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HARDCORE GAMER[®]

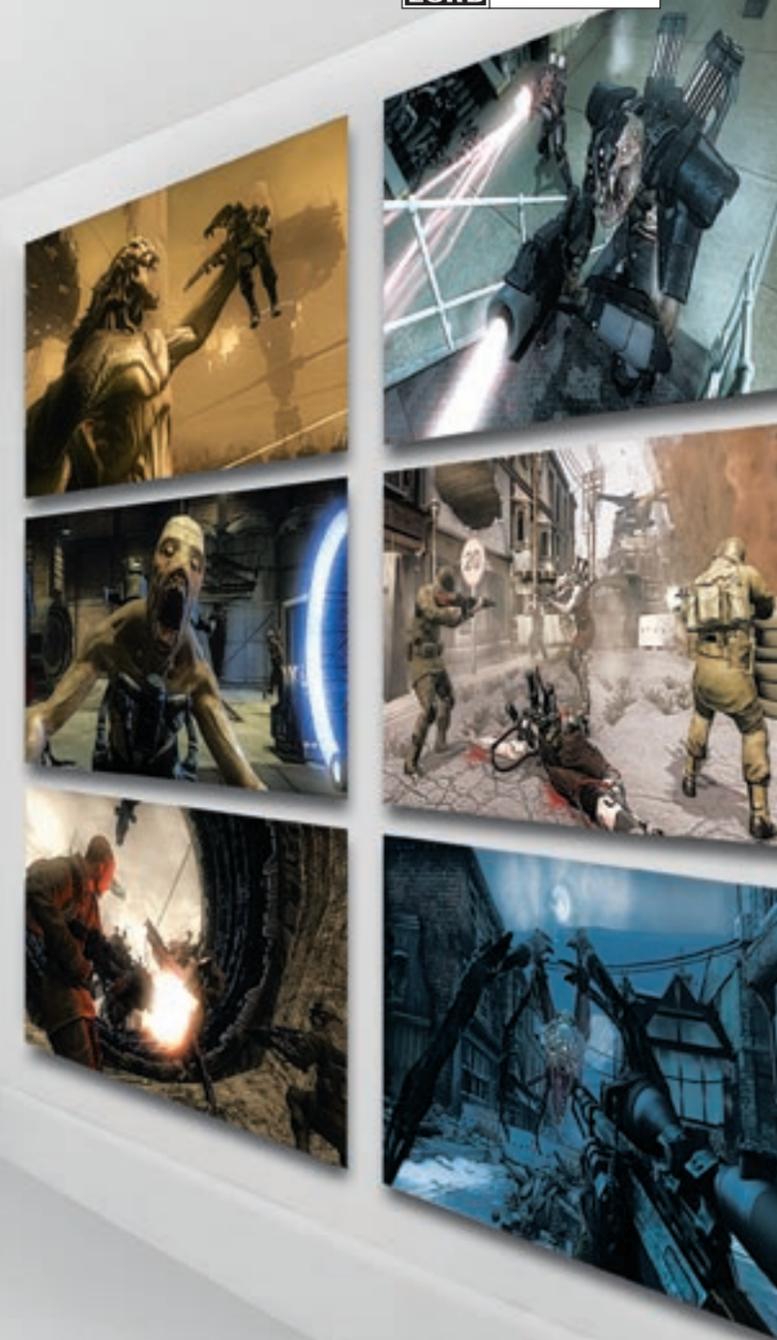
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MAGAZINE

v2i6 . Electric Peen



MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language



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PLAYSTATION 3



LOST PLANET™

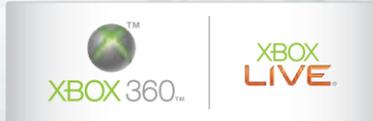
EXTREME CONDITION



MULTIPLAYER DEMO ON XBOX LIVE® MARKETPLACE
NOVEMBER 23

TEEN
T
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Animated Blood
Mild Language
Violence



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Printed in the United States of America

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James Cunningham
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Thomas Shin



DJPubba **Tim Lindquist**
 I only had to stand in line for a PS3 pre-order for ninety minutes and I got spot #10 in line. Whether that will translate into actually getting one, I'll know only after this issue has printed. I got #32 in line for a Wii at GameStop but got #1 in line at GameCrazy. I think I'ma have a Wii in a minute. Yay for GameCrazy!!
 Now playing: *Rocket Slime*, *Dead Rising*, *Bully*



Wanderer **Thomas Wilde**
 How did I wind up reviewing the insufferably cute *Tokobot Plus* and a *Mortal Kombat* game in the same issue? That sound you hear is my paradigm shifting without a clutch.
 Now Playing: *Guild Wars: Factions*, *Mega Man ZX*, *Sid Meier's Railroads*



Lynxara **Alicia Ashby**
 So, I'm not buying a Wii or a PS3 at launch. Why, you ask? Well, between the PS2 and the DS/GBA, I've got more games than I could possibly play and finish in the next six months sitting around *anyway*. Buying more right now just seems kind of silly. If I was going to buy a new system this fall, though, it would so be a Wii.
 Now Playing: *Ar tonelico*, *Super Robot Taisen: Original Generation 2*, *Rogue Galaxy*



Racewing **Geson Hatchett**
 A month into the holiday retail season in my gaming ghetto, and I'm still alive! I'm still waiting for the drive-bys to happen once the PS3 releases, though. Oddly enough, I feel totally safe carting around a Wii in this selfsame neighborhood. Tune in to find out what happens next month... *if I survive!*
 Now Playing: *Guitar Hero II*, *DBZ: Budokai Tenkaichi 2*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (Haru? Please. Needs more Toph, baby.)



Shoegazer **Dave Hulegaard**
 Of course I care about PS3 and Wii, but I've got a long overdue date in Ivalice that takes priority this year. It's a date that I've been trying to keep for about three years now and the cost of entry is more to my liking.
 Now Playing: *Final Fantasy XII*, *Marvel Ultimate Alliance*, *Guitar Hero II*



KouAidou **Elizabeth Ellis**
 I love spreadsheets! I love them more than it is really healthy for a person to love a simple piece of computer software. They have a million uses. Need something organized into a chart? Spreadsheets! Into a graph? Spreadsheets! ...well okay, I guess that's only two uses. Still, they're really cool!
 Now Playing: *Final Fantasy XII*, *Super Robot Wars Alpha 2*



Roger Danish **Greg Off**
 Which one did you buy? The inexpensively priced Wii with *Wii Sports* packed in or the pricey PS3 with a HD copy of *Talladega Nights*? Honestly, it's pretty hard to go wrong, as both systems are going to be worth every penny and then some. And even if you aren't rushing out to be the first one on the block with a shiny new next-gen machine, there's always *Gears of War*. Good time to be a gamer!
 Now playing: *Resistance: Fall of Man*, *F.E.A.R.*, *Guitar Hero II*, *Bully*



4thletter **David Brothers**
 Beef is when Sony and Nintendo decide to release their systems on the day before and the day after my birthday. As of November 18, I'm one step closer to being a grown-up. Is that a good thing? I honestly do not know. Perhaps I should get married next, or maybe buy a motorcycle. Make my birthday a happy one by visiting <http://4thletter.net>.
 Now Playing: *with your emotions* (IRL), *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* (360), *Red Steel*



James **James Cunningham**
 I have my Wii reserved, and life is good. At this point there are rumors flying all over the place about how wonderful it is, what a pain it is, how it's going to take over the world, and why it's just another gimmick. I'll find out for sure mid-November, but I can't say I'm expecting it to go too badly.
 Now playing: *Bully*, *Okami*, *Tiger Woods 07*, *Just Cause*



HonestGamer **Jason Venter**
 By the time you read this, I will be playing my Wii and hopefully my cold will be gone. Someone needs to tell the console manufacturers to release their systems in the spring. It'll make standing in those long lines more tolerable. Sure, they'll miss the holiday window but... Christmas cash!
 Now Playing: *Caesar IV*, *Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner*



Hitoshura **Iaian Ross**
 If you think you might have OCD you could ask your doctor. However, if you'd prefer to test for it in the privacy of your own home, solve those harebrained puzzles in the Seraphic Gate of *Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria* without any outside help.
 Now Playing: *Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria*, *Rogue Galaxy*.



Sarcus **Danny Cowan**
 It's emoticon movie review time! *The Fast and the Furious* - : (, 2 *Fast 2 Furious* - D : , *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* - :) (surprisingly!), the second half of *Ghost World* - :(, *Al Franken: God Spoke* - :D! , *Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties* - >:(, *Silent Night, Deadly Night Part 2* - :DDDD!!!
 Now Playing: *Bully*, *Clubhouse Games*, *Titan Warriors*



Wolfie **Terry Wolfinger**
 The months are getting chillier and the new season of *LOST* is off to a satisfying start. In *Warcraft*, my Undead Rogue is nearing 60 (57 to be exact). I've just read an amazing novel, *The Road*, by Cormac McCarthy, about a father and his young son making their way through a desolate, postapocalyptic America. How's that for holiday cheer?
 Now playing: *W.O.W.*, *Dead Rising*



Metalbot **Anthony Mertz**
 I'm writing this the day that *2142* launches. Will it be the same game it is now, by the time this issue is in your hands? Will DICE screw it up so badly by trying to please everyone that they piss everyone else off? Will I ever stop playing *Battlefield*? No, yes, and no.
 Now Playing: *Gothic 3*, *Shadow of the Colossus*, *Battlefield 2* (PC), *Battlefield 2141*, *Dawn of War - Dark Crusade*



Arbeth **Thomas Shin**
 I've been looking for new indie/freeware games to waste my time on without strangling my wallet. I don't think we'll be seeing another *Cave Story* for quite some time, but *Helherron* and *Liberation Army* were great to kill a couple of days with (again). I have but two words to say now: GENRE! HYBRIDS!
 Now Playing: *Starscape*, *Planescape: Torment*, *Dynasty Warriors 5*



Ashura **Brady Hartel**
 To those guys who are making Xbox games play on a 360: please make *Guilty Gear X2 #Reload* work. I know that there's such an ungodly amount of polygons in *Guilty Gear* that it may be an insurmountable task to make the system output that many, but it must be do-able via some sort of unholy combination of magic and bacon. I'll settle for a King of Fighters if that's too tough, though.
 Now Reading: *Death Note*



Jeremy **Jeremy Peeples**
 If the month of November yields a Wii for me, I'll be happy. The PS3's \$500 minimum cost keeps it out of my price range for a while, and a Wii360 combo should provide me with enough gaming enjoyment so that I won't even miss it.
 Now Playing: *Yakuza*, *WWF No Mercy*, *Columns*, *Burnout: Revenge*



Mads **Amadeo Garcia III**
 Hello, my name is Mads, and I'm not actually a monkey (but I do play one on TV). The whole 'learning to type' schtick was just to cover up for the fact that I was too lazy to do my own damned bios in earlier issues. My editors have since learned to be rather persuasive with a crowbar. I blame *Half-Life 2*.
 Now Playing: *Gradius V*, *Super Princess Peach DS*

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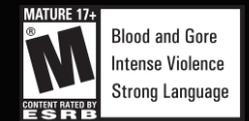
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THERE'S A REASON NIGHTMARES HAPPEN IN THE DARK.

Mankind has no one else to turn to. Nowhere else to run. The planet is falling apart. Its people cornered within the only safe area remaining. The Locust Horde has risen and they won't stop coming. They won't stop killing. The government turns to whoever they have left. The sick, the wounded, the imprisoned. An inmate named Marcus Fenix. Once left to die, he is now humanity's last hope. He can take comfort in but one fact. The human race isn't extinct. Yet.



Jump in.





E3 IS DEAD, LONG LIVE E3



The ESA promised more details on the revamped E3, and they recently made good on their vow by divulging the first tidbits of information about what was the most important games show in the world. The media briefing will move from Los Angeles to Santa Monica and will be held on July 11-13 instead of its usual mid-May timeframe, placing it somewhat controversially closer to the European Leipzig Games Convention.

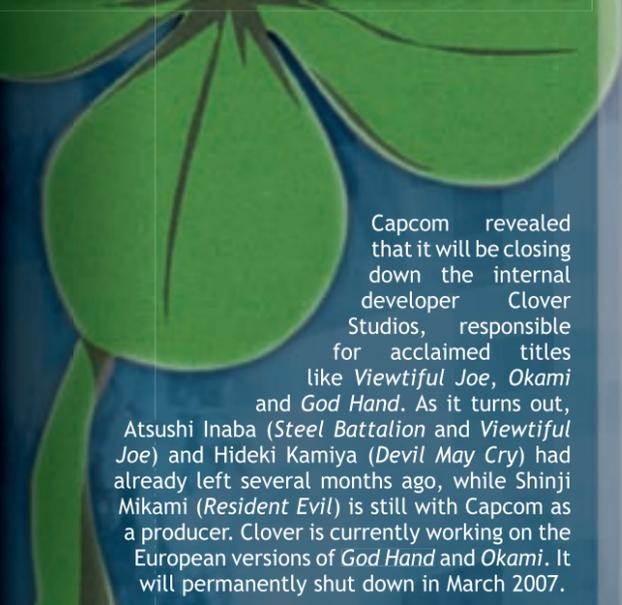
As was previously hinted, the "summit" will be held in hotel suites and meeting rooms within walking distance of each other. Additionally, a converted hangar will allow participating companies to showcase their games in standardized, turnkey display areas ranging from one to four hundred square feet. All display areas will be developed by show management to ensure that the venue is staged efficiently. While the new formula is invite-only, it will retain a few side events such as conference sessions, the Serious Games showcase, and the popular "Into The Pixel" video game art competition.

The catalyst for this overhaul was the out-of-control costs associated with participating in E3, but oddly enough, the evening receptions and parties have remained intact. While they are great opportunities to socialize and network with industry peers, it would be only logical to reduce expenses by scaling down the elaborate parties and not booking big-name bands.

Now that the ESA has revealed its plans for the new E3, the CEA, organizers of the Consumer Electronics Show which will be held in Las Vegas on January 8-11, have consequently decided that it may not be a wise idea to go toe-to-toe with the new formula, citing that the E3 summit will now allow non-ESA members to attend. Instead, the CEA will add a Gaming TechZone to its current exhibition, which will allow gaming companies to showcase their products.



CLOVER NOT LUCKY FOR CAPCOM



Capcom revealed that it will be closing down the internal developer Clover Studios, responsible for acclaimed titles like *Viewtiful Joe*, *Okami* and *God Hand*. As it turns out, Atsushi Inaba (*Steel Battalion* and *Viewtiful Joe*) and Hideki Kamiya (*Devil May Cry*) had already left several months ago, while Shinji Mikami (*Resident Evil*) is still with Capcom as a producer. Clover is currently working on the European versions of *God Hand* and *Okami*. It will permanently shut down in March 2007.

"HERE COME THE HELGHAST! CHALLENGE"

ON HARDCOREGAMER.COM

The "Here Come The Helghast!" Challenge has been issued on HardcoreGamer.com, and runs from October 30th through November 29th. *HGM* readers, be on the lookout! General Metrac and his Helghast are not only invading the PSP with *Killzone: Liberation*, but they're trying to infiltrate *Hardcore Gamer Magazine* and our website, HardcoreGamer.com. It's up to you, our readers, to rid our network of the evil Helghast! Once every three days or so for 30 total days, a different member of Helghast will appear with its "Orange Eyes" accompanied by a Unique ID #. One may appear on the message boards of our website, another may appear on a special version of our PDF magazine that is only available online for download, and one may also appear only in a hard copy of *Hardcore Gamer Magazine*. Who knows? For each Unique ID # that you find, go to www.HardcoreGamer.com and enter the ID # to receive points and a chance for fabulous prizes!



HARDCORE GAMER MAGAZINE VOLUME 2 ISSUE 6 ELECTRIC PEEN

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TRAUMA CENTER™ SECOND OPINION



Blood
Mild Language
Mild Violence

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LOST PLANET

EXTREME CONDITION



Preview by Shoegazer

Capcom knows how to hit hard and fast when they're developing original IPs for new consoles. *Lost Planet* started making waves right around E3 this year and is still gaining momentum. However, new details have been scarce on this promising epic adventure, so we figured it was time to check in.

The most intriguing new information has to do with the online capabilities. In addition to online co-op play, there will be versus modes for up to sixteen players, including Elimination, Team Elimination, Post Grab (think Capture the Flag), and Fugitive mode. As the "fugitive," one player will attempt to complete various tasks for points while evading a team of hunters. The fugitive tries to reach a certain number of points to win, while the hunters try to take that point total down to zero by killing him.

More details are starting to emerge about the storyline as well. While the snow pirates and the Akrid are battling for survival on the surface of the planet, an organization known as NEVEC has been crafting a plan to wipe out all life on the planet. Somehow the game's hero, Wayne, is linked to NEVEC's plans, but large chunks of his past are a mystery. What really happened to him? Only the collaborative masterminds behind *Devil May Cry* and *Onimusha* know for sure, but come January, you can experience it first-hand. Hot off the heels of the incredible *Dead Rising*, Capcom seems to have another winner on its hands.

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: 1/12/2007

Genre(s): Sci-Fi Action
Category: Why You Bought A 360
of Players: 1 (Up to 16 Online)

NARUTO UZUMAKI CHRONICLES

Publisher: Bandai Namco
Developer: Cavia
ESRB: Teen
Release Date: Winter 2006

Genre: Action/Adventure
Category:
Somethingsomething no jutsu
Players: 1

Preview by 4thletter

Raise your hand if you haven't heard of Naruto. The three of you with your hands up might want to go to Hot Topic or watch some Cartoon Network. Naruto is the current big thing.



We've got a treat for the rest of you. *Naruto Uzumaki Chronicles* hits the PS2 this winter, and it's a bit different from the *Ultimate Ninja* series. It's a 3D action/adventure title that features an original story instead of one taken from the anime. Bandai Namco promises a deep set of customization features for Naruto as he strives to become the next Hokage.

You can upgrade his speed, strength, stamina, and a host of other options.

The game ditches the cel-shaded look and goes for a more mainstream 3D style. It looks different from the *Ultimate Ninja* series, but remains aesthetically pleasing. The frame rate seems to hold up very well under the action in the game, and the animations are similarly well done.

Naruto is the main character, of course, but other fan favorites show up to assist him throughout the game. You can look forward to Kakashi, Sasuke, and others playing back-up in certain stages. Expect to see all of Naruto's signature moves and a metric ton of shuriken as you play through the game, as well. Look for it on the PS2 in the wintertime.



BULLET WITCH



Preview by Wanderer

And now for something completely different.

It's 2013, and life on Earth is not going terribly well. Even discounting the wars, famine, and global unrest, now there are demons invading the planet. As humanity faces its extinction, a woman named Alicia is resurrected, and there you have your Bullet Witch. Wielding both formidable magical powers and a fully automatic "witch's broom," she's out to kick the demons off the planet.

Bullet Witch is long on action and style, and short on strategy. It resembles nothing quite so much as a next-gen *Gungrave*, featuring a constant string of over-the-top, gory gunfights set against an apocalyptic backdrop.

There are no power-ups, no discarded weapons to seize, and no health items, as these things would screw with your flow. Alicia will simply recover from wounds on her own, you can get more weapons at the end of a level, and frankly, *Bullet Witch* is the kind of game where you don't really need power-ups. This owes in large part to Alicia's repertoire of magical spells, which include lightning strikes, murders of crows, and meteor showers. You just blew up a tank with a stray gesture. You are already powered up, sir.

Bullet Witch is set in and around a city based on New York, as Alicia mounts a last-ditch assault on the demons. Each of the game's five levels are enormous; the power of the 360 is used here to provide an epic backdrop as you fight through city streets. You'll also be able to download more stages in the Xbox Live Marketplace, as well as extra costumes for Alicia.

Right now, *Bullet Witch* looks like the kind of game that starts slowly, but will eventually give you enough enemies and combat options to provide a satisfying shooter experience. We'll find out for ourselves come next year.

Publisher: Atari
Developer: AQ Interactive
Release Date: Q1 2007

Genre(s): Action
Category: Gothic Lolita Gone Postal
of Players: 1



Ar tonelico

MELODY OF ELEMIA



Title: Ar tonelico: Melody of Elemia
Publisher: NIS America
Developer: Gust
Release Date: February 2007
Genre(s): RPG
Category: Music! Dating! Violence!



Preview by Lynara

Ar tonelico is, in practice, as delightfully weird a game as the premise suggested. The gameplay is very reminiscent of the two *Atelier Iris* games, complete with a complicated item synthesis system, equipment customization, and a similar turn-based combat engine. *Ar tonelico* throws in a new complication in the form of Reyvateils and all their special gameplay mechanics. The result is a considerably deeper and more satisfying experience thus far than either of the *Iris* titles that have been localized.

As in most Gust titles, the plot by itself isn't inspired. Lyner Barsett is a knight errant from the upper world of Platina, who crashes into the lower world called the Wings of Horus while on a quest for an ancient artifact called the Hymn Crystal Purger. If Lyner doesn't get the Hymn Crystal back to Platina in time, it'll be destroyed by a new and deadly type of Virus monster called the ELMA-DS. Of course, Lyner doesn't have to get back home before you've had time to take him through a colorful adventure full of bad guys to beat on, friends to recruit, and problems to solve.

It's the Reyvateil that make playing *Ar tonelico* interesting. Reyvateil have the power of Song Magic but are otherwise fragile young women who can't attack normally in combat. Instead, they can deal damage, heal allies, or create a host of other useful effects by singing. The longer they sing before releasing a spell, the more powerful it is and the better your rewards are at the end of a battle. You must have Lyner Dive into the inner psyche, or "Cosmosphere," of your Reyvateil and interact with her subconscious mind. This'll help her develop new abilities that help you both in combat and in exploring dungeon maps more completely.



