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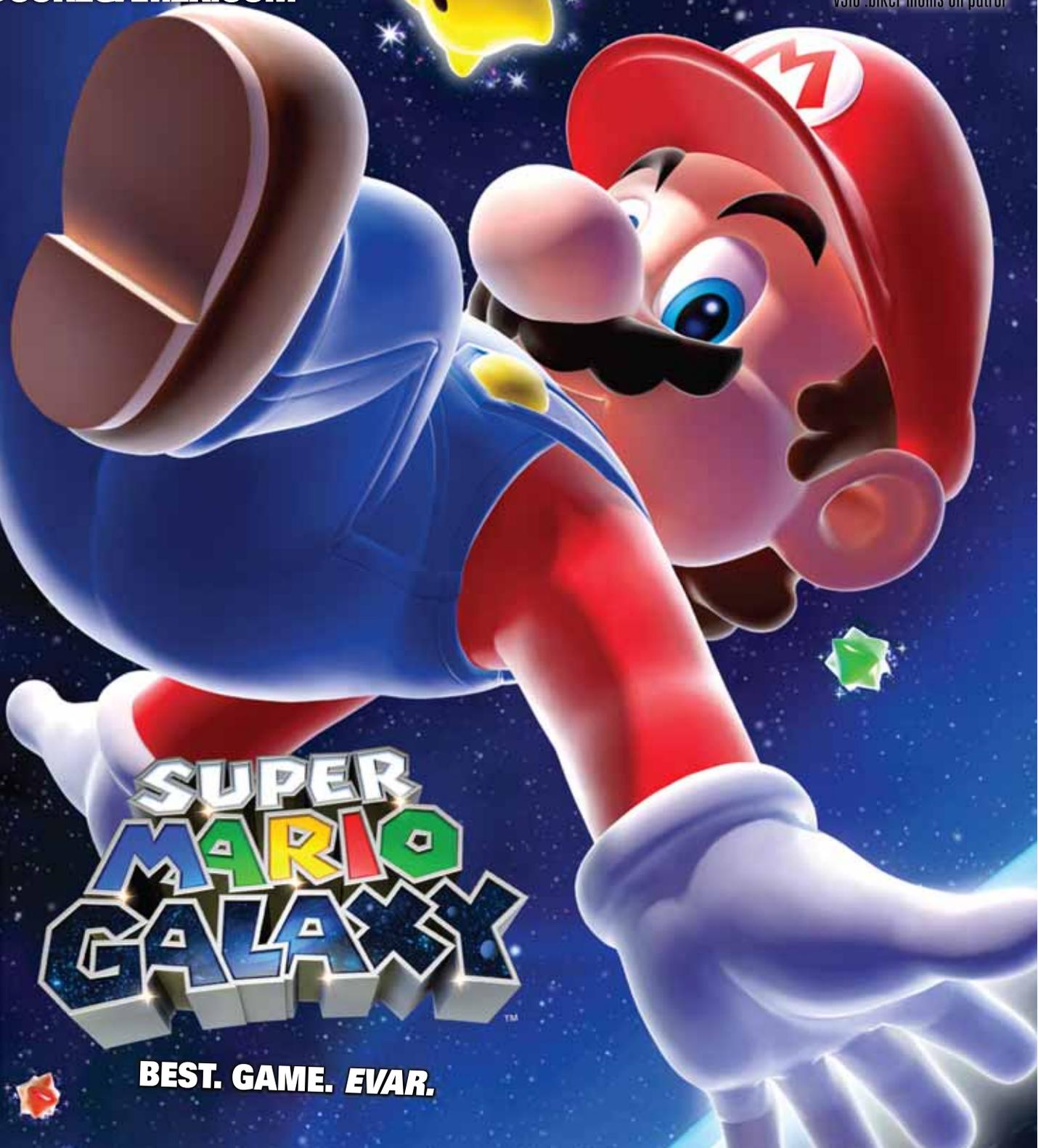
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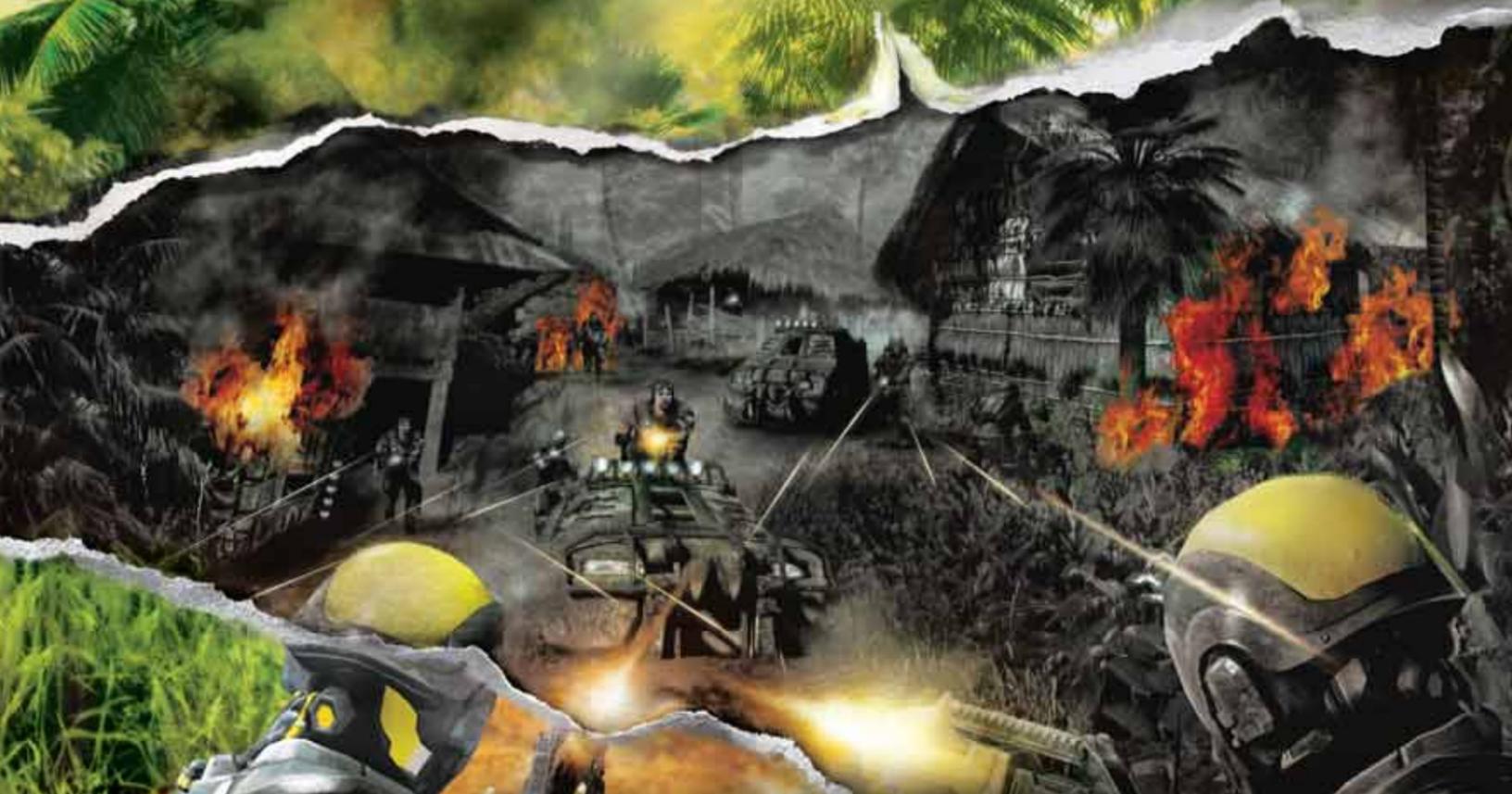
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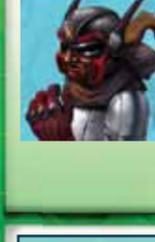
DJPubba_Tim Lindquist
 The highlight of the month (heck, the highlight of my life) was going to Nintendo and having them hand me a retail boxed copy of *Super Mario Galaxy* three weeks early to review for the cover story. That alone makes all the hard work and expense of magazing worth it.
 Now Playing: *The Orange Box* (PC), *Xari Arena* (5200), *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Miner 2049er* (TI-99/4a)



Wanderer_Thomas Wilde
 Happy New Year, everyone. Champagne for our real friends, and real pain for our sham friends.
 Now Playing: *Mass Effect*, *Folklore*, *King of Fighters NeoWave*, *World of Warcraft*



Lynxara_Alicia Ashby
 For once, it's the height of gaming season and I don't have a lot of work to do. So, of course, I'm... obsessively playing games. And buying a car, but mostly playing games.
 Now Playing: *Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker*, *Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings*, *Puzzle Quest* (XBLA), *Dracula X Chronicles*



Racewing_Geson Hatchett
 With the slow games season almost upon us, I can finally get started on catching up on all of the games I missed last year, in preparation for the 2007 Videogame Fanservice Awards! Stay tuned for more details!
 Now Playing: *Sonic Rush Adventure*, *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 3*



Daniel Kayser_Daniel Kayser
 WOW! I actually wrote something for this issue! Sweet! Been a little while, but it's nice to be "back in the game" so to speak. Happy Holidays to all our readers and of course all the staff at HGM! I hope Santa shops at EB on your behalf... (I hear he has mad store credit...)
 Now Playing: *NBA 2K8*, *Halo 3*, *CoD4*, *Mass Effect*, *Jingle Bells*



KouAidou_Elizabeth Ellis
 Yeah, I'm still working.
 Now Playing: *Revenant Wings dammit*



Dack_Steve Hannley
 Girl, tonight we're gonna make love. You know how I know, baby? Cause it's Wednesday, and Wednesday night is the night that we make love. You lean in close and say something sexy like, "I might go to bed, I've got work in the morning." I know what you're trying to say baby. You're trying to say, "Oh, yeah. It's business time."
 Now Playing: *Silent Hill Origins*, *Chex-Blaster*, *Kenna's "Make Sure They See My Face"*



Roger Danish_Greg Off
 I was jealous our very own DJ Pubba got his grubby hands on *Super Mario Galaxy* before the rest of us saps, but I'm glad to hear it turned out to be everything we hoped for and more! I can't wait to play it! In other news, I have become addicted to Yahoo! Japan auctions. That Sharp X68000 is going to be mine!
 Now Playing: *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, *The Orange Box*, *Rock Band*, *Resident Evil: Umbrella Chronicles*.



4thletter_David Brothers
 It's been a pretty raw couple of months, but you know what? I'm still standing. Even better — happy birthday to me.
 Now Playing: *Assassin's Creed* (360), *NCAA Football 2008* (360), *Dead or Alive 4*



James_James Cunningham
 I was looking through the upcoming release list the other day and was hit by a revelation: this may be the most boring Christmas season for gaming I've seen. I'm looking forward to *Rock Band*, of course, and a bit of *Galaxy*, but outside of that the super-mega titles are practically nonexistent. I can't say my wallet minds, though.
 Now Playing: *Puzzle Quest* (XBLA), *ChibiRobo: Park Patrol* (DS)



HonestGamer_Jason Venter
 I hate it when good things end just because there's no longer enough money to be made. Case in point: "King of Queens." I loved that show, and I just started tuning in about the time CBS decided to pull the plug. Oh, and Clover Studio closed for the same reasons, mostly. That was also bad.
 Now Playing: *Puzzle Quest* (Xbox Live Arcade), *Tony Hawk's Proving Ground* (Xbox 360)



Hitoshura_Iaian Ross
 I recently picked up *Etrian Odyssey* and I'm loving it. It's been far too long since I've played a first-person RPG, and even longer since I last had to make my own maps. To whoever it was that came up with the map making extension for the DS's touchscreen: THANK YOU!
 Now Playing: *FFXII: International*, *FFT: War of the Lions*, *Etrian Odyssey*



Sardius_Danny Cowan
 GameTap's pretty great, you guys.
 Now Playing: *Sam & Max: Season 1*, *Break Dance*, *The Typing of the Dead*, *Metro-Cross*, *Deus Ex*, *Shark! Shark!*, *Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars*, *Shock Troopers*, *Panzer Dragoon II Zwei* Dos 2 Two



Princess Cowboy_Abbie Heppe
 The Red Sox won the freakin' World Series and I won't be playing any game that involves a headset for a while because I have horrible laryngitis from screaming at the t.v. and arbitrarily yelling "Yankees suck!", which they do. I also have to listen to the song "Still Alive" from *Portal* at least 5 times a day.
 Now Playing: *The Orange Box* forever and ever..., *Guitar Hero 3*, *NY Times Crossword Puzzles* (DS).



Wolfie_Terry Wolfinger
 So I was wrong — the second season of *Heroes* is actually quite awful... had such high hopes too. Go back and give us another "end-of-the-world" scenario where all the characters are involved in the same story arc! Sheesh! Thank God for *Sarah Silverman* and *The Soup*. Peace out.
 Now Playing: *World of Warcraft*



Metalbolt_Anthony Mertz
 I'm absolutely addicted to tuna, but that is what happens when you're a starving student. I may die of mercury poisoning but, man, is the stuff filled with protein! How can you beat that? James Pond would be proud... or swim away in terror!



Arlieth_Thomas Shin
 So, with a new *Melty Blood* in the works, as well as *Street Fighter IV* and *SSBM*... 2008's going to be a good year for fighters. I guess I need a joystick now. Did you know I've never actually owned a joystick, ever?
 Now Playing: *Hellgate: London* (PC), *Dracula X: Rondo of Blood* (PSP)



Ashura_Brady Hartel
 By the time you read this, I'll hopefully be in a new house with a lot more room for all this crazy paraphernalia I have. Also, building an arcade cabinet. Wish me luck, people of the future!
 Now Playing: *Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness*, *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles*, and *Sonic Rush Adventure*



Jeremy_Jeremy Peeples
 I don't mind the slow gaming season coming up, because it'll just free up more time for me to play *Fire Pro Wrestling Returns*. Previous installments have kept me playing for years, and with the ability to create federations, rings, belts, and 500 wrestlers (on top of the default roster of over 300), I can see this easily getting regular play for at least five years. At \$15, it's a steal.
 Now Playing: *Fire Pro Wrestling D*, *Fire Pro Wrestling 2*, *Shenmue II*, *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*



Mads_Amadeo Garcia III
 Wow, has it been a month already? Where has the time gone? Oh, wait. Into my PSP.
 Now Playing: *Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions*



Big Wyrn_Jeb Haught
 There's no denying it, *Portal* freakin' rocks! But it looks like I may have to upgrade my PC and get a second copy of *The Orange Box* because some coding genius figured out how to make the Portal Gun available in *Half Life 2*. Oh the possibilities....
 Now playing: *The Orange Box*(Xbox 360), *Ratchet and Clank Future: Tools of Destruction*, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*



CRYING FOR AN ENGINE

Most people are familiar with Epic's Unreal Engine, Valve's Source Engine (*Half-Life 2*), or id Software's Quake Engine, but Crytek is starting to get attention from third-party developers for its new CryEngine 2, which is currently being used in its EA-published FPS, *Crysis*.

One of the most visually stunning MMOs at this year's E3 was NCSOFT's *Aion*, which showed off the flexibility of Crytek's latest creation. Jake Song, former NCSOFT founder and creator of *Lineage*, is licensing the CryEngine 2 for use in his new, unannounced MMORPG. Staying with the MMO theme, Korean developer Reloaded Studios has also signed on with Crytek to use its middleware engine for an action/strategy MMORPG.

To further show off its diverse usage, Sarasota, Fla.-based Ringling College of Art and Design is the first educational institution to sign a license agreement with Crytek to use its latest engine for teaching purposes. The goal is to better prepare its students for working in the computer graphics industry when they graduate.



IT'S A NUMBERS GAME

Over the past few years, there have been various discussions regarding the importance of review scores and their impact on retail sales. A recent study by Electronic Entertainment Design and Research, looking at the correlation between game review scores and retail success, concluded that titles achieving scores above 90 grossed sales up to 531% more than the industry average.



Mature-rated titles, comprising 10% of all U.S. retail games examined, have the highest average scores and the highest average gross sales, despite not being offered for sale at some major retailers.

Speaking of which, Rockstar's latest controversial title, *Manhunt 2*, has been toned down to accommodate the ESRB's Mature label and should currently be available in stores. However, if you wonder what all the frenzy was about, you can import the game from the Netherlands, where its Justice Minister says that no ban on *Manhunt 2* is possible under current Dutch law.

If you're baffled by the overwhelming success of Blizzard's *World of Warcraft*, you'd better sit down. A recent study by Strategy Analytics reveals that the MMO market is rapidly expanding, and, together with digital distribution of PC and console titles, will triple from roughly \$4 billion to \$12 billion by 2011, accounting for 30% of the games industry's total revenue.

GAME DELAYS

During its latest quarterly financial results conference call, Take-Two executives revealed that *L.A. Noire* and *Beaterator* have both been delayed and will most likely not be released before November 2008.

Although several online retailers, including GameStop and EBGames, had already updated their respective web site product listings, Pandemic waited several weeks before confirming that its multiplatform action game *Mercenaries 2* has been delayed until early 2008 in order to give them extra time to properly polish the title.

