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HARDCORE GAMER[®] MAGAZINE

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SHADOW HEARTS[™] FROM THE NEW WORLD

Great RPGs one after the other. w00t™!

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PlayStation 2



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Printed in the United States of America



DJPubba Tim Lindquist
 All this talk about who the sexy one is – simply ridiculous. Everyone knows that it is I, Yahknee, who all housewives lust for. Put your photos where your text is, dreamers.




Now Playing: *Disgaea 2, Kingdom Hearts II*

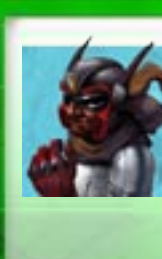


Wanderer Thomas Wilde
 I've had about enough of the lies. Neither David nor Liz are the sexy ones around here. That, sir or madam, is my title. I wrote this issue's cover story, and I did so as *sexily as possible*. Rose in my teeth, come-hither look, whole nine. Beat *that*, tokens.


Now Playing: *Atelier Iris 2, Star Wars: Battlefront II, Dreamfall, Pinball Hall of Fame (PSP)*




Mogis Tim Kinneen
 I played through *Earthbound (Mother 2)* again this month, and I have to say that it holds up just as well as it did in back in 1995. Recently there have been beautiful *Mother 3* screens trickling out onto the Internet, so naturally I've been dreaming about playing the game on a shiny new DS Lite. Now if only Nintendo would lock down a US release date, I'd be able to stop worrying that the game will share the same fate as *Earthbound Zero*.
 Now Playing: *Mario Kart DS, Dragon Quest VIII*




Racewing Geson Hatchett
 Sonic Team's *The Rub Rabbits!* is awesome stuff, but I have a small problem: I sorely prefer the crazy psycho purple-wearing genius villainess to the girlfriend that the game actually saddles you with. The Another Story option you get after beating the game *sort of* addresses this, but for me, it's just not enough. Please make a flip-side game, Sonic Team! I and my fellow Tron Bonne fanboys implore it!
 Now Playing: *The Rub Rabbits!* (duh), *Suikoden V, Sonic Riders* (Xbox)




Shoegazer Dave Hulegaard
 The video game industry doesn't have many time-honored traditions, but nothing quite compares to the artistry of a well-executed prank phone call. While I personally have crafted my fair share of tear-inducing moments, I must bow to Jeff Fedorkiw over at Aspyr Media, who got me good this month. I never even saw it coming. Watch your back, buddy.
 Now Playing: *Kingdom Hearts II, Dreamfall: The Longest Journey, Rumble Roses XX*.




KouAidou Elizabeth Ellis
 As you read this, twenty-five scantily-clad hitmen are en route to Thomas's house to prove his bio wrong. There's no death less sexy than being drowned in a toilet by a beefy man wearing nothing but a thong and a bow-tie. Believe me, I know.
 Now Playing: *Grandia, Super Robot Wars: Impact* (Curse you, I'll get through it some day!)




Roger Danish Greg Off
 Sorry, Thomas, but when push comes to shove, you'll find the sexiest people on Luv2Game.com. One look at the Cosplay Gallery is all you need to see. It's like porn without the naked bits.
 Now Playing: *Kingdom Hearts II, Burnout Revenge, Dexter, Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror*




Lynxara Alicia Ashby
 Just about everything that could go wrong this month did go wrong: games not showing up, bizarre FTP problems, editors feasting on each other's brains. Kids, you don't want to write about video games when you grow up. *It might kill you*.
 Now Playing: *Samurai Warriors: States of War, Grandia III, MS Saga*




4thletter David Brothers
 Thomas Wilde, despite what he thinks, has a physique similar to that of one Fred J. Dukes. Do not believe his lies. He is sexy only in that he is a member of one or more of the various sexes.
 Big thanks to Rebecca Brothers for some invaluable last minute assistance. Happy birthday.
 Now Playing: *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter (360), Kingdom Hearts II*



James James Cunningham
 I spent the month researching new and exciting ways to goof off. Unfortunately most of my efforts wound up with me in the usual place, combing the internet for the weird, different, fun, or bizarre. Stupid distracting internet! Let go of my brain!
 Now playing: *Chibi Robo, Radirgy, Full Auto, Gunstar Super Heroes*




HonestGamer Jason Venter
 Why do the people with the cool abnormalities never get to enjoy them? There's this guy in some country who hasn't slept for 25 years or so and yet he's fit as a fiddle. Before you ask, no: he doesn't play videogames. It's a waste, really. If I had all that time, I'd play role-playing games all the time!
 Now Playing: *Dungeon Lord: Collector's Edition, Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth*.




Hitoshura Iaian Ross
 I just remembered that *Faria* has the notable distinction of being the only Game Arts game that I've enjoyed playing and hardly any Game Arts fans know about it. Something about that seems wrong. Aside from that, I'm pretty certain my "Now Playing" line will not change for several more months.
 Now Playing: *Disgaea 2*




FragHag Julie Stoffer
 Hey, I'm FragHag! I'm brand spankin' new to Hardcore Gamer Magazine. Hard to explain my gaming tastes, but here are some of my favs: *Zelda* (the new one really is coming someday), *Super Smash Bros.*, *Katamari*, *Resident Evil*, *TimeSplitters*, *Half Life*, *Warcraft*, and of course *Halo*. I'm a very jumpy gamer, but I suppose it "adds" to the experience... at least, it adds lots of noise and twitching.
 Now Playing: *Splinter Cell: Essentials, Viewtiful Joe: RHR*




Wollie Terry Wolfinger
 After watching many videos online for Sega's and Pseudo Interactive's *Full Auto*, it looks like I may have to get me one a' them Xbox 360 thangs. I do love me a good racing game. And one where you blow the other cars and buildings to pieces... well, that just seems like the perfect marriage. Can't wait till that comes out. Until then, I'm stealthing around with my Undead Rogue in the land of W.O.W. So watch your backs, Alliance scum!
 Currently playing: *World Of Warcraft*




Metabolt Anthony Mertz
 Goodbye noob tubers. Goodbye bunny hoppers. Goodbye dolphin divers. Goodbye plane and helo whores. No one will miss you, not even your face.
 Now playing: *Battlefield 2*




Arfeth Thomas Shin
 So I've been trying out these Japanese mint-infused eyedrops lately. For what it's worth, it's the only way my eyes could survive while staring at a 1080p image so razor-sharp you could taste the dust on a table in *Resident Evil 4*. Wait a second, maybe I just didn't clean the glass... *cough*
 Now Playing: *Fist of the North Star*(Arcade), *Bleach*(DS)



Ashura Brady Hartel
 Writing this thing at 3 AM after just waking up is probably the worst idea ever. You have weird realizations, such as how you could probably play (a slightly more trim) Benny Hill in a TV movie of some kind. I'm guessing it would be one of those TV movies where Benny Hill is the friend of the actual subject of the film, and runs through in his underwear and heels while wagging his brows.
 Now Playing: *Super Princess Peach, Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence, Metal Gear ACID 2*.



Jeremy Jeremy Peeples
 It's been a month filled with game playing and DVD watching. What some call a waste of time we call a way of life. I'm off to watch E3 DVDs; combining two wastes of time into a single massive one. I'll drink copious amounts of soda and possibly even down some popcorn. Finally, I'll watch C.M. Punk's shoot interview and then do his matches justice in *WWF No Mercy*.
 Now Playing: *Fire Pro Wrestling 2, Power Stone 2, Jak X, and Rez*



Sardius Danny Cowan
 Want to creep out your roommates? Try putting a life-sized cardboard standee of Trane from *Marc Ecko's Getting Up* in their bathroom. Don't be surprised when you wake up the next morning with cardboard Trane looming at your bedside, though. I'll get you for this, Mia D.
 Now Playing: *Marc Ecko's Getting Up, Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan, Karaoke Revolution Country*

Special Survey Invitation

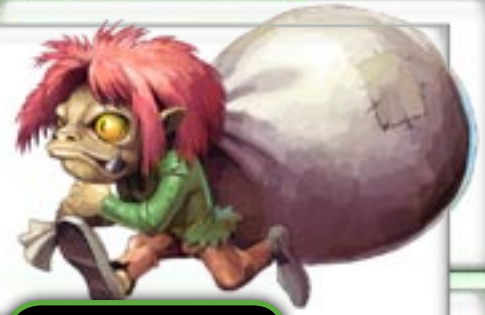
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Contents

Previews

If Katy buys three pencils at .25 cents a piece, then walks the four blocks from the store to her home at two miles an hour, and John buys the latest kick ass issue of HGM for \$4.99 at his local newsstand, then spends sixty minutes reading it from cover to cover before heading home two miles away, who will eat dinner first? Answer: Who cares!!!! Read them previews!



10

Features

On an average day our readers spend 1.54 hours reading our magazine and another 4.25 hours playing video games. Of this total, .18 minutes is spent reading our wholly unique and interesting features that you won't find in print anywhere else. In one week, how many hours do our readers spend reading HGM and playing video games? Answer: Who cares!!!! Read them features!



26

On the cover

Brian drove to Scranton to pick up XSEED's awesome RPG — Shadow Hearts From the New World. He had \$100.00 for the trip. It cost him \$40.00 for the game, \$25.00 in gasoline, and \$5.00 for 12 White Castle sliders and a Coke. On the way home, Brian ran into a back alley dice game and was fleeced for the remainder of his money, his shoes, and a stick of chewing gum. What are the color of Brian's socks? Answer: White.

SHADOW HEARTS FROM THE NEW WORLD



38

- 8 : NEWS
- 10 : PREVIEW: TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION
- 11 : PREVIEW: ATELIER IRIS 2
- 12 : PREVIEW: BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT
- 14 : PREVIEW: DYNASTY WARRIORS 5 EMPIRES
- 16 : PREVIEW: URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE
- 18 : PREVIEW: MOTO GP 4
- 19 : PREVIEW: DREAMFALL
- 20 : PREVIEW: SUPER BUST A MOVE DELUXE
- 21 : PREVIEW: AGE OF PIRATES: CARRIBEAN TALES
- 22 : PREVIEW: CAPCOM SPOTLIGHT
- 26 : FEATURE: HARDCORE GAMING IN THE HD ERA
- 30 : FEATURE: VIDEO GAME PRESERVATION
- 32 : FEATURE: GRAVEYARD
- 34 : MOBILE: MYSTERY MANSION PINBALL
- 35 : MOBILE: CALL OF DUTY 2
- 36 : MOBILE: HOLLYWOOD SQUARES HIP HOP
- 36 : MOBILE: FOTO QUEST FISHING
- 37 : MOBILE: NAME THAT TUNE! LIVE!
- 38 : COVER FEATURE: SHADOW HEARTS
- 49 : REVIEW: METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SUBSISTENCE
- 50 : REVIEW: KINGDOM HEARTS II
- 52 : REVIEW: DAXTER
- 54 : REVIEW: BURNOUT REVENGE
- 55 : REVIEW: GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER
- 56 : REVIEW: TOP SPIN 2
- 57 : REVIEW: METAL GEAR ACID 2
- 58 : REVIEW: GENERATION OF CHAOS
- 59 : REVIEW: YS: THE ARK OF NAFIGTİM
- 60 : REVIEW: WARSHIP GUNNER
- 61 : REVIEW: SAMURAI WARRIORS: STATE OF WAR
- 62 : REVIEW: SUIKODEN V
- 63 : REVIEW: THE OUTFIT
- 64 : REVIEW: NBA BALLERS PHENOM
- 66 : REVIEW: PURSUIT FORCE
- 67 : REVIEW: MEGA MAN POWERED UP
- 68 : REVIEW: METAL SAGA
- 69 : REVIEW: STEAMBOT CHRONICLES
- 70 : REVIEW: MLB '06: THE SHOW
- 71 : REVIEW: FIFA STREET 2
- 72 : REVIEW: SPACE RANGERS
- 74 : HARDWARE
- 76 : JAPAN: RADIRGY
- 78 : FAN ART
- 80 : COSPLAY
- 82 : FUNNIES

i play. i win. i gloat. i kick back. i catch a movie. i hear some tunes. all thanks to one little card.

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GAMES HITTING THE BIGGER SCREEN



Several classic game titles are scheduled to start hitting theatres beginning in 2007. Big names such as *Castlevania*, *Soul Calibur*, *God Of War*, *Max Payne*, *American McGee's Alice*, *Halo* and *Dead Or Alive* are several of the upcoming video game movies slated to hit theatres. Some next-gen titles in the works include *Condemned: Criminal Origins* and *Kameo*. Don't be too shocked if some of these games see another sequel before the movie comes out, as the rights for some of these films were purchased early on and some have been through quite a few delays already. Let's hope they score better than recent movies such as *Doom*, *Bloodrayne* and *House Of The Dead 2* (a Sci-Fi channel special).



NEXT GENERATION OF GROWING PAINS

Many game publishers are feeling the impact of the year of the console transition brought by Microsoft's Xbox 360, Sony's Playstation 3 and Nintendo's Revolution. Midway, Activision UK, Atari, and Namco Bandai are but a few of the publishers feeling the pressures. Delaying critical launch titles can also have a significant impact on a publisher's quarterly earnings, as Tecmo discovered from the postponed *Dead or Alive 4* for the Xbox 360.

To counteract the transition, some companies such as EA are lowering the debut price point of Xbox and PS2 titles like *Black* and *The Godfather*, which are debuting at \$39.99 MSRP. Retailers such as Toys 'R' Us have reduced their inventory of current generation games by selling PS2, Xbox and Gamecube titles for \$9.99. That should provide some nice padding for the next generation bumps. Now if only Sony and Nintendo learn from these console shortages and pre-sales, maybe gamers can spend more time doing what they do best.

That's a wrap of this month's news for your itchy gaming finger. For more news bits, check out gamingbits.com. Have some news you'd like to share? Email alexis@gamingbits.com

Marc Ecko took some time from his *Getting Up* Tour, supporting his recently released graffiti-based game, *Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure* to share his experience in becoming a game producer.

"The base of what I do is understanding youth culture," says Ecko. Inspired by gaming at the age of twelve, Ecko spent time with friends drawing out game inspired side scrollers on tracing paper. Ecko gets nostalgic when he talks about "first-generation" titles like *Metal Gear*, *Tomb Raider* and *Grand Theft Auto* when game publishers were more open to original titles.

The production of *Getting Up* was stuck in a year-long diplomatic arm wrestle to win over a publisher. The breakthrough came when Ecko packed up to Paris and personally knocked on Atari's Bruno Bonnell's door (Chief Creative and Executive Officer of Atari). After some polishing off and guidance from Infogrames's John Sutyack and the respect and openness from the game's developer, The Collective, *Getting Up* was set on course to production.

Ask Ecko what he thinks about the state of the gaming industry and his revolutionary mindset kicks into high gear. "The [gaming] industry is ill and the disruption is happening. We need to figure out a new model," Ecko emphatically states. He feels gamers don't have the luxury of time to fully

complete games. "I know millions bought *GTA: San Andreas*. How many do you think fully completed the game? Games have become so inherently redundant," says Ecko.

The group behind *Getting Up* hopes the game will inspire publishers to be open to original content. Game developers at The Collective were encouraged



GETTING UP ON GAMING

to throw out their pre-conceptions. Ecko will admit that his name did ultimately help push the game to production. He hopes the gaming industry will become more open to game designers with creative ideas that all too often get shut out. With persistence, Marc Ecko has tagged his name to graffiti gaming, just as Tony Hawk has done for skateboard gaming.

To you aspiring game designers, Ecko offers these words: "Manage your emotions. Don't get side-tracked by getting your feelings hurt. Anger and fear can take you out of the playing field. Don't be selfish. Do your due diligence. The pirates become the producers."

For more on Marc Ecko and *Getting Up*, visit gamingbits.com. For Ecko's personal blog, check out eckounlimited.com.

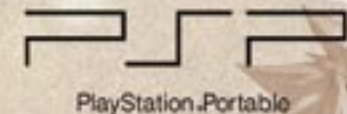
"EXCLUSIVE PSP SCAVENGER HUNT" INVADES LUV2GAME.COM

Last month members on our website Luv2Game.com began the scavenger hunt that lasts until the end of April. It's not too late to JOIN THE HUNT! If you're not already a member of our community, go there now & sign up for FREE. The "Exclusive PSP Scavenger Hunt" features fun challenges involving *Daxter*, *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo*, *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror* and *Pursuit Force* (all titles for the PSP). Prizes include two PSPs and PSP games. Get off your duff, JOIN THE HUNT & be the first to complete the challenges. This ain't yo Grand-Daddy's Scavenger Hunt!



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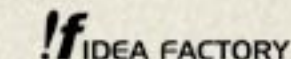


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LEVEL 1

TEKKEN DARK RESURRECTION



Preview by X

Publisher: Namco	Genre(s): Fighting
Developer: Namco	Category: 3D
Release Date: TBA 2006	# of Players: 1-2

Near the end of 2004, Namco released the highly anticipated *Tekken 5* to arcades everywhere. A mere four to five months later - and much to the dismay of arcade owners - the latest installment of the smash hit series was quickly released on the PS2. Namco then decided to release a minor upgrade (for free) under the highly original name *Tekken 5.1*. Perhaps they thought it would compensate the arcade owners that lost revenue to the home version? At any rate, *5.1* wasn't much of a hit with the American audiences (though it performed decently in both Japan and Korea).

Fast-forward to the end of 2005. Namco announces *Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection*, a true upgrade to *Tekken 5*. Similar to what Sega did with *VF:Evolution*, *TK5:DR* features numerous gameplay enhancements (mostly balance tweaks), four new characters (two of which are time-released), more stages, and a bevy of additional customization items. *Tekken* fans have been waiting with baited breath for the inevitable console release date, which was sure to follow. In true Namco form, they surprised everyone by announcing a PSP-only release. That's right... PSP ONLY.

Well, what is one man's junk is another man's treasure! In addition to all of the arcade features - over 30 characters, nearly 20 stages, two original characters (and two old-favorite time release characters), more than double the custom items from *TK5* - the PSP version adds even more of the good stuff. First of all, the new ad-hoc mode allows the battles to get personal. Play any of your characters (customized or not) and pit them against another opponent using the wi-fi connectivity of the PSP. As another extra, and what has become a console *Tekken* staple, *TK5:DR* comes with bonus mini-games for when a break in the action is warranted.

With beautiful graphics, new play-modes, all of the arcade goodness and more, Namco finally pulls through and gives us another much-needed reason to own a PSP. *Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection* is scheduled for release on the PSP this summer.



ATELIER IRIS 2 THE AZOTH OF DESTINY

Publisher: Gust	Genre(s): RPG
Developer: NIS America	Category: 2D, Alchemical, Beating Cute Things
Release Date: 4/25/2006	# of Players: 1

There is evil afoot, and only you—a generally nice kid named Felt who got whacked upside the head with the Heroic Destiny Stick, as well as his best friend Viese and an idiosyncratic cast of dozens—can save the world. *Atelier Iris 2: The Azoth of Destiny* (note: the Azoth is a sword) isn't the most original thing out there, but there's something to be said for execution.

As with the last *Atelier* game to reach American shores, *Ai2* is unapologetically retro, telling its story with brightly-colored sprites, hand-drawn images, and elegantly-animated graphics.

The game unfolds across two worlds. On one, Belkhyde, Felt wields a magical sword both in a rebellion against an evil ruler, and in an attempt to save the land he was born in. On the other, Eden, Viese unravels mysteries and creates the items Felt needs to survive his adventure.

For most of the game, you play as Felt, navigating the dangerous dungeons and wildernesses of Belkhyde. You can use special Break Attacks to stun your enemies and rack up combos, or experiment with hundreds of items to create special weapons you can use against the monsters.

On the bad side, *Atelier Iris 2* is easy like Sunday morning, and its plot is a touch predictable. That said, if you're looking for a classic-style console RPG with big doses of humor and tons of stuff to collect and use, this is your game.



Preview by Wanderer





Preview by **4thletter**

Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Genre(s): **FPS**
 Developer: **DICE** Category: **I am Legion**
 Release Date: **3/15/2006** # of Players: **1-24**

BATTLEFIELD 2 MODERN COMBAT



There wasn't a lot that could've been done to improve on the current-gen *Battlefield 2 Modern Combat*. It had a rock-solid mission-based campaign mode, fun gameplay, and intense action. It wasn't *Battlefield 2* on PC, but it was never meant to be. It stands well enough on its own.

What's new in the 360 version? Enhanced graphics, smarter AI, and online gameplay. The textures are sharper and there's a host of new effects to keep you entertained. The heat effects in front of some vents (most noticeable on the first sniping stage) are incredible.

The improved AI adds worlds to the gameplay, however. The first game wasn't exactly a cake-walk, but it wasn't very difficult, either. That ends now. The enemies no longer pop into view and your squadmates will no longer run directly into their field of fire. They react much better when under fire, and still call out enemy locations when they spot them. This is invaluable, as the enemy is often camouflaged well enough to be hard to spot.

Battlefield 2 Modern Combat is bigger and badder than its predecessors. It looks to make the transition to next-gen intact and better than ever.

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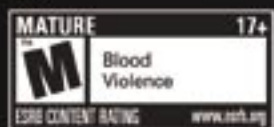
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It's been a whole three months since Koei last released a version of *Dynasty Warriors 5*, and as far as *Dynasty Warriors* fans are concerned, that's three months too long. *Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires* proceeds in much the same vein as the *Empires* version of *Dynasty Warriors 4*, but updated with all of the new music and characters introduced in *Dynasty Warriors 5*.

If your standard *Dynasty Warriors* game is about conquering ancient China with bizarre anime-raver interpretations of characters from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* folklore, then *Empires* is where you get to go conquer ancient China yourself. Edit mode lets you select from a limited selection of options to create your own Generals. Then in Empire Mode, you can assign them to a favorite army; start them out in unoccupied territory to form your very own nation; or head over to Free Mode, and play any battle you want using whoever you want.

After every battle in Empire Mode you'll earn money, items, and customization options for your main general's weapons. Between battles in Empire Mode you'll be able to engage in a very lightweight version of the kingdom-building gameplay from Koei's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* games. Making progress in Empire Mode eventually unlocks more options for your characters created in Edit mode, like new costumes.

So why keep letting Wu, Shu, and Wei have all the fun? Hell, you're at least as good as that Lu Bu guy. If you've still got any will to conquer China left after all the *Dynasty Warriors 5* releases in 2005, then you're probably itching to do it again in *Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires*.



DYNASTY WARRIORS 5 Empires

Publisher: Koei
Developer: Omega
Release Date: 3/28/2006
Genre(s): Hey, You Got Action in My Strategy!
Category: No, You Got Strategy in My Action!
of Players: 1-2

Preview by Lynara

A QUEEN MAY GOVERN THIS LAND.

BUT YOU ALONE RULE ITS DESTINY.

Suikoden

幻想水滸伝

With the queen in danger and your homeland under siege, you as the prince must gather the 108 stars of destiny and defend the crown you will never wear. Welcome to *Suikoden V*, the epic adventure where the fate of an entire world awaits your command.



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HUGE BATTLES & ONE-ON-ONE FIGHTS

60+ PLAYABLE COMPANIONS

20+ STRATEGIC BATTLE CONDITIONS



PlayStation 2

KONAMI

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URBAN CHAOS

RIOT RESPONSE

Preview by Racewing

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Rocksteady
Release Date: Q2 2006

Genre(s): Shooter
Category: First-Person
of Players: 1

In the wake of recent games that have striven to glorify gang life, it's been a while since we've seen a game where your objective is to bring those criminals to justice, through mostly violent means. Urban Chaos: Riot Response will let you do just that, in a crazy, over-the-top fashion.