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Gothic 3

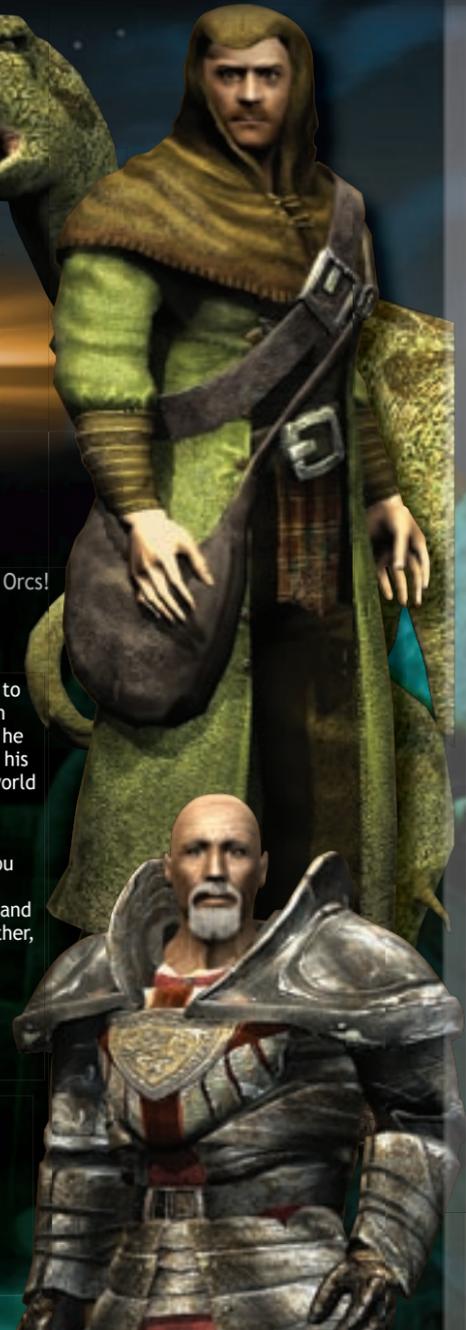
Publisher: Aspyr
Developer: Piranha Bytes
Release Date: 11/2006

Genre(s): RPG
Category: Kill/Slay/Destroy the Orcs!
of Players: 1

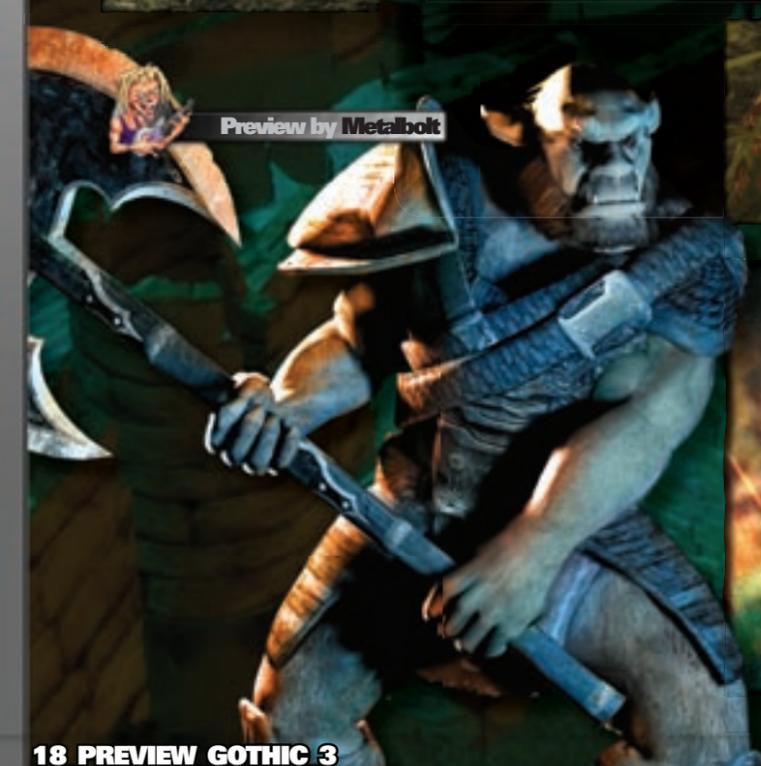
After saving his home island (twice!) our hero sails to the mainland, only to find that it has been overrun by Orcs. Will he help the rebellion and crush the Orcs? Will he help the Orcs and become a traitor to the humans? Will he do neither and be a shadow in the land, stalking and killing everything in his path? These are things that you'll have to answer. What happens in the world of *Gothic 3* is reliant upon the choices that you make.

More *Fable* than *Oblivion*, *G3* focuses on action and gameplay more than numbers and character creation. After the first, and only, load screen, you are free to wander about doing as you please. Use the bow often enough and you'll be rewarded with archery skills. Use your sword often enough and you'll be rewarded with melee skills. You are not limited to one or the other, and can mix and match skills as long as you put enough time into them.

The *Gothic* series has been around for five years, and regardless of the critical acclaim it has gotten, the first two games didn't make a dent in our market. Promising sixty hours of gameplay, a massive world to explore, and stunning visuals, *Gothic 3* just might make a crater.



Preview by Metalbolt



SONIC RIVALS

PUBLISHER: SEGA · **DEVELOPER:** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT · **RELEASE DATE:** 11/22/06
GENRE: RACING/PLATFORMER · **CATEGORY:** MASCOT · **# PLAYERS:** 1-2



Sonic has been a busy little hedgehog over the years, starring in both platformers and a pair of racing games, and *Sonic Rivals* combines two great activities that go great together, peanut butter cup style. Racing against a rival through 2D levels rendered in gorgeous 3D, nabbing powerups that have different effects whether you're in first or second place, and sabotaging your opponent to claim victory should shape up to be all sorts of entertaining.

Sonic and Knuckles are being their usual competitive selves when things start getting out of hand. Joined by Shadow and Silver, the quartet race along the side-view courses to the finish line, searching out hidden paths and undercutting their opponent at every opportunity. Each character has a unique skill that gives them an edge when used correctly, and collecting cards can customize them further. They all have their own individual storylines too, because once again the plans of villainous Dr. Eggman (Robotnik no more) need some serious thwarting.

Characters aside, the name of the game is speed. The Sonic games have always been a combination of exploration and zipping along, but with the added pressure of a rival beating you to the finish, blowing through the environments as fast as possible takes on a new focus. Avoiding traps, grabbing powerups, and dealing with a rival who's got a single-minded focus on the goal leaves little time for stopping to peek in odd corners. *Sonic Rivals* is looking to provide an even more adrenaline-fueled version of the classic Sonic action, both in solo and head-to-head two player modes.

Preview by James

PREVIEW

PLATFORM

MULTI



Sonic and the Secret Rings looks to be a streamlined return to form for Sega's speedy mascot. With a focus specifically on Sonic and the camera at his back, *Secret Rings* is all about high-speed action. Sonic runs automatically, and the player steers him by tilting the controller left and right. Chain jump-attacks or charge the high jump to find secret paths, but never stop moving for anything, ever. Wiiii-ha!



Preview by James



Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team
Release Date: Spring 2007
Platform: Wii

Genre(s): High-speed action
Category: Run!
of Players: 1



Sonic's 15th anniversary party isn't over! Alongside his next-gen debuts, the original *Sonic the Hedgehog* is coming to Game Boy Advance. In addition to being able to save your progress and high scores, *Sonic Genesis* contains a special Anniversary Mode, allowing you to play through Sonic's first outing with the Spin Dash technique that was first introduced in *Sonic 2*. This makes an already fast game even faster. Blast Processing, anyone?



Preview by Racewing



Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team
Release Date: 11/11/06
Platform: GBA

Genre(s): Action
Category: Don't Call it a Comeback
of Players: 1



Xiaolin Showdown, no relation to cult classic *Samurai Showdown*, is a game that puts a kid's touch on the *Power Stone* formula. Your characters run and fight in wide open, tiered stages, resulting in a big emphasis on fast-paced and arcade-style fighting. It sports a cel-shaded style in order to better emulate the distinct look of the show. Expect six playable characters, a number of minigames, and four player gameplay over ad-hoc.



Publisher: Konami
Developer: Bottlerocket
Release Date: 11/14/2006
Platform: PSP

Genre(s): Kung-fu fighting
Category: Xiaolin vs. Lama
of Players: 1-4



Preview by 4thletter



Yggdra Union brings card battles to SRPGs with a *Dragon Force* twist. Decks determine your battlefield movements, attacks, and defensive skills. Properly using your cards will destroy some foes instantly, free Yggdra's oppressed land, allow you to turn enemies into allies, and even let you evade combat. World-renowned artists Sunaho Tobe and Satoko Kiyuzuki created the card and character designs, making this a visual treat game for tactical gaming fans.



Preview by Jeremy

Publisher: Atlus
Developer: STING
Release Date: 11/11/2006
Platform: GBA

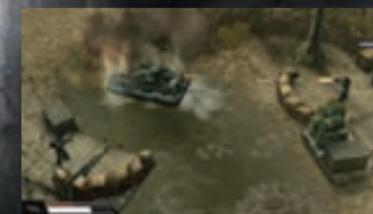
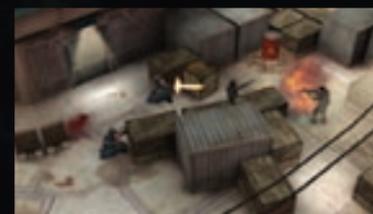
Genre(s): Strategy RPG
Category: WITH CARDS!
of Players: 1



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PlayStation Portable



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Bomberman's classic gameplay has stood the test of time. The latest iteration, Land Touch!, hits the DS this month and it's packing Wi-Fi gameplay and a brand new story mode. The story mode uses the stylus exclusively, even to move Cheerful White, your personal Bomberman, around the stage. Expect to see a collection of Bomberman mini-games in addition to the good old grid-based gameplay. Bomberman Land Touch! plays kind of like WarioWare with a story mode.



Preview by 4inletter

Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Hudson Soft
Release Date: 11/17/2006
Platform: DS
Genre(s): Kicksplode
Category: Cute Terrorism
of Players: 1-8

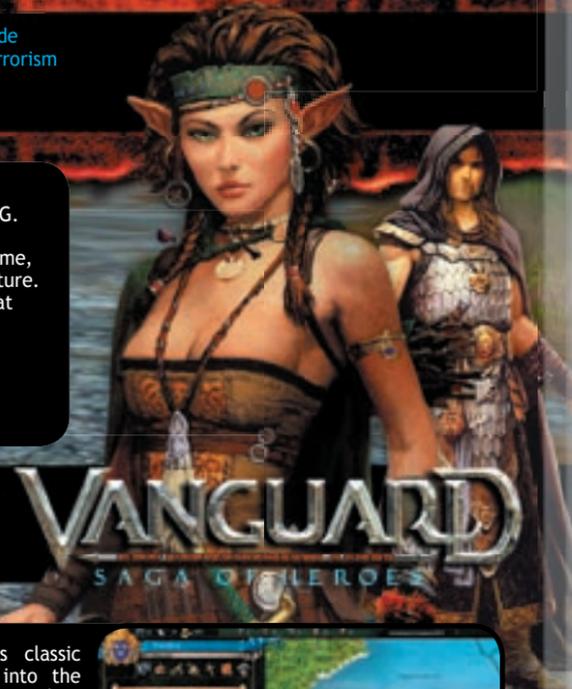
Sigil's Vanguard: Saga of Heroes places an unnatural emphasis on the "massively" part of the term MMORPG. It's being designed from the ground up to be as big as games like Everquest or World of Warcraft have become, with three enormous continents' worth of high adventure. You can buy houses, own ships, pursue three careers at once, and earn your own dragon mount.



Publisher: Sony Online
Developer: Sigil
Release Date: Q1 2007
Platform: PC
Genre(s): MMORPG
Category: Big McLargeHuge
of Players: Many



Preview by Wanderer



Europa Universalis III brings Paradox's classic historical real-time strategy franchise into the world of modern PC gaming, with full 3D graphics and a redesigned user-friendly interface intended to welcome both new players and EUIII veterans. Take one of two hundred fifty real-world nations through the course of European history in the Age of Exploration. The game covers the period between 1453 and 1789, letting players begin at any date and use whatever time remains to try and develop a nation into the single greatest power.



Publisher: Paradox Interactive
Developer: Paradox Interactive
Release Date: Spring 2007
Platform: PC
Genre(s): Strategy
Category: Grand
of Players: 1-32

EUROPA UNIVERSALIS III



Original Generation 2 picks up where the original Super Robot Taisen left off, with nearly the entire cast returning to meet new pilots and trash new robots. The core game engine remains the same, but it's been tweaked and improved to create a deep, challenging game with some of the best graphics and music ever to grace the GBA. This time, the story focuses on Kyosuke Nambu and his wacky girlfriend Excellen Browning, as they lead Earth's mecha heroes to battle otherworldly new invaders.



Preview by Lyozara

Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Banpresto
Release Date: 11/21/2006
Platform: GBA
Genre(s): Strategy RPG
Category: Turn-Based
of Players: 1

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PREVIEW

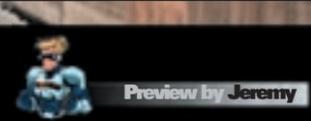


The PSP's line-up of RPGs looks to become even stronger with this innovative entry. Here, you're able to create your main character from the ground up, giving players unparalleled ability to customize their in-game appearance and skills. The game's job system lets you put your skills to the test, and you'll likely need them to survive the Wi-Fi compatible stealth/action hybrid battles. In a genre desperate for new ideas, *Valhalla Knights* could deliver a genre-changing experience.



Publisher: Xseed Games
 Developer: K2
 Release Date: Q1 2007
 Platform: PSP

Genre(s): RPG
 Category: Action/Stealth
 # of Players: 1



Following in the footsteps of *Spider-Man 2*, *Superman Returns* is the kind of high-powered sandbox game that Superman has always demanded, but inexplicably never gotten until now. While you're wielding Supes's trademark powers in the defense of Earth, justice, and freedom, you must keep one eye on not his health bar, but *Metropolis's*; if Superman's city takes too much damage (even if it's from you), you fail.



Publisher: EA
 Developer: EA
 Release Date: 11/20/2006
 Platform: Xbox, PS2, Xbox 360

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



SUPERMAN RETURNS



Half a classic Atari compilation, half a self-consciously "urban" take on the microburst gaming format popularized by *WarioWare*, *HOT PXL* contains two hundred minigames, none of which take more than ten seconds to play. You can download fifty more minigames by connecting your PSP to your PC, as well as unlock bizarre "buddy screens" (ever wanted to pretend your PSP is a glass of soda? now you can!).

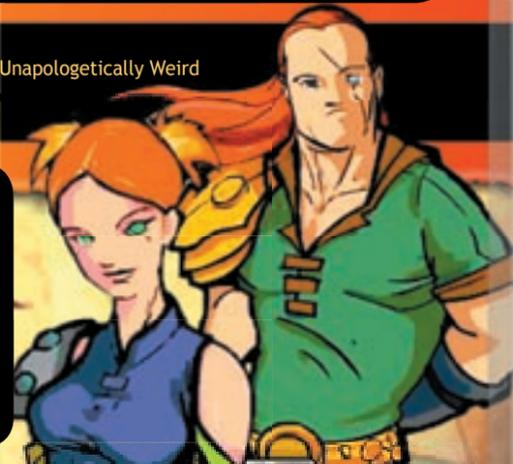


Publisher: Atari
 Developer: Zslide
 Release Date: Q1 2007
 Platform: PSP

Genre(s): Minigames
 Category: Deeply and Unapologetically Weird
 # of Players: 1-8



With FPRPGs becoming a rarity, *Mazes of Fate's* release comes as something of a surprise. It features over three hundred items, fifty levels of play, dozens of magic spells, the ability to make your own character, and even supports five different languages. If these ingredients are used to tell a compelling story, this could be a sleeper hit for the GBA this winter.



Publisher: Sabarasa Entertainment
 Developer: Graffiti Entertainment
 Release Date: 12/2006
 Platform: GBA

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

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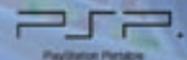


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SLASH

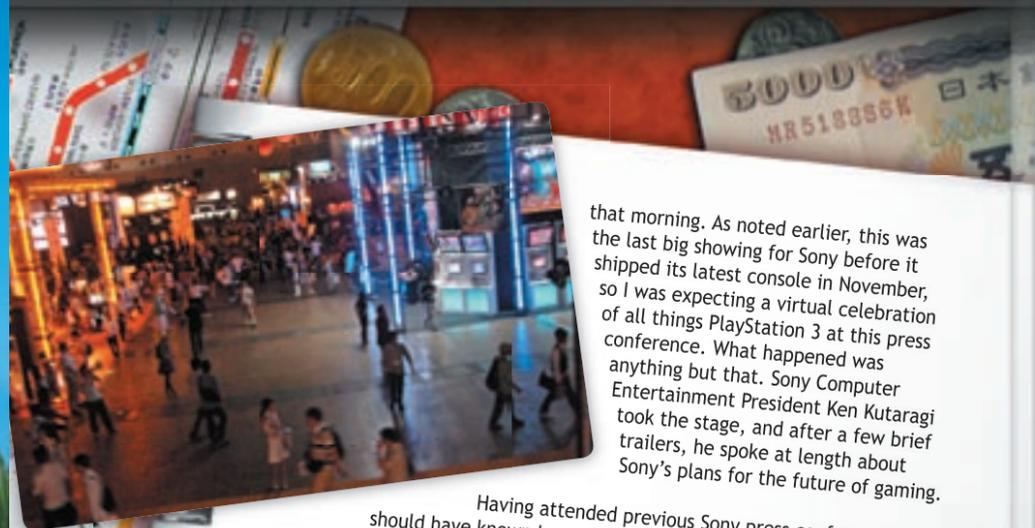
JUMP

SHOOT

CLAW



Wii



that morning. As noted earlier, this was the last big showing for Sony before it shipped its latest console in November, so I was expecting a virtual celebration of all things PlayStation 3 at this press conference. What happened was anything but that. Sony Computer Entertainment President Ken Kutaragi took the stage, and after a few brief trailers, he spoke at length about Sony's plans for the future of gaming.

Having attended previous Sony press conferences, I should have known better than to expect a barrage of lights and sound kicking off the launch of the PlayStation 3, since the company tends to favor pie charts and bullet points over strobe lights and thumping bass. The presentation was surprisingly boring, though mainly because people were expecting one thing and got another. Personally, I didn't digest all that Sony had to say until after the press conference, mainly because during the presentation my fellow journalists were literally trying to figure out what was going on while asking one another, "Where are all the PS3 games?" The answer to that question would be found later that evening and on the showroom floor throughout TGS.



Overall, the press conference was a big disappointment, but the big picture painted by Sony was interesting, to say the least. You can read more about that within the other PlayStation 3 feature in this issue located on page 44.

After the Sony press conference, the showroom floor began to flood with media and anyone else that was able to get into the event, to see the latest games and hardware. TGS isn't as big as E3 used to be, but it definitely holds its own. As is par for the course amongst game journalists, I didn't have time to stop and play nearly anything I'd really like as I scuttled through the crowds to get from one appointment to the next.

The PlayStation booth was noticeably rocking, however, as new trailers were shown on a gigantic screen behind a semi-closed-in area of the Sony booth. I took the time to ask what people's initial impressions of the PlayStation 3 were and found that the answers didn't surprise me too much. "I'd love to have one, if I can afford it," said one art student from the Bronx, now fine-tuning his craft in Tokyo. "The games look great, they have some excellent titles like Metal Gear and Final Fantasy, so yeah, I almost have to get one now that I've seen it." That was the response from another American attending TGS 2006, who specifically came to experience the PlayStation 3.

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Wii



Later on that evening, Sony invited several media outlets over to its Tokyo offices for a chance to get some hands-on time with the PlayStation 3. Several buses full of eager journalists headed out of the Expo center and into the heart of Tokyo for the event.

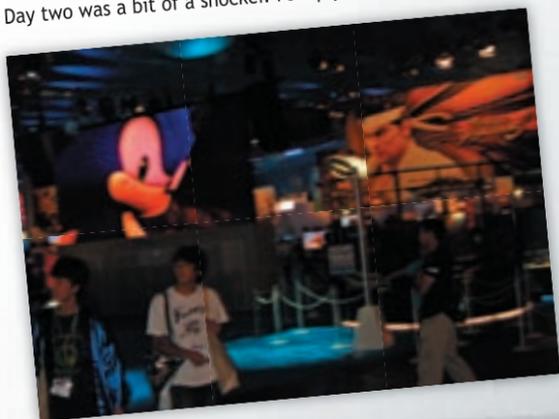
The featured games ranged from the highly anticipated *Resistance: Fall of Man* to the somewhat overlooked *Lair* from Factor 5. Phil Harrison, pretty much the "main man" for all things PlayStation, was in attendance as well and personally showed off the PlayStation 3's Crossbar menu system. He would later chat with us about Sony's online plans for the PS3, but you can read more on that within the other feature as well.



Honestly, they didn't change too much. I've felt for a while now that the PlayStation 3 will offer a great gaming experience if you have everything you need to experience the true potential of the console (HDTV, surround sound, etc.). I've felt that it will provide some great games without truly redefining anything in particular. Better this and better that should make for a "better" overall experience, but exactly what that does for gaming over the next five years... that, I don't know. There are still many reasons to own a PS3, but there are also a lot of questions without answers, like exactly how the online portion will integrate seamlessly with gaming on the platform and how much the price point will impact the industry as a whole down the road.

Those questions remain to be answered, but anyway, TGS certainly wasn't just about the PlayStation 3. Plenty of other companies had some good things to show off at the event including Ubisoft, Konami, Eidos, Microsoft and more. Capcom in particular seemed to stand out from the crowd (even without *RES* on display) with the amazing looking *Lost Planet* and *Devil May Cry 4* being shown. Both games really got the crowd excited, generated a buzz throughout the duration of the show, and seemed to light up American website servers like a Christmas tree.

