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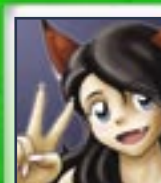
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DJPubba Tim Lindquist
 Ahh, we finally got an English *Disgaea 2* and it's good. It's so, so good. I don't want to do anything besides play this game. Well, I did make an exception for a CNBC shoot at our office. They interviewed Steven Kent for a documentary on the history of games and used the DoubleJump offices as a backdrop and for some b-roll footage. Look for it to air in November.
 Now playing: All the Wii games from E3, *Disgaea 2*, *Big Brain*, *New Super Mario Bros*.




Wanderer Thomas Wilde
 After all the hype's died down and my head is clear, one question about E3 2006 remains: where the hell was *Resident Evil 5*?
 Now Playing: *Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow*, *Persona 2: Eternal Punishment*, *Rumble Roses XX*




Lynxara Alicia Ashby
 If there was ever any doubt that the game industry was doing better than ever, let me dispel it. It used to be that summer and spring was the industry's slow period, when not much was going on and, as such, game journalists (lol) could be pretty lazy. Now we're busy pretty much full-tilt, except for maybe a month or so in December. The upside to this: constant work. The downside: constant work when games I want to play for fun are coming out.
 Now Playing: *SRT: OG*, *Disgaea 2*, *Blade Dancer*



Racewing Geson Hatchett
 Hey, Sega? Thought you'd like to know that other companies are totally blowin' up your spot. *Final Fantasy XII*? *Skies of Arcadia* on the ground. *Rogue Galaxy*? *Skies of Arcadia... in space*. You know what you must do.
 Now Playing: *God of War* (Yes, I'm late) *Field Commander* (Yes, I'm a traitor), *Street Fighter Alpha Anthology* (Yes, I'm using Sakura)




Shoegazer Dave Hulegaard
 I have a sad but true confession to make this month. Despite all of the great Xbox 360 titles that I have played since its debut, I have only been able to unlock all of the achievements for one title: *Uno*. Laugh all you want; *Uno* is the new *Poker*, mark my words!
 Now Playing: *Uno*, *Phoenix Wright*, *Rule of Rose*




KouAidou Elizabeth Ellis
 Guilty confession time: I've never owned a portable system before (except the Game Gear... not really portable!), but I'm falling in love with this little DS contraption. I open it up and my game is right there! It's like I've been living in a bubble all these years... now Ash, how 'bout you get me up to speed on this whole "telegraph" thing?
 Now Playing: *New Super Mario Bros*, *Tetris DS*




Roger Danish Greg Off
 We're officially over a year old and are potty trained, so we've got that going for us. We also had a whoop-assing E3, and are now settling back into the swing of things with some hands-on time with the Wii. Life is good and it's only going to get better real soon. How much better? How about *Zelda*, *Mario* and *Metroid* better?
 Now Playing: *Dead Rising*, *Girl's Garden*, *Saint's Row*, *Super Burger Time*




4thletter David Brothers
 My iPod has a habit of doing things like jumping from Lupe Fiasco to Tom & Jerry to Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters singing "Get Your Kicks on Route 66." My comic collection runs from Spider-Man to Scott Pilgrim to 100 Bullets. Is there something wrong with me? Anyway, shout-outs to Mean Gene, Larry Esco, and the Willionaire for showing me a good time in LA during E3.
 Now Playing: *Tetris DS*, *Metal Gear Acid 2*




James James Cunningham
 Getting my work hours cut in half at the job that pays my bills has made for an interesting month. My choices are either 1) Scramble like mad to re-enter the rat-race full time, or 2) do something interesting while cutting back on useless stuff. My, that second option sure is tempting. Stay tuned for more details as plans progress.
 Now playing- *GTA: Liberty City Stories*, *Mutant Storm Reloaded*, *New Super Mario Bros*.




HonestGamer Jason Venter
 Everyone else is talking about things they loved, like E3. I didn't attend. So I have to pick something else I loved if I want to fit in. Fine. I pick Jim Butcher's Harry Dresden books. Do yourself a favor and read them. No, really. Do it.
 Now Playing: *Disgaea 2*, *New Super Mario Bros*.




Hitoshura Iaian Ross
 As fun and hectic as E3 was, I kind of wish I had more time. More time to see the show as I missed most of the stuff in the West Hall. More time to understand why LA is crazy enough to never sit still for a moment. And more time to spend with HGM's staff in person, because 3+ days just isn't enough.
 Now Playing: *Rogue Galaxy*, *Disgaea 2*




Sartius Danny Cowan
 SGE 2K6 will be over and done with by the time this issue's ink hits paper, but right now intense planning is in effect in order to ensure that this year's Texas throwdown is the biggest and best yet. Contestants will travel across the country and play some of the world's worst games in bloodthirsty competition for the grand prize: a pair of Virtual Boys. Who will survive? Find out next month!
 Now Playing: *Aquaman*, *Death Tank Zwei*, *Richard Scarry's Busytown*




Wolfie Terry Wolfinger
 So I work a little backwards. Not having seen a single episode, I watched the season 2 finale of "Lost," and was instantly hooked. My last two weeks were spent watching every episode from season 1 on DVD. Wow- such a great show. Any series that starts out with a guy getting sucked into a jet engine is my kind of show. I can't wait for the 2nd season to get to DVD now! You hear me, ABC? Now!!
 Now Playing: *World Of Warcraft* What else, right?




Metalbot Anthony Mertz
 I've done a bad thing and become addicted to *Flyff*. Sure, it doesn't pretend to be anything more than it is (level grinding), but it's still an MMORPG. Which is a terrible thing to be addicted to. Well, at least it's free.
 Now Playing: *Flyff*, *Heroes of Might & Magic V*



Arfeth Thomas Shin
 Apparently, a certain wombat decided to eat my camera's memory card and thus, I have to thank JetPhi for photographically chronicling our Japanese escapades, as well as Preppy, Justin Wong, and the TGA staff for helping me out. Now it's time to plan for Evolution 2k6!
 Now Playing: *SEGA UFO Catcher*(Gloomy Bear Dolls), *Melty Blood: Re-ACT*(PC)



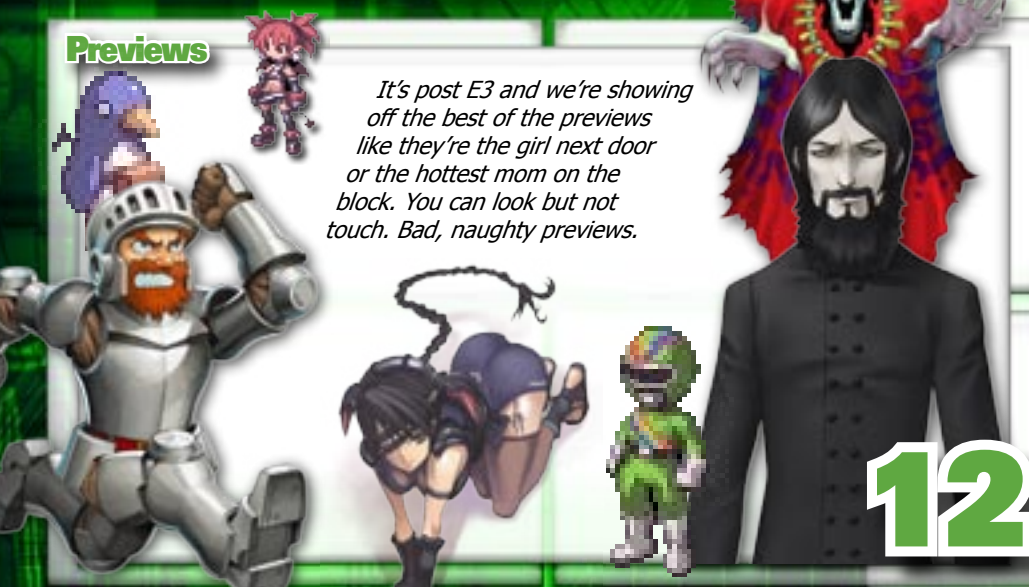
Ashura Brady Hartel
 Back in the days of the telegraph, I wonder if phrases like "so, someone blew up my watermelon," would inadvertently freak the receiver out. They'd be all "S-O-SI? OH SHIZ," and then the fourth letter would come and they would be relieved. I mean, there had to be bad telegraph keyists back then, right? Is that what olden l33t was? "Use stops? Then I wouldn't be a l33t telegraxx0r!" "Balderdash. You're not a l33t telegraxx0r unless you use *smoke signals!* Morse's Electrical Telegraph? Poppycok!"



Jeremy Jeremy Peeples
 Jim Butcher's books are fine, honestgamer, but Harry Stephen Keeler's are much better. Some involve clowns, traveling circuses, and transposed legs - seriously, how cool is that? On the gaming front (which should be cool to everyone reading), I'm excited about *Super Mario Galaxy* and just about all things Wii after E3.
 Now Playing - *Super Mario All-Stars*, *Brain Age*, *WWF No Mercy*, *Tetris DS*, *Steambot Chronicles*

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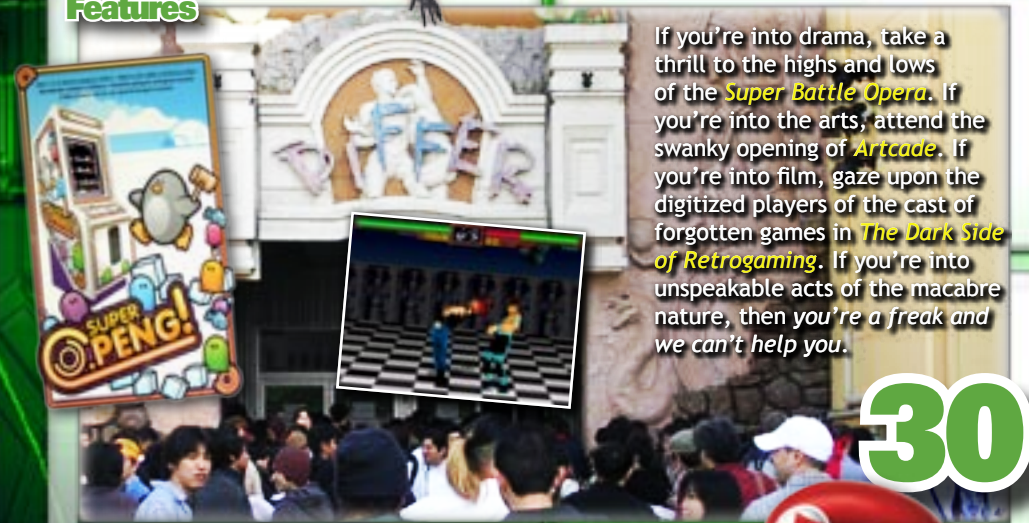
Previews



It's post E3 and we're showing off the best of the previews like they're the girl next door or the hottest mom on the block. You can look but not touch. Bad, naughty previews.

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Features



If you're into drama, take a thrill to the highs and lows of the *Super Battle Opera*. If you're into the arts, attend the swanky opening of *Artcade*. If you're into film, gaze upon the digitized players of the cast of forgotten games in *The Dark Side of Retrogaming*. If you're into unspeakable acts of the macabre nature, then you're a freak and we can't help you.

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On the cover



You know how easy it would have been for us to break out the numerous Wii puns for this text, but we chose to take the high road instead. It's what Mario's dead cousin, Carbunkle, would have wanted.

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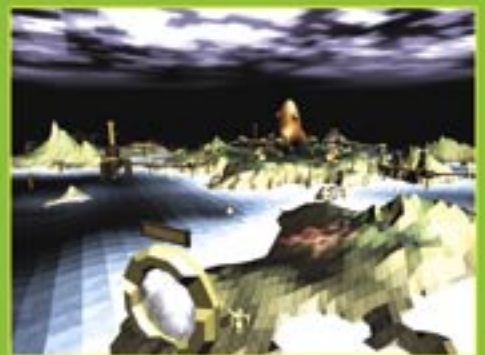
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EXCLUSIVES: AUTHENTIC DARWINIAN KEYCHAIN + POSTER!

Get ready to be immersed in a new sensory level of gaming. Feel the pops of bullets in *Killzone*, the rumbling of grenade blasts in *Far Cry*, the reverberation of machinery in *Sin* and the thuds of your shotgun in *Halo 2* with the AudioFX Force Feedback Headset.



GET A BIONIC GAMING EAR WITH THE AUDIO FX

The AudioFX Force Feedback Headset from eDimensional takes gamers to a new level of sensory immersion. Using a tactile technology called "PSC (Positional Sound Capability)" the headset increases your environmental awareness through vibrations. The rumble works similarly to the force feedback in gaming controllers, vibrating to environmental cues. The headset not only surrounds you with the auditory hum of machinery found in games, but you feel it reverberating through the vibrations in the headset's padding. Coupled with a force feedback controller, you feel more immersed in a game than ever.

eDimensional explains: "The human ear cannot hear anything below 20-25Hz but other frequencies can be "felt" as vibrations. The Audio FX's bass amplifier interprets frequencies below 20Hz and transforms them into vibrations that we can feel through the headphone earpiece. "

Leave the real world behind as the headset snugly fits around your ears with its comfortable padding. The lightweight and adjustable properties practically make them transparent. Just make sure your friends or family know you are engaged in the auditory immersion or you are likely to get spooked when you feel a tap on your back.

The Audio FX Gaming Headset also includes an attached mic for communication. A controller on the 12 foot cord allows you to adjust the sound and vibration level and has a switch to turn the force feedback on or off. The headset attaches to your PC's headset, mic and USB inputs. The USB connection is used to draw the power to the headset.

The Audio FX is designed for use as a PC gaming headset, however, I did experiment with hooking it up to an Xbox 360 and Playstation 2 using a y-adaptor for the left and right audio channels to the headset and the USB ports on the consoles to power the vibration. Although the controller to the headset does not allow you to adjust vibration and audio levels in this configuration, I found it just as usable as on the PC or Mac games. eDimensional said a console gaming headset may be in the works.

Get connected and read more on the Audio FX Gaming Headset, retailing for \$49.95, at www.edimensional.com.

ENGAGE IN REAL LIFE ALTERNATE REALITY GAME "PERPLEX CITY"



Enter alternate gaming reality (ARG) via collectible puzzle cards from *Perplex City* on a quest for The Receda Cube. Cards are part of the key to the unearthing the cube, buried somewhere on Earth, for a real-life \$200,000 reward. "*Perplex City* is a place, a story, a game and a real-life treasure hunt."

By purchasing cards in booster packs, the player is presented with different puzzles. Cards range in color categories: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, black, and silver. The rarer the card, the tougher the puzzle. Some cards even feature heat sensitive or UV (ultraviolet) ink. Game play involves solving the individual card puzzles instead of combating with opponents as executed on card games such as *Magic: The Gathering* or *Pokemon*. Cards can be entered into the *Perplex City* web site, perplexcity.com, to gain points on a leaderboard.

The game began in 2004 and is still ongoing. Developed by Mind Candy (www.mindcandydesign.com), the game uses the various technology that we have made part of our daily lives (internet, phone, faxes) to intertwine you into the puzzle.

If you thought Microsoft's *Halo 2*'s alternate realty game campaign, ilovebees.com, was a breeze, try *Perplex City*. This is one multiplayer, networked experience that will blur the gaming experience that any sole machine can offer.

Ready to start? Find out more about *Perplex City* at perplexcity.com.

HDTV GAMING SHOW DEBUTES WITH "GAMEPLAY HD"



VOOM HD Networks has developed a new high definition gaming channel, GamePlay HD. The 24/7 HD network covers gaming news, reviews, previews and tournaments. GamePlay HD maintains the high level of detail present in next-gen HD games by

keeping to HD resolution. Shows currently on rotation include "Cinemaddicts" (behind the storyline of games), "Art of Play" (covering gaming cinematics), "In Play" (where gamers show off their skills) and "Game High" (the highlights of gaming tournaments). If you think you have some gaming skills to show off, Gameplay will also feature your footage in its "In Play" series (contact spinfo@gameplayhd.com for submission details). New shows premiere on Wednesday nights at 10 PM Eastern Time. VOOM HD Networks is available in the U.S. through satellite and cable operators on Echostar's DISH Network.

NEWS BITS

Crafty gamers used Frappr Maps online (www.frappr.com/dsliteavailability) to track down pre-released Nintendo DS Lite systems, as several retailers prematurely released the DS Lite on May 30, 2006, two weeks ahead of its official release in the US. • 30,000 *World of Warcraft* Accounts were banned by Blizzard for using third party programs to farm gold and items. • Nintendo will bring their *Common Sense Training for Adults* game to the DS, so adult gamers can "avoid embarrassment in the future." • A philosophy student's web pages went down, as an unknowing University administrator took a modified Xbox console functioning as a server home for his son to play with. • Attorney Jack Thompson urged sheriff's deputies in West Feliciana Parish, St. Francisville, Louisiana, to search a teenager's home for video games after Thompson concluded that the manner of the teen's brutal murder of a 55-year-old man matched scenarios found in *Grand Theft Auto*. Thompson says "Nobody shoots anybody in the face unless you're a hit man or a video gamer." • The Sony PSP has received Firmware Update 2.71, allowing downloadable demo games from its home page. The demos start with the new puzzle action game *Loco Roco*.

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DISGAEA 2

Cursed Memories



"DISGAEA 2 FEATURES BOTH THE GREAT 2D ANIME LOOK OF ITS PREDECESSOR AS WELL AS ITS NERDY, LAUGH-OUT LOUD FUNNY SENSE OF HUMOR"

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<http://www.nisamerica.com>

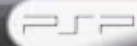


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PlayStation 2





Preview by James

ULTIMATE GHOSTS'N GOBLINS



Publisher: **Capcom** Genre(s): **Action**
Developer: **Capcom** Category: **Platformer**
Release Date: **09/2006** # of Players: **1**

Every few years Capcom takes a platform and puts its mark on it. They did it with Dreamcast, moved on to the GameCube Five (R.I.P. *Dead Phoenix*), and now it's the PSP's turn. The next title in their "let's make this console kick ass" attack is *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins*.

Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins is an all-new game in Capcom's long-lived series. Sir Arthur is still running around desolate 2D landscapes populated by all manner of evil creatures, but Capcom has added a welcome depth to the formula. Boomerang scythes, bombs, crossbows and other new weapons, as well as various kinds of magic, will help Sir Arthur survive, and clever usage thereof will reveal alternate paths through the levels.

You'll need all these toys because the difficulty *Ghosts 'n Goblins* is known for hasn't been toned down a bit. What looks like a generous amount of lives rapidly gets whittled down by the unending supply of enemies, and you'll only survive by skill, practice, and learning where the best hidden goodies are. Sir Arthur's jump doesn't help matters any either, because true to the series's style there's no tweaking allowed mid-air.

On the graphics front, the 3D engine does a great job of giving the enemies and environments a stylish 2.5D look. The music also does its part to keep the action lively, with both revamped and all-new tunes. It's been 15 years since *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* came out, but the series still knows how to work its magic.



Preview by Wanderer

Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin™

Publisher: **Konami** Genre(s): **Adventure**
Developer: **Konami** Category: **Metroidvania**
Release Date: **Winter 2006** # of Players: **1-TBA**

Contrary to popular rumor, *Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin* isn't a side-scrolling 2D action title like the early *Castlevanias* were. It's another exploratory romp through a castle and all related points, with magical paintings serving as portals to distant lands and a return to a more Belmonty sort of hero.

Portrait of Ruin is set in 1944, in the middle of World War II. Two mysterious little girls have raised Dracula's castle yet again. Jonathan Morris, the son of *Castlevania: Bloodlines*'s John Morris, is out to stop them. He's assisted by his childhood friend Charlotte Orlean.

Over the course of the game, you'll control Jonathan and Charlotte simultaneously, which works in much the same way as *Dawn of Sorrow*'s Julius Mode did. You can switch characters with the touch of a button, or bring them both out at the same time to give you extra firepower or a much-needed boost up to a high ledge. Jonathan fights like a Belmont, with various "weapon styles" that consist of a main weapon paired with a subweapon; he can use the Vampire Killer and a boomerang, or a sword and a dagger. Charlotte uses a magical book as a weapon, and while she's not as tough as Jonathan, her spells are the most potent offensive option you have. Think Trevor and Sypha, or Julius and Yoko, and you'll get the picture.

Portrait of Ruin abandons the deeper collection-based play style of the *Sorrow* games in favor of a more challenging adventure. Underneath it all, it's still a 2D exploration-based *Castlevania*, which makes it one of the most reliable bets in this year's DS lineup. Let's face it; you were going to buy this anyway.



DISGAEA 2

Cursed Memories

Preview by Hitoshura

Publisher: NIS America
Developer: Nippon Ichi Software
Release Date: August 2006

Genre(s): RPG
Category: Strategy
of Players: 1

It's the summer months, and that can only mean one thing to SRPG fanatics everywhere – Nippon Ichi is gearing up to release their next big game. Since *Disgaea 2* is the sequel to an instant classic like *Disgaea*, there's a bit of fear in every fan's mind that it might not be as good as the original. That however does not appear to be the case, as everything that made the original *Disgaea* great is back with more additions and improvements than you can shake a sword at.

The many improvements in *Disgaea 2* are quite subtle. Killing things gives out more experience, so you level up more quickly. Listening to the Japanese language track now gives you Japanese voices in-battle as well as during cut-scenes. The Item World has been improved with more helpers and enemies, there are new Mysterious Rooms where residents offer services to you, and an Item Congress that alter an Item's stats and characteristics. There's even a Courthouse to reward particularly amazing gameplay feats, a streamlined Dark Congress that eliminates the rank tests, and Geo Symbols that move around the map. All of that and more waits along with tons of secrets.

The opening moments are in perfect *Disgaea* tone, both cohesive and a laugh riot. This should please fans who thought *Phantom Brave's* story was too depressing, and *Makai Kingdom's* too nonsensical. Though Flonne and Laharl are quite jealous at not being the main characters this time around, Etna fans can rejoice because she'll be playing a bigger role than either of them. Join in the lunacy next issue, when we have our *Disgaea 2* blowout.



In the bizarre world of Sol Ciel, there is a floating continent powered by an enormous tower called Ar tonelico. The ground beneath the island has been transformed into black death, and the sky above it sealed off by the Blast Line. Once Sol Ciel was a normal world, but now it's only possible for people to live in the area protected by Ar tonelico. Even that tower's future is in doubt, as the tower has been sieged for countless years by creatures called Viruses. The Knights of Elemia formed to protect the tower, but something new is emerging that will be far beyond the Knights' abilities.

The key to defeating the new enemy is the Reiva Teil, female beings with the power to use Song Magic. By singing, your party's Reiva Teil can generate all of the usual magical effects: massive damage, stat boosts, and healing. Developing your Reiva Teil's abilities is the key to saving Ar tonelico, but the key to unlocking your Reiva Teils' powers is the protagonist, Lyner. By using Dive Centers to enter the Cosmosphere that is the heart of each Reiva Teil's mind, Lyner can get to know her better and help remove the mental barriers that may be blocking her from unleashing her full powers and finding happiness.

At first blush, *Ar tonelico* looks a lot like Gust's *Atelier Iris* games, and a lot of the features that *Atelier* fans have grown to love are going to show up here. Combat even uses a similar turn-based engine, but the emphasis on using your Reiva Teil is going to make the flow of battle very different. Still, if you like the visual and musical style of the *Atelier Iris* games, you don't want to miss *Ar tonelico*.