You play as Nick Mason, showcase member of your city mayor's new Zero Tolerance ("T-Zero") unit, an anti-gang squad specializing in weapons usage and riot tactics. Organized gangs have gone out of control, and turned your city into a war zone. It's up to Mason and his team to take back the streets, and to silence the skeptics who don't think the formation of your unit was worth the massive blow to the city's budget.

The game's all adrenaline, all the time, such that early into it, you'll gain control of your own riot shield. This shield is essential to survival against the firepower that the gang members throw at you. The good news is that you'll be able to turn the gangs' firepower right back against them with the weapons of their fallen ranks. Since Nick Mason is not Superman, he'll also have to enlist the help of civil service workers in the thick of the action, such as medics for healing, and firemen for area advancement.

Urban Chaos's story progression is chronicled through the very creative and very professional use of mock television news broadcasts which employ real-life actors and settings. These, along with the banter and limited control of otherwise non-playable characters (through a command system), help to immerse you in the fight for your city.

Come this summer, you'll be able to blow the heads off as many thugs as you please without having to worry about "respect" points... and in the end, isn't that what gaming's all about?



SET UP.
LOCKED UP.

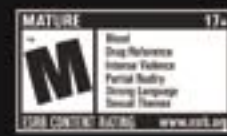
GET OUT.
GET EVEN.

New York City, 1978. You were the fastest wheelman on the street. You were a legend. You were money. Until they set you up and sent you down. Twenty eight years inside for someone else's crime. Now you're getting out. Guess what? You got a new job...
...It's called revenge.



DRIVER

PARALLEL LINES



PlayStation 2



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Preview by Shoegazer

MotoGP 4

Official Game Of MotoGP



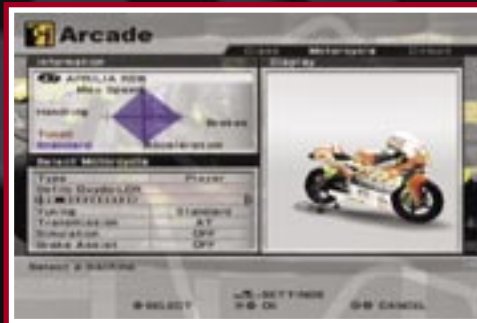
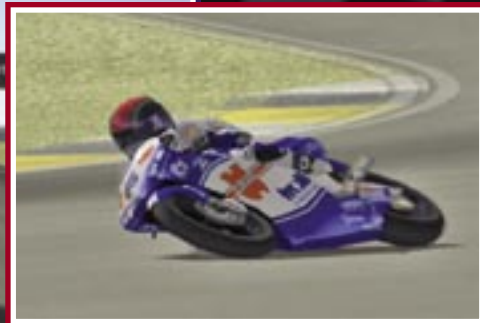
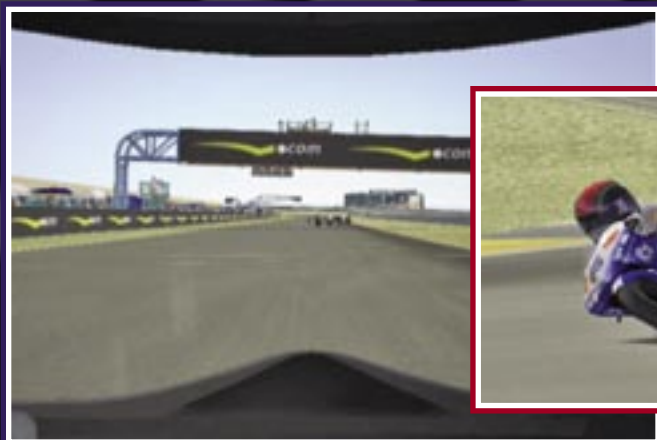
Publisher: Bandai Namco
Developer: Namco
Release Date: 4/4/2006
Genre(s): Racing Simulation
Category: Motorcycles
of Players: 1-4 (Up to 8 online)

It's been three long years, but Namco Bandai is ready to deliver the fourth installment of *MotoGP*. Often thought of as the *Gran Turismo* of bike racing, *MotoGP 4* seems poised to be the ultimate in fanservice with all new updates and features such as the ability to conduct test parts in-between races for improving your bike's performance. Also new are the training and melee modes, and for the first time ever, you can take your skills online with up to eight players. It even supports voice chat with a USB device.



MotoGP 4 is shaping up to be the most realistic and complete GP experience ever with licensed pro riders, tracks, bikes and the MotoGP, 125cc, and 250cc engine classes. There are also plenty of hidden goodies to unlock, and legendary riders such as the late Daijiro Kato.

All of this, in addition to the most realistic bike physics ever, and wet and dry weather conditions, fans certainly have something special to look forward to this Spring when *MotoGP 4* hits store shelves.



Preview by Wanderer

DREAMFALL

THE LONGEST JOURNEY

Publisher: Aspyr
Developer: Funcom
Release Date: 4/17/2006
Genre(s): Adventure
Category: Lots of Spoken Dialogue
of Players: 1

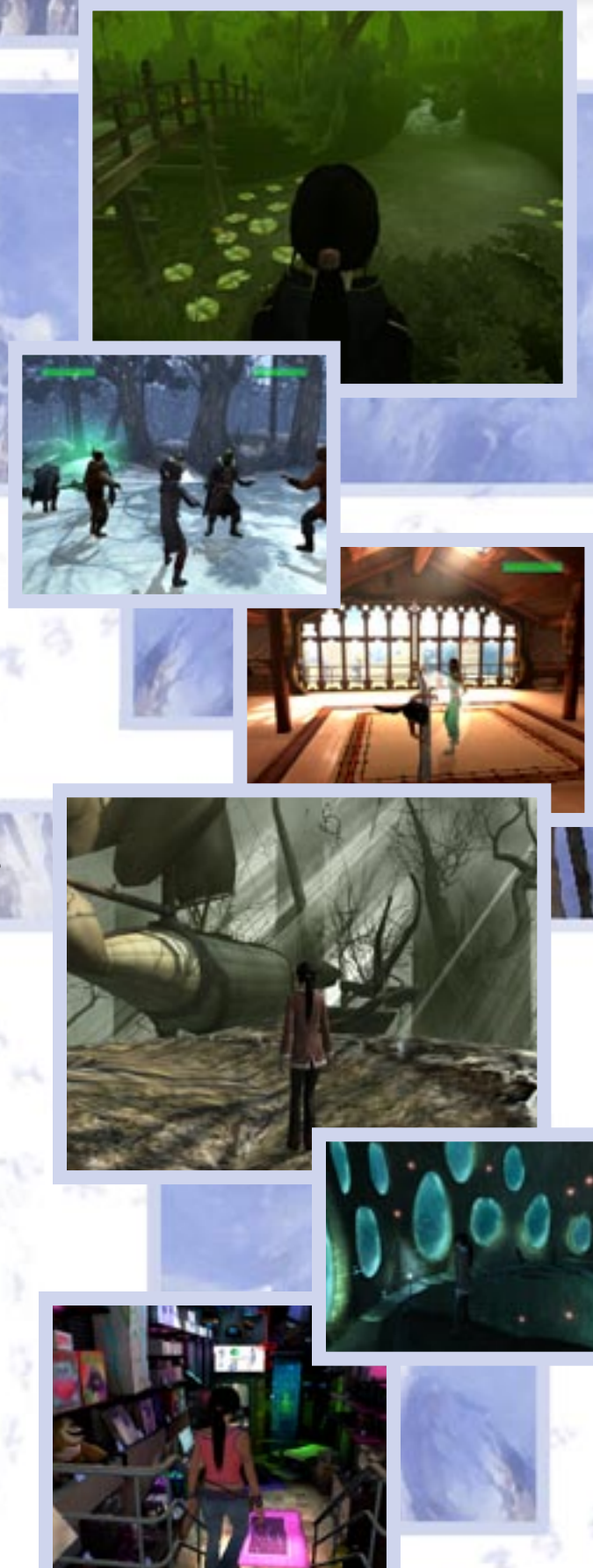
The Longest Journey was the last great adventure game to hit the PC. *Dreamfall* is its sequel, but it doesn't follow the same formula. It's more like *Syberia* or *Indigo Prophecy*, mixing conversation trees, stealth, and martial arts into its gameplay, as well as immersing you in a deep storyline.

The game begins ten years after *The Longest Journey*, when Zoe Castillo's ex-boyfriend asks her for a little favor. Things snowball from there, taking her across the world and beyond... and, at some point, into the depths of a terminal coma.

At the same time, a world away, April Ryan (the heroine of *The Longest Journey*) and her allies are fighting a losing battle against the forces of the Azad.

Dreamfall involves a fair amount of combat and stealth, but the focus remains on investigation and problem-solving. So far, it's not as insanely hard as *The Longest Journey* could be; you spend most of your time tracking down information, not managing your inventory, and picking locks by using logic puzzles.

It may not be the same kind of game as its predecessor, but *Dreamfall* maintains the same levels of amazing cinematography and world design, with an interesting story and talented voice actors. If you're a serious adventure gamer, the wait is almost over.





BUST-A-MOVE DELUXE

Preview by James



Publisher: Majesco Games
Developer: Taito
Release Date: April 4, 2006

Genre: Puzzle
Category: Deluxe Move Busting
of Players: 1 - 2

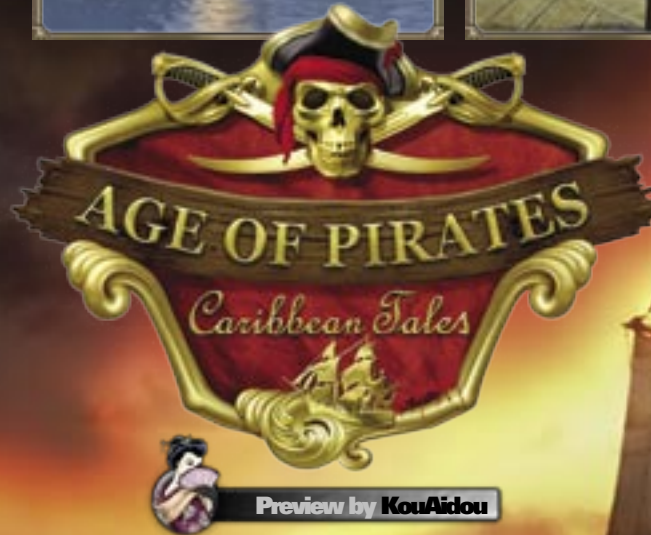


Bust-a-Move has been on every console known to mankind since its original debut on the Neo Geo a dozen years ago, and now it's the PSP's turn to host the long-running puzzle series. *Bust-a-Move Deluxe* brings Bub, Bob, and the rest of the crew to the latest game in the series, with shiny new game modes and the same addictive gameplay that kept me going two hours past when I meant to start writing this preview. Oops.

Same as it's always been, the main gameplay involves clearing the screen of colored bubbles by linking up three of a kind. The launcher sits at the bottom of the screen and can be pointed by angling it left or right, but careful aim is required to put the right bubble in its proper place. The game ends when the bubbles cross a line near the bottom of the screen, whether by too many sloppy shots piling up or the slowly descending ceiling pushing them down. Everything is presented in the classic *Bust-a-Move* 2D style, with not a single polygon cluttering the screen.

In addition to the classic mode, *Bust-a-Move Deluxe* includes seven other styles of play. Shot Puzzle is a series of challenges that have to be completed with only one bubble, Seesaw Puzzle tilts the board as bubbles pile up on one side or the other, Running Launcher Puzzle has the bubble launcher moving left and right across the base of the screen, etc.

All together there are over a thousand boards spread out over the available modes, and all can be played either single or multiplayer, versus AI or head to head against a friend. *Bust-a-Move* has been evolving for well over a decade now, and the PSP version is shaping up to be one of the best versions yet.



Preview by KouAidou

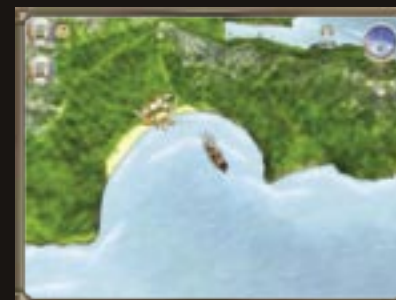
Publisher: Playlogic
Developer: Akella
Release Date: TBA

Genre(s): RPG/Simulation
Category: Pirates!
of Players: 1-16

When it comes to sandbox-style games set in Ye Olde Caribbean, you can't do much better than the original *Pirates!*. That won't stop Russian developer Akella from trying, though, and *Age of Pirates: Caribbean Tales* aims to give the classic a run for its money.

Taking the role of one of the Shark family siblings, Blaze or Beatrice, you'll get to travel around a beautifully rendered Caribbean setting, complete with realistic weather and day/night effects that have a real influence on your high-seas conflicts. You'll start as a captain in charge of a single ship, and gradually be able to work up your reputation to hire extra ships and officers to command them. Of course, officers have their interests too, and they'll only remain loyal as long as you continue to act in their interests. Other features will include real-time swordfights, ship-to-ship boarding, and the ability to raid and conquer government colonies.

The game will also offer up some online options, but while the setup seems like it would be ideal for great MMO community play, it is unfortunately limited to the standard deathmatch setups. Still, if you can think of worse ways to spend your nights than in gloriously animated high seas combat with up to sixteen friends, you'll want to look out for *Age of Pirates*, coming out some time later this year.



Every February, Capcom holds an event in Las Vegas where they showcase all of their upcoming titles for the year. Not to be missed, they always have a few surprises up their sleeve, and you can count on the fact that many of their most popular franchises will be making a return in some form or another. This year was no different. Among the dozens of new games shown were two Xbox 360 titles, a bevy of PSP titles, and even a crop of games for mobile phones. Sadly, *Resident Evil 5* was nowhere to be seen, but it's a sure bet the venerable company is holding this one back for a big debut at this year's E3. Along the next three pages are the best of the best of what was on display. Read on!

CAPCOM SPOTLIGHT

Preview by Roger Danish

Release Date: Q1 2007 Number of Players: TBA
Genre: Third-Person Shooter Platform: Xbox 360
Category: Action



The one big announcement at the event was the unveiling of a second Xbox 360 title in the works (the first being *Dead Rising*) titled *Lost Planet*. This third-person action/shooter is set within the bleak and merciless frozen landscape of a hostile planet where humans struggle for survival against vicious creatures called Akrid. As Wayne, a young man whose only memory is that of his father being slain before his eyes, you join a ragtag group of snow pirates who battle these creatures, as well as other human entities, using heavily armed mechanized Vital Suits (VS).

Directed by Keiji Inafune (the creator of Mega Man and, more recently, the *Onimusha* series), the internal development team for *Lost Planet* is comprised of members from both *Devil May Cry* and *Onimusha* franchises. From the demo we were shown, it's clearly evident that this is a next-gen game through and through. Featuring gorgeous graphics, an unprecedented level of detail, real-time weather effects (which can change from light snow to blizzard-like conditions on the fly), amazing in-game cut scenes that look as if they're rendered CG, and a streaming loading system (for seamless gameplay), *Lost Planet* may set the visual standard for all other 360 titles to achieve.

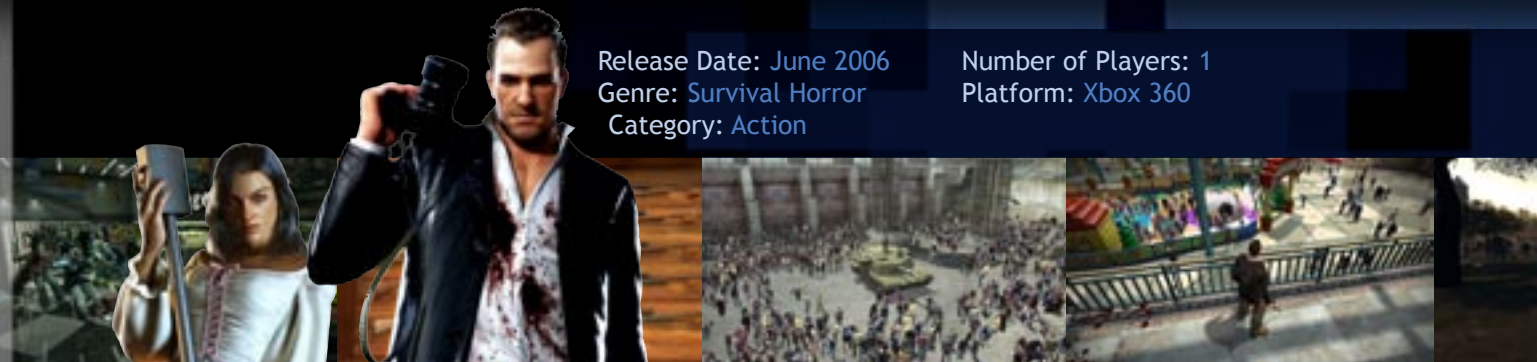
In terms of gameplay, a lot of attention has gone into making this an intense and fast-paced shooter, yet with plenty of depth, storyline and unique game mechanics. It's possible to play on foot or strap yourself inside the variety of VS vehicles. Features include being able to pick up and use blown off VS weaponry (as well as attach them to your mech), the ability to wield a grappling hook, and plenty of white-knuckle shooting action. With single player and online modes (versus and co-op play), *Lost Planet* should be one of '07's first big salvos.

Release Date: Q4 2006 Number of Players: 1-4
Genre: Beat 'em Up Platform: PSP
Category: Melee Fighting



Originally released for the SEGA Dreamcast and arcades, *Power Stone* and *Power Stone 2* are being bundled together on one UMD for the PSP. For the uninitiated, these popular 3D brawlers throw challengers into an interactive "ring" where they can use the environment and a host of weapons to battle each other. The key to victory is collecting powerful gems (a.k.a. power stones) before your opponents in order to power up your character and devastate the competition. New PSP editions to the titles include an improved user interface, new weapons, new mini-games, ad-hoc multiplayer play (two players for *Power Stone* and up to four for *Power Stone 2*), an upgraded camera system that lets you toggle through different angles, and the ability to take your own screenshots and save them to your Memory Stick.

LOST PLANET EXTREME CONDITION



Release Date: June 2006 Number of Players: 1
Genre: Survival Horror Platform: Xbox 360
Category: Action

Obviously inspired by George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, *Dead Rising* throws you into a mall overrun with zombies and challenges you not only to survive for three days, but to also get the scoop of a lifetime. As an overzealous photojournalist named Frank West, you find yourself trapped inside this mall of shuffling living dead, and in order to stay alive, you must use anything (and I mean anything) you can find to fight off the flesh-hungry mob while searching for the truth behind this gory and horrendous epidemic.

Featuring a huge amount of freedom for the players, the mall is a vast, virtual playground that offers a huge array of gameplay possibilities. The variety of different stores (there are more than a hundred twenty) presents players with an endless supply of resources to use for their survival, including vehicles, makeshift weaponry and sustenance. The number of weapons in the game are almost endless, and only limited by your imagination. Golf clubs, weed whackers, umbrellas, dumbbells, frying pans, lawnmowers, axes, swords, chairs, traffic cones, propane tanks, shotguns, pistols, wrestling moves, baguettes, plates; you name it, and it can be used against the undead horde. With the open-ended, sandbox-style gameplay, you can choose what's important for you. Do you choose only to stay alive? Do you save other living survivors and enlist their help? Do you

solve the mystery and learn what's behind the epidemic? Depending on your actions and *Dead Rising's* real time events, you will get a multitude of different endings, which makes for a ton of replayability. Visually, the game impresses, with literally hundreds of gorrified creatures on-screen at the same time. Once the sun goes down, these zombies become stronger and faster. Definitely a departure from the more serious *Resident Evil* series, *Dead Rising* is set to ship this summer. Look for more comprehensive coverage within these pages in the coming months.

DEADRISING

Release Date: Q3 2006 Number of Players: 1
Genre: Action Platform: PSP
Category: New-School



To say we're excited about *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins* is an understatement. This amazing series, which hasn't seen a real update since *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* for the Super NES (*Maximo* notwithstanding), finally gets a sequel and finds a home on the PSP. Developed by members of the original *Ghosts 'n Goblins* team, this fourth installment in the side-scrolling series sees the long awaited return of the valiant knight, Sir Arthur, as he once again must battle his way through hell and back to save the princess from the clutches of evil. Mixing old-school 2D elements with a 3D graphic engine, the *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins* world comes alive as effects, cut-scenes, backgrounds and animations are given more depth and richer detail. While the game still retains the classic design of the series, several new gameplay features have been implemented to give the game a more next-gen feel. In addition to the double jump, Arthur can dash, grab onto ledges, level-up, use magic, take branching paths, wield a host of new weapons (including a whip, *Castlevania*-style), equip and un-equip different armor, and collect a variety of valuable items. Our prediction is that this'll be one of the PSP's best games for 2006.

ULTIMATE GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

Release Date: Q3 2006
Genre: Action
Category: Adventure
Number of Players: 1
Platform: PS2



One of this year's most interesting and anticipated PS2 titles, *Okami* looks to be a visually stunning and distinctly different action/adventure game. Telling the story of a mythical wolf sun god who sets out to restore a dismal world, players assume the role of Amaterasu, and must decimate the forces of evil that stand in her way by commanding the elements and mythical abilities she possesses. Mixing Japanese folklore and a beautiful Japanese art style, *Okami* offers an inventive control scheme by using the "Celestial Brush," a paint brush that allows you to pull off a variety of special moves, attacks and functions. With this paintbrush you can use brush strokes to slash at enemies, solve puzzles, create pathways, chop down trees, call on the elements, and even turn night into day.

Featuring a unique and gorgeous cell-shaded art style, *Okami* comes alive through beautiful scenic 3D levels that have the appearance and texture of paper scrolls brushed with watercolor-like calligraphy art. Throughout the vibrant and distinctive surroundings, players must also interact with a dynamic cast of characters, building their faith to uncover clues and hits. The blend of stylized graphics and unique gameplay looks to result in a rich and dynamic experience.

Okami is the brainchild of Capcom's Clover Studio, which is known for different and groundbreaking titles including the *Steel Battalion* and *Viewtiful Joe* series. At the moment, *Okami* is set to hit retail shelves sometime during the summer months.



