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We sink our claws into the newest
game starring Marvel's hairy bad boy



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EDITORIAL

Comic Sense



SUPERHERO FLICKS were once the bane of comic-book fans everywhere, with their direct-to-video production values, horrible costumes/special effects/dialogue, and so on. But for the last decade or so, supermovies have been improving by leaps and bounds. Can the same be said for superhero videogames? While some definite gems have made it through the cracks over the last couple of console generations, no superhero game's yet garnered the accolades reserved for triple-A franchises. Usually, this is because these games are tied to a cinematic release and given little room to expand on the legend.

But the tide's turning. Games like *Batman: Arkham Asylum* surprised us recently by offering true current-gen visuals, a unique spin on the mythology, and some brutal combat that keeps pace with the more mature, gritty fare that gamers enjoy these days. Next up is *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, developed by *X-Men Legends* and *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* masterminds Raven—and this is a superhero game that, for once, doesn't appear to pull any punches. Wolverine's got big-ass claws, so you expect him to use 'em. You expect people to get cut. You probably expect limbs to fly. Well, they do. So is the crappy superhero game stigma finally fading away? Read our full report on Wolverine's new adventure and let us know what you think.

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

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LETTERS

Gaming solo, dirty music, and more of the funny



1UP Family

This month, we meet 1UP user Will Mercado (clarkspark.1UP.com)

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

Will Mercado: *World of Warcraft* (PC) for around 12 hours.

EGM: What's your favorite gaming console?

WM: SNES.

EGM: How many games did you own for SNES? What's your favorite?

WM: I have 20 or so games, since I frequently rented or borrowed from friends. My favorite SNES game is *Tetris Attack*. I loved it so much that my friends got me the Japanese version, *Panel de Pon*. They did such a good job localizing *Panel de Pon* for the U.S. that you never would have known Yoshi and his friends were not the stars of the original version of the game. I guess that makes two favorite games.

Trivial Issue

This month's **EGM** question: Which X2 locale is used for an escape sequence in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*?

E-mail the answer to EGM@1UP.com (subject head: Trivia: EGM #236) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



For writing this month's LOTM, Wes gets a copy of *Army of Two*, or something else to intensify the crushing feelings of loneliness.

Letter of the Month Playing with yourself

Humans are social animals, and as a result, most things, games or otherwise, are better with a buddy. However, having said this, I take issue with certain aspects of an article in *EGM* #234 titled "Let's Play Together" by Robert Ashley.

Certain games lend themselves well to co-op: *Gears of War* and the *Halo* series are two excellent examples. There are few things better in gaming than the sense of completion one gets after destroying Venezuela with a friend in *Mercenaries 2* or saving a friend just before they bleed out in a hellish firefight on Sera in *Gears of War*. I'm no Freud, but I would venture to guess that such experiences strengthen some hard-to-quantify bond between the participants.

But please, I implore both the gaming industry and gaming community: Do not forget the power of single-player narrative. *Fable* creator Peter Molyneux suggests that five years from now, games without co-op just won't compute. He predicts a world where all games will have co-op functionality. But ask yourself, with any degree of intellectual integrity, what would *Dead Space* or *BioShock* be like with a chatty friend along for the ride?

Let's encourage the storytellers to keep on telling stories. Sometimes a hero needs to walk alone.

—Wes O'Donnell

Admit it, Wes: You just don't have any friends.

Don't forget to tip your waitress

I just finished reading your article "Finding the Funny" [*EGM* #235] and was sorely disappointed in your omission of LucasArts' *Armed and Dangerous*, which came out in 2003. I'm pretty sure that the game was a smash flop; the first time I ever heard of it was at a rental store. Even so,

this is one of my favorite games. The first time I played it, I actually had to pause and set down the controller because I was laughing so hard. With quirky dialogue and weapons that would make *Ratchet & Clank* proud, it seems sad that this game would be overlooked yet again.

It also seems odd that you didn't mention this year's *Battlefield: Bad Company*, which once again proved that comedy in games isn't dead.

—John Jolly

If you liked *Armed and Dangerous*, check out *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*, a similarly humorous game made by the same studio. And you might also be interested in *MDK*, which was created by some of the folks who worked on both *Giants* and *Armed and Dangerous*.

Star power

Quite awhile ago on 1UP, I read a brief article about *Suikoden I & II* making the move to PSP. I've heard nothing about them coming to the U.S., other than wishes and hopes of fanboys and -girls everywhere.

I don't understand why Konami wouldn't release them in the U.S. The used-condition price of either one of these games seems to justify releasing them. They could even release them separately, like Square Enix has done with the *Final Fantasy* games over and over, platform after platform. It seems like it would be a solid business investment.

Do you know anything about why these haven't made it to the U.S.? Is there any hope?

—Jaime Abel

Well, that depends on what you consider reasonable basis for hope. Is it likely? No. The Japanese release reportedly sold somewhere in the low 20 thousand range. That's ridiculously low, especially for such great games. You're probably better off hunting down the originals. >

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■ *Ace Combat 6: PS3* owners? Not for you.

We don't make these up, people. Honest

I am writing today to beseech you all to rise up alongside me in a movement of grave importance. I confess that I have spent my life in pure apathy toward all of the issues in the world around me, but I realized that I could no longer sit idly by and do nothing while an injustice permeates the land. We, the neglected silent majority, need to stand up as one and get "Go Go Power Rangers" into the next *Guitar Hero*. The insolence of the fat cats at Activision and RedOctane for ignoring this iconic refrain! This song represents everything we are. I know the task is daunting, but you know, deep down, that idleness is no longer an option. Together, we are power. Let us all "go go" and fight for something that actually matters. Remember: Alone, we are weak, but together, we have the ability to morph and even up the score. No one can ever take us down!

—W. Geiger

Please, whatever you're taking, up the dosage.

#@%*!

Am I the only person who's sick and tired of the censoring of the songs in the *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* games? It may sound childish, but I want to hear every line of the song, even the blue words. It's especially annoying to play the vocalist path in *Rock Band* and have a lyric cut out of a song that you know by heart. It throws you off of your rhythm and costs you points.

Why, on a system on which I can play many games with much more prevalent swearing (hell, you can download demos on Xbox Live and PSN that have worse language), do I have to put up with this? I am an adult and therefore have the parental controls on my 360 disabled. But if

we have these controls to regulate the amount of gore, sexuality, and swearing that a child can see in other games, then why can't developers Harmonix and Neversoft add a feature that censors the songs in their games according to the levels set on the system they're played on?

—Andrew Coggin

It's a matter of audience. A Teen rating dramatically increases the size of the games' potential audience. And even with the parental controls, if the game includes material judged to be adult by the ESRB—whether it's easily accessible or not—it gets a rating that reflects that.

Confrontational

I am so disappointed with *SOCOM: Confrontation*. *SOCOM* use to be my favorite online shooter. After playing *Confrontation* I really wish Zipper had made the game. The graphics aren't good compared to games like *Call of Duty 4* and *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2*. There aren't a lot of maps to play. Every time I play, there's lag in the game, and sometimes the sound goes in and out. There's no excuse for this game having all of these problems! Slant Six had plenty of time to perfect this game for as long as it took for it to come out! I feel like the game wasn't worth the money.

—Chance D.

No doubt about it: *Confrontation* has had a rocky start. But a patch has already been released to address the worst of the lag and glitches, and as of this writing, the team's preparing another patch for some broader changes. You're not likely to see major graphical updates or anything, but the game should continue to improve.

We'll get your desk ready

Is it possible for me to get a job or something with you guys? I'm 11, really mature, and I really want to be partners with Shane. I play a lot of s***, and I've never liked it, except *Zatch Bell: Mamodo Battles*; the story is the only thing that sucked. Just think about it!

—Justin Johnson

Inappropriate swearing? A professed hatred for most games? A creepy infatuation with Shane? You're hired!

Forever and a day

The fourth *Rambo* and the fourth *Indiana Jones* came out this year.

Guns N' Roses' *Chinese Democracy* is actually a reality. And we have just elected our first member of a minority to the presidency of the United States.

Now, where in the world is *Duke Nukem Forever*?

—Gibson Yen

Well played, sir. Any day now!

Bogey on your six

I have been an *Ace Combat* fan for as long as I can remember. The captivating stories and the impressive graphics are just a few of the things that keep me begging for some more *Ace Combat*. I want to know if *Ace Combat 6* will ever arrive on the PlayStation 3. If so, when? And if not, why, after so many years of dedicated service, has *Ace Combat* left the PlayStation platform?

—Anthony Brown

We can answer the first part of your question definitively, straight from a Namco Bandai spokesperson: "*Ace Combat 6* is an Xbox 360 exclusive and will not be released on the PlayStation 3 or any other console in the future."

As for the second part, we can only speculate, but we suspect it involves parachutes full of money.

Scratch that

I'm a big fan of *Resident Evil*, and I'm currently playing *RE2* to bring back some memories. I've beaten Leon's disc, and I'm at the end of Claire's, but it keeps freezing up! The disc is scratched up a lot, and I don't know why it's now starting to freeze. I've tried so many things. I've used peroxide, alcohol, and even witch hazel to make the disc work. No luck. What should I do?

—Katheryn Blue

Did you say the proper incantations while using the witch hazel? That might be your problem. Failing that, hit up digitalinnovations.com and take a look at the GameDr. We've had success with similar products in the past.

> OOPS!

In last month's *Watchmen* story, we attributed the game's script to Len Wein. We neglected to mention that Peter Aperlo also contributed to the script. They should be considered cowriters. Also, in the same story, we incorrectly identified the Knot Tops enemy gang as Topknots.

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LITTLEBIG FUTURE

After a rocky start, Sony's social-gaming experiment keeps on evolving

By Shane Bettenhausen

IN A CROWDED HOLIDAY GAMING

SEASON stuffed to the brim with testosterone-soaked shooters, epic role-playing adventures, and bulky plastic drum kits, Media Molecule's PS3-exclusive *LittleBigPlanet* managed to carve out its own niche by giving gamers something they've never had before—the freedom to imagine, design, and share their own platforming creations.

With its cuddly, customizable Sackboy avatars, delightful patchwork aesthetic, and undeniably charming soundtrack, *LBP* easily runs away with the prize for "Feel-Good Game of 2008." But even though the game's garnered critical acclaim and brisk sales, *LBP*'s journey hasn't been without incident—a controversial last-minute retail recall and sporadic server downtime marred its launch. Luckily, as of this writing, things are running smoothly, and the game's future expansion seems absolutely limitless.

In this exclusive interview, *LBP* Executive Producer Siobhan Reddy bravely agreed to answer our queries about the game's historic launch, tumultuous birth, and promising future.

EGM: Between the 11th-hour delay to remove the potentially offensive song and the unstable servers during the first 48 hours, was launch considerably rockier than Media Molecule expected?

Siobhan Reddy: We always said that this

was a bit of an experiment. [Smiles] There have definitely been some dark moments over the past few weeks, which is obviously frustrating for Media Molecule and for the people at Sony who are on the journey with us. The consistent thing, though, has been that everyone has and continues to work very hard to try to resolve any hiccups as quickly as possible. Rome wasn't built in a day, etc.

EGM: Do you feel that the community's been patient about the server downtime? It's not as if they can't work on their own levels, or the single-player content, while the Internet fairies try to repair what's broken, right?

SR: Our community has been really great. Obviously, people have experienced "hiccups," and they have talked about it and alerted us to their issues, but for the most part, people's experiences have been good. And since the beta trials, there have been over 70,000 levels published...which is pretty awesome!

You're totally right, though—when servers are down for maintenance, then it's a great time to brush up on your Popit skills or to play through the Media Molecule-made levels. The on-the-couch experience should definitely not be forgotten. We've spent many an hour playing the Media Molecule levels' multiplayer together or creating levels together, with completely hilarious results. You'll discover many benefits from being in the same room. That's one of the

areas I'd love to hear more about from your readers, about the parent/child *LBP* experience.

EGM: Many *LBP* players say that the game imparts an incredibly special, warm 'n' fuzzy feeling of global cooperation and participation—perhaps it's just that while you're sleeping, your creations are being disseminated across the globe. Have you experienced this unique phenomenon yourself? Are these warm fuzzies part of Media Molecule's plan to change gaming forever?

SR: Oh, the whole concept of the game is based around creating warm, fuzzy feelings! While we didn't know that would be the outcome at the start, we definitely set out to make a game that would 1) make people smile/laugh/tease each other when they were playing together, and 2) allow people to express themselves and then share this with the world. And it's because that's what we all like to do here at Media Molecule, it's part of the nature of everyone on the team.

There is something sublime about losing yourself in anything, whether it's playing about with friends in that timeless playground way, getting into the zone creating something beautiful, or simply choosing an outfit. I feel warm and fuzzy when I get lost in a moment but also when watching videos of people talking through their levels or creations and explaining their choices and inspirations. That's really ➤



Media Molecule is happy to see the *LBP* community creating its own level-creation memes and trends. More zombie levels, please!

LITTLEBIGFUTURE (cont.)



■ Playing dress-up with your Sackboy serves as a gateway drug for many LBP players. Next stop: full-blown level-editing addiction.

tear-jerkingly awesome.

EGM: Your pre-LBP background is with Criterion Games, specifically the *Burnout* team. Do you think the user-defined, cooperative, sharing-based design ethos of *LittleBigPlanet* could be applied to racing games? Perhaps even other genres?

SR: We are obviously huge fans of enabling people to play, create, and share, and I don't think that concept can only be applied to specific genres. I am sure where there is a will, there is a way. [Smiles]

EGM: What's your absolute favorite user-created LBP level that you've played?

SR: Azure Palace, Escape from Alcatraz, Black, and The World of Color.

EGM: Um, that's actually four levels.

SR: I simply can't choose just one! Plus, I was playing the Media Molecule levels last night also and don't want to forget these, either—Meerkat Bounce still really tickles me, and the whole of the temples theme makes me feel very warm and fuzzy.

EGM: *LittleBigPlanet* has already become one of the highest-reviewed games of all time...but really, it's only been out for two months, and users are only starting to scratch the surface of its potential. How much better do you expect the LBP experience be in six months? A year?

SR: Well, between the combination of the content that the community is making, which just seems to be more amazing every day, and the new content and

improvements that we have up our sleeves, I think people will be kept pretty stimulated.

The new community content is pretty wild, and the team here is constantly sending around level names and links to YouTube movies. The really interesting thing is when you see the community jam with each other and a theme emerges, such as who can make the fastest vehicles or best outer-space level. As the community becomes more diverse, I am really curious about how ambitious these themes become. For example, it would be great to see more purely artistic or personal or educational spaces.

Then, obviously, there is some *really* cool new stuff happening within Media Molecule that we can't talk about yet. But needless to say, we have to keep our team motivated and inspired. So that means allowing them to flex their creative muscles...so watch this space! 🎮

> LBP EXPANDS IN 2009

Within the first few weeks of *LittleBigPlanet*'s release, users uploaded over 70,000 levels to the game's servers. If the community continues to grow at that rate, how different will the game experience be in a few months? Here's a look at factors that will shape the game's evolution...



New functionality on the way?

We'll see the promised four-player online Create Mode (a feature cut from the retail release) relatively soon, and this leaked photo reveals a tool for importing image files.



LittleBig Community

The official LittleBigWorkshop.com website offers invaluable tutorials, showcases for top creators and their wild creations, and plenty of cool LittleBigChallenges, such as this one for DIY Sackboy Halloween costumes.



Dress for success with DLC

In the weeks since LBP's launch, a bevy of adorable outfits have appeared on the PlayStation store. Some are free, while others carry somewhat exorbitant price tags (\$3!).



Midnight Club: LA Remix



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed



LEGO Batman: The Videogame



Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2



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> FAR-OUT FANS

Captain Nerd:
Kevin Craine

For the Craine family, father nerds best. Proof: Nintendo nut Kevin Craine, the proud dad of two sons, not only pieced together two clever videogame-themed Halloween costumes for his boys but also one

for himself (precious—we know). We recently spoke with Craine about making his kids look like adorable dorks.

EGM: Your son's Mega Man costume is pretty darn cool. But some think it's false advertising to call your wee boy a mega "man." Whaddaya say to that?

Kevin Craine: Dr. Light designed Mega Man as if he were his own son. It only seemed appropriate that I create a costume that would represent the father-son relationship that we enjoy so much. And if anyone gives us grief about that—not *pew-pews* next year.

EGM: So you've made some detailed costumes for both your sons and yourself, but how come you haven't done anything for your wife? Does she not like princesses or peaches?

KC: My wife's awesome, and she's graciously helped build these one-of-a-kind costumes. But the geek factor's just too high for her to join us as Princess Lana. That, and Princess Peach is a bitch.

EGM: Now that Halloween's over, are you already thinking about costumes for next year? We hear Bomberman will be next year's Mega Man.

KC: I've been rack-ing my brain for ideas. All I can say is this: I have to convince my son that Barney's evil—and that hurling bombs through the air is the best way to make new friends.

■ Battling bots is child's play.



> FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI:
IMAGINE

Share the demon apocalypse with your friends

Platform: PC
Likelihood it'll come here? Very good—in fact, the English-language version will likely be in the midst of beta testing over at Aeria Games (www.aeriagames.com) by the time you read this.

I have deep concerns for our economic future. Aw, quit your whining! Your problems are nothing compared to what they'll have to deal with in Tokyo in a decade or two—flooding, ICBM strikes, cities in ruins, and demons running out of every crevice of the ground. They'd call in the Japanese armed forces, but they've proven their worthlessness enough times in Godzilla flicks. Instead, a new group of fighters is ready for action: the Devil Busters, freelance demon summoners ready to help control the chaos—or fan the flames, depending on who's dropping the coolest loot that day.

Wow! So it's World of Nocturne-Craft? Sorta. At its core, *Shin Megami Tensei: Imagine* (a game that has its roots in an abandoned Xbox *MegaTen* online game) is like a lot of other Asian massively multiplayer online games: play for free, buy fancy doodads for your character with real money, grind a lot, and type

"kekekekekekeke" a lot. But all of the *MegaTen* bits are faithfully reproduced, from recruiting and negotiating with demons to combining monsters together to create the ultimate ghost-bustin' squad. The chief difference: Battles are all in real time, meaning you can be attacked while casting a spell or talking with demons. This ain't *Pokémon*, ya know.

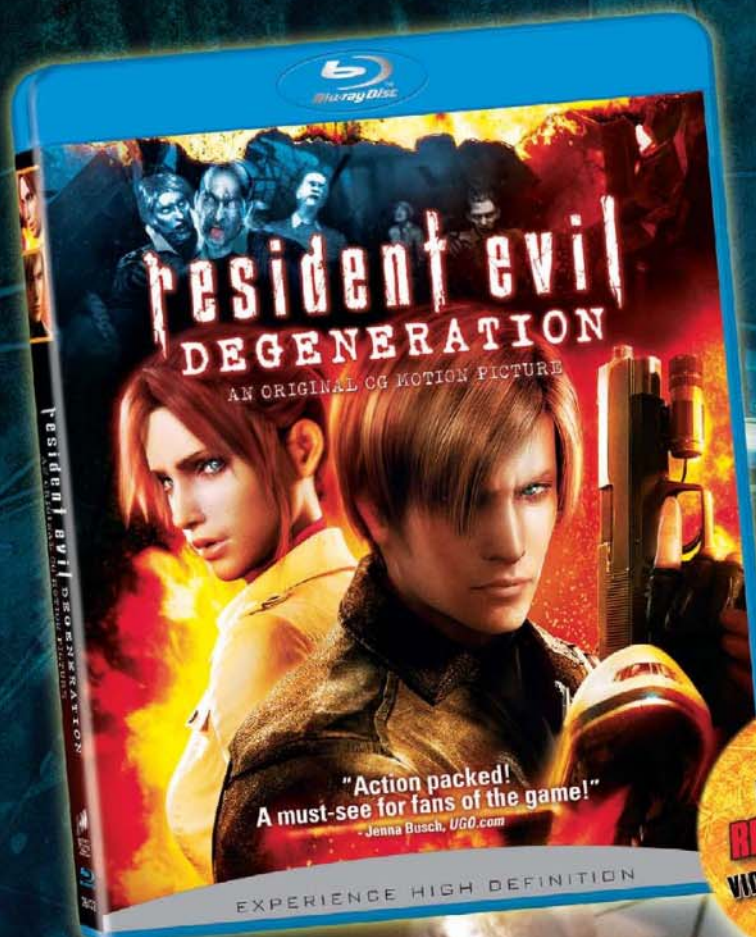


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HOW PC GAMING ENDED UP ON YOUR COUCH

...AND WHY IT'S NOT GOING AWAY BY ROBERT ASHLEY

THE '90S WERE THE GOLDEN AGE OF PC GAMING. In that heady decade, PC gamemakers invented the first-person-shooter genre, connected players on the online battlefield for the first time, transformed 3D graphics from primitive blur to virtual world, and unleashed a flurry of innovative ideas that changed the gaming world forever. No serious gamer of that era would've guessed that the end of PC primacy was just around the corner. But in 2001, the old gray box met an unexpected contender, an upstart game console produced by a software company. Microsoft's Xbox, for all intents and purposes, was a PC. It had a hard drive, offered broadband online gaming, and packed in technology that approached the PC standard of the day. Most importantly, it was cheap (a few hundred dollars compared to the \$1,000-plus you'd need for a high-end gaming PC). Within a few years of the Xbox's release, a seemingly intractable war between two gaming cultures—one that valued depth, strategy, and top-of-the-line technology, the other obsessed with reaction time, all-ages appeal, and mass-market pricing—was over. The game console emerged victorious.

Only it didn't. Because while the PC, as a gaming platform, has seen better days, the gaming culture it championed rules the day. You may

play your games on the big screen in the living room, but if you're spending this holiday season playing games like *Mirror's Edge*, *Fallout 3*, *LittleBigPlanet*, and *Gears of War 2*, you're a PC gamer. Here's the breakdown of just how this unlikely scenario happened:

Brain migration

When the Xbox brought PC features into the living room, some of the best PC game developers in the world eventually came along for the console-gaming ride. Their ranks read like a who's who in modern gaming of both developers and designers: Infinity Ward (*Call of Duty*), Epic (*Gears of War*), Bethesda (*The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, *Fallout 3*), Peter Molyneux (*Fable*), Bungie (*Halo*), Ken Levine (*BioShock*), and on and on. "If you look at who are the big-ticket console developers right now," says *BioShock* creator Levine of 2K Boston, "they're all people who cut their teeth in the PC space." These folks didn't come over to the console to make *Mario* knockoffs. They came to make the kinds of games they made—and still make—on the PC.

Closing the graphics gap

Enabling that migration, the gap between the top-notch graphics technology found in gaming PCs and the guts of modern game consoles has narrowed to the point of insignificance. "Hardware's a prime factor," says *Fallout 3* Director Todd Howard. "Until the Xbox, you could really only make deep games on a PC due to the hard drive and general video performance." When that difference evaporated, PC developers brought their ideas to the mass-market console audience. "If I wanted the coolest, most innovative game back in the early '90s, it was on my PC, with my extra RAM and my Sound Blaster card, playing things like *Ultima* and *Wing Commander*," says Howard. "But today, that innovation's on the 360 and the PS3."

An important series of tubes

Part of that technological upgrade, of course, is the continuing development of online gaming on consoles with Xbox Live and the PlayStation Network. Ten years ago, serious online gaming, though touched upon with Sega's Dreamcast, was the purview of the PC. Today, console gamers enjoy feature-rich online networks with friends lists that keep them connected with their friends across every game in their library. And where the PC was once the only place an aspiring indie game developer could hope to create and distribute their wares, all three modern consoles regularly offer up downloadable games by young, talented hopefuls.

First-person conquered

Consoles had experimented with online gaming in the past, but when *Halo 2* opened its doors on Xbox Live, sinking its teeth into a massive audience for months on end, online console gaming truly arrived. Similarly, after scores of mostly awkward attempts and a few notable exceptions, the original *Halo* brought the first-person shooter, a genre that has come to define our gaming moment, to consoles unscathed. *Halo* felt right without a mouse and keyboard, a rare feat at the time. And Bungie, the game's developer, embraced the limitations of a button-challenged controller, cutting back to an easily switchable set of two guns and ditching health packs (which traditionally required a button) in favor of regenerating armor. When asked about the sudden boom of first-person hits on consoles (including his own *BioShock*), Ken Levine doesn't pause before answering: "A lot of credit there has to go to Bungie."

Games for grown-ups

Perhaps the most decisive moment in the shift of PC gaming culture to consoles, however, came before the release of *Halo* and the Xbox. *Grand Theft Auto III*, the product of PC ➤



■ Halo 2

PC GAMING (cont.)

veteran Rockstar Games (then DMA Design), brought something that had long flourished on PCs—situations and characters aimed squarely at adult players—to consoles. Games for grown-ups seem like a given now, when Mature-rated games frequently top the charts. For most of the history of console gaming, however, gamemakers stuck mostly to family-friendly fare, occasionally dipping into horror (*Resident Evil*) or toying at stories an adult might find satisfying (*Metal Gear Solid*). It took the *Grand Theft Auto* series to make the game world safe for drug dealers, hookers, and pimps.

The rise of Western gaming

Of course, some of the adult direction in modern gaming can be attributed to the rise of studios in North America and Europe that, besides appreciating the average age of today's gamer, set out to create subject matter targeted at Western audiences. Japanese games have entertained American audiences for years, and they still do, but they don't always speak to the sensibilities of the masses. Levine puts it a little more directly: "I was playing the fabulous *Fallout 3* over the weekend, and I was way more interested in that than being some little 14-year-old boy wandering around in my cosplay outfit."

Give the people what they want

The East/West divide extends beyond stories and themes and into the basic philosophy of game design. Where console gaming was once dominated by Japanese designers who created games intended to be experienced *just so*, every moment and option crafted to specification, Western developers who hail from the PC tradition tend to give players more freedom. "Coming up on the PC taught us how to develop

> TODAY PC, TOMORROW THE WORLD

For years, PC gaming has served as a laboratory for ideas that wind up on consoles. Here are a few that could end up on your TV in the near future.

Massively multi: Ever heard of a little game called *World of Warcraft*? Of course you have—and chances are that multiple publishers and developers are, right this minute, frantically trying to figure out how to bring a subscription-based, constantly updated, large-scale multiplayer game to an Internet-equipped console near you.

"Free" games: Rampant piracy is forcing many PC gamemakers to consider nontraditional ways to make a buck. The most promising idea? Free online titles supported by player-purchased add-ons and advertisements.


Full digital distribution: We've all had a taste of the good life downloading affordable, small-file-size games on all three of the current consoles (and in the case of the PlayStation 3, a few full-sized games). For PC gamers, however, nearly all games are available as downloads, a small miracle for those of us who'd rather have a tooth filled than leave our couch and venture out to any brick-and-mortar game store.

games that actually care about what the audience wants," says Levine. "I'm still amazed when I play a Japanese game, and I go into the sound options and find there are only two—stereo or mono—or when I run into a cut-scene I can't skip. We want to make an experience that's what the audience wants it to be, rather than 'We believe you should hear this music' or 'We believe that you should watch this cut-scene.' Right now, I'm playing *Fallout 3*, *Far Cry 2*, *LittleBigPlanet*, and *Rock Band*. All of these guys are from the PC gaming space, and all of these games are really about giving the player choice."

The power to create

The latest trend in console gaming is a freedom that's been at the heart of PC gaming for years: Modding, the idea that a game should allow enthusiastic players to modify its content or create new content, has arrived this holiday season in full force. *LittleBigPlanet* serves,

essentially, as a tool kit for aspiring game designers. *Guitar Hero: World Tour* empowers players to create new playable tracks and share them with the online community. That *Far Cry 2* includes a map editor that lets players test their level-design skills would surprise no one in the game's PC following, but it's a rare concept for those playing it on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 who don't see that option too often.

