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## DISGAEA 2 Cursed Memories

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PlayStation 2





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Printed in the United States of America

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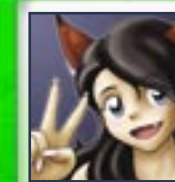
I'm still playing *Disgaea 2* every chance I get. Sadly, free time for play has been at a minimum lately with all the crazy work stuff going on. Strategy guides, instruction manuals and all the regular duties that come from being a member of a ragtag band of wandering magazine makers just doesn't leave enough time for actually playing games.

Now playing: *Disgaea 2, Break 'em All*



**Wanderer Thomas Wilde**

Thanks to Dru Morgan, the Lovely Assistant; Jessica McCampbell, the Dangerous Assistant; Travis Rhoden, the Filthy Assistant; Leanna McMillan, the Cleanly Assistant; and Kyle Murphy, the Murderous Assistant, for their help and general insanity this summer. I look forward to having to bodily throw you all out of the apartment when I get a copy of *Super Smash Brothers Brawl*.  
 Now Playing: *The Suffering, Shadow Hearts, New Super Mario Bros.*



**Lynxara Alicia Ashby**

I played and/or reviewed three different From Software games this month, and not one of them was... I dunno, *Armored Core: Robots Somehow Stab You Through the Screen If You Lose*. Next thing you know, SNK will be releasing something that doesn't involve *KoF* or *Metal Slug!* Everything's possible in this brave new world of gaming!  
 Now Playing: *Rogue Galaxy, Super Robot Taisen: Original Generation, A.C.E. 2*



**Racewing Geson Hatchett**

I have an Xbox 360 now. Funny, I don't feel next-gen. Perhaps that'll change once I get *DOA4* and utterly humiliate Wanderer and 4thletter with Hitomi's FISTS OF JUSTICE. It won't be long now! Also, one month until Sonic! Whoo!

Now Playing: *Super DBZ, KOF 2006, Valkyrie Profile: Aelia... wait, no, Hrist... wait, no, Lenneth. Yeah, that's it, Lenneth. Whoever that is.*



**Shoegazer Dave Hulegaard**

It's been a good past few weeks: I went to a "Smackdown" taping, I pre-ordered my tickets to see Keane, and I made a mad dash through *Chrono Cross* just for old times' sake. All I need now is a Chicken Carbonara sub from Quiznos and my entire summer agenda will have been completed!

Now Playing: *NCAA Football '07, Dirge of Cerberus (oh hush up, haters), Dead Rising*



**KouAidou Elizabeth Ellis**

Life's been pretty full lately, and maybe I'm a little philosophical in this issue as a result. Maybe that's because I just got to play a variety of excellent games. Quality games bring happiness, it's true, but now all I can do is wonder: am I a girl dreaming I'm an Italian plumber, or an Italian plumber dreaming I'm a girl?

Now Playing: *Mother 3, Titan Quest, Final Fantasy IV Advance*



**Roger Danish Greg Off**

I've spent most of this month at the mall in Willamette Colorado. And as much as I hate to shop, I've been having the time of my life. It doesn't hurt that I'm beating the crud out of the living dead, rescuing helpless citizens from certain death and running into the occasional psychotic clown. Trust me, this is the only way to do retail.

Now Playing: *Dead Rising, Saints Row, Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins, Guitaroo Man Lives!*



**4thletter David Brothers**

It's been a weird month. I renewed my efforts to make www.4thletter.net a comics group blog worth reading, I moved houses and managed to screw up only slightly on my deadlines while I've been without steady internet, and I shot the sheriff, too, but I did not shoot the deputy. Visit my site and help me make it a happy place.

Now Playing: *NCAA Football 2007 (Xbox 360, Go Bucks!)*



**James James Cunningham**

The summer release schedule is almost nonexistent as I write, and most likely a fond memory of peace and quiet when this is published. Fighting back gaming boredom, however, is easy. I've been rootiing through the racks and beating games I regret leaving unfinished. *Mario Sunshine* and *GTA: Vice City* down, dozens to go!

Now playing- *Drill Dozer, Cubivore, Osu! Tataka! Ouendan!*



**HonestGamer Jason Venter**

I want a Wii so bad I can taste it. The games look fun, the third-party support looks solid and the odds are good that Nintendo will continue to deliver the great software it has for years. The holiday season can't come quickly enough!

Now Playing: *Disgaea 2 (what else is there?)*



**Hitoshura laian Ross**

After half a year it's time to put down the crack pipe that is *Disgaea 2*. Interestingly, after having played through and reviewed *Xenosaga 1-2* I've started playing both *Xenosaga* episodes in preparation for Episode III. I thought I'd never play either of those games again, or be interested in *Episode III*, after *Episode II* turned me right off the series.

Now Playing: *Xenosaga: Episodes 1 & 2 (PS2), Rogue Galaxy*



**Sartius Danny Cowan**

SGE is over, but the sounds of the Super GB Booster will ring eternal in my head. Thanks again for coming, guys! Our plans for next year call for a bigger venue, more stupid games, and a live performance by Chubby Checker. Well, if he's not too busy playing bingo halls and county fairs, that is. Don't knock The Twist!

Now Playing: *Cosmic Race, The Crow: City of Angels, Fight For Life*



**Wolfie Terry Wolfinger**

So I am still playing *W.O.W.*, just not quite so much at the moment. I too have had a flood of projects I've been working on on top of my art duties for the mag. Gamers working too much to play games... what is the world coming to? And it's been hotter than (insert your favorite expletive here) lately. Brain... melting...

Now playing: *Halo 2*  
 Can't wait to be playing: *Dead Rising*



**Metalbot Anthony Mertz**

Paul, buddy, LateNightSnack is a great online handle, you'll learn to love it. Nathan, pal, I'll kill you the next time I see you... you know why. Becky, sis, we're all glad to see you're doing better. Keep it up and hang in there, we're all pulling for you.

Now Playing: *Battlefield 2 (PC), Titan Quest*



**Arfeth Thomas Shin**

I've been working on some crafty plans lately... so crafty, in fact, that I have now been dubbed "The Vault of Evil and Style™." For those of you who like fighting games, we'll have something neat in store for you. Also, there's a cookie waiting for whomever got the 'Grabby into Slappy' subtitle.

Now Playing: *Melty Blood: Act Cadenza (Arcade), Guilty Gear XX: Slash (Arcade)*



**Ashura Brady Hartel**

ブローケン・ハート: Bacon Hat or Broken Heart!?

Thanks, Casey!

Now Playing: *Dragon's Lair II, The King of Fighters XI, Prey (demo)*



**Jeremy Jeremy Peeples**

I've used the summer gaming drought to catch up on games I missed over the past... half decade or so, like *Sports Jam*. That made me think of *Wii Sports*, one of the very few sports games I've ever cared about. It (and the Wii hardware) give me faith that gaming will get a kick in the pants when it's launched. Developers are actually going to be forced to come up with new ideas for games.  
 Now Playing: *Sports Jam, Crazy Taxi, Jet Grind Radio, Brain Age*



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There's some serious joy in store for the Sony faithful but plenty of goodness to come for everyone else as well. They say the winners of the console wars are we, the gamers, and from what we've seen since E3, we believe it.

**God of War II: p12**

**Maelstrom: p24**

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## Features

**SQE-2K6**

Never been able to make the trek to E3? Don't feel like making the trip to California for CGE? Turn your exposition dreams into unconventional reality. **Start your own Expo! - p34.**

You'll probably want to listen to game music while you're at it. To get you in the mood, check out our piece on the evolution of video game music and the possibilities of sound design in the next generation of gaming in **Settling the Score - p30.**

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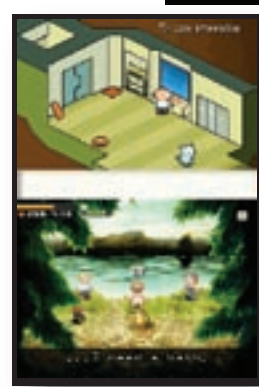
**Lonely Prof. ISO DSP for aid/fun times...**

Me: Rough around the edges, lab coat, bald spot, glasses, Doctorate of Space. Luxury top-screen apt.

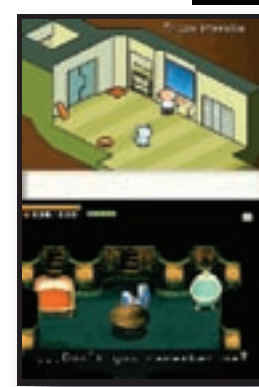
You: Adventurous, DS curious, need to help pixelationally challenged castaway.

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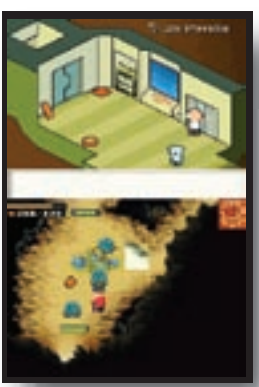
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## EASY COME, EASY GO

At a press conference, Microsoft founder Bill Gates announced that he is stepping down as chief software architect and chief research and strategy officer. Gates will gradually let go of his daily responsibilities over the next two years but will remain full-time until the formal transition takes place in June 2008. Bill Gates will then solely dedicate himself to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a global health charity which has amassed a whopping \$29 billion. Shortly after the retirement announcement, Warren Buffett offered to pitch in and agreed to donate an additional \$31 billion, saying it was time to give back to the world.



## NO FORCED STARFORCE

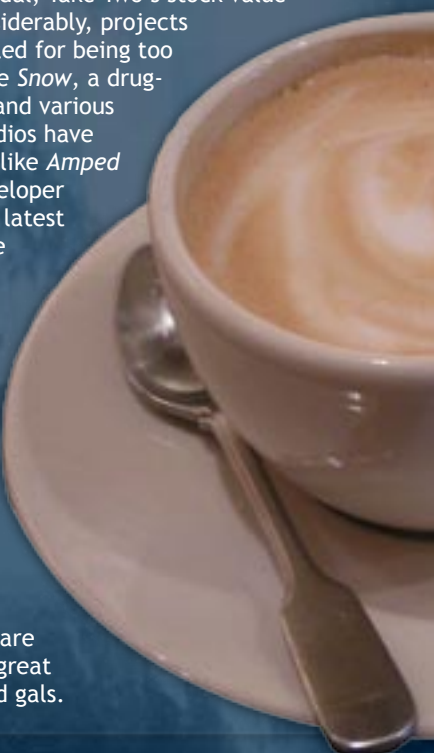


StarForce, a popular but often-criticized copy protection system, seems to be on its way out. Earlier this year, one of the

controversial software's Russian developers tried to demonstrate the need for copy protection schemes like theirs by illegally releasing Stardock's *Galactic Civilizations II* via BitTorrent last March. *GCII* used no form of CD or copy protection aside from a serial key, and continues to sell particularly well. StarForce later issues an apology for their actions, but the damage has been done. Several developers and publishers, such as Ubisoft, JoWood, CDV, and Aspyr, have switched over to less controversial copy protection schemes like Tages and SecuROM, citing the incident among their reasons why.

## STILL IN HOT COFFEE

More than a year after the *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* Hot Coffee scandal broke, Take Two and Rockstar are still feeling the heat. Changing the game's rating from "Mature" to "Adult Only" cost the publisher millions of dollars, and Take Two's Paul Eibeler has been voted Worst CEO of 2005 by financial news site MarketWatch.com. Additionally, the company has been scrutinized by the Federal Trade Commission, endured Senate hearings and two Securities and Exchange Commission investigations, been put on trial for instigating a triple cop shooting in Alabama, took flak from prominent politicians like Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, and finally, got the attention of everybody's favorite lawyer, Jack Thompson, who claims gamers are mentally equivalent to contract killers. Since the onset of the scandal, Take Two's stock value has dropped considerably, projects have been canceled for being too controversial (like *Snow*, a drug-trafficking sim), and various development studios have been shut down (like *Amped* and *Top Spin* developer Indie Built). The latest rumor making the rounds is that Rockstar co-founder Jamie King has left the company, as have "several key employees." Ouch. We at HGM hope it's all just a typical case of media over-hype. The folks at Rockstar are actually a really great bunch of guys and gals.



## NEW CONTRACTS

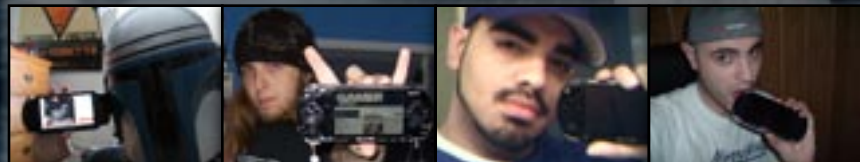


After selling nearly 2 million copies of *Hitman: Blood Money*, developer IO Interactive is not wasting any time and has already started working on its next project. *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men* is described as a third-person action featuring squad tactics, full co-op and multiplayer. Currently in development for the Xbox 360 and PC, there has not been an official announcement or estimated release date.

## FOUR LUV2GAME.COM MEMBERS SCORE FREE PSPS

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We get a lot of spam that claims you can win a free PSP, but so far it's all been a big scam. Several skilled Luv2Game.com members are exceptions, though, as they recently earned themselves a free PSP with two free games by achieving a perfect score in the Exclusive PSP™ Scavenger Hunt. The two-month-long challenge had readers hunting for *Daxter* bugs and scavenging bits of information and trivia for *Pursuit Force*, *SOCOM: US Navy SEALs: Fireteam Bravo* and *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror*, all of which could be found in the pages of HGM, our affiliate websites and Luv2Game.com itself. Big congrats fly out to Steve Hannely (Dack), Christopher Smith (Topher), Juan Gonzalez (Anomaly117) and Jeff Homen (LiquidX)!



HARDCORE GAMER MAGAZINE VOLUME 2 ISSUE 3 GRABBY INTO SLAPPY

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PlayStation®2

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# Saints Row

**Publisher:** THQ  
**Developer:** Volition  
**Release Date:** 8/29/2006

**Genre(s):** Crime Does Not Pay Except For When It Totally Does  
**Category:** Grand Theft Bling  
**# of Players:** 1-12

Despite *Grand Theft Auto III's* massive success, there are three things that basically nobody likes about the way the series developed. There's no online multiplayer, the graphics are serviceable at best even in PC versions, and, as a trade-off for getting a developed storyline, you can't fully customize your main character. It should therefore shock nobody that THQ is about to put out a game that's remarkably like *GTAIII*, but features robust online multiplayer options, really good graphics, and trades away the complex storylines for the ability to fully customize your main character. In short, *Saint's Row* does what *GTA* don't.

When you create your character for singleplayer or multiplayer, you get to determine just about everything about him you could want: hairstyle, skin tone, muscle mass, wardrobe, face shape. It's not quite *Oblivion*, but comes as close as you can get without demanding players spend an hour on character creation. Once you're playing, you'll have the entirety of a Chicago-like town called Stillwater to explore in the singleplayer game. Multiplayer games use a variety of maps, ranging from enclosed areas for the deathmatch-like games and bigger city maps for more complex games like *Protect Tha Pimp* and my personal favorite, *Big Ass Chains*.

By the time you read this, there'll be a free demo of the game up on Marketplace for Xbox Live Gold members. If you've been aching to play a truly next-gen *GTA* on your big white box and can't stand the wait for *GTA4*, then give it a download and see if *Saint's Row* has what it takes to sate your appetite for wanton acts of violence and property crime. There's a good chance it'll be exactly what you want.

Preview by Lynxara



# JUST CAUSE™

**Publisher:** Eidos  
**Developer:** Avalanche Studios  
**Release Date:** 9/19/2006

**Genre(s):** Action  
**Category:** Sandbox  
**# of Players:** 1

*Just Cause* is Eidos Interactive's new intellectual property developed by Avalanche Studios. An open-world sandbox game, *Just Cause* puts you in the role of Rico Rodriguez, a rogue South American undercover CIA operative whose job is to overthrow regimes using whatever means necessary. Not for the squeamish or weak of heart, this role requires Rico to carry out sabotage, assassinations, destruction of property and, oddly enough, lots of parasailing.

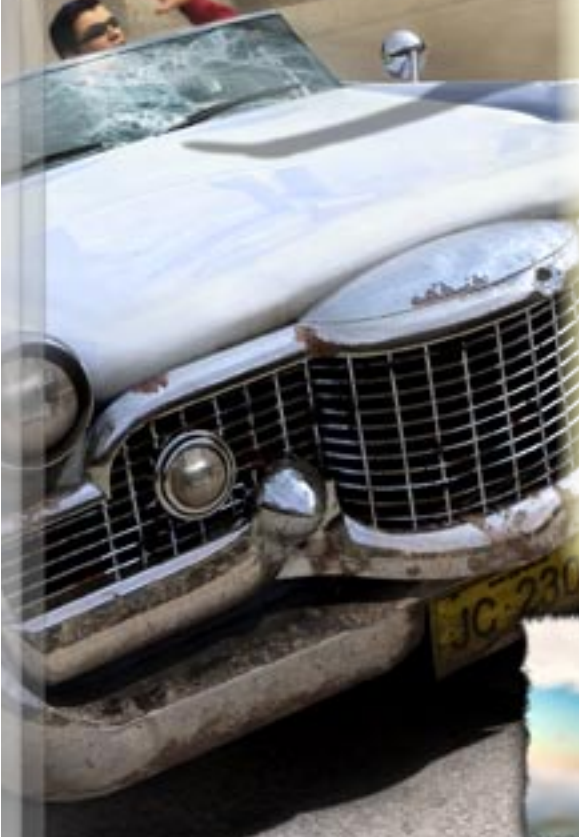
As a sandbox game, the world of *Just Cause* is an expansive playground set on a lush, tropical island. There are over a thousand square miles of terrain to explore, and the way you choose to do so is completely up to you. Rico can commandeer and get inside almost any vehicle, including cars, motorcycles, scooters, boats and even airplanes and jets. In addition, a large part of the gameplay revolves around his trusty parachute, which he can use in conjunction with a grappling hook to attach onto just about any moving vehicle and trail behind it pretty much whenever it suits him. This mechanic is actually really cool and allows you to pull off some fantastic maneuvers, such as jumping out of a plane, latching on to a boat, reeling yourself in to hijack the boat, speed off toward land and then jump off and grapple on to a car. Cool stuff.

Rico has a variety of weapons at his disposal, which you can use to fulfill the game's 21 missions. These weapons include machine guns, pistols, shotguns, grenades and a host of others. How you decide to fulfill these missions is completely up to you. You can go in guns blazing, blowing up and destroying everything in your path; choose to play the island's factions against one another; incite a rebellion against the masses; or build alliances with rebel forces and drug cartels. Of course, there are plenty of side missions to tackle (a total of 314), so you won't get through this game in one or two sittings.

We recently got the chance to see the Xbox 360 version of the game, and were definitely impressed. How the PS2 and Xbox versions stand up remains to be seen.

With titles like *Just Cause* and *Tomb Raider*, it definitely looks like Eidos is righting their ship, so to speak. We'll be back with more on this promising open world game in the next few months.

Preview by Roger Danish







Preview by Racewing

He'd defeated mythological monsters, scaled cliffs, survived the minions of Medusa, and wielded the powers of the gods, all before defeating one himself. Yet, after all of Kratos's hard work, the nightmares that plague him every time he closes his eyes do not end. That's bad news for him, but wonderful news for us gamers. *God of War II* sends Kratos on a quest across even more of Greek mythology, and to the ends of the earth itself, to ease his inner pain.

The cardinal rule of this game is to not be fooled by the fact that it isn't on the PlayStation 3. Kratos's new quest is only superficially similar to his first. The hits are harder, the graphics are (believe it or not) better, and Kratos has new techniques, new spells, and new enemies to fight. Michael Bay couldn't have done this better.

Gameplay-wise, the developers have taken a page out of the Book of Sparda. In addition to the Blades of Athena, Kratos now can command a Wind Bow, which shoots arrows that are light as air. With it, Kratos can fire a volley of shots, which use very little magic, at any target he wishes. This makes for some incredible combos and juggles of the Ebony and Ivory persuasion. You can launch an enemy with the Blades, juggle them with the Bow to your heart's content, then grab and kill them as they come down. This is only a basic tactic; rest assured that using your imagination with both Blades and Bow will leave you very satisfied.

There's no doubt that the PS2 can handle a second helping of Kratos; the question that remains now is: can you? You'll get a chance to find out near the end of this coming winter!

**Publisher :** SCEA  
**Developer :** SCEA Santa Monica Studios

**Release Date :** February 2007  
**Genre(s) :** Action

**Category :** Do-It-Yourself Anger Management  
**# of players :** 1



Preview by Racewing

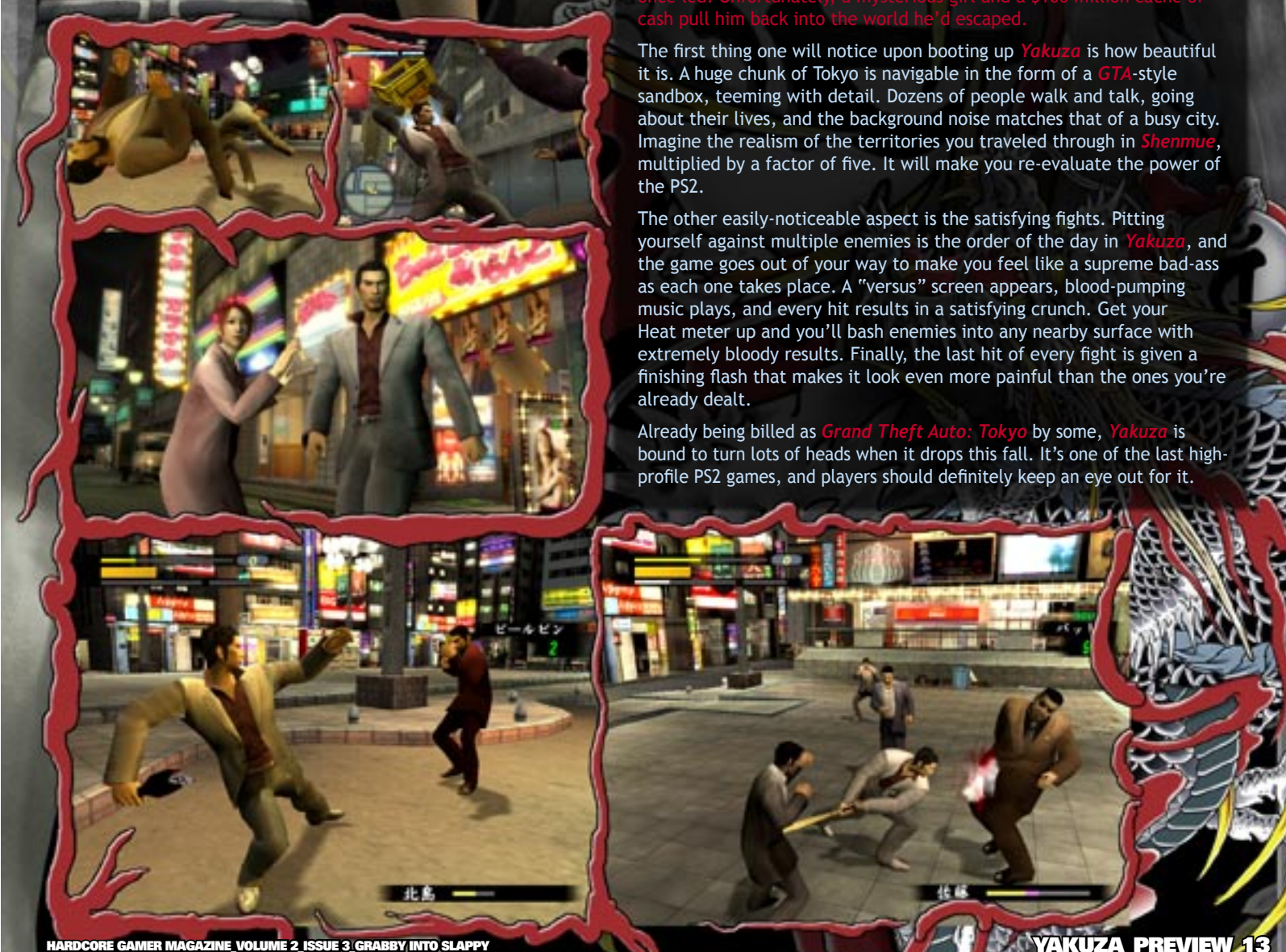
**Publisher:** Sega  
**Developer:** Sega  
**Release Date:** Sept. 2006  
**Genre(s):** Action/Adventure  
**Category:** I! Am! Japanese Badass!  
**# of Players:** 1

He'd once been a rising star of the Yakuza, on the way to fashioning his own mob family... until his girlfriend was kidnapped, and he was roped into committing a murder. Now, after serving a ten-year prison sentence, Kiryu Kazama tries to rebuild his life, and abandon the one he once led. Unfortunately, a mysterious girl and a \$100 million cache of cash pull him back into the world he'd escaped.

