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by Etna



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PlayStation 2



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PlayStation 2



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DJPubba Tim Lindquist

While we didn't put much fanfare into it, I'd like to note that this issue marks the start of our 2nd year! It's been a blast and I can't tell you how proud I am to have had a part in launching the first new successful game video magazine to come about in... how long has it been since a new game mag was established? More than 4 years, I reckon. It boggles my mind that no other new gaming mag has been able to survive and yet here we are going strong! Thank you, readers and thank you, staff.



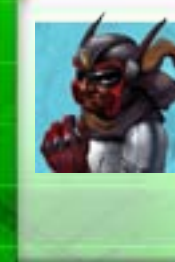
Wanderer Thomas Wilde

This'll be my fourth E3, and the same old frustration always sets in: I will not be able to see everything, I will not be able to be everywhere, and the #@*ing PR people insist on calling things "more unique." CONFIDENTIAL TO ENTIRE INDUSTRY: you cannot be anything less than fully unique. I will destroy the next person to say "most unique" in my presence. Now Playing: *Grandia III*, *Tetris DS*, *Dreamfall*, *Gradius Collection*



FragHag Julie Stoffer

Hiya! I would use this opportunity to let you know how stressed and overworked I am, but that would be a lie. My life is a breeze and I get to play video games for a living. I freaking love it. Now you freaking hate me, but hey - I've got my problems! I mean, my cat gets hairballs the size of golf balls, and guess who has to find some poor sucker to clean them up?



Racewing Geson Hatchett

This E3 was quite possibly the best week of my life. I met Sonic Team, AM2, Intelligent Systems and Itagaki-san in the space of three days! For a short time, I was alive and free! ...then it ended, and I went back home to the 'hood. Ahh, my life, my life.

Now Playing: *Guitar Hero* (I'm practicing up for GH2), The "Scouring Press Kits For Fanservice" Game



Shoegazer Dave Hulegaard

By the time you read this E3 will already be over, so here is a recap of what likely happened: I wet myself after seeing the *Final Fantasy XIII* PS3 trailer, giggled after hearing Reggie Fils-Aime say "Wii" out loud for the first time, and was removed by security after attempting to get Rob Van Dam's autograph at the THQ booth.

Now Playing: *New Super Mario Bros.*, *Gradius Collection*, *Madden NFL 06*.



KouAidou Elizabeth Ellis

I had to miss E3 because I got the flu. I've been immobile and miserable for a week and a half. On the other hand, I had three checks come in this week. Not paying ridiculous LA prices, on the couch for a week, income coming in? It's a sign, baby. I'm gettin' a DS.

Now Playing: *Digital Battleship* and *Paint by Number* puzzles in an ancient issue of *GAMES* magazine.



Roger Danish Greg Off

It was a strange E3. Microsoft looked strong, with a slew of great-looking second gen, next gen titles. Nintendo surprised and delighted with a system that is not just a gimmick and games to back it up. Sony... well, the once mighty giant seems like it might have stumbled. The verdict is out, but they have some serious obstacles to overcome, including a hefty price point. Now Playing: *Dead Rising*, *Oblivion*, *Ultimate Ghosts n' Goblins*



Lynxara Alicia Ashby

Ah, E3. Your sights, your deafening sounds... your way of making me feel like I've been beaten with a sack of potatoes at the end of the day. Now I'm back from the show and hanging out with KouAidou, who keeps stealing my copy of *New SMB* and playing it while I have to work on the magazine. There shall be a reckoning, Kou. A reckoning. Now Playing: *Disgaea 2*, *Atelier Iris 2*, *Rogue Galaxy*, *New Super Mario Brothers*



4thletter David Brothers

I just got out of Nintendo's big pre-E3 conference on 05/09/06 and it was mighty impressive. *Twilight Princess* having both GameCube and Wii skus, *Yoshi's Island 2* and *Starfox* on DS, a new *Metroid*, *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Rayman*, and a gang of other stuff proves that Nintendo knows exactly what it's doing. Save your "going weewee" and "wheeee!" jokes. Nintendo is all about grown folk's business.

Now Playing: All 27 playable Wii demos at E3!



James James Cunningham

I'm writing this on the night prior to taking off to E3, and when you read this the show will be old news. Weird. This month I had adventures in computing, or rather adventures in owning a broken PC. I have yet to learn if it can be fixed with a hatchet, but am one trip to the shop away from finding out. I'll be careful to avoid the hard drive, because there lives my *Oblivion* character.

Now Playing: *Transformers*, *Exit*, *Monster Hunter: Freedom*



HonestGamer Jason Venter

It's not fair that despite retaining my wisdom teeth, I have not in fact gained a single insight about life. Well, there is the one: my mouth just isn't big enough. Teeth start moving all over the place, pushing my gums around until I'm going through Advil like a spy does disguises. My similes are askew, too.

Now Playing: *Dreamfall: The Longest Journey* (Xbox), *Lego Star Wars II* (PS2)



Hitoshura Iaian Ross

It's been a little over a year since I was invited on to HGM, and I still consider myself a neophyte. Mainly because I'll have been to my first E3. I still feel I can safely say this: E3 is not a time for fannish glee. It's a time for chaotic dashing through a sea of people, long lines, rubbing elbows with people who snuck in, complex travel arrangements, and a bed to sleep on at 9PM in order to do it twice more.

Now Playing: *Rogue Galaxy*, *Disgaea 2*



Wolfie Terry Wolfinger

Another E3 come and gone and made more special by marking HGM's anniversary. I finally got to play the glorious, glorious *Dead Rising*!! Though I nearly had to beat the person in front of me for taking two turns in a row, I saved that rage for the zombies. And as luck would have it, a nice Capcom PR person showed me the area where you get into a car and gleefully mow down wall-to-wall walking dead.

Now playing: *W.O.W.*, and saving up for my XBOX 360



Metalbot Anthony Mertz

I refuse to call Nintendo's new system by its proper name. Instead, since I have dignity and self-respect, I will refer to it as "The system formally known as 'The Revolution.'"

Now Playing: *Flyff*, *ÜberSoldier*



Arfeth Thomas Shin

Having just arrived from Japan's Super Battle Opera, I am seriously considering the theory that there is some sort of "Daigo-itis" disease infecting random players from Okinawa to Yokohama to Kyushu. Speaking of which, Daigo is rumored to have retired from games and is now playing Mahjongg. Maybe we should all be following suit and playing Texas Hold'em instead of *Street Fighter*... nahh...



Ashura Brady Hartel

I always wondered how disguised *The Transformers* were after a while. Even when they were still cars and planes and spoons and stuff, they always had their logos plastered all over them. I mean, that had to be a dead giveaway! Wheeljack would be like- "Optimus, I think Megatron has unleashed his new plan! It deals with evil spoons that transform into forks so you can't eat your fruit loops." "How did you figure this out, Wheeljack!?" "Well, the spoons had the DECEPTICON logo on them."



Jeremy Jeremy Peeples

You can't do that on television, and I can't wait to experience the fall rush. *Okami* tops my must-have list, and then there's *Twilight Princess* right behind it. Normally, a *Zelda* game would be THE game to own, but the many delays have cooled my desire. After that comes the new *SmackDown* game, which had better satiate my desire for a hard-hitting wrestling game. Now playing: *Tetris DS*, *WWF No Mercy*, *God of War*, *True Crime: Streets of New York*



Sardius Danny Cowan

I didn't go to E3, but after seeing the lines to play the Nintendo Wii (search YouTube for frightening video evidence), I'm glad I didn't. Missing out on E3 also meant missing out on the Journalist Flu that everyone seems to have caught after the show, so that's another plus. I'm also glad I didn't go because *California sucks*. Yeah I said it!

Now Playing: *New Super Mario Bros.*, *beatmania IIDX 11: IIDX RED*, *Malice*

Contents



Postview: E3

Three next-generation consoles made this year's E3 even more of a madhouse than usual, where the swag and the hype both flowed like wine. Behind closed doors, *Hardcore Gamer* got the lowdown on this year's must-have titles, as well as the latest scoop on the Xbox 360, the Nintendo Wii, and the PlayStation 3. We'll tell you what you need to know, and while we're at it, we'll cut through a little of the pre-release b-pucky. Maybe.

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Feature



The light grey grid in the background is your daddy, Eric.

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On the cover



LEGO STAR WARS II

THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

LEGOs are good. *Star Wars* is good. But can a LEGO *Star Wars* game be good? No. It can be hecka good! We wouldn't be putting it on the cover otherwise. Head on over to page 46 and check out what's so fun about a bunch of little kids toys and, while you're there, check out some of the nutty things we got our readers to do to their game systems with LEGOs.

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SPACE RANGERS 2

(RISE OF THE DOMINATORS)

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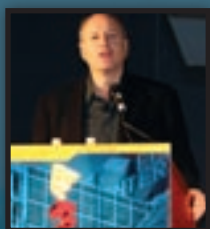
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A WII SURPRISE

A surprise function of the Wii controller came with Nintendo's E3 press conference. A speaker is built into the motion sensitive controller. The speaker helps immerse the player even more with sounds that typically would be heard closer to the player coming from the speaker, instead of from the TV or other audio sources further away. For example, in Zelda, when Link pulls back an arrow from his bow, you would hear the stretching and fling from the arrow on the Wii controller.

VIDEO GAMES INNOVATE AND CHANGE OUR LIVES



At a press briefing prior to E3 opening its doors, ESA President Doug Lowenstein gave his annual keynote on how video games are impacting society beyond the gaming world.

"The video game industry is more than just an exciting entertainment industry. [It] is playing a pivotal role in shaping the economy of tomorrow. When we look back 20 years from

now, it is quite possible that we will add the video game industry to the list of businesses that transformed America and impacted the lives of Americans, whether they are gamers or not," said Lowenstein.

Lowenstein went on to discuss the ways in which video game development move into other industries. Console developers have sought new forms of processing power, to unlock new interactive possibilities and provide greater creative freedom, but the technology doesn't just stop there. It's transferred to other markets, such as medical imaging, the armed forces, nursing, real estate, and hospitality training, just to name a few.

"In the year 2010, there will be 75 million Americans between the ages of 10 to 30. That is more Americans in that millennium generation than there will be baby boomers. We're going to see a fundamental shift in what the dominant generation is in this country," stated Lowenstein.

Lowenstein points out how gamers will take their experiences in the entertainment medium with them as they enter "seats of power" in places such as Congress, media, academia, government and culture. Games will be a central part of daily life and the generational gap will recede. A study funded by the Entertainment Software Association, entitled "Video Games: Serious Business for America's Economy," stated that video game software sales on all platforms are forecast to grow to \$15 billion in 2010, from \$8.2 billion in 2004.

More information on the research and studies in the "Video Games: Serious Business for America's Economy" report can be found on www.theesa.com.

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.

XBOX INTRODUCES ITS FIRST PARTY XBOX 360 PERIPHERALS

Microsoft has several of its own peripherals, several which were previously offered only by third party companies:



The *Xbox 360 Wireless Racing Wheel* uses the latest wireless and force feedback technology to bring new realism to racing games such as "Project Gotham Racing@ 3" and "Forza Motorsport 2." From drifting to power sliding, feel the intensity of every turn.



The *Xbox 360 Wireless Headset* integrates seamlessly with the Xbox 360 console to provide wireless voice chat, stylish ergonomic design and superior voice quality to chat over the Xbox Live network.

The *Xbox 360 Wireless Gaming Receiver* for Windows connects existing and future Xbox 360 wireless accessories to the PC, allowing gamers to enjoy the Xbox 360 Wireless Controller, Xbox 360 Wireless Headset and Xbox 360 Wireless Racing Wheel on a second platform.



The *Xbox 360 Memory Unit (256MB)*. With four times more capacity than the original, gamers can easily store and transfer even more Xbox 360 saved games, Xbox Live profiles, full Xbox Live Arcade titles and other entertainment content downloaded from Xbox Live Marketplace.

BILL GATES'S FIRST E3 APPEARANCE, SHOWING "LIVE ANYWHERE"

Bill Gates lead the charge of "Live Anywhere" at his first E3 appearance, acknowledging that gaming is the future of entertainment. Live Anywhere will bring together Xbox Live, Windows Vista, and Windows Mobile using the Xbox Live interface for cross-platform gaming. Gamers can send assets to each other via mobile phones which can be used in Xbox Live or Windows Vista games.

"Our vision is to deliver consistent, compelling experiences that make it easy for consumers to jump in and play, from any device at any time," said Gates.



NEWS BITS

- Wii was the show stealer at E3 2006, with up to six-hour-long waiting times
- HD DVD add-on for Xbox 360 Console in 2006
- Xbox Live Vision video camera coming to U.S. September 2006
- "Lumines Live!" Fuses Puzzle Action With Madonna's Music Video "Sorry"

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E3 2006 SHOWCASE

NINTENDO 1

BEST OF SHOW

Nintendo always puts on a good show, and this year, they didn't disappoint. With six-hour lines to get in and play titles on the Wii, and some truly impressive gameplay on display, they managed to pull off a comeback of sorts. Instead of looking like the unfocused dreamers that some critics portrayed them as, Nintendo unveiled a solid plan, some solid hardware, and an amazing catalogue of new and classic games.

At their pre-E3 press conference in the Kodak Theater in Hollywood, the infamous Reggie Fils-Aime--a man who needs very little introduction, if you follow gaming news at all; we believe his official duties at Nintendo involve kicking ass and taking names--teamed up with Shigeru Miyamoto and Satoru Iwata, the president of Nintendo, to present Nintendo's game plan for the next generation. They are not in this to win over existing gamers. Instead, Nintendo wants to draw in people who've never played video games before, with easy-to-learn and intuitive gameplay that starts almost from the moment you power the system up. Satoru Iwata promised to "help destroy that wall" between gamers and non-gamers, with the aid of games like *Wii Sports*, a launch title that contains three games in one: baseball, tennis, and golf.

The Wii, for example, was said to be able to start playing games almost as fast as when you wake the DS up from its sleep mode, which is a matter of seconds. It's "the system that never sleeps," to quote Iwata; even while it's ostensibly off, it's using a small amount of power to remain hooked up to the Internet. While you're asleep or away from your console, people can still come along and interact with your Wii, such as by leaving messages in your *Animal Crossing* village.

The virtual console was also touched upon, promising a lineup of classic and nostalgic games, such as *Tetris*, to complement pick-up-and-play new games like *Wii Sports*.

What they *didn't* unveil were the nuts and bolts of their system or their strategy thereof. The Wii's tech specs went undisclosed--which is unsurprising, as this is Nintendo, after all--as did the system's price. Industry critics speculate that the Wii will ship at a price between \$200 and \$249, but Nintendo itself is remaining quiet for now. They're also keeping the system's precise release date a secret, only saying that it'll ship in the fourth quarter of this year, as well as what titles will be available at launch. It'll have *Wii Sports* and *Zelda*, but that's all we know for now.

Instead, they focused on what the DS has done, and what the Wii can do. The DS has officially sold eighteen million units, as well as six million copies of *Nintendogs* worldwide; that, and the success in Japan of the *Brain Age* games, were used as proof positive that new gamers can be lured into the fold by new styles of gameplay. They didn't leave the existing crowd in the lurch, though, unveiling titles like *Starfox DS*, *Diddy Kong Racing*, *Final Fantasy III*, *Mario Hoops 3 on 3*, *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*, and *Yoshi's Island 2*.

DISASTER WII



SMASH BROS. BRAWL WII



SUPER MARIO GALAXY WII

BEST OF SHOW

The Wii's catalogue of software is looking equally impressive. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* was confirmed as not only a Wii launch title--the first time a *Zelda* title has launched with a Nintendo console--but a simultaneous GameCube release. In the Wii version, you can use the Wii controller (a.k.a. the "nunchuck") to deliver downward sword slashes as well as fire Link's bow. With the help of a small speaker in the Wii remote, you can actually hear the drawstring go back as you fire. However, reports from the playable demos on the E3 show floor report that *Twilight Princess's* Wii functionality is limited to simple swordplay, the bow, and the fishing pole, with very little interaction beyond that.

Other titles that were shown at the show include *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*, which Nintendo claims will be the most intuitive first-person shooter ever; *Super Mario Galaxy*, where Miyamoto has "given Mario moves he's never had before"; the delightfully Engrishy driving game *Excite Truck*; and Ubisoft's shooter/slasher *Red Steel*, pairing a point-and-shoot FPS with a remarkably solid swordfighting engine. We can also look forward to *Disaster: Day of Defeat*, a brand-new game focused on survival in the face of natural disasters; *Project H.A.M.M.E.R.*, which is apparently about the fact that it "feels good to smash things"; and a Wii-controlled version of *Madden NFL 2007*, the only football game that HGM's own Racewing has ever liked. (Trust me, if you knew him you'd know how big a deal this is.)

Nintendo sneaked in *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* at the very end, revealing that not only *Kid Icarus's* Pit and *Kirby's* Metaknight would be playable, but also *Metal Gear's* Solid Snake. This announcement caused all of Hideo Kojima's fanboys to wet their pants in unison, and the mess was so gruesome it's best not described.

Announced third-party titles for the Wii include *Sonic Wild Fire* from Sega; a new *Crystal Chronicles* courtesy of Square Enix; and the return of Rayman in Ubisoft's *Rayman 4*. Oh... and... um... *Spongebob Squarepants: Creature from the Krusty Crab*, from THQ, will also be available for the Wii. Right. Let's move on.



ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS DS



MARIO HOOPS 3 ON 3 DS



DK KING OF SWING DS



KIRBY DS DS



STARFOX DS DS



ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS MULTI



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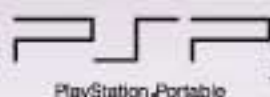
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MICROSOFT 2

Microsoft came out with two fists a-swinging at E3. With more than five million Xbox 360s projected to be sold by the end of March, and a 57% attach rate for Xbox Live with Xbox 360 owners, they're sitting on a comfortable first-place lead in the next console generation.

Halo 3 and *Grand Theft Auto 4* were the biggest announcements by far, with a new tattoo for Peter Moore and everything, but *Fable 2*, *Shadowrun*, Mistwalker's *Lost Odyssey*, and *Forza Motorsport 2* are certainly nothing to be sneezed at, either.

We got a bit of hands-on playtime with *Gears of War*, and it plays just as good as it looks. It combines a suitably gritty, wreckage-filled, and utterly destroyed city-based setting with hard-hitting action; everything looks and feels really sturdy. Weapons range from the usual sniper rifles and rocket launchers to up-close and personal gun-mounted chainsaws for when you need that special touch. Having to take out your down, but not out, foes with a vicious stomp adds just that much more fun to the game. Hyper-detailed graphics and brisk multiplayer options add up to a powerhouse of a package.

Silicon Knights's *Too Human* is also in the running for the Next Big Thing. It combines science fiction and Norse mythology to serve up a post-apocalyptic apocalypse of a different sort. You play Baldur, the Norse god of innocence, peace and purity, which results in a bit of irony. In your quest to save the human race from the technological demons and beasts which menace them, you must choose whether or not to upgrade yourself with robotic parts so that you can better fight your enemies. It's a clear example of what staring too long into the abyss will get you, but the action and easy controls makes it all worth it. The developers have promised us that they're covering all the angles with regards to Norse mythology, even down to the fact that Baldur's death kicks off Ragnarok.

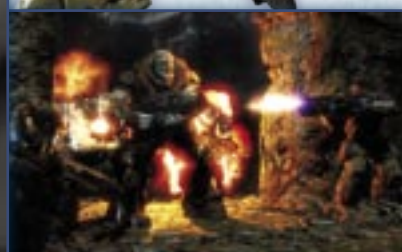
HALO 3 360



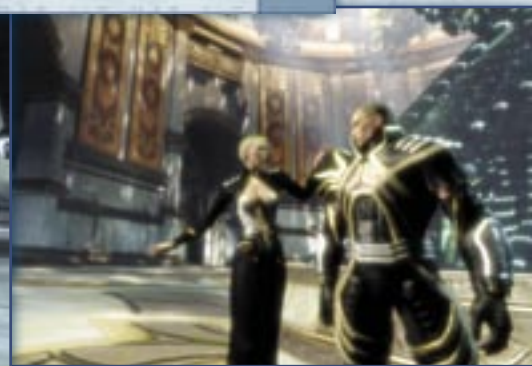
BEST OF SHOW



GEARS OF WAR 360



TOO HUMAN 360



Mass Effect is going to bring *KotOR*-minded gameplay to the far future, instead of long ago in a galaxy far, far away. Straight from the devs' mouths: "Visually, we wanted it to be something different with *Mass Effect*. A lot of sci-fi is dark and dreary, and we wanted to create a beautiful future." They've done a great job so far, with immaculately rendered spaceships, aliens, and landscapes proving the point. You are Commander Shepard, a completely customizable protagonist, and you are charged with figuring out exactly what the dark secret is behind this galactic civilization's beautiful veneer. All the conversation is voice-acted, and you can choose your responses based on facial expressions and tone. Is someone getting uppity with you? Get uppity right back.

Also on Microsoft's list: Rare's *Viva Piñata*, a quirky game about beating-up-raising innocent fake animals with a stick; the first two games from Mistwalker Studios, *Blue Dragon* and *Lost Odyssey*; the announcement of a wireless, force-feedback racing wheel accessory to go with *Forza 2*; the announcement of the Xbox Live Vision Camera, providing real-time video chat capability, and a wireless Xbox Live headset, both of which will be available by this holiday season; and bringing your Xbox Live *anywhere*, from your mobile phones to quite possibly your frontal lobes.

That last point is worth going into. With Windows Vista just around the corner, Microsoft has planned to synchronize it, Xbox Live, and Windows Mobile to an unprecedented extent. The easiest way to talk about it is to use the example they used at their pre-E3 conference.

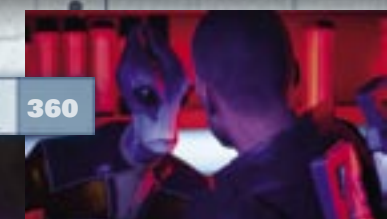
You'll be able to send a car you've unlocked in *Forza 2* to your buddy via your Windows-enabled cell phone. Your buddy can upload the car to his Windows Vista PC, open it up, and trick it out a little bit, adding decals or changing the paint job, then send it through to his Xbox 360. When he races your car in *Forza 2*, all the improvements he made will be intact and present within the game.

Your gamertag, current online activities, and other perks of Xbox Live will all also be available through your Vista PC and your mobile phone. You can check your friendslist at any time to see what your friends are doing, no matter which of the three machines they're on.

It's very cool and sort of creepy at the same time, honestly.

In Xbox Live news, Midway, Sega, Namco, and Konami have signed up with Xbox Live Arcade, adding games like *Root Beer Tapper*, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*, *Contra*, *Pac-Man*, and the original *Sonic the Hedgehog* to the Arcade lineup. Most impressively, Arcade will also get a new version of *Lumines* in the future, complete with music by Warner Group artists.

MASS EFFECT 360



VIVA PIÑATA 360



FORZA MOTORSPORT 2 360



BLUE DRAGON 360



SHADOWRUN 360



THE PS3 →

PS3

BOOTH 2416 • WEST HALL

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

SONY

3

This year was a big moment in video game history, and it's more or less entirely because of Sony. They've been on top of the world for two console generations, and this November will determine whether it stays that way.

The revelation of the enormous price tag on the PlayStation 3 was the major story of this E3. It was met with shock from journalists, horror from developers, and outright disbelief from fans. With the stripped down twenty-gigabyte PS3 shipping at \$499, and the sixty-gigabyte enhanced version shipping at \$599, it's very possible that Sony has just priced themselves out of the console race. Several Japanese developers expressed concern, off the record, about the price of the PS3, and discussed the possibility of jumping to the 360; to quote one source, "We are alarmed."

