13 Final Fantasy Games are headed your way! (see page 20)

HALO 3 Post-beta breakdown

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PLAYSTATION 3

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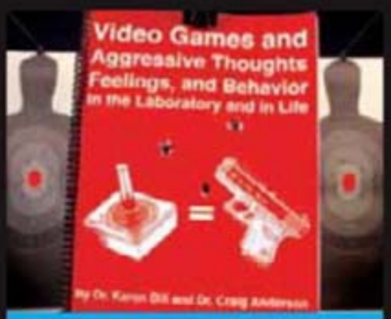

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Army of Two
The co-op shooter gets its own 1UP cover story.

SOCOM: Confrontation
See videos of it in action.

The new Madden vs. 2K8
Our podcast goes deep.

Final Fantasy XIII
A video discussion of Square Enix's lineup.

Take These Jobs
Links to all the past entries in our industry-gig series.

The Solution...
...to the puzzle on pg. 94.

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> EDITORIAL

Online Suffering

IT MADE US MISERABLE, yet we kept going back for more. The *Halo 3* beta was a nightly exercise in masochism for many gamers—so many of you have complained about the unusually tough competition. In the May 18 edition of the *1UP Yours* podcast (find all our podcasts on podcasts.1UP.com), we discussed how strange it was that the game industry is moving toward more accessibility to draw in a wider audience, yet online gaming (shooters, in particular) is still the territory of high-caliber players who like to keep newbies respawning more than playing.

The following features aren't new, but makers of competitive games should have them all if they want to keep their products fun for more than just the hardcore:

Bots (as seen in *Perfect Dark Zero*). Customizable A.I.-controlled opponents ease neophytes into deathmatches before they have to deal with the real thing. Winning is a confidence booster!

Map tutorials (as seen in *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*). Sure, we can load up an offline map for a solo tour, but wouldn't a developer-guided walkthrough be more helpful? It can point out the strategic spots, where to find weapons, and more.

Smarter matchmaking. Xbox Live is supposed to match players of similar skill, from similar "zones" (family, pro, recreation, underground), but the lack of a critical mass of players to support so many subsets means you'll inevitably face off against that terror of a *Halo* player who prefers gunplay to girls. Games should warn you of this and let you opt out of matchmaking that expands its search criteria to find enough participants (better to play with a few folks on your skill level and some bots than to have a piss-poor time getting owned). And don't forget to use Xbox Live's player feedback. Most people don't realize they can use it to "avoid" players just based on their skills alone, regardless of their online behavior.

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

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ESRB

LETTERS

reviewing the reviews, bashing the jaguar, and backpedaling furiously

TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's *EGM* question:

Who shoots cover-boy Mitsurugi with a rifle at the end of *Soul Blade* (PS1)?

E-mail the answer to **EGM@ziffdavis.com** (subject head: Trivia: *EGM* #218) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.

Letter of the Month

Ask and you shall receive

Reading the past couple of issues of your magazine, I noticed something about the games you gave to the writer of the issue's Letter of the Month: They absolutely suck. Seriously, in *EGM* #215 you gave Alvin Jarvenpaa Jr. a copy of *Pony Friends* for the Nintendo DS, a game that I can only imagine would be illegal to give to an inmate due to the Geneva Conventions. Then in Issue #216 you gave Donovan MacLure a copy of *Brooktown High*, with scores that average out to 4.8 out of 10. Do you hate these loyal fans of your magazine? If by some minuscule chance this manages to become your Letter of the Month, the game you reward me with had better be on either the PlayStation 2, GameCube, or the Game Boy Advance and have an average score of at least 7.5 out of 10. And no shipping and handling.

—Nathan Bennet

Sorry, Nathan. We'll try to do better next time.

Who reviews the reviewers?

I don't really pay attention to game reviews, but I noticed something pretty cool about them. When I read a review, I can often finish the sentence as soon as I see the first word.

Someone should write up a generic "positive" review, "average" review, and "negative" review. Just leave a blank for the game's title. Because that's what 90 percent of the reviews out there feel like. They all use the same words, the same phrases, with the same focus on the same aspects of the game. For example, the plot of a game is either "stellar," "forgettable," or "by-the-numbers." It can be nothing else. Seriously, someone should do their thesis on this. Have we reached the limits of game reviews? Or are we simply being held back by our own lack of imagination?

—Susan Kutz

At first, your letter seems promising and inventive. But after just a few quick reads, it quickly deteriorates into just another forgettable diatribe. While it may look pretty, there just isn't enough substance to back up the eye candy. And while the silky-smooth verbs and substantial nouns may hold our interest momentarily, in the end it ends up bogged down by technical glitches, coming off as just one more by-the-numbers knockoff of the same formula we've seen a dozen times before. It's not terrible, just utterly underwhelming.

For writing this month's winning letter, Nathan snags a copy of *Diner Dash*. Unless we don't have one handy, in which case he gets something worse.

The Atari Jaguar: Truly awful, or just misunderstood?

Thanks for the heads-up

I just received my fresh copy of *EGM* #216 in the mail today, and I noticed an error on pg. 102, the crossword puzzle. It's not a huge deal, but I'm choosing to point it out because I'm a stickler about these things. Clue 12 across reads, "Abysmal Jaguar game," but 12 across only has seven spaces. Clearly, "all of them" won't fit.

—Ryan Eiger

Ouch. That's unnecessarily harsh, don't you think? Wait, hmm. OK, perhaps not.

Down there

In *EGM* #216 (in the article about the evolution of the 360 and the PS3) you mentioned that "those weaned on the no-nonsense menus of Xbox Live or impersonal Nintendo DS friend codes might find [upcoming PS3 "virtual world" interface] Home's lifelike avatars and ornate pubic spaces to be an indulgent waste of time."

Well...our feelings are a bit hurt. Are you saying that only Xbox and Nintendo loyalists find "ornate *pubic* spaces" to be an indulgent waste of time? We suppose other people's fur clipping, crotch tattooing, and private piercing are really none of our business, but we [PS3 owners] *also* feel

YOUR BIGGEST MISTAKE

Share your embarrassment with us

Last month, we invited you to admit your deepest gaming shame. Here's the best entry to date.

"I was using the three-month Xbox Live Gold freebie that came with my 360, but it ran out. So I bought a new card...and then, for no good reason, thought I had to start from scratch with all my games. Bye-bye, gamerscore; see-ya, Achievements! Yup, I dumped everything and started over. I later learned I could've continued with my countless hours of *Dead Rising*."

—Dave Laitinen

You're a brave man for admitting that. Who's next?

We want to hear about your biggest gaming mistakes. Did you buy a stupidly expensive racing chair that's now collecting dust in the basement? Did you knock your PS3 out a third-story window? Don't be ashamed—send your story (and photographic evidence!) to **EGM@ziffdavis.com**, *subject head: "My Biggest Mistake."*

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■ Home offers ornate *public* (not pubic) spaces.

that overly ornate pubic spaces are an indulgent waste of time. Does that make us old-fashioned?

—Chris Ladusky and Shannon Howard

Boy, that typo sure did make the fur fly. Guess we really muffed that one. Let's just sweep this whole affair under the rug, shall we? ...OK, we'll stop now.

The picture of restraint

I know that you guys pretty much live for smart-assed comments, but *please* don't make one on this letter, as it is extremely important to me. I've been given mixed answers about which systems *Halo 3* is coming out on. Some say it's on both Xbox and Xbox 360. Some say only Xbox 360. I don't have the money for a 360, as I have better ways to use what little green I have (e.g., *EGM* subscriptions). So can you answer me truthfully once and for all: Is *Halo 3* coming out for original Xbox as well? This is all that I ask, so please, cut a 14-year-old a break, please?

—Alex Garbarino

Listen here, Garbarino: Nobody tells us what to do. Nobody. If we want to make a smart-assed comment, we'll go ahead and do just that, and there's nothing you can do about it, got it? So prepare yourself for the down-smacking of your *life*.

Aww, who are we kidding? He asked so *nicely*. OK, kid, just this once: *Halo 3* is 360 only.

God, we're so ashamed.

Righteous indignation

As a loyal customer and one of the handful of people who bought the PSP at launch, I am terribly aggrieved by Sony's disrespectful actions against their customers and loyal fans. The PSP, a great piece of hardware, has a very small library. One of the reasons why I bought my PSP was the touted ability to play my old PS1 games on my handheld. But tying up this feature with the PS3's online store is a slap in all our faces. So let me get this straight, Sony: I can't download PS1 games unless I buy your $600 paperweight? Well let me give it to you straight: *No PS1 game is gonna make me go out and buy your piece of crap!* Pull your heads out of your asses—not everyone owns a PS3, but even starving children in Somalia own PCs. I want the ability to download PS1 games to my PC and transfer them to my PSP *now!!*

—Nigel Hayles

Easy there, Tiger. At a recent event, Sony revealed they plan to have a PSP equivalent to the PlayStation store up and running by the fall. But don't think it's because you were so adorably indignant; Sony's been planning this function for ages. But hey, Champ, at least you can say you tried, right? Now go ask mom if she'll take you out for ice cream.

"Look Maw, it's one a them game-tape players!"

First, I'd like to admit that I live in the boondocks. This has its advantages, but it also ruins a great part of next-gen gaming: Out here there is no such thing as high-speed Internet. Online play is impossible for this poor old hillbilly. That is, unless I take my DS to the McDonald's down in the Wal-Mart and play Wi-Fi. This deprives me of many great gaming experiences (rednecks like *World of WarCraft* too!), but it also makes my console selection easier. I'm going with the Wii, because Nintendo feels my pain and deprives the *rest* of the world of online play, too! Also, the notion of playing *Duck Hunt* on a next-gen console just makes me giddier than Jeff Foxworthy when he comes up with a new "you might be a redneck" joke.

—"PBGunrunner"

Now, how on earth do you find time to play games between all the hog-tying, jackrabbit grilling, and monster truck rallying? Come to think of it, does your doublewide even *have* electricity?

We're in your brains, changing your thoughts

I have been buying your magazine off the newsstand for years. However, after reading halfway through the Letters section in the June issue [*EGM* #216], I felt an uncontrollable urge to subscribe. I wonder why?

—Chris Krafty

We have no idea. And *neither do you*, if you know what's good for you. Understand?

Backpedal faster

Thanks for publishing my joke letter about *Mushroom Kingdom Hearts* ["The 4/1 one," *EGM* #216, from "name withheld"]. Kind of thought I was skewing it too dumb with the Internet speak, but I'm sure you get at least a few dozen e-mails with "ZOMG" or "OMG" in the title. I'm also fairly sure every other e-mail you receive has Samus Effing Aran in it, so maybe it wasn't as funny as I thought. So, yup, have to tell you the joke's on you. Really, a guy with a cat named Sora doesn't scream "fake"? Though I've looked at gaming message boards, so I guess not. Now we're even for Akuma in *Resident Evil 2*. Ya bastards.

—Bryan Preston

Nice save attempt, Bryan, but we ain't buying it. You obviously fell for our wily April Fool's ways, and you're just trying to save yourself some embarrassment. Now go feed Sora before he scratches up all your Samus fan art.

"Look Maw," part deux

Is it true that if I hook up a PS3 to my HDTV set that only goes to 1080i that it will downgrade all games and even movies to 480p? I've heard that Sony is working on a patch to this problem, but since I only have dial-up I won't be able to get the patch. If there is going to be a patch, will Sony offer a disc to its dial-up customers?

—Dallas Bowerman

Wow, *so many* misconceptions here. First, the problem was with 720p sets and Blu-ray movies only; games were never affected. Second, it's already been fixed in firmware. Third, where the hell do you people live that you can't get broadband? Anyway, don't worry; firmware updates are packed in with games—go rent any brand-new title and you should be fine.

> OOPS!

This is a serious one. Somehow, Matt Leone's score for *WarTech* went in wrong and every single one of us missed it. His score should have been 5.0, not 4.0. Not that it makes *that* much of a difference, but still.

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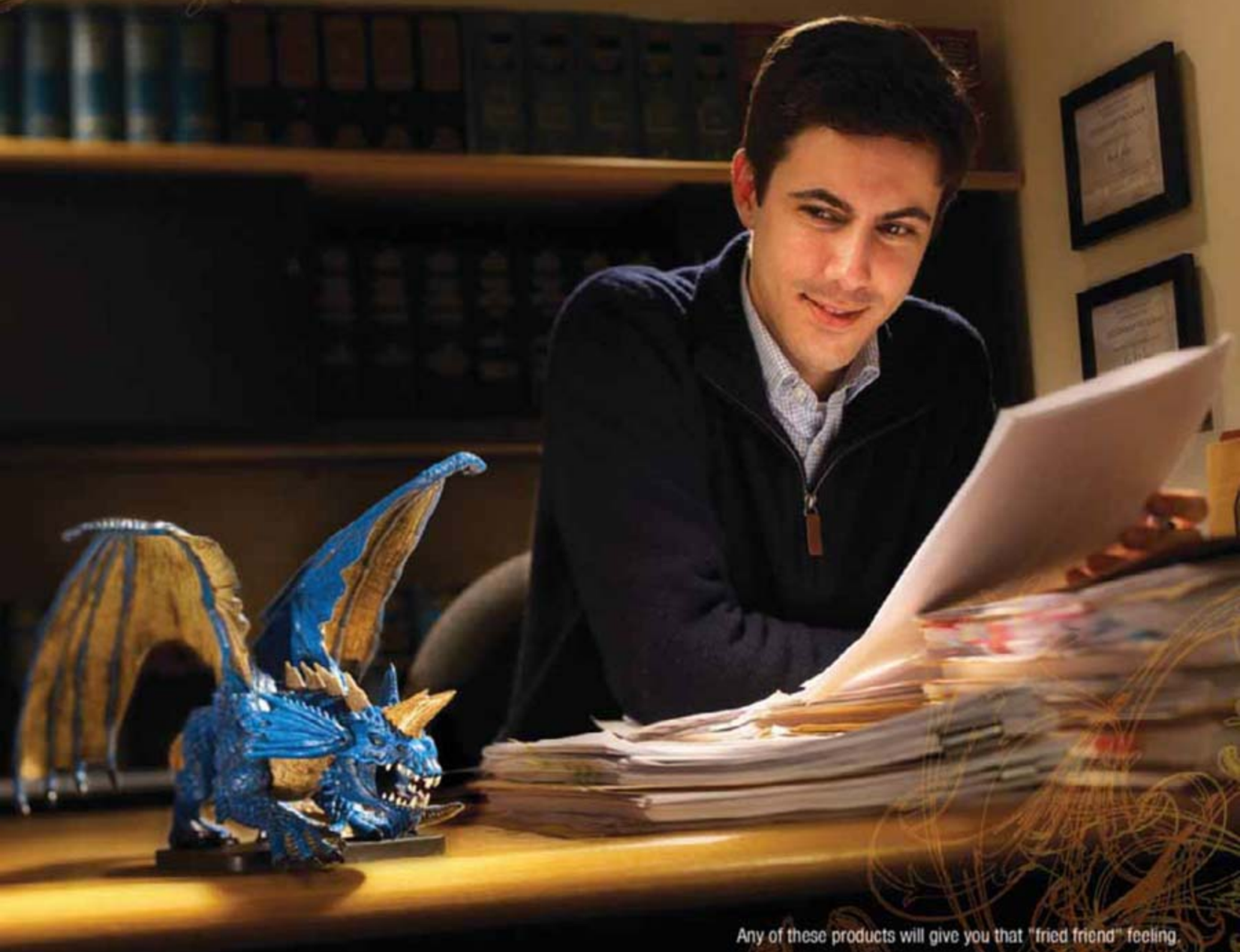

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> EGM INVESTIGATES

Off TARGET

We shoot holes through studies linking violent games to aggression By David Kushner

Read it and weep: We pay particular scrutiny to one study in this article: 2000's "Video Games and Aggressive Thoughts, Feelings, and Behavior in the Laboratory and in Life." Read it yourself on the American Psychological Association's website (www.apa.org).

WE CAN ASSUME TWO THINGS about you if you're reading this magazine: You don't think playing violent videogames can make someone go aggro in real life, and you haven't authored any studies linking violent games to violent behavior. But the people who *do believe* and *have authored* such studies have gotten a lot of play lately in the mainstream media—and they're putting the future of your favorite pastime at risk.

Following the April 16 Virginia Tech shootings, the *Washington Post* reported online that the killer had a history of playing the PC squad-based multiplayer shooter *Counter-Strike*. By the time the paper took down the reference from its website the next day (due, the writer later said, to a necessary update), it was too late. Ubiquitous antigame crusader Jack Thompson raised the specter on CNN. Dr. Phil played the blame game on *Larry King Live*. "The mass murderers of tomorrow are the children of today that are being programmed with this massive violence overdose," he said.

Then on April 26, the Federal Communications Commission weighed in with its report, three years in the making, on the impact of media violence (particularly television violence) on kids. It suggests that Congress can step in to protect kids from harm by regulating violence on TV without violating the First Amendment. The thought of the Feds legislating videogames strikes many as dangerous. The American Civil Liberties Union calls it "political pandering." Howard Stern calls Dr. Phil an a-hole. Once again, the debate that has run from Columbine to Blacksburg continues to rage. And when it does, each side looks to the same place to buttress their arguments: scientific research on the effects of violent vid-

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Preview: Lucky number XIII

PAGE 30
Preview: Uncle Sam wants two

PAGE 42
Preview: Rock and drum roll

eogames. But with sensational media and political distortion in the way, getting to the truth of the research is the trickiest game of all.

Anger management

At the end of the day, scientists—including those behind the studies cited in the FCC report—still aren't sure if playing violent games leads to real-life violence at all. "The research doesn't support the notion that [playing violent games] leads to aggression," says Dr. Jonathan Freedman, a psychologist from the University of Toronto. "It doesn't even deal with the question of whether it leads to criminal violent behavior or real violence. At most, it addresses the question of whether it leads to aggression, which I don't think it does."

One of the problems with the studies is how the term "aggression" is defined. "The missing element is that most of these studies, if you look at them just a little bit critically, don't really measure what a lot of people purport they're measuring, and people don't understand how they fall short," says sociologist Dr. Karen Sternheimer of the University of Southern California and author of *Kids These Days: Facts and Fictions About Today's Youth*. While the general public equates aggression with violent behavior, actual violent behavior has never been measured—for obvious reasons. "We can't have people assault, rape, or murder someone" in the lab, says Dr. Brad Bushman, a University of Michigan psychologist who studies the effects of media violence. Instead, researchers are left to measure innocuous examples of so-called aggressive behavior—behavior that doesn't remotely resemble criminally violent activity. This has ranged from having subjects punch an inflatable Bozo doll to, more commonly, blast opponents with a loud noise.

Even Dr. Karen Dill, who with Dr. Craig Anderson coauthored one of the most-cited studies—2000's "Video Games and Aggressive Thoughts, Feelings, and Behavior in the Laboratory and in Life"—admits "hearing the noise is not harmful." Nevertheless, the report opens with an allusion to Columbine and purports that "one possible contributing factor is violent games." To many, that's an egregious leap. "Pressing a button that delivers a short burst of loud noise is pretty remote from real aggression," Freedman notes.

Old data

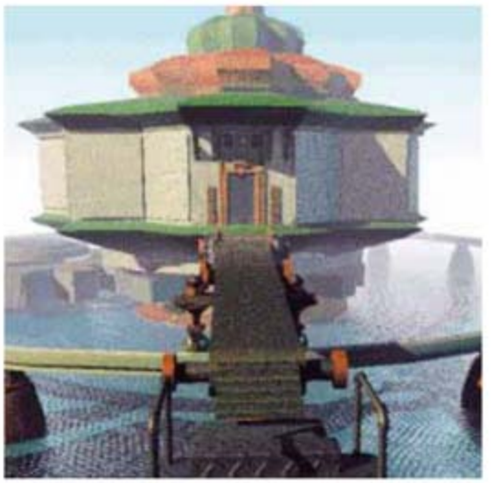
But it's not just the measures of aggression that are questionable—it's the means through which participant reactions are elicited in the first place. Reading the fine print in the Dill and Anderson study, for example, reveals that the researchers used outdated, mismatched games and required an absurdly brief amount of actual playtime from the subjects. The researchers compared the response to people playing two games released in the early 1990s: *Wolfenstein 3D*, the first first-person shooter, and the puzzle adventure *Myst*. The disparity between the game styles raises questions about the results. Though the goal of the study is to explore the effect of violent games on aggression, a shooter is sure to elicit more aggressive behavior than a puzzle game. It's like comparing apples to hand grenades. Wouldn't it have been better to compare two action games—one with violence and one without?

The study required 32 undergrads to play the games for 15 minutes each. They were then given the opportunity to send a noise blast to an opponent—often just a computer proxy—after they finished the game. "You can't study people for 20 minutes and know what's going to happen to people in society 10 years later," says Dr. Dmitri Williams of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Williams recently authored one of the first long-term studies, in which he observed players of the online PC role-playing-game *Asheron's Call* for more than 56 hours in a period of a month. His results? "I found no evidence of increased aggression or aggressive attitudes," he says.

Dr. Patrick Markey, a psychology professor at Villanova University, decided to take another perspective: studying what role a person's anger level *before* playing a game has on the aggressive behavior coming out. And Markey, unlike some of his colleagues, actually uses games played in the last decade. The 167 students who participated played games such as *Doom 3* and *Project Gotham Racing*. His conclusion: The people who had previously filled out questionnaires reflecting an even-keel personality were less aggro after playing a violent game. Those who had a more aggressive disposition were more susceptible

Most of these studies...don't really measure what a lot of people purport they're measuring.

—Sociologist Dr. Karen Sternheimer



Aside from being trailblazers in their respective genres, *Wolfenstein 3D* (left) and *Myst* played a major role in a 2000 study on aggression. Which begs the question: When's the last time these researchers visited a game store?

OFF TARGET (cont.)

to these heightened emotions.

While some could conclude in broad strokes that games cause aggression, the nuances tell another story, Markey notes. "The general research shows there is an effect of violent games on aggression, but what gets lost is [that] this effect isn't that big," he says. And, of course, videogames aren't the only pastimes that could lead to aggression: dodgeball, paintball, and a bad beat in Texas Hold 'Em can heighten arousal, too. Dr. Vincent Mathews, a radiologist at Indiana University who has studied the brain's response to violent videogames, suggests that the effects of these other activities would be comparable. "I would think that paintball or dodgeball would show similar results," he says. But no one is calling for these games to be banned.

Popular science

Critics of violent games cite the studies as further proof that media violence leads to murder. As Thompson wrote in March 2007, "The American Psychological Association [APA] in August 2005 found a clear causal link between violent games and teen aggression." But as political watchdog site GamePolitics.com astutely reported, Dr. Elizabeth Carll, who co-chaired the study, wanted to make clear that "the resolution did not state that there was a direct causal link to an increase in teen violence as a result of playing videogames. Rather, [it stated] an increase in aggressive behavior, aggressive thoughts, angry feelings, and a decrease in helpful behavior as a result of playing violent videogames."

If no one has said there's a causal link between games and real-life violence, why does it keep making headlines, and why do these studies get cited so much? "The [American Psychological Association] is a political organization...and they do what is politically expedient like any other group," says Dr. Christopher J. Ferguson of Texas A&M International University's Department of Behavioral, Applied Sciences and Criminal Justice. Ferguson recently released a study named, with typically academic wordiness, "Evidence for publication bias in videogame violence effects literature: A meta-analytic review." In it, he finds what he calls "a systematic bias for hot-button issues" that results in overstatements and misleading results.

The authors of the reports bristle when their research is challenged. Dill, after agreeing to be interviewed for

If this was affecting all kids in a bad way, we'd see something.

—Harvard Medical School Professor Dr. Cheryl Olson

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTING

We put real guns in pro gamers' hands to see if all that virtual target practice helps them shoot straight

With the mainstream media pointing out the gaming habits of any nut who picks up a gun and wreaks tragedy, we couldn't resist conducting an unscientific experiment: To see if the virtual marksmanship of first-person shooter pros translates to outside-the-game gunplay. So we enlisted Amber Dalton and her twin, Amy Brady, cofounders of the famous lady-gamers group the PMS Clan (pmsclan.com). Both are steely-eyed tournament pros, with Dalton serving on top *Halo 2* and *Gears of War* teams and Brady competing in *Rainbow Six* and *Ghost Recon* tourneys as one of Ubisoft's Fragdolls. Of the two, only Brady has fired a real gun once before.

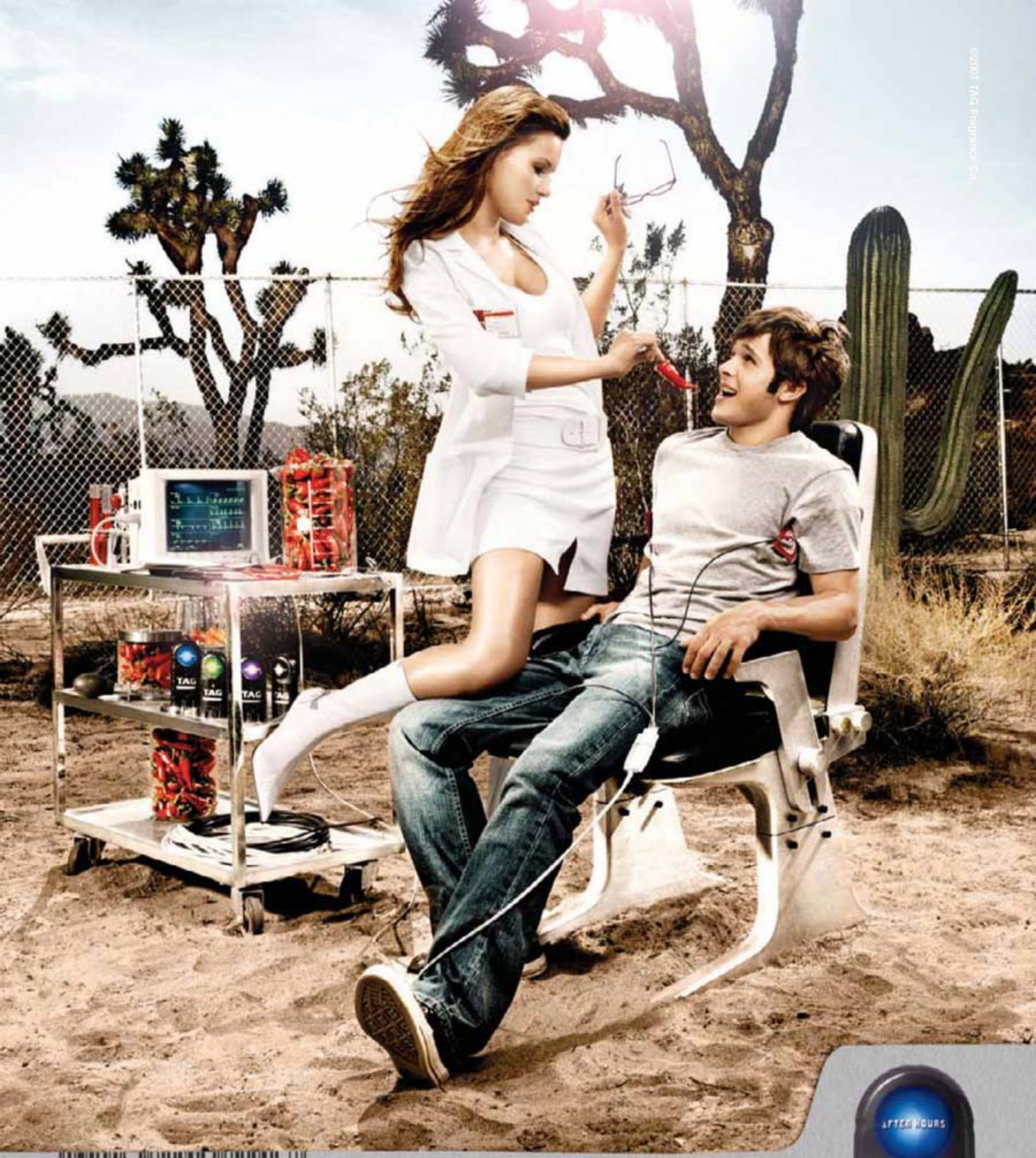
We sent the duo to a Texas shooting range armed with three custom *Halo* Spartan targets each and these rules: You only get six shots per target, you must use a semiautomatic pistol (common to nearly every game arsenal), and you can't request shooting instruction beyond safety and weapon-operation pointers. "I was very nervous at first," says Dalton about picking up her first real gun, "not only from holding it but also trying to learn everything—how to load it, how to use it safely. It's humbling to know that one mess-up could have dangerous consequences."

