

HARDCORE

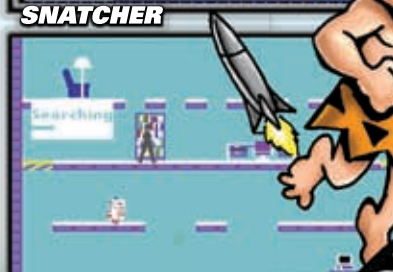
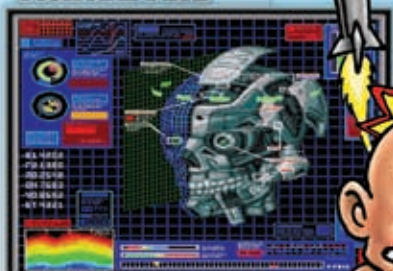
GAMER

MAGAZINE

v2i8 : fission mailed

WET
a Go-Go!

**OLD SCHOOL
BLOWOUT
ISSUE!**



\$4.99 USA FEB 2007 \$6.99 Canada

Plus:
the usual pile of next-gen reviews and previews
tournament coverage especial
more crazy japanese games from japan



PAYTRON

WANTED

FOR SPACE PIRACY



NAME: **JASTER\|DORGENARK**
CRIME: **INTERGALACTIC LARCENY**
LAST SEEN: **VEDAN\|GUIN SYSTEM**

THE DAYTRON CORPORATION POSTS A BOUNTY TO BE PAID IN FULL TO ANY INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CAPTURE OR KILLING OF THIS INTERGALACTIC CRIMINAL.

TEXT
"JASTER"
TO 65579 TO
RECEIVE YOUR
REWARD*



ROGUE GALAXY



Blood
Crude Humor
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol and Tobacco
Violence



WWW.ROGUEGALAXY-THEGAME.COM

PlayStation 2

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.

Rogue Galaxy is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Created and developed by Level 5. ©2006 Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "Live in Your World, Play in Ours" is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. Standard text-messaging rates apply, per your cell phone carrier/text-messaging plan. No Purchase Necessary. Open to legal residents of 50 U.S. & DC aged 13 or older at time of entry. Void where prohibited. To enter: 1) Between 12:00:00 am PT on 1/1/07 & 11:59:59 pm PT on 2/25/07 ("Promotion Period"), text-message either "Jaster" or "Kisala" to "65579" using wireless device capable of 2-way text-messaging. You will receive a return text message including a phone number. Call the provided phone number to hear a prerecorded message from a Rogue Galaxy character on a "Promotion Period" and complete & submit the Official Entry Form to receive 1 entry & 8 e-mail messages about the Rogue Galaxy game. OR 2) To enter and listen to prerecorded message from 1 of the Rogue Galaxy characters above without sending a text message, visit www.spacepirateswanted.com during Promotion Period & complete & submit the Official Entry Form to receive 1 entry & 8 e-mail messages about the Rogue Galaxy game. You may opt out of receiving text or e-mail messages at any time by following instructions in the text/e-mail message sent to you. Eight (8) Grand Prizes: 1 prize winner per Entry Period; one (1) Silver PlayStation2 computer entertainment system & five PlayStation2 games: SOCOM 3; U.S. Navy SEALs: Shadow of the Colossus; Hatchet: Deadlock; Jak X: Combat Racing; and Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves. ARV = \$229.94. Selection of games at Sponsor's discretion & based on availability. Taxes are winners' sole responsibility. Odds of winning any drawing will depend on the total number of eligible entries received for the applicable drawing. Subject to Official Rules & Entry Period details available at www.spacepirateswanted.com or by sending a SASE for receipt by 3/30/07 to: Rogue Galaxy WINNERS, P.O. Box 13198, Bridgeport, CT 06673-3198. For winners list, send SASE for receipt by 3/30/07 to: Rogue Galaxy WINNERS, P.O. Box 13198, Bridgeport, CT 06673-3198.

Biographical Data

Publisher
Tim Lindquist
Editor in Chief
Greg Off
greg@hardcoregamermag.com
Art Director
Terry Wolfinger
Senior Editor
Thomas Wilde
Managing Editor
Alicia Ashby
Editors
Anthony Mertz
Dave Hulegaard
Geson Hatchett
Jason Venter
Jeremy Peeples
Steven Kent
Elizabeth Ellis
Don't Need No Stinking Generators
David Silviera
Artists
Amadeo Garcia III
Dane Miner
Production Director
Brady Hartel
Production Artists
John McKechnie
Casey Yates
Translator
Elizabeth Ellis
Ad sales
Burr Hilsabeck
415-412-5685
burr@hardcoregamermag.com
Ad coordinator
Martin Gilbert
Customer Service
Judy Snow
706-369-3743

Hardcore Gamer® Magazine is published monthly by DoubleJump® Publishing, Inc. at 21407 NE Union Hill Rd, Redmond, WA 98053. Periodicals postage pending at Redmond WA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: send address changes to Hardcore Gamer Magazine, PO Box 146, Redmond, WA 98073. "Hardcore Gamer" and "DoubleJump" are trademarks or registered trademarks of DoubleJump Publishing Incorporated. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without written permission from DoubleJump Publishing. DoubleJump Books is a division of DoubleJump Publishing, Inc.


DoubleJump Publishing and the authors have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this magazine is accurate. However, the publisher makes no warranty, either expressed or implied, as to the accuracy, effectiveness, or completeness of the material in this magazine; nor does the publisher assume liability for damages, either incidental or consequential, that may result from using the information in this magazine. Questions regarding operation of the game software and hardware should be directed to the support numbers provided by the game and device manufacturers in their documentation.

Printed in the United States of America



DJPubba Tim Lindquist
I was playing *Zelda* a lot until we lost power here... just in time for magazine deadline week, too. Since then, I haven't been able to play any games. All my time has been spent keeping the generator running, and gathering firewood. To top things off, while looking for a way to get power to the furnace, I discovered 18 inches of water in the crawlspace under the house. Joy.

Now Playing: Keep the generator running. Stay warm.



Wanderer Thomas Wilde
Since we were doing retro systems this issue, I finally sat down and wired up all twenty-four of my consoles to my entertainment center. Then the entire Pacific Northwest lost power for four days or so. I assume it's a coincidence, but if it isn't, I apologize to all involved.

Now Playing: *Dragon Warrior IV*, *Castlevania*, *Dungeon Siege: Throne of Agony*, *Mazes of Fate*




Lynxara Alicia Ashby
As I write this I'm still sorting through my Christmas presents! Not-so-secret Santas at the mag have given me copies of *Culdcept* and *Skies of Arcadia*, and boy am I looking forward to having some free time once the industry gets into the spring doldrums. Here's to hoping all of you got great games over the holidays to enjoy, too!

Now Playing: *Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin*, *Utawarerumono*, *Final Fantasy XII*, *Super Robot Taisen: Original Generation 2*




Racewing Geson Hatchett
Up until this year, I loved Christmas. Then I got to experience it both as an overworked games journalist and video game store assistant manager. It didn't help that almost every game I was looking forward to has disappointed me. Now I'm a full-blown Ebenezer. Thanks, Sonic Team! Thanks, A2M! Thanks, Itagaki! Bah, humbug!

Now Playing: *Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin* (Charlotte!), *Super Robot Taisen: Original Generation* (Excellent!), *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam* (Wii) (MacKenzie!)



Shoegazer Dave Hulegaard
Now that the holidays have wound down, I'll finally have some time in-between new releases to dive into some of my older games that have been collecting dust. Wait... what's that Pubba? What do you mean *Lost Planet* is only a couple weeks away?? I was so close!! This isn't fair!!

Now Playing: *Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess...* solid.




KouAidou Elizabeth Ellis
What is it with me getting sick at the most inconvenient possible times? I think I'm cursed. Fortunately, retro games are the cure for all ills, and best enjoyed while laying on the couch in a medication-induced daze.

Now Playing: *Pool of Radiance*, *Star Control II: The Ur-Quan Masters*, *Legacy of the Ancients*




Roger Danish Greg Off
Now that the holidays are finally behind us, I can start to concentrate on what 2007 will be like. I imagine *Halo 3* will kick ass, *Grand Theft Auto 4* will likely surprise and amaze everyone (as well as bring with it plenty of controversy). Sony will scratch and claw its way back to the top of the heap (my prediction), and Mario will be Wii-tastic.

Currently Playing: *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters*, *God of War II*, *Zelda: Twilight Princess*, *Call of Duty 3*




4thletter David Brothers
As I sit and ponder time's inexorable, slow march towards its unknowable destination, I have become aware that, as a being whose existence is woven into the very fabric of a slowly decaying universe, I am forced to share the same entropic fate that awaits everything. Since I will not be here to see what lies at the end of time's long journey, it is my solemn wish that, before the very bindings that hold the elements of myself together break down, and the fragile cradle that holds my consciousness and experiences disappears, my words will fire on long after when the minutiae of those who may travel further along the river of time than I shall.




James James Cunningham
There's too much to do, work is insane, and there's still some people on my Christmas list I haven't decided on gifts for yet. On the plus side, right this very moment I'm kicked back without one single person around, my cat balancing on the back of the chair, with a brand-new *Elebits* waiting for my attention. I'll dive back in, but right now it's lovely and peaceful.

Now Playing: *LocoRoco*, *Zelda: Twilight Princess* (Wii), *Elite Beat Agents*, *Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin*




HonestGamer Jason Venter
It seems like I keep looking for the next big thing in games, that new way to play that will totally revitalize how I view my favorite hobby. At the end of the day, though, I keep coming back to the same gameplay that's always worked for me. I'm not quite sure what I think about that...

Now Playing: *Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin*, *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos*




Hitoshura Iaian Ross
I like maps.

Now Playing: *Nothing*




Sartius Danny Cowan
It was tough to decide with competition like *Jaws Unleashed* and *25 to Life*, but my pick for Best Worst Game of 2006 goes to *Final Fight: Streetwise*. It's amazing that one game can single-handedly murder a franchise, close a dev studio, and cause me to yell at my girlfriend in frustration, but *Streetwise* did. Pour one for Drug Zombie Cody. He'll never work in the business again.

Now Playing: *beatmania IIDX 12 Happy Sky*, *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam*, *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins*



Wolfie Terry Wolfinger
And I thought I was stressed from the holiday season... someone give Metalbolt a vacation! What's new with me? I played bowling on the Wii at a Christmas party; the Showtime series, "Dexter," had a very satisfying season finale; and my first ever graphic novel, *Vatican City, Las Vegas*, has been published and released into the world.

Now Playing: *World of Warcraft* (my undead rogue is 60 and chillin')




Metalbolt Anthony Mertz
Hey! UBI! Stop feeding PC gamers console games! Please don't forget us: the PC gamer. Remember us? We need the M4 in a SWAT game (it is, after all, the weapon for US SWAT). We also have no use for blind fire tactics (just like real SWAT!). Please, UBI, don't forget us. We loved *R6* because it didn't mess around, but you've turned it into mini-Gears of War. You've ruined my month!

Now Playing: *Ghost Rider* (PS2), *TrackMania Nations ESWC*




Arfeth Thomas Shin
I haven't been playing many new games due to finals and a translation project (read: Babelfish) I was working on for *Melty Blood: Act Cadenza*. This is because people are too lazy to translate Japanese. Like, everyone should be totally fluent after their 200th episode of *Naruto*! Also, while it's cute that Arima Miyako is too young to read kanji, it makes translating her Bai Ji Quan moves a very painful process.

Now Playing: *Tsukihime* (PC), *Melty Blood: Act Cadenza* (PS2), *Cadash* (Arcade)




Ashura Brady Hartel
I find that if you change one letter in the name of a store, you can drastically alter its purpose. For instance, if you change the L in Big Lots to a T, it then becomes Big Tots. Excuse me sir, what do you sell here at this fine establishment? Gigantic Babies. That goes out to Mitch Hedberg, RIP.

Now Playing: *Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin*, *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops*, *Metal Slug Anthology*



Jeremy Jeremy Peeples
It's been a holiday season of gaming gladness and personal sadness. I lost my cat, Rocky. He lived a richer life in his last day than either of my other cats have in their entire lives. He was endlessly devoted to those he loved, and outlasted a few family cars, about five PlayStations, a few replacement cats, and two Dreamcasts. Goodbye, superdoo.

Now Playing: *Spud's Adventure*, *Crazy Taxi*, *Kim Possible: What's the Switch?*, *Pocky & Rocky!*, *WWE SvR '07*



Mads Amadeo Garcia III
You know the best part about living with a large family? We eventually get *all* the consoles or handhelds of the next few generations. In other words, I don't really care for which system the *Final Fantasy Tactics* port is coming out because our household has three DSes and a Sony PSP! Please excuse me while I fangasm on a nearby colleague. Can I say 'fangasm'?

Now Playing: With myself, *Bomberman Land*, *Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin*, *C* and *C: Red Alert*

Contents



Previews

Our big scoop is on a cute little game called *Gurumin*, but we've also got the goods on other hot spring titles like *Izuna and Lunar Knights*. We even bundled 'em up with big upcoming titles like *Crackdown*, *Cipher Complex*, and *Dragon Quest IX*.



10

New Stuff

HGM is giving you more dirt on more games! Check out our new *On the Download* section on page 72 for the hottest games you can buy outside of a box, and our new *Tournament* feature coverage on page 28. We'll even throw in more *Arcade* coverage for you on page 70! Now how much would you pay??



On the cover



Whether you're old enough for nostalgia or young enough to not know what the hell we're talking about, now is the era of retro! HGM's editors and correspondents get together to run down the best games you've ever played, never played, and how to play the classics again. The party starts on page...

34

- 8 : NEWS
- 10 : PREVIEW: GURUMIN: A MONSTROUS ADVENTURE
- 14 : PREVIEW: CRACKDOWN
- 16 : PREVIEW: IZUNA: LEGEND OF THE UNEMPLOYED NINJA
- 18 : PREVIEW: FUZION FRENZY 2
- 19 : PREVIEW: CIPHER COMPLEX
- 22 : PREVIEW: LUNAR KNIGHTS
- 24 : PREVIEW: DRAGON QUEST IX: GUARD OF THE STARRY NIGHT
- 24 : PREVIEW: DRAGON QUEST SWORDS
- 26 : PREVIEW: GHOST RIDER
- 28 : TOURNAMENTING: THE MGO
- 30 : MOBILE: 24: AGENT DOWN
- 32 : MOBILE: CENTIPEDE
- 32 : MOBILE: FIGHT NIGHT: ROUND 3
- 34 : COVER FEATURE: RETRO A GO-GO
- 56 : REVIEW: LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION
- 58 : REVIEW: CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN
- 59 : REVIEW: AR TONELICO: MELODY OF ELEMIA
- 60 : REVIEW: FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES
- 62 : REVIEW: KARAOKE REVOLUTION PRESENTS: AMERICAN IDOL
- 63 : REVIEW: HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V: HAMMERS OF FATE
- 64 : REVIEW: BIONICLE HEROES
- 65 : REVIEW: TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS
- 66 : REVIEW: DEAD OR ALIVE XTREME 2
- 68 : REVIEW: MAZES OF FATE
- 69 : REVIEW: METAL SLUG ANTHOLOGY
- 70 : ARCADE: INITIAL D: ARCADE STAGE 4
- 72 : DOWNLOADS
- 74 : JAPAN: UTAWARERUMONO
- 76 : JAPAN: CHAOS WARS
- 77 : JAPAN: THE ROAD TO THE INFINITY 3
- 78 : COSPLAY
- 80 : FAN ART
- 82 : FUNNIES



CODEMASTERS PRESENTS A KDV GAMES/CODEMASTERS PRODUCTION A CODEMASTERS GAME
 JAMES BUCHANAN, ARLAN KHAN AND MARCUS O'NEIL IN "MAELSTROM" INTRODUCING SASHA ANTONOVA

MAELSTROM™
 THE BATTLE FOR EARTH BEGINS

"MAELSTROM COULD BE THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE RTS GAME OF ALL TIME."
 - HARDCORE GAMER MAGAZINE

HARNESS THE FORCES OF NATURE AND FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL IN A FULLY DESTRUCTIBLE REALTIME STRATEGY ENVIRONMENT



Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

PC DVD-ROM
 REALTIME STRATEGY



© 2006 The Codemasters Software Company Limited. All rights reserved. "Maelstrom"™ is a trademark of The Codemasters Software Company Limited. Developed by KDV Games Company Limited. Published by The Codemasters Software Company Limited ("Codemasters"). "Codemasters"® is a registered trademark. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.



WILL WRIGHT'S THE MAN!

The Producers Guild of America announced that the 2007 Vanguard Award for outstanding achievement in new media and technology will be presented to game designer Will Wright, known for *Sim City* and *The Sims*. His creative vision has inspired some of the most critically acclaimed and popular video games in the short history of the medium. This is the first time in the Producers Guild history that the prestigious award has been given to a game designer. Wright and his team at EA Maxis are currently developing *Spore*, one of the most anticipated games of 2007. *Spore* will take players on an epic journey from the origin and evolution of life through the development of civilization and technology, and eventually lead all the way into the deepest reaches of outer space.



SPORE

Wright and his team at EA Maxis are currently developing *Spore*, one of the most anticipated games of 2007. *Spore* will take players on an epic journey from the origin and evolution of life through the development of civilization and technology, and eventually lead all the way into the deepest reaches of outer space.

GET READY TO BE IMMERSED WITH AMBX



A blend of a scripting language, software engine and architecture, amBX has been designed to deliver all-new player experiences through enabled devices such as LED color-controlled lights, active furniture, fans, heaters, audio, and video, all placed strategically around a player's room. The scripted effects delivered through the Philips amBX Peripherals will make the experience of playing a video game even more immersive. When racing, wind will blow through your hair and in your face, explosions will cause vibrations, and surround sound and lights will mimic the in-game world to further enhance the feeling of being part of the game.

Currently, Codemasters will implement amBX in its racing titles, and Introversion will adapt its recent *DEFCON* and *Darwinia* products, while THQ and Gas Powered Games will deliver realistic land, sea and air effects into the gamer's room, from the shell-shocking flash, bang and whoosh of artillery explosions to the helmet-rattling rumble of fearsome tank tracks. Even titles that are not specifically tailored to the amBX technology will benefit, as the scripting automatically detects what occurs on the screen and reacts accordingly, although in a lesser fashion.



NEXT-GEN LAWSUITS



There's no question that Nintendo's newest Wii console is popular, mainly due to its innovative controllers. Soon after its launch, reports started surfacing about flying Wiimotes, a result of overzealous gamers wildly swinging the remotes and causing

the wrist straps to snap. Unfortunately, what goes up must come down, and windows, furniture, and brand-new HDTVs were often on the receiving end of a flying Wiimote.

On December 6th, three law firms filed a nationwide class-action lawsuit in federal district court in Seattle, Washington, against Nintendo of America. The litigation requests that the defective parts be replaced, stating that a faulty remote is in breach of Nintendo's own product warranty. In mid-December, Nintendo started offering an exchange for a sturdier version of the wrist strap.

Microsoft also had its share of unhappy users when a recent system update made a user's Xbox 360 system inoperable. Said user filed a class-action lawsuit against Microsoft and is demanding a jury trial, citing breach of contract, a violation of consumer protection act, and negligence.

SEGA HATCHES "ALIEN" GAMES



Sega has signed an agreement with 20th Century Fox to develop some next-gen and PC titles set in the *Alien* universe, including an RPG and a first-person shooter, with the first product to be released in 2009. Sega is in talks with the film actors, including Sigourney Weaver and Lance Henriksen, to provide their likenesses and voices for the games. *Alien vs. Predator* is not part of the deal.

Sega has confirmed that the *Alien* RPG will be developed by Obsidian, known for the recent *Neverwinter Nights 2* and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: Sith Lords*, while the FPS title is in the hands of Gearbox Software, which is currently putting the finishing touches on *Brothers in Arms 3* for Ubisoft.



ALIENS

THE ONLY THINGS THAT QUELL THE VOICES IN KRATOS' HEAD ARE THE DYING SCREAMS OF HIS ENEMIES

GOD OF WAR

THE END BEGINS™
MARCH 2007



Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

GODOFWAR.COM

PlayStation 2



LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.™

God of War is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. ©2006 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. The End Begins is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "Live In Your World, Play In Ours." is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc.

HP 96 / 100

9770 590

A very welcome addition to the PSP library, Mastiff/Falcom's *Gurumin: A Monstrous Adventure* is a splendid Action/RPG romp that takes a page from Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda* series. Combining real-time action, exploration, dungeon crawling, item collecting, and plenty of RPG elements, this title is definitely going to fill a sorely lacking gap and should help give you another reason not to sell off your PSP.

In *Gurumin*, players take on the role of an uber-cutesy young girl named Parin, who has been sent to live with her grandfather in a sleepy mining town that is strangely kidless. While her parents are off excavating an ancient ruin, and with no other children to play with, Parin takes to exploring the town's streets and alleyways. Here she discovers and befriends a group of friendly monsters that only kids can see, who live in the village beyond a crack in the wall. She ultimately comes to their aid when an evil group of sprits, known as the Phantoms, invade the village and steal them away. With the aid of a weapon called the "Legendary Drill," Parin embarks on a grand quest to destroy the Phantoms and save her newfound friends.

As an Action/RPG, *Gurumin* harkens back to the days of 16-bit games when you couldn't get by on just fancy graphics alone. The game's puzzle solving, tight combat controls, and dungeon crawling are inventive, fun, and a joy to play. To top it off, Mastiff appears to be going all-out in producing a high-quality localization. It really reminds us of the glory days of Working Designs's fun-loving translations. To this end, they've collected a hefty who's who of videogame voice acting talent, including Tara Strong (*Final Fantasy X*, *Ninja Gaiden*, *Kingdom Hearts*), Dee Bradley Baker (*Halo 2*, *Destroy All Humans!*, *FF X-2*), and Amber Hood (*Everquest II*, *Oni Musha II*, *Baldur's Gate*), with voice direction by Kris Zimmerman (*Dead Rising*, *Tomb Raider: Legend*, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*).

Surprisingly, *Gurumin* is not a new game. Developed by Nihon Falcom (of *Ys* and *Popful Mail* fame) as a Japanese-only PC title in 2004, it was ported to the PSP by the developers and released in Japan in June of '06. Mastiff picked up on its whimsical charm and solid gameplay and took a chance on bringing it Stateside. At the end of the day, whether or not the game will be a success remains to be seen. The PSP market has become increasingly soft, and even though *Gurumin* fills a niche and is a blast to play, it is targeted to a very small albeit rabid base of fans.

We're looking forward to getting our hands on a localized US version of the game soon. With the release date just around the corner, *Gurumin* should give both PSP owners and RPG fans a reason to rejoice.

PUBLISHER: MASTIFF • DEVELOPER: FALCOM • RELEASE DATE: 02/12/07 • GENRE: ACTION RPG • CATEGORY: CUTE • # OF PLAYERS: 1

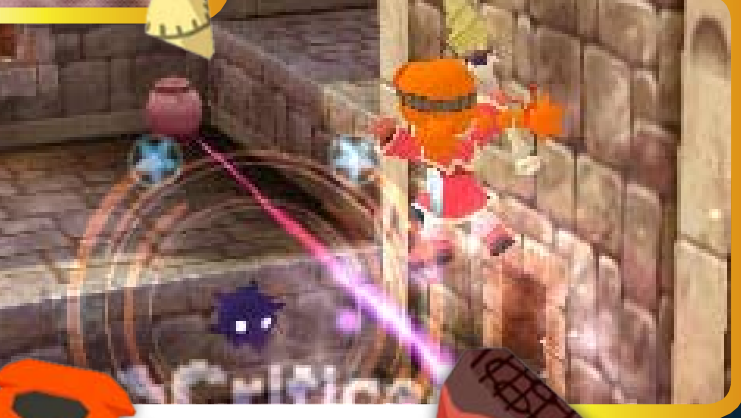
An overload of cute!

GURUMIN

A Monstrous Adventure



Preview by Roger Danish



CRACKDOWN

Carry the scales of justice in one hand, and a two-ton sedan in the other.

You're a genetically enhanced agent of justice authorized to do whatever it takes to sweep the criminal scum out of Pacific City. From the streets to the rooftops, use anything you can get your hands on to show the thugs that crime doesn't pay. And for the ultimate payoff, combine forces in co-op play for twice the destruction and double the retribution.

All Justice. No Restraints.



INCLUDES INVITATION TO HALO 3 MULTIPLAYER BETA

Limited time offer—look for specially marked boxes.*

* limited time offer—see www.xbox.com/halo3 Xbox 360™, hard drive, Xbox Live™, Gold required. Crackdown™, developed by Real Time Worlds Ltd. for Microsoft Corporation. Crackdown, the Crackdown logo, Real Time Worlds, and the Real Time Worlds logo are trademarks of Real Time Worlds Ltd. in the United States and/or other countries. All rights reserved. © 2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, the Microsoft Game Studios logo, Xbox, Xbox 360, the Xbox logos, Xbox Live, and the Xbox Live logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries.

MATURE 17+
 Blood and Gore
 Intense Violence
 Sexual Themes
 Strong Language
 Use of Drugs

Microsoft game studios XBOX LIVE real time worlds

WWW.CRACKDOWNONCRIME.COM

Jump in.

XBOX 360™

PREVIEW

PLATFORM XBOX 360

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Real Time Worlds
Release Date: Q1 2007
Genre(s): Sandbox
Category: Third-person shooter
of Players: 1-4



Preview by Jeremy

With GTA-co-creator David Jones at the helm, this adrenaline-pumping sandbox game emphasizes over-the-top action and visceral thrills over the genre-standard car theft. Through sheer force, you'll have to rid Pacific City of the crime syndicates that have plagued it. Just about everything you see can be used to clear the streets of crime. So if you're low on ammo, just beat someone to death with a piece of a building, or leap over a large building to attack foes on the other side.

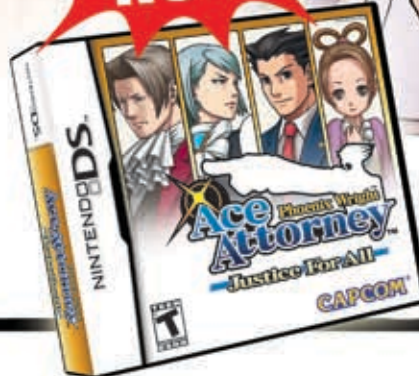
Crackdown's goal is to give players the freedom to do whatever they want whenever they want to do it. With that kind of gameplay behind an agile, Robocop-ish main character, this should be an easy and satisfying task to accomplish. Adding to the thrills will be over 100 licensed songs covering a wide array of genres. RTW promises that they'll give each character and location their own identity, and if that turns out to be the case, this could

By using a XIII-esque cel shading style and comic book panels to tell the story, Crackdown seems like a graphic novel come to life. Its emphasis on environment-destroying explosions gives it an old action movie feel. Plus, unlike other games, these blasts have long-lasting effects on the game world. This should help make RTW's dream of crafting a monstrosity large game full of meticulous gameplay details come true.

