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HARDCORE

# GAMER<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE

v1i1 . rise of the chicken

## DARKWATCH



**Also inside:**



**Shadow of the Colossus**



**See what will be at E3**



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By Prima Games

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PlayStation 2

# ATELIER IRIS

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# HARDCORE GAMER MAGAZINE

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This 1st issue of HGM is dedicated to one David 'Izce\_prime' Gordon, who passed away on April 4, 2005 due to stomach cancer. He was a man who loved his friends, his family, his games, and the writing craft, and the world will definitely be missing a special something without him. Wherever you are, good buddy... we hope you're at peace.

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Printed in the United States of America



**DJPubba Tim Lindquist**  
 It takes a lot of clicking to make a magazine. I must have clicked my silly mouse 10,000 times just trying to make this issue alone. The key seems to be to make sure I have the cursor in just the right spot before clicking, otherwise I get a lot of annoying beeps.



**Roger Danish Greg Off**  
 Greg jumped right back into the mix after a four-month hiatus from the enthusiast print world. He's right at home with his Hardcore brethren and is looking forward to another successful run working with the old fans of games and the new schoolers on staff. A few words of caution: Beware the Foul.



**Wolfie Terry Wolfinger**  
 T's been drawing since the age of 2 and playing games since age 7. He knew one day that art and games would collide and his 2 loves would etch out his place in the world. Now he gets bleary-eyed painting on his computer, night after night, to make pretty pictures for all the nice HGM readers.



**Wanderer Thomas Wide**  
 Thomas Wide got into game writing by accident, after some British guy stole his FAQ. Three years later, he's still not quite sure what he's doing, but somehow, he's wound up working for Hardcore Gamer. Weird.



**Lynxara Alicia Ashby**  
 Alicia Ashby lives somewhere on the East Coast, waiting for the release of new Super Robot Wars games. She started gaming, like most of her generation, when she was about five. Her first console was the Atari 7800, but she was quick to move on to bigger and better things.



**Metalbot Anthony Mertz**  
 Sometimes, he's not sure why he keeps on gaming. Every night, Anthony is reminded by a whispering voice in the sky while he's out in his corn field, "If they make it, you must play it." So he does.



**Syriel Adam Pavlacka**  
 Adam is a schmoozehound of many years' experience, having hung around the video game industry for close to a decade. He does as little work as possible, but if you go to a press event and look around for the best-looking girls, there you'll find Syriel, hanging off their legs.



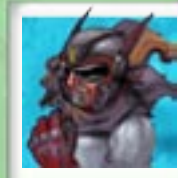
**4thletter David Brothers**  
 4th letter doesn't know what he's doing here. He thought it was an all-you-can-eat buffet, but then they chained him to a table and made him write. It's been nearly a year. His hands hurt and he's still hungry. Call the police!



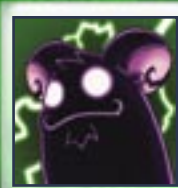
**Arfeth Thomas Shin**  
 So they're coming out with these new flavored lip balms. Cinnabon's really does taste like a cinnamon bun... but I damn near chewed my lip off. I shudder to think of how much of my face I'd try to eat if someone invented ramen-flavored lip balm, or soy-sauce-and-wasabi-flavor.



**HonestGamer Jason Venter**  
 Jason cut his teeth on the old NES games and he's been addicted ever since. Between games and games, there hasn't been much room in his life for things like eating and sleeping. Count on him for an honest opinion on games, but not on food.



**Racewing Geson Hatchett**  
 Racewing thought he could run forever. He was wrong. Eventually he was caught, tried, and found guilty for his crimes against videogame girls everywhere. Racewing was given a choice: community service at a gaming magazine, or facing the wrath of dozens of angry mallets and fists.

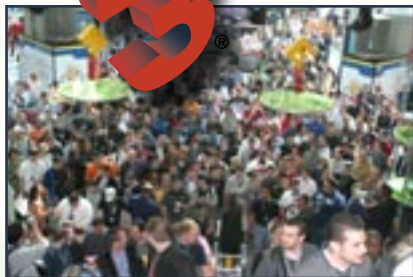


**Shax Shax**  
 Shax WAS enjoying a spring afternoon by the pool, when HGM up and trapped him in a bottle. Now they let him out to draw something from time to time; fortunately, he doesn't plan on quitting his day job anytime soon.



**Preview E3**

Another year, another locustlike convergence on the Staples Center for a sneak peek at the next twelve months' worth of gaming fun. We're on the scene to show you the best-looking booth babes, testdrive the new hardware, snicker at the fanboys who somehow snuck in, stand in line for a total of ten thousand hours, bicker with each other in the ongoing pursuit for the perfect bag of swag, gape slackjawed at the latest trailers, drink all the tastiest-looking free alcohol, shamelessly kiss up to PR people so we can go to the best parties and show you all the places and games that we get to see but you don't. You're welcome.



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**On the cover**

**DARKWATCH**



Far from the lights of civilization, there are bad things brewing in the dark of the Wild West. As a member of the Darkwatch, it's Jericho Cross's job to hunt those things down and destroy them, before — or *until* he becomes one of them.

In High Moon's upcoming Gothic FPS, you can decide whether Cross will retain his humanity or become damned forever, but more importantly, you'll get to hunt down undead cowboys with high-caliber firearms. Check out our exclusive preview, screenshots, and feature history. We guarantee if you weren't interested in *Darkwatch* before, you will be after you read this. Two words: fat zombies. Two more words: dynamite launcher.

**38**



**Strategies courtesy Prima Games**

Thanks to your friends and ours over at Prima Games, we've got a thick, rich slab of custom-made gaming strategies for your reading enjoyment. It's so meaty, it comes right off the bone.

First, and speaking of meat, rip the monsters of ancient Greece to shreds in the bloody battles of *God of War*. If you'd rather fight demons than minotaurs, we'll also teach you the best kung fu around, as we provide handy tips, hints, and ancient Chinese secrets for Bioware's *Jade Empire*.

On a slightly less violent note, we'll also help you build a custom world of higher education with *The Sims 2: University*. Finally, protect your God-given right to do all these things, as Sam Fisher in *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*.

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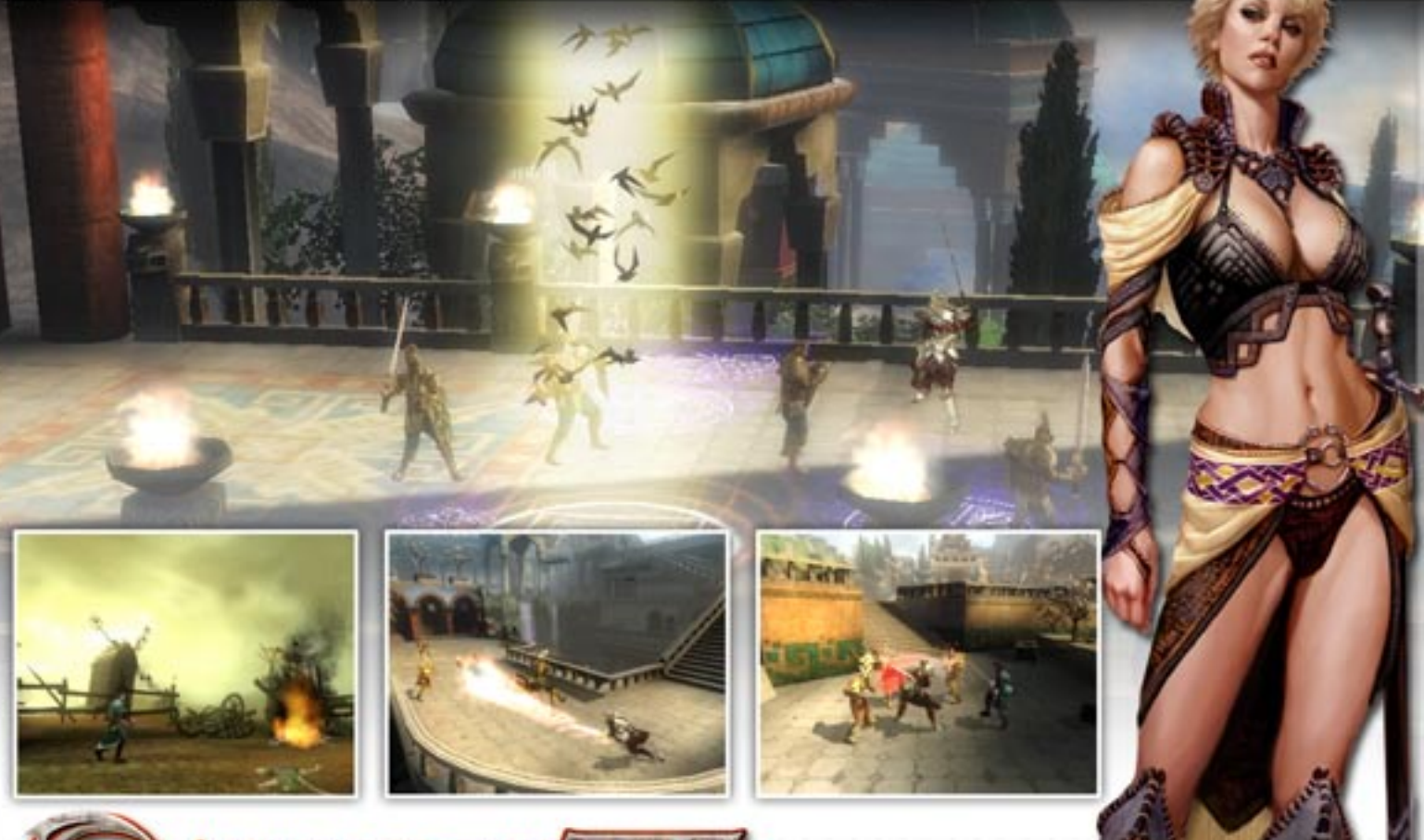
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# GAUNTLET

## SEVEN SORROWS

Preview by Wanderer

The classic *Gauntlet* series reinvents itself again, going from the last of the great quartermunchers to a modern, four-player action-RPG.

In *Seven Sorrows*, up to four players can choose from six heroes, the former prisoners of a mad emperor. To defeat him, the heroes must go on an adventure within his dreams and nightmares.

*Seven Sorrows* overhauls *Gauntlet's* fighting system, adding a strategic leveling system, more destructive and dynamic attacks, and cooperative Junction Skills. You can personalize each character by leveling up their abilities in one of three categories: Weapon, Class, and Iconic.

Midway's also planning to create an online community around *Seven Sorrows*, based on role-playing and the barter and trade of the items you'll find in-game.

They've got big plans for *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows*, and Midway's been firing on all cylinders lately. There's every reason to expect that they'll deliver.

**Publisher :** Midway  
**Developer :** Midway San Diego  
**Release Date :** Winter 2005

**Genre(s) :** Action/RPG  
**Category :** Fantasy  
**# of players :** 1-4



# THE SUFFERING

## TIES THAT BIND

Preview by Syrial

In a genre dominated by the likes of *Silent Hill* and *Resident Evil*, *The Suffering* was a surprise hit when it came out last year. It told the story of a felon convicted of murdering his wife and child, with a twist — Torque's guilt or innocence ultimately depended on your actions. This moral scorecard continues with the sequel's three different beginnings, each corresponding to *The Suffering's* three endings.

Set amidst the urban decay of Baltimore, the new game preserves the claustrophobic feel of the first while serving up even more nightmarish enemies. Inspired by real-life terrors, the demons include the likes of Mainliner, a drug addict who attacks with syringes, and Triggerman, a spider-like creature with a gun in every hand.

Though the disturbing visuals might make you think twice about rushing forward, *Ties That Bind* is all about the action. You will blast and bludgeon your way through hordes of demonic critters. A two-weapon limit forces you to choose your guns carefully, while a limited use "insanity mode" provides a quick escape when you're overwhelmed.

Viscerally enticing, *The Suffering: Ties That Bind* builds upon the horror that players experienced in the original and extends it in ways that're both satisfying and grotesque. We can't wait to see how it turns out.





# geist™

Preview by Syriel

Special agent John Raimi is having a bad day. While investigating some mysterious goings-on at the evil Volks Corporation he managed to lose something very near and dear to him: his body. Playing as Raimi, you not only have to find your corporeal form, but shut down the Volks Corporation once and for all.

Life as a spectre has a few advantages, the most useful of which is the ability to possess other things. Much of *Geist's* gameplay will rest on thinking your way around a problem rather than blasting your way through it. For example, if you need the security code for a particular door, simply possess the lock and make it spark, thereby attracting the attention of a guard. He will enter the correct code, and you can pass through the open door.

If being subtle doesn't work for you, directly possessing a human is always an option. Once you're in control, you have complete access to your victim's memories, skills and weapons.

An included deathmatch mode allows up to four players to battle it out, though there is no word yet on whether you'll be able to possess your friends.

**Publisher :** Nintendo  
**Developer :** n-Space, Inc.  
**Release Date :** 2Q 2005

**Genre(s) :** FPS  
**Category :** Out of Body  
**# of players :** 1



**Publisher :** SCEA  
**Developer :** SCEJ  
**Release Date :** 9/05

**Genre(s) :** Action  
**Category :** Adventure  
**# of players :** 1

Preview by Roger Danish

The successor to *ICO*, one of the PlayStation 2's best-kept secrets, is finally drawing near. And while Sony is doing their best to distance themselves from *ICO* (due to its disappointing sales at retail), there's no denying the same talented development team at SCEJ is striving once again to create a memorable gaming experience that will not soon be forgotten.

In *Shadow of the Colossus*, the game once again centers on a young boy who is on a perilous journey. In this game, he rides horseback with his magical sword and bow in hand, galloping across a majestic landscape in search of ancient beasts the size of mountains. There are 16 of these "Colossi" in all, which range from gigantic Minotaur and huge clockwork creatures, to bizarre, tank-like monsters. In order to locate these behemoths, he must use his sword to light the way (it also must be used to reveal their weak spots once engaged in battle). *SoC* has two modes of play that blend seamlessly together. In the adventure phase, you must explore the expansive environment, climbing, hopping, swimming and locating each beast. In the attack phase, you enter into an epic battle that can take upwards of 20 minutes, where you must climb onto the Colossus and figure out a way to bring it down.

*Shadow of Colossus* is not due out until later this year, but we'll tell you right now — you MUST get it! It would be a shame to see such an amazing experience get overlooked twice.





## MAKAI KINGDOM

Chronicles of the Sacred Tome

**Publisher :** NIS America  
**Developer :** Nippon Ichi  
**Release Date :** 7/19/2005

**Genre(s) :** RPG  
**Category :** Strategy  
**# of players :** 1

**You think you have problems. Preview by Ammadeau**

Lord Zetta was once the most powerful, dynamic, and handsome demon lord in all of the netherworlds. He told me so. Then he made one small mistake, and was forced to bind himself in a magical book to save his infernal skin. The transformation left him nearly powerless, but his demonic associates have taken pity on him, and offered up portions of their own netherworlds for him to conquer. Now he must build up an eccentric army of evil minions to restore himself to normal and regain his former glory.

NIS's latest SRPG makes a return to *Disgaea's* style, so characters have multiple inventory slots and ranks, and can be transmigrated. You'll also be able to earn all the endings in a New Game+, making it easier to unlock secret characters and defeat high-level optional bosses. The game also features improved versions of *Phantom Brave's* free movement and confining. Now that you can fill your armory with gatling guns, nunchucks, and UFOs, not everything will be familiar. Buildings can be summoned to bolster your troops, and you can equip vehicles to bring in the heavy artillery.

If war is hell, then war in hell is silly fun when it's run by Nippon Ichi.



**Publisher :** Midway  
**Developer :** Midway San Diego  
**Release Date :** Fall 2005

**Genre(s) :** Racing  
**Category :** Arcade  
**# of players :** 1-4

## L.A. RUSH

**It's been a while, but Midway's fierce Rush experience is back and better than ever! Moving from the steep hills and scenic vistas of the Bay Area, this all-new racing game is set in sunny Los Angeles.**

In *L.A. Rush*, players will get the opportunity to join the crew at West Coast Customs, pimp their own ride and live the fabulous lifestyle of an L.A. street racer. Deviating from the quick-fix arcade experience of the previous Rush titles, *L.A. Rush* offers up an in-depth Story Mode where you will tear through five fully-open Los Angeles city re-creations while racing, modifying, stealing and pimping out over 50 licensed cars (which include muscle, tuner and exotic vehicles from manufacturers such as Mitsubishi, Cadillac and Chevrolet). Familiar environments include Hollywood, Santa Monica, South Bay, South Central and Downtown. All of the over-the-top, insane death-defying jumps and treacherous trademark shortcuts of the series are making a return trip. *Rush, L.A. style*, will be hitting the downtown streets this fall.



**Preview by Roger Danish**



# MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

## GUNDAM VS. ZETA GUNDAM



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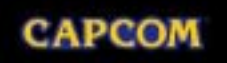
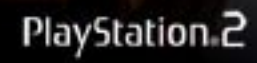
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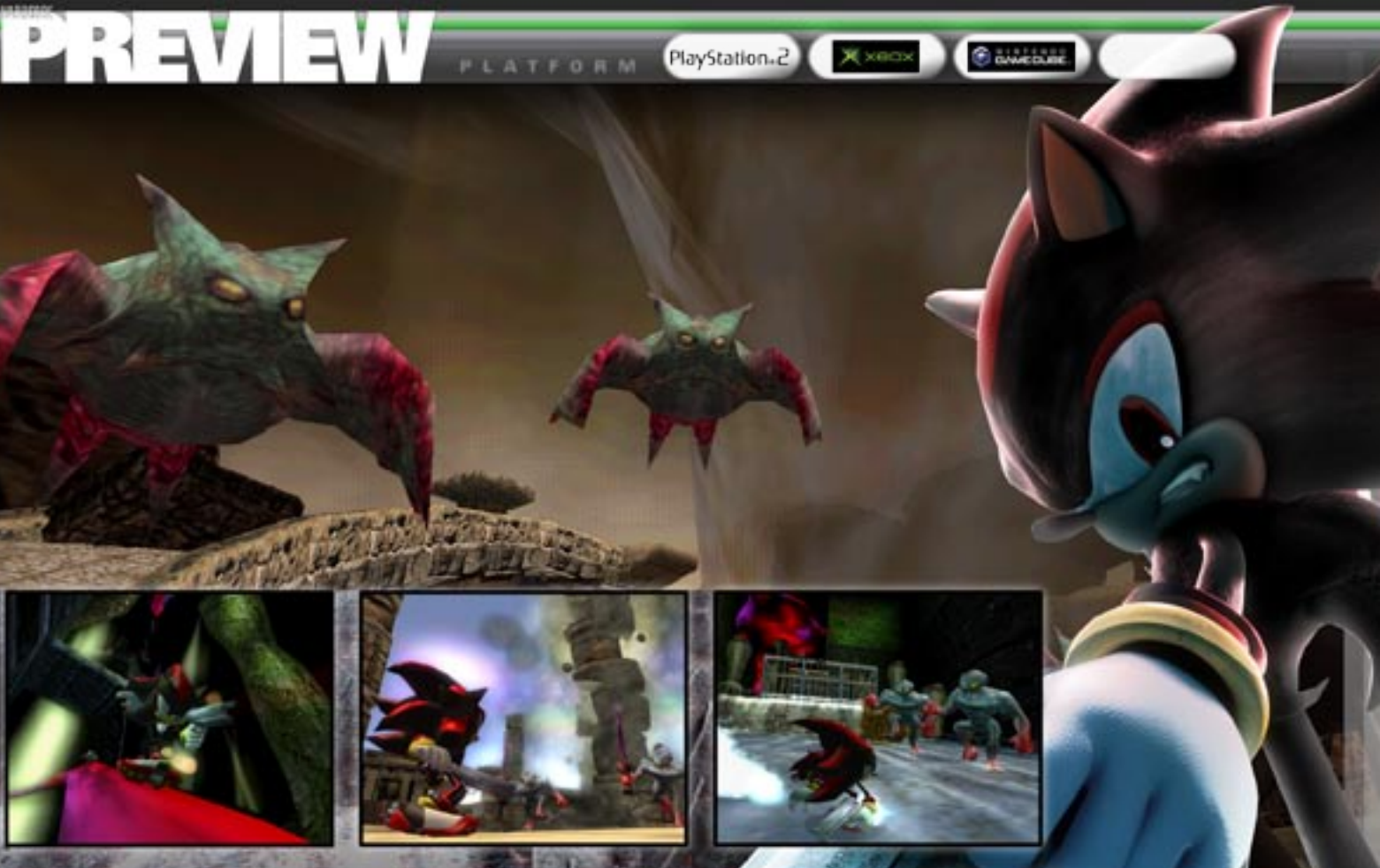
# SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG

Preview by Roger Danish

*Shadow the Hedgehog* is a mix of the blistering high-speed action of the *Sonic* series, combined with the weaponry and intensity of a third-person shooter.

Created as the Ultimate Life Form, Shadow the Hedgehog is a rebel tormented by a dark past. Was he created to save humankind, or was he made to do the evil bidding of the dark side? His only clues are his own forgotten memories, and those secrets can only be unlocked through the powers of the seven Chaos Emeralds. Everyone is after these precious gems, and in order to secure the Chaos Emeralds for himself and learn his true identity, Shadow must do whatever it takes. Is he a renegade or hero? You decide!

Heavy-duty firearms, such as bazookas, blasters and worm shooters, give Shadow the edge against his enemies. In addition, he can use his special skills, such as Chaos Control and Chaos Blast, to manipulate the environment at will. The game features a non-linear story progression that's determined by the choices the player makes. To augment his arsenal of weapons, Shadow can pick up and use environmental objects (poles, sticks, debris, etc.) to plow his way through a mission, as well as operate a wide assortment of vehicles (motorcycles, SUVs and even UFOs). Created entirely in the US, *Shadow the Hedgehog* promises to take the *Sonic* series in a new direction this winter.



**Publisher :** Sega  
**Developer :** Sega Studios USA  
**Release Date :** Winter 2005  
**Genre(s) :** Action  
**Category :** Platform  
**# of players :** 1



This year's E3 is a look at a medium in transition, as we dodge bored TV personalities, catch glimpses of celebrities, and try to get some work done despite all the fanboys who somehow got in. Looking for a heads-up on some of the next two years' worth of killer games? Look no further... this is just a small taste of the titles that will be on display at the show. Check out next issue for the motherlode of E3 game coverage.



## BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT



## JAMES BOND 007: FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE



## THE GODFATHER



## MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT



## BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT



## EA

It's a given that EA has a ton of new titles to show off at this year's E3 (including a host of next generation games), but we unfortunately only have space to show a sampling here and will have to follow up in our wrap up with the whole lineup (including sports!). At the top of the heap is **James Bond 007: From Russia With Love** (PS2, Xbox, GC). This is the first 007 game to put players in the universe of the classic films of the '60s Bond era. This 3rd-person action game features the likeness of Sean Connery and features mission based on the movie, as well as original content. **The Godfather** (PS2, PSP, Xbox, PC) features non-linear action/adventure gameplay with countless choices for solving the "family's" problems — either by brutal violence, skillful diplomacy or a cunning mixture of both. **Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire** (PS2, PSP, Xbox, GC, DS, GBA, PC) will release this November along with the film and reunites Harry and his Hogwart pals as they experience the thrills and perils of the Triwizard Tournament. **Battlefield 2: Modern Combat** (PS2, Xbox) brings both an action-packed single player campaign, as well as the award-winning multiplayer online action of the *Battlefield* series. **Medal of Honor: European Assault** (PS2, Xbox, GC) adds squad-based gameplay to this FPS series. You are the first field agent of the OSS and the path you forge is up to you. Gather intelligence, defeat the Nazis, and then go online and challenge your friends in nine different gameplay modes.

## BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT



## JAMES BOND 007: FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE



## HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE



## MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT



## CALL OF DUTY 2



## FANTASTIC FOUR



## QUAKE 4



## SHREK SUPERSLAM



## THE MOVIES



## CALL OF DUTY 2



## ACTIVISION

Activision looks to have a solid if uninspired lineup, which is mostly based on sequels, spin-offs, and licensed product. **Call of Duty 2** (PC) is the sequel to the intense WWII-based FPS developed by many of the original members of the Medal of Honor team. **Fantastic Four** (PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA, PC) is an all-out four-player, team-based brawler based on the upcoming feature film. **The Movies**, from Lionhead Studios and Peter Molyneux (remember *Populous?*), is an imaginative life-sim game that allows players to create their own movies from the studios to the cutting room floor. **Quake 4** (PC, Xbox), developed by Raven Software using id's *Doom 3* engine, looks dark and intense with both interior and outdoor action. **Shrek Superslam** (PS2, Xbox, GC, GAB, DS) is a four-player melee fighting game based on the *Shrek* movies. **X-Men Legends II** looks to deliver more characters (you team up with the Brotherhood of Mutants this time around) and plenty of mutant-based action/RPG adventuring — both online and off. Finally, **Ultimate Spider-Man**, which is based on the re-invented comic series of the same name, features amazing comic book style graphics and interactive "paneled cinemas." In this sandbox game, you get to play as both Spidey and Venom.

## ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN



## FANTASTIC FOUR



## QUAKE 4



## SHREK SUPERSLAM



## THE MOVIES



## X-MEN LEGENDS II





## DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI TENKAICHI



## INDIGO PROPHECY



## ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3: SOAKED



## THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO



## TYCOON CITY: NEW YORK



## DRAGONSHARD



## ATARI

Atari's diverse E3 lineup has a few potential blockbusters in the mix, with **Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure** (PS2) at the top of the list. This 3rd-person action/adventure allows players to roam a sprawling metropolis fighting the "Man" while scaling just about any object and building and tagging it with graffiti. **Indigo Prophecy** (PS2, Xbox, PC) also has us intrigued. In this unique, free-flowing adventure, the player assumes the role of multiple characters and experiences the game from a variety of viewpoints. Every choice you make changes the game and ultimately affects the plot. **Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi** (PS2) is the first and only DBZ title to combine fighting and flying in wide-open, destructible 3D environments. With more than 60 playable characters and multiple gameplay modes, this promises to be the ultimate *Dragon Ball Z* game. **Dragonshard** (PC) is a real-time strategy game based on the new *Eberron* D&D universe. The game seamlessly combines two styles of play into one — strategy and dungeon crawl — and features both RPG and RTS elements. **RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked** (PC) gives players the chance to run their own water park with this expansion to the popular *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3*. **The Matrix: Path of Neo**, marks the second collaboration of Atari, Shiny, the Wachowski Brothers and Joel Silver. Set in the Matrix universe, this game will let players take on the role of "Neo" and relive the most memorable scenarios from the trilogy. **Timeshift** (Xbox, PC) is a FPS that allows gamers the unique ability to slow, stop and reverse the flow of time. **Tycoon City: New York** (PC) allows would be city planners to make it big building your own business empire in modern day New York. Last but not least, **Test NG: Unlimited** (Xbox 360) is Atari's first offering for Microsoft's next gen system. It features near-photo real graphics, a sprawling island of Oahu on which to race, and some very cool and robust online features — more to come!

## DRAGONSHARD



## MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE



## TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED



## TIMESHIFT



## TYCOON CITY: NEW YORK



## BANDAI

Bandai is big into television show-affiliated properties. **D.I.C.E.** features one-on-one fighting action and some mecha-transformation with the cast of your favorite animated series, *D.I.C.E.* **Gundam Seed: Never Ending Tomorrow** features one-on-one fighting action with giant mobile suits. **Inuyasha: Feudal Combat** features one-on-one fighting action with the cast of your favorite animated series, *Inuyasha*. **One Piece** for PS2 and GameCube features one-on-one fighting action with the cast of your favorite animated series, *One Piece*. **Zatchbell!** features one-on-one fighting action with the cast of your favorite animated series, *Zatchbell!* (starring normal people and their bizarre puppet-like supernatural servants, the Mamodo). Breaking the mold, **Ghost in the Shell** for PSP will be a FPS and the GBA version of *One Piece*, a platformer.

## ONE PIECE



## EMPIRE EARTH II



## THE INCREDIBLE HULK



## D.I.C.E.



## GUNDAM SEED: NEVER ENDING TOMORROW



## ZATCHBELL!



## SCARFACE



## THE INCREDIBLE HULK



## GHOST IN THE SHELL PSP



## INUYASHA: FEUDAL COMBAT



## 50CENT BULLETPROOF



## VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

**50 Cent: Bulletproof** (PS2, Xbox) combines hard-hitting action and unprecedented interaction with the rap artist's music. Not much is known about the gameplay, except that it's decidedly bloody. **Empire Earth II** is the sequel to the original and is a deep and strategic RTS where players take control of a fledgling civilization and strive to forge the greatest of all empires. **Scarface: The World is Yours** (Next Gen, PS2, Xbox, PC) you play Tony Montana as you travel through the steamy, violent streets of Miami in order to rebuild your drug empire. Like the *GTA* series, *Scarface* is an open-ended sandbox game. **The Incredible Hulk** (PS2, Xbox, GC) opens up the world of the Hulk to the player and lets them leap across destructible environments and use virtually anything as a weapon.

## HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY



## 25 TO LIFE



## HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY



## LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND



## COMPANY OF HEROES



## DESTROY ALL HUMANS



## TITAN QUEST



## EIDOS

It may look like Eidos has a relatively small lineup, but they may have some last-minute surprises up their collective sleeves. **25 to Life** (PS2, Xbox, PC) is an online cops and robbers game — think of it as *SOCOM* in an urban gangland setting. In **Hitman: Blood Money**, the bald assassin returns. The game takes place in the US and has a new economic system that results in a unique gameplay experience for each player. Eidos' big guns could be in the form of **Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend**, which was snatched from the Smith bros. and Core Design and handed over to the capable hands of Crystal Dynamics (the *Kain* team), who has been busy rebuilding the *TR* brand while building on the original aspects that made the first few so great.

## DESTROY ALL HUMANS



## MOTOGP3



## WARHAMMER 40,000 DAWN OF WAR



## KONAMI

While many gamers are waiting with bated breath to find out if the next gen MGS will be shown at E3, Konami still has a killer lineup for the show. **Castlevania: Curse of Darkness** (PS2), features a new non-Belmont character (Hector, a Devil Forgemaster) who has the ability to summon Innocent Devils. In **Castlevania DS** (DS), the storyline from *Aria of Sorrow* continues. The game uses a "Magic Seal" system utilizing the DS's touch screen. **Coded Arms** (PSP) features wireless multiplayer for up to four players. **Death Jr.** (PSP) is an action/platform game featuring the son of the Grim Reaper who is armed with his very own mighty scythe, along with an arsenal of guns and explosives. **Dragon Booster** (DS) is a fast-paced 3rd person racing/action/combat game set in a fantastical world. In **Frogger: Helmet Havoc** (DS), the green guy must hop his way through another set of arcade-style levels. **Lost in Blue** (DS) is an RPG that takes players on a journey of survival, adventure and mystery.

## DRAGON BOOSTER



## FROGGER: HELMET HAVOC



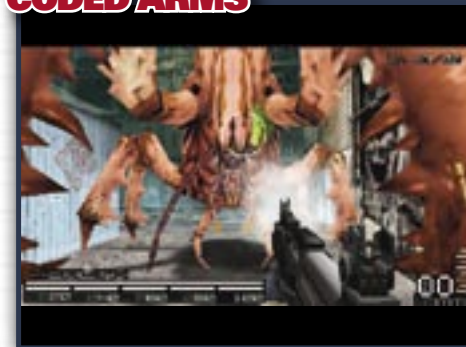
## SERIOUS SAM 2



## CASTLEVANIA DS



## CODED ARMS



## LOST IN BLUE



## CONFLICT: GLOBAL TERROR



## SHATTERED UNION



## CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS



## DEATH JR.



## CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY



## 2K GAMES

While the 2K sports line up will have to wait to be revealed until after E3, we do have the goods on some of their entertainment titles. **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** is an action/puzzle game based on the upcoming Warner Bros. film. **Conflict: Global Terror** (PS2, Xbox, PC) is a modern-day squad-based shooter set in the 21st century that features a host of improvements and additions over the previous versions. **Shattered Union** (PS2, Xbox, PC) is a modern 3D strategic war game in which players fight tactical, turn-based battles in a variety of familiar. Finally, **Serious Sam II** (Xbox, PC) is the true successor to the intense and action-packed original FPS developed by Croteam. Expect amazing graphics, frantic shooting action, vehicles (both machine and animal) and all of the over-the-top weapons you would expect in a SS game. In addition to these titles, 2K will also have *Prey*, *Duke Nukem* (it's really coming!) and, quite possibly, a first-look at *Family Guy*.

## THQ

THQ is announcing their share of sequels, but their E3 lineup should place an emphasis on their forthcoming original content. **Destroy All Humans!** (PS2, Xbox), which simultaneously celebrates and parodies 1950s science fiction movies; the game itself is a mission-based "playground" game, letting you run amok with high-powered alien weapons in the heart of small-town America. **Company of Heroes** (PC) is an intense RTS, using the Havok 3.0 physics engine to provide some stunning visuals. The name of the game is explosions; anything you see can be knocked down or blown up. In further RTS news, **Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War** (PC) also is receiving an expansion, with new added units, new levels, a better single player campaign, and the defense-oriented Imperial Guard to the game. THQ will also be showing a long, customizable dungeon crawler for the PC, called **Titan Quest** (PC). An action game slightly reminiscent of the games made with the Snowblind engine, such as *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*. **Titan Quest** pits a single hero against the monsters of ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt. Finally, THQ has **Juiced** (PS2, Xbox), the hell-for-leather racer they salvaged from the ruins of Acclaim.

## BLITZ THE LEAGUE



## FEAR & RESPECT



## L.A. RUSH



## MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONK



## THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND



## BLITZ THE LEAGUE



## MIDWAY

Midway's been on a roll lately, and they don't show any signs of slowing down. **The Suffering: Ties That Bind** (PS2, Xbox, PC) continues the original's story by taking Torque to a monster-infested Baltimore. **Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monk** (PS2, Xbox) is a surprisingly fun one- or two-player brawler, set around the time of *MK II* and pitting Liu Kang and Kung Lao against all the monsters and ninjas Outworld has to offer. **Midway Arcade Treasures 3** (PS2, Xbox, GC) is strictly for racing fans, featuring games like *S.T.U.N. Runner*, *Hydro Thunder*, *San Francisco Rush 2049*, and *Race Drivin'*. At the same time, **Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows** (PS2, Xbox, PC) is a reinvention of the classic arcade series for home consoles, adding an experience system and unique combos. **L.A. Rush** (PS2, Xbox) evolves the *Rush* franchise into a story-driven street racer that allows you to earn respect and street cred, as well as steal your rivals' rides. On a completely different note, **Rise & Fall: Civilizations at War** (PC) is a new RTS from Stainless Steel Studios. In it, players take control of one of eight nations in the ancient world and go to war against their neighbors. John Singleton's **Fear & Respect** (PS2, Xbox, PC) puts the player in the role of Goldie, an ex-gangster played by Snoop Dogg. In the game, you explore the housing projects of LA to build your reputation as either a feared criminal or a respected member of the community. Finally, **Blitz the League** (PS2, Xbox) is Midway's answer to not having the NFL license, and they are going way over the top.

## THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND



## BLITZ THE LEAGUE



## GAUNTLET: SEVEN SORROWS



## MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES 3



## RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR



## THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND



## SEGA

SEGA is full of surprises, and this once hardware manufacturing giant has rededicated itself to delivering a solid stable of quality. First off is **Condemned** (PC, Next Gen), a FPS psychological thriller developed by Monolith. Expect photo-realistic environments, life-like physics, and intense and frightening gameplay. **Full Auto** (Next Gen) combines fully automatic, weapon-equipped vehicles with highly detailed and interactive urban environments to deliver some of the most destructive racing action ever experienced in a video game. **Gunstar Super Heroes** (GBA), the sequel to one of the most critically acclaimed Genesis titles of all time is finally receiving a sequel — and it's being developed by Treasure. Need we say more? **Phantasy Star Universe** (PS2, PC) is the first single-player PS game to arrive in more than a decade. But, in addition to a 40+ hour RPG, players can also go online and travel with a squad of adventurers to continue their quest and strengthen their characters. **Shining Force Neo** (PS2) moves away from the turn-based tactical gameplay of the prior games in the RPG series and instead is a fast-paced action/adventure. **Spartan: Total Warrior** (PS2, Xbox, GC) is the first console title from The Creative Assembly (developers of Total War) and lets players lead epic and cinematic battles as a fighter known only as the Spartan.

## RADIATA STORIES



## DRAGON QUEST VIII



## CONDEMNED



## PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE



## SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR



## DIRGE OF CERBERUS: FINAL FANTASY VII



## KINGDOM HEARTS 2



## FULL AUTO



## SHINING FORCE NEO



## SQUARE-ENIX

Square Enix has a very eclectic E3 line up this year that focuses on taking advantage of their strong franchises. Kicking things off is **Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII** (PS2). This is the third installment in the **Compilation of Final Fantasy VII**, in which players lead Vincent Valentine through an action-packed adventure game. **Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King** (PS2) is the latest installment of the popular *DQ* series, which features classic gameplay combined with 3D cel-shaded graphics to deliver a sweeping RPG adventure. **Final Fantasy XII** (PS2) has been delayed a few times, but will be at the show. With a new 3D graphic engine and a deep storyline, this could be the biggest title in the series yet. **Kingdom Hearts II** (PS2) continues the quest of Sora, Donald and Goofy as they join Mulan and a host of other Disney favorites to stop Hades's villainous plot. **Radiata Stories** (PS2), the latest RPG from tri-Ace, developer of *Valkyrie Profile* and *Star Ocean*, features a new gameplay system and an emotional storyline that allows players to decide which individuals will lend a hand in their journey. Finally, **Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children** (UMD Movie) revisits the rich universe and characters from the original *FFVII* in a stunning and rich CG movie.

## RATCHET: DEADLOCKED



## SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS



## EYETOY: CHAT



## GENJI: DAWN OF THE SAMURAI



## MEDIEVIL RESURRECTION



## JAK X: COMBAT RACING



# SONY

While Sony looks as if they are ready to move on to the next generation of hardware, this doesn't mean they won't have another solid year of first party titles on tap for the PS2. At the top of this list is **Ratchet: Deadlocked** (PS2). This fourth installment features a decidedly darker look and feel and new squad-based gameplay. With **Jak X: Combat Racing** (PS2), gamers and fans of the J&D series will get to compete in high-speed races and head-to-head vehicle combat. **Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves** (PS2) reunites the crew, as well as adds a few new and familiar faces to the mix. In addition to many new features, Sly 3 includes a cool split-screen multiplayer mode. **Shadow of the Colossus** (PS2) is a breathtaking action adventure from the team that brought you *ICO*. This time around, you are a young boy who must find 16 giant Colossi and find a way to bring them down. **Neopets: The Darkest Faerie** (PS2) is based on the popular virtual pet website that combines whimsy and cute characters with action and RPG elements. **Genji: Dawn of the Samurai** (PS2), a 3rd-person action/adventure game inspired by Capcom's *Onimusha*, features dazzling animation and fierce swordplay. Sony will also have three new EyeToy applications on display: **EyeToy: Chat** (PS2) is the first console-based video conferencing software, **EyeToy: Kinetic** (PS2) is a comprehensive exercise program, and **EyeToy: Play 2** (PS2) brings a whole new suite of interactive min-games for the camera peripheral. In addition, **SOCOM III** (PS2) (not shown) will feature the ability to modify weapons in the field, the inclusion of vehicles and interconnectivity with **SOCOM** for the PSP (not shown). Speaking of PSP, in addition to **SOCOM** (PSP), there's **Medieval Resurrection** (PSP), a re-telling of the original game with new levels, multi-player options and a host of mini-games; and **The Con**, a unique fighting game where the goal is to stack the odds in your favor and win as much cash as you can — even if it means taking a fall!

## SLY 3: HONOR AMONG THIEVES



## NEOPETS: THE DARKEST FAERIE



## EYETOY: PLAY 2



## EYETOY: KINETIC



## THE CON



## ARC THE LAD: END OF DARKNESS



## MOTOGP4



## PAC 'N' ROLL



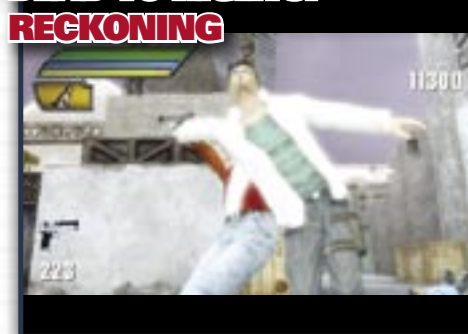
## SNIPER ELITE



## TALES OF LEGENDIA



## DEAD TO RIGHTS: RECKONING



# NAMCO

Namco's E3 line up is huge with a capital "H." Starting with **Arc the Lad: End of Darkness** (PS2), the next installment in the long-running RPG series. This sequel takes a real-time action approach versus the standard turn-based battles of the past and even incorporates online and co-op play. **Dead to Rights: Reckoning** (PSP) brings the same badass gameplay of the original to Sony's portable with new moves, weapons and features. **Katamari Damacy 2** (PS2) returns with the same-quirky captivating gameplay of the first but with all new levels and modes, including two-player co-op. **MotoGP4** (PS2), the latest installment in the most realistic motorcycle racing franchise for the PS2, offers a host of new features and unlockables, as well as online play. The PSP will get its own retro pack with **Namco Museum Battle Collection** (PSP). In addition to the classics, players will be able to play against each other wirelessly or join up for some co-op play. This compilation features 20 games in all, including enhanced versions of all your favorites. Make use of your stylus with **Pac'nRoll**, where you control Pac like a track ball. But wait, there's more of the yellow guy with **Pac-Man World 3** (PS2, PSP, Xbox, GC, PC). In this 3D sequel, Pac-Man bust out a host of new moves, and players will be able to also control Pinky and Clyde. In **Sniper Elite** (PS2, Xbox), you are a lone sniper who must infiltrate hostile enemy environments and use your stealth and sniper skills to stop Stalin's forces from controlling the world's nuclear technology. Pac-Man's not finished with the DS yet. In **Super Pac-Man Pinball** (DS), you can enjoy classic dot munching combined with cutting-edge table design and challenging pinball physics. **Tales of Legendia** (PS2) brings the Tales series to the PS2 with furiously fast real-time battles and an emotionally charged storyline. Finally, **Urban Reign** (PS2) is a unique, objective-based fighting game where you must fight your way through the corrupt city streets over a series of 100 missions.

## KATAMARI DAMACY 2



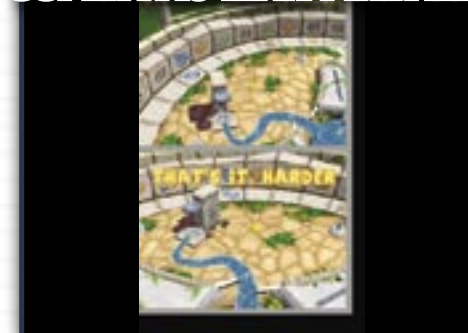
## NAMCO MUSEUM BATTLE COLLECTION



## PAC-MAN WORLD 3



## SUPER PAC-MAN PINBALL



## URBAN REIGN



187 RIDE OR DIE



AMERICA'S ARMY: RISE OF A SOLDIER



FAR CRY INSTINCTS



HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC V



PRINCE OF PERSIA 3



187 RIDE OR DIE



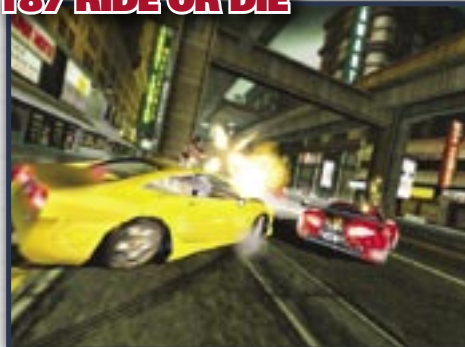
## UBISOFT

Ubisoft always brings something exciting to the table and this year should be no different. **187 Ride or Die** (PS2, Xbox, PC) is a high-octane street racing combat game where automatic weapons, fast cars and hot women are all up for grabs. **America's Army: Rise of a Soldier** (PS2, Xbox) is a FPS developed in partnership with the U.S. Army — be all that you can be! **Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WW II** (Xbox) gives players the harrowing experience of living through the most gripping and famous battles of WWII through the eyes of an ace fighter pilot. **Far Cry Instincts** (PS2, Xbox) is a FPS that originally took the PC world by storm. With realistic physics, a 100% open environment, and advanced AI, this could end up being one to watch out for. **Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 3** (Next Gen, PS2, Xbox, GC, PC) is being developed both for the next generation (Xbox 360) as well as current consoles and showcases some cool new features (such as the Cross-Com — a helmet attached visual aid) and a realistic open environment set in Mexico City. **Heroes of Might & Magic V** (PC) takes this tried and true RPG series into the tactical turn-based realm with 3D graphics, a darker universe, and an intense multiplayer mode. Finally, **Prince of Persia 3** (PS2, Xbox, GC, PC) sees the prince returning from his last adventure to find Babylon in ruins. In this sequel, you control two distinct characters, have a host of new and deadly moves, and still solve puzzles while exploring the expansive backdrop of Babylon.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3



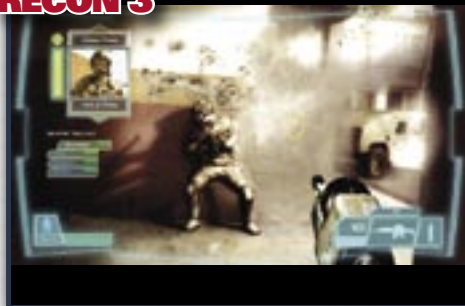
187 RIDE OR DIE



BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WW II



TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON 3



HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC V



PRINCE OF PERSIA 3



PRESENTS

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Controllers

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- PROGRAMMABLE WITH RUMBLE!

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# VIDEOGAME CAMEOS



**Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando**  
• Clank's apartment has a picture of Jak & Daxter above its fireplace.

by Wanderer and the HGM Staff

After nearly thirty years of video games, they've developed a rich history of weirdnesses, in-jokes, and oddities. This is probably just what you get when you stick a few dozen geeks in the same room together for months at a time.

One of the Easter eggs I really like is the cameo appearance, when one game makes a reference to another. This is our listing of and tribute to cameos in gaming, for your entertainment, education, and information.

If you've got a cameo you'd like to contribute, post it at our forums, available at [www.hardcoregamer.com](http://www.hardcoregamer.com). The best ones will appear in future issues.



**Mega Man X (Left)**  
• After collecting all the Heart Tanks, Sub-Tanks, and special weapons in the game, you can find a special capsule hidden on the Armored Armadillo stage. Inside, Dr. Light will teach you the Hadoken, which is, of course, the fireball move made popular by Ryu and Ken of *Street Fighter* fame.  
**Mega Man X-2 (Right)**  
• A special Light Capsule is hidden on the third X-Hunter Stage. It'll teach you the Shoryuken.



**Bad Dudes**  
• The first boss is Karnov, the hero of the NES shooter of the same name.



**Bionic Commando**  
• The object of the game is to rescue Super Joe, the hero of *Commando*.



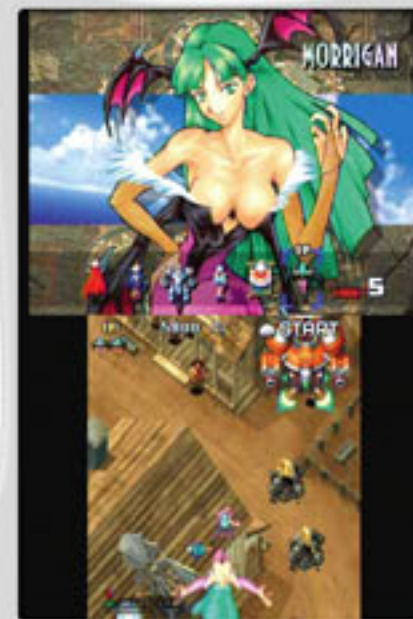
**Uniracers**  
• If you try to enter "Sonic" or "Sega" as your name, the game will start talking smack.



**Garou: Mark of the Wolves**  
• Andy Bogard makes an appearance in Hokutomaru's ending.



**Breath of Fire**  
• In Bleak, put 100 GP on the magician's table. When he says to look behind you, say "No" twice, then say "Yes." You'll see Chun-Li performing a Lightning Kick.



**Gunbird 2**  
• Place the cursor over the random option on the character select screen and press up to select Morrigan Aensland from *Darkstalkers*. Pressing down will select Ein, from the import-only *Sengoku Ace Episode II*.



**Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow**  
• Genya Arikado is actually Alucard; even if Yoko didn't accidentally refer to him by that name, he dispatches the skeletons at the beginning of the game with the Soul Steal spell.

**Cannon Spike**  
• One of the levels has, as a miniboss, a possessed and demonic version of Balrog, a.k.a. Vega. Baby Bonnie Hood and Mega Man are selectable characters, and there's an entire stage dedicated to parodying the *Resident Evil* series



**Crusader of Centy**  
• At one point, you can find Sonic chilling out at the beach.



**Castlevania: Symphony of the Night**  
• While holding the Shield Rod, input ←↻↵↻→ + Attack to summon an energy field, identical to the Shield powerup from *Gradius*.  
• The hellhound in the background chases Richter Belmont through a level of *Castlevania IV* (a.k.a. *Dracula X*, a.k.a. *Rondo of Blood*), and turns up here, dead, in the Colosseum in *Symphony of the Night*.