Publisher: NIS America
Developer: Gust
Release Date: Q4 2006

Genre(s): RPG
Category: Music & Simulation
of Players: 1



Ar tonelico

Preview by Lynxara





Preview by 4thLetter

GEARS OF WAR

Publisher: Microsoft
 Developer: Epic Games
 Release Date: October 2006

Genre(s): Third Person Shooter
 Category: Survival Horror
 # of Players: 1-16

How do you like your apocalyptic wastelands? If your answer is "filled with more enemies than friends," then you're in luck: *Gears of War* is for you. We played it at E3 and come bearing sweet multiplayer details.

Gears of War is brutal. Sniper rifles, rocket launchers, and shotguns are all in effect. There's a vicious twist, though. Your melee attack isn't the usual gun-butt you'd find in other shooters. Here, you've got a gun-mounted chainsaw. It doesn't come out instantaneously, so you have to hold a button and then approach the bad guy. If you manage to connect, you're treated to a gory, but satisfying virtual kill.

If you're used to running solo and playing the role of One Man Army Corps, get ready for a change. *Gears of War* is distinctly team-based. You're going to have to learn to stop and go while you watch each other's backs, or else you're all going to end up very dead. One team member deciding not to play the teamwork game will let the other, better-

organized enemies pick you off one by one. The point of view in *Gears of War* is low and in close, limiting your visibility. You need someone to watch your back, and maybe even a side or two for good measure. It's also useful to pair off and take control of a certain portion of the map with your buddy. This way, you can setup a true meat grinder and have the added benefit of reloading and moving while someone else provides covering fire.

Gears of War really shows off what the 360 can do. The characters are super-detailed to the point that wrinkles in the face, ammo belts, and your standard action movie grimace all come through clearly. The stage we played on was filled with some of the most beautifully-rendered wreckage out there. Characters slam against rubble for cover with a resounding thud and cloud of dust, and the rockets provide satisfying explosions. Hopefully the single player portion of *Gears of War* stands up just as well.



Preview by Wanderer

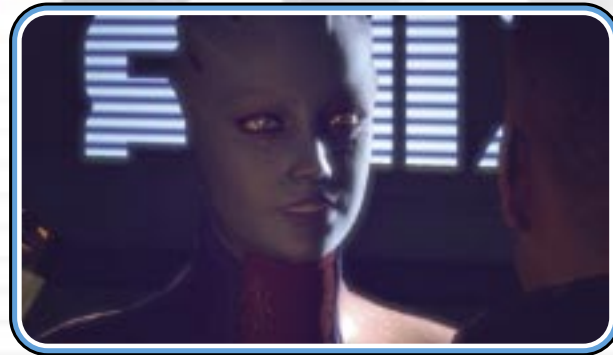
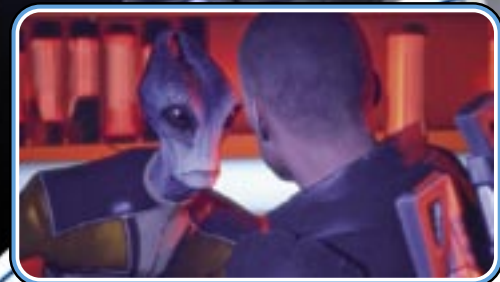
MASS EFFECT

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
 Developer: Bioware
 Release Date: Pending

Genre(s): RPG
 Category: Like Crack, With Lasers
 # of Players: 1

Commander Shepard is the first human to be allowed into the galaxy's most elite defenders, and as a result, no one really trusts him. Humanity's a relative newcomer to the galactic stage, and everyone else is watching to see how they'll turn out. Unluckily for you, as Shepard, you've just stumbled onto a secret that could potentially tear down galactic civilization.

Mass Effect draws upon the same BioWare engine that powered games like *KOTOR* and *Jade Empire*. You can customize your human protagonist, changing his gender or areas of specialty, then send him out into the universe



to unravel the mystery and serve, for better or worse, as an ambassador for humanity.

The first word that comes to mind, really, is "big." Bioware's pulled out all the stops to make a huge, all-encompassing space opera, with realistic graphics animating a cast of thousands. You'll be able to engage in tactical real-time combat with a squad of three characters, using guns, hypertechnology, or biotic powers: what Bioware calls "science-based magic." You can also choose to veer off the main questline and explore the galaxy in your own spaceship, using your own land rover to make planetfall on a host of uncharted worlds.

Bioware's got a pretty good track record at this point of making insanely addictive RPGs, and *Mass Effect* looks, above all else, like them taking their usual style to the next generation. I'm pretty optimistic about this one.





bioshock

Back when we were all much younger, the *System Shock* games scared the blue hell out of a generation of PC gamers. Rumors have been flying for a while about the arrival of a long-awaited third game in the series.

Bioshock, an atmospheric FPS set in the flooding ruins of an underwater city, is that sequel. It, too, will scare the blue hell out of you.

You take the role of an unnamed "everyman" trapped in Rapture, a utopian underwater colony founded by idealists in the '40s. It's now a dark, leaky ruin, populated by bizarre mutants and insane, genetically-modified humans called "splicers." Using improvised weapons, scant amounts of ammunition, and superhuman abilities, you have to find your way past the mutants and through Rapture's lethal jury-rigged security systems.

Bioshock has a unique look to it. Rapture is a decaying art-deco labyrinth, with amusingly retro set design behind all the madness; imagine a *Fallout* FPS and you'll be close to the mark. Simultaneously, you'll need to use your head to stay alive, as *Bioshock* doesn't let you just go tactical on everything. To survive, you need to use your head. Can you turn the mutants against Big Daddy, an anonymous figure who lurks within an old diving suit? Can you trick the splicers into triggering Rapture's security systems? Maybe you should just sneak by. It's your call.



Preview by Wanderer

Publisher : 2K Games
Developer : Irrational
Release Date : 2007

Genre(s) : Action
Category : First-Person Not-Shooter
of players : 1

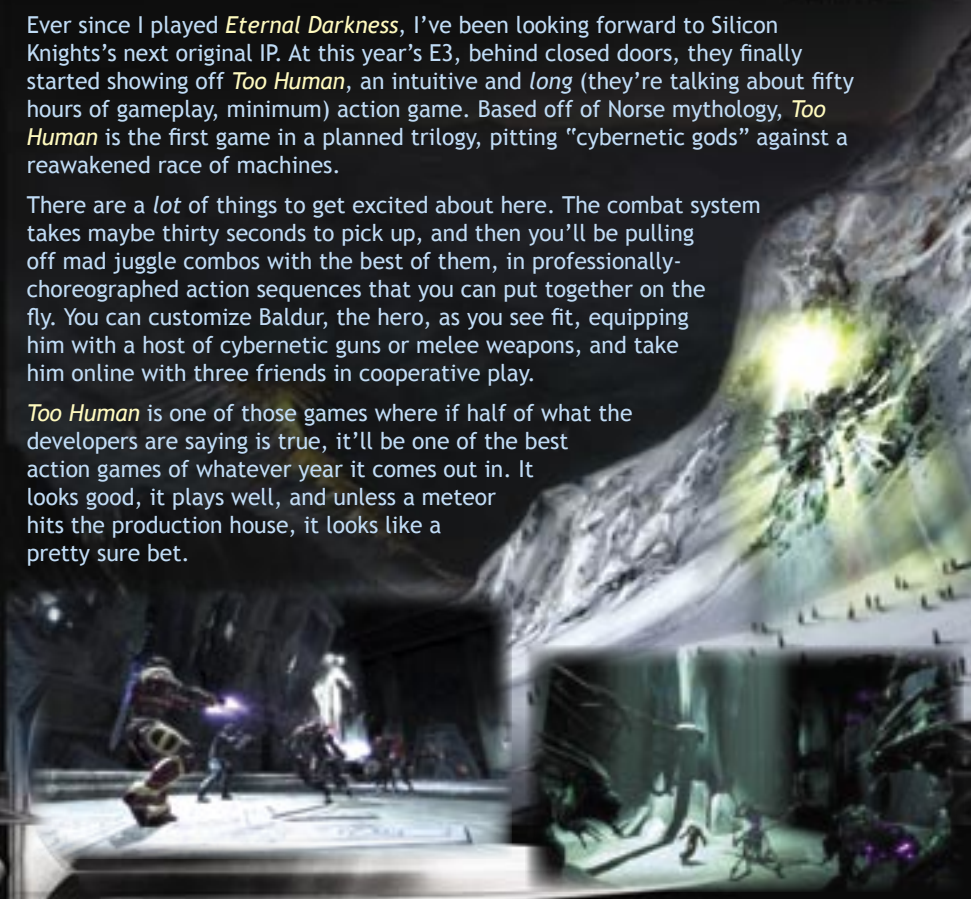


Preview by Wanderer

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Silicon Knights
Release Date: Pending

Genre(s): Action
Category: Ragnarok 'n' Roll
of Players: 1

TOO HUMAN



Ever since I played *Eternal Darkness*, I've been looking forward to Silicon Knights's next original IP. At this year's E3, behind closed doors, they finally started showing off *Too Human*, an intuitive and *long* (they're talking about fifty hours of gameplay, minimum) action game. Based off of Norse mythology, *Too Human* is the first game in a planned trilogy, pitting "cybernetic gods" against a reawakened race of machines.

There are a *lot* of things to get excited about here. The combat system takes maybe thirty seconds to pick up, and then you'll be pulling off mad juggle combos with the best of them, in professionally-choreographed action sequences that you can put together on the fly. You can customize Baldur, the hero, as you see fit, equipping him with a host of cybernetic guns or melee weapons, and take him online with three friends in cooperative play.

Too Human is one of those games where if half of what the developers are saying is true, it'll be one of the best action games of whatever year it comes out in. It looks good, it plays well, and unless a meteor hits the production house, it looks like a pretty sure bet.



Preview by Lynxara

DEVIL SUMMONER

Publisher: **Atlus** Genre(s): **Action RPG**
Developer: **Atlus** Category: **666, The Number of the Beast**
Release Date: **Q4 2006** # of Players: **1**



The next *Shin Megami Tensei* game is going to be something a little different. *Devil Summoner* is an action RPG, starring a silent young man named Raidou Kuzunoha. He's a police officer in turn-of-the-century Japan, armed with a katana, detective skills, and the ability to command demons to do his bidding. Raidou has to use everything at his disposal to gather information, solve crimes, and (of course) battle demons.

In most *MegaTen* games, the main character ends up recruiting a whole pack of demons, but Raidou's relationship to his servant devils is a bit more complex. Raidou can use the services of one demon at a time, and actually fights alongside it in combat. You can even execute tandem attack moves, though Raidou also attacks on his own with his sword and a pistol. When it comes to getting information out of humans and other demons, Raidou also has to team up with his partner devil. You can use techniques ranging from physical intimidation to mind control to get people on the streets to tell you what they really know.

What's really unusual about *Devil Summoner* is the setting. Since it takes place in turn-of-the-century Japan, it realistically (demons aside) reflects a very strange-looking period in the nation's history.

Modern Western styles of clothing and technology were slowly being introduced, and often clashed visibly with traditional Japanese culture. Few games have explored this shadowy period of history, let alone given you control of a character right in the middle of the conflict. It's so unusual that a *MegaTen* game picking it as a focus seems almost... well, not predictable. Still, it's not too surprising, and sure to please the kind of fans who love *Shin Megami Tensei*.



Freedom comes with a price

SPECTRAL SOULS

The tattered Neverland continent is at war once again. The shaky peace between humans and demons finally collapsed when the Demon Army launched a massive offensive against human forces across the land. Eager for blood, the humans reformed long-dead empires and enacted their own war of expansion. Thus began the Seven Year War.

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Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.





Preview by Racewing

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team
Release Date: Fall 2006

Genre(s): Action
Category: Fastest Thing Alive
of Players: 1-4

How do you maintain a videogame character's popularity for fifteen years? There are under ten companies who could answer that question for you, and one of them is Sega. Sonic celebrates his 15th anniversary with a game reminiscent of his first years. In the water city of Soleanna (complete with free-roaming city zones lifted from *Sonic Adventure*), he's charged to protect its princess, Elise, and the Chaos Emeralds, from Dr. Eggman. The game features three characters with unique gameplay types; rest assured that two of these characters (information on Shadow was unavailable at the show) are a blast to use.

Sonic Team's goal is to make sure that all who play this have no doubts that "Sonic is all about being really cool and being really fast." They've also promised to make sure that the 3D camera and control are rock-solid. Clearly, it shows. While exploring a mountainous garden I tripped robots with Sonic's new slide move, and demolished them with accurate high-speed homing attacks while the camera swooped around to follow me just as quickly. Afterwards, I instantly took off running, while sometimes dashing, climbing and rail-grinding to the goal. I traversed ancient submerged ruins with ease, using subsonic speed and reaction commands to coast over both land and water.

Silver the Hedgehog is a new character, hailing from the future to hinder Sonic. His motive? Sonic is apparently the "Iblis Trigger," whose actions will incite a world-threatening catastrophe. Silver's game is total power-trip action, as he's a telekinetic beast. Speed is sacrificed as you lift cars and crates, bend steel girders into jump springs, levitate, and return projectiles to sender.

Sonic speeds into the new console generation this fall, and he's daring the competition to keep up. Right now, all signs point to this being his best game in a long time.



Preview by Lynxara

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Clover
Release Date: 09/2006

Genre(s): Adventure
Category: Mythic
of Players: 1



Okami is the story of Amaterasu no Oomikami, the great goddess of the sun who appears in the form of a blazing white wolf. The monster Yamata no Orochi has plunged much of the world into darkness, and Amaterasu must repair the damage by restoring the world's beautiful colors. To do this, though, she must increase her powers by gathering worshipers who believe in her. You'll guide Amaterasu through a surreally beautiful cel-shaded world, helping her perform the good deeds that will earn her the faith of the world's people.

Amaterasu can run across the storybook landscapes with blinding speed, attack enemies with a shoulder-block, leap high into the air, and bark to call up a menu screen. Tapping R1 freezes the landscape and turns it for a moment into a painting, which the player can alter with an ink-tipped brush. With this power of creation, you can stylishly destroy obstacles, summon gods from the constellations, and solve a plethora of clever puzzles. The only real limit on your ability is how well you can get the PS2's analog controller to respond to your artistic impulses.

I'm honestly not sure it's possible to like video games and dislike *Okami*. The game's cel-shaded visual style is pure art, the music is amazing, and the story and gameplay blend together into a flawless experience. This is the kind of adventure gaming you usually can't find outside of the *Legend of Zelda* games, let alone in a PS2 title. If stuff like *Katamari Damacy* and *Shadow of the Colossus* is what keeps you coming back to Sony's aging juggernaut of a console, then you'll definitely want to be there for *Okami* this fall.





GUITAR HERO II

Preview by Racewing

Publisher: Harmonix
Developer: RedOctane
Release Date: November 2006
Genre(s): Rhythm Action
Category: Woodstock '06: IN YOUR HOUSE
of Players: 1-2

Last year, Harmonix and Red Octane shocked the world (well, a good portion of it, at least) with a game that was a mild risk, but ended up with great rewards. Even today, *Guitar Hero* is rapidly taking rhythm gaming into the mainstream. It's easy to pick up, yet requires skill to master, and it makes you feel like playing a real guitar in a real rock concert to boot.

This time around, Harmonix wants your friends to join in. Got two guitar controllers? Get ready to actually use both of them this time! *Guitar Hero II* gives you and a friend the ability to play the main, rhythm, and/or bass lines for every featured song. In what's sure to be the most popular feature, there's now a cooperative duet mode where both people play a different line of the same song, and share the same Rock Meter. Should the two of you miss too many notes, you'll be booted off of the stage simultaneously. To activate your life-saving Star Power, you both have to tilt your guitars up at the same time.

Expect to jam to songs from KISS, Black Sabbath and Van Halen, with other popular artists waiting to be revealed. For the curious, there will be two SKUs for the game, one with a controller and one without. Thus, if you already have two guitar controllers, you won't be forced to pay for a third with your copy of *GH2*. With a new career mode, 55 songs, and new characters to join revamps of old ones (including a 40% cuter Judy Nails), this looks to be a sequel in the truest and most positive sense of the word.

So practice up! You'll need it. This November, the world will get ready to rock once again.



DEAD OR ALIVE XTREME 2

Review by 4thletter

Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: Team Ninja
Release Date: Late 2006
Genre(s): Beach Fun
Category: Baby Got...
of Players: 1-TBA

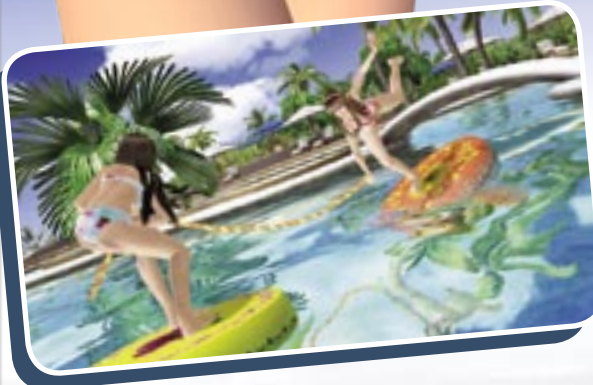
Tomonobu Itagaki's Team Ninja is known for three things: beautiful girls, punishing difficulty, and special love for the hardcore gamer. *Dead or Alive Xtreme 2* is the sequel to *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* and it promises to be yet another fun time for *DoA* fans.

Team Ninja is taking advantage of the Xbox 360's increased processing power to bring you even better graphics. It's a step above even *Dead or Alive 4* in terms of detail, with everything, including shifting sand, splashing water, and er, breast physics getting a facelift. Itagaki's daughters have never looked quite this good.

The game itself is getting some tender loving care, as well. The minigames have been added to and expanded, which means that you get to do something you've always wanted to do: play sexually suggestive minigames in awkward silence with a friend using the power of the internet. The trailer we got to see at E3 included a fun-looking jet-skiing game, and a

sequence where you try to knock a girl off a floating pad by bumping her repeatedly with another girl's behind. The volleyball game will definitely come with online play, and online multiplayer will be included for certain minigames.

All in all, it looks like a fun, cheesecake-y game. If it's up to Team Ninja's usual standards, it'll make for a great time. Just don't let your mother play it. She'll kill you.



HELLGATE

LONDON

Preview by **Lynxara**

Hellgate: London is getting closer and closer to being finished, and every new build that comes along seems increasingly promising. At E3, the latest version of *Hellgate* debuted with near-complete dungeons and the new, playable Kabbalist and Templar classes. You'd never mistake *Hellgate* for anything but the work of the minds behind *Diablo*, but it's a pretty engrossing riff on the old *Diablo* formula. The random dungeons are remarkably more sophisticated, complete with random mission-based encounters, and the variety of enemies to fight and weapons to find is absolutely enormous.

While *Hellgate* likes to make much of the fact that you can play it as an FPS if you really want, the game actually seems to play best in third-person mode. I spent the most time with the Kabbalist, a long-range character that focuses on summoning lots of demonic pets. Her weapons began as an interesting pair of guns, one that immobilized an enemy and another that did damage. Most of the time, though, it was more efficient to immobilize an enemy and send the pets in to tear it apart.

Hellgate's visuals have been striking even from the game's early builds, but they're really shaping up as the game heads toward completion. The wrecked, bombed out London landscape really looks like wrecked, bombed out bits of London despite being randomly generated. There's immense detail and variety in the different areas you can explore, ranging from deserted train stations to blind alleys full of random burnt-out junk. The real test of the game, of course, will be when it's running who-knows-how-many-different-characters-through-a-single-dungeon-instance. If it stays as good as the single-player, then *Hellgate* may end up even bigger than *Diablo*.

Publisher: **Namco Bandai** Genre(s): **RPG**
 Developer: **Flagship Studios** Category: **Shooter**
 Release Date: **October 2006** # of Players: **1 to, uh, Massive**

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Phantom Hourglass

Preview by **Wanderer**

Publisher: **Nintendo**
 Developer: **Nintendo**
 Release Date: **Pending**

Genre(s): **Adventure**
 Category: **More Like Cel-Da, Am I Rite?**
 # of Players: **1**

For the surprisingly large number of fans who're upset by the more "mature" look that *Twilight Princess* is sporting, there's *Phantom Hourglass*, a DS adventure that draws upon the look, world, and play style of the cartoony, cheerful *Wind Waker*.

It's going to take some getting used to.

Phantom Hourglass uses nothing *but* the DS's stylus to control its action. To move Link, you guide his guardian fairy around the screen, and Link will follow behind it. Want to pick something up or swing Link's sword at it? Tap it. Want to use Link's spin attack? Draw a circle around him. Want to toss something, like a pot or a bomb flower? Double-tap it, then tap the screen again in the direction you want Link to throw it.

Want to go to sea? Use your stylus to sketch out the route you'll take, then hold it against the sides of the screen to rotate your perspective and fire your cannon. It's a surprisingly intuitive way to handle the *Wind Waker*-style sea travel, and frankly, I think I like it better.

Really, what it comes down to is this: *Phantom Hourglass* is a *Zelda* game. Specifically, it's a portable *Wind Waker*. My work here is done.





DRAGON QUEST HEROES

ROCKET SLIME

Publisher : Square-Enix
Developer : TOSE
Release Date : 09/12/06

Genre(s) : Adventure
Category : Slime! :-)
of players : 1

Preview by **Lynxara**

Square-Enix's 2006 E3 press conference basically amounted to running trailers for a couple hours, with the audience of journalists oohing and aahing appropriately. Then they ran the trailer for *Rocket Slime Adventures*, and the entire room just stopped. You could hear jaws hitting the floor all across the room. The cute slimes, the horrible puns, the slimes being launched out of giant death-tanks; it was an amazing jolt of surreality that left you wondering what the hell you'd just seen.

It would be hard for any game to live up to a premise as gigantically wonderful as "a slime fights slime criminals with a hundred-story tank," but *Rocket Slime Adventures* actually does it. From the moment you picked up the game on the E3 floor, you could make your slime roll and bounce with the greatest of ease. Ramming into objects tossed them into the air, where your slime



could catch them on his head. In tank fights, you use this technique to grab ammo from various parts of the ship and rush it up to your gunner. The more ammo you could gather at once, the more damage your tank could do. In adventuring levels, you could use this technique to rescue your friends or grab objects and carry them around on your bouncy, bouncy head-body.

Square-Enix has flashier games on the way in 2006, but *Rocket Slime Adventures* was pure playable crack. The E3 demo was a killer way to spend twenty minutes, and the final build of the game is going to offer even more in the way of killer mini-games and tank customization. The demo was a little on the easy side, but that's okay. When *Rocket Slime Adventures* hits this September, it'll still be one hell of a good slime.

(Alicia, put \$5 in the pun jar. -Thomas)



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A FEATURE BY: CHRISTOPHER BIRD WITH PHOTOGRAPHY BY: LINDSAY BIRD

INSIDE THE ARTCADE

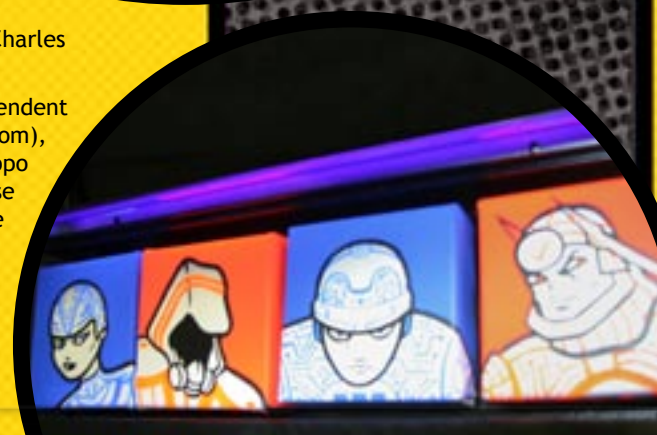
A LOOK INSIDE THE TORONTO ART EXHIBIT

Some say that any form of self-expression is de facto artistic, thus making video games art; others argue that the cooperative nature of the video game keeps the video game creator from truly expressing his inner ideas thanks to a forced compromise, and so they can't be art. Roger Ebert says video games aren't art. "Penny Arcade" says they are. Hideo Kojima says they aren't; Shigeru Miyamoto says they must be.