Day two was a bit of a shocker. I simply could not believe the



amount of people in attendance for the event. TGS, unlike E3 and other big industry events, is open to the public. A nominal admission fee gets you into the main event for a chance to see the games up close and experience them for yourself, months and sometimes years in advance.

With thousands upon thousands of people lining up outside and swarming into the expo center it was hard to stay focused, much less physically get from one place to the other. One thing that really stands out though is the impact that gaming has on Japanese culture. Unlike North American and most European markets, gaming in Japan is much more than an isolated niche usually designated for your stereotypical teenagers. Among the throngs of people in attendance at TGS I saw several families enjoying the event together: father, mother, son and daughter all walking along, playing



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the latest games and taking a sneak peek at the future of the industry.

While families certainly seemed to enjoy the event, the game companies competing for media exposure probably felt a bit more stressed. Microsoft, for instance, is well aware that the Xbox 360 isn't doing so well in Japan. TGS 2006 proved to be their opportunity to showcase two upcoming Japanese-centric games from Mystwalker Studios: *Blue Dragon* and *Lost Odyssey*. The games seemed to garner a warm



the game in order to provide PlayStation 3 owners with the opportunity to experience *Ninja Gaiden*.

Not nearly as controversial, but equally as exciting, was my trip to Polyphony Digital, the team behind the amazingly popular *Gran Turismo* series. After a presentation and Q&A session regarding *Gran Turismo HD* (the new name for the PlayStation 3 game previously titled *Gran Turismo Vision*), I was given a studio tour to see why Polyphony is recognized throughout the industry as one of the cooler places to work.

reception, but proving how big TGS really is, the perception of these games and some others in the mind of show attendees will go a long way towards determining the ultimate success of Microsoft's Xbox 360 in Japan.

Aside from what's happening on the showroom floor, the week of TGS is also a great opportunity for Japanese-based companies to invite overseas journalists to their facilities for some behind-the-scenes looks at their latest projects. I had the chance to do just that when I visited the studios of both Tecmo and Polyphony Digital.



During the visit with Tecmo, I got to see the first official trailer for *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* for the PlayStation 3. Tomonobu Itagaki also revealed some interesting tidbits about the future of Team Ninja and explained to fans that *Sigma* is basically a remake of *Ninja Gaiden Black* on the Xbox (with a new playable character and more detailed graphics) and that they made

The atmosphere, which seems to perfectly blend creativity with productivity, is focused on keeping the *Gran Turismo* development team in drive, while making sure it has plenty of opportunities to relax and feel at home. Polyphony really has some great people behind the wheel (pun intended) and its employees really have a great place to work. By the way, you can watch the full Polyphony studio tour, the interview from TGS over at GameTrailers.com.

The remainder of the show gave me the chance to see some other great games, conduct some entertaining and informative interviews, and otherwise feel the buzz that existed at this year's Tokyo Game Show. Of course, some late-night karaoke and the most amazing sushi I've ever had didn't hurt my impression of Tokyo at all.



In the end, TGS 2006 afforded us all the opportunity to see up close the biggest games in the industry. Aside from the obvious absence of the Wii (which was there only in moderate form via third party publishers), the show proved to be an entertaining and insightful glimpse into the future of gaming. I'm already looking forward to experiencing what the show has to offer next year.



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M.U.G.E.N.

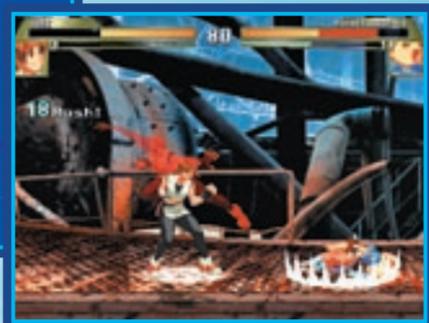


Feature by **Honestgamer**

An Urban Dictionary user famously defined the M.U.G.E.N. creators as "thieves and emotional basket cases." Another user retaliated with a description of the M.U.G.E.N. creator that portrays him or her as an often-persecuted but essentially inspired individual who loves games and just wants to be left alone to enjoy that passion. You'll find a lot of debates like that if you look the phrase up on the Internet, along with terms like "warehousing" and "Elecbyte" and "intellectual property." What do such things really mean, though? What's the excitement all about? How does it all fit together?

To understand M.U.G.E.N. it helps to first understand the enigmatic company known as Elecbyte. If you check the domain now you'll find a page that cannot be displayed. Until 2003, you would've found something else entirely, a site devoted to the creation and further development of an emulation and game creation program known simply as M.U.G.E.N.

Developed originally for DOS systems but later modified so that it would also work for Linux systems, the M.U.G.E.N. engine enjoyed solid support from a variety of diehard fans who were pleased at the opportunity it provided. In an attempt to attract a wider audience than the Linux engine afforded them, the folks at Elecbyte began raising money for the development of a Windows version. This brought the system into 2003, and that's when things stalled. The Elecbyte site dropped off the Internet and the M.U.G.E.N. program itself might have died altogether if not for underground support from enthusiasts.



Though the last official version of M.U.G.E.N. that was released by Elecbyte featured limitations some didn't much care for (only so many fighters could actually be assembled and many features were locked in the beta version), programmers took it upon

themselves to aggressively modify it. Suddenly, the result was a completely unofficial and very popular way to throw fighters into a game and watch them kick one another's butts.

At its heart, that's what M.U.G.E.N. really is: a way for fans to answer questions they've always had. What if Ryu and Sonic met in front of a roaring waterfall and suddenly decided to knock the crap out of each other? Surely you've wondered what the outcome would be. M.U.G.E.N. was designed so that the answers to those burning questions need no longer remain irritatingly out of reach. The engine does most of the work. All gamers have to do is find copies of the software, then rip out the desired animations and backgrounds. From there, a robust system allows them to tweak everything, from damage to combo rates to life meters. One of the only things they can't change is the questionable legality of making such projects.

From the beginning, it was obvious that M.U.G.E.N. presented some legal obstacles to the budding game developer. For starters, the program itself isn't precisely free domain. People talk about it being freeware or shareware or abandonware. As some have observed, Elecbyte isn't exactly around to protect the program it created. Moving past that, though, there are still concerns. The primary one of those is the simple fact that most people who create M.U.G.E.N. games aren't really creating at all. Instead, they're grabbing assets from their favorite fighters, throwing them together and calling them original.

To be fair, many such people are simply tweaking the games they love. They're designing them to play them for themselves and maybe with a few friends. Whether because they fear legal retribution, or because they just like to keep something special by keeping it small, they're not going out of their way to distribute their projects outside the fan community.



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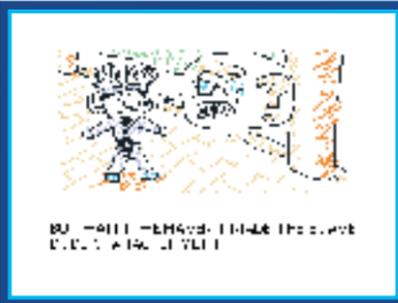
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M.U.G.E.N.



That's where the whole "warehousing" concept comes into play. Let's say one guy slaps together a great project. Finally, he gets to see Mario and Simon Belmont punch their way through the dark Hyrulian forests. It's a dream come true. So he shares it with his pal, who loves it every bit as much as its creator. Unable to resist the temptation, that pal sends it to someone else, until eventually the file has found its way around the Internet and has even been archived (or "warehoused") on numerous sites that collect such things. Then Nintendo inks a deal with Konami to throw such a thing together in its next *Smash Bros.* game, only no one cares; they've already played it.

the development of cool little video clips you can throw up on YouTube (for a real hoot, check out some of those that others have created). That's probably as far as things will ever go, but it's far enough that M.U.G.E.N. is worth a look right now. You can find out plenty of information by starting with a simple Google search or M.U.G.E.N.'s Wikipedia page. Where you take it from there is up to you.

Do you see the problem, here? Even if you don't, you can rest assured that companies like Nintendo and Capcom and SNK have. That's why M.U.G.E.N. won't ever enjoy mainstream success. Right now, it's mostly good only for your private enjoyment, or possibly for



M.U.G.E.N. Without Limits

One of the possible interpretations of the name "M.U.G.E.N." is "Without Limits," in Japanese. Based on some of the modifications available for the engine, it seems like a stark understatement. Just to give you an idea, we've come up with some examples.

A notable mod to check out is the *Super Mario Bros.* Stage, created by Bane84. Featuring a fully functional *SMB* 1-1 stage for any character to run through, it also features coins, mushrooms, stomp-able Goombas, and fully destructible blocks. You can even destroy the castle if you wish.

You can visit <http://www.mugenguild.net/~bane84/> to check out some of his other work, including the first stage of *Contra* and a fully playable remake of *Lethal Enforcers*.



Feature by Arieth

While there are plenty of re-made characters from existing games, there are some creations which have never been playable. *Marvel*™ super-hero Thor, whose only appearance (delivering a single attack) was in *Marvel vs. Capcom*, has been turned into a character with a full-fledged move list. Also, there are plenty of custom-made characters made by fans, such as Homer Simpson, Captain Caveman and... Fat Albert, with all of his friends. If you can think of it, it's probably been done... or can be done. This is why M.U.G.E.N. will never quite go away, unless a bigger, badder program that does the same thing comes out.

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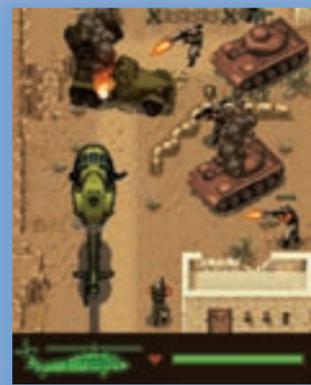
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Jump in.



DELTA FORCE BLACK HAWK DOWN TEAM SABRE

Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre is a tactical action game that manages to create a very entertaining mobile gaming experience... if you don't mind tactical strategy over balls-out shoot-outs.



It's a game in which you control members of the elite Delta Force on 12 missions in locales such as the deserts of Iran and the jungles of Colombia. Missions vary from saving hostages, destroying key enemy facilities and, of course, annihilating enemy forces.

Your unit consists of three commandos with their own unique abilities. There's the Engineer who is weaponless but has the ability to cure team members, diffuse land mines, and call in air raids. The Sniper is able to shoot from far away and can scan the entire area. The Rifleman has tougher armor, more ammunition, and a knife for close encounters.

The game balances play to where each member of the unit is essential to the success of the mission. If one is lost, you'll have a hard time getting by. For example, the engineer is the only one who can spot and diffuse land mines so if you lose him, your remaining soldiers can recklessly walk into them and get killed. Or if you lose the sniper, you will lose the ability to scope out an ambush.

In case you're not too big on the tactical part, the game also provides a few straight shooting levels with the use of a helicopter. As it flies around, you can fire in many directions, destroying tanks and bad guys. These levels are rather lame when compared to the land missions because all you do is control the aim of the guns, not the helicopter itself. There isn't much here but these missions do add some variety overall.

It takes an average of about fifteen minutes to complete each level of *Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre*, with the exception of the shorter helicopter stages, so it's a decently long title. It could have benefited from a few more levels or at least a map creator option, but nevertheless has wonderful controls, detailed graphics and a well-balanced sense of strategy.



Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Vivendi Universal
Release Date: October 2006

Genre: Action
Category: Shooter
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE:
4 of 5

SCARFACE

Let's get down to business right away. If you are a longtime gamer and have been anxiously awaiting *Scarface: The Rise of Tony Montana*, all you need to know is that it is a classic example of a movie-licensed game. If you haven't had much experience with tie-in games and don't know what I mean, read on.

This game is inspired by the story of the classic film and focuses on jobs that Tony was involved in before rising to the top. Some are new and others are taken directly from the movie, but they all carve the path to his ultimate demise. There are 12 missions in all and they entail either driving or shooting.

During shooting missions, Tony is on foot and inside quarters taking out enemies using chainsaws, shotguns, Uzis and more. Starting off with the chainsaw, the other weapons are made available in later missions and they are all accessible at any time. Each deals damage in a different way.

Driving missions consist of traveling the city by car to pick up merchandise, mow down enemies and the now-familiar protecting and tailing missions. Unfortunately, you are not really in control of driving the car. Instead, the car moves automatically and your jobs are completed by pressing keypad buttons that match the numbers or directions that appear onscreen. This relegates these missions to simple button matching and they are fairly easy to complete, even on the highest difficulty level.



To break up both mission types, at one point there is a game of Blackjack where you must double your winnings to win the hand of Elvira. This is a standard game of 21 and allows you to place a bet, take a hit, double down or stand. It's an interesting diversion from the normal game play.

Scarface: The Rise of Tony Montana has standard graphics, minimal audio and decent controls but the game just doesn't "pop." Sure, it features characters and quotes from the movie, but there is very little diversity or challenge. Some fans may be let down.



Publisher: Starwave Mobile
Developer: Living Mobile
Release Date: October 2006

Genre: Action
Category: Shooter
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE:
2.5 of 5

You never forget your first ...



Ar tonelico

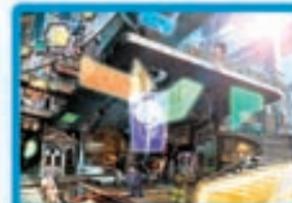
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Space Alliance is a massively multiplayer 3D space combat game where players travel across galaxies exploring new regions, gathering rewards, and working together to destroy an alien threat.

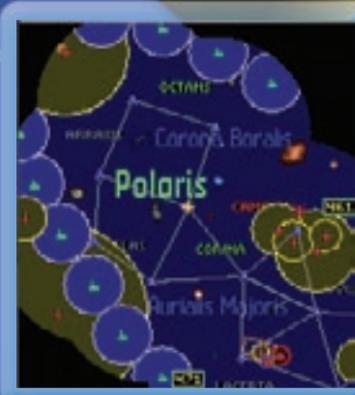
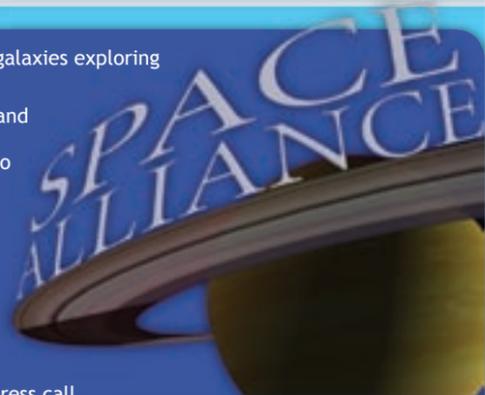
The entirety of the game deals with expanding the known universe, creating more Starbases and destroying the alien nests. You can't do one without the other, so communication between players is important. Once the location of a nest has been found, it takes at least five pilots to surround and nuke the nest while others take care of alien fighters.

You start docked on your home Starbase, where you can get a view of the entire known galaxy. You can see where the action is taking place or select one of the missions that has been assigned. While at the Starbase, you can also check on your ship's status and work on any upgrades. Additionally, you may access a friends list and upload or download new content.

Completing missions successfully grants the ability to power up permanently but temporary power ups can also be found in space. Your ship also comes with a repair robot that takes care of problems during skirmishes, a la R2-D2, but if you become completely disabled, a distress call can be sent out so that any other player can answer and come to the rescue.

As you complete all types of missions, and answer distress calls, you can move up in rank and gain notoriety plus trophies. This strengthens your cause but the in-game moderators can control the alien fleets, thereby dynamically adjusting the threat level according to how the players are faring. Not that you will be fighting a losing battle, but moreso one that will take a long time to win.

Some players will be able to dive right in and join the fray but most will find it necessary to take the guided tour on this mobile MMO. There is plenty to learn and plenty to participate in because it is a real-time universe that continues to evolve.



Space Alliance takes full advantage of the Nokia Snap platform to deliver a mobile gaming experience that has a strong sense of community. It encourages players to form in-game relationships and cooperate together in their quest to conquer the alien threat. It will eat up your calling plan minutes since it requires a connection at all times but if you've been searching for something that's massive and ever-changing, this title should fit the bill.

Publisher: Nokia
Developer: Monkey Business
Release Date: December 2006

Genre: MMO
Category: Shooter
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5

Frogger



These days, remakes of classic franchises are nothing new. Usually the gameplay of the original is updated with new graphics and a few tweaks, or at times, completely reinvented in hopes of keeping the franchise fresh and original. *Frogger* is no stranger

to this and the latest example is *Frogger Evolution*.

Frogger Evolution is split up into two different types of play. The beginning levels are reminiscent of the original game, where you help the tiny frog across a gauntlet of obstacles including a busy highway and a raging river. Aside from the updated graphics, the game now includes new obstacles like rampaging dinos, rising spikes and spinning lilypads.

While the early stages maintain their frantic feel, the newly-designed levels later on in the game are slower paced. In these, the action shifts from dodging cars to collecting coins. The levels are set up as puzzles where coins are scattered throughout. All of the coins must be gathered before proceeding to a checkered square that, when reached, will end the level. Frogger is given new abilities to help him conquer these areas and they include a super jump to vault two squares at once and a tongue lash to grab out-of-reach coins or push barrels.

Most people will find *Frogger Evolution* enjoyable in short bursts. The early levels add variation to the classic game. However, *Frogger* lovers will find the shift in gameplay later on more tedious, rather than engaging. The game leaves a bittersweet taste. You should only consider this if you really need a *Frogger* update.



Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: November 2006

Genre: Classic
Category: Platform
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5



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DEER HUNTER 2

Deer Hunter 2 is not so much an entirely new game as it is more of an update to an already-existing title. The two modes available are career hunt and shooting gallery. The main objective in career hunt is to advance from an entry-level shooter all the way up through the ranks until becoming a World Class Hunter. In shooting gallery, the deer are moving targets and



all you've got to do is aim and fire to hit as many as you can within one minute.

The hunt will start in Georgia looking for Whitetail but will soon open up to Oregon for Blacktail and Utah for Mule Deer once your rank has increased. As you move up in rank, you will gain points that can be assigned towards skills such as tracking, stealth, lures, and weapons and by reaching the highest rank, you will then be able to bag the White Stag.

Before the hunt, you select the locale and essential gear. Each hunt consists of a day where you can bag up to three deer where every deer successfully bagged tallies up points towards your rank. The criteria considered are the number of antler points, weight, weapon used, and a bonus for killzone kills, including headshots.

Using binoculars will spot your prey and give a description of its type and distance from you. To bring it closer, a specific lure will work, depending on the time of season, but be careful to use it correctly or risk scaring the prey away. Once the animal has come within range of your chosen weapon, it's important to have a steady hand. While each weapon will react differently, use of the steady aim button can help, though this is only temporary.

The biggest improvement to *Deer Hunter 2* is that now you can tag and track deer through a GPS map. This map can give you an idea of where the deer are and once you've found one, it can be tagged and its movements followed through the territory. This allows you to find many deer before you select and go after those that will earn the most points, or in case an injured deer has eluded you, the job can be finished.

Deer Hunter 2 maintains a great amount of realism with excellent graphics, good animations and genuine hunting technique. The updated visuals and mechanics surpass the first title, and the new inclusions will please those looking to go on the hunt.



Publisher: Glu Mobile
Developer: Glu Mobile
Release Date: November 2006

Genre: Simulation
Category: Shooter
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

The Motorola i875 is Boost Mobile's first MP3 Player handset that allows users to listen to their favorite tracks using stereo headsets or the rear audio speakers. It has external player keys, a removable Transflash Memory Card slot and even includes Roxio's Easy Media Creator software to create MP3 files from audio CD's. The Memory Card slot also comes in handy since the phone features a 1.3 Megapixel camera with 4x digital zoom and a Video Recorder to capture and store spontaneous footage.

Multi-media messaging, Text messaging, Wireless Web and Java-enabled games and applications are all supported to ensure that users get plenty of entertainment value for their money, not to mention the obligatory ringtones and wallpapers.

More technical features that the phone supports include a 600 capacity phonebook, Bluetooth connectivity, voice activated dialing, and picture Caller ID. But this phone wouldn't be complete without the Nationwide Boost Walkie-Talkie service, the digital two-way radio feature that allows users to speak cross-country at the touch of a button. This is one advantage that Boost has over the competition and is a hallmark of their "Where you at?" ad campaign.

It comes pre-loaded with demos of *Tony Hawk's Underground 2* and *Racing Fever 2*. These choices give mobile gamers an idea of the gaming capabilities the phone offers. Presented on a large screen with good resolution, you control them via a keypad configuration that is half-recessed to allow clear navigation of the buttons.

The Motorola i875 from Boost Mobile at first glance looks conservative and doesn't necessarily "shout out" to its targeted market. Considering it's the flagship phone to its line-up of youth-oriented handsets, it could have used an edgier design but nonetheless performs solid in all functions.

Boost Mobile subscribers looking to upgrade and anyone else looking to get a full-featured phone that also includes nationwide walkie-talkie should certainly consider the i875.

Motorola i875 from Boost Mobile

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

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Zero
to 60
in one
generation



44 Never

improved sound and color handling of the Super NES. Sega of Japan ordered a drive that was little more than an enhanced storage unit. Sony delivered just that: a unit that could access 600 megabytes of Genesis-quality graphics and sound.

As a Japanese electronics giant, Sony was involved in the video games business by 1990. When people raved about the harps playing in the beginning of *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, they were really complimenting Sony. It was a Sony S-SMP sound chip that powered those harps. Without that Sony sound chip, the Super NES would have been limited to the same narrow range of sounds as the Genesis.

In 1991, Sega announced plans to release a CD-ROM drive, the Sega CD. Though Sega had engineers such as Joe Miller in the United States and Hideki Sato in Japan, the company turned to Sony for its expertise in CD-ROM.

