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Strong Language

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HARDCORE GAMER MAGAZINE

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Printed in the United States of America

Biographical Data

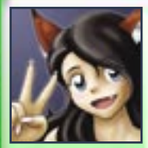
DJPubba_Tim Lindquist

Yes, I am still playing *Disgaea 2*. The whole family is getting involved, believe it or not. I do have to sneak my *Dead Rising* time in after everyone else has gone to bed, though, which means I don't get to play it nearly as much as I'd like. Why can't there be a kid-friendly zombie game? Heh.

Now Playing: *Disgaea 2*, *Gurumin*, *Dead Rising*, *Disgaea 2*, *LocoRoco*, but mostly *Disgaea 2*.

Wanderer_Thomas Wilde

First, *Dead Rising* comes out, and Greg is nice enough to give me the game. Then, I spend the *rest of the $#%&ing* **month** flying around the West Coast on press junkets and writing like half this issue! Yes, it's sunny and beautiful out here and people keep inviting me to parties with open bars and I'm earning a fair amount of money, but I've got zombies to kill, dammit!
Now Playing: *Exit*, *Capcom Classics Reloaded vol. 2*, not *Dead Rising*



Lynxara_Alicia Ashby

Silmeria is the face-rockingest thing to rock face since the advent of face-rocking among civilized man. Game industry, keep the 2.5D and actually challenging RPGs coming. Also, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* is an awesome book and you should read it if you haven't.

Now Playing: *Valkyrie Profile: Silmeria*, *Rogue Galaxy*, *Super Robot Taisen: Original Generation*, *Xenosaga 3*

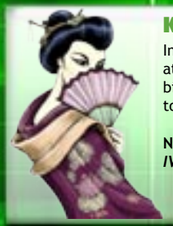
Racewing_Geson Hatchett

It's *Valkyrie*-mania at the HGM house! The releases and stellar gameplay of *VP: Lenneth* and *VP2: Silmeria* have officially allowed me to forgive tri-Ace for *Radiata Stories* (which scarred me) and *Star Ocean* (which scarred many a friend of mine). Sorry, tri-Ace, but you're the *Valkyrie* company now. The sooner you accept this, abandon all other projects, and give us *VP3: Hrist*, the better. Thanks!
Now Playing: *VP 2: Silmeria*, SRT: OG, Dirge (I survived *Ehrgeiz* for my Yuffie Kisaragi fix; this is nothing)

Shoegazer_Dave Hulegaard

This month I celebrate birthday #30. I am officially old. I did my best to fight it, but apparently "30" was a much tougher stage boss than I anticipated. It was like fighting Sephiroth from the original *Kingdom Hearts* with one hand, while the other hand was forced to play *Ultimate Ghosts n' Goblins* for the PSP.

Now Playing: *Madden NFL 07*, *Dead Rising*, *Thunderforce V*



KouAidou_Elizabeth Ellis

Injuries, a messed-up sleep schedule, and random anxiety attacks make for a not very fun week. At least I have the bizarrely huge final dungeons of *Final Fantasy IV: Advance* to get me through those sleepless nights.

Now Playing: *Final Fantasy IV: Advance*, *Civilization IV: Warlords*, *Kirby: Canvas Curse*

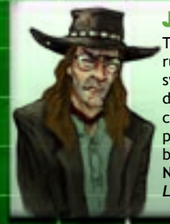
Roger Danish_Greg Off

Hard to believe were just a month or so away from receiving two new pieces of hardware, as well as some amazing game experiences courtesy of Microsoft. This is history in the making, and if you can't find a reason to rejoice and bask in the glow of next gen gaming, then you my friend, are dead inside.

Currently Playing: *Dead Rising* (still!), *Resistance: Fall of Man*, *Okami*, *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins*.

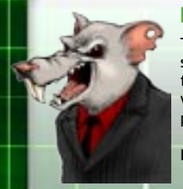
4thletter_David Brothers

What a crazy month. I've done more game work this month than ever, including during E3. I'm not even allowed to talk about a lot of it! I can't complain though. Bills must be paid, especially college tuition. Education is expensive. Who'da thunk it? Call me shamless, but you should still be reading www.4thletter.net, especially if you like comics.
Now Playing: *Dead Rising*, *Wrestle Kingdom* (PS2), *Madden NFL 2007* (360)



James_James Cunningham

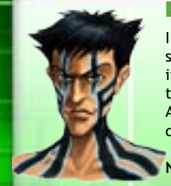
This month, I worked. I also found a swimming hole running alongside a river, complete with cliffs and rope swings. Nothing like swinging out over a deep river and dropping twenty feet to the water below, followed by climbing a rock wall back up, to make a summer feel perfect! Hopefully I can get back there one more time before summer trails off.
Now Playing: *Okami*, the surprisingly fun *Rengoku 2*, *LocoRoco*, *Monster House*, and *Drill Dozer*.



HonestGamer_Jason Venter

This is one of those months where I have more games stacked around me than I can possibly play in a timely fashion. Hmm, that probably sounded like a complaint. It wasn't. I've seldom been happier. So, what is it that I'm playing? *Disgaea 2*. Still.

Now Playing: *Disgaea 2*, *Civilization IV: Warlords*



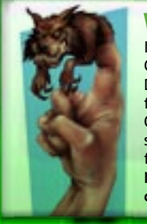
Hitoshura_Iaian Ross

I recently picked up *VP: Lenneth* for the PSP, but something seemed amiss the more I played. Eventually it dawned on me; why did Square-Enix dump the English translation from the PSX version that was fixed for North America into the original problematic Japanese one? How did **that** happen?

Now Playing: *Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth*, *Rogue Galaxy*

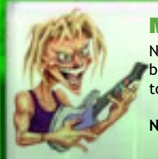
Sardius_Danny Cowan

Having unstable preview code corrupt your memory card is kind of a downer. Having it corrupt a card that doesn't belong to you — and that you should not be using under any circumstances — is a disaster that only magazine shout-outs (and maybe a few free Whataburgers) can fix. This message goes out to The Internet's Chris: you are awesome. Please don't murder me.
Now Playing: *Madden NFL '96* (PS1), *Star Fox 2*, *Sonic X-treme*



Wolfie_Terry Wolfinger

It's been a busy month; I did a drawing of a certain Captain Jack that can be found in a certain piratey DVD that will be coming out soon, and I'm working on final edits of a graphic novel that will be printed in October that I did 134 pages of art on! Woot! OK, enough shameless self-promotion... we now return you to this fine issue of *HGM* already in progress. Boy, I'm tired...
Now Playing: *WOW*, *Digimon Rumble Arena 2* (Yeah, I'm cutting edge)



Metalbolt_Anthony Mertz

Normally there would be some sort of content to my bio, but this month I'm working so much it's amazing I have time to stop and write this! Who loves third shift? Not me!

Now Playing: Not a thing. I don't have the time!

Arfieth_Thomas Shin

I am exhausted. So exhausted, in fact, that I've found myself playing a game, falling asleep, and dreaming that *I'm still playing the game*. Of course, none of my experience or special items carried over into the game itself when I woke up. Thank god I don't play dating sims.

Now Playing: *Castles 2* (PC), *Guilty Gear XX: Slash* (PS2), *Ninety-Nine Nights* (Xbox 360)

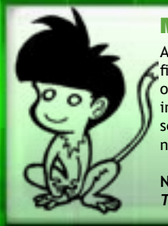
Ashura_Brady Hartel

Does it ever bother you that every time you beat *Super Mario World* with Luigi, Mario is the one who gets all the credit? Well, if it didn't before, it will now!

Now Playing: *Dead Rising*, *Melty Blood: Act Cadenza*, and... *Super Mario World*!?

Jeremy_Jeremy Peeples

It's been a stressful month filled with broken cars, deadlines, and dead relatives, so I'm thankful to have an endless stack of games. I want to enjoy it all now, because once I get my hands on *Okami* and *Yakuza*, I know I'll be far too busy with them to spend much time with anything else. I might have to make an exception for Kim Possible though.
Now playing: *GTA Double Pack* (Xbox), *GTA: LCS* (PS2) *WWF No Mercy*, *Shadow of the Colossus*, and *FF: DoS*



Mads_Amadeo Garcia III

After several months of conditioning, the HGM staff finally managed to train Mads to use a keyboard in other ways than to jump around, strafe, and buy stuff in *Counterstrike*. Mads has yet to be trained to type sentences more coherent than 'lol pwned nub'. Perhaps next month.

Now Playing: *City of Villains*, *Einhander*, *Final Fantasy Tactics* (what can we say, he likes the classics)

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HARDCORE GAMER MAGAZINE

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We've delivered up a big batch of um... paper with, uh... ink in millions of tiny dots arranged just right to show you the new games.

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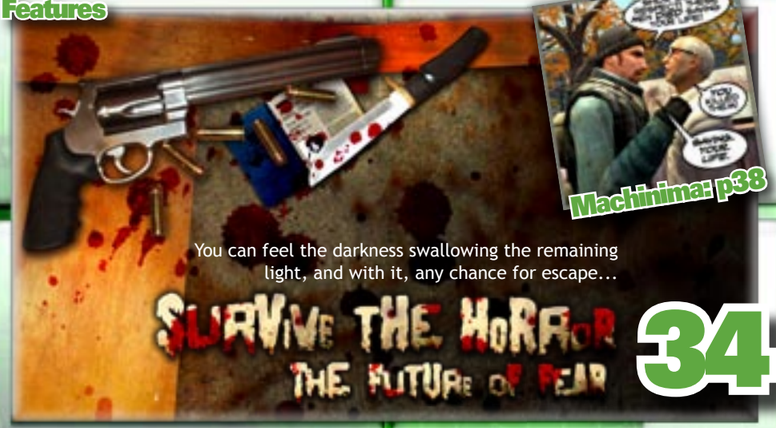

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You can feel the darkness swallowing the remaining light, and with it, any chance for escape...

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On the cover

Crypto's boss Orthopox has been able to clone Crypto a new and improved body. It comes complete with the "Holy Grail" of Furon anatomy: functioning genitals.

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THE END OF E3 AS WE KNOW IT (AND I FEEL FINE)

With their E3 budgets reaching the eight-figure range, several major publishers requested a meeting with the conference's organizing body, the Entertainment Software Association, to discuss finances and the future of the Electronic Entertainment Expo.

As a result, the ESA has decided to evolve the annual convention into a more intimate gathering that will focus on press events and small meetings with media, retail, development, and other key sectors. Additionally, the event has been renamed the E3 Media Festival, and it will take place in July instead of May.

While details are still limited, the end of E3 as we know it has its pros and cons. No longer will media and industry attendees be obstructed by "Exhibits Only" guests who clog up the hallways just to snap photos of scantily-clad booth babes. We may be able to hear game makers discuss their new titles without having to raise our voices because the neighboring booth has cranked up the volume to 11.

On the other hand, the ESA wants to scale down the venue and move to smaller settings in various hotels, which will reduce the number of attendees from 60,000 to 5,000. This means that fewer people per outlet will be allowed, resulting in less overall coverage. This change may also mean that exhibitors who are usually in the smaller halls, like Kentia, may no longer be able to participate.

The ESA has a lot of decisions to make in the coming months, but that isn't stopping various smaller organizations from capitalizing on the situation to get a piece of the E3 pie.

America's VideoGame Expo (VGXPO) is promoting its October 27-29, 2006, event in Philadelphia as an alternative. Gen Con, held in Indianapolis in August and Anaheim in November, plans to expand its offerings by increasing venue space and changing its location. Penny Arcade Expo has already issued a statement about remaining a three-day gamefest, despite an increase in attendance.

Internationally, the Game Convention in Leipzig, Germany, has seen its stature grow each year, establishing itself quickly as the place to be for European publishers, developers, and media alike. While the Tokyo Game Show might be a bit farther than most people want to travel, the Korean Game Show & Trade, All-Round (GSTAR) clearly announced that it wants to be the next international E3.

A viable replacement may emerge from the CEA, organizers of the International Consumer Electronics Show, who have expressed interest in expanding beyond gadgets and making a move towards gaming and gaming products. In comparison, E3 attracts 60,000 attendees, while CES usually receives well over 100,000. The CEA has put together an advisory committee to look into its options, as well as possible locations and venues.

FINANCIAL GIBBERISH

Every three months, game companies file their quarterly financial results reflecting how well, or badly, they have done. While the number crunching is quite boring, those filings often reveal interesting tidbits about new, cancelled or delayed titles. Electronic Arts' net revenue was up 13% (from $365M to $413M), but its net loss also increased to $81M from last year's $58M. Midway's net revenue dropped from $36.9M to $25.9M, and net loss clocked in at $31M, a small increase over last year's $29.9M. Midway has high hopes that *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon* will boost sales during the 2006 holiday season. Atari's net revenue dropped from $23.9M to $19.5M, mostly due to fewer titles in circulation, while net losses were reduced from $32.8M to $7.1M. Eden Studios's *Alone in the Dark* is getting pushed back from its early 2007 release date to fiscal 2008, which translates to anytime after March 2007.

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PLATFORM PlayStation.2

FINAL FANTASY XII

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

Genre(s): RPG
Category: W.A.R
# of Players: 1

It's been five years since a traditional, single-player *Final Fantasy* has hit the U.S., and RPGs as a genre have changed a lot since then. *Final Fantasy XII* takes the series in such a radical new direction that, while it is single-player, some gamers may never accept *FF XII* as a traditional *Final Fantasy* title.

In *FFXII*, the dominating Archadian empire has subjugated its neighbors, and destroyed the kingdom of Dalmasca in Ivalice (last seen in *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*). Main characters Princess Ashe and Vaan team up to destroy the Empire as a punishment for its many evil deeds. They also have a personal stake in the battle; Vaan wants revenge for his fallen brother, and Ashe wants her kingdom back from the Empire's clutches. Square-Enix is taking their usual care in preparing the English language version, and they've had a lot of practice handling voice acting since their early efforts in *FFX*. Now you can expect the sort of polish and craft shown off in recent Square-Enix localizations like *Kingdom Hearts II* and *Dragon Quest VIII*.

The series-long tradition of using a totally unique gameplay system in every *Final Fantasy* game continues in *FFXII*. Its big innovation is the Active Dimension Battle system, which creates a more realistic experience by letting the player seamlessly transition from exploration to combat with minimal load times. Fans of old-school elements like airships also have plenty to be happy about, too. Airships in particular play a more prominent role in the events of *FFXII* than they have in almost any other game.

Die-hard *FF* fans are going to want to spend an extra $10 and pick up the metal-encased GameStop-exclusive Collector's Edition release of the title, featuring both the American and Japanese trailers, developer interviews, history galleries, and a host of other featurettes. Others can probably content themselves with the slightly cheaper, regular edition of the game. All gamers hoping for the *FF* series to have a great return can rest easy. *FFXII* is poised to deliver the high-quality visuals, story, music, and gameplay that form the cornerstone of the franchise's reputation.

Preview by Jeremy

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Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team
Release Date: Q4 2006

Genre(s): RPG
Category: Wow, It's Shiny
# of Players: 1 - A Whole Lot

They say you
can't have your cake
and eat it too. These people are liars.

Case in point: Sonic Team's bringing *Phantasy Star Universe* to current and next-gen systems. Since the series's rebirth on the Dreamcast, it's proven to be massively addictive for anyone who's had an internet connection, but nigh-inaccessible for people who aren't really into MMOs. *Universe* changes that by including both its classic Online Mode, and a new Story Mode that's a full-fledged single-player RPG. It's got heroes (one Ethan Wade), a supporting cast, an evil that threatens the universe (a race of grotesque creatures known only as the SEED), and all.

Single-player gameplay is traditional *Phantasy Star Online* fare, so people who missed out on the PSO craze when it first began can now see what everyone was so in love with. The action-RPG combat becomes second nature after but an hour to learn the game's nuances, so even latecomers to the PSO party can jump right in. In single-player, AI partners join Ethan on his quest and fight alongside him; in Online Mode, you can create your own character and travel in parties of up to six in a sprawling, ever-changing world. The Xbox 360 version, of course, comes prepackaged with improved graphics and Xbox Live support, so no matter which platform you choose to buy this game on, you'll be able to hop online and find someone to adventure with.

If you're like me, and have had to watch friends and family spend hours zombified in front of the television, hacking away at monsters using hordes of shiny weapons to the tune of techno music… well, this winter, it'll be our turn.

I personally can't wait. I love closure.

Preview by Racewing

Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Cyber Connect
Release Date: 10/24/06

Genre(s): RPG
Category: Not Really Online
# of Players: 1

The original four ***.hack*** games were initially released to high praise, but people soon complained that they were ultimately buying four games without enough changes to warrant each distinct purchase. The game world wasn't growing much more complex, the characters weren't changing enough and the music and graphics, while remaining constant, weren't great.

.hack // G.U. Vol. 1 looks to rectify each of those issues. First, the graphics and interface are significantly improved, and the game stands proud among any the genre has to offer. Barren prairies and featureless dungeons are replaced by grassy plateaus overlooking roaring waterfalls, moonlit beaches and underground caverns with crystalline lakes. Between adventuries, numerous cutscenes advance the plot with flair to spare. The characters have strong personalities, as always, and there's a mystery every bit as deep as the one found in the previous games.

The visuals aren't all that's improved. The battle system now feels a bit more standard, but it's every bit as action-oriented as before. When you engage in combat, you're locked within a limited area. Monsters attack with purpose and so must you. As you wail on an opponent, you'll open up the option to use special attacks assigned to the various buttons, which adds a new element of strategy. Before battles begin, you can also try to creep up on your unsuspecting opponents to gain the upper hand.

While the graphics and combat have seen numerous changes, though, the notion of an online world contained within your console has not. Players still gossip on forums and in artificial e-mails about what must be going on behind the scenes, and now there's the added intrigue brought about by a string of player kills that leave people in comas in the real world.

.hack is back in a huge way. Be very excited.

.hack//G.U. Vol.1 // Rebirth

Preview by honestgamer

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

Genre(s): RTS
Category: Kill the Future
# of Players: 1-3

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION Vol. 2

If there is a theme in Capcom's releases this year, it is that the company will not rest until every man, woman, and child on this planet owns at least one arcade-perfect rendition of some version of *Street Fighter 2*. *Super SF2 Turbo* forms the centerpiece of this arcade compliation, which also includes arcade quartermunchers like *Magic Sword*, *Knights of the Round*, *1941*, *Captain Commando*, and *The King of Dragons*.

Some of the other inclusions on this disc, such as the obscure arcade three-in-one *Three Wonders*, are appearing for the first time on home systems.

More nostalgia-oriented *Street Fighter II* fans should look at the PSP *Reloaded* collection, which contains three versions of *SF2: World Warrior, Championship Edition*, and *Hyper Fighting*. Other titles in the collection include *Commando*, *Vulgus*, *Gun Smoke*, *1943*, *Pirate Ship Higemaru*, *Son Son*, *Mercs*, *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, and *The King of Dragons*; the last six titles can all be played via a game sharing mode.

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION RELOADED

CCC Reloaded keeps track of how long you've played each title in the collection and awards you coins based upon your achievements therein. You can use these coins to play a special slot machine, which pays out with music, art, and cheats for each of the games in the collection.

Preview by Wanderer

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

Genre(s): RTS
Category: Kill the Future
# of Players: 1-3

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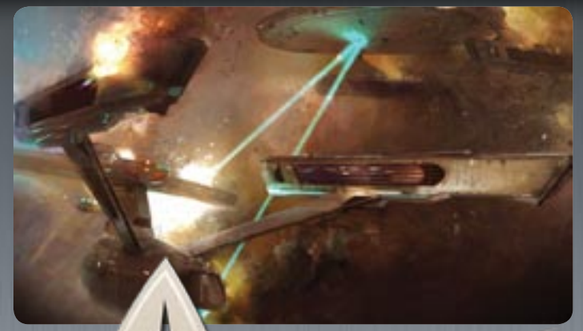
A little red flag goes usually goes up in a gamer's mind when a title has a production history as long and tortured as *TimeShift's*. Originally developed for Atari, the IP instead was abruptly sold off to Vivendi Universal earlier this year, months before the game's original release date. The result has been a last-minute overhaul that preserves the game's core gimmick, manipulating the flow of time in-game to solve puzzles and beat enemies, while totally changing just about everything else.

