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.a buncha some e3 coverage
.crazy previews up the wazoo
.welcome abbie and jeb!

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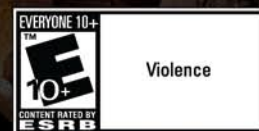
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HARDCORE GAMER Contents

Previews

Check out some of our favorite games from E3 2007! We've got *Timeshift*, *Fallout 3*, *Condemned 2*, and so much more. You might even see some great games you've never heard of before, like *de Blob* and *The Witcher*! It all starts on page 12.

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Features

Did we mention that this is the E3 issue? Check out the line-ups for all the biggest publishers, our favorite line-ups from the smaller guys, and commentary on E3's shocking new direction. It's like being at the show, but with less walking and getting lost between hotels! Start your tour on page 41.



Devil May Cry 4: p54



Halo 3: p42



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On the cover

HGM loves the Gamecock, and we're proud to introduce you to a game you'll love, too. *Legendary: the Box* is a whole new spin on the first-person shooter, with a fantastic story and awesome powers. Best of all? It's not a sequel to anything, or even set in World War III! Someone had their own idea! Prepare to be amazed on page 34.

LEGENDARY THE BOX



34



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CONSOLE RUMBLINGS

Sony America is releasing an 80GB PS3 bundle for \$599, which includes a copy of racing game *MotorStorm*, and dropping the price of the 60GB PS3 model by \$100 to \$499. Sony Europe is not following suit but is increasing the overall value of its 60GB PS3 by bundling it with two first-party games and two SixAxis wireless controllers.

Konami senior executive Kazumi Kitaue doubts the PS3 price drop will have a sufficient impact on sales, and he hinted that Konami may have to make *Metal Gear Solid: Guns of the Patriots* multiplatform, due to the PS3's small customer base.

Industry analysts predict that once Microsoft switches from a 90 to 65-nanometer IBM CPU and AMD/ATI graphics chip, it will be able to reduce the Xbox 360's cost, size and heat. Codenamed Falcon, the revised X360 is expected later this fall and could include an internal power supply, or make use of the new space to add more costly things like it did with the Elite's HDMI.

While a new and improved X360 would be nice, Microsoft first has to contend with the console's problematic and widely-reported hardware failures. It's increased the warranty period to three years, so any X360 owner who encounters the "red ring of death" error will get his console repaired or replaced for free, including shipping. Any customers who have previously paid for repair expenses related to the issue will be reimbursed. This fix will cost the Redmond powerhouse over \$1 billion.

Sony is redesigning the PSP to make it 33% lighter and 19% slimmer. It will also have a thinner, more efficient battery for reduced load times, 64MB of system memory, and video-out capabilities, which will let you play games and movies at standard-definition resolution on any progressive scan TV.

In the meantime, the Wii just keeps on selling.



INDUSTRY RUMBLINGS

Peter Moore left as Microsoft Corporate Vice President and signed on to be President of EA Sports. As compensation, EA offered Moore an annual base salary of \$550,000, \$330,000 in moving expenses, a target of \$412,500 in yearly bonuses, the obligatory stock options, and a \$1.5M signing bonus. Moore's position at Microsoft was quickly filled by EA's President of Worldwide Studios, Don Mattrick.

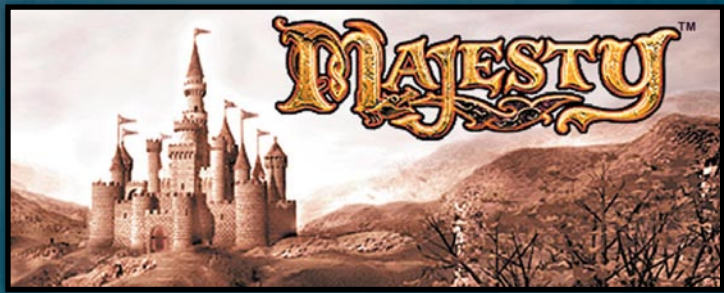
D3Publisher of America acquired North Carolina-based Vicious Cycle Software, which is known for the Vicious Engine. It is currently working on D3P's PSP game, *Dead Head Fred*.

Barcelona-based Gammick Entertainment announced its launch as a video game production company. It is currently working on four projects, a PC RTS *Shadows of War*, and three NDS-exclusive titles, one of which called *Smasher Z*.

Paradox Interactive obtained the rights to Cyberlore Studios' fantasy kingdom sim title *Majesty*, with the intention of creating a portfolio and reviving the franchise.

Climax Racing, known for *MotoGP* and *ATV Offroad Fury*, was acquired by Disney Interactive Studios in October 2006 and has finally settled on a new name, Black Rock Studio.

At E3, Disney Interactive Studios surprised a lot of people by announcing it had acquired Junction Point Studios, which is headed by Warren Spector, creator of the *Thief* and *Deus Ex* franchises. Junction Point is currently working on an unannounced next-gen project, and as part of DIS, it will create new franchises and bring some of Disney's most beloved franchises to next-gen gaming platforms.



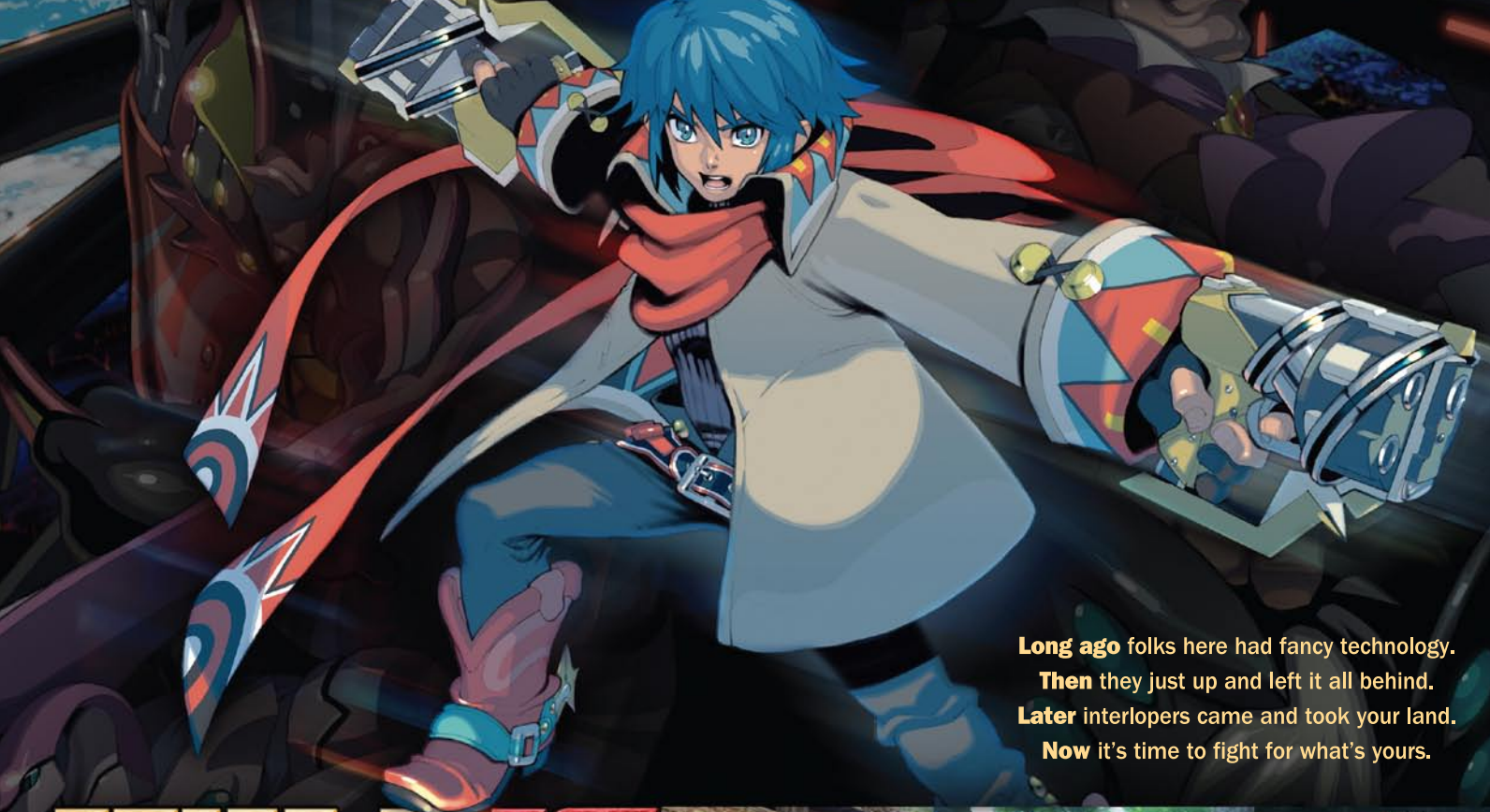
GAME RUMBLINGS

NCsoft launched its vehicular combat MMO *Auto Assault* in early 2006, which allowed players to explore a post-apocalyptic setting in customizable cars, motorcycles, semis and tanks. Without giving any specifics, but undoubtedly due to disappointing sales, NCsoft is closing down service for *Auto Assault* at midnight on August 31, 2007.

Germany is quite particular when it comes to in-game content, and 2K Games' *The Darkness* is the latest victim of such censorship. The usual Nazi symbols were removed, four of the darklings' kill methods are reportedly missing, and the character's tentacles will no longer eat hearts, but instead suck out yellowish-green fog representing souls.

In the UK, Ubisoft's *Mind Quiz* has been temporarily removed from store shelves to address an offensive score result comment that was "derogatory to the disabled," which it claimed snuck in as an apparent translation oversight. Nintendo's *Mario Party 8* met a similar fate, as all UK copies have been recalled for offensive wording in one of the mini-games. An assembly error was blamed for packaging up the wrong version of the disc.

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PlayStation 2



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www.wildarms5.com



FALLOUT 3

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

PUBLISHER : BETHSEDA | DEVELOPER : BETHSEDA
 RELEASE DATE : FALL 2008 | ESRB RATING : MATURE
 GENRE : RPG | CATEGORY : SPLAT! THE GAME | # OF PLAYERS : 1



The real fun of following *Fallout 3* is in the drama that follows it. Bethesda is making *Fallout 3* as a first/third-person RPG, somewhat in the vein of *Oblivion*, set on the other side of the postapocalyptic United States. Predictably, the online *Fallout* fan community is on the verge of spontaneous combustion.

You begin the game with your character's birth, and can customize him or her throughout the next nineteen years; what you do at birthday parties and as you grow up determines what kind of character you're creating. When your character's nineteen, your father does the unthinkable and leaves the Vault you grew up in. To find out why he left, you must enter the postapocalyptic wasteland outside your Vault, which was once known as Washington D.C.

The ensuing experience owes a great deal to Bethesda's experiences working on *Oblivion*, but also to the original *Fallout*. The game can be played a bit like a first-person shooter, with the option of spending "action points" to pause the game and take a rapid series of aimed shots. With enough damage, you can blow off limbs or explode heads, sending eyeballs rolling into the gutter. You can also cannibalize extra weapons you find to customize or improve whatever you're wielding.

That and a broad streak of dark humor are the two ingredients that made the *Fallout* games the classics they are, and hopefully, *Fallout 3* will continue in that proud tradition. Also, you get to lob mini-nukes.



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PUBLISHER: SIERRA ENTERTAINMENT • DEVELOPER: SABER INTERACTIVE • GENRE: FPS
CATEGORY: SHOOTER • RELEASE DATE: 10/2007 • PLAYERS: 1-16 (ONLINE)

TIMESHIFT



I first got my hands on *TimeShift* when it was still a fairly dismal Atari demo, and again in the summer of '06 after Vivendi acquired it and gave it a facelift. It never hit its release date and seemed to disappear off my radar entirely until a European gaming mag ran a story on it with the headline "*****ING TIMESHIFT". Being limited in my foreign language skills, I had no idea if the story was positive or negative, until I saw the most recent demo at E3.

Basically, forget what you know about *TimeShift*. The game you saw before no longer exists. Most of the levels, the main character and even the engine got scrapped when Saber Interactive was given an extra year to work on the game. True to the original build, history is disrupted when Aiden Krone uses a time travel suit known as the "alpha suit" and warps the present into a fascist society under his command. The alpha suit possesses the ability to stop, rewind, and slow time, enabling you (the hero is you now!) to say, grab the guns right out of an enemy's hands or rewind the destruction occurring in front of you to clear a path to your goal.

Hands down the most impressive change to the game is the new engine. Originally, *TimeShift* relied on the Unreal 3 engine, which, while great, has room for improvement, especially when *TimeShift* hopes to compete with the fall's rather impressive line-up of 360, PS3 and PC games. Watching the pouring rain grind to a halt even as it bounces off the muzzle of your gun and visor is downright jaw-dropping. The game now looks as good if not better than the competition, a testament to what can happen when you give developers all the time they need.



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Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING
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Preview by Princess Cowboy

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CONDEMNED 2 BLOODSHOT™



Preview by **Lynnaa**

When the Xbox 360 was released, Sega's unique blend of first person action and forensic evidence gathering, dubbed *Condemned: Criminal Origins*, easily featured the best visuals of any 360 release title. On top of that, it offers a new and exciting fighting system that lets players grab environmental objects, like wrenches, pipes, and even electrical conduit, and bash the hell out of enemies in ultra-realistic combat. For *Condemned 2: Bloodshot*, Ethan Thomas, the forensic analyst from the first title, has been drummed out of the FBI, and has taken to hard drinking to hide his pain.

Fortunately, even in his drunken stupor, he has retained the ability to use makeshift weapons in hand-to-hand combat, and now Ethan can perform brutal finishing moves such as setting people on fire or slamming a TV onto their heads. If there isn't a TV or bottle of flammable alcohol handy, he can now throw any melee weapon at his enemies to inflict damage, and they can also do the same against him. Also new to Ethan's repertoire is the ability to break limbs, which really comes in handy when he is attacked by four or more enemies at once. Since the A.I. in this title is highly advanced, disabling one or more enemies while the player fights the rest is the only way to survive.

The forensic gathering system has also been given a welcome overhaul. With the old system, the player was forced to use certain forensic tools in the right order if he/she wanted to solve a crime. Now, Grissom wannabes can figure out how to gather evidence and proceed on their own, just like in real life. Since the new system is nonlinear, there are several ways to achieve the same goal, which makes unraveling crimes much more exciting.

Players anxious for extra melee combat can partake in Hobo Fight Club (temporary name), and no, Tyler Durden is not a playable character. In this frivolous mode, the player simply chooses the types of weapons and enemies they want, and then are set free to scrap with a never-ending wave of enemies. While there may be no actual point to this mode, it will definitely make players better in-game fighters.



Publisher: Sega
Developer: Monolith
Release Date: Q2 2008
Genre(s): Action
Category: Forensic Survival Horror
of Players: 1-? (multiplayer TBA)



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- Alcohol Reference
- Crude Humor
- Fantasy Violence
- Mild Language
- Mild Suggestive Themes

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Preview by Lyndara

This isn't my usual stomping grounds, but a game like *Universe at War* makes you stand up and take notice. Petroglyph's latest offering lets players take command of one of three alien factions: the brutal Hierarchy, tenacious Novus, or mysterious Masari. Humans? Pfeh, who needs 'em? Humans in *Universe at War* are outnumbered, outgunned, and only important as a potential source of resources for the Hierarchy (who also enjoy cows). Novus gather resources by breaking down inorganic structures on the map, and the Masari use "matter engines" to convert pure energy into building material. If you're tired of RTSes that make you obsessively sit on your pile of off-brand Tiberium, then this is the game for you.

Each of the factions encourages a particular play style, too. Hierarchy let players move freely around the map, by focusing manufacturing ability on their hideously powerful behemoth Walkers. Mount weapons on its hardpoints, and you can make it a brutal offensive tank, too. Novus construct intricate networks of energy that allow instantaneous transportation across the map, so you can swarm your foes with your own mechanical troops. The Masari can use their "light form" to attack enemies from a safe distance, or shift into "dark form" when it's time to wade into mass melee.

Universe at War is set to support Microsoft's Live Anywhere initiative, so PC players will be able to go head-to-head with friends playing on the 360. Petroglyph reports that 360 testers can already pwn PC players, so interface shouldn't be a problem for the console version. Achievements will be in both versions of the game, and let players who favor a particular faction unlock extra abilities to make them even more powerful in multiplayer matches. There's no shortage of RTS games on the market, but *Universe at War* still has what it takes to make something old feel new again: fresh ideas and new options.



Publisher: Sega
 Developer: Petroglyph
 Release Date: Q4 2007 (PC), Q1 2008 (Xbox 360)
 Genre(s): RTS
 Category: Intergalactic Planetary
 # of Players: 1-8

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PlayStation Portable





Ever since Turok: Dinosaur Hunter came out for the Nintendo 64, various sequels have come and gone without recapturing the intense experience offered in the original. Now that Acclaim is defunct, it's up to the developers at Propaganda Games to revive the franchise, and they seem to be on the right path. For starters, the fledgling company is basing the latest game, titled simply Turok, purely on the N64 original. In addition, hero Joseph Turok will encounter modern soldiers armed with lethal weaponry as well as an assortment of prehistoric dinosaurs and genetically altered beasts.

When the game fires up, the first thing you notice is the living, breathing jungle that surrounds the player. Tall grass parts to the side when humans and animals wade through, plants sway in the wind, and deadly creatures are around every corner. Since the devs want to give players choices, most areas are large and expansive. Potential dino-slayers have the freedom to stalk their prey or simply run-and-gun. One big addition to the cinematic experience is actually something left out: the HUD. Players won't see much more than an ammo count onscreen, which really helps put the spotlight on the impressive visuals.

Besides fighting dinosaurs, what really sets the Turok series apart from its competitors is the vast assortment of deadly weapons at the player's fingertips. Two silent weapons perfect for stealthy slaughter make a welcome return, the handy bow and the razor-sharp knife. Bloody stealth kill animations make using the knife fun and rewarding, but nothing says 'hello' quite like an arrow through the temple. Every other weapon either features an alternate fire mode or can be dual-wielded to aid in the hunt. One of my favorites is the alt-fire mode of the shotgun, which shoots a flare that attracts dinosaurs. This is perfect for setting up traps, or luring packs of dinos to fight packs of soldiers while you txt msg your friends about your mad skillz.



Preview by Big Worm

TUROK

PUBLISHER: DISNEY INTERACTIVE • DEVELOPER: PROPOGANDA GAMES • PUBLISHER: GENRE: FPS
CATEGORY: RAR, DINOSAURS!!! • RELEASE DATE: 9/17/07 • # PLAYERS: 1-16 (ONLINE)

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FINAL FANTASY XII

REVENANT WINGS

ファイナルファンタジーXII レヴァナント・ウイング

Preview by Lynxara

The Nintendo DS is rapidly replacing Sony's PlayStation 2 as the J-RPG fan's system of choice, thanks in no small part to Square-Enix's wholehearted support of the portable in 2007. The "twin pillars" of Square-Enix's 2007 line-up were both DS games: *Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker*, which HGM readers already know to be awesome, and the upcoming *FFXII* sequel, *Revenant Wings*.

Revenant Wings brings back the adorable 2D sprite style favored by the classic 8- and 16-bit FFs, and pairs it up with *FFXII*'s distinctive 3D backgrounds and real-time approach to combat. The result is something that's a little like playing a hybrid of an RPG and an RTS. You don't have to worry about creating units or gathering resources, but you still get to command increasingly large armies of characters against equally large armies of enemies, and all in real-time.

Each unit takes certain actions in combat, and you can group different units together by lassoing them with your stylus. You can move your view of the map around with the control pad, and when you're ready for your units to move out, just point at where you'd like them to go with the stylus. If they encounter enemies, then they'll immediately begin attacking or healing wounded allies as appropriate. You can just sit back and watch the carnage unfold.

The official E3 demo in Barker Hangar only offered Vaan, Penelo, Fran, and Balthier as playable characters in a relatively short dungeon, but a quick trip to Square-Enix's suite in the Fairmont Hotel let you play a fuller English build that included all kinds of Espers based on classic *FF* monsters.

If you've ever dreamed about fielding an army of Chocobos or Tonberries (and really, who hasn't?), then *Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings* is the answer to your gaming prayers.



PUBLISHER: SQUARE-ENIX
 DEVELOPER: SQUARE-ENIX
 RELEASE DATE: 11/20/2007
 GENRE: RPG
 CATEGORY: REAL-TIME
 # OF PLAYERS: 1



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<http://na.square-enix.com/heroesofmana>



NINTENDO DS

SQUARE ENIX



THE WITCHER

— ROLE-PLAYING GAME —



Publisher: Atari
Developer: CD Projekt Red Studio
Release Date: October 2007

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


Some of the best and most innovative ideas in gaming right now are coming out of the up-and-coming development studios of Germany, Eastern Europe, and Russia. Polish studio CD Projekt Red is no different, and their title *The Witcher* emerged as one of the biggest, most pleasant surprises in Atari's E3 2007 line-up. Despite vibrantly detailed graphics, it's a DX9 game, so no need to worry about whether or not your PC can run it.