The Defense Never Rests!



AVAILABLE NOW



Ace Phoenix Wright Attorney™ Justice For All™

Also check out Phoenix Wright Mobile
www.capcommobile.com



NINTENDO DS™

www.ace-attorney.com

CAPCOM®

©CAPCOM CO., LTD. 2002, 2006. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. CAPCOM and the CAPCOM LOGO are registered trademarks of CAPCOM CO., LTD. PHOENIX WRIGHT and ACE ATTORNEY are trademarks of CAPCOM CO., LTD.™, ® and Nintendo DS are trademarks of Nintendo. ©2004 Nintendo. The ratings logo is a registered trademark of The Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks are owned by their respective owners.

LEGEND OF THE UNEMPLOYED NINJA 無職忍者伝 IZUNA

Preview by Sardius

Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Ninja Studio
Release Date: February 2007
Genre(s): RPG
Category: Roguelike
of Players: 1

War has ended. All feuding territories have settled their differences. Even the finicky gods have started to loosen up a little. At last, all seems right with the world.

That is, unless you're a ninja. When you live a life of thievery and murder, world peace sort of leaves you out of a job. Such is the problem facing our heroine Izuna, a former ninja settling into a newfound life of joblessness with what is left of her clan in a sleepy little mountain village. Izuna's kind of a clumsy girl, though, and it isn't long before she single-handedly angers the gods and the world once again needs the skills of a ninja.

If you've played *Torneko: The Last Hope*, *The Nightmare of Druaga*, or *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon*, you already know what to expect from *Izuna: Legend of the Unemployed Ninja*. It may not officially be a part of Chunsoft's *Fushigi no Dungeon* series, but *Izuna's* randomly generated levels, strict turn-based combat, and high difficulty level will remind you of the hardcore dungeon hacks of old.

Thankfully, *Izuna* does away with many of the gameplay annoyances that made *Rogue* and its successors so aggravating to play, making it easier to focus on its charming story and unique characters. Customizable weapons and strategy-intense boss battles only sweeten the deal. Get ready to step into the unemployment line in February.



INSTANTLY GO FROM ZERO TO HERO.

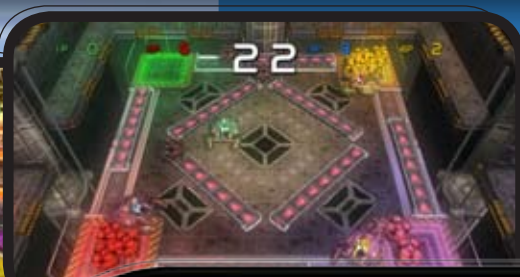
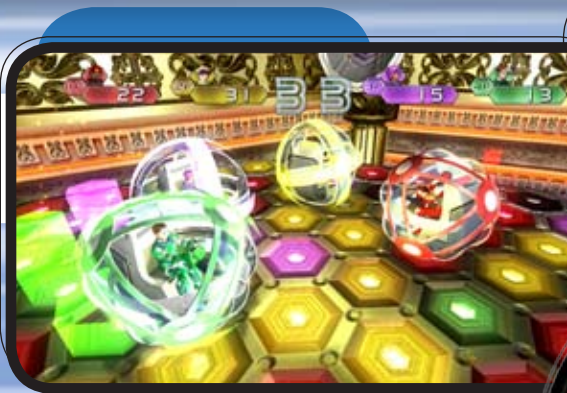
GET COIN, GEAR, AND MORE.

NOW GET 10% OFF*

*Use coupon code **cgsvad**. Expires 4/1/07

CHECK YOUR SERVER @ WWW.IGE.COM

LIVE CHAT & PHONE SUPPORT | BUY & SELL | HUGE SELECTION | INSTANT DELIVERY



FUZION FRENZY

2

Preview by *Lynara*

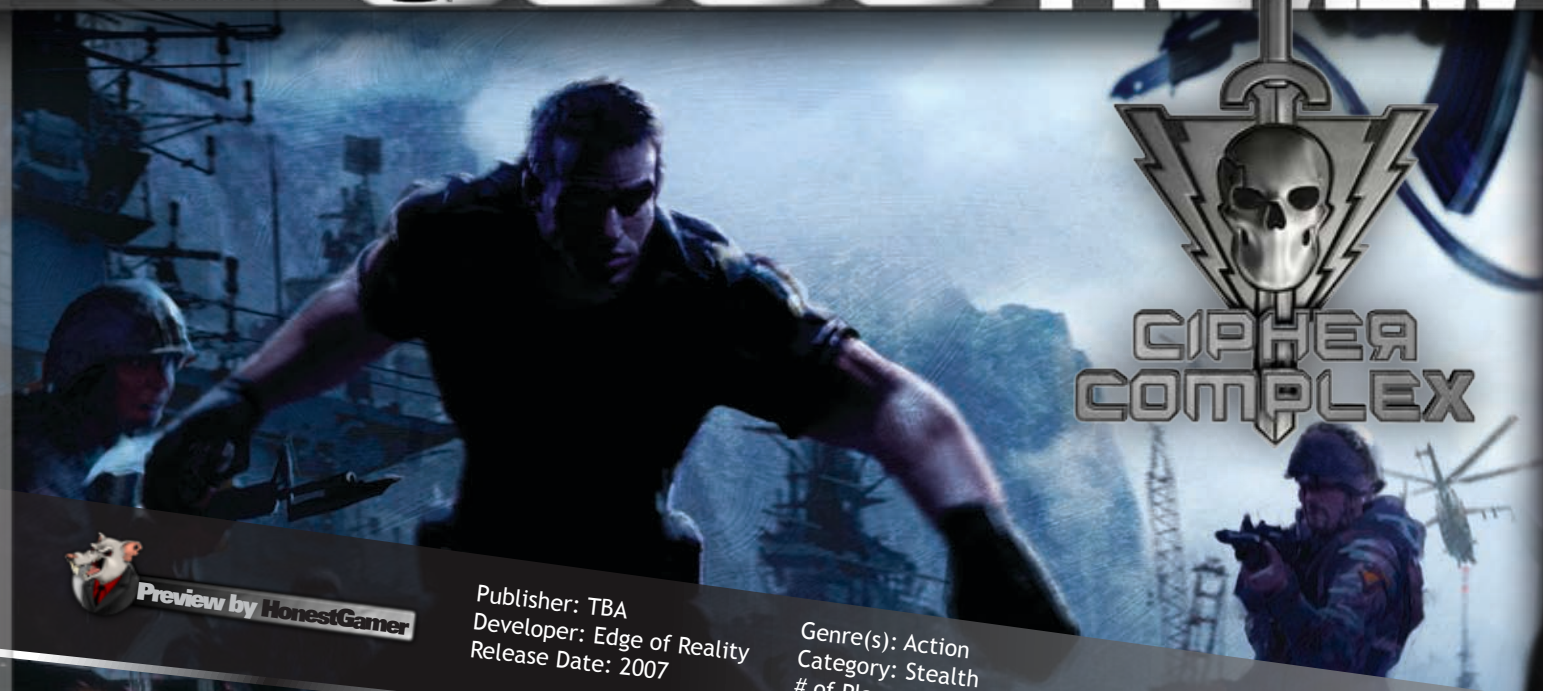
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Hudson Soft
Release Date: 1/30/07

Genre(s): Mini-Games
Category: Cartoony
of Players: 1-4

The talented folks at Hudson Soft developed the various *Mario Party* games for Nintendo, and in *Fuzion Frenzy 2* they're pretty much doing the same thing for Microsoft. To match the 360's sportier audience, the character designs have a bit more of an action-cartoon vibe to them, and they look much better on the 360 than they did on the Xbox. All six of the original playable characters return, along with rumors of a new, hidden seventh character.

What sets *Fuzion Frenzy 2* apart from the other Hudson titles in this vein is the way it incorporates Xbox Live into the gameplay, and its tournament mode. *Fuzion Frenzy 2*'s mini-games are strewn about seven planets, most grouped together by some obvious theme. You clear tournament mode by dominating so many planets (selectable when you start a tournament, up to five) by clearing all of the mini-games there and winning that planet's Battle Royale. During tournaments you play "Card Get" games to gather up "Frenzy Cards" that let you manipulate the rules of the tournament as you go.

Online or off, *Fuzion Frenzy 2* is pure party game. If you don't want to do the standard tournament mode, you can simply play individual games you like in Mini-Game Frenzy mode, or create your own tournaments in Custom mode. The mini-games themselves all use colorful 3D graphics, and seem designed with both young players and older gamers in mind. Usually, they involve collecting something or similarly outracing the other players to perform a particular task, with some hazards thrown around that can penalize you in various ways. It's fun light gaming, and definitely good for making sure little gamers don't up and start trying to play that copy of *Saints Row* you probably have sitting around.



Preview by *HonestGamer*

Publisher: TBA
Developer: Edge of Reality
Release Date: 2007

Genre(s): Action
Category: Stealth
of Players: 1

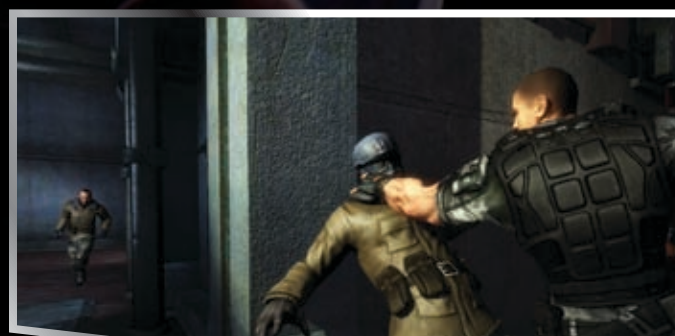
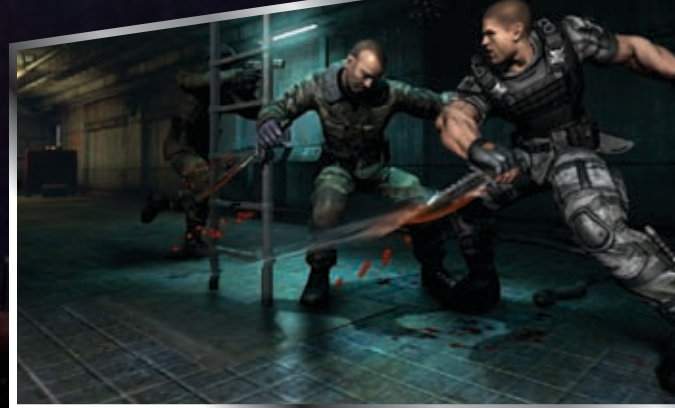


Cipher Complex, Edge of Reality's take on the whole "government likes you enough to grant you carte blanche but won't admit you exist if you get caught" sort of game, is an in-your-face twist on the genre presently dominated by Sam Fisher and Solid Snake. Built on the Havok engine, it boasts stunning particle effects, detailed character models and a glossy sheen that makes something crystal clear: graphics and action weren't afterthoughts.

You can see it in the big details, like a hallway that fades into the sweet darkness. Two soldiers patrol the lonely chamber, guns diagonal across their chest, faces down. You can see it in the small ones: John Cipher stands at one end or the corridor, leaning against a wall with a bloody knife the size of a lead pipe hanging almost negligently from an arm so muscular it would make Arnold Schwarzenegger wake in a cold sweat. Biceps and veins bulge.

As one soldier strays further from his comrade than is wise, Cipher steps out from behind the wall, lifts his hapless adversary with one arm and slams him against the wall. He's like James Bond, if England's finest ditched the martini for an extra 50 pounds of pure muscle. The soldier's bones crack against the concrete and he goes down in a heap. Already Cipher is moving on to the other patrolman. He hasn't even broken a sweat.

The blend of stealth, action and a visual kick in the abdomen are just what some gamers are seeking. It's hard not to look at *Cipher Complex* as a long-overdue upgrade to the genre. The folks at Edge of Reality would certainly like your consideration and, after what we've seen, we're ready to say they just might deserve it. Sometimes you don't see the good ones coming.



DAYTRON

WANTED

FOR SPACE PIRACY



NAME: ZEGRAM\\DORGENARK
CRIME: SPACE PILLAGING
LAST SEEN: ZERARD\\GUN SYSTEM

THE DAYTRON CORPORATION POSTS A BOUNTY TO BE PAID IN FULL TO ANY INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CAPTURE OR KILLING OF THIS INTERGALACTIC CRIMINAL.

TEXT
"ZEGRAM"
TO 65579 TO
RECEIVE YOUR
REWARD*



ROGUE GALAXY



Blood
Crude Humor
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol and Tobacco
Violence



WWW.ROGUEGALAXY-THEGAME.COM

PlayStation 2

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.

Rogue Galaxy is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Created and developed by Level 5. ©2006 Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "Live in Your World, Play in Ours." is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. "Standard text-messaging rates apply, per your cell phone carrier/text-message plan. No Purchase Necessary. Open to legal residents of 50 U.S. & DC aged 13 or older at time of entry. Void where prohibited. To enter: 1) Between 12:00:00 am PT on 1/17/07 & 11:59:59 pm PT on 2/25/07 ("Promotion Period"), text-message either "Jester," "Zegram" or "Keala" to 65579 using wireless device capable of 2-way text-messaging. You will receive a return text message including a phone number. Call the provided phone number to hear a prerecorded message from a Rogue Galaxy character on your wireless device. During message follow directions to enter Sweepstakes & receive 8 text messages about the Rogue Galaxy game; OR 2) To enter and listen to prerecorded message from 1 of the Rogue Galaxy characters above without sending a text message visit www.spacepirateswanted.com during Promotion Period, & complete & submit the Official Entry Form to receive 1 entry & 8 e-mail messages about the Rogue Galaxy game. You may opt out of receiving text or e-mail messages at any time by following instructions in the text/e-mail message sent to you. Eight (8) Grand Prizes: 1) prizewinner per Entry Period; one (1) Silver PlayStation2 computer entertainment system & five PlayStation2 games (SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs, Shadow of the Colossus, Hatchet: Deadlocked, Jak X: Combat Racing, and Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves). ARV = \$229.94. Selection of games at Sponsor's discretion & based on availability. Taxes are winners' sole responsibility. Odds of winning any drawing will depend on the total number of eligible entries received for the applicable drawing. Subject to Official Rules & Entry Period details available at www.spacepirateswanted.com or by sending a SASE for receipt by 3/30/07 to: Rogue Galaxy WINNERS, P.O. Box 13198, Bridgeport, CT 06673-3198. For winners list, send SASE for receipt by 3/30/07 to: Rogue Galaxy WINNERS, P.O. Box 13198, Bridgeport, CT 06673-3198.

LUNAR KNIGHTS™

Konami may have skipped out on bringing the final game in the Game Boy Advance *Boktai* trilogy to the United States, but disillusioned series fans are likely to forget about their angry Internet petitions upon the release of *Lunar Knights*. As a spiritual successor to the *Boktai* series, *Lunar Knights* aims to resuscitate the franchise while simultaneously adding several new features to make the core gameplay better than ever.

Take *Boktai* and *Boktai 2*'s characteristic sun sensor, for instance, which required players to expose their GBA cartridges to direct sunlight in order to trigger in-game effects. While it was a neat enough gimmick at first, many felt that it often impeded gameplay and presented needless complexity.

In *Lunar Knights*, the sun sensor is an optional element that only comes into play if one of the original *Boktai* games is inserted into the DS's GBA cart slot, and serves as a bonus rather than a requirement. Many other improvements have been made as well. While gamers can expect the same action/RPG/stealth gameplay hybrid that defined the *Boktai* series, *Lunar Knights* adds more depth to each of these components. RPG nuts will be pleased by weapon customization features and numerous sidequests, sneaky sorts will enjoy the simplified and understated stealth segments, and as for fans of action games... well, how do full-on, ship-in-space shooter levels sound?

Lunar Knights's earnest, almost puppy-like efforts at pleasing gamers of all breeds seem to be working in its favor so far. The end result should satisfy longtime *Boktai* fans and series newcomers alike when it drops in February.



Preview by Sarius

Publisher: Konami
 Developer: Kojima Productions
 Release Date: 2/6/2007
 Genre(s): Action/RPG
 Category: Sun-tanned
 # of Players: 1



IT COMES...

Vengeance, Power, and a Menace born of Jewels.



Over 5 hours of brilliantly voiced gameplay!

Wireless vs mode lets you battle and trade over 100 monsters!



Monster Kingdom Jewel Summoner



From the creator of the Shin Megami Tensei® series, with a stunning soundtrack and detailed storylines, this is the first truly deep RPG for the PSP® (PlayStation®Portable) system!



© Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved. Monster Kingdom Jewel Summoner is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Licensed to and published by Atlus USA. Shin Megami Tensei is a registered trademark of Atlus USA. "PlayStation", "PS" Family logo, and "PSP" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Memory Stick Duo™ may be required (sold separately). The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.



ドラゴンクエストIX 星空の守り人

IX

Platform: Nintendo DS | ESRB: TBA | Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Level-5 | Release Date: TBA | Genre: Action RPG
Category: YES | # Players: 1-4



This is not something I ever expected to be writing about, but in retrospect I shouldn't be surprised. The DS is crushing not just all other portable competition in Japan, but basically every other system in the market, period. It's not doing much worse over on this side of the Pacific, so it's no surprise that Square Enix would be willing to green light a project of this magnitude for a portable system.

Not much is known about the game itself yet. Pretty much the entire creative team behind the smash hit *Dragon Quest VIII* is returning, including composer Koichi Sugiyama, designer Akira Toriyama, series creator Yuji Horii, and Level-5 (with their trademark 3D cel-shading). Despite this, the game itself is shaping up to be a pretty significant departure from anything previously done in the main series.

Screenshots make it clear that the menu-driven combat style used in just about every previous *Dragon Quest* title is being jettisoned in favor of a real-time action system, said to offer wii co-op for up to four players simultaneously.



DRAGON QUEST SWORDS

Platform: Nintendo Wii | ESRB: TBA | Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Genius Sonority Inc. | Release Date: Q2 2007
Genre: Action RPG | Category: VERY YES | # Players: 1

Before Nintendo graced the world with Wii, *Dragon Quest* fans in Japan could play a game called *Kenshin Dragon Quest* that let you battle monsters with a sword-shaped controller and damage enemies by sweeping your arm. Now that the Wii's here, it's the obvious hardware to host a full-blown console game built around the same concept. In *Dragon Quest Swords* your remote becomes sword and shield, letting you battle it out with enemy monsters in real-time action sequences.

Slash your remote to create a sword-slash in the same direction. When monsters close in to attack, hit the A button and bring up your shield. Point it in the right direction onscreen, and you'll save yourself from a vicious pounding. Enemies too far away for a sword fight? Just aim your remote and press B to unleash a powerful blast of magic lightning. The first person exploration sounds great, and this is definitely a Wii game that'll appeal to people who like to get a workout while they play.



Previews by Lynara

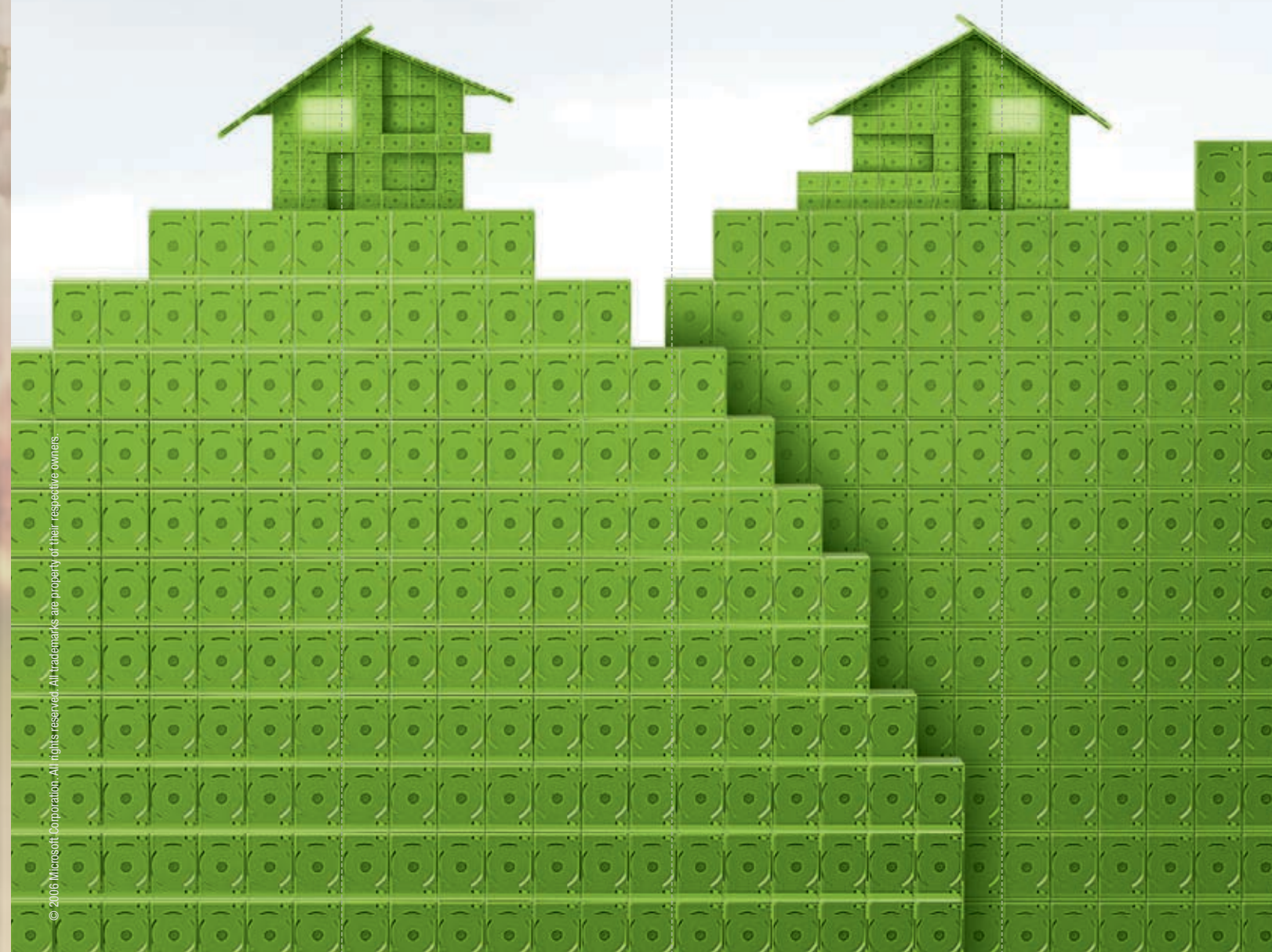
Fold so A meets B **A**

B

THE NEXT GENERATION IS PLAYING WITH FRIENDS ON XBOX LIVE™

No matter where your friends are, they're still only a corner kick away. Play what you want, with whom you want, on your terms and your couch. Video chat, play, compete, gossip, play, love, play. Enjoy. xbox.com

DISTANCE TEARS FRIENDS APART. XBOX LIVE™ BRINGS THEM TOGETHER.



© 2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. All trademarks are property of their respective owners.

Jump in.





GHOST RIDER

Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Climax
Release Date: February 2007

Genre(s): Action
Category: Combos set aflame
of Players: 1 (4 on PSP)



Preview by Metalbot

"Oh, no! Not another movie game!" was probably the first thought you had when looking at this page. Fear not! *Ghost Rider* (so far) is turning out to be a solid game.

In the vein of *Devil May Cry* and *God of War*, *Ghost Rider* is an action beat 'em up that focuses on outlandish combos. Using his fists, chains and shotgun, *Ghost Rider* puts the smack down with plenty of style, and fire. Lots of fire. His head is on fire, after all!

The other half of the game is filled with fast-paced bike levels. These have plenty of obstacles to avoid (via jumping or sliding), lots of demons to kill, and of course, more fire.

There will be plenty of unlockables as well. Never read the first issue of *Ghost Rider*? Now you can. Never read *The End of Ghost Rider*? Get enough points and you can read that too! There will also be concept art and interview videos with the game developers. There have been rumblings of unlockable characters as well, but I won't ruin that surprise.

If you're into *Ghost Rider*, *Combo Orgies*, or skulls that are set aflame, watch for this sometime in February.



FLY AWAY, WIRE.

FLY AWAY.

THE NEXT GENERATION IS A WIRELESS WORLD. Stand up for freedom and sit down wherever you want. With the Wireless Headset, Wireless Racing Wheel with Force Feedback, Wireless Controllers, and more, all optimized for the Xbox 360™, you can play around while you move around. xbox.com

© 2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. All trademarks are property of their respective owners.



Jump in.



TOURNAMENTS

About

The Midnight Gaming Championship is the first competition of its kind, giving gamers the chance to show off their skills at a variety of games for a chance to win cash and prizes. MGC is the brainchild of Jeff Gross, the President and founder of the Video Gamers League. VGL is one of the largest video game leagues in the country and has put together some of the best competitions to date. Players of all skill levels are encouraged to come out and compete.

McDonald's was the title sponsor of MGC, along with a who's who of well-known companies like Coca Cola, G4TV, and Best Buy. MGC featured *Tekken 5*, *Guitar Hero*, and *NCAA 07* competitions on the PS2. The qualifiers took place over nine weeks, with the top twenty-four winners going forward to the Championship. The Adrenaline Gaming Zone, through a close relationship with Rockstar Games, was able to add *Rockstar Games Presents Table Tennis* to the semi-final tournament. There was an open competition for anyone who wanted to compete at the finals, which were held in the private Diamond Club at Ameritrust Field.

The sponsors put up the following prizes for champions:

- a \$1,000 Best Buy Gift Card
- an Xbox 360, courtesy of GameZnFlix
- a Sony PSP, courtesy of Best Buy
- a \$100 Arch Card, courtesy of McDonald's
- \$500 cash, courtesy of McDonald's
- The *Guitar Hero* champion received a guitar autographed by the GH development team, courtesy of Red Octane
- One lucky winner won a trip to appear on G4TV's *Attack of the Show*



Results

Rockstar Games Presents Table Tennis

Don't sell this game short, or you'll miss out on one of the most addictive games for the Xbox 360. The competition used a college basketball-type elimination bracket of sixteen players, each going for a best two out of three wins in order to advance. The winner from the previous week's tournament at the semifinals suffered a surprise defeat to F-minus, who moved on to the finals to face "puppy," an eight-year-old girl who's so good that it was scary. Once F-minus figured out puppy's strategy he made pretty quick work of her, though, and took the title for that game. His winnings included apparel and a \$100 Best Buy card from Rockstar Games. Adrenaline Gaming Zone added a bonus Game Face faceplate for the Xbox 360 courtesy of Nyko Technologies.