Executives at Sega of America wanted a CD drive that would enhance the Genesis, giving it the

Since the Genesis (a.k.a. the Mega Drive) had less than one-tenth of the market in Japan, the Sega CD could not help but bomb. In the United States, where Sega currently controlled more than fifty percent of the market, the Sega CD also bombed. With nearly twenty million Genesis consoles sold in the United States, SEGA only sold approximately 200,000 CD units.

In 1992, Nintendo announced that it had approached Sony for help developing a CD-ROM peripheral for the Super NES. The unit would be called the PlayStation, but Nintendo executives worried about Sony creating a copyright situation that would give Sony too much control over games published for the system.



In January of 1992, Nintendo executives allowed Sony to announce the joint venture at the Consumer Electronics Show only to turn around and announce that they had decided to create the project with Philips instead. There's been bad blood ever since.

Sony would probably have written the entire venture off if it had not been for an engineer named Ken Kutaragi, who argued that Sony should not abandon the PlayStation idea. The video game market, he said, was a growing, thriving business in which Sony should invest. Though other Sony executives would later try to steal the credit, only Norio Ohga, the CEO of the company, saw the wisdom in Kutaragi's arguments.

As Kutaragi silently began work on a game console for Sony, his company dabbled rather haphazardly in publishing software. On the positive side, they published a game called *Mickey Mania* in which players guided Mickey Mouse through levels inspired by his evolution from "Steamboat Willie" to the present day designs.

On the negative side, Sony Imagesoft published scores of bad sports games under the ESPN license, and two lousy movie-based titles based on *Cliffhanger* and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. One of its lowest points was a full-motion video game based on the Keanu Reeves movie *Johnny Mnemonic*, although they did manage to produce a good game based on the Robin Williams movie *Hook*.

In 1994, news leaked out that Sony planned to release a game console. What Sony released in 1995 resembled the Nintendo PlayStation in name only. Between 1992 and 1995, Kutaragi abandoned everything he had created for the joint project with Nintendo, started with an entirely new engine, then abandoned that one and started all over again.

The final product had a 32-bit R3000A RISC chip sometimes referred to as the "Emotion Engine." According to Sony specs, the PlayStation could generate an amazing 500,000 polygons per second. External tests rated the graphics engine at closer to 350,000.

While preparing to release its first game console, Sony purchased a Liverpool-based game publisher called Psygnosis. Though well known

for its *Lemmings* games, Psygnosis seemed like a crazy investment. Sony, however, left nothing to chance.

Though Sony was new to the video games business, the company hired veteran game executives. The Sony Computer Entertainment America team included Steve Race, the former VP of Atari's European operation. Race, the founder of Worlds of Wonder, had worked on such previous projects as Teddy Ruxpin, Laser Tag, and the American launch of the Nintendo Entertainment System. Among his first hires were Jim Whims, another former Worlds of Wonder executive, and Bernie Stolar, a veteran of Sega.

By the time Sony launched PlayStation, two other "next generation" game systems — the Atari Jaguar and the 3DO Multiplayer — were already dying. These systems were generally considered past their expiration dates by the time PlayStation launched in Japan, in March 1995. Three other competitors, however, were still set to ship.

For its part, Sega hoped to capture the market with the Saturn, a system with two 32-bit Hitachi SH2 chips. In theory, the dual processors offered far more power than the single chip in the PlayStation. In reality, the two processors were hard to synchronize, and the Saturn was the best 2D system ever made at a time when the world was turning to 3D.

The two other systems were both from Nintendo. The first was the Virtual Boy, a hard-to-categorize game system that lacked portability because it could only be played on a table, but did not hook up to your TV. Virtual Boy was like a Viewmaster toy. You pressed your face into its mask and saw games projected in 3D, but the graphics were all in red and

black. The system came out in 1995 and died shortly thereafter.

The second system was known as the "Ultra 64," but Nintendo kept much of the information about it under wraps. Nintendo showed arcade games which company spokespeople said were powered by Ultra 64. They showed Ultra 64 tech demos. In the end, though Nintendo gamely told the world that Ultra 64 would hit stores in 1995 along with Saturn and PlayStation, the actual hardware did not come out for an extra twelve months.

On November 22, 1994, Sega released the Saturn in Japan and sold out. In fairness, Sega only shipped 200,000 units, but the Saturn played a very good version of the game *Virtua Fighter*. At the time, that was one of the most popular arcade games ever released in Japan.

On December 3, 1994, Sony released the PlayStation, and Japanese gamers looked the other way and yawned. Sony shipped 100,000 consoles and did not sell out, despite the PlayStation costing 5,000 yen less than the Saturn.

What nobody realized was that the roots for Sony's ultimate success had already been planted. In Japan, Sony executives traveled from game developer to game developer, offering excellent licensing deals in exchange for title exclusivity. One of the first companies to buy into this concept was Namco, the creator of *Pac-Man*.

Namco president Masaya Nakamura had a falling out with Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi, and had a rivalry with Sega. When Sony offered him good terms for exclusive rights to *Ridge Racer* and *Tekken*, he jumped at the offer.

Sony later made an even more important alliance with SquareSoft, the company that made the *Final Fantasy* games. Though originally married to Nintendo, Square jumped ship when offered better terms and a better publishing platform.



COVER STORY

In 1995, Nintendo announced that its Nintendo 64, the final name of the console, would use cartridges instead of CDs. This meant far less storage space for a much higher price. Nintendo preferred going with cartridges because it would make piracy harder, but the decision would later have severe consequences for Nintendo.



Sony and Sega launched their systems in the United States in 1995. Despite promising to launch the Saturn on "September second, Sega Saturn Saturday," Sega released its console in May, trying to avoid direct comparison with the superior PlayStation. The Saturn launched for \$399 and sold poorly.

On September 9, Sony launched the PlayStation with only 100,000 consoles in its inventory. Needless to say, Sony sold out. More importantly, having sold a mere 100,000 units, Sony was already ahead of Sega in the United States.

The beginning of the end had come for Sega. Having launched the Saturn, Sega practically abandoned the Genesis and the 19 million Genesis owners in the United States. The following year, Sega released a raft of new Genesis titles; but by that time, Genesis owners had already packed their game consoles away.

The big winner in 1995 was Nintendo of America, but not because of the Virtual Boy, of course. Sony had sold a few hundred thousand game consoles in the United States and Sega had sold even less Saturns. Nintendo had complete control of the burgeoning 16-bit market that Christmas and made a fortune.

Their fortunes were changing, however. Though the Saturn initially sold better than any other Sega system in Japan, the PlayStation soon overtook it. In 1996, when Nintendo released the N64, it looked like Nintendo would retake the market. Instead, the N64 ran out of gas. The system launched with only three games

in Japan: *Mario 64*, *Pilotwings 64*, and *Shogi*. Although Nintendo sold *Mario 64* at an astounding one-for-one rate with the N64 hardware, few new games launched over the next three months. *Mario 64*, *Pilotwings 64*, and *Shogi* were still pretty much all you had to play.

Sony had a huge game library that grew rapidly. Sony overtook Nintendo first, and within a year eclipsed the Saturn. In America, Nintendo 64 looked

to overtake the PlayStation at launch but fell short. The Saturn was never a contender.

Having Sony in the mix permanently and irrevocably changed the landscape of the video games industry. Before Sony entered the ring, Sega and Nintendo entertained young players until they left for college, then patted them on the back and said, "Hope you'll return some day when you have children of your own."

Sony was different. Sony was something for older brothers; it was an appliance you wouldn't mind showing to the other kids in your dorm. Sega, a company that had built its reputation wrestling fourteen-year-olds out of Nintendo's camp, seemed to be of the opinion that boys lost interest in video games as they became interested in girls. Nintendo seemed to back away from anyone old enough to have zits.

Sega, a company that generally operated on the brink of financial bankruptcy, could not compete in this new climate. In 1998, with Sony controlling more than half the market, Sega dropped the Saturn and returned to the drawing board. Nintendo continued to limp along with one-third of the market. Over the last three generations, Nintendo of America had dropped from approximately 93 percent of the market with the NES, to approximately 48 percent of the market (in 1993-1994) with the Super NES, to approximately 30 percent of the market with N64.

Nintendo's attempts to follow Sony's lead were fruitless. Sony and Eidos lit up the crowds by sending out models dressed like Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider*, so Nintendo

stuck a model in Lycra and called her Joanna Dark. Sony had edgy games full of violence and dark humor, so Nintendo gave a fluffy squirrel named Conker a drinking problem and sent him out in fields of dung.

In 1998, Sega announced plans for the Dreamcast, a game system that was clearly more powerful than the N64 or PlayStation. Howard Lincoln, the outspoken chairman of Nintendo of America, said that it was completely irresponsible of Sega to release a new system considering its financial problems. Lincoln was right.

The Dreamcast faced more than just financial problems, though. It faced Sony at the height of its popularity. Sega's Dreamcast had a lackluster launch in Japan in November 1998. The system was powerful, backed by great games, and inexpensive, but due to manufacturing glitches, Sega did not have many consoles to sell that opening day.

Opportunity missed became opportunity lost as three months later, Sony made its big announcement. Held in a lavish Tokyo concert hall with fifteen hundred journalists, game industry luminaries, and analysts in attendance, Sony's press conference was meant to dazzle. It did. The Dreamcast became all but forgotten as Sony promised millions of polygons, DVD playback, and backwards compatibility.

When Sega launched the Dreamcast in America on 9/9/99 for \$199, the mass market refused to listen. Sega did many things right with the Dreamcast and it remains a favorite console among enthusiasts, but the Sony juggernaut was not to be stopped.

By the time Sony launched its PlayStation 2 in Japan, Sony had sold over eighty million PlayStation consoles worldwide. The PlayStation 2 appeared on the cover of Newsweek Magazine. The launch was covered worldwide while Dreamcast sales all but died out in Japan.



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By the morning of March 3, 2000, thousands upon thousands of people were lined up in front of Japanese stores waiting for the March 4 launch of PlayStation 2. Yauhiro Minagawa of Nintendo referred to it as "Typhoon PlayStation 2." Four thousand people lined up in front of one Laox store in the Tokyo electronics district known as Akihabara; the store had 200 PlayStation 2 consoles to sell. Other stores only had PlayStation 2s for people who had pre-ordered their systems.

By 7:00 am on March 4, the shooting match was over. Sony had shipped 600,000 consoles out and every last one of them had been sold. One disappointed young man climbed to the top of an Akihabara department store and leapt to his death. Some of the lucky people who received their consoles were robbed on their way home.

The funny thing was, the PlayStation 2 launched with no great games. *Ridge Racer V* was ready at launch, but the game had serious aliasing problems. Capcom had a *Street Fighter* game, but few people were impressed. For the next few months, the biggest title for PlayStation 2 was the movie *The Matrix*, as prior to PlayStation 2, DVDs had not caught on in Japan. With the release of PlayStation 2 and the dearth of good software, a flourishing DVD industry began. If you entered stores selling and showing DVDs, you inevitably saw PlayStation 2s powering the demo.

In a business that's about giving away razors so you can sell the blades, so to speak, having your game console become the DVD player of choice is not helpful, but the PlayStation 2 suffered from other problems. Designers said it was miserable to program for. Early units suffered from bugs including a bug that enabled it to bypass regional coding for DVDs.

Sony limped through an entire year with lackluster software, selling its console in droves. "PlayStation 2 is the first console that is selling only for hardware," Sega CEO Shoichiro Irimajiri said in an interview. "In the past, the console was only a box without software; but people are buying PlayStation 2 without software."

That changed in 2001, as Nintendo and Microsoft entered the market with their next-generation games. Suddenly Sony had a new *Gran Turismo*. Rockstar released *Grand Theft Auto III*. Both the GameCube and Xbox hit American shelves

in November of 2001. As Sony's Jack Trenton pointed out, Sony headed into that holiday season with a two-million-console lead over the unreleased competitors. It left that holiday season with a four-million-console lead.

"If they are planning on catching up to us, they better get started," Trenton said in a March interview. They never did.

Microsoft nearly nudged Nintendo out of the market, but in its first four years of existence, the only three months in which Microsoft's Xbox business proved profitable were the three months after *Halo 2* was released.

For its part, Nintendo seemed almost self-destructive throughout the GameCube period. The company could not decide whether to go after its traditional young market or to try and compete with Sony and Microsoft for a shot at adults. Having released only one Mario adventure for each of its last two consoles, Nintendo dropped from a 48 percent share of the market with Super NES to a 30 percent share with N64 to a 16 percent share with GameCube.

Despite starting from scratch and launching its second game system with next to no software, Sony Computer Entertainment has managed to hold on to 60 percent of the worldwide video game market from 1995 through 2005.



The road ahead... SONY'S Got Next

INSIDE THE LAUNCH OF THE PLAYSTATION 3

BOOTING UP

Finally, the launch of the PlayStation 3 is upon us, and the not-so-little black box is causing quite a stir. If you're one of the lucky (and somewhat wealthy) people who'll read this with a PlayStation 3 near at hand, then there is a lot that you should already know about the latest entry into the next-gen console war. If you've been sitting on the fence trying to decide if the system is worth all the hype, then you've still got plenty of decisions to make. Is the PS3 all that it is cracked up to be? Is it *the* definitive next-gen experience that Sony claims it to be? Is it worth the price of admission?

The following write-ups are designed to help you answer those questions for yourself while giving new PS3 owners an opportunity to fully understand what they're in for. The PlayStation 3 is a big deal; in fact, it's a *huge* deal. Let's break it up a bit and dive straight into the next generation of PlayStation from Sony.

SONY'S VISION FOR THE PS3

Make no mistake; the PlayStation 3 is one impressive piece of hardware. Powered by the CELL Processor and featuring Blu-Ray disc technology, Sony is truly attempting to make the PlayStation 3 a universal media device for the home. The question is exactly what this means for us hardcore gamers in the long run and how these new technologies actually impact what we care about most... the games!

I know, I know, you're all jacked up to have your PS3, and we will certainly discuss all the awesome things that you have in store in the immediate future, but before we do, let's really examine what this console means to the industry. After all, if you just plunked down anywhere from \$600 to over \$1,000 for the console, some games, and accessories, you really should know about the finer points of your investment. You're certainly going to have to justify the purchase to someone, aren't you?

Honestly, it's kind of funny to think what consoles have become over the years. It's evident that the gaming experience isn't the sole purpose of gaming consoles anymore. Ever since the original PlayStation broke down the barriers that kept casual gamers away from the industry, companies like Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo have been striving to capture the mainstream audience while continuing to please those of us that have been at this gaming thing for the past twenty years or so.

Despite who the target audience is, both as a gaming console and as a media device, the PlayStation 3 contains more than enough tech to provide a complete experience. In fact, once you get your console home and plug it in, you'll probably be tinkering with all the options and customization that will truly make it feel like a central part of your entertainment hub.

Beyond launch, however, Sony has big plans for the PlayStation 3. In fact, they have big plans for the gaming industry. That's something that was made evident at their (somewhat boring, but ultimately informative) press conference during the 2006 Tokyo Game Show.

By Daniel Kayser of GameTrailers.com

When Sony Computer Entertainment President Ken Kutaragi took the stage, almost everyone there was prepared to be blown away by a celebration of all things PlayStation 3. I can't say for sure, but I gather that everyone there was expecting a series of glamorous trailers and visuals. After all, this was the last showing of their console in public form before it launched, and industry analysts like myself thought for sure they would blow the doors off the thing.

Um... no. After a few brief trailers, showing nothing we hadn't already seen, what followed was over an hour of what came across as monotone banter about everything from curing diseases to some matrix-like virtual online state continually referred to as "The Network." With journalists nodding off all around me, I tried to decipher exactly what was being said. After careful post-analysis of the speech (which you can see highlights of at GameTrailers.com), I realized that Sony's big picture outlook on the console was something rather amazing. It was also definitely weird, but still amazing.

For Sony, the launch of the PlayStation 3 goes way beyond games. The speech at TGS helped define their vision for the industry in which more attention could be paid to creating unique games while helping to remove the leg work involved in doing so. The aforementioned "Network" seems to be all about uniting gamers and game developers in order to generate assets to streamline the development process. Imagine being able to take pictures of your home town, upload them to the "Network," implement them into a game mod and virtually immerse you and your friends' favorite FPS characters into your local shopping mall. Don't laugh; this is sort of what they're shooting for, and besides, I told you it was weird.

Anyway, Sony recognizes that creating games for next-generation consoles is a rigorous and costly affair. This network of shared information and resources is their way of streamlining the process for developers so that they can spend more time focusing on being creative within their craft. Will it work? Who knows... there is still so much more to learn about exactly how they plan to execute all of this and specifically how users will be involved. Ultimately though, it will be interesting to see how this plan plays out and whether or not it will actually impact games the way it is intended to.

Even with all that Sony is looking to accomplish in the future, plenty of gamers are excited about the present and the past. The present because right now, today, if you've been lucky enough to get a PlayStation 3, you have a top tier gaming

machine with incredible capabilities and a laundry list of great upcoming games. The past because, through their highly publicized and well-thought out emulation, Sony has given you access to the immense PlayStation and PlayStation 2 libraries on the PlayStation 3, not to mention the online portion of the console. While the PS3's online features aren't anywhere near as fleshed out and exciting as Xbox Live, it still offers more than the PlayStation 2 ever did... but more on that in a bit.

No matter what your future expectations may be however, the console in its current state is a pretty impressive beast. Weighing approximately 5 kg, the 60 GB HD version console specs include the RSX "Reality Synthesizer" GPU, 256MB of XDR Main Ram, 256MB of GDDR3 VRam, four USB 2.0 ports, the latest Ethernet capabilities, Bluetooth 2.0 with wireless compatibility for up to seven controllers or other devices, resolution support up to 1080p (which is a key selling point to many), HDMI out, Digital Optical out, and of course the read-only blu-ray DVD/CD drive that has caused quite a stir (and some delays).

Looking at the specs, you can see why the box might cost an arm and a leg, but you can also see some amazing possibilities for a truly impressive gaming experience. The visual clarity offered by 1080p, for both games and movies, must be seen to be appreciated, but in the end, many (including myself) wonder exactly how much that will actually impact the gaming experience. Does simply making a game look sharper (it's not so simple, actually) really enhance the experience? Probably not by itself, but when coupled with the amazing power of the CELL processor and the ungodly amount of storage space provided by Blu-Ray, it would seem the pieces of the puzzle are in place.

As stated, this is one powerful machine, but no matter what the box can do, it's going to take developers dedicated to tapping into the power of the PlayStation 3 to make astonishing gaming experiences. In the long run, the question of "more horsepower" over "core gameplay" remains. In the case of the PlayStation 3, it's up to Sony and the industry's best developers to prove that the PlayStation 3 is up to the task.

BLU SHIPS AHEAD

During the week of TGS 2006 Sony held an event at their Tokyo office showcasing an impressive roster of PlayStation 3 titles and giving journalists the opportunity to get some face time with Sony's Phil Harrison. Most of the evening was spent interviewing individual producers or representatives about such titles as *Lair*, *MotorStorm*, *Resistance: Fall of Man*, *NBA 07* and more, but we did get our turn with Phil Harrison to get the inside scoop about the online functionality of the PlayStation 3.

Without giving specific details or elaborating too much, Harrison stated that all the pieces of the puzzle were in place for an extensive online experience. He noted in particular that *Resistance: Fall of Man* was including its online multiplayer mode, which can handle up to forty

players, free of charge. This, according to Harrison, is probably the "best statement we can make" about their commitment to online gaming with the PlayStation 3.

Harrison then spoke about Sony's answer to Xbox Live Marketplace, a virtual online store of its own that's aptly titled the PlayStation Store. Here gamers can access various types of content including PlayStation and PlayStation 2 games as well as premium content for PlayStation 3 titles. Need your music fix? Sony's got you covered, as downloadable tracks from the latest mainstream artists will be available from within the Sony Store.

After dealing with the fluffy stuff, Harrison spoke about the cost structure of online gaming for the PlayStation 3. While Microsoft does charge an annual fee for gaming over the Xbox Live network, Sony has opted to keep peer to peer gaming free on the PlayStation 3. When asked whether or not gaming would *always* be free on the PlayStation 3, Harrison replied very clearly that that was not a part of Sony's strategy. "There will definitely be some games that perhaps have a higher server infrastructure cost" said Harrison, "and they (the developers/publishers) will have to charge a subscription to make that possible." This, of

course, pertains mostly to online MMOs like Final Fantasy XI that hope the PlayStation 3 could deliver a legitimate enough install base to see a growth in the genre's popularity amongst console owners.

Lastly, Harrison addressed the premium content available at the Sony Store, and the costs involved, by setting the stage for its availability. "We have said consistently that we have no plans to charge for the basic functionality of access to the internet through PlayStation 3," said Harrison. "Most of the games we're planning with multiplayer features... we have no plans to charge for the multiplayer game function, but many of our titles will be expanded over time by additional downloadable content, some of which will be free, much of which will be paid for."

All in all, the future of online gaming for the PlayStation 3 looks brighter than that of the PlayStation 2. There are still significant questions that need answering, such as whether or not Sony's infrastructure will be able to handle the online demand for multiplayer gaming or if the experience will be remotely as smooth as that of the fantastic Xbox Live. I know one thing for sure: I'll be jacking in my PlayStation 3 as soon as possible to watch the results unfold before my very own eyes. See you online!

BLU SHIPS AHEAD

Much of the hype (and controversy) surrounding the PlayStation 3 has to do with Blu-ray, but many gamers (either with or without a PlayStation 3 at this point) are still wondering about what exactly Blu-ray brings to the table. Even if you just picked up a PlayStation 3 or if you've heard a lot about Blu-ray but don't know what all the hype is about, here are some key points you should know.