Ubisoft has revealed its holiday lineup, with titles ranging from *Haze* to *Nitrobike* to *Rayman Raving Rabbids 2* and *Beowulf*, but the list revealed that its WWII FPS, *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*, has been pushed back to January-March 2008. The schedule also indicated that while the PS3 and Xbox 360 editions of *Assassin's Creed* are still on track for the holidays (November), the PC version has been delayed until early 2008.

Perpetual Entertainment's MMO, *Gods & Heroes: Rome Rising*, has once again been delayed, and its launch is now set for early 2008. The title was originally planned for an early 2007 release and then pushed back until summer after a round of layoffs. Perpetual decided to trim down the development team by another thirty to forty employees, claiming the game content is complete, and the scaling down of the team is a normal course of events as the title nears its final stages.

Lighthouse Interactive's adventure game *Belief & Betrayal* was originally scheduled for later this year, but the Dutch publisher decided that the game needed more refinement and has moved its release to Q1 2008.



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Once every few days or so, for the entire month of October, these Weapons will appear along with their Unique ID #'s. One may appear on the *Hardcore Gamer* message boards, another may appear in the PDF version of our magazine that is only available online for download, and others may appear only in a hard copy of *Hardcore Gamer Magazine*, (like this one), who knows? We're just silly like that... Now, get outta here and get to Huntin'!!!



Who thought a game as irrepressibly cute as *Little Big Planet* would be the one I'd say is worth the price of the PS3 alone? Its bean bags! In costumes! And it's utterly charming.

Pre-made levels and time trials are just a small component of *LBP's* potential. As you collect "sponge", the game's currency, throughout levels, you can then spend it to build new objects and create your own worlds for other players. The physics engine is more than impressive, and the many types of surfaces in the game all react realistically, mimicking their real-world counterparts.

Any of the quirky, mostly household (or some conglomeration thereof) objects in the game can be grabbed, pushed or jumped on by the Sack Boy (or Girl) characters to complete puzzles and progress. It's the sort of game that could appeal to any sort of gamer, but if you feel it's too cutesy for you: one, it is in fact baby-panda-bear-sneezing adorable enough to win over the hardest of hearts, and two, you can always execute a little flick of the analog stick to slap other players around.

I'm particularly delighted by the amount of customization available in the game. There are the level-building tools, but also the stickers that can be placed around levels, the copious disguises for the characters and an option to select your emotion. Before I feel too compelled to make a terrible "sad sack" pun, I'll mention that the "Pop It" customization menus are simple to navigate, though extensive, and are brought up with just the touch of a button.

While I could have fun playing alone, the four player co-op mode feels like the way to get the most out of *LBP*. Even if your teammates are frustratingly inept, it means more people to slap around. I'm just hoping a few of my friends get a PS3 for the holidays....



Preview by Princess Cowboy

PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SCEA • GENRE: PUZZLE SOLVING PLATFORMER
CATEGORY: UNIQUE&UN-DISLIKABLE • RELEASE DATE: Q1 2008 • # PLAYERS: 1-4

Little Big Planet

The Lines Are Drawn...

Three years ago, Queen Elincia of Crimea won the war against the Mad King Ashnard of Daein, but the Crimean knights, led by Geoffrey, must quell unrest within Crimea's own borders. Ike and the Greil Mercenaries, meanwhile, find themselves facing an old threat.



The laguz tribes unite to seek justice for a crime long unpunished. They are led by Skrimir, an untested general and heir to the throne of Gallia. Can he tame his thirst for battle long enough to see his troops to victory and peace, or will his rage lead all nations to the brink of ruin?



Dheginsea, king of Goldoa, warns that the chaos of war may threaten the land's covenant with an ancient god. He struggles to hold his nation to its pledge of neutrality even as the events surrounding him lead the world to the brink of ruin.



Tibarn and Naesala put aside their differences to lead their clans to war. The raven king, however, carries a secret burden that may cause their alliance to crumble—and seal the fate of their cause.



...But Every Story Has Two Sides.

With King Ashnard's death, Daein fell under the harsh rule of the Begnion Empire. Years later, Micaiah, Sothe, and the Dawn Brigade have taken up the struggle to liberate Daein. They pin their hopes on newfound Prince Pelleas, but can this mysterious youth rally Daein to rise up against her tyrants?



Begnion's senators now rule Daein. They have given their military commanders free rein, all the while hiding their actions from the Apostle Sanaki. Beset by turmoil at home and abroad, Sanaki seems fated to be her nation's last apostle. Is Zelgius's sword enough to help her save all she holds dear?



Two Sides to Every War.

In a war fueled by chaos, who can say what is right and wrong? In a Fire Emblem first, you will play both sides of the war and judge for yourself. Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn introduces a host of new features that make it a snap to pick up and a challenge to beat.





BURNOUT PARADISE

Since its inception in 2001, *Burnout's* legacy has been forged on fast racing and violent crashes that provided visceral thrills to players. Now, Criterion is set to take the series to a new level and expand its world beyond the closed-in tracks that have previously confined it.

New to the series is a completely open, free-roaming area called Paradise City, where players can initiate a race by simply pulling up to a traffic light to challenge a rival. The ever-popular Crash mode has been revamped, and is now known as Showtime mode. Instead of being confined to a certain area for high-damage crashes, they can be done anywhere in the game's world simply by pressing two shoulder buttons at the time of the crash, and then controlling your crash from there.

In a move that is sure to please some *Burnout* purists, traffic checking can be disabled, and players can also choose from *Burnout 1, 2, 3*, or *Revenge*-styled Burnout meters to keep the gameplay and meter style somewhat like each player's favorite *Burnout*. As a *Burnout* fan since the first entry, I'm looking forward to those features a great deal.

The new "mugshot" feature that takes a snapshot of both the player taking and executing a takedown sounds interesting as well, and the open-ended world definitely has the potential to be just what this series needs to be reinvigorated, especially after the bad taste left in the mouths of many *Dominator* players. So far, it looks like Criterion's done a masterful job at making sure their lofty concepts for *Paradise* end up working in execution, and if all goes well, next-gen racing fans will have yet another top-notch game to master.

Publisher: Electronic Arts Genre(s): Free-roaming racing
Developer: Criterion Studios Category: ...with lots of crashes
Release Date: 1/21/2008 # of Players: 1-8

Preview by JPeebles



KILLZONE 2

Publisher: SCEA Genre(s): FPS
Developer: Guerilla Games Category: Cinematic Warfare
Release Date: TBA # of Players: TBA

Preview by JPeebles

Following the events of the original *Killzone* on the PS2, this sequel is set to give the series' fans what they've sought for three years, while also harnessing the power of the PS3 in new and exciting ways. Guerilla Games is also set to remedy some of the problems of the original, including its poorly-received control scheme and poor AI. Thus far, the sequel's been praised for its new control setup, while the AI will learn as the game goes on and should challenge even the most grizzled FPS vets.

Graphics have been a key point of controversy for the game ever since an E3 2005 video was shown that was believed to be too good to be true. Now, it appears like the lofty expectations set by the video might have been met, with recent screencaps showcasing some of the most realistic and immersive shooter visuals yet. Its levels are meticulously detailed, each presently expected to take up 2 GB apiece. Character models are expected to take up as much space as one of the original game's entire levels.

Billed as a "theater of war", *Killzone 2* could very well deliver the most visually impressive and cinematic FPS experience yet. A wide variety of atmospheric lighting effects will be used to make sure that the massive levels are visually impressive and immerse the player in the action. So far, it seems like that goal has been accomplished, as the cinematic look and high level of graphical detail have been praised by those fortunate enough to have played it.

Its AI has also received praise for actually acting in an intelligent manner. Enemies will wear goggles at night to see you, for example, so they won't be standing around in the dark waiting to be shot, and will instead be trying to shoot you. So far, it seems like Guerilla Games has done an incredible job with the first next-gen entry in the series.

Hopefully it lives up to the potential it's shown so far.



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After a year or so of discussion online, *Resident Evil 5*'s protagonist has been positively identified as Chris Redfield, hero of the original game. Ten years after the "mansion incident" and the destruction of Raccoon City, Chris has been sent to Africa on a new mission.

Keiji Inafune is overseeing *Resident Evil 5*, with *Onimusha*'s Jun Takeuchi as producer. Like every *Resident Evil* game to date, *RE5* wears its cinematic inspiration on its sleeve, and this time it's been inspired by (of all things) *Black Hawk Down*.

The theme here is one of being vastly and obviously outnumbered, with surprisingly organized enemies coming at you from all directions; it's no longer a battle of attrition, with each encounter whittling away at your limited resources, but instead, it's a mad scramble for survival. Imagine the best and most memorable fights from *RE4*, turned up to eleven.

At this point, though, much of what *RE5* is going to be about is obscured by layer upon layer of rumor, spread happily by idiot fans on the IMDB. It's been said that *RE5* is a direct sequel to 2000's *Code Veronica* (which means that girl at the end of the trailer is probably Alexia Ashford), but very little is known for sure.



Preview by Wanderer

TIME CRISIS 4



PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NAMCO-BANDAI • GENRE: RAIL SHOOTER • # PLAYERS: 1-2
CATEGORY: SHOOT EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING • RELEASE DATE: 11/21/2007

Time Crisis is a series that has seen two Hawaiian-shirt-wearing frat boys unsuspectingly take down an entire terrorist organization. Although *Time Crisis 4* might not feature the same ready-for-keg-stand characters, it builds exceptionally well on the staple arcade shooting series.

Already a hit in arcades, *Time Crisis 4* is shooting its way to the PS3 in a big way. Besides featuring all the levels in its arcade incarnation, a brand new free-roaming FPS mode will make a series debut. In FPS mode, you are able to engage in combat similar to that seen in a typical first-person shooter, meaning that you can do things like change the camera angle, move while crouching and, of course, aim and move simultaneously. Enabling you to have the ability to free roam, as well as pump your foes full of lead, is the newest addition to the light gun family, the GunCon 3. Featuring two analog sticks and shoulder buttons, the GunCon 3 will be bundled with all copies of *Time Crisis 4* at launch, and be compatible with all TV models.

One of the coolest features *Time Crisis 4* boasts is the ability to switch between screens. By pointing the gun outside the screen, you are able to switch the way you are facing and take on a different set of obstacles. This new feature paves the way for some of the best boss fights *Time Crisis* has seen.

Players that have dropped quarters into the arcade version know how much fun *Time Crisis 4* is. With its constant barrage of bullets flying at you, innovative duck-and-cover system and sheer length, *Time Crisis 4* is one of the best rail shooters to be released. The PS3 version is shaping up to be impressive enough to save you many trips to the arcade, as well as numerous quarters.



Preview by Dack

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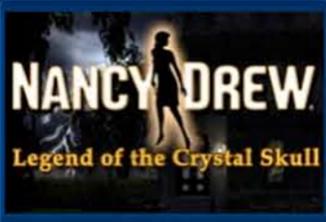
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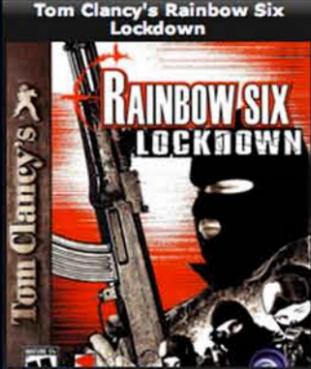
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Tomb Raider Anniversary

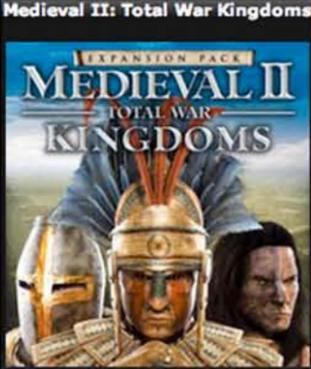
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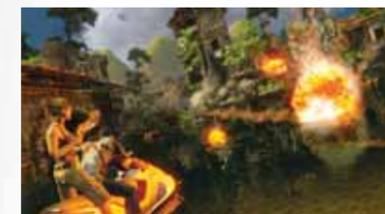
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If you played *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne*, you know that there's been one major omission from *World of Warcraft* so far: Arthas Menethil, heir to the throne of Lordaeron, wielder of the runeblade Frostmourne, and like all the worst villains in *Warcraft*, corrupted hero. He's left his undead minions running around half of Azeroth, but he himself has been taking a time-out.

Wrath of the Lich King, the second expansion for *WoW*, lets players travel to the frozen continent of Northrend on Azeroth, which is the seat of Arthas's power. As a necessary consequence, you'll also get to pick up a few dangling plot threads from pre-expansion *WoW*.

Perhaps more importantly, *Wrath* will also allow players to unlock a new playable class, the death knight. The first of the long-promised "hero classes," the death knight will begin play at a high level, and will wield a variety of necromantic abilities, such as summoning skeletons. Think "anti-paladin" and you're just about there.

In addition, *Wrath* will feature a whole new continent to explore, many new dungeons and raids, a new profession (inscription, which allows you to modify and enhance your character's abilities), and perhaps best of all, new dances and hairstyles. All of this, naturally, is leading up to a battle with the greatest threat in *WoW*'s universe: the Lich King.

Publisher: **Vivendi**
Developer: **Blizzard**
Release Date: **2008**

Genre(s): **MMORPG**
Category: **Zombies on Ice**
of Players: **Many**



Preview by Wanderer

THE WITCHER

— ROLE-PLAYING GAME —



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Preview by **Lyrcara**

Publisher: **Namco Bandai Games America** Genre(s): **Action**
 Developer: **Ganbarion** Category: **Fighty**
 Release Date: **Q1 2008** # of Players: **1-2**

Most *One Piece* games end up being some sort of straight-up 2D or 3D fighter, some better than others. While this is the obvious thing to do with just about any Shounen Jump license, it's always been a little disappointing for *One Piece*. Most of the really great things about that series don't have a lot to do with the parts where guys are punching each other in the head.

One Piece: Unlimited Adventure seems to be an attempt to take on the more adventurous side of *One Piece*. While there is a fighting game component, you have to unlock characters for it by playing through the game's main mode, a sort of action-platformer with a lot of Zelda-lite gameplay elements. Adventuring is the order of the day, and in this *One Piece* game you'll make your own items out of stuff you find, go fishing for exotic treasures, and use tools to break down barriers that block your way. Your characters can beat up all sorts of enemies and beat items out of trees and bushes, but just like the series, deep water is lethal.

The fighter and the adventure portion of the game use the same basic combat controls, which makes the fighter a bit shallow. Almost all of your attacks use combinations of the A button, Wii remote wagging, and the Nunchuk's C button for dashing. The game's real fun comes with running around in the adventure portion of the title, making items and trying to unlock new areas. Much of the movie-like plot revolves around a magic gem Luffy finds that glows in bright light and lets you open up new paths... if you've fed it enough of your items to give it energy. It's a weird mechanic, but like a lot of things about *Unlimited Adventure*, it feels perfectly *One Piece*. What more could a fan ask for?



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MX vs. ATV UNTAMED

Preview by BigMym



Publisher: THQ	Genre(s): Off-road Racing
Developer: Rainbow Studios	Category: Mud-Grubbin'
Release Date: 12/11/2007	# of Players: 1-12

Rainbow Studios' *MX* off-road series has undergone many changes throughout the years, but one thing has remained the same: every version soars high above the competition. No other developer has come close to rivaling the highly advanced physics system and realistic AI found in this series, which is why I look forward to every new version (even though I'm not an off-road racing fan). As the second iteration of their new franchise, *MX vs. ATV: Untamed* blends the mud-grubbin' racing of *MX Unleashed* with the high-flying, stunt-laden action found in *ATV: Offroad Fury* to create the ultimate offroad game!

Budding gear heads can get their hands dirty with a whopping nine different modes, which is enough to satisfy even the shortest attention span. Free Ride, National, Supercross, Freestyle, Supermoto, and Waypoint all return from the previous incarnation, with Endurocross, Minimoto, and Opencross rounding out the new modes. Endurocross puts players in a chaotic race littered with tight corners and various obstacles such as logs, rocks, spare tires, and pools of water, while Minimoto crams racers onto miniature motorcycles for a hilarious romp through the dirt. Think of circus clowns on mini-bikes and you get the idea. If motorcycles and ATVs aren't your thing, then try Opencross. This fun mode lets players race dune buggies, monster trucks, trophy trucks, and more!

When the advanced AI is no longer a challenge, it's time to face up to eleven other players online. Every single player mode is also playable online, even Free Ride! Now players from around the world can form an offroad "posse" and tear up the terrain, create their own competitions and games, or just explore the countryside. As if that isn't enough, *ATV vs. MX: Untamed* sports four addictive mini-games: Tag, Graffiti, Snake, and Section Race. Of the four, Snake is definitely my favorite. Similar to the Light Cycles found in *Tron*, players have a long, colored trail emitting from the back of their vehicle that will immediately wreck anyone who comes into contact. With up to twelve players creating their own trails, each gigantic level seems to close in on you very quickly. Additional new features include stylizing tricks in mid-air with a stunt modifier, as well as the ability to perform ground stunts that link tricks together. In addition, a new first-person cam adds an incredibly realistic feel to each race because it reacts to every bump and displays the player's appropriate body movements during tricks. While *MX vs. ATV: Untamed* may not be quite as visually detailed as Sony's *Motorstorm*, it does sport an extremely long draw distance and offers a much wider variety of game play.