The question is this, then: will Sony's superior marketing and admittedly spectacular catalogue of upcoming games be able to overcome the PS3's enormous price tag? If they are, will they be able to overcome the 360's massive lead? Suddenly, it's anyone's race, and no one quite knows how this is going to turn out.

This came on the heels of the revelation of the PlayStation 3's online format, which had a distinct emphasis placed on micropayments (one to three dollars for equipment and ammo in *Warhawk*, and an iTunes-style payment system for songs playable with the karaoke game *Singstar*). That said, the PS3 will be able to provide consumers with text and voice messaging, video chat, friends list, and news updates from the moment you take it out of the box. According to Kaz Hirai, Sony now considers online gaming to be "as important as the air which we breathe."

They also revealed the new Dual Shock 3, which replaces the "boomerang" controller that was unveiled last year. The D3 swaps out the rumble functionality in favor of a six-direction motion sensing feature, allowing you to play a game like *Warhawk* by simply moving the controller in one of six directions, thus controlling the direction your onscreen helicopter/jet moved in.

PS3 titles that were shown or demoed include the awesome-looking *Heavenly Sword*, a cinematic beat-'em-up that went through a heavily-blogged dev hell; a resolution-enhanced version of *Gran Turismo 4*, shown as a way to promise us that a next-gen *Gran Turismo* is coming soon after the PS3's launch; the aforementioned karaoke-flavored *Singstar*; the visually stunning aerial shooter *Warhawk*; Game Republic's *Genji 2* (working title), an ancient

Japanese brawler that follows last year's PS2 title *Genji*; and Insomniac's *Resistance: The Fall of Man*, a first-person shooter set in the ruins of an alternate-universe Britain. Here, there was no World War II, but there are homicidal aliens coming down to wipe out the human race, and you're one of the soldiers out to defend the last free state in Europe. The gameplay shown featured fast-paced, infantry-focused shooter gameplay, with humans and aliens dropping like flies in a massive gunfight through the ruins of a neighborhood in London. Some interesting weapons were on display, such as "tagging bullets" that'll track an enemy, and a spiky sort of grenade that resembled an explosive hedgehog.



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SYSTEM SPECS

PS3



GRAN TURISMO HD

PS3



HEAVENLY SWORD

PS3



R&C: SIZE MATTERS

PSP



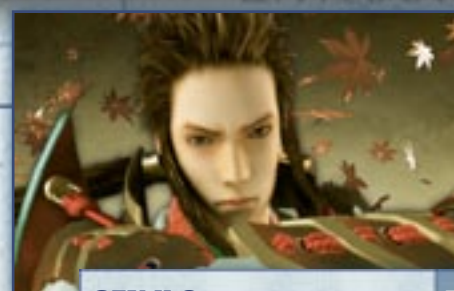
LOCO ROCO

PSP



GANGS OF LONDON

PSP



GENJI 2

PS3

Other announced first-party titles include an unnamed *Getaway* sequel; an awesome-looking third-person shooter, *Eight Days*, out of Sony's London studio, with deeply cinematic gameplay that appeared to be rendered with the in-game engine; a jungle-based shooter from Naughty Dog called... *Naughty Dog* (?)... which featured fistfights and disarm moves in addition to gunplay; Game Republic's *Monster Kingdom*, the "next generation of dark fantasy"; *Lair*, which appears to be a fighter taking place on dragonback; a new *Hot Shots Golf*; and *Afrika*, developed by Rhino Studios, a game of unknown genre set on the savannah.

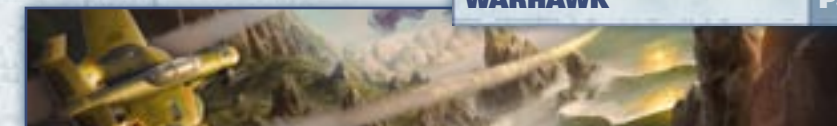
Meanwhile, Sony renewed its vow to support the PS2 for as long as it's a popular platform. The PSP browser also continues to evolve; it now supports Flash, and will go on in later iterations to support voice over IP, RSS channels, and the ability to boot from the memory stick.

Upcoming first-party PSP titles at the show included *Killzone: Liberation*, *Ratchet and Clank: Size Matters*, *Loco Roco*, *SF: Dark Mirror*, *World Tour Soccer 2*, *Tankman*, *Gangs of London*, and *Ape Escape Academy 2*.



WARHAWK

PS3



RESISTANCE

PS3



KILLZONE: LIBERATION

PSP



PERSONA 3 PS2



YGGDRA UNION GBA



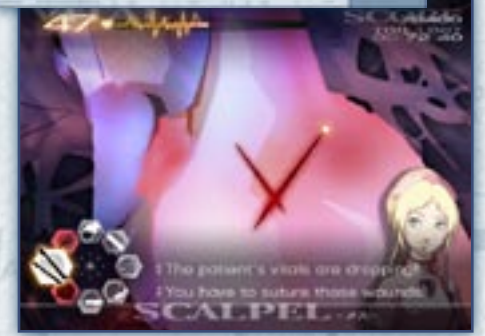
SMT: DEVIL SUMMONER PS2



CONTACT DS



TRAUMA CENTER 2 DS



TOUCH DETECTIVE DS



BOOTH 2408 • WEST HALL E3 2006 SHOWCASE

ATLUS 4

Atlus is shaping up to have one of their biggest years ever in 2006. Their PS2 offerings are probably their biggest releases, including two new *Shin Megami Tensei* titles and the horror-themed *Rule of Rose*. *Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner* lets the player take on the role of occult detective Raidou Kuzunoha and solve mysteries in near-modern Japan. Battles here are action-oriented, with Raidou working in conjunction with his demon partner to dispatch enemies with combination attacks. *Shin Megami Tensei* spin-off series *Persona* makes its long-awaited return in *Persona 3*. This latest entry in the line introduces new summoning mechanics that require your player characters to repeatedly blow their own heads off with special "summoning guns" that transform them into their demon-like "persona" forms. Use this power to investigate the mysterious Moonlight High School after dark to puzzle out why your character not only manifests the demon-like Orpheus persona, and can assume the persona of any demon in the game. *Rule of Rose* is a lower-key, low-violence game that dares the player to puzzle their way out of a deadly situation before a cult of murderous little girls manage to kill you. Your only ally is a loyal dog with a keen sense of smell that might be able to help you figure a way out of your deadly situation before time runs out. GBA sees the US debut of two long-awaited RPGs, HGM office fave *Super Robot Taisen* and the import hit *Yggdra Union*. *Super Robot Taisen* tells the story of two heroic pilot squads, the SRX and the PTX, who battle to save the Earth from alien invaders and reality-bending inter-dimensional threats through two different games, *Original Generation* and *Original Generation 2*. *Yggdra Union* blends elements of strategy and CCGs to create a unique and addictive RPG battle system. Over on the Nintendo DS, Atlus has two games set for release: *Contact*, an intriguing action RPG crammed with a great variety of mini-games, and *Touch Detective*, an adventure game that seems sure to please fans of last year's *Phoenix Wright*. Last but definitely not least is Atlus's first Wii title, a sequel to the unique and challenging cult favorite *Trauma Center: Under the Knife*. *Trauma Center: Second Opinion* is everything a fan of the original could want: more operations, more life-or-death tension, and hands-on gameplay channeled through a unique control system. Where *Under the Knife* helped introduce the hardcore to the Nintendo DS, though, *Second Opinion* will help introduce us all to the massive possibility inherent in the revolutionary Wii controller.

SUPER ROBOT WARS GBA



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WHAT REVIEWERS ARE SAYING ABOUT

"Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars"

"...Every battle [is] a fascinating dance of maneuvering formations."
—GameSpy

"...a depth of tactics to it that strategy gamers will appreciate."
—IGN

"Another technically marvelous wargame that will enthrall click-addicted-twitch-gamers and gronards alike."
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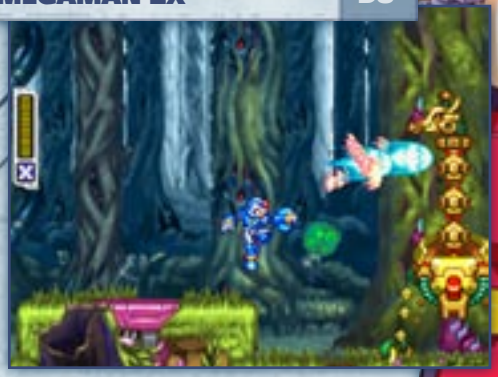
BOOTH 624 • SOUTH HALL E3 2006 SHOWCASE

CAPCOM 5

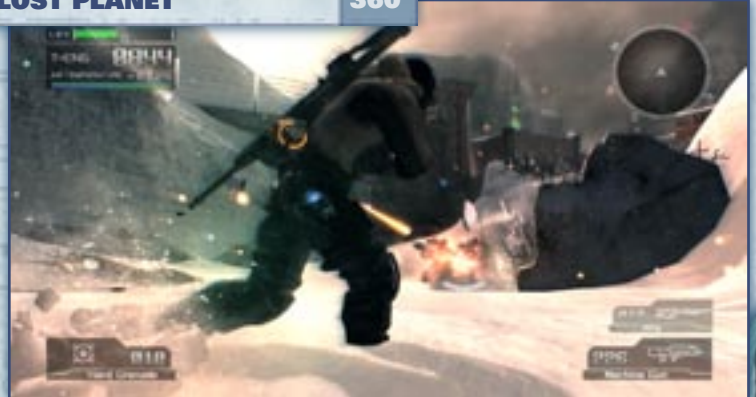
Capcom's *Dead Rising* (X360) stole a substantial amount of the show this year, proving that everyone loves beating zombies with makeshift weaponry. Check out last issue for all the details on that game. Other important news out of Capcom included *Monster Hunter Freedom* and *Street Fighter Alpha Anthology*, both of which are for the PSP, and both are reviewed this issue. In more important, we didn't actually cover these already news, Keiji Inafune brings *Lost Planet* to the Xbox 360 and mobile phones. "First-person shooters are games with a lot of freedom... and it really does feel like you're in a different world," Inafune said. *Lost Planet*, a third-person shooter involving a war for thermal energy on a distant world of ice, is Inafune's "answer" to the first-person shooter. Another Capcom game that deals with that sense of being in a different world is the long-awaited *Okami* (PS2), an action-adventure game where players take on the role of the sun goddess Amaterasu, and go on a quest to revitalize the world. With its Japanese-calligraphy-styled graphics, *Okami* raised a lot of eyebrows last year, and continues to do so now. Finally, as far as original IPs go, *God Hand* is a brutal beat-'em-up starring a drifter named Jean, who wakes up after a beating to find he's been gifted with a brand-new right arm, one that may in fact possess the strength of Satan. Clearly, the only thing to do is beat people with it. *God Hand* delivers in that regard, with some satisfyingly brutal combos and moves. From here on out, it's all sequels. *Phoenix Wright Ace Attorney: Justice for All* brings more lawyering action to the Nintendo DS, and another *Mega Man: Battle Network* (specifically, the sixth one) is coming for the Game Boy Advance. The successful *Capcom Classics Collection* imprint is coming back around for another go, with *CCC2* on the PS2 and Xbox, *CCC Reloaded* on the PSP, and *CCC Mini Mix* on the GBA. Other retro games from Capcom include *Ultimate Ghouls 'n' Ghosts*, just in case your ass was insufficiently kicked lately; *Capcom Puzzle World*, with *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* and *Block Block*; and *Power Stone Collection*, all of which are on the PSP.



MEGAMAN ZX DS



LOST PLANET 360



DEAD RISING 360



BEST OF SHOW

OKAMI PS2



GOD HAND PS2

PW: JUSTICE FOR ALL DS



E3 2006 SHOWCASE MR 7530 • KENTIA HALL

EIDOS 6

Eidos' booth at E3 was an appointment-only affair, but once in they showed off a nicely diverse line of games. Nibbling on the chocolate poker chips they gave out at the door, we saw a variety of titles that looked to be coming together nicely. *Battle Stations Midway* (Xbox 360) would be easy to call "Battlefield 1942 at sea". That would sell short the tactical elements of control given over multiple air, sea, and subsurface vehicles, though. It's one-third strategy and two-thirds action, and jumping from the tactical map to give battlefield commands and then into the cockpit of a plane for a more hands-on approach should provide some good wartime thrills. Throw in up to eight-player Live support and this promises WWII action with its own distinct flavor. Next up was *Bionicle Heroes* (PS2, Gamecube, PC). Think *Lego Star Wars* with a Bionicle facelift and you've got the idea. Developed by Traveler's Tales, just like a certain Lego series, the reps weren't shy about pointing out the similarities. Still, if it ain't broke then fixing it is probably a mistake of some sort. Meanwhile, over in the tropical setting of *Just Cause* (Xbox 360, PC), a few hundred square miles of island paradise are desperately in need of a regime change. Play one faction against another while driving, flying, parasailing, and shooting, all while being secretly backed by the US government. No lineup is complete without at least one movie game, and here's *Reservoir Dogs* (PS2, Xbox, PC) bringing a big bag of brutal violence along with it. While both on-foot and driving missions were showcased, the big hook was that of playing the game either as a Pro or Psycho. Psycho is exactly as it sounds, gunning down anything in your path, while Pro calls for getting through the missions with as little fuss as possible. The developers even promise it's possible to beat the game without killing a single person, although it seems a shame to waste all those lovely guns. Finally, hidden away in a corner was *Shinobido: The Soul of the Ninja* (PS2). While its ninja action will be familiar to *Tenchu* fans, thanks to being developed by Spike, the ability to play three warring leaders off against each other is new. Performing missions earns their trust, but getting caught working against them plummets their trust levels right back down again. Don't get caught stabbing them in the back, because a trusting Lord is a generous Lord.



RESERVOIR DOGS MULTI



BIONICLE HEROES MULTI



JUST CAUSE MULTI



BATTLE STATIONS MIDWAY 360



CV: PORTRAIT OF RUIN DS



BEST OF SHOW

MY FROGGER TOY TRIALS DS



METAL GEAR SOLID 4 PS3



LUNAR KNIGHTS DS



BOMBERMAN ACT ZERO 360



WE: PRO EVO SOCCER 2k7 DS



BOOTH 800 • SOUTH HALL E3 2006 SHOWCASE

KONAMI 7

It's business as usual for Konami in 2006, which means more titles from their blockbuster franchises and a hearty helping of insanity from Kojima Productions. *Metal Gear Solid 4* for the PS3 drew huge crowds every hour, on the hour, with nothing more than a trailer to show off. The mere announcement of *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops* for the PSP drew waves of fresh excitement from the crowd at Konami's pre-E3 press conference. *Lunar Knights*, obviously a DS extension of Hideo Kojima's work with *Boktai*, was playable on the floor and promised a seriously old-school, 2D action RPG where players mastered the powers of light and dark to rid the world of vampires. The big addition to the gameplay seems to be special *StarFox*-like 3D shooter levels where you finish off particularly nasty vampires by dragging them into Earth's upper atmosphere. After the rousing success of last year's *Dawn of Sorrow*, *Castlevania* returns to the DS with *Portrait of Ruin*. This game is a sequel to, of all things, the Sega Genesis title *Castlevania: Bloodlines* and features whip-wielder Johnathan Morris and magician Charlotte Orlean fighting a vampire painter who has somehow seized control of Dracula's castle. Rooting out his influence means diving into magical paintings whose eclectic landscapes allow *Portrait of Ruin* to have far more variety in its level designs than any previous portable *Castlevania*. Konami's giving fans of their other staid franchises like *Frogger* and *Winning Eleven* exactly what they want: more of the same. *Pro Soccer Evolution 2006* and *My Frogger Toy Trials* offer no unpleasant surprises and plenty of time-tested gameplay. One big surprise from Konami, though, was the announcement of a licensed title based off of *Hellboy*. Developed by Krome Studios and created in partnership with *Hellboy* feature film director Guillermo del Toro and original creator Mike Mignola, this new adventure will feature an all-new storyline with villains and enemies unique to the game. Finally, *Death Jr.* is returning for a second round of ghoulish adventure on two different platforms, with *Science Fair of Doom* on the DS and *Death Jr. 2: The Root of Evil* on PSP.

MGS: PORTABLE OPS PSP



HELLBOY MULTI



E3 2006 SHOWCASE BOOTH 746 • SOUTH HALL

8 SQUARE-ENIX

The big announcement for Square-Enix was *Fabula Nova Crystallis*, a series of games that work together to tell the story of a single larger world in the *Final Fantasy* lineage. Modeled after the group of spinoffs, sequels, and prequels that have been retroactively dubbed *Compilation of FF7*, *Fabula Nova Crystallis* right now consists of two PS3 titles and a mobile title. A game simply called *Final Fantasy XIII* is the flagship of the project, developed by the team of programmers who created *Final Fantasy X*. *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* complements it with a different story about a different protagonist, created with the combined efforts of the *Kingdom Hearts II* and *Advent Children* production teams. The mobile title is *Final Fantasy Agito XIII*, a MMO that lets players interact directly with the world of *Fabula Nova Crystallis*. Aside from the setting, the single creative thread that runs through all three games is the design work and direction of artist Tetsuya Nomura. In the way of games you can actually play, *Final Fantasy XII* was on the show floor in localized form and with all of its game engines intact. Employees apologized for the limp demo that shipped with *Dragon Quest VIII* last year, but swore that the customizability of the License and Gambit systems would give *FFXII*'s combat engine the teeth it'd need to please RPG die-hards. Speaking of Enix's darling, *Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime* may be one of the greatest games ever coded. You play as a heroic slime named Rocket, who must use his unimaginably destructive giant tank to destroy enemy tanks, then use the unique properties of his blobby body to rescue his friends from certain doom. All that and tons of silly puns, too! The Enix half of the company also had the two new *Valkyrie Profile* titles on the floor, and both were among the most impressive offerings in the show. *Lenneth* featured all the 2D beauty of the original *VP*, while *Silmeria* translated the classic *VP* battle system into beautiful 3D in a way that was very hard to put down. Rounding out Square's offerings were *Final Fantasy III* on the DS, with 3D graphics so good it was persistently mistaken for a PSP title, and two new games in the long-neglected *Mana* series. *Dawn of Mana* brings the series into 3D on the PS2, while *Children of Mana* for the DS promises classic 2D graphics and four-player wireless co-op action.

FINAL FANTASY XIII PS3



CHILDREN OF MANA DS



FF VERSUS XIII PS3



DAWN OF MANA PS2



VP: SILMERIA PS2



VP: LENNETH PSP



DQ: ROCKET SLIME DS





BOOTH 824 • SOUTH HALL E3 2006 SHOWCASE

NAMCO-BANDAI 9

Namco Bandai has an eclectic mix of titles this time around. *Eureka Seven Vol. 1: The New Wave* (PS2) has very little to do with A Flock of Seagulls and a lot to do with giant robots that glide around on Tapar particles. It serves as a prequel to the television series. *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* is a PSP port of what can only be termed *Tekken 5.5*. It features twice the amount of customizable items that the PS2 game had, two new characters, and the return of at least one old favorite. This is a solid base, even without factoring in the wireless ad-hoc multiplayer. Even better is the ability to trade your customized characters over infrastructure mode. *Ace Combat X* is another PSP title ready for the big time. As the latest entry in the much-loved *Ace Combat* franchise, it has big boots to fill, but an all-new story mode, tons of accurate licensed jets, and up to four player wireless mayhem could result in a tight fit. *Ace Combat* is widely considered the *Gran Turismo* of jet-fighting games, and this one is going to be no different. Your jets are upgradeable and customizable to your liking. In addition, you can alter the controls so that the game is a little more arcade dogfighter than flight sim. *Tales of the Abyss* (PS2) is the latest entry in the same series as *Tales of Symphonia* and is the first game in the series that supports fully 3D control while you battle. You play a man out of his element in a title that should span 80+ hours of gameplay. Be on the look out for four player cooperative combat with the use of a multi-tap, a more cinematic way of storytelling and camera manipulation, and context-sensitive special attacks. *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos* hits the PC this fall with an unprecedented level of detail and control. Everything about your characters and heroes is fully customizable, and you're going to be fielding hundreds of characters versus similarly-sized armies in your quest to end this war. The offline campaign is seamlessly integrated with the online missions, to boot. If that doesn't float your boat, *Snoopy vs the Red Baron* (PS2, GC) will. 'nuff said. *Hellgate: London* (PC) gives us a look at a demon-infested London, randomized dungeons, customizable characters and weaponry, and the choice of various classes.

SNOOPY VS. RED BARON MULTI



PAC-MAN WORLD RALLY MULTI



TALES OF THE ABYSS DS



ACE COMBAT X PSP



XENOSAGA 3 PS2



E3 2006 SHOWCASE BOOTH 946 • SOUTH HALL

10 SEGA

First things first for the self-styled "purists" out there: the next-generation *Sonic The Hedgehog* game is modeled after *Sonic Adventure* and *Sonic Heroes*. It also contains multiple playable characters, like in those games. Before you scream bloody murder, however, know that it's so far the fastest, most polished and overall best game yet to use this formula. When personally questioned about the camera and gameplay hiccups that have plagued the 3D engine thus far, Sonic Team reassured us that they're extremely aware of those problems, and working on finally getting the bugs out for this new installment. Let's hope this holds true. If not, we can always play *Sonic Rivals*, the upcoming 2.5D game for the PSP, which allows for superfast side-scrolling gameplay over incredibly long courses, and which encourages dirty trickery between contestants. If that's not enough hedgehog for ya', *Sonic Wild Fire* is coming to the Wii, and *Sonic Mobile*, a faithful port of Sonic's first Genesis adventure, is coming to a cellphone near you. *Virtua Fighter 5* and *Chrome Hounds* made tremendously strong showings. The former was fully playable on the show floor, and the new characters, Eileen and El Blaze, are more than welcome to join the current cast of characters, bringing monkey kung-fu, wrestling (and in Eileen's case, more than a few doses of cute) to the mix. *Chrome Hounds* features tons of squad-based mech action, and the ability to customize your own robot in unheard-of ways. Want to make your own melee-specialist ninja robot, or a heavy-gunning powerhouse? Now you can! *Yakuza* and *Phantasy Star Universe* deliver solid gameplay for the action-heads. The first takes place in the fictionalized streets of Tokyo, where you struggle to uncover the secrets behind the Japanese mafia. The second takes the battles to a fantastical futuristic RPG setting, where you and a squad of friends can conquer dungeons with a variety of weapons and vehicles. New to the new-age PS franchise is a 40-hour offline single-player story mode. Rounding out Sega's well-balanced mix of games was *Super Monkey Ball Adventure*, which adds explorable worlds and an expansive storyline to the venerable *Super Monkey Ball* franchise. Expect more complicated mazes, a greater variety of themed worlds, and the ability to use the monkeys' special magical spell-chants ("Ei-Ei-Pool!") to progress through the levels.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG MULTI

YAKUZA PS2



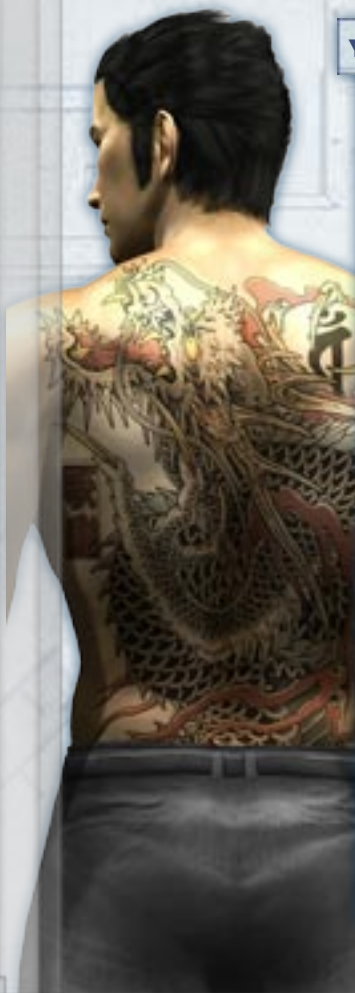
SONIC RIVALS PSP



PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE MULTI



CHROME HOUNDS 360



CRASH BOOM BASH DS



MIAMI VICE THE GAME PSP



FEAR 360



50CENT BULLETPROOF PSP



BOOTH 1224 • SOUTH HALL E3 2006 SHOWCASE

VIVENDI 11

Vivendi showcased many licensed wares this year, alongside some new franchises. *50 Cent's Bulletproof* is going from consoles into the portable warzone of the PSP. Surprisingly, it's an all-new adventure just using the name of the console game. In stark contrast to *Bulletproof's* gritty setting, the vivid landscape of Miami comes alive in *Miami Vice: The Game* on PSP. Those expecting a GTA-style romp will be disappointed, but you can still send Crockett and Tubbs through an intriguing blend of third-person shooting and sim-style minigames. Vivendi is prolonging the spree of bright lights and bloody bodies by continuing its immersive FPS series *F.E.A.R.* on both the PC and Xbox 360. PC gamers can look forward to *F.E.A.R. Extraction Point*, an expansion pack that picks up where the first game left off. The original *F.E.A.R.* hits the 360 this fall and marks the console debut for the series. *TimeShift* brings an all-new FPS experience to the PC and Xbox systems. As the name implies, you'll be able to stop, rewind, or slow down time to suit your needs and bring down the oppressive regime that has taken over the world. *Scarface: the World is Yours* takes Tony Montana's epic death and rewrites it so he survives, but has to rebuild his empire. It's a bit of a GTA knock-off, but those who really wanted to play *Vice City* with Tony should be pleased. *Eragon* is another movie-licensed offering, allowing Eragon and his dragon to fulfill their destiny. This third-person adventure is highlighted by a deep battle system and should provide thrills for movie fans and non-fans alike. *Joint Task Force* continues the co-op trend into the world of military RTS on the PC. *World in Conflict* keeps the military RTS going by taking place in a Cold War-era world with the Berlin Wall intact. You'll have to retake lost American cities to lead your troops to victory. On a lighter note, Spyro and Crash return to gaming with the *Legend of Spyro: a New Beginning* and *Crash Boom Bang!* respectively. Spyro's adventure is an origin story showing his evolution into the fire-breathing creature we know and love, while Crash hits the DS in a series of mini-games, including pool and baseball. In a similar vein, *SWAT* and *After Dark - Flying Toaster* offer quick thrills for mobile gaming fans. The former sees you tackle bad guys, while the latter places you in the role of a FLYING TOASTER. This is a concept so insane I can't help but love it! Vivendi's offerings for the next year are relatively diverse, and should have something to please nearly everyone.