What it is:

Blu-ray is the next-generation optical disc format that was jointly developed by the Blu-ray Disc Association (BDA) and a group of high-profile, experienced consumer electronics companies such as Apple, Dell, Hitachi, HP, and of course Sony. The format was developed because these companies wanted to usher in the recording, rewriting and playback of HD-quality video. It also was developed to provide a new medium for storing large amounts of data—*really* large amounts—more than five times that of tradition DVDs. A single-layered disc will score 25GB of storage capacity while a dual-layered disc gets you about 50GB. It's pretty impressive, although it should be noted for clarity's sake that the PlayStation 3's Blu-ray drive is read-only.

What it isn't:

Blu-ray isn't the only next-gen format that's capable of providing HD-quality video and playback. The big controversy over Blu-ray mainly stems from the format war with another medium, the Toshiba- and NEC-developed HD-DVD. The ongoing format debate (which to many is highly reminiscent of the VHS vs. BETA debate of the late 1970s) has segmented the industry and forced companies to form allegiances to whichever format they plan to support. The result will mean a mixed bag of content, especially in the realm of movies, where one studio produces a film but possibly only releases it for the one High-Def platform they support. That will of course leave potential buyers out in the cold if a film they want to purchase isn't available for the format they own.

Why it rocks:

At the end of the day, the Blu-ray format's immense storage capacity is looked at by many as the differentiating factor. As mentioned, a single-layered Blu-ray disc can hold 25GBs of data, while HD-DVD can store up to 15GB. Multiply both those numbers by two for the storage capacity on dual-layered discs and you'll begin to see a wide gap in storage capacity.

Additionally, Blu-ray touts a higher data transfer rate for audio and video (54 Mbs vs. 34.55 Mbs), which, when coupled with the higher storage capacity, can go a long way towards providing the premier film and gaming experience.

What's in a name?

Current optical disc technologies, such as DVD and DVD+R, use a red laser to read and write data. The name Blu-ray comes from the fact that the new optical disc format uses a blue-violet laser instead of the red. Because of the shorter wavelength (405nm vs. 600nm), the laser can be focused with greater precision, allowing for more tightly compressed data upon the disc. That's why Blu-ray and HD-DVD discs are the same size as normal DVDs, but can store far more information. Go ahead, impress your friends with that little tidbit of information. It's on me.



What it means for gaming:

More, more, more: that's what Blu-ray means. For example, it was apparently an immense undertaking for Bethesda to fit all of *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* on one DVD for the Xbox 360. Now, however, even with that game being as immense as it is, they would have five to ten times the amount of storage on a single disc to work with.

One would think that possibilities within gaming could be significantly increased with that amount of storage. Want to include high-res texture models for every creature in the game? No problem. Want to build a world four to five times the size of *Oblivion's* and keep the game on a single disc? Blu-ray can do that too. In addition to storage, faster read times means good news for those that hate loading screens, but loading is bound to exist in one form or another on any optical disc format. You're just going to have to cope with that no matter what.

Overall, the Blu-ray disc format is a big step forward for gaming and entertainment in general. HD-DVD will make its mark (Microsoft has already announced an external HD-DVD drive for the Xbox 360, in case you didn't know), but it will take time for developers to learn how to utilize all of that storage capacity. It's good for games, good for movies and truly one of the best ways to show off your HD setup, so the astounding optical disc format found inside the PlayStation 3 should leave you feeling anything but blue.

KEY FIRST PARTY LAUNCH TITLES

What fun is a brand new console (or any console for that matter) if there aren't any great games to play on it? Launch titles, while they're not historically the best a system has to offer, do provide instant entertainment and a glimpse into what the hardware's capabilities might be down the road. With the launch of the PlayStation 3 now upon us, let's take a look at some of the key first- and third-party titles hitting store shelves on day one.



- Resistance: Fall of Man



Developed by Insomniac Games (the gang behind the highly successful and often outlandish *Ratchet & Clank* series), *Resistance: Fall of Man* has a lot riding on its shoulders. One of the most highly anticipated launch titles, *Resistance* looks to take full advantage of the PlayStation 3's hardware capabilities by creating a truly next-gen first-person shooter.

What I've seen and played of it so far can be summed up with the word "Intense." The story in the game is quite cool since it doesn't take place in either of the traditional FPS environments (WWII or a sci-fi future), but instead offers a twist on real-world events in a "what if" scenario. Yeah, there are alien life forms and a rather disturbing plague of sorts sweeping the world in the game, but the setting is pretty fresh and impacts the actual gameplay more than one might expect.

Heading online, the game offers multiplayer for up to an astounding forty players! Granted, you probably don't have a shot in hell at having thirty-nine other friends who found a PlayStation 3 and a copy of the game to buy at launch, but at least you can make some new friends once you get inside the online world of *Resistance*.

Resistance: Fall of Man should provide enough atmospheric action and finger-twitching goodness to keep any seasoned FPS fan happy for a while. The game features some crazy weapons, pretty impressive graphics, smooth gameplay and tries its best to utilize the power of the PlayStation 3. If you're looking for an all-around fun game to showcase the power of your fabulous new toy, *Resistance* isn't a bad shot.

- Genji: Days of the Blade



Like a little hack 'n' slash, do ya? How about giant enemy crabs? The last *Genji* game combined action and a little strategy, and wound up as a solid action game, albeit one that didn't quite find the audience it deserved. The next installment has sliced its way onto the PlayStation 3, and the visually appealing game balances itself on the solid foundation of its predecessors.

I'm not going to lie. There isn't a whole lot new here, but what you will find are some gorgeous graphics and interesting gameplay... enough to help you get your action/strategy fix anyway. If you're brining home a shiny new PlayStation 3 and you're looking to give that new wireless controller a workout, check out *Genji: Days of the Blade*.

- NBA 07



The *NBA* franchise has been steadily regaining ground in the highly competitive virtual hoops arena. With *NBA 2K* and *NBA Live* battling it out for the top spot every year, Sony's franchise has steadily been gathering its skills to become a viable contender for your attention.

NBA 07 is launching with the PlayStation 3 and is one of a select few titles to run in full 1080p. How does that impact the game's graphics, you ask? There is no way to deny the sheer visual clarity achieved with that high of a resolution, but a game like *NBA 2K7* on the Xbox 360 seems far more fluid and offers staggeringly detailed animations. Yeah, *NBA 07* for PlayStation 3 is sharp as a tack, but you should know that it's not the all-around best-looking basketball game on the market.

Graphics aside, there's a game to be played and *NBA 07* has a good share of spot-on jumpers, with a few bricks in the mix. The gameplay in *NBA 07* lies somewhere in between EA's *NBA Live 07* and 2K's *NBA 2K7*. It's not as loose and arcade-like as *NBA Live* (go ahead, send the hate mail), and not as simulation-oriented as *NBA 2K*. All in all, it plays well though, with responsive controls, pretty intelligent AI, and nothing too harsh to take away from the experience.

Some of the new features available in the game include NBA Replay, which allows you to relive some of the most exciting moments from last year's NBA season; Games of the Week, which allows you to download the real life All-Stars to replay their top performance from the week that was in the NBA; and some new in-game mechanics including the Power Boarding System and the True Shot Indicator, which dynamically provides info on whether you should shoot the rock or fork it up.

It's great-looking, plays well, and goes more in-depth than you average basketball game. *NBA 07* for the PlayStation 3 isn't a slam dunk, but it should make enough buckets to keep you in the game.



KEY THIRD PARTY LAUNCH TITLES

- Call of Duty 3

As the latest installments of one of the biggest franchises in recent memory, *Call of Duty 3* is looking to take PlayStation 3 owners on the journey of the Normandy Breakout Campaign. Utilizing a new feature for the series, titled Close-Quarters Combat, *CoD 3* looks to be the

most intense offering in the series thus far. The game also sports a snazzy environmental physics system that will put your shiny new PlayStation 3 to work, while maximizing immersion by dropping you knee-deep into a full-scale war."

One of the more impressive aspects of the game is its multiplayer. *CoD 3* offers online



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play for up to twenty-four users and gives them the chance to select from several classes, including rifleman, infantry, scout and others. Also, the game features some sweet vehicles in multiplayer mode, including jeeps, tanks and motorcycles. Best of all, you and your multiplayer partners can ride these vehicles together to perform some critical (and freakin' cool) attacks.

The game itself needs to be reviewed on its own merits, since it's a multiplatform release. As a PlayStation 3 launch title, *CoD 3* should offer a solid campaign, both online and off, for those of you looking to add some firepower to your launch night festivities.

- Ridge Racer 7



Ever since the launch of the original PlayStation, developer and publisher Namco has shipped a new *Ridge Racer* title right alongside Sony's latest console. Well, that trend continues with the launching of *Ridge Racer 7* to accompany Sony's PlayStation 3.

The game itself is pretty standard for the series. You race, you win, you race some more and you do a lot of sliding around while you're at it. This is what some consider good ol'-fashioned racing and what others consider really, really bad. Personally, I dig *Ridge Racer*. It's kind of mindless, but you'll find that you haven't a shot in Hades to complete the tougher courses unless your eyeballs are glued to the screen and you've reached an almost Zen-like state of attention.

New to *Ridge Racer 7* is the art of drafting, which allows you to position yourself behind an opponent, enjoy the tow, and in some instances, use the force generated by drafting to whip right past them. Additionally, you'll find a ton of customization features to tweak out both the look and handling of your vehicle (estimated to allow around 375,000 possible combinations!) for the ultimate in car personalization.

It wouldn't be a Sony console launch without a new *Ridge Racer*, so if you've loved the series in the past, you have no reason to skip out on this one now. If you've never played *RR*, there's a ton of good (but mostly arcade-like) gameplay here, which'll keep you hauling tail back and forth on the game's twenty or so tracks for a while.

- Need for Speed Carbon



The *Need for Speed* franchise has been making quite a comeback in recent years, and PlayStation 3 owners get to see first-hand what the next generation of the franchise looks like... if you can keep your eyes open, that is. This game is *really* fast. *Carbon* is based on the premise of Canyon Racing, which is apparently a big (and dangerous) deal that I've fortunately never experienced personally.

The game delivers some unique customization options and allows you to choose your crew members. They'll help with tricking out your car and even race a bit themselves. One of the other key strengths of the game lies in its online functionality, which allows you to go head-to-head with players from around the world to not only show off your "Autosculpted"

car (EA has a name for everything, doesn't it), but you can even wager vehicles for the ultimate bragging rights.

As far as racing titles go for the launch of the PlayStation 3, *Need for Speed: Carbon* probably offers the best all-around experience. It doesn't hurt that it's one of the better-looking titles, both online and off.

- Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion



When it comes to RPGs that have been released over the past five years, it's hard *not* to put *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* in a class by itself. The sheer scope of the game is absolutely amazing, so it's no wonder that PlayStation 3 fans had plenty to be excited about when Bethesda recently announced that the game would be hitting the console on launch day.

For those that don't know about the game, it is the fourth installment of the popular *Elder Scrolls* franchise, and offers a wonderful balance of sandbox-style gameplay and well thought out quests. You design a character for yourself from the ground up, then enter the world of Tamriel, where you'll find action, adventure and some of the best freaking graphics you've ever seen.

If you're an RPG fan that hasn't played *Oblivion* on the Xbox 360 or PC and if you now hold a brand-spankin' new PlayStation 3 in your greedy little arms, do yourself a favor and block off the next two weeks of your life. You'll spend at least that long with *Oblivion*, and you'll thank me later.

- Metal Gear Solid 4



The *Metal Gear* franchise's fans are a notoriously fierce bunch, and Hideo Kojima's wonderfully scripted, beautifully choreographed and amazingly cinematic trailer for *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* just added fuel to the fire. *MGS4* has had the industry buzzing for nearly two years.

Factor in brand new gameplay elements and deeper insight into the game's long-winded but ultimately entertaining story and you've got a recipe for success. I think it's safe to say that people *will* buy the PlayStation 3 just for this game. It's that huge.



- Gran Turismo HD



Like *Gran Turismo* and *Gran Turismo 2* before it, this ultra-realistic racing simulation is a system-seller. *Gran Turismo HD* will offer refined versions of the vehicles featured in previous games (a staggering 750 in all), and will contain 30 brand new, completely remodeled vehicles. The game's environments have been given the next-gen, high-res bump treatment and the result is the most gorgeous *Gran Turismo* yet.

Running in 1080p and supporting some unique online functionality, including true full online play for the first time in the franchise, expect *Gran Turismo HD* to get some motors running and some PlayStation 3s sold when it ships next year.



- Resident Evil 5



Riding high off the success of *Resident Evil 4*, Capcom has been teasing gamers for a while with what we can expect from the next installment of the game, *RE5*. The brief glimpses we've had thus far imply that some new environments and a new type of atmosphere (the game's apparently set mostly outdoors, in daylight, and you'll have to take the high temperatures of the game's desert environment into account) will take the series into a new direction. For bloodthirsty fans of one of the biggest franchises in gaming, that's nothing to be scared of.

While it's not a PlayStation 3 exclusive, *Resident Evil 5* is bound to have some unique functionality on the platform. Considering that many fans associate their fond memories of the franchise with the PlayStation and PlayStation 2, it could be worth the six hundred bucks for some people.



SYSTEM SELLERS THE KILLER APPS FOR THE P33

Every console has its "killer apps," the games that people will buy a console just to play. The original PlayStation had *Resident Evil*, *Final Fantasy VII*, *Tomb Raider*, *Gran Turismo* and more. For the Nintendo 64, they were *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, *Mario 64*, *Mario Kart* or *Goldeneye*. Of course, for the Xbox, they were the *Halo* games. You get the point.

For the PlayStation 3, which will face fiercer competition from the 360 and the Wii than the PlayStation 2 ever did from the Xbox or GameCube, these killer apps are of critical importance. Not only does the anticipation for these games have to influence people to spend oodles of cash for the system, in most cases they have to keep fence sitters from spending their cash on the other cheaper, more accessible consoles. Here's a rundown of a few of the major killer apps that Sony hopes are up for the task:

- Final Fantasy XIII

If you wanna use words like "huge," "important," "anticipated," or "hyped," you don't have to talk about much of anything besides *Final Fantasy XIII*. First off, it's the latest installment of the world's most popular

videogame franchise, but secondly (and more importantly to most), it is a next-gen *Final Fantasy* that's only on the PlayStation 3.

So what about the game? The trailer seems to indicate that it'll carry forward the new style of gameplay that *Final Fantasy XIII* is sporting,



but it's impossible to say what's in store. *Final Fantasy* has always been a system seller, and with next-gen graphics, tons of amazing cut scenes and some new, innovative gameplay features, you can bet Sony is banking on *Final Fantasy XIII* to continue that trend.

THE CROSSBAR

Now that we've looked at the hardware and some games, how about a little bit of bare-bones functionality? Just like the Xbox 360 Dashboard, the PlayStation 3 features a boot-up menu that functions as a central browser for the console. Called the Crossbar, this is where you navigate through everything from system settings to your friends lists. It is also where you'll access content from the hard drive, boot up your games or even head online to surf the web.



While at the PlayStation 3 event in Tokyo, we saw the Crossbar in action for the first time. It looks and functions almost exactly like the toolbar for Sony's PSP. A horizontally aligned list of categories can be accessed and then, once selected, they display a more robust list of sub-categories. Like the PSP version, the navigation here is simple and straightforward. You're always just a few clicks away from jumping into another aspect of the PlayStation 3's functionality with the Crossbar, and while it is a bit bland (at least during this showing), there's no arguing with the accessibility that's provided by this type of menu system.

With all the power under the hood, you gotta be able to have some fun with the Crossbar, right? Well Sony has dressed up several aspects of the menu system by implementing such neat little features as the ability to open several browsers to surf the web, visualization for your music, and more. Do you like photos? The Crossbar allows you to pick from a variety of effects to display your image collection while having friends or family over to the house. Now, typically I'm not too excited about slideshows, but some of the effects, including one in which the photographs are tainted with an old, weathered look and then drop to the ground like falling leaves, are pretty neat.

The Crossbar is also where you will access Network Updates for the console, link up to your PSP, access portable media storage devices and see which of your friends are online for a game or just a chat. It's pretty simple, and if you don't have to mess with it too much, well, then it's doing its job. The Crossbar is designed for ease of use and to help you navigate through the plethora of functionality equipped with the PlayStation 3. Fortunately for PlayStation 3 owners, it seems to do just that.

LOGGING OFF

So, here we are. The hype has given way to reality. Microsoft's Xbox 360, Nintendo's Wii, and Sony's PlayStation 3 are all on the market. Considering the wide variety of hardware capabilities each one has to offer, along with a unique and diverse software lineup, gamers around the globe should find something to be satisfied with.

In the case of the PlayStation 3, it's been a wild and often bumpy ride to launch. There's no doubting the potential of this console. There are still questions that remain however, including how Sony's online strategy will stack up against Microsoft's Xbox Live or whether or not Nintendo's experiment with the Wii will force Sony's (and to some extent Microsoft's) hand in the future. There's also the question of availability and price. How will having the most expensive console to date, and one that is extremely sparse at that, impact Sony's brand image in the mind of casual and hardcore gamers? Only time will tell!

For now, though, the launch of the PlayStation 3 is cause for celebration. There are new experiences to be had. There are new worlds to conquer, both online and off. But most importantly, there is a feeling of excitement in the air. While the ultimate success of the PlayStation 3 is yet to be determined, it's shining brightly in the spotlight right now.

Q. What makes a hardcore gamer?
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The screenshot shows the Luv2Game.com website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'HOME', 'PARTICIPATE', 'CHALLENGES', 'INVITE A FRIEND', 'SEND/POST A LINK', 'THEATER', 'BANNERS AND ICONS', 'COMPLETY', 'MESSAGE BOARDS', 'MEMBERS', 'BEST OF THE BEST', 'MY PROFILE', 'STORE', and 'HELP'. Below this is a 'TEAM MESSAGE' section with a 'GAMER' logo and a message about downloading issue #18 of Hardcore Gamer. There are also 'CHALLENGES' and a 'LEADERBOARD' section listing members and their points. The bottom part of the page features a 'CHALLENGE GALLERY' with various game-related images and a 'LATEST DISCUSSIONS' section.

We love to game. It's a passion that starts at the controller, but goes beyond into our lives, forming a video game mindset that we're all a part of. It's not just about being hardcore. Hardcore Gamer Magazine and Luv2Game are all about living a gaming life and loving it. Reviews, previews, and strategies are just the start! We want to share with you the kind of gaming content that thrills our hearts as gamers. Feel free to read, explore, connect, and voice your opinions. We've designed this community to be like a game itself, with a point system that rewards you for having fun. Be proud to be a gamer, and be heard and even published here on L2G and in print in HGM. We're gamers. You're gamers. We all love to game and that's why we're here.

This section displays several game reviews and poll results. One review is for 'Disgaea' with a score of 4/5. Another is for 'Dead Rising for Xbox 360' with a score of 4/5. There are also poll results for 'Have you ever given a game as a gift?' and 'Which non-legend game developer created God Hand?'. The 'HGM Review Gauge' is also visible, showing a scale from 1 (Really Bad) to 5 (Really Good).

REVIEWS

- 58 Guitar Hero II
- 60 Need for Speed Carbon
- 62 Bully
- 63 Family Guy: Video Game!
- 64 Mortal Kombat Armageddon
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HGM REVIEW GAUGE

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



Wolfin '06



Review by Racewing

Publisher : RedOctane
Developer : Harmonix
Release Date : 11/7/2006
Rating : TEEN
Genre(s) : Music/Rhythm
Category : ARE YOU READY TO...
of players : 1-2

GUITAR HERO II



If you read *Hardcore Gamer Magazine* (good for you!), then one can probably assume that you're already one of the video-educated. As such, odds are that you already know of the phenomenon that is *Guitar Hero*. You know how accessible it is, even to people who've never touched a guitar in their lives. You know, or have at least heard word of, how fun it is. Finally, you know, or can at least surmise, how it's able to cause people to totally lose their sense of self-image in exchange for a night of virtual rocking out.

(I speak on that last one as a large black man with a basketball player's physique. I've actually jumped around my living room with a fake plastic guitar in my hands. This is not a sight you want to see without preparation.)

Therefore, I won't be spending half this review explaining *Guitar Hero's* past. It's time to talk about the future. The question on everyone's mind is, "does this sequel hold up? Does it live up to both the potential and execution

of the original?" I'm here to tell you that, yes, it positively does. *Guitar Hero II* contains over sixty all-new song tracks for you to get your rock on with. Honestly, just slapping in those new songs was all Harmonix and Red Octane needed to do to ensure that it sold another multi-hundred thousand copies, and moved more truckloads of guitar controllers out the door.

Fortunately, the developers didn't stop there. Indeed, the main draws are the new songs, but as you play through them, you'll notice that there's been a bit of tweaking going on with the note placement. There's now more of an emphasis on learning key riffs and note sets, and as you get into the harder modes, these sets get tougher, crazier, and less forgiving. There are three-note chords now, and indeed, you will come across at least one instance in Expert Mode where you'll have to strum the green and orange fret buttons simultaneously. Fortunately, the game's new Practice Mode, which lets you repeatedly zero in on guitar solos and change their speeds, is your greatest ally against these new, tricky sets of notes.

Secondly, great care has been taken with the song list in order to make sure it keeps in with the atmosphere of *Guitar Hero*. In contrast to the original game, *Guitar Hero II's* song list now puts a total emphasis on rocking out like crazy. There's more punk and faster beats to be found in this installment, though there's still the occasional slow or classic song so as not to alienate fans of rock's heritage.