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Sean Spector and Jung Suh founded GameFly in 2002 with the idea that gamers could benefit from an alternative method of distribution. Let's face it, video games are expensive, and rental outlets only offer a few games on select systems. This means that most consumers who purchase games using traditional methods have to be very selective... but what if you could play anything you wanted, and only buy the games you really liked? We recently caught up with Sean Spector to ask him a few questions about GameFly and what it has to offer the hardcore gamer.

a word with

Gamefly's

Sean Spector



HGM: First and foremost, are you into gaming?

Sean: Of course. I wouldn't be very good at my job if I wasn't.

HGM: What is your Xbox Live Gamertag?

Sean: GameFly2006

HGM: What games are you playing now?

Sean: Well, I'm in the process of moving, so my consoles are packed, but I was awake right when *Warhawk* became available for download on PS3, so I got that right away. Before I packed my Xbox 360, I was playing *Ghost Recon 2*. I finished that, and am about to start *Bioshock*. Funny enough, I went back and rented *Call of Duty 2* because I never played it and I'm very excited about *Call of Duty 4*. As for the Wii, I just started playing *Metrod Prime 3*, and am still really into *Wii Sports*.

HGM: Yeah, I love using the motion controls to play *Wii Sports* golf. That's probably why I prefer *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08* on the Wii.

Sean: I played the demo on Xbox 360, and I don't like the way you have to use the (analog) stick to swing. You can put your face on your character though.

HGM: I remember when *Perfect Dark* was supposed to be the first game with the face mapping feature, but they canceled it at the last minute because they were afraid everyone would run around with a penis on their shoulders.

Sean: Haha, well, you know someone would.

HGM: Do you play PC games much? If so, what genres?

Sean:

I do play PC games. Not as much as consoles these days. Mostly shooters, but some strategy as well. I am looking forward to EA's *Crysis*.

HGM: How did GameFly begin?

Sean: The idea was pretty simple. I was playing all night *Halo* sessions when the Xbox first came out, finished the game, and wanted more games. I got burnt out spending \$50 for games that I ended up not really liking, and the Blockbuster retail experience for renting is not very wide as far as selection goes, and not very deep. There had to be a better way to rent games. Netflix was still in its infancy, and I realized that they didn't offer games. So I did some research on why they didn't do games. The more we thought about it and worked on the model, the more we started to realize that there could be a better business for games. So we spent four months writing up the business plan and six months finding potential investors. In July of 2002 we got funded, and we shipped our first games in October of 2002. GameFly really eliminates the frustration of buying a bad game, because you can play everything from GameFly and buy it if you like it, and you're not spending \$50 or \$60. You can spend \$20 a month, sample two, three or four games, and buy the ones you really love.

HGM: Do you think that 2-4 games a month is enough to satisfy hardcore gamers?

Sean: It is enough to satisfy most gamers we talk to. Keep in mind most gamers can only afford to buy 4-6 titles a year. With GameFly, they could easily pay \$20-\$30 for the cost of those 2-4.

Of course. I wouldn't be very good at my job if I wasn't [into gaming.]

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We currently have over 5000 titles in our library, across nine videogame and handheld platforms.

purchase from them, so they just see it as additional sales.

HGM: How many copies of a game are purchased for GameFly when one is released?

Sean: The number of units we bring in for each title depends entirely on the amount of demand that's been generated by our members.

HGM: How popular are rentals of interactive games? Does the fact that GameFly doesn't offer peripheral rentals hurt interactive game rentals?

Sean: There are many interactive games that are popular, and in growing numbers, with the popularity of the Wii. For games where hardware peripherals are used, our rentals are not affected. For games where you get the peripheral with the title, we probably rent fewer.

HGM: Around how many games are currently in the GameFly library?

Sean: We currently have over 5000 titles in our library, across nine videogame and handheld platforms. We can't disclose the exact number of games that we have in total in our warehouses.

HGM: How popular are rentals of games that are at least one year old? Classics?

Sean: Older games continue to rent at GameFly. I think that is part of appeal of the service, all that variety. We have amassed the largest video game library in the U.S., probably the world.

HGM: So I can rent an oldie like *Beyond Good and Evil* from GameFly, even though new copies are no longer being printed?

Sean: Sure.

HGM: What is the procedure if the consumer scratches/damages a game disc? Any horror stories, like a game that comes back in two or more pieces?

Sean: We do our best to "buff out" scratches and damage. Of course, over the years, we've gotten games back in broken pieces --that can happen in transit. Our members are really great about using the packing material we supply to send games back to us.

HGM: Where do you see GameFly in ten years? What are plans for the future?

Sean: I see GameFly serving as many gamers as possible worldwide. We are building a great service that delivers a ton of value to all gamers whether they play a lot of video games or a little. In the future I am sure we will play a meaningful role in downloadable games, but that is a ways off from now.

HGM: Is there anything else that you want to say to our readers?

Sean: They should give GameFly a try if they have not already. They have little to risk and a lot of upside when it comes to video games.

I got burnt out spending \$50 for games that I ended up not really liking.

HGM: How much do you charge for new releases?

Sean: Usually within the first 30 days of release the games are 20-30% below retail. Prices come down as the title ages. Four months later it could be 40% below retail. It's a really great value because you get to play the game, decide if you like it, then you can go to the website and click "keep it." What's cool is that when we receive the game, we just remove the game from the case, so cases and manuals are in mint condition. Another benefit is that you already have the game so you know it works. Then we ship them out at no charge the next business day. It's a great "try before you buy."

HGM: So it's like an "inside" way to buy games at a discount?

Sean: Right, because as a gamer growing up, the only way to try a new game was to buy it. Maybe a friend had it and you could borrow it or try it out at his house, but there were very few demos at that time. At GameFly, you can try out several games a month and buy them at discounted prices if you want. It's very convenient, because you don't have to return the game to somewhere like Blockbuster, and then purchase it at full price somewhere else.

HGM: How soon after release are games available with GameFly?

Sean: Immediately. We get them the same day the public does. In fact, you can even "flag" future releases and get them sent to you the day they are released.

HGM: Do any game publishers dislike the idea of GameFly?

Sean: Not really. Every game we rent is a retail game that we

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ALL About SWAG

By Princess Cowboy

When I first started working in games journalism, I just about lost my mind poking around the office and checking out how many cool items of video game swag there are everywhere. I just about lost it the first time we got something cool for a game I love and I was told "Sure, take it." I mean, really... they just send us this stuff, and we get to keep it? The only gift I had received from a job before was office supplies, which, technically, I stole. Anyone need highlighters? If there's a game with any sort of money behind it, chances are it has a corresponding promotional goodie, and with the amount of games that come out each year, that's a lot of stuff.

My old coworker used to give her generally over-sized game shirts to Goodwill (would it kill companies to acknowledge that not all gamers are an extra large?), a charitable and apparently popular plan, as I see as many homeless people as gamers in Los Angeles wearing shirts for popular titles. On the other hand, my close friend recently donated over forty pounds of his random swag to the dumpster behind his apartment. In truth, there's only so much game swag you can acquire before your living space or office begins looking like a museum of video game advertising. When your room is a few porn mags short of looking like it belongs to a fourteen-year-old fanboy, you start to wonder if there's any value in keeping that stuff around. For all the people who sent me pictures of their *Halo 3* soda cans on Xbox Live, what landfill will that be in come next year?

Not surprisingly, there is value in keeping this stuff. eBay has shown us there is a customer looking for almost anything you're willing to sell. Now, I'd be terrified to meet the person that collects random buttons, temporary tattoos, and lanyards from E3s past, but there's legitimately cool stuff out there. So what's some of the coolest stuff to grace the offices of writers and editors?

How about a severed arm from the 3DO game *Samurai Showdown* by Crystal Dynamics? Grisly, a near perfect replica of a dismembered arm, weight, gore and all, it was perfect for office pranks. Considering the amount of gore in video games, it's only fair that some swag can be terrifying. For *Manhunt 2*, Rockstar sent anonymous letters to game offices containing a bizarre letter about escaped convicts. As I sat there confused by the seemingly random letter, two bloody hospital bracelets fell out. Call me jumpy, but really! I'm also a huge fan of stand-ups and life-sized replicas from games. Seen in *Grandma's Boy* and various game offices, the life size Snake from *Metal Gear Solid* is pretty kickass. Only, should you invest in stand ups, make sure you can readily distinguish them from an intruder in your apartment and don't scream loud enough to wake the neighbors. Sometimes you just don't expect a life-sized paper Nemesis from *Resident Evil 3* to be glaring at you from the corner of the room!



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There's other great stuff. Some lucky folks received custom *Halo 3* 360 controllers designed by Todd McFarlane, comic book artist extraordinaire. For *Super Mario Land 2*, editors received personalized greeting cards with a recording of Wario announcing the game; it was voiced by Mario/Wario/Luigi himself, Charles Martinet. That is the stuff you should never throw away. It's possibly cooler than Nintendo dropping off the not-yet-released Wii to video game offices in an armored truck. There's also a finger pointing *Phoenix Wright* stylus, undeniably cool and also, useful! Maybe it's the girl in me, but I'm a sucker for anything plush and precious... like giant stuffed cartoon-ish animal heads from Hudson's *Kororinpa Marble Mania*. There's nothing like opening a box to find the giant disembodied head of a cat and pig. It's like the *Godfather*, but adorable. *Animal Crossing* characters, well, pretty much any Nintendo character, tiny, soft and heart-warming, are the stuffed animals of nerds. There are still *Elebits* that haunt the dark recesses of my room.

For lasting value, try the web shooter sent out with an old *Spider-Man* game. A piece of synthetic plastic hung off the ceiling tile at the offices of *Tips & Tricks* Magazine for nearly eight years. It's still there, even if the magazine isn't. My personal favorite isn't even press swag; it's widely available and hugely useless for playing the actual game, but how cool is the *Resident Evil 4* chainsaw controller? Any swag relevant to playing a game, i.e. controllers, styluses, USB flash drives, is immediate gold. If only they had a give-away boyfriend, you could pretend you needed to beat the hard boss level, so it boosts his self-esteem. For the record, the E3 2006 map of the mall in *Dead Rising* was probably more useful than the map in the game, and for some reason, a swag item I feel like I should hold on to.

What does swag do, really? No doubt, we all enjoy free stuff, and more so when it's delightfully nerdy, but if it's ever changed one journalist's mind about a game, they're a poor journalist and deserve to be fired. I see it more as embracing the fact that we're all adult children who love toys and games, and things that are terribly clever. EA recently gave away *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames* hair gel, so if you see one with slicked up, worthy-of-Jack-in-*Tekken*-style hair, you know who's to blame. But despite any public criticisms about game journalists getting paid to write good reviews, we don't, and swag is really the closest we come. Game enjoyment is as selective as enjoyment in any art form; obviously, save irony, it's the reason bands like *Slipknot* can still exist, and why velvet paintings are still hung on peoples walls.

The problem with journalist swag as a marketing tactic is that very little of it sees the light of day unless it falls into the apparel category. I can't have enough messenger bags or t-shirts and I get comments almost every time I whip out my Nintendo belt buckle or wallet, although, to be fair, that inspires people to wax nostalgic for a minute, rather than head to the store to buy a Wii. In fact, it seems the only thing that wearing your gamer tag on your sleeve really accomplishes is calling attention to other gamers... and if you get to talking games, the swag has served its purpose, I guess. There's only so much swag can do. There will always be a hardcore gaming community that gives value to merchandising junk, but most of those people are likely to be up on what to buy or collect, for the same reasons I have friends with every *Star Wars* plastic figurine made on their walls. Or, for the same reason, people who had died were found to have had newspapers dating back 50 years stacked up in their apartments.



There's a lot of game merchandise available to the average gamer without resorting to eBay, or having game-writer friends, and damn, does it sell. But there is something that puts every press give-away, every special controller, limited edition whatnot and game t-shirt you can find at a Hot Topic to shame. That, friends, is Japan. It is mind-boggling and depressing to see how many nifty game tie-ins are available to every Japanese gamer. I can only imagine that for press swag, Japanese game journalists get a real, actual, Katamari, bred from Teletubbies, Playmobile characters, and packrats in a secret underground genetics testing lab. I hear that for *Ninja Gaiden 2*, they didn't get the katana stylus; they got an actual ninja. How I envy them.

Still, you wonder how much money gets appropriated to swag, especially if you need underground genetic laboratories. It's not the sort of thing companies like to share, but I like to think GameMill spent their entire budget on T-shirts that said, "You're the winner!" for the game *Big Rigs*, rather than making sure you couldn't fall through the highway, and that cops were actually chasing you when they should have been. There's no possible scenario in which I can imagine game swag sent to journalists actually affecting sales of a game... but for items available to the public, wow. Take into account that the numbers I'm about to present aren't limited to video games; they encompass all of the swag every random company puts out. Just keep in mind how huge the video game industry currently is, and how many games come with some sort of related product. In 2006, U.S. sales of swag reached \$18.6 billion. That's \$8 million dollars more than 2005.

Not only that, it's growing at a faster rate and bringing in more money than ads on the internet, cable TV, yellow pages and billboards... and practically making more money than all of them combined. You only needed to see the lines of people around the block at the few "Simpsons" movie promotion Kwik-E-Mart 7-11s around the country, waiting to buy Squishees and Duff beer, to realize that. Look, we're American and we'll buy anything. We don't even need it to be limited edition, or be encapsulated in plastic so we can pass it on to future generations, who will wonder why we left them an action figure to an obsolete game that, in their opinion, looks like crap compared to what they play on the PSWii60.

If you're reading this, you love video games as much as I do, and you see the value in collecting, or at least owning for a brief period of time, most things video game related. PR companies... don't stop making this stuff. For those of us who get it directly, or way over-bid our salaries on it on eBay, it's permanently enjoyable. Even my mother, who hates video games and joined me at a Philadelphia game convention last year, spotted a *Paperboy 2* T-shirt and waxed nostalgic over it. While the mainstream definitely doesn't accept games as art yet, games are happily accepted into the traditional niche occupied by other addictive-compulsive collector items like action figures, baseball cards, and Cabbage Patch Kids. That may not be right or fair, but it's true. Now who wants to sell me any possible swag you have for *Team Fortress 2*?



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NINTENDO DS

SQUARE ENIX

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

Review by DJPubba

The new element in this new Mario game is what you can do with the new controls — the nunchuck and wiimote. If you shake either one during a jump, Mario will spin. This spin move will give him the little extra umph he'll need to extend the distance of his other jumps, as well as serve as his alternate means of attack (the primary being jumping on top of suckers). Spinning into enemies will either stun them or dispatch them outright, depending on the enemy. The wiimote is your god hand. Point at stuff on the screen with a cursor to manipulate it — collect star bits, shoot star bits, grab certain objects, etc.

AMAZING VISUALS

These screen shots do not lie. Every inch of this game look as good as

In 1996, Nintendo re-defined a genre with *Super Mario 64* by bringing platform games into the 3rd dimension. It was a revolution in gameplay and in the eleven years since, many companies, including Nintendo themselves, have attempted to capture the magic that made *64* special. Some have succeeded, others failed. Forget about all of those. Where *64* re-defined the genre, *Galaxy* has perfected it.

PERFECT CONTROL

One of the defining elements of every Mario game is the wonderful, fluid control you have over the chubby little plumber. It's just fun to run around and jump even if you're not trying to get somewhere. Mario has a myriad of special moves that he can pull off if you know how to do them. Simply pressing the A button makes Mario jump but, as any Mario veteran knows, if you press the B button for a fraction of a second before pressing A, Mario will perform a super long jump. If you stand still, hold the B button and jump, Mario will do a high back flip. If you jump



three times consecutively in a row without slowing down, each successive jump will be higher than the last. If you run in one direction and suddenly switch directions, Mario will screech to a halt before going the other way. If you jump during that screech, he'll perform a super flip jump. If you jump into a wall, Mario will hang on as he's sliding down. If you press A while he's sliding down, he'll do a wall jump. If you're between two walls, you can jump from wall to wall all the way up. These are all the basic Mario controls that have been around since 1996.





what you see on these pages. In most games, even when the art style is beautiful and the game looks really nice, there are usually some little things that will remind you that you're not actually immersed in the game's world. The leaves in the trees will be 2D, textures will look bad up close, you'll spot some

clipping (seams), or accidentally view the inside of a 3D object thanks to a glitchy camera, gaining an unwanted look behind the wizard's curtain. That is not the case in this game. Every little detail in every level of this game looks perfect. Every object is solid and beautifully

designed. The camera never lets you see something you





shouldn't. Every object looks as good zoomed in to 500% as it does at regular size.

GENIUS LEVEL DESIGN

For the first hour or so of playing, I was a little disappointed by how easy it was. The levels were simple, the enemies were a breeze and the boss took three easy hits and was done. I was afraid the whole game would be like this (which was pretty much the case with *Super Mario Sunshine*). Fortunately, it turned out that the game was really easy at first only because I'd played the tar out of all the previous games. There was no learning curve for me. The first set of levels are designed to give people new to the series a chance to learn the basics.



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Summoning Cost—The amount of Mana needed to summon creatures to the Battle Mat.