### Sonic Adventure

- One stage is set in a casino, patterned after the Saturn classic *NIGHTS into Dreams*.



**Final Fight 2** (Left) • In the first level, Chun-Li is in the background, eating at a sidewalk cafe.

**Final Fight 3** (Right) • The infamous Capcom mainstay, the Yashichi, is hidden behind a pillar in Stage 1. Here, it grants temporary invincibility; in other Capcom games (*Mega Man*, *Strider*), it simply gave out enormous point bonuses.



### Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut

- Among other prizes, you can unlock Kasumi and Ayane's outfits from *Dead or Alive 2* in Mission Mode.



### Dead or Alive 2 Ultimate

- Ayane's 7th costume is Millenia's outfit from *Kagero: Deception 2*, complete with the tattoo on her back.



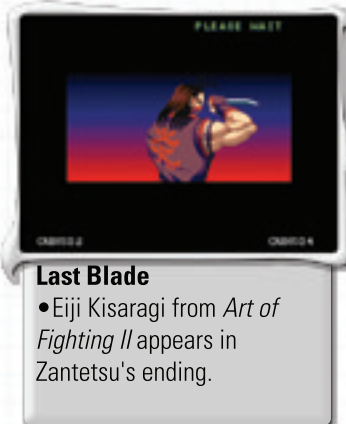
### Street Fighter Alpha 3

- One of Sakura's win quotes alludes to her appearance in *Rival Schools*.
- Dan Hibiki is basically Robert Garcia's head on Ryo Sakazaki's body, wearing a pink gi. In short, he's a walking parody of the lead characters of the *Art of Fighting* series. (That parody was later reciprocated by Yuri Sakazaki, as we'll see on the next page.)



### King of Fighters 99'

- After Capcom parodied the *Art of Fighting* crew with Dan Hibiki, SNK returned the favor with Yuri Sakazaki. Many of Yuri's moves are parodies of *Street Fighter* characters' techniques, such as the Shin-Shoryuken (left), Denjin Hadouken (middle), and Akuma's Raging Demon (right).



### Last Blade

- Eiji Kisaragi from *Art of Fighting II* appears in Zantetsu's ending.



### Rocket Knight Adventures

- One of the minibosses is the Big Core boss from several games in the *Gradius* series.



### Shadow Hearts: Covenant

- One of the competitors in the Wolf Hunt, Kelly, is a parody of Terry Bogard, the hero of the *Fatal Fury* series.



### Snatcher

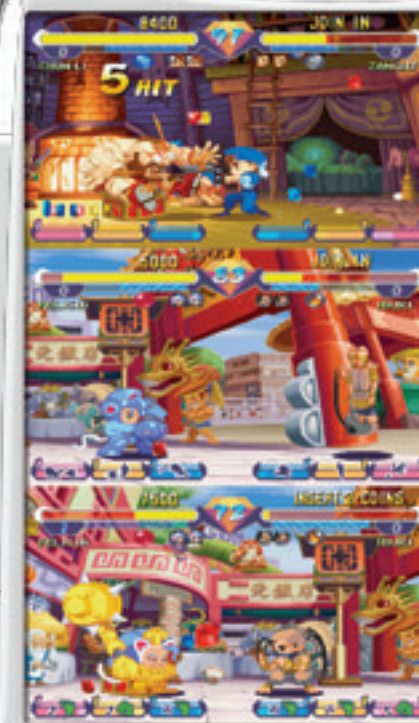
- Your robotic partner is named Metal Gear. It's explained that he's named after the great war machines of the past.

HEH HAD NO INTEREST IN THE FRONTIER. THEN HIS FATHER TROY WAS KILLED. SOMEONE BROKE INTO THEIR LAB., STOLE THEIR INVENTION, AND LEFT TROY AS A PILE OF JELLY ON THE FLOOR. IT'S BEEN 25 YEARS SINCE HEH WAS KING OF THE STREET FIGHTER CIRCUIT. BUT THAT'S NOTHING SOME GOOD BROTHERS CAN'T FIX.



### Street Fighter 2010

- The main character shares the name and occupation of Ken Masters from *Street Fighter II*. Supposedly, this is just a coincidence.



### Pocket Fighter

- Several characters' Flash Combos transform them briefly into characters from other Capcom games (Chun-Li into Jill Valentine, Felicia into Mega Man...).

The secret art of

# GAME HACKING

Diary of a ROM hacker by BegasPack



Having reached the top girder, I had just one more ladder to climb to save the lady and move on to the next level. As I started my final ascent, something intriguing caught my eye. Just a short distance to my left were two long ladders that extended upward into the dark unknown. Since there was still plenty of time left on the clock, I figured that saving the lady could wait. I had to climb these ladders and find out where they went. I dashed to my left and hopped over a couple of barrels. I was abruptly stopped by an "invisible barrier" that prevented me from reaching the mysterious ladders. D'oh! It was apparent that the game's programmers didn't want me or any other adventurous soul to find out what was up there.

## WHY HACK?

Fast forward to more than twenty years later. As I sat hacking those *Donkey Kong* ROMs, I came across the section of code that created that "invisible barrier." I quickly deleted it and played the game again. After all these years, I climbed those ladders and found out what was at the top: nothing.

Well, not every hack turns into an outstanding marvel of gaming ingenuity. I did the "invisible barrier" hack merely to satisfy my curiosity, but there are plenty of other motivations for hacking games. Some people look to create cheats that provide extra power-ups or unlimited lives; some want to add features like rapid-fire or alternative mazes; and sometimes the motivation is just to fix those oh-so-obvious bugs that have annoyed the %#\$!@ out of us for all these years.

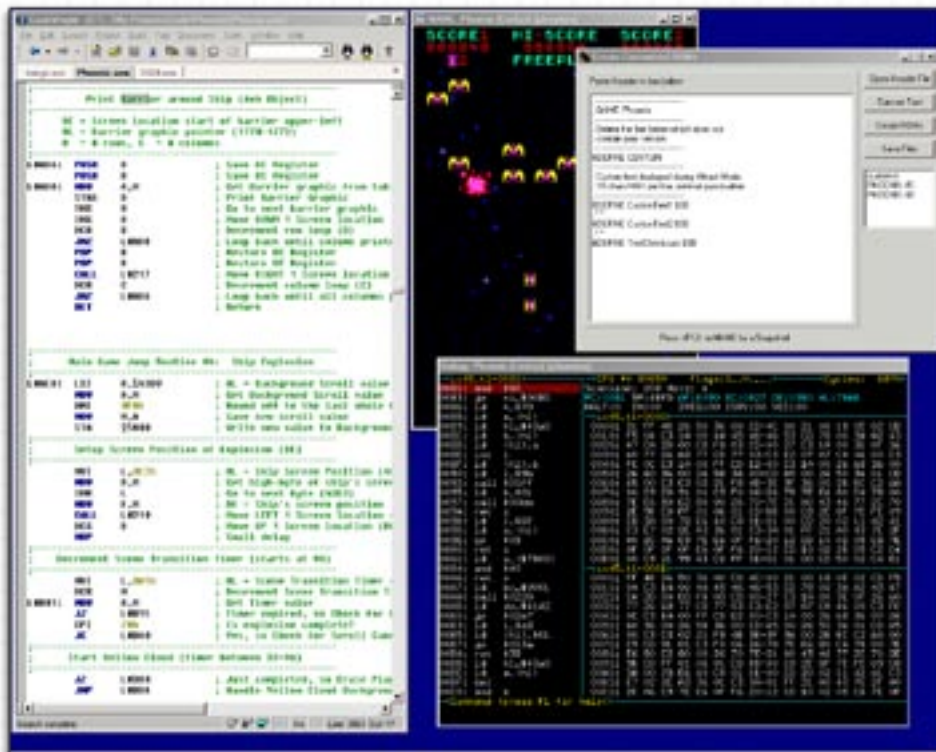
While most modern games stay fresh by offering level editors or expansion packs, the classics can get boring rather easily. Let's face it; it can get old playing the same Pac-Man maze over and over again, and who wouldn't want to see a new level added to *Donkey Kong* for a change? That's where hacking comes in. Numerous people have already lent their skills to some pretty creative hacks. A quick search of the Internet will turn up things like level editors for *Tempest*, upgrades for *Crazy Climber*, and new features for *TRON*. One of my favorites is a hack that lets you play the "Drawbridge Scene" in *Dragon's Lair*.

Most of the hacks that I've created involve adding freplay to games that previously didn't have it. This is great for parties and such, where you don't want to have to keep pumping quarters into your games. The gameplay itself remains unchanged. I simply alter the routines that monitor the START buttons and ignore any checks for credits when starting a game.

Of course, when you dive into the internals of the software code, you never know what you might find. The most surprising thing I found was in the LaserDisc game *Thayer's Quest* when I came across a lengthy list of curse words. Apparently, the programmers had hoped to foil any attempts by kids to abuse the game's "speak my name" feature by creating a Do-Not-Say list. Often I'll find "backdoors" that programmers used to playtest their code. A special patch inside the *Dragon's Lair* code allowed you to play the whole game if you held the joystick a certain way when you inserted your quarters. (I could have saved a lot of money if I knew about this when I was a kid.) If you enter a certain input sequence in *Dig Dug*, you can bring up a secret NAMCO title screen.

Sometimes, I'll find remnants of routines that give hints as to what the

## PHOENIX ROM HACK IN PROGRESS



programmers "wanted" to do, but may have not been able to for whatever reason. In the ROMs for *Bega's Battle*, I found an enormous amount of unused code that turned out to be a demo mode, which never made it into the final game.

I often came across interesting routines and excitingly creative ways to accomplish things, like a really cool routine that generates a random number using the joystick direction, some timers, and the microprocessor's stack pointers. I've seen routines that continuously verify a copyright entry and intentionally screw up gameplay if it's ever altered. I've also seen some amazingly complex scheduling routines that seem almost too advanced to be running on such old hardware.

The thing that surprised me the most is how often I see identical routines show up in different games from different companies. People obviously weren't too shy about copying someone else's work. When you put *Congo Bongo* code next to *Donkey Kong* you'd be shocked at how much of the code is an exact match. There are some rare occasions where I see some bad code too -- stuff that's so messed up that I'm amazed that it even works. *Dig Dug* was one such example of some poorly written code. Most routines were very inefficient, often taking fifty to a hundred bytes to do something that could have been accomplished in five. It's pretty difficult to try to follow, and even more difficult to try to hack.



Jeff recently created a new level for the arcade classic, *Donkey Kong*, which you can install and play in an original *Donkey Kong* arcade machine or play with an emulator such as M.A.M.E. ([www.mame.net](http://www.mame.net)).

If you're interested in trying your hand at hacking, here are a couple of things to consider before getting started. First, make sure you pick a game that you know fairly well. Having a good knowledge of how a game works can be extremely helpful when you start dissecting it. Next, you'll need to become familiar with the language -- assembly language, that is. Find yourself a good tutorial on assembly instruction sets for old microprocessors like the Z80. Once you're familiar with these basics, you can dive in.



Figuring out how to modify games requires that you first familiarize yourself with some of the basic functions that most games share.

### INITIALIZATION

The first hunk of code is mostly used for initialization. Not all the initialization code is useful since most variables are simply set to "zero," so look for variables that are initialized to non-zero values. Variables that are set to 5 or 10, for example, may provide better clues as to what they are used for.

### INS AND OUTS

Search for commands IN and OUT. These commands will be associated with the input and output routines. Input variables include Joystick/Buttons, Status bytes, and DIP Switches. Output variables include Coin Counters, LED/Scoreboard Controls, and Graphic Chip Communications. Search for these instructions right away and make some early assumptions. Chances are you may be right!

### TIMERS

Timers can be count-UP or count-DOWN timers. Look for one- or two-byte variables that get decremented or incremented inside an interrupt. It's probably a timer of some sort. Analyze your game and find out where timers may be used. Does the Attract Mode run for a certain length of time? Do you have a certain amount of time to continue your game? Do you have a limited amount of time to enter your initials?

### DIAGNOSTIC HELP

Identifying the code for Diagnostic Mode can identify such things as RAM addresses, Video RAM addresses, ROM Checksums, Sprite X/Y locations, Joystick Input Routines, Coin Input Routines, DIP Switch Settings, and Sound Routines. The game manual should tell you the order in which Diagnostic Tests are run.

### USING DIP SWITCH INFO

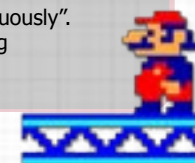
Find the switch settings that control Coins/Credit and Lives/Credit. This will help you find the RAM locations for Number of Coins, Number of Credits, and Number of Lives. Searching on these locations should help you find death routines (loss of life), bonus routines (award additional life) and coin insertion routines.

### COMMON ROUTINES

Look for routines that are called a lot. These routines may be math-type routines. Finding a routine that, say, adds two numbers together can possibly lead to a point-award routine. Finding math routines that subtract may lead to timeout routines or death routines.

### INTERRUPTS

Interrupts normally have routines that must be run "continuously". Routines such as checking for coins or redrawing/refreshing the screen are commonly found in interrupts.

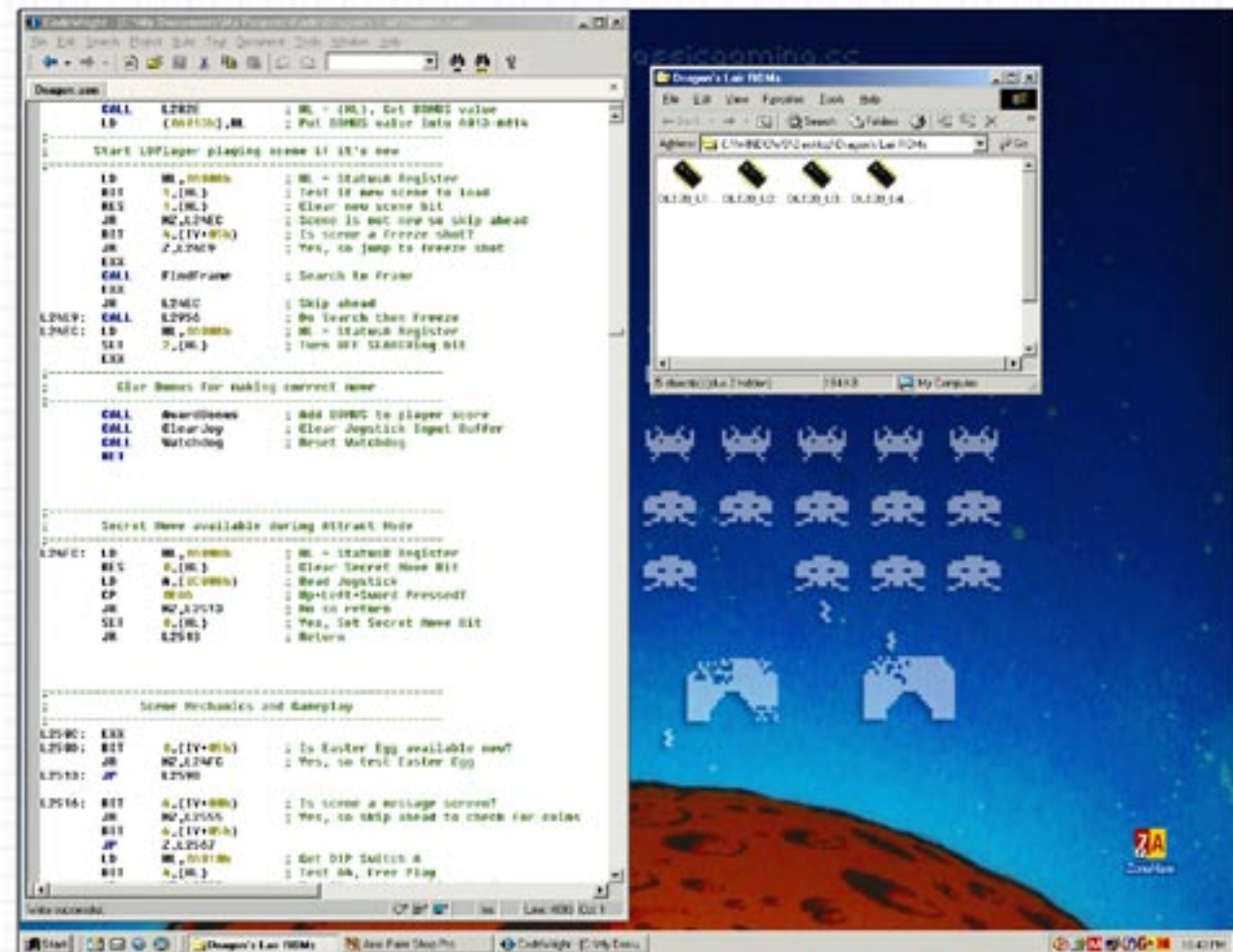
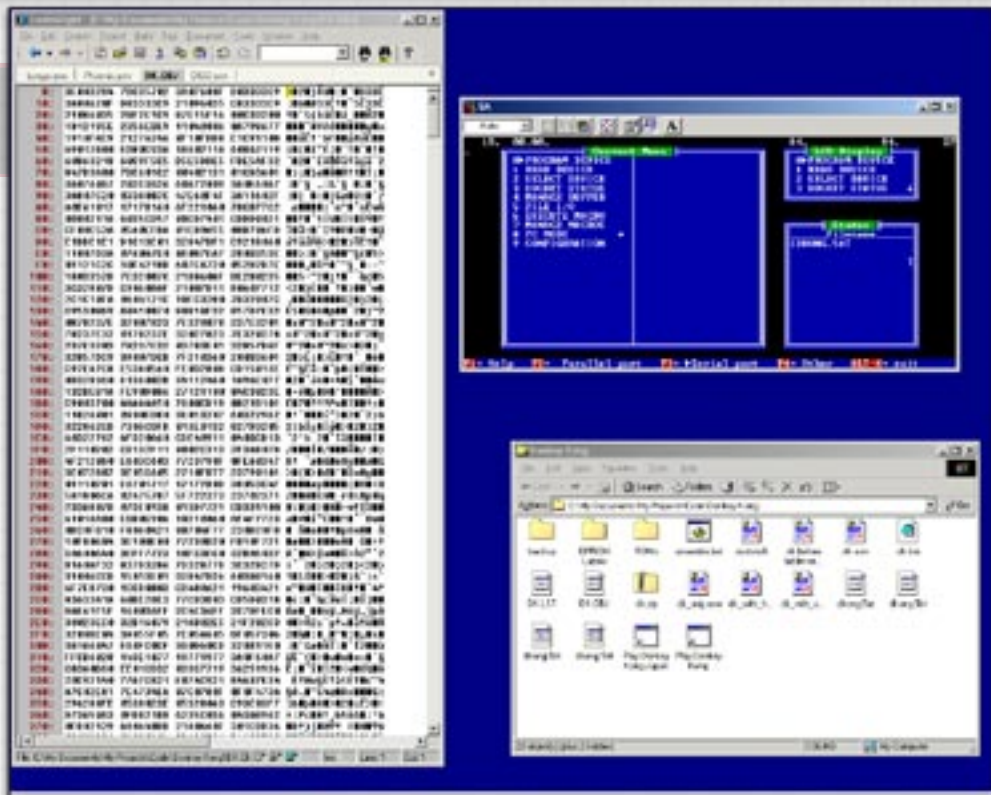




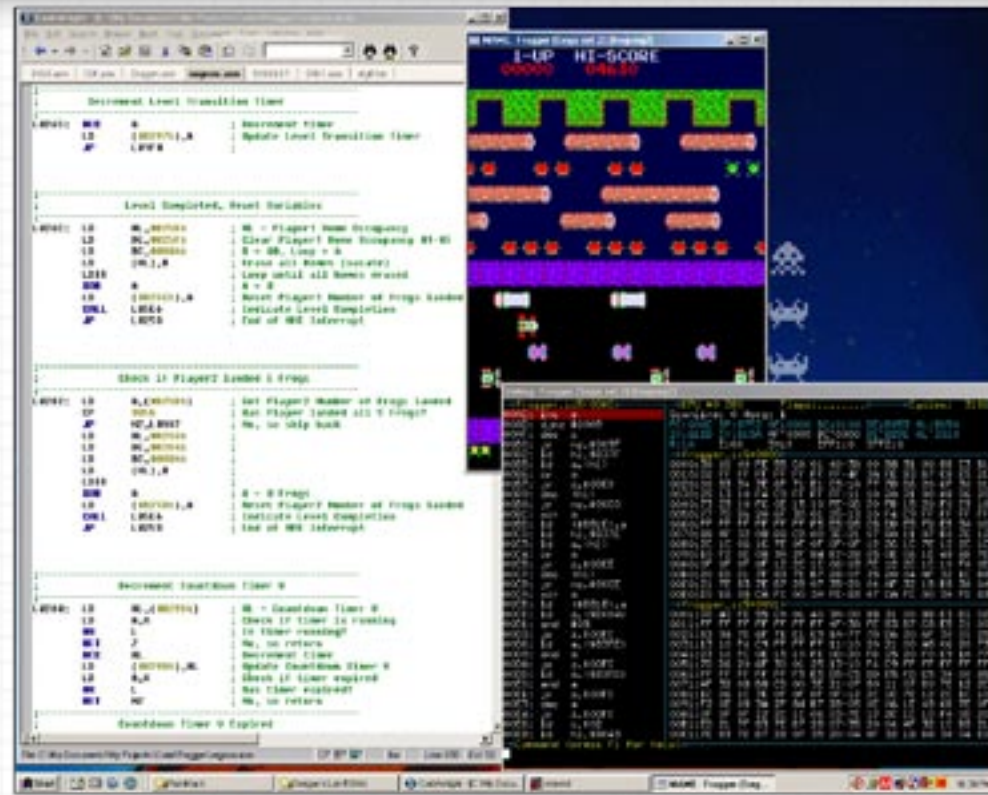
## DAD, WHAT'S INSIDE OF A ROM? IT'S FULL OF BITS, JIMMY. LOTS OF BITS.

Now, don't think that you'll find a sign that says "Place Your Hack Here." Often, the biggest challenge of creating a hack, is figuring out where it goes. You can spend hours, even days, staring at thousands of assembly instructions trying to make sense out of it. For the inexperienced, it can be like staring at a city map that doesn't have any street names. Check out the HACKING TIPS section on the previous page for tips on what you can look for to start making sense of things. With a little persistence (and some trial and error) you'll start to understand what you're looking at, and before you know it you'll be a hacking madman. Good luck!

There's still plenty of life in those old classic games. As more enthusiasts join the collecting hobby, we're bound to see



No, most hackers do not speak hexadecimal from birth. To turn those piles of bytes into something a little more comprehensible, you need a disassembler/ assembler. Once the code is disassembled from the ROM (i.e., converted to english mnemonics) things will start making a little more sense and you can start adding notes to each instruction to keep track of what it's doing.



new and exciting hacks. Someday, your curiosity may even get the best of you and force you to put your hacking cap on. The results will surely pump excitement back into these great games, and one day you may revisit your favorite game and find yourself playing a new level, fighting a new enemy, or climbing a ladder that has never been climbed before.

BegasPack is Jeff Kulczycki, creator of [jeffsromhack.com](http://jeffsromhack.com). If you're serious about becoming a ROM hacker, there's no better place to go to get the tools and knowledge you need than Jeff's web site.

HGM

## FROGGER GOES UNDER THE KNIFE

## M.A.M.E. IS GOOD FOR MUCH MORE THAN JUST PLAYING

M.A.M.E. (Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator) is an excellent tool for exploring the inner workings of arcade game code. You'll need to get a hold of a version that has debugging options enabled. M.A.M.E.'s debugging tools allow you to do all sorts of neat things to a game's code in real-time.

### BREAKPOINTS

Set breakpoints at the beginning of routines that you are trying to understand. Make note of when the breakpoint happens, because knowing when a routine runs can be very helpful in understanding what the routine does. Does the routine run when the player dies, when an enemy is killed, or when the game starts up?