Eras come and go. In a couple of years, when the fast-moving pace of graphics technology gives high-end PCs a leg up, desktop gaming could come back into favor. Perhaps, after a rocky few years, the Japanese tradition of console gaming might once again storm the imaginations of a critical mass of hardcore gamers (and not just their mothers and little brothers). Whatever happens, the history and tradition of PC gaming has been absorbed by the current game-playing audience and the people who serve them. We're all PC gamers now. 



■ *Grand Theft Auto III*



■ *Fallout 3*

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> ACQUIRED TASTE

NINJAS THEN, NINJAS AGAIN

Tenchu returns to the studio that made it great

By James Mielke

TEN YEARS AGO, a small development team named Acquire released an unassuming ninja stealth game that drew favorable comparisons to fare like *Metal Gear Solid*. One sequel later, Acquire moved on to other projects while the *Tenchu* series fell into the hands of other development teams, which ended up muddying the franchise's continuity and quality with too many sequels. A decade later, Acquire's back at the helm of the series it created, and a reinvigorated *Tenchu* once again looms as a series to watch with the release of *Tenchu: Shadow Assassins* in January for Wii. EGM spoke with Acquire President Takuma Endo to get his views on where the series has been—and where it's going.

EGM: At the end of *Tenchu*, an avalanche buries main character Rikimaru. Since *Tenchu 2* is actually a prequel to *Tenchu*, and you guys stopped working on the series after *Tenchu 2*, you never got a chance to reveal what you intended to happen

with him. So where does *Shadow Assassins'* story take place in regard to those previous games?

Takuma Endo: Because we didn't work on *Tenchu 3*, the direction of the series, in terms of storyline, departed dramatically from the direction that we, Acquire, originally conceived. We wanted to go down a different path, but we're not discounting the events that have happened in other *Tenchu* games. Storywise, the game will continue one year after *Tenchu 3*, but we have a clear, separate direction we want to take the story in. We're not going to try and tie up all of the loose ends from the *Tenchu* series. Instead, we're focusing on crafting a solid story that we envision as a three-part series, with—hopefully—*Tenchu 5* and *Tenchu 6* continuing the story. But our overarching goal is to create a stronger, more focused theme.

EGM: So, basically, Rikimaru survives the end of *Tenchu*? After getting buried by the avalanche, he doesn't die?

TE: It was our intention to explain that in *Tenchu 3*, but obviously, that was out of our control. As I said earlier, we had our own ideas of where the story would go, but since it's already done, we will follow the already established *Tenchu* story, where Rikimaru inexplicably survives.

EGM: In our mind, the events of what's happened in the *Tenchu* series, between *Tenchu 3* and *Tenchu Z* on Xbox 360, don't qualify as canon. Like *Snow's Revenge*, the *Metal Gear* game that Hideo Kojima didn't do. That one doesn't count. That's not part of the mythology. And that's how we feel about the *Tenchus* that Acquire didn't do.

TE: That's a little difficult to get into. We respect From Software, and we consider them our equals. They had their own great ideas. Ours are just different.

EGM: How did you envision the series going forward? If Acquire had continued the series, what would you have done

differently in terms of the storyline?

TE: We'd planned to bring Rikimaru back, just not in the same way. In our vision, he's in conflict with Ayame. And while that story was going on, a new generation of ninjas would emerge to move the story forward. We really didn't want to introduce too many paranormal or supernatural aspects to the story. Outside of Rikimaru, who we would've explained didn't really die—when you get killed, you stay dead.

EGM: How did From Software approach you about coming back and renewing your participation in the *Tenchu* games?

TE: It actually wasn't a one-on-one meeting. Ever since the original *Tenchu*, Noriyuki Asakura has worked on the music for the entire series, and he also composed the music for *Way of the Samurai*. He was the one who started talking with From about having us do *Tenchu* again.

EGM: So Asakura proposed to From Software that Acquire resume development of the franchise?

TE: Not exactly. It was just a time when we were all together at a dinner—From, Asakura, and Acquire—and that's when the topic came up. Up until then, it wasn't something we'd talked about. But once the conversation started, we thought it'd be a really great idea.

EGM: You guys love to make level editors. You did it with *Tenchu*. You did it with *Shinobido: Imashime*. Will *Tenchu 4* have a level editor?

TE: No, that won't be included this time.

EGM: *Tenchu* brought ninja games to the modern gaming marketplace well before the 2004 *Ninja Gaiden* reboot on Xbox. How do you feel about the approach of ninja games like *Ninja Gaiden*, which are all about action and combat? Do you feel that stealth-based games are the true "way of the ninja"?

TE: Obviously, we made our games with the idea of stealth as the ideal. In Japan, there are just so many ninja games even besides us, like *Shinobi*. With *Tenchu*, we thought that with the then-new 3D graphics, we could take a new approach in creating a stealth ninja game.

EGM: *Tenchu* came out before the original *Metal Gear Solid* on PlayStation, which led to a lot of people comparing the two as stealth games. How did you feel about those types of comparisons?

TE: We were very honored. *Metal Gear* had been around since the NES days, and

the graphics always had a 3D look but a 2D feel. It was always based around 2D gameplay—whereas with *Tenchu*, we added the element of height and looking at things from different angles. It was very experimental, but they were things we had to learn from. We made mistakes, but I think one of the reasons we were received well is because we were trying something completely new. But in terms of budget, there's no way we could compete against *Metal Gear Solid*.

EGM: You made the original *Tenchu* when you were still working with Sony Music Entertainment. How did somebody working with SME end up creating a ninja game?

TE: Back then, Sony had a program dedicated to discovering new artists and products. So we just sent in our idea, it got accepted, and we started working on it.

EGM: So this became an SME product, but were you technically Acquire then? Or did you only form Acquire when you started on *Tenchu 2*?

TE: Actually, we'd formed Acquire previously, but because we'd just formed the company, we didn't have any funding. So when we learned about Sony's submission process, we applied immediately. It was our first chance to make our own game.

EGM: From the beginning, *Tenchu* was your property; it was just published by SME. And so is that why after *Tenchu*, you were able to move with the property to another publisher?

TE: Actually, SME owned the intellectual property, and they sold the IP to Activision. After that, From Software bought it from Activision.

EGM: Are you glad to be back in command of *Tenchu*, and are you excited about the chance to get the series back in the direction you believe it should go?

TE: For Acquire, *Tenchu*'s always been our



■ Rikimaru demonstrates the art of ninjutsu and quality hair care products.

biggest success. So to get to come back to the series is a huge honor. But there's also a lot of pressure on us to make sure we do a good job and don't betray the series, that we set the right course for the series. Whether or not we'll be able to continue on after *Shadow Assassins* is dependent on our performance this time; it's contingent on how well it sells.

EGM: Would you ever consider making a PS3/360 game?

TE: It's not really our IP, so we can't do whatever we want. But we'd love to make a version for the PS3 and 360. Besides not owning the IP, the Japanese market for gaming isn't doing too great at the moment.

EGM: How do you feel about the Japanese gaming consumer today? Knowing that you're probably going to have a hard time selling games in Japan, do you think more about the Western market?

TE: In a way, yes, we're trying to think about the Western market. But we can't compete against Western developers at their own game—at what they're good at. We have to bring to the table something that Japanese game developers are good at and that can appeal to a Western audience as well.

EGM: In the original *Tenchu*, Rikimaru's hair kinda had a Caesar cut going on. But now it's all slicked back. What the hell happened?

TE: [Laughs] Just following some of the popular trends. 🐸

In terms of budget, there's no way we could compete against *Metal Gear Solid*.

—Acquire President Takuma Endo



> AFTERTHOUGHTS

HAPPY ENDINGS?

Answers to Fable II's enduring questions By James Mielke



MOST FABLE II FANS HAVE LIKELY PLAYED

Lionhead's acclaimed action-roleplayer to death by now, so we decided to

knock on the developer's door to find out what was up with some of the game's quirkier elements. Fortunately, we caught Dene Carter, design director at Lionhead Studios—and one half of *Fable II*'s idiot "Sam and Max" brothers—off guard and forced him to answer our prickly queries. To every *Fable II* geek out there, we salute you—this Q&A's for you. And be warned that this interview contains spoilers galore.

EGM: Will you create new downloadable outfits, quests, and weapons? The selection seems rather limited in the game, though we imagine that you added the dyes to create variety.

Dene Carter: We've got a whole extra weapon class in *Fable II*, yet people want more? Now *that's* evil. But who knows what we'll do in the future?

EGM: Why is there only an Assassin's Coat and not the rest of the outfit?

Somewhere, a clan of shirtless assassins roams about.

DC: Yep. Hilarious, isn't it? Our gambit to get the pants on view for as much of the game as possible worked perfectly.

EGM: After spending 10 years of our life in the Spire, why don't we collect 10 years' worth of rent after we get out? Someone owes us some back rent!

DC: Yeah, but who's gonna bother paying a guy who's locked up in a big spire miles out to sea? I mean, if you were a trucker doing time for beating his wife, then maybe.

EGM: We have reservations about entering, er, Reaver's Rear Passage. But you knew that, didn't you?

DC: But you still did it, didn't you?

EGM: Are Sam and Max, the two idiot brothers who keep reading from *The Normanicon*, named after the classic PC franchise?

DC: Watch it—I happen to like those guys!

They've got great hair and beards, and they love their mom. What the hell's that got to do with a psycho bunny and a big dog, eh?

EGM: We knew Theresa was up to something cagey. Will we find out more in *Fable III*, or do you reckon she'll justify a huge expansion via downloadable content?

DC: "*Fable III*"? Well, theoretically, if we were to theoretically make a theoretical third game in the *Fable* series...Theresa's a hero. As someone who can see how the world's future unfolds from even the tiniest action, she's got her own game plan. Let's just say that being able to see the *reallllllll* big picture leads to some seemingly questionable decisions. As for Theresa justifying a huge expansion, we don't think expanding her would be good for her self-esteem: She's got a great figure—that's what celery does.

EGM: For those who choose the path of ultimate do-goodness, the "Sacrifice" ending's a pretty raw deal. No dog, no money, and the statue the people erect in your honor is a mild reward at best.



DC: Them's the breaks. Who said being good is easy? I mean, look at me. I've killed *nobody* this week, and what do I get?

EGM: Do you ever catch flack over your game's treatment of chickens? Kickin' chickens, suits made out of chicken—does the chicken abuse never end? No, we're not PETA members.

DC: I'm a vegan—and, like all vegans, I deify chickens. But chickens can't fly, and they so yearn to do so that we felt it was our own way of fulfilling the dreams of those little feathered wonders.

EGM: The multiplayer modes. *Hmm.* We'd imagine these didn't turn out exactly like you guys were hoping. They sure didn't turn out how gamers were hoping—like sharing a tug-of-war-style camera. Please discuss.

DC: Tug-of-war? We broke the left index fingers of every henchman we played with—sorted the whole camera thing out wonderfully. But, yeah, we learned a lot about camera during development of *Fable II* and even more about creating multiplayer

spaces. It's still a lot of fun, though.

EGM: We've heard that the reason you aren't able to bring your customized character into another player's game—you have to use a proxy instead—is because it causes too much confusion with the townsfolk. Wasn't that the original point? To see the different reactions and to possibly wreak havoc in a friend's town? If it were an issue, couldn't you have had the townsfolk react just to the host player? Or even vice versa?

DC: Our message on this was more that you are *visiting* a player's game. He's the hero in this world—not you. It is, by definition, *not* an equal experience, and it was never intended to be. You work for "Da Man/Woman/Undecided" and are treated as subservient. However, again, we've learned a lot about what people like and don't like about the multiplayer modes, so it's something on our mind for the future... whatever that might be.

EGM: Your dog never comes indoors with you. Was this an actual design

choice—meaning, someone on the design team thinks dogs belong outdoors—or was this more for practical, collision-related reasons?

DC: Both. It solved a whole slew of annoying nav problems in a way that seemed very much in keeping with our doggy character. He goes in caves and dungeons, though, so it's not so bad, really.

EGM: Poor Barnum. Was his fate designed to reveal Reaver's true nature? We felt quite sorry for him at the end of the game.

DC: Good. Reaver's the most evil person in the world. Lucien was a good guy—didn't you see that?

EGM: Peter Molyneux said that your next game won't be like *Fable*. You're not giving up on the *Fable* franchise, are you? We have a very real dream of the timeline moving forward into Jack the Ripper-period London.

DC: Nothing more will escape our collective lips, I'm afraid! ☹

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> ONLINE SCENE

RX FOR SQUARE ENIX'S NEXT MMO

Fixing what ails your online RPG By James Mielke

SCUTTLEBUTT AROUND THE INDUSTRY

SUGGESTS that Square Enix will finally unveil the follow-up to their almost 7-year-old massively multiplayer online RPG, *Final Fantasy XI*, at this June's E3 convention in Los Angeles. It's designed to coexist with (i.e., not replace) Square's long-running MMO, and *FFXI* Producer Hiromichi Tanaka tells us that "the next-generation MMO that we're working on is going to be different than *Final Fantasy XI*. And even though we have the same staff working on the project, we're not going to make something that'll be exactly like *FFXI*." With Square Enix's next time-sink just over the horizon, we decided to compile a wish list of elements that Square's next MMO should add—while ditching a lot of the dead weight found in *FFXI*.

PLZ ADD

Streaming data uploads: The guys who created *Guild Wars* (PC) definitely got one thing right in their *Diablo*-like MMO-lite, and that was the constant streaming of data updates that loaded to your game, literally bit by bit, while you played—which made massive, bottlenecked 400MB-patch downloads a thing of the past.

More instanced battles: "Instancing" (where players adventuring either solo or in a group find themselves in a private, exclusive area to fight monsters and get good loot) isn't new,

but *World of Warcraft* does it best, keeping real-money trading to a minimum and gamer satisfaction high.

Microtransactions: While the satisfaction of killing a monster in *FFXI* 99 times before getting the item you want may seem like a thrill to the development team, some players would rather drop 5 bucks on a weapon or item than waste real-life time camping for it—as Square's recent real-life merchandise featuring in-game rewards attests to.

KTHXBYE

24-hour monster spawns: Nothing's worse than sitting around for hours, competing with hordes of other players, for something that appears just once a day—or sometimes once per week—only to either lose claim to it or not get the drop you wanted.

Fewer menus: Anyone who's played *FFXI* knows that you have to make over a dozen menu confirmations before you can finally select which character you want to play the game with, whereas in *Guild Wars* or *WOW*, you merely enter your name and password, and—boom!—you're in.

Blank DVDs with the word "expansion" printed on the disc: We're still looking for the "expansion" in *Wings of the Goddess*. Thanks for the 600MB patch, though!

GOING MOBILE

The iPhone gold rush sparks two unusual trends By Joe Rybicki



DEAR ANYONE WHO DISMISSED IPHONE GAMING

as a passing fad: Please pick up your order of crow at the counter. Apple's now sold over 13 million iPhones—nearly 7 million in the third quarter of 2008 alone, according to Apple—and sales show no signs of stopping.

And games have driven much of this momentum: As of this writing, over 1,700 games are available for purchase in the system-integrated App Store. The trouble is that a good portion of those games are any combination of the following: laughably simplistic, blatant knockoffs, or complete crap.

Backhoe-ware

The term "shovelware" simply doesn't do the phenomenon justice. Designers are throwing as much at the App Store wall as they possibly can to see what sticks. The success of the iPhone has created a sort of gold rush thanks to huge numbers of consumers willing to pay tiny, impulse-buy prices to try new products—no matter how simple, derivative, or deficient these are.

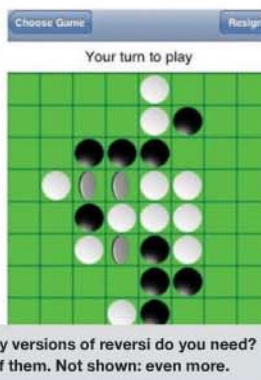
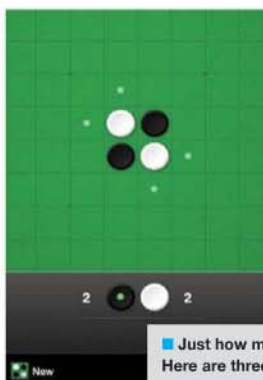
That's making it harder and harder to find quality games amid the horde of solitaire versions (30),

video-poker variants (25), and microscopically different takes on reversi (eight!). Consumers end up relying solely on "hot" lists, notoriously unreliable user reviews, and pricing for their purchase decisions. Which brings us to:

Price juggling

What would you think if you bought the latest *Grand Theft Auto* for \$60...only to discover it selling in the very same store, three days later, for \$10—or even free? This sort of thing's been going on in the App Store for months now as game publishers try to find a sweet spot for pricing. As just one example, prolific App publisher Freeverse initially released puzzle game *Burning Monkey Puzzle Lab* for \$4.99... before dropping the price less than a month later to 99 cents... then raising it to \$2.99...then dropping it again to 99 cents, where it sits as of this writing.

It's clear that the App Store's going through some serious growing pains. But don't get too discouraged; in spite of plenty of throwaway titles, the platform's still home to some exceptional games. We'll take a look at some of those next month.



Just how many versions of reversi do you need? Here are three of them. Not shown: even more.



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> IDOL CHATTER

METAL GEAR MAESTRO

Ex-Konami composer **Norihiko Hibino**
tells us the score By Jeremy Parish

MOST METAL GEAR FANS associate Harry Gregson-Williams with scoring the series' stirring cut-scenes, but Norihiko Hibino deserves just as much credit. Whether counting down an intense alert sequence, punctuating a brutal boss battle, or simply providing a tense backdrop to Snake's sneaking, Hibino's work is an indelible part of the *Metal Gear* experience—not bad for someone whose career arc began as the manager of a movie theater in Kansas City, KS. We met with Hibino at his Tokyo studio, GEM Impact, to discuss the nuances of tactical-stealth audio.

EGM: How did you end up going from managing a movie theater in Kansas to composing for *Metal Gear*?

Norihiko Hibino: After I came back to Japan, I hoped to become a musician or producer. Working for a videogame company is actually really good, because they provide all the gear! At the time, Pro Tools and other recording gear was really expensive, and there was no "light" version for everyone. That made working for a developer a must.

EGM: How did you become involved with such a high-profile series like *Metal Gear* to begin with? Had you ever played *Metal Gear Solid* before?

NH: No! I hadn't. My first assignment at Konami was to clear the first level of the game. But, actually, I couldn't. [Laughs] Honestly, it was just my first assignment. Good timing, I guess. When I was hired at Konami, they'd finished the contract with Harry Gregson-Williams, but they didn't even have a plan for how the music should be—just the ending theme by Rika Muranaka, a jazzy piece.

EGM: Yeah, the use of sax struck me the first time I played *MGS2*.

NH: The demo CDs I gave to Konami were actually my jazz productions, so they wanted me to compose something in that style for the game. In the battle scenes, I used a really freaky sax sound. I used a bit of acoustic recording for percussion and other tracks. At the time, Konami didn't do much acoustic recording, so there was no way to get budget for it. I had to pay for a lot of it myself. That's one of the reasons I really worked to set up my company—even today, if I work for any developer, they're not going to pay for the demo recordings. But if I have my own budget, I can pay a lot for a demo recording and get good quality sound samples for the rest of the production.

EGM: Did you work closely with Gregson-Williams?

NH: Yeah. You know, at the time he wasn't

really all that famous! [Laughs] I was lucky to be able to see the separate tracks that Harry made—drum, bass, and so on—because it really gave me a sense of how he made that Hollywood kind of sound. Because he has a lot of layers, it can easily be adapted to surround sound.

EGM: Despite the consistency found in *MGS2*, I can still tell your tracks apart from Gregson-Williams'. But in *MGS4*, it's hard for me to tell who did what. It sounds much more uniform.

NH: Well, you know, for *MGS4* Harry didn't compose much. Harry composed just a little bit—the main theme and one other, some music for the cut-scene at the bridge with all the soldiers in Europe. For *MGS2* and 3, Harry and I were the only composers. Harry did 30 minutes of music in total; I composed the rest. So that's why we went in different directions. Same thing with *MGS3*. But with *MGS4* I didn't really touch much of the in-game music. Kojima wanted to have a different direction with 4, so [Nobuko] Toda took charge—he was sort of my junior, originally.

At first, I was actually not supposed to help with any of *MGS4*, because I quit Konami and became an outsider. In the end, at the beginning of this year, Kojima called me and said, "I need your music." [Laughs] He realized that in battle themes, they needed the previous games' music. So they gave me a call and asked me to compose for major cut-scenes—90 minutes of music—which we had to finish in three weeks! We took two different approaches to creating the music: The first was to edit Harry's songs; the other way was to create new music. I focused personally on editing Harry's songs, and for the new creations, my composers were responsible for that.

EGM: You mentioned something about Kojima wanting old *Metal Gear* music in there—but many fans were disappointed that the main theme of the previous games never shows up in *MGS4*.

NH: The truth is, Konami [had legal problems with] Russian composers who said we stole their music. They didn't, actually. But Konami was too sensitive about the situation and just decided not to use that music in the game.

EGM: *MGS2* was set 10 years in the future, while *MGS3* was 40 years in the past. How'd you go about approaching these different scenarios?

NH: Composing for the future is actually pretty easy. Lots of people do it, and there's a certain stereotype they use if they want to describe the future. But if you go back, you have to think up something. If you use the old sound, it's just...old sound. It has to



■ *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*

be something in between the '60s feeling and also some kind of *Metal Gear* electric element. So I used instruments like flute and guitar and used a lot of noise from the instruments. Like the way an electric guitar sounds if you just touch the strings, that sort of sound. And I played flute in a really bad way. [Laughs] It makes you feel like you're not in the intelligent future but more human, like you're really in the jungle.

EGM: It's interesting you should say that, because sometimes the main character of *MGS3*, Big Boss, doesn't seem to be as intelligent as Solid Snake. Do you take that sort of characterization into account when you compose?

NH: Yes, definitely. Kojima always has a strong idea for each character—not only Snake, but also for each boss—a strong idea of how they should be. For The Pain, he wanted the character to be like a normal Hollywood action guy, so the music has a Hollywood feel. But for The Fury, it's more like a crazy guy, so he wanted that craziness to be reflected in the music. I got a sense of how Kojima felt about each character because we had a lot of discussions. Mostly, he said "OK." It was really rare that he would ask me to change something.

EGM: Gregson-Williams seems to get all the billing for the music in *MGS2* and *MGS3*, although he really just composed the cut-scenes. The music that people hear for most of the game was by you. Has that been frustrating?

NH: Of course. It's been incredibly frustrating. The first year I was out on my own, I was kind of new. Nobody knew that I'd created the music for *Metal Gear Solid*—everyone thought all the music was done by Harry. With me, they were kind of like, "Who are you?" But because of *Metal Gear Solid*, I've learned a lot of things. So I can never say that I hate Konami—I really thank them. So that first year after I left the company, I really focused on making sure people knew I was the composer for *Metal Gear Solid*. I needed to educate them. I think now, almost four years later, I'm finally finding success. 🍀

EGM Extras: Check out EGM.1UP.com for our full Norihiko Hibino interview and more insights into the art of composing for *Metal Gear*.



> COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

A NEW HOPE

The minds behind the newest BioWare Star Wars project discuss the changes and innovations they plan to bring to the massively multiplayer space By Anthony Gallegos

BIOWARE HAS AN AMAZING TRACK RECORD as role-playing masterminds, but their newest project, massively multiplayer online role-player *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, faces a huge challenge: making players feel at home in such a beloved universe while differentiating the game from the tough MMO competition. To find out how they'll tackle this dilemma, we talked with company founders Dr. Ray Muzyka and Dr. Greg Zeschuk, Principal Lead Writer Daniel Erickson, and Studio Creative Director James Ohlen.

EGM: The numerous MMO fans around the office wonder how the various successes and failures of *Star Wars: Galaxies* will inform *The Old Republic*.

Dr. Greg Zeschuk: That's a tricky one. It's really about pulling back to *Star Wars* in

general. What is it about, being the heroes and the villains in the universe? The most exciting people, the ones that people would talk about, in a fictional sense. I think where we sit with *The Old Republic*, that's really why we put the story stuff in; it's a pretty huge divergence from what *Galaxies* and most other MMOs have done. So it's really the concept of all the good things you've seen in MMOs and adding in the story and, really, the choice element, the making-the-choice stuff. I think it just changes the dynamic so much for the game.

EGM: Another thing we've been wondering about since the initial trailer—because when you made the announcement, you only showed Jedi and Sith—was how you plan to satisfy gamers and provide a rich experience for those who don't necessarily want to be Jedi or

Sith? How do you make it compelling to be a bounty hunter, a smuggler, or some other, seemingly less powerful, class?

Dr. Ray Muzyka: Yeah, that's a very important question. We look at the movies for inspiration, and we see a whole bunch of really iconic heroes or villains. We want everyone in this game to feel like they're a hero in the universe, or a villain, and really be able to take on that role. [We want to enable] choice with consequences, which is something really new for an MMO—to actually have a story with choice and consequences and to be able to take on different roles as you do it is really exciting. But the inspiration for that is from the movies, where you see these iconic characters that actually are involved and engaged with Jedi and Sith and are playing important roles that help the entire *Star Wars* universe



■ The giant lightsabers were apparently just a "bug." Crisis averted.



■ Are droids a playable class? Your guess is as good as ours.

roles that help the entire *Star Wars* universe timeline unfold in different ways, depending on what they do. Imagine the scene... where you have Luke and Leia and Han and Chewie and C-3PO and R2-D2 and Obi-Wan all storming the Death Star. That's an iconic moment, and they're actually enacting a story moment. They're all heroes. They're all doing something really cool, but they're not all Jedi and Sith. Yet they all feel heroic in proportion.

EGM: As far as the way characters will appear, a lot of people have seen the early screenshots and thought that the lightsabers on the characters were awfully huge. Some of us speculate that's because you wanted to have easily distinguishable gear. How do you go about stylizing the characters in such a way that they're still very *Star Wars* but also easily recognizable?

RM: It's kind of like how VCRs used to be really big? So it's like, in the old days, they hadn't managed to shrink them down. They had to use these giant handles.... [Laughs all around]

James Ohlen: The thing is...you could call it a bug that was caught by our fans. We had done adjustments on the size of the hands and feet of our characters but hadn't actually done it on the equipment. So it's actually something we were going to change, and we are now changing.

RM: It's not the shrinkage of the crystals? [More laughs]

JO: No, no. So, our lightsabers are not going to be that big. Actually, it was funny, because one of the artists here in the office who was here for Halloween made fun of that whole thing; it's a big topic on the boards here. So he dressed up, and he brought this ginormous lightsaber.

RM: What you could say is that the feed-

back led us to make this change—it's all about the fans.

GZ: Well, actually, for us, it is—that's the way we approach game development. It really is very much about the fans, and in an online game like this one, we're planning for a long time. We have to make sure that the fans are going to love it in the short-, mid-, and long-term. Their feedback really is critical to us. We do listen to that kind of feedback pretty seriously.

EGM: Will any recognizable characters from the *Star Wars* universe make appearances in *The Old Republic*?

Daniel Erickson: I think our *Star Wars* nerds could take on your *Star Wars* nerds, and we could have a nice big battle at some point. We've got huge, huge fans of the extended universe, the new movies and the old movies, and the games.

One of the things that's always been important to us is that whatever your *Star Wars* experience—your *Star Wars* dream, the stuff you love about *Star Wars*—we want to make this the game where you come for it. Which means that if you don't know anything about the extended universe and you've never read [the books], you're not going to need to.


We're going to walk you through this universe; we're going to show you how everything works. But if you're somebody who's really into it, and you really want to see how new things have developed—how old characters [developed], where their timeline went that you didn't get to see—that stuff's always going to be there for you. And we always want to make sure—*KOTOR* was

the same way—that there are nods in there for the fans who are really looking for them.