Either way, the selection totally works. When your on-screen avatar starts rocking out at high speeds to "Hangar 18," or when you find yourself slowly swaying your head back and forth to "Sweet Child O' Mine" as you tap and strum away at notes, I think you'll agree as well that the set list is one of the best that could have ever been put together. (Even if those rumors of Tenacious D being in the game were unfounded. [sigh])

Finally, it's worth it to buy two guitar controllers this time, because *Guitar Hero II* is very good at helping you make new friends, or gain new rivals in the space of a few minutes. Cooperative Mode lets you participate in a true guitar duet, while playing both main and rhythm/bass tracks. Here, both of you must struggle to keep the crowd pleased. Both guitar controllers must be tilted, in fact, for Star Power to be activated. As for competition, the original *Guitar Hero's* Face-Off Mode is back, along with a Pro Face-Off Mode (see sidebar). Believe me when I say that Pro Face-Off Mode is the greatest gift a *Guitar Hero* player could have ever asked for.



With even better songs than the first game, a perfect set of 2-player modes, more characters as well as redesigned ones (my personal favorites: Judy Nails Version 2 and Xavier Stone. Great job, Harmonix!), and just a whole lot of fun all around, *Guitar Hero's* set to be as big of a hit as last year, if not bigger. Go get it, already. May the power of rock be with you!

Rating : 5 of 5

The Second Opinion!

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

It's cliché and you've heard it all before, but *Guitar Hero II* does most certainly rock. With tons of cool new features, an awesome song lineup, and the ultimate social experience, this is a musical video game masterpiece!

Fight To The Finish!

Beating *Guitar Hero II's* Career Mode once on any difficulty will unlock Pro Face-Off Mode, which is the versus mode that, honestly, should have been in *Guitar Hero* from the outset.

The Face-Off Mode in *Guitar Hero II* caused songs to be "split up" when played. One person would do a small piece of a song, the other person would do the next, and it'd go back and forth. This would, of course, lead to accusations of getting the "easier parts." In the end, this mode effectively nullified any hopes of competitive *Guitar Hero II* play, outside of alternating Quick Play sessions for score comparison purposes.

In light of all this, *Guitar Hero II's* Pro Face-Off Mode is a godsend. There's no trading here; everyone gets the same set of notes to wail away on, and whoever has the highest score at the end of the song is the winner. It's the greatest game of musical tug-of-war... ever.

One of the most fun things to do in Pro Face-Off Mode is to watch your opponent's score multiplier. It's like waiting, as the mighty lion does, for the chance to pounce. When your rival flubs a note, that's the time to get yourself on a crazy hot-streak, and drive your own multiplier up. Once you're far enough to your liking, bust out your Star Power, and overwhelm your opponent with rapid-fire point accumulation! This sort of pincer strike is great for coming back from behind in heated guitar battles, or for driving the nail in the coffin.



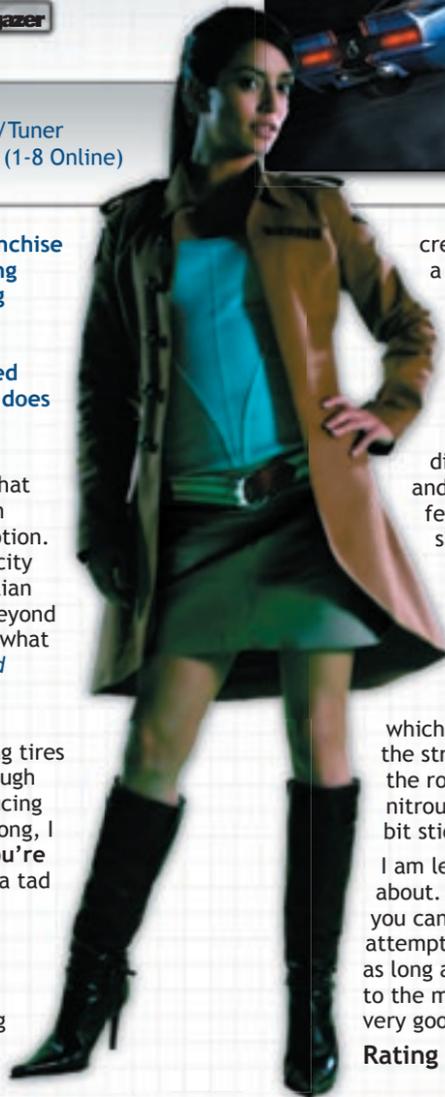
FINAL SCORE : 5 of 5

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON



Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : Electronic Arts **Genre(s) :** Racing
Developer : EA Black Box **Category :** Street/Tuner
Release Date : 10/31/2006 **# of players :** 1-2 (1-8 Online)
Rating : Everyone 10+



It's safe to say that the *Need for Speed* franchise has dominated the current-gen street racing wars. However, its somewhat disappointing return to its roots with last year's *Most Wanted*, as well as competition from the improving *Midnight Club* series, has inspired EA Black Box to go back to what the series does best: insanely fast street racing.

The game is graphically stunning on all platforms, but for the 360 owners who felt that *Most Wanted* didn't quite live up to next-gen standards, wait until you see this baby in motion. The car models are incredibly detailed, the city is full of activity (although why so many civilian motorists are out on the road after dark is beyond me), and the sense of speed is right back to what it was in the first *Need for Speed Underground*.

The sounds of the game are also well implemented. Everything from the screeching tires to the chatter from police radios comes through with impressive detail. If only the yawn-inducing soundtrack wasn't so lame. Don't get me wrong, I know the kids today love their rap (Dave, you're not that old. -Thomas), but how about just a tad more variety, huh, EA?

The concept of the game is to form a crew and race to take control of areas and gain respect. Each section of the huge city has several challenges to complete, and by doing so, you'll earn control of that territory. When you start gaining respect, rival

crew bosses will come looking to challenge you to a canyon race for control of their turf. The story mode is campy fun, thanks to the pseudo-FMV clips that progress the game. The character bio videos are hysterical, but was that intentional?

No tuner game would be complete without the ability to customize your car with ridiculous amounts of options, and *Carbon* doesn't disappoint. In addition to all the standard parts and paint job upgrades, the all-new Autosculpt feature is introduced. It allows you to tweak the shapes and sizes of all your purchased upgrades to give a car your personal touches. Raise your rims, stretch your fins, or plaster a Canadian flag vinyl on your hood. You're only limited by your imagination.

Of course, none of the above would even matter unless the game had solid controls, which *Carbon* absolutely does. Cars glide naturally on the streets and you can almost feel the tires gripping the road around sharp turns. You'll also have wingman, nitrous and speedbreaker controls for when races get a bit sticky. Use them wisely.

I am left with nothing major here worth complaining about. If you get tired of the objective-based gameplay, you can always just enter free-roaming mode and attempt to evade the police in classic hot pursuit for as long as you want. When you're ready to come back to the meat of the game, it's waiting for you. *Carbon* is very good, but is it as good as *Burnout*? You be the judge.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

After taking a detour with *Most Wanted* and *Underground 2*, the *NFS* series looks to be getting back on the right track.

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



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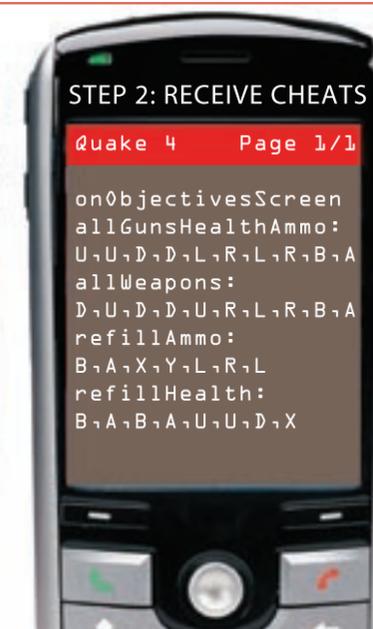
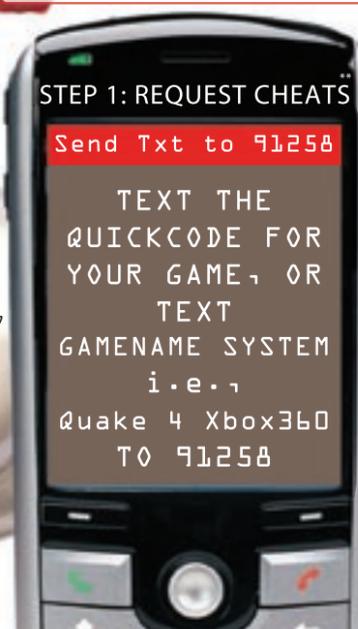
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BULLY



Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : Rockstar Games
Developer : Rockstar Vancouver
Release Date : 10/17/2006
Rating : Teen

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

Bully has been highly touted as everything from "the last great PS2 game" to "the most controversial game ever made" since it was first announced. Unfortunately for Rockstar Games, much of their content has been falsely embellished upon by uninformed politicians who have made the game out to be something it is definitely not. Read on to uncover what *Bully* is really all about.

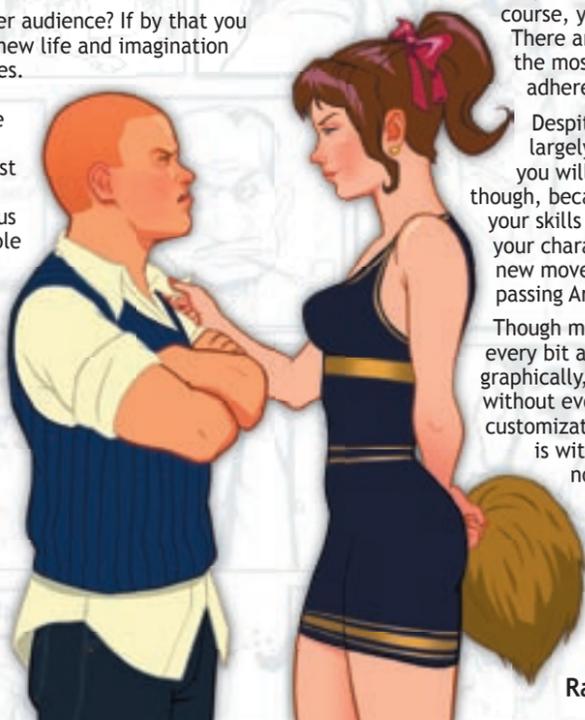
Is *Bully* just *Grand Theft Auto* for a younger audience? If by that you mean is *Bully* a game that breathes some new life and imagination into a stale, sequel-heavy industry, then yes. Otherwise, the two couldn't possibly be any different. You will easily recognize the familiar *GTA* graphics engine and mission-based open world gameplay, but the biggest difference is that *Bully* takes a part of life that you can relate to, and puts a humorous spin on it to make the game more accessible for a wider audience.

There are a large variety of missions to complete as you battle your way to social supremacy, which keeps the game fun for both small and large play sessions. You'll experience everything from escort type missions, where helping a geek get to the library unscathed nets you some extra cash, to helping a teacher exact some revenge on a wealthy family by poisoning their rare plant. Not impressed? Then how about adding in boxing tournaments, bike races and carnival games as well? This baby is deep!

The game has a great sense of humor and never takes itself too seriously. Most missions culminate in pulling off typical



(and relatively harmless) sophomoric hijinks. There are no guns or knives, and characters do not bleed, bruise or die. Of course, you can't just act with reckless abandon. There are consequences for bad behavior, so to get the most enjoyment out of the game, it's best to adhere to the rules as much as possible.



Despite all of the wickedly fun temptation, *Bully* largely takes place during school which means you will have to attend classes. Don't worry, though, because it's both fun and useful. Sharpening your skills through quirky minigames will improve your character's stats. For example, Jimmy will learn new moves and combos from passing Gym class, and passing Art class earns you better health upgrades.

Though much more tame, in a lot of ways *Bully* is every bit as good as *Grand Theft Auto*. It looks better graphically, it captures the same excitement and feel without ever killing one person, and the character customization is deep. The only major complaint I had is with the occasionally spastic camera, but it's not frequent enough to mar the experience.

I may be the oddball, but *Bully* reminded me more of *Fable* than anything else, which is absolutely a good thing. So to Jack Thompson, chill out. The only real controversy here is why a PS2 owner wouldn't add this game to their collection.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

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

Bully is an epic adventure on a smaller scale than open-world games usually see. It's a must-play game for anyone who ever suffered being a teenager.



Review by James

There's no shortage of failed titles in the history of licensed gaming. For every *Aladdin* (the Genesis version, of course), *Batman* (the first one on the NES), or *Spider-Man 2*, there are dozens of forgettable games that exist only to milk the franchise just a little bit more. *Family Guy* joins the ranks of these generic titles, destined for the bargain bin and a quick trip to obscurity.

Following an adventurous day in the lives of Stewie, Peter, and Brian, *Family Guy* jumps from one gameplay mode to another. Stewie has an upgradeable blaster that he uses to run and gun, Peter punches and kicks his way through a *Final Fight*-style side scrolling brawler, and Brian gets the short end of the stick in a series of tedious stealth missions. True to the show, the plot is nearly irrelevant.

It starts out promising enough, with Stewie creating a mind-control helmet that he plans to use to take over the world as soon as it's hooked up to the satellite dish. Once his arch-rival Bertram shows up to steal the dish it's down to business, running after bolts to upgrade his zapper gun and using the mind control helmet to solve a puzzle or two. It's a promising start that dies a quick and painless death. As soon as the blaster is functional, *Family Guy's* brainwork is over and Stewie's section of the game devolves into a mindless action-platformer. It's sometimes fun in an unambitious kind of way, but as the best part of the game it should be more than mildly entertaining.

Once the satellite dish is broken, Peter gets it into his head that the evil machinations of Mr. Belvedere must! Be! Stopped!, and sets out to destroy him by beating up kids, old ladies, and anyone else wandering by. The fighting engine is pretty bad, and once you've earned a few special powers, it's also way too easy. Spin-kicking through hordes of enemies, picking up food to refill the special meter,

2nd opinion by Racewing • Alternate Rating : 1.5 of 5

...oh, God. What did I just play? Tell me! *What did I just play?* This is a two-year-old's game for the twenty-plus demographic, wrapped in bugs galore! I haven't been *this* insulted since... *The Stewie Griffin Story*, actually. Wow.



FAMILY GUY VIDEO GAME!

Publisher : 2K Games
Developer : High Voltage Software
Release Date : 10/17/2006
Rating : Mature

Genre(s) : Run & Gun, Brawling, Stealth
Category : Forgettable Cash-In
of players : 1

and doing it all over again is Peter's entire game, and a few costume changes on the way aren't going to make it any better.

It's poor Brian who really has to suffer. He gets the stealth missions, and being discovered means starting the entire area over. Fortunately, people are easily fooled by simple disguises, but redoing a complex room over and over again while trial-and-error-ing your way to the door means hearing the same jokes repeated endlessly. About half are funny the first time, and the rest just lie there lifelessly. It would have been nice if the first bukkake joke ever in a video game was actually funny.

The biggest problem with *Family Guy* is that it combines three generic styles of game into one generic package. The non-sequitur minigames break up the tedium a bit, but it's too little too late. The ease of Stewie's and Peter's sections are offset by the aggravation of Brian's missions, but *Family Guy* still feels like a kids' game with rude humor stuck in to earn an M rating. It's sometimes kind of funny, mostly too easy, and entirely forgettable.

Rating: 2 of 5



FINAL SCORE : 1.75 of 5

REVIEW MORTAL KOMBAT ARMAGEDDON

PlayStation 2

Review by Wanderer

Publisher : Midway
 Developer : Midway
 Release Date : 10/8/2006
 Rating : M (And Deservedly So)

Genre(s) : Fighting
 Category : Like Mr. Potato Head, But Gory
 # of players : 1-2

Mortal Kombat: Armageddon is what SNK fans might call a "dream match." The story is hilariously thin, and all sixty previously-seen characters in the *Mortal Kombat* series make their triumphant return here, even if they're obscure, unpopular, canonically dead, or have never been playable before now.

As with the last couple of games, there's a ton of bonus content available in the Krypt, as well as Konquest mode, a long and surprisingly entertaining singleplayer adventure game. You can also take on your friends online, go kart racing in the Motor Kombat minigame (complete with stage fatalities, performed upon little SD MK characters), or create your own custom "kombatant" using the Kreate-A-Fighter option.

The latter feature — which is surprisingly flexible, but is mostly good for creating characters that look like mid-'90s superheroes from Image — may be the best reason to pick up *Armageddon*, as the actual fighting probably isn't the main draw. By now, just about everyone has probably made up their mind about the 3D *Mortal Kombat* games, and while *Armageddon* is unquestionably the best of the lot, it's not going to change any minds. It's still weirdly jerky and unbalanced compared to just about any other 3D fighter on the market, and adding aerial combat, parries, and combo breakers didn't do much to change that.

It also doesn't help that all the returning characters from the past 3D *Mortal Kombat* games, *Deadly Alliance* and *Deception*, appear here totally unchanged from their past versions (right down to having the same alternate costumes), except that everyone's lost one of their two martial-arts styles. This means that everyone plays a little differently than they did, but there are a lot of duplicated weapon styles and special moves. Some characters, like Kira, are now almost totally redundant.

(It's also still odd to see what characters know what martial-arts styles. Jax is now expressly a Muay Thai fighter; he has giant cybernetic metal arms and he's a kickboxer? On what planet does

FINAL SCORE :
3.25 of 5

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

So, what we've got is *Deception*, with twice the cast, half the cheapness, and better extras. I guess it works. Motor Kombat totally disappointed me, though. So much of that concept's potential was wasted.



that make sense?)

What's weirder than that, though, is the new Kreate-A-Fatality system, which turns the series's trademark Fatalities into a weird, gory dial-a-combo. Instead of finishing an opponent off with a character-specific act of murder, you use a generic series of punches, kicks, gouges, dismemberments, disembowelments, and what-have-you. While this does allow any character to use Sub-Zero's trademark spine rip, and you can finally tear Kintaro's head clean off his damn neck, it contributes to the generic, thrown-together feel that this game has.

Mortal Kombat: Armageddon is supposed to be the last game in the series, or at least the last game to deal with the series's interdimensional storyline. It's hard to say that it's going out on a high note, as *Armageddon* feels like it wasn't developed so much as tossed together at the last minute. It's strictly a game for people who were already fans of the *Mortal Kombat* series, and even they may find it to be a little disappointing.

Rating: 3 of 5



PlayStation 2

REVIEW DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2

MAKE WAR NOT LOVE

Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : THQ
 Developer : Pandemic Studios
 Release Date : 10/17/2006
 Rating : Teen (Crude Humor, Sexual Themes, Strong Language, Violence)

Genre(s) : Action
 Category : Open Environment/Sandbox
 # of players : 1-2



Destroy All Humans! caught a lot of people by surprise last year with its fresh new take on the sandbox game genre, coupled with its hilarious '50s sci-fi film vibe. The setting now takes place the '60s, but otherwise there is little here to distinguish it from last year's effort. Pandemic is giving gamers one more crack at human extinction, but much has gone wrong since the last game.

Despite being identical to the original in just about every way, there are a few key improvements that are worth calling out. The first, and most significant, is the addition of co-op play. Not only can you play through the entire game with a buddy, but there are also minigames perfectly suited for killing time such as PK Tennis. A second player can jump in at any point during the singleplayer game, and what's cool is that you can go back and redo those special completed missions together instead of just boasting about them.

It's also worth mentioning that you can access your flying saucer at any point to help get around the large cities and by completing special side missions, you can unlock more landing points on the maps. Since the game does require frequent back-tracking, those additional landing sites become extremely appreciated.

In addition to the main storyline and missions,

there are many side missions that frequently open up to give you more gameplay options. You'll be able to complete odd jobs, grow a cult to worship your alien deity, and abduct humans to splice their genes for some powerful upgrades. Unfortunately, a lot of these feel tacked on for the sake of extending gameplay hours rather than adding overall enjoyment. Seriously, the ratio of fetch quests to everything else is ridiculous.

The biggest crowd pleaser from the first game, the off-the-wall humor, has returned in this sequel, but it doesn't quite capture the same feeling of satisfaction as last time. Perhaps because a lot of the jokes require you to have some knowledge of '60s history, and the *Austin Powers* trilogy didn't cover all the intricacies of that era for us younger folk. That said, there are still some genuinely funny moments and without giving anything away, listen carefully for the plays on words that occur every so often. They had to sneak in some stuff for the older crowd, after all.

Overall, *Destroy All Humans! 2* can be entertaining at times, but feels incredibly average. Some of the design flaws can be very frustrating, such as poor objective explanations, mundane missions and the annoying, respawning armed forces that relentlessly interfere while you're attempting to complete a mission. It's not an overly difficult game, so expect to be done rather quickly unless you attempt all the side missions (they're optional for a reason, though). I just can't recommend this game to anyone that didn't absolutely cherish the original.

Rating: 3 of 5

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

Our cover story notwithstanding, *DAH!2* feels like it was shoved out the door a little too soon. It's funny and much less repetitive than the original, but it's nothing really groundbreaking.

FINAL SCORE :
3.25 of 5



DEVIL SUMMONER



Review by Hitosura

Publisher : Atlus USA
 Developer : Atlus Co. Ltd.
 Release Date : 10/10/2006
 Rating : Mature (Blood, Sexual Themes, Violence)

Genre(s) : RPG
 Category : Action/Adventure
 # of players : 1

We like to refer to the new *Shin Megami Tensei* game as *Devil Summoner* for short. This is because *Shin Megami Tensei – Devil Summoner: Raidou Kuzunoha vs The Soulless Army* is a title that the average GameStop/EB clerk is not going to remember. Anyone thinking of buying this game should do the same thing to make that clerk's job easier.

In *DS* you take control of a rookie Devil Summoner in 1931 Japan who has just been granted the honor of using the name Raidou Kuzunoha. Part of a Devil Summoner's duties is to watch over the capital city, which will eventually become known as Tokyo, and he's been given employment at a detective agency to facilitate this role. Your first bizarre mystery starts when a schoolgirl asks you to kill her, but is then abducted by the "Red Army" in front of your eyes.