The first thing one will notice upon booting up *Yakuza* is how beautiful it is. A huge chunk of Tokyo is navigable in the form of a *GTA*-style sandbox, teeming with detail. Dozens of people walk and talk, going about their lives, and the background noise matches that of a busy city. Imagine the realism of the territories you traveled through in *Shenmue*, multiplied by a factor of five. It will make you re-evaluate the power of the PS2.

The other easily-noticeable aspect is the satisfying fights. Pitting yourself against multiple enemies is the order of the day in *Yakuza*, and the game goes out of your way to make you feel like a supreme bad-ass as each one takes place. A "versus" screen appears, blood-pumping music plays, and every hit results in a satisfying crunch. Get your Heat meter up and you'll bash enemies into any nearby surface with extremely bloody results. Finally, the last hit of every fight is given a finishing flash that makes it look even more painful than the ones you're already dealt.

Already being billed as *Grand Theft Auto: Tokyo* by some, *Yakuza* is bound to turn lots of heads when it drops this fall. It's one of the last high-profile PS2 games, and players should definitely keep an eye out for it.







## FINAL FANTASY III

Publisher: Square-Enix  
Developer: Square-Enix  
Release Date: 10/12/2006

Genre: RPG  
Category: Japanese  
# of players: 1



After being denied a U.S. release over a decade ago and excluded from every FF compilation, *Final Fantasy III* will finally be released internationally. As luck would have it, this long wait works out in the game's favor.

Had this been released on one of the collections, we'd have had to do without the new 3D graphics. While they likely won't impress players that were weaned on the 3D entries, they should satisfy those used to the pre-*FFVII* entries. Time will tell if these improvements spill over to the animation, or if the facial expressions are lost in the translation from 2D to 3D, but right now, the move to 3D graphics (and the move to the DS as a whole) was a wise one.

Furthermore, without the DS hardware, we wouldn't have the ability to control the entire game using only the stylus. Players accustomed to the traditional controls have nothing to fear with this, as it's strictly an optional mode of play.

Unfortunately, we don't know if more enhancements are on the way, or if any other changes will be made. One can safely assume that the highly-regarded job system will remain intact, since Square-Enix wants this to be an accurate remake of the original. The liberation of light (the good guys) will still have to gather up all of the dark crystals to prevent the dark warriors from taking over the land and destroying mankind in the process.

Assuming that things are remade accurately, *FF III* looks to provide DS owners with a classic RPG experience, something the system has lacked since its debut. I hope that this rendition is received well; if it succeeds in the eyes of fans and critics, maybe we'll see RPGs taken more seriously on the DS. If not, at least there will finally be an RPG worth playing on it, since Square-Enix definitely put some effort into this remake.



## DIRGE of CERBERUS FINAL FANTASY VII

Preview by **Sardius**

*Dirge of Cerberus* has traveled a rocky road ever since its release in Japan earlier this year. It scored a disappointing 28/40 in the Japanese gaming magazine Famitsu, and earned the scorn of many angry players who were even less forgiving in their own personal reviews. Further indicating *Dirge of Cerberus's* failures is the fact that the game can now be found in clearance bins across Japan, along with a recent announcement that the game's multiplayer online service will be discontinued in September, after only eight months.

Fear not, however, as Square Enix has been working hard to ensure that the American version of *Dirge of Cerberus* will address the many problems found in the Japanese release. Vincent has been made much more flexible, and he can now dash, double jump, and move and aim slightly faster than he did in the Japanese version. To address complaints aimed at the Japanese release's lack of unlockables, the U.S. version will have a new unlockable difficulty level, along with forty new missions that will all grant access to secret bonus material upon completion. Many of these missions were formerly exclusive to *Dirge of Cerberus's* online component, which has been eliminated from the American release.

Sweetening the deal is some excellent voice acting. Cait Sith has a Scottish accent, of all things, and everyone else in the game sounds appropriately gloomy, angsty and mopey. Squealing *Final Fantasy VII* fangirls across the nation will have plenty of material to rip off for their awful, awful erotic fanfiction when *Dirge of Cerberus* is released this August.



Publisher: Square-Enix  
Developer: Square-Enix  
Release Date: 08/15/2006

Genre(s): Action  
Category: Vincent is soooo kawaii ^\_^  
# of Players: 1



# SUPER MONKEY BALL ADVENTURE

Preview by **Sardius**

**Publisher :** Sega  
**Developer :** Traveller's Tales  
**Release Date :** 8/1/06  
**Genre(s) :** Platformer  
**Category :** Ook ook ook AAH AAH  
**# of players :** 1-4

The evil Naysayers are slowly sapping away all the happiness from the Monkey World! Can you stop them? Well? *Can you?!*

Developed by Traveller's Tales (of *Lego Star Wars* fame), this newest installment in the popular *Super Monkey Ball* franchise takes the series into the 3D platforming realm. You'll still have fifty classic-style puzzle levels to roll through, but these are spread throughout a number of hub worlds, each offering their own sets of challenges and objectives.

Of course, navigating through these worlds can be problematic when you're just a damned dirty ape trapped inside a hamster ball. To help you along, your monkey will be blessed with several new powers during your quest, including the abilities to bounce, glide, and become invisible. These moves will come in handy as you traverse the game's five worlds and complete more than sixty available quests.

Multiplayer enthusiasts will find that *Super Monkey Ball's* traditional focus on party games has been scaled back a bit for *Super Monkey Ball Adventure*. Six minigames are offered in all, three of which return from previous *Super Monkey Ball* games (Monkey Race, Monkey Target, and Monkey Fight), while the other three (Monkey Tag, Monkey Bounce, and Monkey Cannon) are new and exclusive to *Super Monkey Ball Adventure*.

*Super Monkey Ball Adventure* has already seen release in Europe, and is scheduled for release in the United States in August.



Every rose has its thorns...



# RULE of ROSE



Visit [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org) for updated rating information.



PlayStation 2





Preview by HonestGamer



**Publisher :** Namco Bandai  
**Developer :** Ganbarion  
**Release Date :** 8/24/2006

**Genre(s) :** Fighting  
**Category :** Action  
**# of players :** 2



Yo ho ho and a bottle of the beverage of your choice! The high seas are about to get a lot busier now that *One Piece: Grand Adventure* is nearing release. You'll again be able to take control of your favorite characters from the show and mix it up on the high seas with all of the furious action you'd expect from a nasty band of pirates.

The main fun here comes from the default Adventure mode, where you can choose your character and set out on a quest to rid the islands of your adversaries. Once you choose a character, it's a matter of hopping around the various islands to deliver beatings and watching as dialogue reveals exciting plot twists.

Battles themselves are a nice mix of standard fighting and three-dimensional mayhem, as you find characters not only using their signature moves from the cartoon show, but also throwing crates and treasure chests and even using elements from the environment as weapons. One pleasing example we found was a village battle between Chase and Princess Vivi where some grazing cows were struck a few times, then went on a rampage that made it unsafe to fight in the middle of the street. The fight was taken to the grassy hillside, over a running stream that fed into a deep reservoir where Chase knocked his unfortunate adversary. Her life meter drooped accordingly.

Bandai Namco promises up to twenty-four main characters and a host of supporting allies, as well as a wide selection of modes that include mob battles and even some mini-games that find you racing, shooting and playing sports. The emphasis on a wide variety of play styles should increase the amount of time you're willing to keep the one disc spinning in your favored console. With favorite new characters like Trace, Tashigi and others joining the party, this should be one game for fans to watch when it 'ships' this Fall.

Preview by Lynxara



**Publisher :** D3  
**Developer :** Tomy  
**Release Date :** Sept. 2006

**Genre(s) :** 3D Fighting  
**Category :** More Ninjas  
**# of Players :** 1-2

*Naruto: Clash of Ninja 2* is a much better game than *Clash of Ninja*, in that it is exactly the same with twice as many characters. Of course, for a fighting game whose main selling point is letting you fight as your favorite character from the *Naruto* franchise, this is really all that most fans are going to be interested in.

I do not exaggerate when I say it is exactly the same game, either. It has the same four gameplay modes available in *Clash of Ninja*, the same system of purchasing unlockables, the same game engine, and even a profoundly similar set of missions available to you in Mission Mode. *CoN2's* graphics offer a few slight improvements, but otherwise there's only the roster to let you know this game initially came out a year after the first one.

It's really the roster expansion that makes *CoN2* feel like such a bigger, more interesting game than the original. It finally includes most of the fan-favorite characters a *Naruto* fan would want to use: Neji, Guy, Shikamaru, Ino, Kiba, Hinata, Gaara, Kankuro, Orochimaru, Mizuki, Akamaru, Karasu, and Sharingan Sasuke. Some returning characters also have slightly different moves to reflect changes in their canonical abilities.

Storywise, the game's plot bizarrely goes back over a lot of stuff that was presented in the first game, but also adapts new material from the fan-favorite Forest of Death and Chuunin Exam storylines. Some characters from earlier in the anime version of events, like Mizuki, have also been retroactively added to the proceedings. Really diehard *Naruto* fans may still be anxious to get to the later *Clash* titles with their huge 30+ character rosters, but if you're following the show on Cartoon Network or reading the Viz manga releases, then this game is probably going to satisfy you.







Publisher: **Namco**  
 Developer: **Monolith Soft**  
 Release Date: **08/29/2006**

Genre(s): **Turn-Based Console RPG**  
 Category: **Mecha, Sci-Fi, Homoerotic Subtext**  
 # of Players: **1**

*Xenosaga II* was not a particularly good RPG. In fact, in some respects, it was a completely terrible one. Its release was accompanied by fan outrage on both sides of the Pacific, as complaints poured in about the battle system, the direction the storyline was taking, and the hours upon hours of non-interactive cutscenes. Someone at Namco must have taken all of these complaints very, very seriously.

*Xenosaga III* feels like nothing so much as a protracted apology for *XSII*. The *XSII* battle system is gone in favor of a blunt reversion to the original *XS* system, the total number of cut-scenes is dramatically reduced, and there's a lot more genuine interactivity in the gameplay. The plot isn't even actually a sequel to the PS2 version of *XSII* that came out in the US; it actually picks up where *Xenosaga I-II* for the DS, an import-only title (reviewed in this issue!), leaves off. It's easy enough to follow with just some basic ideas of what's what in the *Xeno* universe, but at points it feels like *XSIII* is trying to pretend like the game that came before it never actually existed.

If you liked *Xenosaga I* but hated *Xenosaga II*, then Namco would really, really like for you to come back for the grand finale in *Xenosaga III*. With the plug pulled on the next three games in the ambitious *Xeno* project, *Xenosaga III* is really the only chance fans will ever have to get resolutions for the many dangling plotlines and unanswered questions leftover from the earlier installments. So far *XSIII* seems to be handling this challenging editorial remit as well as could be reasonably expected, and is certainly more satisfying from a gameplay perspective than any previous *Xenosaga* title.

## Xenosaga III

Also sprach Zarathustra

Preview by **Lynara**



### Dive to the Depths of Adventure!

# Ar tonelico

MELODY OF ELEMIA



#### Revolutionary Dive System

Interact with your team members in a digitized world



#### Grathmelding

A massive item customization system



#### 3D World Map

with beautiful hand-drawn 2D dungeons



#### All-New Song Battle System

A unique, fast paced battle system that emphasizes strategy over mindless, repetitive combat.

Ages ago, two great wars devastated the world, changing the land into an ocean of death. A barrier was created to seal away the sky. All that remains now is a massive floating continent, powered by the mysterious tower of Ar Tonelico.

Because the tower of Ar Tonelico is the lifeline that supports the people, it is under constant attack by beings known only as "Viruses". The fall of Ar Tonelico means the end of all mankind.

**Available October 2006**

For more information please visit  
[www.NISAmerica.com](http://www.NISAmerica.com)



Visit [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org) for updated rating information.



PlayStation 2







Publisher: Ubisoft  
 Developer: From Software  
 Release Date: 08/29/2006

Genre(s): Turn-Based Console RPG  
 Category: Not Final Fantasy, But An Amazing Simulation  
 # of Players: 1-2

*Enchanted Arms* is about a world where artificial, mechanical creatures called Golems were once used by an advanced civilization to remotely conduct wars. The Golems ended up going berserk (naturally) until a mysterious event obliterated both the Golems and most of the magic from the world. The only magic left to humanity was the ability to Enchant, by fusing magical energy into mundane materials. The three main characters, Atsuma, Toya, and Makoto, are students at an Enchanting University when the game begins. Of course, this status quo doesn't last long.

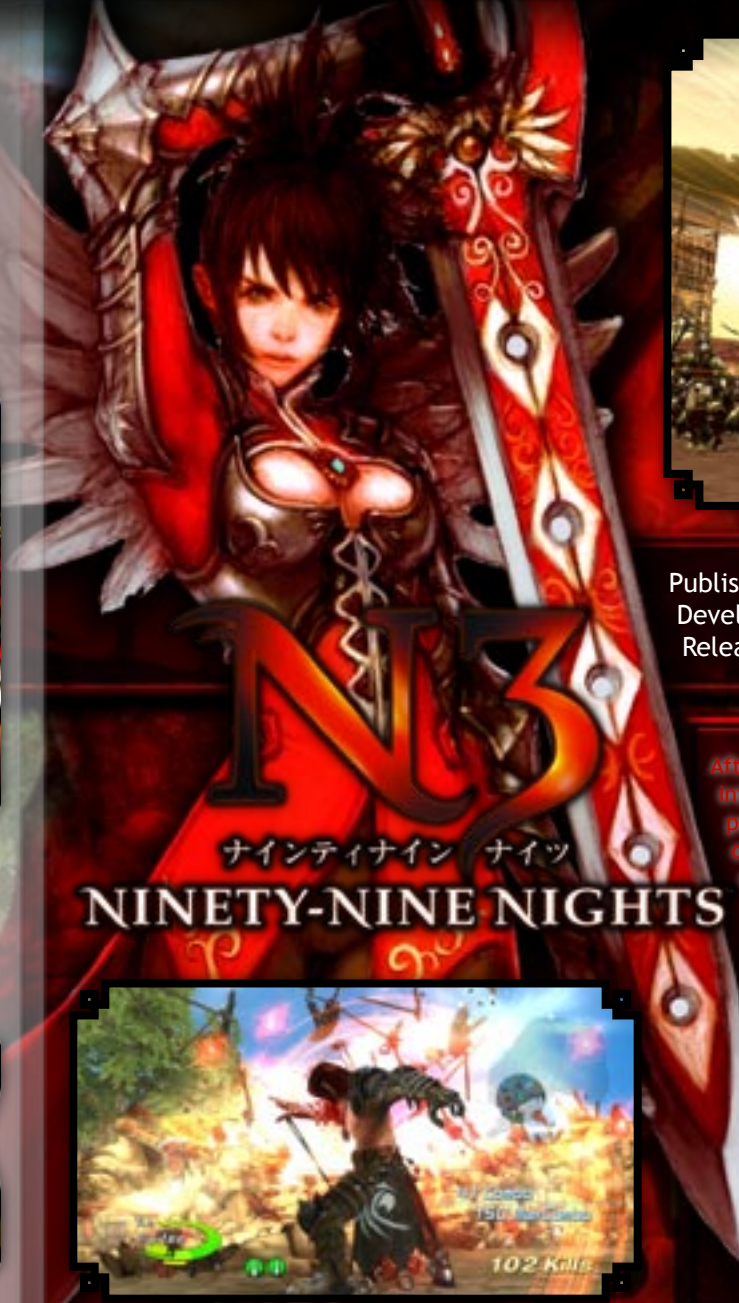
*Enchanted Arms*'s gameplay is quite solid. Characters move about on a 4 by 4 map grid, somewhat like *Suikoden*'s basic battles, and enemies do the same. Each attack affects so many map grid tiles, and you can accidentally hit your own members with attacks. HP and other resources automatically refill after every battle, so you're encouraged to fight as hard as you can in every encounter.

*Enchanted Arms*'s fights tend to be brief and spectacular, as both sides hurl special techniques at each other furiously.

It's hard to imagine *Enchanted Arms* resulting from anything other than Microsoft pulling up to the From Software offices with a truckload of money and the assignment to make something like *Final Fantasy* for the 360. If that is indeed the case, the result is a lot more fun than most developers would have managed. *Enchanted Arms* delivers all the epic scale storytelling fans expect from a serious J-RPG, but there's a welcome touch of tongue-in-cheek humor to the proceedings. Some of the most, uh, "memorable" voice acting this side of the original *Resident Evil* helps the comedy value along, too.

# ENCHANTED ARMS

Preview by Lyndara



# NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

ナインティナイン ナイツ



Preview by Shoegazer

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios  
 Developer: Q Entertainment/Phantagram  
 Release Date: 08/16/2006

Genre(s): Action/Strategy  
 Category: Hacky into Slashy  
 # of Players: 1

After a mysterious and powerful crystal has been destroyed, the world turns into a giant battlefield of good versus evil. That is all that is known as you press Start and begin your first foray into action, but soon, through the eyes of multiple playable characters, the deep storyline begins to unfold into one cohesive tale.

Your first play begins as Inphy, leader of the Temple Knights, on a quest for revenge against the goblins who killed her father. The gameplay comes off as a hybrid of both *Dynasty Warriors* and Phantagram's own *Kingdom Under Fire*, with a bit more depth to its combo system. In addition to gaining temporary super attacks by collecting orbs from fallen foes, success in battle also nets character upgrades such as speed or a bigger life gauge.

Though there are strategic elements via simple troop commands, *N3* is an action game first and foremost. With a deep story, multiple characters and scenarios, and amazingly crowded battlefields, *N3* looks primed to stand out as more than just a button masher.





If I play one more RTS that is set in a post-apocalyptic future I will find the people responsible and snap their frail, geeky necks. Why must we be doomed to nothing but games inspired by Tolkien and nuclear fallout?

Yes, *Maelstrom* follows the same lines as most RTS games that are set in the future. Its story, however, is written by James Swallow (*Star Trek: Voyager*, *Doctor Who*), and since it's actually entertaining, many a trachea has been saved from my righteous neck-snapping fury.

As the 21st century began and civilization came to its breaking point, an asteroid was discovered approaching earth. Scientists gave it a 60% chance of missing. The governments of the world decided to take their chances that it would miss, and the gamble did not pay off. Object 7143-2 slammed into the Earth with the energy of a dozen nuclear bombs, causing global chaos and destruction. With the Earth in ruin and global corporations taking over control of the government, the world was in its darkest hours. After years of oppression, the common man stood up and fought back. The year is 2050 and the real war is just beginning.

This is where you come in. There are four factions to choose from: the Remnants, Ascension, Hai-Genti and Survivors. Each one faction has different vehicles, troops, and motives, and feels different enough to keep game replays interesting. This isn't a game where you always feel like you've done it all before when you use a different faction.

All of *Maelstrom's* factions have the ability to terraform. Sending a volley of water down on your enemy, crushing them and changing the landscape completely, is something you must see to truly appreciate. Not only is the landscape changeable, the environment is almost totally destructible. Buildings, trees, and pretty much everything else you set your eyes on can be knocked down by means as simple as sending a tank through it. This makes for some amazingly chaotic battles.

KD Vision, a developer mostly unknown in the states (*Spanking Runners*, anyone?), doesn't have many games under its belt, but it sure does understand what makes an RTS tick. In *Maelstrom*, how you roll into battle matters more than how many you roll into battle.



Publisher: Codemasters  
Developer: KD Vision  
Release Date: 09/2006

Genre(s): RTS  
Category: Kill the Future  
# of Players: 1-6

Preview by Metalbolt



Publisher: Namco-Bandai  
Developer: Eutechnyx  
Release Date: 08/29/2006

Genre(s): Street Racing  
Category: The Quick and the Angry  
# of Players: 1-2 (up to 4 online)



Preview by Shoegazer

**THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS**  
ファースト ドライブ フェリックス



Though it shares its name with the big-budget movie series and was inspired by the events from the latest flick, this fast and furious racer is being built from the ground up by the talented folks at Eutechnyx. As the masterminds behind 2004's hit *Street Racing Syndicate*, they certainly know a thing or two about underground racing.

Drift racing is the theme of this game, and balancing the right mix of style, speed and customization is the key to success. *The Fast and the Furious* features some of the most robust options available, including the ability to swap engines, customization has never felt so rewarding.

*The Fast and The Furious* promises to offer the most authentic drift racing experience ever, including a new context-based camera and rumble feature. You'll feel exactly what it's like to be behind the wheel with the most realistic physics yet. Keep an eye out for this one in August.