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Attack Power—Denotes the amount of damage this creature inflicts when attacking.

CYBERCODE—Unique glyphs that enable the PLAYSTATION®Eye to summon creatures to the Battle Mat.

Element Icon—Symbolizes the creature's elemental affiliation.

Set & Rarity Icon—Designates card rarity and which card set it belongs to.

Ability Text—Describes special abilities, allied benefits, restrictions and global effects.

Tracking Icons—Markers that the PLAYSTATION®Eye tracks to determine each card's placement and orientation.

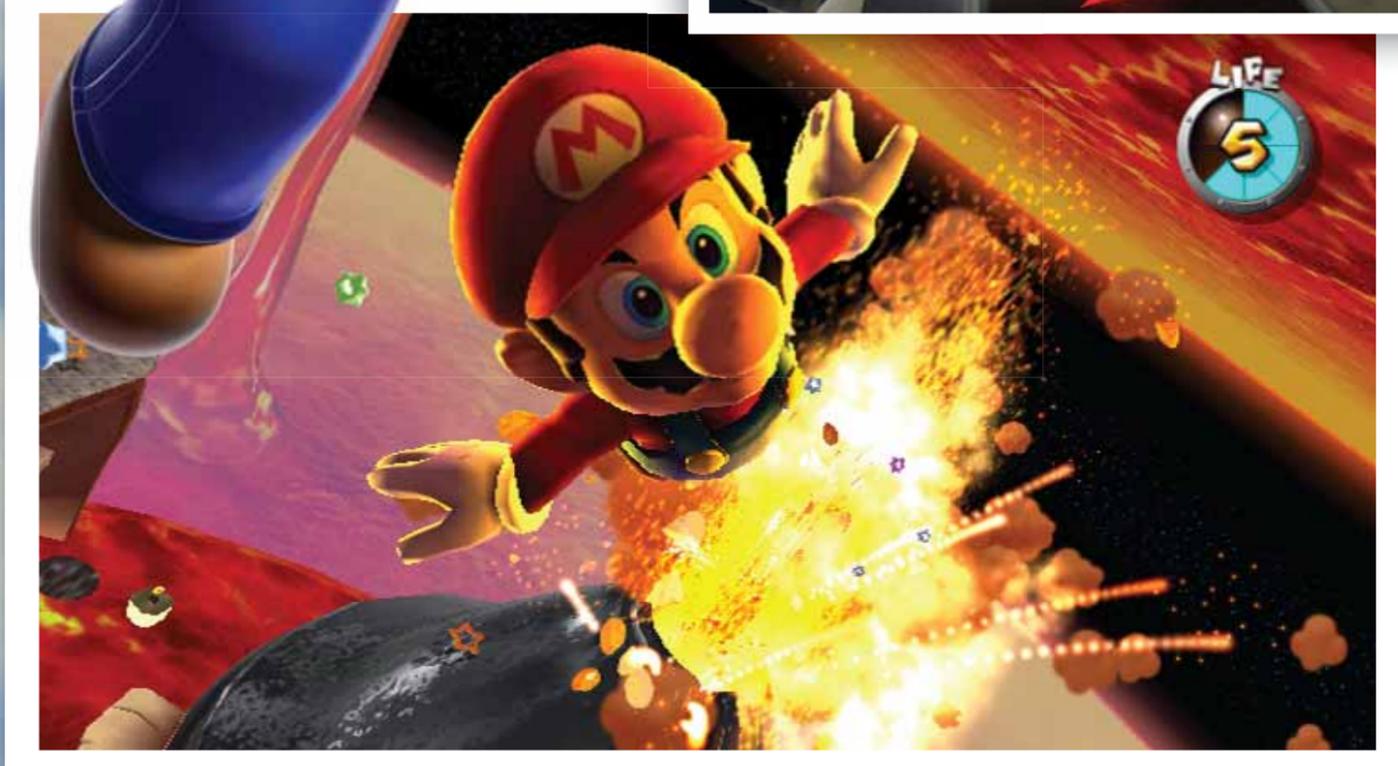
Defense Zones Icon—Displays counter-attack direction(s) and vulnerable Blind Zone(s).

Attack Zones Icon—Indicates the direction(s) of attack and affected field(s).

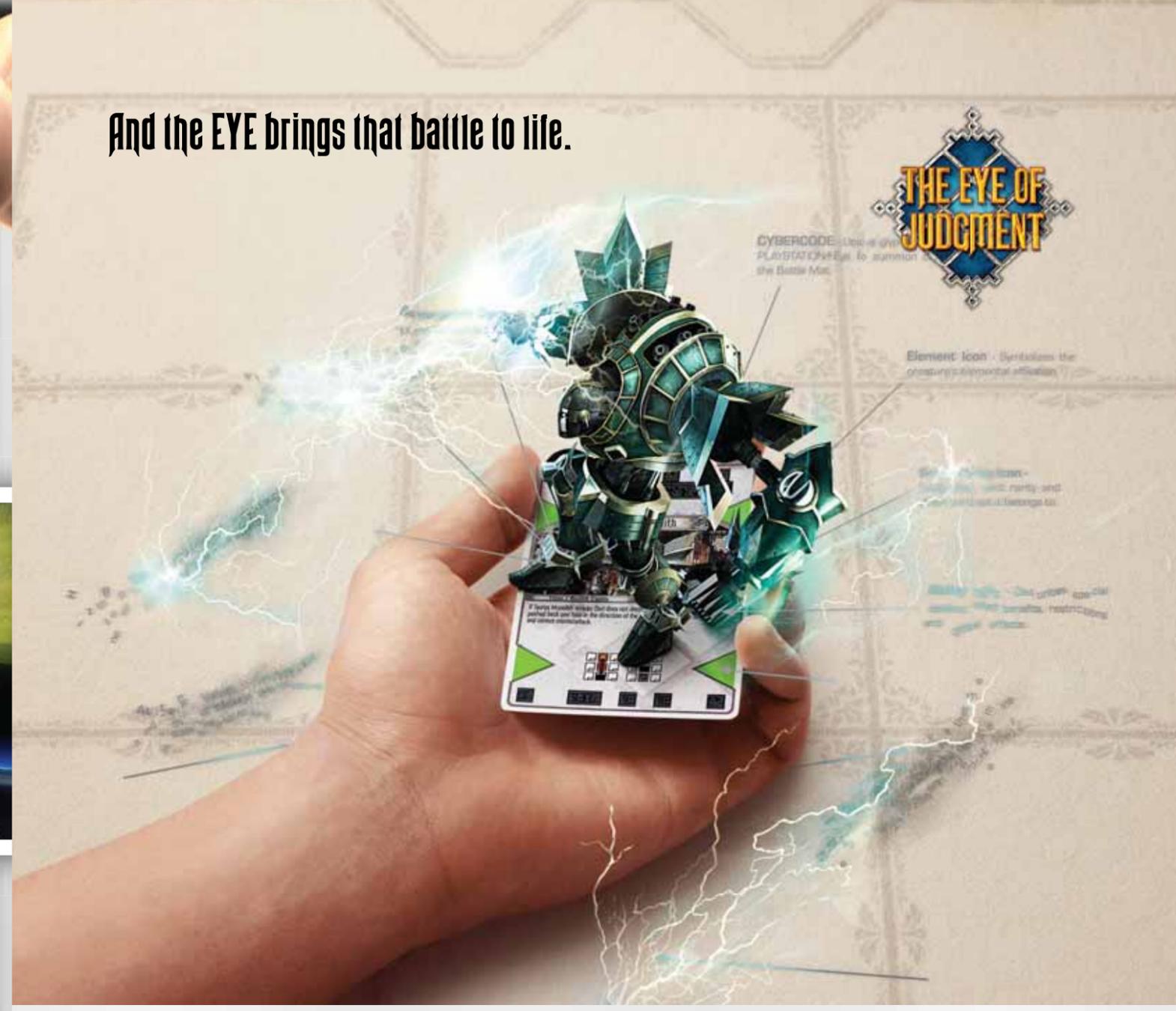


Once I was past those (which were still pretty neat), that's where things started getting really good. The genius behind the level design of this game is that the whole concept of sky = up, ground = down, is completely out the window. While this is not an entirely new idea — *Ratchet and Clank* had a bit of this going on with its gravity boots — the idea is taken to a completely new level. Gravity itself takes twists and turns you'd never imagine but somehow the game still keeps you from pressing left when you want to go right.

But that's not where the creativity stops. You'll be doing things in this game that you've never done in any game before thanks to the unique controls of the Wii. The wiimote is not



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ONLY ON
PLAYSTATION 3





where you were supposed to go next. That's the ultimate genius of the level design. Despite the expanse of the levels, I never, ever wondered where I was supposed to go next. The path is always clear. Puzzle solving in this game does not consist of scratching your head wondering what to do next, it's usually more about figuring out how to interact with the strange objects you find in the immediate vicinity.

HARDCORE GAMING

I've been a Mario nut since I played *Donkey Kong* in the arcades as a teen, so I've never had any trouble accepting the things about Mario that seem to turn off some of my "hardcore gamer" friends. There seems to be a consensus among them that Mario is weak sauce made for kiddies. *Sunshine* is

probably partly to blame for this, along with Mario's super-wholesome, cartoony look. If you're one such gamer, I'm not going to try to convince you that Mario isn't super-saturday-morning kid-friendly. If you can't get in touch with your softer side enough to handle the über-cuteness, you are probably not going to touch this game with a ten foot pole.

However, if you're down with the look or can get past it, as the case may be, the game play is all here for you. Besides some of the most incredible visuals ever seen in a video game, there are lots of very challenging levels that will satisfy the hardest of hardcore gamers. They are exactly the kind of challenges that I crave in a game — ones that reward you for your concentration and precision control. It never makes you feel you died in a cheap way, nor does it feel like you need to die over and over to memorize the sequence for success.

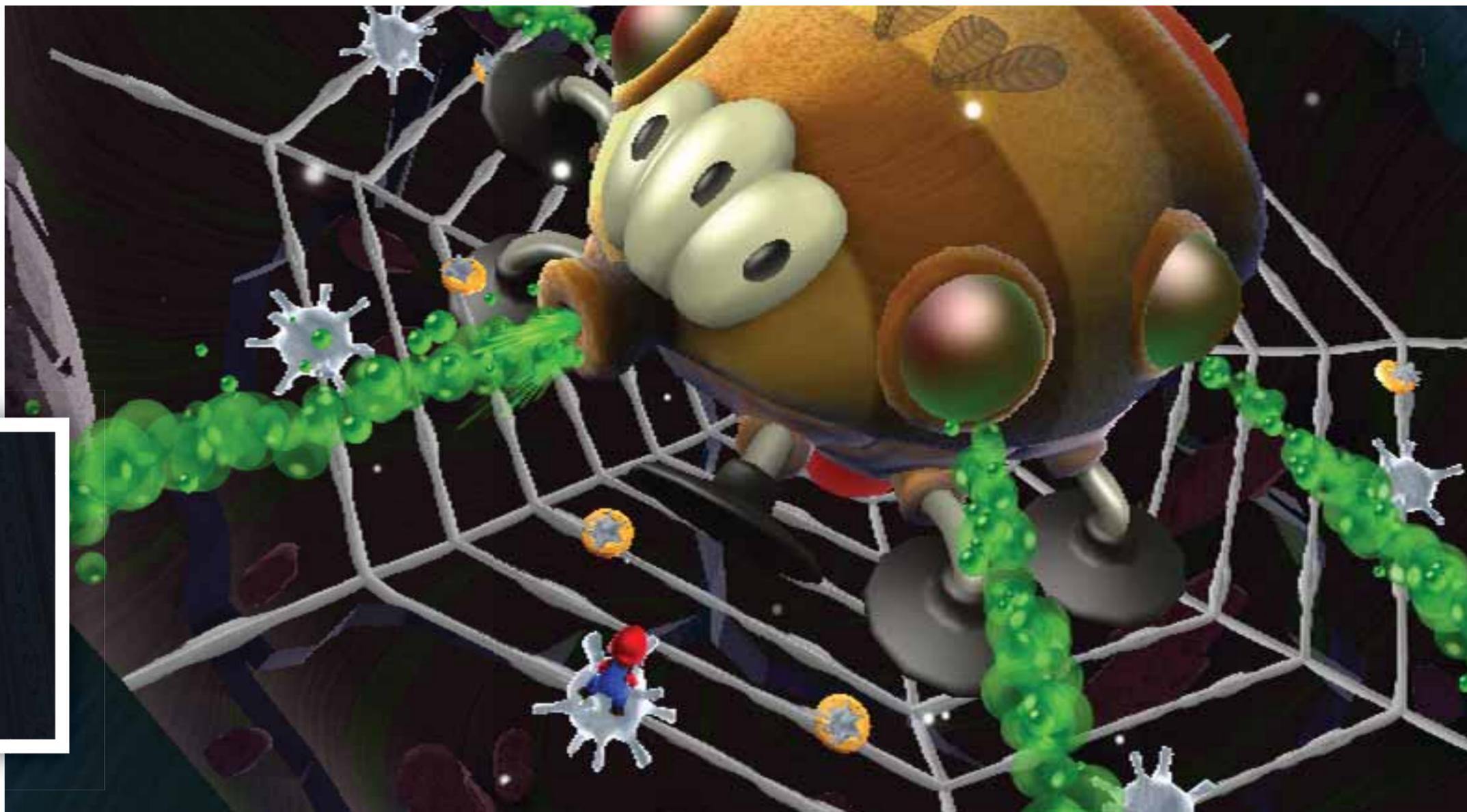
This kind of gameplay is incredibly rare and something you shouldn't miss, no matter what.

A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EXPERIENCE

What I've been experiencing since first putting this game in my Wii is the culmination of several lifetimes of game design mastery by its creators. I can hardly express the joy it brings to have lived long enough to play a game like this. Examples of genre-perfecting games are extremely rare. *Team Fortress 2* is the only other game I can think of that similarly achieves what this game does in its genre. My only complaint? I wish there was more. I played so much it was over too soon.



only used for pointing at stuff and picking it up. You'll also be grabbing ahold of objects that Mario has jumped onto and pulling them back like a slingshot (or a giant rubber chicken, if you're like me) to launch Mario toward his destination. You'll be holding the wiimote vertically and using it to guide Mario as he balances atop a ball, rolling around the level squishing goombas like you just don't care.



You'll probably notice from the screen shots that the levels look like they're comprised of tiny balls floating in space. When I first saw this, I wondered how you'd ever figure out

KEEPING  THINGS
CASUAL
 A FEATURE BY DANIEL KAYSER OF GAME TRAILERS.COM

**CASUAL GAMING
 DYMYSTIFIED**



There is a new breed of gamer, and they are nearly everywhere. You see them in the streets, on the plane, at the theatre. They're average-looking folks who probably don't know the difference between Solid Snake and Master Chief. Their mobile devices double as gateways into portable gaming, and their desktop PCs often depart from the world of spreadsheets and Power Point to venture into the lands of *Bejeweled*, *Bookworm Adventures*, and *Zuma* for hours on end. They are casual gamers, and they are here to stay. We decided to find out for ourselves what the heck people mean when they talk about the casual gaming market, whether casual gamers *really* exist, and whether anyone is actually making any money in the mobile games industry.

Where did they come from? The Sony PlayStation began the transformation, making gaming part of the entertainment mainstream for teenagers and young men. Some visionaries began wondering if just the right product would get other age and gender groups to enjoy video games. Simple games running on ubiquitous hardware like business PCs and mobile phones did the trick, luring in millions of people who would otherwise never be called gamers. They are a vast and promising new market for game developers and publishers, with no signs of slowing down.

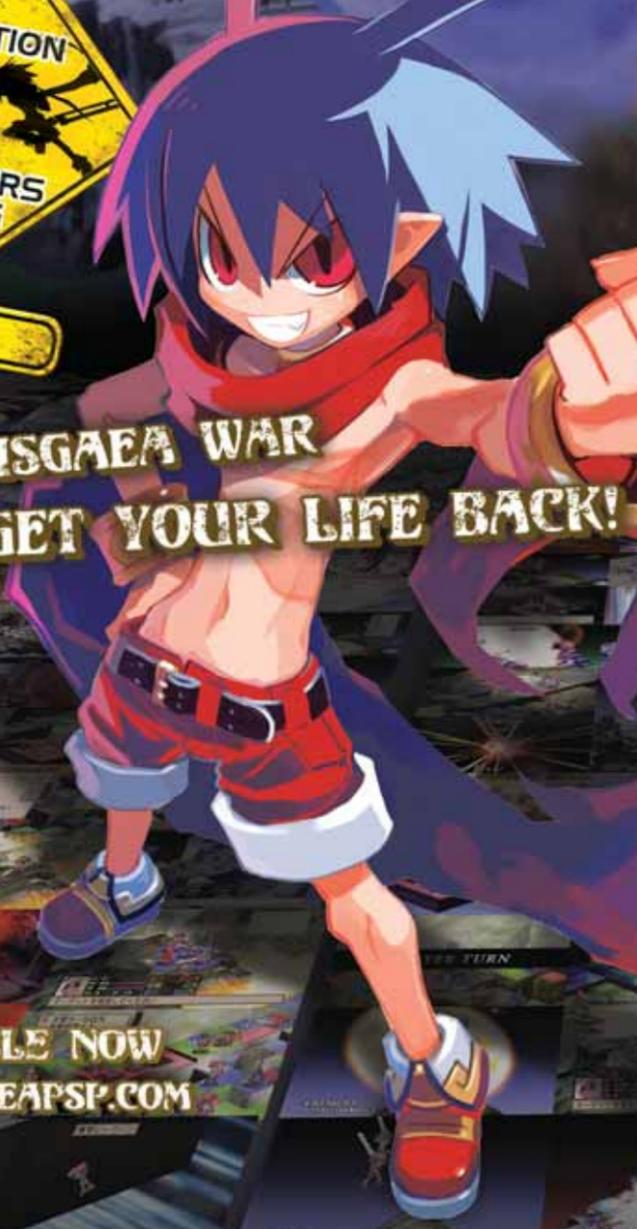
The mobile game market is one of the clearest winners in the rise of casual gaming. So, how do companies investing in the mobile market make their money, and who exactly is behind those digital walls of downloadable bliss? I found one company, California-based *GO SUB60*, which has journeyed beyond humble beginnings to fine-tune the craft of making casual games. They combine the latest innovations in technology to ensure a future for the mobile gaming market that is as progressive as it is lucrative.