Tekken 5

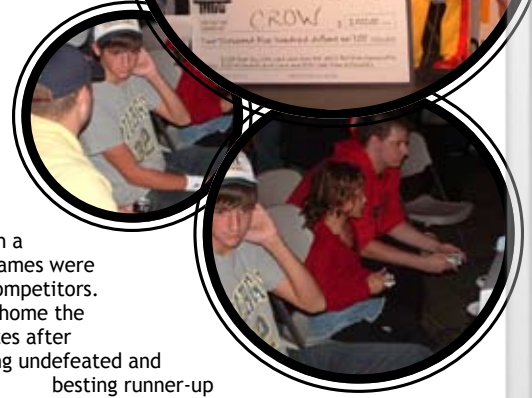
Dozens of players turned out for *Tekken*, including some of the best players in the world like Hatman and Unkonkable. The tournament was speechless when new players like Crow, Jinmaster and DJ Kor pulled off completely new moves. The final match was a "best of seven" brawlfest. Christopher Villarreal, aka Crow, won the championship undefeated by spanking Rene Maistry, aka DJ Kor, to claim his \$2500 in cash and prizes.

Guitar Hero

A lot of the players in the finals, like Forge Fanatic, were actually real-life musicians, and it showed. The final battle was between JW McNay, aka JW2, and Kevin Creadick, Musa, playing to songs like "No One Knows" on Expert difficulty. The bass was thumping and the crowd was going like it was a concert. JW2 walked away the victor, with the \$2500 in cash and prizes including the autographed *Guitar Hero* controller.

NCAA 07 Football

NCAA 07 Football: This came in strong with a huge following of dedicated gamers. Games were long and full of trash talk from the competitors. Vistoht Am, aka The Punisher, took home the big prize of \$2500 in cash and prizes after going undefeated and besting runner-up JimmyDee.



a feature by Vernon Ross of www.agzonline.com

the midnight gaming championship

ADD HD DVD TO YOUR XBOX 360™

THEN ADD SALT TO YOUR POPCORN.

THE NEXT GENERATION IS A MORE BEAUTIFUL MOVIE. Plug in and tune everything else out with the Xbox 360™ HD DVD Player. Experience six times the resolution of DVD at up to 1080p and up to six times the disbelief, for one clearly affordable price. xbox.com



King Kong on HD DVD and Universal Media Remote included for a limited time.

HD DVD
THE LOOK AND SOUND OF PERFECT™

Jump in.

XBOX 360™

© 2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. All trademarks are property of their respective owners. © 2006 Universal Studios. All Rights Reserved.

REVIEW

24: *Agent Down* is the second adventure based on Fox's hit television series. In the game, CTU Los Angeles has been raided by a group of terrorists. They barricade themselves in the building, and threaten to start killing hostages if anyone attempts to come in. Now, it's up to Jack and the remaining agents to save the day.

Like the first title, *Agent Down* is a mixture of action and puzzles, the latter of which are carefully woven into the storyline. Most of the game takes place in Infiltrate mode, where Jack runs around the CTU building freeing hostages, taking out the bad guys and wreaking havoc to secure the safety of his fellow agents. He must quietly go about his missions without prompting surrounding terrorists to raise the alarm, resulting in a *Metal Gear*-esque feel to the gameplay.

Jack has access to weapons like dart guns and knives, but the most cleverly used item is the Decoy. It can be planted in one spot while he moves away. Activate it, and a terrorist guard will go searching in that direction. Then Jack can sneak up on the guard or bypass him altogether. If you take the guard out, you can then drag his body somewhere less visible. You can call on Curtis to provide sniper cover, and take out enemies before they know what hit them. Opportunities like these bring amazing depth to the game, because you can choose how to tackle each level.

When Jack needs to pick locks, defuse bombs, or hack computers, you begin an appropriate puzzle-like mini-game. A few of these include stopping a rotating light on a specific, also rotating target. It's something like a roulette wheel with concentric wheels inside of it, each moving faster. There's one where you have to keep an electric charge "afloat" over a certain distance. Defusing bombs is a matter of pushing pins into holes.

All of them are new and challenging, just like the main game.

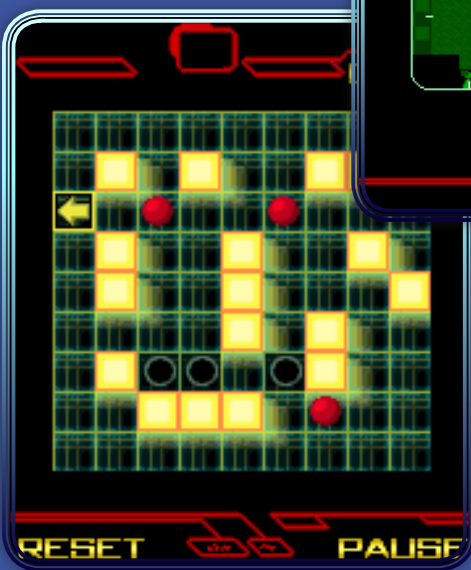
The enemies are much smarter this time around and become very aggressive when the alarm level goes up. They will hunt you down as soon as they see a fallen partner, or until the threat level goes down. It's important to stay cool and proceed with caution without taking too long. While each level emphasizes stealth action, it's also timed.

24: *Agent Down* has twenty-four total missions of well-designed action that clearly surpasses the first 24 mobile title. The game flows from action to mini-game exceptionally well, and the simple one-thumb controls are responsive and intuitive. Like its source material, the game's drama is constant. You'll be hard-pressed to put it down until you've reached the conclusion.

Publisher: I-play
Developer: I-play
Release Date: Now

Genre: The Jack...
Category: Bauer Show!
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE :
4.5 of 5



EXPRESS YOURSELF THE WAY NATURE INTENDED.

WITH YOUR FACE.

THE NEXT GENERATION IS SEEING FRIENDS FROM MILES AWAY. The future of gaming is here, and it looks like your buddy Keith. Video chat with family. Personalize your gamer picture. Practice your smirks. With the Xbox Live™ Vision Camera, those closest to you get even closer. xbox.com



© 2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. All trademarks are property of their respective owners.

Jump in.

XBOX 360

CENTIPEDE

The first *Centipede* for mobiles was marred by slowdown and bad control. Fortunately, an updated version is now in the works, with an eye toward correcting the issues of the previous version.

Purists will be glad to know that Glu has been diligently keeping the look and feel of the original while improving performance. Most of the sounds have been kept intact and the controls, while still lacking a trackball, feel comfortable and are suitably responsive.

One of the big features of the new version is the ability to customize the appearance of your game with a variety of graphical themes. While you can play the game in its arcade original form, you can also choose to play arcade-quality *Centipede* with a modern graphical skin on it. The themes offered include "Contempo," of what the game might look like if it were created today, and "Robo," which gives it a futuristic sci-fi look.

The other big feature is a new "power-up" option. After selecting the theme of your choice, you can choose to play the game with new weapon types added. These additions really enhance the classic shooter in a great way. You can pick up shooter mainstays like lasers, bombs, three-way shots and shields, just to name a few. *Centipede* is fun, but *Centipede* with modern power-ups is even better.



The new version of *Centipede* won't be available until Q1 2007 at the earliest, and it's good to finally see a worthy version of this classic game ready for download. Given that arcade classics tend to do well on the download charts, and that this version maintains the core *Centipede* experience while offering a variety of enhancements, Glu may have the next big mobile hit on its hands.

Publisher: Glu
Developer: Glu
Release Date: Q1 2007

Genre: Arcade
Category: Retro Remake
of Players: 1



Fight Night Round 3 is EA's boxing simulation powerhouse that features real-life world-ranked boxers going mano a mano. Included are greats like Oscar De La Hoya and Roy Jones Jr., but you'll also find other boxers like Arturo Gatti and Mickey Ward that have had big rivalries throughout the years.

The two modes available are Quick Fight and Career, where you can use a customized boxer to fight your way through three circuits. You can give your boxer a name, skin tone and colors. You can then add points to attributes like Power, Stamina, Heart and Speed to build a fighter that fits your style. Before matches, you can opt to train and this increases or decreases the point values of the different attributes. Training takes the form of three types of mini-games and each awards different point values, so you'll need to decide what is important to you. For instance, if you choose Weight Lifting, you can increase power but at the cost of speed.

For controls, you primarily use the d-pad, which is good for beginners. With the keypad, you can access extra punches. Your fighter can move forward or back, and by pressing up or down, high and low versions of punching and blocking are available. You can taunt or tie-up the opposing fighter to replenish stamina, or use an illegal head-butt that can give you a huge advantage or cause a disqualification. If you happen to get knocked down, another sort of mini-game ensues where you must move a cursor over a target before the 10-count ends. In the early going it's not very difficult but after a couple of knockdowns, your aim can be completely off. The fighting is fine-tuned so that you can't just button mash your way through a match. You must set up strong punches with jabs, and good combos aren't necessarily obvious. The opponent intelligently counters your attacks from very early on in the rankings. Reaching the top spot is going to take some blood, sweat and tears.



Fight Night Round 3 has excellent 3D graphics, with a wide range of motion for each boxer. The game's ambience is dazzlingly console-authentic, with superior music, cut-scenes, sound effects, and blow-by-blow commentary onboard. The controls do take some getting used to, but your reward is a great mobile boxing experience.

Publisher: EA
Developer: EA
Release Date: Now

Genre: Boxing
Category: Fight it out!
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE:
4 of 5

REVIEW

PREVIEW



FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

THE NEXT GREAT ACTION RPG FROM THE CREATORS OF THE "Ys" SERIES.

"Classic Falcom gaming reborn in a 21st-century package... It's simply too good and too honest a gaming experience to pass up."

— PLAY Magazine

"Gurumin: A Monstrous Adventure combines beautiful visuals with a solid soundtrack for a great RPG experience."

— RPGAMER.COM

Silver Award

— Famitsu Magazine

From
Developing Incredible
Adventures for Over 25 Years
NIHON FALCOM

GURUMIN

A Monstrous Adventure

IN STORES
FEBRUARY 13, 2007



Level up and master the Legendary Drill to crush enemies, destroy environmental hazards, and unleash powerful combo attacks and special moves.



Interact with 23 unique characters, battle 48 varieties of enemies, and collect over 90 items. Find and forge equipment to gain the upper hand on your foes.



Explore a vast world with challenging boss battles, trap-filled dungeons, mind bending puzzles, and addictive mini-games.



Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.



PlayStation® Portable



Used under license from Nihon Falcom Corporation



MASTIFF

RETRO a GO-GO!

Intro by: Daniel Kayser of GameTrailers.com

"What an awesome time to be a gamer!" I've been hearing that phrase a lot lately, and with good reason. The Nintendo Wii, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 are ushering in the next generation of gaming while a plethora of PC and portable games along with the resurgence of retro gaming are adding tons of variety (and plenty of spice) to the budding culture of video games.

But how did we get here? What has helped define what a "great game" really is over the years? How will inspirations of the past spark the games of the future?

All of us here at HGM are, well, Hardcore gamers. We've grown up playing games that we not only remember, but cherish. I'm talking about games that made us fall in love with an industry very few believed in while instilling a life-long appreciation for the art of interactive entertainment.

In honor of this excellent time in gaming history, we at HGM decided to take a hard look back at the games that inspired us as individuals. Of course the *Marios*, *Zeldas*, and *Final Fantasies* of the world all have a place in our hearts and on our lists of personal favorites, but we wanted to compile a sampling of games that exist somewhere between the known

and the unknown. Somewhere between "Super Star" status and "One Hit Wonder." Games that you may or may not remember (largely based on your age), but games that you *should* know since they impacted the industry in one form or another. While we all revel in the current state of gaming goodness, here's our invitation to whip up a warm cup of nostalgia and enjoy this look back at some of HGM's favorite Hardcore Classics.



Building Blocks

by: Wanderer

If It's Wireless, Put It Down

All right. That's enough.

Shut the computer off. Stop grinding your pally; the guild can last for a few hours without you. Shut off the 360; Locusts will have to remain unchained for the time being. Don't log onto your favorite forum, either. You aren't actually going to win that argument you're having about *Final Fantasy 7*, or about the PS3 and whether or not it has the ability or even the right to survive. Stop worrying about how you're going to afford an HDTV, or whether or not *Oblivion* sucked, or whatever your particular, unique gamer war happens to be.

(You know what a gamer war is. Every one of you has one. It's that one topic, that one thorn in your side, that burr in your bonnet that always gets you into those long online arguments. You could be in a terminal coma and you'd jump up and get into a thread on the topic. If you're voluntarily reading this magazine in the first place, no matter what else you have in your life, you have a gamer war. Forget it. It does not matter today. (Or any day, really, if we're going to be honest about it.) Put it away.)

Go to the attic, or the basement, or the dusty corner of your game room. Open the box where you put your childhood, and clear the cobwebs away. Ditch the Weebles, the denim jacket, and the Motley Crue cassettes; they're incidental to the process. We're after the old hardware.

(If you're too young to *have* an old console, then go buy a Flashback or something. We'll wait. You can coast on our nostalgia.)

Remember these controllers? Remember blowing on the cartridges, or seeing something ridiculous like *ActRaiser* and thinking this was as good as graphics could get? Remember blast processing, fighting Slimes outside Breconary, that stupid reset trick on *X-Men* for the Genesis, or getting your teeth kicked in by *Zelda's* second quest?

Of course you do.



Old Memories at Bold New Prices

It's never been easier to pick up old games than it is right now. Between eBay, arcade compilations, the Xbox Live Marketplace, the Wii Shop Channel, the PlayStation Store, abandonware, GameTap, emulators, and DOSBox, you could be up to your eyeballs in old games in the time it takes you to read the rest of this article. It's weird, but at a point in time where we're talking at tiresome length about the next generation, we're spending a lot of time revisiting the past.

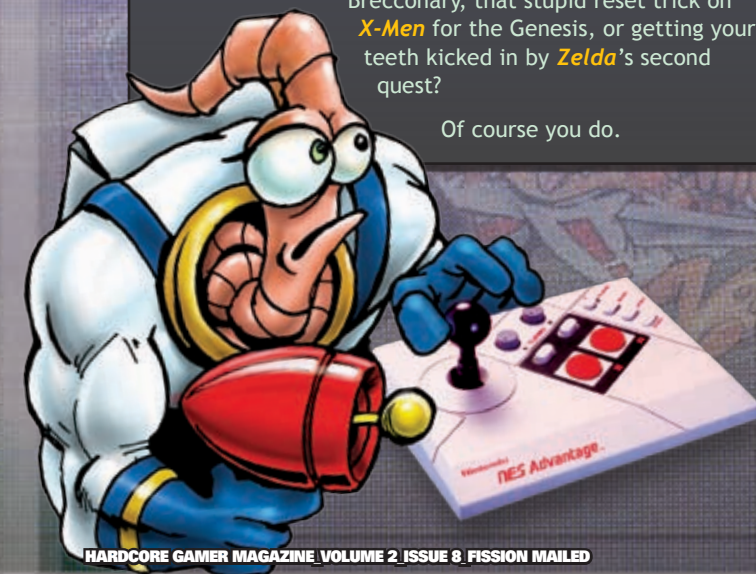
A cynic could note at this point that half the reason we're doing so is because it's cost-effective, and because game companies seem to have this thing about making us pay twice or more for the same title. Fortunately, I am not that cynic right now.

Still, you can't deny it. Everyone is cashing in on nostalgia right now, so we figured it was our turn.

We didn't want to do a top ten, though, or some other ridiculous and artificial ranking article. Oh, sure, the temptation was there; the temptation is always there, to go on autopilot and churn out the Top One Hundred Old Games That If You Have Not Played, You Are A Worthless Smear of Protein Who Should Turn His Gamer Card In To His Local Union Representative, Never Mind The Fact That Half Of Them Go For Two Hundred Dollars or More on eBay.

We avoid that temptation, most of the time, because that's *extremely stupid*. All those articles seem to be predicated on the false premise that there's one way and one road to being, dare I even say it, a hardcore gamer; that if you don't like this and this and this, you don't get into the club. That's crap. It's been crap since second one on day one. If anyone tells you otherwise, tell them the same.

This isn't the top ten, the top hundred, or the top anything. It's what we like, what we decided to talk about, and why.





PlayStation®2

NIS America

Ar tonelico™

MELODY OF ELEMIA



THE ART OF "GRATHMEUDING"

A massive item customization system that allows you to customize and create new items.



UNLEASH "SONG MAGIC"

Use the Power of Songs to heal your friends and defeat your enemies.



INTIMATE "DIVE SYSTEM"

Interact with your team members in a private, digital world.



EXPANSIVE AND FUTURISTIC WORLD

Explore the beauty and elegance of the Tower of Ar tonelico, a world unlike any other.



You never forget Your First ...

Redefining the meaning of RPG!!!

After two great wars, the world has been reduced to a floating continent and the mysterious Tower of Ar tonelico. But, with the arrival of Viruses, the world is once again put in danger, and all mankind faces extinction!

Don't miss NIS America's first premium box!!

Go to www.NISAmerica.com now to find out more about the exclusive offers!



Available February 2007



©2007 GUST CO., LTD. ©2007 BANPRESTO CO., LTD. All rights reserved. Licensed to and Published by NIS America, Inc. Ar tonelico is a trademark of BANPRESTO CO., LTD. Distributed exclusively by ATLUS U.S.A. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.

The Hardcore Gamer Hall of Fame

We sat down and had an argument about this, and eventually, it was resolved by dint of the fact that some of us are more important than others.

These are the most influential, important, historic, or just plain good games we could think of. They're the games we're still

playing, either by themselves or through the hundreds of games they've influenced since then.

If we had giant, shiny gold trophies to give out, these are the games we'd give them to. They're the building blocks of gaming. Respect them.

Super Mario Bros.

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1985

We're all here because of this, more so than anything else. *SMB* is the focus point that everything comes from. As the pack-in game with the NES, it contributed mightily to rescuing the entire video game industry from the post-Atari crash. Even more importantly, *Super Mario Bros.* is the first console game with an ending.



In the 8-bit era, it touched off a relentless wave of sidescrolling platformers. In the 16-bit era, *SMB*'s sequels led directly to the mascot explosion. Even now, any time you see a little cute thing with



an enormous attitude problem jumping over a bottomless cliff, it's because Mario got there and did that first.

Doom

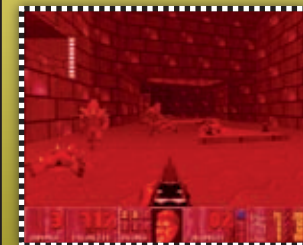
PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 1993

It wasn't the first FPS. It wasn't even the first FPS from id Software. It was, however, the game that put the FPS on the map, with everything that comes with it. Without *Doom*, we wouldn't have half the games that make up the gaming landscape now, from *Half-Life* (and thus *Counterstrike*) to *Halo*.



We also wouldn't have an entire style of gaming. *Doom* embodies the balls-to-the-wall shoot-'em-up in a way that very few games in any genre manage to pull off. It's pure adrenaline-fueled twitch gaming, and it has no real equal. Its recent rerelease on Xbox Live Arcade just reinforced the point.

Perhaps most importantly, though, *Doom* taught us a very important lesson that is still



relevant and wholesome to this day: chainsaws rule. Find some meat!

Zork

PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 1979

"You are about to be eaten by a grue" is one of those gamer in-jokes that virtually everyone recognizes. If we should ever be driven underground by a violently dystopian world government and be forced to unite into a ragtag but determined rebel force, "You are about to be eaten by a grue" will be the secret phrase that lets you into the hideout.



Like *Doom*, *Zork* wasn't the first game in its genre (and *Colossal Cave Adventure* is pretty fun in its own right), but it set a lot of balls rolling nonetheless. It started off the interactive fiction genre, it led directly to modern adventure games, and it provided us all with hours of entertainment being devoured by grues. It seems a little less influential these days, now that the entire meaning of the phrase "adventure game" has



changed so drastically, but that doesn't diminish *Zork*'s importance at all.

Street Fighter II

PLATFORM: Arcade
YEAR: 1991

Capcom has spent a lot of time recently trying to make sure that anyone who owns a gaming platform has a copy of *Street Fighter II* (and a couple of our staffers have three or more), since it celebrated its fifteenth anniversary this year. This, on top of the multiple releases the game's already enjoyed on the SNES, Genesis, PSOne, Dreamcast, PS2, Xbox, 3DO, and some select models of toaster oven, is getting a little silly.



Of course, they couldn't have gotten away with this for so long if they didn't have something special on their hands. *Street Fighter II* started



the 16-bit fighter explosion, which in turn spawned the most enduring and fervent fanbase in the industry. It doesn't hurt that *SF2* itself, in several of its iterations, is one of the most strategic games out there, with people who've spent a decade mastering it. It not only kickstarted a genre, but it's got more staying power than most games can even dream of.

By the way, this needs to be said: Capcom. *Street Fighter 4*. Now, please. Hire whoever you have to.



The Legend of Zelda

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1987

Anecdotally, Shigeru Miyamoto based the first *Legend of Zelda* on the experiences he had exploring the fields and caves outside Kyoto as a kid. Along those same lines, every *Zelda* game since the first one has provided the player with a vast playground to explore, with little secrets and side passages to find almost everywhere you look.



Zelda is a fairly obvious candidate for an article like this just on its fanbase. A modern *Zelda* game occupies a unique niche as How You Do This Kind of Thing; almost everything it does (barring the occasional misfire; Miyamoto's only human, after all) is how things ought to work, from fighting to exploration to dungeon and setting design. If every game that came along was



polished as a *Zelda* game, we would not be able to get anything done.

More importantly, *Zelda*'s influence wouldn't really show up in other games until the last generation. If you sit down and think about it, *The Legend of Zelda* is the first "sandbox" game; it allows you to go wherever you want, and you only need to follow what story it possesses if you feel like doing it at the time. Whenever you find yourself set down in the middle of a massive, persistent world, you are, in some way, back in Miyamoto's pocket garden.

Tetris

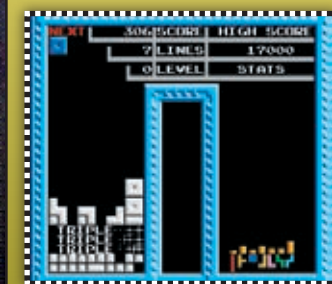
PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 1985

This is what got your mom interested in video games. Maybe she tried a couple of *Mario* games first, but the moment she saw those blocks falling, she was hooked. She may even still be hooked to this day.



Tetris is also the game that put the Game Boy on the map, beginning Nintendo's dominance of the portable gaming industry. It started an argument between Tengen and Nintendo that ended with Tengen releasing its games on those characteristic black cartridges that looked like something out of 2001.

More importantly, it started a seventeen-years-and-counting trend of not only showing up on any platform with buttons on it, but inspiring dozens of falling-block puzzle games. Some of them have been innovative and great in their own right, but few manage to live up to the simple genius of the original, and few versions of the original are as good as the version that shipped with the original Game Boy. At this point, *Tetris* will probably be around for as long as humankind has thumbs to play it with.



Wizardry

PLATFORM: Apple II
YEAR: 1981



By the time you reach the end of your life as a gamer, you will have explored something like five hundred thousand dungeons, according to HGM's Bureau of Impressive-Sounding Statistics That We Just Made Up. *Wizardry* started this tradition off with the Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord, and in so doing, basically created what we now know as a computer RPG.

Wizardry started many things that we now take for granted, from dungeon delving to character creation right down to something as simple as hit points. You can see its stamp on every CRPG that's come out since 1981, clear as day, no matter where that CRPG was developed. *Wizardry* influenced them all.



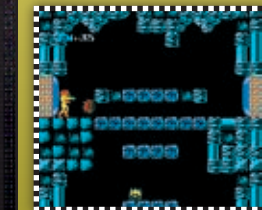
Metroid

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1993

Metroid arguably has as much of a claim to being the first "sandbox" game as *The Legend of Zelda*, if not more. The only thing keeping it from getting that position is that it's essentially meant to be somewhat more linear than *Zelda*, and because it's had a different effect on the games that came after it.

It's a fairly standard gameplay trope at this point. You start out at the entrance to some kind of mazelike area — a dungeon, a mansion, an underground network, you name it — with no real abilities to speak of. Everywhere you go, you find obstacles you aren't quite equipped to circumvent yet. As you explore, though, you'll find well-guarded items, bits of equipment, or tools that'll allow you to overcome what's standing in your way. Get a little bit further in, and you'll find more obstacles, and more tools with which to overcome them.

This pattern's been repeated in countless games at this point, but *Metroid*, in many ways, got there first. It provided a gameplay model that modern action games are still using today. The real tragedy here is not only that Gunpei Yokoi died before he could



have created more classic *Metroid* games, but that his name isn't as well-known as Miyamoto's.

Editor Ramblings About Old-Ass Games

Besides the universally loved classics with which Wanderer just entertained you, there are tons and tons of other crusty old games which you folks may have never heard of, or perhaps never realized were any good.

Therefore, we thought it'd be a grand idea to give each of our editors the green light to extol endlessly about what games really turned them on back in the day. Then we thought better of it and limited them to five games each. We're not so dumb, see?



Sardius's Picks

Duck Tales

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1990

It's based on a licensed property, it's almost insultingly easy, and you can finish it in about ten minutes if you know what you're doing. It's also one of the best platformers to ever be released on the NES, which had no shortage of impressive sidescrollers to begin with. While *Duck Tales* isn't a difficult game in the least, the gameplay is fun enough to make it worth playing through multiple times, and it's *insanely* fun to speedrun. There's also multiple endings, numerous gameplay subtleties, and hidden areas galore. All that aside, who doesn't like Scrooge McDuck? A *heartless dick*, that's who. Don't be a heartless dick. Play *Duck Tales*.



Bionic Commando

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1988

This is the perfect game. *Bionic Commando* takes a number of platformer conventions and forces you to examine them from an all-new perspective thanks to the implementation of what, at first, seems to be a liability. Your character cannot jump, and can only climb platforms and cross gaps by swinging off of background objects with a grappling hook. This turns out to be a *crazy* effective mechanic that breathes life into what would otherwise be a fairly generic experience. In essence, *Bionic Commando* takes a fun genre and makes it *more* fun in a unique way that has never been fully duplicated since. Capcom? Please don't ever remake *Bionic Commando*. You got it right the first time, and if *Bionic Commando: Streetwise* is ever announced, there will be murder.