While the premise is much the same, *TimeShift*'s script has seen a complete rewrite. You still play as Colonel Michael Swift, a "chrononaut" who's trying to use his time-controlling Quantum Suit to defeat a mad dictator named Krone. Instead of the Atari version's camp and humor, the Vivendi incarnation of *TimeShift*'s plot is a more serious, dramatic story. Completely new music and voice acting reflect the script changes, including performances from high-profile celebrity actors like Dennis Quaid, Michael Ironside, and Nick Chinlund. Sharply improved graphics are the bow on Vivendi's bright new package, boasting enhanced animations and far better textures than the Atari version.

Can the gameplay hold up after spending so long in development hell? It really depends on your taste in shooters. The big emphasis in *TimeShift*'s single-player is on clever puzzle-solving, with stuff like reversing time to summon elevators or reconstruct destroyed objects. You can use your time-control in combat, of course, which lets you do morbidly amusing things like freeze enemies in place and then pick them off while they're helpless. Vivendi is promising some special rules for *TimeShift*'s online multiplayer, including time grenades to let you stop or slow down other players. Fans of *Prey* are sure to get a kick out of *TimeShift*, but this is definitely a game to avoid if you can't stand FPS jumping puzzles.

Publisher: Vivendi-Universal Games
Developer: Saber Interactive
Release Date: 05/09/06
Genre(s): FPS
Category: Butterfly Effect
# of Players: 1-16



STAR TREK TACTICAL ASSAULT

Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
Developer: Quicksilver Software
Release Date: October 2006
Genre(s): Space Combat
Category: Final Frontier
# of Players: 1-2

Say what you will about the franchise, but the *Star Trek* games have not enjoyed a lot of mainstream success. Bethesda Softworks and Quicksilver Software want to change that with the release of *Star Trek Tactical Assault*. It's set in the same continuity as the films from the original series. You are Captain James T. Kirk and you've got a whole mess of Klingons to kill.

Tactical Assault is a real-time space combat title that pits you against the various Klingon warships as an agent of the Federation in one mode, and as those very same warships that are fighting against the Federation in another. There are a wide variety of ships to choose from on both sides, each with its own positives and negatives, so there's also plenty of variety to keep you interested.

Human, Klingon, Romulan, Gorn, and Orion characters are all available in the multiplayer mode, each with their own set of ships. You'll have to adjust your tactics according to which race you're playing just to be sure that you don't shoot yourself in the foot. You also can battle wirelessly with your friends.

The story mode promises to have branching paths, allowing you to dictate the route that your campaign for or against the Klingons will take. *Star Trek Tactical Assault* has plenty of choices for you to pick from in almost every way. Give it a look when it drops.

Preview by **Wanderer**

It's England, 1930. Jennifer's an ordinary girl riding the bus when a little boy gives her a homemade children's book, entitled ***The Little Princess***. The boy then runs off the bus, and Jennifer gives chase. She winds up alone in the middle of nowhere, next to a seemingly-abandoned orphanage, and the little boy is leading her into a trap. As she explores the house, the blank pages of ***The Little Princess*** begin to fill themselves in...

You could be forgiven, upon first seeing *Rule of Rose*, for thinking that it's a new installment in the series that gave us *Clock Tower* and the recent *Haunting Ground*. Perhaps you might think it's *Clock Tower 4: That's When I Reach For My Revolver*. It is not, and you're also a weirdo. Instead, it's a distinctly creepy original game that draws inspiration from folklore and silent movies, with a distinctly dreamlike feel.

You spend most of *Rule of Rose* defending yourself from the machinations of the Aristocrats' Club, a bunch of creepy little children who obey their own strange mythology, and their strange possibly-undead minions. Jennifer can defend herself with weapons ranging from a dessert fork to a revolver, while digging up clues and items with the help of her trusty dog Brown.

Rule of Rose is a slow-paced, bizarre game with a phenomenal orchestral soundtrack. If you're patient and willing to put up with severe weirdness, keep your eyes open for this one.

Rule of Rose

ルール オブ ローズ

Publisher: Atlus
Developer: SCEI
Release Date: 09/12/2006
Genre: Survival Horror
Category: Not Clock Tower Really
Players: 1

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TEEN T
Language
Mild Fantasy Violence
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation.2
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cooking mama

Publisher: Majesco
Developer: Office Create
Release Date: 9/12/06
Genre: Mini-Games
Category: Food, Glorious Food
Players: 1

Surgeon. Lawyer. Zookeeper. Pet owner. The DS has been host to a variety of titles where various jobs have turned into good gaming, and now Majesco adds another to the list: chef. *Cooking Mama* is about, logically enough, cooking, turning the variety of tasks needed to make fine dining out of basic ingredients into a series of mini-games. A watchful Mama oversees each task, either praising you for a job well done or offering a fire-eyed "Mama can fix it!" when things go wrong.

A typical dish is comprised of several tasks, usually about six but sometimes as many as ten or more. You get to chop, slice, sautee, boil, fry, knead, bread, batter, and measure a huge variety of ingredients, and that's just for starters. Each of the dozens of processes gets its own stage, with a gaming approximation of how the job would be done in the real world. There are over 70 recipes available, covering everything from omelletes to udon to soups and stews, not to mention a mode for combining two separate dishes into one mega-meal.

100% touch-screen controlled, *Cooking Mama*'s mini-games range in complexity from one simple action (slice a vegetable in half) to multi-stage processes, almost all of which are timed. There's even a Use Skill mode where unlocked mini-games can be played with increasing difficulty, *WarioWare*-style. With dozens available, some requiring more finesse than you might think at first glance, *Cooking Mama* promises a big helping of gaming for its modest $20 price.

Gitaroo Man Lives!

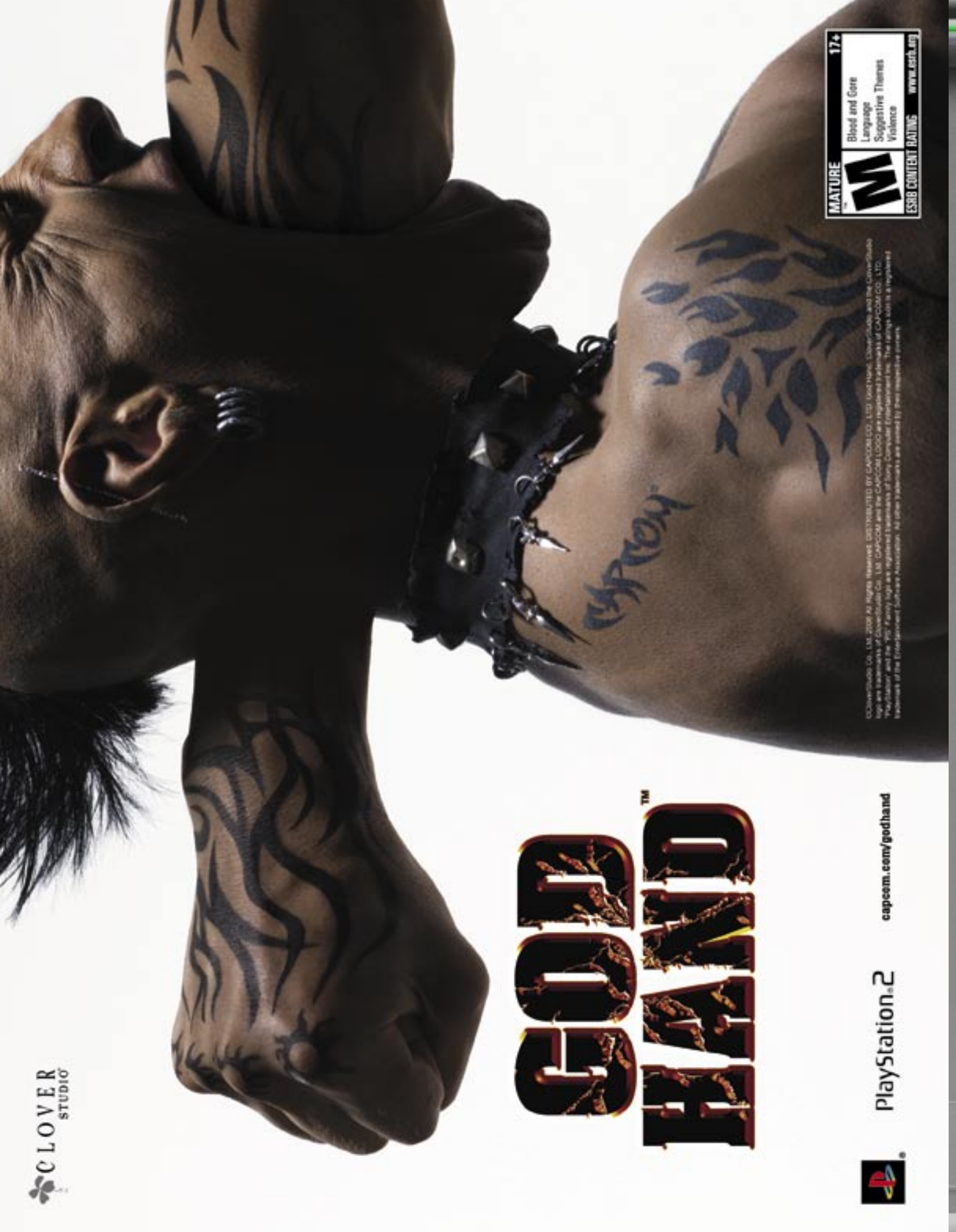
Publisher: Koei
Developer: Inis
Release Date: February 2007
Genre(s): Music
Category: Metal, J-Pop, Blues, Rap-Reggae, etc.
# of Players: 1-2

Gitaroo Man was, quite possibly, the single best *Parappa*-style music game ever made. It came out in 2002 to rave reviews and a tiny print run, then disappeared quickly from store shelves, garnered a cult following, and even got a reprint from GameQuestDirect. Now a new and improved version is on its way to the PSP, bringing music gaming goodness to all those who've never heard Flyin' to Your Heart, Bee Jam Blues, or the ultimate guitar battle of Resurrection.

Gitaroo Man Lives! re-tells the classic story of a nerdy weakling who taps his inner talent to become savior of the Gravillians. Obviously, this can only be done by transforming from pathetic U-1 into the heroic Gitaroo Man, defeating a series of various bizarre creatures in musical battle, and integrating the power of their instruments into his gitaroo.

Those musical battles are where the gameplay lies, with a twisty line winding in towards the dot in the center of the screen. Pushing the analog nub towards the line and hitting a button with proper timing causes U-1 to play the gitaroo, either attacking his opponent or refilling the health bar. There's also a defense section where symbols stream in from the top, bottom, and sides, and hitting the right button dodges the attack. It's all done to the beat, and there are some enjoyably tricky musical patterns to work out.

In addition to the classic single-player game, *Gitaroo Man Lives!* adds some new multiplayer to the mix. Co-op and competitive modes are both available, and there are even two brand-new songs not present in the PS2 version. This means you should all run out and buy truckloads of copies, so maybe they'll finally make that sequel that I've been wanting for the last four years.



PLATFORM PlayStation.2 XBOX 360 XBOX PC

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

Preview by Wanderer

Sam Fisher's daughter Sarah is dead, the victim of a hit-and-run. Ten months later, Fisher has seemingly gone rogue and been slung into Leavenworth, but he's actually infiltrating a terrorist cell. With nothing left to lose, he's taken the most dangerous assignment Third Echelon has, going deep undercover as a — go on, guess — double agent.

We've been playing the singleplayer version of *Double Agent*, and the first word that comes to mind is "challenging." Fisher the terrorist doesn't have all the tools that Fisher the secret agent had, such as his nightvision goggles, tricked-out rifle, or silenced pistol. You'll be forced to rely more on skill and Fisher's talents than your bag of high-tech tricks, which leads to a more intense and focused experience than *Chaos Theory* ever was.

Double Agent retains the basic gameplay from its predecessor, *Chaos Theory*, while adding an innovative trust meter. As Fisher, you must balance your loyalties between the NSA and the terrorist group you've joined; your actions in the field will determine how trusted you are by either side, and going too far to one extreme or the other could wind up ending your game. Depending on which side you favor, you'll lock or unlock missions and gain access to different weaponry.

If you're like me, and I know I am, *Chaos Theory* was the first *Splinter Cell* that really grabbed you. *Double Agent* is *Chaos Theory* plus one, and it'll really test the stealth skills you've developed from the last three games.

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft
Release Date: 10/17/2006

Genre(s): Stealth Action
Category: Hate and Fear the Light
# of Players: 1-4

Publisher: SCEA
Developer: SCEA, San Diego
Release Date: 09/26/06

Genre(s): Sports
Category: Takin' it to the paint
# of Players: 1-8 w/Multitap (Online & EyeToy enabled)

NBA 07

the PSP game

Preview by Shoegazer

NBA 07

FEATURING

the Life VOL 2

the PS2 game

It can be a tough place out there on the sports video game market if your name isn't EA or 2K Sports, but it's the spirit of competition that brings Sony's own San Diego studio back out onto the court. Last year's innovative mode, "The Life," was not only a hit with the basketball gamer crowd, but helped to produce some truly hilarious commercials.

"The Life" returns once again in *Volume 2*, boasting many gameplay improvements over last year, as well as putting you into the role of the league's star player. Key new features include the Smart Shot Indicator, a new Power Boarding System, and the inclusion of over a dozen mini-games such as 21, Own the Court, and the classic 3-Point Shootout. The Smart Shot Indicator will provide visual clues as to how the defense will impact your shot, while the Power Boarding System will position your players for a rebound more realistically within a true 3D environment.

The basic gameplay elements have also been given some tweaks this year which should allow for more accurate control over shot selection, stealing, passing, and even more intuitive AI.

For the NBA hopeful, this is the life. Dust off your EyeToy and get into the game this fall.

ATV Offroad Fury PRO

Publisher: SCEA
Developer: Climax Studios
Release Date: 09/26/06

Genre(s): Racing
Category: Good Ole' Boy Simulation
# of Players: 1-4 w/Multitap (Up to 8 online)

ATV Offroad Fury 4

After the departure of developer Rainbow Studios, the *ATV Off-Road Fury* series stumbled a bit with its third installment. However, the ever-capable Climax Studios is back at it again with a slew of new features and upgrades, in an effort to win back the hearts of the masses.

To get better, you have to go bigger and bolder, which is exactly what Climax has in mind. For the first time ever in the history of the franchise, in addition to racing ATVs, you can also select from an array of MX bikes, Buggies and Trophy Trucks. There are also a total of six continents and over seventy tracks to get your nac-nac on. The inclusion of an all-new story mode should also be of special interest to *ATV* vets as you assume the role of the newest rook on the racing scene, competing for prestige and lucrative sponsorships.

This new installment will also feature robust online functionality including tournaments, player rankings, the ability to swap game data, and PS2-to-PSP connectivity. USB headset and keyboard support is also in the works for you fans of the trash talk. Check it out when the fury hits the road this fall on a PS2 or PSP near you.

Preview by Shoegazer

PS2 VERSION

A drifter named Gene, passing through a town, finds a woman in distress, and attempts to defend her against a gang of superhuman thugs. He's left for dead, and has his right arm severed for his trouble.

Gene awakens to find out that his right arm's been replaced with the legendary God Hand, which allows whoever possesses its power to crush their foes into dust with but a few simple strikes.

We all know what happens next. **(About 30,000 really obvious jokes? -Thomas)**

In *God Hand*, you can purchase dozens of moves, and customize your own combo tree with what you've acquired. From simple strikes to attacks which literally bring down houses, you'll be able to craft your own fighting style with intuitive chain combos that you literally create yourself. Raise enough of a ruckus and you'll be able to harness the God Hand's special skills. You'll be able to utilize everything from shining punches which throw people across rooms, to groin shots which cue laugh tracks, to telekinietic baseball bats which launch people into the stratosphere. It's all about bringing the hurt, and looking good while doing it. However, unlike most games, *God Hand*'s immensely comedic about its over-the-top violence.

Even with the God Hand on your side, you'll need a healthy dose of skill. Learn how to deliver combos and maneuver with the best of them, because, outside of your arm, the odds are stacked against you something fierce. Enemies take a while to go down, they block and parry attacks intelligently, and they surround you whenever possible. As the game's own trailer says, it's hard, but fair.

How well can you handle having an almighty arm? Find out next month when *God Hand* hits store shelves!

Preview by Racewing

GOD HAND™

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Clover Studio
Release Date: October 2006

Genre(s): Action
Category: Most Painful Sitcom Ever
# of Players: 1

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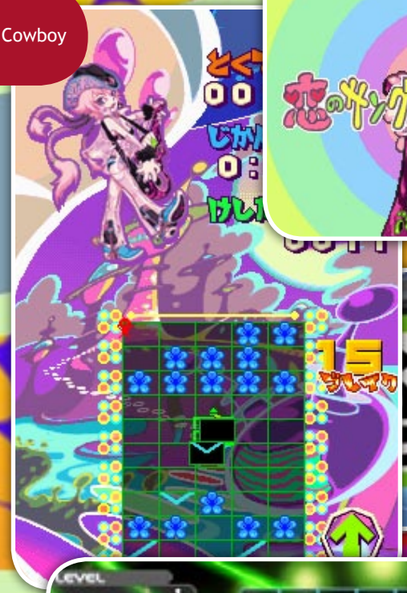
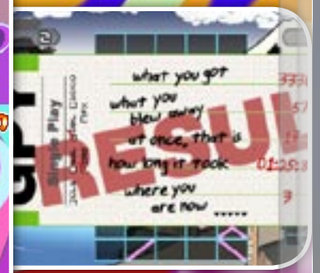
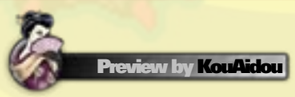
GUNPEY





Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Q Entertainment
Release Date: Holidays 2006

Genre: Puzzle
Category: Psychedelic Space Cowboy
Players: 1-2



You'd be hard-pressed to find a puzzle game coming out this holiday season with a better pedigree than *Gunpey*. The original was the brainchild of Gunpei Yokoi, the legendary Nintendo developer who created the classic Game Boy system. The remake is being helmed by Q Entertainment, the masterminds behind *Lumines* and *Meteos*.

Gunpey stays true to its roots as a puzzle game of the "simple to learn, difficult to master" variety. You're given a grid five blocks wide. Line segments of various angles rise up from the bottom of the grid, and you must maneuver the segments up and down to create a smooth line from one end of the grid to the other. Once the line is connected, the blocks disappear. Naturally, you're rewarded for creating more complex segment chains, and if the blocks fill up to the top, you lose.

The DS and the PSP will be getting highly different versions of the game, tailored to each system's strengths and feel. The DS version allows you to use the stylus to move blocks, and bombards you with psychedelic colors as you face off against a crazy cast of characters in the loosely story-based "Frontier Mode." The PSP version, meanwhile, focuses more on being a pure puzzle game, with an emphasis on the game's customizable graphical and musical skins. Whether you're a Nintendo nut or a Sony obsessive, everyone goes home happy with *Gunpey*.

Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Grasshopper Company
Release Date: 09/19/06

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

Contact

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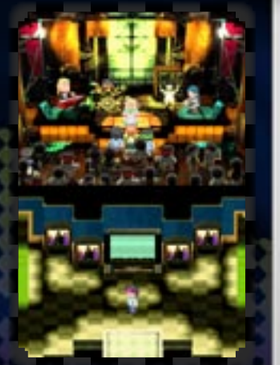
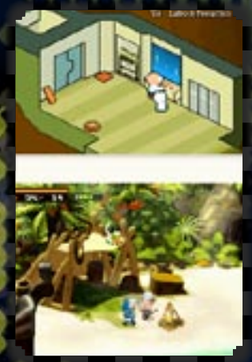


Nintendo's never seemed enthusiastic about continuing the *Earthbound* series in the US, but Atlus is stepping up to the plate with a game importers have been quick to declare the franchise's spiritual successor. In *Contact*, you help a scrappy kid named Terry use costumes, stat-boosting stickers, and mad kung-fu to help a stranded alien scientist gather power cells lost from his spaceship. While Terry's world is about what you'd expect a 2D DS title to look like, the scientist seems to be a refugee from a distinctly more 8-bit reality. You're also made part of the surreal story simply by playing the game, as a benevolent presence that's able to change Terry's reality with a flick of your stylus.

This is the kind of game design that makes ***Contact*** so demented and inspired. Terry moves around his world on the bottom screen, while you get messages from the professor on the top screen. Combat uses a real-time system that lets you level up Terry's various abilities as you use them to fight off hostile animals and angry plant-things. You find a wide variety of items to use, food to eat, and special abilities called Techs. You use everything you have to interact with the world however you wish, but everything you do ultimately affects Terry's Karma, Fame, and Courage ratings and changes the way other characters in the game react to Terry.

Grasshopper Company is the developer responsible for the memorably weird ***Killer 7***, which was long on style and a little short on gameplay. ***Contact***, by contrast, seems to have hit the perfect balance of style and substance. If you're the kind of person who's nostalgic for old games like ***Earthbound*** and ***StarTropics***, or just interested in seeing a refreshingly bizarre RPG, then you really need to play ***Contact***.



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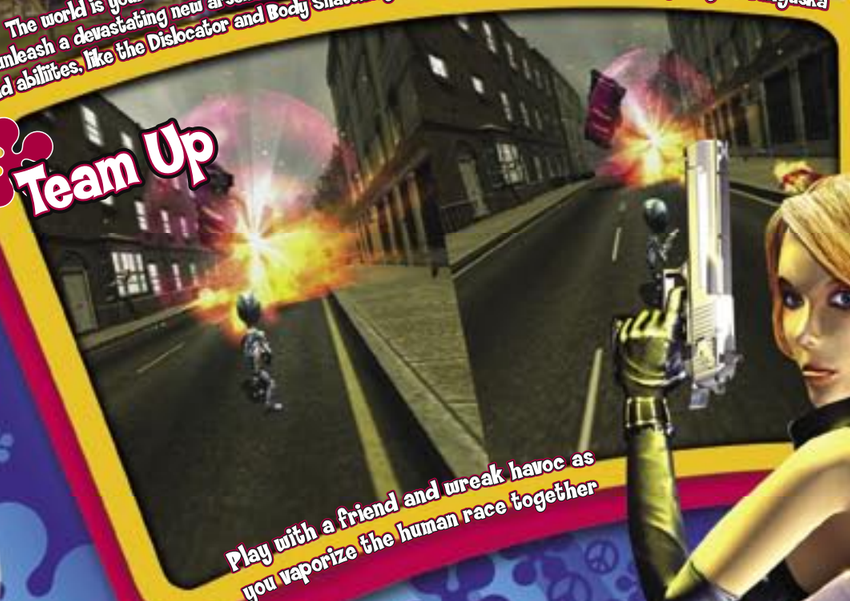

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SURVIVE THE HORROR

THE FUTURE OF FEAR

A FEATURE BY DANIEL KAYSER (OF GAMETRAILERS.COM) AND ALICIA ASHBY

This enormous potential to use gaming to terrify as well as excite players is shaping the future of everything from marketing to level design in the game industry. It was definitely a profound influence on Marcus Beer, who coordinated the marketing and development of Monolith Productions' *F.E.A.R.* for Vivendi-Universal Games. "Monolith really deserves the credit for *F.E.A.R.*'s content. From the start Craig Hubbard wanted to make a paranormal action game," Beer told *HGM*. "Not a supernatural game, no werewolves or zombies or vampires, **paranormal**. *F.E.A.R.* looks like the real world, it's not set in a fantasy environment. We heard all these great stories about people staying until six or seven PM in office complexes to play it. They'd go to use the restroom or something, and then suddenly the flickering light that hadn't bugged them before began seriously creeping them out. I think it was really that in *F.E.A.R.* the levels, the offices and warehouses you fought in, they felt like they could be anywhere, and that makes it scary. It's something you can relate to, and I think psychologically that struck a chord with people."

Inching down a dimly lit hall, your eyes are fixated on the only visible glimpse of light, which weakly glows from behind a single battered door. It's incredibly faint, and barely enough to illuminate the stuffy, stagnant corridor. The echoing sound of low, droning murmurs seem miles away and yet you remain convinced of their presence within your immediate surroundings. In darkness, alone, you reach for your gun, nearly depleted of ammo, as you strain to decipher a signal for what you should do next. Suddenly, the murmurs cease. All you can hear is the pounding of your own heart. You can feel the darkness swallowing the remaining light, and with it, any chance for escape....

Does reading that bring back memories of playing a favorite scary game? You shouldn't be surprised if it does. Fear is a powerful thing, possibly even the most powerful of all emotions. In the world of entertainment, creating a terrifying scenario like the one above relies on achieving one thing: immersion. So gaming, more so than any other medium, has the potential to deliver the most realistically frightening experiences. Nothing happens in a game until you pick up a controller and become a principal actor in that game's world. So in a truly great game you don't just see someone else exposed to terrifying situation; the terror is yours.

Of course, you can't look at the future of a medium without first exploring the past. In older games, limitations in technology hampered a developer's ability to truly induce fear in the player. Classic titles like *Castlevania*, *Ghouls N' Ghosts* and *Friday the 13th* (NES) did the best they could and managed some memorably macabre sounds and imagery, but you probably didn't lose sleep over them. You could even argue these weren't really horror games at all. You might get mad when Simon or Arthur fell to his doom after a mistimed jump, but you weren't really afraid.

It wasn't until 1993, however, when Interplay published *Alone in the Dark* for the PC, that gamers truly got a taste of things to come. *Alone in the Dark* turned the then-popular adventure game genre on its head by using Hollywood-style camera angles to let you follow the main character, Edward Carnby, through what was at the time a tense and immersive experience. Unique puzzles provided compelling gameplay while unusually realistic animations made the title immersive in a way that earlier efforts just couldn't be. Most gaming historians, in fact, credit *Alone in the Dark* as the forefather of the entire "survival horror" genre.

One of *Alone in the Dark*'s spiritual progeny was the next milestone in survival horror gaming. In 1996, Capcom changed gaming history by introducing the *Resident Evil* franchise on Sony's PlayStation. It was impossible to play the game and not recognize the influence of *Alone in the Dark* in everything from the premise to the puzzles to the camera angles. *Resident Evil*'s calling card was a more aggressive, combat-oriented element influenced by the kinds of 3D action games the PlayStation hardware was popularizing. The result was more of a "thrill ride" atmosphere, where zombies and all manner of horrific creatures would jump out at you without a moment's notice. Memorable characters, amusing B-movie voice acting, and most importantly great gameplay helped *Resident Evil* become one of the PlayStation's must-own titles. Its popularity helped in turn fuel demand for PlayStations, and founded a gaming franchise that endures today with titles like the superb *Resident Evil 4*.

Alone in the Dark and *Resident Evil* became classics by using audio and visual enhancements along with compelling gameplay to achieve a sense of immersion. An experienced gamer himself, Beer is quick to acknowledge these games as personal favorites and influences. "The first three *Alone in the Dark* games were brilliant. *Resident Evil* was the first video game that ever gave me nightmares." Otherwise he views the emergence of the horror genre as a relatively new development in gaming, powered by leaps in technology. "There haven't been that many great horror games. For a lot of early ones, the technology just wasn't up to spec. There's a lot of old games that could do with a makeover. *Phantasmagoria*, for instance, could be done so well now."

Properly exploiting technology to create frightening games relies on more than better sounds and more realistic images, though. After all, plenty of games are drenched in blood and gore without being scary at all. The secret is to use the game to push the player's emotional buttons. Frightening images and spine-chilling screams are just the beginning.

We return to Beer and the example of *F.E.A.R.* again. He taps the side of his head illustratively as he speaks to us, eyes intense. "We had this buzzword for *F.E.A.R.*, called "theater of the mind." You see stuff onscreen, but until you suspend disbelief, then you know you're playing a game in the back of your mind. You know you'll be okay. To make the game scary, you need to make the audience start wondering. That's why we included the little visions of Alma and other things designed to make you realize all is not well. I think more games could go with doing that. The best horror films of the past 50 years have been the ones that got your mind to work. Look at *Blair Witch* or *The Ring*."

In short, creating fear in a gamer is something you can't achieve in the game itself. You have to begin manipulating the gamer, and invite him or her to explore the game's chilling scenario. Good game design is essential for making this work. Players don't want to be part of a world until they feel a sense of freedom in exploring it, but that freedom must be continually threatened by a dire sense of urgency.

Technology lets developers give players the tools they need to explore a game's world with a sense

of true freedom. In *Condemned* for the Xbox 360, you'll listen intently to determine exactly where the footsteps of your enemies are coming from, while searching desperately for anything you can use to defend yourself from the impending encounter. *F.E.A.R.* put its emphasis on enemy AI, since obviously you can't be afraid of enemies that you can easily outsmart. The AI itself was so sophisticated that Beer cited it as a reason why it could be years before an online multiplayer co-op expansion for *F.E.A.R.* is released. At the moment it is technologically infeasible to share the enemy AI code across networks. In the meantime, players just have to make do with fan-made mods of the single-player campaign.

Often the technology of modern games is simply used to harness the power of one of the most basic elements of fright, the element of surprise. "It's all about the suspense before the attack, and doing it in bursts so you didn't get immune to it," Beer says of *F.E.A.R.*'s attempts to control the tension players experienced as they played. "So you have the intense bursts and then the slower parts where you are gathering the phone messages and all that. You don't know what you're going to see next, so then you get scares out of things like paint cans rolling across the floor. Making people second-guess themselves is ideal. And the AI in *F.E.A.R.* is so good it could do that."

SPECIAL THANKS TO MARK CLARK, JAMES HOWELL, AND ERIK SNYDER FOR HELP WITH THE LAYOUT.

Despite the abundance of technology, however, it is still up to developers to push the envelope in terms of creativity. Many games today have a "been there, done that" feel to them, but the ones that get ahead of the pack usually garner high praise. A lot of stale old survival horror cliches were quickly eliminated from the list of design elements *F.E.A.R.* was interested in using. "No monster closets, no horror hammers," Marcus says, his expression clearly unhappy. "No invisible trips that make monsters teleport in behind you. If soldiers came at you from a certain area, it's because they could get there and you could get there. That level of realism is unnerving." Although unsaid, his implication is clear: enemies popping out of corridors you just cleared out yourself isn't unnerving. It's annoying, and that takes you out of the game. Once that happens, experiencing a scare is pretty unlikely.

Integrating horror and gameplay isn't always easy, though. Some elements of a great game aren't too conducive to the helpless feeling that produces a good scare. Beer freely admits that the upcoming *F.E.A.R. Multiplayer* isn't really going to include any horror elements to detract from the deathmatches. "The gunfights in *F.E.A.R.* are totally outside of the horror genre. *F.E.A.R.* single-player is always horror-driven, so *Extraction Point* is the future of *F.E.A.R.* as a horror game."

Extraction Point is the upcoming single-player expansion for *F.E.A.R.* that picks up directly where the original game left off, offering eight new levels of action. It's impossible to describe the new content without giving away the ending of *F.E.A.R.*, but the scares of *Extraction Point* are, if anything, more intense than the first game's. You feel truly lost and alone as you explore your decrepit surroundings, even your high-tech arsenal and time-slowing powers not enough to hold darkness at bay.

What is the future of horror gaming? It's hard to tell, but there's plenty on the horizon to tantalize a gamer who wants to be terrified. Developers are definitely still going to keep pushing visual and audio quality to create horrifying new worlds, like *Bioshock*'s bloody underwater hell. There's also room for horror to embrace innovative new genres, like the blend of FPS and RPG action you see in *Hellgate: London*. Atari hopes to re-invigorate *Alone in the Dark* as a horror title that embraces and refines the idea of episodic content pioneered by *Half-Life 2*. Of course, there's also new entries in old franchises like *Silent Hill* and *Resident Evil* to keep looking forward to.

How well, or poorly, any of these titles do is going to depend on how well the developers understand and respect the principles of horror gaming. Show off technological advancements, sure, and have a good story to draw players in. True immersion, though, is only going to happen when developers design games that give players the satisfaction of freedom.

Even gameplay modes like multiplayer that seem a bit counter-intuitive for horror may even be made to work. Regarding the lack of horror in *F.E.A.R. Multiplayer*, Beer is a bit philosophical. "We have a really strong dev team and they're always cooking up ideas. When we implement the horror in multiplayer, it will be done right. There are certan values we want to adhere to. We won't just put in some scare moments in multiplayer to please a few people. Nothing in *F.E.A.R.* will ever feel cheap or tacked on."

"Nothing cheap or tacked on." That's a very simple way of summing up what the future's horror games need.

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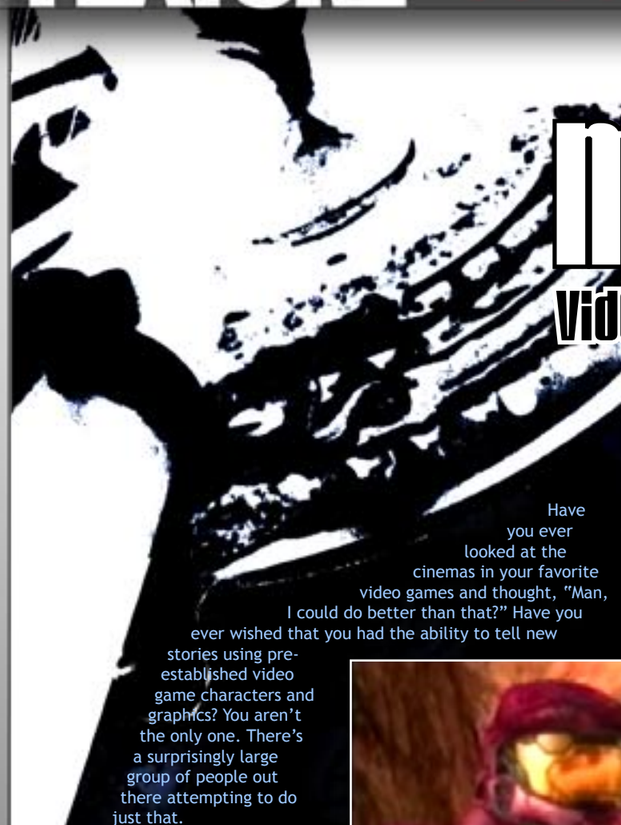


A FEATURE BY 4THLETTER

MACHINIMA

VIDEO REELS FROM VIDEO GAMES

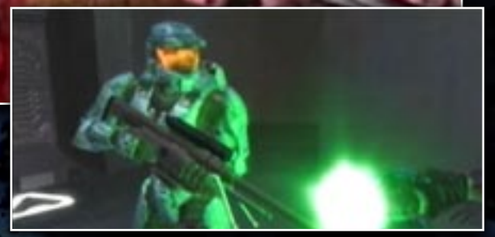
Have you ever looked at the cinemas in your favorite video games and thought, "Man, I could do better than that?" Have you ever wished that you had the ability to tell new stories using pre-established video game characters and graphics? You aren't the only one. There's a surprisingly large group of people out there attempting to do just that.

They call it "machinima." The basic idea behind it is the manipulation of video games in new ways to create new narratives. It bears a superficial similarity to the sprite web-comics that permeated the internet a few years ago, where creating the comic involved taking 8-bit or 16-bit characters from various games (often *Mega Man* or *Final Fantasy*), pasting them onto a background, and adding (hopefully) humorous speech bubbles. *Bob & George* and *8-Bit Theater* are a couple of the longest-running sprite comics.

Machinima takes it to the next level. It creates full-blown movies from video games using a variety of different methods. Some machinima filmmakers use trick photography to create the illusion of characters interacting with each other. This is the method used in the popular Red vs Blue series. Red vs Blue is arguably the most popular example of machinima out there. It combines the super-popular *Halo* series with a distinct, though nearly identical cast of characters and a self-referential and whip-smart sense of humor.

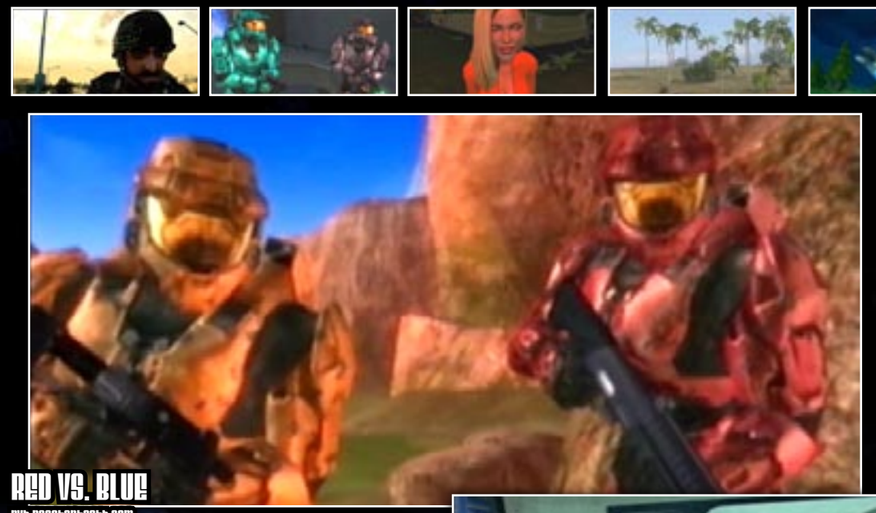
Fans of the original *Quake* had a front seat for the evolution of machinima. A few of you may remember a pretty popular group called Quake Done Quick. They produced a number of extremely fast and complete speed runs for the *Quake* series, among others, and helped pave the way for machinima. A few of the runs come in not only a first-person perspective, but a third-person point of view as well, dubbed a "recam." There was also a short film called "Diary of a Camper" produced by United Ranger Films using the *Quake* engine in 1996. It told the story of a lone camper against five players and his final fate.

RED VS. BLUE
RVB.ROOSTERTEETH.COM



JAMES BOND 007 IN NO LICENSE
WWW.SHORTFUZE.CO.UK

There's another way to create machinima, too. Thanks in part to advancing technology and a willingness on the part of developers to support user-created content, many games are including recording and editing features. *The Sims 2* includes a full-blown movie editor, allowing everyone and their grandmother to create their own soap operas and Shakespearean tragedies at their leisure. Maxis even hosted a number of contests on their site for the best-made films.



RED VS. BLUE
RVB.ROOSTERTEETH.COM

Proof that machinima has gained higher notice by publishers and gamers alike can be found in Lionhead Studios' *The Movies*. In a world where most games needed to be repurposed to create and share films, you can play *The Movies* as if that's the entire point of the game. There is a narrative present in the game, but it's taken a backseat to the movie production. It's been used for everything from adaptations of T.S. Eliot's work to big budget action epics. Lionhead has a community site set up specifically for the dissemination of these movies.