With 9 mm pistols in hand, the ladies got down to business—and some good ol' sibling rivalry. They unloaded their first six shots at their targets from 15 feet away, aiming for the chest. All of Dalton's bullets perforated the Spartan's torso, but only one hits dead center—not bad for her first time pulling a real trigger. Brady missed with every shot but one, which hit dead center. "I kicked my sister's ass," Dalton says. Round two played out with similar results. Dalton, aiming for the Spartan's noggin, scored two head shots and a body shot. None of Brady's six bullets struck home. For the third and final target, the ladies aimed for the green guy's "sensitive area"—a small below-the-belt zone we deemed was worth 100 points. Neither scored a groin shot, although Dalton got two thigh hits (Brady missed entirely). "Even missing the ball shot, I feel like a winner," Dalton says. "Not only did I win the rounds—I also managed to overcome a little bit of my fear regarding real guns."

Triumph over your twin is well and good, but did this seemingly natural marksman chalk up her success to all her pro gaming? "I might have thought that if not for the fact [of my sister's performance]," says Dalton. "She's equally experienced with first-person shooters and actually shot a real gun before." She adds that while playing games might help with the basic points of lining up a target and pulling the trigger, "it doesn't help with critical areas such as proper stance, holding the gun, and actually having to use [the pistol's sights]. In games, it's typically just a circle. Plus, you don't learn how to load a gun or use the safety. Where's the automatic reload? It's much easier in *Halo*."

Download your own Halo Spartan shooting-range target at **EGM.1UP.com**.

Range rovers: Twin pros Dalton and Brady shoot the s***.



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Playing Politics
By Hal Halpin

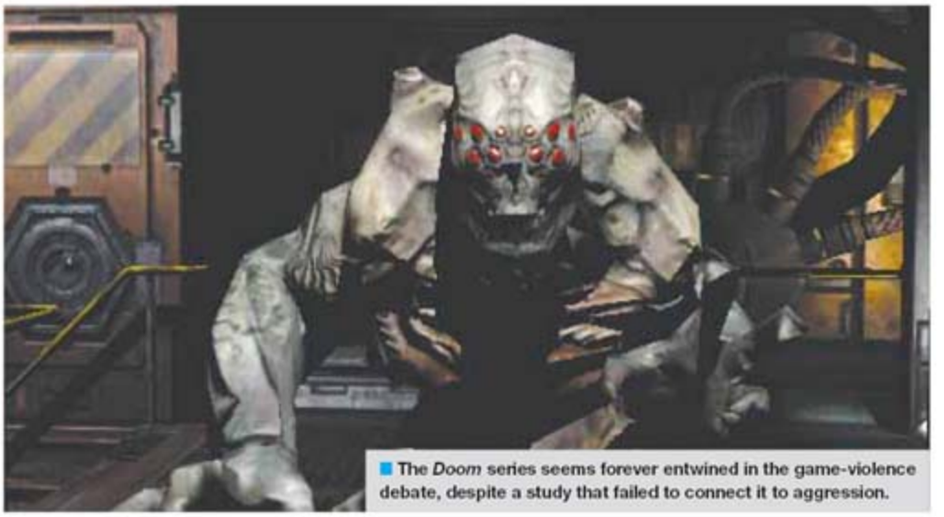
The shooting at Virginia Tech again brings to the forefront the violence-in-videogames debate. The first responders in the media were infamous anti-games attorney Jack Thompson and the always-opinionated Dr. Phil, both pontificating about how games are murder simulators, how they desensitize us from violence and clearly are to blame for this tragedy. It reminds me very much of Columbine back during the early days of the last association I ran (a retail trade organization). The mass media was looking for someone to blame. They wanted causality. What thing could drive someone to commit these acts? Back then, the answer slowly became games, unveiling itself over the course of the ensuing weeks and months despite many a responsive and naturally defensive interview by trade association representatives, myself included, at the time.

Now, we could discuss how games are this generation's rock 'n' roll, comic books, or cable television. We could talk about how there have been no long-term studies that prove playing violent games leads to violent behavior. Or we could handily pick apart their arguments citing our best single resource: the truth. The reality is that nothing will change this paradigm until and unless we affect that change ourselves. Complaining about misrepresentation over the past 10 years or so has proven an ineffective strategy. The answer: change the game.

In politics, as in life, the rules are ever-changing. By channeling our collective voices, holding up examples of who we are and what we're about, and halting the onslaught of false and defamatory definitions about who gamers are, we can, over time, reverse this problem and win the game. The one thing we must stop doing is playing by their rules. Something has to give. We can't continue to allow "them" to state perverted lies as the truth because if there's no one there to counter the point, it becomes what people believe to be the truth.

Hal Halpin is founder of the Electronic Consumers Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to watchdog gaming legislation. Join its cause at www.theeca.com.

OFF TARGET (cont.)



■ The *Doom* series seems forever entwined in the game-violence debate, despite a study that failed to connect it to aggression.

this story, later e-mailed to request that her interview not be used because of what she perceived to be an effort to "push the tired 'party line' that the research is wrong." Her colleague, Anderson, declined entirely, saying an interview would be "pointless."

But it's not just their research that's being challenged—it's the manner in which the findings are presented. "From the present body of literature, there's nothing that supports a relationship between violent videogame playing and aggression—not correlational or causal," Ferguson says. "The moral of the story is that scientists ought to be using much more measured tones in discussing what has become a political issue rather than giving in to the urge to engage in hyperbole." In other words, violent games sell—not to kids, but to the general public at large. Like Elvis in the 50s, or *Dungeons & Dragons* in the 1980s, videogames are still viewed as the dangerous scourge of youth culture. In the face of awful, inexplicable tragedies, media violence is an easy target.

Truth be told

What's lost to the game-violence critics and public is a dose of reality, not only about the truth of the results but the context. "I don't think they understand the way the media are used in daily life enough," Williams says of the researchers. "They tend to focus more on lab research and ignore long-term research. People in the psychology community are less likely to pay attention to the social context of media use." But others are. The British Board of Film Classification conducted a survey that found that "the violence helps make the play exhilaratingly out of reach of ordinary life.... Gamers seem not to lose awareness that they are playing a game and do not mistake the game for real life."

And considered in light of recent youth crime statistics, all the noise blasts don't pass the muster of common sense. In 2005, for example, just 12 percent of the videogames sold were violent enough to bear an M-rating by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board, the industry's voluntary ratings group. At the same time, youth crime is dropping precipitously. The number of kids under 17 who committed murder fell 65 percent between 1993 and 2004. "If this was affecting all kids in a bad way we'd see something," argues Dr. Cheryl Olson, professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School's Center for Mental Health and Media.

Even the surgeon general's youth-violence report, which the FCC cites in its recent findings, couldn't find a convincing link. "Taken together, findings to date suggest that media violence has a relatively small impact on violence," the surgeon general reported. And the specific inferences about game violence were even less swaying. "The overall effect size for both randomized and correlational studies was small for physical aggression and moderate for aggressive thinking...," the surgeon general found. "The impact of videogames on violent behavior has yet to be determined."

So what are we left with? A possible link between violent media and loosely defined "aggressive behavior" (noise blasts, clown-doll punching, and so on) but no evidence that playing violent games actually causes violent—let alone criminal—actions in real life. "It's time to move beyond blanket condemnations and frightening anecdotes and focus on developing targeted educational and policy interventions based on solid data," Olson suggested. "As with the entertainment of earlier generations, we may look back on today's games with nostalgia, and our grandchildren may wonder what the fuss was about."

Scientists ought to be using more measured tones in discussing...a political issue.

—Texas A&M International University's Dr. Christopher J. Ferguson

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> FAR-OUT FANS

Chalkfitti artist

Spray-painting graffiti is a crime. But drawing colorful chalk murals of videogame characters? That's just nerdy...and it's pretty damn cool, too! High school student Daniel LeBlanc and a bunch of his buddies recently constructed a chalk drawing of classic *Final Fantasy* characters on the wall of their school. The pixelated piece caught our eye, so we tracked down LeBlanc to tell us what other things he's working on.

EGM: Now that the *Final Fantasy* mural is finished, are you readying up anything new?

Daniel LeBlanc: I have another friend who wants to set up the next project. He wants to either do a *Street Fighter II*–themed one with health bars on the wall—so people can act out their own fights—or a *Tetris*-type thing with blocks coming down the wall.

EGM: Did your school care that you plastered their walls with pixel art?

DL: I didn't get approved the first time. From what I understood, there was no school that day, but it was actually a parent-teacher conference day, so all the teachers were still at school. So we ended up getting an hour's work done before they showed up and starting yelling at us. But then they were like, "Hey, this is kinda cool. You guys can finish it before you have to clean it off."

EGM: So now the teachers are down with you putting up nice, game-related graffiti on the wall?

DL: I have another friend of mine who is really good with words, so he wrote an eight-page article on why this would be good for the school. It was half BSed.

EGM: Eight-page article? Are you serious?

DL: Yeah, we wrote about grids and the history of videogames. We just [spun] it as long as we could to make them think we really planned this out.

> FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN

Ore no Shita DE AGAKE

It's raining men...in Japan

Platform: PlayStation 2

Likelihood it'll come here: A game about the devil taking lives? We can buy that. But the boy-love part? Uh, no sale.

Oh, great, another bizarro Japanese adventure game? Not just strange, though—this is possibly the cruelest "boy-love" pervo quest that you'll be likely to get through U.S. Customs. Based on a 2002 PC game (the name of which translates to "Struggle Before Me"), *Agake* stars Ichiya Kurosaki, a powerful financier who ends up croaking during a visit to his hometown. Of course, this a game, so you find out that a devil has actually taken Ichiya's life. Mean? Yeah, but at least he makes him an offer: Ruin the lives of three young men (an old friend, a guy with several part-time jobs, and an embittered office worker) to the point where they "submit" and become his slaves. And if he accomplishes that—poof!—he comes back to life.

Wow! That sounds, er, cruel. Sure, you might be using your evil demonic powers to rain down torrents of torment (natural disasters, massive loans to pay back, animal attacks—you name it, the game's got it) on your three unsuspecting targets, but Ichiya makes out with the guys when they finally "submit," so it's all good, right? Besides, this PS2 game has actually been toned down from the original PC version. Yeah, you'll still rip off the unlucky trio, but you won't witness the gratuitous man-on-man action scenes—just use your imagination. (On second thought—don't.) But even if the game's neutered, we wonder if nutjob lawyer Jack Thompson (or, for that matter, anti-homosexuality propagandist Fred Phelps) would approve?

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> PREVIEWS: EXCLUSIVE INFO

Final Fantasy TURNS 20

Celebrate with a mind-blowing 13 new FF titles...of which only 3 are Final Fantasy XIII games. Confused yet?

By Shane Bettenhausen

IN ORDER TO PROPERLY CELEBRATE 20 YEARS of *Final Fantasy*, publisher Square Enix has shifted its lucrative franchise-milking machine into overdrive—right now, the company is developing a startling 13 different *FF* titles. While that "final" moniker has never seemed more inappropriate, role-playing fans aren't necessarily complaining: This series has attained its status by delivering top-quality, genre-redefining games. Problem is, the most-anticipated new *FF* offerings—*FFXIII*, *FF Versus XIII*, and *Crisis Core FFVII*—remain distressingly out of reach. Here's the freshest intel on those big three....

Final Fantasy XIII

PS3 • 2008

What we know: It's been six long years since the minds behind *FFXIII* delivered their last proper, all-new *FF* game (*FFX*), and while the various goofball offshoots (*FFX-2*), online experiments (*FFXI*), and intriguing departures designed by other teams (*FFXII*) have dutifully kept the franchise going, it's high time for a massively ambitious return to form. *XIII* appears to have the goods: As the flagship title in the "Fabula Nova Crystallis" project, a banner uniting multiple *FFXIII* titles for various platforms, this will be the game that establishes the mythology that all games share. It's also the one that will most closely resemble series faves such as *FFVII* and *FFVIII*.

Concrete plot details remain scarce, but we know that sultry heroine Lightning (that's her on the left) will wage war between two separate worlds—Cocoon, an idyllic utopia protected by magic crystals, and Pulse, a primitive, wild realm fraught with danger. From the brief snippets of in-game combat shown, we also know that she can manipulate both time and gravity to pull off some impressive, *Matrix*-style maneuvers. And now, we're happy to report that she won't be doing this solo. "Our publicity plan dictates that we only show Lightning for now," explains *FFXIII* Director Motomu Toriyama. "But in reality, you will be battling and traversing the field maps with a full party—and you'll need these comrades, as the quantity and size of enemies will go far beyond what you've seen in previous *FF* games."

What we don't know: A solid release date isn't the only aspect of *FFXIII* that's elusive—despite Toriyama's promise of a full cast of party members, we've only caught sight of one other candidate, a tall blonde guy wearing a bandana. "He's simply a young man with big feet and a large body," Toriyama muses. "He's Lightning's opposite in many ways, so they're often in conflict...but that doesn't mean he's an enemy." A *Moonlighting*-style love-hate romance, perhaps?

Mystery shrouds *FFXIII*'s combat system as well. It will definitely be a return to the strategic, turn-based style of *FFX*, but with plenty of intriguing tweaks. "Before combat begins, you will be able to make a strategic choice that will give your characters an advantage or disadvantage in the battle," says Toriyama. We're also hearing hints that *FFXIII* may nix the series' infamously unavoidable random encounters.

Of course, the question fans really want an answer to is: "When will we finally get to play this thing?" With a Japanese release unlikely until summer 2008, the only hope for hands-on time this year would come in the form of a demo. Could it happen? "Hopefully we can finish a playable demo in the near future so that gamers can feel the next-gen difference in the gameplay," Toriyama says.

Final Fantasy Versus XIII

PS3 • 2008

What we know: This alternate take on the Fabula Nova Crystallis mythos hails from the fruitful mind of Tetsuya Nomura, the maverick designer behind *Kingdom Hearts*. His distinctive character designs (think: sharply pointed hair and zippers aplenty) galvanized the entire *FF* franchise; this project finally gives him complete creative control over an original *Final Fantasy* game. "I enjoy this freedom very much—in the beginning of the FNC project, we decided that all three games should be free from one another in terms of setting, game design, and inspiration," explains Nomura. "[FNC producer] Yoshinori Kitase was particularly worried about me, because he was convinced that among the three games, mine would be a bit more 'free' than the others... and yes, it's true!"

Unlike *FFXIII* proper, *Versus* deviates from the turn-based RPG mold. "*Versus* will be more action-oriented, with battles more like those in *Kingdom Hearts* than *FF*," says Nomura. "Additionally, I'm thinking of putting in elements from third-person shooting games." Since we've only seen a CG trailer so far, it's tough to get a handle on precisely how *Versus* will play. In the latest trailer, we see our dour, black-clad male protagonist wielding a vast assortment of magical bladed weapons and teleporting with ease—he handily bests a garrison of machine-gun-toting thugs without breaking a sweat. At the clip's climax, however, he meets his match: a shadowy cloaked figure who reaches a tense magical stalemate with our hero. Who is this mysterious rival? "Sorry, we don't want to reveal too much," says Nomura. "But I can say that it's a good representation of what the enemies in the game will be like."

What we don't know: Even though we know that they don't take place >

Hopefully we can finish a playable demo in the near future so that gamers can feel the next-gen difference in the gameplay.

—Final Fantasy XIII *Director Motomu Toriyama*

Odds are that you'll be test-driving *FFXIII*'s battles by year's end.

FF TURNS 20 (cont.)

in the same world per se, *Versus*' setting feels far removed from what we've seen of *XIII*'s colorful alien landscapes. With its busy freeways, posh luxury sedans, and gleaming skyscrapers, the locales in the *Versus* trailer look more like downtown Tokyo than a classic fantasy realm. "Reality is a very important theme to the characters of *Versus XIII*," Nomura explains. "The game's setting is inspired by how the real world is nowadays, which is quite different from the fantasy-derived and Disney worlds I've worked with."

Versus seems a long way from release (2009?), but one thing is certain—the game remains exclusive to PS3, despite the system's slow start in Japan and the U.S. "I believe that the PlayStation 3 will have a bright future, so I'm not looking to 'save the PS3' with my game," Nomura says. "My only intention is to be respectful of the bonds and ties that I have made throughout my career." >

■ *Versus XIII*'s leather-clad hero exudes ennui from his luxury car.

FANTASY OVERLOAD?

So the really killer FF games remain out of reach, but Square Enix isn't about to let Final Fantasy's 20th anniversary go by without inundating fans with a plethora of celebratory spin-offs and remakes. Here's a quick guide to the other 10 FF titles coming down the line—and whether or not you should care....

Final Fantasy Agito XIII
Mobile • 2008
Sure, this multiplayer card-based RPG looks sick (it has PS2-quality 3D visuals), but will U.S. phones even be able to run it?

Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children Complete
Blu-ray movie • 2007
The *FFVII* flick dishes up more sizzle than steak, but this revamped and expanded version looks sweeter than ever.

Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings
DS • Fall 2007
This follow-up thrusts *FFXII*'s unique characters and setting into a genre tailor made for the DS' touch panel—real-time strategy.

Final Fantasy Tactics A2
DS • Winter 2007
This *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* sequel skimps on graphics but delivers on gameplay...yet the lack of touch-panel play is odd.

Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions
PSP • Fall 2007
If you missed the PS1 original, this remixed, expanded, and newly multiplayer remake will make you a believer.

Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles—Ring of Fates
DS • Fall 2007
The lack of online Wi-Fi action hampers this four-player action romp.

Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles—The Crystal Bearers
Wii • 2008
A Wii RPG that doesn't look like it's for babies? Color us impressed.

Final Fantasy IV
DS • 2008
The first Super NES *Final Fantasy* gets the *FFIII* DS treatment, and we're not complaining—it's a true fan favorite.

Final Fantasy XI: Wings of the Goddess
PC, PS2, 360 • Fall 2007
Another expansion pack for this dusty online realm? A genuine sequel would be a better idea at this point....

Dissidia: Final Fantasy
PSP • 2008
This 3D fighter starring characters from different *FF* games could very well suck...but we're down for a Cloud vs. Zidane brawl.

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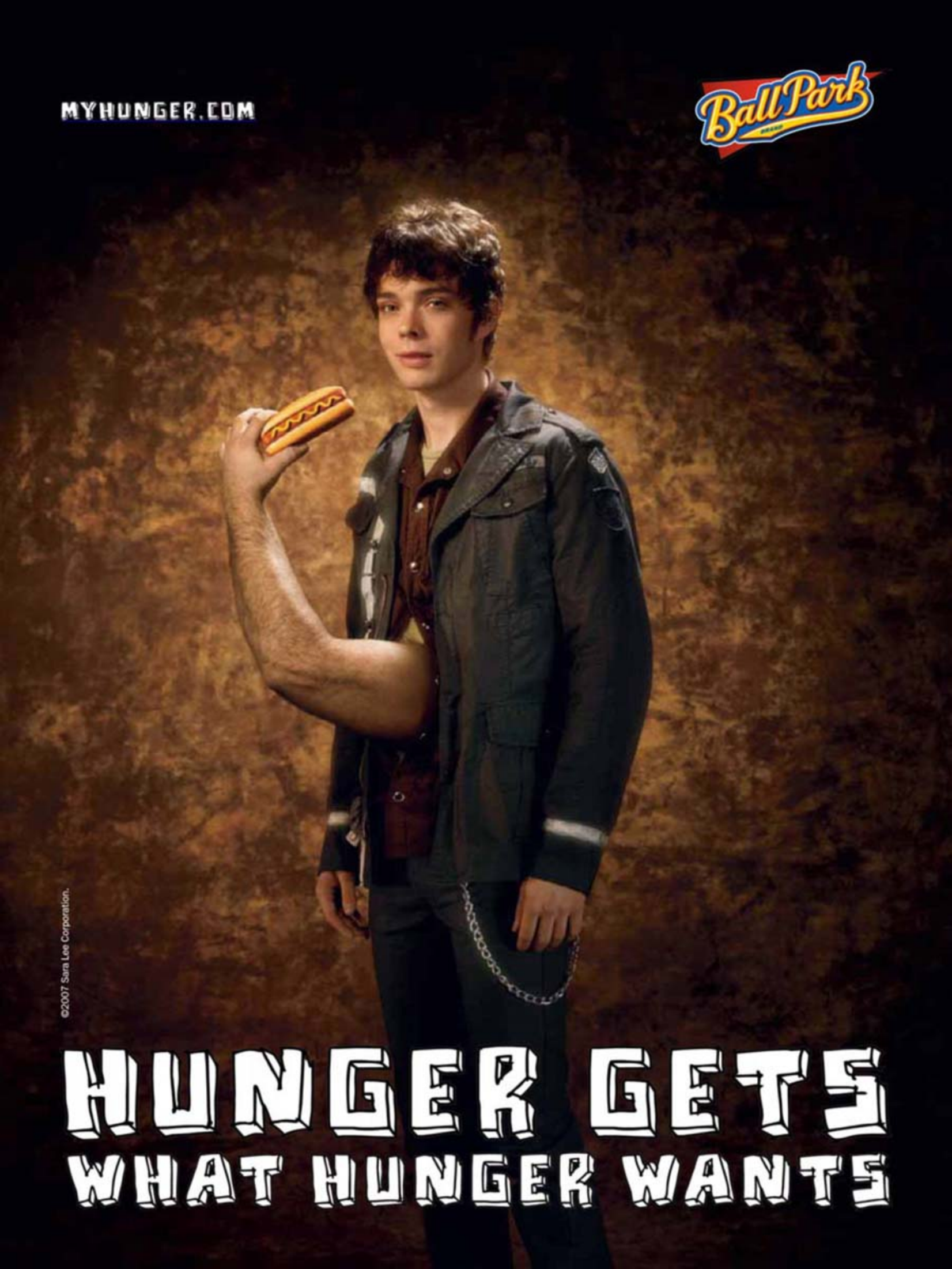
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Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII

PSP • Square Enix • 2008

What we know: Try to repress those nasty *Dirge of Cerberus* memories long enough to rekindle your excitement for all things *Final Fantasy VII*, because PSP prequel *Crisis Core* actually seems promising. And compared to those pesky, inscrutable *FFXIII* games, you actually already know a lot about this one. "*Crisis Core* tells the story of Zack from *FFVII*," explains *CC* director Hajime Tabata. "And since most players already know what happens to Zack at the end, it was a big challenge to forge an intriguing story around that." Is your memory of Zack a bit foggy? He's the black-haired SOLDIER agent whose identity Cloud assumes during the events of *Final Fantasy VII*. And since he ran in the same circles as the *FFVII* stars, this game promises to flesh out the backstories for Cloud, Aerith (Zack's one-time girlfriend!), and Sephiroth, not to mention a host of important newcomers such as fellow SOLDIER members Angeal and Genesis.

And unlike the disastrous *Dirge*, *Crisis Core* appears to do justice to the series' legacy with gorgeous visuals (traversing a fully 3D re-creation of Midgar populated with slickly redesigned, *Advent Children*–esque characters feels eerily close to the *FFVII* remake everyone wants), a powerful soundtrack, and copious amounts of spoken dialogue. Don't expect traditional turn-based battles, though: *Crisis Core* reimagines *FFVII*'s familiar combat as a simple, action-based system centered on Zack, the game's sole playable character. Here, you're still attacking, using magic, and summoning monsters with materia orbs, but everything happens in real time on the fly. The combat feels very simple and streamlined, so even though encounters pepper the exploration quite frequently, they're rather low-impact by action-RPG standards. In fact, the game will even automatically position Zack next to the nearest foe, leaving you to concentrate on reacting to your enemies.

What we don't know: Aside from a domestic release date (all that ambitious voice acting means that we won't see this until next year), *Crisis Core* holds relatively few mysteries. We know the players, we know the world, and we even know how it all ends (trust us, it ain't pretty). At this point, it's just a matter of filling in those crucial blanks.

One other question remains unanswered, however—will *Crisis Core* really be the last installment in the Compilation of *Final Fantasy VII* project? "While *CC* is the final announced title, it's not the final title," admits Tabata. "As for how to end the compilation, [Compilation of *FFVII* producers] Yoshinori Kitase and Tetsuya Nomura are currently thinking of how to correctly resolve the series." Might that correct resolution come in the form a full-fledged *FFVII* remake like the one teased as a PlayStation 3 tech demo a few years back? Hope springs eternal....

To check out a special video roundup of all upcoming Square Enix games, set your browser to EGM.1UP.com.

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> PREVIEW: HEAD-TO-HEAD

A Renewed Rivalry

We see how gridiron-giant **Madden** and comeback-kid **All-Pro Football 2K8** stack up By Bryan Intihar

IMAGINE IF A LOYAL CHICAGO BEARS FAN looked over the team's 2007 schedule, but he didn't spot a single game against their bitter rival, the Green Bay Packers. It would seem strange, right? Well, for the last two years a lot of gamers have felt that way about the football market. EA's exclusive licensing deal with the National Football League put all other pro pigskin makers, including its longtime sim adversary, 2K Sports, on the sidelines.

This season will be different, though. While *Madden NFL 08* expectedly comes out this August (for like every system known to man), 2K returns to the gridiron this July in the form of *All-Pro Football 2K8* (PS3/XB360). Will this *Madden* bring the series back to its glory days? (The last two editions were far from Super Bowl–worthy.) Can *All-Pro* compete without the luxury of the NFL teams? Let's check out each title's gameplan.

> ON THE FIELD

After two years of adding very hardcore gameplay mechanics, this *Madden* aims to make the gridiron more accessible. It seems to be working, too—the new "weapons" feature not only makes studs like the Chargers' LaDainian Tomlinson and the Ravens' Ray Lewis play quite differently from the league's schlubs, but its on-field icons make it so even the most casual football fan will instantly know their strengths. For example, the lightbulb icon under Peyton Manning tells players that he's a smart QB. And because of that attribute, if you keep running the same defense against him, Manning will start picking plays that expose that formation's weakness. You'll also notice that *08* moves a helluva lot faster and smoother (thanks to finally running at 60 frames per second), and players look much more realistic (meaning no more Popeye arms).