Ghostbusters

PLATFORM: Genesis
YEAR: 1990

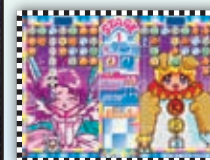
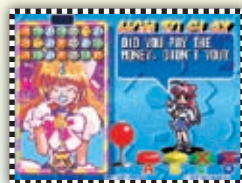
Here's a pick I don't expect anyone to agree with. Screw you guys, though. I love this game. The *Ghostbusters* license may be totally superfluous here (aside from allowing for some really goofy-looking renditions of Ray, Peter, and Egon... sorry, Winston fans, Japan apparently forgot black people existed in 1990), but the game itself is a brilliant, underrated platformer developed in secret by Compile, the creators of the *Puyo Puyo* series and classic shooters like *Zanac* and *Blazing Lasers*. Sometimes silly, other times inexplicable, this is a game that not only stands tall as the best *Ghostbusters* game ever made (though that's not much of an achievement), it's also an unforgettably bizarre adventure you won't regret playing through.



Money Puzzle Exchanger

PLATFORM: Neo Geo
YEAR: 1997

Magical Drop III? Pssssh. This is by far the best grab'n-throw'n-match puzzler on the Neo Geo. *Money Puzzle Exchanger* takes *Magical Drop*'s basic doodad-matching premise and adds in a dash of math to up the challenge and make for a more addictive experience. The idea: match up a certain number of like-faced coins and they will disappear and leave behind a single coin of a higher denomination. With some planning, you can create big combos to put the hurt on a second player or computer opponent. I could do without the played-out anime motif, but otherwise, you won't find a better competitive puzzler on the Neo or elsewhere.

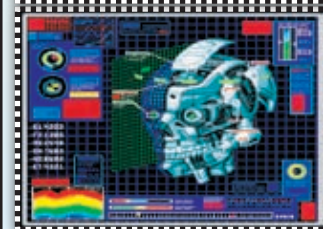


Snatcher

PLATFORM: Sega CD
YEAR: 1994



Before Hideo Kojima went all crazy with the *Metal Gear Solid* series, he directed a text-based cyberpunk adventure game called *Snatcher*. The enhanced Sega CD port of *Snatcher* is actually one of the best things the United States never realized it had; compared to previous Japan-only versions, Sega CD *Snatcher* has extra scenes and a number of additions to its plot. Of course, it's a *Sega CD game*, so nobody ever played it. It's never too late to pay upwards of \$100 for a copy on eBay, though! Come on, you'll get a great localization by *Metal Gear Solid*'s translator, tense light gun shooting sequences, and a timid miniature Metal Gear sidekick for your money. Trust me, it's *totally* worth it.



T & C Surf II: Thrilla's Surfari

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1992

Donkey Kong Jr. made it fun to play as an ape, but



T & C Surf II: Thrilla's Surfari makes it cool. The game is the sequel to a skateboard and surfing combo cartridge featuring a witch doctor and a gorilla. Here, those characters star in a plot that finds the witch doctor kidnapping Thrilla's bikini-clad girlfriend. To save her, Thrilla must skate and surf through numerous jungle and desert stages, with



stops along the way to battle boss monsters like scorpions and a giant shark. Mini-games provide an opportunity to swap tokens for extra lives, in between fast and frantic stages that test your reflexes and fortitude to their limits. Thrilla's adventure will never be remembered as one of the system's first-rate classics, but it definitely warrants a few hours of your time.



HonestGamer's Picks

Captain Skyhawk

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1990

Before it was known for platform titles starring bears and birds, piñatas or secret agents, Rare produced a lot of unique titles for the NES. They really showcased the developer's ability to work within numerous genres. In *Captain Skyhawk*, you pilot a fighter jet as you soar through one mission after another, first bombing the heck out of alien outposts or delivering supplies to the resistance force in a down-to-earth isometric overhead perspective, then taking it straight to the high skies for air duels that feel like they're straight out of *Top Gun*. Action comes fast and furious and there's an amazing sense of speed. Simplistic visuals



grow on you by the time you complete the first stage, until you'll do everything in your power to see the unexpectedly timeless adventure through to its conclusion.

Pinball Quest

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1990

The NES featured its fair share of pinball titles, but none of them provided me with more entertainment than *Pinball Quest*. The main attraction is arguably the quest mode. You progress from one pinball table to the next, breaking apart tombstones and battling monsters with stops in between to visit shops. Completing the last of the tables takes superhuman focus and endurance, since the challenge is significant and making mistakes causes you to drop back to a previous table. If the quest mode isn't your thing, though, there also are themed tables for multiple players. These include golf and a carnival setting, plus a party-themed area. Alone or with friends, *Pinball Quest* provides an engaging pinball experience that many more recent titles in the limited genre have yet to capture.



Astyanax

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1990

Castlevania had its gothic atmosphere. *Ninja Gaiden* had cutscenes that told a riveting story. *Astyanax* has both, with visual polish and an atmospheric soundtrack throughout. Saving the princess Rosebud means venturing deep into one of the darkest worlds that the NES ever featured, with swords and axes your only defense against dragon-riding monsters that serve a dark sorcerer. The highlights include an infuriating trip through a swampland where monsters leap from the murky depths, capped off by a fight with a manticore. You'll have to use every item upgrade to its fullest and have nerves of steel to reach the final encounters. Fortunately, less experienced gamers can make use of a stage select code that's floating around the Internet. Doing so makes it delightfully simple to enjoy *Astyanax* in its thoroughly satisfying entirety.



Swords & Serpents

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1990

There are plenty of compelling role-playing games on the NES, if you're willing to look past the blocky graphics to become immersed in the adventure. *Swords & Serpents* is distinctive because such accommodations hardly seem necessary. It takes place from a surprisingly proficient first-person perspective that allows you to pass from one screen to the next, never knowing whether an enemy or a powerful artifact lurks around the next corner. Combat is seamlessly integrated, and progresses swiftly. Up to four players can play together, hacking at limbs as spiders, orcs, soldiers and more try to cut your adventure short. There are numerous floors to explore on a massive tower, making this one of the best dungeon crawlers around (from any gaming era) if you can find a buddy to share the adventure.





Lynxara's Picks



Arcana

PLATFORM: SNES
YEAR: 1992

It's not the most famous SNES RPG, but *Arcana* sticks out as a massive departure in style from most other console RPGs of its vintage. It was a first-person dungeon crawler with a battle system that really forced you to pay attention to more than making your damage numbers bigger.



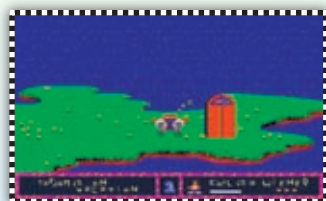
In *Arcana*, human characters were governed by the typical RPG laws of the day: HP and MP depleted in battle until you healed or died. The twist is that you always had a spirit character in your party of four who could recover MP and HP whenever you took a step. How far into the dungeon did you dare explore before surfacing? Losing a single character meant game over, so every step forward courted disaster. Playing *Arcana* was thrillingly nerve-racking, and beating the game felt like an enormous accomplishment.



ToeJam & Earl

PLATFORM: Genesis
YEAR: 1992

ToeJam & Earl is the deeply surreal and satirical tale of two lost, funky aliens who crash-landed on a dangerously insane planet called Earth. Playing as Earl or ToeJam (or together with a friend), you need to find the pieces of their spaceship to escape. The pieces are scattered across twenty-five dangerous levels infested with violently annoying Earthlings. Gather presents to defeat or outrun them. Be careful what you open; some presents are trapped.



What's amazing about this game is that it just never gets old. The random levels meant you never really got the same experience twice. Even if you beat it, it was always tempting to pick the game up and see if you could manage it again. And again. And...

... nine pieces already, I'll finish it in no time, just *one more level...*



Trog

PLATFORM: Arcade
YEAR: 1990

Trog was a four-player spin on the old *Pac-Man* genre of "maze"-type games. It had two versions, but the one covered here is one where you controlled one of four dinosaurs that traveled a maze, collecting eggs and power-ups while avoiding hazards. The eponymous Trog is a race of cavemen who intend to catch and eat you. Collect eggs, clear level, repeat until game is finished. *Trog* sported unusual "PLAYmation!" graphics that were digitized claymation models, and really stood out from the typical arcade fare.



Trying to emulate *Trog* to recapture the experience is pointless, because it was the social aspect that made *Trog* sing. How a given group of players would interact was totally unpredictable. A game of *Trog* could turn into an organized anti-caveman effort, or a festival of backstabbing and skullduggery. You never knew what would happen until you got to the arcade.

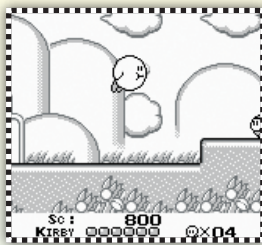
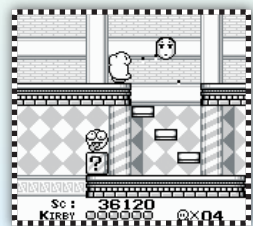


Kirby's DreamLand

PLATFORM: Game Boy
YEAR: 1992

The original Game Boy was a terrible system, with ugly graphics and tinny sounds. Even if you owned one, you knew it. If you were tempted to buy a Game Gear, it's because you knew just how ugly and terrible most of your Game Boy games were. It's a miracle that any good Game Boy games exist, and *Kirby's Dream Land* is nothing less than an immaculate conception.

This is a stellar 2D platformer from start to finish, with wonderfully tight controls, catchy music, and surprisingly pleasant graphics. Even on the ugly old creamed-spinach screen, watching Kirby bounce and drift through his dreamy world of forests and cloud castles was fun. While the game itself is a bit short and easy, Kirby's plethora of unusual moves made for a unique and memorable platforming experience.



Aladdin

PLATFORM: Genesis
YEAR: 1993

While it seems like good licensed games can be counted on the fingers of one foot, the Genesis version of *Aladdin* was one of the best

action platformers of its time. Loosely following the movie, Aladdin ran through Agrabah and its surroundings armed with throwing apples and a good, sharp scimitar. Aside from being a really fun romp, the exceptionally smooth animations were straight from the Disney studio that made the movie, filled with lots of detail and personality. Running around the levels swiping Aladdin's sword at baddies was a good time, of course, but the sheer volume and smoothness of the animation (on a Genesis cart!) was what

really sold the game. The clever level design filled with tons of background gags just sealed *Aladdin's* place as a Genesis classic.



Excitebike

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1985

This game is pure zen. It is like the NES spewing up a perfectly-arranged rock garden, with stark pixels forming lines of feng shui that conform to the contours of thought and impulse. Also, it's fun!

Excitebike is a motocross-themed racer. You can play against CPU opponents or do time trials, but the gameplay always prioritizes clearing tracks very quickly. Go too fast and your bike overheats, so you'll start wiping out on jumps, which costs you time. Each challenge was about finding the way to master the track and get a good time.

It was also one of those games with controls so simple and perfect that anybody could pick it up and start playing it. One button makes you go faster, the other slows you down, and the D-Pad moves your bike around. The stark simplicity made mastering *Excitebike* a surprising challenge.



Earthworm Jim

PLATFORM: Sega CD
YEAR: 1995

The ancient conundrum, "What would happen if you gave a worm a powered suit and a blaster?" was finally answered by Shiny's brilliant run & gun platformer. It turns out that the result is one of the craziest, funniest, nails-tough action shooters around, with some of the best animation the Genesis could produce. Jim launched cows, fought Evil the Cat in Heck, defeated a goldfish, rescued Princess What's-Her-Name, walked a dog through a meteor storm, and blasted the living crap out of everything that moved. While *Earthworm Jim* spawned a sequel and cartoon show, the original game was never topped, although it was perfected on the Sega CD thanks to new levels, an underutilized new gun, and



vastly improved audio. Plus it taught the very important life lesson we ignore at our peril — watch out for flying cows.



James's Picks

The Adventures of Lolo 1-3

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1989-1991

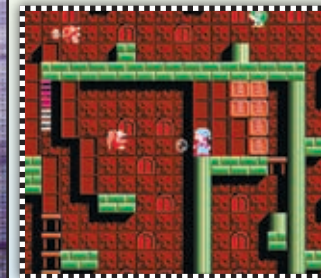
The single-screen puzzler used to be a common genre, requiring a near-defenseless character to run around dozens of levels avoiding hazards, pushing blocks, and using what meager powers s/he had to avoid death and the inevitable resetting of everything in the room back to its starting point. The *Lolo* games were prime examples of this, although they used an overhead rather than the more common side view. Each room had a number of heart tiles for Lolo to collect, all while avoiding monsters and the deadly gaze of the Medusa statues, and when they were all collected a treasure chest would open. Getting the chest destroyed all the monsters and opened the door to the next level, usually accompanied by a cry of "Finally!" and a small party. *Lolo* was fun, brilliant, and brutally tough in the best possible way.



Milon's Secret Castle

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1986

Everyone likes secrets. They're fun to search for, let you feel all sorts of clever when discovered, and ferreting them out is what *Milon's Secret Castle* is all about. Sure, Milon is armed with deadly, vicious bubbles and fights monsters in a side-scrolling platformer, but each level in the castle is covered in hidden goodies. Money bricks are easiest to find, but hidden doorways to stores selling items required to advance, extra health honey combs, and the Hudson bee shield are all much trickier. Getting through the castle takes perseverance, especially due to lack of saves or continues, but like a lot of early NES games it had that "I know what I'm doing this time, one more try!" quality.



Impossible Mission

PLATFORM: Commodore 64
YEAR: 1984

"Another visitor. Stay awhile; stay forever!" You can't think of *Impossible Mission* without remembering the voices in the game, but it wasn't just synthesized catch-phrases that kept people coming back. The randomized nature of enemy AI and level layout meant that every game was something different, with an easy room one game becoming brutal the next.



Our secret agent hero had to search the furniture in a mad scientist's lair while being chased by robots, all in the hopes of finding fragments of passwords to fit together in order to avoid doomsday. With a mere six hours on the clock before disaster strikes, and each death setting you back ten whole minutes, *Impossible Mission's* combination of puzzle and platforming got the world destroyed more times than most C-64 owners can count.





Jeremy's Picks

Virtua Fighter

PLATFORM: Arcade, Saturn, 32X
YEAR: 1993, 1995

After a sea of *Street Fighter II* clones (and utter trash like *Rise of the Robots*) in the early '90s, fighting fans needed a change, and Sega provided them with it. Here was a game that truly tried something new when it first hit arcades, and while it only provided eight playable characters, they had completely different fighting styles and actually felt like distinct fighters. Of the heavyweights, Wolf was more of an all-around fighter, while Jeffrey's heavy attacks favored players seeking a visceral thrill from his head butt barrage. Pai and Sarah were the fastest of the bunch, while Jacky and Lau were easy to jump in and dominate with. Kage and especially Akira rewarded cerebral players' attentiveness by giving them many timing-sensitive attacks that could defeat players in seconds. *Virtua Fighter's* gameplay was so impressive that it led to me buying a Saturn at launch.



Night Driver

PLATFORM: Arcade, Atari 2600
YEAR: 1976, 1978

I first played this barely-colored classic in the spring of '88 while in Cape Cod on vacation with my grandmother, and despite only playing it that one time, I never forget my experience. Its simple graphics let my young mind create a lush racing world as I played, and gave me nearly two decades of memories during my single play with it. It also provided others (like Mark Pursey, the man behind *Drivey*) with the inspiration to create their own tributes to it. Despite its legendary status, *Night Driver* has been forgotten by so many who played it. Fortunately, its legacy lives on in the '04 *Atari Anthology* and in the minds of all who cherish their memories with it. Time has been kind to it, and while its minimalist graphics have certainly been surpassed, the suspenseful gameplay they created has yet to be equaled.



Pole Position

PLATFORM: Arcade, Atari 2600
YEAR: 1982, 1983

1988 was a big gaming year for me as it not only marked my first experience with *Night Driver*, but also my first time playing a home game of any kind in *Pole Position* on the 2600.



While I wasn't all that skilled at the other games we'd purchased, I took to *Pole Position* instantly. As a fan of all kinds of racing back then, I was addicted to this game that allowed me to do what my heroes did on TV. While my love of racing has cooled, my adoration of *Pole Position* hasn't. I can play it at any time and still enjoy it. The play sessions might be shorter, and on a different controller than the 2600's trackball, but they remain enjoyable and conjure up memories of my family hooking up the 2600 to our basement's TV and playing it until daybreak. For that, I'll always hold this particular game close to my heart.

Strider

PLATFORM: Arcade, Genesis
YEAR: 1989, 1990

After a four-year wait, the Sega Nomad sat in my hands in July of '99, and the most memorable experiences I had with that system were with *Strider*. Having only seen screens and heard it praised, I didn't know exactly what to expect. Then, I tore open the box, took out the cart, and crammed it into the portable monstrosity as soon as humanly possible. Its sword-slashing and platform-jumping (and hanging) were unlike anything I'd experienced. Everything happened quickly, but it never got overwhelming, despite being a fast-paced game that challenged you in every way possible and never relented. You'd be swarmed by six foes at once and then immediately have to battle a screen-filling boss, then go back to fighting more enemies. Players never got a break, and most never wanted one. *Strider's* challenging game design has held up well, and can now be enjoyed by a new generation of players thanks to Capcom's first PSP and second PS2/Xbox compilations.



Saturday Night Slam Masters

PLATFORM: Arcade, SNES, Genesis
YEAR: 1993, 1994, 1995

1993 was the year I became addicted to pro wrestling, and then got exposed to the wonders of *Slam Masters*. Sitting in the back corner of the local arcade was *WWF Wrestlefest* and to its right, this four-player fighting/wrestling game hybrid that combined the genres seamlessly and whose concept has never been repeated, even after a sequel. As a *Final Fight* fan, I loved Haggar's inclusion, and he ended up being one of my favorite characters to use outside of Biff Slamovich, whose tombstone piledriver looked far better than the ones animated in today's wrestling games. The SNES version brought the fast action home pretty much intact, while the Genesis version nixed the team elimination matches and placed barb wire bomb matches in its place for two-player action, using one of the rings from the sequel, and marking the only appearance of any kind of that game on a home platform. That bit of info gave me the inspiration to write a review of the Genny version, and that was the first review I ever wrote for a game — starting me on a path that has lasted seven years.



Pool of Radiance

PLATFORM: Commodore 64
YEAR: 1988

If there was ever a game that struggled against the technological constraints of its day, it was *Pool of Radiance*. The Commodore 64 version shipped on eight double-sided disks, which required constant swapping and multiple minutes of loading time. Assuming your disk drive didn't overheat in the process, it was worth it: creating a customizable party of six, you travelled the land of Phlan, righting wrongs for profitable rewards with nary a rail in sight. The journal system (which put a majority of the game's story-related text into a physical manual) allowed for a more in-depth plot than RPGs had seen in a while, when every character of text took up



valuable disk space. Though it inspired a series of imitators and sequels (including the travesty *Ruins of Myth Drannor*), none of them ever matched the original.

Legacy of the Ancients

PLATFORM: Commodore 64
YEAR: 1987

The Commodore 64 had no lack of RPGs. I know this, because we had most of them. *Legacy of the Ancients* sticks out in my mind, though, thanks to its intriguing framing device. As a native of the planet Tarmalon, you are charged with a quest to nullify the evil Wizards Compendium using the exhibits found within the mysterious



Galactic Museum as your guide. You'll travel the land to collect special coins that allow you to unlock the displays, which in turn provide you with special bonuses, or transport you to dungeons containing treasure and other important items. Third-person overworld travel was combined with first-person dungeon crawling and arcade-style training games to create a highly varied experience. Sadly, its superior sequel, *The Legend of Blacksilver*, was never given a PC re-release.

Indiana Jones and The Fate of Atlantis

PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 1994

In any discussion of LucasArts adventure games, the usual suspects will always come up as nominations for the greatest of all time: *Monkey Island*, *Day of the Tentacle*, *Sam & Max*, *Grim Fandango*, or even *Maniac Mansion* for the more retro (and masochistic) gamer. While these are all classics, to be sure, my perennial nomination is *Indiana Jones and The Fate of Atlantis*. Based on an original story and full of globe-spanning intrigue and snappy, sarcastic dialogue, *Fate of Atlantis* managed to perfectly capture the feel of the classic *Indy* flicks with a Lucasarts twist. Add to that some breathtaking pixel artistry and a pathsplit which allowed you to replay the game's significant middle portion three times using vastly different strategies, and you've got a recipe for pure enjoyment.

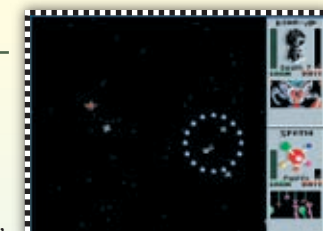


KouAidou's Picks

Star Control II

PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 1992

It would be a crime to do a classic games retrospective and not include *Star Control II*, so it's a good thing it happens to be one of my favorite games of all time. In control of a powerful alien ship, you travel the galaxy trying to liberate the human race (and numerous others) from the control of the paranoid but powerful Ur-Quan, unravelling the secrets of the universe as you go. Containing a combination of sandbox space travel and arcade-style combat, a plotline equal to any space opera you can name, hundreds of pages' worth of interactive dialogue and dozens of memorable, unique races, it's easy to see why most reviews of *Star Control II* quickly turn into love letters. In the fourteen years since its release, it still hasn't met its equal. If you haven't downloaded the freeware version at <http://sc2.sourceforge.net/>, you owe it to yourself, as a gamer, to do so.



space travel and arcade-style combat, a plotline equal to any space opera you can name, hundreds of pages' worth of interactive dialogue and dozens of memorable, unique races, it's easy to see why most reviews of *Star Control II* quickly turn into love letters. In the fourteen years since its release, it still hasn't met its equal. If you haven't downloaded the freeware version at <http://sc2.sourceforge.net/>, you owe it to yourself, as a gamer, to do so.

The Colonel's Bequest

PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 1989

While we're on the subject of overlooked adventure games, let's talk about one of the best and least appreciated games in Roberta Williams's eminent lineup. A murder mystery taking place in the 1920s, *The Colonel's Bequest* puts you in the shoes of Laura Bow, a college girl with an inquisitive nature. When her friend Lillian invites her back to her uncle's murky mansion in the Louisiana bayou, she finds herself surrounded by a classic lineup of shady suspects with murder on their minds. Multiple endings, early real-time elements, and a ton of side mysteries made multiple replays a must, and Sierra's infamous "death around every corner" tropes felt much more suitable in a setting where mortal tragedy was de rigueur. Primitive though the graphics may be, *The Colonel's Bequest's* artistry makes it impressive to look at even today.





Shoegazer's Picks

Chrono Trigger

PLATFORM: SNES
YEAR: 1995



As Squaresoft reached a point where it could no longer fit its epic tales onto a cartridge anymore, it still had a few tricks left up its sleeve that would allow it to exit the SNES era with a bang. Originally released in 1995, *Chrono Trigger* would become an instant classic and set the bar for RPGs for years to come thanks to its sci-fi storyline, unparalleled character development, and perfected use of the Active Time Battle system.



Even before the days of Sephiroth impaling Aerith with his sword, Square was the master of tugging at the heart strings of the player by immersing them in a captivating story and creating moments that would keep nerds debating for years. Today, *Chrono Trigger* still stands as one of the greatest RPGs ever made, hands down.



Baseball Stars

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1989

Whether you loved sports or not, there were a handful of games that every NES owner had fond memories of: *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out*, *Blades of Steel*, *Double Dribble* and *Baseball Stars*. While there were many great baseball games, none even came close to matching the depth of *Baseball Stars*.



Long before EA Sports was a household name, SNK packed its title with never-before-seen levels of detail, which included stat-tracking, custom league play, and complete managerial control of team operations. Best of all were the create-a-team and create-a-player options that required actual strategy. The perfect team needed the right balance of rookies, veterans and superstars if you



ever wanted to be able to take down the mighty American Dreams. Winning games earned you cash to purchase attribute upgrades, which gave *Baseball Stars* replay value for years.

Phantasy Star

PLATFORM: Sega Master System
YEAR: 1988

After many sequels and online time sinks, there still isn't a game in the *Phantasy Star* chronology that matches up against the original. The word "epic" gets thrown around a lot in the RPG category, but *Phantasy Star* truly deserved to be classified as such. It was light years beyond any other RPG of its time and introduced gamers to the awe-inspiring (at the time) 3D-scaling, multi-level dungeons.



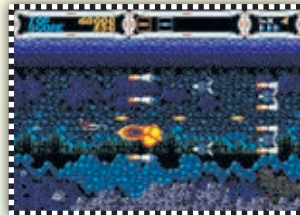
It was all too easy to become engrossed with Alis's tale of tragedy, political strife, and interstellar travel: a tale that would sprawl out across three different worlds before a final showdown with the evil ruler, Lassic. However, with an M. Night Shyamalan-esque twist, the fall of Lassic was not the end of the struggle. Enter Darkfalz: a nightmarish boss character that took up the entire screen.



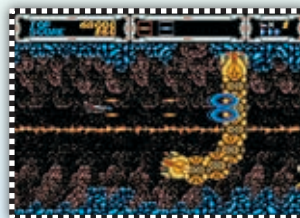
Thunder Force III

PLATFORM: Genesis
YEAR: 1990

There may have been a jillion horizontal shooters on the market back in the old days, but the *Thunder Force* series was a standout because of its superior design. It borrowed heavily from games like *R-Type* and *Gradius*, but with the third installment, it separated itself from the pack. The brightly-colored graphics, huge and challenging boss fights, a rockin' soundtrack, and of course the powerful CLAWS all helped to create a truly impressive game.



The ability to adjust the speed of your ship was incredibly innovative for its time. There were also genuine "holy crap!" moments such as one level where you get knocked off course and are about to hit a wall, when all of a sudden the screen stops, and shifts into reverse, forcing you to do a section of the level backwards. Simply awesome!



Fester's Quest

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1989

One has to wonder how exactly the development pitch for *Fester's Quest* went down. It could have been intended as a Halloween tie-in, or maybe it was meant as a precursor to the movie that would hit theaters two years later. Or maybe it really was as simple as someone wanting to make a game about Uncle Fester being the last line of defense for all humankind as alien invaders attempted to take over the Earth. Come to think of it, that would've made *Independence Day* even more enjoyable.