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**(Some people don't play video games.)**

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# SAMURAI WARRIORS 2

戦国無双

Preview by Sardius

Publisher: Koei  
Developer: Omega Force  
Release Date: 9/19/06

Genre(s): Action  
Category: Also Monopoly  
# of Players: 1-4



One can hardly blame Koei for milking the *Dynasty Warriors* franchise for all it's worth. The series is built on the foundation of a fun if barely changing game engine, and hell, if people keep buying *Dynasty Warriors* games, why should Koei stop making them? *Samurai Warriors 2* looks to offer few surprises in terms of gameplay, but series veterans will be able to appreciate the various tweaks and improvements Omega Force has made to the aging *Dynasty Warriors* gameplay formula.

New to *Samurai Warriors 2* is the Skill System, which offers a more flexible way of teaching your character new moves and techniques than its predecessors' point-based system. Your character will now also be able to store up to three Musou gauges, allowing for a more powerful Musou attack when two or more gauges have been charged. The castle-based warfare that defined *Samurai Warriors* has also been improved for the sequel. Castle raids are now incorporated into field battles, rather than being isolated within their own separate stages.

One of *Samurai Warriors 2*'s most interesting additions is Sugoroku, a Monopoly-like minigame for up to 4 players. Sugoroku plays much like any land acquisition-oriented board game, with the twist being that conflicts between players are resolved by completing brief challenges, most of which involve beating people up with swords. If you've ever wanted to play a bizarre fusion of Monopoly and *Mario Party* with Feudal-era Japanese warlords, your weirdo prayers will be answered when *Samurai Warriors 2* is released in September.



## Freedom comes with a price



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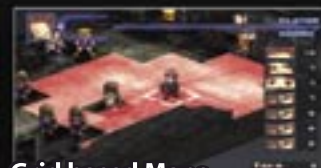
The tattered Neverland continent is at war once again. The shaky peace between humans and demons finally collapsed when the Demon Army launched a massive offensive against human forces across the land. Eager for blood, the humans reformed long-dead empires and enacted their own war of expansion.

Thus began the Seven Year War.



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The story will change depending on which kingdom you choose to command, and when.



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### Chain Skills

Each character has a certain set of skills to chain together.





# SETTLING THE SCORE

A FEATURE BY DANIEL KAYSER OF GAMETRAILERS.COM



Inon Zur (photo by Vaughn Youtz)

Imagine a world without music. There would be no timeless classics from great composers such as Beethoven or Bach, no memorable themes to signify the special occasions that define our lives, no recognizable melodies that deliver instant association with a time, place or event. The notion of downplaying music's impact on our daily lives is absurd. Yet, for an industry continually striving to blur the lines between the real world and the virtual ones, music has traditionally taken a back seat to the immediately gratifying aspects of interactive entertainment.

Now, however, a new generation of gaming is upon us, one in which a more balanced presentation is not only accepted, but in many cases required. This is a generation in which a game music scene all its own has spawned, and one in which the often overlooked, underappreciated and sometimes insignificant role as game music composer has transformed into one of the most important roles in the industry.

Unlike what most would assume however, it hasn't always been public opinion by gamers or the gaming press that have limited the bounds of video game music. Quite simply, the technology and resources afforded to game music composers has only recently reached a significant scale, and that scale has increasingly expanded the creative means of game music composition. "The hardware side has evolved quite rapidly since the early arcade days," says Marty O'Donnell of Bungie Studios, whose memorable, atmospheric opening theme for *Halo* has all but defined a generation of gaming. "There are almost no technical reasons to be constrained aesthetically at this point."

If you've followed gaming over the years, you probably noticed that advances in technology have continually impacted the popularity and success of gaming. As an art form, gaming merges the worlds of creativity and technology, allowing the artists to demonstrate their ability to work within the limitations of current hardware. For music composers, who have traditionally been restrained by small memory allocations, finding the proper blend of sound design and game music that the technology affords tends to be the most challenging and most rewarding aspect of the trade. "I've always believed that sound can make a game come to life and music can make people feel emotionally connected," says O'Donnell. "Those two elements done well, in conjunction with solid game mechanics and story, can be amazingly powerful."

While technological advances are always welcome, merging technology with fitting, creative sound design can be one of the most difficult aspects of delivering a complete experience to the end user. Jesper Kyd, who is well known within the game music scene for his innovative scoring techniques and gritty soundtracks that have accompanied the likes of *Agent 47* from the *Hitman* franchise, explained the necessity of achieving that delicate balance moving forward. "I think that with all the new gameplay types set to be invented by the power of the next generation machines and the awesome graphics capabilities, we really should try to make some next generation music to go with this," said Kyd. And although "next-generation music" might be hard to define, Kyd's explanation explores more of what game music innovators should look to avoid rather than providing an exact road map to a successful score. "The problem is that average music doesn't really ruin a game but it doesn't add that much extra either. Having an average soundtrack

is like a missed opportunity for adding depth and immersion. Games strive to deliver maximum immersion and that's where the music can be a huge factor and deepen the ambience of the game tremendously."

While technology and individual creativity are important factors indeed, budget restraints are a whole different ballgame. Game developers and publishers have

only recently increased the amount of resources afforded to the aural side of gaming. Inon Zur (*Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones*, *Men of Valor*, *Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest*), who is widely recognized as one of the leading composers of orchestral music for video games, has also composed for television and films. His exposure to the varying industries has allowed him to see first hand how larger budgets impact the overall product. "A great deal of change has occurred in recent years," Zur said. "The better the production is, the more inspiring it is for the musical treatment. Also, the demands from the musical score are higher, so the overall level of production becomes higher. Bigger budgets allow for more live players which mean better production values."



Inon Zur conducting the Hollywood Studio Symphony on the world famous Clint Eastwood scoring Stage at Warner Bros. Studios for "Men of Valor" (photo by Vaughn Youtz)

"IMPRESSIVE"  
- IGN

"THIS GAME IS LOOKING WONDERFUL..."  
- COMPUTER GAMES

"WE PREFERRED GOTHIC 2 TO MORROWIND, AND WE'LL PROBABLY LIKE GOTHIC 3 A HELL OF A LOT MORE THAN OBLIVION."  
- KOTAKU.COM

# GOTHIC 3

A NAMELESS HERO BECOMES A LEGEND.  
FALL 2006

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Jesper Kyd (photo by Michael Holm)

Being reliant on the latest technology and abundant resources proves that game music composition does have its limitations, but as a genre, it also provides a vast amount of freedom that other mediums simply cannot. Zur's experience within television and film has given him a unique perspective on the matter. "Music for games is non-linear so there is a need to use different techniques in order to stay close to the dramatic developments. In games you have to describe the atmosphere, it is not locked to picture. You have to focus primarily on the atmosphere, mood and feeling of the scene rather than try to follow each scene precisely as this may vary with each gameplay." What role should music play during these scenes within a non-linear environment? Zur believes that game music "should describe the feeling rather than telling the player exactly what's happening every given moment. This is the main approach to overcome the non-linear issue. In film and television you have to be 100% locked to picture, so it is limiting the musical development but can help you in your musical decisions. In some ways therefore, the new platform of video games offers more creative freedom than movies. The composer is able to write any form of musical piece, as long as it depicts the right mood."

Of course, just like all musicians and artists, game music composers continually face challenges within their craft. It's not easy to capture the mood of an experience that very well might be different for so many players. One of the biggest challenges is simply standing out from the crowd. "A great game soundtrack is one that not only fits the game but also adds an extra level of depth to the game world," said Kyd. "Most soundtracks sit in the background and you hardly notice them. Great soundtracks stand out and make you connect with the character and game world in a deeper sense."

Perhaps Jason Hayes, whose sprawling themes are enjoyed by literally millions of players of Blizzard's *World of Warcraft*, knows a thing or two about the chal-

lenge of creating game music for the masses. "I think that the biggest challenge specific to game music concerns interactivity, and the ability to have a score adapt to changing game situations in a seamless and compelling way. Although I don't think this is only a concern for the music – it is also a puzzle that needs to be solved by the designers and storytellers."

Despite all the challenges that have faced game music, the fact is that music is such an important part of gaming, and our lives, that the game music scene is on the verge of exploding. Think about how far video game music has come. Who in their right mind would have predicted that game music soundtracks would be as popular and as successful as they are today, or that industry events such as Video Games Live or the Play! Concert Series would provide live entertainment to audiences throughout the world?

One man, Greg O'Connor-Read of Music4Games.net, foresaw the rise of game music and established an online resource for fans, an occasion in and of itself that was nearly unthinkable a decade ago. "Music4Games.net was launched in 1999 to raise the awareness and profile of video game music composers and soundtrack album releases," said O'Connor-Read who aims to deliver an invaluable spotlight on today's emergence of the video game soundtrack industry.

Obviously, the game music scene is rapidly progressing, but as O'Connor-Read reflects on its history, it is interesting to note his similar belief in the joint progression of game music and technology. "Although the likes of *Mario Bros.*, *Zelda*, *Sonic* and *Outrun* will always be considered classics by hardcore gamers, it wasn't until the introduction of games on CD that the mainstream started to take a serious interest in the potential of music in games," said O'Connor-Read. "With CD the bandwidth for audio content in games exploded and audio programmers were able to use real instruments to record their music and game companies

could add licensed tracks from popular recording artists. With the launch of the PlayStation, for example, the 'music game' genre was able to flourish (e.g. *Parrapa the Rapper*) and racing games like *Wipeout* pushed the boundaries for music exploitation in game soundtracks featuring hot dance acts like The Chemical Bros., Orbital and Fluke."

It's interesting, then, to imagine the future of video game music. Now that orchestral and synthetic blends of original scores immerse gamers in ways previously unimagined, it's hard to believe what expanded formats like BluRay or HD-DVD will provide. The hardware itself should provide for landmark achievements in gaming, allowing the latest consoles to stream downloaded soundtracks in order to provide a seamless, unique experience every time we game. And what about the many talented musicians, technicians, and artist that will come together united under the banner of creativity. The possibilities sound literally limitless.

As the art form of gaming continues to evolve, the increasing impact of music within the industry has finally allowed the artists themselves to flourish. A newfound respect for their craft has merged the worlds of creativity and technology. It has inspired a generation of previously overlooked artists. It has delivered the ability and the means to create, to innovate, and to explore the boundaries of gaming. But most importantly, the rise of video game music has allowed so many talented, creative and unique composers and musicians to take game music to the next level, proving that the industry of interactive entertainment has finally afforded them the right to settle the score.



www.music4games.net  
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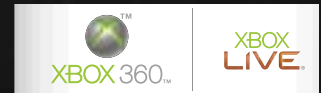
HITMAN  
BLOOD MONEY  
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Composed by Jesper Kyd



TRAPPED IN A MALL SWARMING WITH ZOMBIES,  
DO WHAT YOU MUST TO SURVIVE!  
ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING IS A WEAPON!

# DEAD RISING

CHOP 'TIL YOU DROP!



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# START YOUR OWN EXPO

SGE 2K6



## FROM INSIDE THE TAINTED MIND OF SARDIUS

Never been able to make the trek to E3? Don't feel like making the trip to California for CGE? Start your own Expo! You don't need a convention center. All it takes are a few crazy ideas and a bunch of willing friends, and you can make a successful expo in your own apartment. What follows is but one example of how you can turn your exposition dreams into unconventional reality. Behold Sardius Gaming Expo 2006 (SGE 2K6).

Without a doubt, the highlight of SGE was *The Best Friends Tournament of the Century*. Masterminded by several SGE alumni, The BFTotC is a competition where the stakes are high and the challenges are ridiculous. How ridiculous, you ask? Read on and judge for yourself.



A TYPICAL SGE MOMENT.



## SOUL FISHERMAN III

It's *Soul Calibur III*... played with fishing rod controllers. The rods have been mapped to sense physical movement accurately, so horizontal swipes translate to your character using horizontal slashes, and so on. The Nintendo Wii only wishes it could be as awesome.

**The rules:** One-on-one Vs. Mode. Random character selection. Best of five matches. May the best rod handler win.

**The results:** The most awesome match was an epic clash between Mia D and Zartan, which got so fierce that the competitors actually started swinging their fishing controllers at each other. The rods clacked with a thunderous fury as they smacked together, all while the participants' on-screen avatars perfectly duplicated the real-life fight that had erupted in my living room. The battle raged on until both fighters were reduced to less than 5% health in the fifth round, and ended with Mia D striking the winning blow. Zartan collapsed. The crowd cheered. The neighbors were very, very angry.

## BUSHIDOCHAT

*Bushido Blade* is an underrated classic among 3D fighting games. Its deep, realistic gameplay allows for one-hit kills and the disabling of individual limbs. Too bad the sequel sucked.

**The rules:** One-on-one Vs. Mode. Pre-chosen characters. Best of three matches. Oh, also, you can't look at the screen, and the only guidance you'll receive as to your opponent's location is from your partner sending you hints via PictoChat on your Nintendo DS.

**The results:** I thought I was playing it fancy by running around a lot, but it turns out that my opponent took out my legs early on and I was just flopping around on the ground the entire time. It didn't help that the PictoChat channel was filled with about 15 other people drowning out potentially helpful advice like "DON'T GET HIT W/ SWORD" with pictures that are too filthy to describe here.



## JEEP JEEP

I was wary when it was suggested that we play *Halo*. I didn't want it to be *that* kind of party. It quickly became obvious, however, that the Jeep Jeep *Halo* mod is not at all like *Halo*. The main difference being that Jeep Jeep is actually fun. Ooh, burn.

**The rules:** Four players. Each player gets a Warthog. Smash into other players to get their Warthogs to flip over so that they fall out. Points are scored only by running people over when they fall out of their vehicles.

**The results:** A few minutes into my match, I slammed into John's Warthog so hard that the thing flew up in the air and impaled itself on the top of a tree. John screamed as he shot frantically at the tree in attempts to dislodge it, all while I followed him very closely in my vehicle. I ended up winning the match after I "accidentally" ran him over a couple of times. Oh well!



The tournament left all participants drained and delusional. John spent much of his time wearing a huge stuffed crab on his head, dubbing himself "The Giant Enemy Crab" and insisting that we "hit his weak spot for massive damage." There was an experiment involving multiple Aura Interactor Vests (an old gaming accessory that amounts to strapping a subwoofer to your chest), that likely blessed many people with new and exciting health problems. The less said about the Bussy drinking game, the better.

In the end, Team Family History won the Tournament and took home a wealth of fabulous prizes: a copy of *Oregon Trail 2* and a Philips CD-i game console. Other, crappier teams were awarded with prizes ranging from a Virtual Boy to a "My Little Pony" stickerbook. And everyone went home with fond, loving memories of togetherness.

Also, hangovers.

## FINAL THOUGHTS: TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPO

After certain neck-biting and savefile-deleting incidents of previous years, I've learned a few lessons about how to organize a gaming party that won't leave everyone feeling like their time was wasted. Here are some of the most important rules to follow.

- **Know who you're inviting.** Internet-based mass invites may seem like a good idea, but... well, they're not. If you have a suspicion that someone is going to act like an ass at your party, don't invite that person. Preemptive ass-detection is key, as it only takes one disruptive guest to make everyone suffer.

- **Have plenty of food and drink on hand.** People tend to want to eat and drink things at a party. The trick is, you don't have to pay for it! Encourage your guests to bring their own drinks and snacks to share with everyone, and your private stash of Boo Berry will be safe!

- **Plan things in advance.** Reduce the down-time by planning activities as much as possible beforehand. Multiplayer games and movies make for great group activities, and field trips to restaurants and the local arcade are good for variety and fresh air. Keep everyone busy and involved!

Have fun, and feel free to tell us about your gaming-related get-togethers at Luv2Game.com! Who knows, your expo could become the next PAX!



JAMES AND I ARE ENEMIES!





# X-COM

UFO DEFENSE

Exhumed by **Arleth**



In 1994, there was a game that stepped in quietly, without much fanfare, and somehow became the highest-selling PC title of 1995. Created by the Gollop brothers, *X-Com: UFO Defense* places the player in command of an elite para-military syndicate charged with the defense of the world against the alien menace. X-Com is responsible for the safety and welfare of its contributing sponsors from a multitude of threats, including abduction, terror raids and government infiltration. Global management takes



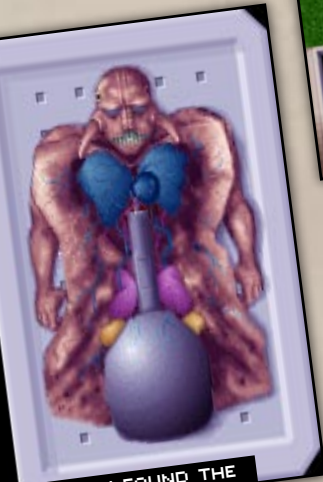
HIDE IN THE GRASS FROM THE EXPLOSION. THE ODDLY REPEATING PATTERN WILL

technology onto the field. Your R&D teams (a.k.a. Rob & Duplicate) will be working around the clock, fabricating new product to put into use in the field, or to sell the spoils of war on the black market. Alien cadavers fetch a street price of \$20,000, and it only goes up from there.

Intercepting and recovering UFOs is as nerve-racking as it is rewarding. Successful extraction will require proper equipment, personnel, intelligence, and timing.

### Floater autopsy

The creature has been drastically altered by surgery. The device which seems to form the core of the body is a life support system, taking over the function of heart, lungs and digestive system. This would enable the creature to survive in extremely hostile environments. The brain is smaller than ours, but the sensory organs are well developed.



FLOATER? DOES THAT MEAN YOU FOUND THE ALIEN IN THE TOILET?

place in real-time, with the option to send multiple interceptors to take down alien craft. You'll need to monitor graphs of reported alien activity for areas not covered by your surveillance systems, and develop a network of bases to expand your reach of power.

New players will soon realize that as time goes on, they will be fighting a losing battle. Newer, stronger breeds of aliens make their presence known over time, bringing even deadlier

Platform: PC, PSX  
Publisher: MicroProse  
Developer: MicroProse  
Release date: 1994  
Genre: Turn-based Tactical/Global Strategy



KOU, WHAT DID THEY DO TO YOU? ;\_;



ALL IT NEEDS NOW ARE SOME RIMS AND A WING.



HQ-ROME? DOES THAT MEAN IT'S IN 1080I?

Attempting to battle during night should be avoided whenever possible, though portable flares can lower your disadvantage. Learning the different types of crafts will tip you off as to their functions and ranking staff. Arming your X-Com agents with incapacitative equipment will allow you to capture and interrogate aliens to learn their tactics, physiology and hierarchy. Finally, your agents will develop over time, gaining confidence and ability during their career. Younger X-Com agents are much more susceptible to panic, but accompanying a ranking officer boosts their morale dramatically. They'll go to pieces if their officer dies, however.

The Terran weapons arsenal in *X-Com* was designed with tactics in mind. Timed explosives can be used to breach walls. Smoke grenades can provide cover so that X-Com agents may deploy safely. Proximity grenades and motion detectors can cover hard-to-defend areas, as well as alert you to possible flanking maneuvers. Heavy weapons carry Armor-Piercing, High-Explosive and Incendiary ammunition, which can help clear vegetation in the Amazon, provide night-time illumination, and rip armored

units apart. Finally, you may eschew soldiers for Heavy Weapons Platforms (HWP), which are armored, carry lots of ammunition, and are immune to panic, but gain no experience. Having these powerful armaments available at the start of your campaign, you can only wonder at what the aliens are equipped with.

*X-Com: UFO Defense* begins with a rather severe learning curve, so it is absolutely necessary that you read the manual before starting. The replay value is staggering, as you learn better and faster builds while developing the ultimate super-soldiers. Researching different technology branches in the beginning of the game can make or break your campaign. If you're up to the challenge and enjoy turn-based tactical games, or even if you've never played a game in this genre, *X-Com* is an excellent place to start.

-If you need help beginning your new game, or want to discuss strategies, come visit us at [www.luv2game.com](http://www.luv2game.com)!



DESTROY THE ALIENS WITH THE CUNNING USE OF A CUBE!



THIS RANDOM WALL MUST BE DESTROYED!



# KARATE SPIRITS 3D

**Publisher:** Bandai  
**Developer:** Bandai  
**Release Date:** July 2006

**Genre:** Sports  
**Category:** Fighting  
**# of Players:** 1

For fighting game fans, the pickings have been very slim when it comes to solid fisticuffs on mobile. Let's face it, unless you were lucky enough to get your hands on *Brady Bunch Kung Fu*, which in itself was more of a casual fighting game, you've probably been let down up until now. If you have a taste for technical 3D fighters like *Virtua Fighter*, then you may be interested in getting *Karate Spirits* on your phone.

*Karate Spirits* is a 3D fighting game where you test your skill against five powerful martial artists. Each has a unique fighting style, and when you select your character, you will be able to nurture his skills from a white belt apprentice all the way up to a black belt master. This move up in rank results from mastering and unlocking moves as well as performing successfully in matches.



The available modes are Training, Promotion Test, Free Fight and 100 Round Kumite. In Training, you can practice all of your karate techniques using any available fighter against the CPU. The opponent can be set to stand, guard, fight and attack. With Promotion Test, you must complete five tasks including defeating an opponent within a time limit or executing chain combos. The missions will vary from character to character and if completed, your character will also move up a rank. Playing a Free Fight, your fighter and opponent will battle it out one-on-one, but the true test of a master will come with the 100 Round Kumite. That's right, 100 rounds.

In the Kumite, you will be pitted against fighters (the same five in recurring fashion), one after another until you can no longer stand or go through all 100 of them. As you move through the matches, your Hit Points and fighting techniques will increase and the opponents will get stronger and more skillful. Every 5 wins, you will reach a save point to restart from if you lose and if you don't continue, you must restart from the beginning all over again. This Kumite is long and arduous and only the truly skilled will survive.

As we mentioned earlier, not all of the techniques are available from the start of the game. As your character goes up in rank, he will acquire new and more powerful ones. These are punches, kicks, grabs and even super moves. They will all be controlled using button combinations that have been simplified to also allow for juggles and counterattacks. Because of this, the game is quick to understand in terms of fighting technique, but it still leaves it up to you as to how effective the fighter actually is. Trust us when we say that you'll really need to know your stuff if you hope to reach the final battle.

For each character, you can cycle through all the belts, outfits and rankings that you have unlocked and they will all be available at any time. The fighters themselves all have distinct moves and appearances but what I was impressed with the most is how easy their animations flow when juggling and hitting combos. The action isn't very fast and the audio could have benefited from something a little more exciting, yet it wasn't terribly needed.

*Karate Spirits 3D* has enough moves, techniques and action to satisfy a serious 3D fighting fan. It starts off very easy but quickly becomes more engaging and forces you to use every bit of your fighting knowledge. (For an added challenge, you can always try selecting a lower-ranked fighter and place him against a computer-controlled higher ranked one that you have created.) If it is available through your carrier and your phone can support it, you'll finally enjoy a fighting experience with depth.



