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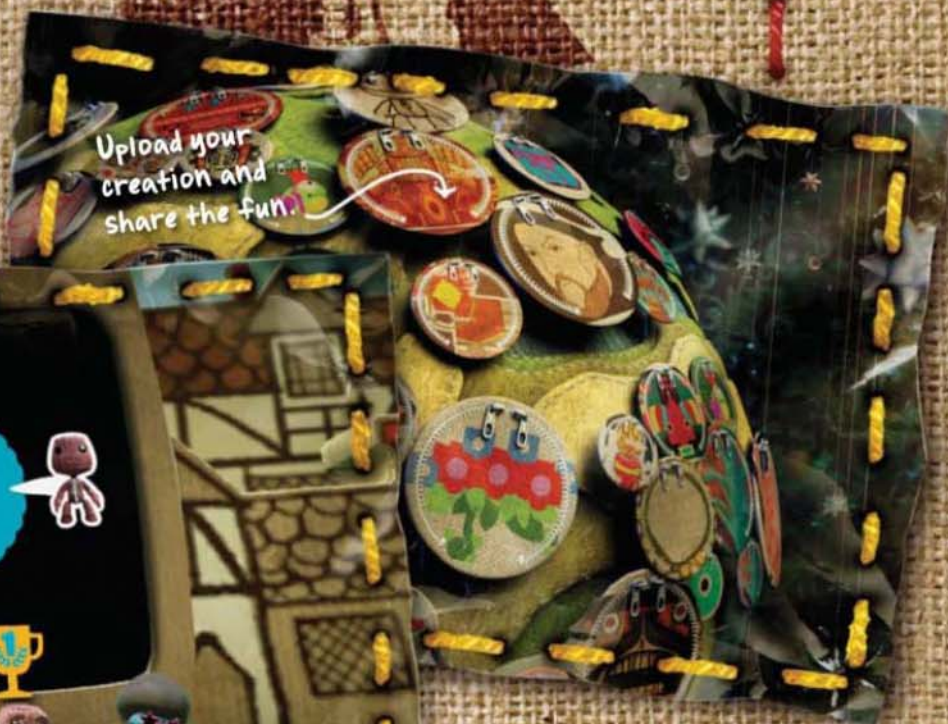
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Cover Story:

RESIDENT EVIL 5

It's dangerous to go alone. Luckily,
Capcom's latest survival-horror
epic is buddy-approved



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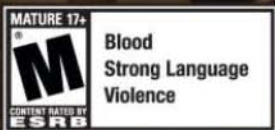
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EDITORIAL

Evil Genius



RESIDENT EVIL 5 PRODUCER JUN TAKEUCHI IS MY HERO. He's everything a videogame producer should be: articulate, interesting, funny, and relaxed. He's got such an easygoing manner that my interview with him and the *RE5* team managed to be informative, enlightening, and entertaining. During this chat—and our subsequent hands-on time with *RE5*'s online co-op play at Capcom HQ in Osaka, Japan—we uncovered a wealth of information about this upcoming survival-horror juggernaut set to drop in March. Turns out that the game's refined controls—now you can play *Resident Evil* like *Gears of War* if you want—are just the beginning. We've also got further insights, like strategies on how to deal with gruesome waves of parasite-infested humans, whether the game's co-op angle *really* works, whether or not *Street Fighter* bad boy Akuma will make his way into the game as an unlockable character, and whether the development team's finally discarded that clunky ol' typewriter save mechanic. Of course, the buddy system is this issue's overarching theme, so we're also profiling some of this year's anticipated co-op titles (*Far Cry 2*, *Resistance 2*). But in case you'd rather read more about zombies, we've also got exclusive peeks and info on *The House of the Dead: Overkill* as well as the cult-hit (in Japan) *Onechanbara* games, coming to Wii and Xbox 360 this fall. So, what're you waiting for?

—James "Milkman" Mielke,
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LETTERS

Game-design feuds, anger management, and banana addiction



1UP Family

This month, we meet 1UP user Amarisse Sullivan (Amarisse.1UP.com)

EGM: What's the longest gaming session you've had, and for what game?

Amarisse Sullivan: A three-day marathon of *Harvest Moon 64*.

EGM: What's your favorite gaming console?

AS: Dreamcast and DS.

EGM: How do boys react when they discover you play games?

AS: In most cases, it's not actually a "discovery"; it's the other way around, really. It's often in social gaming contexts that I meet them, so there's hardly any surprise. Girls playing videogames isn't quite the novelty it once was. Sure, there always seem to be a handful of dudes who are happily amused, but they're mostly just pleased to have another person to call on for *Rock Band* or a round of networked *Double Dash!!*

Trivial Issue

This month's **EGM** question: Which *Resident Evil* was the first to feature multiplayer online gameplay?

E-mail the answer to EGM@1UP.com (subject head: Trivia: EGM #234) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



For writing this month's LOTM, Jeff gets a copy of *Animal Crossing: Wild World*...or something equally cute from our archives.



■ It just doesn't get any more hardcore than this.

Letter of the Month Defending Nintendo

I'm writing in response to Nintendo winning the "Outstanding Achievement in Core-Audience Neglect" category in your E3 story [EGM #233].

Who's Nintendo's "core audience" right now? You mean the fanboys? The people who isolate one fragment of Nintendo's history, glorify it, and then "support" Nintendo by bitching about how [new stuff] doesn't compare to that fragment?

Even when they were struggling [compared to] Sony and Microsoft, Nintendo was still able to satisfy fanboys with *Metroid Prime*, *Super Smash Bros.*, and several awesome *Zelda* titles. And they will continue to do so—mark my words. So, what are we bitching about? Didn't we already get a fanboy explosion with *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*? Don't we already have *Fire Emblem*, *Super Mario Galaxy*, *No More Heroes*, *Zack & Wiki*, *Okami*, and an \$8 *Super Mario RPG*? Do we have enough time to play anything else this year?

How about instead of worrying about the future of *Metroid*, we show some much-needed love to *Metroid Prime 3* and let Nintendo enjoy these years of plenty. We're still going to get awesome software from them, now and forever, so let's stop bitching and actually play what we have now.

—Jeff Lawhead

Valid points, Jeff, but it doesn't change the fact that Nintendo offered almost nothing in their press conference for anyone other than soccer moms and retirees.

Say no to bananas

After reading your article "Lolz in Translation" in EGM #232, I was surprised to find nothing about *Final Fantasy Legend II*. I remember playing that game when I was 14 and coming across a person who really, really wanted bananas. I didn't think

much of it until later in the game, when I was forced to stop some illegal banana trafficking.

Now, I like bananas as much as the next guy, but this was weird even for me. I later came to discover that these bananas were, in fact, *opium* in the original version. I guess that explains the syringe on the side of the boat.

—Don Plattner

Hey, now—let's not underestimate the addictive power of bananas.

Review snafu

I love that Todd Zuniga reviewed both *Madden NFL 09* and *NCAA Football 09*, two EA Sports-published football games. Having the same person review both games adds great context to the scores. But *NCAA* earned Game of the Month (with Todd as the sole reviewer), while *Madden* did not (even though Todd gave *Madden* a higher score). This inconsistency points to one of the flaws in using multiple reviewers on some games and single reviewers on others. I totally understand why you moved to single-review coverage, but I think that having multiple reviews should be a prerequisite for earning Game (or Shame) of the Month. If a game is truly worthy (or unworthy) of our time, it should be worthy of the scrutiny of multiple opinions.

—Michael Lew

Ryan Scott, executive editor of reviews for the 1UP Network, responds: "You definitely bring up a valid concern, Michael—and believe me, we've had similar conversations among ourselves. The transition to a mixture of single- and three-man reviews has made it pretty clear to us that the guidelines for our Game of the Month award could use some revision, and you'll see some changes within the next issue or two, so keep your eyes peeled!" >

GEARS OF WAR 2



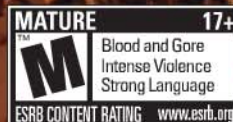
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 XBOX 360 LIVE



■ We doubt Governor Palin would be pleased by the comparison to an angel-slaying witch.

Dog eat dog

I just read your interview with Tomonobu Itagaki in *EGM* #232, and I'm appalled at Itagaki's ignorance. When told about [*Devil May Cry* creator] Hideki Kamiya's comment about *Ninja Gaiden* being uninteresting, Itagaki retorted with only mockery and significantly biased anecdotal evidence.

He went on to recite the old saying "The weaker dog barks more." I find it strange that in the very same issue, you mentioned that Kamiya "doesn't do many interviews," while Itagaki, on the other hand, has been both the defendant and plaintiff in high-profile legal cases and wears sunglasses all the time like some sort of icon.

Ironically, Itagaki just released a pretty bad sequel to a game that's been remade two times, and he's responsible for what many hardcore gamers consider to be the weakest fighting-game franchise to come from Japan—while Kamiya's games nearly always get high praise for their originality and interesting concepts.

Someone's barking a lot to defend his obviously stale bread, and I can tell you that it's not Kamiya.

—Chance Huskey

Meee-yow! Maybe we should just lock Itagaki and Kamiya in a room and let them duel to the death.

Life imitates games

When I first heard of the recent conflict between Russia and Georgia, it seemed all too familiar. I finally realized that the reason for this familiarity was that I had already fought in this war... when I played the original *Ghost Recon* in 2001.

When I looked up the game's plot summary on Wikipedia, the similarities between the first *Ghost Recon*—set in 2008—and the recent conflict were startling: "During the first few missions

of the game, the Ghosts battle South Ossetian rebel forces from the north of Georgia, who are harassing the legitimate government and its allies.... The Russian government complains to the United Nations...and eventually they send in their army to aid the South Ossetian rebels."

This does seem to mirror what's happened in the conflict so far, minus the operational involvement of U.S. forces. However, any U.S. response would have to be covert—thus, a unit like the Ghosts may well be in Georgia as I write this.

As the U.S. appears to have been blindsided by the invasion of their ally, maybe some in Congress should've spent a little less time crusading against videogames and little more time playing *Ghost Recon*.

—Robert Sroka

Let's just hope Tom Clancy wasn't as prescient about *Rainbow Six: Vegas*. Seeing the Strip all blown to hell would make us weep.

Delta Upsilon Mu Beta

I was very upset when I heard about *Pong Toss: Frat Party Games* for WiiWare. As a member of a fraternity ("frat" is a derogatory word), I am faced with stereotypical accusations all the time. Does Nintendo know that there are nondrinking fraternities as well as fraternities set up only for community service? I'm not saying that all fraternities don't play [beer pong] (we're not angels by any means); however, we are no different than many other college students.

—Kevin Kodorsky

If you're concerned about public perception of fraternities, an almost universally derided WiiWare game is the least of your worries. Instead, you might want to have a word with the producers of every college movie ever made.

Reading is fundamental

Why aren't there more games based on books? Books would make game stories much more intelligent. I'm not talking about boring books like *Huckleberry Finn* (not to diss Mr. Twain), but more like some awesome Neil Gaiman or Michael Crichton book. The story is already done for you—just implement gameplay!

—Robert Ezzell

Hey, we've got plenty of games based on books (not to mention your Crichton oversight: hello, *Jurassic Park* games): *Nancy Drew*, *Conan*.... Oh, you meant *good* games?

Don't be a h8er

I've recently seen the song list for *Rock Revolution*, and I'm a little bothered by it. How can Konami expect to be taken seriously in this genre when they have "Sk8ter Boi" on the setlist? I give Konami all the props in the world for creating a gaming concept that I'm totally addicted to, but if they are to separate themselves from the pack, they should've put more thought into the setlist.

—William Ramirez

Sure, *Rock Rev* will have some of those faux angst tracks, but on the whole, we think the song list is pretty sweet. Honestly, "Cum on Feel the Noize"? Who *doesn't* love a little Quiet Riot?

Trouble is, with all the songs being covers (not to mention the insanely complex drum kit), song selection may be the least of the game's issues.

Games imitate life?

Did you guys notice that Senator John McCain's VP pick, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, looks a lot like the lead character from *Bayonetta*?

—Robert Ezzell

Creepy. And we're not talking about the resemblance.

Temper, temper

In the past few years, I've smashed a number of PlayStation controllers, spent over \$300 replacing 360 controllers, ruined a coffee table, and committed various other acts of rage—all from being mad at games. I'm now [trying to manage my temper] when it comes to playing online games, since that's when most of the carnage takes place. Still, I find myself throwing perfectly good TV remotes or other small objects, breaking them into a million pieces. What do you do to prevent such acts of aggression?

—Devon Pieper

Try reminding yourself that without your tantrums you could afford an entirely new game system. 🐉

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> OOPS!

In talking about replacements for E3 last month, we mentioned Ziff Davis' own DigitalLife conference. Unfortunately, shortly after we went to press, this year's conference was canceled due to "poor economic conditions." Ziff Davis hopes to bring the event back in 2009.

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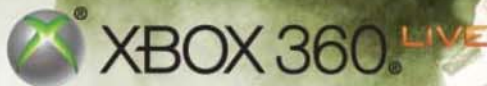
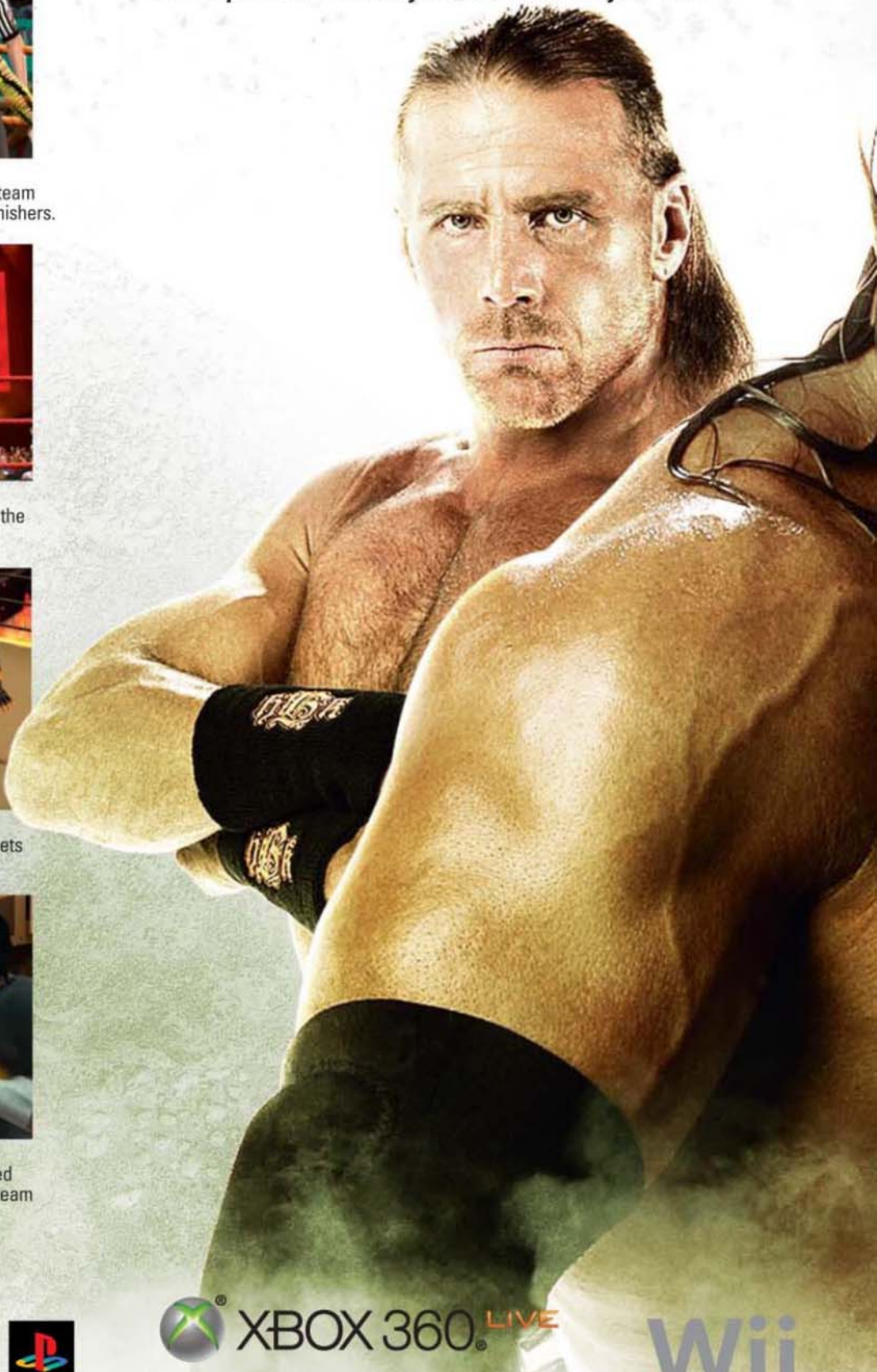
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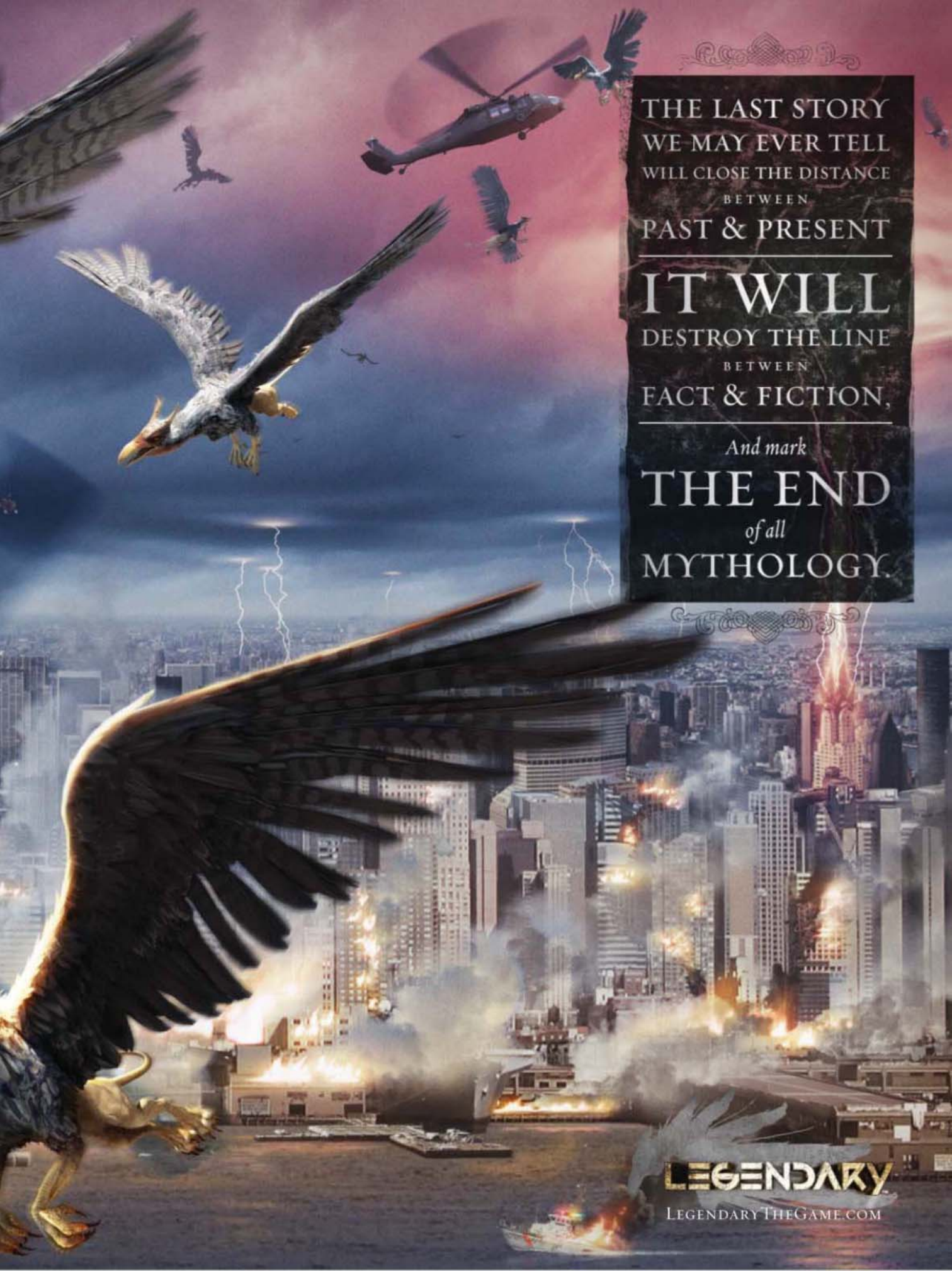
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XBOX 360 LIVE

The background of the entire image is a dramatic, apocalyptic scene of a city, likely New York City, under attack. A massive eagle with dark feathers and a golden beak is in the foreground, its wings spread wide, flying over a city in flames. In the sky, a military helicopter is visible, surrounded by several smaller birds. The city below is filled with smoke and fire, with a prominent skyscraper on the right side being particularly damaged. The sky is dark and stormy, with lightning bolts visible. The overall tone is one of intense action and destruction.

THE LAST STORY
WE MAY EVER TELL
WILL CLOSE THE DISTANCE

BETWEEN

PAST & PRESENT

IT WILL

DESTROY THE LINE

BETWEEN

FACT & FICTION,

And mark

THE END

of all

MYTHOLOGY.

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News, previews, rumors, cosplay hotties, and other stuff



28 Downloads of crap



34 November's reign

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for up-to-the-minute
videogame news.



■ Relive the insanity with our Penny Arcade Expo 2008 scrapbook: **1** Good tidings and fermented liquids flowed freely at 1UP's informal PAX fan meet-and-greet. **2** This year top-quality cosplay thankfully overshadowed the eyesores. **3** PAX attendees patiently await the opening of the Expo Hall. **4** Old friends Bryan Intihar, Chris Johnston, Phil Theobald, and Greg Sewart enjoy the festivities. **5** Not pictured: Vader and the stormtroopers nailing Alanis Morissette's "You Oughta Know" on *Rock Band 2*'s expert difficulty. **6** More friends of EGM: Shawnimals mastermind Shawn Smith and former Kojima Productions boy wonder Ryan Payton.