### WATCH YOUR STEP

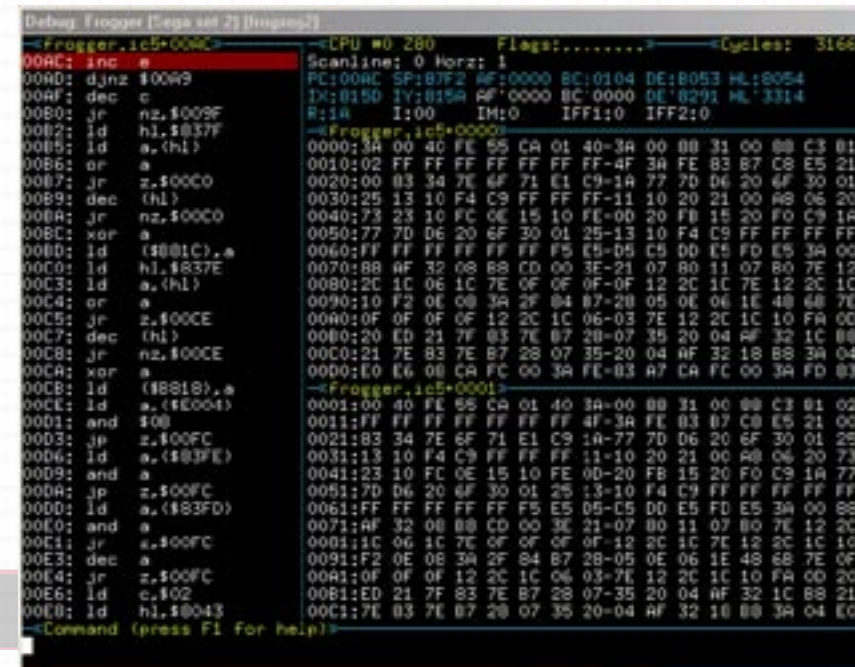
Step through the game using the STEP feature. You'll be able to follow the program flow much more closely, and you'll be able to watch variables get updated as each line of code gets executed.

### KEEP A WATCHFUL EYE

Watch windows allow you to watch the contents of memory. Watching variables change can help you identify timers and counters. Keeping track of when variables change can help you find key routines. When does the player's score get updated? When is an extra life awarded?

### TESTING

M.A.M.E. is also a great way to test out hacks relatively quickly, and with considerably less effort than burning EXROMs and installing them in your game. Do all your testing with M.A.M.E. first. You can field test your hack using the actual game later, once you've worked out all the major bugs. M.A.M.E. emulates the original games so faithfully that there's rarely any difference.



## MAME'S DEBUGGER IS POWERFUL HACKING JOY

# SPARKSTER

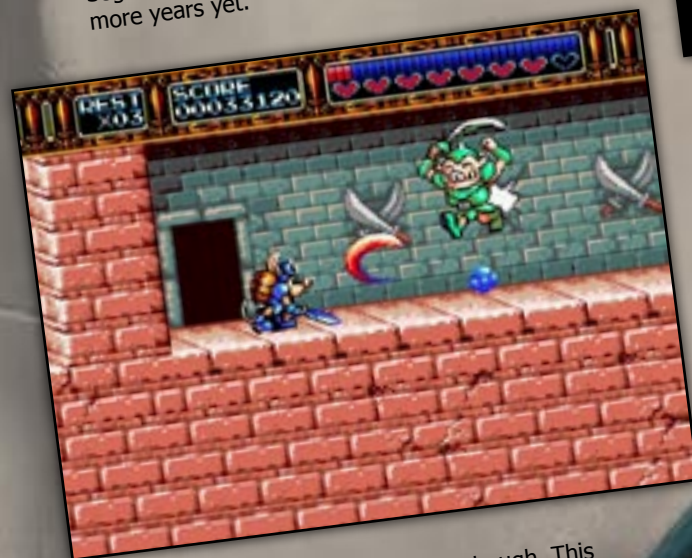
by Racewing

In the early 1990s, the mascot battle lines were drawn.

The popularity of Nintendo's *Super Mario* series was tantamount, and the hero of the games, Mario, had become an icon synonymous with the concept of videogaming itself. Rival company Sega needed something to counter it, to keep their name known in the market, and they needed it fast.

They took this to heart.

Sega eventually bestowed *Sonic the Hedgehog* upon the world; and it was good. It was "cool", filled with "attitude", and spat in the face of Mario's more "traditional" look. It was incredibly fast, and fun to play. Most importantly, it was enough to keep Sega in the hardware and popularity race for a few more years yet.

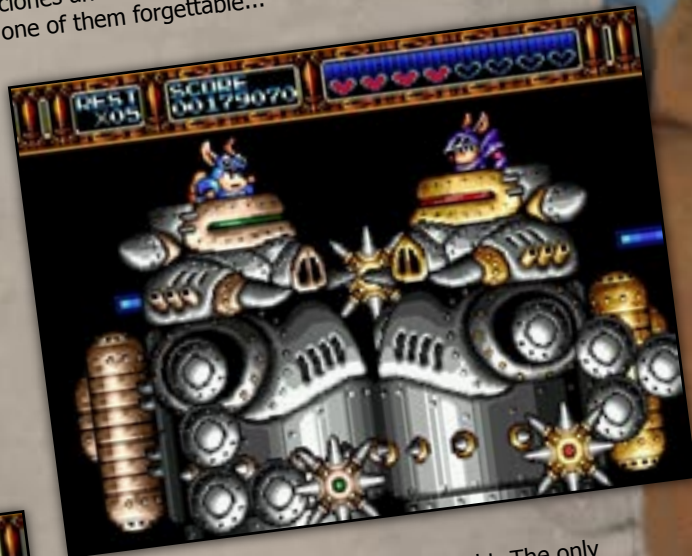


This article isn't about *Sonic*, though. This is about the consequences.

After *Sonic's* popularity exploded, everyone wanted a piece of the mascot pie. Suddenly, you could hardly shake a stick without hitting a brand new franchise featuring a Furry Animal With An Attitude™.

Platform(s) : Sega Genesis, Super Nintendo  
Publisher : Konami  
Developer : Konami  
Release date : 1993, 1994  
Genre : Action  
Categories : Platform  
# of players : 1

Rocky Rodent. Aero the Acrobat. Awesome Possum. *Bubsy*. A licensed *Speedy Gonzalez* game. The clones and derivatives kept coming, every single one of them forgettable...



...except for the only one that got it right. The only one that, instead of just trying to rip off *Sonic's* "attitude", ended up in a game that proved to be just as fun as the big-name games of the day. Indeed, the Big Two Mascots stole the entire show; but there was one more anthropomorphic animal with a 'tude that, by all rights, deserved to share their limelight.

Some of you remember him, some of you don't — if you're one of the latter, you're in luck.



Gamers, I give you *Sparkster*; quite possibly the most underrated, overlooked videogame franchise in existence.

### Rocket Knight Adventures

Konami first set Sparkster on the scene in '93 with *Rocket Knight Adventures*. Sparkster's a cute little possum with a mean sword and an even meaner rocket pack strapped to his back. He's the leader of a protective group known

as the Rocket Knights, and he's charged to save a princess and liberate a kingdom from an evil empire (and its equally evil ruler) comprised of walking, talking pigs, and their terrible colossal machines of super-duper hyper-death. One could actually interpret this as a satire of both the *Mario* and *Sonic* premises, fused together.



If the above weren't enough to contend with, he's also got to deal with his very own mirror-image rival. Mario's got his Wario; *Sonic* his Shadow; *Mega Man* his Bass; Sparkster has Axel Gear, a Dark Knight with the same powers and appearance as Sparkster, but a cocky disposition and a long-standing rivalry against our hero. He's known to always ally himself with whatever evil force is wreaking havoc at the time, and he's a *persistent* little bugger to boot. Sparkster takes him on more than once in the later stages of the game, and fighting him is never, ever easy.

What made *Rocket Knight Adventures* special was rock-solid gameplay, from start to finish. Its other aspects were nice, to be sure; it had a great (if schizophrenic) soundtrack, and passable graphics. However, *RKA* is best remembered as action and platforming at their finest, sometimes twisting your brain in order to make you achieve your goal. In one stage, you're leaping between concealed rocks, with your only guidance being the reflective instant-kill lava underneath you that lets you see where the next rock is. In another, you're switching back and forth between the foreground and background (or as the game shows it; behind and in front of a waterfall) to avoid obstacles and an end-boss's attacks; in yet another, you're flying through space in a direct ripoff of Konami's own *Gradius* series.

This game was seriously inventive, and some of its ideas still haven't been used since. The addition of a rocket pack (charged by holding down the attack button for a certain amount of time; releasing made Sparkster shoot in the desired direction at tremendous speed with his sword in front of him) made the gameplay even more dynamic; it allowed the player to take things slow and methodically, or fast and hard. Switching off between both of these playstyles was key to beating the game, which was at times sickeningly tough. We're talking "one life and one continue on Normal Mode in a game where it's all too easy to get hit simply because you rocketed in the wrong place or just didn't take the time to stop and think" hard. But hey, that's where those old stage memorization skills come back into play — not to mention a whole lot of luck.

While this game enjoyed moderate acclaim and popularity, it got nowhere near what it deserved in this reviewer's opinion. Just not enough people took the time to sit down with it — and who could blame them? The market was crowded with





tons of great games and startup franchises, and *RKA's* premise ("Yet another rodent-type thing out to save the world? Ho-hum.") didn't have the best of track records behind it.

Still, despite this, Konami saw fit to continue the *Sparkster* franchise; and if fans of the original game were psyched before, they hadn't seen anything yet.

### Sparkster (SNES)

Enter *Sparkster*. Actually, this game didn't enter so much as it *stormed* the Super Nintendo in '94, easily earning the title of "sleeper hit" in its heyday. That no-good Axel Gear was back, in league with a race of dogs (or wolves. Or bandicoots. The enemy sprites make it almost impossible to tell). As if that weren't enough, he's done their dirty work by kidnapping yet another princess. So, of course, it's up to Sparkster to put a



wrench in the plans of the forces of evil yet again. To do so, he has to bust his way through hordes of invading warriors, and even more of those colossal machines of super-duper hyper-death that gamers had by now grown to love (to hate).



This game was actually more forgiving than the original, but still just as inventive, and just as mind-bending. The only tools with which Sparkster could accomplish his objectives were his trusty energy-projecting sword, his chargeable rocket pack, an aerial rolling slash (a la Sonic) that he came up with himself, and his wits — or rather, *your* wits. No other game at that time (and few today) made players escape from a sinking sub where the water cascaded through tight, spike-filled spaces at an alarmingly fast rate; escape from rooms where every single aspect of the game's control scheme was inverted, or to have a giant one-on-one robot fight in the depths of space. The game may have been easier, but the adventure was much, much bigger.

What really set this installment apart from the other *Rocket Knight* games, however, was image; not just of Sparkster himself, but of the game as a whole. For starters, Sparkster's sprite was changed, giving him the look of a battle-hardened hero instead of a naïve little possum who may or may not have known which way was up. This new Sparkster actually looked like a warrior, a *Knight*, fully up to the new challenges presented to him.

The game itself also reflected this darker, more grandiose tone. The SNES's color and sprite capabilities were used to their fullest, with enemies and traps just as inventive as the ones in *RKA* coming at Sparkster at every turn, and everything having a rich and vibrant look to it. Even time changes were implemented; day changed to night, stars appeared and disappeared, adding to the immersion. This game was absolutely *gorgeous*, especially when compared to the original; the shock factor being akin to looking at a black-and-white film in color for the very first time. It looked that good. (It also most easily proved that Sega's "Blast Processing" was hogwash; despite the host system's lower processing power, the SNES version of *Sparkster* boasted tremendously fast gameplay, slowing down only during huge explosions or sprite overpopulation. The SNES could do fast gaming, and now everyone knew it.)

It was also blessed with one of the greatest soundtracks in video game history. Tall claim, I know, but seriously: ask anyone who's played this game in their life if they still remember the background music to the space-shooting level. I bet you they can, or at least can reminisce on it fondly. SNES *Sparkster's* music was powerful stuff, able to get adrenaline pumping and ready to play again no matter how many lives



were lost, and on top of that, it was just catchy as all hell. Each tune gave its corresponding stage its very own flavor, and compared with the stellar graphics... well.

The only way to make this game even better was to tell people that this wasn't the end. Yes, there was still even more *Sparkster* goodness to be had... albeit on a competing system. It was indeed a wonderful time to have no company alliances, and to own both a Super Nintendo and a Sega Genesis.

### Sparkster (Genesis)

For clarification, there were actually *two* sequels to *Rocket Knight Adventures*; both entitled simply *Sparkster*, both released concurrently, for both rival systems. The Super Nintendo and Genesis versions, as was the habit at the time, were completely different games, with completely different play



systems. This was usually practiced in light of the Genesis's sorely inferior graphical and processing power — many developers would make two radically different versions of the same title so that people would have a reason to buy and play both (not to mention give the Genesis version a second look in the first place).

The Genesis version was the most freeform one; Sparkster's rocket charged faster and it wasn't necessary to hold down the attack button as before. This meant that it was possible to stay airborne for an infinite amount of time, giving a whole new

meaning to the term "Rocket Knight". In addition, he was given the brand-new ability to power up his sword with the essence of fire. Finally, as if these weren't enough, Sparkster was given a rocket-drill-type attack to dish out more damage with. The attack had the added benefit of unlocking or breaking through certain types of obstacles by screwing or drilling them into oblivion.

(...it's true. Stop looking at me like that.)

All of these combined to create the fastest *Sparkster* game ever to see the light of day — Sparkster himself became a literal speed demon, rebounding off of walls, twisting into and through enemies, coasting along the skies, all at a speed that would have made even Sonic the Hedgehog a little bit jealous. It's a shame that his opponents were just as powerful as he was, if not more so.

An evil reptilian race was having their way with Sparkster's world, and once *again*, his old rival Axel Gear was in cahoots with them... not to mention kidnapping princesses. Again. (Yet another satisfied graduate of the Bowser Koopa School of Cheesy Villainry.) Everyone knew the drill by now — Sparkster rockets onto the scene, slashing and drilling through warriors both mystical and mechanical. Hopefully, he would also find the magical Seven Swords scattered throughout the stages that would — in a homage to Super Sonic — allow him to become Golden Sparkster in the late-game, and make the final boss a near-cakewalk.

The Genesis version maintained a lot of the rock-hard difficulty (and atrocious length) that the original *RKA* possessed; also, the smaller lifebar and the fact that one had so much freedom with the rocket made it much easier to lose control and die quickly. This was no doubt in place to deter players away from its not looking or sounding nearly as good as its SNES counterpart. 90% of the soundtrack in this game was comprised of tinny versions of the SNES tunes, and the transition did *not* go smoothly (however, the pyramid stage has a unique track that I actually prefer to the one used for the SNES's pyramid-themed stage). The graphics actually look not all that bad until one compares them, side-by-side to the SNES version — the difference almost enough to make one cry, really.

Still, despite its aesthetic shortcomings, the Genesis version of *Sparkster* is just as worthy of play as the SNES one. Both were entirely different — and equally engaging — gameplay experiences.

Sparkster celebrated his tenth anniversary just over a year ago; by my count, he's due for a comeback. In this brave new world of three-dimensions, polygons, cinematic storylines, and oodles of processing power, he could well make a good showing. Or perhaps all of this next-generation power we've got going could simply play host to one of the greatest 2D epics of all time. *Sparkster* could be sharing the spotlight with the likes of *Viewtiful Joe* — but Konami will never know unless they try.

Please try, Konami. Give your wonder possum one more chance. He deserves it.



# DARKWATCH

Story by Syriah



As the video game industry matures, it is not unusual to see smaller developers gobbled up by large publishing houses. EA recently acquired Criterion so it could own the *Burnout* franchise, while Midway purchased Surreal Software after its survival horror game, *The Suffering*, found success at retail last year. It isn't often though that we see a developer leave a publisher and strike out on its own — yet that is exactly what High Moon Studios did earlier this year.

Originally founded as Sammy Studios, High Moon was to be the American arm of the Japanese publisher and developer, Sammy Corp. In the wake of the Sammy-Sega merger, though, the small studio near San Diego was considered unnecessary and the parent company made a move to shut it down. Instead of going quietly, John Rowe, the president and CEO of Sammy Studios, decided to buy the company outright and re-brand it as High Moon Studios.

"Everything was going along just fine until Sammy decided to acquire Sega," said Rowe. "They decided to abandon their prior plans in the U.S. market and basically turn over responsibility for video games to Sega corporation."

In making the transition from publisher to independent developer, High Moon was forced to consolidate some positions and reduce its staff, but the company made a concerted effort to retain its development base. According to

Rowe, the only employees laid off were those in the marketing and acquisition departments.

"It is important to note that we haven't lost any development personnel as a result of this change," said Rowe. "We continue to be at full strength on the development side, and in fact, we are hoping to grow our development capabilities and our studio going forward."

Right now, the number one project for High Moon Studios is *Darkwatch*. In development for more than three years, *Darkwatch* is described by the company as a "horror-western." The game tells the story of Jericho Cross, a two-bit bandit out for the big score who manages to get mixed up in something much bigger than he ever imagined. After attacking an armored train, Jericho is surprised to find that there are no riches locked inside. Rather, the only occupant of the secured car is an undead Vampire Lord. In a perverse form of thanks for his freedom, the vampire bites



Jericho before leaving. Now, as he slowly turns into the undead, Jericho's only hope is to join the Darkwatch, an underground organization dedicated to ridding the world of vampires. With them he must hunt down the Vampire Lord before it is too late.

Although vampire myths have been around for centuries, *Darkwatch* does not subscribe to any particular mythos. Rather, the team behind the game decided to create its own interpretation of the cursed undead.

"We respect the lore, but we also expand on it, evolve on it and make it work for us so we can create our own unique sensibilities," said Farzad Varahramyan, the game's creative visual director. "Ultimately, they have to be a fun enemy for the game. We tried to adhere to the rules, but we weren't afraid to bend them here and there."



Some of that rule bending occurs in the design of the *Darkwatch* weapons, which are a combination of Native American sensibilities and Jules Verne-style technological innovations. Because the undead have mystical properties, the Darkwatch pick apart the bodies of their vanquished foes and use them as tools, just as many Native American tribes would use every part of the buffalo they hunted. From the skin to the bones, no part of a dead vampire ever goes to waste.

Every weapon serves double duty as both a ranged and a melee weapon. Much of the time you will find yourself shooting at enemies in the distance, but if the crowd of foes becomes overwhelming, there is nothing wrong with going toe-to-toe. In fact, fighting hand-to-hand is almost a requirement in certain segments of the game.





In order to encourage players to play aggressively rather than inch forward cautiously, the design team implemented a two-tier health system, which rewards maximum carnage. Every time you waste an enemy it will leave behind a small amount of blood. Snag the blood and a segment of your health is restored. The blood also serves to charge up Jericho's vampire powers, which serve as the basis for the game's two paths. "We realized early on that we wanted to differentiate ourselves with this property and create something that

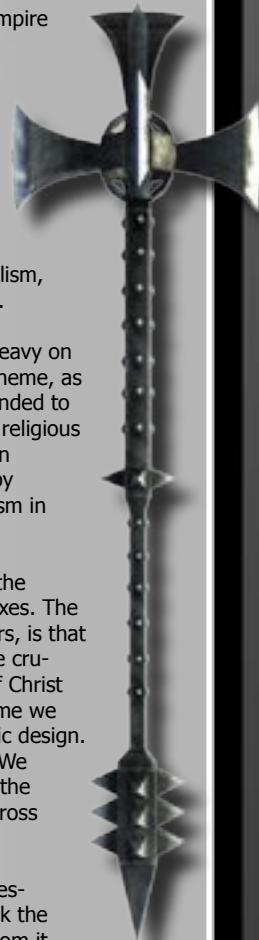
## SYMBOLISM

One of the key components of vampire lore is the power of the crucifix to pacify the undead. Although this has been part of the mythos for ages, many games dealing with the subject matter have skirted the issue, preferring to ignore religious imagery instead of simply using it where it fits. For *Darkwatch* though, the team didn't shy away from symbolism, instead they embraced it head-on.

**HGM:** As a game, *Darkwatch* is heavy on symbolism. While it fits with the theme, as a whole game developers have tended to shy away from anything remotely religious in the past. Was there any concern about possibly offending players by including such prominent symbolism in the game?

**Farzad Varahramyan:** "Part of the vampire lore is crosses and crucifixes. The difference, if you want to split hairs, is that the cross is a torture device — the crucifix is a cross with the imagery of Christ impaled on it. Throughout the game we have crosses as part of our graphic design. It's part of the lore, so we use it. We do not use a crucifix anywhere in the game and we also don't use the cross in any disrespectful way."

**Emmanuel Valdez:** "We don't desecrate the cross in any way. I think the industry back then stayed away from it. There were certain rules set aside from the Nintendos and Segas of the world that you couldn't have any religious type symbols in your game and a lot of us old-timer game developers still remember that, but I think it is a sign of the times. It shows how the industry has matured. We use it in a tasteful way. We don't purposefully put these symbols in the game to shock people. This is part of vampire lore."



was a little bit more unique and had a darker edge to it," said Varahramyan. "Once we were able to define the Darkwatch as a ruthless organization with a 'the ends justify the means' kind of mentality, it gave us a much clearer direction in designing not just the weapons but the rest of the world."

Because Jericho himself is slowly turning into a vampire, he has the ability to tap into a number of vampire powers, or brands, as the game progresses. Each



be tempted to sit on the fence and sample both paths, it is not recommended. Staying neutral ensures that you will never see either of the two ultimate powers — to become the ultimate badass of the Old West you have to pick a side.

Interestingly enough, *Darkwatch* wasn't always this dark. In fact, the concept was originally much heavier on "cute" than it was on "deadly." Initial sketches of Jericho bear a striking resemblance to the character of



brand endows the player with a temporary enhancement, such as berserker strength melee or one-shot-one-kill guns. The catch is in deciding which brands you want to collect.



At certain points in the story, Jericho will be forced into a decision that either moves him towards the good path or the evil path. Making the choice determines which brands Jericho earns. While you might

Woody from Disney's *Toy Story*, and rather than an FPS, the game that was being considered was a comedic platformer.

"Originally, *Darkwatch* was more of a tongue-in-cheek Western, more of a caricature of the old West," said Emmanuel Valdez, creative director. "Some of these guys were just coming off of *Oddworld* — they had a comedic sense, but they applied a very serious undertone and a very dark look to it."





## WEAPONS

A strange mix of technology and religious iconism, the weapons of Darkwatch are just as impressive in their design as the characters found throughout the game. Here are some of the highlights:

### The Redeemer:

A simple gun, the Redeemer's key advantage is its speed in melee combat. Though most gamers will likely discount it due to limited stopping power, the Redeemer serves as an effective melee weapon throughout the game.



**Warmaker Pistols:** Every game needs "John Woo style" dual pistols.



**Dual Crossbow:** The crossbow just oozes style, but this one goes one step further by adding explosive bolts. Using it well requires extreme precision. However, if you manage to land the shot, massive damage is guaranteed — approximately three seconds after impact your arrow will explode.

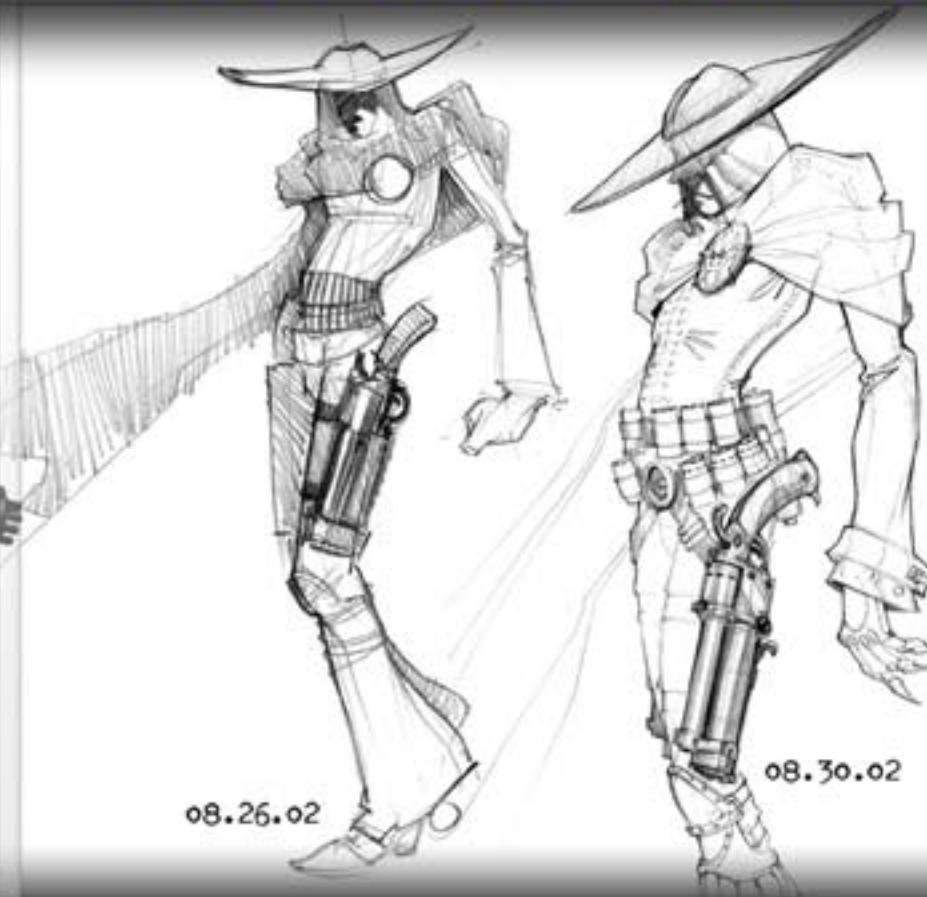


**Rail Rocket:** Put the fear of the Almighty into the undead with this bad boy. High-powered rockets exit the front end at high speed, while the back end serves double duty as the biggest hammer you've ever seen. Thor would be proud.



