HARDCORE
GAMER®
MAGAZINE

v1i3 . written by booth babes
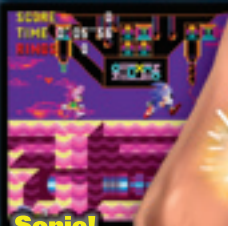
SERIOUS ⊛ SAM II

9 Serious Pages of Sam Inside!
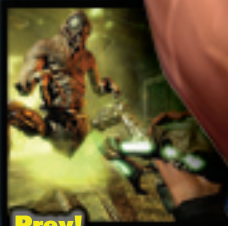
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TEEN
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Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol and Tobacco

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"...the game is much more than
just Disgaea with a fresh coat of
paint"
— GameSpy

JULY 27TH 2005

TEEN
T
Language
Mild Fantasy Violence
Sexual Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING   www.esrb.org

PlayStation 2

日本一
SOFTWARE

NIS America

GAMER

Biographical Data

DJPubba_Tim Lindquist
It's been a real busy time trying to get the *Makai Kingdom* strategy guide to the printer, keep on top of all the instruction manual and packaging projects we've got going on and finish the magazine at the same time. Plus, the games don't play themselves. There's quite a stack built up that need attention. *Genji's* calling real loud and I got a big urge to <3 me some *Katamari*.

Wanderer_Thomas Wilde
I know it's crap. I know it's relentlessly mediocre. So why in the hell am I playing *Resident Evil: Outbreak File #2* night after night after #$%@ing *night?* What is this sadistic hold it has on me? Why am I playing on Very Hard? Capcom! *What have you done to me?!*

Syriel_Adam Pavlacka
After this month Adam is convinced that he should buy stock in Red Bull. He certainly drinks enough of it, especially when deadlines are looming.

Racewing_Geson Hatchett
Racewing is still bitter about not getting to hear "One-Winged Angel" at the *Dear Friends: Music From Final Fantasy* concert he went to last month. How bitter is he? *You don't want to know.* (In completely unrelated news, he picked up *Destroy All Humans!* on release day!)

Shoegazer_Dave Hulegaard
Being the new kid, Shoegazer was anticipating all sorts of sophomoric pranks upon his arrival. Much to his surprise however, there was no gum on his seat, and no glue on his phone. He simply went straight to work using the *Shaq-Fu* licensed mouse and keyboard that *HGM* provided for him. He's still watching out for pranks though.

KouAidou_Elizabeth Ellis
As the supervisor of all things Japanese in the magazine, Kou's powers are few, but mighty. Just try and tell her that *Genji: Dawn of the Samurai* is based off of *The Tale of Genji*. You just tell her that and see what happens to you.

Roger Danish_Greg Off
In a weak moment, Greg thought it would be funny to see how many of his mom's low fat mini-muffins he could shove in his mouth and then wash them down with Diet Pepsi. After 21 and a 32 ounce mega gulp, he went into a saccharine seizure (it's a medical condition, you can check it) and had to be rushed to the emergency room where he was treated for Splenda poisoning. Stupid Splenda. Why do you deceive with your artificial sweetness?
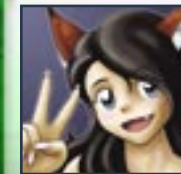
Lynxara_Alicia Ashby
Can you have too many giant fightin' robots in one month? Lynxara came pretty close with the *Gundam vs. Zeta Gundam* and *Gundam SEED* reviews running back-to-back, but didn't seem any worse for wear as the issue went to print. ... she's picked up a lot of new Gundam toys, though....

4thletter_David Brothers
People talk funny nowadays. It's like we're in a movie and everyone's an actor pretending to be a "real person." Some people even go so far as to make up words in an attempt to sound smart or interesting. They should stop. That kind of behavior isn't viewtiful.

James_James Cunningham
Killer 7, Flipnic, Mario Picross, Kururin Squash, Meteos, Atelier Iris, and a replay of *Serious Sam* (PC version) are all conspiring to kill any free time James may ever hope to have. If summer is supposed to be gaming doldrums, then thoughts of fall are pretty scary.

HonestGamer_Jason Venter
Jason has probably played too many games. Sometimes he catches himself driving through traffic and thinking "Wow, those are good graphics." Should he be scared?

Hitoshura_Iaian Ross
Toiling away on individual games one at a time by focusing all his efforts on breaking them down into their components, he comes to understand what makes a game tick by examining every facet. Video games are nothing more than math and logic puzzles for him to layout and solve.
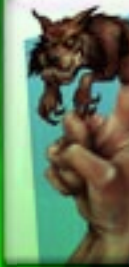
Wolfie_Terry Wolfinger
Ah, summer is here in lovely SoCal, and so is the heat. When ya go outside and the soles of your shoes melt—the AC is barely keeping it bearable inside—and the computer's sweating... oh, but I'm sure there are hotter places. Like the sun... or Hell.

Metalbolt_Anthony Mertz
Firmly believing that one day EA will buy us all, Anthony tried to nip things in the bud by offering them his sole distribution rights for $3.86. Citing that he would make a terrible sports franchise, they refused the offer, saying that he would make a terrible sports franchise. Anthony also wonders why their motto is "Challenge everything," when everything happens to include themselves.

Arieth_Thomas Shin
I played so much notpron.com that when a PDF file I printed came out with gibberish for text, J jotuboumz efdpefe uif ,2 BTDJJ dpef ju xbt qvuujoh po bmm uif ufyu/ On top of that, I can hack into Trillian passwords now. Yeay XOR routines!

Melf_Ken Horowitz
I've somehow managed to find myself knee-deep in Atari 2600 games to play, and my joysticks are calling to me from afar. Now I know why my Carpal-Tunnel Syndrome is making a comeback.

Jeremy_Jeremy Peeples
I've been enjoying a mix of old and new games as of late. For reasons that escape me, and perhaps some higher powers, I've also been enjoying *SvC Chaos.* Pry the controller out of my hands, because I'm sure the sky will fall any day now.

Sardius_Danny Cowan
What started as a *Duck Hunt-*fueled temper tantrum in a department store parking lot soon mutated into full-on obsession for Danny, as his love for video games became slightly more unhealthy with each passing year. Today he is thrown into violent rages by a number of games from many genres, and his parents are still kicking themselves for buying that damned NES.

Contents

Previews

Who wants previews? You want previews? Well, OK then. Thrill to the likes of *GTA: LCS*, *GUN* and *S.L.A.I.* Chill to the spookiness of *MediEvil Resurrection* and *Prey*. Get smacked upside the head with *Urban Reign* and *The Warriors*. Reminisce to the oldies with *Capcom Classics Collection*. Do it!

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On the cover

SERIOUS SAM II

2K Games is all serious about Sam and we're here to tell ya that you should be too—as in *Serious Sam II*. Check out all the pertinent info on Sam "Serious" Stone's next FPS for the PC and Xbox with nine pages of cover-blistering feature. History of Sam; we got it! Quotes from those wacky Croatians at Croteam; we got it! Sidebars on weapons and enemies; we got it! Now come get it!

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Strategies courtesy of Prima Games

If you're a big ol' jock who has a love of the college pigskin, a flying anime fighter with spiky hair, or a gamer who just wants some freakin' codes, Hardcore Gamer has the hookup. Courtesy of our hardworking friends at Prima Games, we're serving up six pages' worth of the best codes and strategies in the 'zines today. Check some strats for *NCAA 06 Football* and *Dragon Ball GT: Transformation*, but stick around for cheats on *Narc*, *Psychonauts*, *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, and so many more. Don't be a hater, be a cheater!

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PSP HACKED

Last month, the PSP world was shocked by the surprise release of a "loader" program that was capable of launching *Lumines* from a memory stick. Other games inevitably followed, giving the PSP the dubious honor of being the most quickly hacked console in history. From a publisher's perspective, the hack is particularly worrying because no mod chip is required. Everything is done in software.

Authored by a 31-year-old former security engineer currently living in France and going by the online handle of AloneTrio, the original loader program wasn't created with the intention of running games. That was merely a side effect, but one that is now impossible for Sony to ignore. While it is impossible to guess the future, we're hoping that Sony embraces the opportunity and starts looking into alternative distribution options for games. After all, we can already legally download tracks for *Wipeout Pure*. It would rock if we could legally download demos and purchased games from Sony directly.

You can find more information on AloneTrio at the WAB website, http://www.wab.com. There's he's published all of his demos, along with the source code so you (and Sony) can see how it's all done. We recently got in touch with AloneTrio and asked him firsthand about the loader.

HGM: What got you started working on the PSP?
AT: I was interested in the console scene when the PSone debuted. [I] coded some intros and demo stuff. I got an Xbox, but only coded one intro before a friend offered me a PSP. Naturally, I tried to code an intro on it.

HGM: How did the original WAB loader come into being? Were you simply trying to reduce the load time on your games or was running games from the MS merely a side effect?
AT: It's always been about the demos. I planned to code a real demo on the PSP, complete with a main menu. Since I wanted to invite people to code some screens for the demo, I needed a way to run other ELFs (PSP programs) from within mine. That's how the first "launcher" code was born.

HGM: Were you surprised at the excitement that your demo launcher has garnered around the world?
AT: Sure I am, but like I've told other interviewers, my goal was never to open the warez door. I'm just coding for fun and trying to promote the demo spirit to the younger generation. Nothing more.

HGM: Now that the cat is out of the bag so to speak, what's next? Are you going to continue coding even if people might use your tools for warez instead of demos?
AT: It's not something that I can worry about. Is a fork maker going to stop making forks because someone somewhere used one as a weapon? Of course not. My goal remains the same. I want to revive the demo scene and skill coding competition and will continue working towards that goal.

HGM: Was it difficult to get code to boot from the memory stick, or was it a relatively easy task? I don't think we've ever seen a console "hacked" so early in its life.

AT: Honestly, I don't understand why my three lines of code were not released by someone else long before I coded the demo launcher. There was a big community of developers working on the PSP that managed to run homebrew code and discover the core kernel functions. I only used some of those that were found.

HGM: Any worries that your work will anger Sony?
AT: In what way? Have I done something illegal? No. So the answer is perhaps it will be angry, but not at my work, rather at the work that it didn't do: properly securing the PSP.

HGM: Is there anything we haven't talked about that you would like to add?
AT: There is an *enormous* business [built] around console modchips. I have received a lot of pressure from different groups to stop releasing stuff so that they can sell modchips. If my code can stop people from selling useless modchips then I don't think that is a bad thing.

GTA HAS SEX

Would You Like Some Coffee With That?

GTA modders have discovered a previously removed "sex game" within *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*.

In early June, a GTA website published a short mod for the PC version of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. The mod consisted of two files which unlocked a pre-

viously inaccessible sex mini-game. Later, modification files for both the PlayStation 2 and Xbox versions of the game were released, causing the mainstream media to go into an uproar. Senator Hillary Clinton has taken Rockstar to task for including the mini-game in the first place. What both the media and the politicians are overlooking, though, is that the mini-game technically isn't in the game.

While the code exists, the only way to "unlock" it is by wilfully modifying your game or by using a cheat device purchased separately. This is because Rockstar decided to cut it out of the game before release. While some would contend that the mini-game code should have been removed entirely, the fact of the matter is that when programming such a complex game you cannot arbitrarily remove code as it may break other things. Instead the unused sections are merely commented out and ignored by the final game. Over the years hackers have found leftover code in numerous video games, containing everything from partially built levels and scrapped items to almost fully realized game modes that were left out of the final product for one reason or another.

It is also worth pointing out that *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is a M-rated game, which means it is meant for players 17 and older. Even if the sex mini-game did exist in the final product, it would be perfectly appropriate for the audience. There's nothing in the GTA sex mod that someone who can buy M games wouldn't see in an R rated movie. If children are playing the game, that should have no bearing on the situation, as the game did not sell itself. Any parent that purchases a M-rated game for their child should take the time to be aware of its contents. Senator Clinton shouldn't be surprised that *GTA* is loaded with mature content.

ROCKSTAR RESPONDS

"We fully support efforts to keep mature-rated video game content out of the hands of children. Although we may not agree with certain interpretations of our titles, we are looking forward to the opportunity for a balanced and open discussion of these issues. Now that video games are mainstream popular entertainment, parents need reliable solutions to ensure family members only play the games appropriate for their age group.

"Thanks to advances in the digital and creative arts, the quality and variety of video games have never been greater. But just as some movies are rated R, some games are rated M because they are intended for mature audiences ages 17 and older. Their plots and storylines are inappropriate for children.

"New technology means modern game designers can tell creative stories in groundbreaking and exciting new ways, but not all stories are for everyone. As the creators of *Grand Theft Auto* and other popular M-rated games, we join political leaders in fully supporting the video game rating system and any efforts to empower families to make the best choices for their homes.

"We are disappointed by comments that misrepresent *Grand Theft Auto*, detracting from the innovative and artistic merits of the game. Unfortunately, the recent confusion only serves to suggest that games do not deserve the same treatment as other forms of creative expression. By promoting awareness, we can avoid propagating the fear and mistrust of a new entertainment medium.

"The organization responsible for rating games and enforcing industry compliance is the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). Senator Joe Lieberman has said it conducts 'the best rating system in the entertainment media.' In addition to age recommendations, ESRB labels include content descriptions that alert adults to specific content. Visit www.esrb.org for more helpful information about game labels and the rating system."

BLIZZCON

Blizzard to Host Convention in October

Blizzard Entertainment, creator of games such as *World of Warcraft*, *Starcraft: Ghost* and *Diablo 2*, recently announced it would be hosting an all-Blizzard games convention in October. Blizzcon, as it is called, will take place on October 28 and 29 at the Anaheim Convention Center in Anaheim, California.

Blizzcon will offer players the chance to grill the developers in Q&A sessions, play in tournaments featuring *StarCraft* and *Warcraft III* as well as sample the unreleased *Starcraft: Ghost*.

"Blizzard has grown enormously in the past fourteen years, but none of that growth would have been possible without our players," said Mike Morhaime, president and co-founder of Blizzard Entertainment. "BlizzCon is the perfect opportunity for us to meet some of those players face to face and to celebrate the Warcraft, Diablo, and StarCraft universes together with them."

For more information on Blizzcon, or to purchase tickets, visit the official website at www.blizzcon.com.

DS OUTSELLING PSP

Nintendo DS outsells PSP in Japan

When the Nintendo DS first arrived in stores, many felt that Nintendo's newest portable system was little more than a weak attempt to blunt the launch of Sony's PSP. Time has proven the critics wrong, however, as a strong lineup of creative games has helped propel the DS into the number one portable position.

Buoyed by the release of *Nintendogs*, the DS has not only been outselling the PSP in Japan, but for at least one week in June, it outsold the PSP and the PS2 combined.

DESTROY ALL MOVIES!

Destroy All Humans! Coming to the Big Screen

THQ recently announced that it has signed Hollywood talent agency United Talent Agency (UTA) to take *Destroy All Humans!* onto the silver screen, as well as develop projects for television.

"The era, characters and irreverent personality created in *Destroy All Humans!* provide a fresh experience and story that is truly dynamic," said Peter Dille, senior vice president, worldwide marketing, THQ. "We're looking forward to working hand-in-hand with UTA to bring this exciting and innovative entertainment property to a broader audience."

Our guides aren't for everyone.

Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories

All but guaranteed to cement the PSP's success and sell tons of hardware units this holiday season, the release of the highly anticipated _Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories_ is finally drawing near.

An all new epic action game set in Liberty City, _GTA: LCS_ takes place three years prior to the events in _Grand Theft Auto III_. _GTA: LCS_ puts you in the role of a scorned wise guy, Toni Cipriani. Cipriani has just returned to Liberty City after having been forced into exile. He killed a made man as a favor to mob boss Salvatore Leone. After a cooling-down period, Toni's welcomed back by the Leones, who put him to work as one of their toughest mob soldiers. What ensues is a surprising full-fledged _GTA_ adventure that will be on par, in both size and scope, with any _GTA_s that have come before it.

We recently had the chance to sit down and play _GTA: LCS_ on the PSP and can say with confidence that the game looks and plays as well, if not better, than the original _GTA III_. All of Liberty City is in the game—Portland, Staunton Island and Shoreside Vale—but each neighborhood has been meticulously recreated for the PSP with all new businesses, pedestrians and missions. Everything you would expect from a _GTA_ game has been packed into this portable version, from full-scale audio production, including an all-new soundtrack played on changeable in-game radio stations, and tons of vehicles, including motorcycles (a first for Liberty City) to classic _GTA_ gameplay elements (side missions, hidden packages, insane stunt jumps, rampages, etc.) and the trademark atmosphere (changing weather, day-to-night cycles, chattering pedestrians and ambient traffic). In addition, Rockstar has packed in some new features, and a few from _Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas_, including the ability to purchase outfits.

To say we were impressed by the early code is an understatement. The missions, while still purely _GTA_, have been set up for quick, on-the-go play, and visually, details like the use of a semi-transparent HUD overlay make the best use of the PSP's screen size. The only things that have us concerned at the moment are the final frame rate and load times. Hopefully, Rockstar Leeds has learned a thing or two from the development of _Midnight Club III_, and will be able to address and fix these issues before the game ships in October.

URBAN REIGN ™

Preview by Roger Danish

Publisher : Namco Hometek, Inc.
Developer : Namco Ltd.
Release Date : Fall 2005

Genre(s) : Fighting
Category : Beat 'em Up
# of players : 1-4

Dusting off all-but-forgotten genres and making them new again seems to be the thing to do these days. First it was the reinvention of the hack-'n'-slash with games such as EA's *Lord of the Rings* series, Atari's *Demon Stone* and, of course, all those isometric action/RPGs (*Baldur's Gate, Champions of Norrath*, etc.). Now, the next genre that seems to be enjoying a comeback is the good ol' beat-'em-up. With roots in such games as *Kung Fu Master*, *Vigilante* and *Double Dragon*, this all-but-forgotten game category is about to strike like a roundhouse to the head.

In *Urban Reign*, you play the role of a hired thug whose job is to protect one of the top gang's leaders. Of course, you're thrust into the middle of a gang war that involves corruption spanning from the streets all the way to the upper levels of city government. While the game offers 100 missions, this game is all about fighting—plain and simple.

In all, there are over sixty different fighters (and you should expect some familiar Namco faces), thirty different weapons and a multitude of different fighting styles, ranging from boxing and wrestling to martial arts and street fighting. While *Urban Reign* does not offer an online mode (which is a shame, as this is the perfect game for co-op online play), you can use that old multi-tap to battle it out in a variety of multiplayer game modes. Look for *Urban Reign* to ship this fall.

MEDIEVIL RESURRECTION

Publisher : SCEA
Developer : Cambridge Studios
Release Date : 9/05

Genre(s) : Action
Category : Adventure
# of players : 1-2

Preview by Roger Danish

During its time in the industry, Sony has produced some true diamonds in the rough, such as *Jumping Flash*, *Ape Escape*, *ICO*, and *Tomba!*. For one reason or another, these games and franchises (which, by any measure, were completely fresh and amazing experiences), just didn't translate into retail success. Another such first-party franchise, which sits squarely at the top of this list, is SCEE's *MediEvil* series.

Essentially a retelling of the original game, *MediEvil Resurrection* combines the bizarre whimsy of a Tim Burton film with a whole heaping of ghoulish adventuring. The game follows the very much undead Sir Daniel Fortesque as he embarks on a quest to defeat the evil Sorcerer Zarok, who has turned day into night and raised an undead army to conquer the land. In this game, you will get the chance to wield over twenty weapons, decipher wickedly devious puzzles, interact with many well-loved characters and places from the original *MediEvil* world, and hook up with a friend with Wi-Fi gameplay via ad-hoc mode and compete head-to-head in various arcade-style mini games.

Having played the one-level demo version that we received to death, I can confidently say that *MediEvil Resurrection* is going to be one of the first great action games for the PSP. While the camera is not perfect (why oh why didn't you give us two sticks, Sony?), the game retains the classic play while offering a slew of new features, including upgraded graphics, new locations, story plots, enemies and play mechanics.
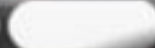
S.L.A.I.
STEEL LANCER ARENA INTERNATIONAL

Preview by 4thletter

Publisher : Konami
Developer : Konami
Release Date : Fall 2005
Genre(s) : Action
Category : Large Robot
# of players : 1-6

The world needs more giant robots. Everyone loves them. There's nothing better than taking your giant robot out for a stroll with your crew, meeting another group of robot jockeys, and knocking their fool faces in for daring to make fun of your mech.

Konami's looking to fill that gap with *S.L.A.I.*, coming this fall for the PlayStation 2. In 2071, robot fighting has supplanted soccer, football, basketball, and extreme crochet as the most popular sport in the world. The rules of the game are simple: beat your opponent before he beats you.

Steel Lancer Arena International aims to be the first online mech-combat game for the PS2. It'll support up to six players online, though only four can go head-to-head at once. When one person is defeated, the next person in line drops into the fray. Each robot has over one million possible combinations and variations of parts and weapons. If customization isn't your thing, feel free to go with one of the stock model robots.

Don't think that *S.L.A.I.* is all about random brawling, however. Look for a story mode that features fifty hours of gameplay, customizable soundtracks, arenas based on genuine cities like London and New York City, and both first- and third-person viewpoints. If you're into wrecking shop in giant robots, keep an eye out for *S.L.A.I.* this fall.