PENNY ANTE

Who needs E3? The fan-focused Penny Arcade Expo expands to bring gaming culture to the masses By Shane Bettenhausen


OVER LABOR DAY WEEKEND, NERDS RULED THE STREETS OF SEATTLE—nearly 60,000 fans flocked to the Washington State convention center to geek out at the fifth-annual Penny Arcade Expo, a three-day celebration of gaming. As the brainchild of webcomic superstars Jerry Holkins and Mike Krahulik (better known by their animated monikers Gabe and Tycho), the event unabashedly embraces the culture of console, PC, and unplugged gaming.

Although PAX 2008 ended the established tradition of doubling the previous year's attendance record, the show continues to expand at an astonishing rate. The presence of 21,000 additional fans at the '08 shindig contributed to massive lines for the keynote address and panels, an overstuffed Expo Hall floor, and the constant threat of an airborne hygienic crisis. Luckily, the event's organizers revealed a plan to alleviate the overcrowding issue by making the show bicoastal: The inaugural PAX East Coast will be held in late March 2010 in Boston, MA.

Arriving in the wake of this summer's disappointingly downsized Electronic Entertainment Expo, Penny Arcade Expo suddenly seems more relevant than ever. While the event has rarely showcased unannounced titles, this year's PAX played host to some surprising debuts, including buzzworthy Wii shooter *The Conduit* and *Colosseum*, an online fighter from Microsoft's homebrew XNA initiative. Intrepid attendees willing to suffer the Expo Hall queues also got hands-on time with many of the fall's hottest games, including *Fallout 3*, *Prince of Persia*, *Mirror's Edge*, *LittleBigPlanet*, and *Left 4 Dead*.

For many, the rare chance to play unreleased games would validate the event's \$45 entry fee for a three-day pass (comparatively, last fall's competing E for All Expo in L.A. charged \$110 for a four-day pass...and only 18,000 people showed up), but PAX offers far more than just demo kiosks. Attendees showed up en masse for a variety of gaming-related panels, including a stuffed-past-capacity keynote address by *BioShock* cre-

ator Ken Levine, a live taping of our own *1UP Yours* podcast, and a candid chat with professed celeb-nerd Wil Wheaton. If you were looking for more interaction, PAX fostered social gaming with massive LAN party rooms, various organized tournaments, and countless beanbags lying in wait for impromptu *Pokémon* battles. And when everyone was all gamed out by nightfall, they could let loose at a Minibosses concert or unwind with classic gaming flicks such as *The Wizard*.

We ran into several old industry pals at the expo, and everyone came away impressed. "PAX has evolved into the trade show that the industry wants and needs," says Ryan Payton, assistant producer of *Metal Gear Solid 4*. "And unlike E3, it doesn't require game enthusiasts to sneak, lie, or cheat their way into admission." And EGM alum Bryan Intihar, who's now Insomniac's community manager, says, "This was my first time attending [PAX], and I definitely got that good ol' E3 vibe from it—PAX is just big enough to feel like a spectacle." 

> FAR-OUT FANS

Block Builder:
Dan Kressin

Lego's currently making a killing piecing together blockbuster videogame hits. Now some people are making, well, nothing

re-creating classic games using a bunch of plastic bricks. Talented block builder Dan Kressin is leading the charge with his moving-pieces replica of the original *Donkey Kong's* first stage. We caught up with Kressin to pick apart his brain (don't worry—we snapped it back on).

EGM: Your complex Lego set doesn't look very kid-friendly. What's the recommended completion age? Thirty-five and up?

Dan Kressin: Tell me exactly what part of Giant Ape + Falling Barrels + Jumping on Girders strikes you as not kid-friendly?

EGM: Why'd you settle on *Donkey Kong*? Were *Crazy Kong* or *Congo Bongo* not good enough for you?

DK: Puh-lease. If you're gonna go retro, you have to go original. But then, I guess I lose points for calling him "Mario" rather than "Jumpman."

EGM: So your YouTube video is pretty sweet, but we never found out what happened to our hero. Does Mario ever save Pauline, or does he just keep jumping in place every 10 seconds or so?

DK: Of course Mario saves Pauline! But he soon leaves when the fruit of her affair with Donkey Kong shows up. It's all there in *Donkey Kong Jr.* Think about it! Better yet, don't.

EGM: We have to ask: Were any plastic gorillas/people hurt in the making of this project?

DK: Always remember to practice safe Lego. Wear shoes.



■ Only a true blockhead could build this.



> FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN

THUNDER
FORCE VI

Horizontally scrolling heaven

Platform:
PlayStation 2

**Likelihood
it'll come
here?**

Given its choice of platform and the legions of feisty, argumentative shooter bastards on webforums, a budget PS2 release following the game's October launch in Japan seems distinctly possible.

This name sorta rings a bell. If it does, then you're an endangered species, and your game room would qualify for EPA protection in a just world. That's because *Thunder Force* (a series that had its heyday on the 16-bit Sega Genesis) represents not one but three great bygone eras in gaming—the era of the 2D shoot-em-up, the era when Sega was still a driving force in console hardware, and the era when games were rated directly on how damned hard it was to beat them. Console shooters didn't get any more mind-blowing than *Thunder Force III*, replete with massive explosions, huge bosses, and a tinny, synthesized heavy-metal soundtrack, and more than one gamer shed a tear (in a manly, hardcore fashion) when the series ended on the PlayStation in 1997.

So why's it coming back? "The thing I'm aiming for with [*Thunder Force VI*] is the restoration of the shoot-em-up—a genre dear to our hearts that's all but disappeared

nowadays," Sega Game Producer Tez Okada wrote on his blog. "I'm burning with the desire to make this moribund genre exciting again." If anyone can do it, it's Okada, the somewhat bent mind behind the crazy-hardcore GBA game *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* and the simply crazy Dreamcast sim *Segagaga*. His plan of action is to keep the basic formula (side-scrolling 2D shooter, 3D graphics, and a music score straight out of *Metalocalypse*) and hope that enough starry-eyed space pilots are left and are still paying attention. Can it happen? As long as someone out there remembers the glory days of blast processing, anything's possible.





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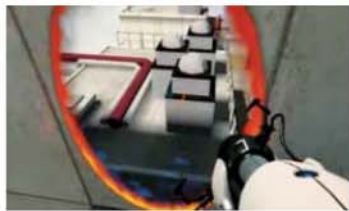
> NOW SHOWING AT
GAMEVIDEOS

We thought about using the margins of *EGM* as a flipbook to show our favorite videos, but then we remembered the Internet. Check 'em out at GameVideos.com/EGM!



ZOMG: The 1UP Show fall 2008 season

The 1UP Show is back, with coverage of *Resistance 2*, *Bionic Commando*, *Mirror's Edge*, and other big games.



1337: Portal "Mirror's Edge Alpha Stage" clip

EvilWeevil re-created a *Mirror's Edge* level in *Portal*. Jumping is for suckers; it's all portals these days.



KEWL: Soulcalibur IV character creation

GameVideos' Jason Bertrand made M. Bison, He-Man, and *Arrested Development*'s Tobias Fünke in *SC4*.



LMAO: Broken Pixels season alpha zero

EGM's Shane Bettenhausen and contributors Seanbaby and Crispin Boyer play the worst games ever.

> ONLINE SCENE

MONSTER HUNTER ONLINE AT LAST

Capcom wises up and brings its biggest handheld franchise online in North America... with a catch By James Mielke

Platform:
PSP


Publisher:
Capcom

Developer:
Capcom

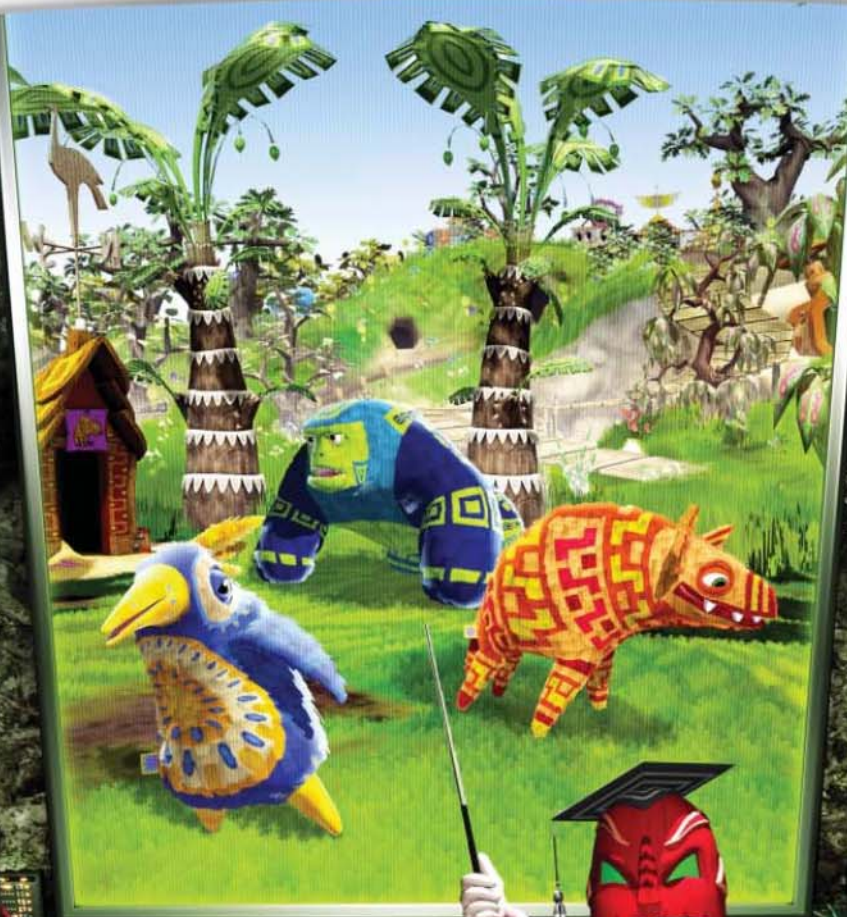
Release Date:
Winter 2008

WHILE THE MONSTER HUNTER SERIES IS A BONA FIDE PHENOMENON in Japan (routinely selling in the millions with every iteration on PSP), it's more of a cult thing in the States, where hardcore fans trade strategies via Internet message boards and wikis. The main thing holding the series back—as evidenced by the number of people playing the ostensibly local-play-only game online using XLink Kai broadband adapters—is the lack of online playability. Members of the game's core Japanese demographic—junior-high boys—don't seem to mind having to physically meet up with three other like-minded monster hunters, but finding fans Stateside isn't so easy. Well, fans' pleas will soon be answered;

Capcom plans to bring a localized version of the latest Japanese expansion, *Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G*, to North America in time for the holidays. This will be the first version of the series available as a download on the PlayStation Network (Capcom hasn't ruled out a packaged retail version). But in an interesting twist, *Freedom 2nd G* will indeed be playable online but only while using Sony's recently revealed PS3-to-PSP infrastructure mode (this adds online play to any ad hoc title). You'll need to play with your PSP synced to your online-enabled PS3 via the remote-play functionality. Once you connect your PSP to a wireless hotspot, you can then access your PS3 as the online hub and start questing for loot.

Chatting with your buddies could prove to be difficult, though. While the Japan-only title *Monster Hunter 2 Dos* had keyboard support, the PSP obviously does not. But Capcom may be able to add voice chat or another work-around to help players communicate with each other. The online evolution of *Hunter* on PSP could also foreshadow Capcom's plans for the Wii-bound *Monster Hunter 3 Tri*, due in 2009. 





His list of demands is short and sweet.

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ONLY ON
PLAYSTATION 3

RUMOR MILL

Your monthly dose of gaming gossip By Quartermann



Resurrected Rumors:

Many moons ago, the Q prophesized the coming of a Japanese PSP renaissance. Now, following the announcements of Sony's *Patapon 2* and *LocoRoco 2* and Square Enix's shocking revelation that *Final Fantasy XIII* and *Parasite Eve* titles are PSP-bound, the platform's definitely seeming healthier.

THE Q LIKES TO FANCY HIMSELF something of an O.G. (Original Gossiper). Other rumormongers have come and gone throughout the years, but I've been dishing up juicy nuggets of simulated truth since the days when Atari was freshly packing dirt on a landfill full of superfluous *E.T.* cartridges. The methods and technology required to land a scoop have changed (more Facebook sleuthing, less digging through John Romero's trash), but my commitment to unleashing the unannounced has not.

Capcom takes it in stride

Bionic Commando: Rearmed, the recently released downloadable remake of the NES cult classic, became an overnight sales success on both PlayStation Network and Xbox Live Arcade. Luckily, this has inspired Capcom to revisit some of the other dusty gems languishing in the old back catalog. They've certainly got oodles to choose from (c'mon, why not show *Trojan*, *Black Tiger*, and *Forgotten Worlds* some love?), but we're hearing that fan-favorite arcade slasher *Strider* will be the next recipient of a snazzy, *Devil May Cry*-esque makeover.

End, these Star Wars will not

Remember back when *Star Wars* was still cool? If you're still bitter after shelling out \$10 to witness Jabba the Hutt's flatulent son erode the bitter dregs of your fandom in this summer's theatrical CG turkey *The Clone Wars*, you could probably use some positive *Star Wars* news. Turns out that LucasArts has licensed out its entire Factor 5-developed *Rogue Squadron* franchise to another publisher, and the whole series will ship on a single Wii disc: *Rogue Squadron*, *Rogue Leader*, and *Rebel Strike* will all receive new Wii-specific controls and enhanced visuals.

Sadly, there's no sign of a Twi'lek rhythm-action striptease minigame utilizing the Balance Board.

Kojima's Western inspiration

Legendary *Metal Gear Solid* creator Hideo Kojima has repeatedly claimed that he will not be heading up the development of *MGS5*, saying that he'd rather leave that task to his younger teammates while he helms an all-new project. Well, if our Q-spies' intel is legit, it sounds as if Kojima might be looking to dive headfirst into the competitive realm of first-person shooters (sorry, *Zone of the Enders* fans). Japanese developers have traditionally had a tragic track record in the genre, but Kojima could very well be the pioneer who changes all of that. He was recently spotted meeting with some of the Western game development community's top FPS teams, including Infinity Ward (*Call of Duty*), Treyarch (*Quantum of Solace*), and Guerrilla Games (*Killzone 2*). Perhaps he's just getting advice...or maybe seeking a development partner. 🐼

Q-TIPS

- Dood! *Disgaea* fans can look forward to a fast-tracked domestic release for NIS' new *Prinny* side-scrolling platformer for PSP.
- Expect to see downloadable *LittleBigPlanet* doods from non-Sony properties very soon, including characters from third-party games and Disney films.
- Digital distribution is the future of the medium, and the future is almost here: Expect every single PSP game that ships in 2009 to also appear as a download.

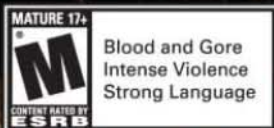
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> FAMILY GUY



What normal people play

By John Davison

Bungie Community Manager (and former 1UP News Editor) Luke Smith and I are both pretty obsessed with game-sales data. We obsess about it the same way movie critics fuss about box-office numbers. It started back in the old *1UP Yours* days, when our highlight would be our monthly show on the sales data from market-research group NPD. When we both moved on to other things, the obsession continued, but it morphed into a series of irregularly placed wagers.

My assertion has been, and continues to be, that observers of the hardcore end of the gaming scene often miss the point of what a hit can be. Kids' titles are dismissed as "baby games," licensed properties are prejudged as "crappy," and anything that doesn't adhere to a preconceived notion of what a game *should* be is derided. I'm a firm believer in the importance of the "normal" gamer who just wants to be distracted for a little while—it's why *Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games* has sold a *hojiiil-lion* copies.

It's this belief that lies at the heart of our wagers. We pick a nonhardcore game to watch and then bet a steak dinner on whether it'll hit a million units. Previous wagers have included *Naruto: Rise of a Ninja* on XB360, which I bet would beat *Assassin's Creed* to the 1 million mark (boy, was I wrong), but this year's holiday season should be ripe with steakiness that won't hurt my Amex.

So toss aside the surefire hits like *Gears of War 2* or *LittleBigPlanet*; scores of other games will make game reviewers cringe but sell by the boatload, including *Boogie: SuperStar*, *Spore: Creatures*, *Ben 10: Alien Force*, *Ultimate Band*, *Zubo*, and—at the heart of my next bet with Mr. Smith—*Club Penguin: Elite Penguin Force*, which I think has a shot at being one of the *biggest selling games of the year*. Care to wager on it?



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.

COMING SOON

Games to gobble up in November



Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars

Wii • Gamecock

At last, the perfect game for that special someone who yearns to play as a 3-inch-tall sentient fungus with its own culture and language—or for a Primus fan. *Spore Wars* features solid action-adventure gameplay, an eerie Les Claypool soundtrack, and a visual style reminiscent of Tim Schafer's cult classic *Psychonauts*.



Skate It

Wii/DS • EA Games

The Wii Balance Board-compatible *Skate It* picks up where the original *Skate* left off, with your character's hometown of San Vanelona leveled by an earthquake—familiar areas from the first game are now devastated by the disaster. Fortunately, the collapsed buildings, enormous fissures, and random debris are all conveniently skateable. *Skate It*'s solid controls and Balance Board option should be enough to get fans excited.

> MORE NOVEMBER RELEASES

Valkyria Chronicles
PS3 • Sega

Quantum of Solace
Wii/PS3/XB360/PC/PS2/DS
• Activision

Legendary
PS3/XB360/PC • Gamecock

Tomb Raider: Underworld
Wii/PS3/XB360/PC/PS2/DS
• Eidos

Sonic Unleashed
Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2 • Sega

The Last Remnant
XB360 • Square Enix

Call of Duty: World at War
PS3/XB360/PC • Activision

Left 4 Dead
XB360/PC • Electronic Arts

Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe
PS3/XB360 • Midway

(All dates on this page are subject to change.)

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ADVENTURES IN FRIENDSHIP



Everything's better with a friend—whether you're playing with a real-life bud or a computer-controlled compadre, there's nothing like dishing out digital destruction with a pal. We ask some experts, including Cliff Bleszinski and Randy Pitchford, to weigh in on the virtues of gaming with buddies, and then showcase the hottest upcoming co-op fare.

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50 Onechanbara

52 The House of the Dead: Overkill
54 Resident Evil 5





IN THE OLDEN DAYS of videogaming, when the most impressive titles looked like Saturday-morning cartoons rendered in Lego and a TV weighed about as much as the average modern American, it wasn't uncommon for a game to allow two people to team up and shoot aliens together (yes, that's all anyone played back then, too). It was called co-op—as in cooperation—and it was a beautiful thing. Gamers spent countless hours practicing exotic curse words with a good friend over a torturous piece of gray plastic called *Contra*. Unfortunately, when games made the jump to 3D, co-op faded away.

Lately, however, as modern-day alien-shooting entertainments like *Halo* and *Gears of War* revived the age-old practice, co-op's crept back into our good graces. Many of this winter's most anticipated games—*Fable 2*, *Resistance 2*, *Gears of War 2*, *Killzone 2*, *Left 4 Dead*, and

LittleBigPlanet—are making co-op a central part of the experience. Why the comeback? Doug Lombardi, VP of marketing for Valve—whose upcoming shooter *Left 4 Dead* is built entirely around the idea of four players teaming up against hordes of zombies—says that it's an idea whose time has simply come. “We think it's a natural next step for today's gaming experience,” says Lombardi. “Not only has it become more viable, technically, to create a next-generation co-op game, but it's the No. 1 feature gamers are asking us and other developers to explore. As the old entertainment proverb goes, ‘Give the people what they want.’”

Feeling connected

In many ways, the current co-op boom's just another step in gaming's ongoing Internet-age transformation. We're all zapped into each other's living rooms on our fancy

online consoles these days, so why not play together? And for people of a certain age, keeping up your so-called social network is imperative. For Gearbox Software CEO Randy Pitchford, whose first-person adventure *Borderlands* (due out in 2009) is built around four-player co-op, games themselves have become secondary to the social experience. “When I play Xbox, my experience usually isn't ‘Tonight, I'm going to play *Halo*,’” says Pitchford. “Usually, my experience is, ‘Tonight, I'm going to play Xbox 360.’ I turn on my console, and I look at the dashboard to see who's online and what my friends are playing.”

Of course, online gaming's been around for over a decade, but the kinds of games made popular in the early days of online play often discouraged socializing. *Fable 2* Lead Designer Peter Molyneux sees today's co-op games as a reaction to the original online-gaming fad: deathmatch.

LET'S PLAY TOGETHER

Why co-op returned from the dead—and where it's headed By Robert Ashley



■ Clockwise from left: *Borderlands*, *Gears of War 2*, and *Left 4 Dead*.

"Deathmatch perfectly describes it," says Molyneux. "When I went into those games, I always felt like the bespectacled kid on the playground who was going to get picked on or bullied. You went into these arenas and got shot within two seconds, and you just felt stupid. That's changed now. People are realizing that if we play together, and we talk about it, it makes the whole experience greater."

That's the idea behind co-op work in *Table 2*, a role-playing game that places importance on decision making. Molyneux wants to facilitate conversation and teamwork by allowing players to tackle the game together, online or in person. "You play through the story and experience it together, not unlike watching a film together," says Molyneux. "If I watch a great film alone, I get one experience. If I watch it with a friend, then I get a completely different experience. The film is no different, but the fact that I can talk to someone about it, laugh and hear them laugh—that's very powerful."

Certainly, part of the popularity of co-op play is that most people don't want to spend their leisure time alone. Gaming can be a lonely pursuit, even online. "When you're playing a pure single-player game or a pure multiplayer game, there's always been a certain detachment," says Lombardi. "In single-player games, the reasons are obvious. In multiplayer games, I believe the disconnect is that the stakes have never been placed upon the team's ability to really work as a unit." *Left 4 Dead* attempts to do this by throwing so many zombies at the team that they don't stand a chance

alone. "If you wander off on your own and play Rambo-style, you're going to die," says Lombardi. "If you work as a team, you may very well survive—and do so in memorable fashion."