The Witcher is based on the novels of Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski, who fuses traditional high fantasy settings with the themes of contemporary fiction to create gritty urban fantasy that dishes up topical stories along with thrilling action. In the game, this means more historically authentic settings and a plot that is more concerned with politics and espionage than epic battles between good and evil. Making decisions is a big part of *The Witcher*, offering players three different endings and hundreds of ways to get to them. Even minor decisions you make in the game, such as whether or not you'll kill a certain character, can affect your game dramatically ten or fifteen hours down the road.

Most PC RPGs are relatively slow-paced clickfests, something CD Projekt Red set out to change in *The Witcher*. Taking inspiration from fast-paced console RPGs like *God of War*, *The Witcher* features complex boss battles and a wide variety of fighting styles and stances for a player to use. Invest skill points in your favorite styles to unlock new abilities and make yourself more deadly.

Your protagonist's status as a Witcher means he can create potions and use magic along with mastering fighting arts, so you have a lot of freedom to build a fighting style that includes just the buffs and blasts that suit your personal gaming taste. Sure, you'll always need to use your steel sword against human enemies and your silver sword against monsters, but beyond that, the sky's the limit. That's the kind of freedom that's been missing from RPGs for quite some time, so here's hoping *The Witcher* delivers on its promising E3 demo.



 Preview by Lynxara



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Jump in.

 XBOX 360 LIVE



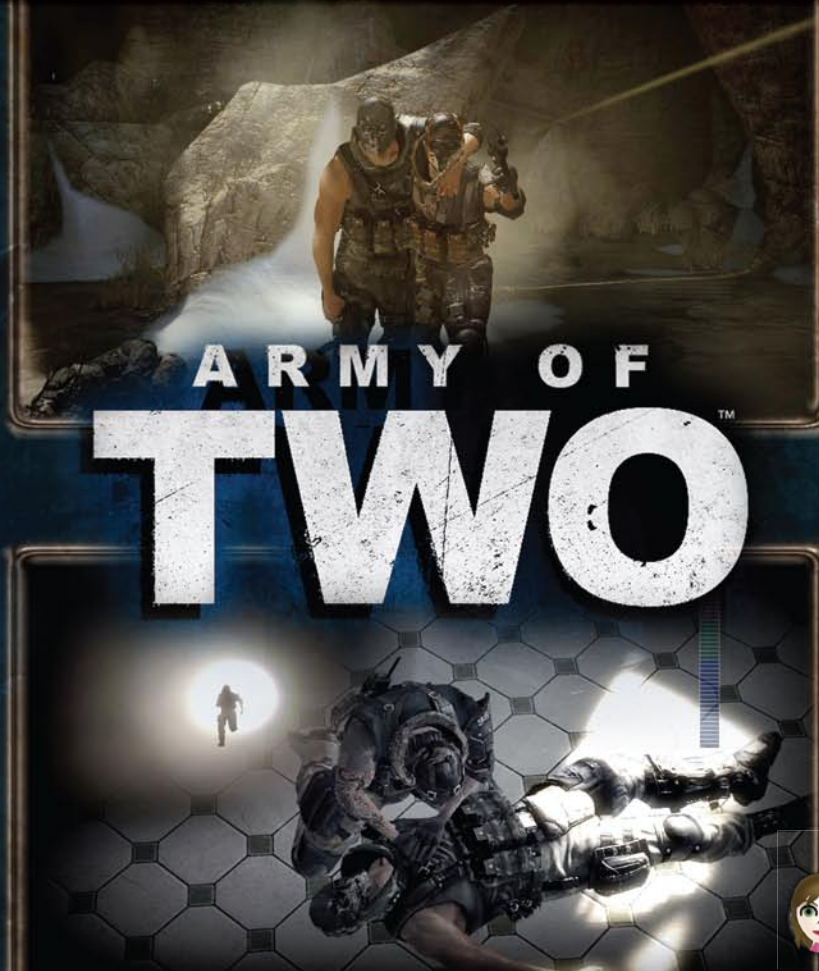
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER: EA Montreal

RELEASE DATE: Q4 2007

"So, are we the good guys here?" is the question at hand in *Army of Two*, EA's co-op shooter that relies on a two-person (you don't say?) team of contracted killers carrying out covert operations overseas. The co-op is beyond impressive. None of this drop-in, shoot a few guys, drop-out nonsense! You are forced to work as a team, whether it's by simply boosting your partner up a ledge or, you know, forming a lethal human death turret of assault rifle fire.

A meter registers the amount of attention the AI is paying to a particular player. Progressing through the level is often dependent on purposely taking some for the team. When all the enemy firepower is directed on one of the pair, he glows red and gains the ability to deal massive damage while the partner turns invisible to the AI. Killing spree! Cooperative sniping, by shielding your partner with a car door, and acting as medic had me paying just as much attention to my partner as myself.



Now, it's impossible not to mention the medic duties. Sure, it keeps you tied to the other guy, but more interestingly, one of the methods of resuscitation involves sticking a tampon into a bullet wound. That is an actual trick employed by real-life special operatives in the field. See? Real men aren't afraid to buy tampons!

But the true strength of *Army of Two*, to myself, and hopefully everyone who picks it up, is its message. It's often easy, when presented with characters that have slightly superhuman abilities and the option of re-spawning, for gamers to forget that there's some reality behind it. Cheers to *Army of Two* for showing the dark side of combat, and its prevalent message that our own government often acts above legal and ethical constraints. Consider it the thinking man's military shooter.



Preview by Princess Cowboy

GENRE: Shooter

CATEGORY: Twice As Nice

OF PLAYERS: 1-2



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Preview by Big Worm

DESTROY ALL HUMANS!

Path of the Furon

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Sandblast Games
Category: Madcapaliensci-fianalprobelematic shooter
Genre(s): Extraterrestrial Adventure
Release Date: Early 2008
of Players: 1-?



What do you get when you cross a pint-sized, pasty humanoid with a bad impression of Jack Nicholson? Oh sure, Christian Slater is the obvious answer, but I'm talking about the demented extraterrestrial known as Cryptosporidium 137... err... 138, or whatever the hell number his latest clone is in *Destroy All Humans! 3: Path of the Furon*. Having 'survived' through the fifties and sixties in his former escapades, Crypto must now hustle his way through the seventies, but no matter how hard he tries, Crypto just can't escape the hellhole known as Earth. He might as well wipe out humanity to pass the time.

For every ounce of effort players give towards completing the game, they get rewarded by tons of sci-fi, hi-fi destruction! That's right, the groundbreaking technology of the seventies returns to enhance modern gaming. Not only can players use their jet pack to blast up to the tops of skyscrapers, but they can also use their spaceship to raze them to the ground. In addition, the Dislocator gun can fire multiple projectiles into the

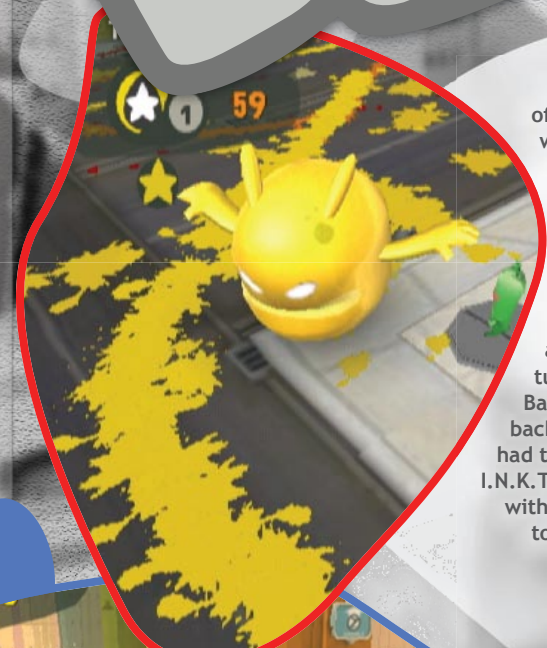


same object, making it fly farther into the distance than before. The Anal Probe can now do dirty work on multiple targets at once (just what every player secretly wanted).

New abilities include the Tornadotron and Seeker-Cannon (fired from the new, visually-enhanced spaceship) and a new psychic power that stops time. Players are free to manipulate the environment while time is stopped, and then start it back up again. This means that it is possible to stack items in mid-air and then hop from one to another to reach new areas, or move people and items into the trajectory of large objects so they get squashed when time resumes. However, the coolest new addition is the ability to use hand weapons, psychic powers, and the jet pack at the same time. Now players have unlimited freedom to cause mass devastation! One small example would be to send a vehicle soaring with the Dislocator, fly after it using the jetpack, and then pick it up in mid-air using Psychokinesis.



de Blob



Nestled in the middle of the THQ demo area, there was a seemingly innocuous Wii title called *de Blob*. I approached the giant TV screen, visions of an engorged Cartman spouting "we are Trapper Keeper" dancing though my mind, but I immediately found out that this blob isn't based on any movie. Instead, it's a Netherlands university school project turned into a full modern video game. Basically, the player must bring color back to monochromatic cities that have had their paint removed by the dastardly I.N.K.T. Corporation. As everyone knows, with the color leached out of the city, so too goes the fun.



Only by absorbing different colors and bouncing against buildings can the player hope to restore the alien city to its former glory. As *de Blob*, the player takes on the form of, well, what looks like a colorless water balloon. Bouncing on colored characters turns *de Blob* into that color, and he/she is then free to bounce against different buildings and structures in order to 'paint' them with that color. One bounce is all it takes to bring color to small buildings, and larger ones will require bouncing in multiple areas. Several additional challenges, such as coloring all the buildings along a street within a certain amount of time, add a frantic pace to the city's restoration. So does the fact that *de Blob* is turned black when it touches enemy 'police,' and must rinse itself in water in order to continue painting.

While the city's inhabitants want color to return, they don't want everything painted the same boring shade, so the developers let players combine colors from the primary color wheel to create all six secondary colors. On top of that, the player can find patterns hidden throughout the city that add stripes and other types of patterns to their custom color creations. Getting used to the controls only took a few minutes, and using the Wiimote to bounce between buildings, over objects, and on the heads of police as well as 'grinding' along walls is very fun. Despite the fact that paint stains whatever it touches, I can't wait to get my immaculate mitts on *de Blob*.

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Blue Tongue
Release Date: Early 2008
ESRB Rating: Everyone
Genre: Painting Platformer
Category: Surrealism
Number of Players: 1-? (multiplayer details TBA)



Preview by Big Worm



PlayStation Portable

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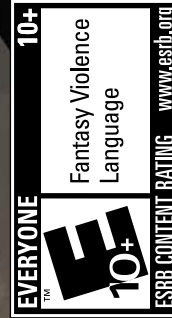


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System to minimize damage!



Unlock the power of the Dragon
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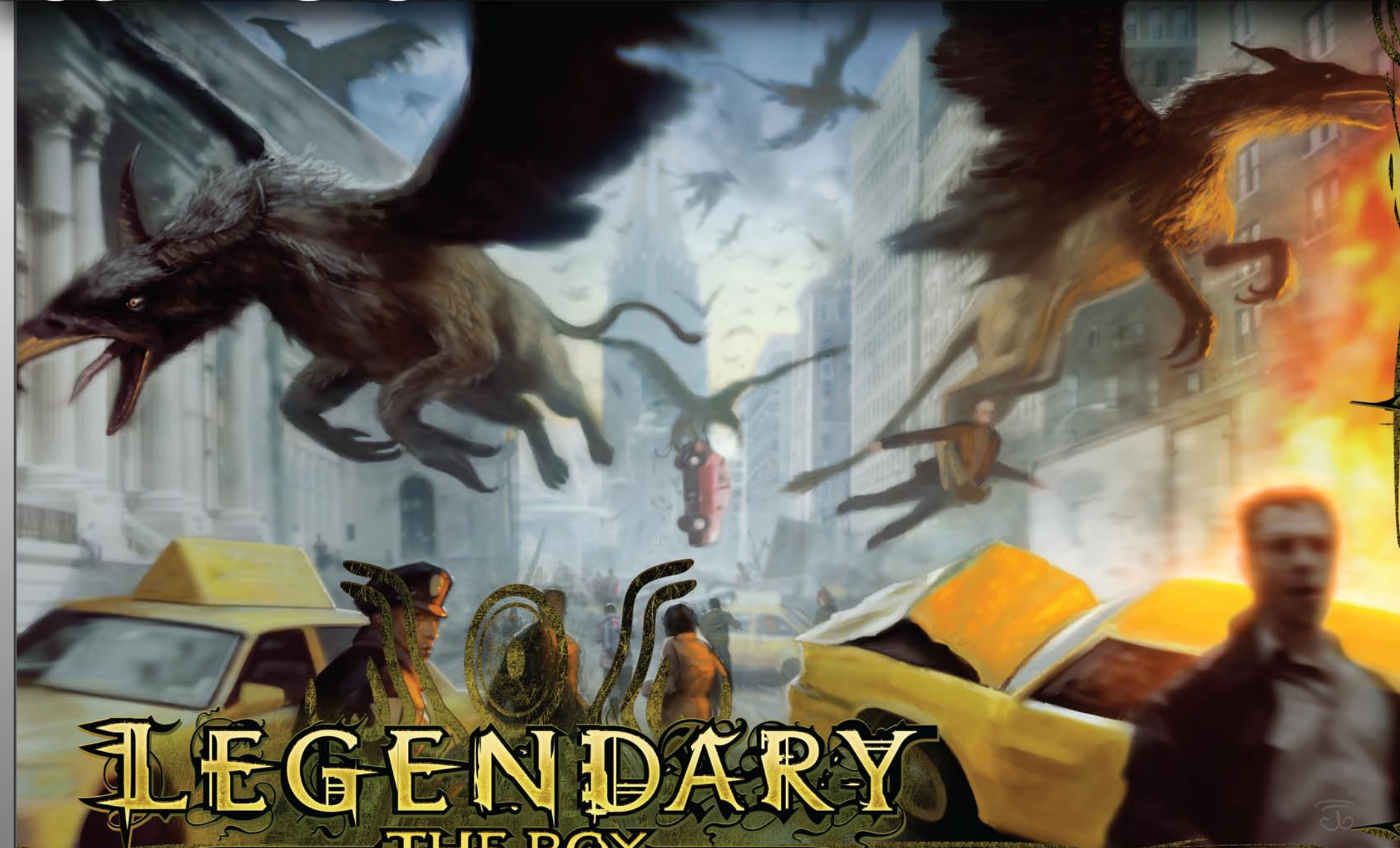
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Fantasy Violence
Language

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org





LEGENDARY THE BOX

By Roger Danish

Big Surprises Come In Ancient Packages

Being truly surprised by a video game is a rarity in these modern times. Thanks to the advent of the Internet, rumors and spoilers about upcoming titles fire so frequently across our eyeballs that even the biggest announcements at best confirm what we all were already thinking.

Even this year's E3 — an event that made its reputation on delivering shocking revelations — was practically devoid of any mind-blowers. By the time we'd arrived in Santa Monica, all the game publishers had already given us the full lowdown on

what we were going to see. After a few hours of checking out games we already knew about, we started asking everyone that inevitable question. "Seen anything good at the show?"

It was near the end of the first day that we got our first hint of *Legendary: The Box*. "There's this crazy game where monsters are blowing up New York City!" Was how it was initially described to us. As the second day of E3 moved along, *Legendary* kept coming up in conversations. We were hearing things like, "There's werewolves jumping at you from all over!"

"In one part this flaming griffon attacks you on a collapsing bridge!"
"It's this constantly overwhelming three-way battle!"

On the third day, we had to see it for ourselves. Everything everyone had been telling us was true. *Legendary: The Box* is one of the most intense video games we've seen in a long while. Turns out there are a few surprises left in the video game world after all.



Pandora Unleashed

Legendary: The Box begins with you performing a deed that will forever alter the world. You play an art thief named Deckard who has been paid by a mysterious organization known as the Black Order. Your mission is to sneak into the basement of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art and open a mysterious box they have stored there. Unbeknownst to you, the thing you're opening is Pandora's Box — a relic that imprisons all the beasts of myth. When Deckard opens the box, one of the most intense opening segments in video games begins.

A ray of red light shoots straight up, smashing through the ceiling and rising into the sky. The museum begins to crumble around you, and it quickly becomes apparent that your life depends on making a hasty escape. As you race to the exit along with the rest of the panicked visitors, you witness people being attacked by mysterious shadow creatures, getting crushed by falling debris, and being flung into the sky when getting too close to the rising red ray emanating from the box. Finally, you escape to the streets of New York City only to see how cataclysmic the opening of Pandora's Box truly is.

Griffons are swooping through the air, picking up cars and snacking on pedestrians. Seismic waves are thrashing the streets, opening chasms from which fiery demons are erupting. Giant golems formed from surrounding ruins tower above you and smash their way through buildings. The city, and the entire world, is in chaos.

As fate would have it, you soon learn that you are the only one capable of returning these unleashed horrors to Pandora's Box due to something unexpected happening when you opened it. You lived.