With no access to the real pro squads, 2K hopes to entice gamers with a legendary lineup...literally. The publisher went out and signed more than 240 retired players, including Hall of Famers such as Joe Montana, John Elway, and Jerry Rice (more later on how you build your team from this star-studded cast). And if you ask 2K, it ain't so bad being freed from the shackles of those uptight NFL execs. "This is real football," says Vice President of Sports Development Jeff Thomas, meaning you'll see things like late hits (just be careful a ref ain't around or he'll throw a flag), coaches chewing out their team, players jumping off the sidelines to talk smack, and bad weather *really* affecting gameplay (apparently, the NFL ain't too keen on kickers falling on their asses in the snow).

OFF THE FIELD

MADDEN NFL 08

The previous PS3 and Xbox 360 *Maddens* haven't exactly been feature-laden. But that's not the case in *08*. Dynasty die-hards will welcome Front Office mode, which lets you do pretty much anything, from creating your own stadium to—you guessed it—setting the price of concessions. Scouting also finally makes its debut on the new consoles, and it's received a complete overhaul from the PS2/XB days (you can now hire scouting agencies, and the longer they profile players the more accurate info you'll learn about a potential draft pick).

Customizing a team will be your first duty in *All-Pro*, but it doesn't happen how you might think. Rather than recruiting only legends, you'll be restricted to picking a total of 11 superstars (for both offense and defense) from three different talent tiers, and the rest of your team will consist of generic players. While this may seem disappointing at first, limiting the number of legends actually adds a lot of strategy and can lead to some interesting matchups. Say you've put the emphasis on the secondary, but you're playing someone who's built their squad around the running game—what will you do? Just don't expect any major offline modes outside of regular season; the developers don't feel a dynasty mode fits with this particular game (but we bet that 2K is saving the deep feature for the sequel).

ALL-PRO FOOTBALL 2K8

THE INTANGIBLES

Remember those god-awful camera angles in last year's ego-driven Superstar mode? They're gone...and replaced with ones that will actually make you enjoy playing from these position-specific perspectives. Too bad, though, the developers didn't address another major *07* complaint: the lack of online leagues. But hey—at least the Wii version is now playable across the Internets.

MADDEN NFL 08

ALL-PRO FOOTBALL 2K8

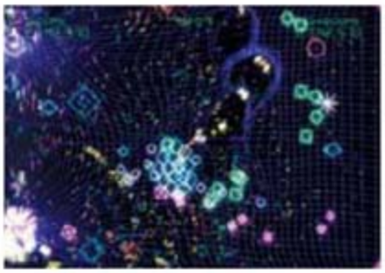
Unlike *Madden*, *All-Pro* is going all-out with its online offerings. The game will fully support Internet-based tourneys and leagues (see, EA, it can be done!) as well as 2K's phenomenal VIP system, which lets you download an opponent's profile and then practice against an A.I. team that will portray the player's tendencies on the field.

SEASON OUTLOOK

NFL GameDay, *NFL 2K*, and now *All-Pro Football*—it's frighteningly ironic that the best *Maddens* always come when they've got some serious competition. This season's game is a prime example of that trend. Yet it doesn't necessarily mean *All-Pro* can't hang with EA's big boy. While some gamers will continue to say "it's the NFL or nothing," the success of *Blitz: The League* in 2005 proves that a great-playing football game with a unique hook can attract plenty of sportos. And let's be honest: Playing alongside greatness like Walter Payton, Barry Sanders, and Dick Butkus sounds much more appealing than breakin' bones and poppin' pills like in Midway's arcadey title....

Wanna hear what Madden's *makers think of 2K's return to the gridiron? Listen to the* Sports Anomaly *podcast at* EGM.1UP.com.

> THAT'S COOL



PREPARE TO TEST your twitchy reflexes—the psychedelic block-bursting simulator, *Geometry Wars*, is taking shape on both the Nintendo Wii (above) and DS later this year.

IN A NEVER-ENDING TREND to transform videogames into films, EA announced it's making a—wait a minute—*Sims* flick? Well, at least it's better than a *Madden* movie....

***DOOM* DEVELOPER** Id is working on a spiffy new engine (and game). It says "new," but wanna make a bet it's a first-person shooter with demons?

> PLAYING FAVORITES

Gun gallery: Resident Evil 4

Survival-horror fans ought to feel right at home splattering the brains of parasite-infected crazies in *Resident Evil 4* thanks to all the killer toys available in the game. Since the weapons are so bloody fun to use, we asked the producer of the recently released *Wii Edition*, Masachika Kawata, and a random reader we solicited on our message boards to tell us which deadly tool they fancy the most.

Masachika Kawata:
My favorite weapon is the rifle. The rifle is a weapon that casts aside the old style of *Resident Evil* close combat in favor of long-distance shooting on wide-open maps, making it a great weapon for really showing off how much *Resident Evil 4* has changed the series.

***EGM* Reader David McDougall:**
I chose the knife because I wanted to be a smartass and not pick a gun. That, and how else are you supposed to open barrels without wasting precious ammo? Oh, and hand-to-hand combat is for the awesome—cowards use guns.

> TAKE THIS JOB

Machinima Director

Our monthly look at the jobs you want

By Evan Shamoon

This month: Chris Burke, director of *This Spartan Life*

Experience: Worked in the film biz for nearly 10 years, then started composing music for movies in the '80s. He moved to audio production and interactive audio in the '90s and has been producer and director of *This Spartan Life* since the end of 2004.

What's a machinima director?

"Someone who creates something cinematic using a game engine—a virtual environment," says Chris Burke, director, producer, and star of *This Spartan Life* (www.thisspartanlife.com). It's much more accessible than film or video, and it's far cheaper to make than live-action films.

Job data

Salary range: While Burke makes no money from *This Spartan Life*, he earns cash from one-off projects for clients (like the *Spike TV Video Game Awards*). "It's tough to make money from machinima," he warns. "The [intellectual property] rights get in the way."

Recommended education: Burke advises watching the Machinima 101 tutorials at www.machinima.com.

Level of demand: "Machinima is moving toward the mainstream," says Burke, who notes that companies like Pixar are creating "virtual puppetry" tools to make films.

Location of most jobs: Machinima artists have a meet in New York City, but "generally [we're] really spread out and decentralized," says Burke.

Burke's typical day

Some days he's just writing or taking long walks in the park to come up with ideas. When *This Spartan Life*—essentially a talk show set in *Halo 2*'s multiplayer arenas—is in production, however, he invites over the local crew. "We all get together here at the studio and fire up the six Xboxes running *Halo 2*," says Burke. "It's shot live, and it's kinda analogous to a TV show." They essentially "tape" from a number of different cameras. Cameras one and two are just players with their weapons dropped. "It's like doing a PBS documentary," says Burke. "You've got a couple of cameras going at all times, and then you

Photography by Seth Kushner

record to MiniDV: capturing live, editing later. The other segments—dance, comedic sketches, body count—those are more scripted."

How'd he get the gig?

In 2003, Burke was invited to perform music remixes at the New York Video Festival, where he was inspired by machinima pieces like *Warthog Jump* by Randall Glass. "It was just great, really funny conceptual work," he says. That summer, when Burke's daughter went away to camp, he started playing *Halo* with his son. They made a machinima greeting card for her from within the *Halo* engine. "And then," Burke says, "little by little, the idea for *TSL* came together."

> TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Multiple Xboxes
Burke's entire show is set in *Halo 2*. Remote guests and actors join via Xbox Live.

MiniDV camera
Burke hooks his and his "cameramen's" Xboxes into a box that splits the signals between a TV—so he can monitor the action—and a camera that records it all.

Laptop with Final Cut Pro/Pro Tools
These video- and audio-editing programs piece together the show.

Xbox Live community
"We do segments with our fans and try to be as interactive as possible," says Burke. "But since they would usually just start shooting at us during our interviews, we've had to make it invite-only."

> THE GAME OF LIVES

5 Lives: Koji Igarashi

Sure, every *Castlevania* game is basically the same: Send Dracula (back) to his deathbed. Still, series producer Koji "Iga" Igarashi always manages to whip up an addicting adventure. Making games may be easy for him, but the stakes are high for our five questions—let's see if he (via his translator) can survive....

1. Who is the hottest *Castlevania* chick?
A) Maria **C) The Succubus**
B) Charlotte **D) Flying Medusa head**

Koji Igarashi: The hottest? I'd go with the Succubus, because Charlotte and Maria are both scary.

EGM: Incorrect. It's the flying Medusa head.

KI: But she doesn't have a body!

Lives remaining:

2. Based on this official character art, name this *Castlevania* character.

KI: Is that Sypha [*Castlevania III*]? She's a girl! I could only tell that from her clothing.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

3. If you had to play a *Castlevania* game all the way through, which one would be the worst to suffer through?

KI: *Castlevania Legends* for Game Boy. I hate Sonia Belmont—she has the worst whipping animation ever.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

4. We're stuck in *Simon's Quest* (NES). How do we get to the Bodley Mansion?

KI: Was it something about finding a red or blue crystal? This is hard—I don't remember!

EGM: Incorrect. You have to kneel by the cliff with the crystal equipped and a whirlwind will pick you up and take you to the manor.

Lives remaining:

5. Last question: "What is a man?"

KI: Ah, that's Dracula's line from *Symphony of the Night*.

EGM: What's the next line? What *is* a man?

KI: In Japanese, it's a completely different line. A better line. I, uh, don't speak English.

EGM: OK, the translation sucks—we'll spot ya this one.

Lives remaining:

Game Over: Good job, Iga—we knew we could count on you to do well.

> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

Army of TWO

EA's masked men follow a simple motto: be aggressive

By Sam Kennedy

Platforms: PS3/XB360

Publisher: EA Games

Developer: EA Montreal

Release Date: Winter 2007

ASIDE FROM A FEW CORNY

Internet videos, the stars of EA's third-person shooter have been pretty much MIA since last summer. *Army of Two* showed so much promise back then that we even awarded it the top slot in our "Top 50 Coolest New Games" feature for original titles (*EGM* #206). And who could argue, thanks to the game's brainy A.I., gorgeous graphics, and truly innovative co-op mechanics (tossing ammo to each other, counting down sniper shots, shoving tampons into your buddy's wounds, etc.).

So what have Tyson Rios and Elliot Salem been up to? Training, naturally.

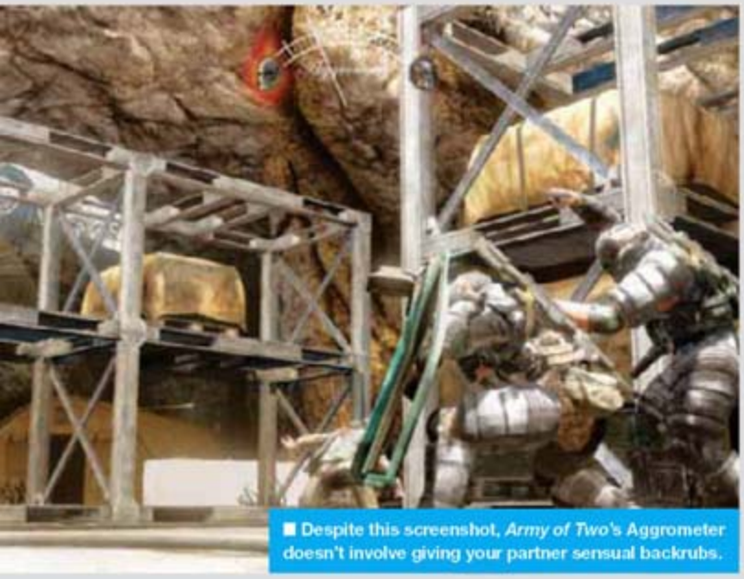
Seeing red

We recently caught up with *Army of Two*'s mercenaries during a routine exercise and received an exclusive look at a profound change to their gameplay: the Aggrometer. Sitting at the top of your screen, this gauge indicates the level of aggressiveness of your character. And provided the developers pull it off, this feature has the potential to make other co-op games feel almost dull by comparison.

Obviously, this meter displays which character has more Aggro at any given time, something that's also indicated by a red hue on the character with more Aggro and a slight transparency on the character with less. As you play, it's a constant back-and-forth in terms of where the meter rests, but this is used for far more than just bragging rights (the kill count in the corner of your screen takes good care of that). Aggro actually comes into play in almost every aspect of a mission. On the surface, it's a way to power up your character—if the meter tilts all the way in favor of your character, it's possible to go into a special mode that speeds you up and slows down enemies—but it also offers strategic benefits. As a character gets more Aggro, enemies will start focusing more on him. This then allows for the other player to have a tactical advantage. Some enemies, for instance, wear armor plating and are only vulnerable from behind, so one player must hold their attention while the other circles around for the kill.

Choose your firearms wisely

Weapons—and, more importantly, how you customize them—also affect how quickly you acquire Aggro. For example, adding a suppressor will



■ Despite this screenshot, *Army of Two*'s Aggrometer doesn't involve giving your partner sensual backrubs.

actually lower your Aggro. This adds another neat twist to weapon selection: Not only do you want to customize weapons for their destructive abilities, but you'll want to consider how they affect the Aggro between you and your partner. If one player can build Aggro much faster than the other, it could throw off the balance of the gameplay. For some players, though, this may actually be OK, as one might want to act as the aggressor (because, ya know, your gaming compadre has no skills).

How does it feel?

The more we played *Army of Two*, the more this whole Aggro concept grew on us. It's a fresh idea, and one that fits perfectly with the co-op focus of the game; it essentially forces you to work as a team, yet it also offers a fun new dynamic to the gameplay. After a few minutes, it became completely second nature. This leaves us pretty excited about how *Army of Two* is shaping up. It's attempting to hit the sweet spot between the instant playability of a game like *Gears of War* and the tactical nature of *Ghost Recon*. And from what we played so far, it seems to be a success.

One last thing: A lot of the game's accidental homoerotic undertones that initially caused folks to giggle have been greatly toned down. But not that there's anything wrong with that....

For some more screens and exclusive gameplay videos of Army of Two, *set your Internet browser to* EGM.1UP.com.

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Distilling the Internet's best game-related clips since, what, like six or seven months ago? See 'em all at GameVideos.com/EGM.

ZOMG: Uncharted: Drake's Fortune
First footage of *Jak & Daxter* developer Naughty Dog's PS3 game *Uncharted*. It's like *Indiana Jones* slept with *Tomb Raider* and *Gears of War*!

LOL: Dog Plays Wii Tennis
With Wii-mote duct-taped to paw, the family dog takes all comers at *Wii Tennis* and *Boxing*. "He just called you out, man!"

PWN: Team Fortress 2
Two great clips: a studio visit with new footage, and Valve's own hilarious Heavy Weapons Guy trailer.

1337: Mega Manniversary: Keiji Inafune
1UP's four-part interview with *Mega Man* creator Keiji Inafune. Which *Mega Man* games does he hate? All the ones he didn't make.

> ONLINE SCENE

Numbers game

Stacking up the services By Michael Donahoe

Now that the three major consoles are all online, playing downloadable games is a cinch. But deciding who has the best line-up? Not so easy. So let this chart (current as of May 22) help you decide.

	Virtual Console	Xbox Live Arcade	PlayStation Network
Total number of Games	93	63	27
Number of original games	0	16	5
Number of coin-op classics	24	25	8
Total cost of the network's library	$622	$470	$173
Best game	*The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*	*Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*	*Calling All Cars*
Worst game	*Urban Champion*	*Totem Ball*	*Super Rub-a-Dub*
Best multiplayer game	*Mario Kart 64*	*Worms*	*Calling All Cars*
Game that will make your mom happy	*Pac-Man*	*Bejeweled 2*	*Go! Sudoku*
Game that will make your mom cry	*Ninja Gaiden*	*Doom*	*Mortal Kombat 2*
Oldest game	*Super Mario Bros., Pinball, Excitebike, Ice Climber, Tennis,* and *Baseball*	*Pac-Man*	*Q*Bert*
Number of free games made by interns	0	1 (*Aegis Wing*)	0
Number of games you can also play on your phone	13	22	3

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Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

> AFTERTHOUGHTS

Odin SPHERE

The flat facts about the PS2's 2D titan

By Michael Donahoe

While it's obvious that fairy tales and folklore heavily influenced *Odin Sphere*'s distinct art style, Kamitani also cites *Tom and Jerry* and Disney's *Snow White* as inspirations.

THE PLAYSTATION 3 MAY BE PIMPING THE POWER OF THE ALMIGHTY CELL PROCESSOR, but the PlayStation 2 is ironically still packing a pretty punch thanks to developer Vanillaware's gorgeous 2D action-role-playing game *Odin Sphere*. The out-of-nowhere hit wowed us so much last month—even winning our coveted Game of the Month award—that we spoke with Vanillaware President (and artist for the game) George Kamitani to get the skinny on this sexy game.

EGM: So be honest with us: Do you hate polygons or something?

George Kamitani: I love 3D games. I created some models for the characters in *Fantasy Earth* [a Japanese massively multiplayer online game], and I'd like to return to that type of work again in the future after I've polished my character-making skills. And of course we'll continue to make the ultimate 2D game!

EGM: Was it ever your intention to create a game that proved 2D is not dead...just on life support?

GK: We never entertained such an outrageous thought. [*Laughs*] We just created what we wanted to create. But it would be nice to see more 2D games come out in the future.

EGM: As a preventive breath-holding measure for us 2D nerds, tell us: Do you have any plans to work on the PlayStation 3 or the Xbox 360?

GK: We'll a make game on any console, as long as we have an offer from someone to do it. In fact, it would be wonderful to have complete freedom to create a game on one of those platforms.

EGM: So one boss practically slaughters the game with slow-down. Were you aware of this glaring problem?

GK: Because the animation designer made the [Queen of the Dead] so detailed, it ended up becoming too heavy for the console to handle. We tried our best to improve the performance during the limited time we had. However, we regret that the end result wasn't what we had originally hoped for.

EGM: Planting and growing food in the game is oddly awesome. What made you come up with it?

GK: We wanted to create a game that encourages players to think strategically. I also wanted to draw plants and animals in the game for my own personal reasons. [*Laughs*]

EGM: Would it be OK for a vegetarian to eat from a Baromett plant [which grows sheep]? We can't decide if those sheep actually count as meat or not.

GK: That's a difficult question. [*Laughs*] Baromett, the mysterious plant that grows sheep, actually came from a 17th-century document. In that document, the plant is called "Scythian Lamb," and was eaten by wolves, so it must've been good meat. Personally, I would recommend the Mandragoras [various vegetable-based plants] for all you vegetarians out there. [*Laughs*]

EGM: And, uh, why exactly did you decide to put this in your game?

GK: I have always wanted to use the idea of a Scythian Lamb in a videogame in some form, so my dream finally came true.

> **I always wanted to use the idea of a Scythian Lamb in a videogame.**

—Vanillaware President George Kamitani

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PSP

PlayStation Portable

> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

SOCOM: CONFRONTATION

Classified intelligence on Sony's online-only shooter

By Joe Rybicki

Platform: PS3
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment America
Developer: Slant Six
Release Date: November 2007

Subject: *SOCOM: Confrontation*
Identifying characteristics: Electronically distributed via PlayStation Store; online-only multiplayer gameplay
Informant: Seth Luisi, Sony CEA senior producer
For further details, reference visual recon shown here.

> LOCATION

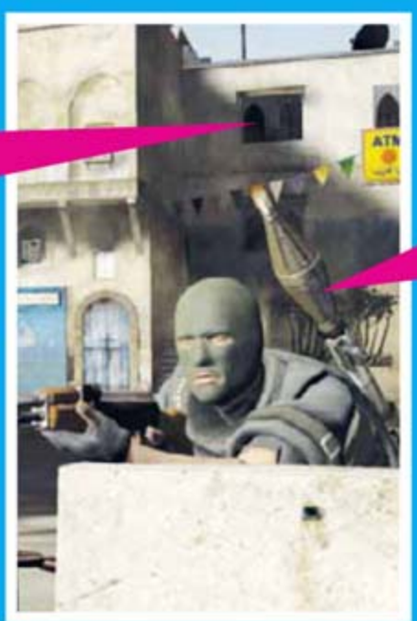
Initial recon indicates subject is returning to previous areas of operation. "Crossroads is by far the fan favorite," Luisi says, "so we definitely wanted to show what this level would look like in the next generation. We're trying to maintain a smaller size; the largest level in this game is going to be smaller than anything we had in *SOCOM 3*. And so while we are going to expand Crossroads out a bit, it's not going to be this huge, expansive area. All the other maps we're going to ship initially with the game are all going to be new."

> EXPANSION

Subject is expected to expand sphere of influence over time. "We wanted to have meaningful content packs that'll be available postrelease that aren't just new maps, but in many ways kind of a mini-expansion pack," Luisi reveals. "You get new weapons, special forces...and even features that are going to change and evolve the gameplay as it goes on. And we're looking at having them themed after different areas. The initial release is the North African theme, and we're looking at bringing in new environments."

> COMPLEXITY

Subject is showing signs of increased guerrilla activity; expect dense resistance and close-quarters combat. Luisi cites "intimate" locations. "Instead of spreading 32 players over this huge area with vehicles," he says, "we want to have a tighter interaction between the players. There's still going to be plenty of cover in the environments—it's not going to be a fragfest—but you're going to have a much different experience. You're going to want to look around every corner and be very careful about how you move through the environment, because it's not going to be as spread out as it was."



> RECRUITMENT

Recon indicates subject is engaging in energetic recruitment, enlisting community participation through material incentives. "We'll have ways of unlocking equipment and customization options by participating in team tournaments and clan ladders," Luisi says. "If you start winning, you're going to get rewards like different weapons and items. We even plan on having some higher-end tournaments that'll have a very specific reward for the person who wins that tournament. You'll be able to get things that set you apart from other people [and show] you've achieved a certain level of success in the game. It's about bragging rights."

> COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Informant cites "more interaction" with regard to physical surroundings, indicating potentially dangerous elements in the environment that must be taken into account (e.g., exploding barrels). "There will be destructible elements to the environments," Luisi says. "We have to be careful so that people can't just blow up any area, because we've spent so much time on the design and the flow of the environment that it's hard for us to allow somebody to just blow up random pieces of it. But we definitely plan on having objects that can be destroyed or moved. So the way you interact with the environment is going to be a lot more complex."

> TRANSPORTATION

In deference to "intimate" locations, subject has disabled vehicular transport. "For the initial release, vehicles are out," Luisi says. "We are looking at possibly bringing them back later on with downloadable updates, but initially, we want to focus on the on-foot combat, making that as visceral as possible."

> CUSTOMIZATION

Informant reveals subject is emphasizing adaptability in personal appearance, potentially resulting in increased difficulty in identifying hostiles. "We are going to focus more on what identifies your character," he says, "like camo, clothing, and some of the gear options. Being able to customize your uniform is a huge part of your identity. It plays a little bit into the strategy of how well you're concealed in the environment, as well."

> IDENTIFICATION

Subject appears to be encouraging community members to establish group identities. While this may make groups easier to target, expect further difficulty in distinguishing hostiles from friendlies. "As a clan leader," says Luisi, "you can go in and customize the camo pattern—including its density and color—and the base uniform structure. Then the members of the clan can go in and further customize objects on their characters and further customize their look. The idea is that they will look like their own special force. So the same way you see these guys out there in the different special forces—each one looks different but you can tell they're one team? That's what we want to go for."

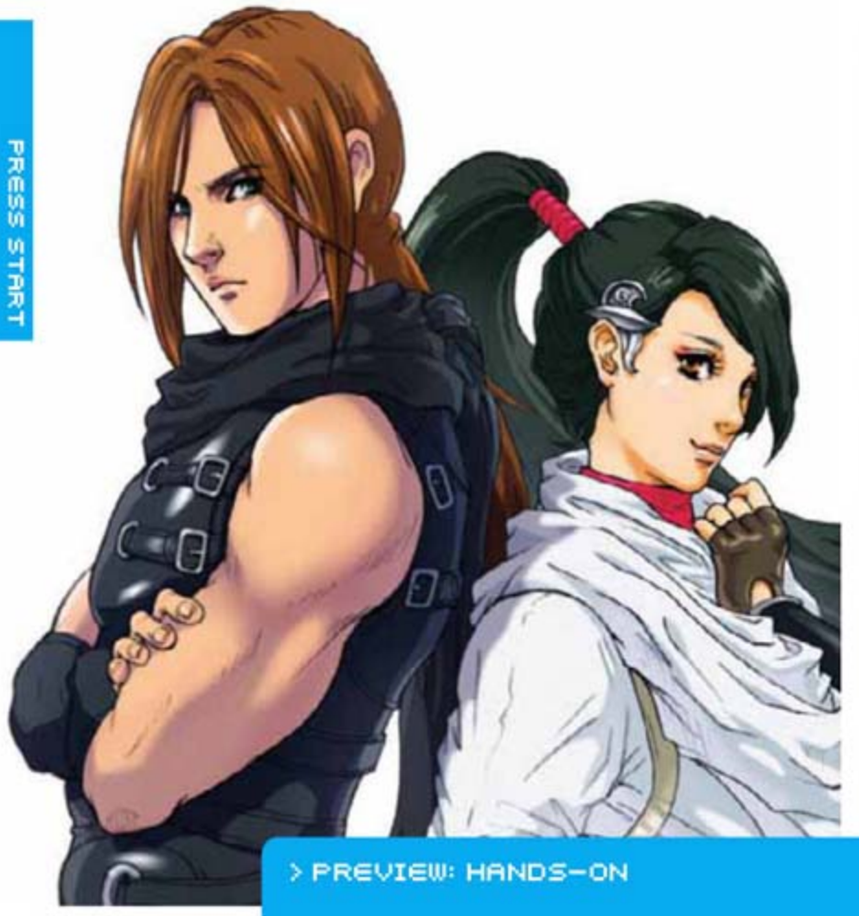
> ACOUSTICS

Subject appears to be emphasizing audio reconnaissance to an unprecedented degree. "The audio system...is going to be highly detailed," says Luisi. "It uses occlusion, so if somebody's fighting around a corner, you can hear it, and it *sounds* as if they're fighting around a corner. The audio will follow paths through the environment. So if you're running around, you're going to be making noise, and it'll be a lot easier to find somebody."

> EXPOSURE

Subject is expected to employ environmental dynamics to assist in locating individuals. "We have a lot of interesting things involving interactivity with the environment," Luisi says. "Like when you're shooting your weapon, you're ejecting shells from your weapon—those bounce off the environment, they roll down hills, and you can walk around and kick them and they'll make noise. So you'll need to be careful."

Wanna see this Internet-based SOCOM *in action? Check out the videos at* **EGM.1UP.com**



> PREVIEW: HANDS-ON

Ninja Gaiden: DRAGON SWORD

Team Ninja's hardcore DS debut

By Shane Bettenhausen

Platform: DS

Publisher: Tecmo

Developer: Team Ninja

Release Date: Fall 2007

SURE, THE DS HAS ROPED IN PLENTY OF NONTRADITIONAL USERS with its paradigm-busting fare (who knew mathematics and puppy-petting were such compelling concepts?), but core gamers might feel a bit bored by all this low-impact gaming. Luckily, Team Ninja's outspoken honcho, Tomonobu Itagaki, has the cure for your nongame blues: He's crafting his first-ever DS title, an all-new chapter in the *Ninja Gaiden* franchise. But can the genre's most complex and rewarding adventure possibly survive the transition from home console to handheld? After slashing our way through an early version, we're inclined to believe.