Two people, same game

Not all games are as inventive when it comes to co-op. Much of the time, even going back to the days of *Contra*, developers simply throw a second player into an enemy-packed version of the single-player game, narrative be damned. "It's kind of like a cheap stepsister of the single-player game," says Pitchford. "Sometimes, but usually not, there's a rationalization for why the other human is in the game, but it's weak at best." For 2006's *Gears of War*, the game's developers managed to work around the narrative issue by fleshing out a squad of teammates for the game's lead, Marcus Fenix. The team aspect also allowed *Gears* to have moments that were tailor-made for co-op play. But what the game's developers couldn't do with the squad, according to Lead Designer Cliff Bleszinski, was allow players to control each member of the crew. "When you start adding four or more players, the complexity increases exponentially, and you begin losing track of the narrative," says Bleszinski. "All of a sudden, some-

body triggers an event or a cut-scene, and you're still back 30 yards, fishing for ammo, without a clue of what's going on or why you're watching a cut-scene." For the sequel, instead of expanding co-op in the main game, Bleszinski and his team created an entirely separate feature called Horde Mode. A five-player game pitting the *Gears* crew against unending waves of aliens, Horde Mode's designed to play like an old-school arcade game: all action, no story, and high-score wins. It's an example of the many ways modern co-op games break with the lazy ways of the past.

Co-op of the future

Has co-op become a necessity, a feature that gamers will soon come to expect in anything they buy? Molyneux suspects as much. "Now that I'm playing *Table 2*...I realize how important [co-op] is and how solitary games feel now when I don't have that option," says Molyneux. "I think we could be looking at something where, if you reviewed a game five years from now that doesn't have co-op, it would be like a first-person shooter not having deathmatch. It just doesn't compute."


The developers contacted for this story were split, however, on the popularity of co-op with players. "Marketwise, the data we have tells us that it's not played very much," says Pitchford. He cites some publicly unavailable data for a "game that features co-op that you've probably played, and only 8 percent of the customers ever tried it." That game must not be *Gears of War*. "Approximately 44 percent of players with Live connectivity played co-op *Gears of War* for at least one chapter," says Bleszinski. "Over 3.5 million people played *Gears of War* in co-op." He believes that co-op is now a must-have. "Co-op used to be a nice-but-not-necessary feature with triple-A games," says Bleszinski. "These days, it's essential."

It sounds nice, but co-op as a standard isn't necessarily a good thing for all those involved. "That's the nightmare for us as developers," says Molyneux. "It's just another thing we have to do, and whenever we *have* to do something, that's when it tends to get not-so good." ❦

When I went into those games, I felt like the bespectacled kid on the playground.

—Lionhead's Peter Molyneux on playing deathmatch



A man with dark hair and a serious expression, wearing a brown leather jacket and a tactical vest, holds a large, multi-barreled weapon. The background is a dramatic sunset over a savanna landscape.

SOMETIMES, STUDIOS START WITH SPECIFIC ACTIONS in mind and then arrange their game worlds to accommodate them. Intending for us to slink through a moving army, for instance, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*'s developers designed the level All Ghillied Up with a linearity that guaranteed we'd see and do what they wanted, when they decided. The resulting reward was one of the most talked-about missions in Infinity Ward's multimillion-selling shooter. The risk was that some players would stray from the script and perish—to the point that they'd see an abstract puzzle in place of a black-ops assassination attempt on a breakaway ultranationalist.

At other times, studios start with a world—in *Far Cry 2*'s case, 50 square kilometers of tropical African savanna, where we play a mercenary in the middle of a war—and extrapolate game scenarios. This isn't to say that they just construct Vice City (*Grand Theft Auto*) or Cyrodiil (*The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*) and hope that fun happens. As concepts, these

Platforms:
PS3/XB360/PC

Publisher:
Ubisoft

Developer:
Ubisoft Montreal

Release Date:
October 2008

FAR CRY 2

A friend in need By Shawn Elliott



■ *Yojimbo* and *Apocalypse Now* influenced *Far Cry 2*'s story.

settings support activities such as *Far Cry 2*'s diamond hunting and drive-in firefights. During the production process, Ubisoft Montreal tests its creation and tweaks certain elements to encourage interesting and entertaining outcomes—adding, for example, tufts of flammable grass around an outpost so that grenades ignite either an unpredictable inferno or a deliberate firewall that divides you from aggressive foes. Nonetheless, Creative Director Clint Hocking and his team can't count on controlled pacing to sustain intensity with the precision of *Call of Duty*—or even *Halo 3*, however unconstrained its jungle gym is in comparison to *Modern Warfare*'s.

"People about to play [*Far Cry 2*] have no idea what to expect," Hocking boasts of the game's enormity. "There's no loading anywhere. We're not talking big levels; it's a world you never leave. It's not like *Oblivion*, where you spend half your time in a menu and half your time managing your inventory. You're always in the world." By which he means that everything—even navigation—occurs in first-person perspective. If we want to beat feet, map and GPS system in hand, we're welcome to try. Together, scale and continuity create a lifelike illusion. You travel from one location to any other on foot, wheels, or wings. As you traverse streams, hills, trails, and sky, you see dry savanna grade into shrub land into jungle.

Far Cry 2's creators embrace the

► THE BUDDY SYSTEM

"Game over" didn't die in arcades. It ended up on our TVs, in "realistic" titles that nevertheless remind us of *Frogger* when we fail. Since even maps appear in *Far Cry 2* players' onscreen hands—one of many attempts to maintain our total immersion—throwbacks to old "gimme more quarters" moments aren't ideal. So instead of dying, we collapse. We wake up when a war buddy arrives to hold off attackers as we pluck bullets from our bodies and set broken bones.

As we accept assignments and sometimes save lives, we develop a dozen or so such friendships with fellow mercs. If they die—either by our treachery or by our inability to protect them—that's it. They're gone for good, along with optional objectives associated with their stories (Creative Director Clint Hocking notes that they don't die easily, though).

On occasion, allies also fight alongside for more than a few minutes. Hocking offers an example: "One faction hires you to assassinate an arms dealer who's selling weapons from his barge. Your best buddy calls your cellphone and says, 'Sure, we're going to kill this son of a b****, but I have a



better idea here. I have this 1,000-pound bomb that I recovered from a crashed chopper, but it needs a new fuse. Find a fuse and meet me on the bridge by the barge. We'll blow up the bridge, which will collapse on the barge and make your boss happy. And since the bridge is a key piece of infrastructure for our opponents' faction, we'll do double damage. But plenty of pissed-off people will want to kill us—we'll have to fight side-by-side to hold them off until we can split up."

fact that we influence pacing. Says Hocking: "Lead Level Designer Jonathan Morin worked hard to define how design would work with this setup. He came up with a model that he calls 'planning and approach, combat, escape and evasion.' At first, I'm far away from a camp and detect it on my map. In the planning-and-approach phase, I can observe and collect intelligence. We invite players to do so and, at the same time, try not to totally punish them

when they don't. The combat phase inherits its difficulty from the degree of success or failure in the planning-and-approach portion."

Escape's optional, he suggests: "Are you the guy who storms in, assassinates his target with a shotgun, and then hops in the nearest truck and hightails it? Escape and evasion comes in when the target's henchmen get in cars and chase after you. [Morin] examined the different ways that people approach ►



■ Sometimes stray bullets start long-lived fires.

encounters and worked with his level designers to ensure that we support several styles of play."

I tried *Far Cry 2* in its current, unfinished state and agree; ambush and frontal assault alike are tactically viable, and foes did indeed pursue me under a full moon until I pulled over and put a rocket-propelled grenade through their front window. In the middle of a second getaway, I slammed into a tree and fled my smoking land cruiser on foot; the gunmen on my heels then used the

crashed vehicle to give chase.

Ideally, *Far Cry 2*'s unscripted combat can compete with the super-charged, if staged, shootouts in gaming's *Call of Dutys* and *Rainbow Sixes*. "Once, when I was in the middle of a gunfight, a car came careening around a corner," Hocking says. "A f***ing buffalo jumped in front of it and caused it to crash. I said, 'What the f***?' It's insane. Then there were a couple of times when I was trying to infiltrate a camp and spooked some gazelles. The A.I.

saw the alerted animals and started to investigate."

Having neither *Half-Life 2*'s ever-visible Citadel nor *Halo*'s titular space station, Ubisoft Montreal's story seems to lack the sort of endgame destination that drives more linear shooters forward. Instead, we criss-cross the same terrain in our quest for diamonds and the life of a notorious arms dealer, frequently revisiting familiar bases where fresh bad guys replace the ones we bested on previous passes. Insofar as *Far Cry 2* is a sequence of skirmishes around these enemy encampments, the smarts or stupidity of its computer-controlled characters will determine the game's greatness. At this time, they're unpredictable and can absorb a great deal of damage before dying. When a first-person shooter's A.I. is tops, it's ➤

A f*ing buffalo jumped in front of [a jeep] and caused it to crash. I said, "What the f***?" It's insane.**

—Ubisoft Montreal Creative Director Clint Hocking

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MAKE YOUR MARK

Far Cry 2 Creative Director Clint Hocking terraforms African countryside with a few clicks. He shoves the sun across the sky and creates clouds. A wind blows and rain falls when he wills it. He then hops into his flash-fabricated, 512-meter-by-512-meter world (the maximum size of user-made maps) and hang glides from a mountain peak to a rooftop. If you enjoyed spawning boxes and such in *Halo 3*'s Forge tool, it stands to reason that you'll love the freedom of expression that *Far Cry 2*'s multiplayer map editor affords PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 players.

Procedural tools generate whole patches of jungle or plains. Conversely, players can become war-zone landscapers by planting individual boulders and trees. Most likely, unfair-but-fun maps will proliferate, as most of us aren't professionals and will experiment with gimmicks such as matchstick grasslands where high winds and hand grenades threaten to turn entire worlds into roaring infernos. Eventually, budding designers will emerge, maybe remaking *Call of Duty* maps in *Far Cry 2*'s African setting before graduating to their own balanced creations.



sensible for foes to live long enough to demonstrate their intelligence (see *Halo* and *F.E.A.R.*); when it isn't, hanging around tends to highlight that fact. It'll be interesting to see how they behave and how long they stick around in the final version.

While *Far Cry 2* shares DNA with PC first-person shooters that run on superwide rails (such as *Crysis* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*), its closest cousins come from the so-called "open-world" category. And so it runs the risk of inheriting defects unique to games of *GTA*'s genus, like long, multilegged missions that end in accidental death and do-overs. It

also stands to clear the way for imitators by carving out a new niche in its combat videogame ecosystem. Hocking's convinced this is a beautiful place to be.

"One thing always amazes me," he says. "I'll save my game, swap weapons, and sleep in a safe house without windows. When I wake up and open the door, I see the world with fresh eyes and just say, 'Holy f***, that's beautiful!' I've called coworkers over to my desk, went back inside the safe house, shut the door, and then reopened it to show them the reveal. Just seeing the world is reward enough." *—Clint Hocking*

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RESISTANCE 2

Five things you need to know about the co-op campaign By Thierry Nguyen

MOST GAMES ARE CONTENT with putting four players into the single-player story mode and calling that the co-op campaign. Not only is Insomniac going crazy by supporting *eight* players in *Resistance 2*'s co-op mode, but it's also making the campaign a completely separate experience. We recently chatted with Co-op Lead Designer Jake Biegel to get the five most important details of the buddy-heavy effort.

1 The two primary influences of the co-op campaign are *World of Warcraft* (PC) and *Team Fortress 2*. "People here play those games all the time," Biegel says. "We believe that's the future of multiplayer gaming—the class-

based experience and emergent gameplay of eight people doing different things in a certain environment." Biegel even uses a raid encounter in *World of Warcraft* as an analogy for an intense co-op firefight against a Chimera boss.

2 It's a separate story campaign. "Co-op's very much intertwined with the fiction and lore of the primary single-player campaign," Biegel says. "This is a parallel campaign that has a lot of reveals that supplement the fiction of the *R2* campaign." The basic concept is that you're part of the Spectres, which Biegel describes as "a covert-ops group that's gone behind enemy lines to

retrieve Gray Tech [in order] to empower the humans against the alien invasion." You get your mission orders from Blake, a character from the single-player campaign who also functions as your commanding officer in the co-op mode.

3 Three separate classes offer different playstyles: Medic, Soldier, and Spec Ops. The Soldier's the damage sponge; he absorbs a lot of abuse and has a shield to mitigate the entire group's damage. Meanwhile, healing's the Medic's main job. "We don't have regenerating health, so you must rely on the Medic to give health to the group," Biegel says. "It's a forced depen- ➤



Platform:
PlayStation 3

Publisher:
Sony CEA

Developer:
Insomniac

Release Date:
November 2008

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■ As if the giganto phaser weren't enough, the potbelly has the soldiers experiencing a whole new type of fear.

dency that promotes teamwork." Finally, the Spec Ops class doles out ammunition, and he also deals damage to foes; Biegel describes him as "the glass cannon."

4 You gain loot and experience in this campaign. Biegel elaborates: "Progression's extremely important to us. Each class has a unique path of unlockables; there are armor pieces and weapon upgrades that are class specific, and you can add bonuses through Gray Tech that you get as drops from either Overseers or Primarchs. As you play co-op, you're obtaining Gray Tech, and each class is evolving and gaining abilities to comple-

ment the class."

Gray Tech's actually shared between your classes; you could theoretically max out your Medic and then use your leftover Gray Tech for your other characters. A few examples of class progression: The Soldier has an energy shield, and as he levels up, the size and duration of his shield can increase. Likewise, the Medic's got a nifty energy weapon that can eventually chain-damage multiple enemies, similar to the "crossing the streams" idea from the *Ghostbusters* films. The Spec Ops can upgrade the alternate fire of his main weapon, the Electro-Orb, which results in a launchable turret that he can use to deliver even more dam-

age on top of his own primary weapon.

Biegel further stresses that "everything you do is on the same progression; you don't miss out on any of your experience points. Every moment, in any class, you're earning experience and gaining rewards toward that class."

5 You can play the campaign how you want to. Biegel says you could roll into a mission with eight Medics. While such a group doesn't do much in the damage department, they almost never die. He also describes the eight Medics firing their energy beams for chain damage among 70 Hybrids as "a situation of visual synergy and pandemonium."

Biegel then points out an inverse situation—sending a team composed entirely of Spec Ops players into a mission. Sure, this team'll take out enemies quite fast, but there's also going to be a lot of downtime, as everyone will die...a lot. ➤

While a group of eight Medics doesn't do much in the damage department, they almost never die.



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Platform:
Wii

Publisher:
D3Publisher

Developer:
Tamsoft

Release Date:
Q1 2009

ONECHANBARA: BIKINI ZOMBIE SLAYERS

When bikinis and zombies collide By James Mielke

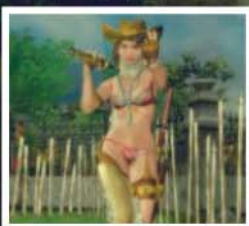


FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, D3Publisher is bringing its *Onechanbara* series—which began life as part of its Japan-only budget-priced Simple 2000 franchise—to North America. With it comes its unique blend of gratuitous cheesecake and blood-spraying pyrotechnics that would make Quentin Tarantino proud.

Bikini Zombie Slayers, developed by Tamsoft (the guys behind *Toshinden*), pits half-sisters Aya and Saki against a never-ending legion of shuffling zombies. With “realistic” sword-swinging Wii-mote motion controls, gamers will be slicing up the undead with the precision of their onscreen counterparts in no time.

ONECHANBARA: BIKINI SAMURAI SQUAD

And now you can play dress-up, too By James Mielke



Platform:
Xbox 360

Publisher:
D3Publisher

Developer:
Tamsoft

Release Date:
Q1 2009

WHILE THE WII VERSION OF *ONECHANBARA* may have an interesting control scheme, the Xbox 360 iteration (titled *Onechanbara: Vortex* in Japan) features sharper graphics and is no slouch in the features department. While both games offer co-op play, *Bikini Samurai Squad* also adds 40 quests and character customization courtesy of its “dress up” mode, which lets you tailor a character’s outfits, accessories, hair styles, hair color, and more. You can then name these coordinated outfits and save them for use in-game. *Bikini Samurai Squad* also features motorcycle combat and unlockable characters.

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THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKILL

A behind-the-scenes look at Sega's new co-op lightgun gorefest By James Mielke

Platform:
Wii

Publisher:
Sega

Developer:
Headstrong Games

Release Date:
February 2009

It's been six years since the last proper chapter in the *House of the Dead* series (which has always been best with a bud), and while there've been a few related games in the interim, fans have waited patiently for a new addition to the classic lightgun-shooter franchise. That wait is just about over with *The House of the Dead: Overkill* for Wii. To get details on the first *House of the Dead* developed outside of Sega, we spoke with Producer Neil McEwan of Headstrong Games.



EGM: How did you guys end up landing this project?

Neil McEwan: It was an inevitable meeting of minds, really. We were interested in doing a shooter for the Wii, and Sega was looking at the kind of stuff that would do the Wii justice if treated the right way. It was an easy decision to come to; it all slotted together nicely.



EGM: What classic, signature elements of the series do you plan to retain, and what new elements are you bringing to the game?

NM: In terms of the look and style of the game, riffing off exploitation and shock-gore cinema is a new spin on the series and adds a huge amount to the game. In terms of raw features, there are plenty of touches and tweaks we're making to the format to make it totally suited for the Wii. The most obvious is what we've termed internally as "Wii-view," which makes the camera view swing around an extra 40 degrees or so when you move the crosshairs to the edge of the screen. This helps you get a better shot on attackers and spot hidden pick-ups and opportunities. It really keeps the player on their toes and gives you a bit more interactivity than is normal for a lightgun-style game.

EGM: We noticed a *Grindhouse* theme in the trailer. Is that just for promotional purposes, or will we see Rose McGowan pop up somewhere in the middle for a sexy zombie fight?

NM: We're being influenced by those shock-horror flicks from the '70s and '60s—just like *Death Proof* and *Planet Terror* did in film recently. There's just such a fantastic style to it. We do have our own hot momma who you'll meet in the [game]; she plays a pivotal role. It's not Rose McGowan, though—although I'd love to work with her if she's reading this...

EGM: Will there be an homage to previous games in the series, and will any of the classic characters return? We thought we saw original protagonist Agent G in the trailer—care to elaborate?

NM: The story's set as a prequel to the original series. We meet Agent G as he arrives fresh from the AMS academy and teams up with a local detective, Washington, to investigate mysterious goings-on in Bayou City, a small town in the Deep South. We thought it'd be cool to go right back to the beginning and see how G became the professional AMS agent we all know and love.

EGM: Lightgun games are traditionally pretty short and offer minimal replay value. How do you plan to extend *Overkill*'s life?

NM: *Overkill* is being developed exclusively for Wii. It's not being ported from an arcade game, so we'll have a distinctly different structure. It'll be much longer than previous games in the series, although we don't know exactly how long at this stage. We'll be talking about additional game modes and unlockables in the future, but there'll be plenty of replay value, should you need it.

CATCHING UP WITH THE DEAD

Overkill isn't actually the fourth game in the series, as *The House of the Dead 4* hit arcades in 2005. That game's peculiar, though, because it's not actually a sequel to *HOTD3*—it takes place between the events of 2 and 3.

Confused yet? Meanwhile, *HOTD EX*, the upcoming arcade cel-shaded blaster, doesn't have any bearing on the "storyline"—it's just a *Point Blank*-style collection of lightgun minigames.



EGM Extras: Read the full interview with *Overkill*'s producer at EGM.1UP.com.