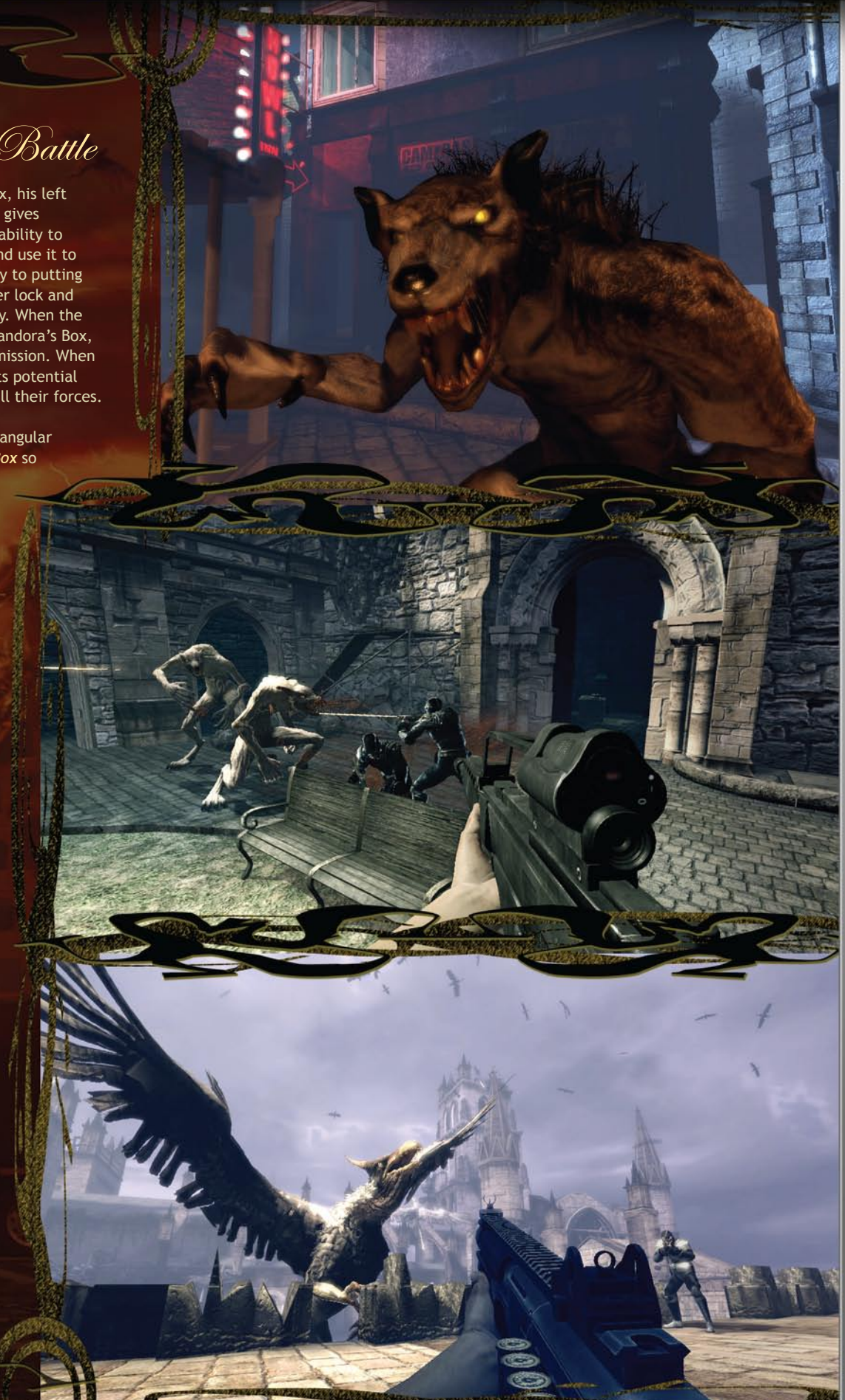
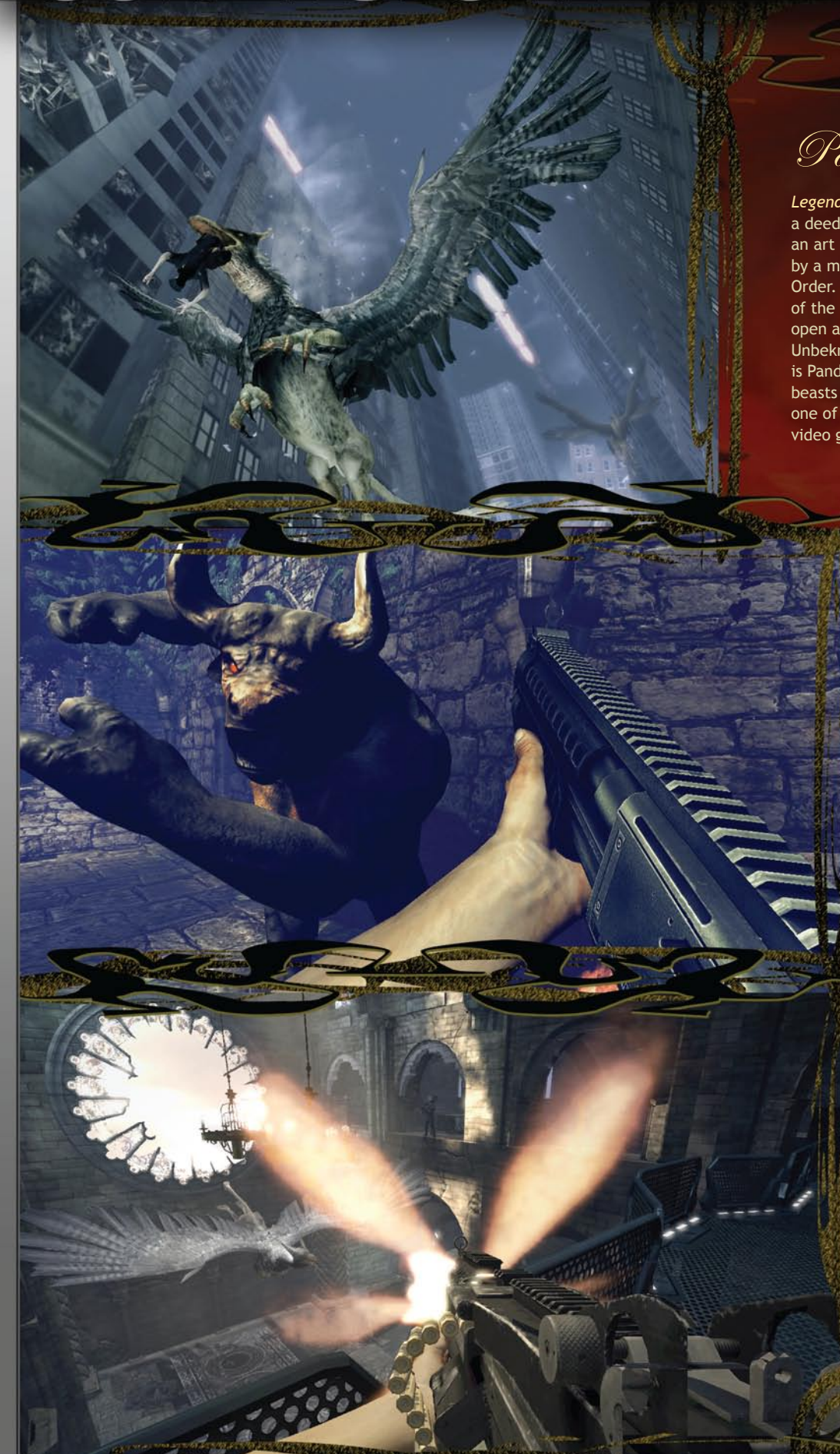
A Three-Way Battle

When Deckard opened Pandora's Box, his left hand was marked with a signet that gives him unusual powers; one being the ability to draw energy from dead creatures and use it to replenish his health. It's also the key to putting all the mythical monsters back under lock and key, returning the world to normalcy. When the Black Order sent Deckard to open Pandora's Box, they thought it would be a suicide mission. When they learn of Deckard's brand and its potential powers, they come after him with all their forces.

This sets up the deadly all-on-all triangular battles that make *Legendary: The Box* so compelling compared to other first-person shooters. Not only do you have to battle a myriad of ferocious beasts looking to rip you apart, you'll also have Black Order members shooting at you any chance they get. Fortunately, the monsters are just as eager to shred Black Order members as they are you.

As *Legendary's* producer, John "Jigs" Garcia-Shelton, explained it to us, "You constantly need to evaluate what you have and what your challenges are because you aren't likely to have the same weapons and load outs if you are playing through an area twice. You always want to be prepared to take advantage of both the monsters and the Black Order's actions."

The cathedral level that Spark demoed for us is a great example of this dynamic. You start in an underground safe house along with a group of soldiers who have been assigned to help you defeat the Black Order and find out what their plans are. As you all leave your bunker, you quickly run headlong into an open pavilion where you can see Black Order members firing away at a mass of werewolves that are crawling along the walls, leaping from pillar to pillar, and striking when the opportunity presents itself.





When you get caught in a firefight with them, you'll notice how these militia members will flank you whenever possible, attempting to force you into a deadly corner. The easiest way to handle them is to sneak up on them when they're distracted by a mythological threat, but even then be cautious. You never know when another Black Order member could be creeping up on you!

Online Attacks

Though Spark was unwilling to reveal too many details on what the online multiplayer experience would be like with *Legendary: The Box*, they did let slide with a few tidbits of info to whet our appetites. To quote Garcia-Shelton, "The dynamic when playing against others will be unlike anything else out there, and all our online modes will be things never tried before with a first-person shooter."

Multiplayer will pit you not only against online humans but also a host of monsters, recreating the panicked three way fight of single player. The best online players will be those that are able to not only quickly dispatch any mythological threats, but also lure them into attacking human adversaries. We've also heard that there will be both cooperative and versus online modes, but what exactly these will be still remains a mystery.

Who Is Spark Unlimited?

You may not know their name, but you've definitely played their work. Spark Unlimited was formed out of 27 team members that were involved in creating *Medal of Honor* and *Medal of Honor: Underground* for the PlayStation. These two titles arguably created the World War II first-person shooter genre that's still prevalent today. Using their experience from these two titles, the first game officially developed by Spark was *Call of Duty: Finest Hour* for the PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube, a title that has sold millions of copies.

Legendary: The Box will be their first title not set in WWII. When asked how it felt to move on to a new setting, you could instantly see how happy Jigs, the game's producer, was about this turn of events. "After working on World War II games for almost six years, I can safely say I'm glad to be taking a break from finding new ways to kill Nazis," he said. "And my friends are glad too. They don't have to hear me say things like, 'you know that was an experimental technology the Germans were working on near the end of the war,' every few hours."



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The Best Is Yet to Come

Despite taking a grand tour of *Legendary: The Box*, after the demo was over we realized we'd really only scratched the surface of what the game would contain. We asked many of the same questions that we're sure are racing through your heads right now. What other monsters will be making an appearance in the game? What's the Black Order's ultimate plan? What kinds of crazy weapons will you get to wield?

To all these queries, Jigs simply smiled and said, "We'll let you know very soon."

His cryptic answer definitely left us wanting to see more. Plenty of amazing games are coming out this year, but now that we've witnessed *Legendary: The Box*, 2008 simply can't come soon enough.

0 E3 2007 LOCKED DOWN

A FEATURE BY: WANDERER, LYNXARA, BIG WORM, PRINCESS COWBOY, AND 4THLETTER

Find the loudest friend you have, dress him in day-glo colors and flashing LEDs, position a scantily-clad woman somewhere nearby, and have your friend try to convince you that he's cool. For bonus points, he should do so while screaming at the top of his lungs. Occasionally he should try to give you random things with video game logos on them.

That is a crude approximation of the old E3 experience. It was often fun, it was always obnoxious, and it was the central event of the video game industry's year. Everything was built around it.

THEN IT STOPPED

This year's E3 was more subdued. Tens of thousands of people used to lie, cheat, and steal to get in; this year, about five thousand people attended the conference, and half of those had to pull strings to do it. The sonic avalanche of the Staples Center was replaced by a series of appointments in quiet hotel rooms, hands-on gameplay, and open buffet tables. You could hear yourself think, and talk to developers one-on-one in a voice that was not a scream. At the end of the day, you were not a solid fused mass of pain.

Most importantly, you did not have to deal with twenty-five thousand retail clerks, fake online journalists, random idiots, unwashed fanboys, and other people who'd figured out a way to attend a show they didn't belong at.

E3 has changed. It's arguably for the better.

We didn't need E3 to convince us gaming was cool or important. We never needed that, but that was the role it somehow fell into. This year's show was a reality check; E3 is and always should have been about the games.

CONSTANT REPETITION

Unfortunately, this year's redesigned E3 wasn't flawless. It seemed to have taken everyone by surprise, judging by the relatively scarce amount of actual news released at the show. Previous E3s threw worldbeating announcements out like machine-gun fire. This year, if you went to the GDC, you sort of went to E3 already. Many companies had already done their bit, making their E3 presentations a repetition of what we already knew. More importantly, the new E3 was exclusionary. Dozens of companies from all over the world were at the 2006 show, from Electronic Arts and their Massive Speakers of Head Explosion to two guys from Croatia tucked into the back row of Kentia Hall.

At E3 2007, there were thirty-two companies, several of which were relegated to the distant Barker Hangar. Everything was by appointment. There was no opportunity to wander around and find something unusual. There was nothing really *new*. Next year, if E3 returns at all, and if it's supposed to be important at all, it needs to bring everyone back. Keep the screening process for entry, but invite the entire industry along for the ride. Those two guys in Croatia were why you attended E3 in the first place; you were there to be pleasantly surprised.

ON THE OTHER HAND

E3 may have shot itself in the foot. Almost everyone at the show was either already planning their next convention appearance, at the Tokyo Game Show or PAX or GDC 2008 or the San Diego Comic-Con. E3 will probably never be as important as it used to be. In fact, Gamecock already buried it in a mock funeral on the last day of this year's show, complete with all the half-naked women and blatant pageantry (and 400% more random cops) that this year's show largely lacked.

Thus, this may be the last E3 report anyone really has to write. With that in mind, let's get it started.





ENTRANCE [NO ADMITTANCE]

MICROSOFT

1

When Xbox front man Peter Moore hosted this year's Microsoft E3 press event, no one suspected that he would leave his position as VP to head EA Sports a mere week later. Judging from his passionate performance, one would think that he planned on staying with Microsoft forever. I wonder if he has to cover his Microsoft tattoos at his new job?

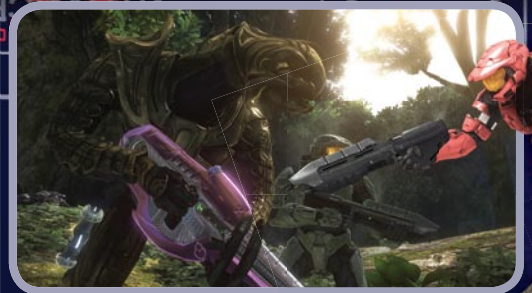
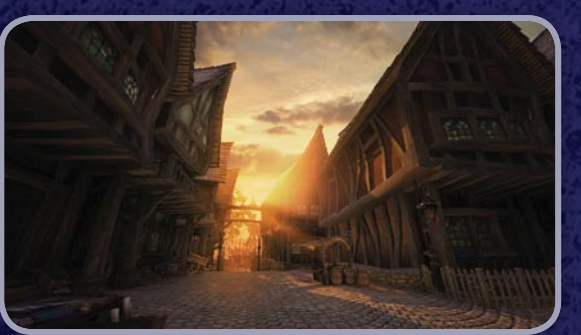
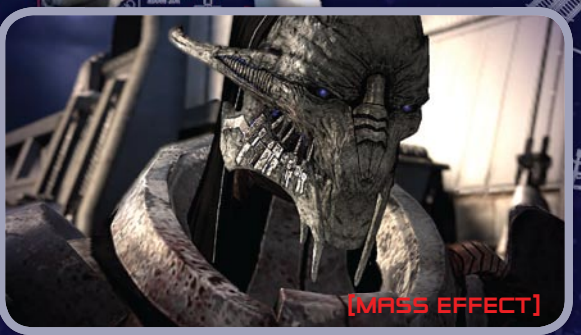
Nevertheless, the event began with a Dexy's Midnight Runners-style tribute to *Halo* by a high school garage band called Corporeal. Let's see, extended remix: check. Cheesy rock sound: check. Overly passionate violinist: check.

Then Mr. Moore attempted to jam with reps from Harmonix while playing their new game, *Rock Band*. The funny thing was, even though he was playing the bass, which is typically easier than lead guitar, he failed twice onstage, bringing on a jovial chant of 'boo' from the crowd. Next Peter went on about a deal with Disney to bring their catalog of animated movies to Xbox Live, and also told of forthcoming casual games such as *Puzzle Fighter*, *Golden Axe*, and the original *Sonic the Hedgehog*. Rounding out the conference were some impressive numbers; over seven million Xbox Live members to date, with an estimated ten million by E3 '08. Of course, *Halo* made an appearance, but this time an odd live action trailer was shown that ended just as the fighting was about to start. After the announcement of an official *Halo 3* Xbox 360, the press event ended.

Microsoft has several excellent games in the works, but none can match the hype surrounding *Halo 3*. I was shown the first level, called Sierra 117, in a closed room, and while I wasn't able to get my hands on the controller (unfortunately, they don't take bribes), the game looks fantastic! When the level begins, Master Chief is in a squad consisting of fellow soldiers and one odd sight, a Covenant elite! As one may guess, this is the Arbiter from *Halo 2*, and it looks easy to mistake him for the enemy in the midst of a hectic firefight. Whether he is a playable character is anybody's guess, but it wouldn't surprise me. During gameplay, a transparent visor is noticeable on the edges of the screen that helps to convey the feeling of wearing a helmet. When the player takes damage, a bluish honeycomb effect flashes onscreen that almost gives the impression that the player isn't human. Either that, or s/he is wearing the most advanced helmet in the universe!

For the next fifteen minutes, Master Chief blasted his way through waves and waves of Covenant enemies, dodging Elites flanking his side, sniping Jackals hiding behind their shields, and shooting Grunts that were fleeing in terror. New Covenant troops that looked like beefed-up Elites were also present, and Master Chief was able to save a fellow soldier from their clutches with a well-placed shot to the alien's temple. After showing Sierra 117, the focus switched to the ability to save films from both the single player campaign as well as online multiplayer. After saving a film, the player is able to go back and watch it from the viewpoint of any character, or 'detach' the camera and move anywhere on the screen. It is also possible to stop the action completely and adjust the camera in addition to advancing the film frame-by-frame. All of this sounds great, but I don't have much desire to see my ass get kicked from ten different angles.

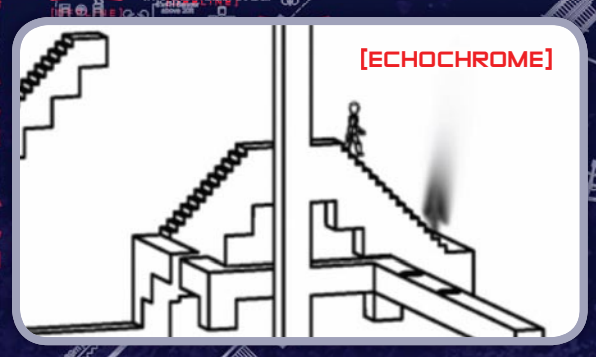
Bioware's latest action/RPG, *Mass Effect*, was next on the list, and it seems to grow more intriguing every day. Set in the 23rd century, the game lets players explore the galaxy as a spaceship captain while commanding two squad mates picked from a group of reserve fighters. Since none of the action actually occurs in space, there are no epic space battles to control. However, there are plenty of planets to explore and aliens to kill. But players won't always have to hoof it on foot as they can hop into a cool six-wheeled ground vehicle called the Mako. This formidable mobile infantry transport is armed with a heavy-duty machine gun and a destructive cannon, and can actually use jump jets to 'hop' over small objects and incoming missiles (which looks really fun).



In addition to in-depth ability customization, players are free to use exotic alien weaponry and psychic powers to eliminate the enemy. One welcome feature is the ability to customize squad members as deeply as the player can with the main character, which can have dramatic effects on the battlefield. In addition, forcing two squad mates from opposing factions into the same group can also produce negative effects. Moreover, some decisions the player makes throughout the course of the game will drastically affect the storyline, but we were told to keep these details under wraps.

For my last game session, I was privileged enough to have *Fable 2* demonstrated by Peter Molyneux himself. His passion for gaming was overpowering as he showed us how excited he was to make the sequel ten times the size of its predecessor. Apparently, players can enter almost any visible house, dungeon, or cavern, and they can now purchase any house they can visit, even castles (if you're made of gold). Most of his demo centered on melee combat, and somehow, he was able to create a deeper hand-to-hand combat system than before by using fewer buttons... one, to be exact. Of course, players can still draw on magic with the B button and fire projectiles with the Y button, but the X button is all anyone needs to swing away.

Simply mashing the X button will get the player quickly incapacitated, so a careful rhythm of button presses is essential for initiating combos. Holding the X button down lets the player guard against attacks, but if he/she isn't attacked while blocking, the button can be released for powerful 'Flourish' moves. These maneuvers usually result in one-hit kills, and every one is as graceful as it is deadly. Rounding out the demo was Molyneux's ideology behind game deaths. Like most players, he hates being forced to return to a previous 'save point' and replay the game. For *Fable 2*, he plans on incorporating a system where the player acquires unsightly scars for every death. They have the choice of reviving themselves on the spot at the cost of experience and/or gold, or saving these costs and retaining the dreadful scars instead. Needless to say, most heroes aren't littered with disfigurements, so people will react negatively to them. If all of these ideas can come together to form a seamless game, then Peter's lofty goals for the original will surely be achieved in *Fable 2*.



SONY 2

T.S. Eliot once wrote "The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is humility: humility is endless." While the last few months may have been humbling for Sony, humility is not the word anyone would use to describe Sony's public persona, so why are we so overcome with the urge to give Sony a great big hug after this year's E3? Maybe it was the self-deprecating humor that flowed from Tretton at the press conference, maybe it's some flashy new PSPs... or maybe it's the truly kick-ass line up of games Sony has in store for us.

While Microsoft and Nintendo touted the sales numbers of their most recent consoles, Sony chose to tout the popularity of the PS2. And while we all know we won't be seeing games like *God of War 2* on PS2 anymore, the fact remains that Sony is still making bank off of the system, and that over a hundred million gamers own one. The Wii has introduced gaming to a wider market and it looks like Sony intends to capitalize on family gameplay with titles like *SingStar* and the trivia game *Buzz!* (exceedingly fun) which is already popular in the European market.

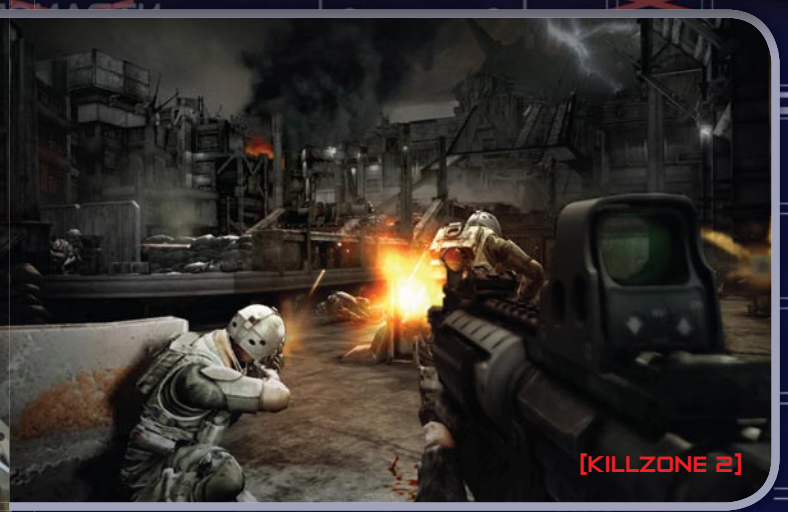
It should be noted that Jack Tretton and Kaz Hirai have been using Sony's Home software as the medium for introducing most topics they're speaking on. The strength of Home is offering two things that Xbox Live and the Wii don't: a fleshed-out means of discovering more about your fellow gamers and a true personalization of your online account. Letting gamers interact in that sort of environment has all sorts of risky potential, and while I'm enjoying the beta, once the floodgates open to the public, all bets are off. The one truly impressive feature was demonstrated by Phil Harrison, who snapped a picture of the crowd with his cell phone and seconds later showed it, framed, on the wall of his pad in Sony Home.