THE WARRIORS

Preview by Racewing

Publisher : Rockstar Games
Developer : Rockstar Toronto
Release Date : October 2005
Genre(s) : Action
Category : Beat-Em-Up
# of players : TBA

"Warrrioooorrrssss... come out to plaaaayyyyy..."

For a lot of people, this quote is all they really know about *The Warriors*, a 1979 film (and 1965 novel) that's about to be adapted to the videogame medium by Rockstar. Fortunately, that's all they'll need to know.

The premise is simple: take every element from every good brawling game ever created, and throw them into a single title. Multiple characters, complex fighting styles, progressive player damage, usage of the environment as weapons, Team and Super Attacks, the ability to make money by committing crimes—you name it, you'll be able to utilize it here.

The object of the game is also simple: the Warriors gang has to get from one end of New York City to the other, surviving by any means necessary. However, there are a ton of rival gangs in their way (all taken straight from the film; expect to mix it up with the Gramercy Riffs, The Orphans and the Turnbull ACs) that have other ideas.

Do you have what it takes to survive the most hellish twenty-mile walk ever? You'll get to find out this October.

PREY

Publisher : 2K Games
Developer : Human Head
Release Date : 2006

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

Preview by **Racewing**

Prey is based on Native American mythology, chronicling the story of a going-nowhere-fast Cherokee mechanic named Tommy. One day, events from off-world change his life forever. Suddenly, he finds himself in control of powers he never knew he had, and is charged with a job he doesn't want— saving the world. We've seen this before, but *Prey* promises to be a well-executed form of the premise, where it's possible to interact with almost everything you can see in the game.

Prey's built with the *Doom 3* engine, so you'll know that the adventure will at least look good, especially since the game's a first-person shooter at heart. Most of the game takes place inside of a living ship that reacts to Tommy's presence, and is capable of outright attacking as well. On Tommy's side are the powers of the spirits, which let him walk on and through barriers, move his body to the astral plane, and wield lots of weapons. He's also got a bird sidekick, which helps him make sense of his quest.

Otherworldly powers, original puzzles, and good action and storytelling are the order of the day in *Prey*. Look for it on the next-gen systems next year.

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION

Publisher : Capcom
Developer : Capcom
Release Date : September

Genre(s) : Arcade
Category : Retro Collection
# of players : 1-2

Preview by **Wanderer**

It wasn't long ago that arcade collections were some of the biggest ripoffs in the market. For thirty bucks, you'd get five classic games, at least three of which were only "classics" in the vaguest sense.

Midway changed that a couple of years ago with its first *Arcade Treasures* disc. Now Capcom's following suit with *Capcom Classics Collection*, which puts more than twenty of their arcade quartermunchers together on one disc.

Personally, I'll be picking this up for *1943*, *Final Fight*, *Forgotten Worlds*, and the original *Street Fighter II*.

The disc will also contain *Bionic Commando*, *Commando*, *Gun Smoke*, *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, *Ghouls 'n Ghosts*, *Trojan*, *Vulgus*, and at least ten more games, many of which have never seen a truly arcade-perfect home release. Since the price point's reasonable ($20), this looks like a great buy.

GUN

Publisher : Activision   **Genre(s) :** Action
Developer : Neversoft   **Category :** Wild West
Release Date : Winter   **# of players :** 1

Preview by **Syriel**

Best known for its long-running *Tony Hawk* franchise, Neversoft recently decided to to branch out and try something new. They kept their new project under a veil of heavy secrecy until just recently.

Set in the Old West, *GUN* is a free-roaming action game that has the player on a quest for vengeance, in search of the man who murdered your father and his lover in cold blood.

As you might expect from the name, combat in *GUN* places a heavy emphasis on firearms. The first level had our hero battling it out inside of a saloon in order to save the life of a prostitute who knew your father, while another had us sneaking up on a rebel outpost and hopping behind a mounted gatling gun, which proved to effectively deliver massive damage.

While much of the game happens on foot, you will also face off against opponents while riding on horseback. Offering a full range of movement, the massive cavalry battle was impressive to watch. Assuming Neversoft can nail the control scheme, it should prove to be an exciting component of the game.

GUN may not involve skating, but it does sound intriguing. Hopefully, Neversoft can step outside of its extreme sports heritage and deliver a game that is both different and enjoyable.

We are proud to announce a section that no sane magazine would think of doing: We are *ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS* for consideration. Each month we will pick one article from the group, and print it here. If you've ever wanted to see your work in P-R-I-N-T, this is your chance to make yourself known in the industry! We want YOU to show us what you've got!

Fan Article by You

OFFICIAL
HARDCORE SUBMISSIONS RULES:

- **Formatting must be in plain text.**
  Please do not attach external documents in another format, such as .doc (MS Word) or .wps (WordPerfect).
- **Your article must be 500 words or less so we can fit it on a page.**
  "Don't kill the ones you love" is a good maxim to keep in mind.
- **May be one of the following: Review, Industry, Event, Culture or Strategy.**
  When submitting, begin your Subject header with one of these. i.e.: "Event: Cannes World Tournament 2005 for *Soul Calibur II*."
  - **Review:** Your chance to spotlight a game or custom piece of hardware we've never heard of...
  - **Industry:** What does (topic) mean for the game industry? We're not giving examples, but to those of you who pay attention, if you can somehow change the way we think, or show us a different angle, this may be exactly what we're looking for.
  - **Event:** Tournaments, promotions, and college projects promoting games. What were the reasons for the event coordinators for running this? Will this be something that all of us should pay attention to?
  - **Culture:** You can never take away the social aspect of gaming culture. How has it affected us, what new trends are brewing, and what will this mean for games in mainstream society? (This is the most flexible category of the bunch.)
  - **Strategy:** Only the best of the best need apply for this one — sick skills, an eye for mechanics and an analytical mind to properly express your focus of expertise will be the feature here.
- **Article must be fully edited with no typos and minimal grammatical errors.**
  We suggest picking up a copy of Strunk and White's The Elements of Style. The basics will help cut your word count down, while fine-tuning your article closer to a professional level. At the very least, it'll teach you how to properly use an apostrophe.
- **Screenshots, photographs and logos (a.k.a. 'assets') should not be submitted.**
  If an article is approved, these will be acquired. With ninjas.
- **If using formatting, please use Adobe InDesign's layout tags.**
  This is case-sensitive, but we won't kill you if you get it wrong. We'll <3 you if you get it right, though~
  Bold: <ct:Bold>**This is Bold text.**<ct:>
  Italic: <ct:Italic>*This is Italic text.*<ct:>
  You'll need to Italicize any game names in your article, i.e.: <ct:Italic>*Castlevania II: Simon's Quest*<ct:>.
- **Deadline for submissions will be on the 5th day if the month prior to the published month, at 11:59 PST.**
  Keep in mind that PST is -8:00 GMT. If you miss the cut-off, you'll have to wait yet another month for consideration.
- **Include your REAL NAME, as well as your handle and location (optional) in the article.**
  One submission per person, please. If we REALLY like an article, it won't be forgotten.
  Please be aware that we review articles anonymously to grade on the merit of your writing alone.
- **If an article does not meet submission requirements, we'll spit back with a Sub Requirements letter.**
  The reply will include what needs to be fixed (in general), but no other feedback will be given.
- **Submitted articles may not be *previously* published in print, online, or other media.**
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- **Do not plagarise (copy) the work of others.**
  If we do notice plagarism, we will report it to the original author.

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Good Luck!
-The [Mysterious and Anonymous] HGM Submissions Staff

THE GAMING GOURMET

Author : Jay "Obijay" Rudd
Location : Seattle, WA

[August Pick!]

As a long time gamer, I've noticed something. We eat horribly. Think of your last LAN party, all night D&D session, or marathon gamefest. What did you have handy to munch on? Chips, soda, candy; all tasty stuff, but all of it's bad for you. Once meal time comes around, it's easier to go get a pizza or Wendy's than cook. Again, tasty, but not exactly the best thing for you.

Before you get all worked up, this isn't going to be Tofu Central. I love food, and I want my food to taste good. With fast food it's not that the ingredients that are bad for you, it's the cooking method. A burger made at home will be much healthier then one grilled up in the grease of thousands.

Now you might be saying, "I don't have time for this. I'm close to the final boss of *Final Fantasy MCCXXXIV* and I have to beat him now!" Not a problem; this recipe is quick, so you'll be back to your game very shortly. This is a nice simple dinner. The recipe has no fancy instructions or techniques that need extra limbs to do. I've learned how to cook through trial, error, and a few fires. Nothing here's too expensive, since I've worked on a minimum-wage budget quite often. If you have the herbs and butter handy, this meal costs about $7. That's less then most decent sized fast food meals

4. In the sausage skillet, melt the butter over medium heat and add the olive oil and garlic, letting the garlic cook a bit. Once browned add the herbs and cook briefly to release the flavor.
5. Dump the pasta back into its original pot, and add the butter herb sauce, tossing lightly to coat all the tortellini.

6. Take the Italian sausage and add it to the pasta, again lightly tossing to mix it through.

Makes about 4-6 servings, depending on one's appetite.

Garlic and Herb Cheese Tortellini with Italian Sausage.
1 lb. ground sweet or spicy Italian sausage (choose your poison based on preferences).*
1 bag frozen cheese-filled tortellini**
4 cloves of garlic, or more or less to taste.
3 tablespoons butter/margarine
1 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon oregano***
1 teaspoon basil***
1 teaspoon coriander***

1. Bring 5 cups of slightly salted water to a rolling boil.
2. Brown the sausage in a 10" skillet until thoroughly browned and drain.
3. Cook the tortellini as described by the directions. Drain the pasta and the pot it was cooked in, setting both aside.

* If you can't find ground sausage, just get Italian sausage in the casings, then slit the casing with a knife and squeeze it out. It's like meat Play-Doh®. If you prefer not to eat pork, then you can substitute by mixing ground turkey (as pictured here) with Italian seasoning.

** Buying is much easier than making, trust me

*** Another option here is a jar of 'Italian' seasoning, which includes these items along with a couple of others, and has the same effect. Just drop in 2 tsp. of that stuff instead.

Homebrew Spotlight

EXPANDING YOUR XBOX

INTRODUCING

xbmc
MEDIA CENTER

by **Syriel**

At this year's E3 press conferences, one common thread between both Microsoft and Sony was the concept of the "digital hub." Both companies want their next system to be more than just a game console. They want it to be *the* box that sits at the center of your entertainment center and plays all of your media. Whoever controls the box controls an incredibly valuable piece of mindshare.

One example given by Microsoft is music purchasing. If your Xbox 360 is hooked up to your stereo system and a new album comes out, there's no need to go to the store. Simply fire up the online music store and purchase the album instantly. Suddenly you're rocking out to the first track while the rest of the album downloads in the background. The key here is the branding; since Microsoft would control the storefront, it could charge companies for placement.

that can turn your current generation Xbox into a digital hub. Today. The best part's that it's totally free.

Organizing Your Digital Life

Setting up the Xbox Media Center is as simple as copying the files onto your Xbox hard drive and then rebooting the system. Further

The XBMC main menu offers quick access to all of the key features.

Navigation is done through a familiar folder interface — just like a PC.

configuration can be done by editing specific XML files or via the settings option in the main menu. You can even choose your favorite RSS news feeds and have them display ticker-tape-style on the main menu while the weather option displays the current conditions at three user-selected cities around the globe, courtesy of the Weather Channel. Once everything is up and running, an intuitive interface provides easy access to any music, movies and photos stored on—or off—the Xbox.

While the cynics out there will claim that the digital hub is only good for the advertiser, the idea itself is sound. After all, who wouldn't want a single box that could fire up all of your media at the touch of a button? Microsoft thinks it can do it with the Xbox 360, and we're certainly excited about the prospect, but we're also impatient sorts here at Hardcore Gamer. We don't like waiting. We did a little research and found a nifty homebrew program

If you're lazy, or perhaps clever, you can enable the built-in web server which allows you to control *Xbox Media Center* from any

Browsing your movie collection is a breeze once it's all been digitized.

device with a web browser. If you happen to have a network-enabled PDA, you can even use it as a remote.

Music playback is easily Xbox Media Center's strongest point. With a wide variety of file support, flexible playlist options and a freedb.org search option there is enough here to please even the most hardcore music fan. On the off chance that you haven't yet entered the MP3 generation, Xbox Media Center includes a ripping function.

WARNING! DANGER AHEAD!

Because homebrew software isn't officially licensed by Microsoft, you will need a modded Xbox if you want to experiment with the Xbox Media Center. Be warned, modding your system will void your warranty and likely prevent you from playing on Xbox Live! If either of these are important to you, don't even *consider* playing with homebrew software.

At its most basic, playing a song requires nothing more than navigating to its folder and clicking on it. Bring up the options menu and you can search for detailed information about the album, including a review and full track listing. While not every album is included in the online database, chances are the majority of your tunes should be searchable. As a bonus, Xbox Media Center will download album art for any albums you scan and display it on screen during playback. Album art is also viewable when you search through your library, making it much easier to choose something on sight instead of scouring the list for a particular track title.

The included virtual light machine is somewhat basic by PC standards, but it's still more than adequate, especially when displayed on a big screen. You can watch the patterns undulate to the beat of the music in a window, or expand it to full screen with the click of a button. Fans of Apple's iTunes will be pleased to note that Xbox Media Center can recognize and stream music directly from the iTunes shared library.

The Video Vault

Xbox Media Center handles video much in the same way as it handles music, but playback support is a bit more limited. The biggest catch has to do with DVD viewing. Though it's region-free, the DVD player cannot process DVD menus. It can only play video. As a result, when you try to play a DVD in Xbox Media Center, it will simply play the first title on the disc. This works for most films. However, it does mean that extras, such as deleted scenes, are not readily available for viewing.

WHAT'S HOMEBREW?

So... what's this homebrew stuff?

Homebrew software is software that is written by hobbyist programmers, as opposed to officially licensed developers. It can be created out of need, to fill a gap, or simply because the programmer wanted to learn a new system. While you will find a lot of homebrew software on the PC, the closed nature of consoles makes it a bit more difficult to "roll your own" when it comes to programming. As a result, the most advanced homebrew software usually arrives near the end of a system's life.

Because it isn't sold in stores, finding homebrew software can be somewhat of a challenge. Community websites, such as http://xbox-scene.com, will often feature homebrew software for download, but they can only offer up so much, due to the "gray market" nature of certain programs.

How can a free program be "gray market?" It has to do with the compiler. While some homebrew software is written using custom tools, many programs are created using pirated versions of official development software. Technically these programs are illegal, but so far Microsoft has simply "looked the other way" so long as the software was being given away and not used for piracy. Software that is not available on the Xbox Scene website can usually be found in the #Xbins channel on IRC. That's where you will find the Xbox Media Center.

The video playback features work incredibly well when playing back movies stored on your local network, or TV shows that you have recorded on your multimedia PC. Xbox Media Center does an excellent job of scaling the content to fit your screen, so even highly compressed, low resolution files look good. Oftentimes, playing a video through Xbox Media Center will make it look noticeably better than viewing the same file on your computer.

Much like the album lookup function for music, a video lookup function will download movie information, reviews and poster art

If your Xbox is connected to the Internet you can use it to download album information at the touch of a button.

iTunes support is a big plus for iPod owners.

The visulizations add a bit of color to your music.

for any files that you have stored on your local network. If you are crazy enough to convert your whole DVD collection to digital media files, the end result is akin to a custom video-on-demand setup. When you feel like watching a movie just turn on the Xbox, pick your film and start watching. You don't even have to get off the couch!

Picture support is the most basic function of Xbox Media Center, but even here it does what it does well. Automatic thumbnail generation makes it easy to browse your collection for a specific photo, while individual images are scaled to fit the screen using the same high quality filters that are used for video playback. More creative users can view a slideshow while playing music in the background. It's a nice way to show off your most recent set of photos to the entire family.

Getting the eGoods

Though Xbox Media Center can use your Internet connection to download information for the music and movies in your collection, that's only one small part of the program's online functionality. In fact, you can use it to stream fresh audio and video programming from a small number of pre-selected sites.

Movie buffs will be pleased to see a direct connection to Apple's Quicktime trailer page. Featuring crystal clear, high-resolution trailers for nearly every current release, it is a great way to preview

Warm and sunny! Just the way we like it in San Francisco.

a film before heading out and dropping $25 on a pair of tickets at your local theater.

The GameSpot link allows you to stream video reviews, game trailers and the latest episode of *On the Spot,* their in-house video game show. It sure beats watching everything in a small window on your web browser.

Launch is the most disappointing of the streaming options, primarily due to a lack of quality. Offering viewers an incredibly huge library of music videos on-demand, the highly compressed content suffers from a very blurry picture. This is one option that will be toyed with briefly, and then immediately forgotten.

Web radio is a great way to discover new music.

SAY WHAT?

It Can Play What?

Xbox Media Center supports an impressive number of file formats. The program can play any of the following files:

Audio: .nsv|.m4a|.flac|.aac|.strm|.pls|.rm|.mpa|.wav|.wma|.ogg|.mp3|.mp2|.m3u|.mod|.amf|.669|.dmf|.dsm|.far|.gdm|.imf|.it|.m15|.med|.okt|.s3m|.stm|.sfx|.ult|.uni|.xm|.sid|.ac3|.dts|.cue|.aif|.wpl

Video: .nsv|.ts|.ty|.strm|.rm|.rmvb|.m3u|.ifo|.mov|.qt|.divx|.xvid|.bivx|.vob|.nrg|.img|.iso|.pva|.wmv|.asf|.asx|.ogm|.m2v|.avi|.bin|.dat|.mpg|.mpeg|.mp4|.mkv|.avc|.vp3|.svq3|.nuv|.viv|.dv|.fli|.rar|.001|.wpl

Picture: .png|.jpg|.jpeg|.bmp|.gif|.ico|.tif|.tiff|.tga|.pcx

Although it doesn't have video, the web radio option links you to a wide variety of Shoutcast radio stations. Each station specializes in a different kind of music, with something for even the most eclectic tastes. If you do run across a poor quality station, just skip it and move on to the next.

A detailed system screen displays your Xbox's vital stastics.

Last but not least is the fully integrated support for Xlink Kai. One of the original "tunneling" programs, Xlink Kai allows you to play any Xbox system link game over the Internet. Yes, this includes the original *Halo.* You can't even do that on Xbox Live!

After spending a good deal of time with *XBMC,* it's obvious that the digital hub is certainly a concept worth pursuing. If the Xbox 360 allows us to manage our media in a similar fashion—and there is no reason to believe it cannot—then we are certainly looking forward to whatever Microsoft has in store.

GET INTO THE GAME

author: syriel

FROM GAMES JOURNALIST TO BASKETBALL SUPERSTAR

Crafting an engaging virtual world is not an easy task. No matter what the genre, games must strike a delicate balance between fantasy immersion and reality in order to suck players in. Sure, we are more than willing to accept that a random street fighter can shoot fireballs from his fingertips, or that it's normal when a pack of Ferrari Enzos races through the streets of Manhattan, but put the Empire State Building on the wrong block and there will be legions of fans complaining about how "inaccurate" the game is on countless message boards across the Internet.
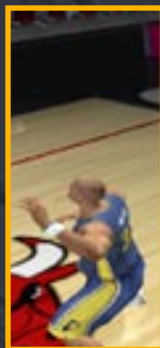
For sports games, the reality challenge lies mainly in accurately modeling both the stadiums and the players. Relatively speaking, getting the arenas right is the easy part. After all, a building is static, but players have varying levels of skill, they move differently and all have a unique look. While it may not seem like much, being able to recognize your favorite player on sight adds a great deal of immersion to sports titles for most gamers.

It was that last bit that got us here at HGM set to wondering, "How do they do that?" So we did what any enquiring minds would do -- we called up Sony and asked. Instead of simply telling us how it was done though, the team working on *NBA '06* invited us down for a visit so we could experience the process first hand. Being the adventurous sort, I volunteered to "go digital" and literally get in the game.

GETTING DIGITIZED

The first step to the process was a normal photograph. I was ushered into a room with pure white walls and told to stand in the corner. A member of the scanning crew then took a few face photos with a high resolution digital camera. According to Chip Parsons, the 3D scanning studio supervisor at Sony's San Diego studio, these reference photos would be used for high-resolution textures.

Next, it was over to the face-scanning machine. This rather complex piece of kit consisted of a camera, a special lighting system and a computer. I had to sit in a chair while a two man team operated the scanner. One was behind the computer, while the other made sure that I was sitting in the proper spot and facing the right direction. Once everything was aligned, the lighting system projected a grid onto my face while the camera took a photo.

"The grid projects and moves during the scan and the software we implement uses the grid to create the geometry," explained Parsons. "The software knows where in space the grid is and reads the deformation in the lines to create 3D data."

We repeated the process from different angles to ensure a full scan of the entire face area. The most difficult part was remaining still and keeping the same expression on my face the whole time.

FOLLOW THE WORKFLOW

Above: A raw shot of the face scanning process in action.