Release Date: Q1 2007
Genre: Third-Person Shooter
Category: Action
Number of Players: TBA
Platform: Xbox 360



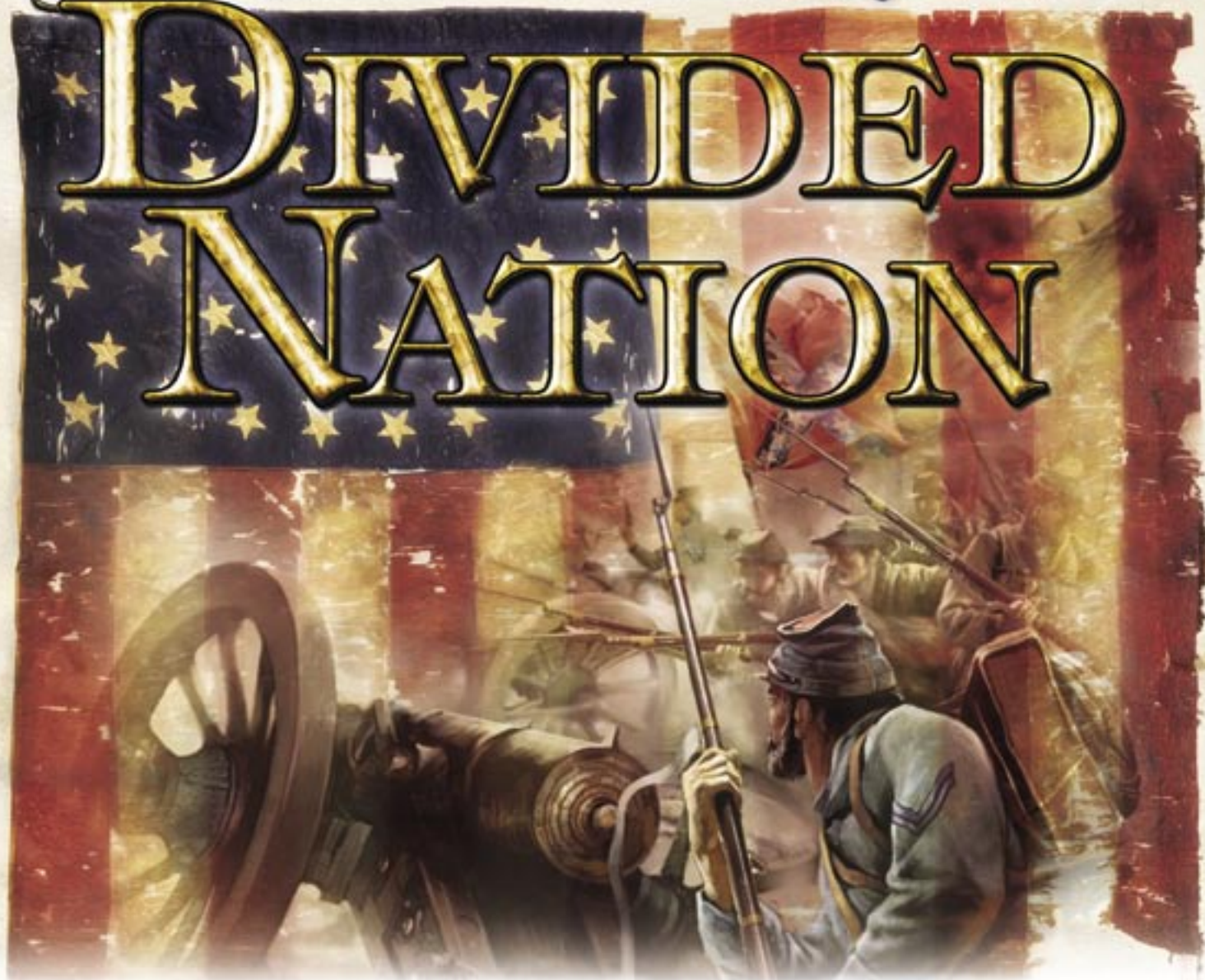
This fan-appreciation title combines five of Capcom's best puzzle games into one PSP compilation: the beloved *Super Puzzle Fighter II*, all three *Super Buster Bros.* titles (*Buster Bros.*, *Super Buster Bros.*, and *Buster Buddies*), and *Block Block* (which can also be found on *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed*). All of these puzzle titles are faithful recreations of their arcade and console counterparts and have even been retouched and updated to conform to the PSP system's 16x9 widescreen aspect ratio.

In addition, a host of new and unique features have been added to the mix, including new gameplay modes, the ability to import personal pictures that can be used as backgrounds (*Buster Bros. games only*), viral infiltration by uploading your high scores onto another player's PSP wirelessly, and two-player ad-hoc modes.



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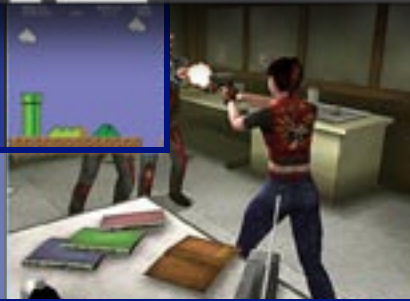


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FEATURE

1.) 240p



2.) VGA: 480p



3.) HDTV: 720p



4.) TRUE HDTV: 1080p



the hd tv era

With the recent shift towards High Definition Television (HDTV), many gamers have lamented the fact that their old classics now suffer visually because of a lack of anti-aliasing, or edge-smoothing. While smearing your screen with Vaseline might blur the serrated edges of Mario's hat, it's not a very practical solution. True hardcore gamers are willing to suck it up for the sake of nostalgia.

However, you may have noticed lately that ever since you took the plunge for that then-new Samsung DLP two years ago, you're falling into more bottomless pits and missing more headshots than ever before. This is because HDTV introduces yet another problem, and this one affects both old and new gamers alike: Lag.

HDTVs can only operate at full speed in their "Native Resolution," which is their default size. DLP, LCD and Plasma (but not CRTs) only have one native resolution. To display images of other sizes on these displays, the HDTV expands the image with a scaler to something approaching normal. Without it, your game would only occupy a fraction of your screen. But scaling the image takes a little bit more time than it would for an image at native HDTV resolution. Newer models attempt to deal with this problem (the best can upscale an image in as little as than 8ms), but most HDTVs in homes will still be slightly affected. Remember that if your CRT HDTV has a 480p native resolution, there will be *no lag* incurred during this phase.

Another consideration is the type of HDTV, which can profoundly affect the response time. DLPs are by far the slowest, followed by LCD, Plasma and CRT. You may have noticed a "Response Time" rating on LCD and Plasma monitors: 8ms and lower is ideal, as 16ms response time is roughly equal to one Frame Per Second (fps). Older LCDs may lag by as much as 24ms. Cheaper DLP models with slower color wheel speeds can be even slower than LCDs, but if your television comes equipped with a "Game Mode" setting (many newer models incorporate this, along with faster color wheel speeds), you'll see a ~30% response time reduction when using it.



I'M NOT THAT OLD, AM I?

Feature by **Arieth**

Splitting up to save their home... Reuniting to save the world!

"This underdog series of 2D RPGs has proven that even new-school gamers can learn to love old-school gaming goodness."

- Newtype USA

"Eternal Mana2 will be another worthy addition to any RPG fan's collection."

- GameInformer

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THE AZOTH OF DESTINY

Coming Spring 2006



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Master the Art of Alchemy to create everything you'll need from weapons to medicine!



PlayStation 2



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FEATURE

the hdtv era

However, by far the biggest factor to consider in HDTV gaming, and one that affects *all* HDTVs equally, is Interlaced vs. Progressive Scan. The conversion process from an interlaced signal involves filling in all the 'gap' lines present in the signal. If performed by your HDTV's processors, it can incur at least 4 fps (60+ms) of lag. In a fighting game, an attack could already have hit you before it even displayed on the screen! Altogether, the accumulated lag from all three processes can reach as much as 15 fps (250+ms).

In a nutshell: Upscale Conversion + Display Response Time + De-Interlacing = GAME OVER

By default, most systems will display in 480i resolution (640x480 Interlaced). By enabling Progressive Scan and using Component video output (the kind with the Red, Green and Blue cables), you can get many games to run in Progressive Mode (480p) and bypass the De-Interlacing process entirely. This will completely eliminate lag on a CRT HDTV with 480p native resolution mode, and minimize lag on other models and resolutions, with a 1080i native DLP HDTV being the worst.

The PS2, however, has a very pesky problem: less than 25% of games on the market (if even that) support Progressive Scan. Even *Metal Gear Solid 3* only runs at a humble 480i resolution.

The solution: Get a device that converts an Interlaced signal to VGA. These are known as Upscan Converters, or VGA Boxes. Unfortunately, a lot of VGA boxes aren't very good, but there are exceptions. It won't look as good as a true Progressive Scan, but it effectively line-doubles your signal, eliminating the conversion lag in your television.

If money isn't an object, Micomsoft's XRGB-2+ Upscan Converter(\$200 US) from Japan is the cream of the crop. It can accept *any* Japanese RGB input with the proper cable, and then some. It also has a lot of calibration bells and whistles to ensure that you get a top-of-the-line picture. It accepts Composite, S-Video or D-Terminal (a Japanese-only deal) inputs, which means that breaking out your old 16-bit systems is once again an option. It has been known to be buggy with LCD monitors, however, so do your homework.



Hori's Upscan Converter 2(\$60 US) is a viable alternative that's only compatible with the PS2's Component input, and with standard Composite(RCA) and S-Video inputs. However, there's a slight design quirk with this box: It must be powered by a USB port. While the PS2 and Xbox shouldn't have a problem, you might look odd lugging your PC to the living room just to play *Final Fantasy VI* on your widescreen. Then again, you might not.

The HDTV market is constantly changing, so these won't be the only solutions available. If you come across affordable, high-quality alternatives, or if an upscan converter that you've tried happens to hate your HDTV, post your experiences on Luv2Game.com! Good luck and happy gaming!

special thanks to tubarduck as a contributor to this article.



the resolutions of consoles

- 224i - Genesis, NES, SNES
- 448i - some SNES (High-Res)
- 480i - PSX, PS2, Gamecube, Xbox, Dreamcast
- 480p - Gamecube, Xbox, Dreamcast, some PS2
- 720p - Xbox 360, some Xbox and PS2
- 1080i - Xbox 360, some Xbox and PS2
- 1080p - PS3

In case you were wondering, notations such as "480", "720" and "1080" refer to the number of pixels in the height of a resolution. "480" is short for the classic 640x480, which means 640 pixels wide and 480 pixels high. The "i" or "p" represents Interlaced or Progressive scan. 1920x1080 is often referred to as "True" or "Ultra" HDTV resolution.

The Nintendo Gamecube, Sega Dreamcast, and Microsoft Xbox all have consistently working 480p solutions on hand. You must be using a Component (RGB), HDMI, DVI or VGA output from your console to enable Progressive Scan resolution for your HDTV.

To enable 480p for Gamecube: Hold the "B" button while loading your game. Your Gamecube will confirm the Progressive option. If your game doesn't support Progressive Scan, you can get a "Qoob" modchip, but it will also void your warranty. NOTE: If your Gamecube lacks the Digital A/V output port, you'll need to call Nintendo (1-800-255-3700) for an older model.

To enable 480p for Dreamcast: You'll need to use a VGA Box. If your television doesn't accept VGA inputs, you'll have to get a converter that can go from VGA to Component.

To enable 480p for Xbox: In the Xbox Dashboard, hold both Left and Right Trigger and press the Left and Right Analog sticks. You must have a connection to Xbox Live to download the 480p Dashboard, however.

To enable 480p for PS2: If your game doesn't have a menu option for Progressive Scan, try holding Triangle and "X" during boot. However, since the overwhelming majority of PS2 games do not have 480p support, a hardware solution is necessary.

For other consoles (such as the SNES), you may be able to find Component cables through import sites such as <http://www.play-asia.com> or <http://www.ncsx.net>. Some modification to the cables may be necessary. An Upscan Converter unit can also accept Composite/S-Video inputs.

To view a compiled listing of games that do have Progressive Scan support and for detailed Progressive Mode instructions, visit <http://www.hdtvcade.com>.

FREEDOM'S ROLE MODEL RETURNS



SPANKY AND HIS CREW
IGNITE THE FLAMES OF REVOLUTION
AS THE CORPORATION FACES A FULL
FLEDGED STATE OF EMERGENCY!

STATE OF EMERGENCY 2

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PLAY MULTIPLE CHARACTERS WITH SPECIAL SKILLS



SNIPER ATTACKS



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INTERROGATE PRISONERS



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CONTROL TANKS, HELICOPTERS, SPEEDBOATS AND OTHER VEHICLES



SEQUEL TO THE
BEST SELLING GAME
STATE OF EMERGENCY



PlayStation 2



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A FEATURE BY SARDIUS

the secret society of game preservation



In the videogame underworld, there exists a struggle unknown to many. You may remain blissfully unaware of the battles that rage on within gaming's outskirts, but they are fought for the sake of history, for documentation, and to save what might otherwise be lost forever. These wars are braved by gaming preservationists, and they fight for your right to enjoy the rare and unreleased games that you would not otherwise get to play.



ROMmunism
games for the people

"Preserving" a rare game is, in simple terms, making an exact copy of its internal data. In most cases, this involves using specialized hardware to "dump" code from a cartridge-based game's ROM chips, then converting this raw data into a format readable by modern computers. The process is simpler for disc-based games, and often involves little more than a CD-ROM drive and some ripping software. The resulting "ROM image" (or "ISO", in the case of disc-based media) can then be distributed across the Internet, insuring the data's immortality through shared ownership, while simultaneously making a once-rare game playable to anyone who downloads a copy. The benefits to preserving games through ROM dumping are numerous. Games once rendered unintelligible by Japanese can be translated into more readable languages by clever ROM hackers. Examining a ROM image's contents can occasionally uncover hidden messages and developer comments, revealing a unique and valuable insight into the process of game creation in days gone by. Most significantly, however, ROM dumping makes possible the proliferation of unreleased games once thought lost to the ages.

The Collector a very big problem

One notable example of a game saved through preservation is the unreleased *Star Fox 2* for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System. A true sequel to the original SNES *Star Fox*, the game's release was cancelled with development almost completed, presumably because Nintendo thought the title would draw attention away from the upcoming *Star Fox 64* for the Nintendo 64. *Star Fox 2* featured classic *Star Fox* gameplay (none of that *Star Fox Adventures* or *Star Fox Assault* nonsense here!) and its own original storyline. It also introduced a number of new playable characters. *Star Fox 2* was long thought lost, until a ROM image of a prototype version of the game was quietly leaked to newsgroups in 2003. Though this prototype was buggy and entirely in Japanese, hackers later fixed the game's flaws and translated it into English, turning what was once a game that only existed in Nintendo Power screenshots into an all-new and fully-playable chapter in the *Star Fox* series.

Unreleased games like *Star Fox 2* are in the greatest need of preservation. The only existing code for such games often resides within EPROMs, volatile memory chips designed to hold information only temporarily for magazine review or internal evaluation. This adds urgency to an already difficult search for these rare games, as EPROMs are subject to bit rot, a common affliction that can lead to partial or total data loss. If all known copies of a game succumb to bit rot before code preservation can occur, the game will never exist in a playable form again. One of the greatest threats to preservation comes from some of gaming's biggest enthusiasts: collectors. Unreleased games naturally carry a premium among the collecting world, often to the tune of thousands of dollars. Though many collectors are aware of the benefits of preservation and welcome the opportunity to protect their EPROM-based investments with backup ROM images, others outright refuse to have their games preserved for future generations. The explanations behind this mindset are many, though the most common argument is that preservation through ROM dumping will cause a once-valuable prototype cartridge to depreciate in monetary value. The reasoning is that collectors will pay more for an unreleased game that is not yet available in ROM image format, strictly for the thrill of being the "only kid on the block" able to play a certain title. Once a game is preserved and freely available to the public, this thrill is lost, and with it, the mounds of cash the game would've fetched on eBay from now-disinterested collectors.



Fight For the Future

Fortunately, there are others for whom historical preservation is a greater priority. These people actively seek out rare and unreleased games strictly for the purpose of preserving them, and often do so at great personal expense.

The web magazine *Lost Levels* (<http://www.lostlevels.org/>) is staffed by a collective of such enthusiasts. Pooling their money together, *Lost Levels* members orchestrate the purchase of one-of-a-kind prototype games with the intent of dumping and distributing them to the public. This is all done under a veil of secrecy, since their acts are not often looked kindly upon by the collector community. To date, the group has saved several games from extinction, and has successfully uncovered the hidden stories behind unreleased titles like *Sonic X-Treme* for the Sega Saturn and the Nintendo 64 tech demo commonly known as *Final Fantasy 64*.



Outside the console realm, the team behind MAME (the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator - <http://www.mame.net/>) make it their business to preserve obscure arcade games. This is a difficult process due to the varied hardware employed by different arcade titles; a recent preservation project is a collaboration between MAME developer Aaron Giles and HGM's own Tim Lindquist (DJPubba). The targeted game is *NFL Football*, a rare 1984 release whose gameplay streamed from, of all things, a vinyl record! Preserving this data and recreating its gameplay within the context of emulation software is bound to prove a challenge, but with the recent discovery of one of the few intact vinyl discs in existence, this project will hopefully emerge a success.



Despite the obstacles of rotting ROM chips and antiquated hardware, game preservation is an effort that marches on undaunted. Preservationists take pride in saving games from obscurity and death, even if most gamers don't know half the story behind the struggles to preserve titles like *California Raisins*, *Earth Bound Zero*, and *Nintendo World Championships 1990*. Their battle silently continues behind the scenes, to save what would otherwise be lost forever.

CED Player photo by Aaron Giles.



WARLORD

March 2006

SAMURAI WARRIORS

戦国無双

State of War



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swpsp.com

Faria

A WORLD OF MYSTERY & DANGER



I LOST MY GOLF BALL!



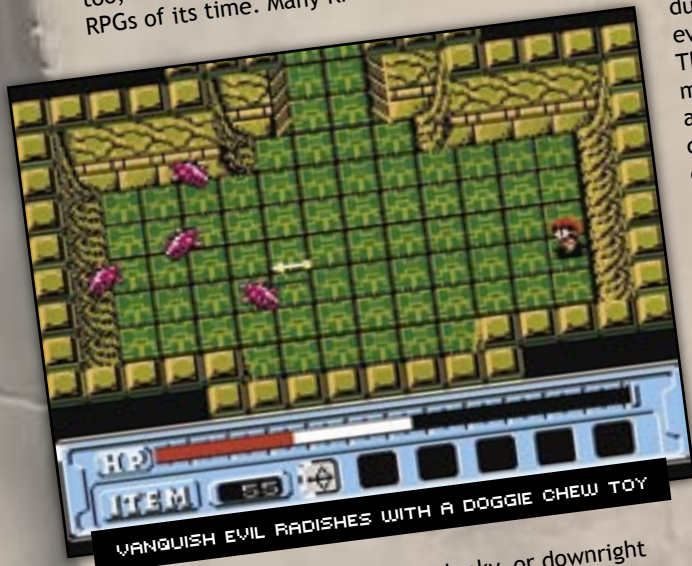
ANOTHER BAG-O-LOOT!



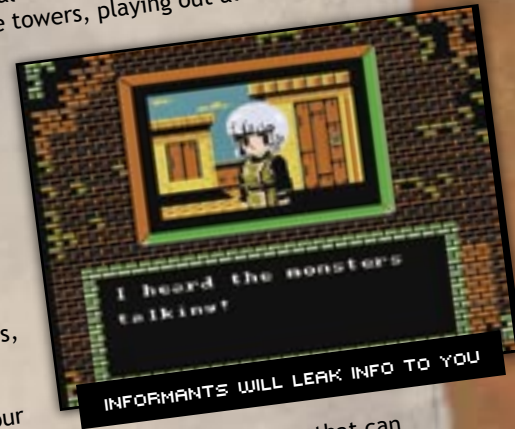
DONT LEAVE HOME WITHOUT A GOOD GPS SYSTEM



NO SMOKING WITHIN 20 FEET OF ANY PUBLIC SHOPPE



VANQUISH EVIL RADISHES WITH A DOGGIE CHEW TOY



INFORMANTS WILL LEAK INFO TO YOU

Faria plays compared to those classics.

Faria can be typically defined as a cross between *Zelda* and *Dragon Warrior*. It has a world map and caverns that you can explore with plenty of random encounters. The battles, however, take place on a fixed screen in real-time. The real meat of the game takes place inside towers, playing out almost exactly like *Zelda* does with one major difference:

they are, hands down, some of the most challenging dungeons ever created. They have multiple floors, areas that can hamper control of your movement, mazes of one-way passages, and switches that can open doors at the other end of the dungeon. There's no auto-map, so you'll have to rough it by making your own, either on paper or by memory.

Faria is a game that wants you to spend hours memorizing its ins and outs. It's certainly no game a casual player would ever play, but is everything any self-respecting gaming fanatic would. There are no symbols in front of a building telling you what it is, you'll have to

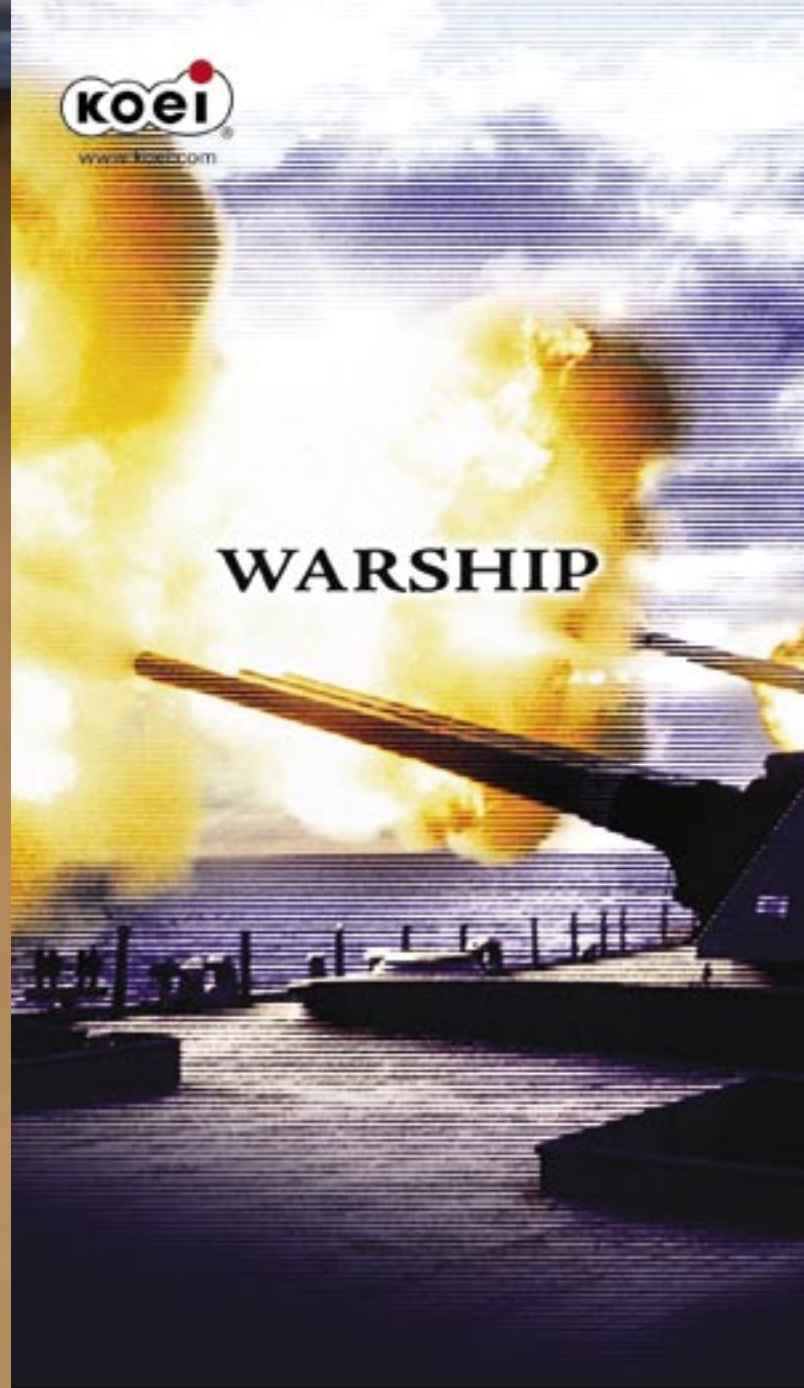
archaic systems had slow, clunky, or downright asinine interfaces that made them frustrating to play. Imagine playing *Zelda* without having to bring up the sub-screen to change items during battle. Imagine talking to people in *Final Fantasy* without having to press a different button. Imagine saving in *Dragon Warrior* being completely unobtrusive. Imagine dying in a grueling dungeon and not losing an inch of progress. That's how

Platform: NES
 Publisher: Nintendo - Castlequest, Cyraid
 Developer: Game Arts - Lunar, Grandia
 Release date: 1990
 Genre: RPG
 Category: Action
 # of players: 1

Edited by Hitoshura

explore and memorize what's there. There's also the fact that this game hammers home a classic RPG design quirk of having difficult enemies hiding in forests in brutal fashion. It's easy to be killed by invisible enemies that fire projectiles at you when wandering into a forested area. You won't step foot in a forest in any other game after that experience. Lastly, traveling around in caves is a punishing experience because you can only see a handful of tiles in front of you, with virtually no way to tell where you are or where you've been while being ambushed by random encounters. Game Arts apparently knew this game would be sadistic from the start, and they designed it so that you'd go back for more and learn from your mistakes by not taking away all your progress if you lost.