Dragon Sword offers an all-new adventure for hero Ryu Hayabusa that fills in the gaps between the end of the first Xbox *Gaiden* and its upcoming, yet-to-be-revealed Xbox 360 sequel. Plot details remain sketchy, but Ryu's definitely hooking up with a mysterious new female ninja and doing battle against sexy Greater Fiends such as Alma. But you honestly don't come to *Gaiden* for its story—here, it's all about the gameplay. And despite a shift from full 3D environments to a classic *Resident Evil*-like blend of prerendered backdrops and fixed camera angles, that legendary *Ninja Gaiden* gameplay remains miraculously intact.

What's more, the game manages to duplicate its console cousin's depth without using conventional inputs: blocking is now the only maneuver performed by pressing buttons. Every other motion—including running, jumping, and busting out frenzied, multihit sword combos—results from stylus strokes on the touch panel. You guide Ryu's movement by tracing the path before him, jump by double-tapping, toss shuriken with a single tap, and unleash all manner of razor-sharp swordplay with vertical and horizontal slashes. You'll also use Ryu's touch-panel-activated Ninpo magic spells to combat foes and solve puzzles.

The learning curve isn't nearly as rough as you'd expect, and the new control setup works startlingly well: You expect a level of abstraction and detachment from your character, but in reality, you feel as if you have complete, direct control. Combat feels just as smooth, responsive, and artful as you'd expect from the series.

Returning fans will surely dig the refined action gameplay, but what of the millions of DS gamers weaned on simpler fare? "If the game is appealing, then people will be willing to learn to play it," Itagaki explains. "A problem that a lot of developers have is that they think, 'DS is for light users, so we'll make our game easier, or we'll put a big tutorial in.' But that's just the appetizer—if the main course is no good, then people won't want to sit through the meal."

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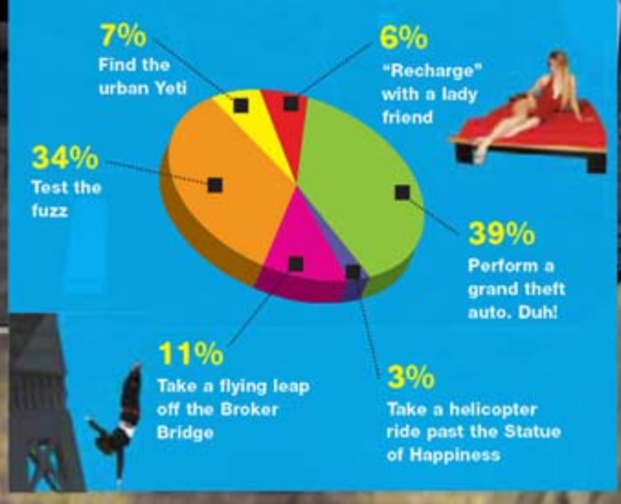
THE BIG ONES

Nuggets of news on your most anticipated titles

Grand Theft Auto IV

PS3/XB360 • Rockstar • October 2007

They call the Big Apple the city that never sleeps. And since we're confident Liberty City (*GTA4*'s take on the famous metropolis) will be just as lively, we polled *EGM* readers on what their first move will be in Rockstar's bustling virtual playground.



■ We looked just as displeased after hearing about the goodies in the *GTA4* collector's edition. C'mon, a duffel bag?!

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

PS3 • Konami • Fall 2007/Spring 2008

See that change to the release date? Yep, it's looking more and more likely that this huge PS3 exclusive will miss the holiday shopping season, as Konami stated in a financial report that *MGS4* would arrive on store shelves before March 31, 2008 (the end of the company's fiscal year). As if that weren't a big enough sign, several major retailers (which sometimes get the early heads-up on software schedules) are now reporting a post-2007 launch for this stealth-espionage title.

Super Mario Galaxy

Wii • Nintendo • Fall 2007

While the Wii continues to sell like crazy, its software lineup hasn't exactly wowed the critics (enough of the PS2, GC, PSP, *and* DS ports, please). The latter part of '07 will have at least three big guns, though—Nintendo of America prez Reggie Fils-Aime confirmed that *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* is set for August, while *Super Mario Galaxy* and *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* (check out pg. 66 for new details) would be available by the end of the year. And for all you DS owners, Fils-Aime announced an '07 release for *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass* as well.

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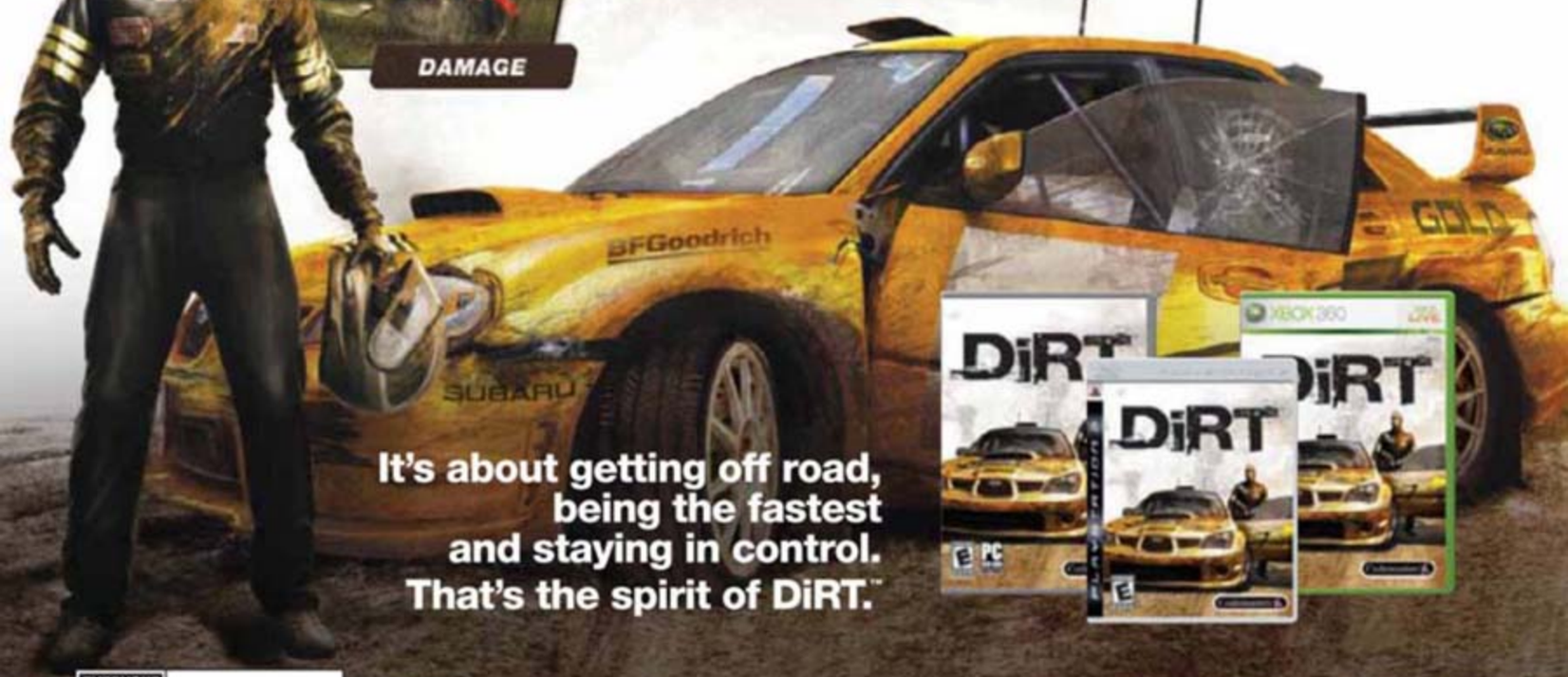

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> FEATURE: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

Ax to GRIND

Newcomer **Rock Band** brings the noise

By Crispin Boyer and Jennifer Tsao

Rock Band will come to PS3 and Xbox 360 this fall, published by MTV Games and developed by Harmonix. Also this fall, *Guitar Hero III* hits PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, and PS2. It's published by Activision and developed by Neversoft.

RIGHT ON CUE—at least if VH1's *Behind the Music* is anything to go by—the hottest "band" in gaming had its own break-up story. Just in time for its third "album," *Guitar Hero* developer Harmonix broke from RedOctane, the game's publisher and guitar-peripheral maker. Activision had snatched up RedOctane, while MTV bought Harmonix. The two companies, once partners in rock, were now at odds.

Axl Rose and Slash can relate.

"We were the band; they were the record label," Harmonix Producer Daniel Sussman says of his company's former collaboration with RedOctane. "We did all the software development, all the design work." (Not everyone sees it this way—read our sidebar on *Guitar Hero III*.) And now that Harmonix—a studio already famed for its music games (*Frequency*, *Amplitude*, and *Karaoke Revolution*) before the breakthrough success of the first two *Guitar Hero* titles—is divorced from the top-selling music franchise it helped create, it's working on what could be its biggest hit ever, a game that goes way beyond *Guitar Hero*. *Rock Band* is, as Senior Producer Tracy Rosenthal-Newsom puts it, "the game we always wanted to make."

That game incorporates everything *Guitar Hero* had to offer—playing on a miniature guitar controller with simplified note patterns—but it ratchets the rock-band experience right up to 11. Now, you can be the singer. You can play bass. You can even be the drummer. It's really five games in one: solo guitar, solo bass, solo vocals, solo drum, or playing together in a two-, three-, or four-player band. With new peripherals designed for each of these parts, *Rock Band*'s complete experience has the potential to leave *Guitar Hero*'s single-instrument game seeming like nothing but a warm-up gig. "[*Rock Band*] really simulates the physicality and sensation of playing in a band," says Rosenthal-Newsom. "For years, there was a mission [at Harmonix] to make a game that allowed nonmusicians to feel like they were rock stars, and that's what we're able to do now."

Harmonix certainly has the chops to make it happen, and an anonymous source who played *Rock Band* confirms that the game, like *Guitar Hero* before it, does rock. It has a natural learning curve, with familiar gameplay built on conventions established in earlier Harmonix titles. The guitar uses the color-coded notes and five buttons, and the singing has a pitch monitor similar to *Karaoke Revolution*'s. But the real innovation is in the drums. The controller (which EBgames.com lists as a separate peripheral for $79.99—Harmonix won't confirm) is >

■ Harmonix hasn't ruled out reusing *Guitar Hero* songs for *Rock Band* (shown here). So if you're itching to sing "Surrender," it could happen—most likely as a downloadable track.

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a sleek and sturdy drum kit, with four color-coded pads and a bass drum complete with kick pedal. Our source says that the setup is so realistic, gamers could conceivably learn to play drums from the game—and that *Rock Band* will offer drum lessons.

It's one thing to promise intensely realistic four-player jamming that works well in your living room or online (*Rock Band* will offer complete online competitive and collaborative play—no word on recordable performances or videos à la PS3's *SingStar*). It's quite another to deliver manageable four-player splitscreen or lag-free virtual vocals. Rosenthal-Newsom isn't worried. "We know how to do [online]," she says. "We've been testing it, and it's going to be a great experience." She also has no concerns about onscreen clutter. "We spend an enormous amount of time working on our interface to make sure it's really clear, and that you're getting that buzz you get from performing live," she says. "Making all our music games in the past has taught us a lot about what players need to be successful and what they need to feel amazing. In *Rock Band*, we're taking it to a new place."

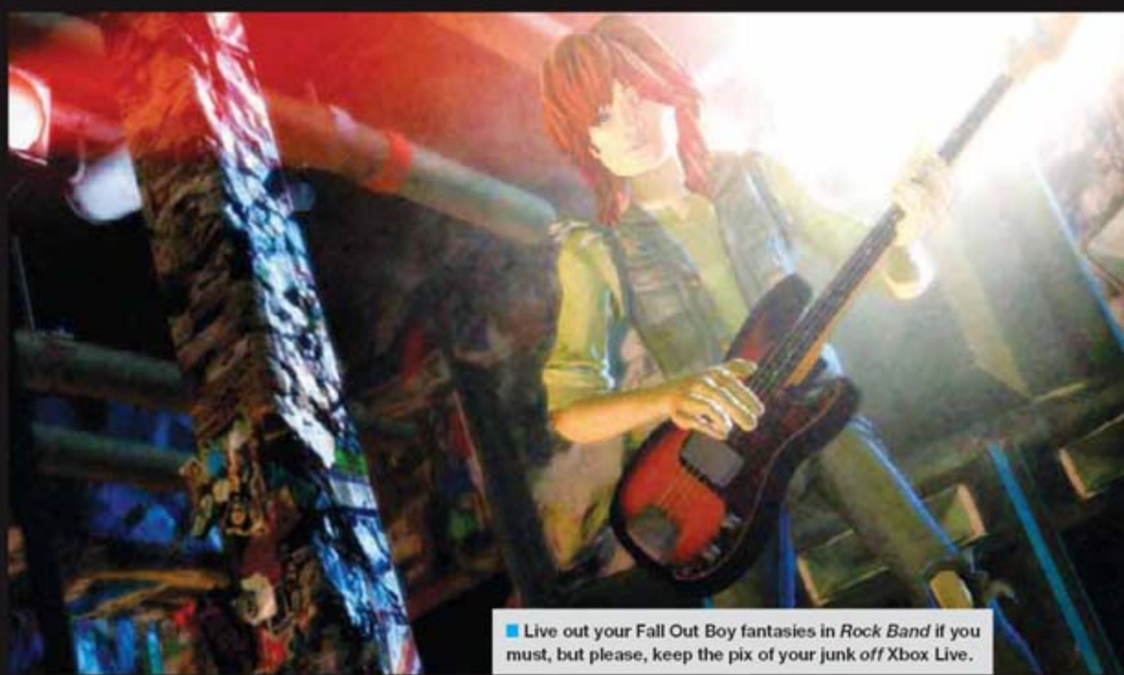
But with any music game, how it plays, how it looks, and all the fancy controllers in the world can't compete with the music. All the team will say so far is that the game will offer all different styles and genres, including classic rock, punk, metal, and pop. With licensing support from MTV, they have unprecedented access to master recordings for the songs, so the game will have more original versions than ever. The team is also committed to extending *Rock Band*'s stay on the hit parade through downloadable tracks.

Who will win the battle of the bands? The folks at Harmonix have a sportsmanlike attitude: "We've never had the opportunity to have competition in the marketplace. We're excited that there's going to be more than just our game representing our genre," says Daniel Sussman. But it's impossible to say there's not a hint of rivalry with his former bandmates: "The people working on the next-gen *Guitar Hero* have their work cut out for them," he says. "I'm really curious to see what they do." Hey, at least he's more diplomatic than Axl.

Listen to the EGM *editors pick their faves to win the Battle of the Bands on the* EGM Live *podcast, available for download at* EGM.1UP.com.

> JUDY NAILS, EAT YOUR HEART OUT

In doing away with the prefab rocker personas that *Guitar Hero* made famous, *Rock Band* will give gamers a new way to fulfill their music-star dreams. With the game's customizable character creation system, players will be able to craft their own personal superstars, choosing every detail from body type and gender to hairstyle and wardrobe. This might add an extra creative aspect to online multiplayer—bands could strive to become known as much for their fashion sense as their ability to play.



Live out your Fall Out Boy fantasies in *Rock Band* if you must, but please, keep the pix of your junk *off* Xbox Live.

HALFPIPE TO HEAVEN?

With the series switching to a developer famous for things that roll, will the next Guitar Hero still rock?

Doing a preview on *Rock Band* without mentioning progenitor *Guitar Hero* is like profiling Ozzy without invoking Black Sabbath. That's why, up until a week before press time, we planned this story as a battle-of-the-bands piece, in which we'd compare aspects of both games and chart their diverging paths. Then the execs in charge of the *Guitar Hero* series threatened to pull out at the last minute unless we gave their game its own preview with no comparisons or references made to *Rock Band*. We refused. The execs made good on their threat.

But even without their help, we know a good deal about *Guitar Hero III*, which hits the PS2, PS3, Xbox 360, and Wii this fall. Since Harmonix owns the patents for the *Guitar Hero* series' game engine, publisher Activision enlisted *Tony Hawk* developer Neversoft to take over design duties for *Guitar Hero III*. It was a worrying move. Harmonix, which had several key music titles to its credit well before *Rock Band*, is the most experienced rhythm-game developer in North America. *Guitar Hero III* will be Neversoft's first music game.

From what we've seen of *GH3*, it looks like Neversoft has taken the safe route, sticking with one instrument and virtually duplicating the series' scrolling-note, color-coded gameplay and rock meter. We don't know how the game plays yet, but it's a given that RedOctane will do everything to ensure *GH3* feels like its predecessors. (Anonymous sources involved with the series bristle when RedOctane's role in the creation of the *Guitar Hero* games is downplayed to just guitar-peripheral development; RedOctane shared just as much of the creative vision, the sources claim.)

As with *Rock Band*, *GH3* will pack an unprecedented number of master tracks rather than song covers, and Activision has already announced serious hits, from Weezer's "My Name Is Jonas" to the Beastie Boys' "Sabotage" to KISS' "Rock and Roll All Nite." Your old guitars will work with *GH3*, while RedOctane is readying new wireless axes—complete with customizable faceplates—to launch with the game. Neversoft is adding a new multiplayer battle mode and online head-to-head play, while career mode will see boss battles, a first for the series.

But we have to wonder what the game's new engine means for downloadable content. Will *GH1* and 2 songs, coded for Harmonix' original software, be incompatible with Neversoft's code and thus off-limits as downloadable content? It's one of many questions we still have about *GH3*. We plan to answer them all when we preview the game on our own terms in a coming issue.

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> SURVEY SAYS

Master CENSUS

Breaking down the Halo 3 beta

The *Halo 3* beta taught us one thing: Waiting for the full game sucks. But at least getting a sneak peek of the multiplayer reminded us that the wait will be worth it. And we're not the only ones who feel that way—scope our Internet survey results to see what you thought.

Have you played the *Halo 3* multiplayer beta?

Yes	**82%**
No	18%

Favorite dual-wieldable weapon:

Brute Spiker	**74%**
SMG	18%
Plasma Rifle	5%
Plasma Pistol	3%

Favorite single-wield, rifle-class weapon:

Assault Rifle	**29%**
Battle Rifle	19%
Covenant Carbine	17%
Shotgun	13%
Needler	11%
Sniper Rifle	10%
Beam Rifle	1%

Favorite heavy weapon:

Spartan Laser	**52%**
Machine-Gun Turret	19%
Rocket Launcher	14%
Brute Shot	12%
Missile Pod	3%

Favorite equipment:

Bubble Shield	**56%**
Power Drainer	18%
Trip Mine	14%
Grav-Lift	12%

Favorite map:

High Ground	**54%**
Valhalla	33%
Snowbound	13%

Favorite mode:

Slayer	**50%**
Capture the Flag	19%
VIP	11%
Territories	8%
Assault	4%
King of the Hill	4%
Oddball	3%
Land Grab	1%

Favorite new feature:

Sharing videos	**31%**
Spike Grenades	21%
Shield Doors	16%
Man Cannon	14%
Mongoose	14%
Service Tags	4%

Were you impressed by the graphics?

Yes	**72%**
No	28%

What do you miss the most from *Halo 2* that's not in the official beta?

Energy Sword	**29%**
Scorpion	21%
Player icons on the battlefield	19%
Magnum	10%
Overshield	10%
Wraith	6%
Old weapon strengths/balances	5%

Worst way to die:

Stupid teammate	**60%**
Spartan Laser shot	16%
Sniper headshot	11%
Vehicular splat	5%
Bop atop the head	4%
Plasma/Spike Grenade stick	4%

Are you more or less stoked for *Halo 3* after playing the multiplayer beta?

More	**89%**
Less	11%

> BETA BREAKER

Note to developer Bungie: If you plan on releasing a beta, don't include stuff you don't want found. Hackers wasted little time tapping into the files, discovering a slew of new weapons (like a Flamethrower and Plasma Turret), vehicles (Pelican, Chopper) and game modes (Infection, which supposedly involves the Flood). But it was the reference to four-player online co-op that got us pumped. Bungie won't confirm what was found, but they also aren't denying it, either....

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RUMOR MILL

Curing the rumor fever By Quartermann

Later this year you'll likely be slapping your knee to both *The Simpsons* movie and its obligatory tie-in game. Well, if you remember (Issue #215 if you don't), I spilled the slushie on the fact that this parody platformer will make fun of different game genres.

WHOA, THIS SUMMER MIGHT NOT SUCK. This must be a trap. Usually around this time we're wading through a sea of wonky games, but now we're slowly getting to chow on some meaty titles before the fall feast later this year. And better yet, I've dug up mountains of dirt thanks to all the recent publisher shindigs. Sure, the big gossip will still come out at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), but I think y'all are going to like this month's scuttlebutt.

Infectious parasite

OK, OK, we know publisher Square Enix is not too shy about shamelessly exploiting its money-printing *Final Fantasy* franchise. But it also wants to pimp its other properties, too...unfortunately, only on systems we don't give a s*** about. Example: The third game in the horror role-playing series *Parasite Eve* is coming to cell phones (ugh!). Makes you sick, eh? Well, I may have a cure—I hear **another *Parasite Eve* is in the works** and, yes, it's on a console.

Unreal alliance

Though Sony boasts that the PS3's hearty insides make its games look snazzier, none of 'em have been as impressive as developer Epic's *Gears of War* on the 360. It doesn't help that Unreal Engine 3 (which runs *GOW*) doesn't work all that well on the PS3. Of course, that may change—I caught wind that **Sony is sizing up Epic for a nice money hat to make the Unreal Engine 3 work better on the PS3**. But more importantly, it plans to fund a *Gears of War*–like exclusive game.

Switching gears

We all know *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima is hard at work making *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* for the PS3. But do you think he has time to work on anything else? You want to say "yes," don't you? Of course you do. Well, you might be right—my Konami mole informs me developer **Kojima Productions is working on another PS3 exclusive**. *Zone of the Enders 3*? Ha, you wish!

Casual change

OK, the Wii is winning the console war right now—no need to argue that one. But Sony may have a sneaky plan up its sleeve. I'm hearing it will **repackage the PlayStation 2 to compete with Nintendo by including a Wii Remote–like waggle wand for $99 this holiday season**. Now let's just hope they don't call it "Pii."

> Q-TIPS

- *Rock Band* is already tuning up to be a big hit. But in case you didn't know that, I hear famed real rock band AC/DC will help promote the game.
- Capcom seems pretty keen about only creating exclusive games for the 360, but my spies say it is actually working on a PS3 exclusive. Take that, Microsoft!
- Here's a *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* nugget for you: I discovered the game will use the popular physics engine Havok (used in games like *Crackdown*).

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COMING SOON

August's arrivals

Blazing Angels: Secret Missions of WWII

PS3/XB360 • Ubisoft

Given the first *Blazing Angels*' tepid reception, your initial inclination may be to skip the sequel. But reenlisting in this war may not be such a bad thing, thanks to a complete overhaul of the mission structure—no doubt to take advantage of the team-based combat. Also, some new dogfighting locales (such as canyons and mountain passes) expand on the best part of the original.

Boogie

Wii • EA Games

Time to finally throw out that VHS collection of *Star Search*—EA is prepping wannabe pop stars in a whole new way. Dancing, singing (via a packed-in microphone peripheral), and starring in custom-tailored videos are all part of *Boogie*. Just don't start crying when the neighbors call the cops, thinking you've been drowning cats.

Medal of Honor: Airborne

PS3/XB360 • EA Games

EA looks to restore its *Honor* by heading to the skies. As a paratrooper, you scout the battlefield from above before dropping into the lion's den. What's cool is that you decide where the action starts based on where you land...and you decide whether that's a big enough hook to revisit this franchise for the umpteenth time.

Stuntman: Ignition

PS3/XB360/PS2 • THQ

If at first you don't succeed, just give it to someone else. That's the case with *Stuntman*, which now has a new publisher and developer behind its wheel, aiming to get things back on track. For starters, *Ignition* isn't as infuriatingly difficult as the original. We're down for that, as well as online multiplayer, where you'll compete in modes such as Destruction Derby and Trick Contest.

More August Releases

BioShock
XB360 • 2K Games

Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War
PS3/XB360 • Koei

Blue Dragon
XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios

Dead Head Fred
PSP • D3Publisher

Jeanne d'Arc
PSP • Sony Computer Entertainment America

Madden NFL 08
Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/XB/PSP/DS • EA Sports

Mega Man Star Force: Dragon/Leo/Pegasus
DS • Capcom

Namco Museum DS
DS • Namco Bandai

Silent Hill: Origins
PSP • Konami

Space Station Tycoon
Wii • Namco Bandai

Warhawk
PS3 • Sony CEA

Warhawk

IF THE GOVERNMENT HAS ITS WAY, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO PLAY HALF THE GAMES IN THIS MAGAZINE.

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SOUL SURVIVORS

Gaming's most revered fighting franchise returns with two ambitious new installments

By Shane Bettenhausen

HAVING SPENT THE PREVIOUS EVENING listening to outspoken *Dead or Alive* creator Tomonobu Itagaki gloomily talk trash about rivals *Tekken 5* ("prehistoric") and *Virtua Fighter 5* ("slow"), we arrive at Namco Bandai's Yokohama office expecting the worst from a *Soul Calibur III* sequel. The hardcore fighting-game scene has become increasingly cutthroat, niche, and resistant to change in recent years, leaving the days of crowd-pleasing, genre-advancing hits like *Soul Calibur* (Dreamcast) a distant memory. But the affable, thoughtful developers we encounter aren't nearly so jaded—and they quickly remind us of why nearly all fighting game fans still harbor love for *Soul Calibur*. The franchise has always delivered ornate visuals, intriguing characters (running the gamut from sexy Greek goddess to handicapped gimp), and deep gameplay...but this time, an ambitious spark of creativity has reignited the developers' passion for the projects. That's right—there are two *Calibur*s in the works—*Soulcalibur IV* (yes, it's apparently written as one word now) for PS3 and Xbox 360, and *Soulcalibur Legends* for Wii.

Of these two, *SC4* easily takes prominence. When it ships in 2008, this sequel will face lofty expectations—it must rectify the wrongs committed by its predecessor (the distressingly unbalanced PS2-exclusive *Soul Calibur III*) while continuing to evolve the franchise. Fortunately,

with the renewed multiplatform stance, a focus on gameplay balance, and the long-overdue inclusion of online play, *SC4* could be the dream sequel that delivers everything fans crave. *Legends* (previewed on page 64), in comparison, casually hopes to extend the *Calibur* brand to the adventure genre. Seems like a neat idea...until you look at the tragic previous attempts by other fighting games (*Tekken*'s forgettable *Death by Degrees*, anyone?). But let's remain optimistic—it's an exciting time for fans of this killer series, so dust off your cow-skull codpiece and prepare to return to the stage of history....

Ivy— Who said that thin was in?