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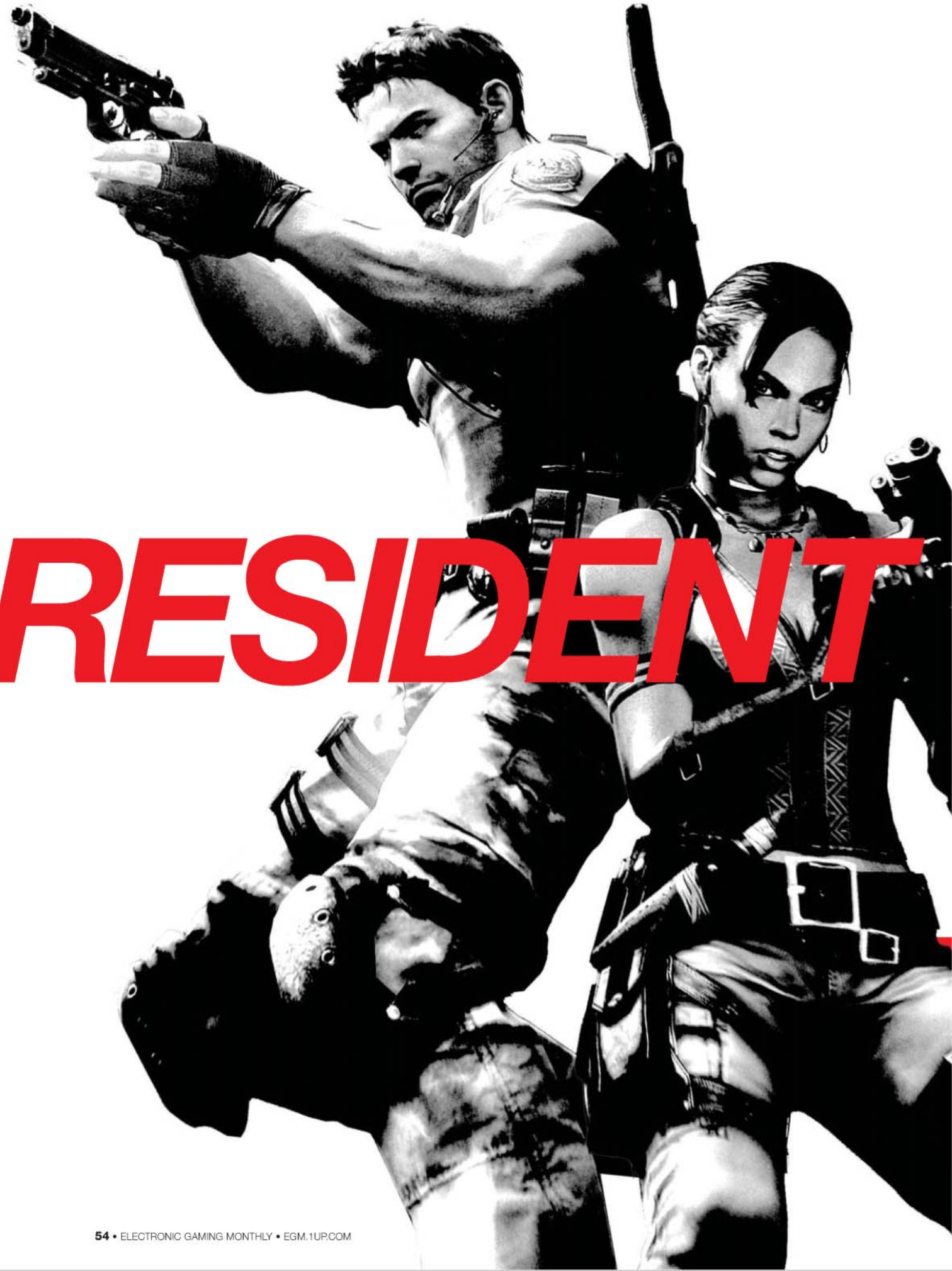


NINTENDO DS

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RESIDENT

Daylight. It's a rare commodity in the world of **Resident Evil**, a series typically entrenched in the unrelenting bleakness of underground sewers, hidden laboratories, bubbling swamps, and, more recently, medieval castles. But in this, Resident Evil's fifth incarnation, daylight takes a leading role in helping redefine gaming's premiere survival-horror series, shoulder-checking the rejuvenated zombie-blasters out of the darkness and into the light

By James Mielke

EVIL

WHILE SHINJI MIKAMI, creator of the *Resident Evil* series and the driving force behind *Resident Evil 4*, has since moved on to other projects outside of Capcom, the creative nucleus of the *Resident Evil 5* team—Kota Suzuki (sound composer), Yoshiaki Hirabayashi (art director, cinematics), Yasuhiro Anpo (director), Jun Takeuchi (producer), and Masachika Kawata (coproducer)—seem to have things well in hand. In the latest episode of *RE* musical chairs, Capcom's swapped out pretty-boy special agent Leon Kennedy for *Resident Evil* O.G. Chris Redfield, except this time he's accompanied by the lovely Sheva Alomar (a fellow BSAA—that's Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance—member). If every major installment of the *RE* series featured one principal innovation, then *RE5* features two. Daylight, as we've established, is the first major shift in this chapter of *RE* lore. It's fair to think that survival-horror's a lot more frightening in the dark, but with a large portion of *RE5* taking place outdoors

and in the searing African sun, there's almost nowhere to hide...and that brings its own brand of terror. After all, it's hardly any more comforting to see the rabid, dozen-strong zombie mob than to merely *hear* them coming in the darkness. You might also think that having a partner with you the whole time—the second major innovation—might lessen the fear, but it's actually more stressful to see that buddy disappear underneath a swarm of plague-infected villagers.

To get our hands on *RE5*'s co-op multiplayer action, we flew to Capcom's Osaka, Japan-based headquarters and hit the ground running, putting both Chris and Sheva through their paces across two full levels of hot pseudo-zombie-blasting action. As we learned in *RE4*, the enemies you encounter throughout the game—and you'll encounter plenty of them—aren't technically zombies. The term "zombies" generally refers to—depending on your source material—reanimated corpses that have gained a simulacrum of life

thanks to an internal, burning hunger for flesh (possibly chemically induced). The atrophied, decaying nature of their rotting muscles, brains, and bodies usually results in the shuffling, sluggish motions associated with the undead we'd blasted since *Resident Evil*'s 1996 inception. The creepy "Los Ganados" who infested *RE4*'s backwoods Spanish village, though, were a different breed altogether—humans infected with the parasitic, mind-controlling organisms known as Las Plagas (which have the particularly unattractive habit of exploding from their host bodies in a variety of painful-looking ways, primarily from the neck or head). In *RE5*, a more powerful strain of Las Plagas has somehow found its way to Africa (presumably somewhere along the East African coastline, where Swahili—spoken in-game by the majority of the antagonists—is the lingua franca), and it's here that Chris and Sheva find themselves toe-to-toe with swarms of the deadliest *RE* enemies yet. ➤

➤ A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

It's been nearly six years since *Resident Evil Zero* last troubled us (on GameCube) and, surprisingly enough, almost four since the release of the franchise's reboot, *Resident Evil 4*. *Resident Evil Zero* is significant because it was the first chapter in the 12-year-old series that featured simultaneous two-character controls, be it on one controller (a precursor to *Resident Evil 5*'s simultaneous two-player co-op), and *Resident Evil 4* is significant because it made people care about the series again. While the intervening years between *RE: Zero* and *RE4*'s respective entries were hardly dormant, they were filled with titles that failed to live up to the series' legacy. With *Resident Evil: Outbreak* (and *Outbreak: File #2*, both on PS2), Capcom took an early stab at cooperative, multiplayer online gameplay, but the games suffered from myriad problems, the biggest of which was finding an audience that wanted to play as a janitor or a nurse while beating back zombies with a broom. *Resident Evil: Dead Aim* (PS2), on the other hand, was an unfortunate and wholly unnecessary attempt to keep the series visible by offering up a disposable first-person, lightgun-style shooter that did little to enhance *RE*'s reputation.

What the series needed was a genuine reinvention—not dabbings in other genres with a slapped-on *Resident Evil* skin—and that's exactly what *Resident Evil 4* provided. Recalling the popular Leon Kennedy (from *Resident Evil 2*) for a second tour of duty, *RE4* featured significant game length compared to past episodes, an updated and improved camera perspective (bringing the camera closer in over the shoulder à la *Splinter Cell*), and—perhaps most importantly—was once again directed by series creator Shinji Mikami. The results were breathtaking, with an invigorated *Resident Evil 4* and its creepy “Las Plagas” plotline racking up countless accolades by year's end. It was a brilliant turnaround for a groundbreaking series that was admittedly losing its luster, and because of its success (on Wii, PS2, GameCube, and PC), the biggest and most obvious question on everyone's mind since then was simply “What's next?”



Takeuchi's keen to remind us that *RE5* is, first and foremost, a horror game, not a first-person shooter. This isn't about running and gunning à la *Gears of War*; it's about the horror-tinged exploration you've come to expect from the series. As such, certain tenets of *RE*'s legacy remain intact, while certain unwieldy mechanics have finally been retired. First of all, you still can't fire while running, but you can strafe in the game's optional *Gears of War*-style control scheme (called D-Type), added to appeal to Western gamers. Of course, the original A-Type “tank-style” controls from *RE4* remain (with slight modifications). Players will pick their preference at the game's outset, but either way, there's still an element of fear gained from planting your feet and remaining steady to draw a bead on an enemy.

Packs of wild dogs also return, this time with a little less zombie and a little more Las Plagas. We were usually running away or trying to time our trigger finger with these canines' jump trajectories, so we can't say for

sure, but they seemed less like the previous games' Doberman pinschers and more like rabid black Labrador retrievers. One thing that hasn't stood the test of time are the typewriter ribbons needed to save your progress. Takeuchi explains: “Actually, I really like typewriters; they're really typical of the *Resident Evil* series. But this time, the save system will be a combination of checkpoints and chapters. As you go through the game, you'll hit checkpoints, and if you die, you'll go back to the checkpoints. At the end of the chapters, you'll be able to properly save the game. Unfortunately, we weren't able to fit typewriters into the chapters.”

Together forever

But back to *RE5*'s biggest addition: co-op play. Whether you're playing solo or online with another person, Sheva—who Chris meets within the first 30 minutes of the game—is always at Redfield's side. Unlike *Resident Evil 2*, *RE5* isn't a split-yet-interwoven story where two parallel perspectives occasionally cross

paths. Instead, Chris and Sheva are an inseparable pair who depend on each other through thick and thin. The first stage we tried, called Assembly Place, finds Chris and Sheva bearing witness to a macabre beheading from within the temporary safety of a small building adjacent to the executioner's podium. As the hooded axman brings his blade down upon his protesting victim's neck (this game's definitely headed toward a Mature rating), a megaphone-toting orator spots our heroes from his higher vantage point and directs the braying crowd toward our soon-to-be-surrounded friends.

As with *RE4*, though, the real action begins from within a house, in which many useful furnishings—like bookshelves—are conveniently positioned to act as barricades once pushed in front of an open window or door. Of course, these are temporary measures at best—even the sturdiest bookshelf eventually shatters. But this buys you enough time to scramble around and open drawers, bust apart barrels and crates, or break open cabinet doors in search of healing



herbs, ammo, and money.

Running Chris through the dilapidated building with a human-controlled Sheva following closely behind, we took turns catching creeps in our crossfire as they started to filter their way in through the windows and doors. Obviously, the difficulty's not quite nailed down just yet, as evidenced by the many baddies who survived our multiple point-blank headshots. This might've been partly due to the relatively low stopping power of our default handguns, though—a few shotguns and sniper rifles later, we were blowing up heads like ripe melons.

As in *RE4*, the closer an enemy gets, the more vulnerable he is for a quick-time event. An onscreen prompt signals this by displaying a blinking "X" button, in which the quickest reflexes trigger an uppercut or clothesline from Chris or a roundhouse kick or flipkick from Sheva. While it's entertaining enough to pull off these moves individually, it's doubly intense to pull one off in the context of saving your partner.

The first (and most obvious) way is to blow enemies away using your gun—this method's more or less risk-free, since there's no friendly fire. A headshot's the most effective strategy, but even blasts to enemy ribs, knees, or arms can buy your buddy some much-needed time. You can also get in close and look for the quick-time prompt, in which you'll then perform some physically punishing (for the enemy) move that'll liberate your partner. Sometimes—and it takes real coordination to do this—a double quick-time event will pop up. Pull this off, and you'll uncork a supermove that smashes enemies backward.

The most satisfying option truly highlights the potential of *RE5*'s co-op system. In certain areas, Chris and Sheva must separate (see the "You Take the High Road" sidebar on pg. 61), and while you may not be able to physically explore together—one protagonist will typically have helped the other reach an otherwise inaccessible area—you can usually see your partner. In the Shanty Town level, we used Chris to help Sheva

jump across from one building to another, leaving Chris behind in his padlocked three-story structure while Sheva looked for a way to open it up from the other side. As she was busy working her way down the stairs across from Chris, a surge of Las Plagas-infected killers erupted from all sides.

In our first attempt, we used Chris and his sniper rifle from across the gap to try and thin out the enemies surrounding Sheva, who also tried to take them down with her gun. But this war of attrition wasn't going to last long, since we both found ourselves out of ammo quite quickly. As you'll no doubt discover, if either character dies during a level (as indicated by the familiar "You Are Dead" dripping down the screen), you've gotta restart from the last checkpoint.

Our revamped strategy played out like this: Assist either Sheva or Chris across the gap between buildings, run down the stairs until you've triggered the flood of zombie wannabes, and then whoever's acting as undead bait runs past the phalanx of explosive ➤

barrels scattered around the level. While the exploding-barrel schtick might seem clichéd at this point, trust us when we say it's extremely satisfying to bring the mob to a sizzling, smoking halt with an expertly timed explosion—with Chris or Sheva running barely ahead of the pack.

So amid all of the clamor and chaos, how do you keep track of your teammate? That's where *RE5*'s streamlined functionality comes into play. While the majority of the default control scheme remains unchanged from *RE4*'s intuitive configuration, a few key adjustments help you keep your eye on your partner—the most important of which is the “locate partner” button. When pressed, a targeting reticle appears on your partner while the camera locks on and pivots toward him or her. If you find yourself in a spot of trouble, the “team-action/call partner” button causes the center circle of your teammate's HUD to flash red while the word “Help!” appears. Of course, it's up to them to actually come to your aid, but the signal's clear. Another useful addition is the overhead-map

button, which is especially useful if you're disoriented or racing down an alley. In *RE4*, you'd have to pause the game in order to bring up navigational options, but *RE5*'s map occupies a relatively minor spot in the upper-right corner of the screen as a transparent overlay, making it a quick-and-easy reference—even in the worst of times.

Extra effort's also been made to ensure the new item-trading function flows as fluidly as possible. While it's never ideal to exchange sundries midbattle if you don't have to, pressing the appropriate button triggers an item-trading interface, which allows Chris and Sheva to freely exchange items—including everything from ammo and grenades to healing sprays and weapons. This should help alleviate situations where one player's busy scooping up everything in sight while the other guy's scavenging to find ammo for his pistol. Of course, if your ally's near death or seriously wounded, you can use healing items on them as well as yourself. It's actually kinda hilarious to see Chris bounce back from the brink of death thanks to a liberal dose of Sheva-

supplied healing spray—it almost looks like you're spraying green deodorant on your partner.

Black Hawk down

RE5 features plenty of serious stuff, though, from the beheadings of the Assembly Place level to the plot twist that sends Chris and Sheva off to save their friend and fellow BSAA member Kirk, whose helicopter's shot down during the beginning of the Shanty Town stage. What helps *RE5* resonate so effectively is that the game's events vaguely mirror the horrific real-world terrorist attacks of the last few years, which are still fresh enough in our memories to be unsettling. Of course, the game's not all based on realism, as you'll encounter plenty of over-the-top craziness, too. Seemingly indestructible burlap sack-wearing, chain saw-wielding maniacs who are much harder to take down than their counterparts in *RE4* appear at the worst possible moments, and hooded, ax-swinging behemoths stalk you at every turn. Fortunately, the enemies suffer from friendly fire, which makes it sweet when you position some ➤



■ A helping hand is always welcome in times like this.



■ Sheva takes her name from the Hindu god of destruction, Shiva.



► NEVER ALONE

Resident Evil 5 was designed with Chris Redfield as the main character, and when you're playing "solo," you always control him. Likewise, the host of an online-ready game always plays as Chris. Setup aside, Sheva Alomar accompanies Redfield the entire time, controlled either cooperatively by another player online or by a surprisingly savvy computer-controlled A.I. The game features a flexible jump-in, jump-out functionality that allows a player to join at any time, and if and when that player has to leave before you finish the mission, the CPU A.I. automatically resumes control of Sheva. This is a very important feature, as both characters must complete the level's objectives alive in order to progress.


When pressed on what the development team would do if they saw a tendency for rogue players to join online games with the specific intent of sabotaging someone's progress, *RE5* Producer Jun Takeuchi told us, "If it turns out that there are players playing the game like that, we'll have systems where, you know, these players either don't come in, or you can just eject them from the game."



of the mob in between you and an executioner—and then watch with satisfied glee as the big guy's ax dismembers and pummels a dozen dudes as he tries to reach you.

While critics leveled few complaints at *RE4*, one common observation was that the game was actually a bit too long, a fact even the dev team admits. "Certainly, we've had to play through *Resident Evil 4* a lot of times ourselves, and we feel it's a very long game. And that's one of the tough parts about it, that it takes so long to play through," *RE5* Director Yoshihiro Anno says. "*Resident Evil 5* will probably end up being a little shorter than *Resident Evil 4*. We've looked at some parts of *RE4* that weren't so exciting, and we're going to add parts that are more exciting and have more impact." Of course, most fans just wanna know which longtime series favorites are returning—and while we're at it, just what the hell did mysterious double-crossing hottie Ada Wong do with that Las Plagas sample she absconded with at the end of *RE4*? Takeuchi won't tip his hand, but he does say that we'll "probably not see too many other characters from previous *Resident*

Evil games." Despite the mostly all-new cast, though, we do know that Chris will bump into old foe Albert Wesker. The chances of an Ada Wong sighting are also pretty decent if the current, advanced form of the Las Plagas virus making its way through Africa has anything to do with her. But what of the newly revealed character, Excella? The team's keeping the plot under tight guard—and with good reason. Besides, half the thrill of any *Resident Evil* is enjoying the twists and turns on the road to discovering the mastermind behind the latest viral infection—and finding out who's playing who in the end.

With 2008 quickly coming to a close, it won't be too long before the new year's upon us—and *RE5* should hit Xbox 360 and PS3 sometime around March. While patience is a virtue, we'd give up virtue in a second if it meant we could pump Las Plagas-infected enemies full of lead right now. But information helps soothe the soul, and if what you've already read hasn't sated your *RE5* needs, then turn the page to see a few more things Takeuchi has to say about this upcoming survival-horror epic. 

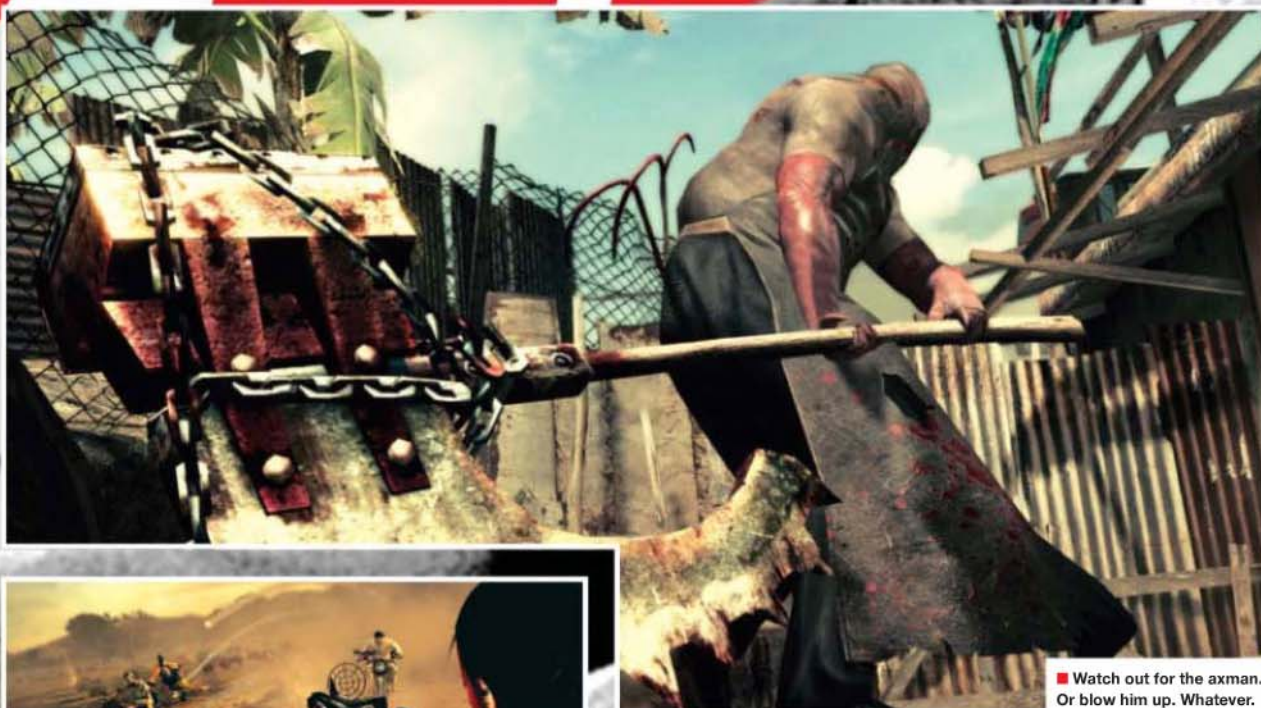
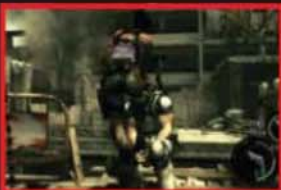


YOU TAKE THE HIGH ROAD...

In each level, you'll find instances where a specific area can be accessed, but only with the help of your partner. By pressing the "team-action" button, Chris will, for example, crouch with his hands cupped, indicating that

the person playing Sheva should also press this button. This results in Chris hoisting Sheva up over a wall or ledge or giving her the added boost necessary to cross a great divide (as shown below). Naturally, whoever did the

helping is also the one left behind. That person must then find another way around—though, on occasion, the person who got the lift in the first place ends up face-to-face with a dozen Las Plagas-infected foes.

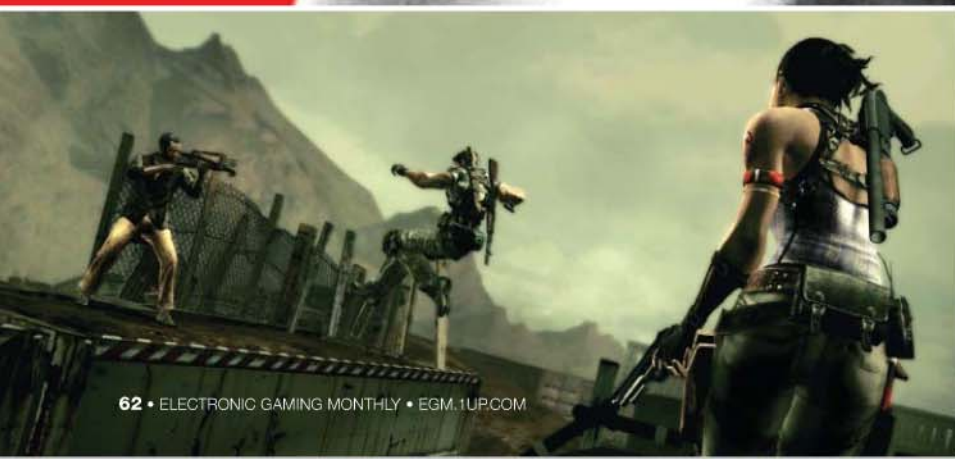


■ Watch out for the axman. Or blow him up. Whatever.





■ Recognize these puppies? Thought so. They're *baackk!*



TRIVIAL PURSUITS

We talk with Resident Evil 5 Producer **Jun Takeuchi** about Akuma, Resident Evil crossovers, and a few of his favorite things



COVER STORY

APRIL FOOLS' JOKES? Shoryuken fireballs? A bromance in the making? What the hell is Jun Takeuchi talking about? Fun stuff, as a matter of fact. And in this excerpt from our lengthy interview with the *Resident Evil 5* producer, he spills the beans on a number of topics that have been bugging us for years.

STREET FIGHTER'S AKUMA IN RESIDENT EVIL, AT LONG LAST?