**Scepter:** The flag carrier is always at a disadvantage when playing CTF, but not here. The bladed Scepter serves double duty as both flag and weapon, making multiplayer matches that much more competitive.





## THE EVOLUTION OF JERICHO

As is often the case during game development though, the game evolved as it went through the various stages of design and refinement. Most notably, Valdez and Varahramyan said the game had to be fun, and while the early theme was certainly stylistic, it also wasn't that interesting.

"One of the things that came out of early analysis, was that if we do an old Western, it's not going to be fun just as a plain old six shooter," said Varahramyan. "You want to have special weapons, lots of ammo, and fun weapons. That's the experience of shooting and having fun."

If shooting is akin to having fun, then *Darkwatch* certainly has it in spades. Mixing explosive weaponry and teeming masses of undead, the game makes excellent use of ragdoll physics. Nothing is more satisfying than chucking a stick of dynamite into a group and watching the bodies fly. In early sections of the game, level design is fairly straightforward, but as things progress, the maps move into the creative realm. One battle occurs inside a ringed tower, with banshees flying all around, while another

## THE HISTORY OF THE DARKWATCH

The history of the Darkwatch is as rich and deep as any empire. For nearly 2000 years, they have kept their existence a secret; hidden among the society they protect.

One thing has remained a constant throughout the existence of the Darkwatch: It is an organization composed of men and women whose lives have been shattered by an evil as ancient and deep as the blackness that divides the stars.

### The Beginning of the Darkwatch

Rome did not fall to barbarian hordes. It did not fall to civil war or internal conflict. It was not foreign influence alone or economic collapse that brought about its doom. It was not theological conflict that would cause the end of the shining city and its empire. It was vampires.

They came from the northlands, hidden amongst the foreigners, led by vampire lords who wore skulls and body parts as jewelry. The 'barbarians' at the gate soon consumed all that stood before them. The law and order of Rome stood as an anathema to the undead.

Rome became nothing more than dust and memories and vampires and their undead legions roamed Europe.

At the beginning of what is now known as the dark ages, a handful of Roman centurions -- the last of their kind -- gathered and swore fealty to each other and to a divine goal. They would study the shadows and destroy the undead wherever they found their rotten presence. As the last library burned and the knowledge Rome was lost to the wind, the Darkwatch formed, taking the symbol of a vampire skull as a warning to those that they fought that in the end, even death may die.

takes place inside a wide-open canyon where you must drive a jury-rigged vehicle and mow down dynamite-carrying skeletons with its mounted machine guns.

"Keeping the focus on maximum flexibility for the game designers was a key theme during technology development for the *Darkwatch*," said Clinton Keith, director of technology at High Moon.

"What we didn't want to do was spend a lot of time and money solving solved problems. Physics, online connectivity — that stuff we wanted to buy off the shelf," said Keith "What we wanted to do was wrap that into an engine we created from scratch that was data-driven and gave as much control as possible to the content creators so that if they had a crazy idea for doing something, they didn't have to wait two weeks for a programmer to implement it."

That flexibility seems to have served the *Darkwatch* team well, as even in its early stage the game already displays a high degree of polish — and this is all without a publisher. High Moon is currently shopping the title around, but until the game is picked up, continuing development is a huge financial burden. After all, most independent developers work on contract in today's market. So why does High Moon take the risk?

"It is about bringing an idea, bringing a concept, to reality," said Rowe. "That's a great challenge and something that I really enjoy very, very much."

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## UNTOLD LEGENDS —BROTHERHOOD of the BLADE—

# MANY WILL ENTER, FIVE WILL WIN

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*Wolfer 05*



# GOD OF WAR™

Review by Wanderer

**Publisher :** SCEA  
**Developer :** SCEA  
**Release Date :** Atlus  
**Rating :** MATURE; Violence, Nudity, Sexual Content, More Violence

**Genre(s) :** Action  
**Category :** Fantasy  
**# of players :** 1

We use the word "epic" a lot in this business, but we don't often mean it. It's one of those buzzwords, like "classic," that we use without thinking. Then, when something like *God of War* comes along, we've devalued all our adjectives.

*God of War* is epic. No other word works as well, and I wish I knew of one that carried more weight.

You do not merely carve up zombies in *God of War*. You slash them to bits with a pair of chainblades before wrenching them apart like chicken wings. Female characters are not just scantily clad; they're topless. When an enemy is down, Kratos, the protagonist, does not simply stab him once to finish the job; he climbs on top of that sumbitch and jams a sword into his screaming mouth, twisting it just so for maximum spurtage. If it doesn't spray blood across half a block, Kratos does not seem to feel that it's worth doing.

Be sure to let kids play this. It'll be funny.

When *God of War* begins, Kratos, a Spartan warrior trying to atone for decades of wanton slaughter, throws himself to his death. We then flash back three weeks, to find out why.

Kratos is on a mission from the goddess Athena, to fight on the gods' behalf throughout ancient Greece. His final mission is to confront Ares, the god of war, who's brought an army of monsters to destroy Athens. If Kratos can kill Ares, Athena promises that his past sins will finally be forgiven.



His quest pits Kratos against all the monsters that Greek mythology has to offer. You'll trade blows with minotaurs, harpies, Gorgons, Sirens, cyclops (cyclopes?), and zombies, among a host of others.

In other games, many of these monsters would be minibosses. Here, they're common encounters. You can fry them with magic, dispatch them with a host of



combos, or stun them and follow up with a host of creature-specific fatalities, each one gorier than the last.

They aren't going to just fall over, though. *God of War* is unapologetically difficult. Gorgons can turn you to stone and shatter you, minotaurs will send you flying into bottomless pits, and Sirens can catch you in a withering crossfire. Even ordinary zombies have some game, slapping on a chokehold or knocking Kratos around a room with flying slashes.

You'll be scattering these monsters' vital bits over some of the most visually spectacular scenery that I've seen on the PS2. The broad streets of Athens are packed with screaming refugees, with Ares himself in the distant background, happily stomping the life out of a vast army. A wrecked pirate ship creaks and groans as it's battered by a thunderstorm and a multi-headed hydra. My favorite level, the temple of Pandora, is a enormous ruin, perched on the back of a suffering Titan.

In the midst of all this spectacle, though, the gameplay has suffered a bit. *God of War's* biggest problem is that it doesn't really feel all that new. Most of its features, from the upgradeable weapons to its combo system, have been done before, and often, in games like *Ninja Gaiden* or *Devil May Cry*. There are even crate puzzles and conveyor belts.

There's always room for a good action game, though, and not

many titles get as intense or challenging as *God of War*. It may be a little heavy on the gore and a little light on originality, but that's okay. You'd be amazed what I'll forgive, if a game lets me decapitate Gorgons with enough style.

What isn't forgivable, on the other hand, is the player's inability to control the camera. This isn't as much of a problem as it sounds like, thanks to some intelligent design decisions, but it's still annoying. *God of War* goes platformer every so often, featuring at least one sequence that's straight out of *Prince of Persia*, and doing any kind of platforming without camera control is a pain in the ass. Even a first-person freelook mode would've been great.

*God of War* is a quality game, aside from a few quirks and frustrations. It's violent, bloody fun from the word "go," and you can really see how much effort, care, and money went into it. It's a great example of what the aging PS2 is capable of, in the hands of the right team.

**Rating :** 4 of 5

**2nd opinion** by Racewing • **Alternate Rating :** 4 of 5

Spotty platforming sequences aside, this is psychological catharsis pressed into a disc, that will have you smiling evilly every other minute, whether you intend to or not.

**FINAL SCORE :**

**4 of 5**





# Unreal Championship 2

THE LIANDRI CONFLICT

Review by Syriel

**Publisher :** Midway  
**Developer :** Epic  
**Release Date :** 4/18/2005  
**Rating :** MATURE; Blood & Gore, Intense Violence, Strong Language

**Genre(s) :** FPS  
**Category :** Fast Fragging Action  
**# of players :** 2

On the PC, *Unreal Tournament* has long been a favorite of action fans. High on the kill count and catering to the twitch gamer, it made its way to the Xbox in the form of *Unreal Championship*. A mere port, the title failed to truly take advantage of the console. For the second iteration, Epic's rethought the game from the ground up. The result is perhaps one of the best multiplayer games ever to grace Xbox Live.

The biggest change to the game is the addition of a melee mode. As odd as it sounds, Epic has managed to seamlessly blend two disparate play styles into one smooth experience. While it doesn't quite have the depth of *Virtua Fighter* or *Soul Calibur*, the included



melee combat offers plenty of opportunities to block, parry and combo, as well execute finishing moves.

When you're going up against an opponent with a ranged weapon, the greatest advantage a melee fighter has is timing. With the ability to reflect any shot, a skillful melee player can send a rocket straight back to its source, making short work of an annoying camper.

Since players can switch between melee and ranged weapons at any time, it pays to become proficient with both. Nothing is more satisfying than softening an opponent up from a distance and then closing in for the personal touch.

Though melee mode forces you into a third-person view, ranged weapons can use either third-person or a more traditional first-person setup. Either way, navigating throughout the map is easy, as all the characters were designed with mobility in mind. On some of the vertical arenas, it's not uncommon to see players backflipping their way up walls before jumping into an aerial attack. It gives new meaning to high-flying combat.

Adrenaline powers differ from character to character, but they're all designed to give you an edge when you need it the most. From super-speed to enhanced vision, making judicious use of your



## UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2 STRATEGIES

**Switch Up Your Style.** Practice switching your view between first and third person on-the-fly. First person allows for better targeting with ranged weapons, while third person offers superior maneuverability. The best players will use third person to get into position and then switch to first before making the kill.

**Master the Adrenaline Powers.** Each character has a unique set of adrenaline powers that provide an edge when you need it most. Forgetting to use them will place you at a serious disadvantage. Spend some time experimenting with each character until you find the combination that suits you best.

**Timing is Key.** You can reflect ranged shots with your melee weapon, however only a perfectly timed reflect will send the shot straight back to its source. If your timing is off, the bullet will reflect at a random angle. This is not a big deal if you are reflecting a sniper shot, but rockets are a different story. A poorly timed reflect in close quarters can send it right into a nearby wall.

**Nali Slaughter.** The trick to mastering Nali Slaughter is choosing your targets wisely. While you will always earn at least one frag for the standard, slow moving Nali, the fast moving cloaked versions can earn three or five frags in one fell swoop. You can either watch for the shimmer, or use an adrenaline power to enhance your vision.

Another helpful tactic is combining speed with enhanced damage. As soon as you collect the damage power up, activate your speed and run the map in a circular path, killing every Nali you see in a single swipe. If you miss one, don't go back for it -- you will waste valuable time. Simply keep moving forward, doing your best to be a harbinger of death.



Adrenaline is an absolute necessity in both single and multiplayer matchups.

*Unreal Championship 2's* single player mode is comprised of three parts. There's Ladder Mode, which is used to train the player and explain the story, Challenge Mode to unlock hidden goodies, and Instant Action, which allows you to experience any multiplayer mode against bots.

**2nd opinion** by 4th Letter • **Alternate Rating :** 4.5 of 5

The melee combat sounded iffy, but it wasn't. Fast-paced action, interesting character design, and highly customizable multiplayer options adds up to a fun time. Plus, it's got sharp knives.

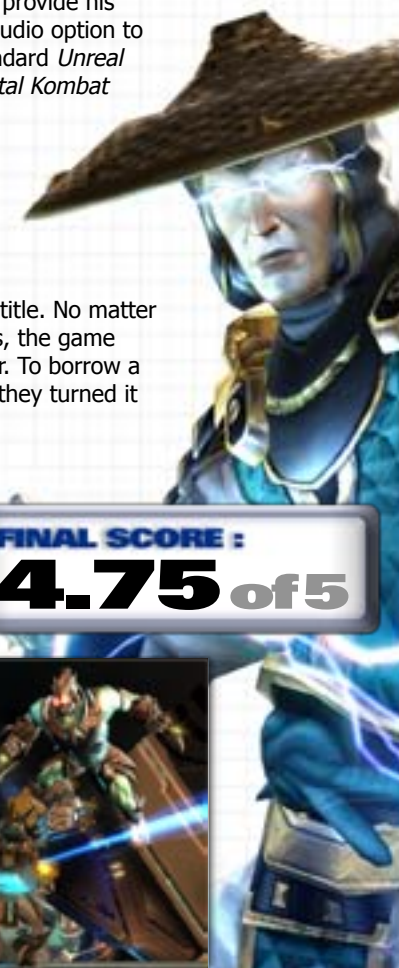
As much fun as the single player experience is, the multiplayer combat is where *Unreal Championship 2* shines. It supports split screen on a single Xbox or networked play via local LAN and Xbox Live, and the game is literally packed with content. You can choose from a number of mutators (many of which have to be unlocked) to customize play to your heart's content. There is even a "classic" *Unreal* mode if you're down for some old school shooting.

One of the more controversial aspects of the game is the addition of *Mortal Kombat's* Raiden to the roster. Rest assured the fan outcry was much ado about nothing, as Epic didn't sacrifice the integrity of either the franchise or the character. Raiden has been outfitted with a custom weapons set and plays just as well as any other fighter. In a nod to authenticity, Epic secured the original voice actor to provide his lines, and there's an audio option to choose either the standard *Unreal* announcer or the *Mortal Kombat* announcer.

With little to complain about and much to love, *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict* is the epitome of a AAA title. No matter what your play style is, the game has something to offer. To borrow a phrase, "for this one, they turned it up to eleven!"

**Rating :** 5 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**4.75 of 5**



## STELLA DEUS THE GATE OF ETERNITY

Review by **Anmadeau**

**Publisher :** Atlus  
**Developer :** Pinegrove  
**Release Date :** 4/26/2005  
**Rating :** TEEN

**Genre(s) :** RPG  
**Category :** Strategy  
**# of players :** 1

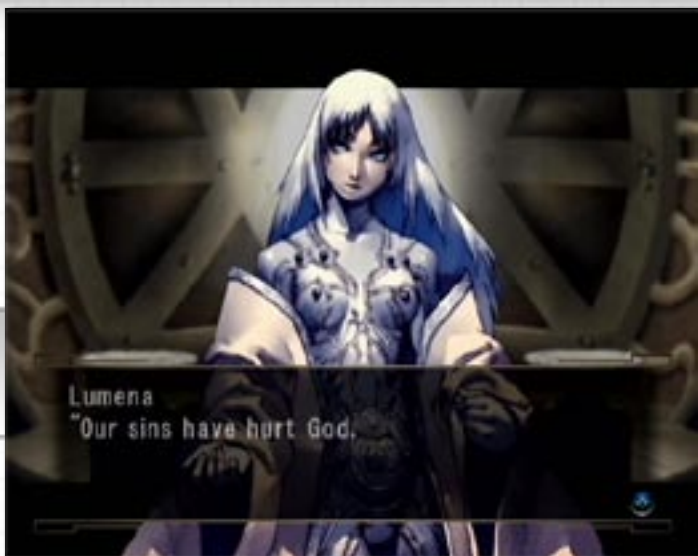
The land of Solum is slowly being enveloped by the Miasma, a deadly white mist that turns what it touches into lifeless desert. The people despair, until the Aequae religion teaches them to accept this peaceful end as the will of God. A bloody tyrant arises, and his army forces the apathetic masses into submission. In the midst of all this, Spero hunts spirits, believing that his alchemist friend Viser can use their energy to drive back the Miasma. It isn't long, however, before he questions if killing these innocent creatures can truly save their dying world.

*Stella Deus* isn't your typical strategy RPG. The high resolution sprites are stylish, the fully 3D battle maps feel like real locations, and the world is populated by characters as fully realized as any novel. It also attempts to push the whole genre's gameplay forward.

You are no longer limited to moving your troops and taking a single action. Here every act has an Action Point cost, allowing you to do whatever you want as long as you still have points to spend. Attacking three times in a row, setting up for a devastatingly powerful team attack, delaying actions to allow the enemies to waste their AP... suddenly, there's a host of new tactical possibilities, where winning becomes less a matter of having the most powerful soldiers, and more about using that power effectively.



While initially the enemy AI will rush forward thoughtlessly, things get more complicated when they have allies that can pick you off at a distance. Taking care of archers and alchemists while not getting swarmed by axemen can take careful planning, though it never requires tedious



leveling. Skilled tacticians can clear the game without ever fighting more than the story battles. While some unused allies might fall behind in levels, there's a quick way to bring them up to speed (see sidebar).

If you're too impatient to read the manual, you might miss another improvement. Selecting the direct control scheme causes one staple of SRPGs, the command menu, to vanish. Those actions are now assigned to various buttons on the controller, and movement is a simple matter of selecting where you want to go. It sounds like a simple thing, but once you get used to it, it speeds up the battles immensely, and will make other SRPGs feel downright archaic.

For being so character-focused, *Stella Deus* ends up with limited character customization. While your small army of allies can earn a wide assortment of skills, don't expect anything as deep as the job system of *Final Fantasy Tactics*. It's far closer to *Final Fantasy X*, where equipment boils down to buying the best stuff available, with the store's stock improving as you progress. Though instead of selling your useless gear for chump change, old items can be fused to make new and better equipment. It's primarily used for creating skill scrolls to expand a character's repertoire, but the fusion system can also produce better weapons and rare accessories if you take the time to experiment.



### STELLA DEUS QUICK LEVELING GUIDE

Forget about the Catacombs. There's a quicker way to level allies that have fallen behind the rest of the pack. Unlike most attacks, alchemy skills have a 100% hit rate regardless



of the level of the caster. Combining Heavy Axe and Antidote under fusion will produce Electric Alchemy, allowing you to teach Shock Blast to anyone. The character will still need 30SP to learn the skill, but that can be gained soloing through the first level of the Catacombs in a few quick trips. The rest of your party should carry MP restoring items so their low level ally can keep using the skill, and unequip any counterattack accessories or skills.

Drop into the next story battle or high-level guild mission, keeping your low-level character near the back while your other troops weaken the onrushing horde. Try to attract as few enemies as possible, and whittle down their life as low as you can without outright killing them. Also, set them up to focus their own attacks on someone who can easily evade or take damage, like Spero.

Now have your low-level character do the rest. He'll earn 24-28 experience with every jolt of Shock Blast, gaining a level for every four attacks. If he lands the killing blow, he'll earn a whopping 100 EXP, which translates to an instant level up. With this trick even the lowest level characters can catch up to their high-level allies in 1-3 missions, which you'll need to clear to progress anyway.

A safer but slower alternate method is using healing skills such as Quick Cure on high-level allies, netting you about the same amount of EXP per cast without getting any enemies involved, but that means passing up on the sweet death bonus.

It's not an entirely pleasant journey, however. The optional Catacombs are meant for power-leveling, but they're too tedious to be worth the effort of exploring. Though rich in detail,



the story is told mainly through still images, while traveling is done from a large world map. It would have been a far more immersive experience to have a few towns to wander around, and chat with one-line locals. The limited number of enemy types can sometimes make battles feel repetitious, especially near the end where two linked melees are essentially repeated three times.

The English dubbing is above average, with humorous side characters like Jade and Tia scoring high points, and a few minor players sounding sour notes. As for the music, while it fits the story that unfolds, it calls so little attention to itself that sometimes it's only noticeable in its absence.

*Stella Deus* isn't the next *Tactics*, but it isn't trying to be. People looking for endless customization and four digit level counts should keep looking. This game is for those who want an engrossing story and challenging battles without any tedious leveling in between.

**Rating :** 3.5 of 5

### 2nd opinion by Hitoshura • Alternate Rating : 2 of 5

Though the side-quests and item fusing, along with above average music, can provide countless hours of playing, the actual bulk of the battles are less than enjoyable. Interesting, but mediocre.

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**2.75 of 5**





Review by Syriel

**Publisher :** Groove Games  
**Developer :** Digital Extremes  
**Release Date :** 5/3/05  
**Rating :** MATURE

**Genre(s) :** FPS  
**Category :** SciFi  
**# of players :** 2 (offline), 8 (online)

Having spent the past few years working on the *Unreal* franchise the team at Digital Extremes is finally breaking out a new franchise. While it is still firmly within its area of expertise, *Pariah* differs from past outings as the focus is on the single-player story.

Opening with a cinematic flair, the game drops you into the role of Jack Mason, disgraced military doctor resigned to transporting sick patients from place to place. Thing is, your current prisoner is sicker than most and someone out there wants her (and you) dead.

Running on a modified version of the *Unreal* engine, *Pariah's* levels feature a varied combination of both indoor and outdoor environments. This can make for some interesting firefights with the AI, as your opponents are not stupid. Enemies will try to flank you as well as run for cover — even in the early levels it is not unusual to find a shooter using the high grass as cover.

Physics within the game are handled by the *Havok* engine, which means a whole lot of stuff can be blown up. Sure, the ragdoll effects are always fun, but watching a bad guy catch air after he eats a grenade is only the tip of the iceberg. *Pariah* allows for full size structures to be destroyed — something that becomes painfully obvious the first time you are taking out opponents from a guard tower and the whole thing collapses underneath you.

An innovative weapon upgrade system gives players the ability to customize their arsenal as they see fit by collecting WECs (weapon upgrade cores). The WECs can be applied to any weapon you choose, and each gun can be upgraded three times. Improvements run the gamut from a faster rate of fire and a better scope, to



remote controlled detonation of your grenades. *Pariah* falters a bit in the vehicle department, as the finely tuned physics become surprisingly twitchy as soon as you jump behind the wheel. Yes, you can master it with practice, but it can make for a frustrating experience the first time around.

Xbox Live subscribers will be pleased to note that *Pariah* has full support for online multiplayer, with a number of different gameplay modes including deathmatch, capture the flag, assault and siege. Assault is particularly fun with two well coordinated teams as it has you vying for control of land rather than simply running a flag back and forth. All of the multiplayer modes can also be played offline, with bots filling in the necessary slots.

If you find the default maps a bit too passé for your tastes, *Pariah* includes a fully featured map editor. Unlike past level editors on console titles, what's here is surprisingly flexible allowing for almost total customization. Once finished, the edited maps can be swapped via memory card or Xbox Live and played online.

*Pariah's* plot may be a bit generic, but the gameplay certainly isn't. While the online play isn't quite up to the level of *Unreal Championship 2*, the single player experience is a bit more robust and the map editor holds the potential for a virtually unlimited amount of custom content.

Rating : 4 of 5

2nd opinion by Roger Danish • Alternate Rating : 4 of 5

*Pariah* may not be revolutionary, but it borrows the best elements of the genre — the result is definitely well worth checking out.

FINAL SCORE : 4 of 5



You'll be thankful that SNK Playmore chose to release *Metal Slug 4 & 5* as a two-disc bundle of the eponymous arcade games. *Metal Slug 4* is a huge disappointment. In the wake of *Metal Slug 3* — and next to *Metal Slug 5* — it's downright underwhelming. Since *Metal Slug* is a franchise known for its over-the-top antics and adrenaline rushes, that's inexcusable. Fortunately, *Metal Slug 5* is awesome.

Consider one moment, when Marco (one of four selectable characters) scales a towering structure on his way to face a massive, spider-like robot at the end. Marco arrives. His nemesis creeps down the side of a building amid shattering glass. Bullets and grenades fly. Soldiers dash about and Marco reluctantly fires at them, loathe to focus on anything but his building-scaling opponent. Sonic waves obliterate the very shell of the building where the struggle takes place. Just when you think the enemy has won the day, it surrenders amidst a final round of explosions.

This is what *Metal Slug* is about, and there are plenty of other moments like it in this compilation's second disc. Picture a hero riding rafts along a shallow river. A jungle landscape passes in the background. Suddenly, soldiers swoop out of the trees, swinging from vines like Tarzan before they descend with knives held ready. If Marco doesn't beat them to the punch with a few quick slashes from his own blade (executed automatically when a foe is within range), that's one life down the drain. Later moments include a swim through stinging jellyfish and submarines, as well as a

2nd opinion by Metalbolt • Alternate Rating : 2.5 of 5

While *MS5* is a decent game, it lacks the overall shine and character of *MS4*. To sum up both games, "Kill me, I dare you! I'll only come back with more grenades!"