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For GOSUB 60, whose products have sold over \$4 million worth at retail, it all started a few years back. After managing the production of video game titles for the PlayStation and GameCube, Josh Hartwell saw the outstanding opportunity in wireless games and recognized that great quality titles could be developed, even within the limitations of the mobile platform. In 2003, at the age of 26, the young entrepreneur started GOSUB 60 from his apartment and formed relationships with carriers via guerilla meetings at trade shows. Now veterans of the mobile industry, co-founders CEO Josh Hartwell and Lead Programmer Paul Bolten have been instrumental in bringing to market top-selling titles including *JAM-DAT Bowling*, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour® Golf 2004*, *Solitaire Deluxe*, and *Sudoku Deluxe*.

Of course, the success didn't happen overnight, but it did translate to GOSUB 60 currently being ranked in the Top 10 wireless game publishers, according to m:metrics, and the only publisher in the Top 10 without outside financial backing. And to prove that isn't only the big boys who've come to play in the mobile market, the number of GOSUB 60 game downloads, a critical aspect by which success is judged, is ranked above such industry heavyweights as THQ Wireless, Vivendi, Sony, Sega and Walt Disney. All of this as the only wireless game publisher with fewer than 10 titles on carrier decks. (By comparison, market leader EA Mobile has nearly 100). Pretty impressive!

When asked what specific challenges face the company and the mobile gaming market in general, Hartwell described the typical obstacles facing any game developer, but also noted the difficulties in actually getting products into the hands of consumers. "Not only do we have to get games to market, but we have to get them to consumers' phones," said Hartwell. "The barriers to developing a mobile game in Java are fairly small, so it takes a great deal of energy to be noticed. For a pure developer, getting those games running on 1,000 phones is really a bigger challenge than developing a game (and potentially a big headache for a publisher, if the game can't run on a lot of devices out of the gate)."

Additionally, consumer education is a key part of the game purchases in this market. A mobile game doesn't come in a box and there is no clear path to purchase. So, a consumer has to download a game from the carrier's deck, and sometimes this can take as many as 17 steps! It makes downloading from Sony's PlayStation Network look almost easy in comparison.

Despite this complexity, Hartwell has already analyzed the state of the industry and sees his company continuing to be a major player for years to come. "In the next few years, GS60 believes that the market will open up tremendously. In fact, Jupiter Research estimates that the (casual) gaming industry will generate over \$1 billion by 2008. With this growth, we believe the market will become much more segmented, and different mobile-gaming companies will begin to target different audiences. We predict the mass market user base will experience the most growth and break off into a couple of segments, mainly those who like to engage in wireless gaming for the social experience, and those who prefer to play alone. In addition, as technology and devices advance, we think the wireless market will provide a better experience for hardcore gamers who previously shunned gaming in the wireless space."

Speaking of hardcore gamers, many of you are probably wondering what the differences are between the development process of a mobile title for such games as GOSUB 60's *Bliss* and a mainstream title like *Madden*. Well, aside from the obvious points, there are two key differences. Mobile games have a shorter development time frame. One of the main differences and challenges in mobile gaming is that you are not writing for one piece of hardware. Instead, you are porting to support a variety of phones with different features. Even though a developer like EA might prepare a title like *Madden* for both the PlayStation and Xbox platforms, the intricacies in creating the same game for different mobile devices makes the process far more difficult for mobile game creators, according to developers like Hartwell.



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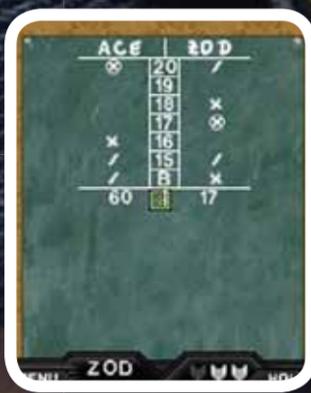
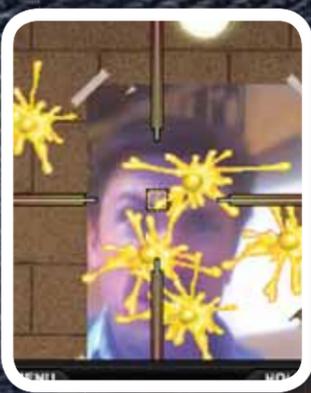
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Despite the difficulties in working with mobile hardware, there are plenty of exciting factors involved in the process. Mobile gaming has become more sophisticated, allowing for more depth in the game titles. In the past, with titles like *Blackjack Cheater*, the player simply started the game and played the game with the dealer. Now, the player has access to a full tutorial on playing Blackjack and can play in eight different casinos, each with their own house rules.

Even though some of their games contain features that would most likely be appreciated by hardcore gamers, GOSUB 60 is honest about its stance on its games and the fact that non-traditional gamers are its main audience. "Our primary audience is the mass market," said Hartwell. "Our core games attract females who are 30+. We also aim to provide hardcore gamers with an entertaining gaming experience when they're away from their PC or console. However, GS60 is not trying to replicate the console experience to the mobile phone."

This brings up an interesting point, though, regarding the fact that more hardcore or "in-depth" games have thrived in other mobile markets, particularly those of Japan and Korea. When asked about the comparisons between these markets and the U.S., Hartwell stated that: "The U.S. is a completely different market than Japan, Japan being more mature in their handheld gaming experience. But what works in Japan doesn't necessarily work in the U.S. GS60 holds the opinion that the market will become more segmented in the U.S. and there will be companies that will focus on attracting the hardcore gamer.", according to developers like Hartwell.

Perhaps it is the fact that the more "mature" mobile markets, like those found in Asia, support more community-based features and have found a way to capitalize on the "mobile, digital lifestyle" so often portrayed as the future here in the States. When considering the potential of community-based feature sets within the American mobile market, Hartwell explained that: "The jury is still out on this one. There is evidence to support the fact that multi-player games vs. single players games doesn't necessarily translate into more sales. While multi-player features certainly enhance game play, it is not yet a feature that affects game purchases."



While the jury is still out on particular sectors of the mobile market and how specifically it will grow, one thing is for sure: it continues to grow at a rapid pace. The keys to future success in the market are: to understand the audience, cater to their desires, and maximize the combination of creativity and technology. The greatest targets for education and growth are with females and young adults, and mobile companies must find innovative ways to market to these demographics and drive adoption by the "non-gamer." Smaller companies seem to have an advantage in that they have the ability to be nimble, listening and responding to customer feedback. Hartwell says his company has done just that. "We took some lessons from the success of the Nintendo Wii, a console that uses simple game mechanics such as a slender remote and simple controls to reach self-proclaimed 'non-gamers'." In developing *Hot Shot Photo Darts*, we used this same "keeping it casual" philosophy to drive adoption by incorporating the camera-phone feature, a feature already widely adopted by mobile phone users. At this stage of the game, handset makers don't design phones in order to enhance the gaming experience, so we should concentrate on using a mobile phone's fundamental features, while still achieving novelty. There is no logic or future in taking advantage of the latest feature just to take advantage of the latest feature. A casual gamer wants a consumer-friendly, entertaining gaming experience."

When it comes to casual game education and adoption, companies like GOSUB 60 have to reach untapped consumer segments with a compelling reason to begin playing games on their phone. How do they do that? Hartwell explains: "With the female audience in mind, we surveyed consumers in Los Angeles who don't consider themselves to be gamers, but who would play a mobile game for a good cause. We then developed *Bliss*, an alliance with The Breast Cancer Research Foundation, marrying mobile gaming with goodwill, where players can turn in game points for donations to breast cancer research."

Although this is a great cause, it certainly isn't the norm when it comes to the development of a specific title. For that, more traditional aspects of game development come into play. "Our focus is on quality over quantity," said Hartwell. "We have good relationships with our carrier partners because we don't inundate them with a lot of below-average game titles. While our competitors have over 100 titles, we might have only 10. As a result, the user experience with each of our games is superior to our competitors'."

Best of all, the mobile gaming market provides choice, flexibility, and the ongoing knowledge that gaming isn't just a fad, but an integrated part of our society. You can check out GOSUB 60's games by downloading it directly from your phone on the carrier deck, from www.gs60.com, or, if you're feeling more edgy, from www.blacklistedgames.com. The potential is there. The ideas are there. The casual gaming market has never experienced this much explosive growth. Let's just hope that smaller companies with a vision like GOSUB 60 continue to innovate, and provide memorable, meaningful gaming experiences for us all. Besides, even we hardcore guys enjoy keeping it casual once in a while.



REVIEWS

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HGM REVIEW GAUGE

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



MASS EFFECT

Publisher : Microsoft
Developer : BioWare
Release Date : 11/2007
Rating : Mature

Genre(s) : CRPG
Category : Space Opera
of players : 1

Preview by Wanderer

Mass Effect, more than anything else, is big. It builds a heavily politicized galactic culture in the first few hours, and then hands you a spaceship. At that point, you're on your own, free to explore a vast universe: surveying planets, digging up ruins, recklessly driving an awesome six-wheeled ATV with a tank turret on it, and blowing up zombie robots. Like most of BioWare's games, it certainly has flaws, but it more than compensates for them.

This is, in short, one of the finest examples of worldbuilding ever seen in a video game. BioWare has always had smart, funny writing in its games, but *Mass Effect* takes it to another level entirely. While a lot of the common BioWare story tropes are on full display here (i.e. a messianic plot that puts you in the role of the last best hope for the galaxy, and an alignment system that comes down to a choice between being either so morally upstanding it's nauseating or a complete jerk), they play out against a surprisingly deep backdrop of intergalactic politics, distrust, and xenophobia. There's a lot of story here, and a lot that's left to be told.

The best parts of *Mass Effect* are spent exploring this universe, using your starship to chart new worlds and chase down the scattered threads of the plot. It's the most open, nonlinear game BioWare's created to date, peopled with a large cast of fully-realized virtual actors. I don't think I'm saying too much if I call it a step forward for how games' stories are told; it trades the stiff line recitals of *Knights of the Old Republic* for something that feels that much closer to real. The only drawback to this system is that, for whatever reason, cutscenes can't be skipped, and the illusion of realistic conversation is often broken when a dialogue tree is repeatedly selected.

One of the reasons why it's frustrating is *Mass Effect's* combat engine, which is definitely the weakest part of the game. By pulling the right trigger, your characters draw their weapons and enter a combat mode that's not wildly unlike a third-person shooter. You can take cover, throw grenades, and return fire, all in real time, while using special powers from a pause menu.

The unfortunate thing is that the game is suspended awkwardly between a shooter and an RPG. Some encounters are incredibly easy, because the enemies act like they're in an RPG; they obligingly soak up punishment until you figure out a way to take them down. Some encounters, conversely, are much harder than they have to be, because you don't have the full toolset that's given to a shooter protagonist. For example, you can't effectively circle-strafe, and you don't move fast enough to sidestep incoming fire unless it's coming at you from a vast distance. It's not impossible to adapt to, as long as you're willing to abandon habits you've learned from other games, but it's also hard not to imagine a half-dozen ways in which it could be improved.

Mass Effect would've been great as a complete action-RPG in the same vein as *Knights of the Old Republic*, and it would've been amazing if BioWare had gone the whole nine yards and made it an action game. As it is, it's merely very good on several different levels, and is more or less a must-play for RPG fans. It will drive shooter fans completely up the wall, though.

Rating : 4 of 5

SECOND OPINION!

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

The combat really is the weak point of *Mass Effect*, but the rest of the game is awesome, especially for us sci-fi geeks. Besides, Ashley's really good with a sniper rifle.

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

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The Orange Box

Publisher: EA * Developer: Valve * Category: Sci-fi Mega-Bargain
Genre: First Person Shooter * Release Date: 10/9/2007
Players: 1 (TF2 = 16) * Rating: Teen-Mature

DREAMERS WANTED.



Review by Big Wym

Oh, *Half-Life 2*, how I have longed to play you in your entirety without having to suffer through constant stuttering. Without having to endure a loading screen every two minutes. Without having to spend more time tweaking my computer settings than playing through your gorgeous levels. Let's face it, you're just high maintenance. There's only one way to tell you this... I've been spending my time with a titillating new title. It's called *The Orange Box*, and while the name may seem odd, it is overflowing with enough FPS goodness to satisfy anyone, even me. We have so much in common that I feel like I've met my soul mate. I'm sorry, but you are just too demanding on my PC to make our relationship worthwhile.

Finally, console owners get to experience the entire *Half-Life 2* saga without having to load games off of several discs or tweak their PC just to get a decent framerate. The game that helped herald a new generation of gorgeous visuals and realistic, interactive physics has landed on both the Xbox 360 and the PS3 in one affordable package. And when you have finished saving the world from the dreaded Combine forces in *Half-Life 2, Episode 1* and *2* offer new chapters that build upon the original to make the experience even more enjoyable.

Sure, none of these games are new, but they were so advanced when they were made that they don't seem the slightest bit dated. In fact, my biggest problem with the game is the fact that my character sometimes gets momentarily "caught" on various environmental objects. As a result, navigating through object-laden areas in the middle of precarious gunfights can become frustrating.

Half-Life 2: Episode 2 is definitely my favorite of the three. In *Half-Life 2*, players don't get the Gravity Gun until they are about a third of the way through the adventure, but it's available from the beginning of *Episode 2*. In addition, you get to team up with other humans, as well as a magic-wielding alien, to fight the dastardly Combine. One particularly fun section lets players use the Gravity Gun

to cover long hallways by relocating sentry turrets. Deadly bugs swarm from all directions, so you have to constantly adjust each turret's location and also use conventional weapons to kill them all.

Even though the fourth game in the package, *Portal*, hasn't received nearly as much hype as the other four, it's still a fantastic title. While this trippy, cerebral puzzle game doesn't feature any killing, it will still compel you to see it through to the end. Players use a Portal gun to create magical, two-way doorways on specific surfaces that link together. Stepping into one doorway will teleport you to the other doorway, and vice versa. It doesn't matter if the portals are located on the wall, floor, or ceiling, they work just the same. Furthermore, objects can be dropped through portals, which allows for unique strategies like placing a portal over a sentry turret and dropping a cube through to knock it over. *Portal* may be short, but it's a unique experience that no gamer should miss.