EGM: Long before the Internet started spoiling everything, *EGM* pulled off some pretty wicked April Fools' jokes. One was Sheng Long as a playable character in *Street Fighter II*, and Akuma as an unlockable character in *Resident Evil 2* was another. With that in mind, have you guys ever thought about adding Akuma to *Resident Evil 5* as an unlockable character? That'd be awesome.

Jun Takeuchi: That might be a good idea. Maybe we can do a [classic *RE* minigame] Mercenaries-style game where you can play as Akuma—that's actually a pretty good idea. Maybe we can make something out of that.

EGM: Not to push this too much further, but just imagine how much of a stress relief it'd be after you've struggled so hard to beat the game and finish its challenges. And you want to get revenge on the game, so you go back and fire up Akuma and, boosh!

JT: [Laughs] That's a pretty interesting idea. One thing that we'd have to be careful [of] is that when we get an idea like that, we go all out—we take it really seriously. So maybe the ESRB rating would actually go up, and you wouldn't be able to buy it anymore if you put in something like that. But, certainly, being able to breeze through the game after you've cleared it is certainly fun. [Laughs]

REDFIELD AND KENNEDY: THE RESIDENT EVIL DREAM TEAM?

EGM: It's interesting that you never actually see Chris Redfield and Leon Kennedy together in the same game; they're always off doing their own thing. So it seems like if you ever got Chris and Leon together, it'd be the ultimate *Resident Evil*. Do you ever foresee a time when their paths collide?



JT: We're always thinking of different ways to take the story forward. And I think you're right; I think *Resident Evil* fans would really love it if there were a game where Chris and Leon met up once. But on the other hand, it'd also be pretty dramatic if the series ended without them ever meeting at all.

EGM: That'd be so tragic!

JT: [Laughs] That, by itself, is dramatic—two people who you want to meet never actually meet up. Maybe one idea would be that they would be driving different cars, but the cars would pass by each other, like two star-crossed lovers.

TAKEUCHI'S RESIDENT EVIL TOP FIVE

EGM: What are your five favorite things about *Resident Evil*?

JT: No. 5 is when I was doing *Resident Evil 2*, and [Hideki] Kamiya was the director. He said, "You can design all of the guns." So I feel that the combination of guns in *Resident Evil 2* was the best in the series.

EGM: Right.

JT: No. 4 is *Resident Evil 2*'s unlockable character, Tofu. Actually, we created that character to check the collision detection as we were going through the game; we'd spent a couple of years using that character. By the time we'd finished, though, Tofu had become very important to us, so I said, "We'll leave him in there for other people to play."



No. 3 is the [full-motion-video] introduction to *Resident Evil 1*—how this foreign guy with his hair dyed blond was playing Wesker. That was pretty memorable, and everybody was like, "What the hell game is this?"



No. 2 is in *Resident Evil 2*, the kiss scene between Leon and Ada in the stage where they...well, it wasn't just a game anymore; it had become a drama.

But my No. 1 favorite thing about *Resident Evil* is Shinji Mikami. It's thanks to his hard work that the series is here and [was] allowed to continue.

EGM Extras: For the full interview with Takeuchi and the RE5 development team (and to check out hours of videos), head to EGM.1UP.com. There you'll find the full reveal behind the game's hot co-op action.

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REVIEWS

Evolution for all, piñatas get small, hedgehog heeds the call, and some sports

Change is afoot! This month marks EGM's very first PC review—and it's none other than the hotly anticipated *Spore* from developer Maxis (also responsible for a little game called *The Sims*—maybe you've heard of it). It's a baby step, yes...but you can look forward to reviews of essential PC games in future issues. Huzzah!

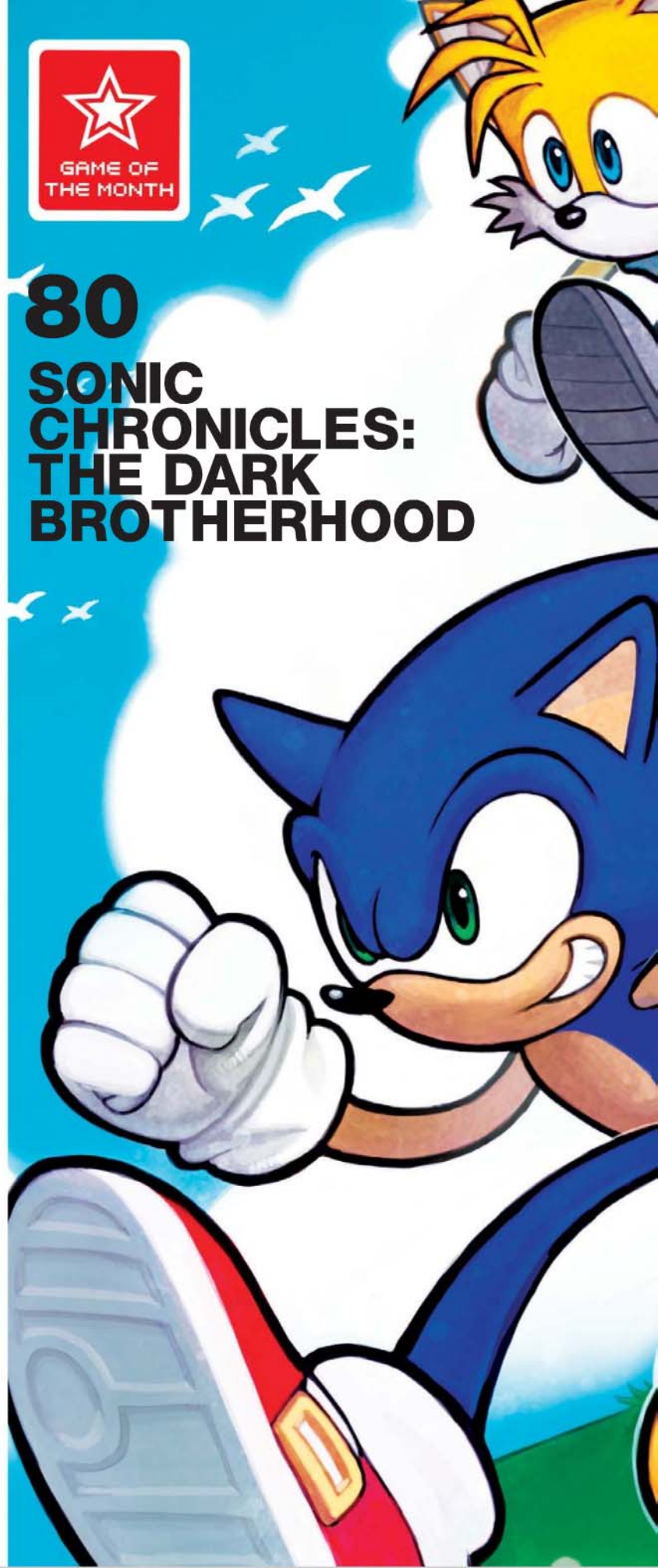
—Ryan Scott

Executive Editor, Reviews

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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
Milkman's recent trip to Osaka for this month's cover story also prepared him to take on the thugs in Sega's *Yakuza* sequel.
Now Playing: *Yakuza 2*



Greg Ford
Managing Editor
Plans of conquering *Mega Man 9* has Ford reminiscing about modernized-classics-done-right achievements from the past.
Now Playing: *Castle Crashers*



Shane Bettenhausen
Senior Executive Editor
Modern-day Shane traveled back in time 24 years to inform his younger self that *Legend of Kage* isn't pronounced "cage."
Now Playing: *LittleBigPlanet*



Giancarlo Varanini
Senior Editor
Giancarlo's been wondering if Wilford Brimley secretly plays *Viva Piñata* when he's not busy with other things.
Now Playing: *Viva Piñata: TIP*



Ryan Scott
Executive Editor, Reviews
As the flood of holiday games grows stronger, Ryan squares off against unruly reviewers while juggling crazy deadlines.
Now Playing: *Lego Batman*



Nick Suttner
Associate Editor, Reviews
Playing levels made by others is so passé—Nick prefers to indulge his megalomaniacal tendencies in *LBP*.
Now Playing: *LittleBigPlanet*



Anthony Gallegos
Reviews Assistant
Playing through the new *Silent Hill* made Anthony suspicious of everyone—especially pushy cameramen.
Now Playing: *Call of Duty 4*



Jeremy Parish
Senior Editor
Jeremy wants them to stop making new videogames so he can finally catch up on his backlog. C'mon, recession!
Now Playing: His assignments

Also on deck...

Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen
Executive Editor, Previews

Michael Donahoe
Senior Writer

Andrew Pfister
Producer, Podcasts

Robert Ashley, Ray Barnholt, David Ellis, Andrew Fitch, Justin Haywald, Eric Neigher, Todd Zuniga
Staff Reviewers



■ Just because it's part of the game's name doesn't mean shaking your Wii-mote's all that fun.

Wii

WARIO LAND: SHAKE IT!

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Good-Feel ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

A throwback that doesn't give back

JEREMY

C+

AVERAGE

RAY

A-

EXCELLENT

G. FORD

C+

AVERAGE

The Good: Classic Wario playability, sumptuous artwork

The Bad: Lackluster levels, tired design

Seriously: Even prettier than *Odin Sphere*

➔ **JEREMY:** Playing 2D platformer *Wario Land: Shake It!* gives you a little insight into how Darwin must have felt when he stumbled upon the Galapagos Islands. It's a creation that seems to have evolved in isolation from the death of hand-drawn art and the rise of rough polygons. This is what games might be if only gamers as a whole valued visual style over bland verisimilitude: Every pixel is gorgeously illustrated, with richness and detail that define it as the ultimate evolution of the noble bitmap.

Unfortunately, beneath that striking detail, *Shake It!* plays exactly like *Wario Land 4* (GBA). You work your way to the end of most levels, then backtrack to the beginning against a clock. Yet its stages are unimaginative

next to its predecessor's, its music tepid and dull. Even the cleverly integrated motion controls can't disguise the dated staleness of the mechanics beneath its sophisticated surface. In the end, its beauty is but a glorious coat of paint atop a tired design—a real letdown. But, damn, does that coat of paint look nice.

➔ **RAY:** Seems I'm the only one shook up by *Shake It!* For starters, I liked the music—some of it's grating, but the catchier tracks balance it out. I can also forgive the game's strict adherence to *Wario Land 4*—that was one of the best Game Boy Advance games, after all, and “more of the same” with higher detail isn't a bad thing. The game's almost over when

the level designs get more clever and fun, but this is a treasure hunt well worth joining.

➔ **G. FORD:** Be it the music or the beautifully stylized graphics, yep, *Shake It!* does well by its charm. But outside of that, not much impresses. Jeremy nails the point about the uninspired levels, yet I'd argue that most of the motion controls feel more tacked on than well integrated. For vehicles, the controls usually work fine. For actions like swinging on a bar or pounding the ground, they had me pining for simple button commands. So we're left with the highs (some of the boss showdowns) and lows (generic enemies, short length) of an average platformer. 🦊



Wii

DE BLOB

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Blue Tongue
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

REVIEWS

NICK

B

GOOD

The Good: Simple, colorful fun

The Bad: Too-similar levels, unnecessary motion controls

I.N.K.T.: Interstellar Nazis Kill Towns?

Paint the town red. And blue, and yellow, and green, and...

✦ **NICK:** If *de Blob* were slightly more charming and slightly less repetitive, this review would write itself. "The Wii has its *Katamari Damacy*," I'd declare, and you'd nod understandingly, walk to the nearest gaming retailer, and purchase it posthaste. But that's just an easy point of comparison for *Blob's* ball-rolling, level-exploring frame-work—it's still a very fun game in its own right, and despite not taking particular advantage of the Wii platform, it makes for one of the most relaxing, enjoyable titles on the system.

The narrative serves as a fine impetus for *Blob's* colorful gameplay: The dictatorial I.N.K.T. Corporation has taken over the chromatic urban sprawl of the Raydians, sucking out all of the color and generally making things mis-

erable (the Nazi-spoofing cut-scenes are a little bizarre, but the aesthetic's silly enough to work). As an unexplained, jungle-dwelling anthropomorphic paintball, the titular *de Blob* shows up to save the day by restoring color to the dreary environments and persecuted citizens—accomplished by smashing into paint-stealing robots and then rolling over buildings, trees, and everything else in sight.

Exploration is a nifty mix of puzzle and platformer, with the constant need to mix the right paint colors and swab the right objects to accomplish objectives. It's simple stuff, but it's surprisingly satisfying and packed with extra objectives for those who want the most out of their Blobbing. Though for some asinine reason, you

have to swing the Wii Remote to jump when a button press would've been perfectly fine. It's not a deal breaker, but it screams of trying to shoehorn in unnecessary motion control (a plague that apparently spreads to the farthest reaches of the Wii library).

Though the visuals of the very urban, industrial settings start to feel a bit similar about halfway through, *Blob's* sound design keeps the presentation savvy—different colors spit out different effects and add flourish to an excellent, jazzy soundtrack. The *Tony Hawk*-inspired multiplayer's solid, but the Wii isn't exactly hurting for great games to play with casual pals. Still, *Blob* fills its own little niche quite nicely—come for the color, and stay for the facile fun.



PS3/XB360

MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Developer: Pandemic
■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

NICK

B+

GOOD

G. FORD

B-

GOOD

SCOOTER

B

GOOD

The Good: Endlessly satisfying destruction

The Bad: Gimped co-op, lacks polish

Jeep with a Jump Button: Unofficial Smuggler's Run 3!

C'mon, baby, light our fire

✦ **NICK:** The original *Mercenaries* smartly relied on one of life's few constants: Blowing things up is fun. *Mercs 2* doesn't do much to evolve that formula, but this is a case where that's all right—this series does open-world destruction best, and despite a plague of idiotic A.I. drones and some other nagging annoyances, this sequel is *almost* everything it needs to be.

The main appeal of *Mercs 2's* Venezuelan expanse is that, with enough firepower, every object within it can be destroyed. From individual trees to entire oil rigs, nothing's safe from your destructive impulses—and with a perpetually growing arsenal of weapons, vehicles, and airstrikes, accomplishing missions is a matter of

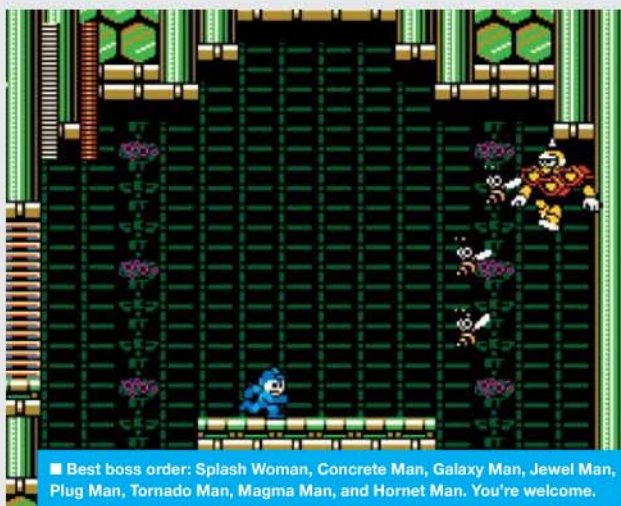
the right tool for the right job.

I could complain about the myriad quirks, but they're insubstantial in light of the enjoyable fundamentals. It won't light the world on fire, but this playground offers plenty of things to do and destroy.

✦ **G. FORD:** If you won't complain about those quirks, Nick, I'll man up. In a genre where *Grand Theft Auto IV* reigns, *Mercs 2's* herky-jerky animation and copious graphical pop-in are hard to ignore. Similarly, it took me a while to grow accustomed to the clunky vehicle controls—I wanna love to drive! But damned if the game didn't grow on me. Leveling every building on an island or subdu-

ing high-value targets had me in a destructively happy mood.

✦ **SCOOTER:** I pretty much view *Mercs 2* the same way I view fine 1980s cinema such as *Predator* or *Commando*: It's technically "flawed," but the carnage makes up for said flaws. A giant fuel-air bomb vaporizing bad dudes makes up for additional gripes, such as the somewhat terrible dialogue/story and menu-heavy interface. Heck, even though the co-op has the "you have to be within a certain distance of each other" caveat, it's still satisfying to jointly blow stuff up with a buddy—or even crash some stranger's game and grief him by killing the people he's working for.



■ Best boss order: Splash Woman, Concrete Man, Galaxy Man, Jewel Man, Plug Man, Tornado Man, Magma Man, and Hornet Man. You're welcome.

WiiWare (also on PSN/XBLA)

MEGA MAN 9

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Inti Creates ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

RYAN

B+
GOOD

The Good: Old-school aesthetic and challenge

The Bad: Difficulty sometimes borders on masochistic

Splash Woman: Let's hear it for Robot Master equality!

Getting one-shotted by flame pillars like it's 1988

➔ **RYAN:** If you're one of those crazies who naysays *Mega Man 9*'s retro vibe, I totally don't understand you. As a decades-long NES lover and evangelist, I'm overjoyed; it's a pretty daring stylistic choice in 2008—and, if anything, the 8-bit aesthetic underscores *MM9*'s similarly old-school platforming elements, which are equal parts satisfying and difficult.

Let's talk about that last part—*difficult*. Forgiveness is *not* one of this game's virtues. In all fairness, you can say that about most of the classic *Mega Man* games, but *MM9* routinely ratchets up the challenge a couple of notches past "insane." The structure's fundamentally unchanged: You guide the titular character through eight themed side-scrolling stages (in any

order you wish), armed with a simple gun and an ever-growing arsenal of useful weapons nabbed from an octet of android bosses—who each exhibit weakness to a specific weapon. So, your task is twofold: Survive each successive gauntlet and deduce an effective kill order (check the caption above for my advice).

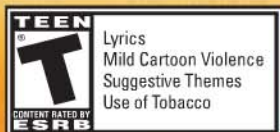
Surviving's rarely easy, though. Whether you're negotiating the series' trademark disappearing-blocks-over-bottomless-pits puzzles in Plug Man's stage, tangling with some of gaming's toughest timed jumps in Tornado Man's stage, or fighting the miniboss from hell in Jewel Man's stage, you're going to die *often*. And when you do, you'd better prepare to retread a lot of ground, as each stage comes

equipped with only two checkpoints: one at the halfway mark and one at the boss' antechamber.

You'll wanna break your controller in half at times, but clearing an arduous section's *extremely* gratifying—and after every hard-won victory, subsequent trips are almost like riding a bike. *MM9*'s relentlessness molds you into an expert by the time you reach the final chain of endgame stages, and you definitely *need* those skills to conquer the evil Dr. Wily's fortress (spoiler, I guess, if you've somehow *never* played a *Mega Man* game).

MM9 is an unapologetic nod to one of gaming's greatest eras. It might've been made for nostalgia-crazed dorks like me, but it's something that any challenge-seeking gamer can dig.

TO SING YOUR SONG
YOU GOTTA HAVE
LIPS!

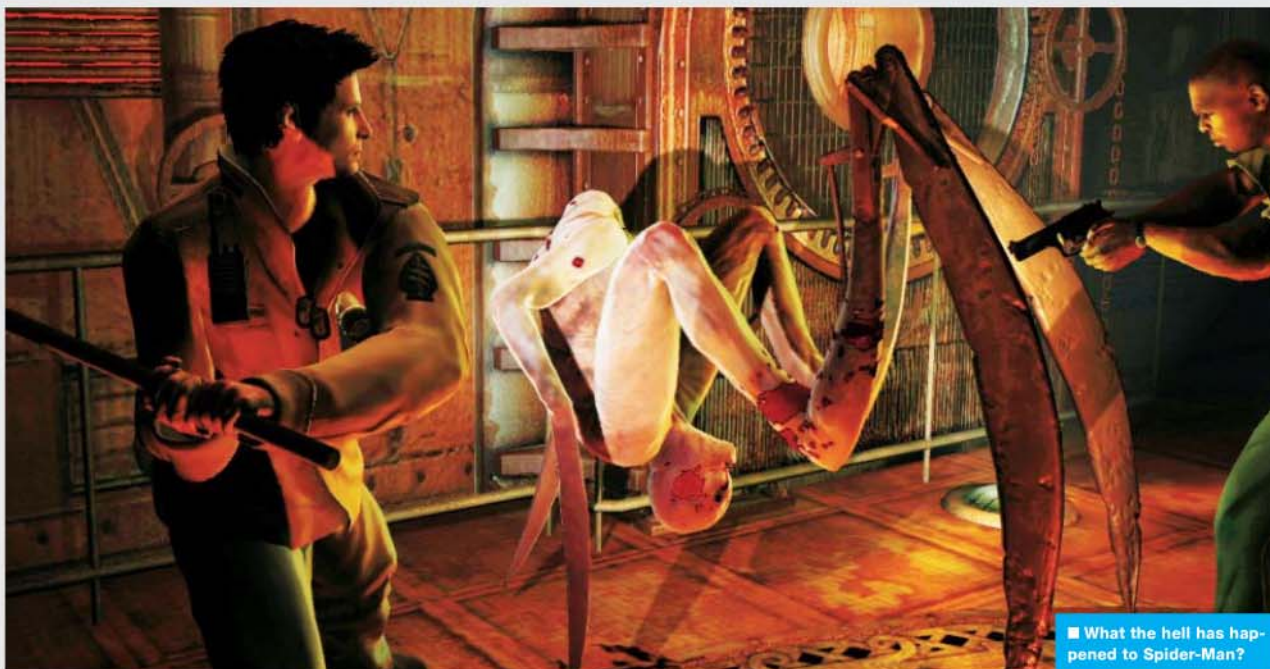


Introducing Lips, the ridiculously fun new singing game from Xbox 360. The party includes two interactive wireless microphones, 40 amazing songs, and an unlimited supply of good times! xbox.com/lips



Jump in.

XBOX 360



■ What the hell has happened to Spider-Man?

Xbox 360 (also on PS3)

SILENT HILL: HOMECOMING

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Double Helix ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

Breaking with tradition

ANTHONY

B
GOOD

GIANCARLO

C+
AVERAGE

SHANE

B-
GOOD

The Good: *Silent Hill* never looked so good

The Bad: Slow frame-rate, clunky controls

Goretastic: Brutal death sequences

✦ **ANTHONY:** Clunky combat and stories that intrigue—but make little sense—are staples of the venerable *Silent Hill* survivor-horror franchise. But if this fifth installment's any indication of what to expect in the future...then much has changed.