Review by Honestgamer

**Publisher :** SNK Playmore  
**Developer :** SNK  
**Release Date :** 5/10/05  
**Rating :** TEEN

**Genre(s) :** Action  
**Category :** Shooter  
**# of players :** 1 or 2

journey to the skies to blast a roaring aircraft out of the skies.

Still, if *Metal Slug* were just about enormous bosses, it would be easily dismissed amid a field of other shooters. The series made its mark because its developers also knew when to have fun. Even sprites can make you laugh, and you'll likely chuckle as Marco frees a captured prisoner and the grizzled veteran struts back and forth, celebrating. Perhaps you'll cringe when a motorcycle rider is thrown from his bike, screaming as flames consume his body. The zombies have made a return, too. Lurching through dimly-lit streets and hurling streams of vomit at soldiers has never been so invigorating.

Thus, it's not the small touches that are missing from this compilation. Rather, it's the heart. *Metal Slug 4* truly is the culprit. While its successor boasted vividly-rendered environments and some of the most memorable bosses the franchise has ever seen, *Metal Slug 4* plays host to dull bits of machinery that will leave you wondering how it is that a level has ended without a major encounter. Stages blur together until you're grasping for even the slightest moments of genius. A pirate throws a sword and it skewers your chosen hero. As Marco collapses to the deck of the ship, you're relieved — not because Marco's stock of grenades is now restored — but for the variety.

It's a shame both games couldn't have gone so well as the compilation's second disc. At the end of the day, *Metal Slug 4 & 5* remains a great purchase for the diehard shooter fan. *Metal Slug 5* is that good.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 3 of 5





# JADE EMPIRE

Review by DJ Dinobot

**Publisher :** Microsoft  
**Developer :** BioWare  
**Release Date :** 4/14/05  
**Rating :** MATURE

**Genre(s) :** RPG  
**Category :** Martial Arts  
**# of players :** 1  
**Notes:** Dolby Digital 5.1, 480p

**Jade Empire is the latest RPG epic from the master craftspeople at BioWare. With a blend of mythology and martial arts, the game steeps the player in a unique world filled with ghosts, monsters, kung-fu masters, and assassins. Intrigues simmer, injustices boil over, and a dash of romance sweetens the brew. Clever storytelling abounds, as we'd expect from a game with Jade's lineage.**

You start by choosing one of six available characters and selecting your fighting styles. As you travel across the empire to rescue your master, you can sometimes use social skills to progress non-violently. To focus on story and dialogue, however, is to miss the joy of enlightenment through ass-kicking.

Jade Empire features a variety of fighting styles, four of which can be mapped to the d-pad for instant access during battle. Martial, magic, support, weapon, and transformation styles ensure that you will never run out of ways to defend yourself. Naturally, some styles are highly complementary and certain creatures are immune to others; think rock-paper-scissors. Martial, magic and support styles are often learned from a trainer, while transformations are learned after defeating demons. Weapon "styles" are a way of simplifying inventory and skills into one button-press. Though combat doesn't always feel as fluid as it should, and there are occasional framerate and camera problems, the diversity of your styles compensates.

Followers will join your cause as your quest continues. You can choose one to accompany you during exploration and combat, either fighting alongside you or acting in a support role, such as tossing jugs of wine to enable your Drunken Master style. In many ways, the choice of follower is merely window dressing, as they aren't playable and have minimal influence on sidequests. It's nice to have someone to draw heat while you're experimenting with



new fighting styles.

Every location in the empire is awash in fantastic colors and rich detail. The audio and visual presentation exude Asian mythology from every pore, and create an atmosphere ripe for adventuring. Be warned: Jade Empire has a penchant for cataclysmic transitions that make previous areas inaccessible. Fortunately, each new area is progressively larger and more engaging than the last. New areas are rife with side-quests--until you reach the last few chapters, which railroad you through to the endgame--and add interesting new layers to the empire.

For all its strengths, Jade Empire isn't without its flaws. Interacting with objects is clunky and confusing, with shoddy animations that highlight a lack of environmental interactivity. Weird anti-aliasing issues crop up occasionally, even during close-ups in dialogue, and while the ancient Asian atmosphere is one of Jade's appeals, there's a bizarre mini-game that mimics the classic aerial shooter 1942. Talk about killing the mood! Thankfully, the mini-game can be skipped, and none of the flaws are critical enough to ruin the game.

Jade Empire's world is so well-realized that you can't help but feel a personal stake in the outcome of your quest. After all, the fate of the empire hangs in the balance! Though at times it comes off like an Asian-flavored Fable mod, Jade Empire has enough more than enough character to stand on its own.

**Rating :** 4.5 of 5

**2nd opinion** by FateBreaker • **Alternate Rating :** 4 of 5

BioWare's latest is definitely something to be heralded in their growing empire. If you liked KOTOR, odds are you'll like this.

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**4.25** of 5



**Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition begins with a pocket full of cash and a dream of high-speed street racing. There's no plot, with only a few cut-scenes, and almost nothing to hold the player back from diving into the racing action.**

Starting off in San Diego, and eventually moving on to Atlanta and Detroit, the game progresses in a nicely free-form manner. There are always a good variety of events to choose from, easy to find and with full race details available. Some races are there to advance the game, and others are just for the fun of racing and earning a bit more cash. Which is which is always obvious.

There are a variety of race modes available. The most common, Ordered, involves going from one checkpoint to another in a linear fashion. Circuit is almost the same thing, but involves doing a few laps of the checkpoints. Less common races are Autocross, a time-trial on a closed circuit, Track, which is the same thing but against other racers, and Unordered, where checkpoints can be raced through in any order. The variety keeps the experience fresh, and at any one time there may be a dozen or more different events open.

Competing in these events, however, involves having a car capable of making the grade. It's certainly possible to enter a D-class car in a high-stakes race, but the odds of winning aren't all they could be. There are two ways to get around this, though: upgrade the current vehicle or buy a new one. New parts and cars become available as races are won, and there's tons of content to unlock. Some things

**2nd opinion** by 4thletter • **Alternate Rating :** 4 of 5

The top of the street racing pile. The sometimes wonky physics are an issue, but the customization options and special moves more than make up for it.



# 湾岸 MIDNIGHT CLUB 3 DUB edition

Review by James

**Publisher :** Rockstar Games  
**Developer :** Rockstar San Diego  
**Release Date :** 4/12/05  
**Rating :** TEEN

**Genre(s) :** Racing  
**Category :** Arcade, street, tuner  
**# of players :** 1-2 splitscreen, 2-8 online

make the car run better, others just make it look like it runs better, and while performance is always important, pimping out the ride has its place as well.

Though upgrades are helpful, it does fall down in one area. All the parts and cars in the game are official licenses from real-world companies, and while the vehicles are all distinctive from one another, the parts aren't. Parts come in three levels of quality among the multiple brands available, but there is no difference in performance from brand to brand.

Of course, all this detail requires good racing action to back it up, and it's here that Midnight Club 3 really delivers. The races are fast, the courses well-designed and challenging, and opponent AI is both smart enough to provide a good challenge but not so brilliant as to never wipe out on a tricky corner. The racing itself is very much of the arcade style, with insane speed, fast cornering, and heavy impacts sending things flying. The action can be taken online, with games like Capture the Flag and Tag available in addition to standard modes. There's also a split-screen two player mode.

In the end, MC3 is a very good arcade racing game. It has moments of brilliance, when all the parts come together to deliver amazing gameplay, but they don't happen often enough. As it is, MC3 is well worth picking up.

**Rating :** 4 of 5



**FINAL SCORE :**  
**4** of 5

Review by **4th letter**

**Publisher :** Microsoft Games  
**Developer :** Microsoft Games  
**Release Date :** 5/3/05  
**Rating :** EVERYONE

**Genre(s) :** Racing  
**Category :** Sim  
**# of players :** 1-8 (2 split-screen)  
**Notes:** 5.1, Downloads, 480p, Live

**If you like your racing games with only two buttons, namely "Go" and "Go Faster," skip Forza Motorsport. If you know how to brake around corners, read on.**

One could say that *Forza Motorsport* is a sim racing game, but that would be kind of like saying "knives are sharp!" You'll understand how realistic this game is as soon as you hit your first turn (and your first wall shortly after). The only thing you'll get in this game from holding down the gas button is a loss. You'll learn how to brake out of necessity.

You'll have help, though. *Forza* includes a brilliant feature called "Suggested Line." It's an on-screen indicator that tells you where you need to be to make a turn and when to brake. It's only a guide, but it'll be pretty indispensable for newbies, at least until they learn the mechanics of the game. The line is a tool, not a crutch. If you're observant, you'll find a better way.

It's pretty common for sim racing games to be all physics and no fun. *Forza* avoids this pitfall. It's tough, and there's no way you can play it like, say, *Burnout 3*, but it's loose enough to avoid the frustration that usually comes with sim games. It takes equal parts quick-thinking and quick fingers to make it around some turns.

The computer AI is strong. Don't be surprised if a computer car nudges you just enough on the last curve of a race to send you careening into a wall and lose. The AI avoids the single-file "follow the leader" style of racing, as well. If you check your rear view mirror (or look ahead on the screen) you'll see them jockeying for position and even outright bumping other cars.

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**4.25 of 5**

**2nd opinion by Syriel • Alternate Rating :** 4.5 of 5

The masses said that Microsoft couldn't produce a game equal to *Gran Turismo 4*. The masses were wrong.



In Career mode, you race for credits, which function as both money and experience points. You unlock new races by winning old ones and gaining enough credits to move up a level. Each race series nets you a new car upon completion, and each new level rewards you with either manufacturer relationships (which means discounts!) or a nice car. It's a nice method.

The game is a joy to watch in motion. All the cars are subject to damage, including leaving paint on the walls. The game is kind of eerily empty of fauna, but the races are hectic enough to make that a non-issue.

*Forza Motorsport* may not have the flash of a *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition*, but it's more than worth the purchase price. There are plenty of cars, plenty of different races, and plenty of playtime. The excellent graphics don't hurt, either. *Forza Motorsport* is top notch fun, even if it does take a bit of brain muscle to play.

**Rating :** 4 of 5



**Microsoft was insane to drop Psychonauts. This is one of the best games of this console generation, and I'd argue that it's one of the best platformers of all time. Its gameplay is solid by itself, but it's paired with a great script, idiosyncratic character design, and an imaginative setting.**

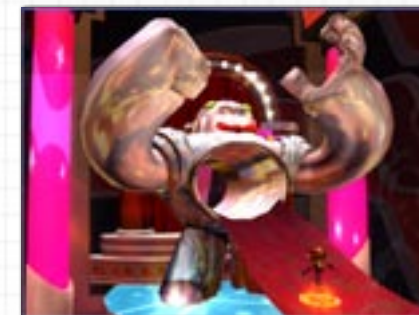
*Psychonauts* is set in two worlds: the Real, and the Mental. In the Real World, you're Razputin, a.k.a. Raz, a kid who's run away from home to attend psychic summer camp. Here, he and his fellow campers are taught about their psychic powers, so they can become highly trained Psychonauts, secret agents inside the human brain.

Their lessons are set in the Mental World, a series of twisted landscapes that represent the contents of someone's brain. Raz's teacher Coach Oleander throws his students into a cartoony battlefield, like a child's drawing of World War I; one of the guest lecturers, Milla Vodello, has the ultimate disco party in her mind, complete with a roller derby.

When you're in the Real World, *Psychonauts* is "just" a solid platformer. The campgrounds are full of secrets, and Raz has the moves to explore them. As you get further into the game, Raz can learn powers like pyrokinesis, telekinesis, or levitation, which'll open up entirely new areas. They'll also let you do hideous violence unto squirrels. This is a subtle but important point in *Psychonauts* favor.

**2nd opinion by Jeremy • Alternate Rating :** 4.5 of 5

Double Fine's name is fitting, as *Psychonauts* succeeds in every area it needs to, and even a few it doesn't. This is one of the most enjoyable games this generation.

Review by **Wanderer**

**Publisher :** Majesco  
**Developer :** Double Fine  
**Release Date :** 4/19/05  
**Rating :** TEEN

**Genre(s) :** Adventure  
**Category :** Platform, Weird  
**# of players :** 1

The Real World is already surreal, with telekinetic grizzly bears, bizarre children, and an old man who's literally everywhere at once. When Raz enters the Mental World, things get considerably weirder. This is where I really started to respect what Double Fine's done here. This isn't the first game set within dream sequences or someone's subconscious mind, but *Psychonauts* is the first one that really uses the concept to its fullest extent.

In the mindscape of a control freak, the Mental World is a perfect cube, and each face has its own gravity. When Raz enters a crazed mutant's mind, he's recast as Goggalar, a giant human in a city of innocent monsters. Other people's minds are creepy, psychologically revealing, or simply surreal, but they're all amazing. Literally anything can happen in *Psychonauts*'s Mental World, from brain thieves to disco parties, and it's almost never predictable.

Just exploring either dimension is good for a few laughs. Double Fine's populated *Psychonauts* with dozens of malcontents, weirdos, and crazy people. There's dialogue everywhere, and most of it is hilarious. If you can make it through the first five minutes of the game without laughing out loud, you are a robot. Report to the nearest recycling facility for disposal.

*Psychonauts* isn't perfect--it's got the occasional issue with collision detection, and the color palette's a little muddy--but it's close. Between the quality of its script and the addictive gameplay, you'll have a hard time putting *Psychonauts* down before you reach the end.

**Rating :** 4.5 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**4.5 of 5**





# SPIKEOUT

BATTLE STREET

Review by **Jeremy**

**Publisher :** Sega  
**Developer :** Sega  
**Release Date :** 3/29/05  
**Rating :** TEEN

**Genre(s) :** Fighting  
**Category :** Beat 'em up  
**# of players :** 1-4



The first console-specific entry in the *Streets of Rage*-esque *Spikeout* series has finally hit home after years of delays, and it was worth the wait. Being unable to play the Japan-only arcade original or the *Spikeout* engine-using *Rent-A-Hero No. 1*, gamers were left with *Spikeout: Battle Street* as the last hope to play something involving this series. As luck would have it, SBT doesn't disappoint.

Sega has delivered the most challenging beat 'em up ever. When you go through the story mode (which unravels the reasons behind a gang war that has seen areas destroyed and families wrecked), you have no continues. You'll be left to rely on just your gaming skill, and maybe a small health pickup to fend off about six foes at a time, and that's not including multiple bosses ganging up on you.

Thankfully, you have dozens of attacks at your disposal to help put the odds in your favor. Punches, kicks, and throws can all be done easily. Unfortunately, once you get into the jumping attacks, things fall apart. For whatever reason, these staples of the genre can't be pulled off as easily as they should due to unresponsive controls. It's the most notable blemish on the controls, although the clumsy default control scheme is another offender. You can configure them to your liking, but if you don't, you'll be suffering from some needless attacks. The homing attacks can help you avoid these needless shots, as can the ability to strafe. I was surprised to see strafing, and I'm glad it's in, since it allows you to pick off each foe a little easier, and make better use of your surroundings to win.

Considering that the graphics are based on a game released over seven years ago, they've turned out pretty well. They aren't the flashiest visuals around, but they are effective. The solid character

models are shown off with rather lush animation; gone are the days of two frame attacks. You are now treated to a beat 'em up with full animation for its attacks, and it is a welcome change. It's worth noting that most of the game is free of slowdown, even on Live with four players playing at a time. Given how fast the action is, and how much goes down at one time, this is quite impressive.

The audio fits the quick action, with techno beats blaring throughout the game. It's a shame that they aren't as memorable as those in the *Streets of Rage* games, but they get the job done. The sound effects don't, sadly. They lack impact in many cases, and outside of the weapon attacks, they rarely fit the action. There is some nice voice work though, especially when the characters yell out a battle cry as they beat you.

While the game does suffer from some control and audio issues, none of them harm the game. The furthering of the gameplay matters more than any of the problems, and given how stale this genre has become over the past decade, I'm surprised that the game injects so much new life into it. The online aspect plays a large part in this, as it was done far better than anyone could have expected considering the likely shoestring budget given for it. This whole game seems like a labor of love, and it was definitely worth the effort.

**Rating :** 4 of 5

**2nd opinion** by 4thletter • **Alternate Rating :** 3 of 5

This old school game is tough, but spirals into monotony a bit too easily. Weak sounds and an iffy default control set don't help. Points for moxie.

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**3.5 of 5**



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about to be **killed**  
for the **11th time** tonight

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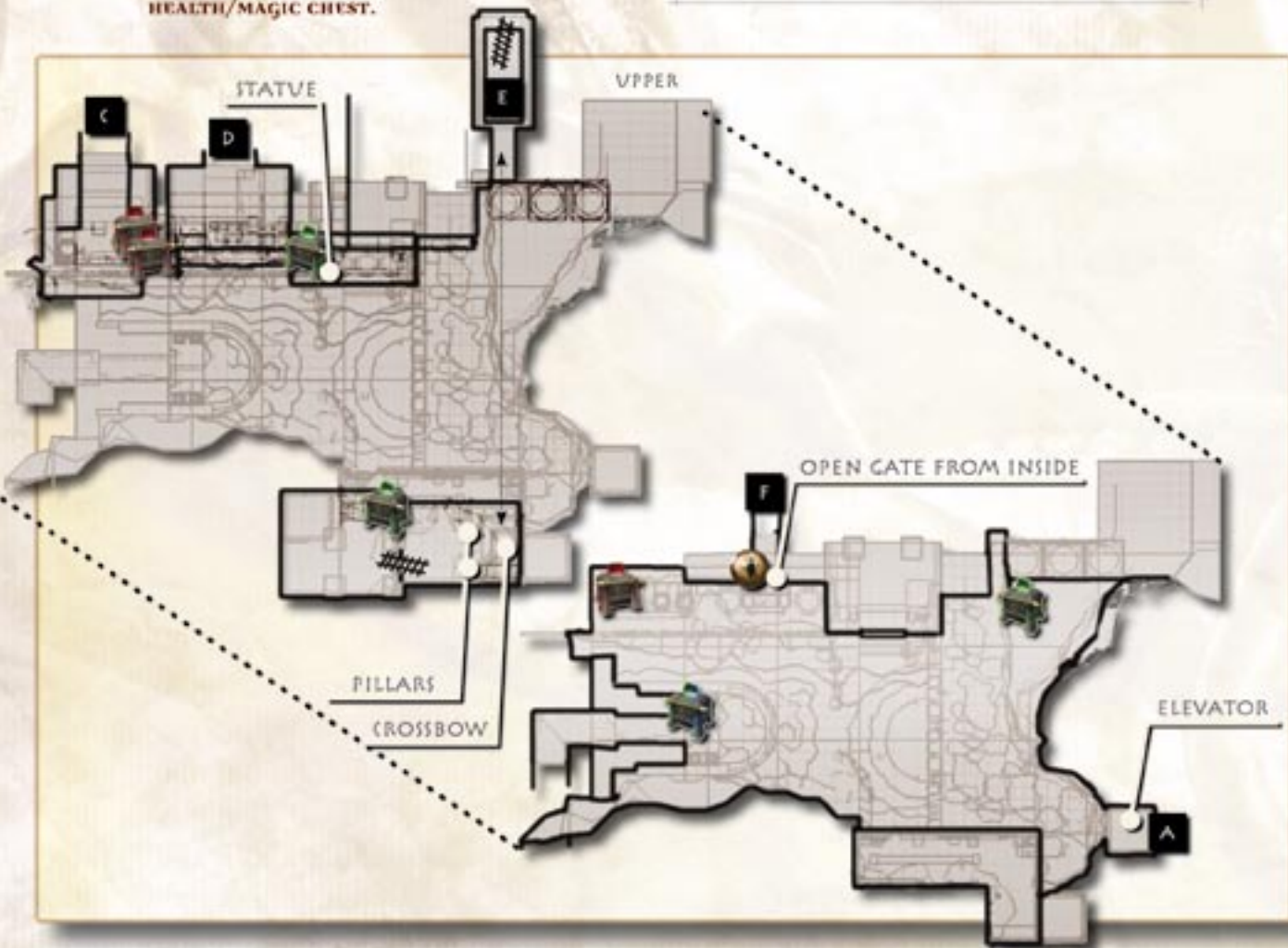


act scene  
**II CARNAGE IN THE COURTYARD**

TEMPLE 1: EXTERIOR

1 once you step into the open, you will be assaulted by several cyclops enforcers. the best tactics to use on these spiked ball-toting enemies is to use quick attacks and roll out of the way. the roll will still allow you to continue your combo.

when they have taken enough damage follow the on-screen prompt to activate a mini-game and finish them off. to the right rear section of the area is a ledge with a health chest. all the gates are locked, so proceed forward into the doorway past a HEALTH/MAGIC CHEST.



MONSTER: CYCLOPS ENFORCER

HIT POINTS: 130  
 MAGIC WEARNESS: CHARGE THUNDERBOLT  
 MINI-GAME: EYE IMPALE  
 STONE RESISTANCE: 20,000  
 STONE HIT POINTS: 20  
 STONE ESCAPE TIME: 5 SECONDS  
 DEFENSE TACTIC: TANK  
 THROW CONDITIONS: LOW HEALTH  
 SPEED KILL TACTIC: N/A

ORE DROPS	
DEATH	30 (100% CHANCE TO 20 HIT)
DEATH DECAP	N/A
CS MILK	N/A
CS KILL	N/A
SHATTER	75
AIR SHATTER	N/A
MINI-GAME	150 (100% CHANCE TO 20 HEALTH POINTS)



THIS LARGE CREATURE CAN TAKE A LOT OF DAMAGE BEFORE THE PROMPT WILL APPEAR TO ENTER THE MINI-GAME THAT WILL KILL IT. AVOID THE LARGE, SPIKED BALL BY ROLLING OUT OF THE WAY AFTER DISHING OUT A FEW QUICK ATTACKS.

CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY: CYCLOPS



GIANTS WITH ONLY ONE EYE IN THEIR FOREHEAD. CHILDREN OF THE EARTH, GAIA. THEY ATE HUMANS, WERE THICK AND HAD GIVEN ZEUS THE THUNDER AND LIGHTNING AS A SIGN OF GRATITUDE WHEN HE RELEASED THEM FROM THE UNDERWORLD. THEY WORKED AS HEPHAESTUS HELPERS UNDER THE VOLCANO ETNA, MAKING ZEUS' LIGHTNING BOLTS, BUT WERE KILLED BY APOLLO AS A REVENGE FOR ZEUS' KILLING HIS SON ACLEPIUS.

THE MOST FAMOUS CYCLOPS WAS POLYPHEMUS WHO ODYSSEUS BLINDED AFTER MAKING HIM DRUNK.




IN GENERAL, HOMER DESCRIBED THE CYCLOPS AS WILD SAVAGES WHO DID NOT USE AGRICULTURE OR LAWS OTHER THAN EACH MAN TO HIMSELF. THIS CAN BE SEEN AS AN ALLEGORY OF THE BARBARIANS, THE NON-GREEKS. OTHER NAMED CYCLOPS WERE BRONTES, STEROPES AND ARGES.



### SWAMP CAVE



#### MAP LEGEND

-  Container
-  Focus Shrine
-  Trapped Container



This lofty cavern, decorated with countless glowing mushrooms, would make a pleasant hideaway if it weren't for the prowling ogres and toad demons. You must fight through this cave to confront Gao the Lesser after he kidnaps Dawn Star.



South cavern

The south cavern, nearest the entrance, consists of two parts. Monsters prowl to the west, while two chests await to the east. A path crosses from south to north through the cavern, leading deeper into the cave.



North cavern

Your ultimate destination, the north cavern is where you reunite with Dawn Star and have your ultimate showdown with Gao the Lesser. There are also several treasure chests and a Focus Shrine here.

### CRITICAL PATH A MASTER'S TEACHINGS

#### SPEAK WITH MASTER LI

The story begins in Two Rivers School, where your martial arts training under Master Li is nearly complete. A junior student, Jing Woo, challenges you to a friendly training match in the sparring ring. This tutorial battle introduces the basics of combat. Follow the instructions that pop up during the battle; Jing Woo heals himself after each successful demonstration.

**NOTE**  
The tutorial is mandatory only if this is your first time playing Jade Empire. On subsequent new games, you can skip it.

**TUTORIAL BATTLE: 0 XP, 0 SP**

Enemy	Style	Health	Chi
Jing Woo	Basic	30	30



After the fight, you are told to seek out Master Li. Before you do, take time to explore the Two Rivers School and speak with your fellow students. Student Lin and Student Wen in particular have plenty to say. Gao the Lesser, your bitter rival, also gives you an earful, but the conversation is less pleasant. After looking around, head into Master Li's quarters.



Jing Woo delivers a summons from Master Li.

**TIP**  
Earn your first XP by reading the scrollstands scattered around the school grounds and by challenging Students Lin and Wen to sparring matches.



Master Li prepares to complete your training by revealing your destiny.