SC4: For graphics whores

Of course it's not all about the graphics, but who are we kidding here—ever since *Soul Calibur* exploded onto the Dreamcast with its even-better-than-arcade looks, the franchise has reigned as a visual powerhouse. "With *Soulcalibur*, we focus on creating a game that's visually appealing on such a level that other games can't really compete," says *SC4* Lead Programmer Masaaki Hoshino. The game's appearance backs up that prideful statement—*Calibur*'s beauty stems from a combination of technical artistry and a distinct aesthetic sensibility that anchors the game firmly in a fantastical age of exploration. Yet by the time of *SC3*, the game's graphical ambitions sometimes overwhelmed the aging PS2 hardware. Luckily, slowdown won't be an issue with *SC4*. Bear in mind the version that we played is still very early, but, as you can see from these work-in-progress screens, it already exhibits an impressive amount of detail. And, since it truly matters to the hardcore crowd, rest assured that *SC4* will run at a smooth 'n' speedy clip (60 frames per second confirmed).

With *Soulcalibur*, we focus on creating a game that's visually appealing on such a level that other games can't really compete.

—Soulcalibur IV *Lead Programmer Masaaki Hoshino*

The first character we get our hands on happens to be Ivy (pictured above), the punky dominatrix with the snaking whip-sword. "Ivy really stands out," jokes *SC4* Director Katsutoshi Sasaki, as her mammoth, undulating breasts threaten to spill out her leather bustier. "We've paid a lot of attention to the character designs to take advantage of the high specs of the next-gen platforms." He's not kidding—Ivy looks stunningly detailed, from her in-your-face flesh fest to her intricately detailed armor. Sasaki kindly points out another landmark achievement in *Calibur* costume technology: The leather straps on Ivy's thighs make real-time indentations into her skin as she fights. Now that's progress.

Next, we ogle ridiculously endowed ninja gal Taki, who demonstrates what happens now that consoles can churn out superfluous polygons to render realistic nipples under a skintight leotard. After that, the return of hula hoop–wielding Cirque du Soleil reject Tira seems like a nonevent...until she reveals a sexed-up new style. "This look reflects her split personality," Sasaki says. "This time, she's a bit more evil, and that really comes out in her character." Also coming out: Tira's impressively animated undercleavage. It wasn't only about the ladies, of course—we also laid our eyes on Siegfried (that's him donning cool crystalline armor on page 54) and Nightmare (surprisingly no longer in need of a midsection).

As iconic as *Calibur*'s cast might be, the games' lavishly detailed stages provide the true eye candy. Past games have always offered memorable environments, and *Soulcalibur IV* updates many of those familiar motifs, but in a far more realistic style. Of the unfinished arenas we fought in, one

SOUL CALL

Familiar faces and new challengers await

So, let's review who's back to kick ass in *SC4*: Ivy, Taki, Tira, Siegfried, Mitsurugi, Yoshimitsu, and Nightmare. As of now, that's the only confirmed roster. "Of course, we had to bring the most popular characters back," says *SC4* Director Katsutoshi Sasaki. "We can't say much about the rest of the cast yet...but we don't want to let anyone down." This, coming from a man who admits that Lizardman ranks as his favorite character, translates to, "Don't worry, your freak of choice is still in the game."

Tantalizing as they may be, Ivy and Taki's ample bosoms couldn't keep us from noticing the distressing lack of new characters. Back when *Soul Calibur III* was first announced (in *EGM* #191), three new faces were revealed— Zasalamel, Tira, and Setsuka (shown here from left to right). This time, the team has opted to keep the rookies under wraps until closer to release. For a franchise that once introduced 10 new fighters between installments, this comes as a surprise. Sasaki divulges little info about the new castmates, saying only that "one of the newcomers will be designed with beginners in mind." (It's not a bad strategy; it worked for Sega—the newbie-friendly cast additions to *Virtua Fighter 5* helped to rope in new players.) Sasaki's other hint about the new warriors isn't any less vague: "*Soulcalibur* is a very international experience with a 16th-century setting, so try to consider possible countries of origin for new characters."

Also, don't count out the possibility of "guest characters," such as the console-exclusive cameos from Heihachi, Link, and Spawn in *SC2*. We've heard that some phenomenally popular saber-rattlers from a major film series may be joining the cast...stay tuned to 1UP.com for the exclusive reveal.

■ *Soulcalibur IV* ups the visual ante with highly detailed costumes...but we had an awfully tough time keeping our eyes off Ivy's jiggly tush.

stands out as the most gorgeous—an ethereal, sun-drenched temple (with an overhead terrace that casts a latticework silhouette across the battlefield) that surely hints at the return of Greek sisters Sophitia and Cassandra. As good as the environment looks, the final version should vastly exceed what you're seeing here. "We're pleased with some of the fine details that we're able to add to the stage, but it's still rough and early," Sasaki says. "We haven't yet added effects like HDR lighting, flare lighting, and tone mapping, so the overall look of the stage will be quite different as the game nears completion."

Ring-outs on the way out?

These revamped stages aren't simply receiving graphical overhauls—some feature entirely new gameplay elements. Remember Zasalamel's clock tower from *SC3*? It's back, but with an unexpected twist: A delightful merry-go-round now circles the arena. "If your character bumps into one of these carousel animals, it will be destroyed," Sasaki explains. "So you can bounce back into the stage and avoid being ringed-out." He promises we'll find plenty of other interactive elements peppered throughout the levels. Some obvious candidates for interactivity we saw include a wildlife-packed seashore (complete with a not-yet-extinct dodo bird) and a creepy circus tent.

Beyond their snazzy new look and interactive bits, *SC4*'s stages still feel a bit different. "In *SC3*, the stages were more closed," Sasaki says. "But now we've opened them up a bit." Several of the areas we spied offered one or two walls, plus plenty of floor space to utilize for evasive maneuvers. "One way that it's

Nightmare— Good luck pulling this off, cosplayers

OFFICIALLY BUSTED

Soul Calibur III...not so balanced, huh?

Around the *EGM* offices, we play a helluva lot of *Soul Calibur III*...so we're all aware of just how unbalanced some of its combatants can be. Given how much pride (and foolishly wagered cash) has been squandered, we decided to ask the guys behind the game to own up to its faults. Shockingly, they did! "When we created characters for the home version of *SC3*, we worried most about whether the character was fun to play, so we decided that it's OK for all characters to be stronger," says Game Director Daishi Odashima. "Since it's a home game and not the arcade, you don't lose money every time you play...and perhaps Sophitia and Xianghua benefitted a little more than the others."

Of course, we had to bring the most popular characters back...we wouldn't want to let anyone down.

—Soulcalibur IV *Director Katsutoshi Sasaki*

■ *Soulcalibur*'s beloved Guard Impact—a pinpoint-timing defensive parry that all characters can perform—will definitely be back.

changed is that, now, you'll have to focus on specific areas where players can fall off," says Game Director Daishi Odashima. "Perhaps this will lead to fewer ring-outs overall." This comes as good news to noble-hearted players who prefer to win by an old-fashioned KO...and forces cheesy Astaroth players to strategize on how to best hurl opponents overboard.

A delicate balance

Like its predecessor, *Soulcalibur IV* will debut on home consoles without the benefit of an arcade forerunner. While that seems like great news for eager console gamers, it's not without risk—just as with *SC3*, no coin-op version could once again mean serious character-balance issues. Arcade fighting games generally receive multiple revisions after players discover exploits, bugs, and overpowered moves, so the eventual home port has all those kinks ironed out. The *SC4* team promises that this won't be a repeat of *SC3*'s disastrously buggy state (which actually got fixed for the later coin-op release). How? "First off, we're starting with the arcade *SC3* balance as a base that we can improve and expand upon," Odashima says. "We're confident that we can produce a game that everyone is happy with." What if they still manage to let a few mistakes slip through the cracks...will they address them through a download? "Of course, it's technically possible to patch it," Sasaki says. "But since we're selling a packaged game at retail, we don't intend to make a game that needs to be patched at a later date."

Other than a renewed promise for character balance, the team doesn't seem prepared to dive into any specifics regarding gameplay. When asked if any of this game's returning fighters will see massive arsenal overhauls (like Ivy and Taki did in *SC3*), Sasaki counters with, "At this point, we can't say much about whether we'll drastically change any characters' move sets." Even our hands-on experience yields little concrete info, since the characters currently have their *SC3* maneuvers in place. Still, expect some major additions. "We're going to greatly improve many elements of the existing gameplay," Sasaki says. "We have some specific changes in mind for the Guard Break mechanic." We're all for beefing up *SC4*'s already complex defense systems: Guard Impact parries, Guard Break staggers, and fake-out move cancels. "We also plan to change the health gauge: Normally, if you deplete your opponent's health you win the match," says Sasaki. "Now there's a new gameplay element that will let you win that doesn't involve the health gauge [or ring-outs]." Hmm...disarms, perhaps? Weapon breaks? Sasaki instructed us to look for hints in the screenshots as to what he could be talking about, but your guess is as good as ours....

As long as they're adding new features, how 'bout cribbing *Tekken Tag Tournament*'s well-received tag matches? "We have considered adding tag play in the past," admits Sasaki. "It won't make it into *SC4*, but we do have something new planned that players will be very pleased with."

Soul to soul

Improved visuals and tweaked gameplay don't really come as surprises in this sword-wielding sequel, but one factor does—online play. While competitors such as *Dead or Alive* and *Mortal Kombat* entered the network fray a few years back, *Calibur* has remained strictly offline until now. But with *Soulcalibur IV*, the time is finally right for Namco Bandai to make the long-awaited leap. "What's changed this time around is that the next-gen platforms have network infrastructure already in place," says Sasaki. "We've heard from fans that they really want the game to be online, so we figured that, with the current environment, we really couldn't make *SC4* without online play."

Since *SC4* remains more than a year from release, the >

Taki— Seriously, she looks like a balloon animal

SINGLE-PLAYER

With this series, it's often just as much fun to play with yourself...

Ever since the original *Soul Blade* (PS1) shocked fans with its deep Edge Master mode, fans have come to expect *Soulcalibur* games to deliver meaty, rewarding single-player experiences. Of course, you'll get an all-new quest mode in which you amass unique weapons and face foes under specific conditions—that's a given. But you can also look forward to another all-new solo diversion. Don't look for a retread of *SC3*'s divisive real-time strategy offering, though. "The Chronicles of the Sword mode will not be returning," says Sasaki. "We feel that it was finished in *SC3* and we were happy with the results, and it gave us a base to build on for the new mode that we're going to implement in *SC4*."

■ *SC3*'s Chronicles of the Sword mode

A TALE OF TWO SWORDS

Soulcalibur IV's storyline promises to finally answer some questions

Throughout its history, the *Soulcalibur* franchise has consistently offered one of the deepest, most engaging narratives in the genre—each character (even the silly ones like Lizardman) sports a complex story arc that spans several games. Generally, one of the game's endings becomes the canonical history from which the next one springs, but *SC4* has other plans. "Actually, it's difficult to say who 'won' *SC3*, as each character's ending is the official storyline of *SC3*," says Sasaki. "We're still considering many options for *SC4*'s plot, but I can reveal that it involves the king who actually created Soulcalibur. We will go into more detail about the creation of the blades, and players will have a deeper understanding of the origins of the weapons."

The current owners of those two magical blades take center stage. "Nightmare and Siegfried play key roles in the story this time," Sasaki explains. "Both characters have absorbed the power of their blades, Soulcalibur [left] and Soul Edge [right], so they've amassed a considerable amount of power." Since both swordsmen represent the absolute light and dark sides of humanity, their eventual face-off seems like a predestined turning point for the overall *Calibur* plot. "Throughout the series, Soul Edge and Soulcalibur have had their power contained, and the balance between good and evil has constantly swung back and forth," says Sasaki. "By the end of this story, the outcome of that conflict will be clearer."

We figured that, with the current environment, we really couldn't make *Soulcalibur IV* without online play.

—Katsutoshi Sasaki

SC4 director Sasaki claims that the health meters hint at an all-new gameplay mechanic. What could those colored orbs symbolize?

team isn't ready to share details about the full network experience just yet. "We definitely want to allow users to fight with their customized characters during online play," says Sasaki. "But we're unsure whether or not you'll be able to trade characters with friends."

The wait commences

While unanswered questions still abound, it's clear that the *Soulcalibur* franchise remains safe under the watchful eye of dedicated development teams. Fans soured by the previous installment should feel secure in their anticipation of *SC4*... it appears to be fully worth the wait. "The *Calibur* team always tries to put out something that's better than the last project," says Sasaki. "These new consoles have so many abilities, so it's hard to rein in our ambitions and get it done in time." Despite the fact that these guys obviously have their hands full, we're still greedy enough to ask for the only thing missing from this *Calibur* renaissance—a souped-up PSP port of *SC3*. "We're happy to hear that players would like to see *Soulcalibur* on PSP," says Sasaki, "so we'll keep that in mind." >

Hit up **EGM.1UP.com** *for copious* SC4 *extras, including a trailer, video interviews, and new character revelations.*

Tira— Modestly endowed, yet highly flexible

■ Players who complained about *SC3*'s tiny, often easy-to-fall-out-of arenas will dig the sequel's more open environments.

We've paid a lot of attention to the character designs to take advantage of the high specs of the next-gen platforms.

—Katsutoshi Sasaki

CUSTOM CHARACTERS

As hot as the game's cast might be, we're guessing that you can do even better

Create-a-Soul mode easily ranks as the most compelling addition to *Soul Calibur III*, and it's receiving even more attention in *SC4*. "The character-creation aspect was something that we felt was very well received in *SC3*," says Sasaki. "So we really wanted to power that up in *SC4*." While it once again threatens to exacerbate the game's balance issues, the ability to forge your own unique character (complete with an array of fighting styles and weapons that aren't even available to the standard cast) gives creative players an amazing new outlet for their sick imaginations. Plus, the easy-to-use interface allows even novice players to model a convincing Michael Jackson doppelgänger to out-freak Voldo in the ring. We can't wait to see what fashion faux pas will be possible with the slick new graphics engine.

"We're really putting a lot of effort into this mode," says Odashima. "It's been greatly enhanced with a lot of new options, like the ability to change the character's voice, plenty of new appearance options to play with, and the fact that the different parts you choose will have actual effects on gameplay." As mentioned earlier, the team is also experimenting with the idea of letting players trade custom characters online, along with the possibility of online contests for the best-looking homegrown fighters. One final note for potential PS3 players who were crestfallen when they couldn't bring their *VF5* custom characters over to their buddy's house—Namco Bandai claims that they'll do their best to allow such a feature in *SC4*.

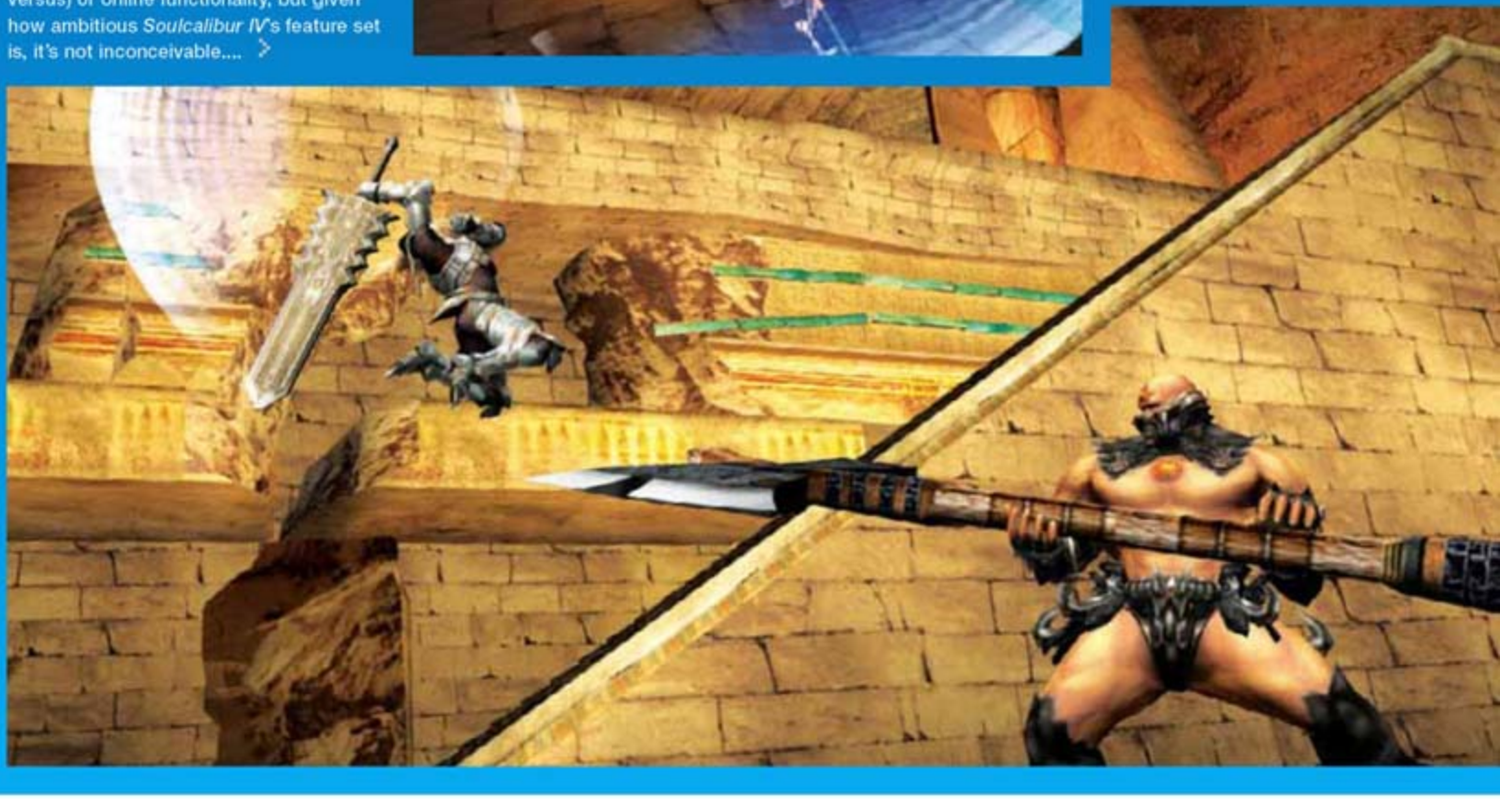
■ Just how flexible was *SC3*'s character-creation mode? Scope these spectacular warriors designed by Japanese player Pusai.

SOULCALIBUR LEGENDS

The stage of history evolves into a bold new genre on the Nintendo Wii

While the true *Soulcalibur* sequel prepares to strike the PS3 and Xbox 360, an all-new 3D action-adventure called *Soulcalibur Legends* will also make its way to Wii in 2008. Although the two titles hail from different development teams, *Legends* isn't just some random offshoot—it's a true piece of the *Calibur* mythos that hopes to further flesh out the franchise's story, characters, and world. "*Legends* follows the journey of Siegfried as he encounters familiar foes, new enemies, and monsters from all over the world," says Director Jin Okubo. "But you will also have the opportunity to play as multiple characters from the series." Concrete plot details remain sketchy, but expect the game to take place between the first and second games in the series (*Soul Blade* and *Soul Calibur*), possibly revealing hitherto unknown bits of various characters' origin stories.

Transplanting the *Soulcalibur* gameplay to a new genre (not to mention a waggle-wand) could prove to be tricky business—need we remind you of the tragedy of failed *Mortal Kombat* spin-offs *Mythologies* and *Special Forces*? So far, *Legends* sounds promising, though. "We took the essence of the *Soulcalibur* series' fighting system and evolved it, taking it to the next level where players can physically perform dynamic movements," says Okubo. "A player's movement is synchronized with the in-game sword via the Wii Remote and Nunchuk, and combinations and special attacks can be executed by performing various orchestrated movements with both controllers." The developers remain coy regarding the possible inclusion of multiplayer (either co-op or versus) or online functionality, but given how ambitious *Soulcalibur IV*'s feature set is, it's not inconceivable....



■ While *Legends*' visuals can't exactly stack up to those of *Soulcalibur IV*, these graphics still look far better than the majority of Wii titles.

BEST OF THE REST

Soulcalibur IV won't be the only game on the horizon that'll sear your fighting soul

Tekken 6

PS3 • Namco Bandai • Late 2007/Spring 2008

While the number of third-party exclusives is dropping faster than Lindsay Lohan after a couple of drinks, we hear Namco is keeping the *Tekken* series a one-console fighter. As expected, this King of the Iron Fist Tournament will send out invites to new pugilists, including the bullfighter Miguel, the astrologer Zafira, and the tomboy Leo. The developers are promising larger (and much more interactive) stages, plus customizing your character's get-up ain't just for show anymore. For instance, we've seen the pulverizing puncher Bryan Fury modified with a shotgun strapped to his back, which he can fire to get an additional hit during a juggle. Sounds interesting, but how about prettying up those graphics? These screens (taken from the arcade version) look a li'l PS2-ish to us....

Online play ? | Customizable fighters ✓ | Adventure mode ? | Guest stars ☐

Super Smash Bros. Brawl

Wii • Nintendo • Fall 2007

Nintendo's iconic cast may look cute and cuddly, but watch out—someone like Princess Peach can knock the piss outta Mario. This third installment in the *Smash Bros.* series steps it up in every way, as *Brawl* features a host of new characters (such as Pit from *Kid Icarus*, Wario, and *Metal Gear*'s Solid Snake), power-ups, and ever-changing stages. Even the audio is receiving a major upgrade, with more than 35 of the industry's top musicians—which includes such talent as Yasunori Mitsuda (*Chrono Trigger*), Yoko Shimomura (*Kingdom Hearts*), and Yuzo Koshiro (*ActRaiser*)—working on the game's soundtrack. But it's the promise of online play that's really got us itching to step into *Brawl*'s arena (the developer's promise of not overdoing the Wii-mote wigglin' and wagglin' also helps).

Online play ✓ | Customizable fighters ☐ | Adventure mode ? | Guest stars ✓

■ Just wait till you see what Shun can do after drink No. 5.

Virtua Fighter 5

XB360 • Sega • Fall 2007

As if the PS3 version of Sega's beautiful fighter (a "Game of the Month" recipient in *EGM*) weren't technical enough, this edition gets even more hardcore. Xbox 360 owners will be treated to brainier A.I. foes (who were already quite smart), a expanded Dojo mode so you practice advance moves like counterattacks and throw escapes, and a revamped VF.TV mode that allows you to upload videos of your matches to Xbox Live. It's a bummer, though, that the game's slight delay (it was originally scheduled to ship this summer) didn't involve Sega adding the one feature we all really desire: Internet-based brawls.

Online play	☐	Customizable fighters	✓	Adventure mode	☐	Guest stars	☐

Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix

PlayStation Network/Xbox Live Arcade • Capcom • Fall 2007

After awhile, even the great ones could use a nip here and a tuck there. Hence the reason for *Turbo HD Remix*, a graphically updated version of Capcom's classic *Street Fighter* title. Udon Comics, the publisher behind the current funny books, is redoing all of the game's art so Ryu, Ken, and the other 16 pugilists look super-snazzy in 1080p HD resolution. Still, this one is more than just a face-lift; online will be a big part of *Turbo HD Remix*, with versus bouts, worldwide leaderboards, and full-stat tracking. And don't forget—this game is only available via the PlayStation Store and Xbox Live Marketplace.

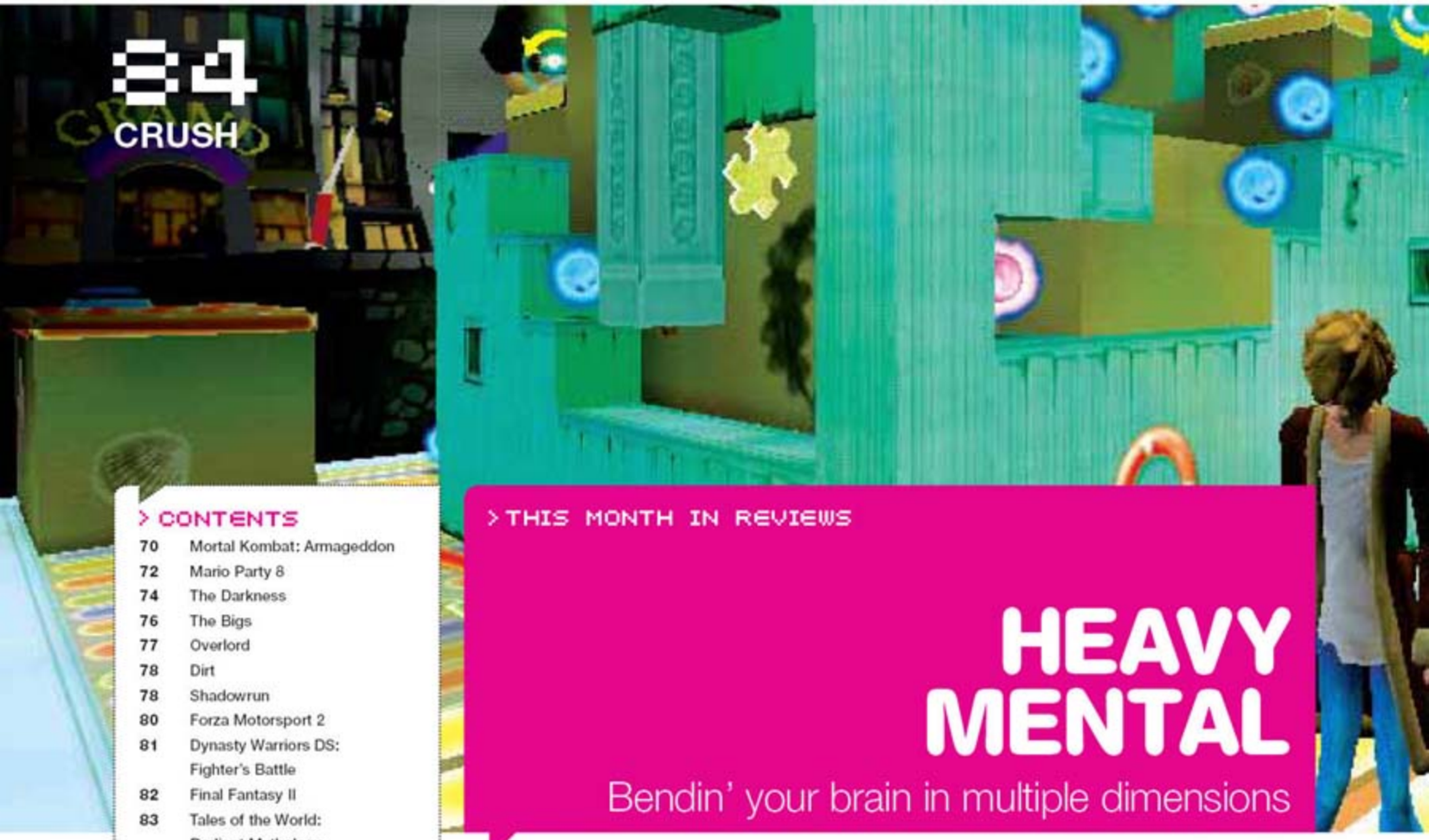
Online play	✓	Custom. fighters	☐	Adventure mode	☐	Guest stars	☐

> IN OTHER HARD-HITTING NEWS...