Most significantly, *Homecoming* completely alters the series' familiar camera and combat controls, so fights are now more about timing and counterattacks than furiously mashing buttons. And while the action's more intense, it's also more frustrating; I often found it nearly impossible to sidestep enemies and felt forced to confront them—a difficult task when outnumbered. The game looks (mostly) great, but some jarring graphical hiccups occasionally took me out of

the experience. *Homecoming's* story is entertaining; it remains grounded in series lore while also managing to make more sense than any previous narrative. While it doesn't top *Silent Hill 2* or 3, I'll still be proud to add *Homecoming* to my collection.

✦ **GIANCARLO:** Yeah, its controls are clunky, its brainteasers hearken back to survival-horror's early days, and it's painful to backtrack through an entire level to search for a single item you might've missed. Despite all of these issues, *Homecoming* has its moments—particularly of the crazy, grotesque sort that produce the “can't look away from the horrible car accident” effect. I couldn't help but want to see what happened next.

✦ **SHANE:** To someone who's been enraptured by this franchise since its inception, this sequel makes for a slightly bittersweet homecoming. Much like last year's *Origins*, this effort displays all the ingenuity of a decent *Silent Hill* cover band—your conflicted antihero still thwacks shambling evil nurses with a stick while deciphering painfully abstract puzzles. Luckily, *Homecoming* manages to nail the series' most compelling elements: Akira Yamaoka's chilling soundscapes mesh perfectly with the dilapidated locales, providing ample nightmare fuel for months to come. 🕷️

 **EGM Extras:** Creepy crawlies getting you down? Our *Homecoming* SuperGuide on EGM.1UP.com will help ya.



■ Would you really have noticed if we had run a screen from any one of a dozen other space shooters?

Xbox 360 (also on PS3)

FRACTURE

■ Publisher: LucasArts ■ Developer: Day 1 Studios ■ Players: 1-12 ■ ESRB: Teen

NICK
C-
AVERAGE

The Good:

Terraforming works well enough

The Bad:

Ridiculously derivative Character Names Don't Get Worse Than: Jet Brody

Crumbling under a mediocre crust

➤ **NICK:** Somewhere deep within *Fracture*, far below its offensively banal crust, lies a worthwhile, original game. The gimmick—terraforming terrain on the fly—works well enough (if a bit too predictably), but all told, *Fracture*'s thoroughly unexciting.

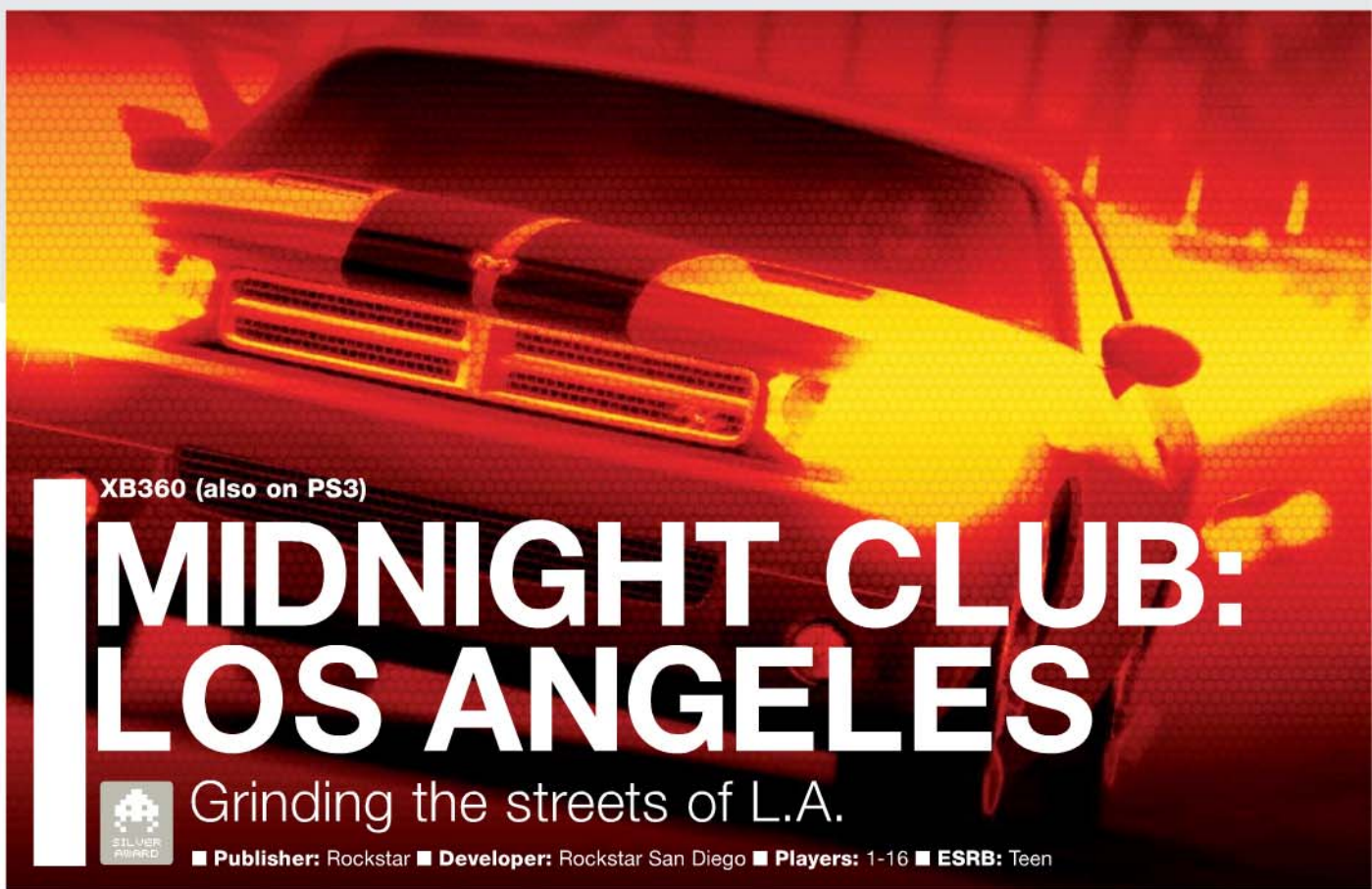
We've all heard plenty of jokes about bald space marines this console generation, but *Fracture* truly typifies this syndrome. Personality-less protagonist Jet Brody (what is this, *Mallrats* in space?) is perhaps the single most derivative character in the modern age of gaming, a direct combination of the heroes from *Resistance*/*Mass Effect*/*Gears of War*/*Too Human*. If the narrative weren't so staunchly heavy-handed, I'd put my money on Brody being a literal parody

of shooter-genre character tropes. That's to say nothing of the ship and armor design being lifted straight from other games—*Fracture*'s shameful, unapologetically trite aesthetic cannot be understated.

The Entrencher gun is *Fracture*'s true star, allowing you to raise and lower the rocky terrain that carpets most levels—providing a mechanic that's both unique and (theoretically) useful for level design. The limits placed on the deformation don't feel artificial or restrictive; you can't build a towering mountain into the sky or tunnel down to the Earth's core, but rarely will you feel like the game isn't letting you do what you want to do. But what the game *wants* you to do is a bit of a different story—it feels

like an endless terraforming tutorial that never really goes anywhere. At least combat uses the mechanic more dynamically, as you'll create your own cover on the fly and fire bombs that travel underground, Bugs Bunny style. If only the enemies didn't take way too long to die....

Fracture isn't fundamentally bad—it's just pockmarked with annoyances and never makes good on any of the positive things it sets up. Multiplayer's worth checking out (if a bit too chaotic), but I ended up having the most fun in the more sandbox-like Weapons Testing mode, simply messing around with the physics and terrain tools—it gives a heartbreaking hint of what the main game *could* have been with an injection of creativity. 🐼



XB360 (also on PS3)

MIDNIGHT CLUB: LOS ANGELES



Grinding the streets of L.A.

■ **Publisher:** Rockstar ■ **Developer:** Rockstar San Diego ■ **Players:** 1-16 ■ **ESRB:** Teen



■ Races are often both fast and furious.

GIANCARLO

B
GOOD

The Good: Solid controls, addictive leveling system, amazing re-creation of L.A.

The Bad: Inconsistent difficulty, some visual glitches and framerate hiccups

The Cops: They're pretty relentless

✦ **GIANCARLO:** It's a testament to the level of detail in *Midnight Club: Los Angeles* that I can search for a real-world L.A. landmark on Google Maps and find it, in approximately the same spot, in-game—give or take a few blocks. But the most impressive technical aspect of the latest *Midnight Club* is how well this massive world seamlessly serves its purpose as a hub for races. Upon entering the GPS mode, the game zooms out of your current location and gives an overhead view of the city, showing which races are currently available and their respective difficulty levels. And then it zooms back down when you're ready to hit the streets. Obviously, this isn't a new idea...but it's an impressive new take on it, nonetheless.

Actually, the same could be said for

the rest of *MC:LA* as well—none of the concepts are original, but they do their jobs, and they do them well. The reputation system's particularly noteworthy: It does away with the typical license-upgrade system and introduces a more involved leveling structure somewhat similar to what you'd find in a role-playing game—you earn experience points based on the type of race, its difficulty level, and where you finish. It's addictive and, at times, evokes the same sense of grinding and reward associated with RPGs.

One major sticking point for all this, though: the difficulty curve. After spending hours leveling up, purchasing new cars, and enhancing their performance, main missions tied to story elements (even those introduced early on) are still difficult. Opponent

A.I. rarely ever makes mistakes in these races...and any attempt to forcibly make them screw up is useless because computer-controlled cars seem impervious to any kind of bumping and nudging.

Thankfully, the game's got plenty of side races (highway races bring back memories of *Tokyo Xtreme Racer* on the Dreamcast) that offer challenges but won't leave you feeling nearly as frustrated, and the abundance of fun multiplayer options—ranging from standard checkpoint races to chaotic capture-the-flag competitions and even user-created races—provide ample reason to tear through the single-player campaign—if only so you can show off your brand new, customized car to friends and the rest of the world. **A-**



XB360 (also on PS3)

NBA LIVE 09

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

The start of something big

TODD

B

GOOD

The Good: Daily roster updates

The Bad: Way too many blocks

Be a Pro: Where's the career mode?

➔ **TODD:** It shocks me to type this, but the future of sports videogames will debut in *NBA Live 09*. I've been a harsh critic of this wobbly series for years, rejecting its failed attempts at rebirth while the *NBA 2K* series continued to grow and impress. But *Live*'s new Dynamic DNA is a growth spurt that'll have the few remaining sports-gaming competitors playing catch-up.

An online revolution, DNA allows users to update their rosters daily, not only with the latest player abilities but also with the latest in player tendencies—so if the Mavericks' Dirk Nowitzki loses his taste for firing up threes in real life, expect him to play inside the arc on your Xbox 360. One annoyance, though, is that the game's

more concerned with updating me on how often a player drives to his left instead of showing overlays of player performance (like points and boards).

Beyond the paradigm-shifting feature (which I hope is the first step toward disc-free annual roster updates), this game beats the Jordans off last year's risk-free foundational effort—more on that in a bit. But the same problem that's plagued *Live* for all these years persists: a soullessness to each possession.

I blame the HUD—which is so small that finding the score takes a telescope—and the camera. I'm so far away that I feel like a crowd member, not the player I'm controlling. I don't feel up close and personal with Heat forward Shawn Marion's oddball

shot or Kobe's fall-away jumper the way I do in *2K*'s hoops game. Here, everything feels distant. The *NBA* players' uniqueness gets lost from the cheap seats.

As for everything else, the improved Dynasty mode (which holds your hand throughout) is a model for *Madden*'s bore-a-dynasty to follow, and the snoozy-but-useful new *NBA* Academy is nice for newbies and for those who may have passed on the series in recent years. But I'm scratching my head at the lack of a Be a Pro career mode. After uncovering the thrills it offers in *NHL 09*, I was looking forward to it here. I guess they can stick it in next season, once the camera's all nice and fixed and the HUD gets some attention.



PS3/XB360

NBA 2K9

■ Publisher: 2K Sports ■ Developer: Visual Concepts
 ■ Players: 1-10 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Looks like we've got a repeat champion

DAVID

A-

EXCELLENT

The Good: 5-on-5 online games

The Bad: Complicated controls

Sweet 16: Re-creating the 1986 Boston Celtics

➔ **DAVID:** The year after winning a title, many teams suffer from a championship hangover. Instead of continuing where they left off, they often grow complacent and lose sight of what made them champions in the first place. Fortunately, the *NBA 2K9* team at Visual Concepts has avoided this mistake.

Immediately noticeable is the presentation. *NBA 2K9* does such an outstanding job of re-creating the *NBA* experience—from the pregame scouting report and the reflections of the arena lights on the court to its realistic player movement and behavior—that it's easy to mistake the game for an actual television broadcast.

And whether it's changing your dribble on the fly or altering shots in

midair, *2K9* offers an amazing level of freedom, but this freedom comes at a cost—the control scheme is shockingly complicated. Many moves and set plays require multiple button and analog presses that feel more at home in a rhythm game than a sports title.

But back to the goods: The game shines particularly bright in the Total Team Control mode, which allows you to hook up online with nine other real-life players for 5-on-5 basketball. This mode simulates the experience of playing an actual game of basketball more closely than any videogame I've played. In these games, my teammates moved without the ball much like they would in a real game, setting up alley-oops and backdoor screens like perennial *NBA* all-stars.

2K9 also sports the usual assortment of online leagues and offline franchise modes, but I particularly enjoyed the player- and team-creation tools. Reconstructing the 1986 *NBA* Champion Boston Celtics was a thrill, and through the *2K* Share feature, I can distribute my custom championship team to other users. Another cool addition is the updated Reelmaker tool, which allows me to edit my personal highlights and even download the video file to my computer to share with other b-ball fans online.

The *NBA 2K9* team has refined last year's game and added several new features that change the way videogame basketball is played. While it's not perfect, *2K9*'s certainly headed toward another title run.

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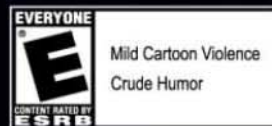
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XB360 (also on PS3)

FIFA 09

■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: EA Canada
 ■ Players: 1-20 ■ ESRB: Everyone

ERIC

B+

GOOD

The Good: Improves a lot of stuff that *FIFA 08* did wrong

The Bad: Goalkeeper A.I. is still frustratingly incompetent

Ugliest FIFA 09 Footballer Award:
 Dirk Kuyt

EA buries it in the upper corner once again

✦ **ERIC:** EA Sports takes a lot of crap from bloggers and haters because they dominate their field. But the truth is that EA Sports is successful for a reason: They boys make some damn fine games, soccer included.

FIFA 09 and its purported "250 core gameplay additions" go a long way (though not all the way) toward perfecting that critical sports-game element: feel. *FIFA 08* suffered from stilted, unnatural movements and imprecise controls, but *09* models players' physical weight, speed, and momentum with impressive verisimilitude. When they go shoulder to shoulder, the bigger athletes realistically push around the smaller ones, while undersized players benefit from superior quickness. Thumbstickery is like-

wise upgraded: It's now easy to string together one-touch passes, switch fields with a long ball, and juke a guy out of his fluorescent-pink, Euro-issue jockstrap without having to brave *08*'s punishing learning curve.

And speaking of Euro jockstraps, *09* features just about every top-flight world soccer league in which you're likely to be interested, including Mexico's Primera División, England's Premiership, and, yes, America's Major League Soccer. In addition to your standard one-shot, tournament, practice, and league options, *09* also features the "Be a Pro" mode. Here, you create a custom player and develop his skills over four seasons, giving you a chance to focus on and master a single position on the pitch. Even

better: You can take your custom player online and join nine of your very closest friends against as many as 10 other dudes all playing custom "pros."

09 isn't without a few foibles, of course. It continues the series' tradition of inept goalkeeper A.I., which—while making for some unintentionally hilarious moments—is much more frustrating than it sounds on paper. Nothing's fun about painstakingly setting up your defensive strategy, only to be foiled by a bonehead keeper who won't move off his line. Also, while more fluid than *08*, *09* doesn't quite reach the "bing-bang-boom" level of the real-life game. Nevertheless, *09*'s the best soccer game on the market—and fans that were put off by *08*'s flaws should surely give it a look.



Xbox 360

INFINITE UNDISCOVERY

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ Developer: tri-Ace
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

Undiscovered potential

A. FITCH

B

GOOD

MILKMAN

B

GOOD

SHANE

C+

AVERAGE

The Good: Seamless real-time battles

The Bad: Clunky menus and interfaces
Palom and Porom

Clones: Kill this RPG cliché, now!

✦ **A. FITCH:** Fair warning: *Infinite Undiscovery*, the first current-gen action-roleplayer from acclaimed *Valkyrie Profile* developer tri-Ace, kicks off with a grinding stealth-action segment, a pointless escort mission, and a half-assed castle-siege minigame...among other ill-advised wrong turns. In short, the first few hours are *disastrous*.

Stick with *IU*, though, and you'll be rewarded with a surprisingly compelling tale and gameplay that shines when it sticks to the basics. The double-digit roster should appeal to those who love managing huge casts of characters, though *IU* lacks the convenient hub castle and streamlined party-swapping at the core of successful army-raising RPGs. Syncing

up with your compadres in battle can also be a chore due to unnecessarily complex button-pressing sequences. Still, *IU* won me over in the end with its rewarding real-time combat (think *Tales* meets *Final Fantasy XII*), kooky charm, and goofy humor. It's absolutely recommendable, but it could've been so much more.

✦ **MILKMAN:** It's sometimes tough to shake the feeling that *IU*'s a second-tier action-RPG (generic Japanese RPG character designs, inconsistent visuals), but tri-Ace has crafted a pretty solid game nonetheless. The thing that really irritates me, though—in this age of advanced hardware—is gathering tons of accessories and gear and still being stuck with the

same-looking character for the entire two-disc marathon. At least you eventually acquire a giant bear ally to ride into battle—what other RPG has that?

✦ **SHANE:** *IU* displays flashes of brilliant craftsmanship: Protagonist Capell's responsive, action-packed swordplay effectively balances offense and defense, expansive outdoor environments provide stunning vistas, and the soundtrack boasts some truly haunting melodies. But many other aspects of this title simply feel rough and unfinished. Poor pacing, cumbersome controls, and severely linear exploration instantly disappoint, and a cavalcade of low-budget cut-scenes and repeat enemies reveals a lack of ambition.



Xbox 360 (also coming to PS3/Wii)

ROCK BAND 2

■ Publisher: MTV Games ■ Developer: Harmonix ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

Will your neighbors ever sleep again?

ROBERT

A-
EXCELLENT

MICHAEL

A-
EXCELLENT

JUSTIN

A
EXCELLENT

The Good:

Enormous setlist

The Bad: Unlocking

songs is taxing

No Soul: If Duran

Duran is "rock," then so is Al Green

➔ **ROBERT:** Harmonix cofounder Alex Rigopulos is fond of calling *Rock Band* a "platform for music," much like Apple's iTunes. In that sense, *Rock Band 2*'s more like a system update than a sequel. It's a collection of interface tweaks and non-earth-shattering new features—most notably, a couple of drum-training modes that teach aspiring pizza-delivery boys real-life drum beats and fills. The real attraction is the game's bulge of songs (84 on the disc, plus 20 free downloads from the online store), and all are original recordings. As in the first game, you'll find tunes that entertain on one instrument and bore on another. And, as in the first game, at higher levels of play, you'll experience the sensation of real musicianship—plastic instruments

be damned. We still need more songs that drunk girls wanna sing, but *Rock Band* remains the ultimate party game.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Don't expect a whole lot of innovation on this disc: *Rock Band 2* sounds (and more importantly, plays) just like you think it will. Is that bad? Hell no. While Harmonix didn't produce a true genre-defying follow-up to their original videogame rocker, they're certainly not suffering from the sophomore slump. Everything in *Rock Band 2* is exactly what you'd expect, even down to the annoying (and overly long) World Tour mode. Still, the few new additions (drum trainer, updated interface, etc.), coupled with the awesome song selection, kept me (and my neighbors) up to the wee hours

of the morning. And once the music ended, it was pretty clear: *Rock Band 2* is another chart-topper.

➔ **JUSTIN:** Harmonix knows what their fans want. Beyond the staggering number of tracks available out of the box, not only is all of the current DLC compatible with *Rock Band 2* (without having to redownload a thing!), all but three tracks from the original will also be transferred over for \$5. The hardware's a step up as well; my apartment's an obstacle course of cords and peripherals, but *Rock Band 2*'s instrument upgrades—especially the wireless, sturdier, more padded drums—make this the ultimate version "for those about to rock" but who haven't quite yet. **A-**



■ Sonic runs circles around foes—if you're quick enough on the draw yourself.



DS

SONIC CHRONICLES: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: BioWare ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Roleplaying's not just for furries

RYAN

A

EXCELLENT

The Good: Fantastic action-lite RPG in the spirit of the *Super Mario RPG* series

The Bad: BioWare's buyout by EA may mean no sequels

Dr. Eggman: Remember when he was called Dr. Robotnik?

► **RYAN:** The idea of a *Sonic* role-playing game from BioWare (*Mass Effect*, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*) sounds like one of EGM's elaborate April Fools' jokes. But it's real, it's here...and it's awesome.

Sonic Chronicles takes the franchise in a new and welcome direction, uprooting the titular anthropomorphic hedgehog and friends from their action-packed comfort zone and dropping them into an RPG environment that closely resembles *Super Mario RPG* and its handheld sequels.

The formula definitely does Sonic's world justice: Events unfold from an isometric perspective, with nonplayer characters to chat up (most with their own conversation trees), environments to interact with (action icons trigger

various travel capabilities, while each area features a smattering of progress-impeding puzzles), and stuff to collect (gold rings, which you'll spend on better gear and consumable items). The goofy, lighthearted story is divided into chapters; things kick off with Sonic searching for his kidnapped compatriot Knuckles and learning that the Chaos Emeralds—the series' signature MacGuffins—have gone missing. He meets up with various pals along the way, and before you know it, he's got a posse of furries ready to battle the Dark Brotherhood's minions.