Since you take the role of a detective in this game you'll be doing a lot of walking and talking, as well as using skills from the demons you capture in battles to aid in solving this mystery. *DS* becomes an interesting blend of those old PC detective-style games (*Police Quest* anyone?) fused with an RPG.

Unfortunately, the game falls short, both as a detective game and as an RPG. *Devil Summoner* is very linear, and most of the "dungeons" are practically set up in straight lines. It's virtually impossible to not know where to go next, since Gouto (your ever-present cat companion) tells you exactly where to go and what to do at nearly every turn. There's not enough thought required for this to be a good detective game.

One other critical flaw is that the game is laughably easy, because the real-time battles can be won simply by pressing the Square or Triangle buttons repeatedly, and the enemies usually aren't as tough as they look. Unlike previous *MegaTen* games, making a mistake is no big deal, since you can call up a menu to pause the battle at any

FINAL SCORE :
3.25 of 5



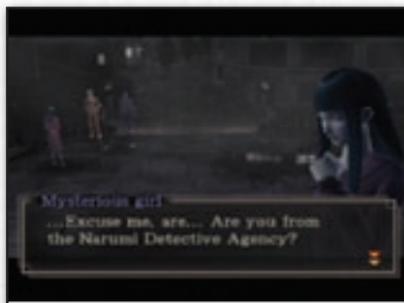
time and try new tactics until something works.

Despite those flaws, *Devil Summoner* is aesthetically astounding. It's hard not to like a game that provides a window into a period of Japanese history that few westerners know about. It's also difficult to hate a game that has an impeccably competent localization full of authentic slang from the '20s and '30s. It's a pleasure to see a story strike a perfect balance of comedy and drama; a scene with Rasputin near the end in particular will have you howling with laughter. Finally, it's a delight to see a game with a suitably detective *noir* soundtrack that contains a variant of the Peter Gunn theme. *Devil Summoner* hits all the right notes with its story and atmosphere, but falls short of being a truly good game.

Rating: 3 of 5

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

It's not an action-RPG so much as a chatty, painfully linear detective game with demons, but *Devil Summoner* is still a *Shin Megami Tensei* game, which automatically makes it worth checking out.



MAGE KNIGHT APOCALYPSE



Review by KouAidou

Publisher : Bandai Namco • Developer : InterServ International
 Release : 9/26/06 • Rating : TEEN • Genre(s) : RPG
 Players : 1 • Platform(s) : PC

The interface has potential, but that is not enough to save this mess of a third-person RPG. While the lack of originality in the story can be forgiven, most games make up for this with visual spectacle and/or crunchy fun. Here, the graphics are lifeless, the animations are clunky, and the roleplaying is limited. You get five pre-made characters to choose from (I'm irritated that the female options are limited to "sexy amazon" and "sexy vampire"), and you can tune some minor aspects of their appearance. Though the "learn through regular use" skill advancement system is fun, it's been put to better use before, in contexts that weren't so limiting.



FINAL SCORE :
2 of 5

Microsoft Flight Simulator X



Review by Metalbok

Publisher : Microsoft Game Studios • Release : 10/17/06
 Developer : Microsoft Game Studios • Rating : EVERYONE
 Genre(s) : Simulator • Players : 1-99 • Platform(s) : PC

Flight Simulator X is less of a game and more of an experience, and is geared towards the sky jockey who just can't stay on the ground. At least, I think that's the intention. *FSX*, with the realism setting all the way up, won't please flight sim fanatics looking for a true experience. With the setting on easy, it won't please casual gamers, either. It's stuck somewhere in the middle; it's not sim enough, and it's too complex to just "pick up." It can be an engrossing experience, however, because of the overwhelming scale of things. With 24,000 real world airports, millions of miles of actual roadways, and accurate scenery; including cities, landmarks and geography, *FSX* is more about exploration than the dynamics of flight.



FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5

POWER STONE COLLECTION



Review by 4thletter

Publisher : Capcom • Developer : Capcom
 Release : 10/31/06 • Rating : TEEN • Genre(s) : Fighting
 Players : 1-4 • Platform(s) : PSP

I used to love the *Power Stone* series. *Power Stone Collection* brings back the two games in one set with a full complement of bonus features. *Power Stone* gets a few formerly *Power Stone 2* exclusive characters, for example, and the UMD features a few minigames to keep you interested. There's one problem, however. The load times are atrocious, particularly for a portable game. Get it for the action, but be prepared to wait for it.



FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5

DAWN OF WAR DARK CRUSADE



Review by Metalbok

Publisher : THQ • Developer : Relic
 Release : 10/9/06 • Rating : MATURE • Genre(s) : RTS
 Players : 1-8 • Platform(s) : PC

Love it or hate it, pre-battle map planning is the newest trend in the RTS genre. Sometimes it's an afterthought, other times it is truly a part of the game. *Dark Crusade* is part of the latter, and uses it to faithfully represent the power struggle between the 40k factions (Tau and Necrons are fully playable this time, but still no Tyranids!). Instead of fighting individual battles one after the other to progress in "story mode," all of your battles are part of a larger war for the planet. This "full scale" approach makes for an incredibly engrossing experience. The only downside is the sometimes-spotty AI. Just keep a close eye on your troops and you'll be fine!



FINAL SCORE :
4.5 of 5



Publisher : HD Interactive/Sierra • Release : 9/12/06
 Developer : Most Wanted Entertainment • Rating : TEEN
 Genre(s) : RTS • Players : 1-8 • Platform(s) : PC

Playing *Joint Task force* is a lot like eating too much of your favorite food. When you start you know why you like it, and definitely want more. By the fourth helping you've become tired of it, and by the sixth you can't remember why you liked it in the first place. *JTF's* strong story, gorgeous graphics and destructible environments will suck you in. The battles, which require tactical thought, will have you thinking that you've found a complex strategy game. After a few levels of resorting to the same tactics, however, you'll realize that this is not the case. That's a shame, because *JTF* has everything else going for it! *JTF* is a fun romp in the park, as long as you don't expect anything too complex or non-repetitive.



FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5



Publisher : Bandai Namco • Developer : Bandai Namco
 Release : 10/23/06 • Rating : TEEN • Genre(s) : Flight Sim
 Players : 1-4 • Platform(s) : PSP

Ace Combat X is precisely the sort of game the PSP needs. It's a satisfying installment in a popular series that doesn't feel the least bit handicapped by its move to the portable system. Aerial acrobatics and the crush of limited firepower and time make each mission feel urgent even before the chatter from your teammates takes it to that elusive next level. The presentation is perfect. You can even play with some of your friends by wireless connection, and the adjustable difficulty ensures that they'll be able to play, even if they're new to the series.



FINAL SCORE :
4.5 of 5



Publisher : Electronic Arts • Developer : EA Redwood Shores
 Release : 10/11/06 • Rating : EVERYONE • Genre(s) : Golf
 Players : 1-4 • Platform(s) : PS2 (reviewed), Xbox, PC

How much enjoyment you get out of *Tiger Woods 07* depends on how much you've played previous versions of the game. Series veterans will enjoy the annual game tweaks and tons of new options and play modes, while n00bs will be drawn in by *Tiger's* accessibility before slamming into the twin brick walls of broken tutorials and useless instruction manual. There's a surprising complexity to the analog swing control, pulling back and pushing forward to mimic the real-world golfing motions, and learning to get the most out of each swing can be a daunting task. The satisfaction of nailing the perfect shot makes all that effort worth it in the end, though.



FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



Publisher : Sony Computer Entertainment • Rating : TEEN
 Developer : Guerilla Games • Release : 10/31/06
 Genre(s) : Third-Person Action • Players : 1-6 • Platform(s) : PSP
Killzone: Liberation feels a lot better than its cousin on the PS2. The third-person gameplay gives it a kind of *Crusader: No Remorse* feel, although with slightly clunky controls. The action may not be as viscerally intense as your standard FPS, but it does get hot and heavy. The auto-aim is decent, but it's much easier to aim at enemies on your own rather than letting the computer's semi-lock on feature do the work for you. It's great fun, but flawed. The multiplayer is excellent, however.



FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



Publisher : Koei • Developer : Omega Force
 Release : 10/24/06 • Rating : TEEN • Genre(s) : Action
 Players : 1-4 • Platform(s) : PSP

Remember *Dynasty Warriors* on the PSP? You don't have to, because *Dynasty Warriors vol. 2* is practically the same game. In singleplayer, the only notable addition is a stable of upgradable mounts, such as horses and elephants; otherwise, it's the same brutal army-vs.-army ancient Chinese warfare that the *Dynasty Warriors* name would indicate. The big addition, though, and the reason to pick this up, is multiplayer action. You and up to three friends can participate in four different *DW*-flavored melees via ad hoc multiplayer. If you've got three friends and four PSPs, this is the business. If you don't... well, hell.



FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5



Publisher : Nintendo • Developer : Monolith Soft
 Release : 9/25/06 • Rating : TEEN • Genre(s) : RPG
 Players : 1 • Platform(s) : GameCube

If not for the surprisingly sophisticated CCG-inspired battle system, you might think this was a PlayStation game. It has the grainy graphics, poor map design, inane fetch quests, and not-quite-functional puzzles that you might find in a mediocre PSOne RPG. The map design is the really unforgivably poor element, since it's often impossible to see where you're supposed to go or where you need to stand to advance in a puzzle. You can have fun with this game when you're fighting, but the rest of it is a bit of a slog. Even the plot is pretty dopey. Cool soundtrack, though.

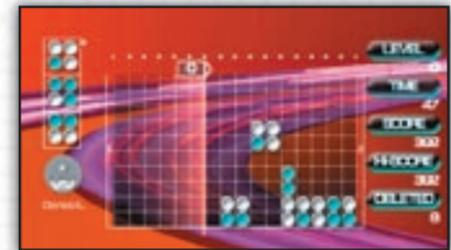
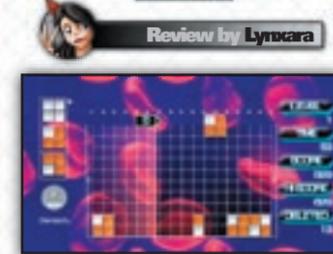


FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5



Publisher : Buena Vista Games • Developer : Q Entertainment
 Release : 11/17/06 • Rating : EVERYONE • Genre(s) : Puzzle
 Players : 1-2 • Platform(s) : PSP

Lumines II somehow manages to feel less impressive than the original, despite having a lot more features and noticeably reduced load times. There are new puzzles, missions, true online multiplayer, and you can even edit your own song sequences. The *Tetris*-like gameplay hasn't changed a bit and the new skins are beautiful, but the music in *Lumines II* just isn't anywhere near as fun to listen to as it was in *Lumines*. The licensed American pop songs feel gimmicky, and some of the new original songs are just irritating.



FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

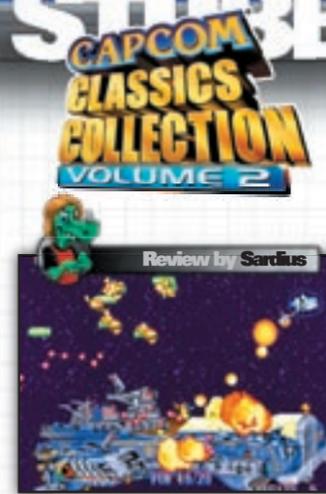


Publisher : Konami • Developer : Konami
 Release : 9/26/06 • Rating : E10+ • Genre(s) : Rhythm
 Players : 1-2 • Platform(s) : PS2

If you can forgive its inclusion of grievous acts of musical terrorism like Fall Out Boy and Kelly Clarkson, you'll find that *SuperNOVA* is a great recovery for the *DDR* series after last year's disappointing *DDR Extreme 2*. The new Stellar Master mode accommodates a variety of skill levels, and ensures that a good chunk of the game's songlist is immediately accessible — a definite improvement over the disaster that was *DDR Extreme 2's* Dance Master mode. The fact that some songs can only be played while connected to Konami's online service is lame as hell, but otherwise, *SuperNOVA* is a step in the right direction for *Dance Dance Revolution*.



FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



Publisher : Capcom • Developer : Digital Eclipse
 Release : 11/14/06 • Rating : TEEN • Genre(s) : Retro Shovelware
 Players : 1-4 • Platform(s) : PS2, Xbox

Capcom must be saving its best games for the inevitable *Capcom Classics Collection Volume 3*, because *CCC2* contains several dubious "classics" that are best forgotten. Rather than fill this compilation with the many never-ported CPS2 titles fans crave, Capcom has instead opted to use the remainder of its late-'80s/early-'90s back catalogue. Titles like *Strider*, *Black Tiger*, and a new Capcom-themed version of *Quiz & Dragons* stand out, but bad sound emulation, occasionally twitchy controls, interface glitches, and lame bonus extras take away a lot of the fun. Stick with the original *CCC* until Capcom releases something more substantial and less problematic.



Publisher : Konami • Developer : Backbone Entertainment
 Release : 10/31/06 • Rating : TEEN • Genre(s) : Platformer
 Players : 1 • Platform(s) : PSP

Death Jr. 2 is the rare PSP game that doesn't have a million lengthy load screens. It also has a remarkable sense of humor, interesting enemies and some platform heroics that fall short only when floaty jumps and enemy bumps send you plummeting to instant death by way of lava. If you can tolerate occasional rough spots, you'll find a neat little game with surprising depth. Collectable weapon upgrades and frantic action are enough to keep anyone coming back, and that's not even counting the laser-shooting chickens. Definitely worth your time.



Publisher : Atari • Developer : Spike • Release : 10/19/06
 Rating : TEEN • Genre(s) : Fighting/Action/RPG
 Players : 1-2 • Platform(s) : PS2, Wii

If *Tenkaichi* was *Street Fighter 2: The World Warrior*, then *Tenkaichi 2* is *Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo*. Every problem that the original contained has been fixed, the engine has been improved for competitive play, and there's more *DBZ* fanservice than you could possibly conceive of. Get ready to rock with more than a hundred characters, five-on-five(!) tag-team bouts, and some of the fastest 3D fighting on the face of the planet, all in a surprisingly robust package that borrows as much from the classic *Virtual On* as it does from previous *DBZ* fighting games. If you're too "cool" for *Dragon Ball*, lower my score by a point, then give this a shot anyway. You may be pleasantly surprised. For the rest of us, the *DBZ* fighter has achieved near-perfection. Get it now.



Publisher : Capcom • Developer : Inti Creates
 Release : 9/12/06 • Rating : EVERYONE • Genre(s) : Action
 Players : 1 • Platform(s) : NDS

To date, I've never much cared for the *Mega Man Zero* games. This has changed, however, with *Mega Man ZX*. Powered by a cool concept (transforming into different types of Mega Man), a decent story, an incredible soundtrack, and some great weapon designs, *ZX* is a *Mega Man* game that anyone can get into... almost. While the action is stellar, the exploration part of the game is horrid. This is due entirely to the map screen, which makes absolutely no sense. Much patience is required to even find your missions, let alone complete them. Other than that snag, though, this a pleasant romp. Here's hoping for a *ZX2* with 8 Robot Master portraits!



FINAL SCORE :
2 of 5



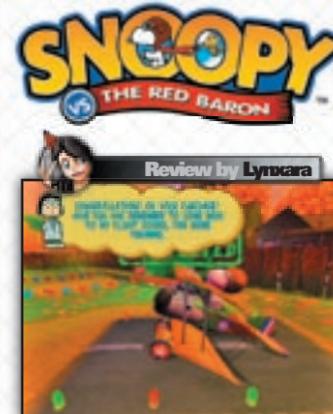
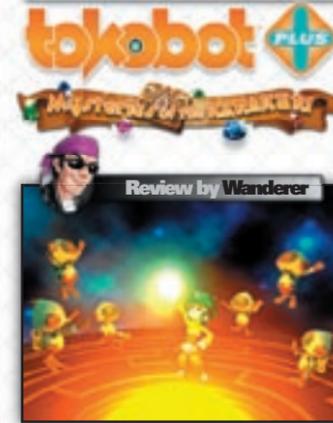
FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
5 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5



Publisher : Bandai Namco • Developer : Q Entertainment
 Release : 11/14/06 • Rating : EVERYONE • Genre(s) : Puzzle
 Players : 1 or 2 (wirelessly) • Platform(s) : PSP

Gunpey is a remake of the Wonderswan title of the same name from a few years ago. The emphasis here (besides moving around various shapes so that they connect to form a line across the screen and disappear before reaching the top) is music, a definite nod to the success *Lumines* enjoyed on the same platform. Unfortunately, *Gunpey* isn't at quite that level. It's hard on the fingers and shuffling pieces around feels frantic but tiresome. Lots of skins and cool music give the package lasting appeal, but the design falls short of timeless by a fair bit.

Publisher : Tecmo • Developer : Tecmo
 Release : 10/17/06 • Rating : EVERYONE • Genre(s) : Adventure
 Players : 1 • Platform(s) : PS2

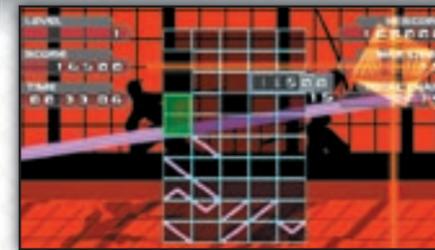
Tokobot Plus is a 3D platformer of the *Spyro* or *Blinx* school, but lacks the embarrassing attempts at edgy humor that seem to characterize this genre these days. Instead, it's got a plot straight out of all-ages anime, starring Bolt, a treasure hunter who explores ruins by shamelessly exploiting his trusty Tokobots. *Tokobot Plus* is pretty easy, the camera's not as responsive as I'd like, and it could really use an automap, but it's got a certain charm. The great voice acting and soundtrack are both a big plus.

Publisher : D3 Publisher • Developer : SCE Studios Japan
 Release : 10/17/06 • Rating : TEEN • Genre(s) : Mini-Game
 Players : 1 • Platform(s) : PSP

Work Time Fun is halfway to being a complete misnomer. Yes, its gameplay revolves around emulating different jobs. No, it's not even remotely fun. The closest you get is a game that has you putting pen caps on ballpoint pens. If you play this and other similar fare long enough (which gets old every bit as quickly as you'd imagine), you'll unlock more mini-games of that nature. Unfortunately, nothing ever feels worthwhile. It's a vicious circle and only one thing is certain: you won't have fun. Avoid this one like the plague on the PSP library that it is.

Publisher : Namco Bandai Games America • Release : 10/24/06
 Developer : Smart Bomb Interactive • Rating : E10+ • Players : 1
 Genre(s) : Children's Games, Action • Platform(s) : Xbox, PS2

A game based on the *Peanuts* license? Is it 1983 again? *Snoopy vs. the Red Baron* is a *StarFox* clone inspired by the comic strip sequences where Snoopy pretended to be a World War I flying ace. The game's pretty clearly intended for very young children, so it's a slow, really easy *StarFox* clone. The gameplay mostly involves clearing simple, repetitive missions set during a bizarre cartoon version of WWI where the Germans field killer robots. The controls are surprisingly good, but the sheer slowness gets very frustrating after a while and the missions aren't very interesting by themselves.



FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
1 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
2.5 of 5

bit Generations™ 7 GAMES OF STYLE VS. SUBSTANCE

REVIEWED BY: HONESTGAMER AND JAMES bit Generations™



INTRODUCTION

Simple is good. The over-complication of gaming has been a concern of Nintendo's for a while now, and with bit Generations it's taken game design back to its streamlined roots. bit Generations is a series of seven games designed to be as low-tech as possible, while showing off just how engaging simple gameplay can be. Plain but colorful visuals are combined with rich sound and stripped-down controls (Orbital only uses two buttons!) to create games that feel like they could have been pulled through time from the early '80s. That's an illusion, though, because there's more going on under the surface than is readily apparent. Ignoring the audio, which would have given even the mighty Commodore 64 some difficulty, the sheer number of smooth-moving sprites wouldn't have been possible until the latter days of the SNES. The bit Generations games are retro as seen through rose-colored glasses. Like many experiments, bit Generations is hit and miss. Game quality ranges from abysmal to brilliant, with most titles somewhere in the middle, but experiments in any media are what keep it alive and vital, whether it's coming up with an entirely new play mechanic or just designing a game with an unusual visual sensibility. The results of the bit Generations project are seven abstract games with no media tie-ins, merchandisable characters, or stories to tell. The only thing to hook the player is gameplay. bit Generations shows that, though the early days of gaming were defined by hardware limitations, the style of gameplay from that period is timeless.

NINTENDO'S BIT GENERATIONS IS THE CLASSIC COLLISION OF STYLE vs. SUBSTANCE



PUBLISHER: NINTENDO . DEVELOPER: NINTENDO . RELEASE DATE: 07/13/2006 . GENRE: RACING . CATEGORY: RETRO . # PLAYERS: 1

dotstream™

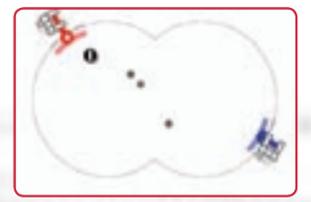
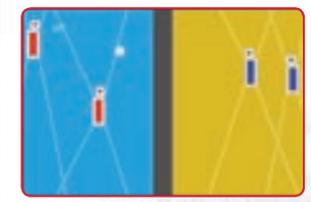
With six lines, a few shapes and some MIDI files, dotstream accomplishes what few games within the genre can: it makes handheld racing simple and thrilling. Even if the English menus hadn't been included, North American gamers wouldn't have trouble understanding what's happening here. Good racing is universal.

You are one of six lines moving from left to right. There's a finite amount of space at any point, even in the early rounds. No two lines can occupy the same area, so as you and your rivals zip through the course, you'll have to be careful. If you're trailing someone and they avoid an obstacle perfectly, you'll have to be either above them or below them on the vertical axis. Since your line adjusts automatically (and not always in the direction you'd prefer), you'll sometimes find yourself wiping out just because you didn't plan in advance.