Right: The initial 3D view of Syriel's head. The different colors indicate the levels of height.
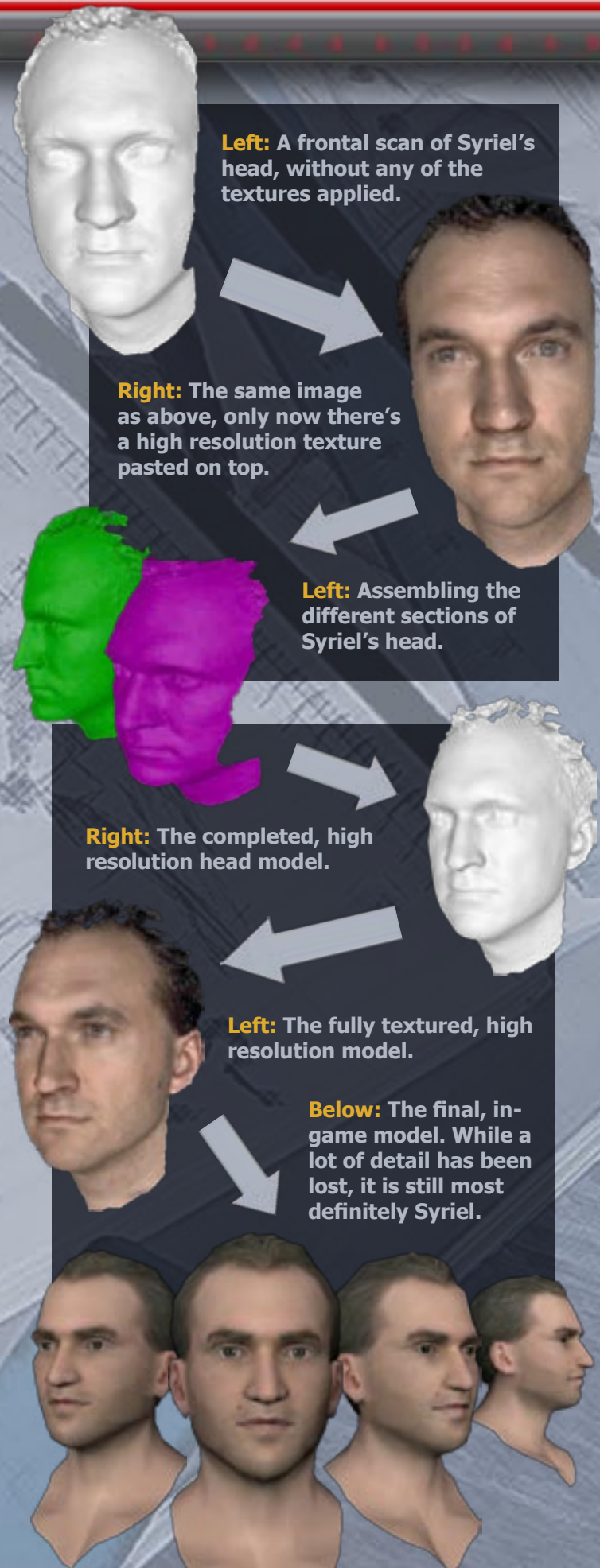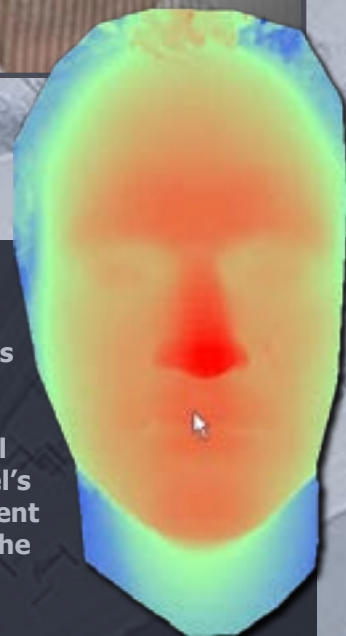
Left: A frontal scan of Syriel's head, without any of the textures applied.

Right: The same image as above, only now there's a high resolution texture pasted on top.

Left: Assembling the different sections of Syriel's head.

Right: The completed, high resolution head model.

Left: The fully textured, high resolution model.

Below: The final, in-game model. While a lot of detail has been lost, it is still most definitely Syriel.

CREATING THE MODEL

All in all, getting scanned in only took around fifteen minutes from start to finish. While the process was relatively painless for me, the animators still had plenty of work ahead because the individual scans were in sections. Before my head could be used, it had to be assembled.

To work with the raw head scans, the animators took each piece and imported them into a piece of software called GSI. It's 3D software, designed specifically for working with scans of 3D objects.

After loading the different scans into GSI, the animator working on the program can align them in order to create one complete model. Since all of the scans overlap somewhat, the animator matches identical areas in order to ensure a completely formed head.

With the final model built, there was only one problem left; the raw data was way too big to use in the game. The full scan of my head clocked in at just under 50,000 polygons. The final in-game heads are modeled at 2100 polygons. Converting the raw head to an in-game model is done with Sony's own custom software.

"We have developed proprietary tools that reposition the vertices of our highly efficient in-game model to match the original scan," said Neil Fordice, character lead at Sony. "As a result of this process, each player has a unique head model and texture derived from a single optimized source."

The same tools also keep track of the facial bones. Because the animation frames are based on bone location, this allows the developers to feature players with fully animated faces, even though the original photographs are all taken with a neutral expression initially.

Going through the process was exciting, but the highlight was actually seeing myself *in* the game, alongside real NBA players. While I won't be able to keep the Bulls uniform (due to some silly thing about needing to be a real NBA player), be sure to keep an eye out for my character in the final version of *NBA '06*. Also, don't forget to check back next issue for my hands-on preview.

VICE
PROJECT DOOM
by Honestgamer

It seemed like *VICE: Project Doom* came out of nowhere. A visual tour-de-force backed by a twisting plot and astonishing game play, the unassuming cartridge quickly lapped up its small share of media coverage, then disappeared into the shadows while lesser games stole the limelight. Even if you were playing NES games at the time of its original release, you may very well have missed the boat. Now the game lines the bottom of bargain bins everywhere. *Well, it's time for that to change.*

A former mercenary with experience fighting in the jungles of South America, Hart presently operates some sort of private law enforcement agency. While driving through the streets one day in his projectile-equipped sports car, he gets a message that a crazed driver is terrorizing the freeway. Just like that, he's off on the chase.

a shootout with a boss vehicle that feels like a more polished version of any gunfight in a vertical shooter.

TM&© 1991 AMERICAN SAMMY LICENSED BY NINTENDO OF AMERICA INC.

1991... BEFORE THE RISE OF CUBAN SAMMY

"SORRY, IT'S ME - SOPHIA. CHRISTY ASKED ME TO CHECK OUT THAT...."

CLOGGED DRAIN?

The game's first stage thus takes place in a style that looks like it was ripped straight out of *Spy Hunter*. The top-down perspective shows your car racing through the streets, dodging oncoming objects, firing shots at enemy vehicles, and collecting the coins their mangled wrecks leave behind. At the end, there's

From there, you're pulled back to the storyline with an extremely competent cinema sequence. Words are spliced around crisp frames of artwork with small bursts of animation, and the text manages to keep you hooked as it reveals the start of a conspiracy theory involving the military. You'll find yourself completing one stage after another, just to find out what happens next.

Those additional stages generally don't take the same form as the first one, either. In addition to

Platform: Nintendo Entertainment System
Publisher: Sammy (Guilty Gear X, Darkwatch, Zombie Raid)
Developer: Sammy (Viewpoint, Pachinko Sexy Reaction)
Release date: November 1991
Genre: Action
Category: Shooter

driving sequences, you'll play through first-person shooting segments (they're on rails, so to speak, meaning all you do is move the cursor around and shoot any goons that pop into sight) and even some surprisingly polished action stages that take place from a side perspective. It's this last variation that you'll see most frequently as you run, jump, climb, stab and shoot your way through incredible environments ranging from jungles to labs to castles and more.

Though you might find yourself scratching your head over how the NES managed so many atmospheric locales that in many ways rival even those in later 16-bit projects, you won't be free to consider such questions for long. Instead, you'll find yourself a lot more active than was the norm for any one of the game styles *VICE: Project Doom* presents. Ledges crumble under your feet, birds swoop down from jungle foliage, electric fish shower you with spread shots, and numerous other monstrous apparitions do their best to keep

you on your toes. Hart handles himself just fine for the game's duration, effortlessly swapping his sword for a gun at the touch of a button. With action so frequently frenzied, anything less would be simply unacceptable. When you die, it's not because the game was cheap. It's because you didn't react quickly enough, or because you didn't respond to a boss pattern with the correct counter-moves.

Speaking of dying, it's not a crisis in this game. If you lose all your lives, you can always continue in the same stage where you left off with all your items and weapons intact. Some of the later stages get pretty difficult, and you may have to attempt the final areas more times than you would like. Still, the 'Game Over' screen will come around again, and you'll click 'Start' once more, just because you can't help yourself. The game is just that good.

SCORE 20000 TIME 214 P2 73
THOSE GREEN KUNG FU GUYS PACK A WALLOP

SCORE 23700 TIME 231 P1 83
KNEEHIGH STRIPED SOCKS WERE ALL THE RAGE

SCORE 53500 TIME 245 P0 91
YOU ARE CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

SCORE 1000 TIME 232 P2 98
I SEE YOU BEHIND THAT WATERFALL, MR. SNEAKY

SCORE 2600 TIME 203 P2 09
NO, IT AIN'T BUMP·N JUMP

SERIOUS SAM II

Story by **Roger Danish**

THE first person shooter has come a long way since the early days of id Software's shareware classic, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. With the advent of the story/event-driven FPS, which includes games such as *Half-Life*, *No One Lives Forever*, *Halo* and *Medal of Honor*, as well as the addition of online multiplayer gaming (the various *Unreal Tournaments* and the like), the old-school "run-and-gun" FPS had become somewhat endangered, all but disappearing from the video game landscape. While we welcome—and even love—these immersive and atmospheric shooters listed above, sometimes a guy (or girl—there's no discriminating at HGM) just wants to jump into a good ol' hardcore FPS and blast anything and everything that moves (or doesn't move; we don't care!).

SERIOUS BEGINNINGS

Croatian-based developers, Croteam, wholeheartedly agree with our twisted mindset, and have been hard at work creating their own brand of arcade-style, kill-or-be-killed, fast and frenetic series of shooters under the Serious Sam moniker. We recently had the chance to chat with a few of the series' designers about the Serious Sam titles and the upcoming sequel, *Serious Sam II*, shipping on the PC and Xbox this fall.

The original game, entitled *Serious Sam: The First Encounter*, was a budget game that hit retail shelves back in early 2001. It was lauded by gamers and critics alike for its fast-paced action, wide variety of weapons and monsters, quirky sense of humor, and the ability to display a huge number of characters onscreen at once. The game didn't set out to reinvent the FPS genre unlike some of the aforementioned titles, but instead, embraced simplicity and didn't take itself too "seriously". According to Ivan Mika, one of *Serious Sam II's* level designers, the idea for the original game came together after an all-night FPS-fest, where the developers (who, at the time, had very little experience in the game industry) had gotten together to play *Quake*, *Duke Nukem* and *DOOM*.

Bleary-eyed and full of adrenaline, they decided that they

wanted to build on the same general concept of these games, but combine it with bright, open environments and crazy humor. Instead of searching for a key or triggering a story sequence, they wanted the player to be constantly swarmed by hordes of relentless enemies and get their gratification by slaying massive quantities of these beasts. The challenge would come not from navigating difficult terrain or solving a puzzle, but from surviving each progressively difficult wave of enemies and, believe it or not, racking up points (now, that's old-school). After five years of crunching code and drawing up their master plans, Croteam's prototype, appropriately called the "Serious Sam Technology Test", was created. As they say, the rest is history.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CHAINSAW

If you're a fan of the series (or you've read the accompanying sidebar), you'll know that *Serious Sam's* storyline takes a backseat to the non-stop action. However, if you want to know why you're chopping through witches, fragging huge devil beasts, and running like a girl from half-nekkid kamikaze men with bombs for heads, then read on.

Game designer Damir Krajovic tells us that *Serious Sam II* will once again be dominated by wacky Croatian humor, "confusing

THE SERIES

So, who exactly is Sam, why is he incessantly shooting at massive numbers of bizarre enemies, and why is he serious? Well, in all actuality, these questions aren't really important or integral to the series. Like *DOOM*, its ultimate inspiration, the *SS* storyline serves as nothing more as a loose framework for mowing creatures down and blowing things up. To better serve our readers, what follows is more background info on the series than you would ever need to know.

Serious Sam: The First Encounter
Release Date: March 2001
Platforms: PC, Xbox

In the first game, we meet Sam "Serious" Stone. He's fighting against an evil extraterrestrial villain named Mental. It turns out that in the very near future, humanity discovers the ruins of an ancient civilization underneath the Pyramids of Egypt and uses the technology they uncover to explore the galaxy. This allows for an era of great prosperity as men travel two new solar systems and colonize foreign worlds. As usual in these "man goes where he shouldn't" scenarios, an extremely powerful race of aliens show up and gave the human race a big old smackdown, driving them back to Earth for a final, desperate stand. Seeing that the fight is hopeless, humanity's leaders send a lone hero (Sam!) into the past to prevent the whole fiasco from ever happening. Of course, upon arriving thousands of years earlier in the Egyptian desert, Sam is beset by the same foes the humans were just fleeing. What follows is a slaughterfest of epic proportions.

Serious Sam: The Second Encounter
Release Date: February 2002
Platforms: PC, Xbox (integrated with First Encounter)

This next *Serious Sam* title wasn't a sequel, as such. Instead, it's the second half of the first game, which was so big that Croteam divided it into two games. (If you, like some of us, were wondering why there's a *Serious Sam II*

millions of gamers and reviewers everywhere." Unsurprisingly, the story picks up where *Second Encounter* left off. Sam finds himself once again confronted with massive numbers of monsters. This time, they're all trying to stop him from collecting ancient medallion pieces that are crucial to defeat Mental. Three wizards from what's left of the Sirian Great Council have volunteered themselves to help Sam along his journey. From some of the early cut-scenes we've seen, the game retains the same quirky humor for which the series has become known, although it remains to be seen if the story ultimately becomes an integral part of the game or just a way to hide the load screens in between levels.

SAME OLD SAM?

With *Serious Sam II*, which Croteam proclaims is the first true sequel to *The First Encounter*, the same heart-pumping action returns in a big way. Again, Sam will be outnumbered at least a hundred to one at any given time, as the enemy creatures barrel down in on him. In fact, its publisher, 2K Games, is submitting *Serious Sam II* to the Guinness Book of World Records for the most enemies on screen simultaneously ever in a video game.

To achieve this record-setting number, Croteam has created a brand spanking new graphic engine, the aptly titled Serious Engine 2. It's capable of rendering environments and physics that are a hundred times more complex than previous *Serious Sam* games. According to level designer Alen Cepin, "It was necessary to create a completely new platform that would be able to implement all of the features required of modern first-person shooters while also being versatile and capable of accepting new technologies. With SE2, we

are capable of such a high level of rendering that there is virtually no hardware yet available (PC or console) that is capable of using it to the fullest." Some of the technical effects that he bantered about included "HDRI rendering, bloom, refraction and parallax mapping."

Other improvements center on enemy AI. Your opponents will not just rush Sam down all the time. Instead, some will try and surround him while others will work in tandem with their brethren. If you kill their leader, the rest of the pack may scatter or retreat. Finally, many of the environments will be completely destructible, allowing you to raze the whole level to the ground if you feel like it.

In regards to the Xbox version, which will be shipping at the same time this fall, Cepin states, "Unfortunately, the Xbox version will be somewhat limited compared to the PC version, but there will be specially optimized content on the Xbox and you have to remember that *SS II* will be greatly improved visually compared to the original."

Fans of the series will be happy to know that in addition to major improvements on the engine side, Croteam has spent a lot of time making this the most visually varied game in the series, with plenty of unique landscapes. When all is said and done, there will be over forty beautiful, expansive levels spread out over seven huge, unique environments, which include lush jungles, Asian temples, murky swamps, volcanic planets, icy wastelands and futuristic cities. On the enemy side of things, Croteam has outdone themselves. A total of forty-five newly designed enemy types await Sam, and each one is bigger than the next. In fact, during a recent demo we received, Sam was going through his paces against a

when there was already a *Second Encounter*, that's why.) As with the *First Encounter*, Mental, the ultra-evil alien leader, was back up to his old tricks, trying to dominate the human race. Sam continued to chase him down through the timestream, in an effort to put a stop to his devious antics. This time, instead of one Egyptian environment, Sam found himself battling Mental and his minion hordes across Meso-america, ancient Babylon and medieval Europe.

Serious Sam: Next Encounter
Release Date: April 2004
Platforms: PS2, GC

An anomaly in the Serious Sam universe, this game was developed by UK-based Climax Entertainment and was tailored specifically for home consoles. Lacking the soul and edge-of-your-seat gameplay of its predecessors, *Next Encounter* once again pit Sam against Mental, who was meddling with different periods of time, such as ancient Rome, feudal China and even the legendary Atlantis. Deviating a bit from the tried-and-true formula, *Next Encounter* added special combo powers that enabled Sam to go into a frenzy mode where he would manically spin, run and shoot like a sweaty-toothed madman for a short period of time after racking up a set amount of kills. Despite the similar look and feel, this game lacked the polish and panache for which the series had become known.

A funny side note: if you mention *Next Encounter* to PR people at 2K Games, they get kind of mad.

Serious Sam: Advance
Release Date: April 2004
Platforms: GBA

Sam showed up for a brief stint on the GameBoy Advance with *Serious Sam Advance*. It borrowed bits and pieces from the previous games. This scaled-down version was also developed by Climax and, surprisingly enough, pit Sam against the alien menace as he traveled through time to stop them. Pseudo-3D graphics and spotty sound effects made this a mediocre portable title.
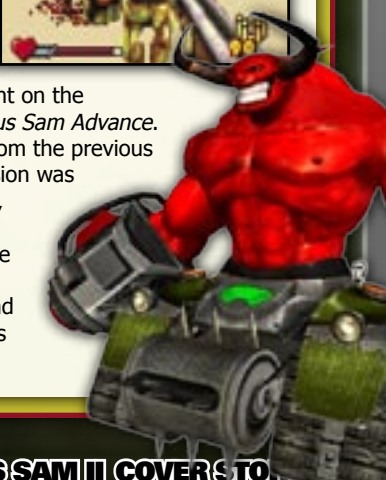
THE WEAPONS

If Sam is serious about one thing, it's his weaponry. This time around, the big lug with the even bigger chin will have plenty to shoot about, as he's packing a heavy arsenal of WMDs that would make even GB green with envy. Here is but a small sampling of the weapons you'll find.

Hydro-Plasmatic handgun

Similar to the BoneSlasher's fuel management system, the weapons industry managed to take some of the concepts and ideas and incorporated them into this new, compact, futuristic handgun. Using a self-driven cold fusion generator, small and precise injectors pressurise the atomized fuel into a frontal chamber. When the maximum pressure is achieved, the chamber opens sending a surge of plasma energy in whichever direction the weapon is pointed. Due to the efficient internal workings of the generator, it is possible to shoot smaller units of energy, giving this weapon a decent rate of fire. Adding a small amount of carbon into the mix, the plasmatic shot is attracted to organic matter, giving the projectiles a homing feature.

• The handgun is very useful if you want to hit a target that's taken cover.

12 Gauge auto-reloading Shotgun

Yet another achievement in weapons technology, the shells' internal combustion energy is not only used to shoot the lead pellets, but also to start an auto-reloading system. When firing, a small explosion inside the chamber is used to pressurize the ammo clip, resulting in the ammo shell being released from the clip and inserted into a new, empty barrel. This system requires no reload input from the user, leaving him to only think about pointing the gun towards a target.

• The shotgun's an efficient means to eliminate smaller, faster enemies at short and middle range elimination. With its rate of fire, it's still useful against bigger, but slower enemies.

Sawed-off, 12-Gauge Double-Barrelled Coach gun

A powerful, menacing weapon with incredible penetration power, the older version pales in comparison. The twin barrels are shortened, giving the pellets better acceleration and precision at short range. The amount of pressure released in the chambers was simply too strong for the titanium casing,

so the manufacturer added two vents connected to an exhaust system. The temperature in the chamber is otherwise too high for the user to quickly reload the weapon, but this is instantly released together with the pressure. However, due to the manual reload system, the rate of fire on this puppy is still its biggest downside.

• While still an imprecise long-range weapon, the coach gun is a must against small and medium-sized enemies at close range.

Serious UZI - Suzzi

The time-honored Israeli submachinegun, the Uzi is fast, precise and reliable; this is the Serious Uzi, and as such, is moreso. When you've got one in each hand, the Serious Uzi is as deadly as they get. Firing at 460 rounds a minute, with no messy reloading, Suzzis are only a step away from the almighty minigun. Now compatible with the 5.56mm bullets used in the Minigun, the Suzzi is great in both rapid-fire mode and when you're firing controlled short bursts.

• Against masses of enemies, or a durable target at long range, the Suzzis can't be beat. You shouldn't be seen in public without one in each hand.