Many gamers today tend to complain that games these days are too easy, or too complex. They should go out and give *Faria* a whirl. It's a simple game that has a sadistic level of difficulty, but *Faria* will be nice to you, as it knows that it's never fun to lose your progress constantly due to bad design. *Faria* simply shows an uncharacteristic level of respect to players that many games don't. If you can manage to get through *Faria* you'll more than likely come away with a sense of accomplishment, and perhaps wiser on how to play a game that doesn't want to hold you by the hand. *Faria* is truly an experience in tough love, making it all the more memorable despite being forgotten by its creator.



WARSHIP

Available Now

WARSHIP GUNNER 2



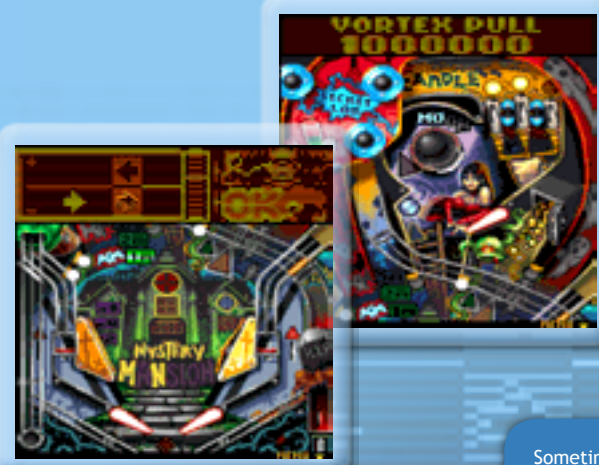
PlayStation 2



Mild Language Violence

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SFB387



MYSTERY MANSION PINBALL



Publisher: Gameloft
Developer: Gameloft
Release Date: March 2006

Genre: Arcade
Category: Pinball
of Players: 1

Sometimes, when you get a pinball game in my hands you may find yourself wondering what the heck you're supposed to be doing besides tapping the flippers to hit targets. However, you should appreciate much of the wizardry that goes into the playing fields and themes of these machines, which is what makes *Mystery Mansion Pinball*. really enjoyable.

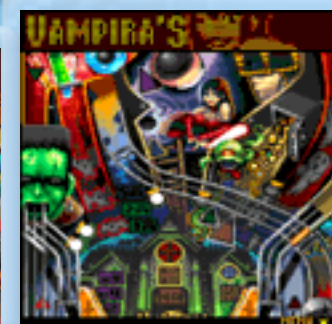
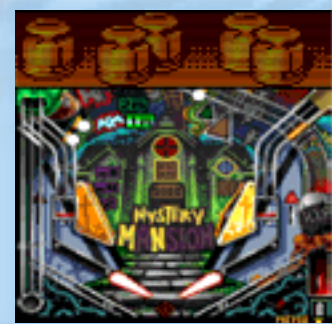
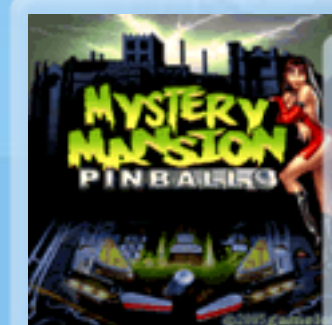
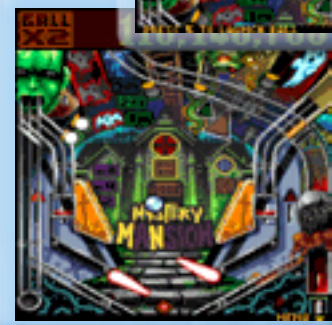
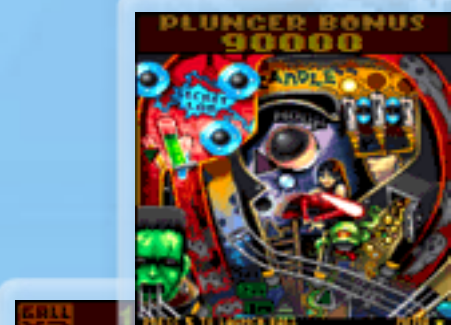
This wireless pinball game has the characteristic of classic horror films and creatures to give it an appealing charm but it also brilliantly mirrors the ambiance and playing field layout of real pinball machines. Other pinball games up to this point have seemed flat and one-dimensional but *Mystery Mansion Pinball* features ramps, bumpers, rails, slots and just about everything else to make it a genuine experience. An illuminated headboard is also included, not just to give you the score, but to show animations and even play mini-games.

The game plays like a normal pinball encounter with three flippers as you try to light up targets and score massive amounts of points. There are bonus situations, challenges to take on and multiple balls to handle. It flows well, but unfortunately the ball physics and controls are a little off. Not too much, but you can certainly notice some delayed reaction at times. The ball, more or less, is somewhat "sticky" on the flippers, so much so that you'll hardly ever use the nudge button. Nevertheless, the game still looks excellent.

You can notice the depth of the playing field and the multiple levels clearly. Colored lights flash throughout the playfield realistically and all of the illustrations are very colorful. Even the headboard has the authentic LED look that relays all of the necessary information and works very well with the mini-games. The sound is also nicely captured in both music and effects to really engulf you in the atmosphere of the game.

Mystery Mansion Pinball pays incredible attention to detail and allows for a fun experience. Expert players may have something to say about the controls and physics, but for others who just tap the flippers to keep the ball in play, you'll get your money's worth. The mini-games are entertaining, the playing field is alive and the theme is well chosen. If you enjoy playing pinball by yourself, or with a friend in the two-player mode, you'll enjoy taking this game on the road with you.

FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5



CALL OF DUTY 2

Publisher: MFORMA
Developer: MFORMA
Release Date: March 2006

Genre: Shooter
Category: Military
of Players: 1

Call of Duty 2 follows British, Russian and American soldiers on the battlefields ranging from the deserts of North Africa to the beaches of Normandy. Based on the Activision hit, it's the second *Call of Duty* title for mobile phones and as expected, proves to be a more gratifying experience.

The game is spread across the last four years of World War II, 1942 through 1945, and features twelve missions, leading up to a final decisive battle in 1945. Each year includes three missions that can be selected independently but will all have to be completed in order to proceed to the following year, and unlike the first *COD*, users only control one soldier through the battles. Even so, an entire computer controlled squad is still present to provide reinforcements.

Players will have access to authentic weaponry including pistols, rifles, grenades and bazookas, many of which also have secondary firing modes. For example, when using a machine gun, players can choose to shoot straight ahead or in a left-to-right spray.

Missions are as varied as the locations they take place in, and there's always the threat of being blasted by flying bombers. You'll have complete control over the soldier and his movements as you and the rest of the squad creep through trenches, crouch behind walls, and do battle in settings such as a train yard, a bombed out city, or a snowy village filled with snipers.

The game provides strong details in its environment and the vehicles or buildings within it. They aren't destructible but nevertheless accomplish a good setting for the game. Soldiers look somewhat small but proportioned, therefore the entire game looks quite accurate, taking into consideration that it's still a mobile game. The sound, even though it does have a few firing and explosion effects, still lacks a full-scale audio assault but does a standard job.

Call of Duty 2 does a good job of delivering the war scenario and is much improved over the first *COD* in many respects. The use of weapons, the types of missions, the difficulty level and the overall presentation blend well to provide one of the better war experiences available.

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



Available Now

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5 Empires



PlayStation 2



Mild Language
Violence

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HOLLYWOOD SQUARES HIP HOP EDITION

Hollywood Squares: Hip-Hop Edition features nine celebrity rappers and recording artists from the world of hip-hop and R&B, including such names as Method Man, Bizarre, Pitbull, and Trina. The celebrities will ask multiple-choice questions in categories like movies, TV, pop culture, sports, and, of course, music. If you answer a question correctly, you win an X or O in that celebrity's square — think Tic-Tac-Toe.

The object of the game is to win two out of the three rounds for 1000 cash points. If you do, a bonus round is awarded where you must answer nine questions under 20 seconds. Each correct answer here will be worth an extra 100 cash points. The more cash points you accumulate, the greater your ranking in the national leader boards.

Since this is the *Hip-Hop Edition*, the hip-hop culture is reflected in the various questions. Who flowed first on Tribe's jam "Scenario"? What comedian has appeared on two of Kanye's joints? Who was the 2005 NBA Rookie of the Year? Once all of the available questions have been exhausted, new ones can be downloaded.

The celebrity figures are caricatured and bear a resemblance to who they're supposed to be, but they have very little animation. Each celebrity has also voiced their own introduction, so that when they're selected or an answer is correctly given, you will hear an audio response. These are captured well, but unfortunately are repetitive and annoying after a while since only one was captured for each.

Hollywood Squares Hip-Hop Edition is a fun Tic-Tac-Toe/Trivia game with a unique feel. The celebrities and questions are well chosen. If you are into hip-hop and want to test your knowledge or challenge a friend's knowledge by playing this game, you should check it out.

Publisher: Sonic Mobile
Developer: Hardcore 3D
Release Date: March 2006

Genre: Trivia
Category: Casual
of Players: 1-2 Online

FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5



Name That Tune! version 2.0 is now available, and it brings all of the fun of guessing songs and artists based on musical notes. It features enhanced graphics, new categories, new songs and even an online multi-player option to compete live against other users.

To get started, you can choose from one of many musical categories including Movies/TV themes, '80s, Hip Hop, Holiday and Modern Rock. There's also a Spanish language version of the game featuring the most popular Latin music on the charts as well as American top 40 hits. Once your favorite category

has been selected, it's time to test your know-how.

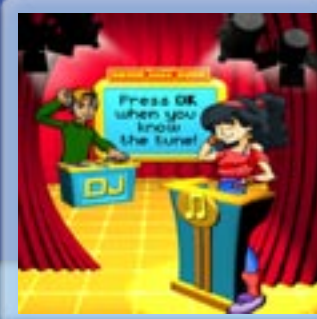
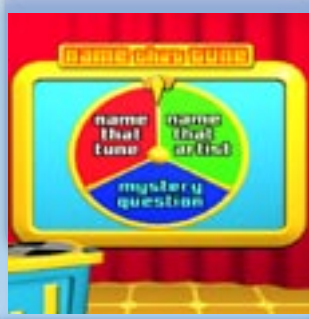
A polyphonic tune will begin to play and a clock will also start running. When you have figured out what song it is, pressing the OK button will stop the music and clock. A question will then be asked as to what is the name of the song, or who is the artist. This will continue for a total of seven tunes and at the end, your right and wrong answers will be tallied. If you happen to answer all of the seven questions correctly, you will be rewarded with a free ringtone of your choice from those seven that were played. Nice prize, right? Wait; there's more.

Version 2.0 also features online tournaments and head-to-head competitions. The tournaments begin every few days and participants will be asked 15 questions in a specific category. The winner is declared by how quickly and correctly all questions are answered. In head-to-head competitions, two players will participate in a standard seven-question round and the one with the quickest time and more answers wins. In both of these, if you answer all questions correctly, you also win a free ringtone.

The most important aspect of this game is how well the tunes sound. Otherwise, it would be a bust. Thankfully, the songs sound great. Granted, they are polyphonic, and there will still be some strange sounding tunes at times, but most do a fine job of translating the music. They are loud, strong and well-created.

Name That Tune! has just about everything you could ever want in a mobile musical game. It has extensive libraries in many different categories, tournaments and head-to-head contests and prizes that are awarded instantly. If you're a music buff like I am and enjoy testing your knowledge for some good stuff, this game should be on your phone.

FINAL SCORE :
4.5 of 5



Publisher: Sonic Mobile
Developer: Sonic Mobile
Release Date: March 2006

Genre: Trivia
Category: Casual
of Players: 1-2 Online



4. 19. 2006

WINBACK 2 PROJECT POSEIDON



PlayStation 2



Language
Violence

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winback2.koei.com

FotoQuest FISHING

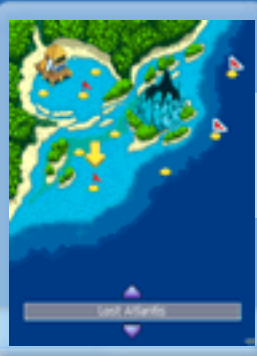
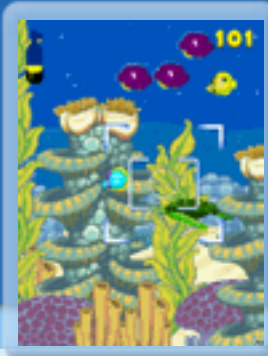
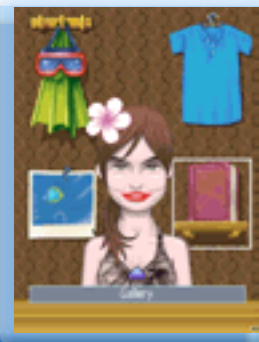
Like Nintendo's *Pokemon Snap*, *FotoQuest Fishing* puts you behind a camera to photograph elusive creatures. This time you snorkel through an underwater world to capture photos of exotic tropical fish. There are a total of eighteen photography challenges to undertake and twenty-seven species of marine life including sea horses, turtles and sharks.

You begin at Ula's booth, who has hired you to take the snapshots for the coming tourist season. After being given instructions, you will then find yourself snorkeling in a breathtaking coral paradise ready to put your photography skills to the test. Each picture taken will net points depending on how well it captures the subject. By photographing more than one fish in the frame, you will not only get a point multiplier, but also possibly gain an extended oxygen boost to replenish your dwindling supply. When this supply is exhausted, your points are tallied and if your mission was successful you may earn badges and promotions for a job well done.

The fish will follow realistic behavior moving around in schools and going about their daily lives. If startled, they will flee or move behind underwater barriers for protection. Let me tell you, nothing startles a fish quite like the snapping sound of your camera or you moving around just to get the right picture, so you'll have to work calmly.

When you are finally done taking pictures, Ula will show you the best one and keep it on display in her booth until a higher-scoring shot replaces it. You can also view all of the species you have captured through your pictures in the Gallery mode. (Select handsets will allow you to upload and share scores, pictures and gain chips in DChoc's Mobile League.)

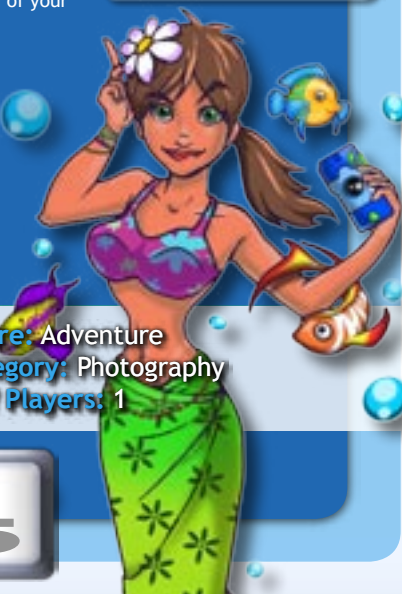
FotoQuest Fishing is yet another innovative and entertaining game for casual players. It's not entirely original or as long as I could have hoped for, yet I couldn't put the game down until I was finished with it. Afterwards, I kept on playing to score as high as possible. It had me hook, line and sinker (Editor's Note: HGM apologizes for this pun. -Thomas), and I bet you'll find it just as addictive.



Publisher: Digital Chocolate
Developer: Digital Chocolate
Release Date: March 2006

Genre: Adventure
Category: Photography
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5





SHADOW HEARTS FROM THE NEW WORLD



SAVING THE WORLD AGAIN

For a long while, RPGs, especially Japanese RPGs, have been stuck in a rut. They all seem to blend together, after a while. Starting from a small village on the back-end of nowhere, a young and frequently silent boy with a knack for swordsmanship gets accidentally involved in a vast adventure that will eventually determine the fate of his fantasy/science-fiction world. Along the way, he'll gather a small crew of idiosyncratic allies (the Loner, the Scantily Clad Girl, the Love Interest, the Token Demihuman, the Huge Guy Who Acts Slowly But Hits Hard, and so on), probably dismantle a major cultural institution such as a religion or a kingdom, and generally beat the hell out of all the evil ever.

I may be exaggerating slightly, but only slightly. The point is that even the most serious RPG fan will usually admit that his chosen genre needs a shot in the arm.

The funny thing is that it gets those *all the time*. It's simply that outside of bland mainstream games, the really good, innovative JRPGs are often left untranslated. Even when we do get a localization, they're often overlooked for almost no reason at all. Up until this point, *Shadow Hearts* is a textbook example.

CASUALTIES OF THE CONSOLE WARS

The *Shadow Hearts* series is one of the best-kept secrets in gaming, and most of it has to do with pure bad luck.

First off, the first two *Shadow Hearts* games were localized and released by Midway, of all people. Like it or hate it, Midway is not a name one associates with RPGs, and they barely hyped either game at all.

Second, while it has more than its share of manic wackiness, the series tends to be very dark. In an age where that word is a marketing code phrase for cinematic bloodshed, the *Shadow Hearts* games simply and unashamedly deal with highly emotional themes. In a genre where characters are usually defined by what they're trying to achieve, *Shadow Hearts* tends to define its characters by what they've lost, or what they'll never have. Its heroes are lost souls, unrequited lovers, the future victims of history, or warriors struggling vainly to hold onto lost ways of life.

Third, and most importantly, both the *Shadow Hearts* games have been released in North America at exactly the wrong time. The original game—a hastily ported PSOne game and a quasi-sequel to 2000's deeply underwhelming *Koudelka*—launched three days before the highly anticipated, visually spectacular *Final Fantasy X*.

Despite its low initial sales, *Shadow Hearts* would go on to gather a cult following. *Shadow Hearts: Covenant* would launch two years later on the strength of that fanbase... and did so in September of 2004, in the middle of one of the most brutal fourth quarters in gaming history. Dozens of amazing but low-profile games were overwhelmed in the rush of triple-A titles, and most of the gamers who were looking for something new and different wound up picking up *Katamari Damacy* instead. Sadly, despite good reviews and a complete visual overhaul, *Covenant* got lost in the shuffle.

Hopefully, things will be different for the third game. It has a new publisher, a new setting, new heroes, and a new quest. More importantly, it's launching at a quieter time of the year, when fans who are looking for something new and different—or just something good—might actually be able to find it.





FROM THE NEW WORLD

The *Shadow Hearts* games are set on Earth, in the early twentieth century. It's still recognizable, but it's sort of tilted on its side.

This is an Earth where a woman can be a lieutenant in the German army during World War I; where the Japanese army has battalions of steampunk mecha; and where the power of alchemy can keep a man alive for eight hundred years. It's half the kind of unexplained phenomena that powers anime—that freewheeling “anything can happen, and often does” plot momentum that’s somehow uniquely Japanese—and half a pulp-fiction wonderland. Magic is real, monsters exist, and the supernatural is a fact of everyday life. In short, it contains many of the tropes of your typical RPG world, placed into a new setting and given a bizarre spin.

It's been about a decade since the events of *Shadow Hearts: Covenant*, where a renegade Catholic priest released the force of the Malice—a thousand years' worth of humanity's hatred and anger—upon the world. The aftereffects of this are still being felt, as Johnny Garland quickly discovers.

At the age of sixteen, Johnny has just opened a private detective agency in New York City, with the help of his manservant Lenny. (And yes, *Covenant* fans, it's *that* Lenny.)

Two years ago, Johnny's father and sister died in a mysterious fire, and while Johnny survived, he lost some of his memories. He's hoping that by working as a detective, he can eventually find a way to remember whatever it is he's forgotten.

He gets his first case shortly thereafter, which is a simple issue of tracking down and bringing in a bail jumper. That “simple issue” is complicated by the appearance of a horrible monster, which proceeds to eat the bail jumper.

Johnny is only saved by the sudden arrival of Shania, an Indian princess who's been charged with protecting her tribe and the world from the Malice. Towards that end, she's gifted with the power to assume monsters' forms.

She and her bodyguard Natan throw their lot in with Johnny to deal with the fallout from Johnny's first case. That starts up a series of events that'll take Johnny and Shania from one end of the New World to the other, and up against a mysterious woman who's wielding the power of the Malice for her own ends.

NEW SYSTEMS

From the New World retains one of the central gameplay hooks of the past games: the Judgment Ring. To accomplish damn near anything, from getting bargains in the shop to successfully attacking your opponents, you must use the Judgment Ring.

Once you activate it, a needle spins around the Ring in a circle. To use it, you have to hit X as the needle passes over certain marked areas on the Ring. Success means the attack goes off, the action succeeds, you get the sale price on an item, or whatever else the Ring is currently being used to represent. In combat, each time you hit the Ring correctly, you pull off one of several possible hits.

It sounds simple, and honestly, it is, but the execution counts for a lot. The Judgment Ring is what keeps the *Shadow Hearts* games' combat engine from falling prey to the dreaded “Just Hold Down the Attack Button” syndrome, where you just keep flogging the basic combat option until you win. The use of the Ring keeps you invested in the fight. It helps that it's both heavily customizable and that the game keeps track of your success rate.



MEET YOUR CREW

Johnny Garland

Our hero, with all that implies. One day, he's a young private detective on the streets of New York; the next, he's following a harmonixer around the Americas to fight both monsters and mobsters. Johnny's a decent knife fighter and a better magic-user. More importantly, he can collect a variety of Handy Tools, like a camera and a vacuum cleaner, to help you gather information or attack enemies.

Shania

Like Yuri, the hero of the past two *Shadow Hearts* games, Shania is a harmonixer. Unlike Yuri, she's an Indian princess, with highly ritualized powers. † Her job is to track down new manifestations of the Malice and destroy them, wherever they may appear. She can fuel her fusions' abilities by acquiring monsters' souls and using them to power up special statuses..



The intricate combo system from *Covenant* also returns in *From the New World*, but it's been tweaked. In that game, you had to gather your characters into the same general area before you could pull off a combination attack. On the plus side, you could link all four characters' best moves into a blistering frenzy of death that lasted for dozens of hits and tore up bosses like a banana in a Cuisinart; on the minus side, well, they were all standing in one place. If the enemy got to go before you did, you were in trouble.

In *From the New World*, the combo system has been revised, making it easier to use and giving you a wealth of new options. Each character has gained a rechargeable Sp. Atk meter, visible just underneath their HP/MP during combat. You get Sp. Atk by landing normal attacks, or as a bonus for wrapping a fight up quickly.

You can spend Sp. Atk on the newest addition to the *Shadow Hearts* system: one of three different kinds of combos. The simple Combo option is just like it was in *Covenant*, allowing you to string all four active characters' attacks together into a single multiple hitstring of near-certain doom.