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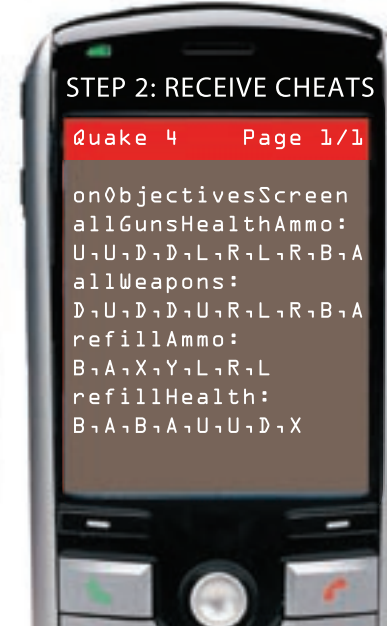
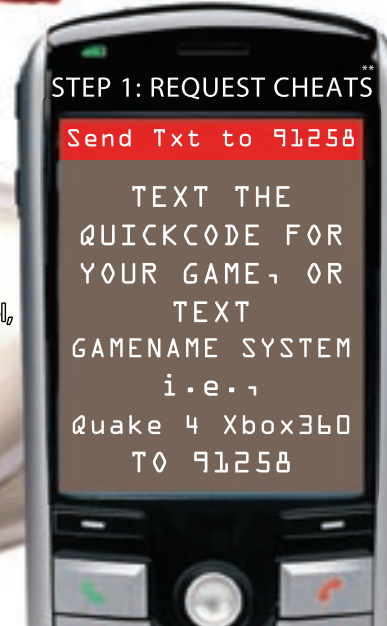
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# OFFICE WRESTLING

Publisher: Centerscore  
Developer: Centerscore  
Release Date: August 2006

Genre: Platform  
Category: Fighting  
# of Players: 1

Everyone can remember having to work for someone they disliked. Whether it was the overweight boss with the bad breath who took out frustrations on you ("sweaty bettys") or the newly promoted schmuck going through a power trip, there is nothing more dreadful than going to work and dealing with an arduous overseer. Let's face it, bad managers are more plentiful than drunken Irishmen at a Saint Patrick's Day parade.

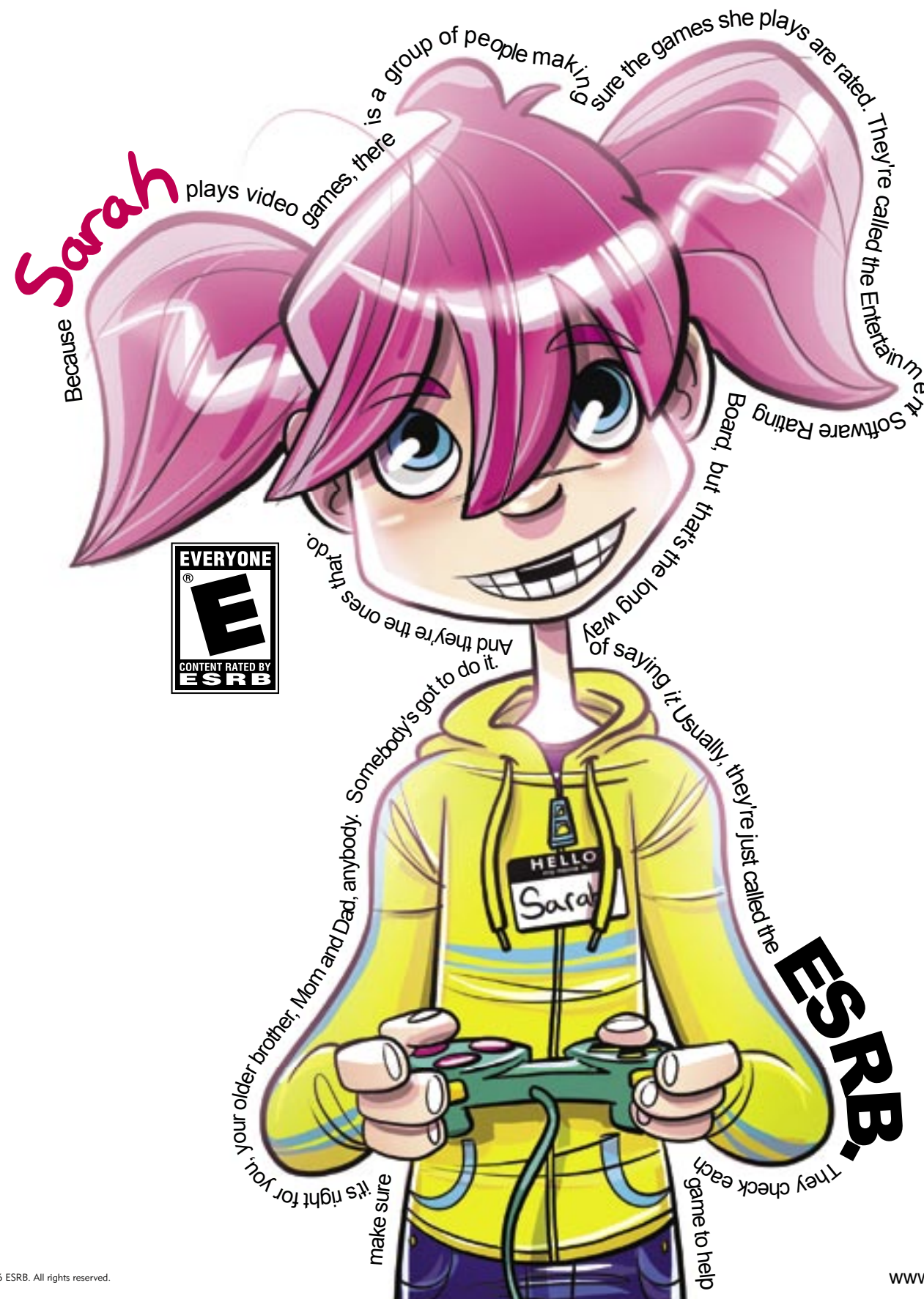
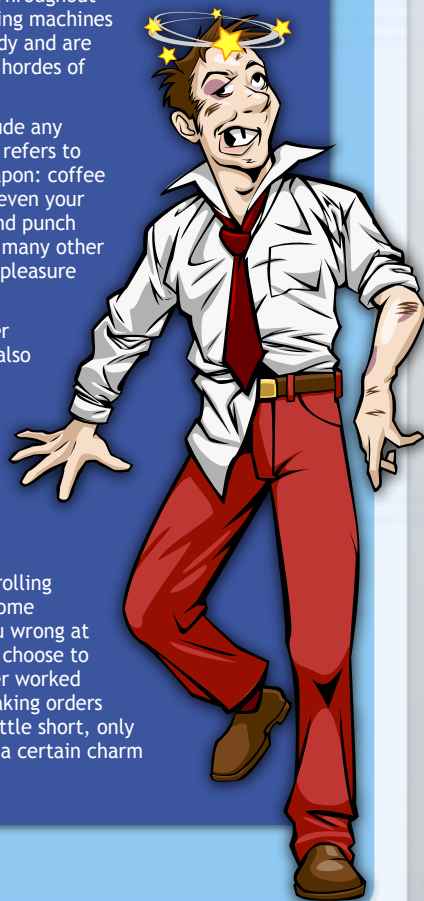
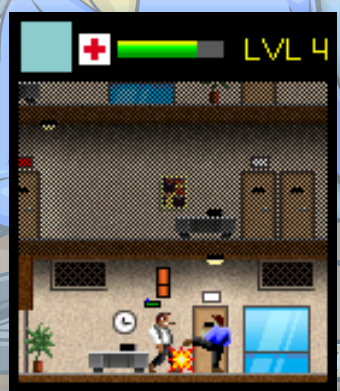
*Office Wrestling* is set in the corporate headquarters of a fictional company called Affable Corp. You play the role of an office assistant who has had enough of "The Man" and is on a quest to take him, and anyone or anything that stands in your way, down. Cubicle walls be damned! The reason is that Mr. Affable, the majority owner of the corporation, is being held hostage on the top floor by the evil Mr. Zareba and his cronies, until he signs over the company. Thankfully, you have the help of the building's janitor, who doubles as your sensei, who will teach you new moves and give tips along the way.

The office building consists of twenty floors and is created in a maze-like pattern by way of doors and elevators. As the game goes, you must smash through waves of enemies and acquire keys or disable cameras in old side-scrolling glory until you get to the executive office. (Most of the keys are held by the managers who are a tad bit tougher than the regular cronies.) Throughout the building you will also find an abundance of vending machines that can be used to regain life. They come in handy and are strategically positioned in areas where there are hordes of brainwashed employees.

Just so you know, the game doesn't really include any traditional wrestling, so I'm assuming the title refers to the no-rules combat where everything is a weapon: coffee pots, mail carts, sodas, ergonomic chairs, and even your co-workers! Sure, you can always choose to kick and punch your way through, but why do that when there are so many other creative ways to knock off the enemies? (There is much pleasure in throwing enemies out the windows.)

The game controls fairly and navigating combat is never difficult. Actually, it's rather enjoyable. Centerscore also implanted a system where you can change character names. You can then have yourself beat the crap out of your real boss, or any other antagonist in your life, virtually. It's a simple feature but it's totally worth it. Just imagine you're taking down all those jerks you've worked for or with in the past.

*Office Wrestling* is a quirky side-scrolling brawler because it lets you exact some justice on those who have done you wrong at one point or another. That's if you choose to change the names. So if you've ever worked for someone you couldn't handle taking orders from, stick it to them here. It's a little short, only twenty floors, but it's infused with a certain charm that's hard to dislike.



Because Sarah plays video games, there is a group of people making sure the games she plays are rated. They're called the Entertainment Software Rating Board, but that's the long way of saying it. Usually, they're just called the ESRB.



And they're the ones that do.

make sure it's right for you, your older brother, Mom and Dad, anybody. Somebody's got to do it.

They check each game to help

ESRB



*Spin Blocks 360* is a nifty puzzle game in which you must spin groups of colored blocks to form chains and clear them. However, the blocks don't just differentiate in color like most puzzle games, but also differ in the patterns in which they must be cleared.

For example, some blocks have either horizontal or vertical arrows on them and must be grouped and cleared in the way the arrow indicates. There are also cross, x-shaped, and solid blocks. To clear all of them, a 2x2 cursor is placed over a set of four blocks and you can then rotate them either clockwise or counter-clockwise. This causes all four highlighted blocks to shift position and make matches.

On each level, there is a spin counter on the lower left hand corner of the screen that displays a set number of spins allowed before another set of blocks is dropped onto the board. This can be a blessing or a curse, seeing as often, you run out of combinations and need more blocks, while other times you already have too many. In case you do find yourself in the position of not having enough blocks, there is an option to force-drop more blocks, but we never found myself in much need of. (Our puzzle solving skills couldn't handle many at a time.) As usual, if your pile reaches the top of the screen, the game is over.

The game doesn't have a clock, so it allows you the time to carefully plan moves and, if you're smart enough, create some awesome combos. The developers also incorporated a unique mechanic in which the screen spins once you clear a certain type of block. What we mean by this is that when this happens, you must literally flip the phone, sideways or upside down, to continue. The buttons all change function, so up becomes down and vice-versa, and the blocks that had to be cleared in an up to down pattern must now be cleared in a right to left pattern. This forces you to change your strategy. It's a crazy feature, but it keeps the game fresh and keeps you on your toes.

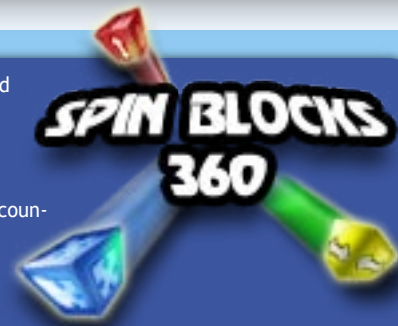
The game features two modes in which to try your spinning skills. The main mode that was previously described starts off simply but as you access higher levels, it'll make you break a sweat. The second mode is called My Puzzles. Here you can connect to Centerscore's online database and download puzzles that the programmers have created.

These puzzles play like the main game but only allow you a certain number of rotations before the game is over. It's usually three, and you must use these to clear the entire screen. Some of them are hard, but it's really cool to watch one or two spins take down a whole screen of blocks once you've figure it out. I enjoyed this mode of play even more than the main game, so I wish there were more of these puzzles for me to play right now, but I guess I'll just have to wait and download more later. Apparently, Centerscore will update these puzzles every two weeks, so the replay value should be very high.

*Spin Blocks 360* comes with a high score database for all of you competitive junkies who get a kick out of showing off to the world. We don't really have too many complaints with the game; the controls are responsive, music is joyful, animation is fluid, and the replay value is high. So if you want to try a puzzle game with a new spin (pun intended), take this one out for a spin (pun intended again.)

**Publisher:** Centerscore  
**Developer:** Centerscore  
**Release Date:** August 2006

**Genre:** Puzzle  
**Category:** Strategy  
**# of Players:** 1



*Moon Patrol EX* is an updated mobile version of another arcade classic that was infamous for swallowing down hard-earned quarters. In it, players drive a moon buggy armed with weapons and a jump suspension to protect a planet from marauding aliens.

To finish the game, you must complete the varying legs of a patrol course that are designated as alphabetical points. Each leg will have a marker A-Z that will act as a new starting point in case you get taken out and certain points will be checkpoints where your current totals are added up. Apart from the attacks of enemy spaceships the course will also have you avoiding rocks, craters, mines, and other dangers. For this, the buggy has a cannon that fires ahead of you and an anti-aircraft gun that fires upwards. The jump suspension comes in handy when you have to avoid land-based dangers.

In Classic mode, the original arcade version is presented. Every detail, down to the bouncing tires after you've been hit, has been put in place. This is yet another seamless translation to mobile, but remember, this is the EX version so a new Arrange mode has been added. What this means is that a new features have been implemented to bring it up to speed.

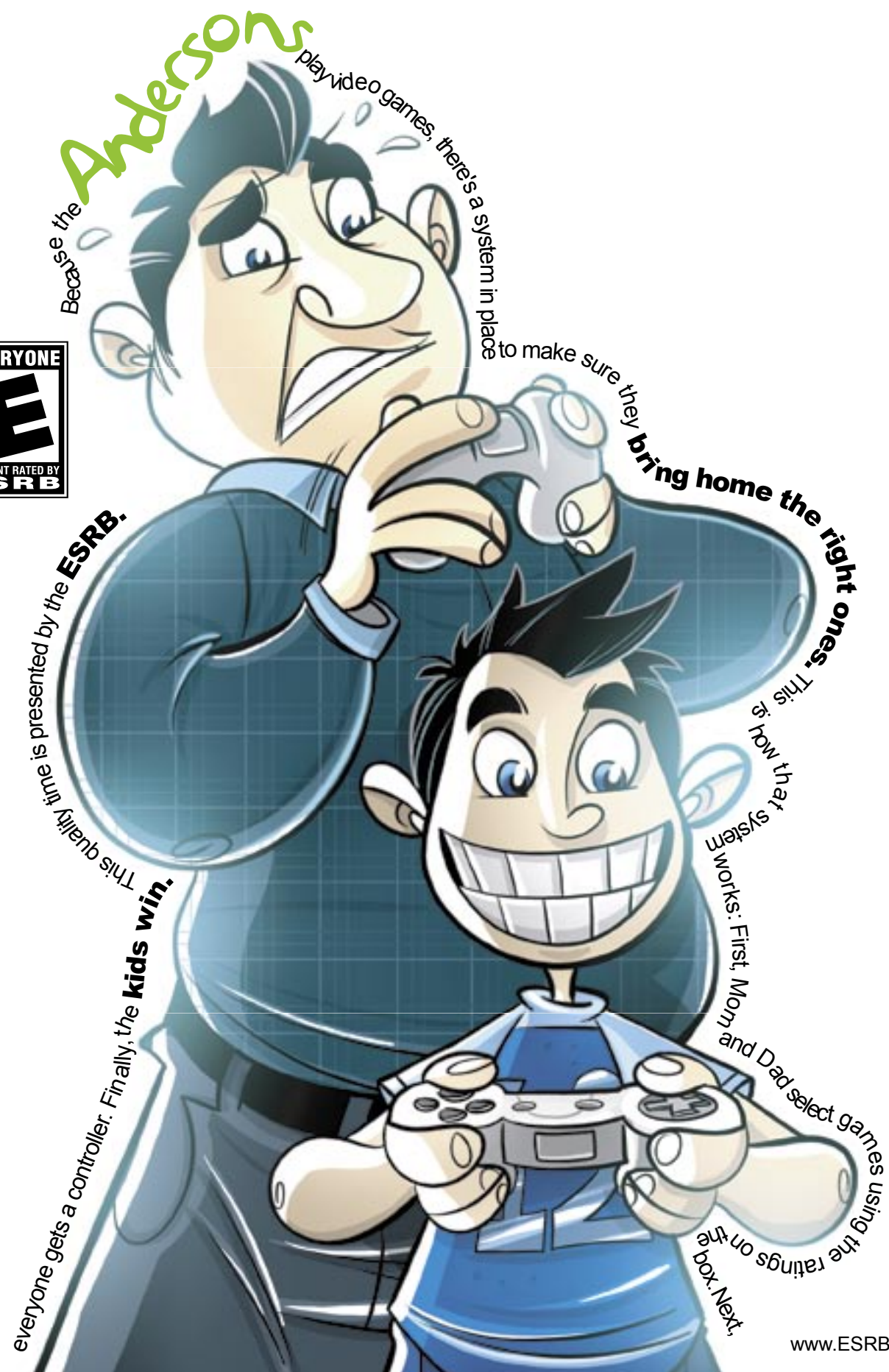
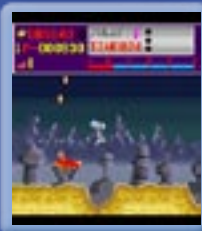
In Arrange mode, you now have the choice of three vehicles. Unit 1 will have normal speed and jumping abilities. Unit 2 has enhanced speed and jumping abilities. Unit 3 moves at a slower speed, but can withstand one enemy attack. Additionally, all units have the choice of three different shooting variations to be more effective in the area you need and the game also receives a visual makeover for added appeal.

To get the highest score possible you'll have to move quickly but that will make it more difficult to avoid dangers. Jumping must also be timed so you'll have to master speed control, and the simultaneous use of jump and fire. This game demands a good deal of attention. If you happen to get to the end of the course, all points are added up and you're congratulated for a job well done. However, your task isn't finished. A second Champion course must then be played, which obviously ends up being more difficult and includes more enemies.

*Moon Patrol* in its original form would have already been a solid download but with the addition of the Arrange mode, it really calls out gamers who enjoy the classics. The best thing about this version is that after all those years, you may finally be able to finish the game. (You probably just never had enough quarters before.) So if you're in the market for another throwback to the good old days, this is one for you.

**Publisher:** Bandai  
**Developer:** Bandai  
**Release Date:** July 2006

**Genre:** Classic  
**Category:** Shooting  
**# of Players:** 1







*Disgaea 2* is the largest and most engrossing console game that has ever been made, period. Where other games have bonus content that is really only window dressing to get the player to "ooh" and "aah" for a day or so, *Disgaea 2* offers not one but *two* secret worlds to play in. This is a game that has enough content within it that you'll be playing until NIS releases their next SRPG a year from now, or even longer. *Disgaea 2* just dwarfs everything in size by adding so much more to the original *Disgaea*. There's more stages, more Geo Symbols, more substance to the Item World, more variety in classes, more things to do in the Dark Assembly, and more insidiously challenging maps.

The best thing about *Disgaea 2* is that none of these additions feel stuck on or out of place; they all feel seamlessly woven into the game. The addition of a Dark Court enables the character to acquire felonies. These felonies affect shop prices, the attitude senators have towards you, and even adds to the amount of experience you can earn. What makes this new system so enjoyable is that you can let a Mage be charged with having too much SP, but have a Fighter take the felony in her place. The amount of freedom you have with this new system is immense, when you factor in that you can be charged multiple times for the same crime if the character has reincarnated after a subpoena is issued.

That might seem rather annoying, since reincarnation means you have to start over again at level 1 and grind your way back up, but the levelling in *Disgaea 2* has been engineered to be much faster than it has ever been in an NIS game. Many classes require less experience than what was generally needed to gain levels in the past, and enemies give you more experience for defeating them. On top of this, there's the addition of two new Geo Symbols that can speed the process up even more. One of these effects increases



Review by Hitoshura

the levels of enemies standing on a Geo Panel, and another makes the target vulnerable to being killed in one hit regardless of its stats. Once you've become accustomed to the game it won't take long to get a character from level 1 to 9999.

Those new Geo Symbols are just the tip of the iceberg, as there are new ones that can restrict what attacks you can use, enhance your spell caster's potency, add more colored panels to the map, and even end your game. One clever twist however is that some of these symbols can move like NPCs. A moving Geo Symbol can be your worst nightmare, or it can be one of the cleverest things a player will see. This simple twist allows for alarming creativity in the map designs. The Dark World maps deserve special appreciation, containing by far the most difficult puzzles in an SRPG ever. All of it results from sadistic positioning of those Geo Symbols and their effects. Dark World stage 11-7 in particular has to be one of most difficult stages of any SRPG to date, because everything is invincible while your characters lose 40% of their HP each turn. Getting rid of those effects without dying is no easy task when the Geo Symbols creating those effects can move.

*Disgaea 2*'s aesthetics, however, are not quite as good as the gameplay. That doesn't mean it's badly presented, but this isn't a game where you're likely to pay much attention to it. Though the game is running in hi-res mode, the sprites and textures all appear to still be low-res. This makes them appear blurry when the camera zooms in, which is rare enough that you won't notice it too much. The overall style of *Disgaea 2* is much the same as it is in most of Nippon Ichi's other games, with simple visuals and a huge variety of music. The BGM is probably the best in a Nippon Ichi game to date, with only a handful of annoying tracks in the entire game. Even when you do encounter them, they mostly play during cut-scenes and the first Item World, areas you'll be leaving behind.

Another minor issue with the game is in the localization. It nails the *Disgaea* sense of humor better than ever, especially the News Break

# DISGAEA 2

## Cursed Memories

Publisher: NIS America  
 Developer: Nippon Ichi Software  
 Release Date: 8/29/2006  
 Genre(s): RPG  
 Category: Strategy  
 # of Players: 1







## FROM LEVEL 1 TO 9999 IN UNDER 40 HOURS

By: Hitoshura

Playing through the story in *Disgaea 2* normally takes about forty to fifty hours of playing time, but getting the most the game has to offer can take hundreds of hours more. There are some people who just don't have that kind of time to devote to a game. For those looking for a quick fix, without resorting to cheating, we've come up with a guide for you. It is possible to get a character from level 1 to 9999 and finish the game on a first playthrough in less than 40 hours.