XM214-A Minigun

This classic tool of death is back! Self-powered and complete with a built-in magazine and a recoil adapter, the XM214-A Minigun is the most powerful personal weapon available. Not much has been changed besides the higher RPM in the main drive shaft and a shorter belt driven transmission, which results in a shorter amount of time needed to spin the barrels. An added feature to the engine is a small turbo unit, which gives the barrel greater acceleration. Once in full motion, the rotors in the main casing release the ammo chamber's safety. The result is a guttural howl from the turbo unit and precise clicking of the ammo box, like spine-tingling music.

• The minigun's best used for short to long-range confrontations with tough enemies, or the mass elimination of medium and large opponents. Given how often you'll need to clear out a roomful of small fry, it's worth it to practice your minigun skills.

XPML30 Rocket Launcher

Just like its older brother, the new XPML30 Rocket Launcher operates with Inferno missiles. Lightweight with a high rate of fire, unguided Inferno missiles are the perfect solution for piercing enemies and vehicles' heavy armor. With a new and improved rocket feed mechanism, it isn't necessary to reload the weapon; the switch on the bottom part of the casing, upon release of the trigger pin, pushes another rocket into one of four rocket slots. While one rocket is being shot, another one is pushed into the main barrel, making the XPML30 a highly effective, fast, and reliable weapon. The only drawback of the Inferno missile is its high splash damage, so the user has to be careful not to use it at close range.

horde of medium-sized devil creatures on tank treads. In the middle of the firefight, a *huge* version lumbered on screen. After a brutal shoot out, which we all assumed was a boss fight, another beast twice the size appeared behind it. We're told that *Serious Sam II* will have the biggest bosses ever seen in a video game and we believe it!

TAKE A RIDE ON THE WILD SIDE

Another new addition to *Sam II* is the addition of "animal-back combat." When asked about this new feature, Damir revealed, "Yes, there are some innocent animals, like raptors, wandering around the levels. Both Sam and the enemies can use these creatures for 'shoot 'n' ride' combat." According to an old Croatian proverb, "It is a lot more fun riding a dinosaur than a military jeep, although one must carry a spatula everywhere he goes." Uh, OK.

While we haven't seen this gameplay in action, we did get a chance to see another "vehicle" event. This one was a spiked ball, which once defeated, Sam could get into and roll around the landscape, squashing

Serious Bomb

Serious Bomb — Miniature Big Bang, Atomic Firecracker, Instant Death With A Smile — any way you look at it, this baby will rock your world. This is actually one of Sam's rare contraptions, which was developed in cooperation with the weapons industry. Only he really knows the ingredients required to make one. During the course of the war on Earth, Mental's army were handed many defeats thanks to this puppy. However, due to their size, you'll never be able to carry more than three of them. They're also very scarce, as Sam can't always find enough of the needed ingredients.

• Just light that fuse and watch your enemies disintegrate in a blinding explosion, while you wait in the safety of the Life-Preserving-Quantum-FieldTM.

MK - 4 Grenade Launcher

A reliable infantry 40mm grenade thrower with adjustable launching speed, the MK - 4 is designed to deliver highly explosive grenades over obstacles and around corners, while reducing the chance that the operator will be hurt by the projectile. A small pressure sensitivity trigger is incorporated, which detects how far the operator wants to throw the grenade. Tap it slightly and the grenade will quickly bounce out of the chamber. Holding the trigger down will propel the grenade a longer distance. A smart impact detector detonates the grenade on impact with a live target.

• A wide-range explosion is an excellent way of blowing up groups of weaker enemies, while the impact alone will bring enough damage to even bigger opponents.

SBC "Paynekiller" Cannon - v 2.0
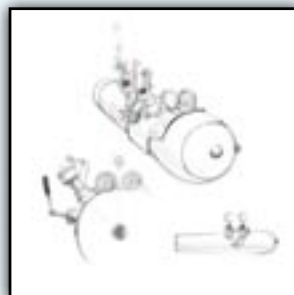
Built on the most powerful infantry weapon available to federation forces, the new and improved Cannon, appropriately known as the Paynekiller, gets a whole new sleeve of upgrades. The primitive firing mechanism was replaced with a Swiss precision timer and pressure controller conveniently hidden by Art Deco gauges. The design is now more compact and modern, as the two pressure release chambers were moved on to the right side of the titanium casing, enabling the uranium steam to convert to standard hydrogen. This is utilized with two exhaust pipes, equipped with micronic atom converters to keep the user in a friendly, ecological environment. The design of the weapon allows for firing very heavy rounds at high speed to provide an excellent penetrating effect. Loaded with high-piercing, uranium-filled cannonballs, it can even drill through several tough opponents in a row.

• Useful against hordes of all types, but you have to be sure to line up your shot for maximum efficiency.

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enemies with its razor-sharp spikes. There's also a Hovertank, which skims along the ground at high speeds, as well as many more that Croteam has yet to reveal.

OF WEAPONS AND GAME MODES

When asked about the variety of weapons in the game, Ivan Mika proclaimed, "we have Colts that shoot bullets, Uzis that shoot bullets, double shotguns that shoot shells, miniguns that shoot bullets, auto-shotguns that shoot shells, bullets that shoot shells, and finally shells that shoot bullets." When I asked again, this time with a mean look on my face, he went on to explain, "Actually, there are more than bullets and shells... some of the old Sam favorites have been redesigned with some extras added, mostly in spectacular visual and particle effects. In addition, there are also weapons that we won't have in the game, but we'll try using psychological pressure to convince players that they have them, so there will be almost fifty weapons in the game, fourteen you see and thirty-eight you don't!" In order to get the straight scoop on the weapons, we encourage you to take a look at the accompanying sidebar. These

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Croatians obviously can't be trusted.

In addition to the arsenal of fourteen weapons, Sam will also be able to hop into turrets found in the environment and lay waste to the enemies and his surroundings.

The original *Serious Sam* featured a very cool co-op multiplayer mode and from what we've been told, it will make a return appearance in the sequel. We asked Cepin about the variety of multiplayer modes going into the game and all he would reveal was that, "For now, we're putting all of our efforts into making... the best possible [co-op]. So, *Serious Sam II* should continue the tradition set by the original and expansion pack. We

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THE ENEMIES

Sam's got enough on his mind as it is (they don't call him Serious for nothing!), yet he constantly has to be on guard when dealing with this gallery of fools, felons and freaks of nature. Each enemy (and there are many more than we can fit in this space) will do its best to track, attack and kill Sam in its own unique and equally horrifying way if given the chance. Here's your one and only chance to study up on the adversary before you head into battle.

MARCEL THE CLOWN

After the end of "The Wazaro Freak Show," Marcel the Clown found himself in a rather tricky situation. He had no money for cake, unicycle repairs, and regular fat reduction treatments, which left him no choice but to give in to Mental's proposals. They cloned him, and made a whole army of cake-exploding horror clowns. (Now there's a sentence no one's ever written before.)
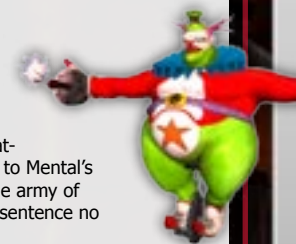
• Stuffed inside the cake's strawberry filling are little packets of plastic explosives that detonate on contact. The good thing is that you can shoot them from long range and they will explode, killing everything around.

MARTIAL ARTS ZOMBIE

The other race that lives on Chi Fang, Mental soon realized that Kung Phews could be good candidates for law enforcement. Of course, the first step would be killing them all, taking out their intestines, removing the brain and implanting hostility towards anything that moves. Simple, but effective. Pretty soon, Mental had a decent army of martial-arts wannabes, as they only seemed to learn one move: a flying cycle kick. Since the zombies' flesh is usually decomposing, hitting something with a rotten foot would surely cause it to fall apart. Mental figured it would be easier to attach some hooves on their legs.
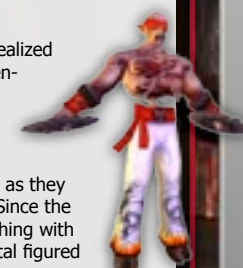
• Each zombie is equipped with a pair of deadly shurikens to deal with long-range threats.

RHINO CYBERTOY

Digging through his basement, Mental found a bunch of his old stuff: diapers, small socks, hats and toys. Mental really likes toys (big ones, to be exact), and the Rhino is surely one of them. Mental almost cried out of joy when he saw one of his dearest stuffed animals. He immediately rerouted a factory to manufacture Rhino toys instead of baby food, but that simply wasn't enough. Mental figured if he could give one to every family, he could easily control and stop any mutinies. He filled the Rhino's insides with exploding plasma fuel and it soon became a deadly weapon, capable of stopping anything.

• When wound up, the Rhino Cybertoy can easily outrun any living creature, including you, and the titanium horn can be deadly. Wait for it to charge, then move to a side and blast it from the behind.

ZOMBIE STOCKBROKER

In the year 2000, due to a shortage of banana ice cream (Mental's favorite meal), stock went down on all the planets in the galaxy. Lots of young stockbrokers committed suicide for fear of Mental's revenge. Since then, their ghosts have wandered around the universe in hopes of finding eternal peace. Mental was so angry at his loss that he raised them from the dead, equipped them with malfunctioning shotguns and recruited them into his legions so they could pay their debt to him.
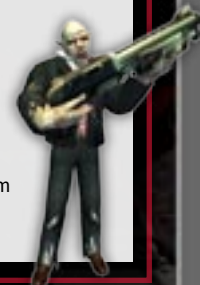
believe these were the most enjoyable and entertaining co-op games out there and with *Sam II*, our fans will get exactly what they deserve... and then some."

THE RETURN OF SAM COMETH

From what we've seen and played, *Serious Sam II* looks like it will offer the same thrilling and insane over-the-top FPS action the series has become famous for while continuing to innovate on the technology side. For fans, such as us, this game will be a no-brainer when it ships for the PC and Xbox this October. If you're new to *Sam*, prepare for one very intense and viscerally satisfying action/shooter experience.

BEHEADED KAMIKAZE

After failing to beat Sam, Mental's engineers on Sirius came up with an upgraded version of the kamikaze soldier. Their motto was: "If you can't make it better, make it bigger," so they replaced two small bombs with one "Sirian bomb of death." Also, in their experiment they noticed that the Life Control Unit (LCU) usually didn't work, so they removed it completely.

• The Kamikaze has a spring-loaded joint between its Bomb and body to compensate for its fast movement. Its bomb activates when close enough to the target.

ONAN THE LIBRARIAN

Mental, being one of the smartest entities in the universe, got *furious* when he learned about a "Dead Librarians' Society." It seems that some of his minions decided to learn how to read and write. Instead of capital punishment, Mental decided to transform those "infidels" into the lowest form of intellect: barbarians. The result are these buffed-up, "human" monstrosities, equipped with axes and chromed shields, which will run at you at full speed. The only evidence of their crazy youth is their eyes, which each seem to look in a different direction. While reading Sirian, they tried to make sense of the text in question, reading it from left to right and backwards. Too bad no one told them to read it bottom-up.

• Use a strong weapon to repel these brutes before they get up close and personal.
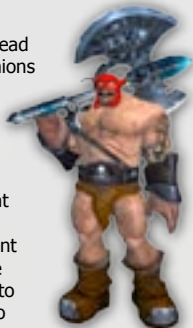
THE NERVOUS CHICKEN

Young son of Biomechanoid Major, he watched as his father was slain by the notorious Sam Stone. He swore to get his revenge in *Serious Sam II*. Unfortunately, he wasn't picked for the game during casting. Subsequently, he came up with a cunning plan, which included bribery, blackmail and death threats. To cut the story short, the game designers finally agreed to give him a chance if he got some plastic surgery. All went well and you can find him fighting Sam on several levels.

• Don't be fooled by this nervous chicken's odd behavior. These mechanical monsters are out to get Sam in a big way and won't waste any time pecking him to death if given the chance.

SPIDER MECHANOID

Genetically engineered in Mental's Laboratories, there are two classes of Spider Mechanoids: one that acts like a spawning mechanism, simply called "The Mommy," and a smaller, weaker one that is used for infantry. The smaller ones usually attack in groups, as they are born together, and will act like one. Their insides are filled with poisonous acid, and the web they eject can be lethal if you receive multiple shots. They are very quick, but the downside is that they have no armor. On the other hand, the bigger ones will be tougher to bring down.

• The Spider Mechanoids' bodies are waxed with a big layer of ant acid, so every metal object that hits them is soon disintegrated, inflicting only small amounts of damage. You'll need a sizable number of rockets to bring these guys down.

HARDCORE
REVIEWS

PLAYStation.2 GAMECUBE

Killer 7

Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : Capcom
Developer : Capcom (Production Studio 4)
Release Date : 07/07/05
Rating : Mature; Blood and Gore,Intense Violence,Sexual Themes,Strong Language

Genre(s) : Action
Category : Adventure, Psychological Thriller
# of players : 1

At long last, the much-hyped and often delayed *Killer 7* is here. Players assume the role of seven personalities all trying to rid the world of a menace known as Heaven's Smile, or so you think. That's actually the whole premise of the game's story: to keep you guessing. Even when you think you've got it figured out, you don't. You blindly proceed to the next mission and wait for more of the plot to unfold through cinematic cut-scenes. Does that sound intriguing?

Let's get one important detail about this game right out in the open before you continue reading. *Killer 7* is about as hardcore as they come, and it definitely won't strike a chord with everyone. It requires a lot of patience, a lot of attention to detail, and if you think that big "M" rating on the box just means it's got some blood in it, you're going to be in for one rude awakening. The squeamish will want to be forewarned that in addition to lots of graphic blood and gore (one boss fight is against two men who just had half of their heads blown off), there are also many instances of intense profanity, and even one creepy sex scene. Yes, these are even in the GameCube version! Still reading? Okay, let's proceed!

At first glance, there is a lot to love about *Killer 7*. The unique visual style and top-notch presentation alone are worthy of game award nominations. It has a fresh new take on tried-and-true action game play mechanics. By allowing the player to

swap out between their seven personas on the fly, each of whom has his or her own special skills and abilities, you will always have immediate access to the right tool for the right job. The occasional puzzles, while fairly easy, are a nice break from the violence and give you a chance to learn what situations are best for using each persona.

Sadly, there is also a lot to despise about this game. Characters move along guided "rails," which takes non-linear exploration completely out of the equation. You just press the run button, or Up on the PS2 version, and your character moves forward. These guided rails also dramatically impact other key game play elements, such as the inability to turn around freely, which you have to press a button to do. The camera can only rotate 180 degrees, which leads to frustrating, cheap deaths that're caused by offscreen enemies. There's also the annoying voice acting. All of the in-game cut-scenes are well-voiced by real actors, but the NPCs speak at length in droning gibberish.

I really wanted to love *Killer 7*, but ultimately it fell a bit short. It's easy to admire Capcom for trying something unique and bold in the US market. They've created something cinematic and stylish that allows the player to become immersed in the story, but to do it, they had to give up any sort of intuitive gameplay. This game is

KILLER 7 Q & A
With Rey Jimenez, Associate Publishing Project Manager, Capcom

Shoegazer: *Killer 7* is such an interesting and unique game. Where did the inspiration come from when beginning development?
Rey Jimenez: Much of the creative direction came from the director of the game, Suda-san. As evident in the game, a lot of the style and mood have been influenced by many of today's cutting edge movies.

SG: There are a lot of mature themes contained within the game. Were there any scenes that got cut out of the US release, or is this an exact translation from Japan?
Rey: There are some minor changes in the US version of the game, but it does not affect the content. All of the mature themes in the Japanese version will be in the US one as well.

SG: With such great stylish anime sequences in the game, one has to wonder if there are any other plans on the drawing board for the license. Has there been any discussion of possibly doing an anime series, or even comic books?
Rey: We are currently working on a comic book and possibly a toy line.

SG: Based on your experience with the game, is there a character in particular that you would recommend players become very familiar with?
Rey: My personal favorite is the Hellion himself, Dan. He has an all around weapon that's fairly accurate, powerful, and has a quick reload time. Of course, since all of the character's attributes can be raised, I also liked taking Con and making him real strong.

SG: Without giving away any spoilers, is there something cool in the game that you might miss if you aren't paying close enough attention?
Rey: Well, I'm not sure it's something that you can miss, but the cut scene at the end of the level where you fight the Handsome Men is pretty cool. It's very surreal, and after the cut scene there's an awesome shout out to old school games.

SG: And lastly Rey, WHAT is up with Samantha?? She seems to have enough issues to fill a magazine rack.
Rey: Yes, Samantha definitely has her own issues, but hey, Harman is a schizo with multiple personalities. I don't think that being catatonic-while-getting-beaten-up is strange for this game. It's pretty much on par as far as the game goes.

one completely bizarre romp through the mind of seven personalities, and may be difficult for most people to stick with until the end. For those of you that do however, congratulations! Today you've officially earned your "Hardcore" pin.

Rating : 3 of 5

2nd opinion by Wanderer • **Alternate Rating :** 2.5 of 5

This is a simple case of style over substance. *Killer 7* doesn't have the gameplay to back up its awesome atmosphere and graphics.

FINAL SCORE :
2.75 of 5

XBOX | PC
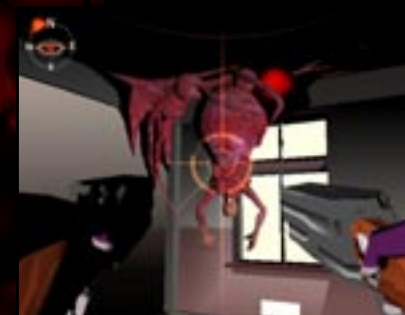
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Review by **Syriel**

Publisher : Rockstar
Developer : Rockstar North
Release Date : June 7, 2005
Rating : **MATURE;** Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Strong Language, Strong Sexual Content, Use of Drugs

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

The original *Grand Theft Auto* may have gotten its start on the PC, but it was the PlayStation 2 release of *Grand Theft Auto III* that shot the series into the stratosphere and gave Rockstar a license to print money. As the series progressed, the games got more complex, and started pushing the PS2 hardware to its limits. While last fall's release of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was undoubtedly fun, no one can deny the noticeable draw-in or the annoyingly long loading times that plagued it. Now that Sony's window of exclusivity is over, the game has made its way to both the PC and Xbox, opening up the world of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* to everyone.
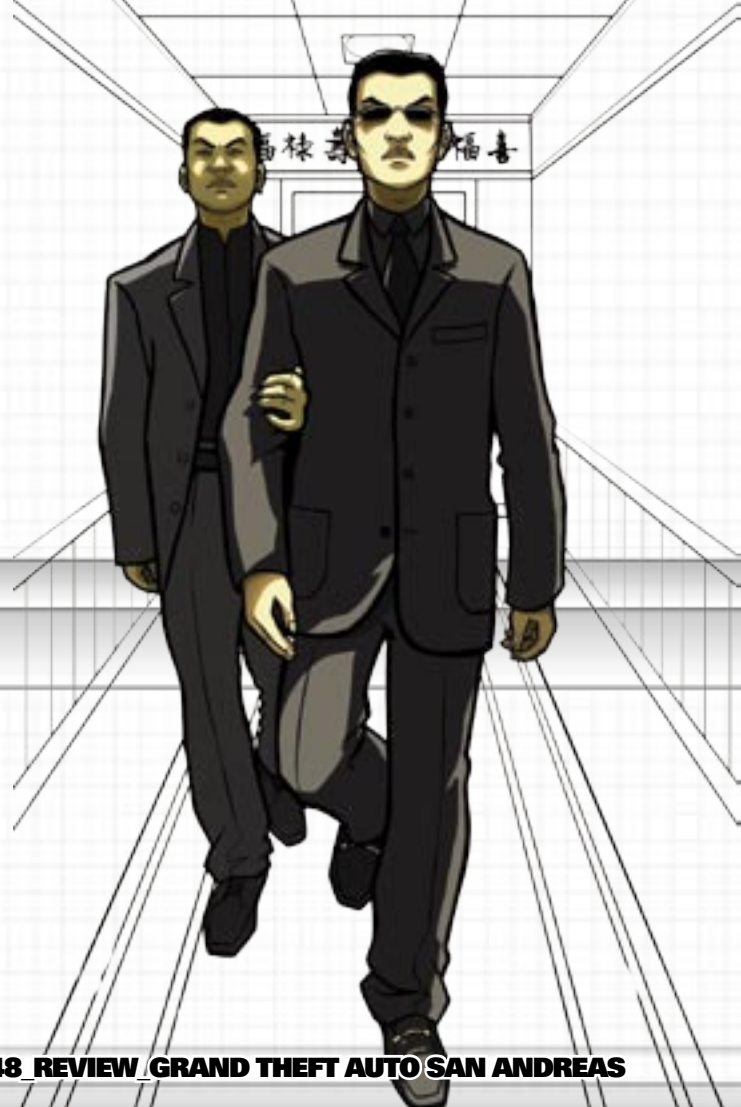
Set in the early 90's, the game tells the story of Carl Johnson. A former gangbanger, Carl has returned home to bury his mother and make peace with his past. Sadly, his past isn't ready to make peace with him. Framed for murder by corrupt cops and facing a neighborhood torn apart by drugs and fighting, Carl is drawn back into the gangland warfare that he hoped to avoid.