The show wasn't all about the PS3. The long-anticipated redesign for the PSP was a large focus of Sony's show. The new PSP will be 19% slimmer and 30% faster, but most importantly, will have the ability to output video. The video looks crisp, and you'll be able to play games or share PSP content on your television. Sony will also be introducing an "ice silver" PSP packaged with the *Family Guy Freakin' Sweet* collection for \$199 in October. Yeah, that's okay, but when Chewbacca comes on stage to introduce the white Darth Vader PSP coming with *Star Wars: Battlefront Renegade Squadron* at the same price, it's pretty clear which one I'll be picking up.



Over one hundred forty games will be coming to PSP this year, among them *SOCOM US Navy Seals: Tactical Strike*, *Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow*, *Silent Hill: Origins*, *Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions*, *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles* and perhaps most notably *God of War: Chains of Olympus*. *Chains of Olympus* doesn't suffer from the lack of two analog sticks on the PSP; the controls feel natural and the cinematic quality of its predecessors isn't lost.

Sony also showed a glimpse into *Echo Chrome*, a puzzle game for PSP and PS3 with extremely minimal graphics that looks like what we imagine M.C. Escher saw when he closed his eyes at night. A stick figure avatar negotiates his way through increasingly difficult maps. Tretton explains that was "just the easy levels."



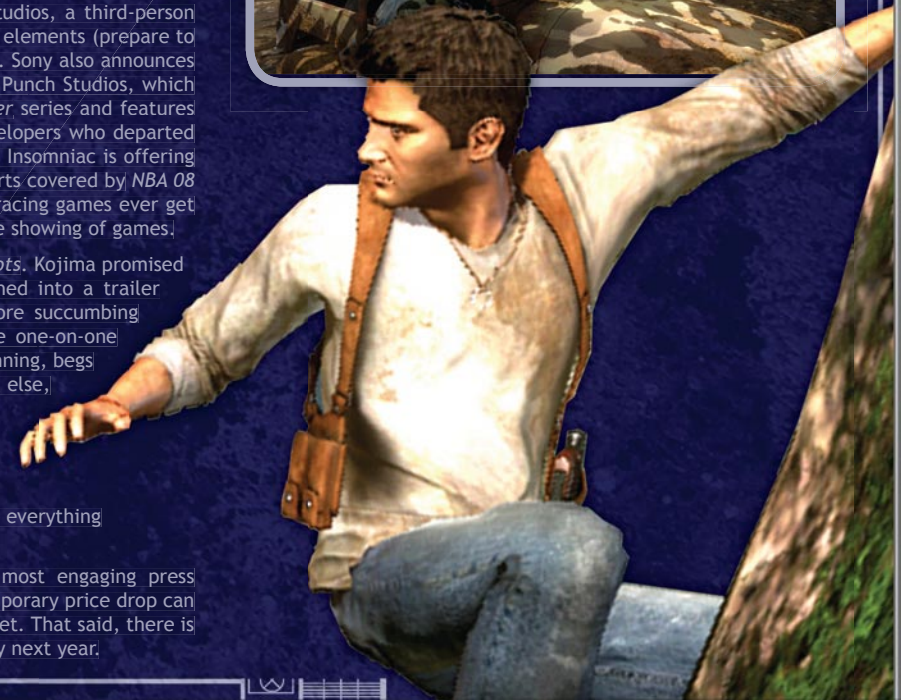
Way to make us all feel smart, Jack! Of course, what we really want to know is what's coming for the PS3 exclusively, and Sony promises 15 PS3-only titles on the way, including a series of NCSoft MMORPGs for the platform. The first stand-out title, introduced at GDC 2007, is *Little Big Planet*. It is impossible not to smile when you pick up the controller to play and the customization features (which, in a way, are the whole game) are accessible enough for all audiences.

There's also *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* from Naughty Dog studios, a third-person shooter/adventure game that uses *Gears of War*-like gameplay elements (prepare to spend a lot of time in cover) in *Tomb Raider*-like environments. Sony also announces *Haze*, a futuristic military shooter and *Infamous*, from Sucker Punch Studios, which appears to have a much more serious tone than the *Sly Cooper* series and features a guy destroying enemies with super powers. Speaking of developers who departed from their classic franchise to create darker-toned PS3 games, Insomniac is offering up a new *Ratchet & Clank* game, *Tools of Destruction*. With sports covered by *NBA 08* and *Gran Turismo 5*, which look very slick (but do sports and racing games ever get better rather than just look better?) it's nothing if not a diverse showing of games!

Hideo Kojima introduced *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*. Kojima promised that *MGS4* will solve all of the series's mysteries and launched into a trailer showing Snake and Meryl hunting down Revolver Ocelot before succumbing to what we assume is a nanomachine attack, and an intense one-on-one fight scene between Vamp and Raiden which, while visually stunning, begs the question... will I be able to do that in the game? If nothing else, Kojima sure knows how to make a trailer.

Finally, what would the Sony Press Conference be without *Killzone 2*? It wasn't just a trailer that may or may not be real-time footage, but someone actually playing the game on stage as we gawk. There was a little lag at one point, but it looks like everything a PS3 game should truly be.

Relatively short and sweet, Sony comes through with the most engaging press conference of the main three. The question is whether the temporary price drop can sell enough PS3s even without the big games being on shelves yet. That said, there is certainly a lot to look forward to from Sony in the fall and early next year.



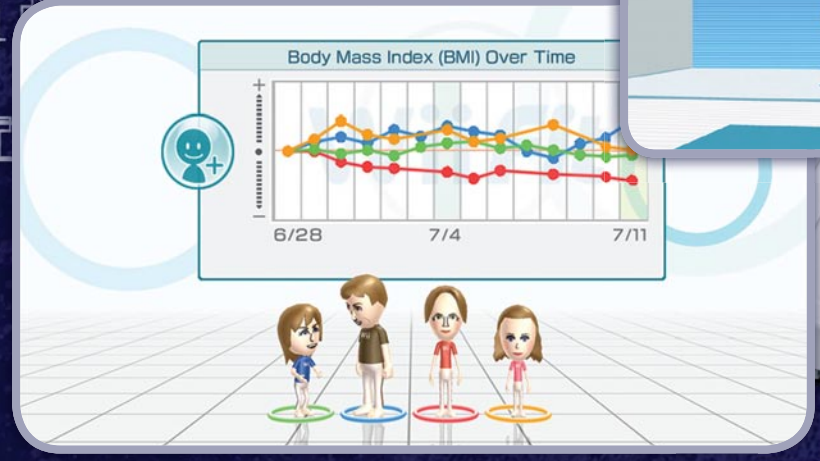
NINTENDO 3

"My name is Reggie, and I am happy," says Reggie Fils-Aime, kicking off Nintendo's E3 2007 press conference. There isn't a person in crowd who needed an explanation. Some flashy montages recap the sheer volume of hype the mainstream media has given the Wii while Reggie touts the obligatory sales numbers that nearly every press conference kicks off with. DS and Wii sales are neck and neck, Nintendo accounts for 69% of all game industry growth this year and unprecedented numbers of female gamers and gamers 18-24 are getting in on the action. We know the score. Nintendo's back must be tired from all the patting. Now, show us *Smash Brothers Brawl*! We need games! We need sweet peripherals!

We don't have to wait long before Reggie unveils the Wii Zapper, a sleek shotgun-esque apparatus that houses the Wii Remote on top and the nunchuck controller in back. Tight. We've since got our hands on the Zapper with Capcom's *Resident Evil: Umbrella Chronicles* and Sega's *Ghost Squad*. It's perfect for those of us who don't get to the arcade to play *House of the Dead* enough, although there may be some tired arm muscles in our future. For rail-shooters on the Wii, the Zapper feels more like a necessity than an option. It'll ship this year with a pack-in game made specifically to show off its functionality for \$19.99. It'll also be used with *Medal of Honor* for the Wii, which Reggie announces will support a 32-player online mode.

From there, Reggie name drops some of Nintendo's upcoming line-up including *Soul Calibur Legends* (Wii), *WWE* (Wii), *Dragon Quest Swords* (Wii) and *Ninja Gaiden Dragon Sword* (DS). They sound great, but they're not showing enough gameplay footage. Same goes for *Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games*; as we just see the titular pair sprinting around for a few seconds. Reggie finally announces that *Super Smash Brothers Brawl* will launch on December 3rd this year, and fan boys around the world should stop (or start!) obsessively refreshing the Dojo Web site for a few minutes.

On to the big stuff. A lucky fan gets to demo *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass* on stage. It's been flying off shelves in Japan and promises to be a strong DS title. Next up? *Metroid Prime 3*. It's coming August 20th and, after about seven lush hours of hands-on, is clearly the best in the *Prime* series. It's gorgeous, runs at 60 fps, and uses the Wii controls to easily switch between visors on the fly. You can even grapple-beam and double-jump when all balled up. *Prime 3* also offers Hyper Mode, a Phazon-induced state that makes Samus a killing machine but could also kill her altogether, and a new targeting system that lets you lock on one enemy and then free-aim at any other target on screen. If that sounds like too much, the game also has a basic control scheme for Wii's new host of beginners. It'd be surprising if this is the game that moms or residents of the senior center will be playing, and it's a necessary step in showing Nintendo hasn't forgotten us hardcore gamers.



And how do you appease the hardcore Nintendo gamer? New franchises can breathe new life and interest into a console (think Sony announcing *Little Big Planet* at GDC), but for Nintendo, it's about the classic titles that have passed through generations of Nintendo consoles. Even though the announcement of *Mario Kart Wii* is no surprise, it's still extremely exciting, especially given the new racing wheel peripheral you can drop the Wii remote into. Reggie tells us, "This is not your father's Mario Kart." We can only imagine that statement actually made most of the audience feel old.

With the *Mario Kart* announcement, we also get a look at the expansion of the Wii's online capabilities. *FIFA* and *Madden* go online this fall, with *Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker* and *Guitar Hero 3* following suit. WiiWare will finally get off its ass in 2008, with the first new channel to be announced since *Everybody Votes*. *Check Mii Out* is a Mii-sharing channel that will allow users to showcase their Miis, vote on Miis and participate in Mii contests, and is coming soon. It should be interesting, especially considering the amount of um... "colorful" Miis that show up in my parade. Please, won't somebody think of the children?

Nintendo is off thinking about our parents with *Brain Age 2*, the vision training game *Flash Focus*, and Ubisoft's *My Life Coach Games*. Apparently, Sony is out to cure cancer with the PS3, while Nintendo is working on Alzheimer's. Before Reggie gets to the show's biggest announcement, we get a chance to see *Super Mario Galaxy* and Mario's new "Bee" and "Boo" suits. Bee allows Mario to fly for a period of time, while Boo lets him pass through walls. Later on, we spend copious amounts of time chasing down bunnies, collecting star pieces and falling through black holes. There's also a co-operative (though not extensive) multiplayer mode that lets anyone hanging around the Wii while you're playing hop in and take out a few enemies.

Cue Miyamoto with the real focus of Nintendo's E3 show: *WiiFit*. Even Nintendo's most skeptical critic has to admit that the Balance Board is damn cool. It measures BMI, weight, and looks like Apple redesigned my mother's old Step for aerobics. There's even a game that mimics the Step concept, but with a more engaging interface that plays like *DDR for n00bs*. Push-ups, yoga, hula hooping and ski jumping are included in the training program, but it's more exciting to think about the inevitable skiing, skateboarding or yoga sim games the board could spawn. Gamers in shape? Sign

me up. I got a chance to square off with Reggie in the soccer ball heading minigame later in the evening. Suffice to say, I won't challenge him again anytime soon. My head can only take so many cleats being kicked into it. But, as someone who regularly practices yoga, I was surprised how accurate the system was in telling me what was wrong with my posture. I certainly didn't leave under the impression that the board was a gimmick. What's the final say on Nintendo at E3? This year is all about follow-through. Certainly the numbers and hype are looking good for Nintendo, but a slow start to online play and the concern that the Wii is a fad have made some gamers wary. As the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* states: "Don't panic." It seems Nintendo has known where the Wii was going all along.



ENTRANCE [NO ADMITTANCE]

MEN [OFFLINE]

CONCESSION [OFFLINE]

WOMEN [OFFLINE]

KONAMI

4

In keeping with its traditions, Konami used *Metal Gear Solid* like a club, keeping as many eyes firmly on it as possible. Hideo Kojima took the stage at Konami's press conference on Wednesday to show off a brand-new trailer for *MGS4*, featuring Kojima's typical trailer style (if you don't think it's over at least three times before it actually is over, it's not a trailer Kojima made) and an admittedly awesome fight between the new Ninja-fied Raiden and Vamp.

At the same time, Konami finally announced word on *Silent Hill V*, which will appear on next-generation consoles... and which will apparently be developed by The Collective (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Marc Ecko's Getting Up*) rather than Team Silent. The player takes the role of Adam Shepherd, a soldier who returns from a war overseas to find his father's dead, his mother's catatonic, and his brother Joshua is missing. Starting in his hometown, Adam's search will (of course) lead him into Silent Hill.

At Konami's actual booth, neither *MGS4* or *SHV* were so much as mentioned. Instead, the spotlight was on Konami's upcoming games for 2007, including *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles*, *Silent Hill Origins*, *Contra 4*, *Hellboy*, and *Dewy's Adventure*. Most of these games had been announced earlier this year in one form or another, but they were all playable at E3. (So were games like *DDR Hottest Party*, the series's Wii debut, and *DDR Universe 2*, but... well, I didn't play them. Sardius is HGM's *DDR* nut. When I try to play it, I come perilously close to injury or death.)

Of the lot, *Silent Hill: Origins* was the most surprising. It had appeared at Konami's summer barbecue last year in an extremely early build, which played a bit like *Silent Hill 4*; it was both easy and fun to blast monsters to bits.

Now, *Origins* has been almost completely overhauled into a more typical *Silent Hill* game, where melee combat is emphasized, your flashlight is your lifeline, and you're rather emphatically screwed. Travis Grady made the mistake of rescuing Alessa Gillespie from the fire that should have killed her. Now he's stuck in Silent Hill, able to pass freely between the Otherworld and the real world, and forced to contend with Alessa's nightmare. Speaking of screwed, *Contra 4* is a blatant throwback to the NES/SNES versions of the game, with a seriously steep difficulty curve. It's *Contra*; it's going to hand you your ass. It's just now you have a grappling hook, which you can use to attach to railings overhead, and the action sometimes extends vertically up to the top screen. Speaking of throwbacks, *Dracula X Chronicles* is shaping up nicely, with the new 2.5D version of *Rondo of Blood* seeming to be much, much easier than the original game ever was. More importantly, Konami let slip some details about the additional features in the included version of *Symphony of the Night*, which will apparently include the ability to play as Maria and some other undisclosed exclusives.

Speaking of lame, repetitive segues, *Dewy's Adventure* was playable at the show. This bright, colorful platformer allows you to control Dewy, a drop of water, by using the Wiimote to tilt the world around him. By pressing up or down on the control pad, you can freeze or evaporate Dewy, allowing for new moves and different mobility. It's an oddly enthralling title which could pass for a first-party Nintendo game; it's got a lot of that *Kirby* flavor to it.



[CV: THE DRACULA X CHRONICLES]



[DEWY'S ADVENTURE]



[MGS4]



[SHV]



5

NC SOFT

Lord British is now General British, and yes, he's been ganked already.

Richard Garriott was on hand at E3 to discuss *Tabula Rasa*, the science-fiction MMORPG that he was showing off at the GDC, and in which he's playing the human commander General British. The game's in beta right now, and it's becoming increasingly interesting as time goes on. That said, Garriott's E3 presentation was not amazingly different from his GDC presentation, so anything you've read in recent memory still largely applies.

As we discussed in our previous preview from the GDC, *Tabula Rasa* doesn't look or play like anything else in the MMORPG genre, which has always basically come in two flavors — Korean click-to-move fantasy or Western WASD fantasy, with a few exceptions — up until now.

As MMO fights go, it's a near-constant gun battle across hostile alien landscapes; it's pure chaos, and could easily be mistaken for a third-person shooter. We'll have a much more in-depth preview of the game for you in the very near future.

NCSoft's booth also featured two new games, as well as the recent hit *Dungeon Runners*; there, they showed off some new features like the difficulty slider and WASD controls, and mentioned that player feedback will continue to influence the content in future patches. Upcoming additions to *DR* will include guild support and, critically, PVP.

The other two games were, unsurprisingly, also MMOs. *Aion: The Tower of Eternity* is a dreamlike MMO being built by a Korean team with the Crytech engine. In the world of Atria, which has been shattered into three realms, you're a deva who's lost his or her memory.

You choose one of two realms to call home, and as your character levels up, you eventually discover the ability to grow magical wings and fly, thus changing virtually everything about the game. While the flight ability has a relatively short timer, it allows for quick travel and a variety of new combat options, particularly since *everyone* can do it. In the endgame, players of *Aion* will battle against both players from the other realm and the NPC race of Balaur.

Finally, *Guild Wars: Eye of the North* appeared at E3. Unlike the previous *Guild Wars* titles, which NCSoft calls "campaigns" — they could be joined to the original game or played by themselves — *Eye of the North* is an actual expansion, meant to advance the game world's plot and to bridge the gap between the current game and the impending *Guild Wars II* (which should enter a public beta sometime in 2008).

It is, to quote NCSoft, "all about the dungeons," with eighteen new multilevel dungeons built into the game, complete with giant bosses, huge traps, and bizarre puzzles. You can also recruit ten new heroes, including members of the three new races that will be playable in *Guild Wars II*: the goblinoid Asura, the half-giant Norns, and the demonic Char.



[AION]



[TABULA RASA]



[DUNGEON RUNNER]



[GUILD WARS: EYE OF THE NORTH]





UBISOFT 6

Ubisoft's press conference offered unusual insight into the company's three-pronged publishing strategy in the coming year, as outlined by CEO Yves Guillemot: a licensed line, a casual line, and a hardcore line. The three lines are Ubisoft's answer to a growing and increasingly diverse marketplace, designed to make sure that Ubisoft is publishing something that caters to the taste of virtually any potential gamer. The licensed line saw little promotion, but after all, licensed games rarely need press attention to sell. Ubisoft's hardcore and casual lines are a different story.

Marketing VP Tony Key introduced the casual line, with a detailed explanation of the "widening of the nets" philosophy behind casual games. Designed to be "games for everyone," Ubisoft's casual line focuses on the *Petz*, *Imagine*, and *MyCoach* brands. *Petz* looks to expand to the Wii in 2007, while introducing new DS titles that let players interact with wild animals like *Dolphinz* and *Tigerz*. While the *Petz* line has gotten little press, it alone accounted for 10% of Ubisoft's 2006 business, and is expected to account for 20% in 2007 thanks to the Wii editions.

The *Imagine* line is specifically targeted to the young girls under fifteen who own a shocking 25% of the DSes on the market, to let them simulate having a particular "dream career" as a grown-up. The line launches with *Fashion Designer*, *Master Chef*, *Animal Doctor*, and *Figure Skater* editions. The *MyCoach* line hopes to hit the older market broken open by *Brain Age* and similar productivity-oriented games. *MyCoach* will come in editions that teach *French*, *Spanish*, and general *Word power*. *My Life Coach* is designed to be your "personal Dr. Phil" and guilt-trip you into taking better care of yourself. They also showed off *Jam Sessions*, a game that effectively simulated a guitar. Players could use any tablature to enter a song into the game, then use the stylus to "strum" virtual chords and practice whenever they liked. You could even practice singing by using the microphone.