SCARFACE: TWIY MULTI



TIMESHIFT MULTI



ERAGON MULTI

WHOM WILL YOU TRUST WHEN THE FORCES OF GOOD AND EVIL COLLIDE?

NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE



FROM THE MAKERS OF SILENT STORM SERIES

NIGHT WATCH

НОЧНОИ ПОЗОР





UL: DARK KINGDOM PS3



GODS & HEROES PC



SUPREME COMMANDER PC

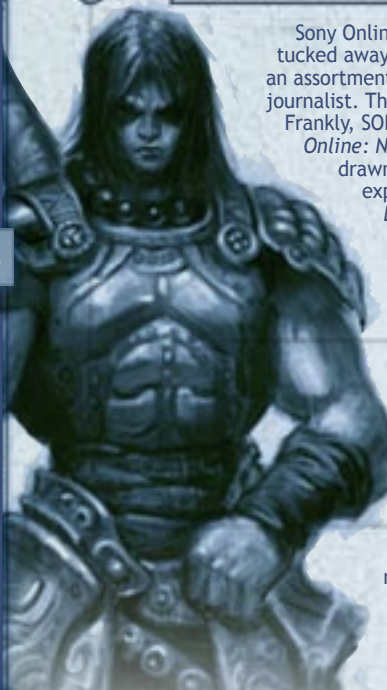


TITAN QUEST PC

BOOTH 700 • SOUTH HALL E3 2006 SHOWCASE

SONY ONLINE 12

Sony Online Entertainment's booth was like an oasis tucked away in South Hall, offering cold frozen drinks, an assortment of snacks, and glorious coffee to a weary journalist. They had the best booth babes at the show, too. Frankly, SOE could've shown off *Paint-Drying Watcher Online: Nothing But Escort Missions* and it would've drawn a crowd. Instead, they were showing off the expected selection of MMOs and *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom* for the PS3. Yes, that's right: PS3. This launch title hopes to work the same magic it has for the PSP, giving gamers the time-honored hack-'n'-slash action they crave with tons of online multiplayer action, co-op modes, and downloadable content to sweeten the deal. *EverQuest II* had demos running to explain new content and other changes to the online world, while *Vanguard: Saga of Heroes* was on hand to present players with an all-new massively multiplayer online fantasy world. *Gods and Heroes: Rome Rising* gives players a whole new aesthetic and mythology to explore in MMO form. Explore an ancient Roman world as the son or daughter of a deity, and acquire more divine powers as you level up. Demos promised unique combat mechanics like the eight-man formation and a "visceral" new interface, although the upcoming beta test will be the real trial of what this title has to offer.



BOOTH 1324 • SOUTH HALL E3 2006 SHOWCASE

THQ 13

THQ's booth was loaded to the brim with licensed property games, but the most eagerly anticipated game there was not one of these. We're talking *Destroy All Humans! 2* (PS2, XBOX), baby! We got to watch Crypto take on the 60s and all that implies: the cold war, the space race, and of course, hippies. The pan-platform *Cars*, based on Pixar's guaranteed hit movie, was also getting a big push, with eye-catching, life-sized versions of the movie's star characters on display outside the booth. Kids' properties were further represented in force with *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *Barnyard*, *Spongebob Squarepants: Creature From the Krusty Krab*, *Monster House*, and *Nicktoons 2006* (featuring characters from numerous Nick series), all coming out on multiple platforms. On the darker side of things, there was a demo of the highly anticipated RTS, *Supreme Commander* (PC) on display. Though the game is still in its earliest development stages, the detail presented in the demo was impressive. Another highly anticipated PC title, epic action-RPG *Titan Quest*, gave us fast-moving gameplay and nearly photorealistic detail in an ancient Greek world. THQ also showed us the next generation of wrestling games in *Smackdown vs. Raw 2007*. While we didn't get to lay hands on the controls, we're excited about the crowd and environmental interaction elements, and the potential of online play with live voice chat. Imagine the trash-talking!



DESTROY ALL HUMANS 2 MULTI

E3 2006 SHOWCASE BOOTH 1024 • SOUTH HALL

14 BUENA VISTA



POC: DEAD MAN'S CHEST MULTI

The big news for us with Buena Vista was a new set of games from Q? Entertainment. *Lumines II* (PSP) and *Lumines Extra* (XBLA) were on display, both of which offered all the block-dropping action of the PSP original with more game modes added. *Every Extend Extra* (PSP) is a souped-up version of the PC freeware game *Every Extend* (check it out with a quick Google search). Lovely and abstract, this addictive arcade game was enhanced with an excellent soundtrack and looks to be classic Mizuguchi. Also announced but not shown was *Meteos: Disney Edition*. Ah, Disney, where would we be without you? Their official Buena Vista Games imprint is now carrying the load for the Mouse's empire, but thankfully they're doing more than just kids' stuff. While the Disney-themed games dominate, covering *Chicken Little*, *Kim Possible*, *Little Mermaid*, and even (god help us) *Little Einsteins*, there were several titles on the floor aimed at a much older crowd. *Desperate Housewives* (PC) is based on the popular TV series, of course, and concerns the adventures of a new member of Wisteria Lane trying to fit in among the street's "colorful" residents. *Turok* (PS3), on the other hand, is straight-out action. A complete redesign of the long-running series, it focuses on fighting humans on a dinosaur-infested planet in the future. Let's not forget *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (DS, GBA, and PSP), based on the upcoming film.

E3 2006 SHOWCASE BOOTH 1000 • SOUTH HALL

15 EA

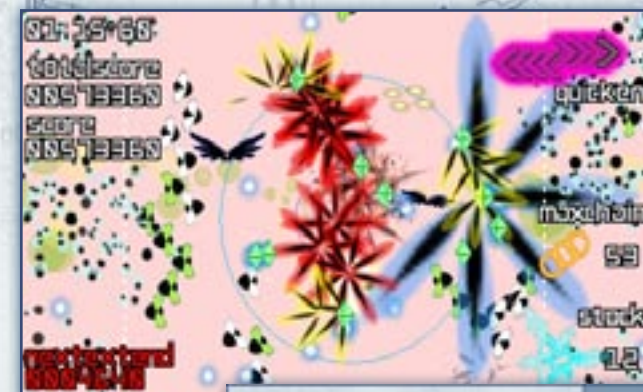
As usual, Electronic Arts had one of the biggest booths and some of the biggest fans. It would've taken an act of God to get anywhere near the theater for *Spore*, Will Wright's new game allowing you to play with the history of evolution. EA Sports had plenty of next-gen firepower to bring to the table, like a near-photorealistic Tiger Woods and the various new *Maddens*; the standout there was the Wii version of *Madden*, which had about ten seconds of learning curve. *Army of Two* (PS3, 360) allows you to team up with a buddy or an AI mercenary in global hotspots, using teamwork to overcome a world's worth of terrorists. In other wartime news, the *Battlefield* series goes dystopian with *Battlefield 2142*, adding mechs, jumpships, and cloaking devices to the *Battlefield* mix. You could also protect (or destroy) Metropolis in a very early version of *Superman Returns* (PS3, 360); marvel at the high-end graphics of *Crysis* (PC), from the team that brought you *Far Cry*; or if you missed it the first time, bust some orc/elf heads in the 360 port of *Battle for Middle-Earth II* (360).



SPORE PC



LUMINES II PSP



EVERY EXTEND EXTRA PSP



ARMY OF TWO 360



BATTLEFIELD 2142 PC



INDIANA JONES MULTI



SC: DOUBLE AGENT MULTI



ASSASSIN'S CREED PS3

BOOTH 152 • CONCOURSE E3 2006 SHOWCASE

LUCASARTS 16

LucasArts had a ton of *Star Wars* games to show off, as one might expect, but also revived old properties and presented some entirely new properties. Check this month's cover story to see how much we loved multi-platform darling *Lego Star Wars II*, and we also got to check up on new developments in the world of *Star Wars Galaxies* (PC). *Star Wars: Empire at War* receives a truly awesome-looking new expansion in *Forces of Corruption* (PC), which introduces a new criminal faction lead by underworld leader Tyber Zann, new units for all of the original game's factions, and a "corruption" mechanic that lets criminals move freely through planets they don't necessarily control. In the way of new IP, we saw *Thrillville*, a multi-platform theme park simulator for the younger set, and *Traxion*, a unique PSP title that lets you play a variety of clever rhythm mini-games that synchronize with the MP3s you've got on your memory stick. The flashiest title at LucasArts was also the most unexpected and the one we'll be waiting the longest for: *Indiana Jones*, for multiple next-generation platforms. The demo we saw was running on an Xbox 360, and while the graphics were sharp, it was the next-gen AI on display that was really impressive.

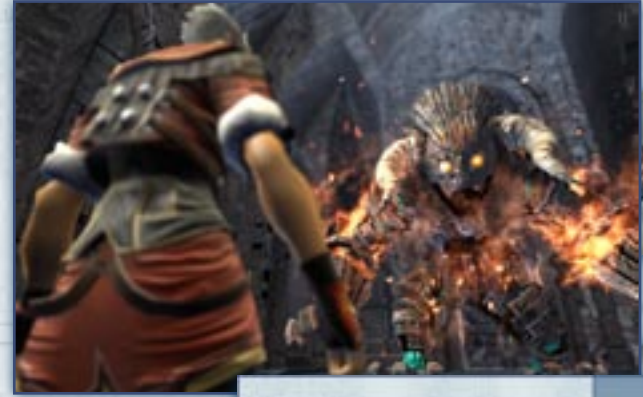


THRILLVILLE MULTI

BOOTH 924 • SOUTH HALL E3 2006 SHOWCASE

UBISOFT 17

Assassin's Creed (PS3) will kiss you and kill you in one motion. The kiss comes from the parkour or freerunning-inspired platforming gameplay, the stellar graphics, and the story based in historical fiction. The kill comes from watching sweet kills and context-sensitive stealth maneuvers and wondering just what you can pull off next. *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* features new aquatic gameplay (including stealth takedowns from under arctic ice!) and Sam Fisher doing evil in order to do good... or is he? *Rainbow Six: Vegas* is ratcheting the tried-and-true RS gameplay up another notch and giving you a high resolution Las Vegas to run around and blow terrorists away in. A number of new gameplay elements, including rappelling down the side of a skyscraper and kicking in a glass window to save an innocent. *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* is the latest in the WWII-era series and combines the protagonists from the previous two games, giving you fine control over two groups of soldiers. Finally, *Enchanted Arms* (360) is a Japanese tactical RPG from From Software, of all people, allowing you to build yourself an army of golems.



ENCHANTED ARMS 360



E3 2006 SHOWCASE BOOTH 1200 • SOUTH HALL

18 ACTIVISION



TH'S DOWNHILL JAM MULTI

Activision, the #2 publisher of video games, had a pretty good showing at this year's E3. *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* (PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, Xbox, NGC, GBA, PSP, NDS, kitchen sink, toaster oven) shifts the gameplay style of *X-Men Legends* into the larger Marvel Universe, letting you form your own teams of Marvel characters to battle villains like Dr. Doom, Galactus, and a new Masters of Evil. *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* (PC) is a tactical FPS set in the

universe of *Quake 2*, pitting teams of humans against the cyborg Strogg. Lionhead's *The Movies* (PC) gets an expansion pack with *Stunts & Effects*, adding pyrotechnics, bullet running, car crashes, and CGI to the films you can make. *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam* (Wii) is a straight-up racing game with skateboarders hurtling downhill at insane speeds, controllable by leaning with the Wii controller; in other Hawk news, *Project 8* takes the series into the next generation with a completely redesigned engine. Other titles included *X-Men: The Official Game*; *Over the Hedge*, another summer movie tie-in; and *World Series of Poker: Tournament of Champions*. *World Series of Poker* on the 360 is most notable for its compatibility with the Xbox Live video camera, allowing you to map your face onto your in-game poker player.

E3 2006 SHOWCASE BOOTH 4001 • PETREE HALL

19 MIDWAY

The biggest up-and-comer at Midway's booth this year was the much talked-about *Stranglehold* (360, PS3, PC) from director John Woo. Meant to imitate the director's famous style, the game showed us easy play control with a focus on style, and fully destructible (and we mean destructible) environments. A number of franchise holdovers were also represented, the foremost of which was *Unreal Tournament 2007* (PC, PS3). This latest edition pits the Axon against the sinister new alien race, the Necris, and features a new "warfare" game mode along with enhanced graphics, gameplay, and AI. *Mortal Kombat* fans will love what we saw from their favorite franchise: *Armageddon* (PS2, XBOX), and *Unchained* (PSP). *Unchained* was a shockingly clean translation of *Mortal Kombat: Deception*, while *Armageddon's* Create-a-Character and Create-a-Fatality proved to be quite user-friendly. Right beside all this blood-and-guts action, there was also a surprising number of family games to be seen: *The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy* (PS2, NGC, AGB) based on the popular Cartoon Network series, and adaptations of the upcoming family features *The Ant Bully* (PS2, NGC, Wii, AGB, PC) and *Happy Feet* (NDS, PC, Wii).



MK: ARMAGEDDON MULTI



MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE MULTI



ET: QUAKE WARS PC



STRANGLEHOLD MULTI



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2k7 MULTI

BEST OF SHOW



BLADE DANCER PSP



SPECTRAL SOULS PS2



DOAX2 360



TOKOBOT PLUS PS2

BOOTH 2408 • WEST HALL

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

NISA

20

NIS America is stepping up their publishing operations in the US, with four major releases on the horizon in 2006. By far the biggest and most eagerly anticipated is *Disgaea 2* (PS2), which HGM is going to cover in obsessive detail in an upcoming cover story. *Disgaea 2* brings back the combat engine from the original smash hit *Disgaea*, but ups the ante with more challenge, more characters, and beautiful new high-resolution 2D graphics. *Spectral Souls* for the PS2 marks the entry of a whole new Idea Factory franchise into the US, this one using time-honored grid-based strategy combat instead of *Generation of Chaos's* more chaotic real-time system. *Ar Tonelico* brings a distinctly different approach to RPGs on the PS2, introducing a combat system that blends traditional turn-based combat with simulation elements. While your sword-wielding hero can easily take out ordinary monsters on his own, truly evil spirits have to be purified by magical songs cast by women with holy magic powers. How strong your magic-users can become depends on how you treat them, and if you help them overcome their personal problems. The final title for NIS in 2006 is *Blade Dancer*, a sharp-looking fully 3D RPG for the PSP that blends crafting and mission questing with the sort of epic storyline people expect from a Japanese RPG.



DISGAEA 2 PS2

BOOTH 2316 • WEST HALL

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

TECMO

21

"I hate having junk minigames," were the exact words to come out of Tomonobu Itagaki's mouth when we asked him about the new minigames in *Dead or Alive Xtreme 2* (X360). Reportedly, this means that it will be full of good minigames, such as jet-skiing, tug-of-war, and bumping each other off of an inner tube. There will also be more of the great lounging around and relationship simulation mechanics that made the first game so memorable. The power of the Xbox 360 means that the girls are rendered even more beautifully now... albeit with slightly questionable breast physics. Ah, heck, it's an early build. We have faith in the man. No, really. Sleeper title *Tokobot* is getting a facelift and renovation for the PS2 in *Tokobot Plus*. Expect more streamlined gameplay, and the power to steal abilities and formations from enemies instead of finding them via blueprints. Finally, the Wii's unique control style has been begging for a golf game for quite some time now, and Tecmo's poised to answer those cries with *Super Swing Golf PANGYA* (PANGYA being a Korean word that Tecmo's using to say "nice shot")! It's based on the PC game of the same name. Experience true club-swinging action, along with a few surprises for longtime Tecmo fans.



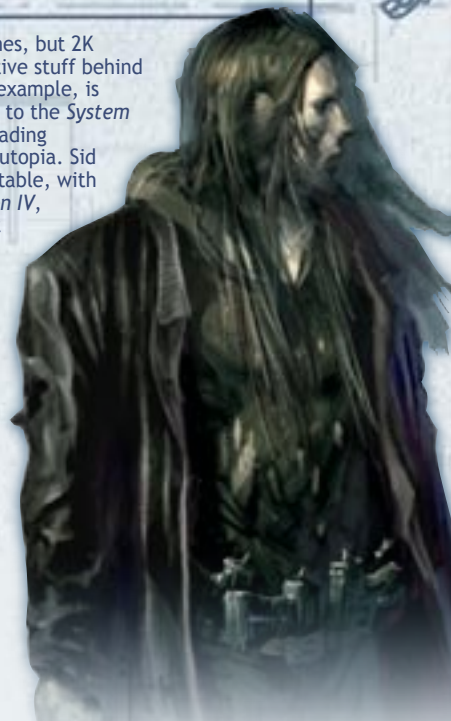
PANGYA WII

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

BOOTH 324 • SOUTH HALL

2K GAMES

Other booths had the high-profile games, but 2K Games was hiding the seriously addictive stuff behind closed doors. *Bioshock* (PC, 360), for example, is the fervently-awaited spiritual sequel to the *System Shock* series, with a nameless hero evading mutants in a slowly sinking '50s-style utopia. Sid Meier also brought some titles to the table, with the *Warlords* expansion for *Civilization IV*, and *Railroads!* (both PC), a game that allows you--yes, you--to become a railroad baron. Along similar lines, *CivCity: Rome*, "inspired by" *Civilization*, lets you take control of the Roman Empire. *The Darkness* (360) stars the Top Cow comic antihero of the same name; it's an FPS starring an assassin who gets greater powers if he's allowed to hide in the shadows. The Indian-vs.-aliens FPS *Prey* (PC, 360) also made an appearance, looking better than ever. Other must-see titles included *Broken World* (PC), an expansion and continuation of *Dungeon Siege II*; *Throne of Agony*, an all-new *Dungeon Siege* for the PSP; *Stronghold: Legends* (PC), another castle-building RTS; and licensed games based on *The Da Vinci Code* and *Family Guy*.



E3 2006 SHOWCASE

BOOTH 2508 • WEST HALL

23 KOEI

The creators of the *Dynasty Warriors* series want you to know that they've got big guns waiting in the wings. *Fatal Inertia* (PS3) is a little reminiscent of the old PSOne title *WipeOut*, but only in that it involves racing hovering vehicles. *Fatal Inertia* features a wide variety of tracks, weapons, and fully customizable "racecraft." *Bladestorm* is a PS3 launch title that's set during The Hundred Years' War in Europe. Command your mercenary army and align yourself with either the French or the English for maximum gain. *Gitaroo Man Lives!*'s title basically sums up the title. *Gitaroo Man* is back and he's ready to save the world. In Koei's own words, "Fun ain't rocket science, it's Rock 'n Roll!" *Samurai Warriors 2* hits the ground running on both the PS2 and 360 with a host of new playable characters, including the legendary Musashi Miyamoto, ninja decoys, traps, and 72 cinemas overseen by the director of "The Princess Blade." *Uncharted Waters* (PC) is a 16th century-era MMORPG that's heavily focused on exploration, trading, and fighting off pirates. Ever fancied being the captain of an armada and terrorizing the Spanish Main? Here you go.



SAMURAI WARRIORS 2 MULTI



BIOSHOCK MULTI



THE DARKNESS 360



FATAL INERTIA PS3



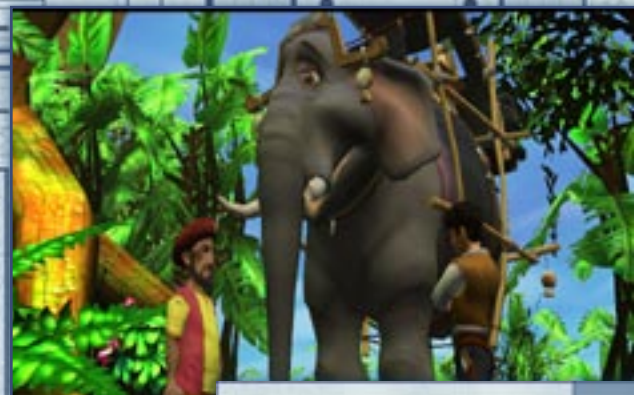
GITAROO MAN LIVES! PSP



STAR TREK: LEGACY 360



ST: TACTICAL ASSULT MULTI



JACK KEANE PC



GLORY OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE PC



BOOTH 2340 • WEST HALL E3 2006 SHOWCASE

BETHESDA 24

While Bethesda only had a few things to show, the big focus was on their new *Star Trek* games. *Star Trek: Tactical Assault* (DS, PSP) and *Star Trek Legacy* (X360, PC) are two different takes on space combat, and *Legacy* in particular looks simply amazing. Whether it's two ships tearing chunks off each other or entire fleets being decimated, the action was beautiful to behold. The story takes place over a period of decades, allowing ships from as early in the timeline as *Enterprise* all the way through Next Generation to be controlled. Over on the handhelds was *Tactical Assault*, and though the PSP version is prettier, the DS's touchscreen allows for more detailed control over the ship's systems. Set entirely in the timeline of the original series, it features the Federation vs. Klingons in a classic Trek showdown. While *Legacy* offers control over entire fleets, *Tactical Assault* is more concerned with single-ship management. Also on display was *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Legend of Jack Sparrow* (PS2, PC). Though starring the obvious protagonist, Will is also available for the Orlando Bloom fans. Taking place between the two movies, and featuring the voice of Johnny Depp, it's an action game with fighting, some mild puzzle-solving, and loads of swashbuckling.