The question may never be resolved, but thankfully the question of whether video games can inspire art is a resounding "yes." The "i am 8-bit" art show in California began the trend, displaying art pieces inspired by video games, and was hugely successful, even marketing a book collection of some of the artwork.

Artcade (www.wire-fu.com/artcade), in Toronto, continues the trend. Displayed in the back of a Microplay (Canada's answer to EB Games) where a large, spare space has been transformed into a display gallery. Brian McLachlan, the show's organizer and an employee at the store, explains. "We'd had this space for ages that we simply weren't using effectively, and someone suggested that I use it sometime as an exhibition gallery. That was a cool idea, but I figured we could do more with the space. I started contacting friends and asking them if they wanted to contribute work, and then we followed the lead of the California guys and added the gaming theme, and everybody who could add a gaming-related piece into their work schedule did." The entire show took about three months to set up and contains artwork by twelve Toronto artists, from Rui Ramelhero's recasting of Donkey Kong and Pac-Man as erotic figures to Steven Charles Manale's black-lit, glowing portraits of the characters from *Tron*.

Arguably the most popular piece in the show is a series of portraits by independent comic artist Kagan McLeod, creator of *Infinite Kung Fu* (infinitekungfu.com), depicting various boxers from the classic Nintendo game *Punch-Out!* King Hippo portrayed as a non-cartoony human being draws the eye, not least because McLeod's chosen to portray him as being really, really naturally ugly. "All the other boxers look at least relatively human, but in the game, King Hippo is just this series of ovals," says McLeod. "And as I worked on him more and more, it turned out that he was really just this ugly freak." McLeod also cites a great love of the *Mortal Kombat* series as being one of the major inspirations for *Infinite Kung Fu*.



Less active as a gamer is J. Bone (gobukan.blogspot.com), creator of the indie comic *Solar Stella*, who's worked on comics like *X-Statix*, *Jingle Belle* and *Wolverine/Doop*. "...I kinda like *The Sims*, but I'm not really a big time game guy," he admits. As we look at his acrylic-on-canvas portraits of Capcom characters like Guile and Morrigan, he shrugs. "I got a bunch of fighting-game character images because I liked how they look, and because *Street Fighter 2* was the last game I really played seriously. That and *Double Dragon*." So he likes Guile's hair? "Nah. I hate his hair. That's why I cut it off at the top of the painting," he grins.

However, Artcade goes beyond its inspiration's intent in one major new way. The show contains both pieces inspired by specific video games and also pieces inspired by video games in general, thus allowing the shared experience of gaming itself to become inspiration for new works of art.

One such piece is "Super Peng!" by Michael Lylloff, a Toronto-area graphic designer (www.lylloff22.ca). A huge Giclée print, "Super Peng!" looks exactly like the video game ads any child of the Eighties would know intimately - glorious eye-popping cutesy cartoon graphics depicting

a penguin with a hammer evading killer ghosts, with a list of the game's features ("One or two player penguin action! Insert coin for continuing add-on play!"), all serving to disguise the fact that it's a standard upright cabinet with blocky pixelated graphics. It's just like you remember - except "Super Peng!" doesn't really exist. It's brand new old school.

"Yeah, it's been a project of mine for some time," laughs Lylloff. "I love the retro design feel of the old Eighties games, and I've actually started looking into Flash and low-end programming, or for interested programmers, to see if I can actually get the game made for real." When asked how the game plays, Lylloff excitedly starts reeling off the features - how the penguin uses his hammer to hit ice bricks and send them at the killer ghosts, what the popsicle powerup does (it makes a big explosion), how the game just keeps getting faster and harder. When you find out how detailed Lylloff's vision gets, it's no surprise that most visitors initially think that "Super Peng!" is a real game. Lylloff even adds that he wants to buy an old standup videogame cabinet, refurbish it and turn it into a "Super Peng!" arcade machine, and display it at a future art show: allowing gallery visitors to play "Super Peng!" at a quarter a pop, and turning the question of "are videogames art" right on its head.





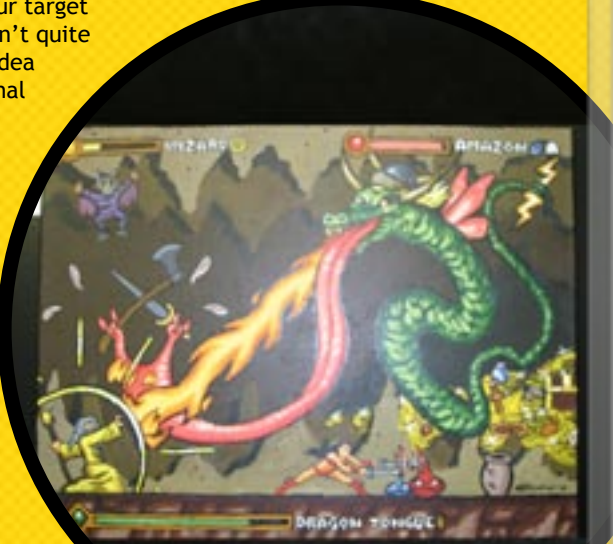
McLachlan (adept.wire-fu.com) follows the same route of "original game concept art" with his "Golden Gauntlet" series, showing off a series of fantasy-warriors-versus-boss-monsters paintings that make games like *Dungeon Siege* look weak by comparison. McLachlan enthusiastically points to "i am 8-bit" as the inspiration for Arcade. "We're not as big as them yet... but the reaction to the show has been excellent. Everybody loves the pieces, even the more unusual pieces like Noel's" - referring to Noel Middleton's mushroom-and-suitcase industrial sculpture, combined with video of someone jumping up and down while wearing a papier-mache mushroom head, each jump enhanced by the familiar sound of Mario's jump noise.

However, the enthusiastic public reception hasn't transferred over to the other aspect of any art gallery - sales. Even with relatively cheap prices for original art works (most of the pieces cost in the range of one hundred fifty to two hundred fifty dollars Canadian, with "Super Peng!" being the most expensive at six hundred), people aren't buying.

"I think our target audience isn't quite used to the idea of buying original art," McLachlan muses. "It's like, when you're younger, you buy Burger King, and you think thirty dollars for a good meal at a restaurant is a rip-off. But then, you get a bit older, and thirty dollars for a good meal makes sense. We need to bridge that gap a little more when we do a second show, have a wider array of duplicate prints in addition to the originals, have pieces with lower price points, that sort of thing. A lot of younger gamers are used to buying a *Tekken* poster rather than original art, and we want to bridge that."

McLeod concurs. "Truthfully, most of us kind of expected that selling the original artwork would be hard, which is why a lot of us went for older games to work from. But we did this because we love games and we think they're cool, and this seemed like a good way to get both art lovers maybe a little more interested in games and gamers a little more interested in art."

In any case, the artists are near-unanimous that this is only the first Arcade of many; everyone is enthusiastic about the show, and more artists have expressed interest in participating in the next one. So next year, in Toronto at least, the debate over whether videogames are art or not will get probably a little more fuel.



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MATCH IN POINT

A FEATURE BY ARLIETH

If there is something that motivates elite players to compete in the fighting game circuits of Capcom, Namco, SNK-Playmore, Arc System Works, and Sega, it is the chance to achieve significance. Every year, during the "Golden Week" of Japan, the world's premiere fighting game tournament known as Super Battle Opera takes place to pit the nation's most gifted players to seize the Arcadia Cup. Now, for 2006, Super Battle Opera has opened its horizons to allow even more teams throughout the world to test their mettle.

闘劇'06

THE 4th ARCADIA CUP TOURNAMENT

SBO's objective has now become a mission: to promote and ignite the revival of the fighting-game genre. In a controversial move, Mr. Yamamoto, chairman of the organization, decided to do away with almost every game from last year's competition. This was done in an effort to encourage the development, and thus sponsorship, of new games. The exception is *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, which has proven itself as the benchmark of 2D fighting, but is over seven years old and deserves an update. Since its introduction in 1999, it stands alone among its newer hand-drawn companions this year: *NeoGeo Battle Coliseum*, *Fist of the North Star*, *Samurai Shodown VI*, *King of Fighters XI*, *Melty Blood: Act Cadenza*, and *Guilty Gear XX: Slash*. The featured 3D games, in their latest iterations, should come as no surprise: *Virtua Fighter 4: Final Tuned* and *Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection*.



Irrashimase!

For *3rd Strike*, two American and two European teams received invitations. From Family Fun Arcade in Granada Hills, CA, the U.S. West Coast Team, "Ero-Gaijin," consisted of "Pyrolee" Michael Fauson (Yun), Frank Melendez (Ryu) and Ricky Ortiz (Ken). Tokyo Game Action (now in Winchendon, MA), fielded the U.S. East Coast Team "TGA-USA," which consisted of Justin Wong (Chun-Li), "Mopreme" Mark Rogoyski (Ryu) and "KO Fiend" Jonathan Sung (Yang). Internationally recognized players "Billy Kane" and Ryan Hart brought their respective teams to represent the European continent. Australia and Korea also made an appearance for 3s. Other noteworthy players included Nin and Qudans from Korea, entering *Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection*, bringing three Korean teams to once again capture the Arcadia Cup from the Japanese. Finally, Taiwan made a killer showing in *King of Fighters XI* with two of their top players, and with six other players entering other games.



We're Baaaaaaack!



Viva la France!



Korea's Tekken Elite



U.S. West Coast Team "Ero-Gaijin"

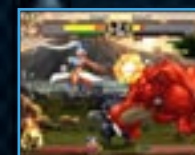


U.S. East Coast Team "TGA-USA"

THE LATEST GAMES YOU'VE NEVER SEEN (YET)

Most of these are currently available only in Japanese arcades. Some have Japanese console versions, either already released or on the way.

Game: *Samurai Shodown VI*
AKA: *Samurai Spirits: Tenka Ichi Kenkakuden*
Released: September 2005
Developer: SNK Playmore



The most complex *Samurai Shodown* game yet, *Tenka* offers 24 characters and six different fighting modes based on previous games in the series, similar to *Street Fighter II: Anniversary Edition*. Expect it to be released on the Xbox.

Game: *NeoGeo Battle Coliseum*
Released: December 2005
Developer: SNK Playmore



Featuring a mish-mash of characters from *King of Fighters*, *Garou: Mark of the Wolves*, *Metal Slug*, *World Heroes*, *Last Blade*, *Samurai Shodown*, and more, it's a rather bizarre fan-service

addition to the genre. Its tag-team mode only requires one member to be defeated to win the battle.

Game: *Melty Blood: Act Cadenza*
Released: July 2005
Developer: Type-Moon, French Bread



Originally a fan-made game for the PC set in the *Tsukihime* universe, it eventually gained enough popularity to be picked up by publisher ECOLE and released on Sega's NAOMI hardware.

With free-form gameplay similar to the *Guilty Gear*, the series has become the most respected doujin-fighter on the market.

Game: *Fist of the North Star*
AKA: *Hokuto No Ken*
Released: October 2005
Developer: Arc System Works



The legendary *Fist of the North Star* series finally emerges onto the arcade fighter scene, complete with the Shining Star of Death signaling when a player is vulnerable to a signature

Fatal K.O. attack. While lacking the head-explody of the classic anime, its nostalgia factor may make you psychically tear your shirt off.

Because of the sheer number of games involved, Super Battle Opera took place over three days of back-to-back combat. Day One featured *Fist of the North Star*, *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* and *Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection*. With the Fatal K.O. system in *North Star*, top players were being wiped out left and right by players using Toki's North Star Destructive Impulse Fist, which can strike downed characters, juggle, or tag someone across the entire screen for a one-hit kill. Because of this, *North Star* also turned out to be one of the fastest tournaments ever. The *Virtua Fighter 4* tournament was won by "Team Yariotta" (Game Center Arashi, Homestay Akira and K-2), beating out the fan favorite Team "Virtua*Fusion" (Chibita, Ohnuki and Ohsu). Finally, the three Korean teams sent to dominate *Tekken 5:DR*, including the 2005 SBO Champion, NIN, were all defeated within the first round. Team "No Respect" captured the Tekken Championships, with Yuu's Feng, Shou's Devil Jin and Jirou's Steve.

out of the eight finalists had both Kula and Gato on their team, and the rest used either Kula or Gato.) Kaoru later defeated Taiwan's Kyogenshou (Kula/Kyo/King) and snatched the SBO KoF Cup for Japan. In *SS VI*, orphaned *CVS2* powerhouses BAS and Tokido made strong showings using archer-girl Mina, with Tokido advancing to finals. Top tier in *SS VI* is believed to be fire-god Enja and Shizumaru, with the fan-service maid Iroha, Mina and Amakusa taking second tier. In the end, Mishima (Iroha) and Doro (Gen-An) turtled their way to victory, flipping the tier system on its head.

When *SF3:3s* began, all hell broke loose. Between US West Coast, US East Coast, France's "Team Festival" and England's "Team Bingo," none of them advanced to the second round. In fact, all foreign teams were wiped out by one opponent each. Despite reports of Okinawa possessing a decent team, TGA-USA was still expected to advance, as team captain Justin Wong nearly defeated Ohnuki's Chun-Li at Evolution 2005. However, Okinawan captain Shirokuro pulled an OCV (One Character Victory) with Chun-Li and knocked the U.S. team out of contention. Soon after, U.S. West team "Ero-Gaijin" faced Keeper (Ken), Teppah (Elena) and Tokido (Chun-Li). Hailing from Yokohama, Keeper possessed such inhuman reflexes that Ricky, Frank and Pyrolee were at a loss. He eventually OCVed the U.S. West team, knocking America out of the race.

Day Two featured *King of Fighters XI*, *Samurai Shodown VI*, and *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*. During the *KOF XI*, it was revealed that none other than Mago of *CVS2* fame had made it to the finals! While he didn't gallop onto the stage Blanka-style, he did try to rile the crowd up into calling him, "2D GOD!" Mago's team of Kula/Gato/Oswald plowed through most of his competition until Kaoru's Kula/Gato/Oswald stopped him. (Four



The traditional PinoAB7 "Huh?" moment



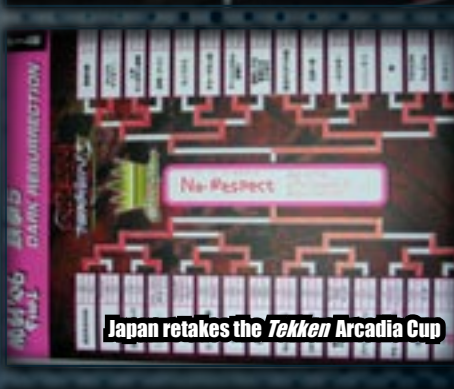
Let the battle... begin!

In Semi-Finals, Kyushu team "Monkey House," with Ushi!? (Urien), Goemon (Yang) and Deshiken (Ken) were defeated by "Champion Road," with Boss (Makoto), Chibi (Yun) and Match (Akuma). Team Vision, with Ohnuki (Chun-Li), K.O. (Yun) and Kokujin (Dudley), was favored to win the SBO Cup this year, but were eliminated by Team Masters: MOV (Chun-Li), Spellmaster J (Ken) and Nitto (Yun). Finally, "Champion Road" and "Masters" faced off, and Spellmaster J stripped on stage once again to flaunt his manly flab to the audience. After Spell-J was defeated by Match, Nitto stepped up to the plate and plowed through Match and Chibi before defeating Boss in a neck-to-neck battle for an OCV and the SBO 3rd Strike title. For the third and final day, *NeoGeo Battle Coliseum*, *Melty Blood: Act Cadenza* and the day's main event, *Guilty Gear XX: Slash* served to cap off the series. For NGBC, Tokido, Mago and Match were also taking a crack at the prize money. Despite the competition, Kee-Roc (Shiki/Shermie) defeated an army of Kim, Mr.Big and Hotaru players to win the tournament. The *Guilty Gear XX: Slash* finals culminated in a battle between Team "It's Yukinose" (Yukinose (Testament) / KA2 (Jam) / GNT (Millia)), and Team "Tero-Daa" *Bleed (Johnny) / Domii (Anji) / Shoot (Axl). Not only did Yukinose eventually OCV team Tero-Daa by himself, but it was also the only game he played throughout the entire tournament. In the *Melty Blood* finals, ILS and Niga, using Berserk Arcueid and Sion, defeated Kubo's Sion and Satoken's Vermillion Akiha for the SBO *Melty Blood* championships. This marked the first time a doujin fighting game was featured in a national major. While the future of *SF3:3s* is up in the air, there are plans for a U.S.-Japan collaboration through the SBO organization. However, the results of the two U.S. teams indicate that changes to America's tournament scene are in order. PC-based strategy and shooter games use hardware that is relatively portable and whose competition spans the internet. However, a fighting game community is severely dependent on an arcade's servicing and maintenance issues; it is impossible to hold a tournament, much less a community, without working controls. Namco has recently included external Playstation controller ports on its new *Tekken* cabinets, giving players the option to bring their console controllers to the arcade. Improvements like this will bridge the competitive gap between arcade and console players that the fighting game community so desperately needs, and maybe, just maybe, we'll win next year.

The Road to Victory... or Defeat



Japan retakes the Tekken Arcadia Cup



We forgot to spike their drinks before the tournament. Oops.



JAPAN'S ELITE

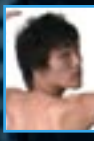
Super Battle Opera is an event that attracts the best players in the world. Keeping track of who they are, what games they play, and where they're from is nearly impossible, but here's a quick summary of some key players you should know about.



Nuki - Shinya Ohnuki, aka "Robo-Chun". Loud-mouthed and cocky, Nuki has long been considered Umehara Daigo's strongest rival in a number of games, most notably *SF3: 3rd Strike*. His Chun-Li possesses nearly flawless execution.



Boss - Another legendary powerhouse of *3rd Strike*, Boss is a master of all characters and single-handedly developed Makoto's 100% Stun combo. He is reported to have refused to play as Ken in tournaments because "it would be unfair."



Mago - According to rumors, "Pervert" Mago is one tuna roll short of a combination plate. With no *CvS2* tournament to dominate in this year, he has entered the *King of Fighters XI* tournament, declaring himself the God of 2-D Games. "The world is mine!"



"Spellmaster" J - Well, we know what "Spellmaster" REALLY stands for, but we think Spell-J doing the Full Monty strip tease at the end of every tournament is traumatizing enough. Despite the antics, Spell-J possesses a very solid Ken and is an SBO *3rd Strike* title holder.



Chibita - The world's best Lion Rafale player, Chibita is both terrifyingly fast and adorably lazy. Playing *Virtua Fighter* since the age of 13, his win record averages at about 93%, with tens of thousands of games logged on his memory card.



NIN - The Korean *Tekken 5* SBO 2005 Champion, NIN caused such an upset last year that researchers from Japanese company Enterbrain actually sent a crew of crack ninjas to analyze the Korean *Tekken* style before this tournament.



PinoAB7 - The guest announcer of every SBO, Pino has a talent for discovering some rather disturbing costumes. Two years ago, he entered the tournament cosplaying as Necro, and this year he shows up as a certain final boss with two body colors, flowing golden locks and a thong. We're taking bets on a female costume for next year.

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THE DARK SIDE OF RETROGAMING

Feature by **Sardius**

DIGITIZED DISASTERS

Of all the gaming subgenres to have ever existed, the digitized fighter is perhaps the one that has aged the worst. *Mortal Kombat* may have been a successful mix of a solid fighting engine and self-aware cheesiness, but *MK's* clones only saw the need to rip off its digitized characters and buckets of blood, gameplay be damned. The result was a series of cut-rate imitations full of pudgy actors and broken dreams. These are but a few of the horrors that were unleashed upon us in the mid-'90s of our discontent.

Survival Arts

Platform: Arcade
Publisher: American Sammy
Release Date: 1993



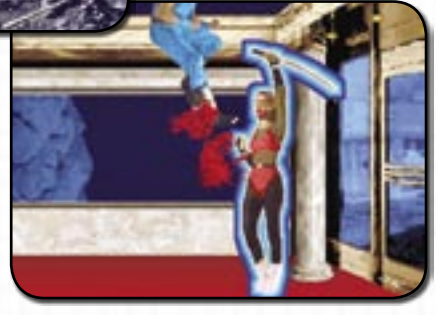
Remember that short-lived trend where games tried to make their characters as large and as beefy as possible? First-gen 16-bit titles like *Last*

Battle and *China Warrior* may have been merely unplayable, but *Survival Arts* is on another tier entirely. While other fighting games at the time used scaling effects to zoom in and out of the playfield to allow for more breathing room between characters, *Survival Arts* is so claustrophobic that it plays more like a hug simulator for digitized fat people. The game smushes you right up against your opponent at all times, and thanks to the huge



character sprites, you'll see every ripple and bulge in their spandex costumes rendered in loving detail. Insert your coins and the game automatically picks Mongo as your

first opponent. You'll grow to hate Mongo. Whereas every other fighter in the game is unarmed and can only attack with punches and kicks, Mongo has an arsenal of machine guns, grenades, and



nuclear freaking bombs that he will use on you repeatedly without any kind of hesitation. You may get lucky and land a couple of punches on him, but as soon as Mongo's life is half depleted, he'll magically gain the ability to fly and drop napalm on your head — a move that can kill you in two hits. Screw you, Mongo.



The game actually becomes much easier if you beat or cheat your way past Mongo, but it's still not worth your time in the least. One of the character's ending sequences says it best: "Winning fills you with no happiness, but emptiness."

Tattoo Assassins

Platform: Arcade
Publisher: Data East
Release Date: Never



It's obvious that this game was designed with the sole intent of one-upping *Mortal Kombat* in every possible way. Hey, *Mortal Kombat*, you think fireballs are

hardcore? Psh. What the kids really want are characters who attack with acidic projectile diarrhea! Nudalities? They're only rumored to be in *that other game*, but the characters in *Tattoo Assassins* get butt nekkid at the touch of a button! Fatalities? *Tattoo Assassins* has 224 of them in all, most of which can be activated by mashing buttons at the end of a match. Move over, *Mortal Krapbarf*, you've been out-awesomed by *Tattoo Assassins!*



The game's flyer proudly states that "41 movie makers, 15 programmers, 2 weeks of filming and literally thousands of hours digitizing images" went into the making

of *Tattoo Assassins...* which is kind of a shame, considering it was never commercially released. The game is extremely hard to find nowadays, and only two prototype boards are known to be in existence.



Luckily, *Tattoo Assassins* is forever preserved through emulation software, so that all may marvel at its ineptitude. There's not much to say about the game itself, which plays like your standard *Mortal Kombat* clone, but *man* is it ever deranged. The storyline



has something to do with tattoos that can totally turn real and kill people, and the characters range from a Nancy Kerrigan-inspired ice skater out for revenge to a shirtless, beer-

swilling mess of a man named "Truck Davis." *Truck. Davis!*



A Google search will reward you with all kinds of sad stories from people who wasted their time working on this atrocity. One tells of a programmer who was so stressed by deadlines that he actually vomited while he was programming the game, but quickly returned to typing code right afterward, as his hands never once left the keyboard. That's right — the dude couldn't even stand to program the game without throwing up. Trying to play it is not recommended.