More and more companies are soliciting machinima movies made from their games. Blizzard and Xfire ran a *World of Warcraft* machinima contest and garnered over a hundred submissions. *City of Heroes* developer Cryptic Studios runs annual contests to show off both their game engine and the creativity of their userbase. There are machinima film festivals that are held on the internet, in games, or even in real life. Pop on over to *http://festival.machinima.org/* to see information about an upcoming event in Astoria, NY.

LOL ANOTHER DAY: LIVE AND LET RESPAWN
WWW.JANUS-SYNDICATE.COM/PORTAL.PHP

Machinima shows that a lot of gamers aren't content to be passive observers. Many of them have stories to tell, and now they have the wherewithal to do it. Machinima gives people who otherwise would be voiceless a platform to share their own stories, with or without the backdrop of an established game. It's perfect if you're on a low-budget/no-budget business plan. All you really need to get started is a decent computer, a PC game such as *Half-Life 2* or *World of Warcraft*, and a few friends willing to be recorded for your film. It helps to have thick skin, a sense of humor, and patience.

THE DINO HUNTERS
WWW.THEDINOHUNTERS.COM

ONE HALF-LIFE TO LIVE

Machinima refers to the moving pictures made by manipulating video games, but what would you call a comic strip that uses many of the same tools of machinima? I don't know, but Concerned: The Half-Life and Death of Gordon Frohman (*http://www.hlcomic.com/*), by Christopher Livingston, is one comic that makes you wonder. Concerned is filled with cases of mistaken identity, mayhem, and bloody carnage, all of it with a humorous twist. Another quality one is Apostasy (*http://www.phwonline.com*), which employs impressive panel layouts and writing to tell the story of City 17 pre-Freeman.

Both of them use Garry's Mod (*http://www.garry.tv/*), a popular *Half-Life 2* modification, to maneuver characters and props into place for "filming." G-Mod gives *Half-Life 2* an extraordinary level of flexibility, and it will be nice to see where it goes from here. If you don't have the rig or the time to create a machinima film, or are maybe a little too self-conscious to do voice recording, but you do have *Half-Life 2*, you've got an option.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Check out these websites for a quick primer.

http://machinima.com
http://www.machinima.org/

INTERNET IS FOR PORN
WWW.MACHINIMA.COM/FILMS.PHP?ID=1988

THE DARK SIDE OF RETROGAMING

Feature by Roger Danish

AWESOME POSSUM: KICKS DR. MACHINO'S BUTT

Platform: SEGA Genesis
Publisher: Tengen
Developer: Tengen
Release Date: 12/25/1993

Genre(s): Platformer
Category: Garbage
# of Players: 1

There are bad games. There are terrible games. There are games so heinously appalling and horrendous that you want to gouge your eyes out with a spork after a few minutes of playtime. However, Tengen's *Awesome Possum: Kicks Dr. Machino's Butt* trumps them all with its crappy gameplay, muddy graphics, screeching music, warbled sound effects, and preachy premise, which attempts to make you feel guilty for not recycling or setting up a compost heap in your back yard and mulching.

Produced at the height of the "run real fast from left-to-right," mascot-based, side-scrolling game era, this awesomely bad video game featured Awesome Possum, an environmentally friendly, wisecracking marsupial who chose to "take on the littering Dr. Machino and his chainsaw goons by cleaning up the rancid rubbish, fighting putrid pollution, and collecting recyclables to win big points!"

In reality, the only thing recycled here was the concept, which was a basic rip off of SEGA's *Sonic the Hedgehog*. The goal was to run to the end of the level while butt-bouncing on enemies and collecting items and power-ups. Of course, that was if you could come to grips with the game's sloppy controls and/or had some self-loathing issues that would actually force you to keep playing after hearing the horrific theme song at the title screen.

One of *Awesome Possum's* key selling points when it was released back in 1993 was that it featured eighty different voice samples. Apparently, Tengen thought it would be a good thing to make their lead character as annoying and narcissistic as possible, and if this was their goal, then they succeeded with flying colors. Awesome incessantly spurted out screechy wisecracks and garbled one-liners that attempted to make you a hateful person. He constantly had to let you know that "he's awesome!" or "so cool!" The only thing cool and awesome about this feature was that it could be turned off via the options screen.

The final insults were the mindless trivia questions in between levels that, I guess, were supposed to be somehow tied into the whole ecological theme of the game. The developers even knew this would piss players off, so they addressed it in the manual by saying "The purpose of the questions is not to shovel facts into your head; the purpose it to surprise you with some fun, interesting bits of knowledge—things you may not have known!" Here's a question, Tengen: WTF?!

In the end, the only thing *Awesome Possum* took on was the bargain bin at the local Toys 'R Us. A true harbinger of death for the platformer genre, this derivative excuse for a video game signified everything that was wrong with the industry at the time. It should have been dumped into a landfill in the desert with all of those *E.T.* cartridges.

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Puzzle Fighter II Network Battle

Super Puzzle Fighter II: Network Battle is a puzzle game that utilizes super-deformed versions of the characters from Capcom's classic 2D fighting games. It combines drop-and-stack puzzle game mechanics with the cute characters to let you engage in head-to-head puzzle battles online.

In the game, multi-colored gems drop from the top of the screen and you must arrange them into groups of their own color and eliminate them before the screen fills up. To destroy gem groups, you need to match a color group with a special circle-shaped gem.

When gem colors match up both vertically and horizontally, they turn into larger gems. The more big gems and gem colors you destroy in a single move, the more gems you can drop on top of your opponent.

When the screen fills, you lose the round, and most matches consist of three rounds. Each round is timed on top of that. The game is set up so that the moves are uploaded/downloaded in intervals, so it's easy to think you're winning and then find out how wrong you are at your next interval download.

Players can initiate matches through the "Quick Match" mode or find friends to challenge using "Multiplayer" mode. Within this mode, you can also send text messages to your opponent prior to starting the competition. Because you are connected all the time, expect some lag as you play and send information.

Super Puzzle Fighter II: Network Battle succeeds in delivering the head-to-head competition of the arcade version, if a bit slowly. The game itself isn't as easy as it sounds, though it's annoyingly easy to succeed just by placing gems randomly. This forces circle gems to spawn more frequently to keep up, and also lets you force more chains to drop onto the opponent. It satisfies an urge to compete, but the game itself stops being fun after awhile.

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: 08/2006

Genre: Puzzle
Category: Online
# of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE : 3 of 5

GoodFellas

GoodFellas, while having no direct connection to the happenings in the classic movie, is one part mobster management and another part poker game with a movie gangster vibe. The goal is to start small-time as a simple goon and earn money and respect from the top dogs (Paulie, Jimmy and Tommy) to work your way to the top.

Each of the Wiseguys has a respect bar for you and these must be filled in order to advance up the ranks. The bars rise after certain "jobs" are completed successfully and as they pertain to a specific Boss. For example, Jimmy's respect bar rises when you hire goons to hijack shipments and sell the goods illegally, Tommy's respect meter rises after your goons collect on high interest loans you've negotiated, and Paulie's meter grows when you collect money from people that you are "protecting".

Hijacking shipments is easy as long as you hire a good crook. You choose the type of shipment you want to jack, like cars, furs, or smokes and then you choose the price you want to sell them at. If the hijacking was successful, just sit back and watch the cash roll in at the end of the week. Loaning and collecting protection monies is even easier. To loan money, first you select the person and then the interest rate. If they feel the interest is too high, you can bargain. When it comes time to collect, all you have to do is hire a goon to pay a visit. If the person refuses to pay, you've got the option of sending someone to "whack 'im" in true mobster style.

An important point to remember is that your goons each have a price as well as skill and loyalty meters. The higher the skill meter, more expensive they are to hire. The tradeoff is that tougher thugs can handle tougher jobs. The loyalty meter is key because it measures your thug's ability to keep his mouth shut if caught. If you get squealed on, it's straight to jail for a long time unless you can bribe your way out and reduce the sentence.

The poker part of the game ensues at the end of each week where you play a game of 5-card draw with the Fellas. You can also play this game separately. During the game they'll dish out juicy details about a hot shipment or other tips, but the main point is that playing with them helps gain respect as well. The longer you can hang with them, the more respect you get. Every once in a while you'll see the opportunity to cheat and drop a card to replace it with another, but be careful because if it's one that they have been dealt, they call you out and you lose some respect.

All in all, *GoodFellas* is an admirable attempt at creating the movie's atmosphere. It certainly won't allow you any of the real life luxuries and pitfalls of mobster life, but anything is better than really going to jail.

Publisher: I-Play
Developer: I-Play
Release Date: 09/2006

Genre: Tycoon
Category: Strategy
# of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE : 4 of 5

Lil' Jon Crunk Golf

Lil' Jon Crunk Golf isn't so much a golf game as it is a game of target practice with golf equipment. You play as Lil' Jon, running around city rooftops trying to hit basically everything, but mostly people. The 29 stages have varying obstacles in your way but they all mainly entail teeing off on someone.

By hitting the required bystanders you earn "bling points", while hitting objects like neon signs and billboards fills a "crunk gauge". Using this crunk power, you can home in on your target with more accurate shots. As you progress through the game, you encounter more obstacles and need to think of more inventive ways to tag your target. For instance, one level requires you to use an antenna to redirect your shot, while another lets you drop an AC unit on your unsuspecting victim.

The controls are simple: you use one button for everything. An arrow moves left and right until you decide to stop it, and that determines the angle of the shot. A power gauge moves up and down to determine the power in your swing. You only receive a limited amount of golf balls to clear the objective, so each shot shows you the angle and power of your last shot to help you fine-tune your efforts.

The graphics have 3D scaling for the city backdrops and a cel-shaded color style for all of the illustrations. Animations are also pretty clean but the best part, and eventually most annoying, is the audio commentary provided by Lil' Jon himself. It's waaaaaay over the top. Hilarious at the beginning, but just unbearable after a while.

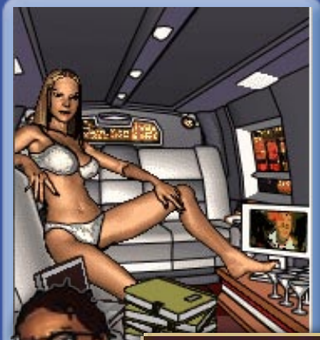
Lil' Jon Crunk Golf is completely one-dimensional but funny while it lasts. You can hit people in the groin over and over! The game's simplicity is its strong point and anyone can easily pick it up to start playing. How appealing it is should depend on how much you can stand repetition.

Publisher: Bling Games
Developer: Lagardere Active
Release Date: 07/2006

Genre: Sports
Category: Golf
# of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE : 3 of 5

Hot Secretary "I LOVE MY BOSS"



The wishlist of every man probably includes the thought of a hot secretary catering to your every need. It may not be at the very top of that list, but rest assured, it's got to be somewhere on there. Legendere Active also seems to have that thought, and tries to give us men what we wished for with this game.

Hot Secretary places you as the busy head of a major rap company with three sexy assistants willing to follow your every command. Your goal is to overload them with tasks until they can't take it anymore, and start agreeing to do anything to save their jobs. Here, anything means removing their clothes.

Each girl serves as a stage in the game with each article of clothing a level within. To overload them with tasks, words are displayed at the bottom of the screen that you must quickly type out using the keypad. If you're successful, the clothes come off one by one until all she can do is cover herself using her arms.

A game like this should seem like a dream come true but *Hot Secretary* is totally botched. The words are never difficult to spell and you rarely fail to succeed at your goal. There is just no challenge. On top of that, the whole premise just feels wrong. It's not fun to pretend to be a guy who overworks a woman until she's so desperate to keep her job that she's taking her clothes off for you. Sure, it's silly to apply real-world ethics to what people do in a video game, but playing *Hot Secretary* still manages to come off sleazy.

Finally: let's say you're a real scoundrel and don't mind the sexual harrassment in the game's premise. Then what's the point of having the secretary cover herself with her arms in the end?! She never shows off the goods! There's no payoff! What, would having actual nudity in the game be too unethical? It doesn't make sense. If you have to make something like this, then go all the way already!

Hot Secretary can be finished very quickly and probably only serves to make you slightly better at text messaging. It doesn't do anything to satisfy that male wishlist and the sleazy set-up is just a shame. At least other soft-porn games have you playing strip poker or something a bit more challenging.

Publisher: Bling Games
Developer: Lagardere Active
Release Date: 08/2006

Genre: Puzzle
Category: Typing
# of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE : 1.5 of 5

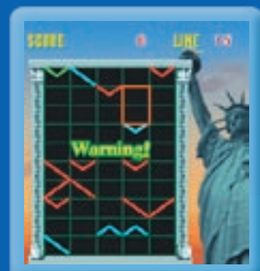
GUNPEY EX

GUNPEY originally saw the light of day on the Wonderswan handheld a number of years back. Because of that, it was hardly noticed outside of Japan and many were unable to experience its freshness. Now, that's about to change.

The game involves manipulating pieces of lines up and down so that they create one long line that connects both sides of the playing field. Linked lines disappear, and you need to create chains that clear lines before they crawl all the way to the top of the screen. If they do, you lose. It's that simple.

Line pieces come in four arrangements, and it takes a lot of skill to create chains. Still, you can always try your luck. Using same colored lines will add extra points.

GUNPEY EX offers four different game modes. While the gameplay is essentially the same in each, the challenges are quite different. "Stages" gives you a set number of line pieces that must be cleared in order to proceed to the next level. "Endless" bombards you with a never-ending stream of lines to see how long you can last. "Time Attack" sets a countdown timer to create as many lines as possible, and "Practice" is a stress-free, no-lose opportunity to polish your skills.



The biggest challenge in the game is learning how to consistently create full lines using the right pieces. A cursor will highlight two vertical sections that you can swap. Sometimes you can even swap lines and empty space. You create combos one swap at a time, so moving a line to a certain spot can waste time.

GUNPEY EX is a slick game that breaks a lot of the unwritten rules that govern all those other match-type puzzle games. Still, it does require that you love those types to begin with. It's a little quirky and not as easy as it sounds, so come prepared. You'll be able to upload your highest scores for all the world to see.

Publisher: Bandai
Developer: Bandai
Release Date: 08/2006

Genre: Puzzle
Category: Strategy
# of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE: 3.5 of 5

PIRATES of the CARIBBEAN MULTIPLAYER

Pirates of the Caribbean Multiplayer is an online naval battle game whereby up to 16 players can participate simultaneously in plundering towns, fighting rival pirates in sea battles and defending their honor.

Players assume the role of a pirate captain and create their character to take command of a ship. Depending on your skills and how successful your pirate is, you can raise your infamy level to become the scourge of the seven seas. There are three types of ships available and each will have its own set of characteristics but you will be allowed to swap types during battles to better fit the situation. Power-ups will also litter the oceans to provide advantages in battle and these include invincibility, more speed, better maneuvering and greater firepower.

Once the captain has been created and the ship selected, the user will be able to go online and join any number of games aptly titled Broadside Brawl, Jolly Roger and Plunder the Port. Broadside Brawl is a simple death match between red and blue teams to see who can sink the most enemy ships and will remain afloat. Jolly Roger is where both teams battle to capture each other's flag. In Plunder the Port, one team takes the role of attacker and the other as the defender of a coastal town. If the attacking team is to win, they must destroy the town and return to their base with 10 units of gold. If the defending team is to win, they must keep the attacking team from capturing the gold units before time runs out.

The game is online as soon as you log in so make sure that your calling plan covers the time spent. Since sixteen players can participate at any one time, features like guilds, creating public or private games, buddy lists and in-game text messages are included.

Pirates of the Caribbean Multiplayer is a great concept to entice more hardcore gamers to mobile games while keeping a mainstream appeal. It's executed well and brings a truly connected experience that's fun. But how many of you have the handset and minutes to handle such a game?

Publisher: mDisney
Developer: Floodgate Ent.
Release Date: 07/2006

Genre: Shooter
Category: Online
# of Players: 16

FINAL SCORE: 3 of 5

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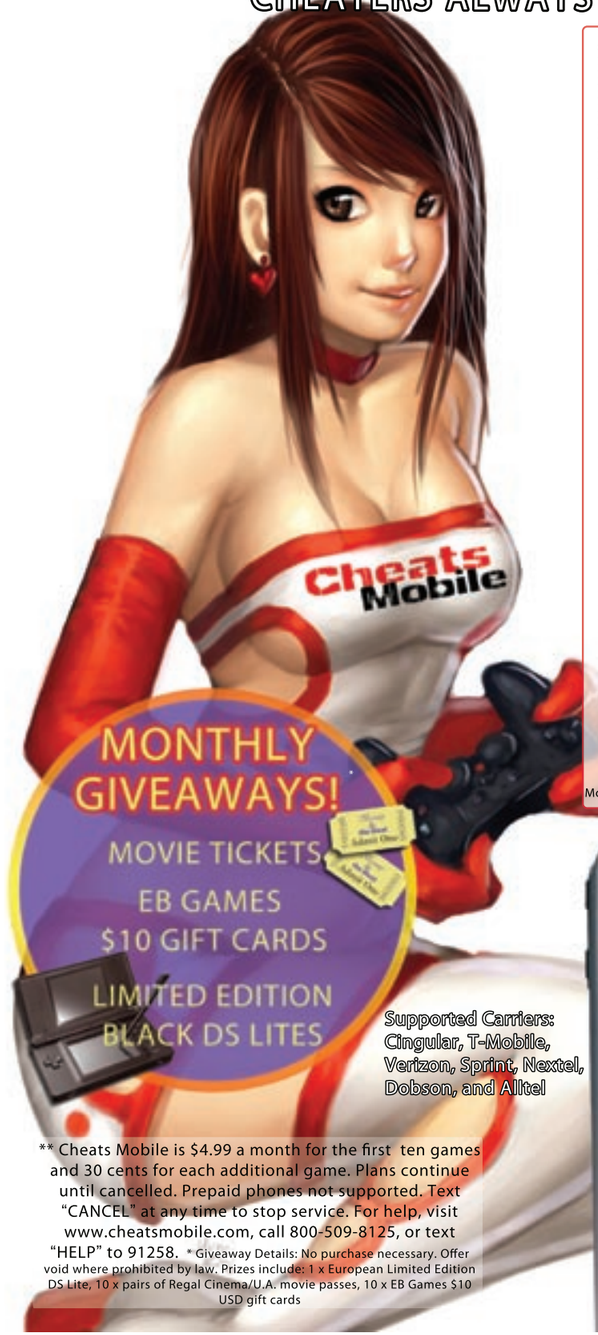

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33111	FAR CRY INSTINCTS PREDATOR
32820	FULL AUTO
33112	MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K6
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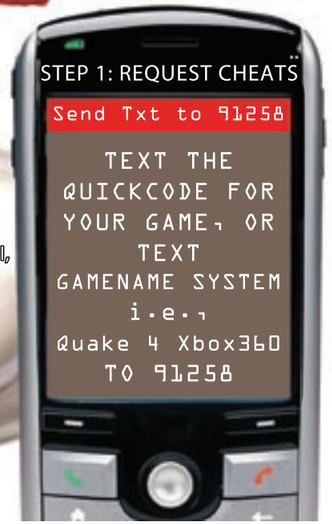