Its turn-based combat's a joy; in addition to the typical attack/defend options, each character packs a repertoire of signature moves that expands with each level gained.

Executing these maneuvers—and evading certain enemy attacks—requires timed stylus movements that coincide with an onscreen marker. Midfight action sequences (jump over crates and collect rings while giving chase) break things up, and boss fights are tense affairs where survival's a matter of hand-eye coordination.

Again, *Chronicles* is a lot like *SMRPG*. Its light action elements provide fun puzzle-solving and exploration opportunities without cramping the fairly traditional RPG style, and even if you're not a big *Sonic* fan, you'll derive plenty of enjoyment. **A-**

EGM Extras: Marauders slowing you down? Hit up our *Sonic Chronicles* SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.com.



DS

THE LEGEND OF KAGE 2

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

Ninjas never go out of fashion

✦ **SHANE:** It's funny—despite desperate pleas and fan petitions on their behalf, many of the most sought-after retro gaming revivals (*Kid Icarus*, *Final Fantasy VII*) remain dead and buried, while others, such as this DS sequel to 1984's *The Legend of Kage*, suddenly arrive without warning. And oddly enough, *Kage 2* doesn't seem all that concerned with paying homage to its original source material. Fans hoping for the same treetop shuriken flurries of the arcade hit may be surprised to find a game that feels more like a decent *Shinobi* reboot.

At the game's outset, you select either titular ninja Kage or his sultry companion, Chihiro (she fights with a chain and scythe), and set in for several hours of old-fashioned, side-scrolling jump-n-slash action. Veteran gamers will immediately wax nostalgic for the colorful sprite artwork and synthetic chiptune music, even if it's something of a faux relic—*Kage 2* almost seems like some lost Super Nintendo (or even NeoGeo) game, not a product birthed of the modern world. The audiovisual trappings aren't completely antiquated, but when held up against the likes of *Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia*, *Kage*'s lack of snazzy graphical effects and voiceovers disappoints.

Luckily, *Kage*'s action-paced gameplay transcends its dated veneer—lightning-fast combat means that you're constantly building up a massive chain of successive kills by slicing through ninja fodder. And while the gameplay initially appears basic, you unlock new skills and additional ninja-magic orbs (that can be combined via a touch-panel minigame) as you progress. These ninjitsu thrills will likely keep you playing, but don't expect too many surprises along the way: Dull boss encounters and slightly repetitive level layouts keep the excitement from boiling over too furiously.

As a sequel that gamers didn't even know they wanted, *The Legend of Kage 2* justifies its existence by delivering traditional ninja action. A bit more ambition could've made this a true classic (how about some Wi-Fi co-op?), but as it stands, it's the next best thing to cramming GBA cult classic *Ninja Five-O* into your DS. Plus, I'd also like to commend the publisher for eschewing what jaded gamers have dubbed the dreaded "Square Enix tax" for this release—

Kage 2 sports a value-added \$20 asking price, a far cry from the exorbitant sticker shock plaguing *Final Fantasy* DS games.

SHANE
B-
GOOD

The Good: Classic ninja gameplay
The Bad: Rudimentary level design
Awesome Pseudo-sequel: *Demon Sword* (NES)



DS

AWAY: SHUFFLE DUNGEON

■ Publisher: Majesco ■ Developer: AQ Interactive/Artoon/Mistwalker
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

A one-trick pony...but what a trick

✦ **JEREMY:** *Away: Shuffle Dungeon* might be the most taxing game I've ever played. The exhaustion isn't a matter of reflexes, however; like most top-down action-role-playing games, it doesn't require thumb dexterity so much as cautious play. That's the rub, though: Caution only goes so far when the dungeon's rearranging itself every few seconds.

Shuffle Dungeon is a conceptual riff on the notorious recurring timed dungeon in fellow DS title *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*, demanding smart play by making the dungeon itself a hazard. Each labyrinth is spread across the DS' two screens—every few seconds, one of the screens shuffles, shifting to a new configuration. Linger too long and you'll be injured—and worse, sent back to the beginning of the current floor.

So conservative play makes for a poor strategy in *Shuffle Dungeon*; sticking around any single spot for more than about 10 seconds leaves you trapped as the dungeon transforms. With the world in an ever-constant state of motion, you're forced to push forward and take risks that you'd otherwise never attempt. You'll quickly learn to keep your eyes peeled so as to see which screen is about to flip, and the countdown timer becomes your nemesis as you make a last-second dash for that tantalizing chest or switch on the screen that's about to disappear (of course, you can always choose to hang around until that screen shuffles back into play, but you never know when that'll be).

Unfortunately, this clever mechanic is the only unique thing about *Shuffle Dungeon*. The game's overarching goal is to rebuild a town by rescuing its myriad captive citizens, much like in the Super Nintendo classic *Soul Blazer*, but that's really just a means to an end. The real meat of *Shuffle Dungeon*'s gameplay is in exploring dungeons; doing so allows you to upgrade the town (and your tagalong party of curious magical creatures)...but really, that's just a bonus on top of all of the dungeon-diving.

Shuffle Dungeon's strength lies in its level designs, which are cleverly crafted so as to force tough choices at the spur of the moment. The limited structure grows a bit long in the tooth once

you've been playing for a while...but even so, it never stops pushing you to make those snap decisions.

JEREMY
B-
GOOD

The Good: Clever core gimmick with solid action on top
The Bad: Not much going on beyond the gimmick
Splendid: One of the best uses of DS hardware yet



DS

CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Konami ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

Finally tapping a new vein

SHANE

A-
EXCELLENT

The Good: Deep gameplay, spooky graphics and music
The Bad: Confusing puzzles, cut-and-paste levels

Formula: *Symphony of the Night* (PS1) meets *Simon's Quest* (NES)

➔ **SHANE:** As the fifth portable “Metroid-vania” to appear since Konami’s *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (PS1) expertly evolved the simple, arcade-rooted franchise into an action-RPG legend, *Ecclesia* will surprise gamers expecting another me-too retread through Drac’s abode.

The game’s lone new heroine, Shanoa, represents a massive deviation from the series’ whip-crackin’ Belmont bloodline—she’s a dutiful, emotionless acolyte who wields amazing magical abilities in lieu of a whip. Her clever “glyph” powers completely redefine the nature of *Castlevania* combat: Rather than fighting with physical weapons, Shanoa must cash in ever-regenerating MP to manifest the powers of equipped glyphs. You

can have two weapons and one ability (magical attack, enemy summon, etc.) ready at any time, and specific glyphs can be used in unison for more devastating effects. This innovative system, coupled with tougher standard enemies, makes for a true *Castlevania* combat renaissance—having to experiment with warping to various locales via magic paintings, but *Ecclesia* gives fans of the NES classic *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* what they truly desire—plenty of labyrinthine manors, spooky outdoor envi-

ronments, and even a town to explore. Sure, some of these stages cut corners with copy-and-paste level design, but expertly hidden secrets, wild new enemies, and awesomely challenging bosses keep things interesting.

So what keeps *Ecclesia* from ousting *Symphony* as the ultimate *Castlevania*? A well-intended set of subquests that sees you running all over creation to rescue kidnapped villagers (who then make goofy fetch-request requests) ends up becoming a disastrous chore when you’re forced to comb every pixel of the world to do their bidding. You must rescue everyone in order to access the last third of the game, and the paucity of in-game hints invokes the classic frustration of *Simon's Quest*. **B+**

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DS

KIRBY: SUPER STAR ULTRA

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: HAL Laboratory ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Tickled pink

ANDREW P.

A-
EXCELLENT

The Good: Plenty of powers to absorb

The Bad: Forgettable DS-specific features

What We Want

Next: Kirby: Canvas Curse 2

➤ **ANDREW P:** If you've played any of the *Super Smash Bros.* games and wondered where a good deal of the items and characters came from, chances are you've never played a proper Kirby game. Considering that the pink puffball's usually emerged toward the end of each Nintendo console's lifespan and has never received the push he's deserved, this is forgivable. But now, it's also redeemable: *Super Star Ultra* is an enhanced remake of the excellent Super NES platforming classic Kirby: *Super Star*, with some DS bells 'n' whistles thrown in for good measure.

Ultra's assorted game segments each put their own twist on the Kirby platforming idea (calling them minigames would be sell-

ing them short). In the starter level, Spring Breeze, you'll acclimate to the mechanics of absorbing enemy powers and playing with your co-op buddy (either A.I.-controlled or a second player with a separate game card—which we were, unfortunately, unable to check out). After Spring Breeze, you unlock further Kirbyverse adventures featuring characters like Meta Knight and King Dedede. Some areas are more substantive than others: The Great Cave Offensive sees Kirby traversing levels in search of 60 hidden treasure chests, while Gourmet Race is a simple face-off through a small obstacle course.

But while these concepts are interesting, a lot of the excellent material gets repurposed in the later unlock-

able game types. In particular, bosses are plentiful, and the strategies never change. The Meta Knightmare Ultra mode essentially consists of repeating portions of the game that you've already seen, but with an overpowered Meta Knight instead of Kirby. It's an issue further exacerbated by Kirby's inelegant level design; it's clever at times, especially when you need to use specific powers situationally. But compared to the Mario games from that era, *Ultra*'s filled with flat, wasted space that platforming vets won't have any trouble with.

At the same time, that problem's easy to tolerate because Kirby and company are just too damn cute and cheerful. If *Smash Bros.* piqued your interest, *Ultra*'s your next step. **A-**



DS



PSP

REVIEWS

VIVA PIÑATA: POCKET PARADISE

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Rare
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Portable piñata paradise for one

➤ ANTHONY: The *Viva Piñata* series has always been about obtaining and breeding adorable living piñata creatures. The way in which you do it—through cultivating a beautiful garden that's attractive to the breed of piñata you seek—really captivated me on the two Xbox 360 versions, and it moves to the DS with grace.

Pocket Paradise functions as a series of loosely connected quests—luring one piñata into your garden will likely attract another one, thus keeping you constantly engaged...assuming that sort of thing appeals to you. You gain experience each time a new piñata visits, becomes a resident, or is successfully bred. Leveling up isn't just about getting a higher number to appear on the screen, though; higher levels mean new piñatas as well as new objects to purchase from the in-game stores.

The basic gameplay remains mostly intact despite the downsizing, but lots of little differences from the 360 versions keep things interesting for *Viva* fanatics. For instance, aquatic plants no longer need to be watered, as they apparently obtain water from the pond. It's just one of many little differences—far too numerous to recount here—but the important thing is that these changes alter play enough that even the most seasoned gardeners must rethink the way they go about working their land.

The biggest difference—and the one that takes the most getting used to—is the stylus control scheme. I was worried that the touch screen wouldn't be sensitive enough for me to place my seeds exactly where I wanted or to dig a pond to my desired specifications, but I was wrong. The stylus works splendidly, and within the first (of many) hours I spent with the game, I was quickly navigating with the same ease I experienced with the 360 version, creating gardens that rapidly attracted waves of new piñatas.

The team at Rare did an awesome job at retaining a surprising amount of features in this DS iteration. Even the colorful art style makes the transition, though understandably, it's nowhere near as gorgeous as *Pocket Paradise*'s console counterparts. And while I still prefer the console version—its beautiful visuals and delightful music are pleasures to take in from the comfort of home—*Pocket*

Paradise will always have a place in my pocket (and my heart) when I need my piñata fix on the fly.

ANTHONY
B+
GOOD

The Good: Addictive as always!

The Bad: Addictive as always...

XB360/DS Connectivity: What we wouldn't give for it

STAR OCEAN: FIRST DEPARTURE

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ Developer: tri-Ace
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

A proper Star Ocean 'sequel'

➤ A. FITCH: Nearly a decade ago, tri-Ace's under-the-radar PS1 sci-fi action-role-playing gem *Star Ocean: The Second Story* hooked me like few RPGs ever have. Its addictive item crafting and unique relationship-sim elements coaxed me into more than 10 total playthroughs in my absurdly ambitious quest to trigger all 80-plus ending vignettes.

Come 2004, though, I couldn't bring myself to complete PS2 entry *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time* even once. The characters, combat, story, and clunky transition to 3D just never clicked—and its notoriously shocking plot twist was, in my opinion, an unwarranted slap in the face to fans of *Second Story* (endless message-board screeds will attest that I'm not alone in this feeling).

With all that in mind, then, *First Departure*—an enhanced remake of the previously Japan-only Super Famicom series debut—is the “sequel” we should've gotten all along. Nearly every familiar element from *Second Story* is lovingly re-created here, whether it's the 2D sprites on prerendered backdrops, the simple yet satisfying button-mashy combat, or the deliciously haunting music. Even the all-capping of every playable character name hearkens back to RPGs of old, and protagonist Roddick is right at home in this retro motif, with his pointy ears and poofy '90s RPG hero hair. In fact, it's the no-frills story, not the archaic graphics, that truly betrays the game's advanced age.

So, if it feels a bit dated, why the hell have I been staying up till 4 a.m. playing this game, then? Easy—the ridiculously engrossing crafting minutiae sucks me in every time, whether it's cooking up a sumptuous feast, penning tomes of arcane knowledge, or composing orchestral opuses. You can even customize character relationships via skits that influence affection toward various comrades—which, in turn, affects the ultimate ending. And with more than 20 possible party combinations, just about every quest plays out a little differently.

Look, I'm not stuck in the past—I realize that this series' ultimate future lies with next year's *Star Ocean: The Last Hope* on Xbox 360, and I'm cautiously optimistic that they'll get it right this time. But I'm

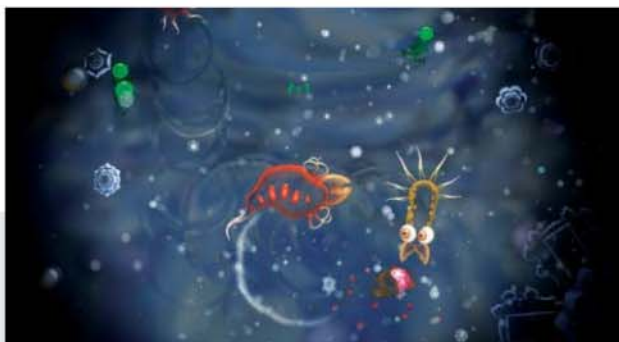
also elated that with *First Departure*, an over-looked classic's finally getting the follow-up it so richly deserved.

A. FITCH
B+
GOOD

The Good: Addictive item crafting, relationship building

The Bad: Archaic storytelling and presentation

A Distinct Lack Of: Stars, oceans, or general spacefaring



PC

SPORE

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Developer: Maxis ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

SCOOTER

B+
GOOD

The Good: Seeing you and your buddies' creations propagate

The Bad: An imperfect mix of genres
1UP Scooter: Add me to your buddy list and let my race of Nomnoms ravage your galaxy!

A tangible realization of intelligent design

➤ **SCOOTER:** Is *Spore* the greatest and grandest creation to spring from the ginormous cranium of mastermind game designer Will Wright? No, but that's because I'm not sure if "game" is the proper term. Like Wright's other projects (*SimCity*, *The Sims*), a better description would be a "toy," as you invent your own fun by messing around with the various gameplay systems. While *The Sims* is essentially a dollhouse/life-drama toy, *Spore*'s a home-science kit that sees you take a species from single-cell simplicity to vast galactic empire.

Spore's five phases feel like a mishmash of five different games at once; it plays like PSN microorganism muncher *fIOW* (Cell), then like a blend of *World of Warcraft*, *The Sims*,

and *Simon Says* (Creature), then like real-time-strategy-for-babies (Tribe), then like an even more streamlined *Civilization Revolution* (er...*Civilization*), and finally like an online sci-fi role-playing game fused with *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Space). While the overall genre blend is pretty spiffy (I grew quite attached to my race of Nomnoms as they developed from parametia to a race of spacefaring savages), each phase that precedes Space actually feels quite shallow. My main *Spore* game took about 15 hours to finish, but four of those were spent breezing through the first four stages, and the last 11 or so were just in Space (which adds layers of complexity, like diplomacy, trade routes, star navigation, terraforming, interstellar

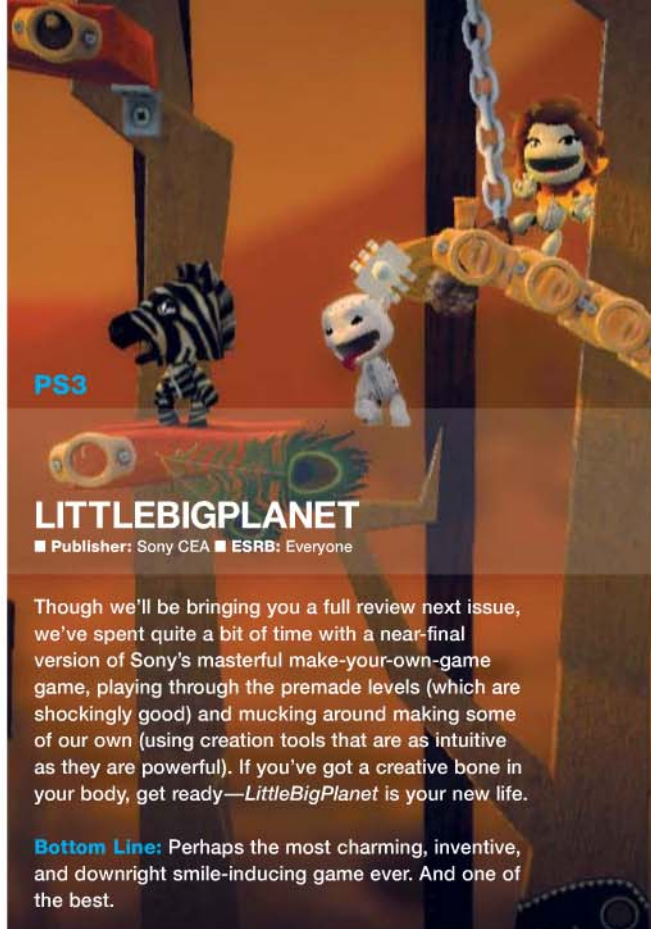
warfare, and so on and so on).

Simplistic gameplay aside, *Spore*'s best features are the various intersecting editors (creature, vehicle, building) and the online Sporepedia database. Seeing the weird things that other players have made (flying teddy-bear spaceships, Mario-shaped houses) and interacting with those creations in my own game is a different and unique experience. It's a flawed game that tries to do too much, but—when you view it as a take on intelligent design with a focus on creation and sharing—it's more than worthwhile, much like the rest of Wright's work. 🦖



EGM Extras: Wanna build the ultimate creature? Check out our *Spore SuperGuide* at EGM.1UP.com.

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



PS3

LITTLEBIGPLANET

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ ESRB: Everyone

Though we'll be bringing you a full review next issue, we've spent quite a bit of time with a near-final version of Sony's masterful make-your-own-game game, playing through the premade levels (which are shockingly good) and mucking around making some of our own (using creation tools that are as intuitive as they are powerful). If you've got a creative bone in your body, get ready—*LittleBigPlanet* is your new life.

Bottom Line: Perhaps the most charming, inventive, and downright smile-inducing game ever. And one of the best.



PS3/XB360

BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ ESRB: Mature

Our full *Hell's Highway* review was supposed to be here, but 11th-hour multiplayer issues hindered the process. On the other hand, the single-player mode will be instantly familiar to those who've played the previous titles and features new cover mechanics, environments, and improved A.I. that ensure even skilled commanders will have their work cut out for them.

Bottom Line: If you're looking for a shooter that fits nicely between "sim" and "fun," take a stroll on *Hell's Highway*.



PS3

BIOSHOCK

■ Publisher: 2K Games ■ ESRB: Mature

Our return to Rapture might look essentially the same on the PlayStation 3, but the new "Survivor" difficulty mode, which decreases the damage you dole out while increasing the amount you absorb, gave us a much harsher greeting. Like, *significantly*. It'll be a good challenge for the Legendary/Veteran crowd that thinks extra Eve is for babies.

Bottom Line: One year later, *BioShock* remains a beautiful and haunting game. And new content, in the form of downloadable challenge rooms, is a good thing.



PS3/XB360

DEAD SPACE

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ ESRB: Mature

Dead Space seems to veer away from its scary aspects more than promised, verging on *Gears of War* territory—some call it a horror game, but it isn't. The main difference is that the difficult sections are the ones where you're low on ammo (as opposed to just fighting enemy waves). But as a tense action game with enemy-dissecting guns, it works extremely well.

Bottom Line: We're intrigued by what *Dead Space* has to offer, but its lack of memorable moments—we've only seen a couple at this point—makes us a little skeptical.



PS3/XB360

BLITZ: THE LEAGUE II

■ Publisher: Midway ■ ESRB: Mature

Once again, former NFL great and one-time addict Lawrence Taylor reprises his role as *Blitz*'s cover "athlete"—and, as before, you'll "juice" players up to recover quickly from their frequent injuries. The single-player mode offers some RPG-lite fare to this arcade-style game as you select your player attributes during an introductory press conference.

Bottom Line: If you love filling your players with enough steroids to be mistaken for Sasquatch, you might actually enjoy this one. The squeamish need not apply.

PS3/XB360

SAINTS ROW 2

■ Publisher: THQ ■ ESRB: Mature

The original *Saints Row* was a hit, partly due to the lack of competition from a current-gen *Grand Theft Auto*, but also because it was a solid, enjoyable open-world shooter. We recently played a near-final version of *Saints Row 2*, which—despite being in *GTA4*'s ample shadow—once again sucked us in. From its sick character creator to its embellished urban theme to its exemplary online co-op setup, we're primed for the final game.

Bottom Line: *Saints Row 2* is no *GTA4* killer...but an entertaining, less-serious offering works for us.



Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2

MOTOGP 08

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ ESRB: Everyone

Incredibly slick-looking, Capcom's latest *MotoGP* is the most comprehensive yet. With tons of real racers, bikes, and tracks, fans of the so-called "fastest-growing sport in the U.S." will be champing at the left trigger to get a hold of *MotoGP 08*. Career mode's the standout here, allowing you to join a team, earn upgrades, and ultimately rock socks. Arcade mode makes biking a piece of cake, yet still manages to entertain.

