble figuring out what you should do with those runes? Venture over to* **EGM.1UP.com** *and read our* Too Human *SuperGuide for these and other helpful tips.*

■ What's better than two candy-filled gorillas? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

GOLD AWARD

GAME OF THE MONTH

Xbox 360

VIVA PIÑATA: TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Fun for anyone and everyone

■ **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios ■ **Developer:** Rare ■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

ANTHONY

A

EXCELLENT

The Good: Plenty of new creatures for the tenured gardener
The Bad: The "story" never really develops
Sharing Is Caring: Gardening with friends? Yes, please!

+ ANTHONY: The original *Viva Piñata* remains an addiction of mine; it still surprises me just how fulfilling it is to cultivate multiple gardens and complete tiny objective after tiny objective in order to attract new species of piñata—I have the same sort of experience when running quests in an online role-playing game. Which is why I love *Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise* even more. While it's not groundbreaking and is pretty much the same as the original, the myriad refinements and user-friendly changes make the game even more welcoming.

It's easy to appreciate the new interface additions, like the ability to more easily locate a specific piñata in your garden or quickly plant a certain seed. The handful of annoying and tedious actions from the previous game were rethought and streamlined, making everything smoother—and a lot more fun. Even the stuttering framerate that would occur during autosaving is mostly gone, which really helps keep your focus on working your green thumb rather than noticing how much your own thumb hurts from playing for hours on end.

Other new features more dramatically change the way you can experience *Viva*, if you so choose. *TIP* features both local and online multiplayer (two players on a couch or up to four online), but it's the community aspect that has the potential to really take off. Players can take in-game photos to upload straight to a community site or scan special Piñata Vision cards—which they can create themselves—that allow them to make instant changes in their garden, including the immediate acquisition of more coveted piñata species. I, for one, can't wait to share the gardening fun with friends. And if you're worried about someone trying to screw up your immaculate garden, you can always adjust their permissions so that they have limited interaction with your world.

If you hated the original, *TIP* isn't going to change your opinion. If, however, you somehow missed out on the piñata party the first time around, I implore you to check it out—it's certainly much deeper and more addictive than its playful visuals would lead you to believe.

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Xbox 360

GUILTY GEAR 2: OVERTURE

■ **Publisher:** Aksys ■ **Developer:** Arc System Works
■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

Over the hill

RYAN: You ever see *Halloween III*? It's a terrible movie—a lackluster follow-up to a pair of classic slasher flicks. It ignores everything one expects from the series, chucking the spooky story of a babysitter-stalking bogeyman in favor of a tale about some nutcase toymaker who manufactures a bunch of Halloween masks that melt kids' faces.

Guilty Gear 2 is a lot like *Halloween III*: After four high-quality 2D fighters (and a handful of revisions for each), *GG2* magically transforms the series into *Dynasty Warriors* with control points. OK, so that's *slightly* reductive—but if you're a *Guilty Gear* devotee expecting another beautiful sprite-based fighting game, it's not inaccurate; *GG2* will leave you scratching your head, as this game was certainly *not* made for you.

Even if you consider *GG2* strictly on its own merits, it's mediocre in most respects. The campaign mode's story is a heap of gibberish that only the nerdiest anime fanfic writer could possibly love (let alone comprehend)—something about series protagonists Sol Badguy and Ky Kiske tangling with creepy jailbait villainess Valentine over the power contained in an alternate dimension known as "the Backyard." It makes perfect sense...if you're *insane*.

And once you learn to ignore that jibber-jabber, the actual *game* part is a clunky mashup of genres. You're pitted against an opponent on a variety of smallish maps; each of you controls a main "master" character capable of wreaking all kinds of button-mashed havoc, and whoever destroys the other's base—using a variety of summoned units, purchased via your finite reserve of mana—wins. Additional mana-producing control points dot each map, and you can issue attack/guard orders to your units in an effort to secure these areas and issue beatdowns.

Problem is that neither the strategy nor combat elements are developed in any meaningful way. All but the most strategy-savvy gamers will regard the capture-and-hold mechanics as primitive, and as for the combat...well, I really wasn't kidding with the *Dynasty Warriors* comparison. *Guilty Gear 2* tries to juggle two genres, executing both at only a fraction of their individual potential. The uneven, oddball fusion might be worth a quick peek, but don't expect it to hold your interest for long.

RYAN
C-
AVERAGE

The Good: Great music
The Bad: Underdeveloped gameplay mechanics
Should've Been: An awesome 2D fighter

DS

SPORE: CREATURES

■ **Publisher:** EA Games ■ **Developer:** Foundation 9
■ **Players:** 1-2 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

Not quite what Darwin had in mind

JENNIFER: I'm excited about *Spore* on PC, and I'm a fan of simple DS games, so *Spore: Creatures* seemed promising. This stripped-down action game has role-playing elements and creature creation—you're a simple organism on an evolutionary journey, traveling from planet to planet in pursuit of your kidnapped friend. Defeating enemies along the way earns you new body parts that enable you to tackle bigger challenges.

Throughout levels on the game's six planets, you complete basic missions (return lost hatchlings to a nest, feed a starving creature specific foods, etc.) and collect a smattering of items. It's simple. It's competent. Unfortunately, it's also half-assed in pretty much every important way.

My biggest complaint is the creature creator, which just doesn't work that well. You can't easily see how new body parts affect your creature's stats, and finding the optimal anatomical configuration boils down to trial, error, and satisfaction with "good enough." Whenever I got new parts, I'd basically dismantle my creature and reconfigure it using my newest or highest-stat pieces. That meant I never got a sense of satisfaction from evolving my creature; it changed radically with each upgrade. That's fine for making a more powerful beast...but the whole point of *Spore* is evolution, and *Creatures* utterly fails to convey that.