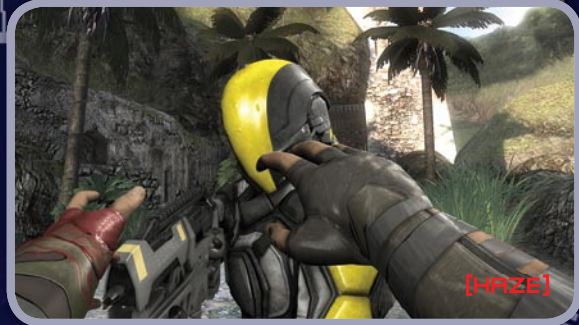
Next, the hardcore portion of the show got under way, offering fewer surprises but much bigger excitement. First up was a demo of the Wii version of *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*, which did a remarkable job of integrating Wii controls into the basic gameplay of the next-gen title, and offered some unusually sharp graphics. A new motorcycle racing title called *Nitro Bikes* was announced, which appeared similar to *Excite Truck* but with an emphasis on using nitro to attain some incredibly ludicrous speeds. The now PS3-exclusive *Haze* got an extended trailer and demo that added significant depth to the previous impression left by the product. With the revelation that the story's really about protagonist Shane Carpenter betraying his corporate masters at Mantle, the gameplay gains a few tactical and strategic elements, and begins to bear far less of a resemblance to *Halo*.

The show ended with an *Assassin's Creed* demo that was obviously meant to be a repeat of the demo from Microsoft's press conference, but took a turn for the interesting during the chase scene in the crowd.

The player caught up with the assassination target much earlier than expected, and a swift motion had him dead in the streets in an instant. Now the player's challenge was entirely different: to successfully escape the crowded area he'd inadvertently killed his target in, by leaping over rooftops and through streets until he found an area to take cover in. The guards pursuing the titular assassin were aggressive and clever, and backed the player into a corner several times. The player had to fight his way free, even though each kill riled the crowd more. It was only after a lucky leap down into a wagon loaded with hay in an alley provided a hiding place that the assassin was able to shake his dogged pursuers. This was a perfect note to end the show on, with a taste of *Assassin's Creed* gameplay that Ubisoft probably didn't want us to see, but still proved all of its claims about how dynamic the crowds and enemy AI could be.



[BIA: HELL'S HIGHWAY]



[HAZE]



[ASSASSIN'S CREED]

7 MIDWAY

One of the most often-heard criticisms about this year's E3, usually from me, is that most of what you saw at the show this year had already been shown off at some event earlier on.

In Midway's case, their entire E3 lineup was essentially its Gamers' Day lineup from earlier this year, minus games that have already been released like *Hour of Victory* and the Wii *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon*, and plus the combat golf game *Aqua Teen Hunger Force: Zombie Ninja Pro-Am*.

Regarding the latter game: your mind was made up about it the moment I mentioned its name and nothing I could say would make any difference. You play as Shake, who must do fierce and manly golf battle, and the show's writers also wrote the game.

The big news at the booth was probably *Lord of the Rings Online*, which is on track at the moment to enjoy the "second largest MMO launch ever," if Turbine's figures are correct. With its upcoming Book 10 expansion in August, Turbine is adding numerous requested features. While it's still working on player housing, the next book will add more than a hundred new quests, a new contested city, and a new reputation system, allowing players to hunt for monsters and trophies by themselves or in small groups.

The more impressive additions arguably have to do with *LotRO*'s signature PvP style. In Book 10, players will be able to launch their monster characters directly from the character selection screen, as well as spend destiny points to play as Trolls or Rangers for an hour. Swapping your present character out for a Troll, as displayed at the show, gets you sixty minutes' worth of AoE devastation, as Trolls can wade into crowds of enemies and send them flying.

You can also spend five hundred destiny points to play as a chicken ("sup, pubba"), allowing you to explore Middle-Earth more or less at will. Chickens move faster than characters do, don't draw as much aggro, and can feign death to get monsters to leave them alone. It's entirely possible to use chicken form to get from one end of Middle-Earth to the other.

The other games Midway had on display at E3 were nothing new. *Stranglehold* still kicks just as much ass as it ever did, and *Unreal Tournament III* remains good clean fun.

BlackSite: Area 51 was also present. At Midway's Gamers' Day event in Vegas, *BlackSite* was playable... for about five minutes. The E3 demo was much longer and more impressive, including a lengthy sequence where the player must use a helicopter-mounted machine gun to destroy a massive alien hydra. *BlackSite* is positioned somewhere between painfully realistic squad-based shooters and your average splattery alien-blasting game, which is an interesting place to be in.

Finally, it wouldn't be Midway if *Mortal Kombat* wasn't present somehow. It's bringing a new version of *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* to the Nintendo DS, complete with wireless head-to-head gameplay. More importantly, the "Puzzle Kombat" minigame from *MK:Deception* will be included on the cart.



[UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3]



[ULTIMATE MK3 DS]



[ATHF: ZOMBIE NINJA PRO-AM]

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A. An undying love for games.

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	4501 Points out of stock Set of 8 figures. Box autographed by NIS bigwigs. You must be Subscriber or higher to claim this item. more info
	4500 Points 1 in stock Bad news: it's already been opened. Good news: it was opened to get the cover sheet signed by Keiji Inafune, executive producer for Dead Rising. Yeah, that's worth it. You must be Subscriber or higher to claim this item. more info
	4499 Points 2 in stock Our first issue, signed by everyone who was available at E3 to sign it. You must be Subscriber or higher to claim this item. more info
	3845 Points 1 in stock Sure, it's \$20 in stores... if you can find one. Maybe when they become common we'll lower the points and offer it to non subscribers. You must be Subscriber or higher to claim this item. more info
	3750 Points 1 in stock The skins you can get in the store just aren't cool enough because they're not signed by the man. This one is (although it may be printed on, not touched by him himself). more info

Activision put on a show at E3 that even Jamie Kennedy couldn't kill. We got a good look at Activision's upcoming line-up, which has a few pretty good looking franchise hits in it.

First up is the game with the somewhat unwieldy title, *Bee Movie Game*. It's based on the upcoming Dreamworks picture *Bee Movie* (think about it for a second). "Bee Movie" was written by Jerry Seinfeld and features an all-star cast of Chris Rock, Matthew Broderick, and Seinfeld himself. The game, like the movie, stars Berry B. Benson, a young bee who has no interest in following tradition and working with honey. He sets out to make something new of himself and, as these things go, adventures ensue.

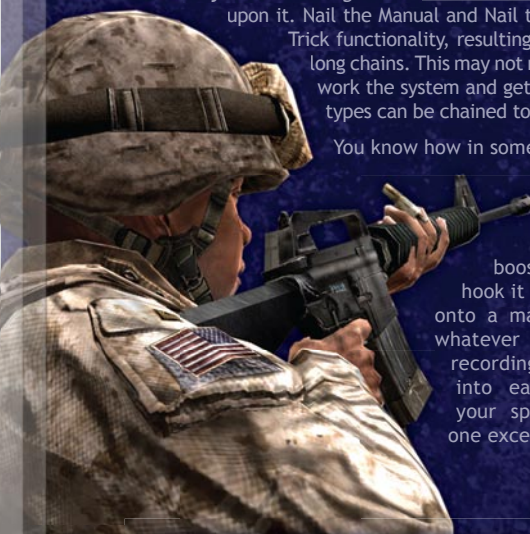
Spider-Man: Friend or Foe is coming up, and looks fairly interesting. It's eschewed the free-roaming style of the movie-based games in favor of a new family-friendly style. Spider-Man, as he progresses through the game, will ally with friend and foe alike. Spidey stalwarts like Doc Ock and Green Goblin will be in full effect, but expect to see a few surprises from Marvel Comics lore, too. If you would've told me two years ago that we'd see Daniel "Iron Fist" Rand in a video game, you probably would've gotten a derisive laugh out of me at best. *Friend or Foe* isn't exactly pushing any graphics boundaries, but it looks like a pretty solid party game.

Call of Duty 4 is Infinity Ward's return to my personal favorite FPS series, and they're coming with heat. They've bumped the setting up around sixty years to something resembling the modern day and it's done wonders for the series. Where the series prided itself on historical accuracy, *Call of Duty 4* brings, well, modern accuracy into the fray. Special Forces members use the same hand signals and touches that they do in real life. The tactics are similarly research, as are the body armor and uniforms.

The story takes place in an unnamed, but pretty obviously Afghanistan-esque, country that's in the middle of a bloody coup. You and your team go in to quell the violence. The *Call of Duty*-standard parallel storylines come into play once again, taking you to places as varied as a hostile tanker ship to a burned out township to a war-torn slum. It definitely looks like one to watch for.

Tony Hawk's Proving Ground builds on the *Project 8* formula and manages to improve upon it. Nail the Manual and Nail the Grab have been added to the Nail the Trick functionality, resulting in some extraordinary tricks that involve long chains. This may not make comboing easier, but wily players can work the system and get some sick combos out of it. All three Nail types can be chained together or pulled off mid-combo, to boot.

You know how in some skate games, you have a specific place where you can build things to skate on? Now, you can do it anywhere. If you think those giant steps in front of the capitol building could use a boost kicker for some high-altitude antics, hook it up. You can even stick a custom camera onto a map, letting you take screenshots from whatever angle you want. When you add video recording capability into all this, which factors into earning money from your sponsors, you've got one excellent package.





[PW:TAT ■ DS]



[PW:TAT ■ DS]



[RE: UMBRELLA CHRONICLES ■ Wii]



[RE: UMBRELLA CHRONICLES ■ Wii]

CAPCOM 9

As the only video game to ever turn the phrase "wow, that was cool" into my own personal mantra, *Devil May Cry* has spawned several sequels that, unfortunately, veer further and further from the original path. Now, for *Devil May Cry 4*, the series returns to its roots, and lets aspiring do-gooders slay demons as a new character called Nero. Unlike the last iteration, *Devil May Cry 4* doesn't make the player choose between character 'builds' or overwhelm him or her with insane difficulty levels. Instead, it provides a virtual ballet of brutality featuring an intriguing mix of surreal sword and firearm combat. New to the series is Nero's awesome 'Devil Bringer' move, that uses his right arm to grab ledges like a grappling hook, or seize enemies and slam them to the ground. This maneuver can also be used to extend combos, adding yet another combat button so players can mix up their ultra-stylish moves. While I'm not too crazy about the inability to control the camera angle, *Devil May Cry 4* still looks and plays fantastic!

Call me crazy, but *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles* for the Nintendo Wii seems a lot like the *House of the Dead* series, especially if you use the Nintendo Zapper. Moving about is controlled by the computer, so the game is basically 'on rails.' However, players do get to make directional choices on occasion that determine where they go to next. Rabid fans will appreciate the ability to blast a path of destruction through locales from *Resident Evil 0*, 1, 2, and 3 as well as new and equally gruesome environments. Controlling the on-screen action is very intuitive thanks to the pointer on the Wiimote, and players can now chuck grenades that blow the undead into bite-size morsels. Of course, the standard knife and firearms are also available, but there is no word yet if the sultan of meat substitutes, Tofu, is playable.

It was easy not to notice *Zack & Wiki: Quest for Barbaros' Treasure* nestled amongst its high profile brethren, so imagine my surprise when it turned out to be a puzzle game that I actually want to play. Similar to PC point-and-click adventure titles, Zack and his pal must move around detailed environments while solving puzzles in order to find Barbaros' treasure. Sure the characters are cute, but the highlights of this game are the thought-provoking puzzles and interesting use of motion controls.

For example, players must use a turning motion to wind a crank that moves a giant hanging basket, move the Wiimote upwards to reach items using an extended arm, twist the Wiimote sideways to mimic turning a key in a lock, and much more!

Rounding out Capcom's line-up was a bevy of Xbox Live Arcade and portable offerings. For the portables, *Phoenix Wright 3: Trials and Tribulations* and *Megaman ZX Advent* are set to take the DS and hardcore fans of the franchise by storm. For XBLA, 360 fans can look forward to a new HD version of *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*. Capcom is a big publisher, and judging from E3, 2007 is going to be a very big year for it.



10 GAMECOCK

Gamecock had a weird show. They took over the Hotel California on Ocean Street in Santa Monica, and while their presence was confirmed in the E3 guidebook we received on registration, the hotel wasn't labeled on the map.

Fortunately, they were pretty hard to miss. Gamecock was one of the only companies that brought booth babes, they gave away T-shirts with their company's URL (www.gamecocksucks.com), and their E3 strategy revolved heavily around throwing energy drinks down visitors' throats until they were convinced they could see beyond the veil of reality. It felt like a throwback to an earlier period in the game industry, where you could do whatever the hell you felt like because no one was watching.

Gamecock's E3 lineup was unusual. They had a little of everything, and they weren't offering any sequels; they had eight games, each one was from a different genre, and each one was an original IP. Every developer at the Hotel California said the same thing: they wanted to do something new, and Gamecock let them do it. This is either going to be an incredible success story or the most damning possible commentary on the modern video game industry. Of the eight games, though, the action-platformer *Mushroom Men* and Firefly's fantasy-based *Dungeon Hero* were only present as unplayable game footage, and two other games – Croteam's currently untitled project and *Section 8* – were entirely absent.

The standout game at the booth (besides this issue's cover story, starting on page 34) was probably *Hail to the Chimp*, a four-player beat-'em-up, sort of in the vein of *Power Stone*, with a broad streak of political humor. All the backstabbing, fundraising, and vote-grubbing of a modern political campaign has been turned into a violent allegory that involves cartoon animals throwing each other into lava.

Sabotage was on the other end of the spectrum. Based loosely on the life of SOE agent Violette Szabo, *Sabotage* is a stealth-based WWII action game made by a team based in Germany. This lends itself to a darker, somewhat more "realistic" sort of game. Instead of being bogged down in American hyperbole, *Sabotage* is unflinchingly grim.

Along the same lines, *Dementium* is a survival-horror FPS from Renegade Kid, a brand-new developer with members who've worked on games like the first couple of *Turok* games. The DS remains a surprisingly solid platform for first-person shooters, and *Dementium*—the story of an amnesiac who wakes up in a monster-infested sanitarium—is extremely atmospheric and creepy. It needs a little fine-tuning before it's ready to go, but it's a solid game so far.

So is *Insecticide*, a 3D platformer for PC and DS by Crackpot Entertainment, a development house made of LucasArts veterans; the team's members worked on games such as *Full Throttle* and *Day of the Tentacle*. In a distant future where bugs have evolved to sentience and humans are largely extinct, you play as Insecticide Division Detectives Chrys Liszt and Roachy Carruthers as they try to solve a murder. If you think *Insecticide* looks like *Psychonauts*, that isn't an accident, as both games share a lead artist, Peter Chan.

Finally, *Fury* is an arena-combat MMORPG with no PVE content. When you fight in *Fury*, you are always fighting other players. It's set up for fast-paced fighting with combat that's surprisingly influenced by shooters; for example, there are power-ups liberally scattered around the arenas. *Fury* is made expressly for people who like to PVP until their eyes bleed.



[DUNGEON HERO]



[HAIL TO THE CHIMP]



[MUSHROOM MEN]



[FURY]



ENTRANCE [NO ADMITTANCE] MEN [OFFLINE] CONCESSION [OFFLINE] WOMEN [OFFLINE]

ATLUS 11

This year's E3 format was miserably unfair to smaller publishers, trimming the massive 400-company roster of last year's show to less than forty. Seeing Atlus's two kiosks in Barker Hangar, full of original and innovative titles to play, was a welcome relief. Much like fellow RPG juggernaut Square-Enix, Atlus is coming off of an extremely successful 2006 and going into 2007 with the bulk of its publishing efforts centered squarely on the red-hot Nintendo's DS hardware.

Not that Atlus has abandoned consoles: the fan-favorite *Trauma Center* series returns to the Wii in 2008 with *New Blood*. *Growlanser: Heritage of War* is coming for the PS2, and you can flip to later in this very mag to see our review coverage of the long-awaited *Persona 3*. Still, neither *New Blood* nor *Heritage of War* was playable on the show floor. Instead, there was a host of three killer, recently-announced DS titles for journalists to get their hands on. All three confirm Atlus's reputation for innovation and originality.

My personal favorite was the DS strategy RPG *Luminous Arc*. The story and design sense are right out of fantasy comedy-adventure anime like *Slayers*, and keep the adventuring light and funny. *Luminous Arc* uses 2D sprite graphics, and each character has a unique look, personality, and set of abilities. The game is designed to be playable entirely with the stylus, or the buttons and control pad, or combinations of the two. This works really well, especially with just the stylus, and keeps combat fast and fun. Best of all, you can actually stop and talk to your characters between levels to give them encouragement. A guy who got smacked by friendly fire might need cheering up, or someone who gained a level might benefit from some congratulations. It's a fun mechanic, and overall, *Luminous Arc* promises to be a very fun part of the DS's growing RPG library.

The DS rhythm game *Ontamarama* was also interesting. The simple story calls for you to help save musical spirits, called ontama, from a demon that's out to destroy them. To call the hiding ontama out, you need to use the control pad to dance to the beat of a given song. Then you can rescue them by tapping or lassoing them with the stylus. Balancing both aspects of the gameplay is surprisingly challenging, and the game clearly expects perfect performances from you. Colorful blends of 2D and 3D cel-shaded graphics keep the action fun to look at, and the song selection includes a lot of interesting J-Pop and J-Rap. Players who loved *Elite Beat Agents* and are hungry for more portable rhythm action are probably going to find *Ontamarama* very satisfying.

Draglade might look like some kind of tie-in with a Saturday morning cartoon-type anime, but it's actually an entirely original title that combines rhythm, fighting, RPG, and 2D platforming elements into a unique and interesting gameplay style. You customize your hero with special moves and supers with a variety of damage types, and then send him into 2D sidescrolling levels that teem with enemies. Punch your way through them to reach the boss, and use the power of fighting to your personal beat to increase your damage and juggle combo your way to victory. There's nothing else quite like *Draglade* for the DS, and the broad gameplay style could appeal to just about anyone. So DS fans, take heart: Atlus is going to give you a lot of love this year.



REVIEWS

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HGM REVIEW GAUGE

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

MEGAMI TENSEI: PERSONA 3 * SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: PERSONA 3 * SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: PERSONA 3 * SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: PERSONA 3 * SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: PERSONA 3 * SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: PERSONA 3

Persona 3 is the kind of game that's very difficult to describe to someone. It's especially difficult when trying to convey just how amazing it is. It's basically a game about a group of troubled high schoolers who use (not really) guns to shoot themselves in the head as a means of using their special powers, which is weird enough. If you point out that it is an amazingly old-school rogue-like game akin to Azure Dreams, you'll probably get a groan of disapproval. If that doesn't seal it, then highlighting that the majority of the game is spent talking to people in a Japanese school-life sim may cause them to throw up what they had for lunch.

Don't overlook this game based on descriptions alone, because you'll be missing out on an experience that is unlike anything else. This game isn't as Americanized as most game translations, with great care obviously taken in preserving virtually every Japanese cultural reference possible. Atlus left so many little things about the dialogue and setting intact, that it lets an American player experience a little taste of what school life in Japan might be like. This may pose a problem to some people, who may find the trans-cultural experience jarring (especially when hearing the American voice actors using Japanese honorifics).

Atlus has done an impressive job in making the dialogue flow smoothly during the game's numerous scenes, even when Japanese words and terms are used. The voice acting makes it sound like the characters are really Japanese, but you're listening through a headset with professional American interpreters. Junpei's voice actor, for instance, delivers such a great performance that you'll forever associate him with this particular role. The lone exception is Aigis, a fanservice robot character who has a creepy and inexplicable obsession with the main character. She's annoying, and it's only made worse by the actress enunciating every word slowly and painfully.

This exceptional voice acting is a contrast to the protagonist, who has no spoken dialogue. He also doesn't have a personality, as that's something you endow him with. This intense focus on the protagonist carries over to the turn-based battles, which use a modified form of the Press Turn system called "1 More", where he's the only one you directly control. The 1 More system rewards that character who struck an enemy's weakness with another chance to attack. When an enemy has their weak point hit they'll be knocked down, and once all enemies have been knocked down you can execute a powerful attack on all of them. While you only control the main character, there are selectable AI scripts you can issue to characters during a battle, and amazingly the AI is smart enough to learn from other characters (including you) what attacks to use or not use against an enemy. Having an amazingly trustworthy AI helps you concentrate on the strategy of changing the protagonist's Persona during the fight to get the skill set and resistances you want to take advantage of the 1 More system.

While having only one randomly generated dungeon, Atlus has made the exploration through each of the 263 floors painless with the option of telling the other characters to split up and explore it themselves. After telling the characters to split up and map the floor out on their own, they can collect items lying about, fight any enemies roaming about, and if an escape point is found, they'll give you the option to use it at that moment. The only annoying thing about exploring is that you have to talk a character to access their menu to equip them with items. Other than that strange stylistic choice, you'll have an exciting time traipsing quickly through the dungeon.

Persona 3's soundtrack is eclectic to say the least, with a very catchy fusion of rap and jazz as the game's main battle theme. Those of you who've played Star Ocean 3 may actually recognize that the only rap tune in that game has a couple of strange remixes in Persona 3 as well by that same artist. There's even a song in French, and if the husky-voiced singer is Japanese she certainly sounds like she's at least been to France.