EGM: A lot of folks are seeing *The Old Republic* as an online *Knights of the Old Republic*. So how familiar will *The Old Republic* feel to fans of *KOTOR*?

RM: I think it's going to be reminiscent of a lot of the great things people have come to love about BioWare games. Great storyline, characters that you feel an emotional attachment to—you're going to have smart companion characters that act thoughtfully, that help you in battles, help you in exploration, and comment on your actions. They almost act as a lens for your choices and help you see the perception of those choices—and what the impact of those are—on the world and the people around you and the consequences.

But beyond that, we have a lot of things that BioWare fans, and MMO fans, moreover, really love: great exploration, great combat, lots of tactical depth, feeling like you're actually having a lot of fun during each battle, and progression and customization that gives you a lot of satisfaction as you advance your character in their role. I think, certainly, *KOTOR* is a good example of that, but so are other games, like *Mass Effect* and *Jade Empire* and *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights*.

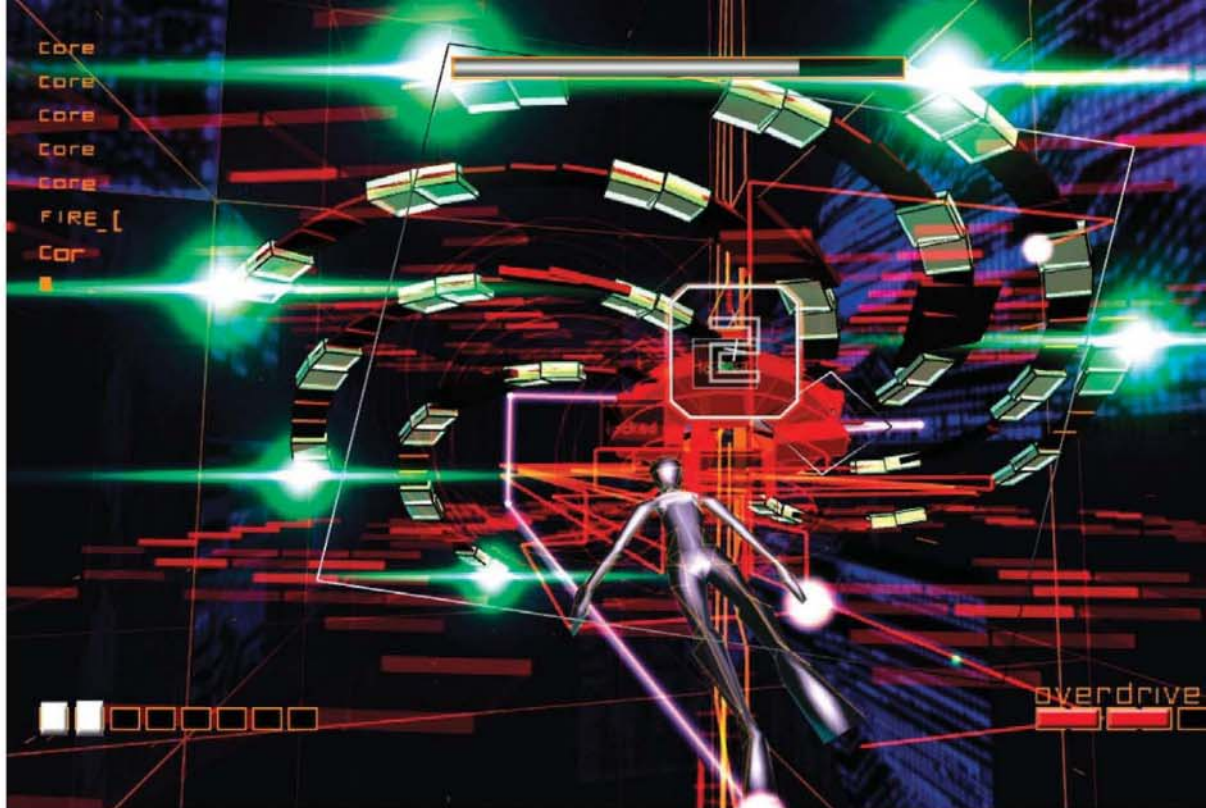
You can look back and almost trace back the history of BioWare and see that a lot of the same kind of threads are being pulled on and grown and made better each time out. Our goal for this game, when it comes out, is to be the best yet. It's *KOTOR* 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and beyond. It's got that much content in it. 

Our goal for this game is to be the best yet. It's *KOTOR* 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and beyond.

—BioWare cofounder Dr. Ray Muzyka

RUMOR MILL

Your monthly dose of gaming gossip By Quartermann



Resurrected Rumors:

Sometimes, the gift of foreknowledge can be a terrible burden. As the Q foretold last issue, L.A.-based publisher Brash Entertainment went belly-up within days of the magazine hitting stands. Hopefully, some of its projects in the pipeline (*Saw*, *Clash of the Titans*, and Factor 5's *Superman* title) will land safely elsewhere.

EXPERTS CLAIMED THAT THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC MELTDOWN

would spare our beloved gaming industry, since the unwashed masses traditionally turn to home entertainment for escape when the going gets rough. While the whole truth won't be known until the holiday-season bean counters have finished their end-of-year calculations, we're already seeing a grim trend emerging in the once-cheery realm of gaming gossip. Rather than hearing the usual buzz about unannounced blockbusters and trade-show hookups, we're eavesdropping on a darker, more depressing kind of talk—mergers, layoffs, game cancellations, and studio closures are threatening to cast a gloomy shadow over 2009's industry scuttlebutt. Our advice: Go buy more games, fools!


Higher Rez

Visionary Q Entertainment Producer Tetsuya Mizuguchi has already revisited his cult classic PS2/Saturn synesthesia-shooter *Rez* with 2008's Xbox Live Arcade hit *Rez HD*, but we're hearing that a true follow-up may finally be in the works. While this project probably won't be a direct sequel (Sega reportedly still owns the rights to the name "Rez"), expect the fundamental shooting mechanics and slick, techno-flavored aesthetic to remain true to the series' flawless pedigree. Don't get too tweaked just yet, though—go ahead and put down the glow stick and candy necklace—for now, this game's only in the theoretical stages, still in search of the perfect publisher/platform fit. But then again, with the new-found possibilities offered by crisp HD visuals, 7.1 surround sound, and wild new control methods...this could be the hardcore gamer's ultimate unexpected wish fulfillment. Consider permission to don a Dr. Seuss hat officially granted.

Wii woos Dragon Quest?

Dragon Quest reigns as the No. 1 role-playing franchise in Japan, beating out even *Final Fantasy*. The long-awaited ninth *DQ* will finally hit DS there in March, but we're hearing that it won't stop there—Square Enix also hopes to bring *Dragon Quest IX* to the Wii. With its four-player online action, *DQ9* seems ideal for a home console, and it'll likely offer interoperability between DS and Wii, just like the upcoming *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles—Echoes of Time*.

Gears keep on grinding

Last month, the Q reported that Epic Games' charismatic wunderkind Cliff Bleszinski would be heading up a completely original horror title...but that doesn't preclude him from also getting his hands dirty with the inevitable (and already-in-production) *Gears of War 3*. Look for *GOW3* to hit the Xbox 360 in the fall of 2010 with plenty of juicy additions and tweaks, including a far more ambitious five-player co-op mode. 

Q-TIPS

- Tecmo's slick PlayStation 3-exclusive shooter *Quantum Theory* might be getting a big boost when a larger copublisher signs on to help push the game.
- For those of you who missed *Rifts* on N-Gage (i.e., everyone), you'll hopefully get another shot at this awesome license when it finds a new home in 2010.
- Although EA adamantly refuses to admit that Steven Spielberg's so-called "LMNO" project is still happening, we hear that development is on hold.

BURN, BABY, BURN!

INVADE THE FUNKED-OUT '70S ON A JOURNEY OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND DESTRUCTION



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TEEN

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Animated Blood
Crude Humor
Drug Reference
Language
Sexual Themes
Violence

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THQ WIRELESS



> FAMILY GUY



Miyamoto fails the kids with Wii Music?

By John Davison

The response to *Wii Music* so far has been, at best, mixed (*EGM*'s reviews ranged from Excellent to Average, but these were unusually high, as the Metacritic average is around 60). For any adult that tries it, the conclusion is invariably that "little kids will probably love it."

So, do they? For this completely unscientific test, I had my boys, Will (5) and Jack (3), play *Wii Music* for as long as their interest held them. The result was just shy of 15 minutes. Both were intrigued at first, but the first hurdle was that they only recognized a little of the music offered. Aside from "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," we were in unknown territory. We determined after just a few minutes that the "gameplay" parts that open up the experience were a little complex for the boys—with some coaching, they could do some of the "pitch matching" puzzles, and the hand-bell minigame was doable if we kept reminding them what to do—so we settled on playing through the "jam session" mode and played around with the different instruments.

Will, particularly, got a kick out of holding the Wii Remote like a trumpet, but the novelty wore off quickly. For Jack, the whole experience was a wee more magical, but this was mainly because he just liked "the drums, because they're noisy."

If you'd heard the cacophonous racket that we made, you'd be forgiven for wondering if *anyone* concerned really had a grasp of what the game was asking for.

It's not unusual for Miyamoto's more experimental dabblings to get mixed reviews, but with *Wii Music* he seems to have finally lost us all. For something to be casually appealing, it's not enough to just dumb things down to the point of inanity. After all, if you can't hold a 5-year-old's attention for more than 15 minutes, what hope do you have with everyone else?



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 make your January jubilant

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

PS3/XB360 • THQ

It should go without saying that *50 Cent: Blood on the Sand* is ridiculous. The premise, the characters, the language, and the action are all ludicrously over the top, but it's the only way this concept could work. Our recent time with the game took us through the first three levels of *Blood on the Sand*, guiding "Fiddy" and one of his fellow G-Unit members—Tony Yayo, Lloyd Banks, or DJ Whoo Kid—through a blasted-out desert city. The cover-based gameplay is similar to *Gears of War* but with an even more arcade-like feel. *Blood on the Sand* does its best to replicate a Hollywood blockbuster, and given the absurd number of explosions and dead bodies we racked up in the demo, it's well on its way.



Race Pro

XB360 • Atari

If your idea of a racing game is crashing into cars at high speeds for no apparent reason other than to create carnage, you might want to steer clear of this one; *Race Pro* drives so far on the sim side of things that you'll feel like a certified mechanic after you're through with it. *Race Pro*'s realistic physics make sure you feel the understeer of a front-wheel-drive Mini Cooper and the oversteer of a rear-wheel-drive Audi R8. Fortunately, *Race Pro* also includes in-depth tutorials that lay down superhelpful lines for maximum speed and turn angle as the player adjusts to the difficulty. While it's certainly lacking the energy of *Grid*, the lessons learned in *Race Pro* could very well translate into faster track times in real life.

> MORE JANUARY RELEASES

Skate 2
PS3/XB360 • EA

Big Bang Mini
DS • SouthPeak

Velvet Assassin
XB360/PC • Gamecock

Star Ocean: Second Evolution
PSP • Square Enix

The Lord of the Rings: Conquest
PS3/XB360/PC/DS • EA

Heist
PS3/XB360/PC • Codemasters

Little King's Story
Wii • XSEED

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

Wanna Take a Swing?

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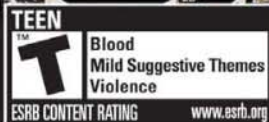
Grab your Wii Remote™ and swing into the action! Journey through the legendary world of Rygar using your mighty weapon, the Diskarmor, to destroy enemies, defend against them, and traverse the island! Show your strength in the new Gladiator Mode by rapidly swinging & slashing your way through nonstop waves of foes!

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 iBUYPOWER® Vantage gaming case + 550W SLI™-Certified Power Supply
 Corsair 2GB DDR2-800 Memory
 320GB SATA II 7200RPM Hard Drive
NVIDIA® GeForce™ 9500GT 512MB Video Card
 LG® 22x Double Layer DVD±RW Drive, LG® 16x DVD-ROM Drive
 Surround 3D Premium Sound
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 600 Watt Surround Sound Speakers
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Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E7300	\$699
Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E8400	\$759
Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E8600	\$869
Intel® Core™2 Quad-core Processor Q6600	\$779
Intel® Core™2 Quad-core Processor Q9400	\$874
Intel® Core™2 Quad-core Processor Q9550	\$919
Intel® Core™2 Quad-core Processor Q9650	\$1159
Intel® Core™2 Quad-core Processor QX9650	\$1654

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R '09

ALMOST FAMOUS

ALMOST FAMOUS

We know what you're thinking: Shouldn't a "Games of 2009" piece feature heavyweights like Resident Evil 5, Halo 3: Recon, and Street Fighter IV? But everyone's already heard of those games. It's really easy for us to say, "Hey, look, God of War III and the next Ratchet & Clank game for PS3 will be swell!"

So instead, we're highlighting the "almost famous" games, the ones you might have heard of but haven't been following as closely because there's always a Halo Wars or Final Fantasy XIII blocking your view. With that in mind, we present a list of titles that we think you should pay some extra attention to—little surprises to go with your Halo/Street Fighter/Resident Evil comfort food.

Turn the page to see our not-so-obvious picks for greatness in 2009. ➤



HEAVY RAIN: THE ORIGAMI KILLER

A wonderfully gloomy forecast

Platform:
PlayStation 3

Publisher:
Sony CEA

Developer:
Quantic Dream

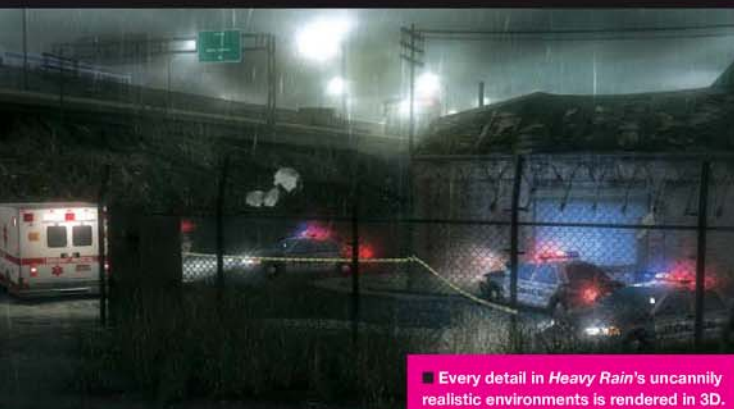
Release Date:
Fall 2009

Why it's almost famous: Although the previous two games from Paris-based *Heavy Rain* developer Quantic Dream—*Omikron: The Nomad Soul* (Dreamcast/PC) and *Indigo Prophecy* (PS2/XB)—were hardly mainstream blockbusters, both pushed the routinely overlooked adventure genre into daring new frontiers. Surprisingly, QD's third effort, a gritty, PS3-exclusive film-noir thriller titled *Heavy Rain*, has already amassed plenty of buzz thanks to a stunning 2006 teaser trailer known as "The Casting." Based solely on that clip's eerily realistic virtual starlet and her unabashedly emotional performance, many players who've rarely considered narrative-based gaming have already taken notice.

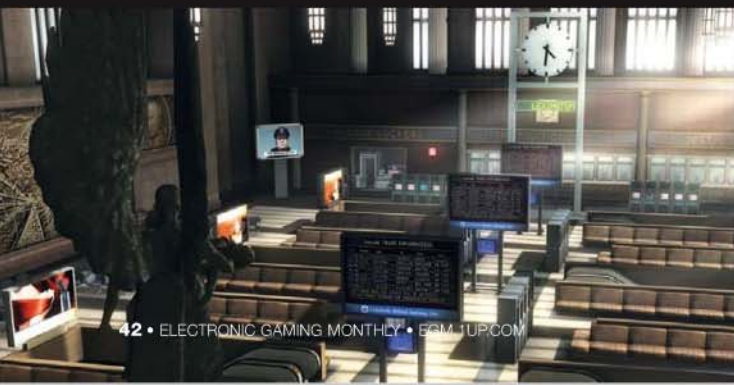
Why you should care: One glance at the game's phenomenally life-like real-time visuals will have you second-guessing your own reality's graphical prowess (every in-game object has been painstakingly rendered in 3D), but ultimately, the quality of *Heavy Rain*'s storyline will determine whether or not it's worth delving into. Luckily, its grisly serial-killer plot shows incredible promise. "Most publishers are still busy mak-

ing games for 12-year-olds," explains Quantic Dream CEO and founder David Cage. "*Heavy Rain* is for an adult audience who wants to be emotionally engaged."

True-crime aficionados will surely be hooked: The game's premise has you investigating a series of unexplained slayings in a dreary East Coast town, but the game's uniquely nonlinear "bending" narrative structure allows for greater freedom than you'd expect from the genre. Here, the game doesn't constrict you to a set path, but rather, gives you freedom to make significant moral decisions that lead to a diverse network of interlocking story possibilities. Your dialogue choices (and contextual interactions, performed via simple, *Shenmue*-style button presses) will determine which ending you'll reach, and it's even possible for major protagonists to bite the dust along the way. Plus, Cage guarantees that we won't be witnessing an absurd, *Indigo Prophecy*-style *deus ex machina* moment in *Heavy Rain*'s fifth act. "I'm trying to avoid adding yellow monsters from the Internet this time around," Cage says. "*Heavy Rain* doesn't need supernatural elements to make an impact."



■ Every detail in *Heavy Rain*'s uncannily realistic environments is rendered in 3D.



MORE ALMOST FAMOUS GAMES

By our estimate, you can find something on the order of a bajillion unknown games on store shelves every year. While we've already shed some light on 2009's hungriest underdogs in our roundup, here's a rundown of other titles worth investigating.

AFRO SAMURAI

PS3/XB360 • Namco Bandai



The concept of Samuel L. Jackson playing a badass samurai with the requisite attitude has us intrigued. The anime-inspired visuals, Jackson's voice work, and cool slow-motion fight sequences will hopefully make for a sufficiently stylish action game.

ALAN WAKE

XB360/PC • Microsoft Game Studios

Significant intel on this action/adventure/horror game from the makers of *Max Payne* remains distressingly elusive. But the trailers still look damn good, so we're holding out hope.

APB

PC • Realtime Worlds

This fast-paced, persistent-world cops-and-robbers action game from the fine folks behind *Crackdown* sounds sweet. Right now it's only confirmed for PC, but we're hoping that Realtime Worlds makes good on its plan for console ports down the line.

BIONIC COMMANDO

PS3/XB360/PC • Capcom

This HD-generation installment of an old franchise actually looks pretty solid. It's essentially *Spider-Man* with a gun, but once you get the swinging mechanic down, using the arm to make mad swings or snatch weapons and enemies turns out to be pretty fun.

BRÜTAL LEGEND

PS3/XB360 • TBD



Double Fine's roadie-simulator-disguised-as-a-third-person action game hit a speed bump when it lost its former publisher (Sierra), but it remains one of our most anticipated games of 2009...assuming it comes out by the year's end.

MORE ALMOST FAMOUS GAMES (CONT.)

DEATHSPANK

PC • Hothead

Game-industry legend Ron Gilbert (best known as the keeper of the secret of *Monkey Island*) returns with a lighthearted episodic action-RPG that combines adventure-game philosophies with the feel of *Diablo*.

FAT PRINCESS

PSN • Sony CEA



A class-based multiplayer game à la *Team Fortress 2*, but with the twist of fattening the princess (by feeding her) to make it harder for the opposing team to pick up and kidnap her? Sign us up, even if that makes us sound pro-gluttony.

F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN

PS3/XB360/PC • Warner Bros.

The original *F.E.A.R.* was a great PC shooter overshadowed by *Gears of War* and *Resistance*...and it had sub-par console ports. This time around, it's being developed from the ground up for PS3 and Xbox 360—and based on our hands-on time, that's looking to make all the difference.

FLOWER

PSN • Sony CEA



Sure, controlling a flower petal that floats around a garden may sound silly, but in our limited time with the game, it feels impressively relaxing and fun.

INFAMOUS

PS3 • Sony CEA

Flip over to pg. 60 to read about why we're excited for *Sly Cooper* series creator Sucker Punch's nonfurry superhero game.

LOCOROCO 2

PSP • Sony CEA

Your cute little LocoRocos can now sport rad Afros. This fact already makes this sequel to a solid PSP platformer worthy of your attention. Afros!



GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS

Open world with a special touch

Platform:
DS

Publisher:
Rockstar

Developer:
Rockstar Leeds

Release Date:
Winter 2009

Why it's almost famous: OK, it's *Grand Theft Auto*, so the "almost famous" thing's a stretch, right? Well, not so fast. Consider the last time a *GTA* game appeared on a Nintendo portable: 2004's *Grand Theft Auto Advance* for Game Boy Advance didn't quite move the genre forward—in fact, you could argue it served as a step backward. This, and the upcoming *GTA4* downloadable content, will certainly draw plenty of attention away from this release.

Why you should care: With *Chinatown Wars*, the team at Rockstar Leeds has spent two years making sure that the perceived limitations of the DS don't negatively affect the open-world game they're creating. "It didn't limit the scope; it just changed our interpretation of that scope," says Rockstar Leeds President Gordon Hall. He explains that the small display screen means that the camera's been pulled back

to show all of the action. The cel-shaded art style, meanwhile, both gives the game a unique look and helps the characters and vehicles stand out. And though the game makes use of the touch screen, it's only in logical situations. This includes managing your PDA, hot-wiring a car, disabling a key-code lock, among others—and it means actions like controlling your character and driving are kept to the D-pad. The story, focusing on Chinese and Korean gangsters and once again set in Liberty City, is vintage *GTA*. "There was no previous business model that showed anything other than abject failure in the adult DS space," Hall says. "We [wanted to get] something onscreen that would really change the perception of the DS and the games it's capable of making." The thought of a full-fledged *GTA* (with 20 hours to 30 hours of story game-play alone) definitely has us excited regardless of the system.



MADWORLD

Red, white, and black

Platform: Wii
Publisher: Sega
Developer: PlatinumGames
Release Date: March 2009

Why it's almost famous: Mix bold black-and-white visuals with a ballsy, lighthearted *Running Man*-style beat-em-up concept, and *MadWorld* potentially has two strikes against its marketability—it's different from everything before it, and it's extremely violent for a system known for family-friendly fare. But its developer pedigree (PlatinumGames includes many former Capcom staffers who worked on games such as *Okami*) has earned it enough attention that it has a shot at success.

The developers are doing their

part—at E3 in July, we ran into Producer Atsushi Inaba after his second day demonstrating the game, and cooling pads covered his right arm. Rather than let Sega staff help show the game, he drove every demo at the show.

Why you should care: In addition to being ballsy and different, *MadWorld*'s the kind of game that properly uses the Wii's strengths and weaknesses—the stylized graphics should help deter comments like "It looks great...for a Wii game," and the

controls don't feel particularly sloppy or overly simple.

Inaba tells us that the game's so specifically designed for Wii that he hasn't even considered putting it on other systems. Then, after thinking about it for a second, he suggests: "*MadWorld: Chinatown Wars?*"

Our only real complaint at this point is the lack of co-op through the story campaign, but Platinum hopes to make up for that with a series of Bloodbath Challenge minigames, where players can compete with each other for high scores.



What *MadWorld* lacks in complexity, it makes up for in blood, blood, and blood.





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DARK VOID

Walk, run, climb, jump, hover, and fly

Platforms:
PS3/XB360/PC

Publisher:
Capcom

Developer:
Airtight Games

Release Date:
2009

Why it's almost famous: When it's next to juggernauts like *Resident Evil 5* and *Street Fighter IV*—as it was at E3 2008—*Dark Void* comes off as the little brother in Capcom's lineup. Or perhaps, more accurately, the little brother among Capcom's biggest games, which is a pretty nice place to be, since this isn't a publisher that drops the ball on its most important games very often. Given that this is Capcom's most ambitious Western-developed game, we imagine that we'll hear a lot more about it soon—especially after *Resident Evil 5* ships in March.

Why you should care: Coming from new developer Airtight (made up of many ex-FASA employees

who worked on games like *Crimson Skies*), *Dark Void* takes a traditional cover-based *Gears of War*-style shooter concept and adds wall climbing, wall combat, and character upgrades that eventually lead to a free-flyin' jetpack—cool! If you wanna climb a mountain and take cover on the way up while throwing enemies to their death, or be a risk-taker and try to fly straight to the top, that choice is yours (once you unlock the jetpack, anyway). *Dark Void* also has, hands-down, the best "guy flailing in the air" animations of any game when you trigger the jetpack, along with some pretty huge bosses—one beast called the Archon looks like an airplane perched atop giant robotic legs. Good stuff.



MORE ALMOST FAMOUS GAMES (CONT.)

NOBY NOBY BOY

PS3 • Namco Bandai

We know next to nothing about the new game from the dude who created *Katamari Damacy*, but the teaser trailer at October's Tokyo Game Show had enough charm to keep us interested. Look for more information on 1UP.com in December.

PATAPON 2

PSP • Sony CEA



Did you miss out on the previous quirky rhythm-based action game starring diminutive tribal people who march to a drumbeat? Don't miss out on more tribal hijinks—now with four-player co-op! You can bang the buttons together!

PRINNY: CAN I REALLY BE THE HERO?

PSP • NIS America

It's Prinny (that rascally penguin from the *Disgaea* series of tactical-RPGs) in a 2D platforming adventure. We practically green-lit this entire "games you haven't heard of but should" feature based on this game, but we actually don't have that much info about it.

PROTOTYPE

PS3/XB360/PC • Activision

Check out pg. 63 for more on the next superhero game from the team that brought you *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*.

PUNCH-OUT!!

Wii • Nintendo

At first, we were like, "Doesn't everyone know about *Punch-Out!!*?" But then we realized *Punch-Out!!* for the NES came out in 1987. It's already older than most of you guys. So we're reminding you: Don't forget the new *Punch-Out!!*, kids!

RETRO GAME CHALLENGE

DS • XSEED



You don't have to be a retro-gaming nerd to appreciate the eight NES-influenced games in this alternate-universe collection—short challenges encourage casual play in shoot-em-ups, ninja games, and even a full-featured RPG.

ALPHA PROTOCOL

A Bauer, Bourne, or Bond RPG, anyone? Your choice

Platforms:
PS3/XB360/PC

Publisher:
Sega

Developer:
Obsidian

Release Date:
Summer 2009

Why it's almost famous: *Alpha Protocol* is a role-playing game without the safety net of an existing franchise or license, but its developer, Obsidian, has a strong background in role-playing games, and their last console title was *Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords* for the original Xbox.

Why you should care: Its premise should already be intriguing. Instead of a typical fantasy or sci-fi RPG, it's actually grounded in modern espionage. Lead Designer Chris Avellone summarizes: "If you were given an unsigned government check and asked to save the world, what would you do?" Like any good modern RPG, *AP* features a blend of action-based combat along with espionage-tinted twists on RPG conventions. Conversations play out more like interrogations instead of two talking heads babbling at each other. Players can shape their version of agent Michael Thorton as a gunslinger, a badass close-combat specialist, or a stealthy gadget-user. And dilemmas include such decisions as whether you should let an arms dealer live to receive information on a known terrorist—knowing full well that the weapons he sells will likely kill others in the future. It might not have a fancy license or established fiction, but a hardcore spy-RPG from these guys should certainly be on your radar.



ALMOST FAMOUS



NO MORE HEROES: DESPERATE STRUGGLE

Yes, more Heroes

Platform:
Wii

Publisher:
TBA

Developer:
Grasshopper

Release Date:
2009

Why it's almost famous: It's a matter of regions, really: The original *No More Heroes* fared well in the States but tanked in its homeland of Japan. That's a shame, too, considering oddball developer Suda51's (*Killer7*) bloody hilarious romp was one of the better Wii exclusives to hit last year. But, hey, at least we Yanks bought enough copies to ensure a sequel.

Why you should care: As good as the original *No More Heroes* is, it definitely needed some spit and polish, which is why we're stoked to hear developer Grasshopper's looking to fix its faults while (hopefully) retaining what made us want more in the first place.