You will need to create a Thief. They are the most useful character class at level 9999 because the ultimate items can only be gotten by stealing them from level 9999 Lord Item Gods. The best items to equip to a Thief are a Gun, shoes, glasses, and a treasure item that increases all stats (such as the Imperial Seal). The other reason you'll need a Thief is that towards the end of this procedure, you'll need to defeat Item World bosses that are at a much higher level than the Thief is by relying on her ability to poison enemies with alarming regularity.

the destination. In the event that there happens to be a Gate Keeper on top of the exit, tower throw Adell towards the gate and use an appropriate Fist skill to knock the enemy off it. In order to for Adell to also move on that same turn, you must pick him up directly from the Base Panel.

than the current floor number the item is at if you want to find it. Court gates never appear on odd-numbered floors or floors that are a multiple of ten, so when you reach a court gate on the 8th, 18th, 28th floor etc, keep on going to the Boss Floor and clear it.



To reach level 9999 quickly, you will need to amass Felonies for your thief. Each Felony a character gets increases the chance a proposal will pass and the amount of experience they earn by 1%, which eventually caps at 300%. Once you start getting Felonies after episode 3-3 is cleared, there are several things you can do to speed up the process. The subpoenas that you use for getting the Felonies contain low-level Item Worlds. Therefore, you should always try to clear every tenth floor to nab a Mr. Gency Exit, because you will be using tons of these.

Characters can acquire Felonies from other characters that have been issued a subpoena. Therefore, you should equip them with increasingly more powerful items to get their stats higher, so you can farm subpoenas off of them. The wonderful side effect of those Felonies is they will reward you with the money you need to buy better equipment.

You can acquire Felonies faster by moving the Judge specialists between subpoenas. If you exit an item after reaching a court gate on the sixth floor, you can leave the Item World, then move a Judge at level 8 into that item, and find the Court Gate just two floors down. You won't find a Court Gate in an Item World if you move a Judge that has the same power as the floor you're currently at. The Judge has to be higher



While in the Item World, be on the lookout for pirates. Pirates sometimes appear



To get through Item Worlds quickly you need to master the art of tower throwing. Tower throwing is simply picking up several characters at once to form a tower, and then throwing each character towards



intermissions between every chapter, but the translation in some other spots seems a bit odd. Yukimaru says "zam" a lot in her dialogue, and this wouldn't be so bad if not for the fact her English voice actress' delivery on that one word seems jarringly out of place. This is in stark contrast to her dialogue in the Japanese voice track where she says "gozaru" instead, which has a completely different meaning and rolls off her tongue naturally. There's also some other strange localization choices, as in certain Geo Symbol names and even things like the Dark Sun Report. The localization seems, at points, more confusing than it really needs to be.

The story in *Disgaea 2* is quite different than past NIS efforts. Even though the plot is as full of comedy and parody as the original ever was, the main focus of the story is more serious in nature than Laharl's madcap adventures. Adell is out to save Veldime and happens to be the only human there that hasn't been transformed into a demon yet, bringing up the obvious questions about why only Adell hasn't transformed. When his family tries to summon Overlord Zenon so Adell can beat him and end the curse that's transforming everyone into demons, they get Rozalin instead of Zenon, and it's obviously not just a coincidence that they did. The story is more about deception than anything else, because the main characters expertly deceive everyone around them, including themselves. The focus on the theme of

deception for a character driven story is an interesting change of pace from the politicized save-the-world affairs that many SRPGs concern themselves with.

Many SRPGs try to challenge the player with smart enemies. *Disgaea 2* does things differently because it challenges the player not with smarter enemies, but with complicated situations that require the player to outsmart themselves rather than an AI script. Puzzles such as clearing the map in so many turns, dealing with invincible enemies, getting rid of annoying Geo Symbols, or using skills to do more than just damage enemies -- stuff like that is what makes *Disgaea 2* fantastic. It doesn't do what the cookie cutter SRPG does, and instead takes a new spin on the word "strategy" by forcing the player to think in terms of efficiency rather than just winning. *Disgaea 2* is a game that just never stops trying to get the player to think of new and ingenious ways to slaughter the opposition, which means there's always something new to come back to. Whether it's the amazing music, the ton of secrets, the great sense of humor, the interesting story, or the insanity of breaking every unwritten rule in the RPG book, this game will linger on in memory for a very long time and won't be forgotten by those who've played it.

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



## INTERVIEW

We happened to catch the producer of *Disgaea 2*, Souhei Niikawa, taking a short break from creating the best strategy RPGs on the planet and took the opportunity to ask him a few brief questions.

**HGM:** What do you think are the reasons *Disgaea* has the fans that it does?

**Souhei Niikawa:** I think it was a

combination of various factors that contributed to the strong fan following, but I believe it comes down to the game system and the crazy characters. *Disgaea* has a great "do anything you want" game play that allows you to go beyond any other previous SRPGs and that won many people over. Also, some of the more casual gamers were attracted by the crazy little demented characters that are completely over the top.

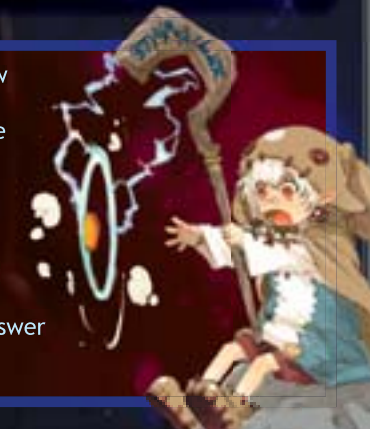
**HGM:** Why did you choose to make the game run in hi-res mode, when your previous games were in low-res?

**SN:** I think we were long due for an overhaul regarding graphics. Our fans were asking for it and our staff members were asking for it as well, so going hi-res was necessary for *Disgaea 2*.

**HGM:** What do you think the chances are a player will find every secret *Disgaea 2* has without a guidebook (shameless plug)?

**SN:** Chances are slim to none. There are the obvious easy secrets in the game that are hinted through out the story, and there are secrets that are not hinted at all. Players can do a trial and error strategy to figure them out, but that would take forever, so the best thing to do is to use the strategy guide.

**HGM:** We know you're busy working on the next secret NIS project so we won't keep you any longer. Thanks for taking a moment to answer our questions!





on the second turn and their leaders hold treasure maps. Be sure to defeat them, because the maps are the keys to unlocking a secret world that you must get to if you want to reach level 9999. There are six different pirates that appear on the first nineteen floors of an item. Another six pirates will be added among them from floor 21 onwards, three more from floor 41 onwards, and finally, one more from floor 61 onwards. To get them to show up more often, you need to collect at least eight of their maps and equip them to characters in your army. Pirates tend to be of a much higher level than other enemies

on the floor, so don't try to take them on until later on when your stats are high enough to kill the leader in one shot. Go for the first twelve maps inside subpoenas by waiting one turn before heading to the next floor, then go for the remaining four inside Legendary Items.

Lastly, never pass up a chance to kill a few enemies with the Deathblow Geo Effect. This Effect makes anything standing on it susceptible to being killed in one hit, which is perfect for hunting specialists, pirates, or even bosses. This Geo Effect makes any floor an awesome place to get

mana and experience quickly, especially if an Invincibility Effect is also present.



## Episode 1: spend about 3 hours here.

Equip Adell with the Imperial Seal and use him to kill all the enemies in the Tutorial Maps to amass 12 mana. Once the Dark Assembly is open he can create



an "Incompetent" Thief. Next, have Adell clear Episode 1-1 to get six more mana, so that he can now create eight "Good-For-Nothing" Fighters for tower throwing purposes. Level up the Imperial Seal to 30 via the Item World, by having Adell knock any Gate Keepers off the exits. Use the mana you got from any floors with the Deathblow Geo Effect to add shoes and glasses to Rosenqueen's inventory. Buy Slippers and Glasses to get them to level 20, so that upon your return you have some more mana to increase the product rank to 1, which enables you to buy a Pulse Gun. Level the Gun up to 30 via the Item World.



**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 3 HOURS**

## Episode 2: spend about 30 minutes here.

By the time your Thief clears this Episode she'll be around Level 10, which is the requirement to unlock the next class in the Thief group. While you're here, increase the product rank to 2.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 3 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES.**

## Episode 3: spend about 2 hours here.

Buy a Mk. II and Binoculars and get them to level 20. Reincarnate your Thief into a Rogue, equip those new items, and clear the stages up to 3-3. The Dark Court system will become available, so now you can get the Rogue's Felony count to 3. During this scenario you'll receive a Dark Rosary; level it up to 20 before replacing the Imperial Seal. On stage 3-4 you can

take an optional shortcut by stealing a Testament from the boss here. It's not a requirement because there's only a 1% chance to steal it, but if you're lucky and persistent, it can save you a lot of time later on.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 5 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES.**



## Episode 4: spend about 3 hours here.

Raise the product rank to 4 and buy a Rose Whip, then level the Whip up to 30.



Repeatedly clear stage 4-3, letting the Nekomatas reach Level 17 before you kill them, so you can get your Rogue to Level 20. Reincarnate her into a Prinny to clear her criminal record, then buy Cross-Trainers and a Plastic Nose from Rosenqueen. Level them both up to 20 in the Item World, and along the way, make sure your new Prinny earns at least 480 Mana.

Once the Prinny has 480 mana, accept all subpoenas before reincarnating to an "Average" Scout, so you can get a head start on racking up felonies. Before you clear this Episode, buy and level up a Ray Gun.



**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 8 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES.**

## Episode 5: spend about 2 hours here.

Obtain 30 Felonies, and while you're here, steal the Devil Ring from the neutral character in stage 5-3. Level it up to 20 to replace the Dark Rosary. Pass five "Stronger Enemies" proposals before clearing the episode.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 10 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES.**



## Episode 6: spend about 3 hours here.



Before moving any further, check your equipment to see if any Thief Lover specialists have appeared. Dive into those Item Worlds to subdue them, because they are crucial into raising your stealing success rate and your stats. From now on, look for Thief Lover specialists to appear on your equipment before diving into Item Worlds.

Once you're done checking and subduing those specialists, raise the product rank of the shop to 6 and get the following items to level 20: Old Glory, Ninja Tabi, and

Nightvision. While you're in those Item Worlds, get at least 250 mana for Adell and check the Mystery Gates for any Cell Phone shops. Buy at least three Cell Phones that summon the "Defender of Earth."

Get your Felony count to 50, and reincarnate a level 40 or higher Scout to a Bandit at the "Skilled" creation level, so the felony stamp carries over.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 13 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES.**

## Episode 7: spend about 3 hours here.

Start this Episode by returning the enemies' levels to normal and getting your felony count up to 75 so that you can pass the Cave of Ordeals proposal. Use the Ordeal 1 stage to get the Bandit up to level 80. Use those three Defender of Earth Cell Phones while clearing stages 7-1 through 7-3, then make Adell a senator in the Dark Assembly so he can vote on and pass the EDF's proposal to "Rescue

the Earth Hero!" This will require a lot of bribing to pass, so buy items from the General Store to keep costs down. After the proposal has passed, go to the extra stage it unlocked, steal Sophia's Mirror from the boss, and get it to level 20. You'll also receive an Accelerator, so replace the Ninja Tabi with it, but don't level it up just yet.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 16 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES.**





## Episode 8: spend a little over 3 hours here.

Start by getting your Felony count up to 99, and then increase the product rank to 8. Purchase a Demon Cry and level it up to 30, along with a Foresight and Crisis, both to level up to level 20. While you're in the Item World, look for a Mana Potion shop and buy four Mana Potions III. You'll need them in order to reincarnate to the next tier of thieves.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 20 HOURS.**



## Episode 9: spend about 2 hours here.



Get as many subpoenas as you can from the Prinny and any other characters before you reincarnate it into a Trickster at the "Distinguished" quality level, then add 50 felonies to her stamp. Use the remaining Mana Potion III so that she gets 1000 mana. Use that mana to pass five "Stronger Enemies" proposals before clearing the Episode.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 22 HOURS.**

## Episode 10: spend about 4 hours here.

There's a lot of work to do. Use the Ordeal 1 map to get the Trickster's level up to 160 or higher. When she's achieved that, weaken all the enemies to their normal levels and start diving for felonies until you get her record up to 99. Since you'll be diving into a lot of subpoenas, now would be a great time to start collecting the first twelve treasure maps.

Increase the product rank to 10 so you can buy a Simurgh and a Furious Scale to level up to 20 and 30, respectively. Inside the Item World look for any enemies that

have a Legendary Megiddo Cannon to steal, and for Mana Potion shops. Buy 13 Mana Potions III. This may take a lot of resetting, but don't worry if you can't get enough Mana Potions. Getting that Megiddo Cannon is far more important.

After the Item World diving is done, pass five "Stronger Enemies" proposals and clear 10-1. Now reincarnate your Trickster into a Prinny and clear the Episode.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 26 HOURS.**



## Episode 11: spend about 2 hours here.

If you were unable to get 13 Mana Potions, you can make up for it now. Clear stage 10-3 repeatedly until you've got 13,000 Mana. Reincarnate your Prinny into a Genius Master Thief. When she's amassed 99 Felonies, you'll have reached the +300% experience modifier limit.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 28 HOURS.**



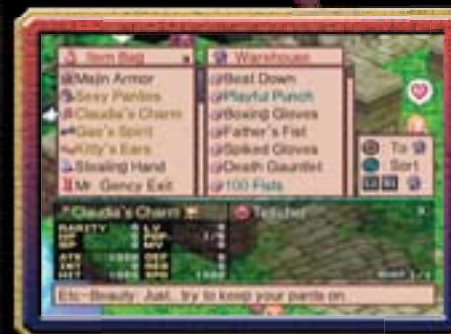
## Episode 12: spend about 3 hours here.

Return the enemies' levels to normal so you can level up the Megiddo Cannon and the Accelerator to 90, while defeating all Item Bosses along the way. Use the Item Congress to boost the Megiddo Cannon's range or critical hit rate and the Accelerator's SPD three times each. Defeat the rest of the pirates to get the last treasure maps.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 31 HOURS.**



## The Final Episode (Part 1) spend about 3 hours here.



Pass ten proposals to strengthen the enemies. Clear Ordeal 4 repeatedly until you're at level 800, then weaken them again before you pass the "Break the mysterious Seal!" proposal. In the ensuing secret stage, steal Claudia's Charm from the boss and clear it to get the Sexy Panties. These items increase your HIT stat by a tremendous amount. Increase the levels of both those items to 90, while passing as many possible HIT

increase proposals at the Item Assembly and defeating Item World bosses. The Master Thief should now be equipped with a Megiddo Cannon, Accelerator, Claudia's Charm, and Sexy Panties, each at level 90.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 34 HOURS.**

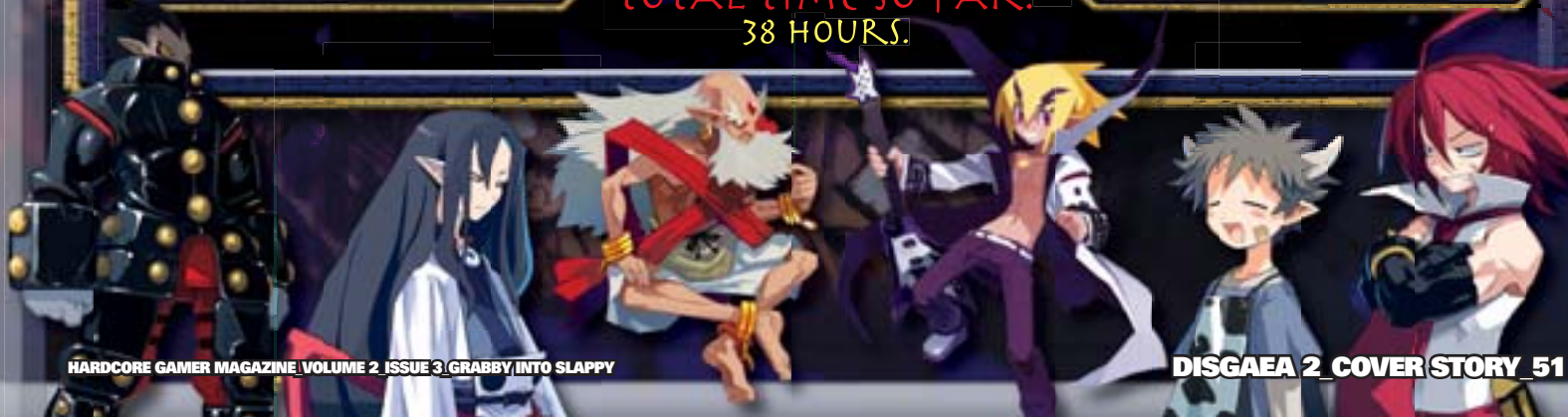


## The Final Episode (Part 2) spend about 4 hours here.



With that obscene HIT stat, pass all twenty "Stronger Enemies" proposals and use Ordeal 4 to power-level. Your HIT should now be over 800,000. You can make it easier on yourself by equipping all the specialists that affect your stats on your accessories. When you reach 800,000, head over to the Land of Carnage version of Ordeal 4 and just power-level like mad with Totenkreuz.

**TOTAL TIME SO FAR: 38 HOURS.**





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

Come join us Hardcore Gamers online at:

**LUV2GAME.COM**

The screenshot shows the Luv2Game.com website layout. At the top left is the 'HARDCORE GAMER LUV2GAME' logo. A navigation menu on the left includes links for HOME, FAVORITE, CHALLENGES, INVITE A FRIEND, SEND POST A LINK, THEATER, BANNERS AND ICONS, COMMUNITY, MESSAGE BOARDS, MEMBERS, BEST OF THE BEST, MY PROFILE, STORE, and HELP. The main content area features a 'TEAM MESSAGE' with a 'DAXTER' game advertisement, a 'BLOG' section with several articles, and a 'CHALLENGES' section with a '21. World Super Contest' and '22. Substance' challenge. Below these are 'EXCLUSIVE PSP™ SCAVENGER HUNT' and 'THE EXCLUSIVE PSP™ SCAVENGER HUNT' sections. A 'FEATURED ITEMS' section at the bottom lists various game items for sale. The right sidebar contains a 'POSS' section and a 'LATEST DECISIONS' section.

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.

This screenshot shows the 'FEATURED ITEMS' section. It lists several items for sale, each with a small image, a description, and a price. The items include:
 

- Special Edition N-Gage**: 4 in stock, 4000 Points. Price: \$53.
- Wizards of the Coast**: 4 in stock, 3700 Points. Price: \$15.
- Wiz & Wario**: 4 in stock, 3700 Points. Price: \$15.
- WCS Wizards of the Coast**: 4 in stock, 3700 Points. Price: \$15.

 Each item has a 'more info' link.



HARDCORE  
**REVIEWS**

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**HGM REVIEW GAUGE**

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



# ULTIMATE GHOSTS'N GOBLINS



Review by Wanderer

Publisher : Capcom  
 Developer : Capcom  
 Release Date : 9/2006  
 Rating : E10+

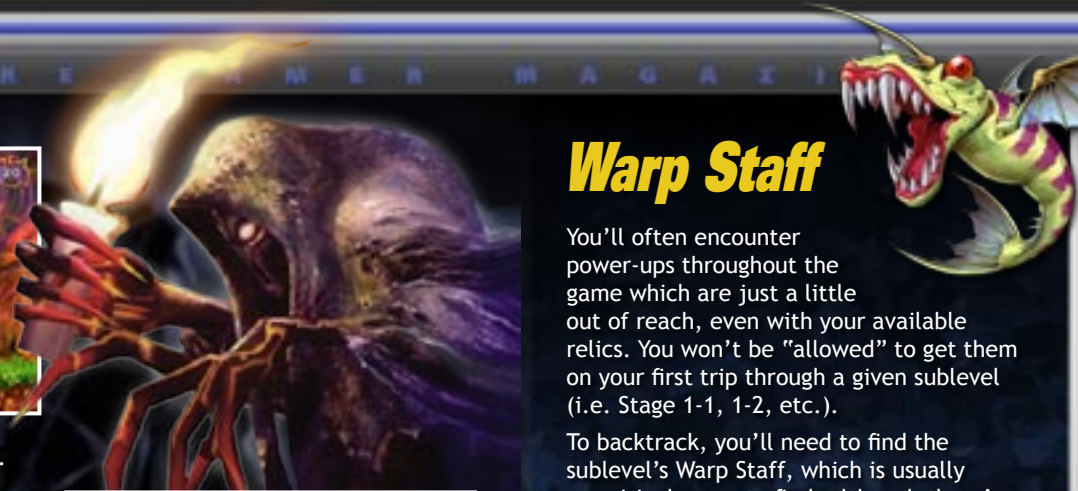
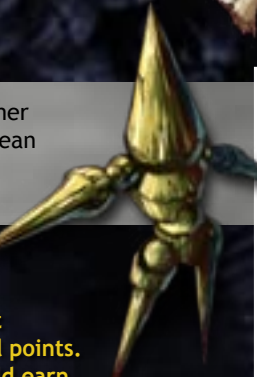
Genre(s) : Action-Platformer  
 Category : What Do You Mean I &#\$\*in' Died Again  
 # of players : 1

Back in the halcyon days of the NES, when every game was hard as nails, *Ghosts'n Goblins* was one of the hardest. Being able to defeat the first devil, let alone the first level, earned you major skill points. Beating the game itself felt like something that should earn you college credit; it's theoretically possible, but so is Communism.

The subsequent games in the series lived up to that standard, but they weren't quite as difficult. *Ultimate Ghosts'n Goblins*, however, is a 2.5D action-platformer, and it returns to the original game's standard in high style. It remixes the music, updates the graphics, provides a solidly nostalgic experience, and, just like the games that came before it, smacks the taste clean out your mouth.

Arthur has been defending his kingdom from the forces of evil for some time now. A new ruler has come to power, though, and he has a plan to mingle his bloodline with that of the royal family. He abducts the princess, and Arthur sets out to save her. That is, after all, what you do when that happens.

Fortunately, Arthur's turned his game up a notch. You can collect magic spells (fireballs, giant explosions, etc.), a host of weapons (lance, dagger, crossbow, fire flasks, bombs, boomerangs; all the greats), and various relics to improve Arthur's skills, such as boots that let him double-jump or a shield that'll deflect incoming projectiles. There are also power-ups hidden virtually everywhere; any terrain feature might conceal a treasure chest or a suit of armor, and random enemies may be carrying items. When you're killed, you instantly respawn close



to or in the location where you died. All of this may buy you a few extra seconds. *Ultimate Ghosts'n Goblins* has used the extra power of a modern console to up its challenge factor through the roof. Every level is nothing less than a test of pure gaming skill, even on the lowest difficulty setting. Enemies constantly respawn from all around you, and the platforming is both solid and intensely difficult, made moreso by the presence of enemies that are placed there specifically to foil your jumps. The level design is practically another enemy, with terrain that can change dramatically with almost no notice. You will die, many, many times. It is, in short, challenging in the way games used to be challenging, back in the glory days of the arcade quartermuncher. *Ultimate Ghosts'n Goblins* is the kind of game that's close to the edge of being impossibly difficult, but never quite goes over; while it'll occasionally kill you out of nowhere, that'll just set you back a few steps. The key to enjoying the game is to be able to roll with the punches, adapt your strategy, and minimize your losses. (You could also just flog the "continue" button like a rented mule, but that would be weak sauce. Don't be that guy.)