Persona 3 doesn't really have much story to speak of, and what's there only shows up later in the game. It's full of inexplicable plot holes and indigestible lumps of mysticism, but gameplay alone makes Persona 3 something special. The intimate relationship you share with your avatar as the protagonist in a cross-cultural environment, along with a fantastic battle system and a surprisingly well-fitting soundtrack, makes for an unforgettable experience.

Score: 4.5 of 5

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI

PERSONA 3

PUBLISHER: ATLUS USA • DEVELOPER: ATLUS
GENRE: RPG... NO LIFE SIM • CATEGORY: LIFE SIM... NO, RPG
RELEASE DATE: 8/14/2007 • # PLAYERS: 1 • RATING: M



Review by Hitoshura

IT'S NOT THAT CONTROVERSIAL

Persona 3's introductory movie seemingly shows Yukari's attempt to kill herself with a gun at her forehead. The gun isn't really a gun, but a device called an Evoker which is used to unleash her Persona's power. As Junpei admits, when talking to him in the dorm at one point, you'd have to be a bit nuts in order to use an Evoker. Given that all the characters who use Evokers have some serious psychological problems, it's easy to see them in danger of committing suicide if not for SEES.

The story in Persona 3 focuses on the delicate issue of dealing with depression and suicide. Each of the characters have their own internal problems from the past which are still plaguing them today, such as Yukari's inability to move on after her father's death. In Akihiko's case using an Evoker is almost like a drug to stave off his own bouts of depression. Firing his Evoker is like a relief to him, but also an escape, in dealing with whatever lingering tendencies there are.

By the end of the game, the characters go through an experience that forces them to rethink their attitudes from before. After that experience they learn how to solve the problems that plagued them, and as a result their Persona changes. The characters still use Evokers, though not as a means to cope with themselves, but as a tool to carry out their goals. Their newfound strength from within is what eventually leads them out of Hell.

SECOND OPINION

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

There's nothing I could say here that Hitoshura hasn't already. For God's sake, buy this. Like lemonade, it's cool and refreshing. Also, Yukari.

FINAL SCORE: 4.5 OF 5

ETERNAL SONATA

Review by **Lynxara**

Publisher : Namco Bandai
Developer : Tri-Crescendo
Release Date : 9/17/2007
Rating : Teen
Genre(s) : Action RPG
Category : Hallucinogenic Historical
of players : 1



Eternal Sonata supposes that, as 19th-century composer Frédéric François Chopin lay dying of tuberculosis, he had a fantastic dream about a world where people afflicted with terminal illnesses gained magic powers from their suffering. In this dream world, Chopin becomes a powerful adventurer who guides a group of young heroes and heroines on a world-saving quest. The people who live in Chopin's dream think their world is real, after all. It's not long before Chopin is wondering whether or not his dream is real, too.

This bizarre premise results in an RPG that's never quite what it appears to be. Despite the bubble-eyed anime character designs, the game's script is sharp and subtle in a way that anime usually isn't. *Eternal Sonata's* plot tends to concern itself more with politics and economics than stopping abstract evils or evil wizards. It's never hugely dissimilar to RPGs you've played before, but just a little too weird to be comparable to anything else. This is, after all, a game where the plot occasionally stops to give you a brief history lesson about the life and times of the real Chopin, complete with instructional photographs of Poland and France.

Motoi Sakuraba's score does much to support the surprisingly engaging story, on par with his excellent work in the *Baten Kaitos* games. The graphics feature some of the most superb cel-shading ever produced. Tri-Crescendo wisely implements proper cloth, hair, and other textures in addition to the cel-shade treatment used for shading and skin tone, to achieve a subtler, more painting-like effect than most cel-shaded games. The world has the beguiling surrealism of a pleasant dream, and truly magnificent cutscenes. You'll occasionally run across a clunky animation or suspiciously unfinished area, but they're forgivable lapses.

Eternal Sonata's gameplay is probably the weakest part of the

package. It's an active turn-based battle system that basically amounts to playing *Grandia III* with a poorer interface. All you know about turn order is who goes next, which rarely affects your decisions. Avoiding damage involves playing a simple but progressively tiresome timing game with the B button, and combat rapidly degenerates into button-mashing. A character's special attacks change depending on whether they're standing in light or darkness, but most specials are too interchangeable for this to really matter. The same goes for the monsters who change form in light or dark areas. Make no mistake, combat can be really fun if you run up against a well-designed enemy that makes you exploit the light/dark system properly, but there's a lot of needless repetition in the system. Couple this with dungeon design that's invariably either frustrating or dull, and you have a game that can degenerate into a real slog at times.

Ordinarily flaws like this would merit a lower score, but the parts of *Eternal Sonata* that work are really incredible. Even the boring dungeons boast intricately beautiful backgrounds, and the mini-games are excellent. You can take pictures of enemies in combat to scare up fast cash, and find pieces of music to perform with NPCs hidden throughout the world. When you get into fights with well-designed enemies, combat can become very engaging. The localization is quite competent, with both English and Japanese voice tracks featured. There's some post-game content, but it feels very tacked-on. After you've sunk your twenty or thirty hours into beating the game, you'll probably put it down and not look back until you want to go through the story again. *Eternal Sonata* just happens to be good enough that, eventually, you will probably want to.

Rating : 4 of 5



FINAL SCORE : **4 of 5**

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

Eternal Sonata is a pretty fun RPG with a great, if a little creepy, hook. The button-mashing is pretty blah, however.



BRAVE STORY



Review by **HonestGamer**

Publisher : XSEED Games
Developer : Game Republic
Release Date : 7/31/2007
Rating : Everyone 10+
Genre(s) : RPG
Category : Turn-Based
of players : 1

Brave Story: New Traveler's initial fifteen minutes are an uninspired mess. Then they're over and the game suddenly turns awesome, a quality it maintains through the very end. There's never a moment where it completely blows a person's mind, where it innovates in any discernible fashion, yet *Brave Story* succeeds in spite of that because it's the perfect mix of old school and modern role-playing sensibilities (with heavy emphasis on the former).

Consider the dungeons. Most of them aren't all that large, yet they manage to pack in their fair share of rooms off the beaten path, treasure chests guarded by monsters and perfectly spaced save points. There's the appropriate sense of risk and reward, yet exploration is never prohibitively harrowing.

Numerous random battles you'll encounter in those dungeons and across the world map are enjoyable thanks to lively presentation. You can take as long as you want to plan your moves then watch them be executed with brief but effective flair. When a weapon strikes an adversary, there's an aural effect and a visual one; bold, colorful text flashes across your victim to emphasize how effective your attack was (or wasn't). The camera never lets you miss a moment of the action, and the detailed environments where battles take place are gorgeous.

Throughout the game, your characters learn special moves and team attacks. There's a cast of lively characters, each with interesting quirks. That comes into play in battles with short little voice clips when one defends another from a near-fatal blow, or when two warriors band together to execute a special maneuver.

Outside of battle, the personality continues in a plot that quickly escapes the fetters of its rather standard 'hero transported to another world' motif. The desire to simply collect a few gems

to build a powerful weapon and gain a prize from the realm's goddess soon turns into a compelling tale of bravery, friendship and self-sacrifice. Throughout, humorous (but not slapstick) dialogue keeps things light in all but the most tragic of moments, which are compelling because of the break from levity.

If you want to rush through *Brave Story* to unravel its intriguing plot, you certainly can, but most players will choose to participate in the various side quests along the way. The game helps you to keep track of your current assignments. Accepting tasks doesn't prevent you from advancing the plot, either. There's also a mini-game where you can collect and raise wild birds to participate in fights with other bird breeders you'll find throughout the vibrant world of Vision.

With enjoyable combat, amazing presentation, enjoyable dungeons, a compelling plot and even a host of side quests, *Brave Story: New Traveler* stands proud as the best of old and new. It's the perfect PSP purchase for RPG fans, and a great way for genre newcomers to get their feet wet. Some franchises start poorly but build to greatness. *Brave Story* got it right the first time.

Rating : 4.5 of 5



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

Generic PSP RPG Review #3: *Legend of Brave Bejeweled Kingdom Heroes: New Monster Summoning Traveler Story* is entirely decent, but why waste time with something so ordinary?

FINAL SCORE : **3.75 of 5**



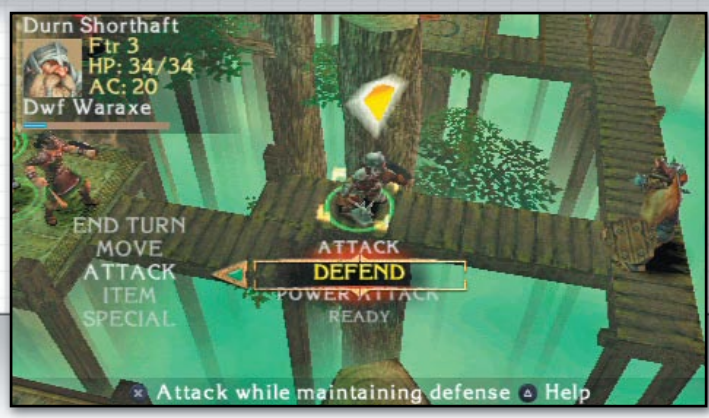


TACTICS



Publisher : Kuju
Developer : Atari
Release Date : 7/31/2007
Rating : Teen (Mild Violence)

Genre(s) : Turn-Based Strategy
Category : Rollin' Twenty-Siders
of players : 1-2



Kou and I have both talked about the old SSI "gold-box" AD&D games, starting with the classic *Pool of Radiance*. It was long past time for someone to put out a new turn-based strategy game based on the *Dungeons & Dragons* ruleset, and now Atari has.

Dungeons & Dragons Tactics is based on the D&D 3.5 rules. You create a party of six adventurers and go on a fantasy quest. Like D&D itself, the game starts slowly, since 1st-level characters are pretty wimpy, but rapidly turns up the gain.

Tactics's strict adherence to the D&D ruleset highlights a lot of the strengths of that system. D&D is basically a war game with RPG mechanics bolted on, and *Tactics* implements that nicely.

That means it plays very differently from most other console games. *D&D Tactics* is a slower, more cerebral game than, say, a Nippon Ichi title, with a much narrower margin for error. Especially early on, one good hit can kill a character.

One of the problems *Tactics* has, though, is that it's *always* a tactical game. You alternate between exploration mode and combat mode as you investigate the map, which slows the game down tremendously. You must manually move each character across the map one at a time even when no enemies are visible, and enemies will obligingly wait for you to enter their line of sight

before attacking. The gold-box games bypassed this by having you explore in first-person perspective until combat resulted. You never had to burn several empty turns searching for enemies. Even a simple map in *Tactics* can take about an hour, since the monsters are usually lurking spookily instead of attacking.

The two larger problems with *Tactics* are harder to justify. First, and more forgivably, the game is designed for people who already know the D&D system. If you've never cracked a *PHB*, this game may be impenetrable.

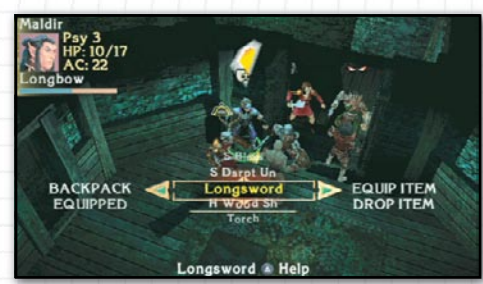
Second, the interface is incredibly clunky. At best, it's usable but counterintuitive; at worst, it's un navigable. You essentially have to unlearn everything you've figured out from any other game on the planet before *Tactics*'s menu system makes sense.

If you're a die-hard tabletop gamer, *Tactics* can be very satisfying in a way that the tabletop game rarely is. If you aren't, you may want to look elsewhere, and even if you are, the menu system takes a lot of getting used to. This game could use a little more polish, but it's entertaining for the right people.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

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

On the one hand, I found this pretty fun... on the other, this is the first time my brain has ever *run out of breath*. For D&D and stats-lovers only.



NANCY DREW

The White Wolf of Icicle Creek



Publisher : Her Interactive
Developer : Her Interactive
Release Date : 6/7/2007
Rating : Everyone (Mild Violence)

Genre(s) : Adventure
Category : Mystery
of players : 1



Though Her Interactive's *Nancy Drew* games are primarily marketed to women and young children, they have their defenders among serious adventure gamers as one of the last real refuges for the genre. The latest in the series, *The White Wolf of Icicle Creek*, is getting an extra push as a tie-in to the recent *Nancy Drew* movie, which meant I got my first exposure to the series I've been wanting to try out for a while.

In this particular adventure, Nancy has been summoned to the Icicle Creek lodge up in scenic Ontario to investigate a series of mysterious bombings and catastrophes. The suspects are a classic rogue's gallery including a surly handyman, a highly competitive cross-country skier, and a bird-watcher who seems to be using those binoculars for more than she claims. Even the lodge itself seems to be hiding a secret, and the closer Nancy comes to the truth, the more she finds herself in danger.

Despite some scary situations and a lot of suspense, Nancy's adventures are strictly G-rated, but snappy, naturalistic dialogue keeps her from being quite the goody two-shoes I remember from the books of my youth. She's helped by a talented voice actress who clearly knows what she's doing after 16 games, so that even though all the dialogue in the game is spoken and unskippable, it feels like part of the performance, and rarely gets tiresome.

Play is set in a first-person style, where you move Nancy between nodes (a la the *Myst* series), then sweep the cursor around the screen to look for clues. There are a few mini-games you'll have to play (based on classics like Chinese Checkers, *Minesweeper*, and *SkiFree*), which are built fairly organically into the game and provide a nice change of pace from all the walking and clicking. The downside is that the timed mini-games often don't afford you enough time to solve them, and there's one that seems to be

based entirely on luck. Thankfully, the game gives you unlimited do-overs which alleviate most (if not all) of the frustration.

The eventual solution to the mystery is a let-down (and something of an anachronism), but up until that point, the game provides an effective aura of suspense thanks to the creepy setting of the dim old lodge and its surroundings, plus a heavy dose of dramatic irony. The understated soundtrack, made up mostly of ambient noise and the sound of your own footsteps, also helps maintain the mood. Though the graphics are hardly photorealistic, a lot of care has gone into the character animations to keep them expressive, and the settings are just detailed enough to alleviate "pixel search" syndrome.

Despite its minor disappointments, I enjoyed *White Wolf* a lot, and it's clear that the developers at Her Interactive really know how to integrate story and gameplay and create a smooth production. I hope that one day, they'll pick a story more suited to their sophisticated techniques, but until then, adventure gamers of all ages can still find a thoroughly satisfying experience in *Nancy Drew*.

Rating : 3.5 of 5



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

I like the mini-games more than the *Myst*-style pointing and clicking, and the mystery itself is fairly dull. It's a promising take on adventure games and the old *Nancy Drew* franchise, though.



Dead Head Fred

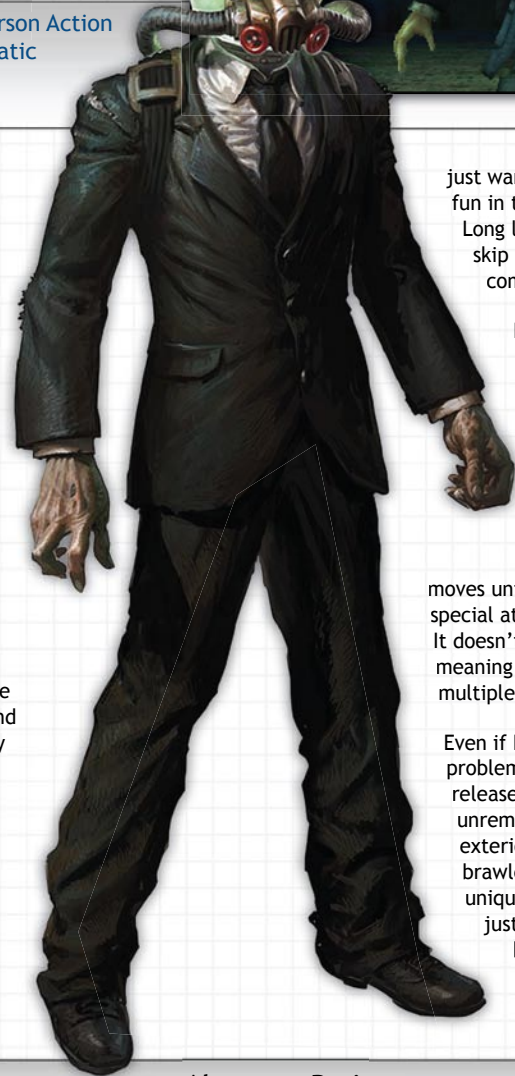
PLATFORM



Review by Sardius

Publisher : D3 Publisher
Developer : Vicious Cycle
Release Date : 8/28/2007
Rating : Mature

Genre(s) : Third-Person Action
Category : Problematic
of players : 1



Dammit, Fred, I stood up for you! I thought you had a few neat ideas and showed buckets of promise, so for months I pestered the HGM guys to cover you. I even wrote up a nice little preview for you a few issues back, and *this* is how you repay me?

I still maintain that the premise is solid, at least. You play as Fred. Fred's dead. Being dead has its advantages, though, and Fred is able to attach new heads that each give him different powers and abilities, to more efficiently beat up zombies and solve puzzles as situations arise.

In theory, this mechanic could have given *Dead Head Fred* the kind of gameplay variety that's often missing from third-person action titles on the PSP. In practice, *Dead Head Fred* ends up being just another semi-offensively bad PSP action game that does nothing special to innovate or entertain. The brawler aspects are irritating at best, and the puzzle portions are so basic that they might as well not even exist at all. What's the point of having puzzles if you're going to baby the player with text prompts, helper icons, and voiceovers that tell you exactly how to solve each and every one?

It doesn't help that the experience is a technical mess marred by persistent bugs and glitches. The review code I played was packaged with an extensive list of gameplay issues that were promised to be sorted out prior to retail release, but there were also several unlisted problems that hurt the game in a big way. The control scheme alternates between being unresponsive and twitchy. Analog movement doesn't recenter properly, leading to Fred running around in circles like an idiot jerk when you

just want him to stay in place. It's especially fun in the parts that require precision jumping. Long load times, cutscenes that take longer to skip than to watch, and stuttering audio help complete the experience.

It's doubtful that anything will be done to fix the busted-ass combat system, either. Enemies are oftentimes completely unfazed by your attacks, and they enjoy breaking your intricate "punch punch punch punch" combos with their own higher-priority assaults on a regular basis. Some have a nasty habit of blocking every single one of your moves until you're forced to employ a limited-use special attack to break through their defenses. It doesn't help that Fred is really fragile, either, meaning that you'll find yourself repeating scenes multiple times after dying from cheap hits.

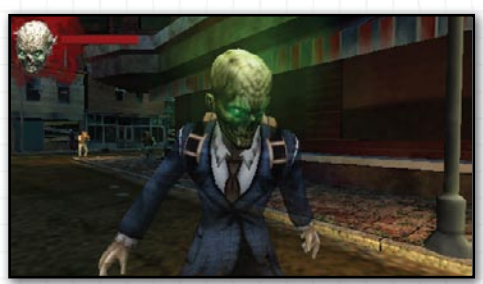
Even if I were to assume that all of these problems would be fixed prior to its final release, though, this would remain a thoroughly unremarkable game. Despite its promising exterior, *Dead Head Fred* is just a problematic brawler with some unpuzzling puzzles, and its unique characters and storyline don't alone justify a purchase or a playthrough. Fred, buddy, you let me down big time.

Rating: 1.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
2 of 5

2nd opinion by Spinner 8 • Alternate Rating : 2.5 of 5

The presentation's there, but the combat, platforming, and exploration elements completely fail to engage.



IF THE GOVERNMENT HAS ITS WAY, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO PLAY HALF THE GAMES IN THIS MAGAZINE.

OVERLORD



Review by KouAidou

Publisher : Codemasters
Developer : Triumph Studios
Release Date : 6/26/2007
Rating : Teen

Genre(s) : Action? RPG? Puzzle?
Category : RTS? Platformer?
of players : 1-2



Editor's note: The Xbox 360 version was not reviewed.

Evil has come in a lot of forms in games. It's been horrifying, awesome, funny, creepy, and tragic, but until *Overlord*, it's never really been cute. At least, it's never been as cute as it is here.

The *Overlord* of the title once scoured a generic RPG domain, until a generic band of heroes invaded his tower and put a stop to his generic evil activities. In the years since, the seven heroes each became corrupted by different brands of evil and brought their own lands to ruin. It's now your job, as the resurrected *Overlord*, to take your revenge upon the heroes, and determine the fate of their lands. You can bring health and harmony to the land (happy followers submit better to your will), or slay its peoples and burn it to the ground (usually easier and a lot more fun).