LEGEND OF JACK SPARROW PS2

MR 7108 • KENTIA HALL E3 2006 SHOWCASE

CDV 25

German PC publisher CDV had several titles to show at E3. One surprise from this generally RTS-loving group was an early showing of a cartoonish adventure game in the vein of *Escape from Monkey Island* titled *Jack Keane* from Deck 13. Also demonstrated was the supernatural-themed tactical RPG *Night Watch*, from Russian-based developers Nival. *Night Watch* is a game that is based on the movie that was based on the book of the same name. CDV of course had plenty of RTS games in its lineup, featuring *Seven Kingdoms Conquest* that spans six thousand years of human history, and throws in demons and magic with high technology. *Cossacks II: Battle for Europe*, the stand-alone expansion to *Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars*, should be on store shelves as of press time, featured RTS battles of epic proportions. Another RTS, *Glory of the Roman Empire*, is pretty much what any RTS devotee would come to expect from a historical game based around the Holy Roman Empire. However the WWII-set RTS game *War Front*, due out September 2006, is CDV's trump card. *War Front's* main attraction is the possibility for the Allies to team up with the Germans, to take on Russia using primitive walking tanks that have energy shields and use ice cannons, while planes drop earthquake bombs.



WAR FRONT PC

E3 2006 SHOWCASE BOOTH 6808 • KENTIA HALL

26 CINEMAWARE

Cinemaware was proudly showing off an array of PC titles that included *Darwinia* and *Moscow to Berlin*, both RTS titles reviewed in this very issue. Their big announcement was the upcoming Cinemaware Classics line, remakes of classic Cinemaware PC games that update them with new graphics and gameplay. The main title mentioned was the immortal *Defender of the Crown*, but some TV Sports games, *S.D.I.*, *King of Chicago*, *Lords of the Rising Sun*, and *It Came From the Desert* are all prime candidates for remakes, too.

DARWINIA PC

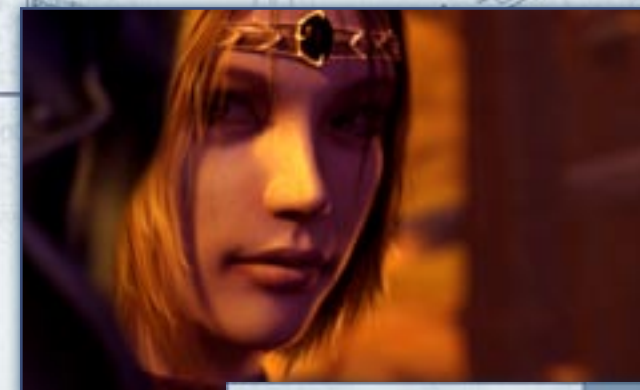


MOSCOW TO BERLIN PC

E3 2006 SHOWCASE MR 153B • KENTIA HALL

27 CODEMASTERS

Codemasters had an eclectic array of titles on display. The new *Micro Machines V4* continues the much-loved kid-friendly miniature racer on multiple current-gen platforms, with whimsical races atop pool tables and happy dancing cars. *Dance Factory* gives rhythm fans the title Konami never would, a game that automatically generates DDR-style dance steps from any CD you insert in your PS2. MMORPGs get a twist in *ArchLord* (PC), a fantasy-themed game where players vie with each other to become the Archlord who rules the entire game world... until some up-and-coming guild knocks him off his throne. Finally, there's *Maelstrom*, an RTS for PC built around the unique gimmick of terraforming.



ARCHLORD PC

E3 2006 SHOWCASE BOOTH 846 • SOUTH HALL

28 CRAVE

Crave continued doing what it does best at E3, by showing off their budget-priced licensed games. They showcased a couple of high-stakes gambling games with the titles *World Championship Poker* (PS2, PSP, 360), and *Hard Rock Casino* (PS2, PSP). Crave also plans to release a couple of Cartoon Network licensed games on the GBA with *Camp Lazlo Leaky Lake Games* and *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends*. Another Dave Mirra game showed up on the floor, this time on the PSP, called *Dave Mirra BMX Challenge*. The biggest surprise was the officially licensed amusement shooter *NRA Gun Club* for the PS2. Yes, even over the already released *VeggieTales - LarryBoy and the Bad Apple* (GBA, PS2).



DAVE MIRA BMX PSP

E3 2006 SHOWCASE BOOTH 546 • SOUTH HALL

29 D3

Ninjas were the order of the day at the D3 booth, with *Naruto: Clash of Ninja 2* (GC) and *Naruto: Ninja Council 2* (GBA) drawing long lines. *Clash of Ninja 2* and *Ninja Council 2* both expand on the initial entries in the series by adding in more characters and plotlines from the long-running *Naruto* anime and manga. The other big attraction at D3 was *Dead Head Fred*, an incredibly fun and quirky PSP action game about a heroic decapitated zombie detective who adventures through a film noir world by stealing other zombie's heads and using them to gain superpowers. There was also WTF: *Work Time Fun*, an extremely eye-catching and occasionally bizarre collection of minigames for the PSP. Rounding out D3's licensed line-up were action-adventure titles for PS2 and GC based on *Flushed Away*, the new Aardman feature from Dreamworks, and Cartoon Network's smash band-turned-animated franchise *Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi* for the Nintendo DS.

BEST OF SHOW



DEAD HEAD FRED PSP



KING OF FIGHTERS 2006 PS2



MR 153A • CONCOURSE

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

SNK

30

SNK didn't have much to present at this year's show, and one major title, *Card Fighters DS*, was missing in action. In its place were a stripped-down version of *Metal Slug Advance*, which boasted an impressive framerate and animation for a GBA game, but had no enemies in the playable build. *King of Fighters 2006* (a.k.a. *King of Fighters: Maximum Impact 2* in Japan) was fully playable and practically complete, with more characters and even more ridiculous alternate outfits than last year's *Maximum Impact*. The real star of their lineup, though, was *Metal Slug Anthology* on the PSP, which boasted arcade-perfect recreations of all five *Metal Slug* games, some of the most well-animated, funny, and punishingly difficult (dare we say hardcore?) shooters out there.



MR 2472 • WEST HALL

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

MYTHIC

31



Mythic's booth at E3 this year was all about *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning*, an MMO set in the vast universe of the *Warhammer* fantasy RPG. We stopped by, and got to beat on vultures with our little goblin shaman guy for a few minutes. *Age of Reckoning* has a lot of humor to it, and while we accidentally sent the last guy we should've into their booth, we still had fun with it. We got to join an orcish gang!



WARHAMMER ONLINE PC

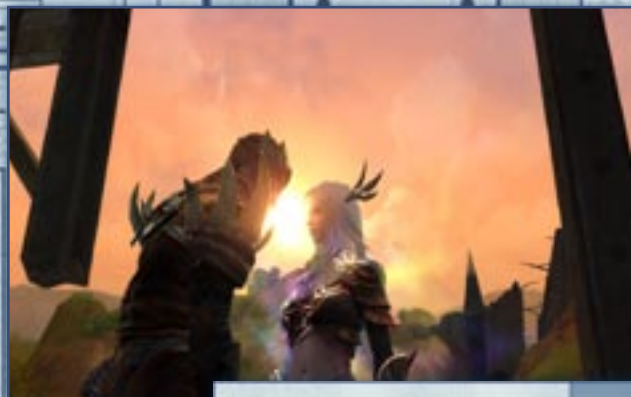
BOOTH 1046 • SOUTH HALL

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

NCISOFT

32

NCsoft had a boatload of games to show at E3. They had four--yes, four--free online games to show off: a pretty basic looking MMORPG titled *Dungeon Runners*, a rather inspired mix of street soccer and martial arts fighting in a game called *Soccer Fury* that enables you to customize characters for three-on-three no-rules matches, the cutesy Action/Tennis game *Smash Star* wherein magical abilities can determine the winner, and a very cool-looking fast-paced mech combat action game called *Exteel*. *Exteel* allows players to completely outfit their mechs for different modes of match play against other players. It wouldn't be an NC Soft show without the new stand-alone *Guild Wars* campaign *Guild Wars Factions* taking center stage. *Guild Wars Factions* will also offer up bonus content if you already own *Prophecies*, though it is not required to play *Factions*. An equally ambitious Sci-Fi action MMORPG called *Tabula Rasa* was also on the floor. *Tabula Rasa* ends up taking place across many different planets across the galaxy as players band together to drive away aliens termed "The Bane." Lastly, NC Soft was also promoting *Aion: The Tower of Eternity* as being "The most amazingly beautiful and detailed MMORPG ever." *Aion* features a complicated MMO structure based on a unique PvPvE (Player vs Player vs Environment) scheme, where any decision a player makes ultimately affects the game's storyline and the environment of that player's particular server.



AION PC



TABULA RASA PC

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

MGP H • KENTIA

33 HUDSON



The big news from Hudson was the long-overdue American debut of the fantastic *Far East of Eden* series of RPGs. The first title in the series hits the Xbox 360 in remade form as *Far East of Eden: Ziria*, while a remade *East of Eden II* is set for release on the PSP. Hudson is also pledging heavy support for the Wii's virtual console, with plans to release their entire English language catalogue for download along with the possibility of new localizations for classic import-only titles. In fact, head to Nintendo's booth and you could already play *Bomberman's Revenge* with the Wii controller. Of course, Hudson is also publishing plenty more *Bomberman*, with one title on the PSP and *Bomberman Land* heading for both the DS and the Wii. They also developed *Bomberman Act Zero*, but publishing duties there fell to Konami.



FAR EAST OF EDEN: ZIRIA 360

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

MR 6946 • KENTIA HALL

34 RED MILE

Red Mile's *Equestrian Challenge* (PS2, PC) is aimed squarely at the 8-13-year old market with a focus on girls, it seems. Think of it as *Nintendogs* for horses and you'd be very nearly on the mark. You create both your horse and your rider at the start, and the you have to manage taking care of your horse and keeping it well-trained. You even have to nourish the bond between rider and horse in this one. *Jackass* is based on the television show of the same name and features the rowdiest stunts to be seen in a game. Ever fancied rolling down an extremely long and hill city street in a trash can? *El Matador* (PC) is a shooter in the *Far Cry* vein and promises oodles of action for your money. Look for high-impact jungle action and higher-impact weaponry in this first person shooter.



EL MATADOR PC

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

STANDARD HOTEL

35 SOUTHPEAK

Southpeak Interactive didn't have a booth on the show floor, but a look at their titles could be found a mere limo ride away in a suite at the elegant Standard Hotel. There you could see *CellFactor* (PC), a simple multiplayer FPS designed to show off the incredible possibilities of Aegia's PhysX card, thanks to the main character's telekinetic abilities. You could kill enemies by overwhelming them with waves of physics objects, or by simply dropping vehicles and a huge crates on them. The multi-platform *Monster Madness* (damn near everything; 360, PS3, PC, PS2, Xbox...) uses Unreal Engine 3 to power a tongue-in-cheek camp horror adventure. The emphasis is on co-op play, using teenage stereotypes to slaughter monsters with weapons like nail guns, golf clubs, and cheerleading batons. Southpeak is also bringing us *World Pro Golf Tour*, a super-realistic golf sim for PC, PS2, Xbox, and PSP, and *Crusty Demons*, an ATV-like game about the world-famous team of daredevil stunt bike riders. The twist with this X-Box title is that you score points in *Tony Hawk* style, but you get even more points for wiping out after a stunt if the carnage is spectacular enough.



CELLFACTOR PC

E3 2006 SHOWCASE

BOOTH 1300 • SOUTH HALL

36 WEBZEN

Webzen's booth featured a diverse line-up of MMORPGs. *Huxley* (PC, 360) was our pick for Best Online Game at the show last year, so it gave us a certain satisfaction to see how it's blossomed. The FPS MMORPG creates a fully interactive post-apocalyptic world as deep as it is stunning. Even more exciting is that, for the first time, players will be able to engage in cross-platform fragging, with shared battle zones for the 360 and PC. Hack-and-slash action is due from *Soul of the Ultimate Nation* (PC), while *Project Wiki* (PC) presents an intriguing MMO "fairy tale" in a more colorful, cartoony style.



SOUL OF THE ULTIMATE NATION PC

Golvellius™ Valley of Doom



THE ENDING FROM THE GOONIES WAS ACTUALLY FILMED ON THIS VERY BEACH.

I still remember that day like it was yesterday: I had sold the drum set given to me by my aunt and uncle at a pawn shop for \$100 with the sole purpose of finally being able to buy an NES system. All my friends had one, and damn it if today wasn't my day to join the ranks. My plan was flawless, save for one slight miscalculation: my parent's ability to preach the value of a dollar at the most inopportune time. As I held that Toys R Us purchase ticket in my anxious little hand, my parents said the five words that would change my path as a gamer forever: "What's a Sega Master System?"

Huh? What's this? For the same price, I can get this "Sega" thing and send in a card for a free

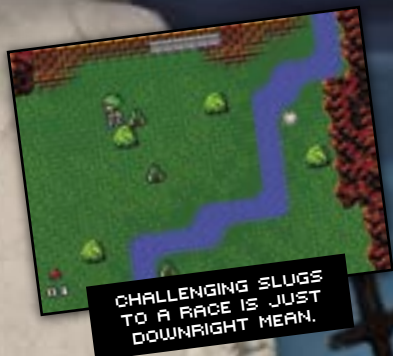


SELECTING THE PATH WITHOUT A SKULL ON IT IS PLAIN GOOD ADVICE ANYWHERE.

copy of Shinobi? Suddenly my vision of playing Super Mario Bros before bed had faded away. However, this is not a tale of woe and regret. In fact, had that gamer life-altering exchange never taken place, I would've missed out on an important era in the history of console wars. More importantly, I would've missed out on the very game that spawned my eternal love for RPGs: Golvellius: The Valley of Doom.

Platform: Sega Master System
 Publisher: Sega
 Developer: Compile
 Release Date: 1988
 Genre: RPG
 Category: Action
 # of Players: 1

Exhumed by Shoegazer



CHALLENGING SLUGS TO A RACE IS JUST DOWNRIGHT MEAN.

Golvellius was the story of a wandering youth named Kelesis who journeyed into the Valley of Doom in search of an ill king's missing daughter, Rena. An ancient evil known as Golvellius ruled the demons, and sent seven of his most fierce subjects to stop him. Through solving puzzles, vanquishing foes and enlisting the help of unexpected friends, the "Bane of Demons" drudged onward through the river valley in search of Rena, and towards his inevitable showdown with the vile former king.

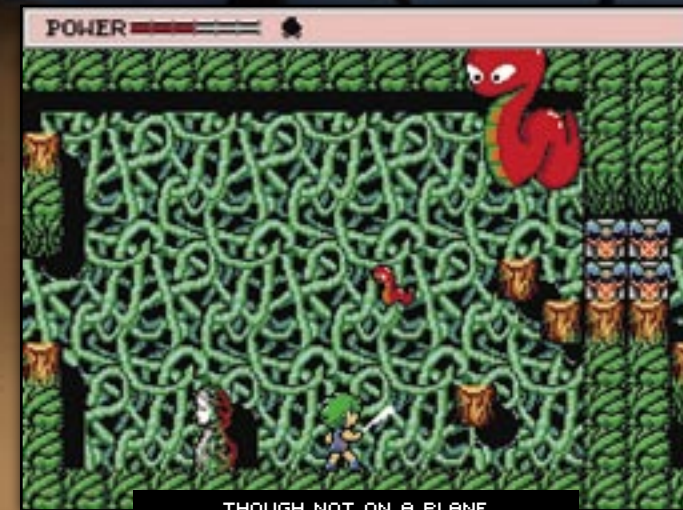
In the real world of 1988, the industry had been shaken to the very core by a little title called Zelda, and Sega was looking for its own champion to deliver an unforgettable adventure. While Golvellius was completely devoid of Octoroks, Tektites, and P-P-Peahats, it certainly did have its share of similarities to the Nintendo giant. However, the mastermind behind Compile, Pac Fujishima, used his experience from creating shooters such as Zanac and The Guardian Legend to mix up the gameplay and keep Golvellius fresh. While the majority of the game is played from the standard 8-bit top down



I AM RANDAR. FOR 150 GOLD, I CAN INCREASE THY POWER FOR THEE.
 O.K. / NO THANKS
 FOR A SHORT WHILE, KIRBY INDEED FELL ON BAD TIMES.



ONLY DUNGEONS THIS PURPLE AND BLUE COULD CONTAIN SUCH A MENACING LOOKING BAT.



THOUGH NOT ON A PLANE, THESE ARE MOST DEFINITELY SNAKES.



TAKING A TRAY OF FRESHLY BAKED COOKIES OUTDOORS IS JUST BEGGING FOR TROUBLE.

view, there are also horizontal side-scrolling cave levels, and vertical scaling dungeon levels that were incredibly innovative for the genre at that time.

Unlike Zelda however, Golvellius was brighter and more colorful overall, and featured far more intense boss battles thanks to the use of more sprites per character, creating larger scale enemies. It also boasted an enormous selection of music that was equally as hypnotic and memorable. It was definitely a game that you



CASTING SNOW MAGIC, OR WAVING POM-POMS? YOU DECIDE.

would find yourself loading up the title screen just to listen to the theme song. Even to this day, I can still pull just about any of its BGM in perfect restoration from the depths of my memory. I can't claim that about many games.

Golvellius was all but ignored when it was released in the U.S., and is often referred to as nothing more than a Zelda clone. I could not disagree more. There were definitely many similarities contained within, but Compile was able to give it a personality of its own and deliver an experience for gamers that allowed you to take pride in owning your Master System. Racewing, you know that Sega pride I'm talking about.

A year later marked the release of the Sega Genesis, and along with it came a teaser title treatment advertising Golvellius 2 as coming soon. Much to the chagrin of this writer, it was later canceled, and Golvellius 2 became a reality only in Japan for the MSX computer, where Compile had achieved the majority of its

success. Sadly, Compile went bankrupt in 2002, leaving behind its most prominent series, Puyo Puyo, and a few rarely discovered gems such as Golvellius: Valley of Doom. While it's unlikely that this game would blow you away today as it might have in 1988, it would be very difficult not to admire its charm and even more difficult to not appreciate its unique charms.





Hudson Entertainment recently announced that their hit video game franchise, Bonk, is coming to mobile phones for the first time. *Bonk's Return*, a platform game starring the classic caveman who made waves as the mascot for the TurboGrafx System, is planned for release in the summer of 2006.

Bonk's Return is a retelling of the original game *Bonk's Adventure*, bringing all the game play and memorable characters from the classic game onto mobile. It will feature 13 unique landscapes as Bonk travels once again to defeat the Evil King Drool. Defeating favorite enemies like Chikkuns, Wicked Florets and Doggies along the way, Bonk's crazy moves and power-ups including the head bonk, climbing with his teeth, and rage mode are all there to make an adventure of prehistoric proportions.

On top of the challenge that lies ahead, players will also partake in four types of mini-games. These include Lava Lobbing, Mad Dash Run, and Spring Flower challenges.

Stay tuned as we travel back in time to 10,000 years B.C. and await *Bonk's Return*.



Publisher: Hudson
Developer: Hudson
Release Date: 7/2006

Genre: Platform
Category: Action/Adv
of Players: 1

ALPHA WING 2

Alpha Wing 2 continues the interstellar battle between the Alliance and an alien invasion force bent on conquering the planets. It's a futuristic shooter and a sequel to the award-winning original, but unlike like most follow-ups that are simply tweaked, this one has been given a full makeover.

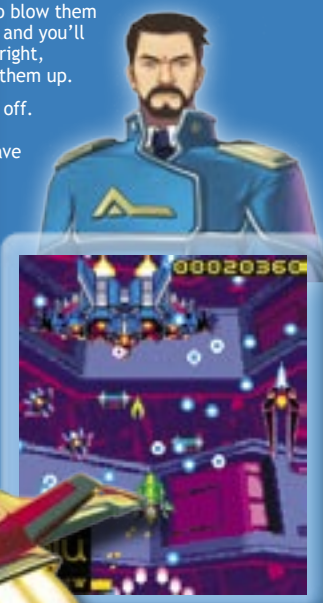
Players now take on the role of three intergalactic heroes to battle the advancing enemy. Each character will pilot a specific ship with unique weapons that can be upgraded three times by collecting power-ups. There are three planetary systems to fight through, each with three levels filled to the rim with enemies and an imposing boss. (What's with all the threes?)

Like most shooters, you'll navigate through an onslaught of strange spaceships and seek to blow them out of the sky. They will come in all sorts of attack formations with different capabilities, and you'll only be given a certain amount of lives to combat them. Can you guess how many? That's right, three. Crystals left over from destroyed ships will also add to your point count by picking them up.

The controls are standard fare for movement and the use of auto-fire can be turned on or off. These function well when taking out enemies, and if you get into some serious trouble, a shield can be activated temporarily to provide cover. However, as in the original, it will save you from weapon fire but not from ramming right into another ship. Once your three lives are gone, you can select a different fighter, but you'll have to restart the level entirely. There are no continues. If higher levels have been unlocked, you can start from there but keep in mind that you won't have as much firepower to combat tougher ships. Sometimes it's best to start from the previous level to power up your ship.

The biggest departure in this game compared to the original is its look. The game now scrolls vertically and blends both 3D and 2D visuals to create a graphically rich environment that blew us away. Background elements scroll at different speeds for an amazing above-the-earth perspective and the colors contrast effectively well to help avoid any confusion. It's a fantastic looking game with splendid music playing throughout though it doesn't deliver any sound effects. (It does of course help to be playing it on a very nice handset like the one we used. Those who have a more entry-level phone will probably see and hear something not as sharp.)

Alpha Wing 2, while not being revolutionary in terms of shoot'em up game play, establishes the new bar when it comes to this genre on mobile phones. It plays extremely well and looks very sharp indeed. Granted, you have to be a fan of the genre on mobile to really appreciate it and therefore you may not notice how much of a leap it really is in terms of quality, but if you haven't yet tried a shooter on your handset, this would be the one to choose.



Publisher: Glu
Developer: Glu
Release Date: 6/2006

Genre: Shooter
Category: Space
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE:
4 of 5



Publisher: Glu
Developer: Glu
Release Date: 7/2006

Genre: Sports
Category: Boxing
of Players: 1

Super K.O. Boxing is the name of the game and if you've been holding out for just the right mobile title to spend your cash on, this is it. It's an excellent blend of inviting casual play with one-handed controls that features plenty of action, lots of fun and just the right amount of challenge to keep you "Glued" to your phone.

Inspired by the classic *Punch Out!*, you are an underdog fighter looking to become the next boxing champ. Taking on fifteen colorful fighters with names such as 15 Cent, Sake Bomb and The Punisher, you'll punch your way through three circuits to deliver knockout blows and win the belt. Three other modes have also been included for more playing time and they are Versus (take on your favorite opponent), Challenge (fight bouts with specific goals and difficulties), and Endurance (last as long as you can against all opponents).

Your boxer will have access to high and low punches, a super punch and a block. He can also sway left and right to avoid hits. All of these are controlled through the D-pad but to use the super punch you'll have to fill a gauge by connecting consecutive blows, dodging attacks, or using the Taunt. With the Taunt, your boxer will strike a pose to humiliate the opposing fighter and it can be called on at anytime, as many times as you want. This could be your key to success or your downfall since it'll leave you open to a big hit.