Shadow: War of Succession

Platform: Panasonic 3DO
Publisher: Tribeca Digital Studios, Inc.
Release Date: 1994



The first time I played this thing, I was convinced that my search for the worst game of all time was over. The opening video alone is a work of art — it features a helicopter flying past a golden Statue of Liberty, accompanied by the worst MIDI



guitar you'll ever hear in your lifetime. This is *shareware-quality MIDI* we're talking about here. This is *Monster Bash* MIDI, screaming that you wasted \$699.99 (MSRP) on your 3DO gaming system. The helicopter then hovers in front of a building. Cut to the

interior, where a guy is standing in place, doing nothing. Cut to helicopter, which then shoots the building. Building explodes. End of video. Ladies and gentlemen, this is *art*.

Likewise, the gameplay is nothing short of amazing. Other digitized fighters are tragic or funny largely because the people who worked on them probably thought they were



making something great. *Shadow: War of Succession*, on the other hand, was programmed by people who just didn't care. They didn't care that the characters all have about five frames of animation each. They didn't care that fights

play about 500 times faster than they should. They didn't even care about the basic logic behind having to be on the same side of the screen as your opponent in order for punches to connect.

Attempting to play *Shadow: War of Succession* is an exercise in futility. Hit detection is random, and special moves are an impossibility. Following your inevitable defeat, your 3DO will spend a good half a minute loading a voice clip from your opponent, who will taunt you with a clever line like "Go to hell!" or "Hi!"



To its credit, however, this game serves the important purpose of establishing the lowest point in human history. You can live a life

full of failure and heartbreak, but at no point will your misery ever equal that of the people who programmed *Shadow: War of Succession*.



PREVIEW



Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: Q4 2006

Genre: Simulation
Category: Strategy
of Players: 1

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney is a crime adventure that challenges players to utilize their wits by unraveling a compelling courtroom drama. A critical and commercial hit on the Nintendo DS, the mobile game casts players in the role of Phoenix, the defense attorney who must prove his client's innocence. To accomplish this task, players must cross-examine witnesses in an effort to extracting confessions and catch inconsistencies in testimony. Of course, cases are rarely what they initially seem and players will need to rely on logic and intuition to defend their client and bring the guilty party to justice.

The game features two distinct gameplay elements. The first is an investigative phase where players survey crime scenes, interview witnesses and gather evidence that will be used in court. The second is the court phase where players present findings from the investigation to support their case, listen to testimonies, examine witnesses, and determine what is and isn't the truth. It's not exactly *Law and Order*, but you get the idea.

The drama's very tongue-on-cheek and includes a few different cases to get your feet wet, but Capcom also promises to deliver additional episodic content via downloads. This way, players can continue the adventure well after the title ships in September 06.



Dammit!... Why me



Oh, hi-Niyal Chie...



I... I've gotta find someone to pin this on...



Butz

Gimme the death sentence!
I ain't afraid to die!

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PREVIEW

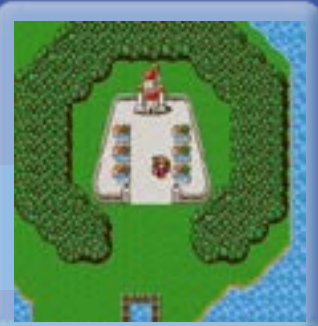
Final Fantasy is such a huge game now and it's hard to believe it's almost twenty years old. If you think about it, that means that many of the franchise's most loyal fans today weren't even born yet or hardly knew how to pick up a controller when the original title was first released. How's that for perspective? Well, if for whatever reason you missed the boat the first time around, it's come to port once again. The game that started it all, before Cloud, before Yuna, will be available soon.

Since ages long past, the legend of the Light has been handed down from generation to generation. The legend tells that the world would remain safe so long as the four Crystals of earth, fire, water, and wind maintain their brilliance. Should the Crystals lose their light, the skies will blacken, the lands wither, the seas rage, and sleeping volcanoes erupt in a flurry of lava. In this hour four warriors would appear, each guided by a Crystal. They are the Warriors of Light.



Final Fantasy for mobile is true to the classic original release. In fact, we were told it would remain intact to provide the original length of game play, all in one download. While that remains to be seen, it was evident that much of the epic adventuring the franchise is known for was retained. It'll be headed your way sometime in 2006.

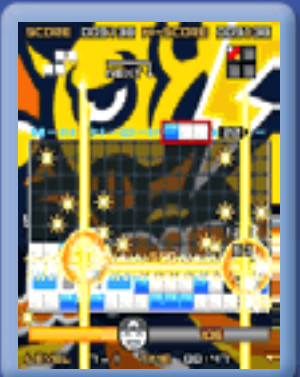
Publisher: RealArcade Genre: Puzzle
Developer: Mumbo Jumbo Category: Arcade
Release Date: March 2006 # of Players: 1



LUMINES mobile

REVIEW

Lumines stands out as one of the best puzzle games available on the Sony PSP, and now it's arrived on wireless phones. Modes held over from the PSP version include Challenge, Single Skin, Time Attack and Puzzle. These are all variations of the game in which you play with specific objectives including high score, eliminating as many as possible or creating a certain shape. This last one is quite challenging indeed.



The new mode introduced specifically for mobile phones is Arcade. The object is to advance through twenty levels while unlocking new skins, new types of blocks and even face off against four computer-controlled bosses. (These boss battles can also be accessed directly in the VS CPU mode.) As you progress through the game, additional shapes and a third color will be added to make the game more intense.

Lumines brings the stylish PSP puzzle sensation to wireless handsets and hardly skips a beat. It's all there plus more. This is the type of game that keeps us from plopping down our cash on the more expensive handheld console versions simply because there is no further need to do so. Seriously, why would anyone want to spend more on a game when the mobile version is just as creative, challenging and fun? Do yourself a favor and save some money. Buy this mobile version instead.

Publisher: Gameloft Genre: Puzzle
Developer: Gameloft Category: Music
Release Date: 6/2006 # of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE : 4 of 5

★ SUPER PAC-MAN ★

The Pac-Man arcade hits just keep coming from Namco Networks and the latest to find a home on your mobile phone is Super Pac-Man, the 1982 release that saw the pellet-munching ghost-chomping character get super-sized before our very eyes. In this edition, Pac-Man must eat keys in order to open doors that allow him to eat fruits and other prizes. Gone are the dots which are now replaced by goodies like apples, doughnuts, coffee and even sneakers.

This time around, there are four different mazes instead of just one and each seems more complicated than the one before it. Also, if you play the Enhanced mode, Pac-Man will have access to four new power-ups: Freeze, Teleport, Mirror, and Stun. These can be activated if you capture them as they rove around the board and come in handy when under the threat of ghosts. Finally, you have three tries to continue the game from where you left off and when those are gone, you can still select up to any stage that has already been cleared.

Super Pac-Man is a more diverse version of the original that compounds the challenge factor of the beloved game. It's actually more frantic because you first have to deal with collecting the keys, then collecting the fruit or items, and of course finally worry about avoiding the ghosts. It's no cakewalk but if you want to crank up your Pac-Man experience, Super Pac-Man should be on your list.

FINAL SCORE : 3.5 of 5

Publisher: Namco Genre: Arcade
Developer: Namco Category: Classic
Release Date: 6/2006 # of Players: 1



REVIEW



REVIEW

The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo is I-play's latest installment of its successful movie-based racing franchise, which now takes you to the Tokyo drift scene. Here, you strive to become the ultimate drifter by winning three different types of races in six different areas.

The first type of race is titled The Call in which you must finish a race in first place against three other drivers. The second is titled Show Off. Here, you must show off your drifting skills and score enough points to proceed. Finally, Twin Battle is a one-on-one race against the Area Master for area supremacy. When you have beaten all three races in each area, you will move on to the next.

During races you'll collect money, that can then be used to improve the car performance in a number of ways. Acceleration, Speed, Brakes, Tires and Nitro are all upgradeable to five levels (except Nitro which only has three) and you can also trick out your car with new paint, spoilers, decals and air scoops. Adding these to your car will help gain respect, but unfortunately the options are limited.

The races aren't terribly difficult, since you can probably outrun most of your rivals if you mod out your car appropriately. The biggest challenge will probably be during the Show Off race since you have to fill a gauge and score points in a certain amount of time by continuously drifting around the track. This means that you must drive erratically to perform drifts and any miscalculation will slam you into a wall and that will deduct from the final score. At first you may be frustrated with this until you finally figure out a trick to be able to clear these levels with ease. Would you like to know this trick? I'm sure you would but that would make it too easy for you.

This new game features the top-down perspective of the original. It gives you a great view of the drifting action and allows for better controlling but that means that there's less detail to the game and everything is smaller. You do get cool smoke and rubber marks though. The audio remains limited with music in-between levels and only minor sound effects during racing.

The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo would make it seem like the second game in the franchise never existed because it's so much like the first game with improvements. We're not sure how followers of the series will take these changes but we're glad to see that I-play has gone back to their roots this time out for this specific type of racing game. We had fun playing while it lasted (which wasn't very long) and enjoyed the new drifting aspect of the game, too. The next iteration will have to be a bigger leap, though.



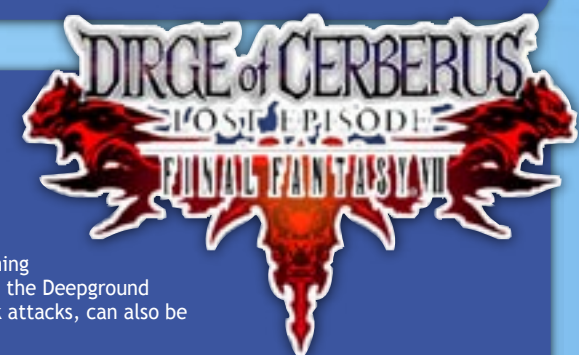
Publisher: RealArcade Genre: Puzzle
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FINAL SCORE : 4 of 5

NEWS

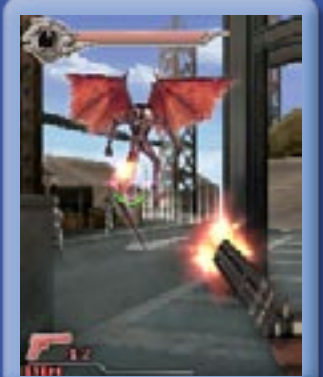
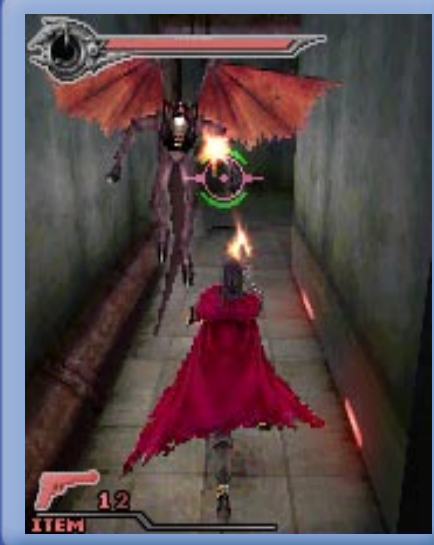
Square Enix and Amp'd Mobile announced the debut of Dirge of Cerberus: Lost Episode - Final Fantasy VII. Japan's leading 3D mobile game will be available exclusively on Amp'd mobile handsets this Summer. The game will be available for download at Amp'd.

Dirge of Cerberus: Lost Episode - Final Fantasy VII tells the story three years after Meteorfall, where the original Final Fantasy VII ended, with Vincent Valentine struggling to save the world from the evil Deepground Soldiers, a mysterious army of bloodthirsty fighters. This action/role-playing game will take advantage of all mobile gaming has to offer, allowing players to explore a sprawling world in Battlefield mode, and battle the Deepground Soldiers in FPS battle mode. Familiar features from FFXIII, such as materia and limit break attacks, can also be utilized by Vincent to smash his foes.



The title will initially release a single player mode, with a multiplayer function launching at a later date. While more details have yet to be announced, the multiplayer mode will offer online head-to-head action with other Amp'd Mobile players. All of this takes place over the mobile network.

Gamers can also look forward to the original PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system game, Dirge of Cerberus: Lost Episode - Final Fantasy VII on August 22, 2006. Part of Square Enix's Polymorphic Content strategy, Dirge of Cerberus is Square Enix's first gun-action game. This release arrives with several new features tailored for the North American market including new missions and special content.





Wolfer '06



At the time, playing an officially licensed game on the Nintendo Entertainment System had become to many the default example of a video game experience. Nintendo capitalized on their brand recognition and entered the portable gaming market with the release of the Game Boy in 1989. Bundled with *Tetris*, the Game Boy would quickly become the most successful portable gaming device in the world and helped Nintendo firmly establish its position of dominance in the exploding video game market.

Life was good, and in fact easy, for Nintendo back in the 1980s. The NES and Game Boy were flying off store shelves and competition was kept to a minimum. Companies like Atari and Commodore had set the stage for Nintendo, and the "Big N" took full advantage by combining memorable characters with innovative gameplay. Franchises like *Super Mario Brothers*, *The Legend of Zelda*, *Metroid* and others proved that home console gaming was here to stay, but Nintendo's outstanding success would soon draw significant challengers anxious to prove that Nintendo wasn't the only game in town.

Although the 8-bit era would pass without much of a threat to Nintendo's dominance, the 16-bit era was on the horizon and soon-to-be rival Sega would ignite the first true console war with the release of the Sega Mega Drive in Japan. The Mega Drive, which released first in 1988, became known as the Sega Genesis in the United States and began to challenge Nintendo in terms of market share for the first time in the company's thriving history. Of course, Nintendo wouldn't sit still and let Sega build momentum, which is why in 1990, Nintendo released its own 16-bit console, called the Super Famicom. The "Mode-7" wielding successor to the most popular home console in the world would be released in Japan during

November of 1990 and one year later as the Super NES in the United States.

By the early 1990s the war between Nintendo and Sega was fully underway. Nintendo's Super Famicom dominated the Japanese market, while an aggressive marketing strategy and early head start meant a near 65% market share in North America at one point for Sega. Even though both the Genesis and SNES were technically comparable to one another, each had a distinctive feel and a significantly different library of titles. Nintendo's blockbuster franchises like *Super Mario Brothers*, *Zelda* and *Final Fantasy* helped them maintain their worldwide status as a leader in the industry while Sega's speedy *Sonic the Hedgehog* and attention to the sports gaming market solidified its own presence in the world of gaming. These factors began to draw lines of division and consequently, formed allegiances among fans of both consoles. Although the Genesis would end up outselling the SNES in North America, Nintendo's 16-bit console would prove to be the most successful in terms of worldwide sales.

With the 16-bit era delivering a whole new level of competition between gaming companies, Nintendo knew that capturing the attention of the industry and its fans was of the utmost importance. Then, in 1993, Nintendo announced its plans for its first 64-bit console, which would be capable of rendering game characters and environments in full 3D. This was a huge time of transition within the industry and one in which Nintendo is often faulted for not accurately predicting the future of the industry that it once completely dominated. Nintendo's formula for success up until that point had incorporated low-cost cartridge-based consoles, but CD-ROMs were "the future" and they seemed to provide everything necessary to create superior gameplay experiences. Sega's lack of success with its own Sega CD add-on to the Genesis most likely didn't convince Nintendo of the new medium's potential, however, Nintendo proceeded in entering an agreement with Sony to develop a CD-ROM-based add-on for the SNES. Nintendo's inhibitions about Sony's profit margins on the SNES CD-ROM however would eventually lead to the termination of the agreement. Nintendo did make one unsuccessful last-ditch effort at CD-ROM gaming through a partnership with Philips. The partnership went nowhere and Nintendo was still unconvinced of the CD-ROM format, which resulted in its plans to pursue its next cartridge-based console, codenamed the Ultra 64.

When it comes to big names in the video game industry, it's doesn't get much bigger than "Nintendo." For many, the name alone is synonymous with gaming, and the company that started off manufacturing Japanese playing cards over a hundred years ago has now become the iconic representation of interactive entertainment throughout the world.

Despite universal, long-lasting success and an arsenal of beloved franchises, the winds of change are blowing at Nintendo. An expanding video game market and increase in competition has meant that the same old formulas for success simply won't work in an industry starving for innovation. Something had to happen. Something had to change. For the company that helped the industry acquire mainstream success, that mandate for change has meant a "revolutionary" return to the fundamentals of gaming.

In order to understand where Nintendo is heading with its latest console, the Nintendo Wii, it's probably best to remember where it's been. Over twenty years have passed since Nintendo introduced its first effort in the home console gaming arena. In 1984, the Nintendo Famicom was released in Japan and was met with a warm reception by the game-centric Japanese. Over half a million units of the console sold within the

first two months and the monumental success of the console gave the company reason to believe it could thrive in other markets. About a year later, Nintendo released a redesigned version of the Famicom as the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) worldwide. Attempting to combat a disturbing trend of quantity over quality initiated by the likes of Atari, Nintendo began to impart their "Seal of Quality" on officially endorsed games for the system.

Even at this early stage, Nintendo's primary focus seemed to be on fun. By placing players in imaginative scenarios and introducing memorable characters, Nintendo's NES helped define current day expectations of what a "good" game should be. For fans of the NES, it wasn't about more buttons or better graphics; it was about opening a doorway to the imagination, testing the boundaries of human interaction with technology and most of all, having fun.



The Evolution of a Revolution

By Daniel Kayser of GameTrailers.com



Of course, Sony wasn't about to waste the research, time and effort it'd placed in its CD-ROM-based gaming platform, and so Sony released the 32-bit PlayStation, aimed at mass-market gaming. The console was designed to directly compete with Sega's 32-bit Saturn and Nintendo's upcoming 64-bit, cartridge-based console. The diverse and innovative format of Sony's PlayStation combined with an aggressive push towards non-traditional consumers that allowed the electronic industry powerhouse to turn heads and opening wallets around the world. For Nintendo, the release of their latest console and all the brand new titles in popular franchises couldn't come soon enough.

On June 23, 1996 the Nintendo 64 ("Ultra 64" was ditched after licensing issues with Konami) was launched in Japan and over half a million units would be sold on day one alone. Nintendo would release the N64 later that year in both the United States and Canada, but by that time, Sony had officially made it a three-

horse race. As the war raged on, the N64 would turn out some of the highest-regarded games the industry has ever known, even if the N64 console began to show the limitations of its hardware rather early in its lifecycle.

By the time Sony achieved enormous success with the launch of its PlayStation 2 in 2000, Nintendo had taken a new, unfamiliar role in the game industry. Companies like Sega and Panasonic couldn't compare to the reach of the PlayStation brand, while gaming newcomer Microsoft recognized an outstanding opportunity to "jump in." Nintendo would launch its first disc-based console, the Nintendo GameCube in 2001, but it would fail to garner its once standard first place position in Japan, Europe or the United States. Nintendo's now proven formula of delivering new installments of classic franchises would introduce amazing titles like *Super Mario Sunshine*, *The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker* and *Metrod Prime*, but the company would consistently lose out to the likes of *Grand Theft Auto* and *Halo*.



Now, the next generation of gaming has officially begun. Microsoft's aggressive stance has allowed them to be first to market with the high-def, always online Xbox 360. Sony's staggering install base means there are millions of consumers awaiting every detail regarding the PlayStation 3, which is scheduled to ship later this year. And on the shelf next to both Sony and Microsoft's next-gen offerings will be Nintendo's vision for the future, the Nintendo Wii.

What makes the launch of the Wii so special? Nintendo is attempting to redefine gaming as we know it with a console that offers up more "innovation" than "imitation." We've all seen the Wii's wireless, motion sensing controller that will allow us to swing our swords like Link, actually putt in *Mario Golf*, point, aim and shoot in Ubisoft's *Red Steel* and jump from planet to planet in *Super Mario Galaxies*. But the biggest

story here is how a company that helped define home console gaming has initiated such a monumental shift in the industry.

Despite every gamer's longing for better graphics, atmosphere and sound, Nintendo is banking on how much fun they can make playing games again. Traveling off the beaten path is a big step, but the history behind Nintendo will help define its future. Carving out a whole new market within the game industry is a pretty risky affair and it will take dedication, innovation and time. But in a multi-billion dollar industry where there's a lot of calculating behind every calculated risk, it's refreshing to see that one of the greatest game companies the industry has ever known is picking up the controller and taking a swing at history.

The Games Evolve



It's not every day you get invited to Nintendo (strange but true fact: during the last fourteen-plus years of making video game magazines pre-HGM, we were never given the opportunity), so when you finally get the call, you must heed it. The reason for the trip was to get some much wanted hands-on time with their new next generation hardware — the Wii, in case you haven't heard — in preparation of writing this very cover feature. Like a lot of people, we were skeptical about its funky Remote control pointer going in to E3. It smacked of a gimmick, and Nintendo has had its fair share of those (anyone remember R.O.B. the Robot, Mattel's Power Glove, and the biggest gimmick of them all, the Virtual Boy?).

After getting the chance to experience its almost flawless technology and unlimited capabilities, we came away ashamed for our silly thoughts and couldn't wait to put it and the system on our cover. In all honesty, the Wii and its unique control setup rocks, and without being dramatic, it will change the way you play games forever. So, we had a fun-filled day where we got to spend lots of cash at the Nintendo store, browse the Nintendo museum (filled with every Nintendo system ever created!), spend some time talking to the folks down at Retro Studios about *Metrod Prime 3: Corruption*, and then sit down and play ALL of the Wii games in development inside the quiet confines of a conference room. All praise Mario!



Super Mario Galaxy by DJPubba

Nobody makes games like this. People have tried but nothing even approaches this level of greatness. Do you see how good the game looks in the screen shots? Or, have you seen any video from E3 yet? It's better than that. It's got the tight, intuitive control of *Super Mario 64*; beautiful, colorful Nintendo® graphics; and the first truly unique game play mechanics since the analog stick was introduced. It's hard to imagine how they came up with a game so good and it's not even close to finished! I'll admit that it could just be that this game hits all my buttons; the *Mario* series has been one of my all-time favorites, and 3D action/platform games in general really do it for me.

Most great artists will tell you that they took inspiration from other great works of art, building upon them in their own interpretation. It's obvious that the same is true of *Super Mario Galaxy*. Many elements of other great games can be seen here, from the tiny planetoid/spherical levels of *Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando* to the low gravity, stratospheric platforming of *Jumping Flash*. The best parts of these kinds of games have been borrowed, perfected and blended with an array of classic *Mario* game play, then fortified with new concepts invented to take advantage of the Wii controller.

So how does a 3D action/platform game incorporate the functions of the Wii controller without making them seem Frankenstein'd on to another type of game? I'll 'splain. The Wii controller basically enables you to interact with Mario's

world (Galaxy?) as if you are pointing at it with the finger of a god who is peering down from heaven upon the antics of an Italian plumber. As you control Mario's direction with the analog stick (officially called the Nunchuk), you point with the Remote at various things to interact with. Want to slingshot Mario over to a distant planet? Jump him onto the rubbery, wobbly ball-thing, grab it with the Remote, pull it back and let loose, shooting him towards your target like a rubber band-launched projectile. Want to search a patch of grass for coins? Point at it and shake the coins loose with the Remote. Want to get a bob-omb off your tail? Point the Remote at him and hit the right button to hold him until you're out of his way, and then let him go. It works and it works well. The game lets you do the kind of things you didn't even know you wanted to until it showed you that you could do them.