Master Li begins to explain the great destiny that is set before you, but the conversation is interrupted. Si Pat barges in to announce that bandits have sailed up the river and invaded the village. You are instructed to seek out Dawn Star, the other top student at Two Rivers School, and take her into the village to get some weapons from Weapon Master Gujin.

**SIDE QUEST**  
You can now solve the riddle of the lion statue in Master Li's quarters. See *The Lion of Two Rivers* side quest for the full solution.

#### FIND DAWN STAR



Gao takes advantage of the chaos to make a move on Dawn Star.

As you enter the garden on the school's east side, Dawn Star and Gao the Lesser are involved in a heated argument. Gao storms off in disgust when you interrupt the exchange. After he's gone, tell Dawn Star of Master Li's orders. She agrees to help and becomes your first Follower.

**Dawn Star Profile**

Attack Style: Long Sword  
Support Ability: Recover Chi  
Health: 130  
Chi: 50



#### ACQUIRE YOUR WEAPONS

Go through the school gate to find a pair of bandits; you're just in time to watch as they kill a helpless villager. This is your first taste of real battle. One of the bandits uses the fast Legendary Strike style; nullify his speed by slowing him with Heavenly Wave or entering Focus mode.

# MISSION 5

## DISPLACE

### SOLO WALKTHROUGH

#### GEAR

You can't kill anyone this entire mission, so the Assault Kit isn't even available. Ammo is absolutely useless, so the only downside to the Stealth Kit is that you don't get the Flash and Smoke Grenades that come with Redding's Recommendation. But you do get non-lethal Gas Grenades (fired through the SC-20K Launcher), which are fantastic. Stealth is definitely the choice here.

##### REDDING'S RECOMMENDATION

SC-20K	60 ROUNDS
LAUNCHER ATTACHMENT FOREGRIP ATTACHMENT	
SC PISTOL	40 ROUNDS
STICKY CAMERA	x3
STICKY SHOCKER	x3
AIRFOIL ROUND	x3
FLASH GRENADE	x2
SMOKE GRENADE	x2

##### STEALTH KIT

SC-20K	30 ROUNDS
LAUNCHER ATTACHMENT FOREGRIP ATTACHMENT	
SC PISTOL	20 ROUNDS
STICKY CAMERA	x5
STICKY SHOCKER	x5
GAS GRENADE	x3
AIRFOIL ROUND	x3



SC-20K w/ LAUNCHER ATTACHMENT



SC-20K w/ FOREGRIP ATTACHMENT

#### GOALS

NOTE: The grey text signifies that the respective Goal is acquired at some point during the Mission, and does not appear among the "default Goals" of the Mission.

##### PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

- Retrieve the Server Access Algorithm
- Recover Displace's central server access algorithm by hacking the laptop of the executive in the Meeting Room or checking for a backup in the Training Area.
- Access the Central Server in the Server Room
- Access the central server to determine if Displace is complicit in Zherkezhi's possible crimes. Find a way in through the R&D Section.

- Discover Who Is in Charge of the Zherkezhi Protection Detail
- Search Displace's servers to find any information about the Zherkezhi protection detail and who is in charge.
- Don't Kill Anyone
- Displace must not discover that intelligence operations are active against them. Killing anyone during the mission will result in immediate mission failure.
- Find Information Linking Displace and Zherkezhi
- User "Moodich" has removed files relating to the Zherkezhi protection detail from the central server. Check his personal computer in his office on the top floor.

##### SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

- Discover the Real Identity of Milan Nedich
- Third Echelon's files draw a blank on the name Milan Nedich, Displace's VP of Protection Services. Find out what his real identity is.

##### OPPORTUNITY OBJECTIVES

- Insert Tracer Programs into Displace's Division Servers
- Grimsdottir will be better able to monitor Displace's activities if you can insert tracer programs into the small servers in each of Displace's divisions.

#### GOALS

- Retrieve the Server Access Algorithm
- Access the Central Server
- Discover Who Is in Charge of the Zherkezhi Protection Detail
- Don't Kill Anyone
- Find Info Linking Displace and Zherkezhi
- Discover Milan Nedich's Real Identity
- Insert Tracer Programs into Servers

#### BRIEFING

##### SECURITY OVERVIEW

Displace International uses the same four alarm system you've encountered in past missions, complete with normal (non-infrared) cameras like those seen at the MCAS Bank. One new twist in this area seems to be an increased level of communication between guards. Even if an enemy can't get to an alarm button, they can call in a security breach within seconds, remotely triggering an alarm. Make sure that if you're seen you K.O. your foe immediately!

##### THOU SHALT NOT KILL

These Displace guys seem like a bunch of jerks to me, but Lambert is pretty adamant that you not kill them. Unlike killing National Guardsmen, which only got you a stern talking-to and no pudding after supper, killing someone here is an instant mission failure. Fortunately the many blind corners in this building combined with the cover of darkness cast by the power failure have made it quite easy to get close enough to foes for a left trigger KO. This should be your primary mode of attack here, and you'll find it surprisingly effective. Even if an enemy several feet away spots you, you can usually reach him and knock him out before he can draw and fire his weapon.

##### A HIGHER CLASS OF FOE

Displace doesn't charge the big bucks because they're a bunch of chumps, and you'll find the enemies here are a class above Panamanian rent-a-cops and Lacerda's thugs. For one thing, they're incredibly attentive; any change you make to the environment will be noticed immediately, so close doors behind you and don't think you can shut off a light without arousing suspicion.

Another problem is that they're pretty familiar with your tricks. Gas Grenades can surprise them, but no one falls for the sticky camera clicker here. That doesn't mean you can't effectively use the sticky camera for KO's, just that you'll have to fire it in their path and gas them when they pass.



#### TACTICS

#### THE WALKTHROUGH

##### A INFILTRATION

1 You begin on the roof, where your goal is to deactivate a ventilation fan and rappel into the heart of Displace International. Don't be in a hurry to shut off that fan, though, as the racket it makes will mask any mis-step Sam makes as he deals with the two guys on the roof.

The first will leave the well-lit machine area for a patrol, and it should be a snap to grab and interrogate him. Blood-thirsty players should remember the no-kill rule, and keep their knives sheathed

when it's time to end the chat.

The entrance to the machine area is very well lit, so skip the door and climb over the fence at a shadowy part. The



technician here has nothing to say, so a solid left trigger smack will do fine. Use one of the big machines to shut off the fan.

2 You're not in yet, though. You have to pick the lock on the trap, and then select "Rappel on Wall" at the pole just outside the trapdoor (it's way too far to jump unsecured).





### Psychology

- ◆ Primary skill: Logic
- ◆ Other required skills: Charisma, Creativity, Cleaning
- ◆ Linked careers: Paranormal, Law Enforcement, Business



### Classes

SEMESTER	CLASS TITLE	COOKING	MECHANICAL	CHARISMA	BODY	LOGIC	CREATIVITY	CLEANING	HOURS
Freshman 1	Introduction to Psychology: We Are Too a Science!	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	4 p.m.–6 p.m.
Freshman 2	Animal Behavior: Of Mazes and Cheeses	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	9 a.m.–11 a.m.
Sophomore 1	Abnormal Psychology: A Guide to Misdiagnosing Your Friends	—	—	1	—	2	2	—	12 p.m.–2 p.m.
Sophomore 2	The Prefrontal Lobe and Other Optional Brain Parts	—	—	2	—	3	—	2	7 p.m.–10 p.m.
Junior 1	Cognitive Dissonance: Recognizing How Broken Your Brain Is	—	—	—	—	—	3	3	2 p.m.–4 p.m.
Junior 2	Emotions: Don't Fear the Amygdala	—	—	3	—	4	—	—	4 p.m.–7 p.m.
Senior 1	Negative Interactions: What Happened to Deviance?	—	—	4	—	—	4	—	11 a.m.–1 p.m.
Senior 2	Advanced Autonomy: Finding the Best Action	—	—	—	—	5	—	4	6 p.m.–8 p.m.

### Choosing a Major

There are many ways to select a major for your Sim. Here are a few:

- ◆ Existing skills: Choosing a major that emphasizes skills your Sim already has lightens his or her workload considerably, leaving more time for socializing, working on grades, and making money.
- ◆ Lifetime Want: If a Sim's Lifetime Want points toward reaching the top of a particular career and you want them to pursue that Want, put them in a major that favors the desired career.
- ◆ Desired career/career object: To enter a particular career or to obtain a particular career object, choose an aligned major to make attaining those goals easier.
- ◆ Aspiration: If your Sim's Aspiration favors a certain career (see Chapter 21), major in an aligned area to make satisfying the Sim's career-related Wants much easier.
- ◆ Personality: If your Sim has a personality that learns certain skills at an increased rate, choose a major that includes one or more of your Sim's personality-accelerated skills. For example, a Sim with Playful 10 learns the Creative skill quickly, so choose Art or Literature to meet class requirements faster.

### Declaring Major

Sims may declare a major any time, but must declare one before the beginning of their Junior year.



Declaring your Sim's major is just a phone call or mouse click away.

Declare your major by contacting the Registrar (under the College menu) via telephone, cell phone, or computer. The option to call the Registrar disappears after the start of Senior year. If you opt not to immediately declare a major, your Sim may be Undeclared for the first two years of college. This "major" has specific class times and skill requirements like any other. If you do not select a major by the start of Junior year, the Sim automatically becomes a Philosophy major.

#### tip

The Undeclared major doesn't focus on any skills in particular, ultimately requiring a Level 2 skill in all except Body (1) and Charisma (1). Though the experience is broad, all other majors require a Level 3 in one skill by the start of Junior year. If, therefore, you stick to the Undeclared major and accomplish only its required skill levels, your Sim will be behind at the start of Junior year in whatever major he or she chooses.

### Changing Majors

You can change your major any time until the start of a Sim's Senior year. Just contact the Registrar by phone, cell phone, or computer.

#### note

When a Sim becomes a Senior, the Registrar options disappear from the phones and computer.

Keep in mind that changing your major can have a negative effect on your Sims' academic progress; if they lack enough skill for the current semester of the new major, they have to acquire any old skill requirements plus all for the current semester to have any hope of a high grade. Failure to make up this lost ground results in academic probation.

### GRADING

To be promoted to the next semester, Sims must achieve at least a C-. Better grades are rewarded with progressively larger academic grants, and finishing college with a cumulative GPA of 3.7 or better yields substantial career benefits. To snare these top grades while leaving your Sims free to socialize, have fun, and make money, you must understand how the grading system functions and how it can be used most efficiently.

#### GRADES AND TIME MANAGEMENT

Sims must spend, on average, a certain number of hours per day on schoolwork of some kind. To give you an idea of the commitment required to excel and the minimum effort your Sims must exert to avoid probation:

- ◆ A: Seven hours per day
- ◆ C-: Two hours per day

Early years require less than the average time, while later years may require more.

### GPA vs. Grades

There are two measures of how well your Sim is doing in college: GPA and grades.

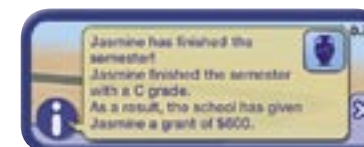


GPA is shown in the Skills and Major panel.

GPA is always viewable in the Sim's Skills and Major panel and is the cumulative measure of all completed semesters (not including the current one). This figure is used, at the conclusion of college, to

determine if a Sim graduates with honors—a distinction that can earn big Aspiration Rewards and a boost in postcollege employment.

Grade is the final letter grade for a semester. Grade is determined by the level of the Class Performance meter in the Skills and Major panel after the conclusion of the current semester's final exam. Grades correspond to the number of grade points the Sim accumulated over the course of the semester.



At a semester's end, a Sim's grade and monetary grant are announced.

Grades also correspond to a sliding scale of financial rewards ("grants") for student performance. When a Sim's final semester grades are calculated (they return home from their final exam), they're immediately awarded the corresponding grant. Thus, an A+ student could earn \$9,600 over four school years just for doing well in college.

#### Grading Scale

LETTER GRADE	NUMERICAL GRADE	MINIMUM SCORE REQUIRED	GRANT
A+	4.0	1,000	\$1,200
A	3.9	975	\$1,100
A-	3.7	925	\$1,000
B+	3.3	825	\$800
B	3.0	750	\$700
B-	2.7	675	\$600
C+	2.2	575	\$500
C	2.0	500	\$400
C-	1.7	425	\$300
D+	1.3	325	\$0
D	1.0	250	\$0
D-	0.7	175	\$0
F	0.0	less than 175	\$0



The art of the third-party controller's been a bit neglected on the critical front lately. It's a huge chunk of what's on store shelves, but third-party hardware usually has to be something asinine or uniquely Japanese before it gets some ink. This is our attempt to redress that balance.

An initial editorial comment: my assistant has lost three fingers this week trying to open controller cases. Could we perhaps return to a blessed, simpler time where I did not need an arc welder to open my new hardware's box? Kthxbye!



## Pelican Pro Series Predator II

Review by Wanderer

2.4 GHz Wireless Controller  
System: PlayStation 2  
Price: **\$22.95**

### Features

Range: 50 feet  
Batteries: 2 AA  
Battery Life: 120+ Hours w/Rumble, 200+ without

This is nice. It feels really solid, with a highly responsive control pad. Just as a controller, the Predator II beats the hell out of the standard Dual Shock 2.

There are a couple of downsides. Pelican's put the power switch where the Dual Shock's Start button is, which was an unfortunate decision. They've also stuck the L2 and R2 buttons on the back of the unit. This takes a lot of getting used to.

Bottom line: if you don't mind its learning curve, the Predator II's one of the best wireless controllers for the PlayStation 2.

## Intec Star Wars "Jedi Hunter"

Review by Wanderer

Wireless Controller  
System: PlayStation 2  
Price: **\$29.99**

### Features

Range: 50 feet (?)  
Batteries: 2 AA  
Battery Life: 60+ Hours  
Programmable  
Autofire

This *Star Wars* tie-in features Darth Vader's smiling face etched on the front, programmable macros, and a trademark "lightsaber" button that activates most of the controller's special features. (It does not, however, allow you to cut your friends in half when they pick Voldo. Pity, that.)

The Jedi Hunter's pretty mediocre, though. Its shoulder buttons are unresponsive, the analogue sticks are stiff, and the battery hatch is in a bad place; I keep accidentally pulling it off during gameplay. The programmable macros are a nice touch, but the Predator II's better all the way across the the board.



## Intec Star Wars Sith vs. Jedi

Review by Wanderer

Glow-in-the-Dark Controllers  
System: Xbox  
Price: **\$29.99**

### Features

Programmable  
Autofire

These glowing "Sith" and "Jedi" pads glow fire red or cool blue, respectively, while they're plugged into a running Xbox.

As *Star Wars* tie-ins go, these aren't much. As controllers, though, they're actually quite good. For a bit more than the cost of an ordinary Controller S, you'll get two decent, programmable pads with autofire. There are even a couple of extra buttons for your macros, a feature which you just don't see enough of. They are a little on the small side, so if you've got huge man hands, stay away.



## Intec PSP Pro Gamer's Kit

Review by Lynxara

System: PSP  
Price: **\$24.99**

Designed to resemble a Pace pistol case and bundled with five PSP accessories, the Pro Gamer's Kit initially seems very impressive. Some of the Kit's accessories are handy, notably the Car Adapter, the Game Buds, and the compact Game Case which holds 3 UMDs.

The included carrying strap is uselessly long, though, and the Kit we reviewed did not include the promised screen protector at all. The case itself is much too cheaply made to be trusted with an expensive, fragile gadget like the PSP. Given the retail price, I'd advise PSP owners to pass on this one.



## Logitech MX518

Review by Wanderer

Gaming-Grade Optical Mouse  
System: PC  
Price: **\$41.99**

### Features

Adjustable DPI  
"On-the-fly" sensitivity adjustment  
1600dpi optical engine

Logitech makes great products, and the MX 518's no exception. It's a bit on the pricey side, admittedly, but it fits comfortably in your hand and it's perfect for twitch gaming.

Your first impressions are likely to be incorrect; it looks like it's padded, and you'd think the DPI adjustment switches, mounted to the top and bottom of the mousewheel, would get in the way during gameplay. It isn't, and they don't. In fact, it's surprisingly ergonomic.

If you just need a mouse, there are cheaper products that'll do the job. If you're a dyed-in-the-wool FPS junkie (and you're not one of those Boomslang hopheads), then check this out.



## Jakks Pacific Star Wars Plug & Play TV Games

Review by Wanderer

System: Stand-Alone  
Price: **\$19.99**

### Features

Five separate original minigames  
Plugs into A/V jacks on any TV or VCR  
Built-in memory to retain high scores  
Requires 4 AA batteries

This... is kinda cool, actually. I'll admit to being a little bit of a snob about the "controller games" packages that've popped up in the last couple of years, as many of them are pretty shameless cash runs.

The *Star Wars* TV Games controller's got five original games, though, and three of them are pretty good. Those three are Droid Invasion, a blend of *Arkanoid* and *Space Invaders*; Grievous Onslaught, a top-down action game that kind of reminds me of *Smash TV*; and Utapau Chase, a surprisingly fast-paced 2D shooter.

The production values on these aren't much above that of a decent NES cart, right down to the MIDI tunes, but the gameplay's there. For twenty bucks, this is a good deal.



## SUPER BATTLE OPERA

### THE 2nd ARCADIA CUP TOURNAMENT

#### AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT JAPAN'S "OLYMPICS" OF ARCADE GAMING

by **Arlie**

This was my third day in Japan. I was in Tokyo for the event known as Super Battle Opera, a three-day tournament that required three-man teams to qualify in regionals from January to April. I was a member of the U.S.A. 3rd Strike team, with 'Pyrolee' Michael Fauson and Frank Melendez. We had to qualify for the team at Sunnyvale Golfland, California in April. What resulted was three hours of a grueling round-robin tournament that came down to three tie-breakers with a final split standing between Frank and myself.

It was ultimately worth it. I got to experience firsthand the uber-ramen, the omnipresent train system, the hordes of cutely-dressed females... and Pyrolee having an ashtray thrown at him in More Arcade. I wondered if us visiting gaijin were going to have to play on Japanese cabinets at SBO with bladed ashtrays surreptitiously positioned next to the audience. During the train ride to SBO, I'd been kicking myself for not practicing more often, but I think everyone tends to do that before something this huge.

After roll call, we met Kuni, our correspondent. Kuni has long acted as translator, manager and coordinator for Japanese players visiting America, and vice versa. He led us into the main arena, and we knew that we were expected to lose in the first round. Unfortunately, 'ohayo1234' Kim Hoang and 'Buktooth' Campbell Tran had lost their first match in the CvS2 tournament. They managed to put up quite a fight with only two members on their team, since Ricky Ortiz had declined to go to Japan.

"Don't worry, I will cheer for you," said Kuni. He introduced us to a customized cabinet with old-school Wico 360's. These sticks were good, and if that weren't enough, Arcadia Magazine had also prepared a four-way projection display and a setup of smoke and pyrotechnics for the final matches. In my 80-page SBO guidebook, there were interviews and transcripts of meetings done months in advance for the planning of the tournament, as well as photographs, brackets and personal memos of the players themselves. The professional manner in how this tournament was prepared was amazing.



THE STAGE IS SET FOR VAMPIRE SAVIOUR

After an introductory video showcasing last year's dramatic victories and defeats, the first round of 3rd Strike opened with apocalyptic glamour. I tried not to think about the audience scrutinizing our every maneuver. When it was time for our match, we approached the cabinet... to be confronted by Pino, cosplaying as Necro and screaming at the top of his lungs, "WE'RE GOING TO MURDER YOU FOR EVERYONE TO SEE!"

I took point for Team Moto with my Makoto, followed by Frank's Ryu, and Pyrolee's Yun as anchor. Pino's team, "The Individualist School", included Ibuki12 (Ibuki) and Messatsu Yarou (Urien). Pino's SBO strategy was to enter with a unique team of characters that would throw everyone off with their unconventionality.

I lost the first round and won the second, but my execution with Makoto's crouching Short xx SA 1 (Seichuusen Godanzuki) was poor at best, so I couldn't escape the corner and was hit with multiple Electric Snakes. Frank also lost with his Ryu- he wasn't quite warmed up and had only arrived in Japan the night before.

Pyrolee, having observed Pino's attack patterns, managed to defeat him. Pino was undaunted, cheering on his next teammate. In the final round against Ibuki12, Pyrolee, with a sliver of his life remaining, parried Ibuki12's aerial dagger super, knocked him down, then jumped in the air and par-

Left: The author mumbles a few choice words into the mic.  
Right: The training room is as full of activity as the main floor.



ried the wakeup EX rising kick and finished him off.

Pino's taunts continued like a plucky hero from an anime. The final member of the team, Messatsu Yarou ('Homicidal Bastard'), nearly trapped Pyrolee in the second round with an unblockable Aegis Reflector trap, but Pyrolee parried the first hit of the trap and threw Messatsu Yarou across the screen. He then activated his Gen'ei Jin and defeated him with a custom combo.

Frank and I collapsed in relief. Pino was crushed, having lost his first match to the American team. He hugged Pyrolee with all his might, smudging him with makeup. "For defeating us, you must carry our dream of winning SBO."

Pyrolee had a maniacal look in his eyes. "Dude, we're gonna make it up there. We can do it."

Afterwards, we were interviewed on stage. Under hot spotlights, Pyro and I gave our two cents on the state of Japanese and American competition, while Frank sweated bullets. At the end we were asked to say something for the audience.

Pyro and Frank finished their statements. The announcer handed me the microphone. "My friend told me to say this, so I mean no offense to anyone," I said.

An "Oh god, Tom's gonna do something crazy" look appeared on everyone's faces.

"Ore no ikizama wo... MISETE YARU ZE!"  
\*\*Roughly translates to, "We're gonna to show you worthless scrubs what the hell we've got!"

Thankfully, the audience got the joke, and I was received with applause and laughter, though it did end up being on the front page of Wednesday's newspaper.

For our next match, we fought a team that only had two entrants, "Sapporo Team, 3rd Rank." We put Frank on point with his Ryu (SA III: Denjin Hadouken) and I never had to play a single round as Frank pulled an OCV (One Character Victory) on the team. Unfortunately, I think that this made us overconfident. I didn't feel the adrenaline rush anymore from my fight with Pino, and I became too relaxed.

Our third match was against the "Die! Die! Club - Namiki Clan", with Isse (Yun), Xiao (Ibuki) and J (Japan's #1 Makoto). Frank took point, followed by myself, and Pyrolee was once again anchor. Yet again, Frank and I were eliminated by their first man, and it was up to Pyrolee to pull another OCV.

His Yun managed to defeat Isse and Xiao. Then it was J's turn.

Pyrolee, in the third and final round, had J at 4% health with a chain combo that should have brainlessly cancelled into the Gen'ei Jin, but it never came out. J instantly recaptured momentum and drove Pyro across the screen, connecting Makoto's Seichuusen Godanzuki in the



Left: Differ Ariake, the site of Super Battle Opera, is just as fancy on the outside as it is on the inside.  
Right: PinoAB7 espousing his philosophy of breaking the mold.

corner. Pyrolee didn't know it at the time, but without an EX attack or Super Art, it was impossible to retaliate against Makoto during her recovery phase. He attempted a crouching medium kick into a lunge punch, but J blocked it and threw him down to the ground for the kill. Thus ended our tournament run.

I exited Differ Ariake for some fresh air and sat down with two guys at a bench. They introduced themselves as Happy and Pierrot, Japan's #1 Alex and Remy players. I asked them where the best arcades were for 3rd Strike competition. They mentioned a place in Omiya, then asked if I had heard of Las Vegas.

"Las Vegas? Wait, what?"

"Oh... not the American Las Vegas. Las Vegas Game Center, in Ikebukuro." Apparently, it was so hard to give proper directions to the place that Pierrot offered to take us there personally. I thanked him for this incredibly nice favor, and we went back inside Differ to watch the semi-finals.

In the arena, the final four teams emerged from smoke and flames. The next match was between J's "Die! Die! Club" and Team "Final Bomb", which had K.O. (#1 Yun), Boss (#1 Yang, only because he thinks Ken is too cheap) and Ohnuki (#1 Chun-Li). Any one of these players could be a team captain in their own right.

K.O. announced, "I will single-handedly defeat their team."

His teammates assented. "It will be so."

Not unbelievable words. K.O.'s match against Isse's Yun went 2-0, and his match against Xiao came very close, but Xiao was unable to get those last few pixels of damage in both rounds. Then, once again, came J's turn.

J and K.O. were trading hits, with J taking the aggressive route and forcing K.O. into the corner with well-placed sweeps. K.O. managed to reverse position and nailed J with a Gen'ei Jin custom combo. However, J baited K.O. into thinking that he was going to sweep him again, and instead caught him with Makoto's karakusa, a choke grab that sets the opponent up for a free combo. J won both rounds with this tactic.