Each spell and special ability in the game has certain characteristics you've got to keep in mind, as using the wrong spell at the wrong time could miss a given opponent, breaking the combo or simply wasting your turn. Floating or flying enemies will ignore ground-based spells, and an enemy standing on the ground can't be successfully hit with aerial attacks.

In *From the New World*, certain combat options, such as Hard Hit or certain spells, will burn Sp. Atk. You've gained a lot of flexibility, as your characters' positions no longer matter when you're trying to start a combo, but you've also got to pick your shots carefully.

You can also use Sp. Atk to try for a Double Attack, allowing a character to take two turns in a row, or a powerful Double Combo, which heavily drains the Sp. Atk gauge in exchange for the chance to use eight actions for the effective cost of one.

Part of the fun of the game is figuring out how best to put together dozens of special moves, magic spells, and individual attack patterns into as long a combo as possible. If you play your cards right, the game'll reward you with extra items, experience, or cash for a particularly long or powerful combo.

All of that comes with a price, though. *From the New World* gives you more combo options than before, but it also lets the enemies use them.

Ordinary monsters can often level you with a quick combo, and most of the bosses we've seen have Double Attacks that tend to kill a character per round. As a result, *From the New World* is considerably more difficult than the games that came before it. You'll need to master the system and maybe powerlevel a little if you want to succeed.



MEET YOUR CREW

Natan

Shania's bodyguard and a bounty hunter, Natan is straightforward and calm, almost to a fault. He's a man of few words, and spends most scenes standing quietly in the background. In battle, he fights with a pair of matched revolvers, in the unique and deadly style of Gun Fu. For Natan, the only way to shoot somebody is point-blank.

Frank Goldfinger

He claims to have learned his secret ninja arts in the Amazon, from a hidden temple of ninjitsu he found after a plane crash. In practice, it looks more like Frank is making it up as he goes along. He gets new weapons by picking up whatever heavy objects he finds—bus stop signs, large fish, saw blades, totem poles, whatever—and sticking a hilt on them.

A NEW STORY

From the New World is a perfect jumping-on point for newcomers to the series. While you'll get more out of a few plot developments if you've played past *Shadow Hearts* games (such as the reappearance of a couple of old friends), you don't have to have played them to understand what happens in *From the New World*.

What you do have to have is a healthy sense of the absurd. *From the New World* is the most lighthearted game in the series to date, all the moreso because it's occasionally surreal.

It's not without its moments of drama or pathos, such as any plot that even tangentially involves Ricardo—something about being a gunslinging mariachi just invites tragedy, I guess—but at the same time, you're traveling with a giant drunken cat, a desperately retarded faux ninja who keeps referring to himself in the third person and slapping a hilt on random objects to make them into "ninja swords," and a dominatrix vampire with an eating disorder. You're fighting to protect the world from an unquestionably malevolent force, and naturally, this will involve the adventures of Brittany the ditzy American ninja; the all-cat film studio, Purramount Pictures; and near-constant sexual harrassment from some of the most deliberately gay characters in video game history. (Johnny may not have inherited the past games' supply of angst, but he did get the traditional protagonist's curse. Every gay guy in three thousand miles both finds him attractive and knows exactly where he is.)

At the same time, the power of Malice is omnipresent and appears everywhere you go, in the form of the unnamed woman who you spend much of the game pursuing. It's to blame for murder, gang warfare, mysterious disappearances, and the creation of countless monsters. This isn't quite a horror title, as it's never really meant to frighten you, but it shares much of a horror title's look and many of its themes.

It's kind of like there are two games going on simultaneously here. Johnny, Shania, Natan, and Ricardo are in one, and Frank, Mao, and Hilda inhabit the other. One is a horror-themed story involving dark powers, human weaknesses, and the monsters that serve them; the other is a hallucinatory series of events that have to be seen to be believed. The impressive thing is that the two stories do not only intersect, but manage to do so without one utterly destroying the other.

If you can handle that dichotomy, *Shadow Hearts: From the New World* is the game for you. It's bizarre and often discordant, but it's never just the same old thing.



MEET YOUR CREW

Master Mao

Frank's ninjitsu master and a practitioner of drunken-fist kung fu, Mao is a member of a race of bipedal, talking cats. She's a close ally of Al Capone's, and she's working on the side to help her fellow cats open a movie studio in Hollywood. Her true ambition is to be a famous movie star, and if you're able to secure the right kinds of funding, you can help her make that happen.

INTERVIEW

For this story, we sat down and had a little chat with Takamasa Ohsawa, the game's director, Takehiro Ishida, the game's designer and Hirotomi Imoto, the game's sound director.

HGM: The *Shadow Hearts* series has a look, setting, and feel that are all vastly different from other games. What led you to create it? Were you deliberately trying to do something new, or simply making the sort of game you wanted to see?

Shadow Hearts is an RPG series that's inspired by historical facts, but with its own original interpretation. Basing it completely on history would be difficult due to legal rights and philosophical issues, so that's where we utilize fantasy to fill in those gaps. The story unfolds in this distorted world with colorful and humorous characters, and that's where we believe *Shadow Hearts* stands out from other series with its originality and charm. Of course as a game we bore in mind to create a "RPG that everyone can enjoy" as a guideline.

HGM: There's a definite pulp-horror feel to the games. What were some of your design influences?

Various elements such as fact-based historical events, unconfirmed mysterious events in the land where the story takes place, our interpretation of myths, the actual experience of the development team, and other elements are all factors that influence the design.

HGM: What design decisions led to the creation of the Judgment Ring?

It was designed after pursuing an intuitive and dynamic system to keep the player engaged in every action while keeping the game from becoming monotonous.

HGM: What spurred the decision to move *Shadow Hearts* to the Americas? Were you looking to work within a new mythology, or simply take the storyline in a new direction?

We've had the idea of bringing *Shadow Hearts* to the Americas for a very long time. It was finally possible to do this by having a new cast of characters in a new setting in this title.

We believe the world of *Shadow Hearts* became much deeper by lacing together the mystical stories and viewpoints of the ancient people and various tribes that lived in the American continent. The theme we wanted to portray wasn't a grand epic based on mythology, but a story about the people who persevered in those times as well as the love and hate people have deep within one's own heart. These are the invariable themes of *Shadow Hearts*.

HGM: We've found this game is a lot tougher than the last two, mostly because of monsters' more frequent use of the new combo system. Were you deliberately out to make a more challenging game?

In this title we added more strategy to make the player really assess each combat situation, making each battle more unique and each victory more exhilarating, so perhaps that's why you had the impression that the difficulty level has gone up. Depending on the turn and action during combat, the battle situation will change. By assessing the enemy's status and selecting the correct command, you can gain an advantage. In some situations it is even possible to eliminate a powerful boss in an instant, so by all means find the battle style that suits you best.

HGM: What new challenges did you set for yourselves with this new title? It's very different from its predecessors, in terms of its challenge level, setting, mood, and basic themes, and we're curious what you'd set out to accomplish with it.

In terms of the gameplay and the difficulty level, users comments as well as our own ideas were implemented during the production phase to make the gameplay deeper and more stimulating. As for the setting and the mood changes, it could be due to the new characters and locations, and pursuing not a world where the demons lurk in the darkness but a world where the power of spirits exist.

Even as a title within an established series, we were not afraid of making changes and always had in mind to develop a game without compromise. However, the core elements have not changed in the series so we believe that all the fans that enjoyed playing the previous *Shadow Hearts* will accept and enjoy this one as well.

HGM: Is there anything you really wanted to put into *From the New World*, but weren't able to?

We are fully satisfied with the new *Shadow Hearts*. But of course there is a never ending desire to make the game better as well as some ideas that popped up after the game was completed, but we will utilize them during the development process of future games.

HGM: We've got a lot of *Shadow Hearts* maniacs over here who've been looking forward to the game for a long time. What do you want to say to the fans?

"With America as the backdrop, *Shadow Hearts: From the New World* is finally coming out!" brings mixed feelings of happiness and anxiety to all us development team members. However, the English version's voice acting is perfectly done and we take pride in saying the RPG is honed to perfection and will not let your expectations down.

We hope you enjoy the game!



MEET YOUR CREW

Hildegard Valentine

A self-professed superheroine and a member of the infamous Valentine family of vampires, Hilda's form waxes and wanes with her caloric intake. When she's fat, she's a powerful fighter; when she's skinny, she has high INT and becomes a potent spellcaster. Between the two extremes, she becomes the fragile but dangerous Pink Bat, which can do a lot of damage but can't use magic.

Ricardo Gomez

Half mariachi, half gunman, all pure undiluted force for awesome. Ricardo is the lover of Al Capone's sister Edna, a professional mariachi, and a walking arsenal, with a ton of weapons crammed into his ever-present acoustic guitar. His Serenata skill has different effects depending on the tempo and mood of the music he's playing, from powerful buff spells to a hidden flamethrower.

A NEW STORY

If you're one of the chosen few who's played the first two *Shadow Hearts* games, you'll find *From the New World* to be a little strange. It's tilted far more towards comedy than its predecessors, and at the same time, it plays a bit like they wanted to take another swing at *Covenant*. The graphics have not vastly improved, and many of the same gameplay tropes reappear, such as the Pedometer and the hidden lottery.

If this is the first time you've had the chance to play a *Shadow Hearts* game, you'll find this pairs an involving, well-told story with an addictive combat system that's deeper than it first appears to be.

It's not without some small flaws. A few areas, such as Alcatraz and the hotel in Las Vegas, feel less like exciting adventures and more like blatant busywork, since it mostly involves running to a series of rooms in sequence.

The new combo system also tends to mess up the game's power curve, since many enemies are made far more dangerous than they ought to be by judicious abuse of the Double Attack.

Despite these minor concerns, *Shadow Hearts: From the New World* isn't just a decent RPG, but it's the antidote to the cliches that plague its genre. It's dark fantasy without dragons and ancient kingdoms, and keeps a sardonic sense of humor at almost all times. In many ways, this is the series that many other JRPG series wish they were, and with any luck, *From the New World* will finally get the sales success that this series has always deserved.

SCORE:
4 of 5



SECRET HISTORY

The *Shadow Hearts* games are set in the real world, after a fashion, and you'll visit real places. Past games have put you in contact with fictionalized versions of real people, such as Roger Bacon, the legendary father of alchemy; Sir Thomas Lawrence, a.k.a. Lawrence of Arabia; the mad Russian monk Rasputin; Margarete Gertrude Zelle, a.k.a. Mata Hari; and Yoshiko Kawashima, the "Japanese Mata Hari" and the last princess of the exiled Manchu Dynasty.

Johnny's adventure starts in New York City; the first real "dungeon" of the game is an abandoned theater in Chelsea, and you'll do some information-gathering in Times Square.

Another early area takes you to the infamous Arkham University, the fictional college that appeared in the writings of H.P. Lovecraft. It comes complete with a full complement of Deep Ones lurking in the basement, and scared students who don't want to know what *really* goes on there. After your initial runs to the college, you'll meet Lovecraft himself. Lovecraft supplies the role of a "monster arena" for *From the New World*, allowing you to fight monsters he's conjured from within his own mind. You'll get valuable items if you can win each fight under the special conditions Lovecraft's set, but you have to be careful. As Lovecraft himself warns you, it's easy for him to lose control...

When the action moves to Chicago, you'll get to meet the infamous Eliot Ness, who's just recently managed to throw the equally infamous Al Capone in prison on tax evasion. You'll have to deal with Ness, Capone, and Capone's rivals in the Irish mob, as well as Capone's ill-fated (and fictional) sister Edna.



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PlayStation 2



IMAGINE TELEVISION



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A. An undying love for games.

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HARDCORE
REVIEWS

- 48 Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence
- 50 Kingdom Hearts II
- 52 Dexter
- 54 Burnout Revenge
- 55 Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter
- 56 Top Spin 2
- 57 Metal Gear Acid 2
- 58 Generation of Chaos
- 59 Ys: The Ark of Napishtim
- 60 Warship Gunner
- 61 Samurai Warriors: State of War
- 62 Suikoden V
- 63 The Outfit
- 64 NBA Ballers Phenom
- 66 Pursuit Force
- 67 Mega Man Powered Up
- 68 Metal Saga
- 69 Steambot Chronicles
- 70 MLB '06: The Show
- 71 FIFA Street 2
- 72 Space Rangers



TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION METAL GEAR SOLID 3 SUBSISTENCE



“MGS3 is one of the greatest action games of all time.

Review by Ashura

This game leaves all the others in the dust!”

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Kojima Productions
Release Date: 3/14/2006
Rating: "M" for Mature
Genre(s): Sneaky Snake
Category: Tactical Espion Action
of players: 1, Online

An insert in the Japanese version of *Metal Gear Solid 3* contains a quote declaring it one of the greatest action games of all time. This might sound like the standard marketing fare from the PR department, until you notice the source of the quote: John Carpenter. This statement, despite its PR-ish sound, signifies just how far the *Metal Gear* series has come since its meager beginnings on the MSX computer system. Carpenter's own *Escape From New York* was probably the single biggest influence on the original *Metal Gear*, with the series' main character being a direct homage to Kurt Russell's portrayal of Snake Plissken. It's quite evident Hideo Kojima's love of classic movies continues through to this very day. *MGS3* is easily the most film-like game in the series so far, offering action, romance, suspense, twists, turns, set pieces, and pants peeing.



Yes, that classic movie staple that everybody knows and loves: pants peeing.

Set during the Cold War, *MGS3* takes place deep in the jungles of the Soviet Union. A CIA operative codenamed "Naked Snake" is charged with sneaking into soviet territory to rescue a defecting Russian scientist and destroy the very project that scientist's working on. Since this game is a prequel, everyone's favorite nuclear equipped walking death mobile doesn't make an appearance.. Instead, you face the Shagohod- a highly mobile tank capable of deploying intercontinental nuclear missiles. So all of you whiny fans who haven't played *MGS3* yet, fire up the waaahhhbalance and get your complaining over with. There is no Metal Gear in this game, save for its sordid history.

(Besides: Just how metal is Metal Gear nowadays? I mean, you have to figure it's actually comprised more of lightweight, durable plastics rather than being a solid chunk of metal. Would that make it Plastic Gear? What if it were made completely out of ceramics? Ceramic Gear?!!)



By now you're probably wondering "Why should I buy this game again? I know it's great, but it's comprised of a rehashed greatness! How can you possibly give it a 5 out of 5? Yes, writer-guy, I cheated and looked at your score before even reading your review! This blasted (yes, blasted) thing better be more than just Snake on a skateboard!" Relax: this isn't another *Substance*. Disk 1 (Subsistence) contains the original game, and for the most part it's the same as the original. Other than a few tweaks here and there, the main addition is the user controlled 3D Camera. At first it may seem a bit unwieldy (especially for returning players), but after getting used to it you'll wonder how you ever fought solid gears of metal with the old camera: the amount of control it offers over your surroundings is amazing. The first disk also offers the Demo Theater mode, allowing you view all of the game's cutscenes at your leisure. There's even the interestingly named Peep Demo Theater, which lets you view key scenes with Eva (and one with Raikov for the ladies) clad only in underwear.

While disk one is a bit light, Disk 2 (Persistence) offers the real motherlode. First off, you'll get the MSX versions of *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*. Never before released in America, the games are faithfully translated so you too can run from evil death pixels and hide in an oversized metal bucket. This disk also includes the old standby Snake vs. Monkey (with new stages added), Boss Duel Mode, and the fan favorite 'Secret Theater' which puts the MGS characters into hilarious situations. Finally, the piece de resistance for this disk (and release) is the expansive Online Mode. Highly polished, and highly fun, *Metal Gear Online* is everything fans hoped for in playing online.

The final disk (Existence) presents a movie version of *MGS3*, created by combining the game's cutscenes with newly recorded gameplay footage. Remixed in Dolby 5.1, this disk is a great way to introduce curious friends to the world of tactical box espionage. The much talked-about E3 trailer for



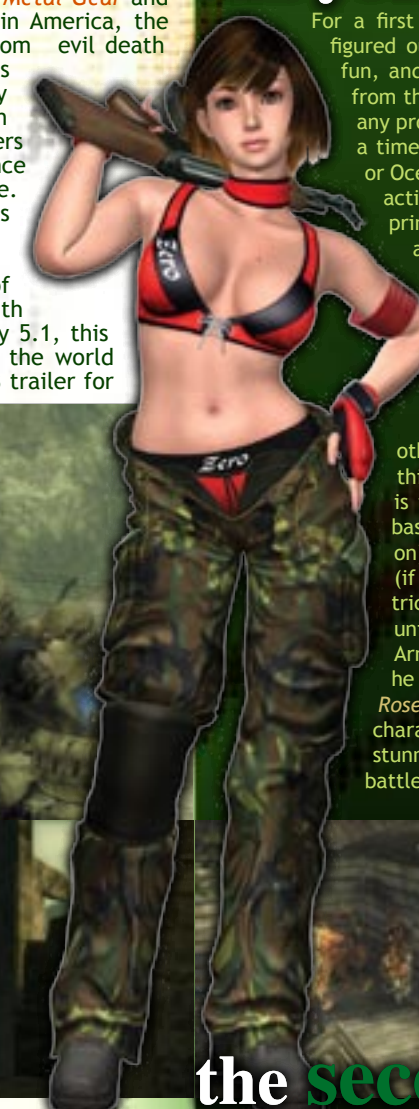
MGS4: Guns of the Patriots is also included on this disk. You'll finally get to see the trailer in high quality, and not remixed in some-random-guy-in-the-crowd's-video-camera-vision. Existence only comes with the limited edition though, so get your copy early!

In short, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* is everything *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance* wasn't. The addition of the expansive (and free!) online mode alone makes it worth the (rather cheap) price. The inclusion of the original MSX games and the new camera as well as the theater modes more than seal the deal.

Rating : 5 of 5



can you subsist online?



For a first stab at *Metal Gear* online, Kojima's team really figured out what makes online play great. The modes are fun, and the lag isn't even bad. (This reviewer connected from the States to Japan and was still able to play without any problem.) In *Metal Gear Online*, up to eight players at a time compete against each other (as guards-KGB, GRU, or Ocelot Unit) to see who's the best at tactical espionage action. The controls are adapted well for online play, primarily using the new camera, and simplifying CQC and other staples of *MGS* to match the quick flow of play. *MGO* offers five modes of play (Sneaking Mission, Capture Mission, Rescue Mission, Team Deathmatch, and Deathmatch), each offering its own unique twist on the pre-established gameplay types and even completely new ideas. The most notable is the Sneaking Mission Mode, in which one player is Snake and he has to face seven other players as guards! In addition to these modes, the thing which makes *MGO* unlike other online war games is the ability to play as leader characters. In team-based play (with the special characters option turned on), the best players get to play as Ocelot, Raikov, or (if you're doing horribly) Sokolov. With all of their tricks in toe, each character has moves and abilities unique to that character. Ocelot's got his Single Action Army, Raikov will grab your balls, and Sokolov, well, he knows kung fu. Reiko and Rowdy Reiko from *Rumble Roses* are also available (after being unlocked) as leader characters in online mode, complete with their instantly stunning Sunrise Suplex CQC move. Are people ready to battle against these two sexy babes online?

the second opinion!

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

Subsistence is all-in-all an incredible package. The third person camera adds an all-new depth to the series and the extras aren't too shabby, either.

FINAL SCORE :
5 of 5

KINGDOM HEARTS II

Review by 4thletter

Publisher : Square Enix
Developer : Square Enix/Buena Vista Games
Release Date : 3/29/2006
Rating : E10+
Genre(s) : Action RPG
Category : Hey Mickey You So Fine
of players : 1

The Walt Disney Company turns 83 this year. Mickey himself is pushing 80. Donald is 72, and Goofy is just about 74 years old. Altogether, that's just over three hundred years. Is it just me, or has the wait between *Kingdom Hearts* and *Kingdom Hearts II* been about that long, too?

It's here now, though, and it was definitely worth the wait. The developers plainly took the "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" maxim to heart. All the things you loved from the first *Kingdom Hearts* are here and in full effect. Everything from the mix of action-adventure gameplay, space battles, and goofy humor to quality voice acting and intriguing story made it through largely intact.

The battle system has a few new additions. Sora, Donald, and Goofy are still the main party, but now Sora has the ability to fuse with one or more party members thanks to a skill called "Drive."

Sora's various Drive forms grant him powerful new abilities that'll help him in his quest. The Drives will be useful, if only because the combat is far from kids' stuff. You'll encounter enemies who strike and recover faster than you can blink, so you'll have to watch their motions and attempt to counter when appropriate. This is tough to do. You're often fighting multiple enemies at once, so taking a time-out to gauge patterns and scroll through your menu is risky business.

You have a new button



at your beck and call, however: the context-sensitive Reaction Command. Pressing the Triangle button when prompted will give you access to new actions. You can use it to ride a skateboard, perform a custom special attack, activate a reversal, or even a bust out a combo attack with another party member. The situation decides what you can do, but there's always visual cues to clue you in. Proper use of the Reaction can turn a losing battle into a rout.

Despite the presence of tons of enemies on-screen at once, *Kingdom Hearts II* never suffers from slowdown. It's pretty much common knowledge now that the PS2 is on the lower end of this console generation, performance-wise. *Kingdom Hearts II* wisely chooses to stick a facelift onto the inventive and cartoony graphics from the previous game and the result is very nice. *KHII* manages to avoid most of the usual pitfalls (jaggies in particular) and brings us sharp textures, expressive animation, and vibrant colors. The characters are marvelous actors, thanks to their body language and voice acting. The voices are all nice fits, though it's still odd to hear characters that I've only known via text boxes speak, even after playing through *Kingdom Hearts*.

The cameos are another well-done section. The *Final Fantasy VII* cast sports updated costumes from the various movies, Cid Highwind finally speaks, and there are a few surprises for old-school Disney fans. Scrooge McDuck makes a brief appearance, sadly sans voice, for example. The lack of characters from *Darkwing Duck* and *Gargoyles* is noteworthy, but that's what sequels are for, right?

The zone-based gameplay from the first game remains in the sequel. You arrive on a world and meet your new party member. After a few quests and cinemas, you fight a boss and move on. This is just the basic format. There's variation all around and it's nowhere near as tedious as the description makes it sound. Half the fun of the



DRIVE FORMS by Lynxara

Drive forms are fusion abilities unlocked at certain points in the game by story events. Once one is unlocked, you can use it whenever you have enough Drive meter. You build Drive meter by attacking enemies, gathering items dropped by defeated enemies, or using special consumable items that boost Drive. As you level up your Drive forms, you'll consume meter more slowly.

Brave Form: Sora fuses with Goofy, and gains the ability to wield two Keyblades at once. In this form his attack power and speed get massive boosts, and he becomes a dynamo for delivering physical damage. Your main disadvantage in this form is losing all access to magic.

Wisdom Form: Sora fuses with Donald, and wields an extra-long Keyblade. In this form his agility and magic power get boosted, letting him easily dodge enemy attacks. Instead of physically attacking opponents, Sora instead shoots energy from it to do magic-based damage.

Master Form: Sora gains the ability to fuse with both Donald and Goofy. In this form Sora wields one keyblade physically and controls the other with magic. All of Sora's stats are boosted in this form, but it consumes Drive meter more quickly than any other form. Its main strength is handling air combat situations, since the Master Form moves by floating.

Final Form: This is a special form that is triggered randomly when you have enough meter and you're entering a Drive form. Sora fuses with both Donald and Goofy, but gains so much power that both keyblades will float magically around him. He receives monstrous stat boosts and incredibly boosted magic abilities. Best of all, in this form, Sora can fly!