We got to play the game enough to encounter two of the three bosses present in the demo. One was a giant mecha-robot dude who you climb a la *Shadow of the Colossus*. Then you lure bob-ombs into the weak-spot on his noggin. The other was a spider-thing on a web surrounded by globs of web-stuff which you can use to launch Mario at its weak spots — all the while avoiding the unhealthy stream of green goo originating from the general area of the spider-thing's mouth.

Nintendo hasn't yet announced whether this'll be a launch title, but here's to hoping.

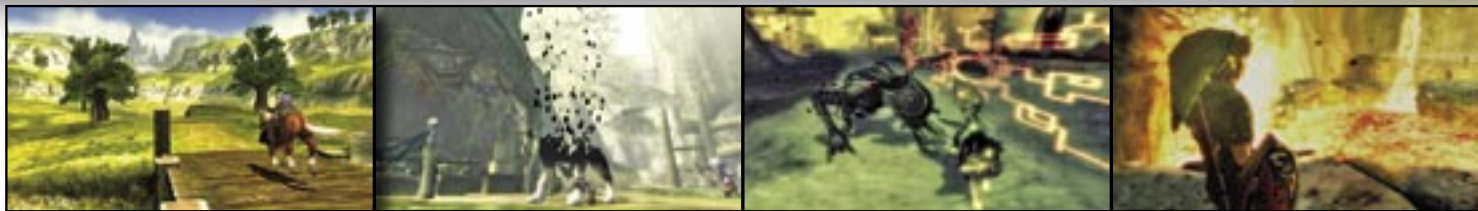
Excite Truck by DJPubba

Have you ever played a racing game and had a good, fun time with it, but didn't get really good enough at it to "pwn" it until your buddy came over and showed you how to power-slide? Or maybe you just suddenly figured out how to do it one day? You know how learning that new mechanic took the game to a whole new level... how it took it from a good, fun game to being the best racing game you've ever played?

That's what the Wii controller does with *Excite Truck*. Being able to turbo-launch yourself insanely high into the air from the edge of a jump and then control your pitch and yaw mid-air by tilting the Remote, and then come down for a landing on all four tires at once regardless of the slope of your landing spot is the mechanic that takes off-road racing games to another whole new level.

There's really not much more required to make *Excite Truck* the most fun you've ever had in an off-road racing game. What we played was a simple two-track demo with four or five computer controlled opponents, and that's it. It's got trees, hills, some water, some scenery, some checkpoints. Everything else they add from here until release will be icing on the best birthday-cake you ever tasted. 'Nuff said.





The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess by Roger Danish

Nintendo certainly revealed more than a few cool surprises at this year's E3. One of the biggest, depending on how you look at it, was the fact that *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* is going to ship for both the Gamecube and the Wii day and date with the launch of the new hardware. Sure, graphically they are both the same game, but the next gen version will have the added benefit of the Wii's unique controller, which is a sweet bonus in our book.

By now, you should know about the storyline behind the game, so we won't trifle you with the same old details. Instead, we'll give you our hands-on impressions from the two demos we were given, which include two different types of play: adventure and fishing... yes, fishing. The first was the adventure portion, which allowed us to control Link as he made his way through an obstacle-filled canyon packed with environmental challenges and hostile enemies. In the adventure portion of the demo, Link's movements were controlled by the analog stick on the Nunchuk controller. By holding down the Z button at the base of the Nunchuk, we called up a sparkling sprite that could be used to aim and target enemies using the Wii Remote. Once an enemy was locked-on, we were able to attack in spectacular *Zelda* fashion with a few combo presses of the A button on the Remote. Instead of charging Link's trademark spinning sword attack with the A button, you quickly flicked the Remote left and right. To use Link's bow and arrow, we just had to press down on the Remote's D-pad (located at its top), which resulted in Link drawing the bowstring, then we aimed

the targeting crosshair with the Remote and released the D-pad to let it fly. All the while, the sound effects of pulling the string taut and releasing with a "thwip!" were emitted from the Remote's small speaker. Some of the other unique control functions in this portion of the game were the ability to jab with the Remote in order to perform a shield bash to stun enemies, a swift stab down with the Remote to perform a downward strike, and the ability to throw items Link is carrying by flicking the Remote forward.

The second portion of the game shown to us was one of *Zelda's* long-standing mini-games. In this fishing portion of the game, we used the analog stick on the Nunchuk to steer the boat to where we wanted to fish, then by holding down the Z button and flicking the Remote, we cast the line out into the lake. The more force we used when casting, the farther the line would go. All it would take to lure a nearby fish was to flick the Nunchuk to wobble the line. And once a fish was hooked, we reeled it in by pulling up on the Remote. If the fish jumped, we had to quickly dip the Remote to give the line some slack. The fishing portion was super-intuitive and, in all honesty, a lot of fun.

We're sure either version you decide to get will be a blast to play. We definitely applaud Nintendo's efforts in ensuring that there will be enough of a difference between the two that *Twilight Princess* will be a must-have for those of us lucky enough to get a Wii on launch day.



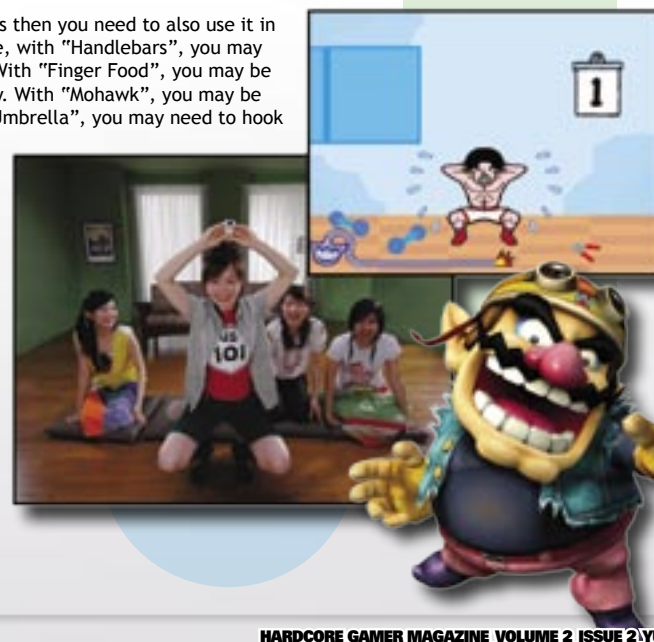
WarioWare: Smooth Moves by Roger Danish

It's completely bizarre, 100% wacky, and more fun than should be legal. While the *WarioWare* titles have been around for a while, this next gen version puts a twist on the quick fix, fast-paced, mini-game gameplay by forcing you to use the Wii Remote in strange and ingenious ways. The game will have over two hundred lightning-quick mini-games, such as balancing a broom on the palm of your hand, running in a marathon, shredding confidential documents, swinging a hula hoop, driving a car down a curvy road, pumping iron, and shaking flies off a banana. Before each game begins, you'll get an image and clue of which way you need to hold the Remote and then it's up to you to decipher the gameplay before the timer runs out. In the demo we were given, there were quite a few different choices. "Umbrella" required the Remote to be held, well, like an umbrella. "Dumbbell" required the Remote to be held horizontally, gripped in one hand like a real dumbbell. "Waiter" required the Remote to be held outstretched in the palm of our hands. "Mohawk" meant we had to hold the Remote on top of our heads. "Sketch Artist" required the Remote to be held like a pencil. "Handlebars" required us to hold the Remote horizontally between both hands, like bike handlebars. Finally, "Finger Food" equaled holding the Remote between our thumb and index finger.

Of course, just figuring out which way to hold the Remote

is only half of the battle, as then you need to also use it in a specific way. For example, with "Handlebars", you may be pumping up a balloon. With "Finger Food", you may be unlocking a door with a key. With "Mohawk", you may be performing squats. With "Umbrella", you may need to hook an object. If you can't figure out and then execute the objective before the time runs out, then you lose the mini-game and move on to the next. Lose three, and it's game over.

Of all the Wii games we played, *WarioWare* definitely provided the most unadulterated fun. We can imagine that it will be a fantastic party game for both adults and kids alike, which is exactly what Nintendo is striving for.



Wii Sports by DJPubba

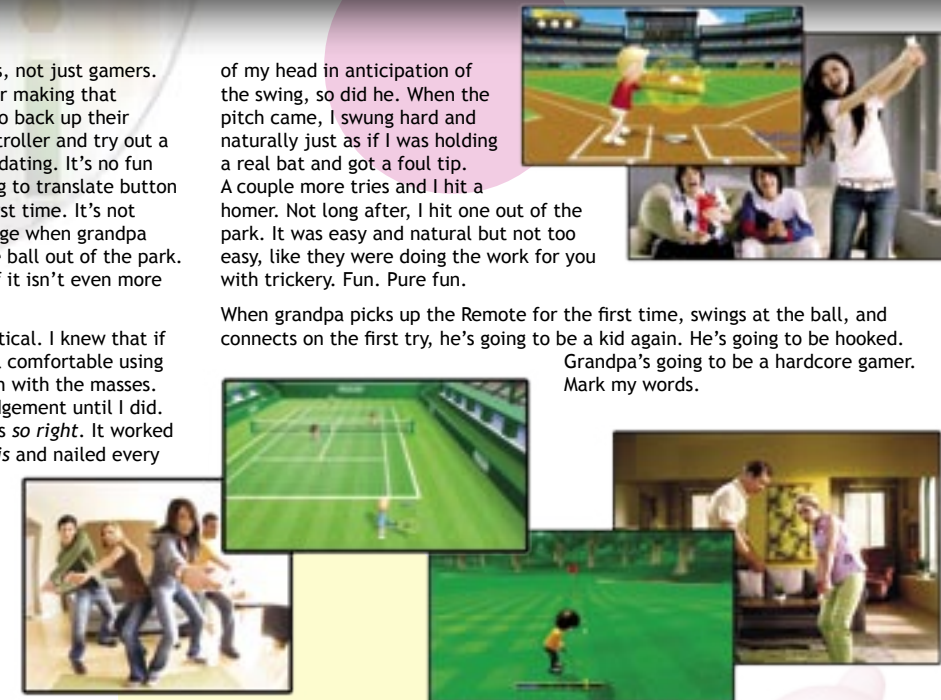
Nintendo is telling us they want *everyone* to play video games, not just gamers. *Wii Sports* (and probably the music title) are their best bet for making that happen. After playing them, it's clear they've got the goods to back up their words. The reason non-gamers aren't willing to pick up a controller and try out a game for the first time is because game controllers are intimidating. It's no fun for mom (or grandpa) to feel like a bumbling idiot when trying to translate button presses and joystick directions to on-screen actions for the first time. It's not immediately intuitive and it's a turn-off. This is going to change when grandpa sees the kids swinging the Remote like a bat and knocking the ball out of the park. It looks like a lot of fun if you're a spectator and, dad-gum, if it isn't even more fun as the player. (... "dad-gum"? -Thomas)

When I first heard the details of the Wii controller, I was skeptical. I knew that if you couldn't pick it up for the first time and immediately feel comfortable using it to control the on-screen action that it would never catch on with the masses. I was very curious to try it for myself and was withholding judgement until I did. That time came for me during a private demo at E3 and it was so *right*. It worked even better than I imagined it could. I took James on at *Tennis* and nailed every swing. When it was my turn to serve, it was a piece of cake. I slammed the ball straight over the net, first try. It was easier and better than other tennis games I'd played with a regular controller, hands down.

Later, during our visit to Nintendo for the cover story, I got to play *Baseball* and *Golf* as well. Both were equally as intuitive and easy to play, right off the bat, as *Tennis* was. Holding the Remote like a bat, my every move translated perfectly to the on-screen character. As I twirled the bat around the back

of my head in anticipation of the swing, so did he. When the pitch came, I swung hard and naturally just as if I was holding a real bat and got a foul tip. A couple more tries and I hit a homer. Not long after, I hit one out of the park. It was easy and natural but not too easy, like they were doing the work for you with trickery. Fun. Pure fun.

When grandpa picks up the Remote for the first time, swings at the ball, and connects on the first try, he's going to be a kid again. He's going to be hooked. Grandpa's going to be a hardcore gamer. Mark my words.



Wii Music by Roger Danish

To be honest, we're not 100% sure exactly what *Wii Music* will end up being. At the moment, it's pretty much a tech demo that showcases yet another unique way to use the Wii's Remote and Nunchuk controllers in tandem with each other. In the demo, which was also the debut Wii title unveiled at this year's E3 press conference where Shigeru Miyamoto came out and conducted the virtual orchestra to a rousing rendition of the theme from *The Legend of Zelda*, we were able to take the "baton" and conduct an orchestra by swinging and moving the Remote to the tempo of the music. How well the musicians played and kept up to the tempo depended on how well you conduct. Go too slow, and they slow down, missing beats and dropping notes. Go too fast, and they get ahead of the music and speed up. In addition to the theme song from *Zelda*, the theme from Georges Bizet's classic *Carmen* was also available.

In addition to the orchestra, there was also a drum demo, where you could bang on a virtual set of drums and symbols while a very '80s sounding glam rock song blazed in the background. The Nunchuk and Remote represented the drumsticks and by holding down the different buttons on each controller, you could target different drums.

There really wasn't much to either demo, but they did represent some cool ideas on some of the other ways the controllers can be utilized. We'll keep you posted as *Wii Music* evolves into a fully realized game.



The Unplayables by Wanderer

Project H.A.M.M.E.R.



At Nintendo's press conference, Reggie Fils-Aime mentioned *Project H.A.M.M.E.R.* as a game that draws on the simple fact that "it's fun to smash things." As an experimental cyborg sent to defeat armies of robots that're attacking the United States, your job is to use the Wii Remote to pound the hell out of an army of robots. Your motions with the Remote mimic the onscreen character's strikes with his hammer; bring it down for an overhead smash, wave it to the side to send them flying, or launch a flurry of blows with the A button.

Super Smash Brothers Brawl

The long-awaited sequel to the must-have GameCube launch title ditches some of *Melee's* cast—just who's gone hasn't been revealed yet, but Pichu's name keeps coming up—and brings a few new characters to the table. You'll have the option to fight with a Zero Suited Samus Aran, *Kid Icarus's* Pit, Kirby's enemy Metaknight, Wario, and oddly, Solid Snake. Nintendo's being cagey about just what else has changed in *Brawl*, but they've mentioned an improved singleplayer mode and a few other new characters who've yet to be revealed.



In addition to the games we've actually gotten to play (and have been gushing about on these pages), there are several that Nintendo has announced but not given any hands-on time with.

Disaster: Day of Crisis

Monolith Soft's *Disaster* is a survival game, but not a survival *horror* game. In the midst of a series of natural disasters that have struck the United States, a rogue special forces team makes off with a nuclear weapon. Ray, a former rescue worker, is the only person in any position to stop them, but he's up against both them and the aftereffects of the disasters. You'll dodge toppling buildings in the middle of an earthquake, outrun lava flows, and swim for your life in the middle of a raging flood.

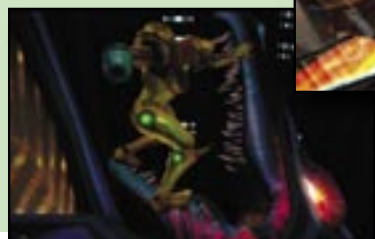
Metroid Prime 3: Corruption by Roger Danish

If *Zelda* and *Mario* aren't enough to get you all jittery with excitement, Nintendo, along with their development partners at Retro Studios, are working hard on their *Metroid* title, *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*. For all of the scoops on the game straight from the developer's mouths, turn to the exclusive interview in this very cover feature.

The first thing to note is that there is a small learning curve involved with *Corruption's* unique controls, especially for those of us who are used to the GameCube setup. While they are intuitive, there are a lot of buttons to use and actions to perform, which takes some getting used to. To aim Samus's cannon, all you need do is point the Remote where you want to shoot on screen. As long as you keep the Remote within the confines of the size of the screen and use quick and precise movements, accuracy and response is spot on. If you want to turn Samus, you'll need to aim the Remote all the way to either edge of the screen. Movement (forward, back and strafing) is handled with the analog stick. To aid you with targeting enemies, you can lock on by holding down the Z trigger on the Nunchuk controller (however, you must be within a certain range to do so). Firing is handled by the A button on the Remote, while jumping is done by pressing the B button, which is located underneath. Finally, you can press the C button to curl up into Samus's trademark Morph Ball.

Here's where things get interesting. You can use also use the Remote for special actions, such as pulling door switches. You actually mimic the movements of reaching forward with the Remote, then turning the handle and pulling it back to open the door. To use Samus's Grappling Beam, you must press the Z trigger to lock-on to a target (in the demo these were pieces of debris blocking doorways and enemies with shields), and then swing the Nunchuk forward. Once the grappling hook is attached, you then pull down on the analog stick to yank the object away.

The demo was impressive, intense, and once we became used to the mechanics, a blast to play. We can't wait to see what other surprises are in store for us as the game gets closer to its expected release.



To get a feel for what it was like to work on a Wii game, we made the trek to Redmond, WA, home to Nintendo of America, and sat down for a chat with a few of the people working on *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*. We got lucky and caught some of the guys in charge of the game.

From Nintendo Co., Ltd.:
Mr. Kensuke Tanabe - Producer, SPD Group 3
From Retro Studios:
Michael Kelbaugh - President
Bryan Walker - Senior Producer
Mark Pacini - Game Director

We didn't go in unprepared. A short while prior to our scheduled meeting, we invited members from Luv2Game.com to give us their questions to ask in person. The following is a transcript of the conversation that ensued with credit given to the L2G members who came up with the original questions.

Glitch: What are you doing to make *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* better than previous *Metroid* titles?

Mark Pacini: What we have done is incorporate the new corruption mechanic that, if you know a little about the story behind the *Metroid Prime* series, has to do with phazons. We're building on that in *Metroid Prime 3* and are making it a critical part of the game's story as well as integrating it into the main mechanics of the game. Samus will become incredibly powerful.

Glitch: Can you tell us anything about any new weapons we may find in *Corruption*?

MP: One of the new things we're doing is implementing a weapon stacking system, similar to what was done in *Super Metroid*. In other *Metroid* games, the player would switch between weapons. In *Corruption*, you will be able to stack the beams on top of each other in a way that you will continue to have the same power of the previous beam but the new beam will be added on top. For example Samus may have one beam that has heat properties, like the plasma beam (that would be an upgrade to the normal power beam). She can then add another beam on top of that that would possibly enable her to shoot through certain types of material — things like that. So really what we are doing is adding a different type of game play that, rather than making you switch between different weapons, you will combine weapon systems themselves. That's just a basic example of the new weapons system.

eL_capitan: Besides aiming, how are you utilizing the Wii controller in the game?

MP: One example would be the grapple beam. The way it's done is you take the Nunchuk controller (**editor's note: the one with the analog thumbstick**) and actually cast it forward at certain targets to fire the grapple beam. You're not using a button to fire the grappling beam; it's actually a motion you make with the controller. The beam will not only allow the player to swing in this game, but you will be able to latch onto things and lift them away. It's a major mechanic that we're working on. Other new control aspects are simple context sensitive interaction. In previous *Metroid* games, we used scanning as one of the ways to do things like open doors or access certain areas. In this game, we wanted to make even the simplest action really interesting because we have this new controller to work with. So, for example, a very simple contextual interaction would be, rather than scanning something, Samus will put her left hand out and grab a handle. You, the player, will use the motion of the Wii controller to pull the handle, twist it and push it back in without touching any buttons. So it's a really different way to interface with the game. We're making interactions, even on the simplest level, really fun. Those are just two basic things we're doing with the controls but there really is a lot more.

eL_capitan: Can you tell us what type of sounds will come out of the controller's speaker?

Kensuke Tanabe: Unfortunately, there is nothing concrete we can discuss about that at this time but we'll release those details as soon as they are finalized.

lobitoh: Can you tell us anything about the online aspects of the game?

Bryan Walker: There will be no multiplayer in *Metroid Prime 3* but we are very excited about the potential of the Wii Connect 24 online functionality and we expect to find different ways of leveraging that.

lobitoh: Will Samus have any new costumes or will we get to see her without her suit?

MP: [chuckles] We always like saving surprises for the player. You can be sure it's being considered heavily.

HGM: I think you'll find that a lot of people would like to see that. [chuckles]

BW: [laughs] Us too.

mrluckypan: Can you tell us where in the *Metroid* timeline this game falls? Is it a direct sequel to *Metroid Prime 2* or does it fall somewhere else in the series?

KT: It's set a few months after *Metroid Prime 2*.

HGM: Can you talk a little bit more about the subtitle, *Corruption* and how that ties into the game

MP: Sure. Like I mentioned before, it's not only a part of the story, but part of the game play as well. In *Metroid Prime* and *Metroid Prime 2*, the planets the player was visiting were actually corrupted by phazons. In *Metroid Prime* the planet got hit by a phazon and it corrupted all the indigenous life forms and the pirates were taking advantage of that. In *Metroid Prime 2* the phazon infected that planet and actually split into a dark and a light world, shall we say... in *Metroid Prime 3* we've taken the next step in which we see what happens to planets that become corrupted. We not only show that on a galactic scale as one of the primary things you're doing in the game, but also dealing with it on a personal scale. Samus herself becomes corrupted by a phazon. Not only is this a detrimental thing, but it unlocks all of these abilities that Samus never had before and that will essentially make her very powerful... but at a cost. So not only is corruption in the game a very large idea but it also affects the player on a very personal level.

HGM: Is this game strictly a first-person shooter? Will we find any 2D or third-person sections in the game?

KT: Besides some cut scenes and the 3rd person view you will get when Samus morphs into a ball, the game is strictly first-person.

Lupus_Gemini: Will any of the bounty hunters from the DS game show up in this game?

Michael Kelbaugh: None of the hunters from *Metroid Prime: Hunters* make an appearance, but plenty of new hunters do.

dack: Will there be any sort of cross-platform link between *Corruption* and *Hunters* via WiFi or anything like that?

KT: We don't have any plans to do that at this time.

HGM: In terms of size and scope, how does *Corruption* compare to previous *Metroid Prime* titles?

MP: It will be very comparable. Previous games had around 20-24 hours of game play and that's where we're headed with this title.

HGM: How many people are on the development team?

MK: There are about 70 people overall.

HGM: Is that more than for other *Metroid Prime* games? Did you have to ramp up for this one?

MK: Yes, but not considerably. There is new technology to deal with on the Wii so we did increase our head count.

HGM: In terms of graphics, I know the Wii isn't trying to push the boundaries of the next generation with visuals, but how would you compare it to the previous titles on GameCube. Are you guys adding new technical bells and whistles?

MP: The graphics have been upgraded considerably. We have more memory, and with the new CPU/GPU architecture, you're going to see a very noticeable improvement in the quality of the visuals.

MK: One of the nice things about working on the Wii is that the transition from GameCube has been very smooth. There hasn't been a lot of downtime. Just from a development standpoint, it's been a blessing not to have to spend months and months just learning a new system. It's been very cost effective and a very nice transition.

HGM: Are you working with the final Wii hardware yet or is it still a work in progress?

MK: No, we're constantly getting tweaks and upgrades. I don't know if hardware is ever really final from a developer's perspective. There's always new things being discovered and taken advantage of throughout a system's life, but we're very comfortable with the way things are going.

HGM: Was implementing the Wii controller into a FPS a "no-brainer" or are there still things you're experimenting with?