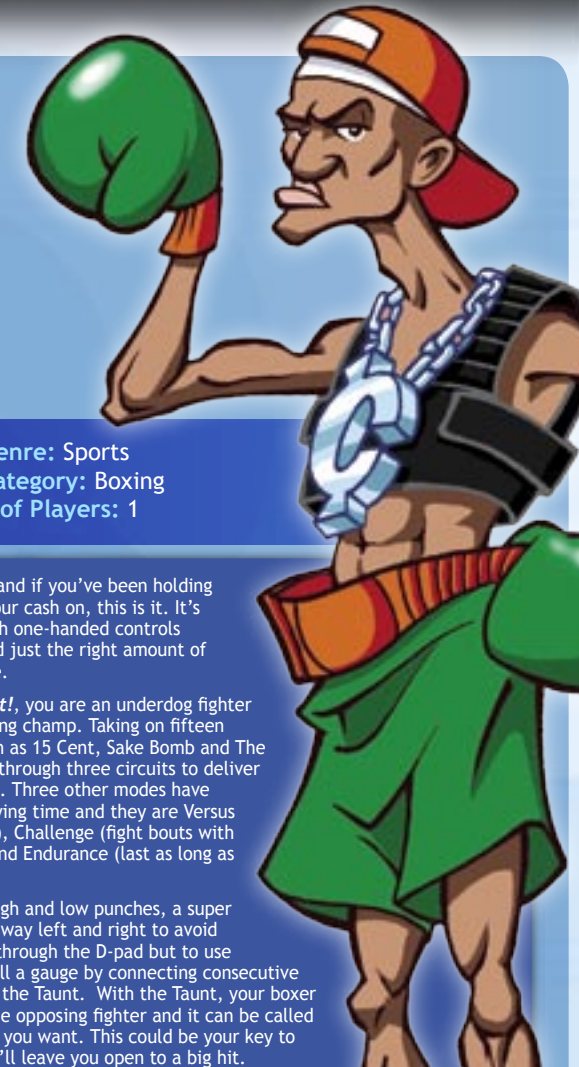
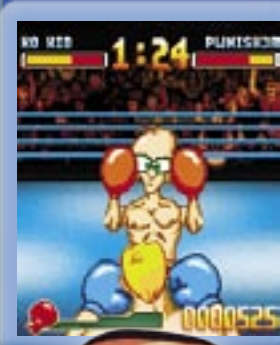
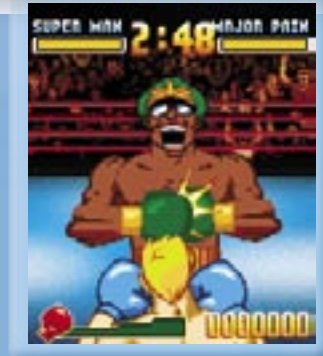
When fighting, you'll notice that each opponent has a unique pattern of attack. You'll have to figure it out and counterattack correctly. At times, only by instigating them will you be able to get them to fight as well. The opponents also have special moves up their sleeves and though they'll give you a hint as to when it's coming, your reflexes will have to be on the ball to avoid being punished and possibly go down for the count, which in itself, is also turned into another challenge.

With other similar games, when you're sent down to the mat, you have to mash buttons to raise your fighter back up. Instead, it's basically an extra mini-game. If you've been knocked down, hitting the correct buttons when the countdown numbers converge in the middle of the screen will eliminate the "birdies" floating around your head. One correct button press means one bird eliminated and you must continue this for all of them to fly away, however many there are. Sometimes you'll have one, sometimes you'll have 10. This rule follows suit for when the opponent is down but if you happen to be pressing the button for the heck of it, you'll notice that it also replenishes some of your health. That's a nice way to get some strength back! You'll need it against the tougher opponents.

Super K.O. Boxing is a shot in the arm for mobile games because of its light-hearted sports theme that many will enjoy. It's quick to understand and play while having a very good learning curve. The characters are large and filled with even larger personalities, the controls are perfect and it's a game you can play continuously. Give Glu a championship belt for this one since this is one of the "must have" titles so far this year.



FINAL SCORE:
5 of 5



BROTHERS IN ARMS EARNED IN BLOOD

"War is Delightful to those who have had no experience of it." - Erasmus

Well, certainly the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus was not referring to war video games when he said that, because quite the contrary, they are quite entertaining. Come to think of it, video games weren't even around in the fifteenth century so we wonder if his opinion would be a bit less pacifist if he were alive today and was a gamer? Probably not since he was a humanist after all. Nevertheless, you will still have a great time playing through this mobile incarnation of the *Brothers in Arms* series.

Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood 3D is the latest in the war game series that has recently graced the console side of gaming. The game has eight missions that consist mostly of gunplay and the tasks of reaching a destination or guarding your position from invading forces. These range from on-foot skirmishes, sniper fights, and tank battles to those in which you must hold down the fort. This action takes place in Normandy and Africa as your forces fight and overtake Nazi enemies.

Graphically, this is one of the best, if not the best, game we've seen so far on a phone. The camera takes a third-person over-the-shoulder perspective that gives your soldier an authentic look with great detail. Certain key points will trigger cut scenes to add a cinematic feel to the game but what we really enjoyed was the sense of excitement added to the battles. Sound effects ripple through the background with flying bullets, cursing Nazis and planes soaring high above. It's almost surreal as you're battling enemies and see planes crashing before you, grenades exploding and soldiers wilting away. You won't believe how well this MOBILE game captured the essence of war just like console games.

The controls work surprisingly well considering you have command over many actions. Movement can be handled by both D-pad or keypad and when seeking cover, all you have to do is get close to the barrier and it will be done automatically. Jumping out of cover to lay suppressing fire or strafing across when you're running around on foot are easily employed with one-button commands. Certain weapons such as the sniper rifle or the rocket launcher allow for zooming in but we had the most fun driving the tank. This game is easy to pick up and once you've completed the first mission that acts as a tutorial, you won't have any trouble maneuvering through the game.

All in all, *Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood 3D* doesn't bring anything new to the video game war genre, but what it does is elevate mobile games a step higher. Like other high-end games for mobile, it pushes boundaries and pulls off a well-polished experience. We just wish it could have lasted longer.



FINAL SCORE :
4.5 of 5

Publisher: Gameloft
 Developer: Gameloft
 Release Date: 5/2006

Genre: Shooter
 Category: Action/Adv
 # of Players: 1

GORILLAZ EGES

Gorillaz Entertainment System (GES) is the world's first mobile game designed and created in conjunction with the musical group Gorillaz. It's a collection of four mini-games, each based on one of the group members that has a cool combination of retro play, looks and style.

Each mini-game is a one-thumb encounter that, more or less, tests your reactionary skills in order to get the highest score possible. They are extremely simple, but still require a certain amount of skill to perform just right.

The first game is Muds' and it's a form of the classic "Breakout". Rows of colored bricks will line the top and by deflecting the ball back against the rows of bricks, they will be cleared one by one. It's fairly standard play with switching brick layouts but instead of using a paddle to deflect the ball, you're actually using his codpiece! The animation is just too funny as he moves into position and whacks the ball back.

In Noodle's game, you must block oncoming objects karate-style. They will approach in high, middle or low trajectories and you must quickly decide whether to use your high, middle or low block. This proved to be the most difficult of the four mini-games because bouncing balls will make it difficult to judge their approach.

With Russel, you must strive to stuff his face with as many cookies as possible within the given timeframe. The cookies will appear at the four corners and by pressing the corresponding button, Russel will collect and eat them. The simplest of all the mini-games, the faster you can press the buttons the higher your score will be.

By far, the game we couldn't get enough from was 2D's punching bag. There are two steps to this game and both rely on pressing the action button at the appropriate time. The first part is to wind up and hit the punching bag as hard as possible. The second part entails bouncing the punching bag as far as possible. In both, pressing the action button at the right time will result in the strongest punch and farthest distance.

Each game is presented in "Atari 2600" style graphics with solid colors and blocky animations but mixes well with the more contemporary art style given to the Gorillaz characters. This gives the game a distinct feel on purpose that we think should resonate well with the group's fanbase. Sounds are also very retro and fit the game perfectly.

GES is nothing special by today's standard of games looking to push the envelope in terms of graphical and gaming prowess. However, it's plain and simple on purpose which is why we enjoyed it more. It's just a fresh change of pace.



FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5

Publisher: RealArcade Mobile
 Developer: FunHouse
 Release Date: 5/2006

Genre: Arcade
 Category: Mini-games
 # of Players: 1



We sit down and chat with John Carmack on his latest endeavor for mobile games

EA just recently announced *Orcs & Elves*, a new turn-based fantasy RPG exclusive to mobile phones and created by the same team that brought *DOOM RPG* to life. That game was critically acclaimed by many and therefore we couldn't help but want to find out more about what this new title holds in store. To wit, we were able to briefly chat with the mastermind behind both titles, John Carmack.

DOOM RPG was a great title for mobile and is proving to be quite a success. What inspired you to create *Orcs & Elves*?

John Carmack: The creation of *DOOM RPG* came about in a very random sort of way. There was no grand design when it was first thought up but I knew that there were just much more powerful possibilities in mobile gaming than what I had been experiencing. The end result was a title we all felt maximized mobile's potential, but with *Orcs & Elves*, we wanted to improve upon that experience and step up even more. Being that I always wanted to create something with this fantasy-styled theme, I thought we could leverage what had been learned from *DOOM RPG* and create something special.

Why did you choose to make it for mobile instead of taking it to other platforms?

John Carmack: Mobile game development is like looking back in time for me. I enjoy the fact that I can come to it from a more pure-engineering type level. I am proud that I can be picky on the low-level details of the game and focus on the sequences of the actions that occur. I also believe that the mobile space is averse to being as risky as other platforms. Other platforms involve millions of dollars whereas mobile is just not.

So do you believe this will be part of something bigger?

John Carmack: We've created what I believe to be just a small peek into an in-depth world that has so much more to offer. If this leads to creating content on other platforms or possible sequels, we're always open to those ideas.

DOOM has a huge following of gamers and the fantasy theme of *Orcs & Elves* will probably appeal to them as well. Do you think casual gamers will be interested in this theme?

John Carmack: We utilized this theme because we are aiming it at a broad market range. The ideas of magical wands and flaming swords don't just appeal to Dungeons & Dragons players... we know there's a massive audience who enjoy the *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* franchises and we're making it for them as well. That's why we're also making the game very easy to play, with as much one-handed control as possible. Again, we learned so much from *DOOM RPG* and we're just improving on it all around.

How will the game compare across the various levels of handset quality? Will a user with an entry-level handset get the same experience?

John Carmack: With *DOOM RPG* we began with the lower-tiered handsets and worked our way up. This time around, we decided to start from the top and work our way down. The game is so much larger this time around and has so much more, it was impossible to maintain the same level of production across the handset ranges. We've tried really hard to make sure that on each handset you're getting the best experience possible.

Are there any last thoughts you'd like to convey to our readers about *Orcs & Elves*?

John Carmack: This game has been in development for a long time now and we were finished with the high-end BREW version almost six months ago. I've had a difficult time not being able to talk about it and I'm so glad that I can finally do so. It's such a great and involving game that even our testers don't want to put it down. We sit people down with it and they are there all afternoon exactly as we left them. I am very eager to get this game into the hands of people.

Well, we're people who are very eager to get our hands on the game! The game is due out by May on Verizon. Other carriers will follow shortly thereafter. Thanks to John Carmack and EA for sitting down with us.





When it made its debut last year, *LEGO Star Wars: The Game* was a pleasant surprise and one heck of a way to blend two awesome things like building blocks and science fiction. Players could assume the roles of all their favorite characters from the recent *Star Wars* trilogy while playing through interactive versions of cinema's greatest moments. It was even possible to play as Jar Jar Binks, Darth Maul and Count Dooku. One year later, the sequel looms, and there's great news, too: this time around, you'll be trekking through the original three films.

While the set of movies that served as the inspiration may have changed, little else of any consequence has. That's encouraging if you're one of many who loved the original, since the basic play mechanics remain every bit as accessible as they always were. You'll be able to jump right in like you never stopped playing, while also knowing that there are some changes that make the experience even more rewarding.

As before, the festivities begin in a central level hub you can explore to find individual stages. They're divided by episode, and you can progress through the story arc as you complete stages. If you wish, you can also re-visit familiar regions to grab items you missed, or to just goof around with characters and cheats you've accessed. What's new to the sequel is the gold brick requirement. Levels now contain four of these wonderful items, squirreled away in places you'd not normally find. If you don't have enough of them, there comes a point where you can't enter later zones. This mechanic forces the player to explore a bit more than before, which is both a blessing and a curse. It's nice that you're forced to take your time exploring, but it kind of gets in the way of the pacing if you're the type who plays for the story (though if that's you, go watch the movies) or who likes to blow through a game like a one-man army.

Of course, that's not going to be possible, anyway. Each level places you in control of the star character, with others appropriate to the current plot traveling at your side. The press of a button switches to a new protagonist the instant a situation requires it. We found that there are still moments where everyone clusters



together and you might accidentally switch to R2-D2 when you wanted Luke (just to cite one common example), but even then it's a snap to make a second swap to the desired form. That's good, because this new adventure is built around character swapping. Now you'll find that various situations force you to abandon your Jedi characters and jump into the shoes of bounty hunters and robots much more than ever before.

No matter who you're controlling, the action comes fast and furiously. Events are viewed from a fair distance, meaning that you don't see a lot of detail in the characters. The result typically is a better perspective on the environments you're exploring (though we ran into some places where tight corridors obscured crucial details from sight and resulted in tedious wandering before we realized we'd walked by a branch in the hallway several times). You'll see plenty of interactive devices at all points, and using them to your advantage is key. The challenge comes from the swarms of enemies that assault you throughout the quest. When you're trying to solve puzzles while avoiding blaster shots from soldiers at the same time, things quickly grow hectic. That's why the player who progresses is the one that realizes what resources he has available and utilizes them completely. Patience is a virtue that will take you far.

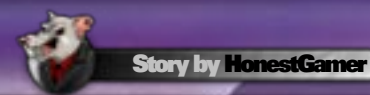
This is particularly true in some zones, where you'll be making use of three or four unique devices. These range from grappling zones (red crosshairs that let you know a gun-toting character can reach higher ledges) to cranes that can lift enemies and objects from one location and deposit them neatly in another. Another common element is the Storm Trooper mask, which lets you head up to where some are congregating without attracting attention. Amusingly, even the fur-covered Chewbacca can sometimes mingle nicely if he slaps on the white visor. It's not uncommon to round a bend and find a few of your foes gathered around a door, as if gossiping about the latest episode of a television show. Then you run toward them, blasters firing, and they're out of commission before they even have the chance to squeeze off some return fire. This makes moving through levels more fun because you really get to feel like a sneak. There's also risk, because taking damage means you have to head back to a previous corridor to suit up again. That's bad news if you take a hit just before coming to a doorway that only opens for those dressed in white. It's amazing how such a simple addition turns sterile spaceship hallways into an invigorating experience.



Platforms: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
 Publisher: LucasArts
 Developer: Traveler's Tales
 Release Date: September 12, 2006

Genre(s): Action
 Category: Adventure
 # of Players: 1-2

LEGO STAR WARS II
 THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY



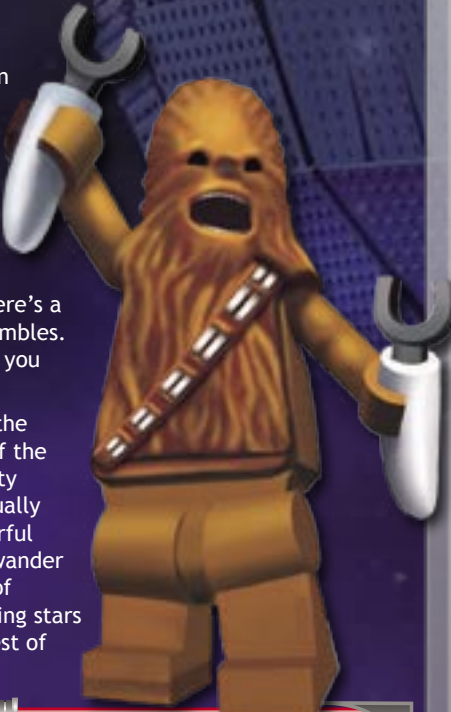


The clothes aren't what make the game, though. Instead, you'll cherish those moments where you're just kicking LEGO butt. As before, you'll be able to exercise some awesome Jedi skills. Ben Kenobi can dive into a group of soldiers with little fear of reprisal because he's so adept at deflecting their shots. Projectiles go flying (often back at those who fired them) and so do helmets. The game is violent in the same way that watching a bowling ball crash through some pins is, but with more of the exhilaration. Plastic chunks scatter everywhere and it's easy to wonder why some games bother with all of the blood and gore. This is a combat-heavy game that's suitable for younger gamers and their parents. Combat is rewarding because there's never really a sense of overwhelming vulnerability, yet there's always the chance that if you lose your focus, your character will fall to pieces. Only those who keep a cool head and play carefully will slash or blast their way to safety.

With that said, the loss of a life isn't as bad here as it is in some titles. As before, you'll simply watch your character scatter into a few pieces, then reassemble within seconds to return to battle. The running meter of LEGO pieces at the top of the screen will take a sizeable hit, but you don't have to return to a previous checkpoint or solve puzzles you've already completed. The downside is that you want to keep your losses minimal, or you won't fill up your meter and reap end-level goodies. Those who simply want to blaze through the game can easily do so, but the truly rewarding experience waits for those who are most patient and skillful. It's a nice balance.

That was true of the first game, as well, but *Traveler's Tales* decided to take things one step further for the sequel. If you find that the challenge you crave isn't being provided, you can turn on a feature that causes the difficulty to adjust accordingly. If you're making quick work of enemy troops every time there's a skirmish, the penalty for failure grows more severe. Pieces scatter more readily when your LEGO figure crumbles. Reaching the end of the stage in good shape will suddenly prove difficult. As one representative suggested, you might not want to try that mode if you suck. It's funny because it's true.

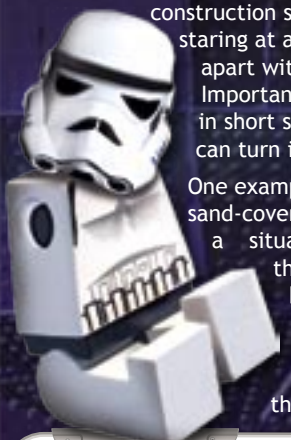
Another tweak we liked is a slight revision to the available moves. In the previous game, Jedi characters generally just pushed soldiers out of the way if they got too close. While that's still a pleasant possibility (particularly near those nasty environmental hazards), an equally intriguing option is to lull them into a stupor with your powerful mind-control abilities. It's great fun to watch an adversary wander about as if drunk, even if it's not the most practical means of dispatching the goons. Little artistic flourishes such as spinning stars show that the developers had a lot of fun with even the tiniest of elements. It's easy to share their enthusiasm.



The adjustments extend beyond just the Jedi characters, though. Even when you're not in control of a master of the Force, you have some additional options. Many of the characters use blasters as their offensive attack, but there come moments where you'll be faced by a web of laser fire. What do you do? For the first time ever, you roll or sidestep out of the way. It seems like a minor twist, hardly worth mentioning, but we can remember how frustrating it was when such evasive actions weren't available and you had to absorb bullets like a sponge. Such limitations resulted in a game where you felt punished each time you couldn't wield a lightsaber. The change this time around is a welcome one, and a bit overdue. We're pretty sure Han Solo demanded the upgrade; he dodges and weaves like a champ if you put him up against the throngs of enemy soldiers. It's hard to imagine things playing out any differently.

Another ability that wasn't around before (at least not on this level) is the construction skill. Suppose you blast away a set of barrels and find yourself staring at a shed of LEGO pieces. Before, you might have tried hacking them apart with your saber. Now, they provide the answer to in-game puzzles. Importantly, the skill isn't limited to the Jedi characters (who are obviously in short supply here). If your character isn't a droid of some sort, he or she can turn into an on-the-spot architect.

One example that springs to mind takes place when you journey through the sand-covered streets of Mos Eisley. Partway through the stage, you come across a situation like the one referenced above. The solution is simple: jump into the shed and start chucking out pieces. Your chosen character will send blocks flying like an absolute madman. He'll slap together a few pedestals, which you then combine with some other pieces lying nearby. Before you know it, you've assembled an ATS unit. What's better is that the pieces used in the construction are actually authentic. It's almost like you actually did some building, and now you can stomp through the rubble that blocks the way forward.



Portable Wars

While we've focused on the console versions, there are portable editions that bring their own set of features to the table. The game is available on the PSP, DS and Game Boy Advance. Not only that, but there are plenty of new features.

First, there's the PSP version. Last year's game didn't make it to Sony's handheld, so this time around the developers made up for that by setting up a unique reward for those willing to undertake speed runs: you can unlock 18 characters from the first three episodes. After you've assembled them, you can use them in Free Play mode.



For the DS, a stand-alone version was developed. It is three-dimensional, and there's a lot of emphasis placed on the stylus. You



Finally, the Game Boy Advance version was developed to utilize an isometric perspective that is more friendly to



can use it to control the camera and to switch between characters on the fly, now with more precision than ever before. You can connect wirelessly and play with a friend, too, just as you can on the PSP.



the system's limitations. You'll still be able to handle multi-character groups, just like you do in the console versions. It's just easier to stick the action in your pocket. Look for all three games to ship alongside their console big brothers.



This brings to mind yet another new feature, the ability to commandeer almost every vehicle you encounter. You could hop aboard a speed cruiser or pod in the first game, but only in specific levels. Now they're a seamless part of the experience. Stealing a ride is as simple as pressing the correct button while within range. You can also hop aboard the backs of giant beasts (something we would have liked to do in some levels of the first game), complete with their own attacks. It's not enough to make you invulnerable, but it's nice. The vehicles' controls sometimes felt a bit off to us, like trying to perform karate underwater, but there's time yet for months of tweaking. Besides, nothing we experienced got in the way of the fun that comes from stomping through hordes of Stormtroopers. At worst, we accidentally drove over a few more characters than we intended. There are no visible repercussions for squishing your own allies, either, so you can just go insane if the urge strikes you.

The vehicular changes also mean more devious puzzles. You'll have to really think outside the box to get past some zones. One early example finds you at a dead end, surrounded by high ledges and no visible way out. How can you use the nearby beasts to make progress? Other puzzles include switches that revert to their original position seconds after being touched. You can't trip them all on foot, but what about if you grab that speed cruiser nearby? With the ability to pull so many tricks out of their hats, the developers really went crazy. You can never be quite sure what to expect next. Some of the stages are so big that you'll play for an hour just to complete them, all without waiting through more than two or three extremely brief load screens.

Besides providing the foundation for larger levels, the gameplay expansions also provide the game with some real depth. Though it was fun enough, the previous title relied on only the most rudimentary of puzzle solving. You knew you could find your way forward if you jiggled enough blocks or shot enough opponents. Here, brainpower comes into play more frequently. The protagonists themselves even play a role. While some character attributes are there just for fun and for the sake of the source material, others relate to puzzles.

Let's say there's a switch above you that must be tripped by a walking droid. C-3PO is obviously needed, but there's a problem: he can't jump. The solution in this case lies in a nearby garbage can. Crush it and you'll reveal blocks, which you can then use to build a ramp. You'll constantly have to switch between party members in moments like these, and it's hard not to feel clever after feeling your way through one of these situations.

One problem with *LEGO Star Wars* was its tendency to take itself just a little bit too seriously at inopportune moments. When a little more focus on the building block side of things might have created some unique gameplay situations, the developers often ignored the chance to push things to the next level and instead threw in a convenient cinema. Here, they seem more willing to place emphasis on making the most of the available tools and just having fun in general. Thus, you'll see characters bumping into each other and falling apart, or getting knocked over by cruisers that take too long coming to a halt, like some old Leslie Nielsen flick.