Playing as Carl, you have to navigate your way through this world of urban conflict, dealing with unsavory characters and completing missions that will require you to drive, fly, shoot, fight, work out, paint and even get your hair cut. Broken down individually, each objective is rather simplistic in nature, but layered together they form the basis of a surprisingly rich story which is helped along by the impressive voice work. Featuring talent such as Samuel L. Jackson and Peter Fonda, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is one of the few games to hit perfection in the voice acting department.

Of course, if you decide to take a break from the story, nothing's stopping you from running off and having a bit of fun. One moment you might be trying to pick up a girl, the next you could be hopping a fence at the airport and stealing a plane. Need some weapons? You can either buy them from the crazy old man across town, or simply run down some rival gang members and collect what you need from their corpses. The choice is yours.

PRESENTATION MATTERS

In the days of minimalist manuals and electronic documentation, it is nice to see a developer actually put some work into the packaging. Detailed manuals and maps used to be standard fare with games, but in recent years packaging seems to have become a lost art. Not so here. Though the console versions of *GTA:SA* ship with thin booklets, Rockstar went all out for the PC release.

Rip the shrink wrap off this one and you won't find a generic jewel case. Instead there is a hardcover book waiting for you. Written as a travel guide for the three cities in the game, the manual is both visually appealing and loaded with tidbits about the world. You can easily waste an hour just flipping though it. A pull-out map is tucked into the front, while the game DVD-ROM is secured just inside the back cover.

While it doesn't directly affect gameplay, the classy packaging is impressive and enjoyable. Kudos to Rockstar for making the PC version of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* more than just a commodity.

Unfortunately, neither the Xbox or PC version of the game offer a totally unlocked world right from the start. Just like in the PS2 original, you must advance through the story mode to enable the cities of San Fierro and Las Venturas. This is a bit disappointing, as tooling around in an open-ended sandbox is one of the series' great appeals, and while the story mode is engaging, it can be a bit tiresome to run through a second time if you've already played the PS2 version.

Visually, both the Xbox and PC versions feature small improvements over the original. On the Xbox, *GTA:SA* supports progressive scan, and the PC version's resolutions go all the way up to 1600x1200. It looks good, but for some reason Rockstar failed to take the extra step and recreate high-resolution textures for the ports. As a result, the new versions are sharper, but aren't as impressive as they could be. It's quite obvious that the game was designed with the limitations of the PS2 in mind. The loading times have also been improved; the Xbox's are manageable, and the PC's, virtually non-existent.

Oddly, control is something of a mixed bag, with the Xbox version feeling incredibly twitchy. This was most noticeable when driving or in the middle of a firefight. On the other hand, the PC version was incredibly tight and responsive, especially when using a Logitech gamepad.

While *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* isn't perfect — it's a jack of all trades, and master of none — it does a fine job integrating a number of different styles of play into one relatively seamless experience. All of the porting flaws combined don't detract from what is still one of the best gameplay experiences around. If you've already put in a few hours with the PS2 version there's nothing new here, but if you skipped out last fall, now's your chance to see what you missed. Of the three, the PC version is easily the best, proving the old adage that yes, you can go home again.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

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

Since *GTA: SA* doesn't really offer much in the way of solid new features on the Xbox or PC, there isn't much of a reason for to go back to *San Andreas* for a repeat visit.

FINAL SCORE :
4.25 of 5

SID MEIER'S PIRATES! LIVE THE LIFE
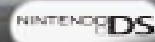
Review by **Syriel**

Publisher : 2K Games
Developer : Firaxis
Release Date : 7/11/2005
Rating : TEEN; Mild Violence

Genre(s) : Strategy
Category : High Seas Adventure
# of players : 1-4

In the days of yore, *Sid Meier's Pirates!* was an amazingly popular, open-ended strategy game for the PC. The big appeal of *Pirates!* was the freedom it afforded the player, and it was doing it long before games such as *Grand Theft Auto III* were ever conceived. Now the classic game has been updated and ported to the console, but the gameplay has thankfully been left intact.

As the story goes, your family was pressed into bondage by the evil Marquis da la Montalban ten years ago. Now, all grown up and with a pirate ship of your own, you have vowed to rescue your family and exact justice. Thus begins your illustrious career as a marauder of the high seas.

Although there is a main story for you to follow, the game doesn't force you into any sort of linear progression. Instead, you are free to wander about and do as you please, enjoying the ebb and flow of adventure as you see fit. The only restriction is time. Your pirate will age, and once you reach your mid-forties it'll be time to retire. As a result, an average game will only last five to ten hours. The relative quickness of play allows players to freely experiment with different styles of gameplay, making *Pirates!* one of the most flexible games on the market.

The action is evenly split between seafaring adventures and competing in various mini-games. You'll battle other ships, get into swordfights, learn to dance as you woo the various ladies in the game, sneak around in a hostile town and fight a ground battle to defeat opposing forces. Doing well in one part of the game will help you excel in another. For example, it will be easier to win the heart of a governor's daughter once you've defeated a number of pirates and gotten yourself promoted. Do well enough and you may even end up marrying one day.

If you prefer economic domination, you can forgo the fighting and run your ship between different ports, buying and selling goods to make a tidy profit. Then there is the treasure hunter option—seek out secret treasure maps and hidden clues to discover a buried cache of cash. On the surface each section of the game seems relatively simple, but they are interconnected in such a way that draws you in for no matter what your current task, there is always something else that you could be doing.

While the majority of *Pirates!* is a single player game, Firaxis did add a multiplayer component for the console release. Up to four players can battle it out in ship-to-ship combat. No, it's not deep, but it is fun. Oddly, the multiplayer action is only supported locally and not over Xbox Live. The game will connect to Live, but you can only access leader boards and future downloadable content.

Compared to the flashy games of today, *Pirates!* is certainly a retro throwback in terms of its visual and audio production. It's not bad, but it certainly is not packed with the detailed models and high resolution visuals that we have all come to expect. That said, the real draw here isn't the graphics, but the insidiously addictive gameplay. Once you get started, it's all too easy to lose hours upon hours of time.

Rating : 4 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
4.25 of 5

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

Sid Meier's Pirates! is one of those rare classics that you will keep going back to time and again. It's not perfect, but it's better than most.

BOMBERMAN

Review by **Syriel**

Publisher : Ubisoft
Developer : Hudson Soft
Release Date : 6/21/05
Rating : EVERYONE

Genre(s) : Strategy
Category : Bombtastic
# of players : 1 player, 8 players via WiFi

When *Bomberman* first debuted back on the NES, no one could have predicted how popular the series would eventually become. After all, it wasn't until the game debuted on the TurboGrafx-16—complete with a brand new multiplayer component—that its sublime genius became apparent. Playing against the computer was fun, but competing against your friends was downright addictive, as both *Super Bomberman* and *Saturn Bomberman* proved to the world. The latest release for the Nintendo DS promises to continue that tradition.

At its core, *Bomberman* seems like a relatively simple game. The object is merely to run around and blow stuff up. Much like chess, though, what appears simple on the surface can actually be rather complex. Most players will breeze through the first few levels, but soon enough you will be forced to plan your moves in advance, lest you be caught in a fiery chain-reaction of doom.

The single player mode incorporates the touch screen by allowing players to "bank" their power-ups instead of using them immediately. When you want to trigger an item, simply tap on its icon. Since items stay in your bank between levels, you know you'll always have something on hand when you need it. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be a limit to what you can hold, so some of the former challenge is lost, especially after death. In prior games dying was a real setback. Here, it's a simple matter of tapping a few icons to get back to full power.

Enjoyable as it is, the single player action is merely practice for the multiplayer battle, which is the real meat and potatoes of this game. Supporting up to eight players on a single cart, *Bomberman* is the fastest way to turn a room full of friends into backstabbing opponents.

Spread across both screens, battle mode drops the item bank in favor of more carnage. Because players (and bombs) can move freely between both screens, keeping alert is doubly important as a well placed explosion on the top screen can trigger a bomb on the bottom screen. The area type and number of power-ups can be selected before each match and custom rules keep the play style varied. There's even a classic mode, in case you're feeling a bit nostalgic.

New additions for the DS include a voice activated bomb, as well as a revenge mode that lets you wreak havoc from beyond the grave. Armed with a cannon, you can slide across the bottom of the screen and launch bombs by flicking the stylus. Eliminate an opponent and you're back in the game.

Bomberman may not be the most visually impressive game out there, but it is one of the most enjoyable multiplayer experiences available. Check it out; you won't regret it.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

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

While I wouldn't recommend it for the solo-minded player (tedious levels, lack of save points, etc.), *Bomberman DS* does deliver some of the best multiplaying action on the DS. The classic lives on!

FINAL SCORE :
4.25 of 5

湾岸 MIDNIGHT CLUB 3 DUB edition

Review by **Lynxara**

Publisher : Rockstar Games	**Genre(s) :** Racing
Developer : Rockstar Leeds	**Category :** Street, Ride Pimpin'
Release Date : 6/27/2005	**# of players :** 1-6
Rating : EVERYONE	
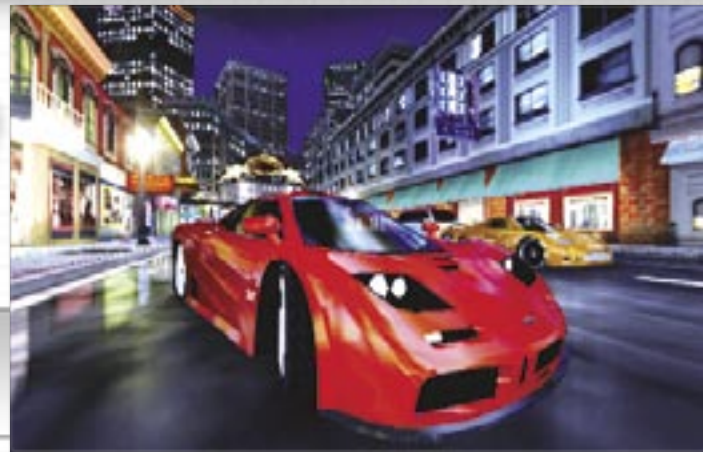
Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition was one of the best racing games of this generation on the home consoles, but on the PSP it's been stripped down into something significantly more mediocre. It also suffers from what are easily the worst load times I've seen since the heyday of the PlayStation and the 3D0. Some load times are longer than the actual races being loaded. This is just inexcusable in a portable title, which should ideally be designed to accomodate short play sessions. If not for the load time problems this game would be pretty good, and it stands it is the first full-featured street racing game for the PSP.

If you played any of the console versions, then you know exactly what to expect here. *Midnight Club 3* is a street racing game with a wide variety of play modes, and a big emphasis on playing career mode to win money for car upgrades. You can opt to start with a selection of six real-world car models, ranging from a '74 Impala to a Volkswagen Jetta. As you progress through the game, you can unlock more cars to buy. All the tuning parts you put on your car are also real-world items, and many of them having very visible effects on how your car looks. Some parts, in fact, do nothing but customize the look of your car. Obsessing over getting just the right look for your car is, in fact, the point of *Midnight Club 3*.

Unfortunately, with the car models having taken such a hit in poly count, it's hard to get worked up over your creations in the PSP version of the game. While the races are still fun and control responsive, the detail on the car damage has been significantly cut back. This ruins another one of the fun parts

of *Midnight Club 3*, the visual spectacle of beating the hell out of your car during a street race. The tracks and locales do still look good, fortunately, so don't mistake my complaints as a sign that the game is ugly. It's a good-looking game as PSP titles go, and the widescreen as always adds a lot to the feel of being in a race. *Midnight Club 3* on the PSP is just so trapped in the shadow of its bigger console brothers that the visuals don't impress the way that, say, *Ridge Racers* can.

If you've somehow owned a PSP this long without picking up a racing title, or love street racing, you'll probably want to pick up *Midnight Club 3*. The load times make it very hard to get much done in a short sessions, but it's got the depth to support dozens of hours of gameplay and up to six player multiplayer in ad-hoc mode. The trick will be finding five friends particularly interested in *Midnight Club 3* over all the other great racing games already out for the PSP.

Rating : 3 of 5

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

Warning: You could probably read Lynxara's full review twice during each loading screen. Otherwise, it's a faithful port, and a decent alternative to *NFSU: Rivals*.

FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5

CODED ARMS ™

Review by **Syriel**

Publisher : Konami	**Genre(s) :** First Person Shooter
Developer : Konami	**Category :** Cyberpunk
Release Date : 7/5/05	**# of players :** 1 (main game, 4 (deathmatch)
Rating : TEEN	

Although the FPS had its genesis on the computer, the genre has become a console favorite, thanks to games such *Goldeneye* and *Halo*. It was only a matter of time then, before someone tried to bring the FPS to the PSP, and that someone was Konami. In doing so however, the design team had to overcome a number of distinct challenges, not the least of which is the PSP's lack of a second analog stick.

Set in a cyberpunk-inspired future, *Coded Arms* revolves around a computer system known as A.I.D.A. Originally created to serve as a military training simulation, the system has long since been abandoned, and now acts as home to a number of rogue programs. As an elite hacker, you have jacked into A.I.D.A. in search of valuable military data, and the only risk is your life.

Visually, *Coded Arms* is a standout title, with a solid framerate and detailed textures. Neon highlights are used liberally throughout, for both explosions and accent lighting—the whole effect is mildly reminiscent of TRON. As you walk into a new area, the rooms are "drawn" right before your eyes and enemy creatures are varied in style. The only noticeable problem has to do with color palettes; enemies often match their environment and can easily blend in with the walls making them difficult to see.

The A.I. here isn't going to win any awards. However, the three types of enemies—security bots, soldiers and system bugs—all react differently to your presence, forcing you to modify your play style. Some will attack from a distance, while others have no problem rushing in for an up close and personal attack.

Initially, you'll start the game with a single weapon. Additional weapon and armor files will be unlocked as you progress through the game. Any unlocked items can be equipped before starting a level and will be replenished by generic ammo and health icons.

Coded Arms supports up to four players in deathmatch, but the real draw is the random level generator which ensures that every map is a new experience. This helps keep things fresh and prevents any one player from gaining an unfair advantage simply because they know the map better than everyone else.

The game hits a stumbling block with its control scheme. While using a single analog stick and the face buttons to control both movement and targeting was acceptable a few years back, it simply cannot supply the precision control that FPS players have come to expect. Konami is to be commended for including a highly customizable button layout that allows players to endlessly tweak the controls, but you're ultimately limited by the hardware.

Rating : 3 of 5

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

Coded Arms, like many of the PSP games that have come and gone, ended up being a bit of a letdown. The major drag is the wonky FPS controls, which end up making this game an exercise in frustration.

FINAL SCORE :
2.5 of 5

SONIC GEMS COLLECTION

Publisher : Sega
Developer : Sega
Release Date : 8/16/2005
Rating : EVERYONE
Genre(s) : Anthology
Category : Console Classic
# of players : 1-2

Often considered to be the pinnacle of old-school Sonic, *Sonic CD* suffered from limited distribution thanks to its format. Back in 1993, not many gamers could afford the hefty price tag for the Sega CD add-on. Two years later, the game surfaced on the PC, but the computers at the time weren't up to the task of running it properly. With *Sonic Gems Collection*, this overlooked title can finally get its due.

Sonic CD is perfectly emulated on the GameCube. It raised the bar for action games with its innovative use of the time-travel mechanic. Each level features four distinct variants, which can be navigated by moving back and forth through time. Certain items can only be reached by time traveling, and the fate of the future depended on defeating Dr. Robotnik's minions in the past. Take them out and the future zone will be a happy place; fail to eliminate the threat and the future's dark, dank and depressing.

Amusingly enough, the biggest point of contention among the hardcore will be *Sonic CD's* soundtrack. Due to licensing issues, the collection features only the US music; the Japanese original is not an option. While the US music isn't bad per se, the title track "Sonic Boom" is renowned for its cheese-filled lyrics. Don't worry; it's not as horrid as some would lead you to believe.

The second game on the collection is the arcade release, *Sonic The Fighters*. Developed by AM2 (of *Virtua Fighter* fame), the game features a surprising amount of depth for a somewhat cartoonish fighter.

Rounding out the major releases is *Sonic R*. A quirky racing game,

Sonic R has players competing for the best time around the track, while giving you the freedom to explore the area at will. It's certainly not for everyone (you'll either love it or hate it), but it is an undeniable part of Sonic's history.

In addition to the three major titles, the game also features the Game Gear versions of *Sonic Spinball, Sonic the Hedgehog 2, Sonic the Hedgehog Triple Trouble, Sonic Drift 2, Tails' Skypatrol* and *Tails Adventures*. Though these games were featured as unlockables in *Sonic Adventure DX Director's Cut*, it's nice to have them collected here. Players will also be able to unlock the Genesis games *Vectorman* and *Vectorman 2*.

Compared to the Japanese release—which has the original *Sonic CD* soundtrack, as well as the *Streets of Rage* series (cut from the US version to keep an E rating)—it is easy to feel a little twinge of jealousy when looking at the game. That said, *Sonic CD* alone is well worth the price of admission, making this bundle hard to pass up. Now if only Sega would see fit to re-release the original *Sonic* arcade game and the rare 32X spin-off, *Knuckles Chaotix...*

Rating : 4 of 5

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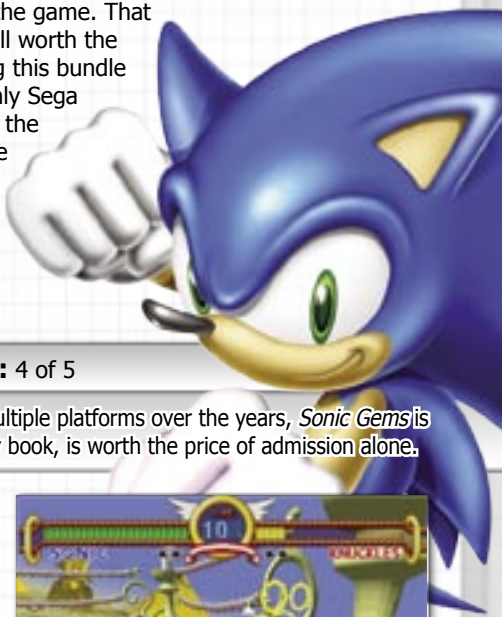
2nd opinion by Roger Danish • **Alternate Rating :** 4 of 5

While there have been many *Sonic* compilations released on multiple platforms over the years, *Sonic Gems* is the only one to include the much-lauded *Sonic CD*, which in my book, is worth the price of admission alone.
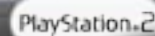
CAPCOM FIGHTING EVOLUTION

Publisher : Capcom
Developer : Capcom Production Studio 2
Release Date : 6/14/05
Rating : TEEN
Genre(s) : Fighting
Category : Two-Dimensional
# of players : 2
Notes : Xbox Live Support

I remember back when *Street Fighter II* was the end-all, be-all of fighting games. I (and basically everyone I've ever met) would rush to either the arcade or someone's house after school to put in time. Much to the chagrin of parents worldwide, "allyoukens" and debates about whether Ryu and Ken were actually brothers rocked the house.

It's 2005 now, and Capcom has released approximately the eleventy-billionth spin on their beloved franchise, this time in the form of *Capcom Fighting Evolution*. It's a team-based fighting game in the *King of Fighters* style, meaning that you can only switch characters when someone dies or between rounds.

It's also the first video game that ever slapped me in the face.

CFE isn't an easy game to describe without resorting to four-letter words. The cast is an odd mix of characters from *Street Fighter III, Street Fighter II, Street Fighter Alpha, Darkstalkers,* and *Red Earth*, with one new fighter. When I say an odd mix, I mean this literally. Each character uses the button layout and combo system of their respective game. This is, to put it lightly, an awful idea. Each character controls so differently that they should obviously be in separate games. Tapping forward twice with Ryu gives you... nothing. With Jedah, it gives you an arching air-dash. With Felicia, you get a short hop. There's no basic underlying system to the fighting that makes the game easy to understand. Even the

commands for throws vary from character to character. If you're looking for a casual bit of street fighting with some friends, this is a deal-breaker. The game makes no sense on a basic level. It feels like a mish-mash of separate games.

It looks like one, too. The menus are clean and the character select portraits are nice, but that's where it stops. The characters *also* use the sprites from their original games. This means that those sprites that you think look kind of familiar, maybe, are actually *over six years old*. This is an unforgivable sin in this age of *Guilty Gear X2* and high-resolution sprites. The game looks like a joke, or perhaps something that a buddy whipped up in Photoshop.

With *Capcom Fighting Evolution*, Capcom brought a knife to a gunfight. The word evolution usually means that something gets better with each new revision. *CFE* is inferior to essentially every other game in its genre that's come out in the past few years. If you really want some two-dimensional, mad-cap fighting, seek out a copy of *Guilty Gear X2#Reload, Marvel vs. Capcom 2, Street Fighter Anniversary Collection,* or *Capcom vs SNK 2: EO.* If you want to have a thoroughly miserable time, keep an eye out for *Capcom Fighting Evolution.* It's the video game equivalent of poking yourself in the eyes.

Rating : 1 of 5

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

This's *SvC: Chaos* all over again. Capcom's supposed 2D fighter swan song indeed makes you mourn—not because it's the last, but because it exists.