The other big problem: No matter how hard I tried or how perfectly I placed body parts, my creature always looked ugly. The graphical style—an unfortunate fusion of 2D objects in 3D space—makes most creatures look like sorry paper dolls no matter how much care you put into their creation.

The game's obviously geared toward kids; dialogue is golly-gee dorky, and minigames involve making friends with other creatures by cuddling and dancing with them, which seems fine until you realize that's all you can do. The few unique challenges—like defending your buddies' food supply against invaders by throwing rocks at them—are either idiotically hard or just forgettable. And neither combat nor exploration make much use of the touch screen. Downloading creatures via Wi-Fi to populate your world adds a fun randomness, but it isn't enough to elevate *Spore: Creatures* to anything above "meh."

JENNIFER
C+
AVERAGE

The Good: Populating the world with friends' creatures
The Bad: Even the well-crafted creatures look a bit lame
Star Power: Befriending a beastie designed by Will Wright

■ A quaint town that needs saving? Believe it.

DS

DRAGON QUEST IV: CHAPTERS OF THE CHOSEN

■ **Publisher:** Square Enix ■ **Developer:** ArtePiazza ■ **Players:** 1 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone 10+

A winning rendition of a slime-slaying classic

JEREMY

B+

GOOD

The Good: Crisp remake of a classic
The Bad: 3D patina doesn't mask some dated elements
Zut Alors! Ze cutesy accents, zey are très overdone

+JEREMY: Aside from its PlayStation-style visuals, *Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen* isn't terribly different from the game NES owners played years ago as *Dragon Warrior IV*. But perhaps owing to the series' simple, traditional feel, its humble graphics and familiar role-playing-game mechanics feel more at home on the DS than its more daring contemporary, *Final Fantasy IV*. Or maybe it's just that rather than focusing on melodrama and innovation, *DQ* is about creating a well-defined cast of characters and an open world full of mysteries and then setting the player loose to find their way. Characters are the heart of any story, and *DQ4*'s cast is as appealing as it was 15 years ago.

The game's story is broken into multiple chapters, each focusing on a different would-be hero chosen by destiny to aid a warrior of legend on his (or her) mission to prevent the reawakening of a long-sealed evil. Each of the first four chapters is a few hours long and covers a wide swath of themes, ranging from two sisters' mission of filial vengeance to an unassuming shopkeeper's dream of making his own fortune, and these brief vignettes endear the side cast to the player before they join the true quest: the massive, open-ended fifth chapter. The overall structure is rather similar to that of *Final Fantasy VI*...except, of course, for the fact that *DQ4* actually came first.

DQ4's RPG mechanics are as familiar as they come, with random battles and turn-based combat. But the game moves at such a brisk pace and has so many interesting quirks (aforementioned merchant Torneko's unpredictable behavior, for instance) that battling through legions of monsters never becomes tiresome. It helps that the original NES game's more dated elements (like the inability to control anyone but the hero in chapter five) are scrapped as concessions to modernity. But generally, it sticks to the source material—and that's not a bad thing at all.

Dragon Quest has always been a stolid counterpoint to *Final Fantasy*: predictable but full of heart. This remake won't wow anyone with its looks, but give it a chance. It'll win you over with its personality.

+DOWNLOAD WRAP-UP+

Last-minute looks at late-breaking games and downloadable content

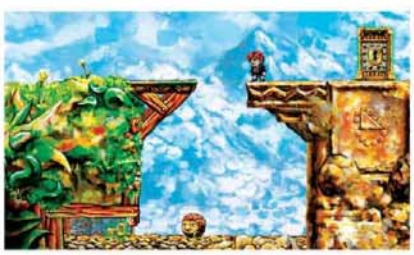
PS3/XB360/PS2

MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

■ **Publisher:** EA Games ■ **ESRB:** Teen

We've only had a few hours to get into this successor to the 2005 sleeper hit shooter, but so far, so good. The first main operation involves capturing a mansion to use as your PMC's headquarters. It's a blast to spray AK-47 bullets and fire the rocket launcher, but we're a concerned about the generous blast radius of rockets and grenades, which could be a problem in such an explosive game.

Bottom Line: A lot's changed in the open-world genre since 2005—next month, we'll let you know if *Mercs 2* has adapted.



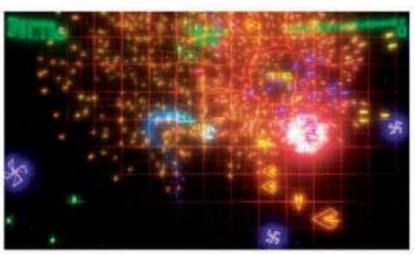
XBLA

BRAID

■ **Publisher:** Microsoft ■ **ESRB:** Everyone 10+

Regret. Guilt. Romantic expectation. *Braid* doesn't just touch upon these things in passing; rather, its narrative and clever puzzles and platforming exist symbiotically. The game rules are simple—move, jump, and control the flow of time—but their applications are anything but. Likewise for the story, which is built upon stimulating musings of life, love, and a search.

Bottom Line: Excellent but intellectually limited as a puzzle-platformer, *Braid* is truly divine thanks to its emotional depth.



XBLA

GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED 2

■ **Publisher:** Activision ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

How do you make a worthy sequel to a $5 twin-stick shooter that single-handedly defined the Xbox Live Arcade service and ensnared a generation of Achievement junkies? With six excellent modes (King and Pacifism are our new favorites), ingenious leaderboard integration, and chaotic-but-fun four-player offline multiplayer.