Bottom Line: It's not perfect, but *MotoGP 08* is a must-have for motorbike fans.



Wii



PS3/XB360



PS3/XB360/PS2

SAMBA DE AMIGO

■ Publisher: Sega ■ ESRB: Everyone

A cheesy remix of "Livin' La Vida Loca" is never a good idea. And when the most exciting extras are ridiculous alternate maraca sounds (think: a voice saying "Hey!" for each shake of an eighth note), you'll begin to see that—despite the inviting veneer—*Samba de Amigo* on Wii just isn't the sequel fans were hoping for. Even as a remake, it falls short of the original's maraca-shaking fun.

Bottom Line: From what we've played, *Samba*'s a lot like its included minigames—lazy and disappointing.

PURE

■ Publisher: Disney Interactive ■ ESRB: Everyone

A gorgeous off-road racer with a nifty approach that keeps you busy from start to finish, Disney's *Pure* marries two distinct disciplines—racing and high-flying aerial tricks—into a single undertaking. Easy to grasp but harder to master, the game delivers 30 incredibly scenic circuits, a surprisingly deep garage and ATV-creation facility, and more free fall drops than a skydiving school.

Bottom Line: *Pure* may be a thrill-seeker's dirt-encrusted paradise, but it also ingeniously puts you on the clock. And that's its charm.

TNA IMPACT!




■ Publisher: Midway ■ ESRB: Teen

Spandex-lovers have been itching for a new wrestling game since the *SmackDown vs. Raw* series became as stagnant as a Triple H title reign. But *TNA Impact!* doesn't quite provide the relief for long-lasting rope burn. The graphics and animations are superb, but this grappler's still green in the ring—the lackluster features and grapple system pin it down.

Bottom Line: *SmackDown vs. Raw* is still the king of the gaming ring, but *TNA Impact!* could be a worthy contender down the line.

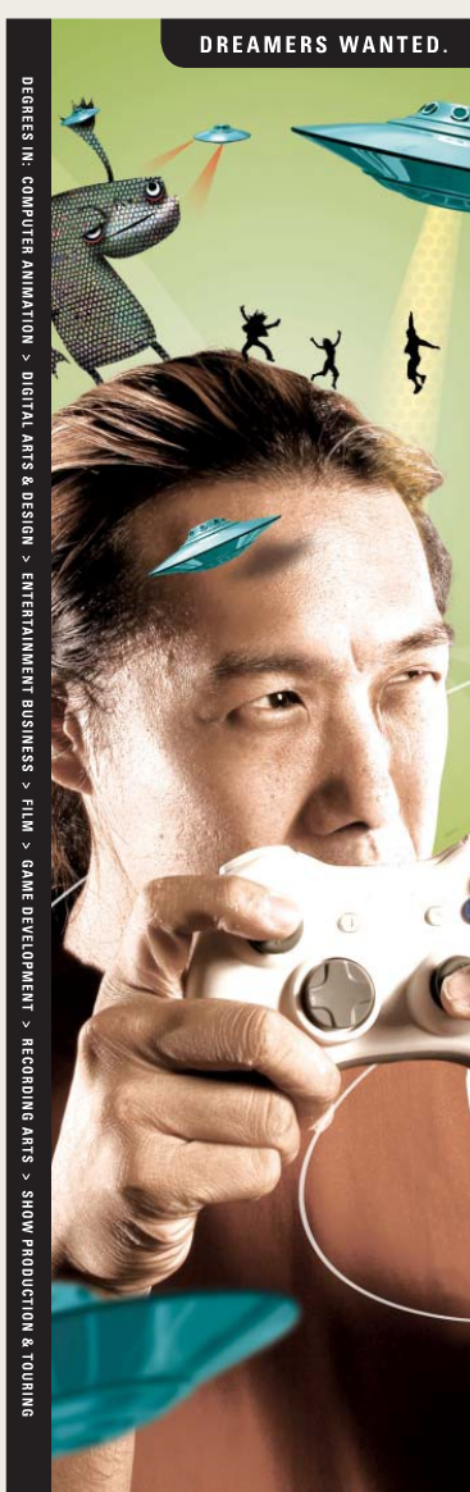
> THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Aug./Sept.

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores		
1	Wii Fit	Wii	B+	B-	B
2	Madden NFL 09	XB360	A	B	A-
3	Madden NFL 09	PS3	A	B	A-
4	Mario Kart Wii with Wii Wheel	Wii	B+	C+	C
5	Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	PS3	B+	C+	B+
	 If <i>Prologue</i> keeps selling this well, we can only imagine what the <i>actual</i> game's going to sell like.				
6	Rock Band: Special Edition	Wii	B- (on 1UP.com)		
7	Madden NFL 09 All-Play	Wii	Not Reviewed		
8	Too Human	XB360	C-	C-	D+
	 It's obvious that review scores have little influence on sales after all. Here's hoping we still have jobs....				
9	Madden NFL 09	PS2	Not Reviewed		
10	Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	Wii	C+	B-	C+
11	Grand Theft Auto IV	PS3	A+	A+	A
12	We Ski	Wii	A (on 1UP.com)		
	 <i>We Ski's</i> doing well for itself—maybe Namco Bandai should release <i>We Canoe</i> during the summer months.				
13	Mario Super Sluggers	Wii	B		
14	New Super Mario Bros.	DS	A+	A	B+
15	Madden NFL 09: 20th Anniversary Collector's Edition	XB360	A	B	A-
16	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	Wii	A	A-	A-
17	Madden NFL 09: 20th Anniversary Collector's Edition	PS3	A	B	A-
18	Soulcalibur IV	PS3	A	A	A
19	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09 All-Play	Wii	B (on 1UP.com)		
20	Rock Band: Special Edition	PS2	A (on 1UP.com)		

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>GAME OVER

Press continue for grading scales, Reagan, more buds, and Michael Bay



92 **Retro: Co-op done right...and wrong**



94 **Blu-ray Bungalow**



97 **Top 10: Videogame Politicians**

EVERY MONTH, I'M HANDED AN ARMLOAD OF GARBAGE and asked to put it in my Nintendo DS.

You'd think this would simply turn me into a murderer, a madman—like the comedy writers who are forced to review poorly manufactured hallucinogens. But, no—instead, it's tuned my senses. Now, with a glance of a DS box, I can accurately gauge the despair contained within it. And I'm about to prove it.

Before reviewing each game, I'll write my expectations for it. To let you join in the fun, I've also left a blank space where you can write in your own preconceived notions. I'm trusting you to use the honor system and not read ahead, check Google, or trade informative love letters with Future Keanu Reeves in some lame movie. You and I are not even allowed to look at the back of the box for further information. Then, after our guesses are tallied, I'll review the game. Later—or, as you know it, now—you'll read ahead to the game's review and see how close we were. It sounds complicated, which is only one of the reasons this has never before been attempted. You only get three shots at this, so guess big.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Since Seanbaby is EGM's plucky comic relief and not an authorized reviewer, he will not be giving these games "real" scores. Ever since he gave .8 Phil Collins *Marrying Himself* to a game, our lawyers have limited the official capacity of his reviews. For this article, however, our lawyers have given him the authority to rate the performance of his own expectations. He is not a wizard. By using methods nothing short of amazing, though, he will also grade how well your expectations do. See if you can spot a bad game as well as our expert!



With school back in session, Seanbaby is ready to teach America's youth the importance of doing splits while punching dudes in the balls.

ROTC REPORT CARD

GAME Smart Girl's
Magical Book Club



MY EXPECTATIONS:

You think you girls are so smart because you read magical books? Well, if reading makes you so great, then why are you reading about how dumb and stupid you are right in this sentence?

YOUR EXPECTATIONS:

ACTUAL GAME:

This is *Brain Age* for ages 0 and below. With bunnies and piggies as your guides, this collection of minithings allows you to *color* pictures, *count* hats, and *draw* adult themes. None of it makes "sense" in the way you and I know it, but if a nearby baby owns a DS, why not?

HOW I FARED:

I really don't know what happened there.

D

HOW YOU FARED:

Psh, you really blew it, though.

F

ROTC REPORT CARD

GAME *Space Chimps*



MY EXPECTATIONS:

With *Space Chimps*, I'm going to expect the unexpected. So I'm expecting this to be a box full of bats and that my grandfather's old amulet is actually useless—the power to open the Unicorn Gateway was inside me the whole time.

YOUR EXPECTATIONS:

ACTUAL GAME:

In *Space Chimps*, you switch between 3D sequences too confusing to be horrible and platforming sequences too generic to be described. The story's so incoherent and rushed that I think it was told to a 911 dispatcher while the writer's burning car plummeted off a cliff. It would have to improve before I even felt like I was playing *Sonic Hedgehog 2* on SuperGame 300-on-1 Video FunSystem. But if you like space, and you like chimps, you still couldn't enjoy this game if someone held a b***** to your head.

HOW I FARED:

I knew it!

A

HOW YOU FARED:

Guessing that it was an adaptation of a role rejected by the Olsen twins when they looked like chimps got you a B because it might be true.

B

ROTC REPORT CARD

GAME *Plushees*



MY EXPECTATIONS:

This simulates life as a lonely security guard at a stuffed-animal factory. The B button eagerly pants, and the A button penetrates toy bears. Pressing L or R checks for onlookers.

YOUR EXPECTATIONS:

ACTUAL GAME:

Plushees is all about purchasing stuffed toys by pouring hours of time into arcade ticket games such as Pachinko and Skee-Ball. Or as it's called in *Plushees*: "Holes Game." Seriously. Now, the process of naming a retail product is no simple task, and we live in an age of information, so it's virtually impossible that the makers of this stuffed-animals game never came across the fact that the title also means "people who hump these things." Is it a coincidence? If it is, then explain why all of these dolls are so, so sexy. I mean, Waldo the Moose might as well be filled with chocolate cake and backing into me.

HOW I FARED:

I nailed it! You might think "nailed it" has some kind of crass double meaning since this is a game based on interspecies relationships. But it's a triple meaning—Hollywood the Monkey was there, too, choking Waldo.

A

HOW YOU FARED:

You got disqualified since you already own this game.

F

Final Scores

My experience slightly edged out your blind cynicism with a score of win to you lose. Congratulations on a well-fought last place. 🏆

> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Reviewing the finest games based on their box

BEST BUDDIES & FOUL-WEATHER FRIENDS

A history of co-op games, good and bad By Jeremy Parish

Best



Buddies

COOPERATIVE GAMEPLAY'S ALL THE RAGE THESE DAYS, and with

Resident Evil 5's co-op, it's *blowin' up* even more.

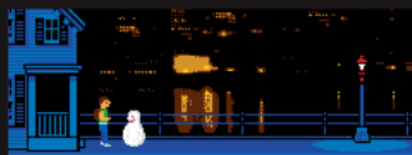
The 25-year road to seamless online tag-team zombie-shooting has been long and bumpy, and the following are some of the best (and worst) sights along the way.

1985 Gauntlet Atari • Arcade

Admittedly, *Gauntlet*'s four-player co-op design was created as a means of efficiently sucking quarters from four kids at once, using the fun of hacking through endless dungeons packed with monster hordes. Less fun: Getting your head dunked in the toilet for shooting the food.

1988 Forgotten Worlds Capcom • Arcade

Capcom's side-scrolling shooter *Forgotten Worlds* required true cooperation. Your spaceborne heroes had a full 360-degree range of fire, but they were slow to reorient. Only by coordinating with your partner did you stand a chance at victory.



1989 A Boy and His Blob Absolute • NES

A platforming puzzler by *Pitfall!* creator David Crane, this quirky adventure saw players assisted by a rapidly mutating white glob who'd transform into new shapes depending on how you regulated his all-jelly bean diet.

1990 River City Ransom American Technos • NES

Sure, *Double Dragon* may have done co-op beat-em-up action first, but *River City* did it best by adding a healthy dose of humor, open-ended design, and RPG elements.



1992 X-Men Konami • Arcade

Sure, *Gauntlet*'s four-person co-op was fun, but it had nothing on Konami's insane six-man *X-Men* brawler. It may have been chaos—and someone inevitably had to play as the ultralame Dazzler—but it was *fun* chaos.

Also: It allowed you to wield your buddy as a weapon. Genius.

1993 Secret of Mana Square • SNES

Even after the novelty of a multiplayer role-playing game wore off, *Secret of Mana* was great fun for three players. Except for when you had to stop to let the sucker who got stuck playing the Sprite grind his magic levels, of course.

1993 Lucky & Wild Namco • Arcade

A cop flick transmuted into pure arcade genius, *Lucky & Wild* put one player in the driver's seat and the other riding shotgun—almost literally, since player two's job was to gun down escaping criminals.

1998 Starsiege: Tribes Sierra On-Line • PC

One of the first games to feature online clans, *Tribes*' fluidly shifting gameplay style and determined genre-bending made for a game years ahead of its time.

2001 Ico Sony CEA • PS2

Yorda would probably be the worst companion—she's scatterbrained and helpless—if not for the fact that the player develops a bond with her, making the game's ending all the more heartrending.



2007 Crackdown Microsoft • XB360

What's better than open-ended super-powered sandbox mayhem? How about the same as above, with a friend, over the Internet? Who needs missions when you've got impromptu cross-city races and dumpster Jenga? 🗑️

EGM Extras: Your favorite not on here? Check out an expanded list at EGM.1UP.com.



> WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

1983 Pac & Pal Namco • Arcade

In this forgotten arcade entry, Pac-Man was joined by a friend who followed him around and did...stuff. An innovative use of A.I., sure, but was it good? Let's just say it's forgotten for a reason.



2000 Daikatana Eidos • PC

John Romero's massively hyped shooter was far less than it had been cracked up to be. The A.I.-controlled companion characters were dumb as a sack of rocks...and almost just as useful.

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> WE LIKE TO WATCH

BLU-RAY BUNGALOW

HD-DVDs in disguise By James Mielke

Transformers

Publisher: DreamWorks

Details: Whether you're old enough to love the Transformers for real or just got caught up in the hoopla, there's no denying that Michael Bay's big-screen adaptation of the '80s cartoon packs as many explosions, car chases, guitar solos, helicopters, planes, hot bods, and robots into the movie's 143-minute run time as humanly possible. But then again, this is a Michael Bay film, and what Michael Bay wants, Michael Bay gets. He wields more military power in every directorial flick of his wrist than the last five real-life presidencies combined, so when an onscreen grunt yells, "We need air support, now!" he gets it within 8.5 seconds. Die-hard Transformers fans may bristle at such quibbles. The real comedy, however, is found in the director's commentary. Check out Bay's impersonation of his Japanese lead animator—you'll need a squeegie to wipe the ego from your screen.

Still, thanks to the manic nonstop-panic mode of star Shia LaBeouf, *Transformers* survives its horrible one-liners, convenient plot devices (the future of humanity is on eBay), and the rendering of Optimus Prime from TV's patriarchal leader of the Autobots to the movie's dunderheaded homeboy ("My bad."). This does not make *Transformers* a good movie; it merely makes it watchable. But thanks to the unbelievably nimble CG robots, if ever you wanted to show off how dope your high-def AV system is, this is the movie to do it with.

Director: Michael Bay

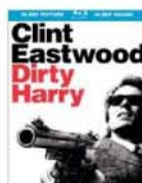
Rating: C **Bonus Material:** B+



Dirty Harry

Publisher: Warner Bros.

Details: "Dirty" Harry Callahan, the character that Clint Eastwood made famous back in 1971, returns to relevance thanks to the movie's reminding on Blu-ray, and you'll be glad to know that everyone's favorite badass cop has stood the test of time. It's interesting to see Harry running rampant around San Francisco in an attempt to nail down a slippery serial killer, mostly because you can't imagine a cop like that in a modern setting, kicking ass first and taking names later. But the film's effectiveness truly hits home when you bookend his famous "You've got to ask yourself one question: 'Do I feel lucky?'" Well, do you, punk?" line and compare the difference between the two deliveries. At the beginning, he's practically chuckling as he delivers the line to a wounded bank robber. But by the film's end, when he's facing the movie's killer on the docks, the same line feels like it's held back by chains, punctuating the movie's violent conclusion. And they sandwich a terse crime thriller that may feel out of sync with today's ultraviolent Glock-fests,



but that's all the more chilling because Harry's quarry is a regular Joe.

Director: Don Siegel

Rating: A **Bonus Material:** A

Cloverfield

Publisher: Paramount

Details: The larger-than-life product of J.J. Abrams' desire to create a Godzilla film for the West, *Cloverfield* rose above the trappings of its viral marketing to become one of 2008's most surprising hits. Part faux documentary and part disaster flick, *Cloverfield* mostly succeeds thanks to its frenetic pacing. Seeing a stunningly realistic CG replica of New York City—a city still smarting from 9/11—crumble under the combined weight of the invading monster and the subsequent military effort to destroy it resonates in ways that no Godzilla movie could. OK, so cameraman Hud was mega-annoying—but have you seen the "acting" in a Godzilla movie lately? *Cloverfield*'s a sharply executed giant-monster flick that will hopefully teach Japan's Toho studio a thing or two in time for Godzilla's 60th-anniversary revival in 2014.

Director: Matt Reeves

Rating: B **Bonus Material:** A



■ Watch out for the crappy dialogue, people!

BOX OFFICE SMASH!
scene it?

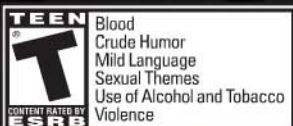


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Jump in.

 **XBOX 360** LIVE

NEXT MONTH

December Issue (#235) • On sale November 18



IT'S A SECRET TO EVERYBODY (EXCEPT US)

Someone get Kyle Hyde on the horn—our cover story for next month is a mystery. It's a damn good one, too! We reckon you're going to want to come on back in 30 once we officially reveal this Manhattan-sized announcement. It's funny, 'cause we want to tell you, but we'd rather that you wait and see for yourself.

Though our cover story's clouded in secrecy, we can tell you about a preview that's sure to be a hoot. Or batty, we should say—return here next month for an update on **Batman: Arkham Asylum**.

Also, be sure to brace yourself—this fall's big blockbusters are starting to drop into our laps. Are they making us hot? Why, that's personal. But I guess we'll tell you: Check back as we give you the final word on **Gears of War 2**, **Guitar Hero: World Tour**, and **Resistance 2**.

(All planned editorial content is subject to change.)

> PREVIEWS



- **Batman: Arkham Asylum** (PS3/XB360)
- **Prototype** (PS3/XB360)

> REVIEWS



- **LittleBigPlanet** (PS3)
- **Saints Row 2** (PS3/XB360)
- **SOCOM: Confrontation** (PS3)
- **Spider-Man: Web of Shadows** (Wii/PS3/XB360)
- **Fallout 3** (PS3/XB360)

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VIDEOGAME POLITICIANS

Election time puts us in a voting mood By Scott Sharkey

10 Any Mario game (various): Princess "Peach" Toadstool

Peach is clearly a figurehead with no actual political power. Her retinue of mushroom retainers holds the reins of the Mushroom Kingdom, which is lucky for all involved, given her typically vacuous, aristocratic cake-centric problem-solving strategy.



8 Operation Secret Storm (NES): Saddam Hussein

He may not have had any WMDs, but Saddam did have a giant, pissed-off vulture, a fire-breathing camel, and Satan himself working for him. According to the manual, the game's protagonist was actually George Bush the elder, who doesn't make this list on account of controlling like crap and dying in three hits.



7 Final Fantasy VIII (PS1): Laguna Loire

It might've seemed a little weird that he ended up as the president of *anything*, but Laguna Loire had everything it took to lead the technologically advanced city-state of Esthar. And by that we mean a constant, unbreakable state of befuddled uselessness. I'm sure someone in *Final Fantasy*-land does a brisk business selling "Laguna-ism" calendars.

6 Bionic Commando (NES): Master-D

The suspiciously Hitler-esque leader of the "Badds" didn't have much of a chance to enact any of his policies before his head violently exploded, but he did make great strides in the arena of swearing at people and being 10 feet tall.



5 Guerrilla War (NES): Fidel Castro

Fun fact—*Guerrilla War* was known as *Guevara* in Japan, with player one taking the role of Che himself and player two guiding his buddy, Fidel. Ever wonder how he stayed in power so long? Extra lives for a quarter.



9 BioShock (XB360): Andrew Ryan

Can't quite swing your wacky new political paradigm in the real world? Go ahead and build your own little cut-throat free-market utopia to reign over—and demonstrate to everyone that Objectivism can do a helluva lot more damage than just turning anyone who reads *Atlas Shrugged* into a complete jackass for a month or two.

3 Final Fight (SNES): Mayor Mike Haggar

The spitting image of future Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura, Mike Haggar was the original trailblazer of former pro-wrestling politicians, beating "The Body" to the punch by nearly a decade. His "personally pound the crap out of everyone" platform has sadly failed to enter the realm of life imitating art.



2 Bad Dudes (Arcade): President Reagan

Oh, Ronnie. You're so hip and in touch with youth culture. Maybe later we can go smoke some "reefers" or listen to that music. The "rap."

4 Fight Club (PS2): Abraham Lincoln

Here's one of the weirdest unlockable characters in history. Watching Honest Abe emancipate the teeth from Fred Durst's stupid head was the only reason to consider buying the *Fight Club* game (other than an overdeveloped sense of irony).

1 Metal Wolf Chaos (XB): President Michael Wilson

In the future, America's political infighting will be settled with giant friggin' robots, and the president himself will duke it out with political opponents on the South Lawn of the White House before piggybacking into orbit on the space shuttle. We really should let Japan rewrite our Constitution. 🇯🇵



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Partial Nudity
Violence



PLAYSTATION 3

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A woman with short brown hair, wearing a red and black patterned skirt and arm guards, is riding a large, scaly dragon. She is holding a large, dark sword aloft in her right hand. The dragon is standing on a rocky outcrop, and its long, curved tail is visible. The background is a bright, fiery orange and yellow, suggesting a battle or a volcanic landscape. The overall style is that of a video game promotional poster.

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 XBOX 360 LIVE


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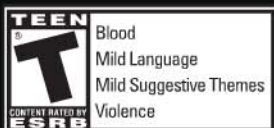
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PlayStation 2

PLAYSTATION 3



Wii

NINTENDO DS



CRYSTAL
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