That play mechanic provides the game's tension. You must decide whether you should use all of your fuel boosts to snag and maintain the early lead, or if you should instead wait for a final lap rush. Racing alongside your opponents increases the odds that you'll totally wipe out and lose. Once you've broken free of the pack, it's much simpler to plot the direct course you want to follow, but the game compensates for this by throwing obstacles at you that your opponents might have removed if you let them lead the charge.

dotstream lives up to every inch of its promise with nary a polygon in sight. It won't bring about a new revolution, but is still the sort of pleasant surprise that you won't regret trying.

FINAL SCORE : 4 of 5



PUBLISHER: NINTENDO . DEVELOPER: NINTENDO . RELEASE DATE: 07/13/06 . GENRE: ARCADE . CATEGORY: RETRO . # PLAYERS: 1

BOUNDISH™

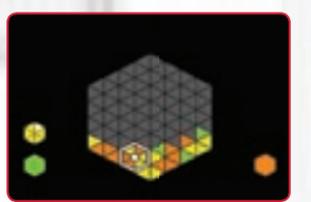
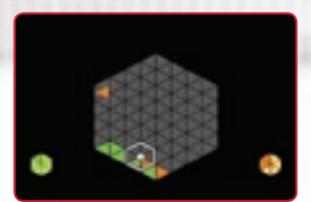
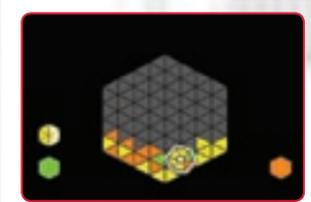
Boundish sounds neat, but then you get past the name and you realize that what you're really getting is four ways to play Pong, plus a variant of the sandbag game from California Games thrown in for good measure. It's amusing for maybe three minutes, but it never reaches a point where you'll feel like the nostalgia trip was justified.

From the main menu, you'll choose your poison. Each variant has a different little title, like "Pool Flower" or "Power Slider." With the exception of "Box Juggling," the aptly-named game that has you pushing a block into the air to score combo points until you're bored out of your skull, each of the other options will find you and the computer bouncing balls back and forth. They bound about the screen and apparently account for the game's deceptively cool title.

To mix things up between modes, the developers added slight variations and extremely irritating music loops. In one game mode, there's a record at the center. You send the ball to your opponent and the constant spinning makes its path unpredictable. This is cool until your paddle suddenly won't move properly. Another mode adds bubbles that drift through the area and slow your paddle's movement, or your opponent's. It's like Pong, only more frustrating. A final mode gives you two paddles connected by strings, so if your first one misses, the backup might save you from an untimely defeat.

FINAL SCORE : 1 of 5

The winning team in any but the "Box Juggling" mode is the one that reaches five points. If you ask me, the real winner is the person who doesn't play Boundish.



PUBLISHER: NINTENDO . DEVELOPER: NINTENDO . RELEASE DATE: 07/13/2006 . GENRE: PUZZLE . CATEGORY: RETRO . # PLAYERS: 1-2

DIALHEX™

Dialhex is another in a long line of puzzle games about arranging items by color, but instead of the usual three-in-a-row or column, it requires six triangles to be set in a hexagon. The cursor itself is a hexagon, and the shoulder buttons turn it left and right. You can move the small cursor around the large playfield hexagon, which contains ninety-six triangles. Pieces slowly rain down one at a time.

As the pieces drop, they slowly accumulate at the bottom of the field, piling up like pointy, colorful snow. The main mode starts off with only two colors to worry about, but clearing six hexagons of each color brings a new shade into the mix. Clear off six hexes of that color and get another one, and then more after that. Meanwhile, the slow rain of triangles is speeding up, the board is getting fuller, and the greater number of colors makes putting hexes together even trickier. Simple strategies and an organized plan of attack, plus taking full advantage of Dialhex's few powerups, are the only ways to survive the later difficulty levels.

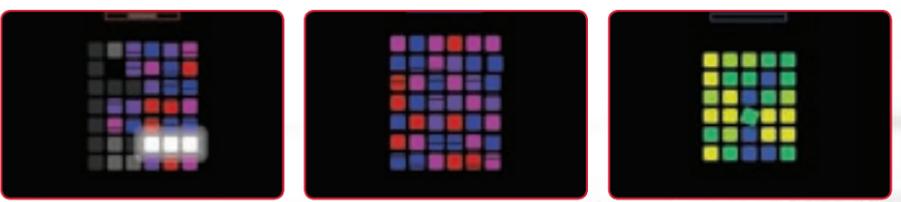
Dialhex is a surprisingly engaging little game, the kind that grows on you the more you play. Learning its patterns is tricky, but the puzzle game allure shines through once you get the hang of it. Unfortunately, setting up six of a color means that combos are rare, and predicting the way the triangles slide around once a hexagon disappears makes them almost impossible to set up. This keeps strategies simple but also limits the game's depth. Despite this, Dialhex is still a fun little timewaster and makes a nice change from the usual puzzle fare.

FINAL SCORE : 3.5 of 5

bit Generations™ 7 GAMES OF STYLE VS. SUBSTANCE

REVIEWED BY: HONESTGAMER AND JAMES

bit Generations™



PUBLISHER: NINTENDO . DEVELOPER: NINTENDO . RELEASE DATE: 07/27/06 . GENRE: PUZZLE . CATEGORY: RETRO . # PLAYERS: 1

COLORIS™

Coloris starts out simply enough, with a field of blocks in four shades to manipulate. The cursor on the initial stage is either red or yellow, and clicking on a block will bring it one stage closer to that shade, progressing through yellow, light orange, dark orange, and red. At set intervals or when a block is clicked, there's a fifty-fifty chance that the cursor will change color. A big part of *Coloris* is dealing with the random nature of the cursor, starting chains and coming back when the time is right. This is a lot easier at the start, when there's only four colors to deal with.

Later on, five colors in a straight line segues into many colors in a ring, blue to red to yellow to blue again with shades in between. Clicking on a block with the wrong color cursor (yellow on purple, for example) will turn it black, and only clearing two sets of three in a row beside it will reactivate it. Worse, when even one block is black the gauge measuring level progression won't fill up. Blocks also turn black when left alone for too long, and when the grid is crammed full of them it's game over.

While the obvious problem with *Coloris* is the random nature of the cursor, which makes planning next to impossible in the later stages when there are twelve colors to deal with, the real issue holding it back is that too many of the in-game colors are too similar. Yellow and almost-yellow just don't look that different, even side by side. *Coloris* ends up being a game for patient, eagle-eyed gamers, and is just a bit too frustrating for anyone else.

FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5



PUBLISHER: NINTENDO . DEVELOPER: NINTENDO . RELEASE DATE: 07/27/06 . GENRE: KATAMARI . CATEGORY: RETRO . # PLAYERS: 1

ORBITAL™

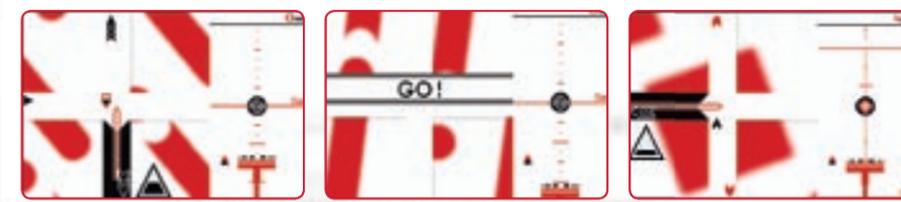
Not many games operate on a planetary scale, but *Orbital* braves the hard vacuum of outer space to show how a plucky little sphere can become a major celestial body. Planetary growth is accomplished, *Katamari*-style, by crashing into spheres of equal or lesser size. Each level has an arrangement of planets, frequently with complex orbits around each other, and you need to guide your ambitious orb to the proper sized ones. Planets that are too large are red, too small are grey, and blue is just right.

While red needs to be avoided and blue collected, the grey planets are where technique comes into play. Ignoring them is fine, but they can also either be run through and absorbed for points or sideswiped and pulled into orbit. In addition to the coolness of controlling a full planetary system, each moon is worth an extra life at stage's end.

Unfortunately, control is *Orbital's* biggest issue. It uses two buttons to control gravity, A for attract and B for repel. While this is simple enough around one big planet, figuring out the forces at work when a number of heavenly bodies are bunched up close can be a mystifying affair. The attract/repel scheme sounds good on paper, but produces some odd effects when competing gravity wells come into play.

Still, *Orbital* ends up as a fun, addicting game that's great to chill out with. Its relaxed pace and peaceful music produce a nice, calming effect, which is especially good when it's too late to avoid death no matter how hard you press the repel button. *Orbital* is a very good game that's just a control-refinement away from genius.

FINAL SCORE :
4.5 of 5



PUBLISHER: NINTENDO . DEVELOPER: NINTENDO . RELEASE DATE: 07/27/06 . GENRE: PUZZLE . CATEGORY: RETRO . # PLAYERS: 1

DIGIDRIVE™

Digidrive is a pure puzzle game. You'd perhaps anticipate that from a cartridge that emphasizes pick-up-and-play mechanics over depth, but you probably wouldn't expect what you get here. The closest comparison is *Klax*, but even that's slightly off because instead of stacking blocks in four piles, you're shuffling them along four bays.

The game area is set up with a cross at its center and gauges along the sides. As you watch, arrows slide onto the cross from one of its four entry points. Your goal is to collect them in groups along the side. You do this by pressing a direction that corresponds to the portion of the cross to which they should head, which will cause a red indicator to point them in the appropriate direction. When enough are gathered into designated sectors, they'll disappear from the screen while giving boosts to the gauges. If you perform well enough and get enough boosts, you'll trigger a reaction that sends your score into the stratosphere.

As you play *Digidrive*, the pace quickly goes from rather mellow all the way up to frantic, with arrows of multiple colors flooding the screen before you can really do much but react in a frenzied state. It's kind of like skipping from level 1 to 10 in *Tetris*.

There are extra complications, too, like ambulances (sirens wail as they approach, so that's what they must be) and combos you can perform to double your bonus scores and such. *Digidrive* is a deep enough puzzle game and sometimes rewarding, but it's not as accessible as some of the other titles within the *bit Generations* franchise. Approach it with caution.

FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5



PUBLISHER: NINTENDO . DEVELOPER: NINTENDO . RELEASE DATE: 07/27/2006 . GENRE: PUZZLE . CATEGORY: RETRO . # PLAYERS: 1

Soundvoyager™

The name of the game in *Soundvoyager* is sound. In fact, you shouldn't even consider playing unless you're in a quiet place with five or ten minutes to spare. That's because success here means that you have terrific hearing and a whole lot of patience.

When you begin playing, you'll see a tree diagram. This will include a few bubbles that are highlighted, representing stages you can enter. To get to the top, you'll have to clear your path along various branches by completing sound-based objectives. These objectives are divided into several styles. They always place emphasis on sound. One finds you floating through space, where musical notes appear. As you collect them, they add instruments to the background music. You must drift about, using your ears to guide you to these invisible notes, until you have a full song playing in the background. It's an exercise in tedium unless you're doing well, at which point it's fun.

Another stage is more direct. You're riding along a road and you can't see anything. You can hear traffic approaching, however, and need to switch lanes to avoid a collision with cars that you can't see. Then there's a slalom area where you must glide through poles of sound and make it to the end without running out of time.

Though the tunes change with each stage, they get old fast. Straining your ears at length isn't anyone's idea of fun, and the graphics never reach beyond "serviceable." The package is a neat idea as a whole, but there's a good chance you'll tire of it long before you've made it all the way through.

FINAL SCORE :
2.5 of 5

Epson
MovieMate 33
• Projector and Screen • Price: \$999.99-1,199.99

It's nearly Christmastime, isn't it? You know what that means. It's time to get that gaming girl or guy in your life something special. HD video is all the rage nowadays, I think, but have you seen the prices on some of those big screens?

Epson's MovieMate 33 is a nice compromise between price and features. It comes with built-in stereo speakers, a separate subwoofer, optical audio out, and Dolby audio support. In short, it's a total package.

Your next question is probably, "Sound is nice and all, but what about the video?" Well, the MovieMate 33 features 480p as its native resolution and 16:9 as its aspect ratio. Composite, S-Video, and VGA inputs come standard, along with an optional component adapter. It may not support 1080p like your latest and most expensive HDTV, but it's got plenty. In a very smooth move, the projector supports both PAL and NTSC. That's great if you've got some limited-run European DVDs, for example.

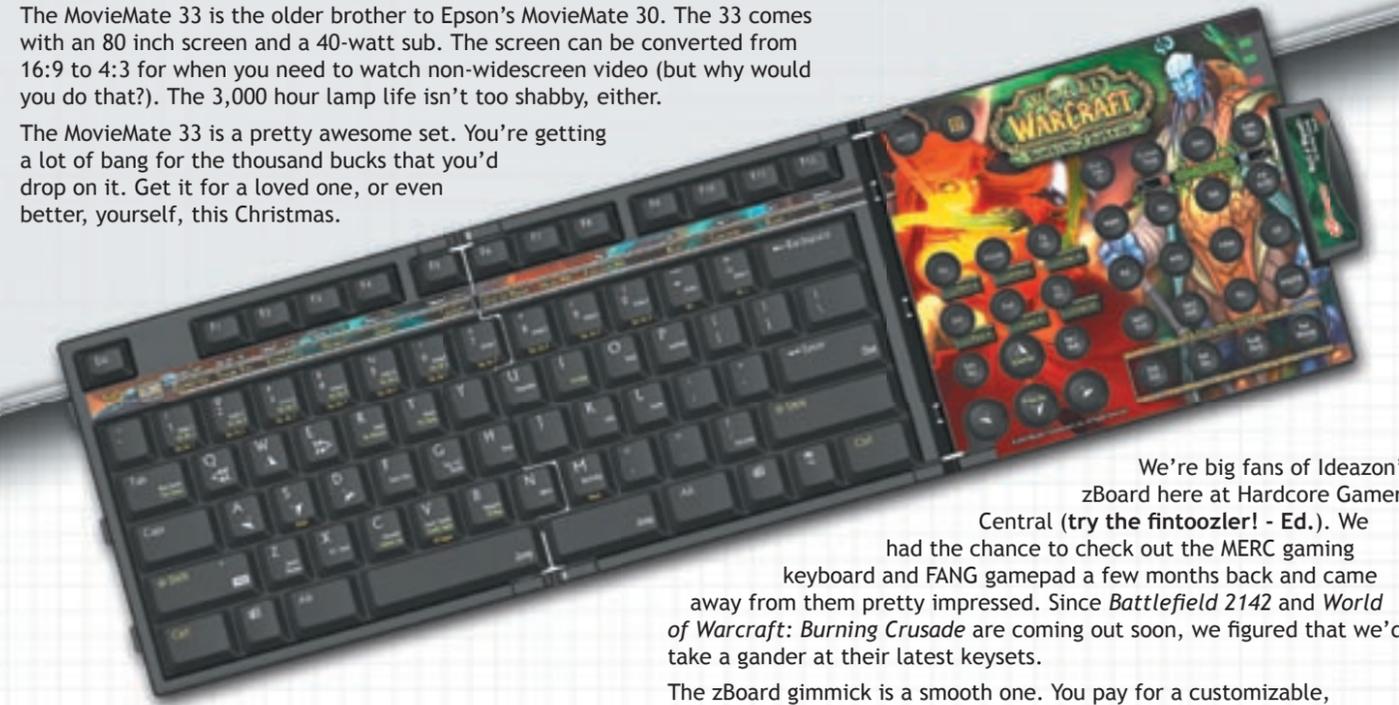
The MovieMate 33 is the older brother to Epson's MovieMate 30. The 33 comes with an 80 inch screen and a 40-watt sub. The screen can be converted from 16:9 to 4:3 for when you need to watch non-widescreen video (but why would you do that?). The 3,000 hour lamp life isn't too shabby, either.

The MovieMate 33 is a pretty awesome set. You're getting a lot of bang for the thousand bucks that you'd drop on it. Get it for a loved one, or even better, yourself, this Christmas.



Reviews by **4thletter**

- Features
- Native 16:9
 - Native 480p
 - 1000:1 Contrast Ratio
 - Built-in DVD Player



Ideazon
zBoard and Limited Ed. Keysets
• Gaming Keyboard • Price: \$49.99 (\$19.99 per keyset)

We're big fans of Ideazon's zBoard here at Hardcore Gamer Central (try the fintoozler! - Ed.). We had the chance to check out the MERC gaming keyboard and FANG gamepad a few months back and came away from them pretty impressed. Since *Battlefield 2142* and *World of Warcraft: Burning Crusade* are coming out soon, we figured that we'd take a gander at their latest keysets.

The zBoard gimmick is a smooth one. You pay for a customizable, pre-programmed, removable keyboard (a "keyset") that comes with a number of important commands, macros, and functions built right into the keyboard. The upcoming *WoW* keyset, for example, nets you an easy way to switch chat modes, activate attacks, and handle other essentials. Of particular note is that this keyset is optimized for PvP. If you think you'll need a helping hand against Onyxia or against the annoying Alliance, give it a look.

- Features
- Customizable Commands
 - Support for:
 - World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade
 - Counter-Strike
 - Battlefield 2142

Fanatec
Headshot
• Gaming Mouse/Mousepad • Price: \$99.99

Fanatec's Headshot controller is a monster of Dr. Frankensteinian proportions, but in a good way. Most gaming mice tend to be of the "high dpi and that's it" variety. The Headshot takes it to the next level. Honestly, it's unfair to classify it as just a "gaming mouse."

The Headshot combines the mouse itself, aURa mousepad, emul8or software, an illuminated cable holder, and a built-in USB 2.0 hub. It even comes with a snazzy clear case to keep it all straight, and believe me when I say that you'll need it. The Headshot is more of a toolbox than anything else.

The mouse itself is pretty slick. It features an adjustable grip and dpi that you can adjust on the fly, or even as part of a complicated macro. The best part of the mouse, however, is the ergonomic grip. Your entire hand sits on the mouse comfortably, and the rubber grips are very nice. The emul8or software is pretty insane, too. The macro files are saved into simple .txt files and can be mapped to any key on the mouse or keyboard. Did I mention that each key can be assigned to two different functions, depending on how long you hold the button?

One-word review: wow.

- Features
- 3 USB slots
 - Memory Card Support



Nyko
MultiReader 360
• Multipurpose Multitap • Price: \$19.99

If you're anything like me, you find the Xbox 360's USB support to be more than a little lackluster. The small hatch on the front where you plug stuff in is pretty ugly, though it's functional. One problem, though: you just get two front-mounted USB slots? What if you want to play a bit of four player *Halo* with wired pads? Are you just SOL?

Nyko once again has created a product that a lot of 360 owners want. Their MultiReader features three additional USB slots in addition to support for Smart Media, Secure Digital, Compact Flash, Memory Stick, and Memory Stick Pro cards. In short, it's got nearly everything under the sun. If you want to play a bit of multiplayer while using your iPod to stream music to your 360, you can do it with no hassle. Got a digital camera with some sweet photos to show off, but don't want to bother hooking your digicam up to a computer? Plug the card into the MultiReader and voila: pictures. At twenty bucks, this is a steal.

eDimensional
G-Pad Pro
• Motion Sensing Controller • System: PS2, PC • Price: \$39.99

PS3 who? eDimensional's G-Pad Pro beats the PS3's motion-sensing pad to the market and even manages to include force feedback in the deal.

The controller is pretty compact, though slightly larger than most "mini" controllers. The D-pad is styled in the standard cross fashion, and concave in order to fit your thumb better. The shoulder buttons are pretty tightly packed, too, but the R2 and L2 keys are larger and feature a lip so that you can distinguish them from their number one brothers.

The gyroscopic features work very well. Break out your favorite racing game. You know how you unconsciously tilt the joypad in the direction of your turn, or away from another car, or that sort of thing? The G-Pad Pro will turn that instinct into a function. Ease your controller to the left and you'll ease into a turn. It's very smooth and adjustable on the controller itself. The PC version features adjustable drivers as well. Give one a chance. It's perfect for racers.

- Features
- Gyroscopic
 - Force Feedback



In this very special edition of our fan art section we are proud to present the best entries from our Where's Crypto? Viewer's Choice Picks challenge at www.hardcoregamer.com in which we challenged our readers to alter, edit, draw or create 1960s scenes and insert Crypto from *Destroy All Humans! 2* into the scene. These are the results. On 8/22/06 (after this issue's deadline) HGM staff members will pick their favorite entry and send that person a free copy of the game! Hot.



Artist : trunks982
Location : Brooklyn, NY



Artist : outofcontrol
Location : Orlando, FL



Artist : Glitch
Location : Cookeville, TN



Artist : dbz321
Location : Woodside, NY



Artist : thebest321
Location : Woodside, NY



Artist : mrluckypants
Location : Duluth, GA



ESRB ratings

Vanilla from Varanoir
Photo Credit: www.dvq.ca



Rosette Christopher from Chrono Crusade
Photo Credit: www.dmphtography.ca

Emma Frost from X-Men
Photo Credit: www.visionofzen.com



Cosplayer: Lafiel
Location: Toronto, ON
Website: www.HimeArts.com
(still under construction!)
Next Con: Anime Boston, Dragon Con
Awesomeness on a scale from 1 to 10: 45.321
Special Thanks to Neko, Lab 604, Kupo, and Vesper! for all their costume help!

HG9000

The Huntress from Batman
Photo Credit: www.dvq.ca

Kasumi from Dead or Alive
Photo Credit: www.dmphtography.ca



Gally/Aiita from Battle Angel Alita
Photo Credit: www.dvq.ca



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