Bottom Line: *Retro Evolved 2* may not feel quite as balanced or as fresh as its predecessor...but it's jam-packed with enough shape-shooting fun to last lifetimes.

WiiWare

STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE: EPISODE 1—HOMESTAR RUINER

■ **Publisher:** Telltale ■ **ESRB:** Teen

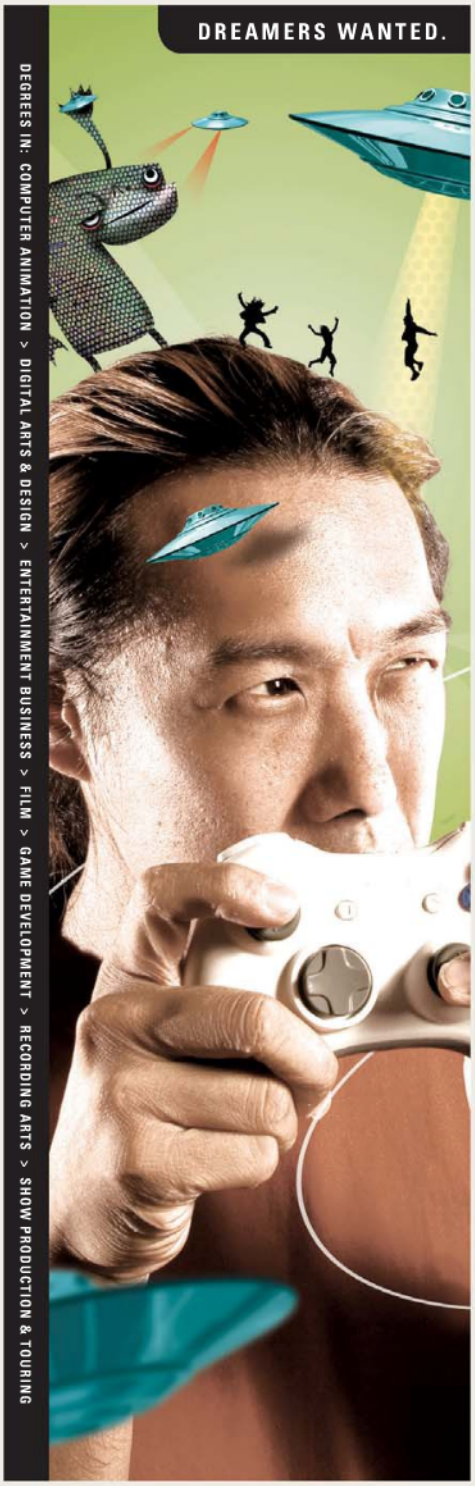
The company responsible for resurrecting the *Sam & Max* franchise brings the inaugural episode of *SBCG4AP* to the console crowd. Hilarious dialogue, clever inventory puzzles, and an easily digestible length (three-ish hours) mark *Homestar Ruiner* as the WiiWare platform's first genuine killer app.

Bottom Line: *SBCG4AP* captures the *Homestar Runner* web cartoon's signature humor style through and through. If you're a fan of Strong Bad—or adventure games in general—this one's unquestionably for you.

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for July/Aug

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores
1	Rock Band: Special Edition	Wii	B- (on 1UP.com)
2	Wii Fit	Wii	B+ B- B
3	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	Wii	A A- A-
4	Mario Kart Wii with Wii Wheel	Wii	B+ C+ C
5	Guitar Hero: On Tour	DS	B-
	How many people out there have hand cramps right now? Over 300,000 of you, apparently—*On Tour* sold more than that in its first week on shelves.		
6	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	PS3	A- A- A
7	NCAA Football 09	XB360	A-
8	Civilization Revolution	XB360	B+ A- A-
9	Final Fantasy IV	DS	B
	This is the fourth version of this game to come to the U.S., and while it potentially could reach an entirely new audience on the DS, we can't help but wonder how many people have all four versions in their collection.		
10	Rock Band: Special Edition	PS2	A (on 1UP.com)
11	Civilization Revolution	PS3	B+ A- A-
12	Soulcalibur IV	PS3	A B+ B+
13	New Super Mario Bros.	DS	A+ A B+
14	Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	Wii	B (on 1UP.com)
	With sales like these, it's probably only a matter of time before we see a *Lego Indiana Jones* game starring Lego Indy and newfound sidekick Mutt Williams.		
15	We Ski	Wii	A (on 1UP.com)
16	NCAA Football 09	PS3	A-
17	Mario Kart DS	DS	A A- A
18	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	DS	A- A A-
19	Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day!	DS	B+ B- C+
20	Soulcalibur IV	XB360	A B+ B+



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GAME OVER

Press continue for puppies, zombies, old-school RPGs, and movies

100 Retro: *Dragon Quest*

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106 Top 10: The Undead

> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

SNUGGLY BUDDY PALS

This month in cute!

THE GAME BOY ADVANCE IS BEING SLOWLY TRAMPLED TO DEATH under a stampede of beasts, and I'm not talking about *That's So Raven*. I'm talking about the onslaught of pet games happening right in your nearest video-game store. If you do your game shopping by letting out a giggle and grabbing for the cutest box, then you already know this. But the sheer number of animal-petting games has Nintendo developing a rabies vaccine add-on. Until that vaccine's released, I urge you to please avoid playing any of these games at home.