Anti-Form: A negative form that appears at random if you're overusing your Drive Forms. Sora turns into a black, shadowy creature very similar to a Heartless. His keyblade vanishes and instead he'll attack with his claw-like hands. He loses attack power in this form but gains enormous speed boosts. Overall it's not something you want to use, since you can't use Reaction Commands in this form and it can't be leveled up like the others.

Kingdom Hearts series is nostalgia, and it is still extremely cool to be able to run through the various realms from Disney movies. The only real downside is that the game progression is fairly linear once you select a world to visit.

Kingdom Hearts II more than delivers, though. The new features mesh well with the

2nd opinion by Lynxara • Alternate Rating : 4.5 of 5

The original *Kingdom Hearts* was badly overrated, but this game is simply amazing. If not for a few old flaws in the battle system that are still hanging around, it'd get a perfect score.



old, the refined graphics show that the PS2 still has some life in it yet, and it's still a bundle of family-friendly fun without being utterly juvenile. Don't bother dismissing this game as "kiddy," either. You know you love Mickey Mouse, just like the rest of us.

Rating : 4.5 of 5



FINAL SCORE : 4.5 of 5

DAXTER

Review by FragHag



Publisher : Sony Computer Entertainment America Genre(s) : Action
Developer : Ready at Dawn Studios Category : Platform
Release Date : 3/21/2006 # of players : 1-2
Rating : EVERYONE

Squished in between the original *Jak and Daxter* and the darker *Jak II*, Ready at Dawn's first release, *Daxter* for the PSP, is a return to what made the original game in the series great: simple platforming fun. After spending the last five years with *Jak*, Naughty Dog has lended its venerable franchise to a new developer and its unfortunate sidekick finally gets some love.

The game begins at the start of *Jak II* with the furry orange ottsel vowing to free *Jak* from the clutches of the Krimzon Guard. Being the half-wit that he is, Daxter quickly lets his ego run away with him and forgets about his quest to save his imprisoned partner. Instead, he inadvertently takes up a job as an exterminator and goes about ridding Haven City of Metal Bugs.

You may think a game devoted almost entirely to the splatting of bugs would grow more than a bit repetitive. While this may be true at first, you'll find that *Daxter's* unique level designs and weaponry make each stage new and entertaining. From the tops of moving trains to the icy waters of a fish packaging plant, this platformer never ceases to deliver a fresh experience and new gameplay mechanics. However, a slight shortage of autosave points does "bug" me, leading to moments of annoying repetition.

Quirky and fun button pressing mini-games themed after blockbuster movies (including *The Matrix*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and more) are accessed whenever Daxter dreams. A rock-paper-scissors-esque multiplayer mode allows you to battle bugs acquired during the game. Don't expect to see any bug-on-bug action (if you're into that sorta thing); it's more along the vein of a *Pokemon Stadium*-type battle. Another very small but noteworthy element is that Daxter gets his own sidekick!! It's a little bug named

Tic who (not surprisingly) isn't much of a right-hand man.

Of course, what would a *Jak & Daxter* game be without a shapely female for Daxter to hit on? This bug-squashing vixen gives our hero his most important tool: the sprayer. Its primary use is to stun larger bugs with its poisonous spray (allowing Daxter some risk-free time to attack with his electric bugswatter), but it can be upgraded with new abilities as the game progresses. The first upgrade is a pressure tool that turns Daxter's sprayer into a nifty temporary hovercraft. My personal favorite is the flame nozzle. One blast with this flamethrower quickly turns bugs into crispy critters. It also comes in mighty handy as an ice-block melter, a spider-web torcher, and a jet engine for hovering. Nice!

Daxter boasts an impressive 15-20 hours of gameplay. The camera is above average (a feat for the single stick-challenged PSP) and the controls are nice and simple, making *Daxter* a fun game for those new to the handheld and vets alike. As in previous *J&D* games, the loading time is cleverly disguised, but there is occasional lag in the open areas of Haven City. Ready at Dawn has also brought back the familiar voice of actor Max Casella (remember Vinnie from "Doogie Howser M.D.?"?) to reprise the role as the wisecracking ottsel.

All in all, *Daxter* delivers hours of unique gameplay. Challenging and full of clever puzzles and unlockables, *Daxter* is light-hearted, quirky, and visually pleasing entertainment for the PSP. Returning to the roots of the series, our hero is just as wisecracking as ever. For those of you who thought that a fuzzy ottsel like Dax couldn't hurt a fly, think again.

Rating : 4 of 5

2nd opinion by Honestgamer • Alternate Rating : 4 of 5

Running *Daxter* through imaginative worlds and humorous mini-games that spoof popular entertainment is great. Riding more crummy vehicles isn't. Still, it's great to see Daxter's solo debut go so well.

FINAL SCORE : **4 of 5**



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BURNOUT REVENGE



Review by 4thletter

Publisher : Electronic Arts
Developer : Criterion
Release Date : 3/7/2006
Rating : Rating Pending

Genre(s) : Racing
Category : Death-defying
of players : 1-6



Racing cars is fun, but crashing them is better. This is *science fact* and the basis of the more recent entries in the *Burnout* series. *Revenge* takes it to the next level with the addition of Takedown Rivals. If someone takes you out, they gain a "Rival" marker. Get revenge (if you'll pardon the pun) on them by returning the favor for extra points.

All the *Burnout* mainstays are here, though with a few additions. Look out for a reinvented Crashbreaker and multi-tiered stages. Even better, you can check non-racing traffic into other racers, walls, and even other cars for a cool pinball effect. The insane physics engine sometimes goes absolutely crazy and lets you launch a car into the stratosphere, but that's just icing on the cake.

There's even a new dimension to the racing, as the multi-tiered stages now let you take out rivals (or be taken out) from *above*. Imagine coasting along, skating to the win, only to have three cars drop from above you, ninja-style, taking you out and knocking you back to fourth place. Now, imagine doing this to someone else and saving the replay to show off to others for bragging rights.

What's probably the biggest draw, though, is revealed on the main menu. *Burnout Revenge* sports the EA|HD logo, which means two things: it looks very, very good and the smaller text is very, very hard to read. The car and damage models have been redone and come with dynamic damage models. If you scrape up your left side, your car reflects that. Nice touch.

Remember all the random clutter, sparks, and lighting effects? Amp them up and you'll begin to approach the level of detail that *Revenge* brings to the table. The screen is often filled with debris. Everything

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

2nd opinion by Lynxara • Alternate Rating : 4 of 5

EA has polished *Burnout* to glorious lustre for its first Xbox 360 outing, but deep down, it's still the same game you've played before. Still good, but not strictly necessary.



from broken chairs, tables, and car parts careen around the stage as you race, not to mention the speed lines that give you that sick sense of acceleration. There's a lot to keep track of, but it all results in a beautiful game. All the buildings are wonderfully detailed. Storefronts look like storefronts and the tarmac is extremely sharp. The draw distance *alone* is incredible and results in some awesome replays. Even better, you can share thirty-second clips of your replays with your friends, which can even be voted on and ranked on Xbox Live.

Revenge highlights one of the biggest problems with being between console generations: Port Syndrome. If you've played the old *Burnout* for any amount of time, the 360 version will be extremely familiar to you. There are a few new features, of course. There are a variety of achievements, stellar Xbox Live integration, new hyper-detailed vehicles, and upgraded graphics. Beyond that, it's the game you know and love... and that you played months ago. For a newcomer, it's great. It's fast, fun, and frantic, but, if you've played it previously, you may not find enough new content to justify the \$59.99.

Rating : 4 of 5



GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARRIOR



Review by 4thletter

Publisher : Ubisoft
Developer : Red Storm Entertainment
Release Date : 3/8/2006
Rating : Rating Pending

Genre(s) : Third-Person Action
Category : Tactical
of players : 1-16



Next-gen has arrived and it looks like a particularly hot, dusty, and violent day in Mexico City. *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* has finally hit, and it is a wonderful thing.

GRAW comes with a lot of hype, but it delivers on every promise. The graphics are stellar. Everything just looks amazing. They've pulled out every lighting effect in the book, and I don't just mean lens flares and faux-dynamic lighting. Coming out from dark cover and looking up into the sky will kill you with brightness, just as it would in real life. There's glare to be careful of and lovely shadows to look at.

The Cross-Com system is everything that it's cracked up to be, too. It's lovely to be able to scope out enemy positions using your UAV Drone and the Tactical Map and systematically take them all down with no casualties on your side. *GRAW* is a thinking-man's shooter. Charging in blindly will get you nothing but a one-way pass to the Pearly Gates. You have to use both the terrain and all your gadgets to your advantage. Your Cross-Com can identify the position and class of enemy combatants through walls and buildings, just as long as someone in your crew or your drone has line-of-sight. This is wonderful for planning attacks. Are there a group of enemies watching the exit to an alley, hoping that you'll come out? Move around and take them from behind.

Creeping in close to a group of enemies and lobbing grenades into their midst is always fun, but what's more fun is picking them off from afar because you know exactly where they're standing. This isn't very easy, of course. The enemies are smart. If they spot you

2nd opinion by Lynxara • Alternate Rating : 4.5 of 5

Fabulous graphics and gameplay that's sometimes alarmingly immersive. The squad implementation sets a new standard for ally AI and controls. Play it, 360 owners.

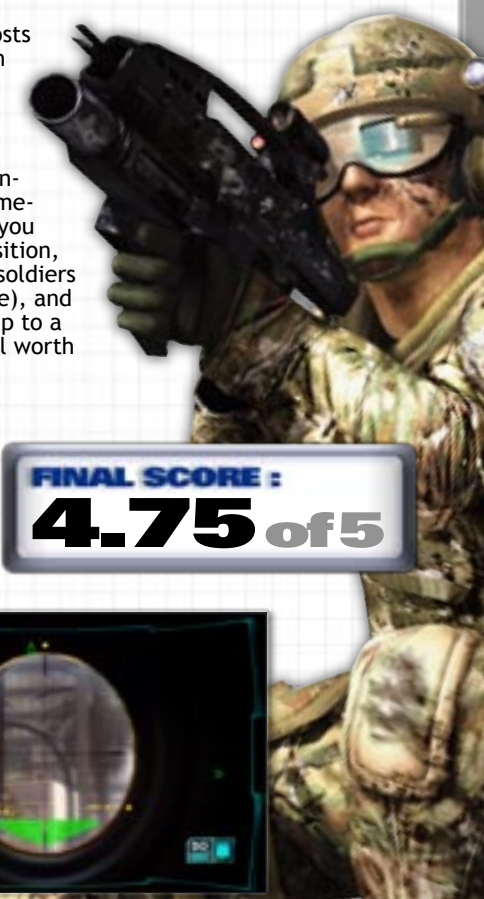


or your muzzle flashes, they'll shout a warning to their friends and fire on you. Some groups of enemies even have marksmen situated on rooftops to take you out before you see them. Vehicular enemies won't just drive near you to shoot you, they'll actively try to run you and your squad over if the gunner isn't doing his job properly. Your men may try to scramble out of the way, but there's only so much you can do when a two-ton truck is coming screaming down the street.

The animations are just as awesome as the graphics. Soldiers carry their weapons on their person, and so they will reach around and pull guns and such off their backs when you switch weapons. Squadmates that are positioned on a corner will gesture at you if it's time to move. You can go from running full-speed to crouching via the press of a button and a slick baseball slide, and even all the way down to prone with a face-first dive. Leaping out from behind cover is not the same as leaning out to catch a peek at the enemies, and the Ghosts don't always run with their guns up in the air, *Halo*-style.

GRAW is the total package. An entertaining story, intense gameplay (just wait until you have to hold your position, protect a VIP, and fend off soldiers in a cramped parking garage), and excellent graphics all add up to a monster of a game. It's well worth your sixty bucks.

Rating : 5 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
4.75 of 5

TOP SPIN 2



Publisher : 2K Sports
 Developer : Indie Built
 Release Date : 4/4/2006
 Rating : "E" for Everyone

Genre(s) : Sports
 Category : Tennis
 # of players : 1-4



The players are where the problems start. The character models are well-animated, but sparsely detailed. They're fairly drab and uninteresting. They just aren't up

to par with the rest of the game's graphics, and that's a bad thing. There's enough detail in-game to allow your character to animate differently on the different types of courts, and that's lovely, but it's distracting to see a goofy-looking character in a cinema celebrating a win.



At its heart, though, *Top Spin 2* is pretty fun, and that's what counts. It would've been nice to get character models that are up to par with the rest of 2K Sports's next-gen offerings, but the rest of the game has enough action between the Career mode and Party Games to keep you fulfilled.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
3.75 of 5

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

Indie Built and 2K have done a solid job at their first next gen Tennis effort. It looks great (funky character models aside) and plays even better.



METAL GEAR ACID 2



Publisher : Konami
 Developer : Kojima Productions
 Release Date : 3/29/2006
 Rating : "M" for Mature

Genre(s) : Card-based strategy
 Category : Sneaky espionage
 # of players : 1-2

Snake is back again, because there's never a dull moment in the life of an amnesiac mercenary whose every action is determined by the cards in his hand. Luckily for Snake, everyone else plays under the same restrictions, making *Metal Gear Acid 2* possible.

Acid 2 picks up immediately after the events of the first game, with Snake and friends on a plane trying to sneak into America. Unfortunately things instantly go wrong, with the group captured on arrival and Snake coerced into a mission that seems easy enough to begin with, but rapidly spins out of control. It's *Metal Gear*, after all, so a couple hundred plot twists along the way are necessary.

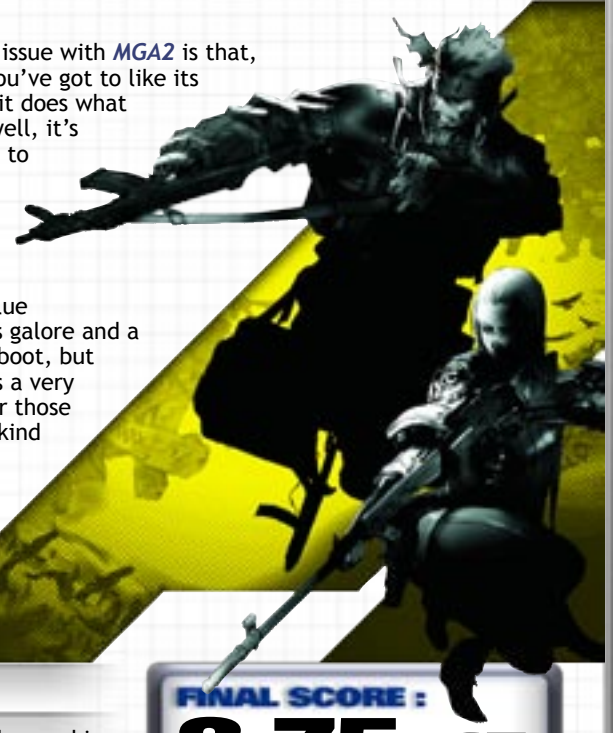
What makes the *Acid* series tick is its card-based mechanics, with almost every action in the game determined by which ones are available at the moment. There are cards for movement bonuses, weapons, reaction, stat adjustment, summoning characters from previous games in the series, and more. Some cards have to be used, others equipped, and some "just happen" when conditions apply. While the cards determine most abilities, certain moves like punching a guard or crawling can be done with just a few button presses.

Using all those cards (hundreds of 'em!) is done in a turn-based fashion, with Snake making two moves and then the guards getting a chance. Up until it's finalized, any move can be taken back unless a weapon is fired or Snake is discovered, and then it's time to live with the consequences. Between each turn, Snake's hand is refilled with two cards drawn randomly from the deck. Putting it all together is a daunting process, even with the included tutorials, but fortunately the first few missions are easy enough that stumbling through isn't really a problem. Getting a good grade on completion will take some practice, though.

Between one mission and the next, there are a variety of options to play with. Upgrading cards to more powerful versions, buying new cards (3 cards per pack or singly) at the card shop, reorganizing the deck either by hand or with the automatic option, and even entering bonus missions in areas already cleared are all available to play with. There are even unlockable movies where cute asian women play with guns in about as gratuitous a fashion as possible, in true 3D thanks to the Solid Eye 3D viewer.

The only real issue with *MGA2* is that, to enjoy it, you've got to like its genre. While it does what it does very well, it's still not going to convert the world to card-based mechanics. There's a lot of play value here, bonuses galore and a 3D viewer to boot, but in the end it's a very good game for those who like this kind of thing.

Rating : 3.5 of 5



2nd opinion by Ashura • Alternate Rating : 4 of 5

Metal Gear Acid 2 improves just about every fault I had with the first game, while also working hard to create its own style and image. Yay for overexposed colors and beautiful artwork.

FINAL SCORE :
3.75 of 5



GENERATION OF CHAOS

Review by Lynxara



Publisher : NIS America
Developer : Idea Factory
Release Date : 2/28/2006
Rating : TEEN
Genre(s) : Strategy
Category : Behold My Army of Scythe-Toting Cat-Persons
of players : 1

There are few good, pure strategy games for any console. Before *Generation of Chaos*, there pretty much weren't any for the PSP. This being said, *Generation of Chaos* is still a very strange game. It's about as far as you can get from the war-sim strategy games that have dominated the genre for the past few years, instead depicting massive battles between fanciful fantasy kingdoms full of anime-style samurai and weird animal-persons.

The gameplay is gleefully, mercilessly slow-paced in a way that most modern strategy titles are desperate to try to avoid. Achieving any major goal requires at least a good hour or so of effort and meticulous planning. You have enormous lists of territories, items, and troops that you can manage in half-a-dozen different ways at any particular time, so you can construct schemes as elaborate as you care to. It can honestly get overwhelming, and a clunky menu interface doesn't help matters.

Fortunately, *Generation of Chaos* is a game that gives you a simple and well-defined goal: use your army to kill things. There are a variety of tactics you can use to approach the killing of things, but ultimately they will result in moving a strong unit toward the enemy commander's fortress and beating the crap out of him or her. This is a nice change of pace from games like the recent *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which offer so many conflicting goals that there ends up being only one style of play that lets you make much progress. *Generation of Chaos* is considerably more flexible, and gameplay features so many randomized factors that you're never quite sure what kind of resources you'll have on hand to get the job done.

GoC is turn-based, and you can only move five units per turn

(but give other sorts of orders as much as you like). You have copious chances to save the game, and it's easy to remember what you were up to if you pick the game up after awhile. The attack animations are a little long, but fortunately you have the option to turn them off to save time. The only really bad thing about *GoC* is that, once you figure out a winning strategy for your troops, gameplay starts to get repetitive. You can beat the game's final bosses with pretty much the same tactics that work against lower-level enemies, and some commanders have abilities that are essentially win buttons.

Still, if this is the sort of thing you're inclined to like, you're going to *really* like it, and there's not much like it out there. You start the game with a choice of two kingdoms to play through the game as, and you'll unlock more as you go. Playing through the game with all ten kingdoms by itself takes around 100 hours of effort, and if you want to play around with Kingdom of Chaos mode and getting all the unlockables, you'll be at it for awhile longer. *GoC* really captures the *Disgaea* spirit of essentially not being over until you're tired of it. It's the kind of game the PSP library desperately needs more of.

Rating : 3.5 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5

2nd opinion by Roger Danish • Alternate Rating : 3.5 of 5

It's about time for a PSP SRPG and *GoC* fits quite nicely. It's got tons of gameplay, wholesome quirkiness, and a good amount of strategy to boot.



Y's

THE ARK OF NAPISHTIM

Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : Konami
Developer : Falcom
Release Date : 2/28/2006
Rating : Everyone 10+ (Fantasy Violence, Language, Use of Alcohol)
Genre(s) : Action / RPG
Category : Old School Awesome
of players : 1

For the sake of this review, let's pretend that there never was a PlayStation 2 version of *The Ark of Napishtim*. Otherwise, I'd have to find a way to say "it's just a port of the PS2 version with some minor tweaks" in five hundred words. If you skipped over the PS2 version of the game, then you couldn't have picked a better time to read up than now.

It's funny to see how quickly the PSP is becoming an RPG machine. It makes sense in that most RPGs lend themselves perfectly to portable play, which is also one of the main reasons why the Gameboy Advance has remained popular for so many years amongst the older crowd. *Y's: The Ark of Napishtim* marks the handheld debut of one of Japan's most cherished brands.

The leap from the TV screen to the PSP was a logical choice for *Y's*. The game already features crisp, beautiful 2D graphics, and hack n' slash friendly gameplay, so virtually nothing has been lost in the port. The PSP version sports some slightly enhanced anime-style character models, which look great, as do the widescreen animated cut scenes.

For those of us old enough to remember the golden days of role-playing games, *Y's* is a shot of old-school goodness. Everything from the classic "Zelda-style" adventuring, to the outdated, yet charming, music format will give you instant nostalgia. As you would expect however, you can't have the good elements of an old school RPG without dragging along some of the bad as

well. Expect some slow-pacing, mildly frustrating trial-and-error boss fights, repeated deaths due to poor difficulty balancing, and who could forget that tried-and-true "what exactly am I supposed to do now" feeling? Also prepare for lots of backtracking to previously explored areas.

An RPG is only as good as its story, and *Y's* is really hit-or-miss in that department. While it does steer clear of some genre clichés, and yet fully embraces others, the story pacing is so slow that it can be hard to stay interested at times. It teases you with interesting little bits of foreshadowing, but then waits long periods of time to give you even the next crumb. If you love the combat system, you'll likely have the patience to continue onward, otherwise you're in for a long 20-30 hour ride.

All-in-all, *Y's* is a decent game, but far from a standout in the genre. It's one of the better RPGs amongst the PSP library, outdone only by Falcom's own *Legend of Heroes*. If you've already played the PS2 version, there is little here to come back for. It has new mini-games, character databases, and unlockable movies and music that can be played in the *Y's* media player, but it's otherwise the same game. I would've much rather seen Konami port *Suikoden I & II* for the PSP instead, but alas, baby steps. This is definitely a worthwhile play-through if the name *Alundra* means anything to you.

Rating : 3 of 5

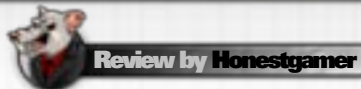
2nd opinion by Lynxara • Alternate Rating : 3 of 5

The graphics are a bit better than the PS2 version, but all the voice acting's been stripped out and the load times are beyond ridiculous. Playable, but not entertaining.

FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5



WARSHIP GUNNER 2



Publisher : Koei
Developer : Micro Cabin
Release Date : 3/22/2006
Rating : TEEN; Mild Language, Violence

Genre(s) : Simulation
Category : Strategy
of players : 1



It's easy to imagine how cool *Warship Gunner 2* might have been with a few modifications. The control scheme, though responsive, suffers from a lack of ingenuity that sometimes feels sluggish. The graphics look like someone spilled sand on a photograph and forgot to clean away the finer grains. Hollywood-style cutscenes are missing in action, with lengthy bits of scrolling text filling in the holes. Menu diving is as common as active combat, and there are enough tutorials to make your head spin. If you can get past all of that, though, the game that lurks beneath is actually addictive!

Naturally, your goal is to save the world from certain destruction. Doing so means coping with all of the aforementioned flaws, but it's not all bad. For every time you press the "X" button thinking it will fire a missile and instead find that you've cycled through menu options, there will come a moment where you're circling an enemy battleship while effortlessly firing depth charges at hostile submarines approaching from below. Each minute spent drifting aimlessly across barren tides is sandwiched between conflicts with ruthless enemies where everyone's firing so many torpedoes and missiles that you're left breathless.