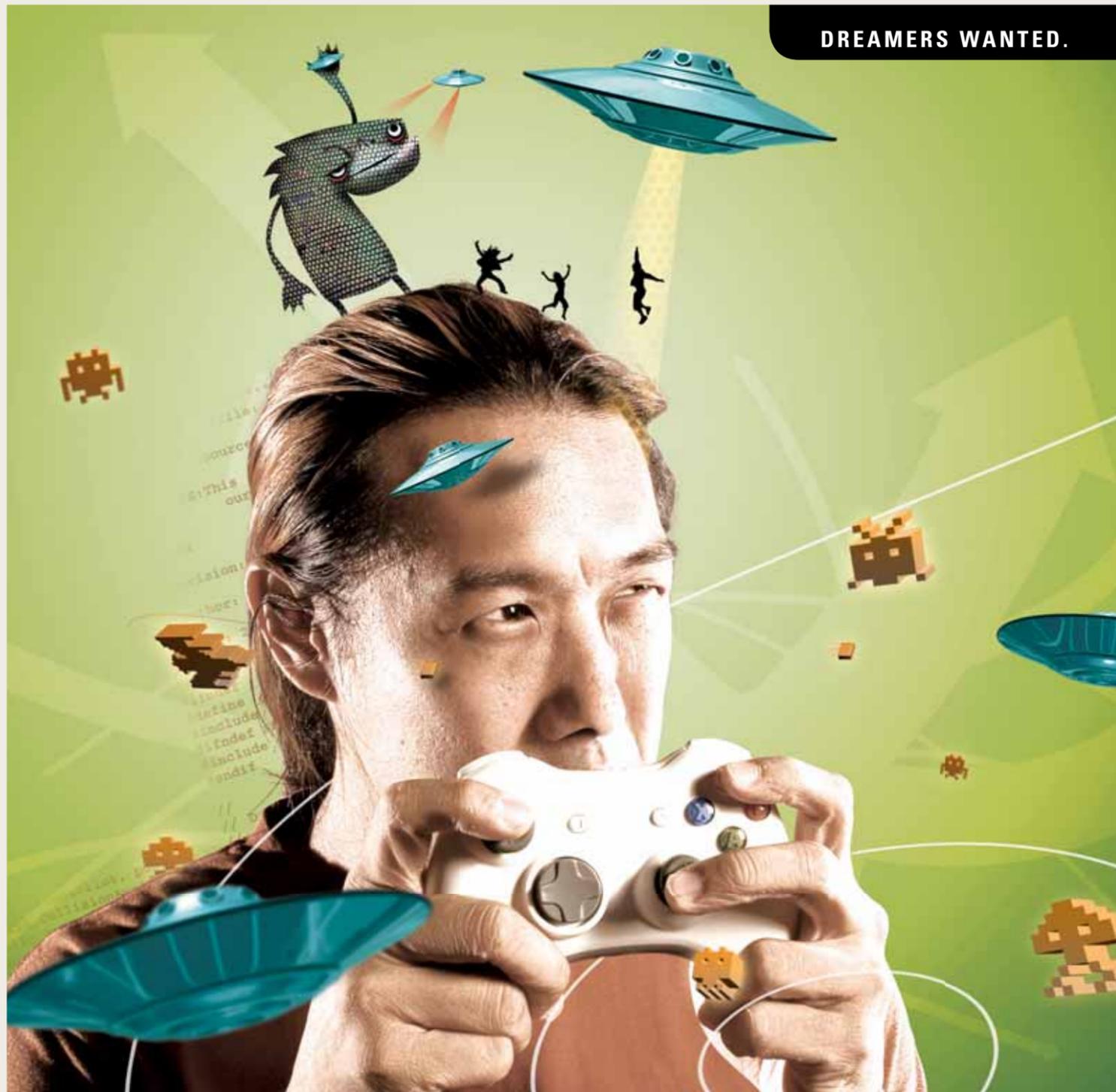
For information on *Team Fortress 2*, see the Online Gamer section of this issue.

Score: 4.5 of 5 **Second Opinion**

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

Portal is ridiculously good, but being one of five complete games is only icing on the cake. This is a pretty cool step forward in terms of packaging and content. Well done, Valve. I'm impressed.

Final Score: 4.75 of 5



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SILENT HILL ORIGINS



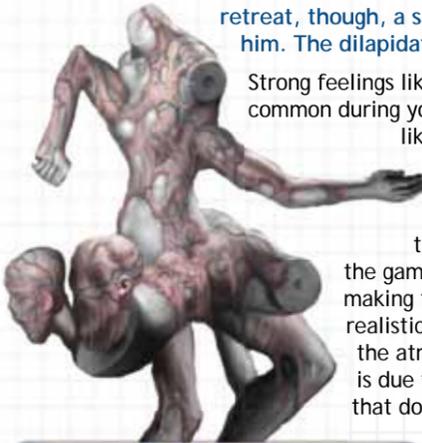
Review by **Dack**

Publisher : Konami
Developer : Climax Studios/Konami
Release Date : 11/6/2007
Rating : Mature

Genre(s) : Survival Horror
Category : Wet-your-Pants
of players : 1



Originally slated to be an adaption of the 2006 film, *Silent Hill Origins* has come quite a long way. Instead of trying to reinvent the series, fresh-to-franchise developer, Climax, decided to stick to the series roots. A better decision couldn't have been made for this portable installment. The game begins with an impressive FMV opening, but that's not the mood-defining start. The protagonist of *Silent Hill Origins* is a simple truck driver with surprisingly clean-cut looks. It's just another day on the job for Travis Grady, when suddenly a woman appears in the street. After narrowly avoiding her, Travis gets out of his truck to go check on the near-stricken female. She's nowhere to be found. The fearless trucker heads down the foggy, winding road, mood-enhanced with Akira Yamoka's beautiful yet eerie music, that makes you as a player feel uneasy yet captivated. Faced by the deserted road that affords only a few yards of visibility, Travis feels as if he should turn back. Before he can retreat, though, a sign materializes in front of him. The dilapidated sign reads Silent Hill.



Strong feelings like the ones described are common during your stay in Silent Hill. Places like hospitals, butcher shops and alleyways create feelings of panic, uneasiness and above all curiosity. Instead of using the tactics of quick-scaries, the game builds up mood throughout, making the entire experience more realistic and captivating. A big part of the atmosphere in *Silent Hill Origins* is due to the attractive graphics that don't seem as if they should

be seen on the screen of a handheld console. There's a purposely grainy look to the game that increases the feel of a decaying and vacant world, while not impairing the graphics. Camera angles are generally stationary, but can be changed, which can at times be a bit tough to handle for players not used to Survival Horror games.

Silent Hill Origins is very tough. Healing items are extremely scarce, so you can't afford to take damage unless it's a truly dire situation. Instead of this making the game annoying, though, it adds to the feeling of hopelessness the game's atmosphere is attempting to create. Fun-to-annihilate creatures from previous titles in the Silent Hill series return along side some new and spooky foes. To fight almost any enemy, you simply approach it and hit it with whatever weapon you have equipped while dodging its attack (which is generally grabbing you). Although it sounds simple, there is actually a lot of strategy needed to defeat enemies, making for quite the enjoyable experience. To make things seemingly tougher, a strange move was made to make all melee weapons break after only a few swings. So that the game doesn't suffer from the constant demise of your weapons, there is always an arsenal of weapons around you, but seemingly it would have been simpler to make weapons not break, like in prior games, instead of littering halls with them. While exploring areas, you will often need to solve a puzzle that makes make for a great diversion from exploring. Puzzle solving ranges from finding items, to triggering switches in the right order.

Lots of enemies, creepy environments, and puzzles make the *Silent Hill* series one of the top Survival Horror genres around. Not only is *Silent Hill Origins* a strong handheld effort, but also a worthy entry into the beloved series.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

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

Silent Hill Origins is a nice return to form for the series, even as it makes the leap to a portable platform. It isn't exactly flawless, but it turned out great.



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DRAGON QUEST MONSTERS-Joker



Review by Sadius

Publisher : Square Enix
Developer : Square Enix
Release Date : 11/6/2007
Rating : Everyone 10+
Genre(s) : Pokémon
Category : Except Totally Better
of players : 1-2

Fellow *Dragon Quest* fans: *Joker* is *Dragon Warrior Monsters* by way of *Dragon Quest VIII*. It's awesome. *Joker* features the same style of RPG-lite storyline and team-based combat from the earlier *Monsters* games, only everything here has been prettied up. Gone are the simple sprites and truncated English translations from the Game Boy days. In their place are detailed cel-shaded graphics and a British-tinged localization (or should I say localisation?) that will alternately surprise you with its writing quality and annoy you with its extra "u"s and improper pluralizations. Basically, if you enjoyed *Dragon Quest VIII* and the previous *Monsters* games, *Joker* offers nearly everything you could ever want in a video game, and you can feel free to stop reading this page right now. Move along!

Dragon Quest noobs can think of *Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker* as *Pokémon* without the annoying gameplay and the social stigma. You fight monsters with monsters, and you can make those monsters join you and help you fight more monsters. Like *Pokémon*, *Joker's* gameplay is based heavily in combat, and story takes a backseat to exploration and party management.

As can be expected, *Joker* is awfully grindy in places, but unlike *Pokémon's* archaic battle system, *Joker* makes combat interesting and worthwhile.

Your monsters level up fairly quickly, and rewards roll in on a regular basis, so combat rarely feels like a waste of time. Anti-random-battle activists will also be pleased to know that combat is mostly optional. Creatures can be seen wandering around the field, and combat can easily be avoided once their behaviors and



FINAL SCORE : 4.75 of 5

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

This game was amazing in Japanese, and Square-Enix's localization makes it better. You may want to pass on this one if you've sunk hundreds of hours into *Diamond* and *Pearl*, but don't make that mistake.



movement patterns are learned. Clever players can even exploit an *Earthbound*-like combat advantage at times, as sneaking up behind monsters is often rewarded with a preemptive attack.

Joker's biggest advantage over *Pokémon*, however, is in its promotion system. Instead of forcing you to evolve individual characters, *Joker* allows you to synthesize post-level-10 monsters together to create powerful mutant freaks of nature who possess most of the strengths of the creatures you fused. An early example: try synthesizing a leveled-up Dracky and a Slime, and you'll get a bubbling pile of goo that can poison monsters, shoot lightning, and heal your party. The three-man battles and shared experience points make leveling up potential pairs a breeze, and fused monsters can be further amalgamated to form even more powerful creatures. It's an addictive process that offers tons of options and stays fresh throughout, and if nothing else, it's a far cry from grinding Squirtle for hours just so it can eventually turn into a slightly different-looking turtle thing.

Pokémon's collection aspect is also severely downplayed in *Joker*, and as a result, *Joker* is able to focus on all the fun parts of *Pokémon* without having to adhere to outdated gameplay for the sake of trade-related compatibility. *Joker* may be combat-heavy, but the accommodating and startlingly non-hateful battle system makes combat something you *want* to do, rather than a process you feel obligated to perform in order to fill out a checklist.

God, I love this game. Please buy it. I want sequels.

Rating : 5 of 5

FINAL FANTASY XII REVENANT WINGS



Review by Kou Aidou

Publisher : Square-Enix
Developer : Think and Feel
Release Date : 11/20/2007
Rating : Everyone 10+
Genre(s) : RTS
Category : Final Fantasy
of players : 1



Superficially, *Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings* doesn't much resemble its predecessor. Though it features most of the same cast, there's a minimum of CGI cutscenes (and those that do appear aren't exactly spectacular), and it tells its story primarily through the use of old-school sprite graphics. With its light-hearted, colorful story about sky pirates, freedom, and friendship, it's more reminiscent of the SNES-era *Final Fantasies*, or even early PS-era games like *Grandia*. On top of that, it's not even an RPG.



Of course, in an RTS, all the system design in the world is for naught if the interface is awkward (I'm looking at you, *Heroes of Mana*). Thankfully, Think and Feel has managed to implement perfectly acceptable pathfinding AI with an interface that's one of the cleanest seen yet for an RTS on a console. While the programmers still haven't figured out how to get around unit clustering, and a way to add or subtract single units from a selection would have been nice, scrolling around the map, monitoring your troop activities, and getting them to do what you want them to do is overall a pretty intuitive affair.

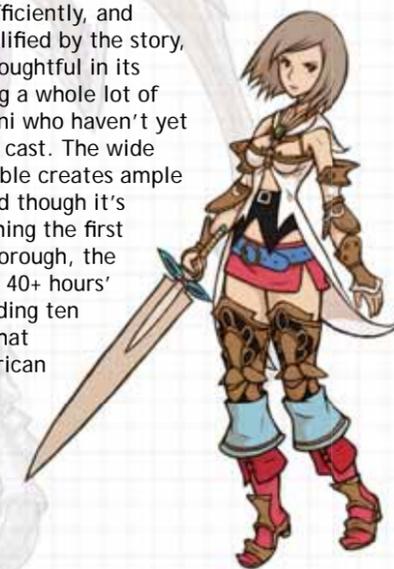
In between battles, RPG elements add further depth to the game. You can travel freely around the world map in your airship

to choose from story scenarios and a wealth of optional side missions. You can find or buy equipment to increase your Leaders' stats, materials to create new weapons, and Auracite, which you can spend to forge pacts with new Espers. While this adds some welcome flexibility to the usually rigid RTS interface, the linearity of the progress trees may seem disappointingly shallow to people who are used to modern SRPGs.

Still, all the parts of the system work together smoothly and efficiently, and they're then further amplified by the story, which is charming and thoughtful in its own right, while featuring a whole lot of fanservice for *FFXII* alumni who haven't yet had their fill of the great cast. The wide variety of missions available creates ample room for strategizing, and though it's fairly easy to find everything the first time through if you're thorough, the game still contains about 40+ hours' worth of gameplay, including ten truly difficult dungeons that are exclusive to the American release of the game.

In short: come for Balthier, stay for the solid gameplay. It's a win-win situation.

Rating : 4 of 5



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

This isn't a sophisticated take on RTS, but the controls are perfect and the mission-based gameplay is ridiculously compelling. I've been playing this non-stop for days. No sleep 'til Midnight's Deep!

FINAL SCORE : 4.25 of 5



UNIVERSE AT WAR

EARTH ASSAULT



Review by 4thletter

Publisher : Sega
Developer : Petroglyph
Release Date : 12/04/07
Rating : Teen (Mild Language, Violence)

Genre(s) : Real Time Strategy
Category : One-on-One-on-One
of players : 1-8



Universe at War is the next game out of Petroglyph, a studio noted for *Star Wars: Empire at War* and made up in part of former members of Westwood Studios. Yes, Virginia, that Westwood Studios, the ones known for the *Command & Conquer* franchise, considered by many RTS aficionados to be second only to *Warcraft* as the tops in the genre, so, yes, you could say that *Universe at War: Earth Assault* has something of an enormous legacy to live up to. Does it? Well, we reviewed the PC rev and the only proper answer to that is "Yes... and no."

Universe at War features three diverse factions. They aren't diverse in the usual RTS sense of "These guys are aliens, these guys are humans, and these guys are robots." Rather, they feature (and require) three different kinds of gameplay.



The tech-oriented Novus can build speedy mecha and use special towers to essentially teleport around the map. The invading Hierarchy's "buildings" are more like "mobile weapons platforms" in practice, with slots that can be designated to produce units or provide defense. The Masari can alter their combat modes between

light and dark, giving them healing or attack capabilities as the situation requires.

Unlike many RTS titles, resource gathering is fully automated. Once you build the appropriate structure, the units that gather the resources will be automatically created and sent on their way. The only thing you have to worry about is how quickly they gather resources, because the battles tend to come rather quickly.

It is fairly easy to get a viable army up off the ground in *Universe at War*. Like any RTS, unoriginal players can rush in with little to no strategy at work, but more intelligent gamers will soon learn that creating actual squads of units genuinely pays off here. Some of the Hero units have special squad-based bonuses or skills when they go into battle. What's better than sending an army into battle, watching them take out half the enemy before nearly dying, and then healing them all up to full health? Not much at all.

Universe at War is a good title, but it isn't without its flaws. The battlefields can feel a little same-y at times. The focus is obviously on the combat and strategy portions of the game, which leave the environs to the usual suspects. Expect to see Major City, Deserted Jungle, Ruined Dusty City, and so on. A little more variety would have been pretty nice.

As-is, though, *Universe at War* is a comfortable ride. The three factions don't make it feel like three separate games, but they do provide enough variety to keep your interest. The unit design, particularly on the part of the Hierarchy, is fairly clever and tends to eschew typical RTS stereotypes.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

2nd opinion by Roger Danish • Alternate Rating : 3.5 of 5

Sega has done an excellent job of varying gameplay between the different factions. Unfortunately, the game doesn't do much to move the genre forward, and the environments seem to lack oomph.



Beautiful Katamari



Review by Racewing

Publisher : Namco Bandai
Developer : Vicarious Visions
Release Date : 10/16/2007
Rating : Everyone (Alcohol Reference, Mild Fantasy Violence)

Genre(s) : Puzzle
Category : We Miss Takahashi
of players : 1-2 or 1-4 Online



Beautiful Katamari is the safest sequel ever. People used to say this about *God of War II*, but you know, at least *GoWIII* actually turned everything about its predecessor up to 11. *Beautiful Katamari*, on the other hand, actually dials things back.

The solar system's in danger, thanks to a tennis serve from the King of All Cosmos going awry, and it's up to the Prince and his cousins to go to Earth and roll up an enormous amount of stuff to create planets to put back into space. *Katamari* rides on such premises, and honestly, familiarity in the plot is forgivable. The fact that almost every stage objective is the same as the other is not. (Roll up a katamari, and always a katamari; gone are the days of rolling up a snowball, or fattening a sumo, or terrorizing a school.) The fact that just about every stage is the same is even less tolerable. Seriously, the final couple of stages show that an entire Earth was painstakingly created for this game; why, then, does 70% of it take place in the same nigh-lifeless little Japanese town?

The erratic difficulty curve is an extra kick in the pants. It doesn't seem as if any part of your katamari, outside of a certain radius of its bottom and top, sticks to anything else in the environment while rolling. This frequently makes picking things up an arduous one-at-a-time affair, slowing progress and turning most sessions into mad, frantic dashes when one finds out the time's almost up and they've barely completed a fourth of their objective. I'm just saying, I remember when the *entire* ball was sticky *all* of the time, not just when it wanted to be.



Well, there is some good news. The soundtrack is actually very well-done, just a slight step below the original game's. (Why, after four installments, we are still not allowed to select which music we'd like to roll to in any stage, at least the first time around, is anybody's guess. Looks like they were so busy pumping the King up with movie quotes that they forgot that little detail.) In addition, there are a couple of decent multiplayer modes, and some spiffy online features, like katamari-size leaderboards, and world stats that combine into a giant visualized katamari. The usual bells and whistles round out the package, such as collectible cousins, a neat camera mode, and the ability to pick up accessories to adorn your character.