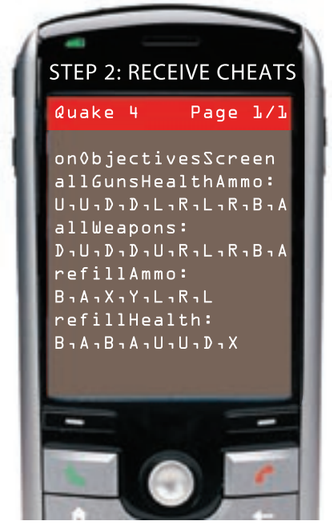

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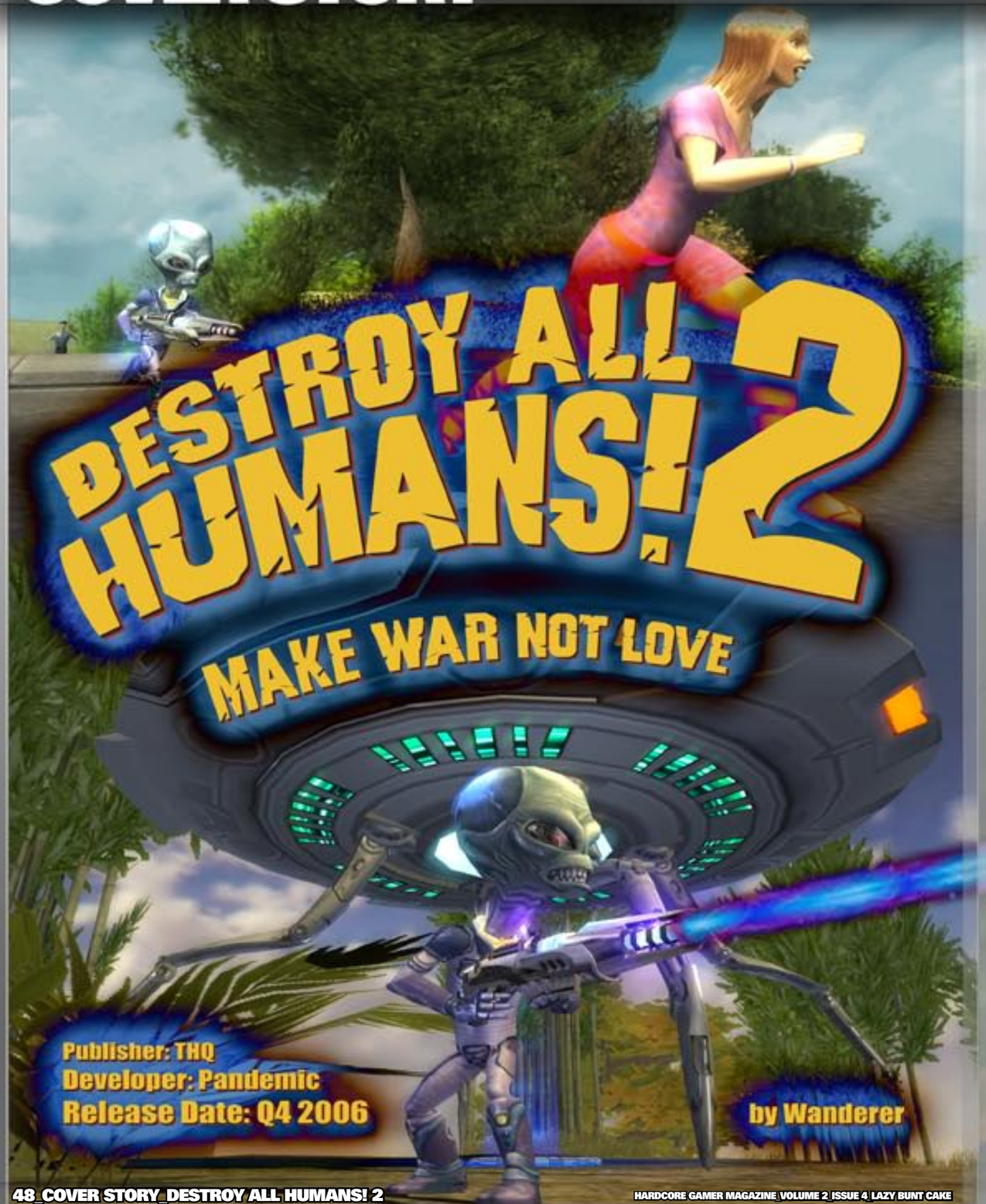
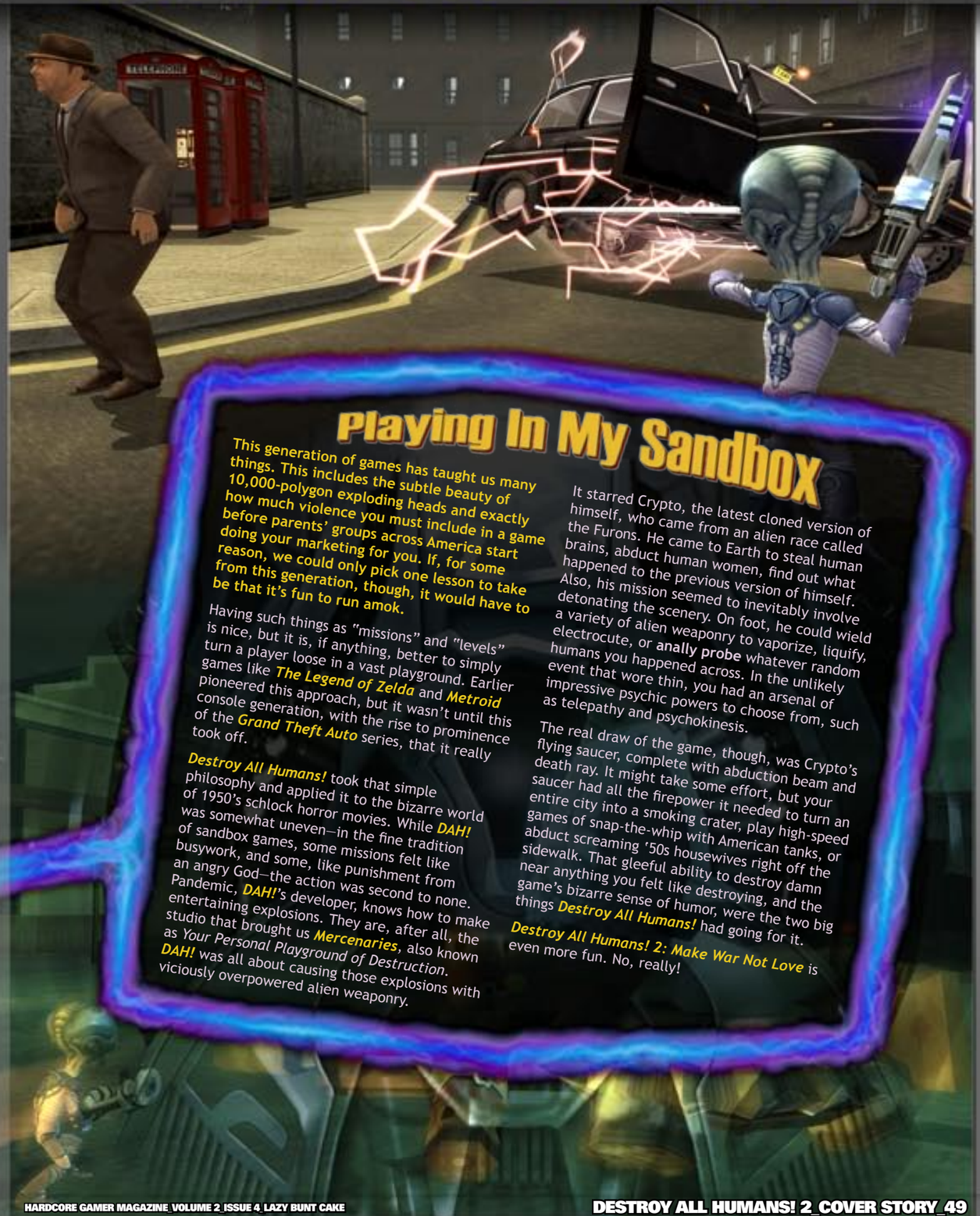




Playing In My Sandbox

This generation of games has taught us many things. This includes the subtle beauty of 10,000-polygon exploding heads and exactly how much violence you must include in a game before parents' groups across America start doing your marketing for you. If, for some reason, we could only pick one lesson to take from this generation, though, it would have to be that it's fun to run amok.

Having such things as "missions" and "levels" is nice, but it is, if anything, better to simply turn a player loose in a vast playground. Earlier games like ***The Legend of Zelda*** and ***Metroid*** pioneered this approach, but it wasn't until this console generation, with the rise to prominence of the ***Grand Theft Auto*** series, that it really took off.

Destroy All Humans! took that simple philosophy and applied it to the bizarre world of 1950's schlock horror movies. While ***DAH!*** was somewhat uneven—in the fine tradition of sandbox games, some missions felt like busywork, and some, like punishment from an angry God—the action was second to none. Pandemic, ***DAH!***'s developer, knows how to make entertaining explosions. They are, after all, the studio that brought us ***Mercenaries***, also known as *Your Personal Playground of Destruction*. ***DAH!*** was all about causing those explosions with viciously overpowered alien weaponry.

It starred Crypto, the latest cloned version of himself, who came from an alien race called the Furons. He came to Earth to steal human brains, abduct human women, find out what happened to the previous version of himself. Also, his mission seemed to inevitably involve detonating the scenery. On foot, he could wield a variety of alien weaponry to vaporize, liquify, electrocute, or **anally probe** whatever random humans you happened across. In the unlikely event that wore thin, you had an arsenal of impressive psychic powers to choose from, such as telepathy and psychokinesis.

The real draw of the game, though, was Crypto's flying saucer, complete with abduction beam and death ray. It might take some effort, but your saucer had all the firepower it needed to turn an entire city into a smoking crater, play high-speed games of snap-the-whip with American tanks, or abduct screaming '50s housewives right off the sidewalk. That gleeful ability to destroy damn near anything you felt like destroying, and the game's bizarre sense of humor, were the two big things ***Destroy All Humans!*** had going for it.

Destroy All Humans! 2: Make War Not Love is even more fun. No, really!

If It's Broke, Fix It

Ten years ago, Crypto destroyed the robotic President of the United States, and became President himself. It's been a good ten years; after gathering enough pure Furon DNA from hapless human victims, Crypto's boss Orthopox has been able to clone Crypto a new and improved body. It comes complete with the "Holy Grail" of Furon anatomy: functioning genitals.

(I can't believe I get to write things like that with a straight face.)

Anyway, that's your warning. Crypto has brand-new genitals in ***DAH!2***, and he's looking to use them. You should know what kind of humor to expect, ESRB be damned.

We rejoin what I must laughingly refer to as "our hero" in the middle of the sixties. As such, Crypto's right in the middle of the sexual revolution. Crypto's reign as the President is cut unfortunately short by the intervention of the KGB. They launch an attack on Crypto's mothership, blowing it out of the sky and nearly killing Orthopox, who survives only by downloading his consciousness into his computer. He exists now only as a deeply aggravated holographic image.

Crypto's job, then, is to help Orthopox repair their mothership. The KGB made their first attacks on him in Bay City, which is where both the game and the conspiracy start.

The KGB is supporting Bay City's local counterculture, including the consciousness-expanding teachings of local hippie legend Coyote Bongwater. He's peddling a special soft drink called Revelade, which seems like it was brewed specifically to screw with Orthopox's plans. Use of Revelade renders a human's brain useless to Furons. Bongwater will not rest until every human in Bay City has been dosed with Revelade, which he believes will usher in a new era of human consciousness.

Clearly, Crypto cannot allow this to happen. Even more clearly, the only solution is senseless violence. Crypto will have to take on the United States military and the KGB at the same time to get to the bottom of the Bay City conspiracy. Eventually, he'll need to track down the KGB's commander, Agent Oranchek (pun almost certainly intended, the bastards), which will take Crypto and Orthopox across the world, to England, Japan, and beyond.

Along the way, you will be forced by circumstance to raze city blocks, abduct nubile young women, destroy armies, blow things up with reckless abandon, and generally do horrible things to hippies. It's unfortunate, but really, the filthy human bastards forced your hand.

New and Improved

You begin ***DAH!2*** in Bay City with just Crypto's Zap-o-Matic lightning gun and your jetpack. Following the destruction of the mothership, you must reassemble your alien arsenal more or less from scratch, as is the trend in your average sequel.

Finding datacores strewn throughout the world will unlock new weapons, better equipment, and various upgrades. The datacores tend to be guarded by the police or military, so expect a fight whenever you find one.

By exploring, you can also find various samples of an alien genome, as well as special Furotech Cells that can be used to purchase upgrades from Orthopox. You'll need the latter, since ***DAH!2*** is often difficult. With tank battalions and submachinegun-wielding KGB agents bearing down on you at every turn, you'll want every scrap of firepower you can dig up. While you can no longer screw yourself over by triggering the arrival of anti-alien-equipped Majestic agents, having to deal with a full-scale military counter-invasion force cramps your style a bit.

In the event that constant battle with the human army makes you yearn for religion, ***DAH!2*** has you covered. As it turns out, Earth is surprisingly, conveniently, and liberally strewn with ancient idols of the Furon god Arkvoodle, left there by Furon explorers from the distant past. Arkvoodle will gladly open up new landing pads for your saucer if you carry out little tasks for him first, such as bringing him hippie girls, cleaning up the area around him, or causing random destruction until the alert meter is maxed out. The more landing pads you open, the more places you can land your saucer, and the easier it'll be for you to quickly travel from location to location.

A little bit of the sandbox has been taken out of ***DAH!2***, but it works out nicely. In the original game, you had to go randomly hunting for human brains or playing various minigames in order to progress through the main storyline; to leave a given area, you had to gather up a certain amount of human DNA. While this gave you a handy excuse to shoot people at random with a charged-up anal probe—I really want to comment here, but I don't think I can make any kind of joke that is fit for print—it also felt frustratingly like busywork.

In ***DAH!2***, to unlock more areas to explore and progress throughout the story, you just have to keep undertaking and completing the main missions. You'll be rewarded for completing the story missions with enough Furotech Cells to keep Crypto upgraded, but the game'll be a lot easier if you thoroughly explore each environment before you progress. ***DAH!2*** has a tendency to hit you with really difficult boss fights without much in the way of warning, so it pays to be prepared.

The rest of the gameplay can largely be defined as ***Destroy All Humans!***, minus most of the really annoying parts. You'll still be going undercover in human cities to find the technology and information you need, but the process of doing so has been vastly simplified and improved.

Disguises are much easier to use, aerial combat's been streamlined, the concentration meter's been completely abandoned, and with the DNA requirements abolished, all you have to do is concentrate on the best part of the game: huge amounts of random property damage. Knock down buildings, blow up armored personnel carriers, disintegrate hippies by the bushel basket, and have a blast. With no Concentration meter to hold you back, you can now use all of Crypto's psychic powers as much as you want. You'll need to upgrade his psychokinesis with Furotech Cells before he can throw cars around, but you're still able to send people and smaller objects flying with just a thought.

It helps that if you like wreaking havoc, and you do (don't lie to me, I've seen our demographics), doing so is easier than ever. Crypto's flying saucer now comes with a handy cloaking device, allowing you to avoid incoming missiles or beat a hasty retreat. Getting hit will destroy the cloak, which means you can't use it to shake a target lock, but it's really handy when you've maxed out the alarm meter and the local military's starting to get frustratingly accurate.

You can also steal vehicles with your Abducto-Beam and leech away their "health," repairing the saucer at the expense of those who damaged it. Of course, you can still use the Abducto-Beam to throw vehicles around like a tetherball, which was arguably the best thing about the first game (see "Bowling for Filthy Humans").

If you like being stealthy instead, Crypto can slip instantly into a disguise any time he sees a random human. Crypto bodily leaps into the human's skull and snatches control of his or her body. This isn't just a disturbing visual, it's also a good method of avoiding detection. Getting into some areas can only be accomplished if you're "wearing" the right body, and body snatching opens up a couple of new tactics (see "Effective Disguises").

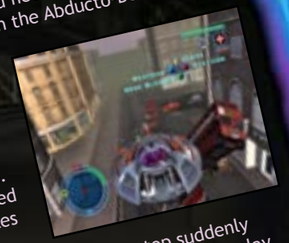
You'll whittle away at your current body's health while you're using it, so you'll need to jump into and out of bodies at appropriate times. More importantly, if someone sees you steal a body, you'll need to either outrun all pursuit, or hit all the witnesses with Crypto's new psychic power: Free Love. Doing so plunges most (if not all) of the humans in an area into a funkadelic wonderland. They'll be so busy experiencing the oneness of universal consciousness to remember that they just saw an alien leap into someone's face. This is your cue to either run the hell away, or start shooting filthy hippies. I suspect many of you will opt for the latter.

Mwa Ha Ha Ha Ha...

Bowling For Filthy Humans

The best minigame in either *Destroy All Humans!* game has never been an official game. It is, instead, something we at *HGM* call "Bowling for Filthy Humans." It's a game that is arguably fun for the entire family... assuming your entire family is comprised of lunatics. I know mine is!

To play Bowling for Filthy Humans, you need Crypto's flying saucer. It comes factory standard with the Abducto-Beam, so you're good to go.



Grab a nice big vehicle with the Abducto-Beam, such as a hippie's van or a tank, then fly off with it. Now, pull a U-turn and move towards your chosen bowling lane. Ideally, this is a nice long, crowded road, with plenty of other vehicles to choose from.

Move in a straight line towards your lane, then stop suddenly and let go of the Abducto-Beam button. This allows you to play snap-the-whip with your towed vehicle, sending it flying in the direction you were going. The more cars and people who get bowled over by your thrown vehicle, the better you do! Try teaming up with a friend to beat each others' records.

"Bowling for Filthy Humans" can also be played with the Psychokinesis power once you've leveled it up, of course, but there's just something more satisfying about playing it with your flying saucer. It also helps that when you're playing it with the saucer, you run much less of a risk of being ventilated by annoying police officers.

Effective Disguises

Destroy All Humans! 2's "body snatching" ability has a few different tactical uses once you get used to it. For one thing, since you slowly deplete a body's health just by being inside it, you can jump into an enemy in full view of everyone around. If there are cops or soldiers handy, they'll usually open fire, killing the body with no harm done to Crypto.

You can also steal a cop or soldier's body to lower the alarm level in an area. Keep an eye out for police boxes scattered around each city. If you're occupying a cop or soldier, you can phone in a fake arrest report, which'll get the cops and military to stand down.

All in all, then, this is the best kind of sequel. It fixes what was wrong with the original game, and keeps what was fun about it: causing ungodly amounts of chaos and destruction, and laughing your ass off the entire time. Pandemic's provided a script that goes for every laugh it can get, cheap or not, which helps to fill the moments between episodes of protracted violence.

With more weapons, better combat, and a less annoying mission structure, ***Destroy All Humans! 2*** can't help but be an improvement on its predecessor. It's a great take on B-movies, a good shooter, and a solid sandbox game in its own right.

INTERVIEW

We were able to corner Derek Proud, the producer of ***Destroy All Humans! 2***, to ask him a few questions, contributed by the forum posters at Luv2Game.com. Here's what he had to say.

Metadragon - Are there any hidden features in the game, such as playing as a cow instead of a human? Are there going to be any memorable boss battles? What are the modes of travel in the game; is it just the spaceship or should we expect to see other modes of travel?

Derek Proud - Crypto has a different holobob ability this time around. He can actually take over the body of a person and make them do things they would not normally do. This has led us to [create] heaps of fun side missions where you can ruin people's lives, create a cult worshiping UFOs and aliens as gods, and do other things that are in Crypto's interests. This is all aside from the main missions, of course. Additionally, when you bodysnatch a human, you can also use them to control the environment. Bodysnatch a cop, for example, and you can turn down the threat level by calling in the all clear. [You can also] bodysnatch a hippie to infiltrate the group in the park [in Bay City], because they don't take too kindly to the cops interfering.

It would not be ***DAH!*** without huge boss battles! I can't say too much, but there is a small radiation experiment in Takoshima, Japan that goes awry and turns an innocent schoolgirl into a mammoth mutant that rampages through downtown! It's up to Crypto to step in there.