Not all of the action takes place away from the docks, either. On land, a customization system lets you spend your points and funds on new water vessels and technology upgrades. If you like micro-management, you'll love how even the smallest of details are yours to tweak. Is the angle of your cannon fire too severe? Adjust its position and orientation. Do the various engine components seem to be working against one another? Slide your way through a few menus and all is mended. You just have to make sure that you performed well enough in each mission to acquire the wealth and

prestige it takes to fund such extravagant diversions. You can also replay those where you performed poorly to boost your finances.

Even if you're only scraping by and don't feel that you have time for engineering, there's plenty to see thanks to a twisting plot. Dated visuals don't prevent *Warship Gunner 2* from delivering a compelling story, with you thrown right into the middle of it all. Characters are vividly drawn so that you care for them almost immediately. The real-world locations you visit and the events that transpire should also satisfy any alternate history fanatics.

Unfortunately, this terrific depth isn't for everyone. The fact remains that there's more down time than there is anything else. *Warship Gunner 2* is for the patient ones out there who like to take their time and truly master a game's intricacies. Those seeking instant gratification should look elsewhere.

Rating : 3 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
3.25 of 5

2nd opinion by Roger Danish • Alternate Rating : 3.5 of 5

Sure, it's not the prettiest girl on the block, but *Warship Gunner 2* is interesting, entertaining and has a lot of depth and strategy underneath its surface. While not for everyone, this game is perfect for its target audience.



SAMURAI WARRIORS State of War



Publisher : KOEI
Developer : Omega Force
Release Date : 3/7/2006
Rating : "T" for Teen (13+)

Genre(s) : Japan Conquerin'
Category : Action and Strategy
of players : 1-4



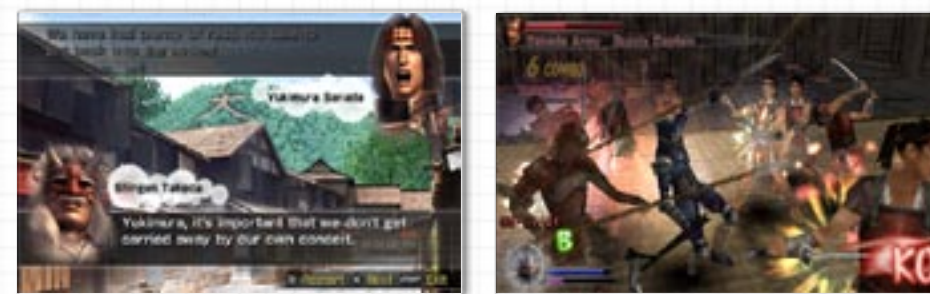
It's really easy to get sick of sequels if you play a lot of video games, but sometimes a sequel or franchise title can come out of nowhere to really surprise you. *Samurai Warriors: State of War* is the game that has done it this time. The PSP's *Samurai Warriors* is one of the best blends of action and strategy Omega Force and Koei have managed in quite some time.

Battles begin with a strategy portion that takes place on a simple grid-based map. Simple icons depict roads, enemies, and major terrain features. You advance your forces so many squares per turn, fighting enemy characters as you go and converting enemy tiles into allied territory. While moving you can use Tactics to achieve goals like breaking down gates and flooding out your enemies, and Charms to heap debilitating effects and damage on your enemies, or heal allies.

When in battle you'll enter a pretty typical *Dynasty Warriors* action sequence, running around and racking up kills with chain combos and Musou special moves. As you win battles you can customize your characters with Skills earned by defeating enemies, which give you new defensive abilities and combo moves. You can bring AI-controlled officers and troops into battle with you, but they generally don't make a whole lot of difference to the battle's outcome. You'll do most of the killing yourself. There's little to no loading time as you move from one map to the other, which makes battles feel fast and varied.

2nd opinion by Roger Danish • Alternate Rating : 4.5 of 5

Koei is one of the few companies that can keep a franchise fresh from one year to the next – and one platform to the next. *Samurai Warriors: SoW* is a great PSP title!



The 3D map areas for the realtime battles are a bit plain, but the character models for *Samurai Warriors* are a vast improvement over the ones from *Dynasty Warriors'* PSP outing. They lack details compared to the PS2 versions of the characters, but still move fluidly and contain plenty of the flamboyant touches that give these games their appeal. There are some minor issues with clipping and collision detection, but they're not too intrusive. If anything it's the 2D sections of the game that feel lacking, as the interface is simple to the point of being utterly plain and boring. The music also completely lacks the kick of the PS2 *Samurai* and *Dynasty Warriors* soundtracks, instead offering up a sharply limited selection of bland techno.

Still, the way this engine integrates strategy and action is frankly superior to what Koei's doing with the *Empires* series on the consoles, and absolutely perfect for portable gaming. You never do any one thing in Story Mode long enough to get tired of it, and while you can quickly unlock all of the characters, unlocking all of the game's 230 weapons and officers will keep you occupied a lot longer. *Samurai Warriors* supports multiplayer for up to four players at once, but the games are a bit shallow to have lasting appeal. The real draw of this game is going to be in the single-player campaign, and that totally delivers. If you've been looking for a fast, player-friendly action game for your PSP, then look no further.

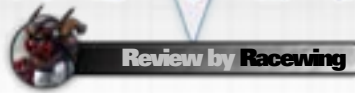
Rating : 4 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
4.25 of 5



Suikoden

幻想水滸伝



Publisher : Konami
Developer : Konami
Release Date : 3/28/2006
Rating : TEEN; Mild Language, Partial Nudity, Use of Alcohol, Violence

Genre(s) : RPG
Category : Apology for Suikoden IV
of players : 1

Let's get this out of the way: *Suikoden V* contains above-average visuals at best. Its soundtrack, while catchy, is certainly neither profound nor moving. Its voice acting... is actually pretty awesome, especially given the large cast. Still, it's a lone standout in an otherwise merely serviceable presentation.

Simply put, it'll be all too easy for this game to get lost in the sea of astronomical polygon counts, cinema sequences, fantasy franchise crossovers, and renowned Japanese composers that make up this spring's RPG onslaught. It stands in the midst of everything, as a pillar of modesty. Note, however, that I said "modesty," not "mediocrity."

Even with the franchise's current low stock, *Suikoden* wants you back, and it's easy to see how badly. For those of us who've been pining all these years for a next-generation *Suikoden II*, Konami's finally given it to us, right down to the return and enhancement of the six-person battle system.

Substance over style is the name of this game. You can recruit or otherwise run across 108 characters, while you involve yourself in a political drama that spans countries. The story, strangely enough, centers around the prince of a matriarchy, who has no power of his own until he's forced to fight the corruption of kings, nobles, and feuding armies. You'll spend countless hours rounding up everyone you can, taking advantage of their skills, and eventually building up your own territory with a central castle. None of these characters are throwaways, either; they each have their own intertwining stories such that hardly anyone will be lost in your mind even though you've got over a hundred folks to keep track of.

Outside of its budget appearance, there are few complaints. There's

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

2nd opinion by Wanderer • Alternate Rating : 4 of 5

It shatters *Valkyrie Profile's* record for time between game start and game play and it has the girliest hero yet, but *Suikoden V* is still the best *Suikoden* since *II*. Get it before it gets rare.



load time, though it's nowhere near as bad as *IV*, and the encounter rate's a bit high. However, the biggest gripe that most people will have with the game is that it holds your hand for too long at the beginning. For the first three hours, you'll meet about forty characters, get into roughly five fights, and never, ever see a map screen. The game spends an enormous amount of time setting up its world and character backstories; in some ways, it's to be respected, but one has to wonder how much exposition is too much.

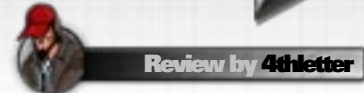
Once the storyline picks up, though, get ready to be a zombie in front of your television. The story has enough red herrings to trip up even the most jaded JRPG players, including the *Suikoden* fans among them, who think they know exactly what will happen next.

Suikoden V isn't the flashiest game in the world, but it's one of the meatiest, and it deserves your playtime just as much as this spring's graphical tour-de-forces. *Suikoden's* been down for a while, but with this installment, has just narrowly averted its own demise in a fit of old-school fun. (Take that, *Radiata Stories*.)

Rating : 4 of 5



The Outfit



Publisher : THQ
Developer : Relic
Release Date : 3/13/2006
Rating : "M" for Mature (Blood, Gore, Language, Violence)

Genre(s) : Third-Person Action
Category : Property Damage
of players : 1-8



You know, I really hate saying this kind of thing, but *The Outfit* walks in the same shoes as last year's *Mercenaries*. The gimmick of "Destruction on Demand" is even very similar. I'm sure that I'm not the only one that thought it was a sequel (prequel?) at first glance. The problem is, though, that it doesn't quite fill *Mercenaries's* combat boots.

Don't think that I find *The Outfit* disappointing because it's not *Mercenaries*. It's disappointing for a whole host of other reasons. We were promised the ability to call in various weapons of small-to-mid destruction to wreak havoc on the Nazi hordes and level entire towns. That's made it through intact. Sadly, it's also come through with a host of tedious and baffling gameplay additions.

Imagine, if you will, being in the middle of a heavy firefight when you receive a notice that Nazis are air-dropping near a friendly armory. You're ordered to get there before it's too late and take them out. Your current battle takes a few minutes longer as you frantically mop up the soldiers, and then you rush to the armory... only to see the parachuted-in Nazi soldiers just kind of chilling out around the armory, doing nothing in particular. They have control of it, which may or may not prevent you from calling down a new weapon, but that's where it stops.

This kind of enemy AI is plainly visible throughout *The Outfit*. Enemy tactics amount to "See enemy, shoot at him or his squad with whatever is available." There's no flanking, no running for cover, nothing. You can shoot a vehicle out from under a person and go to destroy the rest of his buddies, and he'll still be standing there, right where you left him, when you come back. Try tossing a grenade into the middle of a group of enemies. One or two fall down in flames, but the rest will apparently dodge somehow and keep coming at you. A tank shot into a group of enemies will knock them down, but then they'll hop up and, you guessed it, keep coming. You have tons of weaponry available, but they aren't really worth anything. Shots that should have taken off an enemy's head don't even

make them stop firing blindly at you. The Destruction on Demand is an interesting feature, but it feels clunky in execution. Having to manage ordering enemies and fighting at the same time is novel, but if you accidentally hit the menu button while you're in combat, you have to hit an entire different button to cancel out of the menu. It would've been nice to have a toggled menu with one button rather than the way it's set up now.

On the plus side, *The Outfit* is fun to look at. Explosions are appropriately flashy and the towns are well-detailed. Objects tend to break apart into geometric pieces a little too often, but it's still fun to watch. It's just that it isn't very fun to play. The ridiculous and extremely linear gameplay sets it up for the fall, and fall it does. Give it a try if you've got no other choice,



2nd opinion by Lynxara • Alternate Rating : 3 of 5

A poor man's *Mercenaries* for a rich man's system. A decent mindless distraction at best.

FINAL SCORE :
2.75 of 5



NBA Ballers Phenom

Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : Midway Games
Developer : Midway Games - Chicago
Release Date : 4/5/2006
Rating : EVERYONE; Mild Violence
Genre(s) : Sports
Category : Street Basketball
of players : 1-2;
Online Multiplayer

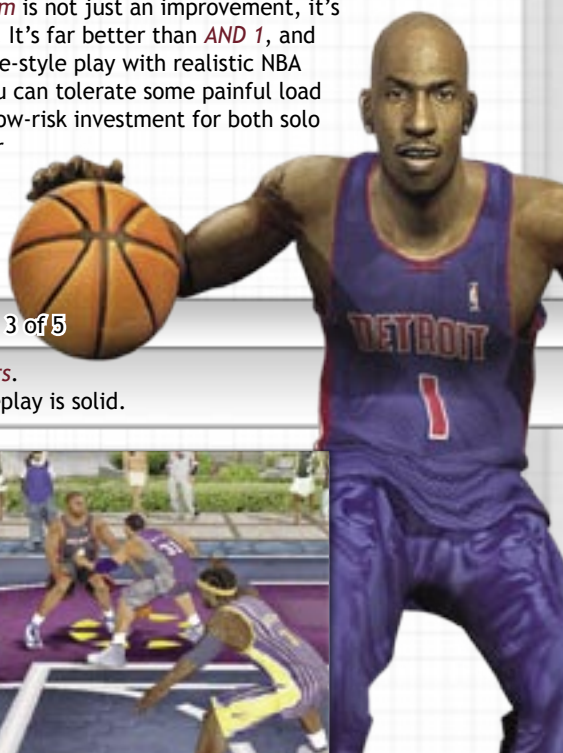


The series' core gameplay has also improved. At first, the controls feel almost too simplistic, but after taking some time to learn all of its hidden secrets, you'll get the most out of your player's controls. It took losing several times before I finally grasped all the cool tricks you could pull off to work over your opponents. As opposed to EA's "trick stick," Phenom uses three "juice" buttons that can affect your shot, steal, and block performance. Finally, a game where the practice mode is actually useful!

All of the flashy goodness comes at a price, however. I hope that you love loading screens, because you're going to see a lot of ultra-lengthy ones. I couldn't quite go to the kitchen and make a sandwich, but I was able to pour a glass of ice water and come back to find my game still loading. Some more mini-games would've also been appreciated. A game like this is ripe for a 3-point shootout, a slam dunk contest, or a game of Horse at the very least. The Shootout competition contained within Phenom is pretty lame, sadly.

In conclusion, Phenom is not just an improvement, it's a bonafide successor. It's far better than AND 1, and the balance of arcade-style play with realistic NBA play is spot on. If you can tolerate some painful load times, Phenom is a low-risk investment for both solo fun, and against your buddies.

Rating : 3.5 of 5



It's pretty safe to say that not even Midway themselves expected the original NBA Ballers to become the major hit that it was. It would've been easy to crank out another version in less than a year to cash in on a sequel too. Only, they didn't. Even with this humongous cash cow at their disposal, they stuck to their strategy of staggering their sports franchises. So was NBA Ballers Phenom worth the wait?

Despite its meteoric sales, the original NBA Ballers was nothing special. That is even more evident after playing just a few minutes of Phenom. The presentation is top-notch, and the cut scenes are well-directed. The voice acting, as a whole, is also well done, and even the mediocre voice work is at least tolerable. It's also worth noting that the soundtrack is chock full of enough exclusive hip-hop tracks to keep 4thletter buried under his headphones for weeks.

The biggest improvement to this installment though is easily the rewarding single-player story mode. Phenom puts you into the sneakers of a young, up-and-coming street baller whose best friend sold him out for his own personal fame and fortune. With the NBA Finals in town, and revenge on your mind, you've got to get out on the courts and prove to the NBA scouts that you've still got what it takes to be the man.

You can create your baller from a variety of options, though the creation tool is nowhere near as deep as you're accustomed to seeing. Luckily, the story mode is plenty deep enough to make up for it. You'll easily rack up loads of play time as you enter various tournaments to win money, increase your street ranking, unlock new baller moves, upgrade your crib, and eventually make your way to the NBA.

FINAL SCORE :
3.25 of 5

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

This is heads and shoulders above the last NBA Ballers. The commentary could use some work, but the gameplay is solid.



HAVEN CITY GAZETTE

DAILY 35¢

BUGS INFEST CITY CENTER!

DAXTER CALLS FOR HELP TO STOP THIS SWARM OF ANGRY INSECTS

Find hidden bugs to earn points at Luv2Game.com for prizes and gear.



THE DAXINATOR: "Let the bug hunt begin!"

As Haven City is overrun with a nasty swarm of oversized arthropods, the city's top exterminator is asking everyone to help "smack 'em down good."

Daxter, aka The Daxtinator, was in his lab testing a new bug potion when a squirming mass of vengeful insectoids escaped his "flyswatter of fury." He called for "an all-out war on bugs," and asks that "bug haters everywhere" take action immediately.

Luckily, Daxter was able to tag each bug with its own ID number before they escaped. Anyone who sees one of these bugs online or in Hardcore Gamer Magazine should immediately:

- Login or register at Luv2Game.com
- Click the "Daxter Bug Hunt" link
- To squash a bug, answer the challenge with the correct ID #



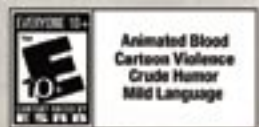
The first of many sickening spiders.

HAVEN CITY SUES DAXTER FOR BUG INFESTATION

... filed a massive class action lawsuit against The Daxtinator, after a lab accident caused a bugs to infest the downtown area. The lawsuit, City v. Daxter the Ottsel, seeks damages to the billion zillion dollars." - Continued A2



Luv2Game website for details and rules. When asked whether he's responsible for the infestation, since he let them escape, Daxter responded, "Well, I, um... look out, a bear!" then ran in the opposite direction. There was no bear.



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PURSUIT FORCE



Review by James



Publisher : SCEA
 Developer : BigBig Studios
 Release Date : 3/7/2006
 Rating : TEEN; Mild Language, Suggestive Themes, Violence

Genre(s) : Driving
 Category : Shooting and Jumping
 # of players : 1

One of the nice things about game design is that it's okay to be stupid so long as the action is fun. For proof let me introduce SCEA's Pursuit Force, a game about leaping from car to car while shooting baddies in mid-jump. Ridiculous, impractical, and entertaining as hell when it comes together.

Capital City is awash in crime, and after years of battling it ineffectually, the Pursuit Force is ready to put an end to it once and for all. You play a rookie cop working his way up the ranks by killing any scumbag in his way, serving justice with a foot on the gas and a gun in your hand. Every cliché in the book is gleefully trotted out for Pursuit Force's back story, including the gravel-voiced police chief who's seen it all.

It's all just a cheap excuse to drive, shoot, and leap through the air. Starting off racing down the road with little more than a police car and a popgun pistol, our nameless hero quickly runs across gun-toting bad guys. Driving close to them allows him to leap onto their car and engage them in a shootout from hood, trunk, or roof. Shooting everyone lets him take over the car, get a better gun and fill up the Justice Bar for even greater feats of derring-do. Once full, a bullet time effect takes place when leaping from one car to another, allowing the targeting of the criminal scum from mid-air. Stupid? Oh yes, wonderfully so.

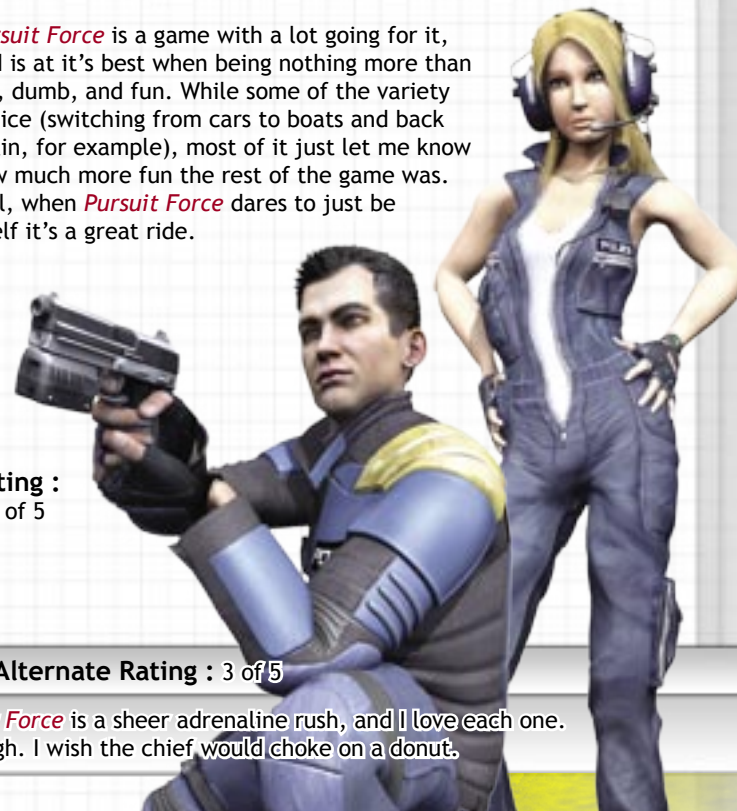
Pursuit Force is at its best when missions concentrate on that central game mechanic, but frequently loses its way by trying something different. There are on-foot missions, for example, that seem tacked on more for the sake of being there than any other reason. Sometimes it's also necessary to nurse a car from the start of a mission to the end, sacrificing the fun of switching

cars for the responsibilities of the dreaded escort mission. Someone, somewhere must like escort missions, and I wish they'd cut it out.

In addition to the main mode, Pursuit Force also comes equipped with time attack and race modes. While putting them in is a nice thought, once again the most fun part of the game is abandoned in the name of variety. Extras are best when they enhance a game, not just exist beside it.

Pursuit Force is a game with a lot going for it, and is at its best when being nothing more than big, dumb, and fun. While some of the variety is nice (switching from cars to boats and back again, for example), most of it just let me know how much more fun the rest of the game was. Still, when Pursuit Force dares to just be itself it's a great ride.

Rating : 3.5 of 5



2nd opinion by Honestgamer • Alternate Rating : 3 of 5

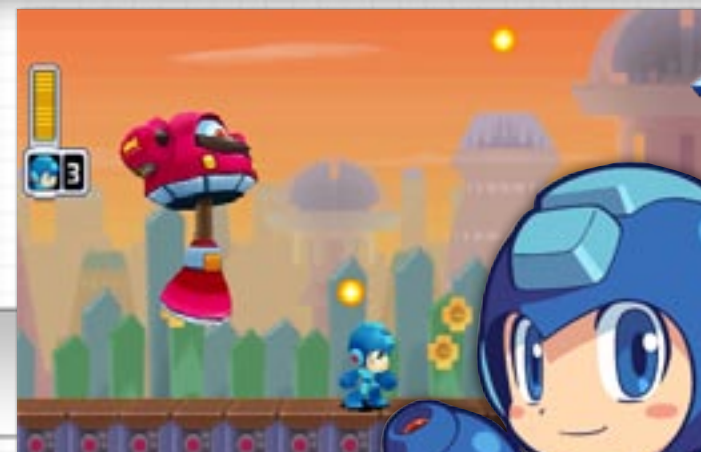
There are moments where Pursuit Force is a sheer adrenaline rush, and I love each one. Some parts just need to die, though. I wish the chief would choke on a donut.



MEGA MAN POWERED UP



Review by James



Publisher : Capcom
 Developer : Capcom
 Release Date : 3/15/2006
 Rating : "E" for Everyone

Genre(s) : Side-scrolling Shooter
 Category : Bomber, Blue
 # of players : 1

As time goes by and the years dissolve, age takes its toll on far too many things. Games that were cool become cheesy and dated, but there will always be some that stand the test of time. The original NES Mega Man is one of those games, and Capcom's updating of it in Mega Man Powered Up enhances it in every way.

The gameplay should be familiar to everyone. Mega Man runs around 2D levels with 3D graphics, presented in the classic side-view, shooting his way to a boss. Beat the boss, get a new weapon, figure out which of the remaining stages it will be most effective in, repeat. Also present is the original difficulty level, leading to the classic cycle of die, swear, die again, swear louder. Mega Man has never been an easy game, and the original levels are cruel but fair from the very beginning.

In addition to the straight Mega Man remake, Powered Up also includes a remixed version of the game. Included is a somewhat painfully voice-acted story, a selectable difficulty, and levels designed to be re-explored when new weapons are earned. Each level has multiple chips hidden in it that unlock new features in the level editor, such as monsters, obstacles, or even the ability to play as a different character in the main game. Most of the chips can only be gotten when the path is cleared using the proper tool for the job, and it's a fun incentive to go back and give a familiar level another run-through.