Taking a page from successful 8-bit era shooters such as *Ikari Warriors*, Fester runs n' guns all over the city collecting power-ups and avoiding power-downs in an effort to blast alien scum. It was as bizarre as it sounds, but incredibly enjoyable, with intense boss fights.



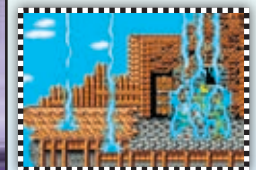
Golden Axe

PLATFORM: Genesis
YEAR: 1989

Over the years certain games have helped define a genre. Think *Super Mario Bros.* and you think platformer. Think *Tetris* and you think puzzler. When it came to one of the most popular genres of the 16-bit era, beat-'em-ups, one game helped lay the groundwork that would define a generation, SEGA's *Golden Axe*.



The beautiful thing about *Golden Axe*, and most beat-'em-ups for that matter, is that there wasn't much to it. You basically advance the screen from left to right by eliminating hordes of enemies in a button mashing exhibition of skill (or lack of skill, depending on who you ask...). Despite its lack of depth however, the overall charm of *Golden Axe* was found in its solid game play, multiplayer functionality, memorable characters, catchy anthem and spot-on depiction of a classic medieval setting nearly every gamer longed to experience. Down with Death Adder!



Ikari Warriors

PLATFORM: Arcade, NES
YEAR: 1987

Before *Gears of War*, before *Rainbow Six*, heck, before any great multiplayer game with guns, there were a few titles that introduced the concept of blowing stuff up with your buddy. SNK's *Ikari Warriors* is one of the better examples of these. Released across a wide array of platforms, *Ikari Warriors* delivered frantic action fest for one or two players as you vertically scroll through rivers, swamps, jungles and other terrain using mad amounts of weaponry (and even tanks!) to blast the living crap out of everything in sight.



At a time when Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Predator* was lighting up the silver screen, wanna-be action gamers were pumping quarters into *Ikari Warriors*. Thankfully, the game showed up on the NES (and other home consoles) so that gamers could enjoy the non-stop, bullet-slinging action anytime they wanted to. Like the *Predator* movie however, the hell spawn of a sequel that was *Ikari Warriors 2* (do we *have* to go to space in every sequel?) lacked the fun and originality of its predecessor. Oh well... one hit wonders have their place in history too!

Daniel Kayser's Picks

Shadowgate

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1989

Very few games on the Nintendo Entertainment System involved more thinking than action. *Shadowgate*, developed by ICOM Simulations, was one of those games and it played more like a medieval fantasy novel than a typical RPG. The term "Text Adventure" comes to mind here, but while that might sound boring to the average modern gamer, the sheer amount of possibilities in *Shadowgate* made the gameplay anything but.



As a "young adventurer" (you could get away with that back then...) sent to the ancient keep of Shadowgate, you must find the Staff of Ages and stop the Warlock Lord from summoning an age-old demon called the Behemoth! C'mon... this was pretty original back then! Solving riddles, experimenting with item combinations, lots of dying (creatively, mind you) and a vast sharpening of your literary skills all await you in *Shadowgate*! A must-read — um, I mean *play*, for any classic adventure gamer...



BattleToads

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1991



Considering how much I (and many other gamers) love the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, it's hard to believe that a blatant rip-off of a game such as *Battletoads* could win me over. That's exactly what happened back in 1991 when Zitz, Rash, and Pimple (yes... those were their actual names) found themselves on an intergalactic romp after partying too hard on a Lost Vega leisure space station (WHAT!!!).



Crazy names and gimmicks aside, *Battletoads* delivered where it mattered

Out of This World

PLATFORM: SNES
YEAR: 1992

Back in 1992, when platformers were all the rage, a few games stood out from the crowd by offering up something unique. Developed by Delphine Software and published by Interplay, *Out of this World* was one of the first games to deliver a truly cinematic experience. Featuring vector graphics and animated cut scenes, the game offered a level of immersion not common for its day. While still an adventure game at its core, *OotW* managed to provide a refreshing blend of platforming and puzzle solving while kind of freaking you out by the game's weird imagery and story.



Personally, I was into *OotW* ever since I first laid eyes on it. I always wanted to prove that gaming could be more than just what it appears to be on the surface, and *OotW* helped usher in some unique cinematic trends still found in the gaming industry today. Besides, who the heck doesn't want to play as a young physics professor named "Lester" who finds himself captured, unarmed, and in a strange alien world after lighting strikes his peculiar particle experiment? Awesome!



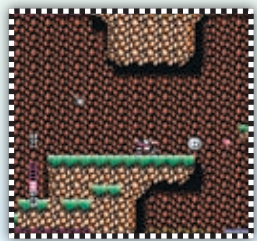


DJ Pubba's Picks

Blaster Master

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1988

Quality *Metroid* or *Castlevania* action/platform-style games are few and far between. If you missed *Blaster Master* on the NES, you missed a great game which took the best parts of the *Metroid*-vania formula and put you in control of a futuristic, well armed, wheeled fighting vehicle (the SOPHIA NORA MA-01) that is an absolute joy to control. The bouncy, ultra-maneuverable "Subatomic Omni-directional Probative Hyper-responsive Indomitable Abdicator" should be used in game design school to show how important fluid control and animation are to the fun factor of a game. Add quality level design and well



thought out power-ups and upgrades, like getting longer jumps, hover ability, being able stick to different surfaces, etc., to the awesome controls and you may have one of the most under-appreciated NES games of all time. It's too bad the sequels didn't stand up.

Kaboom!

PLATFORM: Atari 2600
YEAR: 1981

This game can't be properly appreciated if you don't have a real Atari 2600 system hooked up and working. This is because you can't properly emulate the required Atari 2600 paddle controller with a keyboard, mouse, joystick, analog stick or anything else.



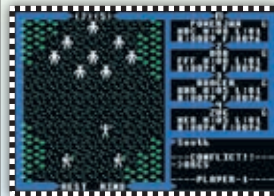
If you are able to play it properly, and practice a lot, you'll find out why it earned its spot here. This is the game that grabbed me by the short hairs of my brain and led me into "the zone" for the first time, at the tender age of 12. The object is to catch the bombs as they fall in a water bucket so they don't explode. The game starts slowly but after a few short rounds, you'll find yourself playing a furious, trance-inducing, adrenaline factory of a game.



Ultima III: Exodus

PLATFORM: Apple II
YEAR: 1983

The *Ultima* series defined the RPG genre. Nearly all of the basic concepts in today's RPGs came from *Ultima*. *Ultima III* was the high point of the series with a massive world map to explore, countless dungeons, towns, enemies, weapons, spells, treasures and was the game that introduced me to the joys of power-leveling to achieve complete world domination.

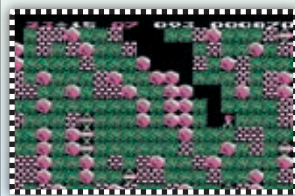
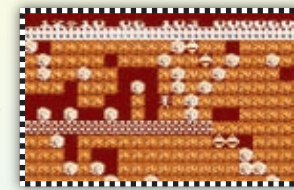


When you boot the game, you'll be able to start creating characters right away, and once you have four to form a party with, your adventuring can begin. The best thing about the game is that it's pure, undiluted gameplay. Instead of shoving a melodramatic story down your throat with a 20 minute intro and countless cut-scenes, the story unfolds as you play with the focus on adventure instead of the lines and lines of dialog that plague modern RPGs.

Boulder Dash

PLATFORM: Commodore 64, Amiga, Atari 800, etc.
YEAR: 1984

Part action game, part puzzler, and obviously a little inspired by *Dig Dug*, *Boulder Dash* has you controlling an alien named "Rockford" in his quest to gather crystals from under the earth. The fun comes from ingenious level designs which have you figuring out how to dig your way through the dirt to collect the pre-determined number of crystals while avoiding the enemy's lethal touch or being squashed by falling boulders which become dislodged by your passing. A timer keeps the pace and you don't know where the exit will appear until you've reached your crystal quota, which creates a new challenge in most levels to even find the exit once your quote is reached. Precise controls and not always needing to memorize the levels by repetition to beat them give the game a long shelf life.



Tower Toppler

PLATFORM: Commodore 64, Amiga, etc.
YEAR: 1987

Also known as *Nebulus* or *Castelian*, in *Tower Toppler*, you control a two-legged alien pig who arrives at the bottom of a tower in his submarine with one thing on his mind - reaching the top, of course. The thing that makes this game unique is that the pig remains in the center of the screen and the tower rotates around as you move. This gives the game an impressive 3D effect rarely found in contemporary games.



This is one of those incredibly hard games that will only appeal to those kind of gamers who refuse to let a game beat them. It requires you to die a lot to learn what not to do or what path not to take. For normal people to enjoy the game, cheats are required. Unlimited lives and unlimited time are just the thing and then you'll find it a lot of fun (although you'll still die a lot).

Devil's Crush

PLATFORM: TG-16
YEAR: 1990

One of the things that developers seem to forget fairly often is that just because you have the power to completely simulate a real-life activity, it doesn't mean you *have* to. As a matter of fact, you probably shouldn't. There's nothing wrong with the *Madden* series that a few homicidal cyborgs couldn't cure.

More relevantly, *Devil's Crush* embodies this simple, basic principle. It's not just one of the two



greatest video pinball games ever made. It's also the greatest heavy-metal album cover ever made. As a game of pinball, it has a loose grasp of basic physics at best, but the game turns that into a net positive. *Devil's Crush*, along with *Alien Crush* and *Military Madness*, is the reason to score that TG-16 off of eBay. It can't pop up on the Virtual Arcade soon enough.

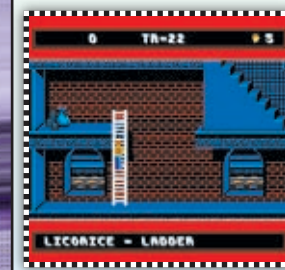
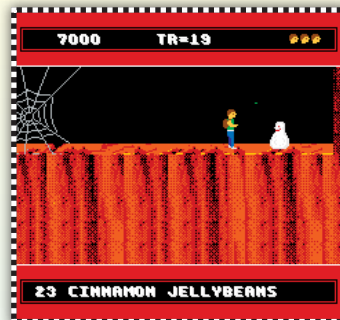


Wanderer's Picks

A Boy and His Blob

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1989

David Crane, the creator of *Pitfall*, put this odd game together for the NES in 1989. It was, and probably is, the definition of "idiosyncratic" in a host of different ways. *A Boy and His Blob* is a deeply bizarre, decidedly flawed game that was nonetheless a complete trip. It's easy to cheat yourself out of victory by doing too much jellybean experimenting in the first five minutes of the game,



and there are a couple of treasure chests that can seemingly only be obtained via divine intervention. For all that, though, this is still one of the lesser-known treasures on the NES. It's a short, one-way ride, but it's one that you'll remember fondly.

Dragon Warrior IV

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1992

There are days where I'd like to live in a parallel universe where the *Dragon Warrior* and *Phantasy Star* series got all the press and acclaim that the *Final Fantasy* series wound up getting, at least over here. (Then again, that means I might have paid seven bucks to see *Dragon Warrior: The Spirits Within*. Never mind.) *DWIV* was the last and arguably the best of the four *DW* games that were translated for the American NES.



By the time *DWIV* rolled around, the relentless grinding had been toned down some, in favor of a huge party that you gradually assembled over the course of five chapters. This game, to some extent, was my *Final Fantasy VII*; *DWIV*'s cast and scenario occupied a disturbing amount of my brain space for several years. It may be the finest RPG on the NES, and it might've been the finest console RPG in the world right up until *Phantasy Star IV* came out.

Pick Axe Pete!

PLATFORM: Odyssey-2
YEAR: 1982

The Odyssey, looking back on it, was almost embarrassing. It existed almost entirely to play bad ripoffs of popular Atari 2600 games, including two different bold-faced *Pac-Man* clones (one of which, *KC's Crazy Chase*, was actually pretty good). It had some occasional moments of inspiration, though, one of which was *Pick Axe Pete!*



It wouldn't exist without *Donkey Kong*, but *Pick Axe Pete!* has its own style. You play as a miner avoiding falling boulders, timing a jump or duck to avoid the boulders' random bounce patterns, while trying to collect keys. At the same time, all the ladders are randomized, turning this into something between a twitch game and a proto-platformer. I played this for about... 1983. Yeah, that sounds right. All of 1983.

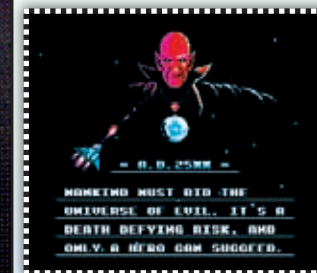
Gyruss

PLATFORM: NES
YEAR: 1988

Even now, your shooter options are dangerously limited. Would you like your quixotic battle against uncountable alien legions to be top-down or side-scrolling? Those, sir, are your options.



Gyruss, on the other hand, allows you to save the galaxy while playing the role of some kind of xenocidal Scrubbing Bubble, much like *Tempest*. It was one of Konami's stealth releases under the Ultra imprint, and as such, it has a little bit in common with the *Gradius* series. The graphics are top-notch, the bosses are inventive and bizarre, and the challenge factor is kick-you-in-the-beanbag intense. Fortunately, it has an odd backwards Konami Code.



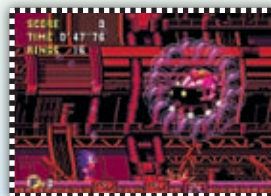


Ashura's Picks

Sonic CD

PLATFORM: Sega CD
YEAR: 1993

Sonic CD is easily the alternate road that the Sonic series could've taken if Naoto Oshima was in charge instead of Yuji Naka. This weird little gem came about when Naka and half of Sonic Team left for America (making *Sonic 2*), and left Oshima to his own devices. What came out was a darker, slower-paced *Sonic the Hedgehog* with awesome music and an animated intro. In this game, Sonic must save the time-traveling Little Planet from the chainy bondage of Dr. Eggman. Instead of just heading to the goal, Sonic must go back and forth in time and fix the past to save the future. Each stage has 4 different iterations: Past, Present, Bad Future, and Good Future. Make everything a good future? Good ending! The game feels much different than its successors, especially with the alternate take on the spin-dash and the mostly abandoned infinitum dash. The levels themselves are more puzzle based, and the music (in the Japanese version) is haunting. Forget about the next-gen Sonic. Naka and Oshima were the ying and yang of Sonic Team, and without them the only thing left now is wang. This game was worth it when I traded 3 PSX games for it, and it still is now. Toot Toot Sonic Warrior.



Metal Slug 2

PLATFORM: Neo Geo
YEAR: 1998

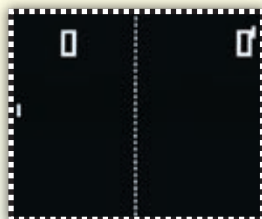
The iron cavalymen are back in hell! The evil DEMON GOD REBIRTH General Morden returns and Macro and Tarma must defend the Earth against his evil army with the help of two new members of SPARROWS, Eri and Fio, and of course the Metal Slug. If you've never played it, *Metal Slug* is a great series of comedic run-and-gun games similar to *Contra*. The concept of the game is simple: You run around in a flurry of chaos, collect weapons, shoot enemies, jump in vehicles, and save the Jesus-dudes. Er, I mean, refugees. *Metal Slug 2* introduces many of the series's staples, such as the item-carrying Rumi Aikawa, the hadouken-shooting Hyakutaru Ichimonji, the 'oooh big' and mummy transformations, Mars People, and everyone's favorite: Camel Slug. Though it's a little less balanced, difficulty-wise, than the first iteration, *MS2* is my favorite just for all the other awesome it contains. Yes, even over *X*. Just one question: What's a Rocket Launcher?



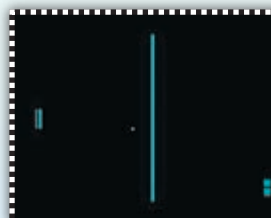
Pong

PLATFORM: Arcade
YEAR: 1972

Pong is this great game with two lines and a dot. The object of this game is that you have to keep that dot from ever escaping your sight by bouncing it around with the clever use of those aforementioned lines. It is rumored that if you ever let the dot continue past the confines of the semi-rectangular viewing area, Armageddon will befall man and your girlfriend will dump you for Phillip the Elevator Operator. Said to be much like ping-pong, not much is known about this classic as it has been lost forever due to global warming and the evil machinations of Adolf Hitler. Its creation predating the discovery of bacon, most current information about *Pong* is actually extrapolated from the little-known *Ms. Pong*, which is said to be exactly like the original *Pong* only the pixel is colored pink. Legends abound of an almost arcade perfect port of *Pong* for the Atari 2600, though no one knows for sure. There were talks of a port of *Grand Theft Auto* for the Atari 2600, as well. It went something like this: OH SNAP THE RED PIXEL JUST TOTALLY JACKED THE YELLOW



PIXEL FOR HIS GREEN PIXEL AND... very slowly moved to the right side of the screen. Above is an artist's conception of what *Pong* may have looked like.



Popful Mail

PLATFORM: Sega CD
YEAR: 1994

This 2D action platformer started life on the PC-88 of all places, and was later ported to the Sega CD with massive updates including beautiful sprite art and 20 minutes of animation. The game follows three adventurers that you can switch between at will: Mail, a greedy elven warrior looking for money, Tatt, a magician's apprentice looking for his master, and Gaw, a purple blob thing which can jump really high. This of course can alter the gameplay from melee, to projectile, to, uh... jumping high depending on who you're playing. *PM* was one of the first games where 99% of the dialogue was spoken as well, so depending on which character you're using at the time, the dialogue can change drastically. These bits of speech and animation are half the fun of the game, and a lot is owed to Working Designs's localization in conjunction with Sega's work improving gameplay for the Sega CD version. *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* and its successors owe more to this game than it does *Metroid*. Gigantic Bosses, Item System, Status Effects, on-the-fly character changing, it's all there. Do yourself a favor and seek it out.



Twinkle Star Sprites

PLATFORM: Neo Geo
YEAR: 1996

Twinkle Star Sprites is what happens when a shmup and a puzzle game collide together and have a traffic accident (4 people died!) of epic proportions. In this game you play Load Ran (yeah), and you must fight your way through various weirdos which spout the most exquisitely crafted English *ever*. You are presented with a screen divided in half, one side with you, and the other with your *opponentos*. The object of the game is to shoot anything which comes at you, which in turn shoots the things you just shot onto your opponent's side. The bigger combo of destruction you create, the more stuff you throw at your enemy! Take away all their hearts, and you are the *winnar*. And so is the game. Find this one and take it to parties with you; I guarantee people will play it for hours. Unfortunately that's the catch — this game is a little hard to find. Don't be *brue*, reader; lucky for you they just re-released the sequel for PS2 (*La Petite Princesse*), and this game is an unlockable on it. Hooray! Let us all munch sweet tacos!



Since Atari first licensed *Space Invaders* from Taito for the Atari VCS and little Ricky Stratton had his very own home arcade, consumers have clamored for the ability to play an arcade game in their home. Even the classic Colecovision boldly stamped "Plays Like the Real Arcade Game" on the retail boxes of its home conversions of now-classic coin-operated games.

Fast forward to the modern day, and you'll notice the giant arcades of the '80s are now rarities. Most of the arcades have closed their doors, and your antiquated consoles have long since been sold in a yard sale or have melted in the attic. You still want to play the classics, and now they are nowhere to be found. You want to relive the good ol' days of sitting on a stool in a dark room with a blue neon glow engulfing your pale body. Well, my friend, prepare to be floored, because your childhood dreams of having an entire arcade in your own home are now possible!

First, you should know that there are several "arcade alleys" that you can choose. There are highly technical routes available for the do-it-yourself type that likes to dig into a hobby. There are also options for those people who are more timid around technology, who just want to take a stroll down memory lane.

The first and most obvious option is to simply purchase an actual arcade coin-operated machine and place it in your home. However, if you are into the classics, you will come



to realize that a lot of those machines have just not aged well over the years and require a great deal of work to keep them in working order. At this point you are partaking in yet another hobby, that of restoration and repair, which takes an enormous amount of mechanical and electrical skill. Of course, there are several groups that still deal with pieces and parts such as joysticks, spinners, trackballs, light guns, steering wheels, sound systems, and buttons. These groups can sell you parts outright, or become hired hands that will actually recondition a vintage coin-op machine for you... for a fee. If you're good with your hands, then by all means jump right in and watch your hobby and wealth of knowledge grow in spades!

Of course, having one coin-op game in your home is fine, but once you have it, you'll quickly learn that one just isn't enough. That's where the beauty of emulation comes in, which can lead to cabinets that pack dozens and even thousands of games into a single unit.

In early 1997, what are now typically referred to as emulators began to appear. The most popular is M.A.M.E.,



short for the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator. This handy hobbyist-made program emulates the actual arcade games using dumps (end user supplied) of the original read-only memory (ROM), and has evolved to be enormous over the years. Those thirsty to replay all the games of the past can currently pick from just shy of 4,000 individual games to play using M.A.M.E. By placing a standard computer within the base of an arcade machine, one can make a full-size unit that is capable of playing the majority of all the arcade games that have ever been created. However, we strongly suggest that you do not buy an arcade cabinet with a computer inside running M.A.M.E. with thousands of ROMs already installed. That would violate all kinds of laws and hurt everyone involved, including the M.A.M.E. developers. Instead, we'd rather see you take the time to populate your home-made cabinet with a collection of your favorite legal

classics, and only use M.A.M.E. for the ones you absolutely can't legally obtain otherwise. It's much easier to stay legal nowadays than when emulation was in its infancy.

If you have noticed a resurgence of classic gaming in the past decade, you are not alone. Dozens of publishers with a history to profit from have been releasing game compilations to cash in on the popularity of the retro gaming scene. Several releases for consoles and PC have been published, and many titles are now also available for download through services like GameTap, Microsoft's Xbox Live service, and Nintendo Wii's Virtual Console. GameTap is an especially great option for access to hundreds of classics inside an arcade cabinet. Some games have fallen into the public domain as abandonware by publishers that no longer exist or whose assets were never sold prior to closing their doors and upon completion of bankruptcy. A few games have even been generously donated with permission of the original developers. However, it can be very confusing and often difficult to determine which games are legal and which are not. While it is doubtful that Mappy of the Micro Police, or an actual law officer, would come a-knockin' on your door, many of us choose to respect such copyright issues. Other legal options are available.



For example, My Big Games (<http://www.mybiggames.com>) has released two full-size units available at many big-box retailers such as JC Penney, Target and Wal-Mart for five hundred smackers each. These cabinets feature twelve fully-licensed games each by either Midway or Konami. However, they would definitely not have survived in an arcade. They are cheaply made and unlikely to satisfy any hardcore gamers.

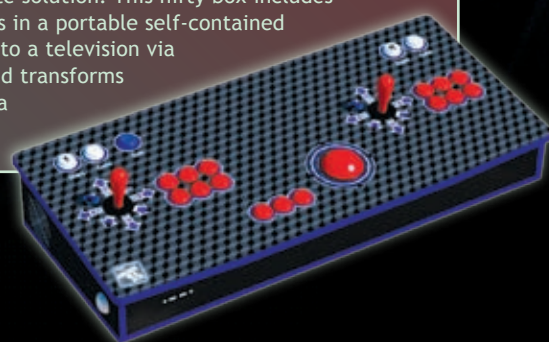
More durable and expanded options are available through Awesome Arcades in the form of their AC-605SP Arcade Center (\$1799) and their smartly designed Personal Arcade Machine, also known as P.A.M. (\$1300). A particularly nice feature of P.A.M. is that she is designed for a smaller room or office. Furthermore, the Personal Arcade Machine is portable. P.A.M. can be removed from her pedestal for easy relocation to a desk, bar top, or any other free space. These machines include a whopping one hundred forty-six games total. They currently play eighty-one legally licensed arcade games and sixty-five Atari 2600 console games. A full list is available online at their website (<http://www.awecades.com>), and their library is ever-expanding.

The units by My Big Games and Awesome Arcades are fully loaded and ready to go from the moment you open the crate. No technical set-up is required for either of these units; no diagrams are needed, no tools are necessary, there's no hardware to assemble, and there's no software to install; there's no hassle! You just plug 'em in and play until your heart is content.

SUPPORTING INFO

The My Big Games Midway version offers the classic arcade titles *Bubbles*, *Defender*, *Defender II*, *Joust*, *Rampage*, *Robotron*, *Root Beer Tapper*, *Satan's Hollow*, *Sinistar*, *Splat*, *Timber* and *Wizard of Wor*.

Additionally, *Blades of Steel*, *Castlevania*, *Contra*, *Frogger*, *Green Beret*, *Gyruss*, *Hyper Sports*, *Jungler*, *Scramble*, *Shao-Lin's Road*, *Super Basketball* and *Time Pilot '84* are available for play on the Konami edition by My Big Games.



If your home is just too small to house an actual full-size arcade machine, or your wife wouldn't appreciate a hulking box in her dining room, then the \$1799 Arcade in a Box (<http://www.arcadeinabox.com>) might be an alternate solution. This nifty box includes the computer and controls in a portable self-contained unit that simply hooks up to a television via an S-Video connection, and transforms your family room TV into a mega arcade.

SUPPORTING INFO

M.A.M.E. <http://www.mame.net>

Other Emulators:

Daphne http://www.daphne-emu.com/site3/index_hi.php
Daphne emulates only Laserdisc games, including *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*.

Final Burn <http://www.finalburn.com/>
An alternative to M.A.M.E., Final Burn emulates many arcade games not emulated by other emulators.

MESS <http://www.mess.org/>
Multiple Emulator Super System. Emulates 100's of old console and home computer systems.

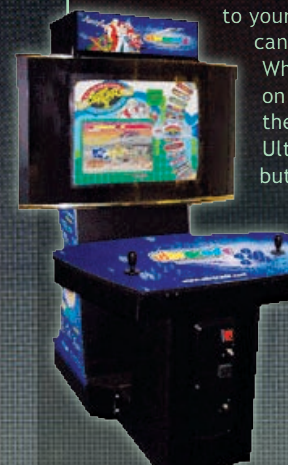
Modeler <http://www.emuhype.com/>
Modeler is the origin of the V60 CPU core emulation, used in Sega System 32 games.

Nebula <http://nebula.emulatronia.com/>
Nebula emulates Neo Geo, games, Sega Model 2B CRX and 2C CRX games including *Dead or Alive*.

Zinc <http://www.emuhype.com/>
Zinc is the emulator for arcade PSX-based games, such as the Sony ZN-1, ZN-2 and Namco System 11 hardware, used by *Soul Edge*, *Tekken* games, and more.