Capcom isn't just in the business of rereleasing titles from its fighting library—word around town is that the publisher is getting closer to revealing the oft-rumored ***Street Fighter 4***. ***Mortal Kombat***'s brutal crew is also prepping a return to the ring, and we hear Scorpion and co. may be squaring off against another extremely well-known cast. EA's Chicago studio (of *Fight Night* fame) has two projects in the works: a ***Marvel Nemesis* sequel** (which promises to be very different from the mediocre original) and an **all-new, nonlicensed fighting franchise**. And for all you ***King of Fighters*** fans, No. 12 is on the way to arcades (don't be surprised to see the popular SNK fighting series start popping up on the new consoles...including the Wii).

REVIEWS

> late-inning thrills, 2d/3d spills, punching grills, enacting your will, and a party foul



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> THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

HEAVY MENTAL

Bendin' your brain in multiple dimensions

FLIP THROUGH THIS MONTH'S REVIEWS and you'll probably notice that a number of them are of games that came out last month. And yeah, anticipated titles like *Shadowrun*, *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon*, and our co-Games of the Month, *Forza 2* and *Crush*, ideally would have been in our July issue. Believe me, we tried to make it happen. But sometimes it just doesn't work out. Given the lead times for a print publication like *EGM*, some games aren't in their final reviewable states prior to our deadline. And sometimes the people or company behind a game simply don't want us getting our hands on their game before its release because we aren't afraid to use that whole scale you see to the right. But just know we are never OK with not getting review code. If it's obtainable, we'll get it. If not, check 1UP.com at the game's release for our take.

—Greg Ford, Reviews Editor

> HOW WE RATE

10 to 9	Excellent
8.5 to 7	Good
6.5 to 5	Average
4.5 to 3	Bad
2.5 to 0	Terrible

> SCORES AND AWARDS

Reviews: You can also find the lead *EGM* review on 1UP.com. The second and third reviews—you'll find those here.
Awards: We dole out awards to games based on their scores. Platinum: all 10s; Gold: 9.0 average and up; Silver: 8.0 average or higher. Game of the Month goes to the highest-scoring game with unanimously "Good" scores, and Shame of the Month is the reverse. Simple.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)
SUB-ZERO 9.0 EXCELLENT
ERMAC 6.5 AVERAGE
STRYKER 1.5 TERRIBLE

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Mario Party 8: Please don't RSVP

PAGE 77

Overlord: *Pikmin* does *Python*

PAGE 78

Dirt: Sure cleans up nicely

THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

WARNING: Editors pictured here are actually larger than they appear

Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Editor-in-Chief

Shoe's latest addictions: finding stuff (*Crush*, *The Godfather*), destroying stuff (*Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*), and listening to stuff (*Soltrio Solitaire*'s haunting soundtrack).

Now Playing: *Crush*, *Halo 3*, *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance Gold*, *Shadowrun*, *Soltrio Solitaire*

Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com

Jennifer Tsao

Managing Editor

After days of failing to catch a Chansey, Jen gave up on this elusive egg-based Pokémon. She then ate omelettes for breakfast for a week. What's that they say? Gotta break some eggs? Take that, Chansey!

Now Playing: *Puzzle Quest*, *Big Brain Academy*, *Crush*

Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com

Bryan Intihar

Previews Editor

Bryan spent the last month playing a good amount of games online, both the *Halo 3* beta and sports. His conclusion: When it comes to the gaming community, jocks definitely ain't the group being dicks.

Now Playing: *The Bigs*, *Dead Rising*, *NBA Street: Homecourt*

Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com

Michael Donahoe

News/Features Editor

After playing two games involving dark men with minions, Michael has decided to play some friendlier titles...like *Animal Crossing*. Now if only that a**hole Tom Nook would get off his ass. Die, raccoon!

Now Playing: *Odin Sphere*, *The Darkness*, *Animal Crossing*

Blog: egmhoe.1UP.com

Nick Suttner

Editorial Intern, 1UP.com

Between a thus-far craptacular summer-movie season and four broken 360s in three weeks, Nick has been drowning his sorrows in halfhearted bouts of *Culdcept*. Thankfully *BioShock* is creeping ever closer.

Now Playing: *Not* the *Halo 3* beta (stupid red rings of death)

Blog: rocksolidaudio.1UP.com

Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor

To prepare for this month's cover story, Shane did what he always does—trounce all comers at various fighters, amassing large cash winnings and mad street cred in the process. No, seriously.

Now Playing: *Soulcalibur IV*, *Ninja Gaiden DS*, *Blue Dragon*

Blog: egmshane.1UP.com

Crispin Boyer

Senior Editor

After learning that *Rock Band*'s drum-kit peripheral is fun but incredibly raucous, Crispin is acclimating his neighbors early by playing three nightly shows with his new band: Boyer Garbage-Can-Turner Overdrive.

Now Playing: *Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the 80s*

Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com

Greg Ford

Reviews Editor

Ford's been loving the downloadable games lately. But he's having a tough time wrapping his head around the oldies—like *Xevious*. Two buttons for a shooter? Saving the world sure is complex!

Now Playing: *Halo 3*, *The Bigs*, *Streets of Rage 2* (Wii)

Blog: egmford.1UP.com

Matt Leone

Previews Editor, 1UP.com

Typically the summer-loving type, Matt has been avoiding everything bright since spending a few days absorbed in *The Darkness*. Which makes it a good thing he works in not-so-sunny San Francisco.

Now Playing: *The Darkness*, *BioShock*

Blog: bigolaf.1UP.com

Todd Zuniga

Sports Guy

Todd's been walking around with spontaneously buckling knees—a condition that came about from watching so many Greg Ford yakkers drop into the strike zone during marathon sessions of *The Bigs*.

Now Playing: *The Bigs*, *MLB 2K7*, *Gears of War*

Blog: sportsguy.1UP.com

Also on deck...

John Davison
Editorial Director
1UP Network

Sam Kennedy
Editor-in-Chief
1UP.com

James "Milkman" Mielke
Executive Editor
1UP.com

Garnett Lee
Managing Editor
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Want more?

Looking for a review of a game we didn't have enough time or room for? We've got you covered. Check 1UP.com for all your up-to-date review needs, including timely opinions on *NCAA Football 08* and *Call of Juarez* this month. Bravo.

■ It's as if the flaming-skull marginalia on your sixth-grade Trapper Keeper came to life!

Wii

MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON

■ **Publisher:** Midway ■ **Developer:** Midway/JGI ■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Mature

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MILKMAN	6.5 AVERAGE
SHANE	5.0 AVERAGE
SAM	5.5 AVERAGE

The Good: It's like a museum of *Mortal Kombat*
The Bad: Feels like an archaeological find from 1993
Motor Kombat: Bad pun. Bad minigame

1993 is so 14 years ago

MILKMAN: With each addition to the *Mortal Kombat* series, the once-mighty fighter drifts further and further into irrelevance. While this waggle-enhanced version lets you wave your arms around to execute imprecise special moves and Fatalities (which abandon traditional character-based finishing moves for lame user-customized ones), tacks motion steering onto the frustrating Motor Kombat kart-racing mode, and adds an unnecessary new Endurance mode, a better value is to be found in the online-enabled XB/PS2 versions, which can now be found at half the price.

The graphics hold up fairly well on the Wii, but the gameplay is straight out of 1993, despite the multiple stances and forms. Sadly, this *MK* still phones in the tired old P+P+K dial-a-combos that make games like *Tekken 5* feel fresh by comparison. *Armageddon*'s only saving grace—beyond the superfluous yet mildly enjoyable extra modes—is the unbelievable wealth of unlockable content.

SHANE: *Armageddon* already felt like warmed-over, gore-caked fan service when it hit PS2 and Xbox last fall, and six months of Wii retooling hasn't done much to change that. Here you get the same hodgepodge of eerily similar characters (although palette-swapped female ninja Khameleon *is* exclusive to Wii), throwaway modes (action-RPG Konquest and racer Motor Kombat still feel half-baked), and antiquated, unimpressive visuals. The all-new optional Wii-mote controls offer a brief glimmer of hope—dishing out special moves with gestures feels surprisingly rewarding and fun—but the disastrous decision to map standard attacks to the unwieldy directional pad crashes the party.

SAM: I was hoping that the Wii-mote would give the *MK* series some much needed freshness and accessibility. It doesn't. The tacked-on controls are kinda cool when they work, but they're nowhere near as good as playing with a Cube pad or Classic Controller. Are the Wii controls different? Sure. Are they any better? Not at all. It's pretty telling that it's a simple cash-in when the game is far better using last generation's controller.

EGM LIVE

"XforeignerX" from AL
"Great Show. Shane and Bryan are hilarious ..."

"cruzin510" from Alameda, CA
"Wow. It was comedy gold!"

"Lukezilla" from OU
"Great podcast."

"zalemale" from IL
"Excellent. Entertaining podcast. Enjoyed the staff and the reminiscing."

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Wii

MARIO PARTY 8

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo ■ **Developer:** Hudson Soft
■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

Waving our hands like we just don't care

SHOE: This is the Nintendo "Minigame Machine" Wii we're talking about here, so it should be the perfect venue for a *Mario Party*, board games that pit four players together in a series of minigames. The events that use the Wii-mote exactly as you'd expect (pump, lasso, point and shoot, rotate, shake, etc.) don't disappoint. But the rest do. You'll see lots of rehashed minigames here, redone with motion controls. Worse, you'll see many games that don't take advantage of the motion controls at all. It's just such a waste to see *Mario Party* get a fresh start here, only to have us turn the Wii-mote on its side to use it like any other motion-control-free controller.

At least the stages show some creativity with boards like Koopa's Tycoon Town, where your coins go toward building up hotels, which give you the stars needed to win the match (other players can steal those hotels...and your stars). But really, it's the minigames that needed the extra effort from the developers.

RAY: Gotta disagree with Shoe here. The last couple of *Partys* were dismal, but this latest get-together feels much improved. For starters, the microphone BS is gone in favor of good ol' remote swinging. Shoe's right about the creative board designs, though—like the train-car one, where rearranging cars can screw you over. I also like the alternative to board-hopping—the minigame-only competitions are quicker and better at keeping everyone's attention. The only thing I don't understand is why the "bigger," untimed minigames (bowling, bike racing, etc.) aren't in the main game, even if they are special unlockables.

JENNIFER: I'm in Shoe's camp, but I've resigned myself, at long last, to the unpredictable nature of *MP*'s minigames. Some are awesome, some annoying, but all of 'em are, in my opinion, way too brief—at least the game has a lot of them. But this is a missed opportunity. It still requires too much reading. It still takes too long to get through turns on the board. You still have to watch your A.I. opponents click through dialogue. All this unnecessary stuff muddies up the party—and makes it too hard to find the fun.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHOE **5.5** AVERAGE

RAY **7.5** GOOD

JENNIFER **6.0** AVERAGE

The Good: Wii controls + *Mario Party* = hand-in-hand
The Bad: Lots of rehashes
What's the Point? Minigames that don't use motion controls

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SILVER AWARD

PS3/XB360

THE DARKNESS

■ **Publisher:** 2K Games ■ **Developer:** Starbreeze ■ **Players:** 1-8 ■ **ESRB:** Mature

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MATT L.
9.0
EXCELLENT

MICHAEL
6.5
AVERAGE

ANDREW P.
8.5
GOOD

The Good: Great intensity and action all around
The Bad: Can be beaten in a day, simple multiplayer
Best Darkling: Kamikaze

Shadows—now for action games, too

MATT L: If publisher Sierra hadn't recently announced a *Chronicles of Riddick* (XB) remake, it'd be easy to point to *The Darkness* as *Riddick 2.0*. It's made by the same developer, looks similar, encourages shadow-hiding, features loads of first-person brutality, and is one of the most "mature" games this side of an Adults Only rating. But here, instead of using guns to punctuate the action, we're looking at an all-out shooter with crazy special abilities, like throwing a black hole to suck in everything around it. A few minor hiccups get in the way—like boss battles that range from amazing to "Wait, was that a boss fight?"; the over-too-quickly length; and a gimmicky multiplayer mode—but it's got some incredible moments.

By the end of the game, you'll be able to orchestrate door openings that'll make *Rainbow Six* vets cry. Set up a few Darklings (demonic helpers that you can spawn) to provide cover fire and jackhammer enemies into the ground, then pop open the door, throw a black hole in, watch three or four enemies bounce around like puppets missing strings, fire off a few rounds, and enjoy the chaos of it all.

The Darkness has a bit of a sensitive side going on as well, with a fair bit of downtime spent talking to people and wandering around New York (it's a dreary version of the city, with little beyond warehouses and alleyways). Hey, it even has a scene where the game encourages you to sit on a couch with your arm around your girlfriend. And that, my friends, is nothing like *Riddick*.

MICHAEL: Uh, I think you're downplaying the downtime, Matt. If you're thinking this is a fast-paced demonic gunslinger, get ready to wait for frickin' subway trains, ask for directions, and—if you're like me—get lost... a lot. *The Darkness* really needed to point players in the correct direction instead of trying to make the game more immersive by forcing them to literally look at street signs like real-world tourists (I want to play games, not life, folks). It didn't help that I involuntarily got myself lost by shooting out all the lights to increase my Darkness powers. Doing this aided my attacks, yeah, but more importantly, it

Before Riddick...

Starbreeze became famous in 2004 for *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* on the Xbox, but do you know your pre-*Riddick* Starbreeze?

The Outforce (2000)

Before the company moved into action games, this PC-only real-time strategy game mixed a futuristic setting with outer-space battles—it was pretty generic.

Enclave (2002)

As a hardcore action-adventure game in a medieval setting, *Enclave* wasn't bad (we gave the Xbox version three 6.0s)—it was just ridiculously challenging.

Knights of the Temple (2004)

Think *Enclave*, but with a (slightly) different setting and more combat-focused. And Europe only.

■ A doctor visit in *The Darkness* involves more "Ah, s***s" than "ahs."

made me realize I needed a permanent in-game tour guide.

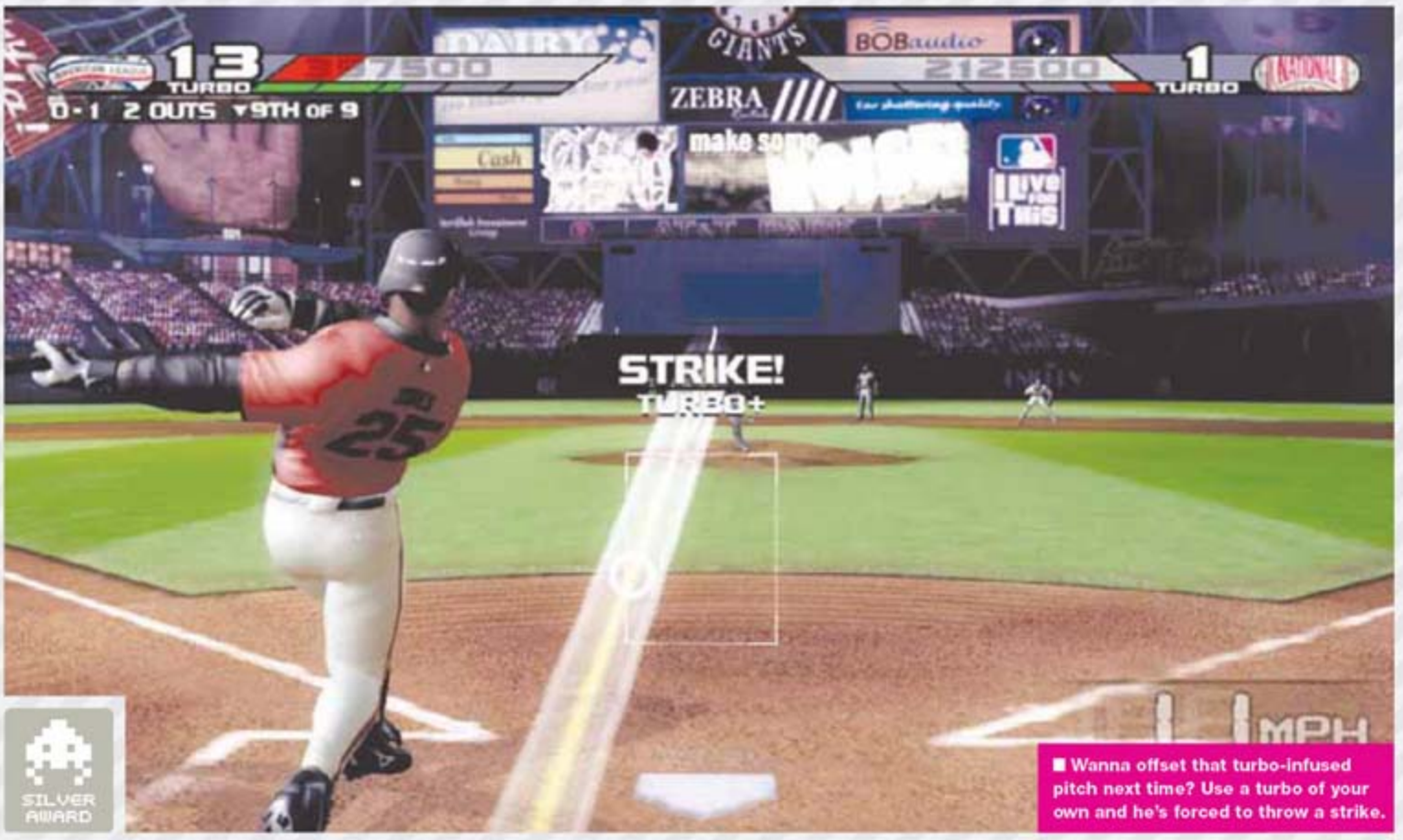
But when I wasn't getting lost (and cursing because of it), I enjoyed whacking gangsters with the game's smorgasbord of sadistic attacks. Between the crazy claw arms, sneaky tentacle munchers, and Darkness-imbued guns, I never really had a hard time making the bad guys go bye-bye. Solving the poorly designed puzzles, though? Yeah, those were annoying (and a catalyst for even more cursing), but not because I had to figure 'em out—I don't mind some crafty mind-benders to break up the action. No, they were annoying because the game does a horrible job of clueing you in about using your powers for puzzles. But I guess the developers expect you to figure things out through frustration.

ANDREW P: Wow, remind me to never get in a car with you, Michael. The only time I felt lost was during the purgatory stage, and I thought that added to the cool "What the hell just happened?" vibe. Everything else was pretty clear-cut: Subways had plenty of signage, and I found maps on pretty much every corner in the city.

I'm with Matt on this: The strength of *Riddick*'s design was alternating dark-and-dirty shadows with shiny and saturated light, and *The Darkness*' version of New York City benefits greatly from this effect. Keeping the "set" locations small allows for some impressive and immersive detail—throw in the quality script and voice acting, and the whole experience is compelling enough (and very well paced) to transcend its brief playtime.

And despite its similarities with *Riddick*, *The Darkness* is its own monster. You start the game thinking that Jackie Estacado's just some gun-wielding Mafia lowlife who will be spending most of the game mindlessly blasting away the even-lower life. But he really evolves as a character, both plotwise and with what he can do with his Darkness powers in gameplay situations. Like Matt says, you have to be strategic with your fighting (even though most enemies are dumb), and it's just plain fun to summon Gunner and Kamikaze Darklings in a crowded room. It'd be nice if the multiplayer were a little less spastic—it's not 1998 anymore—but *The Darkness*' single-player campaign shines bright.

Need us to shed some light on a few of the trickier puzzles? Hit up our SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.com.



SILVER AWARD

■ Wanna offset that turbo-infused pitch next time? Use a turbo of your own and he's forced to throw a strike.

PS3/XB360

THE BIGS

■ **Publisher:** 2K Sports ■ **Developer:** Blue Castle ■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

TODD	8.5 GOOD
G. FORD	8.0 GOOD
BRYAN	8.0 GOOD

The Good: More strategy than Strat-O-Matic
The Bad: Defense and baserunnning can be iffy
For Once: The crowds look sterling

This rook already looks like an all-star

TODD: "The yakker!" That's been *The Bigs* war cry around chez *EGM*, and we've been screaming it *every single time* a curveball tumbles in and baffles a knee-buckled batter. Part of the joy of taunting comes from 2K's game being a cerebral experience; it's the rare arcade-style sports game that makes you think! Beyond the typical baseball tactics, you'll discover a load of strategy in how you earn (through balls and nonfouled strikes), and use, bursts of turbo. Every turbo can be countered, so a blazing throw from center field to the plate can be offset by a turbo that turns the baserunner's legs into a blur. It sparks a brilliant game-within-the-game. My biggest gripe: The defensive dive and throw-home buttons are the same, so a great infield play often turns into a soft toss home (and a runner safe on first). Still, I love how *The Bigs* has the bells and whistles without the *SlugFest*-style BS like punch-throwing or loop-de-loop curves. Thank heavens.

G. FORD: Funny, Todd. I'd think your biggest gripe would be losing nine out of 10 games to me. What a yakker! But like you, I'm a huge fan of 2K's effort—I especially love that the "step in the rookie's shoes" single-player mode mixes in scenarios (mount a late-inning rally) and stat challenges (hit two homers in a winning effort) with the brisk five-inning regular games. It's a shame defense in general is a crapshoot and the baserunning seems intent on killing rallies. But the cocky presentation and raucous multiplayer matches hooked me.

BRYAN: First it was *NBA Street: Homecourt*, and now comes *The Bigs*—it's kinda odd that the best basketball and baseball offerings of this past videogame season arrive from the arcade sector (time to step it up, you annual sim guys). Todd and Greg covered a lot of the good stuff, but allow me to continue: I really enjoy how wall grabs and home-plate collisions finally look *and* feel like special moments on the diamond thanks to some amusing minigame mechanics. Also, I can't get enough of Home Run Pinball—who knew NYC's bustling Times Square was such an ideal place for batting practice?

OVERLORD

■ **Publisher:** Codemasters ■ **Developer:** Triumph
■ **Players:** 1-2 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

DARREN **8.0** GOOD

MARK **6.5** AVERAGE

MICHAEL **6.5** AVERAGE

The Good: It's a sick and twisted take on *Pikmin*
The Bad: You...if you so choose
The In-Game Map: Where the hell is it? I'm lost. Again

For the horde

DARREN: Summarizing *Overlord* isn't easy. On one hand, it's an action game with light-puzzle elements, as you control a big-ass brute-lord back from the grave who's on a quest to rebuild his sinister crib. On the other, it's a tactical-strategy game, with you guiding a group of minions to do your bidding. But most of all, it gives you the chance to be a total jackass.

What kind of overlord was I? Well, each session played out differently—first I acted the benevolent warlord, then a "misunderstood" fascist, followed by a straight-up Vlad the Impaler–evil douchebag. Townsfolk who once cheered my arrival soon cowered and offered virgins.

Still, *Overlord* isn't just about the overlord. I mean, yes, your internal evilometer steers the game's moral compass, and the world slowly shifts its genuinely funny dark humor according to your actions. But the real stars here are your gremlinlike minions. These id-driven imps are a force of chaos. Point in a direction and let 'em go. They'll loot the area, gear up, and attack targets. Seeing them decimate a flock of sheep: priceless.

Unfortunately, these flunkies are also the mostly excellent *Overlord*'s one weak point. Used improperly, the troops quickly become cannon fodder. Loosen your iron grip and they'll stupidly drown themselves or race headlong into overwhelming odds. No doubt someone can argue that the boneheaded A.I. is intentional—that they are supposed to be feral lemmings and you've gotta slow down to use tactics—but I ain't buying it. I want my minions a little more housebroken. Is it my fault I got too attached to a couple of my critters?

MARK: Actually, Darren, I think *Overlord* is pretty easy to summarize: It's medieval *Pikmin*. You've got the same satisfying strategic-action of commanding various colors of minions with different powers (red ones are impervious to fire, and so on), similar obstacles, resources, and light puzzles for them to clear, and a forgettable overall quest to fix up something (now your tower lair instead of a rocket ship) by gathering scattered pieces.

Too bad they didn't also steal *Pikmin*'s elegant control system. Though it diminishes after a few hours, the frustration brought on by the awkward interface for separating and commanding your troops never disappears completely. *Overlord* could also really use a map and a better warp system for getting around—but the differences aren't all bad. The detailed graphics definitely add to the chaotic thrill of watching your underlings ransack the environments, and the wicked British humor is (usually) a nice twist, taking the piss—sometimes literally—out of different *Lord of the Rings*–style fantasy clichés.

MICHAEL: Hey, while we're throwing around comparisons, I can't believe y'all forgot to mention how much this game borrows from *Fable*. Not that it's a bad thing—the cheeky British wit and villager reactions (stolen rather unashamedly)—suit this game well. And I have to say, I'm all gung ho for a game where you control hordes of hellish gremlins. Works great, too, until you get to situations where the game forces you to use strategy. Like Mark said, controlling different groups of baddies is not easy. But the most annoying trait isn't hard to find, because, well, it's not there to begin with: a map. Had they actually included this simple videogame tool, I would have been able to finish objectives instead of aimlessly wandering about. *Overlord* has a neat idea, but it really needs more direction. Or should I say directions?

Xbox 360

SHADOWRUN

■ **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios ■ **Developer:** FASA Studio ■ **Players:** 1-16 ■ **ESRB:** Mature

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MATT P.
5.0
AVERAGE

SHOE
7.0
GOOD

NICK
8.0
GOOD

The Good: Cool abilities, cross-platform play (with PC users)
The Bad: No campaign, two match types
Embarrassing: S*** talking a bot

Brother from an alien mother

MATT P: If pen-and-paper *Shadowrun* is *Alice in Cyberpunk-land*, developer FASA's multiplayer-only first-person shooter seems more like *Through a Glass Blithely*. Forget the license, in other words—this thing only looks like *Shadowrun* (the RPG) if you squint until your eyes squeeze shut. Instead, play it for what it is—another round-based *Counter-Strike* disciple with four races (elves autoheal, dwarves siphon magic, trolls soak up damage, humans are balanced) and some flashy spells and bionics—and it's almost decent enough. Almost? Try "twice the price it should've been."

No story mode, nine ho-hum maps, and matchmaking glitches nearly sink things, but *Shadowrun* offers some novelties. Bamfing around Nightcrawler-style while sprouting glider batwings tops the list, but spawning health-propping trees and deadly crystal-field chokepoints also impress. Sadly, match types come in just two flavors: artifact raids or kill sprees, which makes $60 seem extortionate. At least we encountered no problems when playing PC gamers.

SHOE: Not to mention *Shadowrun* has been a connection nightmare over Xbox Live—dropped games, long delays to start, 10-minute waits to find public matches.... After a while, it just didn't seem worth it (Microsoft had better not charge us for more maps or modes). But when I did actually get to play, I enjoyed the rock-paper-scissors aspect of all the powers working against each other. Just when you think you have an unstoppable setup, someone will find a way to counter it.

NICK: Sounds like Matt misses his tabletop days. Sure *Shadowrun* could have been cheaper, but those looking for a tactically unique, expertly balanced shooter that rewards team play will get their money's worth. The inconsistent art design and jarring animation don't do it any favors, but you'll find plenty of fun as the layers of magically delicious combat options unfold. It would definitely be nice to have a larger single-player component, but the bots fare surprisingly well and can serve as a solid impromptu challenge when you're sick of being teabagged by strangers.