For some people, this process probably sounds like something they'd do to punish shoplifters in Singapore. For others, the retro gamers and the manic platformer fans ('sup Racewing) and the guys who exist to prove and improve their gaming skill, *Ultimate*



*Ghosts'n Goblins* is a gauntlet tossed at their feet; it's a drink thrown in their face. It is, in short, a hardcore game for hardcore gamers.

For casual gamers, this may be too difficult to really be worth a purchase. Try it, if you can, before you buy it.

Rating: 4 out of 5

## The Second Opinion!

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

Controlling Arthur as he runs and double jumps through brutal environments is every bit as difficult as ever, and even more rewarding.



## Warp Staff

You'll often encounter power-ups throughout the game which are just a little out of reach, even with your available relics. You won't be "allowed" to get them on your first trip through a given sublevel (i.e. Stage 1-1, 1-2, etc.).

To backtrack, you'll need to find the sublevel's Warp Staff, which is usually surprisingly easy to find, although there's also usually a trick to it. (For example, you need to jump onto one of the piles of skulls in 1-1, then ride the disappearing ledges above you up to where the Staff is hidden.) You can use a Warp Staff at any time to teleport Arthur to a previous level. It's handy for picking up new spells, new relics, and stocking up on extra lives.

Alternatively, you can opt to return to an earlier level upon defeating a level's boss. That'll put you at the start of the first sublevel, though, so it's not quite as handy as the Warp Staffs are.



FINAL SCORE :  
**4.25** of 5



# DEADRISING™



Review by Roger Danish

Publisher: Capcom  
Developer: Capcom  
Release Date: 08/08/06  
Rating: M; Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Language, Use of Alcohol

Genre(s): Action-Adventure  
Category: Zombie Shenanigans  
# of players: 1



This may be considered a shameful plug, but I wrote the official strategy guide for *Dead Rising*. The reason I'm relaying this pretty much useless factoid is that for someone that has had to live and breathe the game for the last three weeks, day in and day out, I still love it just as

much, if not more, than when I first started playing. The reverse is usually true, as by the end of the grueling cycle of guide work, the last thing you want to do is ever look at the game again. With *Dead Rising*, however, not only do I want to go back and play it again, I can't wait! There's something so good, so amazing, so damn awesome about this game that I am willing to bet it is going to be remembered as one of 2006's best experiences.

So what makes *Dead Rising* so great? To start, it's an incredible adventure that rarely, if ever, lets up. The game puts you in the role of Frank West, a freelance photojournalist who is looking for the next big scoop and gets way more than he bargained for in the sleepy town of Willamette, Colorado. His nose for news leads him to a town cordoned off by the military and, more specifically, a mall overrun with zombies. In order to get his scoop and make it out alive, he has to survive in this infested retail hell for 72 hours. How you choose to spend these three days, which play out on an accelerated clock (making for about 12 hours of gameplay), is completely up to you. Do you engage all of the game's "Cases," learning the truth behind the zombie outbreak? Do you seek out and save all of the human survivors trapped in the mall (all 48 of them, to be exact) and escort them to safety? Do you take on and defeat the crazed psychopaths who are willing to kill others in order to keep themselves alive? Or, do you just have fun using the 300-plus items and weapons found in the sprawling mall's stores to maim, decapitate, disembowel, eviscerate, chop, slice, dice, mow down, and otherwise kill the hundreds of thousands of zombies roaming its aisles? Trust me, whichever way you choose to go (or you can do all of these things!), you'll have a lot of fun doing so.



For those of you who think that *Dead Rising* is a straight-up melee action game with no substance, you'll be happy to know this couldn't be further from the truth. While *Dead Rising* is not as puzzle heavy or slow-paced as Capcom's other survival horror series, it has plenty of exploration, story, missions and more exploration. On the flip side, *Dead Rising* is excruciatingly hard, so much so that it's nearly impossible to get through the game perfectly on the first playthrough. There are a total of six different endings, and the one you get is tied into whether or not Frank makes it out alive; whether or not he's fulfilled all of the Cases and learned the truth about the outbreak; whether or not he's rescued any survivors; and whether or not he's performed certain actions within the strict time limits.

Speaking of time limits, *Dead Rising* requires you to manage your time very carefully. Frank is constantly getting new Scoops (info about survivors stranded in the mall who need rescuing before they are killed) and Cases (missions that must be accomplished within a certain amount of time in order to move the storyline further along). It's entirely possible (and probable) that you'll miss a Scoop, lose a survivor, or fail a Case the first time through. The beauty of the game is that it's set up so that each time you play through, Frank becomes faster, stronger, learns more moves, and can carry more weapons and items, making it easier to get through and see everything.

I haven't even scratched the surface. There's so much to this game that it's impossible to describe everything in the space allotted for this review. From snapping pictures and leveling up, to learning new skills and moves, to finding all of the secrets, extra modes, Achievements, hidden costumes and unlockables, you won't find a more intense, fun and graphically amazing game on the Xbox 360. Don't trust my judgment, though. I'm biased. Go out and see for yourself; you won't be disappointed.

Score: 5 of 5

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

This is, like, a dream come true. I'd go to the mall every day if this is what it was really like. If *Dead Rising* doesn't become this summer's 360 hardware mover, I'll gnaw off my big toe. It's a pure, unadulterated gaming masterpiece.

FINAL SCORE :  
**5 of 5**



## SKILL & MOVES

As Frank earns Prestige Points (points he gets for snapping pictures and performing specific actions), he not only becomes stronger, faster and more capable, he also learns a host of cool moves that can be put to good use (sometimes with hilarious results). Here are some of the cooler moves in the game:

**Judo Throw:** This powerful skill calls upon the art of Judo and takes out zombies with style. To perform and toss the attacker over your shoulder, push the left thumbstick downward repeatedly when grabbed by a zombie.

**Double Lariat:** This skill utilizes Frank's upper body strength by extending both arms and spinning in place rapidly, knocking down surrounding enemies in the process. To perform, press X while clicking (pressing down) the left thumbstick.

**Lift Up:** This skill allows you to lift a zombie and give them a toss. To perform, face a zombie and simultaneously press X and A without pushing the left thumbstick. To throw the zombie once it's been picked up, press X.

**Suplex:** This skill allows you to grab an opponent and send them flying. To perform, simultaneously press X and A without pushing the left thumbstick while facing a standing enemy's back.

**Hammer Throw:** This skill allows you to grab a zombie and give them a good shove. To perform, press X and A simultaneously while standing at a zombie's side, then choose a direction to push with the left thumbstick.

**Neck Twist:** This skill allows you to grab a zombie's head and give it a brutal twist, tearing it clean off. To perform, stand near the head of a fallen zombie and press X and A simultaneously.

**Face Crusher:** This skill allows you to grab a zombie by the scruff of the neck and smash its face into the ground. To perform, press X and A simultaneously while pushing the left thumbstick toward a zombie from behind.

**Disembowel:** This skill allows you to quickly thrust a hand inside a zombie's body and yank out its putrid organs. To perform, push the left thumbstick toward a zombie from the front while simultaneously pressing X and A.

**Zombie Walk:** Only those who have observed and mastered the art of zombie movement can utilize this skill. Blend in with the undead crowd with the ultimate deception and keep their attacks at bay. To perform, continuously hold X.





# PREY



Review by Shoegazer

**Publisher :** 2K Games  
**Developer :** Venom Games/ Human Head Studios  
**Release Date :** 7/14/2006  
**Rating :** MATURE  
**Genre(s) :** Action/FPS  
**Category :** Cussin' & Shootin' at Aliens  
**# of players :** 1 - 8; Online Enabled

Rather than give you the long, drawn-out history of *Prey's* roots, and talk about how it's been in development for over ten years, I'd rather get right to the point. In a genre where every new game gets compared to *Halo*, it's nice to see a title come along that doesn't have to be. It has something going for it that is rarely seen on console: it's a classic, PC-style shooter complete with a compelling storyline and rich narrative.



Tommy's life is about to change. He feels trapped on a Cherokee reservation in Oklahoma and wants nothing more than to leave with his girlfriend. After a failed attempt at convincing her to come with him, the room goes dark. An alien craft soon rips through the roof of the bar and captures Tommy, his girlfriend and his grandfather. Your journey begins in the belly of the ship with only a wrench to defend yourself with, but you'll eventually find alien weaponry scattered throughout. There are some really bizarre weapon designs here, each with unique and powerful effects for taking down the enemy.

For such a dark and gruesome looking game, *Prey* looks absolutely amazing. The maps have been intricately detailed, and quickly drive home the point that this "ship" is actually a living organism that you're inside of. From the



gritty, pulsing landscapes to the squishy sound effects, this game can take its toll on the squeamish.

It is the gameplay that really makes *Prey* stand out on its own. While comparisons to other FPS games are inevitable, some fresh new ideas keep the game fun. For example, when you die, your game is not over. Instead, your spirit is whisked away to do battle with the spirits of the damned, and by shooting them out of the sky with your bow and arrow, you gain health back until you're eventually placed back in the mortal world right where you left off. It really cuts down on loading screens and pointless backtracking.

Other cool features are the ability to spirit walk, which adds an element of puzzle-solving as you progress and also lets you explore new areas, and gravity strips that allow you to walk anywhere without falling off. You'll be able to move across walls, ceilings, and twisting pathways to new sections of the ship. Upside-down firefights are common occurrences that will test your skills and composure, but the strips will also help you bypass a few obstacles along the way. Can't reach a platform in the distance? Keep your eye out for gravity activation pads in sneaky places. If you are prone to motion-sickness, though, be warned.

There's definitely nothing else quite like this on the Xbox 360, and anyone itching for a new shooter need not look any further. The deep story, great voice acting and online play makes *Prey* a solid choice for any serious gamer.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

*Prey* has unsatisfying weaponry, great level design, and some truly memorable, near-hallucinogenic moments. If you're sure you won't get a headache from all the gravity shifting, this is a good shooter.

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**3.75 of 5**



# CHROME HOUNDS™



Review by Lyncara

**Publisher :** Sega  
**Developer :** From Software  
**Release Date :** 7/11/2006  
**Rating :** TEEN  
**Genre(s) :** Mecha  
**Category :** Simulation, You Love Giant Robots  
**# of players :** 1-12

If you A) love giant robots obsessively and B) have an Xbox 360 and C) an Xbox Live Gold membership, you are going to absolutely love *ChromeHounds*. If you do not fall into this rather small subset of the gamer population, then don't buy the game, don't play the game, and you may not even want to finish reading this review. I can fairly say, right up front, that *ChromeHounds* has nothing to offer you. This is a game so focused on multiplayer that it barely has any music, and so focused on the mecha sim aspect that the robots are the only part of the game where you really see the 360's processing power put to work. It is not just a fanboy's game, but a game for an incredibly specific group of fanboys.

*ChromeHounds* is a game built almost exclusively around its multiplayer aspect. The singleplayer campaign is really little more than an extended tutorial that prepares you for the online game by familiarizing you with the different types of mecha in the game (called HOUNDS) and their various functions in combat (called RTs). There is a rather elaborate storyline that explains the politics of the world and why conventional warfare has been abandoned in favor of HOUND-centric combat, but it's mostly covered in the manual. If you play the single-player campaign, you aren't going to get any sense of the world's history or meet any pilot characters. In fact, there aren't any characters; there are just mission objectives and enemies to destroy. As a preparation for online play, it's quite good; as a game unto itself it's dull.

As you play *ChromeHounds* missions, either online or in singleplayer mode, you amass money that lets you purchase parts for customizing your HOUNDS. This is just fun in and of itself (will I use the hovercraft robot or the four-legged robot today?), but it's also vital to keeping yourself competitive in the multiplayer

missions. *ChromeHounds* is an almost perfectly balanced mecha game in that few weapons or part options are outright better than most others available to you. Instead, there are a lot of customization options designed to make your HOUND suit your personal approach to its RT more efficiently. You can sacrifice speed for the stability and low profile offered by tank treads, or risk becoming an easier target in exchange for the agility offered by bipedal jointed legs. Almost any build in any RT can win battles consistently if the player can use the machine's strengths well. This helps keep the multiplayer game fresh and fun long after the point when most online multiplayer has started to stagnate.

If you have Live Gold and a taste for mecha sims, you can have tremendous fun playing *ChromeHounds*. If you don't have Live, then in a very real sense you can't actually play this game at all. A stronger singleplayer campaign could've made this game much better and more accessible, but as it is, it will be very good to the 360 owners who care about the genre and can actually get online with it.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

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

I love giant robots, like all good people, but *ChromeHounds* is a little iffy. It's fun, but it's also slow. The multiplayer is fun, but the singleplayer? Not so much.

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**3.25 of 5**







Review by 4thletter

Publisher : Namco Bandai
Developer : Namco Bandai
Release Date : 7/25/2006
Rating : TEEN
Genre(s) : Fighting
Category : Grabby into Slappy
# of players : 1-2



Williams into The Boss from Metal Gear Solid 3? You can pretty closely approximate that with the options available.

Tekken Dojo and profiles aren't everything, though. Tekken Bowl is back, along with a mode where you gain credits depending on how much damage you do.

Tekken Dark Resurrection is tops. You've got rock solid gameplay, great graphics, fun features, and some pretty good music, too.

This is tied directly into the profile system. You can customize your favorite character, and as you use him more and more, gain a variety of ranks.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

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

Countless characters, fast loading times, smooth animations, ruthless AI... yep, this is Tekken alright.

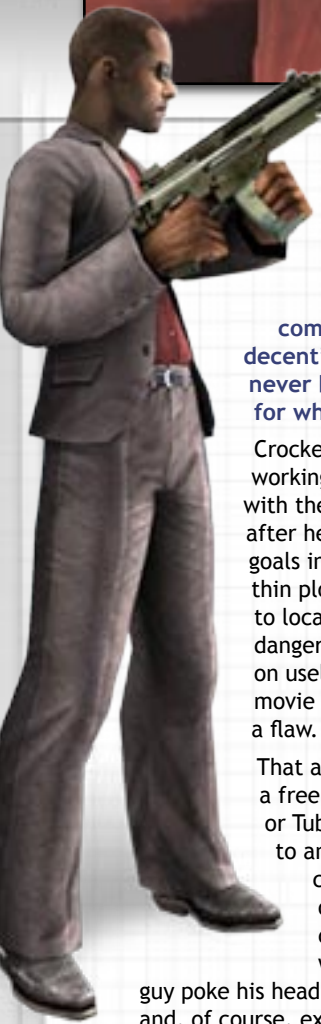
FINAL SCORE : 4.25 of 5



Review by James

MIAMI VICE THE GAME

Publisher : Sierra
Developer : Rebellion
Release Date : 7/2006
Rating : MATURE
Genre(s) : Action
Category : Drug Dealing
# of players : 1-2



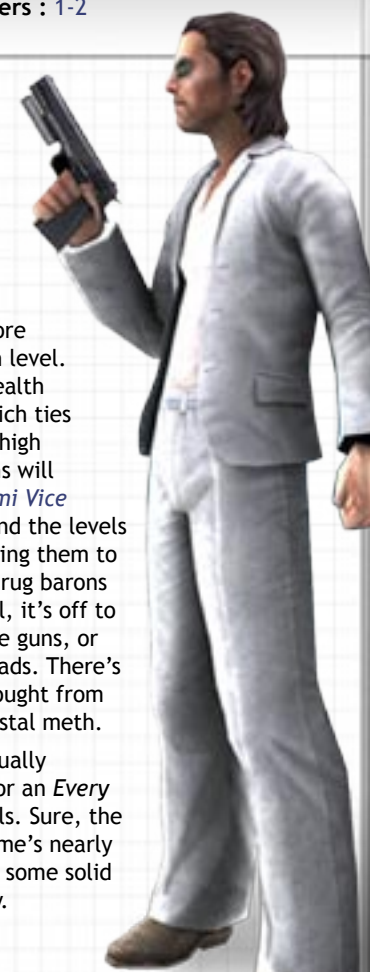
Movie-based games don't have the greatest reputation. The best one can usually hope for is competence, something for the movie's fans that won't be outright painful to play.

Crockett and Tubbs are a pair of undercover cops working the drug beat in Miami. The game starts with them getting an informant back on the payroll after he ran away.

That action isn't half-bad, either; it's basically a free-roaming Time Crisis. You control Crockett or Tubbs, moving from one point of cover to another.

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

The game feels run-of-the-mill and bland even though it really shouldn't with all of the crazy mini-game mechanics.



aren't too bright for the most part, breaking cover and standing exposed for you to pick off, but they can be surprisingly accurate at times.

While no one enemy is death incarnate, Miami Vice whittles your health down slowly over the course of a stage. Health packs are plentiful, but using one lowers the score multiplier received at the end of each level.

Taken for what it is, Miami Vice is actually fairly decent, and gets bonus points for an Every Extend-style mini-game between levels.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 3.25 of 5





## BOMBERMAN Act: Zero



Review by Shoegazer

**Publisher :** Konami  
**Developer :** Hudson Soft  
**Release Date :** 08/29/2006  
**Rating :** Teen; Fantasy Violence, Suggestive Themes

**Genre(s) :** Action/Sports  
**Category :** Prison Reform Acts Gone Awry  
**# of players :** 1-8; Live Enabled



I don't know what it is, but something about new consoles always seems to inspire game developers to make futuristic action/sports hybrid games set in post-apocalyptic environments (RPG developers used to own exclusivity rights to that cliché, but didn't renew the contract). I guess every console has to have at least one of these in its library. Without one, the world may never have known such joys as *The Professional Underground League of Pain, Deathrow*, or perish the thought, even *Bill Laimbeer's Combat Basketball!*

It's always difficult to accept when a cherished franchise goes under the knife in hopes of invigorating the series, or expanding it to a wider audience, but it can be done without too much being lost. Such is the case with *Bomberman Act: Zero*. Cosmetically, you will not find any comparisons here to the old *Bomberman* that you know and love. That cutesy big headed fella in the white body suit is gone, and has been replaced with a fairly generic cybernetic enhanced warrior design. They've even included a *Running Man*-esque back story for those that actually read the back of the box.

Ignoring all of the artistic and character design changes, what you've got here is most definitely a traditional *Bomberman* game. The basic concept and strategy remain unchanged as you're unleashed onto the battlefield against multiple foes in a fight to the death. It's substantially darker now and three-dimensional, sure, but after a few rounds you'll quickly



discover that same fun factor that you had back in the days of the SNES. For the more stubborn of purists, there is a secondary game mode called "Standard," which features the familiar classic overhead view, and one-hit kills.

In some ways, this new installment can even be more fun thanks to the addition of bomb upgrades that get even more deadly as you progress. What's even better is that you don't lose your upgrades advancing from stage to stage. Once you've obtained your upgrades, they stay with you until its game over. In the enhanced "FPB" mode, you'll also enjoy the luxury of a life meter, so now making mistakes doesn't necessarily mean the end for you.

*Act: Zero* is not the most next-gen looking game that you're going to play this year, nor is it the deepest experience to be had on the system (creating a character consists of choosing a male or female frame, and then picking a color), but it is fun and packs a wallop with its multiplayer functionality. The main problem

here is that it feels like a game best suited for the Live Marketplace rather than a full-scale \$50 release. It's an average gaming experience for the single player and slightly above average with some friends over Xbox Live.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

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

It's a shame the grim n' gritty facelift is the most interesting thing about this title. When it comes to the gameplay, it's just the same old *Bomberman* with a too-high price tag.



## BOMBERMAN



Review by Wanderer

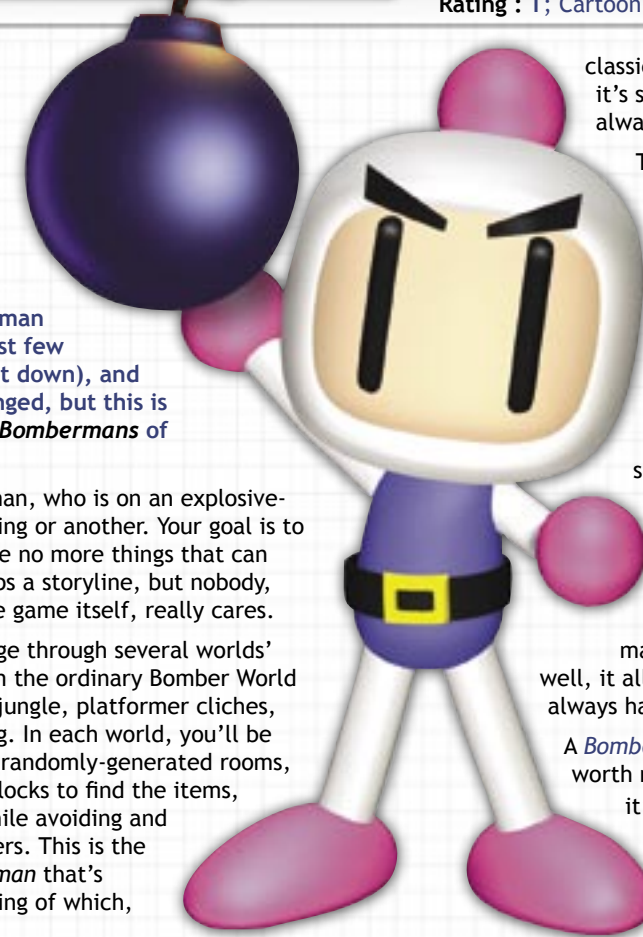
**Publisher :** Konami  
**Developer :** Hudson Soft  
**Release Date :** Q4 2006  
**Rating :** T; Cartoon Violence

**Genre(s) :** Action  
**Category :** Yeah Baby Yeah EXPLOSIONS  
**# of players :** 1-4

At the same time that Konami's updating *Bomberman* to reflect its dark dystopian future, they're releasing this, a nicely retro portable *Bomberman*. The graphics have received an update, the soundtrack's gone all house music on us (*Bomberman* has apparently spent the last few years getting up with his get down), and the power-up system's changed, but this is not wildly dissimilar to the *Bombermans* of the past.

You are, of course, Bomberman, who is on an explosive-powered quest for... something or another. Your goal is to blow things up until there are no more things that can be blown up. There is perhaps a storyline, but nobody, including the manual and the game itself, really cares.