Despite the fact that it's inexcusable for me not to have invented one by now, no standard way to judge terrible games exists—even ones about puppies. So in the tradition of standardized pet evaluation, I'll be rating each of these games based on the *Transformers* scale of strength, endurance, firepower, and courage. These findings will then be covertly hidden from all forms of detection, revealed later by looking through a red plastic bookmark, and then translated into the standard rating system of *Iron Chef*, with each pet game rated on taste, plating, and originality. This will be on a scale of 1 through 10, and to avoid confusion, each rating will then be replaced with an entirely different one.

Petz: Vet

Gameplay: 1 out of 10
You play an intern at a pet clinic in a town named—get this—Pawville. This was the final name chosen from hours of brainstorming. To the writer's credit, he didn't have much time to come up with the game's town, since he became a father during production and had to think of names for his twin sons, Childboy and Sandwichwant. Obviously, they were born shortly before he wanted a sandwich. As for the gameplay, it's made up of walking to and from text menus with breaks for small talk. It's almost as if it's daring you to hate it more than it hates itself.

Graphics: 1 out of 10
I spent most of the game trying to talk my supervisor into letting me give dogs sex changes, and I found the digital renderings of this procedure almost condescendingly cartoony. Do they expect me to believe there wouldn't be a whirlwind of fur and blood? I hold this confused animal's future in my hands, and it's represented by a single frame of badly drawn puppy. Why give me the power of a god and then treat me like a child?

Sound: 1 out of 10
Try to imagine the kind of person you'd hire to write music for this kind of game. Now imagine that they blew it. If you have a better imagination than that, picture a choo-choo train that can talk but is somehow mentally challenged and is caught in a time loop that forces it to relive the same four seconds over and over. The worst part is that it knows this, so it's screaming.

Misspelling in the title: Yes, that's not how it's spelled.

Cuteness: 1 out of 10
The only thing cuter than the combination of sick animals and terrible graphics is anything. I'm not trying to sound tough when I say that I s*** cuter than this.

Puppy Luv: Spa and Resort

Gameplay: 1 out of 10
You're in charge of a pet salon in *Puppy Luv*, only it's less exciting than that. Sometimes you click a

button to feed a cat and he eats, and other times you get a minigame where you guess what kind of food it wants and then guess again if you're wrong. It's like a sick prank by destiny if you're to ever cross paths with this game.

Graphics: 1 out of 10
If you had no formal art training and you used your computer mouse to draw a dog in Microsoft Paint, these graphics would be your fourth or fifth attempt. Some onlookers might decide that they see a dog, but only if you wrote "dog" next to it and they had a master's in dog identification. What's amazing is that neither—and I said neither—of the drawings in this game are animated. Who was the speed freak who decided they needed to get a game about cat shampoo out so quickly that they didn't have time to do a third pet drawing?

Sound: 1 out of 10
Throughout the course of your first and only play session, you'll wash, feed, and groom pets. Which means these lazy idiots had to come up with a total of three sound effects or music cues. They didn't. *Puppy Luv* is like a rough draft for the worst concept ever. It's such unfinished garbage that they could've just sold me a Post-It note that said "Stupid Idea" and I'd hate it exactly the same. I'd demand an apology if I thought the sloppy bastards could finish one.

Misspelling in the title: Yes.

Cuteness: 1 out of 10
You can't shampoo ugly off. The only supplies this evil pet salon should stock are a shotgun and a mop.

Dogz 2

Gameplay: 10 out of 10
This game captures the entire saga of pet care, starting with a puppy survey. The puppy survey really is the crowning achievement of survey technology. No human will ever not want to answer questions about their favorite puppies. I think that's how they detected Terminator robots in the future. Back to puppy: After testing, buying, and naming your puppy, you will then teach it tricks. My favorite trick turned out to be "carry." It's not so much a trick as it is picking up the dog and then walking around with it. Pointless, maybe, but I liked to follow up my puppy's dazzling carry trick with a harsh scolding—I wanted my puppy to expect the unexpected. After that, I praised it for incorrectly performing his next six tricks. I'm trying to find exactly the right combination that will cause it to attack Eskimos but leave regular people alone.

Graphics: 10 out of 10
The adorable puppy graphics will remind you why you paid to simulate puppy ownership to begin with. And its playful comments—it's as if puppy itself bought a typewriter, pinned you down, and typed "joy" directly onto your eyeballs.

Sound: 10 out of 10
"Bark!" What's that? Oh, I love you, too, puppy!

Misspelling in the title: 10 out of 10

Cuteness: 10 out of 10
Maybe this game is getting to me, but is there anything more terrific than a hug from your best friend on a sunny day? I can rate this game's cuteness in 12 words: Climb in my pocket and be with me forever, Puppy the Funpuppy!

I'd demand an apology if I thought the sloppy bastards could finish one.

While Seanbaby enjoys caressing virtual pups, he's way more excited about the game he's working on: *Aquamanz: Fishy Frolics*.

These doggy games are dirty: Watch 'em pee in *Petz: Vet* (top left), wash their flea-infested fur in *Puppy Luv: Spa and Resort* (bottom left), and see 'em stand on piss-stained lines in this Wii version of *Dogz* (center).

> OLD-SCHOOL EGM

10 Years Ago...

On the cover: Star Wars: Rogue Squadron

EGM traveled to a place not so far away to see what was shaping up to be the most visceral *Star Wars* game yet. We detailed a few levels and looked at how characters and locations not mentioned in the movies (some were brought in from the books and comics) fit into the ever-expanding *Star Wars* universe.

Shame of the Month: Batman & Robin

One of the most impressive things about this game is that it was as bad as the movie. We gave a nod to the large environments that you could explore but agreed that nothing else worked. "*B&R* is more than just a mess—it's such a mess that it's nearly worth buying for the shock value," said former *EGM* editor Crispin Boyer.