RESISTANCE: RETRIBUTION

Sony twirls another PSP spin-off

Platform:
PSP

Publisher:
Sony CEA

Developer:
Sony Bend

Release Date:
Spring 2009

Why it's almost famous: Sony's putting a twist on its alien-infested first-person-shooter series *Resistance* by giving PSP a suitable spin-off. Smart thinking (trust us—PSP needs more first-party support), but we're still waiting to see if it can match the epic feel of Insomniac's PS3 games. Until we know the answer to that question, this side story—set between the events of *Resistance: Fall of Man* and *Resistance 2*—at least looks like it'll make the grade.

Why you should care: For starters, it's not a first-person shooter (no, really—that's a good thing!). Instead, it's a behind-the-back adventure. Second, its developers are the PSP pros responsible for the underrated *Syphon Filter* series. And considering their track record with third-person shooters, we don't plan on resisting *Retribution*.



BAYONETTA

Because witches are so 2009

Platforms: PS3/XB360
Publisher: Sega
Developer: PlatinumGames
Release Date: 2009

Why it's almost famous: When you're a famous development team taking on a famous game—one that you yourself directed (*Devil May Cry*)—chances are it's gonna get some attention. But *Bayonetta*'s willingness to dabble in the weird and hypersexual could potentially limit its audience. According to Director Hideki Kamiya, when he was making *Viewtiful Joe* at Capcom, the higher-ups made him cut a scene showing a female character's underpants. For *Bayonetta*, the censors are much more limited.

Why you should care: Kamiya's track record is as bulletproof as they come, with *Resident Evil 2*, *Devil May Cry*, *Viewtiful Joe*, and *Okami* under his belt. And he claims that *Bayonetta* will reenergize the action genre—which, from what we've seen, seems to mean it'll throw as many particles as possible on the screen at every given moment. This is the equivalent of a bullet-hell 2D shooter in a 3D action game.



RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

Riddick remake is still alive and kicking

Platforms: PS3/XB360/PC
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Starbreeze
Release Date: Spring 2009

Why it's almost famous: This remake of a 2004 Xbox game was first announced in the middle of 2007—and there's been little information since. On top of that, its original publisher (Sierra) went through a corporate merger, and the new company actually dropped the game from its lineup, making its future uncertain at the time.

Why you should care: *Assault on Dark Athena*'s picked up a new publisher, Atari, and it's still on track for release, so don't write off its existence just yet. The original *Chronicles of Riddick* was pretty fantastic, so an enhanced remake featuring up-to-date graphics, a new single-player campaign, and multiplayer should make this a great package for *Riddick* veterans and newbies alike.

MURAMASA: THE DEMON BLADE

Odin Sphere for dummies

Platform: Wii
Publisher: XSEED
Developer: Vanillaware
Release Date: 2009

Why it's almost famous: For over a decade, the folks at the developer now known as Vanillaware have delivered some of the most stunning hand-drawn 2D visuals in the industry—and some of the most convoluted gameplay setups. *Odin Sphere*, their gorgeous 2007 take on Norse legend, turned off many with its overly complex item management and sprawling maps.

Why you should care: *Muramasa* explores the enchanting world of Japanese myth—and does it by chucking OS' more ambitious elements in favor of simplified exploration and battles (or at least that's what we've been led to believe—the recent Tokyo Game Show demo featured one-button combat). Some may call it dumbed-down, but we like to think of it as “accessible.” More importantly, the Wii's got the horsepower to potentially deliver a slowdown-free slashfest this time around.



MORE ALMOST FAMOUS GAMES (CONT.)

SABOTEUR

PS3/XB360/PC • Electronic Arts



It's an insurrection game that mixes World War II with *Okami's* treatment of color. Seriously. We're intrigued by the idea of inspiring rebellion in occupied Paris and watching the world shift from black-and-white to color as the result.

SANDS OF DESTRUCTION

DS • Sega

Hey, look, another random role-playing game for the DS. Except this one's got some pedigree—it's from some of the same folks who worked on *Chrono Cross* and *Xenogears*. Now we're officially excited!

SINGULARITY

PS3/XB360 • Activision

In addition to *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (which you might've noticed on our cover), developer Raven's also got an original game in development. Details are kinda sparse on this one, but the Unreal Engine-powered *Singularity* appears to rely on electricity and time travel for its hooks.

STAR OCEAN: THE LAST HOPE

XB360 • Square Enix



This is the final chapter in the *Star Ocean* franchise, a series of damn good Japanese RPGs overshadowed by the likes of *Final Fantasy*. We're thinking that the Xbox 360 release will raise player awareness—not to mention resolve the crazy plot twist from the previous entry.

THE GAMES THAT ARE ALMOST FAMOUS BECAUSE WE CAN'T CONFIRM THEM YET

While publishers have confirmed *BioShock 2*, *Half-Life 2: Episode Three*, *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, and *God of War III*—we hope all of 'em will see 2009 releases—we're curious to see what comes of some heavily rumored titles: *Uncharted 2*, *Assassin's Creed 2*, *Portal 2*, *Mirror's Edge 2*, and the long-awaited PlayStation 3 offering from the team behind *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus*. Get psyched!



ALMOST FAMOUS

DARKSIDERS: WRATH OF WAR

A little bit of everything

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
THQ

Developer:
Vigil

Release Date:
Spring/Summer 2009

Why it's almost famous: Melding the exploration, level structure, and light role-playing elements of *The Legend of Zelda* with the intense combat of *Devil May Cry* sounds like a pretty good idea, and Vigil's attempt to do exactly that with *Darksiders: Wrath of War*. "The combat's quite frantic, and there are quite a few ways you can link in new items into combat," says Lead Designer Haydn Dalton about playing as War, one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. And the person responsible for coming up with a visual style to complement *Darksiders'* mythical backdrop and intense action is none other than renowned comic-book artist Joe Madureira. "Everything about this game comes from Joe; he's the center of everything, visually," Dalton says. "We wanted to have the destroyed element of the apocalypse, but we also wanted to make

it quite beautiful and colorful, even though there are shots out there that look relatively gray."

Why you should care: *Darksiders* isn't a half-hearted attempt to simply cram the mechanics of two popular franchises together. In fact, you don't need to look any further than War's horse, Ruin, to gauge Vigil's dedication to making everything work—and work well. "We looked at a lot of other games—how horses were done," Dalton explains. "We don't want to be restrained by the idea of having a horse in the wild, and it just follows you around. You can summon Ruin at will, so you can just jump off buildings, do combination attack moves—just being able to race through big, open plains and ram through loads of enemies and smash through weakened structures. And you can use guns on top of Ruin as well as your melee weapons."



WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE

'Curving the bullet,' the new action-game catchphrase

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Warner Bros.

Developer:
Grin

Release Date:
Spring 2009

Why it's almost famous: You could easily mistake *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* as another mediocre movie-to-game adaptation that comes out long after the movie it's adapting. But it's coming from a decent developer (Grin, the folks working on the new *Bionic Commando*), with assistance from Producer Peter Wanat, the guy who helped shape *The Thing*, *The Chronicles of Riddick*, and *Scarface* into viable games.

Why you should care: *Wanted* is a cinematic third-person, cover-based action game where players choose to play as either Wesley or Cross—two assassins from the movie—each with slightly different abilities; Wesley's the unsubtle whiz-bang green-horn who uses a lot of flash and wastes bullets John Woo-style, while Cross is the consummate professional, operating quickly and quietly. *Wanted*'s biggest selling point is its trademark "curving bullet" system—sure, it spits in the face of physics, but it's actually pretty cool. Add in the "chaining cover" system (where you can quickly navigate from cover to cover) and intuitive aiming that makes bending the bullets a breeze, and *Wanted* might be another game that defies the infamous movie-game curse.



SIN & PUNISHMENT 2

More sin is a definite win

Platform:
Wii

Publisher:
Nintendo

Developer:
Treasure

Release Date:
2009

Why it's almost famous: To hardcore shoot-em-up nuts, the *Sin & Punishment* series is already famous. But for the majority of gamers who didn't play the addictive on-rails original released for the Japanese Nintendo 64 (and later on the U.S. Virtual Console), it's just another tough-to-master shooter on a system that caters to folks who fancy conducting orchestras with the wave of a remote.

Why you should care: Developer Treasure (responsible for just about every beloved reflex-testing shooter in recent memory) is once again behind the pattern-memorizing punishment. That's pretty much all you need to know. But in case you're not sold, think about this: An accomplished, sequel-adverse developer's reviving an old franchise exclusively on Wii—that's something to celebrate. 🎮



EGM Extras: Head on over to EGM.1UP.com to see interviews with the guys behind GTA: Chinatown Wars, Infamous, and Alpha Protocol, as well as plenty more on Heavy Rain.

CAVE STORY

What's old is new again

Platform:
WiiWare

Publisher:
Nicalis

Developer:
Pixel

Release Date:
Early 2009

Why it's almost famous: *Cave Story*'s actually legendary for those in the know. It's a highly polished old-school platformer that helped spark the retro-style movement that gave us *Mega Man 9*...and it was made by just one person.

Why you should care: Though it's been available as PC freeware for years, this marks *Cave Story*'s first console (and commercial) release. Creator Daisuke Amaya is overseeing the project, including a visual overhaul, to ensure that this new version holds up. Even in its early state, the WiiWare remake plays exactly like the original—which means it'll automatically be one of the best games on Wii the moment it launches. Prior to this release, most players cited *Super Metroid* as *Cave Story*'s closest console cousin...and that's certainly esteemed company.



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Joe Thiel, Game Art & Design, 2007 Graduate, The Art Institute of Portland

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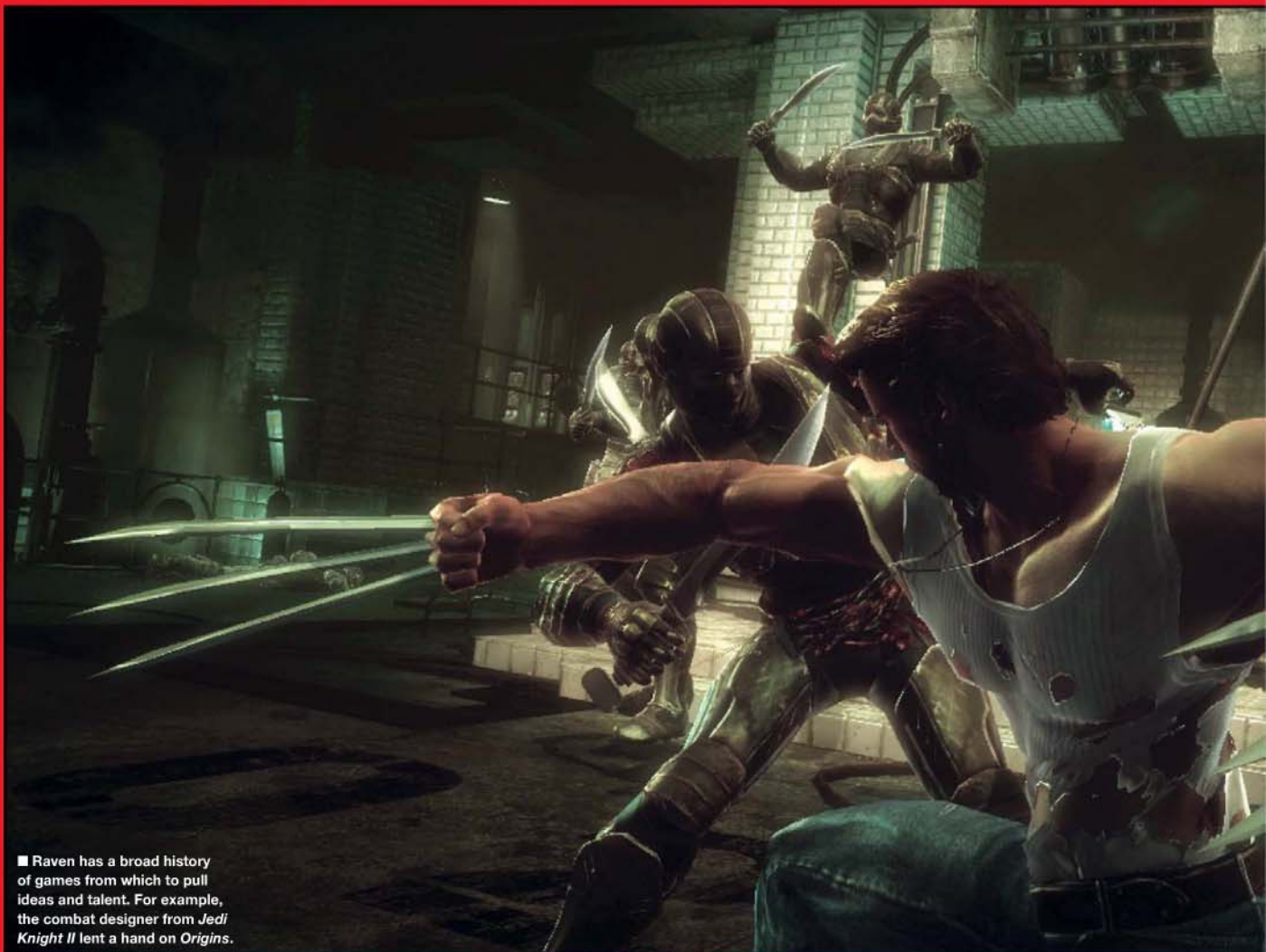


INSUBORDINATE CLAWS

COVER STORY



Superhero titles are the game-industry equivalent of fast food—well marketed and able to put a smile on your face, but you know better than to look too closely—and they still lag far behind Hollywood's current crop of quality hero flicks. EGM examines how Raven Software's doing their best to combat the situation with **X-Men Origins: Wolverine**—breaking from the action-role-playing mold of their popular X-Men Legends and Marvel: Ultimate Alliance series for a more personal, in-your-face adventure for Marvel's scene-stealing standout. Can Wolvie help ratchet up the relevance of comic-book games in this surprisingly polished new brawler? By Nick Suttner



■ Raven has a broad history of games from which to pull ideas and talent. For example, the combat designer from *Jedi Knight II* lent a hand on *Origins*.

Superhistory lesson

We wouldn't dare overlook cultural touchstones like the first few *Superman* and *Batman* films—especially those of us who grew up poring over their illustrated adventures—but superhero flicks have made leaps and bounds over the past eight years, becoming yearly studio tentpoles and reliable summer fun. Sure, we were excited to see our favorite heroes come to life on the silver screen pre-2000, but they always seemed to encounter roadblocks: licensing issues, swelled budgets, and special effects that were perpetually *almost* where they needed to be.

In 2000, the first *X-Men* film changed all that, breaking through to mainstream success behind a respected director (Bryan Singer, *The Usual Suspects*), competent casting, and everything you'd expect from a top-tier action film. It opened the floodgates for other long-brewing comic-book projects, like Sam Raimi's record-breaking *Spider-Man* and Ang Lee's art-house adaptation of *Hulk*. These days, it's huge success after huge success—both *Iron Man* and *The Dark Knight* grossed crazy amounts of dough this past summer, and classic graphic novels like *Sin*

City and *Watchmen* finally have the confidence of movie studios.

So why haven't games based on comic books made comparable progress? Bringing such engaging characters and worlds into an interactive medium offers unlimited potential, but thus far, we've mostly seen underachievers. A handful of classic games left their mark, and the six-player side-scrolling *X-Men* arcade entry still holds up (and is *long* overdue for a downloadable rerelease), but evolutionary steps have been few and far between. Are modern superhero games just in it for the easy sales? Suffering from suffocating deadlines? Restricted by license-approval limitations? Realistically, the answer varies on a case-by-case basis. The best modern examples are those most true to their characters: *Spider-Man 2* nailed its web-swinging mechanics, bringing an exhilarating freedom of movement to a character squarely rooted in his insectile agility, while *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* played to the creature's calamitous MO in one of the most satisfying sandboxes around.

But when series like *Gears of War* and *God of War* have made huge strides for action gaming, it's frustrating to see our favorite

superheroes—who, by all rights, should each have awesome games of their own by now—languish in mediocrity. In the current console generation, the baton carriers for superhero games aren't actually based on real comics at all: *Crackdown* made good on scratching the building-hopping, bad-guy-throwing heroic itch, while *Infamous* and *Prototype* look like they might do the same (see previews on pgs. 60 and 63, respectively).

Action and reaction

At what juncture, then, will we see a turning point? When will gaming get its *X-Men* movie equivalent? Well, you can chalk up a good portion of *X-Men*'s success to Hugh Jackman's spot-on portrayal of team member Wolverine—which launched both his U.S. film career and, arguably, the future purveyance of superhero films (some *EGMers* may even have dressed up as him for the sequel's premiere...). Nabbing the top spot in Wizard's "200 Greatest Comic Book Characters of All Time," Wolverine's risen far above his humble origins in *The Incredible Hulk* No. 180 and beyond the confines of his uncanny team. While often burdened with leadership, he also represents more controversial ideals in

WOLVERINE NEEDS FOOD...BADLY

You'll endure plenty of horrible injuries over the course of *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*—and have the pleasure of watching Wolverine heal up, shake it off, and keep on slicin'. But how far was Raven originally pushing the idea of having you play as a character who's essentially unkillable? How about throwing yourself into the engine of an airborne 767 to bring it down? That's not even the craziest

idea that got cut: "We were going to have a [sequence] where you're actually in a nuclear reactor and the whole thing blows," Project Lead Dan Vondrak of Raven explains. "[Wolverine] was going to be down there, just a skeleton, and you were going to be walking around. But, y'know, that was just too crazy and didn't quite fit with the movie. But that's the scale we were going at."

■ Wolverine won't always be adorned with jeans and a sleeveless shirt. You'll be able to unlock some of his classic duds (Raven wasn't specific about which ones, however). C'mon, brown and tan!



the world of heroism: doing whatever it takes to get the job done—taking lives, if necessary—and spending as much time fighting the beast within as the villains who get in his way. As *Wizard* tells it, "Superman, Batman, and Spider-Man don't own the top slot simply because they live in a world of black and white, definitive right and wrong. Wolverine exists in colorful shades of gray."

That alluring antihero ambiguity has, in large part, led to Wolverine's popularity, and it'll soon lead to a spin-off film of his own, when *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* explores his always enigmatic past in May 2009. Activision-owned Raven will have a game of the same name ready to launch alongside the flick—as the developers of accomplished action-RPGs *X-Men Legends* and *Legends II* and *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*, they're intimately familiar with the superhero genre. But *Legends* and *Ultimate Alliance* are anything but intimate themselves, cramming dozens of playable characters and hours of overlapping comic narrative into team-based adventuring—good for fan service and casual superhero enthusiasts but detrimental to the development of any one character or story.

While many players stuck with Wolverine

as their comfort character in those titles, they weren't the only ones who took a particular liking to him. Project Lead Dan Vondrak (dressed in a well-worn Marvel shirt adorned with a grid of heroes) explains: "It's funny—if you look at all of the [*X-Men*] *Legends* posters and the *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* stuff, it was always like, 'Well, OK, we have to at least make sure we get Wolverine on there.' Then there was the possibility of making this Wolverine game, and we were like, 'Yes, God, please, yes.'" But Raven's work on *Origins* actually started before they even knew for sure if the film was happening, which let them focus on nailing the most important bits early on in the process. "Our first step was...get a room, get 10 guys in it, and make combat so much fun you don't wanna leave that room."

Inhuman feats

Raven showed us the fruits of their labor—slices of a few different areas and a boss encounter—during a recent trip to their Madison, WI, offices. While they weren't ready to put the controller in our hands, two things are eminently clear even from watching: *Origins* looks to stay true to the most appealing aspects of the character, and the polished presentation will surprise anyone clinging to the cynical "movie game" stigma.

While Wolverine is many things to many people, his most infamous trait shows through first and foremost: savagely brutal combat. A far cry from that of Wolverine's last solo outing—the haphazard *X2: Wolverine's Revenge*—*Origins'* action looks fast, pretty, and devastatingly visceral, evoking the recent *Ninja Gaiden* titles...albeit ➤

Our first step was...get a room, get 10 guys in it, and make combat so much fun you don't wanna leave that room.

—Raven Project Lead Dan Vondrak

■ Remember that awesome part in *X2* where Wolverine lands between two soldiers and “snikts” them in the legs? Yeah, you’ll be doing lots of that.



with a more accessible structure. *Origins* relies on three options—light attacks, heavy attacks, and grabs, mapped to one button apiece—but doesn’t ask players to memorize long combo strings. Combined with jumping and myriad context-sensitive conditions—whether you’re clinging to a helicopter in flight, charging toward a towering Sentinel robot, or dispatching armed goons—Raven is striving to make *Origins*’ combat feel as approachable and satisfying as possible.

“*God of War* was an influence. *Devil May Cry*, even *Super Smash Bros.*, to a point,”

Vondrak says. “When we play [games like that], we just like the simplicity. Every character has their basic set of moves—that’s simple. People get that, and mass market gets that, so we’re making sure we bring that to *Wolverine*.” Wolvie really struts his stuff when dealing with *Origins*’ plentiful soldiers, ping-ponging between foes, engaging enemies behind him without turning around, and dealing death with a fluidity usually reserved for fighting games. “People are going to play *Wolverine* and then be annoyed with how slow other action games are,” says Vondrak. “We’ve gone back and played highly touted

action games we all love, and you’re in these attacks forever. And it’s not just the speed—it’s the ease in which you’re able to [break] out of your attacks at any time.”

Origins’ penchant for eye-opening bloodshed is also reminiscent of *Ninja Gaiden* (the second one, specifically)—likely far more than you’d expect from a hero normally dulled down for television and film audiences. Vondrak explains: “I’ve read reviews of *Wolverine* games, I’ve played previous *X-Men* games, and you just hate it when you’re like, ‘This isn’t what it’s supposed to be like to fight this guy. I’m Wolverine. How come I can’t ever just grab a guy and rip him in half?’ Yeah, absolutely—let’s do that. Nothing’s holding us back.” *Origins*, free from childish comic-book associations, is more in line with the darker corners of Wolverine lore. In the intense introductory cut-scene created by Blur (responsible for eye-popping CG scenes in everything from *Tomb Raider: Underworld* to *Halo Wars*), Wolverine brutally dices up a handful of soldiers—and he’s covered in blood by the end. Over the course of combat, Wolverine can turn around enemy shotguns and knives on

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—Raven Project Lead Dan Vondrak

SEXY BEAST



We spoke to Raven Modeler Markus Peekna (left) about getting Hugh Jackman in the game, sexing him up, and watching him die.

EGM: What were your initial thoughts when the full-body scan of Jackman first came in?

Markus Peekna: Well, from a modeler's perspective, I wasn't very surprised. He's an extremely good-looking guy, and as far as scans go, he looks fantastic. We ended up having to create an asset that was made for a game, though, and that meant tailoring the model to read at a distance. I guess you could liken it to stage makeup. This required an entirely hand-modeled approach that led to the current model in the game. It also allowed us an opportunity to appeal to fans of the comics and move a little closer to the Logan they're accustomed to. It's a fine line to walk, but I think we did pretty well.

EGM: What are a few of the basic changes you've made to find that balance?

MP: We decided on a thicker, heavier Hugh Jackman. Hugh's tall and attractive in the classical sense, and that's a sharp contrast from the comic version. A stronger back for the game camera, larger muscles—think stockier and barrel-chested.

EGM: So you're saying that his back wasn't sexy enough?

MP: Ha-ha! He's a way better looking guy than

I could ever hope to be. Perhaps *too* sexy. We needed a brute.

EGM: You remodeled the scan of his head to have removable hair for the purposes of burning it off—any other fun “removable” bits?

MP: Most of the other stuff's handled by our damage shader system. He has three layers that are modeled: skin, muscles, and skeleton. Depending on what's happening in the game, all three might be visible.

EGM: Does meticulously re-creating a model of an actual person and then watching them get destroyed ever creep you out?

MP: Yes! The uncanny valley is a delicate subject for anyone. That's another reason game characters are often best when not perfect representations [of real people]. On the modeling end, though, I tend to look at people as shapes, and I'm way too focused to really think about it. However, there have been many funny moments when people have walked over to my desk, only to see me modeling a crotch or some other less-appealing area of human anatomy.

EGM: How much work did Jackman's crotch region take? What's the shapeliest crotch you've ever worked on?

MP: Um, I guess my favorite was a female model for another title I can't yet talk about. But as for Hugh, he has briefs on, so it was pretty easy.



their owners, lop off limbs and layers of flesh unprotected by armor, and turn unwitting bad guys into a shower of meaty gibs with a spinning claw-drill maneuver. We even watched him decapitate a protesting soldier on the blades of a helicopter. It's a bit grotesque at first (and certainly surprising), but it makes a whole lot of sense when dealing with such a fundamentally deadly character—especially one in his less-bridled earlier years.

Exceptional healing

Wolverine's a man of many talents, several of which translate perfectly to an interactive, visually driven medium. Due to his accelerated mutant healing factor, he can take more damage than he deals and be fit as a fiddle moments later—and for the first time, you'll actually see that grisly technique in action. Wolverine regularly loses chunks of his flesh (and his shirt) in combat, and Raven's given him full muscle and bone layers under his skin (see sidebar above), which means taking damage will open up bloody wounds in the appropriate places (while a “bruise map” makes the transition between healthy and damaged skin less jarring). Take a shotgun

blast to the chest and you'll see the macabre results; screw up while free-falling between a series of midair helicopters (a particularly cool sequence) and Wolverine will shred himself into a bloody mess on the blades. Such reckless actions would have grim consequences in most games, but *Origins* makes surviving a gratifying regularity. Simply avoid taking damage for a few moments—or stand still and zoom in the camera for added effect—and watch gaping wounds seal right up.

But don't expect Wolverine to be *fully* indestructible, as *Origins* relies on a two-tiered recharging health system—a shield-like “Health” bar, which regenerates quickly after taking damage, and a more serious “Vitals” bar that refills much more slowly and *only* when the Health bar is full. When asked about more elegant solutions Raven may have considered, Vondrak explains: “We definitely tried. We explored ideas of never dying, or you die but you get back up, or you die and you get captured—and actually get to play a rescue sequence—but we wanted to make sure we had that balance of the negative effects of combat, and it just wasn't clear when you weren't dying. That kind of ‘shield’

provides at least a little bit of a way to feel like when the core health is down, [you] could die at any moment, and it gives you a chance to get a breather.”

Retro active

Origins has plenty of combat options beyond the starting melee move set—as any action game should—to help with that whole staying-alive thing. Pulling off bigger combo strings yields more experience and skill points, and you can use those to level up basic stats like claw damage or health, or you can purchase specific options like a temporary regenerative boost or the aforementioned claw drill (which are executed similarly to moves in *Ultimate Alliance* by holding down the right trigger—in the 360 version—and pressing an assigned face button during combat). Along with several claw-centric finishing moves, you'll also interact with certain background objects—like a jagged branch in the jungle—when hurling enemies around, making for even more satisfying moments if you throw them at just the right angle. One of the most interesting moves is the lunge, which allows you to lock onto faraway targets and hurdle ➤



■ While we didn't get to view too many environments beyond the ones you see here, this is one game that could probably get away with using the typical lava stage. You've always wondered if that'd kill Wolverine once and for all, haven't you?



through the air—claws outstretched—toward them, adding what's essentially a projectile attack to an otherwise in-your-face brawler. Wolverine can also send enemy projectiles right back at 'em with a perfectly timed claw block, which you use to solve some puzzles as well.

The heightened perception ability of Feral Sense—another one of Wolvie's many talents—comes into play both in platforming (to highlight hidden ledges) and combat (for locating otherwise invisible enemies). Some of its most novel applications are put to use in a boss battle against a massive prototype of the first Sentinel (a mutant-killing menace that becomes a perpetual thorn in the X-Men's side when later mass-produced). Wolverine must first fight on foot, scurrying around a massive base in the Southwestern U.S. while the Sentinel towers above him, trying to stomp and fry him into nothingness.