FINAL SCORE :
1.25 of 5

PLATFORM   PlayStation.2   XBOX   GAMECUBE

PLATFORM   PlayStation.2   XBOX

BATMAN BEGINS

Review by **4thletter**

MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT

Review by **Melf**

Publisher : Electronic Arts
Developer : Eurocom
Release Date : 6/15/2005
Rating : TEEN

Genre(s) : Action Adventure
Category : Third-Person, Movie
# of players : 1

Publisher : Electronic Arts
Developer : EA Los Angeles
Release Date : 6/17/05
Rating : TEEN; Blood & Violence

Genre(s) : First Person Shooter
Category : WWII Action
# of players : 1 (campaign),
4 (split-screen multiplayer)

I'm used to disappointment. My bank account doesn't have six zeroes in it, Jessica Alba isn't returning my calls, and I don't own a Porsche. Movie tie-in games, with a few remarkable exceptions, tend to be disappointments. *Batman Begins* joins the ranks of *Catwoman*, *Constantine*, and *X2: Wolverine's Revenge* as movie tie-ins that, unsurprisingly, just don't work.

The game, like the film it's based on, revolves around the concept of fear. Your actions decide the fear level (represented by a variety of on-screen gauges) of the baddies. If you can get them scared enough, they won't even try and fight you. They'll cower and even go so far as to run away from you, if you get them scared enough. It's an excellent idea, in theory. The execution is where it falls flat.

The problem is that *Batman Begins* holds your hand throughout the game. All of the "fear events," for lack of a better term, are scripted. You can't, for example, sneak into a room and toss a stone (or perhaps a Batarang) at a wall to spook the bad guys, like in *Splinter Cell* or *Metal Gear Solid*. In fact, you can only throw Batarangs when the game tells you it's possible. If you try to do something off the beaten track, you'll die in a hail of gunfire each and every time. This is incredibly frustrating and kills any immersion that the game may have brought to the table. It feels like being given the keys to a brand new car, then being told that you can only use the turn signals.
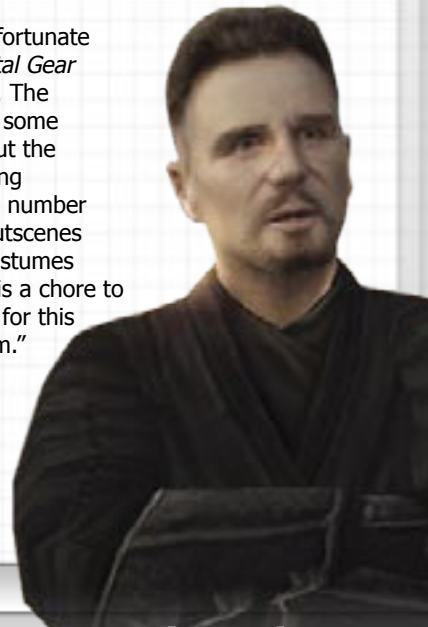
The driving stages don't fare that much better. They play like a slower version of *Burnout 3*, but feel just as scripted as the rest of the game. It's fun for a minute, maybe two, then it just gets tedious. It seems like something that was thrown in "just because,"

and that's not a good sign.

There is a lot of variety to the gameplay, to be fair. The only problem is that the sneaking, lock-picking, hacking, climbing, jumping, and fighting portions have all been done better by other games. If you're completely new to action/adventure titles, you may get a nice surprise or two, but if you've played anything since *Metal Gear Solid*, you'll probably end up bored.

At best, *Batman Begins* is an unfortunate combination of *Splinter Cell*, *Metal Gear Solid*, and *Burnout 3: Takedown*. The graphics are decent, and there's some very quality voice acting here, but the scripted, hand-holding, babysitting gameplay wrecks the game on a number of levels. Being able to unlock cutscenes from the film, interviews, and costumes are a nice bonus, but the game is a chore to get through. The new buzzword for this generation of gaming is "freedom." In *Batman Begins*, you're free to do exactly what you're told to do.

Rating : 2 of 5

By now I should simply be sick to death of WWII shooters. So many have been released in such a short period of time that the genre is really beginning to grow long in the tooth. Of course, just when I'm ready to move on, along comes a new game that reinvigorates my interest.

Returning the action to the European theater, players take on the role of OSS operative William Holt, who has the unenviable task of gathering intelligence in some of the most heated battles of the war. France, Russia, and even the Battle of the Bulge are just a few examples, and all of the stages are wonderfully detailed renditions of the actual locations. From the North African desert to the snowy Ardennes, you'll find yourself teaming with the Russians and British, as well as your own countrymen, in the final push against Hitler.

The heart of *Medal of Honor* is its wonderful atmosphere, and *European Assault* goes back to the style *Frontline* was praised for and actually improves on it, as hard to believe as that may be. The visuals take a hit on the PlayStation 2, but everything else is pretty much the same. Those with both consoles, however, know which version they need to get.

So what does this entry do that the others didn't? Not much, really. An attempt at squad-based gameplay was made, but it doesn't work very well. The three companions you control don't do much more than run right into enemy fire. You can only tell them where to go or when to fall back, but they're not good listeners; I'd imagine it's the long-term

effects of shellshock. They can take a beating, but it would have been nice to see them match the enemy A.I.'s level of self-preservation.

Another minus is that there's still no online multiplayer, and I'm sure I'm not alone when I say that four-player split-screen is less attractive than it used to be. This is a game that screams for online co-op play, and the capacity for deathmatch variations is incredible. Why couldn't they have used the squad-based play for online team deathmatch? Why can't my squad consist of three buddies?

European Assault also heralds the return of the Jedi sharpshooters that made *Frontline* so frustrating at times. German soldiers can still pick you off from behind a brick wall at a thousand paces, and often take too many shots to kill, no matter how close you are. EA did take a refreshing approach to how lives are handled, and instead of checkpoints, you'll be revived with half your energy when you die. You begin with a limited number of revives, and attain more by completing objectives.

Overall, war-torn Europe is still as deadly as it's always been, but it's also just as much fun. There are tons of objectives to complete, the stages are wonderfully designed, and the presentation is top notch. The shortcomings are mostly "could have beens" that don't affect the gameplay overall, and what's here is as solid as the side of a Tiger Tank. The world needs you, soldier! Now get in there and fight!

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
2 of 5

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

Gameplay that constantly holds the player's hand turns *Batman Begins* into another wasted opportunity for enjoyable Caped Crusader action. How sad is it that the NES *Batman* is still the best?

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

This is a step in the right direction for the *Medal of Honor* series, but it's still just another WWII FPS. Could we please find another war to fight?

FINAL SCORE :
3.25 of 5

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM vs. ZETA GUNDAM

Review by **Lyncara**

Publisher : Bandai America   **Genre(s) :** Shooter
Developer : Capcom   **Category :** Third-Person, Sci-Fi, Giant Robots
Release Date : 06/28/05   **# of players :** 1-2
Rating : TEEN; Fantasy Violence, Mild Language

Gundam vs. Zeta Gundam is a sequel to an older PS2 *Gundam* title called *Federation vs. Zeon*. While this game includes material from the 1979 anime classic *Mobile Suit Gundam*, which *Federation vs. Zeon* was based on, it primarily focuses on *Gundam's* 1985 sequel *Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam*. *Federation vs. Zeon* is fondly remembered by *Gundam* fans as one of the better localized *Gundam* games, and *Gundam vs. Zeta Gundam* will probably please them yet again. It's essentially the same game as the original, but with some updates to the engine and a wider variety of mecha to choose from. However, this game is something that *only* diehard *Gundam* fans can enjoy.

Like the original, it's a 3D shooting game with a simple yet frustrating control scheme. The battle engine has been enhanced and new gameplay modes have been added, most notably a major emphasis on two-player co-op in the Arcade and Survival modes. The game is still playable solo, as you can team up with a CPU ally instead, and there's a special single-player campaign called "Universal Century Mode" that lets you follow the three major *Zeta* factions through a series of missions that retell the *Zeta Gundam* plotline. You gain points for defeating enemies in battle, and you can spend points to unlock lots of fan-pleasing extras.

Unfortunately, *Gundam vs. Zeta Gundam* is a relentlessly mediocre game when you look underneath the license. Battles are frequently repetitive, laughable experiences where you run away from bosses and spend your time shooting down weaker enemies to win. While play control is decent once you master the button configuration, the camera system – which only lets you turn to look at another enemy when you try to target them – is simply a bad idea. While I'm sure fans will love having the full range of *Gundam* and *Zeta* mecha to choose from, savvy gamers will quickly realize that only about six of these designs are worth using. The game does nothing to make the stories of *Gundam* and *Zeta* accessible to new players; instead, Arcade mode spoils a lot of the best surprises of the series offhandedly, while Universal Century mode is simply incomprehensible if you don't already know the *Zeta* plot.

The trade-off for this is an amazingly detailed recreation of the look and feel of the anime, right down to art styles in the facial portraits. All of the game's music is authentic BGM from the two TV series, beautifully arranged, and the in-game mecha designs are authentic down to the finest details. However, even fans will have to admit that the controls are still basically clunky and the actual gameplay rather thin. If you're one of the people who pre-ordered the *Zeta Gundam* box set, who shook your fist in rage when Cartoon Network didn't show *Gundam's* last episode, and if you call your Gundam models "gunpla", you'll probably love this game despite its flaws. Anyone else need not apply.

Rating : 2.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
2.75 of 5

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

Losing the original voices and online play is a huge loss, but the game is still pretty fun. A passing familiarity with the characters of the series is required to enjoy all the unlockable plot elements.

Dead to Rights: Reckoning

Review by **Syriel**

Publisher : Namco   **Genre(s) :** Action
Developer : Namco   **Category :** Renegade Cop
Release Date : 6/28/05   **# of players :** 1 (main game), 4 (deathmatch)
Rating : MATURE

Conceived on the PlayStation 2, the original *Dead to Rights* was something of a surprise hit for Namco. Sure, the game had its flaws, and the gameplay was obviously derived from *Max Payne*, but the run-and-gun craziness combined with liberal use of "bullet time" was fun. The second iteration didn't fare as well, and ended up feeling like a rushed imitation of its former self. For the PSP release, we had high hopes that the series would return to its roots. Sadly, we were mistaken.

Though the story is officially a prequel, you wouldn't know it from playing; the plot takes a back seat to blowing things up. Reprising the role of vigilante cop Jack Slate, you and your trusty dog Shadow are hot on the trail of a kidnapped informant. With no respect for criminals, or the law, you will do whatever it takes to eliminate all who stand in your way. The only problem is, you'll be fighting the controls just as much as the bad guys.

Dead to Rights: Reckoning has the dubious honor of featuring the worst camera to grace a PSP game. In theory, pressing the right trigger will cause Jack to lock on to the nearest opponent while the camera attempts to stay behind him. In practice, the lock on will often jump to an enemy located behind a wall, or in the next room, while the camera swings around wildly.

In a nod to some of the great action movies, Jack can perform a disarm move anytime he is near an opponent. Simply press the button and the game switches into slow-motion as the hapless fool is taken out. It sounds great, until you realize none of the other opponents have slowed down and you're getting riddled with bullets.

To its credit, the game does feature a good selection of weapons, but even this is a source of frustration thanks to the autoswitch that occurs every time you pick up a new gun. Using a shotgun to clear out nearby enemies works well... until you happen to walk over a dead body and pick up a rifle. Since the ground is often littered with weapons, it soon becomes pointless to try and use the right gun for the job.

If things get too intense, you can call on Shadow the wonder dog for an assist. He will magically appear right next to the targeted enemy, go in for the kill, and then disappear again. It doesn't make much sense, but hey, go with it.

We might have been more forgiving of the singleplayer game, had the multiplayer component been up to snuff, but it suffers from many of the same flaws that plague the ultra-short story mode. The end result is a game that looks great, but doesn't have the gameplay to back up the graphics.

Rating : 1.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
1.5 of 5

2nd opinion by Roger Danish • **Alternate Rating :** 1.5 of 5

What could have been the PSP's first intense action title turned out to be a verifiable dud. Take a pass on *Dead to Rights: Reckoning* and hold out for *GTA: LCS*—you'll be glad you did.
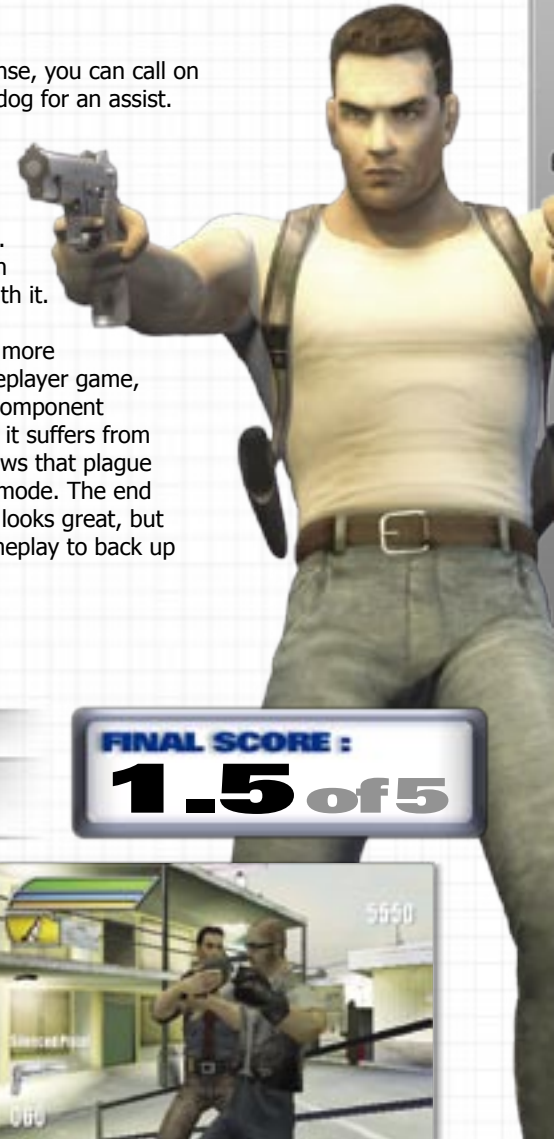
Arc The Lad: End of Darkness

Review by **Honestgamer**

Publisher : Namco
Developer : Cattle Call
Release Date : 6/14/2005
Rating : TEEN

Genre(s) : Role-Playing
Category : Action
# of players : 1

If you've played many role-playing games, you've encountered a fetch quest. A door needs to be unlocked, and the key is on the other side of the continent. A princess will give you the help you need... if you find her favorite dress. Role-playing fans take such moments for granted because they know that a great adventure often awaits. There are exceptions to this rule, which brings us to *Arc the Lad: End of Darkness*.

As the game opens, players meet Edda. He's an orphan who lives on a peaceful island, sheltered from the outside world. Suddenly, a stranger arrives and propels him into a quest to save mankind. Along with his plucky sidekick, Edda, and thus the player, will theoretically experience the adventure of a lifetime. There's just one problem: the game is boring.

To accomplish anything, Edda must work as a hunter. This is game-speak for "perform tedious fetch quests for all eternity." Instead of adventuring in a linear fashion, you'll visit various guilds and pick from tasks you can perform. To progress, you must complete jobs. Some pay you money. Others advance the transparent plot. Once you finish enough tasks, you get to take a test and progress to the next class. Then you have new tasks available and the process repeats.

It might not be so bad if the tasks were interesting. There are only four different kinds of missions: fetching items, clearing a map of enemies, defending someone as enemies attack, or exploring confusing dungeons. Other games within the genre make up for such shortcomings by letting you visit places of interest. Here, the dungeons are dull. They cover the basics, but they're seldom exciting.

The battles also lack that special spark. The game ditches turn-based fighting in favor of a more active approach. You rush an enemy, then hack at it until you win or lose. The shoulder buttons let you circle your target, who will return the favor. Afterwards, you battle the next foe. If you take damage, you might use some healing magic, provided you have the proper card equipped. Alternatively, you can just grit your teeth and hope for the best. When you get to the boss, provided one exists, unleash the rest of your offensive magic. Then it's back to town for another quest.

If this sounds like something you'd play online, it should, as the game includes an online component. Deathmatches are permitted. That's nice, but it's unfair to those who buy the game expecting something along the lines of the earlier titles. Was it too much to ask for a reasonably engaging offline mode? If you strip away its fetch quests, there's barely any game left at all.

At the end of the day, though, no one's forcing anyone to play it. Grab it if you figure you can find some fun online with friends, but remember that you'll need a broadband internet connection to make the most of it. Otherwise, pick up one of the tons of other role-playing games that don't require a modem. Most of them will serve you better.

Rating : 2 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 1.75 of 5

2nd opinion by Roger Danish • **Alternate Rating :** 1.5 of 5

What could have been a compelling RPG with a unique online component turned out to be a drawn-out, uninspired and pedestrian experience. Only fans of the series need apply.

Kirby Canvas Curse

Review by **Wanderer**

Publisher : Nintendo
Developer : HAL Laboratory, Inc.
Release Date : 6/13/05
Rating : EVERYONE

Genre(s) : Platformer
Category : Drawing Rainbows
# of players : 1

This is one of those games that reminds you why Nintendo's still around. You can say a lot about the company—and we often do—but they deliver the goods. Those goods tend to be brightly colored, and suitable for even the tinest and most impressionable children, but they are quality goods and must be respected.

Kirby: Canvas Curse is like somebody fused together the best bits of pachinko, *Marble Madness*, and *Sonic Spinball*, and then made the resulting concoction into a coloring book. It's incredibly simple, surprisingly challenging, and for gamers of any age, it's a hell of a lot of fun.

In *Canvas Curse*, Kirby's homeland's been transformed into a painting by an evil witch. When Kirby pursues her through a magical portal, he winds up in another world, and the witch's magic transforms him into a helpless pink ball.

The entirety of the game is played out on the touchscreen. Using the witch's Magical Paintbrush (read: the stylus), your job is to protect Kirby by drawing on the screen. You can sketch out short-lived colored lines, which'll turn Kirby around, create short-lived bridges, or protect him from enemy fire. You can also tap enemies to stun them, or press on Kirby to let him use one of his trademark captured abilities.

A given level in *Canvas Curse* sees Kirby rolling through countless dangers, and your job is to figure out how to keep Kirby safe. The dangers at hand are the usual assortment of perils for a modern platformer—high winds, flame jets, spiked tunnels, fragile ceilings, powerful fans, lava, giant fish, etc.—but you're not dealing with them the way that you usually would.

The addition of the stylus forces you to think in a whole new way, and lends itself to some amazing and genuinely innovative level design. *Canvas Curse* starts you off slowly, but by the time you reach the fourth world or so, you'll be amazed at the sheer length and breadth of each gauntlet you have to pass through.

The boss fights are amazing, too. You'll be facing off against a selection of past Kirby villains, but the new format allows you to take them on in new ways. One boss fight is a race, where you drag Kirby up and down to grab the foods that'll accelerate him past King Dedede; another battle is a block-smasher minigame like *Breakout* or *Arkanoid*. HAL got an amazing amount of mileage out of this new style of gameplay, and they exploit it to its fullest.

Yeah, *Kirby: Canvas Curse* looks like the best coloring book ever, but it's surprisingly challenging, and I dare anyone out there to not have fun with it. This is one of the first really good reasons to have a Nintendo DS.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 4.25 of 5

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

Guiding a pink puffball along rainbow paths is about as cutesy as gaming can get, but *Kirby* shows how the DS's abilities can make for great gaming.

FLiPNiC
ULTIMATE PINBALL

Review by **Wanderer**

Publisher : Capcom
Developer : SCEI
Release Date : 7/13/2005
Rating : EVERYONE

Genre(s) : Pinball
Category : Fantasy
# of players : 2

Pinball video games have faded into obscurity. The highest-profile pinball games in recent memory are low-budget titles. To be fair, it's not like pinball wasn't asking for it; any genre that has *Austin Powers Pinball* in it suffers for the association.

If you go back a little further, there hasn't been a decent pinball game since *Last Gladiators* on the Saturn, and even that wasn't a patch on the TurboGrafx's *Devil's Crush*. That's what makes *Flipnic: Ultimate Pinball* so surprising. It's not so much that it's a good game, although it is; it's that somebody thought to make it at all.

Flipnic is pure fantasy pinball , with boards that could not be reproduced in reality without six billion dollars and an act of God. There's still a useable tilt button, but that's more of a nod to the game's roots than anything that would actually work.

You've got your choice of several different boards in *Flipnic*, which you can unlock as you go. Some boards are almost traditional pinball, while others couldn't be further from it. The Metallurgy game is a bizarre creation of welded steel, where your goal is to fire your ball up onto the magnetically-charged poles of the upper half of the machine. Optics tosses you into a game that's half *Breakout!* and half *Asteroids*. Other stages add controllable bumpers, mad flying saucers, mounted plasma guns on your ball, or destructible objects that the game, for reasons known only to it, calls "crab babies." If you remember the seek-and-destroy bonus boards in *Devil's Crush*, you'll be either pleased or horrified that they often make a return in *Flipnic*.