The next PlayStation

The PlayStation was an unstoppable success, so as the first bits of information started to trickle out, we looked at the possibilities of the next PlayStation and asked whether or not Sony could pull off a repeat performance. (Spoiler: They did.)

> RETRONAUTS PRESENTS

A DRAGON QUEST DRAWS NEAR!

The past, future, and remakes of a classic RPG series

By Jeremy Parish

BEFORE THEY BECAME STEP-BROTHERS (*Brady Bunch*–style, in the merger that created Square Enix), *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* were the bitterest of rivals. The hard feelings have cooled in recent years, but a fundamental philosophical divide between the two games remains—in fact, it defines them. Whereas *FF* has long since defined itself as a flashy, cinematic series whose role-playing roots are often glossed over, *DQ* is quiet, simple, and conservative.

And that's just how Japan likes it. When Square Enix first revealed the upcoming *Dragon Quest IX: Protectors of the Starry Sky* on DS, American gamers freaked at the thought that the series' next chapter would be taking a step back technologically: After the gorgeous *Dragon Quest VIII* for PlayStation 2, *DQ9*'s rudimentary DS-based 3D is a true shock. Yet Japanese gamers didn't care about that—after all, the DS was the only system that anyone was playing over there at the time. No, what shocked them was the fact that this new *DQ* looked like an action-RPG. They were fine with *Final Fantasy XII* playing like a single-player MMO because *FF* has always been about tinkering with gameplay systems. But this was *Dragon Quest* they were tampering with—a national institution! Square Enix probably would've caused less of a stir by selling Tokyo Tower to the Koreans.

DQ creator Yuji Horii downplays the controversy, though. "When we first announced *DQ9*, we wanted to show off how fun the multiplayer functionality would be," he says. "At that stage, the battle system was still in development, and what you saw was a prototype. After further development, we decided to stick with the traditional battle system, as it's the most accessible system for players." Be that as it may, there's no denying the outcry. Online polls were hastily assembled, significant percentages of fans proclaimed their beloved "*DraQue*" dead to them, and Square Enix quickly compiled a new *DQ9* trailer featuring a good old-fashioned turn-based battle system. All has clearly been forgiven: As of press time, the DS rerelease of *DQ5* was closing in on a million copies sold after just two weeks.

The series' staying power is truly remarkable, especially given Japan's waning interest in games. "Maybe players feel a timeless and universal appeal in *DQ*," suggests Horii. "Just look at old animated movies from Disney. Even though the animation isn't as technologically advanced as today's, they're still very enjoyable to watch. I think *DQ* is similar in this regard. The series has always

■ *Dragon Quest* (Japan)

■ *Dragon Quest IV*

■ *Dragon Quest III* (Japan)

Screens courtesy of vgmuseum.com

been about pushing players to use their imaginations...allowing them to become emotionally involved with a countless number of characters."

In many ways, *DQ* is perhaps the single biggest beneficiary of Japan's nostalgia for Nintendo's 8-bit Famicom (besides Nintendo, of course). Known as the NES in America, the system was Japan's first major homegrown console, and Famicom-inspired merchandise and art are omnipresent in Tokyo; pseudo-8-bit games are a new cottage industry. Likewise, the original *Dragon Quest* was Japan's first major homegrown take on the RPG; while American imports like *Wizardry* and *Ultima* had found a loyal niche in the early '80s, it wasn't until *DQ* that an RPG resonated with the average Japanese gamer; it was simple, accessible, and forgiving despite its difficult challenge level, unlike the dense and punishing fare of previous entries in the genre. "The series' menu-based battles allowed players who were not used to action games to enjoy them at their own pace," explains Horii.

Unlike Western RPGs, *DQ* featured bright, colorful characters and monsters designed by famed manga artist Akira Toriyama along with a single hero battling his way through a world of monsters. Its game mechanics actually owed a great deal to Horii's previous work, an adventure title called *The Portopia Mysteries*. The first-person view that allowed players to interrogate and investigate in *Portopia* became *DQ*'s combat perspective, and the story even offered an intriguing twist on an already hoary videogame cliché: Once you rescued the inevitable captured princess, you learned that your mission had just begun.

"The original *DQ* was the first traditional RPG for the Famicom, so people were hesitant to try it out," says Horii. "But news about the game spread by word of mouth, and we ended up selling about 1.5 million copies. Still, many Famicom games were selling around a million copies at the time, so it didn't really feel like a big hit. *Dragon Quest II*'s release was preceded by a fair amount of hype, and people started lining up at game stores for their copy. When *Dragon Quest III* came out, there were articles in the newspaper describing the winding lines of customers waiting to get their hands on the game. On the release date, I actually went to take a look at the lines myself. That's when I finally realized I had a hit."

Horii's conservative approach to game design means that the series hasn't changed much since the '80s—battles play out much the same, and it wasn't until the eighth chapter that a *DQ* game actually looked like a big-budget production. Yet despite its reputation for being changeless, the series has innovated freely in its quiet way. *DQ2* added two additional characters to the hero's party, *DQ3* added a class-change system that *FFIII* would borrow to great effect two years later, the first dozen hours of *DQ4* focused on individual characters who would later band together to become the hero's entourage, and *DQ5* featured a generational tale somewhat similar to *Phantasy Star III*'s, but better. *DQ9* will continue this trend of modest innovation by offering multiplayer cooperation within the context of a traditional single-player RPG.