This juvenile humor is more prevalent than it ever was in the first game, yet still natural and true to the LEGO universe. Artistic license extends to favorite moments from the movies, like when Han Solo fires his blaster at the Mos Eisley café, to smaller touches such as a vending machine that spits out cowboy hats and baseball caps.

Clearly, the game means to build upon every element of the successful template its forerunner established. Each stage still features ten power cells you must retrieve if you want to create new vehicles. There are plenty of characters to recruit, too. If the thought of running through LEGO-sized environments as a blocky Han Solo excites you, prepare to love much of what you find in *LEGO Star Wars II*. As before, the main adventure is only a fraction of the fun. Playing with a friend and searching for all the hidden goodies you missed will provide the reasons that keep you playing long after the credits role. It's hard to say just why, but dashing through a familiar stage for the fifth time is always a little bit better when you do it as a different character.

Is it any surprise, then, that the developers decided to take that one step further? Suppose you've unlocked a few characters. If you wish, you can then start to mix and match pieces. Maybe you think Leia's slave outfit would look darn good with Chewie's head attached. (Maybe you're a freak.) Your wish is the game's command. There are more than fifty playable characters, and you can swap segments out at will before taking your deformed beauties into Free Play mode. The developers even thought to include unique names for the various possible combinations, a daunting task when you consider the sheer number of options available to the gamer.

Your choices don't end with just the characters from this game, either. If you're so inclined, you can export data from your memory card save for its predecessor. Yes, it's true: you can finally see what Darth Maul would look like in a LEGO bikini. (Jason, knock it off. You're scaring us. — ed.) If you're a fan of setting up events, you can even stage impossible sequences. What might Luke do if he got to meet his mother? Would the LEGO universe fold in on itself if old Ben Kenobi got to tutor a younger version of himself in the ways of the Force? It sounds cliché to say it, but it's really true; your only real limitation here is your imagination.

Ultimately, the most important thing to remember about *LEGO Star Wars II* is that it's fun. We spent hours playing it and when our time ended, we already were thinking ahead to what fun we might have with the finalized version. Even in its unfinished state, the game really has improved on many of those things we loved about the original. It retains the fast and furious combat, but it isn't afraid to break things up with some mind-bending puzzles when the situation warrants it. Not only that, but attention paid to the characters and setting is exemplary. It's great fun to see the *Star Wars* universe come to life in blocky form. We're betting there are hundreds of thousands of gamers out there that feel the same way. If a few more months in development prove time enough to iron out a few rough spots typical of an unfinished product like the one we played, *LEGO Star Wars II* will be every inch the sequel we always knew was possible.



LEGO Casemods

For kicks, we decided to ask our members at Luv2Game.com to try some creative things with LEGOs and their game systems. This is what we got:

MarioLEGOCube

by Anomaly117
Okay, this is my LEGO Mario, with a GameCube inside, and it can hold the controls. It all works just fine. I never really used LEGOs before and I always thought Duplo were regular, so imagine my surprise when I got to the store... I ended up needing over fifty dollars' worth to make this huge monster.



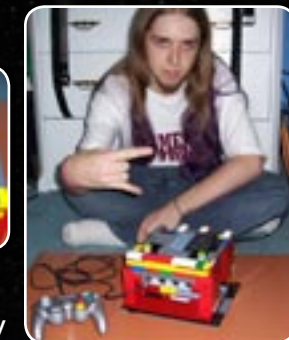
The NES

by jeromy
My LEGO NES case mod. It's a working NES. Made of LEGOs.



LEGOCube

by Topher



You'll have to excuse the variety of colors. There is a joint made of special magnet pieces (they were in an old LEGO set I had years ago). It's hard to tell but in two of the shots the power light is on showing that it works. All ports are clear to allow them to be used.

The PS LEGO Home Garden Terrace Camp Town Zone 2

by tman2k4

Before the days of *The Sims*, we had to make do with LEGOs. This is a small example of what I used to do back in the day before I had the PS2 I made the LEGO set on.



Q. What makes a hardcore gamer?
A. An undying love for games.

Come join us Hardcore Gamers online at:

LUV2GAME.COM

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We love to game. It's a passion that starts at the controller, but goes beyond into our lives, forming a video game mindset that we're all a part of. It's not just about being hardcore. Hardcore Gamer Magazine and Luv2Game are all about living a gaming life and loving it. Reviews, previews, and strategies are just the start! We want to share with you the kind of gaming content that thrills our hearts as gamers. Feel free to read, explore, connect, and voice your opinions. We've designed this community to be like a game itself, with a point system that rewards you for having fun. Be proud to be a gamer, and be heard and even published here on LZG and in print in HGM. We're gamers. You're gamers. We all love to game and that's why we're here.



HGM REVIEW GAUGE

- 5 = Really Good
- 4 = Good
- 3 = Average
- 2 = Bad
- 1 = Really Bad

Wolfin '06

Publisher: Nintendo
 Developer: Nintendo
 Release Date: 5/15/06
 Rating: "E" for Everyone (Comic Mischief)

Genre(s): Adventure/Platform
 Category: Classic Mario Returns!
 # of players: 1-2 (Single or Multi-Card Play)

New SUPER MARIO BROS.

Review by Shoegazer

No matter what Nintendo system you cut your gamer teeth with, there has always been a killer Mario app around to amaze you. However, for us older folk, we've been waiting some 15 years for a true 2D Mario sequel. While the DS port of *Super Mario 64* was a nice way to break in the new system, it also served as a reminder that there just isn't any Mario like a side-scrolling Mario. With the release of *New Super Mario Bros.*, Nintendo is set to kill two birds with one stone: unleashing both a traditional 2D Mario experience, as well as the next killer Mario app.

I will say this right off the bat to avoid any mystery: *New Super Mario Bros.* is not only the game you've been pleading for since the days of the SNES, but it is also the single greatest handheld game that I have ever played. Every aspect of this game encompasses exactly what a Mario game should be, and will not disappoint even the most jaded gamer. Well, that's not entirely true. By the time the ending credits roll, you can't help but feel disappointed that the quest is over, especially considering that we may never see another one like it.



"hop n' bop" play, mushrooms, fireballs, warp pipes, piranha plants, goombas, koopa troopas, hidden 1-ups, beanstalks, and the final showdown with Bowser. Oh, and don't forget to keep your eyes peeled for those sneaky shortcuts. There is more than one way to clear most levels, and finding the alternate path will wield useful shortcuts and secrets.

New Super Mario Bros. was designed with great detail, borrowing all the right elements from previous games in the series as well as adding several new twists and turns. In terms of gameplay, it fits in perfectly right between *Super Mario 3* and *Super Mario World*, closely resembling both. The game is broken out into eight worlds, each with its own set of stages, mini-bosses, and bonus huts. Press start and it's all here: the classic



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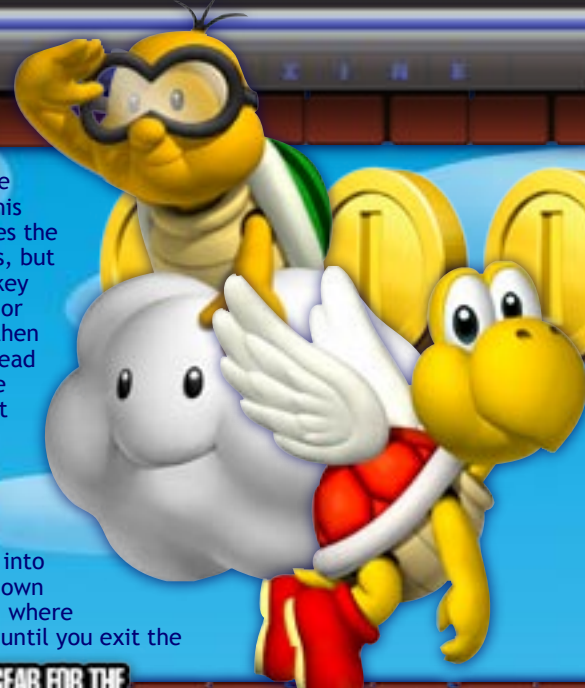
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316

I can already hear the whining about how this game barely even uses the system's dual screens, but if that becomes the key factor as to whether or not you'll play this, then you may want your head examined. While true that this game wasn't built with the dual screen functionality in mind, it does use them in innovative ways. For example, when you drop down into a pipe, Mario drops down to the bottom screen where the action continues until you exit the



GEAR FOR THE LITE-HEARTED GAMER



underground. It's not earth-shattering, but it's pretty neat. The second screen also tracks your progression through the level so that you'll know how close you are to the goal. It also marks when you reach the level checkpoint, which is helpful as you try to memorize the hazards.

While most of the talk surrounding Nintendo these days is centered on the recent Wii announcement, Nintendo is also quietly approaching the re-launch of their dual screen system in the form of the DS Lite. Sleeker, sexier and smaller than its predecessor (don't worry, the screens are the exact same size as the current model), the DS Lite will also feature brighter screens and a larger stylus. Available only in polar white at launch, the DS Lite hits the street on June 11th for the reasonable price of \$129.99.

NSMB comes about as close to perfection as you could ask for. It's somewhat short overall and maybe a smidge on the easy side, but beating the game allows you to replay the worlds, as you left them, in search of all the giant coins and shortcuts that you missed the first time through. Truly, this game was meant to be played through several times. You definitely can't see it all in one sitting.

The nostalgia factor, fantastic graphics, multiplayer mini-games (including the addictive Mario vs. Luigi mode), new power-ups and overall depth make this game as incredible as anything fans could've dreamed up over the past 15 years. Do yourself a favor: Don't you dare pass up the chance to own this one.

THE 2nd OPINION

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

All sequels should be like this. Give us more of what made the original so great, update the visuals to today's standards and add a few thoughtful touches as icing on the cake. My only complaint is that the multiplayer modes seem like an afterthought. I won't deduct points for that since they're unnecessary anyway.

Rating : 5 of 5



FINAL SCORE : 5 of 5

MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM

Review by James

Publisher : Capcom
Developer : Capcom Production Studio 1
Release Date : 5/2006
Rating : TEEN
Genre(s) : Action/Adventure
Category : Huge game hunting
of players : 1-4

If there's one true thing about monsters, it's that they need killin'. Some can be attacked head-on, others need strategy, and the rest need to be run from until later. Eventually, though, they all need eradication. They're monsters and you're a monster hunter. It's a living.

In Capcom's *Monster Hunter Freedom*, life in the village revolves around harvesting the creatures of the land. There are one or two docile, easy targets, but most creatures are dangerous enough that it's going to take some skill to bring them down. Hunting these beasts isn't a matter of hiding in the bushes and sniping from a position of safety, it's a risk to life and limb that, when successful, will allow the harvesting parts useful in many different ways. Monster bone, for example, can be used to create or upgrade weapons, while raw meat can be cooked on a spit and used to revitalize stamina. Scales can upgrade armor, and claws can further enhance weapons. Alternately, everything can be sold for a tidy profit, depending on whether you want to be a pack-rat or not.

In addition to the bits pulled off downed prey, items can also be found lying around the field. Herbs, nuts, and roots can be harvested by hand, while a bug net allows the catching of insects. The insects can then be

used for fishing, and different fish have their own unique properties. Add in the ability to combine two items into something totally new and you get a surprisingly deep, fun item management system.

At heart, though, it's all about taking down the big game, and this requires clever use of the available tools. Certain creatures are just too tough and powerful to take down head-on, such as the giant winged Kut-Ku. Flashbombs have a stun effect, paintballs make monsters show up on the mini-map, and pitfalls are good for immobilization, but just taking sword to creature isn't going to cut it, so to speak. Careful planning is required, and watching a vicious foe fall to a successful strategy is both fun and satisfying.

Hunting is serious business, though, and you can't just traipse into the wilds looking for creatures to slaughter. Missions can be gotten one of two ways: either by the village chief standing outside the Gathering Hall, or inside the Hall for multiplayer action. Sadly, the latter had to go untested at press time, so I can only imagine the strategies and combos a group can get up to.

Single player missions are divided into classes of difficulty, with the 1-star jobs doubling as the tutorial. Completing a job within the generous time limit without dying nets a nice payoff, both in terms of cash and items, but getting KOed causes a significant hit to the final reward. Fortunately, a completed mission can be redone as often as necessary, meaning that money is never impossible to get and there's



always a place to find specific monsters. Still, all monster hunting and no play has the possibility of getting monotonous after a while, so the village offers a few things to do between one mission and the next. Upgrading weapons and armor is a nice start, but there's also a farm to be tended to. The farm has a garden to harvest plants from, a fishing hole, a mining spot, and tall grass to catch bugs in. Only limited numbers of low-level items can be gathered to begin with, but upgrading the farm allows new, rarer goodies to be acquired. On top of that, one addition leads to others, so eventually new areas will open up for an even greater variety of item harvesting. Unfortunately, it just wouldn't feel right to review a 3D PSP game without ragging on the camera, which is as useless as always. No lock-on means that the raptor that jumped behind the camera could be doing anything, and there's no way to track it other than turning around and clicking the Center Camera button. This is as frustrating as usual, especially when being swarmed. The ever-popular "stuck in corner spaz mode" is also present.

Camera issues aside, *Monster Hunter Freedom* is a really fun chunk of gaming. It always feels like there's something to strive for, whether it's the right pieces to upgrade your weapon or a new strategy for the big beasties. While the storyline is nonexistent, *Monster Hunter* provides any number of reasons beyond mere plot to keep moving towards the next goal, and the most important one is that it's just plain fun when everything works as it should.

Rating : 4 of 5

The Second Opinion!

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

This is basically a dungeon crawler at heart, but what a great take on the genre. If only it didn't have so many goofy-looking clipping errors...



Starting Off

There's a lot to do in *Monster Hunter Freedom*, and getting going can easily overwhelm the new player with endless details. Harvesting the farm, combining items, creating and upgrading weapons, and that sword behind the house are all clamoring for attention from the moment the game starts. Dealing with it all can easily be summed up in four words.

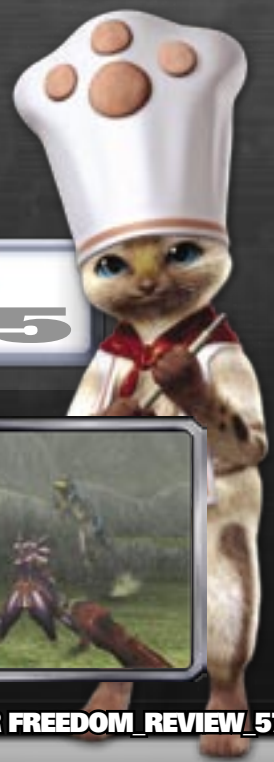
Don't Worry About It.

It's easy to look at a complex game and let the number of things needing to be learned make it seem more trouble than it's worth, but there's no law saying each second of play has to be maximized to its fullest. Especially in a game like *Monster Hunter*, which has no real ending to rush towards, there's no reason to do anything but kick back and smack giant beasts around until you feel like coming to grips with its

myriad systems. Missions are replayable, gold and items are easy to get, and there's no real penalty for experimentation.

The only specific advice for starting out would be to stick with the Hunting Knife. Its speed of attack more than makes up for the low damage, and it's very easy to upgrade as well. Happy hunting!

FINAL SCORE : **4 of 5**



The Legend of Heroes II

Prophecy of the Moonlight Witch



Review by James

Publisher : Namco Bandai
Developer : Falcom
Release Date : 8/2006
Rating : TEEN

Genre(s) : RPG
Category : Cute and Japanese-y
of players : 1



It's only been a few months since *Legend of Heroes*, but the next game in the series is already here, bringing with it a strong feeling of *deja-vu*. Still, *Legend of Heroes II: Prophecy of the Moonlight Witch* is as cute, charming and likable as the first, even with its identical gameplay.

In the small starting village, teenagers of a certain age take off on a pilgrimage of the world. The land of Tirasweel is comprised of seven small countries, with sea to the north and an impassable mountain range to the south, and its people have lived a mellow little existence perfect for the upheaval any self-respecting RPG requires. As Jurio (male fighter) and Chris (female healer) set out on their pilgrimage, all is peaceful. People are kind, monsters are easy, and the foreshadowing is slight.

This can't last, of course, but it's going to be a good while before the story kicks in. *Legend of Heroes* is perfectly content to take its time, slowly dropping hints that something is wrong while familiarizing the player with its world. While effective in making you feel attached to the place and its people, the desire to shake the PSP and yell "Get on with it!" does take hold around hour 15. Fortunately, the game listens and finally starts building its plot, although without any sense of urgency for a while yet.

On the gameplay side of things, very little has changed since its prequel. Battles are still fought on an open field, with characters able to attack anything within their movement range. Each character has certain skills they can use freely, such as Steal or Cheer, and magick, which costs the usual fee to use. While movement is fine for a normal attack and for many skills, you have to stand still to use magic. Throw in a seemingly-random character movement order and any chance of positional strategy is right out.

Where *Legend of Heroes II* really drops the ball, though, is in its translation. When half the game involves reading, it's important to do more than run the text through spell-check. Janglish is all over the place, and similar but wrong words pop up frequently too. Monsters have an abode, not adobe, for example. My particular favorite was when, in a moment of victory, the lovely, polite Chris lets out a jubilant "Hee-Haw!"

Despite the simplistic battle system and broken translation, I actually enjoyed *Legend of Heroes II*. Its charming nature and likable characters make it easy to pick up and play, and the visual style is easy on the eyes. It's just a shame that every fault of the previous game makes a reappearance in the sequel, six months later.

Rating : 3.5 of 5



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

The game's not as fun as the original, and the localization is, if anything, worse. It's not actually bad, mind you, but *Legend of Heroes II* is an inoffensive title at best.



DREAMFALL

THE LONGEST JOURNEY



Review by Wanderer

Publisher : Aspyr
Developer : Funcom
Release Date : 03/20/06
Rating : "T" for Teen (Violence)

Genre(s) : Adventure
Category : Oh, Hell if I Know
of players : 1

How much you like *Dreamfall* is going to depend on what you play video games for.

If you're one of the diehards who insists a game is meant to be played, not watched; if you're a twitch junkie with the hand-eye coordination of a brain surgeon; and if you enjoy a great deal of caffeine with your gaming; then this is not your game at all. It may actually give you a slight rash.

If you're one of the advocates of games as art, a believer that sometimes a game can rise above the level of simple entertainment and tell an actual story, and tell it well, then *Dreamfall* is a must-play. It's not the classic adventure game its predecessor was; instead, it mixes dialogue, action, stealth, problem-solving, and persistence, in much the same way as *Syberia* or *Indigo Prophecy* did. It's an interactive story, and if you're willing to buy into that, it'll pull you all the way through to the end.

Dreamfall's story of Zoe Castillo, who begins the game in a terminal coma, after some unexplained series of events that begins with her agreeing to do her ex-boyfriend a favor; and of April Ryan, who's spent the ten years since the end of *The Longest Journey* fighting in Arcadia. These stories will wind up intersecting, connecting April's fantasy world with the Europe and Asia of the far future.

Unlike *The Longest Journey*, this is a more "modern" adventure game. You'll grab a few items, sure, but you'll more often chat up NPCs, sneak past guards, and engage in hand-to-hand combat. There are a lot of different kinds of game crammed into *Dreamfall*, and while they aren't all equally well-executed--the hand-to-hand combat system's quite weak, in fact--they do keep things from getting dull.

That's actually a bit of a problem for *Dreamfall*, honestly. It's got a lot of style, character, and cinematography going for it, but a lot of the onscreen "action" is a little disappointing. The puzzles have been drastically simplified, and many of the obstacles you run into can either be snuck past or dealt with using some blatantly obvious method. *The Longest Journey* was often counterintuitive--anyone else remember the stack-of-debris shadow?--and *Dreamfall* goes too far in the other direction.

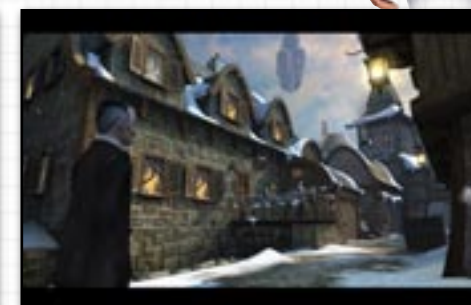
I'd also note that on the Xbox version, the inventory system is a little cumbersome. The rest of the controls are fine, but calling up your items is a lot harder than it has to be.

With all that in mind, it's hard to rate *Dreamfall*. Certain kinds of gamer are going to love it, and all others need not apply. Give it a rental first and see if it's your sort of experience.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

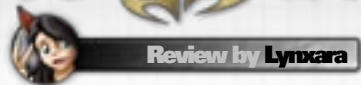
Despite sometimes cumbersome menus, stealth segments and battle sequences, it's easy to recommend this one to anyone who likes a good story.



FINAL SCORE : 4 of 5

HITMAN

BLOOD MONEY



Publisher : Eidos Interactive
Developer : Io Interactive
Release Date : 5/30/2006
Rating : MATURE

Genre(s) : Stealth Action
Category : Creative Murder
of players : 1



The *Hitman* series has chugged along for years based on the simple proposition that most people, deep down, really want to kill somebody and get away with it. This is not the kind of thing people like to admit in public, but if it wasn't basically true, *Blood Money* wouldn't be the fourth title in the series. Fortunately, trying to kill someone as stealthily and creatively as possible is a very solid premise for gameplay, and the latest *Hitman* doesn't disappoint when it comes to puzzles and problem solving. Even the action controls feel a bit better for this installment of the series, quicker and more responsive, and the controls for the 360 port in particular are marvelous.

Blood Money continues the plot of the overall *Hitman* story by creating a situation where the protagonist, super-clone assassin 47, has his immensely successful track record as a professional killer turned against him. The organization he works for, the ICA, is being systematically wiped out by a series of hits being carried out by a mysterious third party. Remembering that a truly effective hitman has to be invisible, 47 decides to flee to America to try and get a fresh, inconspicuous start. The result is an adventure through various cities as 47 tries to carry out the hits he's being hired for, while also keeping himself safe from whoever is trying to eliminate the ICA.

Hitman games have always encouraged players to solve problems with a sense of subtlety, insofar as video games about murdering people are ever subtle. *Blood Money* finally formalizes this game design element with the Notoriety system. When 47 successfully uses disguises, reconnaissance, and other inconspicuous methods to kill his targets without being noticed, his Notoriety stays low. If 47 has to resort to killing a lot of bystanders, fails to blend in with his surroundings, or gets drawn into gunbattles, his Notoriety rises. At high Notoriety, other characters begin to recognize 47 as a dangerous killer and have inconvenient reactions. This makes completing just

about any task in the game nearly impossible until your Notoriety fades. Struggling with Notoriety is only occasionally frustrating and frequently quite rewarding.

The main thing to complain about when playing *Blood Money* is visual. *Hitman* as a series has always been about serviceable, basic graphics moreso than visual flash, but in *Blood Money* this tendency toward sparseness is even more pronounced than usual. The 360's graphics are basically on par with the PC version, which was pretty obviously tailored with mid-range hardware in mind. The PS2 and Xbox versions of the game are even plainer. To *Blood Money's* credit, the game never becomes unattractive and graphical issues never interfere in the course of gameplay. Still, the plainness fights with the exotic ambience *Blood Money* tries to establish. *Hitman: Blood Money* is still a game that manages to quietly and efficiently get the job done, but a little more style couldn't have hurt.

Rating : 4 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

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

It's pretty and it's a step forward for the series, but it's got way too much trial-and-error gameplay for my tastes. Then again, I'm obsessed with getting away clean.



With the amount of heat that the video game industry takes regarding too many overly-violent games unfit for children, it brings a smile to face to indulge in something a bit more light-hearted every so often. Not only are there still games being specifically made for kids, but the quality has improved dramatically since my days of playing that *Kool-Aid Man Atari* game as a tyke. OH YEAH! Perhaps that's why I find an explainable joy in playing through an old-fashioned platform game even at the ripe old age of 29.