MK: One of the things about working with Nintendo is that things like this really are a no-brainer. They made it so easy to implement the control scheme. It's just common sense to use the controller the way we have for aiming, but we've been really trying to look outside of that. The real challenge for us was to come up with things to do besides that. How do we leverage this new controller to make playing the Wii a really cool, unique experience? Those things are what will make this game really fun to play. The things like the grapple beam and manipulating handles are just some of the things that we've been devoting a lot of our resources into to deliver that fun experience.

HGM: Are there any things you tried to do with the controller that just didn't work out and you had to scrap?

MK: Well... there are always ideas that don't work out. It's always a struggle to perfect an idea, but I can't think of any specific thing that we just ditched because it didn't work. Things just got better as the designs were polished.

HGM: Regarding the grapple beam that you've already talked about... can you use this in combat, to rip away an enemy's shield, for example and use it as a weapon?

MP: Absolutely. That was one of the things we showed at E3, pulling away a pirate's shield, and we're planning to really expand that so the grappling isn't just something that you use to pull a panel off a wall or swing from, it's something you'll be able to use in combat in different situations.

HGM: For our readers who still haven't gotten to play the game, can you tell them whether this title will be more adventure oriented or more action/fighting oriented?

MP: The basis for the whole *Prime* series is exploration. That's what makes the *Metroid* games interesting. So that is, first and foremost, the thing that we wanted to stay behind — that this is a first-person adventure game. However, the uniqueness of the controller does allow us to expand upon the action parts of the game as well. It lets us do the action parts even better than we ever could before.

HGM: So then you would characterize it as an adventure with lots of great action?

MK: [laughs] Yes; or as an action game with lots of great adventure.

HGM: When you took over the *Metroid* franchise, there must have been a lot of pressure to maintain the things that made the game a *Metroid* game. Do you still feel that pressure working on this title now that you've been doing it for a while?

MP: There was always a lot of care taken to make sure we did it right and the first *Metroid Prime* was well received by the fans, so we think we did well. But the pressure is always there to make sure we keep improving. It's a continuing battle that we always have. How do we make the game better? How do we meet the goals we put upon ourselves? It's a good struggle and a rewarding struggle and we're glad to be working with the support of Nintendo and Mr. Tanabe to meet those goals.

KT: I might be putting a little pressure on them. [chuckles all around]

BW: The capabilities of the Wii hardware and the new controller have really been a breath of fresh air and made it easier to innovate with this new game in the series. In essence, we were challenged to take advantage of these new features and it has made it so it's not just the third time around for the series. It's very exciting for us to have new toys to play with.

HGM: Is there a collaboration between Retro Studios and Nintendo? How closely do they work with you on the game?

MK: Well, they're sitting right across the table from us [laughs all around]. It's certainly a collaborative effort. They're here a lot, we go there a lot. We're constantly exchanging ideas. There's a lot of input from many different parts of Nintendo. There's a lot of strong support and ideas from Nintendo of Japan and Mr. Tanabe.

HGM: Is there any last thing that we haven't covered that you'd like our readers to know?

MK: We're probably the most hardcore *Metroid* fans on the planet and every day we think about how we can make the game better for your readers. We really appreciate the feedback and the questions.

HGM: We're very excited ourselves. Thanks for taking the time out of your busy schedules to talk to us today.



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

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The screenshot shows the Luv2Game.com website with a navigation menu on the left and several challenge cards. The challenges include:

- TEAM MESSAGE:** A post about downloading issue #8 of Hardcore Gamer magazine.
- CHALLENGES:** A list of 21 challenges with scores, such as "1. 2000 Points" and "21. 2000 Points".
- THE EXCLUSIVE PSP™ SCAVENGER HUNT:** A challenge to find PSP games like Gran Turismo Sport and Gran Turismo Sport.
- 22. Subscribers:** A challenge to find a screenshot with a camera and send it to the forum.
- 23. Create a Gallery (Mar 2008):** A challenge to create a gallery of game characters.
- 24. Best Post A List:** A challenge to post a list of games.
- CHALLENGE GALLERY:** A section showing various challenge images.

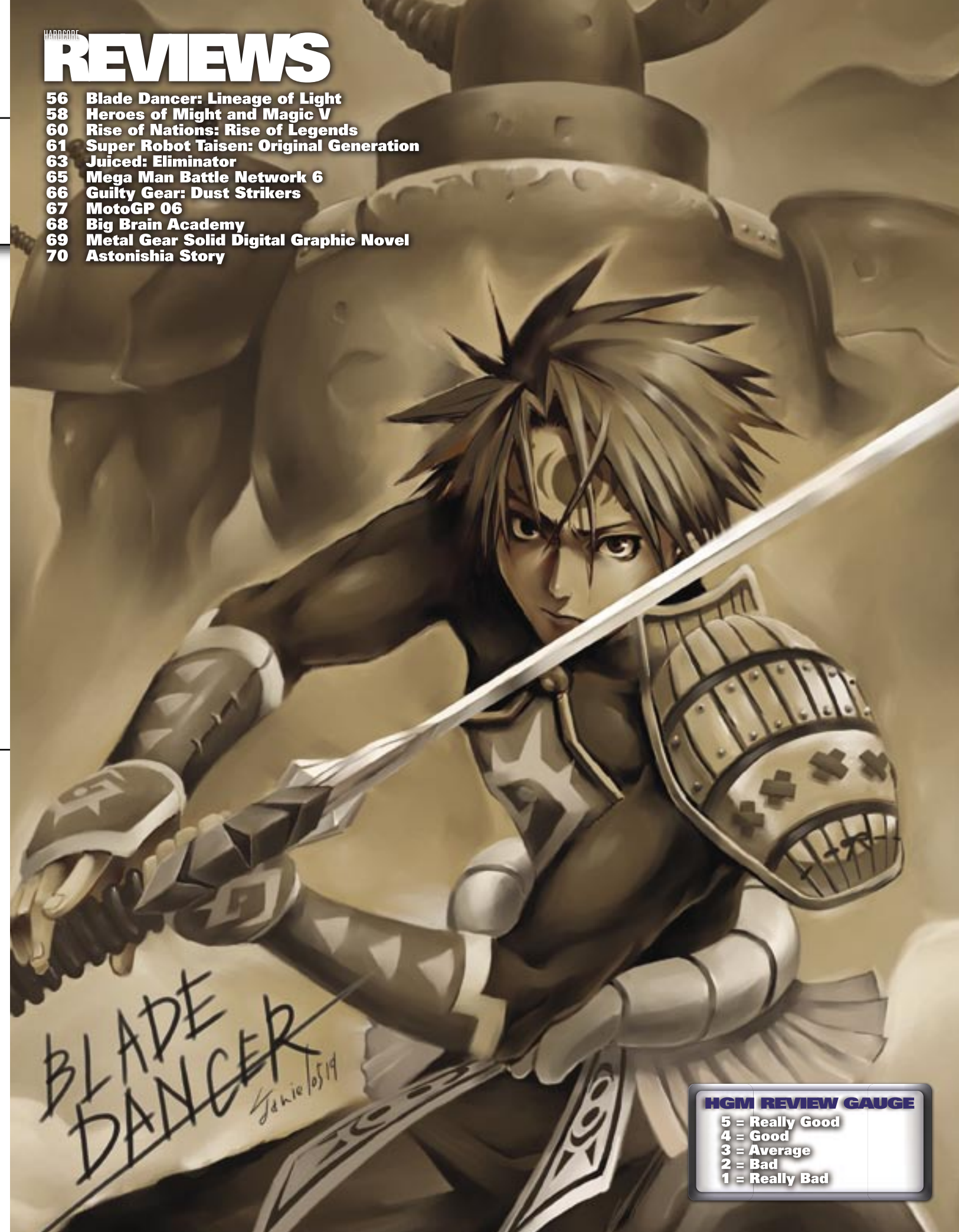
We love to game. It's a passion that starts at the controller, but goes beyond into our lives, forming a video game mindset that we're all a part of. It's not just about being hardcore. Hardcore Gamer Magazine and Luv2Game are all about living a gaming life and loving it. Reviews, previews, and strategies 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 L2G and in print in HGM. We're gamers. You're gamers. We all love to game and that's why we're here.

The featured items section includes:

- Special Edition N-Gear:** A challenge to win a Special Edition N-Gear with 27 games.
- Wrestle 20 Skin:** A challenge to win a Wrestle 20 Skin.
- Bl 3 release:** A challenge to win a Bl 3 release.
- HGM Review Gauge:** A challenge to win a HGM Review Gauge.

REVIEWS

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HGM REVIEW GAUGE

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

BLADE DANCER LINEAGE OF LIGHT

Review by Lynxara

Publisher: NIS America
Developer: SCEJ
Release Date: 7/18/06
Rating: E10+

Genre(s): Turn-Based RPG
Category: An RPG! With Turns!
of players: 1-4

Console RPGs come in two forms. There are friendly, easygoing titles that don't bother with stiff challenges and put a lot of emphasis on flashy graphics. Then there are games that, at first blush, appear to have been made by pathological misanthropes. Often lacking tutorials or any basic sense of fairness, these games dare you to slog through a gauntlet of brutal encounters to reach whatever passes for the game's ending.

What's interesting about *Blade Dancer* is that it's a rare and enjoyable hybrid of the two major RPG types, something of a budget-priced *Dragon Quest VIII*. Leaving the safety of town forces you to cope with what is essentially a persistent, dangerous dungeon crawl. Monsters and treasure infest every world map area. Still, there's an actual storyline to help motivate you, and a full four-character party to recruit and control. In some parts of the game, especially the beginning, the difficulty is unforgiving and minmaxing becomes a must. Things get easier once you've power-leveled a bit, but the difficulty always ramps back up the minute you start taking it easy.



Crafting is trendy in console RPGs right now, but *Blade Dancer* runs farther with this gimmick than any other recent title. Thanks to obscene shop mark-up, you're placed in the position of having to craft basically every item you want to use in the game. Weapons have a durability gauge that depletes every time you use them in battle, and eventually they break. This means you have to craft stacks of weapons before a long expedition. The better your weapon is, the harder it is to craft or purchase multiple copies.

Once you're on the world map, potential encounters with monsters appear as floating skulls. The skulls are color-coded depending on how the encounter level stacks up to your experience levels and equipment quality. Red indicates "tough" and blue "weak." A white skull indicates an encounter that's just right for you. White and red skulls home in on your location and chase you down if need be.



The combat system is very similar to the active turn system from the classic *Final Fantasy* games. Your characters still gain turns as their initiative meters fill up, and monsters keep attacking as you try to decide who goes next and what they'll do. When either side in combat deals damage during a fight, it fills the Luna Meter in the upper-left corner of the screen. Your characters or the monsters can spend amassed Luna Points to use spell-like Lunability moves, and you can hoard turns to use incredibly powerful Group Lunabilities. A well-timed attack can interrupt a Lunability and send the energy back into the gauge. It's an elegant blend of classic and modern elements that stands up well to repetition. *Blade Dancer* is almost *Grandia*-like in how satisfying the combat is.

While there's plenty of good gameplay in *Blade Dancer*, it suffers from badly flawed graphics. Despite the cel-shaded opening movie, the in-game graphics use the sort of basic, flat-shaded polygons you saw a lot in early PS2 titles. Most character models are perfectly serviceable, if a little plain, and the attack animations get the job done. The environments, however, are something of a critical failure. Most of the outdoor areas are painfully drab, and draw distances throughout the game are embarrassingly short.

With *Blade Dancer*, though, the good still manages to outweigh the bad. NIS America's localization is fine, occasionally inspired work, and you get both the original Japanese voice-over and an excellent English dub on the disc. There's a novel ad-hoc multiplayer mode that lets up to four players crawl through bonus dungeons together to grab special loot, granting this otherwise short, thirty-hour RPG a little extra replay value.

All this being said, when it comes to PSP titles, one factor can make or break a game: load times. *Blade Dancer* is a marked improvement over most other PSP titles in this regard, although your load screen experience is closer to PlayStation-era game than PS2. Combat begins and ends with minimal loading, but moving from one map area to the next results in seconds-long load screens. The waits are long enough to make *Blade Dancer* a poor pick-up-and-play title, especially when you're exploring cities or crafting, but it works superbly as a game to zone out with on long trips... or, for that matter, while sitting in a comfortable chair.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

I feel a little guilty comparing a portable RPG to console RPGs but I just didn't have quite as much fun with this one as with other recent games in the genre. I like more action in my RPG. Standards are higher now and this one is only a little better than today's average PSP RPG. Certainly a worthwhile purchase if you're on an RPG kick.



CRAFTING

Remember that you don't need to Appraise items to get all of your crafting recipes. For any purchasable item, there's a good chance you can just steal the recipe for it. Just walk into a shop that sells the desired item and read its description. Chances are the description will list what the item's component ingredients are. Mix the ingredients together successfully, and you'll get both the item and its recipe. The only real limit on this is the required levels for the item you want to make. Characters trying to craft things they aren't experienced enough to use are likely to botch the recipe and destroy the ingredients. This can get really expensive.

Some recipes have blocks of color that appear alongside their entry in your inventory screen. The colors indicate the item's elemental affinity, and conveniently, every character you recruit has an elemental crafting specialty. Lance is fire, Gozen is earth, Felis is water, and Tess is wind. Characters are more likely to craft successfully when dealing with elements they specialize in, and more likely to make mistakes when dealing with their opposing element. In *Blade Dancer*, fire opposes water and earth opposes wind.

Item recipes with elemental affinities grant bonus yields when a character with the right elemental affinity crafts from them. For example, if Gozen goes to craft an earth-type Light Glove, he's likely to end up transforming his ingredients into five Light Gloves. You can also get moderate bonus yields when a sufficiently powerful character crafts from a recipe of a non-opposing elemental affinity. If Lance opts to follow the wind-type Heal Scroll recipe, his efforts are probably going to result in two Heal Scrolls.

FINAL SCORE :
3.75 of 5



HEROES V OF MIGHT AND MAGIC



Review by KouAidou

Publisher : Ubisoft
Developer : Nival Interactive
Release Date : 05/23/2006
Rating : TEEN; Blood, Fantasy Violence, Mild Language, Suggestive Themes

Genre(s) : Strategy/RPG
Category : Fantasy
of players : 1-8



Heroes of Might and Magic V is in the tradition of the ancient RPG series that serves as its namesake, with a tac-strat twist. In the original *Might & Magic* games, you played a small party fighting your way through dungeon hallways to steal treasure from monsters. Here, you're a hero in command of armies, fighting your way across lush landscapes to... steal treasure from monsters. It's all in the service of a greater cause, with some complications along the way, but it's still a glorified dungeon crawl at heart... and boy, is it fun!



Whether you're playing a campaign or the multiplayer mode, the gameplay's basically the same. You move your hero around wilderness and/or dungeon maps, trying to rally an army and recruit other heroes to conquer cities, slay monsters, and acquire resources to help defend your lands, while teams of rival heroes go around doing the same. You can

recruit troops from buildings out on the map or directly from cities you've conquered, and these troops will fight alongside your hero in turn-based tactical combat when an enemy is encountered. Managing your armies is a delicate business; your city can only produce so many troops per week, and your heroes can only travel so far in a day, so calculating the risk and necessity of each of your actions is a vital part of the game.

Fortunately, the interface is quite user-friendly. Almost all of the

information you will need to make your decisions, from the number of days it takes to move from point A to point B, to the number of kills an attack will inflict on an enemy, is either displayed up front or can be discovered with a simple rollover. Though there could be a bit more polish in some of these areas (it would be nice if the initiative bar that determines troop order in combat would visually distinguish enemy and allied troops, for instance) most problems take only a little bit of thought to find a solution.

The game's presentation is strong on many points, with massive, detailed 3D maps to explore and a soundtrack full of sturm und drang. Yet, it is also on this point that the game experiences some of its most tragic failings.

The spectacular opening video promises FMV rivalling anything in games today, so it's almost insulting when you get into the game and your cut-scenes consist of awkward closeups with blocky, expressionless in-game sprites. This, combined with mediocre-to-bad voice acting, makes it pretty hard to care about the story behind it all. The music, while good listening for a soundtrack, is often used inappropriately; there's a fabulous gothic chant that seems ideal for a life-or-death struggle with an enemy boss, yet it only plays when you're... building structures in town? Huh?

Nevertheless, most of *HoMMV's* flaws can be easily overlooked for what it does offer: an unique, addictive strategy game with tons of depth and enormous multiplayer potential.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

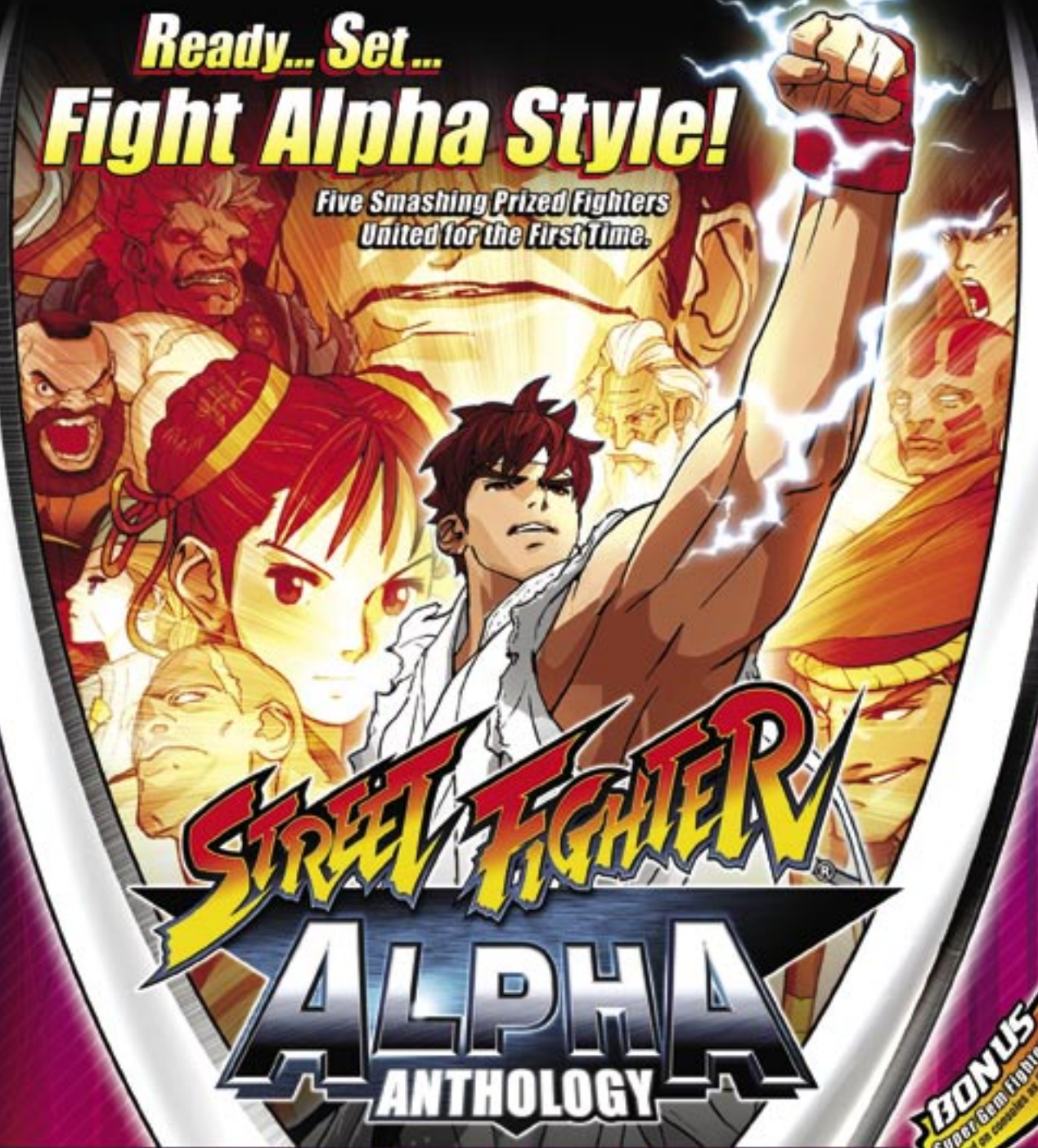
This game is amazing! It's cutting into my *Flyff* time and I don't even care! How amazing is that? Stupendously amazing!

FINAL SCORE : **4.5** of 5



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STREET FIGHTER ALPHA ANTHOLOGY

BONUS Super Gem Fighter Mini Mix (featuring an exclusive new Prized Fighter)



PlayStation 2

AVAILABLE JUNE 2006



RISE OF LEGENDS

Review by **Metalbolt**

Publisher : Microsoft
Developer : Big Huge Games
Release Date : 05/09/2006
Rating : TEEN; Blood and Gore, Violence

Genre(s) : RTS
Category : > or <
of players : 1-8

To say that I was excited about *Rise of Legends* would have been an understatement. I was, in fact, jazzed beyond all belief. Just thinking about finally getting to play it gave me chills. I'm an RTS fan, so how could it not? Adding *Rise of Nation's* insane strategy to a RTS set in a world of pure fantasy should make every die-hard strategy fan's nose bleed like crazy just thinking about it!

Unfortunately, there will be no tsunami of RTS fanboy (or -girl) nose blood, because *RoL* forsakes everything that made *Rise of Nations* stand out in the crowd.

The pre-battle planning stage has been dumbed down into pointlessness. There is no true strategic purpose to it anymore. It's been reduced to nothing more than an overhead map where you pick which level you want to conquer next.

The battles have been reduced to old-school RTS fare: if you manage to build more units faster than your opponent does, you win. *RoN* did not work this way. Even if you had more units than the enemy, a poorly thought out battle would lead you to failure.

All of the instances and events that made *RoN's* battles tactical are gone, replaced by an incredibly simple battle system.

While *RoN's* graphics were OK, *RoL* has taken things into full 3D.

FINAL SCORE : **3 of 5**



With the upgrade comes a fatal error: a camera that does not tilt enough and does not pull far enough away from the map. With the inclusion of 3D terrain, not being able to tilt the view so that you can see all of your units while they climb a hill is irritating. Having air units that are almost hidden because they are at the height of the camera, is just bad design.

The visual upgrade is decent looking, though. While it won't win any awards for in game graphical sexiness, the CG cinemas are near flawless and awe-inspiring: the intro alone will astound you! You can tell that a lot of effort was put into visual sheen, but unlike FPS and racing games a RTS cannot stand upon graphics alone, and coming from a developer who has already proven that they understand this, there is no excuse.

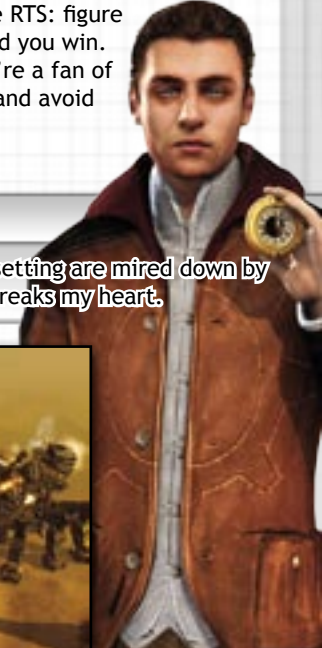
If Big Huge Games had spent a little less time on graphics and a little more time on giving us a game that bothered to make us think (as an RTS should), then *RoL* would be worthy of the *RoN* moniker. If you don't play RTS games that often, you may enjoy *RoL*. It's a very simple RTS: figure

out how to build resources fast enough, and you win. Get to the next level, rinse, repeat. If you're a fan of *RoN*, though, save yourself the heartache and avoid this game.

Rating : 2.5 of 5

2nd opinion by **KouAidou** • Alternate Rating : 3.5 of 5

Breathtaking presentation, gameplay innovations and an ambitious worldsetting are mired down by clunky AI and a lack of novelty in scenario design. This kind of stuff just breaks my heart.