The standard one-player mode is odd, as it's mission-based. To unlock the later boards, you have to clear out a certain number of set

objectives, like hitting certain bumpers to make butterflies appear, destroying a flying saucer, or triggering Multiball. I can safely say that this mode is for pinball wizards only. I've been trying to complete the first stage for a week without much in the way of luck. It's fun, yes, but frustrating. Fortunately, there's an alternative. In the Free Play mode, you can simply explore and play eight different boards, just for the sake of racking up a score.

Flipnic is full of nice touches, though, from the awesome Game Over screens to the game's ethereal trance soundtrack. The graphics are amazing, especially for a pinball game, and the level variety's second to none.

I've got some mild problems with the game. Like I said, I'm having a hard time with the mission requirements, but you can chalk that up to how I'm not very good at this. Also, the physics are occasionally a little wonky. You rarely get any real feeling of impact or momentum with your pinball, which can be frustrating if you're trying to hit a specific target. It's something you can get used to, given time, but it gives the game a bit of a learning curve.

Flipnic may be a bit too loose and weird for hardcore pinball fans, but if you're looking for a nicely-oldschool arcade game with some great pick-up-and-play action, *Flipnic: Ultimate Pinball* is good for all ages.

Rating : 4 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5

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

The fantasy environments might make you temporarily forget how frustrating the bulk of this game is. Then you'll remember and suddenly little else matters.

Romance X
of The Three Kingdoms

Review by **Hitoshura**

Publisher : Koei
Developer : Koei
Release Date : 6/21/05
Rating : TEEN; Mild Violence, Mild Language, Use of Alcohol

Genre(s) : Strategy
Category : Historical Simulation
# of players : 1

Romance of the Three Kingdoms X (RTK X) is the tenth installment in Koei's flagship series that started out on the Nintendo Entertainment System almost seventeen years ago. Its focus lies in the historical simulation of a turbulent era in Chinese history that lasted nearly one hundred years through the turn of the third century. It's no surprise that Koei has over the years, refined, simplified, and improved on its original vision of giving players the opportunity to manage the logistic complexities of uniting a diverse and fractured land.

This game can be quite daunting to newcomers because the learning curve is more like a cliff than a hill. The tutorials swamp you with so much information in a short period of time, that a player may very well give up before even starting. If you stick with the game you'll end up finding it's a lot simpler than it looks. *RTK X* is user friendly, as all commands are easily accessible. You'll be spending a lot of your time going through these menus and Koei, realizing this, made the interface a breeze to navigate. All options in the game are context sensitive, and traveling back and forth between the cities is as easy as picking one from contextual short lists that you can edit. The one major problem with navigating in the game is in moving the cursor around the maps. The squares on the campaign map are so small, and the digital pad so inaccurate it'll take a lot longer than it should to pinpoint a target. On the political map, the cursor moves too fast with the analog stick, and is painfully slow with the digital pad.

The strategy is about micromanaging the health and stability of the

land you control. Though there is combat in the forms of pitched battles, duels, and debates, they are simplistic enough that they're accessible to anyone. Pitched battles and duels use a rock/paper/scissors design. Debates are the most interesting, as they require thoughtful prediction and planning to win. The real challenge comes from campaign battles, which have no room for error. The bulk of the playing depends on how you start out. If you start as a Vassal, expect many hours of completing tasks with intermittent battles. Advancing to higher ranks offers more responsibilities, and the privilege of ordering officers to do jobs. Playing as a Sovereign or Viceroy will offer the greatest freedom and enjoyment. A big draw is being a diplomatic spy to make friends with your enemies so you can convince them to defect.

Three Kingdoms is technically unimpressive for the eyes and ears. A player will probably wonder why the characters are so small in duels and debates. Identifying enemy from ally in pitched battles is also difficult. The music itself is repetitive, droning, and forgettable to the point that if it were at full blast you still might not be able to recognize that the noises you're hearing are supposed to be music.

RTK X ultimately is not for everyone as it's less about battle, and more about micromanagement. Serious strategists will get the most out of this game, while novice players may get tired of the lack of action for being a Vassal, or find the greater responsibilities of a Sovereign or Viceroy too difficult to manage.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
2.75 of 5

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

You'd think a game with so many widgets and sub-menus would have a lot of depth, but it doesn't. *RTK X* has little to do with strategy and everything to do with repetition.

FANTASTIC 4

Review by **Syriel**

Publisher : Activision
Developer : seven studios
Release Date : 6/28/2005
Rating : TEEN

Genre(s) : Action
Category : Comic Superhero
# of players : 1-2

When most gamers hear the name *Fantastic Four*, the first thing that comes to mind is Acclaim's horrendous PSone game. Referred to by many as the worst game ever made, the mere sight of it makes gamers cringe. Thankfully, the current take on the cosmic quartet isn't nearly as bad as its predecessor, though it does make its fair share of mistakes.

Based on the movie of the same name, *Fantastic Four* has players taking control of Mr. Fantastic, the Invisible Woman, the Human Torch and the Thing as the team races to save the world from the evil of Doctor Doom. Though it follows the basic plot of the film, the game expands on the action by introducing new opponents and environments that weren't on the big screen.

The game offers up a different set of moves and special attacks for each character, and requires players to tailor their style to the selected hero. For example, the Thing excels at melee combat, but try the same thing with the Invisible Woman and it's game over. The special powers are just as varied, giving you a reason to switch back and forth between team members, and assist moves allow an AI-controlled hero to help out the player. While certain levels will force you to use a particular hero, the majority of the game allows you to swap amongst them freely with a simple press of the D-pad.

Unfortunately, the coolest moves in the game are context-sensitive, meaning you can only execute them when the game says you can. This is indicated onscreen by a colored icon that corresponds to your hero. Move to the icon, click the action button and a minigame will pop up. Win the game and you'll

perform the move. It's interesting at first, but the repetitive nature of the minigames soon becomes apparent as you play them over and over again.

With all of this variety amongst the main characters, one would expect the fighting engine with *Fantastic Four* to have a bit of depth. Strangely, it doesn't. It feels rushed and simplistic; it's a simple matter of button mashing. The collision detection is extremely picky, requiring players to be spot on for an attack to connect. Another point of contention is range. Why is it that the elastic Mr. Fantastic has the same reach as the bulky Thing when fighting hand-to-hand? Other problems include camera and clipping issues that appear at inopportune times, as well as repetitive level design that has often you playing through the mirror image of the room you just completed.

Ultimately, *Fantastic Four* feels like a game that was rushed out the door just a little too early. The concept is great, but the execution stumbles and the end result is merely average.

Rating : 3 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
2.5 of 5

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

Like the movie, *Fantastic Four* the game doesn't live up to its potential. Derivative beat-'em-up gameplay and sub-par graphics round out this un-fantastic title.
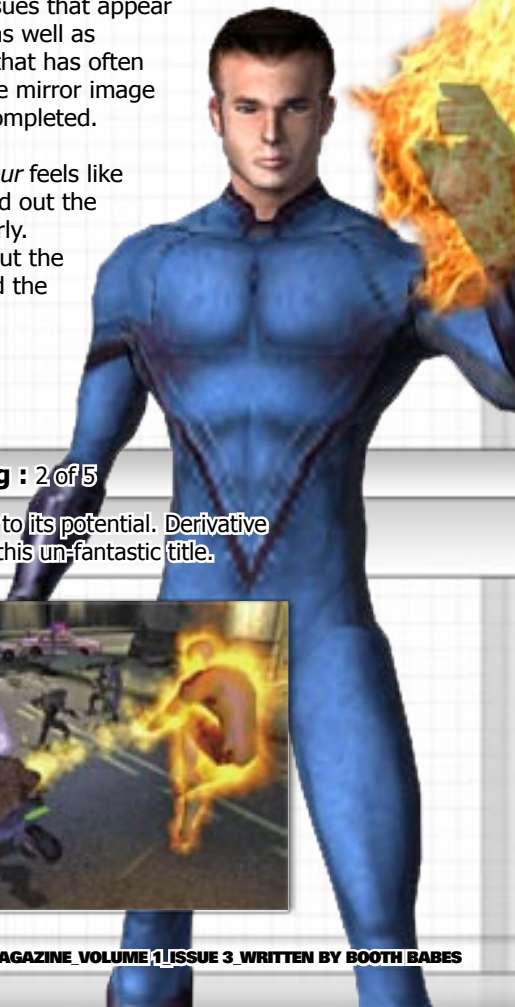
NCAA 06 FOOTBALL

TOP TEN STRATEGIES

1. Put yourself in the Game

There is no better way to feel personally invested in the outcome of a game when you're actually in there laying down big plays on "O" or breaking big plays on "D". Create yourself as a player/prospect and hit the field with your team. Intense gridiron action happens when your buddy's got himself on the opposing team!

2. Sprint/Don't Sprint

There is a serious tradeoff between speed and maneuverability. If you're running full speed down the field it's difficult to turn corners. Don't just jam on the sprint button and keep it down. When moving through a lot of traffic lay off the speed and focus on getting through with jukes, spins, hurdles and straight-arms. When you're out in the open going for green, then hit the gas!

3. Know the Plays

Good play calling skills set the amateurs apart from the pros. Study your playbook often to become familiar with its ins and outs. Memorizing your playbook is no easy task but take the time to look at each play and track the routes of each player to know what their responsibilities are.

4. Run, Pass or Execute the Option?

Generally, most teams favor a mix of high percentage running and passing plays on first and second downs. On third, bring in the deep passing plays if necessary. If you've got a QB with high awareness let the CPU control him and run a triple option play—you may be pleasantly surprised at the results. Study the why's and when's of play calling to really excel on the field.

5. Funky Chicken

As a ball carrier, you don't want to waste too much energy on funky dance moves down the field—that just gets you clobbered and potentially injured. Save the jukes, spins, etc. for when they are required and appropriate.

6. Scramble!

Athletic scrambling QBs are dangerous weapons! If you have one, use him to the fullest extent. Most QBs prefer to stay in the protection of the pocket but when one of them takes off on his own, the defense can be caught completely off guard. This often leads to nothing but green between the QB and the end zone.

7. Spies

Spies are the best counter to scrambling QBs. Several members of the defensive line can be set up as spies, including your linebackers and defensive ends. They are marked in the play calling screens by blue icons, or on the field surrounded by a blue circle. They track the QB or alternate ball carrier to the point he crosses the LOS.
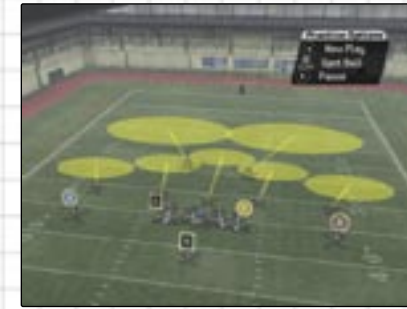
8. Mismatch

Use the match up stick often to pick apart your opponents' weaknesses. Look for players that are either really bad or having composure issues and push your plays in their direction for higher chance of success. Exploiting mismatches is a sure way to keep the pigskin moving downfield.

9. Use Audibles

Always be prepared to change your plays at the Line of Scrimmage using audibles. Inevitably your opponent will throw something unexpected at you—and this is the way to combat it. Quick changes on the fly can make or break a play wide open.

10. Misdirection

Misdirection is tied in to many other gameplay elements including play calling, man in motion, audibles, play flipping, and triple options. The point is to keep the defense on their toes by throwing a devious mix of strategies into your game. Definitely don't use the same tactic twice in a row, unless you're confidant that it will work.

Bonus Tip: Play the Crowd

Don't underestimate the effects of home field advantage; crowd noise is often enough to seriously damage the visiting team's composure. Freshmen are particularly susceptible to these effects; seniors, not so much. Watch for rattled players and use their weakness against them to help complete plays. Mash that button to pump up the crowd, keep the stadium pulse meter in the red and watch your opponents fall into chaos when they can't even call their own plays at the line due to the noise.

DRAGON BALL GT TRANSFORMATION

TOP TEN STRATEGIES

1. Power Up!

Not juiced enough to take on a particular level? If not, keep in mind that you can go back and redo levels you've already played to score additional upgrades to your abilities. The next time you tackle a tougher sequence, you can blow right past it.

2. Giru: Kills Bots Dead

Getting swarmed by baddies (especially those evil little minibots) and can't seem to fight your way out? Keep in mind that, in these cases, Pan and Giro have the best combo attack in the game (A+B) and can do some swing 'dancing' around the screen, learing out nearly everything in their path lickety-split.

3. Tag Team

Remember: if one of your team is getting hammered, you can always tag another in to prevent that character from being eliminated. Also, if you save them, they'll be replenished once the locale shifts in a given level.
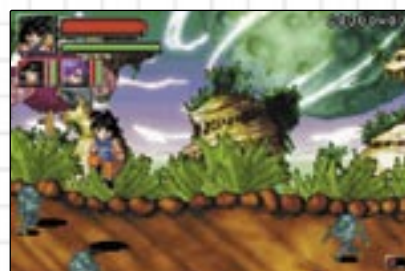
4. Houdini Meets Goku

Trapped in a corner? Remember that you can jump straight up and press 'down+b' to do a diving attack that will not only get you out of that corner in a hurry, but will also flatten any foes that happen to get caught by your diving attack. This will open up some breathing room and give you time to tag out if necessary.

5. Who Needs Tear Gas...

While energy blasts don't do much damage, they are excellent for performing crowd control. By repeatedly zapping foes you'll knock them down and open up some space to work with. This will also allow you to rush in and beat the bejeezus out of any foes that are just getting up after being flattened.

6. An Army of One

Keep in mind that due to the nature of how the game is played, you can tackle 4 or more foes at one time with one set of melee (hand-to-hand) attacks. For maximum efficiency you should attempt to knock down as many foes in one combo sequence as Saiyanly possible. If you do otherwise (i.e. take on foes one at a time) you're just asking for trouble.

7. Keep the Tank Topped Off

It's always a good idea to have a full energy bar as you'll never know when you'll need it to lay out some larger-than-life foe. To that end, use the aforementioned crowd control techniques to flatten your foes, then charge up your batteries with 'L' to keep Goku and friends' tanks topped off.

8. Keys to the Lock

Make sure you beat the game to begin unlocking all sorts of neat extra modes. These'll include many characters you wouldn't normally have access to, such as Uub, SS4 Vegeta, and SS4 Goku.

9. The Team Supreme

Due to how Pan and Giru function, you virtually get two fighters for the price of one. In many cases, this makes Pan the ideal characer to use during the main parts of a level, especially those that're heavily infested with enemies. Giru will act as a second, albeit uncontrollable, Z warrior.
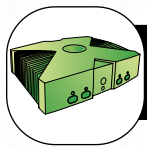
10. Kamehamehaaaaaa!!!

In addition to laying waste to any foe foolish enough to get in its way, the various Special Attack (L+B) that each character can unleash will also hold off any foes that wander into the beginning parts of its animation prior to it "going off." This way you can cut loose and not worry about being bludgeoned by an oncoming enemy.
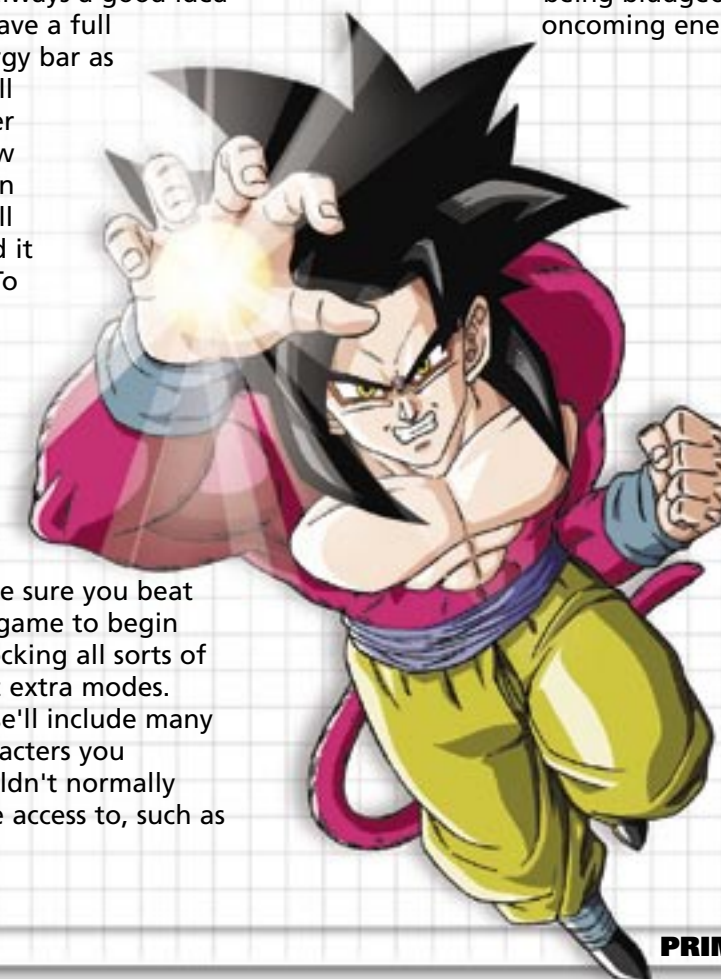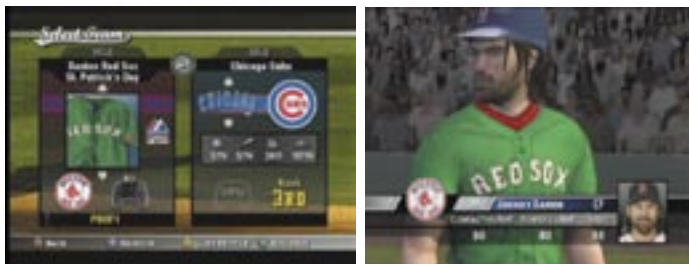
XBOX

MVP Baseball 2005

BOSTON RED SOX ST. PATRICK'S DAY JERSEY
Create a player with the name "Neverlose Sight"

Create a character with these names:

| UNLOCKABLE	NAMES
Player has a huge bat	Keegan Paterson
Player has a huge bat	Jacob Paterson
Player has a huge bat	Isaiah Paterson
Unlock Everything	Katie Roy

Narc

Enter these codes while playing do not pause the game.

UNLOCKABLE	CODE
All Drugs and $10,000	Repeatedly press L + R + click L
All Weapons	Repeatedly press L + R + click R
Infinite Ammo	Repeatedly press L + R + (Only for the weapon you have equipped.)
Invincibility	Repeatedly press L + R + A
The Refinery	Repeatedly press L + R + X

Spy vs. Spy

Go to Extras, Cheats and enter the following:

UNLOCKABLE	CODE
All Spy Attachments	DISGUISE
Invulnerability	ARMOR
Permanent Fairy	FAIRY
Unlock All Modern Maps	PROHIAS
Unlocks All Multiplayer Maps	MADMAG
Unlocks All Story Maps	ANTONIO
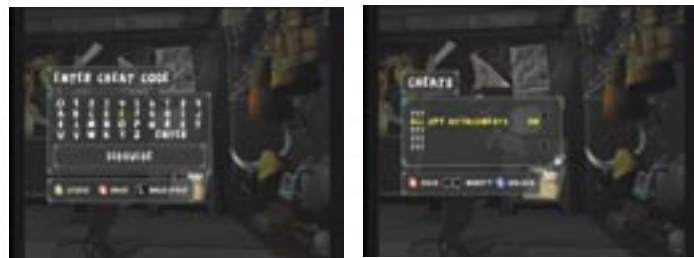
Sonic Heroes

Enter this code after you choose a level for 2 players.

UNLOCKABLE	CODE
Metal Characters	Press A + Y

Robots

Pause the game and enter these codes.

UNLOCKABLE	CODE
Give Rodney a big head	(button sequence)
Unlimited Health	(button sequence)
Unlimited Scrap	(button sequence)

MTX vs. ATV Unleashed

Enter codes in the cheat menu.

UNLOCKABLE	CODE
50cc Bikes	Minimoto
Unlock all freestyle tracks	Huckit
Unlock Everything	Toolazy
One Million Points	Brokasajoke
All Gear	Wardrobe
All Machines	Leadfoot
All Riders	Wannabe

SpongeBob SquarePants: The Movie

Pause the game, hold the Right and Left Triggers and enter the following:

UNLOCKABLE	CODE
Unlock all Health	Y Y Y Y X Y X Y
Unlock all Moves	X X Y X Y Y X X
Unlock all moves to Macho	X X Y X Y Y X Y
Unlock all Tasks	Y X Y Y X Y X X

Star Wars Episode III Revenge of the Sith

Enter these codes in the codes screen

UNLOCKABLE	CODE
All Arenas Unlocked	TANTIVEIV
All Bonus Stages Unlocked	NARSHADDAA
All Concept Art Unlocked	AAYLASECURA
All Duel Characters Unlocked	ZABRAK
All Powers & Moves Unlocked	JAINA
All Story Stages Unlocked	KORRIBAN
Infinite Force	KAIBURR
Infinite Health	XUCPHRA
Quick Health & Force Regain	BELSAVIS

Psychonauts

During gameplay, hold 7+8 and enter the codes. A "you cheated" sound will confirm correct entry.