The cornerstone of *Overlord*'s gameplay, and the source of its tremendous charm, is the horde of adorable imp-like Minions that you control as you travel about the game's realms. These Minions will typically follow behind you and back you up in combat, but they'll also charge forth to do your bidding if ordered. They'll move on their own and attack enemies, retrieve items, destroy obstacles, and generally bash things up according to their own judgment. If you want a bit more order to the proceedings, you can control smaller crowds of Minions more directly by setting up Guard Markers that they'll set up strategic formations around.

Further complexity is added with various types of minions, each of which have their own terrain capabilities, and correspond roughly to Fighter, Rogue, Mage, and Cleric archetypes. Trying to figure out the best way to use your Minions in various situations sometimes turns the game into more of an RTS or a puzzle-platformer (like the old *Lost Vikings* games) than the action RPG that it seems to be at first, and the way it manages to seamlessly combine all of these genres together (along with a lot of humor) is fresh and fascinating.

The realms you'll visit are massive and highly detailed, with a number of irresistible sidequests to engage in and lots of secret goodies to find. Although the general plot is fairly linear, you still have a bit of freedom as to what order you want to take the realms in the middle of the game, and there's lots of incentive to replay to take different alignment paths, figure out new solutions to puzzles, and come up with new strategies for difficult combat situations. Cooperative and

competitive online gameplay modes extend the game's life even further.

While *Overlord* does have its disappointments, they are limited compared to everything it gets right. An autopop feature would've been nice, as would a bit more freedom in your weapon and castle customization. There are also some control issues with the Minions from time to time, but given the complexity of the AI and the game's strategical possibilities, complaining about these issues almost feels nitpicky.

In the end, don't think about what you're not getting in *Overlord*: what you are getting is a hilarious, complex, unique experience. It's an absolute must-have for PC gamers.

Rating: 4.5 of 5



FINAL SCORE : 4.25 of 5

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

Overlord has such a cool premise that it's hard for the actual game not to be a little disappointing. I really, really wish I had more than four types of minions at my disposal, for one thing. *Overlord* is still a very good game as it stands, though.



MEGA MAN STAR FORCE LEO



Review by Racewing



Publisher : Capcom
Developer : Capcom
Release Date : 9/4/2007
Rating : Everyone (Mild Cartoon Violence)

Genre(s) : Action/RPG
Category : Wanna-Be Rockman_X.EXE
of players : 1-2

Spinoffs can be strange things. Some can completely change the way we view the series on which the spinoff was based. Others, possibly afraid of alienating old fans, don't change anything besides aesthetics. Capcom's yielded both during its career, and while its breakout hit *Mega Man ZX* happily falls into the former category, its newest series, *Mega Man Star Force*... well, not so much.

MMSF is a spinoff of *Mega Man Battle Network*, which is, in turn, an alternate-universe take on the original *Mega Man*. You may be able to see how this can get complicated quickly. *MMBN* went on for six games, all of which were similar to each other save for some characters and engine refinements. By *MMBN6*, things had gotten stale for all except newcomers and the series faithful.

Star Force, unfortunately, does little to shake things up. While the names and faces are new, this is basically a futuristic, card-laden skin pasted over the same rehashed premise and gameplay we've had for over half a decade now. Battles play like and are set on a grid straight out of *MMBN* — except now they're in behind-the-back polygonal 3D instead of sprite-based and viewed from the side. *MMBN*'s Battle Chips are now Battle Cards, and function in the same way as said Chips, though now with increased combination attack properties. In a similar fashion, Navis are now FMs, as in radio signal-based beings. That's right: the 'Net is now a series of radio waves, to the point where each piece of the overworld has a highly confusing Wave World overlaid on top of it. It's easy to get lost quickly when traversing it, and the frequent random battles don't help in getting your bearings.

Now, this isn't the first time Capcom's done something like this, but at least spinoffs like the *X* series added enough fresh and new gameplay elements (along with better graphics and sound—that certainly isn't the

case here) to make the core concept worth visiting all over again. I admit to not being a huge follower of *MMBN*, but I think that if I were, I'd be mildly insulted by this. The game even lacks the *Mega Man* series fanservice that lent *MMBN* some of its charm. This is a sixth sequel in spin-off's clothing, with added cumbersome gameplay elements. Meanwhile, *Mega Man Legends 3* is frustratingly still nowhere to be found.

Looking for more *MMBN*, even after the last six games? *Star Force* is right up your alley. It doesn't mess much with the core gameplay, has Wi-Fi capability so you can expand your weapons collection and battle friends, and gives *MMBN* a new coat of paint. If you and *MMBN* have never gotten along, though, there's no reason to look for anything of interest here. Newbies to this whole concept should just pick up some of the GBA games instead. They're cheaper, and are tied just enough into the *Mega Man* that we all know and love to keep the uninitiated from getting too lost.

Rating: 2.5 of 5

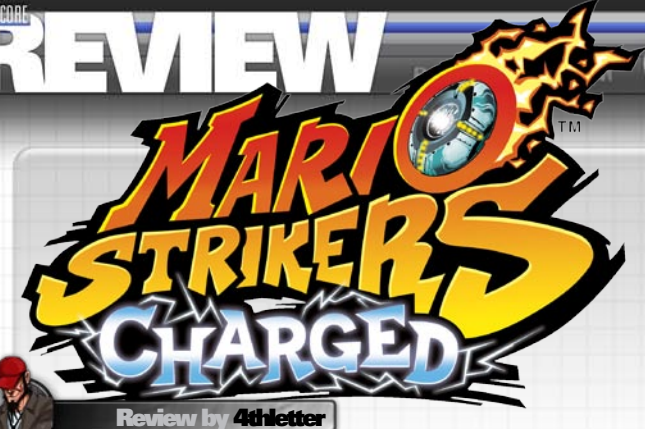


2nd opinion by Jeremy • Alternate Rating : 2.5 of 5

A new coat of paint doesn't do much to help *Star Force: Leo*, which doesn't stray far enough from the *Battle Network* norm to warrant a purchase from anyone who isn't fanatical about that rendition of *Mega Man*.

FINAL SCORE : 2.5 of 5





Publisher : Nintendo
 Developer : Next Level Games
 Release Date : 7/30/2007
 Rating : Everyone 10+

Genre(s) : Soccer
 Category : He's On Fire
 # of players : 1-4



Mario Strikers Charged is one of those games that's perfect for parties. Matches are fast-paced without being too frantic, the controls are pretty darn intuitive, and it's really, really easy to get into a high-scoring game with no real problem at all. In short, you can get a highly competitive game going with no trouble at all.

In a way, that's a problem in and of itself. When playing against the computer, especially early on, it's very easy to run your score up into the double digits while the computer languishes with only a fistful of points. This leads to a game that's very fun in terms of gameplay, but sorely lacking in difficulty. As time goes on, the AI gets better, but it's a little off-putting when you first really dig into the game.

If you can get past that, though, you're in for a treat with friends. *Charged* isn't *Smash Bros. Galaxy*, of course. It sticks closely to the established *Mario* cast, but still manages to infuse the characters with a lot of personality. Nintendo went for a brushed metal, industrial kind of look for the game. Lightning strikes, speed lines, and glows are the order of the day, which results in a pretty handsome package. Everything feels nice and near-futuristic. Even the soccer ball is made out of metal.

The gameplay, as I said above, is fast-paced. It actually feels a lot like old-school *NBA Jam* in execution. Just as in the previous game, players can tackle other players and steal the ball. There's no penalty for doing this, so a large part of the multiplayer game revolves around a pretty brutal game of tug of war.

The shooting is pretty fun, as well. You can do Mega Strikes, which are special shots that give you a chance to earn multiple goals at once. In a clever bit of "Why didn't anyone think of this before now?", the receiving player can block the shots by using the Wii remote to catch the balls as they get near the net. The switch between offensive firing and defensive catching is seamless, and gives each player plenty of time to get ready for their portion of the minigame.

The more I think about it, the more this reminds me of when I first played *NBA Jam*. That same sense of fun for the sake of fun is present in *Charged*. In the same way that *NBA Jam* built and improved upon the *Arch Rivals* skeleton, *Mario Strikers Charged* takes the *Super Mario Strikers* formula and makes it better. The two franchises even have a similar sense of humor.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

2nd opinion by Roger Danish • Alternate Rating : 4 of 5

Mario Strikers Charged is a blast to play, both online and off. I'll forgo the typical soccer puns and just say that Nintendo and Next Level Games have made a fun, multiplayer, arcade soccer game.



Publisher : Sony Computer Entertainment
 Developer : Level-5
 Release Date : 8/21/2007
 Rating : Teen

Genre(s) : RPG
 Category : Parlez Kung Vous
 # of players : 1

It's cool, I don't speak French, either. I will call *Jeanne d'Arc* "Joan of Arc" until my dying days. I can't help it. I know the story it's based on, but I've got to say, *Jeanne d'Arc* does a pretty good job of being just about as interesting as the real thing.

The real *Jeanne d'Arc* was from Domrémy, as in the game, and lived a short life by anyone's standards, but still managed to help push France out of the Hundred Years' War. Unlike the game, however, *Jeanne* contended against normal Englishmen. In *Jeanne d'Arc*, she's up against Englishmen who have summoned extremely powerful demons that were once sealed by five ancient heroes.

I like tactical RPGs, and this one hits a nice middle ground between, say, a *Nippon Ichi* title and *Final Fantasy Tactics*. There's just the right mix of story and gameplay, with a couple of cool twists thrown into both for good measure.

Instead of being able to get into enormous hour long battles, the battles in *Jeanne d'Arc* are on a timer of sorts. Most battles must be completed within a set number of turns, indicated by an on-screen counter, or else you fail. When you stack this on top of the normal battle conditions, you're left with a situation that's a little more tense than what you find in most SRPGs. The counter adds a sense of urgency into the usual mix of overwhelming despair at fighting overpowered villains.

Luckily, *Jeanne d'Arc* leaves the overpowered villains at the door. I found the levelling to be nicely even, in that you don't go into battles underpowered, but not so powerful that you can dominate everything in three turns, either. Of course, the transformations, added by armlets equipped on certain characters, can give your team an edge in a fight.

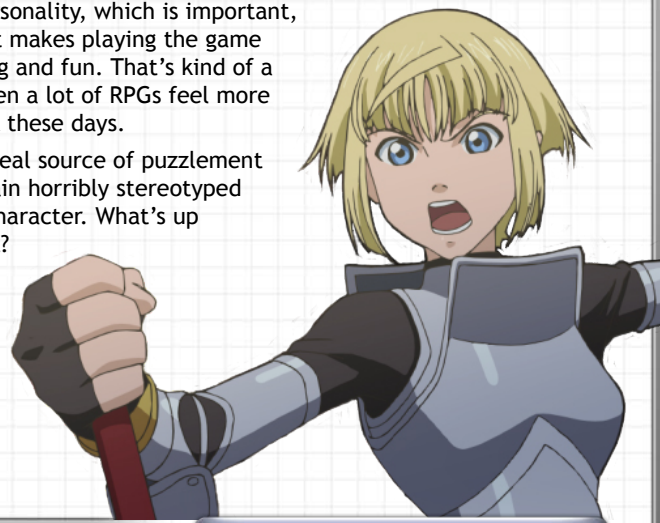
When you transform, your characters get a visual and statistical upgrade. Movement ranges and strengths increase by a large amount, making it easier to take out tough enemies. You cannot do this freely, however. The rule is one transformation per stage, so use it wisely.

The animated cutscenes and voice acting are pretty nice overall. The animation is sharp and fluid and used just often enough to keep you interested. The cel-shaded graphics are also well-animated and surprisingly expressive.

Characters talk to each other, or you, during battle via speech balloons. You can see how they're feeling or watch their exclamations of joy at winning. It's a nice little touch during battle and helps make the characters seem more real. It gives them personality, which is important, I think. It makes playing the game rewarding and fun. That's kind of a treat when a lot of RPGs feel more like work these days.

My only real source of puzzlement is a certain horribly stereotyped French character. What's up with that?

Rating : 4 of 5



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

As far as tactics games go, *Jeanne d'Arc* is right up there with my all time favorite (Konami's PS *One Vandal Hearts*, if you're wondering). Great story, great gameplay, great PSP RPG.

FINAL SCORE : 4.5 of 5



Vampire Rain

Review by Dack

Publisher : AQ Interactive
 Developer : Artoon
 Release Date : 7/3/2007
 Rating : Mature (Blood and Gore, Intense Violence)

Genre(s) : Stealth
 Category : EXTREME STREET SNIPER
 # of players : 1-8 (Via Live)



Vampire Rain begins with a warning: "This game contains graphic depictions of violence." The warning should read "Warning: This game contains graphic depictions of a game." Vampire Rain is a terrible game that is flawed in every way possible, having little to no appeal to any gamer.

The opening cinematics of the game reveal the story. Vampires, or Nightwalkers (as the game makes sure you call them), are multiplying at an alarming rate, and their population is about to surpass humans. It's time to send in the big guns to fight them. No, not the army or any task force like that, it's up to you and three other members of a black ops elimination squad to take down the Nightwalker threat. Basically, you play as, and with, some of the most cliched characters in gaming: A brave but silent man, a leader on his first mission, and a sarcastic, but highly capable, female. The story stays lame and anticlimactic throughout the game, with little or no character development. Your first level in action is the game's first tutorial, where it literally tells you that "vampires can see you, so make sure they can't see you." It then has you "try it out" by running behind two vans to avoid a Nightwalker who's standing still. The first of many repetitive and bland levels then begins.

Nearly every level in the game is all about getting from point A to point B without being spotted by a Nightwalker. Not only is the goal of every level similar, but so is the environment. Vampire Rain's environment rarely changes from your run-of-the-mill city. You usually have to get to point B by climbing on top of buildings, which is the only way to avoid Nightwalkers standing still on the street. If a Nightwalker does happen to see you, you might as well

drop your controller, because there is no way to run and escape, or even kill the newly alerted vampire. You are only equipped with a machine gun and pistol until later in the game. It'd take about 20 straight seconds of holding down the fire button to take down a Nightwalker and, since they can run so fast, you'll never be able to do it. I'm not even sure why the game bothers

giving you weapons – you won't kill a Nightwalker, except for during two scripted fights, until you get the Sniper Rifle, Shotgun, and Knife. You will rarely begin a mission with any of those weapons or have much chance of finding them in the level. The knife is the most effective weapon but it runs out. Yes, you heard me right, the knives have "UV," so they will run out.

The Developers of Vampire Rain took the flaws from the magnificent stealth games Hitman, Metal Gear Solid, and Splinter Cell, added PS2-quality graphics, and called it Vampire Rain. There is an online portion of Vampire Rain, but because there were never enough people ever online to add up to a full game when I wanted to try it, I can't tell you how it was. Anyone looking to play Vampire Rain online will probably have a very hard time doing so as well, although I see no reason why you'd even want to play the game at all. Vampire Rain is thus far the worst game released on the Xbox 360, and that's including the Burger King games. The stealth BK game Sneak King is actually more of an entertaining game than Vampire Rain is.

Rating : 1 of 5

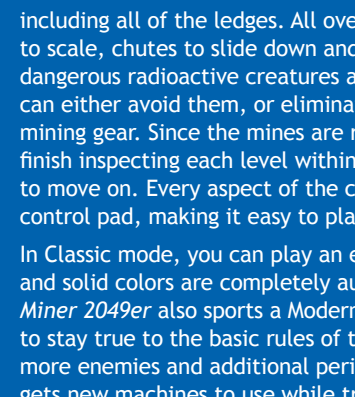
FINAL SCORE : **1** of 5

2nd opinion by 4thletter • Alternate Rating : 1 of 5
 This is an interesting primer on how not to do a game. Vampires fighting in the streets should be gold – this is dross.



REVIEW

MINER 2049



Miner 2049er was first introduced back in 1982, written for the Atari 800 and first released for Apple computers. It tells the tale of Bounty Bob, hot on the trail of a dangerous desperado named Yukon Yohan who's hiding in Nuclear Ned's abandoned uranium mine. Loaded with hazardous radioactive waste, deadly mutant organisms, and lots of dangers, the mine is far more of a challenge than the villain.



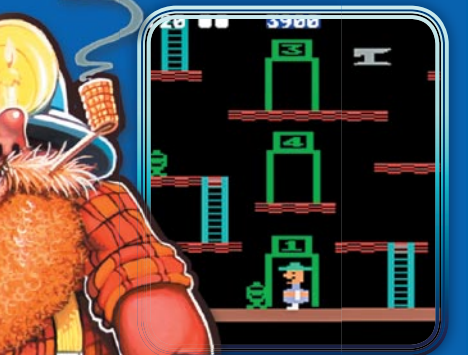
Bob must complete each stage by stepping on every inch of the mine's area to change its color, including all of the ledges. All over there are ladders to scale, chutes to slide down and elevators to use, but dangerous radioactive creatures abound as well. Bob can either avoid them, or eliminate them by using some mining gear. Since the mines are radioactive, you have to finish inspecting each level within a certain time limit in order to move on. Every aspect of the controls is handled with just the control pad, making it easy to play on a wide variety of handsets.

In Classic mode, you can play an exact replica of the original Miner 2049er. The huge pixels and solid colors are completely authentic to the original, early '80s form of the game. Miner 2049er also sports a Modern mode that updates its look and gameplay, while trying to stay true to the basic rules of the game. Modern mode features new level designs, with more enemies and additional perils like moving platforms and acid rain. Bounty Bob also gets new machines to use while traveling, like utility hoists and transporters.

Each mode of Miner 2049er includes ten progressively difficult stages to clear. Each level demands more sophisticated tactics and a lot of replays. If you lose all three of the lives you start with, you have to restart the entire game from the very beginning, so players really want to avoid making careless mistakes. As a game, Miner 2049er remains as fun and challenging as ever, although it feels a little short when compared to modern games. It's still a perfect fit for Mobile gaming and a nice bridge between old and new that should please gamers of all ages.

Publisher: Magmic
 Developer: Magmic
 Release Date: 6/7/2007

Genre: Retro
 Category: Platformer
 # of Players: 1



FINAL SCORE : **4** of 5

Disney SQUARE ENIX

KINGDOM HEARTS

Final Mix



Publisher: Square-Enix • Developer: Square-Enix • Genre: Action RPG
Category: Irresistible Crossover • Release Date: 3/29/07 • # Players: 1

Review by Zippy



Square-Enix has a bad habit of releasing a heavily-anticipated game to great fanfare, waiting until everyone's beaten it, and then announcing that they're going to release an even better version of it. A Japanese gamer might as well just wait on one of these "Final Mix" or "International" releases before even bothering with a Square-Enix title. Gamers from other parts of the world rarely have a choice in the matter. Unless, as with Europe and *Final Fantasy X*, the International version happens to be the version selected for localization in your territory, you'll never fight the extra bosses, see the new endings, or use the new items.

The gap between the original and enhanced releases of a Square-Enix title has perhaps never been wider than it is for the two versions of *Kingdom Hearts 2*. The original version's localization was one of the top-selling games in the US in 2006. The enhanced version that hit Japan earlier this year, called the "Final Mix+" version, comes as part of a two-disc set that contains a bonus game, tons of new story content, twenty new boss battles, new abilities, an entirely new Drive form, and so much more. Check out the sidebar if you're curious about the bonus game, called *Re: Chain of Memories*. For now, we'll just talk about the enhancements to the *Final Mix+* version of *Kingdom Hearts 2*.

The usual rationale for why we don't see these remakes re-localized, at least according to most fans, is that they aren't really different enough from the originals to merit a second release. That could not be less true about *Kingdom*

Hearts 2: Final Mix+. It's the rare title that's received a gameplay overhaul to go along with the new story material. For instance, in the original *KH2*, you only got to fight about half of the members of villain group Organization XIII. In *Final Mix+*, you can fight every single member of the Organization by finding their secret "Data Clones." This includes revamping the cutscene-only conflict between Roxas and Sora into a full-fledged boss battle, too. Beat them all, and you can open up a new turbo-challenging bonus dungeon and fight them again, each battle now dwarfing the original *KH2*'s Sephiroth encounter for difficulty. Beat that, and you unlock a secret end boss, the armor-wearing Keyblade-wielding Knight you could see a glimpse of in *KH2*'s bonus ending video. While you can earn spectacular new items from these enemies, if you can beat them at all then you don't really need them. The real reason to run through this boss-battle gauntlet is to prove your mastery of *Kingdom Hearts 2*.