Super Robot Taisen Original Generation

Review by **Lynxara**

Publisher : Atlus
Developer : Banpresto
Release Date : 07/25/2006
Rating : Pending

Genre(s) : Strategy RPG
Category : Tiny, Angry Robots
of players : 1



RYUSEI: Ready, aim...
Mega Beam Rifle!

I played *Super Robot Taisen: Original Generation* when it came out in Japan in late 2002, and at the time I honestly didn't like it much. When I played the English version of *SRT:OG*, I found myself enjoying the game a lot more, and almost completely due to the localization. There are a few name changes that are sure to become fodder for message board flame wars, but in every important respect — story, characterization, and humor — the English version of *SRT:OG* is damn near perfect. If I could in good conscience give this game a higher score based solely upon the strength of the localization, I would.

I can't, because *SRT:OG* is still a game that's, technologically, going on four years old. This is an eternity in the lifespan of a cartridge-driven system like the GBA. As a result, *SRT:OG* reflects some extremely dated approaches to game design, graphics, and... well, everything else. The only technical area where the game excels at all is the music, which is remarkable even by modern GBA standards. For the most part, though, playing *SRT:OG* demands the same kind of patience from a player that all old games do. The graphics are primitive, the interface is kind of crude, and your level maps are spartan at best.

If you can forgive *SRT:OG* its oldness, then you are going to have a lot of fun with it. *SRT:OG* is classic turn-based, grid-driven strategy RPG stuff. You command an army comprised of mechs and pilots you've recruited by progressing through the game's

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

An *SRT* game without the brand names makes for a pretty unremarkable SRPG. The overly faithful localization may please the fans, but won't win any new converts.



RYUSEI: Disk Slicer!



GIADO: Hey Garnet, did you see that?

plot. Once recruited, you can mix and match most mechs with any pilot from your roster to create your fighting units, and further customize both pilot and mech with a variety of different upgrades. Each of the game's two main characters, Kyosuke and Ryusei, has a unique storyline that changes the assortment of mechs and pilots you get to use. Seeing everything and completely understanding the game's story demands beating it once with both main characters, and you can expect to spend about 20-40 hours on a single pass of the game.

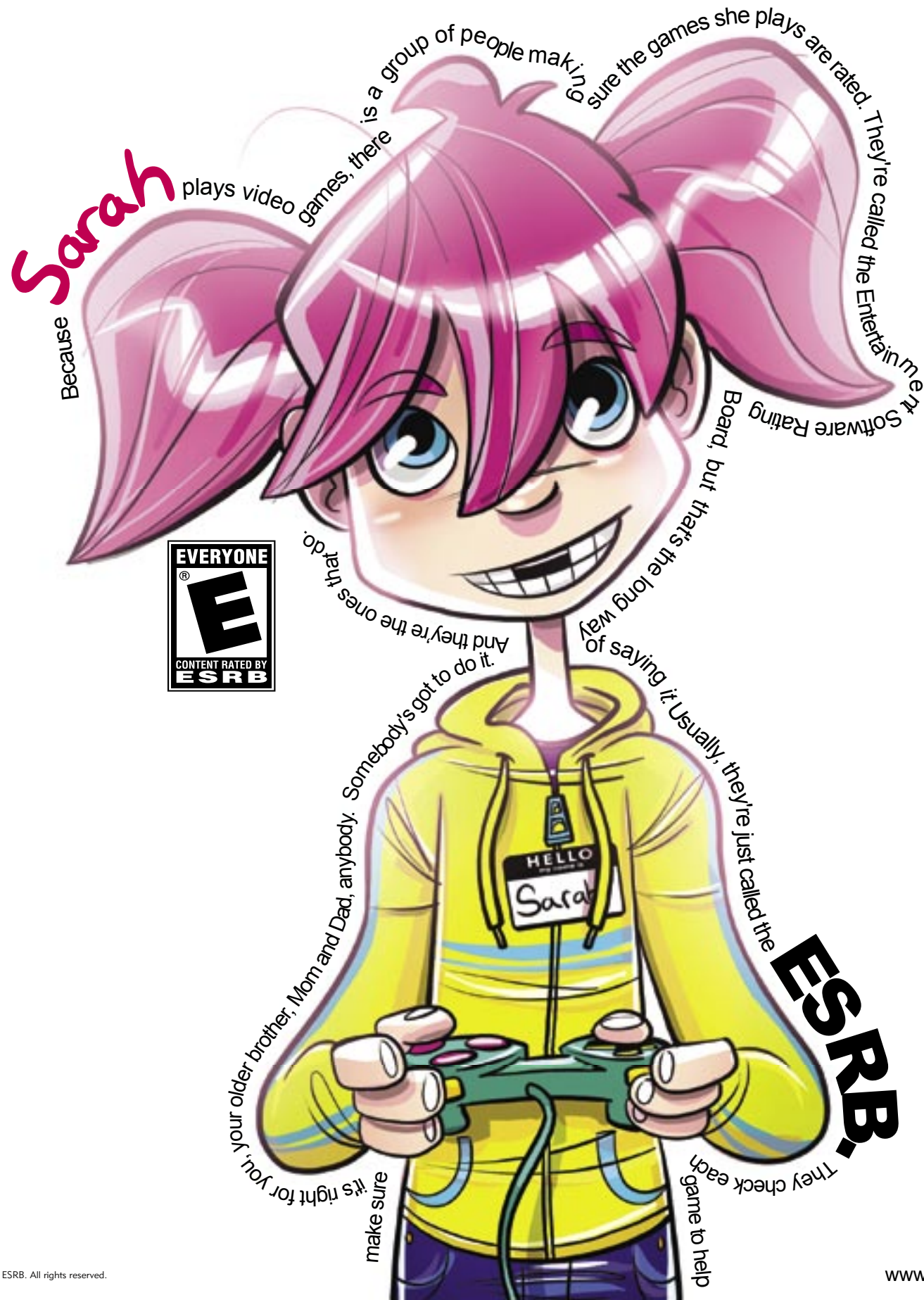
Beating levels in especially skillful ways in *SRT:OG* nets you Battle Mastery points. Amassing so many BM points increases the game's overall difficulty, and you have to finish it on Hard mode to see the story's real ending. You also earn additional secret mechs, pilots, and items as a reward for meeting certain bonus challenges in the game, like getting a lot of kills with a certain pilot or shooting down an especially tough enemy ace. The emphasis on gathering Battle Mastery points and finding secrets keeps *SRT:OG's* gameplay addictive and very satisfying for a hardcore completist.

Storywise, *SRT:OG* is an elaborate celebration of mecha anime cliches. If you have even the least bit of interest in this genre, you'll easily spot plenty of plotlines, personalities, and situations lovingly stolen from classic shows like *Macross*, *Gundam* and *Voltron*. The sheer enthusiasm of it all keeps the characters endearing, and a steady stream of jokes and silly moments helps keep the melodrama from becoming too overbearing. *SRT:OG's* story is basically a mirror of the gameplay: accessible, light, and perfectly suited to flipping on your GBA to kill a little time.

Rating : 4 of 5

FINAL SCORE : **3.5 of 5**





REVIEW

Juiced Eliminator



Review by James

Publisher : THQ
 Developer : Juice Games
 Release Date : 06/2006
 Rating : TEEN; Language, Mild Suggestive Themes

Genre(s) : Racing
 Category : Street/tuner
 # of players : 1-6



"Competent" isn't a word one wants applied to a video game. While its connotation of adequacy is fine if you need, say, a hammer, if the job at hand is high-speed entertainment that's probably not going to cut it. *Juiced: Eliminator* is a competent racer, and that's its biggest problem.

Eliminator is an upgraded version of THQ's 2005 street racer *Juiced*. More tracks, cars, and modifications have been added, fleshing out the respectable amount that were already present. Toss in a variety of race types, finish it off with a respect system governing the other racing crews' opinion of you and there's a good amount of depth to be explored.

Starting off with a pocket full of cash and a dream of being the king of street racers, you've got to integrate yourself into *Juiced's* world by not just winning races, but earning the respect of those you're competing against. There are eight crews to race against, and each has different criteria that they're looking for in a rival.

200 Club likes a good car collection, for example, while Rapid Redliners like to see the best car possible. Earning your rivals' respect opens up new features, such as the ability to hold your own events on their turf or race them for pink slips. While coming in first brings in the cash, gaining respect is the way to progress farther in the game. Of course, losing respect can also get that progression revoked, so it's important to keep on top of it. It can be frustrating to win a tough race and still have it count as a setback.

This is a common theme in *Juiced*, where a good idea is sabotaged by a bad one. The best example of this is the crew: characters who can be recruited to race on your team. They start out weak, and will lose far more often than they win, but continued use will boost their skills to the point where they'll start seeing the checkered flag on a regular basis. Unfortunately, if the race doesn't support multiple members from one crew, it becomes almost completely non-interactive with no way to bypass it and see who won. Overlooked details like being able to skip an AI race are strewn throughout *Juiced*, hampering its otherwise solid presentation.

This is a shame, because when *Juiced: Eliminator* works it works well. The racing is solid; there's a good variety of cars, events, and play modes; and its sharp graphics are backed up with a decent soundtrack. Street racing is a crowded genre, though, and a game that's merely competent is going to have a hard time being noticed.

Rating : 3 of 5



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

A cloud of disappointment hangs over this one not because anything sticks out as particularly bad, but because the inverse is also true. There's a lot to see here, but little reason to bother.

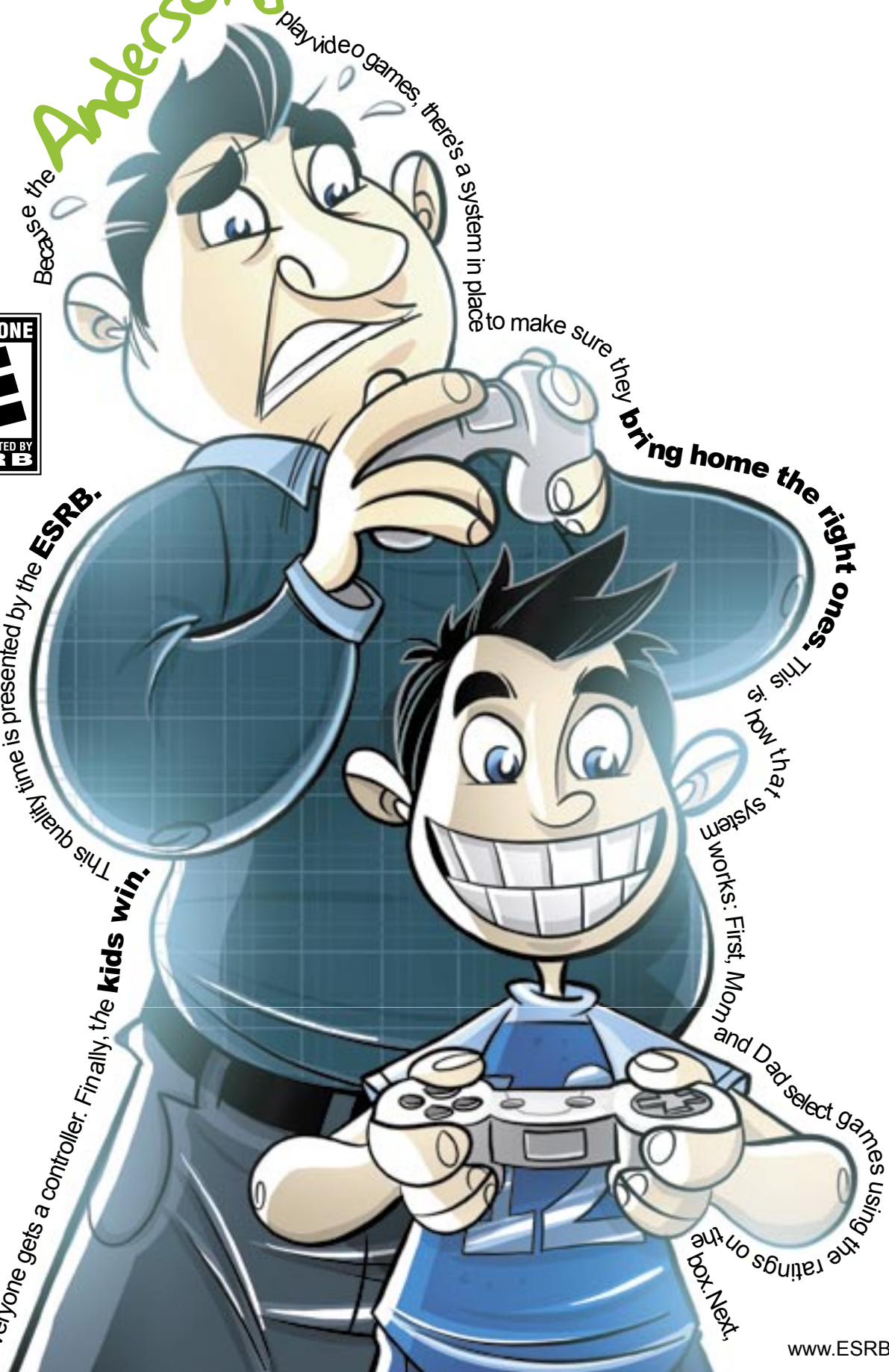
FINAL SCORE :
2.75 of 5





Because the **Andersons** play video games, there's a system in place

to make sure they bring home the right ones. This is how that system works: First, Mom and Dad select games using the ratings on the box. Next, everyone gets a controller. Finally, the kids win.



www.ESRB.org



REVIEW MEGAMAN 6 BATTLE NETWORK



Review by **Sarius**

Publisher : Capcom
Developer : Capcom
Release Date : 6/13/2006
Rating : EVERYONE

Genre(s) : RPG
Category : Internet
of players : 1-2

It feels kind of weird to be introduced to a series through what is supposed to be its final installment. I'd never played a *Battle Network* game before this one, so I wasn't quite sure what to expect. I was afraid of being lost with regards to the storyline, or not knowing the terminology, or having to write a review full of BS in the hopes of fooling people into thinking that I know what I'm talking about. Luckily (for me), this proved to be not the case. *Mega Man Battle Network 6* should prove to be just as enjoyable an adventure for fans who have been with the series from the beginning as it is for a *Battle Network* noob like myself.

You play as Lan Hikari, a young boy who really, *really* likes to use the Internet. *Battle Network's* Internet is a virtual world where users battle each other for fame, glory, and precious, collectible Battle Chips. Battles are fought via random encounters, and though the game's combat system resembles the typical turn-based stuff you've come to expect, all the actual fighting is under the player's control. The grid-based combat is fun and engaging, and requires twitch reflexes as well as strategic management of weapons.

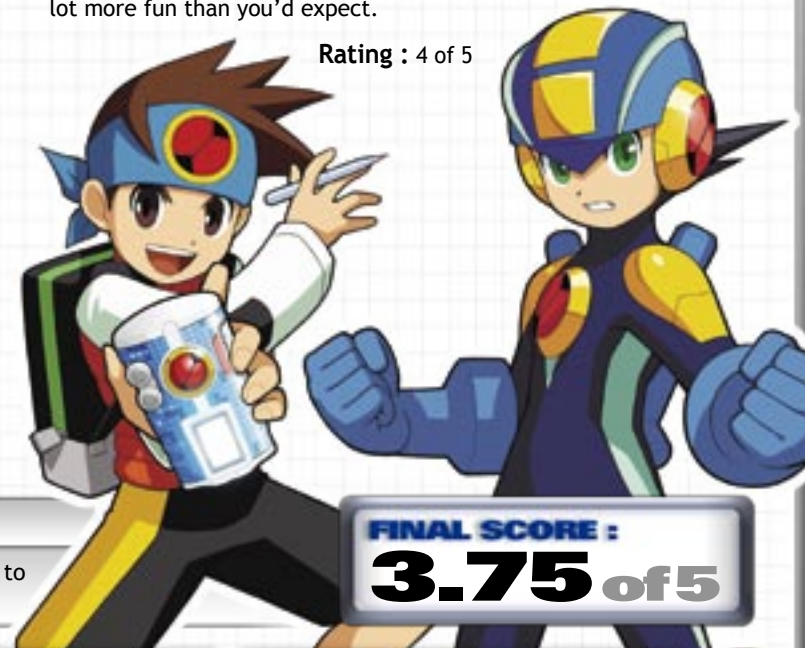
The battles are also where several new gameplay elements are introduced to the series, the most significant of which is the ability to "BeastOut." This is the robot equivalent of a Super Internet Freakout (make sure that Mega Man doesn't delete his LiveJournal friends list or his MySpace profile), and the result is increased attack damage and access to new abilities. The tradeoff is that Beasting Out leaves Mega Man tired and vulnerable once it wears off, so using it effectively can often be a challenge.

It's the storyline that really makes the game, though. Lan himself is a really likeable, good-natured little guy, and his naivete gets him

into all kinds of ridiculous situations. The story has its moments of boring seriousness, but much of the game is spent guiding Lan through his daily school life at the Cyber Academy. It's a simple and endearing tale full of mischief, detention, and kids who have problems with penguins. There's little to not like here, unless your soul is a blackened husk that demands that your RPGs be filled with *very important* philosophical whining and religious symbolism.

The thing that surprised me the most, though, was the fact that the game is extremely accessible to series newcomers. *Battle Network 6* begins with Lan moving to a new town, so knowledge of the previous games' cast is not a requirement. If you've never played a *Battle Network* game before, *Mega Man Battle Network 6* is a great place to start. Even if you're like me and have been skeptical of the series from the beginning, you may end up having a lot more fun than you'd expect.

Rating : 4 of 5



FINAL SCORE : **3.75** of 5

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

If you've played the *Battle Network* games before, you know what to expect. If you haven't, this is as good a place to start as any.



GUILTY GEAR ISUKA

Review by **Racewing**

Publisher : Majesco Games
Developer : Arc System Works
Release Date : 4/25/2006
Rating : Teen (Alcohol Ref, Suggestive Themes, Violence, Jam)

Genre(s) : Fighting
Category : Schizophrenic
of players : 1-4

You know how we have games on the market which are good ideas, but executed badly? *Guilty Gear: Dust Strikers* is the exact inverse. A while back, Arc System Works attempted to turn its hallmark one-on-one fighting franchise into a chaotic four-player game with *Guilty Gear Isuka*. When it was released, many fans of *Guilty Gear* spat it back in Arc's faces with fire and vitriol.

This has not stopped Arc, however. It has merely stalled them. One can only guess as to why.

Dust Strikers again takes the manic, yet technical fighting of *Guilty Gear* and places it into the four-player party arena. The results are much like *Isuka*, only not quite as awful. *Dust Strikers* actually manages to be serviceable, due to some constructive changes to the fighting engine and gameplay settings.

The fighting takes place upon four tiers, stretching across both screens. Think of them as floors of a building. This allows for greater freedom of movement – good for four characters to endlessly wail on each other at high speeds. Turning is done with the directional pad, but for some reason, you cannot change directions unless you come to a full stop while touching the ground. This tends to hinder the creation of combos, which is quite frustrating. It can also be trouble when trying to block in a certain direction.

Other than those changes, the special moves, super attacks, and gameplay features like the Roman Cancel are all preserved. Most special moves are now relegated to a direction and a single button, *Smash*

FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5

2nd opinion by [4thletter](#) • Alternate Rating : 3 of 5

Guilty Gear: Dust Strikers isn't as bad as *Isuka*, but it isn't exactly anything special, either. The minigames are a neat, but lackluster, idea. If you're hard up for games, go for it.



Brothers-style, but for the few moves that require rotations (i.e. super attacks), the D-Pad is responsive. Landing a combo, especially on multiple characters at once, is very satisfying. If you squint just right, this almost looks like the *Guilty Gear* we know and love... if *Guilty Gear* had powerup items, at any rate.

When you tire of fighting, you can play a variety of fun touch-screen minigames. You've got one where you slash the screen with your stylus to cut bamboo sticks. Another one is a circus show that has you coordinating hoops to let dolphins jump through. Yet another is touchscreen billiards. They're great so long as you're playing them for fun, and not attempting to beat the frustratingly high scores required to unlock Robo-Ky's full moveset. The game's Story Mode, meanwhile, doesn't even attempt to be coherent with its "story," resorting instead to comedic interludes, the only purpose of which is to mash four fighters together into a match.

Decent as it may be, playing *Dust Strikers* does little beside make me wonder what might have been had Arc attempted to squeeze a true version of *Guilty Gear XX* onto a DS cart. Based on what we've seen here, it probably wouldn't have turned out half-bad. As it stands, this is a better-playing *Guilty Gear Isuka* with a tenth of the music and smaller sprites. Take that as you will.

Rating : 3 of 5



MotoGP '06

Review by **Shoegazer**

Publisher : THQ
Developer : Climax Studios
Release Date : 6/12/2006
Rating : EVERYONE

Genre(s) : Racing
Category : Motorcycle Simulation
of players : 1-2; 1-16 via Xbox Live

Just a few short issues ago, while reviewing *MotoGP 3*, I was clamoring for an Xbox 360 version and pondering what Climax Studios could do with that kind of power. Well, I shall ponder no longer, because it's here! The demo on the Xbox Live marketplace gave an impressive sample of the gameplay, but I was anxious to get my hands on the final code and go a few laps around the track.

There is one noticeable difference in this installment of the *Moto GP* series: the developers have begun to show signs of mercy and rework the physics a bit. That is not to say that the game has suddenly become easy by any means, but you will find a far more forgiving simulation this time out. In the past, the series has required near flawless racing lines and perfect leaning techniques while coming to be successful. '06 invites you to experiment and learn from your mistakes without flinging your rider fifty feet from your bike. As a result, it's easier to place higher in a race. This will help newbies feel less frustrated right off the bat, and ease them into the more difficult portions of the game gradually.

Don't worry though, *MotoGP* vets, Climax certainly has not forgotten about you. This Xbox 360 upgrade is chock-full of features and depth, just as you have grown accustomed to. The constantly evolving Career Mode's of particular interest, which now allows you to start at the beginning of either the 2005 or 2006 season. There are some new bikes and

tracks to check out in the 2006 season, such as the Shanghai, Laguna Seca, and Istanbul circuits. Extreme Mode is also very well done.

There really haven't been many improvements made to the actual rider creation tool, or bike customization options though, unfortunately. Given the relatively short window between *MotoGP 3* and '06 however, I suppose that was to have been expected.

It just wouldn't be a true 360 experience without the full high-definition presentation, and *MotoGP 06* does not disappoint. The graphics are crisp and gorgeous, and even the audio has been given the next-gen treatment. If you don't have a Surround Sound set-up yet, you're simply missing out. The engine sounds roar, the wheels shriek around every tight turn, and you can hear approaching riders coming up from behind you with eerie realism.

The bottom line with *MotoGP 06* is that you're essentially getting last year's Xbox version with a complete HD upgrade, plus some new bikes and courses from the 2006 season and some cool 360-exclusive features. For some, that will be enough to justify a purchase, while for others it may seem a bit redundant. Personally, I appreciate the more forgiving experience that '06 delivers, and the fact that they didn't skimp out on features like other "current-gen-to-next-gen" franchises. Thumbs up, most definitely!

Rating : 4 of 5

2nd opinion by [Roger Danish](#) • Alternate Rating : 4 of 5

It's fast. It's gorgeous. It's fun. If you're into sim racing games, especially motorcycles, then you've found what you're looking for.