Players must use Feral Sense to locate weak points in the Sentinel's feet, stun it by luring it onto electrical panels, and then take out its arms. Though that's only the first step—shortly afterward, the Sentinel blasts off into flight, at which point the battle heads skyward. Wolverine must climb up

the Sentinel, tearing open several electrical hatches along the way in short button-pressing minigames. If you botch one of these, you're booted to the sky and must free-fall back toward the escaping giant, avoiding a trail of metal debris—or, with the right timing, slashing straight through it. Once the Sentinel starts smoking, you must use Feral Sense again to see through the haze. A capping cut-scene shows the Sentinel landing hard somewhere in the canyons as Wolverine comes down shortly after, delivering the finishing blow by blazing right through the Sentinel's head...and standing up from his final resting place soon after, a broken, bloody mess who's healed up within moments—and already bitching about how he should've landed closer to town.

Another exhilarating sequence we saw involved an escape from the spillway at Alkali Lake (seen in the X2 film), as Wolverine jumped between several transport trucks trying to outrun a massive wave of water, battling a few enemies in each vehicle along the way. Originally a minute-long interactive cut-scene, Raven decided to give players control of the action (outside of a few scripted jumps). They're working to make the game

as participatory as possible, going back and tweaking many similar sequences that used to be passive spectacles.

Clawing your way to the top

While *Origins*' narrative weaves in and out of the events of the upcoming film—flashbacks of pursuing the mysterious Agent Zero in the jungles of Angola become full levels of their own, and an escape from the Weapon X facility serves as a backdrop for several combat scenarios—gameplay's littered with filmic flourishes. If combat conditions are just right, cinematic cameras will kick in to show the action from a more satisfying vantage point. Players can control the camera, but it also adjusts itself intelligently as it follows you.

More impressive are the seamless in-game cut-scenes created by Animation Lead Eric Schlautman. These scripted moments launch off specific player actions already in motion: We watched as Wolverine fought through a swath of enemies on a rickety rope bridge, lunging toward a gunner on the other side of a missing slat; the lunge turned into a brief in-game cinematic, as the bridge fell and Wolvie acrobatically tore through a few unfortunate bad guys to reach the other side, at which

■ Wolverine might be fully clothed in these shots, but get ready for some hot nude action during the Weapon X escape scene. Will we be able to do naked cartwheels like in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*?


COVER STORY

point the player immediately regained control. Whether it's action-oriented moments like that or simply making Wolverine slide down a wall with his claws to bridge a transition between two levels of a building, these touches go a long way toward calling out the highlights of playing as such a dynamic, entertaining character.

We watched some of the motion-capture work in Raven's on-site studio, spoke to Sound Designer Andy Bayless about how he cracks his knuckles, crushes walnuts, and smashes fruit to glean the most gruesome combat sounds (and also listened to some great Jackman growls from his voice sessions), and checked out Modeler Markus Peekna's insanely detailed work on Jackman's in-game model (and his improvements—see sidebar on pg. 57). It's easy to lose sight of the scale of modern game development, but walking around Raven felt more like being on a movie set than touring a development studio. Activision's putting the resources behind *Origins* that it deserves, and with a far longer development cycle than most licensed games—the yearlong film delay gave Raven time for iteration and polish—the results are starting to show. If combat feels

good and works well—something we're looking forward to trying for ourselves soon—the production values are in place to hold up their end of the deal. Raven's looking to make good on that all-important objective of staying true to the character, and it comes through most of all in the details: the way Wolverine uses a claw to catch himself in the ground after a big hit knocks him back, and the iconic dog tag that bounces around his neck as he dismembers hapless antagonists. Even the looping title screen of Wolverine submerged in his Weapon X experimentation tank imparts a simple appreciation of the character.

Raven cofounder Brian Raffel understands the necessity of passion: "We wanted to take Wolverine and make him sing because no one had really done him justice, you know?

He's such a great character and has so much potential; we wanted to show what could really be done." It may well be another eight years until superhero games make the strides of their theatrical kin, but Raven's certainly endeavoring to do its part. *Origins* looks to be a solid step forward for superhero games—and deliver on the potential of a character who's been so thoroughly engaging in more traditional mediums. May's turning into a very important month for Wolverine fans—and we're—ahem—"uncannily" excited to see how it all pans out. 



EGM Extras: Check out EGM.1UP.com for an extended Wolverine interview, more high-resolution screenshots, and (in a couple of months) the first in-game video footage!

It's easy to lose sight of the scale of modern game development, but walking around Raven felt more like being on a movie set than touring a development studio.

SUPERHERO

Wolverine's not the only hero getting in on the action. Check



INFAMOUS

Sucker Punch drops the furry adventures and fully embraces superpowered mayhem

Platform:
PlayStation 3

Publisher:
Sony CEA

Developer:
Sucker Punch

Release Date:
March 2009

It's great to see Sucker Punch, a talented developer typecast by the kid-friendly PS2 platforming series *Sly Cooper* (we won't even get into that whole "anthropomorphic animal gang" thing), finally get the chance to tackle something a bit more mature. Their newest project, *Infamous*, doesn't revolve around an otter on a zany crime caper—it's about Cole, an average dude who suddenly becomes charged with electricity-based superpowers and tries to survive in the open-world environment of Empire City. "People are getting mugged and attacked all around you—whether you decide to do anything about it or not," says Game Director Nate Fox. "We call this the 'crime ecosystem.' However, the story missions are tailored to deliver a cinematic superhero experience.

"The most important thing to making a good superhero game is marrying the hero's powers into the game world. If my hero has razor-sharp claws, yet the game won't let me cut down a wooden fence, it sort of breaks the suspension of disbelief." Hence, the choice to have electricity as Cole's foundation for powers that are "designed from the ground up to work well in the context of a videogame," says Fox, who also points out that shooting lightning, charging up objects and attacks, and navigating the world (i.e., platforming elements) are natural fits

for *Infamous*. "This is our core strategy in crafting our superhero—we're building the world around his powers and his powers around what's fun to do in the world."

After crafting Cole, Fox and the team looked to grittier, harsher media for *Infamous'* overall tone. "The film *Batman Begins* and the graphic novel *DMZ* [a series about New York City torn apart by a Second Civil War] were two of many influences that did it right. I also got a lot out of participating in the Seattle [World Trade Organization] riots," Fox says. "Spending time in a lawless place is interesting, particularly as a superhero with the power to do [both] great good and evil."

The open-world design, electricity-based powers, gritty environment, and a morality system all combine to lend themselves to the experience Fox describes. "While playing the game, I pissed off a bunch of people—they banded together into a mob and tried to stone me to death," he says. "It didn't end well for them, but I admire their courage."

Ultimately, it comes down to one feeling that makes the experience feel true to the subject matter: "Being able to smoothly skulk along the rooftops and then jump down onto the heads of a bunch of bad guys is great," Fox says. "You really feel like a superhero."

THROWDOWN

PREVIEW ROUNDUP

out four other games that aim to push the superhero genre forward



CHAMPIONS ONLINE

Platforms:
XB360/PC

Publisher:
2K Games

Developer:
Cryptic

Release Date:
Spring 2009

Creating an MMO champion

You might think that with *Champions Online*, Cryptic's merely seeking to continue the superhero massively multiplayer online formula that it originally defined with its previous game, PC hit *City of Heroes*. But this isn't a straight sequel, and the team's bringing a lot of new stuff to the table that could really mold the genre—and the future of superhero games in general.

First, *Champions Online* is one of the few attempts to bring massively multiplayer games to consoles. Cryptic isn't just treating the game as a quick-and-dirty PC port, either. The first time we played it, the developers actually handed us an Xbox 360 controller instead of a mouse and keyboard. And it actually worked—quite well, in fact.

Part of the reason for the easy console transition lies in how the game focuses on action more than your average MMO. Cryptic Chief Creative Officer Jack Emmert explains: "*Champions* is to *City of Heroes* as *City of Heroes* is to *World of Warcraft*." For the MMO illiterate, he's saying that *Champions Online* moves much faster than previous games in the genre. Combat's the emphasis—and Cryptic's devoted to making sure that it's as fun as possible.

One of our favorite aspects of *City of Heroes* is its character-creation system's unbelievable level of customization. Emmert says that the options widen in the license-free *Champions Online*, granting the ability to manipulate the size of your hero, their emotions (which dictates facial expressions), and their stance. And perhaps coolest of all, you can also choose all of these things for a second avatar that you design when you start the game: your very own nemesis. No other game—that we know of, at least—lets players create the main bad guy, so let's hope that this feature leads to some exciting, dramatic showdowns in *Champions Online*.

DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

A massively multiplayer superhero action game that might make you believe

Platforms:
PS3/PC

Publisher:
Sony Online
Entertainment

Developer:
SOE Austin

Release Date:
2009

You can interpret *DC Universe Online's* approach to the superhero genre in two ways—as either adding a persistent massively multiplayer universe to the superhero action genre or adding hardcore superhero action to a persistent massively multiplayer universe. However you parse it, it's already a refreshing change—even in our limited playtime, *DCUO* already feels much more actiony than other MMOs. Combat's not about hitting buttons and then stringing multiple button presses to pull off combos. It's about figuring out that you can freeze someone in a block of ice and then pick up that block and toss it at someone else.

While the moment-to-moment gameplay's designed to be reminiscent of a typical superhero action game, traditional MMO trappings—such as quests (one twist is the use of Opposed Objectives, where heroes and villains approach the same quest with separate objectives to make the experience feel different depending on which side you're on), guilds, and even crafting—should keep

things interesting in the long run.

Besides fusing action gameplay with the MMO experience, the developers attempt to make it feel like you're actually *part* of the DC universe. Previous media, such as the comics and movies, were essentially “windows to the DC universe”—and the developers view *DCUO* as the “door.” To that end, while players create their own superpeople (the storyline is that somehow, a whole slew of superhumans—the players—suddenly appear in the DC universe), the game makes extensive, sensible use of existing DC lore. Iconic locations serve as both main city hubs (Metropolis, Gotham) and even dungeons (Arkham Asylum, the Batcave). Superman won't just be some dude who sits around dispensing newbie quests, either—if you're involved in a high-end mission within Metropolis (whether as a hero or villain), you might see him fly in and regulate. A fair amount of development time remains before *DCUO's* release, but if the team manages to meet these goals, we can certainly understand how a bona fide DC superhero game that melds fast-paced combat with massively multiplayer mechanics could legitimately boost the genre forward.





PROTOTYPE

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Activision

Developer:
Radical

Release Date:
Spring/Summer 2009

Taking a superpowered tour of New York City

Most open-world games cast you as some gangbanging thug or heavily armed soldier. With 2005's *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, developer Radical dared to make an open-world game centered on the Incredible Hulk—with a decently successful (at least critically, if not commercially) result. Radical's aiming even higher with the long-incoming *Prototype*, another superpowered open-world game. A typical 15-minute gameplay session in *Prototype* seamlessly moves from leaping across rooftops and wrapping tentacles around enemies to eating civilians and disguising yourself as a military soldier and instigating firefights between paranoid comrades—all with copious amounts of blood and carnage.

You play as Alex, a superpowered badass with amnesia. You wander around New York City, eating various characters to gain their memories and piece together the details of who made you the way you are—and why. Alex has a variety of powers to aid in his investigation, rang-

ing from turning his hands into giant spikes to thickening his skin for armor to shape-shifting into a soldier to sneak into a restricted zone. In theory, you can smoothly switch between these powers; you can impale someone with one arm and harden the skin of the other to create a makeshift, organic sword-and-shield combo—or you can just run away to consume more enemies. Now, combine these powers into an open-world version of New York that's been carved up into zones—some are occupied by military soldiers, others are just normal NYC areas, and some are in the midst of full-out warfare between the military and superpowered freaks.

A fair number of superhero games have been set in an open-world New York City (hello, most of the *Spider-Man* franchise!), but *Prototype* might be able to redefine the NYC-based open-world superhero action game by virtue of its larger array of usable powers and much more visceral (and gory) presentation. **B+**

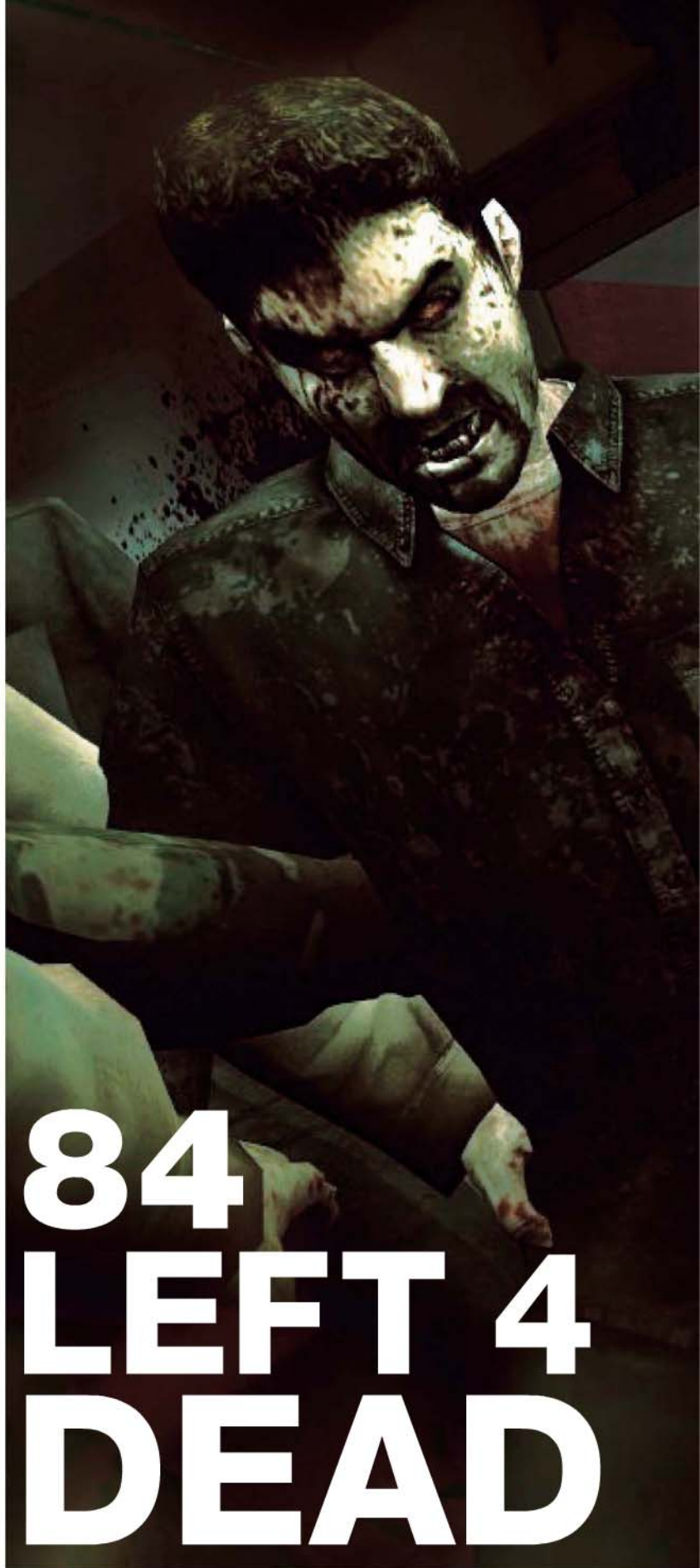
>REVIEWS

Tiny towns, hearts with crowns, fights go down, and zombies a-poppin'

Short-but-sweet note this month: Going forward, *EGM's* Game of the Month will be awarded via editorial vote, with a handful of high-scoring games as candidates. Believe me—this evens the field for those averaged three-man scores in our brave new era of one-man reviews!

—Ryan Scott
Executive Editor, Reviews

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THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

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



James "Milkman" Mielke
Editor-in-Chief

By the time you read this, Milky will have proposed to his lady in Paris, with absolute finesse and *savoir faire*. Zut alors!

Now Playing: *Gears of War 2*



Shane Bettenhausen
Senior Executive Editor

Why wait a whole month to find out what Shane's doing next? Twitter.com/ShaneWatch. Done.

Now Playing: *Celebrity Sports Showdown*, *LittleBigPlanet*



Greg Ford
Managing Editor

It's a month of sad good-byes (good luck, Jen!) and happy homecomings (*SSF2 Turbo: HD Remix*). Oh, the emotion.

Now Playing: *Gears of War 2*



Giancarlo Varanini
Senior Editor

Prince of Persia has Giancarlo hankering for a new *Assassin's Creed*, a churro, and a '68 Mustang fastback.

Now Playing: Everything



Ryan Scott
Executive Editor, Reviews

Between *Street Fighter IV* and *Super SF2 Turbo: HD Remix*, Ryan's currently residing in *Street Fighter* heaven.

Now Playing: All things SF



Nick Suttner
Associate Editor, Reviews

With holiday deadlines crescendoing, Nick hasn't had time for real lunches. Mmmm... promotional food items...

Now Playing: Catch up



Michael Donahoe
Senior Writer

What's Michael going to do now that he's finished *Kingdom Hearts*? Cue obvious response.

Now Playing: *Left 4 Dead*, *Mirror's Edge*, *Gears of War 2*



Jennifer Tsao
Outgoing Group M.E.

This was a triumph. I'm making a note here: huge success! It's hard to overstate my satisfaction.

Now Playing: *Batman & Robin* (iPhone), *Wii Music*

Also on deck...

David Ellis, Andrew Fitch, Anthony Gallegos, Justin Hayward, Sam Kennedy, Philip Kollar, Richard Li, Alice Liang, Mike "Not the Mystery Science Theater 3000 Guy" Nelson, Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen, Tina Sanchez, Scott Sharkey
1UP Editorial Staff

Tyler Barber, Andrew Hayward, Torrey Holbrook Walker, Eric Neigher, Joe Rybicki, Todd Zuniga
Staff Reviewers



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: Editors' choice among the highest-rated games
Shame of the Month: Lowest-rated game with all "Bad/Terrible" scores



■ You'll still find some fun in collecting random crap, but it's not enough.

Wii

ANIMAL CROSSING: CITY FOLK

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Nintendo ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

GIANCARLO

C

AVERAGE

The Good: Better online play, laid-back pace

The Bad: Not that much different from previous games

Tom Nook: Is a loan shark

I owe my soul to the company store

➔ **GIANCARLO:** Somehow, despite two previous time-sucking outings into the open world of *Animal Crossing*—each fully preparing me for what to expect in a sequel—*City Folk* still rouses some excitement at the prospect of collecting more rare furniture, fossils, and that one elusive bug or fish. But all of this quickly subsides upon your introduction to Tom Nook, everyone's favorite predatory lender. That's when the realization quickly sets in: This is all just the same old routine with extra goodies that do little to change things in any meaningful sort of way.

City Folk introduces no interesting ways to navigate the usual process of paying off debts and expanding your collection. You get to engage in

the same usual techniques—the slow and methodical selling of extra items or excess fish, insects, fossils, and fruit...or the quick-and-dirty transfer of funds from a wealthier player in another town. In fact—thanks to a new neighboring city area filled with storefronts—*City Folk* largely delivers more creative ways to *spend* bells than to *make* them. Sadly, some of its establishments and patrons are simple retreads of storefronts and characters from previous *Animal Crossing* games—the theater's now where you learn emotes from Dr. Shrunk, while the shady store is actually just Redd's. And does *Animal Crossing* really need another store with even more over-priced goods?

Online play in *City Folk* is definitely

worth jumping into, if only just to mess around with the shiny new Wii Speak speakerphone peripheral, which works pretty well (voices come in loud and clear most of the time)—even if it makes other forms of communication less relevant (such as bulletin boards and letters). As for the rest of the game: Do you really want to spend the time doing all of the things you already spent so much time on in *Animal Crossing: Wild World*? And do you want to do them in almost the exact same ways?

Animal Crossing: City Folk just seems like a huge missed opportunity—or a lazy cash-in on Nintendo's newfound casual audience. If it's the former, they ought to just call it *Wii Mortgage Payments*. **A-**



Wii

CASTLEVANIA: JUDGMENT

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

REVIEWS

RICHARD

D-
BAD

The Good:

Castlevania in a very unexpected genre

The Bad: Awful camera, flawed combat, ridiculous characters

Completely Rips

Off: Final Fantasy's Limit Breaks

More like 'Castlevania: Tragedy'

➔ **RICHARD:** *Castlevania's* seen some interesting evolutions, going from plodding 2D side-scroller to *Metroid*-like exploration adventure to 3D *Devil May Cry* clone. But fighter *Castlevania: Judgment* wasn't expected.

In Konami's words, this is a "Versus Action" game—an amalgamation that fuses action-game mechanics with a fighter. In my words, it's the bastard son of neologism. Beyond the strange art direction, *Judgment* suffers from jarring mechanics that disregard established fighting-game conventions. The uncompromising camera displays the action in a bizarre, disconcerting manner that tracks players in a 3D area filled with environmental hazards. And in combat, the camera's way too difficult to control.

As the two warriors move independently around the stage, the camera doesn't adjust according to their positions, focusing instead on whoever's in front of the camera. It bobs and weaves back, forth, left, and right—constantly flip-flopping between the two characters in a not-quite-over-the-shoulder perspective. It's highly disorienting, and it's almost impossible to gauge the correct distance between players, especially when one's in the background while the other is in the foreground. Spacing (a crucial strategic factor in fighting games) is thrown and tossed aside in favor of a loose mechanic that affords too much freedom of movement. And because most special attacks are terrible at restricting the opponent's space and options,

you often spend more time chasing after an opponent than engaging them. In short, matches are sloppy, silly, tiresome, and infuriating.

The camera isn't the only shortcoming. Character design stands at the center of every fighter—and unfortunately for *Castlevania's* cast of vampires and vampire killers, *Judgment* leans dangerously over the edge. Characters vary in quality, from formidable to throwaway to forgettable. Series mainstays like Simon Belmont and Alucard carry themselves with conviction, but most of the second-tier characters feel underpowered.

In the end, *Castlevania: Judgment* is a strange misstep for the beloved series, one that Konami hopefully learns from.



Wii

SKATE IT

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Developer: EA Black Box
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

MIKE N.

D
BAD

The Good: Skate parks, character customization

The Bad: Almost everything else

Balance Board:

We wanna see their head QA guy play this game with it

Sloppy and useless

➔ **MIKE N:** I haven't skateboarded for a couple of years now, and playing *Skate It* made me doubt any abilities I ever had. This game demonstrates what happens when a developer doesn't understand a system's hardware and peripheral limitations and overestimates its audience's abilities.

This is most apparent in the game's Party Play feature, where you and a group of friends take turns skating against each other. Not all at once, mind you—you need to share a single Wii Remote. In one of these scenarios, I had to put together the best "line" by executing a series of tricks. So I drew a circle in the air with the Wii-mote, and I got a pop-shuvit. I did it again and got a varial heelflip. A third time, a kickflip. The same undifferenti-

ated motion resulted in *three different tricks*. That's cool if I'm messing around, but not when I'm trying to execute one specific trick.

And that's a small taste of the poor control scheme. The slightest twitch or turn of the Wii-mote creates a wholly new effect—and frequently, it's one you don't even want. It's even worse on the Wii Balance Board; by default, turning's overly responsive, even after reducing the board's sensitivity. However, this makes it harder for the device to register a trick. It worked better when I stepped off the board and then tapped a specific area to pull off the desired move. This isn't skateboarding—it's crappy aerobics.

While the skate parks are well designed, and some offer a small

degree of customization, I didn't notice how vacant *Skate It's* world was until I embarked on my single-player skating career. The in-game justification: An otherworldly calamity strikes the fictional city of San Vanelona, turning it into a wasteland. Apparently, this also affects skate parks in Barcelona, Paris, and London, because I never saw a single skater outside of cut-scenes—and I never got the sense that I was up against an opponent so much as I was up against the system.

I like the idea of using the balance board for something more than step exercises, but *Skate It* doesn't work. Hopefully, the team learns from this experience on the Wii and delivers on the next iteration of this franchise.



PS3/XB360

PRINCE OF PERSIA



Now with less brooding

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Developer: Ubisoft Montreal ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

GIANCARLO

B+
GOOD

MILKMAN

B+
GOOD

G. FORD

B
GOOD

The Good: Beautiful visuals, good story and controls

The Bad: The flying and running plates...

The Prince: Is back...but different

➔ **GIANCARLO:** Forget about any perceived similarities between *Prince of Persia* and *Ico*—they end at some base visual and thematic qualities and don't extend far into the realm of gameplay. In fact, *Prince of Persia* has more in common with *Shadow of the Colossus* than anything else—each individual level's often your main enemy. The crux of the challenge falls upon your ability to complete a level using the Prince's acrobatic abilities to solve puzzles and bypass environmental hazards.

Surprisingly, it doesn't seem like the Prince is up to the task—at least not initially. The controls' sluggish nature results in magic-imbuéd ally Elika routinely bailing you out from certain death and planting you back

on sure-footed ground seconds before you misstep. Paradoxically, controls are less of an issue a few levels in once you realize the Prince is at his best when he's in a constant state of motion, moving fluidly throughout levels to reach their respective fertile grounds. And the game provides a great sense of satisfaction for accomplishing such acrobatic feats, even with some of its excessive hand-holding (platforming feels like one drawn-out quick-time event, which relegates dramatic moments to a single button). What really puts a damper on things are the trial-and-error gameplay moments involving two of the four plates—flying and running—that grant special powers and (ironically) more control over the Prince's movement.

The combat is similar to the platforming, but it's no less exhilarating. Fights revolve around precise rhythmic timing instead of constant button mashing, and while this method carries a relatively steep learning curve and slows the game's normally brisk pace, the added strategic feel and payoff for executing a complex combination with both the Prince and Elika makes it worthwhile.

Prince of Persia delivers artful, crafted gameplay that borrows elements from its predecessors but makes great strides in developing a new identity for a series that seemingly lost its focus over the past few years.

➔ **MILKMAN:** It's ironic that this *Prince of Persia* finally gets the



■ Part of the joy comes from swiftly moving through environments.



combat right—it's thrilling to dive into battle with your beautiful female partner Elika alongside you. Yet, it's also this *Prince of Persia* that places fighting on second stage, behind the rest of the action. This *Prince* is, as Giancarlo says, all about the stages, which evoke the best parts of Team Ico's games—and also remind me of *Shinobi* (PS2) and *Ninja Gaiden* (XB) due to the overt focus on wall-running and climbing. While the game can't decide if it wants to be a platformer or a brawler, I'm still a sucker for the gorgeous visual style and the reimagined Prince-as-vagabond-treasure-hunter. Sure, I had a hard time imagining who put all of these grip points and brass rings all over the world for our hero to grab on to—but when you're having this much fun

scaling such dizzying heights, does it really matter?

➔ **G. FORD:** *Prince of Persia's* certainly well crafted—while you're mostly just running on walls to jump points or hooks, sliding down ramps, or leaping between poles, each level hub in this open-ended world displays thoughtful interconnected layouts. And the distinct art style and storybook direction indeed give the beloved last-gen trilogy—one of my faves—a fresh start.

My problem is that everything's too slick, with an autopilot feel. Once you

identify the correct path (handily—or perhaps lazily—pointed out by Elika's compass power), progress breaks down to hitting the correct button during a usually generous window of opportunity. It simply doesn't offer the same level of satisfaction of the previous *Princes'* more demanding acrobatics. Same with the fights: I'm not sure what these guys see as fun here, but these exclusively 1-on-1 showdowns are boring block-block-strike affairs that just hamper the pace. It's still quite a good game—I just wonder why it feels like a step back from the previous trilogy. **A-**



EGM Extras:

Trying to track down all of those light seeds? Wall-run to **EGM.1UP.com** and check out our SuperGuide for their locations.