This might sound dull at first blush, but remember that the entire game engine has been overhauled and rebalanced with these new battles in mind. Many Reaction commands have had their damage output and timing rebalanced, and some are different entirely. Sora gets to begin the game already knowing the Scan ability, and many formerly useless abilities have gotten much-needed revamps. Even a lot of equipment has been revamped, granting different bonuses and abilities. Sora can gain new abilities like the essential Combo Master, and a new "Limit Drive" form that lets him temporarily use abilities like Strike Raid and Ars Arcanum that are otherwise exclusive to the first *Kingdom Hearts*. You can even hunt Mushrooms as you did in the first game, though now they wear Organization

XIII cloaks. Finally, for gamers that found even Pride Mode too easy, *Final Mix+* offers a blistering new Expert difficulty that puts anything in the original edition of *Kingdom Hearts 2* to shame.

These gameplay improvements add tremendous depth and replayability to a game that was already better than 90% of its competition. Now it's better than 95%. *KH2* was in most respects an excellent game, but *Final Mix+* took everything good about it and made it better. The stiff optional difficulties and new balance make it a hardcore masterpiece, sure to enthrall fans of action RPGs. The inclusion of *Re: Chain of Memories* and the new cutscenes just sweeten the deal for story-centric fans. It's the kind of game that would be a complete must-buy for PS2 owners... if there was any chance of it being released in English.

Worth Importing?

The new version of *KH2* is quite nearly the perfect PS2 action RPG, and absolutely worth buying if you're ready to brave the high-difficulty new challenges. If you're just interested in the new story and *Re:CoM*, though, don't bother. You'll end up resorting to fansubs to find out what's going on anyway, so you might as well just watch those and call it a day.

Score: 4.5 of 5

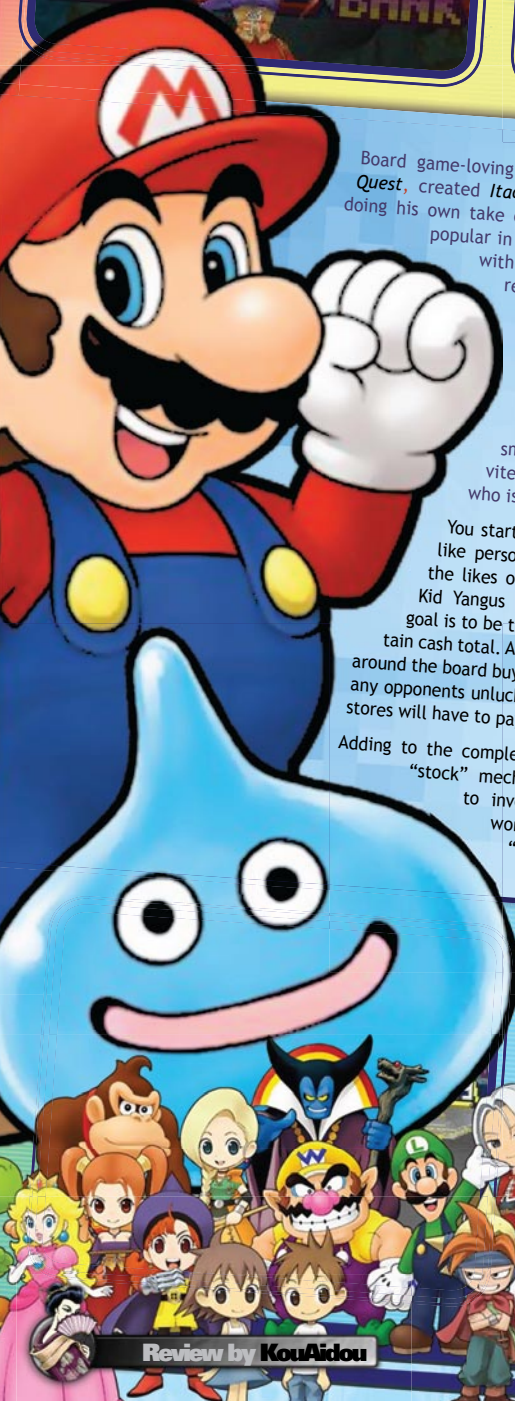
Re: Chain of Memories

The bonus game in *Kingdom Hearts 2: Final Mix+* is a full 3D remake of the 2004 Game Boy Advance title *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*. This includes fully voiced cutscenes and an additional boss battle. The story is basically the same, though: set inside the mysterious Castle Oblivion, *Chain of Memories* involves Sora being forced to travel back through his memories of the events in the original *Kingdom Hearts*. His traditional powers and abilities are stripped from him, and he's got to make do with a deck of magical cards made out of his memories.

Despite the rehash premise, *Chain of Memories* ended up being extremely important to the plot of *Kingdom Hearts 2*. This was unfortunate for a lot of *KH* fans who heard about *CoM*'s poor gameplay and decided to skip it. *Re: Chain of Memories* has all of the same problems, since the gameplay is the one thing that didn't get revamped. Your deck is going to be either broken or worthless depending on your luck with getting cards, which are randomly generated. No matter how good a gamer you are otherwise, a deck of weak cards leaves you impotent during those cool boss battles you want to see. The 3D graphics overhaul adds a lot to the cutscenes, but your environments are still just watered-down, box-like versions of locales you've already visited in *Kingdom Hearts*. If you give a boring game a facelift, it's still a boring game. *Re: CoM* is probably the biggest disappointment in *Final Mix+*.

PUBLISHED: SQUARE-ENIX • DEVELOPER: ARMOR PROJECT
GENRE: BOARD GAME • CATEGORY: IRRESISTIBLE CROSSOVER
RELEASE DATE: 6/21/2007 • # PLAYERS: 1-4

ただき ストリート



Board game-loving Yuji Hori, father of *Dragon Quest*, created *Itadaki Street* with the idea of doing his own take on Monopoly. The series was popular in Japan, and exploded in 2004 with *Itadaki Street Special*, which replaced the game's generic characters with those from *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*. *Itadaki Street DS* is, if anything, even more insidious in its branding. When Mario and a Slime smile happily at you and invite you to join in their game, who is strong enough to refuse?

You start by creating your own Mii-like persona, who you'll pit against the likes of Peach, Slime, Yoshi, and Kid Yangus in four-player bouts. The goal is to be the first one to reach a certain cash total. As in Monopoly, you'll travel around the board buying up real estate, so that any opponents unlucky enough to land on your stores will have to pay you.

A small cut of any rent collected on that street. The more stock is bought in a street, the more that stock worth. Since the worth of your stock at any given time counts as part of your total assets, successfully manipulating stock becomes one of the biggest keys to winning the game.

Unfortunately, the other, more important key is basic luck. The numerous "minigames" you can play by landing on special squares are purely luck-based, and spend a lot of time for a result that could just as easily be achieved through a random card draw. Though the strategy:luck ratio it's better than Monopoly thanks to stock manipulation and some other tricky aspects, this almost makes it more frustrating.

It wouldn't be so bad if the game moved at a brisk pace to allow multiple games in one sitting, but the minigames, combined with the fact that you see every aspect of the computer players' actions, pad out the playtime considerably. While in a real board game, this time could be spent trash talking and chatting with your friends, it's hard to feel warmth or sympathy (or smugness) towards a cold computer opponent spouting your favorite character's catchphrases.

The presentation is solid and the interface is well-designed, and little extras like getting to buy new Mario and DQ-themed costumes for your protagonist avatar are fun. I admire the concept of the *Itadaki Street* franchise, which is to modify a traditional board game with rules too complex to be played without a computer's brain acting as moderator. In this case, though, I just don't think it worked.

WORTH IMPORTING?

I just can't recommend it. Even if you're a Mario/DQ fan, this is clearly a game that was meant to be played against three human opponents in the same room, and even the greatest party game in the world really wouldn't be worth the collective effort with the language barrier, plus the cost of importing four DS cartridges. Without a really worthwhile singleplayer, this one's going to remain sadly skippable on our side of the Pacific in the absence of a real localization.

SCORE: 3 OF 5



Review by KouAidou

新世纪 新世纪 新世纪 EVANGELION エヴァゲリオン BATTLE ORCHESTRA



Publisher: Broccoli
Developer: Broccoli
Release Date: 6/28/2007

Genre(s): Fighting
Category: Super Smash Bros.
of Players: 1-4



Preview by Lyokara



The essence of *Evangelion Battle Orchestra* is best summed up like so: Shinji Ikari in EVA-01 is battling EVA-03, which has been possessed by the spirit of the 13th Angel, Bardiel. All the while, Shinji has no idea that EVA-03 is being piloted by his friend Touji Suzuhara. The battle grows tense, as Bardiel's ability to extend its arms and AT Field give it an enormous tactical advantage over the less agile EVA-01. The battle reaches a dead heat, with both units showing signs of severe damage as they slug it out in the half-submerged ruins of a city destroyed by global climate change.

Just as Bardiel raises a distended arm for what will surely be the bloody coup de grace, a sixty-meter shark swims by and bites his crotch. He tries to get up, but the shark's presence has alerted a nearby tank, which begins shooting Bardiel's torso whenever he tries to stand up. This gives EVA-01 precious seconds to break open a nearby crate and grab a health-restore pack and a handaxe. Faced with a suddenly imposing opponent, Bardiel grabs at the only weapon left: a ten-meter genetically-altered penguin named Pen-Pen. Once Pen-Pen is loosed in the watery gully where the two monstrous foes are battling, nothing can stop his rampage. Both hideous cybernetic machines are bounced high into the air, over and over again. Since Bardiel didn't get a health pick-up, Pen-Pen's rampage kills him first. Shinji wins, but at what cost?

As this little story illustrates, *Evangelion Battle Orchestra* is not very good, while at the same time it's hilarious. It's a forthright *Super Smash Bros.* clone, with little changed besides slightly larger stages and infinitely crappier controls. Picking up weapons, for instance, involves pressing down + attack while over an item. If you're a few pixels off of proper position (and you have no way of knowing that you are), you don't get to pick it up. Instead, you get to attack the air and leave yourself open to retaliation from any enemy who happens to be in the area. Much of the same control ridiculousness applies to using long-range attacks, supers, blocking, countering, and everything else about the game. It's shaped like a proper party fighter, but the engine is just cruddy and half-functional.

There are a few easter eggs here a diehard *Evangelion* or GAINAX fan might care about. Gunbuster, for instance, is unlockable in all its '80s glory. EVA-04 is playable, and Kensuke Aida gets dusted off to serve as pilot. Kaworu Nagisa gets a custom EVA unit of his own, a thoroughly ridiculous golden thing that sprouts wings, wields a katana, and has long flowing Sephiroth hair. This sort of thing is really the problem with *Battle Orchestra*, even from a fan's point of view: it goes out of its way for art, voice acting, and reasonably nice 3D graphics that mimic the look of the show exactly, and then throws in a custom EVA whose super move is basically the Shining Finger. It's pretty hilarious if you can get together some geeky friends and a lot of alcohol, but even at that it's amusing for maybe an hour or two. Don't buy it: play a gullible friend's copy, or otherwise get it on the cheap. It's good for a laugh, if nothing else.

WORTH IMPORTING?

Only if you enjoy wasting money, and if you do, there's a \$100 DX edition of the game that comes with a bunch of hilarious bonus junk like stickers and keychains... and a hand-cranked music box that plays "Tamashii no Rufuran." Honestly, I'd like to be able to just buy the music box and call it a day.

FINAL SCORE:
2 of 5

VIDEO GAMES: ART OR PORN (OR BOTH)?

Between attacks from politicians looking for a vote, and swirling debates between film critics and horror writers, that age-old question that has been popping up in our industry for decades is now at the forefront more than ever. Are video games art?

When considering this question myself, I thought about all other forms of art and the similar cultural battles they go through. All art forms are brought about by some kind of technological advance. There wouldn't be cave paintings without the discovery of pigments, and there wouldn't be rock 'n' roll as we know it without the creation of the electric guitar. In a way, a new form of art is an accident that finds appeal with at least a small segment of the population. When people like something, they want to learn how to do it themselves, and the pool of artists in that medium grows with little thought of how it will be perceived by the masses because, at this point, it's not even art at all. It's still just an experiment.

But once a new art form progresses beyond this touchstone, and becomes something many have heard of if not experienced themselves, art forms seem to follow one of two divergent paths. Some styles of art go from being interesting ideas to cultural revolutions to suffering societal backlash to general acceptance and then eventually to reverence. Examples of art forms that have gone this route include rock music, books, and graphic novels.

Then there's the other path – the one that gets knocked off course because there's just something about it that bothers people. These forms of art go from being interesting ideas to cultural revolutions to suffering societal backlash to being privately allowed but publicly shunned. Examples of these art forms are graffiti, pornography, and... I hate to say it, but right now, video games.

Gaming does share a lot of characteristics with our culturally accepted entertainment brethren, such as movies. Our industry is hit-driven with blockbusters earning the big bucks, but with plenty of smaller releases meant for a more discerning audience. Our titles can be divided into distinct genres. Our products require huge teams across multiple trades to complete, spark passionate debates amongst the fanbase, and the best of the best live on in legend for decades after release. And any venture in the field requires creativity, and is therefore technically art.

Unfortunately, we share more in common with the porn industry. We continually use the same tricks over and over again even if they don't make sense anymore (you can almost always raid peasants' homes for treasure in fantasy role-playing games; girls in porn movies almost always leave their shoes on). Our products have a massive amount of appeal to a certain segment, but limited or no appeal to everyone else. We are technologically driven, besieged by controversy, interactive, and somehow manage to inspire fear. And we continually have to lean on the First Amendment to defend ourselves as a form of free expression, and are therefore legally art.

This isn't to say we're at the point of no return on the latter path, but we are definitely at the crossroads. With the very real and frightening censorship that video game makers are now imposing upon themselves because of continual governmental pressure, we are willfully confining our creativity. Sadly, we desperately need to be doing the exact opposite. Rather than accepting our fate, we need to fight it not only with lawyers and figureheads of our own, but with a renewed creative vigor that pushes the art form of video games into new places that we couldn't have previously imagined.

If we, as an industry, can weather this controversy while at the same time pushing ourselves to reach out in new creative directions, we can get over this hump that every new media form in history has faced. We can grow past this current era of finger pointing, and reach a place where there can be no finger of blame levied because it would have to be directed at everyone in the world. This doesn't mean everyone on the planet needs to be a video game fanatic. It means everyone has to understand what video games are and give them a chance, then decide on their own if they like them or not – and if they do like them, form an opinion on what kinds of games they like and why. Then, and only then, my friends, will video games truly be art.

We're just sayin'...



HERE, HERE!
THE GAMECOCK HAS
SOMETHING TO SAY TO
THE MASSES!



Dear HardCore Gamer,

I, the exquisite Etoile Rosenqueen have reserved this space to bring your attention to the many superior products I am bringing to the RosenQueen Company, just in time for summer!

Firstly, I present to you our wonderfully delightful Kimono Covers for the DS Lite. These highly-crafted, beautiful covers are the only covers elegant enough to grace my DS Lite. And when combined with the wildly adorable Bling-a-ling Jewelry Seals, you can express your inner Miss Marl Kingdom, and compete against your friends!

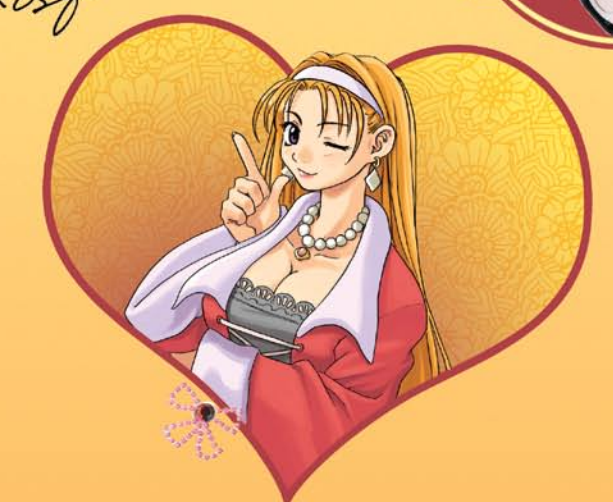
We'll also give you a new choice in Priny Plushies. You know, she's not in my league, but Big Sis is as cute as Prinnies come. And, you can never go wrong with a loyal, classic Priny around!

For those of you who have been anxiously waiting for an RTS-style game to grace your PS2s, we proudly present GrimGrimoire™. You can follow the story of Lillet Blan as she attends a famous magic academy. She's not as interesting as me, but then again, I'm rich!

And finally, we present to you the Disc Case 8P for the PSP. With its 8 UMD capacity, it's perfect for keeping your collection with you on the go!

With all the excitement coming this summer, stock up on all of your gaming and accessory needs! I wish you all a happy and healthy summer, and try to get out a little.

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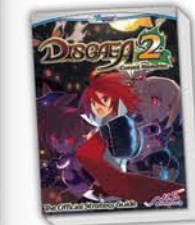


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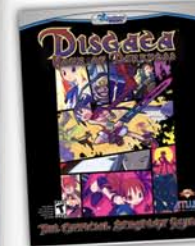
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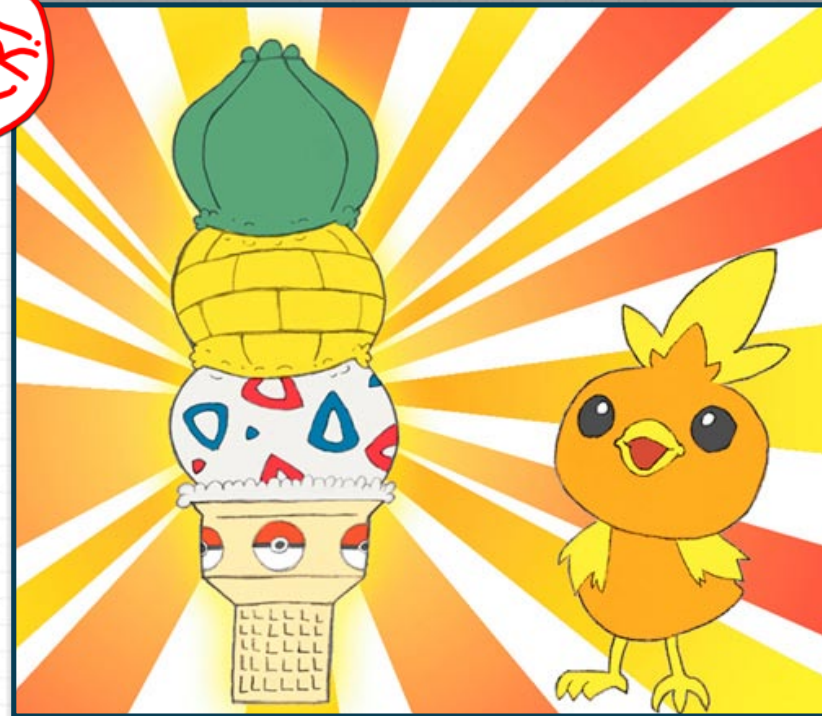
(Some people don't play video games.)

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HGM PICK!

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 to spend on swag in our online store. 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.

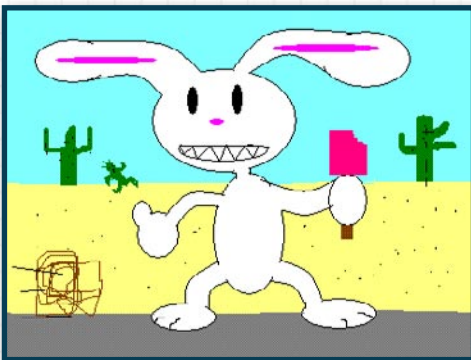
A few things to keep in mind: There is no deadline for submissions because we'll be doing this every issue. Keep it video game related, please. Only post drawings which you drew yourself. Don't expect drawings of nekkid people or any adults-only type stuff to make the cut. Keep it rated "Teen" or below.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



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Location : Las Vegas, NV



Title : Fart Jump
Artist : Ian Isk
Age : 25
Location : West Paterson, NJ



Title : Also: Cacutar
Artist : Kelly Brown
Age : 25
Location : St. Louis, MO



Title : Fiolina Germi
Artist : Ernie Suggs
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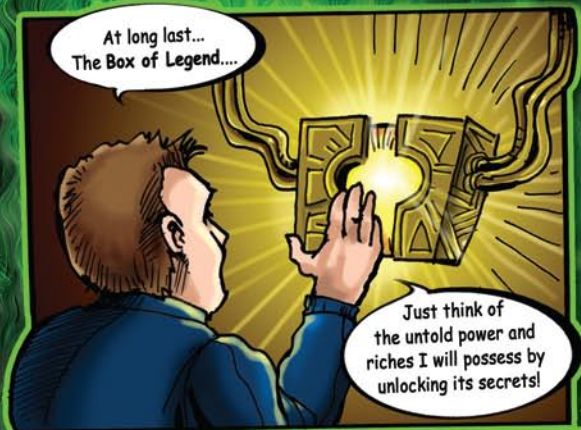
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