Xbox 360

DIRT

■ **Publisher:** Codemasters ■ **Developer:** Codemasters ■ **Players:** 1-100 (but not head-to-head) ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

GORD
8.0
GOOD

DEMIAN
8.0
GOOD

JOHN
8.5
GOOD

The Good: Killer presentation, more "mainstream" than prior *McRaes*
The Bad: Limited multiplayer, lengthy load times
Cockpit Cam: Use it!

Rally racing hits the bigs

GORD: Brandishing wickedly complex physics, ultrademanding vehicular control, and tons of car classes and unpaved roadways, Codemasters' *Colin McRae Rally* series has, since 2000, thoroughly satiated those who'd rather race solo on dirt than compete head-to-head on tarmac.

But *McRae*'s man-versus-clock formula and tight track layouts have kept it somewhat of a niche product. Enter the next-generation *McRae* rebranding, *Dirt*, a rebuilt tour de force that's ready for virtually any well-wheeled hardcore driver. *Dirt* plunks you on scrawny earthen trails, sure, but it also delivers hill climbs, wide-open asphalt circuits, and, for the first time, the chance to bump bumpers with other cars. Bump *too* much bumper and *Dirt*'s awesome damage effects kick in—just part of an outstanding high-def presentation that features perhaps the finest visual detail of any racer.

Sadly, *Dirt*'s unsophisticated multiplayer component supports just one car at a time (in the form of simultaneous time trials), and the career mode lacks depth. Otherwise, getting a little dirty is fine by me.

DEMIAN: Turn on the cockpit view: The windshield cracks as you bump a guardrail, shatters if you rear-end a fellow racer. The sun peeks through the clouds and the glare washes out the road ahead. *Dirt*'s reality-plus, high-contrast look is incredible.

Unfortunately, the driving physics are also amped up, less relentlessly realistic than *Forza*'s. And though I love the many race classes (multicar rally raid and CORR series events, crossover races, etc.) in career mode, it's a tragedy that everything but solo hill climbs and rally stages got the ax in the (so-called) multiplayer.

JOHN: The lack of substantial multiplayer modes didn't bother me as much as it did the others, and I can't for the life of me fathom what Gord's issue with the career mode is. It has *so many* events to enter that it represents an extraordinary value on the single-player front. For me, this is what I had hoped *MotorStorm* would have delivered. With the exception of online racing, *Dirt* delivers on much of what that game so sorely lacked.

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■ *Forza 2* has eight real-world tracks, but this (Nissan Speedway) isn't one of them.

SILVER AWARD

T16 GAME OF THE MONTH

Xbox 360

FORZA MOTORSPORT 2

■ **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios ■ **Developer:** Turn 10 ■ **Players:** 1-8 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

DEMIAN	8.5 GOOD
GARNETT	8.5 GOOD
JOHN	9.0 EXCELLENT

The Good: Great feel, huge car list
The Bad: A little sterile, wheel not as good as it could be
Stock Tip: Good with decals? Cash in at the auction house

Wins its bid for best sim racer

DEMIAN: A game like *Forza 2* deserves at least a couple pages of prime Reviews real estate, but we got our hands on it too late to be timely. So you hardcore driving-sim fans should already know how good it is.

On the track, this *Forza* doesn't feel much different from the last, but then the original didn't need much improvement. Most of the work went into the new online community features and updated graphics—although the game's realistic look feels stark compared to *Dirt*'s stylized color palette and incredible cockpit view.

The new decal-creation tool is daunting but powerful, as anyone who's browsed through *Forza*'s online auction house (also accessible via forzamotorsport.net) can see. This is the kind of stuff that can give a game long, long legs. I'm still not totally sold on Microsoft's wireless wheel (in part made for this), and I wish the A.I. had been improved even more than it was, but those are small complaints: *Forza 2* is the best driving sim out there.

GARNETT: I agree; *Forza 2* reigns as the new king of driving sims...but not of single-player racing games. With some events gone (like the point-to-point races), the thin track selection gets repetitious. Wooden A.I., small fields, and the low number of laps in many races further detract from the experience. But online, I get to set up the race how I want, invite some friends...it becomes a whole new game. The fact that I can grab pics taken in the game, buy cars in the eBay-like auction, check stats, and manage tournaments from my computer really completes the package.

JOHN: Few games offer this much content to play around with, and even fewer tap into that innate (mostly male) need to tinker with things ad nauseam. I don't think I've ever spent so much time in menu screens before. One of the most rewarding aspects here comes from knowing when you can outdrive someone and that the only hurdle between you and victory is a tweak to your setup. Understanding your car enough to know exactly what change to make creates a bond as strong as that in any RPG. A must for car-loving 360 owners.

DS

DYNASTY WARRIORS DS: FIGHTER'S BATTLE

■ **Publisher:** Koei ■ **Developer:** Koei
■ **Players:** 1-3 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone 10+

Little love for this battlefield

BROOKS: *Dynasty Warriors*' first DS foray may look like dog doo, but when have games for this handheld ever been about the graphics? Big hits on the battlefield are this hack-n-slash franchise's calling card. This game's controls make stringing together combos (especially the over-the-top, colorful ones) rewarding and easy to pull off. Choosing between three playable characters also helps mix things up: Each warrior brings different strategies to the table (particularly for Wi-Fi multiplayer matches). Too bad, though, your moves—or your choice of warrior—don't really matter during the single-player mode's 1-on-1 boss battles. These uninspired events (which are sprinkled throughout every area you're racing to conquer) are nothing more than button-mashing slugfests.

Despite the routine beatdowns, *Fighter's Battle* offers a nice new wrinkle: a card system. Each deck is full of power-ups (like Freeze, which halts adversaries' advance). But given the short single-player mode (two hours per character...maybe), you won't spend much time tryin' them out.

BRYAN: I'm thinking Koei should've just dubbed this one *My First Dynasty Warriors*, as this romp through ancient China is ridiculously basic. And sorry, Brooks, but I'm not buying the new card system—it hardly adds anything to the so-simple-it-hurts combat. Skirmishes also play out strangely: They boil down to a race around the battlefield to occupy various camps, but if you meet up with your opponent and defeat him, he'll tend to respawn in a better spot than before (usually next to one of your bases). Now that's messed up.

MILKMAN: That Koei successfully transferred the *Dynasty Warriors* "experience" from console to handheld is impressive. But what has grown stale on consoles is also stale here, as you're tasked with taking down key rivals in rough-and-tumble levels filled with poorly animated dudes out to give you the short end of their polearms. *Fighter's Battle* is an OK diversion, and the responsive controls certainly help, but you really need to love the series to put any extended time into this game.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

BROOKS	5.5	AVERAGE
BRYAN	4.5	BAD
MILKMAN	6.0	AVERAGE

The Good: A simple introduction to the *Dynasty Warriors* series
The Bad: As repetitive as Chinese water torture
Can't Touch This: No utilizing the touch screen? Not even a little? OK...

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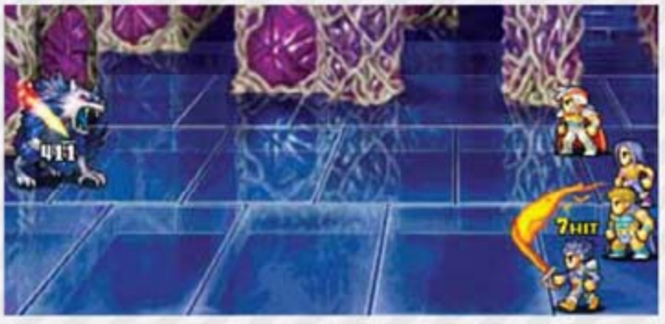

PSP

FINAL FANTASY II

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

More of a bizarre footnote than a must-play classic

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JEREMY **6.0** AVERAGE

SHANE **5.5** AVERAGE

BRYAN **6.0** AVERAGE

The Good: The best version of *Final Fantasy II* yet
The Bad: It's still the odd man out
Rebalanced: You don't have to hit your own party to level up

JEREMY: *Final Fantasy II* is the black sheep of the series—and for once, that works in its favor. Since it doesn't play much like a normal *FF* game, the jarringly non-*Final Fantasy*–like face-lift doesn't seem as out of place as it did with its predecessor. Honestly, with its odd skill system and relative freedom to explore, *FFII* has more in common with old-school U.S. PC RPGs than with its console peers.

Taken on those terms, the game isn't too bad, especially with a newly balanced difficulty level that makes it merely difficult rather than brutally impossible. This is still a quick-and-lazy remake, though, based on the PlayStation and GBA versions of the game; what it *really* needs is a total overhaul. Still, this is the first time *FFII* has actually felt playable, and that's a remarkable achievement in itself.

SHANE: While I'll likely never comprehend how Jeremy can give this muddled mess a higher score than its decidedly less-busted predecessor, I will concede that this PSP *FFII* outclasses all previous versions, thanks to its spruced-up visuals, updated gameplay, and an all-new dungeon. But underneath these trappings, this RPG still feels like a half-assed experiment rather than an epic adventure—its ho-hum story, uneven pacing, unpredictable difficulty, and ill-advised experience system will have even die-hard series fans wishing for the refinement and balance of modern *FFs*. Ultimately, Square Enix really ought to have put this and the first game on one UMD....

BRYAN: Unlike these RPG nuts, this marks my first time in *FFII*'s world. And I agree with Jeremy—this "black sheep" ain't nearly as bad as everyone says. I actually enjoyed all the freedom that comes with customizing your party members' abilities, and the new but old-looking graphics look superb on the PSP's screen. But even after, what—almost 20 years?—the developers didn't realize it was still too easy to wander into areas with monsters that'll wipe the floor with ya? Or worse, what's with the game sometimes forcing you to backtrack through danger zones after surviving a tough dungeon? That's unacceptable.

PSP

TALES OF THE WORLD: RADIANT MYTHOLOGY

■ **Publisher:** Namco Bandai ■ **Developer:** Alfa System
■ **Players:** 1 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

Radiant for fans only

A. FITCH: *Tales of the World: Radiant Mythology* throws together characters from eight of the previous entries in Namco Bandai's long-running action-RPG franchise—and proceeds to send them not on a grand adventure but on a series of tedious fetch quests. What's more, the game's confining mission-based, dungeon-crawl layout may turn off fans accustomed to the series' traditional expansive, expressive worlds.

Still, *Radiant Mythology* is hardly short on fan service. The trademark *Tales* "skits"—enjoyable interludes that reveal the protagonists' quirks—are here in abundance (almost an overabundance), but it feels like the developers spent a little too much time crafting potential fanfic fodder...at the expense of polishing the rest of the game. *Radiant Mythology*'s not bad, but with a huge roster of fan favorites and *Tales of the Abyss*' battle system (one of the series' strongest) at its disposal, I can't help but think it should've been much better.

RAY: No, this isn't your usual console-based *Tales* game, but that's good! The quest-based gameplay and trademark button-mashing battles make for a fine and truly portable RPG—something the PSP could still use more of. You can pass a couple minutes with a fetch quest or spend a half-hour tracking down certain enemies. It's a bit rough around the edges (you won't find any lighting effects, and the regular PSP menu font is used everywhere), but *Radiant Mythology* is still a highly enjoyable time-killing adventure. It could really use a full-screen map, though.

GREG S: OK...I'm gonna go ahead and say that Ray's nuts. The PSP definitely doesn't need any more of these half-assed dungeon crawlers. Would it be so hard to create a decent RPG for this portable? *Radiant Mythology* does a few things right—it has decent graphics, established characters, and a serviceable battle system—but it really needs a cohesive story to go along with it. Instead, we get a level of fetch-questing that would make the folks at Rare green with envy. A decent effort, but like Andrew says, it's far from being the game it could have been.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

A. FITCH	6.0 AVERAGE
RAY	8.5 GOOD
GREG S.	5.5 AVERAGE

The Good: A huge collection of *Tales* favorites...
The Bad: ...who are reduced to fetch-quest escorts
MIA: Some of the previous games' voice actors

Its the first time in my life that Ive felt like I actually fit in
Or at least Im happy now that I dont.
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PSP

CRUSH

■ **Publisher:** Sega ■ **Developer:** Zoë Mode
■ **Players:** 1 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone 10+

We're developing a crush

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

NICK	9.5 EXCELLENT
SHOE	8.5 GOOD
JENNIFER	8.0 GOOD

The Good: Works your brain, innovative and unique
The Bad: Difficult almost right off the bat
We'd Kill For A: Custom level creator

NICK: *Crush* might have a recognizable aesthetic (think *Psychonauts* in a dark alley), but its gameplay is wholly its own. Developer Zoë Mode has crafted a cognitively rewarding, expertly designed puzzle experience that truly plays like nothing else.

Unlike *Super Paper Mario*, shifting *Crush*'s worlds from 3D to 2D and back is a constant necessity, a brilliantly executed game mechanic that forces you to think far, far outside the traditional gaming box every step of the way. Depending on the camera angle, "crushing" a level can align otherwise distant platforms and paths (everything is relatively close in 2D), match up cogs, or turn menacing enemies into harmless stepping-stones. Levels can be intimidating at first, but you feel like a genius by the time you're at the exit. Endlessly inventive and fiendishly difficult, *Crush* isn't for the faint of brain—though rarely have I welcomed such a challenge and felt so rewarded every step of the way.

SHOE: Not every stage made me feel like a genius. Sometimes, I just got lucky. Trial and error, not careful planning, would occasionally show me the way to the exit—an unavoidable side effect of *Crush*'s countless combinations of platforms fitting together in 3D/2D space. But otherwise, I wholeheartedly agree: This is a wonderfully unique game (and quite a developmental feat) that will test the noodles and patience of the most hardcore of puzzle fans. It's a steep, steep difficulty curve...but extremely rewarding once you conquer it.

JENNIFER: And for me, it's fair to say that *none* of *Crush*'s brain-bending stages made me feel like a genius. Indeed, pretty much every one made me feel sorta stupid. I'd run in circles, crushing endlessly, trying different combinations of warped right angles and squashed 3D blocks until either luck or unexpected discovery guided me out of the insanity. (Eventually, I realized you can turn on hints, which are essential for dummies like me.) Once I accepted my "special" status, though, and resigned myself to making straight Ds (each level gives you a letter grade upon completion), I savored *Crush*'s complexity.

PSP

SMASH COURT TENNIS 3

■ **Publisher:** Namco Bandai ■ **Developer:** Namco Bandai ■ **Players:** 1-2 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

In contempt of court

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JOE	5.5 AVERAGE
GREG S.	4.5 BAD
TODD	4.5 BAD

The Good: Deep career mode, not overly arcadey
The Bad: Sluggish, imprecise controls
Wants to Be: The *Virtua Tennis* series' stodgy older brother

JOE: The question *Smash Court Tennis 3* needs to answer is this: Do PSP owners really *need* another tennis game beyond *Virtua Tennis: World Tour* and *Virtua Tennis 3*? The answer here is "no"—especially when *Smash Court* exhibits so many of *Virtua Tennis*' more tedious traits and so few of its charms. From the annoying time management of the schedule-based career mode to the ho-hum training minigames, *Smash Court* feels like a less entertaining *Virtua Tennis* knockoff. And while it may be just a *teensy* bit more realistic—with lots of ways to manipulate shots—and mostly responds how it should, the occasional inexplicable missed shot frustrates.

The career mode offers *loads* of playtime, sure—but after you've busted out of your fifth or sixth tournament because, for some unfathomable reason, your player just refuses to *take a freakin' swing at the ball*...well, if you're not ready to throw the game out a window on these occasions, you're much more forgiving than I am.

GREG S: I'm with Joe here. It seems great that you have such a versatile shot system (which makes use of the four face buttons, as well as the ability to aim on top of that), and even while you're running through the tutorials, you'll be thinking to yourself how awesome it'll be to have *that* much precise control over the power and placement of the ball. But yeah... then the game starts, and getting the timing right is a bitch. Why my player seizes up sometimes when I attempt a hit is still a complete mystery to me.

TODD: Joe, are you a *VT3* apologist or something? Do you remember the constant diving, no unforced errors, and lack of generic players (meaning you see only the same pool of pros on your quest from 300 to 1, which makes absolutely no sense)? I do. *Smash Court* wins those sets, but loses the match with the occasional busted shots you guys are talking about. But what makes me want to catch Joe's thrown PSP, run upstairs, and throw it out the window myself are the generic characters with idiotic features: Mr. Tattoo on His Bald Head, Mr. Blue Beard, and Mr. Gray Dreadlock Ponytail. Come on!

PSP

PARAPPA THE RAPPER

■ **Publisher:** Sony CEA ■ **Developer:** NanaOn-Sha
■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

PaRappa's delight

NICK: The tale of a young hip-hop pup could only stay dormant for so long. PaRappa's first adventure from his PS1 days is here in its entirety, with a few nice additions, namely four-player multiplayer and several downloadable remixes of each of the six levels' songs. The phat tunes are as catchy as ever, and the scenarios are still bizarrely engaging as PaRappa tries to win the girl of his dreams by getting a driver's license, learning to cook, and pulling off all other manner of tasks that might impress a talking flower.

Granted, you'll find only about 20 minutes of actual rapping here if you skip the peculiar cut-scenes (which you shouldn't), but with *PaRappa*'s unique timing, you'll likely be replaying the six levels quite a bit. The experience doesn't hold up to the depth of modern rhythm-action games, but the songs are so good that you likely won't mind such a limited selection.

SHOE: Either my hand-eye-ear coordination has heavily deteriorated since the PS1 days, or this PSP update is busted. Or it just likes hearing me yell out "What the f***?!" a whole lot. Button presses are just so hit-or-miss here ("unique timing"? Nick's way too kind). And the multiplayer (which basically just compares scores) and forgettable remixes are *not* nice additions. But do play *PaRappa* to reexperience the catchy original soundtrack, charming storyline, and bizarre cast. It's rare to see this much personality in one game these days....

MICHAEL: If there's one thing I gotta believe, it's how much I suck. Like Shoe, I had a hard time busting out the beats on time. The weird part? I used to be a master MC mutt back in the day. But even though I couldn't quite wrap my head around the tricky rhythms this time, I still got a kick (and even a punch, too) out of the hilariously addictive songs.

Too bad the extra content isn't quite as fresh. The new remixes are totally wack. And the multiplayer is just a weak attempt to add something new to a PS1 game that, well, should be a $5 download on the PlayStation Network. But first-time rappers should definitely check it out, yo.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

NICK **7.0** GOOD

SHOE **5.5** AVERAGE

MICHAEL **6.0** AVERAGE

The Good: Songs are still excellent
The Bad: Core game is way short
Could Have Used: All the songs from the sequel

DREAMERS WANTED.

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PlayStation 2

HOT SHOTS TENNIS

■ **Publisher:** Sony CEA ■ **Developer:** Clap Hanz
■ **Players:** Everyone ■ **ESRB:** 1-4

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

TODD **3.5** BAD

NICK **4.5** BAD

SAM **7.5** GOOD

The Good: Teaches tennis to tots
The Bad: Overly simplistic, bad incentive structure
Thanks, But We'll Stick With: *Hot Shots Golf Fore!*

A total racket

TODD: I should first say that I love *Hot Shots Golf* way more than the realistic alternative (EA's *Tiger Woods*). So when I got word that *Hot Shots Tennis* was coming, I was thrilled. Then I played it. My experience can be summed up in one word: *yaaaaaaaawn*. The game's tennis mechanics are solid and the graphics are fine, but that doesn't really matter when it has a barren feature set that'd be more at home on a downloadable game. Plus, this has all the personality of a Honda Civic. The characters are glib and disinteresting. I looked all over for a create-a-player feature, and no go. Isn't that a gaming standard in 2007? I hate games that require me to self-motivate (*MotorStorm*, another Sony game, was like that), and drumming up enthusiasm was no small task as winning moved me up the lame-o ladder, unlocked more no-fun characters, and gave me access to pointless bubkes like Retro Americana costumes. Excited yet? Me neither.

NICK: I wasn't as utterly bored as Todd, but *Hot Shots Tennis*' mediocrity is inexcusable with a few top-notch, accessible tennis games already on the market (*Mario Tennis*, *Wii Sports*' Tennis). *Hot Shots Golf*'s charmingly goofy presentation simply feels forced here, with gratingly cutesy voices and downright silly stereotypes (the ditzy blonde yells "Ponies!" throughout matches). You'll find a decent tennis game in here somewhere (albeit with a much steeper learning curve than you'd expect) and plenty to do, but it's not really worth digging for under such an obnoxious exterior.

SAM: Damn, you guys are harsh! Don't forget, this is the *Hot Shots* series, after all. Sure, some of the characters are a tad goofy and the whole thing is a bit shallow, but that's kinda the point, isn't it? It's still a lot of fun, especially when playing with a bunch of friends. The A.I. opponents don't offer much of a challenge once you really get the hang of things, so going up against a buddy is ideal. Trust me—for gamers who haven't already played the more serious stuff like *Virtua Tennis*, or who just want something a little less simmy, this is a simple, accessible good time.

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Great moments in arcade-sports gaming history

Playing 2K Sports' *The Bigs* and Sony CEA's *Hot Shots Tennis* left us nostalgic for big-head codes and turbo blitzes...ah, the goofiness of arcade sports

Battling Piston Honda and Soda Popinski in *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* ruled, but sneaking in that first hit on the seemingly invincible big Mike felt unnaturally good.

1987

Spine-shattering tackles were a common treat, but nothing beat catching up to, and stripping the ball from, a hopeful, out-of-turbo runner in the original *NFL Blitz*.

1997

Chucking an ecologically inconsiderate bender in *MLB SlugFest 20-04* was like nothing before: It dips below the ground, kills some worms, and hops up to baffle hitters. Wicked.

2003

1993

NBA Jam's big heads were legendary (for 10 seconds), but nothing matched the flaming splash of a "He's on fire!" trifecta, from way outside the arc, crashing through the hoop.

1999

Hawk's 900 made him a legend, but *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* made him mythical. Why not? It let you do a 900 while crashing through glass—then top it off with a grind.

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REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The games that were too late...or too little

Wii/PS2

MANHUNT 2

■ **Publisher:** Rockstar ■ **ESRB:** Mature

The stealth genre got a brutal beating with 2003's *Manhunt*. Its sequel keeps the gameplay intact (sneak up behind enemies to viciously attack them) but adds smarter A.I., a new story, and environmental attacks.

BOTTOM LINE: *Manhunt 2* feels a lot like the original—but roll with the Wii version. It's prettier and has interactive controls (during execution cut-scenes, you poke, swing, and shake the Wii-mote and Nunchuk to the beat of the onscreen prompts). The only problem: Watching the commands closely means you might miss the bloody carnage on your TV.

PS3/XB360

NCAA FOOTBALL 08

■ **Publisher:** EA Sports ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

NCAA definitely looked (and played) like a freshman on the new consoles last year, but the series' sophomore stint is shaping up quite nicely. On the field, the game moves much smoother, which really comes in handy when you're running *08*'s new assortment of trick plays (the developers smartly ripped off Boise State's playbook). Online seasons are absent yet again, but at least you can capture video clips of your *SportsCenter*-worthy highlights and send them to friends.

BOTTOM LINE: With this year's gameplay catching up to last year's presentation, *NCAA Football* is a BCS contender yet again.

PS2

GUITAR HERO ENCORE: ROCKS THE 80S

■ **Publisher:** Activision ■ **ESRB:** Teen

The era of Spandex and hair spray sounds like a perfect fit for jumping around in front of the TV rocking out with a plastic guitar—and it is. Crunching power chords and nailing soaring riffs while banging your head embodies the very essence of *Guitar Hero*. But the desire to broaden the appeal means too much bubble-gum pop and not enough monsters of rock—A Flock of Seagulls but no Bon Jovi or Def Leppard? We haven't had time with the absolute final set list yet, though.

BOTTOM LINE: *Encore* lays down some of the series' best licks, but it's merely a stopgap until the next-gen successors hit this fall.

XB360

VAMPIRE RAIN

■ **Publisher:** Microsoft ■ **ESRB:** Mature

Imagine a budget version of *Splinter Cell*... with vampires. That's pretty much what we have here. *Vampire Rain* is mostly about avoiding the vampires at all costs, because unless you headshot 'em with a sniper rifle, your silver bullet peashooters don't do much damage. At least the levels encourage clambering from rooftop to rooftop.

We couldn't try out the online modes (no one else had the game when we played), but it offers the usual deathmatch, king of the hill, and capture the flag game types.

BOTTOM LINE: $60 is kinda steep considering it looks and plays like a last-gen game.

XB360

HOUR OF VICTORY

■ **Publisher:** Midway ■ **ESRB:** Teen

Someday, a heroic developer will muster up the World War II game to end all World War II games, but *Hour of Victory* (out now) ain't it. From the brief Xbox Live demo (Midway didn't send us a review copy), *Victory* feels more like a flashback to battles in the *Call of Duty* series. The ability to play as one of three characters—sniper, gung-ho commando, or sneaky covert operative—adds variety to the levels, but not enough to earn the game a medal of honor for originality.

→BOTTOM LINE: Don't enlist until you try the Xbox Live demo for yourself.

DS

PLANET PUZZLE LEAGUE

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

Puzzle League has had many trappings through the years (including *Yoshi's Island* and *Pokémon*), but with Nintendo's new emphasis on casual gamers comes the most dramatic reinvention the series has seen yet: *Planet Puzzle League*'s tile-swapping has been recast in the mold of *Lumines* (with its stylish skins) and *Meteos: Disney Magic* (with its new sideways orientation and stylus interface). The result is the best version yet, with tons of options, including Wi-Fi multiplayer.

→BOTTOM LINE: One of the all-time puzzle greats gets a face-lift, new modes, and online support. What more can you ask for?

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for May

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores
1	**Pokémon Diamond**	DS	8.5 9.0 8.5
2	**Pokémon Pearl**	DS	8.5 9.0 8.5
3	**Super Paper Mario**	Wii	8.0 9.0 9.0
4	**Wii Play (with Wii Remote)** This collection of so-so minigames made quite a splash this month. Either people get it for the extra Wii-mote...or they can't get enough laser hockey.	Wii	4.5 6.0 5.0
5	**Guitar Hero II (Bundle with Guitar)**	XB360	Not Reviewed
6	**Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!**	DS	8.5 9.0 9.5
7	**New Super Mario Bros.**	DS	9.5 10 8.0
8	**Spider-Man 3**	PS2	Not Reviewed
9	**The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess**	Wii	10 10 10
10	**Guitar Hero II (Bundle with Guitar)**	PS2	9.0 9.0 8.5
11	**Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team**	DS	6.5 6.5 8.5
12	**Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords**	DS	Not Reviewed
13	**Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars**	XB360	7.0 8.0 7.0
14	**Spider-Man 3**	XB360	7.5 6.5 5.0
15	**Gears of War** Developer Epic just unveiled Achievements for the game's downloadable multiplayer maps—which you get for free if you hold your horses till September.	XB360	10 9.5 9.0
16	**Mario Kart DS**	DS	9.0 8.5 8.5
17	**Crackdown** Now that the *Halo 3* beta is over, you can get back to its partner in marketing, *Crackdown*, and finally try out some of its killer downloadable content.	XB360	9.0 8.5 7.5
18	**Final Fantasy XII**	PS2	8.5 9.0 9.5
19	**God of War II**	PS2	9.5 9.0 9.0
20	**Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy** Bummed at the lack of Jar Jar here? Then wait until this fall's *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga*, which covers all six flicks on your PS3, XB360, and Wii.	PS2	6.5 7.5 8.0

SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

Fun and BAD Games with EGM!