As one might expect, *Over the Hedge* was built from the ground up with one goal in mind: to create a solid 3D platformer sprinkled with influences from similar games of the past, and then incorporate the characters and personality of the source material. Edge of Reality, the developer behind *Pitfall: The Lost Expedition*, was certainly able to deliver just that. The addition of movie clips and voice-over work from decent sound-a-likes round out the top-notch presentation.

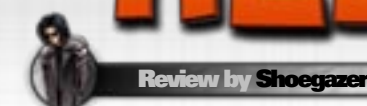
What's most impressive is the large variety in gameplay and the spacious level design. These are two things typically sought after by adults in their video games, and not typically found in kids games. It's a compliment to Edge of Reality to be able to take their wealth of experience and make an enjoyable game for any age group. Of course, the younger sorts won't even notice the technical achievements. Kids will get a kick out of controlling their favorite critters from the movie and being able to destroy just about anything on screen. In traditional collect-a-thon fashion, smashing everything isn't just about good clean fun. Hidden items and power-ups are often discovered, as well as

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

It's full of giggle-worthy one-liners, and the varied objective-based gameplay is nice, but this is still Movie-Licensed Platformer #5,247. Kids should probably like this better than most, however.



OVER THE HEDGE



Publisher : Capcom
Developer : Capcom
Release Date : 6/2006
Rating : "T" for Teen

Genre(s) : Retro Fighter Compilation
Category : Better Late Than Never
of players : 1-2

DVD tokens that unlock extras such as movie clips and comic excerpts.

There is little to complain about here if you're under the age of 12, but the older the player, the more obvious certain flaws will become.

The most noteworthy concern is the locked camera, which isn't always gamer-friendly. Apparently the developers felt camera controls might be too advanced for their target audience. What's also worth scratching your head over is why a two-player co-op function wasn't implemented. You have an AI controlled teammate with you at all times, so it would only make sense to allow room for a second player. Brothers and sisters fight over controllers, guys, so you have to take that into consideration in order to make parents happy.

It's a very short game for older or advanced players, but what is here is fun. The ability to complete objectives and unlock mini-games is a nice touch, and adds good replay value. Parents can definitely feel safe letting their youngsters play this one. You could say it closely resembles a diet version of *Sly Cooper*, and that is meant as a most sincere compliment.

Rating : 3.5 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
3.25 of 5

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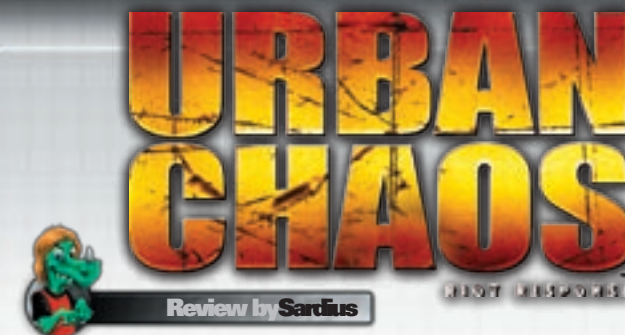
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PLATFORM

PlayStation 2

XBOX

REVIEW



Publisher : Eidos Interactive
Developer : Rocksteady Studios
Release Date : 6/13/2006
Rating : "M" for Mature

Genre(s) : First-Person Shooter
Category : Babysitter Supercop
of players : 1-2

Do you love escort missions? Does your heart jump with glee every time you're forced to repeat a level when a computer-controlled teammate spazzes out and gets killed? Would you be a happier person if more games were based around the concept of watching your helpless friends get shot in the face? If your answer to any of these questions is an enthusiastic "Yes!", then *Urban Chaos* is going to rock your world.

Seriously though, does *anyone* like being forced to protect helpless AI teammates? Anyone at all? Obviously someone has to, because every single level in *Urban Chaos* plays out like one big escort mission. You'll play babysitter to medical personnel, firemen, and unarmed civilians, all of whom seem to take delight in dying at the earliest opportunity and rolling back any progress you've made.

It's a shame, too, because *Urban Chaos* could have easily earned a 4 out of 5 if it weren't for all those damned escort missions. It's a first-person shooter that isn't set during World War II, for one thing, so that's already a plus. The modern-day urban setting is interesting and detailed, and the game controls fairly well, too. Pretty much all the basic ingredients of a great game are present here, with the possible exception of a good storyline -- in short, you're fighting a group of terrorists who want to *set an entire city on fire*. It's stupid, but it's the kind of stupid that's told through live-action FMV cutscenes, so it's at least unintentionally amusing at times.

Urban Chaos offers a number of innovations that help to set it apart from other first-person shooters, chief among them being

the ability to use a see-through shield to absorb enemy fire. The concept is sound and is implemented well; the shield protects against all frontal attacks, with the tradeoff being that you can't fire weapons while using it. Blocking enemy fire for a few seconds can often give you enough time to line up headshots, though, so it's to your advantage to use the shield as often as possible.



You'll enjoy certain moments of *Urban Chaos*, and the game's a good amount of fun at times. That is, until you reach the subway level, where you'll have to protect two unarmed teammates located at opposite ends of a subway train. Enemies will drop in to attack either character at random, leaving you to race back and forth while your friends stand in place and get shot repeatedly. If one dies, it's game over. Is this supposed to be fun? Who thought this was fun? You're *fired*.

Urban Chaos has a lot going for it -- a solid game engine, plenty of replay value and side missions, campy FMV -- but ultimately, babysitting stupid teammates who do nothing to protect themselves is simply not any fun at all. Die, escort missions, die.

Rating : 3 of 5

2nd opinion by Racewing • Alternate Rating : 3.5 of 5

It's a little rough around the edges, but it most certainly has its moments, both of gameplay and technical polish. Rent to see if you like it. You just might.

FINAL SCORE :
3.25 of 5



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PLATFORM PC

REVIEW



UBERSOLDIER



Review by Metalbolt

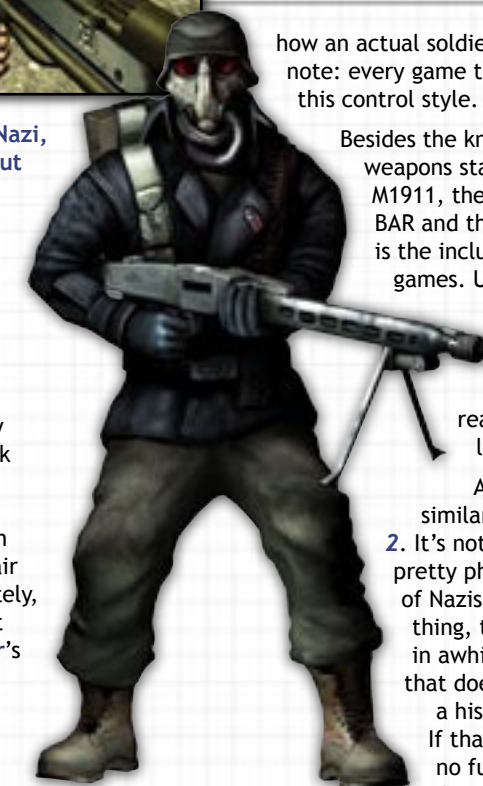
Publisher : CDV
Developer : Burut
Release Date : 3/31/06
Rating : "M" for Mature

Genre(s) : FPS
Category : Nazi Slaughter
of players : 1

Karl Stolz hasn't had the best of luck. He's a Nazi, and a dead one at that. Thankfully, that's about to change. Since Nazis are always working to revive the dead, his corpse gets to be a test subject! Luckily for us, Karl comes back to life under the control of an Allied supporter (don't ask). Although the rebels he fights with are German, you'd never know it. Every character in the game speaks perfect English, even the Nazis!

In his resurrected form, Karl now has the ability to control space and time. Apparently, the shock of death and revival opened up the unused part of his brain that allows for special powers. The time shield, as it's called, is what makes Karl an *Übersoldier*. With it he can stop bullets in mid-air and sometimes even fire them back. Unfortunately, the shield is more of a last-ditch move for inept gamers than it is a core element of *Übersoldier's* gameplay. It's simply not useful enough to be anything more.

Another thing that makes Karl so Uber is the ability to permanently increase his maximum health at any time by getting three knife kills in rapid succession. The knife actually is mapped to its own key, so you don't have to pause the action and equip it when you feel like knifing someone. It's convenient and more in line with



how an actual soldier would use the weapon. Developers take note: every game that has a knife as its last-ditch weapon needs this control style.

Besides the knife, you'll find that Karl can use many other weapons standard to WWII games. These include the M1911, the Luger, the Mauser, the MP40, the FG42, the BAR and the Panzerschreck. What's more impressive is the inclusion of some weapons rarely seen in WWII games. Usually, we're so busy playing as the Allies that we don't get to use the sPzB41 (a 20mm anti-tank rifle), the PPSH41 (it looks like a drum-fed "Tommy" gun) or my personal favorite, the MG42. Yes, you read that right: there's finally a WWII game that lets you carry the MG42 as a personal weapon!

As far as WWII games go, *Übersoldier* is more similar to *Wolfenstein* than it is to *Call to Duty 2*. It's nothing more than a fast-paced shooter with pretty physics, big explosions, and lots of Nazis to shoot. That's not a bad thing, though, because every once in awhile we need a WWII game that doesn't give us a history lesson while we kill.

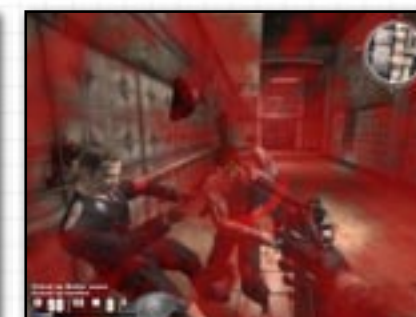
If that's your bag, look no further. If you hate Starforce or you need a realistic story and multiplayer, look elsewhere.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

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

For being a budget game, *Übersoldier* sure does bring some neat stuff to the table. It's about time someone cared about the single-player FPS again.

FINAL SCORE :
4.25 of 5

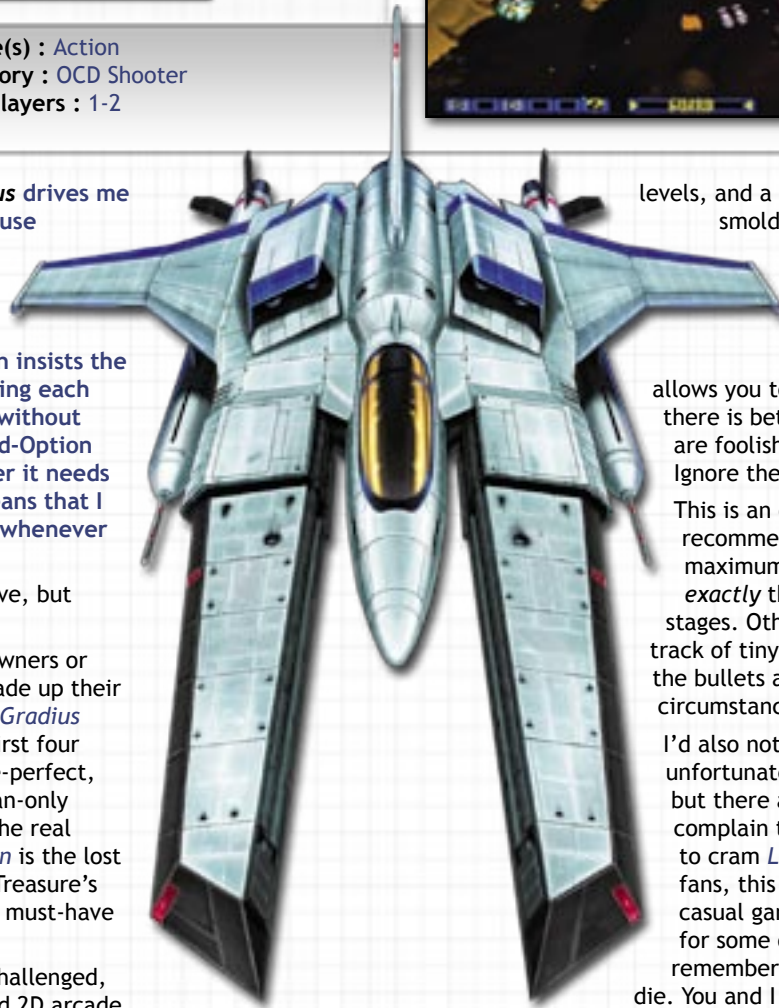


GRADIUS COLLECTION



Review by Wanderer

Publisher : Konami
Developer : Konami
Release Date : 6/6/2006
Rating : TEEN
Genre(s) : Action
Category : OCD Shooter
of players : 1-2



Hi, I'm Wanderer, and *Gradius* drives me insane. (Hi, Wanderer!) Because the stupid games always make you start back a little ways from where you died, in your ship's default configuration, my tricky brain insists the thing to do is to keep practicing each stage until it can be cleared without dying, so my tricked-out quad-Option Vic Viper has all the firepower it needs to succeed. This, in turn, means that I always hit the power button whenever I die.

I'm not an obsessive-compulsive, but *Gradius* makes me that way.

With that in mind, most PSP owners or shooter fans have probably made up their minds about this one already. *Gradius Collection* puts together the first four arcade *Gradius* games, arcade-perfect, along with the previously Japan-only *Gradius Gaiden*. The latter's the real jewel of the collection; *Gaiden* is the last step between *Gradius IV* and Treasure's *Gradius V* on the PS2, and is a must-have for any sort of shooter fan.

For the young or the history-challenged, this is a collection of rock-hard 2D arcade shooters with remixed music, adjustable difficulty

levels, and a long trail of broken gamers smoldering in their wake. These are the games where bullet hell got started, and *Gradius Collection* lets you track the series's evolution. Some people will say that this also allows you to see just how little difference there is between the games. These people are foolish and are not paying attention. Ignore them.

This is an okay port, too. I wouldn't recommend anything less than the maximum aspect ratio, and you need *exactly* the right lighting on several stages. Otherwise, you'll start to lose track of tiny onscreen details, like where the bullets are. This is an undesirable circumstance.

I'd also note that there are a few unfortunate omissions from the collection, but there are five games here, so I can't complain too loudly, even if I wanted them to cram *Lifeforce* in there. For arcade fans, this is an essential purchase, and casual gamers can turn down the difficulty for some quick action on the go. Just remember not to throw your PSP when you die. You and I both know it'll shatter like glass.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

A great collection, even if (a) Konami wants to forget about SNES *Gradius III's* existence, (b) there's no *Life Force/Salamander*, and (c) now I'll have to hear *Gradius Gaiden* vs. *Gradius V* arguments yet again. Gawd.



Review by Lynxara

Publisher : Namco Bandai
Developer : Cyber2Connect
Release Date : 6/20/2006
Rating : Pending
Genre(s) : 2.5D Fighter
Category : Believe it!!!
of players : 1 - 2

graphics, the battles are conducted in a 2D plane... but each stage has multiple 2D planes and platforms to fight in, and characters can freely move between them. This results in both hilarity and tense mind games when you go head-to-head with a human opponent in Free Battle Mode.

Naruto: Ultimate Ninja finally brings the *Naruto: Narutimate Hero* series of fighting games to North America. The localization changes are pretty much what you'd expect: English voiceovers featuring actors from the dub, a new opening song, and nicely translated menus. If you're a big fan of the Cartoon Network version of *Naruto*, you'll be pleased. If you prefer your *Naruto* in Japanese, then you're kind of screwed.

Ultimate Ninja delivers solidly enjoyable and at times even innovative gameplay. It's a fighter in the chaotic tradition of *Power Stone* and *Super Smash Bros.*, with interactive environments, stuff to grab, and spectators who'll happily interfere in the proceedings. Games like this usually suffer from fighting engines that are excessively friendly to button-mashing, but *Ultimate Ninja's* combat is surprisingly deep. High-level play is driven by an emphasis on strategic item use and counter-moves. Flailing your way to victory is basically impossible.

A standard set of input commands trigger basic and special moves for all characters, which keeps controls simple and intuitive. Each character's version of these basic moves is unique, designed to reflect their abilities from the *Naruto* story as faithfully as possible. So all of the twelve playable characters rightfully demand a different sense of strategy, and interact with stages backgrounds in different ways. Despite the game's 3D



Ultimate Ninja begins with six playable characters (Naruto, Sasuke, Sakura, Rock Lee, Kakashi, and Shikamaru), and you can unlock six more by completing the game's Story Mode (Neji, Hinata, Haku, Zabuza, Gaara, and Orochimaru). After that, there are around 450 videos, songs, and pieces of artwork you can unlock by going to the game's "shop" and inserting money you've won from playing Mission Mode into a "capsule machine." It can keep you replaying the game for a while if you like that sort of thing, but after awhile the Missions get tedious enough to try even an obsessive-compulsive's patience. *Ultimate Ninja's* real replay value comes from using it as a party game and beating the crap out of your friends.

Graphics are *Ultimate Ninja's* major weak point. It's a localization of the first game in the *Narutimate Hero* series, which means you're basically playing a title that was made in 2003. Cel-shading that was pretty impressive back then looks kind of sad now. Compared to any of the recent *DBZ* cel-shaded fighters or even *Naruto: Clash of Ninja*, *Ultimate Ninja* is distinctly lacking. The graphics improve later in the franchise, of course, but that just begs the question of why you'd pick up this title instead of waiting. The only possible answer is "because I really like *Naruto*."

Rating : 3.5 of 5

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

It's more *Power Stone* than *Street Fighter*, which makes it perfect for two-player. The killer counter system leads to tons of "Oh, *snap!*" moments, too.



FINAL SCORE : 3.75 of 5

Gallop Racer 2006

Review by Racewing

Publisher : Tecmo
Developer : Tecmo
Release Date : 5/2/2006
Rating : Everyone (Simulated Gambling)

Genre(s) : Horse Racing/Stable Simulation
Category : Virtua Jockey 5: Hardtype
of players : 1-2



Motorsport, and Codemasters's *Indy Car* games can be high-level driving simulations while making the gameplay somewhat intuitive, and also include in-game ways for you to learn the ropes and eventually work your way up to being a technical racing star. *Virtua Fighter 4*, one of the most realistic and complicated fighting games to date, contains an extensive school filled with tutorials on every single nuance of the game engine, which break things down into easy-to-learn chunks.

Gallop Racer, on the other hand, abbreviates terms that only a jockey would know, features controls that, while well-meaning, can be a lot to grasp even when set to Easy Mode, and tells the user to refer to the instruction manual for anything which may confuse him or her. You'll be at that manual a lot. A decidedly mediocre presentation in terms of looks and sounds, along with a disinterested announcer certainly don't help things.

As a sim, *Gallop Racer* excels. As a game, or even a way to get other people interested in its subject matter, it flounders miserably. As I've said before, if horses are your life, raise this score by a point. The rest of us, however, will have to take what little amusement we can get, by picking horses with such quaint names as Gothic Value, Second Death, or Naked Love.

Rating : 3 of 5



2nd opinion by Roger Danish • Alternate Rating : 3 of 5

Racewing is right on the money. For those of you who love the franchise or are into the whole horse racing sim scene, then look no further. If not, then *Gallop Racer 2006* probably isn't for you.



darwinia

Review by HonestGamer

Publisher : CinemaWare
Developer : Introversion Software
Release Date : 6/7/2006
Rating : "E" for Everyone

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



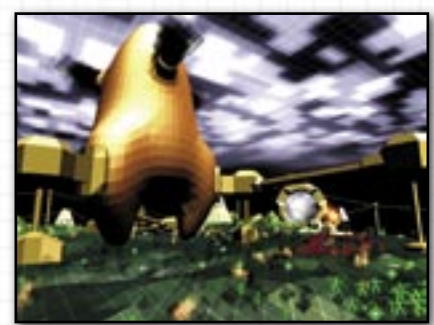
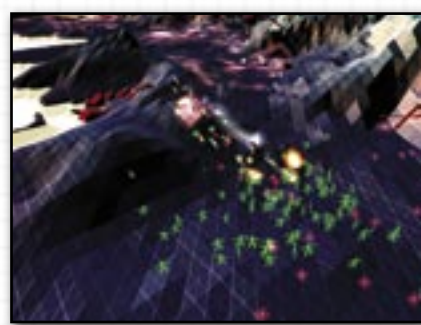
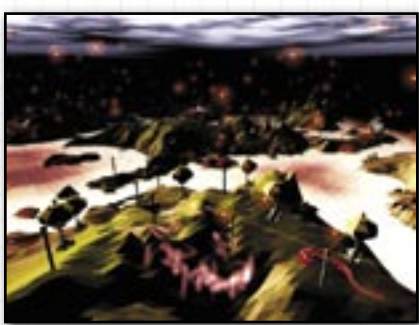
Darwinia's premise is refreshingly simple. You're the master of a computerized world that follows your every whim but for one minor detail: it's full of viruses. Your job is to rid that world of such threats while ushering its inhabitants into an age of peace and harmony.

The developers use the concept of a virtual world to its fullest advantage. You don't have soldiers, just military "programs" that fight and perform engineering functions. Simple icons represent each character, friendly and otherwise. Glowing red worms are just a string of triangles. Spiders are crudely rendered, polygonal blobs. Even the settlers you command hardly look better than paper cutout dolls. If they weren't so small, you'd expect to see smiley faces. Despite the simplicity in presentation, though, it works. There's something endearing about this strange environment and before you know it you'll be caught up in bringing about its salvation.

That's when the problems arise. The minute you start to love the intuitive blend of strategy and shooting action, you begin dreading the dull micro-management periods between. When you send a squad of military programs into a swarm of viruses, it's exhilarating. You blast this way and that, strategizing on the fly as you watch the resulting explosions. Combat really keeps you on your toes. Then you're left to manage the tedious clean-up.

2nd opinion by Arlieth • Alternate Rating : 3.5 of 5

Introversion's latest offering scores points for innovation, but this adorable *Tron*-meets-*Lemmings* world lacks that impending Crisis-O'-Doom that makes for an engaging experience.



The issue here is the spotty AI. Characters aren't capable of thinking outside the box. Rather than allowing you to trace the route you want your characters to follow with the mouse, the developers chose a more hands-on approach. Does that land mass curve around an inlet of water? If so, forget about just selecting the desired destination. You'll have to take baby steps around the shoreline because your digital charges aren't bright enough to behave independently.

That's a problem in a game where much of your time is spent crisscrossing the map. Your engineer and soldier programs move quite slowly, but somehow wind up lost if you stop watching them for even a few seconds while you tend to other matters. Sometimes they've stalled and sometimes they've just started wandering. Since multi-tasking provides so many issues, you'll likely give up the endeavor and direct each move by hand. Suddenly, clearing a map takes much longer than it should.

Still, it's clear that the developer's heart was in the right place. The minimalist art style really pays off, and there are some innovations that give a hands-on feel, such as a program creation window where you must draw patterns with your mouse to complete the process. *Darwinia* could have used a little interface tweaking and some AI improvements, but otherwise it's just fine the way it is. Give it a try the next time you want something a little different.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 3.5 of 5



Review by KouAidou

Publisher : Cinemaware Marquee
Developer : Monte Cristo Multimedia
Release Date : 06/07/06
Rating : Pending
Genre(s) : RTS
Category : WWII
of players : 1



There have been many World War II RTS in the past, and we've seen everything from D-Day to the war in the Pacific represented. Moscow to Berlin: Red Siege, the latest such game from Cinemaware Marquee and Monte Cristo Multimedia, tries to edge its way into this crowded marketplace with a focus on the lesser known conflict between the Nazis and the Soviets along the Russian border.