Raine <http://www.rainemu.com/>
Raine emulates arcade titles like M.A.M.E. but requires less resources so it operates more efficiently on older computers.

Visual Pinball <http://www.randydavis.com/vp/>
3D pinball program that plays rebuilt versions of classic pinball tables and emulates the scoreboards using pinMAME.



If you have a lot of quarters (23,900, to be exact) you can add the commercial UltraCade Showcase multi-game arcade system to your home. This heavyweight contains 86 games and can be upgraded with many more licensed game packs. While the UltraCade can be programmed to operate on "Free Play," you may want to have your friends use the coin slot to try and recoup some of those quarters! UltraCade does have three other models available, but if you are going to plunk down this kind of cash for the "real deal" then go for it all! For a breakdown on all the models, visit <http://www.bmigaming.com/ultracade.htm>.

There are several companies that make new upright and tabletop units designed specifically to house a computer and run emulation programs. These can be purchased in kit form with most pieces already cut to scale, needing only minimal installation or construction, or completely assembled units ready to be placed in your game room!

If you're up for building your own, remember that different games have different control schemes, so you'll need to have an interface with options! You could make your own interface with quality arcade parts (<http://www.happcontrols.com/>) or purchase a control interface from several different companies. Check out the following chart to learn more:

| Control Interface | Dual Joystick | Joystick Button | Buttons | Trackball | Spinner | Interface | Lifetime Warranty | Price |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------|-----------|---------|-------------|-------------------|-------|
| Hanaho HotRod SE | Yes | No | 18 | No | No | PS/2 | No | \$99 |
| OzStick Super Single | No | No | 8 | No | No | USB | No | \$129 |
| OzStick Ultimate | Yes | No | 15 | No | No | PS/2 or USB | No | \$199 |
| Slick Stick Solitaire | Yes | No | 15 | Yes | Yes | USB | No | \$399 |
| Treyonics Centurion | Yes | Yes | 24 | Yes | Yes | USB | Yes | \$449 |
| Treyonics Devastator II | Yes | Yes | 19 | Yes | Yes | USB | Yes | \$399 |
| X-Arcade Solo | No | No | 9 | No | No | PS/2 or USB | Yes | \$99 |
| X-Arcade Dual | Yes | No | 18 | No | No | PS/2 or USB | Yes | \$129 |
| X-Arcade TankStick | Yes | No | 18 | Yes | No | PS/2 or USB | Yes | \$199 |

SUPPORTING INFO

Treyonics <http://www.treyonicscontrols.com>

OzStick <http://www.ozstick.com.au>

X-Arcade <http://www.x-arcade.com>

Slik Stick <http://www.slikstick.com>

Hanaho <http://www.hanaho.com>

Arcade in a Box \$1799 <http://www.arcadeinabox.com>

Super Link:
http://users.bigpond.net.au/paj/links_and_resources.htm

Build your own arcade controls:
<http://arcadecontrols.com/arcade.htm>



X-Arcade TankStick



Treyonics Centurion



Treyonics Devastator II

So, if you remember watching Ricky Schroeder play *Dragon's Lair* in his mansion arcade back in 1982 on "Silver Spoons" and you are still envious, you can finally emulate that experience. Now, all you need is an oversized indoor train set and a break-dancin' friend named Alfonso and you're almost there!

Our guides aren't for everyone.

(Some people don't play video games.)



Rogue Galaxy™

Miss nothing. Learn everything. This comprehensive guide is packed full of extreme detail about every inch of the game.

- Complete maps of every planet
- Every weapon identified
- Lists of every enemy's stats
- Every secret revealed
- Too much to list here!



SMT: Devil Summoner™

Learn the terrible secrets of the Soulless Army!

- Crush every opponent
- Find every secret
- Collect every demon

Beat them at their own game, in their own world.



Disgaea™2: Cursed Memories

640 pages jam-packed with extreme detail. If you've ever seen our Monster Size™ guides, you know they're fat. This one is our fattest ever. We went a little nuts.



Genji: Dawn of the Samurai™

Whether you're a novice or an expert player, there's something for everyone in the official strategy guide for *Genji: Dawn of the Samurai*.



Castlevania®: Dawn of Sorrow™

Set one year after the events of 2003's *Castlevania®: Aria of Sorrow™*, this sequel follows the protagonist Soma Cruz into a new castle, and a new adventure.



Disgaea: Hour of Darkness™

Secrets, techniques for capturing monsters, all the item ranks, job evolutions, class prerequisites and much, much more.

www.DoubleJumpBooks.com

Rogue Galaxy is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Created and developed by Level 5. © 2006 Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. SMT, Shin Megami Tensei and Devil Summoner are registered trademarks of Atlus USA. Disgaea © NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE INC. ©NIS America, Inc. Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow © 1986-2005 KONAMI. "KONAMI" and "CASTLEVANIA" are registered trademarks of KONAMI CORPORATION. "CASTLEVANIA Dawn of Sorrow" is a trademark of KONAMI CORPORATION. Genji: Dawn of the Samurai is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Developed by Game Republic. © 2005 Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. DoubleJump and Monster Size are trademarks or registered trademarks of DoubleJump Publishing, Inc.



REVIEWS

- 56 **Lost Planet**
- 58 **Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin**
- 59 **Ar tonelico: Melody of Elemia**
- 60 **Full Auto 2: Battlelines**
- 62 **Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol**
- 63 **Heroes of Might and Magic V: Hammers of Fate**
- 64 **Bionicle Heroes**
- 65 **Rainbow Six: Vegas**
- 66 **Dead or Alive Xtreme 2**
- 68 **Mazes of Fate**
- 69 **Metal Slug: Anthology**

HGM REVIEW GAUGE

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



Review by Lynxara
Publisher : Capcom Genre(s) : 3PS
Developer : Capcom Category : BRR, Chilly!
Release Date : 01/12/2007 # of players : 1-16
Rating : T (Animated Blood, Mild Language, Violence)

Lost Planet is a third-person shooter that lets you battle it out with rival pirates and insect-like aliens called the Akrid on the frozen ice planet E.D.N. III. You can opt to fight on foot, or using rather *VOTOMS*-esque mecha called Vital Suits. Refreshingly, Vital Suits aren't simply your win button in combat. In some situations they dominate, and in others they'll just get you killed. You can even remove the heavy weapons from a Vital Suit and use them on foot, à la *Mellowlink*, which is both surprisingly useful and tremendously satisfying.

Much like *Resident Evil*, you'll notice that you move rather slowly in *Lost Planet* (relative to the usual 3PS fare, anyway). This is actually not off-putting at all; it adds an engaging tactical element to the action. For instance, you quickly learn that you need to evade oncoming enemies with leaps and dodge-rolls. The left and right trigger buttons let you make instantaneous 90-degree turns, and you have to remember to use them.

Falling more than a very short distance leaves you staggered and vulnerable, so you must make proper use of your "anchor," a grappling line that lets you descend from ledges and scale otherwise-impossible heights. If this description is making you think of *Bionic Commando*, you're right on the mark. At times *Lost Planet* feels like nothing so much as a snowy, 3D update of that incredible and oft-forgotten platformer.



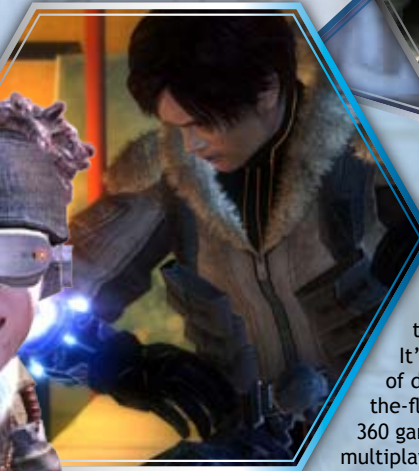
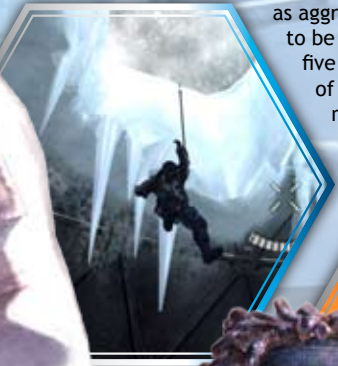
LOST PLANET

EXTREME CONDITION

Lost Planet's arctic setting easily could've degenerated into a gimmick, and in the hands of many developers that's all it ever would've been. Capcom, to its enormous credit, did not churn out a game full of bland white empty areas. *Lost Planet* is brimming with inventive level designs, and offers a wide variety of environments for you to explore. Along with the windswept cliffsides (where you can actually fall to your death!), you can creep through abandoned parking garages full of destructible cars, and bizarre underground Akrid hives.

Capcom really pushes the 360's particle physics with this title, frequently putting enormous smoky explosions, falling torrents of ice, and sprays of snow from the ground all on-screen at once. Add in environments that are almost completely destructible and dozens of enemies moving onscreen at a time, and you have a gaming experience that truly feels next-gen from the graphics alone.

There's a gameplay kink to the game's polar locale, too. In the upper left corner of your screen, you'll notice a thermal energy reading in addition to the usual life bar. Your thermal energy depletes constantly. If you take damage, it depletes even more quickly in order to boost your life gauge back up to full. The only way to get more is to extract it from destructible objects or dead enemies, and the only way to stretch out your energy supply is to not get hit. *Lost Planet* encourages you to play as aggressively and perfectly as possible. Levels are long enough to be nerve-racking, often lasting around forty-five minutes, which only adds to the sense of satisfaction when you clear one. It also makes *Lost Planet's* singleplayer rather unusually long and substantial for a modern action title.



Lost Planet has a multiplayer component, and while it's a solid effort, it's just not as interesting as the single-player campaign. It's basically the same sorts of deathmatch and capture-the-flag variants that most 360 games offer for their online multiplayer. Being able to use *Lost Planet's* unique weapons and Vital Suits in combat definitely makes it worth a try, but the novelty quickly wears off. If you're like me, you'll just go back to focusing on the single-player campaign, which cannot be praised enough.

These few pages don't give me the words necessary to praise Capcom's enormous attention to detail with this title, but just as a final example: this game has the first original score I've ever heard in a 360 game that was truly interesting. Most 360 action titles don't even bother with much in the way of music, because they know players can just import custom soundtracks anyway. Capcom had to know this, too, but they went to the effort of giving you a rousing score that perfectly enhances the feel of the game anyway. *Lost Planet* is full of superior, artful touches like that. It's one of the 360's growing number of must-have titles.

2nd opinion by Roger Danish • Alternate Rating : 4.5 of 5

Lynxara has pretty much summed it up. *Lost Planet* rocks. Like *Dead Rising*, The talented people at Capcom are creating amazing and unique experiences on the 360. I can't wait to see what they do next!

Rating : 4.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
4.5 of 5



THE STORY OF LOST PLANET

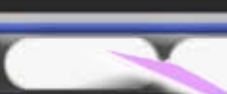
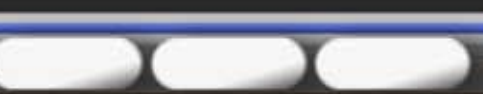
Most action games don't bother to have much of a plot at all; *Lost Planet* has, amnesia aside, one of the most wildly inventive stories you'll ever see in a video game.

Humans came to colonize E.D.N. III in T.C. -80, and their efforts met with success until the emergence of the Akrid. The colonists were simply overwhelmed by the Akrid's strength and numbers, and those who could afford to fled the planet immediately. Those who couldn't were forced to stay behind and try to fight as best they could.

Driven by sheer necessity, the humans' ability to fight the Akrid improved. They discovered that Akrid's bodies contained tremendous amounts of thermal energy, which is a precious resource on a frozen world like E.D.N. III. This only intensified the human will to resist. Advanced mobile weapons called Vital Suits were developed to increase human offensive potential. Time hardened the survivors into bands of roving nomads called "ice pirates," who battled both each other and the Akrid.

One such band of ice pirates finds a young man frozen inside a Vital Suit. Miraculously, all it takes is an infusion of thermal energy into the Harmonizer mounted on his arm to revive him. His name is Wayne, and his memory is spotty at best. All he knows is that a terrifyingly powerful Akrid called "Green Eye" killed his father during some sort of enormous disaster.

Wayne remembers how to fight, and he's the only Vital Suit pilot the group has. Wayne really wants vengeance on the Akrid, but there's far more at stake than he realizes. It was no accident that Wayne's division fell before Green Eye twenty years ago, and even on a half-dead planet like E.D.N. III, secrets won't remain buried forever.



Castlevania Portrait of Ruin™



Review by Wanderer

Publisher : Konami
Developer : Konami
Release Date : 12/5/2006
Rating : Teen
Genre(s) : Whip it Right...
Category : ...Like You Should
of players : 1-2

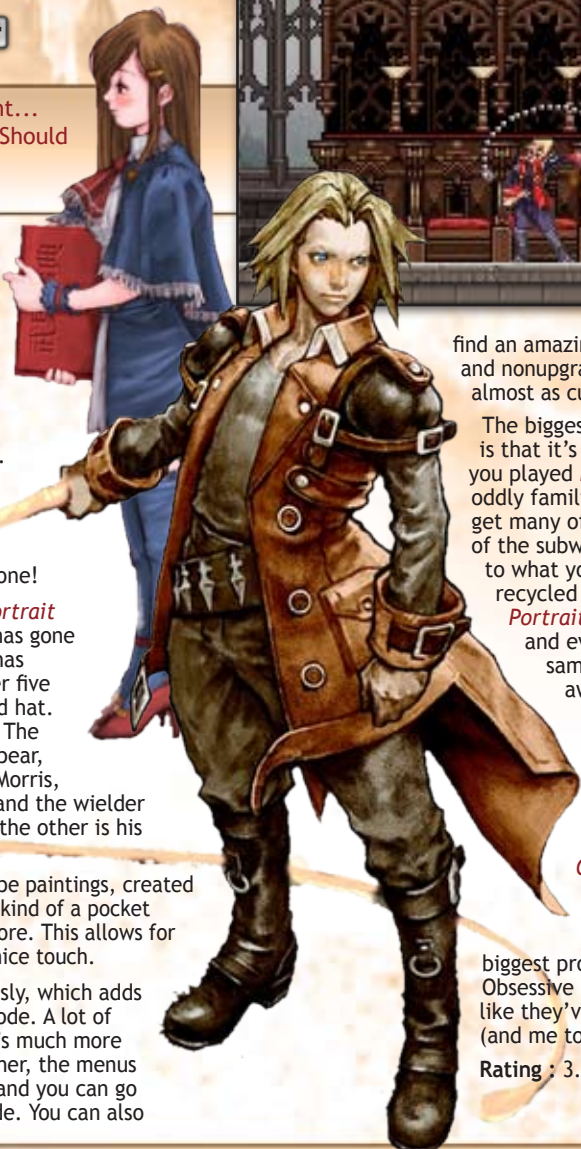


For the last few years, the best titles in the *Castlevania* franchise have been 2D portable games (although *Curse of Darkness* was decent), all of which are attempts to live up to the standard set by *Symphony of the Night*. They all follow the same basic formula. You start at the entrance of the castle, and must explore it to find the relics you need to get further into the building. These relics are guarded by bosses. Eventually, you'll run into either Dracula or some schmuck who's trying to resurrect Dracula and who will succeed three seconds after you find him. Kill Dracula... with violence. Watch the castle collapse. Bonus modes are unlocked. See you next year, everyone!

I'm ordinarily fine with this. Now that I've beaten *Portrait of Ruin*, though, it's becoming obvious that Konami has gone about as far as it can go with this formula. *Portrait* has perfected the formula, but if you've played the other five "Metroidvanias" as much as I have, it's very much old hat. *Portrait* is set in 1944, at the height of World War II. The worldwide chaos has caused Dracula's castle to reappear, and two hunters rush to the scene. One is Jonathan Morris, the son of John Morris from *Castlevania: Bloodlines* and the wielder of the mysteriously-depowered Vampire Killer whip; the other is his friend Charlotte Aulin, a powerful magician.

Inside the castle, they find a series of magical landscape paintings, created by an insane vampire named Breuner. Each painting is kind of a pocket dimension, making each painting an area you can explore. This allows for a little variety in the game's backgrounds, which is a nice touch.

You control both Jonathan and Charlotte simultaneously, which adds some new gameplay and an awesome online co-op mode. A lot of the issues from *Dawn* have been improved as well; it's much more challenging, the enemies' item drop rate is much higher, the menus are better-designed, you have more accessory slots, and you can go online to purchase items from other players worldwide. You can also



find an amazing variety of upgradable subweapons and nonupgradable spells, which makes the game almost as customizable as *Dawn*.

The biggest problem that *Portrait* has, in fact, is that it's too much like its predecessors. If you played *Dawn of Sorrow*, *Portrait* will seem oddly familiar, even with its new features. You get many of the same special abilities, many of the subweapons are functionally identical to what you've had in past games, they've recycled a lot of sprites (for no real reason, *Portrait* is full of shoutouts to *Symphony*), and even a couple of the bosses are the same. Other series can and have gotten away with this much repetition, but we've gotten an exploration-based *Castlevania* almost every year like clockwork since the GBA launched. The series needs to break new ground.

If you haven't played as much *Castlevania* as I have, you should add a point onto my score. *Dawn of Sorrow* is one of the best games on the DS, and *Portrait's* biggest problem is that it's too much like it. Obsessive *Castlevania* fans (i.e. me) may feel like they've been here before, but other gamers (and me too, honestly) should have a blast.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
3.75 of 5

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

PoR is almost a perfect evolution of DoS's spin on the *Castlevania* formula, but the level and boss designs are hopelessly trite. It's a shame; the new online features and co-op are brilliant.



If you're like me and have already played *Atelier Iris* and *Atelier Iris 2*, you may want to take half a point off of my score. This is because *Ar tonelico* is, functionally, the same game you've already played twice before. The characters are quirky and shallow, the dungeon crawls are almost laughably easy, and the game's real challenge is primarily in collecting all of the many items you can synthesize. Very little is different aside from the names and the dungeon environments, and what new elements are present feel more like elaborations on the core formula than real change.

In addition to items, *Ar tonelico* lets you collect power-ups and costumes for your three song maidens, and "conversations" that serve to develop their personalities. Your song maiden (or "Reyvateil") is in theory the heart of *Ar tonelico's* gameplay; you can only ever have one in your party at a time, and she uses "song magic" either to attack enemies or buff up your party in various ways. Other characters are more general types of attackers, or protect your Reyvateil from damage.

All this is really a bit academic, though. You'll never need to exploit the finer points of the combat engine to accomplish anything other than maybe trying to get extra item drops from enemies. Fortunately, *Ar tonelico* limits random encounters with a depleting

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

This game is delightfully weird, but it really needed deeper characters to make the system work. Still, I can't hate a game with Japanese gangsta rap on its OST. Can you?



Ar tonelico

MELODY OF ELEMIA



Review by Lynxara

Publisher : NIS America
Developer : Gust
Release Date : 02/06/07
Rating : Teen (Language, Mild Fantasy Violence, Suggestive Themes)
Genre(s) : RPG
Category : Girls ♡
of players : 1

gauge as in *Atelier Iris 2*, so you never really have to fight more than you want to. You can use items you've acquired for a variety of purposes, ranging from customizing weapons to synthesizing new items entirely. You can in turn use items either in combat, or to create other items. This is the part of the game that can get addictive, as the item synthesis system is even better in this title than it was in the alchemy-driven *Atelier* games.

By fighting battles you also accumulate Dive Points, and you can then go to Dive Centers and cash them in to enter your Reyvateil's Cosmosphere. The Cosmosphere is simply, well, her mind. Once there, you engage in story events that unlock extra costumes and new powers for her. How deep you can Dive is only limited by how many Dive Points you have, which is a problem. It's very easy to trigger Dive events that reference story events you've yet to play through.

Even more of a problem: your three Reyvateils just aren't interesting characters. The datesim-style gameplay is somewhat interesting as a gimmick, but doesn't really work without a compelling cast. How deep you Dive with given characters ultimately just feels like a means to the end of collecting all seven of the game's endings. It should be mentioned that you do unlock some "suggestive" still art of the girls later on in the game as a reward for deep Diving, but the imagery is extremely tame compared to, say, *DoAXVB*. Make of that what you will.

Ar tonelico is not a bad game, although it does feel less interesting than it should be. It's primarily a collecting sim with a vestigial RPG attached, and most of the enjoyment in the game comes from the sim-like elements and beautiful 2D sprites. The soundtrack is far and away the best it's been in any Gust game to date, and is almost worth the price of admission by itself. While the localization is a bit disappointing as NIS-A efforts go, *Ar tonelico* still has some good gags and an intact Japanese voice track to offer. It's easily a better play than either of the *Atelier* games, but still frustratingly similar to them.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
3.5



REVIEW

FULL AUTO 2

BATTLELINES

PS3

Review by 4thletter

Publisher : SEGA
 Developer : Psuedo Interactive
 Release Date : 11/19/2006
 Rating : Teen (Violence)

Genre(s) : Racing
 Category : Road Rage
 # of players : 1-5



Full Auto 2: Battlelines is okay. It's neither great nor terrible. It's just kind of there. To be quite honest, I think I like the racing more than I do the car combat.

The racing is fun, if a bit floaty. I've hit a wall or obstacle and spun in a complete 360 in mid-air more than once. Otherwise, the action comes fast and furious. Attaining high speeds nets you a cool, but not distracting, motion blur. That sensation is a temporary one, however, since you'll most likely go careening off into a wall or gas truck post haste. The trick is to find a nice mix between all-out speed and careful driving. Judicious use of the handbrake on your turns can make what would've been a skid into a gas truck into a smooth turn around a sharp bend. Getting across the finish line isn't quite as simple as good driving, though.

You're going to have to manage car combat while you push 150mph. You have primary and secondary weapons at your beck

and call, each with their own special characteristics. Shotguns deliver a lot of power at short range, while machineguns give you tons of low-strength shots in a short period of time. You aim with the right analog stick, and I think that that is where my biggest problem lies with this game.

The aiming is clunky and awkward. You have to take your thumb off the fire button in order to aim the crosshairs, which is generally a bad idea. There is some good news, though: you don't really have to aim very much at all in this game. You can leave your crosshairs set at the default and do a perfectly good job of smashing up the competition. Sure, aiming may come in handy for certain specific environmental destruction traps, or if someone is just off to your left or right, but if they're that far over, they can't hit you anyway. Better to just tap L1 and boost away from them period.

The rewind feature makes it onto the PlayStation 3 intact, and it is quite useful. You can easily turn the tide of a battle by rewinding to a point a second or two before your death and making a slight course adjustment or firing your weapon. It's a cool little feature, and one that I hope sticks around.

Overall, though, *Full Auto 2* is a competent, but fun, racer and a so-so car combat title. Seeing cars and buildings explode is always fun, but putting it into a genuine race atmosphere seems like an odd mix. Even the destruction derby-style minigame falls flat. Actually getting a bead on an enemy is a pain and a half. The game's physics engine is much more suited to actual racing than car combat. It's a decent game if you're thirsty for something on your PS3, just don't come in expecting the second coming of *Twisted Metal*.

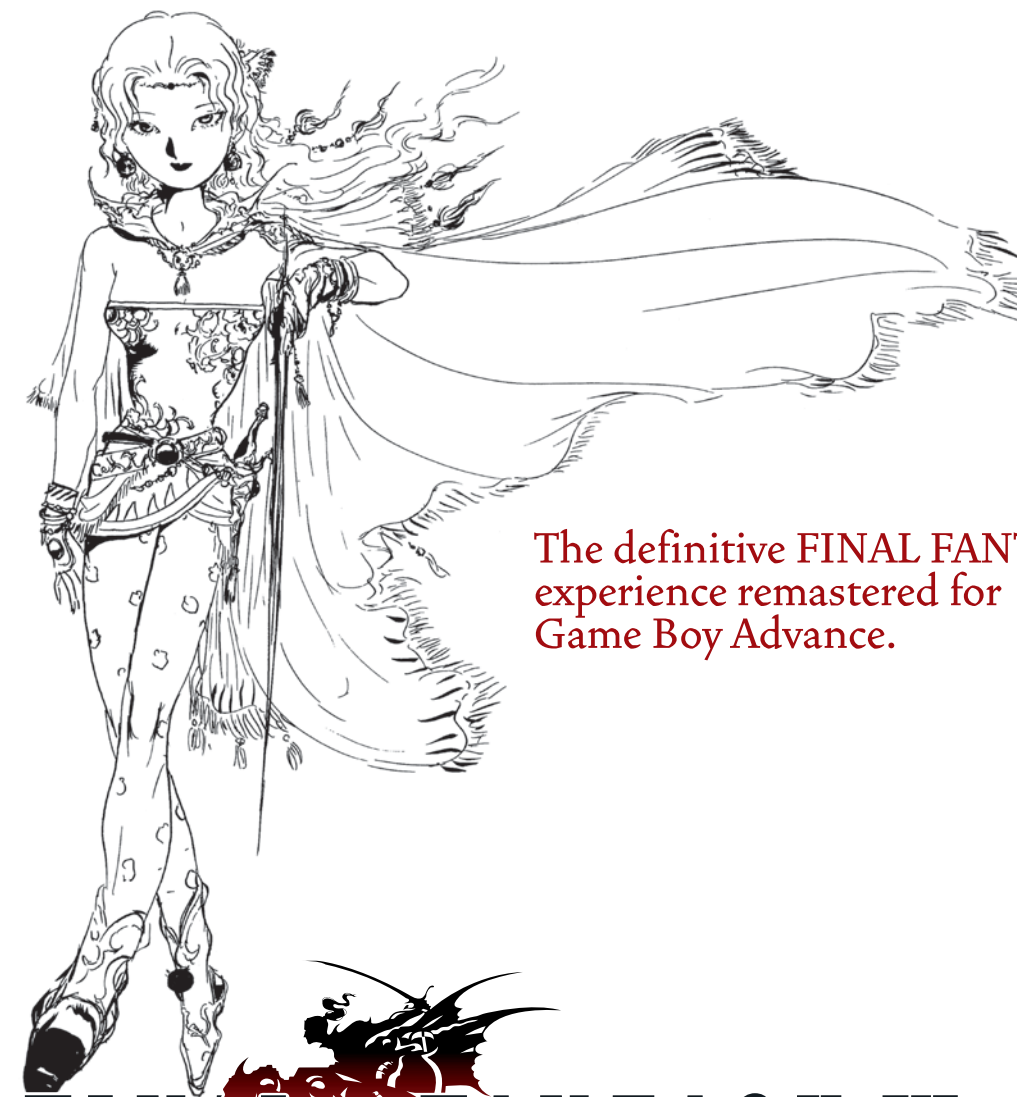
Rating : 3 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
2.5 of 5

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

Full Auto 2 plays like a poor man's version of *Burnout* with the inclusion of guns and the played-out rewind mechanic. Hold out for the real thing.