DeathxFromxAbove - What new devices and weapons, if any, can we look forward to? Will the game be able to use our saved games for the first one for some secrete items? Are the game controls new or still the same with some new features?

DP - The game has four new weapons and many of the mental abilities have been changed. I should point out here that there is no concentration bar anymore, and you can use most of your mental abilities without limit. The new weapons include the dislocator, a gun that shoots a disc into people, cars or objects and starts flinging them around, and a gun that calls a beast up from the ground to eat people. The controls in the game are pretty much the same with a few key changes; we had some people who played the first one try the new game and they adapted pretty well.

AngstOverlord - Considering so many abilities from the original beta concepts are already included (actual body-snatching, people-into-items), is there any chance of the precision laser being implemented? Slicey beams are just wonderful.

DP - We kind of have the heat ray in the saucer, that's about as [close to] precision as we get! You can move the saucer up and down now, so there is a lot more control over the beam weapon there. It comes in very handy. The saucer also has a cloaking ability this time around, which makes it great for sneaking up on troops.

AngstOverlord - Are animals a possibility in a future title? Gnawing on a hippie's leg as a Crypto-hound would be amusing to say the least! Be disorderly in public without blowing cover!

DP - We thought about doing animals the first time around, but things with four legs are so much harder to animate! We decided to stick with humans, since most of the animators have seen those.

AngstOverlord - If you were to do a next-gen ***DAH!*** title, what system would interest you the most for the project? Will we get the precision laser then?

DP - We really like the ***DAH!*** franchise and would like to see it expand in the future.

Dack - Did any movies influence the ***Destroy All Humans!*** series?

DP - Of course! The bad sci-fi movies of the 1950s really helped the tone and humour of the first game, and the second game is influenced by the cheesy spy movies of the '60s.

Nickro226 - How did you come up with the ideas for the new weapons and mental powers? What other features will be added to the game? Was an effort made to make the missions less repetitive?

DP - We didn't come up with the mental powers. We've had an alien prisoner here since '02, and whenever we need more ideas for the game we just torture him a little more. You can't say his name if you only have one tongue so we just call him "Brad." He's cute.

All the side missions are story-based, meaning you have to do something to progress that mission other than just "killing 15 humans." The Alien Cult missions are all about convincing people to join your cult, or strengthening your cult, and the ruin lives missions are about, well, ruining lives. The assassination missions are about taking out specific humans (despite the fact that they should be about asses). Lastly, we have some two-player missions and multiplayer games that are lots of fun to play with a fellow clone.

Thorbahn3 - Has the merge with Bioware helped in the creation process? If so, how?

DP - They were very helpful with the conversation mini-games. They have lots of experience with those from their past games.

Anomaly - What's your favorite weapon in the game, and why? What do you think is the funniest feature in the game?

DP - I think my favourite weapon in the game is the Meteor Strike, especially when fully upgraded. All of the weapons and mental abilities (and jetpack and saucer weapons) can be fully upgraded as the course of the game goes along. The funniest feature is definitely still mind-reading; scanning people's thoughts as you walk down the street is great.

Honroise42 - How do you write the jokes and humor for the game? [Do you work] individually or just toss ideas back and forth?

DP - We just toss Brad back and forth until he says something funny. He's great under pressure like that, but the main source of the humour in the game comes from Tom Abernathy, our lead writer and chief alien wrangler.

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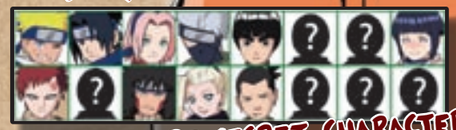

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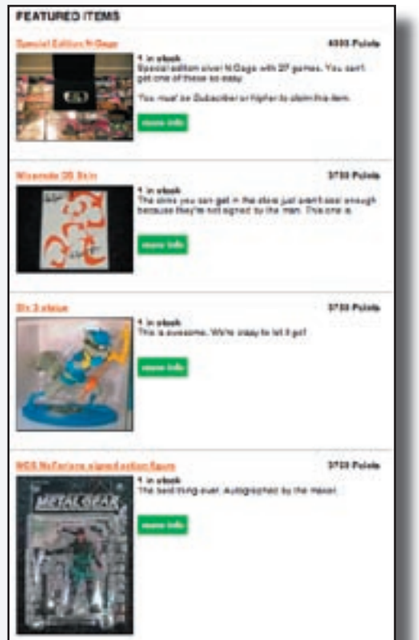

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HARDCORE REVIEWS

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HGM REVIEW GAUGE
5 = Really Good
4 = Good
3 = Average
2 = Bad
1 = Really Bad

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Clover Studio
Release Date: 09/05/2006
Rating: T; Crude Humor, Fantasy Violence

Genre(s): Adventure
Category: A Wolf!!!!
# of players: 1

Okami

Review by Sardius

This may be considered a shameful plug, but I wrote the official In an era where "next-gen" now semi-officially means "generic first-person shooter," it's refreshing to see a title that attempts something new. *Okami* does not take place in a gritty dystopian future, nor does it feature a single hard-boiled space marine reducing thousands of alien terrorists to a gory mess. For all its innovations, *Okami*'s greatest asset is that it's nothing like *Gears of War* or any of the countless games that want very badly to be *Gears of War*.

For those who are immediately put off by any game that doesn't feature futuristic weaponry awash in undersaturated colors, *Okami* may be a tough sell. The game is steeped in Japanese mythology, and may at first glance appear impenetrable to those unfamiliar with the underlying cultural references. Not every game places you in the role of a reincarnated sun goddess, after all, and *Okami*'s quest to revitalize nature across ancient Japan may seem too weighty for some gamers to attempt.

All these fears should be immediately forgotten, however, because *Okami* is surprisingly lighthearted in nature, and is much more accessible than one might think. *Okami* presents its subject matter so well that no prior cultural knowledge is necessary to enjoy the experience. What's more, even the abstract concept of restoring nature is handled in a way that many gamers will be immediately familiar with, as everything from *Okami*'s exploration elements to its approach to puzzle solving bears remarkable similarity to Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda* series.

The difference is that *Okami* is a smoother and more intuitive experience than any *Zelda* game. Solving puzzles in *Zelda* titles often involved the laborious process of pulling up a subscreen, selecting a required item, equipping it, and then using it. In *Okami*, all that you need to do is pull out your "Celestial Brush" and draw on the screen in order to create the desired effect. Whether you want to slice apart a tree blocking your path or use a Hookshot-styled vine to rocket across the landscape, the effects are immediate, with no need to fumble through an inventory beforehand. This unique approach toward item usage is elegant in its simplicity, and is so effective that it makes you wonder why nobody has ever tried it before.

Don't let *Okami*'s familiar exploration-based gameplay fool you into thinking that the title is nothing more than a straight-up *Zelda* ripoff, however. *Okami*'s goddess powers may seem similar to the items in the *Zelda* games, but their applications are many, and most of these powers can be adapted for use in combat as well.

Unfortunately, combat is where *Okami* stumbles slightly; most fights are all about button-mashing — despite the skill required to effectively use Celestial Brush powers — and there's little challenge to be found in many of the battles at the game's outset. The boss fights remain challenging and creative, however, and the game's exploration aspects provide all the difficulty the combat lacks, and then some.

Despite its slight lack of difficulty, *Okami* is simply a joy to play through. The action never becomes boring, and the plot is so enthralling that you'll genuinely look forward to every new challenge the game throws your way. *Okami* has successfully taken the *Zelda* series's basic structure in several bold new directions, and is now the new benchmark by which *Twilight Princess* will be judged.

Score: 5 of 5

2nd opinion *by James* • Alternate Rating : *5 of 5*

More than just a gorgeous art-project of a game, *Okami* is engaging and loaded with personality. More challenging enemies would have been nice, but it's still fun to beat on them unmercifully then cut 'em in half with a brush stroke. *Okami* is as entertaining as it is beautiful.

FINAL SCORE : 5 of 5

Stupid Wolf Tricks

The sun goddess Amaterasu is given several powers throughout the game to aid her in her quest to restore ancient Japan to its former glory. Here are some of the first few you'll encounter.

Sunrise: Paint a circle in the sky and within seconds, night will turn into day and dusk will become dawn. Some creatures and townspeople will only come out at night, however, so use this power wisely.

Rejuvenation: With a few strokes of the Celestial Brush, bridges and pathways that were once hidden from sight can be created and used to gain access to new areas.

Power Slash: Draw a single straight line and any destructible objects in your path will be cleaved in half. This can be used to slice enemies into pieces, as well.

Cherry Bomb: Similar to *Zelda*'s bombs, these explosives will blow apart cracked walls and create a wide swath of destruction in battle.

Water Lily: Crossing deep water is as simple as drawing a series of these stepping stones between two land masses.

Vine: Draw a line between two attachable points and these elastic vines will form a bond. They can also hold certain tough enemies in place, as well as slingshot you to faraway locations.

N3
ナインティナインズ
NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

Review by Lynxara

Publisher : Microsoft Game Studios
Developer : Q Entertainment & Phantagram
Release Date : 8/15/2006
Rating : MATURE

Genre(s) : Kill Everything
Category : No, Seriously, Just Kill Everything
# of players : 1

Ninety-Nine Nights **seems be entirely inspired by that one scene in Peter Jackson's *Return of the King* where Legolas kills approximately one jillion orcs single-handedly. Imagine seven different anime-style fantasy characters going through that scene for fifteen hours, and that's pretty much everything *Ninety-Nine Nights* has to offer. It takes *Dynasty Warriors* and inflates the scale of the carnage to previously unimaginable, and unattainable, heights. Your kill and combo counts routinely stretch into the *thousands*.**

On a technical level, it's extremely impressive. The 360 *Dynasty Warriors* games certainly couldn't pack so many enemies onto the screen, nor boast graphics so detailed or controls so fluid. *N3*'s characters have memorably bizarre fighting styles, with one able to bounce herself from enemy to enemy like a ping-pong ball, and another able to regularly summon crushing waves of water to wash away opposing armies. Learning how to pull off these gorgeously flashy moves is as simple as picking up the controller.

This doesn't mean that playing *Ninety-Nine Nights* is necessarily any fun, though. It's a pale, shallow experience, especially if you compare it to a feature-rich title like *Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires*. *N3* has no co-op, no significant online features, no sense of strategy, a single-digit level-up system, and an equally simple-minded equipment system. Fighting is so easy that it rapidly becomes tedious. Hit X or Y, and things die. Chain your button-mashes together to create combos, and you'll kill things more quickly. There's no reason to favor any one combo over any other. They all kill things equally well, and so quickly that you don't need to worry about blocking or dodging very often.

So, sure, *N3* lets you achieve 2,000 hit combos that kill 1500 guys... by spamming the button of your choice. To complete a mission, spam that button for twenty minutes or so. Everything dies long before it can pose a threat to you. Frequently you can't even see your character or what you might be hitting in the massive crush of onscreen characters, but this is no obstacle to success. Point yourself in a direction, spam a button, and you'll starting racking up one of those big combo counts. You have some super meters that you fill up by killing enemies, and when full they let you hit the B button to kill enemies *even faster*. Unlike *Dynasty Warriors*, you can't increase the difficulty level when things feel too easy. You get to keep mashing your button until you've unlocked everything and then the game is over.

Ninety-Nine Nights is honestly kind of fun at first, in a way that appeals to one's aggressive violence-loving sub-brain. Even when that wears off, there's still the raw spectacle of the game's beautiful visuals and epic music score to keep you entertained. *N3*'s storyline is too incoherent to be engaging, despite a ton of *DW*-style cut-scenes, but the hilariously terrible voice-acting is amusing for awhile. After a few hours, though, most of *N3*'s entertainment value is simply gone. Visual dazzle cannot save gameplay this appallingly sterile.

Rating : 2.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 2.75 of 5

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

It's a bit too much "hack-'n'-slash" to stay compelling for long, but I did appreciate the rich storyline and multiple playable characters. The question is: will you?

YAKUZA

Review by Honestgamer

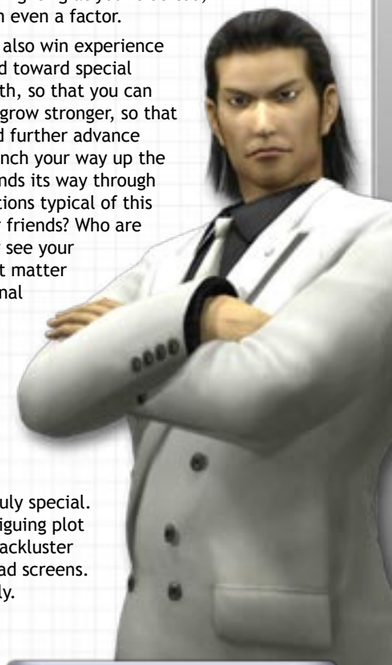
Publisher : Sega
Developer : Sega
Release Date : 9/5/2006
Rating : MATURE

Genre(s) : Action
Category : Brawler
# of players : 1

Yakuza **opens a little bit like a soap opera that was run through a blender and thrown against a wall. Your name is Kazuma and you're standing over a body with a gun in your hand and a glittering ring on the floor while police bust down the door and demand your surrender. No, that's not right. It's a day before and you're helping collect money from corrupt loan sharks, only it goes wrong and you have to use force to persuade the clients to pay what they owe. A night of drinking later, you wake up to go see about becoming the head of your own crime family. You have everyone's blessing, but then a phone call informs you that your girl is missing and one of your bosses plans to have his way with her. Against your mentor's advice, you rush over to save her and find that your "brother" already spared you the trouble. The man is dead and your honor demands that you take the fall.**

As the story unfolds and you wade through a gauntlet of profanity (everyone here embraces the 'f' word like it's a long-lost relative), you'll find that *Yakuza* is a brawler to its very core. This means that you do only two things: fight and look for the next rumble. The latter is tedious, since the areas between loading zones are small and the load times are a bit long, even if the digital streets of Tokyo do look fantastic with their weather effects and attention to authentic detail. The plot makes up for it, but you'll have to fight for each pleasing cutscene.

The brawls are simplistic to an eventual fault. While at first it can be fun to dance around your rivals, throwing punches and kicks like a movie superstar, the whole experience wears thin. Even grabbing thugs and throwing them at their comrades feels a bit stale, and the inclusion of useable weapons only brings so much to the table when half the time it's simply more practical to keep mashing buttons. Sometimes you have friends fighting at your side too, but their presence is seldom even a factor.



When you win a battle, you also win experience points. These can be applied toward special moves and increased strength, so that you can fight more, so that you can grow stronger, so that you can fight even more and further advance the plot. As you kick and punch your way up the *Yakuza* ladder, the story wends its way through the sort of interesting questions typical of this type of game. Who are your friends? Who are your enemies? Will you ever see your girlfriend again? The subject matter perhaps isn't the most original (it all feels a little bit like a Japanese version of *The Godfather*), but at least it's interesting.

Of course, you probably want more for your money than just "interesting." This is one of those games that could've easily been truly special. In the end, though, the intriguing plot can't make up entirely for lackluster fights and over-abundant load screens. Only brawler fans need apply.

Rating : 3 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 3 of 5

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

This is a spiritual successor to *Shenmue* in almost every way... including its faults. *Yakuza* can be enjoyable, but you'll swear it started out in development as *The Bouncer II*.

PLATFORM PlayStation.2 XBOX 360 XBOX GAMECUBE

MADDEN NFL 07

Review by 4thletter

Publisher : Electronic Arts
Developer : EA Tiburon
Release Date : 8/22/2006
Rating : EVERYONE

Genre(s) : Sports
Category : Football
# of players : 1-2

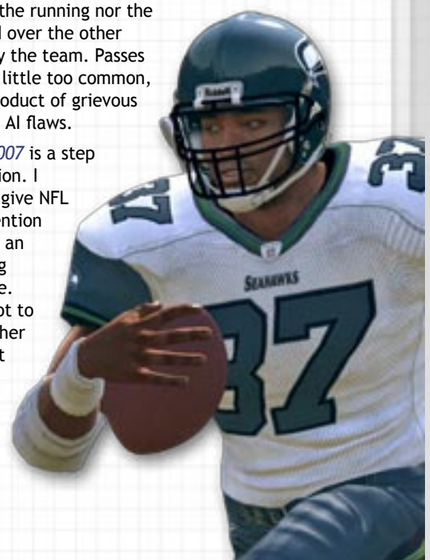
Have you ever heard the term "reviewproof?" Boiled down, it means that a property has become so huge that regardless of actual quality, it's going to sell zillions and you've probably already made up your mind on it. The biggest reviewproof series are *Final Fantasy* and *Madden NFL*. Regardless, *Madden NFL 2007* needs reviewing. The good news is that it's mostly positive.

The first thing I noticed about this year's *Madden* is that it has a lot of little touches and improvements. I've been playing this series for thirteen years now, and we've finally got some long-awaited improvements. There's no rapid-fire mashing of the switch player button on defense so you can get to the spot you want before the snap. Hold the switch button and use the d-pad to move directly to who you want. Hitting any of the audible buttons brings up a hotkey list of exactly what audible you're about to call. All of these are welcome and functional additions to the game.

The presentation during the game has been improved as well. The redone banner graphics remind me most of Windows XP. The in-game notifications for fumbles, run commits, or other things like that are very clean, colorful, and bright. They get across color-coded data quickly. If it's blue, it's probably good, like a Hit Stick tackle or Impact Stick escape. If it's red, well, you probably just fumbled. Way to go, champ.

I played the Xbox version for the review, and the graphics are suitably impressive. It seems like there were a ton of new animations added so as to make each block, sack, and tackle different from the previous one. You can genuinely tell when a facemask penalty is about to be called just by the interaction between tackler and tackled. Some of the high impact hits will make you go "Ow!" for the ball carrier, and the Impact Stick brings some truly heart-stopping broken tackles out onto the field. The sound is about what you'd expect, with the addition of specific commentary that takes into account previous plays. It is pretty cool that Lupe Fiasco is on the soundtrack, but the rest of it is pretty forgettable.

The gameplay is as smooth and fast as its ever been. the aforementioned enhancements make the game more fun and efficient overall, not to mention easier to use. In my experience, neither the running nor the passing game dominated over the other except when required by the team. Passes for long yards are still a little too common, but that's usually a byproduct of grievous human error rather than AI flaws.



All in all, *Madden NFL 2007* is a step or six in the right direction. I don't have the space to give NFL Superstar mode the attention that it deserves, but it's an intriguing and frustrating feature at the same time. I'll just say that it's a riot to be part of the team, rather than all of the team, but it's irritating when you don't see the ball and are stuck running routes. If *Madden NFL* continues on in this vein, next year is going to be excellent.

Rating : 4 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 3.75 of 5

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

Poor camera placement makes Superstar Mode (360) nearly unplayable, but the rest of the game is classic *Madden*; no more, no less. Keep your fingers crossed for next season.

PLATFORM PlayStation.2

SAMURAI WARRIORS 2

戦国無双

Review by Hitoshura

Publisher : Koei
Developer : Omega Force
Release Date : 9/19/2006
Rating : TEEN

Genre(s) : Action
Category : RPG
# of players : 1-2 (Co-op play), 1-4 (Sugoroku only)

Koei's Omega Force division has been pumping out *Warriors* titles for a number of years, and during that time they've always managed to make each game a slight improvement over the last. One thing that's held them back is that no matter how many characters they dumped in, they all played the same. *Samurai Warriors 2* sets out to make all of its twenty-six characters play radically different from each other by giving them unique special attacks, skills, and move lists.

Characters will slowly become more powerful as they learn their skills, which increases their number of attacks. You will also earn money, which you can use to purchase (random) upgrades for your weapons as well as new guards, steeds, and support skills. One might be led to believe that since characters level up as they fight, becoming even more disparate, and since you can purchase stuff from a shop with money earned in those battles, that this game is an action-RPG. Even with heavy influences from that genre, *Samurai Warriors 2* is still very much the same kind of fast-paced action game as its predecessors.