In singleplayer, you must forge through several worlds' worth of stages, moving from the ordinary Bomber World through worlds of lava, ice, jungle, platformer cliches, deserts, ghosts, and lightning. In each world, you'll be plunged into a succession of randomly-generated rooms, where you must bomb soft blocks to find the items, keys, and exit teleporter, while avoiding and destroying the native monsters. This is the same basic game of *Bomberman* that's existed since the NES (speaking of which,



classic *Bomberman* is in here as an unlockable), and it's still as weirdly absorbing and challenging as it's always been.

The big change to the gameplay is the ability to save up and apply powerups as you see fit. When you pick up an item, its effects don't automatically kick in; instead, it's saved until you decide to activate it, either during or between levels, and the power-up lasts for either a set span of time, a single level, or until you lose that life. It goes a long way towards remedying the first and most obvious problem that *Bomberman's* always had; there inevitably comes a point where your bombs are so powerful that you spend most of your time dodging your own explosions.

Singleplayer *Bomberman* does get old kind of fast, though. When that happens, there's ad hoc, game-sharing multiplayer, with several modes. It's very fast-paced, which makes it great to crack out on a bus or train, and well, it allows you to blow up your friends. That is and always has been entertaining.

A *Bomberman* title has shown up on every console worth mentioning. This is the *Bomberman* for the PSP; it's simple, fun, and addictive. Check it out.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

*Bomberman* has had pretty much the same gameplay for how long now? Who would've thought it'd still be this fun?



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

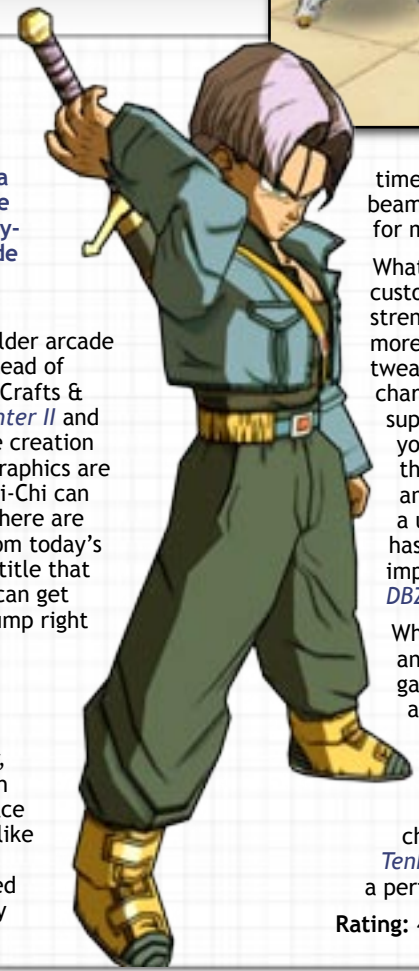
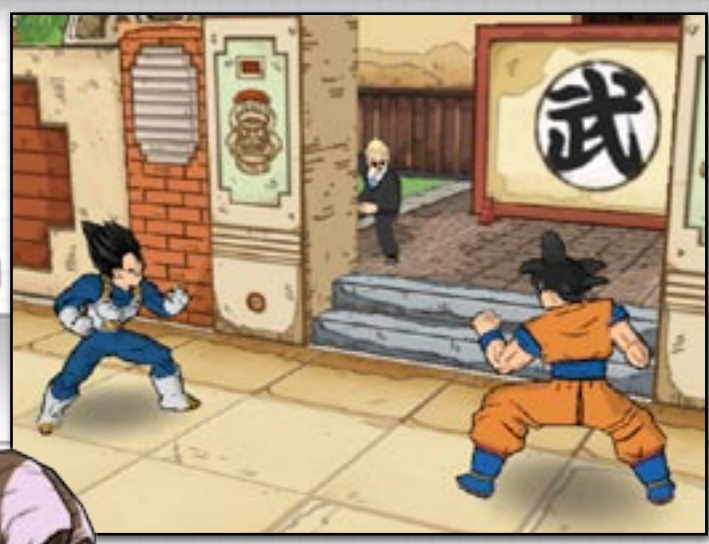




Publisher : Atari  
Developer : Crafts & Meister  
Release Date : 7/18/2006  
Rating : Teen; Cartoon Violence

Genre(s) : Fighting  
Category : ROCK THE DRAGON  
# of players : 1-2

Review by Racewing



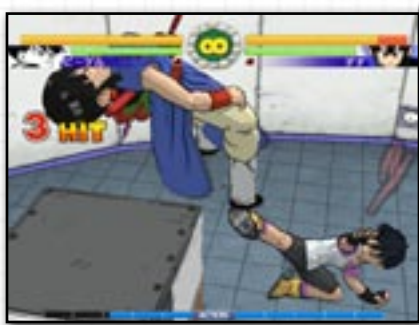
Dragon Ball Z gamers, myself included, are a bit spoiled. Thanks to the Budokai games and Superionic Warriors 2, we're used to DBZ "fighters" which are essentially ways to reverse-engineer a DBZ episode via a game engine. We use character skins that are largely the same, except for a few differently-fired beams here and there. We let them slide because their fanservice quotient is off the charts, but the fact still stands. Super Dragon Ball Z, an enhanced port of an older arcade game, throws this idea out of the window. Instead of trying to "simulate" DBZ battles to the letter, Crafts & Meister and Arika (the producers of Street Fighter II and Street Fighter EX, respectively) prioritized the creation of a more technical fighting game. Thus, the graphics are slightly dated, transformations are limited, Chi-Chi can beat Perfect Cell if she tries really hard, and there are only eighteen characters, which is a far cry from today's massive rosters. However, the result is a solid title that even people who aren't fans of Dragon Ball Z can get into. If you can play Street Fighter, you can jump right into this. In Super DBZ, everyone is their own unique character with strengths, weaknesses, and a diverse movelist. The close-up fighting is the best it's ever been in a DBZ fighter. You can fly, dash, and 8-way run around the ring, with both characters zooming in and out of the same space at all times. This is good for those who didn't like Tenkaichi's split-screen battles. Melee, beam, launcher, dash and flight attacks can be chained or linked together, giving birth to a surprisingly durable create-a-combo system. For the first

time, these characters are actual fighters, instead of beam turrets and cutscene triggers. It's refreshing, at least for me. What also shines about Super DBZ is the character customization. You're able to adjust your characters' strengths, and compensate for their weaknesses, even more so than in previous Budokai games. Some of these tweaks are universal, others are attuned to specific characters. You can even go so far as to steal special and super moves from other characters, and add them to your own moveset! The more you adjust your character, the more capabilities they have, and the more freeform and open the game engine becomes. Since everyone has a unique fighting style in this game, customization has far more of an impact and purpose. It's almost imperative if you want to get the full Super DBZ experience. When it comes down to it, the only slight anyone could feasibly have against this game is a lack of flashy fanservice and one-button finishing moves. That may still be enough to cause some players to ignore this game. Those who take the time to practice the engine and customize their characters, however, will be rewarded. Tenkaichi 2's still a ways off. Super DBZ is a perfect bridge until then.

Rating: 4 of 5

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

It's not a flashy game, and not exactly Virtua Fighter, but there's still a solid 3D fighter in here. A sequel with more playable characters and this level of detail would be completely awesome.



If you pass over The King of Fighters 2006, I will find you, and when I do, it won't be pretty. If I could end the review here, and possibly tweak the above sentence to make it even more threatening, I would; unfortunately, I've grown to like working at this magazine thing, so here's the deal. KOF2006 is actually the sequel to KOF: Maximum Impact, which was a passable effort to bring the KOF series into 3D. This game, however, is a massive improvement. It's a production of SNK's fanboy-turned-employee Falcoon, and it shows. No expense or amount of fanservice has been spared. The roster is massive, topping over forty characters from throughout SNK's history once everyone is unlocked (including Samurai Shodown's Hanzo and Metal Slug's Fio), and everyone ends up with least fifteen diverse costumes to their name. The fighting is just as fast as the first game, but the engine's been highly tweaked so that more moves flow and chain into each other for a non-stop adrenaline rush. Air combos, ground combos, juggles, off-the-ground combos, you name it, it's in here. Every hit booms in your ears, there are hit sparks and flashes galore, and every single move from the 2D KOF games has been reproduced and enhanced (check out Terry's Buster Wolf!) in spectacular 3D glory. If SNK made a (Marvel) Versus or Rival Schools game, this is probably what it would turn out like. It's great to bust out at parties to ogle the wild super moves, but people who take the time to go into training mode will find that there's more to the game than flash and button mashing. There's really a great combo system behind this, and it's urged that people check it out. I didn't know Leona could do that. Seriously.

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

I liked Maximum Impact, but it did seem short and broken. KOF2K6 delivers on the promise of its predecessor... and my God the fanservice is through the roof.



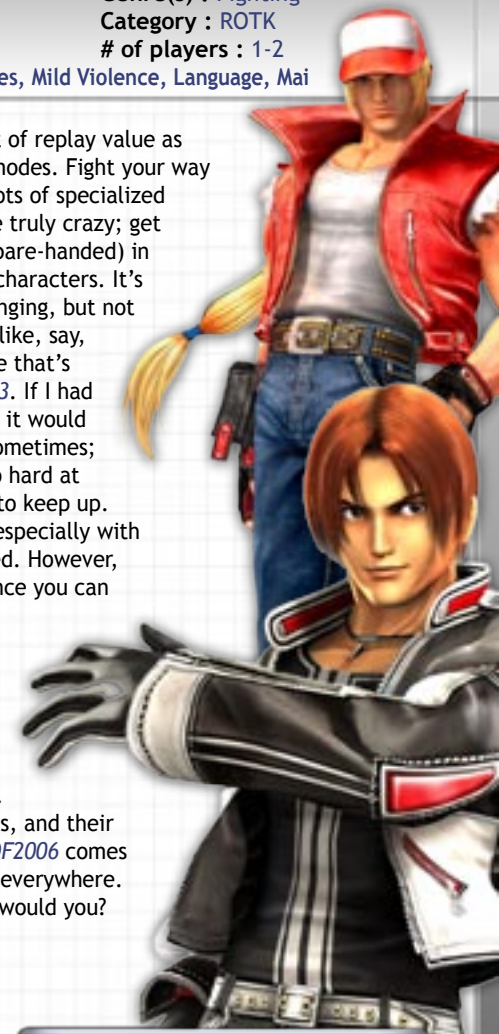
Publisher : SNK Playmore  
Developer : SNK Playmore  
Release Date : 8/22/2006  
Rating : T; Suggestive Themes, Mild Violence, Language, Mai

Genre(s) : Fighting  
Category : ROTK  
# of players : 1-2

Review by Racewing

The game boasts quite a bit of replay value as well with its single-player modes. Fight your way through survival mode, or lots of specialized missions (some of which are truly crazy; get ready to fight a Metal Slug bare-handed) in order to unlock stages and characters. It's straightforward, and challenging, but not annoying in the slightest unlike, say, just about every extra mode that's gone into Soul Calibur 2 or 3. If I had any gripes about this game, it would be that there's slowdown sometimes; this game pushes the PS2 so hard at times that it seems unable to keep up. Online play is also missed, especially with no Xbox Live version planned. However, that's truly it, especially since you can pick between Japanese and English voices now. SNK wants the world to know that they are coming back, and that they refuse to just roll over and die as a video game manufacturer. They're proud of themselves, and their history. Out of nowhere, KOF2006 comes out to light up living rooms everywhere. Try not to miss out on this, would you? It'd be a shame if you did.

Rating : 4.5 of 5



FINAL SCORE : 4.25 of 5



## TITAN QUEST



Review by Metalbolt

Publisher : THQ  
Developer : Ironlore  
Release Date : 06/26/2006  
Rating : T

Genre(s) : Dungeon Crawler  
Category : Killfest  
# of players : 1-6

*Titan Quest* is Ironlore's entry into the dungeon crawling hack-'n'-slash, and for their first time out they have managed to make a very solid game, bringing many new ideas to the table.

*TQ* puts you in the role of a nameless, classless Greek who must rid the empire of all sorts of demons and mythological creatures. Unlike *Diablo 2* (which forces you into a class) and *Dungeon Siege* (which makes you train your class), *TQ* allows you to master two classes. Not being pigeonholed into one type of class gives you more freedom to develop your character as you see fit. Can we have something like this in more dungeon crawlers, please?

*TQ's* skill tree is different as well. Instead of skills being locked until a specified level, they are locked by the main mastery of the tree. Putting points in the main mastery not only gets you closer to using high-level spells; it raises the stats that are important to that class. Do you master low-level skills, or do you put all of your points into the main mastery so you can have high-level spells by level 10? The choice is yours. If you screw up and put a point into a skill you dislike, for a price (which is cumulative), you can free that point up to be spent again.

Using your skills to kill is a lot of fun, too! You can thank some really nice ragdoll physics for that. After all, whacking a baddy half way across the screen, who then slams into a rock and slumps to the ground, will never get old. He'll also drop everything he had equipped when he dies, regardless of its utility. It's such a simple thing, yet it adds so much depth to the overall experience.

This is possible because *TQ* is 100% 3D, and it's gorgeous, too; its soft shadows are on par with *FEAR!* It's not just the lighting, though. With the detail cranked up, *TQ's* textures make it shine like no other dungeon crawler ever has. There were no sacrifices

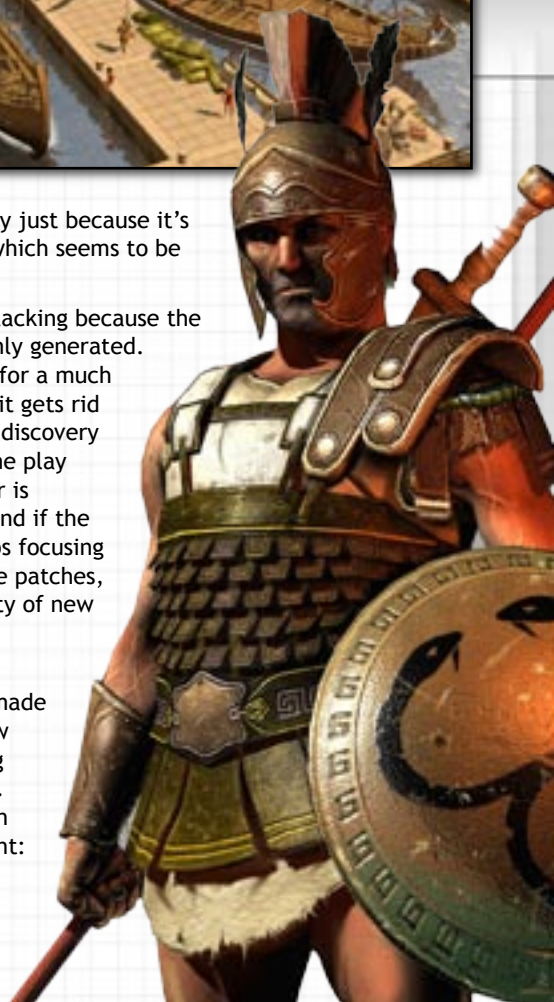


made in visual quality just because it's a dungeon crawler, which seems to be the usual trend.

Sadly, online play is lacking because the maps are not randomly generated. Although this allows for a much nicer looking world, it gets rid of the false sense of discovery needed to keep online play alive. A world builder is included, however, and if the community ever stops focusing so much on new nude patches, we should have plenty of new worlds to explore.

Ironlore did a lot of thinking when they made *TQ*, adding many new elements and getting rid of many old ones. Now you can focus on what's truly important: the killing.

Rating: 4.5 of 5



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

This is a visually stunning, addictive little crawler with a great aesthetic and a near-flawless interface. Other than the slightly overwrought voice acting, I can't find much to complain about.



World War II's overuse in video games is such a cliché at this point, it feels redundant to mention it in a review at all. Nevertheless, it needs to be said here, if only because of what an exception this particular WWII game is. *Rush for Berlin* proves that the right combination of gameplay, interface, and tone can breath new life into even the most stale of subjects.

The conflict this time centers around the Allied powers' rush to sack the German capital at the end of the war. At first, you can only choose between Soviet or Western Ally campaigns, but later you'll be able to unlock a scenario based on the French Resistance, and an alternate timeline about a hypothetical German retaliation. It's here where things get really fun, as the Germans pull out all the stops and start resorting to prototype weapons that were actually created but never used in the war.

As far as the game system goes, there's nothing radically new, but there's a solid combination of classic RTS elements that keeps the gameplay familiar without feeling like they're old hat. What's most surprising, actually, is what's *not* there. Though you can produce new units in *RfB*, you don't harvest resources. Resources are given to you over time, and it's the *time* that you have to manage. Wasted time in earlier missions will penalize you later on in the game, so you can't just sit back and create a huge army to steamroll over everything. Strategy is of utmost importance.

One new feature that *RfB* boasts is the Core Unit system, which allows you to carry certain units and officers over from mission to mission, gaining more experience and abilities as they go. Each mission has a number of optional and secret objectives that can

2nd opinion by 4thletter • Alternate Rating : 4.5 of 5

*Rush for Berlin* is tops. It brings a few new twists to the RTS formula that end up working really well, and your usual Zerg rush tactics are useless here. Real strategy? Real fun.



Review by KouAidou

Publisher : Paradox Interactive  
Developer : Stormregion  
Release Date : 6/12/06  
Rating : Teen

Genre(s) : Real-Time Strategy  
Category : World War II  
# of players : 1-8

allow you to acquire more Core Units, which gives the single player game a fair amount of replay value. Once you wear out these options, you can take the gameplay online, where you'll find the standard Deathmatch and Capture-the-Flag modes, in addition to two other all-new modes: R.I.S.K., and R.U.S.H.

The presentation and interface for the game are in almost perfect balance, with little to complain about (save for an occasionally rebellious allied AI). The cinematic openers to each mission and unit voice clips give a touch of personality to a conflict that could so easily become impersonal. Mission maps are created with such artistry as to actually offer a distinct tone to each mission, from the melancholy of lonely Ukrainian ice fields to the desperation of cities that have been reduced to rubble. Mission objectives are highly diverse, and the optional graphical briefing before each mission makes it easy for you to plan your strategies ahead of time.

What Stormregion has really created in *Rush for Berlin* is a historical RTS that doesn't feel like a historical RTS. It's not just occurring in a history textbook or on a Hollywood soundstage; it feels real, and in the moment. World War II is one of the richest and most interesting conflicts of the 20th century. Finally, it feels that way.

Rating : 4.5 of 5



FINAL SCORE :

4.5 of 5





# RACE DRIVER 2006



Review by James

Publisher : Codemasters  
Developer : Sumo Digital  
Release Date : June, 2006  
Rating : Teen

Genre(s) : Racing  
Category : Super-sim  
# of players : 1-12



There are two extremes that racing games fall between: arcade and sim. Arcade racing is all about speed, and most console racers tend towards that side of the scale. On the other side of things (and normally found on PC), there's the sim, where the emphasis is on providing as much realism as the hardware can model. *Race Driver 2006* falls solidly in the sim camp.

A remake of 2004's *TOCA Race Driver 2*, rather than the superior *TOCA 3*, *Race Driver 2006* still manages to offer an impressive chunk of driving. The big series hook has always been the staggering number of vehicles available to race, complete with appropriate handling for each. A SEAT Leon Supercoup feels nothing like a Ford Mustang, and neither handles like a pickup truck or Formula 1 racer. The good news is that means every race is something new. The bad news is that as soon as you get used to a car, the race series it's used in is over.

The heart of the game, Career, is divided up into a series of races, each two to three events long. Every racer in the event drives the same car, and the lack of rubber-band AI means it's all down to skill. Rather than needing to constantly place first, though, progress requires accumulating a cash or point goal. While it takes a bit of the pressure off individual races, being forced to use a car that controls like a wet bar of soap can



make you consider the gentle art of UMD origami. *Race Driver* is all about control and once you learn to lay off the gas (and re-map the handbrake to the shoulder button) it starts to fall into place. Reckless driving loses championships; controlled driving wins them.

There's also a second main mode, the Trans World Cup. Unlike Career's series-oriented progression, Trans World is a large group of mostly single-race events. Overtake a rival, win a race with no damage, come in first with a damaged vehicle, and more offer a good variety of challenges. Points are awarded based on performance, and like Career it's possible to put in the occasional weak showing in order to blow past a troublesome race. On the downside, the overly-complex map layout for the events menu leads

to a lot of guesswork when trying to change races.

*Race Driver 2006* does a lot of things right, but sim racing is a very different kind of game from the usual console fare. The damage modeling is impressive, with five different systems that directly effect the car's performance in addition to the usual cosmetic body denting. Cars spin out due to over-acceleration or just driving on the wrong surface, but is it any fun? Some people think so, and *Race Driver* is an excellent game for them.

Rating : 4 of 5

2nd opinion by [HonestGamer](#) • Alternate Rating : 2 of 5

Killer presentation doesn't make a great game. If you slide off the track or bump into cars or walls a few times, your race is over. That's no fun, no matter how cool the videos that follow look while they tell you that you suck.



It's a special time of the year in the video game industry. *NCAA Football* is kind of like the unofficial symbol that the "dead season" is at an end, and a wave of exciting new games is on the horizon. Last year, *NCAA* dazzled me with its meaty Race for the Heisman mode, but now it must compete against itself with a next-gen console debut. Which version is better? The answer may surprise you.

So you don't have an Xbox 360 yet? You're in luck, because Tiburon has gone to great lengths to make sure that current-genners will be playing the best game of college football to be found anywhere. While some of the changes and improvements may be invisible to the naked eye, the loyal veterans will quickly be able to pick them out. For starters, the defense has been given a major tune-up, and the experience is now closer to a real game of football than ever before. There are also new slow-motion cuts to highlight a bone-jarring hit, a "turn the tide" momentum system that rewards your team accordingly (and actually works), and the ability to switch to a reverse camera angle on defense during kick attempts.

The star of this game, however, is the Campus Legend mode, which takes last year's Heisman mode and adds even more depth by giving you control over your created player's academic future

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

I wouldn't say that this is as bad as last year's *Madden* on 360, but the lack of Campus Legend is a head-scratcher. I love the game and its graphics, but where are my I-AA teams?



Publisher : Electronic Arts  
Developer : Tiburon  
Release Date : 7/18/2006  
Rating : Everyone

Genre(s) : Sports  
Category : Alpha Beta Gamma Pi  
# of players : 1 - 2; Online Enabled

and social status. Seriously, you will have to pass exams in order for your player to remain academically eligible for the big game. There are varying levels of difficulty though, so you can start off slow and work your way up to the harder courses. I wasn't sure I would like this level of depth at first, but it actually becomes somewhat addictive. First *Brain Age*, now this? It's a conspiracy, I tell you! They're sneaking education into our gaming!