J's next fight with Boss was incredibly fast, the screen barely keeping up with the players. J couldn't gain control long enough in the first round, and nearly lost early in the second round, but made a comeback and defeated Boss for a 1-1 tie. The momentum carried over to the final round, where J captured the initiative and pummeled Boss in the corner to an inch of his life before he could attempt to fight back. By then, it was too late for Boss.

The final battle between J and Ohnuki involved strategic poking, and a technical oversight. Ohnuki used Chun-Li's natural advantages to dominate the majority of the fight, but he missed two Houyoku-Sen Super Arts, allowing J to punish him and recapture control in the three-round fight to defeat Team Final Bomb.

The reason that Ohnuki missed the Houyoku-Sen is that he had attempted to punish Makoto's crouching Short kick, which possesses a three-frame penalty regardless of whether it hits or is blocked. However, the Houyoku-Sen has a start-up of four frames. Most Super Arts begin after

but two or three frames; Ohnuki had miscalculated by 1/60th of a second.

Pyrolee went to K.O. afterwards. "I'm sorry K.O., it was totally my fault for letting J's team through." K.O. really didn't have much to say, at that point.

The final match was between the "Die! Die! Club" and Mester's team, "Omnipotent", which included Spermstar J (Ken) and Raoh (Chun-Li). Spermstar J took his shirt off, swung it around, and got a rise out of the crowd like a pro wrestler.

In the introduction to the match, the MC actually grabbed a handful of Spermstar J's belly and jiggled it. We had a pretty good laugh at that.

For the team order, Spermstar J took point, and the Die! Die! Club kept the same team order, so Isse was first.

In this first match, two things became apparent to me: Spermstar J had an unrelenting offense against Yun, and this man knew how to range. He baited out dive-kicks and shoulders from Isse, and even used an EX uppercut to interrupt a Gen'ei Jin trap and capture momentum for the win. After beating Isse, Spermstar J faced Xiao's Ibuki. In this match, he was a lot more patient, playing the range game once again and capitalizing on openings left by Xiao's offense.

Finally, against J's Makoto, Spermstar J utilized rock-solid defense, and was smart enough never to use the same escape twice, allowing him to punish J for every wrong guess. He was also never afraid to back off if he had the offense, because his Ken could easily recapture momentum, so he let J come to him.

Spermstar J won SBO2 with a simple crouching Fierce. Then he stripped down to his boxers for the Full Monty before his teammates could drag him off stage.

We headed outside with everyone (read: fled the stadium in terror) and watched the winning CvS2 team get tossed into the air in victory. While Mago and Sawada were flung into the air with ease, Kindebu was a pretty big guy, and it took a coordinated effort to throw him. Then gravity took effect and crushed them all.

Saying our goodbyes to KSK, K.O., and many other players, we met with Pierrot and left for Las Vegas Game Center in Ikebukuro. We ended up talking to this guy on the way back that spoke flawless English. He was 'rkf' Sei Kondo, and hailed from Saitama, the region where RX (#1 Urien) and Georgia (#1 Ryu) were from. He said that Frank's performance with Ryu's Denjin Hadouken had inspired many Japanese players to experiment with it, because it was previously considered to be too risky for serious play.

Meanwhile, the winning 3rd Strike team went on to use their \$1000 worth of SBO prize money to rent out a room in Shinjuku and hold what was supposedly, one hell of a party. This included unlimited alcohol. I almost regretted not knowing about the party (let alone not going to it), but then again, Spermstar J, 'Pervert' Mago and Hayao were there... with alcohol and a karaoke machine.

So there was this Las Vegas arcade in Ikebukuro, and then there was this karaoke machine with aforementioned drunk Japanese guys... giving themselves wedgies, and stripped down to their boxers and mooning people while attempting to sing along to Japanese rap.

I'll take my chances with Ikebukuro, thanks.

Top: Utter calm in the heat of battle.

Center: PinoAB7 firmly believes in doing more than his share when it comes to international relations.

Bottom: The winning team of SBO - Spermstar J, Mester (back) and Raoh.



Left: It's a bird, it's a plane, it's...a giant four-sided projection screen!

Right: Backseat driving has nothing on backseat tournament play.

## STAR OCEAN EX

Review by KouAidou



**Licensed By :** Geneon  
**Production :** Studio Deen (*You're Under Arrest!*, *Read or Die*, *Gravitation*)  
**ADR Production :** The Ocean Group (*Dragon Ball Z*, *Inuyasha*, *Ranma 1/2*)  
**Release Dates :** 1/4/05 (v1)  
 3/24/05 (v2)  
**Genre(s) :** Fantasy, Comedy, Adventure



*Star Ocean EX* is a 26 episode TV series which originally ran on TV Tokyo at 6:30 PM on Fridays from 4/3/01-9/25/01. The game on which it is based, the hit Enix RPG *Star Ocean: The Second Story*, was originally released for the PlayStation in Japan in 1998, and in the US a year later. The game is now best remembered for its complex gameplay and branching plotlines that gave it high replay value, so at a time when many RPGs are already becoming little more than interactive movies, it may seem a strange choice for a direct adaptation to such a linear format as anime. *EX* is indeed a direct adaptation of the game, but the creators reach a compromise by simply following its most popular events and character paths.

The story of *Star Ocean EX*, like that of *The Second Story*, revolves around Claude C. Kenny, the son of the protagonist of the first *Star Ocean* game. Claude's father is now a famous hero and starship captain, and Claude is an ensign serving under his command. Naturally, Claude admires his father, but feels overshadowed by his fame, and wishes to make his own life for himself. That chance arrives when Claude's ship lands on an alien planet, and the crew stumbles upon a strange machine that transports Claude to another world.

At this point, the series turns into a fairly typical fish-out-of-water fantasy series. The world that Claude finds himself on, Expel, is your average fantasy world. Magicians and



**"THE FAITHFULNESS OF THIS ADAPTATION IS A CURSE AS MUCH AS IT IS A BLESSING.."**

wandering swordsmen live there in harmony with mysterious spirits called Demons. Unfortunately, a dark shadow has been cast on this otherwise peaceful world: a meteor has crashed into the continent of El, wreaking havoc with the world's environment and turning its creatures into monsters. This strange meteor is known as the Sorcery Globe, and it might just be Claude's ticket home. With the help (and cajoling) of a young girl named Rena who believes that Claude is their world's legendary savior, the two of them set out to the continent of El to learn more about the meteor. On the way, the two of them encounter a

number of strange and colorful characters, and get dragged into many more adventures than they had originally planned.

Up to this point, the anime is extremely true to the events of the game, skipping only a few minor plot points and adding character details where necessary. The faithfulness of this adaptation is a curse as much as it is a blessing: the concessions that a player typically makes for "RPG Logic" in a game are not so easily dealt with in an anime, and *Star Ocean EX* shows some strain as the writers struggle to deepen character motivations without straying from the game's basic chain of events. On the other hand, there is no denying that *The Second Story* had great material to lend to an adaptation, with a broad universe that allows science fiction to enter seamlessly into an otherwise typical fantasy world, a unique protagonist, and a cast of colorful secondary characters that any entry in the genre would envy. The use of classic RPG tropes like sidequests and boss fights before major plot points may seem a bit random to mundanes, but will only add to the show's humor for any RPG fan.

*EX*'s production is headed by the legendary Hiroshi Watanabe, director of the *Slayers* OAVs, who once again demonstrates that

he knows how to handle a good fantasy-comedy. *EX* is indeed a very funny show, but also manages its drama and pathos well, emphasizing the common (but still worthy) themes of friendship, identity, and love. Although Rena herself



seems a bit young-looking to be a romantic lead (let alone the center of multiple love triangles), Ayako Kurata's interpretations of the game's original character designs are very easy on the eyes and a joy to watch in action.

Other aspects of the show are to be expected of a modern production on a modest budget. Action scenes are overly reliant on



still-shots, which is very unfortunate in a show that tries to manage at least one fight per episode. Oddly enough, the animation outside of the action scenes is quite smooth, but in some ways this only serves to make the fights stick out worse. The effective use of a great soundtrack does what it can to create tension, and the emphasis on team fighting and character development during combat make these sequences at least forgivable. Still, the poor budget makes them somewhat tiresome to watch, especially after ten episodes. CGI is often used as a budget-saving device, but outside of the opening and the first episode, it is primarily (and thankfully) used mainly as a background enhancer.

Geneon's release of the first two discs is good, but nothing exceptional. The subtitles are accurate for the most part but occasionally feature awkward English grammar, and the credit lists are rife with typos and improper romanizations. Extras seem to be mostly an afterthought, with the standard trailers, a set of opening and ending sequences both with the original kanji and textless, and a set of fairly useless spoiler-free character bios. Fortunately, the DVD quality itself is excellent, with no noticeable flaws in picture or sound, and menus that are easy to navigate. Fans of the game



may be disappointed to find that neither English nor Japanese cast are reprising their roles here, but the veteran casting on both tracks shouldn't give anyone a cause to complain. Each DVD also comes with a mini-pencil board (while supplies last).

As both an adaptation of a popular RPG and a fantasy comedy in the vein of *Slayers*, *Star Ocean EX* succeeds fairly well. Flaws in the transition are noticeable; game purists may object to some

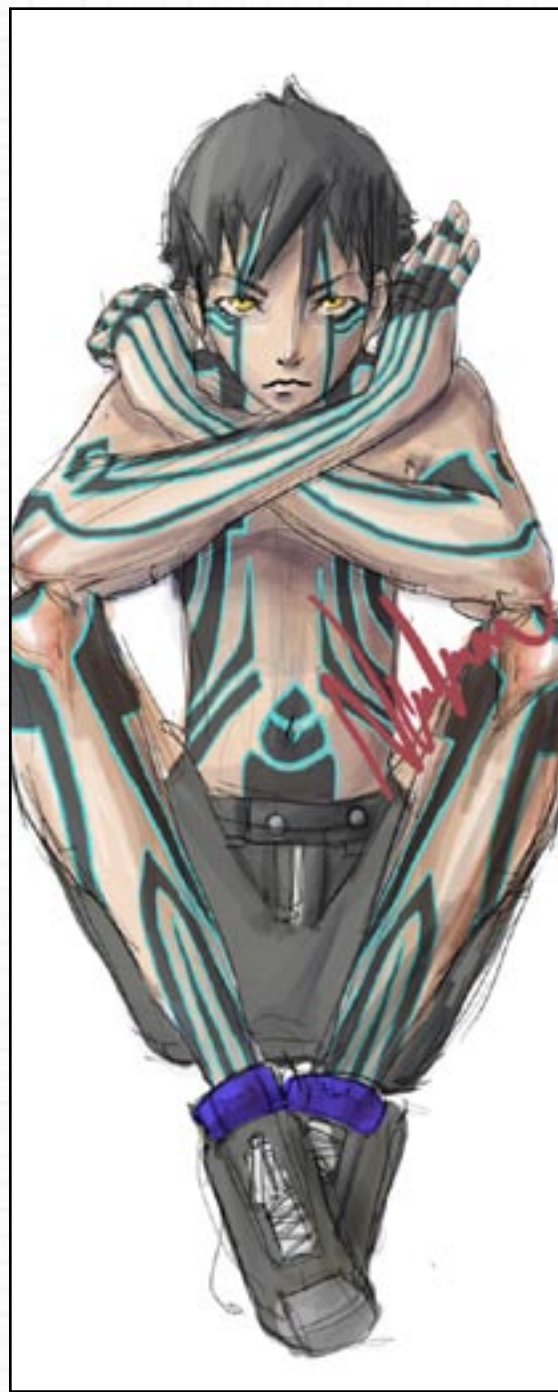
of the changes when it comes to their favorites, while those unfamiliar with the show's namesake may occasionally be left scratching their heads. However, the breadth of the extended worldsetting manages to give *EX* its own distinct identity, and its winning sense of style and humor should make it an enjoyable show for just about anyone. It's not high art, but it is fun, and at five episodes per DVD, it's worth checking out.



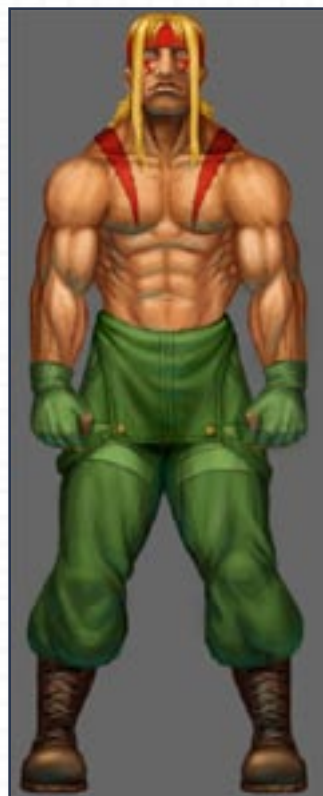
**FINAL SCORE :**  
**3 of 5**

Fan art is all about giving exposure to aspiring artists who might not otherwise have a way to get their artsie parts seen. If you are one such artist, point your web browser toward <http://www.hardcoregamer.com/hgmforum/> and check out the Fan Art section of our message boards. That is where you can post your arts to get them considered for this section. You may also email submissions to [fart@hardcoregamer.com](mailto:fart@hardcoregamer.com).

A few things to keep in mind: There is no deadline for submissions because we'll be doing this every issue. Keep it video game related, please. Only post drawings which you drew yourself. Don't expect drawings of nekkid people or any adults-only type stuff to make the cut. Keep it rated "Teen" or below. You are the copyright owner of your artwork as soon as you draw it whether you make note of that fact or not. However, in submitting your artwork to us, you give us permission to reprint your art and make fun of it if necessary.



**Title : Shin Megami Tensei Nocturne**  
**Artist : Narukamei**  
**Age : Undisclosed**  
**Location : Undisclosed**



**Title : Alex from Street Fighter III**  
**Artist : Jigsaw**  
**Age : 19**  
**Location : Göteborg, Sweden**



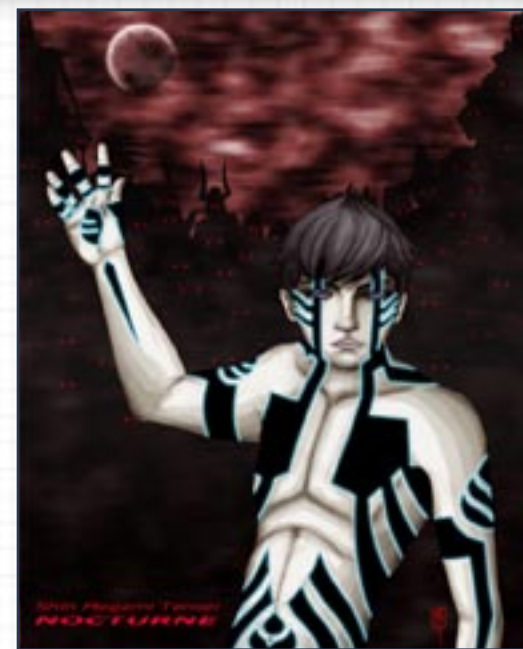
**Title : Scooter**  
**Artist : Sara**  
**Age : 6**  
**Location : California**



**Title : Prieravy**  
**Artist : Kitty**  
**Age : 20**  
**Location : California**



**Title : Gen Beatrix of Alexandria**  
**Artist : Valentine Enigma**  
**Age : Undisclosed**  
**Location : UK**



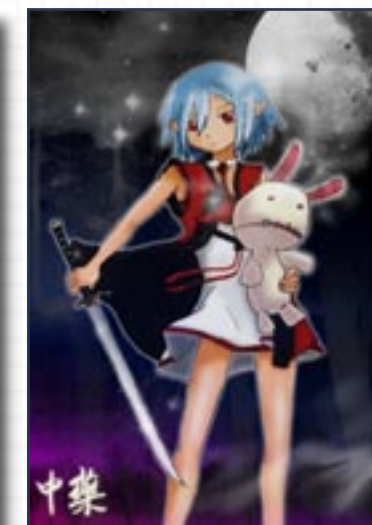
**Title : SMT Nocturne: Come Forth**  
**Artist : entropic\_soul**  
**Age : Undisclosed**  
**Location : Undisclosed**



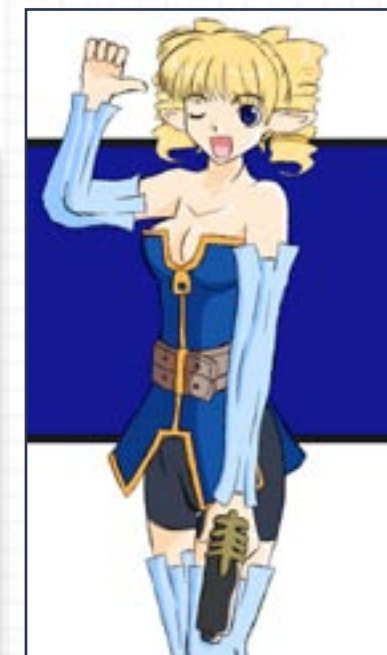
**Title : Great Summoned Beast**  
**Artist : Michael Beckett**  
**Age : Undisclosed**  
**Location : Undisclosed**



**Title : Aryll**  
**Artist : Marionette**  
**Age : Undisclosed**  
**Location : Puerto Rico**



**Title : Samurai Plenair**  
**Artist : AbyssXII**  
**Age : 18**  
**Location : In your ear...**



**Title : Archer**  
**Artist : Cho**  
**Age : 18**  
**Location : Undisclosed**



**Title : kfamily**  
**Artist : KyokujitsuNoTenshi**  
**Age : 17**  
**Location : USA**



## INTERVIEW WITH THE COSPLAYER



Meet the first featured cosplayer of HGM's cosplay section. His name is Christopher A. Canizales and he makes the slickest Beyond the Grave, from *Gungrave*, on this side of the sun! While he says it was an image on the front of *Hyperhobby* that inspired him to cosplay Grave, I like to think that God told him in a dream to "Kick their ass," since every time I see him cosplaying Grave, it kicks my ass! Now let's find out a little more about the man behind the coffin.

**HGM:** How long have you been cosplaying?  
**CC:** Going on five years now. My first cosplay, if you can call it that, was at Otakon back in 2000.

**HGM:** What first got you into cosplay?  
**CC:** It's kind of a funny story. My first anime convention was back in 1999... Otakon, no less. I honestly had no idea people dressed up as characters [at] these things and it sparked my interest... I said to myself, "Hey that looks like fun! I wanna do that too!" 2000 rolls around and there I am at Otakon again, but in ghetto cosplay style! The rest, as they say, is history.

**HGM:** What was your first cosplay?  
**CC:** You guys'll love this response. My first costume from a video game or anime was my rendition of Ryu Hayabusa from the *Ninja Gaiden* series. I was like 10 years old and the costume consisted of black sweats, a ninja mask my father made for me and a dollar-store kid's katana. During a visit to my grandparents in New York, my mother took a photo of me in front of the World

Trade Center, like on the cover of *Ninja Gaiden II*. Yeah, I was obsessed with that game! Of course, who wasn't back then? But if you mean convention "cosplay," then I'd have to say it was a Sony PocketStation. You know I'm a hardcore gamer if almost all of my cosplays are video game cosplays! My first anime cosplay was Mihawk, the Invincible Swordsman from *One Piece*. That was back in 2002.

**HGM:** How many different cosplays have you made? How many were finished, or left on the cutting-room floor? Which one's your favorite?  
**CC:** When I was 13, I went as Reptile from *Mortal Kombat* for Halloween. I've done two versions of Cervantes de León from the Dreamcast release of *Soul Calibur* (the gold-armoured version as well as his pirate outfit). I also did Maxi's 3rd player outfit from the same game. I did a very basic Iori Yagami, alternate colour. That consisted of me in pleather pants with a connecting strap and me borrowing my uncle's suit jacket with a crescent moon design stapled to the back. That one was totally last-minute. I've also done an original Sith Lord character from *Star Wars* and Beyond the Grave from the PS2 game *Gungrave*. ...I've never left a project undone.

Christopher a.k.a. "DigitalCactus" as Beyond the Grave

**HGM:** When did you start working on Grave, and at what Con did you first cosplay him?  
**CC:** We started working on it sometime in January of 2003 and debuted it at Otakon 2003.

**HGM:** How long did Grave take to make (how many hours of work total, and how many weeks/months total)?  
**CC:** It took about six months due to procrastination just on the outfit itself. In actuality it would be about 60-80 hours total.

**HGM:** What material does the Coffin consist of?  
**CC:** Seven layers of polystyrene insulation foam sheets. A can's worth of expanding insulation foam. Three layers of paper maché and gesso. A dozen cans of spray paint. Foamcore, polystyrene plastic sheeting, duct tape, gaffer's tape, epoxy, contact adhesive, PVC pipe, latex tubing, a plastic door stop for



When I die...

the eyeball, Frost King window insulation tubing, fiberglass-coated spikes. All [the coffin's parts were] hand crafted of course.

**HGM:** How heavy is the Coffin?  
**CC:** Surprisingly, it's only fifteen pounds.

**HGM:** Did you buy the guns, or did you make them too?  
**CC:** The guns (both the sets I made) were hand-carved.

**HGM:** What material are they made of?  
**CC:** The original pair had wooden crosses and were carved out of the same polystyrene insulation foam sheet, but due to time constraints I wrapped black gaffer's tape around them. The second pair were also polystyrene foam, but were finished in paper maché and gesso as well as several coats of paint.

**HGM:** Did you sew all the material for the clothing yourself?  
**CC:** Nope! Not at all. I just did all the hardware (buttons, crosses, kneepads, all the trim, guns and coffin) My cousin did a majority of the slave labour... I mean sewing on the jacket as well as my poor sister and my girlfriend made my new and improved hat.

**HGM:** What is the general reaction you get when you cosplay Grave?  
**CC:** I tend to hear a lot of "Dude! That kicks ass!" So I would say its usually a welcomed surprise.

**HGM:** How many cons have you cosplayed Grave at, and which ones?  
**CC:** 5 conventions so far. There was Otakon 2003, Katscon 2004, Pacific Media Expo 2004, Anime Expo 2004 last but not least, Otakon 2004.



Christopher strikes a pose for us at Otakon 2004

**HGM:** How long have you been going to cons?  
**CC:** Anime conventions? Since 1999.

**HGM:** What's your favorite con?  
**CC:** I would say Otakon. Hands down! Why you ask? It's huge! There's so much to do and see there! Just the video game room alone is the main reason to go! It's like an underground warehouse of pure gaming debauchery!

**HGM:** Anything you're working on currently that we can look forward to seeing at a con in the near future?  
**CC:** I'd like to eventually start work on my Beyond the Grave from *Gungrave: Overdose*, Gazelle the Peacemaker (a Yasuhiro Nightow original design), and go as Saisyu Kusanagi & Rugal Bernstein from the *King of Fighters* series, but with my current schedule, who knows?

**HGM:** Any other cool things we should know about you and your Grave cosplay?  
**CC:** I would have to say that meeting Yasuhiro Nightow,



HGM Exclusive!



Fear him.

Freakin' bad-ass!

These I pulled from his Cosplay.Com Galleries



They "two bad-ass dudes"



Mr. Canizales meeting the maker, Mr. Nightow



He likes lasagna!

the creator of *Trigun* and *Gungrave* was amongst the coolest experiences, me being a huge fan of both of those series. It was at Pacific Media Expo '04. Originally I had flown out to California to spend time with someone very special to me, and I heard that a few of our friends were going to PMX. I didn't think much of it until I learned that Nightow himself was going to be there. I immediately extended my stay for a few more days. I had to meet the man behind the masterpieces. I remember walking in a few minutes late to the conference room where it was held. Nightow hadn't started talking yet but everyone was seated. I strolled in with my Grave costume on and he just stared at me with this awestruck look on his face and exclaimed "Grave...!" in his thick Japanese accent.

After the Q & A session, he posed for some photos, I came up to where he was and he takes one of my guns and poses, and says to me as best as he could pronounce, "We badass dudes!" He autographed a couple posters, my copy of the *Gungrave Archives* artbook and my copy of the imported version of *Gungrave*.

Later on, I bumped into him. I was out of costume, but he still recognized me. "Nightow-san!!!" I shouted when I saw him from a distance, and he came walking up to me looking confused.

"Oh! Grave! Why you change? You looked so cool!" I told him I started feeling fatigued. He looked as if he was trying to get somewhere so I let him go about his business, but not before he snagged my camera and took a photo of both of us standing there.

**HGM:** That is cooler then cool! OK, last question, "Glomp me" signs, for or against?  
**CC:** That's a definite "against."

Thanks for your time Chris! We can't wait to see what you have in store for us next! If you want to see the other Cosplays Chris has done, head on over to: <http://images.cosplay.com/showgallery.php?ppuser=678&cat=500>

Until next month, keep on LARPing! Or don't. Someone has to care about your sanity.

Thanks for readin'



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Seeya next issue... HGM Staff

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