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



Big Brain Academy



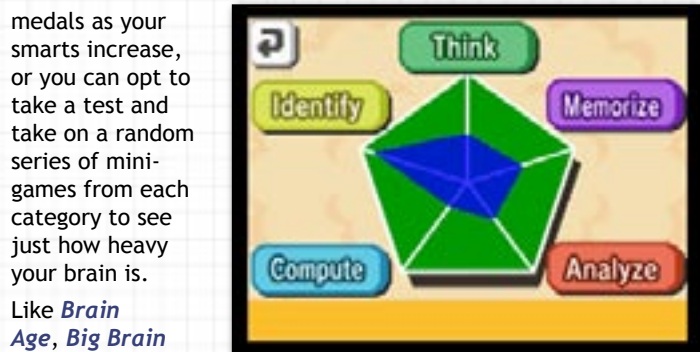
Review by Roger Darish

Publisher : Nintend
 Developer : Nintendo
 Release Date : 6/5/2006
 Rating : E

Genre(s) : Brain Training
 Category : Touch Generations
 # of players : 1

Nintendo's *Big Brain Academy* is the second "Brain Training" game in their newly branded line of *Touch Generations* titles geared toward casual players. Similar to their first brain-exercising game, *Brain Age*, the gist of *Big Brain Academy* is to play a series of brain-teasing mini-games in order to see how smart you are (which is measured in brain weight), and then continue to practice in order to exercise your grey matter and become even smarter. While this game seems to be more geared toward younger players versus *Brain Age*, it still offers up a sufficient challenge and plenty of enjoyment, especially at its budget price of twenty bucks.

Big Brain Academy's gameplay is comprised of fifteen timed minigames, with three of each being broken down into five different categories meant to measure different aspects of your intelligence. The "Think" category will have you figuring out how to accomplish such tasks as moving an animal down a series of poles in order to connect it to the animal below or figuring out a set of directions in order to get a dog to his bone. The "Compute" category will have you solving a set of mathematical mini-games, such as figuring out which set of coins adds up to the highest value or answering simple mathematical equations. The "Analyze" category is geared toward reasoning, where you will have to quickly deduct the number of blocks stacked together or connect the missing line in a dot-to-dot picture. The "Memorize" category is like a game of Simon, where you have to quickly memorize a series of sounds or numbers and then repeat them using the stylus. Finally, the "Identify" category focuses on your visual recognition, challenging you with mini-games such as finding and matching items in a grid or matching up spinning silhouettes with their visual representations. You can choose to concentrate and practice on individual categories, earning bronze, silver and gold



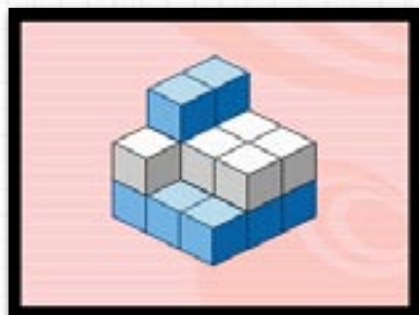
medals as your smarts increase, or you can opt to take a test and take on a random series of mini-games from each category to see just how heavy your brain is.

Like *Brain Age*, *Big Brain Academy* is good, clean fun and more than a little addicting. While it's not going to help you pass your SATs or get into Harvard — the mini-games are way too simple and full of saccharine-sweet imagery, such as flowers, pets and other Tamagotchi-like creatures to take it seriously — *Big Brain Academy* still provides plenty of entertainment. To be honest, it's actually refreshing to play something that actually makes you think every once in a while. So here's how I break it down: If you enjoyed *Brain Age* and want to continue your virtual education, pick this game up. If you'd rather blow stuff up or deactivate the fleshy material inside your cranium while playing your games, then take a pass.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

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

If you're expecting just another *Brain Age*, you'll quickly see that this *Academy* has its own unique brand of torture... er... brain teasers. Easily worth the \$20 purchase.



Metal Gear Solid: Digital Graphic Novel. What can I say? It's a game, with gameplay. Where you're playing a game. Gameplayingly. Like, first you press start! This in turn makes the comic begin, and then you, err, uh... that's it, mostly. Can you imagine the strategy guide for this?

PROTIP: Press the X BUTTON to go to the next page.

The comic tells the story of Solid Snake's mission into Shadow Moses Island, a.k.a. *Metal Gear Solid*. Presented as 'The Solid Snake Simulation', *MGS:DGN* takes the art of IDW's *MGS* comic series and adds motion to it. Now, one of the coolest things about this game is the motion. While it's not technically animation, *MGS:DGN* doesn't give off that weird, flat-cartoon look that everyone hated in early Flash comics. The heavy shading and painted look somehow give the game a 3D feel, and the clever use of parallax scrolling and warping helps to fool the viewer even further. It has a kind of surreal depth that's not usually inherent in digital comics, giving the medium a new kind of life. Of course, this is Kojima Productions. Do you expect anything less than reinvention, if not innovation?

Wait, there's more! No, really! Hidden within every page is glorious, spectacular data! Now, I know what you're thinking: "No snake, Sherlock!" (Yeah, "snake.") The data I'm referring to are actually pieces of a bigger database, called memory elements. You collect these bits of data using a special scanning mode, going through every page in the comic with a fine-tooth comb. Once you locate all of these fragments of info, you can then take them into the Memory Building Simulation Mode and puzzle them together to form a coherent stream of consciousness, or at least a very in depth database of *MGS1*.

Some of the memories are hidden in very interesting places, and you have to use the scanner to zoom in and out to find them, be they hidden in the little nooks or crannies or even behind a character.

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

I'm not a big fan of Ashley Wood, but this, er, "game" does some interesting things with the comic book format. It's worth a look-see.



METAL GEAR SOLID DIGITAL GRAPHIC NOVEL



Review by Ashura

Publisher : Konami
 Developer : Kojima Productions
 Release Date : 6/13/2006
 Rating : MATURE

Genre(s) : Digital Comic
 Category : Not Quite Gamed
 # of players : 1

Just remember, while Meryl's underthigh gives you the 'Imprisoned' element, there is no 'Cleavage' element hidden between Naomi Hunter's breasts. Believe me, I tried really hard to find that one, and no amount of zooming helped. The scanning mode also doubles as a picture viewer, as well, letting you inspect the really cool 3D warping and layering aspect used on the comic.

How much you like this game depends greatly on whether you like the original game's story, and conversely, the art of Ashley Wood. Some fans really drama-llamaed about the art style he (yes, he) used in this comic when it initially came out in paper form, though I'm personally not one of the haters. Wood's art style is actually very similar to Yoji Shinkawa's sketchy, deeply shaded artwork. While it may look like the "Metal Gear-style" is limiting him a bit, especially compared to his other work, he still sneaks in enough touches to make the art his own. There's a specific piece he did of the Cyborg Ninja ("062"), in fact, which just screams awesome.

Just remember, it's not Shinkawa, and it's not meant to be. If that puts you off, then this "game" might put you off. The database collecting is a fun twist, though. As is the presentation. Don't forget this really isn't a game, per se. It's a moving comic book. No, I'm sorry, moving art. If you like the series and have an open mind, or just love intriguing use of artwork and the manipulation thereof, you should at least check it out. What's the worst that could happen? A couple hours of reading?

Rating : 4 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 3.5 of 5



ASTONISHIA STORY



Review by Wanderer

Publisher : Ubisoft
Developer : Sonnori
Release Date : 6/6/2006
Rating : Teen (Cartoon Violence, Making No Damn Sense Sometimes)

Genre(s) : RPG
Category : Tactically Retro
of players : 1



Astonishia Story is going to get an interesting critical reception. At least half the reviewers are going to mark it down because it looks, plays like, and in fact, is an RPG from 1994... and whoever's left is going to give it high marks for the very same reasons.

I fall into the latter category. *Astonishia Story* is an enhanced port of the first title in a long-running series of Korean RPGs, and yes, it's a twelve-year-old PC game. Get over it. It's also a 2D RPG with clean, crisp sprite-based graphics and a bizarre sense of humor (knowing it's an old PC game is the only way that an early in-joke about password protection makes *any sense at all*), and playing it is like a weird look into an alternate universe where *Final Fantasy VII* never happened.

Playing it is also vaguely masochistic, thanks to a weird difficulty curve, but I'll get to that in a second.

Sir Lloyd is a knight charged with guarding the caravan that, in accordance with local tradition, is transporting a holy staff on a pilgrimage. An ambush leaves Lloyd as the only survivor, and he swears to reclaim the staff from the unnamed elven knight who stole it. All he has to go on is the elf's emblem, that of a griffon. From that point on, Lloyd's got to plow through all the various obstacles in his way, and since he's a noble knight of the old school, that means stopping to help virtually everyone he meets.

Astonishia Story is almost a retro gamer's dream title. It takes almost no time to pick up and play, you can save anywhere, the sprite-based graphics keep load times down while maintaining that 16-bit charm, and the gameplay's simple yet deep. It's a near-perfect portable RPG, and how the hell it wound up on the PSP and not the GBA is beyond me.

Outside of combat, it's old-school RPG puzzle-solving involving

talking to people and hunting down items; inside combat, it's an intuitive grid-based strategy game. Imagine something like a vastly streamlined version of *Shining Force*.

However, every time you manage to accomplish a story goal, *Astonishia Story* turns up the gain. You're clearly meant to spend time between missions powerleveling, but it doesn't tell you that, which can result in hilarity.

Further complicating matters is the fact that Lloyd is alone for much of the early game, so you have to... well, run like a rabbit half the time.

If you can handle its dated graphics, odd sense of humor and horrifyingly steep difficulty curve, *Astonishia Story* is a lot of fun. It's simultaneously brand new to most Western gamers and a serious nostalgia trip. I liked it a lot more before it tried to kill me, but it's still not bad.

Rating : 4 of 5



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

While the game is easy to get into, I get the feeling I've played it once before. The graphics are enhanced SNES-era and the story didn't do much for me. +.5 for the nostalgia factor.

FINAL SCORE :
3.75 of 5



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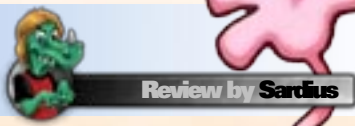
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伝説のスターフィ

DENSETSU NO STARFY 4

Publisher : Nintendo
 Developer : Tose
 Release Date : 4/13/2006

Genre(s) : Adventure
 Category : Starfishvania
 # of players : 1



Starfy sure is a cute lil' bugger, isn't he? Many a curious importer has been sucked in by the blinding amount of cuteness emitted by Starfy and his pals, who have thus far starred in three titles for the Game Boy Advance. *Densetsu no Starfy 4* marks the series's first venture into dual-screened territory, and though this latest offering doesn't feature much new in terms of gameplay, it remains a solid if mostly unremarkable platformer.

If you've never played a *Starfy* game before, think *Kirby's Dreamland*, but underwater. Alternately, think *Ecco the Dolphin*, but fun. *Starfy* represents a melding of several different platformer styles, but ultimately, you've played something like it before. The game amounts to Starfy running, jumping, swimming, and collecting doodads through a number of levels, each of which feature their own brand of simple puzzles or obstacles. There's nothing terribly new on display here, but it's a time-tested formula that happens to work especially well with a cast of cute characters.

Densetsu no Starfy 4 follows the ever-popular "Metroidvania" style of exploration-based platforming, though only to a limited capacity. Most levels feature branching paths and some amount of backtracking, but there's no way to go back to previously-completed stages, so the game lacks the epic sense of exploration present in titles like *Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow*. The lack of backtracking also means that if you happen to miss an optional item or upgrade found in an earlier level, you've



lost it forever and there's no way to get it ever again. Too bad!

The level-based structure allows for gameplay to progress at a decent rate, however. Every few levels or so, Starfy (or his gal-pal Starpy) will gain a new ability, though only some of these are crucial to gameplay. One particularly worthless upgrade is the ability to summon the "stars or poop?" coin, which has a 50/50 chance of either awarding Starfy with some bonus stars or causing a big hunk of poop to materialize and bonk him on the head for a small amount of damage. Yeah, I don't know either.

Another of Starfy's powers makes him invincible for a short while, which is notable only for the fact that you'll never feel the need to use it. One of *Starfy's* biggest flaws is that it's an incredibly easy game. At no point will you ever feel challenged by the platforming bits, and the puzzles will only be puzzling to very small children. It's to be expected that a game with such cutesy visuals would be a little on the easy side, but the game has almost no difficulty progression whatsoever, and the experience remains unchallenging from start to finish.

In the end, *Starfy's* straightforward gameplay is at once its biggest asset and its greatest flaw. It's refreshing to return to the simple fun of a basic platformer, but the easy difficulty level and lack of unlockable material makes *Densetsu no Starfy 4* seem empty and hollow. If you've ever wanted to see an anthropomorphic starfish dress up in a mermaid costume, though, this game could be just what you need. *Freak.*



WORTH IMPORTING?

Starfy is fully playable for those unable to read Japanese, but you'll spend minutes at a time skipping past the surprisingly long and kanji-laden story scenes if you have no knowledge of the language. Try before you buy, if possible.

TOSE WHAT?

It's not surprising if the name of Japanese game development house Tose is unfamiliar to you. As a group of self-proclaimed "ninja developers," Tose has a history of anonymously creating titles based on original and licensed properties owned by larger publishers. The cloak of secrecy under which these titles are developed is not to be underestimated; Tose's mere existence is a secret that is spread only by word-of-mouth among Japanese developers and publishers, and Tose-developed titles often feature credits full of fake names and pseudonyms.

Tose's development portfolio is nothing less than astounding, however. During the company's 26-year history, Tose has been responsible for full or partial development of more than 1,100 titles. Most of the company's portfolio is kept a secret due to confidentiality agreements with publishers, but rumors suggest that Tose has been involved in the development of everything from *Super Princess Peach* to *Final Fantasy VII*, with hundreds of other popular titles in between.

Densetsu no Starfy 4 is one of the very few games that specifically cites Tose as its developer (the upcoming *Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime* is another), but the mind boggles over the sheer number of titles the company has developed in the past. How many of your all-time favorite games were actually developed in secret by Tose? How many more titles will the company develop in the future? Will you be able to tell if a game you're playing has had its development outsourced in part or in full to Tose? The answers to these and many more questions may remain forever shrouded in mystery.

(More information about Tose can be found at <http://www.gamasutra.com/>)



FINAL SCORE:
3.5 of 5



Publisher: Sega
Developer: Arc System Works
Release Date: 04/13/06
Genre(s): Fighting
Category: Gears of Guiltyness
of Players: 1-2

WORTH IMPORTING?

The final boss is insane, and I love it. My love, however, doesn't translate into the game being right for everyone. I don't have a hard time seeing it for what it really is, and it's a retreat.

FINAL SCORE: 3.5 of 5

After the release of Isuka, fans of the Guilty Gear series felt a bit slighted by Arc System Works. The game wasn't the sequel they clamored for, and their release of #Reload right before it wasn't much more than a slight upgrade either.

Guilty Gear XX SLASH! S L A S H! Yes, just another upgrade to good 'ole XX. Following this trend, I surmise the next release in the series will be Guilty Gear XX SLASH-DOT, and then the ubiquitous Guilty Gear XX SLASH-DOT-EXCLAMATION-POINT!

What's the difference between #Reload and SLASH, you ask? Well, the answer is: not too much, little Billy. They made some gameplay balance tweaks, such as the removal of some infinite combos, the addition of a few new special moves, as well as giving the enemy-AI a much appreciated upgrade.

Oh, and the menus and hud finally got a face lift. Whoopie.

What else? Uh... I wish there was more to talk about. It's as-if the series is having a mid-life crisis of the Super Ultra Street Fighter II: Super Turbo Hyper Nazi Cucumber Edition variety.

A cheese monster.

It's to the point where I have to wonder what the people at Arc System Works were thinking, if they were at all. My guess is Daisuke Ishiwatari was tired of people talking smack about how cheap regular Sol was and just said, "Here. Take this, bitches!"

Putting that aside, the game is still a solid title. It has beautiful animation, a highly underrated (and technical) fighting system, characters which aren't just some random karate guy in a headband, and anchors of death!



Publisher: SEGA
Developer: Treasure
Release Date: January, 2006
Genre(s): Fighting
Category: Four Player Pandemonium
of Players: 1-4 (1-4 Online)

Is "Bleach" the next big thing? The anime is coming to Adult Swim later this year, the manga is selling plenty of copies, and it's only a matter of time before you can buy "Bleach" gear from your alt-culture store of choice.

Bleach DS takes the form of a 2D, multiplane, four-player fighting game. It's set during the Soul Society arc of the series and features most of the characters involved in it.

One of the biggest draws for this game is the wifi multiplayer. It's pretty well done, though it can be tough to find a match. Local wireless multiplayer is built-in, of course, as well as a detailed story mode for each character, an arcade mode for card and points farming, and versus mode for when you just want to throw down against the AI.

Bleach DS's gameplay will feel very familiar if you've played any fighting game at all. The move lists all feature quarter circles, half circles, the traditional "Dragon Punch" motion, and then doubled motions for super moves.

Since this is a four-player fighter, you will end up surrounded by enemies. In order to switch and attack the one behind you, you simply walk towards



him to focus on him, or perform the special move attack in the opposite direction. This is easier and much more convenient than having to worry about a lock-on button.

Bleach DS is fast. The two on one matches will often end up in a bloody mess, with your character ping-ponging between simultaneously attacking enemies. Expect to get a lot of use out of your block button.

The touch screen is useful and can be a true life saver. You can use a number of collectible cards to throw out beneficial and detrimental effects.

WORTH IMPORTING?

Definitely! There is a lot of Japanese text, and you won't understand the story, but the fighting is fun and easy to get into.

FINAL SCORE: 4 of 5





Reviews by **4thletter**



Features
20% Lighter than the DS
2/3 Smaller than the DS
Super-bright Screen
Bigger Stylus

Nintendo **DS Lite (Polar White)**

• Portable Console • Price: \$129.99

You've heard the hype. The new DS Lite is supposed to be smaller and sexier than the original DS. It's got a sleek, shiny finish, better button placement and design, and much better battery life. All of this stuff is absolutely true. The DS Lite is very, very pretty.

The top and bottom screens haven't shrunk in size, but there is one huge difference between the DS screens and the ones on the DS Lite. The DS Lite sports four different levels of brightness compared to the DS's two (off and on), and the newer, brighter screens also enhance the graphics. It's so much easier to see exactly where you need to step or press in a game when the screen is bright enough that all the little details in the sprites come through.

Another thing that you'll notice about the DS Lite is that its shiny finish makes it look like a sibling of the iPod. This isn't anywhere near a bad thing, because the iPod is an attractive machine. The smaller size and shape of the DS Lite makes it perfect for pocket-carrying, but also gives it a kind of techno-chic look. The DS isn't a game system any more. It's a *gadget*. It's something to show off to people, assuming that they aren't already asking you about it. The Nintendo DS Lite is cool. That's about all we really want, isn't it?



Ideazon/Zboard **MERC Gaming Keyboard**

• System: PC • Price: \$39.99

The MERC Gaming Keyboard is a serious no-brainer. The WASD keys are enlarged and setup for easy access, you have 11 weapon selection keys at your beck and call, and the gaming portion of the keyboard is inclined for your comfort. The MERC is a full-function keyboard as well, so you can always keep it plugged in. The usual game commands are mapped to hotkeys, so that you have easy access to scoreboards, reload commands, and other important functions. On the negative side, having to disable NumLock in order to use the keys around Home and End on normal keyboards is something of a pain. Otherwise, the keyboard is excellent.



Features
Multimedia hotkeys
34 gaming-specific keys
Customizable layouts

Griffin **iTrip PSP**

• FM Transmitter • Price: \$49.99

Griffin's iTrip is an interesting little transmitter. It does exactly what you'd expect it to do: it transmits the sound from your PSP to a nearby FM radio. It features the full range of FM channels for easy tuning, which is a boon in this day and age of anyone with a little money having his own FM station. Tuning is a snap, and so is locking in specific channels. Reception is generally clear, all things being equal. The iTrip is specifically designed to fit snugly onto the bottom of your PSP, complete with pass-through ports for earphones and the AC adapter. It even features the same texturing as the top of the PSP, lending it a nice bit of style.

Features
Digital display
PSP-style design sense
88.1-107.9Mhz



ExtremeTech **Hacking the PSP**

• by Auri Rahimzadeh • Tech Guide • Price: \$24.99

Hacking the PSP is an interesting read on a number of levels. First, writing what amounts to an enthusiast tech manual on a still-evolving bit of hardware is no mean feat. You have to keep track of firmware updates and hardware changes that could easily invalidate your work. The author handles this nicely in the introduction to Chapter 1 as he details the easiest way to gain access to a hackable PSP. Is some of the information out of date? Well, yes, but it's still a good read.

The book covers everything from hardware hacks to software hacks to simple tips and tricks. If you want a step-by-step guide to opening up your PSP or controlling WinAmp, it's all in here. You can even create a car mount for your PSP for those long trips. The book runs the gamut from hardcore hobbyist behavior (firmware downgrading) to giving you common sense hints on how to get the most out of your system. If you've been looking for a good guide, pick it up.

Features
Step-by-step
illustrated guides
Easy-to-read writing style
In-depth details

Pacific Design **Sony PSP Gaming Flip Case**

• Case/Storage for PSP • Price: \$29.99

This case is good for those of you who hate to end up with a scuffed-up PSP. The top of the Flip Case folds down and over the PSP's screen, protecting it and the back of the PSP from wear and tear. The case is made of a material that feels like leather but isn't, and has a sturdy backing. The magnetic clips that hold the case closed and give you access to the UMD slot are a very nice touch. The side portions of the cradle seem like they're placed just a little bit too close to the Circle button and the D-pad, but they don't actually impede gameplay at all. The UMD slot on the cover also manages to avoid scuffing your screen by resting the tip of the UMD on the cradle or on the PSP logo at the bottom of the system. This is a top-notch case.



Features
Stores one UMD
Protects the PSP's screen
Magnetic Closure

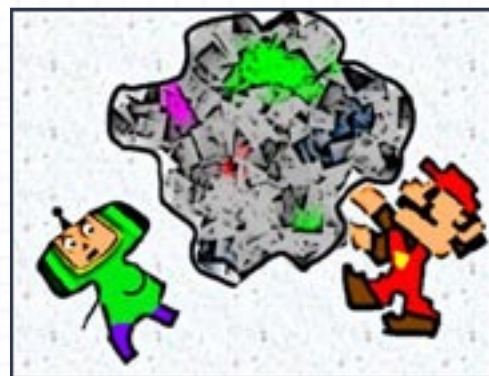


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A few things to keep in mind: There is no deadline for submissions because we'll be doing this every issue. Keep it video game related, please. Only post drawings which you drew yourself. Don't expect drawings of nekkid people or any adults-only type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



Title : soul edge returns
Artist : olisa (artcore)
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Cleveland, TN



Title : Katamari DaMARIOcy
Artist : Kyle Stone
Age : 19
Location : Marana, AZ



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



Title : Yu-Gi-Oh!: Duelists of the Dark (not a real game... seriously.)
Artist : Christine "Slifer" T
Age : 17
Location : Walnut Creek, CA



Title : Kingdom Hearts-Lulu
Artist : Dane Romley
Age : 22
Location : Burbank, CA



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Argyl
(Sephiroth - Final Fantasy)



Katie and Jessica
(Chocobo and Moogle
Final Fantasy)

No, folks, I'm not getting lazy. These two shots speak volumes by themselves. So, I'm leaving them that way. Enjoy!

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.

Photos by: RisingSun.net

...and anyway, next month this page is going to rock your socks off!

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