"When I'm making a game, I don't focus too much on the power of the console," says Horii. "I wanted to make a game utilizing the DS' wireless communications, and after careful consideration, I chose *DQ* as the medium for this idea. *DQ9* represents the evolution into a multiplayer experience. I'm sure that with past titles, players have shared their adventures in some manner, but *DQ9* will finally give players the chance to actively participate together."

The real question is whether or not this curiously small-scale take on the multiplayer RPG will boost the series' consistently modest showing in the U.S. Square Enix gamely publishes nearly every *DQ*-related title to come down the pipeline these days, but none of them seem to find much of an audience outside of a dedicated core of followers. While *Dragon Quest VII*'s slow pace and painfully dated visuals did it no favors with American audiences in 2001—it looked like a first-generation PS1 game, yet it was released just weeks before the stunning *Final Fantasy X* for PS2—*DQ8*'s beautiful graphics seemed like a no-brainer. Square Enix even upgraded the soundtrack and interface for U.S. release, but to no avail. That the DS remakes are being localized in advance of *DQ9* suggests that the company hasn't given up. Or perhaps they're simply content for *DQ* to remain a niche player in the West. After all, it's still a powerhouse at home. In a time when Japanese developers are desperately retooling their flagging brands to appeal to American audiences, the smartest thing *Dragon Quest* can do is stay the course.

"I can't say for sure why *DQ* has done as well as it has," admits Horii. "But what I can say for sure is that with each title, I make an effort to create a game that any player can enjoy. So maybe that has something to do with it. In the past, computers had a cold and distant image, so I tried to make the *DQ* world as bright and exciting as possible."

■ *Dragon Warrior IV*

■ *Dragon Quest II* (Japan)

■ *Dragon Quest* creator Yuji Horii, with slime.

EGM Extras: *Check out* **EGM.1UP.com** *for a full rundown on the history of the* Dragon Quest *series.*

> WE LIKE TO WATCH

BLU-RAY BUNGALOW

Beat the heat with cool flicks By James Mielke

Appleseed: Ex Machina

Publisher: Warner Bros.

Details: The much-ballyhooed sequel to 2004's *Appleseed* movie is a merging of director Shinji Aramaki and producer (and in his spare time, director) John Woo's considerable talents. Reading the Blu-ray jacket, you might expect sci-fi/action-freak nirvana, but propped up on a big screen, the film's tepid content reveals the pitch as little more than premeditated geek trap. Where the 2004 original was the vibrant, popcorn-action-flick yin to Mamoru Oshii's ponderous, pretentious *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* yang (both released in the same year and based on material by manga artist Shirow Masamune), the follow-up makes the mistake of taking its conceits far too seriously. The usual distillation of Masamune's favorite topics—cyber crime, political intrigue, and the military consequences that follow—*Ex Machina* lacks the humor peppered liberally throughout the manga, and it tackles the source material from atop a guileless, heavy-handed cyber soapbox. Even the CG, which bristled with a crisp veneer in the first film, arrives homogenized for round two. As far as major anime borefests go, *Appleseed: Ex Machina* isn't quite as coma-inducing as, say, *Steamboy*, but it's almost twice as insufferable because of its potential.

Director: Shinji Aramaki

Rating: C- **Bonus Material:** B+

Illustration by Andy Potts

Be Kind Rewind

Publisher: New Line

Details: It's almost unfair how many effortlessly inventive ideas pour out of director Michel Gondry's head and onto celluloid. The director of countless cutting-edge music videos for the likes of Björk, Kylie Minogue, and the Chemical Brothers, Gondry has teased audiences before with glimpses into his fertile imagination with *The Science of Sleep*, but with *Be Kind Rewind*, he takes the leash off completely. Set in Passaic, NJ, the flick finds our heroes—played by Mos Def and Jack Black—accidentally demagnetizing every tape in the VHS video store they've been tasked with managing while the shop owner (Danny Glover) is out trying to keep his building from being demolished. Their solution to this dilemma is to reenact every movie using homemade special effects and a recurring ensemble cast of "actors," resulting in lo-fi movies (called "Swedes") that transform into an unexpected neighborhood phenomenon. While the movie is mostly about the gimmick, the laughs are genuine, and the ideas percolate from beginning to end.

Director: Michel Gondry

Rating: B+ **Bonus Material:** B

The Bank Job

Publisher: Lionsgate

Details: If Jason Statham keeps cashing in those crap-action-movie checks he's gotten for dreck like *Crank*, *In the Name of the King: A Dungeon Siege Tale*, and his upcoming vehicular-carnage flick *Death Race*, he'll never emerge from his chrysalis and transform into the Bruce Willis–like butterfly Hollywood so desperately wants him to be. But if he sticks to smart crime capers like *The Bank Job*, he may yet discover career longevity. Statham's a one-note actor—specializing in pissed-off looks—but when the script and setting around him fit, it works like a charm. In the case of *The Bank Job*, in which Terry Leather (Statham) and an old flame must break into the vault of a London bank to retrieve some scandalous photos of British royalty, all hell eventually breaks loose in the manner of the finest crime flicks. As the plot's myriad threads finally weave together toward the tense, pulse-quickening finale, you'll realize that *The Bank Job* is a superior alternative to the stylish-yet-hollow Guy Ritchie–style machinations that have lately flooded the genre.

Director: Roger Donaldson

Rating: A **Bonus Material:** C

■ *Be Kind*: Even their Wonder Twin powers couldn't salvage their wardrobe.