Got an Xbox 360? Well... at least you get the prettiest version of the game, because other than next-gen graphics, you'll pay

\$10 more for a version that's inferior in just about every other way. The camera position has been pulled back a little bit, allowing you to see more of the field before the ball is snapped, but otherwise this is just last year's *Madden* with college teams, from its bare bones presentation and occasional glitchy animations, to its spotty defense and over-powered running game. What's worse is that it doesn't even have Campus Legend mode. All you get is a tacked-on create-a-player option and Dynasty Mode.

The next-genners are getting snubbed once again by EA's "pretty games are better" strategy, but the game can still

be enjoyable despite it all. I don't love it and I don't hate it, I just expected a whole lot more. If next-gen is your only option, then reduce my score to a 3.5.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :

3 of 5

FINAL SCORE :

4.25 of 5



# REVIEW

## WORLD TOUR SOCCER 06



Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : SCEA  
 Developer : SCE Studios London/SCEE  
 Release Date : 6/27/2006  
 Rating : Everyone

Genre(s) : Sports  
 Category : Futbol/Soccer  
 # of players : 1-4 (Ad-Hoc);  
 1-2 (Online)



If you've been following my reviews for the last few months, you've probably noticed that I've been playing an insane amount of soccer games this year. In fact, despite being someone without an athletic enough frame to play an actual game of soccer, video game soccer has been instrumental in helping me to understand the finer points of the sport. Now, with all the force of a Zidane headbutt, Sony has prepared the next installment of *World Tour Soccer* to close out the summer of the World Cup.

*World Tour Soccer 06* is something of an oddity amongst the other sim-heavy soccer games because of its unique approach to the sport. It opts for a more arcade-like experience. The controls are simple, the flow of the game is blazing fast, and scoring goals is about as common as a David Beckham trading card. Considering how uncomfortable the PSP can be to hold for long periods of time, these are all things I appreciate. If



you're a die-hard fan of true simulation, though, the frenzied pace is sure to make you twitch.

It's easy to get sucked into the casual approach to the sport and enjoy the much more forgiving experience, but you'll soon start to notice something disturbing. At first glance, it appears that there are enough modes of gameplay here to keep you busy for quite some time, but once you start to try them all, it'll become increasingly difficult to tell them apart. The challenges are essentially the same in every mode until you finally start to unlock some different options. However, doing so will require a great deal of patience and repeating several scenarios, which kind of defeats the purpose of developing a casual game in the first place.

All in all, *WTS 06* stands out on the PSP for a number of reasons: the graphics are sharp, the presentation is solid, the load times are minimal, and above all else, it's the most user-friendly game of *futbol* available anywhere. Despite EA's attempt to accomplish this same feat with *FIFA Street 2*, *WTS 06* comes out ahead in the end on points.

Just to be clear here, if you're a *FIFA/Winning Eleven* kind of player, it's doubtful that you will find much here to keep your interest for very long. It doesn't require a great deal of strategy, and the AI isn't going to keep you out of the opponent's net. It has that early Sega Genesis sports charm to it that games like *Pat Riley Basketball* and *Tommy Lasorda Baseball* brought to the table; it's not the best representation of the real deal, but it puts all of the fun of playing backyard sports in the palm of your hand.

Rating : 3 of 5

FINAL SCORE :  
**3 of 5**

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

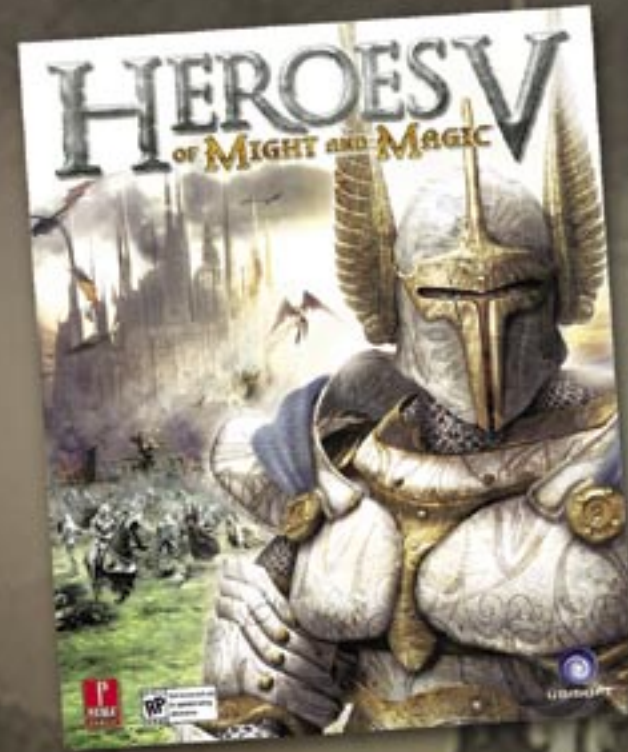
This is a good one for soccer newbies, but the hardcore vets may want to look elsewhere. A fun game to be sure, but lacking a little right out of the gate.



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UBISOFT





# MOTHER 3

Review by KouAidou

Publisher: Nintendo  
Developer: Nintendo  
Release Date: 04/20/06  
Genre(s): RPG  
Category: Crazyness  
# of players: 1



As a fellow staff member recently lamented, when it comes to video games, people nowadays tend to use the term "quirky" as a synonym for "Japanese." The *Mother* series, which began way back in 1989 and is only now releasing its third installment, is Japanese. It's not quirky, though. The *Mother* series is downright weird.

The idea behind the first *Mother* game was to create an RPG based in the modern day US. It had all the typical RPG elements, but with a modern-day "American" spin: you get equipment from department stores, healing items from fast food restaurants, and money from the local ATM. The hero is a little boy in a blue striped shirt, red cap, and yellow backpack, who wields baseball bats as his primary weapon. Can you get more American than that? According to at least one Japanese reviewer, no, you cannot.

In the US, the only game of the series we ever saw was *Mother 2*, which was released for the SNES in 1995 under the title *Earthbound*. Despite an eventual cult following and some aggressive marketing tactics by Nintendo, *Earthbound* didn't do terribly well in the US market. In an era where RPGs were getting darker and more serious with titles like *Final Fantasy VI*, a lot of people just didn't warm up to the bright, cartoony graphics, kid-friendly characters, and parodical plotlines that were the *Mother* games' stock and trade.

With all that said, *Mother 3* begins on a decidedly grim note. It all starts when a strange group of pig-masked invaders arrives in Tatumairi Village, setting fire to the surrounding forest and genetically altering the friendly woodland animals into violent beasts. The young protagonist, Lucas, loses his mother and twin brother in the conflict, and his father, who failed to save them, becomes a broken shell of a man. Three years pass, and the sinister merchant Yokuba has managed to convert the quiet farming village into a bustling modern town. It all began when he started selling those "happiness boxes," mysterious cubical containers that emit a hypnotic light...

The pacing of all this is decidedly odd in itself. You'll get about a third of the way through the game before you actually get a definite protagonist, a stable party of characters, and a world that you can freely explore. Until then, you'll play out what feels essentially like an extended prologue set primarily in Tatumairi Village, as the game shifts you between secondary characters to view different aspects of the storyline from their POVs. This pacing is ultimately very rewarding, as actions witnessed in the early game begin to light later on, but it may be off-putting to people who prefer a more traditional RPG structure.



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Want to show everyone how much you love your *Mother*? The *Mother 3* Deluxe Box comes with a special custom-made Game Boy Micro, a durable cloth sleeve, and a snazzy "Franklin Badge" pin. The set retails from Play-Asia for \$195.00, and is still widely available.

### Deluxe Import Special!

Though the overall plot is heavier and more complex, and the aggressively "American" tone is missing, the unmistakable *Earthbound* humor is still there. You'll enlist the aid of a race of magical gay transvestites and some popular rock bands, and you'll perform sacred disco dances in order to open a path through ancient ruins. The trademark crazy enemies are still there, too: while there's a sad derth of New-Age Retro Hippies, you'll still have the opportunity to fight deadly sweet potatoes, adorable little UFOs, and ferocious creatures with the body of a snake and the head of a chicken.

Battle uses a typical turn-based command system, with one significant twist: the "sound battle" mechanic. Each enemy has its own theme song that plays when you fight them (with over 250 themes available!). These songs do more than just provide some audio variety; they represent the enemy's "rhythm." If you mimic the enemy's rhythm carefully (by pressing the attack button in time with their BGM), you can execute powerful combo attacks. The timing is hard to grasp at first, but once you've mastered it you'll find your moves are significantly more powerful.

Those who remember *Earthbound* fondly will also be grateful that some of that game's more obnoxious flaws have been fixed here. Though your inventory slots are still limited, you can carry more items than before, and plot items no longer take up inventory slots. You can also dash at any time by



holding and then releasing the B button. In addition to making exploration significantly easier, dashing can be used to unlock secrets, and stun or defeat enemies without having to engage them in combat.

Graphically, *Mother 3* makes good use of the GBA's hardware, and those who found the technicolor brightness of *Earthbound* hard to take should find a lot less to complain about here. There's some nice environmental effects, such as the fire and rain at the beginning of the game, and some rather impressive sprite animations, too.

Whether you're new to the *Mother* series or an old fan, *Mother 3* probably has something to offer you. Though it's still sadly as linear as its predecessors, the series has matured significantly in many ways, not only in the cliched manner of becoming "darker" and "edgier," but by finding more sophisticated ways to tell a story that is still warm and good-hearted.

### Worth Importing?



As an RPG, *Mother 3* naturally has tons of dialogue you'll need to know Japanese to understand, and you'll miss out on a lot of the humor and plot if you can't read it. Still, it's an innovative and fun classic-style RPG and there's still plenty of enjoyment to be had if you're determined to find it, particularly if you enlist the aid of a good FAQ.

For those who do know some Japanese but aren't fluent, it's worth noting that the game's dialogue and menus are entirely in kana. This can make it easier to look up what's being said in a dictionary if you want to read it yourself, but harder to understand if you've learned to play imports through kanji recognition.

FINAL SCORE:  
**4.5 of 5**







Publisher: Namco  
Developer: Monolith Soft  
Release Date: 3/30/06

# Xenosaga I-II

Genre(s): RPG  
Category: Cinematic  
# of Players: 1

Review by Hitoshira

The *Xeno* series has always stumbled out of the blocks. Nearly ten years ago, *Xenogears* was released on the PlayStation, but unfortunately, it shipped with a second disc that was 5% playing time. Some years later a few of the key developers splintered off from Square and formed Monolith Soft, to start the project over again. That didn't work out as planned either. The finished game, *Xenosaga: Episode 1*, was also cut short. When *Xenosaga: Episode II* arrived, it failed spectacularly with poor game design and scripting, which was probably due to the fact it was done by a new development team. Now Monolith has released both games on a single DS cart that is only available in Japan, and it's a bit of a mixed bag.

*Xenosaga I - II* melds the storylines of *Episode I* and *II* together into a single gameplay experience using a modified version of *Episode I*'s gameplay system. However, many of the dungeons and story sequences have been cut or are rewritten and abbreviated into what's best described as "talking heads," and what's left is so short that you could get through a given sequence in less than five minutes. Momo's rescue from Margulis, for instance, is just a side-story which you don't get to play through. The game is divided up into twenty chapters, and you'll find that many offer no actual gameplay.



When there is actual play going on, things become a little better. All the different types of points in *Episode I* are now

pooled into one. There are 3 AP per turn instead of 6, which means no more strategic use of Items. Ether skills can now be levelled up, and Tech Attacks now affect certain areas of the battle grid. The biggest addition is formations; if your characters are arranged in specific spots on the battlefield grid, they'll get various enhancements. However, Shion's formation unbalances the game so much that it's impossible to lose a fight. Worst of all, the touch-screen mini-games are horrifyingly terrible.

Once *Episode II* starts, it's clear that much of the story has been completely overhauled; over half the script has not been seen before. On top of that, all of the lame dungeons, like going through the same location twice in a row, have been removed. The big surprise is when you finally get to fight in mechs not long after the start of *Episode II* since they were removed entirely from this version of *Episode I*.

What was once a shoddy game on the PS2 is now really quite interesting on the DS, since it is so far removed from the original. Slogging through the first ten hours by speeding through cutscenes and only playing one to two hours felt like all the good from *Episode I* was sucked out, but afterwards, *Episode II* becomes an enjoyable experience.



FINAL SCORE:  
**2.5 of 5**

**WORTH IMPORTING?**  
Unless you understand Japanese perfectly, you will not understand the UMN Database or *Episode II*. This is a game that only a die-hard *Xeno*-fan could enjoy fully.



Publisher: Banpresto  
Developer: From Software  
Release Date: 03/30/06

Genre(s): Action  
Category: Mecha, Anime Crossover  
# of Players: 1

Review by Lynara

Banpresto has spent years trying to spin some sort of action game off of the *Super Robot Taisen* franchise. Most of their in-house efforts resulted in nearly unplayable disasters, so it was probably inevitable that they'd farm the task out to a different developer. From Software, the creators of the fan-favorite *Armored Core*, are a pretty natural choice for the job. The original *Another Century's Episode* was only a mediocre title, but even that was better than Banpresto ever managed. With *Another Century's Episode 2*, From Software has actually turned out one of their most polished efforts in years, and the first really good action game produced in the *SRT* spirit.

*A.C.E. 2*'s combat is less like *Armored Core*'s and quite a lot more like *Zone of the Enders* than you might think. Each unit can attack with a variety of long-range weapons or a melee attack, targeting the enemy via a hard-lock system. No matter what unit you're using or what you're fighting, getting attacks to connect is relatively easy if you can get an enemy in your sights. Mission requirements usually build off of this by challenging you to kill large numbers of enemies, or particularly tough enemies, within a certain time limit. Enemies can also hit you as easily as you hit them, which depletes your machine's Armor Rating. *Armored Core* vets may find this style of play far too easy to be entertaining, but most other players are probably going to find it easy to pick up and fun to master. *A.C.E. 2* also lacks any significant form of mecha customization; instead your challenge is to upgrade your machines enough so that you can succeed with their canonical abilities. *Armored Core* vets may find this style of play far

# A.C.E. 2

Another Century's Episode

too easy to be entertaining, but most other players are probably going to find it easy to pick up and fun to master. *A.C.E. 2* also lacks any significant form of mecha customization; instead your challenge is to upgrade your machines enough so that you can succeed with their canonical abilities.

Visuals and feel are the big difference between *A.C.E. 2*, *SRT*, and pretty much all of From Software's other mecha game series. Robots in *A.C.E. 2* are rendered in full-size 3D and obsessively detailed. The setting is your typical *SRT*-style fusion Earth that slams all the anime stories together, but the game only crosses over about a dozen series, most of them decades-old classics like *Macross* and *L-Gaim*. The result is a game that covers all of the included series in a lot more detail than *SRT* ever does, complete with pilots appearing in both 2D cel art and cel-shaded 3D art. In keeping with the anime feel, mecha in *A.C.E. 2* can pull off some spectacularly over the top moves, including team-up moves with other machines, although the sequences are disappointingly scripted. Although some music and voice acting in the game is verbatim from the various licensed anime, there's a lot of original BGM and original voice actors speaking completely new dialogue for the game, too.

If From Software's usual mecha games are in the simulation vein, then *A.C.E. 2* is something of an unapologetic, brightly-colored arcade approach to the subject. It's almost a shame that *A.C.E. 2* is so reliant on its anime licenses, because this type of gameplay with an original IP attached could be a big hit if it came to the US. It's the rare licensed game, from East or West, that manages to offer a completely solid gaming experience.



## WORTH IMPORTING?

If you want to play a fast-paced mecha combat game and can get into the anime licenses, you'll probably find *A.C.E. 2* worth your while. The fan community has documented the gameplay and interface quite well, and the controls are easy enough to figure out once you're in combat.

FINAL SCORE:  
**4 of 5**





Reviews by **4thletter**



**LG Flatron 1970H**  
 • LCD Flatscreen Monitor • Price: \$379.99

**Features**  
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 5:4 aspect ratio  
 VGA and DVI Inputs

Your monitor is arguably the most important part of your gaming experience. Without it, you can't actually see the game that your monster computer system is running at umpteen frames per second. A good monitor can make all the difference when you're playing. Sure, that 14-inch monitor you got for free with your box was nice a couple years back, but it's time to upgrade. If you can't afford to buy another large-screen TV with VGA inputs, you might be interested in LG's Flatron 19" LCD.

The first thing you'll notice is the fact that this monitor can squeeze in almost anywhere. It's nice and thin to start with, and its base is compact, but still big enough to keep from tipping over if the monitor is jarred. The stand also allows you to easily angle or height of the monitor so that you can pick the best possible viewing angle. The flat LCD screen is great for gaming. The 19" of viewable space and large resolution is free of blur and glare. It's nicely sharp, and the colors come through perfectly. I didn't notice any flicker, and eye strain was minimal after hours of use. The native 1280x1024 helps, too.

If you're into accessorizing, the monitor comes in a snazzy silver that matches just about anything. It's a fine fit for any high-quality gaming system, and great for general computer use, as well.

**i.Sound Drive-in Cinema**

• PSP Movie Stand • Price: \$49.99

**Features**  
 Adjustable Strap  
 Two Headphone Jacks  
 Remote Control

Sony hit on at least one good idea with the PSP: it's a useful portable movie player. The only problem is that holding it in your hands to watch movies leads to pain in both your neck and your wrists. iSound's Drive In Cinema is here to alleviate that problem, as well as one you probably didn't even know existed.

The Drive In Cinema is just the thing you need for long trips. It fastens securely to the back of a headrest in your car and features a headphone splitter so that the score to whichever cartoon is popular with the kids nowadays doesn't annoy their parents. It's built more for a car, which has a shorter distance between seats, than for a van. The small remote is a great help, as well. At its heart, the Drive In Cinema is for passengers, not drivers. If you've got a trip coming up, be it cross country or half an hour, it's worth hooking up to either watch a quick TV show or listen to a few MP3s.



**Razer Copperhead**

• High Precision Gaming Mouse • Price: \$79.99

**Features**  
 Thorough Device Drivers  
 Up to 2000dpi  
 32kb Onboard Memory

Is this "Hardcore Gaming Hardware" month here at HGM or what? In addition to high quality monitors, biggie-sized memory sticks, and super-duper mousepads, we've got Razer's Copperhead gaming mouse. This serves as a nice complement to Razer's eXactMat on this same page. It's nice and attractive, too, with a cool glow highlighting the mouse. You've got your pick of blue, red, and green.

The Copperhead sports a huge 2000dpi laser for sensing movement. Keep in mind that the average dpi for optical mice is somewhere between 400 and 800. This means that your every little motion will be reflected on screen. If you have the reflexes that pay the bills, this will be a huge help to you. Add customizable sensitivity settings and four customizable buttons in addition to the standard two mouse buttons and a wheel, and you've got one tricky little device. If you're looking for just a little more edge in your gaming, this is a good choice for you.



**Sandisk 4.0 GB Memory Stick PRO Duo**

• PSP Memory Stick • Price: \$229.99

**Features**  
 Plenty of Space

Well, color me shocked. This little piece of plastic holds twice the gigabytes of my first computer in a fraction of the space. It looks better, too.

Sandisk's 4.0 GB Memory Stick PRO Duo is a pretty astonishing little bit of hardware. Its nearest competitor is a bulky add-on with the same capacity, but a much, much larger size. This little stick is pretty much the only PSP memory card you'll ever need, as it has space for a ton of non-DRM mp3s, movies, and pictures. The stick is a fast format, despite its size, and reads files just as fast as a smaller stick would. If you ever wanted to show your friends every single totally awesome video you found on YouTube or Google Video, you'll want one of these. Now, whether your friends want to see all of them is another matter entirely. It's pricey, but it's definitely worth the trouble.



**Razer eXactMat**

• Gaming Mousepad • Price: \$29.99

**Features**  
 Control Side  
 Speed Side  
 Anodized aluminum

How serious are you about your gaming? If you're serious enough to put hours upon hours of time into your favorite MMORPG, FPS, or RTS, Razer's eXactMat may end up giving you that edge you need.

Its premise is simple; it's a mousepad with two sides. One side is smooth; the other, textured. The smooth, high-sensitivity side, dubbed "Speed," is good for games where you don't exactly need a soft touch. You can flick your mouse back and forth faster than you would normally, allowing you to handle twitch games with ease. The textured, low-sensitivity side, "CONTROL," is for precision. This side is good if you're working on things other than gaming, such as graphic design or photo editing. The pad itself is made out of anodized aluminum, which means it wears out exponentially more slowly than your standard pad. It's also oversized, which gives you more leeway when you're surrounded by foes and need those sweeping gestures to take them out.





Fan art is all about giving exposure to aspiring artists who might not otherwise have a way to get their artsie parts seen. If you are one such artist, point your web browser toward [www.luv2game.com](http://www.luv2game.com) and check out the Fan Art section of our message boards. That is where you can post your arts to get them considered for this section. You may also email submissions to [fart@hardcoregamer.com](mailto:fart@hardcoregamer.com).

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



**Title : Cham Cham cherrriiii!**  
**Artist : Adrian Gutierrez**  
**Age : 29**  
**Location : Lubbock, TX**



**Title : Bub and Bob**  
**Artist : Kris Jacque**  
**Age : 21**  
**Location : Ann Arbor, MI**



**Title : Silver The Time Traveller**  
**Artist : Ryan Bloom**  
**Age : 23**  
**Location : Lafayette, CO**



**Title : The Gang from Disgaea**  
**Artist : Cena**  
**Age : 7**  
**Location : Redmond, WA**



**Title : Bussy Has a Question**  
**Artist : Kris Jacque**  
**Age : 21**  
**Location : Ann Arbor, MI**



**Title : NES Link**  
**Artist : Jeremy Gates**  
**Age : 21**  
**Location : Vanceboro, NC**



**Title : Castaway Drawing**  
**Artist : Juan Gonzales**  
**Age : 20**  
**Location : Phoenix, AZ**



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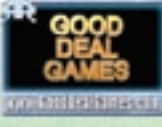

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## J-List has a few things from Japan for you...



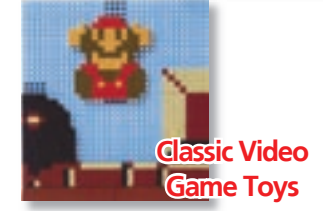
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Wacky Japanese T-shirts & Hoodies ("Looking for a Japanese Girlfriend," at left)



Black Black Caffeine GUM



Classic Video Game Toys



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Bizarre Japanese Design T-shirts



Authentic "Geta" Sandals and Ninja Boots



Solar-Powered Hidamari no Tami Relaxation Toys



Sexy Anime Figures



"Walkie Bits"



Samurai Champloo Items



Rare Totoro Products from Japan



Unazukin Nodding Toys



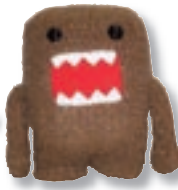
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