With its budget price and most of its bizarre humor intact, you could most certainly do worse than picking up a copy of *Beautiful Katamari*. It really is hard to mess up a game about rolling, after all. Just be prepared to accept that it really doesn't bring anything new to the table. What's there, though, is decent, especially the phenomenal final two stages. If we get another unoriginal sequel like this, however, the franchise is officially dead.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

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

This is about as safe as you can play it when your game's concept is as weird as this one. If you've played any *Katamari* game, you've played this one.

FINAL SCORE : 3.25 of 5





The premise of Zack & Wiki is relatively simple. You are Zack, and you are a pirate, so you want treasure. Treasure has an unfortunate tendency to be placed behind hazards like locked doors, enemies, or fire. You are cursed with a small stature and stubby limbs, and have no video-game-hero superpowers. The best you can manage is your cute magic-monkey sidekick Wiki, who transforms into a golden bell that turns enemies into items. You can use these items, and others you find lying around in the game's levels, to try to create safe pathways to the treasure.

That's right: Zack & Wiki is an adventure game, one built around the Wii remote and graced with bright, beautifully detailed cel-shaded graphics. You use the Wii remote in mimicry of the various items you need to use in puzzle-solving. Push its buttons to play a flute, move it in circles to turn a crank, shake it to ring Wiki, or use the d-pad on it to command vehicles. By the end of the game, you will have used the Wii remote in countless bizarre ways, everything from turning it upside down to jerking it around to simulate tossing items.

Despite all of these possibilities, the controls aren't complex and literally anyone can pick up this game and figure out what to do very quickly. Much like the traditional PC adventure game, you get an onscreen cursor you direct at items you want to interact with, or to move Zack around. The game's cursor turns pink and you get a bit of rumble feedback whenever you highlight an item or place that you can interact with, so the gameplay never devolves into pixel-hunting.

Early on, you can work out each level's puzzle by simple process of elimination. Later levels assume more of a Rube Goldberg quality, full of misleading items and puzzles that can easily turn lethal. Fortunately, you can use Platinum Tickets to bring yourself back to life after dying in a level, letting you keep any progress you've made with

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

Zack & Wiki is a great kids' game with a decent sense of humor. If you think it's too simplistic at first, try some of the harder puzzles.



ZACK & WIKI

Quest for Barbaros' Treasure

Review by Lynxara

Publisher : Capcom
Developer : Capcom
Release Date : 10/23/2007
Rating : Everyone (Cartoon Violence)

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

the puzzle. If you get utterly stumped, (and you will), you can use an item called an Oracle Doll to get a hint about what to do next. Using both of these items penalizes your score, encouraging you not to rely on them too much.

While you can solve most puzzles in roughly twenty minutes, once you know what to do, figuring out what to do can take hours and may possibly involve any friends or relatives in the house wandering by, taking the Wii remote from you, and going "here, let me try that." Even after you've beaten a puzzle, you'll be tempted to go back and solve it again for a higher score, or to scour the level for bonus treasures and mini-games.

At its best, Zack & Wiki lets players go at their own pace, experimenting with all of interactions possible in a level to see what works and what is lethal. This experimentation can eat up hours before you even notice it, and the reward of figuring out a puzzle sequence on your own is tremendous. There are some awkward puzzles that involve twitch gameplay, and they badly disrupt the gameplay's flow. Fortunately, they're also infrequent, and mastering them doesn't detract from the rest of the game. Zack & Wiki is a brilliant use of the Wii's strengths, and easily one of the best games available for the console.

Rating : 4.5 of 5



FINAL SCORE : 4.5 of 5



KANE & LYNCH DEAD MEN

Review by 4thletter

Publisher : Eidos Interactive
Developer : Io Interactive
Release Date : 11/20/2007
Rating : Mature

Genre(s) : Action
Category : Buddy Movie
of players : 1-8

Kane & Lynch is one of Eidos Interactive's biggest titles for this holiday season, if not the biggest. It mixes a Michael Mann-esque visual style with stunning graphics with fast-paced action and a suitably mature storyline into something that is hopefully a good thing. Being the lovechild of Hitman and Freedom Fighters doesn't hurt, either.

The first thing that you're likely to notice about the game, after the style, is its language. To call Kane & Lynch foul-mouthed would be somewhat underselling the point. Your characters drop f-bombs like it's going out of style. If that isn't your cup of tea, move on. This isn't the game for you. If you don't mind a bit of salt in your language, though, the dialogue is actually pretty good.



There is a bit of the cliché "Hey, I'm crrrrrrrazy!" dialogue going on, but in general, the interplay between Kane and Lynch is pretty solid. The two of them clearly do not enjoy being around each other, and it's nice to see the tone and inflection reflecting that.

Of course, the entire game is about them hanging around each other and doing jobs, so they're stuck. Kane

& Lynch uses a new cooperative squad-based kind of gameplay. It works fairly well, as Lynch will run around and shoot whoever needs to be shot, but it isn't quite perfect. Why can't Lynch put down the body of the target, or dodge, or do something other than stand there when guys are shooting at him in a Tokyo nightclub? It feels as if the mission took precedence over the otherwise quality A.I. for the sake of a tense escort scene.

There are a number of scenes, for lack of a better word, throughout Kane & Lynch. Breaking into a bank, car chases, kidnappings, and assaults on corporate buildings are just a few of them. These scenes force you to switch up your gameplay tactics and adapt to the new scenario. However, these scenes are also one of the game's worst weaknesses.

You will find yourself pinned down and defending your position from a few dozen enemies all too often. From there, it's just a matter of killing as many people as possible while your getaway driver gets it in gear or one of your squadmates fulfills an objective. It is tense, yes, but you end up feeling like you're doing the lion's share of the work, not to mention the fact that it kills the momentum of the game to spend ten minutes or so just firing blindly at enemies. There's nothing wrong with that, as the entire shooter genre can attest, but Kane & Lynch feels like it could have been a bit more than that.

Kane & Lynch is more Freedom Fighters than Hitman, so it should appeal to action junkies looking for their next fix. If you were looking for something a little slower-paced, this isn't it. If you were looking for a game that mixes a solid story with some fun action sequences, you're in luck.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

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

Kane & Lynch is a beautiful game with some fun action, but doesn't quite live up to its potential. The spotty story progression doesn't help much, either.

FINAL SCORE : 3.5 of 5



ON THE



SIN AND PUNISHMENT



Developer: Treasure • Platform: Wii VC
Genre: Rail Shooter • Category: Get Bonus • # of Players: 1-2
Price: 1200 points (\$12.00) • Get it at: Wii Shop

Sin & Punishment is one of those treasures that never made it to the English-speaking world upon initial release. With amazingly beautiful art by Yasushi Suzuki, (go buy his artbook, it's out right now in the US), *S&P* is more than just a rail shooter. Developed by Treasure, makers of such fine games as *Bakuretsu Muteki Bangaiou* and *Rakugaki Showtime*, the game was initially intended for an English release. Various politics – chief among them most-likely the Gamecube's impending belly flop onto the scene – washed away the game's chances of making it to shore. Released in 2000 in Japan, the game quickly became a hot import, due to the highly-regarded fact that it's really freaking awesome.

Taking place in the far-flung future of 2007, overpopulation has caused a food crisis for human beings. Ruffians – odd robotic demon-creature things I would probably not eat myself – are created to combat world starvation, but, *TWIST*, they turn on the human populace and start destroying everything... starting with Japan! A group of Americans known as the Armed Volunteers are sent to take out this new threat, but also use this opportunity to vie for control of Japan. America, *F yeah!* Meanwhile, a mysterious psychic named Achi has been helping the downtrodden on all sides of the war by sharing her blood with them. The blood itself has an odd effect that's not completely explained, though it seems to make people stronger... oh, and eventually turns them into destructive robotic-monster things.

You control either Saki or Airan, two rebels recently saved by Achi, who wield combination gun-x-swords called "Dolphins." How this weapon is implemented is one of the things which makes *S&P* cooler than most rail shooters. You are not only firing your lasers at everything that moves, pew-pew-pew, but you are also slashing things which come close with your sword to either take it out or reflect it. The latter is one of the chief mechanics of the game, as you are constantly winging back wave after wave of projectiles (such as gigantic cruise missiles) to do massive damage on whatever you hit. Combine this with the fact that you can move your character left and right to dodge, as well as somersault, in those same directions, makes the game a whole lot less constrictive than many games on rails.

Beyond the gameplay, though, what makes this game is the presentation. It's amazing to think that this game was designed to run on the N64, and Stage 2-2 is probably the most epic thing that Treasure has ever created, if not one of the coolest interactive set pieces in all of videogamedom. Imagine your party is trying to escape the inner depths of an aircraft carrier, and then one member rips out a big chunk of the ship's hull with her psychic powers so you both might ride it to escape. This thick chunk of metal whips and careens through the air as your character must take out wave after wave of gunships, speedboats, flying demon creatures, and all manner of aircraft, before a final showdown with a gigantic laser-firing battle platform. By the end of the game you literally dwarf continents; your gigantic, hulking self defends the entire planet from a big, juicy ball of Armageddon raining down hellfire from above, that turns out to be a clone of Earth itself.

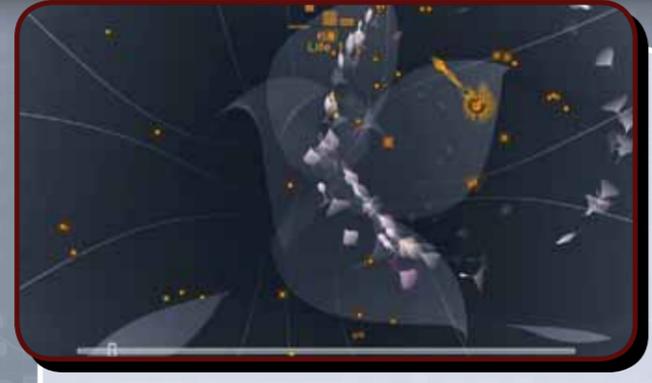
I will not lie, I bought my N64 for this game... and ended up paying more for the game than the system itself. This is Treasure's hidden treasure, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, and now it's out on the Virtual Console. This release is a reward for those Treasure fans who made that "Hang in there, kitten!" sticker their mantra. Smile, Nintendo; you get one of those pasty gold stars right in the middle of your twinkly little nose.



SCORE: 5 OF 5

Downloaded by Ashura

EVERYDAY SHOOTER



Developer: NC Soft • Platform: PS3
Genre: Shooter • Category: Everyday • # of Players: 1
Price: \$9.99 • Get it at: The PlayStation Network

If variety is the spice of life, then *Everyday Shooter* is an entire rack stocked full of fragrant and tasty flavors. Twin-stick shooters have recently become a dime a dozen, but there's still plenty of room for innovation, and *Everyday Shooter* offers eight unique levels, with original graphics and combo mechanism for each.



The basics of "move dot-ship with left stick, shoot with right" never change, but while one level can play like *Every Extend*, with huge explosions causing screen-clearing chain reactions, another is more RTS inspired, with enemy tanks that set up and energize cannon emplacements. Meanwhile, the level's guitar theme is playing, meshing with the musical riffs that replace the usual sound effects.

It's hard to overstate the importance of music in *Everyday Shooter*, seeing as it's half album, half game. The eight levels are structured like the tracks on a record, each different, while working the common theme of squishing guitar and twin-stick shooting together. The music is the easy part, however, especially when taking into account the lack of instructions. The chaining and combos of the first level are explained in full, and after that you're on your own to figure out how to exploit each level's mechanics. Learning the tricks and then exploiting them ruthlessly is a lot of fun, and *Everyday Shooter* plays fair with the visual cues to help sort out what needs to be done. A host of unlockable content, including graphic filters, extra lives, and single-level score runs rounds out the package, providing plenty of replay for your trippy musical abstract gaming dollar.

SCORE: 4 OF 5



Developer: Infinite Interactive • Platform: Xbox 360
Genre: Puzzle RPG • Category: Gem-breaker • # of Players: 1-2
Price: 1200 points (\$15.00) • Get it at: Xbox Live Arcade

It's 5AM, my eyes are about to fall out of my head, and I'm looking at a bit over three hours of sleep tonight. Yeah, that'd be *Puzzle Quest* at work. The handheld mashup of *Bejeweled* and RPG has finally hit the TV screen, and it's just as addictive as ever. Despite the core problems of the *Bejeweled* formula, plus a few new ones unique to *Puzzle Quest*, it's still capable of killing hours in an alarming fashion.



The land of Etheria has been at peace for centuries, meaning it's the perfect time for the hordes of evil to take a crack at world domination. Rather than epic swordfights, though, battle is waged on eight by eight grids covered in gems and other icons. The four colors of the gems correspond to the magical elements, while coins and stars give out cash and experience, respectively. The gems give out mana when lined up three or more in a row, and mana powers spells that affect the battle in a huge variety of ways. Properly harvesting mana while managing the skull icons, which deal damage directly, is the key to victory.

The big problem with *Puzzle Quest* is how much random chance plays a factor. Getting a Heroic Effort bonus for an x5 combo would mean something if it could be planned, and losing because the enemy made an impossibly brilliant move after some blatantly stupid mistakes earlier in the match can be frustrating. That *Puzzle Quest* manages to make these issues seem almost irrelevant is amazing, and a testament to just how much fun a good bit of genre-blending can be.

PUZZLE QUEST

Downloaded by James

SCORE: 4 OF 5

A.C.E. 3 is a baffling game. On paper, it seems like it should be a significant improvement over the very good A.C.E. 2: better graphics, more cutscenes, new two-player modes, and an expanded series selection, including relatively recent shows like Eureka 7 and Overman King Gainer. If you actually sit down to play it, though, it's an experience that's disappointing on just about every level.

The graphics, for instance, should be about as good as anything on a PS2 ever could be, yet the mecha and battleship models are only slightly better than A.C.E. 2's, while the backgrounds are staggeringly worse. The cityscape you fight in during the campaign mode's first battle, for instance, is represented by a long flat expanse with 2D "building" textures on the bottom, and then some uniformly-sized and shaped rectangular "buildings" sticking out of the ground. What? C'mon, guys, even R.A.D. managed to do better than that, and it came out years ago!

Some of the cutscene advances are pleasant. Human characters now appear in them, fully 3D and cel-shaded, although this frequently clashes with traditionally rendered backgrounds and mecha. Vocal songs from the various anime sometimes play as inserts, adding extra punch to dramatic moments. Unfortunately, campaign mode's story is plagued by laziness. A bunch of series listed on the roster, including Brain Power'd, Dunbine, and Gundam SEED, don't actually get to contribute anything to the plot. Instead, you purchase the available units and their pilots from an in-game shop after meeting particular goals. You can use them in your roster and the other game modes, but that's all. It feels incredibly lazy, as if more series were added simply to make the roster look bigger.

Controls are the one thing A.C.E. 3 manages not to screw up. Instead, they're even more streamlined and responsive than A.C.E. 2's. Jet modes handle better, using sub-weapons is more comfortable, and in-battle transformations more practical. Frustration sets in when you take these wonderful controls into A.C.E. 3's abysmally designed levels. Battles are mind-numbingly repetitive, waves of weak enemies followed by bosses who require no thought or strategy to defeat. As you level up your mecha to improve their damage, armor, and other stats, battles just get easier. The supposedly advanced optional missions are laughable, and the higher-difficulty levels are a joke.

Strong two-player content could've improved this game, but that's also a wash. The co-operative mode isn't very interesting because it doesn't let you play through the campaign levels, just a handful of really boring missions. Versus mode lets two players field a team of units against each other and dogfight, and that's fun for awhile. Unfortunately, A.C.E. 3 has enough super-broken über-units available that eventually someone picks Gundam X or Freedom, and the battles degenerate into throwing one-shot kills around.

Where A.C.E. 2 was exciting, A.C.E. 3 is boring. As the last entry in the series, it's unforgivable. A word of advice to any developers who might be reading this: never, ever, sacrifice level design for anything else when you make a game. It doesn't matter how good your game looks, sounds, or controls if there's nothing fun to do in it.



WORTH IMPORTING?
No. Pick up A.C.E. 2 instead if you want a good fast-paced mecha action game, or even Dynasty Warriors Gundam.
SCORE: 3 OF 5



Review by Lyndra

PUBLISHER: BANPRESTO
DEVELOPER: FROM SOFTWARE
RELEASE DATE: 9/6/2007
GENRE(S): ACTION
CATEGORY: MECHA COMBAT
OF PLAYERS: 1-2

Another Century's Episode 3



Publisher: Capcom • Developer: Cavia • Genre: Drama CD • Category: w/Some Really Annoying Gameplay Bits • Release Date: 09/13/07 # of Players: 1-4

You would think a game that has a cute girl who beats people up with a frying pan would be really freaking cool. How could you go wrong with this epic, nay, completely badass, concept? It was proven by the Discerning Association of Girls with Frying Pans (The DAoGwFP) that frying pans + beating people = awesome, so a game which builds upon the epic, world-ending power of frying pan-fu should also be awesome, right? Right? Well, unfortunately, it's not.

Fate/Tiger Colosseum takes the characters from Type Moon's highly popular Fate/Tiger Night series, shrinks them down into cute little super-deformed scamps and drops them into a 3rd person brawler. Developed by Cavia, makers of such classics as Bullet Witch and, uh, Winback 2, Fate/Tiger Colosseum delivers an experience on a par with the company's other groundbreaking releases.