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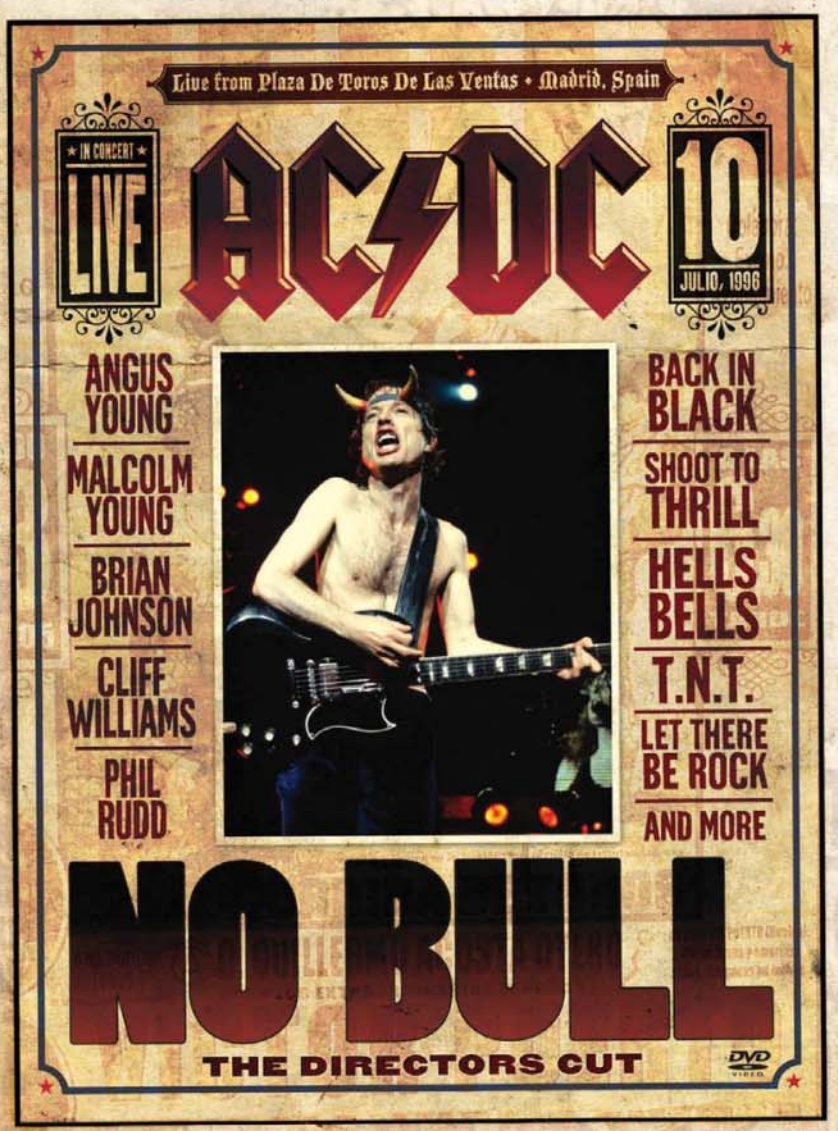

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NEXT MONTH

November Issue (#234) • On sale October 14

RESIDENT EVIL 5

Aim for the head! And the body. And, hell, the legs, too—next month we're shooting down the door of evil for an exclusive blowout of the PS3/XB360 survival-horror shooter ***Resident Evil 5***. Co-op is the big feature this go-around, so we're buddying up with a pal to see if two brains are better than one. We think so. And that's not because we're too scared to go at it alone or anything. Ha ha. Anyway....

In case parasite-infected Africans weren't enough to frighten you, we'll also take a look at the PS3's alien-infested first-person shooter, ***Resistance 2***. We're not resisting, either—come invade us already!

Are these too eerie for you? Then come back for an interview with Suda51 (*No More Heroes*) to hear what he's got cooking over at his development house. There's a chance it won't contain zombies or aliens.

(All planned editorial content is subject to change.)

> PREVIEWS

- **Resistance 2 (PS3)**
- Dead Space (PS3/XB360)

> REVIEWS

- **Lego Batman (Wii/PS3/XB360)**
- Wario Land: Shake It! (Wii)
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BADASS UNDEAD

Thriller night By Scott Sharkey

10 ***Half-Life* series (PC): Headcrab zombie**

What's worse than being a zombie? Not much. Unless you're a zombie with a giant gonad stuck to your head. It's even better when you're still conscious and your screams for help are muffled by your testicle-hat until some bearded jerk throws a saw blade at you.

9 ***Legacy of Kain* series (PS1/PS2): Raziel**

Maybe taking the "undead" idea a little too far, Raziel is a kind of double-undead, returning from a second helping of death to feed on other vampires. This would've been more awesome if his double-resurrection hadn't somehow made him twice as whiny.

8 ***Monkey Island* series (PC): LeChuck**

A not entirely brilliant villain who usually clues you in to his weakness (hint: It's always voodoo), LeChuck's versatility makes up for what he lacks in common sense; he shows up as an evil ghost pirate, evil zombie pirate, and an evil undead-demon-zombie-ghost pirate. That covers the undead-pirate spectrum.

7 ***Halo* series (XB/XB360): The Flood**

It's hard to forget the unsettling moment when we first came across these things. By that point, we were pretty happily used to offing Covenant goons, and then *bam*: space zombies and exploding zitmonsters all over the place. That'll teach you to ever feel like you know what you're doing.

6 ***Silent Hill* series (various): Nurses**

These things are somewhere near the top of the hierarchy of psychosexually disturbing *Silent Hill* monsters. Putting the "dead" in "dead sexy," they'd be really hot if they didn't have heads that looked pretty much like week-old hamburger. If you didn't have problems with women before, *Silent Hill* can help you develop some.