Samurai Warriors 2 also comes with an optional four-player party game called *Sugoroku*, a virtual board game where you roll dice to move your chosen character around a map of Japan. You'll buy up land, collect flags, and then return to your home square to earn money based on the values of the land you own. You can also challenge other players for their land by partaking in handicapped contests of battle prowess. Ultimately, the first player to reach a target sum of money is declared the winner. *Sugoroku* doesn't really work as a party game, though, because it is very slow. Good party games are quick enough to allow frequent passing of the controller, because it's no fun to sit and wait for others to finish playing. The quickest and least rewarding game of *Sugoroku* can take about twenty to thirty minutes.

When you're playing *Sugoroku*, you might want to reach for the mute button on the remote, because the main tune you'll be hearing a lot of is a traditional Japanese melody. Traditional Japanese music is an acquired taste, kind of like Vegemite; unless you were brought up on the stuff, or you have an adventurous attitude to new things, it won't be to your liking. However, most of the music elsewhere in the game is an interesting fusion of traditional Japanese instruments mixed in with modern electronic synth. The music for the Battle of Osaka Castle, for instance, is incredibly distinctive and hypnotic due to this amazing fusion.

The only thing this game lacks is an historical encyclopedia similar to the one from *Dynasty Warriors 5*, to complement the romantic character vignettes of Japan's Sengoku Period. Regardless, *Samurai Warriors 2* is an immensely fun game that also has everything a fan would expect from a new *Warriors* game.

Rating : 4 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 4 of 5

2nd opinion by M.U.L.E. • **Alternate Rating :** 4 of 5

The best version yet of the decade's best action/strategy gameplay engine. The revised level-up skill system is lovely, and Sugoroku is a hoot.

Review by James

LocoRoco™

Publisher : SCEA
Developer : SCEJ
Release Date : September, 2006
Rating : Everyone

Genre(s) : Platforming
Category : Super-Happy Ex+Alpha'
# of players : 1

LocoRoco **is an amazing achievement. It's not for being a well-designed, clever, creative 2D platformer, because we've had those before. Rather, it's the way *LocoRoco* is an injection of pure happiness into the gamer's soul. It's more cheerful than a barrel of katamari, and more upbeat than a choir of singing Yoshis; it will leave you grinning like a loon even while wrestling with the occasionally inefficient control scheme.**

The world of the LocoRoco is under attack by evil, hungry, floating black blobs called Moja. You don't control the LocoRoco directly. Instead, the whole planet tilts to guide them through each level and past a huge variety of obstacles. This is done almost entirely with the L and R buttons, and holding both at once charges up a jump. It's not a bad setup, but a long series of precise jumps can get very frustrating when trying to tilt a small platform under a cheerful glob of jelly. Most of the trickiest jumps are needed to get to one of the game's many secret areas, rather than being a requirement for level completion, but what kind of wuss rolls past a bonus area because he's afraid of a little challenge?

While surviving *LocoRoco*'s levels isn't that difficult, getting a Perfect rating is going to take some major exploration and a fair chunk of skill. Hidden areas are all over the place, concealing the usual variety of pickups. Normal berries add to the score, big red berries make LocoRoco grow, and MuiMui give out parts to the LocoHouse you can build between levels. The post-level score calculates all these pickups plus level time, so getting everything in one run can be important. This can be especially tricky when spikes knock bits off or Moja drifts in to tear a chunk off the poor LocoRoco.

Losing pieces also effects more than just your score. The only action not involving the L/R buttons is dividing one large jelly-blob into its component parts. Each red berry eaten adds one new LocoRoco to the blob, and certain paths require a large amount of the little guys. Sometimes a scale needs to be weighed down to open a door, or the LocoRoco break down into their component parts to sing in harmony and wake up the sun, moon, or friendly MuiMui. "Charming" doesn't even begin to describe it.

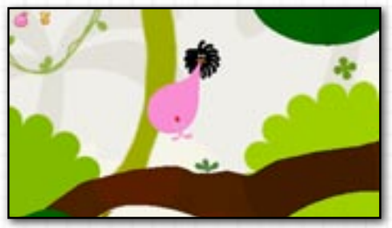
Fun, creative, loaded with levels and extras, and with a unique style looking like the best Flash game ever, *LocoRoco* is everything a platformer should be. It's easy to play while still being tricky, with hidden goodies all over the place, and is just pure happiness on a UMD. Don't even think about missing this game if you can possibly avoid it.

Rating : 5 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 4.5 of 5

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

Even the most depressed person would smile after playing this. It's fun, it's fresh, it's easy to play, and it's hard to believe it's on a PSP.



Guilty Gear Judgment

Review by Racewing

Publisher : Majesco Games
Developer : Arc System Works
Release Date : 9/5/2006
Rating : Teen

Genre(s) : Fighting
Category : Did You Know She Is A B... Ahhhhh, Never Mind
# of players : 1-2

Guilty Gear **is one of my favorite fighting games. When the import of *GGX2* for the PSP was released, I played it day and night, and loved it. Arc had actually taken the time to make the game controllable despite the PSP's horrific D-Pad, but the control was even better on the analog nub, which promptly broke because I was playing it so much.**

Thus, having already used my warranty once, I was apprehensive about this game's localization. Fortunately for me (and unfortunately for the rest of the world), since it lacks the Story and Mission modes that I'd been waiting for, my PSP is safe! Hooray!

Yes, folks, the PSP version of *GGX2 #Reload* lacks key features that were in the Xbox version, including Story Mode, Mission Mode, and online play. The one thing redeeming this otherwise stripped port is that it's the best-controlling 2D fighter on the PSP. The control is, in fact, even better than the import version. I'm a Millia player (now you all know how my nub done got broke), and I can pull her air combos off on an unmodified D-Pad with surprising regularity. People hankering for some outdoors *Guilty Gear* action shouldn't be afraid to pick this one up.

The other half of this package is *Guilty Gear Judgment*, a beat-em-up that's basically Arc's take on Tekken Force. Nearly all of the cast participates in a game that's half side-scroller, half story mode. There's also a survival mode included which pits you against hordes of enemies at once.

Everyone retains the special moves, combo properties and speed variables that they possess in the fighting game, plus the Burst maneuver for getting out of dogpiles, combos and other tight spots. In other words, beating up on random demons (especially with 2-player co-op) is a blast with the varied cast, and while the story mode is pretty bare-bones, it still beats the living heck out of the travesty we got in *Dust Strikers*.

There's no excuse for *#Reload*'s single-player material not being included, as said material already exists for the console versions. The lack of online infrastucture play here (and, in fact, in the PSP's fighting offerings in general) also stings, and there are sprite jaggies if you stare hard enough. However, the inclusion of the decent *Judgment* side-game, and the fact that Arc's basically conquered the PSP's playability hurdles, make this still worth your time and money.

I must say, though: I've finally snapped. If I have to review yet another *Guilty Gear* title that isn't a bonafide fighting sequel, or that is a party game, or that doesn't contain some sort of online play, I swear I'm giving it a 1. I've had all I can take. It's bad enough that I've got 8,000 versions of *Street Fighter* lying around the house, you know?

Rating : 4 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 3.5 of 5

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

I'm not quite as forgiving as Racer. Barebones story and no mission mode? Average brawler mechanics? It's nice to have a portable *GGX2*, but this is lacking.

PlayStation.2 | GAMECUBE | PC | PSP

PAC-MAN WORLD RALLY

Review by 4thletter

Publisher : Namco Bandai
Developer : Smartbomb
Release Date : Summer 2006
Rating : Everyone

Genre(s) : Racing
Category : Slidey into Crashy
# of players : 1-2

Shockingly, there are people out there who haven't played *Mario Kart*. Insane, right? If it's because they only have a PS2, they no longer have any excuse. *Pac-Man World Rally* follows the *Mario Kart* formula and delivers quite a ride.

If you've played a *Mario Kart*, you've got a leg up on learning *Pac-Man World Rally*. It doesn't exactly break a lot of new ground, but it's a fun ride. Everything from power-sliding to item deployment is familiar. You may not have Koopa shells, but you can launch out a blue item that'll track down a certain racer and blow him off the map, if you know what I mean. The actual racing action feels much faster paced. I averaged around thirty-five to fifty seconds per lap while I played, and each lap was packed with things to do. You're going to launch off ramps, find hidden shortcuts, and constantly bang into the other cars, usually all at the same time. Powersliding is a must-have skill, since many of the turns tend to be built so that you're going to hit the wall and lose speed if you don't slide.

The items that you can find run the usual gamut. You've got boosters, fake item boxes, bombs that run (or fly!) behind your cart, and a few new ones. You can plant snowmen, for example, which obstruct the track. The stages are filled with a variety of things, too. The haunted stage is filled with ghosts and beasts that will kill your speed and make you lose your place, in addition to possibly destroying your item.

In true *Pac-Man* fashion, the stages can be filled with yellow dots or different kinds of fruit by picking up a Power Pellet or Fruit Key. Collect enough yellow dots to fill your meter and you'll turn into a Pac-Mobile. This is a new twist on an old power. The Pac-Mobile is a giant kart that lasts for a number of seconds. While you're empowered, the other racers turn into blue ghosts on unicycles. Catch up to them and eat them for points. The Fruit Keys unlock shortcuts. If you have a certain kind of fruit, you can enter a gate to cut across part of the map. Power-sliding enough allows you to use a Guardian Angel or Devil. Activating these give you a shield that prevents attacks and fauna from hurting you. Keep an eye out for a *Galaga* cameo, too.

Overall, *Pac-Man World Rally* feels like a faster *Mario Kart*. There isn't a lot that's brand new, but there's enough fun here to more than make up for it. It's a "Ain't broke? Don't fix it" sort of situation.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 3.5 of 5

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

It's got *awesome* music and the Prince of All Cosmos is an unlockable character, but in the end, *PMWR* is just *Mario Kart* with floaty controls. It's still a decent amount of fun.

EVERYONE 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

This is Ben, and he plays video games. Before dinner, he's been a star athlete, arch wizard and crime fighter. Ben's mom is glad the ESRB is around to help make sense of all this stuff, with clear ratings on every game to help her make the best choices for her family.

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Publisher : Square-Enix
Developer : tri-Ace
Release Date : 09/26/2006
Rating : Teen
Genre(s) : RPG
Category : Mythic Norse World-Shattering Time-Travel A-Go-Go
# of players : 1

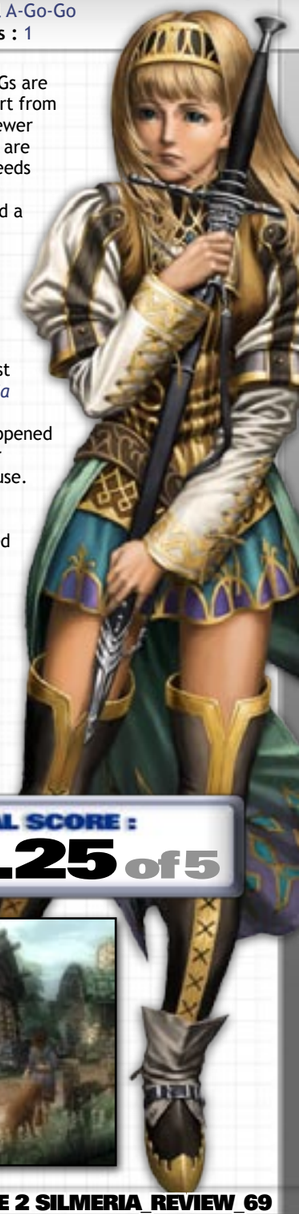
Silmeria is the climax of the ***Valkyrie Profile*** revival, and it's remarkably similar to its predecessor. In ***Silmeria***, you explore the world in a sort of 2.5D side-scrolling mode, complete with dungeons full of brain-teasing platformer puzzles that involve the main character's ability to turn enemies into blocks and teleport. Combat uses a 3D iteration of the original ***Valkyrie Profile*** battle system: the party follows a leader as it moves, and targets enemies automatically as they come into range. Each party member is mapped to a face button and attacks when their corresponding button is pressed. You must work to chain together your party's real-time attacks into the longest juggle combo you can manage to gain EXP and unlock spectacular "Soul Crush" finishing moves.

This is not to say *Silmeria* is merely a repeat of *Lenneth* rendered in 3D. *Silmeria* is unmistakably a more modern game. It progresses in a basically linear fashion, with no multiple endings, no weapon breakage, and no time constraints limiting your actions. Battles include the interesting new option to defeat an entire enemy party by defeating their leader. You can also opt to split your party up into multiple smaller parties on the battlefield and move each of them independently, allowing you to catch enemies in pincer attacks or get characters through dangerous areas more quickly. Using such tactics to win quickly nets you hefty EXP bonuses, and beating enemies with well-timed combos earns you more bonus items than you'll ever know what to do with.

Tactics are overwhelmingly the order of the day in *Silmeria* battles. With the right moves you can sail through the whole game while grossly under-leveled if you like. *Silmeria* is still a demanding game, moreso than most modern RPGs, but this only creates a real and enjoyable sense of danger. Your victories are very satisfying because you know how easy it is to lose. Few RPGs are willing to use combat engines that depart from safe and well-trod territory, and even fewer manage to have innovative engines that are actually fun to play with. *Silmeria* succeeds admirably at both. For gamers who love RPG combat, this title is a must-play and a must-own.

Silmeria's only real failing as a game is the storyline. The plot is so entwined with the events of *Lenneth* that it doesn't quite make sense when taken on its own. This isn't just a case of needing to generally know about the first game to understand the second; *Silmeria* is frequently not even comprehensible without detailed knowledge of what happened in *Lenneth*. Fortunately the story never becomes obtrusive even at its most obtuse. It's easy to just enjoy *Silmeria* for its visual eye-candy, relative to the PS2's limitations, or the beautiful orchestrated score. As a pretext for making you explore dungeons, solve puzzles, and get into fights, the plot is perfectly adequate. It's not going to engage your emotions unless you already love *Valkyrie Profile*, though, and that's a shame. A more accessible storyline is really all that stands between *Silmeria* and gaming perfection.

Rating: 4.5 of 5

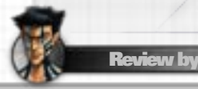


2nd opinion by Racewing the Valkyrie Profile Elitist • **Alternate Rating :** 4 of 5

Sakuraba does lounge. Storyless einherjar. A depressingly linear plot. Yet, *Silmeria* still manages to do *Lenneth* justice. It's one heck of a ride, and the fighting system is *bliss*.

FINAL SCORE : 4.25 of 5

Xenosaga EPISODE III



Review by Hitoshura

Publisher : Namco Bandai
Developer : Monolith Soft
Release Date : 8/29/2006
Rating : Teen; Language, Mild Suggestive Themes, Violence

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

Xenosaga **attempted to craft one of the most complex and robust stories ever seen in a video game. This is evident from the moment *Episode III* begins. The average player needs to spend a few hours reading the in-game database entries just to catch up on events between *Episode II* and *III*, which includes Shion's resignation from Vector Industries to join Scientia. The stupendously huge database covers not only current happenings, but also events from the past two games. Thanks to some expert translating, the database is concise and eminently readable. Even if you haven't played the previous two games, you won't be left clueless. You may even understand *III* a bit better than you might otherwise.**

One peculiar trait *Xenosaga* and its PlayStation ancestor *Xenogears* share is their frankly pretentious usage of philosophy and religious references to tell its story. Unfortunately, at the end of *Episode III*'s first disc, these references are used to unveil an enormous plot twist that drives the whole narrative down into a quagmire of confusion, self-contradiction, melodrama, and brutal misappropriation of its prime source materials (Nietzschean philosophy and Gnosticism). From there on, it quickly turns into a random episode of *Dragon Ball* crossed with a French art house film. It's dumb in a way it involves very obtuse words. This is a far cry from the first few hours, which tied up most of the loose threads dangling from the previous games in a satisfying fashion.

Unlike the previous games, the vast majority of *XSIII* cutscenes use voiced text instead of cut-scenes. If you want, you can even skip these outright and get right back to playing. *Xenosaga* has always had rather average gameplay when compared to the story, so it's amazing that *XSIII* may leave you wanting to skip the story in favor of the gameplay a lot. It's downright addictive. You can set and detonate traps as you please to gain an advantage in encounters. Individual battles are strictly menu-based, with a modified version of the boost system from *XSII*. You can use boosts to execute special attacks that earn you bonus EXP and money from defeated enemies. Customization and limited energy consumption have returned from *Xenogears* in an improved form to make the E.S. mecha battles a lot of fun. While fighting in mechs, you'll see cut-scenes to dramatize battles between rival characters and use the Anima meter to boost your craft's all-around performance.

It's astonishing that the script alone can do so much to hurt the amazing visuals (e.g. The Planet of Fifth Jerusalem), exceptional soundtrack by Yuki Kajiura, solid gameplay, and outstanding voice acting. The unsatisfactory ending even leaves room for an *Episode IV* that is not very likely to be made. *Episode III* is a game that could've been phenomonal, but falters on the one thing it needed most -- a clear and concise storyline to drive the action.

Rating: 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 3.25 of 5

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

The combat system is the best of the *Xenosaga* titles thus far, but the storyline is beyond awful. *XS3*'s plot actively leeches all possible joy out of the game.

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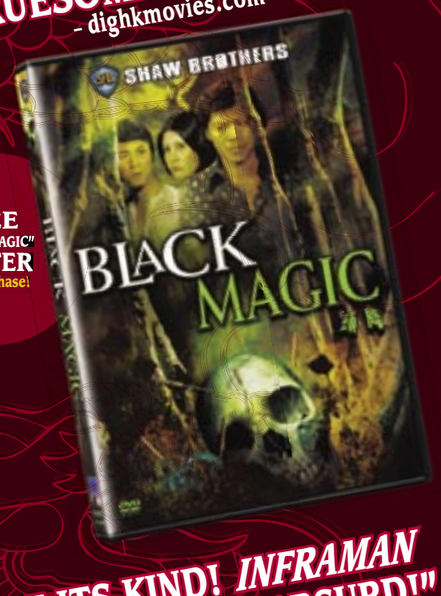

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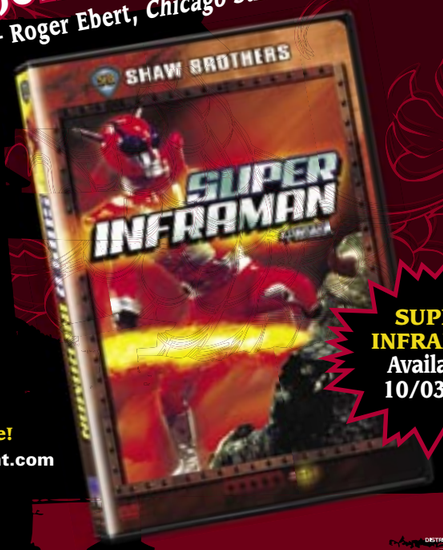

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Wrestle Kingdom
レッスルキングダム

Publisher: Yuke's Media Creations
Developer: Yuke's Media Creations
Release Date: 7/20/06

Genre(s): Wrestling
Category: Shining Wizardry
# of Players: 1-2

Review by 4thletter

There is a lot to be said for getting directly to the point. Case in point: wrestling. I, along with a lot of other people, have pretty much given up on the WWE, despite having grown up on it. There's too much non-wrestling content for me to bother, along with a general dislike of the matches they do put on. What's a fellow to do? Well, in a lot of cases, the fans turn to puroresu, a.k.a. Japanese wrestling. You'll often find this to be the case in the video game arena, as well. The ***Smackdown*** series is nice and all, but sometimes you need something that just gets to the point. Enter ***Wrestle Kingdom***.