■ Despite its brevity, *Underworld* has some great adventuring moments.

XB360 (also on PS3)

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Crystal Dynamics ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

NICK

B
GOOD

ERIC

B
GOOD

SAM

A-
EXCELLENT

The Good: Organic exploration, sensible puzzles

The Bad: Crappy camera and combat, very abrupt ending

Still Too Cartoonish: Lara needs another makeover


Lara's latest plays catch-up with *Uncharted*

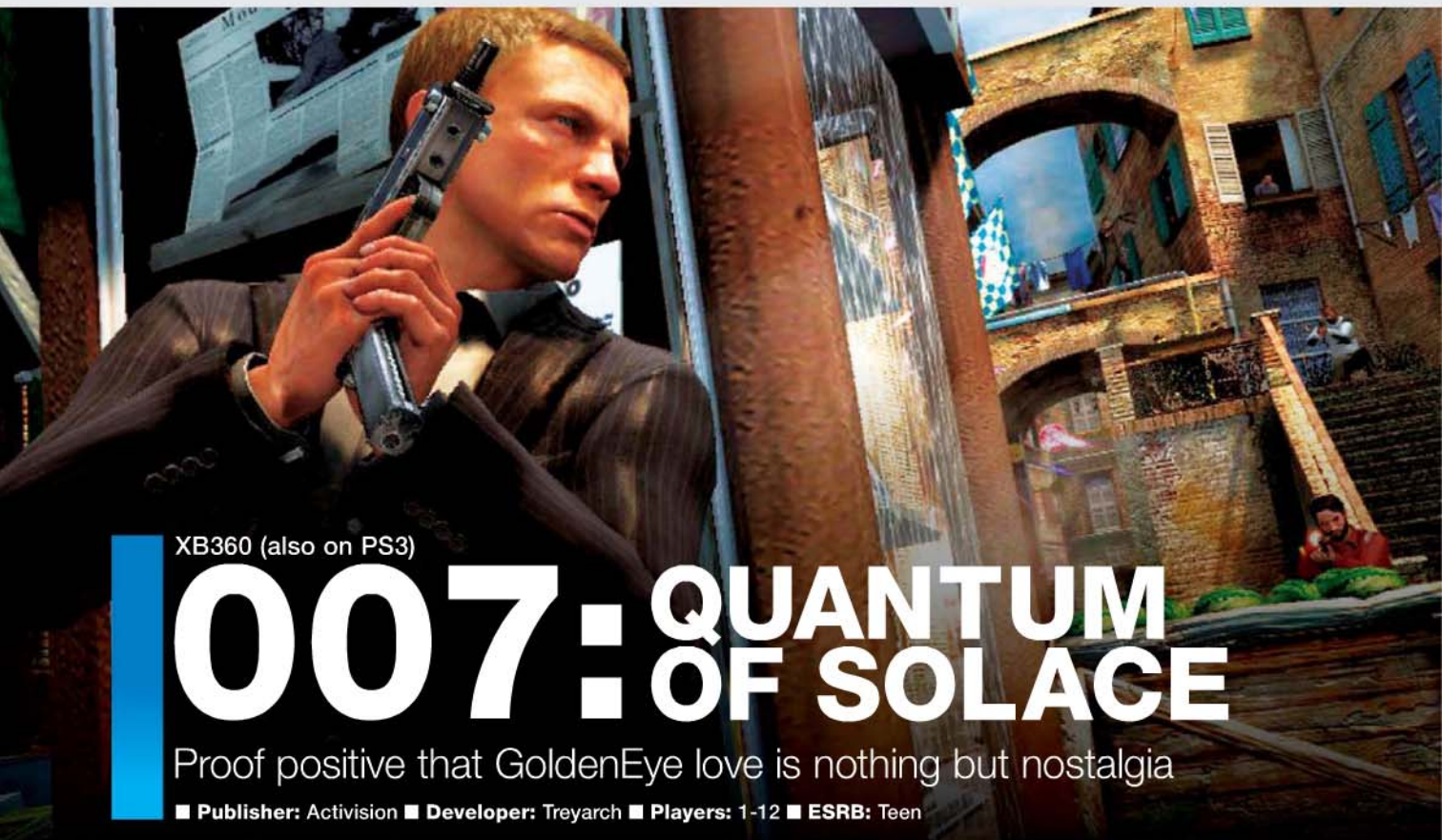
➔ **NICK:** *Tomb Raider* recently underwent both a renaissance (2006's *Legend*) and a redux (last year's *Anniversary*), so *Underworld* is seemingly right where it needs to be. For better or worse, it clings tightly to tradition—it's big on exploration and globe-hopping treasure hunting. The absolute best thing about *Underworld* is that it doesn't take exploration for granted; it's still a subtle breadcrumb trail of handholds and ledges, but it expertly conveys a sense of visual navigation. Puzzles are much less arcane than in previous *TRs*, and the gorgeous environments convey a wonderful contrast of tight construction and immense scale. Unfortunately, the sloppy, unnecessary combat feels like more of an afterthought than

ever, and the sometimes malevolent camera makes clambering around more annoying than it should be. But the biggest crime of all is its abruptness—after seven levels, it just *ends*, with a cut-scene that handily wraps up all of the loose ends. *Underworld* is an excursion worth taking for fans of low-impact, low-commitment adventuring; I just wanted *more*.

➔ **ERIC:** Nick, old sausage, you're spot-on with this one; *Underworld* simply ends too bloody soon. Seven levels of sticky wickets, expertly designed to test your sound mind and Lara's ever-so-sound body, might be enough for the lesser peoples of the world, but cannot hope to satisfy a red-blooded Englishman.

Nevertheless, *Underworld's* maps consistently manage to coax you, siren-like, around that next corner, across that next crevasse—if for no other reason than to view what fantastic visuals the artists have in store. If only it had lasted longer....

➔ **SAM:** I disagree with you guys on the length—for me, it was just fine. I'll admit, I abandoned the *Tomb Raider* series in the late '90s after it started being developed in a sequel factory. But last year's incredible *Uncharted* had me itching for more jungle-questing, and *Underworld* totally fits the bill. Yeah, the gunplay sometimes gets clunky, and you're often battling the camera, but what a small price to pay for such an incredible adventure. 



XB360 (also on PS3)

007: QUANTUM OF SOLACE

Proof positive that GoldenEye love is nothing but nostalgia

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Treyarch ■ Players: 1-12 ■ ESRB: Teen

TYLER

C+
AVERAGE

The Good: Well-paced stealth and action segments

The Bad: Too short, "me too" online play

Why So Stiff,

Craig?: Bond's own voice work is robotic

➔ **TYLER:** James Bond's latest pixelated escapade leapfrogs through the events of 2006's big-screen *Casino Royale* and its recently released sequel, *Quantum of Solace*. Depending on your mood, you can play as either a suave badass who sneaks past guards and security cameras or a suave badass who sprays hot lead into everything. When fire-fights inevitably break out, you must rely heavily on *Solace*'s appended third-person cover system (with a handy dash-to feature that lets you zip to safety midprint or push forward while you're already behind cover). It's handy for outflanking the flankers, but it's unresponsive in tight spots. *Solace*'s smart enemies love to pin you down, too—they'll quickly push

you back into a corner, flushing you out with well-placed grenades.

Outside of a few quick-time events, your guns are your only tools for escaping sticky situations. Online, though, Bond's signature gadgets come into play in the form of upgrades, synonymous with *Call of Duty 4*'s "perks" system. And though *Solace* runs on the same engine, don't expect the same visceral *COD4* gunplay. The maps and modes pull inspiration from the Nintendo 64's classic *GoldenEye*. Classic mode starts players off with meager pistols, forcing them to seek weapon spawns, while Golden Gun mode's all about one-hit kills. It's nice to revisit these modes, but they turn stale. Bond Versus and Evasion are new; one player steps into

Bond's shoes, while the others either protect or hunt him. Sadly, because it's easy to camp spawn points and objective points, these modes don't make for lasting fun.

Nor does the *entire game*, really—I finished *Solace* in one sitting. That's not necessarily a bad thing, as the game's paced like a Universal Studios theme-park ride; levels split into branching paths and feature controlled environments designed to convey a high-intensity vibe.

So, what does a relevant Bond game look like? A lot like *Solace*... but longer and with more than me-too multiplayer. Still, *GoldenEye*'s heyday is long gone, and *Solace* leans far too much on nostalgia to be anything close to the next shooter milestone. **D+**



XB360 (also on PS3)

SONIC UNLEASHED

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sonic Team
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

SHANE

C

AVERAGE

The Good: Colorful and evocative visuals, 2D gameplay bits

The Bad: Way too much Werehog, old problems persist

The Sad: Sonic's constant franchise reboots

The blues are still blue

➔ **SHANE:** With his edgy, art-deco Genesis glory days now long gone, Sonic's recent platforming efforts have feebly attempted to recapture the well-crafted 3D prowess demonstrated by Dreamcast launch hit *Sonic Adventure*. Regrettably, every post-SA outing garishly gilded the proverbial lily, screwing up the formula with the addition of extraneous playable characters, misguided new gameplay styles, and laughable narrative excess. Somehow, the kiddies have remained loyal throughout Sonic Team's decade of desperately grasping for relevance, but many of his more discerning fans jumped ship. If Sega could pull off something akin to *Super Mario Galaxy*—a mainline franchise reboot that augments classic gameplay with

clever new concepts—he could once again be a contender. Sadly, *Sonic Unleashed* is not that title.

With a cartoon-caliber story that finds Sonic morphing into a ridiculous-looking Werehog by night, *Unleashed* quickly reveals its fundamental resistance to change. Just as in every typical Sonic game since *Adventure*, you'll bounce between several jumbled gameplay styles: speedy run-n-jump stages, slower combat-laden Werehog sections, and dull fetch quests throughout various hub worlds.

At least it looks gorgeous: Postcard-perfect architecture and wonderfully disorienting camera trickery definitely impress, yet questionable control decisions (needlessly reworking and convoluting Sonic's homing attack,

adding an autopilot "Sonic Boost" speed burst, and clumsily paring down dodging to the shoulder triggers) degrade the fun. The feral night-time sections crib heavily from *God of War*'s combat manual, and the dorky-looking Werehog becomes increasingly fun to play as you unlock new abilities, but these leisurely paced brawls tend to drag on too long, constituting nearly half of the overall game.

Unleashed's absolute nadir comes in the form of profoundly lame, unskippable minigames (including a disastrous button-matching exercise aboard Tails' plane) that'll have older gamers tossing controllers in frustration. This simply isn't the fresh start Sonic fans hoped for—but it's not as execrable as the last two efforts.



PS3/XB360

DESTROY ALL HUMANS! PATH OF THE FURON

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Sandblast
■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

ANDREW H.

D

BAD

The Good: Large-scale destruction

The Bad: Crummy presentation, tepid missions

Online

Shenanigans:

Nowhere to be found

Was 'Destroy Your Remaining Fan Base' already taken?

➔ **ANDREW H:** Open-world action titles have come a long way since the previous console generation, with many offering massive "living" settings and sharp online integration. But you wouldn't know it from *Destroy All Humans! Path of the Furon*, a game that feels both woefully dated and curiously incomplete.

Foul-mouthed extraterrestrial Crypto returns in the starring role—faux Jack Nicholson delivery in tow—and runs rampant through five distinct settings (including some inspired by Las Vegas and Paris) to toy with humans both on foot and in his heavily armed saucer. The dozen-hour string of story missions finds you performing a variety of tasks, from hijacking human bodies or probing Mafia thugs on the ground to

blasting city blocks with your ship and abducting the folks that emerge from the rubble. Just don't expect much of a challenge—the game exhibits an excessive degree of hand-holding, offering step-by-step instructions and often transporting you from location to location.

Couple this with sparsely populated locations and tame optional missions and the open-world setting ultimately feels like a lost opportunity. And if you're searching for online multiplayer or even a local co-op campaign, look elsewhere: *Furon* features nothing more than a trio of short-lived two-player modes like "Ion Soccer" (because what you *really* wanna do with superpowered alien invaders is play a bit of footy, right?). One might

point to the series' less-than-serious nature for the inclusion of such modes, but even the humor's a liability in *Furon*, with each occasional winning joke bookended by an endless stream of tiring innuendo.

The aesthetics fall equally flat: While *Furon*'s certainly the shiniest-looking *Destroy All Humans!* to date, it's an absolute mess in motion. Textures load in close proximity, the speed's constantly in flux, and structures pop out of nowhere as you approach them via jetpack. Whether it's presentational bugs (clipping issues, brief pauses, poor transitions) or poorly constructed set pieces (especially the generic and muddy-looking final world), the end result is a terrible underutilization of the HD consoles' capabilities.



■ Get caught near an artillery strike and your vision and movement become impaired...provided you survive at all!

XB360 (also on PS3)

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Treyarch ■ Players: 1-12 ■ ESRB: Mature

War is brutal

ANTHONY

B
GOOD

G. FORD

B
GOOD

TINA

B
GOOD

The Good: Isn't shy about its portrayal of warfare

The Bad: Competitive multiplayer ain't as good as COD4's
Zombies: Check

➤ **ANTHONY:** *Call of Duty: World at War* may not be a direct sequel to fab first-person shooter *COD4: Modern Warfare*, but the comparisons are inevitable. Treyarch does a good job of crafting a single-player campaign that's entertaining, if a little too difficult at times. The competitive multiplayer isn't good enough to convince me to leave *COD4*, but the cooperative play through the campaign—as well as in the new Nazi Zombie mode—ensures that those who seek to play with friends can still have plenty of fun.

Moreover, *WAW*'s the best-looking WWII game to date. But not all of the visuals are beautiful: Grisly—but historically accurate—scenes of brutality present themselves throughout the campaign to remind you that while

WAW is a game, it's also anecdotally portraying heroic and horrific scenes that happened to *real* soldiers.

➤ **G. FORD:** About that competitive multiplayer—it's still addictive. Leveling up and earning new perks keeps that carrot delectable. But Anthony's right: It isn't quite enough to overtake *COD4*...especially since the gulf between the good and bad old-timey weapons means that the difference between low- and high-level players is frustratingly more pronounced. The campaign has its peaks—hand-chucking mortars is good fun, and I'd gladly sacrifice my virtual life for Jack Bauer (yeah, that's Kiefer Sutherland yelling orders), but the seemingly endless enemy spawn

points will have you thinking *WAW* has no exit strategy.

➤ **TINA:** Greg, the “no exit strategy” strengthens the war-torn environments. The campaign's quick-paced action and violent nature will entice any FPS fan. But unlike its predecessor, this story lacks strong segues and emotionally charged cut-scenes. Nazi Zombie mode's considered a generous “bonus”—one map with varying waves of difficulty, similar to Horde mode in *Gears of War 2*. Each zombie kill earns you points to purchase weapons and unlockable sections of the fort. It's basically just a goofy gimmick without much lasting appeal. Fortunately, the other multiplayer modes should keep me busy! 🎮



RYAN
A+
EXCELLENT

The Good: Some great modern trap-pings, silky-smooth online play

The Bad: Maximum enjoyment requires a quality joystick
Classic SSF2 Turbo Mode: Yep, that's in here, too


► **RYAN:** Some games stand the test of time; *Street Fighter II* drags time into a back alley and beats it senseless. Fourteen years on, *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*—the pinnacle of the SF2 series, and of fighting games, *period*—still gets serious play among genre geeks. That's a *long* time to dismantle a game and analyze its merits and flaws the way only a community of frame-counting fanatics can.

HD Remix—SF2's sixth iteration, shepherded and meticulously number-crunched by developer Backbone's tourney-pro-turned-game-designer David Sirlin—is the product of that nearly decade-and-a-half-long dissection. To casual players, *HD Remix* is a generous facelift with a few fun new moves, something to whet the

appetite for *Street Fighter IV*. Ryu's fake fireball, M. Bison's brief window of immunity during his Devil Reverse, Guile's horizontal-angled roundhouse Flash Kick, T. Hawk's block-safe dive, and Chun Li's now-useful Spinning Bird Kick will all but escape the week-end warrior's notice.

But for serious players, those represent just a few of *HD Remix*'s significant, game-changing tricks. Behind all the lush new stage back-grounds, hand-drawn HD character models, and remixed music is a fighter obsessively tuned to what the collective hive-mind of SF2 culture deems "perfection." Of course, it'll be a while before anyone's *really* scrutinized what all the mechanical tweaks mean for *HD Remix*'s metagame—are Balrog

and Dhalsim (whose nigh-unstoppable throw chains dominate high-level SSF2T play) still the relative kings of the ring? Can the rebalanced (and once overpowered) Akuma finally stand as a "real" character?

At any rate, I can answer the more immediate question—whether *HD Remix* holds up in online play—with a resounding "Hell, yes." Backbone wisely co-opted fan-favorite peer-to-peer platform GGPO.net, which you can essentially think of as the netcode equivalent of the Google algorithm. This crazy Internet voodoo works *well*, and it makes for the most lag-free versus play this side of a brick-and-mortar arcade. Much like the revered game built around it, it is—to *these* eyes—flawless. 



PS3/XB360

MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE

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

RYAN

B-
GOOD

The Good:

Interesting casual approach, smooth online play

The Bad: Tacked-on 3D movement plane, still not a "real" fighter

Mad Props:

For including a DC character as obscure (and as rad) as Deathstroke

Marvel vs. Capcom gets some competition

➔ **RYAN:** The idea of comic-book superheroes (and villains) duking it out with the *Mortal Kombat* series' eclectic cast of costumed weirdos goes well beyond the realm of absurd. Yet, somewhat ironically, this ridiculous concept is the best thing that's happened to *MK* in the past 13 years.

The single-player story mode (split into two seven-chapter halves) immediately catapults you into comic-book cheeseball territory, spinning a silly tale of worlds colliding and hazily explained "Rage viruses" infecting those worlds' chosen champions. It doesn't take long to recognize this narrative for what it is: a paper-thin series of excuses for Batman and Raiden and friends to knock each other around. Some hilarious

plot points—such as Sub-Zero randomly wandering into the Batcave, Catwoman's voice actress doing her best Eartha Kitt impression—might make serious fighting-game players roll their eyes...but if you ask me, the tongue-in-cheekness is half of the fun.

The other half—the brawls themselves—don't come anywhere near, say, *Soulcalibur IV*'s stylishness. As usual, *MK*'s pronounced stiffness is its eternal shortcoming; average attacks and dialed-in combos just don't feel as fluid as they do in more mature 3D fighters, and the 3D movement itself almost feels like a tacked-on afterthought. At times, I found myself wishing the game had just gone fully 2D.

But I dig the combat in spite of itself—for all its faults, *MK vs. DCU*

is an oddly enjoyable distraction from "real" fighters. Its masher-friendly controls appeal to me in a casual-gamer way, and the midmatch minigames (damage-percentage tugs-of-war, airborne ass-kickings with the defender mirroring the aggressor's button-presses in a bid for dominance) give the fights a sort of party-game vibe. Even the online mode is virtually lagless; outside of a parade of day-one savants, I can't complain. I just wish the game's signature Fatalities (and "Heroic Brutalities") appeared in each character's move lists, as I'd rather not look up a button combination every time I want to shoot my opponent in the face or drop a *Mortal Kombat* arcade cabinet on his head. You know, the *important* stuff. **B+**



PS3/XB360/PS2

NCAA BASKETBALL 09

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

Not ready to go pro

➔**TODD:** In January 2008, EA struck an exclusivity deal with the NCAA, which means that their annual college hoops title is all alone at midcourt this season. That's disappointing for hardcore fans, since 2K's *College Hoops* had outdone EA's efforts since the jump to this console generation. And it's *particularly* disappointing right now, as *NCAA Basketball 09* is little more than mediocre.

While *09* cleans up a load of last year's issues, the gameplay's still got fundamental problems. For starters, steals are way too prevalent. Passing the ball around is a huge risk, as the opposition will suck up anything nearby. It's better—and this is where the realism suffers—to just break off quick-strike moves with your guard until you can figure out a way to the hoop. As long as you don't attract a double team, you can cause enough mayhem to find an open shot—or a gap in the lane for a layup.

Shooting gets frustrating as well, especially if you're trying to snap off a quick jumper to beat the shot clock—sometimes, players simply won't fire up shots as quickly as you want them to, and it can take several button presses before they finally put the ball in the air. And getting anything close to a stop-and-pop shot—instead of what looks like a desperate off-balance toss—means you either have to pump-fake or receive the ball perfectly.

The inclusion of *Blue Ribbon Yearbook*—a go-to scouting source for every college coach—is a fantastic addition that means player ratings are no longer based on the development team's biases. And college hoops historians should love the Tournament of Legends, which pits classic teams like '83 North Carolina State and '79 Indiana State in a 64-team tourney. But the lack of a Be A Pro mode—EA's hot new career option in the rest of their sports titles—miffs me. Maybe EA just didn't have the time or inclination to grace this year's hoops titles with the features (it's noticeably absent from *NBA Live 09*, too), but it would've been a great addition.

While it's got gobs of visual polish—including a vast array of impressive generic player heads—*NCAA 09*'s gameplay double-dribbles in too many key spots, making this little more than a

palatable No. 6 seed: It's worth supporting if you're a rabid hoops fan, but it's far from Final Four material.

TODD
C+
AVERAGE

The Good: Awesome, expressive player faces
The Bad: Steals are way too prevalent
Phoned In: Repetitive commentary needs help



PS3/XB360/PS2

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Konami
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

It's great on the pitch but shaky off it

➔**TODD:** Few sports-gaming mano-a-mano tussles remain because of exclusive licensing, but the annual heavyweight brawl between EA's *FIFA* (fully licensed and prettily polished) and Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer* (the annual gameplay champion) rages on.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that *PES*' ever-evolving organic gameplay remains the leader, though the margin's thinning. *FIFA*'s made huge strides in recent years, but *PES* retains its mastery at creating nearly imperceptible nuances that showcase stellar feel and control. In *PES 2009*, every single goal feels earned and looks unique (which results in fist-pumping delight), and the between-player jostling before jumping for a header gives a sense of achievement each time you gain possession (and, oh, how I wish *FIFA* would adopt *PES*' genius postgoal-replay system).

This year's *PES* isn't without its problems, though—particularly when it comes to player movement. For one, transitioning from normal speed to speed burst carries a subtle-yet-annoying herky-jerky-ness. Also, shooting's sure to give new users fits—it's even easier to sky the ball over the crossbar than in past seasons...and it was already too easy. That's if you even get the shot off, of course. And the defense's A.I. is almost telepathic, what with the way opposing players hurriedly change direction in an effort to throw themselves in front of your shots.

Off the pitch, the game modes are significant letdowns. For starters, *Become A Legend*—*PES*' answer to *FIFA*'s *Be A Pro*—is embarrassingly poor. An obvious tack-on, the mode feels directionless and lacks a proper feedback system. *FIFA* displays onscreen arrows to inform you of how well you're positioned, but in *PES 2009*, you're an island with a camera system that isn't afraid to cut you out of the picture altogether. Beyond that, the Champions League isn't the significant add-on that it should've been; its lack of integration into the game's Master League career mode is a *failure*. That's both surprising and shameful, as Master League's grown exceedingly stale over the years.

The *PES*-versus-*FIFA* bout is always tough to call—but while neither of this season's installments disappoint, I've ultimately gotta side with the glitzy, überlicensed *FIFA*.

TODD
B
GOOD

The Good: Cross passes are better than ever
The Bad: Laughably undercooked *Become A Legend* mode
Card Game: Refs give way too many reds



XB360 (also on Wii/PS3/PS2)

GUITAR HERO: WORLD TOUR

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Neversoft
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

JUSTIN

A-

EXCELLENT

The Good: Best drum peripheral yet
The Bad: Music creator needs a bit of work

The Funky Strong Fight: Billy Corgan busting a move like Michael Jackson

Because 'Drum, Mic, Guitar, and Bass Hero' is just too long

➔ **JUSTIN:** Several years have passed since *Guitar Hero* first made expensive music peripherals ridiculously popular. But the music genre's gotten pretty crowded recently, and to keep up with the popularity and multiplayer appeal of *Rock Band 2*, *World Tour* is a necessary evolution of the *Guitar Hero* franchise.

The game delivers a varied setlist: From Michael Jackson to Modest Mouse to Willie Nelson, *World Tour* brings in a little something from a wide range of genres. Avatar customization goes beyond mere hairstyle and costume changes—you can alter everything from your character's skull size to his intro and outro cheers.

The full instrument bundle is all-around awesome—particularly the

drums. They're painless to set up and adjust, the drumheads give excellent bounce, and the raised "cymbals" leave plenty of room to maneuver. The titular guitar hasn't changed too much, either. I found the touch-sensitive pad on the neck gimmicky and unnecessary, but an easy-access Star Power button under the heel of your strumming hand is a welcome addition. And the mic...well, it's still just a mic.

The new music creator showed a lot of early promise, but while freestyle recording is easy, editing is an overly complex process. The tutorials don't explain enough, and you can't use the controller as a master input device. Sure, some players will put in the time and suffer through the interface in the name of really good music, but it's for

dedicated fans only.

Unfortunately, one of *World Tour*'s biggest weak points is its multiplayer. Unlike *Rock Band 2* (which groups all instrument career paths into one overarching setlist), each instrument—and the band as a whole—forces you through a completely independent progression. Any songs you unlock as a group become available in quick-play...but you've gotta start from the beginning to play them in the solo career mode. Despite these flaws, *World Tour* still delivers exactly what I want out of a rhythm game: high-quality peripherals and fun-to-play music. *Rock Band 2* outclasses it in a lot of ways, but I have a great time whenever I turn it on—and that's ultimately what's most important.



PS3/XB360

SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Plenty to keep you busy—just no incentive to do it

JUSTIN

D+

BAD

The Good: Incredible sense of speed when hurtling down the mountain slope

The Bad: Good luck figuring out the confusing controls

The Comedy: Shaun's foreign snowboarder buds have superthick, stereotypical accents

➔ **JUSTIN:** At the start of *Shaun White Snowboarding*, the game asks if you want to go through a tutorial. Choose the path of the uninitiated, and blocks of text describing the controls pop up onscreen as you speed down the mountain. That's all the help that you get. Throughout the game, you receive more sporadic text hints—but if you don't understand the short description of each move, the game just assumes that you'll figure it out on your own.