The game's three campaign modes focus on a number of points during the historic conflict: the first German charge on the Russian border, the second charge after the hard winter of 1942, and the subsequent Russian counter-attack. After you've beaten a mission in any of the campaigns, you can replay it at any time in single mission mode. Historical accuracy is the name of the game here, so these missions don't involve any city construction aspects or outlandish abilities, just a lot of tactics and careful use of regular reinforcements.



The interface is one of the make-or-break points of most RTS, so I'm happy to report that MtB's is clean and easy to use. Infantry can be set to run or crawl (crawling is slower, but safer) with the click of a button, and all units have a pair of easy-to-use dials to assign general movement and firing orders (such as "hold position" or "fire at will"). There's also a "smart pointer" that lets you perform the primary task associated with a target simply by right clicking. Unfortunately, the "smart pointer" is not always as smart as it claims to be, and there are times when it won't activate when you expect it to. To counter for these occasional inconveniences, though, the programmers have added an unusual (but very convenient) option to pause or modify game speed.

Nevertheless, there's plenty of complexity to be had. Buildings and vehicles are considered neutral territory until occupied by a unit from either side, so it's up to you to try to gauge between destroying and stealing enemy-controlled structures. If you abandon a tank or truck, it can be repaired and seized by enemy units; an enemy bunker can turn into a haven for your own troops if you don't wreck it too badly in the siege. The units you put into your vehicles will also have a direct influence on the vehicle's abilities; a machinegunner will give it secondary firing abilities, while a scout will increase the vehicle's site range.

On the presentation side, the graphics are clean and vibrant 3D (though the controls for spinning the camera are somewhat awkward), and the sound, including the obligatory voice clips, adds some nice flavor. In the end, though, MtB's accomplishments are evened out by its flaws, and while the action can be fun and fast-paced, there's little we haven't seen before in other forms. Moscow to Berlin will enthrall the target audience and those looking to explore this lesser-known bit of history; others need not apply.

Rating : 3 of 5

2nd opinion by Metalbolt • Alternate Rating : 3.5 of 5

There's not a lot of innovation to be had here, but if you're looking for a solid battle tactics game, then enjoy! Otherwise, yawn this off as another "me too!" WWII title.

FINAL SCORE : 3.25 of 5



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UBISOFT

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: 03/2/06
Genre(s): Rhythm
Category: Hyper Japanesque
of Players: 1-2



Review by Sardius

Far too often, rhythm games try to justify their existence by attempting to simulate the playing of a specific musical instrument. It's good from a marketing standpoint, I suppose, but that doesn't change the fact that the simulation aspects of most music games are superficial at best. Playing *beatmania* isn't going to make you a better DJ, for instance, and guitar players will be the first to tell you that rocking out with *Guitar Hero* isn't an experience that's much at all like playing a real guitar.

Pop'n Music is different. *Pop'n Music's* candy-colored controller bears no resemblance whatsoever to any musical instrument in this universe, and that's where the brilliance of the game's design shines through. In *Pop'n Music*, gameplay focuses on music creation rather than instrument simulation, and the game's songlist reflects a variety unbounded by the genre limitations found in other rhythm games.

If you've never played *Pop'n Music* before, think *beatmania* with nine buttons and no turntable. Then replace *beatmania's* dull look with a bright interface painted in primary colors, and throw in a number of cutesy mascot characters. The gameplay itself should be immediately familiar if you've played any other rhythm game; notes fall from the top of the screen, and you have to hit the corresponding buttons using proper rhythm in order to make music.



pop'n music

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The core mechanics may seem familiar, but *Pop'n Music* offers up gameplay variety in amounts that are unheard of in other rhythm titles. Most gameplay modes focus on competition, even the single-player ones. "Challenge" mode, for example, encourages the player to select goals and handicaps in order to test the limits of one's skill, while "Taisen" mode places the player in direct competition with computer-controlled opponents. Competition in any of these modes can get pretty crazy at times, as players can "attack" one another with effects that can make an opponent's note patterns difficult to read. This element of challenge and competition is nowhere to be found in other titles like *beatmania*, and serves as a refreshing change of pace from the solitary experience that characterizes most rhythm games.

Further distinguishing itself from *beatmania*, *Pop'n Music* features a much more forgiving learning curve, and a soundtrack that has actual variety to it. There are more than a hundred songs in *Pop'n Music Iroha*, and remarkably, no two share the same genre. Some tracks sound a little similar, but otherwise the songlist represents a variety that spans jazz, rock, ska, and everything in between. Anime fans in particular will find a lot to like musically, as *Iroha* includes playable cover versions of theme songs from shows like "Neon Genesis Evangelion," "Crayon Shin-Chan," and "Dragonball Z."

Pop'n Music is simply one of the best rhythm games money can buy, and *Iroha* is the most addictive and full-featured entry the series has seen so far. If you're in the market for a rhythm title that's accessible, challenging, and a hell of a lot of fun, *Pop'n Music Iroha* is a must-buy.

Worth Importing?

Yes! The game contains a daunting amount of Japanese (mostly katakana) in its menus, but no knowledge of the language is required to play and enjoy *Pop'n Music Iroha* to its fullest.

FINAL SCORE:
5 of 5

Controller Craziiness



To get the most enjoyment out of *Pop'n Music Iroha*, you're going to want to invest in a special *Pop'n*-specific controller. But which one? If you're just starting out, Konami's official *Pop'n Music Controller 2* is the best option. The controller is a vast improvement over the now out-of-print *Pop'n Music Controller 1*, which suffered for its use of flat, hypersensitive buttons. *Controller 2*, on the other hand, uses durable domed buttons that can withstand the harshest of poundings, and will only run you about 50 bucks. Beware of knockoffs, though; the unlicensed *Crazy Hit* controller may look like the official Konami controller, but it needs to be opened and rewired before it becomes compatible with any *Pop'n Music* game!



The problem is, none of these smaller controllers accurately simulate the feel of the arcade version of *Pop'n Music*, which uses a much larger controller setup and gigantic buttons that are each about the size of a small hamburger. For the true arcade experience, Konami at one time issued a small number of *Pop'n Music Arcade Style Controllers*. An ASC will usually cost you around \$400, though, and that's before shipping. Ouch! Websites like *Ransai* and *Desktop Arcade* offer fan-built replicas of the *Arcade Style Controller* for a fraction of its price, but they'll still set you back at least \$200 for the basic models. Bottom line: until you're absolutely certain you want to invest a large portion of your life into playing *Pop'n Music* stick with Konami's *Pop'n Music Controller 2*.

Relevant links:

- <http://www.desktoparcade.com/>
- <http://www.ransai.com/>





UNDER DEFEAT

Preview by James

Publisher: G.Rev
Developer: G.Rev
Release Date: March 2006
Genre(s): Vertical shooter
Category: Classic-style
of Players: 1-2

"Final Dreamcast Game" is a distinction that several games have appeared to have a shot at, but *Under Defeat* looks like it's going to take it. With no more titles announced, it seems we've reached the end of the road for Sega's little white box. It was a good trip, and *Under Defeat* is a fitting end.

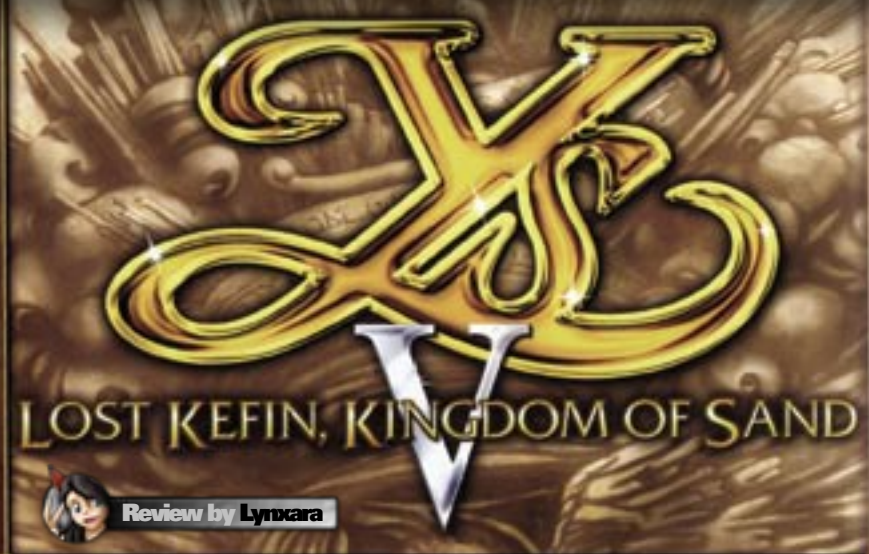
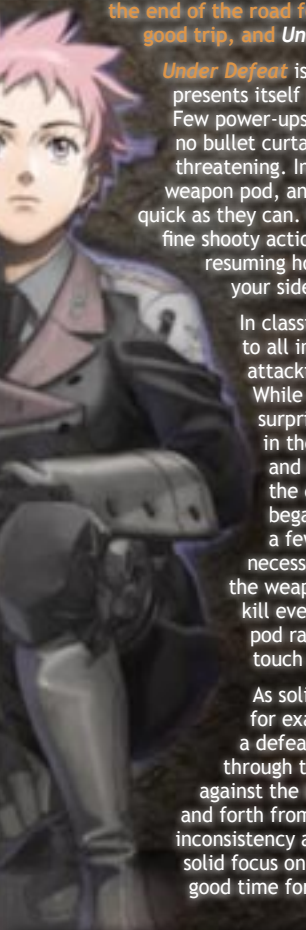
Under Defeat is an excellent vertical shooter that presents itself in a deceptively simple package. Few power-ups, simple combo multipliers, and no bullet curtains that are pretty moreso than threatening. Instead, you have a helicopter, a weapon pod, and enemies that want to kill you as quick as they can. Wrapped up in a very slick 3D presentation, *Under Defeat* is some damn fine shooty action set against the backdrop of two countries ("Empire" and "Union") resuming hostilities after an abortive attempt at a ceasefire. Someone backstabbed your side, so your helicopters sortie to counter-attack the aggressor.

In classic shooter style, you pilot the helicopter up the screen and lay waste to all in your path. This includes background objects as well as the enemies attacking you, which is a lot of fun. Fighting back is a two-button affair. While button two works the bombs, which are plentiful, button one does a surprising amount of work. When held, the fire button locks the helicopter in the direction it's facing, shooting an unending stream of bullets. Let up and move horizontally and the copter angles either towards or away from the direction of movement, depending on what you decided when the game began. Additionally, the fire button summons a weapon pod that appears for a few seconds, shoots, and disappears. Once the pod bar is green again it's necessary to stop firing for a few seconds to summon it back. Killing things with the weapon pod grants a score bonus, so you need to balance out your need to kill everything with the game's directive to kill as much as you can with your pod rather than the default weapon. It's a judgement call that adds a nice touch of strategy to the proceedings.

As solid as the action is, the visual design can be a mixed bag. In level two, for example, you fight over a bright blue sea as black smoke billows up from a defeated warship. A bomb pick-up waiting inside the ship glows enticingly through the haze. Move on to level three, and you're fighting dull brown enemies against the backdrop of a dull brown desert. *Under Defeat's* tendency to move back and forth from gorgeously designed levels to utterly drab ones is a bit odd. This visual inconsistency aside, *Under Defeat* is an all-around fun shooter for two players with a solid focus on basic gameplay, and just enough gimmicks to keep it feeling fresh. It's a good time for shooter fans and a fitting end to the Dreamcast's run.

WORTH IMPORTING?

Every menu option in the game is in English, and all it takes to play a Dreamcast import on an American system is a boot disc you can easily download and burn yourself. There's no reason not to snag *Under Defeat* if you like shooters at all.



Publisher: Taito
Developer: Falcom
Release Date: 3/30/2006
Genre(s): Action RPG
Category: Old-school
of Players: 1

Review by Lynxara

Ys is one of those "lost franchises" from the 8-and-16-bit era, a name that dominated the Japanese RPG scene while being repeatedly denied entry into the American marketplace. The one game we did get during that era, *Ys III: Wanderers from Ys*, hasn't been remembered fondly. Konami's release of *Ys VI* failed to impress the masses, too. I wish I could say that Taito's remake of the original *Ys V: Lost Kefin, Kingdom of Sand* was the game that could make an *Ys*-lover out of you, but that's just not the case. If anything, playing *Ys V* just makes you feel thankful for all of the advances in game design that have happened since the early '90s.

Taito's *Ys V* is the final installment in a series of PS2 remakes of the three SNES *Ys* titles. All of the games in the series received roughly the same treatment: tons of voice-acting, 3D backgrounds, and control schemes modeled after *Ys VI*. To reward the diehard *Ys* fan who's played through all of the remakes, *Ys V* lets you import save data from *Ys III* and *Ys IV*. Doing this lets you start your *Ys V* game with some bonus equipment from those games.

Any *Ys* veteran is going to quickly notice that Taito's remakes rewrite the plots and sequence of events from the original SNES titles pretty thoroughly. It's kind of annoying from an importer's perspective, since this means the walkthroughs and translation FAQs fans have created for the SNES versions can't be relied on. Still, it means that old-school *Ys* veterans can play the remakes and get an experience that feels different, if not exactly new. The remakes are for the most part easier than their often-brutal SNES counterparts, but still much harder than any modern action RPG.

Of the three remakes, *Ys V* is overall the best. This is a bit of a backhanded compliment, since the other games are nearly unplayable. *Ys V* can be played well enough, but the combat controls are sluggish and hit detection a bit spotty. While the 3D environments for the game look pretty sharp, a lot of the still art and sprite work is simply unattractive. The game feels profoundly similar to *Ys VI*, right down to having a similar power-up system for Adol's swords, but inferior in just about every way. Part of this you can excuse with *Ys V's* pedigree as a SNES title, but with so much else in the game altered, would enhanced AI and more variety in the enemies be too much to ask? Taito seems to think so, and that results in a game that's a slog at best.

WORTH IMPORTING?

No. The *Ys* remakes all play like neutered versions of *Ys VI*, which you can just play in English on the PS2 or PSP. If you want to get an idea of what early *Ys* was like, then just play the SNES versions.



FINAL SCORE:
2.5 of 5



Ideazon/Zboard **FANG Gamepad**

• System: PC • Price: \$34.99



The FANG Gamepad is the very definition of hardcore. It started life as a custom-made military training tool, and now it's available for the regular consumer. It sports 41 programmable keys, ambidextrous control, and fine design. The gamepad's design is spot-on, with everything within easy reach. The movement buttons are large and curved for easy use, the number keys are concave, and the other keys are either large-sized or convex. It makes it easier to distinguish between the different keys and keeps you from changing your weapon when you want to check the score. The FANG is pretty much built for FPS games, but it also works just as well on RPGs, action games, and RTS titles. My only real complaint is that you can't make use of a USB hub or extender when you plug it up.

Features
7 Simultaneous Keystrokes
Fully programmable keypad
Media player controls



CoolIT Systems **USB Beverage Chiller**

• System: Anything with USB ports (i.e. PS2, PC, X360) • Price: \$29.99

This is, and you'll pardon the expression, one of the coolest ideas in a long time. Put a cold aluminum can or glass bottle on this baby, and you'll never have to worry about your drinks losing their chill again. Installation is simple: true plug and play, no drivers required, no operating system dependence. It even works with the old USB 1.1 outlets, and console USB ports! Genius.

The only downside is that if you're trying to chill something in a thick plastic bottle or cup, it won't be quite as effective. Still, hot sodas during long coding or gaming sessions are now a thing of the past. Recommended.

Features
Plugs into your computer's USB port
Coldplate chills to 45 degrees F
Keeps your beverage cold



AK **Rocker 200 Gaming Chair (and Skin)**

• Price: \$79.99 (plus \$19.99)

The AK Rocker 200 is the latest in a series of "gaming chairs." If you think of them as rocking chairs that sit low to the ground, you won't be too wrong. This one features easy assembly and is customizable via different "skins," basically colored and cushioned padding that fastens onto the chair itself.

The chair sits at a comfortable height, even for people with long legs, and the rocking is nice and smooth. Rock too far back and the chair will set down on two wooden legs and put you in a reclined position, rather than tipping you over. The chair's light weight is also good for when you need to move it in a hurry, but the weighted base keeps it from sliding across the floor while you play. Nicely done.

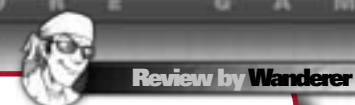
Features
Rock or Recline
Pimp Your Chair
Easy Assembly
Smooth Motion

The skins are included in this review because they are necessary, unless you like sitting on hard plastic. They provide cushioning, decoration, and a softer edge to the chair, which can otherwise be fairly cold and plain.



Griffin **iFM Radio/PSP Remote**

• System: PSP • Price: \$49.99



It's expensive, but the iFM offers a handier alternative for those of you who use your PSP to listen to MP3s... and if you're doing that in the first place, you've obviously got money to burn. You can plug the iFM into your PSP's headphones/serial port, then plug a normal set of headphones into the iFM.

This does lead to having rather a lot of wires on your person at once, but the iFM gets surprisingly good radio reception, and it's easier to clip it to your belt than to carry the PSP around in your pocket. It's a toy for well-heeled audiophiles, but it does what it does quite well.

Features
Doesn't need batteries
Handy and small PSP remote



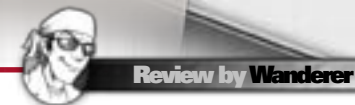
Griffin **RoadDock Car Seat Strap**

• System: PSP • Price: \$29.99

Griffin specializes in "common-sense" products that'll help you get more out of your PSP, but they're mostly focused on enhancing the video experience. The RoadDock, for example, is a clip and strap that allows you to fasten your PSP on the back of a car seat, for easy on-the-go viewing.

If you're a PSP owner and a parent, this could come in handy on long car trips; you can mount the PSP up on the seat so your kids aren't fighting for control of it. It's hard to imagine anyone else getting any use out of this, and the price seems a little high.

Features
Solid metal construction
Vinyl strap
Snaps right onto a PSP



Griffin **SmartShare Headphone Splitter**

• System: PSP • Price: \$14.99

This lets two people listen to the audio on the same PSP, by allowing you to hook up two pairs of headphones. The odd thing is that the SmartShare is compatible with most standard models of headphones, but *isn't* compatible with PSP-specific headphones like Pelican's subwoofer-equipped model. Thus, you'll need to carry two extra pairs of normal 'phones to get some use out of the SmartShare. Like the RoadDock, it's easy to imagine this seeing some serious use on car trips, or if you want to share music with a friend without sharing earwax, and it's cheap enough to be worth the purchase. Take a look if you've got kids and a penchant for road trips.

Features
Independent volume control
Compatible with most models of headphones



Fan art is all about giving exposure to aspiring artists who might not otherwise have a way to get their artistic 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 : Luv2Game.com/Metal Saga Contest
Artist : Juan Gonzales
Age : 20
Location : Phoenix, AZ



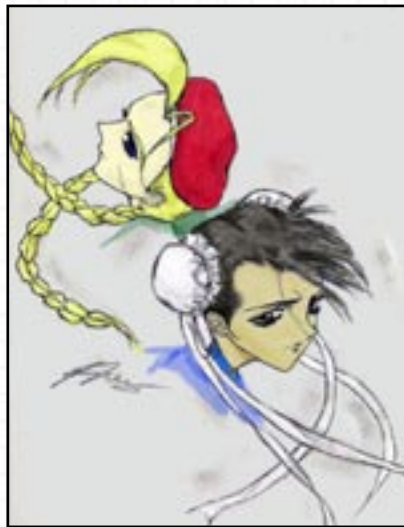
Title : Rampage!!!
Artist : Douglas De Guzman
Age : 23
Location : Las Vegas, NV



Title : X-Men
Artist : Brian Hovey
Age : 32
Location : San Antonio, TX



Title : Your Mom
Artist : Andrew Sanchez
Age : 26
Location : Sarasota, FL



Title : Cammy & Chun Li
Artist : Jamie Wang
Age : 22
Location : Boyds, MD



Title : SMB
Artist : Jason Zamojski
Age : 20
Location : Chicago, IL



Title : a Koopa's head
Artist : Mitch Aselage
Age : 18
Location : Minster, OH



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COSPLAY



by Metalbot

This month we bring you some hardcore cosplayers from the Philippines. After taking a good look, you may think that they are professional costume designers. However, they are just fans who taught themselves to make pro-level costumes because they love to cosplay. They are so good that the local distributor of *Guild Wars* paid them to "represent" at a recent event. Some of them were even lucky enough to get employment at the local TV station for its anime channel "Hero-TV."



Ramil Abdula
(as The Lich Lord)



Tanya Obedoza
(as Monk/Necromancer)



Robert Wong
(as Warrior/Elementalist)



Jewel Pineda
(as Mesmer/Elementalist)



Pablo Bairan
(as Warrior/Monk)



Leandro Polidario
(as Necrid Warrior)





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.





www.filcosplay.tk
Photos by: Pablo Bairan





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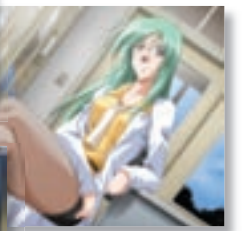
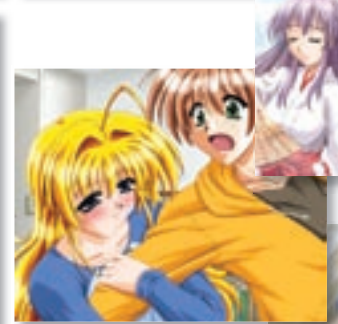
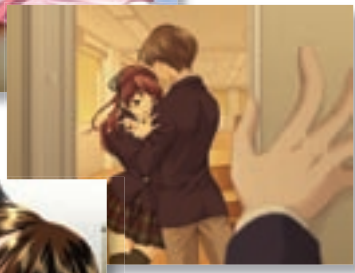
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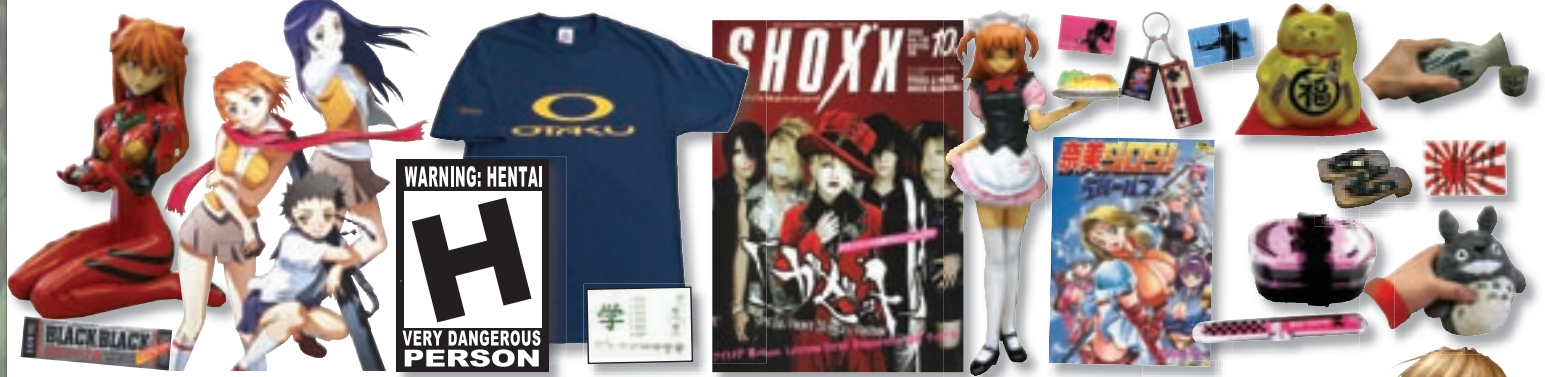
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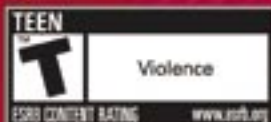


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