Wrestle Kingdom is about wrestling. This seems like a no-brainer, but it's refreshing. You don't have to worry about Bra & Panties matches or Humiliation matches, either, thank goodness. You simply get into the ring and go at it. There's an in-depth career mode, which requires knowing a pretty good bit of Japanese, and an edit mode, which requires a whole lot more Japanese.

The career mode is dubbed "Drama Mode" and features thirty matches to raise your created wrestler's stats. This is really the only way to turn your newly created Ninja, The Rock, or whoever you want, into a powerhouse. You'll start out by fighting wimpy edits, but you'll eventually graduate to real wrestlers. You're given breaks between matches to train and edit your wrestler to your satisfaction. His looks are set in stone, but his moveset is malleable.

It's pretty similar to, say, an arcade mode in a fighting game. The story boils down to having to pick a trainer, fight, pick a fed, fight, fight a little more, and then win a belt. It's straight and to the point: you're going to

wrestle, and after wrestling, you have either won or lost. You don't have to worry about managing a diva, or having a gimmick match in jello and a fetching set of Victoria's Secret-brand delicates. You just have to worry about putting the other guy down for three as soon, and as impressively, as possible.

The edit mode is deep, and going into detail about the various options is beyond the scope of this review. Just know that you have all the normal options that come in edit modes, save for the option to select your wrestler's sex. Sorry guys, but there's no women's wrestling this time around.

Of course, that isn't to say that the graphics aren't well done. I was expecting the usual graphics we've been getting from the almost-dead PS2. Instead, I got sharp, nicely detailed, and very well-animated large-size characters. *Wrestle Kingdom* is a joy to look at, and while it may not be as good as its cousin on the Xbox 360, it's still excellent. The wrestlers move and react very realistically. Brock Lesnar's taunt and stance is as true to life as Jushin Liger's, for example, and the finishers are flashy and punishing.

The fighting is fun and logical. It's somewhere between *Fire Pro Wrestling* and *WWE Smackdown*. You have hard and soft grapples, strikes, and then various moves that branch off those bases. Countering is done by pressing X or Square with good timing. Finishing moves require pressing Square and X at the same time in a certain position. All of the action is fast. You can be done with a thirty-minute match in ten minutes if you rush, but there's something to be said for taking your time and delivering a crowd-pleaser. Watch the crowd while you fight, by the way. They'll respond intelligently instead of just cheering whenever you do something. They'll be almost as pleased as you'll be when you pull off a Dragon Screw off the top turnbuckle or land a Shining Wizard.

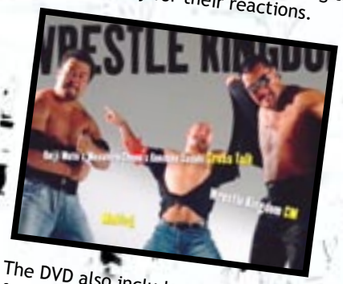
Worth Importing?

I hate to say it, but this may have displaced *Fire Pro Wrestling Returns* as my favorite home console wrestler. It's easy to get into, but really getting into the meat of the game requires lots of Japanese knowledge or a good FAQ. *Wrestle Kingdom* is worth it for the gameplay alone, however.

FINAL SCORE : 4 of 5

CROSS TALK: THREE GUYS WALK INTO A BAR

Lucky purchasers of *Wrestle Kingdom* get a cool bonus: a DVD of Keiji Muto, Masahiro Chono, and Kensuke Sasaki sitting around and shooting the breeze. One problem: it's totally in Japanese. So, you might not get much from the fifteen minutes or so that they chat, but it's interesting to watch if only for their reactions.



The DVD also includes a commercial for *Wrestle Kingdom*. It shows the three men getting ready for battle, flexing, and generally hyping themselves up... to play *Wrestle Kingdom*. It's a cute commercial, if anything featuring Muto can really be called "cute." Also included is a Making Of featurette, but again, the lack of subtitles makes it pretty much a non-entity for most gamers.

プロジェクトハッカー
PROJECT HACKER: KAKUSEI

Review by Kou Aidou

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: RED Entertainment
Release Date: 7/13/2006

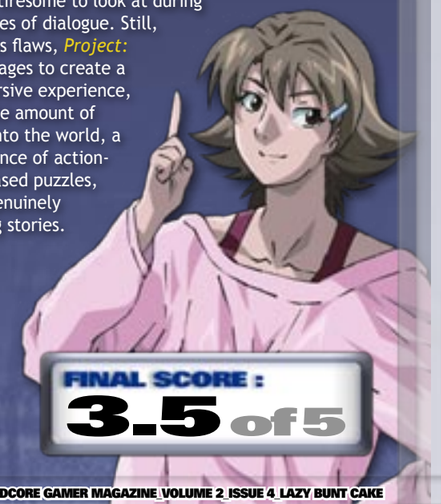
Genre(s): Adventure
Category: Text
# of Players: 1

Project Hacker: Kakusei is, as you might guess, about hackers, and while it's not a documentary by any means, it seems to at least understand hacking a bit better than most Hollywood movies. It recognizes the difference between a hacker and a cracker, and it knows that often, getting into a system is less about playing the system and more about playing the people who use it. Past that, it's all video game logic, but the net result is still an engaging little adventure game.

The story centers around Satoru Amatsubo, a talented young programmer who finds himself involved in a life-threatening conspiracy when his scatterbrained friend Rina opens some files on a CD-R she was never meant to see. Using a combination of Satoru's computer skills and Rina's street-smarts, the two manage to survive, only to be recruited by the international police, who want Satoru's help to catch a notorious computer criminal known as Blitz. On their way to catching Blitz, the two get involved in a number of smaller cases that center around such messy issues as embezzlement, money laundering, and murder. Nevertheless, the tone remains lighthearted, thanks to the impulsive antics of Rina and a cast of kooky secondary characters, such as the occult-obsessed data analyst Kei, and the tightly-wound police detective Ookouchi.

Since *Project: Hacker* is a text adventure, you'll spend a lot of time looking at static images, scrolling through dialogue, and occasionally being asked to make a decision to confirm that you're paying attention. The plotlines are fairly linear, and as near as I could tell, the worst fate you can suffer is getting a bad grade on a mission for not being thorough enough. Fortunately, that's not all there is to it: there are plenty of puzzles you'll need to solve before the story can progress, and these range from the action-oriented stylus-tapping kind to the classic adventure game problem-solving kind. The addition of a limited (but still impressively detailed) in-game internet adds an extra dimension to the usually linear world of adventure game logic; you can use Satoru's pocket-PC to access the 'net at any time, and the solutions to many puzzles can be found there, if you can find the right website to cross-reference with the the clues of the case.

While this aspect of the game can be a lot of fun, sadly, the presentation is decidedly mediocre. The graphics and soundtrack are acceptable but uninspired, and though the character designs are expressive enough, each character's three or four stock poses grow tiresome to look at during long stretches of dialogue. Still, even with its flaws, *Project: Hacker* manages to create a fairly immersive experience, thanks to the amount of detail put into the world, a careful balance of action- and logic-based puzzles, and some genuinely entertaining stories.



WORTH IMPORTING?

Like most games of its type, *Project: Hacker*'s only worth importing if you can read the Japanese text. While the stylus-tapper puzzles don't require any reading to play, they're too few and far between to be worth the price of admission.

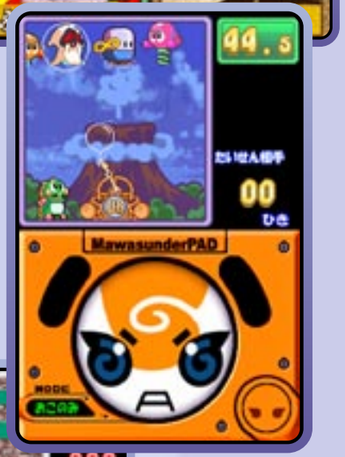
FINAL SCORE: 3.5 of 5

まわすんだ!!
Mawasunda!!™

Review by Sardius

Publisher: Taito Corporation
Developer: Taito Corporation
Release Date: 7/20/2006

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



We thought we had the scoop on something great here. Though there are currently no plans to bring *Mawasunda!!* stateside, Taito is apparently readying a Wii-exclusive sequel for release in the United States sometime in the near future. The Wii version will be called *Turn it Around!!* in the U.S., and if the Nintendo DS prequel is any indication, you'll want to avoid the living *hell* out of it.

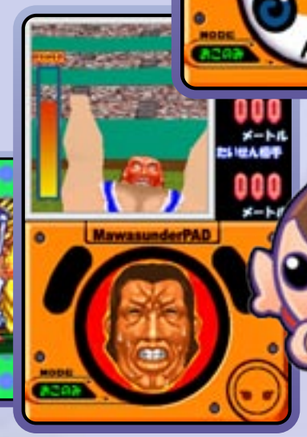
Mawasunda!! contains a series of *Wario Ware*-style minigames that are all controlled by a turntable on the bottom screen, which you can twist back and forth by dragging the stylus across it. In essence, Taito took my least favorite part of *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan* and made an entire game out of it. Oh, *rapture*.

It might not be so bad if this control scheme wasn't such a turd. The mechanic is flawed to the point of worthlessness. Your stylus will slip off of the tiny control disc time and time again, and attempting to spin it *too* fast will inexplicably result in the wheel moving slower than it should. It's telling that most of *Mawasunda!!'s* minigames offer alternate control schemes that utilize the D-pad and face buttons instead—you'd be advised to use them whenever possible, as attempting to play with the spin pad only leads to frustration.

Fortunately, the game doesn't allow you to spend enough time with it for severe irritation to set in. Each minigame will take you anywhere between 5 to 90 seconds to complete. Most fall somewhere in the thirty second range, and most are easy enough for you to complete on your first try. The problem is that there are only 25 minigames in all, so less than half an hour after I first popped *Mawasunda!!* into my DS, I had already completed the game and unlocked everything. At this point you can then replay each minigame individually through Free Play mode or try finishing the game again at a higher difficulty level, but all challenges will always remain exactly the same with no variation, ensuring that replay value is nonexistent. Thanks, Taito.

Few of these minigames are actually any fun to play in the first place, either. A good third of *Mawasunda!!'s* games simply require you to rotate the pad as fast as possible for a few seconds. There's no challenge, nor is any specific technique or skill required. The rest of the games are similarly braindead, with only modified versions of classic Taito arcade games like *Arkanoid* and *Cameltry* being genuinely fun. Sadly, challenges like these are few and far between; an entirely Taito-themed minigame collection would have likely produced much better results.

Despite a fun premise and some hilarious artwork between stages, *Mawasunda!!* just doesn't contain enough game to make it worth your money.



WORTH IMPORTING?

Do you like the idea of paying premium import prices plus the cost of overseas shipping for a game that offers about 20 minutes of frustration? This is a rhetorical question.

FINAL SCORE: 2 of 5

Saitek
Eclipse II Illuminated Keyboard
• Keyboard • Price: $69.99

Features
Multicolor Backlight
Laser Etched Keys
104 Key Layout

Review by 4thletter

The more I think about this, the more I wonder why more companies don't make backlit keyboards. Saitek's Eclipse II is a fully functional keyboard with the buttons you need and nothing more. It's no-nonsense, and I kind of like that. The keys are large and cushioned, so they don't click-clack like a lot of other keyboards do. If you do much computing at night, I'm sure you'll understand the annoyance that comes with hearing that noise.

They keyboard's angle can be adjusted even while its rubber feet make sure that it stays in place. It comes with a wrist rest, which is always good if you're worried about carpal-tunnel. My favorite feature by far, though, is the adjustable backlight. It's nice to be able to choose between blue, red, and purple for the backlight, and then the degree to which it is backlit as well.

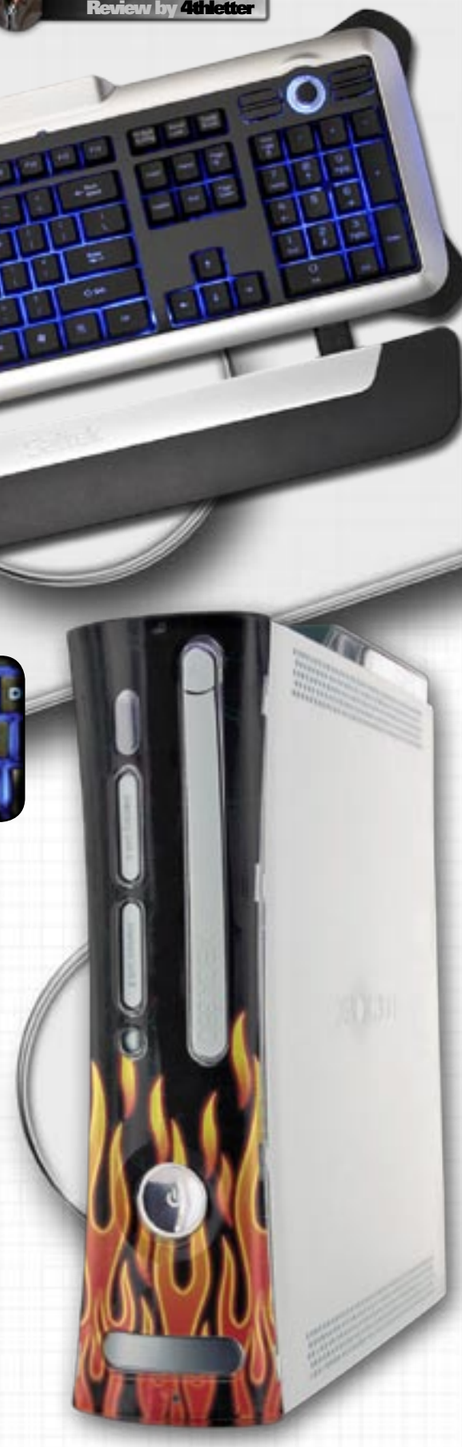
Nyko
GameFace 360
• Customizable Faceplate • Price: $19.99

Review by 4thletter

Features
Easy Operation
Fifteen Blank Templates
Six Pre-printed Faceplates

One of the cooler things about the Xbox 360, beyond actually playing games, is the ability to swap out faceplates to show off to your friends. Up until relatively recently, you were limited to the factory-made faceplates supplied by Microsoft and a couple 3rd-party companies. With the advent of Nyko's Gameface 360, you've got the ability to get that Jessica Alba or Spider-Man faceplate you've always wanted.

It's really a simple idea. You create or download a design on your computer, then print it out using one of fifteen templates. Punch out the paper faceplate and slide it between two bits of plastic that snap into the 360. It's quick, easy, and pretty swank, too. Nyko's website already has a community set up to share custom faceplates, so you're sure to find something to like.



Nyko
Intercooler
• Cooling Fan • Price: $19.99

Review by Wanderer

Features
Plugs into the back of your 360
Runs off of the existing 360 power supply
Easy to install

If you don't mind spending another twenty bucks for a feature your Xbox 360 arguably should've had already, the Nyko Intercooler provides your 360 with a handy, inexpensive cooling fan.

The Intercooler does its job reasonably well and the price is all right, but it's not quite a must-have. It snaps right onto the back of the unit, but it's not very securely anchored, especially if you keep your 360 vertical like I do.

Review by 4thletter

Nyko
Intelligent Remote 360
• Xbox 360 Remote Control • Price: $19.99

Sometimes, you need something more than a dinky little universal remote. Nyko's Intelligent Remote 360 can control your Xbox, television, DVD player, or stereo for those times when you absolutely do not want to get up from the couch.

Programming this bad boy is easy. You point the remote to the device you want the Intelligent Remote to learn at the Intelligent Remote, and start pushing the buttons that you want it to learn. (Hint: "Set" gets you started.) Once you're done, you'll be able to use the remote on anything you want. This is easier than hunting down access codes in a flimsy manual, and it lets the remote do everything that other remotes are programmed for, not just what the access code lets you do. It runs off two AAA batteries and powers off when not in use, so it's going to last you a while, too. It's a nice alternative to the hyper-pricey Harmony 360.

Features
"Smart" Programming
Backlit Buttons
Automatically Powers Down

Review by 4thletter

Saitek
P2900 Wireless Gamepad
• Wireless PC Pad • Price: $37.99

I realize that I probably shouldn't admit this in a public forum, but I prefer to play PC games with a gamepad whenever I can. I grew up on Nintendo, even though I've definitely put in time using WASD on the PC, so gamepads feel more natural to me. Saitek's P2900 is a good one.

The Dual Shock is the standard by which most controllers are judged nowadays, and this one uses a similar design scheme. It's slightly wider, which is good if you have large hands. The face buttons are smaller and around the size of an Advil. In a move that I love, the D-pad is of the disc variety, which makes it much easier to hit those diagonals and 360s in fighting games. The two analog sticks are nice and smooth, but move easier than I'm used to. It's very easy to push too far when using them, but that's something that practice will fix. The four shoulder buttons are nicely done. Buttons 7 and 8, in the L2 and R2 position, are oversized and easy to press. It's almost more natural to sit your index finger on those buttons rather than 5 and 6 (L1 and R1). Add in a lengthy battery life and a ten-meter range, and you've got a pretty solid controller.

Features
Requires 1 AA Battery
50 Hours Play Time
FPS Quick Configure Button

FANART

ART BY THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE

Fan art is all about giving exposure to aspiring artists who might not otherwise have a way to get their artsie parts seen. If you are one such artist, point your web browser toward www.luv2game.com and check out the Fan Art section of our message boards. That is where you can post your arts to get them considered for this section. You may also email submissions to fart@hardcoregamermag.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 drewed yourownself. 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 your 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 : **OMGZORZ a Goblin!**
Artist : **Kristin Whitney**
Age : **20**
Location : **AZ**

Title : **Awesom Possum and Grey Robot**
Artist : **Janet Jennings**
Age : **22**
Location : **Des Moines, IA**

Title : **You scream, I scream, Lance-cream!!**
Artist : **Naobita**
Age : **28**
Location : **San Marcos, CA**

Title : **Christmas Sophie**
Artist : **Remy Langlois**
Age : **28**
Location : **Bay Point, CA**

Title : **World of Warcraft Earth Elemental**
Artist : **Jason Durden**
Age : **31**
Location : **Wooster, OH**

Title : **Thrall**
Artist : **Kristin Whitney**
Age : **20**
Location : **AZ**

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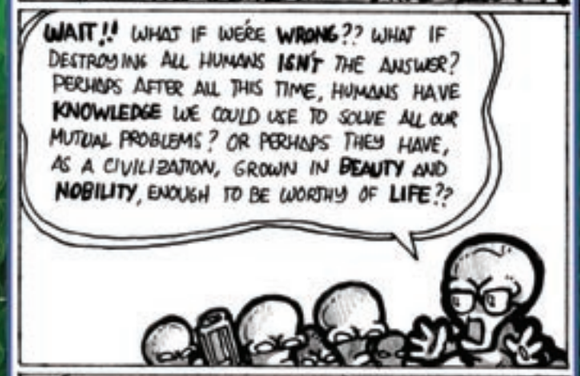

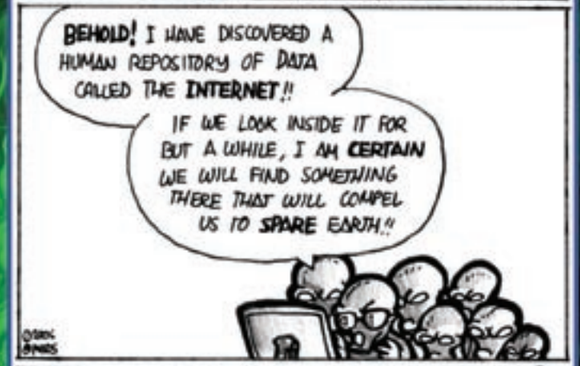

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