Although it sounds overwhelming, the problem isn't that every move is available from the start of the game; it's that moves change depending on what direction your character faces. Holding up on the control pad starts a forward flip from a straightaway,

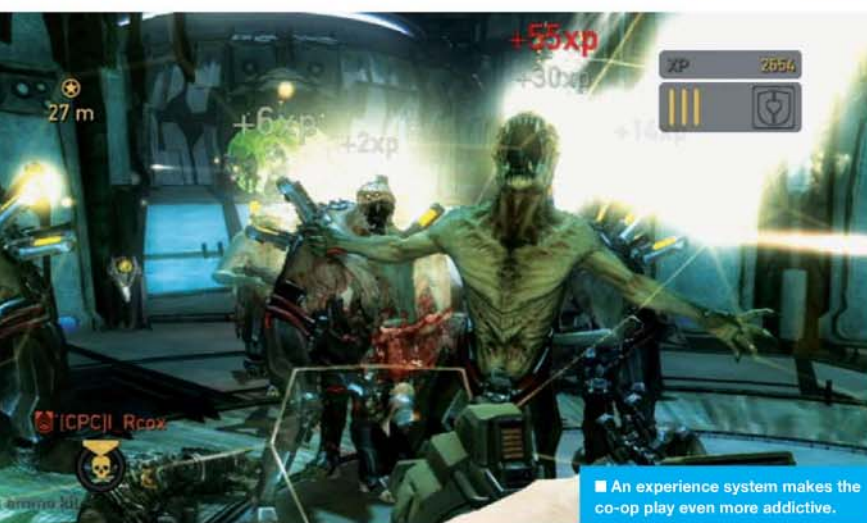
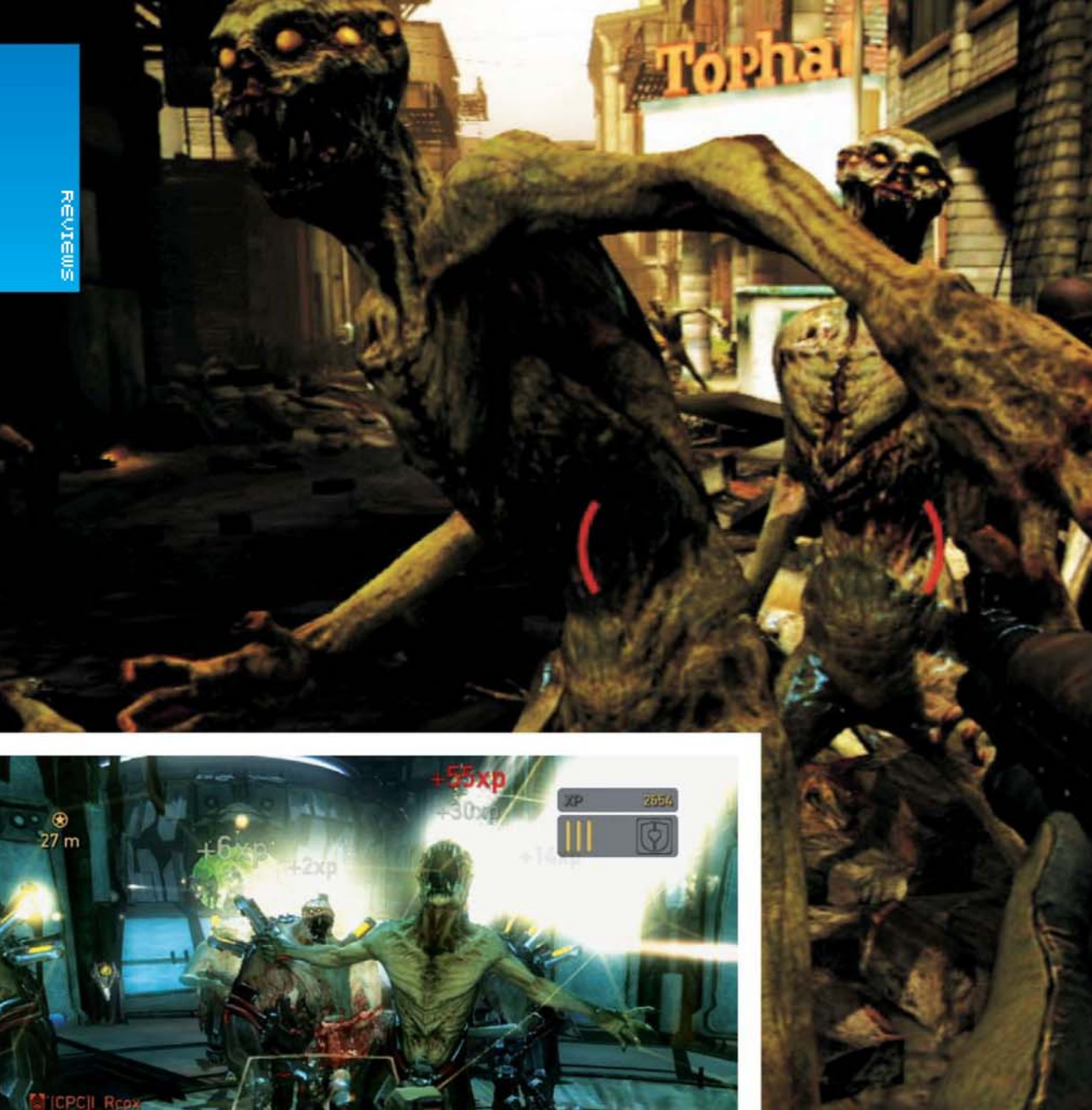
but if you're facing left, the same input causes a 360-degree turn. In the halfpipe—where your orientation constantly changes 90 degrees—it leads to controllers shattered out of pure frustration. Sure, I got the hang of it eventually, but I don't think "Overcome Unintuitive Controls!" is the kind of game-selling bullet point Ubisoft wanted to pimp on the back of the box.

Still, not everything's a downward slalom into disaster. The warp system, which allows you to set a marker at any point on the map and transport back to it on the fly, isn't just functional—it also shaves off a lot of potential tedium. And hitting a long slope—activating your focus power just as you soar off the edge—brings

an exhilarating (albeit brief) rush of icy awesomeness.

The multiplayer could also provide fun for a group of online-connected friends. Unfortunately, what I remember most about my online play experiences are trick contests where you're forced to sit and watch everyone else compete for 90 seconds each. Events cap out at eight competitors, but that's still 10.5 minutes of watching other people play.

It's disappointing that *Shaun White* crashes so badly on its first try. But the intimidating controls and lack of direction will scare away anyone hoping for some quick and easy fun, and sports-game enthusiasts looking for the next *SSX* or a snow-themed *Skate* won't find it here.



■ An experience system makes the co-op play even more addictive.



PlayStation 3

RESISTANCE 2



Insomniac's epic alien-invasion shooter is easily one of the top PS3 titles

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Insomniac ■ Players: 1-60 ■ ESRB: Mature

SCOOTER

B+
GOOD

GIANCARLO

B+
GOOD

JOE

A
EXCELLENT

The Good: Awesome cooperative mode

The Bad: Single-player is not as good

Bay Area: What bridge is that?

➔ **SCOOTER:** Insomniac's sci-fi shooter sequel *Resistance 2* ingeniously combines *World of Warcraft* with *Team Fortress 2* for a novel cooperative campaign. Dividing players into three classes (Soldier, Medic, and Spec Ops—*Resistance*-speak for "tough guy, healing guy, and damage-dealing/ammo-supply guy") and having them run through a map to fulfill objectives and take down legions of aliens makes for a fantastic—and utterly unconventional—multiplayer session. *Resistance 2* handily manages to turn *WoW* into a shooter (or conversely, *TF2* into an epic *WoW*-style battle).

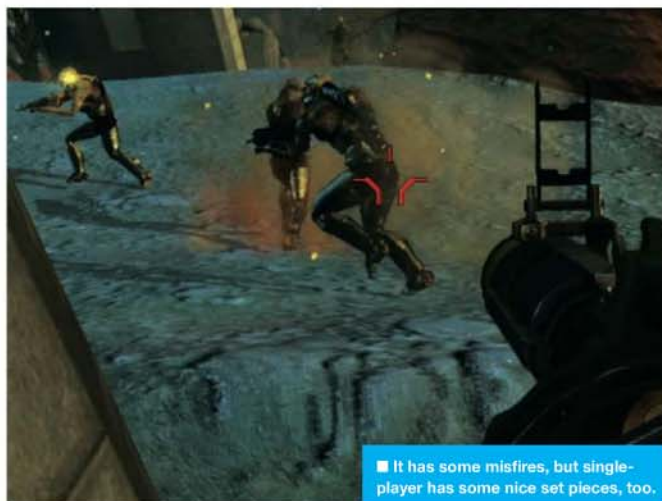
It's too bad that the single-player mode—while generally better than the original (specifically in terms

of color-palette variety and boss encounters)—doesn't have quite the same joy and polish as the cooperative campaign. Sure, the set-piece moments (such as a vicious firefight in a Californian redwood forest and a frantic zombie invasion in Chicago) are certainly a step up from the previous game's. And I love the improvements to the Auger and the new weapons like the Marksman assault rifle (a Chimeran weapon that blurts out a three-bullet statement) and the Spider grenade that shoots out a weird, sticky napalm.

Yet ginormous bosses and slick new guns don't do quite enough to make up for flaws such as enemy A.I. that always targets you (yes, I realize it's a first-person shooter, but

it totally breaks the immersion when a bad guy completely ignores three dudes shooting at him and focuses just on *you*, even if you're sneaking around without doing anything to him) or underwhelming graphics. Overall, it feels like *Resistance 2*'s single-player campaign needs a bit more polish—it just doesn't seem to hold up as well as, say, developer Insomniac's *Ratchet & Clank* series.

Even with the underwhelming single-player, the workmanlike competitive multiplayer (yes, it supports more players than before—whether that's awesome or not depends on your feelings about the previous game's competitive multiplayer) and the awesome cooperative mode end up making this a very strong shooter.



■ It has some misfires, but single-player has some nice set pieces, too.

✦ **GIANCARLO:** As someone who usually prefers some alone time with first-person shooters (as opposed to the hectic and supercompetitive nature of multiplayer), I'm a little disappointed with *Resistance 2*. Its single-player campaign—while offering more variety than its predecessor—often suffers from all-too-familiar FPS pitfalls, ranging from cheap enemy A.I. and trial-by-death situations to a variation on monster closets where progress means defeating wave after wave of Chimera, often against the backdrop of a dull parking lot or similarly drab storage facility.


Still, unlike most single-player-focused shooters, *Resistance 2* pushes some compelling multiplayer

modes that actually make me want to play online. Eight-player co-op's an absolute blast, and it's one of the rare instances where teamwork means more than just standing in a room shooting at something with a bunch of other guys (and the A.I. problems from the single-player campaign aren't nearly as prevalent, either). Even the competitive online mode offers far more fun than what *Resistance 2*'s single-player shenanigans ultimately achieve.

✦ **JOE:** You're both dead-on about multiplayer—and about single-player's technical flaws. Enemies' hyperawareness of your position certainly gets obnoxious, and the trial-and-error quality of some of the

bigger encounters feels a little dated.

But I think you're both missing the fact that *Resistance 2*—like the first game—does an amazing job with some of the bigger-picture elements of its single-player campaign. Some of the levels are really smartly designed, and I love how the game shifts smoothly from massive-scale chaos into too-quiet moments of tension and back (it never gets scary, per se, but I'll admit to jumping in my seat more than once). And though some areas certainly look a bit dull, some really stunning scenery—like that first shot of San Francisco—makes the bland interiors easy to forget.

Single-player's certainly the game's weakness, but the multiplayer excellence more than makes up for it. 

EGM Extras: Get a leg up on your Chimera overlords by checking out the *Resistance 2* SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.com.



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YAHOO! MAIL

Xbox 360

LEFT 4 DEAD



Valve teaches us to live together or die alone

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Developer: Valve ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Mature

SCOOTER

A-
EXCELLENT

DAVID

A
EXCELLENT

SHARKEY

A+
EXCELLENT

The Good: Great co-op action, brilliant A.I.

The Bad: Looks somewhat aged, occasional glitches

Technicality: They're superabundant infectees

➔ **SCOOTER:** If the stats and figures about stuff like “number of times died” or “friendly fire” incidents that *Left 4 Dead* tracks in each play session are any indication, then I know one thing for sure: When the zombies come a-knockin’, I’m gonna be a-dyin’.

And yet, I’m totally fine with that. Valve’s co-op-centric multiplayer zombie-apocalypse shooter is one of the few games I don’t mind losing at. And as is the norm with Valve titles (*Half-Life 2*, *Portal*), the moment-to-moment gameplay—even when resulting in defeat—is pure joy, especially when playing in a full four-player co-op session or an eight-player versus match (four survivors versus four zombies).

What I commend most is the A.I. Director. It sounds like a dorky and

totally “you’re excited over this?” feature on paper: an A.I. system that determines enemy spawn points and encounters based on player performance (i.e., health, accuracy, ammo, etc.) *on the fly*. So when you actually play, it feels like having a vindictive sadist behind the zombie curtain. Moving forward fast? Watch out—Infected can fall from above. Find yourself a bit behind the rest of the team? Guess what: A Smoker snatches you away.

The A.I. Director, the pure gunplay, and the little touches—you can take a bathroom break while competent friendly A.I. seamlessly takes over—are enough to overcome minor quibbles like occasional glitches (such as getting stuck in the level), decent-but-

not-totally-awesome graphics, and a somewhat steep price for a Valve game (\$60...and who knows whether it’ll see much free content?). *L4D* is one zombie apocalypse I completely and utterly embrace.

➔ **DAVID:** I may not be a zombie, but I’m learning to love the taste of brains. Like a great horror film, *L4D* creates a sense of constant unease and occasional terror through the four campaigns by always keeping you guessing about what’s around the next corner. Yeah, the content (you can finish all the campaigns in six-ish hours) is relatively sparse, but each level’s jam-packed with loving detail that stands up to repeated playthroughs. Quality over quantity, my friends.



■ Jared's Subway diet has gone horribly, horribly wrong.



■ A Smoker zombie gives Francis a severe tongue lashing.

> GRAFFITI TALK

Valve loves using graffiti as an exposition device (starting with the Marines taunting Gordon Freeman via graffiti in *Half-Life* and continuing in the mad ramblings written on the walls in *Portal*), and *Left 4 Dead* not only continues this tradition, but it also expands on it. Within safe houses or other parts of a level, entire conversations are scrawled out on walls—ranging from people boasting about kill counts (“31” “54,395” “Liar!”) to riffs on other zombie media (one great graffiti exchange references the “We are the walking dead!” line from Robert Kirkman’s *The Walking Dead* comic series) to somber scrawlings (the numerous “We have to leave you behind. I’m so sorry. Meet us at...” types of messages). Leave it to Valve to sneak funny and interesting writing into the most unusual of places.

Of course, the only thing more satisfying than surviving a zombie onslaught is actually *taking part* in the apocalypse. The versus mode unfolds in the same levels as the campaign, but instead of outsmarting A.I. undead, you’re pitted against a team of four human opponents. Controlling one of four specialized Infected classes requires a lot of strategy and coordination due to somewhat awkward controls and relative weakness compared to the human survivors, but when you’re on a good team, it comes together like teeth on craniums.

L4D could’ve been an easily dismissed gimmick—but as it turns out, it’s fresh, frightening, and bloody fun.

✦ **SHARKEY:** *L4D*’s concept is near

impossible to screw up: Drop me in an empty box with some armed buddies and a buncha zombies, and we’ll have the time of our lives. Hell, plenty of *Half-Life 2* mods do exactly that. But if Valve excels at anything, it’s taking good, simple ideas and applying expert artistry and psychology until they’re perfect. It’s hard to find any rough edges around *L4D*, even when you’re trying. Playing as Infected isn’t the strongest part of the game, but calling it bad would be like calling Mike Tyson a sissy because he stepped into the ring with Godzilla. The weakest parts of this game will still bite your damn ear off.

Allowing players to cooperate in a game is nice; *forcing* them to cooperate might not go over quite as well.

But encouraging them and guiding them to cooperate with an invisible hand in such a way that they can’t blame failure on anyone but themselves? That’s practically magic. ☞



EGM Extras:
Looking for a real zombie-survival guide? Seek refuge at EGM.1UP.com and learn everything you need to know about surviving the zombie hordes.



Xbox 360

COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: EA Los Angeles ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Teen

ERIC
B
GOOD

The Good: Well-balanced, beautiful graphics, great tongue-in-cheek cut-scenes

The Bad: PCs exist and allow you to play games on them

Actress Gemma Atkinson: Can come to my house whenever she wants, and she doesn't have to call first

All the fun of the U.S.S.R.—none of the Gulag

➤ **ERIC:** EA's clearly invested a ton of resources into researching and developing innovative ways to make the real-time-strategy genre viable for consoles. And they've made major strides (see: *The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II*). Unfortunately, they still ain't strode enough. *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3* is a top-quality RTS in almost every respect, but the whole thing just doesn't work smoothly on a console.

Having already forayed into Thumbstickland with last year's *Command & Conquer 3*, EA Los Angeles evolves their approach a bit with this alternate-universe military strategy game. For example, most movement around a level isn't done via a minimap interface; instead, you

press the left trigger to bring up a large map overlay and then click on where you want to jump on the active area. It's quick, but it's not particularly precise. I found myself jumping to an area and then rapidly making a few smaller jumps to zero in before I finally started building and fighting. And as for building, that's done primarily with the right trigger: You press it to bring up a build menu and then plop your creation down with the left stick. It works about as well as any console RTS interface, but it's still clumsy.

Is this a fair criticism? After all, your (non-A.I.) opponents are in the same boat, so it all evens out, doesn't it? I don't know. Maybe you don't own a PC. Or maybe you're new to the whole RTS thing. If so, sure—you

won't know the difference. But I'm honor-bound to keep it real here, and the real is: This game is clumsier on console than on PC.

If you can get past the interface issues, *RA3* is wonderfully balanced in terms of both units and maps, and it features gameplay that's fast without delving into breakneck territory. It explores combined arms much more deeply than other *C&C* titles, with naval, air, armor, artillery, and infantry units all playing critical roles. Even better, it's designed to incorporate cooperative play in both the single- and multiplayer modes—every mission is played with a "co-commander." Bottom line: *RA3*'s not bad, but if you've got a good PC, you're better off buying that version instead.



PlayStation 2

KINGDOM HEARTS RE: CHAIN OF MEMORIES

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

REVIEWS

Not a halfhearted remake

MICHAEL

B-
GOOD

The Good: Graphics are no longer flat
The Bad: Card combat's still a bust
This Is Great: But can we have *Kingdom Hearts III* already? Like, now?

➔ **MICHAEL:** For all the differences Disney and Square Enix must have while developing their *Final Fantasy*/Mickey Mouse mashup franchise, at least they can agree on something: Rereleases are so much easier than sequels. Thus, instead of a proper sequel (hell, even the two new portable *Kingdom Hearts* titles coming out next year aren't true sequels), we get *Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories*—a 3D remake of a Game Boy Advance title from late 2004. But even when faced with a simple rerelease, I admit it: I'm a total sucker for anything *Kingdom Hearts*. So while my mind says, "You're an idiot for replaying a 4-year-old game," my heart says, "You're an idiot for drooling over yet another game that

combines *Final Fantasy* and Disney together, but, hey, that's why I love you, you big goof."

Despite the déjà vu *Re: COM* inspired, I still enjoyed going through all of the levels again...just like I enjoyed going through the same exact levels in the original *Kingdom Hearts*, because, well, *Re: COM* is essentially a remake of the first game, but with cards. Now, if you're keeping count, I've been through the same *Kingdom Hearts* areas three times now. Excessive, yes...but if you're obsessive about the series, like me, it's fun. Why? Well, playing through *Re: COM* feels old and new at the same time. Sure, I already know what's gonna happen in the story (a confusing yet rewarding tale that takes place

between the first and second game). And sure, I already know how the game plays (plenty of button-mashy action layered atop a competent but completely unnecessary card-combat system). But I really enjoy seeing everything in 3D—though I'm baffled by the choice to include the original *KH*'s puke-worthy camera. If you missed out on *COM* the first time, this is definitely the best way to play it.

While the new additions aren't much of substance (a few so-so minigames in Winnie the Pooh's 100 Acre Wood, additional voice acting from the *Sixth Sense* kid, and that extra dimension), my memory of *Chain of Memories* hasn't changed: It's a pleasant little title that reminds me how much I want *Kingdom Hearts III*.

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PlayStation 2

PERSONA 4

■ Publisher: Atlus ■ Developer: Atlus ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

A. FITCH

A+
EXCELLENT

PHILIP

A
EXCELLENT

SHANE

A
EXCELLENT

The Good: Improved
dungeon crawling
The Bad: Minor
loading issues

Where Else: Can
you summon a
demon on the john?

Shaggy and the crew ain't got nothin' on this Mystery Machine

➔ **A. FITCH:** You can add one more descriptor to *Persona*, the controversial demon collector/school sim/dungeon crawl/Japanese cultural primer: stylish murder mystery. If *Persona 3*'s secret shadow-slaying society played out like *Harry Potter* in a Japanese high school, this adventure's more *Scooby-Doo*—complete with a fuzzy anthropomorphic teddy bear sidekick. As always, *Persona 4* crams so many disparate genres into one package, yet the day-by-day progression means that every sunrise brings a new challenge, which keeps the daunting quest manageable. And rather than tackling one gargantuan, intimidating tower over the course of a 100-hour-plus adventure like in *P3*, you'll confront a series of challenging bite-sized

dungeons. Vastly underrated localizer Atlus authors yet another sublime translation, managing to capture the cultural implications of the original Japanese while *still* sounding colloquially cool. If you're a role-playing freak who hasn't given this series a shot, I'm comin' to take your nerd card.

➔ **PHILIP:** Don't tell Fitch and the nerd police, but I never tried *P3*, so my reaction to this latest installment is akin to the surprised joy many RPG fans felt last year. Between the hardcore-yet-fun fast-paced combat, the *Psychonauts*-esque levels built around characters' psychological profiles, and the strangely addictive popularity simulation, *P4* blew me away. I struggled past the first three or so hours of slow

introduction before my first battle, but beyond that, this insanely deep, lengthy journey hooked me.

➔ **SHANE:** The aging, unsexy PS2 retains its dusty JRPG crown thanks to the latest *Shin Megami Tensei* epic. *P4* delivers a nuanced quest that retains its predecessor's engaging mix of adventure-game schoolwork and dungeon hacking. Axing *P3*'s familiar Tokyo-style setting in favor of a rain-soaked rural mystery straight outta *CSI: Kyoto* seems risky, but the new digs impart a chilling sense of small-town dread. And don't overlook a host of tiny upgrades: larger-scale battles, direct control over all party members, more meaningful Social Links, and a more diverse soundtrack. **A+**



DS

LUMINOUS ARC 2

■ Publisher: Atlus ■ Developer: Image Epoch
■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

The Skinemax of strategy-RPGs

➔**A. FITCH:** On the surface, *Luminous Arc 2* is standard Japanese strategy-role-playing fare: Astonishingly earnest young swordsman Roland somehow finds himself surrounded by a bevy of witch babes of varying buxomosity and ends up double- and triple-crossed in some convoluted plot to destroy the world—if you asked me to recount exactly how it all happens, I couldn't quite tell ya. But that's OK, because thanks to some clever (albeit sometimes way over-the-top) writing and solid-enough strategy, the game manages to both surprisingly entertain and shed the shackles of its predecessor, a dull *Final Fantasy Tactics* knockoff.

To be sure, the *FFT* influences are still present, but they're far less overt—*LA2* is definitely more of its own game this time around, thanks in part to bumped-up difficulty. Most battles revolve around confrontations with big, bad foes who'd be impossible to take down in a 1-on-1 duel; instead, you slowly build up attack power in order to unleash your deadly "Flash Drive" on the unsuspecting boss. Unfortunately, the experience system still falls into the standard *FFT* trap, almost unacceptably so—you gain about eight times more XP for felling a foe as you do for a nonlethal blow. After the excellently egalitarian PS3 tactical gem *Valkyria Chronicles*, that tired strategy-RPG convention's feeling less and less acceptable. Oh, and don't think combat's free from overt cheesecake, either: Roland can "Engage" his various witch companions to gain their elemental powers for a short while—triggering a come-hither-ish illustration of a curvaceous cutie in a revealing wedding gown.

Still, I wouldn't dismiss this as misogynistic Tomonobu Itagaki-style exploitation—*LA2* almost seems to double as a bizarre social commentary on its intended target audience. Among the evidence: The game forces a lascivious "witch otaku" into your party who's constantly trying to snap candid photos of the winsome wenches, features a witch with a bikini top complete with "hands" that look like they're copping a feel, and tops it all off with surreal "Life of Kopin" intermission segments that revolve around radish-headed critters ruminating on life. To me, it's quite clear that developer

Image Epoch and Atlus' tongues are planted firmly in cheek.

A. FITCH

B-

GOOD

The Good: Goofy characters, competent strategy

The Bad: Clunky interface, archaic XP system

Bouncin' Witch Boobs: Two seconds into opening movie



DS

GUITAR HERO: ON TOUR—DECADES

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Vicarious Visions
■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Worth the crippling hand cramps

➔**JUSTIN:** The abridged version of its bigger console brethren, *Decades* still provides some quality music in a portable package. Anyone who's played *Rock Band* or any version of *Guitar Hero* should recognize almost all of the selections—except here, you can play 'em on long bus rides. And any music game with the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Weezer is gonna make me happy.

Unfortunately, the developers didn't refine this sequel's input method, which means it suffers from the same problems as the original *On Tour*. You still can't hold the specialized "guitar grip" peripheral comfortably while keeping the screen steady (and maintaining circulation throughout your fingers). And the strum bar's just as bad as before—without any tactile feedback, you can't tell whether you're missing notes because your rhythm's off or because you're hitting the wrong part of the screen, especially during fast, note-heavy songs.

Another thing that still isn't fixed is the note-track screen's complete lack of information. Your star-power, crowd-approval, and score-multiplier meters are all on the strum screen, which is too far away for a quick glance during intense passages. Too-thin lines along either side of the note tracks broadcast how well you're doing, but they're hard to see. Too bad they wound up on this screen, as the note-track screen has plenty of room to squeeze 'em in.

On the other hand, *Decades'* multiplayer is almost pitch-perfect. Co-op doesn't let you play through the career mode with a friend, and the tug-of-war modes aren't anything different. But you can compete 1-on-1 against a friend who's packing the original *On Tour*. *Decades* combines both games' setlists, so you can choose to jam to any unlocked song from either game.

Guitar Hero: On Tour—Decades' days are numbered, since it's incompatible with the upcoming DS hardware revamp, the DSi (due to the missing GBA slot that the specialty controller uses). But in short play sessions—and especially when competing against a friend—the game's almost as good as the stellar *Elite Beat Agents*. If you can get past the grip controller and don't mind sustaining some permanent hand injuries, *Decades* is a fun, short rhythm game.

JUSTIN

B-

GOOD

The Good: Well-rounded setlist of familiar hits

The Bad: Carpal tunnel-inducing peripheral

The Awkwardness: Rockin' out on public transportation

DOWNLOAD/WRAP-UP

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



XB360

THE LAST REMNANT

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ ESRB: Mature

This ambitious, Unreal Engine–powered role-playing game promised to fuse Western design sensibilities with Japanese creativity, but just a few hours in, we’re skeptical if that lofty aim holds true: Combat’s marred by a swirling, puke-inducing camera, confusing commands, and text that’s too small for SDTVs. The game cap-

tures Western design in *one* respect, though: The chicks are rockin’ some serious *Oblivion*-style man-faces.

Bottom Line: For now, we’re pegging this as another *Infinite Undiscovery*: a B-level Square Enix appetizer in anticipation of a *Star Ocean/Dragon Quest/Final Fantasy* main course.



Wii

COOKING MAMA: WORLD KITCHEN

■ Publisher: Majesco ■ ESRB: Everyone

Last year’s onion-choppin’, mochi-poundin’, motion-controlled Wii cooking “sim” *Cooking Mama: Cook Off* gave wannabe chefs the satisfaction of a virtual meal well cooked. Not so this time around with *World Kitchen*, which moves titular chef Mama to the back burner and thrusts you—the apprentice—into Mama’s role amid slow, cumbersome controls.

Bottom Line: *World Kitchen* tries to spice up the recipe with new characters, slapstick minigames, and cheesy-in-a-bad-way voiceovers. The result leaves a funny aftertaste.



Wii

TALES OF SYMPHONIA: DAWN OF THE NEW WORLD

■ Publisher: Namco Bandai ■ ESRB: Teen

A direct sequel to 2004’s GameCube hit *Tales of Symphonia*, *Dawn* picks up precisely two years later. Unfortunately, the developers took the same opportunistic, value-conscious approach that Square Enix did with *Final Fantasy X-2*; *Dawn* repurposes nearly all of its environments, remixes nearly half of the first game’s tunes, and features return performances from most of its cast.

Bottom Line: An optional monster-raising minigame and a revamped combat system help justify this retread’s price.



DS

MOON

■ Publisher: Mastiff ■ ESRB: Teen

The few hours we’ve spent with *Moon* thus far reveal something of a low-budget *Metroid Prime: Hunters* that eschews 3D platforming in favor of remote droid puzzles and some vehicular action. You gather an arsenal of alien weapons, but as for your targets...we’ve seen more imaginative enemy designs in *Geometry Wars*. Top it off with groan-inducing dialogue and you’ve got a solid yawn of a package.