The definitive FINAL FANTASY experience remastered for Game Boy Advance.

FINAL FANTASY VI

ADVANCE

Previously released as FINAL FANTASY III for the Super NES, enhanced with new features!



A power-hungry empire threatens to enslave the world by reviving the dread power known as magic. An unlikely band of rebels is all that stands in its way...

- Explore never-before-seen dungeons.
- Summon powerful, all-new espers to aid you in battle.
- Command over a dozen unforgettable heroes, each with unique skills.
- Study your foes in the Bestiary, or enjoy your favorite songs with the music player.
- Also playable on Nintendo DS.



EVERYONE 10+
E
 10+
 MILD FANTASY VIOLENCE
 MILD SUGGESTIVE THEMES

SQUARE ENIX™

GAME BOY ADVANCE SP

AVAILABLE: 2-7-07

© 1994, 2006, 2007 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved. Illustration © 2006 YOSHITAKA AMANO. FINAL FANTASY, SQUARE ENIX and the SQUARE ENIX logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. TM, ® and Game Boy Advance are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2007 Nintendo.

Karaoke Revolution Presents

American Idol



Review by Sardius

Publisher : Konami
Developer : Blitz Games
Release Date : 1/2/2007
Rating : Everyone 10+

Genre(s) : Karaoke
Category : With Angry Brits
of players : 1-2

Konami's rhythm-centric Bemani series shone brightly upon its debut, but in the PS2's twilight days, this luster has started to fade. Years of similar sequels to *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Karaoke Revolution* have failed to evolve the core gameplay for either series in any meaningful way, and with *Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol*, this lack of progress has never been more prominent or as detrimental.

Though its name may suggest otherwise, *KRP: American Idol* is just as much of an expansion pack-styled upgrade as all previous *Karaoke Revolution* sequels have been, offering only a select few new features to make itself stand out. Thankfully, the gameplay in *KRP: American Idol* remains much the same as previous *Karaoke Revolution* titles. Blitz Games's attempts to add to this engine, however, are where the real problems lie.

Unlike previous *Karaoke Revolution* games, you are now rated by a panel of judges at the end of every song, making for a significantly tougher experience. While a middling performance may have allowed you to barely pass a stage in earlier *Karaoke Revolution* titles, that same act will probably get you ripped to shreds when it's analyzed by polygonal representations of Randy Jackson, Simon Cowell, and...uh, some woman who isn't Paula Abdul.

These judging sequences — arguably the main selling point of the game that best distinguishes it from previous *Karaoke Revolution* releases — are awful, if you're lucky. At their worst, they're terrifying. *Karaoke Revolution's* polygon character models may be well suited for singing and dancing, but during the judging sequences, you'll see creepy facial expressions, laughably repetitive animations, and a scenic view into the depths of Randy Jackson's throat.

This is not to say that the criticism offered is of any significance, either. The judges have a habit of criticizing your lack of rhythm, for

FINAL SCORE :
2.25 of 5

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

I'm amazed that Konami found a way to make *Karaoke Revolution* even less fun. The *American Idol* license is used about as well as you could hope for, but this was just a bad idea from the start.



one thing, even though the *Karaoke Revolution* gameplay engine only detects vocal tone, not rhythm. The attempts at humorously slamming poor performances often fall flat as well, and post-show standings are reported by a very obviously recorded-from-TV Ryan Seacrest. *American Idol* fans will be disappointed by the poor execution of admittedly neat concepts throughout.

None of these shortcomings would be worth any consideration if *KRP: American Idol's* song list was at least halfway decent, but unfortunately, this is not the case. Here's hoping you like crap-pop bands like Nickelback and Fall Out Boy. While it's fun to win the *American Idol* finals by singing the wrong words to Nickelback's heinously terrible song "Photograph," ("Look at this Nickelback! / Every time I do, it Nickelbacks!") series fans looking for familiar classics — or at the very least listenable music — will find little of interest here.

Lacking the sort of fun additions that made *Karaoke Revolution Party* worthwhile, *Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol* comes across as gimmicky and entirely unnecessary. It's a shame that the series's run on the PS2 had to end on such a sour note.

Rating : 2 of 5

HEROES V OF MIGHT AND MAGIC HAMMERS OF FATE



Review by Kou Aidou

Publisher : Ubisoft
Developer : Nival Interactive
Release Date : 11/14/06
Rating : Teen

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



Heroes of Might & Magic V was my first experience with the *HoMM* series, and upon playing it, I immediately lamented all the years that the series had not been in my life. Thankfully, there's now an expansion set, *Hammers of Fate*, which provides a new campaign, a new faction, and fixes a few of the original game's problems.

The most important of these fixes is the addition of a map editor, a series standby that for some reason wasn't included in *HoMMV's* original release. As this is the kind of game that's designed to let players get crazy with online multiplayer, this expansion pack would be worth buying purely for the addition of the map editor and its added multiplayer potential. Fortunately, there's a decently tasty singleplayer campaign to be found there as well.

Things have gone badly since the events of the war against the necromancer. Queen Isabel reigns on the throne, but her character has changed, and even her most loyal subjects feel that she may have come under the influence of dark magics. Her generals declare war on the dwarves, who have provided sanctuary for the only other heir to the throne, and it's up to a small band of human and dwarven rebels to put a stop to her evil machinations. The plotline is covered over a series of fifteen missions. They offer a wide variety of challenges, from escorts to sieges to simple survival.

The graphics have significantly improved from the original, resulting in better cut-scenes that, unfortunately, make the terrible scriptwriting stand out more. It's at its worst when it attempts to be hip and humorous: try to imagine an overblown John Rhys-Davies-esque burr speaking the line "Elrath has sent us a few more butts

to kick!" and you'll know what I mean. The voice actors do their best, but usually just sound embarrassed.

Fortunately, the gameplay additions are all positive. The new dwarven faction has the ability to spend resources in battle to employ runic enhancements, providing for new strategies and structures. There's also a new gameplay element, caravans, that allow you to directly recruit creatures from dwellings without having to send your hero out as a go-between. The latter is extremely useful, as it means your hero can spend more time being heroic out in the field, and less time babysitting your towns.

There are also some charming little touches that have been added here and there, such as the descriptions that accompany the non-game-significant weeks (my personal favorite is "Week of the Hamster," which doubles unit growth for Battle Hamsters). Sadly, these touches are offset by occasional programming sloppiness, such as text runovers and typos in unit names. While none of this is terribly significant, it takes away from the product's overall polish.

While *Hammers of Fate* may have benefited from a few more weeks of quality control (and a new scriptwriter), it's overall a welcome addition to the fabulous *HoMM* family. The map editor more than justifies its \$30 pricetag, and the little changes don't hurt either.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

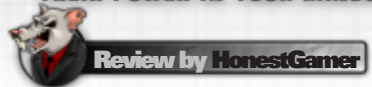
Offers more of the solid, varied strategic gameplay that the *Heroes* series is known for. The presentation is still uneven (and unintentionally hilarious at times) but at least the characters' mouths move now.

FINAL SCORE :
3.75 of 5



BIONICLE HEROES

THEIR POWER IN YOUR HANDS



Publisher : Eidos
Developer : TT Games
Release Date : 11/14/2006
Rating : Everyone 10+

Genre(s) : Shooter
Category : Kid-Friendly
of players : 1



Bionicle Heroes Bionicle Heroes works because it removes the carnage so many gamers like but remembers to replace it with something equally cool: robots.

Levels begin with a few available robots. From there it's all about finding more of them and destroying the bad ones. Switching between any of the six standard heroes is easy, provided you've found the appropriate masks. If you take a lot of damage you lose whoever you're presently controlling (savvy players will switch to less valuable characters when the end is near), but gaining him back is as simple as relocating his mask.

It's important to keep every robot nearby because every stage features areas only one character can access. Hidden passages abound, but you can't reach them without purchasing the proper upgrades for each Bionicle.

With or without upgrades, you'll eventually experience what the game calls "Hero Mode." This turns your robot invincible and lasts until you use golden-colored building blocks to construct a way across some gap or wall, or until you create a beast to help you in one of the numerous boss encounters. Such battles are unfortunately rather redundant, since they usually just require fighting small enemies until you refill your meter, then unleashing a special attack and repeating the whole process. If you proactively retrieve masks whenever you've taken too much damage, victory is assured.



Fortunately, the game provides new content to keep you busy even after you win. You can go back through any conquered stage to collect items you've missed.

In fact, you'll need to if you want to gather everything. You can also play as new robots once you've bested them in battle or found all the right goodies scattered throughout the zones. That's cool, but it can't completely mask the game's primary flaw: tiresome combat.

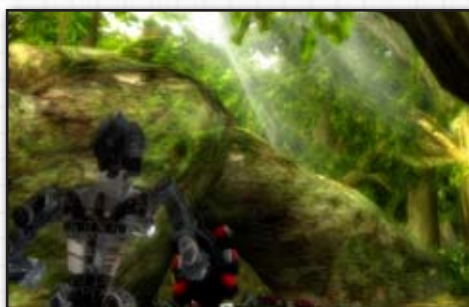
Though each world you visit is brimming with detail and life (more than you might think is even possible in the case of the PlayStation 2 version), combat is not. It mostly amounts to a lot of strafing and is worsened by your inability to adjust the camera or your shots while running and firing. At least you can lock onto targets.

Because combat sometimes isn't as satisfying as it should be, the stages suffer. Aside from offering a few rudimentary puzzles, their main purpose is to serve as an arena for the combat. Even though you can revisit zones to try for better rankings or more blocks, you probably won't more than once or twice. Still, *Bionicle Heroes* is a surprisingly solid shooter that's appropriate for anyone who doesn't mind the repetition. Robots rule.

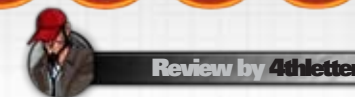
Rating: 3.5 of 5

2nd opinion by [Racewing](#) • Alternate Rating : 3.5 of 5

Are these are the *same people* who gave me *Sonic 3D Blast*? This's quality run-and-gun, and oh-so-shiny on the 360. I didn't expect to have fun with this, but I did.

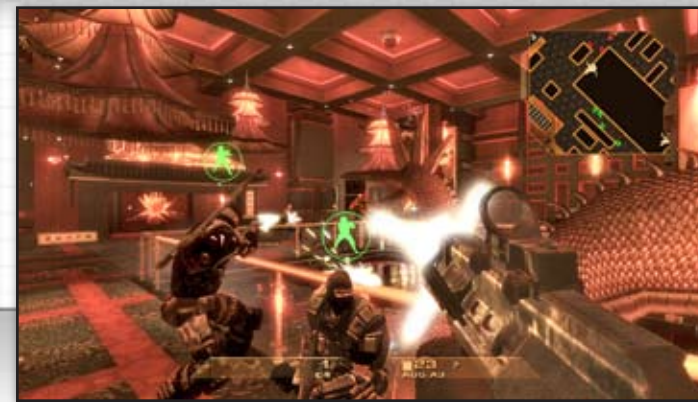


Tom Clancy's RAINBOW SIX VEGAS



Publisher : Ubisoft
Developer : Ubisoft Montreal
Release Date : 11/21/06
Rating : Mature (Violence)

Genre(s) : FPS
Category : Tactical
of players : 1-16



Vegas is the first next-gen exclusive entry in the Tom Clancy series of games, so it's got quite a bit of hype to live up to in this HD-era. Luckily, it is more than up to the task. It takes place mostly in the first-person perspective, save for a few context-sensitive areas that pull out to third-person. So, yes, this is yet another military/tactical FPS, but it's a standout in the genre.

The gimmick is that Las Vegas has been taken over by certain terrorist group and only RAINBOW can clear it out. You will fast-rope in and command your squad to victory or death, depending on your skill. The controls are standard first-person shooter fare, from weapons selection and acquisition to accessory activation. Commanding your squad is accomplished via the d-pad, which is really the only sensible choice. This does result in making moving and commanding at the same time somewhat rough, but it's nothing insurmountable. You should be commanding from cover, anyway.

Speaking of cover and commanding, both are just as important as always. You aren't going to be able to rush into a room or down a crowded hallway without a gameplan. Commanding your men to move to a certain position on hot or cold status is simply done. Setting them up to bang and clear a room is super-easy, too. You also have the option of having them form up on a door while you go searching for another entrance, resulting in a two-pronged attack.



There is plenty of audio feedback from your squad, as well. They'll let you know if what you're planning is a stupid idea. If they tell you something isn't tactically sound, listen to them.

The plan may be more trouble than it's worth. Luckily, if you get shot to pieces, you can just duck behind some cover until you heal up and are ready to get back into the fray.

If this new Unreal Engine is the beginning of the future, consider me duly impressed. *Rainbow Six: Vegas* is one pretty-looking game, and it doesn't play too shabbily, either. There is a stunning attention to detail at work throughout the game. The first stage in the game alone, a washed-out urban area, has enough debris, scratched up walls, dirty streets, and realistic grass to impress even the most jaded of graphics nuts. The requisite nightvision and infrared goggles are available and look quite impressive in hi-def.

We're left with a visually impressive package with perfectly solid team-based gameplay. The multiplayer is, as per usual with the Clancy titles, excellent, too. You could make the point that shooters are prevalent to the point of oversaturation nowadays, but that doesn't detract from the overall quality of the title. It's fun, and I figure that is all that matters.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

After a dismal last outing, the *Rainbow Six* series is back on track thanks to several new gameplay implementations and some of the fiercest multiplayer firefights ever.



FINAL SCORE : **4 of 5**

DEAD OR ALIVE XTREME 2



Review by Racewing

Publisher : Tecmo
Developer : Team Ninja
Release Date : 11/13/2006
Rating : Mature (Partial Nudity, Sexual Themes, Simulated Gambling)

Genre(s) : Sports/Simulation
Category : Pixellated Pimpin' Ain't Easy
of players : 1 (2-4 online)

When *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* was released, it blew my mind.

Never before had a mainstream developer so brazenly sacrificed basic concepts of video game structure and design for the sake of somewhat tasteful fanservice, skin-shots, thinly-veiled lesbianism and general fluff. As this magazine's resident fanservice connoisseur (trust me, it's tough work), I was on cloud nine... for about a week, after which, I went back to playing games with actual substance.

Now, the sequel is here, on next-generation hardware; however, instead of weeks, I have sadly tired of it in mere hours. *DOAX2* somehow feels like a phoned-in sequel, a project that Itagaki perhaps had second thoughts about mid-production. At every turn, there are aspects that could and should have been executed far better.

DOAXVB pushed the Xbox hardware almost to its limit for the sake of fantasy fulfillment. *DOAX2*, on the other hand, is surpassed graphically by this Christmas's crop of Xbox 360 hits. *Gears of War*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Smackdown vs. Raw 2007*... all of these contain far more convincing graphical feats than the game that truly needs to contain such fidelity. Why is there clipping and flat polygon usage in an Xbox 360 game? Why do hands and feet look almost like solid masses on my high-definition TV? Why do the girls move stiffly, and act like they're afraid to come within five feet of each other besides? Finally, for God's sakes, what is up with the independently bouncing breasts? They don't work like that, Itagaki. Seriously.

Gameplay-wise, *DOAX2* "fixes" things that weren't broken. The functional volleyball from the first game is now an utter mess, with spotty AI and extra control mechanics that didn't really need to be added. Pool Hopping now incorporates the color-coding of the face buttons, which makes no sense when you think about it.

FINAL SCORE :

2.75 of 5

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

I'm honestly torn. This is harmless fanservice, and its total lack of pretension or violence is endearing, but just like the original, it's not actually much of a game.



Which would you rather concentrate on, guys — a hopping girl, or your controller?

The new minigames don't fare much better. Beach Flags is imprecise, Tug of War and Butt Bouncing are too simplistic and almost based on luck. Water-Sliding isn't even fun to look at, let alone play. The best of the bunch is Jet Skiing, and even that can get frustrating. This is supposed to be my dream vacation? This is supposed to be my stress relief? This is supposed to be virtual worship and appreciation of the female form? Consider the ball totally, completely dropped.

The one good thing about this game is what it does for your ears. The bouncy soundtrack makes a return, and the English voice acting is actually decent. (Extra props who whoever cast Zack's voice this time. Boo-yah.) Sadly, this is the only place where *Xtreme 2* truly excels. Your mileage may vary, but for me, this game was a mess of disappointments that could have been easily avoided with extra development time. Rent before buying.

Rating: 2.5 of 5



GOOZEX™

1 GAME 1 DOLLAR

Join Today & Start Trading!

Use coupon code:
HCG-0207-35799 and get **3 FREE** bonus trade credits after your first positive trade!



WWW.GOOZEX.COM

SAVE
get games for only \$1
No other fees!

TRADE
you pick the games you want,
Goozex does the rest

PLAY MORE
thousands of games
for all major platforms

"... Goozex believes it's got a great answer"

PC GAMER

"There are already a few game trading sites on the internet. We like the looks of Goozex, though."

GAMES RADAR

(c) 2007 Goozex, Inc. All rights reserved. Goozex, the Goozex logo and the Goozex mascot are the property of Goozex, Inc. The Goozex mascot is a registered copyright of Goozex, Inc. All other registered trademarks, trademarks and logos are the property of their respective owners. You must be 18 years or older and reside in the USA or Canada to use the service. Cost of each transaction is \$1.00. Users may incur additional costs due to shipping rates, returns, purchase of Goozex points, and other service charges.

graphic design: OzStudio www.ozstudio.com

Mazes of Fate

Review by Wanderer

Publisher : Graffiti Entertainment Genre(s) : RPG
 Developer : Sabarasa Entertainment Category : Time Paradox
 Release Date : 12/6/2006 # of players : 1
 Rating : Teen



You could be forgiven for thinking *Mazes of Fate* is a repackaged ten-year-old PC game, sort of like *Astonishia Story* on the PSP. It's got all the earmarks of a classic first-person dungeon stomp, right down to a somewhat unfair difficulty curve.

The weird thing is that it's a brand-new game. Sabarasa Entertainment, out of Argentina, is the first Latin American developer to make a title for a Nintendo console. I've been following this game for a little while, and they've been up front about what they wanted to do. They played a lot of classic dungeon crawlers, and were hoping to make a game that was a distillation of what made those classic titles fun.

Mazes of Fate, as such, is aimed strictly at hardcore retrogamers. Think of *Wizardry*, *Dungeon Master*, and *Eye of the Beholder*, and you'll get some idea of what *Mazes of Fate* is all about. You begin in a small village, with no greater ambition than surviving long enough to become a hero. Early conversations serve as teasers for what'll eventually become the game's driving plot — a battle against a race of evil goatmen to save humanity from extinction at the hands of the gods — but you start off as J. Random Adventurer, with a hundred gold crowns, a simple weapon, and the life expectancy of a snowball in a cyclotron.

You pick up on quests by talking to the people around town, who show up as hand-drawn images whenever you enter a building, and who you interact with through conversation trees. Most of these quests will take you into caves, crypts, dungeons, towers, and forbidden temples; in other words, you go to many of the usual places where evil things with fat loots tend to hang out.

Exploring those areas forms the bulk of the gameplay in *Mazes of Fate*, and this is where the retro kicks in. You interact with your environment by pressing B, then moving a hand icon around the screen and pressing A, to pick things up, take objects, pull levers, or what-have-you.

When enemies show up, you take them on by calling up a combat menu. It looks like the combat should be real-time, but it's turn-based, and its conflict resolution system seems to owe more to pen-and-paper RPGs (or maybe to early computer games that were essentially based on pen-and-paper RPGs) than to anything else. You should expect to miss a lot, but then, so should the enemies; at the same time, you may drop an enemy in one lucky hit, but they can sometimes do the same thing to you. You need a few levels under your belt before you can really expect to survive without convulsively saving the game every couple of feet.

That may be the biggest problem *Mazes of Fate* has. It's an unapologetic throwback of a game, and it faithfully recreates an entire bygone subgenre... including a few of the bad parts. It's riding the boundary between being challenging and being completely ridiculous. That, on top of a generally unpolished presentation (the script's full of minor translation problems, and there's a certain amount of input lag on all the menus), is enough to dock it a point and a half. There's a hell of a sequel lurking somewhere in *Mazes of Fate*, but for now, how much you like the game may depend on how fondly you remember the PC RPGs of the late eighties.

Rating: 3.5 of 5

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

Due to dim dungeons, a slow pace, and choppy battle, this is only recommended for *Eye of the Beholder* fans. Curious players should wait for a price drop, while the rest can safely skip *Mof*.



Wii

METAL SLUG ANTHOLOGY

Review by Racewing

Publisher : SNK Playmore Genre(s) : Retro Shooter Compilation
 Developer : Terminal Reality Category : Leave No Cute Soldier Girl Behind
 Release Date : 12/14/2006 # of players : 1-2
 Rating : Teen (Blood, Violence)



Alongside *Contra* and *Gunstar Heroes*, *Metal Slug* has always stood for run-and-gun action on an awesome level. Throughout its seven installments (*Metal Slug 3D/Evolution* doesn't count, though I can't quite bring myself to loathe it outright), expertly-animated hand-drawn sprites populate the screen, leaving you and a friend to shoot them down without getting shot yourselves.

For the most part, all six *Metal Slugs* (and *Metal Slug X*) are all reproduced faithfully on the Wii. It even lacks much of the slowdown that the NeoGeo games had. There's just one niggling bit that the developers left out: when enemies with large amounts of hit points are shot, they're supposed to flash. In this anthology, that rarely happens. Sure, it adds some challenge, but not in the way it should.

The presentation itself also shows signs of being rushed. The menus are bare-bones, not even going to the trouble of giving you visual diagrams of the control schemes. Also, is it asking too much these days for developers to provide high-resolution official art as unlockables instead of small, blurry images? The unlockable arranged music is a plus, lack of online play is a minus.

Seven differing control schemes have been included, and the developers went all out. Some are welcome additions, such as the one that moves your character with the nunchuck while letting you shoot with the Wii Remote's trigger, and chuck grenades by flicking

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

I am probably the biggest *Metal Slug* fan here, and the lack of a classic controller config (or GC d-pad) and hit-flash brings *MSA* down. The collection is great despite its flaws, however, and well worth picking up.



your wrist. Some are just crazy enough to work, like the Nunchuk-Only mode that lets you play one-handed. Some are well-intentioned flops, like the Arcade mode that asks you to hold the remote as if it were an upright arcade joystick. Finally, some just outright fail, such as the one that asks you to tilt the Wii Remote left and right to move your character.

However, depending on your point of view, these control setups are either *MSA*'s biggest draw or biggest flaw. For all of its ways to play, the developers neglected to include a traditional mode with digital control and three buttons. The closest it gets is with the Gamecube controller, and D-Pad support for it was disabled, along with Classic Controller support. This means that people wanting to play with a control pad or an arcade stick are pretty much SOL.

Is this a ballsy move, or just developer idiocy? You be the judge. The lines have already been drawn regarding this one by the fans. Personally, I got the game for the Wii-specific controls, and have other ways to get my *Slug* on, normal-style. Therefore, I'm not complaining.

If you absolutely, positively must recreate a "true" arcade *Metal Slug* experience, you're best off looking for a different version of *MSA* in the months to come. If, however, you like your shooters with added comedy and play variation (trying out all of the different controls is a blast with friends), then you might want to give this a shot. You bought your Wii to play games in non-traditional ways anyway... didn't you?

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 3.5 of 5

Initial D Arcade Stage 4

Preview by Arlieth

Sega is bringing a long-awaited update to the *Initial D: Arcade Stage* series to arcades, complete with new graphics, new hardware and plenty of new cars to redline down the hills of Akina, Tsuchisaka and Irohazaka. Featuring the

new Lindburgh platform (also used in *Virtua Fighter 5*) and a 40-inch wide-screen HDTV, it is no longer referred to as "Arcade Stage ver," in order to signify its status as a true sequel and not a simple upgrade. The vehicle physics have also been revamped, getting rid of the gimmicky speed glitches from *Initial D: Arcade Stage ver.3* and removing much of the artificial balancing that evened out the capabilities of many vehicles. *Initial D: Stage 4* contains a variety of courses, playable in reverse and with varying environmental conditions such as rain, snow and day/night, as well as new cutscenes using cel-shaded models of the characters from the anime (not that anyone really bothered reading the cutscenes, but it's nice to know that Sega's going all the way with the overhaul).

Not all of the new features will be a step forward for players, however. *Stage 4* will also introduce the IC Card system, which holds more data and is more durable than the magnetic cards used in the past. Because of this, it will no longer be backwards-compatible with previous versions, meaning that you'll have to start over from scratch. With the IC Card's enhanced capacity, however, it now has room for a new avatar feature in which players can customize and accessorize their likenesses (drawn in the *Initial D* manga style) with new haircuts and clothing. Players also won't have to buy a new card every fifty plays, like before.

Initial D: Arcade Stage 4 will also feature Sega's All.Net online link system, allowing players to challenge each other from separate arcades! Combined with the IC Card's avatar customization system, this allows players to suffer the indignity of being smoked by a fourteen-year old girl driving a super-tuned RX-8, anywhere in the world! Previously, this sort of online network was attempted by Taito for its *Battle Gear 3* racer, but the NESYS network (which players logged onto by inserting a slick-looking key into the ignition) established in the United States was prematurely cancelled, and U.S. arcade operators found themselves unable to connect to the Japanese NESYS servers. (NESYS did not support online head-to-head play. It only provided network support for stats and scores.)

Hopefully, Sega's American All.Net servers will allow domestic players the opportunity to race head-to-head against the best in Japan, or at least across the country. It's this combination of an immersive experience with the convenience of online play that is a key strategy to reviving the arcade coin-up industry in the United States. Don't expect the American version of *Initial D: Arcade Stage 4* to arrive until late 2007, but in the meantime, keep your fingers crossed for All.Net's online play support!

Publisher: Sega | Developer: Sega Rosso | ESRB: Teen | Release Date: TBA
Genre: Head to Head Racing | Category: Driving Way Too Fast | Players: 1-2
Platform: Arcade (Sega Lindburgh)



NEW YORK COMIC CON

Feb. 23-25, 2007

Jacob Javits Center
New York City

COMICS TOYS GRAPHIC NOVELS MANGA ANIME GAMES MOVIES/TV

SECOND ANNUAL!