How well do you know your crap?

Seanbaby finds inspiration for his column all around him, especially on trips to the dentist, where he enjoys his favorite magazine, *Highlights for Children*.

VIDEOGAMES ARE AWESOME, but you have to admit that they grant us some of the most inapplicable skills of any hobby. Especially bad videogames. We spend hundreds of hours training our thumbs to navigate icy platforms and headshot bitches, and we'll be lucky if it comes in handy once before we die. Unless I've yelled it myself, I've never been in a restaurant and heard someone shout, "This man is choking! Please! Does anyone here know how to find the red candle in the second quest?"

Every other hobby has applications outside itself. Fixing cars helps you bond with your estranged father, cat owning teaches you what smells can't be removed from Earth carpet, and excessive snacking helps you survive longer at sea. And look funnier when you slip. And make awesome sounds when objects impact against you. My point is, playing bad videogames has no real-world application and is the opposite of self-improvement.

Until now! The puzzles featured here reward experience and knowledge in crap! Please note that if you're a specialist without a skill set outside of terrible games, then these two pages are no less than your only chance to do anything with your life.

Playing bad videogames has no real-world application and is the opposite of self-improvement. Until now!

PAGE 92
Retro: Series that need sequels

PAGE 94
Puzzle: Find the hidden games

PAGE 98
Comic: Hsu & Chan in Low Calibur

> QUIZ!

1) How many Mary-Kate and Ashley videogames have been released?

A) No way. Last time I answered that question I got punched in the face. And rightfully so.
B) After seeing 1994's *How the West Was Fun*, my answer is: not enough!
C) Eight
D) If the answer is not zero, I have a question for you: What are we going to do about Satan actually existing?

2) In *Superman 64*, what is the superpower most commonly used by the Man of Steel?

A) The game, or my fan-fiction screenplay where Superman and MacGyver have ball sex? I guess it doesn't matter. Both answers: ball sex.
B) The ability to fly through hoops
C) What's that *Superman II* power called when he takes off his chest logo and throws it like a giant cellophane frisbee? That, probably.
D) I've got 14 words for you: x-ray vision on Mary-Kate and Ashley and then, after that, laser-melt vision.

3) In *E.T.* for the Atari 2600, what is E.T. trying to put together?

A) A telephone
B) A support group for space monsters who look like colonic accidents
C) A puzzle forming an eagle over the word "Inspire"
D) It was a chain saw, but Spielberg went back in and digitally changed it to a hug.

4) In *That's So Raven*, what is Raven's special ability?

A) Dual wielding
B) Ham sandwich
C) Druid
D) Oh, snap! Comically mispredicting the future!

5) "Sex" is to "Sex Crime" as "Bubsy" is to _____.

A) *Bubsy 3D*
B) *Bubsy: A Powerful Performance By Hillary Swank*
C) Man, I'm terrible at these. I'll go with "Cattitude."
D) Cattitude

6) *Aquaman: Battle for Atlantis* came out for which two systems?

A) The Atari Youmust and the Panasonic B-Joking
B) GameCube and Xbox
C) Great Neptune! According to the Trouble Alert, teens are trapped in abandoned fish costumes! I've got to get there—and fast!
D) It doesn't matter. Anyone who owns these systems is long dead from stupid or from just not existing in the first place.

7) Finish this PS2 game title: "*Pryzm Chapter One: _____*"

A) *Gyrls Gone Wyld C'an C'un*
B) *Legend of the Never Will Be a Chapter Two*
C) *Bubsy Sex Crimes*
D) *The Dark Unicorn*

8) Which of the following is an enemy in *Total Recall* for the NES?

A) Dwarf in Pink Jumpsuit. Weapon: Crotch Kick
B) Trash Can Containing Man in Pink Jacket. Weapon: Ping-Pong Ball Launcher
C) Crushing Boredom. Weapon: Total Unstoppability
D) All of the above

9) Two fans of *Sneakers* for the Xbox meet on a train. How do they greet one another?

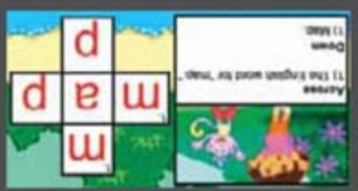
A) "Ready yourself. Soon, I will be the only one."
B) "Mouse in the house!"
C) "You ruined my life, Trevor!" and "I'm not Trevor," respectively.
D) Name one universe where this train could possibly not explode from dislogic.

10) This is the box art from what game?

A) *Holy Crap: Adventure of the Best Game Ever*
B) *Dirty Larry* for the Atari Lynx
C) Is that guy arresting me and shooting me at the same time?
D) *Crime Criminals 4: Mad Scientist Alley*

Answers: 1C, 2B, 3A, 4D, 5A, 6B, 7D, 8D, 9B, 10B

> CROSSWORD!



Answer:

> MONSTER MASH!

Answer: He's inside...*Home Improvement* (SNES). He's made of...Head: *Deadly Towers* (NES). Chest: *Secret Agent Barbie* (GBA). Arms: *Altered Beast* (Genesis). Tail: *ALF* (SMS). Legs: Strong Bad from *Tag Team Wrestling* (NES).

> HOW'D YOU DO?

Nine or fewer correct: Great job!
Ten or more correct: Nothing I say can take away the pain you must be feeling. Listen: It doesn't go away. It doesn't ever get better.

> OLD-SCHOOL EGM

10 Years Ago...

On the cover: Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi

File under "MF," for milking the franchise. Sure, it features lightsabers that are about as dangerous as whiffle bats—and unbalanced characters—but *Teräs Käsi*'s mismatched battles (such as Princess Leia vs. Boba Fett) gave fans something new to cheer about. Even if the game sucked.

Game of the month: Ace Combat 2

Taking plane blow-em-up sequels to new heights, *Ace Combat 2* proved entering the danger zone isn't all that dangerous when you're packin' heat-seekers. And while the Crew geeked out over the game's mission variety, they felt cheated that head-to-head dogfights weren't included.

Hot water: Nude Raider

In a move that likely pissed off a bunch of prissy parents, Ed Semrad, *EGM*'s then-editor-in-chief, provided readers with an Internet link to saucy images of Lara Croft naked. Equally funny: The printed disclaimer at the bottom of the page stating *EGM* doesn't condone behavior like this.

> RETRONAUTS PRESENTS

Where are the SEQUELS?

Ten follow-ups that exist only in our fantasies By Jeremy Parish

retro nauts BONUS STAGE

To hear (and see) more retro jibber-jabber, set your browser to bonusstage.1UP.com to watch 1UP's video podcast.

THE END IS ONLY THE BEGINNING...for the fortunate ones. We're talking 'bout the lucky sequel-spewers like *Mega Man*, *Zelda*, and even those damn *Medal of Honor* games (we surrendered five years ago, guys!). 'Tis a shame some should-be franchises don't get another chance to shine. Honestly, do we really need a dozen *Final Fantasy* games every year when classics like *Skies of Arcadia* (Dreamcast) are forgotten? Not every crusty gem deserves to be put out of mind—which is why we demand the following sequels.

Bionic Commando 2

The original: *Bionic Commando* (Arcade, 1987)
Series last seen: *Bionic Commando: Elite Forces* (Game Boy, 2000)
Why bother: In a world of same-y games, it's always refreshing to play something that breaks the mold and works despite taking creative risks. *Bionic Commando* (NES) was precisely that—a platformer without jumping (say wha—?), requiring instead the use of a grappling arm to swing around (oh, and also to eliminate a thinly veiled Nazi army trying to resurrect Adolf Hitler). Many have tried to mimic its mechanics, but none have pulled it off quite like the original.

Chrono Trigger III

The original: *Chrono Trigger* (Super NES, 1995)
Series last seen: *Chrono Cross* (PlayStation, 2000)
Why bother: One of the greatest role-playing games ever deserves a little more love. Just ask any fan of console role-playing games to name his favorite, and there's a pretty good chance the name *Chrono Trigger* will come up (OK, after *Final Fantasy VII*). A collaboration of the talents behind both *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest*, *Trigger* was destined for greatness, offering one of the most accessible and entertaining RPGs

ever. With a convoluted time-hopping plotline, multiple endings, and top-notch graphics and audio, it's gone on to be regarded as an all-time classic (even if its sequel, *Chrono Cross*, elicits mixed opinions). Few games are more deserving of a sequel than this—just as long as it doesn't get the *Parasite Eve III* treatment and end up on cell phones.

Jumping Flash! 3

The original: *Jumping Flash!* (PS1, 1995)
Series last seen: *Robbit Mon Dieu* (PS1, 1999)
Why bother: *Jumping Flash!* was one of the first truly great PlayStation games, and it introduced some mind-bogglingly good ideas, to boot. It's nice to see the original available for download on PlayStation Network—but what would really rock would be another sequel. The PlayStation games were limited by early 3D technology and a lack of analog control, but the core element (that is, jumping hella high) is every bit as exhilarating as it ever was. Add some spiffed up graphics and refined control, and you have a golden sequel just waiting to happen.

Kid Icarus 2

The original: *Kid Icarus* (NES, 1987)
Series last seen: *Kid Icarus: Of Myths & Monsters* (GB, 1991)
Why bother: Because we're sick of hearing about it. Seriously, if there's any one series Nintendo fanboys just won't shut up about, it's *Kid Icarus*. Hell, it sure doesn't help that Nintendo is teasing them by including hero Pit as a playable character in the upcoming *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* on the Wii. And while the original NES game's not quite as awesome as your rose-tinted memories tell you, it was still pretty good. And we trust Nintendo to make sure Pit's return is excellent. The question is, will they bother?

The Lost Vikings III

The original: *The Lost Vikings* (SNES, 1992)
Series last seen: *Norse By Norsewest* (PS1/Saturn, 1997)
Why bother: *StarCraft*? *World of WarCraft*? Bah. Blizzard's greatest game ever was multiplayer, sure, but it didn't involve crafts, and it sure didn't involve level-grinding and Zerg-rushing. No, we're talking about *The Lost Vikings*, a brilliant side-scrolling platformer that required three Vikings to work together in order to solve some deviously designed puzzles. Making a good sequel is simple, too. All you need is an updated version with the same gameplay. Then add new levels, abilities, and make it all online. See, easy, huh?

Shenmue III

The original: *Shenmue* (Dreamcast, 2000)
Series last seen: *Shenmue II* (Xbox, 2002)
Why bother: Poor Ryo is *still* looking for information on the dudes who shot his old man. His kitten-raising, forklift-driving quest for vengeance is suspended in medias res after the first two chapters of this amazingly ambitious (and expensive) epic failed to turn a profit. *Shenmue* pioneered a lot of brilliant ideas that have been done better by the likes of *Grand Theft Auto* and *Bully*, so we'd be pretty OK with Sega borrowing those refinements to make *Shenmue III* the game the original was always supposed to be.

Skies of Arcadia II

The original: *Skies of Arcadia* (Dreamcast, 2000)
Series last seen: *Skies of Arcadia Legends* (GameCube, 2003)
Why bother: It's the next best thing to a real *Phantasy Star*. We loved it, even though *Skies of Arcadia* embodied pretty much every RPG cliché ever inflicted upon the world when it was released in 2000. Turns out you don't have to be particularly creative, so long as you're enthusiastic enough with your hackneyed ideas, and *Arcadia* was nothing if not enthusiastic. But for all the borrowed ideas, it actually incorporated some clever ones of its own—mainly the massive airship battles and find-em-all discoveries. Plus, we've had enough gloomy pretty boys in our RPGs, and only Sega can deliver fluffy good times and make us buy it.

Soul Blazer 5

The original: *Soul Blazer* (Super NES, 1992)
Series last seen: *The Granstream Saga* (PS1, 1998)
Why bother: Square Enix should realize it's perfectly OK to resurrect other rusty franchises, like *Soul Blazer*. Developer Quintet's loosely connected action-RPG series looked and played a lot like *Zelda*, but it focused far more on story and gray shades of morality than you'd expect from 16-bit adventures. While the series' move to 3D (*Granstream Saga*) pretty much sucked, we have confidence that a 2D follow-up on a portable system would be glorious.

Streets of Rage 4

The original: *Streets of Rage* (Genesis, 1990)
Series last seen: *Streets of Rage 3* (Genesis, 1994)
Why bother: Aging mall rats may remember blowin' bucks on classic side-scrolling brawlers like *Double Dragon* and *Final Fight* in the arcade, but luckily for Sega Genesis fans, dishing out the pain in *Streets of Rage* only required an endless buffet of knuckle sandwiches. Featuring tight gameplay, bitchin' special movies, and a thumpin' soundtrack, the *Rage* trilogy powered its way through the 16-bit era—and promptly vanished. But it's hardly forgotten—and sometimes, when we ball our hands into fists, we think fondly on Sega's classic brawlers and how much we'd like to punch a totally new set of enemies...right in their teeth.

Wizards & Warriors IV

The original: *Wizards & Warriors* (NES, 1988)
Series last seen: *Wizards & Warriors III* (NES, 1992)
Why bother: Since developer Rare created the franchise, it'd be nice to see them work on something that doesn't involve nonsensical furries. Because back when it could produce 20 games a year instead of one game every 20 years, Rare sometimes came up with some real gems. The *Wizards & Warriors* games were among them—three fantasy-themed NES platformers with tiny hints of RPG, each progressively better than the last, the third being a cool free-roaming action-RPG. We'd love to battle our way through a new one, provided Rare didn't get carried away with annoying item collection (a few fetch quests are enough). And definitely, definitely bring back acclaimed videogame cover model Fabio as hero Kuros.

Oldies that need to be newbies (top to bottom): *Bionic Commando*, *Chrono Trigger*, *Jumping Flash!*, *Kid Icarus*, *The Lost Vikings*, *Shenmue*, *Skies of Arcadia*, *Soul Blazer*, *Streets of Rage 2*, *Wizards and Warriors II*

Do we really need a need a dozen *Final Fantasy* games every year when classics like *Skies of Arcadia* are forgotten?

World 9-5

Work time fun

By Michael Donahoe • Illustration by Bill Mudron

Don't be perplexed by the picture below—what seems like a scattered mess of the 1UP Network offices is actually a clever distraction of clues. Inside, you'll find 21 references to random videogames. Some are easy to find, while others will cause some serious head-scratching. Can you find them all?

How it works: Peruse the picture to discover hints that represent specific videogame titles. For example, the above picture of the man packing a cardboard box is—wait for it—*Pac-Man*. Get it? Now find the rest!

Think you found all the games? Head over to **EGM.1UP.com** *to get the solution.*

Jamaica
HAVE YOU SEEN ME?

> GAMERSCOPES

Playing Fate
By Mr. Death

Oh, don't look so surprised. It's true—when I'm not needling you for hit points in *Gauntlet*, I'm a practicing amateur astrologist. *EGM* happened to find me predicting futures and asked me to take a crack at you gamers, so...what the hell? Here goes:

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): What starts as a friendly game of *Burgertime* will end in the most colorful stream of profanity and violence your children will ever witness.

Pisces (Feb. 19-Mar. 20): It's true that playing games too close to the TV can ruin your eyes in time. But your torch-welding accident this week will do it much, much faster.

Aries (Mar. 21-Apr. 19): A keypunch error will convert your advance order for *Halo 3* into the first recorded preorder for the *World Championship Poker* controller skin.

Taurus (Apr. 20-May 20): While your Dragon Punch is feared at the arcade, it will prove ineffective at preventing the broken nose you'll receive at the hands of a real hand.

Gemini (May 21-June 20): You feel that the online community doesn't understand you, but it's probably just because you've been wearing the headset backward all this time.

Cancer (Jun. 21-July 22): Technically, it's not your new *Tomb Raider* screen saver that will cost you your job. It's the 40-minute masturbatory medley it precipitates in your cubicle.

Leo (Jul. 23-Aug. 22): Moral victory will be yours after fighting fair in an online deathmatch. Unfortunately, the leaderboards will always remind you how much you suck.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sep. 22): You've always looked up to prominent game designers, which is fitting, as they've always looked down on you.

Libra (Sep. 23-Oct. 22): You'll reach a creative plateau this month by working "moose knuckles," "donkey punch," and "smegma" into one humdinger of a gamertag.

Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Convincing your girlfriend to try out games will prove to be a mistake when you discover she is not only a better player, but she's also dumping you.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): People will say you can't make a living hustling *Dance Dance Revolution* in the movie-theater lobby. Then again, they haven't seen how you live.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): You'll learn the true value of a dollar this month after spending $30 on *Dogz 2*. You will then almost immediately learn the value of store credit.

Pixel art by 4Boy

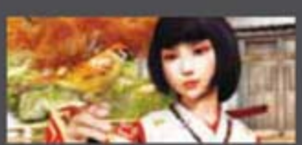
> GRUDGE MATCH

Shurikens & Roofies

Taking ninjas to the test

Tecmo has rolled out a re-rehash of their popular Xbox ninja game for the PS3. But the frat bros at Kappa Sig aren't taking too kindly to this new chapter on campus.

Ninja Gaiden Sigma VS. Kappa Sigma Fraternity



Environments

Graphically enhanced for the PS3
Advantage: Ninja

Strewn with moldy pizza boxes and other crap

Female Participation

Rachel is a playable character

With enough drinks anything's possible
Advantage: Kappa

Enemies

Other ninjas
Advantage: Ninja

Those Sigma Chi bastards

Heritage

Buncha solid console games dating back to 1989
Advantage: Ninja

Founded by prominent moustache waxers of old

Special Moves

Izuna Drop, Guillotine Throw
Advantage: Tie

Keg stand
Advantage: Tie

Winner: Ninja Gaiden Sigma

Even drunk, ninjas still kick ass. But regardless of the winner, we expect years of rivalry played out through repeated childish pranks.

> NEXT MONTH

Single Green Spartan

September Issue (#219) • On sale August 7

YOUR FIRST LOOK AT HALO 3'S SINGLE-PLAYER STORY

The Flood lay waste to a futuristic Pittsburgh! The Covenant die from chicken pox! And Master Chief faces his greatest enemy yet: Voltron! Yes, we are spouting bulls*** about ***Halo 3***'s mysterious campaign mode, but next month we'll be the first mag with details on how this third installment in the space-shooter series finishes the fight that *Halo 2*'s cliff-hanger ending c***blocked. And we're showing as well as telling, with lots of single-player screens that—from what we've seen so far—look better than the multiplayer game. We're topping it all off with enough new multiplayer details to fill a star cruiser. It's a double-barrel blast of *Halo 3* intel that should leave you gooier than the Flood in July and hold you over until the game hits Xbox 360 on September 25.

In Wii news, reclusive developer Retro Studios tells us about that system's answer to the *Halo* series: ***Metroid Prime 3: Corruption***. Our Review Crew will also tell you if bucking-dragon adventure ***Lair*** for PS3 soars or spirals out of waggling control. And we even have our eye on the next-gen PS3 **EyeToy**, with a gander at the first batch of games that'll change how you look at your system. All that and much more (***Napoleon Dynamite***...the game?) next month.

(All planned editorial content is subject to change.)

> PREVIEWS

- **Metroid Prime 3: Corruption (Wii)**
- Skate (PS3/XB360)
- Unreal Tournament III (PS3/XB360)
- Mercenaries 2: World in Flames (PS3/XB360)

> REVIEWS

- **BioShock (XB360)**
- Stuntman: Ignition (Multi)
- Space Station Tycoon (Wii)
- Madden NFL 08 (Multi)
- Blue Dragon (XB360)

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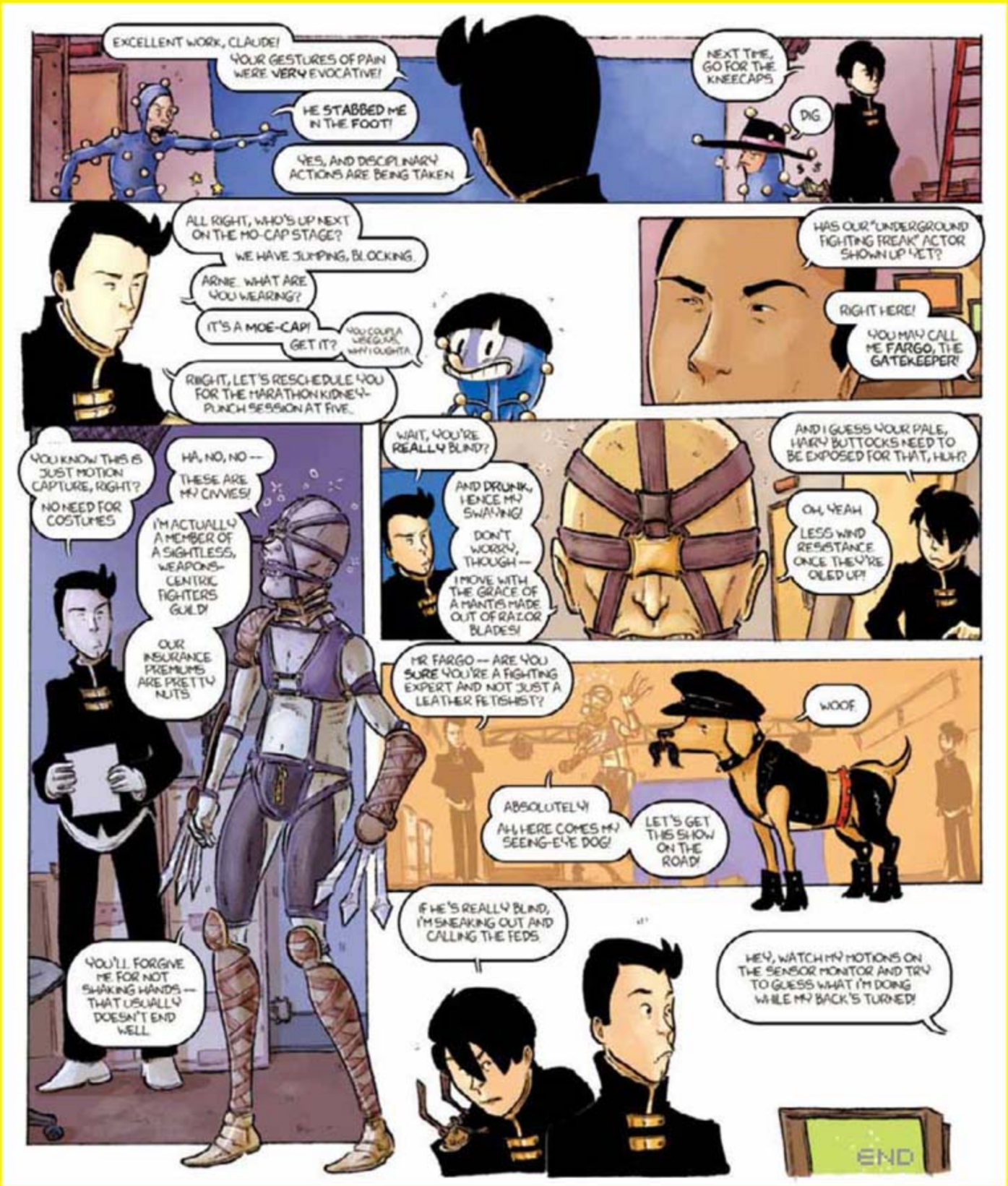
> HSU & CHAN IN:

Low Calibur

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott



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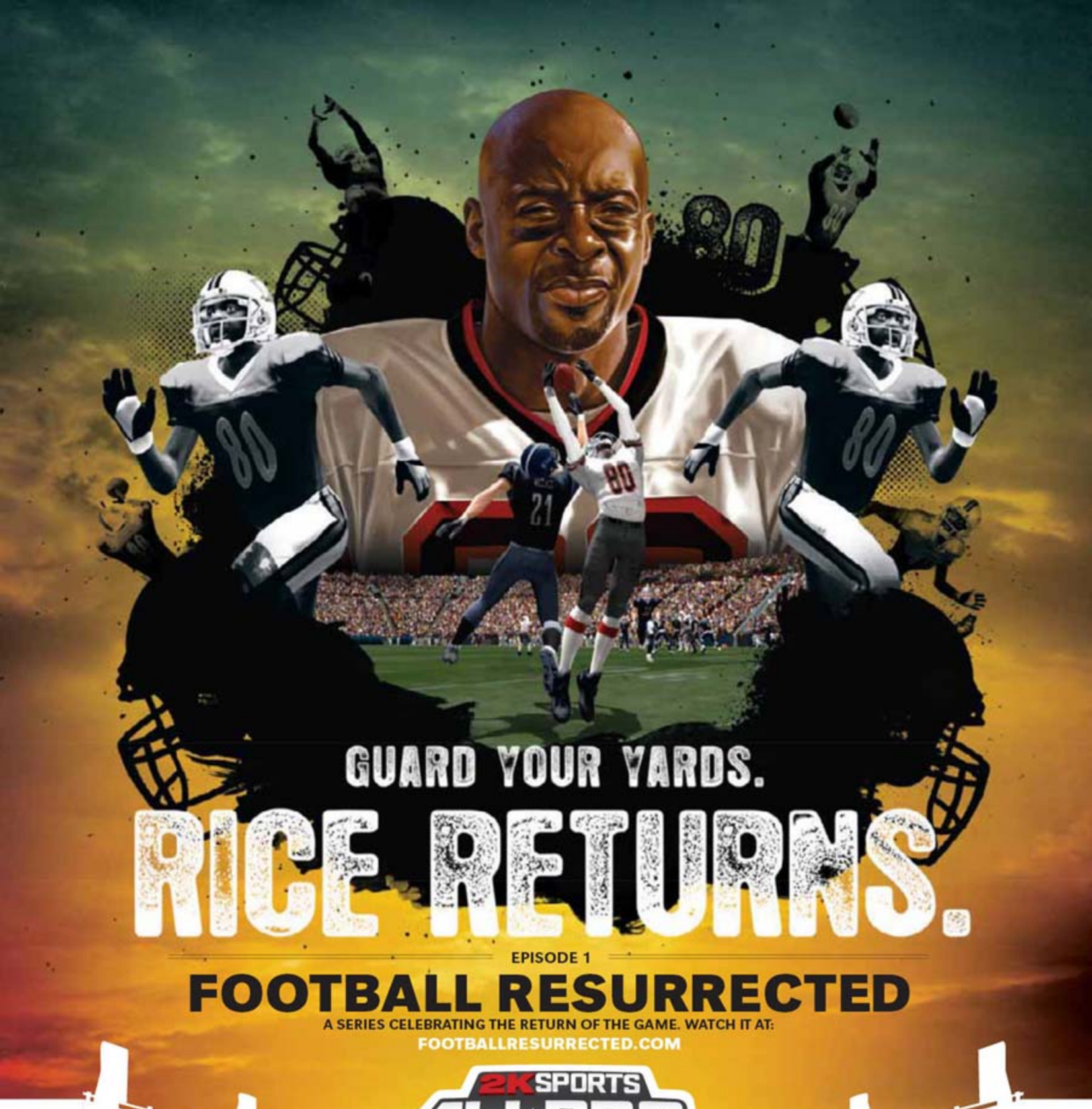

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