Bottom Line: If you need another portable first-person shooter, consider something with more spirit than a stoned mime.

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Oct./Nov.

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores		
1	Wii Fit	Wii	B+	B-	B
2	Fable II	XB360	A	A-	A-
3	Fable II: Limited Collector's Edition	XB360	A	A-	A-
	 Extra in-game outfits: Because crafting your own Halo armor from cardboard is just dorky.				
4	Mario Kart Wii with Wii Wheel	Wii	B+	C+	C
5	LittleBigPlanet	PS3	A+	A	A
6	Jillian Michaels' Fitness Ultimatum 2009	Wii	Not Reviewed		
7	Wii Music	Wii	A-	B-	C
	 A divisive title that led to bloody office dance-offs—including reviewer Ray Barnholt's patented "Nunchuk shuffle."				
8	Fallout 3	XB360	A	B+	A+
9	Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga	Wii	B (on 1UP.com)		
10	Guitar Hero: World Tour with band kit	Wii	Not Reviewed		
11	Active Life: Outdoor Challenge	Wii	Not Reviewed		
12	Fallout 3: Amazon Exclusive Survival Edition	XB360	A	B+	A+
13	SOCOM: Confrontation with Bluetooth headset	PS3	B+ (on 1UP.com)		
14	Dead Space	XB360	B+	B-	B+
15	Kirby: Super Star Ultra	DS	A-		
16	Fallout 3	PS3	A	B+	A+
	 Open-world nuclear-holocaust aftermath! Bizarre social experiments! Fun for the whole family!				
17	Rock Band 2: Special Edition	XB360	A-	A-	A
18	Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga	PS3	B (on 1UP.com)		
19	Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	Wii	C (on 1UP.com)		
20	FIFA 09	PS3	B+		

If You Purchased A Defective Nyko Intercooler 360 From March 2006 To August 2007, Please Read This Notice Carefully

You May Be Entitled To An Extended Warranty On Your Nyko Intercooler.

Nyko Technologies, Inc., seller of the Intercooler 360 product for use with the Microsoft Xbox 360, has entered into a proposed settlement with Plaintiff in the lawsuit *Coles v. Nyko Technologies, Inc.*, U.S.D.C., C.D. Cal. Case No. 2:07-cv-02977-FMC-RCx (the "Action"), under which you may be entitled to have the warranty on your Intercooler 360 product extended to three years from your original date of purchase.

What is the Lawsuit About?

Plaintiff alleged that the Intercooler 360 was defective and that Nyko refused to honor warranty claims for defective Intercooler 360s in violation of its warranty obligations and consumer laws, and engaged in unfair competition by misrepresenting the ability of the Intercooler 360 to reduce the Xbox 360's operating temperatures. Nyko denies all of Plaintiff's claims in the Action. However, to avoid the uncertainty and expense of litigation, Nyko and plaintiff have reached a proposed settlement.

What are the Terms of the Settlement?

Nyko has agreed to extend the warranty on version 1 and version 2 of the Intercooler 360 from 90 days to three years, and will provide each original purchaser of a defective version 1 or version 2 Intercooler 360 who makes a warranty claim within the extended warranty period with a new Intercooler 360 or other Nyko product of equal or lesser value.

Who Can Benefit From the Settlement?

If you purchased a defective new Intercooler 360 version 1 or version 2 between March 20, 2006 and August 25, 2007, you could be a member of the settlement class. If the settlement is approved, you may make a warranty claim if you are in this group by requesting shipping authorization from Nyko and sending your defective Intercooler 360 to Nyko, who will pay standard domestic U.S. shipping costs related to the exchange.

What are My Legal Rights?

If you wish to remain a member of the settlement class, you do not need to take any action. If the court approves the settlement, you will not be able to file any legal claims or lawsuits that you have against Nyko relating to the conduct alleged by Plaintiff in the Action. Personal injury claims are not released by this settlement. If you do not wish to remain a member of the settlement class, you must mail a written request to exclude yourself by January 19, 2009, to Dan Sedor, Jeffer, Mangels, Butler & Marmaro LLP, 1900 Avenue of the Stars, 7th floor, Los Angeles, California 90067. A final hearing on the proposed settlement will be held on February 2, 2009 at 10:00 a.m. in Courtroom 750 of the Honorable Florence-Marie Cooper at the United States District Court, Central District of California, Western Division, 255 East Temple St., Los Angeles, California. If you are a settlement class member and wish to object to the settlement, you must take the steps detailed in the complete Notice of Proposed Settlement by January 19, 2009. Copies of the Settlement Agreement and other related documentation, including a form for requesting exclusion from the settlement, are available for download at www.nyko.com/settlement, or may be requested from Nyko at the address, telephone number and email below.

This is Only a Summary. For Complete Information and a Copy of the Notice of Proposed Settlement:

Call: 1-866-333-6741 or
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Visit: www.nyko.com/settlement
Or Write: Nyko Technologies, Inc.
1990 Westwood Blvd., Penthouse Suite
Los Angeles, California 90025

>GAME OVER

Press continue for half-baked brain games, retro composers, and digital pups



94 **Retro:**
The Konami Sound



96 **Blu-ray Bungalow**



98 **Top 10: Gaming dogs**

EVERYONE LOVES TO DELUDE THEMSELVES about how much self-improvement they sneak into their lives. I've got some bad news, though. Swimming through triple-cheeseburger drippings to get to your Diet Coke isn't a healthy meal. Watching pornography in ankle weights isn't a workout. *Conan* with French subtitles is not learning a second language, and sticking a baby in front of Mozart only takes jobs away from puppet musicians. And most of all: High-speed, second-grade math on your DS is not making you smarter. More to the point, I also put my brain through a battery of tests with every brain videogame I could find.

I remember reading that intelligence is traditionally measured in five different ways: Arkansas capitals, shot put, ham glazing, TV/VCR repair, and necromancy. I threw out these outdated, culturally biased categories and came up with two of my own. The first is Reasoning. This is a very measurable standard of intelligence based around arithmetic and logic. The other is Practical Intelligence.

Reasoning is easy to quantify; it goes from one to five. Practical Intelligence is much more difficult to measure, so pay close attention. Smart people in the wild show off their intelligence through the inverse of their knowledge of culturally shared experiences. You'll find that the smarter a person is, the less applicable knowledge they have. To explain anecdotally, people were asked if they enjoy watching VH1's *Rock of Love with Bret Michaels*. Their answers ranked, with five being the smartest, and one the dumbest:

5 I'm sure I don't know. In fact, I'm so smart that I don't even know what a Bret Michaels is.

4 *Blarg of Blarg?* I don't watch much TV, and my intelligence makes it hard to even remember what you asked.

3 I've seen it, but only because I taped *Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire* all those years back, and now my damn TiVo thinks I watch game shows where the prize is people.

2 I never miss it! I even caught hepatitis from sharing a drifter with a chick from that show!

1 Enjoy it?! Man, I'm withholding

emotional support from my daughter so she'll grow up and give future generations her own *Rock of Love!*

Now that you're fully briefed, I'll rate each game on how well it improves my brain in the two categories. Some games that didn't make the cut to clinical trials were *Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!*, *Mega Brain Boost*, and *Best of Tests DS*. *Best of Tests DS* is by far the best adaptation of traditional IQ tests, but I refused to review it because I kept pronouncing it "Best of Testes, Yes." This was not only the exact opposite of the spirit of the article but also impossible to prevent. I apologize to the makers of *Best of Testes*, Yes—recipient of the coveted Official Nintendo Seal.

Hot Brain (PSP)



Hot Brain is based on the idea that brain activity causes blood to flow into the brain, which increases its temperature, so that must be good. The game managed to squeeze that simple concept into a 10-minute slide show featuring the voice of funnyman Fred Willard as he humorlessly describes thermal brain imagery. I think *Hot Brain*'s goal is to lull the player into a coma to skew the results of his or her initial performance. It's easy to see improvement if your first game is the off button.

Reasoning: 1

They gave a device designed to heat up a brain to gamers? These are people who spend six weeks taking photos of *Zelda*'s friends to unlock collectible miniatures. They are people who will, while pooping into any nearby sock, devote 200 hours to killing the same bear village so a text menu changes an adjective on their *World of Warcraft* character sheet. And now you want to give them the goal of heating their skull and the means to do it? You want to talk about stupid and shortsighted—I give you molten brain dripping out of nerd ears.

Practical Intelligence: 1

In a gross misuse of the term, one of the IQ tests involves counting the

number of people who run in and out of a location. I've seen this in three intelligence games now. Am I the only one who notices that this is the exact job they give to the dumbest employee of any store? At my local Best Buy, they have an elderly ape with an office chair for legs doing this job. If there were any intellectual growth from counting entrances and exits, then why does the guy at the Target door still try to eat my receipt when I leave?

Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)



In this popular game, a detective and his young boyfriend solve puzzles that they receive from riddle-obsessed townspeople.

Reasoning: 2

I had no idea that intelligence was so tightly tied to self-esteem. *Professor Layton* will destroy any confidence you have in your decision-making. The puzzles go from simple one second to an untangling of the Gordian knot the next, then back, and then the easy ones and hard ones will disguise themselves as the other. Then, suddenly, something insane will get thrown in, like a picture of two cats, but one's been shot in the head. And it asks, "Which cat is happier?" I don't know anything anymore! If *Professor Layton* were a waiter at a restaurant that only served cherry pie, it'd take you 45 minutes to order, and you'd still somehow order a dead cat on your first three tries.

Practical Intelligence: 4

To the Professor's credit, his game never claimed that it would make anyone smarter. Although I'm sure

part of being smarter is realizing how dumb you are. And if that's true, it makes me just a few unwanted pregnancies away from my PhD.

Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?: Make the Grade (DS)



This show supports the theory we had in fifth grade that we were all wasting our time and that adults haven't retained a single fact from fifth grade. I guess once your brain goes two decades without classifying invertebrates, that whole part gets jettisoned and replaced with *Seinfeld*. These adults come on and act like they didn't even know alphabets had letters while some smug kid can name all 17 of them in order.

Reasoning: 1

I may be a writer, but I'm not what anyone would call an educated man. I had to Google six of those words, and at best, I have vague memories of kickball and Ultimate Warrior from fifth grade. Yet it was still almost impossible to miss questions in this game. Its idea of a clever trick is to have you alphabetize numbers in their spelled-out form. Does "two" come before "spoon"? And besides, if you miss a question, your show-appointed pet fifth grader just answers it correctly for you.

Practical Intelligence: 1

If you're reading this on a working magazine, on top of a larger, nonworking magazine, on top of a screaming trapped fifth grader—you *might* be smarter than a fifth grader!

Left Brain Right Brain (DS)

How do you measure creativity like

you measure regular smarts? Let's look at the facts: In *Timecop*, you would explode if you touched yourself in the past. Obviously, whoever thought of this is very dumb, but



look back at the beginning of my point—that's the genius that made *Timecop*! So you can see the dilemma we run into when left brains and right brains are forced to live under the same umbrella of judgment. This game didn't think things through as well as I did.

Reasoning: 1

When I unboxed this, I was expecting a spring-loaded snake. There wasn't one, but it felt like something a smart person would be ready for. I wasn't ready for this game, though. It looks like software designed to demo the capabilities of a computer mouse two days after the computer mouse was invented. A little hand drawing is your host, and you play don't-touch-stuff with your right hand, and then you play don't-touch-stuff with your left. The idea of this having anything to do with your intellectual and creative sides is like shaving a dog and calling yourself an astronaut. I...I feel like I used to explain myself much better before this game rotted my language center.

Practical Intelligence: 1

Who had the idea to play games with each hand and call that self-improvement? I not only feel dumber, but I also think that I play videogames worse. I used to have a *Gradius* side and a *Sniper Rifle* side, and now I just have a *Bored* side and a *Carpal Tunnel* side. This game would have a better chance at making you smarter if you fell on it ear-canal first. ☹



It's stupid to think that Seanbaby's intelligence is measured by his IQ. True geniuses know that his smarts are actually measured by his JCVDS.

> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

QUEST FOR THE GIANT BRAIN

Can games make you smart?

10 Years Ago...

GAME OVER



On the cover: South Park

We ended 1998 by putting one of the best games ever on our cover: *The Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time*. So we knew that we had to kick-start 1999 with a game everyone will remember, one that we'll look back at fondly 10 years from now. Something like—wait, we chose *South Park*?



Lazily titled Game of the Month: Ninja

No, really—this game stars a ninja. We thought maybe a cowboy. Or pirate. Or maybe a pirate cowboy (but definitely not a cowboy pirate). But, no—it's about a ninja. Uh, how were we supposed to know that?



How-to: Cheat like a pro

We'd say that reading a how-to about cheating is cheating, but if you're so incompetent about breaking the rules that you need a guide to help you out, maybe it's actually fair. It's not like we expect you to win, anyway.

THE KONAMI SOUND

The man responsible for the rockin'-est tunes on NES By Jeremy Parish

KONAMI GAMES AND GREAT MUSIC HAVE ALWAYS GONE HAND IN HAND.

Series like *Castlevania*, *Suikoden*, and *Metal Gear* are renowned for their soundtracks, and both *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* owe their existence to *Beatmania* and *GuitarFreaks*. Konami's legacy as a music innovator goes back to the NES era, when the company's silver-trim boxes could be counted on to contain both great gameplay and great music. The distinctive electronic tunes that set Konami's NES games apart from the competition even netted their own nickname: the Konami sound.

Much of the credit for the Konami sound belongs to Hidenori Maezawa, who worked as a sound programmer and composer at the company dur-

ing its 8-bit days. His combination of engineering smarts and love for classic rock helped establish the feel of the company's home games, and his work remains dear to fans even now. While Maezawa wasn't solely responsible for Konami's trademark music—it was developed very much in the spirit of collaboration—he helped perfect important techniques and hardware during his tenure with the company. "[I joined] during the Famicom era, right around the time the NES was released in America," he recalls. "When I entered the company, they were working on *Castlevania*."

Lacking confidence as a performer, Maezawa looked instead to composition as his creative outlet that was impossible through live music. But he



■ *Castlevania III*'s awesome VRC6-powered tunes might be Maezawa's greatest contribution to gaming. Sadly, U.S. gamers missed out.

EGM Extras:

Check out EGM.1UP.com for our full Maezawa interview, a look at the two versions of *Castlevania III*, and more!



■ Maezawa brilliantly adapted *Contra*'s arcade tunes to the NES hardware.

quickly discovered that creating game audio was radically different than writing music for a band or orchestra. "There were a lot of limitations," he says. "The NES only had three sound channels and a sampling port, so I had to compose music with just three notes."

Rather than be discouraged by these deficiencies, Maezawa approached the technical weaknesses of NES' 8-bit hardware as a personal challenge and savored each innovative solution. "For *Contra*, we developed a way to create an echo sound with just a single sound channel instead of two, which made the sound thicker and deeper," he

says. "For games like *Contra* and *Gradius*, I had to scale down the music from the arcade versions and make it work on a low-tech machine. In fact, it was when I started to do this work...that I started thinking, 'OK, I have to do a really good job with this.'

"Back in the day, we weren't professional musicians, and none of us had clearly defined assignments. There was always an atmosphere of people being creative.... I was able to concentrate on my music. Because of that, I think, my music became something strong that left an impression in people's hearts."

—Sam Kennedy and Hiroko Minamoto contributed to this article

> MAEZAWA BEYOND GAMING

After the NES era, Hidenori Maezawa helped Konami establish a music label; from there, he sought to break out of gaming. "I started to deal with people outside gaming, people in the music business. After seeing all that was outside of Konami, I wanted to strike out on my own," he admits. His most recent work is *Rain Book*, an album written in collaboration with folk musician Yoko Yamamoto, and he sees his studio, Picnic, as a possible bridge between two worlds.



> CHIPTUNE FACTORY: KONAMI'S VRC6 CHIP

The physical nature of the cartridge medium let developers expand 8- and 16-bit hardware through special chips built into the carts themselves, and the NES stands as the heyday of the special chip. Perhaps the most impressive of these was Konami's VRC6, which Maezawa designed as a means of beefing up the company's latter-day titles. "With the VRC6, you could add an additional three channels for a total of six notes," says Maezawa. "Of course, there were other technical people who put the parts together, but I was involved in its design."

The VRC6 never made its way to the U.S. despite powering one of the company's most popular games: *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*. Likely due to its expense, the American version of the game used Nintendo's less-ambitious MMC5 chip and featured downgraded music—though Maezawa wasn't involved with its bastardization. "I didn't work on that port, so I didn't have to tone it down," he says.



Images courtesy of vgmuseum.com

> WE LIKE TO WATCH

BLU-RAY BUNGALOW

What's so funny? By James Mielke

Get Smart

Publisher: Warner Home Video

Details: For every dozen small-screen-to-big-screen movie adaptations that fail, you occasionally get one that rises above the pack of mediocrity.



Get Smart works, partially because it doesn't try to slavishly imitate every catchphrase from Don Adams' hit '60s TV show, and also because director Peter Segal keeps the pacing fresh with another verbal or visual joke lurking around every corner. Ace performances from an on-fire Steve Carell, a sexy 'n' smarmy Anne Hathaway, and a hilarious supporting cast keep the burden of carrying a movie from resting solely on Carell's shoulders. Some truly outrageous sequences (Carell's Maxwell Smart in an airplane bathroom is merely one) balanced with some lighter comic moments ("the cone of silence") ensures that *Get Smart* refrains from being a one-note action-comedy. The only downside to this otherwise complete package is an incomplete extras section, which sorely needs a segment revealing how the filmmakers created *Get Smart*'s thrilling skydiving sequence. Besides that minor gaffe, this film features one of Steve Carell's finest performances...as well as Bill Murray in a tree.

Director: Peter Segal

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

Forgetting Sarah Marshall

Publisher: Universal

Details: Rarely has a movie about getting dumped turned out as hilarious, painful,



nuanced, and on-point as *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, in which a surprisingly well-developed cast of characters goes through the motions of breaking up, rebounding, and reconciling in the most unlikely ways possible. Anchored by the revolving cast of character actors that usually pop up in most Judd Apatow productions (*Knocked Up*, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*), *FSM* benefits the most from breakout performances by screenwriter Jason Segel and love interest Mila Kunis, who display a better onscreen chemistry than what you see in more serious romance movies. Anchoring the film is an equally hilarious wealth of bonus footage and featurettes. While comedies like this and *Wedding Crashers* show that there's room for more R-rated, risqué fare in the genre, it's films like *FSM* that will hopefully spark the moribund "rom-com" genre out of its decade-long slumber.

Director: Nicholas Stoller

Rating: A **Bonus Material:** A+

Kung Fu Panda

Publisher:

Paramount

Details: As funny as Jack Black can be, he's usually better in ensemble pieces than



in situations where he must carry a whole movie alone. Too much Jack Black is too much, but in *Kung Fu Panda*, he's just right. Surrounded by an underutilized cast of voice actors (including Angelina Jolie, Lucy Liu, Seth Rogen, Jackie Chan, and David Cross), Black shines as the movie's hero, Po, an overweight panda destined to become the legendary Dragon Warrior. Some truly inventive animation work elevates the movie into near-Pixar territory visually, but the overcooked *Karate Kid*-esque "underdog versus the bully" story runs a little flat. That, however, does not stop *Kung Fu Panda* from being an almost relentlessly hilarious avalanche of physical humor and CG choreography. The subtle touches are what help it rise above recent Dreamworks dreck like *Shrek 3*. Marvel at the slightly wobbly rendering of kung fu master Oogway, expertly voiced by Randall Duk Kim, or listen closely to the rubbery sound effects applied to nearly everything that involves Po and Po's belly. The overall direction of *Kung Fu Panda*'s overflow of comedy is predictable, but it's highly entertaining nonetheless.

Directors: John Stevenson and Mark Osborne

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



■ Will Ferrell called. He wants his career back.



HELL FREEZES OVER

Brrrrr! Things are gonna get chilly next month. We're unthawing an exclusive first look on a game that's both hot *and* cold. How's that possible, you ask? Hell if we know—ask the scientists who created *Icy Hot*. But we do know this: You'll wanna return in 30 for a warm look on a cool game. Get it? It's both hot and cold. Man, we're geniuses.

Game publishers also think they're pretty brainy. Next month, we'll look at some of the ways gamemakers are trying to keep penny-pinching consumers from raiding the bargain bin. But is it smart to take on the retail giants? Don't answer—we'll do that next month.

Sure, our Review Crew's tackled most of the big-name titles, but the post-holiday rush still has a few choice contenders. Check back to see how *Tony Hawk*—killer *Skate 2* and 50 Cent: *Blood on the Sand* fare.

(All planned editorial content is subject to change.)

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- **Moon (DS)**

NEXT MONTH

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GAME OVER

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VIDEOGAME DOGS

Virtual pups are so en vogue By Bob Mackey



1 **EarthBound (SNES): King**

He doesn't stick around very long, but King accompanies you throughout the first spooky moments of *EarthBound*'s alien invasion. So why isn't he a permanent party member? Like all stupid animals, King has the common sense to stay the hell home and let someone else do all of the dirty work.



2 **Duck Hunt (NES): Laughing Dog**

He may be annoying, but Laughing Dog is the only member of the animal kingdom that's ballsy enough to laugh at a frustrated human with a loaded rifle. As hundreds of duck corpses rain from the sky, Laughing Dog remains confident that you can only shoot him in the arcade version.

3 **Super Mario World 2:**

Yoshi's Island (SNES): Poochy

Poochy may not be stupid, but his bonus stage is balls hard. Even so, his invulnerability to lava is the only thing keeping Baby Mario and Yoshi from suffering horrible third-degree burns. And when you're done, he has the common courtesy to sacrifice himself in a pool of the stuff. What a pal.



4 **Resident Evil 4 (PS2/GC): That Dog**

Rescuing That Dog from a bear trap in *Resident Evil 4* rewards you with a little extra help in the game's first El Gigante boss fight. We hope this act spreads the message of violence-based retribution throughout the animal kingdom; caring for injured birds would be much more rewarding if they returned later in life to attack your enemies.



5 **Fable II (XB360): Your dog**

Fable II is probably the only game where your dog accurately reflects your moral barometer. If this happened in real life, we'd all benefit from the added perspective. As it stands now, the dull, dopey gaze of a real dog can only tell you when it's time for a walk.

6 **Final Fantasy VIII (PS1): Angelo**

Upon his introduction in *Final Fantasy VIII*, Angelo doesn't appear to be much more than your average pooch. But when you learn his true role as a Limit Break on four legs, things get weird. Note that, due to some pending lawsuits, Square Enix does not endorse launching your own dog as a ballistic weapon under any circumstances.



7 **Nintendogs (DS):**

The Nintendogs

Laugh all you want at the Nintendogs and their cute little hats; they can buy and sell you—and feel no remorse. It's easy to see why: Nintendogs make girls melt like butter. Anyone with that kind of power is well on their way to capitalist success.

8 **Fallout 3 (PS3/XB360/PC): Dogmeat**

Forget any utilitarian purpose Dogmeat may have; in a postapocalyptic wasteland, sometimes it's just good to have someone to hang out with. Dogs are a great resource in fighting off the inevitable loneliness-induced insanity spawned when 90 percent of the world's irradiated—but keep things platonic, pal.

9 **Okami (Wii/PS2): Amaterasu**

OK, Amaterasu's more wolf than dog, but she's also the mother of all creation, so let's not split hairs. Developer Clover's brilliant *Zelda* clone gave us the powers of a Shinto deity who can literally do her business on enemies. If this mythology's accurate, we're converting. 🐺



10 **Sam & Max series (Wii/PC): Sam**

Sam doesn't let that he's a dog stop him from having opposable thumbs and a complete, Chandler-esque mastery of the English language. His on-the-job ethics may be a little shady, but police brutality's much easier to swallow when it's paired with brilliant one-liners.



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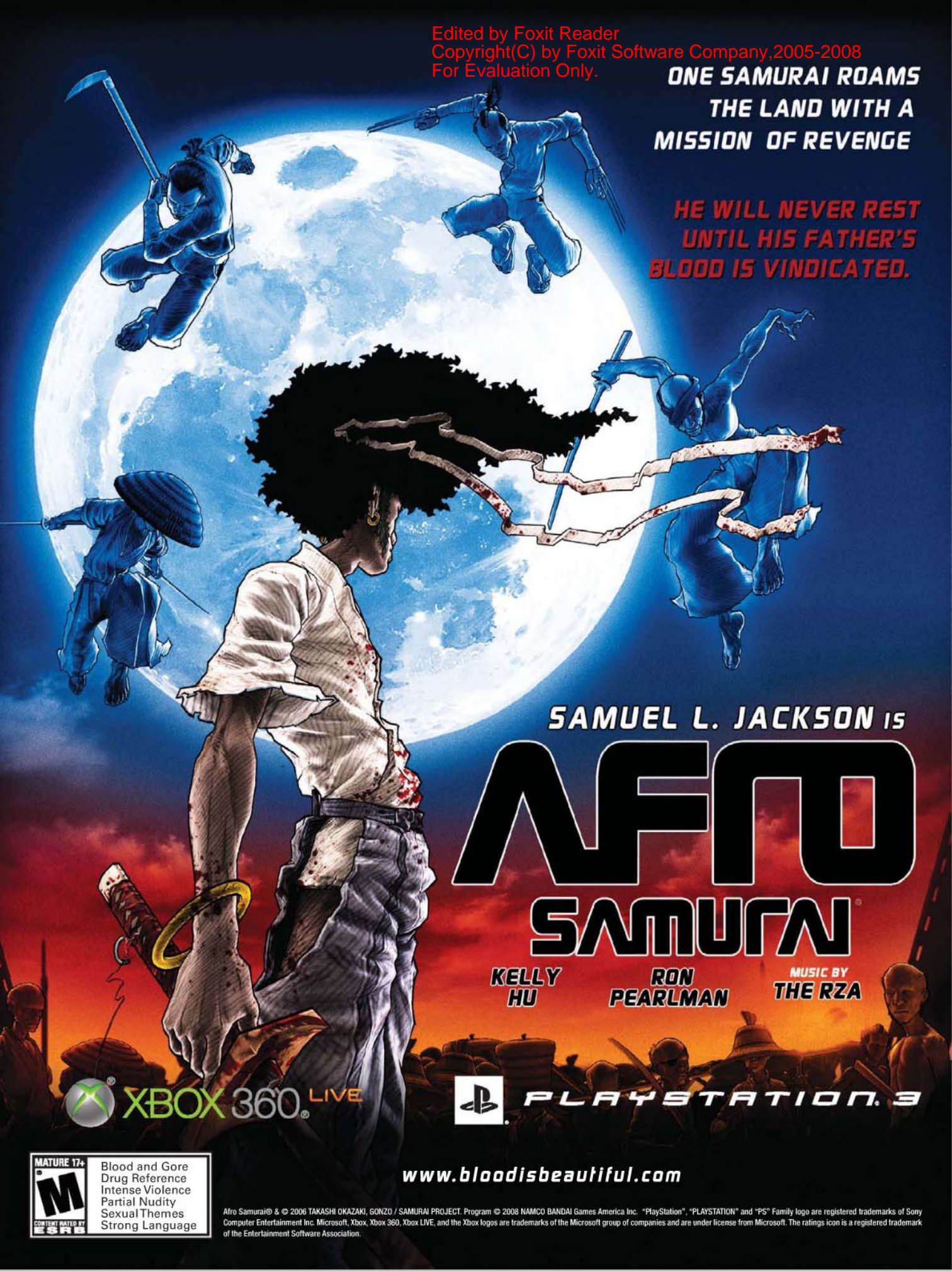
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THE LAND WITH A
MISSION OF REVENGE**

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UNTIL HIS FATHER'S
BLOOD IS VINDICATED.**



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