GAMING HAS A NEW HOME AT NEW YORK COMIC CON

- Gaming events from **WizKids, Wizards of the Coast, Score, Hidden City, Privateer Press, Tenacious**, more!
- Videogames from **Konami, Sony, 2K Games, Ubisoft**, more!
- MMO games from **EA Mythic**, more!
- TCGs, miniature games, boardgames, and RPGs from other top manufacturers and retailers!

MMO ZONE PRESENTED BY:

Computer Games MAGAZINE
MASSIVE MAGAZINE

WIZKIDS



KONAMI



Buy Tickets online NOW and SAVE:

WWW.NYCOMICCON.COM

or call 1-888-605-6059

Sponsors:



Presented by:



GAME TRADE

Reed Exhibitions

New York Comic Con is not affiliated with any other comic convention event, including any other event having Comic-Con in its name.

Organized by Reed Exhibitions © 2006 REED-ELSEVIER, Inc.

ON THE DOWNLOAD

GAMES YOU CAN DOWNLOAD AND PLAY ON YOUR CONSOLES AND COMPUTING MACHINES



DEVELOPER: TREASURE • **PLATFORM:** WII
GENRE: ACTION • **CATEGORY:** TWIN-STICK DESTRUCTION
OF PLAYERS: 1-2 • **PRICE:** 1200 POINTS (\$10.00)
GET IT AT: WII VIRTUAL CONSOLE

There's been a lot written about *Gunstar Heroes* over the years, starting off with calling it the best run & gun shooter ever made and only getting more positive from there. Well, it's all true, every bit of it.



The level design is flawless, with every area offering something different. The standard enemies are fun to fight and swarm the screen in large numbers, which is fine seeing as you've got tons of firepower in addition to a number of hand-to-hand moves, and it all controls perfectly with the standard three button setup left over from the Genesis days. Bosses are huge, creative, numerous, and require a variety of strategies to defeat. *Gunstar Heroes* deserves a spot on every Wii owners' Virtual Console. It's Treasure at its best, showing exactly why after all these years we pay so much attention to everything it does. This game deserves a permanent spot on every Wii owner's Virtual Console.

SCORE: 5 OF 5



DEVELOPER: DLITWISE PROD. • **PLATFORM:** PC
GENRE: ARCADE SHOOTER • **CATEGORY:** CLASSIC TRIPPINESS
OF PLAYERS: 1 • **PRICE:** \$20.00
GET IT AT: [HTTP://WWW.DLITWISE.COM/NEONWARS.HTML](http://www.dlitwise.com/neonwars.html)

Ever since the success of *Geometry Wars 2*, arena shooters have been in the middle of a renaissance. While most of them stick to the tried and true twin-stick formula, *Neon Wars* does something new, taking fire control away from the player almost completely. Instead, the player guides the ship around as it shoots a constant stream of firepower at unending waves of enemies. Collecting stars powers up the weapon, eventually turning it from a slow-firing single-shooter into a high-speed spread of death.



The lack of control over fire direction combined with the need to constantly collect stars makes *Neon Wars* a game of maneuvering. Because the ship targets the closest enemy, aim becomes a matter of deciding which group of enemies to close in on, assuming they're not coming to you at top speed. With a bit of practice it feels like the game is reading your mind, usually shooting at just the right enemy without any conscious thought involved. If that's not working, there are a variety of super-weapons to either clear the screen immediately or give you enough firepower to do the job yourself.

SCORE: 4 OF 5



DEVELOPER: NIFFLAS • **PLATFORM:** PC
GENRE: EXPLORATION • **CATEGORY:** AMBIENT
OF PLAYERS: 1 • **PRICE:** FREE
GET IT AT: [HTTP://KNYTT.NI2.SE/](http://knytt.ni2.se/)

It's not always necessary to slaughter everything that moves; sometimes it's nice to be able to just kick back, explore, and soak in the otherworldly sights and sounds of a new land. Of course, it doesn't help that Knytt, after being abducted by an alien spaceship, is kind of stuck on the planet until he finds all the missing saucer parts, but there's no reason not to enjoy the sights along the way. Knytt can jump, climb walls, and send out a beam of light to point a straight line to the nearest saucer piece, and the rest is pure exploration.



On land, jumping from cloud to cloud, through caverns and tunnels, but not through water (he can't swim), Knytt makes his way through the large, side-scrolling world as best he can in a relaxed, low-key adventure that's a great change of pace from the usual adrenaline rush.

SCORE: 4 OF 5



DEVELOPER: NAIKED SKY • **PLATFORM:** XBOX 360, PC
GENRE: ADVENTURE • **CATEGORY:** ROBOT MAYHEM
OF PLAYERS: 1 • **PRICE:** 1200 POINTS (\$10.00)
GET IT AT: XBOX LIVE ARCADE, [HTTP://WWW.ROBOBLITZ.COM/](http://www.roboblitz.com/)

Space pirates get into everything if you're not careful, and in *RoboBlitz* they're attacking the space cannon that space technician Blitz is space protecting. Under attack from a variety of enemy robots, Blitz has to roll around the station and bring all the systems back online so that the cannon, currently in a sad state of disrepair, can repel the advancing horde. Each of the station's broken-down systems requires two levels full of combat and simple problem solving, plus a boss battle, to bring back up to speed. Finding the computer chips scattered around each area lets Blitz upgrade himself from a slow, weak mech into a high-speed, heavily-armed robot of doom, complete with a spiffy double-flip slow-mo jump for those bullet-time moments.

RoboBlitz is a good deal of fun when everything's working right, with some creative weaponry like the homing missile that burns into enemies, launching them into the air where they explode in a lovely display of fireworks. Blitz also earns a bungee cord-like energy device, allowing him to connect items together, reel smaller stuff in from a distance, or sproing towards any surface at high speed. It's just unfortunate that the floaty controls and spastic third-person camera can be so frustrating, because it almost overshadows the fun of linking two airborne enemies together and watching them explode. It doesn't quite do it, though, so despite its issues *RoboBlitz* ends up being a good round of mech blasting adventure.

SCORE: 3.5 OF 5



DEVELOPER: WINDMILL GAMES • **PLATFORM:** XBOX 360
GENRE: ACTION • **CATEGORY:** TWIN-STICK DESTRUCTION
OF PLAYERS: 1-2 • **PRICE:** 1200 POINTS (\$10.00)
GET IT AT: XBOX LIVE ARCADE

In *Assault Heroes*, a heavily-armed buggy drives along blasting everything in its path using far more firepower than such a cute vehicle should have available. Movement and firing are controlled in the classic twin-stick style, with the left analog used to steer and the right to fire. A click of the right bumper cycles between the three main weapons, each of which has its place. The machine gun puts out a steady stream of weak firepower, great for mowing down infantry and small vehicles, while the slow but powerful cannon is good on buildings, bosses, and larger armored tanks. Finally, the flamethrower's powerful but limited-range constant stream of burning death is good on everything, but can overheat and conk out with constant use. If that's not enough then grenades and a screen-clearing nuke are available to aid in the devastation.

While the screen doesn't get as crowded with enemies as *Geometry Wars* and the like, there's still a lot going on at once. Spiderbots and infantry, all sorts of tanks and aerial threats, and huge, creative bosses abound. The colorful graphics and booming explosions are even better in co-op play, although the doubling of firepower doesn't equal twice the enemies so it can be a bit easy. *Assault Heroes* is the game *Total Carnage* should have been: an ass-kicking mindless blaster with overpowered characters facing ridiculous odds, made even more fun when taken on with a friend. Games like this are why we have Live Arcade.

SCORE: 4 OF 5



PUBLISHER: AQUA PLUS • DEVELOPER: AQUA PLUS + FLIGHT PLAN • RELEASE DATE: 10/26/2006 • GENRE: ADV/RPG • CATEGORY: NEKONIMI MODE • # OF PLAYERS: 1

Every game has a plot, but few have anything that could really be called a story, and fewer still tell their stories well. *Utawarerumono* is in that happy minority. That's not too surprising, since life as one of Aqua Plus's experiments in seeing how far they could push the gameplay aspect of the already story-heavy (and much maligned) datesim genre.

Half of *Utawarerumono* is the familiar datesim process of going through dialogue and wandering from location to location to trigger events, but the other half is a full console-style grid-based strategy RPG. The way Aqua Plus brings the plot demands of these two disparate genres together is quite clever, and results in one of the more fully-fleshed and engaging game stories you're likely to find on the PS2.

In all fairness, the original *Utawarerumono* was part of the thriving genre of adventure-game throwbacks that still finds an audience in Japan. It was originally an H-game, but virtually all of those girl-get elements have been excised from the console version. Instead, new subplots and artwork were added to replace them, and the overall result is a far better and more logical story. It also means you get higher-resolution, better-drawn artwork than most PS2 titles that use still art usually bother with.

The original PC game's combat system has received an overhaul courtesy of Flight-Plan, the developers of the excellent *Summon Night* series, and the result has all of the tactical depth you'd expect. The gameplay is more like *Shining Force* than *Disgaea*; which is to say it's more about using what characters you have efficiently than running a sprawling power-level grind into infinity. Instead of making an army of characters from generic classes, *Utawarerumono* gives you one or two story characters who conform to each of the major SRPG archetypes (archers, caster, healer, etc). This helps give the game a livelier and more engaging cast than most recent SRPGs, since there are more named characters to go around. Most characters have a variety of inherent special abilities that need to be exploited properly on the battlefield, and stats you can customize by investing bonus points in them at level up.

The green "energy gauge" that each character has is particularly interesting. It goes up every time a character takes an action on the battlefield. You can spend energy on special maneuvers, like team-up attacks with compatible characters when they're nearby, and have sufficient energy to pay for the attack, or on combo chains. The team-ups are vital because they're really the only way to damage more than one target at a time, and how you use them will frequently determine the overall course of a battle. Whenever a character attacks (or when Eluluu heals) and you have enough energy, a circle flashes around the target. Tap the circle button in time with the flash and your character attacks again, doing extra damage at a reduced rate. The combat engine is fond of letting enemies hang on to life with single-digit HP, so using your combos properly can save you a lot of grief in the long run. At high enough levels, you can finish combos with beautifully animated and catastrophically damaging "finisher" moves, but the timing required to do one is remarkably exacting.

The story is probably going to be hard to appreciate when you play the game as an import, especially since it's conveyed largely in spoken dialogue and text, with the odd battlefield cut-scene using the marvelously detailed, high-resolution battle sprites. Digging up a synopsis of the game won't help you much either, since *Utawarerumono*'s core plot doesn't really cover any new ground: it's got the amesiac protagonist, secret origins of the world, and political bickering between rival fantasy kingdoms all down. What's special about *Utawarerumono*'s story is the way its told, with a truly novel-like attention to detail. It subverts quite a few game story cliches to fascinating effect, and takes a delightfully realistic view of what the logical end of a game character's progression of power-ups would likely be. Despite the large cast, no character gets forgotten about and everyone gets fleshed out with a variety of personality quirks, preferences, and sometimes genuinely surprising revelations. Before long you are likely to find yourself genuinely interested in who the man called Hakuoro really is, and what this means for his adoptive family Eluluu and Aruruu. When the game's ending rolls around, you'll be sad to see it over so soon.

Given how badly most RPGs overstay their welcome these days, and how blandly interchangeable their casts are, that's high praise indeed.

うたわらるもの

utawarerumono



Review by Lynxara

The Anime

If you've heard of *Utawarerumono* at all before this, you either hang out on the Megatokyo forums, are some other sort of datesim geek, or happened to hear about the anime. The *Utawarerumono* TV series was produced by Oriental Light and Magic, who have in the past produced some truly dire material when adapting video game licenses. For *Utawarerumono* they were in good form, though, and the result is a show that is not just watchable but often downright entertaining. The series shows signs of being low budget throughout its run, much like the game, but still manages some lovely battle sequences and one-on-one duels.

ADV snapped up the license in August of 2005, and the first volume of the domestic DVD release goes on sale January 16th as *Utawarerumono: The Mask of a Stranger*. If you're interested in the *Utawarerumono* plot but afraid of trying to slog through reams of Japanese text in the game, the anime's domestic release may seem like an attractive option. *Caveat emptor*: while the anime sticks to the game's overall plot, it's not nearly as well-told a story. Up through the show's halfway point it's a good watch, but the last half of the series is so rushed as to be nearly incoherent. You may ultimately find yourself wanting to play the game so you can better understand what the hell was going on in the anime!

Worth Importing!

It's very worth picking up *Utawarerumono* if you're willing to hang with the immensely long text sequences between battles. A kind soul by the handle "LegoTechnic" has written an excellent FAQ that tells you basically everything you'd ever need to know to play it as an English-speaker, complete with Shift-JIS support. Still, I hope some enterprising American publisher will read this review and get it in their head that this is a game worth localizing. Atlas? NIS America? Mastiff?

FINAL SCORE: 4 of 5



Review by Wanderer

カオスウォーズ CHAOS WARS

Publisher: Idea Factory Genre(s): Turn-Based Strategy
Developer: Aruze/Atlus/Idea Factory/Red Entertainment # of Players: 1
Release Date: 9/21/2006 Category: Hey Kids Look It's Yuri Hyuga

Chaos Wars is sort of like the RPG equivalent of Namco x Capcom or Super Robot Wars, with the casts of the first two Shadow Hearts, Spectral Souls, Gungrave, and Grawlanser all teaming up. The story involves a first-year student, Hyoma Kusaka, inadvertently fulfilling a prophecy about his family when he opens a magical gate. Strategy-themed combat on a host of different worlds ensues, as does a ton of text.

Fortunately, Chaos Wars is a fairly intuitive turn-based strategy game, so playing it doesn't require any real fluency in Japanese. It's actually very much like Phantom Brave; the battlefield is hexless, you dispatch your fighters from a base panel at the beginning of a fight, and characters and monsters take actions based upon their stats rather than alternating between player and enemy turns. As you progress through the game's missions, you'll gradually accumulate more fighters for your "army," which you can dispatch one by one at the start of a fight. Fortunately, the similarities to Phantom Brave stop short of implementing the bizarre "hopping" battlefield, so surrounding a weak caster with meatshields is once again a viable defensive tactic.

Chaos Wars's combat system is probably the most interesting thing about it. Instead of assigning characters one action per turn with at least one "free" combat option (i.e. Attack), everything you can do costs something. All

combat abilities cost their user a certain amount of SP, some of which regenerates between turns. At the same time, if you attack an enemy who's within a certain radius of one or more of your allies, you'll have the option to team up for a devastating combo attack. Of course, the natural consequence of this is that you may wind up burning all of a given character's SP before their turn comes up. It also means that in order to use your best attacks, you'll have to forfeit a few turns.

At the same time, Chaos Wars has a bizarre sort of "momentum" system. Every time a character acts in combat, they may fractionally improve one or more of their statistics. You don't exactly level up, per se; you just use a character until he or she stops sucking, and his or her rank consequently increases.

That actually winds up being a problem. You see, characters level up very quickly in Chaos Wars, so it's very easy to wind up ahead of the curve. That's the only explanation I have as to why I steamrolled the game as hard as I did; by the time I hit the second world, I could not be stopped. Imagine Gamesharking your way through an average Nippon Ichi game, and that'll be a lot like playing Chaos Wars. It's long on fanservice (sort of), but very short on any real challenge, and without a challenge, there's no real reason to play it at all.

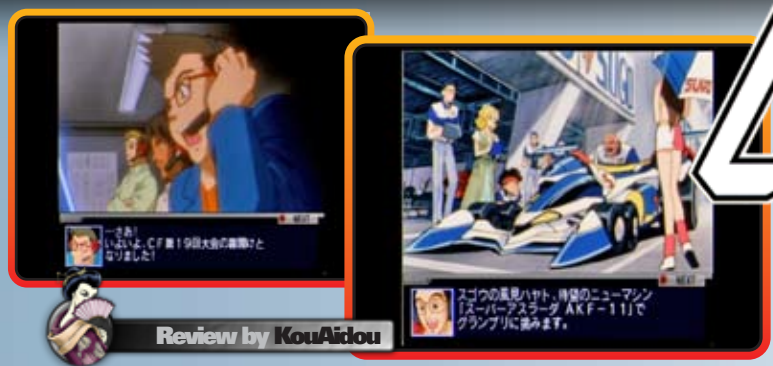


FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5

WORTH IMPORTING?

This will receive an American release right about when they open an ice-skating rink in Hell, unless it gets a fan translation. Die-hard strategy gamers and the hardcore American Shadow Hearts fans might get a kick out of it, but it's not much more than a brief distraction.

新世紀GPX CYBER FORMULA サイバースポーツ3 ROAD TO THE INFINITY



Review by KouAidou

Publisher: Sunrise Genre(s): Racing
Developer: Sunrise Interactive Category: Cyber Formula
Release Date: 10/26/06 # of Players: 2

Future GPX Cyber Formula: The Road to the Infinity 3 is a game that makes a lot of promises, any arrangement of which would send any good Cyber Formula fan scrambling to the nearest import site to place an immediate order. It promises an all-new story mode written by Mitsuo Fukuda and Chiaki Morosawa, new character designs by Hirokazu Hisayuki, and new car designs by Shoji Kawamori. It promises a GPX mode where you can follow the story of any character featured in any historic Cyber Formula race since the 13th. It promises an unprecedented amount of visual and audio fanservice, from music to voice clips to character profiles.

It also promises new graphical and racing engines, and here's where you might be fooled. I'm going to tell you now that "new" does not always mean better. In the case of Rttl3, think of "new" in the sense that it is used in the following phrase: "beating my head against that brick wall was a totally new experience."

This is an ugly, ugly, ugly game. The crisp detail and reflection effects that made the original Road to the Infinity a delight to play and watch have been tossed out in exchange for something that would almost look more appropriate on the PS1. The cars are blocky, jaggy, and cheap; the backgrounds are stark and lacking in detail. The anime screencaps that help tell the various story modes don't appear to be taken from a remastered source: they look muddy, blurry, and dark, especially next to the vibrant digital footage of Hisayuki's newly-drawn character designs.

The gameplay's not much better. While the original Rttl was accessible even to casual racing fans, with a multitude of cars that catered to a variety of skill levels, here, the cars all handle like 10-ton shopping carts. You're screwed if you don't know how to Drift, and God help you if you want to use a Grip racer. I guess it's possible that the developers were going for a more realistic engine — cars that regularly do 400 kmph shouldn't exactly be great on corners — but who had the idea to pack a game full of anime-related unlockables, and then make the actual racing completely inaccessible to casual fans?

What's ironic is that, in all other ways, the game fixes just about everything that was weak with the original Rttl. All the additional voice clips and customizable BGMs give the game a more personal feel, and the story modes would add a ton of replay value if individual races were worth playing in the first place. That it should simultaneously lose everything that made the first game attractive and fun in the first place, though, just makes it an exercise in frustration.

WORTH IMPORTING?

There may be some Cyber Formula fans out there dedicated (or skilled) enough to struggle through all this to access the plentiful unlockables and story modes, but the visual quality is so bad overall that even as fanservice, it hardly seems worth it. Maybe we'll see a remake in the future that gives us the best of both worlds; until then, all but the most hardcore should pass.



Same car, same track, same location, but the image on the left is from the 2003 game, while the image on the right is from Rttl3. Yeah, apparently they just hate you.

FINAL SCORE :
2 of 5



by Metalbolt

Jon Fotis and Destiny Burch, cosplaying *Final Fantasy 6*'s magitek armor being driven by Terra, have experienced the highest honor a cosplayer can possibly experience. They were hand-chosen for an award by the creator of the characters they were cosplaying. The man himself, Yoshitaka Amano, chose and presented them with the "Amano's favorite" award at the Metrocon: Amano's World cosplay contest.

When he first saw it, Amano said: "This is exactly the size and the shape as I pictured it, as I was thinking of it. You guys did an amazing job with this. I love it. You guys are awesome." When presenting them with the award, he had this to say: "Back when I was coming up with the general idea for [*Final Fantasy 6*] I was coming up with ideas that would make a good poster for the game. I thought the best thing I could do would be Terra and the magitek armor, and this weekend, my poster came to life... and the winner is Jon and Destiny!"

Over one hundred man hours, six hundred dollars, and a torn ACL later, all of Jon's hard work definitely paid off!



Cos-play (kos-plä)

v. A combination of the words costume and play. People known as "cosplayers" dress up as their favorite characters from anime, movies, and video games.

Photos by: risingsun.net



POLITICIANS CONSIDER VIDEO GAMES TO BE AS DANGEROUS AS GUNS AND NARCOTICS. AND THEY'RE SPENDING \$90 MILLION TO PROVE IT.

Fight back at www.theeca.com



Fan art is all about giving exposure to aspiring artists who might not otherwise have a way to get their artsie parts seen. If you are one such artist, point your web browser toward www.hardcoregamer.com and check out the Fan Art section of our message boards. That is where you can post your arts to get them considered for this section. If your entry is picked to print in the magazine, we'll give you an extra 100 points. If your entry is the pick of the issue, we'll give you an extra 500! You may also email submissions to fart@hardcoregamer.com.

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

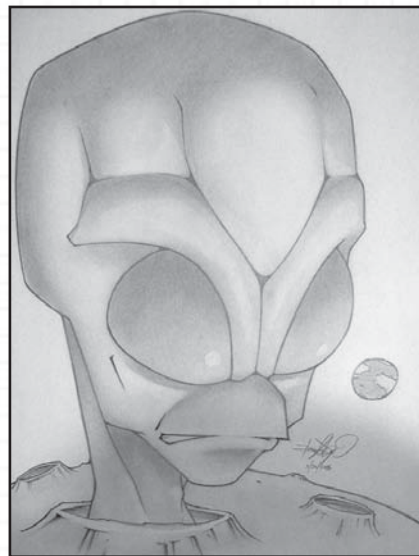
HGM PICK!



**Title : Dark Hero Akutare
(Disgaea 2 home-made plush)**
Artist : Nukascrue
Age : 25
Location : Reading, MA



Title : HGM Galaxy
Artist : Javier Bravo
Age : 21
Location : Fontana, CA



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




Title : Death Jr.
Artist : Ronald Townsend Jr.
Age : 18
Location : Orlando, FL











Title : Akutare Family Christmas
Artist : Nukascrue
Age : 25
Location : Reading, MA

Join us!





Support us and our affiliates with your patronage.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  www.WorthPlaying.com |  www.PrimaGames.com |  www.VGPub.com |  www.Gamephiles.com |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  www.GoodDealGames.com |  www.goozex.com |  www.HonestGamers.com |  www.EntDepot.com |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  www.jeffsromhack.com |  www.Got-Next.com |  www.GameSegment.com |  www.FightingFanatic.com |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  www.studioSFO.com |  www.Play-Asia.com |  hg101.classicgaming.gamespy.com |  www.udgl.org |
|---|---|---|---|

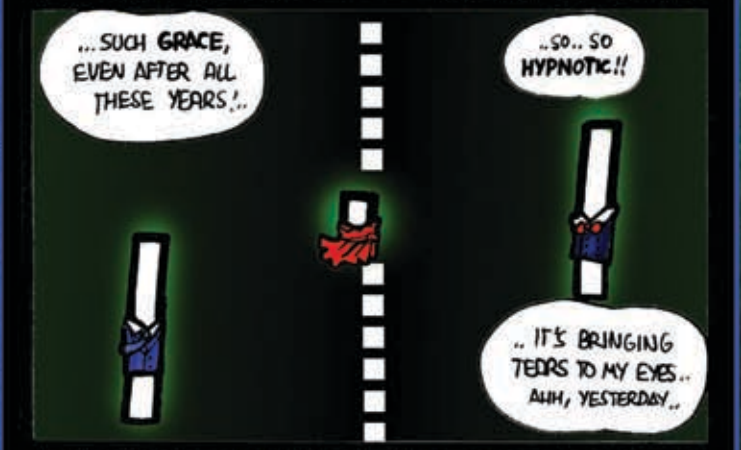
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  www.stuffwelike.com |  www.wgworld.com |  www.gamingbits.com |  www.defunctgames.com |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  www.randomnj.com |  www.marvel-ous.com |  www.agzonline.com |  www.videogamevault.com |
|---|---|---|---|

Want your logo here? Join the Hardcore Gamer Magazine affiliation program today! It's simple! All you have to do is host the online version of Hardcore Gamer Magazine on your web site and you're in. It's that easy! Send an email to affiliates@hardcoregamer.com to sign up today.



©Wolfie



©Mads



Finally, a dungeon RPG strong enough for a man...

LEGEND OF THE UNEMPLOYED NINJA
 無職忍者伝
 忍小

...but played as a hot CHICK!



You have the privilege of controlling the cutest ninja ever, Izuna (that's me!), through all these different dungeons. Customize my weapons and unleash devastating ninja spells to destroy monsters and score major treasure. Let's face it, I need the cash!

The Izuna online comic is coming to atlus.com!

EVERYONE 10+
E
 10+
 MILD FANTASY VIOLENCE
 MILD LANGUAGE
 MILD SUGGESTIVE THEMES

NINTENDO DS

ATLUS
 WWW.ATLUS.COM

LOST PLANET™

EXTREME CONDITION



"...it simply rocks."

-Game Informer

"...plays like a dream..."

-Games Radar

"...has been making us jump in all the right places..."

-GameSpot

"...action packed..."

-IGN

"Capcom has another winner on its hands."

-Hardcore Gamer

"...an action game on full throttle..."

-Play

"Gorgeous graphics..."

-GamePro

"...one lean, mean, addictive futuristic shootin' machine."

-Official Xbox Magazine



CAPCOM®
lostplanet-thegame.com

S T E E L 3 0 0 K™

XBOX
LIVE

Character Wayne by ©Lee Byung Hun/FANTOM CO., LTD., ©CAPCOM CO., LTD. 2006 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. CAPCOM and the CAPCOM LOGO are registered trademarks of CAPCOM CO., LTD. LOST PLANET is a trademark of CAPCOM CO., LTD. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox Live, the Xbox logos, and the Xbox Live logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks are owned by their respective owners.

Jump in.

XBOX 360™

Love games?

SUBSCRIBE TO HARDCORE GAMER!

We love games. In fact, we were going to call the magazine "We really like games allot, monthly," but that was kinda dumb. Plus, it's supposed to be "a lot," not allot. Anyway, if you love games like us, then you should subscribe and get this thing stuffed into your mailbox every so often. You can fill out this card and drop it in a mailbox and we'll start sending your issues and bill you later or just get on the horn and order at **800-478-1132**. You could also do it online at **www.sub2hgm.com**.

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Authorized signature _____

for only
\$24.95
12 issues

new games • old games • console games • arcade games • pc games • portable games • game stuff



HARDCORE
GAMER
MAGAZINE