Once you select a character from a roster of a veritable who's who of Fate characters and dash your way past the highly detailed story segments (option four on the pause menu!), you're finally thrown into the "Colosseum" and ready to do battle. You are charged with beating up your opponent(s) more times than said opponent(s) beat you, but unfortunately your options are pretty slim. Using the lock-on feature, you utilize your two attack buttons via alternating presses to create a simple combo string and beat on your opponent. These combos consist of a barrage of barely different strikes before the game decides you've hit your opponent enough with your cleverly-constructed combination of Square-Triangle-Square. During this downtime, you're given essentially three options: you can either let the other character beat on you; you can try to block; or you can dash behind them and THEN beat on them some more. Guess which one of these time-honored strategies is the one you should employ?

Now you might be saying, writer dude, you've covered both the Fate and the Colosseum aspect of this game in a somewhat Tarantino-ishy ordered manner, but what the heck does that Tiger thing in the middle of the title have to do with anything? To make the title tenuously comprehensible, the game spews the aptly named tiger balls (I'm avoiding, like, 45.3 jokes, here) around the level. When you pick up these balls, your MP (super) bar doubles in size, and with the right amount of MP, you can execute a bunch of really poorly-animated super attacks that pause the entire stage, and sort of nebulously moves the camera in, perhaps, the right place to view said splendidorous super attack... or else into the middle of really blurred tree texture. Either way, massive damage.

That's pretty much it. You beat on your opponent, or they beat on you. You can recover, jump around, pick up vaguely helpful items, hop on one foot, whatever; it all leads back to the humdrum back and forth. Whoever beats down the most opponents, wins, and you repeat this process, well, repeatedly. Almost all the characters play the same, even if they may be holding a different beat-down stick or shoot laser eye beams, and it really comes down to which one you like the best. Unlockables are, woo, more characters, and the other game modes beyond the story amount to nothing more than sharing the boredom with a friend wirelessly. Even technologically advanced, boredom is still boredom.

I didn't go into this game expecting something that could break the mold, but I at least expected a little fun. If thinking up some kind of original game-making gimmick to push the game above mediocre was impossible, they could've easily ripped off something fun like, I dunno, Power Stone. You know, battle with your surroundings in a vaguely Jackie Chan-like manner? But no, the whole game is lifeless backgrounds with cute little characters who beat each other in a loop of poor animation. Fate/Tiger Colosseum is the tediously plain game that the devil makes you play in hell for eternity after you sell your soul to date those two really hot twins who wouldn't normally give you the time of day. It's not bad, so much as elaborately boring.



Review by Ashura

Worth Importing?

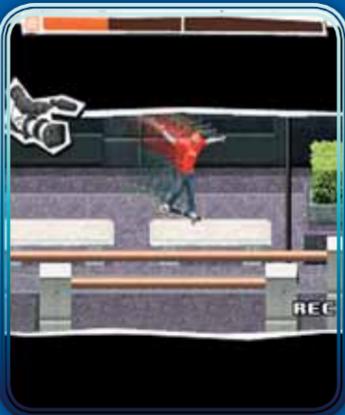
Maybe the highly convoluted story segments add something to the game, but the language barrier breaks Fate down to its key gameplay and reveals all the flaws. It's just not fun, and you shouldn't play it.

Final Score: 2 of 5

REVIEW



goal than the console version of the game. Mobile *skate* is mission-based. Each mission requires you to complete a series of objectives throughout the city, such as stringing together tricks, finding lost items, and scoring points. Missions aren't very long, but do test your skills by making you perform a number of well-known boarding



In *skate*, you play the role of an up-and-coming skateboarder looking to make it big in the fictional city of San Vanelona. With help and challenges from real-life boarders like Danny Way, Chris Cole, and others, your ultimate goal is to make the cover of *Thrasher* magazine, which is a bit different



tricks. A couple of tutorial stages introduce the easy one-thumb controls, and by far the coolest aspect of them is performing them in slow-motion "footie time".

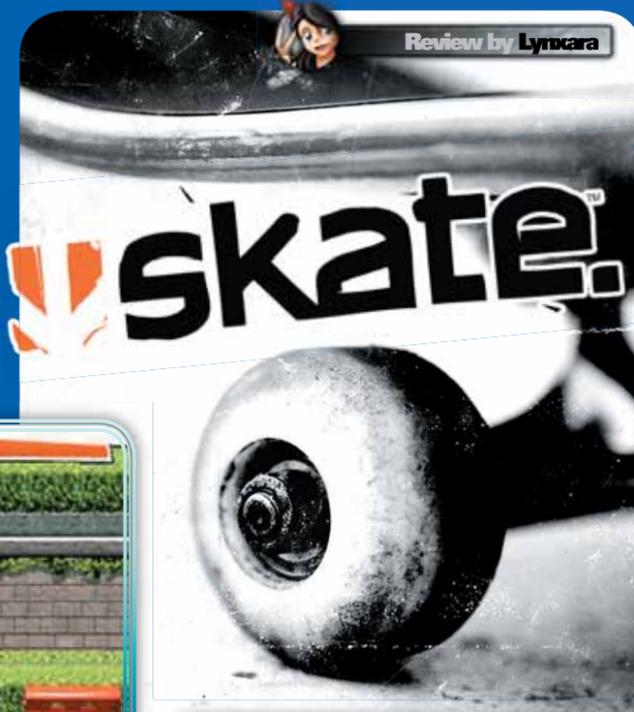
Landing the cover of the magazine means finding photographers and showing off your skills in front of them. You can find photo opportunities throughout the free-roaming city, or the half-pipe, and the requirement in this part of the game is to look sharp. That means that you can customize the look of the player, including winning sponsored clothing and boards.

The game is surprisingly large, with 12 different maps available in three environments. More impressive is the game's look; the city is very much alive, full of details like moving cars and fountains in the background. You can perform tricks just about anywhere, and even the sound effects are authentic.

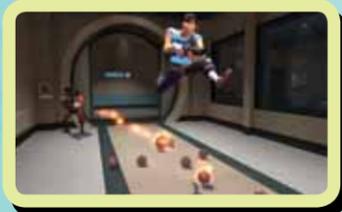
skate also offers a Free Skate mode that lets you run around town at your own leisure, and a Scrapbook feature for viewing achievements and stats. These are good additions to an already solid game that has easy controls, large environments and a captivating style of play.

Publisher: EA Mobile Genre: Skating
Developer: EA Mobile Category: Free-Roaming
Release Date: 9/13/2007 # of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



But there's no time to revel in my discovery, as a stream of fire hits me from behind. Fortunately, I run ahead and drop out of sight without dying. With the Pyro on my tail, I run into a drainage pipe and disguise myself as an enemy Sniper. The Pyro runs up, glances in my direction, and then turns around. Seizing the opportunity, I thrust the razor-sharp blade into his back and he drops to the ground. Donning the disguise again, I run around the enemy's base screaming for a Medic, just to see if I can get an enemy to heal me. Thinking that he's a team player, a rival Medic runs up and recharges my health. I let him take a few steps before he feels my cold appreciation pierce his spine. I would love to have seen the look on his face.



As the CTF match on the level 2Fort begins, I choose the grenade-launcher-wielding Demoman class and start to run downstairs to defend our briefcase. Five seconds later, I start taking damage and turn around just in time to see the killing blow from a rival Scout's baseball bat connect with my cranium. Ugh. That death was way too quick. While waiting to respawn, I see another Scout join my executioner and they both rush in and grab the briefcase full of intelligence before anyone has time to react. Stealing our briefcase so quickly is a prime example of the advantages of knowing the layout of each map. I can't help but smile while the in-game announcer keeps repeating: "You've lost your intelligence, you've lost your intelligence..."



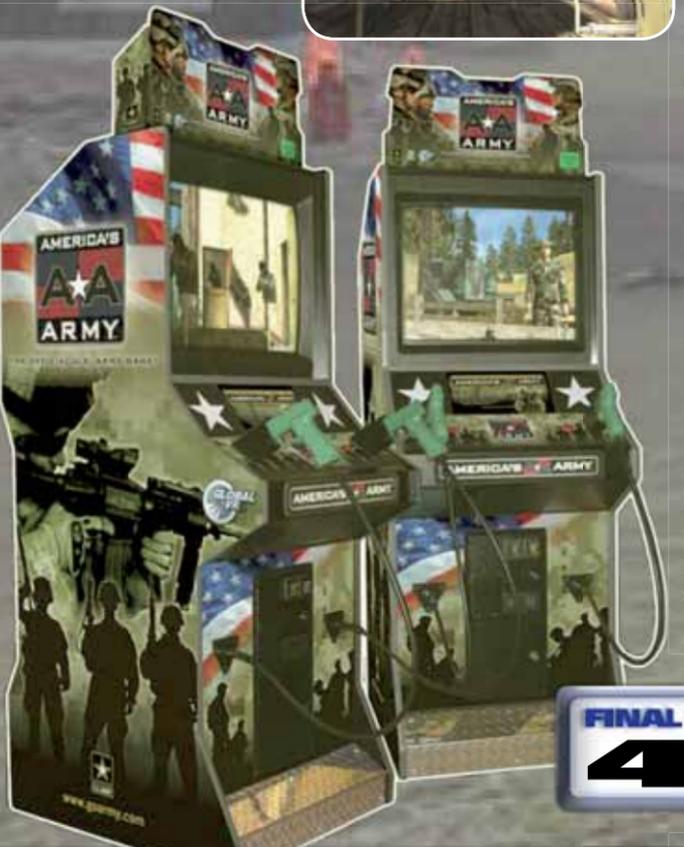
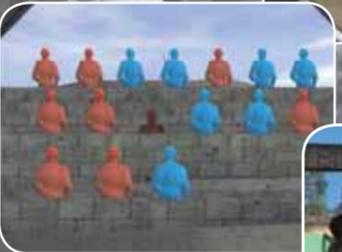
After some extended playtime, I discovered some important facts that help to lower enemy suspicions when you're disguised. For starters, don't don an enemy disguise on your way to their base; wait until you are already there. Second, try to disguise yourself as a class that won't be expected to heal or defend, because you will arouse suspicion if you don't perform your duties. Third, your disguise is not lost when using the Electronic Sapper, so feel free to toss one on enemy turrets when no one is around. Lastly, people will randomly shoot others just to see if they are a spy, since there is no friendly fire.

While waiting to rejoin my comrades, I decide to check out the stats screen. It gives detailed info for each map, about everything from the number of kills using a sentry turret, to the amount of headshots, to the amount of time I have played each class. Hmm. Time played as a Demoman, seven seconds. Number of kills, zero. Amount of damage inflicted, zero. Time to try something else.

With nine classes to choose from, I decide to specialize in one so I can learn its skills. So I respawn as a Spy and head towards the enemy's base. Two enemies cross a bridge and head in my direction, but with a press of the left trigger, I immediately turn invisible and continue on my way. They glance around for a few seconds and decide that finding me is not worth the trouble. Up ahead is an engineer who is busy building a sentry turret, so I whip out my knife and sneak up to him. I press the right trigger a couple of times to perform a backstab, but nothing happens. What the hell? Just then my ten second invisibility wears off and I backstab the Engineer with no problem. Ahhhh, so you can't backstab while invisible.



TEAM FORTRESS 2



Developer: GlobalVR
Publisher: GlobalVR
Players: 1-2
Genre: Light Gun
Category: You have been recruited by the Star League...
Release Date: September 2007

by Adam Pratt of ArcadeHeroes.com

In 1984, *The Last Starfighter* was released in theaters (and recently on HD-DVD), bringing with it the idea of an arcade game being used for recruitment into a military operation. It was all fantasy, of course, although games have been used as training tools ever since Atari created a separate version of *BattleZone* for the military. The arcade version of *America's Army* differs from previous versions that have been released on consoles. Instead of a FPS, the arcade version is a light gun game and features different gameplay than the home versions.

America's Army for the arcade consists of eight army exercises similar to what one might experience at boot camp: Sniper Course, Shoot House, Shotgun Training, Mover Target, Pistol Range, Point Man, Grenade Course, and Indoor Shooting Range. Once an exercise is selected, a drill sergeant appears and explains the challenge the player will face, along with what score is expected to pass the challenge. If you fail three challenges total, it's game over. The challenges are pretty fun to play, and one nice touch to the gameplay is that the difficulty adjusts itself based on how well (or how badly) you are playing. Each challenge leaves some room for you to screw up, either by hitting civilian targets or by missing enemy targets completely. In addition to these challenges, there are a number of hidden bonuses to find and a high score table to record the best gamers and their efforts.

Graphically, *America's Army* is a let-down. It uses an old version of the Unreal Engine and by today's standards it shows. Of course, this type of game doesn't really need spectacularly photorealistic graphics, as it's really just a shooting gallery. Still, it never hurts to see an arcade title looking better than games you see at home. The cabinet itself looks great, with a small footprint; it's decorated with patriotic pictures of soldiers and flags. The guns attached to the cabinet feature realistic recoil and are well-balanced between weight and design.

America's Army is a good deal for operators: fairly inexpensive, and it features the green label rating, which indicates that it's suitable for all ages. On top of that, it's a fun game that plays even better with a friend.

FINAL SCORE:
4 of 5



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

THE FIRST ANNUAL... FAWARDS

It's that time of year again, when video game magazines and web sites bestow upon their favorite titles an annual award that declares them the best in the genre and/or on their respective console. Traditions are certainly nice in this young industry, and no one dislikes being declared the best, but let us be the first to come out and say it: F Awards.

No developer sets out to make a bad game, nor even an average one. It's everyone's goal in this industry to create something great. Sometimes we succeed; many times we don't. That's just the price you pay for creating art, for the only crime worse than making a bad game is not making a game at all.

Every independent developer lives by this credo. There's no sugar daddy to float them a check if their game doesn't succeed. They're living and breathing by the potential sales of the titles they're working on. Indies aren't out for medals or badges of honor; they just want to make great games, and make a living doing it. Stamps of approval at the end of the year are cool, but at the end of the day, no award is going to put food on your table or help you code your next great game idea.

We at Gamecock have decided to give out our own awards, right here and now. May we present the first annual F Awards! The F Awards go out to this year's greatest gaming moments of independence. They go out to those who took a chance, those who dared to show the world that the only real failure is not taking a risk, and those who pretty much ruled this year.

Our first F Award of the year goes to Harmonix for saying: "F playing it safe, and F thinking small!" From their humble console beginnings, with *Frequency*, through their branching out with *Karaoke Revolution*, to their mega-hit *Guitar Hero*, these guys have never played it safe. Harmonix could have sat back and collected checks off *Guitar Hero* for the rest of their lives, but they wanted to keep reaching for the brass ring that is *Rock Band*. Talk about a risk! Here's a game with an entry point of \$170 that demands four players to reach its fullest potential. If anyone else was trying it, it would be a classic recipe for disaster, but Harmonix has never let us down yet.

The second F Award goes to Bungie for declaring: "F being a part of a big corporate machine; we're going back to being independent." After crafting Microsoft's three biggest console hits, in addition to a gaming trilogy that's firmly implanted itself in the popular culture lexicon, they realized the only way to stay creative was to break free. In doing so, they've proved to everyone that big checks take a distant back seat to creative freedom. We can't wait to see what they have up their sleeve.

Our third F Award is reserved for Renegade Kid for basically saying: "F everyone, we're making the game we want." Sure, call it self-serving for us to call out a developer whose game we're publishing, but the fact is, these guys have really risked it all. They quit the safety of their jobs to create *Dementium: The Ward*, a game that has everything against it, on paper. Think about it: a three-man team with no publisher funding, making an M-rated horror game on a handheld known for being kid-friendly. Everyone thought they were crazy. Yet despite all the adversity, they created something that people never thought possible on the DS. *Dementium* looks great, plays great, and most importantly, is incredibly fun.

The fourth F Award of the year has to go to the planners and organizers of the Penny Arcade Expo for letting the video game industry know: "F your exclusive and lame events; we're going to show you how it's done." And they did. In the few short years PAX has been around, it's become the largest, best run, and most fun video game event in North America. Created by video game fans for video game fans, PAX is leagues ahead of E3, E For All, and pretty much every other gaming event ever put together. In fact, it's the only event in this industry that we actually look forward to, rather than dread.

Our fifth and final F Award (and the biggest F Award of them all) is a tie between Microsoft and Sony, for supporting their thriving online networks and content downloads, as well as anyone who has, or is creating, a game for these networks. Never before has there been an easier point of entry for independent and small developers to get their games into the hands of the console audience. Sure, these games can't be as big or flashy as their boxed counterparts, but that only further proves that it's not necessarily a big budget or pretty visuals that make a game great. The fact that these big companies heavily support game downloads just goes to show how important independent developers are to the video game industry. This is where the most innovative and freshest ideas are going to come from in the years to come.

We're just sayin'...

Hear, hear!
The Gamecock has something to say to the masses!



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



Title : Disgaea__Fallen_Angel_Love
Artist : Marionette



Title : The mii version of Mario.
Artist : link12332



Title : Whisky
Artist : Kitty



Title : Zero Suit Samus
Artist : Brian Jun



Title : Caster from Fate/Stay Night
Artist : Brian Jun

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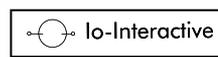
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