5 ***Final Fantasy X* (PS2): Auron**

While he was already the awesomest character in the entire cast (being the only non-crybaby helped), Auron ends up burying the needle on the cool meter when it's revealed that not only has he been dead the whole time, but he's too laid-back to brag about it.

4 ***Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* (PS1): Nemesis**

Nemesis is hardly a sparkling conversationalist, and he has the world's worst case of smoker's gums, but he can break through walls like they're made of kitten farts before punching your head off. And really, that's all he needs to do. Keep it simple, stupid.

3 ***Castlevania* series (everything): Dracula**

Dracula is the undisputed King of the Undead, if only because he's died more times than anyone else. Death himself is Dracula's best bud, so any time you off him, it's pretty much a given that he's going to come back to life next week, along with his 50th castle and an even cooler beard.

2 ***Stubbs the Zombie in Rebel Without a Pulse* (XB): Stubbs the Zombie**

The only thing funnier than Stubbs killing people with butt-gas was the stink U.S. Senator Joe Lieberman made complaining about the game's "endorsement" of cannibalism, calling it "the worst kind of message to kids." His reminder that eating each other is bad barely saved America from an orgy of misguided brain consumption. Thanks, Joe.

1 ***Pac-Man* (everything): Ghost**

We may never know what Inky, Blinky, Pinky, and Clyde were like in their former lives, but whatever tragedy cut them down left their spirits more than a little pissed off. You can run from them, hide from them, and even eat them...but you can never stop them. God help us all if they ever get out of that maze.

XBOX 360. LIVE

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Language
Partial Nudity
Violence

PLAYSTATION.3

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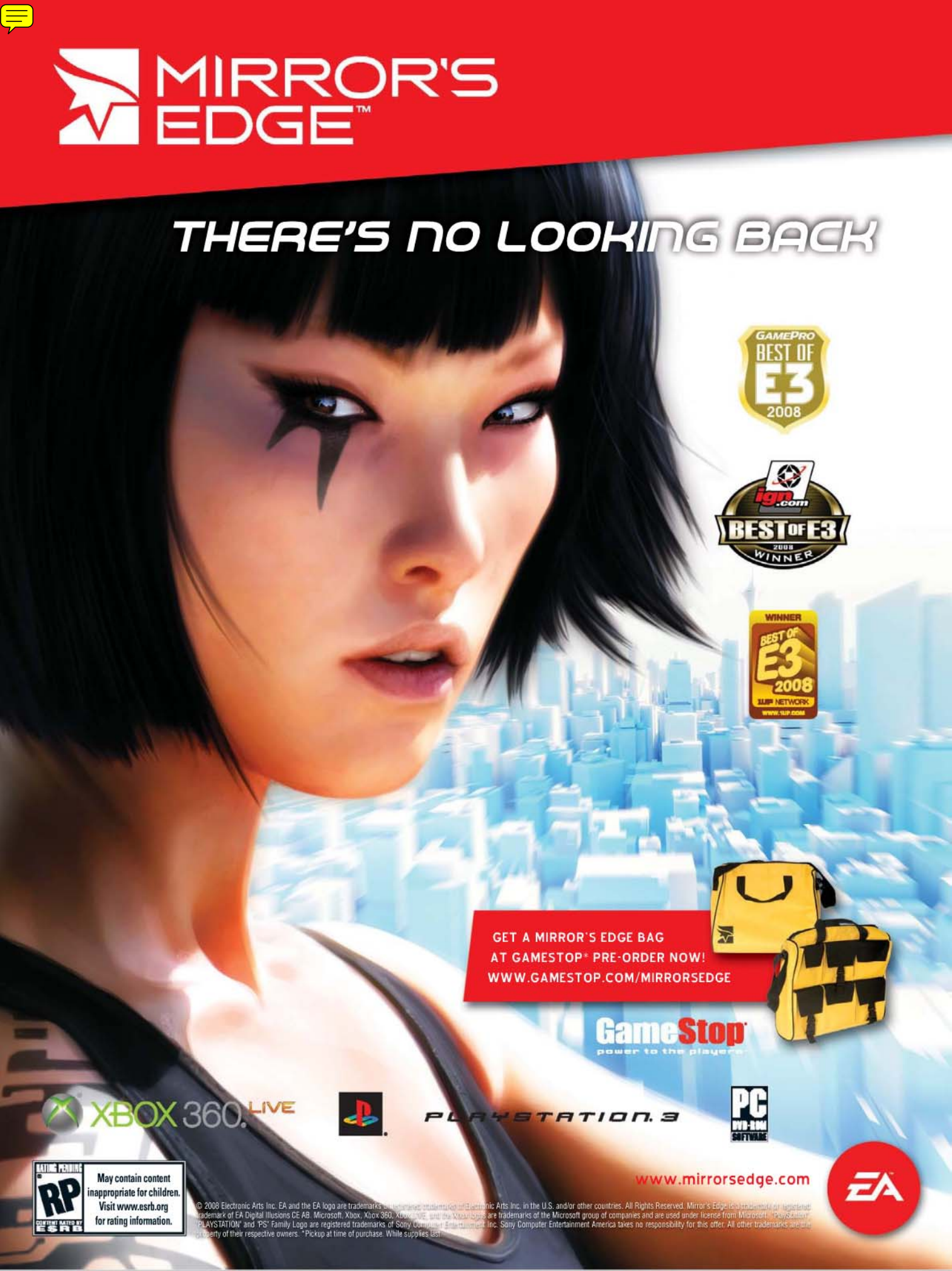
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