UNLOCKABLE	CODE
9999 Ammo	(button sequence) A (button sequence) Y B
9999 Arrow Heads	A (button sequence) WHT Y X
9999 Lives	(button sequence) WHT WHT B A (button sequence)
All Items Except Dream Fluffs, Colorizer, and Psi-Ball	(button sequence) B WHT WHT (button sequence) Y
All Powers and Max Rank	(button sequence)
All PSI Powers	B B Y WHT (button sequence) Y
Invincibility	B WHT B B Y WHT B WHT
Text Changes	WHT A (button sequence) WHT WHT B

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus

In the Options Menu, select Passwords to enter any of these codes. When selecting a turtle, hold the 7 button to pick his New Nexus Outfit.

UNLOCKABLE	CODE
Challenge Code Abyss	SDSDRLD
Challenge Code Endurance	MRMDRMD
Challenge Code Fatal Blow	LRSRDRD
Challenge Code Lose Shuriken	RLMRDSL
Challenge Code Nightmare	SLSDRDL
Challenge Code Poison	DRSLLSR
Challenge Code Super Tough	RDSRMRL
Cheat Code All You Can Throw Shuriken	RSRLRSM
Cheat Code Health	DSRDMRM
Cheat Code Mighty Turtle	LSDRRDR
Cheat Code Pizza Paradise	MRLMRMR
Cheat Code Self Recovery	DRMSRLR
Cheat Code Squeaking	MLDSRDM
Cheat Code Super Defense Power	LDRMRLM
Cheat Code Super Offense Power	SDLSRLL
Cheat Code Toddling	SSSMRDD
New Nexus Outfit for Donatello	DSLRDRM
New Nexus Outfit for Leonardo	LMRMDRD
New Nexus Outfit for Michelangelo	MLMRDRM
New Nexus Outfit for Raphael	RMSRMDR
Playmates added to Bonus Materials	SRMLDDR

You've seen them. Every week, those mysterious packages full of bright, shiny new toys show up in the electronics aisle at your favorite store. The problem is, as far as most of the media is concerned, they don't exist. When you buy one of them, it's a crapshoot; it could be the best thing ever, or a tragic waste of irreplaceable materials.

Fortunately, we're here for you. Check out these reviews of some of the newer pieces of kit to find their way to the HGM offices.

NeoFlash
NeoFlash
Nintendo DS Development Tool
System: Nintendo DS
Price: **$199.99**

Review by Syriel

Features
Magic Key
512 MegaBit flash cart
Battery
USB flashing tool

There is already a strong homebrew coding community working on creating original programs for the DS. One of the challenges when authoring code is testing it. Official Nintendo developers can simply flash their games to a test cart. Homebrew coders didn't have that luxury until now.

By combining a GBA flashcart with a device known as the Magic Key, the NeoFlash gives homebrew coders a way to run their original software on the DS. It's a bit of a hack, but it does work. The Magic Key is based on the homebrew Passme device.

Due to the high price, the NeoFlash isn't meant for the casual gamer. Sure, it'll allow you to run any homebrew program out there, but that's it. Don't expect to use it to copy retail games.

Logitech
Cordless RumblePad 2
Wireless Controller
System: PC
Price: **$39.99**

Review by Syriel

Features
Dual analog sticks
12 programmable action buttons
more than 100 hours of battery life
Includes 2 AA batteries
Mac and PC compatible

Gaming on the PC has traditionally been limited to games that played well on either a keyboard and mouse or a classic joystick. However, as more and more titles become multi-platform, a control pad becomes a necessity.

Modeled after the company's PlayStation 2 controller, the RumblePad 2 will be instantly familiar to anyone who has ever picked up a PS2 controller. Installation is as simple; it works right out of the box.

For games such as *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* that got their start on the console, the RumblePad 2 is a dream. It's also great for retro/emulators.

Nyko
Charger Case
Protective Case
System: PSP
Price: **$59.99**

Review by Syriel

Features
Hard aluminum shell
Soft neoprene interior
Recharges the PSP while it is in the case

The PSP's two biggest problems are its fragile screen and short battery life, which make taking it on the road a risky proposition. After all, who wants to see their $250 toy get scratched up? Nyko's Charger Case solves both problems in an affordable and stylish way.

The Charger Case is hard plastic, with an aluminum shell and form fitted neoprene interior. Fitting snugly inside, the PSP is protected from damage at all times.

What really makes the Charger Case stand out though is the built-in battery. Seen by the PSP as an external power adapter, the battery will automatically recharge the PSP while it is stored in the case, ensuring that you are always ready to play. An included extension cord allows you to use the case as an external battery pack. Sweet.

Logic3
PSP Sound Grip
Portable Speaker System
System: PSP
Price: **$29.99**

Review by Roger Danish

Features
1W RMS (0.5+0.5W)
2 Myra speaker drivers
Class D Amplifier
Battery operated (included 2 x AA)
Pass through ports for earphones and AC adaptor
Stand for playing music and movies

This elegant, compact system produces high quality output that just about doubles the PSP's sound capacity. The attached plastic grips create enough of an extra handhold to help relieve the finger cramp that can accompany extended bouts of gameplay. The unit itself is of solid construction and feels meaty without being bulky, and while the PSP snaps firmly into place, an additional spring-attached acrylic clip fits nicely over the top of the unit for extra stability.

Overall, this is a sweet add-on for the PSP, especially at its inexpensive price point. Logic3's debut PSP products are high quality, and actually enhance the PSP experience.

Logic3
PSP Sound System
Portable Speaker System
System: PSP
Price: **$79.99**

Review by Roger Danish

Features
2.1 Sub-woofer speaker system
12 Watts RMS – 120 Watts PMPO
Runs off included AC Adaptor or Batteries (4 x AA)
Docking station for PSP re-charging
3.5mm stereo line-in

For our money, this is the gold standard for portable PSP speakers. Stacked with a solid amplifier, virtual 3D surround sound (which can be turned on and off), two neodymium dynamic tweeters and a subwoofer, the system delivers a full spectrum of pure and distinct sound with deep bass and rich tones. The sound output is strong and clear. Pop in the included AC adaptor and the decibels crank up to a level where you have to shout in order to be heard over the din—without distortion.

The 2.5" sub-woofer folds back and is used as a stand while the PSP snaps firmly into place in between the satellite speakers. The system comes with a sweet nylon carrying case that can fit the speakers, the PSP and a handful of UMDs snugly inside. Unlike Logitech's *PlayGear Amp*, the system comes with a nice long extension cable which allows you to play your PSP while connected to the speakers.

We're impressed with Logic3's first U.S. PSP products and are looking forward to their next batch.

Logitech
PlayGear Amp
Portable Speaker System
System: PSP
Price: **$59.99**

Review by Roger Danish

Features
Quad micro drivers
Custom-fit PSP cradle
Protective traveling case
Included AC adapter
1-year limited warranty

The PSP already has plenty of cool gadgets and gizmos available for it, from protective cases and battery chargers to full-on home theater-style audio equipment. The *PlayGear Amp* falls into the latter category, with a fairly inexpensive set of portable speakers modeled with a sleek, cool presentation.

Let's get this out of the way first: the *PlayGear Amp* isn't really designed to allow you to play games while using the speakers to output the audio. While the provided cord is long enough for you to hold the PSP with it attached, the speakers and display stand are definitely more for listening to MP3s or watching a movie than playing a game. That said, it's still possible to do so, just not conveniently or comfortably.

As far as sound goes, the *PlayGear Amp* delivers solid, full audio and remarkable performance for such a small set of speakers. When we compared them with similar products, the *PlayGear* outperformed many, but couldn't stand up to Logic3's similar *PSP Sound System*.

This is a cool set of portable speakers, and Logitech makes an identical white iPod version as well. If you use your PSP to listen to music at home or watch a lot of movies, then it's a recommended buy. If you have the extra $20 to spend on a nicer set, you might want to check out the competition.

namco X CAPCOM
ナムコ クロス カプコン

Import Preview by **Lynxara**

Namco x Capcom is one of those games Americans just aren't supposed to care about. Yet, every new announcement about the title generated a new wave of buzz about the game on forums around the internet, and a lot of gamers are importing for the very first time so they can play it. *Namco x Capcom* has all the craziness of a Japanese crossover game, blended with the retro joy of seeing some great old games like *Dig Dug*, *Final Fight*, and *Captain Commando* get fresh new exposure.

Since the game is really easy to play and enjoy—even if you don't speak Japanese—we here at *Hardcore Gamer* decided that it deserved a few pages in the spotlight in our magazine. We've had a lot of fun playing this game, tripping on a mixture of nostalgia and a surprisingly inventive game engine. Maybe it'll get a North American release, and maybe it won't–but either way, you'll be able to know the score with this game right now.

STORY

Ten years ago in Shibuya ward, Tokyo, a great battle took place. A shadowy organization, for unknown reasons, tried to open a gateway that connected a world not unlike our own with something else entirely. They sought to create this gateway by exploiting "ripples," tesseract-like folds forced into the fabric of the space-time continuum.

Shibuya was locked down, and the secret government organization known only as Shinra sent their agents in to try and put a stop to the experiment. Employing psychics, mystics, and powerful martial artists, Shinra has existed since time immemorial. Their goal is always to protect human civilization from the destructive influence of evil spirits, demons, tengu–all powers that would prey upon human weakness. Few are allowed to know of Shinra's existence, and the organization contin-

THE CAST

You can expect to see characters from the following games in *Namco x Capcom*. Each title will usually contributes two or three playable characters and a widely varying number of villain designs.

We have used the localized names of games that were released in the US. Along with each game we note the platform it was originally released for, and the year of release. Titles that were never localized have been denoted with an asterisk (*).

From Namco:
Namco x Capcom Original Characters
Tales of Destiny [PlayStation, 1998]
Tower of Druaga [Arcade, 1984]
Klonoa [PS1, 1998]
Tekken Series [Arcade, 1995]
*Legend of Valkyrie** [Arcade, 1989]
Soul Calibur [Arcade, 1998]
*Beraboh-man** [Arcade, 1988]
Shadowland [Arcade, 1987]
*Wonder Momo** [Arcade, 1987]
Alien Sector [Arcade, 1985]
Burning Force [Arcade, 1989]
Xenosaga Episode I [PS2, 2003]
*Genpeitoumaden** [Arcade, 1986]
Dig Dug [Arcade, 1982]

From Capcom:
Megaman Legends [PS1, 1998]
Resident Evil: Dead Aim [PS2, 2003]
Ghouls & Ghosts [Arcade, 1988]
Dino Crisis [PS1, 1999]
Strider [Arcade, 1989]
Final Fight [Arcade, 1989]
Captain Commando [Arcade, 1991]
Street Fighter series [Arcade, 1987]
Darkstalkers Series [Arcade, 1994]
Forgotten Worlds [Arcade, 1988]
Rival Schools [PS1, 1998]

WORTH IMPORTING?

So, is *Namco x Capcom* worth importing, or should you wait and hope for a localized version? This is a pretty tough question. The game is a lot of fun, but if we reviewed it right now it would probably merit a 3.5 score.

Namco x Capcom's gameplay is great, the 2D graphics are quite nice, and the game's music and voice work are absolutely superb. The game's major problem is just how long it takes to get through missions later on in the game. They can last two or three hours apiece. Since it's not a particularly challenging title, extended gameplay sessions can start to feel tedious. Still, it's worth picking up and playing if the price is right, and if you're already a big fan of one of the games in the crossover.

Normally we'd urge waiting for a localized version of a game like this, since the finer points of the game engine are easier to appreciate when you can read the menu interfaces properly. Unfortunately, we can't say our hopes for a US release of *Namco x Capcom* are high. We saw nothing of *NxC* at Namco's E3 booth this year.

While we'd love to see Namco and Capcom work out a way to get this an English-language version of this game on store shelves, you'll probably have to import if you want to play it. Importing is expensive, so you'll want to think carefully about how much you think you'd enjoy the game before you commit to buying it. You may want to play a friend's copy first if you can.

ues to fight most of its battles in the shadows.

The Shinra agents succeeded ten years ago, preventing the rival organization from successfully creating the tesseract they wanted. However, the victory was only partial, and the damage done by the battle was immense. To this day, Shibuya is uninhabitable, and long-term damage was done to the nature of our universe's space-time continuum. Shinra agents have confirmed contacts with other universes in the time since the first Incident in Shibuya. These chaotic ripples have spread across the world since the Incident, with Shibuya as the epicenter. Shinra's battle never truly ended.

Now, the year is AD 20XX. A new Incident seems ready to occur in Shibuya, something far too like what happened ten years ago. Shinra dispatches rookie agent Reiji and his more experienced partner Shao Mu to investigate the situation. Reiji lost his father ten years ago in the Incident, which also left his forehead scarred. Reiji and Shao Mu will find the beginning of an adventure that spans many worlds in Shibuya, and will begin to unravel the secret of the Incident.

THE WORLDS

The story begins in the Physical World, a world much like our own. This world, however, is one where people with amazing physical and mental abilities exist... so, really, it's a lot better than our world. Aside from Reiji and Shao Mu, the casts of *Rival Schools*, *Street Fighter*, and *Tekken* call this world home.

The Far Future is a world that the Physical World might develop into given enough time. The characters of *Xenosaga*, *Dig Dug*, *Megaman Legends*, *Alien Sector*, and *Burning Force* hail from this world.

Fantasy World is the world of RPGs and other epic stories. The casts of *Tales of Destiny*, *Tower of Druaga*, and *Klonoa* have their adventures here.

The Makai, or Underworld, is the realm of demons, ghosts, and other macabre creatures. You'll meet characters from *Darkstalkers* and *Ghouls & Ghosts* in it.

Spirit World is home to the tale of swords and souls, eternally retold. The cast from *Soul Calibur* originates here, as well as the wicked Soul Edge.

God World, the last of the realms, is the holy world that is home to the *Legend of Valkyrie* cast.

IT'S A THINKER, NOT A FIGHTER

The first thing *Namco x Capcom* probably makes you think of is titles like *Marvel vs. Capcom* and *Capcom vs SNK*. However, *Namco x Capcom* is absolutely not another 2D fighter in that tradition. Instead, it's a strategy RPG, where characters take moves based on initiative. The combat system does revolve around doing combo moves, but you input them using a single button and the D-pad when the game prompts you. You could think of the game as sort of an "action strategy RPG".

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM SEED

Volumes 1-3

Review by Lynxara

Licensed By : Bandai Entertainment
Production : Sunrise (*Cowboy Bebop, Infinite Ryvius, Gasaraki*)
ADR Production : The Ocean Group (*Hamtaro, Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade, Mobile Fighter G Gundam*)
Release Dates : V1 – 8/10/04, V2 – 10/12/04, V3 – 10/12/04
Genre(s) : Sci-Fi, Action, Teen Drama, Mecha

An avalanche of games based on this anime property is still crashing down on the US, so the time seems right to take a look at the *Mobile Suit Gundam SEED* TV series. The show originally ran in the choice 6:00 PM timeslot on TBS/MBS and became a breakthrough hit, triggering what some Japanese critics have termed "the second *Gundam* boom." *Gundam* has been a merchandising giant in Japan ever since the first series rose to mainstream popularity in the early '80s, but none of the many sequels have merited direct comparison to the franchise's original impact in the way that *SEED* has. The show was so outrageously popular that Bandai had practically no choice but to rearrange their release schedule and get it released on American shores as quickly as possible, and all things considered they did a respectable job with it.

So it must be a really good show, right? Well... yes and no. *Gundam SEED*, just like its 1979 ancestor *Mobile Suit Gundam*, suffers from some real inconsistencies in tone, writing, and production values. The story touches on classic pulp themes with a brilliance rarely seen in the *Gundam* franchise, but also just as frequently falls into soppy sentimentality and blunt clichés. Since there's so much material on a *Gundam SEED* disc, I experienced this several times. By the end of volume 3, I was simultaneously elated and ready to punch something. I imagine this is a fairly common reaction to the series.

SEED is a show that's easy to get into and develop strong feelings about even when you know something stupid is happening onscreen. The show's storyline is aggressively modeled on that of the 1979 *Gundam* in many respects, telling the story of a young man named Kira Yamato who, through a series of tragic but highly convenient coincidences brought on by the war, becomes the pilot of a super-soldier robot that the ad copy calls Strike Gundam. Like the original series' protagonist, it turns out that Kira isn't just any young pseudo-Japanese kid in the future. He is one of the genetically enhanced humans the *SEED* world calls Coordinators, who are hated and feared by normal humans, who now call themselves Naturals. The twist on the original series premise is that Kira's enemies, a group of pilots from the Coordinator military group ZAFT, are lead by his former high school buddy Athrun Zala, and they're all piloting stolen Gundam robots with unique and marketable abilities, too. The way the conflict plays out, with its emphasis on honor, justice, and personal relationships, often feels quite a bit like reading an issue of an *X-Men* comic book.

So, for the most part, this means that a good *SEED* episode is as exhilarating and emotionally involving as... well, a good superhero comic. The mecha fights are superbly directed, emphasizing colorful bombast and dynamic action. The character sequences that detail the situation of the war, or how a given relationship is faring, are as angsty and emotional as anything you'd see on a show like *Dawson's Creek*. Unfortunately, *SEED* also has all of the same basic failings of a superhero comic. The action is very blatantly unrealistic, despite desperate attempts to make it seem somehow plausible, and the characterizations are basically caged into marketable, two-dimensional archetypes. The large ensemble cast does a lot to draw attention away from the thin characterizations, but there are still a few episodes where it's obvious the story wrote itself into a corner and had to be saved by a particularly ham-fisted turn of events. The final volume of this batch of episodes also had a very noticeable problem with spending way too much time in each episode on recapping the basic premise of the show. I can sort of understand wanting to do a lot of recap for a series with so many characters and such a detailed plot, but there's a point in volume three where a recap episode recaps things from a *prior* recap episode. It smacks of a sloppy, rushed production, and is absurdly unexcusable in such a mainstream, big-budget series.

I imagine trying to cover up *SEED*'s warts and play up the good stuff is part of why the US DVD release has so much material crammed into it. An extraordinary amount of bonus features are available on each disc, including the music video for the series's original opening theme, a nicely varied selection of trailers, textless openings and endings, and expository data profiles on the various mecha that appear in each volume of the series. Each DVD also comes with a nice insert flyer that explains some of the key terms and concepts behind *SEED*'s fairly detailed setting, most of which aren't addressed in the series proper. The only sound mix offered appears to be Dolby 2.0, but putting five episodes on each disc without noticeably sacrificing picture quality does a lot to make up for that. The menu interface is nice and intuitive, easy to navigate through while still attractive. The only big wart on the DVD release itself, actually, is the English language track. Ocean Group has turned out some fine dubs of *Gundam* series in the past, but their work with *SEED* is very clearly a sub-standard rush job. The original Japanese language track for this series is pretty lackluster to begin with, so the lack of a high-quality English track is a serious disappointment. It's frustrating, because given Ocean's usual quality levels, it's obvious that even just a few extra months of production time probably would've resulted in a vastly superior product.

If you like your anime fast-paced, intense, and emotional, *Gundam SEED* is definitely worth a try, given the sheer amount of material on each disc. While the series is far from perfect, there's certainly a reason why it's picked up such an intensely devoted fanbase and spawned so much merchandise. I can't recommend taking it very seriously, but *Gundam* is typically just as serious as it needs to be to wring a strong emotional reaction out of the audience. *SEED* is one of the most blatant iterations of that formula, but also by far one of the most entertaining.

FINAL SCORE : 3.5 of 5

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.hardcoregamermag.com** and check out the Fan Art section of our message boards. That is where you can post your arts to get them considered for this section. You may also email submissions to **fart@hardcoregamermag.com**.

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

Title : **Wanted**
Artist : **GeeLW**
Age : **Undisclosed**
Location : **Bronx, NY**

Title : **Elta**
Artist : **Matt Perlot**
Age : **23**
Location : **Boston, MA**

Title : **Darkwatch**
Artist : **rmedtx**
Age : **Undisclosed**
Location : **Undisclosed**

Title : **Kingdom Hearts Happy Time**
Artist : **Alayna**
Age : **19**
Location : **Undisclosed**

Title : **Warhawk_soldier**
Artist : **Dennis Baraba**
Age : **Undisclosed**
Location : **Downey, CA**

Title : **Bloodween**
Artist : **GeeLW**
Age : **Undisclosed**
Location : **Bronx, NY**

Title : **Tala from Darkwatch**
Artist : **Troy Kimball**
Age : **Undisclosed**
Location : **High Point, NC**

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

As the first couple of issues of Hardcore Gamer have made their way out into the world, we've had numerous people ask us: why is there a cosplay section? Aren't these people kind of... goofy? Should you really be encouraging this?

We believe these pictures speak for themselves. Enjoy these fine examples of cosplay, courtesy of Cosplay.com.

A beautiful summon.
(Shiva from FFVI)

She would be a fight worth fighting for.
(Helena from DOA2)

On the cosplay prowl.
(Beserker Rikku - FFX-2)

What's up?
(Warrior Rikku - FFX-2)

Party Mage.
(Black Mage from FFIX)

A short break from battle to pose for the camera.
(Lei Fang and Tina from DOA2)

Aeris... alive?!
(Aeris from FFVII)

So shiney! So um... tight.
(Zac from DOA2)

Photo(s) by Kyle Johnsen/Cosplay.com

Thanks for readin'

©Wolfie

©Mads

©Otherdane

Seeya next issue... HGM Staff

©Mads