Capcom's also included a hundred challenge levels. Jumping puzzles, boss fights, timed runs and more provide bite-sized challenges aside from the two main games. On top of that, an

editor is available so users can not only create their own levels but upload them to Capcom's servers and share them with the world. Unfortunately that last bit had to go untested, but seeing what users can create promises to bring a major chunk of longevity to a game that wasn't short on it in the first place.

About the only real issue with the game is a bit of slowdown now and then when the screen fills up with action. While the graphics are vibrant, with well-defined critters and sharp textures all around, the PSP buckles under the load now and then. It's more of a mild annoyance than any kind of major flaw, but when timing and precision are called for, anything that can throw it off is highly unwelcome.

Still, it takes a lot of looking to find anything wrong. The level design is solid, bosses are fun to fight, and plenty of extras keep the game alive long after the first run-through. It's a fantastic remake of the original Mega Man, and a worthy game for just about anyone.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

2nd opinion by honestgamer • Alternate Rating : 4.5 of 5

The Mega Man games have been fading lately, but this is a good reminder of what made us play them in the first place. A lot of care went into this. I'm in love and ready for the sequel!



FINAL SCORE : 4.5 of 5

REVIEW METAL SAGA

PlayStation.2

Publisher : Atlus
 Developer : Success
 Release Date : 3/28/2006
 Rating : Rating Pending

Review by **Metalbot**

Genre(s) : RPG
 Category : Post-Apocalyptic
 # of players : 1

The first US outing of the *Metal Max* series from Japan, *Metal Saga* doesn't pretend to be anything that it's not. You won't find a deep story here. You won't even find deep characters! What you will find is a light RPG that is a good deal of fun.

Based in a post-apocalyptic world where humans are the minority and robotic "outlaws" are the majority, *MS* is a cross between *Mad Max*, *Desert Storm*, and a Western movie. With a story so shallow and overdone, *MS* makes fun of itself and the RPG genre every chance it gets. For example, there is a boss named Mad Maxwell, and the text that is generic in most RPGs (i.e. save text, etc.) is often times silly and downright odd. This keeps things fresh and entertaining! The story progression is incredibly non-linear. This is confusing at first, since most RPGs spell out your every move for you. Once you realize there is no one single story arc that must be followed, you'll warm up to the idea of just playing and letting the story happen as it happens. This is a laid-back and much-needed, approach to a genre that is all about getting to the next story sequence.

As a hunter, your job is to rid the planet of robotic "outlaws." Tanks are your weapons of choice, and boy, are they fun to kill stuff with! You can still fight on foot, and you'll sometimes have to, but given the choice you will use a tank. After years of random battle abuse, there is nothing more satisfying than putting a 80mm shell into the face of a low-level baddy. The meat of this game is customizing your tanks by adding new weapons, changing the paint job, and making custom decals.

However, a few things detract from all of this freshness. The load times are often painfully long, especially when entering a building



in town. The random battles are not frequent enough, which makes leveling up somewhat of a chore. Lastly, the price may be too steep. For \$50 you could buy a nice meaty RPG. If that's more your style, wait until *MS* hits \$20, then definitely pick it up.

Compared to today's RPGs, *Metal Saga* is fairly generic. The story is shallow, the characters are cookie cutter, the graphics are bland, and the battle system is 8-bit simple. Once you realize that this isn't meant to be one of today's games, you may just enjoy this nifty little adventure.

Rating : 3 of 5



FINAL SCORE : **2.5** of 5

2nd opinion by Sardius • Alternate Rating : 2 of 5

Metal Saga's simplistic graphics and gameplay remind me of early Dreamcast RPGs. I hate early Dreamcast RPGs. The satirical dialogue is fun, but otherwise...no.



PlayStation.2

REVIEW STEAMBOT CHRONICLES

Review by **Lynxara**

Publisher : ATLUS
 Developer : IREM
 Release Date : 5/23/2006
 Rating : "RP" - Rating Pending

Genre(s) : Simulation
 Category : Bumping, Trotting
 # of players : 1



Steambot Chronicles is the sort of thing that should be hard to dislike: a non-linear, feel-good RPG where you can build your own mecha, join a band, and get yourself involved in all kinds of crazy money-making ventures. Unfortunately, it's hard to enjoy a game about doing random things when all of your options are really kind of dull. It's not a case of the concept being "boring," either, as there are plenty of sims like *Harvest Moon* or *The Sims* that make completely banal subjects pretty entertaining. *Steambot Chronicles* has some truly admirable game design ideas, but the final product just doesn't work.

The big problem with the game is that it takes way too long to get to the portions that are actually free-form, and often what you can control isn't particularly interesting. You spend much of the early game rigidly on rails, and these portions of the game aren't in the least bit interesting. You mostly spend them kicking around small towns performing minor services for various townspeople and annoying a dreadfully uninteresting group of bandits called the Killer Elephants (who you can later join if you like). You travel through the world with the aid of a steampunk mecha called a Trotmobile, doing whatever comes up to earn money and practicing songs on the various instruments you collect. You can use your Trot for performing heavy labor, dungeon crawling, or just running around on fetch quests. Only about half of these activities are any fun, owing to the Trots having one of the absolute



worst control schemes ever devised and a massively ill-advised camera system layered on top of that. Trying to control your Trot involves using no less than seven buttons, often as many as four of them simultaneously, and there's no direct camera controls short of entering a first-person view mode where you can't move. Good luck trying to get through a fight with the camera pointed anywhere useful the whole way through.



When you talk to people you can pick your responses, and in some cases all of your conversation options are voiced. Unfortunately, not all of them have any real effect on what happens in the game's story, and not all of the voice acting is actually worth listening to. There's some impressive musical sequences with singing, but otherwise the dialogue has a choppy sound that doesn't really feel like people having a conversation. The graphics are equally choppy, as there is not even an attempt to give the characters much in the way of body language or expression. It's sort of like *The Sims* graphics, only going down a step from "utilitarian" to "actively unattractive."

Steambot Chronicles was clearly supposed to be a game about exploring a fantastic world full of adventures, getting to make your own choices and seeing how they turn out. The problem is that none of the choices you make feel terribly important, and getting anywhere you want to go is an exercise in annoyance and irritation. It's not impossible to have fun with this game, but you'd really have to love weirdness and nonlinearity for its own sake to get much out of it. If you're just in the market for a quirky sim, then there are dozens of superior titles already out there for you to play.

Rating : 2.5 of 5

2nd opinion by 4thletter • Alternate Rating : 2.5 of 5

Talk about wasted potential. A cool steampunk setting, neat design... and lackluster gameplay. Thanks, but no thanks.

FINAL SCORE : **2.5** of 5



REVIEW

MLB 06 THE SHOW

PlayStation 2



Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : Sony Computer Entertainment
 Developer : SCE Studios San Diego
 Release Date : 2/28/2006
 Rating : EVERYONE

Genre(s) : Sports
 Category : Baseball
 # of players : 1-2;
 Online Multiplayer

Admit it: if you're a fan of baseball games, you were more than a little pissed off that the NFL license war between EA and 2K Sports had to involve the MLB license as a measure of retaliation. Not to discount the 2K series, but MVP was certainly delivering a consistently improved product each year. Now, with EA out of the picture, that just leaves Sony to contend with 2K Sports for the PS2 major league crown this year.

You have to give Sony a lot of credit. They did exactly what any other developer would've done in the same situation: study what EA did right, and steal as much of it as possible to make their game look better. In the end, they got it about half right. The menus and gameplay options are straight out of EA's playbook, but Sony was able to add their own familiar touches as well. The new three-man commentary team does a very convincing job of calling the action, and the sheer amount of recorded dialogue and phrases is stellar. It's so thorough, in fact, that the commentators will make references to what a player did in the 1st inning, even if the game is in the bottom of the 9th.

Where Sony really sets itself apart with this installment is in the presentation. Not since the days of 3DO's *High Heat* series has a baseball game come this close to encapsulating the experience of watching a real game on TV. That's especially impressive considering that they did it all without having to rely on additional assets, such as an ESPN license. Though you may wind up skipping them over time, the first time you see the detailed pre-game introductions is a jaw-dropping experience.

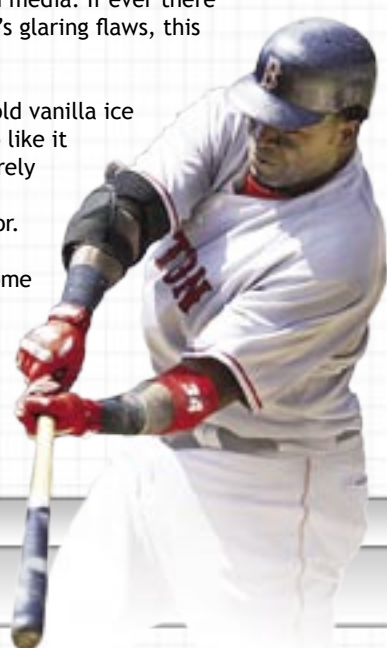
However, what hurts *MLB 06* the most is the same thing that has plagued the series since the dawning of the PS2: it simply refuses

to adapt to the changing times and technology. It looks and feels extremely dated, which to be blunt, is to say that it's graphically on par with the games that released at the PS2's launch over five years ago. If it was just limited to the graphics and textures, the problem could be easily overlooked, but then there's also the unbalanced hitting physics, and wonky pitching mechanics to contend with, making this game's flaws overall hard to stomach.

It's too bad, really, because *The Show* has, yet again, a lot of promise and several enticing game modes that up the replay value significantly. Of particular interest to baseball nuts is the new Career Mode, which is the equivalent to *Madden NFL 06's* Superstar Mode. Build your created player up from the minor leagues to a successful career in the big league through training, and managing his interaction with the staff and media. If ever there was a reason to ignore the game's glaring flaws, this mode is it.

Simply put, *MLB 06* is like plain old vanilla ice cream: some people are going to like it as is, but the majority will be sorely missing the chocolate sauce and sprinkles that spruce up the flavor. Instead of playing *The Show*, I recommend a cozy evening at home watching the big league classic film *Major League* as a means of passing the time until *MLB 2K6* comes out.

Rating : 2.5 of 5



2nd opinion by 4thletter • Alternate Rating : 2.5 of 5

The Show is far from perfect, but it's still a fun game. It just needs more polish.



REVIEW

PlayStation 2 XBOX 360 PSP



Review by Shoegazer

FIFA Street 2

Publisher : Electronic Arts
 Developer : EA Canada
 Release Date : 2/28/2006
 Rating : "E" for Everyone

Genre(s) : Arcade Sports
 Category : Soccer/Futbol
 # of players : 1-4

If there is one thing that can be said about EA's *Street* series, it's that the games are constantly improving. With each iteration, the series seems to be creeping ever so close to recapturing the fun factor that made sports games so memorable back in the good ole' days. *NFL Street 2* is by far the most solid experience to be had in this series, so it should come as no surprise that *FIFA Street 2* borrows directly from it.

As you would expect from an arcade-style game, *FIFA Street 2* is easily accessible right from the moment you press the power button. The sleek "Need For Speed-ish" styled menus are simple to navigate, and will get you into actual gameplay quickly. Even if you dive right away into the Creation Zone, you'll find that customizing characters, teams, and tricks are both effortless and fun.

The beauty of *FIFA Street 2* is that it doesn't require any knowledge of soccer to be enjoyable. That's not to say that it's too easy for soccer pros, because there is certainly a degree of both depth and skill required to be successful. That said, the vastly improved controls are thorough, but laid out in user-friendly fashion. Just the very basic concept of a one-timer is enough to get you scoring goals until you can uncover some of that aforementioned depth. Unlike its FIFA brethren, *Street* is all about the high-scoring, grandstanding, and fancy footwork skills. So fear not the red card, and go slide tackle the hell out of some wanna-be Freddy Adu scrubs!

To get the most enjoyment out of this one though, you've got to rule the streets. By starting a new game, you'll first create your player through a variety of options and participate in various KickABOUTs (the soccer version

of a pick-up game) around the world. Winning these games nets you extra skill points to build up your character, but you can also unlock new tricks, as well as improve your player rating. A higher player rating means that you can eventually lead your own team, and recruit other players to build the best street soccer team in the world. It's a dam good thing that this mode is so much fun too, because this is where the bulk of the game resides. The mini-games are fun too, but nothing more than a temporary distraction. There are a huge helping of unlockables to be had as well, such as additional venues, clothing, and accessories.

This is normally the part of the review where after I've pointed out all of the good qualities about a game, I move on to the bad. However, there really isn't much to complain about with *FIFA Street 2*. It's not a must-have, but it is incredibly solid. Given last year's debut which had spark, but no fire, it's nice to see a formal budget given to the talented crew at EA Canada to make a better title. Their development cycle was longer, and the result is a satisfying title that you really can't go wrong with whether you like soccer or not. Imagine that: a budget AND a longer development cycle equating to a better game? That's almost crazy enough to work! Good thinking EA!

Rating : 3.5 of 5



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

This is a big improvement over the original, but not quite up to par with the rest of the *Street* games. It's worth at least a cursory look.



FINAL SCORE : 3.25 of 5

SPACE RANGERS 2



Review by KouAidou

Publisher : Cinemaware Marquee
Developer : Elemental Games
Release Date : 3/2006
Rating : TEEN

Genre(s) : EVERYTHING
Category : Space Exploration
of players : 1



Space Rangers 2 was developed in Russia, and Russia is probably the only place in the world where it could have been made. With the professional industries in the US and Japan happy to work within comfortable genre constraints, you need to be a little company in an unproven nation to take a chance. If you just want to buckle down and make something totally flippin' off-the-wall crazy, I guess, you just have to make it in Russia.

This game simply defies description. Try to imagine *Star Control 2* wrapped up with *Pirates!* and *Master of Orion*, then add in some *Starcraft*, some *Asteroids*, and then hey, what the heck, how about a little *Oregon Trail*? If you can believe it, that's just the start.

The five sentient races of the galaxy have kept an uneasy peace for centuries, but recently, a robotic race known as the Dominators has appeared, hellbent on destroying life as we know it. As a member of the Space Ranger corps, a sort of intergalactic privateer organization, your eventual goals will involve quelling Dominator threats, liberating star systems under their control, and gathering materials to help the galaxy's scientists find a permanent solution to the conflict. Before you can really make a difference, though, you need to make a name for yourself. That's where the main game comes in.

The main game, I can say, is third-person, turn-based, and involves commanding a spaceship to travel between systems and perform various tasks; nothing unusual there. It's in the scope of these activities where words fail. As a ranger in this thriving universe, you can take the role of a mercenary, a merchant, a pirate, a policeman, a researcher, a soldier, a commander, or any combination of these things; it all comes down to how you want to play the game. While you're spending time in one system, another is taken over; criminals

are arrested, governments are overthrown, the balance of power shifts. Become famous enough, and you'll start to see your name in the news briefings. The universe is huge, vibrant, alive. You're a part of it. It *breathes*.

Genre mixing comes into play as you get deeper into the game. Take a mission on a planet, and you could find yourself in an RTS or an old-school text adventure, struggling to recall your high school algebra. Head into a black hole, and you'll have to defend yourself in an old-fashioned arcade shoot-em-up, because—and seriously, this is the explanation the game offers—physics in a black hole are different from those in regular space. These elements all have pretty slick interfaces and a surprising amount of depth, even reflecting your status in the main game. The text adventure missions, in particular, really shine, demonstrating the wonderfully tongue-in-cheek humor of fans making games for fans.

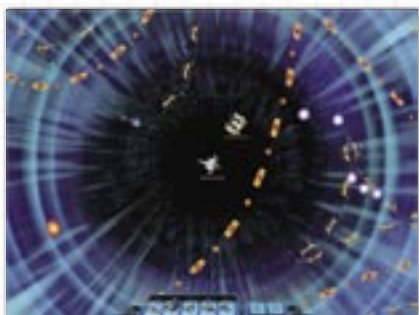
Space Rangers 2 is a great game, but its lack of convenient genre tags and big-name franchise backing will result in its getting shifted to the back shelf of the GameStop within five minutes of its arrival. Don't let it pass you by.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

2nd opinion by Metalbolt • Alternate Rating : 4.5 of 5

If you enjoy the likes of *Freelancer*, *Master of Orion*, and *Hegemonia* you need *SR2*. Yes, it's *that* kind of addictive!

FINAL SCORE :
4.5 of 5



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Reviews by Mogis

Digital Innovations Game Doctor Advance CD Restorer/Cleaner

• Scratch Remover • System: Multi-Platform • Price: \$29.99

There are few sounds gamers dread more than the telltale chug of a console trying to load a scratched disc. In the past scratches could turn a game into a useless piece of plastic, but today the Game Doctor can breathe new life into wounded titles.

The system works by skimming a thin layer of plastic from a CD's surface, making it perfectly smooth again. While severe gouges can't be helped, everyday scratches are removed with ease. The Doctor works on more than just games, and can repair DVDs and music CDs as well. On the downside, the buffer eventually has to be replaced, but will repair 50 discs before it's worn out.

Scratches can happen to even the most careful people, so the Game Doctor is a great thing to have on call. It'll definitely provide peace of mind, and may even be able to reunite you with some of your old, scratched favorites.

Features:
Fixes scratches that can cause, skips, freeze, and fail to play
Vertical Disc Loading
Repairs all types of CD based media



Mad Catz Blaster

• Light Gun • System: Xbox • Price: \$29.99

Light guns have been a staple of game consoles for as long as the industry has existed, but the genre has become more and more niche over the years. That didn't stop Mad Catz from releasing the Xbox Blaster for diehard shooter fans. The gun has some good things going for it, like sharp accuracy, decent rumble feedback, and an extra long cord.

Unfortunately the Blaster has an Achilles' heel that overshadows nearly all its positive qualities: a single, poorly placed reload button. It's located on the gun's handle, and is nearly impossible to avoid during an intense firefight. This accidental pressing gets to be really frustrating, and causes a lot of unnecessary deaths.

Another downer is the lack of software support. There are only a few compatible games on the system, and none of them are must-play titles. If you're looking for a shooter fix, save some money and try to track down an arcade instead.

Features:
Auto Fire, Reload, Shotgun, and Burst Modes
Vibration
Rubber Grip
Memory Card Slot



Nyko Pocket Case

• Game Case • System: PSP • Price: \$7.99

Features:
Hard Plastic Shell
Stores 3 UMD Cartridges
Fits Easily Into a Pocket
Spring-Loaded

The Nyko Pocket Case is a great option for gamers who frequently take their PSP out of the house. It lets you carry three spare UMDs while on the move, and slides right into normal-sized pockets. The case is spring-loaded for easy access, and its sleek pod shape is made out of a hard, sturdy plastic.

While there are other cases on the market that carry more games, the Pocket Case is the most durable and portable. It's a no-brainer for gamers who cringe at the thought of a loose UMD floating round a lint-filled pocket.

Datel Extended Life Battery

• Battery • System: Nintendo DS • Price: \$9.99

Features:
20 Hours of Play Time Per Charge
Lithium Ion Battery

The premise of the Extended Life Battery sounds great on paper: a lithium ion pack that lasts up to twenty hours on a single charge. Sadly, it's bogged down by a slew of drawbacks that will have you switching back to the original battery in no time flat.

First of all, the pack juts far out of the system's base, but only on one side. As a result the DS becomes completely asymmetrical, making it awkward to hold and control.

To add insult to injury, the battery's girth prevents the DS from fitting into most protective cases. The Extended Life Battery has very few redeeming qualities and should be avoided like the plague.



Bensussen, Deutsch, and Associates GBA Micro Sox

• System Protector • System: Game Boy Micro • Price: \$9.99 (\$4.99 Gamestop)

Features:
Custom Fitted for the Game Boy Micro
Includes three colors: Blue, Red, Gray

The inside of a pocket can be a dangerous place for a portable gaming system. It's like a minefield of loose change and car keys that can do a number on a screen or paintjob. This poses a problem for the Game Boy Micro, which was designed to tag along with gamers wherever they go.

A bulky case defeats the system's whole purpose, so the GBA Micro Sox are one of the best protective options out there. They fit snugly around the handheld, and add virtually no extra bulk to clutter pockets.

The package comes with three different, high-quality Sox. These days they can be picked up for as low as \$4.99, and will save you the embarrassment of pulling out a musty tube sock when you're gaming in public.



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 www.luv2game.com 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.

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.

HGM PICK!



Title : Dead or Alive 4!
Artist : D. Miner
Age : 27
Location : Oregon



Title : Maya from Septerra Core
Artist : Aaron Millsaps
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Gainesville, FL



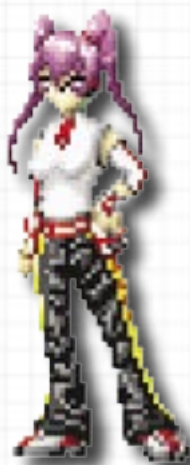
Title : Battle of the Giants
Artist : Richard Ramirez
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Undisclosed



Title : Easter Face
Artist : Douglas De Guzman
Age : 22
Location : Las Vegas, NV



Title : Chun li
Artist : Jason Durden
Age : 31
Location : Wooster, OH



Title : Celica
Artist : Trick2
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Minnetonka, MN



Title : Leon
Artist : Weskershouse
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Aurora, CO



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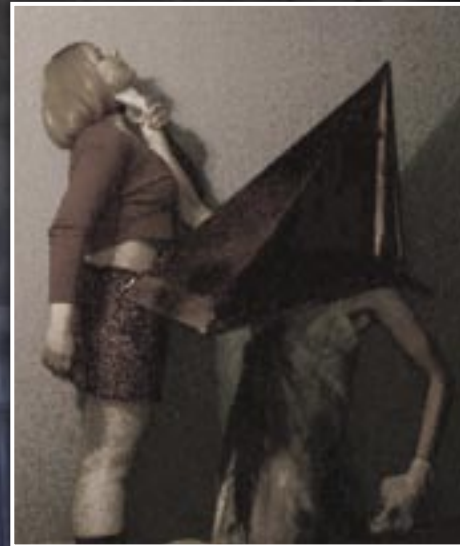
Cos-play (kos-plä) v. A combination of the words costume and play. People known as "cosplayers" dress up as their favorite characters from anime movies, and video games.

SILENT HILL: THE ROOM



by Metalb0k

Here's one of the most hardcore cosplayers we have ever seen. Steven Yount loves *Silent Hill* so much that he not only cosplays Pyramid Head, he also built a Blue Creek Apartment set! Constructed of mainly plywood, a bit of lumber, some 2x4's and a lot of hardcore love, the set was finished in about three months. Using house and spray paint to color the room and give it a weathered look, he definitely captured the *SH* vibe. Not content with an empty room, he added a red save point, the map found in the apartment's stairwell, and the Eddie's All-Star pizza box found in Pete's Bowling Alley.



For more pictures of this duo cosplaying, and a hilarious home movie of Pyramid Head, head on over to :

www.freewebs.com/bluecreekapartment



Steven didn't do all of this alone. He had a huge helping hand from his fiance Birgit Chlupacek (who also cosplays Mary and Maria). We're not sure which is more hardcore: building a set to go along with your cosplay, or being so in love that you allow your man to indulge in such flights of hardcore! Regardless, if you love *Silent Hill*, have basic construction knowledge, \$350, and a fiance who is willing to cosplay, you too can be as hardcore as Mr. Steven Yount. Just remember, he did it first.



Photos by: Steven Yount, Birgit Chlupacek and Elizabeth Yount

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